

New European Commentary

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## MATTHEW

### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The book of the generation*- "Book", Gk. *biblos*, suggests a formal volume. It could be that Matthew refers only to the genealogy- but in this case, *biblos* hardly seems the appropriate word. The Gospels were transcripts of the Gospel message preached by e.g. Matthew, and as time went on and the Lord didn't return, under inspiration they wrote down their standard accounts of the good news. The Greek *genesis* translated "generation" is also translated "nature" in its' other two occurrences (James 1:23; 3:6). If the "book" refers to the book of the Gospel of Matthew, the idea could be that this is a Gospel which focuses upon the nature of Jesus. Related words occur often in the genealogies- people "begat" [Gk. *gennao*] their descendants, until Jesus was *gennao* of Mary (Mt. 1:16). Jesus as a person had a 'genesis', He was 'generated' by Mary as His ancestors had been 'generated' by the 'generations' of their ancestors- the whole chapter is a huge blow to the idea that Jesus pre-existed as a person before His birth. His 'generation' is presented as being of the same nature as the 'generation' of His human ancestors.

*The son of David, the son of Abraham*- The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogy of Jesus, whom the Gospels present as the ultimate Emperor, is quite radical in this regard. For it traces the pedigree of Jesus back to a man, Abraham. The greatness of Jesus was in his humanity.

1:2 *Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob begot Judah and his brothers*- The fact Isaac and Jacob had brothers is carefully omitted- because the descendants of Ishmael and Esau were not counted as the people of God.

1:3 *Judah begot Perez and Zerah of Tamar and Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram*- Since the Lord was descended through the line of Phares, why mention the birth of Zerah- seeing that so many details are omitted in this genealogy, even whole generations, why take space to record this? Perhaps it was because Zerah was the first born, but Phares got the birthright. And the genealogies teach us how God delights to work through the underling, the rejected, the humanly weak.

Tamar was a prostitute and adulteress, just like Rahab. See on 1:5.

1:4 *Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon*- Salmon was of the tribe of Judah, because this is the genealogy through Judah (1:2). The two spies who had been faithful the first time when spies were sent out were Joshua and Caleb- of the tribes of Ephraim and Judah (Num. 13:6; Jud. 2:9). It seems a fair guess that when the two spies were sent out, they were from these same two tribes. Salmon was a prince of the tribe of Judah- it's a fair guess that he was one of the two spies who went to Rahab, and he subsequently married her.

1:5 *Salmon begot Boaz of Rahab and Boaz begot Obed of Ruth and Obed begot Jesse*- Rahab was a Gentile and a sinner. Jesus was morally perfect, and yet the genealogy shows how He had much against Him spiritually. We can't blame our lack of spirituality upon our bad background. Note that there was so much intermarriage with Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth throughout Israel's history; their standing with God was therefore never on the basis of ethnic purity, but rather by cultural identity and God's grace. Matthew's genealogy features [unusually, for Jewish genealogies] several women, who had become the ancestors of Messiah through unusual relationships. It's almost as if the genealogy is there in the form that it is to pave the way for the account of Mary's conception of Jesus without a man.

1:6 *Jesse begot David the king*- Literally "*the David the king*". The others aren't mentioned as being kings. The implication may be that Jesus was the promised descendant of David and the promises of eternal Kingship made to David's descendant are therefore applicable to Jesus.

*And David begot Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah*- Literally "she of Uriah". "She that that been the wife of" is added by some translators in explanation, but isn't in the original. Whilst God 'forgets' sin in the sense that He no longer holds it against us, the memory of those sins isn't obliterated, and His word is full of such allusions to sin which although He has forgiven it and symbolically "blotted it out", it still remains within Divine history. We too can forgive but 'forgetting' isn't always possible, and is no sign that we have failed to forgive.

1:7 *And Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, Abijah begot Asa* - Wicked Roboam begat wicked Abia; wicked Abia begat good Asa; good Asa begat good Josaphat; good Josaphat begat wicked Joram. Perhaps the emphasis is that spirituality isn't genetic, and neither is sinfulness. Jesus was perfect despite being from such "bad blood"; and

we likewise can't blame our failures on bad background. Neither can we assume that the children of the faithful will be righteous.

*1:8 Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, Joram begot Uzziah-* Three generations are skipped here. See on 1:17. Perhaps the omission was because Joram married Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel the wife of Ahab, and those generations were idolaters. As we note on 1:12, children who don't worship the true God are forgotten in the ultimate course of Divine history. In this case, his iniquity was indeed visited upon the third generation (Ex. 20:3-6). We also see here a fulfilment of the prophecy that Ahab's house would be eradicated (2 Kings 9:8).

*1:9 Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, Ahaz begot Hezekiah-* The record here and in :10 seems to stress that the good beget the bad who beget the good; as if to establish the point that natural pedigree is no guarantee of spirituality. This was something the Jews needed to appreciate.

*1:10 Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, Amon begot Josiah-* See on :9.

*1:11 Josiah begot Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the captivity in Babylon-* The apparent contradiction with 1 Chron. 3:5,6 is solved if we understand this to be a reference to Joachin.

*1:12 And after the captivity in Babylon, Jechoniah begot Shealtiel, Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel-* Therefore the reference to Jechoniah being written "childless" (Jer. 22:30) perhaps means that as Jeremiah goes on to comment "No man of his seed shall prosper". If our children aren't spiritually prosperous, it is as if we were childless. Thus we see that the whole purpose of having children is to "raise a Godly seed".

*1:13 Zerubbabel begot Abiud-* Other children of Zerubbabel are recorded in 1 Chron. 3:19. But it was through one who was not otherwise of note or fame that the Lord was descended. Or perhaps Abiud was another name for one of the sons listed there. The apparent contradiction with Lk. 3:27 is solved if we read that as "which was the son of Rhesa Zerubbabel". See on :16.

*Abiud begot Eliakim, Eliakim begot Azor-* This part of the genealogy is not found in the Old Testament. We wonder whether God as it were beamed this information into Matthew, or whether he did his own research through public registers and was Divinely guided and inspired in his findings and how he recorded it.

1:14 *Azor begot Sadoc, Sadoc begot Achim, Achim begot Eliud*- Matthew is presenting the line through Judah. But there was a Levite at this time also called "Zadok" (Neh. 10:21). It could be that this person was descended from both Judah and Levi through an inter-tribal marriage of his parents. In this case he would've been a potential king-priest, preparing the way for us to understand Jesus as a king-priest.

1:15 *Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, Matthan begot Jacob*- The genealogies prove that Joseph was a descendant of David, indeed the rightful king of Israel had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23). The record in Luke appears to be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying Mary, the daughter of Heli (Lk. 3:23); the Talmud speaks with gross vitriolic about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

1:16 *Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*- Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (:6).

Joseph was actually the rightful king of Israel, according to this genealogy. Yet he was living in poverty and without recognition for who he was- exactly the kind of person God would use for the great task of raising His only begotten Son.

1:17 *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen*



*generations and from David to the captivity in Babylon fourteen generations and from the captivity in Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations-* This must have some connection with the 42 stopping places before Israel reached Canaan, as described in Num.33:2. Thus the birth of Christ would be like God's people entering the promised land of the Kingdom in some way. It could be argued from this (and other evidence) that it was God's intention for the Kingdom to be entered by Israel at the time of Jesus- it was after all, His intention that Israel accepted their Messiah. But they crucified Him, and therefore the potential didn't come true. This open ended nature of God's prophetic program means that it's impossible to fit together all latter day prophecies into some chronological framework.

The genealogy presented by Matthew doesn't include every generation, there are some gaps (see on 1:8; and Zorababel was Salathiel's grandson, 1 Chron. 3:19, yet 1:12 says he "begat" him). Thus some "begat" their grandson or great grandson. Clearly Matthew had a purpose in presenting the material like this- but expositors have failed to come up with anything convincing. It could simply be that the Gospels were designed to be memorized, as most Christians were illiterate; and the 3 x 14 structure was to aid memorization. One interesting observation is that the last 14 generations from the captivity to the time of Christ amount to the 490 years prophesied for this same period by Dan. 9:25- if we take a generation to be 35 years, which it is in Job 42:16. The numerical value of the Hebrew word "David" is 14, so it could also be that Matthew is eloquently demonstrating that Jesus was indeed the promised seed of David. If indeed six is the number of man and seven represents perfection, then  $6 \times 7 = 42$ - the generations culminated in the perfect man, Jesus.

*1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit-* The Greek seems to imply she was understood ["found"] to be with a child which had come *ek*, out of, from, the Holy Spirit. This could be implying that Joseph himself believed or perceived that the child was from the Holy Spirit. This would explain why he sought not to humiliate her publicly about the matter (1:19).

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months... all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an

Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

1:19 *And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not willing to make her a public example, decided to send her away secretly-* The very same phrase is used by Matthew to describe Christ as the ultimately just or righteous man as He hung upon the cross (27:19,24; Lk. 23:47; 1 Pet. 3:18); the implication is surely that Joseph's just or righteousness played a role in the final perfection of Jesus as the ultimately "just man". For it was he who would've first taught Jesus the *shema*, emphasizing the word "one" as Jewish fathers did, correcting the young Jesus as He stutteringly repeated it. The same term is used about Jesus now in His heavenly glory (Acts 22:14; 1 Jn. 2:1) and as He will be at the day of judgment (2 Tim. 4:8); the influence of parents upon their children is in some sense eternal. For Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever; we too, as the sum of all the influences upon us, will really be saved and immortalized as persons. And the same was true of Jesus; hence the words and style of Mary's hymn of praise can be found repeated in the later words of Jesus, and also in the words He spoke from Heaven to the churches in Revelation. Joseph had various alternatives open to him; the trial of jealousy of Numbers 5, divorce, seeking compensation from the father, public shaming of the wife, or to stone her. But his justice was such that he sought to show grace and quietly divorce her (see on 1:20 *Take unto you*). Love protects from shame, not as it were covering

up sin which needs to be exposed, but seeking to cover over in the sense that God's atonement covers over our sins, as 1 Cor. 13 defines at length.

It was normal that the father of the crucified disposed of the body. But another Joseph, also described as a "just man" as Joseph was (Lk. 23:50), was the one who took this responsibility; remember that Joseph was alive and known as the apparent father of Jesus during His ministry (Jn. 6:42). Likewise one would think it appropriate that the first person to whom the risen Lord revealed Himself would've been to His mother, for she after all was the channel of the whole marvellous thing, the only one who for sure believed in a virgin birth. But by an apparently cruel twist of circumstance, it was to another Mary, Magdalene, that the Lord first revealed Himself, and it is she and not His mother Mary who takes the message to others. In this context we recall how in His last mortal moments, Christ motioned to His mother that John and not He was now her son (Jn. 19:26), addressing her as "woman" rather than "mother"- an unusual and even rude form of address to use to ones' mother in public. In all this we see a conscious diminishing of the human significance of the Lord's earthly family, in order to underline that now a new family of Jesus had been brought into existence by the cross. This must have been so hard for Joseph and Mary, as it is for us- to realize that we are but channels, used by God in certain ways at certain times, to the development of His glory according to His program and not our own.

*1:20 But as he thought on these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: Joseph you son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit-* The descriptions of Jesus as a "man", a human being, have little meaning if in fact He pre-existed as God for millions of years before. The descriptions of Him as "begotten" (passive of *gennan* in Mt. 1:16,20) make no suggestion of pre-existence at all. And the words of the Lord Jesus and His general behaviour would have to be read as all being purposefully deceptive, if in fact He was really a pre-existent god. There is no hint of any belief in a pre-existent Jesus until the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century- and he only develops the idea in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The Biblical accounts of the Lord's conception and birth just flatly contradict the idea of pre-existence.

*He thought-* The Greek *en-thumeomai* could mean to be angry or indignant, for that is how *thumeomai* is usually translated in the NT. His anger and frustration would still be possible even if he correctly perceived that the child was from God (see on 1:18).

"Do not be afraid" was a feature of Joseph's life at this time. The three Angelic appearances to him which are recorded show him immediately responding. Such immediacy of response is typical of God's faithful servants; delay in these cases is so often an excuse for inaction and disbelief. The Greek *phobeo* is also used of reverence and awe before God. Perhaps he understandably thought that he could in no way marry and sleep with a woman who had been the channel of God's Spirit to produce His only begotten son. Those thoughts surely did cross his mind, whatever view we take of *phobeo* here. We see here the sensitivity of God to human fears and feelings; He knows our thoughts and fears perfectly, and gives the needed assurance. The message that "that which is conceived of her *is* of the Holy Spirit" would therefore have had the emphasis upon the word "is", confirming Joseph in his perception (see on 1:18- he had perceived [AV "found"] that the child was of the Holy Spirit).

The implication of "take Mary as your wife" could be that they were about to marry, when it became apparent Mary was pregnant. He immediately married her (:24), seeking to protect her from the shame of the situation, thereby giving the impression that the child was his.

1:21 *And she shall give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins-* But the mission of Jesus was to save "the world" (Jn. 3:17), to save those enter into Him (Jn. 10:9; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13). The "world" is ultimately the people of Christ whose sins have been forgiven.

1:22 *Now all this happened so what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying-* The present tense reflects the ongoing, living nature of God's word. Otherwise, a past tense would be required. What was spoken is still being spoken to each individual Bible reader / listener.

1:23 *The virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son; and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us-* God *meta* us means somewhat more than simply "God with us". The idea is also "among". God is now among humanity through we who are the body of Christ.

1:24 *And Joseph woke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife-* Such immediate obedience is highly commendable, especially as marrying an already pregnant woman was bound to make the rest of his life very difficult. We think of Rebekah

and others who were immediately obedient; it is the flesh that always wishes to delay our response.

1:25 *But he did not have sexual intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus-* The obedience of Joseph (in this case, to :21) is emphasized. Likewise 2:20,21 "Arise... and he arose".

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king, astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem, saying-* Probably Jews from Babylon who had seen the similarity between the 'star' and the Messianic star out of Jacob whom Balaam had prophesied (Num. 24:17). Perhaps they are called here *magos*, sorcerers, magic men, because this is the image they presented to Herod, rather than stating they were Jews in search of Judah's Messianic King. Daniel had once been counted amongst the 'wise men' of Babylon (Dan. 2:48).

2:2 *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him-* The star did not take them directly to Bethlehem. It may have disappeared for a while, so they went to Jerusalem, assuming the king was to be born there. This would indicate they were ignorant of Mic. 5:2, the prophecy of Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, or had at least failed to interpret the prophecy properly. Seeing that stars do not move across the sky over time in a way which can be followed on earth over a period of days or weeks, it's clear that again (see on :1), things are being described as they appeared to an observer on earth. It could be that they first saw the 'star' two years previously (see on 2:16).

Some kings become kings by revolution or war, others are born into a kingly line. They clearly understood that this king was in the kingly line of Judah- a direct descendant of David.

2:3 *And when Herod the king heard it, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him-* "All Jerusalem" were "troubled", whereas the birth of Messiah was to be a time of joy for Israel and "to all people" (Lk. 2:10). The despised and lowly shepherds rejoiced, but "Jerusalem", perhaps referring to the Jewish ruling class, were "troubled". They rejected the good news of the Gospel because it threatened their little power structure. "All Jerusalem" cannot be taken literally because there were some in the city awaiting the birth of Messiah and joyful at the news of His birth (Lk. 2:38).

2:4 *And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born-* The priests are repeatedly described in the OT as the priests of *Yahweh*. Now they are merely the priests of the people, just as the OT "the feasts of Yahweh" become 'feasts of the Jews' in the Gospels. They hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own religion, meeting the basic religious needs of humans, rather than accepting His Truth for what it was. Biblically there was to only be one chief priest- but Israel now had several, hence the plural *chief priests*.

"Be born" is Gk. *gennao*. Messiah was procreated, gendered, beginning

within the womb of Mary- a concept incompatible with theories of a literal pre-existence of Christ.

Herod understood that the wise men were seeking the Messiah. This indicates that they were Jews who understood Messiah to be the King of Judah in David's line.

*2:5 And they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judea. For thus it is written through the prophet-* We get the impression that the reply was immediate, and that it was expected that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. When Angels appeared in praise of a baby born to a poor woman in a stable, people were not so quick to accept that God acted not according to their expectations of Him. And Judaism within the next 30 years moved away from this expectation towards a position whereby they taught that nobody could know where Messiah was from (see on Jn. 7:27).

*2:6 And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah. For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who shall be shepherd of My people Israel-* The emphasis is on the word "not". She was perceived as the least, but she was not in God's sight. This is so typically His style- to use the most despised and lowly in order to do His work. The same was His style with Mary.

*2:8 And he sent them to Bethlehem-* They followed this providential leading, and then the star re-appeared and confirmed them in the path (:9). Divine guidance is rarely constant, there are times when it appears to leave us and we are left to work and order our path on our own initiative, and then guidance reappears to confirm us.

*And said: Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I may also come and worship him-* "Search" is the same Greek word as in 2:7 concerning how Herod enquired diligently about Jesus. The impression is given that Herod wanted the wise men to as it were be his agents; his diligence was to be theirs. It could be that he was simply lazy to himself go to Bethlehem to see the child when it was far from confirmed that the child was in fact there.

*2:9 And they, having heard the king, went their way; and the star which they saw in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was-* The star gave varying degrees of guidance- it led them to Palestine, and then to Jerusalem in general. Then it disappeared. Now it specifically pinpointed the building in Bethlehem. Divine guidance is rather similar in our lives.

*2:10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great*

*joy-* Because the star had disappeared but had now reappeared.

2:11 *And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him, and opening their treasures they offered to him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh-* These three gifts are typically what was offered to kings and there are several references to kings being presented with these three things. The extent of the wise men's conviction was therefore very great. This is how much it can cost us to accept that Jesus really is Lord and King of our lives- financial expense, risk, long travel...

Note the absence of any reference to Joseph. His amazing obedience and immediacy of response to God's word wasn't rewarded by any permanent recognition. He played his role without recognition, and this is the lesson to us in our largely unrecognized and humanly unappreciated lives.

2:12 *And being warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod-* The Greek for "warned" implies 'to be answered', so it seems they had prayed to God for guidance- and now received it.

*They departed for their own country by another route-* As Joseph the next night likewise had an Angelic message, immediately responded and 'departed' to another country. Their obedience was an example for Joseph and Mary to follow. 2:13,14 Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

2:13 *Now when they had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying: Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him-* The Hebrew idea of 'seeking' includes the idea of worship- which was exactly Herod's pretext for wanting to locate Jesus. If Joseph hadn't been obedient, would God's whole plan in the Lord Jesus have been destroyed? Presumably so, or else the whole impression given of command and obedience would be meaningless, for Joseph would've just been acting out as a puppet.

2:14 *And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt-* That same hour of the night (assuming dreams happen at night), Joseph obeyed the strange call. The observation has been made that Matthew's record has much to say about Joseph, and Mary is presented as passive; whereas in Luke, far more attention is given to Mary herself. The suggestion has been made by Tom Gaston that Joseph gave eyewitness testimony which was used by Matthew, and Mary gave such testimony to Luke. "Arose and took" was in exact obedience to 2:13 "arise and take". See on 1:25. For *Departed-* See on 2:12.



2:15 *And stayed there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt did I call My son-* One of many NT statements of the nature of inspiration of the OT writers. God spoke *dia* the prophets, they were a channel for *His word*, they were not speaking merely for and of themselves.

The emphasis is that *Joseph* fulfilled this prophecy- the grammar states that *he* was in Egypt until he was told to return. Hos. 11:1,2 speaks of how Israel were disobedient to this call: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt... But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me". The implication again is that Joseph had the freewill to obey this call or not- and he was obedient. For the call to leave Egypt had not been answered by Israel and it was no foregone conclusion that it would have to be by Joseph.

2:16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the astrologers-* The record doesn't give the impression that the wise men did what they did because they were mocking Herod. Rather did they fear him and obeyed God's desire to foil his evil plot. But Herod perceived what they did as mocking him, and the record states things from the perspective of how he perceived things [as with the language of demons]- see on 2:1.

*Was furious-* An example of where the Bible teaches us basic human psychology. He felt mocked by the wise men, although actually they hadn't mocked him, he just perceived it that way- and so he took out his anger against them on the babies of Bethlehem. He transferred his anger from one to another. And that explains why the woman behind the till was so angry with you for no reason this morning- because she was transferring onto you the anger she felt against her mother / partner / neighbour arising from an incident [probably a misunderstanding and wrong imputation of motives] which happened last night.

*And sent out soldiers and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders of it aged two years and under, according to the time which he had determined from the Magi-* This would suggest that when he asked them when the star had first appeared, they replied 'about two years ago'. It would seem they had been planning their journey, or perhaps even making it, for two years.

2:17 *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying-* Be aware that when it comes to *prophecy*, in the sense of foretelling future events, the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot

fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

*2:18 A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children-* But the focus of the massacre was Bethlehem. Clearly a reference to one event is being applied to another, and this is how Matthew understood the 'fulfilment' of prophecy.

*And she would not be comforted, because they are not-* The words are used about Rachel's husband Jacob weeping for Joseph, a clear type of the Lord, and refusing to be comforted because he 'was not' [Gen. 37:35- cp. the brothers' explanation about Joseph's supposed death, that "one is not", Gen. 42:13]. This again is rather out of strict context because Rachel died before Joseph's supposed death (Gen. 35:19). The literary argument seems to be that *if* she had then been alive, *then* she would have wept as Jacob wept for her son Joseph. Jacob's weeping [on behalf of Rachel] for the death of Joseph / Jesus was ultimately misplaced because Joseph was safe in Egypt. And so the weeping of 'Rachel' for the Bethlehem babies was done whilst Jesus was in fact safe in Egypt. This could explain the semantic link between the quotation of 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' and then this quotation about Rachel weeping as Jacob wept for Joseph, when in fact he was safe in Egypt. Jer. 31:15,16 reports Rachel weeping for her children who had been lost, and then being told to stop crying because they would come again from the Gentile land where they had been taken. In other words, she was being told that the children she thought were dead and gone were actually alive- in a Gentile land. Which was exactly the case with Jacob's mourning for Joseph which is clearly the basis for the mourning of 'Rachel' here. But then the problem is that the women this verse is applied to in Matthew 2 had lost actual children by real physical death. It's all a very complicated argument, and very forced and unsatisfactory to Western eyes and ears because the context appears to always be so inappropriate and the facts don't quite fit. Only parts of the picture fit. But this is very much the style of Jewish *midrash* [commentary] on the Old Testament. It probably would've been more persuasive, interesting and intriguing to first century Jewish ears than it is to ours in the 21st Century.

*2:19 But when Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream*

*to Joseph in Egypt, saying-* Literally, "appears", not 'appeared'. The inconsistent use of tenses isn't the grammatical mistake of an uneducated, uninspired writer. This device is common in the Gospels. It focuses attention upon the Angel appearing, and encourages us to re-live the moment, as if to say, 'And wow, lo and behold- an Angel appears!'. The Gospels were initially intended for public reading, even performance on street corners, as the majority of people in the first century world were illiterate. So this kind of device is just what we would expect.

*2:20 Arise and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead that sought the young child's life-* Herod was not alone in wanting Jesus dead. The "they" presumably referred to the Jerusalem leadership of 2:3 [see note there].

*2:21 And he arose and took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel-* Again we note his immediate obedience. International migration was a major thing in those days, when people rarely travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace let alone moved that far.

*2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee-* The implication could be that Joseph had no other information apart that from Herod had died, but on crossing the border, he learnt that Herod's son was reigning- and Joseph feared to go further. Therefore, so I read the record, God made a concession to Joseph's weakness and told him to go to the backwater of Galilee. He "turned aside" into Galilee suggests in the Greek that he 'withdrew himself', as if pulling back into obscurity. The same Greek word is found in Mt. 12:15: "Jesus withdrew himself from there". He likewise "withdrew into a desert place" (Mt. 14:13), "withdrew [from the crowds]" (Mk. 3:7), "withdrew" when the crowds wanted to crown Him King (Jn. 6:15), judges "withdrew" and talked privately amongst themselves (Acts 26:31). So the picture seems to be that God intended Joseph to raise Jesus somewhere other than Galilee, perhaps in Bethlehem or Jerusalem. But Joseph feared Archelaus, and therefore he was given a 'plan B', to withdraw and fade away into the obscurity of Nazareth. But in God's perfect way, the upbringing in Nazareth could also fulfil His plans and this explains the otherwise rather forced interpretation that Jesus lived in Nazareth so that He would be a 'Nazarene' (see on 2:23). God works oftentimes with us in the same way. He makes concessions to our weaknesses, and whilst the plan Bs, Cs and Ds don't fit as snugly into His prophetic intentions as plan A might have done- they still fit. Because He makes them fit. And that in my opinion explains the slight sense we get in some parts of the record here that events are being 'made to fit' Bible prophecies. And we see it in our own lives. We may take a plan C or D, e.g. a sister may marry an unbeliever, and this doesn't mean that God's

purpose with her finishes, but rather that [e.g.] Bible teaching about marriage just doesn't fit as snugly to her experience as it might have done otherwise.

*2:23 And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets-* It was not specifically spoken by plural prophets that Messiah was to be called "a Nazarene" because He would grow up in despised Nazareth, but that was the implication of the prophecies that Messiah was to be despised of men. See on 2:22 for some thoughts about this apparent 'forcing' of the prophetic fulfilment here.

*That he should be called a Nazarene* - The town was despised spiritually as incapable of producing a prophet (Jn. 1:46; 7:52), and yet in Hebrew it meant 'town of the shoot', and the shoot was a title of Messiah (Is. 11:1). Again this is typical of God's style- to invest the most spiritually despised with the highest spiritual calling.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying-* Presumably this connects with 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

3:2 *Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand-* There has always been the rulership of God over the individuals whose hearts accept His Kingship. But through the work of the Lord Jesus, this rulership was made so much greater, and His example, teaching and spirit enabled believers to come more totally within that rulership. But clearly the Kingdom was "at hand" not in the sense of its literal establishment on earth physically, but in that as King of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus could rightly have "the Kingdom of Heaven" as a title.

It appears that Matthew under inspiration expressed the Gospel in terms which were attractive and not unduly provocative to his hearers, hence he uses 'Heaven' for 'God' as was common Jewish practice. We too should present the Gospel with the same kind of forethought to the sensitivities and nature of our audience, rather than baldly present 'truth' to them considering that we have thereby done our duty. We are not seeking to merely fulfil a duty, but to actually "so speak" that we convert men and women.

A possibility is that the Kingdom of God / Heaven could have come soon at that time ["at hand"] *if* Israel had repented. Then they would not have killed their Messiah and King but rather accepted Him. Whilst God's purpose was not ultimately thwarted by Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and their impenitence, the Divine project would have taken a different form if they had repented and accepted Him. We note that those who responded to John's call to repentance were again asked to "Repent" by the Lord (Mt. 4:17). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit in responding to John's message, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. The Lord describes John as mourning to his audience, and them *not* mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:3 *For this is he-* Is this part of John's message about *Jesus*? Or is this a note from Matthew about *John* being the voice in the wilderness? The other Gospel writers use the Isaiah quotation as if it is their comment on

John (Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4). The present tense 'this is he' can be understood as part of the dramatic present tense style of some parts of the Gospels [see on 2:19]. The way Mt. 3:4 continues "And this same John..." might suggest that "This is he" is also Matthew's comment about John.

*The voice of one crying-* When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice" (Lk. 3:7). He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance'. And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to be conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

*In the wilderness-* John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path *to* Christ as well as the one He would travel. Those converted became a path to Christ for others. One purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others onto that same way. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

*Make ready the way of the Lord-* The quotation from Isaiah suggests that if the way was prepared by human repentance, then this would be the path over which the Lord's glory would return to Zion in the establishment of the Kingdom. See on 3:2 *repent*. The strong suggestion is that the

Lord's coming in glory was a possibility if Israel had repented at John's preaching and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Lk. 3:6 goes on to say that if they had repented, then the prophecy that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" would come true- and that is clearly language of the future Kingdom of God on earth. For not even all Israel saw / perceived the Jesus / salvation of God, let alone "all flesh". The term "all flesh" is used frequently in the OT about mankind generally rather than just Israel; indeed it is used in contradistinction to Israel (Dt. 5:26; Job 34:15; Is. 49:26; Is. 66:16,23,24; Jer. 25:31; Dan. 4:12).

*Make His paths straight-* The implication is that the repentance of people in Judah would make straight the Lord's path over which He would travel. Repentant people are therefore His way to Jerusalem. This of itself suggests that the Lord shall only come to Zion once there is repentance in Israel, seeing repentant people are the way or road which enables Him to travel. The allusion is clearly to the practice of preparing the road for an important person to travel upon. The whole metaphor suggests that Christ will only come to Zion once His people are spiritually ready, once there is repentance, perhaps specifically in Israel. John the Baptist was to prepare the Lord's way (Lk. 1:76 same Greek words). But it was repentant people who were to prepare the Lord's way. John's appeal was for others to prepare the Lord's way by repentance. But his preaching meant that he was the one preparing the way; the change of life in his hearers would therefore as it were be counted to John. The work of preparing the Lord's way is mentioned in Mal. 3:1 as being the work of "the messenger"; and the context appears to be the restoration from Babylon. Perhaps because those addressed in Is. 40:1 ("Prepare ye") failed in their task and God sought to see it fulfilled through a specific messenger.

The ideas of fleeing wrath (Lk. 3:7) and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

*His paths straight-* There is a definite allusion to the language here in Acts 13:10, where a man is accused by Paul of perverting "the right [s.w. 'straight'] ways of the Lord". Paul clearly saw *his* mission as likewise to

prepare straight paths for the Lord Jesus by preaching the Gospel of transformation. The implication could be that John's mission ultimately failed, in that the Lord Jesus did not come to Zion in glory. Paul seems to imply that therefore that work is now placed upon all Christian preachers; we are to prepare the way so that the Lord can come to Zion and establish God's Kingdom. When we read that Paul instructed men "in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25) we have the same idea- we are preparing the way of the Lord Jesus. Each person who is truly converted is part of the Lord's highway, and once there is sufficient transformation of human life, the way will be ready enough for the Lord to return upon it.

Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come (Lk. 3:4), so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way of the Lord", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way of the people". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (Lk. 3:4 s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And



the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the "Lamb of God", a phrase the Jews would've understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself. John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13). There was another reason behind John's appeal for repentance. It was that he perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

3:4 *Now John wore a garment*- Lit. 'Had his clothing'. The Greek *ekho* translated "had" is also translated 'conceive', 'count' and 'take for'. He took himself as Elijah. Clearly John was consciously presenting himself as the Elijah prophet by the way he dressed. He had to make

some personal effort to fulfil the prophecies about him. Even if a calling is intended for us by God, we still have to make conscious effort to fulfil it. We can easily overestimate the amount and frequency of Divine contact with Bible characters. It was not so much that John was told 'You are to be the Elijah prophet, now you must dress, act and speak like him!'. The choice of dress, appearance and even location in the wilderness were all probably John's own conscious attempts to be like Elijah, without being specifically asked. We too are set up with Bible characters whom we are asked to follow in essence- for this is why so much of God's word is really history. And there are ways in which the initiative is left with us as to how and how far we follow them.

*Of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins-* This was not the clothing of the poor- their garments were typically made of goat's hair. Indeed, camel's hair coats were a luxury. We therefore conclude that John was consciously modelling himself on Elijah, who had dressed like this (2 Kings 1:8).

*And his food was locusts and wild honey-* Not necessarily from bees, but perhaps tree gum e.g. from the tamarisk tree.

*3:5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him-* These global terms such as 'all Judaea' clearly aren't literal- people from all Judaea went out to John. Perhaps John set up his place of witness as he did so that those interested had to make some effort to come out to him for baptism, considering that candidates had to make some effort and show some commitment. On the other hand, if he wanted to reach as many people as possible, surely he could've set up his place of preaching and baptism in the city and thereby attracted and saved more people. For not everyone was able to make the long journey down to Jordan and back. One wonders whether he made the same mistake as the historical Elijah, in having too low a view of others. Whatever, his hard hitting message attracted people, so much so that the city dwellers streamed out to him, motivated by the testimony of the others who had been there and returned to share the good news of sin confessed and forgiven and of the coming of the Christ.

*3:6 And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins-* As if they confessed their sins whilst in the water and the baptism process was ongoing. *Exomologeō* essentially means to agree with, hence the same word is used about 'confessing' in the sense of praising (s.w. Mt. 11:25, Rom. 15:9). To repent, to confess sin, is essentially to agree with God's perspective on our sins. They agreed that they were sinners. Elsewhere, what they did is described as 'the baptism of

repentance', of *metanoia* (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). *Metanoia* strictly means to think again, or legally, a reversal of a legal decision. The legal connotations of the language are developed further in Romans 1-8, which expounds the Gospel in terms of the court room. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul may have heard John preaching, for all Jerusalem went to hear his message, including "many of the Pharisees" (:7), and Paul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time. This would explain his many allusions to John's teaching, and it could be that the whole legal approach of Romans 1-8 is based upon this language of charge, agreement with the charge and re-thinking of the human case which we meet here, right at the start of the NT Gospel story (see on 3:7 *The wrath to come* to see how Romans uses John's term 10 times). The decision that we are condemned must be agreed with by us, whereas previously we had not agreed with it- considering us to be not that bad as people, victims of circumstance etc. Our re-thinking leads to God's re-thinking and reversal of the judgment against us. Note that the whole sense of the Greek words for 'confessing' and 'repenting' is internal to the human mind. Practical change is not of itself implied in the words. This of course comes as a result of a genuine agreement with the charge of sin and a radical re-thinking. It is not therefore for us to demand repentance from others in terms of external appearance. We cannot judge the secrets of the heart, and are to accept repentance as claimed, seeing that it is a deeply personal and internal affair.

*3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them-* Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

*You offspring of vipers-* This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself

convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution... than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do. The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude... ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience. But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

*Who warned you-* The Greek means to exemplify, to 'exhibit under the eyes', and can imply that John had himself shown them the way of repentance by having done so himself. John the Baptist rhetorically asked his hearers: "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt. 3:7). The answer, of course, was 'Well, you, John'. And John continues: "Bring forth *therefore* [i.e., because I am the one who taught you] fruits meet for repentance". John recognizes that his converts will be after his image in one sense; as Paul put it, what his hearers had heard and seen in him as he preached, they were to do. So I suggest the emphasis should be on the word 'who', rather than on the word 'you'. The sense is not 'You lot of sinners? Ha! And where did you lot hear of the need for repentance!'. Rather is it a rhetorical question. Who warned them to flee from the wrath to come? John himself. Here we see another window onto the humility of John in his appeal. He is saying that he too has confessed and repented of his sins, and he knew this was witnessed in his life. And he asks the legalistic Pharisees to follow his example. John was asking them to repent of their legalism and accept Jesus as Messiah, and it would seem that John had had to pass through that very same path himself, freeing himself from the Essene's legalism which it seems he had

got associated with. And Elijah, John's role model, was another man who was led to repent of exclusivism and legalism. The point is clinched by a look at the Greek word translated 'warned'. It literally means to exhibit, to exemplify. John was the pattern for them. And if Paul was indeed amongst that crowd of cynical Pharisees, Paul was ultimately John's most stellar convert, although little did he realize it at the time. The same can happen with our preaching. We may make converts years after our death. And the lesson comes home clearly, that the preacher or the teacher is to be the living embodiment of his or her message, the word being preached made flesh in the preacher.

*To flee from the anger to come-* A common idea of Paul's especially in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22;12:19; 13:4,5). 1 Thess. 2:16 surely alludes here in speaking of how the wrath has come upon the orthodox Jews. See on 3:6. In Mt. 23:33 Jesus seems to say that it is now impossible for that group to flee the coming wrath. Even in this life the frame of opportunity can come to an end before death.

Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others. An example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28). Or again, reflect how Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking.

*3:8 Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance-* It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching (Acts 26:20)- Paul describes his preaching in

language which is directly alluding to how John preached. As John said that he was *sent* to baptize, but especially to witness of Christ (Jn. 1:33), so Paul felt that he too was *sent to baptize*, but his emphasis was more on the preaching of Christ than physically baptizing (1 Cor. 1:17).

"Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance" must be connected with our Lord's description of the Gentile believers as "a nation bringing forth the (vineyard) fruits" of the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43). These are defined in Rom. 14:17: "The Kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy". Christ's parable of the vine in Jn. 15 explains that it is the word abiding in us which brings forth fruit. Bringing forth fruit is therefore a way of life (cp. Rom. 6:21,22). In each aspect in which we 'bear fruit', we have in a sense 'repented'. Our repentance and fruit-bearing is not something which we can set time limits on within this life. Christ would have been satisfied if Israel had borne at least some immature fruit (Lk. 13:7). Only when there is no fruit at all, in any aspect of spiritual life, will Christ reject us. Some will bear more fruit than others- some sixty, some an hundredfold. Mt. 3:8 connects repentance with fruit bearing. This shows that God may recognize *degrees* of repentance and response to His word, as He recognizes degrees of fruit bearing. It is far too simplistic for us to label some of our brethren as having repented and others as being totally unrepentant. In any case, the fruits of repentance are brought forth unto *God*, not necessarily to fellow believers (Rom. 7:4). There is a marked dearth of evidence to show that a believer must prove his repentance in outward terms before his brethren can accept him. The "fruits" John had in mind are made more explicit in Luke 3. In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have... for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

And yet despite the demand for "fruit", John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he

expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding. John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor... they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right...?

3:9 *And think not to say within yourselves-* Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

*We have Abraham as our father, for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham-* Said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim*, sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:10 *And even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire-* John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (:13), meaning that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:11 *I indeed baptize you in water to repentance, but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire-* Christ "shall baptize you" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire (Mt 3:11); this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words of Matthew 3:11 spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy") to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal



was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

For baptizing in water unto repentance, see note on Mt. 3:3 above. Given that Isaiah 40 offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance, it could be that the AV translation is correct- although *eis* ["unto"] has a very wide range of meaning. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

"He shall baptize you" points up the contrast is between John baptizing unto repentance, and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between 'repentance' and 'the Holy Spirit'. I suggest that the idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower repentance and new-mindedness far more than what was achieved by unaided, steel-willed human repentance.

*3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire-* "He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

*3:13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him-* John's ministry was known throughout the land; perhaps the Lord travelled with others, some who would later become His disciples; this of itself was an act of identity with the humanity of first century Palestine.

*3:14 But John would have stopped him, saying: I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?-* There had clearly been contact between the Lord and John; John had not literally remained his whole life in the wilderness. Or if he did, then the Lord had travelled out there to meet

him. His limited contact with the Lord had persuaded him that He was Messiah; for he wanted the Lord to baptize him. Baptism was something which it was expected would be done either by the Elijah prophet or Messiah (Jn. 1:25).

3:15 *But Jesus answering said to him-* The sensitivity of the Lord is reflected in how He frequently sensed and foresaw human behaviour and objections / response to His teaching and actions. You can read the Gospels and search for examples. Here's a classic one: "But John would have hindered [Jesus]... but Jesus answering said..." (Mt. 3:14 RV). Jesus 'answered' John's objection even before John had properly expressed it (see another example of this in Lk. 22:70).

*Permit it now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he permitted him-* Maybe the Lord Jesus felt that this act of total identification with sinners in their need was necessary for Him to achieve perfect / total righteousness. And He needed John's assistance in this- "it becomes *us*". He was baptized in order to be absolutely perfect, and that perfection involved the act of identification with sinners in order to totally identify with them. Perfection will never be achieved by holding aloof from sinners, but rather by identification with them that they might be saved. The reason for Jesus being baptized was surely that He wanted to identify with sinful man, taking His place in the line of mixed up folk waiting on the banks of the Jordan.

3:16 *And Jesus when he was baptized immediately came up out of the water, and the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming to rest on him-* Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

"To Him" suggests that only the Lord Jesus saw this, although John too saw the dove descending and heard the voice (Jn. 1:33). But He uses the same language in Jn. 1:51: "Hereafter *you* shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God... descending", just as He had seen the heavens opened and the dove descending upon Him. His sense was that His experience at baptism was in essence to be that of all in Him. This connection lends weight to the idea that His baptism was an act of identification with us, He shared our experience and we are to share His.

Likewise the Spirit 'lighted' upon Jesus at His baptism, and the only other time we find this idea is when He promised that although we know not from whence the Spirit 'lights' ["comes"], it will indeed 'light' upon every one that is born of water and Spirit (Jn. 3:8). The same term is used in Acts 19:6, where after baptism the Spirit 'lighted upon' those baptized. Thus the believer's baptism is spoken of in terms reminiscent of the Lord's. He was baptized to set us an example, identifying with us in order to appeal for us to likewise identify with Him.

*3:17 And a voice came from the heavens, saying: This is My beloved Son-* Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.

*In whom I am well pleased-* Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus. God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father.

## CHAPTER 4

:1 *Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil*- The Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing; and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my *The Real Devil*.

4:2 *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he hungered*- The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called "the devil". It was this same human weakness, the "satan", or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

The temptations were controlled by God for the Lord's spiritual education. The passages quoted by the Lord to strengthen Himself against His desires ("devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs: -

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 "Jesus led up of the spirit" "forty days" "in the wilderness". Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
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commandments (word), or no."	
Deuteronomy 8:3. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord..."	"He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. "He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God".,
Deuteronomy 8:5 "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee"	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus the Lord showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by "wild beasts" because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

4:3 *And the tempter came and said to him-* Matthew's record speaks of "the tempter", and the suggestion has been made that this was a technical term used to refer to the Essene priest whose duty it was to test the claims to Messiahship made by people (5). This would confirm the suggestion that the Lord's temptations were at the hands of the Jews. The desert where He was would've been accessible from the Qumran settlement of the Essenes, and the preceding chapter 3 of Matthew has recorded how many of these people appear to have accepted baptism from John the Baptist in the very area where the temptations occurred. Perhaps "the tempter" priest stayed around and entered into dialogue with Jesus. In confirmation of the idea that the "devil" was some form of Jewish priestly figure, we note that Mt. 4:4 records that Jesus told him that "It is *written*...". To the illiterate, Jesus usually said that they would have *heard* something *said* in the Old Testament; but to the literate Jewish religious leadership, He prefaces His quotations or allusions by

saying that "It is *written*". The fact He uses this phrase here would suggest He may have been talking to one of that class. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life and death amongst the Jews, suggesting that they did indeed subject Him to tests of His Messiahship:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it" (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.).

Every other use of the word "tempter" in Matthew is about the temptation / testing of Jesus by the Jewish leadership (Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18,35); and that very group are presented as the 'satan' or adversary to the Lord Jesus and His work. There is nothing sinful of itself about putting someone to the test. The same word is used about Jesus putting the disciples to the test (Jn. 6:6); Paul tested / put to the test [s.w., A.V. "assayed"] the idea of preaching in Bithynia (Acts 16:7); we are to put ourselves to the test (2 Cor. 13:5); God put Abraham to the test (Heb. 11:17), false apostles were to be put to the test by the faithful (Rev. 2:2). It ought to be clear that there is nothing sinister nor sinful about the idea of being 'put to the test' nor of putting another to the test.

*If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread*- It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of God..." by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class

conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

*Command that these stones become bread*- This would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left" (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

*4:4 But he answered and said: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God-*

The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

**Deuteronomy  
8**

v. 2 "The Lord thy God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"  
Forty years in the wilderness

**Matthew 4**

v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.  
Forty days in the wilderness



v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".	The Angel made Jesus hunger.
The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)	Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.
"Man does not live by bread alone"	v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

4:5 *Then the Devil took him into the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple-* The Greek for "took him" is often used in a non-literal sense, with the idea of receiving someone into an office or situation. The

same word is used in :8 about the Lord being taken up a high mountain. The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise 'set him' later on in :5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

The Synoptics speak of how satan 'comes to' and tempts and challenges the Lord Jesus to claim earthly political power, which 'satan' can give him (Mt. 4:8,9). But John describes this in terms of "the people" coming to Him and trying to make Him King- which temptation He refused (Jn. 6:15). Likewise it was 'the devil' in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread. But in Jn. 6:30,31, it is the Jewish people who offer Him the same temptation. In the wilderness, the Lord responded that man lives by the bread which comes from the mouth of God. In Jn. 6:32, He responds likewise by speaking about "the true bread from heaven". The temptation from 'the devil' to publicly display His Divine powers in front of Israel in the Jerusalem temple (Mt. 4:5,6; Lk. 4:9-12) is repeated by John in terms of the Lord's brothers tempting Him to go up to the same temple and openly validate Himself "to the world" (Jn. 7:1-5).

*4:6 And said to him: If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning you, and on their hands they shall carry you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone-* Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

*4:7 Jesus said to him: Again it is written, You shall not make trial of the Lord your God-* The Greek effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He

accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

*4:8 Again, the Devil took him to an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them-* The Greek could be translated 'the very highest', clearly a reference to the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here- within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:-

- Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, "In a moment of time". There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Matthew 4: 2-3 says that "when he had fasted forty days...the tempter (Satan) came to Him...". Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no

record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk (note the devil "led" Jesus there) to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end, :11). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

That the temptations were internal to the mind of Jesus is suggested by the way that in Matthew's record, there is a progression from the desert, to the temple pinnacle, to a high mountain- as if in some sort of ascent toward Heaven. It's even possible that Paul has this in mind when he comments that Jesus did not consider rising up to equality with God a thing to be grasped at, He dismissed that temptation, and instead He progressively *lowered* Himself, even to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

4:9 *And he said to him: All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me-* The Lord knew full well that "all things", the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

4:10 *Then said Jesus to him: Away with you Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve-* The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how "Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve". He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master

begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

4:11 *Then the Devil left him, and angels came and ministered to him*- The same words are used of how they minister to *us* (Heb. 1:14). And the theme of Hebrews 1 and 2 is that the Lord was indeed of our nature, and in essence had the same relationship with us as they had with Jesus.

4:12 *Now when he heard that John was imprisoned*- It's as if the Lord took the end of John's public ministry as the cue to begin His ("from that time...", :17). He may have worked this out from the implication of the prophecies about the Elijah prophet. Or it may be that He took John's imprisonment as the sign to go to Galilee. Whatever, He was acting according to information which came to Him, and structuring His ministry accordingly. We get the impression that this was done without direct commandment from the Father but at His initiative.

*He withdrew into Galilee*- The Greek definitely implies to withdraw oneself. This seems typical of the Lord during His ministry- to go public for a while and then withdraw.

4:13 *And leaving Nazareth*- Gk. 'to forsake'. Perhaps because of the lack of response already apparent in His home town. Again, as commented on :12, we see the Lord making decisions about His ministry on His initiative in accord with how situations developed.

*He went and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali*- The idea is of 'to reside'. He changed His base from Nazareth to Capernaum in order to give His message more access to Gentiles.

4:14 *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the*

*prophet, saying-* This sounds as if the Lord was consciously attempting to fulfil God's word. He was "the word made flesh" but He had to consciously achieve that. See on 3:15.

4:15 *The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-* "Toward the sea" is "by the way of the sea" (AV). The idea was that John the Baptist was to prepare "the way" for Messiah. Even at this early stage in the ministry, it seems that the Lord recognized that that "way" was going to have to be amongst the Gentiles.

4:16 *The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light-* Each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. Matthew, for example, changes the Lord's quotation of Is. 9:9 from "the people which *walked* in darkness..." to "the people which *sat* in darkness saw great light" (Mt. 4:16), because he was *sitting* at the receipt of custom when the Lord called him (Mt. 9:9).

*And for those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death-* As if death is personified, having its own region and shadow. The darkness of the context in Is. 9:2 is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Isaiah 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the Sea of Galilee (Is. 9:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the Sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

*On them a light has dawned-* The light is clearly the Lord Jesus. He uses the same word soon afterwards in speaking of how God makes His light to 'spring up' upon both the just and the unjust, the evil and the good (Mt. 5:45). These categories are therefore within the group of those to whom the light of the Gospel has been revealed. Likewise the rising of the sun in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:6 s.w.) would refer to the beginning of Christ's public ministry; the various types of ground initially responded to John's message, but when Christ's ministry was revealed openly, i.e. the sun sprung up, then persecution began, and they fell away.

4:17 *From that time began Jesus to preach and to say: Repent!-* The Lord's first public word was the challenge to change. His opening words

were surely carefully chosen to verbatim repeat those of John (Mt. 3:2). He wanted to show the continuity of the message from John to Himself. For He was building upon John's work, which had been intended to prepare the way for Him to come triumphantly to Zion over the 'way' which had been prepared in the hearts of repentant people. The exact repetition of John's message could suggest that the Lord saw John's ministry as not having been responded to- and therefore his message and appeal needed repeating.

*For the kingdom of heaven is at hand*- Gk. 'approaching'. The idea was that John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way, the highway, over which Messiah would come. So now, Messiah was approaching. "The kingdom of God" was a title for Messiah, seeing that He was the King of the Kingdom; and the term is used like that in Scripture too, e.g. Lk. 17:21. The Kingdom could have been then established, the glory of Yahweh could have come to Zion if John's work of preparing the road for it had been successful. But ultimately, Israel would not. But the Greek can also mean that the Kingdom was being 'made near', it was being drawn near by repentance- which is why the Lord was appealing for repentance. This is a significant theme in Bible teaching- that the exact calendar date of the Kingdom's establishment is dependent upon the repentance of Israel. This repentance appears a prerequisite to the Lord's coming in glory and the establishment of the Kingdom. Our focus should therefore be upon appealing to Israel to repent.

4:18 *And walking by the sea of Galilee*- "Walking by" is literally 'around'. The idea could be that He walked all around the lake.

*He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen*- The Lord's call always comes at the most inconvenient moment. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, caught in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life. Lk. 5:5 gives more detail. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) at *thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's

brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on any manner of mobile devices, have recordings of Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a recording of Isaiah on his mobile device if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house).

4:19 And *he said to them: Follow me, and I will make you-* One intention of our calling to the Gospel is to bring others to the Kingdom. Evangelism isn't therefore something intended for only some within the body of Christ. And the Lord has a personal training program for each of us- "I will make you...".

*Fishers of men-* The Greek *halieus* is literally 'a salty one', from *hals*, salt. The Lord invites all in Him to see themselves as the salty ones of the earth (Mt. 5:13). The call to be fishers, salty ones, is therefore not only for those men on the shore of Galilee, nor for just some of us- but for us all. The Qumran documents spoke of 'the fishers of men' as being those who would condemn Israel in the last day; and yet the Lord clearly had the idea that they were to 'catch' people out of the 'sea' of the nations and bring them to salvation. So the preachers as 'fishers of men' actually have a double role- as Paul put it, to some our preaching is the savour of death, to others, the savour of life (2 Cor. 2:16). Not only does this encourage us as the preachers to *plead* with men to choose life rather than death; but it is a sober reminder that we too face the impact of the



very Gospel which we ourselves preach, and must likewise live lives of ongoing response. We preach, therefore, aimed at a decision- not merely 'witnessing', nor simply imparting helpful information.

*4:20 And they immediately left the nets and followed him-* The Greek word translated "left" is used throughout the Synoptic records of the disciples 'leaving' what they knew in response to the Gospel. They left their nets, then their boat and even their father (:22). The same word is translated 'to forgive'. Because of our experience of having our sins 'let go' by God and His Son, we are thereby motivated to 'let go' not only others' sins and debts to us, but all the ties that bind us to the things of this life. The immediacy of their response is a theme of Matthew's; it is he who begins by so stressing how immediately Joseph and Mary responded.

*4:21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them-* They were intending to continue fishing. There was therefore no theatrics attached to their dramatic leaving of all.

*4:22 And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him-* They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. The way the Lord called people in the midst of their daily lives, and they immediately "left all and followed Him" is surely recorded to set a pattern for all future response to Him (Mt. 4:22; Mk. 1:18). See on :20. Those fishermen who left their nets had heard the message some time earlier, but the record is framed so as to stress the immediacy and totality of response to Him, in the midst of daily life. In a day when the complexity of modern living can become an excuse to justify almost anything as an expression of discipleship, we need to remember the starker simplicities of Jesus' first call: "Follow me". And the immediate response which was made to it. In this sense, Jesus through His word that makes Him flesh to us, i.e. an imaginable person...still walks up to fishermen, into shops, accountants' offices, school classrooms: and bids us urgently and immediately leave behind our worldly advantage, and follow Him in the way of true discipleship. The immediacy of response is quite a theme (:20, and especially in Mark's early chapters). It continues with the speed at which people were baptized in the Acts.

*4:23 And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people-* "Went about... teaching... preaching... healing" is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted

from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

The preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (Lk. 4:43 cp. 19, 2 Cor. 6:2); Rom. 14:17, which seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now.

*4:24 Then his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them*

- The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness – physical and mental, understood and not understood – was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatic" translates the Greek *selēniazomai* – "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction – just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase. "Brought" translates a word which was used in the technical sense of bringing sacrifice- and the idea of converts as sacrifices is repeated in Rom. 15:16.

*4:25 And great crowds followed him, those from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan-* Luke makes the point that His popularity was not only because of the miracles, but because of His teaching. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was so impressed with the words of His Son. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *And seeing the crowds, he went into the mountain and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him-* The article suggests a specific mountain in mind- perhaps the great mountain Jesus had in mind in 4:8? Jesus taught up a mountain, suggesting that His teaching is accessible to those who make some effort to receive it. The Sermon on the Mount is the equivalent of the giving of the Law, also on a mountain. As God / the Angel gave the law to Moses, so Jesus did to the disciples. The disciples ascending the mount to receive the teaching parallels them with Moses, with the implication they too were to relay it to Israel. Instead of the people being forbidden to come up the mountain, they were allowed to- for by the end of the Sermon we learn that the multitudes were also there (7:28,29) and descended from the mountain (8:1). The Rabbis also *sat* to teach- but they taught always indoors. The similarities and differences are being emphasized to demonstrate how Jesus was in continuity with Jewish culture and yet also radically different. The scene of Ex. 20 is of Moses ascending the mount to receive the Law, the first part of which was the ten commandments. The beatitudes seem to be the New Covenant's equivalent of the ten commandments- see on 5:22. The Lord's sermon quotes or alludes to all of the ten commandments (excluding the Sabbath) and redefines them (5:21,27). The way the Lord makes no comment upon the command to keep the Sabbath is surely significant. Simplistically, one could argue that He was suggesting that His followers would not be bound by the Sabbath commandment. But it was well understood in the first century that priests on duty were free from the Sabbath legislation. The hint could therefore be that the Lord believed that because His obedient listeners were to live their lives as the new priesthood, they were therefore free from Sabbath legislation. The Lord was surely very conscious that John had come to prepare the way for Him, in terms of Isaiah 40. And yet that same prophecy saw the good news being declared to Jerusalem from a mountain (Is. 40:9). Perhaps the Lord was seeking to consciously fulfil this by going up a mountain and proclaiming blessedness and good news to spiritual Jerusalem. It could be further noted that the Gospel of Matthew features five sections of recorded speeches of Jesus, each concluded by the phrase "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (Mt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It may be that Matthew is seeking to present the Gospel as a new Torah, with five 'books' to it just as there were in the old Torah.

5:2 *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying-* As if this struck Matthew, recalling how this manifesto of His teaching first fell from His lips. There may be the implication that what He said was by direct revelation from God.

5:3- see on 5:43.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven-* Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon,

waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

*5:4 Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted-* Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). The time of God's grace was extended, therefore, to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

We noted in chapter 4 that the Lord had in mind the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

*5:5 Blessed are the meek-* Those humbled by their sins. James, in his commentary on the Sermon, alludes here by saying that God gives grace to the meek, and therefore sinners should cleanse themselves (James 4:6,8-10).

*For they shall inherit the earth-* Clearly a reference to the promises to Abraham. But it was no good just being a physical descendant of Abraham- humility was the required characteristic. To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: "Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness".

*5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness-* Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and *thirst* after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is

alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity.

Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

*Thirst after righteousness*- The characteristics of the 'blessed' in the first four beatitudes are that they will be spiritually poor (:3), mourning (often used in connection with contrition for sin), humbled, and thirsting to be more righteous than they are. "Righteousness" could mean 'justice' but the term is used by Paul to specifically refer to 'justification from sin'. These descriptions immediately give us all the encouragement that this message of the Kingdom is for me, even me. The next blessing is for the merciful, the forgiving, because they shall obtain mercy- i.e. final cleansing from sin and justification on judgment day. Although of course this is possible even now. See on 5:9 *peacemakers* and on 6:12.

*For they shall be filled*- S.w. Mt. 14:20 about the 'filling' of the multitude who came to hear the word of Jesus. All the Kingdom blessings have some fulfilment in this life. John's version of this is the record of the Lord saying that the salvation He provides would satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for it (Jn. 6:35).

5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*- This is apparently missing in Luke's record. He says instead that the reviled and excluded will be blessed (Lk. 6:22). Samuel Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Happy are they who are excommunicated for they shall receive mercy" (Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 75). There's a clear connection with Ps. 18:25: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With the perfect man, you will show yourself perfect". This verse was clearly in the Lord's mind, and it may shed light on His later challenge to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)- in this case, He would be inviting us to forgive others as God does. Paul in 2 Tim. 1:16 saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart*- Heb. *bare lev*, also translated 'broken hearted' in Is. 61:1. A pure heart can also be understood in the context of

what happens on repentance and receipt of forgiveness, for Ps. 51:10 uses the term to describe David's position after his repentance and forgiveness (also in Ps. 73:13).

*For they shall see God-* Again the Lord is encouraging the disciples whom He was addressing to see themselves as Moses (see on 5:1), for Moses was held in Judaism as the only one who had seen God (Ex. 33:11).

*5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God-* Samuel T. Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Blessed are they that stumble" (Lachs, p. 77), and this would fit with our suggestion made on 5:6 that the 'happy' people are those who are spiritually weak but are accepted and forgiven. However, the reference may be to the priesthood, with whom God made a covenant of peace, that they might bring Israel to peace with Him (Num. 25:12; Mal. 2:6). Just as the Lord encouraged the disciples to see themselves as Moses, so He inspires them with the thought that they, the nothing special, secular Jews, could and would take over the work of the priesthood. Rabbi Hillel "exhorted his students to become disciples of Aaron, 'peace lovers and peacemakers' (mAb1:12)" (As quoted in Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 314).

*5:10 Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven-* 'Persecute' is literally 'to drive away' (s.w. Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as often in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

*5:11 Blessed are you when men reproach you because of me, and persecute you and falsely accuse you of all sorts of evil-* Quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. Verses 10 and 11 seem to imply that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised.

Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets". These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11). When Corinth

reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12.

5:12- see on 5:7.

*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for likewise they persecuted the prophets that preceded you-* The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Sermon- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

5:13 *You are the salt of the earth-* Salt inevitably affects, by reason of *what it is*, whatever is next to it. We are lights in a dark world. Lights give light. If the salt doesn't have the influence of salt, it is thrown away. Our poor record of preaching by personal contact is very worrying when seen in this light. We have hidden behind leaflets and press adverts and giving money. But if we aren't the salt, if we don't show *our* light in our little world; are we in fact the salt or the light of the earth? This unconscious spirituality, this natural witnessing, is the essential reflection of our experience of the Lord Jesus. He didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father.

One characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more 'in there' than many of us are. The language seems to suggest that unless we are not influencing others, then we will be condemned. As in 4:19, the Lord seems to be teaching that some form of outgoing effect upon others, if not evangelism, is part and parcel of following Him. The parable of the light under the bucket in 5:15 teaches the same.

We *are* the salt of the earth. The Lord doesn't say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its

user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don't just hold the light in our hands; we are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do. Sodium chloride (salt) is inert, meaning it remains unchanged by processes acting upon it and retains its characteristics through whatever. In the same way as the believer is the city set on a hill which cannot be hid, the man who builds on rock, the good tree that must bring forth good fruit, so the Lord seems to be saying again that the essential direction of a believer's life is clear. God sees as either His people or not, and there is no grey area. We don't drop in and out of fellowship with Him. And this should be a comfort to us. We are His. Any salt that lost its saltiness was not true salt, but some imitation (at the time, gypsum was sold by rogue salt traders as salt) or just something which appeared like salt- there is some 'salt' from the Dead Sea area which may have been in the Lord's mind. But the point was, that it was not true salt from the start. The covenant of salt was given to Aaron (Num. 18:19)- so yet again, the Lord is encouraging those secular men to see themselves as a new priesthood.

The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The beatitudes were spoken generally of all believers, but "You are the salt of the earth" was spoken specifically to the disciples. We can understand the 'earth' as the land- of Israel. The Lord pinned His hopes



for the whole land of Israel on that band of rather unlikely men, most of them secular, non-religious Jews. It was in their power to change and prepare the whole land for Him. The very metaphor of salt was well chosen- for salt was cheap and common. It was by their very earthliness and humanity that their mission was to succeed, just as was the case for the Lord Himself.

*But if the salt has lost its savour, with what shall it be salted? It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under the feet of men-* The idea could be that if we are not salt for the earth, preparing people to be acceptable sacrifices to God, then there is no plan B. It all depends upon us. And if we don't do that work, then we shall be rejected. Note how Paul speaks of the conversion of people as the offering up in sacrifice of the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16).

"Good" in "good for nothing" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. Lk. 14:34 carries the same idea- if salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use.

The same phrase "thrown out" is used about the rejection of the wicked at the last day (Mt. 13:48; Jn. 15:6). The 'treading underfoot by men' would then refer to the faithful having some part to play in the condemnation of the wicked. The idiom may mean that they will be despised by them. Or there could be a literal element to it (Mal. 4:3 "the wicked shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day"). It is not for us to thus judge others *now* because we are to do so *then*.

5:14 *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid-* The reference is surely to Jerusalem, which was known as the city set on a hill (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001) p. 289). The connection between this city and "the light of the world" is clearly drawing from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem being a light to which the true Israel would rally and the Gentile world would come for enlightenment about the true God (Ps. 132:17 cp. 1 Kings 11:34-36; Is. 2:2; 60:1; 66:20). Jerusalem was the classic external symbol of Israel and Judaism- and the Lord is saying that His largely non-religious, secular Jewish disciples were to be the true Zion for the enlightenment of both Israel and the world. This is similar to His invitation for them to see themselves as Moses, who alone "saw God", and sharing in the persecutions of the prophets. This high calling echoes down to us- we who like to think that we are not amongst God's great heroes, and who prefer to leave the dramatic acts of faith to our leaders and high

profile members. But the calling is to each of us, to be of no less significance than them, not to hide behind the grand religious symbols of faith such as the temple and the city of Jerusalem- but to be those things in daily life. Judaism understood the Levitical priesthood as the light of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Testament of Levi 14:3 claimed of the priesthood: "For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles [or in another manuscript "ye who are the lights of Israel, shall be as the sun and moon"]". And yet as so often in the Sermon, the Lord applies the language of priesthood to his secular, spiritually poor listeners.

There appears the idea that if we hide who we are from others, then we are not really Christian. A city on a hill cannot possibly be covered. It is totally public. There must be an element about our discipleship which is likewise absolutely open and obvious to the world. When the Lord returns, it would be strange indeed if our neighbours were shocked to know that we were actually one of His people. The same word is used about the man who 'hid' the talent of the Gospel (Mt. 25:25). The relevance of this emphasis in the first century world was that it was apparently easier to merely quietly assent to Christian teaching, rather than come out in the open about it. The same word is used of how Joseph of Arimathea 'secretly', hiddenly, believed, for fear of the Jews (Jn. 19:38). But in the end, he 'came out', as we all are lead to do by providential circumstance and our own growing conviction of Christ.

*All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise "could not be hid" in His preaching (Lk. 7:24). He was the light of the world, and so are we. In the work of witness, we find ourselves especially united to Him. We are Him to this world, and in a sense, He only shines in this world through us. Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. Perhaps in answer to the unspoken question 'How can we avoid losing our saltiness?', the Lord replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. The city set on a hill is specifically spoken as being Nazareth, where the Lord had grown up (Lk. 4:29). Jesus must've seen the town from the distance and thought out His teaching over the years before He now publicly stated it.*

*5:15 Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a basket but on the stand; and it shines for all that are in the house-* The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company

of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed, to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible

consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

5:16 *Likewise, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*- These are those "in the house[hold]" (:15), "those who enter" (Lk. 8:16; 11:33). The general public does not seem to glorify God because of good works. 2 Cor. 9:2 seems to understand the verse as meaning that we give light and opportunity for praise to other believers. Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the public's gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

It could be that the "men" who glorify God in Heaven are the Angels- the same "men" who lit our candle in the first place (:15). "Men" in the parables who do the 'gathering' of our fruits (Jn. 15:6; Mt. 7:16) represent Angels, who are the ones who will actually do the gathering at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 24:31). This seems to make most sense, and avoids the idea of our doing good works specifically in order to impress men. And men do not glorify God just because they see our good works. But Angels, who lit our candle in the first place, notice how our light is shining out to others "in the house", and glorify God in Heaven [*"is in Heaven"* is unjustified- the idea is that they glorify the Father, in Heaven]. In this interpretation, the "men" are different to those who are "in the house".

5:17 *Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfil*- The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He

reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". Then, it was "accomplished" (:18), and *ginomai* there is usually used about events being accomplished; the supreme event in view is the cross. The Lord taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17). Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself. The Law of Moses was intended to create a perfect man- if it were to be totally obeyed. The Lord Jesus did this- and therefore there was no more need for the Law. Yet the Beatitudes were addressed to those who hungered to be righteous, and who were spiritually poor, having broken God's laws. It was therefore in this context that the Lord Jesus sets before those very people the ultimate good news- that He has come determined to succeed in perfect obedience to the Law, and thus fulfilling it, He would remove its binding nature upon others. Hence the Law was added *until* the Seed should come (Gal. 3:19). This conclusion (in broad terms) was also arrived at by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 2001 ed.) pp. 74-76). The Lord's total obedience and fulfilling of the Law is therefore further good news for we who have failed both historically and in present life to keep it.

5:18 *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the law, until all things be accomplished-* Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed".

5:19 *Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments-* See on 'jot and tittle' (:18). Note the connection between breaking "these least commandments" and being "least in the Kingdom". The least in the Kingdom will therefore be those who didn't consider the small things worthy of their attention. But the principle is that by our attitude to that which is "least" we show our appropriacy to receive that which is great (Lk. 16:10 s.w.).

*And shall teach men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven-* The Lord explained that "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven" would have broken "the least" commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet "the least in the Kingdom" was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the

Kingdom (Mt. 11:11; 25:40 "the least of these my brothers"). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding ('teaching men so'). The idea of being called / named / pronounced great or least in the Kingdom suggests differing degrees of reward distributed at judgment day. The idea of being called / named at the day of judgment has just been used in Mt. 5:9 (s.w.). There is thus the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

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It is Jesus Himself who shall be called great (the same two words used in Lk. 1:32 "He shall be *great* and shall be *called* the Son of the Highest"). The one who would do and teach supremely would be Jesus. Here, as so often, the Lord makes an oblique reference to Himself (as in mentioning that some seed would bring forth one hundred fold). The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19);

although not the only one. Again we see the implication that we are to somehow teach others, to engage with others, in order to be acceptable.

*5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven-* The Lord asks us to *exceed* the "righteousness" of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By "righteousness" he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a "quiet room" of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven". Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around. And yet surely the answer is that super-abounding (AV 'exceeding') righteousness is only attainable by being justified / counted righteous in Christ. The Lord's challenging statement was surely in order to lead us to the same conclusions reached in Romans 1-8 about being counted righteous when we have no righteousness of our own. For to super-abundantly exceed the technical, points-scoring righteousness of the Pharisees was well-nigh impossible.

'Entering the Kingdom' is a very common idea in the Lord's teaching. But He understood people to be 'entering' the Kingdom right now ("them that are entering", Mt. 23:13). In the same way as judgment is ongoing now, so is condemnation and entry into the Kingdom.

*5:21 You have heard that it was said to those of old: You shall not kill, and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment-* Jesus was addressing the illiterate poor. Elsewhere, to the educated and literate, He says that they are aware that "It is *written*". Here He quotes both one of the ten commandments and also the tradition of the elders. We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

5:22 *But I say to you*- Having quoted one of the ten commandments, Jesus implies that His teaching now supersedes them. See on 5:1.

*That everyone who is angry with his brother*- We are all brothers and sisters, each of us adopted into the Divine family, each of us freed slaves, rejoicing in that pure grace. Most times the NT speaks of 'brothers', it is in the context of tensions between people (see Mt. 5:21-24, 43-48; 7:1-5; 18:15-35). We can't separate ourselves from our brethren any more than we can from our natural families. Once a brother, we are always a brother. No matter what disappointments and disagreements we may have, we are baptized into not only the Lord Jesus personally, but also into a never ending relationship with each other. We cannot walk away from it.

*Without a cause*- As added in some texts and AV. The Greek is always translated elsewhere 'vainly', the idea being 'in vain', 'without an effect'. Anger which doesn't achieve anything positive is wrong. God's anger is creative- e.g. the 'anger' of His judgment through the flood brought about the salvation of the faithful. Anger therefore is not in itself wrong. The motives are all important.

*Shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council, and whoever shall say Moros shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna*- One of the major themes of the Lord's teaching in the sermon on the mount was the need to respect others; to see the value and meaning of persons. Indeed, it can rightly be said that all sin depersonalizes another person. Sin is almost always against persons. Relentlessly, ruthlessly, the Lord drives deeper, and yet deeper, into the very texture of human personality in demanding that, e.g., we are not even angry with others, lest we effectively murder them. To say "Raca" to your brother was to commit sin worthy of serious judgment, He taught (Mt. 5:22). "Ra-ca" was the sound made when a man cleared his throat to spit, and it was a term of abuse in earlier Semitic languages. To despise your brother, to disregard his importance as a person, was to be seen as an ultimate sin. In this light we should seek to avoid the many terms of abuse which are so common today: "a right idiot" etc. The Law taught that one should not curse a deaf person. Think what this really means. Surely the essence of it is that we should never be abusive, in any form, to or about anyone, even if it is sure that they will never know or feel our abuse.

Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will be justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who says to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction



because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more*- a moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX) was liable to eternal condemnation by Him. John Stott claims that the Greek may directly transliterate the Hebrew word *mara* (a rebel or apostate) (John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-culture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) p.84). The fact that calling our brother a 'fool' warrants definite condemnation surely implies of itself that the term meant that the fool would be condemned at judgment day. If we condemn others, even if they are to be condemned, then we shall be condemned. That is the Lord's message. We must remember that in Hebrew thought, to pronounce a curse upon a person was seen as highly meaningful and likely to come about. To declare someone as condemned at the future judgment seat would therefore have had a huge psychological effect upon the person. They would have felt that they really would be condemned. The evil practice of disfellowshipping individuals, implying implicitly and at times explicitly that they have no place in the body of Christ, can have the same effect. When the Lord spoke about calling your brother a fool being the same as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15), He may well have been thinking of the passage in Leviticus 19:16-18: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people... thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise (frankly, NIV) rebuke thy neighbour... thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". The fact this passage is expanded upon so many times in Proverbs would indicate that gossip was as major a problem among the old Israel as it is among the new. But notice the fine psychology of the Spirit here: gossip in the church is related to having a grudge, to hating your neighbour in your heart, to not loving your neighbour as you love yourself (and we are very conservative about our own failings). To hate your brother in your heart, to gossip about him, was and is as bad as murdering him. And this same connection between gossip and murder is made in the prophets (Ez. 22:9 cp. Prov. 26:22). But the Law provided a way out. If you had something against your brother, frankly tell him about his failure, *so that* you would not hate him in your heart. If we

don't do this, or try to get someone else to do it, we will end up hating our brother in our heart and we will gossip about him.

"In danger of" in the Greek doesn't imply a mere possibility, but rather, that such a person will receive the threatened judgment. "The council" refers to the Sanhedrin; but you didn't come before them for muttering 'Raca'. The Lord surely meant that such would come before the Heavenly council, of Angels. For this was a well-known, Old Testament based idea- that there is a Heavenly council of Angels. And Christ will come with the Angels with Him to judge us. So the rejected will first come before the Lord, then the Angelic council, and then condemnation. It could be argued that calling a brother 'Raca' and being angry at him without a cause would lead to discussion about this at the day of judgment; but not condemnation ['hell fire', Gehenna]. Only pronouncing a brother a 'fool', i.e. positively condemned and not to enter God's Kingdom, would lead to that condemnation. There appears to be a three stage progression here from judgment / discussion to council (Gk. *sanhedrin*), to condemnation in Gehenna. It could be that the three ideas are all parallel. But it's tempting to see them rather as a progression, and to note the similarity with the three stage progression of Mt. 18:15-17, where in case of interpersonal conflict there was firstly a private reasoning with the brother, then bringing the church together to discuss the case (cp. the Sanhedrin), and then treating the person as a sinner. However, the surrounding context of Mt. 18:15-17 suggests to me that the Lord spoke all that tongue in cheek and did not intend it to be obeyed literally. For the question of the context is 'If my brother sins against me'. The Lord outlines the three step scenario- and then says that if your brother sins against you, forgive him 70 x 7, that is, even if his repentance seems less than credible, without seeking to test the legitimacy of his repentance. The three stage process was well known in Judaism, and the connection with Mt. 5:22 shows that in the Lord's thinking, it was an attempt to reflect the judgment and condemnation of God in the community of believers today. And that is precisely what the Lord implores us *not* to do (especially in Mt. 7:1). We are not to attempt to mimic Heaven's judgment and condemnation in our encounter with our brethren in this life. There are churches and groups who seek to follow Mt. 18:15-17 to the letter, claiming they are being Biblical in their approach. But some more research would indicate that perhaps by doing so they are doing exactly what the Lord did not want us to do, and by doing so may be placing themselves in danger of condemnation.

5:23 *If therefore*- The link with :22 is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that we should reconcile with our brother in order to avoid the temptation to unwarranted anger with our brother, muttering 'raca' about him, or pronouncing him a condemned fool. If we are unreconciled,

even if the situation is our brother's fault because *he* has something against *us*, then we are liable to the temptation to become wrongly aggressive and condemnatory towards him. And this is a significant part of spiritual life- getting ourselves into an environment of thought and situation with others where temptation will not press so strongly upon us. It's easy to leave situations unreconciled, but time does not actually heal them, and the situations lead to temptations towards aggression and judgmental attitudes which may lead to our condemnation.

*You are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you-* I'd always read this, or perhaps glanced over it, as saying that I shouldn't offer my gift on the altar if *I* had something against my brother, but I should reconcile with him; but seeing *I* have nothing against anyone, well I can just go on in serving the Lord. There may be others who have a problem with me, but then, that is for them to sort out with me. But no. The Lord is saying: 'If your brother has something *against you*; if the fault is *his*... then *you* take the initiative and try to reconcile it, before doing anything else'.

5:24 *Leave your gift before the altar and go your way-* The only Old Testament case of an interrupted sacrifice was Cain and Abel. Yahweh told Cain that if he would 'do well', then his sacrifice would be accepted, and Yahweh appears to suggest an animal for Cain to offer (Gen. 4:7)- on this basis I would suggest that the sacrificial meeting was interrupted by Cain murdering Abel. The Lord also may have in view the way that a thief or deceiver could repent by putting things right with his brother *and then* offering a sacrifice (Lev. 6:4-6). The Lord is assuming that we are guilty- and this is part of the hyperbole. If you have a relationship breakdown with your brother, then you are guilty. That's the hyperbole; we are not always guilty, but the Lord is making the point that we simply must do all within our power to reconcile, with a sense of pounding urgency. Refusal to talk to our brethren is absolutely not the right way. The Lord also surely has in mind the teaching that the sacrifice of the wicked is unacceptable (Prov. 15:8; 21:27). Again the hyperbolic point is that we should act as if we are the guilty party in the case of relationship breakdown, and act with urgency to put things right. For time never heals in these cases- the longer the situation continues, the harder it is to ever resolve. Perhaps in turn Paul alludes to these things by urging us to examine ourselves (and his context is to examine our attitude to our brother) before we make the sacrifice at the Lord's table in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:27,28)- 'the Lord's table' was another way of speaking about the altar, thus making the breaking of bread meeting the equivalent of offering sacrifice under the Old Covenant.

*First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your*

*gift*- Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God with our sacrifices (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. Reconciliation with our brother is required before acceptably meeting God. And yet many if not most die unreconciled with someone. This is one window onto the necessity of the judgment seat- it is for our benefit rather than the Lord's. There we will become reconciled to our brethren as we observe their judgments, realizing why they were as they were, and perceiving our own desperate need for grace. The tough alternative to this suggestion is that those who refuse to reconcile with their brethren in this life shall not therefore meet the Lord acceptably. Now we perhaps understand better what Paul meant when he urged us "as much as lies in *you*" to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18). Given that Christ can come at any moment, or our lives end, there is an urgency in all this. Which lead the Lord to urge us to reconcile "quickly" with our brother at any cost (:25). See on :25 *lest at any time*.

5:25 *Agree with your adversary*- The context of the preceding verses imply this is our brother. The Lord recognized there would be satans and personal adversaries within His ecclesia.

*Quickly*- We must agree with our adversary quickly, for we are on our way to judgment (Mt. 5:25). This continues Matthew's theme of immediate response; see on 4:20. The call of the Gospel is effectively a call to go to judgment. If we truly perceive this, and our coming need for the utmost grace, we will settle our differences with our brethren- "quickly". The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). This urgency of our approach to preaching is in harmony with the generally urgent call to spiritual life which there is everywhere in the Lord's teaching. He gives the impression that we are living life on a knife edge. He saw men as rushing to their destruction. We are the accused man on the steps of the court, whose case is hopeless. Now is the very last moment for him to settle up with his brother (Mt. 5:25 cp. Lk. 12:58). We're like the unjust steward, with a knife at our throat because all our deceptions have been busted. *Everything* is at risk for the guy. Life in prison, goodbye to wife and kids, poverty... stretch out before him. He *must* get right with his brethren by forgiving them their debts. We can't come before God with our offering, i.e. our request for forgiveness, if our brother has any complaint against us regarding unforgiveness (Mt. 5:23). Forgiving each other is as important as that. As we judge, so we will be judged. Our attitude to the

least of the Lord's brethren is our attitude to Him. There are likely no readers who don't need this exhortation- to ensure that they have genuinely forgiven all their brethren, and that so far as lies within them, they are at peace with all men. At any moment the bridegroom may return... so have your lamp burning well, i.e. be spiritually aware and filled with the Spirit. Put on your wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus, before it's too late (Mt. 22:11-13). He's just about to come. The judge stands before our door, as James puts it.

*While you are with him in the street-* Gk. "in the way". The Lord seems to have in mind Joseph's admonition to his brothers to not fall out whilst in the way together, but to abide under the deep impression of his grace towards them (Gen. 45:24).

*Lest-* The idea seems to be 'In case he...', or even perhaps stronger, implying 'because he will...'. Surveying the NT usage of the term, it generally seems to imply that 'this will be the case'. The idea is that if you have an adversary and do not reconcile with him, then you will be found guilty. The facts of the case don't come into it- if you are unreconciled, then you are guilty. Thus hyperbole is to reinforce the point made in :24- that reconciliation is so vital. There is of course the unspoken rider, that we must be reconciled "as much as lies in you" (Rom. 12:18). Paul died apparently unreconciled to many brethren- they in Asia had turned away from him personally (note the irony, that they 'turned away'; (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26)), although some of the believers in Asia are addressed positively by the Lord Jesus in the letters of Rev. 2 and 3. But the point of the Lord's hyperbole is that those unreconciled to their brethren will be tempted to get into aggressive and condemnatory attitudes which may well lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. And therefore He uses this hyperbole- that the unreconciled will be certainly found guilty and condemned, simply because they are unreconciled and have adversaries amongst their brethren.

*The adversary deliver you-* The implication is that our brother has the power to deliver us to judgment, or not. Again we see how reconciliation is a choice; it is in our power to bring our brother to judgment for certain things, and that process might even lead to his condemnation. But, the metaphor implies, we can *not* be adversarial, reconcile, and therefore our brother will not come to judgment for being unreconciled with us.

*To the judge-* The synagogue official. Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. Thus Lk. 6:47; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars,

which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience.

*And the judge deliver you to the officer and you be thrown into prison-* There will be degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion. The progression judge-officer-prison is similar to judgment-council-Gehenna condemnation in :22. I suggested that this may refer to the stages of the judgment process for the condemned at the last day, with unresolved sin being passed further on to others [Angels?] to consider. I suggested also that perhaps judgment and council may refer to unresolved sins being referred to more serious processes of judgment, out of which we may still emerge 'saved', but have eternally learnt our lesson. The same idea may be here- and even the final 'prison' can be exited, although at great cost to us (although on the other hand, a similar metaphor is used in Mt. 18:34 for the unforgiving debtor who is cast into prison and tormented "until he should pay all that was due". This could be speaking of condemnation). These metaphors may all be speaking about the learning process through which the unreconciled may have to pass at judgment day.

The rejected amongst the people of God will in some ways share the condemnation of the world which they loved. It may be that there will be different geographical areas of punishment; some are cast into fire, others into outer darkness, into prison (Mt. 5:25)... or are these simply

saying that there will be different kinds of punishment? Or are they different figures for the same thing? Whatever, the sense that the day is drawing near should find expression in the love and care we show towards our brethren. The Lord exhorts to agree with our adversary quickly, whilst we are on the way to judgment- and He says this in the context of warning us to be reconciled with our brother (Mt. 5:23,25). In the light of approaching judgment there is an urgency about our need for reconciliation both with our brother and thereby with God (is He the "adversary" in the parable?). All this talk about reconciliation is placed in the Lord's opening manifesto of His fundamental values and beliefs. It should have the same prominence in our thinking and action.

*5:26 Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny-* This may refer to the eternity of final condemnation for having been unreconciled to our brethren. In this case, we need to do all we can so that each and every situation of lack of reconciliation is truly not our fault. At the very least we are to have an open table to all our brethren. But not getting out "until" could mean that a slack attitude to reconciliation with our brethren will lead to dire consequences for us in this life, and there will be no way out until whatever our fault was in the matter, our debt, is completely manifested and paid.

*5:27 You have heard that it was said: You shall not commit adultery-* AV "Said by them of old time". The Lord seems to avoid saying 'By Moses'. He seems to be stressing that the ten commandments had come down to them in oral form; and He was standing before them actually telling them new commandments. The contrast is 'They said... but I say', rather than 'Moses wrote, but I write...'.

*5:28 But I say to you, that everyone that looks on a woman-* Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*" (2 Sam. 11:2). And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looketh on* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28). Jubilees 4:15,22, a commonly known book in Judaism at the Lord's time, claimed that the sons of God of Gen 6.2 were Angels who fell because they lusted with their eyes after "the daughters of men". As so often in the Bible, wrong ideas are alluded to and corrected. It was not that Angels sinned by lustful looks leading to adultery- this language is reapplied to us as humans. Looking on a woman lustfully is also the language of Job 31:1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?". Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (Job 31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

*Lusting for her*- Gk. 'to set the heart upon'. The Lord is not speaking about involuntary turning of the eyes to simply look at a woman.

*Has already committed adultery with her in his heart*- Gk. 'even now'. The suggestion is that the adultery is going to happen in real physical terms, but it happened before God at the time of fantasizing it. It seems to me that the sense of the Greek here implies that an act of actually physically committed fornication will always begin with lust for the act in the heart. This is not to say that sexual fantasy is OK and only actually performing it is sinful. But the sense of 'even now' would appear to mean that this is not what the Lord is teaching here. He is saying that acts of fornication are actually committed ahead of the act- within the human heart. Sexual fantasy about forbidden partners would surely be outlawed by the many NT commands about spiritual mindedness- e.g. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

5:29 *And if your right eye causes you to stumble*- To make to stumble, not to give umbrage. The eye must surely be understood in the context of :28. It could be that the Lord specifically has sexual sin in mind. It is His form of "Flee fornication". Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

*Pluck it out*- The Greek word is every other time translated to save or deliver.

*And throw it away* - The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and "cast it [away] from you"- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be "cast [away] into hell" (Mt. 5:29- the same Greek word is used in both places in this same verse). What He's saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and we must condemn them now in this life, dissociating our spiritual self from our carnal self as Paul does in Rom. 7- for this is the meaning of the figure of 'casting away'. He has just used the term in 5:13,25, and it is so often used to mean 'cast to condemnation' elsewhere too (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; 13:42,50; 18:30; Lk. 12:49; Jn. 15:6). We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29,30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then.



*For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body be thrown into Gehenna-* The idea of self-condemnation is continued here. If we literally cut off part of our body, it perishes. If we do not, then the whole body will perish in Gehenna, the condemnation of the last day. For God is able to destroy [s.w. to perish] the body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28). So we are to make perish those parts of our lives which make us sin- i.e. we are to condemn them.

5:30- see on 7:19.

*And if your right hand causes you to stumble-* Not just 'your hand'. The right hand was a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

*Cut it off and throw it away, for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body go into Gehenna-* Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has. He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest".

5:31 *It was also said: Whoever shall send away his wife, let him give her a contract of divorce-* I suggested earlier that the Lord was carefully not

saying that 'Moses said this, but I say differently'. But now He moves on to criticize the teaching of the religious leaders about divorce, which had effectively been elevated to the level of God's law. Divorce was often practiced in ancient societies for trivial reasons and in the heat of the moment. The divorce contract demanded by Moses however required some forethought; for one thing it had to be written, which in a largely illiterate society would involve getting others involved. And the contract would have stated the reasons, and the conditions regarding any issues of maintenance. This is a far superior and more morally developed way than in many primitive societies.

*5:32 But I say to you, that everyone that divorces his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality-* The Lord has in view the guilty Pharisees of the Hillel school who were twisting Dt. 24:1-4 to mean that one could divorce for any reason so long as a divorce paper was written. Jesus at this point is not addressing the Pharisees but His potential followers. He is probably citing this well-known controversy in order to demonstrate how motives behind an action are what are culpable. He is inviting His hearers to consider the motive for divorce and perceive that as all important, rather than the fact of divorce. This is why I suggest the key word in this verse is *logos*, translated "cause". It is the *logos* of fornication which is the reason for divorce (see on 5:37). The thinking, reasoning, idea of fornication is what leads to divorce. This interpretation makes the Lord's reasoning here flow seamlessly and directly on from His teaching in preceding verses about the root of sexual sin being in the mind. So the Lord is indeed saying that the Hillel school of thought- that divorce was possible for any trivial reason- was wrong. But as always, He moves the focus to a higher and more demanding level. He implies that "fornication" is the Biblical justification for divorce, but He says that actually it is the *logos*, the thought, of fornication which is the problem. And this is in line with what He has just been teaching about the thought and action of fornication being so closely connected.

*Makes her commit adultery-* There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects.

*And whoever shall marry a divorced woman commits adultery-* The 'whosoever' earlier in this verse seems to refer to men who thought they could divorce their wife for any reason and go off with another woman. This view led women into sinful relationships with those men. But perhaps

what is in view in this part of the verse is the women who divorced their husbands for any reason- for women in some circles did have the power to divorce in the first century. The man who married such a woman was also committing adultery. The 'whosoever' refers to people who were getting divorced for any reason apart from fornication, and thereby leading both themselves and their new partners into sin.

5:33 *Again, you have heard that it was said to them of old: You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord-* This refers to perjury, i.e. lying about something in court. Perjury has a motive- e.g. simply lying about your age to a causal enquirer is not perjury, but it is perjury if you lie about your age in order to get old age retirement benefits. So we see the theme of *motive* being continued. But the Lord takes the matter further. He not only forbids false swearing but swearing at all- as if He foresaw that any oath is likely to end up a false oath, such is the weakness of humanity and our tendency not to be truthful. James 5:12 quotes this and says that "Above all" we should not swear falsely, lest we fall into condemnation. This is strong language. The implication is that if we lie in a human court, that is one thing- but that lie will be tried in the court of Heaven and will lead to condemnation.

5:34 *But I say to you: Swear not at all, neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God-* The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence. Swearing by "heaven" may refer to the temple; the "earth" of :35 would be the land of Israel.

5:35 *Nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King-* The Jews, like many people, swore too easily. They thought that swearing by something greater than them was so acceptable that it actually excused them from basic truthfulness within their hearts. Their reasoning therefore was that they could lie about a matter because they judged they would never be found out; and swore by all manner of greater things to add credibility to their lie. This is the whole problem with religious structures of whatever kind; external things are invested with more authority and importance than the need for internal truth and spirituality. We see here the Lord's penetrating analysis of human psychology. The Lord clearly understood God as a personal being,

who was personally manifest in the earth / land of Israel and Jerusalem- despite their apostasy. Clearly God does not offer His fellowship only on the basis of purity, nor does He practice any sense of guilt by association.

5:36 *Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black-* Starting with the greatest thing- the throne of God- down to the apparently most insignificant (one hair), the Lord shows that absolutely nothing (great or small) can give any more meaning to human words than the words themselves.

5:37 *But let your Yes mean Yes, and your No, No. For whatever is more than these comes from evil-* The AV and some manuscripts add "Let your communication be...". The word *logos* is used. The contrast is between 'swearing' in words, and having an internal *logos*, a thought behind the words, which is clear and honest. This continues the theme of 5:32 about the *logos* of fornication. We are to pay attention to our *logos* rather than merely the external word and action.

Yes, yes- People had the idea that there was normal language, and then oaths, which ensured that what you were saying was really true. The Lord is teaching that we should operate on only one level of language- absolute truth. We should not think that some areas of our language use can be less honest than others. The demand is for a total influence of God's truth into every aspect of human life and thinking.

Wrong words come *ek*, 'out of', evil or "the evil one". Yet the thrust of the Lord's teaching so far in the Sermon has been that wrong words and behaviour come *ek*, out of, the human heart and motivations. This, then, is 'the evil', personified as 'the evil one'. In using this term the Lord was radically redefining the popular conceptions of an external 'evil one' as an external being, teaching that it is the evil *logos* within the human heart which is the real 'evil one'. We note how deeply the Lord's teaching is concerned with internal thought processes. Whatever is more than a simple yes-no way of speaking involves something from 'the evil one'; and we weasel our way with words and meanings only when we are under temptation to be sinful. But that is a deeply internal, psychological situation, deep, deep within the human heart.

5:38 *You have heard that it was said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth-* When the Lord Jesus gave His commandments as an elaboration of Moses' Law, that Law was still in force. He didn't say 'When I'm dead, this is how you should behave...'. He was showing us a higher level; but in the interim period until the Law was taken out of the way, He was opening up the *choice* of taking that higher level, even though making use of the concessions which Moses offered would not have been a sin during that period. Thus He spoke of not insisting on "an eye for an eye"; even though in certain rare cases the Law did allow for this. He was saying: 'You can keep Moses' Law, and take an eye for an eye. But there is a

higher level: to simply forgive'. And that in fact was inculcated by Moses' law itself.

*5:39 But I say to you: Do not resist him that is evil-* The Greek term for resisting evil occurs only in Eph. 6:13. We are in this life to arm ourselves spiritually, so that we may be able to resist in the evil day. If Paul is alluding to this part of the Sermon, the point would be that we are not to resist evil in this life, because our time to ultimately resist it will be in the last day. Then, along with the Lord Himself, we will resist and overcome evil through the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Rom. 13:2 is likely another allusion to "resist not evil"- if we "resist" [s.w.]

Governments whom God has put in power, then we are resisting God. This means that Paul fully understood that the 'powers that be' are indeed "evil", but they are not to be proactively 'resisted' by those in Christ. The time for that will come, but is not now. We are, however, to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Surely "resist not evil" is in view. We are to resist sin within us, but not evil in its political form around us. Again, as so often in the Bible, we see that the focus for our spiritual struggle is within rather than without. As always in the Sermon, the example of Jesus was the making of the word into flesh. James 5:6 seems to make this point, by pointing out that Jesus did not and in a sense does not resist evil done against Him: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn't resist you". And yet He will judge this behaviour- not now, but at the last day.

*But whoever hits you on your right cheek-* You singular. Time and again the Sermon on the Mount / Plain seems to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor... love your enemies... to him who strikes thee on the cheek...". Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually.

*Turn to him the other also-* The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15).

When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

5:40 *And if anyone wants to sue you and take away-* A rather liberal translation of the single Greek word *krino*. The idea is quite simply of judging. We can be wrongly judged by others without them taking us to court. The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgements and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life.

*Your coat, let him also have your cloak-* It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

5:41 *And whoever shall compel you to go one mile, go with him two-* The Lord's high value of persons is reflected in how He taught His followers to not resist evil. A poor man had only two garments- an outer one, and an inner one (Dt. 24:10-13). Underneath that, he was naked. Yet the Lord taught that if you had your outer garment unjustly taken from you, then offer your abuser your undercloth. Offer him, in all seriousness, to take it off you, and leave you standing next to him arrystarkus. This would have turned the table. The abuser would be the one left ashamed, as he surely wouldn't do this. And thus the *dignity of the abused person was left intact at the end*. This was the Lord's desire. Likewise, Roman soldiers were allowed to impress a Jew to carry their pack for a mile, but they were liable to punishment if they made him carry it two miles. To offer to carry it the second mile would almost always be turned down by the abusive soldier. And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one

humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:42 *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would-* Luke says that the Lord taught that we should "give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Lk. 6:38). We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

*Borrow from you-* The Greek strictly means to borrow for interest. Seeing this was illegal under the Law of Moses, the Lord is saying that we should just lend- but not for interest. We would all soon be bankrupt if we read this as it stands in many English translations. Or it could be that the Lord was aware that He was talking to extremely poor people who had so little to lend that it was not as hard for them to take Him seriously on this point as it is for those who have so much more.

According to Luke's record here, the Lord taught that we must love our enemies "and lend [in whatever way] never despairing" (Lk. 6:35 RV). The Lord sought to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt... never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus.

5:43 *You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy-* The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms "'poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in

spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44 *But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you-* Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... spitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate] the terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The



language is not applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

5:45 See on 6:26.

*That you might be sons of your Father who is in heaven*- Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father". What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father.

*For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust*- God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. "If he causes his heart to return unto himself", the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists... is proof that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be

in us His children.

Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation. We noted on 5:44 that our prayer and goodness to our enemies is in order to lead them to repentance and salvation. This is surely one motive behind the way God sends rain and sunshine upon the evil as well as the good. His goodness to them is intended to lead them to repentance. Only at the day of judgment will He execute judgment against them, and that is to be our perspective too. See on 5:39 *resist not evil*.

5:46 *For if you love them that love you*- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *unloving*.

*What reward have you?*- The idea is of wages. Whilst salvation itself is a free gift, in contrast to the wages paid by sin, this is not to say that there will not be some element of reward / wages / eternal recognition of our spiritual achievements in this life. The preceding verses have spoken of prayer and blessing for our abusers. This kind of attitude will be eternally rewarded. Not least if we see those we prayed for, those we blessed and forgave without their repentance, eternally with us in God's Kingdom. The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

Lk. 6:32 speaks of us having "thanks". The Greek for "thank" in Lk. 6:32 is 'charis', normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts. Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for recognition and affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have

no "thank"- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters.

*Even the tax collectors do the same-* As demonstrated by the account of Zacchaeus, these were the most friendless people in society. Rejected by family, they were unloved by about everyone. The only person who would salute / greet them was a fellow publican (:47). The implication is that publicans [tax collectors] were loved only by themselves. Loving those who love us is little better than the selfish self-love of the lonely publican. Matthew was a publican and he surely had himself very much in view as he recounted this teaching of the Lord.

5:47 *And if you greet your brothers only, what do you more than they. The tax collectors do likewise-* "More" is, Gk., 'to super-abound'. This is a word characteristic of the new life in Christ. As God makes His grace *abound* to us, we are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to 'abound' in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God's abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

5:48 See on 5:7.

*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect-* We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way. The pure in heart see God, their righteousness (to God) exceeds that of the Pharisees, no part of their body offends them or they pluck it out; they are perfect as their Father is (Mt. 5:8,20,29,48). Every one of the faithful will have a body even now completely full of light, with no part dark (Lk. 11:36); we will walk, even as the Lord walked (1 Jn. 2:6). These impossible standards were surely designed by the Lord to force us towards a real faith in the imputed righteousness which we can glory in; that the Father really does see us as this righteous. Men have risen up to this. David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way.

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of

this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal. We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible if we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can we decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. On "Be ye therefore perfect", Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect" (Phil. 3:12), alluding to the Lord's bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. And yet we must compare "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" with "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect..." (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is 'perfect', and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not "already perfect", he admitted.

Luke's account has "be merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be ye holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave... be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)-

his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself. Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christians. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your father in heaven is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation... so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Take heed you do not do your good deeds*- Gk. 'to hold the mind towards'. Again and again, the Lord's emphasis is upon the innermost functioning of the mind and thought processes. For to be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

*Before men, to be seen by them*- The same Greek phrase is used in Mt. 23:5 about the Pharisees doing all their works motivated by this desire to be seen of men. What we do *unseen* by men is therefore the litmus test of our love and Christianity. We should almost have an obsession about doing good works unseen by men- we must "take heed", consciously set our mind, to do unseen acts of kindness to others. Because the "reward", the nature of our eternity, will depend on these things.

*Else you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven*- Salvation is by grace, but the 'reward' will be in terms of how the *nature* of our eternal existence reflects good things done in this life. The Greek word for 'reward' is quite common in the Sermon, and the first usage of it suggests that the reward is given in Heaven right now (Mt. 5:12 "great *is* your reward in Heaven", s.w. Jn. 4:36 "he that reaps receives wages / reward, and gathers fruit unto life eternal"; Mt. 5:46; 6:1,2,5,16). Yet the Lord comes from Heaven to give us the rewards after we have been resurrected at the last day (Mt. 20:8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12). So if we will be given an eternal reward for our works, it follows that there is a recompense for us noted in the books of Heaven at the very point we do the good deed. But there will be no such recompense for things which are openly seen of men, or anything which is consciously done so as to be seen by men. In the reality of life, the hardest thing about good deeds is when we sense nobody appreciates us, that we are holding the fort alone, that we have no recognition. On one hand, recognition for labour is hugely important to our basic psychological makeup- and employers have all come to realize that. It is only by appreciating the principle of eternal blessing for being *unrecognized* that we can live the way Jesus asks of us. It is my observation in the life of believers that often the Lord's most zealous servants are marginalized, falsely accused, rejected from churches etc. The Lord's teaching here makes perfect sense of that phenomenon. He wants them to continue their service in a way which will be eternally recognized, and He wants to ensure their motives for their good works are not in order to be seen of men. Therefore He allows them to be marginalized. So that their works may be totally sincere, and receive an eternal recognition. It is also the case that when serving others, we reflect that nobody realized all the host of planning and frustrations which went into one good deed. A plan to visit someone in

hospital may involve struggles with public transport, getting lost on the way, forgetting our telephone, being late home which meant we missed something important... and so forth. It is all those good deeds which others don't see. They 'see' only that we spent 15 minutes in a hospital visiting someone. But those other components to the good deed of the 15 minutes are all carefully logged with the Lord.

*6:2 When therefore you do alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets-* The reference may be to the bronze collection 'trumpet' into which the wealthy loudly poured large numbers of pennies. Remember that Jesus was addressing His sermon to the illiterate and desperately poor. There was little likelihood they would ever do this. So we are to understand the Lord as making a warning out of those wealthy people- to all of us, in whatever context, great or small, to not advertise our kindnesses, and to not be motivated to it by the thought of what others would think of it.

*That they may have glory from men* - Perhaps the emphasis is upon "they". Our good works are to be so that "men" give glory to *God* (Mt. 5:16). To have any intention of attracting glory to ourselves is therefore to play God. For all glory is to go to Him.

*Truly I say to you, they have received their reward-* The Greek translated "have" means both to receive fully, and intransitively, 'to keep away'. They get their full reward now, so they are keeping themselves away from any future reward at the last day. According to the allusion here in 1 Tim. 4:8, the implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

*6:3 But when you do alms-* The Lord Jesus was addressing the very poorest in society. And yet He assumed they would do some good and show some generosity to others. We can too easily dismiss Bible teaching about generosity and assume it applies to the rich, or at least, not to me. Yet the Lord's implication is that every single person can give and be generous in some way. The Lord speaks here of "*when*" you give, rather than *if* you give. He took giving to others in need as being a basic, intrinsic part of life in Him.

*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand does-* There had developed a strong Jewish tradition that the right hand side of a man was his spiritual side, and the left hand side was the equivalent of the New Testament 'devil'. The Lord Jesus referred to this understanding when He warned: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt.

6:3)- implying that the good deeds of the spiritual man would be misused by the 'devil', e.g. in using them as grounds for spiritual pride.

The idea perhaps is that our good deeds should not be done consciously, we hardly know ourselves that we are doing them. The Lord taught just the same when He portrayed the faithful at the last day almost arguing back with their Lord before His judgment seat, totally denying they had done the good deeds which He was now rewarding them for ("when did we see You...", Mt. 25:39).

6:4 *That your alms may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you*- as if God is especially manifest in Christ when we stand before him in judgment to receive our rewards openly. Our prayers "in secret" will be 'rewarded' "openly"; but the language of 'open reward' is used by the Lord in reference to the judgment: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his father with his angels; and then he shall reward [s.w.] every man" (Mt. 16:27). In that day the workers will be 'rewarded' for their work (s.w. Mt. 20:8; Rom. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12); yet Mt. 6:4-6 says they will be rewarded for their prayers. Prayer will only ultimately be answered when the Lord returns; hence Mt. 6:4-6 leads on to the Lord's prayer, with its emphasis upon requesting the coming of the Kingdom, forgiveness etc. rather than petty human requests. Here again we see a connection between prayer and the final judgment.

Giving alms should be so secret, according to our suggestion on 6:3, that we ourselves are not even fully conscious of them. There is repeated emphasis that what is in secret, concealed from view, will be openly rewarded (Mt. 6:6,18; Lk. 12:2). The day of judgment will be a judging of the secret things (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). Absolutely nothing that is now hid shall not then be made open- this is a considerable theme in the Lord's teaching (Mt. 10:26; Mk. 4:22; Lk. 8:17; 12:2). The Lord's own journey to die at Jerusalem was done 'in secret'- as so often, He spoke His teaching to Himself (Jn. 7:10). The need for a sense of significance, reward and recognition to be attached to our works is basic to the structure of human personality. We're not asked to deny this, to live as if we are more or less than human. We're asked instead to realize that the day for that shall come, but it is not now, nor are we to seek it now from the eyes of men.

The public dimension to the judgment process [AV "openly"] will mean that somehow in a moment we will know 'the secret things' of each other. Only with that basis of understanding could believers who appear to differ in this life live eternally together.

6:5 *And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received*



*their reward*- The same Greek word for "seen of men" occurs in 6:16,18 (AV "to appear"). Doing spiritual things for the sake of external appearance was clearly a particular concern of the Lord Jesus. Church life inevitably leads to temptations in this area- mixing with the same people regularly, with families intermarrying over the years, appearance becomes a great temptation. But having this as a motivation for any act of spirituality is so abhorrent to the Lord.

*6:6 But you, when you pray, enter into your room and shut your door, pray to your Father who is unseen*- The Lord taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. Take Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage. In the time of Elisha we read that when a problem arose, the people concerned went indoors and shut the door. Going inside and shutting the door is associated with prayer, both by the Lord (Mt. 6:6) and Elisha himself (2 Kings 4:33). The other instances of shutting the door don't involve prayer, but they involve obediently doing something in faith- the woman shut the door upon her sons and poured out the oil in faith; she shut the door upon her sick son (2 Kings 4:5,21). Perhaps the implication is that what she did in faith and hope was read by God as prayer, even though she didn't apparently verbalize anything. The widow woman shut the door and started to pour out the oil into the vessels (2 Kings 4:5); the way the Lord alludes to this implies that she prayed before she started pouring, and yet she was sure already that it would happen (Mt. 6:6). This should inspire a spirit of soberness in our prayers.

*And your Father who sees in secret shall reward you*- We should be saying and expressing things to God which are our most intense, essential, personal feelings. We cannot, therefore, easily use trite, stock phrases in our personal prayers. Note the grammatically needless repetition of the personal pronoun in Mt. 6:6: "You, when *you* pray, enter into *your* closet, and when *you* have shut *your* door, pray to *your* Father, which is in secret; and *your* Father who sees in secret shall reward *you* openly". Likewise when reading the Psalms, especially 71, note how many times David addresses God with the personal pronoun: thee, thy, thou... it really is a personal relationship.

*6:7 And in praying do not use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*- We will not use "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7); the Greek means literally 'to stutter / stammer with the *logos*'. We know what the man with a chronic stammer is trying to say before he actually finishes saying it. To hear him saying

the same syllables again and again is a frustration for us. It's a telling way of putting it. God knows our need before we ask (Mt. 6:8). Say it, if we have to be explicit, and mean what we ask. And leave it there. 'Don't keep stammering on in your prayers' is to be connected with what comes a bit later: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)... but seek (i.e. pray for, Is. 55:16) the Kingdom of God, and His (imputed) righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:31-33). We are not merely to believe that what we ask for we will receive. Note how again the word *logos* occurs; we commented several times in chapter 5 that this is a core idea in the Sermon. Our innermost thought and intention is of the essence.

*6:8 Therefore, do not be like them! Even before you ask Him, your Father knows* - This gives a profound insight into the purpose of prayer. Prayer is not in order to inform God of human need. He knows all things, and He knows every human need. So if prayer is not in order to inform God of anything, what is it for? Ultimately, it is for our benefit. Keeping on and on repeating our perceived needs, repeating them vainly, as if we are endlessly stuttering, is actually a form of selfishness. Prayer is to be about dialogue with God, sharing life with Him, confession, sharing thoughts. An analysis of David's prayers as recorded in the book of Psalms shows that only about 5% of the verses are requests for anything material. The rest is simply talking with God. The idea of prayer as a mindless repetition of specific needs, in the belief that the more times we state them, the more likely God is to respond- is the very opposite of the kind of prayer which God intends. The Lord's model prayer which He goes on to give features only one request for anything material- and that is simply a request that God gives us enough food for today.

The Kingdom prophecy that "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24) is applied to us *now* (Mt. 6:8)- as if answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life.

*What things you need-* The hope of the future Kingdom means that we will not now be materialistic. It will give us strength against materialism. And the model prayer was given by Jesus in the context of His comment on how some tend to always be asking God for material things. The Lord teaches that the paramount thing we should request is the coming of the Kingdom, and our forgiveness so that we might partake in it. *This* is the request we should be making- for "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of... after *this* manner therefore pray ye..." (Mt. 6:9,10). Later in Mt. 6 the Lord repeats the same words: "Your heavenly Father *knoweth that ye have need of all these things...* seek ye first his Kingdom" (Mt. 6:32-34 RV). The structure of the Lord's prayer reflects this- for the first and only request in it is a seeking for the coming of His Kingdom. The RV

of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: " Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Having warned against materialism, the Lord bids His men to "rather seek ye the Kingdom of God... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:31,32) in the place of seeking for material things. The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34).

*6:9 In this manner you should pray-* The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

*Our Father-* The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father". Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers. "Give us this day *our* daily bread" may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

*Who is in Heaven-* A feature of Biblical prayers is the way they start with some reference to God, often involving several clauses. We are to firstly visualize Him there. This is to be connected with the idea of lifting the eyes to Heaven at the start of a prayer (Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ez. 23:27; Dan. 4:34; Lk. 16:23; 18:13; Jn. 11:41; 17:1). "God *is in Heaven*, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven. The fact that God is a material, corporeal being is vital here. The very fact God has a spatial location, in Heaven, with Christ at His right hand,

indicates of itself that God is a physical rather than purely spiritual being. The fact Christ really is there, seated at God's right hand interceding for us, was a concept which filled Paul's thinking (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 cp. 1 Pet. 3:22). This teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence... it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members... now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

*Let Your Name be glorified*- "Hallowed / sanctified be Your name" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well-known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language.

The Lord prayed this in Gethsemane; and it took Him so long to say these words that the disciples fell asleep.

6:10 *Your Kingdom come*- Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come

Your Kingdom, done Your will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom.

"'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term 'basileia', the first thing people thought of was the Roman 'kingdom' or 'empire'. That is, 'basileia' really meant 'Roman empire' to most people who heard it... It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96). And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

*Your will be done*- Again using an aorist which demands a one-time fulfilment- in the sense of 'May Your will come about...'. The will of God is often associated with His ultimate plan of salvation (e.g. Eph. 1:5-12; Col. 1:20). It has been pointed out that "Hallowed be Your Name" is (grammatically) a request for action, rather than simply an expression of praise. Jesus prayed this in Gethsemane and it cost Him His life. We know from the Old Testament that God in fact "hallows" His own Name (Ez.

20:41; 28:25; 36:22,23; 38:16; 39:27). By asking God to "hallow" or sanctify / realize that Name in our lives, we are definitely praying in accordance with His will. He wishes to do this- and so He will surely do this in our lives if we ask Him. All the principles connected with His Name will be articulated in our lives and experience for sure if we pray for this- for we will be praying according to His revealed will in His word. And the ultimate fulfilment of all this will be in final coming of the Kingdom. But see on 7:21.

In interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, we need to look for similar phrases within the Sermon in order to grasp the sense the Lord was seeking to develop. And we have just such a connection of thought here when we observe that the Sermon concludes with an appeal to 'do the will of My Father' (7:21; and the theme continues in the Lord's teaching, e.g. Mt. 12:50; 21:31; Lk. 12:47). We are praying therefore not only for Christ's return when the literal coming of the Kingdom on earth will mean that God's will shall be done on earth. We are asking for the principles of God's rulership / Kingdom over men (as outlined in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) to be manifested in our lives; and for strength to do God's will on earth here and now. In probing deeper how the Lord understood the Father's will, we find the term specifically and repeatedly linked with the salvation of persons, supremely enabled through the Lord's death (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 6:39,40; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:5). We would therefore be justified in seeing this request for the Kingdom to come and [in parallel] God's will to be done as a request for the successful spreading of the Gospel worldwide (see note on "in earth" below). The coming of the Kingdom and the doing of God's will are in parallel- the coming of the Kingship of God in human life means that humans do God's will as taught by the Lord in the Sermon. Of course, the final physical coming of the Kingdom is also in view, but that is the final manifestation of the process which is now ongoing in human hearts. This more internal, spiritual interpretation of the coming of the Kingdom would be in line with the rest of the Sermon, which emphasizes the rule of Divine principles in the deepest parts of the human heart.

This phrase occurs verbatim on the Lord's lips when He Himself prayed in Gethsemane "Your will be done" (Mt. 26:42). So often we find the Lord Himself being the embodiment of His own teaching in the Sermon. The difficulty with which the Lord said those words shows how hard it is to really pray 'the Lord's prayer'. The way it can be rattled off so quickly is tragic.

*On earth as it is in Heaven-* Gk. *epi* the earth, as the will of God is now done in (Gk. *en*) Heaven. *Epi* in this context has the sense of being spread throughout; whereas *en* more simply and directly means "in". Is there a hint here that we are to be praying for the success of the geographical spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the earth? Not just knowledge of that Gospel, but people actually submitting

to God's Kingship and living by Kingdom principles; not just baptisms but transformed lives. By doing God's will as it is now done in Heaven, we are developing outposts of God's Heavenly Kingdom here on earth, and this will come to term in the return of Christ and the more physical establishment of the Kingdom on the planet, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in every fibre of earthly existence.

6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread*- This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea

that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us in Mt. 6:11.

6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors-* Probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that of burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "O ye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Those "indebted" to us (Lk. 11:4) are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us



if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us... and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if we forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much... then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people... by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.

Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

"As we..." is a challenge. The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Lk.) again uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful

exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

6:13 *And lead us not-* The Greek *eisphero* definitely means to lead inward. The internal process of temptation is in view here, as explained specifically by James 1:13-15- which may be a specific comment on this part of the Sermon. Much of James is an expansion upon the Sermon. Whilst the process of temptation is internal (and note how internal processes are the great theme of the Sermon), God is capable of leading a person in the process. The dynamics in the upward and downward spirals are ultimately of God.

*Into temptation but deliver us from evil-* This can only really come true when we are changed into divine nature; for only then will we be freed /delivered [aorist- once, finally, for all time] from the 'devil' of sin. The word for trial / temptation is *peirasmos*, and I have never been entirely satisfied that we can reconcile the Lord's words here with the fact that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13-15). However, I feel happier with the idea that the Lord may specifically be bidding us pray for deliverance from the latter day holocaust to come upon the saints. The Lord Jesus can keep us from "the hour of trial [*peirasmos*] which is coming on the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). When the disciples were bidden pray that they enter not into temptation (Mk. 14:38- *peirasmos* again), they were being asked to pray the model prayer with passionate concentration and meaning. Yet those men in Gethsemane were and are representative of the latter day saints who are bidden pray that they may escape "all those things", the hour of trial /*peirasmos* which is coming, and to stand acceptably before the Son of man at His coming. We ought to be praying fervently for this deliverance; but I wonder how many of us are? For the days of the final tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect- i.e., for the sake of their prayers (Mk. 13:19,20). The final tribulation of the last days will be the supreme struggle between the flesh and spirit, between the believer and the world, between Christ and the Biblical 'devil'; and we are to pray that we will be delivered victorious from that struggle. Thus "Lead us not into 'the test'" (Mt. 6:13) could in this context be understood as a plea to save us from entering into the time of final tribulation- just as the Lord specifically exhorts us to pray to be delivered from that time. The implication would be that the final time of testing will be so severe that indeed the elect will scarcely be saved. It seems to me that none of us have the urgent sense of the time of testing

ahead which we should have; how many are praying daily to be spared it? How many are in actual denial that it will ever come, even though it's clear enough in Scripture?

We must pray not to be led into temptation (Mt. 6:13); but when we fall into such temptation (s.w.), count it all joy, James says (1:2). The exercise of praying not to experience those temptations was for our spiritual benefit, and God is willing that it should be so.

"Deliver us from evil" is surely alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:9 "The Lord knows how to *deliver* the Godly out of temptations". Evil and temptation are thereby paralleled.

The Lord Jesus based this part of His prayer on Old Testament passages like 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:8; 34:22; 69:18; 78:35,42; 140:1 and Prov. 2:12; 6:24, which ask for 'deliverance' from evil *people*, sin, distress, tribulation etc. here on earth. Not one of those passages speaks of deliverance from a personal, superhuman Satan. Esther's prayer in Es. 4:19 LXX is very similar – "Deliver us from the hand of the evildoer", but that 'evildoer' was Haman, not any personal, superhuman Satan. Even if we insist upon reading 'the evil one', "the evil one" in the Old Testament was always "the evil man in Israel" (Dt. 17:12; 19:19; 22:21–24 cp. 1 Cor. 5:13) – never a superhuman being. And there may be another allusion by the Lord to Gen. 48:16, where God is called the One "who has redeemed me from all evil". As the Old Testament 'word made flesh', the thinking of the Lord Jesus was constantly reflective of Old Testament passages; but in every case here, the passages He alluded to were *not* concerning a superhuman Devil figure. God 'delivers from' "every trouble" (Ps. 54:7), persecutors and enemies (Ps. 142:6; 69:14) – but as Ernst Lohmeyer notes, "There is no instance of the [orthodox understanding of the] Devil being called 'the evil one' in the Old Testament or in the Jewish writings" (Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1965) p. 214).

It's been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. "Why do you make us err from your ways?" was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to

resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord's Prayer. "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil".

*For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever-* AV and some manuscripts. "For Yours..." is significant. The sense of 'for' is definitely 'because...', but it could simply be with reference to the entire preceding prayer. Or it could particularly be with reference to the preceding request: "Deliver us from evil". In any case, the question arises: Why should God answer the prayer, be it the entire prayer or the specific request for deliverance from evil, because the Kingdom, power and glory is God's? The idea may be that because the Kingdom we seek now to be part of, and to eternally live in, is God's, therefore it follows that He earnestly desires to grant it to us His children. And we plead that He hears our requests, especially for deliverance from temptation and evil, because surely He wants to give us His glorious Kingdom. Because the Kingdom is *His*, all glory is to Him, and He wants to see us giving Him glory; because He has all power- therefore we ask Him to give us the requests we have made, because they are all intended to achieve glory to Him and to ensure our entry into His Kingdom. Another angle of exposition would be to consider that we ask for deliverance from temptation and sin because we know that God has rulership ("Kingdom") and power over all- given His unlimited physical and spiritual power, we ask Him to use it to answer our requests. This reasoning of course assumes that all that has preceded in the prayer is in order for us to enter the Kingdom and to see His glory worked out. Any requests for merely human benefit and advantage cannot be concluded with such an argument- that we ask God to hear this *because* the Kingdom, power and glory is His.

This is the appropriate conclusion to a prayer that asks for the establishment of that Kingdom. Whilst commenting upon the Lord's prayer, it is worth pointing out that the Lord repeated the essence of each phrase at various points during His life. When facing His ultimate struggle when facing up to the cross, He asked that the Father's Name would be glorified (Jn. 12:28)- quoting His own words from His model prayer. It hurt and cost Him so much to pray that prayer- the prayer we may have known for so many years that we can pray it almost at no cost. But to truly ask for the Father's will to be done is in fact a commitment to the way of the cross (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:7-10; Mk. 14:36). So let us pray the prayer- but putting meaning into the words.

May I place two well-known Scriptures together in your minds. "Yours [God's] is the Kingdom". And "Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 6:20). The Lord assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken... the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will* the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

*Amen*- AV and some manuscripts. Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance" (See the article "Amen" in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) pp. 35,36). Thus the Lord Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. But He did so because He wanted us to realize that if our spirit is united with God's, then our words to God are in a sense God talking to Himself; hence we say 'Amen' to our own words, when 'amen' was usually a confirmation of God's words. Jn. 16:26 fits in here, where in the context of speaking of the unity of the believers with the Father and with Himself, the Lord says that He will not need to pray for the believer, but God Himself will hear the believer. I take this to mean that Jesus foresaw that the time would come when our prayer would be His prayer. It's not so much that He prays for us, but rather prays with us and even through us.

6:14 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*- The Lord guessed that His teaching to ask for forgiveness "as" we forgive others would be radical and hard to accept. The Lord's teaching in the prayer ["as we forgive"] was clear enough, but He repeats it twice (also in :15), so that there be no possible difficulty in interpretation. He rarely spells things out this specifically and with such immediate repetition. The vital, eternally vital need to forgive others is underlined. And the Lord repeats this teaching later in His teaching, with the further detail that unless we forgive others "from your hearts", we will not be forgiven (Mt. 18:35; also in Mk. 11:25). This chronic and urgent need to forgive others, aware that *how* we forgive them is the basis of *how* God will forgive us, leads to the question of whether we should forgive others without their repentance. If we first demand specific repentance, then this is the basis upon which we are asking to be judged;

and we all, surely, sin without repentance, sometimes because at the time we do not perceive the sinfulness of our behaviour.

*6:15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses-* Paul alludes here in Eph. 4:32. Jesus said: "If you forgive, you'll be forgiven". Paul subtly changes the tenses: "You've been forgiven already, so forgive". It's as if Paul is saying: 'Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very close analysis of those simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had. Note that the command to forgive our debtors when we pray is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

*6:16 Moreover when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces-* There is a semantic connection between these words. A *hupokrites* was a play actor, one who wore a mask. These hypocrites create false faces for themselves, that is the idea- their disfigured faces are but as a mask. The Greek for "disfigure" occurs only five times in the NT, once here- and twice in the next few verses, 6:19,20, where the Lord warns that external material wealth 'corrupts', destroys itself, or is disfigured. By disfiguring their faces, they were destroying their faces, destroying themselves because they wanted to appear other than they were.

*So that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward-* "May be seen" is s.w. 6:5, also in Mt. 23:27,28. To act in a way so as to spiritually impress men is especially distasteful to the Lord. The issue of what other churches, ecclesias or individuals will think of us is not to pay any part in our decision making and action. We are living, thinking and deciding in the loving gaze of the Father and Son. The wonder of that should mean that all fear of human criticism or desire for human approval plays absolutely no role.

*6:17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face-* Every effort is to be made to conceal our spiritual sacrifices. We are to appear as usual (as in Dan. 10:3). We are to be actors, hypocrites, in a good sense. The Lord is also alluding to how the rabbis forbade "washing and anointing" on the day of atonement, which was a day of fasting. The Lord is teaching open defiance to their hypocrisy.

*6:18 So you will not be seen by men to fast, but by your Father who is unseen; and your Father, who sees in secret-* Gk. 'the One who is in secret / hidden'. The hiddenness of God is in the sense that He specifically

looks at the hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4). This is the sphere in which He operates and sees.

*Shall reward you- "Openly".* Who we will eternally be in the Kingdom, is who we were secretly in this life. What we think about as we fall asleep, as we travel, walk down streets... this is the essence of the life in Christ. The change of nature we will experience at the Lord's return will simply be a physical manifestation of who we are in spirit in this life. We will be made manifest [s.w.], declared openly, at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). This means that we will be preserved as we spiritually are in this life. This means that the development of our spiritual person is of paramount importance, because that is how we shall eternally be. The Lord goes right on to warn against materialism (:19,20). But that is in the context of the paramount need for the development of spiritual mindedness. It is petty materialism which is the greatest enemy of this development- the cares of this life and the attainment of material wealth are what crowd out spiritual thinking. The treasure, the most important thing in our life, is our "heart", our thinking (6:21; "the good treasure of the heart", 12:35). Building up spirituality is placed in opposition to building up material wealth.

6:19 *Do not store up for yourselves treasures upon the earth-* see on 6:18 "openly".

*Where moth and rust consume-* Or, "corrupt". James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

*And where thieves break in and steal-* Literally, 'dig through'. Relevant to the earth houses of the very poorest people. The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it.

Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break (Gk. dig) through and steal" (Mt. 6:19) was spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord

wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

6:20 *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves cannot break in or steal-* The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

6:21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also-* Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

6:22 *The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is healthy, your whole body shall be full of light-* This observation about single-mindedness ["healthy" = 'single'] follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (Mt. 6:22 s.w.- this is one of James' many allusions to the sermon on the mount). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace,



and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here in Mt. 6:22. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor.

Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

6:23 *But if your eye is bad, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If*

*therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!-*

A bad or evil eye was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean". A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

6:24 *No one can serve two masters-* It would be too simplistic to interpret this as meaning that we are either totally serving the Lord, or not serving Him. Paul seems to have thought a lot about this verse because he refers to it several times in Romans, basing his entire Romans chapter 6 around the idea that we do not serve sin as a Master (Rom. 6:6). But he goes straight on to lament that in reality, he does serve "the law of sin" with his flesh, but "I myself" serve the law of God (Rom. 7:25). And he concludes the letter by warning that some do not serve the Lord Jesus (Rom. 16:18). Perhaps Paul is writing partly in response to confusion about the Lord's words- for we keep on sinning, yet He taught we can only serve Him alone. And his perspective is that we ourselves as believers are totally devoted to Him as our only Lord and Master. But the flesh, which we do not identify as the real self of the believer, continues to serve the sin principle.

*For either he will hate the one-* The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19).

James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15). The man who found the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, sold *all* that he had, in order to obtain it. If he had sold any less, he wouldn't have raised the required price. These mini-parables are Christ's comment on the Law's requirement that God's people love Him with *all* their heart and soul, realizing the logic of devotion. Samuel pleaded with Israel: " Serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things [i.e. idols]" (1 Sam. 12:20,21). If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road. If we are God's people, we will flee from the false teacher (Jn. 10:5). If we do anything other than this, we reflect our basic attitude to God's truth.

*And love the other-* Because Israel were in covenant with God, *therefore* they were not to make covenants with the other nations, and marriage is mentioned as an example of this (Ex. 34:10,12). In his repetition of this part of the law in Deuteronomy, Moses gave even more repeated emphasis to the fact that our covenant with God precludes any covenant relationship with anyone else: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them... neither shalt thou make marriages with them... for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all (other) people that are on the face of the earth. The Lord ...set his love upon you ...chose you... because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers... the Lord hath brought you out (of the world) with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen... know therefore that the Lord thy God, he God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments... and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments..." (Dt. 7:2-11). The wonder of our relationship with Yahweh is stated time and again. To marry back into Egypt, the house of bondmen from which we have been redeemed, is to despise the covenant, to reverse the redemptive work which God has wrought with us. In this context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy "him that hateth Him", and repay him to his face. On the other hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving* God (Josh. 23:12,13). So according to Moses, whoever married a Gentile was effectively hating God. It is possible that the Lord had this in mind when He taught that we either serve God and hate the world, or we love the world and hate God (Mt. 6:24). This isn't, of course, how we see it. We would like to think that there is a third way; a way in which we can love God and yet also love someone in the world. Yet effectively, in God's eyes, this is hating Him. Doubtless many Israelites thought Moses was going too heavy in saying that those who married Gentiles were hating

God. And the new Israel may be tempted to likewise respond to the new covenant's insistence that our love of God means a thorough rejection of this world. Whoever even *wishes* to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

*Or else he will be loyal to the one-* There are only two masters whom we completely serve; we hold to either mammon, or God (Mt. 6:24). The idea of loyalty or "holding to" in Greek implies holding *against* something else; the result of holding to God is that we are against everything else. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mt. 12:30)- rather than being passively indifferent. Men reacted to the Lord in ultimately one of two ways- they either truly believed on Him, or supported the Jews in murdering Him (Jn. 11:45,46). Those who apparently believed on Him but kept it quiet were forced by the cross and resurrection to make their commitment one way or the other [and serious reflection on the memorials of these things in bread and wine leads us to the same decision]. So much for the philosophy of balance! The Hebrew word for vacillate (translated "dissemble" in AV) also means to go astray; indecision and indifference are effectively decisions against God's way. The Hebrew language often reflects God's characteristics and attitudes.

*And despise the other-* The Greek word is usually used elsewhere about despising other believers (Mt. 18:10; 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:10). Loving God involves loving our brother, and despising our brethren means we do not love God but rather despise Him.

*You cannot serve God and money-* When the Lord spoke of the impossibility of serving two masters, He personified the one as "Mammon" (AV), the antithesis of God. He goes on to define what he meant: "Therefore... take no *thought* for your life... which of you by *taking thought*... why *take ye thought* for raiment... therefore take no *thought* saying, What shall we eat?... seek ye first the Kingdom of God... take therefore no *thought* for the morrow" (Mt. 6:24,25,27,28,31,33,34). Clearly the Lord saw "Mammon", this personified anti-God, as an attitude of *mind*. He had the same view of 'Satan' as we do: a personification of sin in the human mind. He also saw seeking "the Kingdom of God" as somehow parallel with serving God rather than mammon. We would wish there were some third category, God, mammon and something in between; as we may idly speculate that it would suit us if there were three categories at judgement day, accepted, rejected, and something else. But both then and now, this very minute, this isn't the case. A deep down recognition of this will have its effect practically. If we are serving God, let's not give anything to mammon, let's not play games, juggling and using brinkmanship.

There is fair evidence that in God's eyes, our attitude to materialism is

the epitome of our spirituality. The Lord places before us only two possible roads: the service of God, or that of mammon (Aramaic for riches / wealth, Mt. 6:24). We would rather expect Him to have said: service of God or the flesh. Indeed, this is the choice that is elsewhere placed before us in the NT. However, the Lord evidently saw "mammon" as the epitome of all the flesh stands for. It is probably the view of many of us that while we have many areas of spiritual weakness, materialism is not one of them. But according to the Lord, if we are reading Him rightly, our attitude to the flesh generally is reflected in our attitude to wealth. This is why the Bible does have a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality.

Mt. 6:24 is alluded to in Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word. Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

6:25 *Therefore I say to you-* Because our hearts can only be in one place, either with God or not, we should especially beware of materialism. For this more than anything else can lead us to hate God and to despise Him- because it takes our hearts away from Him.

*Do not be anxious for your life; what you shall eat, or what you shall drink. Nor for your body; what you shall wear-* The Sermon is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus

established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.

This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

*Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the garment?-*

This continues the theme outlined above. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

6:26 *Look at-* Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

*The birds in the sky; they do not sow, nor do they reap or gather crops into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they?*- As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns are words repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26), then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at 6:25 and elsewhere that the Sermon is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things

continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Things being "better than" or "of more value than" is quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

*6:27 Which of you by worrying-* As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence (see on 6:25).

*Can add-* The same word occurs in 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

*One cubit to his stature-* The Greek can mean 'age' as well as referring to our body. No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same



word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

6:28 So *why do you worry about clothing?*- The allusion is surely to how God provided food, drink and clothing which didn't wear out for the Israelites on their wilderness journey (Dt. 8:4), just as He will for those who have crossed the Red Sea in baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2). Again, it seems likely that the Lord intended us to refocus from material to spiritual. For later in Matthew we read of Him emphasizing the ultimate importance of having the right 'clothing' [s.w. "wedding garment"] to enter God's Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 22:11,12). On a simply practical level, it's my observation that many believers find spirituality hard because their minds are too taken up with making money- to fund the buying of branded, designer clothing. In our generation as never before, the price range of clothing is as never before. It is rather beyond me why in a brotherhood of need, it seems perfectly acceptable to not buy good second hand clothing and pay ten or more times the price for new clothing with the right brand name on it. But maybe that's just me.

*Consider the lilies of the field*- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. The same idea, although a different word, as the Greek for "Behold" in 6:26. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

*How they grow*- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

*They neither toil nor spin!*- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The later appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

6:29 Yet *I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*- It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of

the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here—plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer (Mt. 6:29,30). This reference to Solomon is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. He goes on to warn against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes (Mt. 6:31)—all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow... sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33)—clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling

connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 *Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today-* The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on 6:26. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? The Lord brought out the point in Mt. 6:30: If God so clothes the grass... how much more will He clothe us, therefore, don't worry! "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them (Mt. 6:29). Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

*But tomorrow is thrown into the furnace-* We have noted that the idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

*Will He not more surely care for you, O you of little faith!*- The word is used another three times in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case it refers specifically to a lack of faith in the saving power of Jesus. The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

*6:31 Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, How shall we be clothed?*- The three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them.

God will provide for us to be "clothed", but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

*6:32 For the Gentiles clamour for all these things*- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to first century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding

nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. Mt. 6:32 goes on to imply that the difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

'Clamour' is the idea of seeking, and is parallel with 'thinking' anxiously in :31. Again it is the overall direction of our hearts, to where our seeking is set, our mental life and thinking, which is the issue. Rather than individual acts of spiritual failure or success.

*Even though your heavenly Father knows you have need of them all-* God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

*Hapas*, 'all things', means strictly 'each and every one of'. God knows every single human need relating to eating, drinking, clothing and existing. And He knows better than we do our greatest need- to eat and drink of that bread and blood which gives eternal life, and to be clothed with His nature.

6:33 *So seek first-* Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :31,32. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

*His Kingdom-* I noted under 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

*And His righteousness-* The Sermon was intended for those who earnestly wished to be righteous but felt unable to attain it as they wished (see on

5:6). Yet we should continue 'seeking' it. And Paul takes the thought further by declaring that if we really seek to be righteous, then we will become "in Christ" and believe in God's offer of imputed righteousness.

*And all these things*- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verse 32- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on 6:31.

*Shall be added to you*- The only other usage of the word in Matthew is just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height (6:27).

6:34 *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*- The only other occurrence of the Greek word in Matthew is a few verses earlier in :30. God provides for the grass which "tomorrow" will be cast into the fire. We observed under 6:30 that this is the language of condemnation. If God even keeps alive and provides for those who shall be condemned, and the things of the animal and plant creation which live for only a day or so, how much more will He care for us. The "tomorrow" which is in view is therefore the ultimate 'tomorrow'- of the coming of Christ. We are to take no anxious thought for the outcome of that day if we know that in our hearts we are seeking the things of the Kingdom above all. In the same spirit, Paul taught that all who wholeheartedly love the Lord's appearing shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). We should not be full of worried thought about our possible rejection on that day, but rather the overall thinking of our mind should be positively full of the things of the Kingdom. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" could be read as meaning 'Yes there will be evil for some on that day, but don't waste your thoughts worrying about that. If your heart is for the Kingdom of God, you are secure. Don't worry about it'. Although this is the ultimate sense of 'tomorrow' which

the Lord has in mind, His words can be understood on a quite simple literal level too. We are to live one day at a time without worrying about the future, because quite simply- God will provide. Each day has its own problems, and don't worry about them ahead of time. Rather focus your thinking and mental energy upon the things of God's Kingdom. This is exactly in the spirit of the command in the Lord's model prayer to ask for enough food only for today (6:11). Living like this is of course seen by the world as irresponsible. But it is not irresponsible if we do so with a firm faith that God is responsible for our tomorrows.

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged-* For Paul, one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5). The commentary of James on this part of the Sermon is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". I suggest under 7:24 that James considers the Sermon to be "the perfect law". The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

*7:2 For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged-* The "judgment" is of condemnation- every one of the 28 occurrences of the Greek word refer to "damnation" or "condemnation". The 'judging' which is prohibited in :1 is therefore of condemning others.

*And with what measure you use, it shall be applied to you-* This verse begins with "For". Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

*7:3 And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye but ignore the plank that is in your own eye?-* In Luke, the Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is



that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit". This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging from verses 1 and 2. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 4- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter is literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity... these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really

register.

"Consider not" is alluded to by James. James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

7:4 *Or how will you say to your brother-* Remember that the Sermon was spoken to the disciples. The Lord is foreseeing how things would tend to go in the life of His collective people. There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, it's presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on 13:28.

*Let me remove the splinter in your eye, when you have a plank in your own eye?*- "Remove" is s.w. 'cast out' in :5. The word is elsewhere used

about the casting out of the rejected in condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). It is also used about casting out from church (3 Jn. 10) and synagogue and society (Acts 13:50; Jn. 9:34; Lk. 6:22). In Luke's account of the Lord's presentation of the material, he uses the same word for "cast out" from religious association (Lk. 6:22) as he does just a few verses later for this 'casting out' of splinters (Lk. 6:42). The casting out is therefore a judgmental condemning of others- and that is the connection with the preceding context of Mt. 7:1-3. In practice, this involved religious disfellowship. Christ's people are to associate with each other in fellowship because they are convinced that by grace, they in the body of Christ shall share eternity together. To 'cast out' from fellowship someone is therefore to effectively 'cast them out' in condemnation. The same word is used in both senses. The Lord's parable is most insightful- because He observes that actually to do this is a natural tendency for His followers, and they will justify it in terms of thinking they are doing it out of concern. And yet their attempt to do this is in fact the plank in their own eye. That judgmentalism is in fact a far worse failing than any fault they have observed in their brother. And this all flows directly and seamlessly on from the Lord's point blank statement that He will condemn those who condemn others (Mt. 7:1). The practice and upholding of the wicked practice of disfellowship therefore appears to be an issue upon which our eternity may be staked. We must pay any price, including social death and being cut off from communities and families we have known and loved, in order to avoid doing this.

We cannot "behold" our plank. This is an invitation to try to actually see the plank in your own eye. The plank is there exactly because you have tried to 'cast out' your brother, having heard the Lord's teaching about the need for a "single eye" (Mt. 6:22) and deciding that your brother's eye is defective. The plank is your judgmentalism. And that is what is so hard to perceive.

7:5 *You hypocrite*- Usually on the Lord's lips with reference to the Pharisees whom the Lord clearly detested and whom the rank and file disciples whom He was addressing likewise despised. But the Lord is saying that their critical, condemnatory attitude to each other would make them no different to the Pharisees.

*First*- The Greek *proton* suggests that the following clause is of ultimate, supreme importance; it's not simply a chronological statement that 'first do this, then do that'. If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation.

*Remove the plank from your own eye and then shall you-* We are to condemn ourselves firstly, recognizing our major blindness, and then with the humility of spirit elicited by this, we will have crystal clear vision with which to assist others.

*See clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye-* The Greek *diabolepo* is related to the verb *blepo* in :3 ("why do you *behold* / *see* the splinter..."). The judgmental believer sees the splinter in his brother's eye and wants to condemn him for it, but the one who has repented of his judgmentalism and removed that plank from his spiritual vision will see through ('through' is really the sense of *dia*). The translation "see clearly" doesn't seem to me to have much to commend it. The one who has repented of the plank of his judgmentalism will see through casting out / condemning the splinter in his brother's eye. "Then" you will see through casting out the splinter from his eye- *tote* more comfortably carries the sense of 'right then'. The moment you repent of your condemnatory judgmentalism, you immediately see through condemning your brother's weakness. And so the Lord has powerfully enforced His principle which He began with at the start of this section- do not condemn. And through this profound parable of casting out splinters and planks, He has brought us to see through our brother's splinter. But the only way you can do that is to cast out / condemn your own condemnatory attitudes. It is often claimed that those who have committed what some would see as 'major' sins feel unable to judge others for their sins, and this is seen as a weakness. But actually, we are all major sinners. Those who have repented or matured into softer, non-condemnatory attitudes are mature, and not 'weak' as they are portrayed by their hard line brethren.

The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community of believers in Him; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. This story is a classic- of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses

which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

In Luke, having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye...? For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to "cast out" the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to "cast [out]" our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for "cast out" in 7:5 (*ek-ballo*) and "cast" in 7:6 (*ballo*) are related. Clearly verse 6 belongs in the section about judging which begins in :1. The idea of being "cast out" is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be "cast out" and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be "cast out" into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be "cast out" into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be "cast out" at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor.

11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would've confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren't food but stones. They just wouldn't have appreciated them. This isn't any justification for hypocrisy; it's simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to "pearls"; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

7:6 *Do not give*- We are to judge, but not to condemn (7:1). Clearly this verse 6 requires us to show discernment.

*That which is holy to the dogs*- *Hagios*, "the holy", could be translated 'the holy ones', the saints. They were not to be thrown out to the dogs- i.e. to be condemned. This command not to condemn would then fit in seamlessly with the teaching of the preceding verses. The dogs which were on the edge of the city are associated with condemnation in both Jewish thought and Biblically (Ps. 59:6,14; Rev. 22:15). We are not to condemn, to throw the saints out to the dogs.

*Nor cast*- *Ballo*, related to *ekballo* ("cast out") in :5. I have noted several times that 'casting out' is used in the Lord's thought for condemnation.

*Your pearls*- Pearls represent the believers. The 12 pearls of Rev. 21:21 represent the 12 disciples. The Lord Jesus in His work with us is "seeking goodly pearls" (Mt. 13:45). The pearls are 'ours' in the sense that all that are Christ's are ours, as He makes explicit in John 17. His pearls are our brethren.

*Before the pigs, lest they trample them under their feet*- Trampling by pigs was another Jewish figure of condemnation, of rejection into the Gentile world. Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord used the figure of trampling [s.w.] to describe condemnation and rejection (Mt. 5:13). To trample under foot meant to despise and specifically, to reject (s.w. Heb. 10:29 "trodden underfoot the Son of God"). Again the point is being made- don't

condemn your brethren and treat them as mere worldlings, or even worse, those who shall be rejected from God's Kingdom. To refuse to fellowship them is treating them just like that.

*And turn again and tear you to pieces-* If we condemn our brethren, as it were casting them out to the pigs- those same pigs will turn on us and rend us- i.e., we will share the same condemnation which we gave our brethren. And thus the point of 7:1 is repeated- if you condemn, you shall be condemned. The same word translated "rend" is used by the Lord in Mt. 9:17 about how the wine of the new covenant will "burst" or destroy the old wineskins and the wine will run out from them. The bursting or rending of the wineskins is a picture of destruction and condemnation. The pigs of condemnation to whom we consigned our brethren will turn again and trample *us* underfoot. Therefore- do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. This interpretation of verse 6 fits snugly into the context of the preceding verses. Any attempt to make it apply to not offering the Gospel to "pigs" in case we get hurt by them would seem out of context- and contrary to the spirit of taking the Gospel to all men without discrimination, and never holding back in sharing the Gospel from fear that we might get beat up for it.

*7:7 Ask and it shall be given you-* The connections within the Sermon surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit". The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of

James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfil his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

*Seek and you shall find*- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12; ). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so? The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. Not long previously in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought



and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

*Knock and it shall be opened to you-* This again is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren, in the context of :6), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

*7:8 For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened-* Note that the first two clauses [asking and seeking] are in the present tense. If we ask and seek for spiritual things, we shall receive them. But the metaphor of knocking and opening I suggested on 7:7 has a specific reference to seeking salvation at the last day. Hence the Lord uses the future tense. His repetition of what He has said in 7:7 is to drive home the wonder of it all. That if we ask for salvation, for ourselves as well as opportunities for others to have it, for the extension of God's Kingdom and glory- we really will receive it.

The other couplets use the same Greek words as in 7:7 (seek... find; knock... opened). 'Ask' is the same Greek word, but *lambano* is used for 'receive' rather than *didomi* ("given", 7:7). The words 'ask... receive' are to be found again in Jn. 16:24, where the Lord says that in the era of the comforter, whatever is asked for in His Name will be received. This would not be the only time that the Sermon appears to look ahead to the promises of the Comforter era- see on 5:4. James 4:3 continues James' commentary on the Sermon by saying that his readership asked and did not receive (same Greek words) because they asked for the wrong things from the wrong motives. He was correcting the impression some had taken that the Lord was offering a blank cheque for anything. Our commentary so far has shown that the Lord is promising salvation and the things connected with the extension of His Kingdom principles in our lives and those of others.

7:9 *Which one of you*- The Lord was addressing the disciples in Matthew's record of the Sermon. We can imagine Him looking around at each of them.

*If his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?*- Ask... give are the same words as in 7:7. The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

The point has been made that loaves of bread looked like stones, just as there were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes (7:10). This surely played a part in the Lord's temptation to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread (Mt. 4:3). The similarity of the Aramaic words for bread and stone would have strengthened the connection. The simple message is that God will not play a cruel trick on us- because He is our loving Father. The Lord sensed human scepticism about God's simple offer of salvation. It is simply there- for all who will trust Him in a simple, child-like way. Perhaps the stone is to be connected with how the same word is used for the millstone of condemnation in Mk. 9:42 and Rev. 18:21, and "the stone of stumbling" in 1 Pet. 2:8. If we seek the bread of the Kingdom (a common Jewish concept at the time, Lk. 14:15), God will not condemn us. Note how the Lord spoke of salvation and relation with Him as "the children's bread" (Mt. 15:26), the bread of salvation given (*didomi* as in Mt. 7:7) freely (Jn. 6:32). The Lord saw to the essence of human fear- of Divine condemnation, that instead of the children's bread we would be given the stone of condemnation. One reason for the crucifixion was in order to try to openly persuade the world of God's grace- that it is for real. The Lord's

teaching here signals one of man's greatest difficulties: to believe in God's grace. To accept His desire and passion to save us.

The *giving* of bread to us by Jesus at the breaking of bread (*lambano* again, as in 7:8) is surely an acted parable of His utter commitment to indeed give us the bread we seek above all things (Mt. 26:26). Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same words to teach us to do just this: "Give us this day our daily bread". So He clearly intends us to see ourselves as the hungry little child, asking his daddy for bread. And surely God will not disappoint. The prayer will be answered.

7:10 *Or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?*

- Lk. 11:11 labours the point: "If he ask a fish, will he *for a fish* give him a serpent?". The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

7:11 *If you then, being evil-* This record of the Sermon was addressed to the disciples. Did the Lord consider them to 'be evil'? The only other time we encounter the phrase "being evil" is again on the Lord's lips and again in Matthew: "O generation of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:34). He may have the sense that 'Even the worst Pharisees have a soft spot for their little boys and would never play a cruel trick on them- so do you think God will do that to you?'. The sentence opens with the particle *ei*, and it would be justifiable to translate this 'Whether' or 'Even if' instead of "if". Even if they were as evil as the very worst sinners, they would still give their child bread rather than a stone. The logic is very powerful. If we believe God is basically good, then seeing even wicked people would not play a cruel trick on their kiddies, how much more would God not do that to us His beloved children, whom we address as "Our Father"?

*Know how to give-* Now the Lord moves beyond simply teaching that God will give us daily bread and salvation if we ask. He alludes here to how a father, even a man who is otherwise evil, has an intuitive sense as to what present his child would like. Paul Tournier's insightful book *The Meaning of Gifts* demonstrates that the desire to give gifts is psychologically part of 'love'. God knows what ultimately we would love so much. And yet, as the James 4:3 allusion demonstrates, it is not material things in this life which are in view here. God knows us and He knows all our possible futures, our eternal possibilities throughout His Kingdom. And He will surely give us that. He has created for us the most wonderful things to lavish upon us. To think that in any sense God is a 'hard man' is to tragically misunderstand. That persuasion only really comes from a lack of basic faith in Him and His grace.

*Good gifts to your children-* The emphasis upon "good" continues the laboured addressing of our fear that God just might not be 'good' and we might get a serpent rather than a fish from Him. The point is laboured because it is such a powerful array of step logic- if it's not all a cruel trick, then it is all wonderfully true. The parallel record speaks of "the Holy Spirit" instead of "good gifts", and there is a clear connection with Eph. 4:8: "He gave gifts unto men", referring to the Holy Spirit. All the Greek words there are used here in Mt. 7:11,12. On one level, there is a prediction of the Comforter, as elsewhere in the Sermon (see on 7:8). And yet the principle appears to be clearly that in general terms, God will not only give us daily bread and future salvation, but so much more besides- in spiritual terms. Whilst the form of manifestation of Spiritual gifts has changed since the first century, the principle remains- that God will give His Spirit to those who are poor in spirit and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

*How much more shall your Father who is in heaven-* Many times the idea of "Your father which is in heaven" is used in the context of faith in prayer being answered (Mt. 7:11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; James 1:5,6,17 etc.). It's as if the reality of God actually existing in Heaven in a personal form should be a powerful focus for our prayers.

*Give good things to them that ask him-* Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is

contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

7:12 *Therefore*- The reason why we should do to others as we would like them to do to us flows straight on from :11. But what is the connection of thought? Perhaps the Lord is changing tack here and introducing His concluding summary for the Sermon, which is about 'doing' what He has been teaching. The same Greek for 'do' here in :12 is translated 'bring forth' or 'do' in the distinct seven-fold exhortation to do' which we find in 7:17,18,19,21,22,24,26. The Greek *oun* translated "therefore" is of wide meaning, and could just as comfortably introduce a new section rather than conclude the section about judging which began in 7:1. It can have the sense of 'truly' or 'certainly', as if introducing a major truth. But it may be that the context of judgment, so clearly established in the preceding 11 verses, is not out of the Lord's mind in His use of the word *oun*, "Therefore...". If we condemn others, if we drag them before God's judgment because we refuse to forgive them, then we must consider: Do I want others to do that to me? For we have all sinned and upset others to the point some struggle to forgive us. As we judge others, then we shall be judged likewise. If we really hope they have to answer for their sin against us, then perhaps they will have to. And would you like others to take you to the Divine court for your sins?

*Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*- This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermon. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we

can understand His comment: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

*7:13 Enter in-* The context is quite clear that the Lord means 'enter into the Kingdom' (Mt. 18:3; 19:24; Lk. 18:25). But the question is, whether the Lord speaks of entering into the Kingdom at the last day, or in some sense, in this life. Luke's record of this statement of the Lord is in Lk. 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate: for many... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able". This favours a 'last day' interpretation, for we know from the parable of the foolish girls that some will seek to enter at the time of the Lord's return and be unable to. Some other usages of the phrase 'enter in' imply the same (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 25:10; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:19; 4:6; Rev. 22:14). However, John's equivalent of this phrase speaks of the believer 'entering in' to a relationship and salvation with the Lord right now (Jn. 10:9). And other words of the Lord speak of 'entering in' to "life" right now (Mt. 18:3,8,9; 19:17). The guests enter in to the Messianic banquet now, before the Master comes, Mt. 22:12; the Scribes stopped men entering the Kingdom right now, Mt. 23:13; by birth of water and spirit we enter the Kingdom, Jn. 3:5; the Gentiles enter in every time one is converted (Rom. 11:25); a promise is given us of entering the promised rest, but we who believe do right now 'enter in' to that rest (Heb. 4:1,3). And yet we are to labour in order to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11). The rich man must shed the load of his wealth and enter in- now (Mt. 19:23,24). For judgment day is too late to shed the load of wealth. We can therefore conclude that by following the Lord's teaching now, we enter into His Kingdom; insofar as His Kingship is exercised over us, we are His Kingdom, those whom He is King over. The outcome of the judgment day is not therefore some terrible unknown to us if we are in our hearts and lives clearly under His Kingship in this life. Our passage into the future Kingdom of God on earth will be a seamless continuation of our present experience.

*By the narrow gate-* The Greek could imply 'made narrow'. The Lord repeats the term in :14, emphasizing how narrow is the entrance. The contrast is with the wide gate and broad road. The idea of two gates facing a man was surely an allusion to the gates of Jerusalem, which had a main gate, through which camels could pass, and the small gate through which only pedestrians could enter. This leads me to favour the traditional interpretation of entering through into the Kingdom through the eye of a needle (Mt. 19:24; Lk. 18:25)- the rich must unload their camels of all their wealth and squeeze through the small needle gate. The narrowness of the gate is because it is so hard for people to give up their materialism. They desire spirituality, to enter in, but not without their present attachment to wealth. Remember the Lord was primarily and

initially addressing the poor. The desire for wealth, and especially mental concern about it, is the main reason why people do not grasp the way to the Kingdom. That needs some sober reflection, because our natural assumption is that warnings against materialism do not apply to *me*. Whenever we find ourselves making such an assumption, that Biblical warnings do not apply to us, we need to really ensure that we are thinking straight and that our self-deceiving flesh is not kidding us that we simply don't have to take the Lord at His word.

*For wide is the gate and broad is the way-* Surely the Lord at this stage in His ministry had in mind the way that John the Baptist had come to prepare a "way" for Him (Mt. 3:3). By admitting that this way would only be found by a minority of Israel, the Lord was perhaps tacitly recognizing that John's attempt to prepare a way over which the King of glory could come to Jerusalem had not succeeded.

*That leads-* *Apago* is used another 14 times in the New Testament. Ten of these specifically refer to being 'lead away to death', the majority referring to the leading away of the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. 7:14 contrasts being lead to destruction with being lead to life; but the way to life is through the death of the cross. We either bear our iniquities and their result (Lev. 19:8), or we bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's a burden either way. The Lord played on this fact when He spoke of there being two roads, one which *leads* to death, and the other to life (Mt. 7:13,14). The Greek word translated 'lead' is in fact part of an idiom: to be led is an idiom for 'to be put to death' (cp. Jn. 18:13; 21:18). Indeed, the very word translated "lead" in Mt. 7:14 is rendered "be put to death" (Acts 12:19). So, we're led out to death either way, as the criminal made his 'last walk' to the cross. We're either led out and put to death for the sake of eternal life, or for eternal death. The logic is glaring. The Hebrew of Ps. 139:24 reveals a telling play on words which makes the same point: "Wicked way" is rendered in the AVmg. as 'way of pain'; the way of wickedness is itself the way of pain.

*To destruction-* The Greek is used another 19 times in the New Testament, nearly always with reference to condemnation at the last day. We are making the choice now- condemnation, or the path to the cross, to death, and thence to eternal life. The essence of the future judgment is before us daily; "we make the answer now".

*And many are they that enter in thereby-* The same word used about the "many" who were now listening to Him teach (Mt. 4:25; 8:1). Surely He was saying that the Kingdom road is not found by many. And yet we compare this with the promise that Abraham's seed will become many. Compared to the wonder of salvation, we are indeed "many", but relative to the many who do not respond, we are a minority.

7:14 *For narrow is the gate and straight the road that leads to life*- "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He appreciated that from *our* perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right. The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

*But few*- See on "many" in 7:13. We find another contrast between the few and the many when we read that only "few" will be chosen from the many who are called (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). The implication seems to be that out of the "many" who were then listening to the Lord's teaching ("many" in 7:13 is s.w. Mt. 4:25; 8:1), only a minority would enter into life. There seems fair Biblical reason to think that the community of God's people are a minority in the world, and yet within them, only a minority will finally choose the way of salvation. This helps make sense of why all the faithful lament the weak spiritual state of the church communities surrounding them. And recognizing that this is a general principle shields us from the disillusion which arises from having started out believing that the majority of our community are genuine believers. We have no option but to assume they will be saved, for we cannot condemn any individual; but on the other hand, we are to recognize that on a statistical level, only a few of those within the community will be saved. The majority of those who were 'baptized' in the Red Sea did not make it to God's Kingdom, and this fact is used in 1 Cor. 10 and Hebrews 3 and 4 to warn us not to assume that the ratio will be much higher in the Christian community.

*Are they that find it*- This is clearly to be connected with the Lord's



teaching a few verses earlier that whoever seeks will find (Mt. 7:7,8). He is balancing out the statistical difficulty of salvation with the fact that those who want to be there just have to ask- and they will be. The promise that whoever seeks / asks will find / receive is not a blank cheque about material things, but rather is a promise of entry into the Kingdom. All those who truly love the Lord's appearing will enter the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1,8). It is so simple that it is hard to believe- those who truly seek to be in the Kingdom, will find a place therein. Note how the Lord here speaks of finding the way that leads to life, elsewhere He speaks of finding life (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). This is typical of the now / but not yet teaching of the New Testament. We have the eternal life in the sense that we are living that kind of life which we shall eternally live, we have entered the way to life; but we are still mortal and await the physical change to immortality.

7:15 *Beware*- Clearly the prohibition against judging others in the sense of condemning them (7:1) doesn't mean that we can't form a valid opinion about someone's genuineness as a teacher.

*Of false prophets- Pseudo-prophetes* means that these people are not spiritual at all, they are faking it, pseudo- prophets. To be such a fake, a *pseudo*, is not the same as being a believer who has failed in behaviour at times or who has some Biblical interpretations which we don't personally agree with.

*Who come to you*- The Greek phrase likely means 'Appear to you'.

*In sheep's clothing*- Dressed as if they are Jesus?

*But inwardly*- Given our inability to judge the inner thoughts of others, and the clear prohibition against judging to condemnation in the context (7:1), perhaps this is the Lord's comment upon them, and is not meant to be an invitation to us to claim to read the inward thoughts of others? However the next verse goes on to say that we can observe their fruits, and it is by their fruits that we are to discern them. But the Lord discerns them by their inward thoughts, which are visible to Him. Thereby His position on these false prophets becomes our position too- but we arrive there by different routes. We are to observe their fruits, whereas He looks upon their hearts. The Lord uses the same word several times to tell the Pharisees that *inwardly* or 'within' they are full of unspirituality (Mt. 23:25,27,28; Lk. 11:39). This suggests that His warning against "false prophets" is a warning against the Jewish leadership. But He uses the language of 'prophets' because this fits in with the Old Testament theme of false and true prophets. Just as the people had to discern between those two groups, so now, in an era when there were no more prophets in the Old Testament sense, God's people had to beware of imposters like

the Pharisees. They were false prophets, false speakers of God's word, in that they had effectively elevated their interpretations of God's word [the *halakah*] to the same level as God's actual inspired word.

*Are ravening wolves-* The Greek word is always translated elsewhere as 'extortioner'. The Pharisees are clearly in view here, and yet the Pharisee of Lk. 18:11 thanked God with the same word, that he was not an 'extortioner' (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisee didn't see his own sin. The Lord saw their hearts and saw that they were extortioners, but they thanked God that they were not. This is an essay in the blindness of humans to their own sins, and in our need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us, with His eyes and from His perspective. This is the essence of self-examination. The motive of the Pharisees / false prophets was clearly financial gain. This is pinpointed by the Lord as the fundamental reason for their false prophecies, for their external appearance of spirituality- it was because they wanted cash out of people. This was and is clearly deeply upsetting to the Lord.

We've seen that these false prophets were specifically the Pharisees in the Lord's immediate context. When He warns the disciples that He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves (Mt. 10:16), He is clearly alluding to His teaching here- that the Pharisees appear as sheep, but are as wolves. The implication could be that there would be fake disciples of Jesus, and that the real opposition to the work of the disciples would be the wolves of the Pharisees (see on 'The Jewish Satan' in my *The Real Devil*). This clearly happened after the Lord's death, where the Judaist plot to destroy Paul's preaching of Christianity involved Judaist 'false brethren in Christ' entering in to the flock as wolves (Gal. 2:4). In Jn. 10:12, the Lord speaks of how He as the good shepherd would give His life fighting the wolf so that the sheep might be saved; the implication is that the wolf killed Him. His death was at the hands of the Jewish leadership. Wolves don't usually kill men. This is an element of unreality to highlight the point- that legalism may not appear too bad nor too ultimately dangerous; but in fact it is, and was what led to the death of God's Son. Paul's warning that wolves would enter the flock (Acts 20:29) likewise came true in the Judaist false teachers who entered in to the ecclesias and destroyed so much, both spiritually and doctrinally. I have shown elsewhere that the roots of the false thinking which led to later false doctrines such as the Trinity actually began in Judaist ideas which entered Christianity. From our standpoint today, we can take the point that the major enemy of the Gospel will be legalism and posturing religious leaders.

7:16 *By their fruits you shall know them-* Perhaps the emphasis was upon the "you". The Lord knows the evil hearts of these people- but we can't

see their hearts, and so we shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

*Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?*

- The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publicly on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn in 7:1.

He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may say to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as one's spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade... until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come?

Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

*7:17 Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit but the corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit-* See on :18.

*7:18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit-* This appears to belabour the point made in the preceding verses. But the Lord so wishes to drive the point home- that fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

*7:19 Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire-* The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit *"is hewn down, and cast into the fire"* (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire is surely referring to the words of Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

*7:20 Therefore by their fruits you shall know them-* The belaboured repetition of the point (see on 7:17,18) is surely because we will have a strong temptation to undervalue spiritual fruit, and to seek to judge others in terms of their traditions, culture and specific interpretations- rather than by their fruit.

*7:21 Not everyone that says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven-* Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom ("in that day", :22). The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

*But he that pleases my Father who is in heaven-* Or, "does the will". Allowing the Sermon to interpret itself, we see an obvious connection with our prayer asking "Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). If that request was just

asking for God to do His will, it would be easy to pray and also somewhat meaningless. But the connection with Mt. 7:21 means that we are asking that we do God's will. And doing His will is difficult, slow progress, building on a rock- as the rest of Matthew 7 records. The Lord's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates the difficulty of praying for the Father's will to be done in our lives- prayed there with sweat like drops of blood (Mt. 26:42). So we are to pray for strength to do God's will, for spiritual strength to live obediently to the principles of the Sermon. 1 Jn. 5:14 encourages us that if we ask for anything "according to [*kata*] His will, He hears us". But asking *kata* His will could just as well be translated 'in order to fulfil'. If we want strength to do His will in practice, He will give it to us. And His will is expressed here in Matthew 5-7 quite clearly.

"The will of My Father in Heaven" is a fairly common phrase with the Lord (Mt. 12:50; 18:14; John's equivalent seems to be 'to do the will of Him that sent Me', Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38,39,40). The idea seems to be that we on earth can do the will of Him who is in one sense so far away from us, "in Heaven"; and thereby collapse that distance between us.

7:22 *Many*- The Greek often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

*Will say to Me in that day*- Judgment will be a process, with the rejected initially protesting, seeking to change the Lord's mind- and then slinking away in shame. Nobody will be passive in that day. The only thing important will be acceptance at His hand and a place in the Kingdom. We will come to that position either by loving obedience to His ways in this life- or all too late, in condemnation. The logic is powerful- we must choose that desire for the Kingdom life *now* as the dominant emotion, overarching all our emotions, decision making and formation of our deepest desires.

*Lord, Lord*- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last

day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the forward (in this life), He will show Himself forward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

*Did we not prophesy in your name-* When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom. The mention of prophesying must be seen in the context of the Lord's warning in 7:15 about *false* prophets. To claim to have spoken / prophesied in His Name (cp. 'in sheep's clothing', appearing as Jesus) implies these people had considered themselves followers of Jesus in this life.

*And in your name cast out demons and in your name do many mighty works?*- The possession of Holy Spirit gifts which enabled healings and miracles to be performed was no guarantee of final acceptance at the last day. Pentecostal theology needs to take note of this- for the power to do miracles is simply not any guarantee of salvation, as they wrongly suppose. And we who live in an era when the miraculous gifts have been withdrawn can still take a powerful lesson- no matter how dramatically we may be a channel for God's activity in the lives of others, this is irrelevant to our final salvation. The essence of the life in Christ, the life of the



Kingdom, is internal spiritual mindedness. The contrast is between 'doing' wonderful works and 'doing' (the same Greek word is used in :21) the will of the Father. The language of 'doing the Father's will' is used about the Lord's life and final death on the cross. To be as Him, to give our deepest life as He did, is not the same as doing external works for others.

*7:23 And then will I tell them-* The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46). The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment.

*I never knew you-* "Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question. The Greek for "never" means literally 'never at any time'. The course of their lives was such that there had never been a time when He 'knew' them. We rather expect Him to say '*You never knew Me*'. But He says that *He* never knew *them*- because the whole idea of 'knowing' Him is mutual. Insofar as we know Him (in a relational sense), He knows us- and vice versa. We really need to ask whether we are praying to Jesus, talking to Him, 'knowing' Him...

*Depart from me-* This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

*You that work iniquity-* And yet they have just protested all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage (see on "ravening wolves", 7:15). In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him.

Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them (:22)- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

*7:24 Everyone therefore that hears these words of mine-* *Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you'.

*And does them-* An echo of :21, he who *does* the will of the Father. The parallel is thus made between the will of the Father, and "these sayings of Mine" in the Sermon. Yet in the Lord's own case, the doing of the Father's will meant the death of the cross. This finally was and is the outcome of living in accordance with the Sermon. This is what it leads to. The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly

understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "*Hear and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: "But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". "But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermon on the Mount (see on 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

*Shall be like*- As in :27, "shall be likened unto". The future tenses imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is likened*",

present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

*A wise man who built his house upon the rock-* This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel Lk. 6:48 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool

built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day (Mt. 7:21,22).

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's

tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10). The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

*7:25 And the rain descended and the floods came-* The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do the will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we

can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock (v.49) is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil is running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

"Came" is the same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

*And the winds blew-* The disciples surely recalled the Lord's teaching

when they were on the sea of Galilee with winds blowing so strongly that they were going to drown (s.w. Mt. 8:26; 14:24; Jn. 6:18 s.w. 'blow'). Those incidents they would've understood as a foretaste of judgment and condemnation- out of which they were saved only by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the winds refer here to the Angels who will play a major part in our judgment process; for God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4).

*And beat upon that house-* The Greek for 'to beat upon' is used seven other times in the NT- and always about falling down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. We either do that in our desperation today, or His judgment shall fall upon us in the last day. There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

*And it did not collapse-* The same house stood before and after judgment. See on 7:24 "his house". The same word is used of how we desperate sinners in this life fall down before Jesus in confession that we have sinned and we dearly wish to do something about that debt (Mt. 16:26). We either do that, or we shall fall down in condemnation at the last day, with the same realization (Mt. 18:26). Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

*For it was founded upon the rock-* Surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

*7:26 And everyone that hears these words of mine and does not obey them, shall be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand-* The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10;



Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

*7:27 And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it collapse-* The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

*And great was its collapse-* A common figure for condemnation (Mt. 15:14; Acts 5:5; Rom. 11:11,22; 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:8,12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). Condemnation will be tragic- "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; in Luke, these words of Jesus (Lk. 6:47) are set against the background of Lk. 6:27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. Lk. 6:41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for "many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ,

hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

*7:28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words that the crowds-* Although the Lord started teaching only His disciples, leaving the multitude at the bottom of the mountain (Mt. 5:1), clearly many of them came up to hear Him over the course of His discourse- for in Mt. 8:1 we learn that the multitudes returned from up the mountain.

*Were astonished at his teaching-* The sense of reality commented upon in :27 left the people with utter astonishment. Never before nor since have the eternal issues of existence been stated so clearly and compellingly.

*7:29 For he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes-* It was exactly because the Lord Jesus had the power to give or take eternity that He had this authority which the people sensed.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 See on 7:28.

*And when he had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him-* The word for "crowds" is used 48 times in Matthew alone. The verbal picture is powerful- the Lord Jesus at the head of a multitude, with them, followed by them, and yet so alone...

8:2 *And a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying-* The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (8:3). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

*Lord, if You desire, You can-* The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (8:3). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

*Make me clean-* The leper didn't ask so much for healing as for cleansing. He wanted the healing *so that* he could be accepted into the community of believers in the temple. Our requests for health and healing should likewise be motivated by a desire to use the healed situation in the Lord's service. Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If thou wilt, *thou canst* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

8:3 *And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying-* The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

*I do desire. Be made clean!-* In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the

work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

*And immediately his leprosy was cleansed*- The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease.

8:4 *And Jesus said to him: See you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them*- The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

8:5 *And when he was entering into Capernaum, there came to him a centurion, begging him*- "There came" is a poor translation. The Greek word is related to that translated 'worship' in 8:2. The parallel is thus drawn between the socially isolated and poverty stricken leper, and the wealthy, respected Centurion. The point is that they both were experiencing the same utter desperation which led them to cast themselves upon the Lord. Social differences are therefore eliminated within the community gathered around Christ- on the basis of our common recognition of our desperation and His unique and sole ability to help and save.

8:6 *Saying: Lord, my servant*- Masters were well known for disregarding the welfare of their slaves, so in the centurion's passionate concern for his slave we have an insight into the nature of this delightful man.

*Lies in the house paralysed*- The same words recur in 8:14, where Peter's mother also lies at home sick, and the Lord heals her. The centurion's servant and Peter's mother are thus being paralleled- just as in 8:5 the wealthy Centurion and the poor leper are paralleled. The point is being made that many people from very different lives and circumstances had

one thing in common- desperate need for healing and salvation at the hands of the Lord.

*Grievously tormented*- The same word for 'grievously' is used about the disciples' fear during the storm on the lake (Mt.8:26); the Lord was seeking to educate the twelve by showing them His ability to cure a person in a 'grievous' situation, and then the next day (or later that same day?) giving them the opportunity to themselves be in a 'grievous' situation from which likewise just His word was sufficient to save them. But they failed to see the similarity. And so a bit later, He gave them another opportunity to learn from this situation. The servant was "tormented", and the very same Greek word is used about how the disciples "toiled" or were tormented in trying to row their boat in another storm (Mk. 6:48); in Mt. 14:24 we read that their ship was "tossed", or tormented [same word again]. And again, they failed to learn the lesson- that a word from the Lord was sufficient to save them out of 'grievous torment', just as it had done for the centurion's servant. In our struggle to attach meaning to event, we are to likewise perceive how the Lord demonstrates His power in another's life- and then brings us into a situation which in essence is similar, so that we might ourselves experience His power to meet *our* human need. And whether we 'get it' or not, He tends to repeat the lessons, as He did with the disciples.

8:7 *And he said to him: I will come and heal him*- See on 8:9 *Come and he comes*.

8:8 *And the centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*- He was aware that Jews were not supposed to 'come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof of a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant.

*But only say the word and my servant shall be healed*- He had a deep belief in the power of the Lord's word, and may well be alluding to the unique Hebrew conception of the creation of all things being through the medium of a word spoken. One of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels is in 1 Thess. 1:5, where he observes that the Thessalonians had not heard "the word only" but had had it confirmed by signs and miracles. He seems to be reminding them of the centurion, who believed "the word only" *before* he experienced the healing miracle.

8:9 *For I also am a man under authority*- The centurion had perceived exactly who the Lord Jesus was- a man, who was under (Divine) authority and yet had others beneath *his* authority. And he understood the Lord Jesus as his representative, very similar to him, but with far more power. Admittedly he seems to have misunderstood the issue of demons- he

understood that the Lord could say 'go' to whatever mighty ones [cp. his soldiers] were making his servant sick. Whatever his beliefs about sickness and its cause, he believed the Lord Jesus was far more powerful than whatever was causing it. But the Lord all the same commended the man for his *faith* even if the precise content of that faith was misinformed, and if his way of life as a Roman centurion was not the best way of being a Jesus follower; not to mention that he was a Gentile. This opens a helpful window onto how the Lord feels about those who strongly believe in Him but have their understanding of some details awry.

*Come and he comes*- The same word just used by the Lord in saying that in response to the centurion's request: "I will come" (8:8). Perhaps the centurion is marvelling at the grace of the fact that he had asked the Son of God to come, and He had come in response...

*Having under myself soldiers and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this! And he does it*- The centurion seems to have believed in demon possession. He understood that his servant was "grievously tormented" by them. He believed that the Lord could cure him, in the same way as he could say to his underlings "go, and he goeth" (Mt. 8:6-10). And so, he implied, couldn't Jesus just say to the demons 'Go!', and they would go, as with the 'demons' in the madman near Gadara? The Lord didn't wheel round and read him a lecture about 'demons don't exist' (although they don't, of course, and it's important to understand that they don't). He understood that this man had faith that He, as the Son of God, had power over these 'demons', and therefore "he marvelled, and said... Verily... I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel". He focused on what faith and understanding the man had. With the height of His spirituality, with all the reason He had to be disappointed in people, the Lord marvelled at a man's faith. It is an essay in how He seized on what genuine faith He found, and worked to develop it, even if there was an element of false understanding in it.

8:10 *When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him*- He admired him [Gk.]. Here we see the humility of the Lord Jesus, that despite His own peerless perfection, He could admire the faith of a man who as a centurion was yet far from His own level of spirituality. Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at the extent of other's faith; the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. "No, not in Israel" suggests the Lord thought that Israel's faith was something very high; when their rejection of Him was the cruellest tragedy in their history. The Lord marvelled at the man's faith, and also at the extent of unbelief in others (s.w. Mk. 6:6). Given the Lord's tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion, demanding program,

extreme loneliness etc., the fact He had the emotional energy to marvel is an essay in His extreme sensitivity, and how He let neither His spiritual mission nor His external circumstances stop Him from having such sensitivity regarding the spiritual state of others. In this we see a deep challenge to ourselves.

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6.

*Truly I say to you, I have not found anyone in Israel-* The Lord was and is actively searching for faith in people. He is the man looking to find a great treasure (Mt. 13:44), seeking to find a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46), finding a lost sheep or coin (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:4-9), finding weak and rejected workers to work for Him in His work (Mt. 20:6), wanting to find spiritual fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19), finding willing guests for His own wedding (Mt. 22:10)- any who believe in Him. As He meets so many disappointments, imagine His joy at finding *our* faith, incomplete and at times misplaced as it is. Surely in all this work of seeking and finding just a few He was living out His own command to seek, because we will find (Lk. 11:10). He seems to allude to the idea in telling the disciples to fish on the right side of their boat, and they would find (Jn. 21:6). The incident is replete with symbolism- the message surely is that we will find converts for the Lord, if we seek for them as the Lord did. We in our turn are searching to find the Lord (Acts 17:27); and He is seeking to find us. Hence the flash moment when the searching God and His Son meet searching man in conversion to Christ. Ultimately we are 'found' at the Lord's return (Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:14), but we are also 'found' by Him at the point of first faith in this life.

*With such great faith-* But as demonstrated in the comment on 8:9, this man had profound *understanding*. Faith must have content, it is belief *in* something, and in this sense faith and understanding are connected.

8:11 *And I say to you, that many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven-* Gk. 'to recline'. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk. 12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'. We note too the literal, personal nature of our existence in the Kingdom age.

*8:12 But the sons of the kingdom shall be-* The similar passage in Lk. 13:28 identifies this class as "you yourselves", the Jews of the first century in whose streets the Lord had taught (Lk. 13:26). They were therefore still in some sense God's Kingdom, even though the political form of that Kingdom had been overthrown in Zedekiah's time (Ez. 21:25-27). Likewise those who are under the dominion of the King are in a sense His Kingdom right now, even though the Kingdom is not yet restored in its visible, literal, political sense.

*Cast out into the outer darkness-* The metaphor continues from the idea of reclining at banquet in 8:11. Some would be cast out from that happy, well lit room- into the darkness outside. The idea of entering a banquet and then being cast out of it is repeated in the parable of the man without a wedding garment, who enters the banquet but is then likewise cast out into "outer darkness" (Mt. 22:12,13). That man therefore becomes symbolic of the Jews who trusted in their fleshly descent from Abraham as a guarantee of salvation and eternal fellowship with him. 'Cast into outer darkness' to experience weeping and gnashing of teeth is paralleled in Mt. 13:42 by "Cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". The "furnace of fire" and the "outer darkness" are both therefore figurative. The language speaks of intense aloneness (in the darkness) and searing mental pain. The spectre and possibility of rejection at the last day is brought frequently before us in the Scriptures, especially in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It is an element, a dimension of life, that we need to bear in mind. On the one hand, the Lord seems eager to save anyone who believes, such is His grace; on the other pole there is this kind of language about condemnation. I submit that this is an intended, irreconcilable paradox which we are left with, purposefully, and for our good. I doubt that the paradox can be resolved, at least not by any intellectual, expository process.

*There shall be the weeping-* Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

*And the gnashing of teeth-* Weeping and gnashing of teeth is emphasized in Matthew (Mt. 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Luke mentions it once (Lk. 13:28), Mark and John never. It was clearly a dimension to the Lord's teaching which struck Matthew deeply, and he used it often in his teaching of the Gospel, of which 'the Gospel according to Matthew' is a transcript. Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, and Lk. 13:28 says it is triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in



which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once faint would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

8:13 *And Jesus said to the centurion: Go your way-* The Lord several times uses this word (literally, 'depart') to a person after having healed them or having had a saving encounter with them. He used it to the healed leper in Mt. 8:4, and again in Mt. 9:6 (the paralyzed man); Mk. 5:19 (Legion); Mk. 5:34 (the woman with an issue of blood); Mk. 7:29 (the Syrian woman); Mk. 10:21 (the rich young man); Mk. 10:52 (the blind man); Lk. 17:14 (the lepers); the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:16); the blind man at Siloam (Jn. 9:7); the resurrected Lazarus (Jn. 11:44). This is a significant theme, therefore, in the Lord's dealings with people. It suggests a commission, a sending forth on His work- the same word is found in the commission to "Go into the vineyard" to work (Mt. 20:4,7; 21:28), 'going' to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16) and finally in 'going' to the world to tell them of the Lord's resurrection (Mk. 16:7). We are each

individually sent out from Him to do His work in our own unique way. The way for the great commission is therefore prepared by these many examples of 'sending'. That commission, the sending out, is therefore a totally personal matter- not something to be merely considered by missions committees, or groups of enthusiasts. We are each personally 'sent', bidden depart on our personal way, as a result of our encounter with the Lord.

*As you have believed, so it is done for you-* The idea could be that the quality, nature and extent of healing was dependent upon the nature of the faith. We ask for forgiveness for our own sins "as" we have forgiven others. There is here a recognition by the Lord that issues like faith and forgiveness are not simply black or white situations. They are processes, and there is clearly a sliding scale of measurement for things such as faith and forgiveness. The point is that according to where we set the slider on our own faith or forgiveness, so there will be a corresponding response from God. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone (Mk. 9:23). The extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as...so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

*And the servant was healed in that hour-* The phrase could mean that the servant was cured within the same hour, or at that very instant. In this case the suggestion would be that the centurion's faith was great and therefore the cure happened totally and instantly. The Greek for 'healed' is also translated 'made whole', so there could be a comment upon the extent (total healing) and immediacy (instant) of the cure- as a result of the man's great level of faith.

*8:14 And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying-* As if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to. Yet Mk. 1:31 states that "they [told] Him about her" and He responded. Surely the overall picture is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

*Sick with a fever-* The Greek literally means 'to be on fire'. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater

that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn't exist.

8:15 *And he touched her hand and-* One of the colossal 28 references in the Gospels to the Lord touching needy and neglected people, thereby showing His desire to connect with us in our humanity. We noted under 8:14 that the belief was that this woman's high temperature was because of our fire deep within her. By touching her *hand*, an extremity, perhaps the Lord was showing that actually that belief was wrong. But as with the whole issue of belief in demons as a cause of unexplained illness, the Lord dealt with the issue by inference and implication rather than a direct statement that 'this is wrong'. He reserved such a style for the condemnation of spiritual intolerance and other moral issues.

*The fever left her-* Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

*And she arose and ministered to him-* Her response to her healing was to serve the Lord and His people. This should be the underlying motive why we ask for healing and good health- so that we can serve. And our response to the Lord's touching of us can never be passive- it involves some level of active serving. Perhaps the use of *diakoneo* looks forward to the office and practice of women being deacons, ministers, in the early church. For the church of any age is to be an extension of the men and women who followed the Lord Jesus in Galilee. There was a Rabbinic prohibition of women serving men at table, so this is yet another instance of the Lord and His people being driven by their desire to respond to God's grace to breaking accepted social norms about gender.

8:16 *And when evening had come, they brought to him many possessed with demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all that were sick-* The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing Sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

8:17 *So that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: He took our infirmities and bore our diseases-* "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" is how Is. 53 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about the Lord's healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross- personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification.

8:18 *Now when Jesus saw-* An example of how the Lord was so human that He still acquired knowledge by the exercise of His senses. Knowledge was not just beamed into Him.

*Great crowds-* Why did the Lord dislike the crowds? It may be that He simply found it nervously and spiritually too exhausting for Him to be surrounded by so many wrongly motivated people. If so, what does that mean about our decision making in view of our human limitations? Or it could be that His focus was upon the training of the twelve and He didn't want to be distracted from that. Or perhaps He foresaw that if the crowds remained too long with Him, then they would begin a public revolt to enthrone Him as a King or at least some figurehead in protest against the Roman occupation. Hence His continual emphasis that His kingdom was about internal renewal, not external revolt. There may well have been a simple logistical issue- He could not normally address thousands of people and be heard by them all without speech reinforcement. The feeding miracles seem to have involved the use of a natural amphitheatre which enabled this. But thousands of people just tagging along, pressing closer to see or feel a miracle... often there would have been no chance to actually teach them anything, and most of the crowd would've only heard exaggerated and distorted versions of what was being said and done by Jesus. And there was also the very real practical danger of a stampede and people being trampled to death; Lk. 12:1 speaks of how one such "innumerable multitude... trod one upon another".

*About him, he gave commandment to depart to the other side-* The Greek *peran* doesn't have to mean this; it can also simply mean to go further or beyond.

8:19 *And there came a scribe and said to him-* Not necessarily a religious one, although probably this is the reference. The same word is also translated "clerk". It was after Jesus had commanded the disciples to sail to the other side of the lake, that this scribe came to Him. By talking to this man, who likely was just asking the Lord trick questions and trying to catch Him out, the Lord delayed their departure; with the result that they nearly lost their lives in the storm that came (Mt. 8:18-23). The disciples must have many times during that storm reflected with bitter annoyance how the Lord has gotten them in to this problem all because He had been wasting time with that Scribe. But the Lord had such a hopefulness and a spirit of passionate concern for the salvation of the individual, however arrogant and conceited they seemed to be, that He would risk danger in order to spend time with such a person. I find this an amazing example, surrounded as we are by a majority of people who appear like that Scribe.

*Teacher, I will follow you-* A massive 76 times we read in the Gospels of people following Jesus. Following Him *wherever He goes* is the characteristic of the faithful (Rev. 14:4). The following of Jesus around Palestine therefore was presented in the Gospel records (and they are

transcripts of the preaching of the Gospel) as the pattern for all who would later follow Him. His teaching in these verses, as so often, is that following Him is not about being part of a large crowd which broadly identifies with Jesus and hangs around Him, although often not hearing and taking seriously His words (see on 8:18). It is about real self-sacrifice, and a following Him to the cross. In this we see a rebuke of the cultural 'Christianity' which has historically been so much a part of the Western world. It's hard to follow Him; whereas joining the Christian denomination in which they were raised is for many people easier to do than not do. But really following Jesus is not so easy, and it leads to the death of the cross.

*Wherever you go-* He sensed the Lord was trying to distance Himself from the crowds (see on 8:18) by going on beyond them, or to the other side of the Lake. And this man said he was willing to do that, to be in the inner circle which the Lord visibly had around Him. For when surrounded by the crowds, He addressed Himself to the disciples (Lk. 12:1; and also in giving the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5:1 cp. 8:1). "Go" here translates the same Greek word as the Lord has just used in 8:18- He commanded the inner circle disciples to "depart", or "go". And this scribe wanted to be in that inner circle and to go with them. The Lord Jesus had a way of gently turning comments and questions back on the person who made them, and of redefining the terms used. The man said that he would follow Him "whithersoever you got", i.e. to whatever end point the road may lead to. The Lord replied that He had nowhere to lay His head. In other words, it's the following of Him that we need to focus on, rather than the hardness of some possible great future sacrifice that may lie ahead. It's the road, and not the destination, that are important (Mt. 8:19-21).

8:20 See on 6:26.

*And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head-* The only other time the Greek phrase is used in the record that on death, He 'bowed His head' (Jn. 19:30). His later warnings about what it meant to follow Him were to the effect that it meant carrying our cross with Him to the place of crucifixion. Perhaps there is a hint of that here. It may be that that night, the Lord literally had nowhere to sleep. But it was not the case for Him every night. Yet He seems to be purposefully painting a demanding picture in order to make the point- that following Him was not a case of tagging along with the crowd, hearing garbled reports of His words from others and enthusiastically hoping for some personal benefit from being involved with Him. Jesus died because He gave out His Spirit, as an act of the will. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him by murder. The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he

died... the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person to have ever lived. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him. When the Lord spoke of how "the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), He was apparently alluding to a common proverb about how humanity generally ["son of man" as generalized humanity] is homeless in the cosmos. In this case, we see how the Lord took every opportunity to attest to the fact that what was true of humanity in general was true of Him. Perhaps this explains His fondness for describing Himself as "son of man", a term which can mean both humanity in general, and also specifically the Messiah predicted in Daniel.

8:21 *And another of the disciples said to him-* The scribe of 8:19 could therefore be classed as a 'disciple'. The term doesn't necessarily refer to the twelve, although there does seem a distinction between the 'multitudes' who followed and from the edge of that crowd heard a few garbled versions of the Lord's words and work (see on 8:18), and 'disciples', those who were willing to be learners from Him as from a rabbi.

*Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father-* This was perhaps said in response to the Lord's decision to move on beyond the crowds, or "to the other side" (see on 8:18). Like the scribe, this man wanted to be in some kind of inner circle. And he had shown some interest- it would seem that on the morning of his father's funeral, he had come to listen to Jesus. But he wanted the Lord to delay His departure until he had completed burying his father that afternoon. It seems that a third individual also wanted to follow the Lord further in response to the command He gave to the inner circle to "depart"; for Lk. 9:61 records another person wanting the Lord to just wait until he had run home to say goodbye to his family and explain his absence.

8:22 *But Jesus said to him: Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead-* All three people (see Lk. 9:61) wanted to follow Jesus. But the Lord's point is that unless they were going to pay the price until it hurt, then they were not following Him. They were just tagging along the huge crowds. There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father's coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt.

8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk.

8:23 *And when he had boarded a boat, his disciples followed him*- This is quite a compliment, given the definitions the Lord has been giving in :22 about the difficulty of following Him truly. Chapter 8 emphasizes this theme of following Jesus, the Greek literally means to take the same road as (8:1,10,19,22). Verses 21 and 22 emphasize that this was not as easy as merely literally walking around Palestine with Him, externally following- but it involved the loss of all one holds dear in human life. And the road or way taken by the Lord ultimately led to the cross. A huge 76 times this word is used in the Gospels. The following of Jesus in all ways is the essence of Christianity- for the faithful are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* [and that surely is the emphasis] He goes (Rev. 14:4).

8:24 *And without warning, a furious storm*- The word is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

*Arose on the sea*- Same Greek word occurs in 8:26 "there was / arose a great calm". Just as easily as God can raise up a crisis, He can raise up the resolution to it. The changes of tense in the Gospel records suggest an eye witness telling the story. Take the parallel Mk. 4:37: "And there arises a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (RV). But the rest of the account in the surrounding verses is in proper past tenses- e.g. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said..." (Mk. 4:39). The impression we have is of the author getting carried away with the memory of the event, and telling it as if it's happening. And this is especially fitting if in fact the Gospels were performed live rather than coldly memorized as prose.

*So much so that the boat was covered with the waves; but he slept*- The Greek could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of

immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

8:25 *And they came to Him*- 'Coming to' can be understood in the sense of worship. His apparent silence led them to an intensity of prayerful approach to Him. See on :24.

*And awoke him*- Literally, to raise up. 'Asleep' in 8:24 can also mean simply to lay down to rest. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

*Saying, Save us, Lord!*- Peter used the same word when he urged the Lord in another storm "save *me*" (Mt. 14:30). We see how the Lord repeated the storm experience in the lives of the disciples, hoping they would learn the lesson of faith and focus upon Him, and repeating them so that they might be learnt. The two incidents are again connected by the rebuke "Ye [plural] of little faith" (8:26) and then to Peter "You [singular] of little faith" (Mt. 14:31).

*We perish!*- The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.



Mark records that they actually said: "Carest thou not that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

8:26 *And he said to them: Why are you fearful?*- Fear and unbelief are again connected in Rev. 21:8. The unbelief refers ultimately to disbelief in our salvation, fear of condemnation; see on 8:25 'We perish'.

*O you of little faith!*- See on 8:25 "save us". The question as to *why* they had little faith echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object

(e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in what or whom?*'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

*Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm-* The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves "Peace, be still". His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that

unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:27 *And the men*- An unusual term for the disciples. But it's understandable- they were awed by the power and majesty of the Father and Son, and therefore keenly felt their humanity.

*Marvelled, saying*- A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith in 8:10, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

*What manner of man is this*- What sort of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons(*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that.

But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

*That even the winds and the sea obey him?*- The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

8:28 *And when he had arrived on the other side*- The Gospel records often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural verb *without an explicit subject* to paint a picture of the disciples or crowd generally; and then follows this by a singular verb or pronoun referring specifically to Jesus. Here are some examples: "They came to the other side... and when He had stepped out of the boat" (Mk. 5:1,2); "when they came from Bethany, he was hungry" (Mk. 8:22); "they went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples..." (Mk. 14:32). The grammatical feature is more evident in Greek than in English. If the writer of Mark had been a cameraman, he'd have taken a broad sweep, and then suddenly hit the zoom to focus right up close upon Jesus Himself. This is what is being done with words, and it reflects the Christ-centeredness of the whole narrative and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospels are transcripts.

*In the country of the Gadarenes*- The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

*There met him two possessed with demons*- Mark and Luke focus upon just one of them, Legion. Luke says that Peter went to the Lord's tomb after the resurrection, yet several other disciples also went there ("some of our number"). Luke chose to focus upon only Peter; and here too, he chooses to focus upon only one of the two demoniacs.

*Coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could go that way-* See on 8:34.

For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Mark 5 and Luke 8.

8:29 *And they cried out, saying: What have we to do with you, you Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*- The language of judgment at the last day, "the time" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). See on :30 *a good way off* and on :31 *cast us out*. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons'- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk.5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29).  
"He [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "My name [singular] is Legion: for we are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

8:30 *Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding-* The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The men saw themselves as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them and Him (:29). His

response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips. See on :31.

8:31 *And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out-* The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). These men were obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on :30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on :32). They correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring them that their fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. These men had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. They realized that meeting Him was meeting their judge. And they ask that the pigs bear their condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once they had as it were received their condemnation, they had passed from death into life.

*Suffer us-* AV and some manuscripts. They recognized Jesus as not only Son of God but also their Lord, in total control of their final destiny.

*Send us away into the herd of pigs-* The same word is used about the rejected at the final judgment 'going away' into condemnation (Mt. 25:46).

Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this?

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the

curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

Steve Keating pointed out to me that the madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behaviour in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae.... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*8:32 And he said to them: Go. And they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the hill into the sea and perished in the waters-* Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation.

The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).



8:33 *And they that fed them fled, and went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to them that had been possessed with demons-* See on :34 besought.

8:34 *And all in the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in :31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved. The parallel record in Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

*To depart from their borders-* Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it

involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

Mark records further: "And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him. But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you. And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled" (Mk. 5:18-20). This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

**Mk. 5:19**

Go to thy *house*

unto thy *friends*

*tell* them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"-  
by personal demonstration to  
individuals]

how great things

the *Lord [i.e. God]* hath done for  
thee

and how he had mercy on thee.

**Mk. 5:20**

He goes to the *ten*  
*cities* [Decapolis]

He goes to *strangers*

He "*publishes*"

how great things

*Jesus* had done for him

[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others

what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

Mary's praise that "He hath done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids Legion go home" and shew how great things God hath done unto thee". Her eternal influence on her Son is a huge encouragement to all mothers. For the language of the risen Lord in Revelation has discernible links with language she used to Him in His infancy.

## CHAPTER 9

*9:1 And he entered into a boat and crossed over-* The Gospels record the Lord entering into a boat around 15 times. The visual image of Him entering the boat remained deeply with the Gospel writers. It's an incidental proof of the veracity of their records as eyewitness accounts. There must've been something about His body language as He climbed over the boat's side which lodged deeply within them. Perhaps because it is awkward for a man to climb over a boat's side, especially for one who had not grown up as a fisherman, messing with boats from childhood. Perhaps that proof of His utter humanity remained with them all, and is artlessly reflected in their later write-up of their time with Him.

*And came into his own city-* Another essay in the Lord's humanity. The same term is used about Joseph going to be taxed in "his own city" (Lk. 2:3).

*9:2 Behold-* AV and some manuscripts. Another encouragement for us to play 'Bible television' with the record, inviting us to 'Look' at Him, imagining the Lord in a particular situation which is being described.

*They brought to Him-* The term is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame.

*A paralysed man, lying on a bed-* The Greek *ballo* suggests they had thrown him onto the bed / stretcher in their haste to bring him to Jesus. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

*And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralysed man-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain

unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

*Son, be of good courage-* The same term is used later in the chapter, when the sick woman is told that because of *her* faith, she can be of good comfort because the Lord will heal her (9:22). Note too that the woman "said within herself" (Mt. 9:21), using the same phrase as used about the scribes talking 'within themselves' (9:3). The parallel in the situations is surely to underline the lesson- that the faith of *others* can be as effective as the faith of an individual in leading to healing and forgiveness.

*Your sins are forgiven-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

9:3 *Behold-* AV and some MSS. We are invited to imagine the faces of those men, and likewise perceive as Jesus did what they were thinking within.

*Certain of the scribes said within themselves: This man blasphemes-* Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)

- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spoke within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

9:4 *And Jesus knowing their thoughts*- Matthew says the same about the Lord in Mt. 12:25. Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]... these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts..." (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This

incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

*Said: Why do you think evil in your hearts?*- The Gk. means 'to ponder', to dwell upon- which is how the word is translated in its two other occurrences in the New Testament (Mt. 1:20; Acts 10:19). The human heart is a fountain of evil thoughts, but the sin is to dwell upon them as the Jews were doing. We note again how the root cause of the Jewish plot to murder the Son of God is located as attitudes within their hearts which grew into the final sin of the crucifixion.

What evil did the Lord have in mind? The use of *poneros* here rather than any word carrying the idea of sin would suggest the Lord had a particular evil act in mind; and surely, He could foresee the evil of the crucifixion. He perceived that this was beginning as a jealous thought brooded upon within their minds. The Lord may have had the same idea in mind when He taught that the Jews would bring forth evil things from their evil hearts (Mt. 12:34,35). The 'evil things' may have been an intensive plural for the greatest evil- the crucifixion. A review of the passages listed in the commentary on 9:3 will reveal that He perceived it was the state of their mind which would lead them to kill Him; there is therefore a great appropriacy in the language of 'satan' being used about both the Jewish opposition, and the mind of the flesh.

9:5 *For which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier *for Me*'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive

sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:6).

*Your sins are forgiven, or, Arise and walk?*- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:6 *But so you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would



have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

*That the Son of Man-* The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

*Has authority on earth to forgive sins-* He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "*all* power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

*He then said to the paralytic-* As if He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

*Arise, take up your bed-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

*And go to your house-* The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

9:7 *And he arose and departed to his house*- Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him in :6.

9:8 *But when the crowds saw it*- A word used about 150 times in the Gospel records. The crowds were a major feature of the Lord's ministry, and they must have been a great trial to Him. We sense Him seeking to avoid them, to stop them gathering, and yet being so compassionate towards them, despite their often superficial grasp of His works and message. It makes an interesting exercise to consider whether on balance the Gospel writers take a positive view of the crowds or not. John seems to be more negative about them, whereas Matthew seems to emphasize their wonder, naivety, weak understanding and fickleness. But all the Gospels seem to present a clear pyramid structure beginning with Jesus, then an inner circle of disciples, then the twelve, then the crowds, and then the unbelieving, aggressive Jewish leadership. There are certainly similarities with Moses on Sinai and in his relationship with Israel, but they cannot be pushed too precisely. The crowd here in Mt. 9:8 is contrasted favourably with the Scribes- the opening "But..." suggests that they marvelled at the Lord's authority, whereas some of the Scribes became bitterly jealous.

*They were afraid and glorified God, who had given such authority to men*- See on 9:6 *Son of Man*. There may be significance in the plural *men* rather than *a man*. They marvelled that one of them could have such power to forgive and remove the consequences of sin. It is all an essay in the Lord's evident humanity.

9:9- see on 4:16.

*And as Jesus left there he saw a man*- Towards Matthew, the author of the account. Such close up detail makes sense if this is indeed an eyewitness account. It's almost as if Matthew had a video camera on his desk and captures the Lord walking towards him after healing the paralyzed man.

*Called Matthew*- Matthew's preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi (see Mark and Luke's

record), strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (9:3).

*Sitting at the tax office-* It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

*And he said to him: Follow me-* The Greek means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

*And he arose and followed him-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (9:6- another example of Matthew highlighting immediate response to the Lord's call). It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better

translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

9:10 *And it came to pass, as he sat eating in the house-* Matthew's record is purposefully ambiguous. Whose house? His own house, where He was living? For Capernaum is called "his own city" at that time (9:1). Or the house to which the healed paralytic had returned (9:6)? Or Matthew's house? However, the other Gospels say that the house was Matthews, and the presence of other publicans supports that. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

*Many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. See the digression about the significance of eating together, and the Lord's open table. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

9:11 *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples: Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?-* To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

9:12 *But when he heard it, he said-* Did He overhear? Or simply perceive, as in 9:4?

*They that are sick need a doctor-* Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be

whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are* whole'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

*Not they that are healthy*- The Greek word is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

9:13 *Go*- The Lord was telling them to literally get out of the house, and do some Bible study. Of course, the Pharisees spent their time doing this. The Lord's point was that if they really meditated upon the implications of God's love of grace over sacrifice, then they would understand that it is therefore actually necessary to eat with sinners to call them to repentance.

*And learn*- The Pharisees saw themselves as only teachers, not pupils. The Lord had diagnosed this problem, for He told them as a teacher would tell a pupil: "Go ye and learn what that means...". He sent them away to do some homework. And there is a warning for speaking brethren here; the repeated experience of teaching can take away from the eternal sense of student-ship which the true believer will ever feel.

*What this means*- Literally, 'what is'. The same two Greek words have just been on the Lord's lips to the Scribes- "*What is* easier..." (9:5). Capernaum was a small place, and probably the incidents recorded in Matthew 9 featured the same group of opponents.

*I desire mercy and not sacrifice*- This was some kind of proof text for the Lord, for He says exactly the same words in Mt. 12:7: "If you had known what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *chesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *chesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshiping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt. 12:7).

*I came not to call*- It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). Matthew again is showing that he considered himself a sinner, one of the sick who needed a doctor.

*The righteous*- Those who *thought they were* righteous.

*But sinners to repentance*- AV and some MSS. The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

9:14 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying*- Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

*Why do we and the Pharisees often fast*- The Greek for 'often' can just as well mean 'largely', i.e. they abstained from food for long periods.

*But your disciples do not fast?*- Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting

unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

9:15 *And Jesus said to them: Can the sons of the bride chamber-* John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

*Mourn while the bridegroom is with them?*- The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord here in Mt. 9:15 is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that

they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

*But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be-* Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22)

*Taken away from them, and then they will fast-* The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *paio* which has just been used in 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after



the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return-Mt. 9:15]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes "your voice to be heard on high". Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting

because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

9:16 *No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth*- The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples (9:14 and see note there on *fast not*). The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :17. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something

which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibres are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

*Onto an old garment*- The same phrase is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11.

*For the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made*- AV and some MSS: *That which is put in to fill it*- This translates one Greek word, *pleroma*, which is elsewhere simply translated 'to fulfil' and refers to the fulfilment of the Law in Christ and "the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

*Takes from*- Gk. to separate, divide. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

*The rent* [NEV "tear"]- Gk. *schisma*, used elsewhere about divisions between people, especially the Jews, concerning Christ (e.g. Jn. 7:43; 9:16). We note the contrast with unrent, untorn garment of the Lord Jesus which even in His death was not rent. Acceptance of the way of Christ means that there will come schism with the old; and more positively, seamless unity is only possible between those who have totally given their lives and way of thinking to Him and His way.

*Is made worse*- The word and its NT usage has a moral sense. The

division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (9:14). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again. Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

*9:17 Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins-* A clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

*If they do, the skins will burst-* Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

*The wine will run out-* S.w. "shed" (Lk. 20:20). Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

*And the wineskins will be ruined-* The point is twice emphasized. The bottles are 'broken' or shattered, and they also "perish". The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation.

*No, they pour new wine into new wineskins-* Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of

sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

*And both are preserved-* The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

Luke's record adds that the Lord concluded by observing that "No man also having drunk old wine immediately desires new: for he says [deep within himself], The old is better" (Lk. 5:39). This appears to be a concession to the weakness of John's disciples, and to our weakness. Having taught that unless we are transformed, we shall shatter and be destroyed / condemned, the Lord accepts the basic conservatism of human nature- that we will not make the change immediately. There was indeed a changeover period between the Lord's death and the destruction of the temple in AD70. And in human lives today, the Lord recognizes that the total change of life will not come immediately- because we are essentially conservative. In seeking to make the total transformation, we ourselves must realize that however progressive, liberal, flexible, open to new ideas we think we are- when it comes to spiritual change, we are terribly conservative. And it is such unbridled conservatism which stops people changing and accepting the new wine. There is the assumption in many Christian groups and minds that conservative = righteous, and change is likely to be for the worst. And yet the Lord is teaching that it is our native conservatism which stops the vital, transforming change which is necessary to avoid the shattering of life and personality now, and final destruction at judgment day. The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all

find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the 'old' ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very slow from a human perspective*. The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being

wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.

*9:18 While He spoke these things to them-* The impression is given that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

*A ruler-* Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue (Mk.). Matthew omits his name- perhaps because his Gospel first circulated in areas local to Jairus where the mention of his name could've led to persecution? The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter (see on *While He spake*). He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

*Came and knelt before him, saying-* Perhaps not in so many words, but in that believing in the Lord's absolute power in action is a form of

worshipping Him. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

*My daughter is even now dead-* The Greek could carry the idea of 'for now, she is dead' (see the usage in Mt. 3:15; Jn. 13:7; 16:12,31; 1 Cor. 13:12 etc.); in this case, the man believed her death state was only temporary, until the resurrection he believed Jesus would achieve.

*But come and lay your hand upon her that she shall live-* The man "came" to Jesus, and now Jesus 'comes' to the man; the same Greek word is used twice. The impression is given of a mutuality between the Lord and those who come to Him in faith.

9:19 *And Jesus rose and followed him, as did his disciples-* This verse zooms in close on the body language and physical movement of the characters, as if the author was the cameraman on the scene. Truly we have eye witness accounts in places like this. The image of the Lord Jesus following a man is unusual, as readers are accustomed to the disciples following the Lord, not Him following men. The point perhaps is that He is responsive to human need and prayer in a sense controls Him, according to His will of course. The picture is of the man racing ahead, so eager to get home. This sets the scene for the interruption to the journey, and serves to heighten the sense we get of his frustration with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

9:20 *Behold-* AV. If Matthew is like a cameraman at these scenes, the word "behold" is as it were a zoom in message, bringing us to focus upon an individual.

*And a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years-* Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing.

*Came behind Him-* The scene is being developed from 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

*And touched the border of his garment-* Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be



worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

<b><i>Focus</i></b>	<b><i>Distraction</i></b>	<b><i>Resumed Focus</i></b>
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay

		and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

9:21 *For she said within herself-* Earlier in this chapter the inner thoughts of the Scribes were discerned by the Lord (9:4); here again we have insight into private thoughts. This emphasis upon thoughts continues that of the Sermon on the Mount; and contributes to the general impression Matthew gives of the importance of thought, what Paul later calls 'spirit'. For to be spiritually minded is indeed the very quintessence of Christianity.

*If I only-* 'If I can *only*' is the idea; she thought that physical touch was all that was required. She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today- that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by telling her that it was *her faith*- not the touch of His garment- that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). As so often, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus' clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.

*Touch his garment I shall be healed-* The Greek *sozo* is that usually used for 'saved'. She had a wider desire for not only healing (for which other Greek words could have been used) but for salvation on a wider level.

9:22 *But Jesus turning and seeing her, said-* Again the emphasis is upon recording the physical movement of the persons involved in the scene, so that we can visually reconstruct it. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

*Daughter-* Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

*Be of good courage-* The language has clear parallels with the healing of the paralyzed man recorded earlier in 9:2. "Son" there is matched by "daughter" here, and is followed by the same "be of good comfort". This phrase is used by the Lord four times in the Gospels (Mt. 9:2,22; 14:27; Jn. 16:33); like all of us, He had some phrases He liked to use. But after His resurrection, He used the same phrase when He appeared to Paul (Acts 23:11). He is the same today as yesterday (Heb. 13:8), even down to His word choice and style of speaking. The Jesus whom we shall meet at judgment day is the same Jesus who walked around Galilee; and likewise, our essential personality will be continued eternally throughout the Kingdom. Our spirit will be saved (1 Cor. 5:5), just as His was.

*Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment-* The emphasis was on the word "faith"; see on 9:21. The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Thy faith hath made thee whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

Luke adds: "There comes one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master" (Lk. 8:49). We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. And the Lord goes on to calm them: "Do not fear *but* believe" (Lk. 8:50). This shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful disease.

9:23 *When Jesus came into... He saw...He said-* This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13), came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns,

areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

*The ruler's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult-* Flute players. If these had already been called, the implication is that the girl had been dead for some time. This places a question mark over the ruler's claim that his daughter had only just died (9:18 Gk.). All through these accounts we see the Lord's grace. The man exaggerated, just as the woman thought that merely touching Christ's clothes was all that was needed for a miracle- and yet the Lord graciously worked with all these people and situations to bless them. On the other hand, embalming would've been done quickly, and perhaps the intensity of the tumult and weeping was because she had indeed just died, and the minstrels would have only just arrived. The Lord in this case would've arrived at the very peak of human distress and need. This is why He was 'delayed' on the way, in order for that peak of need to be reached. Mk. 5:38,39 emphasizes the extraordinary agitation.

9:24 *He said: Leave!*- He was not particularly attempting to create some calm before doing the miracle; but rather was He telling the hired mourners and flute players that their services were no longer necessary. Often the Lord acts before a miracle as if He is sure the miracle is going to actually happen. In this He exemplifies faith- believing that we have already received what we asked for, and acting appropriately. We think of Paul being so confident in his release from prison that he asks people to prepare a room for him to stay in (Philemon 22). In this case, the Lord saw the dead as if she was actually alive, although sleeping. This is to be our perspective regarding those whom we believe shall be resurrected.

*For the little girl is not dead but sleeps. And they Laughed at him in scorn-* This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people

were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

*9:25 But when the crowd had been put outside-* The Lord was consciously seeking to reduce the element of hysteria at the miracle He knew He was going to do. He wanted as few as possible to see the dead body actually revive. There was perhaps a similar logic in the way His own resurrection was not done publicly and His risen body was only seen by a relatively few rather than being displayed publicly. This was not His way, nor the Father's way, even during His ministry.

*He entered in and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose-* The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous. The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for this girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55).

The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

9:26 *And the fame thereof went into all that land*- Gk. 'the rumour'. This is why the Lord seems to have disliked doing public stunts and miracles in front of many eyes; He didn't want this kind of publicity. Rumours, inevitably exaggerated and distorted, started to spread about Him. He wanted to teach God's word, and the miracles were incidental to that. So easily, they created a false message about Him because of the rumours which were created by them. It was inevitable that such rumours would spread, and yet it is hard to find anywhere in the Gospels where the Lord specifically seeks to correct them. Instead He focused upon being Himself and teaching the message He had come to deliver, and living the life He had to live. This focus needs to be remembered by us in our ministries, for the more earnestly we work for Him the more rumours will be generated and come back to our ears. But the Lord appears to have largely ignored them, and to have allowed His own personal example to be the ultimate answer to all rumours.

The Greek *ge* is used for "land" and the language could hint at a global distribution of the Lord's fame, as if Matthew saw in this a foretaste of the future spreading of the Gospel about Jesus.

9:27 *And as Jesus passed on from there*- It was such a long day for the Lord, wave after wave of need assailing Him. And perhaps He had many such days, this is just one typical day recorded. That He maintained mental perfection despite exposing Himself to such pressure and exhaustion is a window into His love and desire to save humanity. He could easily have reasoned it was better to take it easy locked in a monastery-type existence. But that would've led to sins of omission, and love is simply not like that. The same word is used again in Mt. 20:30, where again two blind men latch onto Him as He 'passes by' or 'departs'.

The picture is of circumstances repeating in the Lord's life, just as they do within ours. Doubtless the later two blind men were inspired by the story of these two blind men. The note that the Lord 'passed by' is again an indication of eye witness accounts, with the Gospel writer as a kind of inspired cameraman focusing closely upon the Lord's movements and presenting us with a gripping picture of Him and His movements, so that we may really feel we too are 'there'.

*Two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying: Have mercy on us, son of David!*- A phrase emphasized in Matthew more than the other Gospels. Significantly, he records the phrase on the lips of the wise men who came from a Gentile land (Mt. 2:1-12), a Gentile woman (Mt. 15:22), children (Mt. 21:15) and twice on the lips of two blind men (here and in Mt. 20:30). Perhaps the implication is that the Jewish spiritual leadership didn't perceive Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of David- it was the blind, Gentiles, children, women, i.e. the marginalized, who did so.

There is a definite connection between the appeal for mercy and faith the Jesus is "Son of David", both here and elsewhere (Mt. 15:20; 20:30,31). This surely was because of their understanding that God's mercy would not depart from David's son (2 Sam. 7:14; 22:51), the mercy to David was therefore "sure" (Is. 55:3); thus these people understood that if *Jesus* as the "Son of David" enjoyed the mercy / favour of God, therefore He could share that mercy with them. They believed what the Lord made explicit in John 17- that the relationship He enjoyed with His Father could really be shared with all who believed in Him. No wonder that the Lord healed these thoughtful, marginalized people; they really had meditated deeply upon Him. We should also note that in Hebrew thought, being a 'son of' someone meant sharing their characteristics. And David must be the most merciful of all the Old Testament characters; his grace to Saul and the family of Saul, to Absalom and all who rose up against him, are amazing.

9:28 *And when he had arrived into the house*- The men had been crying (Gk. 'shrieking') to Him as He was walking to the house; but He waited until He was in the house before healing them. This is similar to how on the way to cure Jairus' daughter, the Lord appeared not to be so urgently responsive; He stopped to cure the woman with blood issues. Likewise He remained 'asleep' on the boat as the waves almost submerged it. This is not because He doesn't care, is too busy, or has slow responses to human situations. Rather by this method does He seek to heighten *our* sense of desperation, faith and need for Him.

*The blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them: Do you believe*- It might have seemed obvious that they believed the Lord was able to heal them. But by having to face the question, the issues are focused. And the Lord also perceived a difference between people who simply have desperate need and urgently beg anyone for help- and those who believe



in His ability to resolve the issue. The cry of need is not the same as the cry of faith. The cry of need simply is an animal cry of desperation for help, any help, from anyone. Whereas the cry of faith is focused specifically upon the Father and Son and their unique ability and power. The Lord clearly wanted to ensure these men made that distinction, and He works in our lives likewise. The question "Do you believe...?" sounds rather like a question asked before baptizing someone. It's possible that Matthew was aware of that, and was again seeking to develop a continuity between the people Jesus encountered during His ministry, and we whom He encounters today.

*That I am able to do this?*- The Lord wanted to know if they accepted His *ability* to do the cure. He was probing the degree to which they would accept that He could therefore choose not to cure them. He therefore spoke in terms of His *ability* to cure.

*They say to him: Yes Lord*- A poor translation. *Nai* means far more than "yes", it is a solemn affirmation, better rendered 'Truly'. Along with the confession of the Lordship of Jesus, this heightens the impression that we have here some form of early confession of faith, as if these men were being set up as representative of all those who later would likewise profess faith and come from darkness to light. Being blind, these men had never seen Jesus and yet they believed in Him; perhaps there is emphasis in Matthew upon the faith of blind men because these people were in a similar situation to the recipients of his Gospel- believing on having heard but never having actually seen Jesus.

9:29 *Then he touched their eyes, saying*- The eyes of these blind men may well have been secreting ritually unclean body fluid. Actually touching the eyes, when the Lord had all manner of options open to Him, reflects His desire to connect with human weakness and need as directly and intimately as possible. Again, Matthew the cameraman is as it were zooming in close up on the movements of even the Lord's fingers. Around 30 times the Lord is described as touching people to heal them, with the principle "touch not the unclean thing" clearly in view. By doing so, making this conscious allusion to one of the greatest tenets of Judaism and Jewish social interaction, He was redefining 'touching'. He perceived that the ritual requirements not to touch the unclean were not because there was anything unclean in itself on a metaphysical level, but rather to teach against involvement in wickedness. But to save the unclean, we must touch them, be involved with them, enter into their lives, engage with them. And the Lord insistently and repeatedly demonstrated this by touching the unclean. Many conservative Christian believers make the same mistake as the Jews- they consider that the Lord's table must be closed to the unclean. But there is no guilt by association. We are not to "fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness" in the sense of participating in them ourselves, but we are to reach out to and 'touch' the individuals

caught up in those things. The Lord's redefinition of 'touch' needs to be taken seriously by many conservative communities today. And we note how just a few verses earlier, earlier that same day, the unclean woman had 'touched' Jesus. And now He in turn touches others. In ritual terms, He was unclean and was spreading His uncleanness to another. But He was actually spreading His holiness by doing so. He was purposefully subverting the understanding of guilt by association and uncleanness by physical touch.

*According to your faith be it done unto you-* This might imply that the extent of their restored vision was dependent upon the degree of their faith. In some cases, the Father and Son operate in a sovereign way, as with the blind man of John 9 who was cured without knowing who Jesus was. In others, their action and the extent of it is directly in proportion to human faith.

9:30 *And their eyes were opened-* The Lord's work is to be repeated by us, for we are commissioned as Paul was to open the eyes of those in spiritual darkness (Acts 26:18). We therefore are not to simply view Him and His work in Palestine as history, as interesting background... He there, in all His ways, in life and death, is our real pattern to be copied in our own contexts of life.

*And Jesus strictly ordered them, saying: See that no one knows it!-* The Greek for "see" means just that, indeed it can mean to stare, to look intently at something. Clearly it's a play on ideas- 'Now you can see, use your seeing to ensure that nobody knows about this'. But surely it would be obvious? How can a healed blind man be hidden? How can it not be known what has happened to him? And this was exactly the point. In line with the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, our witness is essentially in who we are. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. There is no possibility that a lamp burning in the darkness can be unnoticed. And by this command to tell nobody, the Lord was encouraging them to witness in exactly the way He had outlined in the Sermon. Clearly the man wanted to shout out his good news. But by quietly walking around, seeing life as it really is, being his normal self, this would be an even more powerful witness.

9:31 *But they went and spread abroad his fame in all that land-* Disobedience to the Lord's commands about witness is a sad feature of the New Testament record, not least in the initial refusal by the disciples to obey the great commission and take the Gospel to the entire Gentile world.

9:32 *As they were leaving-* S.w. "departed" in :31. This was a very long day for the Lord. Again, Matthew's record focuses upon physical movement of the players in the scene. It was as the cured blind men were going out of the house, intent on disobedience to the Lord's request

not to publicize their cure, with the Lord surely guessing that would be the case, that people brought a dumb man to him for healing. Wave after wave of pressure and human need broke against the Lord; we can only admire His stamina and core principle of love which enabled Him to endure and not turn others away because of His own exhaustion.

*A dumb man who was possessed with a demon was brought to him-* Gk. they lead to Him. Again, Matthew focuses close up on the person of the Lord and the physical movements involving Him. The statement is not that he was dumb *and* demon possessed. Clearly the idea was that his dumbness was thought to be due to His possession by a demon. The causes of dumbness have now been analysed and explained. It's not caused by demons, and is today usually capable of some degree of cure or improvement. Therapy doesn't partially drive demons away. Clearly, the language of demon possession was used to describe illness and human conditions which could not be otherwise explained in the first century.

*9:33 And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke and the crowds marvelled, saying: Such a thing has never been seen in Israel!*- Recorded from the perspective of the onlookers. They couldn't perceive that a dumb person could be healed without something exiting them. I have heard doctors in less developed parts of the world using language such as 'This will get it out of you' when persuading uneducated folks to take medicines. This verse proves too much for those who claim demons actually exist- for it suggests that dumbness is cured by a demon being located and cast out from within the person. Yet dumb people are cured by medical methods that make no reference to demons. The dumb spoke, whilst in the same chapter, on the same day, the lame had been made to walk and the blind been given sight; and the deaf had been given hearing (if Mk. 7:32-37 occurred at the same time). So during this very long day in the Lord's ministry, the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5-7 had been initially fulfilled. Perhaps the people came seeking such healing because they were convinced that Messiah had come and His Kingdom must be beginning. Despite their misunderstanding the nature of the Kingdom, the Lord seems to have responded positively to their faith, just as He does with misbelievers today.

There were people claiming to cast out demons in Israel at the Lord's time. But as Josephus records, they operated by first asking the sick person for the name of the demon within them and then cursing that demon until it supposedly departed. The need to name demons was therefore very important for the exorcists. The problem with dumb people was that they couldn't speak, most were illiterate and couldn't write, so it was thought to be very hard to cure the dumb because they could never name the demon possessing them to an exorcist. The Lord's healing of

dumb demons (as the people understood it) therefore placed Him in a category of His own far above the exorcists.

*9:34 But the Pharisees said: By the prince of the demons he casts out demons-* We sense that the Pharisees were desperate to minimize the Lord's miracles, but they were driven to admit they were miracles, the demons did actually leave (as they saw it), and all they could say was that the Lord must therefore have been in league with the prince of the demons. This of course was a foolish and desperate argument, because as the Lord later pointed out, their sons also claimed to drive out demons, so that would imply that they were also in league with the prince of the demons. This shows that the miracles of Jesus were beyond doubt, as those by Peter were later. Genuine miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit cannot be denied even by the most cynical- contrasting sharply with many Pentecostal claims of healing and supposed exercise of the Spirit gifts of healing.

*9:35 And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues and-* As in 4:23, the emphasis seems to be upon the Lord trying to get to as many isolated people as possible. The Greek suggests this idea, and is used again in Mt. 23:15 "You *compass* sea and land to make one proselyte". The Lord's emphasis upon the villages rather than the big cities such as Sepphoris was in line with His mission to specifically get to the marginalized and those whom no itinerant preacher ever would bother trying to get to. The "villages" would've been no more than a few houses, requiring hours of walking to, over hilly tracks. Our own missionary work can take an example from this, but for all of us there should be the spirit of wanting to spread the message to the very corners of society.

*Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom-* Literally, heralding the Gospel of the Kingdom. Not 'Preaching / heralding the Kingdom', but heralding the preaching of that Kingdom. The difference is significant. The Lord saw Himself as doing the groundwork for another evangelizing of the Kingdom- namely that which would be done by us. Significantly we read that Paul simply preached [s.w.] the Kingdom (Acts 28:31). Matthew, like the other evangelists, often hints at the great commission to spread the Gospel with which the Gospels all end (even John, if you look for it!).

*And healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness-* As if the Lord purposefully tried to engage with every kind of human need and weakness. This means that His unity with humanity, His ability to be a total representative and utterly sympathetic High Priest "in every point" (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16), was not something which was achieved automatically. He consciously worked on it, and His life of engagement with humanity resulted in Him developing into the unique mediator and representative which He is. The language here is repeated in 10:1

concerning the work of the disciples- the Lord's preaching ministry isn't mere history, it is to be replicated in essence in *our* ministry.

*Among the people-* AV and some MSS. Literally, "in" the people. There is the hint at internal sickness and healing.

9:36 *But when he saw the crowds, he was moved with-* This is part of the general summary of His preaching work which we have in :35. Most men would've inwardly groaned whenever they saw the crowds surging towards them. But not the Lord. Every time He saw a crowd of humanity, He was moved with compassion. We too are faced by human need, crowds of it, if only we will have the sensitivity to perceive it. And instead of groaning and raising eyebrows, we ought to be moved with compassion at their need, at how humanity is rudderless- if we have the spirit of Christ.

*Compassion for them-* Several times used in the Gospels about the Lord's response to people. In His self-revelation in the parables, the Lord uses the same word about Himself and the Father- He is the Samaritan who "had compassion" on the wounded man (Lk. 10:33), as the Father of the prodigal son likewise had compassion on him (Lk. 15:20). Mk. 6:34 adds at this point that He *therefore*, as a result of that compassion, started to "teach them many things". Then He asked His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest..." (Mt. 9:36-38). It was their spiritual as well as their material and human need which evoked His compassion. I have to say that this spirit of urgent compassion is not as strong among us as it should be. There seem few if any tears shed for the tragedy of humanity. The world's desperation seems written off as 'they're not interested' rather than felt as a tragedy that should evoke our emotional and practical response. When Jesus saw the leper who wanted to be "clean"- not just 'cured' or eased of his discomfort- He made an emotional response. He put forth His hand, touched him, and made him clean- because He was "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:40,41). Mt. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 5:19 and Lk. 7:13 all record other times when the sheer humanity of the situation evoked the Lord's compassion: e.g. the woman in the funeral procession of her dear son, or the hungry crowds, unfed for 3 days...

*Because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd-* Could be rendered "harassed and helpless". The hypocrisy of the Pharisees didn't simply irritate the Lord, He went further to proactively feel sorry for the crowds who were without a shepherd- and He did something about it. Their lack of shepherds is the background for the Lord's command to pray therefore for *workers* to be sent out into the harvest (Mt. 9:37,38). We might think that the crowds being without a shepherd would lead the Lord to urge that good shepherds be sent to them. But instead He chooses another metaphor- seasonal labourers

required to go and reap a harvest. Perhaps this was because He didn't consider the disciples nor indeed anyone in Palestine at the time to really be capable for shepherding. He was the only shepherd- the singular good shepherd. Perhaps the point of the change of metaphor was that the Lord's flock doesn't need mere shepherds, those in the positions of leadership, so much as *workers* first and foremost. The Lord is clearly alluding to the concern of Moses that after he died, the people would not be "as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). The hint is that Israel were in effect without Moses- whereas the Jewish religious leadership considered that they were being fiercely faithful to Moses. Perhaps there is also the hint that the Lord realized that He would not always be with these crowds (He had just taught that the bridegroom would be taken away from them in 9:15), and His prayer is that the Father will send out workers to replace Him. For our ministry in this world is effectively that of Jesus reincarnated in us as His body. See on 10:1.

*9:37 Then said he to his disciples: The harvest-* The harvest and reaping is ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30,39). The prayer here could not simply be for more Gospel workers, but for the Angels who are the reapers in Mt. 13:39 to be sent forth- thus, a prayer for the second coming, motivated by the hopeless situation with the shepherds of God's people. But we can surely interpret the Lord as once again teaching the 'now but not yet' aspect of His Kingdom. Insofar as we go out and reap the harvest, we are doing what the Angels will do at the second coming. Note how He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest. He saw the potential... Note how the phrase "the harvest is *plenteous*" uses the word usually translated "great" in describing the "great multitudes" that flocked to the Lord (Mt. 4:25; 8:1,16,18; 12:15; 13:2; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 20:29). Those crowds were seen by Him as a harvest.

*Indeed is plentiful-* His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it's not being fully gathered. The fault for that lies with the weak efforts of the preacher-workers ("few" both in number and weakness, as the Greek means). This means that the ultimate degree of success of the Father's work with men to some degree depends upon us. There are people who would be gathered if there were more and stronger, better workers (not so "few"), but who will not be. To some extent the Father has delegated His work into our hands. He will not necessarily raise up another way of harvesting those people into His Kingdom if we fail Him. In this lies the power of the fact that *we* are the labourers who do the reaping in our Gospel work now; and yet it is the Angels who do this reaping at the last day (Mt. 13:39). This means surely that there is a direct correlation between whom we reap for the Lord now and who shall finally be gathered into His Kingdom by the Angels at the second coming. Our responsibility for others' eternity and the extent of God's glory on this

earth is huge. The Lord Himself here prayed that more labourers would be sent forth into the harvest, but the real answer only came in the sending forth of labourers by the Father in the post-resurrection dispensation (Mt. 20:1). We are all commanded by the great commission at the end of Matthew to go forth and do this work.

*But the labourers-* The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that all who are called to the Gospel are called to be labourers in the harvest. The call is not to learn a few theological truths and preserve them, nor to slump into a culture of meeting attendance or churchianity. It is to labour in harvesting the great potential which there is in this world.

*Are few-* The Greek means in both number and strength. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that many of those who are called for this work only work a few hours, they are standing idle a long time before being called. They are the weak, the lazy, the handicapped, the old, those with a bad work record, whom nobody wanted to hire. Most of the Lord's workers are like that- we shouldn't be surprised to find the Lord's workforce full of those who seem most unsuited to the work of harvesting others. The disciples were the labourers- for a few verses later we read that He sent them forth in His work with the comment that they were labourers who were worthy of their hire (Mt. 10:10). The Lord only had the 12, perhaps, because that was all there was in Israel able to do the job. And He asked them to pray that there would be more sent forth by the Father. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable of Lk. 14:23, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

*9:38 Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest-* The Lord is praying that the time of the great commission, the sending forth of God's people worldwide to reap the harvest, would be hastened. But it had to wait until after the Lord's resurrection because the disciples were not yet mature enough for it. The Lord *prayed* and urged

others to pray, that the great commission would be given as soon as possible. With what eagerness, therefore, does He watch our fulfilment of it; and with what sadness therefore does He observe our negligence and even denial of it.



## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he called to him his twelve disciples-* Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:5). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

*And gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out-* This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

*And to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness* Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on 9:35.

10:2 *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother-* Note this is not the record of the choosing of the twelve, but rather of their commissioning and being sent out. The list is broken up into pairs, perhaps because they were sent out as six pairs.

*James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother-* Mark adds that James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on 16:19.

10:3 *Philip and Bartholomew* Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

*Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus-* The Gospel records were transcripts by the evangelists of their personal preaching of the Gospel. Matthew adds in the list of the disciples that he was "the publican" (Mt. 10:3). And throughout, there are little hints at his own unworthiness- in his own presentation of the Gospel to others.

10:4 *Simon the Canaanite-* Not 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of t, of whatever accent and formation.

*And Judas Iscariot who betrayed him-* "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

10:5 *These twelve Jesus sent out and ordered them, saying-* Literally, apostled them. Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers.

*Do not go unto the Gentiles and do not enter into any city of the*

*Samaritans-* Given Judaism's strong opposition to Jesus and His teaching, did the Lord foresee they would be tempted to go to the Gentiles? He surely wanted them to replicate His ministry as exactly as possible- and He was sent at that stage to Israel and not to the Gentiles.

10:6 *Instead-* The construction 'Not this but rather that' could mean 'Focus more on that than this', i.e. focus upon the Jews. It was not necessarily a total prohibition on preaching to Gentiles. For similar constructions see Jn. 17:9 and 1 Cor. 1:17.

*Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel-* It's hard to tell whether the Lord meant that all Israel were lost sheep, or whether He meant that the apostles were to go to the lost sheep within Israel- to the spiritually marginalized whom He too had targeted. For the sense of the commission is that they were to replicate His ministry, as if they were Him to the world around them. He was personally sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24) and He asks them to do just the same. His mission was theirs, and it is ours. As He was sent out by the Father, so He sends us out; we're all in that sense 'apostles', sent out ones. The Lord's parables about *His* searching for the lost sheep until He found it were to be understood by the apostles as now applying to *them*. And we understand from His words here that He considered that lost sheep to be Israel. The search until it was found would then be an appropriate figure for the Lord's never ending search for Israel, a love which He can never give up over the centuries. The allusion is also to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of "the house of Israel" being lost sheep because of their bad shepherds. The Lord doesn't specifically state that the disciples are now the new shepherds of Israel (see note on 9:37,38). He simply sends them to the lost sheep. It seems they were not ready for full pastoral responsibility, but they were to begin their shepherding. We note that the Lord specifically commissions Peter to "feed My sheep / lambs", and these are here defined as the lost sheep of Israel. Hence Peter's ministry specifically to the Jews. These were the sheep who were now lost because of the Jewish religious leadership. The Lord was sending out the apostles to try to provide what the standard religious leadership didn't, even though they weren't mature enough to be designated as 'shepherds' at that stage; and that is how many of us feel or felt when we first perceived we too are being sent out just as much as they were. Notice that the Lord sent the disciples to the lost sheep as sheep (10:16)- not as shepherds. It is the commonality we have with our audience which is the bridge across which we can engage with them and persuade them. To stress what we have in common on a human level is what sets up the possibility for those 'flash' moments when we really get something of the Gospel across to them.

10:7 *And as you go, preach-* The idea could be that they were to 'preach'

whilst travelling, not just as set piece deliveries of speeches about the Gospel, but the good news of the Kingdom should come out of them from who they were, "as" they were going. The same word is in the great commission to us, to 'go and preach' (Mt. 28:19). It was a foretaste of the greater worldwide campaign which was to be the way of life for all in Christ.

*Saying: The kingdom of heaven-* In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is "the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was "among" first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king.

*Is at hand-* Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. The Greek could mean 'Is soon coming', 'Is being brought near' or 'Has come near (already)'. All these meanings were likely intended by the Lord, hence the choice of this wide meaning phrase. The Kingdom was potentially scheduled for establishment 'soon', but Israel's refusal of the Gospel and rejection of the Lord Jesus meant that it was delayed. Mt. 21:34 uses the same phrase to describe how the time of harvest 'drew near'- but the husbandmen refused to give the fruits, and so another program of operation was put into practice. Rom. 13:12, James 5:8 and Heb. 10:25 likewise speak of the day of the second coming drawing nearer by the day. Regardless of whatever delays there may be to the Divine program, we are to live as if "The Lord is at hand" (s.w., Phil. 4:5), as if He is about to come soon. In another sense, by response to the Gospel, the time for the establishment of the Kingdom was being hastened, being 'brought near'. But in a sense, the Kingdom had come near to Israel in that Jesus as King of the Kingdom was the embodiment of Kingdom principles, and He was amongst men at that time. Those who witnessed His Kingdom-like healing miracles had the Kingdom brought near to them (Lk. 10:9). The teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was therefore a bringing near of the Kingdom to men. The Lord Jesus, the essence and embodiment of the Kingdom, was there amongst men, and the apostles were heralding ['preaching'] His presence.

*10:8 Heal the sick-* The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples here in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over

one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding words.

The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

*Raise the dead-* The Greek definitely means 'to awake'. We wonder how many dead people were raised by the apostles, even though the power of resurrection appears to have been granted them here. It's tempting, given the spiritual dimension to the three words chosen here for their work (heal, cleanse, raise), to wonder whether their ministry was intended to be of spiritual service and healing, with physical miracles in second place, although not out of the picture.

*Cleanse the lepers, cast out demons-* The word also has the sense of moral cleansing. Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs.

*Freely you received, freely give-* Gk. 'without a cause'. The allusion is not to anything monetary, but to the free gift of God's grace to us. The only other occurrence of the Greek phrase 'give freely' is in Rev. 21:6, where we read of the free gift of the water of eternal life to whoever really wants it. There is a connection between us 'freely giving' the Gospel now (Mt. 10:8), and being given 'freely given' salvation at the last day (Rom. 8:32; Rev. 21:6). The freeness of God's gift to us should be reflected in a free spirited giving out of the Gospel to others. Paul's decision not to take money from Corinth (1 Cor. 9:18) was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8; although there were other passages in the Gospels which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issue of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life.

*10:9 Acquire no gold, nor silver-* The idea of the Greek is to get or acquire, and the hint could be against taking money for their work with people. But the meaning extends into verse 10, and the sense is clearly that they were not to worry about how materially they were going to do

their preaching tour. They were to trust that what was basically necessary would be provided, just as it was for Israel on their wilderness journey. To just go out and preach with nothing behind them was a huge challenge to their faith in the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which taught to take no anxious thought for food or clothing (Mt. 6:25). And their obedience and success is likewise a great challenge to our own faith- for so often lack of finance and material things is what leaves many good intentions to preach stillborn. But it is the Lord's will that should spread the Gospel, and as a wise old brother of wide missionary experience told me in my youth "I have never seen a preaching initiative fail for lack of funds".

*Nor brass for your purses-* Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

10:10 *No wallet for your journey, neither two coats-* Maybe a reference to a double garment. But the similarity with Israel's wilderness journey is clear. No food pouch for the road, no extra clothes or shoes- because as the Father provided those things for Israel, so He would for those who preach His Kingdom.

*Nor shoes, nor staff; for the labourer is worthy of his food-* The Lord has used the word about how the labourers are "few", meaning both weak and also few in number (9:37,38), and He will go on to speak of how the labourers He uses to reap the harvest are those who have been standing around unused by others because they are maybe old, weak, lazy or have a poor work record (Mt. 20:1,2,8). Clearly the Lord recognized that His labourers would be weak, but He still expects them to be recognized as "worthy" of support as they attempt to do His work.

The Greek for "food" can mean 'rations', as if they were to be as soldiers on duty. They were to believe that their needs would be met. The mechanism for meeting that need was presumably from the things provided by those who would receive them, although the Lord was clear that they wouldn't always get a positive reception (:14). Their faith in the provision of their needs by their audience was therefore tantamount to faith that some at least would respond positively to their message. Note that by the time Paul wrote 1 Tim. 5:18, this phrase was considered as "Scripture", another hint at an early date for the writing down of the Gospel accounts. The context of that verse is of the financial support of teachers of the Gospel. It seems the Lord expected that those who gave their lives to spreading and teaching His word should be supported in doing so. Note that the context here in Mt. 10 is of itinerant preachers being supported; Paul doesn't quote the Lord's words strictly in context, because he applies them to teachers based in one particular church. But this is how we are to interpret Scripture- taking the principles and applying them to our situation locally, even if that situation may differ in

some ways from the original situation and context in which the principle was first established or stated.

There is a strong theme in the NT that none of the Lord's people are ultimately "worthy", but rather unworthy. There will be faults with all preachers. But by reason of their devotion to the Lord's word and work we are to consider them "worthy" of support- even if aspects of their wider unworthiness are apparent. Support is not only to be given to those who appear faultless, for none are. The word 'worthy' is used later in Matthew 10. Those who respond to the message are "worthy" (:13); there is a mutuality between the teacher and the convert, they both consider each other 'worthy' in that the righteousness and worthiness of the Lord is imputed to them both. Later in the chapter, the Lord teaches that the 'worthy' are those who take up their cross and follow Him, regardless of loss of family and social standing. Their journeys in the preaching of the Gospel were therefore seen by the Lord as a taking up of the cross and following Him (10:37,38). There is nothing therefore glamorous to missionary work, and that point needs to be well understood especially by young people who jet off to exotic places in the name of Gospel extension work.

According to Mark's record of the Lord's words here, He is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats". All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter... there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

10:11 *And into whatever city or village you shall enter, search out who in it is worthy-* The contrast is between the worthy and those who don't accept the Gospel (:13,14). So the worthy would be those who have responded to the Gospel already. The Lord's fame had gone throughout Israel (Mt. 4:24) so the apostles weren't going into totally virgin territory. They were following up on the rumours people had already heard about Jesus. "Worthy" seems a strange term to use for the believers, but maybe already the Lord was teaching the idea of imputed righteousness. Those

who had believed in Him were "worthy", and He expected them to likewise consider the preachers of the Gospel to be "worthy" of their support. Belief in Him, therefore, was not without practical demands; it was natural and expected of the Lord that those who had believed in Him should provide materially for His preachers. The first mention of this word for "worthy" in the NT is in Mt. 3:8, where John the Baptist asks his followers to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Perhaps 'the worthy' had become a technical term for those who had responded to John's teaching about Jesus, or at least openly confessed faith in Jesus. The mission of the apostles here may have been to follow up on them. This would mean that the information in Lk. 7:4 that a man was "worthy" of a healing may have implied that he was one of those who had responded to John the Baptist.

*And stay with them until you go-* To build relationships, to enhance the possibility of a house church developing there later, and to avoid the temptation to shop around for the best accommodation or the wealthiest sympathizers. Luke adds: "Go not from house to house". The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip "from house to house" (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

10:12 *And as you enter into the household, greet it-* The Lord empowered the traditional *Shalom* greeting with real meaning when uttered by the apostles on entering a house. The household were offered real peace with God- all they had to do was say yes to it. If they did not, then the opportunity was withdrawn (:13).

10:13 *If the household be worthy-* Worthy of Christ (same word in :37,38). None are worthy (Rev. 5:4) except Christ (Rev. 5:9), yet if we are in Him, we are counted worthy. The Greek word is used about those who responded to John the Baptist producing fruit 'worthy of repentance' (Mt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8). It could be that the Lord is using the word in a technical sense, referring to those who had responded to John's preaching.

The apostles would have gone to the household because they had heard that it was worthy, or believing in Jesus (see on :11). But the Lord was well aware that there would be those who had a name as believers in Him who actually were not. Even though the household was "worthy" in the sense of having professed faith in Him, they needed to confirm that by



accepting the *shalom* offered in Christ's Name. Note that the household was judged as worthy or unworthy. Here we see the beginnings of the house church movement which was so characteristic of early Christianity. We note too the household baptisms mentioned in the NT. One purpose, therefore, of the apostles visiting these households was to find out who had a name as a Christian believer, and to ascertain whether they were indeed believers. The test was whether the household who claimed to be Christian would receive them, the representatives of Jesus, who were as His body to the world. If the household publicly professed faith in Jesus, having heard something about Him or maybe learnt from John the Baptist, but refused to accept Christ's brethren and the word of Christ as they taught it- then they were classified as not actually believing at all. This has uncanny parallels with our own day, where many claim publicly to be "worthy", to be believers in Jesus personally- but refuse and reject His brethren and are not seriously interested in His words. Herein lies the danger of 'out of church Christianity'. Whatever that means, if it means in reality that we profess a personal allegiance to Jesus but have no time for His people- then it is wrong and a path to rejection by Him. Vague connection with the idea of Jesus and advertising it publicly is not enough of itself- if we reject His brethren, then we have rejected Him. This is a sobering challenge to those whose closed table policies lead them to reject many of His brethren and representatives. There has to be a connection with the use of the same word "worthy" in 10:12- the labourer in the Gospel's work is "worthy" of being supported. The connection could simply be that the worthiness of the household is proven by whether they consider Christ's servants likewise 'worthy', and whether they treat them accordingly.

*Let your peace come upon it, but if it be unworthy, let your peace return to you-* See on 10:12. If the household didn't accept Christ's brethren, then the peace of salvation which He had invested the apostles' greeting with, would be withdrawn. His *shalom*, His peace and fellowship with those who name His Name, is dependent upon whether or not they accept His brethren.

10:14 *And whoever-* Whichever town, according to :15.

*Shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that household, or that city-* To receive an apostle personally was to receive his words. As the Lord was the word made flesh, so there should be a continuity, an identity and congruity between the words we preach and us as persons. This means that the receiving of the preachers as persons was connected with receiving their words.

*Shake off the dust of your feet-* The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in

allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

10:15 *Truly I say to you, it shall be more tolerable-* There will be degrees of punishment for the rejected at the last day.

*For the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city-* The people from Sodom will appear at the day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge brings responsibility, it follows that somehow those people had had God's word preached to them, just as the towns of first century Israel had. But by whom? There is no direct record of Abraham or Lot witnessing to them, but it could be that Lot's righteous living was counted as a witness to them which demanded they too accepted Lot's righteous lifestyle. Seeing that Melchizedek lived in the area, one wonders whether he may have witnessed to them. In any case, we read only a few incidents from the lives of Bible characters; perhaps Abraham and / or Lot made a major witness to those cities and to the area around them ("*the land of Sodom...*").

10:16- see on 24:14.

*I am sending you out-* When He uses the metaphor of sending out His sheep in Jn. 10, the Lord makes the point that He leads them forth, going ahead of them. And yet with the sending out of the apostles, He didn't literally go with them nor go a day's journey ahead of them. He went before them in the same way as He goes before us, His sheep of this age- in personal example. As He had gone around Israel preaching, so they were to replicate His ministry. And He is a most unusual shepherd, in that He sends them forth knowing that they are walking right into the wolves. "I send you forth" is actually a quotation from the LXX of Ex. 3:12, where Moses is sent forth to take Israel out of Egypt. Thus the Lord bids His men

see themselves as Moses, taking Israel out of Egypt, which becomes a symbol for orthodox Judaism. This subversion of popular Jewish understandings continues throughout this section.

*As sheep-* Bridge building involves us becoming 'as' our target audience- as Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles. Thus the Lord tells the disciples to go forth and preach as sheep / lambs; in order to appeal to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 10:6). They were to be as sheep to win the sheep.

*In the midst of wolves-* The language suggests they would be totally outnumbered. They were making a brave witness in the teeth of aggressive opposition. Jewish teaching was that Israel was the sheep which was surrounded by 70 wolves, seen as the Gentile nations (*Pesiqta Rabbati* 9:2; *Tanhuma Toldos* 5). The Lord is subverting this idea- the apostate, legalistic, Torah-observant Pharisees were in fact Gentiles in the Lord's eyes, and the true Israel was comprised of the secular, spiritually immature followers of Jesus.

*Therefore be wise as serpents-* The Lord may not be using the snake here as a symbol of sin or sinful people. He may simply be alluding to the way that when a snake moves into a new area, it is cautious, uses camouflage to blend in, spies out opportunities, doesn't act hastily and doesn't immediately go for what looks the easiest target. These kinds of characteristics were absolutely necessary for the apostles to emulate in their work. The Lord was not a fan of mass rallies and high profile publicity, rather did He prefer to work as quietly as possible and as deeply as possible with individuals; and He wanted His preachers to do the same. Yet again, as with "in the midst of wolves", the Lord is alluding to an understanding then common within Judaism; in this case, to *Shiyr hashirim Rabba*, fol. 16: "The holy blessed God said to the Israelites, Ye shall be toward me as upright as the doves; but, toward the Gentiles, as cunning as serpents". The Lord is saying that the Jewish religious leadership, with all their hatred of Gentiles, were to be treated as Gentiles- for this is who they were. And again, the true Israel are the Lord's bungling, hesitant, misunderstanding followers and preachers.

*And harmless as doves-* Doves and snakes are not aggressive and move away from conflict- whereas wolves are aggressive. Perhaps that is the Lord's point- be wise, prudent, but not aggressive, and retreat from confrontation.

10:17 *But beware of men-* As in 10:16, this is an appeal to not be like sheep in their naivety. The apostles were going to suffer, ultimately.

Therefore, they should beware of trusting men too quickly, because the aggression towards them was going to be far greater than they imagined. The apostles likely didn't think that the Jewish religious leadership were as bad as the Lord knew them to be, and they were initially too concerned not to upset them (Mt. 15:12). The "men" of whom they were to "beware" were surely the Pharisees, because elsewhere the Lord teaches the disciples to "beware" of them (Mt. 7:15; 16:6,11,12; Lk. 20:46); and He goes on in this verse to speak of "*their* synagogues", showing that "men" are in fact the Jewish religious leadership.

*For they will deliver you up to councils-* Their Sanhedrin. The language of 'handing over', Sanhedrin and scourging is all relevant to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He is teaching here that the preaching of His Gospel is an incarnation of Himself, and will result in our suffering the essence of His own sufferings and death. To go out on the road of missionary witness is to walk the path of the cross. It's not anything glamorous- if done properly as He intended.

*And in their synagogues they will scourge you-* Scourging was usually only practiced for blasphemy or breaching public order. Maybe we are to read this in the context of the Lord asking His preachers to be as snakes and doves, to not be provocative and not seek to create public showdowns with the Jewish leadership. Perhaps the Lord foresaw that some of His men would fail in this, and suffer accordingly. Or perhaps He foresaw how belief in Him as God's Son would be classified as the ultimate blasphemy. And yet synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn't intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) (See references to the Jewish laws in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) Vol. 2 p. 183).

10:18 *Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony-* The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

*To them-* Or, "against them". The "men" of :17, the Jews; for there is a

contrast made between "them" and "the Gentiles". In :14 the Lord has taught to shake off the dust of their feet as a "witness against" the unbelieving Jews (this is added in the parallel records in Mk. 6:11 and Lk. 9:5).

*And to the Gentiles-* Yet the commission told the apostles to *not* go to the Gentiles. The Lord speaks in this wider sense because He wanted them to realize that what He was asking them to do on their brief preaching tour was to be understood by them, even then, as programmatic and prophetic of their (and our) later witness to the entire world, as required by the great commission. The implication is that the "men" of :17 are the ones who will lead to the disciples being persecuted by Gentiles; and this indeed is how it worked out, due to a program of Jewish orchestrated opposition to the Gospel's spreading. The idea of a testimony to or against the Gentiles is to be found in Mt. 24:14, where we find the same two Greek words used in speaking of the preaching of the Gospel as a *testimony* to "the nations" (s.w. "Gentiles") in the very last days. The spreading of the Gospel to the whole world will likely be facilitated by high profile, well publicized legal cases against the Gospel's preachers- something perhaps we have yet to see in the last days.

10:19 *But when they deliver you up-* The Jews (the "men" of :17, the "them" of :18) delivering Christian preachers to Gentile powers, after the pattern of what they did to Jesus.

*Do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak-* A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would not have specific fulfilment in time of persecution. Likewise "for My sake" in 10:18 alludes to Mt. 5:11.

"Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God

still kept this aspect of the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

10:20 *For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you*- Mark has "the Holy Spirit", but the reference to God as Father paves the way for the next teaching- that human family will likely forsake us if we are faithful to our true Father (:21). Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind Mt. 10:20: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". This is why Paul can thank God that he finds himself praying constantly for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)- because he recognizes that not only can we influence God by our prayers, but He influences us in what we pray for.

We read "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. This approach would explain the present tense here, when the context is speaking of the future (:19). He doesn't say 'It will not be you who will speak, but the Spirit which will speak in you'. The present tense is used here in :20 to suggest that if we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

10:21 *And brother shall deliver up brother to death and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*- "Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the

language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

10:22 *And you shall be hated of all men*- This again was Judaism's understanding of Israel's experience in the Gentile world (the word is used of Gentile 'hate' for Israel in Lk. 1:71); but the Lord is teaching that His followers were the true Israel, and the Jewish orthodoxy who hated them were in fact the unsaved Gentile world.

*For My Name's sake*- It is the Jews who would do this (Jn. 15:21) and yet by doing so, they would simply be doing what "all nations" would do the Lord's people 'for His Name's sake' (Mt. 24:9).

*But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved*- It is only by having *hupomone* that we can be saved (Mt. 24:13 cp. Lk. 21:19). And yet Mt. 10:22 would suggest that it will be difficult to have *hupomone* in our last days; many will fall away. Our present world is ever changing; stability in work, residence, relationships etc. seems impossible. *People give up so easily*. The generation brought up on telly and Snickers bars and deregulated Capitalism seeks only immediate resolution and satisfaction; and their short-termism fuels yet further their endless quest for the new and novel. And yet we must endure to the end in our work for the Lord and our relationship with Him, believing the same One Faith, living the same spiritual life which those doctrines demand. He amongst us who has *hupomone* to the end of the last generation, right up to the day when the Lord comes, the same will be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Lord Jesus had *hupomone*, it lead Him to the cross and beyond; and we must share His spirit of *hupomone* if we would ultimately share in His salvation (2 Thess. 3:5; Rev. 1:9; 3:10).

The "end" in view may well be the Lord's second coming, when "the Son of Man comes" (:23), in the context of the latter day preaching of the Gospel during the tribulation; for this passage in Matthew 10 is repeated in the Olivet prophecy in this same context. But not all readers of these words will have lived at that time. James so often comments upon Matthew's Gospel, and James 5:11 is the only other place in the NT where the words for 'enduring' and 'end' occur: "We count them happy which

endure [an allusion to the 'blessedness' of the Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew]. You have heard of the patience [endurance] of Job, and have seen the *end* of the Lord". The "end" may therefore refer to the end of the period of trial in some aspect which the Lord brings into the life of a believer.

10:23 *But when they persecute you*- Persecution was and is a matter of 'when' rather than 'if'. The parable of the sower likewise assumes that persecution because of the word will definitely come. "Persecute" is yet another word which figures frequently in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10,11,12,44) as an event bound to happen to those who follow the Lord. So often, believers stumble because their experience of it catches them off guard. But we are to expect it, and a life lived under Sermon on the Mount principles will prepare us for the moments of crisis when persecution comes to us in direct and ugly forms.

*In this city*- Which city? The fulfilment of this prediction was surely in the persecution of the Christians which began in Jerusalem; but Jesus was not then talking in Jerusalem. But "this city" could be translated "that city", and the city every Jew had in mind was Jerusalem.

*Flee into the next*- Fleeing persecution was a characteristic of the persecuted prophets and righteous. Hebrews 11 is full of allusion to the language in which Judaism's heroes were spoken about in the first century, and Heb. 11:34 speaks of how the Old Testament heroes of faith *fled* the edge of the sword (s.w.). Again and again, the Lord is seeking to inspire His secular followers that they are not to glance at those men as icons of a faith far beyond they themselves, but to realize their significance, and to be as them in the history of the new Israel that was now being created.

*For truly I say to you, you shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes*- The construction could mean that *when* they had gone over the cities of Israel, then the Son of Man would come. "Gone over" translates *teleo*, the noun of which the Lord has just used in the preceding verse (:22) in saying that despite persecution for preaching, they must endure to "the end". All this was His intention for the disciples in the first century, but this whole section of Matthew 10 is later repeated in the Olivet Prophecy, which clearly has reference to the last days. When the witness to Israel is ended, then the Lord will return. The whole picture of preaching within Israel whilst enduring fierce persecution is exactly the picture we get from a futuristic understanding of parts of the book of Revelation. I have outlined such an interpretation in my *The Last Days*.



The idea could be that they would still have cities to flee to right up to the point when the Son of Man comes. The preachers of the Gospel will somehow be preserved in the final tribulation- that would appear to be the message, although Rev. 11 and other passages hint that some at least of them will die.

10:24 *A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord-* The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to flee persecution (:23). He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die in 'that city' of Jerusalem, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality (:25), and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me (:25), as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught in Mt. 10:24 that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

10:25 *It is enough-* As explained on :24, the Lord may be teaching that the apostles were not to eagerly choose a martyr's death- that was for Him, not them. It was enough for them that they shared in His sufferings by being slandered as He was.

*For the disciple that he be as his Master-* See on :24.

*If they have called the Master of the house-* The head of household. A term often used by the Lord in His parables. And yet He implies that this role is to be functionally aspired to by us. Those instructed in the things of

the Kingdom are like a 'master of the house' (Mt. 13:52), and as the household's master would watch for the thief coming, so we are to fulfil His function and watch (Mt. 24:43,44).

*Beelzebub*- 'Beelzebub' has various possible meanings, but one of them is 'Lord of the house'. By using this term, the Lord's critics were implying He did in fact have a household over whom He was Master and Lord. The Lord is saying that He is the head of the family, the household, and the disciples are His *oikiakos*, His relatives, His family ("them of His household"). This idea of disciples being part of a new family based around their teacher, with them all thereby becoming brothers and sisters, was unheard of in the various schools of the Rabbis. A Rabbi had disciples, but the imagery of family was not used. The family unit was exalted as supreme in importance, and could not be emulated in other contexts. The Lord is teaching that the bonds between Him and His followers were so strong that they were indeed a new family, of more importance and significance than the natural family, which no longer claimed first loyalty in the lives, feelings and self-perceptions of His followers. Even today, this is a radical challenge- for so many turn back from full discipleship because of placing loyalty to family above loyalty to Christ. The reasoning is that what we do for family is done for Christ, and family must come first. But time and again the Lord's teaching is that our spiritual family are to come *before* our natural family. So many divisions and dysfunctions within the Lord's body are caused by those who name His Name insisting on putting their family unity before the unity of *His* family. We can't fellowship *them* because if we do, then uncle Tommy won't fellowship *us*... and so the selfish destruction of the Lord's body continues by those who love themselves more than their Lord.

*How much more them of his household!*- At first blush, this may seem strange. Usually the charismatic, visible leader attracts more slander than his individual supporters. But we see here the Lord's sensitivity to every individual experience of slander for His sake- for He presumably means 'The sum total of all the suffering of My preachers down the centuries until I return will be far more than what I personally shall suffer from the Jews'. We see here His loveliness- His grace, His generosity of spirit, His sensitivity to all we suffer for Him.

10:26 *Therefore fear them not*- Because of the detailed judgment which is to come, at which every name calling, every suffering, shall be openly revealed for what it is and judged- why fear men and their religious elites, or even death itself (social or literal) at the hands of their persecution.

*For there is nothing*- The Greek could be translated 'Nobody'. This would fit with the sense of the next verse, which is that we as persons should not hide ourselves but come out in the open now, just as we shall be openly revealed at judgment day.

*Covered-* The Lord uses the same word to warn against 'covering' our light in the sense of not openly preaching and showing who we are (Lk. 8:16).

*That shall not be revealed-* Judgment has a sense of 'now, but not yet'. Thoughts are revealed now, both to God and to ourselves (if we are perceptive enough to know ourselves); and this is especially stimulated and enabled by reflection upon the cross (Lk. 2:35 s.w.). And yet the public revealing of our thoughts and who we essentially are will be done publicly at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13 s.w.). In this sense, 'we make the answer now'. More on this huge theme in *Judgment to Come*.

*And nothing hid that shall not be known-* The Father right now "sees in secret" (Mt. 6:4,6,18 s.w.). So the concept of being able to even be 'hidden' from Him is foolish. Again, we are to live as if we are at judgment day. Therefore our light of the Gospel should not be placed in a 'hidden place' (Lk. 11:33 s.w.)- the idea of *not* preaching, concealing our faith, is foolish because we shall come out in the open about it at the last day anyway. The "secrets of men" (s.w. 'hidden') shall be judged openly (Rom. 2:16), the "hidden things of darkness" will be made manifest (1 Cor. 4:5)- not to God, who sees them right now anyway, but to ourselves and to others. We are therefore to 'come out' with the Gospel now, whatever the cost, and take comfort that "the hidden man [s.w.] of the heart" is noticed by God and it is this which shall be judged (1 Pet. 3:4).

10:27 *What I tell you-* It could be argued that the content of the Gospel which is to be preached is therefore to be the words of Jesus, what He told the disciples. That is certainly how they understood it, for the four Gospel records are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel by the disciples, and they are just that- what the Lord told the disciples.

*In the darkness-* In the same way as the day of judgment will be a bringing to light what was done and said in darkness (:26), we should live now in that transparent spirit, openly speaking the Gospel, not hiding it, bearing in mind that one day and for eternity, it will be openly revealed who we are and what we believe. The Lord later stated that "in secret [s.w. "hid" in :26] have I said nothing" (Jn. 18:20). He was for a moment adopting the perspective of the disciples, just as He does with the language of demons; *to them*, what He was telling them was said in darkness, was hidden. But it was not to remain hidden within their hearts and brain cells, they were to speak it forth *now*, in that they were to live in the spirit of judgment day today. There are many allusions to Job in the New Testament; far more than may be apparent on the surface. Mt. 10:27 is one of them: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops". The

idea of God telling us things in the ear which we must then openly declare is surely looking back to Job's words in Job 42:5. "Darkness" is also a Job idea; the word occurs at least 30 times in the book. The final appearance of Yahweh in the darkness of the thundercloud was His reproof of Job's repeated suggestion that the darkness of sin somehow separated God from involvement with man. What Job was told out of darkness, he had to speak forth in the light. It seems that Job's spiritual growth is being picked up by the Lord and presented as our pattern. He does the same in Lk. 18:30, another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament, when He speaks of how each of us must give up house, wife, brethren and children for the Kingdom's sake, and then afterwards receive "manifold more in this time, and in the world to come...". This is exactly the position of Job (Job 42:10), and yet the Lord applies it to each of us.

*Speak in the light-* This verse is repeated in Lk. 12:3 but from a different perspective: "Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops". We are to preach upon the housetops what the Lord told us in the ear. But what we have spoken in the ear, or whispered, shall likewise be broadcast from the housetops. Nothing will be secret in the day of judgment, and so we are not to be secretive about our faith now. We are to live as if we are in the Lord's judgment day presence- because in essence, we are. For judgment is going on right now. John's take on light and darkness is that Jewish society was the darkness in which the light of Christ was shining (Jn. 1:5; 12:46). The Lord may therefore be implying that they were still partially in darkness, and into that darkness He had come and was showing them the light.

*And what you hear in the ear-* The personal relationship which we have had with Christ will be very evident at the judgment. What we say to Christ in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud. But there is a related statement from the Lord: What we hear from Him in the ear, we must speak openly (Mt. 10:26,27; after the pattern of Isaiah in 22:14). Putting these passages together, we get the picture of us speaking to God through Christ, talking in His ear, as one might whisper something very personal into a friend's ear, in the darkness of our bedroom. And then the Lord whispers back in our ear, i.e. His revelation to us (through the word) is very personal and not perceived by others; but we must openly, publicly act upon it. And this private relationship we have with the Lord in our prayer life will then be revealed openly at the judgment. God told

Samuel "in his ear" about Saul's future, and although the message must have been hard to relay to Saul, Samuel did so, on the housetop (1 Sam. 9:15,25). The similarities with the Lord's words are too close to be accidental. Surely He saw each of us as passing through the essential experience of Samuel. As we witness our relationship with Christ to an unspiritual world now, so He will speak openly of us to God (Mt. 10:32; Rev. 3:5), Angels (Lk. 12:8) and to the world (Lk. 12:2,3). He will openly confess our name, i.e. our character and personality. What we have said to Him privately will be revealed in the light, i.e. in the Kingdom (Col. 1:12). Preaching on the housetops is built on the language of 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

The outcome of the judgment seat will be a reflection of our attitude to witnessing to others: "What you (the twelve disciples) hear in the ear, that preach upon the housetops... *whosoever* therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:27,32). The Lord seems to go beyond briefing His men before they set off on their preaching mission; He goes on to say that in a sense, *whoever* follows their example will be confessed before the Father. Notice what He *isn't* saying: He isn't saying that if you're keen about preaching, this is the be-all-and-end-all of spiritual life, and this alone will guarantee your acceptance with God. He says that what we hear (i.e. believe) in the ear, our own very personal understanding and belief of the Gospel, must be spread abroad openly to others. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves.

*Proclaim upon the housetops*- According to the Talmud (*Shabbat* 35b), it was the priests who were to proclaim the commencement of the Sabbath by blasts on the shophar from the housetops. Again, the Lord takes language appropriate to the professional religionists and applies it to His largely secular followers. All the time He was seeking to encourage them that *they* were to do this work. And the proclamation of the Kingdom is thus turned into a form of proclaiming a Sabbath of rest. Hebrews uses the language of the Sabbath concerning the Kingdom of God. The idea of teaching upon the housetops what we hear in the ear is language which surely alludes to how Isaiah and the prophets heard God's word in their ear and then taught it to others (Is. 5:9; 50:4). The idea was that the

Lord's followers were not to see the prophets as pale faced, iconic figures- but to realize they were no less than them in their service of God and His Son.

10:28 *And do not be afraid*- The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :26- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel. Luke's record adds: "I say unto you *My friends*, Be not afraid of them..." (Lk. 12:4). If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The laboured assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

*Of those that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul*- It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

*But rather fear Him who is able to destroy*- See on 16:25 *lose it*.

*Both soul and body*- The inference can be drawn that the rejected will have both soul and body destroyed at the last day. This means there must be a resurrection of the body- and then the destruction of that body in the condemnation process, as well as of their "soul". *Psuhe* has a wide range of meaning- sometimes it can mean simply the body, at other times, the essential personality. This too will be destroyed, for the

memory of the rejected will be forgotten, they will cease to exist in all dimensions. There should be a "fear" of rejection; there are more details, more frequently, about the condemnation experience than the joy of acceptance in that day. This is not negative psychology; the Lord in His wisdom knew that this was necessary for us, to keep ever before us the sense of the future we may miss. This should be our fear, far more than death or social rejection by those to whom we witness.

*In Gehenna*- The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

10:29 *Are not two sparrows*- "An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbade prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable

sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others...

*Sold for a very small coin-* An *assarion* / farthing, the tenth part of a drachma / denarius, which was a day's pay for a labourer. The Matthew record has the Lord saying that two sparrows are sold for one farthing; Luke 12:6 records that He said that five sparrows were sold for two farthings. So what did the Lord really say? I suggest something like this: 'As you know, two sparrows are sold for one farthing, they cost half a farthing each; but often, as you know, *five* sparrows are sold for *two* farthings, they'll throw one extra in for free, they're worth so little'.

*And not one of them shall fall on the ground-* One sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without (the knowledge of) your Father". God is aware of the death of each bird- He does not allow animals to die due to their natural decay (the clockwork mechanism) without Him being actively involved in and conscious of their death. Again, Jesus shows how God's knowledge and participation in the things of the natural creation must imply an even greater awareness of us. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered... you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:30,31). God hasn't wound up this world and left it ticking by clockwork, dispassionately looking on as Israel and all His people make such a mess of things. He sends the rain, consciously; not a sparrow falls from the air [i.e., as the result of a man's sling stone- for birds die in their nests usually, not in mid-flight] without Him being aware, and, by implication, grieving for it. He even knows how much sparrows are sold for. See on 6:26.

*Without your Father-* The Lord was "the word made flesh". All that He taught, He in some way experienced and obeyed. In the time of His persecution and death, He fell to the ground literally (same words- Mk.



14:35) as well as figuratively (same words Jn. 12:24); and called out to the "Father". Clearly He had in mind His own earlier teaching; but how hard and demanding it was for Him to live it out.

10:30 *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered-* see 2 Sam. 1:23. The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

10:31 *Therefore fear not-* The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

*You are of more value than many sparrows-* The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than

the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do not fear is repeated and laboured throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and "therefore" preach openly- this is the force of the "therefore" in :32.

10:32- see on 10:27.

*Therefore-* See on :31 "more value". The sense here is 'accordingly'- in accordance with the colossal emphasis upon not being held back one bit by fear of consequence, we are to accordingly confess Christ before men. The requirement not to fear but to confess is so strong that it could be called a first principle of the Lord's teaching. We are to be fearless in witness.

*Everyone who shall confess me before men-* Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It

seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words for "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 "If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus... you shall be saved". The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord has just used the word *logos* with reference to the "words" of our preaching before men (10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of 'assent', in that our *logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will "profess" His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will "profess" it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Sermon on the Mount: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:

- Herod *confessed* [AV "promised"] with an oath in front of witnesses to give Herodias' daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught them (Acts 23:8)
- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publicly when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don't match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God's promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

In Matthew 10, the Lord uses the word in the very context of the need to openly witness. He who refuses to make this public profession will not be

accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before "My Father". Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before "My Father". Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that "Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV "acknowledges"] the Son has the Father also". Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. The absolute necessity of public confession was taught throughout the Sermon, and it is being made plain again here in Mt. 10 and throughout the other references to confession. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

*I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven-* The "also" suggests there will be a direct correlation between our confessing of Him before men now, and how He speaks of us before the Father both now and in the last day. The same idea is found in the way in which He earlier taught that we are forgiven *as* we forgive others. What's going on in Heaven concerning us need be no mystery to us- because it is a direct reflection of our lives of forgiveness, witness etc. in this world. The future judgment seat will be only a bringing to earth of the judgment seat which even now is going on in Heaven. Mt. 10:32 surely also has in view the Lord's speaking to the Father in Heaven right now, in this life. But compare the parallel Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God". Of what does this speak? Surely of the last judgment [note the reference to the "Son of man", a term usually used about judgment to come; and denial before the angels surely equates with the "I never knew you" of the final judgment]. The events of the last day, with the Lord confessing or denying us before the Father and the Angels, are actually going on this very day.

10:33 *But whoever shall deny me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publicly. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It's tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who "Profess [s.w. 'confess'] that they know God, but in works *deny* Him". We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who 'denied' the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as

'confession', but the point is that it isn't necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him...

*Before men I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven*- There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven "before", or 'before the face of', the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually "before men". As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It's this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men*, not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witnesses about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

10:34 *Think not that I came to send peace on earth*- The Lord surely has in mind what He has just commanded in 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here in :34 seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted. In the exposition of 10:13,14 I suggested that the households being visited were those who had initially responded to the message about Jesus as preached by John. The sad reality was that many of these did not further respond to the peace offered to them in Christ.

"Peace on the earth" is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

*I came not to send peace*- The context is the Lord telling His preachers to 'come' to households and pronounce the 'coming' [s.w.] of peace (10:13). But He is warning them that the potential will typically not be realized; only a few individuals within those households would accept the message, and effectively they were going to be breaking up those households

because of the total loyalty to Christ and the new household in Him which they were to demand. Their coming to those households was effectively His personal coming to them- for in the work of witness they were Him, just as we are too. Who wants to break up another's household? I found myself thinking about that after coming to realize the social and relational results of baptizing individuals into Christ in Moslem families and societies. We can only do so if we are utterly convinced that the only ultimate household worth belonging to is that in the body of Christ.

*But a sword-* The *machaira* was really a dagger, suggesting interpersonal conflict and hatred. He wanted His preachers to be under no illusion as to the result of people accepting their message; there would be acceptance of it on a national level, the implication is that the Lord expected individuals to accept it, and to suffer in their relationships and family life as a result of it. This needs to be remembered in our preaching too. We are not offering an easy life now, of peace and happiness on all fronts- but rather peace with God and hope in the future Kingdom of God on earth.

10:35 *For I came to set a man at variance against-* The single Greek word translated here is a form of the noun for 'two'. The division would be down one line, into two groups- the household of origin, and the household of Christ, where He was head of the household. Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

*His father and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law-* Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new Kingdom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

10:36 *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household-* Jewish thought was that their enemies were the Romans, and Zechariah's song

reflects this expectation- that Messiah was to save Israel from her foes (s.w. Lk. 1:71,74). The Lord is redefining things. The foes were no longer to be the Gentiles, but all those who rejected the Gospel. For a strongly family based society, this was an almost impossibly high bar to jump. But the implication was that those who accepted it would not be alone, but would be making the sacrifice in order to take their place in a new family. For those raised within believing households, the radical nature of the call to leave family is hard to appreciate. One can understand all the positive hopes and often unrealistic expectations held by those who do break with their families in order to come to Christ, and their difficulty in finding that many long established members within the new household are sceptical and highly critical of the community. The Lord's teaching about the cost of following Him in terms of loss of relationships must be given its full weight. Loss of relationships, especially family ones, is part of following Him in spirit and truth.

The use of "own" in "own household" suggests that the believer was still to accept his or her unbelieving family as their own.

*10:37 He that loves father or mother more than me is-* This is the language of Levi (Dt. 33:9), encouraging the disciples that they, secular men that they largely were, must consider themselves the new priesthood by whom Israel were to be taught and saved.

*Not worthy of Me-* We must supply something for the "Me"; the idea is surely that we are not worthy of His love and death for us, of *His* family, if we love *our* family members more than Him. The contrast is between "Me" and our earthly families. 'Worthiness' was an idea associated in the first century mind with families. We cannot be worthy of membership in His family if we choose to identify ourselves as members of our natural family first and foremost. On one hand we are never worthy of Christ, and yet He implies here that He does consider us worthy of Him *if* we respond. This is not the same as salvation by works in the sense that Paul later decries; it is salvation by grace through faith, but faith without works is dead. There must be some response. The idea that we can never be worthy of Christ is therefore quite simply wrong, or at best poorly worded and inadequate. He speaks here of being worthy of Him by sacrificing family relationships; and being not worthy of Him by refusing to sacrifice them.

*And he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me-* *Huper* Christ means just that in the accusative, "more than" Him. But the idea of *huper* in relation to the Lord is used many times in the NT concerning His death "for" or *huper* us. It would seem likely that the Lord had His death for us in mind at this point, for He goes straight on to speak of how we are to take up our cross and follow Him to His death on Golgotha (:38). The shift of thought towards the cross in :38 is more



natural if we perceive that He is already thinking of it in :37 when speaking of our being worthy of 'Him', i.e. His death for us.

*10:38 And he that does not take his cross-* The context is about the preaching of the Gospel. It is not at all glamorous. We should be ready to die a martyr's death. That is the clear teaching here. The context before and after this teaching about the cross is of preaching the Gospel and suffering persecution and broken relationships because of it. This, then, is the sense in which the Lord foresaw many of us suffering for His sake. We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours. He remembers how it was, and sees the commonality of feeling which we have attained.

*And follow after me, is not worthy of me-* Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "... the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him. I have made the point that the instructions regarding witnessing here have their equivalent in the Olivet prophecy, and they may particularly refer to our preaching just before the Lord's return. At that time especially, "a man's foes shall be they of his own household", and therefore "he that takes not his cross (then), and follows after Me, is not worthy". Our response to our trials then during the tribulation will effectively be our judgment seat.

Consider the contexts in which the Lord spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, the Lord spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Mt. 10:38 is in the context of the Lord's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but He asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow the Lord - but only

insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with our Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ.

*10:39 He that finds his life-* The Lord must surely mean us to read in an ellipsis: 'Thinks he has found the meaning of life without Me'. For the Lord has just called the unsaved audience of His preachers "the lost" (10:6 s.w.).

*Shall lose it-* The Lord has just spoken of how God will "destroy" (s.w. "lose") the "soul" (s.w. "life") of those rejected at the last day (10:28). So here in :39 He is surely thinking of destruction of the 'soul' / "life" at the last day. Only those responsible to judgment will appear at the day of judgment; so the Lord's teaching here concerns those who have known Him, who are responsible to Him, but who are not totally committed to Him; those who think that despite their knowledge of Him, they can 'find their lives' without Him. See on 16:25 *lose it*.

*And he that loses his life for my sake-* The same Greek word is translated to destroy, to die, to mar, to cause to perish. Once again, this is not what we wish to hear- that we must do real damage to our human life, crucify it, if we are to share in the life of Jesus. 10:28 has just spoken of the destroying / losing of life in condemnation; perhaps the 'loss / destruction of life' is in self-condemnation. This would continue a major theme of the Lord's teaching- that those who condemn themselves in this life shall be saved from condemnation at the last day.

*Shall find it-* As we go up the spiral of spiritual growth, we will find the true life- perceive, see, realize (Mt. 10:39 Gk.) the real, spiritual life, as the wayward son "came to himself", he found himself, when he repented. The Lord had laboured the point that whoever seeks shall *find* (Mt. 7:7,8,14), and the context clearly is of spiritual things and salvation. The Lord spoke in Mt. 7 of *seeking* and finding, here He speaks of *losing life* in order to find it. The language of seeking and losing suggests a process, rather than some finely spoken, albeit genuinely intended, momentary statement of commitment to the Lord. The more we *seek* the things of the Kingdom, the more we will naturally lose our fleshly life. The loss of life the Lord has in view is clearly a process of "seeking" the things of His Kingdom- rather than the death of martyrdom. The taking up of the cross in the previous verse is the epitome of losing life... but the Lord intended it to be understood as a way of life, a sharing of the same road as Him ["following" Him], upon which dying is literally a way of life as well as the

way to life. What in practice does it mean to 'lose life'? Issues concerning where we live, careers, food, the pleasures of this life, all become eclipsed by the mission before us- of consciously dying, *in His service*. For the entire context here is about serving the Lord by sharing the Gospel with others, engaging fully with the mission the Lord intends for us. The context of the Lord giving His people work to do would suggest that the life which is 'found' is not only the life eternal at the last day, but is the life in His service. This kind of life will be eternally lived, and it is in that sense that we can understand the Lord's words elsewhere that those who follow Him right now begin living the eternal life, the kind of life in His service which they will eternally live. If we are ever seeking to balance and arrange things so that we can apparently live our fleshly life as well as 'His' life, then we have failed to grasp the entire point of His teaching. Total surrender, absolute and eager, willing submission, is what He is about.

10:40 *He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me-* The Lord is speaking of 'receiving' His preachers and materially supporting them (:13). He's saying that every act of support given to them is done as it were directly to Him. He has the same idea in Mt. 25:35-45- whatever was done to "the least of these My brothers" was done to Him. His "little ones", the disciples / preachers in their immaturity (:42), were all the same His, and whatever was done to them was done to Him and to His Father. We note that Mt. 25 speaks of material support of food, clothing, hospitality to the unknown and visiting in prison- all exactly in the context of the preaching mission He sent His disciples on. Whatever more general reference there may be in Mt. 25:35-45, clearly the primary reference was to the Lord's future judgment of those who claimed to be His (who had accepted John the Baptist's message), in accordance to whether or not they had materially supported the disciples on their preaching mission. Luke's version of this teaching records that the Lord said that "He that *hears* you, hears Me" (Lk. 10:16). The 'receiving' was therefore of the message and therefore receiving the disciples personally (10:14 "receive you... hear your words"). We are the voice and face of Jesus to people- it's a concept colossal in its implications. Our attitude to receiving or accepting each other is our acceptance or rejection of Jesus personally. Hence Paul tells the Galatians that they had "received me... as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14), surely alluding to the Lord's teaching here. We are to "receive one another, as Christ also received us" (Rom. 15:7).

The idea of *shaliach*, whereby someone's representative was seen as them, was well known in Judaism; the Lord is almost quoting it here, and He does the same in the next verse. Realizing this is going on is a key to correct interpretation of the next verses.

10:41 *He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward-* This is a quotation of well-known Jewish thinking. I have shown multiple times in this commentary that the Lord was seeking to encourage His followers that they were no less than Moses, the prophets and the "righteous men" of the Old Testament. The context here is encouraging them that they are worthy labourers, worthy to receive material support from those they stay with. The 'receiving' of them on their preaching mission (:13) is the 'receiving' the Lord now has in view. His idea is that just as those who received Old Testament prophets will receive a prophet's reward at the last day, possibly 'from the prophet' as the Greek could mean- so just as much those who materially support the disciples will be rewarded. Such supporters will in no wise lose their reward (:42) – just as surely as those who supported Old Testament prophets will be rewarded, to no lesser extent, those who supported the disciples would likewise be rewarded.

10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward-* Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for Oxfam. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to the interpretation of :41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "*these* little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 42 is effectively a soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples-* Vine feels that the *dia* in *diatasso* ["commanding"] suggests "a distributive force: giving to each his appropriate charge". In this case we see the initial application of the parables about the servants being each given a specific work to do. That work was to preach to specific people whom the Lord intended for each of the disciples. Those parables apply to us- perhaps in that we are each intended to take the Gospel to specific individuals. If we fail in that work, there is no guarantee that the Lord will give that work to others; the harvest will simply not be gathered as it could have been.

*He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities-* Without their presence (as they were away on their preaching tour), the Lord went to their home areas. He showed by this how He saw out witness amongst those whom we know and our families to be of the utmost importance- and He was and is willing and eager to back up our credibility in such witness.

11:2 *Now when John heard about the works of the Christ while in prison, he sent word by his disciples-* AV "Sent two of his disciples". It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

11:3 *And said to him: Are you he that comes-* The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26.

*Or look we for another?-* Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred

that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfilment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

So even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks here of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used,

especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

*11:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: Go and tell John-* They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (Lk. 7:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord.

*The things which you hear and see-* The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfilment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

*11:5 The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up-* The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

*And the poor have good tidings preached to them-* This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind

seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

11:6 *And blessed is he, whoever shall find no cause to stumble over me-* Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that... therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with



who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

The Lord tried not to offend people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive as the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

*11:7 And as these went their way, Jesus began to say to the crowds concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*- The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see here the fulfilment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

*A reed shaken with the wind?*- The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting

ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are...

11:8 *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4).

*Those that wear soft garments are in king's houses*- The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

11:9 *But what did you go out to see?*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see...' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

*To see a prophet? Yes! And I say to you, much more than a prophet!*- The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who

had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell in Machaerus Fort, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

11:10 *This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He was the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John was that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'. See on :14 *this is Elijah*.

*Of whom it is written: Listen*- AV "Behold". An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this is he".

*I send my messenger before your face; he shall prepare your way before you*- The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the

Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniym*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

11:11- see on 20:11.

*Truly I say to you, among those that are born of women-* The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

*There has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Yet he that is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he-* The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones' were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

Note the present tense in "is greater". The following verse speaks of preaching the Gospel of that Kingdom (Mt.11:12 cp. Lk.16:16), perhaps implying that by responding to Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom we are associated with the Kingdom, and are thereby "greater" than the message which John preached.

Luke adds: "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him" (Lk. 7:30). God will fulfil His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in

everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will... then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

11:12 *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and men of violence take it by force-* This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "The Kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presses into* it"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

However, there are other alternatives in interpretation. It's been suggested that 'the violent ones' may have been a term used to describe Jesus and His followers by His opponents; in which case the Lord would be alluding to this and saying that the enthusiasm of His people was in spiritual and not physical terms. Another option would be that the Lord is alluding to the Zealots and other groups who were trying to bring the Kingdom of God about by political, violent action; and the Lord would then be lamenting that since John's time, there were men who had misunderstood his message of the Kingdom by trying to bring it about by force. And there is a telling double meaning in the Greek for 'take it by

force'; it could also mean that the Kingdom is under attack by these violent men. In this case, the real meaning and progress of the Kingdom as God intended, in terms of His spiritual dominion in human life, was being hindered by those who were trying to establish it by force. This suggestion is re-enforced by the use of the same word in Jn. 6:15, where the mistaken multitudes wanted to 'take [Christ] by force' and make Him King there and then. And this would explain the context- the imprisonment of John by the violent Herod would then be the basis for this saying. The violent were attacking and taking by force the Kingdom preachers like John.

11:13 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John-* The sentence begins with "For...". This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18, using the same word as in 11:13 "until"). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

11:14- see on 21:32.

*And if you are willing to receive it-* The same word was used earlier in this section, when the Lord spoke of the apostles being 'received' by those who had initially responded to John's teaching (Mt. 10:14,40,41). If Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfilment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them

for the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Kingdom *could* have come in the 1st century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (RVmg.) says it all. The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfilment. It could be that Mal. 4:6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah ministry may not be totally successful- for the earth / land is to be smitten with a curse unless he succeeds in turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and there is no lack of evidence that the land may well be 'smitten' in the last days.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfilment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. When the Lord stood up and read from Isaiah, He commented that "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:21). He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" as standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

The "it" in "receive it" could refer to the prophetic message of the Law and prophets- hence GNB offers "and if you are willing to believe their message...". It was taken as assumed that every Jew received / accepted the Law and the prophets, but the Lord's point was that if they really received it, then they would accept John's message and now accept Him as Messiah. Likewise the Lord challenges the Jewish scribes as to whether they had ever really read the Old Testament (Mt. 21:16,42; Mk. 2:25)- when they spent their days doing so (Jn. 5:39 RV).

*This was Elijah that has to come-* See on :10. John in humility and self-effacement had denied being the Elijah prophet (Jn. 1:20), and he now had a similar doubt, wondering whether in fact Jesus was the Elijah prophet and the Messiah was still to be looked for. The Lord is saying that John was who he was, the Elijah prophet, despite John's self-doubt. And we again have an example- we are to treat our brethren as whom God sees them as being, notwithstanding their temporary weaknesses and

self-doubt. The use of “this” rather than “he” could be because the Lord had in mind the Elijah prophet’s ministry, and not just John personally.

*11:15 He that has ears to hear, let him hear-* The Lord often uses this phrase, the idea seems to be that not all have the capacity to really hear, but if we do, then, we still have to exercise a choice as to whether we do or not. That would also be true to observed experience, because that is indeed how it seems- some people have no interest in God’s word, something is not ‘given’ them, so that they never ‘get it’; and those to whom it is given, there must still be a conscious choice exercised. For those who decide rightly, it becomes true that to him who has, more is given (Mt. 13:12). That verse in 13:12 begs the question ‘Has what?’. The answer is surely given here in 11:15: ‘ears to hear’. The hearing or listening which the Lord refers to is listening to the message of John- for the next verses liken John’s ministry to calling out to people to respond, although most choose to be non-responsive. Maybe the idea is ‘Despite John having a temporary crisis of faith and understanding, that is no excuse for not hearing his message’. Perhaps the tension is being developed between the need to *hear* John, whereas it is thrice stressed that this crowd had gone out into the desert to see John (11:7-9), as if they were going to a show- a powerful challenge that echoes down to our generation of churchgoing and churchianity.

*11:16 But unto what shall I liken this generation?-* The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist’s work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John’s ministry had been unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

*It is like children sitting-* John’s ministry was like children wanting to play funerals, and taking the initiative by beginning with mock weeping- but not getting any response. The Lord’s ministry was as children wanting to play weddings, piping to the other children, who would not respond by dancing. Note that in 10:42 the Lord has likened His preachers to little children. Children were considered non-persons in society, and yet the Lord uses children in this parable as representative of His preachers. We note that although He likened them to children, He had to sternly warn them that they still needed to be converted and become *as* children (Mt. 18:3). We see Him so often imputing status to His followers which they had not in reality attained. This is to help us appreciate how He can impute righteousness to we who are not righteous. The parable of preaching here pictures children appealing to children. The commonality



between us and our audience is very attractive and persuasive. We are humans reaching out to humans, indeed, children to children; the children called out (cp. calling out the Gospel) to "their *fellows*".

*In the market places, who call to their fellows-* The town square. The Lord uses the same word in the parable of Mt. 20:3, where the call of the Gospel comes to men who are standing idle in the market place (s.w.). The picture is perhaps of society getting on with its existence, but the weak labourers and the children being left to one side, excluded from standard adult social and economic life. And it is to these that the call of the Gospel comes, in the midst of human busyness.

11:17 *And say: We piped to you and you did not dance. We wailed and you did not mourn-* The Old Testament as well as the New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orchee-sasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekop-sasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never **stept**; we dirged for you, and you never **wept**'. We note that the Lord parallels the work of the children John's 'children' or disciples, and His. Although both of them were somewhat negative about each other, the Lord saw both groups of children as doing the same work, despite a different culture and even doctrinal emphasis. The division in the town square was between the children begging the others to respond, and the children of this world who didn't want to, in the midst of those who didn't even have ears to hear and were just getting on with their worldly business and never 'heard' the invitation from either group of children.

The Lord was speaking this whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour. He could say that just as John's preparation of the way had not been responded to on the level of the whole "generation" or society, neither had His more upbeat and joyful invitation been accepted. Note that the call of the Gospel is a call to engage with the preacher, to dance in response to the tune piped. Community and fellowship are all part of response to the Gospel; it's not about delivering truths to an individual who then accepts them and has no further relationship with the preacher. This is why the father-son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

Remember that the Lord is addressing those who had gone out to hear

John preach (:7-9). He is implying that they had not actually responded to his call to them.

11:18 *For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say he has a demon*-The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

11:19 *The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, Look, a gluttonous man and a drunkard*- The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return,

when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

*A friend of tax collectors and sinners!*- The Lord was 'fond' [*philos*] of sinners; He liked them and their company. In this we see His greatness, for most spiritual people admit to finding the company of the unspiritual somewhat of a burden. But the Lord's spirituality was beyond that. Truly He is the sinners' friend. And Matthew as a tax collector is testifying to this personally.

*But wisdom is justified by her children*- Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.

On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

11:20 *Then he began to chastise the cities*- The Lord also upbraided the disciples for their unbelief (Mk. 16:14 s.w.). Again we see the Lord being positive towards His disciples in the eyes of the world, and yet privately challenging them with the same language of criticism which He had for the unbelieving world. His imputation of righteousness to us doesn't mean He is blind to our weakness.

*Wherein most-* Gk. 'the majority'. We must give this word its full weight. The majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three tiny villages- Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. We have just learnt that whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour, He had gone to preach in their home villages (11:1). Perhaps some time had elapsed between verses 19 and 20. He had had little response. Philip, Andrew and Peter were all from Bethsaida, the 'home of fishermen' (Jn. 1:44; 12:21). We sense that the Lord had a specific plan in mind for His preaching work. He made a particular focus upon Galilee and the home villages of His disciples- and Galilee was of course His own home area. We see in this policy a desire by Him for us to witness in our own immediate environment and family situations. Mk. 8:22-26 records the only miracle the Gospels record as performed in Bethsaida, and the Lord told the cured blind man not to tell anyone in Bethsaida about the miracle- presumably because the people there had already seen ample miracles and had not repented.

*Of his mighty works had been done, because they had not repented-* Here we see the purpose of the healing miracles. They were not simply to alleviate human suffering for the sake of it- they were specifically designed to lead people to repentance. God's goodness is intended to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). The doing of Christian 'good works' can't be criticized in itself, but it needs to be observed that they often seem to be performed 'for the sake of it', whereas the Lord's works were always within a wider plan and aim of bringing people to spiritual healing.

11:21 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have-* God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not. To know all possible futures must make experiencing human life and poor decision making all the harder and more tragic for the Father and Son.

*Repented-* Here we see that the intention of the miracles was not merely healing in itself, as a good to humanity- but rather to invite people to repentance. Hence the connection between healing and forgiveness in the account of the healing of the paralyzed man.

*Long ago in sackcloth and ashes-* Made of camel and goat hair, therefore very similar to the clothing of John the Baptist- which is the context here (11:8).

11:22 *But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you-* Tyre and Sodom were major Gentile cities. The Lord clearly believed their inhabitants would be resurrected and appear at the future day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge is the basis of responsibility to judgment, it follows that there was some witness made to them. Ezekiel's prophecies of condemnation against Tyre can therefore be seen as conditional prophecies, like the prophecy of Nineveh's destruction- they could have repented in response to them. The witness to Sodom was presumably through the witness of Lot's righteous life. The extent of human responsibility to Divine judgment would appear to be far greater than we might suspect. Those who live in the presence of believers are surely responsible to judgment, according to the pattern of Sodom. Clearly there will be degrees of punishment at that day- and for the home villages of the disciples, their suffering will be 'intolerable'. The implication is that if the witness of Ezekiel, Lot etc. had been backed up by the kind of miracles the Lord was performing, then this would've tipped the balance- and they would've repented.

11:23 *And you Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven?* - Here we have another example of the Bible being written from the perspective of men. Capernaum was exalted in her own eyes, the people there were spiritually proud and exalted in their own eyes. Likewise "the wise" in :25 refers to those who thought they were wise.

*You shall go down to hades-* The prophecy against Babylon of Isaiah 14 is here applied to the towns of Israel. The point is that the condemnation of the wicked Gentiles will come upon those of God's people who act like them. Likewise the punishment of Babylon was to be cast as a millstone into the sea, but this is applied by the Lord to those of God's people who make their brethren stumble (Mt. 18:6; Rev. 18:21).

*For if the mighty works-* The Greek *dunamis* also has the sense of ability, possible power. The miracles, to which the "mighty works" clearly refer, had potential power to bring the people to repentance, but they were content to just accept the temporal blessings of knowing Jesus rather than being moved by those blessings to repentance.

*Had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would*

*have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes-* The Lord knew that cities like Tyre and Sidon would have responded to the Gospel in the first century; had it been preached to them. But the message was taken to Jewish villages like Chorazin and Bethsaida instead. Such was God's love, His especial and exclusive love for Israel. Sodom likewise would have repented if the message of Lot had been backed up by miracles; but, that extra proof wasn't given. But such a concession was made to Israel through the ministry and miracles of Jesus.

*11:24 But I say to you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you-* The Greek for "tolerable" could suggest 'endurance', hinting at a period of suffering rather than an eternal state of suffering. The suffering will be the sense of regret for what could have been, how they could have responded. This sense will be so acute that it is described in figurative terms as Gehenna fire, gnashing of teeth etc. Time and again we must remind ourselves of this, so that day by day we 'grasp the moment' and proceed in life with no ultimate cause for spiritual regret.

*11:25 At that time Jesus answered-* Often the Gospels record that Jesus "answered and said...". Yet it's often not clear whether anyone had asked a question, or said anything that needed a response (Mt. 11:25; 22:1; Mk. 10:24, 51; 11:14,22,33; 12:35; 13:2; 14:48; Lk. 5:22; 7:40; 8:50; 13:2; 14:3,5; 17:17; 22:51; Jn. 1:50; 5:19; 6:70; 10:32; 12:23,30; 16:31). If you go through this list, you will see how Jesus 'answered' / responded to peoples' unexpressed fears and questions, their unarticulated concerns, criticisms, feelings and agendas. This little phrase reveals how sensitive Jesus was. He saw people's unspoken, unarticulated needs and responded. He didn't wait to be asked. For Jesus, everybody He met was a question, a personal direct challenge, that He responded to. And of course this is how we should seek to be too. And yet here in Mt. 11:25 He could be responding to His own question and reflection upon why so few responded and why only the immature disciples seemed to understand anything at all? We see here a window into the very internal thought process of the Lord, something which could only come from a Divinely inspired record.

*I thank You O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth-* This is language taken directly from the *Hodayot*, the Qumran "Thanksgiving Psalms". There is reason to think that in his years in the Qumran area, John the Baptist became familiar with the Qumran community, and may have passed on some of their style and culture to his converts. The multitudes addressed here by the Lord had initially responded to John (11:7). So it would seem that the Lord is bridge building with them, speaking to them in terms

known and accessible to them, and yet leading them further and away from the legalism and extremes of Qumran thought. Note how there is a juxtaposition of God's Almightyness, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with His closeness to us as "Father".

*That You did hide these things from the wise-* Those who think they are wise in their own eyes- see on "exalted" in :24.

*And prudent-* Again we see the Lord's grace, for the disciples themselves weren't 'understanding' (s.w.) of everything at this time (s.w. Mt. 13:51; Mk. 6:52 they considered / understood not; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34; 24:45). Yet to them was revealed the Truth which others had hid from them.

*And did reveal them to-* This continues the thought of 11:15, that only some have ears to hear. The word is used in Mt. 16:27 of how the truth of Christ was revealed to Peter, one of the "babes".

*Babes-* An essay in the serious immaturity of the disciples, and yet the Lord's love of them all the same. They are the 'little ones' of 10:42, the little children in the town square of 11:16. See on 1 Cor. 1:19. Paul saw the simplicity of the Corinthian believers as the sort of thing Christ referred to in Mt. 11:25.

11:26 *Yes Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Your sight-* We have the same kind of thing in Revelation, where Angels as it were take a breath and praise the Father for His wisdom in the judgments which they have just executed. We have here one of the few times when we get the record of the Lord's actual words to God in prayer. We note that He repeatedly addresses Him as "Father"; and through receipt of the Spirit, His relationship with the Father becomes ours. And "Father" ought surely to be our most common form of address to God.

11:27 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father-* Gk. 'were delivered'. The "all things" may be the power of salvation for all men.

*And no one knows the Son save the Father. Neither does anyone know the Father-* Gk. 'to know fully'. Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our

sinfulness and repent. And this is the “rest” from sin which the Lord speaks of in :28.

*Save the Son-* Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: “No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son” (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).

*And to whomsoever-* The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method- the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in :28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

*The Son wishes to reveal Him-* This revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

11:28 *Come to me all you that labour and are-* See on :27 “whomsoever”. The Lord may be urging the audience to come unto *Him* in the same way as they had come out to hear John preaching (:7-9). The invitation at the last day to “Come” into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34 s.w.) is heard even now in the invitation to come after Him. The preceding verses share with us a beautiful insight into the mind and inner prayer of the Son to the Father. He meditated upon why apparently so few were responding, and went on to marvel at the Father's wisdom in revealing only to some, and to the



immature 'little ones' of His disciples. But arising out of that time of prayer and meditation, the Lord goes on to make a public appeal to whosoever will to come to Him. And this is the exact pattern which our public witness and appeal to others should follow.

*Heavy laden*- The context is a lament that because people are wise, prudent and exalted in pride, they will not come to the Father and Son. But this way of life and thinking is in fact a hard way to live. Hence the Lord commends His own humility to those proud people. Whilst the arrogance and self-assurance of modern man seems an impossible barrier to the Gospel, we must be aware that actually they are struggling with it and are laden down with it. The word is only elsewhere used about the lawyers lading people with heavy burdens (Lk. 11:46)- not only of guilt, but also of pride in having kept irrelevant laws. David found his sins associated with Bathsheba "as an heavy burden... too heavy for me... I am (thereby) bowed down greatly" (Ps. 32:4,6). Surely our Lord was thinking back to David when he invited all of us: "Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden (with sins), and I will give you rest... for My... burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

*And I will give you rest*- The Lord Jesus invites those who follow Him to accept the "rest" which He gives (Mt. 11:28). He uses a Greek word which is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Sabbath rest. Jesus was offering a life of Sabbath, of rest from trust in our own works (cp. Heb. 4:3,10). We shouldn't, therefore, keep a Sabbath one day per week, but rather live our whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were the ones burdening the people (Mt. 23:4; Lk. 11:46), so this could be read as a fairly direct appeal to quit respecting the religious leaders of the day and follow the teaching of Jesus instead. Legalism and obedience to the Law is likened to an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

11:29 *Take*- The same word is used in the challenge to "take up" the cross. To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Clearly the knowledge of the Father and Son is so much more than knowing theological propositions about them.

*My yoke*- The yoke metaphor was commonly used at the time to speak of a career or profession / daily occupation. Our 'career' is to be in His

service, and any human yoke or career is to not be seen by us as our defining situation in life. We can't be 'career people' in the sense that many are in this world- for our career is with the Lord. And yet the yoke was also understood as 'teaching'; for Sirach 51:26 has the sage inviting students to put their necks under his yoke and learn his teaching. The Lord Jesus is a yoke- He unites men together, so that the otherwise unbearable burden of the spiritual life is lighter (Mt. 11:29). If we do not let our fellowship with others lighten our load, then we basically have not been brought under Christ. To be in Him, under His yoke, is to put our arms around our brethren and labour together. The Lord paralleled "Come unto Me" with taking His yoke upon us, in order to have a light burden (Mt. 11:28-30). A yoke is what binds animals together, so that they can between them carry a burden which otherwise would be too great for them individually. The invitation to come unto Jesus personally is therefore an invitation into a community- to be lined up alongside another, and have a yoke placed upon us. Without submitting to this, we can't actually carry the heavy burden laid upon us. This heavy burden laid upon the believer must surely have some reference to the cross we are asked to share in and carry. We can't do this alone; and perhaps it happened that the Lord Himself couldn't even bear His own cross without the help of another, in order to show us the point. We can't claim to have come personally unto Jesus, somehow liking the idea of the Man Jesus, intellectually accepting His teachings on an abstract level- and yet keep our distance from our brethren. It seems increasingly true that human relationships are almost impossible to maintain at an intimate level- without Christ. He is the yoke which enables the psychological miracle of people pulling together, for life, in order to carry His cross. The most essential "law of Christ" is to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Paul had this in mind when he described his brethren as 'yokefellows' (Phil. 4:3). For Paul, his joy and crown would be to see his brethren accepted into God's Kingdom at judgment day. David had the same spirit when he wrote of how he longed to "see the prosperity of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance" (Ps. 106:5). His personal vision of God's Kingdom involved seeing others there; there's no hint of spiritual selfishness in David. And he goes straight on to comment: "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity... our fathers understood not..." (Ps. 106:6). David felt himself very much at one with the community of God's children, both in their failures and in their ultimate hope. Life with God simply can't be lived in isolation from the rest of His people. Our salvation in that sense has a collective aspect to it, and if we want 'out' with the community of believers in this life, then we're really voting ourselves out of their future glory.

The reference to having a heavy yoke lifted recalls the servant song which spoke of the need to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6).

Paul takes passages from Isaiah's servant songs and applies them to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ does here (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the "servants" who fulfil in principle the work of the singular servant. When the Lord speaks of a change of yokes for the weary and a granting of rest in Him (Mt. 11:28-30), He is using terms taken from Isaiah's restoration prophecies. The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon.

*And learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*- Vine comments: "The word for the Christian virtue of humility was not used before the Christian era, and is distinctly an outgrowth of the Gospel". To be able to say in genuine humility that one knows the state of their own heart, and that it is humble, is an essay not only in humility but in the acute self-knowledge of the Lord. The Greek translated "lowly" definitely means cast down, depressed, implying a bringing down from a superior position (s.w. 2 Cor. 7:6). This helps us understand the language of Phil. 2:5-11, which speaks of the progressive humiliation of Christ, culminating in the death of the cross. Even at this point in His ministry, the Lord felt that He had been brought down in mind- He felt the progressive nature of His humility. And in that passage, the appeal is to allow that kind of mind and process to be in us, which was in Christ.

*And you shall find*- The yoke is *given* but we still have to *find* it by accepting the potential enabled by the Lord.

*Rest for your souls*- He assures us that if we come to Him, we will find "rest" (Mt. 11:29); but the same word is only used elsewhere about

the rest / comfort which our brethren give us (1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; Philemon 7,20).

11:30- see Ex. 2:11.

*For my yoke is easy*- A poor translation. The cross of Christ is anything but "easy"; the idea is more that it is helpful for service; the relationships He enables between believers is what makes it easier for us to carry the heavy loads of His service, i.e. the cross. Even if we still insist on the translation "easy", we reflect that the way to the Kingdom is easy relative to the wonder of what is in store for the faithful (2 Cor. 4:17); and yet from our human perspective it is hard indeed, a life of self-crucifixion (Acts 14:22; Rev.7:14). "Easy" translates *chrestos*, which sounds very like the 'Christ'. By this word play the point is being made that Christ *is* His yoke. One of the most essential things about Christ is that those in Him are bound together with each other. Any view of 'Christ' which excludes those in Him is therefore fundamentally flawed. Paul therefore teaches avoidance of any who cause division contrary to the teaching of Christ which we have "learned"- using the same word used here about Christ's uniting yoke being 'learning' of Him (Rom. 16:17). See on 20:16.

*And my burden is light*- Mic. 2:3 reminded Israel that they will be under the yoke of judgment if they reject Yahweh's yoke. The Lord spoke of His servants having a light yoke. The Bible minded among His hearers would have thought back to the threatened punishment of an iron yoke for the disobedient (Dt. 28:48). 'It's a yoke either way', they would have concluded. But the Lord's yoke *even in this life* is light, and has promise of the life which is to come! The logic of taking it, with the restrictions it inevitably implies (for it is a yoke), is simply overpowering. Note that the Greek for 'light' essentially means 'able to be carried'- which connects with the idea of 'taking up' the yoke and cross (see on 11:29). The point is- it is doable. The cross can be carried, the yoke can be worn- if we learn of Christ and thereby learn to take our place with others in carrying it.

## CHAPTER 12

*12:1 At that time, on the Sabbath day, Jesus went through the grainfields, and his disciples were hungry-* The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbade fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312 (*op cit.*)). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

*And began to pluck ears of grain to eat-* The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

*12:2 But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him: Look, your disciples do what is unlawful on the Sabbath-* A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

*12:3 But he said to them: Have you not read-* Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*What David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him-* The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

*12:4 How he entered into the house of God-* For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

*And ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?*

- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

*12:5 Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day-* We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*"

(Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

*The priests in the temple-* The rabbis taught that "Temple service takes precedence over the Sabbath" (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 313 (*op cit.*)). Thinking through the logic of the Lord's argument, He clearly has the view that His disciples are about the work of the temple, walking through that cornfield. Otherwise His appeal to the rabbinic dictum had no sense. Again, He is encouraging His followers to see themselves as far more than secular, not very spiritual people who are personally attracted to the teachings of Jesus and are awed by His miracles. He's saying that actually they are as priests, professionally committed to serving God actively.

*Profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?-* The Lord (Mt. 12:5) said that the priests "profaned" or 'desecrated' the Sabbath; He didn't say that because they kept the spirit of it, that was OK. By using a word as extreme as "profaned" He seems to be even emphasizing the point of paradox within God's self-revelation.

Having accepted the Bible as the source of authority, we find that the Bible does not categorically list what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Even within the Law of Moses, to obey some commands meant breaking others. And it is a common dilemma of sincere believers that they find themselves having to break one principle to keep another. The Bible is written in such a way as to give clear instruction to those who love and respect it, and yet to confuse those who do not fundamentally accept it into thinking that their faulty understanding is in fact the will of God. This is why it is true, on a surface level, that you can prove what you like from the Bible. Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* all managed to 'prove' the most bizarre things from the Bible- and persuade others to genuinely think that to do evil was in fact doing righteousness. So the fact that someone thinks that they are correctly interpreting the Bible does not thereby justify them, however sincere their conscience may be. And it does not mean that the church must therefore accept them, just because their conscience is clear and they think the Bible justifies their behaviour. The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency... all

means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

12:6 *But I say to you, that one greater than the temple is here-* AV "in this place". Sacred space was a big idea within Judaism. The Lord is directly challenging it by stating that He as a person was more holy and significant than the temple. The way He ate with sinners and touched the ritually unclean likewise reflect a redefinition of the holy. The implication could be that the Lord was standing at the edge of a cornfield (He was not within the synagogue- :9)- and He declared everywhere touched by Him to be holy.

12:7 *But if you had known what this means-* This continues the challenge of :3- "Have you never read?". They *had* read, but without understanding. They had read without perceiving meaning- and it led them to "condemn the guiltless". Without unduly exalting intellectualism for its own sake, this is a sobering thought- that the crucifixion of God's Son was the result of a chronic lack of understanding of God's word. To pay lip service to Biblicism is not enough; the meaning in the words, the whole issue of interpretation, is crucially important; getting it wrong can lead to crucifying the Son of God afresh. The Greek *esti* translated 'means' is basically the verb 'to be'- if they had known what the Scripture 'is' they would've have condemned the guiltless. The Bible 'is' its true interpretation, and this idea comes to its ultimate term in the declaration of Jesus as being 'the word'.

*I desire mercy-* Hos. 6:6 says that Yahweh "desires mercy". These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He desires / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If *He* delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight



in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage here in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

*And not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless-* Who exactly did the Lord have in mind? He has just used the same word when stating that the priests work on the Sabbath and are "blameless". By condemning the disciples, the Pharisees were thus condemning the priests too. This argument of course supposes that the Lord's secular, spiritually ragtag followers were in fact priests- the priests of the new system He was bringing in. The ultimately guiltless was of course the Lord Himself, and He foresaw their final condemnation of Him, perceiving that in essence it had already happened. For whoever condemns His followers condemns Him, so deeply is He associated with them. But how would the Pharisees have avoided condemning the guiltless disciples by appreciating that God wants mercy and not sacrifice? I suggest that the Lord is again meeting them on their own level: 'You consider the disciples are guilty. OK, that's not what the Law says, but OK, let's assume they are. But if you simply *loved* showing mercy as God does, then you would not have condemned them anyway. You would've overlooked the incident'.

*12:8 For the Son of man is Lord-* Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

*Of the Sabbath-* The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord *on* the Sabbath". Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

*12:9 And he departed from there and-* Luke's record adds that this was on another Sabbath- at least the next week.

*Went into their synagogue-* The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on :6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews".

12:10 *Behold*- AV. I have suggested that this word is best understood by likening Matthew to a cameraman shooting a movie, who now zooms in on an encounter.

*And saw a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?*-His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered.

*So that they might accuse him*- A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

12:11 *And he said to them: Which of you, if having only one sheep*- A poor man, who had only one sheep- as in the parable Nathan told David. The Lord saw the man with the withered hand as His sheep- His only sheep. Here we have an insight into an old problem: 'Seeing we are many and Jesus is one, how can it be that He feels so uniquely towards me, when He has so many other people to think about and relate to?'. It is possible for God and His Son to have emotional and psychological capabilities which we do not have. The Lord seems to be teaching here that He identifies with the poor, who has only *one* sheep; but He feels to each of us as if we are all that He has. Likewise in the parable of the woman who lost one of her dowry coins; they were all she had. We are all Jesus has. He has no other group on another planet in another dimension- we here on earth, we with all our dysfunction and poor response to His love, are all He has. And further- *you* are all He has. The man had been sick for some time, but the Lord saw his situation as if it had only just happened, that Sabbath day, and felt an urgency to respond. The *urgency* is a key issue- for the issue wasn't healing, it was why Jesus couldn't wait a few hours until the end of the Sabbath to heal. The Mishnah taught that the Sabbath could be broken if life was in immediate danger (m. Yoma 8.6). The Pharisees obviously reasoned that this wasn't the case- a paralyzed hand could wait a few hours for healing. But Jesus was perhaps making the point that to Him, human need is urgent and cannot wait. We must remember His sense of urgency when we struggle with His apparent slowness to respond. The spirit of urgency comes through the Gospel records and also the Acts.

*And it falls into a pit on the Sabbath day*- The Law specifically foresaw such a situation, pronouncing judgment against the person responsible for leaving a pit open so that animals might fall into it (Ex. 21:33,34). The Lord's point was that there was not a moment to lose once this happened- there was an urgency to save the animal, and that urgency was far more important than seeking to condemn the person who had breached the law. And this was how the Lord saw that man with a "withered hand"; the need was the call, and to Him there was an urgency

about the situation that was far more important than any concern about legalistic obedience to laws- be they real or imagined.

*Will not grab hold of it-* This apparently unnecessary detail is included because the same word is used about the Lord's touching or grasping of people before He healed them (Mt. 9:25; Mk. 1:31; 5:41; 9:27). As they would urgently lay hold upon a lost sheep and lift it out of a pit, so the Lord laid hold upon people and healed them. Reflect on how the Lord 'took hold' of people before healing them. This feature of the miracles demonstrated His desire to fully take hold of our human experiences, thereby identifying Himself with us- and on that basis, healing us. The same idea, although a different word, is to be found in the language of Heb. 2:16, speaking of the Lord Jesus taking hold upon humanity by having our nature.

*And lift it out?-* The same word is used for people 'rising up' after being healed by the Lord (Mt. 8:15; 9:5,6,25; 10:8; 11:5). Jewish people would've thought of the rescue of Joseph and Jeremiah from pits. The healing of this man, like so many of the healing miracles, had a spiritual intention- it was in order to save him from the pit of death. We saw on 11:20 that the purpose of the miracles was to lead people to repentance, not simply to alleviate human need for the sake of it.

12:12 *How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!-* The Lord favourably compares men to animals (to birds, Mt. 6:26; sparrows, Mt. 10:31; and again in Lk. 12:7,24). Whilst in the manner of our death we are as "the beasts of the field", the Lord seems to be at pains to ensure we realize the value and meaning of the human person, made as we are in God's image. If we treat people as animals, we have failed to perceive something of God which is uniquely in humanity.

*Therefore-* Again, the Lord doesn't base His argument around the obvious misunderstanding of the Law which the Pharisees had. He avoids a tit-for-tat expositional battle over semantics by introducing higher principles- the sheer value and need of the human person transcends any issue of legalistic obedience to any law, be it God's laws or the interpretation of them. This is a principle which legalistic churches need to bear in mind to this day in their decision making.

*It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day-* Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers

on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

12:13 *Then said he to the man: Stretch out your hand-* Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

*And he stretched it out and it was restored whole, as the other-* This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

12:14 *But-* AV "then". Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and

even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

*The Pharisees went out-* Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Matthew's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

*And took counsel against him, how they might destroy him-* S.w. "a consultation". Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

12:15 *And Jesus perceiving it-* Were there sympathizers for Jesus within the Pharisees who told Him this? Or is this another case of Him perceiving the minds of men?

*Withdrew from there; and many followed him and he healed them all-* Several times we read of the Lord withdrawing from the public, or at least trying to (Mt. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; Mk. 3:7; Jn. 6:15). We get the impression that He made public appearances, did some healing and teaching, and then 'withdrew'. The Gospel records focus much on the last week and months of His ministry. The first three years has relatively little recorded- but there is a lot of information about some very long, action packed days. We can assume too easily that these recorded days were typical. But perhaps they were not. There are probably no more than 20 days' events recorded- out of the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. One possibility is that the rest of the time, or much of it, He spent simply teaching the disciples. If the Lord maintained the same tempo and intensity of His recorded activity throughout the three and a half years, it surely would've been almost impossible to have avoided His being propelled to political power by the masses. This suggestion of limited public activity makes better sense of the note we made on Mt. 11:20, that the majority of His miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

Mark adds that the Lord withdrew grieving for their hard hearts. The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mk. 3:5), and finally broke down and wept over

Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind...? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

12:16 *And charged them that they should not make him known*- It was predicted of the Lord's preaching that He would not "strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [raised up in this way] in the streets". And for this reason He asked His converts not to "make him known" in this way; He wanted them to witness *as He witnessed* (Mt. 12:16,19). This is quite something, the more we reflect upon it. He rebuked the self-righteous, restored peoples' dignity, alleviated their poverty and sicknesses to give them a foretaste of the future blessings of His Kingdom on earth, opposed legalistic and corrupt religious practices, and ultimately gave His life to show that even His enemies were encompassed in His love. This is the pattern for us, especially in our seeking to do these things in the lives of those who respond to the Gospel.

But the same words ("*make Him known*") are used about how later, He was made known by the church (Acts 4:16; 1 Jn. 3:10). It could well be that as so often with Semitic languages, we must read in an ellipsis- 'Not make Him known [immediately, right then, at that time]'. The implication could be that they were indeed to make Him known- but later. The great commission, to take the knowledge of Christ to all men everywhere, could then be comfortably read in this context; the commission signalled the end of the relative silence which the Lord called for. In line with our comments on how and why the Lord withdrew Himself from the crowds in the preceding verse (:15), it would seem that the Lord was constantly concerned on a practical level that His ministry would be badly impaired if the masses of Palestine rose up out of His control and made Him King. He wanted above all to teach and personally model the Kingdom, and being at the centre of a political uprising thrusting Him forward would not enable that. *Phaneros*, "known", is only elsewhere used in Matthew in the Lord's teaching about what would happen "openly" (s.w.) at the establishment of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18). The Lord didn't want them trying to establish the Kingdom there and then in their own strength, and especially whilst so seriously misunderstanding the nature and essence of the Kingdom- for they still thought it was all about military victory against Rome. So it could be that the idea of 'to make known' may mean far more than 'Don't tell anyone'; it was

psychologically impossible to expect that multitudes of people who had seen healings would literally not breathe a word to anyone else. It was obvious that healings had been done- people came home healed. To 'not make known' doesn't have to mean 'Don't tell a word of this to anyone', indeed the Lord's parables and other teachings suggest that such telling of others is an inevitable part of response to Him. I suggest it means more of the flavour of 'Don't declare Me publicly as King'.

12:17 *That it might be fulfilled*- This is often stated as the reason why the Lord did and said things. He was consciously seeking to be 'the word made flesh' and consciously tried to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies. Despite strong resistance to this idea by some expositors, Harry Whittaker particularly, it seems to me the most natural understanding of the phrase and the force of the word "That...".

*Which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying*- The implication could be that Isaiah publicly spoke these words, directing Israel's attention to a "servant" figure of his own time, who all the same failed to be Messianic as intended, meaning that the prophecy had its fulfilment reapplied in Jesus. Or perhaps it was because the Lord was addressing people who had largely only *heard* Isaiah being read. Literacy was only a few percent in first century Palestine, and nobody had the Old Testament scrolls at home. Therefore the Lord speaks in terms of Isaiah *speaking* and *saying*, rather than writing and us reading.

12:18 *Look at My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon him*- The focus was to be upon beholding Jesus personally, and not listening to endless tales of miracles, inevitably exaggerated as they were passed around. If this is the reason for the quotation, then the stress would be upon *beholding* Him, appreciating Him, rather than seeking to get temporal benefit from His healing miracles.

*And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles*- The Lord didn't want the crowds getting so maxed out on His miracles and other physicalities that they paid no attention to His message; for the purpose of His being amongst men was primarily to "show justice". And that justice was to be shown to *Gentiles*- they were to be shown justice and salvation, not slain so that a Kingdom of God open to Jews only could be established upon Gentile corpses. This was the kind of false view of the Kingdom which the Lord didn't hold and didn't want given credibility by associating Himself and His miracles with it. But *krisis*, translated "justice", can also mean judgment in the sense of future judgment to come. Yet these same Gentiles who were to be shown (according to that reading) judgment to come, were to be given the opportunity to trust in the Messiah's Name (:21). And justice [s.w.] was to be "cast out" in victory- i.e. victory against judgment. In Christ, mercy was to triumph against judgment,

rejoicing against it as if after a bitter contest which was won by mercy (James 2:13). But to appreciate that good news, the Gentiles firstly had to realize what "judgment" really was. These were the things the Lord wanted to teach, but to get the points over, He needed the crowds to not be so hyped up by His miracles and to stop all talk of establishing a political Kingdom at that time.

The Lord's showing judgment to the Gentiles and not publicly striving or crying in his preaching (Mt.12:18-21) primarily fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 42:1-3. Note how His gentle, low pressure attitude to preaching will be the same in the Kingdom as it was in the first century. In the same way Is. 54:13 concerning the future preaching of the Gospel in the Kingdom is quoted about Christ in Jn. 6:45.

As in :21, the purpose of the healing was to show something to the Gentiles. But there were no Gentiles mentioned as being in the audience. Are we to infer that there were some present? More likely, as this whole incident occurred in a Jewish synagogue (:9), the Lord's point was that the unbelieving amongst God's people are no better than Gentiles. The Lord's miracles showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He showed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

12:19 *He shall not strive, nor cry aloud, neither shall anyone hear his voice in the streets*- Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

*Not strive*- This is quoted from the servant song of Is. 42, and the Lord is applying it to all those who follow Him. If *He* is not to strive or clamour in the streets, then neither are those who follow Him to do so. For all that is true of Him is true of them. Paul makes the same point in stating that "the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24). The "servant" is ultimately the Messianic servant of Isaiah's servant songs, but the point is that all that is true of that Servant is true of all those in Him.



*The streets-* The Lord didn't shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* "he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

*12:20 A bruised reed he shall not break and a smoking wick he shall not quench-* The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick. Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor, condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

*Until-* The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

*He sends forth judgment to victory-* Gk. to cast out, thrust out. See on 12:19 *show justice*. Judgment is cast out *eis*, "in", victory.

*12:21 And in his name shall the Gentiles hope-* Mark's record adds what Matthew strangely omits- that the great crowds whom He charged to not "make Him known" included Gentiles (Mk. 3:6-8). This makes sense of why the Lord healed "all" in the crowd (:15)- the sense is not that He healed every person in the crowd, as not all of them were in need of

healing; perhaps rather the stress on "all" is to show that the sick Gentiles who were present were *also* healed. Note that "In His Name shall the Gentiles trust" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 42:4 and not the Masoretic Text, which reads "The isles shall wait for His law". The ready acceptance of the LXX by the inspired NT writers, even preferring it over the Hebrew, has many implications. One of them is that the genealogies as found in the LXX do not support the idea of Adam being 4000 years before Christ, which is essential to those who believe that the six day / thousand year periods ended in 2000 AD and the Millennium must now be established.

12:22 *Then was brought to him one-* The Greek is used about bring an offering. We recall how the conversion of individuals is spoken as offering them as a sacrifice in Rom. 15:16. Bringing people to the Lord is offering them to Him because they are to present themselves, or be presented, as living sacrifices in His service (Rom. 12:1). There may therefore be a connection with the use later in this verse of *thereapeuo* for "healed", as this word is also translated "worship" in the sense of Divine worship. The Lord had just cured large numbers of people, but then withdrew from them. Now they find Him again and bring just one sick person for healing. The people were "amazed" (:23) at this one healing- whereas the Lord had healed many sick people in :15. We are left with the impression of how deeply "amazed" the crowds must have been, if there was so much amazement at just one cure, there must have been super amazement at the mass healings.

*Possessed with a demon, blind and dumb, and he healed him, so much so that the dumb man spoke and saw-* The Greek strictly means to be exercised or controlled by a demon. This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

12:23 *And all the crowds were amazed, and said-* See on 12:22 *brought*. This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

*Can this be the son of David?-* The people made a direct connection between the ability to do miracles and being Messiah. Yet earlier in this commentary I have pointed out that generally the Lord worked with an economy of miracle, and the number of miracles He did appear to have decreased as His ministry progressed. His understanding of Isaiah 42:1-3 just quoted was that Messiah should be 'beheld', be understood and appreciated on a spiritual level, rather than be a miracle worker whipping

up mass support because of that. And yet He appreciated the strong connection in peoples' minds between Messiahship and miracles, and He therefore conceded to this by doing miracles.

*12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said: This man does not cast out demons but-* Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

*By Beelzebub-* By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is

powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*The Prince of the demons- Archon, "the first", would imply that Beelzebub*

was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

12:25 *And knowing their thoughts, he said to them-* But they had "said" these things (:24). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

*Every kingdom-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

*Divided against itself-* The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

*Is brought to desolation-* The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

*And every city or house divided against itself shall not stand-* The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

12:26 *And if Satan-* Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if* Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

*Casts out Satan-* But the argument is about casting out of *demons* (:27). One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

*He is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?-* Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

12:27 *And if I-* Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

*By Beelzebub-* 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

*Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?-* The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless.

*Therefore shall they be your judges-* Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific

incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

12:28 *But if I by the Spirit of God-* One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see :30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested as God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to

accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure. A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit.

*Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you-* The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

12:29 *Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man and ruin his goods-* 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on :28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18). The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

*Except he first bind the strong man?-* The binding of the strong man was already in process, for the Lord's miracles were proof that his goods were being spoiled and he was powerless to stop it. But the ultimate binding of the enemy was in the Lord's death- and several times the records of the Lord's passion use the word to describe how He was 'bound'. Surely He was encouraged by the intended paradox- that through His binding, the power of sin was being bound. The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).



The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

*And then he will ruin his house-* AV "Spoil his goods". The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his

spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical

reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

*Goods-* If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic- including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'; and this provides the context for the 'gathering' of the next verse.

12:30 *He that is not with Me is against Me-* The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against Me*' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: "He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us" (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord's cause, even if we're not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be 'not against' Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively 'not against' Jesus. If we're not whole heartedly with Him, we're against Him. That's how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

*And he that does not gather with me scatters-* In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house in :29. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the

surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. We saw on :28 that people were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

12:31 *Therefore I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men-* His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (see the parallel Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others... See on 10:29.

*But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven-* The exposition offered above suggests that people were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst a person is in the position of so

strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

12:32 *And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man*- See on :31. The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person-although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure (:31), including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The "son of man" here could refer to Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean 'human beings'. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to Jewish people at some point after the Lord's resurrection. The message may be: 'Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you'. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

*It shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him*- Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court

of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

*Neither in this age, nor in the age to come-* This is not suggesting that there is some kind of forgiveness in this world and another kind of forgiveness in the world to come, the Kingdom age. Rather is the simple point being made that the forgiveness granted or not granted now is directly related to "the world to come". The judgment is as it were ongoing now. The positions we adopt now are those we shall eternally hold.

12:33 *Either make-* In their interpretation of Jesus they had to see Him as either good or bad, and He urged them to make a choice. The miracles were good fruit- therefore He was good, and working by God's Spirit rather than being an agent of Satan. The fruit of the tree equals the words (as in Prov. 12:14; 13:2); a corrupt man will speak corrupt words. And these will be the basis of his condemnation. By contrast "the fruit of *our* lips" should be praise (Heb. 13:15). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) refers to this passage- the corrupt fruit is corrupt words. But the idea is that we bear the fruit *now*- our words *now* are our fruit.

*The tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt-* The Lord had taught in the Sermon on the Mount that it was a fundamental principle with Him that true spirituality cannot be hidden; what is within is openly revealed, even in this life. Good fruit means a good tree. His works were the good fruit. The Pharisees were claiming that His fruits, His works, were corrupt, and therefore He was corrupt. The Lord is asking everyone, especially the disciples, to decide one way or the other- either He is a good man doing good works, or an evil man doing evil works. There is no half way position, as He made clear in :30 ("He that is not with Me is against Me"). They were to 'make' or consider, decide, about Him one way or the other.

*And its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit-* As so often, the Lord is repeating the principles of His opening manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount (cp. Mt. 7:17,18). The fruit of a man's life reflects who he

essentially is; the good fruit of the Lord's miracles was clear proof He was not of Satan but God's Son and supreme agent.

*12:34 You offspring of vipers-* A clear allusion to the Jews as the seed of the serpent of Gen. 3:15 who would be the ones who would be in conflict with the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus.

*How can you-* Because of the principle that who we are internally is ultimately reflected by our external actions and words (:33), it was impossible that their 'good words' could be sincere because the other fruit of their lives showed they were rotten within. "How can you..." doesn't mean that they could not change. It means that given their present internal condition, they could never speak good things. The 'good word' which the context has in view is the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son; the evil word was that He was Satan's agent. This wrong judgment of Jesus' identity was because of their evil heart. Their doctrinal mistake was a reflection of their internal fleshly thinking. The Lord said that the Jews were evil, and therefore good things could not come from them (Mt. 12:34; 7:17-20). And yet He also said, presumably with the same audience in mind, that although they were evil, they potentially knew how to give good things, e.g. to their children; and therefore how much could God give them good things if they repented (Mt. 7:11).

*Being evil speak good things-* This may be an intensive plural, 'the good thing'. The good thing to be spoken was the confession that Jesus was Son of God. John's Gospel emphasizes this, and Rom. 10:9,10 suggests that a verbal confession of Jesus as Lord was required in the conversion process: "if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation". This confession was likely made at baptism, as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. We must ever remember that Matthew's gospel is the transcript of his preaching of the Gospel; it was a missionary document, intended to bring forth the confession that Jesus is Lord and Son of God. This is not to say that the Lord's teaching here does not establish basic principles regarding the connection between thought and speech. It does. But the specific context is of confessing that He is Lord rather than of Satan.

*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks-* Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life (:33).

12:35 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate "good man" and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

*Out of his good treasure brings forth good things*- The heart is our wealth. This is the real gold and silver, the core value of a man's life- what we are thinking about. Spiritual mindedness is the essence of Christianity.

*And the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth*- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV "wicked") generation" in :45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

*Evil things*- The words of blasphemy accusing Jesus of being Satan's agent.

12:36 *And I say to you, that every idle word that men shall speak*- Gk. lazy, unproductive. At first blush, this seems a strange word to use in the context of explaining that the words of blasphemy the Jews had uttered would be judged at the last day. We expect a word to be used which carries the sense of blasphemy or proactive aggression. Instead, the Lord uses this word for "idle". His point was that what is ultimately wrong with blasphemy is what is wrong with all unspiritual language- it is not creative, not productive, it is a waste of potential resource. We marvel at His insight. Words can be powerful and creative, but we will answer for those which are not. The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life. Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will be justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who says to his brother 'Raca' or 'You fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is



kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before Me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

*They shall give account of it in the day of judgment-* For every idle *rhema* ["word"], men shall give a *logos* ["account"], another word. We shall have to explain the *logos*, the intention, of idle words. Literally we will have to give a word for a word. This surely suggests that words will be as it were played back to us in that day and we will explain the *logos*, the intention and inner sense, behind those words. But the Lord of course will know all this anyway. It will be a profound preparation for entry into eternity- to have our idle words played back to us, and our having to give an explanation of what our innermost thought behind them really was. The whole process will elicit self-knowledge to the ultimate extent. The words behind 'give an account' are found elsewhere in NT teaching about judgment. We must give an account of our stewardship of the Lord's goods (Lk. 16:2), give an account of our moral lives (1 Pet. 4:3-5), give an account of those under our spiritual care (Heb. 13:17); and give an account / *logos* of our idle words. Without doubt, judgment will not be a mere yes / no decision, nor an awards ceremony. It will be a revelation to ourselves of our motives, the *logos* behind our words and actions.

*12:37 For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned-* In the context, the Lord is referring to how their words regarding Him being an agent of Satan would lead to their condemnation. Yet their words had all started from basic jealousy which ran on unbridled. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). The reference may be to Eliphaz (Job 15:6): "Your own mouth condemns you, and not I"; or to Prov. 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue". And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it" (1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. The specific words which some have spoken will be the reason for their condemnation. "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16)- not so much for their idolatry, their worldliness... but for their uncontrolled and cruel words. By our words we will be acquitted [Gk.] and by our words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)- but it is God who acquits, and therefore nobody but He can condemn us (Rom. 8:33; Is. 50:8). Yet how does and how will He do this? Surely on the basis of our acquittal or

condemnation of others. The connection in thought surely shows that through our words, we form our own judgment of ourselves, to acquittal or condemnation.

Our eternal destiny will be *ek*, from out of, our words. If the Lord had simply meant 'according to, on account of', another word or construction would've been used. The use of *ek* suggests that the decision on our eternity will not only be on account of our words, but *in* our own words- for it will be *out of* our own mouths. We think of David's response to Nathan's parable and how his own words were his appropriate judgment. Lk. 19:22 is clearest: "Out of [*ek*] your own mouth will I judge you". The servants' *thoughts* about his Lord are then cited back to him as if they were his spoken *words*, and he is judged according to those words. There could be no more powerful exhortation as to the significance of spoken words, but the appeal must not be to merely curb the tongue by brute psychological force, but rather to have the new mind and spirit of Christ which simply will not speak words leading to condemnation. The intensity and deeply personal force of the Lord's reasoning was such that that group of Pharisees went silent and brought in another group to raise yet more legalistic and theological issues with Him; but those things were and are to this day simply a way of trying to take the Lord's intense and practical *moral* pressure off us. It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, judged by their own words, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. "He that keeps his mouth keeps his life; but he that opens wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear. See on 21:43.

The words by which men shall be condemned are clear from the context- the words of blasphemy against Jesus, making Him the supreme agent of Satan rather than of God. But this is not to say that a general principle is not also being demonstrated. Words reflect the inner man, the Lord has taught- and so they are a fair index for judgment. This cuts right through the idea that we can harbour evil thoughts and yet cover them in nicespeak. The culture of nicespeak lays revealed for what it is- the Lord is saying that ultimately, our words *will* at some point reflect our thoughts. The whole section began with the explanation in :24,25 that the Jews "said" but Jesus "knew their thoughts". I suggested in the commentary there that perhaps they never actually spoke those words out loud. It is these thoughts for which by which we shall be judged.

The idea of being "justified" by our words at first sight it could seem that this contradicts Paul's argument for justification by grace alone- and not by the steel willed control of our words. But Romans 1-8 is a unit, and the teaching about justification by grace is on the basis that those in Christ are in a status, "in Christ", under grace- and in that status, the Spirit of God is at work in the human minds of all those who are in that status. And the Lord has made clear here that the words He will judge are those which are a direct reflection of the human heart or spirit.

*12:38 Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying: Teacher-* It would seem these were a different group of Pharisees to those with whom the Lord was in engagement earlier in the chapter; they address Him as "Master". They appear at least to be trying a more subtle approach than the previous group. Mk. 3:22 notes that this group had come from Jerusalem.

*We would see a sign from you-* The context of the chapter makes it clear that the Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. So maybe the emphasis is on *we*. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign *from Heaven*". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

*12:39 But he answered and said to them: An evil and adulterous generation-* The Lord may have in mind female adultery, alluding to the Old Testament passages which liken Israel to an adulterous wife. The parallel is between self-righteous Jewish society of the first century and sexually immoral but penitent Nineveh of previous centuries.

*Seeks after a sign, and there shall no sign be given it-* The idea could be 'no further sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No more sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign greater than [that of Jonah]'.

*Except the sign of Jonah the prophet-* The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

12:40 *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth-* Matthew's Gospel doesn't seem to teach a literal 72 hours for Jesus in the grave. But a 'day' can mean 'part of a day'- as in 1 Kings

20:29; Esther 4:16-5:1. The term is surely used to highlight the connection with Jonah's experience.

As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

12:41 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall-* Again we must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :27 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

*Condemn it-* The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment, and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall "discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common

(e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

*For they repented-* The Lord is going to soon claim that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned (:43,44). But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

*At the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here!*- This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

12:42 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment-* "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "rise up" in :41 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

*With this generation and shall condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, one greater than Solomon is here!*- If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise

repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

*12:43 When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none-* The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Matthew's Gospel. The unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth.

Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

The Lord has just given an invitation to come to *Him* and find "rest" (Mt. 11:28 s.w.). Hebrews may allude here when suggesting that Moses and Joshua could not give Israel "rest", only Messiah could (Heb. 4:8-10). John's work gave Israel a desire for this "rest" and pointed them to Jesus as the One who could give it- but they were refusing to take it. And so the (parabolic) unclean spirit was returning to the house of Israel and would make them worse than before.

*12:44 Then it says: I will return-* The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17).

*To my house from which I came out-* The same word is used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

*And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order-* The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

*12:45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation-* "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first".

However, "the last", the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It "is worse" and yet thus 'it *shall* be' for that generation.

12:46 *While he was yet speaking to the crowds-* The same word for "speaking" is used later in the verse, in reporting that His mother and brothers wished to talk / speak with Him. The impression is given that He was talking, but they wanted to talk to Him rather than to listen.

*His mother and his relatives stood outside, seeking to speak to him-* Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. In the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

12:47 *And someone said to him: Look, your mother and your relatives wait outside, wanting to speak to you-* Note how in the parallel Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and brethren seek for thee", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for thee"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary sought for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention.

12:48 *But he answered and said to him that told him: Who is my mother? And who are my relatives?-* These terms are repeated three times in :48-50. In a fiercely family based society, such radical redefinition of family



was remarkable, and the Lord was labouring His radical point lest there be any misunderstanding. He was creating a new family, based around hearing and doing His Father's will; there was a new Father, God, and those who did His will were His children. The nature of the scene portrayed here seems to suggest that in His case, as in so many others afterwards, the new spiritual family was separate from the family of origin; for they were here outside the house. And we must bear in mind that 'house' meant not only a building but a family. This gives new meaning to the way that Paul and James (especially James) so love to address their brethren as "my brothers" (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12). Their brethren in Christ were really their new family. And it should be the same for us. The divided state of the body of Christ today is surely a result of over-familiar, over-privileged believers failing to grasp the wonder of the fact that others have come into the family by conversion into Christ. In believing communities comprised of first generation converts, there is generally a far greater sense of brotherhood.

*12:49 And he stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said: Behold, my mother and my relatives!*- Another mark of an eyewitness account is found in this reference to His stretching out His hand. Given the loss of family many had experienced, this visual image would've remained in their memories, to be drawn upon in the hard times of rejection by family of origin. The Greek *epi* translated "toward" could strictly mean 'over'- as if the disciples were sitting near to Him. For it was they, rather than the general audience, whom He knew were doing the Father's will.

The Lord implied that those who did God's will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

*12:50 For whoever shall please my Father who is in heaven-* Or, "Do the will of"- another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9 speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21).

*He is my brother and sister and mother-* The very fact the Lord calls us brethren in Mt. 12:50 the Hebrew writer saw as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *On that day-* This is programmatic to our understanding of chapter 13. The preceding chapter 12 has recorded how the Lord now changes His position regarding the Jews. Instead of the positive tone of the Sermon on the Mount and the hopeful appeal to Israel, from now on in Matthew there is much talk of condemnation to come, of Israel's rejection of the Gospel, and of how they were an adulterous generation for whom judgment was reserved. From now on, the Lord started using parables- hence the shock of the disciples and their question 'Why parables?' immediately after He had finished the sower parable (:10). And He spoke in parables exactly so that from now on, the masses would *not* understand. The mission of John had been largely unsuccessful, despite the good initial response. The Jewish religious leaders and the hopes for an immediate Kingdom in this world had lead Israel to reject the message, and their last state would be now worse than the first. The parable of the sower speaks of seed which initially grew (Israel's response to John's message) and then went wrong.

*Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea side-* He has just spoken of how the house of Israel is being re-inhabited by seven evil spirits. The suggestion could be that He was now dissociating Himself from the house of Israel and was going to the sea of Gentiles.

13:2 *And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach-* The Gospel records give more information about the day on which Christ told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in his ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt.12:22-13:23; Lk.11:27; Mk.4:10). Various types of people heard his words; the immediate context in Mt.13:2 is that "great multitudes were gathered together unto him". The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to Christ's sowing when he first "went forth to sow" in his ministry.

"Gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

In Mark we read that Jesus "entered in to a ship, and sat in the sea" (Mk. 4:1). All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so

zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence. Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AV mg.]" – to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

13:3 *And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying-* The Lord in chapter 12 seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of chapter 12. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in :11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in :11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

The chiasmic structure of Matthew 13 has been observed by several

expositors, and it makes the sowing of the weeds by "the enemy" the central point of the entire presentation; the point is, that Israel initial response to the Gospel preached by John had been destroyed by a conscious program to stop the message being accepted, operated by the Jewish enemy / satan:

Sower and the Soils (vv. 1-9)

Question by Disciples/Answer by Jesus (Understanding) (vv. 10-17)

Interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (vv. 18—23)

Tares (vv. 24—30)

Mustard Seed (vv. 31—32)

Leavening Process (v. 33)

Fulfillment of Prophecy (vv. 34—35)

Interpretation of the Tares (vv. 36—43)

Hidden Treasure (v. 44)

Pearl Merchant (vv. 45—46)

Dragnet (vv. 47—48)

Interpretation of the Dragnet (vv. 49—50)

Question by Jesus/Answer by the Disciples (Understanding) (v. 51)

Householder (v. 52)

*Listen, the sower went out to sow-* The Lord's teaching in 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "a sower" (followed by the AV), others "*the sower*" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went out" is the same Greek word has just been used in :1 to describe how Jesus had 'gone forth' out of the house to preach by the lakeshore. Although multitudes were there listening, the Lord knew that only a few would be good ground for the word. The word is several times used of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... *for therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.),

but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Matthew doesn't record that the Lord made a big issue about the seed- Luke's account records this: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

13:4 *And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side-* The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk.10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

*And the birds came-* Lk. 8:5 adds that first of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable in the same chapter speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt.13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catcheth away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catcheth" the sheep (Mt.13:19; Jn.10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false

teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

*And devoured it-* The same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the seed*- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

13:5 *And others fell upon the rocky places where they had not much earth-* The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation (:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

*And immediately-* There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and Matthew often notes the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the

inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

*They sprang up*- The idea is that they germinated. The seed of the Gospel began to grow- the multitudes had begun to respond to John's message. The same word is used in the next verse to describe how the sun then 'sprung up'. After response to the word begins, there will be trouble and testing. Just as Israel's Red Sea baptism was immediately followed by tribulation and testing. The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

*Because they had no deepness of earth*- John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). These people had only a



surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of Christ and His work.

13:6 *And when the sun had risen-* See on 13:5 *sprung up*.

*They were scorched-* Literally, burnt. John the Baptist had presented a powerful logic- either baptism by fire by the Jesus whom he preached, or being burnt up with [figurative] fire at the last day (Mt. 3:10-12). The Lord clearly has that in mind here- those who had refused John's message about Him were even now burnt up, for judgment in its essence begins now, according to our response to the word of Christ.

*And because they had no root, they withered away-* The same word used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

13:7 *And others fell upon the thorns-* This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good seed brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in :22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through

people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

*And the thorns grew up and choked them-* The next parable explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up' (:26); the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

*13:8 And others fell upon the good ground and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty-* The next parable is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was

in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

Mk.4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:

- 1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.
- 2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and Christ's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If thou wilt be *perfect*...' sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. Christ wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly Christ sees others; because we can't know.

The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

I have shown in the commentary above that growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is

huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

Note how the three types of wasted seed and poor ground are matched by three types of response on the good ground. This feature of triads (features occurring in threes) may not necessarily have any meaning, but it may simply be part of a structure designed to aid memorization- which was the initial usage of the Gospel records.

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible. The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept

on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

13:9 *He that has ears, let him hear*- Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see on :1 also), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear the parable*" (:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

Luke adds: "As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8). The Lord so wanted their response. "As he said these things, he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8 RV; Jn. 7:37). The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that hath ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of the next verse, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in Lk. 8:10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God". There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

13:10 *And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables?*- This question is understandable if this was the first parable the Lord spoke; see on :1. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening

multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

*13:11 And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven-* The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

*But to them it is not given-* Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is "given". Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?"- i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of

grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us. The phrase "them that are without" (Mk. 4:11) seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. But those "without" in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand "without" begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those 'without' in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord's teaching, for whom it's all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn't mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires.

*13:12 For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance-* The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort, but through the gift of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (:9). Mt. 13:12 speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adopts a more human perspective. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

*But whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has-* The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and



hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

*13:13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand-* See on 13:12 *even what he has*. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John the Baptist which became the basis of their subsequent total blindness and deafness to Jesus. If the word sown isn't responded to further, or only partially so, then there remains only a hardening. We must respond, and immediately- and be led wherever the word leads us.

*13:14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which said: By hearing you shall hear and shall in no wise understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no wise perceive-* Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt.13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk.4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown...". That prophecy evidently had fulfilment at Isaiah's time; the point is thereby established that prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

*13:15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest-* Here we have explained why some people don't get it, will not understand. It's not that they are mentally inadequate. The Lord's reason is because they realize, albeit subconsciously, that if they do, then the process will lead to repentance, to change, and thereby to spiritual healing. And people don't want to change, to allow God's claim over every part of their lives. And so they choose not to understand. So often we marvel that despite God's Truth being so simple, so few understand it. That is now no mystery- for the Lord's explanation here is that it's because they don't actually want to change. It's why so many prefer a life of apparently searching for Truth, rather than accepting the most obvious Truth, which is Christ. It's why despite all the miracles and teaching and personality of the Lord Jesus, so few wanted to accept Him as Messiah. This would've been of great relevance to the disciples and first century preachers who first heard this, for whom Israel's rejection of Jesus would've been so hard to understand.

*They should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and repent, so that I should heal them-* True conversion

involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). True understanding is a seeking for God, a doing good; hence those who sin have no true knowledge as they ought to have, whatever their theoretical understanding (Ps. 14:2-4). But we can nominally believe the Gospel, 'understand' it in an intellectual sense, and bring forth no fruit to perfection (Mt. 13:15 cp. 23)- not perceiving the power of the Gospel. Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness (Mk. 4:12). Moses persevered because he *understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience.

The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). There are levels of conversion. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32), the Lord told Peter. Yet Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn't conversion: it's a beginning, not an end.

13:16 *But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear*- The disciples were so slow to perceive. And yet the Lord could (perhaps gently and smilingly) tell them: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" (Mt. 13:16). Yet He later reprimanded them for being so slow of heart to perceive... Surely He was speaking of the potential which He recognized in them; a potential which He rejoiced to see. Of course we are blind and spiritually obtuse. And yet the New Testament speaks of us as if our blindness has been lifted. In the same way as our Lord sees us as if we are perfect, without blemish, as if we are already in the Kingdom, so he sees us as if we are without blindness. This is how he treated the disciples. He spoke of them as "seeing", i.e. understanding (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). But frequently he despaired at their lack of spiritual perception, i.e. their blindness. Yahweh describes His servant Israel, both natural and spiritual, as a blind servant: "Who is blind but my servant?... who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were

not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! As the Lord was the light of those that sat in darkness (Mt. 4:16), so Paul writes as if all the believers are likewise (Rom. 2:19). Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness.

*13:17 For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see and saw them not, and to hear the things which you hear and heard them not-* These men, the Lord said, wanted to understand but didn't. But He has just explained that lack of understanding is rooted in a subconscious refusal to understand. He is using 'seeing' here in the sense of understanding, rather than physically seeing. I therefore wonder whether He is speaking with irony- of the Jewish false prophets and supposedly 'righteous ones'. They claimed to desire understanding, but they never attained to it.

*13:18 Hear then the parable of the sower-* The Lord has defined 'hearing' earlier in the context as something which requires conscious effort. He is therefore issuing a command here, rather than speaking a meaningless preface to the interpretation.

*13:19- see on 13:38.*

*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom-* "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11-15) and "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the "word of the Kingdom" means the word which is *about* the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "The seed is the word of God" (Lk.8:11), i.e. the word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt.13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems that Jesus is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as

God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled. The seed is the word (Lk. 8:11); and "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

*And understands it not-* The Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in :15 that it is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on :4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there

was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one". Mere knowledge of the word will not necessarily stop the spiritual temptations; the word must be hid in the heart to stop sin (Ps.119:11); not just left on the surface of the soil. Those on the good ground both hear *and* understand it (Mt.13:23), corresponding in the first instance to those who heard the parables and understood them. There is no doubt that a degree of intellectual effort is required to understand the word, not least the parables. The Jews generally did not "hear with their ears"- they did not respond or recognize the basic message of the word, let alone go on to understand it.

In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, Jesus twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and anon with joy receiveth it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). "The care of this world" (Mt. 13:22) must primarily refer to the Jewish world.

*Then comes the evil one*- Note that the parable was spoken the same day as the discourses of chapter 12- see 13:1. The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

*And snatches away*- The same word had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as

responsible for the scattering of the sheep. Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

*That which was sown in his heart-* Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

*This is he that was sown by the way side-* The person is put for the seed. Because according to a person's attitude to the word of Christ, so he is.

13:20 *And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that hears the word and immediately with joy receives it-* So long as he 'believes for a while' (Lk.). Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

13:21 *Yet he does not have root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles-* The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or persecution" (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day. When Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), perhaps he was alluding to the parable of the sower, where the Lord taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

13:22 *And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that hears the word, and the-* One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

*Care of the world-* In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is

used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world.

*And the deceitfulness of riches-* There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

*Choke the word-* Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because



"riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

*And he becomes unfruitful*- The types of ground represent the hearts of various categories of people. We expect to read that *the seed* becomes unfruitful. But the seed never does, it never of itself loses its power and life. The seed of the word, of Jesus who is *the seed*, becomes the person. The word is to be made flesh in us as it was to perfection in the Lord (Jn. 1:14). See on 13:6 *withered*. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced

were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

13:23 *And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that hears the word and understands it-* "Accepts" (Mk. 4:20), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15). In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite

rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

*Who truly carries fruit and brings it forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty-* Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them

from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this. Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light (Lk. 8:17 RV)- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank. The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life. "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21), refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith.

13:24 *He set another parable before them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field-* Potentially, even then, the field of the world had been given to the Lord Jesus.

13:25 *But while his men slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away-* The sense of "while" is supplied by the translators. It could just as well mean that *when* men slept- after the

death of the apostles? And yet the Lord commands His followers *not* to sleep, and Paul in 1 Thess. 5 repeats this. The implication could be that the sowing of the weeds was avoidable if the Lord's workers had been more attentive. Jesus so understands human weakness. But let's try to enter into the sense of shame and hurt which He must feel at our apathy; the shame is similar to the shame of the farmer who has tares growing in his field. Everyone sees it's the result of his workers sleeping instead of keeping the night watch as they should have done (Mt. 13:25). The Lord foresaw this; He saw that the ultimate harvest wouldn't be a good one. Even some that looked like "good seed" would be rejected (Mt. 8:12 cp. 13:38). Yet in this same context, Christ speaks of how the believer starts off as a tiny mustard seed, but in the Kingdom grows into a tree which will shelter others (Mt. 13:32). He saw *how* small are our spiritual beginnings compared to our position in the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom will be spiritually greater than John the Baptist was in his mortal life (Mt. 11:11). The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4). The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4-6). In the parable of the sower, "the Devil" is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel – and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the "tares" sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, "things that offend" – and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt. 13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15:12-13 describing the Pharisees as plants "which My Heavenly Father hath not planted" which were to be rooted up at the judgment.

Mark's record speaks as if the *sower Himself* slept. The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "He knows not how" (Mk. 4:27, with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit immeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

13:26 *But when the plants sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the weeds appeared also-* See on :7. This is the "good ground" category of the previous parable. They were sown amongst thorns and yet all the

same, brought forth fruit. It may be that the Lord intends us to perceive that one mark of spiritual maturity is that once we start to bring forth fruit, we realize that we are surrounded by weeds / thorns. But we cannot for sure judge any given individual as being in that category.

*13:27 And the servants of the householder came and said to him: Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?- To a Palestinian rural audience, the answer was obvious. Enemies sowing weeds amongst the wheat was a fairly common occurrence. The story is set up to make these servants seem somehow foolish for not suspecting the obvious explanation. In the first instance, the Lord is addressing the problem the disciples were having as to why there was such mixed response to the Gospel. He's gently trying to explain to them that surely it was obvious why there wasn't better response- there was, clearly enough, a systematic campaign orchestrated by the Jews to damage the harvest.*

13:28- see on 15:14.

*And he said to them: An enemy has done this! And the servants said to him: Then do you want us to go and gather them up?- The term is used several times in the parables of Matthew 13, and in the context it effectively means 'to judge'. The gathering process is the judgment- not only because the process of gathering and judgment will likely be in a split second in terms of time as we understand it, but because our attitude in the moment when we know 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who go immediately will be saved, and those who delay to prepare themselves will thereby show themselves unworthy. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:28) shows Christ's knowledge that this would be the desire of His servants throughout the generations. If we take His teaching seriously, we must come to the conclusion that all of us have a desire to "help" our brethren by 'sorting out' the weaknesses which we see in them, but that there is the real possibility that often this desire is spiritually grotesque in God's eyes. According to the parable of the tares, we are very sure that we know who are the tares and who are the wheat. But we can't be as sure as we feel, is the Lord's message. Some we feel are obviously tares are actually wheat. And the sensitivity of Jesus foresaw this so accurately. There's a fascinating twist in this story that is exactly descriptive of our experience. The servants slept first of all, after the word was first sown, and only once the wheat and tares came to bear fruit did they pester the Master to let them root up the tares. This reference to bearing fruit must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the sower, which describes how the good ground bears fruit (Mt. 13: 26, 8). The implication is that the servants shouldn't have been sleeping first of all, thinking there wasn't really much to do in the field. And so it is a familiar pattern: conversion is followed by a period of feeling there isn't much to do, and then the*

realization dawns that due to our own negligence in those early days there are some tares in the ecclesia. The desire to sort out the tares therefore comes some time *after* conversion. And on the overall level, there is another truism: the servants of Christ are keener to eradicate error than stop it in the first place. It's sad to see that there is almost a despising today of the warnings against 'the thin end of the wedge'; awareness of the possibility of apostasy is seen as somehow negative-exactly as the parable predicts. The parable implies that *if* a greater level of watchfulness was maintained by the servants, there wouldn't be the tares. But, as the Lord foresaw, we seem to lack this watchfulness, often under the guise of feeling that we must sort ourselves out rather than guard against apostasy being introduced. The sensitivity of Jesus constructed that parable with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right *therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'. See on 7:4.

*That we go-* The emphasis is surely on the "we". They assumed that because they were the man's servants, they were therefore also the reapers. The contrast drawn between the servants and the reapers was an element of unreality in the story. For farmers didn't have a separate category of workers who were specifically "reapers". But this householder did, and the element of unreality points to the fact that contrary to what we intuitively think, the work of reaping is *not* for us. There are others, the Angels, who will do this. And the other element of unreality is that the householder wanted the weeds to continue to grow, even though they would be taking away moisture and nutrients from the good seed. This is the way the Lord wishes for things in this life. Those who offend, who cause the righteous to stumble, will only be removed from them at the last day (:41). The preceding parable of the sower had featured a type of

ground where there were thorns who grew up and stopped the good seed from developing; but the point was that the 'good ground' category would still prosper *despite* growing next to weeds. Such was and is the power of God's word in Christ, that those who respond to it can still bring forth amazing yield *despite* the presence of the weeds next to them.

13:29 *But he said: No. Lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them-* The message is that we can rightly sense that there are pseudo plants within the field, but we can never actually define any one individual as being one of them. The parable of the wheat and weeds features another unlikely happening. Someone sows weed seeds on top of the wheat seeds. The farm workers who were sleeping aren't upbraided as we might expect. The weeds can't be uprooted because the roots are intertwined; and anyone walking into the field to remove them would trample the wheat. So how, therefore, can they be rooted up at the time of the harvest? It can only be by some super-human reapers- i.e. the Angels. It is totally and utterly beyond *us* to do the uprooting. And yet this obvious meaning has still not been perceived by many of us.

13:30 *Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to-* The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). There is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The suggestion is that when the fruit is ready, then the harvest begins. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore variable; it depends upon the development of spiritual fruit by the last generation before His return.

*The reapers-* These are different to the 'servants' of :27. The implication is that we are the servants, and not the reapers. And yet the same word is used in Jn. 4:36-38 about how in preaching the Gospel, we are reaping people into the harvest of eternal life. As an exercise in Biblical exposition, this simply shows that a figure may be used in one context in an entirely different way, even with a completely opposite sense, to how



it is used in another usage. And in yet another sense, we as it were reap ourselves according to how we sowed in this life (Gal. 6:7-9). And yet we shall be reaped by the Angels in the actual judgment process; the connection perhaps shows that effectively, we judge ourselves.

*Gather up the weeds first and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn-* This detail is surely not merely incidental. The idea is that the wicked and righteous will be gathered together with others within their same category. Then, it will finally be clear who is who; they will be displayed together. There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will be destroyed together: "Gather together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying wilful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into His barn (Mt. 13:30).

All these parables end with the impression that the faithful are going to be of eternal use to others, providing food / salvation for them. The 100 fold increase of the good ground was to be eaten, the wheat turned into bread or sown again, the mustard seed tree gives shelter to others, etc. We are to develop a desire to do that for others in this life, so that we might eternally do it in reality.

13:31 *He set another parable before them, saying-* Bearing in mind the Lord's earlier explanation that He was speaking to the Jewish masses in parables so that they would not understand, I wonder if the "them" here refers specifically to the disciples.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a grain-* Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out

of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

*Of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field-* The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

13:32 *Which indeed is smaller than all seeds-* Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest, the least. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

*But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree-* Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is AV "The greatest"; but the mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny

beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

*So that the birds of the sky come and lodge in its branches-* Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *megas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *mega*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true. There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

13:33 *He told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast-* This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *a/ways* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will

influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew (op cit.)* p. 422).

*Which a woman took and hid-* The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publicly things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

*In three measures of flour until it was all raised-* Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here in Mt. 13:33. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:34 *All these things spoke Jesus in parables to the crowds, and without a parable he said nothing to them-* See on 13:10. The idea surely is that *from now onwards* the Lord only spoke parables to them, which explains the shocked question of the disciples in :10 as to why there was this change of teaching method. Mark adds that the Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to hear it", not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics. There is a tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed . There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right: wrong, truth: error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

13:35 *This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet-* Again we see the Lord consciously trying to make the word flesh.

*I will open my mouth in parables-* Asaph in Psalm 78 seems to be saying that he was going to recount the history of Israel in order to reveal to his audience the hidden message of Israel's history; and he was not going to "hide" that message from them, but rather to 'declare' it and 'make it known': "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, declaring to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a teaching in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (Ps. 78:1-5). And yet the Lord has been saying that He will teach in parables in order to hide, not declare and not make known God's Truth to the majority of Israel. But Psalm 78 says that He *will* declare these things. The point surely is that these truths were being declared, made known etc. *to the disciples*, but the very process would continue to hide them from Israel as a whole. The context of Ps. 78 is likely Asaph seeking to declare to Judah under Babylonian domination the meaning of their history and how Israel's history was to come to a climax and a full declaration of its meaning in Messiah. It therefore has relevance to the true Israel under Roman domination. Note that Ps. 78:2 is quoted here as it is in Jn. 6:31; Ps. 78 is alluded to at least 10 times in the N.T. The strongly uneven nature of quotation from the OT shows that some OT chapters were as it were proof texts for the early church; Ps. 110 is the clearest example.

*I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world-* See on 13:33 *hid*. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

13:36 *Then he left the crowds-* AV "Sent the multitude away". Here we sense the power of the Lord's personality, able somehow to send a crowd of eager people away.

*And went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying: Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field-* The disciples only got the interpretation of the parables because they made the effort to go into the house and ask Him. Previously in this chapter the Lord has spoken of how blessed they are because they understand the parables, and how the crowds don't. But clearly effort had to be made to reach that understanding, it was not automatically beamed into them. They clearly didn't automatically understand the parables because they asked the Lord

to "declare" or (Gk.) expound them to them. They do the same in Mt. 15:15.

13:37 *And he answered and said: He that sows the good seed is-* The present tense may suggest that the Lord was referring to the response to His preaching there and then.

*The Son of Man-* But it also refers to any preacher. If we are in Christ, then in our preaching, we are Him to this world.

13:38 *The field-* The emphasis is repeatedly on the fact that it is *His* field (:24,27,31). The Lord often speaks as if He has already overcome the world, even though the cross was still future for Him. So confident was He that the Father would bring Him through to inherit all things.

*Is the world-* In the first instance, the Jewish world.

*And the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom-* We would expect the good seed to represent God's word, as it does in the earlier parable of the sower. And in a sense, it does; but the word becomes flesh in those who truly respond to it, and therefore the Lord interprets it as individual believers. Being 'children of' something suggests that we have that thing as our family of origin, our parent. And this is how we should feel towards the things of God's Kingdom. "The Kingdom" is placed in contrast with "the wicked one". The plants are the children or offspring of whoever sowed them. The weeds were sown by the wicked one, and the good seed were sown by the Lord Jesus; but He is styled "the Kingdom" in that as King of that Kingdom, this is a legitimate title for Him. He was and is the essence of the Kingdom.

It is our attitude to God's word which is the fundamental indicator of our spirituality. The sower parable teaches this by its equation of the seed / word and the types of ground. In the next (but related) parable of the tares, "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38)- i.e. the seed / word is people. In the sower parable, we read of "He which received seed by the way side" (Mt. 13:19), connecting the believer with a type of ground which receives the seed, whilst Lk. 8:12,13 speak of the people as the seeds rather than the types of ground: "Those (seeds) by the way side are they... they on the rock are they...". Mt. 13:19 speaks of people receiving seed by the way side, but Mk. 4:15 likens their *heart* to the way side, where the seed was sown. In God's sight, a person *is* his heart or way of thinking (Prov. 23:7); and to God, a person's attitude to the word *is* his mind.

The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the

convert: "he that was sown..." (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom". Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?).... This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. "The word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24) surely means that the number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus "the word of God" is put by metonymy for 'the response to the word of God', as if the word will inevitably bring forth response.

*And the weeds are the sons of the evil one*- I have demonstrated throughout the exposition of this chapter, beginning with the parable of the sower, that the adversary to the growth of the word of Jesus in the first century was initially the Jewish system. They are here personified as 'the wicked one'. And the noun is used elsewhere in this context by the Lord; He speaks of not resisting the evil one [s.w.] when the disciples were hit on the cheek, which was distinctly a synagogue punishment for uttering heresy (Mt. 5:39). Judaism understood 'the wicked one' as a personal Satan figure, but the Lord is redefining it- as they themselves. On a wider scale, the New Testament does this masterfully, redefining the common understanding of 'Satan', the adversary, the wicked one, as a personification of you yourself. The Lord specifically defines the Jewish religious leaders as 'the wicked one' in Mt. 7:11: "If you then, being evil



[Gk. 'the wicked one']...". Earlier that same day (Mt. 13:1) the Lord had three times called them "evil ones" and an "evil generation", using the same word *poneros* (Mt. 12:34,39,45; John's Gospel likewise records the Lord calling the Jewish world "evil" in Jn. 3:19; 7:7). They were the personification of 'the wicked one' because they had 'evil' [s.w.] in their hearts (Mt. 9:4 "why do you think evil in your hearts?"); for moral 'evil' comes from the heart (Mt. 15:19). Later in this chapter He uses the word to speak of how the 'wicked ones' will be separated from the righteous at the last day (Mt. 13:49). Clearly 'the wicked ones' are people- and not supernatural beings. Note how the very same word and grammatical construction is used to describe a church member as "the wicked one" (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:2). The term does not of itself require any reference to a supernatural being.

We shouldn't seek to over-interpret every element of a parable- although such approaches often yield very fruitful lessons. Indeed, here is the difference between parables and allegories- an allegory requires every symbol to be interpreted, but parables aren't like this. It's a different genre. The focus is often on the end stress, not the details of the parable itself. And so I submit that rather do we need to seek to perceive the main issues which the Lord is seeking to get over to us, through these special features of His stories. Indeed, when the Lord *does* give interpretations of His parables, He doesn't give interpretations of every feature which formed the furniture of the parable. When He gives quite a detailed interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He doesn't comment on the significance of the servants sleeping, the barn, the *bundling* of the weeds, etc.

13:39 *The enemy that sowed them is-* The Lord uses the same word in Lk. 19:27 to describe how the Jews who refused the Gospel were the Lord's "enemies". Paul likewise uses it to speak of how the unbelieving Jews are "enemies" (Rom. 11:28).

*The Devil-* see on :38.

*The harvest-* The Lord used the same metaphor in Mt. 9:37,38 in speaking of how during that earlier part of His ministry, the harvest was ongoing and He was sending out the disciples to reap the harvest; at that time, the Lord could say that "the fields are white already to harvest" (Jn. 4:35); the disciples were sent out to harvest it (Jn. 4:38 s.w., AV "to reap", literally 'to harvest'). But now He speaks of the harvest as being at a considerable distance in time from where they were now located- "the end of the age". This could be an example of the 'now but not yet' theme, whereby the language of the Lord's return and future Kingdom is used about our present experience. But in line with my observations about the

abrupt change in the Lord's attitude to Israel at the end of chapter 12 (see on 13:1,10), it seems to me that He now considered that the time of harvest had been delayed. The parable of the sower earlier in the chapter had taught that the crop would only be reaped "when the harvest is come" (Mk. 4:29). This likewise was an implicit statement that the time of harvest in Mt. 9:37,38 had now been delayed. And one of the factors was not simply that the fruit was not ready, but that there had been insufficient labourers to harvest it (Mt. 9:38). Likewise the parable of the weeds suggests that weakness amongst the Lord's servants had led to the problem being experienced- if they had not slept, then the enemy would not have sown the weeds (Mt. 13:25). This is perhaps why towards the end of His ministry, the Lord taught that *He personally* was going to do the harvesting, albeit assisted by the Angels (Mt. 25:26 "I harvest", s.w.; AV "reap"); see on :41.

*Is the end of the world-* The Greek *aion* means 'age', and so there is no suggestion here of the destruction of planet earth. The disciples impatiently asked when this would be, using the same term (Mt. 24:3). The phrase is only used outside Matthew in Heb. 9:26, where we read that the Lord's death on the cross was "the end of the age"- and this is part of an argument that the Mosaic age has ended and should not be, as it were, lived in any longer. Paul uses a related phrase in 1 Cor. 10:11 to describe how his generation lived at a time when the ends of the ages had *already come*. Paul was writing before AD70. In neither of these references is there any suggestion that 'the end of the age' was in AD70; rather the reference is to the Lord's death on the cross, which ended the Mosaic age. The Lord defines "the end of the age" more specifically in Mt. 13:40 as "the end of *this* age"- the period in which He was then living, which was the Mosaic age. The significance of the events of AD70 appears to me to have been overstated and over interpreted by many expositors. I suggested that "the harvest" was possible in the first part of the Lord's ministry, but He delayed it because of Israel's lack of fruit and a lack of faithful harvesters. He delayed to 'the end of the age'- His death on the cross. But the harvest didn't happen then either. God's ultimate appeal, indeed the ultimate appeal of Jesus Himself, was in His death, in His body hanging upon the cross for all to see, and in His resurrection. But that appeal went unheeded by Israel. And so it seems to me that the time of harvest has again been delayed, to the final end of the age at His second coming. The great preaching commission includes the promise of the Lord's personal presence with and support to His preachers "until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20); the implication could be that the new age which the Lord had in mind would be terminated by the Gospel being preached into all the world. This naturally connects with the Lord's teaching that the Gospel "shall be preached in all the world... and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). He doesn't define "the end". The end of what? Surely "the end of the age" which He had taught about here in Mt. 13:39. But the "end" is therefore without a specific chronological terminus- because it

depends upon whether the preachers take the Gospel to all the world. Perhaps He didn't say specifically "the end of the age" in Mt. 24:14 because He realized that His death would be the end of one age, the Mosaic age, but the final end of the age would depend, to use His earlier metaphor, upon the ripening of the harvest and the zeal of the preachers to harvest it.

*And the reapers are Angels-* "The reapers" means literally 'the harvesters'. The same word has been used for how the disciples were sent to harvest in the earlier part of the Lord's ministry. The suggestion could be that this is all part of the Lord's changed program- now, it is no longer the disciples who would reap, but the Angels would. Note how the Lord's parable of labourers in the vine harvest suggests He had a chronic problem getting enough workers- the owner is desperate to get absolutely anybody to do a bit of work in that harvest, paying men a day's wage if they only worked one hour. And connect this with how the Lord prayed and asked others to pray that more labourers would be sent out to harvest (Mt. 9:38).

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

13:40 *As therefore the weeds are gathered up and burned-* These are the same weeds of the sower parable, who choke the response of people to the message of Christ, initially in the form it was preached by John the Baptist. They refer to *people*; yet the similar parable of Mt. 25:41 speaks of how the devil and his angels, his followers, are to be burnt in fire. The devil and his angels therefore refer in the first context to the individuals and collective system behind them which have discouraged response to Christ. The 'angels' of Mt. 25:41 are the weed category of people defined here in chapter 13.

*With fire, so shall it be at the end of the world-* I suggested in the above commentary on :39 that the harvest began earlier in the Lord's ministry, but He recalculated His program and delayed it. Likewise the idea of a gathering of and destruction of the wicked in "fire" is clearly taken from the Lord's earlier teaching that the fruitless trees were even then being

cut down and were about to be thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19- note the tenses), which was in turn repeating the words of John the Baptist, who predicted that in the ministry of the Jesus whom he was announcing, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). Note again the tenses- this was about to happen, the winnowing fan was already in the hand of the Lord Jesus. But now, the Lord reschedules that judgment and burning until "the end of the age", and urges the disciples to allow the weeds to grow in the field and just wait until Divine judgment comes. Again, it would be possible to understand all this as part of the nexus of 'now but not yet' language we find in the New Testament; in a sense, that fire was "already kindled" by human rejection of the message (Lk. 12:49), and we can even now drag men out of that fire (Jude 23). But the context of Matthew 13 is without doubt a change in program by the Lord, and I therefore prefer to see this change in timing as part of His rescheduling of His program. In the past, God Himself had clearly reinterpreted and rescheduled His prophetic intentions with Israel and various Gentile nations (e.g. Nineveh), and so this should not strike us as unusual. Indeed in these last days it could well be that there were various times in the 20th Century when prophetically, the stage was set for the Lord's return; but there was again a rescheduling, partly because of the pooriness of the harvest, and partly because of the reluctance of His people to go out and gather it, preferring instead to squabble amongst themselves and chase their own tails over the finer points of Biblical interpretation.

13:41 *The son of man*- A term often associated with the Lord in His role as final judge, for due to having fully had human nature, He thereby has the right to judge men (Jn. 5:27).

*Shall send forth His Angels*- Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment.

The Greek *apostello* ("send forth") is earlier used of the Lord sending forth the apostles / disciples to gather the harvest (Mt. 10:5,16,40; 20:2;

Mk. 3:14). But now the Lord is rescheduling His program, perhaps due to the weakness of the disciples in doing the work (see on :39 *The harvest*); instead of them doing the work, He would do it, at the end of the age, through His Angels. The same word is used in the preceding sower parable, of how the sickle is 'sent forth' to gather the harvest when it is ripe (Mk. 4:29). Such rescheduling is common in God's working with men. Earlier, the Father had 'sent forth' prophets at the time of harvest- but they had not been given any fruit; and therefore He sent His Son (Mk. 12:2 s.w.). The same word is used about how at "supper time", when all things of the Kingdom were "ready", servants were "sent" to bring the guests (Israel) to the table (Lk. 14:17); but they refused.

It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that offend. There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" (1 Cor. 4:9) implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probations is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react.

It seems that when Christ first comes, He sends *His* Angels to gather us (Mt. 13:41), and it is also His Angels which punish the wicked (Mt. 13:41); however it is God's Angels which reward the righteous (there seems a distinction between the Angels of God and of Christ). The Angels of Christ bring us to Him with their report on us, and He then makes the decision- those same Angels are told to arrange the destruction of their charge if unworthy, whilst the worthy are confessed to the Angels of God for glorification.

*And they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity-* Literally, 'All that offend'. The sentence continues: "And *them* which do iniquity". The reference is to *people*, those weeds who stopped others growing, in the terms of the parable of the sower. Causing stumbling to others is clearly a major sin in the Lord's eyes, and we need to give His perspective its full weight in assessing the likely impact of our dealings with others. To cause others to stumble, to offend them, leads to condemnation with a millstone around the neck; but we can do that *in this life*, be condemned for it, and yet whilst there is life- we can repent. For Peter was one such who potentially caused another (none less than the Lord) to stumble (Mt. 16:23). We note that it

is the Jewish world whom the Lord saw as full of offence / stumbling (Mt. 18:7). In our day it is those who cause division who cause others thereby to stumble (Rom. 16:17); for even the whiff of division is what is so spiritually carcinogenic to new converts and indeed to us all. Causing others to stumble from the path to the Kingdom is the leading characteristic of the condemned, according to the Lord's words in Mt. 13:41. Compare His words: "It is inevitable that offences come; but woe to that man by whom they come" with "The son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man (Judas) by whom the son of man is betrayed!". The Lord sees those who cause offence as being as bad as Judas. It's serious. We are the body of Christ. It has been truly said that Jesus has no face, no hands, no legs on this earth apart from us. Positively, this means that we beseech men and women "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV).

The Kingdom is here described by the Lord as a time when all those in the ecclesia who cause others to stumble will have been thrown away into condemnation (Mt. 13:41). Yet in some things we all offend others (James 3:2). Our places in the Kingdom will therefore be by pure grace alone; but we must respond to this wonder by *trying* as earnestly as possible to only upbuild and not to stumble our brethren. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others. Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken.

"Them that do iniquity" are not necessarily a separate category to 'all who offend'. To cause others to stumble is the essence of 'doing iniquity'. And we can make others stumble passively; for attitude and unspoken messages have huge effect upon others' spirituality. *Anomia*, "iniquity", is literally 'not-law'. Yet again the Lord is driving home the paradox- the legalistic, law-following Jews were in fact not keeping the Law. The Lord specifically states that the Pharisees are "full of iniquity" (Mt. 23:28 s.w.). And in Mt. 24:12 He again defines 'iniquity' as being damaging to others- the abounding of 'iniquity' causes "the love (*agape*) of many [to] become cold". And in our own times, this is clearly seen; legalistic attitudes cause that vital *agape* love to disappear from individuals and communities of believers.

13:42 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace*- Defined in 13:50 as *the* furnace of fire. The reality and picture of final condemnation was so clearly in the Lord's mind so often. He saw clearly where disbelief in

Him and legalistic behaviour was going to ultimately lead. To Jewish minds, the idea of being cast into a fiery furnace on a King's orders obviously recalls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being cast into such a furnace in Daniel 3. This incident was held up in militant Judaism of the time as the ultimate example for Israel in their struggle against the Gentile world. But, the Lord is saying, there will be no deliverance for you. *The furnace* begs for Biblical identification with Sodom and Egypt both being described as "the furnace" (Gen. 19:28; Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4); and yet Jerusalem was to become "the furnace" when burnt by Babylon (Ez. 22:18,20,22). The punishment of the rejected will be to be treated as this world, "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sharing Babylon's judgment of having a millstone around her neck and being cast into the sea of the world. But Judaism's strongest theme was their much vaunted separation from the Gentile world. And yet they were to be judged as the very world they hated, because in essence their legalism brought them to the same moral position as that world, and even far worse.

*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth-* A phrase so often used by the Lord (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). He evidently had the vision of the last day judgment before Him. Here, as so often, it serves well to consider in what tone of voice He spoke. His passion for the lost and urgent desire to save from condemnation lead us to wonder if He spoke these words almost in tears, knowing what was coming. The desolation of the rejected would be so deep because they would then realize the eternal future they could have had. When He spoke of blessedness for those who weep now (Lk. 6:21), the Lord surely meant 'those who weep for the wretchedness of their own spiritual failure, who recognize how worthy they are of condemnation and feel it as if it had happened'. In contrast, those who wish to appear so spiritually wonderful before men will "weep" in the last day- they will be condemned (Lk. 6:25 s.w.). Peter likewise wept in this life after denying the Lord, experiencing the condemnation of going out from the Lord into darkness with shame; but repented and will be saved.

13:43 *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father-* The second coming of Christ as Malachi's "sun of righteousness" is a clear Bible theme. At the transfiguration, a clear vision of the Kingdom age, the Lord's face shone as the sun (Mt. 17:2); and it is He personally who shall shine forth to all at His second coming (Lk. 17:24). The Lord is saying that we will then be openly revealed as Him. But "shine forth" translates *ek-lampo*; and we are to be a visible *lampo* right now, shining in a way which cannot be hid from men (Mt. 5:15,16). Again and again, we find the Lord's later teaching so often rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. Our shining before men now is related to our shining eternally in the age to come. The other clear OT

allusion is to Dan. 12:3- those who turn many to righteousness shall shine eternally. The opposite to causing others to stumble (and being condemned for it) is to teach others righteousness (and be saved). We cannot therefore be somehow in a neutral position, doing nobody any evil and yet nobody much good either. We are either making them stumble or turning them to righteousness.

Contrary to how some wish to interpret things, the Lord did understand "the Kingdom" to have a future aspect; for He speaks of how "then... in the Kingdom" the righteous will shine as the sun. The shining of the sun was to give light on earth, and this basic reason for the sun is mentioned often in the Bible. In some way, we shall eternally give light to others; and this aspect of the Kingdom life must begin in us now. Even in the future Kingdom, the basis of our witness to the world will be that we are in Christ. Thus Micah's description of how "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass" (Mic. 5:7) is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth". The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

*He who has ears, let him hear-* The Lord has earlier in this chapter told the disciples that His audiences generally did not have ears to hear; but the disciples do. This would therefore be an invitation to the disciples specifically to use the potential for understanding which they had. They were to continue shining; for the context of this whole long day's teaching (see on 13:1) was that they were weary in their witness because of opposition and lack of response.

13:44 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field-* This mini parable, and the next one about the man seeking to buy pearls, presents things to us from the perspective of the Lord Jesus. He had just taught that "The field is the world" (:38). Who bought / redeemed the world? The Lord Jesus. It is "His field" (13:27,31). When did the Lord "buy" (this is the word usually translated "redeem") the world? In His death on the cross, which cost Him all that He had. We note that the parable puts the focus on the joy of the obtaining rather than all that was given up and lost. Surely Paul alludes here when he writes that we are "bought [s.w.] with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and should act and feel accordingly. Why did the Lord do this? Because within "the world" there



was "treasure"- us, those who are finally His special personal possession. Here we see neatly explained the difference between the Lord's redemption of the whole world, "all men", and yet personal salvation only being experienced by a few hidden within the world, His "treasure". Rev. 5:9 may have this in mind when speaking of how the saved were "redeemed [s.w. "bought"] by [Christ's] blood out of every tribe, language, people and nation". But to save *us* He had to redeem the world, purchase the field. Yet we are 'hidden' in the world; not that our faith is to be invisible, but insofar as we are a minority. This again was in the context of encouraging the disciples that the poor response to their message in the Jewish world was nothing to be unduly discouraged by. The world- and perhaps the Lord had in view the *Jewish* world for whom Christ primarily died (Gal. 4:4,5)- was to be bought by Christ in His death, but only a few would respond and be 'found' as His treasure. Again, we find "treasure" mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. The principle that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21) applied to the Lord- His heart is totally with us. And there is to be a mutuality between a man and his Lord; if we are our Lord's treasure, then we are not to lay up treasure on earth, but rather have Him as *our* treasure (Mt. 6:19,20) just as we are *His* treasure. Paul seems to play around with this idea of 'hid treasure', for he uses the same Greek words twice. But each time, slightly differently. He speaks of how we the light of God's glory has *shone* in our hearts, using the very same word as in Mt. 13:43 about the righteous shining as the sun in the Kingdom; but he then says that this "treasure" is hidden in the "earthen vessels" of our own bodies (2 Cor. 4:6,7). Just as we as a community are 'hidden' in the soil of the field / the world, so actually the real essence of our relationship with Christ is likewise hidden within all the dust of our own personal humanity. This is not to say that we can relax and justify worldly living as being merely 'the flesh'. But it is a comfort that the Bible teaching here recognizes that our real spiritual essence is indeed 'hidden' in the dust and ashes of all we have to do as we go about life in the flesh in this present world. Again, as it were playing with the ideas, Paul speaks of how "In Christ are *hid* all the *treasures* of wisdom" (Col. 2:3). There is no very obvious semantic connection with the Lord's teaching about us being His treasure hid in this world. So perhaps this is one of Paul's many unconscious allusions to the Gospels, whereby he had the words so deeply in his consciousness that they influenced his thinking and writing both consciously and unconsciously. For more examples of this, see my discussion of the issue in *Bible Lives*.

*Which a man found*- In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had put the emphasis upon *us* seeking and finding the way to life (Mt. 7:7,8,14; 16:25). Yet He is also searching for us; He speaks of how He 'found' faith in a Gentile man, and had been seeking to find such faith in Israel (Mt. 8:10 s.w.). The Lord told parables of Himself as the good shepherd seeking and *finding* the lost (Lk. 15; Mt. 18:13 s.w.), of Him seeking and

*finding* workers for His work (Mt 20:6), wanting to *find* fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19; Lk. 13:7), *finding* people to come to the marriage supper (Mt. 22:9,10). This is why when the searching Lord finds the man searching for Him, there is a spark of mutuality which makes all the Angels of the cosmos rejoice. Thus the same words are used about the early disciples 'finding' Christ, and Him 'finding' them (Jn. 1:41,43). We may justifiably speak of our search for God, for Jesus, for "the truth", but the reality is that the Father and Son were in search of *us*. The Hebrew prophets likewise present God as in search of man, and not simply awaiting our approach to Him if we wish to make it, with passive emotionless indifference. The Lord is saying that His death on the cross would not be simply to die for the world; it was because He had 'found' the treasure of believers. But who did He find? A small group of mixed young men, one time prostitutes and a few Gentiles. That was enough. His finding of *them* motivated Him to die for the world that He might save *them*. In this we have a window onto the apparent 'wastage' of God; that the whole world was redeemed just for the sake of a few. Some argue for universal salvation on this basis- that why should Christ have died to save just a few. But the parable is clear- it was for joy at having found the minority, which were to Him a priceless treasure, He bought the entire field- just to get them. This is the waste and abandon that comes with love, and only a utilitarian, pragmatic, loveless legalist would question its authenticity, credibility or necessity. So the Lord is encouraging His dispirited disciples that He has found them, and He rejoices over them with love and devotion; and they have found Him. That the rest of the world haven't responded cannot take anything away from this experience.

*And hid*- It seems that He hides the treasure, although it could mean that He hides Himself. Hiding the treasure gives the impression of an intensely personal relationship between Him and the treasure which He can't share with others. Or if He hides Himself for a period before going to buy the field, we likewise get the impression of a man overcome with an intense sense of in-loveness which only He can understand. This is how He felt about the disciples. It could be in the context of 13:10-15 (see notes there) that He means that He is hiding Himself from the world by telling them parables from now on; and instead will focus on giving His all to get the disciples and the few with "ears to hear" as His special treasure. He is thus putting a far more positive slant on His realization of how Israel generally have rejected Him, only a minority have accepted Him, and Israel had not accepted her king, nor John's ministry, and so Yahweh's glory was not going to come to Zion as envisaged. The Lord is saying that He has so fallen in love with the remnant who *had* responded, that He felt a joy so great that He would give all He had to redeem the whole world in order to save them. And this is in keeping with His teaching in the previous parables- that the wonder of the few good seeds who respond

amazingly, of the wheat that grows so well despite the weeds, is such that all the loss, rejection and casualty is worth it.

If we really want to make encounters and conversations work, we need to consider who we're talking with. The Lord's parables of Mt. 13:44-49 make it clear that people have different motivations when they first encounter our preaching. Some are merely fish caught in the Gospel net and compelled to come in; others are as the merchant man who is searching for good pearls, who sells all he has to get that pearl and just have it, gazing at it with admiration and appreciation each day; others are as the man who finds something of value in a field, maybe he sees there's some precious raw material he can exploit there, and so he buys the field in order to get some benefit for himself. The strange (to my ears) comment in Mt. 13:44 that the man 'hides' his discovery appears to contradict the reality that we should joyfully share our discovery of Christ with others. Perhaps the picture is being painted of a man with all the wrong motivations, who comes to the treasure from the viewpoint of 'What can I selfishly get out of this' (it may be in our age... a desire for welfare support, a partner, a social club...). And yet all the same he has come to the treasure, been called to it, allowed to find it... that is perhaps the point. All these types of people have differing motivations, and need to be treated differently by us.

The man who finds treasure [or, perhaps, a deposit of precious metal in a field which could be mined] *hides the fact* (Mt. 13:44), and sells all he has to buy that field. The hiding of the discovery speaks to me of the utterly personal knowledge between a man and his Lord which we enter into when we 'find' the treasure of the Kingdom, the pearl of great price. For any man or woman who hears the Lord's words, He and His Father will enter in and make their abode with them (Jn. 14:23). Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He had made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there unto thee [you singular]" (Ex. 29:42).

*And in his joy*- This is the joy of the in-love Jesus, so excited at having found the remnant, the treasure in the field of the unbelieving world, so excited He hides Himself for a while, or hides the treasure from others' view. One of the motives behind His endurance of the cross (which was how the field of the world was bought / redeemed) was "joy". Not joy in the sense of giggling and happy-clappy; but "joy" in the sense that He could speak of "My joy" just hours before beginning the ordeal (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). The parables of Luke 15 describe the Lord's joy as being in

relation to finding the lost, and this was what had happened in the Lord's 'finding' of the disciples and responsive remnant.

*He went and sold all that he had and bought that field-* These very words are used by the Lord in teaching that the rich ruler should sell all that he has- and give to the poor (Lk. 18:22). The Lord wasn't asking the man to do anything that He Himself was not doing. His giving to the poor was in giving redemption to *us*. And the Lord was a "cheerful giver"; He gave up all "with joy" for us; and in the first instance, to die for that small group of mixed up men and women who tagged around with Him. "Sells *all*" might suggest He was wealthy; seeing that the Lord was not a wealthy man, we wonder what this 'wealth' was which He gave up, recalling Paul's comment that He who was rich became poor for our sakes on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). What did He 'give up' or 'sell'? What was His real loss? Perhaps it was that as God's Son He could personally have been saved without the cross, but He did all He did in order to save us- and thus set the ultimate example of overcoming selfishness.

The man who sells all to buy the field containing the treasure (Mt. 13:44)- what does he *do* with his newly found wealth? The question, of course, bids us reflect what we have done with the wealth of the Gospel which we have found. These open-ended parables with unanswered questions are left hanging because the point is, it all depends upon our response as to how they end in our cases! The parables are thus not just cosy stories. They challenge our response. Our tidy images of reality are shattered by the open endings and elements of unreality in the parables. Our minds are arrested and teased by them, as they lead us to self-realization, self-knowledge, at times even healthy self-condemnation. The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work...? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially... And yet we are left to reflect upon this.

13:45 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a man that is a merchant-* A traveller, for that is the essence of the Greek word translated "merchant". He was going around seeking- just as Jesus was in search of believing hearts. Paul saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. Paul took comfort, real comfort, from the way he found himself in situations similar to those of his Lord.

*Seeking-* Elsewhere the Lord speaks of Himself as *seeking* (s.w.) the lost- the lost coin, sheep and son (Lk. 15; 19:10 s.w.). Those rather unfortunate people were beautiful pearls to the Lord, and that is how He sees the irritating self-righteous ones, the alcoholics, the druggies, the lazy, the socially awkward... whom He so seeks as His precious treasure. We are to seek Him and His Kingdom and His Father (Mt. 6:33; 7:7,8). And yet He seeks us. Hence there is some kind of 'flash' when we meet, a flash which is felt throughout the cosmos, in which *all* the Angels of Heaven rejoice. The Lord was seeking fruit on the Jewish fig tree (Lk. 13:6 s.w.) and found none; but just one response was as it were a "pearl" for the Lord. Thus the Lord is presented as 'seeking' individuals who respond, often from very bad life situations. John puts this in more spiritual terms in recording how the Lord 'seeks' God's glory (Jn. 7:18), alluding to how Moses sought the same glory in more visible terms. The repentance of that unlikely minority is the very essence of Yahweh's glory.

*Fine pearls-* Perhaps the tension is between His seeking for pearls in the plural, but being so thrilled to find just one (:46), for which he was prepared to give all. This would be in the spirit of the preceding parables; that the beauty of the response of a minority is such that it makes the failure to redeem the others seem less hard. This merchant didn't find the many pearls he had intended to find; but he was so thrilled to find just one beautiful one that he would give all he had just to get it, and presumably, to end his business life and just sit and admire the pearl. For the question 'And what did he do next?' seems to require that kind of answer. For what he did wasn't the wise thing to do in business terms. It is the element of unreality in the little story. Note the use of pearls as representative of believers in Rev. 21:21; and see the note on "pearls" under Mt. 7:6.

13:46 *And having found one-* He was thrilled with just one, even though

He began seeking pearls in the plural (:45). The combination of 'seeking' and 'finding' beyond question is to be connected with the Lord's teaching about His seeking and finding of wayward individuals (Lk. 15 and see on :45; the same Greek word for "find" is used a significant seven times in the parables of Lk. 15). This strange little story could be making the simple point that if the Lord saved only one person, He would be thrilled by that. This is all directly in the context of this chapter, in which the Lord is discussing the general lack of response to Him, and comforting His flagging preachers in the disillusion which arises from little response to the Gospel. The Lord had taught that we should seek and be assured that we will find, in spiritual terms. All of His teaching He spoke to Himself, and He was the word of His own teaching made flesh. *His* understanding of seeking with the assurance of finding was that if we seek for persons to respond, we will find. Even if only one person. This surely should be our daily prayer- that we will be lead to meet the right people, that our seeking for others will result in at least one being found.

*Of great price-* As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" (using a related Greek word) and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden'

in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

*He went and sold all that he had*- The very same phrase is used by the Lord in speaking of how the hopelessly indebted man was sold "and all that he had" (Mt. 18:26). The picture is of absolute and total destitution from selling every imaginable possession. This story does indeed have a strange twist to it. A rich man so loved a pearl which he saw that he became a pauper by selling absolutely *all* he had- his business, his transport, his expensive clothes- in order to buy a pearl. And, finishing off the story, we are to surely imagine him living the rest of his life in some humble dwelling amongst the poor of this world, daily admiring the beauty of his pearl, totally unrealized by the world around him, caring for it as the most important thing in his whole existence, realizing that in it was the epitome of absolutely all his being: his love, his wealth, his future, his joy of life day by day. And this is what the Lord did from His deep in-loveness with persons who only had potential to become pearls. He was and is in love with the idea of who we may become.

*And bought it*- The Greek is elsewhere translated "redeem". This speaks of our redemption by the love and self-sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. The emphasis is perhaps on *autos*, "it". He had searched for many pearls, but was thrilled with giving His all for just one single one.

13:47 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net*- It's so easy to have a negative spirit. Are people sincere? Do they just get baptized in the hope of material help? Can we cope with so many converts? Won't many of them leave? What does this person really believe about doctrine? Can you believe them? Isn't this or that the thin end of the wedge? This isn't the spirit of the Lord's parable about the drag net fishermen (note, not fishing with a line for a special, prize catch- but concentrating on saving as many as possible, of whatever quality, Mt. 13:47). In drag net fishing, one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy. God's fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the

harvest was plenteous during the Lord's ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). 1 Cor. 12:21 gives something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done.

*That was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind-* We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also *gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. See on 13:48.

"Of every kind" here is *genos*. Does *genos* here suggest that every genetic type of human being will have been called to the Gospel by the time the fishing is done? The word can of course refer to a nation or kindred. The suggestion is perhaps that once persons of every nation / kindred have been gathered into the net, then the night of fishing is over and the judgment (and therefore the Lord's return) can happen. Hence our extension of the Gospel net to every *genos* will affect the coming of the Lord. Mt. 24:14 is actually explicit about this; indeed, it is a repeated teaching of the Lord (although only implicit at times) that He will come only once we have extended the net of the Gospel to every nation.

13:48 *When it was full-* Again we see the teaching that the drawing of the net to shore, the beginning of judgment, the return of Christ- is only once we have achieved certain objectives in preaching. Every *genos*, every nation or kindred, must have its representatives in the net. It must be "full" in the sense that there is a specific number of persons who must be saved. Paul specifically states this and uses the same word translated "full" in Rom. 11:25: "Until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles be



come in". "Until the times [s.w. "opportunity"] of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24) probably has the same reference- for the same word is used for "fulfilled" as for "full". The opportunity of the Gentiles to be saved will come to fullness. And then shall the end come.

*Men drew it to shore-* It cannot be incident that the only other usage of the word for "shore" in the synoptics is earlier in this chapter, in 13:1. The crowds stood on the shore, whilst the Lord taught them. In one sense, judgment is yet to come; in another, as we hear His word, we are judged. They on the shore were as it were at judgment day. See on :47 *gathered*.

*Sat down-* Perhaps alluding to how a judgment session 'sits'. But it cannot be accidental that the same word is used of how the Lord was "sitting" as He taught the people (the word is used twice- Mt. 13:1,2). As the people were on the shore, it was as if they were before Him in judgment; He sat there as if He were sitting in judgment before them. See on :47 *gathered*.

*And sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad-* An allusion to Jewish ideas that the Gentiles were those 'cast away' and that they were the 'good ones'. But the whole idea of the faithful coming out of the sea, with all its associations with the Gentile world, suggests that the Lord foresaw how many of the good fish would in fact be Gentiles and not Jews. The image of 'casting away' surely shows the Lord's attitude to the rejected. There is no pleasure in their destruction, but rather simply getting rid of them and focusing upon the "good" category. In a Jewish context, hearers would assume that the fish who were cast away were the ritually unclean fish of Lev. 11:10-12 which could not be eaten. The Jewish leaders who made others stumble are thus declared unclean, and fit only to at best be cast back into the sea, the Gentile world.

13:49 *So shall it be in the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous-* This work is actually done by the Angels, but the Lord uses the same word for "sever" in Mt. 25:32 for how He personally will separate the sheep from the goats. We can fairly assume that His personal judgment of us will to some extent be delegated to the Angels. If indeed we each have guardian Angels in this life, then their involvement in our judgment would be appropriate. The word is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for how the orthodox Jews would sever the true Christians from their fellowship (Lk. 6:22), and the word is likewise used in the sense of religious fellowship in Gal. 2:12, where Peter "separated himself" from table fellowship with Gentile Christians when the Jewish brethren were present. And this was how the word was used within the Judaism of the time- what we might call 'to disfellowship' in a religious sense. The sum picture of these usages is

surely that we are *not* to operate any fellowship policy which pretends to sever the clean from the unclean- because this is not for us to do, and whenever it was practiced (by the Jews and by Peter)- they got it wrong. The faithful were the ones wrongly separated from.

13:50 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth-* See on 13:42.

13:51 *Have you understood all these things?-* The word is used repeatedly in the context concerning how the Jewish world do not understand, because they do not want to understand, whilst the Lord considers that the disciples have ears to hear and have indeed understood (Mt. 13:13,14,15,19,23). But the Lord wanted to be sure; He wanted to get the disciples to consider the question. *He* thought they understood, but He wanted *them* to know that they understand; He wanted them to share His view of them. Just as in Romans 6, Paul wants his readers to "consider" themselves as "in Christ" just as God sees them.

*They said to him: Yes-* AV "Yes, Lord". A little phrase we find a significant seven times on the lips of those who encountered Jesus and to whom He asked questions regarding their belief in and commitment to Him (Mt. 9:28; 15:27 Gk.; Mk. 7:28; Jn. 11:27; 21:15,16). I wonder whether it was the early equivalent of the later questioning of a baptismal candidate as to whether they believe, to which they effectively answer "Yes, Lord". In this case, the question to the candidate is ultimately asked by the Lord Himself, albeit through the medium of the baptizer: 'Do you understand and believe in Me?'.  
  
13:52- see on 9:9.

*And he said to them: Therefore every scribe-* All of the other occurrences of the word in the Gospels refer to the Jewish scribes who spiritually lorded it over the masses of secular Jewish people. The Lord is inviting the disciples, who were largely secular men and women, to believe that if they did indeed 'understand' the things which the scribes did not- then *they* were the new scribes, the new religious leaders and interpreters of the Law, in the new Israel which the Lord was creating based around Him rather than Moses. The force of "every scribe" would be to assure the disciples that every single one of them was included in this new vision of leadership.

*Who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven-* The Greek *matheteuo* specifically means 'to disciple', and thereby the Lord is making clear the connection He sees between being a scribe (a teacher) and being a disciple (learner). Perhaps 'Matthew' saw the play on his own name. We cannot simply learn of Him; the nature of the understanding we receive is such that we must share it with others by teaching. The

Lord uses the same word in telling the disciples to go out and make disciples (Mt. 28:19). We are to seek to make men learners, not give them a set of theological truth which they are to grip on to in an unthinking manner. We are to lead them to the feet of Jesus and to a position wherein they accept *Him* as their teacher. Distributing New Testaments and persuading people to accept the message seems to me a classic way in which we can do this in our generation. And we wonder whether Matthew, *Matthaios*, specifically records this saying of the Lord which none of the other Gospel writers do exactly because he perceived the connection between his own name and the concept of discipleship. For the words are related. Remember that his Jewish name was Levi (Mk. 2:14), but Matthew seems to call himself 'Matthew', as if after his conversion, his very name and public image before men was now to be that of 'disciple'. Discipleship was a major concept for him.

Instruction in the things of the Kingdom in the context of Matthew 13 surely means to be instructed through correctly understanding the parables of the Kingdom which the chapter is full of. Because the disciples understood them, they were thereby instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We note that the things of the Kingdom which were explained by the parables were not simply details of the future Kingdom of God to be established on earth. They taught about the Lord Jesus and His ways amongst men- right now. It's quite possible that "the things of the Kingdom" and "the [things of the] name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12) are not two separate groups of theological teachings but rather are the two phrases put in parallel as referring to the same things. For the Lord Jesus was and is the essence of His Kingdom and the living exemplification of God's dominion / king-dom over men.

*Is like a man who is a householder-* The "householder", the head of the household, is a term used repeatedly by the Lord with reference to Himself personally; He considered the disciples to be the members of the new household over which He was head. Only a few verses earlier He has likened Himself to such a "householder", using the same word (Mt. 13:27; also in Mt. 10:25; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25; 14:21). Without any doubt, the Lord used this term about Himself. So He is saying that if they understood the essence of the parables of the Kingdom, they were not only as scribes, teachers, but like unto the head of the house Himself- the Lord Jesus personally. This is the specific teaching of Mt. 10:25: "It is enough for the disciple that he be[come] as his master". The Lord's teaching of others was not an end in itself; to know the mind of Christ and thus become as the teacher is a real possibility. The height of the calling and possibility is breath-taking. Correct 'understanding' of the Lord's teaching could not be given a higher importance and end result; although as I have tried to explain, 'understanding' is not the same as grasping academic theory. By its nature, it involves action. "A man, a householder" perhaps emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus in order

to demonstrate that rising up to His status is not at all out of the question for us who are human.

*Who brings out-* This was what the Lord was doing there and then in His teaching, bringing forth things of the new covenant and the old. And He is saying that if they are instructed in the things of the Kingdom, then they can do the same. The idea of bringing forth things out of a treasure must surely be connected with the Lord's usage of the very same words earlier that same day (13:1) in His teaching that "a good man out of the good *treasure* of his heart *brings forth* good things" (Mt. 12:35). The heart is also called the "treasure" in Mt. 6:21. In the context of 12:35, the Lord is referring to Himself as the "good man", who was doing good things- despite being accused of doing 'evil things' by the Jewish leaders. The ultimate 'treasure' of the Lord at this time was His heart, His mind. And thus the invitation to be "like" the Lord becomes even more intimate and meaningful. We are being invited here to have the mind of Christ. He has already explained that the learner [disciple] is to be the scribe [the teacher]. If we have the mind of Christ, then just as He brought forth things new and old from the treasure of that mind / heart, then we shall do likewise. Yet we note that the householder, the Lord Jesus, brings forth these things out of *His* treasure. And He has just spoken of how He finds His treasure- us- in the field of the world (Mt. 13:44 s.w.). The idea is that if the disciples understood, then He would bring forth out of *them* "things new and old" with which to impress the watching world. Again- the learners [disciples] were to be used by Him as scribes [teachers]. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3 s.w.), but He reveals these things to the world through His followers.

*From his treasure-* Every one who is taught the Gospel will naturally *bring forth out of his treasure* (his innermost heart- Lk. 6:45) things new and old- his new knowledge, plus his old things of the old covenant (Mt. 13:52 cp. Song 7:13). The Lord said that a scribe (one who knows well the Old Testament scriptures) who also knows the Gospel of the Kingdom is like a man who brings out of "his treasure" things new and old (Mt. 13:52). But Jesus had just defined the "treasure" as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44). If we make that 'treasure' *our* personal treasure, the most valuable thing in our whole being, then out of the basic Gospel that is in our hearts we will bring forth things "new and old". Our treasure is where our heart is (Mt. 6:21). Yet the treasure is the basic Gospel, i.e., that Gospel lodged in our deepest hearts. The old things of basic certainties; and the new things relating to our increasing appreciation of what they really mean, these will come out of us in our lives and feeling and being.

*Things new and old-* The Lord's previous use of these terms in Mt. 9:17 was in the context of the things of the old and new covenants. Matthew's Gospel was clearly aimed at Jews, and his point in recording this was

surely to assure them that not everything from the "old" way had been rejected.

13:53 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there-* This seems to serve as the end point of the longest day recorded in the Lord's ministry apart from the crucifixion (see on 13:1). The idea is that when He had finished the teaching, He departed. We meet the same idea and Greek word for "finished" in Mt. 11:1 (also Mt. 19:1; 26:1- "When He had finished [s.w.] commanding His twelve disciples, He departed". We get the impression that He was teaching according to a program; when He had finished delivering what He intended, it was time to go. And He went. This impression is given several times in His ministry. The question is whether God directly revealed this to Him, or whether He Himself on His initiative designed a program of teaching and ensured that He kept to it. My sense is the latter, which explains the way that earlier in this chapter He appears to take the decision to change from one teaching program to another.

13:54 *And coming into his hometown he taught them in-* The fact Jesus had a *patria* is an eloquent essay in His humanity. His physical origins were earthly; He didn't literally come down from Heaven, having been a pre-existent being there.

*Their synagogue-* The Mosaic feasts are described in the OT as "feasts of the Lord", but in John as "the feast of the Jews". We have the same idea here in the reference to the synagogues as *theirs*. The Jews had hijacked God's religion and turned it into their own, just as "the table of the Lord" has been turned effectively into 'our table' by so many who profess to be mere guests at that table. Matthew repeatedly speaks of *their* synagogue (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9), and also of the 'synagogues of the hypocrites' (Mt. 6:2,5; 23:6,34)- not the synagogues of God.

*So much so that they were astonished-* The Gospels emphasize how people were astonished at the Lord's *doctrine / teaching* (the same word is used in Mt. 7:28; 19:25; 22:33; Lk. 2:48; 4:32). There was something arrestingly different in the Lord's message, quite apart from the astonishing miracles He performed. We note how on hearing Paul's teaching, men were "astonished [s.w.] at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Our preaching and teaching is the Lord Jesus as it were personally teaching others; for we are Him to this world. And the response to our teaching is therefore comparable to the response made to the Lord's. The phrase "wisdom and mighty works" in Greek seems to directly connect the wisdom [the teaching] and the miracles [the works].

Mk. 6:2 is more explicit in the connection: "What wisdom is this... that such might works are worked?". The miracles were therefore directly connected to His teaching. Any 'doing good' we may do in society is to be likewise underpinned by our teaching of the Gospel, and is to be a consciously connected exemplification of it. As in the Lord's ministry, there is to be a clearly visible connection between the teaching of the Gospel, and the good works.

*And said: From where has this man received this wisdom and these mighty works?*- The idea may have been: 'From God, or from Satan?'. But see on :56 *whence*. They couldn't 'get it' that a man could come to such things through private study of God's word and personal relationship with God.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. I wish to labour the point- that to my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-worldliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30,

the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

13:55 *Is this not the carpenter's son-* "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him" (Mk. 6:3). Mark records that they said "the carpenter" (Mk. 6:3). In full, therefore, they likely said that Jesus was "carpenter, son of a carpenter". Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed 'father' on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasants who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety". If

this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

*Is not his mother called Mary-* It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. ""Jesus, son of Mary" has a pejorative sense... [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name". The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother. According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The



reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

*And his brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?*

- The Greek *a-delphos* literally means 'connected to the [same] womb'. Whilst it is true to say that the term is used for close relatives as well as blood brothers, the idea is still present of very physical natural connection. If Mary had no other children (as the Catholics claim) or the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed (as most Protestants claim) or only passed through Mary's body as a pre-existent Angel (the Watchtower's version of pre-existence), then surely another Greek word would have been used apart from *adelphos*. This whole passage speaks eloquently and deeply of the Lord's humanity and cannot be easily explained away by Trinitarians or believers in a personal pre-existence of Christ.

This makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

13:56 *And his sisters, are they not all with us?*- The intention of using this particular phrase was probably to hint that the Lord's sisters were 'with' the local population in their cynicism about Jesus. *Pros* definitely can carry the idea of 'on our side', 'pro'.

*From where then did this man get all these things?*- As in :54

"Whence...". We note their sense that "wisdom" had to be imparted from outside a person. Their perception was that there were bodies of wisdom that could be passed on to disciples / learners. But they had never noted Jesus for studying in any particular rabbinic school, nor following any sage. He was a secular, working man- not a religious freak. Therefore they found it hard to grasp from where He had got His understanding. The idea that a man could study God's word, have a personal relationship with God and learn direct from God was very strange to them. They considered that truth and wisdom had to be passed on from man to man, not discovered personally. And that attitude is alive and well today. 'What

Bible School did you finish?' becomes more important than an individual's relationship with the Lord and direct learning from Him.

13:57 *And they were offended by him*- He was a stumbling block to Israel generally, and particularly to His own neighbours. When He taught terrible judgment for those who make others stumble, He must have spoken with acute awareness that He too would make others stumble. *En autos*, "in / by Him", grammatically means that He was the instrumentality of their stumbling. The point is that He did not do this intentionally, and the fault for the stumbling was with the stumbler. In some things we all make some stumble, James comments (James 3:2). When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. If He indeed was God, a Divine comet which hit this world for 33 years and sped off again, then the depth of His humanity was nothing less than a cruel deception.

*But Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour*- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris* ("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem

as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on :58.

*Except in his hometown and in his own house [hold]-* We have yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity, in that He talked of His own family of origin, which included His blood brothers and sisters of the previous verses. But He has just spoken of Himself as the 'householder', the head of the family / house (see on 13:27,52). Clearly enough, He is contrasting His spiritual family with His natural family. That group of mixed up, doubting and misunderstanding men and women who followed Him- had replaced His family of origin as His real family.

13:58 *And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief-* He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

## CHAPTER 14

14:1 *At that time Herod the tetrarch-* Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

*Heard the report concerning Jesus-* A play on words: *akouo... akoe*. The Lord has recently used the same word play in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear [same two Greek words] and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

14:2 *And said to his servants: This is John the Baptist!-* The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

*He has risen from the dead-* The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

*And therefore do these powers work in him-* The Greek could more likely mean 'the powers', a reference to the popular beliefs in various 'powers' rather than one God. Jn. 10:41 is plain that "John did no miracle", and yet such was the evident spirituality of John that the theory quickly arose that the miracles of Jesus were really being done by John *redivivus*.

14:3 *For Herod had arrested John and bound him-* 'Laid hands on'. The Greek means just that, but it is possibly mistranslated in Jn. 20:23: "Whosoever sins you retain ['lay hands on'], they are retained". The idea is that we can in some cases obtain forgiveness for others' sins; but we must beware lest we lay hands on their sin and commit it ourselves. This is exactly the teaching of Jude- to reclaim others who are in sin, whilst being careful not to become contaminated by their sins rubbing off on us. Herod and his servants (:2) had laid hold on John, bound him, and cast him into prison. These are all terms used elsewhere about how the Lord Jesus will do exactly the same in condemning people at the last day. His servants (Mt. 22:13) shall lay hold of them (Rev. 20:2), bind them (Mt. 22:13) and cast them into prison (condemnation- Mt. 18:30). And these terms are also used about what happened to the Lord Jesus in His death: laid hold on by servants at a king's command (s.w. Mt. 26:4,48,50,57) bound (Jn. 18:12), to prison (Lk. 22:33). Herod is therefore being set up here as an anti-Christ, a fake Christ. And the Lord's death is again described in similar terms to that of John, whose ministry He continued. The way disciples came seeking the body is another point of connection. As events unfolded with the Lord's arrest and binding, He would've surely perceived the connection with John. And would've likewise seen how He was as it were going through the process of condemnation, being treated as a sinner, although He was not one. This means that He has even more so the right to condemn men, because in essence He knows the condemnation process. And it gives Him the ability to identify with those who in this life are currently under condemnation for their sins, and seek to lead them out of that position.

*And put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife-* Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus.

14:4 *For John had said to him: It is not lawful for you to have her-* The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

14:5 *And though he wanted to put him to death-* The same Greek words used about Herod wanting to kill Jesus in Lk. 13:31.

*He feared the people-* Another similarity with the plans of the Jewish leadership to kill Jesus, and being frustrated by “the crowd” because they counted him as a prophet (the very same words are used in Mt. 21:46); see on 14:3 *laid hold on*. These similarities between the deaths of John and Jesus draw a parallel between the despised Gentile Herod (regarding John and the Jewish leadership (regarding Jesus). Yet again, highly religious, legalistic people who have rejected the spirit of Jesus are equated with the very worst of the Gentiles.

*Because they held him to be a prophet-* As made explicit in chapters 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God’s word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another.

A manipulative woman arranging the death of a prophet through a weak willed ruler recalls Jezebel in 1 Kings 21; and she was a protagonist of Elijah, upon whom John the Baptist was clearly modelled.

14:7 *Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask-* This continues a theme we find in the book of Daniel- powerful rulers making a rash oath and feeling forced to carry it out because of shame and the pressure of courtiers. The contrast with God, the ultimate ruler, is not that He is not so rash and not manipulated by His subjects. Rather the contrast is surely that Yahweh *does* change, He has no fear of shame or being shamed; such is His grace that when He sees a repentant Nineveh, He *does* change His original intention. The fear of shame and pressure from the eyes of others is what leads so many leaders into behaviour and positions which are against their better judgment. There is no shame in change. Indeed, change is part of real spirituality.

Mk. 6:23 adds “Up to half my kingdom”. This is alluding to the king’s promise to Esther in Esther 5:23, but it seems an allusion with no context or specific meaning, for Herodias was not at all Esther.

14:8 *And she, being encouraged by her mother, said: Give me here-* The emphasis on “here” is strange. She wanted the head brought in before everyone. This rather strongly contradicts Josephus’ claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, a long way from Herod’s court.

*The head of John the Baptist on a platter-* The feast would have been full of plates with various dishes. The idea was that the head would be offered for eating. The implication is that the head would’ve been brought immediately, which suggests that John was imprisoned nearby. This again

rules out Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, far from Herod's palace in Tiberias. The offering of a head on a platter is full of allusion to pagan ritual. Herod, as one who claimed to be an observant Jew, was now forced to choose- between being a serious Jew, following Divine principle, or a pagan. He was forced to decide- and chose wrongly. He had earlier wanted to kill John, and now his evil thought was being brought to action, in a powerful outworking of the Lord's principle that the thought is indeed counted as the action. We ask, naturally, why it all had to be as it was. John would've carefully reflected upon the life of Elijah, and John would've seen the parallel between Jezebel and the manipulative women behind his own death- and taken comfort from that in his last moments: that he was in fact the Elijah prophet.

14:9 *And the king was grieved-* And yet we learnt in :5 that Herod had wanted to kill John because John had criticized Herod's lifestyle. We may feel flushes of anger against a person, but if it were to come to actually carrying out what we imagine- we would likely regret it.

*But for the sake of his oaths and of his dinner guests, he commanded it to be given-* A *horkos* was not merely a verbal promise; although he was not ethnically Jewish, Herod claimed to be a practicing Jew, and an 'oath' would've been something like 'May I be eternally condemned at the last day if I do not...'. Peter used the same oaths in denying the Lord. And so we see the torture of this unhappy man- asking himself to be condemned if he didn't do something which surely warrants eternal condemnation. The only way out was to *change*, to re-pent, to re-think; to recognize that he was not going to get out of this without a deep repentance.

14:10 *He sent word and had John beheaded in the prison-* The implication is that the court party was held close to the prison. This would have been most unlikely if Josephus is correct in claiming that John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress of Machaerus. Herod's court was in Tiberias. See on 14:3. The implication of the language is that Herod took full responsibility for this- as if he personally beheaded John. And he realized this later in his conscience: "John whom I beheaded... John have I beheaded" (Mk. 6:16; Lk. 9:9).

14:11 *And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother-* The Greek for "brought" is used only four times in Matthew, twice in this verse, and three times in this chapter. The Lord uses the word of how He wished the loaves and fishes to be "brought" to Him for His Messianic banquet (Mt. 14:18). It may be that Herod's banquet is being set up in contrast to that of the Lord Jesus described later in the chapter.

14:12 *And his disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him-* The phrase is only used elsewhere about Joseph taking up the body of the

Lord Jesus after His death (Jn. 19:31,38). And doing the same with it-burying it. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist, and his fine action here was surely motivated by the memory of those brave brethren who 'took up the body' of John. The example of devotion shown by believers can inspire later believers in different contexts. The power of example is far greater than we can ever imagine.

*And they went and told Jesus-* The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

14:13 *Now when Jesus heard this-* Therefore the feeding of the five thousand came some time before the parables of chapter 13, and is not in chronological sequence; it is part of the flashback to John's death. Perhaps the intention is to present the Lord's banquet as the antithesis of Herod's banquet which led to John's execution. We see here yet another insight into the Lord's humanity. Knowledge of John's death wasn't beamed into the Lord's mind; He didn't have the total omniscience of God. For He was not God Himself, but the human Son of God. He had to be informed of some things before He knew them. And He reacts in a very human way- He wants to go away on His own with His closest friends to reflect upon the death of a relative and co-worker. But again, in a typically human way, His plan to have time out relatively alone was thwarted- despite His intention to get away alone, or at least just with His close friends, the crowds heard He had been spotted heading out to an uninhabited area, and followed Him there by foot.

*He withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone-* Lk. 9:10 says that it was near to Bethsaida. This indicates the literal accuracy of the Gospels, because Bethsaida was just outside the boundary of Herod's jurisdiction, and it would be understandable that after his execution of John, the disciples and Jesus might want to be outside of his territory.

*But when the crowds heard, they followed him on foot from the cities-* This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people-



healing and feeding them (see on :22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

The Lord in Jn. 6 comments upon their efforts. The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own. The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. In typical style, He responded: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

14:14 *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd-* We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush, noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to

retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because Mk. 6:33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The 'coming forth' would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

*And he had compassion on them and healed their sick-* Mark adds the reason- "because they were as sheep having no shepherd" (Mk. 6:34). His pity was therefore for their spiritual state rather than their material need. This being 'moved with compassion' is a major characteristic of the Lord which the Gospel writers noticed (s.w. Mt. 9:36; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 in Matthew alone- see too Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Greek speaks of a literal movement within the ribcage, as if the Lord's actual body was moved by the compassion He felt. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and at the day of judgment- and forever. This same basic pity is part of Him, as it is of His Father- and it must be with us too. Several times when we read of the Lord showing such pity, it is in the context of others *not* doing so. In this instance, the disciples don't want to feed the hungry people; and likewise in Mt. 15:32. In Mt. 18:27 the compassion of the Lord to His indebted servant was not reciprocated by that servant; the Samaritan of the parable had compassion when the priest and Levite did not (Lk. 10:33); the Father had compassion on the prodigal son when the older brother did not (Lk. 15:20). Such compassion is therefore an act of the will, rather than a streak some are born with. We can shut up our "bowels of compassion" against human need (1 Jn. 3:17), we have to "put on... bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12).

14:15 *And when evening had come, the disciples came to him, saying-* The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

*This place is deserted and the day is now over-* AV "The time is now past". "Past" translates *parerchomai*; the Lord uses a similar word in replying that "they need not *depart*"- *aperchomai*. This word choice not

only aided memorization of the Gospel record. The disciples considered that time had more than gone, that it was inevitable that the Lord must now send the crowd away, and should've done earlier. But He is saying that actually He is not limited by time, the time didn't have to be "past"; because He was not limited by food either, and could feed them.

*Send the crowds away-* Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50).

*That they may go into the villages and buy for themselves food-* Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

*14:16 But Jesus said to them: They need not go away-* See on :15 *the time is now past*. They ask the Lord to send the multitude away (Mk. 6:36), whereas Jesus later taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

*You give them something to eat-* According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them...", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!"

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have ye? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "we" could get food from to feed them

(Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall we find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

14:17 *And they say to him: We have here only five loaves and two fishes-* Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's

extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

14:18 *And he said: Bring them here to me-* The word "here" would appear to be redundant in terms of the meaning if the Lord simply meant 'OK, give them to Me'. He wanted to focus the disciples upon the need for His personal presence and involvement with whatever we are willing to give Him. The loaves and fishes had to be brought *here*, to Him, and the miracle would proceed only once they were in His hands.

14:19 *And he commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fishes and-* The zoom of Matthew's camera is now very close up. We are invited to play 'Bible television' with the language and re-live it all again.

*Looking up to Heaven-* This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1.

*He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples and the disciples to the crowds-* Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of

bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

14:20 *And they all ate*- See the special section about the openness of Jesus.

*And were filled*- Perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full".

*And they collected what was left over*- Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("what was left") that it filled twelve baskets. Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

*Of the broken pieces*- Why this feature in both the feeding miracles? In Mt. 16:9,10, the Lord asks the disciples to recall how many baskets they took up after each miracle- in order to help them to show faith in another time of need. The details of the Lord's past actions with us need to be remembered- because they are designed to fortify us in future tests of faith. We sense that all along, the Lord was working with the disciples (just as He does with us) according to a specific program, tailor made for them, designed to lead them from one spiritual level to another whilst reinforcing the points learnt.

*Twelve baskets*- A different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here in 14:20 is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas.

14:21 *And they that ate, besides women and children, were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded in Mt. 15. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

*Beside women and children*- AV. The Greek for "beside" can carry the sense of being separate from physically, as if the men were seated in a slightly different place to the women and children- which is just how a Middle Eastern feeding scheme would be run to this day.

14:22 *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the sea, while he dismissed the crowds*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on :13 *on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter



redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

The Lord told them to sail to the other side of the lake, but said that they would be 'going before / ahead of Him'. The Greek could suggest that His words could have been understood as meaning that they would sail to that place, He would send the crowds away, and then go behind them- i.e., walking on the water. Of course, they could have understood 'going before Him' as meaning that He would join them there at a later stage. But as they sailed away, they must have debated whatever He meant. Because if He meant that He would join them there at a later stage, however was He going to walk there around the lake, whilst so desperately wanting the crowds to go away from Him? Remember He had no personal boat, and they were in a deserted location. Whichever exit He took, whichever way He walked around the lake, He would have the very people with Him whom He was so earnestly trying to avoid. Again, as in asking *them* to *give* and not *buy* food for the crowd, the Lord was stretching them. He wanted them to reflect upon His words, and if they had done, then logically they were intended to come to the conclusion that He was implying that He would walk over the water to them. And if they were Old Testament minded, they would have known the passages which spoke of Yahweh walking upon the water and the waves of the sea (Ps. 29:3,10; 77:19; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:15). When, therefore, the waves arose and they seemed likely to drown, they were intended to figure that He would come to them, manifesting Yahweh, walking upon the waves of the sea- to save them. Whether any of them did actually get that far in perception and faith seems doubtful. But I believe we can discern how the Lord was seeking to lead them and educate their faith. The tragedy is that so many of His detailed plans for us are likewise wasted because of our lack of spiritual perception, and allowing the immediacy of issues to obscure the clear light of His leadership through life.

However, Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

14:23 *And after he had dismissed the crowds-* The phrase is repeated as in :22, probably in recognition of the miracle performed in managing to send these crowds away empty handed, with no visible Messianic Kingdom. At least, the power of personality in the Lord was very great to be able to get Himself out of this situation.

*He went up the mountain by himself to pray-* The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent both the crowd and the disciples away was because He knew He simply had to be alone with God. And there can be times like this for us too. No matter how stupid we might appear in secular life, there can be a time when you just have to go and sit in the toilet for 5 minutes in your lunch break and pray. The Lord uses the term in speaking of how we are each given something very personal which we are to use in His service- *kata idios*, 'alone by ourselves', or as in AV "according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15). Each sheep is called by the Lord *kata idios*, AV "by name" (Jn. 10:3). And therefore the judgment of each believer will be *kata idios*, AV "according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). There is a very wide range of translations of this phrase. But the idea is that we were each individually called by the Lord and given different callings, and our judgment will be according to this. This is not to say that there is anything other than one basic faith, Gospel, Hope, Lord etc. But in many denominations and fellowships the idea is pushed that each believer must adopt an identical, detailed statement of understanding and calling. Yet in practice, the frames of our calling and the Lord's hopes for our responses vary significantly between individuals.

The fact the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father is one of the profoundest and logically strongest evidences that He was not God in any Trinitarian sense. The basic facts of the Gospel records were simply not given their full weight by the unBiblical politicians who first created the Trinity doctrine. The liberal theologian Hal Taussig observes that other theologians haven't written much about Jesus at prayer- for this very reason, that of itself it contradicts Trinitarian dogma: "Because Jesus at prayer confuses theological categories of "divine" and "human" (is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?), theologians have rarely been interested in Jesus at prayer" (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 7). Taussig's question "is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?" is ultimately impossible for Trinitarian apologists to answer.

*When evening came, he was there alone-* This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough*. Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

14:24 *But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them-* People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

14:25 *And in the fourth watch of the night-* Between three and six a.m. This indicates how long they had been struggling. It is the same 'watch' of

the night in which God used the sea to destroy the Egyptians and thus save His people (Ex. 14:20).

*He came to them*- The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night. Mk. 6:48 adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away.

Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

*Walking upon the sea*- The Greek *peripateo* means to walk *around* (from whence 'peripatetic'), and is used about our walk of life, career, habits etc. The impression is of the Lord walking around at ease upon the waves which were so frightening to the disciples. Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them" (Mk. 6:48). I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective.

14:26 *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were disturbed, saying*- The word is specifically used in literature of troubled water (and in Jn. 5:4,7). The state of the water was as the state of their minds. Hence the power of the image of the Lord Jesus walking at ease upon that troubled water.

*It is a ghost!*- The Greek *phantasma* could refer to a ghost, in which cases we see how under pressure, disciples return quickly to their previous belief systems. But the word could equally refer to an Angel. Their fear, and that fear being met with assurance *not* to fear, would then be typical of human reaction whenever Angels appear to them. The Lord's assurance that "It is I" would then be yet another evidence that the Lord Jesus was not an Angel (as the Watchtower wrongly claim).

*And they cried out for fear*- These Greek words are only used together elsewhere in Rom. 8:15, where Paul says that we do not cry out in fear,

but rather cry "Abba, Father". This would again present the disciples at this point as condemned and far from the right relationship with the Father and Son which they should've had. The point of the incident is that they were saved out of that, by grace.

*14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: Be of good cheer!*- They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today.

*It is I-* The *ego eimi* construction could be understood as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. They were to understand Him as the fulfilment of the Old Testament language of Yahweh walking upon the raging sea. "It is I" could be a quotation of the Divine Name from Is. 41:4; 43:10. It is used in that context of not fearing the power of Assyria / Babylon. The Lord wanted the disciples to perceive that the huge waves were to be met with the same faith that the faithful remnant had in the face of the opposition of superpowers against Israel. However, it needs to be asked how else the Lord could have said "It's Me!". There are alternatives, but this is the phrase used. And yet on the other hand, the use of *ego eimi* is not necessarily an allusion to the Divine Name, because it is found on the lips of men in 2 Sam. 2:19 LXX; Mt. 26:22,25; Jn. 1:20,27; 9:8 and Acts 22:3 (see too Lk. 1:18,19). The question is: Did the Lord really expect the disciples to perceive such Scriptural allusions in the midst of panic and crisis? And if so, what was the point? For surely they were not in the midst of a quiet Bible class evening. The point likely was and is that in the heat of crisis, the spiritually minded will unconsciously perceive spiritual nudges from the Father and Son- and thus be strengthened to endure and decide rightly in the heat of crisis.

*Be not afraid-* A phrase so often on the Lord's lips to the disciples. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). Despite His high demands on the one hand, on the other, He was and is ever assuring His people of His total and saving love for them. Peter uses the same phrase when he in his turn urges us to not be afraid nor 'troubled'- the very word used about the troubled disciples on the water that night (1 Pet. 3:14; Mt. 14:26). The Lord likewise leads each of us through situations in order that we might then strengthen others in those situations. Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 1:4-8 would seem to go as far as saying that in fact *all* we experience is in order that we might later give strength to others in similar situations. And this enables us, in broad terms at least, to attach meaning to event in a way which the unbeliever simply cannot.

The Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns* are full of reference to the true Israel being saved from drowning in the sea of Gentile nations (1 QH 3:6,12-18; 6:22-25; 7:4,5). The *Testament of Naphtali* 6:1-10 speaks of "the ship of Jacob" almost sinking in a storm, but Jacob himself walks on the water to save her. Clearly the Lord has these popular images in mind, and is recasting them- Jesus is the founder of the new Israel as Jacob was of the old, his 12 disciples are as the 12 sons of Jacob. And the faithful Israel in the boat are in fact not very faithful, they are secular, non-religious very human Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

How exactly was Peter motivated to walk on water? We want to know, because it's the motivation that we so urgently need. We read that the Lord "passed by". This is the very language used in the Old Testament concerning theophanies, i.e. those times when God 'passed by' before His people, accompanied by earthquake, rain, wind, fire etc. These ideas all recur here in the account of Jesus 'passing by' before the fearful disciples. In Mt. 14:27 the Lord tells them: "It is I". This was a reference to the "I am" of the Yahweh Name. Peter knew that it was Yahweh who walks upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and so he asks that if Jesus is really "I am", God manifest in flesh, then He will bid Peter also walk on the water. It was Yahweh whose way was *upon* the sea (Ps. 77:19 Heb.; Ps. 29:3). Indeed, the whole incident on the lake is almost prophesied in Ps. 107. The people are hungry in desolate places (:4,5), they are filled by Yahweh with good things, as the Lord Jesus fed the multitude (:9); some go down to the sea in ships (:23); a storm arises, sent from God (:25); they are troubled and cry out (:27,28); and then Yahweh delivers them, bringing them to their desired haven (:28-30). Peter, I think, perceived all this. He saw that this Man from Nazareth was indeed manifesting Yahweh, and he is asking that he too will be a part of God's manifestation; he perceived that what was true of Jesus really could be true for us. If Jesus, manifesting Yahweh, walked upon the sea, then so could Peter. When Peter asks Jesus to "bid me come unto thee", the Greek word translated "come" is also translated "to accompany". He wanted to walk with Jesus on the water. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. This of itself explains how the fact Jesus did what God did [e.g. walk on waves] doesn't mean He is "very God of very gods"- for Peter realized that he too could have a part in that manifestation. If Jesus was a man of our nature and yet God manifest, then, Peter reasoned, I too can manifest the Father. And the same is true for us, today. The reality of God's manifestation in the human Jesus should inspire us too to leave our comfort zones and enter the adventure of living Godly- living like God- in this present world. Peter "came down" out of the ship to go walking on water (Mt. 14:29). He is described as "coming down" [s.w.] in Acts 10:21, where he came down from the roof top and said: "Behold I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?". "I am he" uses the same two Greek

words as in Mt. 14:27, when the Lord says "It is I". Three Greek words occurring together like this is surely not incidental. Peter recalls when he 'came down' out of the ship- and now, he really is Christ-manifest. He speaks as Jesus did; and further, "I am he whom ye seek" and "wherefore [are ye] come" are the very phrases of Jesus in Gethsemane. The record is showing us that consciously or subconsciously, Peter is Christ-manifest now. The words and person of Jesus have all had such impact upon him that now for him, "to live is Christ". To 'come down' and manifest Him is what life is all about; Peter's coming down out of the ship is a cameo of a life lived like this, time and again manifesting Him, overcoming the fear, the cowardice of our brethren, the distractions of the life and world which surrounds us...to walk out unto Him.

14:28 *And Peter answered, and said: Lord, if it is you-* I suggested on Mt. 14:22 that the Lord had hinted that He would come to them walking on the water. Jn. 6:17 comments that the disciples were in the boat in the sea "and Jesus was not come to them"- suggesting He had promised to do so and they should have been looking for Him, walking on the water to them. Perhaps Peter had grasped this, and therefore reasoned that what the Lord could do, all in Him could likewise potentially be empowered to do. Another angle on Peter's question is that He realized that only the Lord would ask such a thing of His followers. No ghost, satan, Angel or other imagined entity would actually invite a disciple of Jesus to do such a thing. To challenge us to the very limit of human faith is indeed the Lord's unique and distinguishing characteristic. Yet another slant on Peter's words is provided by the consideration that the three Greek words translated "If it is you" are always used elsewhere in the Gospels about whether Jesus is indeed the Christ ("tell us *if it is you* the Christ", Mt. 26:63; Lk. 23:37,39; Jn. 1:25; 10:24). The miraculous providing of manna had been sure evidence that Jesus was indeed Messiah, the Christ. But they still doubted. But on the other hand, Peter was willing to be persuaded again, and it is to his huge credit that he obeyed the Lord's invitation to get out of the boat and walk on the water.

Mark's account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

*Command me-* Peter's unswerving respect for his Lord's word is seen as he looked out of that sinking ship on Galilee, battling with his own humanity as he weighed up in his own mind whether to be spiritually ambitious enough to get down into that raging water. He only felt able to

take such a leap of faith if he had Christ's word behind him. So he yelled out above the noise of the wind: "If it be thou, *bid me come* unto thee" (Mt. 14:28). In other words: 'With your word behind me, I'll have a go; without it, I won't'. How much spiritual ambition is there within us? Or do we huddle in the sides of the ship, or desperately expend our own strength to bring about our salvation, without even seeking the word of Christ? Peter's request to be bidden walk on the water was (typically) both full of faith and yet also tinged by an element of unspirituality. His words as recorded here ("If it is you, bid me come unto you on the water") appear strikingly similar to the LXX of 2 Kings 5:13, where a spiritually limited Naaman is rebuked for expecting to be asked to do something "demanding"- also connected with going into water!

*To come to you-* The same words are used in describing how Peter obediently 'came unto' Jesus on the water (:29). This phrase is used multiple times in the Gospels for people coming to Jesus. The crowd had 'come unto Jesus' (Jn. 6:5) and the disciples had clearly not been happy about that, and wished to send them away. The crisis on the lake was not so much the Lord's punishment of the disciples for that attitude, but rather His attempt to teach them a better attitude (see on 14:30 *sink*). Now Peter realizes the need to come to Jesus and the grace of His 'coming to' them on the lake. This is why he asks to 'come unto' Jesus, rather than simply to walk on water. Never again would He despise those who wished to come to Jesus; Peter was asking permission to do what the crowd had done, and which he had despised them for doing- namely, coming to Jesus. The Lord's discourse afterwards emphasized the need to 'come to Him' and how all who were of God would come to Him and never be turned away (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's desire to come to Him made Peter typical of all disciples. The same challenge, to leave the boat and walk on water, echoes down to us all. Peter as so many others had in a sense already 'come unto' Jesus but now he perceived that he was to come to Him again, going through a level of re-conversion.

*By walking on the water-* The Lord walked "on the sea" (:25) but Peter asks to walk "on the water". Different words are used. I would be open to suggestion as to the significance, if any, of this difference.

In the account of Peter walking on water, we have a cameo of what it means to walk out of our comfort zone. Peter asked the man on the water to invite him to walk on the water; for Peter knew that only Jesus would be that demanding. He's a demanding Lord for us too. Peter didn't have to get out of the boat. But He realized that following the Lord Jesus involves this stepping out of our comfort zone. For us, it may be making a radical donation of our money, our time, a donation that really hurts, that is significant, not a giving that is well within our comfort zone. Or it may be a radical forgiveness, a radical refusal to answer slander, to not fight back, to day after day after day live amidst provocation. This may be our



walking out on the water. Picture Peter as he stood by the side of the boat, wind blowing his hair back and forth, rain driving into his forehead, his brethren muttering "You're absolutely *crazy*, there's no need for this...we're only going to have to save you ourselves". He must have felt so alone. There was no human encouragement. Probably his thoughts went back to the wife and kids he had left behind on the other side of the lake, in that humble home in that quaint fishing village. But his focus was upon one Man, the same Lord and Master whom we look out to from the sides of our ships. The sheer bravery of Peter's walking on water stands out. Was he afraid to walk on water? Of course he was. But he focused all his faith into the word of Jesus: "Come!". He overcame his fear to the point that he climbed over the sides of the boat. Picture him there, with one leg over the side and on the water, and the other still in the boat. He couldn't stay like that. He had to go only forward. The only thing that kept him back was fear. And it is basically *fear* which holds us within our comfort zones. Fear, fear, fear...that's all it is. To know 'truth' in its experiential sense should free us from fear; for fear is related to the unknown. God appeals to Israel: "Of whom has thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied?" (Is. 57:11). Fear leads to our abdicating from the responsibility of making choices; and this is why humanity has such a dearth of truly creative imagination, and why genuinely new ideas are so rare. But the true life in Christ is a life of repeatedly overcoming that fear, the fear which paralyzes, which holds you back. Let the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:13 be our heroine; she had totally nothing, just some flour; and she was hunting around in a parched land for two sticks with which to make a fire to bake it and eat her last meal, then to lie down in the dust of death. She must have been literally on her last legs. But then god through Elijah asked her to give Him even what terribly little she had. And Elijah encourages the frightened, wide-eyed woman: "Fear not!". And she went forward in faith and gave him her very last hope of life. Living at such an animal level would have made her very self-centred; but she stepped out of it in response to the Lord's challenge. Fear is, to my mind, the greatest single barrier to faith and true spirituality. It is fear alone which stops us from keeping commitments, from not entering into covenant relationship as deeply as we are bidden. This is why people shy away from covenant relationships, be they with the Father through baptism, or to another person through marriage or having children. Fear holds us back. We fear even ourselves, our own spiritual capacity, our standing before the Father. Our inner anxieties, our unconscious inner conflicts as we stand with Peter on the edge of the boat, contemplating what walking on water concretely meant, often lead us to criticize others or to speak and act with a hypocritical bravado. Yet true faith asks us to risk. As a psychotherapist friend of mine once jotted to me: "We are asked to risk all we believe ourselves to be, we may find we're not what we thought ourselves to be, our constructs of the self will be pushed to the limit and we're afraid of what we may find of ourselves, that we may not be what we imagine ourselves to be in the construct upon which we

have built our theories of the self. Obeying rules, staying within the construct, is much easier, much safer. We may have never tested ourselves in the real world. To launch off into the unknown, into a future that contains or may contain unknown risk, where our worst fears are realised, the greatest fear may be that we are failures... most of us, it would seem, don't have enough faith in there even being a God to risk even getting out of the boat let alone walking on the water". Don't underestimate the power of fear when it comes to walking on water. Nor let us fail to appreciate that the fearful are listed alongside the unrepentant whores and idolaters who shall remain outside the city of God (Rev. 21:8). Our thirst for love, our fear of death and spiritual failure before a perfect God, the fear of displeasing or misunderstanding the infinite God...these fears should all be taken away for the man or woman who is truly clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet they have a way of persisting in our weakness of faith. And so there develops a conflict between our true conscience and the false suggestions of our faithless fears. All this can lead to neurotic behaviour and a repression of conscience. The only way out of this is to boldly step forward as Peter did, albeit bricking ourselves as we do so.

14:29 *And he said, Come-* The Lord's appeal to all men to 'come to Him' invites us to see ourselves as Peter, the prototype for all who would 'come unto Jesus'. Peter was asking to do as the Lord was doing- walking on water. Our coming to the Lord is therefore not merely an intellectual assent to a set of theology, however good that theology may be. The Lord defines coming to Him in practice as coming to the sick and imprisoned and thereby coming unto Him (Mt. 25:36).

*And Peter got out of the boat-* The idea of "go out" is 'to descend'. The boat was not that much above the water, but the point is being made that Peter 'came down' from it. The same word is used about how the disciples 'came down' to the sea as they boarded the boat (Jn. 6:16). And Peter is to descend yet lower when he sinks into the water. The impression is that the whole incident was intended to bring Peter down- and from thence to be raised up by the Lord's grace. The Lord's following discourse about Himself as the bread of life has many verbal connections with the incident on the lake which preceded it, as well as the feeding of the 5000 which had preceded that. Thus He emphasizes in the discourse the need to 'come' to Him, just as Peter had done. He also uses this same word for 'come down' to speak of how He too 'came down' as the bread of God (Jn. 6:33,38,41,42,50,51,58). It cannot be coincidental that this word has been used of the disciples 'coming down' into the boat (Jn. 6:16) and of Peter 'coming down' from the boat into the water (Mt. 14:29). Surely the message is that in Peter's 'coming down', and indeed in the necessary 'coming down' in humiliation of all disciples- the Lord is with us and has passed through the same. The idea of 'coming down' suggests both humility, and also, in the context, manifesting God, being sent from God.

But this very process means it is done in humility. The Lord developed the same theme with Peter when he later sees the sheet of unclean animals 'coming down' to him, and then he is commanded to 'come down' to the Gentiles waiting for him below (Acts 10:11,20,21).

*And walked upon the water to go to Jesus-* The very words in Mk. 6:48 used about the Lord Jesus walking on the water to go to the disciples. Peter wanted to replicate exactly what his Lord was doing; and he knew that if it really was his Lord, then this was possible. As He is the light of the world, so are we. If we in Him, we too are Abraham's singular seed; all that is true of Him becomes true of us. And if He can walk on water, then given the appropriate motive, time and context, we too can do so.

At Peter's initial conversion, he had also been in his ship on the sea of Galilee, and had seen Jesus walking [s.w.] near the sea shore (Mt. 4:18). He left his boat, and responded to the call to follow Jesus. Now it's the same basic scene, but this time Jesus is walking not "by" the sea but "on" the sea. The similarity is perhaps to teach Peter that the Lord's real call may be repeated throughout our lives; the initial response may be relatively painless, but through the storms of life, the Lord teaches us as He did Peter how radical is the response required. To follow Him meant not merely walking away from the cares of this life, the boat, the nets, the fishing...but if Jesus walks on water, then those who follow Him must do likewise. And Peter, to his immense credit, perceived this; he saw his Lord walking on water as an imperative that demanded he do likewise. For him, Jesus wasn't just a Saviour on whose back he could ride to salvation in God's Kingdom. Yes, He is of course our saviour wherein we sink and drown in our weaknesses. But He is more than that; He is an inspiring example. His offer to walk on water wasn't motivated, therefore, by any form of inquisitiveness or daredevilery; the offer to walk on the water was rooted in his grasp that if this is where the Lord walks, then axiomatically, we must do likewise. When the Lord walked "by" the sea, Peter had come out of the boat and followed Him; now the Lord walks "on" the sea, Peter perceives that he must follow Him even there. For "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6- the same word is used as in the record of Peter's walking on water with Jesus, making it possible that John is upholding Peter's example for us all). For many, our conversions were relatively painless; indeed, for those raised in the faith, it may have been easier to get baptized than to walk away from it. But the essentially radical invitation to follow Jesus is repeated in later life; and the validity of our earlier choice to follow is put to the test by our later response to the same invitation.

14:30 *But when he saw-* His focus wandered from Jesus, for one can only 'see' the wind by seeing what it blows. Perhaps his focus moved from the face of Jesus to His clothes, or maybe he even looked back to the sails of

the ship being blown, or down to the waves beneath him. Our focus on the Lord's face likewise so easily wanders.

*The wind was strong-* The Greek can strictly mean 'stronger, mightier', with the sense of comparison to something else- as in "one *mightier* than I" (Mt. 3:11), "a *stronger* than he comes" (Lk. 11:22). The wind seemed stronger to Peter- than what? Presumably- stronger than the power of Jesus. Maybe Paul had this in mind when he used the word in 1 Cor. 1:25; 10:22: "The weakness of God is *stronger* than men... [men] are not *stronger* than Him". Even though the Lord was Himself standing at ease upon those waves. Peter later uses a related word to speak of the strength or might which God gives in order to fulfil our ministry (1 Pet. 4:11). He had learnt the lesson- that nothing equals God's power, nothing is really stronger than Him. And yet any lack of faith in Him is effectively saying that there are winds or crises stronger than Him.

*He was afraid-* The record presents this as direct disobedience to the Lord's command "Be *not* afraid" (14:27). The Gospel records are transcripts of the preaching of the apostles, and they seem to love to emphasize their own weakness, especially that of Peter, their early leader, the rock upon whom the church was initially built. Such recognition of weakness should likewise stud our own presentations of the Gospel.

*And beginning to sink-* The same word is only used elsewhere in Mt. 18:6 where we read that those who turn away the little ones, as Peter and the other disciples had wished to do by wanting to send the crowd away, will be condemned by being cast into the sea where they will drown (s.w. "sink"). It wasn't that the Lord was punishing Peter for his attitude, but rather helping him realize that this was what condemnation would feel like for turning little ones away. We noted on 14:28 *come unto you* that the Lord's subsequent discourse when they reached land pointed out that their turning away of the crowd was the very opposite of His refusal to turn away any who come to Him. We must pause and reflect whether in any way we are turning the little ones away; or whether we are lending support to any church policy which results in that. Peter's experience of what condemnation would feel like surely empowered him never to do this in any way. Especially through supporting exclusions of the little ones from the Lord's table we run the risk of making the same mistake- with eternal consequences. We really must think through the implications of our positions, whatever it costs us in this brief life.

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to "sink" into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question 'Who will be the greatest?', that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. "sink"] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this

with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don't swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were "tossed" or 'tormented' (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be "tormented" in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter's salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: "Save me!". Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to "save [themselves]" by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

*He cried out, saying-* The use of the two words highlights the significance of his words.

*Lord, save me!*- Even in a moment of crisis, Peter's mind was in God's word; for here he is quoting from the urgent cry of the drowning man which is recorded in Ps. 69:1,2,14,15. This is where our subconscious absorption of God's word is so valuable. In the split second of crisis, the word comes to mind. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by

the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

Note that Peter cried out "*Lord, save me!*" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren (Acts 15:11).

14:31 *And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand-* Peter again reflects his experience of personal salvation in his witness to others- for he likewise stretched out his hand to the lame man, and again with "immediate" effect, as here on the lake that night (Acts 3:7 s.w.). Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to

reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

*And took hold of him and said to him-* The writer to the Hebrews twice uses the same Greek word. First, in describing how the Lord Jesus 'caught hold' of all the seed of Abraham in His saving work (Heb. 2:16), and again in speaking of how God "took" [s.w. "caught"] Israel "by the hand" and redeemed them from Egypt (Heb. 8:9). Peter is thus presented as everyman in Christ. He was saved out of condemnation, drowning in the waters for turning away the little ones. There is surely in each of us, looking back upon our lives, the sense that we were in His grip, and still are; He took hold of us, to save us. And there is a mutuality in this- for we too desperately catch hold of the hope of the Kingdom (s.w. 1 Tim. 6:12,19).

*O you of little faith-* A word used five times by the Lord, four of them recorded in Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31;16:8). It's as if Matthew loved to emphasize in his preaching how weak their faith had been.

*Why-* The *eis tis* construction means far more than "why?". The simple sense of "why?" could have been expressed in one word. This little phrase is elsewhere translated "to what purpose?" (Mt. 26:8; Acts 19:3). The idea would then be: 'You know you need saving. To what purpose is doubt? Will doubt save you? No. So, seeing that lack of faith will not save you, and you need saving, then totally believe in My ability to save you'.

*Did you doubt?-* A form of the Greek for 'twice' or 'double'. James surely has the incident in mind when he warns not to be a double minded man, wavering in faith "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6,8). He is holding up Peter- leader of the early church to whom he was writing- as the example of how *not* to be. This is no evidence of any tension between James and Peter; rather is it typical of what Peter himself does, in drawing attention to past weakness and development from that weakness as the sign of real spiritual strength and the basis for legitimate respect. James is clearly telling his readers not to be like Peter. It is easy for our reaction against Catholic extremism to lead us to underestimate the high status of Peter in the early church. Here was James, also a respected elder, telling the flock to take a snapshot of their great leader Peter in his moment of weakness on the lake- and not be like him! Leaders of worldly organizations have a way of telling the flock that all their fellow leaders are as spotless as they are. But this wasn't the case in the early church. It was Peter's very humanity which was and is his inspiration.

14:32 *And when they boarded the boat-* Jesus and Peter. The "they" is contrasted with the "they" who were still in the ship (:33). The word picture is of Jesus and Peter united very closely.

*The wind ceased-* Gk. 'grew weary', as if there was a brief period over which the raging decreased.

John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee (Jn. 6:21). Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation, can we properly 'receive' Him?

*14:33 And they that were in the boat-* They are not simply called 'the disciples', perhaps because as Matthew retold the Gospel, he felt that at that time they were not worthy of the name. The desire to send away the crowd hungry was such a major failure. And it makes sense that in the process of retelling the Gospel to audiences (of which the Gospel records are transcripts), Matthew would emphasize this- that the Lord turned nobody away, and neither would the apostles who were now retelling the story- because they had learnt how wrong that would be.

*Worshipped Him, saying-* Let's not miss the significance of the fact they 'came' to Him. The same word has been used of Peter 'coming' to the Lord on the water (:28,29), of the crowd 'coming' to Jesus immediately prior to their departure in the boat (Jn. 6:5), and the Lord will go on straight away to teach the need to 'come' to Him (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's example inspired them all. They too realized that the crowd had not been wrong to 'come to Jesus', and that they had been wrong to want to send them away (Mt. 14:15); for they had been saved exactly because Jesus does not send away any who come to Him (Jn. 6:37). Those who were in the ship came and worshipped Him after He came into the ship- suggesting that they kept themselves at some distance from Him and Peter, marvelling at Him, realizing their unworthiness, and therefore cowering around the sides of the boat.

*Of a truth you are the Son of God-* The implication is that they had doubted it previously. The miracle of feeding 5000 people surely had elicited faith in them that He was God's Son. But when He appeared silent to their needs when about to die on the lake, they started to lose that faith- just as we can, when the Lord doesn't act as we think He should or when He appears completely silent. The title they use is "Son of God" when they could just as easily have called Him 'Messiah' or some other equivalent term. Because He acted as God, whose voice is greater than stormy winds (Ps. 148:8) and who walks upon the waves of the sea- they therefore concluded and intuitively felt that He must be God's Son. And yet when Trinitarians perceive that Jesus did things which the Father is spoken of as exclusively doing, they conclude that 'Jesus is God'. But that



was never the conclusion of the disciples- their conclusion and immediate, intuitive feeling was that therefore this Son of man must be also Son of God. And that is indeed the Biblical position. The only other person who cried out "Truly [this was] the Son of God" was the Centurion at the cross (Mt. 27:54- the same three Greek words are used). Our experience of the cross likewise leads us to the same position as the disciples upon the lake. And it seems likely that this exclamation that 'I truly believe Jesus is God's Son' was one of the declarations made by baptismal candidates in the early church (as it was in Acts 8:37). In this case, Matthew and the apostles would have been holding up their own conversion experiences as a pattern for other believers, just as Paul saw his conversion as a pattern for all who would later believe (1 Tim. 1:16).

"You are the Son of God" was the emotional confession of a moment, because Mk. 6:52 says that their hearts were hard and they didn't "understand". In this we see the fickleness of what can appear to be faith; we can with sincerity say one thing, when actually our hearts very soon go to a position of unbelief or at least, far lower faith than in the heat of the glorious moments when faith is rewarded. The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness. After having been awed to this confession by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

After recording the feeding of the 5000, Luke records that the Lord asked the disciples again about who He was, and Peter replied that He was the "Christ of God". The Lord was seeking to develop and consolidate their confession of faith. Thus in Lk. 9:18, the Lord Jesus asks His men: "Whom say the people that I am?". Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things...and be slain, and be raised...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me... For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer...". I submit

that "Tell no man..." is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

14:34 *And when they had crossed over, they came*- Perhaps the emphasis is upon *they*. The Lord and His disciples were now united again.

*To land at Gennesaret*- This is on the northwest shore of Galilee. Mk. 6:45 says that they departed on their journey aiming for Bethsaida, on the northeast shore. The Lord had upbraided Bethsaida in Mt. 11:21. Perhaps the disciples had insisted on pressing ahead with giving those people another chance, whereas that was not the Lord's will. Such providential overruling of our preaching is a common occurrence. One wonders whether the changed journey plan involved not returning to the Jews but going to a more Gentile area. This would have been in line with the Lord's own change of course in His ministry, turning away from the Jewish masses towards the tiny minority who accepted Him and towards the Gentiles (see on 13:10).

14:35 *And when the men of that place recognised him*- This would suggest that they didn't know His face. Their faith was therefore based around the word about Christ which they had heard. Matthew may well have this in mind as an example to the audiences he is preaching too, who were likewise hearing about Christ and being asked to show practical faith in Him, even though they had not seen Him. We in our generation are of course in the same situation.

*They sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick-* These "men" were not disciples. But they 'sent out'- Gk. *apostello*. Although they were not the apostles, they acted as apostles, purely on the basis of what they had heard about Jesus, as they had not personally seen Him before. And they sent out the message to "all", inviting people to come to Jesus and 'leading' them to Him (AV "brought them to Jesus"). This is all very much the language and concepts of the great commission. That commission was to be obeyed by those who had not personally met the Lord, whose faith was based upon the word of others; and they were to do the work of apostles, going to "all" and urging people to come to Jesus. These "men" of Gennesaret are being set up as a model of obedience to the great commission, and are therefore a particular role model for our generation. Mark seems to put the emphasis at this point on the Lord going out into all the region. Mk. 6:56 speaks of His preaching campaign as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society. So the Lord went out to people in those hamlets (Mk.), and yet people from those hamlets came to Him (Mt.). This is how the Lord operates to this day. God is in search of man, and yet man is in search of God- hence the cosmic joy in the 'touch' of meeting.

"Sick", Gk. *kakos* can mean a very wide range of illness, including spiritually.

14:36 *And they pleaded with him that they might only touch-* The Greek *parakleo* means literally 'to call near' and in this case we can understand it literally. They felt that they had to touch Him in order to be healed (unlike the cases of faith in His spoken word which the Lord so commends). Therefore, needing that physical presence, it makes sense to understand *parakleo* here as meaning to literally call near. They called Him near so that they might touch the hem of His garment.

*The fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well-* The Law of Moses commanded the Jews to make "borders" of blue upon their clothes (Num. 15:38), presumably to remind them of Heaven in daily life. But the same Hebrew word is found in Mal. 4:2, speaking of how the Messianic "sun of righteousness" was to arise with "healing in His hems". Their seeking for healing in the hem of the Lord's clothes was therefore a sign that they accepted Him as Messiah. But the 'arising' of Malachi 4 is the time of the Kingdom established on earth, with Judah freed from her oppressors. The time for Mal. 4:2 was not then. They thought it was. And yet the Lord still goes along with their misunderstanding, by granting them healing from His hems. This may have been simply from compassion of the moment towards human need; or it could be that the Lord was happy to reward faith when He saw it,

even if it was based upon somewhat wrong interpretation of the Father's word.

## CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Then there came to Jesus Pharisees and scribes-* Matthew records many people 'coming to Jesus'. A related word is found in Jn. 6:37: "All that the Father gives me shall come to Me; and he who *comes* to Me, I will in no way reject". Many 'came to Jesus' but only some really came. Again we see a warning against surface level Christianity- coming to Him externally, but not in essence.

*From Jerusalem, saying-* They came all the way to Galilee to try to trap the Lord in His words. And yet it was some of the Jerusalem priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5) who later accepted Christ. We would likely have ignored these troublemakers and given up on them as hard cases, to be endured but not converted. But the Lord's hope and vision for humanity was so wide- and in the end, even after His death, it paid off. This is a great challenge to us in our witness to all men, including the bitter, self-righteous religious leader types.

15:2 *Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?-* The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

*For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread-* Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

15:3 *And he answered and said to them: Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?-* Although the Lord was very hard in some ways upon the twelve, accusing them of "no faith" etc., whenever He spoke about them to others or to His Father, He was so positive and defensive about them. This is a valuable window onto His current mediation for us. The disciples were ordinary Jews who weren't

such righteous men; they didn't wash before a meal, and the Pharisees criticized them. The Lord explained why this wasn't so important; but the disciples still didn't understand (:15,16). And yet He justifies them to the Pharisees as if they *did* understand, and as if their non-observance of ritual washing was because of their great spiritual perception. Surely the Lord imputed a righteousness to them which was not their own. He had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

The force of "also" transgress is that the Lord didn't deny that His men were transgressing the tradition of the elders- even though He had elsewhere taught them to obey those who "sit in Moses' seat" (Mt. 23:2). But still He justifies His disciples to the world, reflecting His love and imputation of righteousness towards them. And this Lord is our Lord.

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God's *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God's inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, 'getting around' the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

The tradition in view is not specifically their teaching about washing. The subsequent context shows the Lord has in view other traditions. His argument is therefore 'If *some* of your traditions are wrong and unBiblical, then why demand we keep other traditions which are within that same body of tradition'. And so He relentlessly requires that tradition within any religious group is fearlessly analysed- if some are unBiblical, then the others need not be respected. Just as "tradition" and "commandment" are placed in apposition to each other, likewise "your" is in opposition to "of God". Elevating tradition to the status of Divine commandment is yet another way in which religious people 'play God'.

15:4 *For God said-* AV "Commanded". His word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for "tradition" means something passed down.

To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

*Saying-* AV. This apparently redundant word serves to emphasize that God's word is a living word, speaking directly to us, and not mediated to us through passed down traditions of men.

*Honour your father and your mother, and he that speaks evil of father or mother-* The Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the* commandment" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them. He therefore speaks in :6 of how they did *not* honour their parents by the legal loophole they had devised- but this is the same as cursing them. The Lord looked very deeply at the implication of human behaviour and positions; and He does the same with ours too. The fact He has such penetrating depth of analysis highlights His patient grace with us- for He realizes the nature of human sin far more perceptively than we do, who see only a few implications of each sin.

*Must surely die-* In Mark's account, the Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other).

15:5 *But you say-* The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

*Whoever shall say to his father or his mother-* To give a word, or written contract.

*That with which you might have been profited by me is given to God-* If a

gift was made to the temple treasury of what was reckoned to be the obligation of the man to his parents, or if the man agreed to list the temple treasury as a beneficiary in his will, giving to them the amount he would have spent caring for his elderly parents- then he was considered free from having to honour and care for them. The reasoning was that something promised to God in the future was His and could not therefore be spent on parents. But this was *not* honouring the parents (:6). We can't buy our way out of spiritual responsibility by making donations or making legacies which cost us nothing today. We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual ego, rather than as a fast which He recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community of believers, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

The very language of "profit" is inappropriate. If we have a duty to help someone, then that help is hardly their "profit". The very term reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction.

15:6 *He shall not honour his father*- To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.

*Thus you have made void the word of God because of your tradition*- It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" by our traditions or our lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.

Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to



teach us something. Here in Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect'. God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

It's also quite legitimate to understand *akuroo* as meaning to disannul (s.w. Gal. 3:17). In this case, the Lord is saying that the Jews were doing the unthinkable for them- disannulling God's law. The law was disannulled by the death of the Lord Jesus, and Judaism and the early communities of Jewish converts clearly struggled with that idea. But Matthew records the Lord's words at this point to demonstrate that effectively, the Law had been disannulled already by Jewish disobedience to it and following human traditions which left the Law without power and function.

Again, "tradition" is put here for 'the keeping of tradition'. Tradition means 'that which is passed on', and it is only that if it is actually practiced.

15:7 *You hypocrites*- The Lord could use this term about people only because He could see what was on the inside (the heart, :8). We who cannot do this are perhaps not able to define others in this way.

*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying*- The reference to "this people..." was not to be understood as only Isaiah's hearers, but all who read this living word (:8). And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you in your generation*.

15:8 *This people honours me with their lips but their heart is far from me*- The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah's time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass 'people of the land' whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in :10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they externally kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely

guarded the pronouncement of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27). The Lord perceived that "your tradition... the commandments of men... your doctrines" resulted in the hearts of Israel being "far from [God]". Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how "every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for "planted" is interpreted by James Strong as meaning "Figuratively, to instil doctrine". The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: "Thus have you made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

15:9- see on 15:2.

*But in vain do they worship me*- Worship and sacrifice to God can be done "in vain" if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn't mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God's word, is so that our lives are *not* lived "in vain"; there is "effect" in the outworking of God's true word in human lives. "In vain" here is surely to be semantically paralleled with "no effect" in :6.

*Teaching doctrines*- The original of Is. 29:13,14 doesn't say this. It is addressed to *the people*, stating that their fear of God is taught by the doctrines of men. The Lord amends the text slightly to make it relevant to the *teachers* whom He was addressing. Such amending of Old Testament quotation was common in Jewish *midrash*. The point is, that God's ancient word is to be reapplied to us today in *our* contexts, rather than be left as mere historical statement to people long ago.

*Which are the precepts of men*- The emphasis was surely upon the word "men". The Lord has been comparing the commandments of *God* with Jewish tradition. Tradition had become the word of God to these people.

15:10 *And he called to himself the crowd*- His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the "scribes and Pharisees" of :1 in a private audience. See on :8 *this people*.

*And said to them: Hear and understand*- The Lord was speaking specifically to the crowd, without the presence of the disciples, who only later came to Him (:12). The Greek words for "hear and understand" were repeatedly used by the Lord in Mt. 13:13,14,15,19. There He had explained to the disciples that the crowds did *not* and *could not* "hear and understand", and therefore He was confusing them by parables; only the disciples heard and understood. But here, hoping against hope, the Lord makes a desperate appeal to the crowds to hear and understand. Such is His hopefulness that He was unashamed to depart from a declared position about people, and hope that they might somehow respond. We are left to imagine the tone of desperate pleading in His voice as He appealed for them to "hear and understand" in the light of how He had used those words about the crowds in Mt. 13. In the same spirit, Paul turned to the Gentiles- and yet continued by all means trying to persuade the Jews.

15:11 *It is not what enters into the mouth which defiles the man*- The same words are found in the Lord's final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching 'unclean' things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating "with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands" (Mk. 7:2 s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord's teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. 'defiled'] in itself" (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper, those shimmering images on our screens, become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

*But what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man*- Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles (:18,19), but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out "from *within*", is what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and

so he is his words, just as "the word was [and is] God". We note that the same word is used about gracious words 'proceeding out of [the Lord's] mouth' (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to 'proceed' [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that "may minister grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

15:12- see on 17:10.

*Then came the disciples, and said to him: Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?*

- The Lord's teaching that nothing external can defile was undermining the very basis of their worldview. No wonder they were angry. Although it was the death of Christ which ended the Mosaic Law and cleansed things so that nothing should be called "defiled" (s.w.- Acts 10:15,28; 11:9), the Lord ahead of that time pronounced this to be the case. And in essence this was the case anyway- because in spiritual terms, the 'unclean' things could not defile a person. They were only declared unclean under the Law of Moses to teach people about the more important internal defilements they should avoid.

The Lord elsewhere taught of the immense danger and responsibility of making another stumble / be offended (18:6,8,9). But sometimes stumbling is inevitable- "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2). Responsibility for stumbling is therefore not only with the party who causes it. Some did stumble at the Lord's teaching (Mt. 11:6; 13:21,57); He was a rock of stumbling. But perhaps the disciples hoped the Pharisees would be converted, and considered that the Lord's teaching here was so radical that it was going to make them stumble from that path. According to this understanding, the Lord didn't make the Pharisees ultimately stumble. The disciples *feared* He would, thinking (wrongly) that a less demanding message might make the way easier for the Pharisees. And the Lord conceded to their concerns, whilst not agreeing with them- for in Mt. 17:27 He picks them up on this incident and tells that they should act in such a way that does not "offend" others.

15:13 *But he answered and said: Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up-* It was commonly understood that all Israel were the planting of the Lord, having been planted as vines in His vineyard (Num. 24:6; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; 11:17; 45:4). Yet He implies here that the scribes and Pharisees were *not* planted by God. The Old Testament references to Israel having been planted by God are many- to say that Israel's religious leaders were *not* planted by God was to clearly say that He did not consider them to be the true Israel. But the restored Kingdom of God was to feature

planting of new vines (Is. 41:19; 51:16; Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; Ez. 36:36; Am. 9:15) just as He had planted a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8), and so again the Lord is hinting that the old Israel was coming to an end, and a new Israel being planted which was in embryo the Kingdom of God, paradise restored. Paul picks up this figure in speaking of how his preaching of the Gospel was 'planting', specifically, a vineyard (1 Cor. 3:6-8; 9:7). This connects with the Old Testament and New Testament descriptions of Old Testament Israel as the vineyard God planted (Mt. 21:33; Lk. 13:6; 20:9). Paul saw that a new Israel was being formed one by one. Teaching God's word is described by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:6-8 as 'planting', and it would seem this was a Jewish metaphor used for the instilling of God's word into students. In this case, the Lord would be continuing the theme developed so far in Matthew 15- that attention to God's word is what makes someone part of the true Israel. Because of their rejection of the word of God in favour of the word of men, the Pharisees and scribes were therefore not planted by the Father. This was their choice.

Clearly the Scribes and Pharisees were plants, in the same field as the ones planted by the Father, who would be rooted up. They had been planted by someone other than the Father. This of course is exactly the picture presented by the parable of the wheat and weeds. But the Lord taught in that parable that the 'rooting up' must be left to the Angels at the last day. The subsequent command to the disciples to "let them alone" could be understood in the context of the wheat and weeds parable- the idea might be 'Don't *you* think you can sort them out. Leave them alone. Let God do it'. The Lord saw the problem that the disciples might root up wheat as well as weeds (He uses the same word- Mt. 13:29). And His concern was justified- for as noted on :1, there were within this general category of Scribes and Pharisees a number who would later repent and come to Christ. Those who are to be plucked up at the last day are in essence already plucked up by God, from His perspective (Jude 12 s.w.). The repentance of some of those Scribes and Pharisees (see on :1) who appeared in the 'to be plucked up' category is a great example and warning to us. If the disciples had rooted them up then, those individuals would not later have come to Christ. So one reason why we are not to 'root up' is because we have no idea how that person may change in later life; we do not see the specific potentials in people.

15:14 *Let them alone*- The Lord bothered with the scribes and Pharisees, and some were converted thanks to His efforts (see on :1). But He knew it was best for the disciples to keep away from these people. Yet He may have meant 'Don't *you* try to root them up'- see on :13.

*They are blind guides-* But some in this category repented (see on :1). That was how they were at that time. But even blind leaders can repent, Saul of Tarsus being the great example. They were heading for the "ditch" of condemnation, but some pulled back.

*And if the blind are guided by the blind, both shall fall into a pit-* The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved (see on :1).

15:15 *And Peter answered and said to him: Explain to us the parable-* The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said in :11 about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching in :11 was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than

by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

15:16 *And he said: Are you still without understanding?*

- The emphasis may be on the "still"- He says the same in the next verse, "Do you *still not* understand?". The Lord asked the disciples; as if to say that He was surprised the disciples still hadn't come to the understanding which He hoped the Pharisees soon would. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

15:17 *Do you not understand, that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly and is expelled?*- The world would not perceive / understand (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had. The Lord was frustrated that by this point in His ministry, they still didn't understand that food couldn't really defile a person. And even by the time of Acts 10, Peter was still not persuaded of this. The Lord's hopefulness in them was such that He had great expectations of the speed of their spiritual growth, which resulted in disappointment for Him. This is all very much the enthusiasm of the lover for the beloved.

15:18 *But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart, and it is they that defile the man*- Mark adds: "This He said, thus making all foods clean" (Mk. 7:19). Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal

persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records. Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

15:19 *For out of the heart*- I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength



against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that 'spirit' usually refers to the mind / heart. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

*Come evil thoughts-* Mark's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar (Mk. 7:21). The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

The Greek for "thoughts" means reasonings or disputings (s.w. Phil. 2:14). The Lord surely had in mind the cunning but carnal reasoning of the Pharisees which is mentioned at the start of this section (15:1-6). There are separate Greek words used here for "evil" and "thoughts"; but every single one of the 14 New Testament usages of the word *dialogismos* ("thoughts") is in a distinctly sinful context (Mk. 7:21; Lk. 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phil. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 2:4). Yet the word itself has no moral overtone, it means simply 'to think / reason'. But the point is, that human thinking is so often sinful, and is the root cause of sinful behaviour.

*Murders, adulteries, sexual immorality, thefts, false witness and slander-* Notice the purposeful juxtaposition of bad *thinking* next to murder. This confirms the Lord's constant emphasis that the thought is equivalent to the action in His judgment. Murder, adultery and fornication have already been defined in the Sermon on the Mount as being essentially performed

in the heart. The list of seven sins here is surely intended to encompass all sin in totality (seven)- whatever specific sin there may be, it originated in a human heart.

15:20 *These are the things which defile the man - but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man*- The emphasis may be upon the word "hands". The idea would then be that it is the heart which requires washing, rather than hands. In this case the Lord would be directing their minds to Jer. 4:14: "O Jerusalem [note the Pharisees in question were from Jerusalem, Mt. 15:1], wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts dwell within you?". But this of course begs the question- how can a man wash his own heart? Surely it needs the Father and Son to do this for us. The whole offer of Jesus is of a *holy* spirit or heart to be given to those who believe in Him. Perhaps John's equivalent of this section of teaching is in the repeated mention he makes of the Greek *nipto*, to wash- the same word used here in Mt. 15:2. John records how utterly essential it is for the disciple to allow the Lord Jesus to wash *them* (Jn. 13:5,6,8,10,12,14, and also in the record of the cleansing of the blind man in Jn. 9:7,11,15). The cleansing of the heart in and by Christ is implied by the teaching recorded here in Mt. 15, but only made explicit in John's Gospel.

The Greek *koinoo* ["defiles"] strictly means 'to make common'. The later New Testament uses it in a quite different and spiritual way, speaking of how there is a "common faith" (Tit. 1:4; Jude 3) which means that the community of believers are bound together by what they have "in common" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The Lord's new Israel had new principles. If the heart was cleansed, then the focus moved from fear of collective *defilement* to rejoicing in and experiencing what we have *in common* in Christ.

15:21 *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon*- The words is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 "when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*"; 14:13 "When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence"). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to 'withdraw' may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away

from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

The Lord had emphasized earlier that His mission was not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel. Perhaps He decided to go to Gentile areas in order to avoid engagement with the crowds and focus upon the disciples. But again, His humanity is indicated by the fact that even that plan had an outcome that He didn't foresee, in that there He met a Gentile woman who so deeply impressed Him by her perception that He healed her daughter.

15:22- see on 18:11.

*And a Canaanite woman-* Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on :21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

*From that region came out-* AV "Came out of the same region". The phrase is awkward and lengthy if the intention was simply to convey the idea that she was a local woman, a woman from that area. *Exerchomai apo* ("Came out of") implies a proceeding forth from, and is even translated "escape". *Apo* has the sense of cessation, completion, separation, departure. Further, the Greek word translated "region" or "coasts" (AV) is not the same as that used to describe the region in :21. It strictly means a boundary or border. The impression we get is of a woman who lived in the area and yet had radically come out of it. Perhaps the awkward phrase is used to create this impression- that this Gentile woman had come out of her environment in the hope of connecting with the God of Israel. One could just about translate it with integrity: "A woman of Canaan who had emigrated out from that very area...".

*And was crying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David-* These were the very words used by the blind men of Mt. 9:27. Perhaps she was inspired by them, or at least the rumours she had heard of them, their understanding and their healing. See on 9:27 concerning the connection between David and mercy. "Lord", *Kurios*, is used about men in passages like Acts 25:26; Gal. 4:1; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22 and Rom. 14:4, so it is nothing but intellectual desperation which leads Trinitarians to claim that

the use of *kurios* means that people thought Jesus was God. The confession of Jesus as Lord was however a fundamental part of conversion to Christianity in the early church. To openly accept Him as Lord of human life was and is the essence of the Christian call. To call upon Him as Lord is presented in the later New Testament as the essence of conversion to Him (Acts 2:21; 22:16; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). The Gospels are full of examples of men and women who called upon Jesus as "Lord" during His ministry, and these individuals are being set up as the prototypes of those who would later convert to Him. The Gospel writers such as Matthew were preaching towards conversion, towards men and women calling upon Jesus as Lord in baptism and devotion to His Name. So the people they record doing this during His ministry are presented as role models to be followed by their audience. But those whom Matthew records as calling upon Jesus as *kurios* are those on the edge of Jewish society- a leper (8:2), a Gentile centurion (8:6,8), blind men (9:28)- and now this Canaanite woman. Matthew emphasizes three times that she repeatedly called Jesus "Lord" (15:22,25,27). In a society where religion was largely a hobby for men, it was quite radical thinking to present a female role model- let alone a Gentile one. See on :27 *masters' table*.

The parable of Mt. 18:33 uses this same phrase "Have mercy on me" and presents it as the very essence of the Gospel. We all beg the Lord to "have mercy on me", and are to likewise reflect that mercy to others. Again, the woman is being presented as typical of all who would come to Christ. And the word is used in the later New Testament about how all in Christ have received such personal mercy (1 Tim. 1:13,16; 1 Pet. 2:10). But the request was in fact for her *daughter*. The parent is totally identified with the sick child, and in this we see the absolute psychological credibility of the record.

*My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon*- The very same words were repeated by the man of 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise "badly vexed" (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of 9:27 (see above), so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth. The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable to the people of the time. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being "whole" or "healed" (:28). The implied 'driving out of demons' was simply another way of saying she was cured.

15:23- see on 14:15.

*But he did not answer her-* Another case of the apparent silence of the Lord, seen also in His not coming immediately to Lazarus when He received news of his sickness, His appearance of walking past the drowning disciples on the lake, and making as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus (cp. Is. 30:18). And, we might add, in His apparent delay in returning to establish the Kingdom, along with countless examples from human lives today. But this delay and silence is not at all from disinterest and hard heartedness, let alone distraction with other issues. We are accustomed to human lack of response to us being because of those things, and we can too easily assume that the Lord's apparent lack of response is for similar reasons. But the Bible, and the Gospels especially, surely make it clear that the lack of response is indeed only apparent- it is ultimately part of a larger spiritual plan for our eternal good at our latter end. In this case, the silence elicited in the woman a depth of understanding and intensity of hope and faith which perhaps she had not had previously. For she didn't shrug and walk away, muttering that all Jews were snobs and elitists. Instead, she considered that indeed, she was not worthy of any response, and yet seeing that this Son of David was the epitome of God's grace, she renewed her faith and appeal. Instead of shrugging and walking off, "she worshipped Him" (:25), in the spirit of Job, who said he would trust God even if He slew him (Job 13:15). And was rewarded.

*And his disciples came [pros-erchomai] and begged him, saying-* The woman "came" (*erchomai*) and worshipped Him (:25). The coming of the disciples to Jesus and begging Him (to send the woman away) *and being rejected* is clearly matched in the record by the woman coming to Jesus (a related word is used), begging Him- *and having her request accepted*. Again, the Gospel writers are presenting themselves negatively, in humility recognizing that their way of rejecting the Gentiles and turning people away was *wrong*. This of course had great significance in the communities of believers which were formed as a result of Matthew's Gospel being believed. For the tendency to turn away Gentile believers was very strong.

*Send her away-* The very word the disciples had recently used in requesting the Lord to 'send away' the hungry crowds (14:15). He intended them to learn from their mistake, and so providentially they were presented with another case of someone whom they were tempted to "send away". And they failed the test. And so in the feeding of the 4000 which now follows in the record, they are again presented with a temptation to "send away" the crowds (15:32)- and again, they fail. Surely Matthew is bringing out the point that they had failed miserably to grasp this point- that the Lord's followers are tempted to send away those

whom He will not send away. This point was of extreme practical relevance amongst groups of Jewish converts who were tempted to 'send away' Gentile converts from table fellowship. It's just possible that the disciples were using the term "send away" in the sense that it is sometimes used elsewhere- to loose, to send away with the request granted (18:27; Lk. 13:12; 14:4). But it seems to me from the surrounding context of the sending away of the crowds that we are intended to read this as the disciples yet again wanting someone to be refused by Jesus, when He wanted to accept them.

*For she cries out after us-* The Greek *opisthen*, "after", really means 'behind'; and the word used for 'crying' is literally 'to growl or croak'. This is the language of an unwanted dog running behind men and irritating them with the noise of its barking. This paves the way for the language of the woman as a pestering dog (see on :25 *worshipped Him*). But there is also a sadly typical attitude displayed here- 'This person is irritating *us*, therefore, we deny them a relationship with the Lord personally'. So many of those called to Christ are indeed irritating types- it is the 'normal', calm, self-satisfied types who fail to perceive their need for Him.

15:24 *But he answered and said: I was only sent-* The Lord Jesus, who spoke and acted the words of God, was clearly willing to change His position depending on human response. He initially declined to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman because, as He clearly stated, He had been sent *only* unto "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; and it was not appropriate, He said, to take the food from those children and feed it to Gentile dogs (Mt. 14:24,26). He may well have had in mind His own principle of not throwing pearls before swine [Gk. 'wild dogs'] (Mt. 7:6). But... He changed. He healed the woman's daughter. He was so deeply impressed with her perception and faith that He changed the operation of His principles.

*To the lost sheep of the house of Israel-* The ambiguous genitive here could mean that the lost sheep *were* the house of Israel; or that the lost sheep had been lost *by* the house of Israel. The *apollumi* sheep means more than 'lost' as in confused and in the wrong place; the word has the distinct sense of 'destroyed' or 'dead'. The Lord's mission was almost to resurrect the slain sheep of Israel.

15:25 *But she came and knelt before him, saying: Lord! Help me!-* The kneeling was worship. The Greek *proskuneo* is defined by Strong as meaning "to lick like a dog licking his master's hand, to crouch". This paved the way for the Lord's response, that it was not appropriate to cast the children's food to the dogs. And she responds that she is as a dog

under the children's table (:27). Her posture, therefore, was perhaps consciously intended to mimic a crouching dog. Her worship was not in song, but simply in recognizing that He alone can "help".

The Canaanite woman simply prayed: "Lord, help me". The Lord's response was to heal her daughter, with the comment: "Be it unto you even as you wish" (Mt. 15:25,28). She didn't specifically ask for anything, she just stated her problem, but the Lord understood her few words as expressing her hidden will, and treated this as her specific prayer request. And here we have untold comfort for those who feel (needlessly) that they are not good at praying because they're not good at verbalizing.

*15:26 And he answered and said: It is not right to take the children's bread-* The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food intended for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children. The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

*And cast it to the dogs-* The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs (Mk. 7:27). Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was potentially prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

*15:27 But she said-* Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

Yes, Lord- A word signifying her assent to what the Lord had just said. She agreed with the position that the bread of salvation was primarily for Israel and that Gentiles were but dogs.

*But even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table-* She perceived the healing of her daughter as a mere "crumb" compared to the bread of the Kingdom, full salvation, which had been obtained for Israel by Jesus. She perceived too that that great salvation had been rejected by them, or at best, treated carelessly and without due respect, in that crumbs had fallen to her. The Lord at the end of Matthew 12 and throughout His subsequent parables of chapter 13 had explained how Israel had rejected the Gospel, and that He was therefore turning to the disciples for response. The parables of Matthew 13 were His attempt to help the disciples come to terms with the fact that in reality, Israel had rejected John's message. But this woman perceived it well, and thereby perceived that the bread of salvation must therefore be available to the Gentiles if Israel didn't want it. In this she was far ahead of the disciples themselves. It could be argued that she was not *seeking* 'crumbs', in the sense of equating the hoped for healing with the crumbs. It could be that she is saying that she is already eating of those crumbs, in that she felt she was feeding on whatever small parts of the bread of salvation were possible for her as a Gentile. She says that the dogs *are eating* the crumbs- rather than begging for them. The Lord was so deeply impressed by the woman's use of metaphor that He Himself builds it into a later parable- Lazarus the beggar desired to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). The rich man clearly represents Judaism, which was to be condemned and rejected, whilst the beggar was saved. In this we see the Lord's humility as well as His sensitivity; He was deeply impressed by the woman, and absorbed her use of metaphor into His own mental material.

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on :22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios*, "Lord". There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as 'masters' or 'lords' of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel's salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with Gentiles and sinners, which was what led the children of Israel to reject Him. And this incident is sandwiched between the records of the feeding miracles, in which the



Lord dealt His bread to all and sundry, including Gentiles. This amazing woman accepted Jesus as her Lord even though she felt that she was not fit to sit at His table; she got to be at His table by being as a dog. This amazing devotion to her Lord, fully accepting the barriers there were between them brought about by ethnic birth circumstances beyond her control- resulted in the Lord tearing down those barriers. Significantly, Paul uses the very same Greek words in 1 Cor. 10:21 about eating at the Lord's table- and he has the breaking of bread service in mind. The sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles was a highly divisive issue in the communities of Jewish Christians who first responded to Matthew's Gospel. He is surely making the point that in a strange way, Gentiles partook of the Lord's table in that even the dogs under the table still eat what is on the table. And this happened even during the Lord's ministry. They were "under the table" (Mk. 7:28)- but still *at* the table.

15:28 *Then Jesus answered-* This has been said in :23,25 and :26. His responsiveness to human words, actions and perceptions was clearly very impressive to Matthew. And this Lord is our Lord.

*O woman, great is your faith-* The Lord commended the Canaanite woman for her understanding of the Hope of Israel and the Gentile's place in it: "Great is your faith" (Mt. 15:28); great was her understanding, and therefore her faith. Mark records that the Lord also said: "For this saying go your way; the demon is gone out of your daughter" (Mk. 7:29). This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

*Be it done to you even as you wish. And her daughter was healed from that moment-* It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him. His words abode in her- see comment on *from that very hour*. Mark adds: "The demon is gone out of your daughter". The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn.

9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

We get the impression that the woman didn't have her daughter with her. She had to go home believing in the Lord's words, and according to that faith it was given to her.

*15:29 And Jesus departed from there and came near to the Sea of Galilee-* The Greek could imply a relocation, as if He had been based in that Gentile area and now returned to spend time in Galilee.

*And he went up the mountain and sat there-* Reminiscent of the giving of the sermon on the Mount, the earlier feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:3 "Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat"), and also His sitting upon the Mount of Olives teaching (Mt. 24:3). Sitting on a mountain was metaphorical for reigning (Rev. 17:9). Although His political Kingdom had not yet come, in His teaching He was as it were ruling over His people- which is exactly the sense in which He is now ruling over us His kingdom, those under the domain of His teaching and rulership as Lord and King.

*15:30 And there came to him great crowds-* The use of the Greek word *ochlos* is perhaps intended to be associated with the very similar word *oikos*, family. The Lord was seeking to turn those multitudes of variously motivated people into a family- His ecclesia.

*Having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others-* This is an intentional echo of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5,6, where we read of the healing of "the blind... the deaf... the lame... the dumb". The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind, and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace.

*And they put them down-* Another touch of the eye witness account. For they had just carried handicapped people up a mountainside.

*At his feet, and he healed them-* This is not merely an incidental description. To be *para pous* ("at the feet of") a person was significant- it was a declaration of their seniority as a leader and teacher (Lk. 7:38; 8:35,41; 10:39; 17:16; Acts 4:35,37; 5:2; 7:58; 22:3). The term would

surely not have been used here unless it has that sense. The point is perhaps that people were brought to Jesus, with all the healing and teaching that implies, because of the effort of third parties for them.

15:31 *So much so that the crowd wondered-* They had struggled to carry those sick and handicapped folk up a mountainside, casting them down in exhaustion at the Lord's feet (see on :30). Surely they did so because they believed. Precisely what they hoped and prayed for was given- hence the record labours the point that the dumb *spoke*, the blind *saw*, the lame *walked*, the maimed were *made whole*. And yet when they saw the fulfilment of what they had hoped and prayed for, they "wondered". Rather like the believers praying for Peter's release and then being amazed when he appeared at the door. We can genuinely believe and even act according to that faith, and yet not have the faith which calmly envisages the answer as having effectively been already given.

*When they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel-* The implication is therefore that these were Gentiles. The Lord therefore broke His bread with non-Jews; see digression on 14:20.

The account of the feeding of the 4000 is very similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. Therefore see notes on 14:14-21.

15:32 *Then Jesus called his disciples to him, and said-* We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

*I have compassion on the crowd-* Reflect how the Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place (Mk. 8:2). They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of Jesus towards this world; so must

our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

*Because they have been with me now-* AV "Continue with Me". The same word is used about believers 'cleaving unto' Jesus (Acts 11:23). The Lord uses the same word about His wish for the disciples to continue with Him in the heat of temptation in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:38), and it is the same word used so often in John for 'abiding' with Christ. The Lord was more sceptical about the (Jewish) crowd in the earlier feeding miracle (of the 5000), later commenting that their interest was largely in the food. This more Gentile crowd (see on :31) He felt were abiding with Him in a more spiritual sense.

*Three days-* The provision of manna, the bread of salvation, after three days... this is surely prophetic of the resurrection. The Lord could have fed them at the end of the first day- three days is a long time not to eat, and they were at the point of losing consciousness due to lack of food ("they will faint in the way"). The Lord surely didn't provide food earlier in order to prove the level of interest. Surely many did walk away in search of food. But 4000 (at least) remained. It certainly was a great expression of sincere interest in the Lord's message, and compares favourably to that of the crowd of 5000, who were fed after only a few hours. The disciples' desire to dismiss this extraordinary group therefore appears even worse.

*And have nothing to eat-* The same Greek phrase is on the Lord's lips in Mt. 25:32, where He says that condemnation awaits the man who gives 'nothing to eat' to those who are hungry. The disciples like many of us assume automatically that it can't be their problem to provide others' needs if they don't have what is required materially. But the connection between this verse and Mt. 25:32 puts that assumption under a spotlight. Even if we do not have what is needed, our confrontation with that need requires to exercise faith that that need will be resolved. And the resolution of it may well depend upon our *faith*. This doesn't mean that we ask that material resources are dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

*I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way-* Mark adds "Because some of them had come from afar" (Mk. 8:3). This again is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- see on :31.

15:33 *And the disciples said to him: Where can we get so many loaves in this deserted place to fill so great a crowd?*

- "From whence shall we get bread here in the wilderness?" (AV) is how

Peter / Mark recorded their question to the Lord (Mk. 8:4). But the wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?". We must note that the very same word "Whence...?" was used by the disciples before the feeding of the 5000 earlier (Jn. 6:5). The answer to the question then had been 'From Heaven'. But the repeated situation didn't seem to register with the disciples. Just as circumstances repeat in our lives too, but we don't perceive it.

Mark has 'Whence can a man...' (Mk. 8:4). Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

They were indeed "filled" (:37). The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. In Matthew 15, the feeding of the 4000 comes straight after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :31).

15:34 *And Jesus said to them: How many loaves have you? And they said: Seven, and a few small fish-* The feeding of the 4000 is clearly

recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers, such as "How many loaves do you have?". John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21- the parallel to this section in Matthew) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

Mark's record speaks as if the fish were something of an afterthought (Mk. 8:7); the use of the diminutive word for *little* fish suggests they thought them hardly worth mentioning. The stress (in Mark) is that *they* had a few small fish. The situation is of course purposefully similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. They were really intended to learn from it. But they didn't. There were some differences, and one of them was that this time, their own small amount of food was used rather than that of the boy. The Lord was seeking to show that what little they personally had, fish they had personally caught but felt inadequate for the task, could and would be used by Him in order to meet the hunger of the Gentile world.

15:35 *And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground-* The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshiping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present. See the digression at 14:20.

15:36 *He took the seven loaves and the fish; and he gave thanks and*

*broke the bread and gave it to the disciples-* The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, just ten verses later in the narrative, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on 16:5.

*And the disciples gave them to the crowds-* The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on. Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

15:37 *And they all ate and were filled-* See on :33 to fill.

*And they collected-* According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord. "And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread... When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to Him: Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to Him: Seven. And He said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?". Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

*What was left over of the broken pieces- seven baskets full!*

- Literally, 'the breakages'. The word is only ever used in the Gospels about the broken pieces of bread from the feeding miracles. The related verb *klao*, to break, is used only of the 'breaking of bread' in the feeding

miracles, and every other occurrence in the New Testament concerns the breaking of bread service in memory of Jesus (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7,11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Clearly the breaking of bread in the miracles is intended to be seen as programmatic for the later 'breaking of bread' services. In this connection it becomes highly significant that there were Gentiles participating, along with women and children, and there was no 'test of fellowship' operated. The simple fact people wanted to be present around Jesus was enough.

"what was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000 in 14:20. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

The crowd were filled, totally satiated; and the leftover food *filled* the baskets. The impression is given of superabundance of provision.

15:38 *And besides women and children*- Gk. 'at a space from'. This was literally true, in that women and children would have sat separately from the men. At least 10,000 people would've been present in total.

*They that had eaten were four thousand men*- Eating is a consciously presented theme in this chapter. The disciples are condemned for eating in an unclean manner (15:2), the Gentile woman eats the crumbs rejected by the Jews (15:27), and now a huge crowd of Gentiles (see on :31) including women and children (the socially and religiously marginalized) also "eat". The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the 'crumbs' in :27 in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food (:31) demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

The way the number of eaters is presented at the end of the meal might suggest that this is the equivalent of a bill being presented at the



conclusion of a meal. If this is the case, then the hint would be towards Is. 55:1,2, where again we have the theme of free provision of food, and being utterly filled / satisfied: "Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness".

15:39 *And he sent away the crowds, boarded the boat and went into the region of Magdalla-* The Greek *horion* definitely means a border, rather like a state line in North America. Matthew especially uses the term, 7 times in all; it only occurs twice in the other Gospels, and only one other time in the New Testament. At the borders of the regions there were often customs posts through which travellers must pass. Matthew had once 'sat at the customs table', and likely knew these crossing points, or at least, took note of them as they passed through them. This is yet another incidental evidence of the veracity of the records- the Gospel of Matthew really was written as it claims, by a tax collector called Matthew- albeit under Divine inspiration.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees*- The force of *kai* ("also") is that they were united. Here we see the theme being developed of how groups who were otherwise against each other united against the Lord as their common enemy. This came to its ultimate term in the Lord's crucifixion, where even Pilate and Herod became friends (Lk. 23:12). Acts 4:27 comments that not only Pilate and Herod, but even Jews and Gentiles, were gathered together in unity against Him. This of course was a parody of how in the sphere of God's Kingdom, Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ- for Him, rather than against Him. All that is true of God's sphere of operation appears to have its parody in the system of the world.

*Came to test him*- This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system.

*And asked him to show them a sign*- This appears an exact repetition of the situation in 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims based on the similarity with 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

*From Heaven*- The implication was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on 12:38,39.

16:2 *But he answered and said to them: When it is evening, you say: It will be fair weather, for the sky is red*- The Lord's examples relate to reading the appearance of the sky. This is His answer to their request for a "sign from Heaven"- bearing in mind that in Hebrew and Aramaic, the words for 'sky' and 'Heaven' as in the abode of God are the same. They realized that the same sign- the redness of the sky- could signify two different things. The sign is specifically defined as being the sign of Jonah- the resurrection of Christ (12:38,39). If they perceived the sign of reddened sky in the evening, then it was a sign of "fair weather". The word "weather" is an insertion from the translators and reflects no original Greek word. Most other usages of the Greek for "fair" refer to acceptance

with God: "*Well done* (s.w. "fair") good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21,23); "*Well* (s.w. "fair"), you good servant" (Lk. 19:17; and see Acts 15:29; Eph. 6:3). If they read that sign right in the evening, then their morning would be 'fair'- acceptance with God. But if it was in the morning that they saw the sign, then there would be "foul weather" (:3). Again, "weather" is an insertion by the translators, but the Greek really refers to heavy rain- it is translated "tempest" or "storm" in Acts 27:20, and where it is elsewhere translated "winter", the literal sense would be 'rainy season'. The language of rain, storm and tempest recalls Noah's flood and is a clear metaphor for condemnation. The Lord is observing that the same sign can portend two different destinies- depending upon when it is perceived. The sign is that of Jonah, and the resurrection of Jesus. If they perceived that in the evening, before the night time and darkness of death- then that sign would mean their salvation and blessing. But if only in the morning, after His resurrection- then it meant the rainstorm of condemnation for them.

*16:3 And in the morning: It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening-* See on 16:2.

*You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky-* AV "You hypocrites". Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive that they were Nineveh with Jonah in their midst; and according to their response to the Lord's resurrection, their eternity would be decided. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

*But you cannot interpret the signs of the times-* The "sign[s] of the times" which they wanted but couldn't discern can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the resurrection of Christ [cp. that of Jonah], because it portends the return of Christ in judgment. And the outcome of that sign was either to their blessing ["fair weather"] or condemnation [rainy / foul weather]. There is no reason to think that "signs" and "times" have to be read as plurals. They could just as easily refer to the one great sign of the one great and ultimate time. The one great sign would then refer to the Lord's resurrection, perception of which (and *when* it was perceived) would lead to either acceptance or

rejection at the ultimate "time" of the last day. This is how the Lord elsewhere uses the word *kairos* ("times"): "The time of harvest" (Mt. 13:30); "the time of the fruit" (Mt. 21:34); "you know not when *the time is*" (Mk. 13:33).

16:4 See commentary on 12:38,39,45.

*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there shall be no sign given to it except the sign of Jonah-* This sign is defined in 12:38,39 as his figurative death and resurrection, symbolic as it was of the Lord's. But seeing the Lord only appeared to His followers, how was His resurrection such a compelling sign to the Jews? Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance "to all men" (Acts 17:31). But how? They hadn't seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men and a sign to the Jews? Surely in that the disciples (and ourselves, in this age) are the risen Lord's representatives "to all men", and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God's plan for them. This explains how the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn't see the risen Lord Himself. But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

*And he left them and departed-* The original words suggest that this is more than a mere notice of the Lord moving on. The Greek for "left" can imply a more conscious and formal abandoning (see examples in 19:5; Lk. 5:28; Acts 18:19). This would be in line with how in the similar incident in 12:38-45, the Lord had decided to 'leave' the masses of Israel and instead focus upon a minority. He 'left' the majority in the wilderness and went after the one lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4 s.w.). In Matthew 12, the Lord made clear His change in policy- that He was leaving a wicked and adulterous generation and focusing upon the few who had truly responded, i.e. the group of disciples. But here He is again reasoning with the Jews and again formally leaving them. This is not inconsistency, but rather is such behaviour typical of the love that always hopes, that draws a line and yet revisits it in the hope that some will still change. Paul's behaviour to the Jews was the same- having turned away from them and towards the Gentiles, he still revisits the Jews in hope they will yet respond to Christ (Acts 13:46).

16:5 *When the disciples reached the other side-* The style of reporting this doesn't say 'When *they*...'. And yet presumably the Lord went with them. Hence the impression is given of a mental separation between the disciples and the Lord. This would have been all the more painful for Him

because He had just 'left' the Jewish masses to focus upon them (see on 16:4)- and even they were now somewhat 'off' with Him, and still caught up in hardness of heart, not perceiving the wonder and meaning of the feeding miracles (:9).

*They had forgotten to bring any bread-* This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord 'taking the bread' in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase occurs five times in the next verses (16:5-10- "loaves" is s.w. "bread"). The phrase is used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of bread in the feeding miracles, and about 'taking bread' at the breaking of bread service. The only other use is directly in the context of the feeding miracles (see on 15:26). To 'take bread' therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the 'taking of bread' in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in 'taking bread'- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to 'take bread'. Their slowness to understand is really brought out in the record. The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders'- even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

16:6- see on Mt. 15:2.

*And Jesus said to them-* The disciples heard the Lord's warning about yeast, missed the danger of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and therefore wrongly assumed the Lord was saying something about the bread they had not taken.

*Beware of the yeast-* Their fear that they might have done something ritually wrong regarding bread was an outcome of their being influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines led to folk like the disciples becoming paranoid and self-suspicious over issues which were irrelevant, and indeed a distraction from the thrust of the Lord's teaching and intended way of life for His followers. The same effect can be observed in sincere believers who have fallen under the influence of Christian legalists.

*Of the Pharisees and Sadducees-* Here, yeast is used in a negative sense. The preaching of the Kingdom by us is also likened to yeast- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the metaphor is

simply of 'spreading'. Or maybe the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the 'lump' of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

16:7 *And they discussed this-* Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes "reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

*Among themselves-* The impression is given of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (:8).

*Saying: We did not bring any bread-* See on :5 *take bread*.

16:8 *And Jesus, aware of it, said: O you of little faith!* - Note the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding. *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*. Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (Is. 43:10).

16:9 *Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered-* One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do

not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had wrought (Mt. 16:9). His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone.

*16:10 Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets you took up?*- It seems that in educating the twelve, the Lord designed the numbers of baskets they took up in order to be memorable by them. As they were immersed in all that broken bread, they were intended to perceive that bread was utterly no issue to the Lord. But they failed to learn that intended lesson, and the Lord was disappointed that the memory and intended lesson had not remained with them.

*16:11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*- The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it (Mt. 16:11,12).

*16:12 Then they understood*- On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus they failed to see after two miracles relating to bread, that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord (Mk. 8:19-21). It's possible that "then they understood" doesn't necessarily mean that finally, they got what the Lord was on about. Because on another occasion He identifies "the leaven of the Pharisees" as "hypocrisy" (Lk. 12:1), rather than their teaching generally. So perhaps they still did not totally get the drift of the Lord's thinking.

*That he told them not to be careful concerning the yeast in bread but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees*- The Lord's teaching to the disciples about this came directly after He had told the Jews that they would be given no sign apart from that of Jonah. I have suggested above that He foretold that the Jews would fail to perceive the meaning of His resurrection; and He feared that the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees would lead the disciples likewise to not perceive this. We see here a classic example of where wrong teaching about apparently smaller issues can lead to.

*16:13 Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi*- Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask

them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

*He asked his disciples, saying- Erotao* can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.

*Whom do men say-* This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:15). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

*That the Son of Man is?-* This is how the Lord saw Himself. Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him? AV "That I the Son of Man am" is good translation but it remains an awkward phrase, until we perceive that the Lord is juxtaposing His humanity as "son of Man" and His Divine aspect, as the 'I am', the revelation of Yahweh in human flesh (see on :17 *Simon Barjona*). Often we encounter this in the New Testament, especially in John's Gospel. The most highly exalted language about the Lord is to be found nearby to other statements of His absolute and total humanity. The Lord's words here lay the ground for His question to the disciples as to whom they thought Him to be. He has led up to that question by describing Himself as "the Son of Man". This was His preferred self-perception. Peter's response: "The Son of the living God" was therefore especially gratifying to the Lord, because Peter didn't merely repeat the Lord's own phrase "the Son of Man". Peter shows that he perceived the Divine side to Jesus, despite His evident humanity. Perhaps Peter was joining in the implied dialogue set up by the Lord juxtaposing His humanity ("son of Man") and Divine side ("I... am") in the phrase "I the Son of Man am". The Lord says that He is "Son of Man", and asks the disciples whom they think He is- and Peter gives the other side of the story, by saying that He is "Son of... God". Perhaps Peter was responding to the Lord's hint at this when He asks "Whom do you say



that *I am?*" (:15), for this could have been heard as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. We see this kind of dialogue ("banter" would not be too coarse a word) going on in the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. And He seeks to lead us in such dialogue, speaking personally to us through His word and life experiences, as we respond in the words of prayer and life decisions made for and to Him.

Another possibility is to translate the phrase: "Who do men say that I am? The Son of man?". This would be tantamount to asking the disciples whether people generally believed He was Messiah. As made clear at the end of chapter 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord knew full well that the majority did not accept Him as that, because they had effectively rejected John's message about Him. The crowds had simply liked his hard line about sin and his invitation to recognize human sinfulness. They had not gone further in accepting the solution he had proposed, which was acceptance of Jesus as Messiah. The Lord knew full well the answer to His question, but He wanted the disciples to consider it in order to elicit from them the recognition that John's ministry had not been accepted by Israel, and that their belief in Him as Messiah left them standing with their backs to the Jewish world. Compromise with that world, intellectual or social, was impossible.

16:14 *And they said: Some say John the Baptist-* Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

*Some Elijah-* John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. See on 11:3. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of

Elijah- and not Messiah.

*And others Jeremiah-* Why was Jeremiah a popular candidate? Was the persecution of Jeremiah by the Jerusalem leadership seen as a common theme with Jesus? Or the urgency of his appeals for repentance before the day of judgment came? Or the depth of his grief for Israel?

*Or one of the prophets-* Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

16:15 *He said to them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think

about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

"Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in 16:13. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or *thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said-* Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

*You are the Christ-* The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are also juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in

Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *Satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on. Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death (:14), it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on :14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession

before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11)

*The Son of the living God*- We naturally enquire as to the significance of "the *living* God". In Mt. 22:32 the Lord seems to connect this with resurrection; He says there that God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He will ultimately resurrect and immortalize them, seeing He is 'not the dead God but the living God' (Gk.; see Lk. 20:38). His 'living' becomes ours in that He will give us life; "living water" refers to water which gives life (Jn. 7:38), and "the living God" likewise (see another hint of resurrection by "the living God" in Rom. 9:26). "The living *bread*" meant 'the bread which gives life', and this is paralleled by the Lord with "the living *Father*" who also gives life (Jn. 6:51,57). Having taught that, Peter had gone on to state that Jesus was indeed "that Christ, the son of the living God" (Jn. 6:69). This would suggest to me that Peter perceived this connection with resurrection, and when here in Mt. 16:16 he uses the same phrase again, we may be justified in seeing within it an understanding of how the Lord would not only be resurrected but would be the source of life to others. The phrase "living God" was used in Judaism, e.g. the High Priest adjures the Lord Jesus "by the living God" (Mt. 26:63)- but more in the sense that the living God sees and knows all things. Again, we note that it was John the Baptist who preached (AV "bare record") that Jesus was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34). Yet after his death, it was only Peter, the disciples and a few others who accepted this- for :14 has made it clear that most people considered Jesus to be some reincarnation of a previous prophet, but not "Son of God". In commenting upon the end of Matthew 12 and the meaning of the parables about poor response to the word in Matthew 13, I suggested that the Lord recognized at that point that the Jews had been unresponsive to John apart from the circle of disciples- and He switched focus at that point onto them. See on 16:18 *gates of hell*.

Even before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!". Peter's confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. The titles we apply to God and Jesus come to have more meaning to us over time. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord's death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: "Thou savourest not the things of God", straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus' Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn't yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: "This *is* my beloved Son... hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son's words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

16:17- see on 13:11.

*And Jesus answered and said to him: Blessed are you-* The Lord is thrilled that although John's teaching about Him as Son of God had generally been ignored or rejected (see on :14), Peter had grasped it. He had earlier explained that although the preaching of the word by John had generally not brought forth a permanent response in Israel, the disciples were "blessed" because they *did* understand (13:16). The idea of being "blessed" with an understanding suggests that the understanding was a blessing given- see later in this verse on *not revealed*.

*Simon Bar-Jonah-* Simon, son of John. The Lord is contrasting Peter's natural origins, speaking of Peter's old name and his natural father, with Peter's high spiritual status as one of the few who perceived the Lord as being the Son of God. This juxtaposition of the natural and spiritual sides in a person is exactly what the Lord had just done with regards to Himself- see on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

*For flesh and blood has not revealed it to you-* The correct understanding

of the Lord was a "blessing", something given. Earlier the Lord had taught that the Father through Himself had chosen to "reveal" Himself [s.w.] to the spiritually immature disciples ("babes"), and not to the Jewish religious leaders who studied every letter of the Old Testament from dawn to dusk (Mt. 11:25,27). John's equivalent of this is his record of the Lord's comment that the Jews generally did not believe because Isaiah had prophesied that the "arm of the Lord" had to be "revealed" [s.w.] to people, and it was revealed only to a few (Jn. 12:37,38). And our spiritual birth is not of "flesh and blood" but by the sovereign will of God for us (Jn. 1:13). Paul surely has all this in mind when he writes that the things of God "are revealed unto us by His spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10 cp. Gal. 3:23; Phil. 3:15). Faith in Christ therefore requires 'revelation' from God. There was an element to which the disciples, and all of us who have truly responded to the word of Christ, have chosen to do that, and this is pleasing to the Lord. But if that was where the story ended, then salvation would be a matter of human works and intellectual tenacity and correctness in interpretation. Grace would be out of the equation, and God would face off against man over an open Bible which man must correctly interpret and live by if he is to be saved. The will of the Father for human salvation, and the depth of human moral and intellectual weakness, is such that this cannot be the way to salvation. Paul in Romans starts talking about predestination and election in the context of demonstrating that salvation is by grace, and therefore such metaprinciples exist- so that human works and correctness of understanding is only *part* of the final, invisible equation which finds its sum in human salvation. And so it has to be so that there is *some* element of God revealing Truth to us, blessing us with that revelation. Hence the Lord tells Peter that it is God's grace in revelation, His 'blessing', rather than "flesh and blood" which has revealed this to Peter. And yet the Lord says this against the backdrop of having spoken about the mixture of flesh and spirit in human salvation- see on *Simon Barjona* and on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

*But my Father who is in Heaven*- Luke's equivalent seems to be that the Father which is in Heaven gives the Spirit to His children (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). Again, the emphasis is on God's part- our part is to request and then to be receptive and responsive.

16:18 *And I also say to you*- The theme of :17 has been that human action, faith and response is only part of the overall picture of spiritual work and human salvation. The church is to be built- by Jesus- upon the rock of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Again, the two aspects come together. Flesh and Spirit, Son of Man and Son of God, "flesh and blood" and Heaven.

The idea was perhaps that the Lord was going to build His church upon Peter and the confession of faith which Peter had made, but the Lord was

going to be the builder and not Peter. This would instil into Peter an appropriate humility for his later work of bringing thousands to Christ so publicly.

*You are Peter-* In response to Peter's 'You are the Christ'. We note here the mutuality the Lord was seeking to build up in His dialogues with His followers, and that sense of mutuality between us and our Lord can be felt today too.

*And upon this rock-* The term could refer to Peter personally, as his preaching was chronologically the basis upon which the church began. Perhaps the Lord held the shoulders of Jesus and spoke those words to the disciples- that upon the rock of Peter ["rock"], the future community was to be built. But the context is of declared faith in Him as God's Son. If this confession of faith (see on :16 *The Christ*) is the basis upon which the community was and is built, then we need to ask what else is really required as the basis for Christian faith. That confession is only a beginning- the Lord will build upon it. The Lord is surely alluding to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham was the rock upon which the community of Israel was to be built- and showing that each believer in Him as Son of God was no less than Abraham in the new Israel.

*I will build-* The idea of building upon a rock naturally recalls the Lord's parable of Mt. 7:24-26. As so often, the Lord told that parable to Himself as well as to us; He Himself built a house upon a rock, and He therefore knows how very slow the progress is. In that parable, the ability of the house to withstand the testing storm of judgment day depends upon the builder. We must take the step of faith, and yet the Lord builds upon that and our final passing through judgment day is partially dependent upon His building of us. And yet the metaphor of building is taken over by Paul as referring to the work that we do in building others up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:4,17 Gk.). The clear implication is that our efforts for others are partially responsible for their entry into the Kingdom. I keep saying 'partially', because as we have seen throughout this chapter, the human factor works together with the Divine factor to achieve ultimate salvation for individuals. The Jewish religious leaders are likened to builders who built without a true foundation (Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11)- and so the Lord is saying that He has taken over that job, and the leaders of the ecclesia share with Him in doing it (the 'masterbuilders', 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 10:8). But not only the leaders- for we each are to build each other up (Rom. 15:2; 1 Thess. 5:11 s.w.). And yet it was Peter himself who speaks of how we are "built up" by the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5)- it's just that in practice He works through others, so that the church in a sense builds itself up (Eph. 4:16).

*My church-* The first reference to *ekklesia* in the New Testament. The only other usage of the word in the Gospels is in Mt. 18:17, where the Lord



speaks of a process of telling a matter unto "the church" in the case of interpersonal disputes. The Lord implied, therefore, that He was confident that despite the failure of John's ministry, the minority who had responded and believed in Him as God's Son would provide the basis upon which He would successfully build a community of believers. Every reference to "the church" in the later New Testament needs to be understood in the context of how the *ekklesia* is first introduced in the Gospels. It is a community built by the Lord Jesus personally. The Septuagint had used *ekklesia* concerning the community of Israel; the Lord's talk of building another *ekklesia* based around faith in Him was radical stuff- for the obvious objection of Judaism would have been that the *ekklesia* already existed. The Lord's use of *ekklesia* in this sense was radical, and an effective rejection of the old Israel in order to build a new one- not on Abraham personally, but on faith in Him (which Abraham exemplified through his faith in the promised seed). The LXX of Gen. 28:3 speaks of an '*ekklesia*' (AV "multitude") of people' being created from Abraham's seed. And the Lord is now redefining this- as those whom He would build up into a new nation, based upon faith in His Divine Sonship.

*And the Gates of the grave-* An allusion to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham sat at the gates of hell to prevent the circumcised falling into it (mentioned by Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*). The Lord is saying that faith in Him is what shall save us rather than descent from Abraham. And yet the Old Testament speaks of the gates of death as being under God's control (Job 38:17; Is. 38:10), and He can "lift me up from the gates of death" (Ps. 9:13). The "gates of hell" can only not prevail against us through resurrection of the body. Peter's confession of faith was that Jesus was "Son of *the living* God", and I outlined the connections between "the living God" and the idea of resurrection under 16:16 *Son of the living God*. We should note that there were many wrong beliefs about "the gates of hell". The Lord doesn't specifically dismantle nor criticize them, just as He doesn't do so with the wrong idea of demon possession. Instead He places emphasis upon belief in Him and the hope of resurrection, which meant that death, and whatever "the gates of hell" were imagined to be- simply had no power over the believer in Him. His repeated 'casting out of demons' showed the same- however 'demons' were understood, the Lord's power was so great over them that they remained no credible worry for the believer in Him.

This may also be an allusion to a cavern in northern Palestine known as "the gates of hell". The Lord had just been in that area instructing the disciples- it's likely they had heard of it, or even made a tourist excursion to view it. The Lord is saying that even that much feared precipice, into which the locals threw sacrifices to ward off the powers of the underworld, had no power against faith in Him as the Son of God.

*Shall not prevail against it-* The only other time the word is used is in Lk.

23:23, speaking of how the voices of the Jews "prevailed" to get Christ crucified. He must have recalled His own words here, that the gates [or gatekeepers / rulers] of the grave would not ultimately prevail against Him.

16:19 *I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven*- The root word for 'key' means literally to close or shut. The Scribes "shut up" the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13 s.w.) - the job of Peter was to use the Gospel to open the way to salvation to ordinary people and those otherwise shut out by the Jewish leadership. The same word is found in Mt. 25:10 where the Lord speaks of how He will shut the door to the Kingdom at judgment day to those who didn't want to be there in this life (and again in the context of final condemnation in Rev. 20:3). The parable of Lk. 11:7 adds an interesting insight- even if in this life the door is shut [s.w.] to a person, if their way of life warrants condemnation, such is the Lord's grace that it can be opened in response to the intercession of others on behalf of that person. The key to entry or exclusion from the Kingdom was given to Peter in the sense that the Gospel of Jesus as Son of God could open the Kingdom to people, and if they hear that message and reject it, then the Kingdom is closed to them. It doesn't mean that Peter could just chose to condemn or save individuals. Rather does it show that the keys to eternity are in our hand, and we should therefore be devoting our lives to opening the doors for others to that eternal future. The keys of knowledge were given to Peter, and through his preaching they opened up the closed door of salvation to many who would not otherwise have entered (Mt. 16:19). Losing bonds is the language of bringing salvation and forgiveness (Is. 51:14; 58:6; Mt. 13:30; 18:27; 22:13; Lk. 13:16). And those keys are likewise in our hands too. If we introduce the Gospel of salvation to a man, the door is opened to him; if we don't, it remains closed for him. In this sense what we bind and loose is automatically confirmed by God, in that He has delegated to us the preaching of entrance into His Kingdom. Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]... if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

*Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*- The promise is repeated to all the disciple in 18:18, disproving Roman Catholic interpretations of Peter. There is here a continuation of the idea of the Gospel as being the keys to the Kingdom. "Whatever" could equally be translated "Whoever". The idea of binding is connected in the Lord's

thought with condemnation (s.w. Mt. 12:29; 13:30; 22:13 cp. Rev. 20:2). The idea isn't that Peter arbitrarily had the power to condemn someone, and have his decision confirmed by Heaven. Rather is this almost hyperbolic language an encouragement to us as to the eternal power of the Gospel we also preach. By men rejecting it, they are bound in condemnation; by accepting it, they are loosed. Their response to the Gospel we preach is to their condemnation or salvation, and what goes on here on earth is reflected in Heaven. We can think that if we offer the Gospel to a man and he shrugs and walks on in his life, somehow the passing of time after the encounter makes it less eternally meaningful. But not so. He encountered the offer of salvation from us, and the choice of rejecting or accepting it is reflected and noted in Heaven. This is the intense significance of our witness, the eternal moment of every encounter. Another time the words for binding and loosing occur together is in the account of the disciples being sent to loose a donkey that had been tied (Mk. 11:2-5). One wonders if the Lord intended them to perceive in that simple domestic task an acted parable of their possibilities- through unloosing that which had been bound, the way was enabled for the Lord to enter into Jerusalem. The hint might be that the witness of His people in the last days is what can enable His return and triumphant entry to Jerusalem. So very much has been delegated to us.

Binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain.

16:20 *Then he ordered the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ-* The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels.

"Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how

Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ (:16). The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of chapter 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

"That he was the Christ" is AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

16:21 *From that time*- Again we see the Lord educating the disciples according to a timetable. Now He was satisfied that they were convinced of His Messiahship and Divine Sonship, He felt He could move on to teach them more about His death and resurrection. This is how we were likewise taught the components of the Gospel; but we should not think that the Lord's teaching process ends there for us. He is continuing to teach us, in accordance with how quickly we have grasped the preceding elements.

*Jesus began*- Matched by Peter 'beginning' to argue with the Lord (:22).

*To explain to His disciples*- Mk. 8:32 adds that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in :20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

*That*- The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

*He must*- The usage of *dei* is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

*Go to Jerusalem*- *Eis* has more the sense of '*into* Jerusalem'. Perhaps He foretold the 'triumphal entry' and how so quickly, things would unlovely themselves. Such explanation was necessary, otherwise the euphoria of

the triumphal entry being dashed by what then happened would've been perhaps too hard for the disciples to cope with.

*And suffer many things*- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

Mark and Luke (Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22) add here that the Lord added that He would be "rejected" by the Scribes, elders and Priests. The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

*From the elders*- *Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

*And chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

16:22 *And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying: Be it far from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you!*

- Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. "Be it far" is Gk. 'Be merciful to yourself' (s.w. only Heb. 8:12 "merciful"). As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the Satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we

have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

"This shall not be" could suggest that Peter thought that by his own strength and use of force he could stop this happening. By saying this he not only over-estimated his own strength, but showed his naivety about the strength and nature of the opposition to the Lord. He likely still didn't appreciate how evil were the Jewish religious leaders.

16:23 *Turned and said*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*... if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death.

Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

*To Peter-* Mark says the Lord "rebuked" him (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] strictly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "strictly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

*Get behind Me, Satan-* When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation,

hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in :24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

"Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in :24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

*You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man-* The Greek *skandalon* literally means a trap or snare. But the Lord Jesus saw the snare and therefore didn't fall into it. Peter's attitude was a snare to the Lord in that it was attractive to Him- a savouring of the flesh rather than of Godly things was therefore attractive to the Lord. Some reflection on this will surely find in this a profound evidence of the Lord's utter humanity. For 'very God of very God' would no way have reasoned like this nor found the things of men an attraction over the things of God. Peter's fleshly thinking was a trap or snare to the Lord Jesus in that it was found superficially attractive by Him.

*16:24 Then said Jesus to his disciples: If anyone wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me-* The disciples had a psychological barrier in understanding the teaching of the cross, just as we can likewise. Often when He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40).



They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

Lk. 9:23 adds that the Lord asked us to take up our cross *daily*. Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

Mark, who as we have suggested elsewhere was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34

Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Luke gives more detail about this saying about carrying the cross (Lk. 9:23-26). In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross. Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins. We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to

incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people. Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?' (William Barclay, *The Gospel Of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122). The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

16:25 *For whoever would save his life*- The Lord is speaking also to Himself here- see on :23 *Get*. I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is therefore more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-

assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

*Shall lose it*- Luke's record speaks of forfeiting life or self. Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35). Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred. The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there

"ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves so weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if he is ashamed of His words and seeks to gain the world for himself in this life. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. But in Mt. 10:28,39 the Lord teaches that men cannot take that "life" from us- only God can, at the day of judgment. He clearly doesn't simply have mortal life in view, because this can be taken from us by men. Perhaps the idea is that for those written in the book of life, they 'have' eternal life, as John's Gospel makes clear. No man can take that from us. But if we spend our lives trying to find the ideal life for ourselves in this life (the coolest place to live, high income, fulfilling career etc.), we are in fact losing or destroying that eternal life, and therefore there is such a thing as names that were once written in the book of life being erased from it. In Luke's record, the Lord goes on to say that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the

cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

I mentioned above that the Greek for 'losing life' has been used by the Lord in 10:28,29,39 to speak of losing or destroying life in the condemnation of the last day. Perhaps the idea is that we resign not only any attempt to materially turn this life into the eternal life, our small world into God's Kingdom- but we also condemn ourselves now, so that we shall not be condemned in the last day. Flesh must be condemned, and it is our wisdom to do it now.

*And whoever shall lose his life for my sake-* Mk. 8:35 adds: "And the Gospel's". The Lord envisaged that the preaching of the Gospel could likely involve the loss of life. For many of us today, that is not the case; and in fact it has usually not been the case for the majority of Christ's followers over time. But the idea is that we are to sacrifice life for the Gospel; be it momentary embarrassment, social death, defriending on social networks or sacrifice of career and wealth. This is the large part which "the Gospel" was envisaged as playing in the life of a believer. Mk. 8:35-38 records the Lord's teaching here slightly differently: "For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it! For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life? For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my

words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed". The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation.

*Shall find it-* 10:39 has made it clear that if we find our lives we shall lose them. This finding of life likely refers, therefore, to finding it in the day of judgment. However, according to John's Gospel, the essence of the eternal life, the kind of life we can eternally live, can be lived right now in Christian experience today. So this is an element to which we who have forfeited having the Kingdom now, in all the apparent possibilities for self-fulfilment which there are today, can find the eternal life now in that we can live the Kingdom life today. Likewise if we take the Lord's yoke upon us, we shall "find rest unto [our] lives / souls" (Mt. 11:29 s.w.). And the implication is that that experience begins now, having shed the heavy burdens of guilt and legalism.

*16:26 For what shall a man be profited-* Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What *will it* [future] profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What *does it* [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

The metaphor is clearly of trading: profiting, gaining, exchanging, losing. The parable of trading the talents uses the same metaphor. Mt. 25:17,20,22 speak of 'gaining' more talents- the same word used here about 'gaining' the world. And yet the intended paradox is that by losing materially, declining to profit and gain in the material things of this world, we shall gain eternal things. The idea of not being profited by gaining the things of this life is recorded in all the Synoptics (Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25). John's equivalent is to record the Lord's teaching that the flesh can "profit" (s.w.) nothing, whereas His words are spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). The spiritual life, lived in response to His word, is the true profit. There can be no ultimate profit in any fleshly, worldly enterprise.

*If he shall gain-* See on *profit*. We are to 'gain' more talents for the Lord, not the world for ourselves (Mt. 25:17,20,22 s.w.). We 'gain' our brother (Mt. 18:15)- not for ourselves, but for the Lord; Paul wanted to 'gain' men by all means for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-22 s.w. four times). Unspiritual husbands are to be 'gained' by the spiritual efforts of believing wives (1 Pet. 3:1). The first century believers likely memorized the Gospels, and so Paul's repeated usage of the word 'gain' regarding gaining others would've been easily connected with the 'gaining' of talents in the parable, where the same word is also repeatedly used. Instead of gaining the world for ourselves, we are to gain people for Christ. Instead of careers and long hours at work to fund a cool lifestyle, we are to spend time visiting, phoning, writing, emailing, arranging things... for the gaining of individuals for Him. The contrast is between gaining *persons* for *Christ* and gaining *things* for *ourselves*. Paul had clearly meditated upon the Lord's teaching here because he says that whatever things were once "gain" for him [s.w.] he now counted as *loss*, and even saw his death, the loss of this present life, as "gain" (Phil. 3:7; 1:21). The "things" he no longer wished to "gain" refer to his life of legalistic obedience and condemnation of others (Phil. 3:4-6). The call to no longer gain but lose is not simply an invitation to unload our wealth in monetary terms. If it were, then it would only apply to the minority of believers over time who have been wealthy. More essentially, the call is to lose whatever human advantage we have had, even spiritual power and advantage over others, in order to align ourselves with the life and death of our Lord. Paul continues the allusion to this section by saying that he has counted all such human advantage as "loss" (Phil. 3:8)- the same word used in "lose his own soul / life"- in order that he might "gain" Christ. The gaining of life which the Lord spoke of is described by Paul as a gaining of Christ- for He is our life (Col. 3:4). Our existence is eternally intertwined with His.

*The whole world-* An allusion to the Lord's wilderness temptations. Yet again, He speaks largely to Himself in His teaching of others, as every true teacher does. The parallel records in Mark and Luke speak of suffering and loss in order to not be ashamed of the Lord's words and to preach those words. The work of witness is the 'gaining' of people for Him. It is not incidental, therefore, that the only other reference in Matthew to *holos kosmos*, "the whole world" is in the context of speaking of how the Gospel is to be preached to "the whole world" (Mt. 26:13). With this in mind, it may also be that the Lord is warning that a preacher may indeed gain the whole world for God in a spiritual sense- and yet be cast away himself. In this case, He was more than ever speaking to Himself, He who did die in order to gain the world. What we do for others is no replacement for personal spirituality. If this is a valid interpretation, perhaps subtly built in by the Lord into His appeal to not gain the material



world for ourselves, then we must re-examine the common assumption that a person must be good and spiritual because of all the good they have done for others. That good may indeed have been done, but is no guarantee of deeply personal integrity before God.

*And forfeit his life-* The allusion to Mt. 10:28,29 means that no man can take life from us, but God can, at the condemnation of the last day. Therefore the "life" in view is not simply mortal life, which can be taken from us by men. Rather does it refer to our eternal life, potentially given to us from the foundation of the world in Christ. We cannot give anything for that, it is priceless. We are to accept it, but if we accept it, then we will not seek to gain the world for ourselves in a material sense in this life. Note the emphasis upon his "own" life. The eternal life which we shall eternally experience is personal to each of us. The Bible teaches personal salvation. You, and me, as the sum total of all we have experienced, we as persons... shall personally be saved. The eternal life is not therefore merely a biophysical state which can no longer die; immortality is not merely the absence of death. It is more personal than that. It is about you and me personally existing for eternity; we ourselves as persons shall be saved and eternally continue. This of course highlights the eternal importance of character development in this life; for we shall eternally be who we develop into.

*Or what shall a man give in exchange-* The Lord is perhaps envisaging how some might think to offer their wealth in order to buy eternity at the last day- verse 27 goes on to speak of the day of judgment as if this is the scene which the Lord has had in view throughout this section. Surely nobody will actually do that- at that day. But effectively, that is how so many live today, thinking that their attempts to acquire this world can somehow be compared to the riches of eternity.

*For his life-* The Greek and Hebrew words translated "soul" ["life"] have a very wide range of meaning. The idea is usually of the person, the life, often the natural life. But here we have one of a few usages where the word is used about the person and their life in the sense of the person and life which they could eternally be in God's Kingdom. The use of "soul" here rather than "life" is perhaps because the Lord has been emphasizing personal salvation- see on *his own life*.

*16:27 For the Son of Man shall come-* There is a powerful practical result of the connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "For (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the

cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now.

Luke adds that the Lord will be "ashamed" of those who have been ashamed of Him in this life. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

*In the glory of his Father with his angels-* The intention of this phrase may be to demonstrate that the Lord will execute judgment with the full authority of the Father. Or perhaps the language is to remind us of the awesomeness of the day of judgment, and how inappropriate it would be to stand there and think that before the light of that moral and physical glory, with all the Angels present, we could suggest giving our wealth as an exchange for our soul.

*And then shall he repay every man according to his deeds-* The Greek refers to payment, and this is how the word is usually translated in the Gospels. And this is in keeping with the metaphor used here- of trading, gaining, losing and exchanging. The payment to us is for our loss of material advantage in this life; the attitudes which led to this are therefore the "works" which shall be paid back. It could be argued that the idea of paying a reward implies that the "every man" in view here refers to the group of faithful believers. For it is those accepted into the Kingdom who shall be given payment. In one sense, the penny a day refers to salvation, which all the same requires us to resign seeking the reward of this world. Or it could be that in another sense, the nature of eternity will indeed be according to the works we have done, in that one star differs from another in glory, and the servants were rewarded with different levels of reward according to their trading on their Master's behalf.

The 'deeds' of the context refer to taking up the cross, not wanting to gain the world for ourselves but seeking to gain men for Christ. These 'works' appear largely to be mental attitudes rather than deeds physically performed. The work of God is to believe in Christ (Jn. 6:29). The outcome of the day of judgment is according to human works in the sense that it is only a confirmation of the decision and judgment about ourselves which we ourselves have decided in this life- see on 16:25 *lose it*.

16:28 *Truly I say to you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom-* Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of

apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 27 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 27 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of 'Some here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:27). I note under 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words in 16:28. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the

harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will "see" Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with

John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

It is the "Son of man" who shall 'come'. The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

## CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And after six days*- Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother*- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the rock*, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

*And led them up a high mountain by themselves*- Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

17:2 *And he was transfigured before them*- Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that we should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to

show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistening white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

*And his face shone-* The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into.

*As the sun-* The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

*And his garments became white as the light-* The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many



connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. - "shew" is the same word translated 'to see' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on :5 *cloud*.

17:3 *And there appeared before them-* See on :9 *the vision*.

*Moses and Elijah-* They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

*Talking with Jesus-* The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 16. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

*17:4 And Peter said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here. If it pleases you-* Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death (Lk. 9:31), and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself

had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say (Mk. 9:6). The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

*I will make here three tabernacles- one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah-* See on 17:1. It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

17:5- see on 16:16.

*While he was yet speaking, a bright cloud-* Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

*Overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is*

*My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*- This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

*Hear Him*- This was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

*17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were terrified*- The strong similarity with Moses (see on :5 *cloud*) was such that they felt utterly unworthy, which is what falling on the face is commonly associated with in the Old Testament (Abraham, Gen. 17:3; Joseph's brothers, Gen. 50:18; Moses, Num. 16:4; Balaam, Num. 22:31; Joshua, Josh. 7:6; Ruth, Ruth 2:10; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 2:46). Their fear is similar to Israel's when confronted with the sight of a similar theophany on a mountain. They felt, as we all do at times, that all this was beyond them. The Lord's comfort of them was not simply reassuring them that they were not going to be consumed by the vision, but more so encouraging them that they really could rise up to the height of the calling to be as Moses. Paul grasped the point when he invites us *each one* to see ourselves as Moses, beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, "we each with unveiled face" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). Each of us are as Moses, not just the church leadership, but each one of us who has entered a personal relationship with Christ and seen God's glory in His face.

*17:7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said: Arise and be not afraid*- This is intentionally similar to the experience of Daniel in Dan. 10, with the Lord Jesus lifting up the disciples, who were feeling unworthy as Daniel did. Again, the disciples were being taught that in the new Israel, there are no heroes set in stained glass that are high above our possible reach. We are the heroes. Just as Daniel felt unworthy, so did the disciples- the connection made the point that the heroes of Judaism were also weak and felt their sinfulness, and on this basis the disciples were encouraged to be like them and rise up to their spirit.

Their fear was not simply of the majesty of the moment, but more fundamentally their fear of being called to be as Moses- see on :6. A massive 23 times we find the Greek phrase translated "Fear not" on the lips of the Lord Jesus. His consistent, persistent reassurance of His

faltering followers, whose fear is often because of their own moral inadequacy, is significant indeed.

17:8 *And lifting up their eyes, they saw-* 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of :7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead... Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

*No one, save Jesus only-* In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

17:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying: Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of Man be risen from the dead-* Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event

finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him" (:3). It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

Mark adds (Mk. 9:10) that "they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean". This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the

disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (wilfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

*17:10 And his disciples asked him: Why do the scribes say-* The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned, implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

*That Elijah must first come-* This provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

*17:11 And he answered and said: Elijah indeed comes-* There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's

failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11). Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn.1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias" (Jn. 1:25).

*And shall restore all things*- The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirke R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the*



*Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

17:12 *But I say unto you, that Elijah came already and they knew him not, but did to him*- Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32-35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

Mk. 9:12 adds more detail to the Lord's words: "Elijah indeed comes first and restores all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?". His question was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said..." something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His

sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

*Whatever they would-* Mk. 9:12 adds: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

*Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer by their hands-* Mk. 9:12 extends this in saying that He would likewise "suffer many things and be set at nought". Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

17:13 *Then understood the disciples that he spoke to them of John the Baptist-* Towards the end of Matthew 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord had explained at length how Israel *en masse* had *not* "understood" (the same word is used) about John, but the disciples *had* understood (Mt. 13:13-15,19,23). He then solemnly asked the disciples whether they had "understood" (s.w.; Mt. 13:51), and they assured Him that they had. They are presented as children, saying they understand when they don't. The Lord commended them for understanding when the masses didn't. But this understanding was imputed to them by Him. On one hand we see His simple and pure love for them, counting them as understanding what they didn't; on the other, we see how His hope that they would understand paid off, for they did finally. And this is the practical outworking of imputed righteousness and the status that is counted to us "in Christ"- we are to live out that status in practice, and the Lord works patiently with us to ensure that we do. And likewise in our pastoral work with others; faith and love and hope in others are at times rewarded, although not always.

17:14 *And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and knelt before him, saying-* This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event,

because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

*17:15 Lord, have mercy-* This is a phrase commonly used by those who besought the Lord for a miracle. But later in the New Testament, the word is used almost exclusively concerning the Lord's spiritual grace and mercy specifically in providing salvation. We are left wondering, therefore, whether each of those who requested such "mercy" were not thinking solely of physical healing, although that was obviously very much in their minds, but also had a sense of their need for spiritual healing, forgiveness and salvation. And this was what led to their requests for healing being positively received by the Lord. For presumably there were many requests for healing which were not met, seeing that the majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three small villages (see on 11:20).

*On my son-* His only child (Lk.).

*For he is epileptic and suffers terribly-* Literally, "Lunatic". Literally it means one who is "moon struck". It was once believed that if a person went out walking at night when there was a clear moon, they could get struck by the moon and become mentally ill. We use that word "lunatic" today to describe someone who is ill, but it does not mean that we believe mental illness is caused by the moon. If our words were written down and re-read in 2,000 years' time, people might think we believed that the moon caused illness; but they'd be wrong because we are just using the language of our day, as the Lord Jesus did 2,000 years ago. The New Testament likewise reflects this association between the moon and mental illness. "They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them" (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness- physical and mental, understood and not understood- was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatick" translates the Greek *selēniazomai*- "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction- just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase.

*For often he falls into the fire and often into the water-* Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt

he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

17:16 *So I brought him to your disciples*- Lk. 9:40 adds that he "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:19).

*But they could not cure him*- They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

Mk. 9:23 adds that the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. Mark also adds the detail that the Lord "asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child. And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!". It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see

ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The word "believe" in Mk. 9:23 is omitted from many texts. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth". It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

17:17 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long must I tolerate you?*- An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless (:20). In chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses

who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in

response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.

- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... show yourself to the world".

*Bring him here to me*- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.



17:18 *And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him*- There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

*And the boy was cured from that moment*- The immediate effect of the Lord's healings contrasted sharply with those of faith healers, both then and now.

Mk. 9:27 adds that the Lord touched him and lifted him up- exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the

three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

17:19 *Then came the disciples to Jesus privately, and said-* In a house (Mk.).

*Why could we not cast it out?*- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment that "*If you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed...*" was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

17:20 *And he said to them: Because of your little faith-* See on :19 *Why could we not*. "Ye of little faith" (Lk. 12:22,28); they had "no faith" (Mk. 4:40). "Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25). They asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). Luke records that the Centurion had more faith than the disciples (Lk. 7:9). The Gospel writers were very self-critical regarding their own faith in the message they were now preaching. They openly admit that they didn't have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was "because of your little faith...if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove..." (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn't have the faith to cure the boy. But Jesus says they did have "little faith". He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him*, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*.

*For truly I say to you: If you have faith as small as a mustard seed-* This calls for obvious connection to the Lord's earlier likening of the Gospel of

the Kingdom to a grain of mustard seed which then grows into a great tree (13:31; Lk. 13:19). The Lord then had been explaining that although the disciples' faith was small, and His plans for the Kingdom had tiny, almost invisible beginnings in that group of disciples, yet they would grow into the Kingdom. But now, in the heat of this disappointed moment, the Lord feels that the disciples don't even have such beginnings. In this frustration and deep disappointment we have yet another window into the Lord's utter humanity.

*You shall say to this mountain-* Just a very small amount of real faith during this life will enable us to move "this mountain", perhaps referring to Mount Zion. The idea of Mount Zion being moved sends the mind to Zech. 14:4,5, describing how Mount Zion will be moved at the Lord's return; and also to Ps. 125:1, which speaks of how they who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; and yet Christ said we *will* remove it by prayer. The point of these allusions is surely to show that real faith will bring about the coming of the Kingdom, which is a totally super-human achievement; the unshakeableness of Mount Zion is likened to the solidity of true faith. The Lord's point seems to be that if we truly believe, then the coming of the Kingdom will be brought about by our faith; the outcome of our faith in this life will be seen in the Kingdom. But what our faith will achieve in the Kingdom will be hugely out of proportion to what it really is now. But there is another way to read Mt. 17:20: "If ye have (now) faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall (in the Kingdom) say to this mountain (of Zion), Remove hence..."; as if in the Kingdom we will be control of the physical world as the Lord was even in His mortality. In this case, His commanding of the sea and waves will be shared by us in the Kingdom; not just sea and waves, but mountains too (Mt. 8:27).

But the Lord spoke these words at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, and the more comfortable interpretation would be to think of Him saying these words with a nod towards the mountain from which He had just come down. Real faith would enable that Kingdom experience to be replicated anywhere. The vision of the Kingdom which had been seen there could be moved anywhere- by faith. There was maybe another gentle encouragement for them to think in terms of God's Kingdom as not being geographically limited, but capable of removal to the Gentiles, if they had faith. The Lord uses similar words after cursing the fig tree, symbolic of Israel and God's ultimate destruction of her: "If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to this mountain: Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Mt. 21:21). In that passage, the mountain is almost certainly a reference to Mount Zion. The sea was symbolic of the Gentile world, and so the Lord would be developing His teaching which began here at the mount of transfiguration- the things of the Kingdom, centred

as they then were in the mountains of Israel, could be moved to the Gentile world by faith.

*Move from here to there, and it will move-* Ps. 46:2 was perhaps in the Lord's mind: "Therefore we won't be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains are moved into the heart of the seas". In this case, the Lord would be suggesting that if we have real faith, we will not fear the results of that faith. We will not fear mountains being cast into the sea; and it is fear which holds us back from faith, we unconsciously fear the answer we apparently seek in prayer.

*Nothing shall be impossible for you-* With God nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37- the only other occurrence of the word in the NT), but here nothing is impossible *unto us*. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as... so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

17:21 *But this kind-* This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

*Will not go out-* Angels are of course active in answering our prayer, obeying the commanding voice of God Himself in Heaven- answers to prayer "go... out" by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The answer to prayer is therefore likened to a 'going out'- of the Angel and command from the throne of grace? This language of 'going out' is frequently used in the Old Testament about the going forth of the cherubim Angels. See Is. 37:36 for another example.

*Except by prayer and fasting-* Which evidently, the disciples should have done but had not. The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it (Mk. 9:29). Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for

somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

*17:22 And while they stayed in Galilee, Jesus said to them-* Luke adds that the curing of the young man led to wonder and amazement at His healing power, but He wished the disciples to realize that the crowds would all the same turn against Him: "But while all were marvelling at all the things which He did, He said to His disciples: Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Lk. 9:43,44). The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

*The Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men-* Mk. 9:31 puts this in the present tense- He *is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come... the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

*17:23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up-* Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

*And they were greatly distressed-* Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45). And yet in prayer to the Father,

He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer-speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

*17:24 And when they arrived in Capernaum, they that collected the tribute money-* Matthew was also from Capernaum (9:9), so these were his one time colleagues. Josephus says that the temple tax was payable in March, a month before Passover. This would suggest that Matthew is now recording incidents in the final month of the Lord's life. The half shekel (as RV) of the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16). This had to be paid in the old coinage of Israel, and the money changers in the temple converted Roman money into this coinage at a large profit. It was their tables which the Lord overthrew.

*Came to Peter and said: Does not your teacher pay the tribute money?-* Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is portrayed as the representative disciple. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21).

*17:25 He said: Yes-* The question naturally arises as to why, then, the Lord miraculously provided a coin to pay the temple tax if He had already paid it; and why that coin only paid for Jesus and Peter, and not for the other disciples. Another question is why this tax had to be paid in

Capernaum (:24) and not in Jerusalem or the home towns of the disciples. My suggestion is that the payment of that tax at that time and place was unnecessary, but the Lord did so in the spirit of His teaching about offering to go two miles when asked to go one; or offering the undergarment to him who asks your cloak. In commenting upon those teachings, I made the point that such offers restored the balance of power to the abused and took it away from the abusers, who would feel awkward accepting the offer. And we are therefore left to wonder as to whether the coin was really accepted by the questioners. It would've seemed a chronic waste of money to the unspiritual, but the Lord works on a higher level than the pragmatic and utilitarian.

The Pharisees taught that one could only worship in the temple if the temple tax had been paid (Jostein Adna, *The Formation of the Early Church*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) p. 27). The Lord could have engaged with that wrong view in direct confrontation. But He didn't. In His gracious way, He once again went along with misunderstandings by paying what was required, and yet His example and teaching demonstrated that service to God was totally independent of such human demands. The children of God who are "free" from such taxes could be understood as all Israel, and more specifically, the new Israel, comprised of God's own Son and His disciples.

*And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first of all, saying-* The Greek word for "first of all" really means 'to anticipate'. Again we see the Lord's sensitivity in knowing what is in human nature. So often we read that He "answered and said..." when there had been no stated question. That acute sensitivity to human thinking and situations remains with Him to this day, and should be a great comfort to us at the day of judgment.

*Simon. What do you think? The kings of the earth, from whom do they receive toll or tribute? From their own children, or from strangers?-* There was a double meaning here, for there is in Semitic languages 'the plural of majesty', whereby the plural can be used to speak of one great thing. The great king of the earth was God. His children are therefore free from the demands of men; but the Lord goes on to teach that we should all the same submit to those demands in order not to make them stumble. Another approach is invited by the possibility that the phrase "kings of the earth" has been consciously lifted from Ps. 2:2 LXX, which speaks of how "The kings of the earth... and the rulers... take counsel / were gathered together against Yahweh and His Christ". One of the many applications of this verse is to the rulership of the earth / land of Israel collaborating in the crucifixion of Christ and later of His disciples (Acts 4:26; note how He

speaks of "the rulers of the Gentiles" in 20:25). There are indirect applications of Ps. 2:2 to the Jewish leadership in Mt. 22:34; 26:3,4. The priesthood of the time has been described as "A priestly aristocracy"; therefore the language of kingship was not inappropriate to them. Josephus speaks of the priesthood as this: "The constitution became an aristocracy, and the High Priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:10, 5). So it could well be that these rulers which the Lord was focusing on were the Jewish religious rulers and priests of the day, and their children were free from the temple tax. Yet the Lord argues that the disciples are likewise free from it- because they were the new priesthood.

Again we note the high status the Lord argues for His followers- the children of kings, and in this case, the King of all the earth. The implication was that the Jews who paid the temple tax, considering it as the highest sign of their membership in God's people (as it was a voluntary tax), were in fact thereby showing that they were strangers, Gentiles, and not His true children.

17:26 And when he said 'From strangers', Jesus said to him: Therefore the children are free- Barnes summarizes the argument: "Kings do not tax their own sons. This tribute-money is taken up for the temple service; that is, the service of my Father. I, therefore, being the Son of God, for whom this is taken up, cannot be lawfully required to pay this tribute". Peter later asks his sheep: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man... unto governors... *as free*... honour all men" (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn't need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for baptism. Peter's readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn. The Lord seems to make a concession to the inability of the surrounding world to understand Him, when He tells Peter that as God's people, they are free from the requirement to pay taxes to the present world. But "lest we should offend them", we should pay them (Mt. 17:27). As the Lord spoke to men according to their level of ability to comprehend Him (Mk. 4:33; and consider how He used the language of demons), so should we.

The statement that His followers were "free" from paying the temple tax was effectively a statement that the Lord's greatness as "one greater than the temple" (12:6) meant that He was at liberty to therefore abrogate the teaching of Torah- for Ex. 30:13,14 did indeed stipulate a temple tax. His



overturning of the tables of the moneychangers, who enabled the payment of the temple tax in practice (21:12-17) was likewise effectively stating that the temple tax law was not binding on His followers. The Lord taught that the tax should be paid so as not to offend the potential Christian faith of the Jews, rather than because it was a question of obedience to Divine law- because that law was ended.

Another consideration is that the Lord is alluding to the Jewish idea that the priests themselves were exempted from the temple tax (*Sheqalim* 1.8)- because He considered His followers the new priesthood. He had used the same argument in justifying why the disciples could grind corn on the Sabbath- they were, He implied, like the priests who could even eat the showbread on the Sabbath.

17:27 *However, not to give offence to them*- This sets the scene for the Lord's sober teaching about the eternal danger of offending others (i.e. making them to spiritually stumble) in 18:6-9. His own example was of supreme effort not to offend others. He likewise carefully explained to His disciples the likely sequence of events surrounding His death "so that you should not be offended" (Jn. 16:1). But He also knew that they would be offended because of those things (Mt. 26:31). But so sensitive was He to the tragedy of others stumbling that He as it were laboured against His own foreknowledge, so that others would not be offended in Him. We are without doubt to take His example to ourselves, and go to any lengths to ensure that others do not stumble, especially because of us. The Lord specifically focused upon Peter, in order to teach him the extent we should go to in order not to offend others; because He had recently rebuked Peter for being a cause of stumbling to Him (Mt. 16:23). Not to offend others was a major plank of the Lord's teaching- it was the epitome of the kind of iniquity which would exclude from His Kingdom (Mt. 13:41), and literally any length must be gone to in order not to offend (cutting out own eyes, hands etc.; Mt. 5:29,30). Paul speaks of divisions and offences which are contrary to the doctrine learnt by the early Christians (Rom. 16:17). That "doctrine" or teaching would've been the Gospels themselves; and these teachings about not offending others were therefore up front as first principles in the early church. We do well to note that Paul brackets together divisions and offences; spiritual stumbling so often comes from division, and those who cause division thereby make others stumble. This is so true to observed reality amongst us- people spiritually stumble because of their exposure to divisions.

As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that

He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith... a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. In those last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin...but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. See on 8:4.

Acting as He would act is really the whole key to not giving offence / causing others to stumble. He above all valued the human person to an extent no other human being has ever reached. When asked to pay the temple tax, which apparently few people paid in Galilee at that time, the Lord did so "lest we should offend them"- even though, as He explained to Peter, He was exempted from it, as the Son in His Father's house (Mt. 17:27). He could have appealed to higher principle. But the Lord was worried that somehow He might make these apparently mercenary, conscience-less legalists to stumble in their potential faith. We would likely have given up with them as not worth it. But the Lord saw the potential for faith within them. And only a few verses later we are reading Him warning that those who offend the little ones who believe in Him will be hurled to destruction (Mt. 18:6). Could it not be that the Lord saw in those hard hearted, hateful legalists in the ecclesia of His day...little ones who potentially would believe in Him? And His positive, hopeful view of them paid off. For a year or so later those types were being baptized,

along with a great company of priests. People change. Remember this, and given that fact, try to hope for the best, as your Lord does with you. People *can* change, and they *do* change, even those whom at present you just can't abide in the brotherhood.

*Go to the sea, cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find-* Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack, apparently. He had a strong attraction to fishing, almost making us wonder whether "Do you love Me more than these?" was a reference to the haul of fish lying there when the Lord spoke those words. His claim in Mk. 10:28 to have "left all" wasn't really totally true. He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's..." (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

*A coin. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself- A stater, a shekel (RV)- enough to pay two half shekel taxes, for Peter and Himself (see on :24).*

The whole incident of fishing for the coin in order to provide the temple tax is somewhat strange at first blush- until we realize that it is in fact a further commentary upon the prediction of the Lord's death which He has just made in the immediately preceding verses. The temple tax was Biblically described as "the atonement money" (Ex. 30:16), "a ransom for his soul" (Ex. 30:12), and this led the Jews to claim that all who paid it therefore were represented in the sacrifices offered on the temple altar. It's therefore logical that this incident follows straight on from the Lord's prediction of His death on the cross. The Mishnah made the connection

clearly when commenting upon the temple tax: "R. Eleazar (the Amora) further said: a man would pay his Shekel and thus obtain atonement" (*Baba Bathra* 9a). The coin He provided was to be given "for Me and you", the *anti* (translated "for") suggesting that the coin was *instead of or representative of* 'Me and you'. At least theoretically, the temple tax was used to buy the animals which were sacrificed- and so the Lord would be teaching that He provided the atonement money, the ransom, because He was the animal sacrificed. And He provided for both Himself and Peter, representative of all the disciples at this moment (see on :24), in that His sacrifice was the basis of His own redemption insofar as He too was human. If Matthew indeed is bringing out a more figurative aspect of the story, this would explain the rather strange way the questioners are recorded as asking "Does your Master *teleo* tribute?" (:24). *Teleo* means to fulfil; and this is how the word is usually used in the New Testament. There were more obvious words which could have been used to express the simple idea of 'payment'. The usage of the word surely hints at the Lord Jesus not just paying but fulfilling the type of the temple tax. It's noteworthy that here in Mt. 17 we have the second prediction of the Lord's sufferings and death. The first prediction was also followed by an allusion to the temple tax- the Lord speaks there of what a man could give "in exchange [s.w. 'ransom'] for his soul" (Mt. 16:26)- the very phrase used in the LXX of Ex. 30:12, which speaks of the temple tax as "a ransom for his soul". And in that same context in Mt. 16, the Lord speaks of His resurrection as being predicted in "the sign of the prophet Jonah", whereby salvation was in the mouth of the fish. And that theme is here continued. The third prediction of the passion is likewise followed by the statement that the Lord's death was "a ransom for many" (20:28)- yet another allusion to the temple tax of Ex. 30:12. The initial question was whether the Lord paid the temple tax. As so often, He answers the question with a meta principle which places the issues so far higher than the original question. He was providing the actual atonement money, ransom and sacrifice which the temple tax prefigured. He *was* those things. To ask Him to pay a coin to a corrupt religious leader was so irrelevant and inappropriate. And yet having made the point, in His grace and condescension to human weakness, He still pays the coin in concern that otherwise, the potential faith of those legalists might be somehow hindered.

## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *At that time*- At the end of chapter 17, the Lord has spoken of His death. According to the parallel records, the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves as to who was or would be the greatest amongst them in the Kingdom. This detail is omitted in Matthew because he seems to want to emphasize how in the light of the Lord's prediction of His death, the disciples still argued about petty things and were divided amongst themselves because of their own pride. In the shadow of the cross. Again we see how self-critical were the Gospel preachers and writers- for the Gospels are transcripts of how they usually preached the Gospel message.

*The disciples came to Jesus, saying*- Their arguments and divisions had been carefully conducted by them outside of His earshot, just as we can wrongly assume that our own church politics are somehow not in His presence. The Lord knew their discussions, for He asked them what they had been arguing about, and they refused to say (Mk. 9:33,34). Lk. 9:46,47 makes clear His perception: "There arose a reasoning (Gk. *dialogismos*) among them, which of them was greatest. And Jesus perceiving the thought (Gk. *dialogismos*) of their heart...". In any case, they gave the game away by asking who was greatest in the Kingdom. Luke is bringing home the point that the discussion amongst them also took place within their hearts; the thoughts of jealousy gave direct birth to the words spoken.

*Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven*- The present tense suggests that they had accepted the Lord's frequent teaching in the parables of the Kingdom that the rulership, the dominion of God is in essence now amongst His followers. They wanted to know which of them He considered the greatest. We could possibly infer that there was a perception that one of them, presumably Peter, was perceived by the Lord as the greatest. And they disagreed with that judgment. The Lord had indeed spoken of "the least in the Kingdom" (11:1), which suggests He did indeed see some element of gradation amongst His followers. Without doubt, Peter, James and John formed an inner three whom the Lord appeared to have especial hopes for, and out of them, Peter was the one the Lord seemed to have especial hopes for, and it had just recently been demonstrated in 17:24 that Peter was perceived even by outsiders as the leader of the pack. The Lord's response was that whoever became as the little child "is greatest in the Kingdom" (:4)- again, using the present tense, as if He saw the essence of His Kingdom as already existing in the form of the disciples. And yet He seems to suggest that their focus should be upon *entering* the Kingdom (:3) rather than being the greatest in it. The suggestion was that He doubted whether they had yet entered that community as they should have done; they had yet to be "converted" (:3). But at other times, He is so positive about them, especially when justifying and defending them to the unbelieving world

around them. This is typical of love. Love is not blind, the weaknesses of the beloved are noted and commented upon, and yet the object of love is still seen as wonderful and spoken positively of to others. The whole Biblical teaching of justification and imputed righteousness is really just the logical outflow of the love of God and His Son for us.

The Lord had repeatedly implied that He would be the greatest in the Kingdom, because He humbled Himself the most. When the disciples asked Him "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?" (Mt. 18:1), they therefore reflected a complete lack of appreciation of *His* greatness. The disciples' immaturity and squabbling amongst themselves had led them to forget the superlative greatness of the One who stood and sat and walked amongst them. And conversely, they had failed to allow His surpassing greatness to make all discussion about which of them was the greatest absolutely irrelevant. Thus their perception of His greatness, the extent of it, and the nature of it, only grew *after* His death.

Mk. 9:35 adds that before the Lord called the child to Him, He made the comment that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all". The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an ellipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

18:2 *And he called to himself*- Just as the Lord is often described as calling the disciples. The idea is that those called, which included the disciples, should be as little children.

*A little child*- The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbade the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

*And set him*- The Greek means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus,

but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

*In the midst of them*- This phrase is used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom (:4). Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

The Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

18:3- see on 13:15,16.

*And said: Truly I say to you, except you turn and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven-* This is all sober language, repeated quite soon afterwards (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17), indicating the degree to which the Lord saw the salvation of the disciples as being in doubt unless they were going to humble themselves, and quit their pride and the divisions which come from it.

There are levels of conversion, as exemplified in the life of Peter who was not totally 'converted' until he devoted himself to strengthening his brethren after his encounter with the Lord after the resurrection. The same Greek words for "become as" are used for the need to become as their Lord and Master (10:25). The focus was to be upon becoming as Christ, rather than seeking greatness amongst themselves. The idea of 'becoming' suggests a process- to become as Him was to be the thrust of Christian life.

18:4 *Whoever therefore shall humble himself-* This is the very language of the Lord Jesus on the cross; the hymn of Phil. 2 speaks of seven stages in the Lord's self-humiliation until He finally died "the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), and then the hymn speaks of seven stages of exaltation. This is yet another indication that the little child, the one who would be greatest in the Kingdom, was to be seen as representative of the Lord personally. The disciples had initially followed John the Baptist, and his message had been that men must be "brought low" (s.w. 'humble self'; Lk. 3:5). And yet they had clearly not grasped this, even though in chapters 12 and 13 the Lord seems to rejoice that they had responded to John in spirit and truth, unlike Israel generally. Such was His grace and positive feelings about His beloved. To humble oneself suggests conscious effort, and yet it is almost impossible to make ourselves more humble by our own act of the will, or by some self-instigated internal intellectual process. Paul speaks of how *God* humbled him (2 Cor. 12:21), and Peter speaks of humbling ourselves "under the mighty hand of God, that He



may exalt you" (1 Pet. 5:6). He is willing to humble those who wish to be humbled, and so the essence of self-humiliation is surely to appreciate that God is seeking to humble us, and to cooperate with this, allowing His mighty hand to humble us, rather than resisting the process. We need to daily carry this in mind- that today, God seeks to continue His process of humbling us, so that He might exalt us in His time.

So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom: "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:10-11). Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us [I am verily guilty of this]. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it.* The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner... this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for ... he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9). It seems to me that so often in His teaching, the Lord was speaking to and about Himself. We understand from Phil. 2:8 that on the cross, the Lord "humbled himself". He used just those words in speaking of how the greatest in the Kingdom, the one who would be the most highly exalted

(and He surely had Himself in view) was the one who would be the most servile in this life. His references to *becoming* as a servant He therefore spoke partly as exhortation to Himself (Mt. 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). The Mt. 18:4 reference speaks of humbling oneself in terms of being converted and becoming like a little child. This was lived out by the Lord in His life and ultimately in His acceptance of the death of the cross. Yet this is what "conversion" is essentially about. In the same way as the Lord Jesus Himself had to be "converted" even at the very end of His life, to accept the awfulness of the crucifixion with an almost child-like simplicity (in some ways- e.g. His silence when surrounded by evil accusers, just like "the child in the midst"), so we too will pass through stages of 'conversion'. Note in passing that the same idea of the humble being exalted is used by the Lord in Lk. 18:14 with reference to how the humble man recognizes His own sinfulness. Whilst the Lord was sinless, perhaps part of His humiliation and taking on a servant-form involved His acceptance of the full horror of sin, and His willingness to bear it for our sakes.

Whilst humility isn't a natural characteristic of children, we are asked to take as it were a snapshot of that child in that situation, looking at the ground, pining away inside himself. The Lord said that the child had "humbled himself" (Mt. 18:4)- showing that He didn't see children as naturally humble. But as he stood (or sat, Mt. 18:2 Gk.) in the middle of the circle, the impishness and immature self-assertion was driven out, and in a moment the child was humbled. That child in that situation, the Lord said, represented the true disciple; and it represented Himself, the Lord of glory. It seems to me that the Lord was standing next to the child, identifying Himself with it, in the middle of the circle of disciples. *In the very same context, a few verses later* the Lord spoke of how He was *in the midst* of the disciples (Mt. 18:20). There is no doubt He saw that humbled child as the symbol of Himself, possibly implying that He Himself had been progressively humbled, from one level to another. Yet in Lk. 9:48, the Lord goes further: the child represents not only the believers and their Lord, but also *the Father* (Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48). The humble surroundings of the Lord's birth, the way the exalted Lord of life and glory appeared from the tomb dressed like a working man (whilst the Angels, far inferior, had shining white garments), the way during His life He spoke in such a way that reflected His lack of formal education (Jn. 7:15)- all this shows a humble, super-human Father. And His Son was and is the same. Indeed, Lk. 2:12 RV (cp. Is. 7:11,14) says that *the* sign would be that the Son of God would be laid in a cattle trough; this was to be the extraordinary indication that God Himself was involved in this wonderful birth.

*As this little child-* In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"-

presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people. Solomon's words: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in", i.e. to rule God's Kingdom (1 Kings 3:9) are alluded to in Mt. 18:3,4; become a child so you can rule the Kingdom; Christ was the greatest child as he will be the greatest ruler. This sets Solomon up as our example in this respect.

*The same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*- Elsewhere the Lord taught that he who humbled himself would be "exalted" (Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14), a word which is used both about His 'lifting up' on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 and His ascension to Heaven (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Eph. 4:8), with all the subsequent 'exaltation'. Again, we sense that He has Himself in mind here- He who made Himself the lowest, was to be lifted up both on the cross and to Heaven. Paul makes a telling allusion to this idea in saying that he has humbled himself, not so that *he* would be exalted, but so that the weak brethren in Corinth might be (2 Cor. 11:7). When Peter later preached that Jesus was 'the exalted one' (Acts 2:33; 5:31) he perceived finally what the Lord was driving at here- that *He* was the greatest, the most exalted one, because He had humbled himself the most. And therefore all argument about seniority or greatness amongst the body of Christ was therefore irrelevant and deeply inappropriate.

On at least four separate occasions, the Lord taught that he who *exalts* himself will be *abased*, and he who *humbles* [s.w. abases] himself will be exalted (23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). This was clearly a major theme in His exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom; this is what will happen when that Kingdom is established at His return. He paralleled conversion with humbling oneself (Mt. 18:3,4). The humble will be exalted, and the exalted humbled. Because this will happen, we

must *now* humble ourselves, so that then we might be exalted. The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled him* (Acts 8:33). If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. It was the logic Israel failed to comprehend... "When Israel was a child...". It is prophesied of those who will be condemned: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty [as Moses did in this life]. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Is. 2:10-12). "And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment" (Is. 5:15,16). There are many similar passages; the theme of 'bringing down' pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). They pave the way for the announcement that in man's response to the Gospel of Christ, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a levelling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, "we make the answer now" by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God's grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9-10).

18:5 *And whoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me-* To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We

should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they

must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbid [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

18:6 *But whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble-* Why the warning against offence, causing to stumble, in this context? The context so far in this chapter has been about the need for humility and not dividing against each other in jostling for seniority in the community of believers. Lk. 9:48 says that the Lord went further and urged the disciples to receive such children. Surely the connection is in the fact that refusing to receive little ones and divisions amongst believers are what cause little ones to stumble, hence Paul brackets together "divisions and offences" (Rom. 16:17). This is the sin of division- it causes little ones to stumble, and that is so true to observed experience in the body of Christ. Refusing to receive little ones and divisions over this matter have caused so many of the little ones to go away from Christ. Lk. 17:1,2 repeats the teaching about not offending little ones, and the Lord goes on to teach about the need for unlimited forgiveness of others. Not forgiving is a form of not receiving others, and this too can lead the person to stumble from the way.

The implication may be 'Even just one'. If 'just' one person is rejected by us, then we have not received Christ and condemnation awaits us. Each encounter we have with people is therefore of eternal moment and significance. We cannot hide behind any sense that 'generally' we are innocent on this matter; if just one is rejected by us, then the Lord's terrible picture of condemnation must loom large before our eyes. Of course we can in this life repent and seek to put things right with one we previously rejected. But for the rest of our days we need to live in quiet humility realizing that we should have been rejected, that we caused a little one to stumble from the way, and our salvation truly is by grace.

By "little ones *who believe in me*" the Lord was clarifying that He was not so much talking about the spiritual acceptance of children as the acceptance of believers in Him whom His disciples might consider spiritually immature or inappropriate for acceptance into their closed circle. This may well have reference to John's disciples, whom the disciples were slow to accept, both in the Lord's ministry and probably also in the early years of the church. In the parallel records, He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as

being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

*It would be better for him that a great millstone should be hung about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea-* The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that they refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

A nice picture of the Lord's perception of the disciples is found in the way He said that the little boy who came to Him, responding to His call (Mt. 18:2) represented the "little ones" who believed in Him (Mt. 18:6). 'Little ones' is a title of the disciples in Zech. 13:7; Mt. 18:3; Jn. 21:5; and it is disciples not literal children who have Angels in Heaven (Mt. 18:10). The context in Mt. 18:11,12 speaks of the spiritually weak, implying the 'little ones' were spiritually little as well. Christ's talking to them while he knew they were asleep in Gethsemane and the gentle "sleep on now", spoken to them whilst they were asleep (Mk. 14:41,42), sounds as if He was consciously treating them as children- especially fitting, given their spiritually low state then. His father-like care for them is seen also in His promise in Jn. 14:18 RVmg. that He would not leave them "orphans", but He would come to them. The disciples were not orphans- because they had a true and real Father-figure, in the Lord Jesus. But the disciples were the Lord's children. John records in his Gospel only once how Jesus described His disciples at the Passover meal as "My little children" (Jn. 13:33). The Lord Jesus was acting as the father of the family, instructing his children as to meaning of the Passover. But the same phrase occurs seven times in 1 John. He had dwelt upon that phrase of the Lord's, and it clearly came to mean so much to him. Our child-father relationship with the Lord Jesus likewise needs sustained meditation. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was manifesting the Father, and thus leading the disciples to the Father through Him.

Drowning in the depth of the sea was a common figure for the condemnation of the wicked. And yet Mic. 7:19 had spoken of how the sins of the faithful in Judah would be cast into the depths of the sea and drowned like the Egyptians at the Red Sea. And yet individual condemnation is spoken of with the same metaphor. The meaning is surely that our sins will be condemned, and thus forgiven; but if we are not identified with our sins, then we shall not be. In this lies a strong basis for understanding Paul's introspection of Romans 7- clearly he recognizes his sins, but doesn't identify himself personally with them.

We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6. If we offend one of His little ones, "it is profitable for [us] that a great millstone should be hanged around [our] neck, and that [we] should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (RV). This is the language of Babylon's future condemnation at the last day (Rev. 18:21). But how can such a condemnation be "profitable" for us? Remember that James teaches that in some things, we all offend someone (James 3:2). Maybe the Lord is saying: 'When you offend others, as you all do at times, then you're deserving of condemnation at the last day. But condemn yourselves for it, now, in this life; that will be profitable for you, and then you need not be condemned at the last day'. It's a sober thought, that deserves introspection. We all offend others- let's give James' words their full weight. And instead of going down the road of 'Yeah but it was after all *their* fault they allowed themselves to be offended...', let's just allow these Bible passages their obvious meaning. Our poor attitude to others at times shouts for our condemnation. And we need to recognize that, resolving to live life ever more sensitive to our colossal impact upon others.

18:7 *Woe to the world... the man*- CEV: "The world is in for trouble because of the way it causes people to sin". The *kosmos* in mind was surely the Jewish world [the word usually has this primary meaning in John's Gospel]. In this case "Woe to that man" would then be specifically addressed to the disciples; they were to take the warning to themselves each one, which is why the next verse speaks of the need for 'you' singular to do absolutely everything to avoid causing another to stumble. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out. But there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly



focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man.

*Because of temptations to stumble! For it is necessary that the temptations occur, but woe to that man through whom the temptation comes!*- The Lord continues His theme of giving offence to others when He says: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! [The Lord must have said this after such careful introspection, knowing that He was the rock of offence to many, and that Jewry were to be 'offended' by Him]. *Wherefore* if thy hand or thy foot *makes you a cause of stumbling* [i.e. to others], cut them off..." or else you will be condemned (Mt. 18:7 Gk.). This is how important it is to search our lives and see what may cause others offence. And, in His relentless way, the Lord continues: "See that ye despise not one of these little ones" (Mt. 18:10), the little ones He has Himself just been so careful not to offend, by paying up His taxes. We offend people by 'despising' them. And, on and on and on, Jesus incisively takes His teaching further- in the parable of the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.

To *not* seek others' salvation is to despise them. We may not think we are spiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are...if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation. And the shepherd seeking the lost sheep matches the man who plucks out his eye and cuts off his hand lest they offend others. So you see the parallels throughout Matthew 18:

Lest we offend them	Pay the temple tax, go fishing, make the effort
Lest we offend others and are cast into condemnation	Pluck out our eye, cut off our hands and feet
Lest we offend the little ones and are cast into the sea	Receive the little ones as if they are Christ, see the Christ in them
Don't despise others	Go out looking for the lost sheep with unlimited effort
Lest we are cast "to the tormentors"	Give unlimited forgiveness to your brother, try to "gain your brother"

The self-willed effort we must make to not offend our brother is quite something. Just imagine looking at yourself in the mirror, wedging your finger nails under your eye socket, and pulling out your eye. This is the conscious effort we must make not to offend, and thereby to save. It's really quite something. Note that the parallels tabled above show that to

not offend is to save. If we seek above all the salvation of others, then we will not offend them. We will, quite simply, *care for them* as the Lord cares for us.

18:8 *And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble-* Cause you to stumble. The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be 'If these things cause you to stumble others'; or, 'If these things cause you yourself to stumble'. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

*Cut it off-* I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how "the world", the Jewish religious system of the Lord's time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

*And throw it away-* The Greek for "cut off" here is that translated 'hew down' in speaking of condemnation at the last day in Mt. 3:10; 7:19; Lk. 13:9; Rom. 11:22. The idea of 'casting' ["throw it"] is used about the casting of the rejected into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 3:10; 5:13,25,29; 7:19 and often). This is the language of latter day condemnation- and yet the Lord says that this is what we must do to those parts of our bodies which cause us to make little ones stumble. I believe that we have here the idea which James 3:2 is articulating more directly: "In many things we offend all". We are warned that if we offend / make others stumble, then we shall be condemned. James says that we all make others stumble in some way (and honest self-examination will reveal that to us). So, we all should be condemned. But we must

recognize and confess wherein we have done this, and condemn those parts of our lives which have done that- and cast them from us.

*It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame, rather than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the perpetual fire-* The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God's tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshiping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserable excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

18:9 *And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it*

away- The idea has been pushed that this refers to sexual lust. But that is not the context here. The context is of our offending others, and how we should be willing to pay any price, no matter how awful for us, so that we do not do that. I suggested above that the allusion is to how the blind, maimed and lame could not enter the priesthood for public service. The Lord is saying that it is better to be out of public service in the community of believers, if it means upholding policies which make little ones stumble. In the *kosmos* or the *ekklesia* of His day, it was necessary to separate oneself personally from the damage to others which the system was doing. It's better to enter into the Kingdom not having had the honour of public priestly service in the community in this life, rather than to have that public honour and yet cause others to stumble, meaning we shall not enter the Kingdom. The idea of entering the Kingdom without an eye or limping doesn't necessarily mean that we shall eternally be like that. I suggest it means that we enter the Kingdom having not had those things in this life, and not having therefore had a public ministry. The Lord was speaking to the 12 disciples at this point, some of whom, Matthew (Levi) especially, could have had a priestly career. Or He could be making the point that they were not going to be able to ever be priests in the old system because of their inclusiveness- but they would be shepherds of the *new* Israel He was forming, as He goes on to explain in :12-14.

Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

*It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna-* The Lord bid us cut off the hand or foot that offends, and thus enter into life halt...blind, rather than be

condemned in Gehenna (Mt. 18:8,9). It sounds as if 'entering into life' means entering into the Kingdom; and so it can do, for this clause is set as the antithesis for being condemned at the last day. Yet it is hard to imagine us entering the Kingdom somehow maimed, and in any case then we will not need to be without what causes temptation. The figure rings more true to our lives today; if we cut off our flesh *now*, we will live the rest of our mortal days somehow lacking what we could have had. In this case, we enter into life right now, insofar as we cut off the opportunities of the flesh. Jesus told another man that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments (Mt. 19:17). Insofar as he kept those commands, he would right now enter into life. We are entering into life, eternal life, right now!

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life. There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no

tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where 'little ones' had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God's Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

18:10 *See you do not despise one of these little ones*- Paul uses the same word in one of his many allusions to the Gospels in 1 Cor. 11:22, where he warns that exclusive attitudes at the breaking of bread, even having 'another table' to ones despised brethren, was in fact despising the entire church of Christ. Our attitude to the little ones is our attitude to Him and thereby to the entire church or body of Christ. Elsewhere, the Lord uses this word for "despise" as counterpoint to loving; the opposite of loving is to despise (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). He is forcing us to perceive that we either love little ones by accepting them, or we despise them. We of course would prefer to argue for some third way, whereby we are conveniently indifferent to some and accept others whom we consider on our moral and spiritual level. But those whom we do not love and accept, we effectively despise. That is the Lord's understanding. The Lord had warned His followers to "despise not" the 'little ones' (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase in 1 Tim. 6:2 in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as 'little ones', with all the patience this would require.

*For I say to you, that in heaven their angels do always see the presence of my Father who is in heaven*- The Greek could equally mean that they fully behold the face of the Father. The idea seems to be that the "little ones" are in fellowship with God, they are indeed represented in Heaven, they are 'before God', in His presence. And we should therefore not reject anyone who has relationship with God and in a spiritual sense is in His presence. This is the essence of John's teaching- that we cannot claim to have fellowship with the Father unless we fellowship His children, and if we do not fellowship His children, then we thereby break our relationship with the Father. It is seriously wrong, therefore, to admit on one hand that individuals are in fellowship with the Father, and yet refuse them fellowship.

The guardian Angels of Christ's "little ones", "do always behold the face of My Father in Heaven". There seem two options here:

- The Angels may be physically present with us on earth but also maintain

a presence in the 'court of Heaven', perhaps by means of another Angel there.

- A more likely explanation lies in the meaning of the word "behold" - 'to look to, be aware of, perceive, take heed'. Although physically present with us, the Angels are intensely aware of the face of God which they behold when assembled in the court of Heaven awaiting God's words of command. The "little ones" in the context are the spiritually weak- does this have something to do with their Angels being physically absent from them in Heaven?

18:11 *For the Son of Man came to save*- In the context, the point is that if *His* mission was to fellowship with and thereby save "the lost", then it should be ours. His method of saving the lost was to have table fellowship with them in order to try to lead them to repentance and salvation. All that is true of Him is to be true of us- we have the same mission and should use the same methods. And refusing to open our closed circle to the little ones is going right against that method.

*Those which were lost*- The Lord Himself was evidently very conscious of the inclusiveness of both male and female in His redemptive work. He came to save that [both male and female] which was lost (Mt. 18:11). He asked His people to follow Him in His cross carrying, and then told them to follow a *man* bearing a pitcher of water (doing woman's work)- probably a slave bearing water for the purification rites of Passover. In asking this He was requesting us to see in that man a symbol of Himself in His time of self-sacrifice. Yet the Lord saw Himself as a slave, a man doing woman's work, as the seed of the woman...surely the Lord had worked out in advance this wonderful blend of the genders in the figure He chose to represent Him. He spoke of leaving one's sister for His sake as being a sacrifice, whereas the contemporary culture would rarely have felt that way about a female relative. Jesus not only spoke to women publicly, but is even recorded as allowing a Gentile woman to change His mind (Mt. 15:22). This was unthinkable and shocking to contemporary society.

The sentence begins with "For...", connecting the "lost" with the "little ones". Following through the theme of this section, the lost, the little ones, the despised ones, will be won back and not stumbled by receiving them in table fellowship. This is the going out to seek the lost. The Lord's parables describe those He will save as the son who refused to go to work, but later went, sheepishly aware of his failure; the sheep that went away, i.e. those Christ came to save (Mt. 18:11) (a symbol of us all, Mt. 18:12 cp. Is. 53:6); the lost coin; the son who went away and sowed his wild oats, and then returned with his tail between his legs. Christ expects that we will fail, as grievously as those parables indicate. Yet we have somehow come to think that they refer either to our follies before baptism, or to those within our community who publicly disgrace

themselves. Yet they describe *all* the faithful. But is there that sense of contrition in us, really? Aren't we more like the elder brother, or the son who said "I go, Sir, but went not" (Mt. 21:30)?

18:12 *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray*- Of course we must use our freewill and repent, but the Lord in the parables of the lost coin and sheep likens us to things which *cannot* repent and are not repentant, and yet all the same are brought back by the Lord's endless searching and pastoral care. By all means compare this with Peter's comment that the Lord's exaltation was in order to give *repentance*, not just forgiveness, to God's people (Acts 5:31; 11:18 cp. 2 Tim. 2:25). This is the extent of His atonement for men; not only to enable forgiveness, but to show His matchless grace yet further in even granting *repentance* to men. In the light of this it remains open to question how much credit we can personally take for our repentance. Not all lost sinners will come back, but the Lord speaks as if He will search always, in every case, *until* they do. These hyperboles are all to teach the vast extent of His desire to win back the lost. In the light of this, who are we to start questioning whether or not a brother has actually repented, if he says he has and shows this to some extent?

*Does he not...?*- The answer is, No, he doesn't. This is the element of unreality in this parable. It seems there are such elements in all the parables, and they are there to signpost us to the essential point of the parable. The Lord's parables all feature an element of unreality, which flags attention to His essential point. The shepherd who left the 99 and went after the lost one was an unusual shepherd. Common sense tells us that one should think of the good of the majority, not max out on the minority. We invest effort and resources in ways which will benefit the maximum number of people. But the Lord turned all that on its head. The heart that bleeds cannot disregard the minority, however small or stupid or irritating it or they may be. For people matter, and the heart that bleeds will bleed for every single one.

*Leave the ninety nine*- This may appear irresponsible. But it is in line with the Lord's grotesque language of cutting off body parts in order to avoid offending little ones. It's hyperbole to make a point- that the one little one or lost one is to have our maximum attention. I suggested above that the loss of body parts was an allusion to rendering themselves unfit for priestly service under the Old Covenant system. The Lord may be continuing the idea. Focusing on the little ones, the lost, may well lead to our being judged unfit for wider shepherding roles by those who are the power brokers within the human side of God's people on earth. But so be it. Lose that kudos, those roles. Focus on saving the lost. For that is what the Lord did, and thanks to that, we have been found and saved.

The idea of "leave" is 'to send away', and four times in this chapter alone is translated 'forgive' (Mt. 18:21,27,32,35). The same word is then found



in Mt. 19:14, where the disciples again forbid little ones and refuse to 'receive' them, and the Lord tells the disciples to 'suffer' those little ones to come to Him. The use of the word suggests that the disciples needed to 'forgive' their immaturity. The whole section is very thematic and it therefore seems unlikely that the repeated usage of this word is insignificant. Maybe the Lord is hinting that we should not waste energy on unforgiveness, but rather forgive even 99 sheep, and seek by all means to rescue / save / receive / not cause to stumble the one. It's as if unforgiveness towards others may lead the "one" to stumble. And that is indeed true to observed experience, because those who stumble are often full of stories from church life of where they encountered unforgiving attitudes towards others. The parable seems to be saying that if someone has been offended by the exclusion they experienced from the majority, then we are to forgive the majority and all the same do all we can to regain the lost. The closed circle of disciples who turned away the children from Jesus thus become the 99 sheep; the focus must be upon winning back those who have become lost. The parable teaches this in itself, because a sheep will only leave the flock if there has been some incident or situation between the flock and that sheep which mean that the flock has rejected or excommunicated it. For sheep do not just wander off alone from the flock and get lost. They tend to stay together by nature.

*On the mountains-* The Old Testament is clear that the sheep of God's people were lost on the mountains because of poor shepherding (2 Chron. 18:16; Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:6). The language of 'going astray' fits this picture, because the Greek word essentially means 'to be deceived' and is used in the context of the Jewish religious leaders deceiving ordinary Jewish people in the first century (Mt. 24:4; Gal. 6:7; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26). The mission of the disciples was to take over the role of the shepherds; they were resigning from the chance of being shepherds under the Old Covenant, disqualifying themselves from priestly service by cutting off their limbs, leaving the shepherding of the 99- but thereby becoming the shepherds of the New Covenant.

We all have the desire to keep our faith to ourselves, to hold onto it personally on our own little island... and it was this attitude which the Lord so repeatedly and trenchantly criticized. And in his demanding way, he implied that a failure in this would cost us the Kingdom. He more than any other must have known the desire for a desert island spiritual life; but instead he left the 99 righteous and went up into the mountains (i.e. he prayed intensely, after the pattern of Moses for Israel?), in order to find the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12).

*And go in search of the one that went astray?-* We are all such sheep who have gone astray (1 Pet. 2:25 s.w.). We are to replicate what the Lord did for us, in seeking the lost. But it is only if we perceive the degree to which we really were "astray" that we will be motivated to use His methods to

likewise save others. This is especially difficult to achieve for those raised in believing homes, who were schooled into Christ from an early age. The lost sheep who leaves the fold and goes off is based on Ps. 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments". The lost sheep that is found therefore has the attitude of recognizing it is lost, that it is still the servant of the shepherd although isolated from him, and still has not forgotten the things of God's word. The picture in Ps. 119:176 is strange indeed: a lost sheep asking the shepherd to come and find him. It's as if the sheep talks to himself, feeling the shepherd can't and won't hear, feeling that he's just too far away. And this is *exactly, exactly* the position of all those who leave the faith and return: they don't forget the doctrines of the Truth, in their hearts they feel too far away, but they wish somehow something could happen to get them back. This explains the type of sheep one is dealing with in the parable, and why the parable isn't true of all who go astray.

18:13 *And if he finds it*- Although in other parables the Lord is presented as searching *until* He finds the lost sheep, there is the possibility that He will not find it. Such is the huge power the Father has given human freewill.

*Truly I say to you, he rejoices over it*- The same word used for the man of Lk. 15:5 rejoicing in finding his lost sheep, and the Father's rejoicing at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32). The time of rejoicing is at the day of judgment, when sower and reaper shall "rejoice together" when the fruit is gathered unto life eternal (Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The rejoicing is when the sheep is 'found', and whilst that can happen in a sense in this life, the ultimate 'finding' of the sheep is surely at the final change of nature when Christ returns. Our joy at the day of judgment will not simply be because of our own personal salvation, but because of how others are receiving that great salvation, in part thanks to the efforts we made for them in this life. Paul's "crown of rejoicing" would be to see his converts accepted in that day (1 Thess. 2:19).

*More than over the ninety-nine that never went astray*- We could read this as meaning 'who did not *think* they went astray', seeing that all the Lord's sheep go astray. In this case, the reference might be to the majority of Israel; the Lord was saying that His disciples were to go searching for the little ones, the children, the women, lepers, whores and gamblers, and forgive or not worry about the masses of Israel who didn't consider they needed repentance. Or this could simply be the element of unreality in the story- the 99 simply function as part of the furniture of the parable, to focus our attention upon the proactive effort we should be making to win back the lost. And this huge effort stands in contrast to the negative attitude of the disciples in not 'receiving' the little ones.

18:14 *So it is not the wish*- It is not the Father's *will* that little ones should "perish" (see too Jn. 6:39 s.w.), but :13 has made it clear that the

finding of the lost is conditional: "*If so be* that he find it". Such is the huge power delegated to us, the extent of human freewill- that it can even stop the will of God being fulfilled. Because we have a choice as to whether we do His will or not.

*Of your Father who is in heaven-* RVmg.: "It is not a thing willed before your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" seems to refer to the guardian Angels who represent the "little ones" before the court of Heaven. Every situation in which we reject the little ones is played out in the court of Heaven. This section began with the disciples thinking that their internal politics could somehow be hidden from the Lord (see on :1 and :2). They cannot be. The situations, discussions, rejections, formulations of policies, inward thoughts... are all played out before the throne of God in Heaven.

*That one of these little ones-* This serves to show that the lost sheep are the same as the little ones.

*Should perish-* The Son of God came to "save that which is *lost*" (:11- s.w. "perish"). His mission was indeed the doing of God's will- that little ones should not "perish" or be "lost". But it's possible that they will be- because we can make them stumble, make them perish, even though it is the will of the Father and Son that they do not perish. The Lord gave His life so that they would not be lost / perish (Jn. 3:15,16 s.w.). But we can fight against the intention of the cross by making them stumble and thereby perish. The same word is used for how we can make a believer stumble and they thereby "perish": "Don't destroy [s.w. "perish"] with your [attitude to] food him for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). By doing so we are making the cross of Christ of no power for that person. Exactly the same is said in 1 Cor. 8:11, and I think 2 Jn. 8 has the same idea: "Look to yourselves, that we don't make to perish [s.w.] those things we worked for"- and those things were surely the converts which John's community had converted and built up.

18:15 *And-* AV "Moreover". Thus the previous theme is continued. Having spoken of such radical inclusiveness, the Lord foresees and tackles the obvious objection- that there may be cases where a believer has sinned against us, and that, surely, would be a reason for exclusion from the circle of disciples. But of course that would be illogical- if we are to be open to the little ones coming into the circle, then once they are within it, it would make no sense to then throw them out of it because they sinned against us. And the Lord now spells that out clearly.

*If your brother sins against you-* Luke's record adds: "*Take heed to yourselves; if your brother trespass... forgive him*" (Lk. 17:3). This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to

forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'. On another level, "take heed" suggests that in the case of personal offence, the tendency may be not to actually talk to your brother about it, nor to consciously forgive him in your heart. And it is these undealt with issues which create so much damage, both to us and to others. The purpose of the process outlined here is *not just* for the sake of the brother who has erred, it isn't just a polite protocol to follow; it is for *our sake too*, who have seen the weakness of our brother. *Unless* we talk frankly to him about it, between us *alone*, then we will end up hating him in our heart (even though it may not feel like that) and we will gossip about him. The frank raising of the issue with our brother is associated with loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is actually the opposite to what we would think; we would imagine that it would be more 'loving' to say nothing to our brother. But in this case, we will inevitably gossip about him and be bitter against him. The practice of true love will result in an open community in which we can frankly discuss with each other the issues which concern us, with love and not hatred in our hearts. This is the teaching of Lev. 19:16-18. No wonder the Proverbs expand upon it so much. And no wonder the Lord appropriated it as a ground rule for His ecclesia- there must be no gossip in the church. See on 5:22.

"Trespass" is the same word translated "sin" in 18:21 where Peter alludes back to these words and asks how many times his brother can "sin" [s.w. "trespass"] against him and be forgiven. The Lord's answer is basically 'An unlimited number of times', which indicates that Peter is to forgive without analysing the integrity of the supposed repentance. Luke's record in Lk. 17:3,4 could suggest (if read in isolation from the context) that the sinning brother should only be forgiven if he repents. But the way the Lord clarifies this to Peter effectively offers a far higher level of response to the brother's sin. If he is to be forgiven multiple times for the same sin, even the same day, and if the genuineness of his repentance is irrelevant- then in practice the Lord is teaching to forgive without requiring repentance. The lower level is to forgive only upon repentance; but the only problem with that is that as we behave in this matter, so we shall be dealt with by the Lord. In the Lord's prayer we are taught to ask for forgiveness *as* we forgive others. It's therefore important for us to be as generous as possible in forgiveness. As so often in spiritual life, taking the lower and easier path (in this case, forgiving only if we receive repentance first) creates a far harder situation for us- in this context, only being forgiven ourselves if we consciously repent of absolutely every sin. Not for us, therefore, could be David's prayer to be forgiven for his "secret faults" (Ps. 19:12), those that were secret or hidden from himself.

This whole section about 'taking matters up' with our brother and forgiving upon repentance (Lk. 17:3,4) seems out of step with the spirit of the material which precedes it (about doing absolutely anything to

receive our weak brother), and with that which follows it (the teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of repentance). I suggest it is purposefully out of step with it, and is in fact an allusion to and parody of synagogue disciplinary rules; it is certainly alluding to the procedure for discipline mentioned in the Qumran documents as being practiced in the Qumran community (1 QS [Rule of the Community] 5:24-26; CD [The Damascus Document] 7:2; 9:8). The synagogues had a disciplinary sanction of *Niddui*, casting out with no further association, and it would seem clear that the Lord is alluding to this when He speaks of making the disciplined brother as a Gentile and publican. There is evidence that later Christian excommunication was called "the judgment of the Jew", so clear was the Judaistic basis for the later Christian practice of excommunication (Lawrence Frizzell, 'Excommunication', in E. Kessler and N. Wenborn, *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2005) p. 152; see too G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community. Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: Gleerup, 1972)). This kind of parody of the language and practices of Judaism is common on the Lord's lips, and I have mentioned such cases throughout this exposition. This would explain the way that He goes on to assume there is some kind of established meeting with a congregation, witnesses etc. Admittedly He uses the word *ekklesia*, often translated "church", instead of synagogue, but the synagogue was the *ekklesia* for the very first disciples (we note how the early ecclesia is called a "synagogue" in James 2:2, and early Christian writers like Ignatius and Hermas likewise call the church a "synagogue"). When recounting Old Testament history and quoting from the Old Testament, Josephus at least nine times replaces the LXX *sunagoge* with *ekklesia* (F.J.A.Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1898) p. 7). *Ekklesia* as a word doesn't have any religious connotation. And strictly speaking, the *ekklesia* was not so much the body of believers or synagogue as the called-together assembly of the members at a specific time and place, which in the synagogue context ratified disciplinary decisions. The word developed into meaning 'the church' generally in the later New Testament, but initially it meant a specific local gathering of called individuals at one place and time, and had no universal sense to it. There was no established Christian congregation at the time the Lord was speaking, and yet He speaks as if such a system was well known by the disciples. Hort comments on the use of *ekklesia* in Mt. 18:17: "The actual precept is hardly intelligible if the *ekklesia* meant is not the Jewish community, apparently the Jewish local community, to which the injured person and the offender both belonged" (Hort, *ibid.*, p. 10). To therefore follow this section to the letter in *church* life today may be totally missing the point, and acting as the synagogue did- rather than as did the ever forgiving Lord of unconditional 'receiving' of little ones, sinners, the lost etc. This is only a suggestion- my notes on the passage don't always assume that this is the only interpretation.

*Go show him his fault-* The Greek word carries the sense of convicting a person, persuading them; it carries with it the hope of success. It's not a case of merely telling a person that we have noticed their faults, it is an attempt to convict a person of them with a view to their positively changing. The Lord uses the word later when He comments that He does this in love and hope of reformation: "As many as I love I rebuke [s.w. 'tell a fault' here] and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

*Between you and him alone-* This is so difficult! We would far rather notice the fault and tell others about it. This teaching is likely one of the most disobeyed principles of the Lord. The sense of being alone together is supported by the command to "*go* and tell him his fault... alone". The command to "*go*" and tell him he fault would seem a mere literary flourish until we perceive that *hupago* means not simply 'to go', but to go away, to depart. We are to depart from the time and place of realization of the offence against us, and then *alone* with the brother, attempt to convict him of a better way.

*If he hears you, you have gained your brother-* The question arises as to whether the gaining / regaining of the brother is to us personally, or to God. It *could* mean that personal regaining of relationship is in view. But the word translated 'gain' is elsewhere used about gaining or regaining a person *to God* (1 Cor. 9:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:1), and the word is repeatedly used in the parable of the talents, whereby the servants 'gain' more talents *for their Master* (Mt. 25:17,20,22). In practice, this surely refers to gaining *people* for Him. The two are of course related, because to gain a brother for the Lord is to gain a brother for ourselves.

Here the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins... go and point out the fault... if he listens to you, you have [re]gained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me practically impossible to judge the level of another's repentance. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'.

18:16 *But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two others, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established-* The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6). The context is indeed of personal offences, but as with all Scripture, we are not using it out of context if we extract the principles and apply them in different contexts.

The "two or three witnesses" were required in order to execute someone under the Mosaic law (Dt. 17:6; 19:15; Heb. 10:28); having 'witnesses' was very important to the Jews in the way they operated their judicial thinking (Mt. 26:65; Acts 6:13; 7:58). Surely the Lord didn't intend His new Israel to as it were re-enact the death penalty by excluding someone from the community if they personally offended you, didn't repent and therefore were unforgiven by you? That would be absolutely in conflict with His teaching which surrounds this section. This kind of legalistic, judgmental approach, and the need to establish "every word", seems so out of step with the radical grace, acceptance, patience, forgiveness without repentance and non-judgmental of the preceding and subsequent teachings of Jesus. The sharp difference in tone confirms me in thinking that the Lord here is not merely speaking tongue in cheek, but is parodying synagogue disciplinary procedures, as suggested on 18:15.

18:17 *And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church*- I have suggested in commentary on :15 and :16 that the allusion is to the synagogue methods of discipline, rather than to the church of Christ which had not then been established. There is no hint that this procedure was intended for application in the future, after the church was established. Greek tenses are specific, and this could have easily been conveyed. But it isn't; indeed, the whole procedure is spoken of as if it were already in existence and was what those offended by their brother could do right away.

*And if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you*- It seems that we have here a case of the Lord offering a concession to human weakness, to live His Truth on different levels. For the parable of the lost sheep shows Christ never giving up; but then there is the teaching of :15-18 concerning us trying to gain the brother that has offended us (Mt. 18:15 = Prov. 18:19), resulting in finally throwing him out of the church if we fail to reach an understanding with him. The teaching here seems to be that it is legitimate in such a case of personal offence to give up with the brother and separate from him. But the preceding parable shows Christ saying that He never gives up. And then in :22 Christ tells Peter ("I say unto *thee*", singular) never to stop forgiving his brother in a case of personal offence, up to 70 times seven. My summary of all this is that the ideal standard is never to give up in trying to regain our brother; but it is possible to live on the level of 'taking up' every issue with him, and eventually parting from him. 'But', the Lord continued, 'For you Peter, I expect a higher level; constant forgiveness of your brother, all day long!'.

If your brother sins against you, you can go to him, then get the church involved, and then, the Lord says to the person sinned against, let him be unto "thee" as a Gentile / publican. About the only advantage from the KJV is the way 'thee' signifies a 'you singular' as opposed to 'ye / you' which in KJV English meant 'you plural'. Modern English no longer makes

a distinction. So, let such a person be unto *thee*- you singular, not your ecclesia- as a Gentile and Publican. And what was Jesus' attitude to them? To mix with them, eat with them in table fellowship, and try to win them. Clearly this is talking about personal relationships, not ecclesial disfellowship.

*As the Gentile and the tax collectors-* The Lord's attitude to Gentiles was so different to that of religious Jews. He ate with them, thereby sharing religious fellowship; spoke positively of them, healed them and looked forward to the way that His death would end the spiritual status difference between Jew and Gentile; and therefore the Lord acted as if it were effectively ended anyway. The intention of 'being as a Gentile' was surely that it meant 'Have nothing to do with him'. But the Lord *did* have much to do with Gentiles, and by implication He did not think that the Jewish religious attitude to them was correct. Surely He is alluding here to Jewish 'disfellowship' practices, speaking tongue in cheek. For are we to really imagine Him now teaching that we are to only forgive our brother if he repents, and if we feel he has done wrong to us, drag him through a whole procedure of meetings and then declare him 'a Gentile', one not to be associated with? Surely not.

Matthew, the human author of this Gospel, had been a "tax collector" (10:3). The Lord did not ignore publicans as the religious Jews did; He had shocked the Jews by eating / fellowshiping with publicans (9:10,11). So the command to treat someone whom you won't forgive because they haven't repented (Lk. 17:3,4) as if they are a publican makes little sense if this is what Jesus is personally commanding us. Because He had taught by example that we should share religious fellowship with publicans, and He looked forward to sharing eternity with them (21:31,32)! It seems therefore almost certain that He is simply re-stating the well known procedures for disfellowshipping someone from the synagogue. The Lord is surely teaching that unless we practice radical acceptance and forgiveness of others, then we will end up disfellowshipping the little ones rather than receiving them. It would be fair enough to conclude the translation of each verse in Mt. 18:15-17 with a question mark- as if to say, 'Is this *really* how you want to carry on, endlessly taking up issues with your brethren, initiating procedures against them and then refusing to receive them at your meetings?'. The sense here in :17 would then be 'If he won't hear your witnesses- what, tell it to the church? And if he doesn't hear the church- make him to you as a Gentile and publican?'.

How we treat each other should be a reflection of how God treats us. We can make concessions for each other's weaknesses, accepting that some will live on higher levels than others; or we can demand a rigid standard of spirituality from them. I would venture to say that neither of these attitudes are *morally* wrong in themselves; it's just that as we judge, so we will be judged. For some time I have struggled with Matthew 18. It's a



chapter all about forgiveness, of forgiving until 70 times 7, of never giving up our search for the lost sheep; *of being soft as shy children in dealing with each other* (a matchless, powerful analogy if ever there was one). But wedged in the middle of the chapter is this passage which says that if your brother personally offends you, go to him and ensure that he sorts it out; and if he doesn't, take someone else with you, then tell the other believers about him, and throw him out of the church. This always seemed to me rather out of context in that chapter. But there must be a point behind the paradox presented here. Perhaps it's something along these lines: 'If your brother offends you, you are quite justified in 'taking it up' with him, demanding he acknowledge his wrong, and eventually expelling him from the church. But- why not just forgive him, without demanding an apology from him?'.

18:18 *Truly I say to you: Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever things you shall release on earth shall be released in heaven-* 'Binding' is associated with the binding of the rejected in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 13:30; 22:13; Rev. 20:2). The idea of binding and loosing occurs here in the context of warning us not to be too hasty to cast a brother out of the ecclesia. The earlier context of this section is of not causing others to stumble. It doesn't mean that any ecclesial decision has God's automatic sanction. But because salvation is related to remaining in the Christ body, the Lord may be saying: 'By unnecessarily expelling someone from association with My people, not 'receiving' them, you are endangering their salvation. I won't necessarily come to their rescue; I have delegated the keeping of that brother to you. You are your brother's keeper. If you throw them out, they will probably lose their salvation. What you do on earth in these decisions is not necessarily overridden by Heaven. The eternal saving of a man is delegated to his brethren, and therefore you also have the possibility of causing him to stumble from salvation'. The implication of this is surely that we should only cast out of the ecclesia those who openly and beyond doubt have placed themselves outside of God's salvation- and we cannot judge whether they have or not. And the Lord surely meant us to compare this against His command not to judge. He is surely saying in this passage: 'You can argue it out with your brother, and eventually get the ecclesia to disfellowship him. But by this you'll be saying that he is out of the way of salvation, and what you do may well drive him to condemnation; for it's a hard and unlikely way to the Kingdom without your brethren. And you know that you mustn't condemn him. So better just forgive him, 490 times / day, unconditionally'. Paul takes this idea seriously when he says that if he forgives anybody, he does it "in the person of Christ", and so, by extension, the church at Corinth did too, seeing they were partakers in that same one body of His (2 Cor. 2:10).

Another approach is suggested by the consideration that the Greek words for binding and loosing, along with their derivative words, are often used

in the NT for binding in prison, and loosing from prison's bonds. In this case, as in 16:19, the Lord may simply have the idea that through the power of the Gospel (16:19) and through forgiving and receiving sinners (here in chapter 18), we have the power to loose people. The "keys of the Kingdom" are in our hands. And if we don't do that, then we effectively bind them. And God ["Heaven"] will not as it were come rushing in to change things. He has given us genuine freewill, which means that our decisions with regard to others have significances which He doesn't necessarily mitigate. For otherwise, human behaviour would lose meaning and ultimate significance.

We should note that here the language of "the keys of the Kingdom" used in 16:19 to Peter specifically is now repeated to all the disciples. It is not so that Peter was given some unique power which the others were not.

*18:19 Again I say to you, that if two of you-* Surely to be connected with the "two or three witnesses" of :16, and the "two or three" of :20- see note there. The idea may be that in your decisions about how far to go in 'receiving' a little one, you will be confirmed in that decision by Heaven. Or the sense may be that seeing the little ones should be 'received' without limit, if the group of you making the decision pray for strength to do that, then it will be granted.

*Shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask-* The Bible nowhere offers such a blank cheque assurance that literally whatever we ask for we shall receive. Always there is a specific context to such assurances that prayer will definitely be answered and requests given. That specific context here is concerning not offending others, efforts in winning them back and receiving them. We note that this is foreseen as a collective activity, involving more than you- because decisions regarding fellowship involve at least two or three.

*It shall be done for them by-* An allusion to the saying of 'Amen', so be it, may it be done. Your 'Amen' will in this case surely come true. Some of the assurances that prayer will surely be answered are in the context of praying for others. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them" is in the context of concerned brethren trying to win back a weak brother. Likewise "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us... if any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 Jn. 5:14-16). Again in a forgiveness context, Solomon asked that God would hear Israel "in all that they call unto thee for" (1 Kings 8:52).

*My Father who is in Heaven-* The whole section emphasizes how God in Heaven is intensely involved with what we are doing on earth with regard to these decisions about excluding or including others (see :10,14,18,20).

18:20- see on 18:4.

*For where two or three-* This obviously connects with the two or three witnesses just mentioned in :16. There the Lord had said that if you won't unconditionally forgive your brother, then before two or three witnesses you can disfellowship him. I suggested that this was said tongue in cheek, for the Lord's intention in the surrounding context is that we should unconditionally forgive. But if we choose not to, then we can take this lower level of responding to sin against us. But He warns that we take this decision with Him in the midst of us, very much present. He has made this point in other language when reminding us that the representative Angels of the sinner are in God's presence in the court of Heaven, and what we do, how we decide, is being played out in the very presence of God. This saying about His presence in the midst of the "two or three" is saying the same thing. This evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the Divine presence [*shekinah*] rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be. Surely the hint is that if we agree together to show grace and acceptance to a little one, then this is the outcome of the true study of Torah. But whatever decision we come to regarding issues of forgiveness, acceptance and exclusion of others, we must accept the Lord's laboured and sober warnings that we are taking them in the very presence of the Father and Son. And we must recall how this whole section begins in 18:1,2 with the disciples thinking that their strivings against each other were somehow hid from their Lord- when He knew exactly what the thoughts of their hearts were about these things.

The personal presence of Jesus amongst us when gathered may suggest that He is especially manifested / revealed in the gathered together groups of believers, in a special and far different way to which an isolated believer reading a Bible may know the presence of Jesus. All this must especially be true of the breaking of bread- the only other time in the New Testament we meet the three Greek words translated "I am in the midst" is in Lk. 22:27, where the Lord comments how He is in the midst of the disciples at the first breaking of bread. Of course, mere church attendance doesn't mean we perceive Christ there, in the midst of us; we perceive Him there insofar as we perceive the spirit of Christ in our brethren. The context is of two or three being gathered together in united prayer and receiving the answer. Receiving the gift of answered prayer is paralleled with the personal presence of Jesus in their midst. Answered prayer is part of His presence with us. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" surely promises a special closeness of Christ when we are physically gathered together. All those who have made real effort to gather together for the memorial meeting will know the truth of this. Our community increasingly features many in semi-isolation; this promise of special spiritual blessing in meeting

together is something which they can and surely *do* know the truth of. The close fellowship which was engendered by the Passover feast, as Israel huddled together in family units around the slain lamb, the focus of their love and gratitude to God, explains why Israel were repeatedly warned not to share that meal with those not in covenant with God. However this cannot mean that the presence of Christ is *only* available if two or three physically gather together, and that He does not tabernacle in the individual. We could also read the clause as meaning that if two or three gather in His Name, this is because of Him being in their midst; i.e. unity, gathering together, is only possible around the person and presence of Christ.

*Are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them-* Literally, 'synagogued'. I have suggested above that the Lord is parodying the process of synagogue discipline, and teaching that His followers should not follow that but rather unconditionally accept the little ones. By doing so, they would no longer in practice be able to be part of the synagogue structure, which was based around excluding rather than including. I would read the Lord here as yet once again teaching that He is establishing a new Israel; the new synagogues would be comprised of twos and threes of secular but sincere believers earnestly praying together that the lost might be found, for forgiveness for those who have sinned against them without repentance.

18:21 *Then Peter came and said to him: Lord-* Peter asked: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?". Jesus responds with a parable in which a man who calls his king "Lord" is himself forgiven, but refuses to forgive another man. Surely that parable was specifically for Peter, the one who delighted to know Jesus as Lord. He was warned through the parable that calling Him 'Lord' wasn't enough. An appreciation of Him as Lord of his life would mean quite naturally that he had a spirit of frank forgiveness for his brother, not carefully measuring it out, but rather reflecting his Lord's forgiveness of him. If Jesus is really Lord, then everything which He does and all that He shows becomes an imperative for us to follow.

*How often-* Jesus replies, 70 x 7. i.e. to an unlimited extent, even when the repentance is obviously insincere. It's as if He's saying that yes you can go through the procedure of sorting it out with your brother and rejecting him from your personal company. But, the higher level, is to simply forgive him. It's like adultery under the Law. There were several options for the husband. Do a trial of jealousy and make her infertile. Stone her. Divorce her. Or, just forgive her. We surely all ought to be aiming for the higher level. Those who quote Matthew 18 as a reason for withdrawal are in my view living on a lower spiritual level than those who forgive 70 x 7. But the gracious Lord doubtless shall accept them too in the last day.

*Shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?*- The Lord's comment that "If your brother shall trespass against you" (:15- see notes there) is picked up here by Peter. The Lord's reply was that Peter should forgive his brother to an unlimited extent, each and every day. It seems to me that the Lord was saying that the 'one-two-out' attitude which He had just described was very much the lower level of response, the way of the Jewish synagogues; He wished His followers to take the higher level, of unconditional forgiveness. Indeed, the whole passage where He speaks about going to see your brother and then telling the church is wedged in between His teachings about grace and forgiveness. It's so out of place that one wonders whether He wasn't saying it very tongue in cheek, in allusion to the synagogue discipline methods. At the very least, He seems to intend the contrast between His surrounding words and those about 'one-two-out' to sink in, to the point that we realize, as He told Peter, that there is indeed a higher way.

*Until seven times*- Lk. 17:4 adds "in a day". Perhaps Peter had in mind how Jacob bowed seven times to Esau and was forgiven (Gen. 33:3), or perhaps he had wondered whether the sprinkling of blood seven times in the Mosaic rituals spoke of forgiveness of a maximum of seven sins in one day, as some Rabbis taught (Lev. 4:6,17; 8:11; 14:7,51; 16:14,19; Num. 19:4). Or perhaps Prov. 24:16 was another source for his thinking- "a just man falls seven times and rises up again". The Lord's answer was that we need to forgive far more than seven times because we too sin far more than seven times / day- which is the function of the hopelessly indebted servant in the following parable. Peter's phrase "*until seven times*" is strangely lifted right out of Dan. 4:23, where Nebuchadnezzar was to be punished "until seven times" passed over him. Peter often alludes to Old Testament scripture in his recorded speech; he was very Bible-minded. He may have been suggesting 'Even if someone's as bad as Gentile Nebuchadnezzar, we should still forgive them, I suppose, but that surely is the limit'. But the Lord's subsequent comment about 70 sevens is from the prophecy of Daniel 9 regarding the far longer "times" which were to pass over Israel for their sin. So His comeback on Peter's clever allusion was: 'No, Peter. Don't forgive people "till seven times", as much as God did Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar- but as much as God forgave *Israel*, which was an infinite amount, 70 times, more than that!'. Such level of dialogue with Peter would've been perfectly possible and normal, for he really knew and loved the Old Testament and was quite the amateur Bible student- see 'Peter: Bible Student' in my *Peter and Paul* (Sydney: Aletheia, 2008). See on 18:27 *Forgave him the debt*.

18:22- see on :15.

*Jesus said to him: I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven*- The Lord's command to forgive 490 times per day (Lk. 17:4,5) is surely teaching that we have no ability to judge the sincerity of

repentance; all we can do is forgive. Seven being the number of completeness, we are surely to understand this saying as not so much 490 times, but an infinite number of times.

*18:23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened-* This "therefore" is crucial. Because we must forgive 490 times / day regardless, therefore, of the sincerity of repentance, *therefore* the Kingdom of God [i.e. the behaviour of those who claim to be under the domain of God's Kingship] is like the forgiveness of the King of that Kingdom. How was it that he had a servant who was so hopelessly in debt? 10,000 talents can be seen not as a literal number but as meaning 'a huge, infinite amount'. How did the position arise? Because the King had repeatedly forgiven him debts without demanding repayment, and had given in to requests for yet more debt. This is the connection between the parable and the fact we have to forgive 490 times / day. It's because we too repeatedly sin each and every day. How many times do you catch yourself each day muttering or thinking a brief prayer for forgiveness of some failure? If it's not 490 times, then that's because you're not sensitive enough to human failure and Divine standards. And how really sincere is our repentance each time? Do we not find ourselves asking for the same basic sins to be forgiven, hour by hour, day by day? If we have been forgiven so much, then we simply *must* accept the little ones and forgive them, regardless of their repentance.

*To a certain King-* Gk. 'an *anthropos* King', a human king. This strange phrase emphasizes how the King in view here, the Lord Jesus, was and is only exalted to Kingship because of His humanity. He is judge *because He is* the "son of man". In the issues and feelings regarding forgiveness and acceptance, the Lord Jesus fully understands our humanity.

*Who would make a reckoning with his servants-* The word is only used again in 25:19 about the last judgment. And yet the parable seems to speak as if the last judgment is only at the end of the story, after the forgiven servant has had time to grab his fellow servant, demand the debt, get him into prison, and the other servants have gone to inform their Lord, who then punishes him with "torment". There is an intended confusion here- because the essence of judgment day is going on now, and we 'make the answer now' every time we are confronted by a little one needing acceptance into our closed circle, every time we are sinned against, every time a sheep goes astray. This is seamlessly in the spirit of the earlier part of this block of teaching, where the Lord has spoken of those who offend the little one by not accepting and not forgiving as being sure of future damnation, and has urged us to cut off any parts of our lives which have stumbled others and cast them from us, as a symbol of self-condemnation now, so that we are not condemned in the final judgment.

The Lord spoke of how when we sin, He 'takes account' of us and forgives us- and we are to respond by being frankly forgiving to those in our debt (Mt. 18:23,24). But the Lord uses the very same words and imagery in speaking of how at His return, He will "take account" of His servants and utter an unchangeable verdict upon them (Mt. 25:19). The connection of thought is surely to indicate that in our repeated experience of sin, coming before the throne of grace, receiving the judgment of condemnation, seeing it changed and responding by showing grace, we are living out the essence of the meeting with God which is yet to come. This is how God uses our experience of sin, repentance and forgiveness. The whole process is in order to give us an insight into the future judgment. The reality is that in those experiences of today, we can change the verdict. But in the last day it will be too late.

"Reckoning" is a *logos*. He asks us even in this life [see on *Take account*] to share our inner motives and core feelings / ideas with Him, the *logos* of our lives. Especially in this area of rejection of others and unforgiveness of them. The king (Jesus) makes a reckoning with His servants right now, and it is for us to be influenced by the gracious accounting He shows towards us, and then in this life reflect an appropriate grace to our brother (Mt. 18:23 RV). The reckoning is going on right now, indeed in a sense it occurred on the cross.

18:24 *And when he had begun to reckon-* See on :23 *take account*. These words were spoken to Peter, and he seems to have later grasped their meaning when he wrote of how judgment is now beginning at the household of God, the church, "us" (1 Pet. 4:17- the same Greek word for 'beginning' is used). Every time we engage with those who sin against us, each moment we remember them and the associated situations, we stand at the day of judgment making our own answer according to how we think and feel towards them. It is a very personal question. We simply cannot exclude them just because the circle of disciples around us [with which this section began] are hard set against those persons. We are to be as the Lord, and break the circle, putting the child in the midst. In a sense the judgment process has already begun; Mt. 18:24 says that the Lord has "begun to reckon" now, and so now we must urgently forgive one another. He is watching our attitude to each other here and now. Mt. 18:33,35 teach that the attitude we have towards our brother deep in our heart will be revealed and discussed with us at the judgment.

*One was brought to Him-* The same word used about the little ones being brought unto Jesus and being rejected by the disciples (19:13). The word is so often used of how people were brought unto Jesus.

*Who owed him-* The Greek is also translated 'a sinner', so clear is the connection between debt and sin. The Lord is clearly alluding to His own model prayer, where He taught that we are to ask for forgiveness "as we

forgive our debtors" (s.w. 'one which owed', Mt. 6:12). It seems that although the disciples presumably obediently prayed that prayer, the reality of the implications wasn't felt by them.

*Ten thousand talents* - One hundred million denarii (Mt. 18:23). This was a monstrous, unimaginable sum- in 4BC, the whole of Galilee and Peraea paid only 200 talents per year in taxes, one fiftieth of the amount. The annual income of Herod the Great is estimated at only 900 talents (New Jerome Bible Commentary). The Lord was using shock tactics to show how great is man's debt to God... and to throw into strong relief the sharp contrast with the way the fellow servant has such a trivial debt. The story is plain. The sins we perceive others have committed against us should be as nothing compared to the huge debt we feel personally before God. This explains why the acceptable man in another parable prays with his hands on his breast- when every Palestinian Jew would have expected a story about a man praying to feature him with uplifted hands, as was the custom. The unusual element to the story brought out the extent of the man's contrition. Indeed, the total acquittal of the indebted man, with no further penalty at all, would have caught the early hearers by surprise. The man, they imagined, would have walked off surprised by joy, ecstatic, thankful, relieved. And yet he goes and does something totally unexpected and illogical- he grabs another man and demands he pay up his debts. The unexpected twist of the story of course brings out the madness of any unforgiveness on our part, and the awful nature of human ingratitude for forgiveness- just as in the two carpenters parable.

The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25). This was surely for the benefit of the servant. The servant hopelessly, desperately in debt to his Lord is a picture of the believer's debt to God (Mt. 18:25). The Lord didn't say 'Well, don't worry about it, I've got plenty, just forget it'. He reckoned up the exact debt, calculated it with the servant progressively panic stricken as the full figure registered: and "his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made". Only *then*- and this is a crucial feature of the story- "the servant therefore fell down, and besought him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". This was of course a nonsense; he had no way of paying it. But in his desperation, at the very and utter limits of human feeling, he fain would pay it all. And only then, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him". This is not to say that the Lord is a hard man. But His frank forgiveness is not lightly given. Remember that God is elsewhere described as the magistrate who is to be feared, "lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite" (Lk. 12:58). And yet again, the Lord is not a hard man. In the context of our spiritual



bankruptcy, "He constantly lendeth to thee" (Job 11:6 Heb.); and yet He demands our deep recognition that He deserves and in a sense should be given it all back. This will be our attitude, if we appreciate that indeed sin is serious.

There are degrees of sin- in God's sight. But this parable teaches that for us, our perception is to be that the colossal extent of our sin is such that we should be eager to forgive anyone anything, because whatever they have done is so small compared to *what we perceive* that we have done. The difficulty is that it may actually be that in God's judgment, some have sinned less than us- and we get a strong hint at the nature of that judgment in the Bible. But *from our perspective* we are to feel that our sin is so much hugely greater than anything anyone else has done. Paul was a great example of this, progressing over time as he wrote his letters from considering himself "least of the apostles" to being "less than the least of all saints" to finally being "chief of sinners".

18:25 *And since he could not pay*- Neither of the indebted servants in the parable could pay. It's an urban myth to think or assume that in cases of sin against us, the sinner can put it right. He cannot. The only way forward is unconditional forgiveness on our part, which must be granted knowing that the person cannot put anything right. This is a window onto the issue of whether or not we should forgive only if the person repents. The parable is at pains to demonstrate that personal debt cannot be repayed- all that can be done is to write it off. Even if letters of regret are written in total sincerity and with absolute meaning behind every word, they can never repay the debt. All we can do is to forgive, and therefore the person's repentance to us is in that sense irrelevant. It could be argued that the man truly wanted to pay the debt, but was unable. This should be our feelings about our sins. The man was forgiven his debt due to his *desire* to repay it, even though in fact he couldn't repay it. Sin can, in a sense, never be put right, it can only be covered over. And the man was expected to reflect his experience of forgiveness in how he dealt with his brother. Our fellowship of failure should be bound close together by our common experience of God's forgiveness. What we owe to God can never be repaid. Realizing this affects how we define what is repentance. Just one sin brings eternal death; after sinning, we cannot go back and re-live those minutes, hours, days or years when it was committed. All we can do is trust in God's grace and believe that God will negate the just results of that sin. Because we are forgiven debts which we can never repay, we are asked to liberally forgive our brethren for their far smaller debts. It appeared that the man who owed a small amount was better able to repay it than he who owed much. But the *ability* of our brethren to repay the debt of their sin is not something we should consider. Surely this is what the parable teaches. The *ability* of people to repent is something we should not *consider*. God

does not consider *our* ability to repay Him- for we are utterly unable to do so.

A case can be made that the man did in fact have some of the money, because he had stolen it [rather than borrowed it] from the King, and had at least some of it stashed away- see on 18:34 *The tormentors*.

*His master ordered that he be sold-* This King is clearly angry and hurt at the extent of the debt; but he also has a heart of compassion (:27). According to the story line, he really intended the servant to be sold to another master. He didn't want anything to do with this man any more. But then he changed. Without this detail about the King's anger, we would be left with the impression that he is a soft hearted type who didn't take the personal loss, betrayal and pain with any real personal suffering. But the Heavenly King, God Himself, does indeed have these feelings, and it is this reality which gives backdrop and meaning to His frequent movement with compassion in subsequently forgiving us. His forgiveness of sin, just like ours, doesn't mean that He is indifferent to sin. This is therefore a recognition by the Lord that forgiveness isn't instant nor automatic, but that like God, we will legitimately feel hurt and anger before moving on to forgiveness.

*With his wife and children-* The Lord spoke this in the first instance to Peter personally, in answer to his question. Peter had a wife (1 Cor. 9:5) and at least one child (1 Pet. 5:13). Likewise the way the servant "fell down" before the King (:26) is just as Peter had recently done before Jesus (Mt. 17:6 s.w.).

*And all that he had-* But he "had" [s.w.] nothing to pay with, "he had not to pay" [AV]. What he did have was not even the right currency with which to repay what he owed. Even if he and his family were sold to be someone else's slaves, the amount received would be tiny compared to the huge debt. We are maybe intended to imagine that it was reflection on this fact which led the King to simply show compassion. We cannot repay our debt to God, even if we give our bodies and very being to Him. All we can do is hope for His grace, and so it is with our forgiveness of others.

*And payment to be made-* The idea is of repayment, putting things right. The powerful point of this parable is that when someone sins against us, they *cannot* put it right, they cannot repay. We must forgive without that- which meshes well with the impression we get from this entire section that we are to accept, receive and forgive the little ones in an absolutely open manner without demanding repentance or them restoring a situation. So much forgiveness and reconciliation fails to happen in practice because of this assumption that the one who has done wrong must somehow put it right. Even if e.g. a stolen item is restored, the

damage done in other ways by the theft cannot be put right. Except by our forgiveness.

*18:26 The servant therefore fell on his knees, saying-* This is precisely what the second servant does to the forgiven servant (:29 s.w.; he also asks for "patience" just as the first servant did). Our situation before God is exactly mirrored by the situation of others before us who have sinned. The Lord's prayer had made this point, in asking that we be forgiven *as we forgive others*. Forgiving them, therefore, becomes of utterly crucial importance in our personal salvation. Nothing else we may do or be can compensate for unforgiveness, rejection of little ones, and the subsequent causing them to stumble which this causes. See on :25 *His wife and children*.

*Fell down and worshipped-* AV. The two words often occur together. The basis of real worship is thereby defined for us as being a deep conviction of the depth of our sin. Such worship isn't therefore something that can just be turned on or turned off. True worship has very deep roots, in deep conviction of personal debt and a core desire to somehow beseech God's grace.

*Lord, have patience with me-* See on :26 *Fell down*. The servants both ask for "patience", and yet the story invites us to see how irrelevant is that request- no amount of time can repay such a huge debt. Even although the servant therefore doesn't throw himself on the King's grace to the extent he ought to have done, and still entertains the absurd idea that he can actually somehow repay the debt- the King shows grace. Again, the attitude of those 'little ones' we engage with will be far from ideal, they miscalculate their debt just as the servant genuinely thought he could "pay all", they fail to appreciate the damage done, the hurt caused, believing that they can put right what clearly they never can. But the King's forgiveness of that servant is our pattern for forgiving those indebted to us by their sins and poor behaviour. Yet again we see the hint that forgiveness based upon repentance and restoration is not what is needed at all. Sin cannot in that sense ever be restored or put right by the sinner, but only by the grace of the one sinned against.

*And I will pay you all that I owe-* The servant is presented as insincere, to those who meditate a bit upon the information given. His falling down at the feet of the King was not sincere, surely; for instead of admitting his fault and begging for grace, he claims that with time, "patience", he can actually repay it. No amount of work could repay his debt. The huge sum which he 'owed' the King was so large that we are invited to imagine that the debt had arisen more by theft than by being lent that huge amount. For why would he, a servant, need to borrow such a huge amount? We are led to expect a confession of theft from the King- but there is none. Likewise the huge sum of debt is an element of unreality in the story that attracts our attention. The King typically would have killed such a person-

but this unusual King doesn't do that. He offers him a way out apart from death- and still the man isn't grateful, he doesn't even want to do a period in bonded slavery for his sins. Within the context of Israel, a slave could only be held for seven years. And "in the seventh year he shall go out a free person, without debt" (Ex. 21:2). In the seventh year, all debt was to be forgiven (Dt. 15:1-3). So this gracious King was willing to actually forgive the debt and give the man a path to total freedom. But he didn't want even that- he wanted time so that he could pay the debt. He clearly had no real conception of the extent of his debt. And he even implies that the problem is with the King not being patient enough- as if to say 'If only you were patient, I can pay all this back'.

*18:27 And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion-* The Lord forgave the sinner exactly because he could not put it right. Bearing in mind the insincerity of the man's words and claims even after being called to account, it is clear that the King's pity was not because of the man's genuineness. It was rather pity at the sad state of the man, pity at his pride, at his pathetic wriggling on the hook. The King's pity and forgiveness is set up as the pattern for ours- and this, therefore, must be shown not only to those who appear sincere in their repentance, but to those like this servant, who appear patently insincere, repeating the same sin 490 times each day. The King had pity, realizing that power in this case was solely in His hands. And so it is with our interactions with those who sin against us. We have total power. They are unable to put anything right ultimately. Because they have done what they have done, just as we have done what we have done.

*Released him-* This is hard to interpret because *apoluo* can have such a wide range of meaning. It can mean to simply send away. Or it could mean that the man had already been bound as a convicted criminal- in which case, the 10,000 talent debt was due to theft, which is likely what the initial hearers would've assumed anyway.

*And forgave him-* The same word translated "forgive" occurs in 19:14, where the Lord rebukes the disciples for forbidding the little ones to come to Him, and tells them to "Suffer [s.w. "forgive" through the idea of leaving alone] the children". The suggestion is that despite all this emphasis on receiving little ones, the disciples failed to do so still. This shouldn't be hard for us to imagine, because the church is full of those who know these principles in theory but fail to apply them, turning away so many little ones week by week. The king forgave his servant; but in the parable of Lk. 16:7, it seems that the king's servants also have the power to forgive others what they owe to their lord. Our forgiveness of others is therefore recognized in Heaven, although that is not to say that if we will not forgive a person, therefore God will not. The connection between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness (in the context of this section's teaching about offence) may be that if we don't forgive people,

they often stumble out of the way of relationship with God and thereby God doesn't forgive them. Whereas if we forgive them and accept them, they often remain in a relationship with God whereby their sins are forgiven by Him.

I mentioned under 18:26 *I will pay you all* that the King was alluding to the seventh year release for slaves. But this King, despite the insincerity of this servant, simply proclaims the forgiveness and release there and then. This is how King Jesus operates- He makes the seventh year of release the ongoing status in which He lives with men and women. And this is to be our pattern, not waiting until the seventh year, not demanding a passage of time or partial restoration before we forgive, but doing so immediately without attention to issues of sincerity of repentance. The King's example in immediately offering the spirit of the seventh year release is surely saying that we should forgive and accept without demanding any passage of time. Observation of ecclesial life suggests that in the end, members are forgiven about anything, but it just takes time. But if forgiveness is going to be granted, why not grant it immediately... The release from slavery and debt in the seventh year was on the basis that Israel had been released from slavery in Egypt by grace (Jer. 34:13,14; Dt. 15:12-15), an exodus which speaks of our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we have been released, we are to thus release others. They were to "let go" their indebted slave brother (Dt. 15:12 Heb.) just as Israel were "let go" from Egypt (Ex. 5:1). They were to send away the released slave "not empty handed" but with gifts (Dt. 15:13)- exactly as Israel left Egypt *not empty handed* but with the gold and gifts of Egypt (Ex. 3:21,22; 12:35,36).

I noted at 18:21 *Seven times* that Peter's initial question about forgiving "until seven times" was a quotation from Dan. 4:23 about the seven times or years punishment upon Nebuchadnezzar. It could be the Lord is alluding to this in saying that the spirit of the seventh year or 'time' should be lived out all the time; they were not to wait "until seven times" or years to forgive. And the release from debt must be given no matter how insincere the debtor, and no matter how huge the debt. And immediately. The Lord's language of loosing and forgiving debt and His allusion to the seventh year release is therefore radical and far reaching. If we are to show His forgiveness, then we have no option but to be absolutely open and inclusive of all. According to Jer. 34:17-22, Judah's captivity in Babylon was solely because they had rejected the need for granting release to their brethren; for that they were condemned.

*The debt-* An unusual Greek word is used here to express debt. *Daneion* occurs only here in the New Testament. It seems to mean a gift as well as a debt; there were other standard words for "debt" which the record could have used, but did not. Perhaps the strange word choice

is to teach us that whatever we think we have borrowed or even stolen from the Lord cannot really ever be repayed- it is effectively made a gift to us. In our forgiveness of others, we must remember that they can never repay, and so our forgiveness of them is not on the basis that they have repayed something, but on the basis that we consider their theft from us to be a gift from us to them.

18:28- see on 20:15.

*But that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred denarii-* "Went out" is the language of condemnation at the last day. By being unforgiving to our brother, we are condemning ourselves. And this has been the Lord's message earlier in this section- for those who make their brother to stumble by not accepting and forgiving him, they have an awful condemnation awaiting them. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

He remained in the service of his master, even though the master / King had considered selling him into slavery to another man. But this King retained such a bad and insincere servant- again, setting up the pattern for our unlimited acceptance of others and not rejecting them. The staggering number of unrealities in this parable is in order to direct us towards the need for radical acceptance of others and open forgiveness without repentance- things which are indeed unreal for us in their demands. And yet without this, can we be forgiven? Faced with the teaching here, I end up asking God for what apparently I cannot or should not ask- forgiveness for my unforgiveness. And strength to indeed forgive, quicker and more fully.

*And he laid hold on him-* The Greek is several times used to mean 'arrested'. The first servant had the power to arrest and "cast into prison" (:30). We assume therefore that the first servant was a senior one, hence

his ability to borrow or steal 10,000 talents. And still he has retained his position!

*And took him by the throat-* The Greek means to choke or strangle, it is only elsewhere used about the choking to death of the Gadarene pigs in the sea, representative as they were of condemnation of the unclean at the last day (Mk. 5:13). He was not only demanding repayment but almost killed the man in order to extort a promise of repayment. All our sympathies are directed by the story to be against this first servant- but he was the one who the Lord who knows all was so forgiving and acceptant towards. And that is set up as our example.

*Saying: Pay what you owe-* There was indeed a debt. We are to forgive the person who 'repents' 490 times / day for the same sin. Clearly enough, their repentance wasn't sincere. Yet we are still to show forgiveness without waiting for repentance. The parable of Mt. 18:28-30 implies that forgiveness involves us not requiring of our brother that which we could legitimately demand of him. That surely is saying that we are to forgive our brother without demanding full repentance in terms of 'putting things right'. We are to follow God's example of frankly writing off the debt. This parable of the debtors splits the responsible into two categories; those who forgive their brother, and those who demand that their erring brother pays up what he owes, even though he can't possibly do so. All of us who walk away from our annoying, spiritually weak brethren (as we perceive them) are playing with our salvation. The day of judgment will be a day of surprises for all of us.

*18:29 So his fellow-servant fell down and begged him, saying: Have patience with me and I will pay you-* The words and actions of the second servant are exactly those of the first servant before the King. We are to see ourselves as the first servant- and he was not very sincere, nor did he appreciate the enormity of what he had done. But we are presented as being him, up to the point where he imprisons his fellow servant. The difference between him and us is that we are to forgive our indebted brother. But our repentances and pleadings for mercy are likewise less than totally sincere- the ease with which we repeat sin is surely proof enough of that. And we are not, therefore, to refuse forgiveness to our brother because we sense his repentance is insincere.

*18:30 But he refused-* The first servant wouldn't show patience to the second servant, even though he had asked the King for "patience" with himself. He didn't believe that the second servant would repay the money given time. And yet he puts him in prison, from where likewise the second servant will have no possibility of repaying the debt. He has no sensible option than to write off the debt. Just as forgiveness with or without repentance is not ultimately an option for us. The request for patience

was exactly what he had made to the King. The King dismissed it as unreal and untrue; the King didn't say 'OK, well, in six months' time, then'. He just forgave him. The first servant was being brought to realize how he had made the King feel. The very similarity with his own position surely beckoned him towards a similarly gracious response. But he would not. The awfulness of the situation becomes even worse if we consider that he was delivered to the torturers in order to repay the money because he [presumably] did in fact have much of the money, but had stashed it away in secret locations; see on :34 *The tormentors*.

*And had him cast into prison-* See on :28 *Laid hands on*. He was a senior servant who still had the power to do this. The King expressed his anger in a more Biblical way- the first servant was to be sold as a slave labourer so that at least some of the debt would be repaid, and then in the seventh year he would go free and the debt cancelled. But that servant now puts the other servant *in prison*. The Law of Moses never envisioned any kind of prison system, even though there were prisons in the surrounding cultures. Rather was correction to be effected more quickly and at the hands of those who had been offended or wronged. In prison, the man had absolutely no chance of repaying the debt, and so to imprison until he should repay the debt is oxymoronic. And obviously so, especially to the initial audience. They knew that those in prison had to be provided for by their families, and so the truth was actually the opposite- imprisoning the man would increase debt, not reduce it. But this is what we do by not forgiving people- we put them in a position where they are a spiritual liability to others, and we assign them to a place where they can never get right with us. Because the earlier section in this block of teaching has demonstrated that to not forgive or to exclude is to cause another to stumble. Not forgiving damages the unforgiven person- that's the point. It puts them in a place where they cannot escape- it makes them stumble, or as in this parable, it imprisons them. This is a powerful picture of the damage caused by unforgiveness.

*Until he should pay that which was due-* Another possible twist to the story is that the first servant believed that the second servant had family members or friends who were capable of paying the debt; by throwing him into prison, he was thereby putting pressure on the family to pay the debt. This kind of thing often happens with forgiveness; granting forgiveness or acceptance is made possible only if third parties respond. Typically the argument is 'We will only accept you if you reconcile with X or Y'. The King, by contrast, dealt directly with the offender in offering a way forward- and finally abandoned any attempt at partial and negotiated solutions, and just gave frank and total forgiveness.



18:31 *When his fellow servants saw what had taken place*- There is a similarity with the workers who notice the weeds sown amongst the wheat and who then go and tell their Lord, rather than taking affairs into their own hands.

*They were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place*- What are we to do when brethren... refuse to speak to us or others, divide families, cause others to stumble; and all the other long list, the endless sentence, which we could now write or come out with? How are we to feel, how are we to cope with it? When the fellow believers saw the unreasonable attitude of a brother against another, they were "vehemently distressed" (AV "very sorry" doesn't do justice to the Greek)- not about themselves, but about the situation and the punishment of their fellow servant. Matthew uses the same Greek words to describe how distressed the disciples were to learn that there was a betrayer amongst them (Mt. 26:22). That extent of distress can destroy men and women. So "they came and told their Lord all that was done". They didn't just "tell Him". They went and told Him. We are invited to imagine the process of coming before the Lord's Heavenly presence in prayer, like Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the Lord. The parable suggests there was no response from the Lord to the grieving servants. He called the offender to Him, asked for an account, and punished him. This speaks of how we shall be called to account at the Lord's return. But until then, there's silence from the Lord. But that silence is to develop our faith and perspective in the day of judgment. If there were bolts of fire from Heaven in response to our prayers, there would be no faith required, no longing for the Lord's return, no trust in His ultimate justice. The Greek translated "told" means 'to declare thoroughly'. Tell the Lord every detail of what happened, how you feel; what colour shirt he was wearing, exactly how she looked at you. Just as children artlessly retell every detail of a hurtful event. When they saw "what was done", they came and declared thoroughly to their Lord "what was done" (Mt. 18:31). The double repetition of the phrase suggests we should indeed tell all the details to Him; but not more, and stripped of our interpretation of them. Prayer isn't to be merely a list of requests; it's a pouring out of ourselves and our situation before God, as David taught us in his Psalms. And in this sense one rises from their knees healed and able to cope. The believers of the parable told their Lord of the ungrateful behaviour of their brother (Mt. 18:31)- they brought the situation before Him, without asking specifically for something to be done.

18:32 *Then his Lord summoned him and said to him: You wicked servant; because you pleaded with me*- What is the function of the detail about the fellow servants informing their Lord, and His response being to call the wicked servant and punish him? The calling to account and 'eternal punishment' is surely allegorical of the second coming of Christ and the

final judgment. The impression is surely that He is encouraged in doing this by His servants coming to Him and sharing with Him their hurt at the way His servants are being treated- both within the household as well as outside of it.

*I forgave you-* The Lord was absolutely sure that He would be victorious on the cross; His parables speak of our responsibilities and blessings on account of what He knew He would achieve for us. Thus the Master in the parable is able to remonstrate with the unforgiving servant: "I forgave you all that debt". The Lord's assumption was that He would attain our forgiveness on account of successfully enduring the cross. Yet He triumphed through His faith; although He was all too aware of the human possibility of failure, He believed He wouldn't fail, He made use of the constant encouragement of the word to this end. He described Himself as the Lord of the servants, and also as the King (e.g. Mt. 18:23 cp. 31- there are other similar parables)- even before His cross. He had such confidence that He would be crowned as a result of His future cross. The tenses in Greek can be used very exactly (unlike Hebrew); it was quite within the ability of the Lord to build into His parables the concept of future Kingship. He could have implied 'When I'm King, I'll judge like this'. But instead He saw Himself as already having overcome. "Be of good cheer, I have (already) overcome the world... now I go my way to him that sent me (bypassing the cross in His words) ... I have glorified thee... I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 16:33,5; 17:4); these are only a few samples of the Lord's remarkable confidence that He would overcome. This confidence is reflected in the parables. He was practising His own preaching concerning believing that we have already received what we ask for. No doubt His words recorded in Jn. 15-17 and the parables which reflected this confidence came back to Him as He struggled to quell His crisis of doubt in Gethsemane.

*All that debt-* The hint could be that the exact amount was still clearly in the King's mind. God forgives sin but He doesn't literally forget it in the sense of as it were deleting it all from memory cells. It is 'forgotten' in the metaphorical sense of not being held against us. Peter was the one initially addressed here, and he uses the ideas in his later letter, when he criticizes some of his converts for having forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, and notes that therefore they were without motivation in living the Christian life (2 Pet. 1:9).

*Because you desired me-* AV. Actually, as noted at :26, the wicked servant didn't actually desire forgiveness of the debt. He asked instead for time, "patience", so that he could repay everything he owed. The pity of the Master was more because of the man's lostness and how little he appreciated his own position. However, the Master kindly and sensitively read through the man's request for 'time to repay' to the desire of the man's heart- that the debt be written off in total. And he did so. The

Father and Son likewise perceive the spirit behind our prayers, and see through the surface level word choice which we make. This of itself is a great comfort to those who fear that they 'are not good at praying'. Because it is our inner spirit rather than our word choice which is the essence of prayer.

18:33 *Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-servant*- This doesn't give the force of *dei*, which is the imperative, 'must'. The idea isn't that he *ought* to have been compassionate, but that he was obligated to be, he 'must' be like that. This is exactly the teaching of the earlier part of the chapter- condemnation awaits us *unless* we are forgiving and acceptant of others.

*Even as I had mercy on you?*- The Lord's compassion is clearly intended to be ours, who are to live and move and feel "in Him". The Lord of the servant "*was moved with compassion* and forgave him"- the very words used about the Lord being "moved with compassion" for the spiritual and human needs of the Galilean Jews He lived amongst in His life. But the point of the parable was: "...shouldest not thou also have had compassion...?" (Mt. 18:27,33). If we have seen and known His compassion, ought we not also to show that compassion in the same way as He did and does? His compassion must be ours. The Samaritan of Lk. 10:33 was clearly intended to be interpreted as the Lord Jesus. He "had compassion" on the dying man of humanity, not counting the personal cost and risk; and then the Lord bids us each to go and do likewise. Our 'doing likewise' will issue in us too sensing the tragedy of those who have not heard, of those without a shepherd, of those who have fallen out of the way. We will be like the Father who was likewise moved with compassion for his wayward son (Lk. 15:20). The crowds of unknowing people who stream before us each day, the sad fact that we are so outnumbered in this world, that those you live and work with are dying in ignorance of the wonderful eternity that *could be* for them... that they live their lives in the darkness of selfishness, as existence rather than real life, without the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is in the face of Jesus Christ... all these things will powerfully *move us* to witness after the pattern of our Lord.

"Even as" is the very teaching of the Lord's prayer, wherein we daily ask for forgiveness *as* we have forgiven others, in accordance with our attitude to them. This is the very meaning of those who sin against us in life- their function is really to provide us with practice for forgiveness and thereby a basis for our own forgiveness.

18:34 *And his lord was angry*- The wrath of God here stands in sharp contrast to the amazing grace He has just shown to the indebted man. His anger was not that the man had stolen such a colossal sum from him [see on *The tormentors*], not admitted it, not appreciated the depth and gravity of the theft, not repented... but rather that despite that, the man

would not forgive another. The purpose of the parable in its end thrust [which is so significant in nearly all the parables] is that unforgiveness of others is the ultimate and worst sin, far worse than anything else, including lack of repentance for our own sins.

*And delivered him to the jailors-* In the Lord's frank forgiveness of the heavily indebted man, there was no mention of any conditions. But when that same man refused to forgive his debtor, he was brought back into court, the debt was re-instated and he was eternally imprisoned until he paid every bit of it. The frank forgiveness of the debt, the 'release' from it, was actually conditional on him being forgiving to others subsequently. But that condition wasn't mentioned.

In the furniture of the parable, the tormentors may refer to the prison keepers. But the same word is used in Rev. 14:10; 20:10 about the tormenting in fire of the beast and his supporters at the last day. Clearly the point is that self-righteous unforgiveness of the little ones, the obviously immature and even insincere, will lead to the same condemnation as the very worst of the world. The same point was made by the Lord talking about offenders of little ones having a millstone put around their neck and cast into the sea- the very punishment of Babylon.

"Jailers" can also be rendered "tormentors". Another option is that the man needed torturing- and that is the essential force of the Greek word used- because clearly his huge debt was a result of theft, and he did actually have the money stashed away somewhere. Hence the need for torturing to get him to confess where it was hidden. This would mean that his claim not to have anything at all to pay back was simply a false plea, a fake repentance. Which would be a function within the story exactly relevant to the context, which is that we should forgive others without limit, regardless of the sincerity of their repentance; and realize that so much of our own repentance is hardly that genuine either, resulting as it has done in the huge debt which we personally owe to God; a debt so great we are to perceive it as far more serious than anything anyone has done to us. If this interpretation of the torturers is valid, and it is hard to interpret it any other way really, then this throws into an even worse perspective the man's demand for the 100 denarii from his fellow servant. He already had considerable wealth stashed away... Remember that this unpleasant, insincerely repentant man is our representative right up to the point where he encounters his fellow servant who is in his debt. All his insincere representations about his debt, his complete failure to appreciate the extent and gravity of what he had done- these are all typical of our shallow repentances. And this serves to remind us not to refuse forgiveness to others because we consider their repentance somehow insincere. We also reflect that the King surely knew that the servant had stolen the money- it was such a huge sum. But He chose not to 'take the matter up'; He didn't make that specific allegation. And this lends weight to my suggestion that the earlier language of 'taking up a

matter' with a brother who has wronged us is not a command for us to do so, but is rather a parody of Jewish and legalistic thinking.

There are of course those who misuse this verse to support their view of literal torture at the last day. But remember that this is a parable, and that every other entity in the parable has a fairly obvious interpretation. The torturers likewise must represent someone or something, rather than be the only element of the parable which is taken literally. That they represent something is clear, but what- is not so clear. In Matthew's pictures of judgment, the Angels have a major part to play in punishing the wicked (Mt. 13:41,42,49,50; 22:13). So perhaps they refer to how Angelically-ministered punishment will bring the wicked to some state of self-knowledge and confession, although tragically all too late.

*Until he should pay-* The teaching is surely not that through the experience of torment, the man somehow could earn the 10,000 talents. Then he would finally be free and justified before God, as if through some kind of Roman Catholic purgatory. Rather I suggest the Lord is demonstrating His principle of judging people from their own mouths and according to their own words (Lk. 19:22- the context is likewise of a "wicked servant"). The servant had claimed to be able to "pay all" if given time (:29). Now, that untruth is being quoted back to him.

*All that was due-* The same Greek word is used elsewhere in this chapter only with regard to how the wicked servant perceived the debt of his brother- he uses the word in saying "Pay me what you owe me ['what is due to me']" (:28), and demanding the man "Pay the debt", 'that which was due' (:30). Again the words and attitudes of the wicked servant are being quoted back to him, and he is being treated as he treated his brother.

The big debtor was rejected because he wouldn't forgive his brother. The Lord says that He will make such a person pay all the debt. There is a connection here with an earlier parable, where He spoke of how unless a man agrees with his adversary quickly, the adversary will drag him to court and jail until he pays all that is due (Mt. 5:26). The adversary of the parable, therefore, is the Lord Himself. He is the aggressive invader marching against us with an invincible army (Lk. 14:31), with whom we must make peace by total surrender. Putting the Lord's teaching in context, He is showing Himself to be very harsh and demanding on the unforgiving believer, but very soft and almost unacceptably gracious to those who show forgiveness.

18:35 *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you-* The unpleasant wicked servant is therefore symbolic of us each one- at least up until our meeting with our fellow servant, after our own experience of forgiveness. And the wicked servant up until that point is not presented

positively, but rather as insincere in his repentance, and totally miscalculating the extent of his own sin.

*If you do not forgive your brother-* The same ideas are repeated, relentlessly. This most sober warning applies to each one of us, not to some of us. None are exempt, none are in a position where this problem of forgiveness doesn't apply to them. It applies to each of us. If we consider that we do not struggle with the issue of forgiveness, then it seems to me that we are not in touch with ourselves.

*From your heart-* By adding this detail, the Lord seems to recognize that forgiveness (like all spiritual characteristics) can appear to have been achieved on the surface, when it has not been achieved in the heart.

## CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words-* The same phrase is used in 26:1, as if Matthew sensed how the Lord was teaching them in a very structured way, delivering content and then moving on to somewhere or something else as soon as it had been delivered.

*He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea on the other side of the Jordan-* The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The teaching throughout Matthew 18 is profound, He teaches the need for absolute and unconditional forgiveness and perception that our sins are the colossal 10,000 talent debt, making all sin and failure against us thereby seem minimal. And if we 'don't get it', then condemnation awaits us at the last day. And on that note, He finishes the instruction of the twelve and begins His journey to die at Jerusalem. The departure coming straight after His most challenging and profound teaching serves to highlight the importance of it, as if this is the crescendo of His message to His followers.

There is a clearly intended chiasmus developed in this part of Matthew, and whilst chiasmus is a typical way of simply ordering material, it also helps us with interpretation. According to the following pattern, the section about divorce [D1 in the outline below] is to be paralleled with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones and not dividing the body of Christ by unforgiveness [D in the outline]. The body of Christ is Divinely joined together and to refuse to accept its members is to do despite to God's most holy intentions. The teaching against divorce is therefore addressing the same principles. It's a cruel paradox that so many have been so intolerant of divorce based upon this section that they have broken the principles concerning it which are the basis of the parallel section in 18:10-14 about unity and not despising little ones. So what is wrong with divorce is therefore what is wrong with the behaviour criticized in 18:10-14- a despising of others and refusing to view their significance in God's sight, because of our own self-righteousness and self-obsession; a lack of forgiveness and failing to perceive the significance of human relationships before God. Thus to divorce your partner becomes parallel with not accepting your brother / the "little ones".

"A. 17:24-27: Giving freely; money; sacrifice  
Challenge

"Parable" (Who should pay taxes anyway?)

B. 18:1-7: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven

C. 18:8-9: Sacrifice of the body for the sake of the kingdom

D. 18:10-14: Do not despise what God values

Parable (Lost sheep)

E. 18:15-17: What to do when a brother sins

F. 18:18-20: Agreement between heaven and earth

E1. 18:21–35: What to do when a brother sins  
Parable (Unforgiving servant)  
D1. 19:1–9: Do not separate what God has joined  
C1. 19:10–12: Sacrifice of the body for the kingdom of heaven  
B1. 19:13–15: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven  
A1. 19:16–20:16: Giving freely; money; sacrifice”.

19:2 *And great crowds followed him; and he healed them there*- The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- “there”, in Judea “beyond Jordan” (:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

19:3 *And Pharisees came up to him*- Presumably “there”, beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they “also” came unto Him.

*And tested him, by asking*- Another hint that the source of ‘testing’ in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

*Is it lawful to divorce one's wife*- According to the chiasmic structure of this section [see above], this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord’s teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on chapter 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to “put away”, because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in 18:27, where the gracious Lord “loosed” the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife “for every cause”. In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

*For any cause?*- The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently ‘out of the blue’. If the question was simply as to which



rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness' (:9). But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]'. In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia*/ assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus... but really, literally, for every cause, in every case...?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

19:4 *And he answered and said: Have you not read-* The Lord is addressing the literate Pharisees, rather than the illiterate crowds who *heard* rather than *read*. His implication is that He wondered whether they had even read the opening passages of the Torah, which describe the creation of Adam and Eve. They had of course read them, but the Lord's implication is one which echoes down to us today- we can read, many times, and yet not really read as God intends, and not grasp the most essential meaning of the text. So many times the Lord uses this challenge- 'Have you not / never read?' (in Matthew alone: 12:3,5; 21:16,42; 22:31). This perhaps is one of our greatest temptations in this over-literate age- to read, but not really read.

The parallel Mk. 10:3 records the Lord asking "What did Moses command you?". We note He doesn't say 'command *us*', not because He considered Himself above the Mosaic law, but maybe because the law was a bond of covenant between God and Israel, and He saw Himself as the mediator of a new and different covenant. His point was that Moses had written this command to "you" the hardhearted, those so hard and spiritually dry that they needed such concessions from God (Mk. 10:5)- but the Lord wasn't in that category. The two questions are connected to each other- 'Have you not read?' is followed by a request for them to quote what they had read ["What did Moses command you?"]. This highlights the Lord's point that one can know the text of Scripture and be able to quote it and even sensibly discuss it- without having *really* read it for ourselves in the sense of grasping the personal message and implication for ourselves.

In Mark, the Lord begins His reply by pointing out that Moses' teaching about divorce was "for the hardness of your heart", and was a concession to their weakness not found in God's original intention "at the beginning". Their legalistic mindset considered that if Moses stated something, then it was a command to be obeyed. But the Lord tried to demonstrate there were different levels accepted by God- rather as He had taught in chapter 18 that in the case of personal sin, we can drag the person through the synagogue discipline process, or apply the higher level of forgiveness without qualification and condition. And He repeats that here- seeking to get them to see that the higher level was to stay together and remain in with the process of unity between persons that God wishes to operate; and the lower level would be to make use of Moses' concessions to human hardness. Assuming a literal record of the Lord's words here, Mt. 19:8 repeats the point that Moses allowed divorce "for the hardness of your heart"; the idea of Moses having granted a concession was significant to the Lord. Because His theme here as in chapter 18 was that there are different levels upon which we can live before God, and thus had it ever been.

*That He who made them from the beginning made them male and female-* The whole nature of creation was so that there would be a process of division, separation and then uniting together to produce fruit. The processes of separation and unity were inbuilt to creation, but we are to allow them to operate in the way that God intends- not needlessly separating and not uniting in wrong ways at the wrong times. Various views of evolution are disallowed for those who believe the Lord's words here- that male and female were created by God in the beginning.

19:5 *And said: For this cause shall a man-* Although a different original word is used, the idea is clearly the same as in the original question in :3, about whether it was lawful to divorce "for every cause".

*Leave-* The Hebrew and Greek words for “divorce” mean literally to go or send away from. And this is the same idea which the Lord now uses (although a different original word) in saying that because of how God created humanity, a man will leave or go away from [the same idea as ‘divorce’] his parents and cleave to his wife. The Lord is surely saying that the process of leaving / separating and cleaving to another is natural and intended by God- but it must be done within the bounds of His intentions.

*His father and mother and shall cleave to his wife-* Translated in Eph. 5:31 as “shall be joined to his wife”. The reference in my opinion is not to the wedding nor to the sexual act so much as to a process of being joined together, parallel with ‘becoming one flesh’, which is conducted by God in response to a man and woman wishing to come together. This involves His work on the minds of the couple and through orchestrated circumstance in their lives which results in their coming together as one. But the process is ongoing. This is surely a parade example of where God is able and eager to work on the minds of people directly. There could be no falser impression than that an indifferent God faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving it over to us how far we wish to be obedient. He is actively seeking to work in the very inward parts of the minds of His people, by His Spirit, in order to bring us together with Him and each other. The reason why sex before marriage or casual sex is wrong is that this is a physical coming together without the spiritual bonding or joining process which God has promised to perform in the lives of His people. The existence of this bonding process is another reason why marriage to unbelievers is not appropriate- because it will be hard for God to work on the heart of a person who has closed their heart to Him.

*And the two shall become one flesh?* - “*Shall be one flesh*” (AV) is a future tense. The process of unifying works towards a final unity between persons called “one flesh”. It’s hard to say what point is in view here- a point where a married couple are “one flesh” presumably speaks of the consummation of marriage in sexual intercourse. Clearly the whole implication here is that two people cleave to each other whilst at the same time leaving their parental background or family of origin, and during that process there is a psychological process of confirmation going on from God, binding them together; and this then comes to term in “one flesh”. This intended process rules out casual sex, just as it rules out individuals remaining psychologically bonded to their parents or family of origin. The false teaching regarding sexual matters argued that sleeping with a prostitute was OK so long as it was understood that the sexual act made two into flesh (1 Cor. 6:16); but this of course was just attaching a Bible verse to a situation in order to justify what people wanted to do. In sleeping with a prostitute, two do not become one in the Biblical sense because there has not been the spiritual process of God joining the couple. And that is what is wrong with it.

19:6 *So they are no more two but one flesh*- This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with "what God has joined together" and is not to be sundered.

*What therefore God has joined together*- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

*Let not*- Because by sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the 'little ones' by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can choose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the "little ones". And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

*Man separate*- The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to "depart" or 'sunder' from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

19:7 *They said to him: Why then did Moses command to give* - They had missed the point, that a concession is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

*A certificate of divorce-* Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

*And to put her away-* Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

19:8 *He said to them: Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to send away your wives, but from the beginning-* Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on 19:4 *Have you not read?*

*It was not so-* Here we have another connection with the preceding argument in chapter 18 (see on :1). This time, to the statement that "it is not so" (same Greek phrase) that the Father wishes a little one to perish, and therefore we should not cause them to stumble but rather forgive and accept them. The idea is clearly that divorcing a partner, even for adultery, rather than forgiving and accepting them still within the marriage, is likely to cause that straying little one to stumble. And this is the whole context of the Lord's teaching that the higher level is not to divorce for adultery- even though He clearly accepts that as a lower level, in the same way as in chapter 18 He accepts the possibility that in the case of personal offence we can drag the offender through the synagogue disciplinary process and reject them. But the problem with that is that it's likely to cause them to stumble, and we will find it hard to do that if we accept the full import of the parable with which He concludes chapter 18. We are to perceive ourselves as the serious sinner, the colossally indebted man, who effectively has no option but to forgive all sin against him. Mark's record goes on to use this same phrase "not [to be] so" in Mk. 10:43, in teaching that it is not to be so amongst us, the community

of God's people, that we are in any sense superior to each other but rather should be servants to each other. Perhaps that also is relevant to this whole issue of whether we demand what is owed us from those who sin against us, even in the case of adultery within marriage.

In Mark's record, the Lord went on to quote from early Genesis: "But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh". It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

19:9 *And I say to you*- This rubric is usually used when the Lord is replacing commands of Moses with His own higher standard. He appears to be merely repeating the Mosaic teaching- that there was an exception which permitted divorce, namely adultery, but that otherwise, divorce was not be countenanced. But in this case He would appear to have allowed Himself to have been drawn into the debate between Shammai and Hillel, and was coming down directly on the side of Shammai [divorce only for adultery]. This is not His style- the Lord engages with questions thrown at Him by lifting the issues to a different level, rather than answering them on the same level as they were given to Him. Mark's record has the Lord clearly teaching that divorce should not be countenanced for anything, and the disciples respond in amazement that it would be better not to marry rather than sign up for this (:10). Perhaps they held the common chauvinistic view that a wife was almost inevitably adulterous and would likely need to be divorced at some stage in the marriage. The Lord responds to that by saying that He accepted that not all His followers could live by what He was teaching (:11). To understand how "I say unto you" was therefore something radically new and higher than Moses' teaching, we have to therefore include Mark's record of His teaching that there should never be divorce for any reason. He mentions that there should be no divorce "except for *porneia*" in order to clarify in passing that Hillel's view that Moses allowed divorce for literally anything was not correct. But "I say unto you" suggests He was not merely reiterating Moses' position, but adding something new and more demanding. But we only see what that was by putting Mark's account [no divorce for any reason] together with what we have here in Matthew's. Jewish law in the first century *demanded* that a man divorce his wife for adultery, and in that sense the Lord's principle that ideally he forgive her rather than divorce her was something radically new.

*Whoever shall send his wife away*- The Lord seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in chapter 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now in chapter 19 focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in chapter 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards (:11). Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here in chapter 19 the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

*Except for porneia and shall marry another, commits adultery*- This is a more general word than *moichao*, the word which refers strictly to 'adultery' and which we find used later in this verse and e.g. in 15:19. Indeed *porneia* appears to be a different category of sexual sin to "adultery" in Heb. 13:4. Remember how this section is an expansion upon the general teaching in chapter 18 about how to respond to personal offences against us. The word in practice, therefore, refers to whatever unfaithfulness constitutes a personal offence against a marital partner. The word could, therefore, just as well refer to the use of pornography. Pushing for a strict interpretation of the word misses the point- that this teaching is in the context of personal offences and forgiving what needs to be forgiven. Any view other than this ends up having to define the word in terms of the insertion of body parts into other body parts; and yet there are a whole range of sexual, mental and emotional positions which may just as well be the *porneia* which a partner must forgive. The Lord's use of *porneia* rather than *moichao* would appear to be a disagreement with Shammai's school, who taught that divorce was possible strictly for *moichao*, adultery. In this we see again that the Lord isn't coming

down on either side of the Shammai – Hillel dispute, but rather teaching an altogether higher level.

*And he that marries a divorced woman, commits adultery-* I noted above that 'sent away' [NEV "divorced"] suggests the woman has committed adultery but remains living with her husband. The "whoever" here may not necessarily be global, as if to say that anyone who marries a divorced woman is an adulterer. Because clearly the Lord recognizes that adultery breaks the marriage bond and He appears to consider that once that is broken, then remarriage is possible- just as the marriage covenant between God and Israel was broken, and He entered into relationship with another wife, the Gentiles, or more exactly, the body of Christ comprised of whoever (Jew or Gentile) who believes in Christ. It needs to be seriously noted that the English word "whoever" found in many translations doesn't translate any original Greek word in the text. The text literally reads 'And the one marrying her who is sent away commits adultery'. That 'one' in view could well be the man with whom she has had the affair. This reading means that contrary to how some wish to read these words based on the mistranslation "Whoever", the Lord is not in fact condemning second marriage. His theme is of forgiveness, and of the spiritual damage done by not forgiving. If a man will not forgive his wife for an isolated act of adultery, then he is likely to lead her towards marrying the man she sinned with and thereby falling deeper into sin. And her husband's lack of forgiveness will have played a part in making her stumble in this way. This is how I would understand the Lord's teaching in Mt. 5:32, that sending away a wife causes her to commit adultery. See on :10 *The man*.

19:10 *The disciples said to him: If such is the case-* See on 19:9 *I say unto you*. But *aitia*, translated "case", more commonly means an accusation, a legal case against someone. The idea is probably that if by marrying a divorcee or by remarrying after divorce a man is really going to be accused of adultery, then it is better not to marry in the sense of remarrying in the cases the Lord has just outlined. On this reading, they would not be fearful of first marriage, marriage as a concept, but rather of the kind of marriage after a marriage breakup which appears to be adulterous in the Lord's eyes. He therefore goes straight on in :11 to assure them that although they have indeed understood Him correctly, He is talking of ideal standards and is prepared to accept lower achievements and to make concessions to human weakness in this area.

*Of a man-* AV "The man". The presence of the article suggests that a specific man or case is in view- and this would be 'the one' who marries the woman whom he has had an affair with whilst still living with her first husband, whom he 'sends away'.

*With his wife, it is better not to marry-* They thought that the Lord's policy



of no remarriage in this case meant that marriage was "not good". And yet the Genesis record clearly states that it was "not good" for a man to be unmarried. Matthew in his own [over-ruled] word choice seems to be commenting how they were out of step with the spirit of Genesis. However, the Greek reads *sumphero* ['profitable', 'good'] *ou* [not] *gameo* ['marry'], and a better translation would be 'It is good / profitable not to marry'. The 'marrying' they had in mind was surely the case of marrying a married woman with whom one had had an affair, for this is the 'marrying' of the immediate context in :9. The Lord has just used *sumphero*, "good", in 18:6 in saying that those who offend little ones would be "better" cast into the sea with a millstone around their neck. And He had used it twice earlier in saying that it is "profitable" to lose our dearest body parts and enter the Kingdom, rather than offend a little one and be rejected from it (Mt. 5:29,30). Given the connections between this section about marriage and the earlier teaching about offending little ones in chapter 18 (see on :1), these occurrences of the same word can't be incidental. Note too that 1 Cor. 7:35 speaks of the single life as being for our "profit" [s.w.] - and Paul's teaching there about marriage is full of allusion to the Lord's words here in Mt. 19. The disciples could therefore be read as agreeing with their Lord - it is profitable / good not to marry - in the specific case in view, which is if a man has an affair with a married woman and then is faced with the choice of marrying her. The Lord then almost rushes on to say that in this whole area of sexual and moral failure and less than ideal marital situations, there is the possibility of following Him still even if lower level decisions have been taken and sins committed. The "eunuchs" that He now speaks about in :12 are those for whom marriage was not possible - but His point is, that for some this is simply too much to "receive", and the implication is that He encourages people to accept the higher level ("let him receive it") whilst accepting those who don't.

The New Testament is full of examples of concessions to human weakness. 1 Cor. 7 is a chapter full of this kind of thing. You could paraphrase it something like this: 'Basically, consider the option of not marrying. *But and if* you do, it's no sin. Once married, don't separate; *but and if* you do, this is allowable. If you are an elderly widow, it's best not to re-marry; *but and if* you do, OK go ahead'. The Lord Jesus recognized that these sorts of concessions to failures in married life had been made earlier; He spoke of how God through Moses had "for the hardness of your hearts" allowed divorce under the Law, although this was hardly God's original ideal in Eden (Mt. 19:8). The Lord Jesus spoke the word to His listeners "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), following the same pattern. The exceptive clause, allowing divorce for adultery, is a prime example of this kind of concession. And yet the Lord speaks in Mark 10 as if there is no allowance for divorce even in this case; whilst in Matthew's record He clearly allows it. The point is, God doesn't advertise His

concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. Likewise Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn't want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

19:11 *But he said to them: Not all men can receive this saying-* The saying is surely that of :9 which is prefaced by: "I say unto you"- the saying that putting away your wife and remarrying is adulterous. To the legalistic mind, this is so hard to accept that- that a statement that certain behaviour in a given context is adulterous can actually be ignored or broken on the basis that the strength to 'receive' it was not given.

*But they to whom it is given-* The strength to obey is a gift, just as repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9 Gk.) and other spiritual fruits are gifts; and in this case, it is not given to all. Again, this is hard for the legalist to accept. It is given to some to receive a saying of Jesus- and not to others. Our greatest obediences, therefore, can never be felt to be purely the triumph of our own strength of will. Even they are gifts of grace. Being 'given' the ability to 'receive' the Lord's word is expressed in terms of being "able" to receive it (:12). No other teacher apart from the Lord would have been so profound as to say that what He was teaching could only be obeyed if we are 'given' the strength to do so. And yet the idea which follows of making ourselves eunuchs for the Kingdom indicates a huge amount of willpower and conscious effort, in order to live up to the potential made possible for us.

19:12 *For there are eunuchs that were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men-* Perhaps the idea is that there are some people who are put into a position in which they cannot remarry due to the failures of others [cp. "of men"]. The purpose of making men eunuchs was so that they would be faithful servants of a king- and the King in our case is the Lord Jesus.

*And there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake-* By the literal cutting off of a body part. In this we see another connection with chapter 18, where the Lord had taught that it was better to cut off body parts in order not to offend a little one (18:7-9). The teaching not to divorce and remarry, to remain single if need be, was therefore not just a command with no reason behind it. The intention, according to the parallel with 18:7-9, was in order not to make the woman concerned stumble because of your unforgiveness of her. Once we perceive this context of forgiveness and not causing to stumble,

we realize that the whole teaching here is not about divorce and remarriage in a global context, but specifically as to what to do in the case that a wife commits adultery as a one-time event, whilst she remains living with her first husband. This was the context of the initial question- is it possible to forgive so unconditionally, as Jesus had just taught, even if your wife commits adultery? And the answer to that is 'yes'. It may be in certain cases of failure that one remains single, making themselves a eunuch, but the decision will be in order not to make another little one stumble and sin. The one caused to stumble may be the first partner, or it could be the woman to whom the husband is subsequently married. This desire not to cause others to stumble, especially the partners involved, is what should be the guiding principle in all our thinking about this vexed topic.

"For the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" is to be paralleled with the command to cut off body parts *in order to the enter the Kingdom* in 18:7-9.

*He that is able to receive it, let him receive it*- The Greek literally means 'to have space for'. We have here the Lord's recognition of varying spiritual capacities, and His other parables suggest the same in talking of varying amounts of spiritual wealth being given to different servants, with His expectation of differing response. And it is for this reason that our ultimate status in His Kingdom shall vary- one star differs from another in glory, one rules over five cities, another over two. Of course we are all inclined to think that we are one talent material, that this is not given to me to live by. But in this lies the crucial need for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus within which we ask Him to reveal to us what are His hopes and expectations of us, the nature of our talents and callings.

19:13 *Then little children were brought to him*- This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in chapter 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

*So that he should lay his hands on them and pray*- The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the

disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*But the disciples rebuked them-* Just as they had turned away the little one in chapter 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbad John's disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

19:14 *But Jesus said: Let the little children come to me-* See on 18:12 *Leave.*

*And do not prevent them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven-* The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for "receive" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being

shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

Mark and Luke both add that "Whoever shall not *receive* the Kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein" (Lk. 18:17). The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used here in :12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

19:15 *And he laid his hands on them and departed from there*- His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

19:16 *And someone came to him and said: Teacher*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and knelt before Him.

*What good thing-* The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:21). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

*Shall I do-* Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

*That I may have eternal life-* Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "have eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

19:17 *And he said to him: Why do you ask me about what is good?- Or: "Why do you call Me good?".* The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

*There is only One who is good. If you would enter life-* This is in response to the man's request that to know what to do that he might *have* eternal life. He saw the eternal life as beginning at judgment day, and thought he could do one great act now in order to assure getting that life then. The Lord tells him that he must "Come follow Me" (:21)- it was a way of life rather than one great act of sacrifice that was required. And we enter into life now, in that we can begin living the kind of life we will eternally live. The man had separated the future Kingdom from present life in a way that we are all tempted to. The future begins now in this respect. The Lord Jesus is the Kingdom of God (Lk. 17:21); *He* is the salvation of God rather than anything physical (Lk. 3:6). The Lord paralleled entering into

the Kingdom with entering into "life" (Mt. 19:17 cp. Mt. 19:23; Mt. 18:3 cp. Mt. 18:8). He saw being in the Kingdom as essentially being about a *life* that would be enjoyed.

*Keep the commandments*- The Lord uses *tereo* for "keep", and the young man replies that he has "kept" the commandments from his youth, using *phulasso* (:20), which more has the sense of 'preserving'. His legalistic mind prides itself on having preserved the statement of faith, as it were; he has not [as the Scribes endlessly feared] added to the commandments but has preserved the correct text. But the Lord uses a word which implies more to obey and live by the commandments. The same mentality is perceivable in the one talent man, who kept his talent in pristine condition- but didn't use it (25:25). One problem with legalistic attitudes to statements of faith is that they can give the impression that the entire duty of man is to preserve them to the letter; when the Christian life is a call to obedience and action, rather than mere intellectual, theoretical preservation of ideas, however correct those ideas may be as theories.

The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

19:18 *He said to him: Which? And Jesus said: You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness*- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

19:19 *Honour your father and mother and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself*- See on :18.

19:20 *The young man said to him: All these things have I observed from my youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young



man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

*What do I still lack?*- Mk. 10:21 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

19:21 *Jesus said to him: If you would be perfect-* The Lord is saying that if the man wants to serve Him on the highest level, then he should sell all and give to the poor. And the man went away from Christ because of that. Because in his pride, he considered he was serving already on the highest level. This introduction of the idea of different levels of service is seamlessly in context with the teaching about 'receiving' the Lord's high standards concerning divorce and remarriage; but the Lord had recognized that not all were able to reach them. And this incident happens in demonstration of this principle. The man could have humbled himself as a little child, and admitted he couldn't rise to that standard of selling all- and yet still begged to be allowed a place as a Christ follower. And surely the Lord would have accepted him, because there is no evidence that literally selling all we have is a global requirement for men to enter the Kingdom. Zacchaeus only have *half* of his goods away (Lk. 19:8). This is, therefore, encouragement for all who feel they can't rise up to the highest standards. There is still a place for them, for all of us- for we all fail to attain them. Only our pride will turn us away because of their existence and our failure to attain them. The incident also functions as a foil for those who think they are in a position to condemn those who don't rise up to the highest level regarding divorce and remarriage- have they, with their perfect marriages, sold all they have and given to the poor? If not, then allow others likewise to live on a lower level in other areas of human life. See on :26 *With God all things are possible.*

*Go sell your possessions-* We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his

possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on :16 *What good thing*. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

Luke adds: "One thing you lack...". The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

*And give to the poor-* Lk. 18:22 uses the word "distribute". The Lord laboured the point: 'Give, yes go out and distribute the proceeds, to the poor'. Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

*And you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me-* Alluded to in James 1:12.

19:22 *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away-* When he understood the *logos*, the essential intention of the Lord's teaching.

*Sorrowful-* Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was

because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from chapter 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

*For he was one that had great possessions-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

19:23 *And Jesus said to his disciples: Truly I say to you: It is hard for a rich man-* The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

*To enter into the Kingdom of heaven-* The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt.19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt.19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven".

This is the same idea as in Mt.18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

19:24- See on 7:13.

*And again I say unto you-* Note the double repetition of this powerful point- that wealth makes entry into the Kingdom difficult.

*It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God-* I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom*. He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate (Mt. 19:24). This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expository gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

19:25 *And when the disciples heard it, they were surprised, saying-* A strong term. They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

*Who then can be saved?-* "Can" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in chapter 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

19:26 *And Jesus looking upon them said to them: With men this is impossible, but-* The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

*With God-* The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

*All things are possible-* Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained

to, then God will still accept us. See on :21 *If you will be perfect* and :25 *Can be saved*.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Mt. 19:23-26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that Thou canst do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too 5:27-30.

19:27 *Then asked Peter, saying: We have left all-* The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material in chapter 19 is strongly related to that in chapter 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

*And followed You-* Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

*What then shall we receive as a reward?-* The emphasis is on the word "we". The Lord had taught that the rich needed to give up their wealth if they were to be saved- but God's grace was enough to make even their

salvation possible if they didn't rise up to that higher level. Peter considered that he and the disciples *had* given up what wealth they had. And the Lord agrees with Peter- indeed, there would be great blessings for them in the future Kingdom.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; purely for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshiping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me-* This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and

dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

*In the regeneration-* The reference is to the last day, when the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel will be regenerated / restored. But the only other occurrence of the word is in speaking of baptism as "the washing of regeneration" (Tit. 3:5). The Kingdom experience and process begins now- a thought which although common in the NT probably fails to grip us as it should. For is our own depressed and passive spiritual experience today really the Kingdom life as it could be? The Greek word literally means 'the re-naturing'. The final and ultimate change of nature will be at the last day, but the essence of such regeneration begins now.

*When the Son of Man-* As so often, the term is here associated with the glory and judgment reigning of Jesus. This is because His glorification is on the basis of His having been so human.

*Shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones-* The Lord foresaw the twelve *who at the time included Judas* sitting in glory upon twelve thrones. The question therefore arises as to whether or not the Lord knew Judas would betray Him, and if He did [as He says He did], then why did He apparently trust Him? Samson trusted Delilah and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a common psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson: Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]...but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence and in your love to us" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their



better judgment they disregarded the tell-tale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand- against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; and for me so far, the contradictions evident in the Jesus: Judas relationship and the Samson: Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people. Let's note that when the Lord repeats this teaching at the last supper, He mentions only that the faithful will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30). Surely He realized that 'the twelve' were not now all faithful.

Lk. 22:30 speaks of the disciples sitting eating and drinking at the Lord's table, judging the twelve tribes. The suggestion is that the seats at His table somehow turn into thrones of judgment. In this case the idea may be that being in fellowship with the King means that we are co-rulers with Him; His table of fellowship becomes the basis of judgment for the Israel who refused Him and His disciples. Or in another sense, the seats at His table merge into seats of glory and of judgment. If we are at His table now, we shall be rulers in His Kingdom.

*Judging the twelve tribes of Israel-* There are many problems in trying to work out the chronology of events at the judgment seat. I suggest they are resolved by understanding that there will be a collapsing of time [and space too, if Einstein's relativity theory is correct] at the day of judgment. This would explain difficulties such as how we and the disciples can come before the judgment throne of glory when we and they are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

The Lord has repeatedly spoken in terms of establishing a new Israel, and so He may have in mind here the tribes of spiritual Israel. In Revelation, the disciples form the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem; the entire edifice of the Christian church was built upon men who were so weak in faith, understanding and perception. But *krino* ["judging"] can just as well mean 'condemning'. In this case the Lord's picture would be of the

despised disciples playing a part in the judgment and condemnation of natural Israel who had rejected Christ.

19:29 *And everyone that has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life-* This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar [note how Acts 11:7 uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching]. And this connects with how Paul had earlier spoken in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of. When we read of 'ministering' in the NT, we are to generally perceive an allusion to the spirit of priesthood; for it was the OT priests who were understood as "ministers". Paul speaks of preaching God's word, both in the world and to brethren and sisters, as ministering (Col. 1:23,25; 1 Cor. 9:13). He saw himself as a minister of the Gospel "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable" (Rom. 15:16). This is priestly language. Paul saw his efforts for others as preparing a sacrifice. He says that we are *all* ministers (cp. priests) of God, stewards of the true Gospel, and should act appropriately (1 Cor. 4:1). Others gave money to poorer brethren, and again this is described as ministering, priest-ing (Rom. 15:27; Heb. 6:10). Reminding brethren of basic doctrines they already know is another kind of ministering (1 Tim. 4:16). Indeed, Peter says that we *each* have something to minister to each other, there is some way in which we can each serve each other (1 Pet. 4:10,11). We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood. Paul speaks of his

preaching work as offering up the Gentiles, as if he is a priest (Rom. 15:16)- and in the same figure, Peter is encouraged to preach to Gentiles by killing and eating animals in a peace offering (Acts 11:7). The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num. 18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all* priests, we are all preachers.

It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account here in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ

(Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

19:30 *But many shall be last that are first, and first that are last*- The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *For*- The context is the end of chapter 19, about the first now being last in the eternal order of things to be established at Christ's return. The parable is therefore about the situation amongst believers in Christ. At 19:1 I presented a chiasmus plan, showing that this parable is to be read in the context of chapters 18 and 19 with their theme of the need to accept and not reject our brethren. That theme is to be found at the very end of the parable- insofar as the harder workers are inclined to reject their brethren who have not worked so long nor so hard. Many of the parables contain their essential point right at the end, and this parable does likewise. The end stress is upon the need for the harder working brethren to accept their weaker brethren, standing as they all do before the judgment presence of the Lord Jesus. The teaching that "the last shall be first" concluded chapter 19 and it concludes this parable (20:16). I suggested under 19:30 that the point of this is that the first in a secular sense *within the community of believers* will be saved only by grace and will be "the last" in the Kingdom. The phrase therefore talks of salvation by grace, and this is the theme of this parable too.

The context of the parable is Peter's comment: "What shall we have therefore?", implying that the disciples ought to get a far greater reward than the spiritually immature rich people who refused to part with their wealth but could be saved anyway by the Lord's grace. The hard workers are thereby to be equated with the disciples and all who consider themselves spiritually superior to others- they "expected that they should have received more" (20:10 NIV), just as Peter likewise expected more. The parable suggests the Lord wanted to specifically reward the lazy and weaker workers. For they are called first to receive their penny- when surely appropriacy would demand that the harder workers were first in line. And yet the parable had wider relevance to the situation in the first century- and today. The harder workers somehow felt unhappy with the *basis* of contract upon which the lazier workers had been taken on and 'saved' by being given the same penny as they. But the basis of salvation was the same- for the zealous and for the lazy, for Jew and Gentile. And that basis was grace. The weaker workers showed perhaps more faith in the Master's offer- because it would've seemed unreal that they would be given the same pay as the stronger, longer workers. But they believed it- which is why they went to do their little work.

The impression we are left with is that the Lord was and is utterly desperate for workers- He is willing to take on any "little ones" prepared to believe His amazing offer. And the same impression is given in the parable of the street people being urged in to the feast. All they had to do was say yes- there was an urgency to fill the house. And surely we in these last days must perceive ourselves as the 11th hour workers, then ones taken on at the very last minute. That alone adequately explains the

mixed bag which comprises the body of Christ in our times, and the weak state of that body.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house-* AV "A man". The man, the head of the house, is clearly the Lord Jesus. And the Kingdom of God is like... Him. The grace of the Lord Jesus, His manner of being and judging amongst men, is the essence of the Kingdom both now and evermore.

Perhaps we are to connect this parable to the other parable about a *householder* who had a *vineyard* (21:33- the same Greek words are used). Putting the two parables together, God worked so hard to prepare the vineyard so that maximum spiritual fruit would be brought forth. But Israel rejected His prophets and murdered His Son- even though God was confident they would "reverence My Son", actually they killed Him. The wonderful vineyard was therefore given out to the Gentiles, or at least, to others, whom the owner was likewise confident would tend it and bring forth fruit for Him. But this parable indicates that actually He had a major problem getting them to come work in it- meaning that much potential fruit was lost. And the parable of 21:28 says that the vineyard owner's very own sons were not much help either- one refused to go, and only later went to the work; the other said he would go and work, but never did. God's hopefulness for human response, and the tragedy of our paucity of response, is thus brought out yet stronger. It may be objected that the parables appear to be chronologically out of sequence if they are indeed intended to be read together. My response would be that we have in the Gospels a highly abbreviated record of the Lord's teaching, and likely He repeated His teachings and parables many times over. Perhaps the parable of the vineyard owner was told in full [both parables put together] several times, but we have just parts of the parable recorded on two separate occasions.

*Who went out-* This is emphasized four times (also in :3,5,6). The Greek word is often used about the Lord Jesus 'going out' to men with the Gospel; it is the same word in Jn. 8:42 "I *proceeded forth*... from God" and Jn. 13:3 "He was *come from* ['went out from'] God". Rather than suggesting any personal pre-existence, this is simply a reference to the Lord *during His ministry* likewise 'going forth' to men and women with the Gospel, seeking to engage men in the Father's service. The call of the Gospel, therefore, is not merely to believe the Gospel- it is a call to action, to harvest fruit, to work in the vineyard.

*Early in the morning-* The very same Greek phrase is used about how the Lord "went out early in the morning" to pray about the calling of the disciples (Mk. 1:35). The language is also used about the earliest disciples 'going out' from the tomb of the risen Lord, also "early in the morning", to bring word to others. The message was ultimately not just passing on information, but an invitation to actually work.

The Lord Himself was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning.

Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries... This figure of rising up early is surely the basis for the Lord's parable in Mt. 20:1- where God is likened to a man going out early in the morning to hire labourers. It is through the ministry of His word that God does this- each morning that word calls us to labour for Him in His vineyard. Israel didn't notice the huge effort God puts into His word- that every day He rose early and taught them. We can also misunderstand Biblical inspiration to mean that God effortlessly inspired "the original autographs" long ago, and moved on; but actually the whole process is an ongoing and incredible outgiving of God's energy in appealing to us. And... in our mismanaged, weakly disciplined lives, is it so that we don't even make time to read His word daily? If Job could value God's word *more* than His regular daily food... then for us too, regular contact with His word should be part of the atmosphere of life within which we live.

*To hire*- Rom. 4:4 uses the same word in stressing that salvation is not our "hire" from God, it is the gift of grace. One wonders if Paul is alluding to the parable- to make the point that salvation is a gift, and yet in another sense we each receive a response for our labour. This is in that our labours now will receive eternal recognition in the form in which we will be throughout eternity.

*Labourers for his vineyard*- Literally, 'toilers'. There can be no mistaking the Lord's impression here- response to His invitation is not merely intellectual assent to the truth of Bible teachings, nor is it about painless involvement in the work of His church when, how and how far convenient to us. It's an invitation to toil and really work in His enterprise. The Lord had earlier lamented that the harvest was more plenteous than the few

labourers (Mt. 9:37,38). He had asked the disciples to pray for more labourers- and the added detail of this parable is that those labourers were still not enough, and were weak [nobody had wished to hire them] and didn't in the end do much work. In this we see how the total conversion of others is limited by the preachers; for the Lord surely implies that there are more potential converts than there are preachers to bring them in. This passage paves the way for the giving of the great commission to us all later in Matthew- to work in the vineyard in harvest time, gathering the plentiful harvest. The "Go..." of :4 fulfils the same function. Elsewhere the Lord likens labourers to the preachers. He clearly saw a primary reason for our calling as to preach and help others to the harvest of the Kingdom. He called us in different ways to labour for and with Him in this work; not to merely passively hold various doctrinal truths in intellectual purity, or to dumbly attend church meetings of whatever sort.

20:2 *And when he had agreed with the labourers-* The Greek carries the idea of entering into a contract- the new covenant. We enter covenant relationship with the Father and Son when we are baptized. Again I must labour the point- that this agreement, this entry into Christ and His vineyard, is not merely a sign that we like the social club or that we assent to the teachings of a particular Christian denomination. It is a personal commitment between the individual and their Lord, to work for Him.

There is the suggestion in the parable of the labourers that the Lord makes some big concessions to human weakness. The Spirit in Paul points the contrast between realizing that salvation is by pure grace, and the wrong perception of salvation as a wage paid for works (e.g. Rom. 6). Indeed, the whole spirit of the Bible is that we should be willing to serve for nothing. The parable of the slave preparing his Master's meal after working hard for him a whole day makes this point. And yet in the parable of the labourers, Christ *agrees* with the labourers for a penny (note his humility, cp. God reasoning with men to accept His forgiveness, Is. 1:18); He asks them to go to work, and then He will give them the wages (cp. salvation). He even describes their salvation as "that which is right", so much did He present the Gospel to them from the selfish level they were then on. The Lord was not ignorant of the line of argument Paul would later present regarding salvation by pure grace. Surely the parable is teaching that the Lord recognizes that in our spiritual immaturity at the time of our conversion, we do need the Kingdom as a carrot, as a motivator. He treats us on this low level initially, hoping we will rise up the higher level of grace. It is possible to witness this spiritual growth in converts, and also in the community of true believers over time; initially we are motivated by the reward of the political Kingdom, but as spiritual perception increases, we grasp Paul's gospel of pure grace. The concept of working and being rewarded decreases, and the recognition of



salvation by grace increases, with the resultant zeal for a truer spirituality.

*For a denarius a day-* The implication is that the workers were intended to work for several days. But at the end of the first day comes the scene which is clearly intended to be reminiscent of the last judgment. The idea may be that the last day comes sooner than expected and is hastened by the Lord of the harvest.

*He sent them into his vineyard-* "Sent" translates *apostello*, meaning that all who go to work for the Lord, including the weak who work only one hour, are in fact apostles. We have a specific sense of mission, a sense of having been given a concrete and actual mission in life. That sense is rarely met in unbelievers, and the senses of mission they may have typically only last for part of their lives and become tinged with disillusion. The mission of harvesting men and women for the Kingdom never becomes like that.

*20:3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others-* Here is an insight into how the Lord 'foresees' potential workers / believers, but it is over to them if they respond to the call given. Truly God and His Son are in search of man.

*Standing idle-* The Greek *argos* definitely means 'lazy' and isn't a particularly positive word to use about someone (Some young widows became *argos*, gossiping and interfering where they ought not because they had nothing better to do, 1 Tim. 5:13; Cretans were rumoured to be lazy, *argos*, Tit. 1:12). The word means literally a non-worker. These men hadn't been hired because they were lazy. The ones the Master was so eager to use were in fact not very good workers, in fact they were non-workers. The hard workers obviously had a problem with the acceptance of these men, and their being treated on the same basis as themselves. This section thus continues the theme begun in chapter 18 and developed throughout this set of material which this parable concludes- see on 19:1. The hard workers equate with the disciples who didn't want to accept or forgive the "little one", the man who would not forgive others their inadequacies and ended up condemned, the big debtor who refused to forgive others their minor debt to him. This parable finishes with the harder workers rebuked and possibly even rejected- and these lazier ones accepted. The point is that the harder workers were disciplined / rejected because of their despising of their weaker brethren.

If we insist on reading *argos* as meaning strictly those without work, then another challenging lesson is presented. All human endeavour and achievement is a standing around doing nothing- compared to the ultimate achievement of harvesting for the Lord, of working with the Lord in His work of bringing people to eternity and to ultimate existence.

*In the marketplace-* The Lord's preceding usage of this term had been in the context of the work of preaching. He had spoken of how His disciples were like children in marketplaces appealing to others to respond to His message (11:16). But in this parable, the men in the marketplace were inactive and lazy. And yet at the end of the parable, these are the ones who are more acceptable than those who work harder but reject the lazy workers. The similar usage of "the marketplace" in these two parables suggests that whilst it is the Lord's followers who appeal to other children, their 'fellows' in humanity, it is also the Lord personally who works through them to make the appeal.

20:4 *And to them he said: You go-* This again paves the way for the "Go..." of the great preaching commission which Matthews's Gospel concludes with.

*Also into the vineyard and-* The hint may be that the later workers are working for their Lord on the same basis as the harder and longer workers, even if their achievements and levels of service vastly differ.

*Whatever is right I will give you-* "Right" translates *dikaaios*, a word carrying a distinct moral sense and elsewhere translated 'righteousness'. The idea of the gift of righteousness, that which is right, is at the heart of much of Romans (Rom. 5:17 specifically speaks of "the gift of righteousness"). The penny paid for a few hours work speaks of salvation, granted as an undeserved gift, and yet also somehow 'that which is just / right' because of the way we are counted just because we are in Christ. There was no specific promise of a penny, and yet this was judged by the Lord as 'what was right'. Intentionally, the storyline of the parable leads us to cry out that it is *not* just to give labourers the same pay, when some work far longer and harder than others- at least 12 times longer, in some cases. But it *is* just in the new justice taught by the Lord. The point of the paradox is that human works and achievements are so irrelevant in terms of obtaining salvation, the penny. Rather like the 100 pennies owed to the man who had been forgiven a 10,000 talent debt (18:28).

Preaching is a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the preacher. We could get the impression that the labourers were called to go out into the vineyard because the Lord felt sorry for them, standing idle with no work or livelihood- rather than because He needed them. If this was His motivation, He wouldn't have called anyone at the 11th hour, neither would he have paid them all the same wages if he was only using them for his benefit. God will call His people unto Himself without us doing a thing; and yet we have a responsibility and even a commission to take Christ to the world. The fact God will call His people to Himself anyway does not exempt us from the duty of witnessing; and the process of this witnessing is so often for *our* benefit.

*And they went their way*- We explained on 19:1 how there is a whole block of material presented in a long chiasmus, and this parable is the closing part of the section which began at the start of chapter 18. It's significant therefore that *aperchomai*, translated here to 'go [a] way', recurs twice in the section. The man with the colossal debt 'went his way' and imprisoned his slightly indebted brother (18:30), and the rich young man 'went away' sorrowful (19:22). In each case, men 'went their way' after having been confronted by extreme grace. The rich man in that despite not wanting to part with his wealth as requested, he could still be saved by grace; the man with the colossal debt who had it frankly forgiven. They 'went their way' into obscurity, unable to accept the grace offered. These weak, lazy labourers went *their* way to harvest at least a few for Christ, believing and clinging on to the Lord's desire to use even them despite their inadequacy.

20:5 *Again He went out*- The very same words used of how the Lord 'again went out' to teach the Gospel (Mk. 2:13).

*About the sixth and ninth hour and did likewise*- *Peri* ("about") used in relation to time doesn't have to mean 'roughly at' that time, it could mean that throughout the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, the Lord searched for workers. In this case we see an indication of His urgent need for workers. The harvest really is there to be brought in, all complaints that 'nobody is interested' are simply a reflection of a serious mismatch between the potential harvest and the approach being taken to harvesting it. Typically great effort is expended on trying to get people to sign up to a denominational position and be regular attenders at meetings- and if that fails, the feeling is that evangelism has failed because the harvest is simply not there, 'nobody is interested'. But the clear impression from this parable and others is that the harvest is indeed there- the problem in harvesting it is with the labourers. The work of harvesting isn't the same as doing a public relations exercise for a denomination. We may or may not succeed in getting folks to sign up for our denomination or fellowship; but the work of harvesting men and women into Christ isn't necessarily the same thing as that. And that work is guaranteed of success.

20:6- see on 22:8.

*And about the eleventh hour*- The servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. And they get paid the very same wage as those who had worked all day. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. He will take on anyone who is willing to work, no matter how feebly, no matter for how short a time; the fact they are standing there ready and willing to do their little bit is what is important to Him. A man does not usually go out between 4 and 5 p.m. looking for more labourers, with sunset approaching. He must have had

an unusually great need for workers, racing against time to get the harvest in. And this is the very urgency of the Gospel, and the passion of the Lord's desire to get the harvest reaped. God could reap the harvest of the earth, requiring not help from man. But He has chosen to work through men in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore the number of workers and their zeal reflects the amount of harvest of souls that can be reaped. The eternal destiny of others is therefore seen to depend on our extent of labour in preaching. It's also apparent that the amount of harvest was unreal huge- hence the unusual running backwards and forwards to get more workers. One expects the manager to know the size of the harvest and hire the right number of labourers at the start of the day. But in this parable, he doesn't. The awesome size of the potential harvest out there in this world means that *never* should we conclude that 'nobody's interested'. There is a *huge* harvest out there. And in passing, it can be noted that grapes have to be harvested at just the right time. If they're left even a day too long on the vine, the sugar content becomes too high and they are no use. We can perhaps infer that the parable describes a scene on a Friday, with the Sabbath coming on when nobody can work- and yet it is *just* the right day for reaping the harvest. This makes the obvious connection in our minds- that just before the Sabbath day of the Millennium, in the last days, there is an abnormally huge harvest to be reaped. And this would connect with other Biblical teaching about a great appeal being made to all nations, just prior to the Lord's return. The parable also yields the lesson that those men would not normally work for one hour. We are to imagine those men with families at home who needed feeding. No pay that day, no food. But they were willing to do at least something. And their generous Lord simply pitied their poverty, so he gave them a day's wage- even to the 11th hour workers. And this is the Lord who has graciously hired us. Likewise, no rich King who finds that the wedding of his son will be poorly attended would go out and invite beggars. The element of unreality is that he so wants every place filled. No human King, nor his son, would want riff raff at the wedding, just because his own class of people turned down the invitations. But the King of Heaven is unlike any human king. He wants others to share in the joy of His Son, and absolutely nobody is too low to share; and moreover, He has a compelling desire to fill those places. The implication is that the net is being spread wider and more compulsively as the days shorten unto the supper.

*He went out and found others-* This parable forms the closing section of the block of material which began at the beginning of chapter 18 and which is arranged in a chiasmus [see 19:1]. The Lord's 'finding' of men to do His work connects with the 'finding' of the lost sheep in 18:13. These men whom the Lord 'finds' are the lost sheep. The parallel is thus between the lost sheep, the child brought into the midst, the man who owes 100 pence, the brother who sins against us... and now, the lazy or weak labourers who are saved by grace. The point of the section is that

they must be accepted- and the parable speaks of how those who have worked harder and longer will have a tendency not to do so. And that tendency may cost them their own salvation.

*Standing, and he said to them: Why do you stand here idle all the day?*- The implication is almost that they should've gone to work without waiting to be invited. They should've been motivated by the tragedy of an amazing harvest wasting. Or perhaps the question was more rhetorical. Why were they idle? Why had nobody hired them? Because they were weak, lazy, had bad reputations, been fired by other employers, were too old to work effectively... And the Lord wanted them to be fully aware of their inadequacies before He sent them to do His harvesting work. The same is seen in how the Lord made the disciples perceive their own blindness and lack of faith- and *then* gave them the great commission. This is indeed the ultimate qualification for preaching work. And that is taught by the Lord's hand in life, not by Bible colleges or preparatory programs.

The parable of the labourers indicates that the Lord's desire for response to the Gospel will increase as the coming of the Kingdom advances. Apparently He increasingly is the Jesus who understands human weakness. There is an element of unreality in the parable; the servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. The parable of the marriage supper explains why this is. We need to enter into the sense of urgency and tragedy which there was; the marriage of the King's son was going to be delayed because the guests didn't want to come. The shame, even anger, of the King (cp. God) and the bridegroom (cp. Christ) need to be imagined; and this really is the feeling of the Father and Son whenever the Gospel is rejected. And time and again it happens, from Sunday School kids to those hundreds who every year complete Bible study courses and turn away from the call.

20:7 *They said to him: Because no one has hired us-* They answered honestly, recognizing that in the urgency of harvest, nobody had hired them. Their answer implied a recognition of their weakness- through old age, mental issues, laziness, bad reputation, physical weakness or disability. But it is twice emphasized that they "stood" in the marketplace and did not *sit* there, as is common in marketplaces in the Middle Eastern harvest time sun. Their saving feature was that they were willing to work, and they recognized their weakness; and they believed that they would be given an appropriate reward by this strangely gracious employer. This is so important, and forms almost the only precondition which the Lord requires to work with men. The Lord surely knew why they had not been hired. They had been there all day- so He had surely seen them when He

had gone out looking for workers earlier that day. His question to them was therefore rhetorical. He wanted to elicit from them a recognition of their weakness. We also sense that as He would have noticed them earlier in the day, He as it were was lowering the bar because He was as it were driven to do this by the chronic lack of labourers and the unexpectedly huge harvest. The same lowering of the bar just before the last day, the final end of the harvest, is seen in the parable of the street people being urged in to attend the majestic supper.

The Lord had earlier spoken of the disciples as labourers in the work of the Gospel, who were worthy of their hire (Lk. 10:7; Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The connection with that teaching is in that the Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as those who had been first hired, and was warning them that the potential harvest was so great that He was taking on other workers whom they would be tempted to despise. This is exactly the theme of the entire block of material which began with their rejection and despising of the little ones at the start of chapter 18.

*He said to them: You go also into the vineyard-* AV adds: "And whatever is right I will give you". He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day's work becomes that which is "right" for those who have only worked one hour.

*20:8 And when evening came-* The Lord's coming is likened to the dawn in Mal. 4, here to the sunset. The day of opportunity for service ends, and yet in another sense the sun arises heralding the eternal day of God's Kingdom.

*The owner of the vineyard said to his steward-* AV "The Lord". The Lord of the vineyard is presumably God, and His "steward", the duty manager, is the Lord Jesus.

*Call the labourers-* *Kaleo* is used both of the calling of men and women to the Gospel in this life, and also of the final call to judgment. In responding to the call, we are actually embarking upon a journey to judgment, and therefore as the Lord elsewhere explains, it is absurd if we uphold differences with our brother on that journey. We are on our way to judgment- that should humble us and impart a sense of urgency to every moment of this journey. Mt. 22:3 speaks of how the Lord's Angelic servants "call them that were bidden". But "call" and "bidden" both translate *kaleo*. The called ones are further called- to judgment.

*And pay them their wages-* At the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis

of works; but the judgment is of works in order to teach us self-knowledge. And this is why there will be a 'going through' of our deeds. In this life, we see ourselves in a dark mirror; but only when the Lord appears will we clearly see ourselves face to face. This coming to true self-knowledge will only be possible through the judgment process. There is indeed a 'wage' paid for Gospel work; each man shall receive "his own reward [s.w. "hire"] according to his labour"- but that "reward" is the fact that a man's work 'abides' through the fire of the final judgment (1 Cor. 3:8,14). So whilst the hire / reward / wage is on one hand salvation, it will also be unique to each of us and directly in proportion to the success of our work with others. If they enter the Kingdom, then that will be an aspect of our eternal reward, and thus Paul can say that his eternal "crown of rejoicing" is the likes of his Thessalonian converts standing approved at the final judgment (1 Thess. 2:19). So often, allegiance to a particular denominational way of thinking hinders believers from this work. They may read these words and find the idea somewhat strange, because they feel they have never brought anyone into the group they belong to. But the group we ultimately belong to is the body of Christ. The commission to take the Gospel to the world and baptize them is given to each of us. And so we do well to ask ourselves the question: 'How many times have I ever asked someone if they want to be baptized, offered to baptize them, and baptized someone?'. Fear of eldership displeasure and rejection from what is little more than a church social club has hamstrung so much such witness.

*Beginning from the last to the first-* The giving of the payment begins at the last, which is an element of unreality in the story. The message may be that this was in order to teach the longer and harder working labourers that the wage really was a penny a day for each worker. The purpose of the judgment process will be for our benefit, and one of the hardest lessons for Christ's people is to accept that others who worked less than us are really also saved to the same extent and by the same grace as we are.

20:9- see on 25:23.

*And when they who were hired about the eleventh hour came-* I mentioned earlier that *peri* with time clauses can mean 'throughout'. The payment was at the twelfth hour; some had been hired at various points throughout the eleventh hour, meaning that they had worked far less than an hour. It outrages all human works-based justice to think that they received the same as those who slogged twelve hours. But this is to affront our sense of justification by works, and to demonstrate to us that salvation cannot be on the basis of works but rather on the basis of the contract / covenant which all by grace have entered into. And the parable has an even more demanding twist in its end stress, whereby those who considered this was unreasonable and felt they should be given more for

their superior work are in fact rejected for thinking that. If indeed "Go your way" means they are fired from the Master's service.

*They each received a denarius-* No employer really pays all workers the same amount as the 11th hour worker; no creditor would really cancel debts simply because the debtors can't afford to pay, and take nothing at all from them; no father would really give preferential treatment to a wayward son over a son who had never disobeyed him. But the point is, God acts in the very opposite way to how we do or would do. His grace to sinners makes no human sense. And He asks us through these parables of His Son to walk out against the wind and follow His example in our treatment of sinners. Our own natural sense cries out that he who works most should have the most pay; but the unreality of the parable teaches us that this principle is set aside in the way God deals with us. *Any* gift from the Father and Son is by grace alone. The elements of unreality in the parables often bring out the extent of God's grace. The fruit farmer [=God] asked His worker [= the Lord Jesus] to cut down a barren fig tree. But this worker had such fondness for the tree, he was so unusually concerned for it, that he pleaded that it be given some more time. This reflected the Lord's love for Israel, a love beyond all reason. Likewise, which wealthy person would ever arrange a banquet and invite the very dregs of society to it? Here is the Father's amazing grace. Sometimes we have to fill in the details [another feature of the Lord's amazing stories] in order to perceive this grace. The younger son, for example, demanded his share of the inheritance; and thus he lost his name, forfeited any claim to family membership, and openly showed that he did not wish to be part of his father's family. And yet he was received back with such grace and longing by the Father.

This addition of *ana* ["every man"] is to underline that they each, every one individually, received their pay. The sense would be conveyed quite adequately without the addition of this word, but the Lord wished to remind us of how each of us will personally meet the Lord at judgment day, and we will behold each of those whom we considered the little ones, inferior workers or believers to ourselves, receiving their rewards. The public aspect to the judgment process is several times brought out- e.g. the rejected will walk naked and others will see their shame (Rev. 16:15).

20:10 *And when the first came, they supposed-* NIV "they expected". The connection is clearly to Peter's expectation that he and the disciples who had forsaken what they had should be rewarded more than those who had not done so (19:27). We are led by the story line to sympathize with their position- our sense of human justice cries out against such an approach, whereby the harder workers were rewarded the same as the slacker and shorter workers. But that outcry is intended. Because the point is, that we are the colossally indebted man, saved by grace; the 11th hour workers who were too weak and lazy to do much for their Lord.



This parable forms an appropriate conclusion to the material which began at the start of chapter 18. The despising of the little ones by us is simply because we have failed to perceive that we are the 10,000 talent hopeless debtor, *we are the man...* we are the weak workers, etc.

Yet *nomizo*, "supposed", is the verb of the noun *nomos*, the law. They believed it was their legal right to receive more than the later workers. But they had "agreed" in contract for a penny a day (:2). The law was not at all on their side. They only came to this new and very twisted view of their rights by observing the Lord's grace to the weaker, shorter workers. Their eye or outlook became evil because of the Lord's goodness. We too can come to assume that salvation is our right, failing to maintain any sense of wonder at God's grace to us.

*That they would receive more, but likewise each received a denarius-* This again is particularly appropriate to Peter, who had to be forced to consider carefully whether he did in fact love the Lord "more" [s.w.] than others (Jn. 21:15).

20:11 *And when they received it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying-* The word is repeatedly used concerning Israel's murmuring against Christ (Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41,43; 7:32; 1 Cor. 10:10). These who murmured against Christ's grace at the last day were therefore, we can conclude, under the influence of Jewish legalism and a sense of superiority to others. The tension is between them murmuring at the very moment in which they "received it".

Those hired into the vineyard first "supposed (on judgment day) that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house... but he answered one of them (what's the significance of this?) and said, Friend (a description of the faithful, Jn. 15:15; James 2:23), I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is... I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Mt. 20:10-15). If the penny represents salvation, the harder workers only started questioning once they saw, to their amazement, the weaker and shorter workers receiving a penny. They received the promised reward of salvation, but couldn't understand the principles on which the Lord rewarded the weaker servants. If the hard working faithful will have a problem with this even at the judgment, how much more now?

20:12 *These last-* The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door

(Lk. 13:23,24). This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). John's Gospel ends with Peter yet again being distracted by the possible spiritual destiny of his brother John- 'What about *this* man?' was answered by the Lord with an appeal to Peter to not worry about that but instead "You- follow Me". And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. We should rather be like the weak old labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment day clutching their 'penny' [of salvation], thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this... this coin... this is a day's pay". But we will be there. You and me. For all our doubts and fears, our chronic lack of self worth, for all the inward, unspoken struggles to believe and understand, that nobody knows nor even notices. We will be there. This is grace, and this will be grace. Truly there is all joy and peace through believing these things, "that ye may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:25).

*Have spent-* Clearly the harder workers believed that there was to be a direct connection between work and reward. And the purpose of the story is to debunk that idea.

*Only one hour-* The labourers had been brought into the vineyard at various times. It was the scandal of the 11th hour labourers which so stuck in the gut of the original workers. And those 11th hour workers, at least in chronological terms, are us- called in these very last days. We therefore can see ourselves as the recipients of maximum grace- for we are hardly the strongest or most functional of the generations of Christ's servants, more focused as we are on internal grievances than on the massive work of getting the amazing harvest in.

*But you have made them-* This is precisely the same word used earlier in the verse to speak of how the weaker workers had 'worked' or, literally, 'made' only one hour. By accident, almost, these complaining labourers had stumbled upon the salvation by grace and imputed righteousness which Paul spells out in Romans in so many words. The strangely gracious Lord of the harvest had 'worked them' as worthy of a day's pay; He had imputed to them the work of a whole day when they had only done a fraction of that. And still the workers didn't get it. The story ends with them still in confusion. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the wise

virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

*Equal to us-* It was on this basis that they were all made "equal" before the final judgment. The basis of their unity, therefore, should have been- and indeed *is*- the fact that our salvation is by imputed righteousness. Peter surely learnt the lesson of all this when he spoke of how to the Gentiles had been *given* by God the 'like' [s.w. "equal"] *gift* which had been given to "us", the Jewish disciples (Acts 11:17). In this sense the dimensions of the new Jerusalem are "equal" (Rev. 21:16 s.w.).

*Who have borne the burden of the day-* The same words used for carrying the burden of the cross and of the sins and failures of others (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17; Rom. 15:1). It can be no accident that here in Mt. 20 the Lord goes on to speak of His cross and the need to participate in that death through carrying the cross. Whenever we behold the cross, surely we are left with the deep impression that 'I would not have gone through with this'. But that is the burden we are to carry, and no amount of other works or attainment of standards can compensate for that. The disciples thought they could so easily carry that cross (20:22 "we are able"), just as these workers were sure that they had borne the required burden and should be rewarded for it. But in the light of the cross and of the demand implicit within it to likewise suffer in the salvation of little ones, the hard workers had carried nothing. Their salvation too was to be on the basis of total grace.

*And the scorching heat-* This is the language of the day of judgment (2 Pet. 3:10,12; James 1:11). These hard workers had been through nothing- they had not been through the day of judgment, at which acceptance will be proportionate to our acceptance of other little ones.

20:13 *And he answered and said to one of them-* The personal nature of the judgment is emphasized, as we saw in :9,10 where it is twice stated that the payment was given to each individual.

*Friend-* This term could imply that for all their blindness and unfounded sense of superiority over their brethren, these workers were still acceptable with the Lord. But the same word is used in 22:12 for the man who is condemned because he thinks his own clothing is good enough for the wedding, and will not take the garment of righteousness offered him; and it is also used by the Lord concerning Judas the betrayer (26:50). These more negative associations of "friend" must be considered together with the possibility that "Go your way..." means effectively 'You're fired!'. The idea that we are superior to our brethren because we achieved more

than them is so obnoxious to the Lord that it may be the basis for the condemnation of such people. That is the undoubted implication and possibility. The structure of the parable leaves it somewhat unclear, because indeed the issue is unclear. The Lord may forgive the unforgiving, show grace to the ungracious- and save them. This would indeed be in line with His grace. But on the other hand, we are to understand that such arrogant and exclusive attitudes warrant condemnation before Him at the last day.

Note that before the Lord of the harvest, *having received* the 'penny' of salvation and Divine nature, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Robert Roberts wrote that he was certain that the only response of the saints once they are given Divine nature will be to break down in tears. And I agree with him. And the passion of Jesus may mean He does likewise. Being Divine doesn't mean you don't cry- in whatever way Divine beings cry. Which is why, in some ways, there are tears in Heaven as we pass through our vales of tears down here. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God even then (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?)- i.e. self-imposed shame and embarrassment; some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25). This all suggests that even after our acceptance at the judgment, we may be more 'human' (or whatever word I should use) than we may now imagine. More emotional, more seeking towards understanding, with a greater potential for eternal growth, than perhaps we have thought. Divine nature doesn't mean being passionless. Whichever hymn writer called the Kingdom "passionless renown" just, quite frankly, got it wrong [or was trying too hard to rhyme his words]. Because God *is* passionate; and we will share *His* nature.

There is even here the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever

with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

*I do you no wrong*- The grace shown by one to another can be perceived by a third party as a personal attack upon that third party. But that is just an illusion, a game of the mind- and yet it explains why there is so much anger with the Lord because of His grace to others. The hard workers felt the Lord was personally doing them wrong- when instead He was giving them exactly what He had promised and what they had hoped for.

*Did you not agree with me for a denarius?*- The question arises as to what exactly the Lord was supposed to give these men beyond a penny. Likewise, the Lord can give us no more than salvation, the penny. The fact He may give it to those we consider far beneath our level, doesn't mean that somehow He must give us more than salvation.

20:14 *Take*- This is a slightly strange way of talking about a penny which the Lord had given to the worker. It might imply that the worker had thrown it down on the ground in protest. Or the sense of 'take away' which is in the Greek may suggest 'Take it and go away from Me', lending weight to the possibility that the subsequent "Go your way" is effectively a firing of the man from the Master's service- a hint that the penalty for superior thinking concerning little ones is in fact rejection by the Lord.

*That which is yours*- Salvation will be intensely personal, it will be as it were 'our very own'. Having been faithful in what the Lord entrusted to us in this life, we will receive at the day of judgment "that which is your [very] own" (Lk. 16:12).

*And go your way*- This could be interpreted as meaning 'You're fired'. Harry Whittaker was a great fan of this view in his *Studies in the Gospels*. Perhaps the hard working labourers were sent packing by the Lord because of their complaint at the others getting the same payment for what they considered to be inferior work to theirs. If the parable is meant to be read in this way, then it seems so sad that those hard working men (cp. brethren) were *almost* saved, but for their attitude to their brethren.

*It is my wish to give to this last even as I gave to you-* Here and in :15, *thelo*, "I will", doesn't mean 'I want' but rather to choose, to be disposed to. The idea connects with the conclusion in :16, that the saved are those who are "chosen". These ideas of a sovereign undeserved gift, the will of God, Divine choice and election [*elektos* is the word used for "chosen" in :16] are all found again in Romans, where Paul makes the same point more pointedly and directly: Salvation cannot be by works, but by grace. And the element of election and predestination within the final algorithm of human salvation is proof enough that works are not and cannot be of paramount importance.

20:15 *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own money? Or is-* This is another connection with the earlier part of the chiasmus which began in chapter 18. In this case, to the question of 19:3 as to whether it is "lawful" [s.w.] to divorce a wife for any reason. The Lord's answer had lifted the question to higher levels, by arguing that the spirit of the law was to forgive marital failure without limit. He is expanding upon that thought here, by teaching that the spirit of 'law' is to accept the weak believer, the little one, the sinner, with no regard to their works but rather upon the basis of their having entered and 'agreed' to the covenant of grace. He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day's work becomes that which is "right" for those who have only worked one hour.

*Your eye evil, because I am good-* A figure for mean spiritedness (Dt. 15:9; Prov. 23:6). They should have been generous spirited, and the connection is clearly to the colossal debtor in the parable at the end of chapter 19, who should've been generous to his indebted brother. God's grace to us, the honour of having served Him so long, should mean that we are happy at the inclusion of those who appear far less than us, which is the context of this entire section of material which began in chapter 18. And the Lord's words here are so tragically and frequently true to observation in spiritual life. The grace shown by some towards others who are clearly morally or doctrinally weaker provokes untold anger towards those who are showing the grace. This explains why otherwise nice natured believers can shake in rage, use expletives and behave with unnatural anger towards those whom they perceive as opening the circle, weakening the boundaries behind which they have hidden, by welcoming in the children, the little ones who are apparently so far beneath other believers in faith and behaviour. Their eye clouds over as evil as they behold the grace of others. There are Biblical examples of this, but the hatred towards the Lord Jesus Himself, hatred unto the death of the cross, is proof enough. And the same path was followed by men of grace such as Paul and Peter.

"Is your eye evil, because I am good" was quarried from Jonah 4:2-4, where Jonah is also asked a similar question after his bitterness that God

had allowed Nineveh to repent. We must be aware that such self-righteousness and uncomfortableness at the repentance of others is a feature of our very essential nature. The Lord Jesus overcame this aspect of His nature superbly.

The pureness of the grace of the Lord Jesus is hard to plumb. He knew that the extent of His grace would cause others to stumble. The element of unreality in the parable of the labourers shows this. He hired the labourers no-one else wanted, the old and weak workers, some of them only for an hour, and still gave them a day's pay. They must have walked away from the pay table with their heads spinning, scarcely daring to believe what they held in their hands- a matchless picture of the response of the faithful after learning of their acceptance at the day of judgment. But the outlook of those who felt their salvation (the penny) was less by grace than the others became bitter: "Is your eye evil, because I am good?". In saying this, the Lord was referring back to Dt. 15:9, which warned Israel not to have an evil eye towards their poverty stricken brother (cp. the unwanted labourer) who asked for a loan near the time of the year of release, when all debts were cancelled. In the year of release, Israel were "to remit every private debt... and not *demand* it of thy brother" (Dt. 15:2 LXX). This is behind Mt. 18:28, where Christ speaks of the man who demands repayment from his brother. The Lord is implying: You should live in the spirit of the year of release all the time, giving without expecting. Lk. 6:35 has the year of release in mind, in the idea of lending without expecting anything back. This only happened in the year of release. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good" is therefore saying that the Lord's grace towards the poverty-stricken labourer had provoked an "evil eye" in the others, they somehow felt that they were having to give to him, that they were standing to lose by his acceptance. Yet, as the Lord implies, this is a nonsense attitude. Of course we don't stand to lose anything by another's acceptance! And it's possible to reason that it was those 11th hour labourers represent the accepted, whilst the complainers are rejected ("Go thy way" has been read by some as meaning they were fired whilst the others were taken on permanently). But with what superb accuracy does He get right inside the future mentality of many in His ecclesia! How very true this parable has been time and again in the history of our community. Discussion of and practice of the idea of grace has provoked untold bitterness amongst those who live less by grace.

20:16 *So the last shall be first and the first last*- The entire section beginning in chapter 18 has taught that those who refuse to forgive and accept the spiritually weak- will in fact be condemned. And yet the section also speaks of the possibility that they will be saved, just as the rich are told to sell what they have and give to the poor, if they "will be perfect"- otherwise they will be condemned. But the Lord says that salvation even in that case is "possible" with God, by grace. Therefore the section concludes on the same note- on one hand hinting at the condemnation of

the hardest workers because of their despising of their weaker brethren, whilst on another hand suggesting that they shall be in the Kingdom, although "last" in the Kingdom, due to their superior attitudes.

*For many are called but few chosen-* AV. This is the conclusion to the large chiasmus of material which began at 18:1 (see on 19:1). The conclusion is that salvation is partly on the basis of predestination- some are simply chosen, others aren't. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Paul speaks of choosing and predestination in the context of seeking to persuade believers that salvation is by the gift of grace and not according to works- and he could well have been prompted to that thinking by the Lord's usage of 'choosing' here. God uses language in a relative sense in order to emphasize something. Thus we read of many being saved (Gen. 22:17), yet in another sense few will be saved (Mt. 7:14; 20:16; Lk. 13:23). Relative to the wonder of salvation, many will be saved; but numerically, the figure will be small, from the perspective of this world. See on 11:30; 25:19.

20:17 *And as Jesus was going up-* This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid".

*To Jerusalem-* From Jericho, 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

*He took the twelve disciples aside-* The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*And on the way he said to them-* It could be inferred that "the way" is the way to Jerusalem and the cross; the disciples were following Jesus in that "way" without appreciating what it really involved and where it ultimately led, and that can be true for us too.

20:18 *Listen, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be-* This



was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too.

*Delivered to the chief priests and scribes; and they shall-* The Greek means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. It's the same Greek word as in :19, translated "deliver". The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

*Condemn Him to death-* Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

*20:19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify; and the third day he shall be raised up-* The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament.

*20:20 Then...*- So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does our attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

*The mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling before him and asking a certain thing of him-* The mother of James and John. We can identify her with Salome, who was likely the mother of Mary the Lord's mother (see Jn. 19:25; Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56). They were His cousins, and in the culture of nepotism in which they lived, it would be normal for them to have some honourable place in the future Government of their relative. But the Lord's answer was that such fleshly connections were irrelevant; there was no short cut around drinking His cup and suffering with Him. So often, having predicted His cross, the disciples become obsessed with petty issues; just as we can, right before His cross.

20:21 *And he said to her: What do you desire?*- These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in :32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w. - Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

Mk. 10:37 makes it clear that the brothers themselves went on to request this, having tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory

under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

*She said to him: Command-* Literally, 'say'. The same word is used in describing the Lord's response; He "answered *and said* [s.w.]" (:22). What He gave or said was not directly what she wanted, but rather an invitation to die with Him, and to share in whatever consequences arise from that.

*That in your kingdom-* Mk. 'In your glory'. This confirms that she had 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

*These my two sons may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand-* She surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that You should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two... who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and

aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

*20:22 But Jesus answered and said: You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink-* The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

*The cup that I am about to drink?-* The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

*And to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?-* AV. Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I shall drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- *we are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom.

6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

The Lord spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of "the cup that I *shall* drink of, and.. . the baptism that I *am* baptized with" (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions in John's gospel when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense "I am" there already.

*They said to him: We are able-* The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

*20:23 He said to them: You shall drink-* Seeing even the Lord balked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, this is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

*My cup indeed-* John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blasé spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

*But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand-* When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to

what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

*Is not Mine to give*- A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

*But it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father*- A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet we are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lies the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done

what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14).

*20:24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation concerning the two brothers-* This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:25). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

*20:25 But Jesus called them to himself, and said: You know-* This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them. This is all to be found in the implication of the word "But...".

*That the rulers of the Gentiles-* The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

*Lord it over them-* Gk. *katakuriuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations, e.g. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is



full of words containing the compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte*, *synodos*, *koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

*And their great ones-* The *meegas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

*Exercise authority over them-* They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

20:26 *It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you-* This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and total *exousia* (see on :25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

*Must be your servant-* The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the

last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they (:28).

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching

ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

20:27 *And whoever would be first among you-* The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even* as the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor.

15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

*Shall be your slave-* Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

20:28 *Even as the Son of Man came-* If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that verse 28 is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

*Not to be ministered to-* Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

*But to minister-* The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man came", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

*And to give his life as a ransom for many-* The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

*20:29 And as they went out from Jericho-* The healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

*A great crowd followed Him-* The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

20:30 *And two blind men who were sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying-* Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way". See on :34 *Followed Him*.

*Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David-* These were exactly the words of the two blind men of 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he

begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

20:31 *And the crowd rebuked them*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*That they should hold their peace; but they cried out the more, saying,*

*Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David!*- This fits with my comment on 20:21 *What do you want?*, in that this could be seen as piquing their sense of urgency for Christ.

20:32 *And Jesus stood still and called them, and said: What do you desire I do for you?*- See on 20:21 *What do you want?* The Lord a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

20:33 *They said to him: Lord, that our eyes may be opened*- The one thing they wanted was to see. Those healed blind men are types of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). See on 20:21 *What do you want?* This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

20:34 *And Jesus, being moved with compassion*- So often we read this, indeed the Greek word is only used for the compassion of Jesus during His ministry; and it is never in itself because the object of the compassion had some great spirituality or was somehow worthy of that compassion. Rather was it basic pity, which is the idea in the Greek; pity at the human condition. It is exemplified in how the Samaritan had compassion upon the wounded man, and how the Father has compassion on the prodigal



(Lk. 10:33; 15:20). In this case, as explained above, the blind men did indeed have quite some spiritual insight. But that of itself didn't elicit the Lord's compassion. The Lord who is the same yesterday as today was and is simply moved by human need- and responds.

*Touched their eyes-* Which were likely secreting ritually unclean emissions. Again the Lord shows an eagerness to identify with human uncleanness rather than avoid it. He could, after all, have cured the men in a different manner. This was the same manner in which the Lord had cured the two blind men in 9:29. The critics love to see here a confusion in reporting a singular incident twice. But it seems perfectly likely that the Lord rewarded the fact that these men had heard of the faith of the other blind men, come to share it- and therefore the Lord treated them likewise. There is a continuity and similarity in the way in which the Lord works in human lives, which is why our sufferings are designed so that we can share what we learnt from them with others who are suffering in the same way (2 Cor. 1:4). It likewise explains the otherwise uncanny similarities which there are between the experiences of believers, both with those contemporary with us and personally known to us, and others in the past or of whom we read in the Bible.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

*And immediately they received their sight and followed him-* See on :30 *Followed Him* and :30 *Sitting by the way*. Mk. 10:52 adds that at least one of the blind men "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your way*" (Mk. 10:52). The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here,

for *akolouthéo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has been defined in :17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

## CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when they drew near to Jerusalem-* This suggests that Matthew was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

*And came to Bethphage, to the mount of Olives, then Jesus-* 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

*Sent two disciples-* The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

21:2 *Saying to them: Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me-* The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier in Matthew, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were

fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

21:3 *And if anyone says something to you, you shall say: The Lord-* See on 21:1 *Sent two disciples.*

*Has need of them-* God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be.

*And immediately he will send them-* "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

21:4 *Now this happened so-* The Gospels are highly abbreviated accounts, and yet a significant amount of time is spent explaining how the Lord obtained the donkey and foal. This is to show how consciously He tried to fulfil God's word. He consciously tried to make the word become flesh in Him, as we must (Jn. 1:14).

*That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying-* The use of *hina* definitely suggests action *so that* there might be a specific outcome, in this case, the fulfilment of prophecy. This construction is common in the Lord's ministry- something was done *hina*, in order to achieve, the fulfilment of prophecy (Mt. 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 21:5; 26:56; 27:35; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,36).

21:5 *Tell the daughter of Zion-* A term used in the prophets for the righteous remnant within Jerusalem. The idea was that they would perceive how the Lord was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of Zech. 9:9. However, the Hebrew text of Zech. 9:9 says that the King comes "having salvation"- but that is omitted in this quotation. The ultimate 'triumphal entry' was yet to come. The Lord entered Jerusalem to obtain salvation through death on the cross, not to bring the immediate salvation from Rome which the people were so fixated upon.

*Look, your King comes to you, meek and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass-* Kings were supposed to enter their new capital on a charger, a war horse, beaming in proud triumph. The idea of a humble king was an oxymoron to the first century mindset. But the Lord was a King like no other- a humble king, who entered Zion not on a charger but on a donkey with a colt wandering insecurely behind them. Zech. 9:9 goes on to say that by doing this, He will bring deliverance from the war horse / charger: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, *humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. He will *cut off the chariot* from Ephraim *and the war horse* from Jerusalem; and the *battle bow shall be cut off*, and he shall *command peace* to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth". In this we see the principle of non-

violent victory over violence; the King who comes riding on a donkey will thereby "cut off... the war horse" which was threatening Jerusalem. That war horse was initially a reference to Rome, from whom the Jews thought Messiah would violently deliver them. The Lord went to great efforts to fulfil this prophecy of Zech. 9:9- in order to demonstrate that it was by humility and non-violence that deliverance from violence would finally come. The other accounts say the Lord rode upon the foal of the donkey (e.g. Jn. 12:15). If He sat upon this animal rather than the mother donkey, the Lord was showing how He chose to ride in the 'chariot' rather than on the donkey pulling it. But the donkey and foal were the humblest and weakest imitation possible of a charger and chariot. But this was exactly His point. The glorious victory procession came from Bethphage "and Bethany" (Mk. 11:1), which can mean 'house of the poor'. It was here that the Lord sat upon the humble donkey- again reinforcing the idea that He came as a humble King.

21:6 The record emphasizes the disciples' obedience and solidarity with the Lord, placing their personal clothes as His saddle (:7). It must've all seemed rather bizarre, for they too nursed hopes of an immediate salvation and Kingdom, but they were commendably willing to go along with His insistence of teaching the lesson of 'the humble King'. Jn. 12:16 adds the information that the disciples didn't understand at the time, nor did they see the connection with Zech. 9:9: "These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him". And yet they went along with it all. It is an essay in loyalty and obedience, although not in perception and faith.

21:6 *And the disciples went and did as Jesus directed them-* This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :6. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

21:7 *And brought the ass and the colt and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon-* Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one

who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

21:8 *Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road*- Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

*21:9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed shouted: Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!-*

Hosanna means 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.

Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

The other records add that the Pharisees asked the Lord to restrain His supporters. His response was "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out". There's a strong similarity between the Aramaic and Hebrew words for "sons" and "stones"; and the Lord's 'sons' were the disciples, His spiritual children. It was the disciples who were enthusiastic for His triumphant entry- the crowds soon lost their enthusiasm.

*21:10 And when he had arrived in Jerusalem- See on :11 The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

*All the city was stirred, saying-* This is the word for a quake or tremor, the



crowd were shocked deeply- by the idea of a humble King.

*Who is this?*- The Lord was well known in Jerusalem, His miracles and previous visits had hardly gone unnoticed. The question was rather 'What kind of person is this?'. His careful effort to obtain a donkey and colt, and ride the bucking colt in imitation of a charger and chariot... had worked. It had achieved the desired effect of stunning people by the new paradigm of humility which He was exemplifying. The "daughter of Zion" (:5) was singularly unimpressed by the coming of their King. Doubtless there was a connected element of sarcasm in Pilate's question: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15). And they stated beyond question that they would rather have Caesar as their King than this humble man from Nazareth.

21:11 *And the crowds said: This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee*- I think we can conclude that this answer was not given in proud introduction of their Messiah, but rather agreeing with the sceptical question 'What kind of person is *this*?'. For Nazareth and Galilee were despised and hardly seen as the origin of Messiah nor of any half decent prophet. "Out of Galilee arises no prophet" was the Jewish position (Jn. 7:52). It was to them an oxymoron to say that a prophet, let alone Messiah, could come from there. And Nazareth, with its Gentile connotations and a reputation for siding with the Roman occupants, was likewise despised. Nathanael struggled with the idea that Messiah could come from Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). We can feel the mockery in the recorded words of the girl in the courtyard concerning Peter: "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth", and the subsequent comment that Peter shared the Galilean accent of Jesus (Mt. 26:71). This sceptical answer to the Jerusalem crowds was given by the "multitude" that welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem. In the hour or so which His parody of a 'triumphal entry' took, their enthusiasm turned to bitter disillusion. This was not the Messiah they had expected. And their enthusiasm turned to bitter cynicism and disappointment. This is the significance of the information that they said this "When He was entered into Jerusalem" (:10). The crowd greeted Him as their Saviour King, throwing their garments in the street before Him, but as He rode the bucking colt with the dawdling, unenthusiastic donkey before Him, their views changed over that 30 to 60 minutes. Lk. 19:41-44 adds that He burst into tears of desperation and predicted that the enemies of Israel [clearly He had the Romans in view] would soon destroy the city and temple. This was so unpatriotic, and the exact opposite of what the crowds expected from Him: "When he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not

leave in you one stone upon another. All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation". The Lord implies that their rejection and destruction was precisely because they turned away from perceiving His entry into the city as their "visitation". They didn't think this was the "time" because they weren't seeing immediate salvation. Or rather, they didn't wish to see it. All they could think was that this was not their man, not at all the Messiah they had expected. Their cry of 'Save now!' ['Hosanna'] produced no dramatic action on His part. He just kept on riding that awkward beast, wandering probably in a zig-zag through the streets.

*21:12 And Jesus entered into the temple of God-* This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

*And cast out-* A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (8:12 and soon after this incident, in 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

*All them that sold and bought in the temple-* This is the context of Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned

carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

*And overthrew-* This was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

*The tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold the doves-* These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind. See on :17 *Went out of the city into Bethany*.

21:13 *And he said to them-* The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these

connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*It is written*- The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions (:15). Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house*- Just as the "feasts of the Lord" are described as "feasts of the Jews", God's house becomes "your house" (23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

*Shall be called*- Luke uses the present tense, "is called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*Den of thieves*- The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

*A house of prayer; but you make it a den of robbers*- This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The

Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

21:14 *And the blind and the lame-* Previously banned from the temple on the basis of 2 Sam. 5:8 LXX. Those rejected from the sacred space now came in to replace those whom the Lord had ejected from it. Clearly His view was that kids and cripples were to replace the pious religious Jews.

*Came to Him in the temple and he healed them-* The time scale couldn't have been more than a few hours. It presumably took Him some time to eject the Jews from the temple and to stop people carrying burdens through it. The marginalized had heard that the others had been ejected- and came to Him naturally. They would've walked or looked around with glee at the sacred space previously denied to them. Quite why the temple guard didn't arrest the Lord is a significant question. They were surely there, and the Jews would've wanted them to intervene. I suggest the Lord stopped them in their tracks by supernatural power, just as He had earlier been able to walk through the midst of those seeking to kill Him (Jn. 8:59). The Lord demonstrated clearly that He could restrain the power of civil authority, guards and soldiers- if and when He wished. His submission to them in the process of arrest and crucifixion was therefore the more remarkable. It was His submission, not their power. Those same leaders and soldiers would surely have realized that He had the power to restrain them- for He had done so here in the temple, so shortly before His arrest and death. We see here an essay in how the process of His death was a result of His wilfully giving His life; it was not taken from Him, He laid it down (Jn. 10:17,18).

21:15 *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David!-* Presumably they too had been cast out of the temple. This conversation likely took place after the Lord had finished in the temple.

*They were moved with indignation, and said to him-* Their eye was evil because He was good. The welcoming of the previously marginalized into sacred space produces a similar reaction today. If such categories are allowed to break bread, some get angry to the point of white hot hatred, which in God's eyes is murder. Their eye became evil because He was good. The same Greek word for "displeased" is used regarding how the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because the Lord had healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14).

21:16 *Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them: Yes. Did you never read-* He was speaking to the educated who could read. "Never read" would've jarred with them- they spent their lives poring over the Scriptures. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?-* A strange grammatical construction, the plural "babes" have a singular "mouth", so united are they in devotion to the Lord. Hence we find that the word translated "perfected" is elsewhere rendered "perfectly joined together". The quotation from Ps. 8:2 is from a Psalm often alluded to in the New Testament. It was first written as David reflected upon his victory over Goliath, an incident clearly typical of the Lord's victory on the cross. The young people rejoiced in David's victory and joined Him in triumphing over his enemies in praise to God for the victory. This indicates that the Lord considered His victory as in a sense already accomplished; He saw those youngsters' praise of Him and acceptance of their place in God's house as being effectively their praise for His victory over the Goliath of sin. The quotation also associates the angry, intellectually defeated Jewish leaders with the Philistines- another one in a series of suggestions that they are effectively Gentiles and no longer God's people (see on :13). Let's pause to give all this teaching its due weight- that legalism and exclusiveness are no better than Baal worship, and such orthodoxy is only a faithfulness to human tradition rather than to God.

21:17 *And he left them and went out of the city-* His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it.

*To Bethany and lodged there-* This continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of

anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publicly explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death, however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

21:18 *Now in the morning as he returned to the city-* A hint that His final return in the morning of Zion's new day will require at least some fruit on the fig tree, the beginnings of repentance and spiritual fruit in Israel.

*He became hungry-* Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

21:19 *And seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he went to it and-* Symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by

(Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

*Found nothing thereon*- His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down.

*But leaves only*- The inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

*And he said to it: Let there be no fruit from you*- If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

*Again*- AV "For ever", for the *aion*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

*And immediately the fig tree withered away*- "From the roots", Mark adds. This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

21:20 *And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying*- Their amazement is presented in Mk. 11:21,22 as a lack of faith, calling forth from the Lord the rebuke: "Have faith in God". After all the miracles they had seen, it's pathetic that they doubted as to the Lord's ability to dry up a fig tree. Yet again, the initial Gospel writers and preachers draw



attention to their own weakness of faith. Seeing that the fig tree was such a well known symbol of Israel (see on :19), the disciples may have perceived the incident as an acted parable. Their comment "How soon is the fig tree withered" (Mk.) could be seen as a criticism of how quickly the Lord had withered it. But this would in turn indicate that they had totally failed to understand His earlier teaching of how He had asked the Father for more time for Israel than He had intended to give it, and had personally done the servile work of digging and dunging it in the hope that fruit would come. Their struggle to believe what the Lord had done reflected the wider struggle they and we have to accept that humility, the humble entry rather than the triumphal one, is the way of God. They struggled to believe that the entire system of formal religious worship was being done away and replaced by kids and cripples, literally and spiritually, in the sacred space. The Lord's subsequent exhortations to faith must be seen in this context- the faith to believe this. I recall a brother once at the heart of a community of believers being disfellowshipped over a false accusation. I urged him to break bread alone. He told me that he didn't have the faith... to sit and break bread alone, with no hymns, no president, no surrounding church. We sat in a fast food joint in a London suburb and I had to lead him in the breaking of bread service- he was so used to standing there on Sunday mornings, either presiding or giving the lesson... He has often recalled that there in McDonalds, he found his faith. Faith in God and Jesus, and not in any organization or human church.

*How did the fig tree immediately wither away?*- The Lord had said that it would happen immediately (:19). According to the other records, the disciples made this comment the next day. They somehow doubted the Lord could work with such immediate effect. And this strange lack of faith was surely because they perceived that the fig tree represented Israel and all they had once held dear in their culture. The disciples asked how the fig tree [cp. Israel] withered away so quickly. The answer, of course, was in that Jesus had faith that it would. He goes on to tell them that if *they* had faith, the mountain of Zion, the hope of Israel, would be cast into the sea of nations (:20,21). The Lord Jesus is surely saying that *His* faith should not be seen as separate from *our* faith. According to the faith of the disciples, the Hope of Israel, rejected by the withered fig tree of Israel, could be spread to the Gentiles. But the spread of the Gospel world-wide was and is conditional upon our faith, modelled as it must be upon His example.

21:21 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Truly I say to you, If you have faith-* See on :20. The faith in view was faith in the Lord's new way of doing things, a religion of kids and cripples outside of organized religion.

*And doubt not-* The 'faith' was faith in the passing of the Jewish system.

"Doubt not" translates *diakrino* which can better be translated to make a difference, to discriminate. It was as if the Lord was saying: 'I know you believe. But to believe in *this* will be hard. Don't make a difference, believing in some things and not others. Believe in this too'.

*You shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to-* They too were to play a part in the withering of the fig tree- by preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

*This mountain-* There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Matthew's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

*Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done-* To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing

forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them- to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

21:22 *And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive-* This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

21:23 *And when he had entered into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said-* "Entered" is *erchomai*, and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

*By what authority do you do these things?*- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

*And who gave You this authority?*- To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

21:24 *And Jesus answered and said to them: I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things-* It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :27 that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

21:25 *The baptism of John-* Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another

window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*Where was it from? From heaven or from men?*- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

*And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?*- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :27 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

21:26 *But if we shall say, from men, we fear the crowd*- They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

*For all hold John as a prophet*- And yet the Lord had said that "the men of this generation" held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

21:27 *And they answered Jesus and said: We do not know*- See on :25 *They reasoned with themselves* and :24 *If you answer Me*. The Greek

means 'We cannot *know*'. They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

*He replied to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things-* He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

21:28 *But what do you think? A man-* God.

*Had two sons, and he came to the first, and said-* In the form of John, who "came unto you" (:32- a related word is used for "come"). God was manifest in the preaching of John, just as He personally comes to men through our preaching. This accounts for the special sense of Divine presence which we have in our efforts to preach His Son and appeal to men. Paul can speak of how God Himself appeals to people through us (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1).

*Son-* These people were already in the family of God. They represent those to whom John the Baptist came (:32).

*Today-* The suggestion is that there is urgent work to do, presumably harvest was ripe and what was not gathered today would be lost. The refusal to work was therefore rooted in a refusal to appreciate the significance of their work. Without it, harvest would be lost, and they would all be the poorer.

*Go and work-* The Lord's interpretation is that the "work" required was belief and repentance (:32). The work of God is indeed to *believe* in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:29). This definition of 'works' was so different to that held by Judaism, according to which 'works' were physical acts of obedience to specific legal regulations. And yet clearly the Christian call is to action, to "works", without which any profession of faith is "dead". We are to "go trade" [s.w. "go work"] with the talents given us, and the man who does not so work with them will be condemned (Mt. 25:16). Paul's apparent deprecation of "works" in Romans (Rom. 4:4,5; 6:23) is surely to be understood with reference to "the works of the Law" of Moses (Rom. 3:27; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10), i.e. works done in obedience to that legislation in the hope of salvation upon that basis. The call is to work in response to the call. Not simply assent to theology, the specific doctrines of a Christian denomination, join a Christian social club; but work, labour, toil for Him in His service.

*In the vineyard-* The vineyard must refer to the means of bringing forth spiritual fruit, according to the Lord's use of the vine figure in Jn.15. Being in the vineyard is therefore all about bringing forth the fruits of spirituality, showing forth the moral likeness of God. This is the intended "work" we are asked to do. And yet the idea of being called by God to work in His vineyard [Israel] was language used in Judaism for the call of the priestly class to do the work of religious specialists amongst the nation of Israel, God's vineyard. But the parable teaches that this is God's invitation to everyone in the new system of things which He is developing.

21:29 *And he answered and said: I will not-* Not so much a bald refusal as 'I don't wish to, I don't have the desire to'.

*But afterward he repented and went-* This Greek word for "afterward" is used three times in Matthew 21 (and only 9 times elsewhere in the NT). The Jews are criticized for not repenting "after" they had seen the whores repent at John's teaching (21:32); and "afterward" (AV "last of all"), after sending the prophets of which John was the last, God sent His Son to appeal to Israel (21:37). The son who initially refused to work therefore speaks of those in Israel who refused to hear the prophets and John, and yet "after" all that appeal, responded to the Lord Jesus.

"Afterward he repented" is exactly the same words in :32. Afterwards- after the Lord's ministry- they did *not* repent. The Jews who initially responded to John are therefore the son who said he would work but never did. The same Greek word for "afterward" is also found in :37: "Last of all [s.w. "afterward"] He sent unto them His Son". The Lord's coming was intended to bring the disobedient son to repentance- and to go work in the vineyard.

He went- to work in the vineyard. The motivation of the man to labour was because he had repented and been forgiven. His motive was not simply obedience out of respect to his Father, but rather now was it gratitude for forgiveness.

21:30 *And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said: I go sir-* Literally, "I, Sir!". The suggestion is that he was presenting himself as more obedient and respectful than his brother. And yet as so often, those who consider themselves the longer and harder workers in the vineyard, feeling superior to their weaker brothers, are in fact less than them in practice. Surely the Lord had in mind Ex. 24:7: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient".

*But did not go-* In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

21:31 *Which of the two did the will of his father? They replied: The first. Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you-* The contrast is between doing the will of God, and simply saying in words that we will. This is the very tension which the Lord illustrates in the parable of the houses built on sand and rock. The same words for 'doing the will of the Father' are found in 7:21: "Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *does the will of My Father*". Israel's response to John had been a saying of "Lord, Lord" to Jesus, a prompt response to the request to work in the vineyard- but they never went further. They did not actually repent, even though John's message had been a call to repentance. Repentance can be easily 'made' in words, but this is merely surface level. We need to examine our own repentance in the light of this caveat. Surely the Lord had this same category in view when He spoke of how "many stripes" await the one who knows his Lord's will, but doesn't do it (Lk. 12:47 s.w.). As ever, the Lord had Himself in mind as He spoke such demanding words. He was the Son of the Father who "did the will" and finished His "work"; who said yes straight away, and fulfilled it (Jn. 4:34; 6:38; Heb. 10:7,9 s.w.). In all our teaching of others we must likewise never take our eyes off our own position before God.

*That the tax collectors and the prostitutes-* Matthew, the speaker and author of this Gospel, had been one of them, a tax collector. His appeal for others to respond to the call was therefore interlaced with his own recognition and proclamation that he was in the category of those who had initially said 'No', but afterwards repented. Doubtless the Lord was aware that His followers included tax collectors and prostitutes and He was seeking to justify them.

*Go into the Kingdom of God before you-* To 'go before', *proago*, means just that. The word has just been used of how the crowd 'went before' Him in His [parody of a] triumphant entry into Jerusalem (:9). It doesn't necessarily mean that they would enter the Kingdom, for as mentioned above, the Lord's teaching was that those who did not do the will of God would not enter the Kingdom at all. The idea is rather that the harlots and tax collectors would go into the Kingdom as their heralds, suggesting that their judgment at the time of the Kingdom would be on the basis that the serious sinners had repented and entered the Kingdom, but they had not. And that fact would be waiting for them as they arrived for judgment at the gates of the Kingdom. Paul may be alluding to this when he says that the sins of some men 'go before' them to judgment (1 Tim. 5:24 s.w.). Or it could be that even at this dire moment, the Lord still entertained the hope that His persecutors and enemies would enter the Kingdom finally, even if the whores would have a better place in the Kingdom than them.

21:32 *For John came to you-* His coming to the people was as it were God's coming to them (:28,30). God was manifest in him, as He is in all



preachers. We are His voice and appeal to men.

*In the way of righteousness-* The very phrase used in 2 Pet. 2:21 about the Christian Gospel. John's work had been to prepare the Lord's "way" (3:3; 11:10), over which Messiah could have come in glory to Zion, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies about this. The Lord is referencing the idea that if Israel had responded to John, then the triumphant entry into Zion which He had just parodied earlier in this chapter could really have been achieved.

*And you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him-* This was clearly intended to address the inner thought of the audience, that "If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?" (21:25). The Lord knew their thoughts- clearly, in this instance at least, not so much as from direct Divine revelation, but from His sensitivity to them and reading of their minds.

John the Baptist was a popular preacher. All Jerusalem went out to hear him. Even the hardline Orthodox were baptized by him. People liked his hard line austerity, his criticism of them. They lined up to hear it, and to confess their sins to him. But Jesus interpreted it differently. He said John's ministry was like children wanting to play at funerals with some other children- so they started weeping, but the others still wouldn't respond. Jesus came, piping; He wanted them to play weddings. But still they didn't respond in true repentance (Lk. 7:32-35). The Lord judged that Israel didn't respond to John; indeed, *if* they had truly received him, he would have been the Elijah prophet for them (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.). What this teaches is that believers can respond to a tough line, to the ra-ra of an uncompromising moralizing message; and yet not *really* repent nor accept the Lordship of Jesus in their hearts. Mt. 21:32 states clearly that the Jews generally didn't believe John the Baptist, nor repent. And yet they flocked to him in apparent repentance and were baptized. As we all know, repentance is one of the hardest things to be thoroughly genuine about.

*And afterwards when you saw it-* The second son who had said 'Yes' but not gone to work needed to become as the first son; realizing he was no better than the first son, and likewise repenting and going to work whilst there was still time, to achieve at least something in the Father's vineyard. But it was a bridge too far for the Jewish leadership and Israel in general to make this connection- that they had to shift from their self-righteousness into the position of the whores and tax collectors.

The good example of others contributes to our experience of the upward spiral. And yet if we don't respond to them, we can be held accountable for it and slip into the downward spiral. Thus the Lord held the elders of Israel guilty because when they saw the whores and tax collectors repenting at John's preaching, "you, when you had seen it, repented not".

They should have been influenced by the repentance of those people; they should've allowed repentance to be contagious. But they didn't, and so they were held guilty for that. The Lord is telling the Jews that they were even more culpable for not repenting at the preaching of John the Baptist because the publicans and sinners had done so; and they hadn't. They should've changed their minds ['repented'] after they saw the publicans and sinners repent- so the Lord incisively observed and judged. The implication of that seems to me to be that we are intended to be inspired to faith and repentance by that of others. This is why the Christian life is intended to be lived in community.

*You still did not repent-* Mt. 21:29,32 parallel 'repent and work' with 'repent and believe'. As the Lord said in Jn. 6:29, the work of God is to believe- in the forgiveness of sins. The experience of repentance and forgiveness will result in an ever deeper faith, and the works of gratitude which are inseparable part of faith. The parable speaks of repenting and going to work in the Father's vineyard; as if care for our brethren, seeking their fruitfulness and that of this world [after the pattern of the vineyard of Isaiah 5] is the obvious work of repentance. The Lord castigated the audiences of John the Baptist that they did not "repent, that ye might believe". Repentance would lead to faith... and yet it is faith which leads to repentance. The two things work together to form an upward spiral of growth.

*And believe him-* Their repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of sins which John spoke of necessitated their belief in Christ as the lamb of God, the sacrifice for sin, of whom John also spoke. The repentance he urged them to make suggests that forgiveness was available- but his message was that that forgiveness was possible ultimately through the work of Jesus as the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Paul explained this in so many words: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4).

AV "Repented not so that you might believe him" translates an awkward phrase in the Greek, and the translations which suggest 'You didn't repent and believe him' are being too simplistic. There is definitely a causative sense implied- they did not repent *so that* they believed him. To repent, to change their minds as required by John, involved believing his message, which was about Jesus as the lamb of God who took away sin and thereby gave meaning and possibility to their repentance. Here, the Lord connects repentance with belief; yet we read that in practice, people believe and are baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sin. So belief and repentance are connected. The belief in John that is spoken of here was effectively a belief in Jesus: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4). If we repent, change our

minds and decide to respond, then immediately the issue of forgiveness is thrown up. Have I now been forgiven? Can I be? How? And this is what leads seamlessly into faith in Christ as the lamb of God to take away our sin.

21:33 *Hear another parable-* The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], *gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], *planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"], *built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], *but, behold, a cry of distress".*

*There was a man that was master of a house-* Literally, the head of the family. Clearly in this parable it refers to God, but the Lord used exactly this term to refer to Himself specifically (10:25; 20:1,11; Lk. 13:25). It is far too simplistic to conclude 'Therefore Jesus is God'. There is too strong a weight of Biblical evidence against that position. The titles and functions

of the Father are clearly applicable to the Son- and in fact the same Greek word is used about us as believers "in Christ" (13:52; 24:43).

*Who planted a vineyard-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. See on :34 *The winepress*. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*And set a hedge about it-* The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

*And dug a winepress-* This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard

to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness (Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

*And built a tower-* It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit.

*And let it out to husbandmen; and went into another country-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile,

country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particularly careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

21:34 *And when the harvest season drew near*- A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent*- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*His servants to the husbandmen, to get his fruit*- The prophets (2 Kings

9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

*21:35 And the husbandmen took his servants and beat one-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head.

*And killed another and stoned another-* There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

21:36- see on 13:19.

*Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did the same to them-* The two groups of servants is unique to Matthew's account, and is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the "former prophets" and the "latter prophets".

*21:37 And last of all he sent his son to them, saying: They will respect my son-* Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds "My beloved Son". Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

*21:38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves-* That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him*, there is no

beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

*This is the heir-* The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Come, let us kill him and take his inheritance-* Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains



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*21:39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him-* Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him, killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:42). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

*21:40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard shall come, what will he*

*do to those husbandmen?*- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

21:41 *They said to him: He will miserably destroy those miserable men-* In the Greek, "miserable" [*kakos*] is related to "wicked" [*kakos*]. Those men will suffer their own wickedness. And just as the Jews said that those wicked men would be punished with their own wickedness, so out of their own mouths they were judged; in the same way as the Father had asked the Jews to "judge between Me and My vineyard", even though they were the vineyard (Is. 5:3). It would seem that the literal words of the rejected will be quoted back to them at the day of judgment (Lk. 19:22 "Out of your own mouth will I judge you"; Jude 15 "To convict all that are unGodly... of all their hard words"). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). See on 12:37.

*And will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen-* The Lord's judgment is different. He will *give* the vineyard to the others (:44). And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (:43; Jn. 15).

Mk. 12:9 records that the Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naïve, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

*Who shall pay him the fruits in their seasons-* Literally, 'times'. But for the Lord there is only one harvest. Once the fruit is ripe from the first harvest, then it will be reaped. Or it may be that God's aim is that we the husbandmen bring forth all the required fruits (of the spirit) "in their seasons". This indicates that over time, the various members of the body between them will bring forth every aspect of God's spirituality. The parable of the talents indicates how we have each individually been given something different by Christ. The parable of the pounds is along the same lines; as is the story of the Master who went away and left his

servants looking after the house. *Each* of them was given his own *separate* work to do (Mk. 13:34). This accounts for the way in which each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do.

21:42 *Jesus said to them: Did you never read in the scriptures-* They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The stone which the builders rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

*The same was made the head of the corner-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

*This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes-* In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation in Mt. 21:42 is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

21:43 *Therefore say I to you: The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you-* The whole vineyard system is spoken of as the Kingdom of God. The Jewish people were therefore not the Kingdom of God- because the Kingdom was taken *from* them and given to others. They had been

instated as God's Kingdom at Sinai, but now, by implication, that status was being withdrawn from them.

*And shall be given to a nation-* In the singular. The various nationalities of the new group of workers are irrelevant, we are seen as one new nation, a new people.

*Bringing forth the fruits of it-* This is subtly different to 'rendering Him the fruits in their season' (:41). The new nation are no longer merely tenants, but are the vine themselves; the fruit is to be on them. And this is exactly the way the imagery of viticulture is used in Jn. 15. Spiritual fruit is the fruit of the Kingdom. The fruits of the Spirit in terms of personality traits, characteristics etc. are the fruits which will eternally be seen in the Kingdom. They are a firstfruits, a foretaste, of the Kingdom age. In John's terms, we are living the eternal life now, the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

21:44 *And he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust-* AV "Will grind him to powder". There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world-being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on 3:11.

21:45 *And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived-* The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple.

*That he spoke of them-* *Peri* in this construction more means 'through'. They realized that their very own words of :41 were the Lord talking to them. They had been trounced, and stood self-condemned. And so they went blindly ahead in their hurt pride and confirmed it by planning to

murder the Son who had been sent to them. They should have stopped in their tracks and repented. They realized they had uttered the words of their own condemnation. The Lord Jesus had spoken to them through their own words. They were furious about it. The only options were to repent, to give in; or to go madly ahead, fuelled by the hurt pride of a moment, and do the unthinkable in murdering God's Son.

21:46 *And although they were seeking-* The very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod.

*To arrest him-* The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (26:4,48,50,55,57).

*They feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet-* We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

## CHAPTER 22

22:1 *And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying-* As often with the Lord's parables, He begins by setting up an expectation (in this case, of joy and fulfilment) which is then dashed by human failure, and turns very unpleasant and indeed calls forth the hardest judgments. The parable is clearly related to that of the wicked husbandmen at the end of chapter 21, and seeks to add more detail and justification for that judgment upon Israel. The feast can be understood as a betrothal feast, to celebrate the engagement of the Son, rather than speaking of the marriage supper of the Lamb. And yet it could also refer to this, in that this was planned and could have happened far earlier than it finally will do, just as in the previous parable, the time of fruit was ready right from the time of the sending of the first servant.

The parable is clearly quarried from Zephaniah 1:7,8: "The day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass... that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel". The context of Zephaniah is his appeal to Judah at Josiah's time (Zeph. 1:1), who had *appeared* to respond to Josiah's call to repent, but not in their hearts. It was exactly his "princes" who had apparently responded to his appeal for radical reformation (2 Chron. 34:29-32); but in Zeph. 1 they are condemned as insincere. This is clearly seen by the Lord as analogous to Israel having responded to John's attempted reformation- when their hearts were far from it, and eventually they like the Judah of Josiah's day were to be judged and have their city and temple burnt by the Gentiles.

22:2 *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son-* The parable of the marriage supper is what "the Kingdom of heaven is like". As with so many of Christ's parables, this one too is quarried from the book of Proverbs; in this case Prov.9:2-5, which describes how wisdom makes everything ready for her feast. The food and wine which is there represents the wisdom of God. The Kingdom of God is therefore likened to this supreme feast on the knowledge of God. The Kingdom will therefore be a feast of such things. We love God in this life, but surely we cry out for a greater understanding and appreciation of Him? Do we not cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding? If we do have this feeling, then we will be supremely motivated to strive to reach that glorious time of true knowledge.

22:3 *And sent out his servants-* The parable is similar to that of the preceding parable of the wicked husbandmen. These servants are God's "servants the prophets" who in Old Testament times called Israel to repentance and the Kingdom. The term "servants" is used throughout the parable. The servants go again to Israel, and are beaten and killed (:4). Those "other servants" are perhaps the apostles in their witness to Israel after the Lord's death, whose rejection culminated in the burning up of

their city of Jerusalem (:7). More "servants" are then urgently sent to bring in anyone willing to say "yes". And they refer to our witness in this age. Yet it is also the "servants" who bind and destroy the rejected (:13). These servants are all "sent", *apostello*. There is a clear continuity between the witness of the prophets, the apostles and ourselves. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" in the sense that our preaching of Him is in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets (Rev. 19:10). Again we are all encouraged to see ourselves as brethren of the prophets; they were not, as Judaism supposed, some separate group of white faced saints. Our witness is the equivalent of being them in the new Israel. The "servants" who bind the man in condemnation refer in other parables to the Angels. It could be that we too do this work; or it may be that we're being shown that we are not only in a continuum with the Old Testament prophets and 1st century apostles, but are likewise inline with the Angels. Hence an Angel urged the apostle John that He was one with John and also "your brethren the prophets" (Rev. 22:9). We are not alone. We are in a direct line, on a continuum, with Angels, prophets and apostles, the *elohim* of the new Israel and new age created in Christ.

God's servants (the Old and New Testament prophets - Rev. 2:20; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Am. 3:7; Zech. 1:6) were sent by God "to call them that were bidden to the wedding: but they would not come" (Matt. 22:3). The Greek word for "call" being the same translated "bidden", we have here an example of the interplay between predestination and the calling of God through the Gospel - the word of the prophets/apostles 'called them who were (already) called' in God's purpose. This class must primarily refer to the Jews. The refusal to attend the wedding obviously equates with the Jewish rejection of Christ's work. God pleaded, "I have prepared my dinner", i.e. the Kingdom (Matt. 22:2). This corresponds with the Kingdom 'coming nigh' to Israel through the first century preaching of the Gospel (Luke 10:9,11) and the primary fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy in the run up to A.D. 70 (Mark 13:29).

*To call them that were invited-* Literally, 'to call the called'. Israel and in a sense all God's people were called from the foundation of the world. The allusion may be to the way in which people were invited to banquets, gave their agreement to attend, and then a servant was sent to actually take them to the banquet. But we should be aware that the language of 'calling the called' doesn't necessarily mean that there is a list of called ones, established from the beginning of the world, and our preaching is a hit and miss affair, sometimes reaching the 'called' and sometimes not, in which case our words were wasted. 'Calling the called' could equally mean that whoever hears the call is therefore and thereby 'called'. The invitation is to "whomsoever will", and the more people we call, the more are called. The urging of men to respond with the encouragement "whomsoever will..." is hardly appropriate if some cannot respond

because they were not 'called' from the beginning, were never on the list. And yet in the bigger picture, there clearly is an element of predestination involved with calling; and Paul references this in Romans as the ultimate example of grace. In the final picture, not all have heard the call. Because God's servants didn't take the call to all, and so for whatever reason, some are not called- and in that is the element of predestination. And yet the parable gives some further insight into this question. The first group of servants 'call the called', but the last group of servants after the burning of Jerusalem are urged to drag in whoever they can find. It's as if in Old Testament times, the appeal was to all within Israel, the called people. But now, all men can be called.

*To the marriage feast-* An engagement banquet, or the actual wedding? In either case, the principle is established that the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom could have come in Old Testament times; it could have come when the second set of servants [the apostles] made their appeal [in the first century up until the burning of the city in AD70]; and it will come whenever we as the servants of God in this age have finally gathered in enough potential guests. This is the same idea as in the preceding parable, where the harvest was ready, the time had 'drawn near', at the time of every appeal to Israel through the prophets. God's purpose is taught, time and again, to be open-ended and dependent upon Israel's response and our efforts in witness. For *when* the Gospel has gone to all the world, *then* shall the end come (24:14). The whole idea of a royal couple being kept waiting, in fact kept waiting for centuries and a few millennia, is shocking and tragic. We feel sorry for them, just as we in a sense feel sorry for the Father and Son. This unexpected delay in the wedding banquet is developed in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in chapter 25. Because of it, they all fell asleep when, according to the allusions to the parable in 1 Thess. 5, they should have stayed awake. It was a huge tragedy and shame all round, if we put the parables together.

*But they would not come-* The same words in 21:29 of the son who said "I will not" [work in the vineyard] but repented and went to work. The Lord wished to gather Jerusalem's children under His wings to save them from the great fire of destruction coming upon them, but they "would not" (23:37 s.w.). But in what practical way did they not want to come? The same words are used of how the Jews "would not" help their brother with the burden of human failure (23:4), or how the unforgiving debtor "would not" forgive his brother (18:30) and the older brother "would not" go in to the celebration banquet for the returned prodigal (Lk. 15:28). They "would not come" to Jesus in repentance (Jn. 5:40). Their refusal of the invitation to the Messianic banquet, to the Kingdom, was in terms of their attitude to others. Just as if we don't want a part in the church as the body of Christ, we don't want a part in Him.



22:4 *Again*- This and the use of the word "other" later in the sentence develops an impression of the King's continued effort with the guests.

*He sent other servants, saying: Tell them that were invited*- People are called to the Kingdom, and yet also called [s.w.] to repentance (9:13) and called to appear at judgment day (20:8). When we hear the call and respond, we begin our journey towards judgment day. That day, therefore, is not just for the baptized, but for any who heard the call and began the journey. The parable and teaching of Luke 14 show that we are those called, and yet we are also those who call others (Lk. 14:10,13). We are to reflect the grace of how we were called by calling others. The Greek *kaleo*, "call", isn't a passive word when used in the sense of inviting persons. It's from *keleuo*, to command or urge onwards. Our calling of others, and God's calling of us, involves an urging towards response.

*Look, I have made ready my dinner*- The obvious unreality of the story is that the dinner sits on the table, as it were, for centuries. But this is indeed the strangeness of God's openness to us. The time has always been ready, if human response and the effort of His servants has been enough. John's mission had been to "prepare" the way for Messiah (3:3 s.w.), through 'preparing' a people for Him (Lk. 1:17,76 s.w.). Although it had indeed been prepared, Israel didn't want it. A unique place in God's Kingdom has been "prepared" for each of us from the foundation of the world (20:23; 25:34 "Them for whom it has been prepared of My Father"; Jn. 14:2 "to prepare a place for you"; 1 Cor. 2:9 "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"; 1 Pet. 1:5 our salvation is "prepared" for us). The tragedy of the story is that such a wonderful feast had been "prepared"- the same word is found later in :4 "All things are *ready*" and in :8 "the wedding is *ready*". Perhaps this helps us understand the otherwise enigmatic words of the Lord to the Jews in Jn. 7:6: "Your time is always *ready*" (s.w.)- the time of establishment of the Kingdom, the time of the harvest in the previous parable of the labourers, was always potentially prepared and ready, it just depended upon Israel's acceptance of it.

*My oxen and My fatlings are killed*- Perhaps a reference to the end of the Mosaic system, or perhaps an intensive plural referring to the one great sacrifice that had been made in the Lord Jesus. "Oxen" or bulls are specifically spoken of as the animals which prefigured the Lord's sacrifice (Heb. 9:13; 10:4 s.w.). "Killed" translates *thuo*, the word for sacrifice. We could also note that the Greek word translated "prepared" is used about 15 times in the Gospels for the preparation of the last Passover, which was typical of the Lord's death.

*And all things are ready*- The same word for "prepared". Absolutely all things were prepared for the Messianic banquet, it really could have come in the first century.

*Come to the marriage feast!*- "Come" translates *deute*, which is a summons in the imperative. It's the same word used in "Follow Me" (4:19), "Come unto Me" (11:28; 19:21), "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom" (25:34). The wonder of what has been prepared coupled with the tragedy of it having been refused means that the Father is eager to compel people to accept it. This intense desire of the Father is to be ours as we in our day appeal to men to "come". In no way is God somehow passive and disinterested in human response, even if His apparent silence in the face of the rejection of His Kingdom may appear that way. Behind that apparent silence is an intense desire for our response. "Come unto", using *eis*, really means 'Come into'. This isn't simply an offer 'for your information', it is a willing desire to compel men to enter into the Kingdom through their response to the Gospel call.

We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord.

There are ample hints that this parable should also be given some reference to the burning up of Jerusalem in the last days. The prophetic "servants" of :4 who call Israel to repentance are matched by a singular "servant" in the similar parable in Lk. 14:17. There can be no doubt that such differences are designed. 'Elijah' and his latter-day school of prophets will minister the word to Israel, which would explain the use in the parables of "servant" and "servants" - the group of prophets being led by one particular prophet.

22:5 *But they made light of it*- The note of tragedy in "But..." mustn't be missed. This is the tragedy of human rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom- the greatest things are prepared, but they are 'made light of' because the things of this life seem heavier. Israel's making light of the invitation is our warning, for Heb. 2:9 uses the same word here translated "made light": "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* such a great salvation". Paul uses the same word in urging Timothy not to "neglect" the gifts of potential service which he had been given (1 Tim. 4:14).

*And went their ways*- Albeit masked in translation, this one Greek word *aperchomai* is related to the word *erchomai* used in :3- "They would not *come*". Instead of going to the banquet, they went... to their various concerns. Two ways were therefore placed before them- to go the way to the banquet of the Kingdom, or go the ways of worldly cares. Although again concealed in most translations, this is the connection of thought with the unusual word *diexodos* translated "highways", literally 'the parting of the two ways', in :9. It was there, at the fork between two ways, that the appeal was to be made by the later servants.

*One to his farm*- Literally 'this one to his farm, this one to his trading'. We are thus invited to imagine these characters. Maybe the Lord was nodding His head towards passers by as He spoke these words. Banquets began in the evening [hence the man thrown out of it was thrown out into darkness, :13], and so this apparent element of unreality makes us interpret the Lord as meaning that *in their minds* they went off to their various secular concerns. For they would hardly be going off to those things in the evening. The farmer was presumably living at his farm when the servant came to take him to the banquet, so this going to his farm must be interpreted psychologically. Time and again we must remember that John's message, which had been primarily about the Lord and the need for repentance (Acts 19:4) had enjoyed amazing response. But it was all surface level response- even the baptisms. In their hearts, people made light of it and went off in their secular worries and concerns. This has biting relevance to us, who can be fully and positively engaged with the call to the Kingdom as we consider it in reading about it or listening to it preached in church. But that enthusiastic agreement with the message can so quickly and easily be displaced by the cares of this world. The Lord's parable of the sower was initially His commentary upon how the people had responded to John's message about Him and the Kingdom, but the cares of the world and other factors soon choked the growth of that seed.

*Another to his business*- Again, trading isn't done in the evening, which was when the banquet would have begun. The only other time the Lord uses this idea of trading or 'merchant-ing' in the Gospels is in speaking of the merchant man who sold up all he had in order to buy the pearl of great price, and thus quit his trading (13:45). The parable is alluding to the way in which invitations were sent out, accepted, and then a servant came to escort the invited person to the banquet. This generation had accepted the invitation in that they had accepted John's preaching. But when it came to actually entering the Kingdom, they were instead dominated by the cares of secular life. And it is exactly this, rather than any logical or intellectual difficulty in accepting the message, which is the real reason people turn down the invitation. "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" would imply that there was a period of crazy addiction to materialism among Jewry between the crucifixion and A.D. 70. This is confirmed by the epistles to the Jewish believers, notably James and Peter; it also finds a counterpart in our present 'last days'.

22:6 *While the rest seized his servants*- "Took /seized" means to lay hands on by force, and has just been used about the Jews' desire to arrest the Lord (21:46 "They sought to *lay hands on* Him"). And it's used in that connection when they did finally 'take' Him to death (26:4,48,50,55,57).

*Treated them shamefully*- Again, the very word used about the Lord's final sufferings: "He shall be *treated shamefully*" (Lk. 18:32). The point is, that the Lord's final crucifixion sufferings were to be shared by His people as they took His appeal to the Jews. Paul seems to have grasped this, for he uses this same word in precisely this context: "We were *shamefully treated*" by the Jews when preaching the Gospel to them (1 Thess. 2:2; Acts 14:5). Paul saw himself in the parables- just as we should. Paul describes himself as having been "shamefully entreated" when he brought the Gospel to Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2)- using the Greek word used in Mt. 22:6 concerning how the messengers sent to the vineyard were "entreated spitefully". And maybe Paul was consciously aware that the Lord Himself had spoken of how He would be "spitefully entreated" (Lk. 18:32) during His final sufferings. Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ's sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ's Gospel (Col. 1:24).

*And killed them*- To put to death, the same word used about the Lord's crucifixion (16:21; 17:23; 21:38). The killing or slaying [s.w.] of the Son sent to the vineyard in 21:39 was to be repeated in the slaying of the first century preachers of the Gospel. Even today, our sufferings for preaching the Gospel are a share in the Lord's crucifixion sufferings.

The question arises: Why the extreme treatment of the servants by those invited, and why does the King react so devastatingly in destroying their entire city? Marriages of King's sons were political statements. Often the King's son would be pronounced as heir to the throne when he got married. The guests were invited in order to test their political loyalty to the King and his son. To refuse an invitation to a King's banquet was therefore highly significant- it was tantamount to a declaration of disloyalty. Even worse was to accept it, to proclaim loyalty to him and his son, and yet in practice not follow through with that declaration of loyalty. Israel's widespread acceptance of John, whose message was largely about Jesus (Acts 19:4), had been a declaration of loyalty to God and His Son. To not take it seriously in practice and to in fact turn against His Son was therefore the ultimate betrayal. This explains the King's anger, the wrath of God against Israel as a whole.

The persecution of the prophets connects with the same thing happening in Rev. 11, where the two witnesses make a similar last-minute appeal amidst great opposition. We have commented elsewhere how the true prophets within Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion represented the Elijah ministry - and they too were persecuted. The servants were "entreated spitefully" (Mt. 22:6), as was our Lord on the cross (Luke 18:32). The righteous fellowship Christ's sufferings during the tribulation. The idea of persecuted servants occurs again in Rev. 11:18; 19:2, both of which passages have an application to latter-day persecution.

22:7- see on 22:11.

*When the king heard-* AV. When the news came to His ears. This may be just the furniture of the parable, or it may reflect the Old Testament impression given that God has a mechanism whereby He is informed of happenings on earth, e.g. of the wickedness of Sodom or the building of the tower of Babel. That mechanism presumably involves the Angels. "When the king heard thereof" implies that as soon as Israel's rejection of Christ came to God's notice, "he sent forth his armies... and burned up their city". This is similar language to Gen. 6:12; 11:5 and 18:21 concerning God 'noticing' man's wickedness at the time of the flood, Babel and Sodom. The judgments with which He reacted on those occasions were typical of the second coming. As Babylon burnt Jerusalem with fire, so it seems certain from many other prophetic references that literal fire will be used by Israel's enemies to inflict her final punishment. The Arab armies will therefore be those of God and Christ, as were those of Israel's earlier Arab invaders. They are called 'sanctified' in Joel 3:9 (A.V. mg.), i.e. 'separated unto' God's specific purpose in punishing Israel.

*The King was angry-* "Wrath [s.w.] upon this people" was what happened in AD70 (Lk. 21:23). New Testament references to the wrath of God are often specifically about His wrath with Israel for rejecting His Kingdom and His Son. Of particular interest is Eph. 2:3, where Paul writes of how he had been one of those who were "by nature the children of wrath". I suggest this refers to his being part of the generation of Jews who had rejected the Son of God; but now Paul could rejoice that God has "delivered us from the wrath to come" in AD70 (1 Thess. 1:10). In 1 Thess. 2:16 he specifically defines that "wrath" as God's wrath upon Israel. The fact he speaks of this as a past status which he had now come out of would make it hard to interpret this as any global statement about what it means to be human. I don't think this passage means that the wrath of God is upon every bearer of human nature. God's own Son had human nature but the wrath of God was not upon Him. God's wrath comes upon "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). To be a child of wrath therefore has no reference to physical birth, but is parallel to being a child of disobedience.

*And he sent-* A reference to the common Old Testament concept of the court of Heaven, whereby God is presented as reviewing evidence and sending out His Angels, His "hosts", in response. Those Heavenly hosts have hosts of soldiers on earth which they can move and use as they wish.

*His armies-* The Roman armies were God's armies, just as the Babylonians had been. Josephus appealed to the Jews in Jerusalem in AD70 in these terms: "It is God, therefore, it is God Himself who is bringing on this fire, to purge that city and temple by means of the Romans, and is going to pluck up this city, which is full of your pollutions"

(*The Jewish War* 6.2.1). The Romans being described as "his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus. We must take the lesson that we can be strongly used by God, but this is no guarantee at all that we are His people.

*And destroyed those murderers-* Using the word for "destroy" which the Jews had just used in 21:41, saying in response to the parable of the wicked labourers that they should indeed be "destroyed". Out of their own mouths they were to be judged. The 'destruction' of the Jews for persecuting and killing the Lord Jesus and His apostles was in AD70, when their city was burned up. But the same word is that used in John when the Lord taught that those who believed in Him would not "perish" or be destroyed (Jn. 3:15,16; 10:28). Whatever else may be referred to in this teaching, it could also have simply meant in the first context that those Jews who believed in Christ would not be destroyed in the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70. The same word is used by Peter in predicting the perishing / destruction of the Jewish 'heavens and earth' in AD70 (2 Pet. 3:6,9). This destruction, however, was not going to touch those who were in Christ. They would not "perish" or be destroyed. For in the terms of the parable, they were not the murderers.

*And burnt their city-* The burning of Jerusalem in AD70. The Roman soldiers who actually did this were directly moved and controlled by God to do so. Stephen used the same word when accusing the Jews of being Christ's "betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). The Romans being described as "his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus.

22:8 *Then he said to his servants-* We are meant to imagine how they felt. The previous servants had been at best ignored, others beaten and killed. And now... it was for them to go out with the same message? We too should not fail to see the cost involved in the work of the Gospel, for we stand in direct continuum with the persecuted prophets and preachers who have gone before us. It may even be that by following the Lord's instructions to persuade all men, bad and good, to enter the Kingdom, simply on the basis of them saying 'yes', we will suffer isolation and rejection from our own brethren. And that too would be a sharing in His crucifixion sufferings, and taking our place in the sufferings of the Gospel. The work of the Gospel, if done properly, can never ultimately be 'fun' or purely pleasurable.

*The wedding is ready...*- This statement seems so obvious it doesn't need to be made. But it is made in order to motivate the servants in their efforts to get at least someone somewhere to say "yes". They were being asked to do something most unusual- to just grab anyone and urge them to come in to a King's banquet without a prior invitation and agreement, as was the norm. This appeal to secular people *without* the prior invitation

was so wonderful and unusual that the very unusualness of it would be hard for both preacher and listener to accept. Surely there was a catch somewhere... And so often when we present the things of the Kingdom to people, their honest response is that 'Can that really be... it sounds just too fantastic'. This is the difficulty with the level and depth of grace we are asked to believe in and share. It is so unusual and out of our experience that we find it hard to believe for real.

*But they that were invited were not worthy-* John's appeal had been to bring forth fruit "worthy" [s.w.] of repentance (Lk. 3:8). They had initially agreed to this, but hadn't come up with the fruit. Paul surely had this part of the parable in mind when he turned away from preaching to the Jews and went to the Gentiles, because the Jews had "judged [themselves] unworthy [s.w.] of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46).

The parable of the marriage feast highlights the tragedy of Jewish rejection of what could have been theirs. There will be an ever-increasingly vigorous preaching campaign by the "servants", seeing that "they which were bidden were not worthy" (Mt. 22:8) - the Greek perhaps implying not enough numerically. As a result of this preaching, "the wedding was furnished ('filled' - numerically) with guests" (Mt. 22:10). This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Once the required number of converts is made, then the supper can begin. Their appeal being to "the poor... maimed... halt and... blind" suggests that the marginal and desperate within society will be those who respond- and this is happening right now in the triumphant progress of preaching in our day. The servants are sent "into the highways" (Mt. 22:9), one possible meaning of the Greek is 'a market square'. This must be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). The very short probation of those 11th hour workers will match that of the latter-day converts. And again, it was the old and weak who nobody wanted to hire. See on 28:20.

22:9 *Therefore, go-* Leading up to "go therefore and teach all nations".

*To the main roads-* AV "Highways". See on :5 *Went their ways*. The RV offers: "unto the partings of the highways". The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. The art of preaching seems to be to bring people to perceive that they stand at a fork in their life's journey, they can take the road to the Kingdom or the road of temporary absorption in the things of this life. The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe

or perish. *Diexodos* can also be understood as the place of crossing the city boundaries, out into the countryside- a possible hint at taking the invitation beyond Jerusalem, for the work of the Gospel was to begin in Jerusalem and spread outwards (Lk. 24:47).

Another possible meaning for the term is 'a market square'. This would then be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). In the Septuagint this word *diexodos* describes "the issues from death" (Ps. 68:20), the waters of death (2 Kings 2:21), "rivers of water" (Ps. 1:3), "watersprings" (Ps. 107:35). If this usage was in the Lord's mind [and I am unsure it definitely was], then the idea would be that people were to be called from their seeking of water to seeking the water of life eternal; to exchange their secular passions and concerns for a concern about eternity.

*And as many as-* The phrase could possibly imply that there was a specific number that had to be found and invited. That certainly is the teaching of the parable overall. Therefore the more people we invite, the quicker the wedding begins. The repetition of the phrase in :10 suggests that the servants were obedient to the instruction, strange as it was- to scrap the idea of a guest list and invite people from the street, bad or good, to a royal banquet which was getting cold on the table, without any pre-invitation or agreement to attend having been given by the people.

*You shall find, invite them to the marriage feast-* The Lord Jesus is described as "finding" His people- the lost sheep, lost son, the idle workers in the marketplace (Mt. 20:6; Lk. 15:5,6,8,9); and yet He sends us out to "find" [s.w.] those who are to be invited into His Kingdom, just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense. And yet of course people "find" the narrow way themselves, they "find" the treasure and pearl of the Gospel (Mt. 7:14; 13:44,46); but only because we have gone out and 'found' them. The Lord's finding of us leads to us doing His work in finding others for Him and on His behalf. Thus Jesus "finds" Philip, and Philip's response is to go and 'find' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). And so it must be ours too. Just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense.

It was totally scandalous that the majority of guests refused an invitation by the King (Mt. 22:9; Lk. 14:21-23), and that whilst the dinner was cold on the table, a desperately urgent expedition was sent to get people to come in and eat it. This is the urgency of our Gospel proclamation. And no King or wealthy man would really invite riff-raff off the street into his party; yet this is the wonder of God's grace in calling us through the Gospel. And such is the tragedy of humanity's rejection of the Gospel. To



reject a royal invitation was tantamount to rejecting a royal command. It was unheard of in the time of Jesus. Yet people just don't perceive the honour of being invited by the King. Notice too how it is the King Himself who makes all the arrangements- not, as the initial hearers would have expected, a senior steward or his wife. But the King Himself. And this reflects the extraordinary involvement of God Almighty in personally inviting each of us to fellowship with Him, through the call of the Gospel. Likewise that *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch.

22:10 *And those servants went out into the highways*- The same word in Mk. 16:20 "They *went out* and preached everywhere", just as the sower "went out" to sow, with varying response (Lk. 8:5 s.w.).

*And gathered together*- Just as the net in the sea of nations gathered together fish "of every kind" (Mt. 13:47 s.w.)- here they are called "both bad and good". The suggestion may be that one intention of preaching is to gather people together into one. Hence the language of gathering together. The figure of the Lord's servants gathering together His called ones is exactly the figure of the gathering to the final judgment (s.w. Mt. 13:30; 25:32). By inviting people to Christ we are inviting them to the day of judgment. Knowledge of the Gospel thereby brings responsibility to the day of judgment. The moment we respond, we begin our journey to judgment. The Lord seems to have developed the thought of this parable in His later teaching in 25:35,38, where the same Greek word translated "gathered together" is translated 'to take in'; the Lord said that those who gathered together or took in a stranger had accepted Him, and those who refused to do so had rejected Him personally. 'Stranger' was understood to refer to a Gentile. The Lord might be saying that our gathering in of the Gentiles, the strangers, the despised, is related to our salvation; and if the early Jewish believers refused to gather in the Gentiles, then the Lord would take that as a personal rejection of Him. Those who refuse to gather in others because they consider them not to know enough or to not be appropriate material may well be under this threat of condemnation by the Lord.

*All as many as they found*- The specific use of the word "all" here adds nothing, surely, unless the idea is that there is a specific number who must "all" be gathered to the banquet. Rom. 11:25 says this in so many words, in talking of how the 'full number of the Gentiles' must "come in"- *ex-erchomai*. The same word *erchomai* is used in 22:3 about how the invited would not "come".

*Both bad and good*- This is quite radical for many Christian preachers today. There was *not* to be any thought about whether the persons being brought to the banquet were bad or good. The focus was upon simply

persuading them to come in, to say yes to the most unusual invitation. Just as the servants of an earlier parable were told not to worry about dividing the wheat from the weeds, so here, the servants were not to worry about the impressions they had about the worthiness or sincerity of people. Their job was to persuade them to say 'yes' and to come on in. So much outreach today is tacitly concerned with what kind of person is being brought in to the community of believers. And even more concern is expressed about who exactly sits at the Lord's table. But according to this parable, the general public are to be encouraged to say "yes" to the Kingdom invitation, and come in and sit at the banquet table, the breaking of bread. Only then, once they are sitting there, does the Lord come and judge who is bad and good. The implication could possibly be that He comes to inspect us at the breaking of bread, both mystically every time we break bread, and literally in that His coming may be at the breaking of bread.

*And the wedding was filled with guests*-When the wedding is "filled with guests" as a result of the final appeal to absolutely all men, 'all you can see / perceive', then the wedding starts (Mt. 22:9,10 Gk.). "Filled" translates *pletho*, which carries the sense of being filled up. When the full number of guests are seated, when a certain number of true converts to the Kingdom feast have been made, *then* the King comes in, and the wedding starts. This is what imbues our latter day witness with such a sense of urgency. Every baptism or invitation to the Kingdom could be the last. "They which were bidden were not worthy" (:8) - the Greek could imply not enough numerically. This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Whilst there may be reference here to an appeal to Gentiles, the implication is that it will be to Jews in particular. The servants go "into the streets and lanes of the city" (Lk. 14:21), i.e. Jerusalem.

"Guests" are literally, recliners at the table. The word is usually translated like this in its 14 occurrences in the New Testament. In a sense, the banquet had begun- even before the King entered to review the guests. Just as the Kingdom experience, crystallized and epitomized in the breaking of bread, has begun for all who respond. Although this is no guarantee of ultimate acceptance by the King. The contrast between recliners at table and servants is brought out in Lk. 22:27: "For which is greater, he that reclines at table [s.w. "guest"], or he that serves? Is not he that reclines at table?". In the parable, we are asked to identify ourselves with the servants. Our audience are the recliners at table. In the context of preaching, of bringing people in to the banquet, we are to consider our audience greater than us and to approach them with every respect. Our witness to them, therefore, is a serving of them; not a showing off to them of our superior Bible knowledge, the superiority of our positions over theirs.

According to Luke's version of an earlier telling of the parable [with some differences], the King Himself invited beggars into His feast. This also stands out as strange... what kind of king is this? And what fortunate beggars. Immediately, we have the lesson powerfully brought home to us. And why ever would a guest refuse the wedding garment offered to him on entry to the feast (Mt. 22:11)? The element of unreality in the story makes it stand out so clearly. And yet ask people why they are not baptized, why they are refusing the righteous robes of Christ, the call of the Gospel... and it is anything from clear and obvious to them. The scandal of the parable hasn't struck them. And there's another strange element to the story. Whilst the supper is still getting cold, the King sends off a military expedition (Mt. 22:7,8), but this is incidental to his desire to get on with the feast with his guests. Surely the message is that what is all important for the Father and Son is our response to their invitation, our desire to be at that feast, our turning up there- and the punishment of the wicked is not that significant on their agenda, even though it has to be done.

*22:11 But when the king entered to see the guests-* The same words used about the Lord's 'coming in' to Jerusalem and looking around the temple, in His parody of a triumphant entry (21:10,12). This was the immediate context of this parable, and the point was that He had come to judge Israel and found them unworthy.

*He saw there-* We are set up by the story line to expect that the King will question "the bad" out of the "both bad and good" which have been gathered. But instead He focuses upon the lack of a wedding garment. Banquets functioned on the basis of the guests arriving, accompanied by a servant, who then gave them a wedding garment, which they wore. This man obviously thought that his clothes were good enough, and he didn't need the wedding garment offered. This man would likely have been in what appeared to be "the good" category, the type who was well dressed and apparently appropriate for invitation to a King's banquet. It was exactly those types who will be ultimately rejected from the Kingdom banquet, because self righteousness, a refusal to be clothed in the white garment of imputed righteousness, is far worse than being an immoral street person.

*A man who was not wearing a wedding-garment-* Literally 'not clothed with the wedding clothing'. We are to 'put on' [s.w.] Christ; and "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ" (Gal. 3:27). But baptism only 'works' if we believe in what it represents- our clothing with His righteousness by the imputation of righteousness to us. Clearly enough, before the coming of the King, those without a wedding garment [obtained through faith and baptism] are sitting in the same place as those who have one. They sit at the same table- the division is only made by the Lord's coming.

22:12 *And he said to him: Friend*- Another element of unreality, because a King would hardly address a street person as "Friend". But this is how close the King of the Universe feels to any who have at least responded to the call, even if they have to be rejected. The Lord foretells the spiritual culture which He will show even to the rejected, when He mentions how He will call the rejected "friend" (Mt. 22:12), using the same word as He used about Judas (Mt. 26:50). Vine describes it as a word meaning "comrade, companion, a term of kindly address expressing comradeship". If this is how the Lord will address those who have crucified Him afresh- surely there is hope, abundant hope, for us. The suggestion is that there are Judases amongst us, although we can't identify them (and shouldn't try), just as the disciples couldn't. The evil servant who (in Christ's eyes) beat his brethren was a hypocrite, he didn't appear to men to be like that (Mt. 24:48-51); he was only cut asunder, revealed for who he was, at the judgment. He appeared to be an ecclesial elder who loved the flock.

*How did you come in here without a wedding-garment?*- Obviously a rhetorical question, rather like God's question to Adam: "Where are you?". The King knew. The purpose of the day of judgment is to explain to the rejected why they have been rejected- and it is this realization which is itself the punishment, for it will elicit from them weeping and gnashing of teeth in anger with themselves. Jude 12 speaks of false believers as being spots marring the love feast. There will be such persons at the breaking of bread meetings of the believers, but this parable teaches that it is the King who reveals and removes them, at the last day. It is our duty to simply gather men and women into the Kingdom, both bad and good, just as the net gathers both bad and good fish, but they are only separated from each other when the judgment sits at the last day.

Judgment day is not only for our personal education and humbling. It is for the enlightenment of us all as a community, in that there is fair evidence that in some sense the process of judgment will be public, and all the believers will see the true characteristics of those with whom they fellowshiped in this life. Thus the unworthy will be revealed as being without a wedding garment, and the faithful will see him (for the first time) as walking naked and in shame (Mt. 22:11; Rev. 16:15).

*And he was speechless*- Other pictures of the rejected describe them as having plenty to say in self-justification ("When did we see you...", 25:44, "You are a hard man", Lk. 19:22). But in this picture, they are speechless. It's possible to put the various pictures of the judgment together and create a chronological impression of them initially knocking

on the door pleading for acceptance, justifying themselves, and then being left speechless in the ultimate darkness and loneliness. Or it could be that different ones of the condemned respond in different ways, some with words, some in silence.

22:13 *Servants*- In the Lord's other parables, it's the Angels who carry out the condemnation of the rejected. But in this parable, the prophets, Angels, apostles and Christian preachers are all called "servants", encouraging us to see ourselves as of equal significance and meaning in God's Kingdom plan as the other servants.

22:13 *Then the king said to the servants: Bind him hand and foot*- It is the reapers, who represent the Angels (13:39), who bind the rejected for destruction in 13:30. The 'binding' suggests that the rejected will desperately want to be in the Kingdom, to the point they would even forcibly push their way in. Nobody will be indifferent at the last day; all will want more than anything to be in the Kingdom. And this should be our view now.

*And throw him*- The Lord uses this picture three times, using the same words for 'casting out' and 'darkness' (8:12; 25:30). The implication is that these people were within the light of the Kingdom banquet, and then are taken out of it into the darkness outside. This is why having a positive feel and sense about our presence amongst God's people is not of itself any guarantee of our final salvation; for some will be ejected from that into the darkness of condemnation.

The language used here for the condemnation of the rejected ['bind... take away... cast away'] is also used about the Lord's final sufferings and death. He too was bound (s.w. 27:2; Jn. 18:24; and the only other Gospel reference to being bound hand and foot is to the dead Lazarus in Jn. 11:44, as the term implied 'death'). 'Taken away' translates the same Greek word used about the 'taking up' of the cross (16:24; 27:32) and the cry 'Away with Him [to the cross]!' in Jn. 19:15. 'Cast away / out' is the same word used to describe how the wicked husbandmen killed and then 'cast out' the Son, representative of the Lord Jesus (21:39); it is also used of how "the prince of this world" was to be 'cast out' at the crucifixion (Jn. 12:31). Whether or not that prince refers to the Lord Jesus is an open question, however. The 'outer darkness' would then connect with the darkness at the crucifixion, and the "weeping" with the weeping for the death and suffering of Christ (s.w. Mk. 16:10; Lk. 23:28; Jn. 16:20). Why this similarity between the language of the Lord's death, and that of condemnation? Surely because on the cross, the Lord was treated as if He were a condemned sinner, even though He personally never sinned. So close was His identity with sinners and their condemnation. He can identify, therefore, even with the rejected; He is not like a human judge, who hands down punishments which he has nowhere near experienced himself. The Lord carefully designed His parables and

teachings; their various elements are clearly intended to dovetail with each other. It is therefore no accident that He uses the same language for His condemnation to death and the condemnation of the wicked at the last day. He consciously identified with them.

*Outside into the darkness , where there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth-* The rejected are described as being cast into outer darkness. This is even an Old Testament concept: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness" (Prov. 20:20 RV). The rejected will be "pursued into darkness" (Nah. 1:8 RV). It is doubtful whether this darkness is literal, unless there will be a specific geographical location into which they are driven which is totally dark. Mt. 22:13 might imply this by saying that "there", in the darkness into which the rejected are cast, there will be weeping. It perhaps more implies a depression so deep that everything loses its colour. There is no point in existence, no meaning to anything. It could be that "darkness" is to be understood as blindness, which is how it is sometimes used in Scripture. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee. And their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit" (Job 11:20 RV). This is all the language of the final judgment. They will seek death and hope for it, because existence in the state of condemnation is simply unbearable. But remember that outside of Christ, mankind is likewise in such an unbearable state, if only he will perceive it. He is even now in a figurative furnace of fire.

22:14- see on 24:5.

*For many are called but few chosen-* When the Lord said that many are called but few chosen, He was actually alluding to a well known saying from 4 Ezra 8:3: "Many have been created, but few shall be saved". He was as it were raising the bar. It was to be a minority of those called, not just a minority of all creation, who were to be saved. In the context of the parable, the servants call many; but only relatively few are chosen, in that few chose to really accept the gift of imputed righteousness in the garment of Christ. Although only one such person is detailed in the parable, this final observation could imply that the majority of those invited will be ejected. The language of 'chosen' is maybe used to emphasize that it is our duty to call people into the banquet; it is not for us to choose who will ultimately be accepted, because that is not our work.

22:15 *Then the Pharisees went and plotted-* The Greek suggests they went away from Him and held a conference. They found strength in numbers; we wonder how many were individually convicted of their position.

*How they might trap him in his talk-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9).

As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny.

*22:16 And they sent to him their disciples-* The use of *apostello* ["sent out"] and *mathetes* ["disciples"] obviously recalls the use of these words concerning the Lord sending out *His* disciples. Just as the kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria are described in terms of *God's* Kingdom, thus making them anti-Kingdoms of God and their leaders antiChrists, so the Jewish system of the first century was a parody of God's Kingdom as it was exemplified in the Lord and His group of followers.

*Along with the Herodians-* The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

*Saying: Teacher. We know that you are true-* Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

*And teach the way of God in truth-* John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

*And care not for anyone-* That was, in a sense, the impression which people took of Jesus. The same words and accusation about His not caring for people are to be found on the lips of the disciples, in the same words (Mk. 4:38 "Don't you care that we perish?"; Martha thought the Lord 'didn't care' that she was serving alone, Lk. 10:40). In reality, it was the hireling who cared not for the sheep (Jn. 10:13 s.w.), and the Lord was the one who cared for them so much that He died for them. That the most caring man of all time and space could be so misunderstood, even by His closest followers, is encouragement to us when we feel so globally misunderstood. We are thereby fellowshipping part of the Lord's sufferings and existential loneliness.

*For you regard not the person of men-* This again was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording the actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

*22:17 Tell us therefore, what you think-* If all the flattering things they had said in :16 were indeed true, then what on this basis was His view of the tribute money?

*Is it lawful-* This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

*To give tribute to Caesar, or not?-* The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

*22:18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said: Why do you test me?-* The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their



secret lives.

*You hypocrites!*- In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws- see on 22:19 *Shew me... they brought*. They should've been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

22:19 *Show me the tribute money. And they brought to him a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (:16) brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically

the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

*22:20 And he said to them: Whose is this image and superscription?-* He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him (:21); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

*22:21 They said to him: Caesar's. He then said to them: Therefore give to Caesar-* The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

*The things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's-* What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with (see on :18). Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in

practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

*22:22 And when they heard it, they marvelled and left him and went away-* The record is making a clear connection back to the use of the same word in the preceding parable, where the Jews "went their way" (:5) having been invited to the banquet, off to their immediate concerns. The Lord had challenged them to give themselves to God, seeing they were made in His image, and stop worrying about petty issues such as the writing on a coin. This challenge was another form of the invitation to the banquet. They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet. But they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God. Going that evil way is thus paralleled with going the way of petty materialism.

Lk. 20:26 concludes that "They could not take hold of His words before the people". The Greek for "take hold" is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, "before the people". But Luke speaks of the Jews doing these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

*22:23 The same day Sadducees-* Surely added to give the impression of intensity. The Lord came to His death at the point of mental as well as physical exhaustion.

*That say that there is no resurrection-* The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego*, spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be taken to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is

not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

*Came to him, and they asked him-* Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

22:24 *Teacher. Moses said-* Luke: "*Moses wrote unto us*". The Lord picks this up in His answer in :31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

*That if a man dies having had no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother-* The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated

to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

*22:25 Now there were with us seven brothers; and the first married and died having no seed, and thus left his wife to his brother-* This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

*22:26 In like manner the second also and the third, to the seventh-* As noted on :25, this was clearly not a true story.

*22:27 And after them all, the woman died-* She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :25). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

*22:28 In the resurrection therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her-* The other records add "When they shall rise from the dead". The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

*22:29 But Jesus answered and said to them: You are mistaken-* The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had "gone astray" (18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

*As you neither know-* Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know.

Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly.

*The Scriptures, nor the power of God-* The two are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

22:30 *For in the resurrection-* Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection"? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

*They neither marry nor are given in marriage-* Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can they die...* they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die... shall be equal... shall be...'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).

*But are like the angels in heaven-* The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and

spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

22:31 *But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read-* Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

*What was spoken to you by God, saying-* Mk. 12:26 records the Lord saying: "...God spoke unto [Moses], saying". Surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying...'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

Luke adds: "That the dead are raised even Moses showed...". Sadducees believed only in Moses' writings, and denied the resurrection. The Lord

takes that position and runs with it, instead of trying to assert the inspiration of the rest of the Old Testament.

*22:32 I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?*- If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

*He is not the God of the dead but of the living*- This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: "For all live unto Him". The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by



saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

22:33 *And when the crowds heard it-* Our debates with others are often not so much in order to convert them, but the listening audience and onlookers. And the Lord was ever aware of this. See on :42.

*They were astonished at his teaching-* Yet for all this, it was "the multitude" who were soon shouting for His blood. Mere intellectual persuasion of the truth of theology is no guarantee that a person is truly with the Lord.

22:34 *But when the Pharisees heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered together-* The idea could be that the Pharisees and Sadducees, traditionally opposed to each other, were united together in their desire to again try to entangle the Lord. This unity of opposed persons and groups against Christ is a theme of the records. Just as He unites people together around Him, so He unites people against Him- thus creating the Biblical picture of how we are either in God's people or in the group actively against them. This division will come to its final term in the latter day tribulation before the Lord's return.

22:35 *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him-* Again we see the Lord's temptations being at the hand of the Jewish religious leaders, strengthening the case for thinking that the 'adversary' of the wilderness temptations was likewise somehow connected to the same group or thinking. *Peirazo* can mean both to test, and also to tempt to sin in a moral sense. If in the latter sense, we must ask in what the Lord was tempted to sin? Perhaps in exasperation, inappropriate anger, or to a giving up of effort with the Israel for whom He was dying.

22:36 *Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?-* It is often claimed that this means 'Which type of commandment?'. But the Lord's answer suggests that He saw it as meaning 'Which specific commandment'. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest

commandment "of all", which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on :37).

*22:37 And he said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind-* Mk. 12:29 adds: "The Lord our God is one". That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

*22:38 This is the great and first commandment-* They had asked which was the greatest commandment, but the Lord adds that this commandment is not only "great" but also "first", and we can understand that as meaning first in importance in our lives. He earlier had talked about seeking *first* [s.w.] God's Kingdom.

*22:39 And the second is like it-* The Lord is thus putting two commandments together to form one. Hence Mk. 12:31 records Him concluding, having quoted the two commandments: "There is none other commandment [singular] greater than these [plural]".

*You shall love your neighbour as yourself-* This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don't actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord's teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

*22:40 On these two commandments-* Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that "all the law", all the others,

hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

*Hang the whole law and the prophets-* The Lord surely had the Sadducees in view, with the differentiation they made between law and prophets. This would support the suggestion on :34 that they were somehow involved in this ongoing questioning. The achievement of love in practice between brethren, on the basis of their unity with each other elicited by their common connection to the one God, is what the entire Law was aiming at. The 613 commandments of Moses were not, therefore, to be seen as mere tests of obedience. They were designed to produce love and unity in practice.

*22:41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying-* The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it's easy to misinterpret this as Him now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But remember His opening comment, that they 'erred' or were as sheep 'astray'. He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

*22:42 What do you think of the Christ-* The use of *dokeo*, to seem or think, may be a hint that Matthew is here combating at least the incipient beginnings of Docetism, the idea that Christ only appeared to be whoever He was, a kind of Divine image cast upon the earth. This came to full term in the theology of the Trinity some time later.

*Whose son is he? They said to him: The son of David-* They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. See on 22:45 *How is He his son.*

Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case.

Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on 22:33 *When the multitude heard this*. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

22:43 *He said to them: How then does David in the Spirit-* See on 22:29 *The Scriptures...*

*Call him Lord-* Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

*Saying-* Another present tense, continuing the Lord's theme of God's word being a living word speaking to us today as if in an eternal present.

22:44 *The Lord said-* Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

*To my Lord-* Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

*Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies underneath your feet-* The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

22:45 *If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?*

- The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence is He his son?*". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary (see on :42 *The Son of David*).

22:46 *And no one could say a word in reply. From that day nobody dared to ask him any other questions-* These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found

themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their wilful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

## CHAPTER 23

23:1 *Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying-* The chapter is clearly in three parts. Verses 1-12 are spoken to the disciples and the crowds; then there are the seven woes against the Pharisees (:13-33), and finally a statement of the Lord's love toward Israel and the inevitable judgment of Jerusalem. The Lord's interchanges with the Sadducees and Pharisees in chapter 22 had been in the presence of the crowds, and He had thrown at least one question to them. Clearly He was seeking to use those dialogues to appeal to the watching audience. So often this is what happens in preaching work. It is those who are observing who are persuaded, rather than the protagonists of the discussion. The Lord realized this, and now consciously appeals to those onlookers.

23:2 *The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat-* This appears to some to be a past tense: They sat themselves in Moses' seat, the place from where Moses taught [Jewish teachers sat to teach], i.e. they had in the past appropriated to themselves the authority or seat of Moses. This retranslation avoids the apparent difficulty of the Lord otherwise claiming that they had equal authority to Moses. In this case, His command "That observe and do" (:3) would need to be rendered as His observation rather than His command- 'Whatever they tell you to do, that you observe and do'. But it is also possible to understand the Lord to be teaching submission, for the moment, to the religious leaders- rather than rank revolution against them. For the time to rise up in literal protest was still not yet, rather does the Lord's teaching urge that the revolt He has in mind is purely internal, deep within the human heart and psyche. By bidding obedience to those men, He would have been appealing to Dt. 17:11: "And you shall observe to do according to all that they (the religious leaders) shall teach you".

23:3 *Therefore-* Because they were in the place of Moses, the Lord advised obedience to them rather than quitting the synagogue system. He told His disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2). He clearly had no conception of guilt by association, acquired through religious association with those who taught and lived wrongly. For He goes on to roundly condemn the whole system of Judaism. Perhaps He hoped that the presence of His people amongst that system would be an influence for good upon at least some and a witness to the leadership. Or perhaps He knew that until the more public founding of the Christian church, those people had no realistic alternative but to continue attendance. For outside of the religious system they would spiritually flounder. Whatever, we never hear Him making a direct command to come out from the system until in Revelation we hear His call to come out of the latter day Babylon, which was likely an extension

of His teaching in the Olivet prophecy to leave Jerusalem when she was besieged in the very last days. But this was therefore more of a call to self preservation rather than of religious separation because of differing principles. If He had intended separation for religious reasons, He surely would have called for it earlier. But He doesn't. The essential witness is made from our position embedded, at least externally, in this world.

Put together two scriptures in your mind: "You must obey [the Pharisees] and do everything they tell you"; and, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees" (Mt. 23:3; 16:6). Surely the Lord is teaching that we should respect elders but never cease personally analysing what they teach for ourselves. Once we stop doing this, we start resigning our own personality and will be unable to follow our Lord personally, i.e. with our own persons. And then we will be ripe for being caused to stumble, if those elders we are listening to then offend us. For 'we', with all that we are, will have been dominated by them.

*All things whatever they tell you, do and observe-* But soon the Lord would be sending the disciples out with the commission to teach the world "to observe [s.w.] all things that I have commanded you" (28:20). And this command became programmatic for the early church, whose integrity was to be judged on the degree to which they had kept / observed [s.w.] the Lord's commands (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 3:22,24; 5:2,3; there are other allusions to the great commission in John's letters, e.g. 3 Jn. 7). So clearly enough *His* commands and the need for loyalty to *them* soon replaced His word here in Mt. 23:3 about observing / keeping the commands of the Scribes. He may be employing an element of sarcasm, as if to say 'It's OK, you don't have to put up with this much longer; in a day's time, I shall be dead, the Law of Moses will be completed, you will be free. But for just another 24 hours, endure their tyranny'. Only afterwards would the disciples have appreciated what the Lord meant.

*But do not you copy their works, for they say and do not-* The Lord is making a purposeful paradox. Their 'works' were a not doing or working. Their sins of omission were counted by Him as a work. They, of course, prided themselves upon their works. But the Lord is saying that they actually did nothing- in His book. In this lies the tragedy of Christianity as mere religion. The works can be done, and yet in the Lord's eyes, the essential works are not done. The Lord continues His play on this idea by going on to say that the works they do are done to be seen of men (:5). They did the works but because they were done towards men and not to God, they were not really done. If we have our reward of men, then we have no reward of God. Our works [s.w.] must be made manifest / revealed by the light of Christ, specifically in the cross, as to whether they are worked "in God" or not (Jn. 3:21). The mere doing of the work is not the basis of acceptability.

The Pharisees did all the works, but in their hearts they never knew God, and finally went and did His Son to death. The Lord plays on the fact that ultimately, in God's eyes, they did no works at all: "Do not ye after their works; for they say, and *do* not" (Mt. 23:3). We are left to imagine the anger of those zealous men. They *did* do works, as the Lord observed. But to Him, ultimately they did nothing at all. They had no genuine motives.

23:4- see on 23:25.

*Yes, they bind heavy burdens-* John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith (:23). Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

*Hard to be carried-* AV. The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden. If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.



*And lay them-* The same word used about the cross being laid upon the Lord (Lk. 23:26), and the laying of the lost sheep on the shoulders of the shepherd (Lk. 15:5). As this is the Lord's only other reference to anything being laid upon the shoulders, we may be intended to understand that carrying the weight of the lost, seeking to save them, can be replaced by carrying the weight of worrying about obeying human regulations. So many spiritual lives and so much endeavour goes into keeping in with a social club based around the laws of men, when that energy could be far better used carrying the lost to salvation.

*On men's shoulders-* The laying of an unbearable weight upon the shoulders recalls exactly the language of the cross of Christ being laid upon Him. Instead of men carrying *this* burden, they can instead end up carrying the burden of obedience to human regulations. The focus changes to obeying human expectation rather than the effort involved in engaging with the crucified Christ. All such human laws, regarding fellowship practice, dress codes etc., are therefore likely to make men stumble and thereby bring condemnation to those who demand them. Legalism and human religion are a burden laid on men's shoulders. But the cross of Jesus is also a burden laid upon our shoulders (Mt. 23:4). The greatness of the demands of the cross free us from the burdens of man's legalism. But it's still a choice, between a cross and a cross. See on 3:11. As Moses "looked on their burdens" at age 40 (Ex. 2:11), so at the start of His ministry, our Lord assessed the weight of ours. His concern for our burdens in Mt. 11:30; 23:4 is perhaps a conscious allusion back to Moses' awareness of Israel's burdens, and his desire to deliver them, even though it cost him all that he had in this world.

*But they will not move them-* Gk. 'remove' them. In His earlier teaching about this in Lk. 11:46, the Lord said they would not "touch" the burdens. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

*With their finger-* The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps

with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

*23:5 But they do all their works-* See on :3 *Their works... they do not.*

*To be seen by men-* The same Greek word and teaching as in 6:1; the Pharisees did good deeds "to be seen of men" and therefore have no reward. But the warning of 6:1 is to us all. Too easily we can feel that these woes against the Pharisees are not relevant to us, but they were merely giving in to the same tendencies as are common to us all. John's Gospel uses the same word for 'seeing' with regard to our 'seeing' Jesus in the sense of believing in Him. So the contrast is between those who look to Jesus, and those who want others to look to them. Widening and enlarging the religious symbols on their clothing was exactly in order to be seen by men. Our focus upon looking toward Jesus will make us less interested in how men look upon us.

*For they make their phylacteries wide-* Nearly all the descriptions here of what the Pharisees did are couched in language which is elsewhere used about spiritual things. The point being made is that they were living a religious life which was an inversion of what true spirituality, and especially the example of the Lord Jesus, are all about. The reason why so much attention is given to the Pharisees in the Gospel records is surely because their mentality is so typically human, and their failure is preserved as a warning to all who claim to be committed to the same God of Israel. The Greek word translated "enlarge" is elsewhere nearly always used about the need to "magnify" *God* rather than ourselves (Lk. 1:46 "My soul *magnifies* the Lord"; Acts 10:46; 19:17; Phil. 1:20).

*And the tassels on their garments long-* The same word translated "hem" is used elsewhere only about the hem of the Lord's garment which gave blessing and healing to others (9:20; 14:36).

*23:6 And they love the chief place at feasts-* The Lord had earlier used the very same words to describe how the attitude to places at feasts was directly relevant to placing at the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom. Those who now take the lowest places around the Lord's table will be exalted, and those who took the high places will be demoted in "shame", a term usually associated with rejection and condemnation (Lk. 14:7,8). Those who consider themselves as spiritually superior in the ecclesia will be demoted and that demotion may well be in terms of condemnation. Our attitude around the Lord's table now will be directly relevant to our placement at the Lord's table when He returns. Those who have taken for themselves the more glorious places will be rejected- that is the clear message.

*And the chief seats in the synagogues-* They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

*23:7 And the salutations in the marketplaces-* The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

*And to be called of men, Rabbi-* This uses *kaleo*, the standard word translated 'call'. The Lord and His followers *call men* to the Kingdom from the markets (25:14; Lk. 14:16); rather than going to the markets to *be called something by men*. Again we see how the Pharisees' behaviour was a parody of true spirituality.

*23:8 But you are not to be called Rabbi-* The Lord was looking ahead to when those immature disciples would be the leaders of the new community He believed He was creating. He foresaw the day would come when their converts would naturally want to show them respect, and He warns against the use of titles as a sign of respect. But in this kind of thinking ahead, we have an insight into the great faith and hope the Lord had in His men; for they were so immature, and so far away from such positions of authority and leadership. But He has the same hopes for us too. His positivity is and was extraordinary. The whole vision was a huge challenge for the disciples- to learn that they would one day be the equivalent of the Rabbis in the new Israel the Lord was creating.

*For one is your teacher-* AV "Master". 'Rabbi' means 'master' and is from the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'. This explains why having taught against using the title 'Rabbi', the Lord now speaks specifically about 'master' and 'father'. The greatness of Christ means that once it is perceived, then we will naturally perceive that in the light of His excellence, we have no pre-eminence over each other; we are brethren, in Christ.

*And all you are brothers-* Just because we are all brothers, actually something *more than physical brothers and sisters*, we are not to call any of us 'Master', because if we do, it will distract us from our personal looking to Jesus as Lord and Master. This is why anything that even suggests a personality cult built around leading brethren, no matter how wonderful they are or were, really must be avoided. For it takes us away from the one and only Lord and Master. Whatever leaders or organisers we have, we are to call nobody our 'father' in a spiritual sense. The wonder of our relationship with *the* Father ought to mean that we never do this. Above all, we are all brethren in Christ. John refers to himself as the brother of the congregation (Rev. 1:9), and the leading apostles were addressed as 'brother' just as much as anyone else in the ecclesia (Acts 21:20; 2 Pet. 3:15). There may be leaders among brothers (Acts 15:22), but we are still essentially brethren. The intimate inter-connectedness of the family must ever remain; which explains why Paul is called 'Paul' and not a longer form of address. Likewise I'd suggest that the practice of calling each other by our first names, with the prefix 'brother' or 'sister', is healthy; and, indeed, a privilege. Reference to a brother as 'Dr.' or 'Mr.' seems to me to be quite at variance with the family nature of our relationship. If the Lordship of Jesus is fully felt as it should be, then even those who become leaders in the congregation [the disciples, in the first instance] are to feel themselves as brethren with those they are leading. This brotherhood between leaders and followers is essential for true functioning of the body of Christ.

23:9 *And call no one on the earth your father-* Although the twelve called Jesus 'Rabbi', they perhaps didn't respect Him initially as the *only* Rabbi - because the disciples were too influenced by Judaism. The Lord has to remind the disciples to call no man their rabbi or 'father' on earth, i.e. in the land, of Israel. The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46. 'Father' was a common title for the rabbis, who referred to their disciples as their 'sons'. The disciples clearly respected the apostate rabbis far more than He wanted them to. We can easily overlook the deep and awesome significance of calling our fellow believers "brother" and "sister". As Paul so strongly stresses, the Lord Jesus created a new sense of family, of "social identity". We can easily miss how radical this was in first century Palestine; just as we can miss it in our own context. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, families were supremely important. The head of the family exercised total control. For the Lord to teach that His followers should call no man on earth their father was extreme; and yet He said it and expected it (Mt. 23:9).

*For one is your Father-* This appeal to the unity of God would've sat well with the Jewish audience. But like many who profess faith in the One God, they hadn't thought through the implications. If God alone and uniquely is our Father, then we are not to call men 'Rabbi', rooted as the word was in the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'.

*He who is in Heaven-* If there is a Father in Heaven, we don't need a spiritual father upon earth. The implication is that they considered that although indeed there was one Father in Heaven, Heaven is distant and we need a father on earth. The Lord is implying that the King-dom, the rulership and essence of God in Heaven, is to be seen and felt on earth in our lives.

23:10 *Neither be called-* The Lord has warned His people not to call their spiritual leaders by titles such as father or master, and now He addresses those who would become leaders, the nervous and wavering disciples, and urges them not to allow others to call them by these titles. Again, He foresaw how those weak men would soon be in a position where others would wish to give them these titles, and in so doing we have a window upon His hopefulness and vision, at a time when the material in His hands seemed so weak and immature.

*Masters-* The root word is used about leaders in the church: "Them which *have the rule over you*" (Heb. 13:7,17,24); "He *that is chief*" amongst the believers should be as the servant (Lk. 22:26); Paul was "the *chief speaker*" (Acts 14:17), Barnabas and Silas were "*chief men* amongst the brethren" (Acts 15:22). So the Lord is not teaching that there are not to be leaders; it is practically impossible in any case to have any community wherein all are identical and without leadership. But the Lord's point is that those in such positions should not be named as such, and should stop others calling them by such names. All in the community of faith should perceive Christ as the one ultimate Lord and Master, and in the light of that deep sense, all should see themselves as brethren on the same ultimate level with each other. One of the key factors in the apostasy of the early church was a failure to give due weight to the Lord's teaching here.

*For one is your master, the Christ-* Perhaps this was added by Matthew in brackets, as it were, seeing that the Lord never baldly calls Himself "the Christ" in so many words.

23:11 *But he that is greatest-* The Lord spoke distinctly in the singular. Not 'Those who are the great ones', but the specific individual who is the greatest. Surely He had Himself in view.

*Among you-* Again, this is distinctly relevant to the Lord Jesus personally. He was soon to repeat these words with specific reference to Himself: "He that is greatest among you... He that is chief, as He that serves... I am *among you* as He that serves" (Lk. 22:26,27). The idea of "among you" is an oblique reference to His humanity, as one of us.

*Shall be your servant-* The servant of Israel was the subject of Isaiah's servant songs, which came to their climax in the Lord's death upon the cross, prefigured by His washing the disciples' feet half naked as a servant, dressed as He would be at the time of His final death on the cross.

23:12 *And whosoever-* The singular "greatest" person in view in :11 was the Lord Jesus; He was speaking of Himself, and in a sense speaking obliquely to Himself as well as to His immediate audience. But He now teaches that all in Him must pass through the same path of humiliation and exaltation. The same words for 'abase' and 'exalt' are used about all believers, e.g. "Humble yourselves [s.w. 'abase'] in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up [s.w. "exalt"]" (James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord gave a parabolic example of what He meant when He also used the same words together about how the proud Pharisee would be "abased" and the convicted sinner 'humbled himself' and would later be 'exalted' (Lk. 18:14). The Lord's path of humiliation and exaltation is therefore to be that of us all; and Phil. 2:4-12 clearly applies this to His whole life and supremely to His death on the cross and exaltation subsequently. "He *humbled Himself* (s.w. 'humble' and 'abase' here in Mt. 23:12)... unto death" (Phil. 2:8). He there is therefore no longer a mere historical event, but rather a living pattern with which we engage throughout the progressive humiliation which the Lord's hand brings upon us, so that we might be exalted in due time. This, in one sense, is what the paths of our lives are all about- progressive humiliation under His mighty hand, both pushing ourselves down and being pushed down.

*Shall exalt himself-* Again relevant to the Lord Jesus, who was highly exalted because of His servanthood. But He was exalted by God, not Himself (Acts 2:33; 5:31 s.w.). And the very same word is used of the Lord's lifting up on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32,34). This was the true exaltation.

*Shall be humbled-* This is the very same word used in the next clause: "He that shall humble [s.w. 'abase'] himself...". In the end, we are brought down. We are humbled by our own humanity and weakness. We either bring ourselves down, or God will bring us down. So we may as well humble ourselves so that we shall be exalted by God, rather than exalting ourselves so that God will eternally bring us down in

condemnation at the last day. It's humility, bringing down, either way. So certain is the connection between humility and exaltation that James 1:9 can say that the brother who is 'abased' (AV "of low degree") is exalted- in the eyes of the God who sees outside of our time, for whom all live unto Him even now.

*And whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted-* God recognized Mary's "low estate" [humility] and exalted her above all women (Lk. 1:48), just as He would exalt His Son among men. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation ['low estate'] his judgment was taken away". It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: "He *humbled himself*". In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of his mother. She taught him the life and the way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again here in Mt. 23:12: "Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

23:13 *But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- The Lord now utters seven woes, just as Isaiah had uttered seven woes after telling Judah the parable of the vineyard (Is. 5:8-6:5)- which the Lord had also recently done. Isaiah's woes were likewise uttered as a reflection of genuine Divine anger, but they were also a last ditch appeal to the Judah of Hezekiah's time to repent, lest the Assyrian invasion come and destroy them. Isaiah's woes largely concerned the extremely fleshly behaviour of Judah at his time; the Lord's woes concern religious hypocrisy of the apparently zealous, Torah-obedient Jews. The point is that religious hypocrisy, even if it involves careful obedience to some Divine principles, is just as wanton and fleshly as drunkenness and theft, the kinds of things criticized in Isaiah's seven woes.

*You lock up-* The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not

inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. The Pharisees had "the key of knowledge" (Lk. 11:52) in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God's Kingdom by limiting their access to God's word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

*You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves-* As if they slammed the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others.

*Nor allow those who would enter to go in-* The Greek *aphiemi* translated "allow" more commonly carries the idea of loosing, setting free, and is translated 'forgive'. There may be a hint here at what the Lord also taught in chapter 18- that unforgiveness of others makes them stumble from entering the Kingdom. And the Pharisees with their endless demands upon men were indeed unforgiving. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.



Earlier when speaking these words, the Lord had said that the lawyers were 'hindering' those who were in the process of entering the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). The same word is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they are simply felt to be in a category [like "children" were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

23:14 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- They were totally fleshly people on the inside, but their acting involved the "pretence", the *prophasis* or actor's cloak, of making long prayers, appearing righteous on the outside. The Lord homes in upon such behaviour in the Sermon on the Mount- appearing to be spiritual when we are not is deeply angering to the Lord.

*For you devour widow's houses*- I mentioned earlier that the language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

*While for a pretence you make long prayers*- See on *Hypocrites*. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Matthew 22. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

*Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation-* There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

23:15- see on 17:12.

*Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you compass sea and land to make one proselyte-* *Periago* ("compass") is only elsewhere used in the Gospels of the Lord 'walking around' the villages around the sea of Galilee (4:23; 9:35). Again, their behaviour was a conscious inversion of His.

*And when he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves-* The condemnation of anyone is partly their fault, and partly the fault of others. They stopped people entering the Kingdom (:13) and thus made them inherit condemnation. This is the danger of legalism. Despite such huge missionary efforts and apparent devotion, imposing legalism upon others leads to their condemnation and the worse woe, therefore, upon the missionary. They made the person be condemned in that they had made him a proselyte. The same Greek word is used both times for "made". By becoming a proselyte, the person became responsible to judgment and would be condemned. Here is proof enough that knowledge makes responsible to judgment. The Jews didn't give men the good news of Christ and God's grace; rather they gave only partial knowledge of the whole picture, of God's demands upon men. They persuaded men to enter covenant relationship with Him, undertaking to keep His commandments, whilst not explaining grace and the love of God. And thereby they made those people condemned. This is just as easily done today in the preaching of a one-sided message which lacks any real Gospel, or good news of salvation by faith and grace.

In "twofold more" we again see the idea of degrees of punishment. The Lord has just said that the Pharisees would have greater condemnation than others (:14), and now He says that their converts would have double even that. Perhaps the implication of that is that these proselytes were not mere passive converts, but were inspired by the example of their teachers to be even more extreme in their legalism and lack of true faith. A case could be made that the Hellenistic Jews who persecuted Paul so fiercely were in fact Gentile proselytes. Reflect too how Saul was more obsessed against Christians than his teacher, the Pharisee Gamaliel. This is all so true to human observation, that the converts of legalists become typically even more fanatic than their spiritual fathers.

23:16 *Woe to you, you blind guides, who say: Whoever swears by the temple-* Their blindness was a major source of criticism (:16,17,24,26).

Paul uses the language of blind guides of the blind to the Jewish Christian believers in Rom. 2:19- showing again that the mentality of the Pharisees is likely to be a problem for us all; we are failing to get the point if we read these woes upon them and feel somehow isolated from those men by time and culture. Their blindness was self-inflicted, otherwise it would not have been cause for rebuke. If someone doesn't want to see God's ways, then they never can see them, because the darkness in which they have chosen to mentally move has blinded them. This is true for those who do not live in love (1 Jn. 2:9,11), homosexual sinners who go so far in their perversion that they conclude they were born gay [blindness indeed], and those who are blind to God's existence [because they have chosen such darkness].

*It is nothing-* They were saying that an oath could be taken but breaking it was no problem if one 'only' swore by the temple. Jews swore by the temple because of their belief at the time that the temple was eternal. Because they broke their oaths and considered the temple to effectively be dispensable, therefore the Lord goes on in chapter 24 to predict the destruction of the temple.

*But whoever swears by the gold of the temple-* On the basis that that men swore by the greatest thing they could (Heb. 6:13,16), we have here an insight into their mind. For them, gold was paramount, for they were materialistic (Lk. 16:14). And it was even more important than the temple and the God who dwelt there.

*He is bound by his oath-* This suggests that some oaths were binding and others were not. And thus a scale of honesty was created, whereby human words themselves were not significant, but were only given value according to how much they were underpinned by oaths. The Lord therefore taught that all such swearing was to be outlawed for His people (5:34-36). The word *opheilo* is used often in the Gospels but always in the context of the debt owed to God for human sin (18:28,34; Lk. 7:41; 16:7; 17:10), and the debt of others to us for their sin against us (18:30; Lk. 11:4). Instead of judging to what degree others are bound / obligated to us for their sins, we are to frankly forgive, just as God frankly forgives our debts.

23:17 *You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple-* The idea was that men swore by the greatest thing they could, which means that if they are going to swear at all, they should swear by God (Heb. 6:13,16). However, Jews didn't like to swear by God, and so they had a whole range of things by which they swore- despite the fact that Dt. 6:13 clearly stated "You shall fear Yahweh... and shall swear by His Name". An oath by the temple was "nothing", but by the gold of the temple was even more. They were thereby effectively introducing a whole range of possible

levels of honesty. Which the Lord had cut right through by insisting that our yes must be yes, without any oaths (5:34-36). James alludes to this by saying that "Above all things... swear not" (James 5:12). The importance of absolute truthfulness and not grading the honesty of our words is so important that James urges us to this "above all things". Truthfulness with God, with others and within ourselves, is paramount. It is a reflection of our experience of God's total and genuine forgiveness of us. In the forgiveness context, this spirit of truthfulness is what allows us to genuinely, from the heart forgive others not in word only but in feeling and reality.

*That has made the gold sacred?*- By so saying, the Lord reduced 'gold' to a mere metal of no intrinsic holiness outside the context of God's service. The Pharisees, as many believers today, had isolated aspects of their religion and glorified them in themselves, forgetting the wider context. Thus it may be that a sister focuses on one particular aspect of service until it is out of all context, a brother may obsess about a specific Bible teaching out of all perspective with the rest of God's revelation and intentions. But it's doubtful that the temple of itself sanctified the gold within it- that isn't a Biblical idea. See on :19 *The altar that sanctifies the gift*.

23:18 *And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing!*- Their desire to define everything led them to downplay the significance of the altar because they were so concerned with the value of the sacrifice placed upon it. And yet Ex. 29:37 pronounced the altar to also be holy. Their penchant for definition led them to ignore the clearest statements in the Law they claimed to read, study and love to obey. Having spoken three times in the same section about "the altar" and "the temple", it cannot be incidental that the Lord goes on to say that they had effectively slain Zacharias "between the temple and the altar" (:35). He is demonstrating that despite their hypersensitive interpretation of these things, they had committed sacrilege in those very places.

*But whoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is bound by his oath*- Again we have an insight into how the Pharisees thought. Gifts to the temple were all important to them, because those gifts were effectively their income.

23:19 *You blind men! For which is greater: the gift*- The fact the Lord rebukes them for their blindness shows that blindness is in this sense their choice. I would suggest that much erroneous understanding is a result of people choosing not to understand, rather than having some genuinely excusable intellectual blockage.

*Or the altar that makes the gift sacred?*- The Lord had earlier taught that a gift brought to the altar was unacceptable if the offerer was not first reconciled to his brother (5:23,24). But as so often, He uses their reasoning and for a moment, argues as if it were true. If they considered that the altar sanctified the gift, then effectively there was a unity between the sacrifice and the altar. To draw a distinction between oaths made by the altar and those made by the sacrifice upon it was therefore utterly a false distinction. The Lord could have argued that oaths should only be made by God, in line with Dt. 6:13. Or He could have reiterated His position that our yes should mean yes, and therefore there was no need for any swearing by anything (5:34-36). But we note *how* He argues here- He uses their wrong ideas and works with them to demonstrate ultimately how they were misplaced and wrong. He does the same in using the language of demons. Instead of a bald declaration of truth, He worked with people from where they were. Far too often, bald declarations of truth are presented in a way which can only alienate, and is more for the benefit of the speaker than the audience. It all comes down to whether we genuinely wish to lead a person onwards, for their benefit; or whether we are involved in the whole interchange for our own self-justification and benefit.

*23:20 He therefore that swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it-* The Lord is criticizing the distinction made by the Jews between swearing by the altar, and swearing by the sacrifice; or swearing by the temple, and swearing by the gold placed in the temple treasury. If a man swore by the temple or by the altar, those things could not be taken up if he was found to be telling untruth. But if he swore by the sacrifice or donation of gold he had made, those things could be seized.

*23:21 And he that swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him-* The Lord's point here and in :22 was that effectively, the Pharisees were doing what they were trying hard not to do, i.e. swearing by God. And yet Dt. 6:13 had commanded that oaths should be sworn by God, and Lev. 19:12 implies that too, in warning against swearing falsely by God. There is no suggestion that oaths were to be sworn by anything else. This was the point of the commandment not to take the Name of God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Abraham swore by God (Gen. 14:22,23); the formula was typically "as Yahweh lives" (Jud. 8:19). The Jews tried to avoid this, placing the sacrifice, gold, temple and altar in some kind of varied scale of solemnity. But the Lord's point is that effectively, they were swearing by God. The lesson is that all such careful, legalistic attempts to place a respectable distance between God and ourselves in the matter of honesty are foolish and irrelevant. In reality, the Jews were breaking one of the ten commandments, by taking God's Name in vain. And this was the very commandment they were so careful to apparently obey by not even

mentioning or pronouncing the tetragrammaton. The Lord's earlier command in 5:34 not to swear could be read as meaning that people were not to swear by the things they were swearing by at the time (heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your head), but only by God. But seeing God knows all things, the Lord is saying that our yes should be yes, for effectively all that we say is said before God.

*That dwells in it-* The Lord goes on to say that the house of the Lord was no longer God's house but "your house", and it was 'left desolate' (:38). The glory had departed from it, just as God's shekinah presence is depicted in Ezekiel as progressively departing from the temple. And yet again the Lord is using their own beliefs against themselves. If they believed that God still dwelt in the temple, then the gold in its treasury, the altar and sacrifices were all equally connected with Him. Note that "Him that dwells" in the sanctuary / Most Holy (Mt. 23:21,35 RVmg.) could be a reference to an Angel who dwelt there- see Ps. 78:60.

23:22 *And he that swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by-* To draw a distinction between swearing by Heaven and swearing by God personally was purely academic. Earlier the Lord had clearly stated that there is practically no difference between Heaven and God: "Heaven... is God's throne" (5:34). We note, however, that Matthew often uses "Heaven" as a synonym for God, using language in a way which makes concession to Jewish sensitivities, even though they were mistaken. The use of the language of demons for unexplained illnesses is another example. The Lord could have simply quoted from the Old Testament, as Stephen did: "Heaven is My throne" (Acts 7:49). But instead He works with the false distinction they were making to show it to be false, instead of head on confronting them with the error of their thinking by Biblical quotation. And in that He sets us an example. The Lord's point is that all oaths are before God because He sees all things. The distinctions being drawn by the Pharisees were pathetic efforts to distance man from God in terms of personal responsibility to Him. Whilst we may shake our heads at their intellectual vanity and desperation, we practically do the same within the deepest levels of human psychology. For we too can assume that somehow God is not present, we are not held to be utterly truthful, because of some get out clause of our own creation and imagination. But His omnipresence means that there are no such separations to be made, nor distances to be placed, between God and man. We are directly responsible to Him, in His presence. See on :26.

*Him that sits on it-* A clear invitation to conceive of God as a personal corporeal being having specific location.

23:23 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you tithe-* The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded

and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

*Mint and anise and cumin*- These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop' would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who wilfully misunderstand Scripture, it's easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

*Yet have left undone*- The Greek *aphiemi* occurs three times in this verse; clearly a word play is intended. For the Lord concludes the sentence by saying: "... and not to leave [*aphiemi*] the other undone [*aphiemi*]". And He uses it again at the end of His speech: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate" (:38), and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house (24:2); not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs; they had omitted what they had omitted. The double use of *aphiemi* in the last clause is to give the sense of how totally they had omitted [*aphiemi*] "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

*The weightier matters of the law-* The heavy burdens tied on men by the Pharisees were in fact relating to the lighter matters [s.w. :4 "heavy burdens"]. Clearly the Lord saw there was a variation in God's requirements, ranging from light to heavy. This of course was and is anathema to any legalistic mind, who sees obedience to specific statements as paramount. The Lord is trying to show that life before God is lived in a spirit of life in which omitting the weightier matters means that specific obedience to the lighter matters is thereby rendered void.

*Justice, mercy-* These were "matters of the Law", these were what the various specific commandments of the Mosaic Law sought to inculcate. Why these three matters? Mercy is part of justice, in that justice must be shown with mercy if we have any awareness of our own moral frailty (James 2:13); just as God integrates mercy with justice in His judgment of men. Mercy and justice are what David praises God for (Ps. 89:14; 101:1). God's judgment of men is connected with His mercy (Is. 16:5; 30:18), and human judgment of situations must likewise be a mixture of justice and mercy (Hos. 12:6; Zech. 7:9). But to exercise these things requires faith- faith that God's judgment of us and others is mixed with mercy. For those like the Pharisees with no sense of their own sins and experience of God's judgment-mercy, this was all a foreign language, just as it is for the many self-righteous legalists of today. Our calling is to reflect God's mixture of justice and mercy on the basis of our own experience of it, and this was the intention of the entire legal apparatus of the Mosaic law.

*And faith. These you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone-* Faith is something which ought to be 'done', the Lord is teaching. Faith never exists alone. James argues that there is no essential difference between faith and works. 'Faith' is not just credulity or a vague feeling of hope, but an active, driving force. There is "the work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11). Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (43:10); and the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding (Mt. 16:7,8). *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*.

23:24 *You blind guides-* That they were "guides" is a repeated reason why the Lord condemns them. This is because they were leading others to



condemnation. We play a larger part than we currently can ever imagine in either the salvation or stumbling of others, and this fact of itself should impart to all our interactions a seriousness and intensity. On one hand, deeply sensitive to whether a course of action will cause another to stumble, and on the other, ever reaching out to others with the possibilities of the Kingdom and forgiveness.

*That strain out the gnat and swallow the camel-* Gnats lived on camels, so this is a picture of how extremely these highly religious men had utterly missed the point. And remember that they were members of the ecclesia of their day, the people of God. Amos 6:6 (LXX) condemns a similar Israel as those "which drink strained wine". The Pharisees would've been shocked by this direct association made between them and apostate Israel of Old Testament times. The context of Amos 6 is about the forthcoming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple for the sake of the materialism of Israel's leaders.

23:25 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cleanse-* The Lord Jesus is described using the same word as making others clean (8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. Again, they are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

*The outside-* The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord's earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside*, the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be 'so as to look good to others'. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal* attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

*Of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion-* The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous"

(:28). And Lk. 11:39 is clearer: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

*And excess-* The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

Time and again Paul warns his brethren not to behave like the Pharisees did in various incidents in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 23:4 = Acts 15:10; Mt. 23:25 Gk. = 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul is saying 'If you lust inwardly but outwardly appear to have rejected marriage for the sake of the Gospel, you're like those condemned Pharisees'). Let it be noted that the danger of Pharisaism, of spiritual hypocrisy, of adopting a hard line on issues which in essence we too fail in, was a great theme with Paul.

23:26 *You blind Pharisee! Cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the plate-* What was within them was a ravening (7:15) for material gain and plotting to obtain it (Lk. 11:39), extortion and lack of self-restraint (:25). There was of course no prescription in the Mosaic legislation for cleansing internal attitudes. But the Lord's command for them to cleanse these things surely suggests they were to think harder about what the sacrificial blood of cleansing might represent. The argument of Heb. 9:9-14; 10:2,22 is that the blood of Mosaic sacrifices could not cleanse from such internal conscience of sin- but the blood of Christ can. The Lord's command for them to "cleanse" their inner parts could therefore find no opportunity for fulfilment within their legal framework. But the language would've recalled David's need to be cleansed in the inward parts after his sins relating to Bathsheba (Ps. 51:2). His request for cleansing was met by God's direct operation on his heart, because as he was aware, there was no prescribed sacrifice which could address his need. The scribes and Pharisees were surely intended to realize that they must ask God for special cleansing; and yet they knew that blood played some role in cleansing. Therefore they were intended to come to the conclusion that God could indeed cleanse them, but through some special sacrifice. The priests and Pharisees who later converted to Christ perhaps followed this

path of logic to where the Lord intended it to lead (Acts 6:7; 15:5). His hopefulness in people finally paid off- setting us a great example.

*That the outside of it of it may become clean also-* There is a jarring element of unreality here. Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. This reasoning continues the theme that 'God sees all things' which the Lord has developed in :22; see on 23:22 *By Heaven*.

23:27 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs-* A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. Earlier the Lord had used the opposite figure about them: "You are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them" (Lk. 11:44). It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required. And so again we see the idea that they led men into defilement.

*Which outwardly appear-* S.w. 6:16 "That they may *appear* unto men to be fasting".

*But inwardly are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness-* The idea of being inwardly 'full' of unclean thinking is found likewise in :25: "Full of extortion and excess". Only from God's perspective is this apparent. We tend to perceive elements of spirituality and also of unspirituality co-existing within a person. But ultimately, in God's judgment, the inner heart is either fully for Him or against Him, dead or alive in spiritual terms. They are full of "all uncleanness". The language is in absolute, total terms.

*Bones-* Perhaps a reference to the spiritually dead house of Israel being likened to dead bones in Ez. 37:1-11, awaiting the coming of the spirit of the new covenant.

23:28 *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men-* This is the language of 1 Sam. 16:7. Man looks on the outside, but God looks within. And within the Pharisees was not a pretty sight.

*But inwardly you are full of hypocrisy-* We would imagine that the language of hypocrisy was more relevant to their outward appearance than to their internal state. But they were hypocrites *within*, meaning that they deceived their own selves within, wearing masks within their own hearts to deceive themselves that they were actually righteous. The Lord Jesus perceptively commented that hypocrisy is something which

is *within*- it's about acting out a role *inside* ourselves, a split personality *within* a person, whereby they kid themselves they are someone whom they are not. Their real self and their shadow self are in conflict deep within their minds, in their own self-perceptions they act one way when their real self is something different. And this all goes on *within* the human mind. Hence Paul speaks of hypocrisy being essentially a lie which is told within the mind, and parallels it with a conscience which no longer functions properly (1 Tim. 4:2). The Lord's definition of hypocrisy therefore concerned an internal state of mind- and He warned that this is a yeast which inevitably spreads to others (Lk. 12:1). Thus Barnabas was carried away into hypocrisy by the hypocrisy of others (Gal. 2:13). Although it's so deeply internal, the dissonance between the real self and the portrayed self that goes on *within* human minds somehow becomes a spirit which influences others. And that's how society has become so desperately hypocritical. James 5:12 gives some good practical advice in all this- our yes should mean yes and our no should be no, or else we will fall into hypocrisy (Gk.- AV "condemnation" is a terribly misleading translation). James seems to be saying that we can guard against falling into the hypocritical life and mindset by ensuring that our words, feeling and intentions are directly and simply stated, with meaning to the words, with congruence between our real self and the words we speak.

*And iniquity*- The Greek *anomia* means literally 'not law', without law. These religious scrupulous legalists were in fact moral anarchists, with no law. This is the great paradox of legalism, to the point that it could be argued that legalism is in fact a cover for internal moral lawlessness. This would explain the otherwise staggering moral hypocrisy, double standards and depth of moral failure observed in the lives of so many legalists. Their external legalism is a cover for their own internal moral anarchy and lack of law and self-restraint.

23:29 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets-* *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on 23:30 *Our fathers*.

*And garnish-* The same word is soon to be used of how the temple was 'garnished' (Lk. 21:5), and the Lord predicted its utter destruction. In the Lord's teaching, it is the inner mind which must be "garnished" (12:44), the lamp of our own spirituality must likewise be "trimmed" (s.w.; 25:7). Again we see a tension between the Lord's focus upon the internal, and their attention to the external.

*The tombs of the righteous-* The same word has just been used in :28, where the Lord observes that the Pharisees tried to "appear righteous unto men". And they accordingly made a great show of tending the graves of "the righteous". The implication is therefore that they saw righteousness in terms of imitating 'the righteous' who had gone before them. The whole thrust of the New Testament is concerning imputed righteousness, not attaining righteousness in the eyes of others by our own imitations of men. The idea that righteousness involves modelling some past religious leader of our denomination is not at all dead in these days.

23:30 *And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers-* The Lord takes their use of this phrase and reasons that they were thereby calling themselves the descendants of those who had killed the prophets, and were therefore guilty. That may seem a very harsh analysis and judgment. But the Lord has the power to see meaning in words for good or for bad. All we hear are the words, and we cannot judge words alone, because we cannot see the background motivation behind them. See on 23:29 *You build*.

*We would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets-* Blood is here put by metonymy for 'death', and this explains how the term "The blood of Christ" refers not so much to the red liquid of His blood, but to His death.

23:31- see on 15:2.

*Therefore you witness to yourselves-* AV "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned of

*himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

*You are the sons of them that slew the prophets*- The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

23:32 *Fill up*- The language of the iniquity of the Amorites filling up to a point where they would be cast out of Canaan (Gen. 15:16). The Lord is saying that the Jewish legalists were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of the land, and they would be cast out of the same land, to make way for a new Israel, largely comprised of Gentiles. God is not insensitive to sin; the account builds up to a point where He will openly act. The question is whether the Lord was commanding / encouraging them to 'fill up' this measure of sin by going ahead and crucifying Him, or whether He was merely commenting that they were filling up that measure of sin which would bring Divine judgment. If He is encouraging them to go ahead and fill up the measure of sin required of them, then we have here another insight into how the Lord as it were provoked His own final arrest and death, in the sense that He consciously gave His life rather than having it taken from Him. His parody of a triumphant entry into Jerusalem so broke and disappointed Jewish expectations of Him that it could be argued that He was purposefully moving the crowds to turn their misplaced love for Him into hatred, and join forces with the Jewish leadership in killing Him.

The comparison between them and the Gentile Amorites is part of a wider theme, in which those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Thus Moses prophesied of an apostate Israel: "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV). These very words are used by Paul regarding the Gentile world (Phil. 2:15). Likewise Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the

very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

*Then the measure of your fathers' iniquity-* The Lord elsewhere uses the figure of a measure to describe final judgment. With the measure we measure, it will be measured to us in that day (7:2). So the Lord could be urging them to go ahead and fill up the required level of sin to bring about on *them* the judgment due to their fathers. For this is His teaching in :35- that judgment for all the righteous blood shed by Israel's leaders was to come upon that generation. This may appear to contradict the principle that the sons shall not suffer for the fathers' sins. But the Lord seems to be saying that there is also another dimension to the picture, and that is the principle of imputed sin to those who repeat the sins of their fathers.

23:33 *You serpents, you offspring of vipers-* A clear reference to them as the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

*How shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna?-* The Lord's whole attitude to Israel showed that they could be saved from condemnation, even at the very last minute. And this was clearly His will. So rather than seeing this as spoken in anger as the final invective against a deeply wayward nation, I am inclined to see this as spoken with a voice cracking under the passion of wanting to save the beloved who hates their Saviour. And surely there was a rhetorical element to it. How they could escape it was to ditch their plans to crucify Him. And the Lord goes straight on in 24:16 to say that even when judgment started to come upon Jerusalem and the temple, they could "escape to the mountains" (s.w.). This was how they could literally escape the coming condemnation; which suggests that surely the Lord did have an appealing, rhetorical sense to His question here. The similarity with that clause in the Olivet prophecy is really a marvel of grace. They who deserved instant death were being given grace upon grace, every chance to change the outcome of their wicked ways. Further, the Lord is quoting here from the words of John the Baptist: "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee [s.w. "escape"] from the wrath to come?" (Lk. 3:7). "All Jerusalem", including the Scribes and Pharisees, had initially heard John approvingly. The Lord is surely saying that the way to escape the coming condemnation was by doing what John had taught- to repent and accept Jesus as Messiah and Saviour from sin. Again, the Lord's quotation of John's words confirms that He is speaking rhetorically and seeking their repentance and salvation, even at that late hour.

23:34 *Therefore, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes.*

*Some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city-* This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature; Lk. 11:49 introduces it with: "Therefore also said the wisdom of God". The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts. Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

"I send unto you" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Lk. 11:49 adds: "Prophets and apostles". Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

The Lord was talking to the scribes (:29), telling them that He was sending "scribes" to them. And those scribes were men amongst whom were the illiterate and who therefore didn't know the text of Scripture that well. Their qualification was that they had known God's Son. The Lord is here comparing and contrasting the old and new in the starkest possible terms.

*You shall kill-* As Stephen and James (Acts 7:59; 12:1,2).

*And crucify-* The Lord implied this would be Peter's fate.

*Scourge-* Fulfilled Acts 22:19-24; 2 Cor. 11:24,25.

*In your synagogues-* The punishment of synagogue scourging could only be applied by the Jews to official synagogue members. The fact Paul experienced synagogue discipline by beating with rods shows that he too chose to be a member (2 Cor. 11:24). The Lord spoke as if His followers would remain within the synagogue system until they were forcibly expelled (Jn. 16:2). In all this we see a distinct lack of any 'guilt by



association' mentality with the Lord. He did not ask His followers to break religious association with those who were both morally and doctrinally astray, but rather to remain in those associations until they were cast out. Notice again how the Lord refers to *your* synagogues, just as *God's* house became "*your* house".

*Persecute them*- By Paul, who was himself later "persecuted" by the Jews (s.w. 2 Cor. 4:9; Gal. 5:11; 6:12).

*From city to city*- Fulfilled in Acts 14:19; 17:13.

23:35 *That upon you*- One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles of :34 to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant 'guilt for their death'. Soon the Jews were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

*May fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land*- This stands for '*judgment* for all the righteous blood shed'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment* for the sin. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

*From the blood of Abel the righteous*- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

*To the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah*- Or, Baruk. The prophet

Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate *inclusio* with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

*Whom you slew between the sanctuary and the altar-* See on :18 *The altar*. The mention of this detail would perhaps be because the Lord has just spoken of their wrong attitude to both temple and altar (:20,21). He is saying that effectively they had desecrated temple and altar- when they claimed such deep reverence for them. Their mercenary focus upon the gold of the temple and the gifts placed upon the altar was to such an extent that they had robbed the actual temple and altar of their holiness. This was no better than killing a righteous prophet in the holy place.

"Whom *you* slew" shows that the murder was counted to them, in the sense that the blood of those martyrs was "required of this generation" (Lk. 11:51). Sin, like righteousness, can be imputed as part of the downward spiral which operates as the opposite of the upward spiral in spiritual life.

23:36 *Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation-* Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened

judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord in Matthew concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same "this generation" in 23:36 as in 24:34. The Lord doesn't, therefore, mean 'The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled'. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn't fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn't repented, but because God's loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

23:37 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*- It was "this generation" which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? "Daughter of Zion" was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem's residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire; or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord's feelings to the "Jerusalem" which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn't want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn't want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

*Which kills the prophets*- The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (21:35).

*And stones those sent to her!*- The punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

*How often would I have gathered your children together* - He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many

verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. "How often..." suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion's children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

*Even as a hen gathers her chickens*- We see the Lord's humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of Christ in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! See on 15:13.

*Under her wings- but you were not willing!*- This is a classic Old Testament figure, of the faithful taking refuge under the wings of God's cherubic care. The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God's saving care in the Old Testament.

23:38 *Behold, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being "*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were "*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

*Is left unto you desolate*- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 24, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter

day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment.

*23:39 For I say to you, you shall not see me from this time forward, until-*  
The same words are used in 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when*, or, *until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

*You shall say-* When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

*Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord-* When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say "Blessed is he..."- as if the time of His return depends upon their 'seeing' / perceiving Him beforehand.

## CHAPTER 24

24:1

### Matthew 24: Introduction

Old Testament prophecy was conditional. There can be no doubt about that. Take these words: "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel: an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee" (Ez. 7:2,3). But the ultimate end did not come then in Ezekiel's time and the Babylonian destruction of the temple. God's program delayed that ultimate end. Perhaps because of His mercy, the repentance of a remnant, or for other reasons as yet unknown to us and unseen from our earthly viewpoint. My approach to the Olivet prophecy is that it was intended to be fulfilled in the first century- because this was the intended time [or one of the intended times] for the Lord's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom. Therefore those aspects of the predictions which depended upon God to fulfil, He did [e.g. earthquakes, famines]. But the essential preconditions of Israel's repentance and the spread of the Gospel worldwide were not fulfilled. And so the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied to some later time- and it would appear that time is now upon us. This approach may be new to some, for it involves understanding God as 'open', and more responsive to human behaviour than we might have thought. If this is something you feel the need to still get your mind around, then the digression about the nature of prophecy may be helpful. If you have no problem with the idea of God's prophetic word being delayed or rescheduled in its fulfilment, then the digression doesn't need to be read.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfilment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfilment in AD70- the final fulfilment will be in our last days.

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet

prophecy alone a highly illegal document (Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 28).

*24:1 And Jesus came out of the temple and was going on his way when his disciples-* This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

*Came to Him-* We sense a separation between the Lord and the disciples. His hint that the temple was to be desolated (23:38) was hard for them to accept. They were probably embarrassed that their teacher had spoken out against the quintessential symbol of Judaism, the temple; which would explain why they come to Him "privately" for more explanation (:3). And in :3 they again 'come to Him', as if they moved away from Him after His confirmation in :2 that He did indeed intend to be understood as saying that the temple would be cast down.

*To show Him-* Mark says that *one* of the disciples said: "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings!". This may well have been Peter, as Mark appears to be Peter's gospel. It was his response to the Lord's previous comment that this house was effectively desolate already (23:38), so sure was God's forthcoming judgment upon it. And Peter is perhaps saying 'What a shame that would be- it's such a wonderful building!'. In this we would see, therefore, another example of Peter, the leader of the early church, being somewhat out of sync with the Lord's intentions- another hint at the weakness of the disciples.

*The buildings of the temple-* These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

24:2 *But he answered and said to them: Do you not see all these things?*- AV "See ye not all these things?". Read this carefully. He doesn't say 'Do you see all these things?'. He uses the negative- 'Do you *not* see all these things?'. This isn't mere style or literary convention. To not see something means you do not see it. Let's not assume that "all these things" refers to the temple building. The Lord has just used the term in 23:36: "All these things shall come upon this generation". And *pas tauta*, "all things", runs as a triple refrain throughout the Olivet prophecy, concerning the 'all things' of the predicted time of crisis coming upon Israel (24:8,33,34). If reading in context means anything, the "all things" must refer not to the temple buildings, but to the "all things" of Jerusalem's coming judgment. The Lord is asking them: 'Do you not see / perceive that all these judgments ["all things"] must come upon these wonderful buildings you're showing Me? No? Then OK, I will spell out those "all things" in gruesome detail. Don't look at the world as it stands before you at this moment, but remember the "all things" of judgment to come which are spoken about them'. The Lord has previously condemned the Jewish world for 'not seeing' and He is warning the disciples that again they may be so influenced by Judaism that they don't 'see' the judgments to come with the eye of faith in His word. See later in this verse on *Left here*.

*Truly I say to you. There shall not be left here*- This again expands upon His previous use of this word in 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

*One stone upon another*- The judgment of the leprous house (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

*Which shall not be thrown down*- There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age (:3). This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which



seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

*24:3 And as He sat on the mount of Olives-* The word picture is painted of the Lord sitting alone, and then the disciples come to Him. Again we sense the separation between the Lord and His followers. Matthew gives much attention to the Lord sitting (13:1,2; 15:29; 22:44). This is what we would expect of a genuine eyewitness who recalled the Lord's body language and movements.

*The disciples-* Mk. 13:3 defines them as strictly Peter, James, John and Andrew. Hence they came "privately".

*Came to Him privately-* See on :1 *Came to Him*.

*Saying: Tell us, when shall these things be? And what is the sign-* They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

*Of your coming-* Without doubt, *parousia* is used in the NT and contemporary literature to refer to a literal and not an invisible presence (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). Any 'coming' of the Lord in Jerusalem's judgment of AD70 was only at best a foretaste of His final coming. It's simply not good enough to claim that He 'came' invisibly or spiritually. The word *parousia* simply doesn't mean this. And yet the destruction of the temple and His 'coming' are linked together; hence my conclusion that His *parousia* was delayed and the prophetic program delayed and rescheduled.

*And of the end of the age-* See on :2 *Thrown down*. They saw this as parallel with His 'coming' and the destruction of the temple. There is no suggestion that they saw these as three different chronological events, and the Lord's answers give no hint that He saw them as distinct events. Quite simply, the Lord's second coming and the destruction of the temple were understood by them all, the Lord included, as simultaneous. The fact the Lord's coming didn't occur when the temple was destroyed can only

therefore mean that the Divine program was rearranged. For preterism notwithstanding, the Lord has clearly not returned in glory yet, neither did He do so in AD70. "The end of the age" had been used by the Lord to describe the last day of judgment (Mt. 13:39,40, as also Dan. 12:4,7 LXX). The very same phrase used in 13:39,40,49 with clear reference to the Lord's second coming. In no way was the separation between true and false believers, and the punishment of all the latter class, achieved in AD70. The phrase is also used in 28:20, where the Lord sends out the disciples on their great preaching mission with the assurance that He will be with them "unto the end of the age". The implication could be that the end of the age is dependent upon the fulfilment of the great commission. The disciples failed in this, both in performing it [because of their initial hang up about preaching to Gentiles] and because of the paucity of response to their work. And so the end of the age, the second coming, is yet to come- when the Gospel really does go into all the world, then the end shall come (:14). Heb. 9:26 uses the phrase with reference to the situation in the first century- "now once in the end of the age has [Christ] appeared". It could have come then- but it did not. Rom. 9:28 speaks of how God will have to finally intervene in speeding things up- and Paul writes here in the context of Israel's final response to the Gospel: "He will end [s.w.] the work, and cut it short". And the word for "end" is also used to describe how God will end or finally execute the new covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:8)- when they accept that new covenant in responding to the Gospel. Clearly the global preaching of the Gospel and Israel's response to it are crucial requirements for the "end of the age" to come. And there is no lack of evidence that these signs are on the cusp of fulfilment.

Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions (in this case, "When...?"); He gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the

same event. It could be that the Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but His real coming and the final ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days.

Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent. 'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23).

*24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one lead you astray-* Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the

majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority. "Be not deceived" (Lk. 21:8) is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers Christ spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

24:5 *For many shall come in my name*- Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ, is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

*Saying: I am the Christ, and shall lead many astray*- The reader who pays attention to detail will note a significant use of pronouns in the Olivet prophecy: "ye" seems to refer to the faithful minority, who would (e.g.) understand, be persecuted, perish, lift up their heads, and finally endure to the end. "The many" (Gk. the majority) in the ecclesia would fall away. No fewer than four times does the Lord stress that "the majority" would be deceived by false prophets, be offended, and have their love wax cold (Mt. 24:5,10,11,12). Probably he connected this, at least in his own mind, with his earlier statement that "the many" would be called to his truth, but not chosen (Mt. 22:14). This difference between "the many / majority" in the ecclesia and the minority of suffering faithful is a theme in the parables which are an appendix to the Olivet prophecy.

The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

24:6 *And you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars*- Gk. 'to come to the ears'. The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

*Ensure you are not alarmed*- The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level

of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

*For this must happen- but the end is not yet-* Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet.

4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

24:7 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Moslem nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment (:14); the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is

those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

*And kingdom against kingdom-* It seems likely that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the Arab world. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, after the example of Saddam Hussein, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

*Famines-* There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the



fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

*And there shall be famines and earthquakes-* Just as there was at the crucifixion (27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

*In various places-* The word "various" (AV "divers") is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in :15 about "the holy place". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her Arab neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be

somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

24:8 *But all these things are the beginning of the birth pains*- The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life. See on :9 *To be afflicted*.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

We frequently struggle to understand which verses apply to AD70 and which to the last days. I have suggested that forcing such a distinction is

unwise because the entire prophecy was a conditional prophecy which began to have fulfilment in AD70 but was rescheduled in its final fulfilment. However it could be argued that Mt. 24:8-22 can be read as a parenthesis specifically concerning the events of AD70: the first seven verses and Mt. 24:23 ff. refer to events of both the last days and AD70.

24:9 *Then shall they deliver you up*- Just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

*To tribulation*- S.w. "great tribulation" (:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea as in :8 of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them-

to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

*And shall kill you-* "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" (Lk. 21:16) can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the first century disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too. *Apokteino*, 'to kill', is used many times in the Gospels, nearly always with reference to the killing of the Lord Jesus. Again there is the hint that the sufferings of the tribulation period are intended to create identity with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. In John, the upper room discourse replaces the Olivet prophecy. The word is used there for how the believers would be put out of the synagogues [opposition from synagogues is specifically mentioned in the Olivet prophecy] and then "whoever kills you will think that he does God service" (Jn. 16:2). Only religious hatred could explain the mad hatred unto death of which we are reading here- persecution on the basis of thinking that they are doing God service. We can expect, therefore, religiously motivated persecution in the last days. With the collapse of secular Christianity and strong religious commitment in much of the modern world, the only religion likely to fulfil this picture is Islam- and there is no lack of evidence that a worldwide persecution of Jews and those who hold a Jewish rooted faith is absolutely on their agenda, and is already bursting upon us.

*And you shall be hated by all nations-* But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen.

*For my Name's sake-* The phrase rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the

Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

*You shall be beaten in the synagogues* (Mk. 13:9). The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2), as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

Mark and Luke add "It shall turn to you for a testimony". Maybe the idea is that public trial for our faith will be a good public witness. Or it could be that the testimony in our favour is before the Heavenly throne room, where our human situations are as it were played out before the Lord. When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

Lk. 21:13 speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". Perhaps the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. And at the final judgment, these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their

response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

Lk. 21:15 adds at this point: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay". This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the 3.5 year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

24:10 *And then shall many stumble*- To stumble, in its Biblical sense, implies those in view were once walking in the Faith. This is clearly how the Lord uses it in the parable of the sower (13:21 s.w.). The majority [Gk.] will stumble out of the way in this final tribulation. Such a test of faith is logically required for that generation- because those who are alive at the time of the Lord's coming will be the only generation who never actually die. They will therefore require this particularly acute test of faith; and the majority will fail it, and stumble from the path. The

language of betrayal which is then used would suggest that those who stumble will be like Judas who betrayed the Lord- and he was amongst the believers. It's a sorry picture, but we must let the Lord's words have their true weight and fairly obvious meaning. The cosy church environments of today will simply not be that way during the very last days before the Lord's return. The upper room discourse again has a connection with the Olivet prophecy at this point, because the Lord says that He was warning His followers ahead of time that they would be persecuted and cast out of the synagogues, and He was warning them ahead of time exactly so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The Olivet prophecy, if taken seriously, is therefore not mere prediction of future events, but rather specifically intended to stop the faithful stumbling as they behold every detail suddenly coming true in the very last days.

*And shall deliver up one another-* Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

*And shall hate one another-* The same word just used for how the believers would be "hated of all nations" (:9). The spirit and religious position of the world will be adopted by some amongst the believers, and they will turn against their brethren as a result of this. This is in line with the language of betrayal just used, replete as it is with allusion to Judas, one of the twelve. Likewise "false prophets" (:11) suggest those located within the community of faith who are pushing a totally different agenda.

24:11 *And many false prophets-* A comparison of Mt. 24:11 and 24 suggests that there will be two particular periods of false prophet activity- at the outbreak of the persecution, and then immediately prior to the Lord's return. This latter group reason that Christ's second coming has already occurred in some non-literal form. Thus :27 speaks as if the clear return of Christ in the clouds will prove them wrong. These men would equate with Peter's description of some within the ecclesia of the last days saying "Where is the promise of His coming?". The language of false prophets suggests they arise from within the community of believers (see on :10). The "many" whom they deceive are presumably the same "many" who shall stumble from their faith (:10). The 'false prophets' of our age are hardly very credible. But if these false prophets have

apparent access to Holy Spirit gifts and claim to do miracles, as passages in Revelation suggest, then they may well have more credibility. This particular sign was fulfilled in the first century, for "many false prophets [s.w.] are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

*Shall arise*- The reference is to the LXX of Jer. 29:15, where we read of false prophets arising amongst Israel whilst they were in Babylon. The message of those false prophets was that Judah would be saved from Babylon without repentance, and that in practice, spiritual separation was not required from Babylon. And this will be the precise context for the false prophets in latter day Israel.

*And shall lead many astray*- False prophets of both Old and New Testaments were associated with immorality or at least, an easy, fleshly 'spirituality'. With harsh persecution and death sentences for true faith in Christ, the environment will be ripe for such false teachers; and false prophets are believed because people want to believe their message. Four times the Lord repeats this warning against being deceived, using the same word (:4,5,11,24). The words for deception and 'false prophet' recur in Revelation, again in a latter day context (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). The source of the deceit is 'Babylon', the latter day confederacy of anti-Israel and anti-Christian powers around Israel.

24:12 *And because iniquity shall be multiplied*- The LXX of Dan. 12:10 "The wicked shall do wickedly". This is last days language, describing the situation just before Daniel is resurrected. It cannot therefore have had any major fulfilment in the period before AD70. Thus "Because iniquity shall abound (within the ecclesia?), the love of many ("the many", R.V.- the majority) shall wax cold" (Mt.24:12). Bad spiritual standards will spread like cancer in the last days. Thus the ecclesial leaders of the last days must beware of the temptation to be over harsh on the faithful remnant, whilst eating and drinking with "the drunken", i.e. those elements in the ecclesia who will be unprepared for the Lord's coming. 2 Thess. 2:7,8 use the same word to describe how the "mystery [the Greek is a distinctly religious word] of *iniquity*" was already gathering momentum in the first century, leading to "the wicked one", the one of iniquity / lawlessness [s.w.] being revealed; again, we sense the possibility of a first century fulfilment which never came to its ultimate term. "Multiplied" translates *plethuno*, the noun of which is *plethos*, frequently translated "multitude". The idea is that because of the masses being without law, iniquitous, the love of the majority *amongst the believers* will become cold. They will be influenced by the lawlessness of the majority around them; the church will become as the world. And there is no lack of evidence that this is already happening.

*The love*- The love- *agape* – of the majority will be lost in the latter day community of believers, whilst peoples from all nations hear and accept the Gospel. Could this mean that the established groups of believers lose



their *agape* whilst the real fire of the Truth spreads to the new converts made during the great tribulation, as spoken of in Rev. 7? The parables of Mt. 25 seem to refer specifically to the state of the latter day believers, and they speak of a beating of the fellow-servants.

*Of the majority-* The presence of the article, '*the many*', means that this refers to 'the majority'.

*Shall grow cold-* A related word is used in Rev. 3:15,16 in speaking of how the love of the early believers had decreased from hot to lukewarm, although not completely cold. Again we get the sense that this part of the Olivet prophecy was on its way to fulfilment- but had not come to full term.

24:13 *But he that endures-* The idea of enduring to the end and being saved is the spirit of the Lord's struggle on the cross (Heb. 12:2,3 s.w.). Again we see that the sufferings of the last days enable the faithful to fellowship the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. *Hupomeno* ["endure"] is a form of *meno*, the word used so often by the Lord in the upper room discourse for 'abiding' or remaining in Him. Again, it seems John has replaced the Olivet prophecy's call to endure to the end of the tribulation period with an appeal for the believer to abide / endure in Christ to the end of life. The language of the tribulation is applied to the entirety of the Christian's life. 'Enduring to the end' is paralleled with *agape* love not becoming cold; the real endurance is in continuing in the thankless life of love, in the midst of a majority of believers who have lost their way. This is what is so difficult.

*To the end-* The end of the tribulation period is described with the same term as is used about the Lord's death on the cross being "the end" (26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). Again we see that the experiences of the tribulation are intended to forge identity with the final sufferings of the Lord. 1 Thess. 2:16 speaks of Divine wrath coming upon Israel "to the end" (s.w.; AV "to the uttermost"), as if "the end" could have come in the first century. Peter was very clear: "The end [s.w.] is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Constantly we see evidence for what could have happened- and yet did not. And yet it shall happen, ultimately. And the only conclusion can really be that the final "end" was deferred, the Divine program rescheduled.

*The same shall be saved-* In the first instance, "the end" was the end of the tribulation period, for he that endures to the end *shall be saved*, but :22 explains that unless the days [the 1260 days of the time periods?] are shortened, then even the elect will not be "saved" (s.w.).

24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom-* We wonder what is the intention of the emphasis upon "this" Gospel being preached. We are assisted in understanding by the way Matthew uses the same terms in 26:13:

"Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial to her". The language is so similar that there is surely a connection. The Gospel records are transcripts of how those like Matthew originally preached the Gospel. Over time, the account they gave became written down, under inspiration. The Gospel message is, therefore, in the Gospel records. 'This Gospel' would therefore be a reference to Matthew's Gospel record, which it was the intention of Matthew and those who had been converted by it to spread worldwide. This would explain why each of the Gospel records includes the incident of the woman anointing the Lord; wherever the Gospel was preached worldwide, that testimony to her would be included. Matthew was therefore proactively attempting to fulfil the Lord's comment that the Gospel must be preached in all the world. He saw prophecy not so much as prediction but command. It could also be that the "this" connects with the end of :13, "shall be saved". Salvation is the good news of the Kingdom. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29).

*Shall be preached*- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then "the end comes". The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord's command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

*In the whole world*- The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means 'the inhabited', and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached "in", *en*, all the world, and not 'to' the whole world. This may envisage

there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7);

Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

*For a testimony-* The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "ye are witnesses... *you* will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

*To all the nations-* If every *ethnos* must at least have the Gospel of the Kingdom witnessed to them, it's impossible to understand this as having

had final fulfilment in AD70. The fact there will be believers from every *ethnos* saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) means that this witness will succeed- against all odds, seeing that at the time, there will be mass persecution and hatred against believers. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29). Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The word used in Mt. 24:14 for "witness to all nations" occurs in Mt. 10:18 concerning our being brought before judges etc. as a witness. Our behaviour during the final tribulation is the witness- perhaps the implication could be that there will be quiet believers world-wide before the final tribulation begins, and their witness under persecution will be the public proclamation of the Gospel world-wide of which the Lord speaks here? In the spread of the true Gospel recently we perhaps see the way for this being prepared. The word also occurs in the parallel Lk. 21:13- our behaviour during the final tribulation will be the witness we make. The reluctance of the early church to throw their full weight behind obeying the command to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel" was only ended by the cosy ecclesias of Judea being persecuted, resulting in their increased appreciation of their hope, and preaching it to those previously neglected nations into which they were driven (Acts 11:19-22). Are the Christian heartlands in for something similar? That the mission fields are so white to the harvest but so chronically short of labourers indicates how nicely such a scenario would work to God's glory.

*And then shall the end come-* The Lord gave some signs which would be required but would not be the "end" (:6 "the end is not yet"). It would seem that the urgent spreading of the Gospel as a witness worldwide, perhaps in the context of well publicized legal cases against believers, will be the very final sign which heralds "the end". This witness to the Gospel worldwide would therefore be during the tribulation itself, or at least at some point between verses 6 and 14. The witness may therefore take a matter of days, rather than the gradual spread of the Gospel worldwide over a matter of decades. With the nature of the media and instant communication, such global penetration and persuasion of a minority could indeed happen in a matter of days. The high profile, globally

covered testimony under tribulation or torture of even one believer could trigger the conversion of individuals literally worldwide. Perhaps the prophecy of the two witnesses in the last days in Rev. 11 provides more details, or will then be understood as being fulfilled. Even if we cannot quite imagine now how it will be fulfilled, when the time comes for it to be, it will be compellingly clear.

24:15 *Therefore, when you see*- Luke adds "Jerusalem compassed by armies". Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then (Lk. 21:20,21 RV). The "therefore", *oun*, need not necessarily reference the previous clause. It may be setting up a condition upon which something must be done- in this case, fleeing (:16).

*The abomination*- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

*Of desolation*- Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil

of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel').

*Which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place-* Mk. "where it ought not". "Holy place" is without the article, and could refer to any holy place. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that

happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

*Let him that reads understand*- The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that readeth understand" Daniel's prophecies (Mk. 13:14)- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him... understand... let him... not go down... let him... not return... let them... flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When



you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "*Let him... understand*" is paralleled with "*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]... *let him* that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then...do something about it'. "Let him that readeth understand" is yet another Olivet allusion back to Daniel (12:10); yet generations of believers have read those very words and *not* understood. Presumably the latter day remnant *will* clearly understand Daniel's enigmatic words about the abomination. Whilst we should live *as if* we expect the Lord's imminent return, it has to be said that we don't seem to have yet reached this level of understanding. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive,

comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them. The expansion of understanding may be not only of prophecies like Habakkuk, Daniel and Revelation. Because Revelation especially is so full of reference to other passages throughout the Scriptures, our comprehension of the whole Bible will go into another paradigm. It may be that in the last days, *all* the words of God will in some sense be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17)- we will realize that the whole Bible is especially speaking to us, the last generation. Many of the parables are specifically aimed at the last generation of believers- they have a very secondary application to believers of other ages. They are specifically about the attitudes of those who will be alive when the Lord comes in glory; e.g. the wise and foolish virgins, or the men given talents, or the servants left watching the household etc. The Lord's letters in Revelation speak of him being about to come, as do many other NT passages. They were written specifically for the last generation of believers! Their full meaning and relevance will therefore only be perceived by that generation. Take Rev. 3:20 as an example: "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Whatever else this may be taken to mean, according to its connections with other passages, this is clearly relevant to the Lord's second coming; the believer who responds to the Lord's voice in the last days will be rewarded with the Lord's coming. Verses like this and the parables mentioned above are pre-eminently relevant to the last generation. No wonder there will be a growth in understanding in the last days!

24:16 *Then let those who are in Judea flee*- The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

*To the mountains*- Better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

24:17 *Let him that is on the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years,

leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

*Not go down to take out things that are in his house-* The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains" (:16). This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

*24:18 And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak-* The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". See on :17.

*24:19 But woe to them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days!-* This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor.7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe

to them... who give sick", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

*24:20 And pray that your flight is not in the winter, nor on a Sabbath-* The "flight" refers to the opportunity given to the civilians of Jerusalem to flee. These opportunities were in October AD67 and in Spring AD70. "The Sabbath" refers more likely to the Sabbath Year rather than to the weekly Sabbath. There would've been little food in the Sabbath year because the land was not to be planted that year. The Sabbath year at the time was AD68/69 (the last Sabbath year ever observed in the land). So perhaps we can reason from these facts that the Lord's words were heeded, the faithful did pray as He recommended- and so they did not flee in Winter (but rather in Autumn 67 and Spring 70), nor in the Sabbath year.

The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel'); and :22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the

people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot*". This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

<b>Luke 21</b>	<b>Zechariah 14</b>
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfilment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. I have explained in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments but had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

24:21 *For then*- Mk., "in those days". Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming, the days during which the obedient 'flee' (and I have suggested that may be in response to the Angelic invitation to go meet the returning Lord Jesus). At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

*Shall be great tribulation*- The LXX uses this same word for "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and

the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)  
The "day of trouble" in Hezekiah's time, when Jerusalem again was surrounded by armies (Is. 37:3), and saved by a visible 'coming' of the Lord against the Assyrian confederacy.

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days. This verse would appear to be in the Lord's mind at this time. The same Hebrew phrase for "day of trouble" is repeatedly used about the traumas of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian invaders (Is. 33:2; 37:3; 65:16; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 14:8; 15:11; 16:19; 30:7; Obadiah 12,14; Zeph. 1:15). These historical situations were clearly intended to be understood as precursors of the final tribulation of Jerusalem, again at the hands of the neighbouring nations. The time of "trouble" [*tsarah*] in Dan. 12:1 is literally 'the time of the enemy / adversary', and the same word is used of the time (Esther 4:14) of the enemy and adversary [*tsar*] in Esther 7:4,6, when again the Jews were threatened with destruction at the hand of the Agagite / Gog of Haman.

*Since the beginning of the world*- Mk. 13:19 "From the beginning of creation". But the allusion is to Dan. 12:1, "Since there was a nation", and the context suggests the idea is 'Since *Israel* were ever a nation'. The "world" in view may therefore be the Jewish world, and "creation" is being used as Judaism sometimes used the term, to refer to the creation of the nation at Sinai. The use of the phrase "the beginning of creation" rather than just "creation" would suggest that the creation of the world in view was an ongoing process, which is a beautiful insight into the nature of God's natural and spiritual work with the world of believers, with Israel, and even with the natural creation.

*Until now, no, nor ever shall be*- surely only applicable to the last days, the time of Jacob's trouble predicted in Jeremiah. Clearly the main fulfilment cannot be limited to AD70. The threat to "all flesh" in :22 likewise cannot be seriously applied to the situation of AD70. The language of Lk. 21:28 is also impossible to apply to AD70: "But when

these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near". The allusion is obviously to Dan. 12:1: "A time of trouble such as never was". I have shown in the digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that this particular prophecy had various possible fulfilments; and in harmony with that history, it could have been fulfilled in AD70, that was the intention, but the preconditions were not all fulfilled, and therefore its ultimate fulfilment was delayed until the final 'last days'. The "time of trouble" in Dan. 12:1 is after Michael 'stands up', after the visible manifestation either of the Lord Jesus personally, or the Angel Michael who represented Him in the court of Heaven. The "time of trouble" is therefore in the very last days, perhaps literally days, the "then" of this verse 21 in Matthew 24, the time when the faithful have already dropped their jackets and left their homes to go to meet the Lord. It is inappropriate, therefore, to describe our present times *before* that period as "the time of trouble such that never was". And it may be that Dan. 12:1 specifically refers to this unprecedented time of trouble as being for *Israel*- trouble such as never was since they were a nation.

24:22 *And except those days had been shortened*- The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem for a year before it fell, but the Roman siege lasted about five months- according to Josephus, from April 14 to September 8. God can shorten intended time periods at will, for time is seen by Him in a different dimension and context to our experience of it. According to 2 Sam. 24:15,16 LXX, it would seem that the three days of intended plague became one day, because of David's prayer and repentance, and God's pity; "the Lord repented Him of the evil". It seems this shortening happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 RV says that "the time is shortened", in clear allusion to the Lord's words here. Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was "shortened" by at least 3 years "for the elect's sake". And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times. Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

The Greek tense specifically means that the days had already been shortened. And yet the verse concludes with the future tense: "The days will be shortened". The Lord Jesus was confident that although the shortening was yet future, it had in essence been achieved. This may well have been by the Lord's intercession. In this case, Mk. 13:20 would be a comment inserted by the evangelist, referring to the Lord Jesus: "The Lord had shortened the days... He has shortened the days". See on *The elect*. According to the parable of Lk. 13:8, the Lord Jesus had persuaded the Father to extend an intended time period for Israel's repentance, and had gained at least another year or half year of patient waiting for



spiritual fruit on Israel. It's quite possible, therefore, that the intended "days" of suffering had already been reduced by the Lord's intercession, because He foresaw the weakness of the latter day "elect"; and also, simply was heartbroken at the prospect of all the suffering He was predicting. 2 Pet. 3:12 says we can hasten the coming of the day of the Lord- perhaps the Lord was speaking in faith that elect would indeed hasten it and thereby shorten the days. Hence He speaks in both past and future tenses concerning the shortening of the days. And yet on the other hand, it is the delay of judgment which allows opportunity for repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). Thus in the final algorithm controlling the coming of Christ, there are delay factors and hastening factors. The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened (Mk. 13:20). And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days. The difference in tenses between "has shortened" and "will shorten" may also simply reflect how God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

With so many allusions to Daniel's prophecies, perhaps "the days" in view are those of Daniel's various prophecies. Perhaps this is the explanation of the 1260, 1290 and 1335 days in Daniel 12; and the otherwise difficult reference to 2300 days in Daniel 8. As suggested in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel', these time periods may have referred to potential periods which had the possibility of extension and reduction- in accordance with the strange mixture of Divine grace, the intercession of Jesus, the prayers of believers, the repentance of Israel... and perhaps other factors. In Daniel's own experience, the 70 years of exile was a period which was extended. "The days" are likened to "the days of Noah" (:37). In the days of Noah again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages

would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

*No flesh would have been saved*- "Saved" here may mean 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

*But for the elect's sake*- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. 1 Pet. 2:4,6 call Jesus "the elect / chosen" and then the same word is used about the believers being an elect / chosen nation (1 Pet. 2:9). The days will be shortened for the elect's sake- and this may refer to either the Lord Jesus, or the believers in Him; the shortening will be for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring to the same group- of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the

armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [eklektos], whom He has chosen / elected [eklegomai]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

*Those days shall be shortened*— see on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

24:23 *Then if anyone shall say to you*— This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

*Here is the Christ, or another, Here is the Christ- do not believe them!*— "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in

those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

*24:24 For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, which shall show great signs and wonders-* The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet... and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous "sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from :30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs" shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be

crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

*So as to lead astray- if possible-even the elect-* The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (:4,5,11). As observed under :23 *Look, here is the Christ or here*, the need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

24:25 *Listen, I have told you beforehand-* The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

24:26 *Therefore, if they shall say to you-* This appears to be a laboured repetition of the warning in :23- see notes there. The Lord is really underlining the possibility of deception by false claims to be Him in the very last days of the tribulation. He will not be hidden "in" anything nor anywhere- His coming will be as clear as lightning.

*Look, he is in the wilderness! Do not go-* These are the identical Greek words as used about how the people of Jerusalem 'went forth' into the 'desert' to see John the Baptist (11:7 "what *went you out* into the *desert* to see"; 3:1), and how the crowds went out to see the Lord Himself in the "desert place" (14:13,15). It will not be a question of going forth to see Jesus, as it had been until recently in the Lord's ministry.

Now it will be too late for that- His coming will be evident to all. Yet the Lord has introduced the Olivet prophecy by saying that the house of the temple has been left unto them "desolate", the same word translated "desert" (23:38). He may be saying that any idea that He has appeared lurking around the desolated temple area will likewise be false; He will not be in any "secret chamber" of that temple. This would explain the parallel between "desert" and "secret chamber". Do not "go forth" uses the same word as the Lord goes on to use in :27- His coming will be as the lightning 'goes forth'. They will not go to Him, He will come to them. But He is talking here concerning the unbelievers. The faithful will have already 'fled', and I have suggested that their dropping all things, even their jackets, to respond to that call is nothing less than their response to the news that 'He's back'. The same word translated "go forth" is used in 25:1,6 about the need to "go forth" and meet Him, and how the unfaithful amongst the ecclesia will delay in response to that call. Again, Revelation provides more detail, using the same word to describe the latter day call to 'go forth out of' Babylon or else they will be destroyed along with her (Rev. 18:4).

*Look, he is in the inner chambers! Do not believe it-* Seeing they were sitting near the temple, the reference would contextually have been to the chambers of the temple; see on *In the desert*.

24:27 *For as the lightning comes from the east and is seen even to the west-* This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10 :19; 11 :22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

The Lord had earlier used these very same words in Lk. 17:20-24: "The Kingdom of God comes not with observation [it wouldn't be as if a series of signs were fulfilled and people could see the Kingdom of God inching nearer over the decades]. Nor shall they say 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' [this is Mt. 24:23 " 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'"]. For the Kingdom of God [a title of Messiah] is amongst you... They shall say to you [in the final tribulation], 'See here' or 'See there' [this again is Mt. 24:23,26]; go not after them, nor follow them [Mt. 24:26 "Go not forth... believe it not"]. For as the lightning that lightens out of the one part of Heaven and shines unto the other part under Heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in His day... they shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man". The

connection would suggest that as the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analysing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment.

*So shall the coming of the Son of Man be-* No more doubt can be allowed that the *parousia* is visible and not invisible. The Lord is here specifically warning against any idea that His *parousia* is somehow invisible.

Jehovah's pseudo-Witnesses and preterists need to take this far more seriously. The point must be driven home that *parousia* always refers to the physical presence of a person. There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but *parousia* means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:-

- "As the lightning cometh out of the east... so shall also the *coming* (*parousia*) of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:27).

- "The day that Noe entered into the ark... the flood came... so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (:38,39).

24:28 *Wherever the carcass is-* This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. The key word is "For". This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming down from the sky of eagles upon the carcass- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcass in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcass or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. If we take Rev. 11:8,9 as an expansion of the Olivet prophecy, we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcass of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The

Greek word for "carcase", *ptoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcase as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcase (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". The question is similar to that in Lk. 17:37, where this is said in answer to the question: "Where, Lord?". This may not necessarily mean 'to where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled. Our Lord's quotation of Dt. 28:26 in here in :28 ("your carcases shall be meat unto the fowls of the air") is confirmation of this.

*There will the eagles gather together-* I suggested under *For where the carcase is* that this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcase of Israel, or for the sake of the carcases of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17- note that this part of 1 Thessalonians is full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17).

The Lord's usage of similar language in Lk. 17:37 must, however, be given its due weight. There the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess. 4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret



eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body... realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

24:29 *But immediately after the tribulation of those days*- The phrase *eutheos meta* doesn't necessarily have to mean 'and then, after that', in a chronological sense (although it can mean that). It could refer to things going on at the same time, *meta* the tribulation. The tribulation is that spoken of in :21 "Then shall be great tribulation". Verses 22-28 are therefore a parenthesis, developing the theme that false Christs shall appear, but we should not be taken in by them because the Lord's coming will be literally visible and crystal clear to all. The "tribulation" will be "immediately" followed by the Lord's return. Yet the "tribulation" of :21

was clearly initially relevant to the destruction of the temple in AD70. There was a rescheduling of the Divine program, just as has happened so often in prophetic history, not least in the promised restoration of the Kingdom not happening after the 70 years in Babylon.

"The tribulation" is explained in Luke's record as being Jerusalem being "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24). After this, in Luke's record, there are the signs in sun, moon and stars which Matthew's record also describes- as coming "immediately *meta* the tribulation". The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appear to refer to the time of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, and yet it is reapplied to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. And yet the application to Jerusalem's tribulation may remain true ultimately, in the very last days. For the allusion is to Zech. 12:3: "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to by Jesus in His description of Jerusalem being captured by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arabs, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

The Lord predicted that the final tribulation- which He says is that prophesied in Daniel- would be followed "immediately" by His return. The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Dan. 11:45)- just as the same individual does in Daniel 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1,2). So the Lord's own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

It is at this time, *after* the fall of Jerusalem, that we read of "the sea and the waves roaring" (Lk. 21:25). There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the Arab nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-semitic conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering (Lk. 21:25) is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem. It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

*The sun shall be darkened-* After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

*The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light-* Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12;

8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity... men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

"Immediately after the tribulation... shall all the tribes of the earth (land-of Israel) mourn, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming" (:29,30) is followed immediately by the fig tree parable. The chronology seems clear- a tribulation, repentance of Israel (note the allusions to the mourning of Zech.12 and 13), and then the second coming, with the fig tree parable about the repentance of Israel added as a footnote to this part of the prophecy.

*And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken-* The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

24:30 *And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven-* Matthew began his Gospel with the same word and idea, speaking of the 'appearance' of the star which heralded the coming of the Son of Man (2:7). The Lord has just used the same word in speaking of how His coming would be as the lightning shines or appears in the sky (:27). This,

along with the allusion to the star seen by the wise men, encourage us to think of this final "sign of the Son of Man" as a literal appearance in the sky, strengthening our suggestion that the signs in the sun, moon and stars in :29 are likewise to be interpreted literally. Jn. 1:5 perhaps puts all this in more spiritual terms by likening the Lord to a light shining [s.w. "appear"] in Jewish darkness, unperceived. Now is the day to perceive Him as He is, rather than too late at His return. These signs of the Lord's return will be in the sky for the world; the faithful will have already dropped all and fled, to Him, knowing He has come. How they will be called to go forth to meet Him isn't altogether clear, although 2 Pet. 1:19 uses the same word translated "appear" in speaking of how when the day of His coming dawns, i.e. begins, the day star will arise shining brightly in our hearts.

As noted earlier, it was exactly such a visible sign that the disciples and the Jews wanted in order to know Jesus was Messiah and that He had returned (see on :23). The Lord had explained at least twice that no such sign would be given. But now He is saying that all too late, such a sign would be given. For now, we are to believe without such signs written up in the sky. If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim, then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress.

*Then all the tribes of the earth-* "Tribes", *phule*, is used exclusively of the tribes of Israel, until the references in Revelation to people of all nations, tribes and languages having representatives who were redeemed, being under the power of the beast etc. Even those references could be understood as referring to the tribes of Israel, along with the nations of the Gentile world. But "the earth" often refers to the land, of Israel. And the idea of tribes mourning is clearly referring to the prophecy of Zech. 12:10-14 that the tribes of Israel will mourn when they see the once crucified Christ, still with the marks in His body testifying to His crucifixion. Rev. 1:7 uses the same language. Israel will finally all repent when they see the sign of the Son of Man- and then, He will return literally and visibly in the clouds. The call of John the Baptist and the Lord's own preachers had been for Israel to "mourn" in repentance (11:17). This they had not done as intended, but they shall do so at His actual return. They who had laughed in this life will mourn then in rejection (Lk. 6:25; James 4:9); their repentance will be too late. Another possibility is that the impenitent amongst Israel will die in the final tribulation as outlined in Zech. 14, and these who mourn are those who repent and are accepted; for Zech. 12:14 adds the detail that the tribes who mourn will be those "that remain", who are [so the Hebrew means] 'the remnant'. But see below on *They shall see*.

*Shall mourn, and they shall see*- A play on words in the Greek: *kopsontai... opsontai* . The intention of this paronomasia is that Israel's repentant mourning is directly related to their seeing Him in the sense that His visible return only happens once they repent. When "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. This is why the pronouns change from "they" here to "you" when talking again to the faithful disciples in :33. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" here in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. These are those who mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

*The Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven* - Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming (:27 *parousia*) is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This

makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then shall they deliver you up... then shall many be offended... then shall the end come... then let them which be in Judea... then shall be great tribulation... then if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... immediately after the tribulation of those days* (*"in those days, after that tribulation"*, Mk. 13:24)... *then shall appear the sign of the Son of man... then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming*" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies of :29 are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

*With power and great glory*- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive

the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

*24:31 And he shall send forth his angels-* The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send... Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

*With a great sound of a trumpet-* The trumpet associated with the Lord's second coming in Rev. 11:15? The trumpet associated with our change to immortality in 1 Cor. 15:52, "the trump of God" associated with the resurrection and gathering in 1 Thess. 4:16.

*And they shall gather together his elect-* Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The



point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

*From the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other-* "To the uttermost part of heaven" (Mk. 13:27). Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on :31 *Power and great glory*.

24:32 *Now from the fig tree learn her parable-* Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

*When her branch has become tender-* The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is

the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet..." is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as... the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

*And puts forth its leaves-* The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the

Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

*You know-* Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

*That the summer is near-* One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon

the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

24:33 *Even so you also, when you see all these things-* The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]"

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig

tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

*Know that he is near- at the doors-* The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

*24:34 Truly I say to you, This generation shall not pass away-* This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests

the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

*Until*- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

*All these things are accomplished*- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

24:35 *Heaven and earth may pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are

to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :34 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

*But my words shall not pass away*- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the

essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :34. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential logos. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation (see on :32).

24:36 *But of that day and hour-* *Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the prophecy: "Those days" (:19), "those days should be shortened" (:22), "the tribulation of those days" (:29), "the days of Noah" (:37), "the days that were before the flood" (:38). So the Lord isn't necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because "you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes". When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that "the times or seasons" have been "set within [the Father's] own authority" (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord's return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour- see below on *Knows no man*.

*No one knows-* There's a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated "knows", carries the essential idea of 'seeing' or perceiving. We are to "see" / know / perceive the abomination



of desolation (:15), and when we "see" / know / perceive "all these things, know that it is near" (:33). And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. The reason is made crystal clear in :42: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes". 25:13 repeats this: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes". The 'watching', therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (:43). But if he doesn't know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their 'watching' is not so much a personal readiness for the Lord's coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of 'watching' the "signs of the times".

It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when

Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils  
Beaten  
rulers and kings for a testimony

...brother shall betray the brother  
...turn back to take up his garment

...false Christs...  
the sun shall be darkened...  
Watch pray...

at even...  
at midnight...  
at the cock crowing  
in the morning  
find you sleeping

As Christ to the  
Sanhedrin  
Christ buffeted  
Chief priests, Herod,  
Pilate  
Judas; Peter's denial?  
John Mark's linen  
garment  
An echo of 'Barabbas'?  
As at the crucifixion  
"Watch with me";  
Gethsemane  
Last Supper  
Gethsemane  
Peter's denials  
trials and crucifixion  
disciples in  
Gethsemane

And at the end of the prophecy, He hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the

Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

*Not even the Angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father-* A clear indication of their limited knowledge, which helps explain their 'testing' of God's servants in some Old Testament incidents, apparently in order to obtain more knowledge about them.

24:37 *And as-* The similarity with Noah's days is logically linked to the Lord's word about not knowing the day nor the hour. In the digression about this, I suggest that the very last generation may in fact know the day and hour. And that would be similar to Noah. There is no indication that he knew exactly when the flood would come- until he was told right at the end of the period, that the time had come and he must enter the ark.

*Were the days-* "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined earlier in these notes is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". See on :36 *That day*. The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come on board. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

*Of Noah-* A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at

the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.
- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.
- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.
- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.
- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

*So shall be the coming of the Son of Man*- This commonly used phrase (16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven". This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel's prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and

obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His "coming" is parallel with a period of time- see on *The days*.

24:38 *For as in those days which were before the flood-* See on :37, perhaps a reference to the immediate seven days before the coming of the flood. *Pro* ("before") would suggest 'immediately before', something standing directly in front of something else. Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

*They were eating and drinking-* Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

*Marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark-* Mt. 25:10 continues the Noah allusion by saying that the faithful 'enter in with Him' (s.w.), and the door is shut, just as it was with the ark.

24:39 *And they did not realize until-* The implication is that they did "know", but tragically too late. In the moment of their condemnation they

saw it all, so clearly; just as the process of condemnation so often results in men 'knowing Yahweh', but all too late. They will proclaim blessing on Jesus as Messiah next time they see Him, i.e. at judgment day (Lk. 13:35). But all too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth in anger with oneself which :51 speaks of.

*The flood came-* Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used in :38 about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

*And took them all away. So shall the coming of the Son of Man be-* The 'coming' of the flood represents the 'coming' of the Lord; just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away', so :40 continues that theme, that one shall be "taken" and another left. The 'taking away' of the one in the field is therefore 'taking away' in condemnation rather than the snatching away of the faithful to meet the Lord. The Greek *airo* definitely means to be taken *up*. Upward movement into the air is definitely in view. It could be that the Lord has in view the responsible. Those who respond to the call and want to go and meet their Lord will be confirmed in that by being caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. 4:16,17). Those who delay, the foolish virgins who go to buy oil, will all the same be gathered to judgment by being snatched away- but just a short time later.

24:40 *Then two men shall be in the field. One shall be taken and one left-* The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (:39). The idea of not being 'left' is what the Olivet prophecy started with- not one stone would be "left" (s.w., 24:2). But there will not be the total destruction of all persons on

the earth at this time. The unworthy responsible will be 'taken away'- see on :39 *And took them all away*- and those not responsible to judgment will be "left". The Greek has a wide range of possible meanings here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (13:38). And earlier in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation.

The present tense is used here. Therefore the RV gives "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. The same arresting use of the present tense [in the Greek] is to be found in :41 and :43- perhaps for the same reason.

24:41 *Two women*- So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive.

*Shall be grinding at the mill. One shall be taken and one left*- Using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. One [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left". See on :40.

24:42 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on what day your Lord comes*- Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch / stay awake" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus

cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must "watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

The blessedness of the 'watching' is not that they have an accurate timeline in place; we must watch exactly because we *don't* and *can't* know the exact time of the Lord's return. We cannot, therefore, have a detailed timeline which tells us *for sure* that Jesus will return after event x or y. We can speculate, of course, but we cannot say for sure. The message is to be ready, to love Him and His return, just because we *don't* know when exactly He is coming (Mt. 24:42; 25:13). 'Watching' means holding to our faith and repenting of our weaknesses in Rev. 3:3- not interpreting latter day prophecies. This of itself won't make us spiritual people. The Greek word translated "watch" is usually translated "imprison" - the idea is of guarding oneself and one's faith, "vigilantly" watching out against the [Biblical] devil [same word in 1 Pet. 5:8], rather than searching for the understanding of latter day prophecy.

We do not know the exact calendar date of the appearing of Christ; and yet we should be watching for his coming with the same intensity *as if* we did know the day and hour. This seems to be the message behind Mt. 24:42,43, where Jesus reasons that if the manager of a wealthy house



knew when the thief was coming, he would have watched carefully; 'And that', Jesus continued, 'Should be the intensity of expectancy *you* should have towards my return, even though you don't know the exact date'. Now this is quite something. If we knew the exact date of the Lord's return, we can imagine how we might behave the day before. It seems Christ is asking us to imagine that scenario; and then He asks us to live like this all the time. This is truly a high challenge. Our attitude to God's word, entertainment, hobbies, money, relationships; all these areas of life would probably be somewhat different to what they are now if we really took on board this idea: that we should live *as if* we expect the imminent return of Christ. This idea makes sense of two apparently contradictory strands in the Lord's teaching: that we do not know the exact time of His return (Mt. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; Acts 1:7), and yet He tells us clearly it will come "soon" (Rev. 1:1,3 and many other passages). Perhaps the implication is that we should read coming 'soon' as meaning 'as *if* you know He is coming soon'. For, we ourselves cannot know the exact time.

Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It's as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world... and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn't saying 'Well, you'll never properly interpret what I've just said'. He meant rather: 'OK you'll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless'.

24:43 *But know this!*- Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

*That if the master of the house had known in what watch-* The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

*The thief was coming-* Gk 'is coming'. See on 24:40 *Taken... left*.

*He would have stayed awake-* The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations. Lk. 12:35-38 repeats the same teaching, but with the metaphor of men keeping watch all night so that they might open to the Lord immediately.

*And would not have let his house be broken into-* This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it is our family. The connection is to 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

24:44 *Therefore you also must be ready-* The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk.

12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

*For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect-* The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near.

"The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be... ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

24:45 *Who then-* Translated "What manner of man?" in Mk. 4:41; Lk. 1:66.

*Is the faithful and wise servant-* The Lord has just likened us to the master of the house, but now He explains further. We have responsibility

for the house and act in the role of the householder because He has given us that responsibility. Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" of the very next parable (25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

*Whom his lord has set over his household-* This parable is repeated with the same Greek words in Lk. 12:42,43 but with a change in tense: "Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing". The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that

when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. See on 24:47 *Shall make him ruler*.

*To give them their food in due time?*- When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (:49), or feeding and caring for them (:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

24:46 *Blessed is that servant*- The only other reference by the Lord to blessed servants is in Lk. 12:37,38,43 where He teaches the blessedness of the servant who is found awake / watching when his Lord returns. 'Watching' is a major theme here in Mt. 24, but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing. Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

*Whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing...*- Again we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

24:47 *Truly I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has*- See on :45 *Has made ruler*. If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this.

The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the

head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When Christ comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. See on :43 *The householder*- He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

24:48 *But if that evil servant*- The next parable likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of this "evil servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant... the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

*Shall say in his heart*- The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

*My Lord's coming*- There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehaviour is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the

foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

*Is delayed-* The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. Christ's words of Mt. 24:48,50 suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder" - recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus- v.15,18) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn.14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer thee". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

24:49 *And shall begin*- The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

*To beat his fellow servants*- Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.



The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

*And shall eat and drink with the drunkards-* His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord has just spoken of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world (:38)- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life. The next verse continues allusions to Noah's time.

Lk. 12:45 adds that the man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. Mt. 24:49 is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish (Lk. 12:45). This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

*24:50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect him and in an hour-* The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply

that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When ye shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is nigh... ye *know* that Summer is near... *when* ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is nigh... when ye therefore shall see (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when ye see (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

*When he does not know*- This is *ginosko*, used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (:39). We are to "know" the time (:33 "know that it is near", "know this" :43; Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

24:51 *And will cut him in pieces*- Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is

for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

*And put him with the hypocrites-* AV "Appoint him his portion with the hypocrites". Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). Note the parallel between hypocrisy and faithlessness. It is faith which is the real power against hypocrisy; if we believe that the Lord sees and knows all things, we will not act in the eyes of some. We will be ourselves, because we believe in Him and His grace and love towards us. The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The Lord used almost identical words earlier in His ministry, but with the conclusion that such a servant would be appointed his portion with *the unbelievers* (Lk. 12:46). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

Just as the man had chosen to be "with [*meta*] the drunken" (:49), so the Lord's judgment of him will reflect the decisions he himself made, and the position in which he was found at the Lord's coming- he will be "with" [*meta*] the hypocrites.

*There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth-* This phrase is recorded seven times on the Lord's lips, but six of them are in Matthew (8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). The awful prospect clearly gripped Matthew, and in presenting the Gospel he felt it his duty to remind people graphically of the future they might miss, and the eternal consequence of rejecting God's Son.

The Olivet prophecy doesn't finish at the end of Mt. 24; the chapter break with chapter 25 is unfortunate. The context runs straight on. The Lord spoke a number of parables at the end of the prophecy, which teach us the need for watchfulness against his coming. Each of them speak of his "coming" and the state of his ecclesia. They refer back to various parts of the Olivet prophecy. *Without any doubt* their main relevance is to the second coming; whatever minor relevance they may have to AD70, when they speak of the Lord coming and judging us, they speak of his second coming. They are a further elaboration on the things of which he had

been speaking in the prophecy: and therefore the prophecy must basically concern his second coming and the state of the ecclesia at the time of the end.

## CHAPTER 25

25:1- see on Mt. 13:19.

*Then*- Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom... will be likened unto ten virgins...", the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. "Then shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (Mal. 3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Mt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

If the judgment is in time as we now know it, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! Christ comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of Christ to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of Christ in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ. Therefore it would be fitting if the whole

process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of time as we know it. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: "The morning is come and also the night". This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence.

*Shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins-* Ten men were required for a synagogue to be formed. The Lord may be consciously subverting this idea, implying that in the new Israel He was creating, the congregations would be comprised of believing individuals, whose gender was unimportant.

*Who took their lamps-* Gk. 'they received'. The same word is used throughout the chapter, also of the servants receiving their talents (:16,18,20,22,24).

*And went to meet the bridegroom-* Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively a calling to go and meet the Lord. However, the parable seems to be specifically about the response of the faithful immediately prior to the Lord's coming, once they know He is 'back' and must of their own volition go out to meet Him. This would then follow straight on from the teaching of chapter 24. The same Greek word translated "meet" is that in 1 Thess. 4:17. The faithful who are alive at the time of Christ's coming will be snatched away to "meet" Him. But they will have gone forth to meet Him of their own volition, and those who delay going to meet Him will not meet Him in that way.

25:2 *And five of them were foolish and five were wise-* Dan. 12:3 speaks of "they that be wise... they that turn many to righteousness". This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as "the wise" amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob's trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during "the time of the end... the time appointed" (RV)- of the three and a half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these "wise" in mind in His parable of the "wise virgins" of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously

preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

*Foolish-* The Lord uses the same word in saying that we are not to call anyone 'foolish' because it implies that we are condemning them (Mt. 5:22). Clearly enough, the people of God are divided between those who will be saved, the wise, and those who will be condemned. But that division will only be apparent in the last day, and will be made apparent by varying responses to the knowledge that the Lord has finally come. Likewise the parable of the two builders shows that the difference between the wise and foolish will only be apparent when the flood comes, i.e. at the Lord's return. The foundation they built is invisible to those around them- nobody can see whether they dug down through the sand onto the rock, or just built in the sand.

*25:3 For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them-* The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Lk. 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents- symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word- are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus during the delay period they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on genuine spirituality. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

However, it's quite likely that the oil has no particular significance. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

*25:4 But the wise took flasks of oil along with their lamps-* The fact the lamps of the foolish 'went out' means that they all had oil in their lamps.

The difference was that the wise thought there might well be a delay, and so they took oil with them. The wise took lamps plus vessels; the foolish only took their lamps. The only other time the Greek word translated "vessels" occurs in the New Testament is also in Matthew and also on the lips of Jesus in a parable, in 13:48. There, the faithful are likened to good fish which the judge casts into "vessels" whilst the bad fish are cast away. The telling paradox is that the wise, those ultimately saved, are those who have "vessels" exactly because they suspect the oil of their own spirituality will not be enough. It is their awareness of their own likelihood of failure which is their salvation. And further, they recognize that the outworking of God's purpose is changeable- there may be delays, such is His sensitivity to human spirituality. The foolish, by contrast, think that all will be well with them because they accurately know the time of the bridegroom's coming, and cannot think that their own oil may not be enough. Personal spirituality [oil] is therefore related to our perception of God's sensitivity and openness.

25:5- see on Mt. 22:9.

*Now while the bridegroom was delayed-* The same word translated 'delay' in 24:48 (see note there). Without doubt, there is a delay in the Lord's return. Beyond question, the fact not all will work out as expected in terms of chronology means that some will stumble. This is a sober warning to the very many who hold dogmatic views about the interpretation of end time Bible prophecy. Rev. 10:6 uses a related word to speak of how there will finally be no more delay. And yet 'delay' is to some extent metaphor- the same word is used in Heb. 10:37 "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (s.w. "tarried", Mt. 25:5). In one sense there will be a delay, in another sense there will not be. God on one hand foreknows all things, and in that sense there is no delay; in another sense, He does in real terms delay His program in response and sensitivity to human behaviour. This paradox is at the root of Hab. 2:3, which is being quoted in Heb. 10:37: "The vision is yet for an appointed time [the Hebrew could mean 'Will still not happen for another year / *moed* / until the next feast / until the time appointed]... though it tarry, wait for it... it will not tarry". Despite the delay, it will fulfil, and so it must be waited for. It tarries in one sense, but in another sense "it will not tarry".

*They all became drowsy and slept-* The word is used figuratively of 'delaying'. The only other NT usage is in 2 Pet. 2:3, where it clearly means 'delaying': "Their condemnation *slumbers* not". Because the bridegroom delayed, so did they. Here again is the Lord's commentary upon the dangers of assuming a fixed date for His return. Spiritual life grinds to a halt when it is perceived [wrongly] that God's purpose has ground to a halt. The delay in the Lord's coming means that there is a delay in the spiritual life of those who waited for Him on a particular day. By slumbering, they were assuming that He too is slumbering. But the



God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4). David had sworn not to slumber nor sleep until God was enthroned in Zion (Ps. 132:4). Regardless of delays in the program, it is the end result which must ever be kept in view- the coming of the Lord to Zion. The fulfilment of prophecy is not an end in itself, but it is the end result which must be our desire- rather than merely seeing the vindication of our own pet interpretations.

Both wise and foolish "*all*" slumbered and slept". This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Mt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Mt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber. Clearly enough, the very last generation of believers will all be weak, and those of them who shall be saved will only be 'ready' because of their own admission of their weakness and lack of oil.

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom is unusual- an element of unreality in the story. They must have been a pretty unenthusiastic, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 (as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely a similar element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I...?"... maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the weddings. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just

in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

25:6 *But at midnight-* Israel both kept Passover and went through the Red Sea at night. Indeed, it is stressed six times in Ex. 12 that it was "night", and hence Dt. 16:1 reminds them to carefully keep the Passover (i.e. at night), "for... thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". Other latter day prophecies speak of the events of the second coming being at "night": Lot left Sodom in the very early hours of the morning; and it was "at midnight (that) there was a cry made" informing the virgins of their Lord's return (Mt. 25:6). There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. And yet there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps- which needs continual topping up by our freewill effort. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt. 25:6). The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Mt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

*There was a cry-* This is surely representative of some specific indication given to the latter day believers that the Lord is back and they must now exercise their freewill in going to meet Him. It may be in the form of a trumpet blast. The book of Revelation often uses the same word for the 'crying' of Angels in their various proclamations. So this may refer to the "voice of an Archangel" (1 Thess. 4:16) with which the Lord returns. This great cry also equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.

- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

*Look! The bridegroom [comes]! Come out to meet him-* "Comes" translates *erchomai* and "go out" is *ex-erchomai*. The coming of Christ must be greeted by our 'coming out' to meet Him. The idea is that we cannot be merely passive. The whole parable is designed to debunk the idea that we can know the exact date of the Lord's return, with the implication that we are just waiting for things to happen to us. But God's purpose involves us having a hand in the outworking of it; He is responsive to our freewill attitudes and decisions. His coming / going out to us cannot just be waited for by us; we have to go out to Him. The virgins had all 'gone out' to meet the bridegroom (:1 s.w.), but now they actually go out to meet Him after the delay. And it is the response to how the Lord delays which is effectively the division between wise and foolish, worthy and unworthy.

The same Greek word translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

*25:7 Then all those virgins arose and-* In the general application of the parable, this invites interpretation as resurrection. But the burden of the parable is clearly specifically for those who live in the last days, those who are "alive and remain" and are called to meet their Lord, but find there is a delay. The more obvious picture, however, is that the call will grab all by surprise, and will lead to them arising and taking stop of their lives, and coming to terms with who they really are. Again, this is relevant to the closing section of the Olivet prophecy- the Lord's point is that even if they think they know the day and hour of His coming, it will be a shock which can in no way be prepared for. And knowing the day and hour is not the essential thing, but rather being willing to immediately go to Him and leave the things of this world.

*Trimmed their lamps-* This is the same word translated "garnished" in the Lord's parable about how response to John the Baptist's teaching left a

house "garnished" (12:44). And his teaching was about Jesus as Christ and the need for repentance and faith in His grace. Those who properly responded to it would be ready for the Lord's second coming. The whole language of Jesus as bridegroom was surely intended to recall John, for he had used the very same figure for the Lord. The introduction to the Olivet prophecy had noted that the temple was "garnished" (s.w. "trimmed"; Lk. 21:5), and the Lord is surely saying that that was irrelevant, for the true garnishing is of personal preparedness for His coming. The bride herself is to be "adorned [s.w.] for her husband", the bridegroom (Rev. 21:2).

*25:8 And the foolish said to the wise: Give us some of your oil-* Those who thought they knew the day and hour of the Lord's coming are revealed here as actually having no personal spirituality. They could have just gone to meet their Lord for joy of wanting to see Him, throwing themselves upon His grace. A bridegroom wants to see His bride and would rather see her without some piece of jewellery, than find she turns up very late. Their request for oil from others indicates they have no personal love of Him, no personal relationship with Him, and a group mentality whereby they thought others' spirituality could count for theirs. All they had was their conviction that they knew the day and hour of His coming. So it's no surprise when finally the Lord tells them "I know you not" (:12). This puts all obsession about figuring out Bible prophecy into correct perspective.

*For our lamps are going out-* Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" (relative to the foolish, anyway) can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterise the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at His coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyse and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realisation will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period. This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analysed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ- they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic- "Give us of your oil"! In that

moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish. Those who are spiritually empty will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually stronger, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil- what faith they had- ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

*25:9 But the wise answered: Perhaps there will not be enough for us and you-* AV "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you". The translation is problematic, as reflected by the way the AV puts "not so" in italics. This has been added in a valiant bid to make the difficult Greek have at least some kind of sense. The idea seems to more accurately be: 'In any case there is not sufficient for us, let alone for you too'. The only other time *arkeo ou* occurs it is translated "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7); and there, the idea is 'We cannot possibly have sufficient of ourselves, only God's grace can provide the sufficiency'. As it is translated in most English versions, the sense is somewhat selfish- as if the wise are too concerned for their own acceptance by the bridegroom to worry about anyone else. But I suggest the sense of the original is rather 'We ourselves hardly have any oil, we are woefully unprepared ourselves, we are going to throw ourselves onto His grace when we meet Him. It's not about how much oil we have. It's about loving Him enough and trusting His grace enough to just want to go immediately and be with Him. But if you're so worried about oil, well, presumably you will have to go and get some- a hard job, in the middle of the night, when the shops are all closed'.

*Instead, you should go-* The Greek really means 'to depart', and significantly, the very same word is used by the Lord in this same context when condemning people at judgment day in :41: "Depart [s.w. "go"] from Me, you cursed". So the point is again established that in their response to the news of His return, the rejected have their judgment. They are asked to go and meet Him, but they depart, to try to make themselves prepared by relying upon others ["them that sell"]. Their departing from the Lord was in essence their condemnation, for condemnation is all about departing from the Lord.

*To them that sell oil and buy some for yourselves-* This may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change; or going looking for *people* who could sell them oil. But again, they go to others- rather than immediately to the Lord Himself. Hence His comment in :12 that they do not know Him, and therefore He doesn't know them. There is simply a lack of personal relationship with Him, despite their confidence that they knew the day and hour of His coming. "Go... and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position,

but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: 'Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?'. I mentioned under *Not so...* that the only other time *arkeo ou* ["not enough"] occurs is when the amount of bread required was described as "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7). The advice to *go and buy for yourselves* is also alluding to that same feeding miracle. The lesson then had been that no amount of bread was enough / sufficient, nor was it possible to go and buy for oneself- rather must there be total reliance upon God's grace in Christ. I feel the allusion or similarity is purposeful, because lack of oil didn't have to mean rejection by the Bridegroom. They could simply have thrown themselves upon His grace. If they were ready and eager to go and meet Him at any moment, regardless of whether they felt or externally appeared ready, then this was enough for salvation. And that, really, will be the struggle of every spiritual heart when we know the Lord has returned; our love for Him and trust in His grace must be greater than our awareness of our own unworthiness, lack of preparation and poor external appearance. Those who thought they knew the day and hour [and we must ever remember that this is the context of the parable] couldn't cope with things working out other than they had expected, needed to run to others for help, rather than to the Lord personally; and had no sense of His grace nor, in fact, any overpowering desire to simply be with Him. Rather was their own correctness of expectation the most significant self-defining issue for them. And it would appear so many 'Christians' have fallen into this trap, becoming obsessed with chronologies of events and accuracy of prophetic interpretation, at the expense of true spirituality and direct personal relationship with the Lord.

*Buy for yourselves*- Literally, 'redeem yourselves'. The whole point is that we were bought / redeemed by the Lord and not by ourselves.

25:10 *And while they went away to buy*- There seems no reason to think that the Bridegroom would have rejected them because their lamp was not burning. They could have just gone along anywhere, motivated by the joy that comes from love. But they were too convinced by their need to *appear* ready externally. I have spoken elsewhere of a collapsing of time [as we understand it] in the period around the Lord's return and judgment. But let us not think that such collapsing of time only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus we read here of the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside the marriage. In time as we know it, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

*The bridegroom came- and they that were ready-* "You- be also ready" (24:44) uses the same word. This parable is the definition of what 'readiness' means. The wise virgins were hardly ready. They fell asleep when they should have stayed awake; and they recognized that they didn't really have enough oil. They hadn't calculated the day nor hour of their Lord's return. They were 'ready' only in the sense that they wanted above all to be with their Lord, and this sense was far stronger than their deep awareness of their own shameful unpreparedness. But this is what 'readiness' is about.

*Went in with Him to the wedding-* This is another hint that the faithful come with Jesus to judgment. See Digression *With Jesus to Judgment*. The Lord entering into the wedding feast is the exact picture of His coming in judgment (22:11 "the King *came in*" s.w. "went in"). But in that same parable, we 'come in' to the wedding feast at our response to the Gospel in this life (22:12 s.w.). The nature of our initial response is highly significant. "Went in" translates the same Greek word found in 24:38: "Noah *entered into* the ark". The next comment that "the door was shut" continues that allusion to the ark.

*Went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut-* The very same words are used in Lk. 11:7 concerning how although the door is shut in this life, yet it can be opened by prayer and beseeching. We as sinners are condemned here and now, the door is shut- but we can repent and pray, and the door shall be opened. But like the shutting of the door of the ark, once this is done at the day of judgment, it is too late. Now is the day to change the verdict, then will be too late.

25:11 *Afterward came also-* We may be intended to imagine some details of the story. They would have searched for oil sellers in the middle of the night, and finding none, they came without oil to their Lord. I suggested earlier that the issue is readiness, a love for the Lord, rather than having oil; they could have gone immediately and thrown themselves on His grace. But they didn't do that and chose instead to try to get human help; resulting in their rejection.

*The other virgins-* If the Lord literally meant 'the others', He would have used a Greek word like *heteros* [or the Aramaic equivalent]. But *loipoi* definitely has the sense of that or those which remain; it is elsewhere translated "the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2). The foolish virgins are those who remained, those who didn't go immediately in response to the call. Yet again, attitudes to the Lord's coming will decide our eternal futures.

*Saying: Lord, Lord-* The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here in :10 "they that were ready *went in* with Him to the wedding". The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally

correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Lk. 13:25 adds the detail that they 'knocked'. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

*Open to us*- The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord's return.

25:12 *But he answered and said: Truly I say to you, I do not know you*- Lk. 13:25 adds "From whence you are", from what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended



paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

25:13 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know the day nor the hour-* "Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the tribulation period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge".

It cannot be accidental that Matthew's Gospel twice records Christ's plea for us to watch (Mt. 24:42; 25:13); and then goes straight on to describe how in Gethsemane, Christ pleaded with the disciples to join Him in watching and praying, lest they fall to temptation (Mt. 26:38-41). He was evidently deeply, deeply disappointed that they could not share this with Him. Surely the reason for this further mention of watching is to suggest that in the pain of our latter day watching, we will be at one with our suffering Lord in Gethsemane, as He too watched- not "signs of the times", but His own relationship with the Father, desperately seeking strength to carry the cross rather than quit the race.

25:14 *For it is as when a man, going into another country-* The same word is used in the parable of the tenants (21:33), and also at the end of the Olivet prophecy in describing the Son of Man travelling into a far country and leaving His servants to watch, not knowing exactly when He shall return (Mk. 13:34). The parables of Matthew 25 are an extension of the Olivet prophecy and appear to comment particularly upon the fact we do not know the exact time of the Lord's return but are to live as if He is coming any moment. The key phrase in this parable, in this connection, is the idea of the Lord returning to assess the servants "after a long time" or delay (see on :19). It may be that the Lord foresaw the rescheduling of

His intended return in the first century, and wanted to teach that regardless of the delay, His servants were to keep 'ready' and watching by trading the goods He entrusted them with, and progressing His work on the earth. In one sense, the Lord Jesus is very present. The teaching of the Comforter passages in Jn. 14-16 is that through the Spirit, He is as good as personally present with us. And yet He is apparently absent, in that we no longer possess the miraculous gifts, and it visibly appears that He is far away. The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

*Called his own servants-* A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

*And delivered to them His goods-* The same word is used about how all things have been delivered unto the Son by the Father ("All things are delivered to me from My Father", Lk. 10:22). The totality of the action is the element of unreality- that this Master would share out all He had amongst His servants, when He Himself was not present to oversee their work. Again, this is metaphor. He is present. But He is 'absent' in the sense that He will not forcibly intervene to ensure that His work prospers in our hands. He has left us with absolute freewill and self-determination. In a different metaphor, Paul likens the community of believers to the body of Christ. we are Him, and without us, He is not. We each have part of His work, some aspects of His characteristics, which we are to develop and reveal in the world. The most common usage of *paradidomi* concerning what has been delivered to us is in the context of "That form of doctrine" which has been "delivered" to us (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:2,23; 15:3 2 Pet. 2:21; "the faith which was once delivered to the saints", Jude 3)- not to simply keep buried, but to develop in various ways, to the glory of the Lord who gave it. Thus the basic doctrines of the Faith were "delivered" to us at our conversion, as the talents were delivered to the servants. We are asked to use that understanding of basics to develop our own character. It doesn't mean we're each given different doctrines; but we all have different characters and areas of spiritual growth, and we must each use the same doctrines we are "delivered" to develop these. This would explain why it's so easy to see

others' lack of spiritual development in some areas, whilst being so sure that we have grown spiritually in other areas. Our observation is correct; this *is* the case. But it's nothing to be proud or critical about; we ourselves have our blind spots. This approach to the parables of the pounds and talents may also explain why brethren of past generations seemed so strong in some areas (e.g. defence of the Faith and preaching) but so weak in others (e.g. compassion).

"His goods" follows on from the Lord's word that "He shall make him ruler over all his goods" (24:47 s.w.). What we are faithful with now will be in some sense eternally given to us in the Kingdom age. We will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.). The talents here are the pounds of the similar parable in Luke 19, His *very own* (Lk. 19:23). Here in the parable of the talents we read of the servants as "His own". The Lord's personal identity with His servants and His goods could not be more stressed. This is no disinterested business transaction. The goods of Christ are those which He took from the devil (Mt. 12:29), the absolute righteousness which is possible once sin is bound. I would suggest the goods of Christ refer to the ultimate spirituality which He has, the various aspects of His character. The ten pounds are delivered to the ten servants, who are to be compared with the ten virgins of Mt. 25. The ten servants and ten virgins represent the body of Christ, each of whom has been given a part of Christ's "own" to develop; we are called to develop His likeness, and I am suggesting that each of us has been given a certain amount and aspect of His perfectly righteous character to develop. The unworthy calls what he has been given "...yours" (Mt. 25:25)- when it was intended to be *his* personally (cp. Mt. 20:14). He just didn't let himself see the wonderfully personal nature of what God had given him.

25:15 *And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one-*  
This is one of the most programmatic, persistent and widespread translational problem in the New Testament. A talent is a weight, a measure. The Lord did not have in view 'talent' as in the natural ability in a particular area which a person may have. These talents are given to us by Him when we are called to Him; they are not something we had of ourselves. A Roman talent weighed 71 pounds or 32.2 kg. The servants were given *His* goods; something they previously did not have was given to them. And to each servant was weighed out a different amount, suggesting that gold or silver is in view. The use of *argurion* in :18 confirms it is silver. The suggestion that the one talent could have been left with the bank in order to receive interest confirms that a precious metal is in view. The figures are large- 32 kg. of silver for the one talent man. The story line of the parable suggests he thought he had not been

given much- but 32 kg. of silver is a huge amount. Even if we think we have little or no capacity for service, we need to consider that in fact we have been given a huge amount. And the five talent man was given 160 kg. of silver. As I write this in 2014, 1 kg. of silver is worth around 700 US\$. The one talent man was therefore given the equivalent of around 22,000 \$. And he considered it not enough to do anything much with. The story line suggests that many of us have been given far more than one talent. The five talent man was therefore given something like 110,000 \$. This is all a picture of the great riches in Christ which are given to us- each one of us. The relative lack of guidance they were given, with their Lord leaving immediately and leaving them to get on with it, is an insightful picture into how so much has been delegated to us to get on with according to our own initiative, and how we are tempted to think we have not really been given that much. And it's a powerful statement of what huge potential we have.

The parables several times speak of the relationship between our Master and ourselves. They do so in somewhat unreal and arresting terms. It would've made everyone think when the Lord spoke of how a master handed over a total of eight talents to His servants and told them to use them as best they could. This was, humanly speaking, a huge and unreal risk for a master to take. He so trusted those servants! And so much has the Lord delegated to each of us, entrusting us with the Gospel. And we can imagine His joy when they lived up to the trust He placed in them. We can also imagine them walking away from their meeting with Him, wondering why ever He had entrusted so much to them, feeling nervous, praying for strength to act responsibly and zealously. The talent was worth 6,000 denarii, i.e. 20 years' wages for the workers in the parable of the labourers (Mt. 10:1-16). In 2014 the average annual income in the USA was 50,000\$- 20 years wages would therefore be \$1 million in dynamic terms. For one talent. But most of the Lord's servants are given more than one talent. Looked at in this way, the church is a millionaire's club. The element of unreality in the story is that this is a huge and unrealistic amount to give to a servant to have responsibility for! But this is the huge responsibility which passes to us in having been called to the Gospel. Likewise, what human Owner of a vineyard who give out his vineyard to *other* tenants, after the first lot had proven so wicked, and killed not only His servants but His beloved Son? But this speaks of God's amazing desire to keep on delegating His affairs to frail mortals. And just as people typically fail to manage large sums of money which they are unaccustomed to, so we too miserably mismanage the Lord's wealth. But it was and is His will that we should use our own initiative in progressing His work and managing His wealth.

Note how valuable just one talent was- equivalent to 20 years earnings of a working man. This seems to me to be an element of unreality in the story, that flags up a lesson. The point is, we have been entrusted with

a *huge* amount. We tend to see it as something ordinary; that we have a faith, a denomination, just like many others do. But the personal, individualized gift which we have been given is simply *huge*. Imagine if you were given say \$1 million to use for the Lord's service. You'd be quite busy working out how to spend it all. But the point is, we have each been given *far more* than this. The parable has specific application to our witness; for it was just prior to the Lord's departure that He gave us the great preaching commission, corresponding to how in the parable, the Master leaves His servants but just beforehand, gives His servants the talents to go and trade with. Hence the one talent man is criticized for not having lent the talent on usury, a practice which Jews could only practice with Gentiles. He should've taken his talent, the riches of the Gospel, to the Gentiles. And yet I'd suggest that 21st century disciples aren't one talent people. We have been given so much- not least literacy and having the Bible in our own native languages.

*To each*- This idea is repeated and alluded to so often in the New Testament. Each man shall be judged individually according to his works because to each servant something has been given, and he must answer for its usage (16:27). This parable leads on from the Olivet discourse, which concluded with the Lord's teaching about the household which "the Son of Man" departed from, "and gave authority to his servants, and to every man [s.w.] his work" (Mk. 13:34). In a culture where religious specialists were thought to be God's workers, this was a radical teaching- that each and every one of us has been given specific work to do. And the culture of our present age is a no less difficult one into which to introduce this teaching. Our fear of responsibility, our desire to retreat deep within ourselves, to live only semi-aware lives in an age of abstraction and minimalism... all this makes it difficult to accept that we have been given specific work to do, for which we shall be judged at the last day. 'Every man... each of you' is a very common term in the New Testament, seeking to persuade people of their personal connection with God and Jesus, and not to rely on mere group membership. Hence "Be baptized *every one of you*... in turning away *every one of you* from his sins" (Acts 2:38; 3:26) would appear redundant until we realize this personal appeal that was necessary against a culture of group mentality.

Analysing the later NT allusions to this term "to every man", we have an insight into what in practice the talents may represent. God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3); we have each been given a specific ministry, and according to Romans 12, we are to develop that ministry. If we have no idea what that ministry is, what hopes the Lord has for us, we need to earnestly ask Him to reveal it to us. But if we're not perceiving it, this may well be because we don't want to perceive it. On a more obvious level, it may be that faith itself is a gift of God, and different people are given different amounts of it- but we are to develop whatever we are given and not leave the potential dormant. This would explain the great diversity of spiritual levels and of faith which there

clearly is within the body of believers. Life and especially psychological and spiritual life is not experienced by each person on an even playing field. There are background factors which affect how easy it is for a person to believe; and the Lord is aware of this and will judge accordingly.

When we read of how "the Lord gave to each man" (1 Cor. 3:5 s.w.) we have a very clear allusion to the parable. But the context is of how the Lord 'gave' converts to both Paul and Apollos. This too is a gift which we must use. Some make much brave effort to preach and never win a single convert. Others seem to keep stumbling across folks eager to hear and respond to the message. But that is all a gift from the Lord, for us to use and develop. And so the testing of 'each man's work' in the day of judgment will be a testing of the quality and extent to which they have worked with people (1 Cor. 3:8,10,13). Another allusion to this part of the parable is in 1 Cor. 7:7, where singleness or marital situation is described as "every man has his *idios* gift [s.w. "his own / *idios* ability / power"]... one [this way]... one [that way]". This is the same wording used in speaking of how this one was given five talents, that one was given two talents. As God has distributed to and called every man, so we are to develop our lives in that calling (1 Cor. 7:17), whether as slaves, single people, married or whatever. Many lament their marital situation, considering that if only it were otherwise, they would be able to serve God better. But it is in fact a gift from God, to be used for Him.

1 Cor. 12:7,11,18 again allude to the parable in saying that the gift of the Spirit "is given to every man... the Spirit... dividing to every man *idios*, personally". The talents therefore refer to the Spirit, spiritual gifts to be used within the body of Christ- so the passage continues. Likewise "unto every one of us is given grace" (Eph. 4:7). "Grace", *charis*, does indeed mean simply a gift. But it is so often used in the context of God's forgiveness that we can overlook the obvious fact that the gifts of God to us are His recurrent acts of patient forgiveness, given so freely to "every man" in Christ. These gifts of grace, and so many other such gracious gifts, are to not merely be *accepted* but developed and used. Again in allusion to this parable, Peter pleaded: "As every man [s.w.] has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

*According to his abilities*- The Lord recognizes that we each have unique abilities in some areas- and thereby unique inabilities in others. And He gives us work to do according to those abilities and not according to our inabilities. It may be that understanding of 'correct doctrine' is a gift given to one and not another; because not all are wired as Bible students. The giving of such different gifts, in different amounts, suggests that there can never be uniformity of spiritual level or achievement in the church. And yet so much church structure, hope, intention and expectation is

geared towards achieving such uniformity. We each start at a different point and much more is expected of those who start further down the road. *Kata... dunamis* is the very phrase Paul uses in 2 Cor. 8:3 in commending some brethren for responding to others' needs "according to their ability [*kata... dunamis*], yes, and beyond their ability". Surely this is an allusion to the Lord's words here. The point is that the Lord understands our ability and asks us to work according to that; but those brethren excelled themselves in that they responded beyond what the Lord even expected or hoped for from them.

The goods are distributed "to every man according to his several (Gk. *idios*, individual, s.w. "private") ability" (Mt. 25:15). We each have our own private spirituality which we must develop in our own private way. The talents parable is alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:7-12: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man (RV) to profit withal". In the first century, this was seen in the way in which different believers were given different gifts of the Spirit. In our dispensation, each of us is called to manifest a different aspect of the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). But the principle of 1 Cor. 12:7-12 remains true, as indicated by the way Paul reasons that we each have a different aspect of the Spirit to manifest because "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit". In principle, these words are true of our baptisms. At baptism we were given our talents, our different aspects of the Spirit / mind of Christ to manifest. We are all in the Christ body, and manifest His spirit / mind in different aspects. And as the manifestation of different aspects of the Spirit in the first century caused frictions, so too today.

However, there is no equivalent of the pronoun "his" in the Greek text here. *The Lord* gave the talents to the three servants "according to his own power and immediately took his journey". The 'he' in view could quite easily be the Lord, and the 'His... ability / power' would then refer to that of the Lord. This is rather confirmed by the recurrence of *kata... dunamis* in Paul's writings [which allude once every three verses at least to the Lord's words in the Gospels, especially His parables]. "*Kata* the gift... given unto me *kata... His power [dunamis]*" (Eph. 3:7)... that He would give you, *kata... the might [dunamis] through His Spirit*" (Eph. 3:16). "He that is of power [*dunamai*]... *kata* the power [*dunamis*] that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). Each of these verses associates *kata... dunamis* with the *gift* of the Lord, and the same word is used as in the parable for the giving of the talents to believers. Note too 2 Tim. 1:8 "*Kata* the power [*dunamis*] of God".

I suggest there is a purposeful ambiguity of meaning here. We are given some aspects of the Lord's goods according to *our* power / ability, and in order to develop them and use them we are given *His* power / ability. For His Spirit is to be merged with our spirit. Maybe Paul appreciated this

when he wrote: "I also labour *kata* His working, which works in me with power [*dunamis*]" (Col. 1:29).

*And he went on his journey*- Perhaps an element of unreality in the story. For we would expect Him to train them and explain to them how He intends the wealth to be used. The one talent man's response at the end suggests that he had not been given any clear commands by his Lord as to how to use his one talent. But this is the point. We have been given the talents we have, and we are to use them- at our initiative, and not in response to a legal code which defines how we use them. And therefore one believer will make more than another out of what God gives.

The same word for 'took his journey' has just been used by the Lord at the end of the Olivet prophecy in saying that the Son of Man 'took a far journey' and "left His house" (Mk. 13:34). The leaving of His house surely connects with the introduction to the Olivet prophecy, in which the Lord stated that "Your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38). It was no longer His house, but theirs. And in departing from the temple, He was leaving the house of Israel. The structure of Judaism was no longer going to be used- instead, He would give His wealth to a few individual servants and leave it to their initiative what they did with it. And this is what was and is so hard for so many- to serve the Lord on our initiative, without religious, legalistic structures. And these are [re]built exactly because people generally struggle with the calling to take ownership and responsibility for what the Lord has given them.

This idea of using one's own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher



located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

Several times Paul alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

*25:16 Immediately he that received-* Continuing Matthew's common theme of immediacy of response. We have freely received [s.w.], and are to freely give (10:8). The context is of giving the things of the Gospel to others. This is the incredible wealth of silver we have been entrusted with. We "receive" [s.w.] the seed / word of the Gospel (13:31,33), just as in the previous parable the virgins receive [s.w. "took"] their lamps (25:1) when we "received the knowledge of the Truth" (Heb. 10:26). The emphasis upon their 'receiving' the talents (:16,18,20,22,24) shows that the talents are not natural abilities, but what is given by the Lord. And straight after this teaching, the Lord uses the same word to urge His followers to take or [s.w.] 'receive' the bread and wine, the symbols of His life given to us (26:26,27). But that is ongoing- we receive [s.w.] "of His fullness" (Jn. 1:16), all that He is, He has divided amongst us His servants; different aspects of His personality and work in this world. This is achieved practically through the medium of the word and the Spirit- for again He uses the word about us 'receiving' the Father's words (Jn. 17:8) and receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). There are specific things we are called to do- Paul surely alludes here when he speaks of how what he "received of the Lord Jesus" was the ministry of testifying to the good news of His grace (Acts 20:24).

*The five talents went-* This may seem a superfluous word, until we perceive a connection with the great preaching commission, to *go* into all the world with the Gospel.

*And traded-* The same word is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace

and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word has just been used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:14) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The

Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: "The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags" (Mt. 25:16 NCV). The law of the peace offerings was designed so as to encourage the person who decided to make such a freewill offering to execute immediately- they were to eat it the same day they offered it, and the sacrifice would be totally unacceptable if it was killed but left for some days (Lev. 19:5-7). If we have an impulse to respond to the Lord, we should respond to it immediately. This isn't mere impetuosity. It's a spirit of always having an immediacy of response, which empowers us to overcome the procrastination which holds us back so much.

*With them-* The idea surely is that we are to trade / work with what the Lord gives us to do, with those same things; rather than decide that our natural talents, which were not given at conversion but rather are an outcome of our own environment and experience, are to be developed just as everyone in the world does- and then claimed as work for the Lord.

*And made another five talents-* "Made" translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it has just been used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found 'doing' care to

his brethren (24:46). And the word is twice used later in this chapter about 'doing' good unto the least of Christ's brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It's worth noting that this teaching is followed by the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She "did it" (*poieo*, 26:12,13), she "worked" (s.w. "traded") a good work ['trading'] on the Lord (26:10). It's as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of 'absence' of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

25:17 *In like manner he also that received the two gained other two*- The word is used regarding 'gaining' others for the Kingdom: "You have gained your brother" (18:15), Paul was sensitive to his presentation of the Gospel "that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19,20,21,22); unbelieving husbands are "gained" by the example of the believing wife (1 Pet. 3:1). Clearly enough, the trading and gain of talents refers to what we do for others on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has personally given us. Not having oil to give light to others in the house [the ecclesia] and to the world is made parallel with not gaining more talents, which matches not ministering to the least [the word often refers to the spiritually least] of Christ's brethren. This shows the primacy of preaching & pastoral work / effort for others, especially in the last days. Oil burning is giving light to others. Going to sleep / not tending the lamps in the last generation is therefore lacking in love to the household, not keeping ourselves awake to give light to others. Lack of care for others in the last days results in lamps going out and our generation slumbering. Does this imply that in the last days there will not be the care for the least of Christ's needy brethren which there should be? The last generation will be slumbering when shouldn't be, i.e. not giving light to the world and brotherhood as they should. And could it be that the spiritually "least" whom they despise are the new converts made in the last days tribulation, whom they somehow disregard?

25:18 *But he that received the one went away and dug in the earth and hid his lord's money*- The tragedy is that the Gospel is hid from the majority anyway (s.w. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). It is treasure hid in a field which must be found (13:44). And it is hid now by one to whom it was revealed in order to share with others, put back in the earth from which the Lord Jesus had extracted it. By hiding it, the man effectively was placing himself in the same position as the unbelieving world. The allusion is clearly to Achan, hiding God's talents in the earth,

for himself. In this connection we perhaps have an insight into the man's mentality. Can we infer that the man reasoned that the Lord might in fact never return, and therefore, his Lord's talents would become his? His excuses about the Lord being unreasonably demanding and "therefore" he did nothing with the talent all seem rather illogical, as if he was just saying it for the sake of mumbling at least something. His real motivation, surely, was to keep the talent for himself- on the basis that his Lord would not return. And this is the context of the parable. The fact we know that Christ will return, even if we do not know when exactly, will guard us against such an assumption- that we can take what is His as ours.

The fact it was not his ("his Lord's money") meant that he had no right to simply not use it. The fact we have been given so much by the Lord is undeniable; and we are to use it for Him and not hide it. Because it's not ours to do that with.

25:19 *Now after a long time- Chronos*, "time", can as a word imply delay or an interval. If time has 'length', as it does here, this can only be in the expectation of human beings. It would be fair to interpret this phrase, even simply on the basis of the original Greek, as meaning 'after a long delay'. And this would admirably fit the context- for the parables of Matthew 25 are a commentary upon the closing warning of the Olivet prophecy, that there is indeed a delay to the Lord's coming (24:48; 25:5). Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps. 37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time" (25:19). See on 20:16.

*The lord of those servants came and made a reckoning with them-* The Lord's coming was surely not in AD70 because He did not reckon up with all His servants then; there was no resurrection of the faithful in order to reckon with them. The Greek text here is *sunairo logos*- He reckons the *logos* with them, He considers the thought behind their actions. It wasn't so much a reckoning on a simply utilitarian, mercenary level. Rather was it an examination of their inner *logos* and motivation, as demonstrated by the discussion with the one talent man concerning his inner thoughts about his Lord. *Sunairo* is only used elsewhere in 18:23,24 where the Lord's reckoning with His servants begins now in this life. And they had miserably failed in money management. Yet He still wanted relationship with them, and frankly forgave them, whilst assuming they would on that basis forgive any of their own far smaller debtors. But even that didn't work out. Putting the Lord's parables together, so many of them are about servants; and the servants often behave in an incredibly bad way to Him. And we are those servants.

25:20 *And he that received the five talents came-* This is *proserchomai*, and the word used for the Lord's coming is *erchomai* (:19). He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. As

outlined earlier, this will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquitting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

*And brought another five talents, saying: Lord-* He offered / presented the talents to his Lord. Only in the day of judgment will we achieve final self-knowledge and be able to perceive what we have done and achieved with what He has given us. Our trading / work is clearly with the Lord's people. The presentation of the wealth gained therefore refers to what we have done for others. Paul spoke of how he would 'present' his converts to Christ at the last day; hence his concern about their development, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

*You gave me five talents. Look, I have gained another five talents-* This is the word used for the 'delivering' to believers of the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3). Again we see that the talents refer to what is specifically given to us by Christ at the time of our calling by the Gospel, and not to any latent natural ability within us.

*25:21 His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant-* The term used in the previous parable (24:45). There, the "faithful servant" was faithful in that he provided food for the other servants within the household, and didn't beat the fellow-servants. Here, the faithful servant trades his Lord's wealth for a profit. The metaphors refer to the same essential activity- sharing the wealth we have in Christ for the benefit of our brethren. To cut them off, waste their energy and attention with empty arguments and pedantic concerns, ignore them... is to not trade the talents, to be unfaithful.

*You have been faithful over a few things-* The equivalent parable in Lk. 19:17 says "in a very little" (*elachistos*). This very same word is found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated "the least" of the Lord's brethren (25:40,45). The talents we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the "few things", and how we shall be given "many things" to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centred merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord's work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally.

*So I will set you over-* The preceding parable says that we have already been made ruler in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord's goods (24:47). We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to be prepared for eternity.

*Many things-* The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. "Many things" is equivalent to "all His goods" (24:47; Lk. 12:44). There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

*Enter into-* This is *eis-erchomai*, and is the Lord's confirmation of how the servant responded to the call to come to Him by 'coming' to Him, *pros-*

*erchomai* (:20). Once again we meet the teaching that our initial response at the Lord's return, our willing desire to go to Him, will be confirmed by Him bringing us closer to Him. The same word has just been used about the wise virgins 'going in' to the wedding (25:10) having initially responded to the call without delay. The same word is used of Noah entering the ark (24:38), and these parables in chapter 25 appear to be an expansion upon that.

*The joy of your Lord-* The joy of the Lord Jesus as revealed in His own teaching is specifically His joy at the repentance of others. He speaks of Himself as the shepherd rejoicing over the lost sheep (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:5) and the repentance of any sinner (Lk. 15:7), at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32), joyful that the disciples believed in Him (Jn. 11:15), joyful at finding the believers in the world (Mt. 13:44). The reasons for the Lord's joy were all related to the salvation and spiritual blessing of *others*. He went on to say soon afterwards that His joy was to become the joy of the disciples even in this life (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). This will ultimately happen at the point of entry into the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but the essence of it is to begin now. And it can indeed begin now, if the Lord's joy at others' repentance, growth and salvation becomes *our* joy, and our joy is no longer in ourselves and material things. There is also here a Joseph allusion- "They were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.

25:22 *And also he that had received the two talents came and said: Lord, you gave me two talents. Look, I have gained another two talents-* Paul uses the same word for "received" in 1 Cor. 4:7: "For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?". All that we have spiritually including the knowledge of the Lord Jesus in truth, is a gift we received. And yet we can easily act as if we did not receive it, suggesting instead that we found the Lord ourselves by our own searching. Many people have a spiritual search all their lives and never find much if anything. What we have got is a gift we received, and we must ever be humbled by that.

25:23 *His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things-* The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).



*So I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord!*- The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done... enter into the joy of your Lord". The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "you, enter into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things He reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" sounds like the Lord may have to encourage us to get over our weeping, and enter into the sheer joy which He has, that we've finally made it. "*Come...!!* You blessed of my Father! Enter the Kingdom...!" sounds like something similar. Now all these things are highly emotional. Yet we will have God's nature. He therefore has the same kind of emotional capabilities as we will have. And, He exercises them right now.

*25:24 And also he that had received the one talent came and said-* The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

*Lord-* The man considers himself one of the Lord's servants, within the household. He clearly felt he had been given too little to do anything much with; but actually the talent was worth around 1 million \$, or 20 years' wages. He didn't appreciate the greatness of what he had been given.

*I knew you-* In reality, he didn't know his Lord. For those who 'know the Lord' will be saved, and it is the unbelieving world who do not know Him (s.w. Jn. 17:3,25). Because that isn't at all how the Lord is (hard, unreasonable, etc.). But the Lord doesn't correct the false understanding, thereby justifying Himself. Rather does He [as so often] reason with the man upon the basis of the man's professed belief system. We see this so often in the Lord's teaching style, and in the way the Gospels use the language of demons. Error is not baldly exposed and corrected, rather are those who believe it worked with according to their understandings, and gently brought to a realization that those views are unhelpful and not the correct reality. The focus, therefore, was upon people, upon the persons holding the ideas, rather than the error of the ideas in themselves. And

this has much to teach us; for so many Protestant groups have become obsessed with exposing intellectual error for its own sake; whereas our focus must be upon the individuals who hold those misbeliefs.

*Are a hard man-* The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

*Reaping where you did not sow-* The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19:13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he 'knows' [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has 'known' [*eido*- which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress

His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son-who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being 'You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates'. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured...". The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

*And gathering where you did not scatter seed-* The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord 'reaps' or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him a talent, 20 years' wages, \$1 million. And yet the man

reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and showered with all spiritual blessings... can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

25:25- see on Mt. 25:14.

*And I was afraid*- Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25). Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

*And went away and hid your talent in the earth*- Just as Achan did, hoping that what was not his would somehow become his in time. In line with our earlier suggestions that the man was alluding to the Lord's words, one wonders if here he has in mind the Lord's teaching about the Kingdom as

treasure hid in a field [i.e. in the ground] which must be found (13:44). Of course, it's terribly out of context. But that's the way so many people use the Lord's words, as if sharing the same lexical items with Him somehow adds legitimacy to their doing just precisely what *they* want to do- rather than serving Him. The Lord Jesus was the man of 13:44 who sold all that He had to buy / redeem the field in which the treasure was buried. By returning the treasure into the earth, the man was effectively undoing the work of the Lord on the cross; for the field is the world (13:38), and the price of the field's redemption was the Lord's blood. But by laziness and a vague hope that the wealth would by default become his own, the Lord's work on the cross was undone for this man. The connection with 13:44 is surely purposeful.

*Here, have what is yours-* So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his talent, but buried it and returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Lo, there You have what is Yours" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn't ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn't spend it on himself, he wasn't like the prodigal son. But too late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You* have what *belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. Thus the other two servants speak somewhat differently, of the talents which had been "delivered" to them. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation. See on :29 *Taken away*.

Perhaps we have never seriously thought of being generous to someone else [even if it's a few pennies from our poverty]; of actively telling an acquaintance about the Gospel; of doing acts of kindness for someone 'out of the blue', thinking up something nice for them which will make them feel 'Wow!'; doing mission work; reconciliation with our enemies; seeing beyond our immediate emotions of hurt, pleasure, anger, passion. When we step out in faith and do these things, we start living a totally new kind of life. We find God setting us up with situations, working with and through us- and we feel it. We will see beyond the steely silence of the skies to know the reality of Angelic existence. One of my favourite Bible stories is that of Elisha and his frightened servant. Elisha asks God to open the man's eyes so that he might see the Angelic armies surrounding them; Elisha [and I so love this] didn't ask for his own eyes to be opened to see them; he was so certain they were there.

*25:26 But his lord answered and said to him: You wicked and slothful servant-* The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" of 25:26 does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, his laziness [AV "slothful"], meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity,

'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

*You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter seed-* See on :24 *I knew you*. There are different words used. Here, *eido* means more 'to see'. The Lord's response could actually be translated as a question: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow...?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

25:27 *You should-* Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that... is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. "Oughtest", *dia*, means you must have, you had to- very possession of the talent meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers. I have often pondered what we are to learn in our generation from the strict statement that males without the ability to procreate were barred from the Lord's congregation during the Old Covenant (Dt. 23:1). Perhaps the point is that all those who are the Lord's people must recognize their ability to procreate for Him, in the bringing forth of yet others in their Lord's image.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of

course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something*! Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

*Have deposited my money with the bankers-* The Lord probably means that the man should have done at least something, putting the money into "the bank" (Lk.), doing something effortless [in line with his lazy character], but at least doing something. And yet just possibly the Lord may also have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mes'ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

*So that on my return I would have collected my own money with interest-* The Lord will *receive* or collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He



fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

Lk. 19:23 says at this point that the Lord will "require" of us our use of wealth (Lk. 19:23). The man who did nothing with his pound should have at least lent it out on usury, the Lord said- even though this was illegal according to Moses. He should have done at least *something* with his money, even if it involved taking a lower level of service than the Lord ideally expects. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our achievements at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord.

"My own money" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all*. This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God? Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, in this life, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.*

25:28 *So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents-* The faithful will have enough self-knowledge to be able to say:

'You gave me these basic doctrines and these characteristics to develop with them, and I can now present you with this...'. That part of the character and mind of Christ which was given to the unfaithful servant to develop is taken away and given to the faithful. The unfaithful receive the riches of Christ but do nothing with them; they don't let them impact their character.

The man having ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours" (:25). The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. Yet words like 'achievement' are almost dirty words in the vocabulary of grace which some insist on. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

*25:29 For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance-* This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

*But from him that has not, even what he has shall be taken away-* This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have talents, or not? He did, of course, have a talent; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused talent that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the talent- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the talent as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours" (:25). The Lord intended that we identify with the talent, rather than see it merely as His. See on :25 *You have what is yours*.

25:30 *And cast out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There, shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth-* Unless we are going to actually achieve something for the Lord, then we are unprofitable. But of course the same words for "unprofitable servant" are found in Lk. 17:10- after we have "done all" that we could, we are to recognize that we are still in this category of "unprofitable servant". Salvation itself is still by grace. The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word "*charis*", usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" there (Lk. 17:9). The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become slaves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

25:31

In Mt. 25:31-46 we have a parable depicting the last judgment, where the Lord sits as judge and we come before Him. Usually, a person comes before a judge regarding things which they have committed wrongly. But our expectations, which are set up by the story of a judge and people coming before him in judgment, are shattered. The issues the people are judged about aren't acts of commission. It's all about what they *omitted* to do, continuing the theme of the preceding parable of the talents, which concludes with the one talent man being condemned for what he omitted to do. We tend to be all so freaked out about our committed sins, rather than realizing the tremendous importance the Lord attaches to our *omissions* of acts of kindness and thoughtful love, and perceiving the image of Christ in our brethren. It's rather like how Paul starts writing to the Corinthians. He doesn't start as we might have done with their gross immorality, false doctrine, perversion of the Lord's supper into a drunken orgy [although he comes to those things]... rather, he

begins with and spends most time discussing their lack of love, their divisiveness etc.

It is worth observing the very simple fact that the New Testament is essentially a missionary document- all the expressions and articulations of doctrine / theology found there are all in the context of the preaching of the Gospel and the immediate problems of men and women in responding to it. This is why we aren't given a cold statement of faith or catechism in the New Testament, but rather the history of the mission of Christ at its first beginning. Even parables like that of Mt. 25:31-46 were relevant in a missionary context- regarding the perils of not supporting the itinerant missionaries in the first century. And this is why the power of the early Christian witness lay in who they were- for this was the real advertisement for the doctrine they preached.

*But when the Son of Man shall come in his glory-* A clear allusion to Dan. 7:13, which is interpreted later in Daniel 7 as referring to the coming of Jesus with the accepted believers with Him. There is a sense in which we will be involved with judging others; thus the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the day of judgment (Mt. 12:41). In this case, the judgment of the nations could be a judgment of people from all nations concerning how they have treated the faithful who were recently under tribulation in all nations. This would make good sense of the allusion to Joel 3:2 "I will gather all nations... into judgment" which we have in :32. The nations gathered to judgment in Armageddon or at least, in Israel somewhere, would then be judged according to how they have treated God's people. However, the stubborn problem for this interpretation is the reward given to some of these unbelievers- eternal life in the Kingdom just for helping God's people under persecution. Such salvation is surely predicated upon faith in Christ, rather than the doing of good works.

*And all the Angels with Him-* If all the Angels accompany the Lord Jesus and relocate from Heaven to earth, then we can better understand why the Kingdom of God on earth is described as "the Kingdom of Heaven". The future Kingdom of God seems to involve Heaven, including God Himself, ultimately, descending from Heaven to earth. This is certainly the scene presented in the final chapters of Revelation.

*Then he shall sit on the throne of his glory-* The Lord's throne is the restored throne of David, in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called the throne of God's glory (Jer. 14:21, and Mt. 23:22 may have the same reference), and the Lord's glory is ultimately God's glory. But His glory is ultimately His character and personality- God's revelation of His glory to Moses was the revelation of His Name and character. Yet the Son attained that glory through His own perfectly God-like character, and this is the basis upon which He shall be enthroned as King of the cosmos. There is surely here also a reference to Zech. 6:13, where the Messianic "Branch" sits upon a

throne of glory and rebuilds the temple. But that prophecy was clearly intended to have had a fulfilment in Zerubbabel's intended rebuilding of the temple when the exiles returned. But the exiles who returned, and their leadership especially, dropped the baton. The intended temple outlined in Ezekiel 40-48 was not built by them. And so the prophecy was rescheduled in fulfilment. Not every detail needs to be literally fulfilled [e.g. the rebuilding of a temple], but the essence will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ to earth. The Lord spoke of how the disciples would sit with Him in His throne of glory (Rev. 3:21), judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). This would support our earlier suggestion that the Son of Man coming in judgment is in fact a picture of the Lord Jesus along with the faithful coming in judgment. This is why there are thrones [plural] of judgment (Rev. 20:4). The contrast is with the man of sin, who at that time will also be sitting upon a throne in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4 s.w.); the Lord Jesus shall come and depose him.

25:32 *And before Him*- *Emprosthen* could just as well mean 'against' Him, referring to the gathering of the nations against Christ which is spoken of in Joel 3, Zechariah 14 and Psalm 2. But the sense is likely the more obvious one, of being gathered in front of Him.

*Shall be gathered*- See on :31 *The Son of Man shall come in his glory*. This is a figure used about the gathering of individuals to judgment and both to condemnation and salvation (3:12; 13:30; 24:28; Jn. 15:6 "men gather them and cast them into the fire"; "bring / gather here, and slay them before Me", Lk. 19:27). And yet right now the gathering is going on as the net of Gospel preaching gathers in people (13:47; 22:10; the fragments are gathered that no man be lost, Jn. 6:12, the other sheep are brought / gathered into the fold, Jn. 10:16). Our first steps in responding to the Gospel call are in fact our first steps towards meeting the Lord at judgment. The Lord has just been falsely accused of gathering where He did not sow, and therefore I suggest that those gathered are those from all nations who have received the seed of the Kingdom message. When we are called to judgment, the immediacy of our response will be a summary of how we have progressively responded to that call to go to Jesus. But the word for 'gather' is used extensively by the Lord in this section of His teaching. The one talent man has complained that the Lord is unreasonably gathering him to judgment (25:24), and the Lord now goes on to say that indeed people from all nations will be gathered to Him. And He goes further to say that the basis of acceptability with Him is whether we 'gathered' [AV "took me in"] *Him* in this life, when He was manifested to us in the least of His brethren (:35,38). Again we see the idea of mutuality. We gather Him, He gathers us. And this will be literally, visibly manifest in that when the call comes, those who voluntarily, immediately gather towards Him will be confirmed in that by being snatched away towards Him, and will thereby

come with Him in glory to His throne (1 Thess. 4:16,17). The nations will gather themselves together against Christ at the last day (Rev. 16:14,16; Psalm 2, s.w. Acts 4:26).

*All the nations-* Frequently, New Testament references to "all men" really means "all true believers" or those who have become responsible to God. Hebrews 2:14 states that Christ killed the devil (the power of sin) on the cross; but this is only true for those in Christ. Those who are ignorant of the saving power of God's Truth are under the active control of sin- the Biblical devil. Revelation 20:5 speaks of "the dead" as those responsible to judgment, whereas many other Bible passages show that not all the dead will be raised. Only those who have heard the Gospel will be resurrected to judgment. Thus "the dead" in God's usage does not refer to everyone who has ever died. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 speaks of "the dead" as those in Christ. Matthew 25:32 describes "all nations" coming before Christ for judgment. This indicates that to God, the world He sees is comprised of those who are responsible to Him; not literally "all nations" will come before Christ, only those people from them who are responsible to Him. We must surely read in an ellipsis here, 'People from all nations', because the Gospel will have gone to all nations before the Lord returns (24:14). The great commission to take the Gospel to all nations (28:19 s.w.) will finally have been fulfilled. Knowledge of the Gospel is the basis of accountability to judgment, and that fact alone means that if people from all nations come to judgment, then the Gospel must have gone to all nations; the believers [spiritual Israel] will be persecuted in all nations (24:9 s.w.) at the same time as Jews [natural Israel] are lead away captive into all nations (Lk. 21:24) and this likely will be the basis of our witness to all nations, just as the early church needed persecution to make them take the Gospel to the Gentiles. If we do that now in this day of opportunity, maybe that final persecution by "all nations" will be unnecessary. The whole scenario could have been allowed a first century fulfilment in that Jews from all nations were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:5 s.w.), but clearly they did not return home and take the Gospel further to the Gentiles of literally all nations. it took Peter until the Cornelius incident to realize that people from literally all nations could be accepted (Acts 10:35 s.w. "all nations"), but the church generally struggled with that understanding. Rev. 14:6 explains that only in the last days will the Gospel go to all nations, during the tribulation period; only when God's judgments are revealed in maybe literally the very last days before the Lord's coming will people from "all nations" come to Him (Rev. 15:4).

*And he shall separate them-* The separation between sheep and goats is not, therefore, ultimately visible now. Mt. 13:49 uses the same word to describe how "the Angels" shall do this work of separation. And yet the

essence of separation does go on in this life, insofar as men "shall separate [s.w.] you from their company" (Lk. 6:22; Acts 19:9). The final judgment will be a confirmation of processes which have been ongoing in our lives today. Likewise, separating ourselves from our brethren as Peter did in weakness due to political pressures (Gal. 2:12 s.w.) is effectively separating ourselves from the sheep, and placing ourselves with the goats. Significantly, the only other occurrence of the phrase "from one another" is in Acts 15:39, where Paul and Barnabas "departed asunder the one from the other". The Greek translated "separate" in these passages means to set a boundary, a limit. And in this lies the danger of the misuse of Statements of Faith and legalistic fellowship boundaries. Any drawing of a line in the wrong place can lead to our condemnation, so it's better to be open to all our brethren.

*One from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats-* Sheep and goats were similar looking. The sheep of the first century would typically have been dirty and with dark patches, making it possible to separate them from goats only by an experienced shepherd who knew his flock. The point may have been that from a distance, sheep and goats looked quite similar. The Lord Jesus was the shepherd during His ministry, and commented that "I know My sheep" (Jn. 10:14). He knew who were the goats and who the sheep. But His judgment will only be made manifest in the last day. But the purpose of the last judgment is not, therefore, to gather information about us; for the judgment in essence is ongoing now as we live our lives before the shepherd of our souls.

The way the Lord speaks of dividing the sheep from the goats and not vice versa could suggest that there are far fewer sheep compared to goats (Mt. 25:32). This would imply that the majority of those who are responsible are in the goat category. The word used for 'goat' here strictly means a kid, and the purpose of the division may well have been because the goats were to be killed for meat.

25:33 *And he shall set-* Gk. 'to stand'.

*The sheep on his right hand-* The paradox is that seeing the Lord will be facing the people, His right hand is their left hand. Those who place themselves at His left hand from their perspective, those who condemn themselves, are thereby on His right hand, and saved. The Lord Himself was rewarded with a place on the right hand (of the Father), and He shares that reward with His people by likewise placing them on the right hand.

*And the goats on the left-* The Greek *euo-numos* means literally the good named or good omended. The Greeks understood the left hand as being

the side of good fortune. The Lord turned this idea upside down. His culture is radically different to that of the world.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Matt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

25:34 *Then*- If indeed the Lord comes to judgment with the faithful with Him (in line with the allusions to the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the faithful saints, coming in judgment), then we would have a chronological problem- if the sheep here represent the responsible from all ages standing before Him. We note too that He speaks to them of "the least of these My brethren" (:40), as if His brethren are standing somehow in another group. These considerations have led some to think that the



group now being judged are those who have ministered to the Lord's people during their final tribulation. The nakedness, being in prison etc. is exactly the language of persecution found in Rom. 8:35. But I think this is unnecessary, and this suggestion in turn raises problems when analysed further- for will unbelievers in the world enter eternal life and the Kingdom simply on the basis of good works? And the whole language of gathering and separation [as demonstrated above] is elsewhere used about the judgment of all the responsible at the judgment seat of Christ. It seems to me that there is abundant evidence for a collapse of time and space at the period around the Lord's coming. This means that such chronological issues need not concern us. Another possibility is that there are various possible chronologies of events in the last days, and there may be different scenarios for the gathering and judgment of the Lord's people.

*The King shall say to those on his right hand: Come-* The invitation to come to Him is what we respond to now, in this life, in daily situations (11:28; 19:21; 22:4; Mk. 10:21 s.w.). The judgment seat will simply be a continuation of that principle. Perhaps "*Come*" suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, He will "make us" sit down at a table, and He will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph.

*Blessed of my Father-* The Greek means literally those who are praised. The Greek *eu-logeo* is literally those who are spoken well of. And this is exactly what the Lord proceeds to do. He praises the righteous, bewildered as they appear to be, for their good works. Righteousness is imputed to them. This connects with other New Testament pictures of the righteous being praised by the Father and Son at the last day.

These words are spoken collectively: "Come, ye (not 'thou', singular) blessed... ye [plural] gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw we thee an hungered...". Yet we know that there must be an individual judgment. These words sound as if we are all judged together, at the same time. Again, the reconciliation of this is in appreciating that the meaning of time will be collapsed. In similar vein, the rejected going off to try to get oil and then turning up later at the judgment (Mt. 25:10) probably describes a process that occurs in the

minds of the people, rather than something which occurs in real time- although it may *feel* like real time to them. The existence of these two groups at the judgment explains how the men of Nineveh and Sheba will "rise up in the judgment" and condemn the rejected Jews; if they are in the group of sheep facing the group of goats in which the faithless Jews will be. The wicked will walk naked, and the accepted believers will then see their shame (Rev. 16:15). The rejected will experience "shame and everlasting contempt" at the judgment (Dan. 12:2). Shame and contempt must be in the eyes of others- i.e. the group of 'sheep'?

"My Father" suggests that the King is therefore the Lord Jesus. Yet He judges as God because God has given Him authority to do this, because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

*Inherit the kingdom*- 'Be heirs of'. But we are right now "heirs of the Kingdom" (James 2:5 s.w.). What we are now by status will be realised in a more physical sense. Note that inheriting the Kingdom parallels inheriting the earth (5:5), inheriting eternal life (19:29), inheriting incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50), inheriting salvation (Heb. 1:14), inheriting the promises (Heb. 6:12) and "all things" (Rev. 21:7). In no way could these things have been inherited in AD70. These words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

*Prepared for you*- We each have a specific, unique role being prepared for us in eternity; and the process of that preparation is ongoing now, and is the reason for all our current experiences. This brief life prepares us for eternity, who and what we shall eternally be; this is why life is so intense now, even if at times it seems so repetitious. We prepare ourselves (Lk. 12:47 "that servant.... prepared not himself", "His wife has prepared herself", Rev. 19:7; 21:2 s.w.), and God works through this in preparing us. This perhaps explains the irregular dative translated "for you"- it could equally mean 'prepared *by* you'. The 'preparation' of God's people for that eternity was a major theme of John the Baptist, and it involved repentance (Lk. 1:76; 3:4). The cross was a major part in that preparation (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.); each of us was somehow represented in Christ then. We are now being "prepared unto good works" (2 Tim. 2:21)- which we shall eternally do. For the Kingdom of God will not be a passive state. We will be active in the good works for which we are now being prepared. I have made the point that the parables of Matthew 25 all address the issue of preparedness for the Lord's coming with which He concluded the Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24. He concluded it with an appeal to be "ready", the same word as "prepared" here (24:44). If we have this sense of being prepared for an eternity of service, then we will be prepared for His coming even though we don't know the day nor hour.

The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

*From the foundation of the world-* In a literal sense, perhaps, our unique genetic structure has been under preparation from the beginning. We were intended to be who we are and to do something specific for the Lord, to be someone unique, throughout eternity. For we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), our names / personalities written from the foundation of the world (Rev. 17:8).

25:35 *For I was hungry and you gave me to eat-* The Lord was hungry (21:18; Lk. 6:3), wanting to be satiated by fruit on the fig tree, the repentance of Israel.

*I was thirsty and you gave me drink-* The Lord was thirsty, and satiated by the food and drink of the Samaritan woman's interest in the Gospel (Jn. 4:13,14). She 'gave Him to drink' (Jn. 4:7); the same words are used here. And He thirsted on the cross (Jn. 19:28) and was 'given to drink'- the same words are used (Mk. 15:36). Hunger, thirst, prison and nakedness are all part of the sufferings of Gospel preachers (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27). It may be that Matthew is making this connection because he sought to remind his converts of the need to support the itinerant preachers who were going around reciting the Gospel of Matthew at his time. Further, the spread of the Gospel worldwide is one of the preconditions for the Lord's return, according to the preceding Olivet prophecy. And the point is being made that those who do this are to be supported.

The Lord's focus on the positive is shown by the way He quotes Job 22:7 in the parable of the sheep and goats: "Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry". These words are part of Eliphaz's erroneous allegations against Job- for Job was a perfect man, and not guilty on these counts. Yet the Lord extracts

elements of truth from those wrong words, rather than just contemptuously ignoring them. Likewise Job 22:25 speaks of God being our "treasure... our precious silver" (RV). Surely the Lord had this in mind when saying that our treasure must be laid up "in heaven", i.e. with God (for He often uses 'Heaven' for 'God'). And James follows suite by approvingly quoting Job 22:29 about the lifting up of the humble (James 4:6).

*A stranger I was a stranger and you welcomed me-* The Lord was buried in the place of "strangers" (27:7 s.w.); He was treated as a Gentile especially in His death on the cross. "Welcomed" is the same word translated "gathered" in :32. As they gathered Him, so He now gathers them.

25:36 *Naked-* The Lord Jesus was naked or at least without clothing on the cross.

*And you clothed Me-* As the believers clothed Him, so He will clothe them (Rev. 3:5; 7:9; 19:8; being clothed upon with immortality is definitely a picture of salvation). He will act spiritually to us, in terms of salvation, as we have acted materially to His brethren as they in their lives, as the body of Christ, experience various aspects of His life, sufferings and death.

*Sick-* Gk. 'weak'. "He was crucified in *weakness*... we also are *weak* in Him" (2 Cor. 13:4). His crucifixion 'weakness' is manifest in all who are in Him, part of His body. Both in His life and supremely in His death, the Lord carried our weakness / sickness (Mt. 8:17, quoting from the prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus in Isaiah 53). He fully shared in "our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15 s.w.) and was "compassed with infirmity / weakness" (Heb. 5:2 s.w.). Clearly the weakness / sickness of the Lord is to be found in all those in Him, and we are to minister to that as we would minister to Him personally.

1 Cor. 8:9 is one of several passages which warn us not to make "the weak" to stumble. There are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that we actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed, we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak. The Greek word translated "weak" usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the "sick" brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the "sick" brother in Mt. 25:36).

Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same word), we visit *him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother. Christ on the cross carried the sins of "the weak" (i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the "weak". In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are "weak" whilst the rest of us are "strong". Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

*And you visited Me-* The idea is not really to pop around to someone's house or hospital ward. The idea really is of identity, with a view to salvation. Thus God visited us in Christ to save us (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 "God has visited His people"; Acts 15:14 God "visited the Gentiles to take out a people"; Heb. 2:6 "what is man that You visit him"). This is the 'visiting' in view. As He ultimately 'visits' us to save, crossing the huge distance between God and man to do so, likewise we are to 'visit' our brethren. Again, what we do materially for those in Christ is a reflection of what He spiritually does for us. This is to be the motivation; to perceive that their poverty, their imprisonment, all of which may be their fault, is a reflection of our spiritual need and poverty, as we like them miss chance after chance to pull ourselves out of our poverty, and fall down too easily into survival and coping mechanisms that bind us to our poverty. And we are to show the same compassionate care to them as the Lord does to

us.

*I was in prison and you came to me-* Prison is a metaphor for where sin and spiritual debt leads us. We are all hopelessly in spiritual debt and therefore in the debtors' prison (18:30). The Gospel which saves us is of freedom for the spiritual prisoners. And we are to reflect that experience in visiting others in prison, even if it is their fault they are there, just as it's our fault that we too are imprisoned spiritually. And "prison" was understood by Peter as a fair description of the Lord's sufferings, "to prison and to death" (Lk. 22:33). In His death, the Lord went to the "spirits in prison", He was with them / us there (1 Pet. 3:19). But "prison" wasn't necessarily understood as a building with "Prison" written on it. Legion was 'bound', imprisoned, with fetters (Lk. 8:29 s.w.); and yet still free. Likewise Paul was 'bound' or 'imprisoned' to a soldier (Acts 28:16 s.w.). The Lord's binding could therefore be fairly understood as an imprisonment. And He was imprisoned at least for 24 hours before His death. The wonder of all this is that those imprisoned even by the effect of their own sin are thus still fellowshiping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings; and we are to minister to them as we would have done to Christ on the cross. Would we not have rushed to provide something in response to His plea "I thirst"? Of course. But we are to do so in response to the need of His brethren. Even "the least" of them, who are suffering for their sins.

So we can say that hunger, thirst, being a stranger, naked, weak and imprisoned are all things which the Lord experienced during His life and especially in His death. His brethren, His body, share His sufferings. We are to minister to them as we would have done were we there beholding the sufferings of Christ on the cross. We should emerge from such 'beholding', as we do it at the memorial meeting, practically resolving to reflect it to His brethren. And we are the more motivated by realizing that all those situations of hunger, thirst, imprisonment, weakness and nakedness are in fact metaphors for our own spiritual poverty, which the Lord through the cross responded to, in utter grace. As He has done spiritually to us, so we are to do, spiritually and materially, to others. All those symptoms of poverty are often (although far from always) the result of mismanagement, weak motivation, unhealthy coping patterns, chronically missed chances... and yet in spiritual terms, those things are the story of our lives. In the materially poor we see exact reflections of ourselves, of our spiritual poverty and failures. As the Lord has graciously responded to us in our weakness and self-inflicted poverty, so we are to do so to His people.

*25:37 Then the righteous shall answer him, saying: Lord-* The parable implies the day of judgment will be such a surprise. Both righteous and wicked will find that they are criticized and commended for things which surprise them. There are several indications that because of this, the

rejected will begin to argue back with Christ (e.g. Mt. 7:22), until eventually they realize their errors, stop speaking (Mt. 22:12) and gnash their teeth in anger against themselves (Mt. 22:13). This should truly be a sobering thought to us all. We must strive, really, to examine ourselves, to know ourselves, to try to see our motives and actions a little more from God's perspective; because it is His perspective, not ours, which is ultimately important; and it is this lesson which the day of judgment will ultimately teach each of us.

*When did we see you hungry and fed you? Or thirsty and gave you drink?*- "See", *eido*, means effectively 'to know'. The Lord has just used the same word in warning that He will have to tell the foolish virgins "I know you not" (:12). Here He explains that this is in fact because they knew *Him* not, in that they didn't recognize His brethren. To not recognize His brethren means that He will not recognize us. It becomes crucial, therefore, to recognize the Lord's brethren- and upholding a statement of faith as a basis of brotherhood seems to be a sure way *not* to do that. Such a system may work well in secular life, but in spiritual terms, we end up creating fellowship boundaries which effectively treat others as not the Lord's brethren because we do not recognize them as *our* brethren, seeing they fail to meet some curious criteria of theology or practice.

One major characteristic of the judgment will be *surprise*- for both rejected and accepted (Mt. 25:37,44). Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44). The judgment will be a surprise for all. The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee... wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank?". The rejected are to be cut in two, shown as the two faced hypocrites which they were. But the idea of cutting in two was immediately associated in the Jewish mind with making a covenant. When Abraham placed the sacrifices in two parts and the Lord passed between them, the idea was really that God would cut in two the man who broke the covenant. Hence the Jews spoke of 'cutting a covenant'. Those who have made the covenant with God but not kept it will be cut in two, as they initially agreed. God will keep His side of the covenant.

We need to observe that the goats are rejected not so much for their lack of actions, but for failing to discern Christ in the least of His brethren. Then, the rejected will finally see their good works in context. They will realize how little works really meant. The faithful already knew that- for

they objected when the Lord told them all the good things they had done. The list of works in Mt. 25:35,36 include the following: giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, a bed to the homeless, help to the sick. Yet these are the very things which Job claims he had done, when he clears himself from all his accusers (Job 31:17-20). But the voice in the whirlwind soon reduced him to realize "I am vile"; all his good works became as filthy rags before the supremacy of salvation by grace alone. The connection with the parable isn't merely incidental. Surely the Lord is saying that the self-righteous in the ecclesia may seem as righteous as Job was before his conversion; but they must either in this life realize the totality of grace, or the whirlwind of judgment condemnation will reduce them to the same realization. Job seems to oscillate between believing and not believing in the resurrection (consider Job 14:7-15). At the end, Job confesses he has not spoken the right things; and Yahweh then says that he has only spoken that which was right. The friends likewise said some true things and some false things; and yet because they did not repent, their bad words were remembered against them. The final revealing of Yahweh in Job was some kind of judgment day for all concerned. Job, the righteous, had only his good deeds and words remembered; whereas the wicked friends had only their bad words remembered. It seems it will take a while for the penny to drop for the rejected- that they're "out", and actually never were "in". This Jesus, in whose presence they had broken bread (although note the difference between this and Jesus breaking bread with us, Lk. 13:26 cp. Mt. 26:29), actually doesn't know them. The Lord has to repeat the very same words twice to the rejected: "I know not whence you are" (Lk. 13:25,27)- as if they are dumbfounded and slow to comprehend the eternal implications of His words.

The righteous gave to the poor, the sick, the hungry- without even realizing they had done it. They will confidently deny it when Jesus points it all out to them. They served with no expectation of reward; so much so that they even forgot what they did. And every one who is accepted at the judgment, all the sheep, will have been like that. Giving without any thought of getting anything back is a *must* for all of us who seek to truly manifest God: for this is exactly what He does and has done, minute by minute, down through the millennia of indifferent, unresponsive human history (Lk. 6:35,36). The accepted will feel so certain of all this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly,



genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

There is surely an intended contrast between the accepted denying the righteous acts that the Lord reminds them of, and their telling Him how much they have gained (spiritually) by trading (Mt. 25:37-39 cp. 20,22). These quite different attributes of the accepted are recorded within the same speech of the Lord. He frames those parables as if He is getting over global lessons rather than describing the response of different people. Perhaps the point is that first of all, the accepted feel as if they have done no righteous acts, and feel their unworthiness so strongly that they even dare to genuinely disagree with the Lord's praise of them. But then they come to accept themselves as He sees them, and later on in the judgment dialogue, He teases out of them a realistic self-assessment of their spiritual growth. There is a similar intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 4 cp. 25).

*25:38 And when did we see you as a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and clothed you?*- They were commendably unaware that they had done these things. Or perhaps the focus is upon the word "You". Their genuine surprise is because they had never realized the degree to which their actions to their brethren were done directly to their Lord.

*25:39 And when did we see you sick, or in prison and came to you?*- The parable of the sheep and goats clearly suggests that after the judgment, the worthy and unworthy will be in two distinct groups to the right and left hand side of the Lord. The group of "sheep" then enter the Kingdom all together, at the same moment. This explains how the Lord will address the faithful and unfaithful as groups (note "ye" in Mt. 25:37,39); how the men of Nineveh stand together in a group, as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will (Mt. 12:41; Mk. 6:11). In some way, there will be a collective sense at the day of judgment, as well as an individual one. If there will be a collective sense then, before the presence of His glory... there ought to be now.

At judgment day, the Lord will commend the righteous for feeding Him etc.- and they will reply in genuine surprise, feeling that they truly have *not* done any of those things for which He commends them. The point is, their way of life was an unconscious doing of good; it is the mindset which legalistically remembers every act of righteousness which will be finally rejected.

*25:40 And the King-* The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way he speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth). This indicates that the Lord wishes to put before us the picture of those who have been called to the Kingdom but reject His offer.

*Shall answer and say to them-* They answer to Him (:37), and He likewise to them.

*Truly I say to you, inasmuch-* The Greek suggests an exact correspondence. Whatever is done to the Lord's brethren is done to Him. This is the point of the Lord's teaching. He is not simply saying that if we do good practical works we shall be saved, and if we don't, then we shall not be. He is saying that it is what is done or not done *to Him* which is significant. So the point of the teaching is an appeal to recognize and serve His brethren, rather than to simply do good works. The rejected of Mt. 7:22 "*did* many wonderful works"- and the same word is used here, "*you did it* unto one of the least of these my brothers". It's not so much works that are being appealed for, as recognition of the Lord in His brethren. It's the same word used in :16 for the faithful man who 'made' talents for his Lord. The making of talents is therefore parallel with serving the Lord's brethren. It's also the word used in 24:46 [which introduces the parables of chapter 25]- the watching servant will be found 'doing' care for his brethren.

*As you did it to one of these my brothers-* This word may seem superfluous until we realize that 'one of the least of these' is an invitation to look at the group of sheep and focus upon any one of the faces. This is a unique insight into the day of judgment. We are enabled to imagine ourselves there. The Lord is inviting us to imagine the colossal importance of perceiving Him in His brethren, and treating them as Him. If only this principle were understood in church life now, the church would be a beacon of light in this world's darkness. All rejection, spitefulness, hard speaking against other believers... would disappear. We are to treat others in Christ as if they were Him. And that is the basis of our acceptance or rejection.

*Even the least, you did it to me-* See on :34 *Then*. The 'little ones' in the Lord's earlier teaching are believers in Him (10:40-42; 18:6,10,14). 10:42 is strikingly similar: "And whoever gives one of these *little ones* even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward". The least of the Lord's brethren refer to His disciples, and not to needy humanity generally. The purpose of the parable is to continue the theme of watchfulness which began at the end of chapter 24. There the Lord taught that watchfulness and readiness for His return will be achieved by feeding the household, and

here that is defined in terms of practical care for His brethren. Careful reflection on the parable surely indicates that the Lord doesn't condemn people for not doing acts of kindness; that would be salvation by works. Rather is the basis of their condemnation whether or not they perceived the Christ in the least of the Christ's brethren. The Lord's point is that things were done or not done *to Him*. If He meant 'If you feed the hungry, you're a sheep; if you don't, you're a goat', He would have expressed it otherwise. He's not teaching salvation by works, but rather the crucial importance of perceiving Himself in His brethren and not denying their connection with Him. This lifts the whole issue to a far more personal and demanding level than doing a few acts of kindness to needy folks.

The 'least' of the Lord's brethren are those who are spiritually weak. The "least in the Kingdom" are those who break commandments and teach others so (5:19 s.w.); Paul felt "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9 s.w.), "the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8 s.w.). The parable describes those on whom the righteous expend effort as sick, hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, in prison: *every one of which* is a description used elsewhere in Scripture concerning our spiritually weak state. Therefore the parable is teaching that one of the grounds upon which we will be rejected or accepted relates to how we have treated spiritually weak brethren. The wondrous, wondrous thing is that the Lord of glory identifies himself with the spiritually *weakest* of his brethren: and structures his judgment seat around how others have behaved towards them. Yet the description of "the least" brethren exactly match the Lord's own experience in His death- one who is imprisoned (Mt. 26:50), sick (Mt. 27:26), naked (Mt. 27:35), thirsty (Mt. 26:29; 27:48), friendless like a stranger (Mt. 26:56). In responding to "the least" of the Lord's brethren, we are responding to His cross. For our brethren, in their poverty, nakedness and imprisonment, are fellowshiping the sufferings of their Lord.

As He says "Of these", we imagine a nod towards the crowd of sheep, with an invitation to focus upon "one" of those faces. There will be a public element to the judgment process. This is why the rejected shall walk naked and have their shame seen by others (Rev. 16:15). The purpose of judgment is to teach us all, to prepare us for eternity together as we behold each other's lives revealed and perceive the same patterns of God's amazing grace. This is why hypocrisy is pointless; we shall then be revealed for who we really are before all.

25:41 *Then he shall also say to them on the left hand: You who are cursed, depart from me-* The same word has just been used about the foolish virgins when they were told to "Go [s.w. 'depart']" to buy more oil (:9). The rejected will be told: "Depart from me" (Lk. 13:27); and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13).

Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. here in Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

*To the perpetual fire which is prepared for the Devil and his messengers*—Clearly alluding to the Gehenna myth. This is a phrase taken straight from Jewish apocalyptic thinking and literature. It was the worst category of punishment conceivable in Judaism. And yet Jesus in the context is talking of the way that religious people who claim to believe in Him will not go unpunished for ignoring the needs of their poor brethren. This all too easy to commit sin... The Lord uses Judaism's toughest language to condemn. But this doesn't mean that He actually believed in the literal existence of either "eternal fire" nor a personal Devil. The Devil's angels are those who ignore their needy brethren. It's a powerful and telling juxtapositioning of ideas by the Lord Jesus. The warning that the wicked will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil (Mt. 25:41) was referring to the apocryphal fate of supposedly 'wicked angels' as recorded in 1 Enoch 54. The references to Tartarus and sinful angels in 2 Peter and Jude are also clear references to wrong beliefs which were common in Jewish apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings. These wrong ideas—and they *are* wrong—are not corrected directly, but rather a moral lesson is drawn from the stories. This is the point of the allusion to them; but there is no explicit correction of these myths in the first instance. It is the Angels of Jesus, and not of the Devil, who punish the wicked (Mt. 13:42–50). A wresting of Scripture to make out that the Devil is the tormentor of the wicked simply runs in straight contradiction to these plain statements of the Lord Jesus.

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). Their condemnation, the nature of their punishment, will have been specifically "prepared" for them (Mt. 25:41). The bitter self-hatred and ineffable regret of the rejected will be their punishment; and in accordance with the specific, personal way they mistreated and neglected God's Truth in this life, so they will mentally torture themselves. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16).

25:44 *Then they shall also answer, saying: Lord*—The figures of judgment can be taken literally to an extent. However, the actual process will be slightly different for each of us. Thus for some, Christ gives his verdict immediately and then discusses it with them (Mt. 25:33,34,41). Others

are apparently given the reasons for the verdict first, and then explicitly told the verdict (Mt. 25:27). Others tell the Lord of their spirituality and are then told his comment (Mt. 25:20). Others don't realize the spiritual growth they've achieved (Mt. 25:37), others see it quite clearly (Lk. 19:16). To some, Jesus speaks first; in other cases, the believer starts the dialogue (Mt. 25:41-44 cp. 11,12,24-26). Some sense their rejection coming and plead to be let in to the Kingdom (Mt. 25:11,12); others complain at their Lord's apparent unfairness, as if they're sorry, but they just have to make their point to him (Mt. 25:44).

The Lord points out their failings, then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44). There is an intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected within the Lord's parables of judgment in Mt. 25; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 44 cp. 25). According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9). Adam likewise began by answering back, blaming the woman and the fact God gave her to him (Gen. 3:12). So they go through three mood swings: 'Lord, Lord', assuring Him they have never omitted to serve Him (Mt. 25:44), then a more bitter feeling that He is unreasonable (Mt. 25:25), and now a desperate begging for mercy.

*When did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?*- This is the word commonly used about people ministering to Jesus, and the ministering women at the cross. Again the point is established that the language used about ministrations to the historical Jesus is applied to ministration to the least of His brethren. The shock of both sheep and goats reflects their shock at the degree to which their brethren really had been the very same as the Lord Jesus. The parable suggests that we shall never in this life appreciate the degree to which He perceives His brethren as Himself, and our actions to them are our actions to Him. Any exclusion or spitefulness towards them is directly felt as action against Him. The thought of not ministering unto the crucified Christ is unthinkable, and is so clearly expressed by the goats in their denial of having been guilty of this. And yet to ignore our brethren who are part of Christ, who are Him to us, is to do the same. We wish to minister to the Lord in His time of need. But He is not here personally. And yet effectively He is, insofar as His brethren are His body, and are right before our eyes.

*25:45 Then he shall answer them, saying: Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these least, you did not do it to me-* See on :40 *The least.*

Many of those who ungraciously storm out of fellowship with the rest of the body, do so because they complain that other believers are weak, unloving, hypocrites, don't practice what they preach etc. And in many ways, their complaints are true (seeing that the Lord came to heal those who need a doctor rather than shake hands with the healthy). And again, Paul has a comment on this situation. He says that those parts of our bodies "that seem to be weaker... that we think are less honourable... the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty... with special honour" (NIV). The private parts of our bodies are the parts we are most sensitive to, although on the outside they seem weak and hidden. And so Paul reasons that the weaker parts of the ecclesial body should be treated the same. The Greek for "feeble" (1 Cor. 12:21) is used (notably in Corinthians) to describe spiritual weakness: Mk. 14:38; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14. And in some ways, we are all "weak" (1 Cor. 1:27; 4:10). So those we perceive ("that seem to be... that we think") to be spiritually weak in their external appearance, we should be especially sensitive towards. Significantly, the "sick" (s.w. "feeble") in the parable of Mt. 25:44 are the "least" of Christ's brethren, the spiritually weakest; and at the day of judgment, the rejected are condemned because of their attitude towards these spiritually weakest of Christ's brethren. As John realized the tendency of some to think they could love God without loving His Sons, so Paul tackled the same problem at Corinth. He reasons that "the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee... if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if they were all one member, where were the body?" (1 Cor. 12:21). He knew that some would want to go off on their own, and he shows that such behaviour would suggest that they alone were the whole body. He knew that some would think that they had no need of other parts of the ecclesial body; he saw that some would feel that they were so inferior to others that they had no place in the body. All these are reasons why believers push off on their own. But notice that Paul doesn't actually say 'the eye *shouldn't* say to the hand, I have no need of thee'; but rather "the eye *cannot* say to the hand...". Although some may say or feel this, ultimately, from God's perspective, it's simply not valid. Christian disillusion with Christianity mustn't lead us to quit the body. The same logic applies to those who think that the body of Christ is divided; ultimately, there is one body, and from God's perspective this is indivisible. The divisions only exist in the minds of men. Those who say that they don't need fellowship with their brethren "cannot say" this, according to Paul. If they continue on this road, ultimately they declare themselves not of the one body of Christ; although I trust there are many brethren who have done just this who may still receive God's gracious salvation.

"Of these" suggests that the righteous are present and visible at the time of the verdict given to the goats. Again we see the public dimension to the judgment process.

A telling chronology is suggested by putting together a few Scriptures. The foolish virgins will knock on the door, as it were, and be told by the Lord "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12). Lk. 13:27 says that He tells the rejected *after* they have justified themselves to Him: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity". Mt. 7:22,23 describes a dialogue in which the rejected justify themselves by listing their good works, and the Lord will profess unto them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". All their good works He will see as works of sin, because they were not of faith. Mt. 25:41-45 gives more information: the rejected are told "Depart from me", but they argue back with self-justification, and then they are told that they had not shown love to the least of Christ's brethren, and are sent away to punishment.

25:46 *And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life-* After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the face, the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was (Gen. 4:14). Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27). We are invited to see worthy and unworthy walking away from the throne *into* different futures. The sheep will enter *into* the city (Rev. 22:14), *into* the temple (Rev. 15:8), *into* their rest (Heb. 4:11), *into* the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; Jn. 3:5; Lk. 18:24; Mt. 18:3); *into* life (Mk. 9:45; Mt. 18:9; 19:17); *into* the joy of Christ (Mt. 25:23).

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so, so unwillingly. The man who refuses to immediately respond to the Lord's call to service says that he must first *go away* from the Lord and bury his father (Mt. 8:21); the young man *went away* in sorrow (Mt. 19:22); people hear the Gospel and then *go away* to all their petty businesses of this life (Mt. 22:5). Those who couldn't handle the demanding Lord *went away* from Him (Jn. 6:66); and Judas *went away* of himself to hang himself (Mt. 27:5). He condemned himself. These are all the same words as in Mt. 25:46- those who of their own choice went away from the Lord now, although that isn't maybe how they saw it, will then go away from Him into condemnation. This point is made even within Mt. 25. The foolish virgins *went away* to buy oil- they didn't want to immediately go to their Lord (:10); the one talent man *went away* and buried his talent (:18,25). And then at

judgment day they again *go away from* the Lord (:46). Their going away from the Lord is simply being confirmed by Him.



## CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples-* The same rubric as in 19:1, suggesting that this was a way of dividing up the material to assist in memorization. The earliest converts would have memorized the good news preached to them by e.g. Matthew, and then the material was written up under inspiration as 'the Gospel of Matthew' which we now have.

26:2 *You know-* The knowledge can refer to both the subsequent clauses in the sentence. The Lord said that they knew that Passover was coming, and that He must be handed over to crucifixion. Yet the disciples did not 'know' of His crucifixion in that clearly they had shut their minds to it. And the Lord knew that. But He is still trying to get them to understand. His effort in teaching the disciples is admirable; we would likely have sought to focus solely upon personally getting through with the trauma of death over the next few days. But He perceived that His perfection involved love for His chosen to the end.

*That after two days the Passover comes, and the Son of Man will be-* A present tense, when we expect a future. The essence of the Lord's function as the Paschal lamb was lived out throughout His life. Perhaps the Lord used this unusual tense because He wanted to prepare the disciples for the fact they were going to keep the Passover a day earlier than usual; but they need not worry about that, because the essence of Passover was ongoing in the Lord's life. John the Baptist had perceived that when commenting that the Lord was "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29,36) even when it wasn't Passover time. See on :28 *Is shed* and on :30 *They went out*. Luke says "the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover". "Called the Passover" might suggest that it was only called Passover, but was not so in reality. This would connect with the theme of the feast being called a "feast of the Jews" rather than of Yahweh, and the temple becoming "your house" rather than God's.

*Delivered up to be crucified-* Literally, 'is being betrayed'. The next verse shows what was going on in justification of this statement. The Lord could have known of it through direct Divine revelation, but I prefer to think that His sensitivity was such that He perceived it of His own perception. The Greek can mean to be handed over, and also to be betrayed, with reference to Judas. The obvious double meaning indicates that the Lord did purposefully use words and ideas with more than one meaning, realizing that after His death, the other meaning would be made apparent. This means that we are quite justified in perceiving multiple meanings and intentions in inspired words, the Olivet Prophecy being a classic example, with its various possible applications. "Is betrayed"

reflects a present tense in the Greek. The Lord's handing over to death, indeed His death itself, was in essence lived out throughout His life. His life was a form of ongoing death.

*26:3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered at the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas-* The record may wish to give the impression that it was because of the Lord's prediction of His death that the Jews assembled and arranged it. He certainly planned His death consciously, and the Jews responded to His provocations. The gathering or assembling together of the Lord's enemies is a major theme (:57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12); and uses the same word for the gathering together of the rejected to condemnation at the last day. Coming before Christ in His time of dying was and is a foretaste of the last judgment. The Lord Jesus causes people to gather together either for or against Him. This is the fundamental divide- not between brother and brother, but between the believer and the world, light and darkness.

The word translated "court" or "palace" is used 12 times in the New Testament, and eight of them refer to the court of the High Priest. It's tempting, therefore, to think that the Lord may well have had this same court / palace in mind when He spoke of how an armed strong man "keeps his palace" [s.w., Lk. 11:21], but the Lord Jesus through His death on the cross would overpower him, and take his goods and share them with His people. The strong man who kept the palace may have had some reference, therefore, to the Jewish High Priest; the good things of the temple were inaccessible to God's people, until the Lord overpowered that entire system. The Lord also spoke of how He has a "fold", the same word translated "palace" or "court", into which He must gather His sheep (Jn. 10:1,16). He had to take over the whole temple system, and replace the Jewish religious leadership with His own band of secular men, prostitutes and hangers on.

*26:4 And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him-* The Greek specifically means to jointly decide. The collective guilt of Jewry is being emphasized, because their judgment was likewise collective. The same word is used four times later in this chapter about the 'taking hold' of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (:48,50,55,57). This 'laying on of hands' against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord's sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty*"- an allusion to the Lord's Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15). But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could

arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him "on the feast day", which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:5).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers' plans to kill Joseph.

26:5 *But they said: Not during the feast-* But they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :4 *By subtilty*. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

*Lest a riot arise among the people-* This indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

26:6 *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper-* The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto

Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

*26:7 A woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it-* The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

*On his head as he reclined at table-* The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness... this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

*26:8 But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying-* Mk. 14:4 adds that the indignation was within themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on *26:10 When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered in commentary on :8, we can better understand their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

*To what purpose?-* The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the *deja vu* of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

*Is this waste-* This is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing

Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

26:9 *For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor-* The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

26:10 *But Jesus perceiving it, said to them: Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a-* This translation is misleading; the idea of the Greek is that the Lord perceived the situation immediately. But the fact He perceived it confirms the suggestion that the words the disciples apparently spoke were in fact spoken within their minds and not out loud- see on 26:8 *Indignation, saying*.

*Good work-* The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41;

10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

*Upon me-* The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

26:11 *For you always have the poor with you-* Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

*But you will not always have me with you-* We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it.

"Always" is literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

26:12 *For in that she poured this ointment upon my body-* A different word from that used to describe how she poured the ointment on His head (:7). Perhaps her focus was upon anointing Him- but because the ointment dripped from His head onto His body, the Lord imputed to her

an understanding of His upcoming death and saw it as an embalming of Him, in line with the oft repeated idea that His life was in effect His death; as He sat at the meal table, it was as if He were already dead.

*She did it to prepare me for burial-* The RV has "to prepare me for burial". This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

*26:13 Truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world this gospel is preached, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of-* Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

*As a memorial of her-* The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none



less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

26:14 *Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests-* In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. The [apparent] waste of money in senseless devotion obviously irked Judas. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house (:6). It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

26:15 *And said: What are you willing to give me-* The financial aspect was important to Judas. He, like so many after him, was prepared to betray the Son of God purely for money. The decision of Judas to make this offer is recorded as coming straight after the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet with the expensive ointment. Judas's heart cried out as he saw all that money wasted; he knew that the perfume could have been sold for much and the money entrusted to him as the treasurer, and therefore he would have had the opportunity to take some for himself. As I read the records, the motivation of Judas was *fundamentally* financial, whatever we may like to speculate about his other reasons. It's almost too farfetched to believe; that a man who walked in the company of the Son of God, who entered into deep spiritual conversation with him, who is even described by the Spirit of Christ as "a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:13,4), could steal the odd few dollars (in our terms) out of the bag of those 12 travelling men. It couldn't have been any great sum that he notched up in those three years. And yet this led Judas to betray the Lord of all grace, for a sum no more than at most a few thousand US dollars (in our terms). They valued the Son of God at 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 27:9)- and *all it could buy was a field*. And Judas was happy with that. The way he later hurled those coins down and stalked off to hang himself suggests that he saw the essence of his failure as being tied up with that money. "The reward of iniquity" was what Peter contemptuously called it (Acts 1:18).

*If I will deliver Him to you?*- The Lord had predicted this, using the very same words, concerning how He would be delivered over to the "chief priests" (20:18). The Lord had only just used the word translated "deliver" in predicting His betrayal (:2). And Judas did it. The Lord surely knew the power of self-fulfilling prophecies; to some degree He psychologically set up this situation so that this would indeed happen. For ultimately the Lord 'gave Himself', He handed Himself over [the same Greek word] for us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25; 1 Pet. 2:23). It is not at all unbelievable that Judas would do the very thing which the Lord had predicted the betrayer would do. It is true to human experience; people do the very thing they know they should not, performing to the letter the very situations which they have been clearly warned about. Yet through all this, it must be remembered that the same word for deliver up / betray is used about how *God* 'delivered up' His Son for us all (Rom. 8:32). Although Judas was without question guilty and did what he did of his own volition, God's hand was somehow in it, working through the freewill of men. And this is the great comfort to all those who suffer evil at the hands of evil men; the evil of the men and their actions doesn't mean that we have been forsaken by God, nor that His far higher hand is not in it all, working as He does for our ultimate good in the latter end.

We noted earlier that the very language of betrayal into the hands of the religious leaders and thence to the power of the Gentiles (20:18,19) was used about the experience of the faithful in the final tribulation (24:9,10). In the very last few days, the last generation will pass through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, identifying with His death so that they might live with Him. This will be especially appropriate if the last generation are the only human beings to never taste of death. And even for those believers who do not live at that time, they too find that their experiences of betrayal are a part in their fellowship of their Lord's sufferings. For the same word is used in speaking of how we are all "delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:11). For the sake of being in Him, identified with Him, we must all share in His sufferings and betrayal experience.

*They paid him*- They weighed [Gk.] the money, fulfilling Zech. 11:12 "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver". The legalism of all concerned shines through. According to Mark 14:11, this was really an advance payment. The money was perhaps weighed out because the shekels were the temple shekels, those used in the temple.

*Thirty pieces*- The legal price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). The money intended for purchasing the temple sacrifices (see on *They covenanted*) was used to buy the Lord at the time when He appeared supremely "in the form of a servant".

*Of silver*- They were "the price of [Christ's] blood" (27:6), "the price of [Christ]". We are surely intended to use this identification to interpret the

parable of the pieces of silver [s.w.] given to the Lord's servants (25:18,27). He calls it "My money" [s.w. "silver pieces", Lk. 19:23]. The money of Christ was the money paid to get His blood. Perhaps those to whom more silver pieces were given are those who had sinned the more, whose redemption was the more costly; or those who appreciate the price of their redemption the more.

*26:16 And from that time onward he sought opportunity to betray him-* One with the Lord's sensitivity would easily have realized what was happening. Yet He was so far above it all; for He was going to hand Himself over, and not be handed over by anyone.

*26:17 Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying: Where do you want us to-* This is noted so often, as if the Lord was alone, presumably in prayer to the Father, and wasn't with the disciples all the time.

*Prepare the Passover for you to eat?-* Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.

*26:18 And he said: Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him-* Mark and Luke add that he was a man bearing a pitcher of water (Mk. 14:13; Lk. 22:10). This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

*The Teacher said-* The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

*My time is at hand*- The Lord used similar language in teaching how in the very last days of the tribulation, we will likewise know that the Lord's time is at hand (24:32,33). This is another one of many suggestions that we who live in the last days will go through the essence of the Lord's sufferings.

*I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples*- The use of *meta* carries the sense of amongst, in the midst of, and not simply 'together with'. Heb. 2:12 perhaps alludes to this by quoting and applying to Jesus the Old Testament passage which says "I will declare Your Name unto My brothers, in the midst of the church will I sing praise". This is quoted in the context of a sustained argument in Hebrews 2 that the Lord shared our nature. His breaking of bread with the disciples therefore was an essay in His humanity and solidarity with us- and that is the intention of the breaking of bread meeting to this day. The intended meaning is so much enhanced by correctly appreciating how the Lord shared our nature.

26:19 *And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover*- The same rubric is used about Moses' obedience to all commanded him. Those secular men were being painted in terms of Moses, who was seen as without equal in Judaism. But the Lord often paints His secular followers in the very terms of the most stellar Old Testament heroes of Judaism.

26:20 *Now when evening had come, he was dining with the twelve disciples*- "Dining" is "reclined". Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the twelve" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. Matthew's record may simply be focusing upon them. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

26:21 *And as they were eating, he said: Truly I say to you: One of you shall betray me*- The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We

must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of *you*" would do this.

26:22 *And they were exceedingly sorrowful*- It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

*And all began*- The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later (:25). Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him*?'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

*To say to him: Is it I, Lord?*- The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later (:25), and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

*26:23 And he answered and said: He that dipped his hand with me in the dish-* The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish.

"Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publicly pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

*The same shall betray me-* The Greek word translated "betray" really means 'to hand over'. This was yet future for Judas. The 'betrayal' in the English sense of that word had already happened.

*26:24 The Son of Man goes-* The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

*Even as it is written of Him-* Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15.

But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

*But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed!* - The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

*It would have been better if that man had not been born-* "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and wilfully do evil.

*26:25 And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said: Is it I, Rabbi?-* See on :22 *Lord, is it I?* If Judas openly asked the question and was told 'Yes Judas, it's you I'm referring to', then there is no easy explanation for why no reaction from the disciples is recorded, nor any attempt by them to persuade him otherwise or limit his actions. Likewise we must give full weight to the fact that when Judas exits, they assume he has gone to buy something for the feast or to minister to the poor (Jn. 13:27-29). This leads to the conclusion that Judas asked the Lord this quietly and received a hushed reply. John likewise leaned on the Lord's chest and asked Him quietly who it was (Jn. 13:24-26). Is it possible that Judas also at this stage also lay on the Lord's chest, so close to Him that he could whisper

to Him out of earshot of the others? It was a "large upper room", and so it may well have been possible. In this case, Judas was indeed the Lord's "familiar friend in whom I trusted", and the closeness of Judas and Jesus would explain why the disciples were completely not suspicious of Judas. If the Lord had publicly answered Judas, then surely events would not have unfolded as they did. The Lord knew exactly what Judas was planning, more by His premonition and sensitivity to Judas' feelings than by a bolt of Divine revelation. The Lord freely gave His life, it was not taken from Him by betrayal and murder. He therefore set the situation up, on one level, to happen as it did. And He didn't want to stop it happening. And yet on the other hand, He so wished for Judas' repentance on a personal level. And this is how He works with men to this day.

*He said to him: You have said it-* This is exactly the style the Lord adopts with Pilate in answering the question as to whether He is King of the Jews: "You said it" (Mt. 27:11). He allows people to come to a point where they state the truth out of their own mouths, rather than Him putting words into their mouths. And He works likewise today.

*26:26 As they were eating-* Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

*Jesus took bread-* Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely



open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

*And blessed it-* It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

*And he gave it to the disciples, saying: Take, eat-* The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

*This is my body-* See on *Gave it*. He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give one's body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke

that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

*26:27 And he took a cup-* This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Matthew was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

*And gave thanks and gave it to them, saying-* Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drunk weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

*All of you, drink it-* The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet

another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in :28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

*26:28 For this is My blood-* Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

*Of the covenant-* The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of

confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might have a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

*Which is poured out for many for the remission of sins-* He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in

the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life. "Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

*26:29 But I say to you, I shall not drink of this fruit of the vine from this time forward, until-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as

excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

*That day when I drink it anew with you-* This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

*In my Father's Kingdom-* The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

26:30 *And when they had sung a hymn-* Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

*They went out to the Mount of Olives-* The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as

Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

*26:31 Then Jesus said to them: You will all fall away because of me this night-* They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation (:41). He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

*For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad-* His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

26:32 *But after I am raised up*- There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

*I will go ahead of you into Galilee*- This is the language of the shepherd going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

26:33 *But Peter answered and said to him: If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-instates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord



worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which could only have been effected by a Divine, higher hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us to the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

26:34 *Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, that this night-* Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

*Before the cock crows-* There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close.

*You shall deny me three times-* See on :35 *Deny You*.

26:35 *Peter said to him: Even if I must die with you-* Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

*I will not deny you-* Surely the allusion is again to 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

*Likewise said all the disciples-* AV "Likewise also". Two words are used when one would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out

his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

*26:36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane-* The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

*And he said to his disciples: Sit here-* The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

*While I go yonder and pray-* Literally, 'there', as if the Lord was pointing out a location not far distant. He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not to* give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

*26:37 And he took with him-* As Moses took Joshua with him.

*Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed-* This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

Mk. 14:33 adds that He was "amazed". The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac's at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question "Why have You forsaken Me?". This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

*26:38 Then he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death-* The Lord's psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord's death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that

when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when we in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

*Stay here-* This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

*And watch with me-* The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

26:39 *And he went forward a little and-* Lk. 22:41 "About a stone's cast", pointing us back to David's conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord's final conflict with sin.

*Fell on his face and prayed, saying: My Father-* Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience

in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

*If it be possible, let this cup pass away from me*- This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even to the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to

note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour... even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

*Nevertheless-* The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (:40) suggests not 'even just for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

*Not as I will, but as You will-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

26:40 *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: What!-* "Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

*Could you not watch with me for one hour?-* Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could



desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house.

Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4; 1 Acts 22:7 = 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

*26:41 Watch and pray-* The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records.

*That you may not enter into-* These words are addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

*Temptation-* Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak-* The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

*26:42 Again a second time he went away and prayed, saying-* This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

*My Father, If-* The Lord in Gethsemane took a long time to pray the simple words: "Father, if ....". It was long enough for the disciples to fight a losing battle against drowsiness and fall fast asleep (the Greek implies). But how do you pray? With simple, staccato words and phrases like His? Or do you desperately seek for words, any words, just to make it seem you prayed, trying to be like the more mature brethren you hear praying at gatherings? Or after many years of prayer, can I ask, are you just churning out the same old phrases and ideas, with little meaning put into the words...? If the Son of God Himself prayed in such simple terms, surely we ought to likewise.

*This cup-* The use of "this..." suggests the Lord had so clearly in mind the course of events which were to follow. 'The cup' would have been less specific, as if He simply knew that an ordeal was ahead. But "*this cup*" suggests He knew what the cup was specifically, and was holding that understanding in His mind as He prayed to the Father.

*Cannot pass, except I drink it-* The same word translated "possible" in :39 "If it be possible". Both Father and Son clearly were aware that all things are possible for the Father, and yet those who seek to do His will must accept that He will not use that possibility in a boundless sense. The contrast is between the Father's will / desire on one hand, and His boundless potential possibility on the other. If we seek to do His will or desire, to please Him, as the Lord did, then the fact He can potentially do anything for us somehow recedes in significance. We above all wish to please Him. Therefore the fact He could save us from any pain no longer weighs so heavily with us. It is primitive indeed to complain that God could have stopped a certain painful course of events. He indeed could

have done. But the issue is, whether or not we wish to do His will, to please Him, to do His work in this world. This is the significance of the Lord saying "Your will be done".

*Your will be done*- He had the authority to call down legions of Angels to change the course of events- implying the Father would have allowed that. All things were possible to God. The fact this possibility remained for the Lord suggests that the prayers in Gethsemane were really the Lord coming to the conclusion that He Himself wished to go ahead with the cross. It wasn't so much that He asked for the cross to be taken away from Him, and the Father said "No", and He meekly accepted it. Prayer functioned for Him as it often does for us- a means of dialogue with God and thereby with ourselves, the process of which in itself provides the answers to our deepest questions. The will of the Father is never presented in Scripture as immutable and some predestined code which we are to follow. Rather is God open to change in response to the cry of His beloved people. So the Lord's conclusion "Your will be done" is not a shrugging acceptance that in this case, He couldn't change some preordained will of God; but rather a willing desire on His own part to do the ideal wishes / will of the Father. The Lord's statement was therefore His own conclusion, His own decision to continue in the way of the cross, even though the practical realities of what it meant were now becoming more practically apparent to Him than ever before. No wonder the Father sent an Angel to strengthen His beloved Son in this fine resolve. See on 26:54 *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?*

26:43 *And he came again and found them sleeping*- See on :40 *Comes... and finds*.

*For their eyes were heavy*- It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the

situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

26:44- see on :39.

*And he left them again and went away and prayed-* The language of leaving to be with the Father and coming again to the disciples is very much the language of the Lord's ascension and return (Jn. 16:28 has just recorded the Lord using this language in the Upper Room). His coming to them and finding them sleeping is therefore an enactment of the condemnation of the last day- but we can be condemned in this life, but be saved out of it by repentance.

*A third time-* The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

*Saying again the same words-* If the idea was simply that He repeated again the previous words, another word would've been used. *Hautou* definitely means something like 'His own words', 'The words of Himself'. And in this we see a powerful picture of what prayer to the Father really is- praying our very own words to the Father. The intimacy of the Son with the Father is thus brought out.

26:45 *Then he came to the disciples and said to them: Sleep on now-* The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :46 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

*And take your rest-* Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking

literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

*The hour is at hand*- Gk. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in :46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

*And the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners*- Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (17:22), to the chief priests (20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

26:46 *Arise!*- See on :45.

*Let us be going*- If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself.

*He that betrays me is nearby*- See on :45 *The hour is at hand*.

26:47 *And while he yet spoke*- This, along with the repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas...", to encourage us to re-live the incident.

*Judas, one of the twelve*- Emphasized in all three synoptics.

*Came, and with him a great crowd*- This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*With swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people*- This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the

Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross. See on :48 "That is He".

26:48 *Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying-* These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is *against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

*Whomsoever I shall kiss-* The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

*That is He. Take him-* The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

26:49 *And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him-* Most of the 74 NT occurrences of *chairō*, "hail", are translated "rejoice". Perhaps the Lord was reminded of His recent words about the cross being His "joy". But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :50 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably

that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

26:50 *And Jesus said to him: Friend*- During the few seconds between the kiss and the appearance of the armed men. See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

*Do what you came to do*- AV "Wherefore". The Greek *epi hos* doesn't simply mean 'Why?'. In this a word like *tis* would have been used. 'For what' is a reasonable translation. RV "Do that for which thou art come"- confirming a wicked man in the evil way he had chosen to take. And yet it seems to me that the Lord tried to save Judas to the last. This rhetorical question asked Judas to consider *why* he was doing this. One reason which the record gives is that he was interested in the money. He was a chronic materialist. He enquired how much he could receive for the job of betraying, and only then did he do it. The way he flung the coins down before committing suicide surely indicate how significant the money was to him. And the Lord knew that, and was asking him, even at this late moment, to consider *why* he was doing this- just for coins, pieces of metal. The Lord really was the good shepherd who searched for the lost until the very end, and sets a supreme example to us all.

'For whom' would be another possible translation of *epi hos* ["Wherefore...?"]. But why say this, when it was obvious? The Lord clearly knew what was happening- He knew the armed men were with Judas although hidden, and that they would now appear. He also knew that at least Peter had a sword and was keen to use it. In the crucial few seconds between the identification of Jesus with the kiss and the appearance of the armed men from the trees, the Lord knew that Peter could easily have killed Judas. The Lord may have been playing for time- to preserve Judas' life. Primarily this would've been in order to give Judas the possibility of repentance; but it was also to enable the foreseen sequence of events leading to the cross to happen. This makes sense of the Lord's statement at His trial, that if His Kingdom was immediate, then His servants would fight (Jn. 18:36). They wanted to fight, as Peter's rash action with his sword made clear, but the Lord disallowed them from doing this. We marvel at how conscious the Lord was on so many levels in bringing forward God's purpose, whilst allowing men the maximum possible opportunity to display faith, loyalty and repentance.

*Then they came* - See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

*And laid hands on Jesus-* The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

*And took Him-* Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the 'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

26:51 *And one of those with Jesus-* Peter.

*Stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear-* The camera, as it were, is zoomed in close upon Peter. Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not



one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

*26:52 Then said Jesus to him: Put away your sword into its place-* When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will ‘turn away’ sinners from their sins (Acts 3:26), he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to “put up again” his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Whether Peter's allusion was conscious or unconscious isn't clear; we tend to use language which has recently been used to us even in other contexts, especially if we have meditated upon it and feel it personally relevant to us. Again we see that Peter's appeal to Israel to repent in Acts 2 and 3 was so successful because it was shot through with reference to his own failures and experience of repentance, conversion and forgiveness. Peter's appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his ‘Maschil’ (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. The same word used of how Judas “brought again” his pieces of silver to the Jews (27:3). This is part of a series of similarities between Judas and Peter at this time. They both in essence did the same thing, but Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace, whereas Judas didn't know the Lord's grace.

*For all that take the sword-* Peter was the one who had literally just put forth his hand and taken a sword (:51). So it was by grace that he didn't “perish” by the sword at this time. Again, we see how grace ran through the Lord's actions at this His greatest moment of personal stress. The same word *lambano*, “take”, is used of how Judas had ‘received’ a band of

men armed with swords in order to capture Jesus (Jn. 18:3). Again, the similarities are being developed between Peter and Judas; both in essence made the same mistakes and committed the same sins, in this case, taking the sword. But Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace.

*Shall perish with the sword*- Not particularly in this life, but at judgment day, because "perish" is repeatedly used about final condemnation (e.g. 5:29,30; 10:28,39; 16:25; 22:7). The word is specifically used of the 'perishing' of Judas (Jn. 17:12, AV "lost"; 18:9). Again, the warning to Peter was not to be like Judas, even though the similarities between them were great at this time.

Jn. 18:11 adds: "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?". If Peter had entered into the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning the cup, then he wouldn't have made this mistake of attempting violent resistance. But he fell asleep, and as with us so often, failure or laziness at one point leads to failure in others later on.

26:53 *Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now*- The word "now" is all significant. Even then, the Lord could have changed the nature and sequence of events which lay ahead of Him, and this possibility was uppermost in His mind, the temptation He struggled with. This factor must be given due weight in seeking to understand His struggle in Gethsemane. It wasn't a case that He Himself didn't want to drink the cup, but the Father insisted He must, and therefore He resigned Himself to the Father's will. There was another way, indeed there were multiple ways forward. He could have called down legions of Angels. But He made the Father's will His own, He willingly agreed to do it, because He wanted to fulfil the Scriptures, to be obedient to them rather than merely bring about a neat correlation between them and events. He rose up from the final prayer in Gethsemane having committed Himself to do this, even though there were other options. So His willing giving of Himself over to death wasn't merely an iron-willed submission to the Father's will, in the spirit of 'islam' [submission]. Rather did He arise from the final prayer resolved to do the Father's will as His will, and this meant turning His back upon all the other possibilities before Him. This makes His decisions and death even more awesome, knowing that there could have been other legitimate ways to bring about the plan of salvation- indeed, it could be argued that God's hands were not tied, and He could forgive and save who He wished with no requirement for the cross. But the cross was powerful in order to persuade others of the need to respond to it, and therefore the Lord died as He did for our sakes, in order to persuade us. And we should therefore allow the cross its full and maximum persuasive power in our lives. See on :28 *The new testament*.

*Send me more than twelve legions of Angels?*- But the Lord had learnt the lesson of Elisha, who could have himself seen legions of Angels but chose

not to, so certain was he that they were potentially there (2 Kings 6:17). "Give Me", *paristemi*, has a wide range of meaning, and it is used of how Peter was one of those who "stood by" the Lord in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:47); the Lord is saying that as Peter stood by Him with drawn sword, just one man against so many, so in fact there were legions of Angels standing by or 'given' to assist the Lord; but He was not going to make use of them. The same word is used of the officers who "stood by" Jesus and struck Him at His trial (Jn. 18:22; Acts 4:26 s.w.); the Lord must have reflected that actually there were legions of Angels standing by / given unto Him. His self-restraint in not using them is remarkable, and highlights the way in which His life was not taken from Him but He willingly gave it. The reference to "twelve" legions of Angels was perhaps therefore in contrast with the twelve disciples; even if all twelve of them had stood up to fight for the Lord's deliverance, actually He had not twelve men, but twelve *legions* of Angels at His disposal. But He was not going to use them, and so He would not make use of the twelve disciples. The use of "legions" naturally contrasts with the Roman legions who were ultimately going to be used by the Jews to destroy the Lord. Peter's letters are absolutely full of his reflections upon these incidents, and this is why he could write of how the Angels are not subject unto the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 3:22).

The Lord Jesus could've called upon legions of Angels to help Him; but He chose not to (Mt. 26:53); He could have taken power there and then in His ministry and declared Himself King- but He walked off to the hills instead (Jn. 6:15). In these examples we see what we could call a renunciation of power. Time and again we are called upon to decide whether we will renounce what power we have, or use it or abuse it for our own selfish ends. A parent faces this issue so often with a young child. The parent has more power; but how and for what reasons should she / he use that power? We can use 'power' in many ways in the trivia of daily life; but actually in most of those micro level decisions we are challenged with a choice as to what level of spirituality and unselfishness we are going to show.

26:54 *But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?*- See on :42 *Your will be done*. The Father was willing to allow another way- legions of Angels could have been sent to change the course of events. In this lay the intensity of the temptation, and the height of the Lord's achievement in rising up to the highest level. Scriptural prophecy has all kinds of possible fulfilments, as we noted in discussing the Olivet prophecy. There is not only one possible fulfilment. I suggest therefore that the Lord saw the Scriptures as speaking to Him by way of personal commandment, and He knew that to fulfil them was to obey them. To be disobedient to those Scriptures would not have falsified them, because another way of fulfilment could have been found. But the

Lord felt strongly the need to make the word become flesh to utter fullness and perfection.

*26:55 In that hour Jesus said to the mob-* The size of the crowd of armed men is an indirect indication of the fierce loyalty of the eleven disciples to the Lord. Judas expected that they would or at least could put up major resistance.

*Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me?-* The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

*I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me-* The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

*26:56 But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled-* This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old

Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

John inserts at this point that the Lord was revealed in glory and the crowd of armed men fell to the ground; He asked them to let the disciples "go their way". And yet He had earlier lamented that their scattering from Him would be related to their lack of faith: "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad". This has to be compared with John's account in Jn. 18:4-9: "Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one". The scattering from the Lord was part of their falling away. And yet the Lord sets them up to flee, he apparently urges them to do so, in order that He would not spiritually lose any of them. We see here a profound principle- that there are times when it would be better to allow disciples to follow a lower principle, to even fail, to run away from the highest principle of dying with Christ; lest otherwise the height of the demand means they become lost totally. The church of my youth forbade divorce and remarriage, and yet by forcing disciples who divorced to never remarry, they ended up causing many of them to be lost to Christ's cause. And there are multiple other examples.

*Then all the disciples left him-* Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

*And fled-* Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

*26:57 And they that had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes-* There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

*And the elders-* Sometimes a technical term for the Sanhedrin.

*Were gathered together-* This word is often used in connection with the Lord's opponents being gathered together against Him at His death (Mt. 26:3,57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12; Lk. 22:66; Acts 4:26,27); and yet it is also used of the gathering together of the faithful, especially at the breaking of bread, around the symbols of the Lord's death (Acts 20:7,8; 1 Cor. 5:4). The cross becomes the essence of the division between the believers and the world; each group gather together around it. The cross and the person of the Lord Jesus therefore divide the believer from the world; and this is where the line really is, rather than between believer and believer. To make the breaking of bread service and the emblems of the crucified Jesus the means of dividing between believers is therefore extremely serious; at best, it totally fails to perceive the intention of the Lord Jesus and His death. His suffering, He there in His time of torture, is intended to be the focal point of the gathering together of the believers for Him, and likewise it becomes the focal point of the unbelieving world's gathering together against Him.

*26:58 But Peter followed Him afar off-* This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we

are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

*To the court of the high priest; and entered in-* The same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

*And sat with the officers-* The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

*To see the end-* Critically, we could say that the Lord had called His men to participate in His "end", to die with Him, to carry His cross, and Peter (like us) wished merely to observe His end, rather than participate in it personally. I have thought the same about myself often in self-examination at the breaking of bread. And yet Peter's love for the Lord cannot be questioned, for it was not mere curiosity that led him to take the risk he did of sitting amongst "the servants". The only other time the Greek phrase occurs is in James 5:11, where James says we have all seen the end of the Lord [the Lord Jesus?], that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Writing as James was in the context of an early church led by Peter, it is not impossible that he is hinting that we are all in the place of Peter, and have an experience of pity and tender mercy none less than he experienced.

26:59 *Now the chief priests and the whole council-* Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal.

In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publicly in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

*Sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death-* The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

*26:60 And they did not find any, though many false witnesses came-* This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

*But afterwards came two-* The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient



to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

*26:61 And said: This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days-* They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

*26:62 And the high priest stood up and said to him-* As a judge arises to give the verdict.

*Do you answer nothing?-* One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves- see on :61. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

*What is it that these testify against you?-* The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on :5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave

His life.

26:63 *But Jesus held His peace*- The High Priest 'answered' to this silence. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

*And the high priest said to him: I bind you under oath to the living God, tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God*- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

26:64 *Jesus said to him: You have said it; nevertheless I say to you, from this time forward*- "You have said" shows how again, the Lord sought to

elicit confessions from men in their own words.

*You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven-* The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

26:65 *Then the high priest tore his garments, saying-* Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by

truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

*He has spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy-* Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

26:66 *What is your judgement? They answered and said-* No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

*He is worthy of death-* The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and

blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

26:67- see on :39.

*Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists-* This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

*And some slapped Him with the palms of their hands-* A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

26:68 *Saying: Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the

prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophecy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

26:69

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!

	do not know what you say.	understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.		
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?

	makes you known.			
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crew.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

*Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard-* But likely within earshot. "Outside" translates *exo*, and the idea of being 'outside' from the Lord Jesus, especially in the context of Him being in a court, is exactly the picture of the rejected- Jesus at the day of judgment, with the rejected 'outside', away from Him. The term is used of the rejected being "cast out" (5:13), the rejected 'standing without' seeking entrance with the door closed (Lk. 13:25), the Jews "thrust out" of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28), saltless salt 'cast without' (Lk. 14:35), the rejected 'cast out' (Jn. 6:37; 15:6). The word is used again to describe how Peter finally "went out[side]" into the final darkness (:75). He was living out the very picture of condemnation. We too can sin and be condemned in this life, yet the verdict can be changed. And that explains the intensity of zeal and desire in responding to such grace with all our hearts. If we do not perceive our condemnation nor the gracious change of verdict, there can be no real



flame of zeal in response, no true humility, no deep seated motivation to service, forgiveness and grace to others.

*And a maid-* Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to describe the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

*Came to him-* Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

*Saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean-* Another passing evidence of the Lord's utter humanity; He spoke like a Galilean and was clearly a man brought up there, and not a pre-existent Divine being that came to earth.

26:70 *But he denied before them all, saying-* Again, Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*I do not know what you say-* Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

26:71 *And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him-* John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :69. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" in :70 suggests he kept on and on denying.

*And said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth-* Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial (:72). This is absolutely psychologically credible. By "with Jesus" she meant, 'There in the Garden', for *meta* Jesus is how the disciples are described there. See on :69 *A maid*.

26:72 *And again he denied with an oath-* Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not... neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation.

*I do not know-* See on :70 *I know not*.

*The man-* As if he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

26:73 *And after a little while-* Luke says it was after an hour.

*They that stood by came and said to Peter-* Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was

specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. See on :71 *Another maid*. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

*Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known-* This implies that the band of disciples were perceived as a group of Galileans. Matthew has earlier recorded the first accusation as being that "You also were with Jesus the Galilean". Mark is explicit that they now said: "You are a Galilean". And Luke records the statement of their simplistic logic: "Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean". The fact Jesus was a Galilean and Peter was clearly a Galilean didn't, surely, have to mean that therefore Peter had to have been with Jesus as one of His disciples. But their reasoning shows to what extent they perceived Jesus and His followers to be all from Galilee. Remember that Galilee was despised as the most backward and least spiritually 'Jewish' of all of Palestine; their accent was noted and perceived as harsh and crude, full of grammatical mistakes. But it was from the larynx of a Galilean Jew that there came the words of God Almighty, clothed as they were in the country accent and provincial style which was so despised. Christianity began as a peasant religion, a group of men perceived as simpletons. And it is in such communities or those perceived as such that the true spirit of Christ has often prospered most. Christianity has become a culture, and often the culture of the Western wealthy. But that is not at all how it began, and 'Christianity as culture', merely following the faith of our fathers, churchianity, is not the real, raw Christianity of Jesus and His Galileans.

26:74 *Then he began-* The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

*To curse-* Not with expletives, but a declaration of himself as anathema to God and Messiah if he was on the side of Jesus. The Greek *kata-anathematizo* means just that; to declare oneself anathema, to exclude oneself from the body of God's people.

*And to swear-* Peter was in total disobedience to the Lord's teaching: "Swear not at all" (5:34,36 s.w.). See on 26:72 *With an oath*.

*I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed-* See on :70 *I know not*.

26:75 *And Peter remembered-* The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to

"remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

Mk. 14:72 adds that Peter "thought thereon", using the Greek word usually translated 'to lay hands upon'. We can hear the Lord's word but not really engage with it. This in fact is likely the status of so much of God's word which we have read, heard and stashed away in our memory cells. We heard it, we are reminded of it as Peter was by the first cock crow after the first denial episode, but we fail to lay hands on it, to bring it to mind ['remember' it], to engage with it until it is paramount in our consciousness.

*The words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows-* The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials- see on :71 *Another maid*. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'. This would make a total of six denials. I believe I established beyond doubt in commenting on :71 *Another maid* that there were multiple denials by Peter. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before

the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

**First denial:**

A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).

**Second denial:**

A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).

**Third denial:**

A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).

**First crow.**

Mark 14:68 (King James Version).

**Fourth denial:**

Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).

**Fifth denial:**

Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).

**Sixth denial:**

Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).

**Second crow.**

Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

*You shall deny me three times-* Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

*And he went out and wept bitterly-* There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn.

15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

## CHAPTER 27

*27:1 Now when morning had arrived-* Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

*All the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death-* We sense their nervousness and conscious desire to try to spread the responsibility for their decision as wide as possible. We can imagine the learned, pseudo-spiritual shaking of heads amongst those men, arguing that they had, sadly, no option but... struggling, somewhere, with their own consciences, and desperately seeking support from others.

*27:2 And they bound him and led him away-* Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (12:29). For "Led Him away" see on 26:57 *Led Him away*.

*And delivered him up to Pilate the governor-* The Lord knew that He was the Messianic "Governor" (2:6 s.w.), just as He was in fact the judge rather than the accused. He had only the previous evening pointed out that He was "the chief", the same word used for "Governor", but chose to be the servant (Lk. 22:26). The whole scenario was a total inversion of what was actually the case.

*27:3 Then Judas, who betrayed him-* "Betrayed" is the same Greek word as translated "delivered" in :2. Judas handed Him over to the Jews, and the Jews handed Him over to the Romans. We see here a reflection of the unity between Judas and the Jewish system, which is why both of these entities are called 'satan' or 'the devil'. Satan entered into Judas in the sense that he was taken over by the spirit of Judaism, the world system around him, just as we can be. The Lord foresaw all this; He realized that He must die by crucifixion, and therefore since the Jews didn't have the power to do it, He knew they would have to hand Him over to the Romans. There were elements of His sufferings which were clearly revealed to Him by the Father, but many of His predictions are also explicable in terms of His sensitivity and intense perception of the nature of human behaviour.



*When he saw that he was condemned-* Perhaps the emphasis should be upon the "he". I speculated earlier that part of the deal with Judas was that he was to be the key witness for the prosecution at the Sanhedrin trial. He surely would have been present, and seen Jesus condemned. But he perceived that actually Jesus was the judge, and it was he that was condemned by the Lord's condemnation at the hands of men. He was in the same position as Peter, who also at that same time realized that he was condemned, weeping the bitter tears of the rejected. But Judas simply didn't trust the Lord's grace.

*Changed his mind-* Literally, 'to care again / afterwards'. A different word is used for repentance in a moral sense. This word suggests that Judas was selfish to the last, and realized the best way to care for himself was to commit suicide. Faced with our sin, we have the option of responding either as Peter, in sincerity and vowing our loyalty again to our Lord, or as Judas did- caring for ourselves, trying to make the most of a bad situation, taking what we perceive to be the lesser of various evils which now face us. This latter option does of course involve an element of re-thinking, but that is not of itself repentance in the Biblical sense. As with all facets of spirituality, there is the true repentance and the false one, just as there is true peace and false peace, sincere love and feigned love, faith unfeigned and faith which is merely hoping for the best, prayer from the heart and prayer as a form of words. The Jews left in the land just after the Babylonian invasion had a sense of guilt, a knowledge that they were sinners and were suffering for their sin; but they had to be exhorted to truly *repent*: "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'. Say to them... I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:10,11 NIV). Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

*And brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders-* The same word ["brought back"] used for how the Lord bade Peter put again his sword into the sheath (26:52). Again the similarity between the positions of the two men is being developed. The concern of Judas for the money surely reflects how financial motives had played a large part in his decision to betray the Lord. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?" makes clear that he was obsessed with money. The record here emphasizes his attitude to the money- he brought it again to the Jews and then cast it down on the floor. Clearly he felt that the money had been a large part in his motivation. And again we should be aghast at what men will do for money, how strong is our love of it, our

desire for it... and this led Judas to commit the greatest sin ever committed in the cosmos.

27:4 *Saying-* As if he was speaking, admitting that "I have sinned", whilst holding the silver pieces in his hand. Again the impression is given that quite simply he did what he did from the love of money.

*I have sinned-* The very words of the repentant prodigal son, Job, Micah and David (Lk. 15:18,21; 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10; Job 7:20; Mic. 7:9). But instead of going back to the Father, Judas went and killed himself. Again we see that recognition of sin and regret for it are one thing, but this is not at all the same as repentance and conversion. Peter, who was in the same position as Judas, truly repented and converted. Instead of going to his own death, Peter went to the cross to see the death of God's Son, and perceived in that the possibility of his own forgiveness. "I have sinned" were likewise the words of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20) and several times of Saul (1 Sam. 15:24,30; 26:21). But although these men all said the same words as the prodigal son, Job, Micah and David- they all perished in condemnation. Recognition of sin, therefore, is not the same as true repentance. To admit that we are, of course, sinners... is not the same as repentance and conversion. And so it was with Judas.

*In that I have betrayed innocent blood-* Judas at his final end recognized that Jesus was sinless; and he refers to Jesus not by His name, but as "the innocent blood". He had a good theoretical grasp of the principles of the atonement and the nature of Jesus. But that didn't help him. He recognized the ultimate innocence of Jesus. Correct knowledge concerning Jesus and recognition of personal sin is not enough to save us. There has to be the faith in grace which Peter had, and because Judas lacked this, he remained condemned. This highlights the fact that appreciation of grace is not just a cosmetic issue, but is fundamental to the Gospel and our personal salvation. The Greek word for "innocent" means literally 'not guilty'; Judas recognized that the Lord's trial at the hands of the Jews had been nothing but farcical, and the innocent had been condemned as guilty.

*But they said: What is that to us? See to it yourself-* Maybe their idea was that Judas had given his testimony in court and it could not now be retracted. Again we note their strict legalism on one hand, whilst behaving in the most unconscionable way on the other.

27:5 *And he threw the pieces of silver into-* The Greek *rhupto* literally means to disperse and is used in classical Greek for depositing money; it may be a technical term for a donation to the poor, or some sort of charitable donation. Perhaps this was his final repentance for stealing what had been intended as donations for the poor. This would explain why he didn't give the money back to the priests and elders, but rather

took it to the temple and cast it / dispersed / donated it there; hence they decided that it could not remain in "the treasury" (:6). He now gave it back, even though he had no personal hope of salvation because he didn't trust the Lord's grace.

*The temple-* Judas presumably had been at the High Priest's palace for the trial, and it was a fair walk from there to the temple. His visit to the priests and elders may have been at the High Priest's palace, not at the temple. So he went to the temple purposefully, to throw his money down in the temple, perhaps throwing it into the 'trumpets' into which people poured their money, and where the Lord had commented upon the widow throwing in her two last pennies. It would seem, therefore, that he did repent of his materialism, in the sense that he realized he had done wrong and wished to give those thirty pieces of silver at least to God's house and work. And yet he did not ultimately repent. See on :4 *I have sinned*. It is one thing to recognize our sin of materialism and to even give the wealth to the Lord's cause, but true repentance is another matter. It is a state of heart, and is modelled in Peter as opposed to Judas. It seems Judas did externally what was appropriate for someone who 'repented'; he returned the money to God, but this is still not enough. All that 'putting things right' was rather irrelevant compared to the need for faith in the Lord's grace and forgiveness.

*And departed, and he went away and hanged himself-* Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to draw oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away), from the house of God, the temple, to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight... smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9). All this was a foretaste of how there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment seat by the rejected, being "ashamed from before him at His coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away

in shame (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falls back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6).

*27:6 And the chief priests took the pieces of silver and said- See on :5 Cast down.* I suggested there that Judas actually put the silver pieces into the trumpet-like collection bowls, and thereby into the temple treasury. But the priests literally had to fish them out of there because of their legalistic obsession with not having blood money in the temple treasury. Even though they had likely taken that money out of the treasury themselves in the first place. Their self-contradictory legalism is a great theme of the record here.

*It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood-* "Put" here translates *ballo*, to throw. Although it is a different word to that used about Judas 'casting' the silver pieces in the temple [I suggested, into the collection containers], the idea is similar. They were now trying to find fault with Judas- and were claiming that he had acted incorrectly by 'casting' blood money into the temple treasury. Their idea that it was not lawful was based around their extension of the commandment of Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". But there was not actually any direct Divine law which forbade those pieces of silver going into the temple treasury. Their extension of the *implication* of a Divine law had become, in their minds, itself a law which they had to obey. This is the problem with legalistic attitudes- more laws are spawned. Their concerns about what was lawful and "not lawful" run throughout the Gospel records (12:2,10; 19:3; 22:17 etc.). The Law of Moses was intended for the time and place it was given, and was part of an ongoing dialogue between God and His people; and the legal code given by Moses in places contradicts itself, or allows various options for obedience or various outcomes for disobedience [e.g. adultery]. It wasn't intended to be used in a casuistic sense, and parts of it were overridden or abrogated even before the Lord Jesus came. If it is used in a casuistic, black and white sense, then like any law, it logically spawns hosts of other requirements. What 'logically follows' becomes the deciding issue, rather than the spirit of loving God and doing what He wishes.

*27:7 And they took counsel-* As in :1. They were eager to spread responsibility for their actions in the entire business of killing the Lord; human beings feel safer beneath the umbrella of a committee, a group.

And yet those men, like us, will each have to meet the Lord personally and face the consequence of their actions.

*And bought with them the potter's field-* Acts 1:18 says that Judas "obtained it with the reward of his iniquity" (RV). And yet the thirty pieces of silver were still in his hand right up to the end of his life. Purchase of property was a slow business in Palestine, and nobody would have been doing business over the Passover feast. Neither is there any time in the narrative for Judas to have bought or obtained the field. And yet Acts 1:18 states that Judas "obtained" the field with the silver pieces, the reward of his iniquity, and killed himself there. I suggest the reconciliation is that the Jews bought the place where Judas had committed suicide *in Judas' name*, even though he was dead. This again would've involved a fair amount of fiddling books and behaviour of low integrity. And yet it was ostensibly done in strict and careful obedience to the idea that money earned by dishonest means should not be brought into the temple; this was based on Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". Again and again we see how these men who committed the worst possible sin in the entire universe... were strictly legally obedient to some Divine laws and the principles arising from them. This is a powerful warning to all of us religious people; we can so easily serve God with only part of our mind, one half of our brain. And the results are disastrous. Nothing less than the entire heart and soul and mind must be given over to Him.

The Potter's field was in the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna; Judas went to Gehenna to kill himself, the ultimate proof that all who shall finally be condemned will in essence have condemned themselves.

*To bury strangers in-* Thus through the death of Christ it became possible that Gentiles could have a place within Jerusalem, the city of God.

*27:8 Therefore that field is called to this day, The field of blood-* This was surely not what the Jewish leadership wished it to be called. Time and again we see that their careful plans didn't work out. Likewise they bribed the soldiers guarding the tomb to say that the Lord's body had been stolen- and the news of their bribery became widespread. "Unto this day" suggests an early date to the Gospels.

*27:9 Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying: And they took the thirty pieces of silver-* The quotation is from Zechariah (Zech. 11:12). The standard explanations are that the volume of the prophets in which Zechariah was included began with Jeremiah and was therefore referred to as "Jeremiah"; or that in fact Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11 and this was included in the prophecy now known as Zechariah. For more on this, see on :10 *The potter's field*. Given the very detailed congruence between reality and the Gospel records, it would be unlikely that such an obvious error was made. We who believe in an

inspired Bible should rather, in any case, say with humility "I am still searching for more light on this question" rather than assume that here we have an evidence of a fallible Bible. If one part is inaccurate, what about the rest... The context of Zech. 11:12,13 is significant- note the pronouns in the Hebrew text, in that the money was cast to the potter by the same prophet who had been valued at the low price of 30 pieces of silver: "If it seem good to you, give me my wages; but if not, let it alone: and they weighed me as wages thirty silverlings. Then Jehovah said to me, Throw it to the potter, the splendid price at which I am valued by them; and so I took the thirty silverlings, and threw it into the house of Jehovah to the potter". Throwing it to the potter was a response of sarcasm [as was the reference to "the splendid price"], in that this was the price of a dead slave (Ex. 21:32), and far below what a prophet should have been valued at, let alone the Son of God. Just as Judas threw the coins into the temple treasury, so the Jews threw them to the potter. Judas and the Jewish leadership are thereby once again connected, they were part of the same 'satan' system which was the adversary to the Lord. Those learned Jews, steeped as they were in the text of Scripture, surely closed their minds to these words as they so clearly fulfilled them. We too can know Scripture, and yet the flesh has a way of hiving off the part of our minds that is aware of them. And according to the prophecy, it was the undervalued prophet himself who threw the coins to the potter. The action of the Jewish elders was therefore directly controlled by the risen Lord. This connection between the prophet (Jesus) and the Jews is surely reflected by the way in which the Hebrew text speaks of the prophet himself throwing the coins to the potter, whereas that is quoted here in Matthew as if they, the children of Israel, cast them to the potter. See on :10 *As the Lord appointed Me*. If they had thought upon Zechariah 11 with open minds, they would have seen in their own actions the very evidence that He was alive and working through them to their own condemnation. And the context of Zech. 11:12,13 is God's breaking of His covenant with Israel because of their undervaluing of His prophet. This is precisely what happened in that the new covenant was confirmed to the extent that the old covenant was abrogated.

*The price of him on whom a price had been set-* The implication is that the Lord's price was 30 pieces of silver. This is strong evidence against the suggestion often made that the 30 pieces were a down-payment made to Judas. That suggestion is perhaps so frequently offered because 30 pieces of silver seems such a low price. But Judas had asked: "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?", and the price agreed was 30 pieces of silver. But we need not be so surprised. Because surely we have all seen people make the most unwise and sinful decisions for the sake of money, even relatively small amounts of it. And the more I reflect upon these records, the more convinced I am that the crime of the cosmos, of all time in eternity, the worst action at any point of infinite time and space, was committed for love of money. And so pathetically

little of it. It truly is the root of all evil. And such a pathetically small amount, the compensation price of a dead slave, that could only buy a piece of ground in the despised valley of Hinnom, the Potter's field, muddy and useless for building, from which much of the clay had already been dug out by the potters, surrounded by the smell of burning bodies and garbage that remained constantly in the valley of Hinnom. In these reflections is surely the most powerful warning which there could be against petty materialism. Peter had surely reflected upon all this when he wrote of "the precious blood of Christ... unto you therefore who believe He is precious" (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:7), using the same word translated here as "valued". Indeed, that family of Greek words is used around 12 times by Peter in his letters; the tragedy of how the Lord was not "valued" by Judas and Israel was a tragedy to Peter, and he wanted the church to compensate for it. *We* are to value Him and His blood, far more than Judas and the Jews did.

*By some of the sons of Israel-* Jesus was "Him... whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.

27:10 *And they gave them for the potter's field-* We cannot miss the fact that the potter is a clear Old Testament symbol for God (Is. 41:25; 64:8; Jer. 18:6; 19:11; Rom. 9:21). And "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38). The price of the Lord's blood bought the potter's field, God's field, the world, as a resting place for faithful Gentiles who had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died there. We noted on :9 *By Jeremiah* that Zech. 11:12,13 was likely written by Jeremiah. And that now makes sense. Because it was at "the potter's house" that Jeremiah had uttered his prophecies, stating that God was the potter, He was manifest in that potter to whose field Jeremiah had 'gone down' (Jer. 18:2; 'going down' implies it was in a valley, as was the Potter's Field bought by the Jews). The money being cast to the potter therefore suggests that ultimately, all returns to God. No silver pieces are ours for ever, as they were not the Jews' nor Judas's. It was ultimately thrown to the potter in the Potter's Field, the very place where Jeremiah had prophesied and explained that that potter was in fact representative of God.

*As the Lord directed me-* See on :9 *By Jeremiah*. The throwing of the coins to the potter by "the children of Israel" was in fact done by the undervalued prophet, the Lord Jesus. Their purchase of the field was surely done after Passover had finished- after the Lord's resurrection. And actually He was controlling what they did. If they had compared their actions against Zechariah 11, a passage they knew well, then they would have perceived this.

*27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him-* This is Matthew's preferred term for Pilate. Perhaps he doesn't name Pilate because he wants to draw out the similarity between how the Lord stood before a governor, and how those in Christ (especially in the last days) will likewise be brought before "governors" (10:18; Mk. 13:19; Lk. 21:12 "You shall be brought before governors"). This is yet another example of how the faithful in the very final days of the tribulation will share in the spirit of Christ's passion; even if they do not literally die, they will be led by the tribulation experience to identify with the spirit of the suffering Christ, so that they can legitimately share in the spirit of His resurrection life.

*Are you the King of the Jews?-* Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*And Jesus said to him: You say it-* Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

*27:12 And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders-* The accusations were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering



together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

*He said nothing-* Perhaps for the same reason that He remained silent during the Jewish trial (see notes on 26:63). His only answer would be to speak judgment against them, and He wished to delay this until the last possible moment, in order to give them the chance for repentance. So many times in the Gospel records, in Matthew especially, we read that during His ministry the Lord "answered and said...". The same Greek word is used. He had given His answer to their accusations and positions throughout His ministry, and now the time for providing fresh evidence was over. They knew His answers.

*27:13 Then Pilate said to him: Do you not hear how many things-* The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God

only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

*They testify against you-* The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; twice at this point (in Mk. 15:4 also) and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

27:14 *And he gave him no answer, not even one word, so much so that the governor was astonished-* This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (26:62,63; see on 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

27:15 *Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd-* The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who

crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

*Any one prisoner whom they wanted-* In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

*27:16 And they had then a notable prisoner called-* The Greek *epi-semos* literally means 'one of sign'; we are thereby invited to see the name 'Barabbas' as signifying something. Before the Jews were two men claiming to be sons of Abba, and they chose the false one. The Lord's

claim to be Son of God was the reason why the Jews particularly wanted to kill Him.

*Barabbas*- Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

*27:17 Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said to them: Who do you want me to-* See on 26:57. The way the Jews were "gathered together" at this time, literally 'synagogued', is significant in that we see how the Lord's passion gathered men together, either for or against Him. And it is the same today.

*Release to you-* This word is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

*Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?-* Not 'who claims to be Christ' or 'is called by some 'the Christ''. Pilate is reminding them Jesus was the Christ, and they had stated that they thought this was a capital offence. Pilate was offering them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus exactly because he knew they would choose Barabbas. He had a conscience about the matter of this Jesus of Nazareth, and he wanted the choice to crucify Him to be theirs and not his. He cleverly reasoned that he had

pronounced Jesus innocent, but the choice to kill him would effectively have been the choice of the Jews if they chose Barabbas over Jesus. This is all the sense of the following explanatory comment "For he knew that they had delivered him up out of envy".

*27:18 For he knew that they had delivered Him up out of-* See on :17 *Jesus which is called Christ.* Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

*Envy-* James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

*27:19 And while he was sitting on the judgment seat-* This may not be strictly chronological. The AV offers: "When he was set down...", as if he had no sooner sat down to consider the case when the message came from his wife, implying that Jesus was a righteous man and should not be crucified with Pilate's involvement. In any case, I suggest that this piece of information is given to explain why Pilate acted as he did in offering the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, knowing full well that "they had delivered [Jesus] out of envy" and therefore blindly wanted his destruction. Although usually conscienceless, Pilate's own nagging conscience was confirmed by the message from his wife, and therefore he came up with this idea of trying to offload responsibility onto the Jews, forcing them to effectively chose that Jesus should be crucified. Of course, the power was ultimately with Pilate, and this was but a desperate ploy to avoid ultimate guilt; but the fact he did it reflects the degree to which the Lord Jesus can touch even the hardest consciences.

*His wife-* It seems it was Origen who started the tradition that she later became a Christian thanks to a dream given her about Jesus.

*Sent a message to him, saying: Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him-* These are the very same Greek words used at least four times to record the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion as being a 'suffering of many things' (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 9:22; 17:25). This sensitive woman had a correct premonition of what was to happen to the Lord, and dreamed about it; and sensing His innocence and origin from God, she didn't want her husband to be involved in bringing those sufferings about. Again this claim has the ring of truth to it the more it is meditated upon.

*27:20 Now the chief priests and the elders-* The Greek *deh* translated "Now" is often untranslated in English, it's a connecting word meaning 'Now... And...'. The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

*Persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus-* It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

*27:21 But the governor answered and said to them: Which of the two do you want me to release to you? And they said: Barabbas!-* Putting together the Gospel records at this point, it is clear that Pilate first asked the Jewish leadership which of the two they wanted, and then he asked the crowd; and it would seem Pilate asked each group the same question at least twice, whilst emphasizing that he did not consider that Jesus was worthy of death and would be happy to release Jesus to them. At first blush this may appear as if Pilate was seeking to persuade first the leaders and then the crowd to allow him to release Jesus to them- and failed to get their agreement. I take a slightly different position. We have

noted that Pilate gave the choice to them exactly because he knew that the leaders had delivered Jesus to him *because they envied Jesus* and therefore wanted Him dead. I would understand Pilate's offers to release Jesus as carefully calculated to produce the obvious result- each time the offer was made, the leaders and then the crowd shouted yet louder to destroy Jesus. Those outcomes were not hard to predict. Pilate knew they would respond like this, and he was playing the crowd, rather than simply making the same appeal to them and being shouted down ever louder each time. But the point to note is surely that he was doing all this to assuage his own conscience; he wanted the Jews to take absolute, widespread and public responsibility for the death of Jesus, and therefore once he had the crowd worked up into a frenzy of desiring Barabbas rather than Jesus, he solemnly washed his hands before them all, claiming that this was totally their choice. Of course, it was ultimately his choice, and he was indeed concerned to hear himself being called 'not Caesar's friend'. My point is that this conscienceless man did in fact have a conscience, which was touched by Jesus and the prospect of His crucifixion. And that is to me the only satisfactory explanation of his long drawn out psychological game with the Jews, and even then it was not ultimately successful nor convincing in distancing himself from the decision to crucify Jesus. See on :22 *What then shall I do to Jesus.*

27:22 *Pilate said to them: What then shall I do to Jesus who is called Christ? They all said: Let him be crucified!-* This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their wish* that Jesus be crucified. See on :21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

27:23 *And he said: Why, what evil has he done?-* Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. But in line with my commentary on :21 and :22, I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

*But they cried out exceedingly, saying: Let him be crucified!-* When

people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

*27:24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying-* I do not take this as meaning that Pilate tried to prevail upon the crowd to change their mind, but now gave up. Rather do I take this as meaning that he realized that he had played his psychological game with the crowd long enough (see commentary on the previous three verses), and saw that if he played it any longer, then a riot could break out. And so he brought his game to an end, having successfully elicited from them a clear taking of responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus, and now he washes his hands publicly. But this of course did not take away his ultimate responsibility- for he could have simply thrown the case out of court. But he correctly perceived that if he were to do that, then there would be major rebellion against him.

*I am innocent of this man's blood-* The historical Pilate is recorded as killing men for any or even no reason, and being apparently conscienceless. But he is clearly concerned with declaring his own innocence, using a Greek word which means 'without penalty'. He realized there was going to be a penalty paid for crucifying Jesus. Surely he wasn't fearful of his Roman overlords or Caesar himself demanding a penalty for crucifying Jesus. Pilate was clearly aware that there was someone who was going to execute a penalty upon those who crucified Jesus; and Pilate wanted to publicly declare his innocence and to protest that he at least should be without penalty. That someone was the one true God. Pilate could not see the death of God's Son without realizing that men are held accountable by God for their part in it. Again we see the power of the cross in touching even the most callous and concealed conscience. We are left to reflect that of course Pilate was not ultimately without responsibility in the decision making- he could have refused. And we therefore reflect further that no man can just declare himself right or innocent before God; that declaration can only be made by God. This is the whole idea of justification, of being counted right. But this requires faith in God and Jesus.

Guilt for the Lord's blood was placed clearly upon the Jews (23:35 "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth", "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us", Acts 5:28). Acts 3:14



condemns Israel for desiring a murderer and rejecting "The Just", the same word used by Pilate "this *just* person". These Scriptures, and many others, clearly place the blame for the Lord's crucifixion upon the Jews rather than Pilate and the Romans, even though Pilate was clearly not innocent. Hence the Lord's observation to Pilate that "he" who had handed Him over to Pilate had "the greater sin" (Jn. 19:11). The "he" was the Jewish system. We marvel at the Lord's grace to Pilate, who clearly was weak and didn't do what he knew he should have done; it's as if He perceived Pilate's struggle of conscience and felt sorry for him about it, and as it were comforts Pilate that although he is sinning, the greater sin was being committed by the Jews. In this again we see how grace and pity ran through all the Lord's actions at this time; facing death, who He essentially was became revealed the more intensely. And He was and is grace, pity and love to their utmost.

*This just person-* AV. Even the deeply immoral Pilate perceived the Lord's sinlessness. He uses the same word as used by his wife in :19 "Have nothing to do with that *just man*". The immoral Herod likewise perceived that John was "a just man" (Mk. 6:20 s.w.). The Centurion echoed Pilate's words as he beheld the Lord's death: "Certainly this was [as Pilate had famously said] a righteous / just man" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.). If Pilate was purely dealing with this case with no conscience, then he would not have used this term, involving as it does a moral judgment and commendation of Jesus. And we wonder at how Pilate insisted upon writing on the inscription over the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews", rather than as the Jews wished, 'He *claimed to be* King of the Jews'. Is it too much to think that Pilate had indeed grasped the elemental truth about Jesus and even believed it? Perhaps at that moment, he did- but didn't maintain his faith.

*See to it yourselves-* The very phrase just recently used by the Jews to Judas (:6). It's as if Pilate was aware of how they had treated Judas, and is quoting their own words back to them. It's as if Pilate perceived the Jews as Judas. God certainly saw the Jews and Judas as connected, for they are both termed the great satan / devil / adversary to the Lord Jesus. Pilate's perception and insight at this point is significant, hence my suggestion above that Pilate on one level almost became a believer in Jesus through being exposed to Him close up and by reflecting upon His death. There is indeed something in the death and cross of Christ which brings men to faith. There is surely some truth to the old missionary stories of unresponsive, illiterate tribes becoming strangely responsive when the cross of Christ was explained and portrayed to them.

*27:25 Pilate washed his hands-* AV. Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many

real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it'. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

*And all the people answered and said: His blood is on us and on our children-* The Jews perceived that Pilate was genuinely concerned about his own guilt in the matter, hence their attempt to assure him that it was indeed their choice and responsibility. Again we see how Pilate's conscience was visibly at work. In both his and their attitudes, they wrongly assume that human beings can ascribe and decide guilt. It is impossible for us to do this. The guilt for the Lord's death is apportioned by God and not man. This provides insight into the question of whether the children or descendants of the Jews involved are indeed carrying the guilt for the Lord's blood. It is God who decides individual human guilt; He

doesn't punish the children for the sins of their ancestors. Whether or not the ancestors asked for their children to suffer is in this sense irrelevant- it hardly means the descendants will suffer just because of a statement made generations ago. And we should note that the rubric 'We and our children' often refers only to the immediate generation, not to longer distance descendants. Further, there were likely no more than a few hundred people at most who shouted these words; they did not speak them as official representatives of anyone, and they cannot surely refer to the children of any other people [e.g. the rest of Israel] apart from their own. To explain the Holocaust and anti-Jewishness as a fulfilment of these words seems to me quite mistaken. Such things occurred and do occur because of faults within the minds and cultures of those performing them, and not because of any particular guilt in the individual Jews who suffered. Many racial groups have suffered because of baseless aggression from other groups; but it would be facile to posit that the individuals who suffered were somehow guilty as charged by their obsessive attackers. The simple reason for anti-Jewishness is jealousy and the nexus of thinking and action which accompanies it. The fault for murdering and abusing Jewish people is solely with the abusers, and not because of the emotional cry of some members of the Jewish race many generations ago. This verse is a classic example of where although the record of the Bible is inspired, the words recorded as having been on the lips of men are not always true in their content. Sennacherib's claims outside the walls of Jerusalem would be another example.

In reality, the people screamed the words they did because they became increasingly obsessed with the conviction that Jesus was guilty. They were so sure that He was *not* innocent blood, that they were able to confidently ask for any possible guilt to be upon them and their children. Their conviction on this point was therefore very great, and yet it was elicited by the repeated reminders from Pilate that Jesus was *not* guilty; both Herod and Pilate had concluded the same about Him. Everyone knew the trials were a farce and the case had collapsed from lack of evidence. And yet the more conscience was prodded, the blinder these people became to the evidence. Again we have a telling insight into human nature. Blindness descends upon people the more they are led to the light- unless they respond to it. The Lord's crucifixion is the parade example. This is where human psychology and human nature leads when it is confronted by God's Son, unless there is an acceptance of Him.

Peter addressed this same group just six weeks later, very close to the spot where they shouted this out. And he alludes to their words "our children", by saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to them and to their children (Acts 2:39). I have suggested in *Bible Basics* that in its first context, the gift which the Holy Spirit enabled or gave was that of forgiveness of sins and turning away from sin. In this case, Peter was directly addressing those words of the crowd, willing the Lord's bloodguilt

upon them and their children. For those words would be ringing like an echo in the memories of everyone in Jerusalem. Not just for those who had been in the crowd, but for all Jewish people, as they wondered whether God would in fact honour the words of those men upon all Israel. And Peter speaks [as we should in our preaching] directly to those fears of his audience, both spoken and unspoken. The simple fact was that instead of a curse upon them and their children, they and their children could be cleansed in the blood of Christ and find [as Peter had] the blessed gift of forgiveness.

*27:26 Then he released Barabbas to them, but Jesus he scourged-* As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions (John Pollock, *The Master* (Victor Books, 1985), p. 160).

Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't" (Frank C. Tribbe, *Portrait Of Jesus* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983)).

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they

crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting...they clothe him...they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".

All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

*And delivered to be crucified*- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then

the cross was laid on that bare back. The word translated "delivered" or "betrayed" is commonly used in the records. Judas handed over the Lord to the Jews, the Jews handed Him over to Pilate and the Romans, and they handed Him back to the Jews to crucify. All this was only how things seemed on earth, because all was in the Father's hands. The Lord must surely have meditated upon this- that He was giving Himself, and they were merely the process He was using to do that.

The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analysing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11
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Always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross.

*27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium-* Being Roman soldiers, these were likely Gentiles from many different nations within the Roman empire. The Lord was abused not only by Jews but by a wide range of Gentiles- the very ones for whom He was dying. When we do things in love for those who are in the throes of hatred against us (and many are in domestic situations where this has to be done by the believer in Christ)- then we are fellowshipping His sufferings at this time in this way.

*And the whole battalion gathered around him-* Similar to the way the record repeatedly stresses that *all* the chief priests, the *whole* Sanhedrin, condemned the Lord to death. The point is that group mentality is far more powerful than we think, and leads even good men like Nicodemus and Joseph, and perhaps the Centurion who came to confess that "Truly this was the Son of God", to do things which are far beyond the evil intention within any one individual mind. Again, we see in the crucifixion of Jesus where human nature leads in its ultimate end. It comes to full term in nothing less than the crucifixion of God's Son. One of the ways in which our nature operates is in tandem with others. Many have noted that the sum total of human evil in this world is likely more than the sum of all the individual 'evil' of every human being combined. The 'extra' factor in the equation is provided by the way in which humans in group mode can end up thinking and acting far more extremely than all the individual 'evil' within each of them as individuals. This is why the New Testament parable of 'satan' uses the term not only for individuals and for abstract human sin, but for sinful organizations and group entities. I have commented upon this several times throughout my *The Real Devil*.

"Gathered around Him" continues the theme of the Lord's passion causing men to gather and unite, either for Him or against Him. We note how John adds that Herod and Pilate were reconciled together- over the issue of Jesus. And this is what response to the fact of His suffering and death continues to do today. If we as believers are *not* united around Him, we are allowing our own traditions to become an obstacle to the process of

unity which the Lord's death is intended to achieve. Our refusal to unite, e.g. by forbidding brethren from communion and remembrance of Him, is to work against the intention of the cross.

*27:28 And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe-* Stripped naked? To be undressed is used by Paul as a metaphor for human death (2 Cor. 5:4 s.w.), and to be clothed upon is used by Paul to mean a change of nature. The Lord may have seen in this mockery a strange foretaste of the death and change of nature which awaited Him. Through all His sufferings, the hand of providence was giving Him encouragement. And that happens in our lives too. The Lord would've thought of His own story of the wounded man who was stripped (Lk. 10:30 s.w.). He was both the Samaritan Saviour and the wounded man, in that He identified so fully with us in our moral tragedy. The same LXX word is found in "They stripped Joseph out of his coat" (Gen. 37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit?

*27:29 And they plaited a crown of thorns and put it upon his head and a reed in his right hand, and they knelt down before him-* The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).  
*A reed-* This is the same word translated "pen". The hint was that the



Lord was taking note. All was written and would be judged when the books are opened.

*And mocked him*- The Lord had foreseen that the Gentiles would "mock" Him (20:19 s.w.). Matthew gives more attention to the repeated mocking of the Lord than the other Gospels (27:29,31,41).

*Saying: Hail, King of the Jews!*- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'.

J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and *kept on* saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to

come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break... he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked Him for His apparent inability to do.

27:30 *And they spat upon him and took the reed and struck him on the head-* The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

27:31 *And when they had mocked him, they took the robe from him and dressed him in his own garments-* The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have

joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

*And led him away to crucify him*- The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that

concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

27:32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name- Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that all His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else...until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

*Whom they forced to carry the cross-*"The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck

and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar" (W.D. Edwards, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA March 21 1986, Vol. 255 No. 11). This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to

assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, " my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", " my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

27:33 *And when they came to a place called-* He didn't carry His cross all the way to Golgotha; He went out of the guard room with His face set towards Golgotha, as it had been so visibly set on Jerusalem a few weeks before. Note the emphasis on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. They arrived at the destination. "Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (Edwards *op cit*). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar.

*Golgotha, that is to say, the place of a skull*- Possibly meaning 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem.

Luke adds that He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'.

"If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated



that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

*27:34 They gave him wine to drink mingled with gall. And when he had tasted it, he would not drink it-* To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity

with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that Christ would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow

Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that we have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

27:35 *And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots-* "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm...four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just

a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes

evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

*Divided His garments-* There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed

worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

*By casting lots*- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all

too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four



actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which

He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

27:36 *And they sat there*- "And they sat down" after symbolically killing Joseph. "Sitting down *they* watched *him* there". Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on " he... him... his"; also " they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4).

*And watched him*- In the sense of guarding Him, rather than simply staring at Him. Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), "Father, forgive them"; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His

head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They knelt on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well-paid careers... all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt. The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

*27:37 And over his head they put the written accusation against him, which read-* This is out of sequence; the inscription was placed at the actual impalement (according to the other Gospels). Luke seems to imply that the mocking was because of this placard; it must have been a very unusual crime to die for, contrasting sharply with the usual reasons for death which were displayed on crosses.

*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews-* Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This was...'. But over the Lord it was written: 'This is Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations.

Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name

was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the *ekklesia*, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare His righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

Ps. 40:9,10 speaks of how the Lord Jesus would proclaim righteousness to the *ekklesia* and declare God's faithfulness and salvation, i.e. the things of His Name. Yet this passage is quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 about the cross. It was there above all that "thy law is within my heart" and He "preached righteousness". This is why Paul can talk of "the preaching [which is] the cross". He as He was there is the ultimate witness. And this was why the Yahweh Name was written up over Him.

Note that Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

27:38 *Two robbers were crucified with him*- Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt

it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

*One on his right hand and one on his left-* The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

*27:39 And they that passed by-* The idea of crucifixion was that it was public. The invitation to carry the Lord's cross is an invitation to likewise be public and open in our identification with Him. But these people repeated the false accusation raised in the Sanhedrin trial, that the Lord had planned to destroy the temple (:40). One wonders, therefore, whether these people were indeed passers by. To have access to that information means they may have been close to the Jewish leadership. Perhaps they simply made out that they were 'passers by', and the Biblical record is at times written from the standpoint of how things appear to men, even if that is not the actual case [consider the language of demons]. Or it could be that these people continually passed back and

forth in front of the Lord in order to try to provoke Him repeatedly with their blasphemy.

"Those that passed by" were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought "Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look". Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; "crowds came to the spectacle" (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

*Derided him, wagging their heads-* The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself". These mockings were therefore part of "the cross". The "cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles. As "the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise "the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's grace. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

*27:40 And saying: You that would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days-* This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to

Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVMg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

*Save yourself-* All the emphasis on *save yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

*If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross-* A repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn. 6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of

theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

*27:41 In like manner also the chief priests with the Scribes and elders mocked him, saying-* Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

*27:42 He saved others-* A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

*He cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him-* RV "He is the King of Israel..." - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His



wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

27:43 *He trusts in God*- As in :42 "He saved others", a tacit recognition that He had indeed trusted in God.

*Let Him deliver him now*- Perhaps mocking the Lord's model prayer, "Deliver us from evil". If so, this is an indication of how well known the Lord's teachings had become. Even the elders knew the content of His model prayer.

**If He desires him- They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God likes Him', is what they were really implying.**

*For he said: I am the Son of God*- The Lord is never recorded as actually saying that in so many words. He preferred to leave His works and character to show that fact. And these learned men showed ignorance of the most basic Bible teaching- that God does not immediately deliver His children from their crises, nor does His apparent silence mean that He does not love them.

27:44 *And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach*- The same word is used of how these reproaches were actually against God, but they as it were fell upon the Lord (Rom. 15:3). In this we see the intensity of God's manifestation in his crucified Son. Paul quotes this in the context of appealing for our patience with the weak, knowing we are living out the spirit of the crucified Christ in our patient bearing with them (Rom. 15:1). Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind how the Lord was patient with the thieves, the weak, who reproached Him; and that patience paid off, in that one of them was converted to such an extent that he was assured of final salvation.

The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why

the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man's conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self-respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God. This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

*27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour-* The only other Biblical reference to the sixth and ninth hours together is again in Matthew, and again on the lips of the Lord. It is when He spoke of how the householder went out at the sixth and ninth hours to desperately appeal for labourers to come and work for Him (20:5). This connection surely cannot be so arbitrary. The Lord intended that each waypoint or landmark in the crucifixion process would be an appeal to us to break out of our lethargy and come forward and serve Him in practice.

Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

*27:46 And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?-* The Greek seems to mean "Why *did* You forsake me", perhaps implying

that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi"? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

<b>14th Nissan</b>	<b>9p.m.</b>	<b>Last Supper</b>
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth Darkness to the ninth hour")		
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

### **God will not forsake His people if they are righteous**

"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

### **God will forsake His people if they sin**

"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)

"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It is finished*".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their

judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin- bearing and sin- feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the

wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of Israel", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)

"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)

"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)

The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).

The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case,



Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man

didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "*leave (forsake) his soul in hell*". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bore our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*")

"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

"Hide not thy face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.

"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him. Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink "that the Scripture might be fulfilled", or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

### **Notes**

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', *in Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

*27:47 And some of them standing there, when they heard it, said: This man calls Elijah-* They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

*27:48 And immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink-* John defines the reed as a hyssop, which is not more than 50 cm. long. We conclude that the Lord was not lifted up that high above the earth. His knees would have been at head height for those standing by the cross.

*27:49 And the rest said: Let him be. Let us see whether Elijah comes to save him-* They grudged even temporal relief for the Lord, because they were intent on testing whether He was indeed a true prophet. They felt justified in subjecting Him to the worst torture and indignity because they thought they were testing a false prophet.

*27:50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit-* "Again"- after "It is finished". The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

*27:51 And the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth quaked-* The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). .

*And the rocks were split-* "Rocks" translates *petra*, the Lord's special name for Peter. According to the reconstruction of events offered earlier, Peter was present at the crucifixion, a witness to the Lord's sufferings (1 Pet. 5:1), and what he saw there was the basis of his conversion. Perhaps we are therefore intended to imagine the rending of Peter's heart as part of his conversion process; and his path is to be ours, if we allow the cross the same power in our hearts.

Job said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock... for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

*27:52 And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised-* Not in order to let the bodies climb out, for

they were already decayed; but rather as a visual witness to the fact the Lord had conquered death. Likewise at His own resurrection, the Angelic rolling away of the stone was not simply so that the Lord could walk out into the open air, as if He was otherwise trapped behind the rock. He could pass through walls at ease. Rather was it again a visual witness to men.

*27:53 And coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection-* The graves were open for three days, and the bodies only came out of them when the Lord rose from the dead. The message was that His resurrection meant the resurrection of others, if we identify with Him. This latter point suggests to me that these people were likely known followers of the Lord who had died during His ministry and would've been well known to those who saw them.

*They entered into the holy city-* That sinful city is called "the holy city", even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly... there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

*And appeared to many-* The idea of the Greek is not a mere appearance but an explanation or giving of information. These persons were therefore actually preaching something, which supports my suggestion above that they were believers in Jesus.

*27:54 Now the centurion and those that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that happened-* There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:

- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us.

*Were terrified, saying-* Not just the Centurion but the soldiers with him all made the confession that "This was the Son of God". This is the confessional formula used in the Gospels and Acts. They feared because it was exactly that battalion of soldiers who had just hours before so cruelly abused and mocked the Lord. They came very quickly from that extreme of hating Him to a public confession of faith in Him at the foot of His cross. This is the power of the cross in convicting men. I suggest that psychologically, they could only have made this step of faith because they believed that somehow He would forgive them. They perceived a connection between His death there, and the forgiveness of the greatest human sin, the sin of the cosmos, the worst sin ever committed in the infinity of time and space- to abuse and crucify God's Son. Even that could be forgiven. If those soldiers did not have that conviction, then it seems to me that they simply would have cursed their luck and lived the rest of their days with a "certain fearful looking for of judgment".

*Truly this was the Son of God-* He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him".

*27:55 And many women were there watching from afar-* There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross. Lk. 23:48 says that there were people 'coming together to that sight'. This might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "Cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every

condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

Luke adds that people smote their breasts and 'returned', the same word used about repentance. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on Him they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

John notes that all the 'beholding' of the crucified Christ was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy about Israel beholding the one whom they had pierced. Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that as the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of



Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

*Those who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him-* The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

*27:56 Among whom were Mary Magdalene-* Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower-Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to. Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

*And Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee-* The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't. The fact it doesn't, and therefore accepted women as witnesses, was actually quite a radical thing. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	<b>Cross</b>	<b>Burial</b>	<b>Resurrection</b>
<b>Matthew</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"

	Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee		
<b>Mark</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James
<b>Luke</b>			

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

Jn. 19:25 speaks of "His mother's sister". It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions...must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk.

15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the

bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James...and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

*27:57 And when evening had come, there came a rich man-* The Greek term is found elsewhere in the Lord's parables of the rich fool and of the rich man who refused to believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets about Messiah's resurrection (Lk. 12:16; 16:19). Perhaps Joseph had reflected upon those teachings and vowed not to be like those rich men, but rather to give up his wealth.

*From Arimathaea, named Joseph-* Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel.

*Who also was a disciple of Jesus-* He was 'also' a disciple, in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

*27:58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given him-* The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection.

For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). If the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed" (Werner Keller *The Bible As History* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983 ed.) p. 356). It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile... is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?" (Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977)). In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death (see 38). Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (38:10; 73:26).

The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual

temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort.

*27:59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth-* Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

*27:60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone as the door of the tomb, and departed-* This apparently needless detail is added because Matthew's camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

*27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there-* They didn't stay there long, but

Matthew's camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

*And the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb-* The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

*27:62 Now the next day, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together before Pilate-* Matthew wants to present the day of the Lord's death as being the day upon which the Passover lambs were killed. "Came together" again shows how the Lord's cross both gathered together and divided people, as it does, or is intended to do, today.

*27:63 Saying: Sir, we remember that that deceiver said when he was still alive, After three days I will rise again-* They were capable of accurate quoting the Lord's words, which means their frequent misquotations of His words were the more culpable and consciously done.



27:64 *Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him away and say to the people, He is risen from the dead; and so the last error will be worse than the first-* The Greek for "error" is the same basic word as that translated "deceiver" with reference to the Lord (:63). The first deception would therefore refer to the Lord's [supposedly deceptive] claim that He was Son of God and would therefore rise from the dead; the last error / deception would then be the distribution of the idea that He had indeed risen from the dead. And of course it was exactly this which happened; yet again, we see how the careful, cunning plans of the Jews concerning the Lord's destruction never really worked out. They ended up crucifying Him at Passover, exactly when they did *not* want to do it; their plan with Judas backfired when he recanted and killed himself; their attempt to bribe the soldiers became an openly known secret. Quite clearly, the Lord's death was arranged by the Father and was the Lord's own will, and was in no way merely the result of the clever plots of wicked men. But there is another possibility regarding the first and last errors. It could be a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

27:65 *Pilate said to them: You have a guard. Go make it as secure as you can- The Jews had access to detachments of Roman soldiers with which they policed and protected the temple. These would have been the same soldiers who arrested, guarded and mocked the Lord, and perhaps were also present at the crucifixion. Surely many of them came to believe.*

27:66 *So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard-* Absolutely all was done to make the tomb tamper proof, making the Lord's resurrection all the more powerful.

## CHAPTER 28

*28:1 Now after the Sabbath-* AV "In the end of the Sabbath". This could be another hint that the ordinances of Judaism had now come to an end with the Lord's death; the Sabbath was now "past" (Mk. 16:1).

*Toward the dawn of the first day of the week-* AV "as it began to dawn toward the first day". The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went-* The Lord's mother. Inevitably there would have been jealousy between the two Marys, not least because Mary Magdalene apparently saw the Lord first and appears to have been closer to Him than His own other. This is perhaps reflected in the other records focusing on Mary Magdalene going to the tomb as if she went alone.

*To see the tomb-* The same word has just been used about the same women 'beholding' the crucified Christ (27:55). The impression presented [as so often] is that the Lord's followers fiercely and deeply loved Him, but with such little understanding. And perhaps that is the abiding impression we are left with of the body of Christ, despite all our strife over 'understanding correctly'.

*28:2 And there was a great earthquake, for an Angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came-* Two earthquakes happened, three days apart (27:54). A "great earthquake" is associated with the Lord's return (24:7; Rev. 6:12; 11:19; 16:18). And there is plenty of other language used about the second coming which also occurs here in the record of the Lord's resurrection. A descent from Heaven, an Angel [Angels will come with the Lord at His second coming], lightning, glistening white clothing, fear and great joy- this is all the language of the second coming and the resurrection from the dead. The connection is clearly because the Lord's resurrection is to be understood as the basis for the resurrection of all in Him- see on 27:52,53. The women went to the tomb in the immediate aftermath of a great earthquake; or perhaps it happened whilst they were on their way there. Their love of their Lord, purely as love for Him as a person, as they had little firm expectation of a resurrection, is amazing. The earthquake didn't faze them.

*And rolled away the stone and sat upon it-* The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls

the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

*28:3 His appearance was as lightning and his garment white as snow-* This is the language used elsewhere about the Lord Jesus, especially at the transfiguration and later in Revelation. The similarities were intentional. The women were being shown that the Lord's representative Angel [perhaps Gabriel] was visible and active, and this was to encourage them to believe that He Himself was now alive.

Of course Mary was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were so scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "As lightning, and his raiment white as snow". Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him... drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

*28:4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men-* They shook along with the earth, which shook at the earthquake. Their association with the earth is therefore made apparent. The women came to the tomb, therefore, to find the stone moved away, the Angel sitting upon it, and the soldiers laying on the ground like corpses. The women had come expecting to find the dead body of Jesus, slain as He had been by Roman soldiers. Instead they find the situation reversed; the soldiers are lying there dead, as corpses [*nekros*], and an Angel who is clearly representative of Jesus tells them that He has risen from the dead.

*28:5 And the angel said to the women-* AV "Answered and said". The fear of the women was not verbalized, but the Angel responded to it, just as God often responds to our unexpressed fears.

*Do not be fearful-* The idea is 'You do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because :8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

*For I know you seek Jesus, who has been crucified-* The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them ('I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds: "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

28:6 *He is not here, for he is risen, even as he said-* The idea may be 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?".

*Come see the place where the Lord lay-* There is no hint that the women obeyed. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience

of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused (Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

*28:7 And go quickly and tell his disciples-* The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyse our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

*That he has risen from the dead, and that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There you shall see him-* This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell....* The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of

His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

*Look, I have told you-* This could be in order to encourage their obedience. But see my suggestions above, that the disciples simply failed to have that level of obedience. Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; they you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "... as he told you... Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel who now appeared as Him and represented Him.

28:8 *And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy-* In apparent obedience to the command to "quickly" tell the disciples (:7). But again the record is imputing righteousness to them, for Mk. 16:7,8 says that they fled in fear and said nothing to anyone: "Go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see Him, just as He told you. And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid". It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples... and they departed quickly... and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen... and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context

is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

*And ran to bring this message to his disciples-* Running and sharing God's word are associated to the point that running is almost a metaphor for preaching. Thus Paul writes of his preaching among the Gentiles as 'running' (Gal. 2:2; 1 Cor. 9:26; Phil. 2:16 s.w. cp. Dan. 12:2). The clearest example would be in 2 Thess. 3:1: "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly" (s.w.). The running of the women with the fresh news of Christ's resurrection then becomes the pattern for all Christian preaching; we are continuing to run with the message. And the content of the message, 'the word of / about the Lord', is the word that He has risen. We should recall that this very first obedience to the great preaching commission was not met with success- but rather the words were mocked as madness and disbelieved.

*28:9 And Jesus met them, saying: Greetings!-* Having changed His plan of meeting the women in Galilee, see on :7 He goes ahead of you into Galilee. "Greetings!" is otherwise translated "Joy" or "Rejoice!". The last two times the Lord had heard it, it had been addressed to Him sarcastically by His abusers (26:49; 27:29). But it is the word also used of how the shepherd 'rejoices' on finding the lost sheep (18:13). This perhaps was the sense of the Lord's joy upon meeting them; the whole process of death and resurrection had been in order to seek and find the disciples. And surely the Lord was consciously aware of His prediction of Jn. 16:22: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" [s.w. "greetings!"]. But again it was as if He had to get them to rejoice, rather than them doing so on their own initiative; their weakness is so emphasized.

*And they came and took hold of his feet and worshipped him-* The Lord appeared to them from a slight distance and did not go up to them and initiate physical contact. Rather did He announce Himself and leave them to come to Him. The Lord, straight after His resurrection, repeats verbatim the Angels words to Mary: "Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel's words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with them especially after His resurrection.

Is "took hold of his feet" to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another's feet implying a desperate request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness. Or was it simply because they feared He would disappear, as in Jn. 20:17? The same Greek words for falling down at the feet and worshipping are used about how Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25) and how the believers at Philadelphia will be worshipped (Rev. 3:9).

Trinitarians therefore display their Biblical ignorance and paucity of Biblical scholarship by making any claim that the fact Jesus was worshipped by the feet therefore means He was God. That is simply not the case.

*28:10 Then Jesus said to them: Fear not-* See on 28:8 *They departed quickly*. Their fear was wrong, the Angel had urged them not to fear, and yet they still feared.

*Go tell My brothers-* Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren. Note how the Lord uses the term "My brothers". He was anxious to demonstrate that His resurrected, glorified status did not mean that His human brethren were not His brethren any longer; just as in Jn. 21 He addresses the disciples with a slang word, 'guys' [AV "children", *paidos*], to emphasize His humanity, urging them that His God and Father is theirs (Jn. 20:17,18). We note that it was fear which held them back from obeying the commission to preach, and it is fear which likewise stymies so much of our obedience to the great commission. Fear of consequence, of what others may think of us, of our own unworthiness, fear that we may have misunderstood... all these fears are what stop obedience to the clear, simple command to take the good news directly and personally to others.

"Go tell my brothers" is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord's death and resurrection, we read that therefore "I will tell of Your name to my brothers". The "I" is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord's resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The "things concerning the name of Jesus Christ" would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfil those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name". And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary!



She was to be Him, in the fulfilment of the great commission to tell the world.

The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brethren...". In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Go show these things... to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: "That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you", our brethren. It's as if John is acknowledging that the Lord's commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

*To go to Galilee and there shall they see Me-* The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:

- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses.

Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

*28:11 Now while they were going, some of the guard came into the city and told the chief priests all the things that had happened-* The impression is given of two parallel groups of people running back to Jerusalem from the Lord's grave. Both were fearful, both carried the news that the tomb was now empty. The one group went to tell the disciples, the other group went to the chief priests; both groups of messengers were full of an urgent need to tell what had happened. One group were women, the other were men. The suggestion may be that they all carried the same message- Angels had appeared, the body was not there any more, the grave was now open. Something Divine, supernatural and unstoppable by men had happened. See on 28:15 *Did as they were told*.

*28:12 And when they were assembled with the elders-* Again, as with every stage of the whole process, the Jews tried to take comfort in numbers, always meeting together in a vain attempt to spread the responsibility.

*And had taken counsel-* Matthew especially notes this feature of the Lord's Jewish enemies (12:14; 22:15; 27:1,7- all using the same Greek word).

*They gave much money to the soldiers-* Circumstances repeat under the hand of Providence, but wicked men never learn. They had given money to Judas but he had made a huge mess of it- in that he had not provided the incontrovertible legal evidence they had hoped for, the Lord's trial had been an obvious farce, and then he had come out on the Lord's side and killed himself. But they still tried to use money to get around the problem. We note that the Jewish leadership did not seek to discredit the soldiers as liars nor did they produce a corpse and claim it was that of Jesus. Their policy had to take account of the simple fact that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, despite the seal, the soldiers, and every effort to ensure that something like this did in fact *not* happen.

28:13 *Saying: You are to say that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept-* The desperation of the story is self-apparent; if the soldiers were really asleep then they would not know it was the disciples who had come, nor would they have any explanation as to how the corpse disappeared. Theft, after all, was only one possibility. The story shows every sign of having been thought up too quickly, and then those who wished to believe it were left to justify it for evermore. There was no recorded attempt to arrest or try the disciples for grave breaking or stealing a corpse- a serious offence under Roman law. There should at least have been a semblance of effort to do this if indeed the story were true.

28:14 *And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble-* The same word translated "persuade" in 27:20. They had persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and crucify Jesus, and they thought they could deal with Pilate in the same way. Their power over Pilate was assumed; it is doubtful whether they had that much power over a man who was consistently written into history as a conscienceless man- in every matter apart from that of the Lord Jesus.

28:15 *So they took the money and did as they were told-* The Greek *didasko* means 'taught' [as AV], and is an unusual word choice here. Perhaps the idea is that they were taught an official explanation which they memorized and were to trot out each time the issue of the empty tomb was raised. Early Christian converts had to memorize a Gospel record by heart- they were taught [*didasko*] the message of the empty tomb and repeated it. The same word is used just five verses later in :20, where the disciples are commanded to go and teach [*didasko* again] the good news of the empty tomb to the whole world. And the soldiers did the same, spreading the same reality [an empty tomb] but with a different explanation. This connects with the observations made on :11 *While they were going* that there were two groups of people telling the same message- the tomb was empty. But the Gospel preachers were paralleled, as it were, by another group of messengers whose message was identical but freighted with concern that it *not* be believed.

*And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day-* This is another allusion to the great commission; see on *Did as they were told*. As the story [Gk. *logos*] of the empty tomb was spread by the soldiers "among the Jews", so was the Christian account of the empty tomb spread "among the Jews to this day". The Greek word for "spread" is only elsewhere used about the spreading of the *fame* of Jesus. This is perhaps an allusion to the spreading of Matthew's Gospel record amongst the Jews right up until the day when it was written down- "this day".

28:16 *But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where*

*Jesus had told them to go-* This continues the theme of the resurrection accounts imputing righteousness to the disciples. The Lord's intention had been that they went into Galilee *before* they saw Him, in order to test their obedience to their Lord's words. But sensing their weakness of faith, the Lord dramatically changed plans and appeared to them whilst still in Jerusalem; see on :7 *He goes ahead of you into Galilee*. And according to John 21, they returned to Galilee to return to their fishing business, rather than out of obedience to the Lord. The disciples "went [away from Jerusalem] to the mountain [in Galilee]"; this may not mean that they actually went where He told them, but rather that they left Jerusalem in that direction. For the whole plan of meeting in Galilee was abandoned; the Lord appeared to them before then, in Jerusalem. And yet the record here speaks so positively of their obedience.

28:17 *And when they saw Him-* His appearance to the disciples in Galilee was the third time He had appeared to them (Jn. 21:14). And even then, they doubted. The disciples were the ones preaching the Gospel records, and truly were they emphasizing their own fallibility and slowness to believe the very message which they urged people to *quickly* believe and accept in instant baptism.

*They worshipped him; but some doubted-* The idea may not be that some believed but others doubted. It may rather be that they worshipped him and yet doubted at the same time. 'Doubted' translates a word essentially implying to be double minded, wavering between the two positions. The Lord was either dead or alive, and amazingly, they still wondered whether His appearances were tantamount to Him being alive. Even after the resurrection, they *all* saw Him and *all* worshipped Him; but some of them "doubted". You can worship, see the evidence of the Lord with your own eyes, as Israel daily saw the manna, and yet still doubt. Despite having seen the risen Jesus before, they *still* doubted. We really have to reflect on this and be challenged by the weakness of our natures.

28:18 *And Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying: All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth-* Mark and Luke suggest the great commission was given in Jerusalem or on the mount of Olives. So this verse 18 may now be talking about the Lord's next appearance to them in Jerusalem. Or it may be that He gave them the commission twice, and this was the first time He gave it to them. If this latter possibility is correct, then we would have the Lord's triple commission to Peter concerning feeding His sheep given at the same time as the great commission. This commission to Peter was therefore part of the commission to go and make disciples of all the world; with Peter taking special responsibility for the pastoral care of the converts.

*All power-* The Lord's promised presence with His preachers is capable of being backed up by "all power". The assurance is that insofar as we give

our lives to follow the great commission, all power will be potentially available to us in order to help us achieve that work. This is the force of the "therefore" in :19; because the Lord has all power, we are therefore to go and teach all nations. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" He was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication He was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'.

The Lord gave a reason for His great preaching commission: "Go *ye therefore*". "*Therefore*". Because of what? Mt. 28:18 provides the answer: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go *ye therefore*". Because of this, we must spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole planet, because His authority is over the whole earth. He has that power just as much now as He did in the first century; and *therefore* the command to spread the Gospel world-wide still stands today. Indeed, His words here in Mt. 28 have evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at

judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (note the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation to having "all power". We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all. There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was Christ (2 Kings 9:2 = Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (v. 13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be so exalted.

Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them. An Angel may be given a mission to preach somewhere, and success may be arranged by Him in prospect, but it is for us to put the work into practical effect, without which the converts will not be produced, despite the Angels preparatory work, although of course ultimately this is all foreknown by God Himself. Thus we read in Rev. 14:6 of an Angel being sent "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (same word as 'land'- the land of Israel),

and to every nation, kindred and tongue and people "(i. e. the whole world as well). However, this actual work of preaching to the Jews and to the world will be done by the saints; thus they will work out in practice what was achieved by the Angel in God's plan. In this context it is worth considering how the great commission as recorded in Mt. 28:18,19 is set in the context of other references in Matthew to world-wide preaching. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; and yet it is the Angels who will gather the harvest from "the world" (Mt. 13:38), Angels who will "repay" us for our work at the last day (Mt. 16:27), Angels who gather the elect from "the four winds" (Mt. 24:31) and gather [converts from] "all nations" to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The implication surely is that in our preaching work, the Angels are with us and will gather in the converts which we have made.

*28:19 Therefore go-* This evidently connects with the Lord's command in the parable: "Go ye" into the highways and "gather together *all*", as many as were found. And this in turn is an extension of an earlier parable, where the net of the Gospel is presented as *gathering* "every kind"- every *genos*, every "kindred / nation / stock / generation", as the word is elsewhere translated (Mt. 28:19; 22:9,10; 13:47). The work of the Gospel described in those earlier parables was now specifically delegated to the Lord's men. Through the work of the Lord's followers over the generations, there would in every nation and generation be some who were gathered in, of as many social classes as one finds walking along a street [highway / byway]. The net of Gospel preaching is filled (*pleroo*), and then pulled to shore for judgment. When the Gospel has been preached in all the world (with response), then the end will come. Elsewhere Paul uses the same word to describe how the Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25). To have the Gospel is to have an imperative to preach it.

The victorious truth that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" is purposefully juxtaposed against the next clause, which seems to contradict it: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:18,19). Through teaching and baptising all nations, the extent of that universal power is made known. But it depends on the freewill obedience of the believers to this commission. The Lord had the Spirit without measure, and yet He "could not" do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

*And make disciples-* The aim of our fulfilling the great commission is above all to "make disciples", to get more followers behind Jesus, more learners of Him, a greater bride for Him. Grammatically in Mt. 28:19-20, *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, and *poreuthentes* ("while going"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. In other words, the focus of our work must be upon making disciples for Christ, on

thereby bringing about His glory. All the baptizing and teaching which we do is subsidiary to this aim, and they can therefore never be ends in themselves.

Matthew's record of the great commission draws on earlier themes and passages in his Gospel. The Lord told His men to go out and make disciples of men (Mt. 28:19 RV). In the immediate context, there are many references to the disciples (Mt. 27:64; 28:7,8,13,16). And the term "disciples" occurs more often (73 times) in Matthew than in any of the other Gospels (e.g. only 37 times in Luke). The Lord is telling His men: 'Go out and make men like you- disciples, stumbling 'learners', not experts'. Thus they were to witness from their own experience, to share this with others, to bring others to share the type of relationship which they had with the Lord. In this sense preaching is seen by Paul as a bringing forth of children in our own image. John likewise was "the beloved disciple", the *agapetos*. And yet this is the very term which he uses in his letters to describes his "beloved children" (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:11). He saw them as sharing the same relationship to his Lord as he had. The nature of our relationship with the Lord will be reflected in that of our converts. He tells His men to go to the lost sheep, and yet in that same context He calls them sheep, in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:6,16). They were sheep sent to rescue sheep- to plead with men and women as men and women, to witness to humanity through their own humanity. Likewise the Lord spoke of how the extraordinary unity of His men would convince others that "thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:23), having just commented how they had surely believed "that thou didst send me" (:8).

The command to 'make disciples' of all men in Matthew is framed in such a way as to make '...baptizing them...' a subordinate clause. Baptism is only part of the work of making disciples. In Mt. 28:19-20 *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, while *poreuthentes* ("while going" or "when [you] go"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. The focus clearly is upon making disciples- all the other things, the teaching, baptizing, our effort in travelling and preaching, are incidental to this main aim. This is why responsibility to those we may convert only begins at baptism; it's a beginning of a man or woman being fashioned into the image of Christ, not the end. This is why Paul often uses the language of preaching about his pastoral efforts with his brethren [e.g. his desire to 'preach the Gospel' to the believers at Rome to whom he was writing]. He sees himself as preaching Christ to them still, in so doing warning them, "that we may present every man perfect" (Col. 1:28). Thus Paul parallels being a minister of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel, and being a minister of the church (Col. 1:23, 25). He saw his continued work amongst his baptized readership as *fully preaching* the word of God (Col. 1:25 AVmg.). So Paul said in Gal.



4:19 "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you". How do we see our responsibility to those to whom we have preached the gospel? We should continue to nurture and feed them well after the time of their baptism. It seems that this is not a general responsibility which falls on the shoulders of all of us. Rather we have a personal responsibility to those we have begotten through the gospel (1Cor. 4:15).

*Of all the nations-* A reference to Gen. 18:18. The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. The Lord commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all; but He describes this in other terms as being witnesses of Him to the world (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred.

If we say that we are *not* commanded to obey the command to go into all nations, then we must also conclude that we are not commanded to baptize people. And if these words about baptism don't apply to us today, then there is no command of the Lord Jesus to be baptized. The connection between the command to preach and the command to baptize is made clearer by the parallel record: "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of, AVmg.) all nations, baptising them... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19,20), i.e. Christ will be with us in our preaching right to the ends of the world. The special closeness of the Lord in preaching work has been widely commented upon by preachers. The commission of Mt. 28:19,20 is alluded to in Acts 14:21 AVmg. concerning the work of Paul and Barnabas, neither of whom were among the twelve: "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had made many disciples...". This in itself disproves the idea that the great commission was intended only for the twelve.

*Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit-* To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings

and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

*28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you; and I am with you always, even to the end of the age-* The Lord will support the work of the great preaching commission right up to the end of the age- which means that once the commission is completed, and the whole world has indeed been told the good news of the resurrection, then this age shall finish and the Lord shall return. He said the same very clearly in teaching that once the Gospel goes into all the world, then the end shall come. Matthew clearly saw his own Gospel record, the testament to his life's work, as playing a part in bringing about "the end". The further it could be distributed, the faster the end would come. And that challenge remains with us as with no other generation.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Daniel 12:13 LXX</b>
Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)	Go thou thy way
"...then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)	till the end
I am with you all the days (28:20 Gk.)	for still there will be days
unto the end of the world	to the end of the world.

These connections suggest that the great commission to preach worldwide will be powerfully fulfilled in the last days- see on 24:14.

New European Commentary: The Gospel of Mark

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## MARK CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*- This may simply mean that Mark is beginning at the beginning, with the account of John the Baptist. Given the intensity attached to words used in the Gospels, which are highly abbreviated records anyway, that would appear somewhat superfluous. It's likely he also meant to suggest that the events of the Gospel record were only a beginning, and in the lives of all future disciples, the Gospel story continues. John begins his Gospel with the same word- "In the beginning was the word". Luke uses a related word when he says that his Gospel was the record of all that Jesus "began to do" (Acts 1:1), with the implication that it was not being continued. So we are to see the Gospel records as a beginning of the work and word of Jesus, which continues into our lives. Matthew uses the same word in saying that Jesus "began to preach" (Mt. 4:17). Indeed, this word is later used by Matthew concerning how Jesus 'began' to do and teach things (Mt. 11:7,20; 16:21; 18:24); we are to understand that this beginning implies a continuation, and that continuation is in our lives. Mark's Gospel opens with Jesus going around preaching, appealing for people to repent and believe the Gospel (and this is described as "the beginning of the Gospel"). Mark concludes with *us* being asked to do the same, thereby directly continuing the work of the Lord, because we are in Him. The only other occurrence of the phrase "beginning of the Gospel" is in Phil. 4:15, where it means the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel. Mark's gospel is a transcript of how he or Peter used to teach the Gospel; it was written down under inspiration so that it would be preserved for future generations. We learn from this that the Gospel is in the gospels. The good news is essentially the biography and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The rest is interpretation.

The Greek text in Mark often has a rhythm and rhyme to it created by similar sounding words- because the early church aimed for new converts to memorize Mark's Gospel. Just one example from Mk. 1:1:

*Ar-khay tou you-ang-ge -lee-ou Yay-sou Khrees-tou whee-ou the -ou.*

The 'ou' endings are somehow rhythmical. Especially do we see this rhythmical quality in the phrase used for "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in Mk. 1:1: "*Ieso-u Christo-u huio-u Theo-u*".

*1:2 Just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Look, I send My messenger before your face-* Both the MT and LXX in Mal. 3:1 have "before Me". The face of the Lord Jesus was the face of God. He was the man with the face of God. To meet Him, to spit upon that face, was to do so to the face of God. And in Judaism it was well known that not even Moses could see the face of God. But it was now revealed in the face of the Lord Jesus. 'Face' in Semitic thought refers also to the presence; the presence of Jesus can be felt today, and it is none less than coming before the face of God. "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you" is how Mk. 1:2 quotes Mal. 3:1; but "before your face" is added, as if to create a reference to the Angel sent before Israel in the wilderness, to find a resting place (Ex. 23:20). The parallel is set up between John and the Angel, and therefore between Jesus and the people of Israel. The Lord Jesus *is* His people. He personally is the vine, the one body- symbols of the whole community. He isn't the trunk, and we the branches. We are the branches, and He is the whole vine. We are Him to this world. Thus Eph. 3:20,21 and many other passages parallel Christ and the ecclesia. "The servant" of Isaiah's prophecies is therefore both Israel and the Lord Jesus. The fact He was and is the representative of God's people means that those in Him must act and witness as Him.

*He will prepare your way-* This was John's intended mission, and he certainly tried to achieve it. But ultimately his mission failed in that Israel were generally like the children sitting in the marketplace with John as it were weeping to them- and they didn't respond. There was the possibility that if John's mission had succeeded, then Messiah could have come to Zion in glory over the made up way or road. But they didn't respond as needed- despite being baptized and approving his message in crowds. This is a sobering thought- that such response alone is not the same as really responding to the call for radical preparation for the coming of the Christ.

In response to Israel's attitude of "Where is the God of judgment?", and a genuine failure to realize their sinfulness ("wherein have we...?"), God prophesied He would send His messenger and then His Christ; His Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and

naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

1:3- see on Mt. 11:14.

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness-* The idea is of a radio play for voices. We are focused not upon the person of John, but upon his message, upon the voice crying in the wilderness. We likewise are to hear the message of the preacher rather than being side-tracked by his or her personality. For we preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ. But John didn't literally go into the desert and shout out his message with nobody listening but the wild camels and conies. The image is that actually it was a spiritual wilderness- it was *as if* there was nobody there listening, even though there were large crowds listening to his message with apparent approval. The hint is that actually he may as well have been shouting out in the desert with nobody listening. The same metaphor of a wilderness is used in speaking of how at this very time, the Lord Jesus arose as a tender green shoot out of a parched land (Is. 53:1). We might be able to infer from this that it was John who prepared the way for the personal emergence and spirituality of the Lord Jesus out of an environment which was otherwise unresponsive to his message. Or perhaps we are to make the connection with the fact that after John's preaching, the Lord Jesus went into that same barren wilderness, was tempted and emerged spiritually triumphant, for the same words are found in 1:12- Jesus went "immediately" (s.w. "straight" regarding his way) into the wilderness. It could be that His triumphant emergence from the wilderness was partly due to the inspiration he received there from John's preaching.

*Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight-* The work of John was to prepare the way for Jesus (1:2), but this would be achieved insofar as individuals prepared themselves. But Israel generally were not prepared by John, they rejected the One whose road John tried to prepare. But the Greek word translated "prepare" is commonly used in the New Testament for how the Father and Son are 'preparing' our place in the Kingdom, of how the Lord Jesus was the Passover lamb 'prepared', and how on the cross, He prepared a place for us in His Father's Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). But this was all plan B. The potential and intended plan was that Israel would respond to John's message and repent, thus becoming a people prepared for the Lord Jesus (Lk. 1:17,76 are very clear about this). Failure to respond has never stopped the God of all grace; He takes over where human response fails. Such is His passion for our final salvation. This thought should calm the fearful hearts of all we who at times shake our heads at our own paucity of response and preparation.

That one purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others is brought out by the way John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path to

Christ as well as the one He would travel. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

1:4 *John came and baptized in the wilderness, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*- The two clauses in this sentence appear to be the wrong way around. We would expect to read that John came preaching baptism, and then baptized people. One way around the problem is to imagine that the second clause ("preaching the baptism...") is as it were in brackets, explaining that the baptism he performed was not Christian baptism but simply a sign of repentance and request for remission of sins. But Mt. 3:11 makes it explicit that his baptism *preceded* the call for repentance. "Baptize... unto repentance" alludes to the Isaiah 40 passage which offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

The Greek *metanoia* ["repentance"] was used as a legal term describing the re-thinking of a sentence. Paul uses this figure in Romans to describe how we are condemned as guilty, but the sentence is re-thought because we are in Christ. Strong's lexicon claims that the word can mean "by implication, reversal of another's decision". Our re-thinking thus becomes God's re-thinking. In this we see something of the intimacy and connection between God and man achieved by human repentance. The legal metaphor continues in the word translated "remission"- the idea is of legal pardon or freedom from the accusation.

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built

on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: "They do *not* return to the Lord their God" (7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God's estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

Remember that this is in explanation of what the content of the Gospel was (1:1). The good news is not solely of a future political Kingdom to be established on earth at Christ's return. It is of forgiveness of sins right now.

1:5 *And there went out to him all the country of Judea and all they of Jerusalem-* The emphasis on "all" is perhaps to make the point that there was mass response to John's message about Jesus; and yet ultimately, his mission failed, because these large masses of people did not fully accept Christ despite their acceptance of John's teaching and baptism. "They of Jerusalem" are depicted as those who later refused or were at best agnostic towards the Lord Himself (e.g. "they of Jerusalem", Jn. 7:25 s.w.). We get the impression that the Galileans were more receptive of the Lord than "they of Jerusalem". They were eager enough to get caught up in a movement teaching that Messiah would soon come; but when He actually came, they didn't want Him. It can be that some are so enthused about "the signs of the times" that personal relationship with the Lord

Jesus becomes subsumed beneath the interest in the search and expectation, rather than the finding. And that is observable in so many people today.

*And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins-* Judaism at the time believed that the Elijah prophet must appear and baptize a repentant Israel, and then Messiah would come and save them from Roman domination. Their confession of sin was therefore unlikely to have been totally genuine; as noted above, these mass crowds later rejected the Lord Jesus as Messiah. Repentance can therefore be insincere, or surface level, tokenistic rather than from the heart. And yet despite being aware of this, John made no attempt to judge or assess the sincerity of repentance before baptism; and neither can we.

*1:6 And John was clothed with camel's hair and had a leather girdle about his waist, and-* John 'put on' [Gk.] this outfit, in conscious imitation of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). He took his calling seriously and intentionally emulated the Bible character most relevant to his work, just as we should. John is presented as a cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

*Ate locusts and wild honey-* To 'eat' in Semitic terms can mean to dominate or absorb into oneself. Locusts are consistently used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel's enemies (Dt. 28:38; Jud. 6:5; 7:12; Jer. 46:23; 51:14; Joel 1:4). John's father Zacharias had incorrectly supposed that the herald of Messiah would be directly involved in bringing about the triumphant coming of that Messiah in order to destroy Israel's enemies (Lk. 1:71,74). It seems that John lived out parental expectation and thus made the same mistake, assuming that he as the herald of Messiah was effectively Messiah, and that Israel's locust enemies were therefore soon going to be subdued. It was Messiah who was to eat honey (Is. 7:15,22), and again John seems to see himself as effectively the Messiah figure, so close was his identity with Him. He knew that he was heralding Messiah, but he presented himself as Messiah, knowing that Messiah's representatives were effectively Him to the world. We are in the same position. What John failed to realize, just as his father had failed to, was that Messiah had the possibility of being rejected, and the promised salvation and Kingdom of God could well be long after His initial exposure to Israel.

*1:7 He preached, saying: There comes after me-* Gk. 'behind me', alluding to John as a herald, the one who went before the greater one. His message included up front that he was not preaching himself, but One far mightier and better than himself.

*He that is mightier than I-* The Greek is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22,



where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously possessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

*Whose shoelaces I am not worthy to-* The idea of untying sandals was an idiom for being a herald of a person. John was doing this, untying the sandals, for he was the herald; but he is saying that he is unworthy to do the job he was doing. This must be a feature of our proclamation- a clear statement of our own inadequacy.

*Stoop down-* Gk. 'to bend toward'. John saw himself as bowing at the feet of Jesus in his work of witnessing about Him; and this should be our attitude. All self-presentation and self-exaltation through preaching is the very opposite of what the work of witness is all about. It is a bowing at our Lord's feet in unworthiness.

*And untie-* The same word used about Moses unloosing his sandals at the beginning of his public ministry, at the burning bush (Acts 7:33). John surely felt that the Lord Jesus was the second Moses, but so exalted, so higher than Moses, that the Lord should not unloose His own shoes, but rather John as His servant would unloose them for Him. To see anyone, Messiah included, as greater than Moses was a paradigm breaker within Jewish thought.

*1:8 I baptized you in water, but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit-* The Greek grammar could just as well mean 'I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with that *as well as* with the Holy Spirit'. The structure 'I [this], but He [that]' is used in a number of languages in this way- meaning effectively 'He [this + that]'. Indeed the Greek *de* translated "but" is also translated "also". For water baptism was clearly practiced by those following Jesus in the early church; they understood His baptism to involve water baptism. John's version of this material is in the record of the discussion with Nicodemus, where He says we must be "born of water and of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3-5- this is one of many examples of where John repeats the essence of the material chosen by the other Gospel writers). If John the Baptist's words here apply generally and not just to the disciples, then we note that every baptism is therefore effectively the Lord Jesus baptizing the person. The human baptizer who holds our shoulders as we are immersed is therefore irrelevant- we are baptized by none less than the Lord Jesus. Just as literally as John baptized people, so Jesus baptizes us to this day. The reference to water and spirit is repeated, with the same Greek words being used, when just two verses later we read of the Lord Jesus arising from the baptismal water and the Spirit descending (1:10). This cannot be incidental. The idea is clearly that the baptism of water and Spirit is the baptism Jesus Himself experienced, and His

baptismal experience becomes ours in Christian baptism- for the act identifies us with Him, with His death and resurrection. It cannot be denied, however, that the reference to a future baptism in Spirit has reference to the specific experience of the disciples; Acts 1:5 records the Lord Jesus stating clearly to them that John had truly baptized them with water, but soon they were to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. And this was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Spirit as tongues of fire fell upon them. Matthew and Luke add that the Lord's baptism was to be of Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16)- which was clearly fulfilled at Pentecost. But the impression is given that the general principle remains for all time- Christian baptism is a participation in the baptism of Jesus, which involved water and Spirit. Peter reasoned that if people had received the Spirit then they must also be baptized in water (Acts 10:47), suggesting he understood the promise of water-and-spirit baptism as relevant to believers of all ages. Indeed, in explaining his actions here Peter says that he was inspired by the Lord's own teaching that John baptized with water, but His followers were to be baptized by the Spirit (Acts 11:16). This means that Peter's insistence that there must be water baptism too shows that he didn't believe that water baptism had been superseded by a Spirit-only baptism. Rather did he understand John's words and those of the Lord as suggested above- that John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize not only with water but also with the Spirit.

It must be remembered throughout this discussion that the Greek and Hebrew words for 'spirit' and 'wind' are the same. The teaching about baptism in wind / spirit and fire has to be understood in the context of the metaphor of winnowing which follows immediately in Mt. 3:12 and Lk. 3:17, whereby the Lord Jesus is pictured as threshing His people by casting them into the wind, and thus separating out the chaff, which He then burns in fire. The above evidence must be given its due weight- that baptism in Spirit refers to later Christian experience in baptism. But it cannot be denied that there is connection to the metaphor of winnowing in wind and condemnation in fire, speaking of the condemnation of the wicked at the last day. Christian baptism is a symbolic death, an acceptance of condemnation for sin- and yet at the same time a connection with resurrection and hope of life eternal. Or it could be that the baptism in Spirit and fire speaks of two separate things- the acceptance of the faithful and destruction of the wicked in fire. But this is hard to square with the Lord's usage of the prediction of fire baptism with His baptism of the disciples with fire and Spirit at Pentecost.

*1:9 And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee-* The idea is that the Lord Jesus came forth from the obscure, despised north of Israel and began His public ministry at His baptism. John's Gospel puts this in more abstract, spiritual terms in saying that Jesus came down or came forth from God. This language, therefore, does

not speak of any literal descent from Heaven to earth of a pre-existent being.

*And was baptized by John in the river Jordan*- The Greek *hupo* ("by") speaks of being beneath another. He was baptized under John's ministry and authority. Here we see the Lord's humility in submission, and we can better understand John's reticence at baptizing Him. We would rather expect to read of the Lord's baptism *by* John, but *hupo* doesn't mean simply 'by'. The validity of baptism doesn't of itself depend upon the baptizer, but we do also have a sense in the New Testament that the baptizer often had some sense of responsibility for their converts.

1:10 *And immediately coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the Spirit* - The contrast is with how as the Lord came *up*, so the Spirit came *down* upon Him. There was a meeting of Heaven and earth, of God and man, in the man Christ Jesus. This ascending and descending was associated with "the heavens opened". These three concepts are to be found in Jn. 1:51: "Hereafter you will see Heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". The context of Jn. 1:51 is that John has just spoken of how *he* had seen the Spirit descending upon Jesus and remaining upon Him [at His baptism], proving that He was indeed the Messianic figure who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:32,33). The Lord Jesus is surely alluding to this, teaching that "hereafter" the disciples would *also* see what John had just said he had seen. And they would not just see it once, but would perceive that Heaven was now permanently open, and the ascent and descent of God's Spirit in the Angels ["He makes His Angels spirits", Heb. 1:7) was not just a one-time incident at the Lord's baptism, but was ongoing in His life. The comment that they would "see" this must be understood in the context of how John's Gospel uses the idea of 'seeing'. It refers to spiritual perception rather than literally seeing a specific incident. The only other time Mark uses the Greek word translated "opened" is in describing how the veil of the temple was "rent" at the Lord's death (Mk. 15:38), thus making the way into the most Holy ['Heaven', in the tabernacle symbology] open to all (Heb. 9:8). The opening of the Heavens at the Lord's baptism therefore looked forward to what would happen at His death; for He understood His baptism as also having an ongoing dimension, culminating in His death (Lk. 12:50). At His death, the Spirit would freely ascend and descend on Him, through the ministry of the Angels (Jn. 1:51), and the book of Acts records how this happened in the history of the body of Christ, the church. And in this we see the sense of the obvious connection to the experience at Bethel, the house of God, which represents the church- the Angels ascended and descended upon that place.

*As a dove descending upon him-* The Greek can equally refer to a pigeon. The hovering of the Spirit over the waters of creation can be read as an allusion to the hovering of a dove; in which case, seeing water is also present at the Lord's baptism, we can see the theme of a new creation being developed. What arose from the waters with a dove's presence was not a new planet, but the man Christ Jesus- the apex and quintessence of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). I consider it unlikely that John saw a literal dove fly down. Therefore the comparison with a dove is intentional; and surely to recall some earlier Biblical allusion. Noah's dove likewise was associated with water, and the flood water is also understood by Peter as representative of baptism; and again there is the theme of a new creation and God's loving goodwill toward men being developed. It's tempting to accept a variant manuscript reading of the Messianic prophecy of Is. 11:1,2: "A shoot will come out of the stump of Jesse... like a dove the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him" (see George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2005 p. 20)). In any case, the idea of the descent of the Spirit was predicted as being a sign of Messiah, and John therefore felt confirmed in saying that he had seen with his own eyes the confirmation that Jesus was Messiah (Jn. 1:32).

*1:11 And a voice came out of the heavens: You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased-* See on 2 Pet. 1:17. The voice had the same intonation as the voice on the mount of transfiguration; it was the voice of God Himself in person. The Father's 'pleasure' spoke also of His 'will'. His will was done, and His pleasure thereby achieved, "in" His Son; because of the Lord's internal state of mind. And this sets the path toward understanding our own status "in Christ".

*1:12 And the Spirit immediately drove him into-* The Greek *ekballo* means to cast out, to drive out from one place to another. But Matthew and Luke both say He was "led" by the Spirit into the wilderness. There were therefore both push and pull factors. He was led by the Spirit, perhaps in the form of an Angel. The allusion is to Israel at their baptism at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2); immediately afterwards, they too entered the wilderness, for 40 years instead of 40 days. we note that the Lord's quotations against temptation were all from the Deuteronomy passages concerning Israel's experiences in the desert. They were *led out* of Egypt, and yet they were also *cast out* of Egypt. The Lord's 'driving out' could therefore refer to opposition which forced the Lord to leave that area, as if there were some who strongly reacted against the declaration that He was God's Son; we read the same of how He was cast or driven out from Nazareth. Yet Israel's experience was typical of that of all God's people. And that experience is being made the prototype for what happened to

the Lord at His baptism. Whilst the Lord's baptism differed in some dimensions from ours, clearly we are to see our baptisms as a participation in His; or rather, the other way around. His baptism enabled Him to enter into ours. See on 1:13 *took care*.

Note how Legion was 'driven' by 'the demon' into a wilderness (Lk. 8:29)- as if to imply that the Lord's wilderness experience enabled Him to identify with the episodes of mental illness experienced by the man. So many of His experiences were likewise to enable Him to enter into the essential experiences of us His people.

*The wilderness*- There is an intended connection with the fact that John had been living in and preaching in "the wilderness" (1:3,4). Clearly the same "wilderness" is in view. The very place where John had preached about Jesus' Messiahship and Kingdom was where He was now being tested. It follows that His temptations were therefore related to the things which John had preached about Him there, and the fact that in that very same place, the crowds had apparently agreed to follow this new Messiah. All the temptations were concerning these things and the Lord's temptations were to misuse them. This is more ground for considering the temptations to have been internal to the thought processes of Jesus, as argued in our comments on the wilderness temptations on Matthew 4. But perhaps we can also speculate that we are intended to think of "the wilderness" as the location of persons who believed in Jesus as Messiah and wished to see His Messianic Kingdom. So there's no reason why the satan / adversary could not have been a Jewish person or persons suggesting to Jesus these ideas of immediate Messianic rule. The temptations departed from the Lord for a period, implying they returned (Lk. 4:13). And elsewhere we read of Him going out into deserted places [s.w. "wilderness"] and praying (1:35,45; Lk. 5:16) or struggling with crowds who wanted an immediate Messianic Kingdom (Mt. 14:13,15; Mk. 6:31; Jn. 11:54)- perhaps suggesting that the same temptations returned later in His ministry.

1:13- see on 1 Cor. 15:45.

*And he was in the wilderness forty days*- See on 1:12 *Drives Him*.

*Tempted by Satan*- see more detailed commentary on Matthew 4.

*And he was with the wild beasts*- Suggesting He was as it were in Eden, and is compared favourably against Adam who failed his test when amongst the wild beasts. Paul in Philippians 2 and 1 Cor. 15 likewise compares the Lord's strength against temptation against Adam's weakness. Yet *therion* is the word repeatedly used in Revelation about the Lord's struggle with "the beast", and again we there encounter the motif of the wilderness. Indeed, the parallel between 'beast' and 'satan', the

adversary, is found both here in Mk. 1:13 and in Revelation- and hardly anywhere elsewhere. The Lord's struggle and victory against the beasts in the desert was therefore what is being repeated now in His struggle against the various beasts of political and spiritual opposition to His work, and His victory in the desert looks ahead to His final victory against the beast in the last day.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

*And the angels took care of him-* AV "ministered". This is alluded to in Heb. 1:14, where we learn that Angels are spirits [He was led of the Spirit] who 'minister' unto us. Again we find the hint that His baptismal experience was a participation in ours; see on 1:12 *drives Him*. I would therefore conclude that the purpose of the Lord's baptism was not in order to obtain forgiveness of sins, but to enable Him in essence to be able to participate in our baptisms- the driving out of Egypt, the leading into the desert, the ministration of Angels afterwards. And this was surely the reason for so many of His experiences.

1:14 *Now after John was delivered up-* The same word used about the betrayal / handing over of the Lord Jesus. He must have seen John's sufferings as a precursor of His own, as He makes explicit in Mt. 17:12: "Elijah came already and they knew him not, but did to him whatever they would. Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer by their hands".

*Jesus came into Galilee-* He had come down from Nazareth to be baptized by John near Jerusalem at the Jordan, and now He returns into Galilee. He took John's imprisonment as the cue to begin His public ministry. His 'coming' can be understood as the fulfilment of the idea of Messiah as 'He that shall come' (Lk. 7:19; Jn. 6:14; 7:28); Legion likewise speaks with that perception of His 'coming' (Lk. 4:34). The many references in John to the Lord's 'coming down' from Heaven would therefore refer not to any literal descent of a pre-existent being from Heaven to earth, but of His 'coming' in the sense of His public manifestation to Israel as their Messiah. Jn. 4:54 seems to describe the beginning of His public ministry as when He 'came' [s.w.] out of Judea into Galilee, which is precisely the same moment being described here by Mark. The Lord 'came' because He had been 'sent' (Jn. 7:28); that sending was therefore into Galilee to begin His public ministry, rather than a sending from Heaven to earth. He was sent from Heaven, i.e. from God, in that His sending was Divine; not in any literal sense. It would be literalism's last gasp to read this as

meaning that Jesus personally was in Heaven and was literally sent all the way 'down' to earth. He 'came' [s.w.] into the Jewish world not at His birth but at the beginning of His public ministry (Jn. 9:39); this was when light 'came' into the Jewish world (Jn. 3:19). He 'came' when He 'spoke' the word of the Gospel to Israel (Jn. 15:22 "If I had not *come* and spoken unto them..."). He came into the Jewish world in order to publicly bear witness (Jn. 18:37)- that bearing of public witness was when He 'came into the world'. John the Baptist had repeatedly taught that Jesus would 'come' after him (Jn. 1:15,27,30)- proof enough that His 'coming' was not at His birth but at the start of His open ministry. Jewish thought expected Messiah to 'come into the world', not through a literal descent from Heaven, but through public manifestation to the Jewish world (Jn. 6:14) and 'coming' from the family of David (Jn. 7:42 "Christ comes of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem"). We can helpfully note how often we read of men 'coming' to Jesus in response to His 'coming' to them (e.g. Jn. 3:19,20- the light comes into the world, and men come to that light; Jn. 4:5,7- Jesus came to Sychar and the Samaritan woman came to Him; Jn. 5:40,43- "I am come... come to Me"; Jn. 11:20,29,30,32- when Jesus came, Martha and Mary came to Him; Jn. 12:1,9- Jesus came to Bethany and the people came to Him). This is the ultimate meeting between God and man- when we respond to His having 'come' to us in His Son. For He 'comes' to us today in knocking on the door of our hearts (Jn. 14:3,18,23).

*Preaching the Gospel of God*- The same word is used of how John 'preached' (Mt. 3:1), emphasizing the continuity between John's activity and that of the Lord Jesus whom he heralded. Mk. 1:15 and Mt. 4:17 say that the preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom was a preaching of repentance- and that is in fact good news. The good news of the Kingdom is therefore not simply information about a future good time to come on this earth, but [as the Lord's parables of the Kingdom make clear] the good news of a repentant life which can be lived right now in preparation for the future Kingdom on earth.

Mark's truncated term "The Gospel of God" perhaps intends to get over the idea that God is good news. For in so many religions, Judaism included, "God" or 'the gods' are generally bad news for sinful man. But the true God is good news for sinners.

1:15 *And saying: The time is fulfilled*- But later on in His ministry, the Lord taught that His time was not yet fulfilled (Jn. 7:8- the same words are used). The words are used in Lk. 1:20 concerning how each prophetic word has a time for its fulfilment. But as we learn from the prophetic word against Nineveh in Jonah's time, those times for fulfilment can be changed. The Kingdom could have come in the first century had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah. But instead they refused Him. And so the time of fulfilment was changed; and the content of the fulfilment likewise

changed. The "time" shifted from being the time of the Kingdom to the time of their crucifixion of their Messiah. We see how God's purpose is in some ways open-ended, such is His respect of human freewill decisions.

*And the kingdom of God is at hand-* In the sense that Jesus as King of the Kingdom could be called "the Kingdom of God". His life was the Kingdom life; to accept the offer of His life was therefore, in John's gospel, to receive the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. John's message was that the Lord was about to be revealed; "the Kingdom" was therefore "at hand". This was good news for all men because this message was of the forgiveness of sins; the imminent arrival of God's political Kingdom on earth is not good news for sinners, nor for anyone unprepared for it. The essential good news is of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus. Thus the good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Therefore the response to this good news was intended to be repentance.

*Repent and believe in the Gospel-* This might seem to be in the wrong order- for surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does. But the point is, life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place. Thus Rom. 6 teaches that we were once servants of sin... and we expect the sentence to conclude: 'But now you are servants of righteousness'. But it doesn't. We were once servants of sin but now we have obeyed the form of doctrine delivered to us... and are *therefore* servants of righteousness. Or we could have here an example of where teaching and belief of the Gospel in its fuller sense comes *after* conversion; this is stated explicitly in the great commission, which tells us to take the good news of the resurrection to people, to baptize them into the risen Christ, and then to teach them all things the Lord commanded (Mt. 28:19,20). We might expect 'repent and you will be forgiven'. Instead we read that repentance is to lead to believing in the Gospel; the good news of sin forgiven and that we can really have a place in God's eternal Kingdom on earth. The Gospel of the Kingdom is not therefore simply that the Lord shall come and establish an eternal Kingdom on earth. It is that we can really be forgiven and given the life eternal in that Kingdom which He shall establish at His return.

Mark gives no prior definition of what the Gospel of the Kingdom is (:14). And the LXX only contains the word once (2 Sam. 4:10). Is this an example of Mark assuming that his readers know what 'the Gospel' is? Or did the Lord speak in this way in order to beg the question from His audience: 'And what is your good news?'- and the rest of the Gospel record is the answer to that question. Another approach is possible; although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of



Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

*1:16 And passing along by the sea of Galilee-* The Greek could mean that He walked around the entire lake. But He waited to call them, it seems, until the most inconvenient moment, just as the nets were in mid-air. And His call likewise comes to us in the midst of daily life.

*He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen-* Literally, 'salty ones'. The Greek can equally mean 'sailors'. The Lord must have had this in mind when He said that they were "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). If we are likewise the salt of the earth in our influence upon others, we will find ourselves as the modern counterpart to those 'salty ones' who followed the Lord in His Galilee days.

1:17 - see on Lk. 9:59.

*And Jesus said to them-* It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, snap shotted in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life.

*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men-* The Lord had a program of education in view; their following of Him would mean that they would naturally reach out to save others. One aspect of our discipleship is likewise that we might bring others to salvation; otherwise, they swim off to their death in the sea of nations. We are saving people out of the world; for the sea refers to the Gentile world. And in that connection we see how the Lord considered the Jews to be no better than the sea of the Gentile world, and His disciples were initially to save Jewish people out of it. Separation from the world is therefore an essential part of our message and the result of our work with people. This was exemplified by the way the disciples themselves forsook their nets and [s.w.] also their own father (:18,20).

1:18- see on Mk. 10:28.

*And immediately they left the nets and followed him-* Mark uses this kind of word often, especially in his opening chapters, to create the impression of speed and urgency associated with the Lord Jesus. Immediacy of response is likewise a theme in Matthew. If our lives are in the realm of the Spirit, we will likewise experience the Lord's fast moving activity in our lives and hearts. Whilst each day can seem much like the previous day, the speed of His activity is incredible. And we are to respond immediately to it.

*1:19 And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the boat-* The reference to a specific boat suggests that they had been in the boat from which Simon and Andrew had been casting their nets (:16).

*Mending the nets-* Which were presumably damaged. The implication was that the Lord would give them nets which would not break- the work of the Gospel will always succeed, ultimately. Hence the later acted parable of the nets which did not break despite the 153 fishes caught (Jn. 21). We can assume that they had just had a good catch, hence the need to mend their nets. It was at the peak of their career success, as it were, when they were feeling good about their work... that the Lord asked them to leave it all for Him.

*1:20 And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went after him-* The fishermen disciples were not, therefore, of the lowest social class. They owned a boat and a business large enough to employ workers. Their speed of response and forsaking it all is therefore all the more commendable, a challenge indeed to the middle class. And it is a witness to the power of the seed of the Gospel which John the Baptist had sown in them. Our preaching of the same message may likewise elicit radical response in people quite some time after we first sowed the seed in them. The middle class are uncomfortably, inconveniently challenged by the real call of Jesus; but it's worth reflecting that the majority of the people brought before us in the Bible as examples of faith and commitment were in fact not the poorest of the poor; they were from the middle class of their day. But much was expected of them.

*1:21 And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught-* The synagogue minister gave the lesson or sermon, but invited members of the congregation to contribute their thoughts. The Lord's message would therefore have been brief, but so powerful that it astonished people (:22).

*1:22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for-* The "they" may refer to the newly called disciples. They had not had previous exposure to His teaching; all they had received was the message of John the Baptist. Their immediate response was therefore on a fairly slender knowledge

base. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

*He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes-* As noted above, this authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. The astonishment at the Lord's teaching in :27 was because of the actions of Jesus, in that case, in curing a man. The emphasis is perhaps to be placed on the word "having". He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

*1:23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out-* As John speaks of the "synagogue of the Jews" and a "feast of the Jews". The Old Testament spoke of the feasts of Yahweh and *His* house; but Israel had hijacked God's religion and made it their own, just as we can in our day. And indeed the established churches appear to have done just that. "And immediately" suggests the cameraman as it were suddenly introducing a new person to us, with a jolt, "immediately". The impression is being created by the record of a fast moving ministry.

*1:24 Saying: What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God-* Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the

Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

*1:25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him-* If as suggested on :24, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

*1:26 And the unclean spirit, tearing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him-* This and :27 are recorded from the perspective of the onlooking crowd, with their beliefs and observations coloured by those beliefs. The video camera of the Gospel writer is as it were focused on them, and therefore the language of demon possession is used. The Greek for "tearing" is literally 'to make gasp'. It is appropriate to an epileptic convulsion or fit. But these incidents are not the work of indwelling demons; for they can be managed by medication today. The convulsion is described in the language of the day, as if there was a struggle within the man, and then in the man's panting afterwards we are invited to imagine a spirit departing from him. There was no actual "unclean spirit" involved; the cure was of personality, as noted on :24, it was as if one of the man's less dominant personalities now left him. And that is the kind of healing which the Lord through the Spirit can work today.

*1:27 And they were all amazed, so much so they questioned each other, saying: What is this? What a new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him!-* See on 1:22 *He taught them as one having authority*. We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching*

had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

*1:28 And the report of him went out immediately everywhere into all the region of Galilee and thereabout-* "Report" in Greek is literally the hearing; as noted on :27, the Lord performed this miracle in terms of their understanding of 'spirits' in order that the hearing about *Him* might spread. And so it did.

'Galilee' literally means a circle or ring; the Greek here is a play in words, developing the idea that the Lord's fame spread around around Galilee, the circle, as if in concentric circles rippling out from a lake. This kind of literary device would be an aid to memorization, and is understandable if indeed tradition is correct in claiming that first century Christian converts were required to learn the Gospel of Mark by heart.

*1:29 And immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue-* "Come out" translates the same Greek word used in :28, "went out". This kind of repetition of original words is common in Mark, and was an aid to memorization. This word occurs seven times in Mark 1 alone (:25,26,28,29,35,38,45). An alternative word or method of expression could have been used in most of those cases, so the repetition is purposeful. See on :28.

*They came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John-* Perhaps we are intended to see a movement of the Spirit out of the houses of organized religion and into domestic homes, which became the house churches upon which the Christian faith was originally built. See on :33 *Gathered together at the door.*

*1:30 Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever-* Gk. 'on fire'. Clearly the unscientific language of the day being used to describe medical conditions, as was the language of demon possession.

*And immediately they told him about her-* He obviously knew about her condition already. For He is portrayed in the Gospels as the one who knew all things. The gospel records feature often this way they had of telling Him about things which we now can imagine the Lord already knew. The gospel writers are witnessing to their own immaturity, and this admission of personal lack of perception and weakness made their message attractive and compelling to their hearers. It is the same today.

*1:31 And he came and took her by the hand and raised her up-* Most of the other 46 uses of *krateo* in the NT imply an exertion of significant energy, as if hauling her up; rather than a graceful touch of her hand. There was an expenditure of effort by the Lord in order to heal a person (Mk. 5:30).

*And the fever left her, and she served them-* The response to the Lord's healing was and must still be to serve Him through serving His people. Again we note her immediacy of response, such a theme in the gospels [Mark especially] and the Acts.

*1:32 When evening came, and when the sun had set, they brought to him all that were sick and those possessed with demons-* This is saying the same thing twice. The point being made is surely that these sick people and their relatives waited with impatience until the Sabbath was ended before being healed. The contrast is with Simon's mother-in-law, who was healed on the Sabbath, within the dwelling place of Jesus, and worked in service immediately. There was no need for them to wait; and they must surely have reflected on that, having heard that the woman had been healed that Sabbath afternoon.

*1:33 And all the city was gathered together at the door-* The Greek *episunago* is related to the word for "synagogue"; see note on :29. A new synagogue had been formed in a house- that surely is the idea.

*1:34 And he healed many that were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons-* The Greek for "healed" is defined by some as meaning "to wait upon menially". The Lord performed His healings in a spirit of humble service. Another form of the word is found in Heb. 3:5, where Moses is described as a "servant". This is a far cry from the arrogance and self-glory of faith healers today. All that we do for others is to be done in a spirit of menial service; and this means that when they are deeply thankful to us, we will not in any sense be proud. It's just part of what we are called to do on the Lord's behalf, as His servants, doing His work in His power. To the glory of God. The "various diseases" demonstrated His wide ranging power; for healers tended to specialize in specific diseases, claiming power over particular [supposed] demons. But the Lord could heal all kinds of diseases.

*And he did not permit the demons to speak-* The same word translated "send forth". The idea could simply be that the Lord didn't send out these converts as 'sent forth' missionary apostles. "The demons" are put for the [supposedly] 'demon possessed' people. The focus is ultimately upon the person and not upon whatever was thought to be possessing them. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them.

*Because they knew Him-* It was the mentally sick who were the main group to 'know him to be the Christ' (Mk. 1:34 RVmg.). And it was a woman, and one with a history of mental illness, who was chosen as the first and leading witness of His resurrection. And women had no legal power as witnesses. The Greek here can be translated to the effect that

the Lord did not allow them to preach, which they wanted to do because they knew / recognized Him. In this case, knowing Him naturally leads to a desire to witness to Him. It's the kind of knowledge which cannot be merely theoretical. The Lord had to command those who knew Him not to speak out that knowledge (Mk. 1:34 cp. 44)- because people knew Him, they quite naturally wanted to preach it. One cannot truly know the Lord and not tell others of Him. This is the power of true knowledge, believed as it should be believed. But at this stage the Lord did not wish for yet further mass publicity. His focus was upon training the twelve and others who wished to understand His teachings. The miracles were it seems largely done when people came to the Lord for them, or when in the course of His preaching work, He encountered need [such as the hungry crowds who had listened to Him and were starving, even fainting, from lack of food].

*1:35 And in the morning, a great while before daybreak, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place; and there prayed-* Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning. The Lord's attitude to prayer was radical in itself. The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Perhaps He was motivated in His prayers by the lengthy implications of the fact that Yahweh is indeed one, and this demands so much of us.

*1:36 And Simon and they that were with him followed after him-* The Greek means to search for, implying they found Him on His knees in some discreet corner or behind a bush.

*1:37 And they found him, and said to him: All are seeking you-* Lk. 4:42 says that the crowd, "the people", were seeking Him. But so were Simon and the disciples- and they found Him, whereas the people did not. And that was an acted parable of how they sought and found, but the masses did not 'find' the Lord because they didn't really seek Him properly. The contrast, therefore, is between how the masses were 'seeking' the Lord; but the disciples "followed after Him" (:36), using the Greek word usually translated 'persecute'. Passing fascination level interest, mere religious curiosity, is not the real seeking for Jesus which will result in finding Him.

The contrast between the crowds and the disciples seems to be that they found Him because they searched for Him more passionately.

1:38 *And he said to them: Let us go elsewhere, into the next towns, so that I may preach there also; for this is why I came-* This could imply the Lord was unimpressed by the crowds searching for Him; see on 37 *All are seeking you*. The Lord's focus is presented as being upon preaching, teaching His ways, rather than upon meeting human need through miracles. This strongly impacts our thinking as to whether a purely social gospel is Biblical or even any kind of 'gospel'. The reason for His 'coming' was to preach- not to heal. Otherwise He would have remained where He was, seeing He had attracted droves of sick folks and likely more were now on the way to Him, to be bitterly disappointed that He had abruptly left first thing that morning. His 'coming [forth]' was not from heaven to earth; the same word is used of how He 'came forth' from Bethlehem (Mt. 2:6). It refers to His coming to Israel in His ministry. However, we can note that "I came" is the same Greek used in :35: "He went out". He may simply be saying: 'This is why I went out of the house early in the morning; because I must be on My way to take the Gospel further to other towns'.

1:39 *And throughout all Galilee he went into their synagogues, preaching and casting out demons-* See on 1:23 *Their synagogue*. The miracles, the 'casting out of demons', were to back up His preaching; hence "preaching" is mentioned first; see on :38.

1:40 *And a leper came to him, begging him as he knelt down before him, saying to him-* "Begging" is the Greek *parakleo*; and John's Gospel records at length the Lord's promise to be our *parakletos*, doing the work of comfort and entreaty, *parakleo*, for *us*. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord; both relate to each other in the same passionate way, in prayer [from our side] and in the Lord's gracious response [from His side]. The *parakleo* group of words are appropriate to both sides of the relationship.

*If you will-* The man recognized that it was within the Lord's power to heal him, but he also recognized that the Lord's will is not always ours, as His longer term plan may require Him not to respond to our request in the immediate term. This is a great example to us. For he would have been aware that the Lord did not heal all human need which He encountered; He had just left Simon's house, apparently because He didn't want to cure all the crowds surely gathering there for healing.

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy



was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

*You can make me clean*- The man realized the spiritual dimension of his affliction; for he asks not merely for healing but specifically to be made clean. The Lord replied that this was indeed His will. This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mt. 8:2; Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

1:41 *And being moved with compassion*- It has been observed that oral performance of texts like e.g. the Gospel of Mark was designed towards producing an emotional impact upon the hearers. We who read the same text and seek [quite rightly] to understand from it doctrine and practical commands for living somehow miss much of this; we inevitably subject the text to intellectual analysis, whereas the first century audience would have felt from their performance an appeal to convert, to accept, to feel something in response towards the Man Jesus who was presented there. Perhaps this is why a reading of the Gospels produces less response in us than that from a first century group hearing the same Gospels read / performed to them. Thus a first century reciter / listener would have paid special attention to the way Mark indicates the emotional state of Jesus as He said His words- angry (Mk. 3:5), compassionate (Mk. 1:41), snorting like a horse (Mk. 1:43 Gk.), troubled and distressed (Mk. 14:33). Likewise Mark's constant use of the term "immediately..." in his early chapters would've created a sense of urgency, fast flowing narrative, perhaps matched by the reciter speaking quickly.

*He stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him: I will. Be cleansed*- The Lord responds within the terms of the man's request: "If You will, You can make me clean". We note the man sought cleansing above mere healing; his spiritual need for cleansing was paramount in his mind. We likewise should ask for material blessings motivated by spiritual concerns. The Lord could have cured the man in multiple ways, but he chose to touch the man, making Himself technically unclean; although it could be argued that the cure was so immediate that it was therefore debatable as to whether the Lord had actually touched a leper or not. Surely He did it the way He did to provoke such questions; for the process of questioning led to them becoming the more aware of the fact that the

Lord's touch had indeed cleansed the man. And the whole question of ritual uncleanness was of course put in the spotlight. The Lord was and is unafraid to associate with the very dirtiest of human conditions and situations. There was no revulsion from them, as there is not today. The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

*1:42 And immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was made clean; and-* For this whole incident, see commentary on Mt. 8:1-4. The immediacy of the cure upon touching the Lord raised all kind of questions for the legalistic mind, as to whether the Lord was made unclean or not (see on :41).

In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done here. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease.

1:43- see on Mk. 1:41.

*He immediately sent him away with a stern warning-* As noted on :45, the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal; see on :39.

*1:44 Saying to him: See you say nothing to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing the things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them-* The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness first and foremost to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done

by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

*1:45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news, so much so that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but stayed in deserted places-* If we put the stress on the word "openly", we are left imagining Jesus somehow disguising Himself in order to enter the towns. This is the reason why the Lord so sternly charged the healed man not to spread the news (:43); the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal; see on :39.

*But still they came to him from every quarter-* This was a small foretaste of people from every direction coming to Messiah. The Lord's life experiences, like ours, were a living exemplification of the future Kingdom experience.

# MARK CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Mk. 6:2. For this section on the healing of the man carried by four, see on Mt. 9:1-6.

*And after some days, when he entered again into Capernaum, it became known that he was in the house-* The "that" is recitative, so the sense is 'It was reported- He is in the house!'. This was the level of gossipy attention paid to the Lord, which must have been so irritating: "He has gone into the house, and is there!". Again we get the impression that the Lord was not interested in mass public meetings and healings; His focus was upon training the twelve and teaching the Gospel. It seems He was almost hiding away in the house. Not surprisingly, because He left there because of the attention caused by His miracles, and He had been hunted down even in the deserted places by those eager for a miracle (1:45).

2:2 *And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even about the door; and he spoke the word to them-* "Gathered together" is literally 'synagogued', and this continues the idea noted on 1:29,33 that the Lord was effectively setting up a new Israel, with synagogues in homes, in public places, under fig trees- anywhere, where the Lord's followers gathered together. We can be sure that the "house" where he was was likely that of Simon, and the crowds of people wanted healings. For they had descended on that same house for healing in 1:33. But instead of reading that He healed them, we read that He preached to them. Mark is stressing that this was the Lord's essential ministry. The fact He chose to heal just one person was because He perceived deep faith in those who brought him, and also because He wished to make a point out of that healing- but again, harnessed to the objective of teaching the people.

2:3 *And they came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them-* The Greek for "carried" means literally to be taken up or away, and reflects the Hebrew term used for the bearing away of sin. And :5 confirms this association by stating that it was through the faith of the four friends that the man's sins were forgiven. This is the huge horizon of potential which there is for us in our efforts for others- we can even play a role in the Lord forgiving them their sins. This lifts the concept of pastoral work far beyond mere doing of good works. See on Mk. 7:32-35.

2:4 *And when they could not come near to him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the paralyzed man lay-* This was all done in faith, and by doing this the Lord saw their faith (:5). "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

2:5 *And Jesus seeing their faith, said to the paralyzed man-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22). Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others.

*Son, your sins are forgiven-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

2:6 *But some of the scribes sitting there questioned in their hearts-* Mt. 9:3 "said within themselves".

Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spoke within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

2:7 *Why does this man speak so? He blasphemes. Who can forgive sins but one- God!-* The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

We should deeply note at this point that the thoughts of men in their hearts are known to the Father and Son, and have been recorded publicly here in these records for many centuries.

*2:8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit what they questioned within themselves, said to them: Why do you question these things in your hearts?*- Perhaps we're helped to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings by Mk. 2:8: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So Mk 2:8 gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator.

*2:9 Which one is easier to say to the paralyzed man?*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier for Me'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:10).

*Your sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, pick up your bed and walk*- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ

maketh thee whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

2:10 *But so you may know*- He cured the man sick of a palsy that the onlooking, cynical Scribes *might know* that He had power to forgive sins. He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4).

*That the Son of Man*- The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

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*Has authority on earth to forgive sins-* He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "*all* power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

*He said to the paralyzed man-* As if He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

2:11 *I say to you! Arise, pick up your bed and go to your house-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

2:12 *And he arose and immediately picked up the bed, and went out in full view of them all. They were all amazed and glorified God, saying: We have never seen anything like this before!-* The immediacy of the cure, especially in response to the faith of third parties, was utterly unknown amongst those who had seen too many fake healers attempting to heal illness. "In full view of them all" is another hint that the miracle was for teaching purposes; the Lord was surrounded by people eager for healing, and instead He taught them.

2:13 *And he went out again by the sea side; and all the crowd went to him and he taught them-* The imperfect tenses mean they kept on coming

to Him, and He kept on teaching them. The interest in miracles had given way to interest in His teaching, just as the Lord had intended. His location by the lake side was perhaps in order to require some effort by the people to come to Him; and there were no houses large enough to hold the crowds coming to Him anyway.

2:14 *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus-* Mt. 9:9 calls him Matthew. Matthew's preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi, strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (Mt. 9:3).

*Sitting at the tax office-* It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

*And he said to him: Follow me-* The Greek means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

*And he arose and followed him-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (another example of Mark highlighting immediate response to the Lord's call). As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on").

The Lord valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

*2:15 And it came to pass, that as he was dining in Levi's house-* Matthew's account is vague about whose house it was; he just says "the house" in his record. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

*Many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many, and they followed him-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them, even though to eat with a person was seen as a religious act of fellowship. The Lord's open table was and is scandalous to the religiously minded. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the

same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

*2:16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples: How is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?*- To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

*2:17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them-* The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

*They that are whole have no need of a doctor-* Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are whole*'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

The Greek word for "whole" or healthy is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated. Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was

a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

*But they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance-* It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). They were not the most righteous of people. The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call to or towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on Mt. 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

2:18 *And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came, and said to him: Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?-* Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all

until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

*2:19 And Jesus said to them: Can the sons of the bride chamber fast-* John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

*While the bridegroom is with them?-* The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord is saying here that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

*As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast-* Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews

of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work (Mk. 2:19). But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

2:20- see on Jn. 14:2.

*But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them. In that day, they will fast-*

The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pairō* which has just been used ("take up your bed" Mt. 9:6) and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-

parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return-Mt. 9:15]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes "your voice to be heard on high". Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced



that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

2:21 *Nobody sews a piece of unshrunk cloth*- The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples (Mt, 9:14 and see note there on *fast not*). The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in Mt. 9:17. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt.

9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibres are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

*Onto an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse-* "Pulls away from" is Gk. *schisma*, used elsewhere about divisions between people, especially the Jews, concerning Christ (e.g. Jn. 7:43; 9:16). We note the contrast with unrent, untorn garment of the Lord Jesus which even in His death was not rent. Acceptance of the way of Christ means that there will come schism with the old; and more positively, seamless unity is only possible between those who have totally given their lives and way of thinking to Him and His way.

"Made worse" in its NT usage has a moral sense. The division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (9:14). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again.

Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

*2:22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins-* A clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

*Otherwise the new wine bursts the wineskins-* Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

*The wine is spilled-* The same word for "shed" (Lk. 20:20). Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

*And the wineskins are ruined-* The point is twice emphasized. The bottles are 'broken' or shattered, and they also "perish". The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation.

*New wine must be put into new wineskins-* Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

*2:23 And it came to pass, that he was going on the Sabbath day through the grain fields; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of grain-* Luke says they rubbed them in their hands; Matthew says they ate. Here we have a superb example of the Gospel writers being in artless

agreement with each other, in a manner which would not have been achieved by an uninspired record. The force of "began..." might be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbade fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

The Pharisees had reasoned themselves into a position whereby plucking heads of corn whilst walking through a corn field on the Sabbath was regarded as reaping. When the Lord was questioned about this issue, He didn't reply as most of us would have done: to attack the ridiculous definition of 'work on the Sabbath'. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter.

The Lord's men were accused of 'threshing' on the Sabbath because they rubbed corn in their hands (Mk. 2:23-28). The Lord could have answered 'No, this is a non-Biblical definition of working on the Sabbath'. But He didn't. Instead He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*2:24 And the Pharisees said to him: Look, why do they do on the Sabbath day what is not lawful?*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

*2:25 And he said to them: Have you never read-* Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

*What David did when he had need and was hungry- he and they that were with him?*- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

*2:26 How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the showbread, which it is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and gave also to those that were with him?*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's

later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency... all means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4). Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

*2:27 And he said to them: The Sabbath was designed for man, and not man for the Sabbath-* Mark alone records this. The allusion is surely to the fact that at creation, man was made [NEV "designed"] just before the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made afterwards, so that man could rest. The Sabbath, the seventh day, came *after* man's creation on the sixth day. It was therefore for man. It was for man's blessing, and therefore it was wrong to add legislation to it which made it an utter pain for man rather than a blessing. We can almost read in an ellipsis- the Sabbath was made for man's [blessing]. Man was not made in order to keep a pre-existing legal code about the Sabbath. The laws and institutions of God were intended for human *blessing*; and yet human legalism has meant that so often, they become a curse and frustration to man. Man is not made or designed to keep legal codes- man was not made to keep "the Sabbath"

as it was being presented by Judaism at that time. The Sabbath was made for man's blessing, not in order to trap him. This same argument can be applied to so many of the trappings of religion, from dress codes to statements of faith.

*2:28 Therefore the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath-* The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord *on* the Sabbath". Mark in :27 adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word. This could be the inspired comment of the Gospel writer, rather than the actual words of the Lord. Because the Sabbath law was made for human benefit and blessing, man is therefore above the Sabbath; and so "the Son of Man", the quintessential and supreme human, the Lord Jesus, is "Lord of the Sabbath". We see here an incidental proof of the utter humanity of the Lord Jesus; if something is true for man generally, then it is all the more true for Him, because He was also a man, although the supremest of all men. He could legally infringe the law, just as men like David did, because He understood that the intention of the law was for human blessing. If that intention was fulfilled, there was no need to keep the letter of the law. This of course can too easily become a slippery slope towards disobedience; and yet the other extreme is a legalistic obedience to the letter of a law, which results in not achieving what that law intended, which is blessing to man. "Lord even of the Sabbath" can be rendered 'Is also lord of the Sabbath'; as if what were true for man generally is all the more for Jesus. As David and the Lord's disciples were masters of the Sabbath, rather than being dominated by it and the associated legislation; so even more was the Lord Jesus Himself, as the archetypical man, "the son of man", also lord of the Sabbath.

Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

# MARK CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there who had a withered hand-* His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered. The hand had "withered", suggesting this was a result of human accident or sin, rather than genetic.

3:2 *And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day- so that they would have an excuse to accuse him-* "Would heal" is literally 'Will heal'; this typical change of tense is to encourage us to see the situation played out live before our eyes, as it were; entering into the question as we do when watching a movie: 'Will He heal him... or not?!?'.  
*Will He heal him... or not?!?'*

An "excuse to accuse" is a legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

3:3 *And he said to the man that had the withered hand: Come here-* The man was apparently not next to the Lord; he was probably lurking at the back of the hall or outside it.

3:4 *And he said to them: Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil? To save a life, or to kill? But they remained quiet-*

When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are.

He said that if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. See on Mk. 7:11.

The Lord said that He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision



making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

3:5- see on Mk. 1:41.

*And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man-* The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts, and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind...? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

Almost every reference to Israel's hardness [s.w. "blindness"] of heart is to their hearts having been made hard / blind. Their attitude of mind was confirmed by the work of God's Spirit; just as Pharaoh hardened his heart, and had it hardened by God in response. But the Lord grieved for this condition, whatever the cause.

*Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored-* Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

AV adds: "Whole as the other". This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

3:6 *And the Pharisees went out-* Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Mark's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

*And immediately took counsel against him with the Herodians-* Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

*How they might destroy him-* Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

3:7 *And Jesus with his disciples withdrew to the sea; and a great crowd from Galilee and from Judea followed-* Several times we read of the Lord withdrawing from the public, or at least trying to (Mt. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; Mk. 3:7; Jn. 6:15). But Mark especially references this, at least 11 times. We get the impression that He made public appearances, did some healing and teaching, and then 'withdrew'. The Gospel records focus much on the last week and months of His ministry. The first three years has relatively little recorded- but there is a lot of information about some very long, action packed days. We can assume too easily that these recorded days were typical. But perhaps they were not. There are probably no more than 20 days' events recorded- out of the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. One possibility is that the rest of the time, or much of it, He spent simply teaching the disciples. If the Lord maintained the same tempo and intensity of His recorded activity throughout the three and a half years, it surely would've been almost impossible to have avoided His being propelled to political power by the masses. This suggestion of limited public activity makes better sense of the note we made on Mt. 11:20, that the majority of His miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the

comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

*3:8 And from Jerusalem and from Idumaea and on the other side of the Jordan and about Tyre and Sidon, a great crowd, hearing what great things he did, came to him-* There would have been many Gentiles in this crowd. Their attraction was because of the miracles, the "things [which] he did", rather than His teaching. Primitive societies are always attracted to healers, and this healer appeared to be the best ever.

*3:9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, in case they crushed him-* "Crushed" translates the Greek word usually used for 'affliction'. There was the real danger of serious damage to Him. Not just because of the crush of people, but perhaps because of the anger there would be from those who feared they would not get cured. Once the Lord started healing, it was hard to stop- for there would be huge anger and disappointment from those who felt they had missed out. And the line waiting for healing was unending. To draw a point beyond which 'no more' was going to provoke anger.

*3:10 For he had healed many; so much so that as many as had illnesses pressed upon him that they might touch him-* This could suggest that the Lord's physical touch was required for the healing to happen. This would explain the physical danger to the Lord, with perhaps thousands of sick people and their carers desperately trying to touch Him. His pushing out to sea in the boat was therefore a master stroke; because it signalled an end to the healings and a focus upon teaching. It also provided Him with literally a platform from which to speak, with the hills and cliffs behind the shore providing a natural amphitheatre which would have amplified His voice.

*3:11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried, saying: You are the Son of God!-* Again, the 'spirits' or 'demons' are put for the [supposedly] demon possessed. It was those afflicted with illnesses which were not understood, the isolated and despised, those with mental illnesses, who perceived the Lord for who He was. Their heightened states of perception in some areas enabled them to make this connection. The falling before Him was in worship.

*3:12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known-* The Lord charged the healed people to not make Him known, in the sense of not advertising their experience of healing, because He wanted to focus on teaching without the distraction of the crowds who sought only healing. Yet His commands about this were disobeyed. Clearly if He were

addressing literal spirits, then He failed to have power over them. For they were disobedient, in going around praising Him for His healing. The whole insistence upon reading the "unclean spirits" literally simply breaks down. For evil spirits are not supposed to utter the praise of the Lord Jesus. The language only really makes sense if we read the "spirits" as referring to persons who were once ill but whom the Lord healed.

*3:13 And he went up into the mountain and called to himself whomever he would; and they came to him-* In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses (Mk. 3:13). Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closeness to God.

*3:14 And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach-* It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with him and that he might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

The idea of course may also be that they were firstly to be with Him, trained by Him; and then sent out alone to preach.

*3:15 And to have authority to cast out demons-* This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on Mt. 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body

of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

3:16 *And Simon he surnamed Peter-* Note this is not the record of the choosing of the twelve, but rather of their commissioning and being sent out. The list is broken up in Matthew into pairs, perhaps because they were sent out as six pairs. Simon was anything but rock-like, but the Lord named him Peter, 'rocky'. He perceived the ultimate stability in Peter's faith, despite all the ups and downs He had. And He sees to the core of each of us too.

3:17 *And James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James he surnamed Boanerges, which means, sons of thunder-* James and John were to be the "sons of thunder", a Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on Mt. 16:19. The Lord was establishing a new Israel with a new synagogue system.

3:18 *And Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus and Simon the Cananaean-* Bartholomew is apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51. "Simon the Cananaean" doesn't mean 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of person, of whatever accent and formation.

3:19 *And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. And then he went home-* "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

The Lord's "home" may have now been in Capernaum. That He can be described as having a "home" is an essay in His utter humanity.

*3:20 And the crowd gathered again, so many people that they could not so much as eat bread-* The Lord appeared to have taken the disciples into the "home" He lived in at Capernaum (:19). But the people invaded the home, desperate for healing, to the point that they could not even eat. We can now better understand why the Lord didn't want the healings advertised; it seriously derailed the function of His whole ministry.

*3:21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying: He is out of his mind-* His natural family were no longer in the family home (:19), because it had been taken over by the Lord's new family. "They were saying" to the critical Jews, now eager to check out the Lord's relatives, that He was crazy.

As Paul wrote to his unspiritual Corinthian brethren, he was doubtless hurt at the thought of their opposition to him; yet his mind flew to the similarities between himself and his Lord being rejected by *his* brethren (Mk. 3:21 = 2 Cor. 5:13).

When she stands outside the house asking to speak with Jesus, Mary is identified with her other children who considered Jesus crazy. Jesus says that His mothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. This must have so cut her. There is a rather unpleasant connection between Mk. 3:32 "they stood without" and Mark 4:11 "unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And further, Lk. 13:25 speaks of how the rejected shall stand without [same words] knocking and asking to speak with the Lord. Mk. 3:19,20 RVmg. says that Jesus came home- i.e. to the family home, and it turned out that the interested visitors took the house over, with His relatives, mother, brothers, sisters etc. left outside (Mk. 3:21 RVmg.). No wonder the point was made that He now had a new family; and His natural family, Mary amongst them, resented it.

The incident of Mary and her other children coming to Jesus is inserted by Mark in the context of his record that the Scribes concluded that He had "an unclean spirit". In that same context, we read that Mary and His brothers concluded that He was "beside himself" (Mk. 3:21,22). The language of demon / unclean spirit possession is used in the Gospels to describe mental rather than physical illness. The Scribes thought that Jesus was demon possessed; His family and mother thought He was mentally ill. The two thoughts are parallel, as if to imply that His family had been influenced by the prevailing opinion of the elders about Him. The Lord responded to the Scribes by warning them that they ran the risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by saying this of Him. And it would appear that His own mother may have been running the same risk. This is such a tragic difference from the young, spiritually minded woman who was so convinced that her Son was indeed Messiah and the uniquely begotten

Son of God. And it happened simply because she was influenced by what others thought of Jesus, rather than what she had learnt from the word and experienced herself. It's a powerful warning to us.

In Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. The parallel Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

3:22 *And the scribes that came down from Jerusalem said-* Perhaps the very ones who had come from Jerusalem to be baptized by John; see on 1:5.

*He has Beelzebub, and by the prince of the demons he casts out the demons-* "The Prince of the demons", *archon*, "the first", would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (Mt. 12:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

*3:23 And he called them to him, and said to them in parables: How can Satan cast out Satan?*- 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if Satan...*". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

But the argument is about casting out of *demons*, yet here 'satan casts out satan'. One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

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Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now



taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*3:24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself (Mk. 3:23-26) in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom. Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

*3:25 And if a family be divided against itself, that family will not be able to stand-* The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

*3:26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end-* The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire

family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated". This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

*3:27 But no one can enter into the home of a strong man and spoil his goods-* When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than satan (Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

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'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on Mt 12:28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18). The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

*Except he first bind the strong man*- The binding of the strong man was already in process, for the Lord's miracles were proof that his goods were being spoiled and he was powerless to stop it. But the ultimate binding of the enemy was in the Lord's death- and several times the records of the Lord's passion use the word to describe how He was 'bound'. Surely He was encouraged by the intended paradox- that through His binding, the power of sin was being bound. The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding

of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

*And then he will spoil his home-* AV "Spoil his goods". The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even

fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic-including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'.

*3:28 Truly I say to you: All the sins of the sons of men shall be forgiven and their blasphemies with which they shall blaspheme-* His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others... See on Mt. 10:29.

*3:29 But whoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is never forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin-* Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. See on Rev. 3:17.

People were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst

a person is in the position of so strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (Mt. 12:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

*3:30 He said this because they had said: He has an unclean spirit-* They had seen the Holy Spirit in operation; and they could not deny it. But they were wilfully choosing to call this the work of an "unclean spirit".

*3:31 And then came his mother and his brothers and standing outside, they sent a message to him, calling him-* Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. Here in the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

3:32- see on Mk. 3:21.

*And a crowd was sitting about him, and they said to him: Look, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you-* Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and your brothers are outside looking [seeking] for you", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for you"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary looked for for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so

easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

*3:33 And he answered them, saying: Who is my mother and my brothers?-* In a fiercely family based society, such radical redefinition of family was remarkable, and the Lord was labouring His radical point lest there be any misunderstanding. He was creating a new family, based around hearing and doing His Father's will; there was a new Father, God, and those who did His will were His children. The nature of the scene portrayed here seems to suggest that in His case, as in so many others afterwards, the new spiritual family was separate from the family of origin; for they were here outside the house. And we must bear in mind that 'house' meant not only a building but a family. This gives new meaning to the way that Paul and James (especially James) so love to address their brethren as "my brothers" (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12). Their brethren in Christ were really their new family. And it should be the same for us. The divided state of the body of Christ today is surely a result of over-familiar, over-privileged believers failing to grasp the wonder of the fact that others have come into the family by conversion into Christ. In believing communities comprised of first generation converts, there is generally a far greater sense of brotherhood.

*3:34 And looking round on them that sat round about him, he said: Behold my mother and my brothers!-* Another mark of an eyewitness account is found in this reference to looking round. Given the loss of family many had experienced, this visual image would've remained in their memories, to be drawn upon in the hard times of rejection by family of origin. The Greek *epi* translated "toward" could strictly mean 'over'- as if the disciples were sitting near to Him. For it was they, rather than the general audience, whom He knew were doing the Father's will. The Lord implied that those who did God's will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

*3:35 For whoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother-* Another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9



speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21). The very fact the Lord calls us brethren here is seen by the Hebrew writer as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

# MARK CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And again he began to teach by the sea side. There gathered to him a very great crowd-* "Gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

The Gospel records give more information about the day on which Christ told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in his ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt. 12:22-13:23; Lk. 11:27; Mk. 4:10). Various types of people heard his words; the immediate context in Mt. 13:2 is that "great multitudes were gathered together unto him". The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to Christ's sowing when he first "went forth to sow" in his ministry.

*So he entered into a boat and sat in the sea, and all the crowd were gathered along the shore-* Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AV mg.]" – to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

Think about how Mark speaks of Jesus "sitting in the sea" teaching the people on the shore. All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence.

As noted on 3:9,10, an offshore boat was required because of the huge press upon the Lord in order to get a miracle. In order to get the people to listen to Him, it must have been necessary for Him to ignore human

need for the time being and not do any more miracles- in order that His word might be spread. This was His priority, far more than addressing human material need.

*4:2 And he taught them many things in parables, and said to them in his teaching-* The unusually large crowd (:1) were attracted to the Lord for various reasons, not least the hope of miracles. And He now tells them a parable to the effect that out of all those who encounter His word, only a minority would truly respond. Perhaps this parable is recorded out of all His teachings from the boat, because time proved it so true to that mass of humanity who heard Him preaching.

According to the parallel in Matthew 12, this was the Lord's first parable; and it marked a turning point. Now He was intentionally using parables exactly so that the majority of Israel would not understand. The Lord seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of Matthew 11. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (Mt. 12:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in Mt. 12:11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in Mt. 12:11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

*4:3 Listen! Behold, the sower went forth to sow-* The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (Mt. 13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher,

or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "a sower" (followed by the AV), others "the sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went forth" is the same Greek word has just been used in Mt. 12:1 to describe how Jesus had 'gone forth' out of the house to preach by the lakeshore. Although multitudes were there listening, the Lord knew that only a few would be good ground for the word. The word is several times used of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... for *therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.), but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Luke's account stresses the seed: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

4:4 *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside-* The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks

of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

*And the birds came-* Lk. 8:5 adds that first of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower

parable "shall be *taken away* even what he has" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

*And devoured it-* The same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

4:5 *And other fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth-* The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of

persecution and tribulation (Mt. 12:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

*And immediately-* The immediacy of response is not wrong; immediate response is a great theme of Mark. The good ground also features immediate response. The problem with many is that they do not continue that immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's

appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

*It sprang up*- The idea is that they germinated. The seed of the Gospel began to grow- the multitudes had begun to respond to John's message. The same word is used in the next verse to describe how the sun then 'sprung up'. After response to the word begins, there will be trouble and testing. Just as Israel's Red Sea baptism was immediately followed by tribulation and testing. The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

*Because it had no depth of soil*- John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). These people had only a surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of Christ and His work.

4:6 *And when the sun had risen, it was scorched*- Literally, burnt. John the Baptist had presented a powerful logic- either baptism by fire by the Jesus whom he preached, or being burnt up with [figurative] fire at the last day (Mt. 3:10-12). The Lord clearly has that in mind here- those who had refused John's message about Him were even now burnt up, for judgment in its essence begins now, according to our response to the word of Christ.

*And because it had no root, it withered away*- The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever,



whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

*4:7 And other fell among the thorns-* This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's later parable makes that clear- the good seed brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (Mt. 13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in Mt. 12:22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

*And the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit-* The later parable explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up' (Mt. 12:26); the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (Mt. 12:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

*4:8 And others fell into the good ground-* The next parable is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

*And yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; and brought forth, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold-* Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible.

Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in two ways:

1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.

2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows that; the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and Christ's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If you will be *perfect...*" sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. Christ wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly Christ sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently

without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide, rather than sowing like any normal sower would do. This taught that even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. To reach "all men" must be our brief; all types of men and women, including those who are obviously going to respond poorly. Yet the parable talks of one grain of corn that yields one hundredfold (Mk. 4:8). Any farmer would pick up on this impossibility. An average yield in 1st century Palestine was about ten fold (This has been carefully worked out by R.K. McIver 'One Hundred-Fold Yield', *New Testament Studies* Vol. 40 (1994) pp. 606-608). What kind of response was *this*? What kind of grain of corn? Clearly, the Lord Jesus- who described Himself in John's record as the grain of corn that was to fall into the ground and bring forth much fruit. But the other grains of corn yielded 30 and 60 fold. This was quite amazing response too, totally unheard of in practice. Was it not that the Lord was trying to show us just how radically His Gospel can transform human life? Amazing fertility was a feature of the future Messianic Kingdom (Amos 9:13; Jer. 31:27; Ez. 36:29,30)- it's as if the Lord is saying in the sower parable that the abundance of the future Kingdom can begin in human life now.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

Note how the three types of wasted seed and poor ground are matched by three types of response on the good ground. This feature of triads (features occurring in threes) may not necessarily have any meaning, but it may simply be part of a structure designed to aid memorization- which was the initial usage of the Gospel records.

I have shown in the commentary above that growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

In fairness, this parable can be read another way. In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface.

4:9 *And he said: Who has ears to hear, let him hear-*

Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see Matthew), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear* the parable" (Mt. 12:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

Luke adds: "As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8). The Lord so wanted their response. "As he said these things, he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8 RV; Jn. 7:37). The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that hath ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of the next verse, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in Lk. 8:10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God". There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

4:10- see on Mk. 3:14.

*And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked him about the parables-* The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?"- i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had

privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

This question is understandable if this was the first parable the Lord spoke; see on Mt. 12:1. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

4:11 *And he said to them: To you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those that are without, all things are done in parables-* The Lord explained that parables only remained incomprehensible to "them that are without". That phrase seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. Those "without" in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand "without" begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those 'without' in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord's teaching, for whom it's all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn't mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires. See on Jn. 16:25.

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

4:12 *That seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn again and it should be forgiven them-* Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness. Moses persevered because he *understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience. See on Mk. 7:29. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John the Baptist which became the basis of their subsequent total blindness and deafness to Jesus. If the word sown isn't responded to further, or only partially so, then there remains only a

hardening. We must respond, and immediately- and be led wherever the word leads us.

The Lord Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt. 13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk. 4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown...". That prophecy evidently had fulfilment at Isaiah's time; the point is thereby established that prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

4:13 *And he said to them: Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?*- Not understanding was characteristic of those sown by the wayside, according to the interpretation we have in Matthew 13. We can therefore imagine a note of deep concern in the Lord's voice at this point. For the Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (Mt. 13:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in Mt. 13:15 that it is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on Mt. 13:4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one", the Jewish satan. In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, the Lord twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and



immediately with joy receives it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). And the Lord was concerned that the disciples were in the same category.

*4:14 The sower, sows the word-* In terms of a 'this equals that' interpretation, "the sower" is left without interpretation. The seed is the word, but "the sower" is left as "the sower"; but the Lord Jesus and any preacher. The purpose of the parable is to focus not upon the sower but upon human response to the word.

*4:15 And these by the way side, where the word is sown, represent those who, when they have heard, have Satan immediately come-* Note that the parable was spoken the same day as the discourses of Matthew chapter 12- see Mt. 13:1. The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

*And take away the word-* Mt. 13:19 "snatches away". The same word had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as responsible for the scattering of the sheep. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

*Which has been sown in them-* Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the

story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

*4:16 And these in like manner are they that are sown upon the rocky places, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy-* So long as he 'believes for a while' (Lk.). Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

*4:17 But they have no root in themselves and only endure for a while. Then, when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they stumble-* The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or persecution!" (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day. When Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), perhaps he was alluding to the parable of the sower, where the Lord taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul

knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

4:18 *Others are represented by those that are sown among the thorns. These are they that have heard the word-* One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed

"fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt. 13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted.

4:19 *And the cares of the world*- In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world.

*And the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in*- There are not a few Bible passages which present materialism as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated

by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh.

God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

*Choke the word*- Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

*And it becomes unfruitful*- Mt. 13:22 has "he becomes unfruitful". The types of ground represent the hearts of various categories of people. We expect to read that *the seed* becomes unfruitful. But the seed never does, it never of itself loses its power and life. The seed of the word, of Jesus who is *the seed*, becomes the person. The word is to be made flesh in us as it was to perfection in the Lord (Jn. 1:14). See on 13:6 *withered*. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these

things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

*4:20 And these are they that were sown upon the good ground: such as hear the word and accept it-* "Understand it" (Mt. 13:23), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15). In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (Mt. 13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

*And bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold-* One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up

into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

4:21- see on Mt. 5:15.

*And he said to them: Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a lamp stand?-*

The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden. He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him.

We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them.

The Greek article in "the lamp / lamp stand / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The

light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

4:22- see on 1 Cor. 14:25.

*For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret but that it should come to light-* The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason



why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The whole process of covering truths before revealing them is not because God plays hard to get. It is because the process of discovery is for our benefit.

4:23 *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear-* See on :9.

4:24 *And he said to them: Pay attention to what you hear. What measure you use shall be applied to you, and more shall be given to you-* The measuring and giving as we have measured and given is used in Mt. 7:2 regarding the outcome of the final judgment. But it is not that our works shall as it were earn us a place in that Kingdom. The measure we use is applied here to what or "how" (AV) we hear. The context is the parable of the sower; how we hear God's word is critical to our eternal destiny. The outcome of judgment day will be directly proportionate to how far and in what way we have 'heard' the Lord's word. Hearing is doing; intellectual purity of understanding is not in view here.

4:25 *For he that has, to him shall be given-* This is a clear statement of the upward spiral which we can experience. What we 'have' in our commitment to His word (see on :24) will be added to. The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort and application to God's word, but through the gift /grace of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (Mt. 13:9). Mark speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adds to "shall be given" the idea of 'given in abundance'. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

*And he that has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he has-* The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and

hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

In the sower context, those who appear to have been committed to the word but have now fallen away (the seed on the rocks, wayside and amongst thorns) will find that their time of apparent commitment to it was nothing; they have nothing if they did not endure to the end, and what they appeared to have will be taken away from them.

*4:26 And he said: So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth-* The Greek tenses suggest a one-time sowing, contrasted with regular sleeping and rising (:27). As King of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus did at times give Himself the title "the Kingdom of God". John's Gospel often mentions that the gift of the life of the Lord Jesus is also that of "eternal life"; His life, the kind of life He lived, His spirit, is that which believers shall eternally have. The sower in the preceding parable of the sower refers to the Lord Jesus sowing the seed of God's word; although all those "in Him" are likewise sowers of the word. Perhaps "the earth" refers specifically to the land of Israel, as often in the New Testament. But it could be that this parable is an extension of the parable of the sower, and the earth / ground in view is specifically the good ground, which brings forth much fruit. This parable is then a reflection on the wonder of salvation from the Lord's viewpoint.

*4:27 He sleeps and rises, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he does not know how-* The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "he does not know how" (with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit unmeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase.

The Lord was limited in understanding. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or as here, the mystery of spiritual growth), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

*4:28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear-* As noted on :25, these comments are added as caveats to the parable of the sower, lest the impression should be given that all is required is correct exposition of God's word. For this was the great fallacy of Judaism. He who "has" in hearing / understanding / obedience is "given" the more (:25); the hand of grace is a major element in achieving that person's salvation, rather than their own

unaided intellectual efforts. And so here, there is an element of mystery to spiritual growth, which even the Lord Himself did not understand; the earth "by itself" appears to produce the fruit. It is not simply a case of receiving the seed into good ground. There is another element in the whole business of spiritual fruition.

*4:29 But when the grain is ripe, immediately he puts forth the sickle, because the harvest comes-* He is closely watching our spiritual growth, as the farmer watches the wheat and then *immediately* begins to harvest it once the humidity and growth is just right. This is the enthusiasm with which the Lord watches our growth, not just individually, but as a community, i.e. the whole field. As the growth is still in some sense a mystery to the farmer, so it may be to the Lord (Mk. 4:26,27); we grow, "he knows not how". This could be taken as an eloquent essay in the Lord's own limitation of knowledge. But the point is, once there is sufficient spiritual fruit, then the harvest is put in. This means that we cannot fix a calendar date for the Lord's return; we have conditions to be met, rather than dates to be waited for. Once the fruit is on the fig tree, then that generation shall see the Lord's return. I suggest this refers specifically to spiritual fruit amongst repentant Jews; and in this may lie the significance of the seed being sown upon the earth / land of Israel (:26).

*4:30 And he said: To what shall we compare the kingdom of God? Or in what parable shall we set it forth?-* The Lord has explained that He is going to teach in parables so that Israel shall not understand. The point had arrived in His ministry where the window of their opportunity was starting to close. So it could be that He is asking the disciples to think up parables, a casing within which to place the things of the Kingdom. The "we" would therefore refer to Him and His disciples. They apparently made no response, and so the Lord went on to share another of His comparison parables. 'Think up a modern day parable...' is no bad exercise to use as a pastoral tool today.

4:31- see on Jn. 12:23-25.

*It is like a grain-* Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so

wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

*Of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the earth-*

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest, the least. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

4:32 *Yet when it is sown, grows up-* The phrase in Greek appears rather strange until we recall Mark's theme of immediacy of response. He envisages the sown seed growing up immediately, in a moment.

*And becomes greater than all the herbs, and puts out great branches so that the birds of the sky can lodge under the shadow of it-* Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is (Mt. 13:32) "the greatest"; but the mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand

speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33; Rev. 17:18.

Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *megas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *mega*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.

There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

*4:33 And with many such parables he spoke the word to them, according as they were able to understand it-* The Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to understand it", not as He was able to expound it. He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics.

There is tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right: wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if

placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

*4:34 Without a parable he did not speak to them, but in private he explained all things to his own disciples-* As noted earlier, this marked a changeover in His ministry. He *only* spoke to Israel in parables; there was no more of the plain teaching of the Kingdom as found in the sermon on the mount. They were expected to have grasped that. If they did not, then it was too late. He also designed things so that He explained the truth of things to those who came to Him wishing to understand, rather than those who simply wanted to experience healings.

*4:35 And on that day, when evening had come, he said to them: Let us go over to the other side of the lake-* "That day" refers to the longest day recorded in all the Gospels.

*4:36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him-* "Just as he was" could imply He had fainted or was unwell. He would have endured immense nervous pressure from the ministry of this very long and active day.

*4:37 And there arose a great wind storm and the waves slammed into the boat, so much so that the boat was now filling-* The changes of tense in the Gospel records suggest an eye witness telling the story. "And there arises a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (RV). But the rest of the account in the surrounding verses is in proper past tenses- e.g. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said..." (:39). The impression we have is of the author getting carried away with the memory of the event, and telling it as if it's happening. And this is especially fitting if in fact the Gospels were performed live rather than coldly memorized as prose.

The word used for the storm in Mt. 8:24 is also translated "earthquake". "Arose" uses the same Greek word as found in Mt. 8:26 "there was / arose a great calm". Just as easily as God can raise up a crisis, He can raise up the resolution to it.

4:38- see on Mt. 8:25; 20:32; Jn. 10:13.

*And he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke him, and said to him-* The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship (Mt.). Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique

the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

The Greek for 'sleep' could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

'Awoke' is literally, to raise up. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

*Teacher, do you not care that we perish?*- His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

Matthew records that they asked Him to save them, because "We perish!". The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.



4:39 *And he awoke and rebuked the wind*- The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

*And said to the sea: Peace! Be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm*- His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mt. 8:26; Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming

death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

4:40- see on Mt. 8:26.

*And he said to them: Why are you fearful? Do you still not have faith?*- Fear and unbelief are again connected in Rev. 21:8. The unbelief refers ultimately to disbelief in our salvation, fear of condemnation; see on 8:25 'We perish'. The question as to *why* they had little faith (Mt.) echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in*

*what or whom?*'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

4:41 *And they feared exceedingly, and said to each other: Who then is this?*- "What manner of man is this" (Mt. 8:27); what *sort* of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons(*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

Jesus does not proclaim Himself, and yet He expects us to base our lives

around Him. This is yet another paradox. Clearly we are intended to reconstruct Him from our repeated and sensitive readings of the Gospels. We in our day must read the Gospel records, portraying Him as they do from four different angles, and seek to reconstruct Him in our own minds as a person. His actions spoke loudly [and in this He is a pattern to us in our witness]. When He stilled the storm, the disciples marvelled: "What manner of man is this?", knowing full well that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

*Even the wind and the sea obey him!*- The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

# MARK CHAPTER 5

5:1- see on Mk. 10:28. For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Matthew 8 and Luke 8.

*And they came to the other side of the sea-* The Gospel records, Mark especially, often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural verb *without an explicit subject* to paint a picture of the disciples or crowd generally; and then follows this by a singular verb or pronoun referring specifically to Jesus. Here are some examples: "They came to the other side... and when He had stepped out of the boat" (Mk. 5:1,2); "when they came from Bethany, he was hungry" (Mk. 8:22); "they went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples..." (Mk. 14:32). The grammatical feature is more evident in Greek than in English. If the writer of Mark had been a cameraman, he'd have taken a broad sweep, and then suddenly hit the zoom to focus right up close upon Jesus Himself. This is what is being done with words, and it reflects the Christ-centeredness of the whole narrative and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospels are transcripts.

*Into the country of the Gerasenes-* The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

5:2 *And when he got out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit-* "Immediately" suggests the man was waiting for Him; although :6 says that Legion ran to the Lord from far away, which would make the "immediately" here relative, and intended to create an impression of fast moving action. From his isolated hideouts on the cliffs, he had seen the boat traversing the lake so many times. And he was convinced that within it there was the Son of God. "With an unclean spirit" appears to contradict the idea that he had a legion of such spirits within him- until we accept that this is just the language of the day for mental illness. We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on :7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, ""Unclean spirits" is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of

Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

*5:3 Who had his dwelling in the tombs; no one could any more bind him, even with a chain-* A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3-4).
- Legion was always "in the mountains"- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.
- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob
- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?".
- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land".

- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mk. 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called "great things" (Ps. 106:21).

*5:4 For he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him-* See on :3 for the connection between Legion and Judah. He had "often" been restrained, in efforts to cure him. He therefore needed some assurance that the cure from the Lord Jesus was going to be permanent, and the rushing of the pigs over the cliff to their permanent destruction would have been a reminder of that.

*5:5 Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and cutting himself with stones-* A psychological approach to the self-mutilation [which is a classic symptom of mental illness] would be to understand it as him trying to stone himself, convinced he was unworthy and deserving of condemnation. No surprise, in this case, that the presence of Jesus lifted that sense of condemnation from him, and the miracle of the pigs was therefore performed to assure him that his sin really had been removed and condemned by drowning in the sea [a figure of condemnation in Mt. 18:6 and Rev. 18:21. 33]. The French social scientist René Girard commented at length upon the curing of the demoniac. He took the gashing of himself with stones as being representative of the man's desire to stone himself, and he observes the phenomena of "autolapidation" (self-stoning) as being common within the mentally disturbed. But he observes further that the pigs running over the cliff has "ritual and penal connotations" in that both stoning and being thrown over a cliff were common methods of execution in primitive societies (René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 176. The same points are made in Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac", in Roland Barthes et al, eds., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) pp. 57-84). We recall how the townspeople tried to execute Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29). And yet Jesus turned the man's fears on their

head; for the pigs, representing the crowd who wished to stone the man and throw him off the cliff, are the ones who are thrown over the cliff by Jesus. The crowd therefore suffer the execution which they wished to inflict upon the victim. Thus "the miracle of Gerasa reverses the universal schema of violence fundamental to all societies" (*Ibid* p. 179). Now we understand why Jesus declined Legion's request to follow Him on His mission, but insisted he instead return to his own society and live at peace with them. For Jesus had taught the man that the crowd he feared were no more, the lynch mob he obsessively feared had themselves been lynched over the cliff. The man begged that the demons *not* be cast into the sea (Lk. 8:31) in the sense that he himself feared being cast over the cliff into the sea by the mob. But that fear was taken away by Jesus; for it was the demons, the lynch mob which he feared, the Roman Legions, which he saw represented by the pigs, hurtling to their own destruction over the cliff.

5:6 *And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him-* Yet the man is described as "immediately" meeting the Lord; see on :2. His worship suggests He had heard and processed the works and teaching of the Lord, and come to the conclusion which the Lord never stated in so many words- that He was the Son of God. The Lord's style was to let His audience join the dots and come to that conclusion; and this mentally disturbed homeless man was one of the few who did so and saw the picture. It was His illness which stopped Him credibly and usefully proclaiming that; and so the Lord cured that dimension of the man.

5:7 *And crying out with a loud voice, he said: What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I solemnly implore you by God, do not torment me-* See on :6. He was one of the few who joined the dots and saw that the Lord was God's Son; yet he feared condemnation, which is what "torment" spoke of. It was his mental illness which was largely responsible for that paranoia about condemnation; and the Lord healed him of it.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons' (see on :2)- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29). "He [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "My name [singular] is Legion: for we are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.



Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

*5:8 For Jesus had said to him: Unclean spirit, come out of the man!*- The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with the man's self perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (:7).

*5:9 And he asked the spirit: What is your name?*- The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to

Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And the spirit replied: My name is Legion. For we are many-* I have outlined in :3 how Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-political and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor

of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if

their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analysed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be

understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

5:10 *And he pleaded earnestly with him not to send them out of the country*- This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :8. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "*he*", the man, with "*them*", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by

invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

5:11 *Now there was there on the mountain side a great herd of pigs feeding-* Mt. 8:30 "Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding". The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The man saw himself as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them (Mt. 8:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. See on :8 for the man's paranoia about condemnation, although he believed in the Lord as God's Son and worshipped Him as such. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips.

5:12 *And they pleaded with him, saying: Send us into the pigs, let us enter into them-* Mt. 8:31 adds: "And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out". The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). Legion was obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (Mt. 8:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on Mt. 8:30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on Mt. 8:32). He correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring Legion that his fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day; and this addressed the man's paranoia about condemnation noted on :8. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. Legion had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he ask that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was

surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "The demons besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (:12,13); the Gadarenes "began to beg him to depart out of their coasts" (:17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "begged him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (:18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

5:13 *So he gave them permission*- Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6);

indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

The madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behaviour in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae.... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in



terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the hill into the sea and were drowned in the sea-* Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

5:14 *And they that fed them fled and told it in the city and in the country. And they came to see what it was that had happened-* "What had happened" was the cure of Legion; they came to investigate, and saw the cured man (:15). As Jews they were not supposed to be keeping pigs; they realized they could say little against the Lord's action, for what they had been doing was illegal. It would have taken some time for the news to spread to "the city and in the country"; so we can assume the Lord sat with the cured Legion for some time, even days, teaching him further.

5:15 *And they came to Jesus and saw him who had been possessed with demons, that previously had the legion, sitting, clothed and in his right mind- and they were afraid-* When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind". His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

The "fear" of the people was perhaps related to their bad conscience about keeping pigs. The parable of the prodigal son associated Jewish pig keepers with those who needed to repent, and for whom the Father was eagerly waiting to welcome back home. Those people were in the same position as Legion; being now aware of the Lord's Divine power, but fearing condemnation. They actually needed the same basic healing which the Lord had given Legion in curing him of his complex about condemnation. Indeed the case of Legion speaks to so many believers today, who believe in and even worship the Lord as Son of God, but who are obsessed with a fear of final condemnation.

5:16 *And they that saw it described to them what had happened to him that was previously possessed with demons, and about what had happened to the pigs-* Apart from the loss of their pigs, what had happened was good news. Fear of condemnation, to the point of paranoia, really could be cured by the Lord Jesus; the demons of doubt and fear really could be cast out, and the miracle of the destruction of the pigs was dramatic visual evidence of this. But when faced with this, the people feared and didn't want that good news.

5:17 *And they began to beg him to depart from their borders-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in Mt. 8:31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (Mt. 8:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (Mt. 8:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (Mt. 8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (Mt. 8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.

Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

5:18 *And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him-* Motivations for involvement in evangelistic work vary. This man was separated from his family and society, for he had been violent and abusive to them. It would have been far more convenient for him to just leave them and join the peripatetic ministry of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord realized that the healing of relationships was a fundamental outcome of acceptance of the Gospel; and He wished this process to at least be given a chance in this case. And so He established a principle which many have struggled to accept: ministry to family and local society is even more important than joining in mobile missionary work.

5:19 *But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you-* See on :18 and :20. We must "do" the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21), but the Lord also 'does' for us by His grace ("mercy"); our 'doing' is in response to His 'doing' for us. The same word is used in Jn. 4:1 (also Acts 15:17) of how the Lord 'did' or "made" disciples. That was the end point in view; the "great things" done were not just the cure, but the making of a disciple.

5:20 *And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled-* This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples

themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

**Mk. 5:19**

Go to your *house*

unto your *friends* [relatives]

*tell* them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"-  
by personal demonstration to  
individuals]

how great things

the *Lord* [*i.e. God*] has done for  
you

and how he had mercy on you.

**Mk. 5:20**

He goes to the *ten*  
*cities* [Decapolis]

He goes to *strangers*

He "*publishes*"

how great things

*Jesus* had done for him

[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

5:21 *And when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great crowd was gathered to him; and he was by the sea-* Just as Legion

"immediately" met the Lord on His arrival on the shore (:2), so on going back to "the other side", there was a great crowd waiting for the Lord "by the sea", on the shore. Jairus must have had to push himself to the front of that crowd (:22). According to the parallel in Mt. 9:18, the Lord began teaching the crowd immediately. Again we see that teaching was the primary focus of His ministry, for surely the crowds were expecting healings. The impression is given in Matthew that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

*5:22 And there came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name-*

Matthew omits his name- perhaps because his Gospel first circulated in areas local to Jairus where the mention of his name could've led to persecution? The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter (see on :21). He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

*And seeing him, he fell at his feet-* This kneeling (Mt.) was in worship; just as Legion had done on the sea shore the other side of the lake. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped

Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

*5:23 And implored him earnestly, saying: My little daughter is at the point of death-* Mt. 9:18 "My daughter is even now dead". The Greek could carry the idea of 'for now, she is dead' (see the usage in Mt. 3:15; Jn. 13:7; 16:12,31; 1 Cor. 13:12 etc.); in this case, the man believed her death state was only temporary, until the resurrection he believed Jesus would achieve.

*I beg you to come and lay your hands on her, that she may be made whole and live-* The man "came" to Jesus, and now Jesus 'comes' to the man; the same Greek word is used twice. The impression is given of a mutuality between the Lord and those who come to Him in faith.

*5:24 And Jesus went with him; and a great crowd followed him, and they pressed upon him-* This verse zooms in close on the body language and physical movement of the characters, as if the author was the cameraman on the scene. Truly we have eye witness accounts in places like this. The image of the Lord Jesus following a man [stressed in Matthew] is unusual, as readers are accustomed to the disciples following the Lord, not Him following men. The point perhaps is that He is responsive to human need and prayer in a sense controls Him, according to His will of course. The picture is of the man racing ahead, so eager to get home. This sets the scene for the interruption to the journey, and serves to heighten the sense we get of his frustration with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

*5:25 And a woman, who for twelve years had an issue of blood-* Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing.

*5:26 And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse-* This is another similarity with Legion, who had suffered from many failed attempts to cure his conditions. Getting 'worse and worse' is the picture of all people outside of Christ, and specifically of the spiritual state of Israel at the time (Mt. 9:16; 12:45; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:20). The Mosaic system of Judaism could not "better" humanity (s.w. Jn. 6:63; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 4:2; 13:9). Perhaps the implication is that the woman represented Israel, who like Asa had trusted in physicians rather than the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Job's 'friends' had many Judaist characteristics and reasoned in the same way as orthodox Judaism; and they were "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). The woman was bankrupt and desperate. This was how all were under the Law; the only answer was to throw themselves upon the Lord Jesus.

*5:27 Having heard the things about Jesus, came from the crowd behind him-* The scene is being developed from :24, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

*And touched his garment-* Mt. "the hem". Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Distraction</i>	<i>Resumed Focus</i>
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.

He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

5:28 *For she said: If I touch but his garments-* Mt. 'she said within herself'. She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today- that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by telling her that it was *her faith*- not the touch of His garment- that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). As so often, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus' clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.



*I shall be made whole-* The Greek *sozo* is that usually used for 'saved'. She had a wider desire for not only healing (for which other Greek words could have been used) but for salvation on a wider level.

*5:29 And immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her illness-* The immediacy of the Lord's cure contrasted sharply with all human attempts at curing an internal disease. "Healed of her illness" is literally "healed of her flogging". For that is how the Greek translated "illness" here is usually translated. We sense an allusion to the prophecy that by the Lord's floggings / stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24). The woman becomes thereby typical of us all. Our stripes / floggings become His; and thereby, through the representational nature of His life and sacrifice, we are healed.

*5:30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in himself that the power proceeding from him had gone forth, turned towards the crowd and said: Who touched my garments?-* This gives an insight into the huge outflow of energy from the Lord when He healed people. As noted on :29, His healing of people was on account of His total identification with them; and each healing was a living out in essence of the cross even during His life. The Lord of course knew the woman had touched Him; but He didn't want her to just have a secret faith. He wanted her to 'come out'; and He engineers circumstance in our lives likewise, so that we have to become a city that is set on a hill.

5:31- see on Mk. 14:70.

*And his disciples said to him: You saw the crowd pressing upon you and you ask, Who touched me?-* The gospels are transcripts of how the disciples spoke the gospel message. And yet they are shot through with the disciples' recognition of their own weakness, and thereby their message was the more appealing and convicting to their hearers. Here, they paint themselves as foolish and inappropriate; they record their mocking of the Lord in the same section in which they record the scorning of the Lord by unbelievers in :40.

*5:32 And he looked around to see who had done this thing-* Mt. 9:22 "But Jesus turning and seeing her...". Again the emphasis is upon recording the physical movement of the persons involved in the scene, so that we can visually reconstruct it. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

5:33 *But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had been done to her, came and fell down before him and told him all the truth-* We see another connection with Legion, who feared condemnation and yet also fell before the Lord in worship. The Lord knew her history; but "the truth" to be told forth is a personal confession of our hopeless spiritual history, and the Lord's saving by grace.

5:34 *And he said to her: Daughter-* Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

*Your faith has made you whole-* The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 9:20)- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood" whose faith hath made her whole [or, saved]. It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

*Go in peace and be free of your illness-* The woman was fearful of condemnation, and so the Lord wished her peace, with God. Her full healing was only now pronounced, although she had felt it already within herself. The Lord required public confession from her; and so He does today.

5:35 *While he was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying: Your daughter is dead. Why do you trouble the Teacher any further?-* Luke adds: "There comes one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master" (Lk. 8:49). We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" along with the "some" mentioned by Mark who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master", which is how Matthew records the form of address. And it is the disciples who ever show themselves concerned at others 'troubling the master'; every time they try to turn people away from Him on this basis [the children, their mothers, the Phoenician woman etc.], He makes a point of accepting and working with those whom they sought to bar from Him. The implication is

that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later.

*5:36 But Jesus, not heeding the word spoken, said to the ruler of the synagogue: Fear not, only believe-* The implication could be that the Lord, just like us, was momentarily tempted to heed that bad news and falter in faith. But as so often, His words to Jairus were spoken effectively to Himself. This shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

5:37- see on Mt. 17:1.

*And he permitted no one to follow him-* We see here the Lord's amazing force of personality when He wished to use it, just as He walked through the crowd in Nazareth who wished to throw Him off the cliff. He sent away the inquisitive crowd, just as He sent away the crowd after the miraculous feeding. He used the same power in commanding the mourners to leave the home (:40; Mt. "Leave!").

*Save Peter, James and John the brother of James-* These were clearly the inner three whom He especially sought to educate further.

*5:38 And they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue-* Again we have the impression of the cameraman following Him, shooting from behind. Mt. 9:23 "When Jesus came into... He saw...He said". This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to

perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

*And he saw a tumult, and many weeping and wailing greatly-* Mt. 9:23 "The flute-players and the crowd making a tumult". if the flute players had already been called, the implication is that the girl had been dead for some time. This places a question mark over the ruler's claim that his daughter had only just died (Mt. 9:18 Gk.). All through these accounts we see the Lord's grace. The man exaggerated, just as the woman thought that merely touching Christ's clothes was all that was needed for a miracle- and yet the Lord graciously worked with all these people and situations to bless them. On the other hand, embalming would've been done quickly, and perhaps the intensity of the tumult and weeping was because she had indeed just died, and the minstrels would have only just arrived. The Lord in this case would've arrived at the very peak of human distress and need. This is why He was 'delayed' on the way, in order for that peak of need to be reached. Mk. 5:38,39 emphasizes the extraordinary agitation.

5:39- see on Acts 21:13.

*And when he had entered, he said to them: Why make you a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeps-* The Lord dismissed the noise of the flute players as a mere "tumult". The Angel repeated the same words to the women at the Lord's grave, as did the Lord to Mary: "Why do you weep?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Surely those women were close to the Lord at this time. The Lord used the same word choice before and after His resurrection, showing the continuity of personality between how we are now in the flesh, and how we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal, and how we are now is of critical importance eternally.

*5:40 And they laughed him to scorn-* This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics. It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

*But he, having put them outside, took the father of the child and her mother and those that were with him, and went to where the child was-* The Lord was consciously seeking to reduce the element of hysteria at the miracle He knew He was going to do. Pentecostals need to note this. He wanted as few as possible to see the dead body actually revive. There was perhaps a similar logic in the way His own resurrection was not done publicly and His risen body was only seen by a relatively few rather than being displayed publicly. This was not His way, nor the Father's way, even during His ministry.

*5:41 And taking the child by the hand, he said to her: Talitha cumi, which means, little girl, I say to you, rise!-* The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

"Rise" here isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

*5:42 And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement-* We note the connection with the woman who had been sick for twelve years. God was at work in parallel in those lives over that period. Their being overcome with amazement reads rather negatively; amazement rather than faith and thanksgiving. The same word is used of the women's amazement at the news of the Lord's resurrection, having again been told not to weep (Mk. 16:8).

*5:43 And he strictly ordered them that no one should know about this-* The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected to tell nobody what was done, even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

*And told them to give her something to eat-* We see here a window into His sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Despite the inevitable hysteria of joy experienced by the parents, He realized she was hungry, not having eaten for a long time.

# MARK CHAPTER 6

*6:1 And he left there and went to his own country; and his disciples followed him-* An artless reflection of the way in which He really was so human, having His "own" native area- here on this earth and not in any pre-existent form in Heaven! He had a very common Jewish name. The brothers of Jesus had names which were among the commonest Jewish names at the time- James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). I know we know this, but just remember how Jesus truly shared our nature. He smelt the smells of the marketplace, as He walked around helping a little child crying because he'd lost his mum. From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there truly came the words of Almighty God. There, in the very flesh and body tissue of the man Jesus, was God manifested in flesh. And yet that wondrous man, that being, that Son of God who had no human father, readily laughed at the funny side of events, just like anyone else. His hands and arms would have been those of a working man. He is always described as walking everywhere- and it's been calculated that He must have walked 10,000 km. during His ministry. He slept under the Olive trees at the foot of the Mount of Olives; the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head. So He would often have appeared a bit rough, His feet would have developed large blisters, and His skin would have been sunburnt. Palestine was infested with bandits at the time. It was almost inevitable that the Lord was robbed and threatened at least once. He would have gone through all the gut feelings one does when they are mugged: the initial shock, the obvious question that skates through the mind 'How much harm are they gonna do me...?', the bad taste left in the mouth afterwards, the way one keeps on re-living every moment of what happened. He would have known those feelings.

*6:2 And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying: Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom given to him? What mighty works are done by his hands!-* To my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-wordliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs.

Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

*6:3 Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended by him-* See on :2. It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. ""Jesus, son of Mary" has a pejorative sense... [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name". The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

Their offence or stumbling is effectively what is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus



to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized. He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasant who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower

class Palestinian piety". If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

6:4 *And Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour, save in his hometown-* We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris* ("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different

sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

*And among his own kin, and in his own family-* We have yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity, in that He talked of His own family of origin, which included His blood brothers and sisters of the previous verses. But He has just spoken of Himself as the 'householder', the head of the family / house (see on Mt. 13:27,52). Clearly enough, He is contrasting His spiritual family with His natural family. That group of mixed up, doubting and misunderstanding men and women who followed Him- had replaced His family of origin as His real family.

6:5 *And there he could not do his mighty work, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them-* He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

6:6- see on Lk. 2:33.

*And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages teaching-* The Lord Himself *marvelled* at the unbelief of men, despite knowing what was in man. Surely He could only have genuinely felt such marvel because He began with such an essentially positive spirit. We notice that the focus of His ministry was upon the villages. He clearly didn't want to attract large crowds. His desire was to get His message over rather than deal with the material problems of humanity.

6:7 *And he called the twelve*- Mt. "called to him", implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:5). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

*And began to send them out in pairs*- The "pairs" may not just have been for mutual encouragement, but in allusion to the principle of two or three witnesses. For a witness was being made to Israel, to which they were to be held accountable.

*And he gave them authority over the unclean spirits*- This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I have suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on Mt. 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

6:8 *And he instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff. No bread, no wallet*- Mark is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats" (AV). All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter...

there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

*No money in their purse-* Mt. "Nor brass for your purses"- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

*6:9 But to go wearing sandals, and not to wear two coats-* See on :8; an allusion to Israel on Passover night. Adam Clarke claims: "The sandal was originally a part of the woman's dress; ancient authors represent them as worn only by women". In this case the command to not wear shoes but sandals (Mt.) was significant. It was another part of the Lord's attempt to challenge gender stereotypes in the new community of people He was forming, where there was to be in that sense neither male nor female, slave nor free. And He may be directing their attention to Ps. 68:11 Heb. and LXX, where "great was the company *of the women* who published" the word of salvation.

At this point, Matthew records that they were commanded not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Mt. 10:5). Mark omits this because he was preaching to Gentiles. We cannot omit any part of the basic Gospel message; but we can present it in ways which are appropriate to our audience.

*6:10 And he said to them: Whenever you enter into a house as a guest, remain there until you leave town-* This appears to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on; see on :8. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, the Lord implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

In practice, this command was in order to develop relationships in families which would lead to the development of house churches, which was the Lord's preferred vision for His church, at least in the first century.

*6:11 And whatever place shall not receive you and they will not hear you, as you leave there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them-* The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused

defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Indeed, John's immersion of repentant Israelites would have recalled the way that Gentiles had to be likewise dipped before being accepted into the synagogue. He was teaching "that all Israel were Gentiles in the eyes of God". Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations. The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world...".

6:12 *And they went out and preached that all should repent-* Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. The very message of the Lord Jesus is of itself an appeal to re-think, to repent, to change.

6:13 *And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them-* Anointing with oil was a common way of trying to cure people. In the case of these healings, they were achieved by the power of God and not by the oil. And yet they did this in order to relate to people in their terms, to as it were speak their language; and that is also the reason why the language of demon possession is used. Anointing with oil also meant to be given a commission. Those healed were thereby commissioned to do something for the Lord, for the Messiah / anointed one with whom they were now associated. We noted on 1:31 how when Peter's wife's mother was cured she responded by immediately serving the Lord and His people.

6:14 *And king Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become well known-* When the disciples went out preaching around Israel, Herod heard of the fame of *Jesus*- because they so manifested Him.

*And he said: John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these powers work in him-* The Lord's relationship with His cousin John provides an exquisite insight into both His humanity and His humility. The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected. Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero-

and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

*And therefore do these powers work in him*- The Greek could more likely mean 'the powers', a reference to the popular beliefs in various 'powers' rather than one God. Jn. 10:41 is plain that "John did no miracle", and yet such was the evident spirituality of John that the theory quickly arose that the miracles of Jesus were really being done by John *redivivus*.

14:3 *For Herod had arrested John and bound him*- 'Laid hands on'. The Greek means just that, but it is possibly mistranslated in Jn. 20:23: "Whosoever sins you retain ['lay hands on'], they are retained". The idea is that we can in some cases obtain forgiveness for others' sins; but we must beware lest we lay hands on their sin and commit it ourselves. This is exactly the teaching of Jude- to reclaim others who are in sin, whilst being careful not to become contaminated by their sins rubbing off on us. Herod and his servants (Mt. 14:2) had laid hold on John, bound him, and cast him into prison. These are all terms used elsewhere about how the Lord Jesus will do exactly the same in condemning people at the last day. His servants (Mt. 22:13) shall lay hold of them (Rev. 20:2), bind them (Mt. 22:13) and cast them into prison (condemnation- Mt. 18:30). And these terms are also used about what happened to the Lord Jesus in His death: laid hold on by servants at a king's command (s.w. Mt. 26:4,48,50,57) bound (Jn. 18:12), to prison (Lk. 22:33). Herod is therefore being set up here as an anti-Christ, a fake Christ. And the Lord's death is again described in similar terms to that of John, whose ministry He continued. The way disciples came seeking the body is another point of connection. As events unfolded with the Lord's arrest and binding, He would've surely perceived the connection with John. And would've likewise seen how He was as it were going through the process of condemnation, being treated as a sinner, although He was not one. This means that He has even more so the right to condemn men, because in essence He knows the condemnation process. And it gives Him the ability to identify with those who in this life are currently under condemnation for their sins, and seek to lead them out of that position.

6:15 *But others said: It is Elijah; and others said: It is a prophet, even as one of the prophets-* As made explicit in Matthew 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another. By assuming the Lord was Elijah rather than Messiah, we see how they had missed the whole point of John's teaching; for he had been the Elijah prophet, heralding Messiah. And yet John had such popularity that Herod had been unable to murder him because of his mass support (Mt. 14:5). The image of John was popular, John as religion; but his essential message went unheeded. And so it can be with us today; the image and religion of Christianity may be appealing to us to the point we identify with it. But the essential message of the Christ who should be at the core of it can be totally ignored or not even grasped. See on :20.

6:16 *But Herod, when he heard of it, said: It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen-* Having killed John, Herod's conscience was haunted by him, and he was eager to see John alive again. He regretted murdering him; his subconscious desire was that John would somehow overcome that death and revive. And so he became convinced of the idea that John had reincarnated as Jesus. This explains why people can be so utterly convinced of after death experiences, reincarnation, ghosts, appearances of the dead etc. Such apparent experiences are a reflection of their own deep subconscious desire to see the dead again, to make death somehow not death. This is where the clear Biblical definition of death as unconsciousness is so challenging.

6:17 *For Herod himself had had John arrested and thrown into prison to please Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her-* Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on Mt. 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus.

6:18 *For John said to Herod: It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife-* The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's



law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

*6:19 And Herodias set herself against him, and desired to kill him; but she could not-* Mt. 14:5 says that Herod also wanted to kill John, but feared the people. The same Greek words are used about Herod wanting to kill Jesus in Lk. 13:31. A manipulative woman arranging the death of a prophet through a weak willed ruler recalls Jezebel in 1 Kings 21; and she was a protagonist of Elijah, upon whom John the Baptist was clearly modelled.

*6:20 For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly-* This came about after his initial desire to murder John (Mt. 14:5). There was something in John's message which made him oscillate between respecting him and wanting to murder him. He heard him gladly, just as the crowds of self-righteous Jerusalem Jews streamed out of Jerusalem to hear John's rough message of repentance. We too can intellectually assent to a message without grasping the personal appeal for actual change and repentance. See on :15.

*6:21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles, military commanders and the leading men of Galilee-* The idea of "opportunity" leads us to think that the whole scene was set up, so that when Herod was drunk and made one of his famous 'I'll give you whatever you like!' statements, they could then pounce with their request.

*6:22 And when the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests, and so the king said to the girl: Ask of me whatever you will, and I will give it to you-* As suggested on :21, Herod when drunk probably often said these kind of things; for this would not have been his first wild birthday party.

*6:23 And he made an oath to her: Whatever you shall ask of me, I will give it to you, to the half of my kingdom-* This continues a theme we find in the book of Daniel- powerful rulers making a rash oath and feeling forced to carry it out because of shame and the pressure of courtiers. The contrast with God, the ultimate ruler, is not that He is not so rash and not manipulated by His subjects. Rather the contrast is surely that

Yahweh *does* change, He has no fear of shame or being shamed; such is His grace that when He sees a repentant Nineveh, He *does* change His original intention. The fear of shame and pressure from the eyes of others is what leads so many leaders into behaviour and positions which are against their better judgment. There is no shame in change. Indeed, change is part of real spirituality. "To the half my kingdom" is alluding to the king's promise to Esther in Esther 5:23, but it seems an allusion with no context or specific meaning, for Herodias' daughter was not at all Esther.

6:24 *And she went out and said to her mother: What shall I ask? And she said: The head of John the Baptist-* I suggested on :21 that the whole thing was a set up. They knew Herod made exaggerated offers when drunk, and so they waited for that moment and then pounced with the request for John's head as the next dinner dish. Her going to her mother was therefore just part of the act, rather than from genuine lack of awareness as to what to ask for.

6:25 *And she rushed to the king and asked, saying: Here and now-* The emphasis on "here" is strange. She wanted the head brought in before everyone. This rather strongly contradicts Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, a long way from Herod's court.

*I want you to give me on a platter the head of John the Baptist-* The feast would have been full of plates with various dishes. The idea was that the head would be offered for eating. The implication is that the head would've been brought immediately, which suggests that John was imprisoned nearby. This again rules out Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, far from Herod's palace in Tiberias. The offering of a head on a platter is full of allusion to pagan ritual. Herod, as one who claimed to be an observant Jew, was now forced to choose- between being a serious Jew, following Divine principle, or a pagan. He was forced to decide- and chose wrongly. He had earlier wanted to kill John, and now his evil thought was being brought to action, in a powerful outworking of the Lord's principle that the thought is indeed counted as the action. We ask, naturally, why it all had to be as it was. John would've carefully reflected upon the life of Elijah, and John would've seen the parallel between Jezebel and the manipulative women behind his own death- and taken comfort from that in his last moments: that he was in fact the Elijah prophet.

6:26 *And the king was exceeding sorry; but for the sake of his oaths and his dinner guests, he could not reject her request-* And yet we learn in Mt. 14:5 that Herod had wanted to kill John because John had criticized Herod's lifestyle. We may feel flushes of anger against a person, but if it

were to come to actually carrying out what we imagine- we would likely regret it.

A *horkos* ["oath"] was not merely a verbal promise; although he was not ethnically Jewish, Herod claimed to be a practicing Jew, and an 'oath' would've been something like 'May I be eternally condemned at the last day if I do not...'. Peter used the same oaths in denying the Lord. And so we see the torture of this unhappy man- asking himself to be condemned if he didn't do something which surely warrants eternal condemnation. The only way out was to *change*, to re-pent, to re-think; to recognize that he was not going to get out of this without a deep repentance.

*6:27 And immediately the king sent a soldier of his guard and commanded that he bring John's head. And the soldier went to the prison and beheaded John-* The implication is that the court party was held close to the prison. This would have been most unlikely if Josephus is correct in claiming that John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress of Machaerus. Herod's court was in Tiberias. The implication of the language is that Herod took full responsibility for this- as if he personally beheaded John. And he realized this later in his conscience: "John whom I beheaded... John have I beheaded" (Mk. 6:16; Lk. 9:9).

*6:28 And brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother-* The language of bringing to and giving on further is found in the following account of the miraculous feeding. The Lord uses the word "brought" of how He wished the loaves and fishes to be "brought" to Him for His Messianic banquet (Mt. 14:18). It may be that Herod's banquet is being set up in contrast to that of the Lord Jesus described later in the chapter.

*6:29 And when his disciples heard of it, they went and took his corpse and laid it in a tomb-* The phrase is only used elsewhere about Joseph taking up the body of the Lord Jesus after His death (Jn. 19:31,38). And doing the same with it- burying it. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist, and his fine action here was surely motivated by the memory of those brave brethren who 'took up the body' of John. The example of devotion shown by believers can inspire later believers in different contexts. The power of example is far greater than we can ever imagine.

*6:30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught-* The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18 of Mary going and telling the disciples. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's

death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

*6:31 And he said to them: Come, we shall depart for a deserted place and rest for a while. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure time, even to eat-* Lk. 9:10 says that it was near to Bethsaida. This indicates the literal accuracy of the Gospels, because Bethsaida was just outside the boundary of Herod's jurisdiction, and it would be understandable that after his execution of John, the disciples and Jesus might want to be outside of his territory.

Matthew says that this desire to withdraw for a while was immediately upon hearing of John's death. The feeding of the five thousand is not in chronological sequence; it is part of the flashback to John's death. Perhaps the intention is to present the Lord's banquet as the antithesis of Herod's banquet which led to John's execution. We see here yet another insight into the Lord's humanity. Knowledge of John's death wasn't beamed into the Lord's mind; He didn't have the total omniscience of God. For He was not God Himself, but the human Son of God. He had to be informed of some things before He knew them. And He reacts in a very human way- He wants to go away on His own with His closest friends to reflect upon the death of a relative and co-worker. But again, in a typically human way, His plan to have time out relatively alone was thwarted- despite His intention to get away alone, or at least just with His close friends, the crowds heard He had been spotted heading out to an uninhabited area, and followed Him there by foot.

*6:32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place-* Bethsaida, according to Lk. 9:10. See on :31. "The boat" suggests they were a common sight, travelling in the same boat, which presumably belonged to the family of James and John, whose father Zebedee had a large enough business to employ hired hands.

*6:33 Now many saw them going and recognised them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them-* This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them (see

on Mt. 14:22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

The Lord in Jn. 6 comments upon their efforts. The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own. The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. In typical style, He responded: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

6:34 *And when Jesus came ashore, he saw a great crowd-* Or, 'came forth', as Mt. We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush,

noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because :33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The 'coming forth' would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

*And he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things-* His pity was therefore for their spiritual state rather than their material need. This being 'moved with compassion' is a major characteristic of the Lord which the Gospel writers noticed (s.w. Mt. 9:36; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 in Matthew alone- see too Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Greek speaks of a literal movement within the ribcage, as if the Lord's actual body was moved by the compassion He felt. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and at the day of judgment- and forever. This same basic pity is part of Him, as it is of His Father- and it must be with us too. Several times when we read of the Lord showing such pity, it is in the context of others *not* doing so. In this instance, the disciples don't want to feed the hungry people; and likewise in Mt. 15:32. In Mt. 18:27 the compassion of the Lord to His indebted servant was not reciprocated by that servant; the Samaritan of the parable had compassion when the priest and Levite did not (Lk. 10:33); the Father had compassion on the prodigal son when the older brother did not (Lk. 15:20). Such compassion is therefore an act of the will, rather than a streak some are born with. We can shut up our "bowels of compassion" against human need (1 Jn. 3:17), we have to "put on... bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12).

6:35 *And when the day was far spent, his disciples came to him-* The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

*And said: The place is deserted and the day is now far spent-* AV "The time is now past". "Past" translates *parerchomai*; the Lord uses a similar word in replying that "they need not *depart*"- *aperchomai*. This word choice not only aided memorization of the Gospel record. The disciples considered that time had more than gone, that it was inevitable that the Lord must now send the crowd away, and should've done earlier. But He is saying that actually He is not limited by time, the time didn't have to be "past"; because He was not limited by food either, and could feed them.

6:36 *Send them away-* Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50). They ask the Lord to send the multitude away, whereas He had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

*That they may go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat-* Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

6:37 *But he answered and said to them: You give them something to eat. And they said to him: Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?*

- The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are

given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations; but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

If a labourer worked for a denarius a day during harvest season, we can conclude that their figure of 200 denarii was a year's wages for a working man. Like us so often, they focused on the size of the problem rather than on the Lord's ability to move absolutely any mountain.

According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them...", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

6:38 *And he said to them: How many loaves have you? Go and see. And when they knew, they reported: Five loaves and two fishes-* He calmly bid them feed a huge crowd with just a few loaves. We are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking



about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). We sense something of the Lord's same style to this day as He works in our lives. They were asked to number their loaves, but they perhaps sarcastically add: "And two [small] fishes".

Mt. 14:17 adds the word "only": "We have here only five loaves and two fishes". Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7 AV). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:39 *And he commanded that all should sit down in groups upon the green grass-* "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty, waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children.

6:40 *And they sat down in groups of hundreds or of fifties-* Vine comments: "Lit., like beds in a garden. The former adverb, by companies, describes the arrangement; this the colour. The red, blue, and yellow clothing of the poorest Orientals makes an Eastern crowd full of colour; a fact which would appeal to Peter's eye, suggesting the appearance of flower-beds in a garden". If this were the case, then the allusion would be to the encampment of Israel in Num. 24:6: "As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Equally if the allusion is instead to military groups or companies, the idea is that this apparently random group of peasants, with all their shady biographies and legal uncleanness and lack of understanding, were the new Israel the Lord was forming; the new "hosts" of Yahweh of Hosts.

6:41 *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven-* This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1. And the Comforter passages promise us that we can share His relationship with the Father, through the gift of the Spirit.

*He blessed and broke the loaves; and he gave them to the disciples to set before them; and the two fish he divided among them all-* The aorist followed by the imperfect in "broke and gave" suggests He broke the bread once, and went on giving it out as a continuous act. This speaks of the Lord's one time death, and His continuous giving out of that to His people. The miracle of multiplication therefore happened at the moment of breaking the bread and His giving it out. This is indeed the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

6:42 *And they all ate and were filled-* "All" ate; and eating together at a banquet was a sign of religious fellowship. There were for sure some there who were Gentiles, unclean, or simply curious. They were "filled", perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full". The blessings of an obedient Israel were counted to this random crowd. By grace. They were "filled" superabundantly. The Lord's generosity is wonderful.

6:43 *And they collected twelve basketfuls of leftovers, and also of the fish-* Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("leftovers") that it filled twelve baskets, another implication that here were assembled the new Israel. The word for "baskets" here is a different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas. The Lord imparted a sense of ritual holiness to the otherwise random and unclean.

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the

background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

6:44 *There were five thousand men that ate the loaves*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded later. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

6:45 *And immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and to go without him to the other side to Bethsaida*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on Mt. 14:13 *on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that

the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

The Lord told them to sail to the other side of the lake, but said that they would be 'going before / ahead of Him'. The Greek could suggest that His words could have been understood as meaning that they would sail to that place, He would send the crowds away, and then go behind them- i.e., walking on the water. Of course, they could have understood 'going before Him' as meaning that He would join them there at a later stage. But as they sailed away, they must have debated whatever He meant. Because if He meant that He would join them there at a later stage, however was He going to walk there around the lake, whilst so desperately wanting the crowds to go away from Him? Remember He had no personal boat, and they were in a deserted location. Whichever exit He took, whichever way He walked around the lake, He would have the very people with Him whom He was so earnestly trying to avoid. Again, as in asking *them* to *give* and not *buy* food for the crowd, the Lord was stretching them. He wanted them to reflect upon His words, and if they had done, then logically they were intended to come to the conclusion that He was implying that He would walk over the water to them. And if they were Old Testament minded, they would have known the passages which spoke of Yahweh walking upon the water and the waves of the sea (Ps. 29:3,10; 77:19; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:15). When, therefore, the waves arose and they seemed likely to drown, they were intended to figure that He would come to them, manifesting Yahweh, walking upon the waves of the sea- to save them. Whether any of them did actually get that far in perception and faith seems doubtful. But I believe we can discern how the Lord was seeking to lead them and educate their faith. The tragedy is that so many of His detailed plans for us are likewise wasted because of our lack of spiritual perception, and allowing the immediacy of issues to obscure the clear light of His leadership through life.

However, Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

*While he sent the crowd away-* The phrase is repeated twice in Mt. 14:22,23, probably in recognition of the miracle performed in managing to send these crowds away empty handed, with no visible Messianic Kingdom. At least, the power of personality in the Lord was very great to be able to get Himself out of this situation.

6:46 *And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray-* Mt. "by himself". The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is

used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (Mt. 14:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent both the crowd and the disciples away was because He knew He simply had to be alone with God. And there can be times like this for us too. No matter how stupid we might appear in secular life, there can be a time when you just have to go and sit in the toilet for five minutes in your lunch break and pray. The Lord uses the term in speaking of how we are each given something very personal which we are to use in His service- *kata idios*, 'alone by ourselves', or as in AV "according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15). Each sheep is called by the Lord *kata idios*, AV "by name" (Jn. 10:3). And therefore the judgment of each believer will be *kata idios*, AV "according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). There is a very wide range of translations of this phrase. But the idea is that we were each individually called by the Lord and given different callings, and our judgment will be according to this. This is not to say that there is anything other than one basic faith, Gospel, Hope, Lord etc. But in many denominations and fellowships the idea is pushed that each believer must adopt an identical, detailed statement of understanding and calling. Yet in practice, the frames of our calling and the Lord's hopes for our responses vary significantly between individuals.

The fact the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father is one of the profoundest and logically strongest evidences that He was not God in any Trinitarian sense. The basic facts of the Gospel records were simply not given their full weight by the unBiblical politicians who first created the Trinity doctrine. The liberal theologian Hal Taussig observes that other theologians haven't written much about Jesus at prayer- for this very reason, that of itself it contradicts Trinitarian dogma: "Because Jesus at prayer confuses theological categories of "divine" and "human" (is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?), theologians have rarely been interested in Jesus at prayer" (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 7). Taussig's question "is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?" is ultimately impossible for Trinitarian apologists to answer.

6:47 *And when evening had come, the boat was in the midst of the sea-* People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the

sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

*And he was alone on the land-* This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough*. Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

6:48 *And seeing they were having difficulty rowing, for the wind was against them, about the fourth watch of the night he went to them, walking on the sea; and he would have passed by them-* The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night (Mt.). Mark adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road

to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away. Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

Mark's account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them". I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective. The same is the case with the language of demons.

6:49 *But they, when they saw him walking on the sea, supposed that it was a ghost and cried out-* The Greek *phantasma* could refer to a ghost, in which cases we see how under pressure, disciples return quickly to their previous belief systems. But the word could equally refer to an Angel. Their fear, and that fear being met with assurance *not* to fear, would then be typical of human reaction whenever Angels appear to them. The Lord's assurance that "It is I" would then be yet another evidence that the Lord Jesus was not an Angel (as the Watchtower wrongly claim).

6:50 *For they all saw him and were disturbed-* The word is specifically used in literature of troubled water (and in Jn. 5:4,7). The state of the water was as the state of their minds. Hence the power of the image of the Lord Jesus walking at ease upon that troubled water.

*But he immediately spoke to them and said to them: Be of good courage! It is I! Be not afraid-* They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words "be of good courage" before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today. "Be not afraid" was a phrase so often on the Lord's lips to the disciples. They so often



feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). Despite His high demands on the one hand, on the other, He was and is ever assuring His people of His total and saving love for them. Peter uses the same phrase when he in his turn urges us to not be afraid nor 'troubled'- the very word used about the troubled disciples on the water that night (1 Pet. 3:14; Mt. 14:26). The Lord likewise leads each of us through situations in order that we might then strengthen others in those situations. Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 1:4-8 would seem to go as far as saying that in fact *all* we experience is in order that we might later give strength to others in similar situations. And this enables us, in broad terms at least, to attach meaning to event in a way which the unbeliever simply cannot.

The Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns* are full of reference to the true Israel being saved from drowning in the sea of Gentile nations (1 QH 3:6,12-18; 6:22-25; 7:4,5). The *Testament of Naphtali* 6:1-10 speaks of "the ship of Jacob" almost sinking in a storm, but Jacob himself walks on the water to save her. Clearly the Lord has these popular images in mind, and is recasting them- Jesus is the founder of the new Israel as Jacob was of the old, his 12 disciples are as the 12 sons of Jacob. And the faithful Israel in the boat are in fact not very faithful, they are secular, non-religious very human Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

"It is I" is *ego eimi* and could be understood as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. They were to understand Him as the fulfilment of the Old Testament language of Yahweh walking upon the raging sea. "It is I" could be a quotation of the Divine Name from Is. 41:4; 43:10. It is used in that context of not fearing the power of Assyria / Babylon. The Lord wanted the disciples to perceive that the huge waves were to be met with the same faith that the faithful remnant had in the face of the opposition of superpowers against Israel. However, it needs to be asked how else the Lord could have said "It's Me!". There are alternatives, but this is the phrase used. And yet on the other hand, the use of *ego eimi* is not necessarily an allusion to the Divine Name, because it is found on the lips of men in 2 Sam. 2:19 LXX; Mt. 26:22,25; Jn. 1:20,27; 9:8 and Acts 22:3 (see too Lk. 1:18,19). The question is: Did the Lord really expect the disciples to perceive such Scriptural allusions in the midst of panic and crisis? And if so, what was the point? For surely they were not in the midst of a quiet Bible class evening. The point likely was and is that in the heat of crisis, the spiritually minded will unconsciously perceive spiritual nudges from the Father and Son- and thus be strengthened to endure and decide rightly in the heat of crisis.

6:51 *And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly amazed-* Gk. 'grew weary', as if there was a brief period over which the raging decreased.

*6:52 Because they did not understand the miracle of the loaves; their heart was hardened-* And yet Matthew says that they worshipped Him as "Son of God". Perhaps they did this after their initial amazement. Or it could be that we can make such statements of belief whilst still having hardened hearts and amazed in our actual unbelief.

*6:53 And when they had crossed over-* Perhaps the emphasis is upon they. The Lord and His disciples were now united again.

*They landed at Gennesaret and anchored there-* This is on the northwest shore of Galilee. Mk. 6:45 says that they departed on their journey aiming for Bethsaida, on the northeast shore. The Lord had upbraided Bethsaida in Mt. 11:21. Perhaps the disciples had insisted on pressing ahead with giving those people another chance, whereas that was not the Lord's will. Such providential overruling of our preaching is a common occurrence. One wonders whether the changed journey plan involved not returning to the Jews but going to a more Gentile area. This would have been in line with the Lord's own change of course in His ministry, turning away from the Jewish masses towards the tiny minority who accepted Him and towards the Gentiles (see on Mt. 13:10).

*6:54 And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognised him-* The Lord was a well known figure. But He used an economy of miracle, focusing upon the instruction of the twelve and those who wished to learn from Him. We get the impression He avoided crowds wherever possible; the crowd scenes are nearly always against His will. So whenever He was seen in public, the crowds came.

*6:55 And ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard he was-* As noted on :54, "wherever He was" suggests that He sought to avoid gathering crowds to Himself. But those who made the effort to come to Him were not disappointed (:56).

*6:56 And wherever he went, into villages, or into cities, or into the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces-* See on Mt. 9:21. His preaching campaign is spoken of as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society.

*And pleaded with him-* The Greek *parakleo* means literally 'to call near' and in this case we can understand it literally. They felt that they had to touch Him in order to be healed (unlike the cases of faith in His spoken word which the Lord so commends). Therefore, needing that physical

presence, it makes sense to understand *parakleo* here as meaning to literally call near. They called Him near so that they might touch the hem of His garment.

*That they be allowed to touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched him were cured-* The Law of Moses commanded the Jews to make "borders" of blue upon their clothes (Num. 15:38), presumably to remind them of Heaven in daily life. But the same Hebrew word is found in Mal. 4:2, speaking of how the Messianic "sun of righteousness" was to arise with "healing in His hems". Their seeking for healing in the hem of the Lord's clothes was therefore a sign that they accepted Him as Messiah. But the 'arising' of Malachi 4 is the time of the Kingdom established on earth, with Judah freed from her oppressors. The time for Mal. 4:2 was not then. They thought it was. And yet the Lord still goes along with their misunderstanding, by granting them healing from His hems. This may have been simply from compassion of the moment towards human need; or it could be that the Lord was happy to reward faith when He saw it, even if it was based upon somewhat wrong interpretation of the Father's word.

# MARK CHAPTER 7

*7:1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus-* They came all the way to Galilee to try to trap the Lord in His words. And yet it was some of the Jerusalem priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5) who later accepted Christ. We would likely have ignored these troublemakers and given up on them as hard cases, to be endured but not converted. But the Lord's hope and vision for humanity was so wide- and in the end, even after His death, it paid off. This is a great challenge to us in our witness to all men, including the bitter, self-righteous religious leader types.

*7:2 And they saw that some of his disciples ate with unclean hands, that is, unwashed-* The Lord Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

*7:3 The Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they first wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders-* This was well known to Jews in Palestine, and so Mark's addition of this background information suggests he was preaching to Gentiles.

*7:4 And when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they first purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze-* "Washing" is *baptizo*. The Jews practiced immersion multiple times in order to cleanse themselves, as they imagined, from the defilement caused by association with unclean persons. The Christian take on baptism is so different- it is to cleanse us from our own sins, not those of others which we have been associated with by physical contact. The Christian baptism was into death, into a grave, into association with a dead body- all of which made a Jew unclean and requiring immersion to cleanse them from.

*7:5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him: Why don't your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders-* The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be

a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

*But eat their bread with unclean hands?*- Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

*7:6 And he said to them: Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me-* See on Heb. 11:4. They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27).

Isaiah prophesied "of you" in the first century. The reference to "this people..." was not to be understood as only Isaiah's hearers, but all who read this living word. And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you in your generation*.

The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah's time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass 'people of the land' whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on Mt. 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in Mt. 15:10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

*7:7 But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men-* The mere act of worship itself is not spirituality. Religion is full of 'worship' of God but this is not of itself acceptable to Him; so much such religion is "in vain". It depends whether our worship is a reflection of our understanding the right teachings / doctrines; otherwise it is worship in vain. Worship is therefore a reflection of and outflow from the things we believe about the Lord we worship.

Worship and sacrifice to God can be done "in vain" if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn't mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God's word, is so that our lives are *not* lived "in vain"; there is "effect" in the outworking of God's true word in human lives. "In vain" here is surely to be semantically paralleled with "making void" in :13.

The original of Is. 29:13,14 doesn't say "teaching for doctrines". It is addressed to *the people*, stating that their fear of God is taught by the doctrines of men. The Lord amends the text slightly to make it relevant to the *teachers* whom He was addressing. Such amending of Old Testament quotation was common in Jewish *midrash*. The point is, that God's ancient word is to be reapplied to us today in *our* contexts, rather than be left as mere historical statement to people long ago.

7:8 *You leave the commandment of God and cling to the tradition of men-* The contrasts are between 'leaving' and 'clinging'; between "commandment" and "tradition"; and finally, between "of God" and "of men". "Leaving" is literally 'to put away' and is used of divorce. The marriage contract between God and Israel was the Mosaic law. But they were putting that away, and thereby effectively divorcing God; His action in divorcing Israel was therefore only confirming them in what they themselves wished to do. "Cling" or 'cleave to' is likewise a marriage allusion; they had applied 'leave [Father] and cleave to [wife]' to their relationship with God. They had left Him and cleaved to men, with human tradition as their marriage contract with them. This is how serious it is to become enslaved to following tradition. God "commands", from God to man, whereas "tradition" is that which is passed on from men to man. The acceptance of tradition is therefore effectively a playing God.

7:9 *And he said to them: You are good at rejecting the commandment of God so that you can establish your tradition!*- They had rejected or [Gk.] brought to nothing, neutralized, the commandment of God. They had ended the law. What God did in ending the Mosaic law was only a confirmation of what Israel themselves had done. And they did it despite all their much vaunted attention to every letter of the words which comprised that law. They wished to effectively write their own law; they annulled God's commandment in order to establish their own tradition. "Establish" is a variant reading, but it fits well with the following verses which speak of their voiding of God's law in order to obey the tradition which they created (:13).

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have

this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God's *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God's inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, 'getting around' the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

The tradition in view is not specifically their teaching about washing. The subsequent context shows the Lord has in view other traditions. His argument is therefore 'If *some* of your traditions are wrong and unBiblical, then why demand we keep other traditions which are within that same body of tradition'. And so He relentlessly requires that tradition within any religious group is fearlessly analysed- if some are unBiblical, then the others need not be respected. Just as "tradition" and "commandment" are placed in apposition to each other, likewise "your" is in opposition to "of God". Elevating tradition to the status of Divine commandment is yet another way in which religious people 'play God'.

7:10 *For Moses said-* "Commanded". God's word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for "tradition" means something passed down. To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

*Honour your father and your mother, and, He that speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death-* Thus the Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the commandment*" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them.

7:11 *But you say-* The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

*If a man tells-* Matthew's word means to give a word, or written contract.

*His father or his mother: Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban (that is to say, an offering to God)-* "Gained" or 'profit' is a term which reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction. The Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other). See on Mk. 3:4.

If a gift was made to the temple treasury of what was reckoned to be the obligation of the man to his parents, or if the man agreed to list the temple treasury as a beneficiary in his will, giving to them the amount he would have spent caring for his elderly parents- then he was considered free from having to honour and care for them. The reasoning was that something promised to God in the future was His and could not therefore be spent on parents. But this was *not* honouring the parents (:6). We can't buy our way out of spiritual responsibility by making donations or making legacies which cost us nothing today. We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual ego, rather than as a fast which He recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community of believers, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

7:12 *You no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother- thus-* "Not do anything" is "not honour..." in Matthew. To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.

7:13 *Making void the word of God by your tradition which you have delivered; and you do many similar things-* see on Mt. 13:39. It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" by our traditions or our



lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.

Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to teach us something. In Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect'. God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

7:14 *And again he called to him the crowd, and said to them: Hear me all of you, and understand-* His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the "scribes and Pharisees" in a private audience, so Matthew implies. The Lord was speaking specifically to the crowd, without the presence of the disciples, who only later came to Him (:12). The Greek words for "hear and understand" were repeatedly used by the Lord in Mt. 13:13,14,15,19. There He had explained to the disciples that the crowds did *not* and *could not* "hear and understand", and therefore He was confusing them by parables; only the disciples heard and understood. But here, hoping against hope, the Lord makes a desperate appeal to the crowds to hear and understand. Such is His hopefulness that He was unashamed to depart from a declared position about people, and hope that they might somehow respond. We are left to imagine the tone of desperate pleading in His voice as He appealed for them to "hear and understand" in the light of how He had used those words about the crowds in Mt. 13. In the same spirit, Paul turned to the Gentiles- and yet continued by all means trying to persuade the Jews.

7:15 *There is nothing from outside the man that going into him can defile him-* Nothing which enters in can defile (Mt.). The same words are found in the Lord's final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching 'unclean' things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating "with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands" (Mk. 7:2 s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord's teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. 'defiled'] in itself" (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper, those shimmering images on our screens, become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

*But the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man-* Mt. 15 says "what proceeds out of the mouth". Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles, but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (Mt. 15:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out "from *within*", is what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and so he is his words, just as "the word was [and is] God". We note that the same word is used about gracious words 'proceeding out of [the Lord's] mouth' (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to 'proceed' [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that "may minister grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

7:16 *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear-* We are granted potential hearing as a gift from God; this is the element of calling and predestination by grace. But we must respond; we must use that gift of spiritual hearing to "hear" in the sense of obedience.

7:17 *When he had entered a house away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about the parable-* Matthew says it was Peter who asked, but Mark as Peter's gospel omits this. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18; see on 8:29). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said earlier about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just

spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

*7:18 And he said to them: Are you without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever from without goes into the man, it cannot defile him-* The world would not perceive (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had.

*7:19 Because it does not go into his heart but into his belly and is eliminated [this he said, thus making all foods clean]* - See on Acts 10:35,36. Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records.

Jesus clearly explained that nothing a man eats can spiritually defile him; it is what comes out of the heart which does this (Mark 7:15-23). "In saying this, Jesus declared *all* foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19 NIV). Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

*7:20 And he said: That which proceeds out of the man is what defiles the man-* "The man" is here paralleled with "the heart of men" in :21. A man is his heart, his mind. Whatever external appearances and acts are achieved, the Lord looks upon the heart because He looks upon the man.

I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to

their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that 'spirit' usually refers to the mind / heart. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

7:21 *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts-* Matthew's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar. The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable

in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

The Greek for "thoughts" means reasonings or disputings (s.w. Phil. 2:14). The Lord surely had in mind the cunning but carnal reasoning of the Pharisees which is mentioned at the start of this section (15:1-6). There are separate Greek words used here for "evil" and "thoughts"; but every single one of the 14 New Testament usages of the word *dialogismos* ("thoughts") is in a distinctly sinful context (Mk. 7:21; Lk. 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phil. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 2:4). Yet the word itself has no moral overtone, it means simply 'to think / reason'. But the point is, that human thinking is so often sinful, and is the root cause of sinful behaviour.

*Fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries*- Notice the purposeful juxtaposition of bad *thinking* next to murder. This confirms the Lord's constant emphasis that the thought is equivalent to the action in His judgment. Murder, adultery and fornication have already been defined in the Sermon on the Mount as being essentially performed in the heart. The list of seven sins here is surely intended to encompass all sin in totality (seven)- whatever specific sin there may be, it originated in a human heart.

7:22 *Covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness*- Perhaps the list of evil behaviours here is exactly what the Lord considered the Pharisees to be guilty of in their hearts. There is no shortage of evidence that they were guilty of all these things beneath their appearance of hyper righteousness.

7:23 *All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man*- The Greek *koinoo* ["defiles"] strictly means 'to make common'. The later New Testament uses it in a quite different and spiritual way, speaking of how there is a "common faith" (Tit. 1:4; Jude 3) which means that the community of believers are bound together by what they have "in common" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The Lord's new Israel had new principles. If the heart was cleansed, then the focus moved from fear of

collective *defilement* to rejoicing in and experiencing what we have *in common* in Christ.

7:24 *From there he arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and wanted no one to know it; but he could not be hidden-* Mt. "He withdrew". The word is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 "when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*"; 14:13 "When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence"). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to 'withdraw' may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

The Lord had emphasized earlier that His mission was not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel. Perhaps He decided to go to Gentile areas in order to avoid engagement with the crowds and focus upon the disciples. But again, His humanity is indicated by the fact that even that plan had an outcome that He didn't foresee, in that there He met a Gentile woman who so deeply impressed Him by her perception that He healed her daughter.

7:25 *But immediately a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet-* "But immediately" shows that the Lord was proven mistaken in thinking that by going to a Gentile area, he would be away from public ministry and able to focus upon teaching the twelve. He as a human did not have full knowledge, and things at times turned out differently to how He expected; just as in His work as a *tekton* ["carpenter"] He may well have made mistakes and misjudgements as He cut and sawed and measured.

7:26 *Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by race-* Matthew says she was a "Canaanite". Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on Mt. 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and

shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on Mt. 15:21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

*And she pleaded with him to cast out the demon from her daughter-* Matthew: "My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon". The very same words were repeated by the man of Mt. 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise "badly vexed" (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of Mt. 9:27, so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth. The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable to the people of the time. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being "whole" or "healed" (Mt. 15:28). The implied 'driving out of demons' was simply another way of saying she was cured.

*7:27 And he said to her: Let the children first be filled, for it is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs-* The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food intended for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children. The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs. Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in

our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

*7:28 But she answered and said to him-* Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

*Indeed, Lord-* A word signifying her assent to what the Lord had just said. She agreed with the position that the bread of salvation was primarily for Israel and that Gentiles were but dogs.

*But even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs-* She perceived the healing of her daughter as a mere "crumb" compared to the bread of the Kingdom, full salvation, which had been obtained for Israel by Jesus. She perceived too that that great salvation had been rejected by them, or at best, treated carelessly and without due respect, in that crumbs had fallen to her. The Lord at the end of Matthew 12 and throughout His subsequent parables of chapter 13 had explained how Israel had rejected the Gospel, and that He was therefore turning to the disciples for response. The parables of Matthew 13 were His attempt to help the disciples come to terms with the fact that in reality, Israel had rejected John's message. But this woman perceived it well, and thereby perceived that the bread of salvation must therefore be available to the Gentiles if Israel didn't want it. In this she was far ahead of the disciples themselves. It could be argued that she was not *seeking* 'crumbs', in the sense of equating the hoped for healing with the crumbs. It could be that she is saying that she is already eating of those crumbs, in that she felt she was feeding on whatever small parts of the bread of salvation were possible for her as a Gentile. She says that the dogs *are eating* the crumbs- rather than begging for them. The Lord was so deeply impressed by the woman's use of metaphor that He Himself builds it into a later parable- Lazarus the beggar desired to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). The rich man clearly represents Judaism, which was to be condemned and rejected, whilst the beggar was saved. In this we see the Lord's humility as well as His sensitivity; He was deeply impressed by the woman, and absorbed her use of metaphor into His own mental material.

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on Mt. 15:22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios*, "Lord". There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as 'masters' or 'lords' of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel's salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children



sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with Gentiles and sinners, which was what led the children of Israel to reject Him. And this incident is sandwiched between the records of the feeding miracles, in which the Lord dealt His bread to all and sundry, including Gentiles. This amazing woman accepted Jesus as her Lord even though she felt that she was not fit to sit at His table; she got to be at His table by being as a dog. This amazing devotion to her Lord, fully accepting the barriers there were between them brought about by ethnic birth circumstances beyond her control- resulted in the Lord tearing down those barriers. Significantly, Paul uses the very same Greek words in 1 Cor. 10:21 about eating at the Lord's table- and he has the breaking of bread service in mind. The sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles was a highly divisive issue in the communities of Jewish Christians who first responded to Matthew's Gospel. He is surely making the point that in a strange way, Gentiles partook of the Lord's table in that even the dogs under the table still eat what is on the table. And this happened even during the Lord's ministry. They were "under the table" (Mk. 7:28)- but still *at* the table.

*7:29 And he said to her: For this saying go your way. The demon is gone out of your daughter-* This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

I think the extraordinary sensitivity of the Lord Jesus is reflected in the many examples of Him displaying extraordinary perception and precognition of what had happened or was going to happen. He had felt that Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree before they even met (Jn. 1:48); He knew the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter had been cured; He knew the thoughts of men, etc. Now all this may have been due to the Father directly beaming that knowledge into Him through a Holy Spirit gift of knowledge. Maybe. And this was the explanation I assumed for many years. But I have noticed in myself and others that at times, we too have flashes of inexplicable precognition; we somehow know something's happened. I remember sitting next to a sister, and she suddenly came over looking distressed. She simply said: "John B's mother has just died". And so indeed it was. I think we've all had such things happen. And we share the same nature which the Lord had. So my restless mind wonders, and no more than that, whether His extraordinary precognition was not simply a result of a bolt of Holy Spirit knowledge, but rather an outflow of His extraordinary sensitivity to other people and their situations. This Lord is our Lord, the same today as He was back then yesterday. In any case,

living as such a sensitive person in such a cruel and insensitive and blunt world would itself have been almost unbearable. And yet He was like that for us, the insensitive, the ignorant, the selfish and the uncaring, in so many moments of our lives.

*7:30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed-* "She found" could suggest that she did not have complete faith that it had happened until she saw it. The mention that her daughter was lying on the bed, calm, draws a similarity with the healing of Jairus' daughter; as if to say that there were certain hallmarks to the Lord's ministry and work amongst people. We see the same today, and this forms the basis of fellowship between those the Lord has touched. Presumably the girl had been running around in a wild state due to her illness; which means the mother had shown all the more faith in leaving her in order to go to the Lord. The Ethiopic text adds that she was lying "clothed", suggesting that she had previously torn off her clothes due to her vexation.

The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him.

*7:31 And again he left from the borders of Tyre and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the borders of Decapolis-* The Lord was now meeting those to whom the healed Legion had preached to. He had purposefully stopped Legion from coming with him, so that Legion could instead witness where he was. Just as the Lord made a point of visiting the home areas of His disciples, so now He returns to Legion's home area. This following up on the work of His converts continues today, as He partners with us in our local witnessing.

*7:32 And they brought to him one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand upon him-* Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35;

Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to be seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

*7:33 And he took him aside from the crowd, and in private put his fingers into his ears, and he spat, and touched his tongue-* The Lord as ever sought to avoid showmanship; He wanted that man to have an intimate personal relationship with Him, knowing that the whole incident would be programmatic for all He does in opening the ears of every believer in Him. The Lord's saliva was to touch the man's saliva; the Lord's spirit and words were to be mixed with the man's. Fingers in the ears spoke of deafness; the man was to become deaf in order to hear- suggesting that the true hearing is from being deaf to the world and open to the word of the Lord Jesus. The finger of God was what touched Egypt in causing the plagues (Ex. 8:19; Lk. 11:20); it refers to His power. It is that same immense power which works in opening a man's ears, if he so wishes them to be opened, to attend to the word of Jesus. But in subsequent life, he must hear the Lord's word and mix his spirit with the Lord's. But it was "the finger of God" which wrote the old covenant on tables of stone (Ex. 31:18; Dt. 9:10). The Lord may be implying that a new covenant was being now written on the man's mind, through the words / saliva of the Lord Jesus. For the new covenant is to be written by God on human hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). And by grace, the Lord takes the initiative in doing this to people, leaving them to respond further.

Because the tongue controls swallowing, surely the man was frothing in his own spittle. And yet the Lord spits and puts His spittle on that of the man, to show His complete ability to identify with the human condition. The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

There is however another take on the passage, which the grammar does allow. It is the paraphrase suggested by Adam Clarke: "And Jesus took him aside from the multitude: and [the deaf man] put his fingers into his ears, intimating thereby to Christ that they were so stopped that he could

not hear; and having spat out, that there might be nothing remaining in his mouth to offend the sight when Christ should look at his tongue, he touched his tongue, showing to Christ that it was so bound that he could not speak: and he looked up to heaven, as if to implore assistance from above: and he groaned, being distressed because of his present affliction, and thus implored relief: for, not being able to speak, he could only groan and look up, expressing by these signs, as well as he could, his afflicted state, and the desire he had to be relieved. Then Jesus, having compassion upon him, said, Be opened: and immediately his ears were opened, so that he could hear distinctly; and the impediment to his speaking was removed, so that he spake properly".

*7:34 And looking up to heaven-* This is typical of how the Lord prayed, with no barrier between Him and the Father; and He invites us to share the same relationship with the Father which He had, enabled by the gift of the Comforter.

*He sighed-* This is the Greek word used for our groaning in desire for the Kingdom situation to come about on earth, and for an end to our limited human condition (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2,4). The Lord knows those groans, for He had them Himself. Therefore His healing of this man, as noted on :32, was to provide a foretaste of His Kingdom. The same word is used of the Lord's intercession for us now with "groanings" (Rom. 8:26). This incident of healing, for which the Lord groaned in prayer for it to happen, is therefore a cameo of His present intercession for us. But let us note that His groaning / sighing was not simply in frustration at the human condition, but it merged into prayer to the Father. And this is important for us to follow; otherwise our groanings are merely the groaning complainings of Israel in the wilderness.

*And said to him: Ephphatha, that is, Be opened-* Recording the Aramaic term used is another indication that this was written by a genuine eyewitness. "Opened" is a term which tends to be used of the opening of ears in understanding (Lk. 24:31,32,45; Acts 16:14; 17:3). The literal opening of his ears was therefore so that his understanding be opened. The Aramaic term "ephphatha" is perhaps used to direct our attention to its Old Testament usage. Israel were the ones whose ears were not opened (Is. 48:8), whereas the ears of Messiah were opened (Is. 50:5). The same Hebrew term is used as "ephphatha". The Lord's ears had been opened, and now He opened the ears of this man- so that the man might be "in Him", and respond to the Father's word as the Lord had done.

*7:35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly-* Again, the language of the day is used; the idea that dumb people were literally tongue-tied is alluded to. The more essential idea is that the Lord through His word, His saliva, His spirit, had broken the ties that bind, that seem unmoveable. "Plainly", *orthos*, literally means 'correctly, rightly'. The miracle worked upon the man's

mind by the Lord's spirit and word was to result in right speaking and action from then onwards in the man's life. We are reminded of 2 Cor. 3:12: "Seeing then that we have such hope, we have great plainness of speech". The bold, plain speaking of the disciples in the early chapters of Acts is an example of how this works out in practice in human life.

*7:36 And he ordered them that they should tell no one. But the more he ordered them, the more widely they proclaimed it-* See on Mk. 5:19,20. The Lord didn't want the man distracted from his spiritual transformation by mass popular interest in him. And yet those who heard him speak would be amazed. And we noted on :35 that plain speaking was a feature of the early preachers of the Gospel. The Lord's idea was that the quiet witness of just living ordinary live, speaking plainly and hearing others, was going to be witness enough to Him, without any need for dramatic claims about healing.

*7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying: He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak-* This is an echo of how every stage of creation / 'doing' was pronounced "very good". The Lord's healings were not just done for the sole sake of addressing human need; but in order to create a new creation of persons who would exist to God's glory.

# MARK CHAPTER 8

8:1 *In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them-* We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

8:2 *I pity the crowd-* The Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place. They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of Jesus towards this world; so must our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

*Because they have continued with me-* The same word for "continued" is used about believers 'cleaving unto' Jesus (Acts 11:23). The Lord uses the same word about His wish for the disciples to continue with Him in the heat of temptation in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:38), and it is the same word used so often in John for 'abiding' with Christ. The Lord was more sceptical about the (Jewish) crowd in the earlier feeding miracle (of the 5000), later commenting that their interest was largely in the food. This more Gentile crowd (see on Mt. 15:31) He felt were abiding with Him in a more spiritual sense.

*For three days-* The provision of manna, the bread of salvation, after three days... this is surely prophetic of the resurrection. The Lord could have fed them at the end of the first day- three days is a long time not to eat, and they were at the point of losing consciousness due to lack of food ("they will faint in the way"). The Lord surely didn't provide food earlier in order to prove the level of interest. Surely many did walk away in search of food. But 4000 (at least) remained. It certainly was a great expression of sincere interest in the Lord's message, and compares favourably to that of the crowd of 5000, who were fed after only a few hours. The disciples' desire to dismiss this extraordinary group therefore appears even worse.

*And have nothing to eat-* The same Greek phrase is on the Lord's lips in Mt. 25:32, where He says that condemnation awaits the man who gives 'nothing to eat' to those who are hungry. The disciples like many of us assume automatically that it can't be their problem to provide others' needs if they don't have what is required materially. But the connection between this verse and Mt. 25:32 puts that assumption under a spotlight. Even if we do not have what is needed, our confrontation with that need requires to exercise faith that that need will be resolved. And the resolution of it may well depend upon our *faith*. This doesn't mean that we ask that material resources are dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

8:3 *And if I send them away to their homes without food, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from far away-* This is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- hence the crowd are described as glorifying "the God of Israel" (Mt. 15:31). The Lord certainly made no attempt to decide who was pure, or who was Jew and who was Gentile; He shared His bread with all who were in need, as He does today, regardless of moral circumstance. By sharing fellowship in this way He seeks to transform and change those who are willing to sit with Him.

8:4 *And his disciples answered him: Where shall one be able to find bread for these men here in such a desolate place?-* The wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?".

"Where can" is literally "Whence can a man...". Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully

human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

*8:5 And he asked them: How many loaves have you?-*

*And they said: Seven-* The feeding of the 4000 is clearly recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

*8:6 And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground-* The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshiping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present.

*And he took the seven loaves and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and they set them before the crowd-* The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in Mt. 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on Mt. 16:5.

The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid



relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on.

8:7 *And they had a few small fishes; and having blessed them, he commanded to set these also before them-* Mark's record speaks as if the fish were something of an afterthought (Mk. 8:7); the use of the diminutive word for *little* fish suggests they thought them hardly worth mentioning. The stress (in Mark) is that *they* had a few small fish. The situation is of course purposefully similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. They were really intended to learn from it. But they didn't. There were some differences, and one of them was that this time, their own small amount of food was used rather than that of the boy. The Lord was seeking to show that what little they personally had, fish they had personally caught but felt inadequate for the task, could and would be used by Him in order to meet the hunger of the Gentile world.

8:8 *And they ate and were filled-* The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. The feeding of the 4000 comes soon after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :3).

*And they gathered seven baskets of broken pieces that remained over-* According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord.

Literally, 'the breakages'. The word is only ever used in the Gospels about the broken pieces of bread from the feeding miracles. The related verb *klaō*, to break, is used only of the 'breaking of bread' in the feeding miracles, and every other occurrence in the New Testament concerns the breaking of bread service in memory of Jesus (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7,11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Clearly the breaking of bread in the miracles is intended to be seen as programmatic for the later 'breaking of bread' services. In this connection it becomes highly significant that there were Gentiles participating, along with women and children, and there was no 'test of fellowship' operated. The simple fact people wanted to be present around Jesus was enough.

"What was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the

hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the 'crumbs' in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

*8:9 And they were about four thousand; and he sent them away-* The way the number of eaters is presented at the end of the meal might suggest that this is the equivalent of a bill being presented at the conclusion of a meal. If this is the case, then the hint would be towards Is. 55:1,2, where again we have the theme of free provision of food, and being utterly filled / satisfied: "Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness".

The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

*8:10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went into the region of Dalmanutha-* There is no contradiction with Mt. 15:39 which says they came into the region of Magdalla; Dalmanutha would have been a village within the region of Magdalla. Different words for "region" are used by Matthew and Mark. Perhaps Matthew focuses on "Magdalla" because he may be wishing to say that this was the area from which Mary of Magdalla [Magdalene] was from.

*8:11 And the Pharisees came and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, testing him-* This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system. This appears an exact repetition of the situation in Mt. 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims

based on the similarity with Mt. 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

The implication of requesting a sign "from heaven" was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on Mt. 12:38,39.

8:12 *And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said-* As noted on 7:34, this is the word used about the Lord as "the Lord the Spirit" groaning for us in mediation (Rom. 8:26), reflecting how our groaning or sighing for the Kingdom age is known by Him too even now (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2,4).

*Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, No sign shall be given to this generation-* Matthew says there would be no sign given apart from that of Jonah being three days within the fish. Here we have a parade example of how the correct picture will only be arrived by careful reading of the whole Bible. A sign was given; but there was no other sign given apart from that one sign.

8:13 *And he left them, and again got into the boat and departed for the other side of the lake-* The original words suggest that this is more than a mere notice of the Lord moving on. The Greek for "left" can imply a more conscious and formal abandoning (see examples in Mt. 19:5; Lk. 5:28; Acts 18:19). This would be in line with how in the similar incident in Mt. 12:38-45, the Lord had decided to 'leave' the masses of Israel and instead focus upon a minority. He 'left' the majority in the wilderness and went after the one lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4 s.w.). In Matthew 12, the Lord made clear His change in policy- that He was leaving a wicked and adulterous generation and focusing upon the few who had truly responded, i.e. the group of disciples. But here He is again reasoning with the Jews and again formally leaving them. This is not inconsistency, but rather is such behaviour typical of the love that always hopes, that draws a line and yet revisits it in the hope that some will still change. Paul's behaviour to the Jews was the same- having turned away from them and towards the Gentiles, he still revisits the Jews in hope they will yet respond to Christ (Acts 13:46).

8:14 *And they forgot to take bread; and they did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them-* This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord 'taking the bread' in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase is used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of

bread in the feeding miracles, and about 'taking bread' at the breaking of bread service. To 'take bread' therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the 'taking of bread' in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in 'taking bread'- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to 'take bread'. Their slowness to understand is really brought out in the record.

8:15 *And he ordered them, saying: Take heed! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod-* The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (Mt. 13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders'- even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

The preaching of the Kingdom by us is likened to leaven- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the 'lump' of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

Their fear that they might have done something ritually wrong regarding bread was an outcome of their being influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines led to folk like the disciples becoming paranoid and self-suspicious over issues which were irrelevant, and indeed a distraction from the thrust of the Lord's teaching and intended way of life for His followers. The same effect can be observed in sincere believers who have fallen under the influence of Christian legalists.

8:16 *And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread-* Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes

"reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

"One with another" gives the impression of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (Mt. 16:8).

8:17 *And Jesus perceiving it said to them: Why do you so reason, because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart so hardened?*- Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel. See on Mk. 7:18.

8:18 *Having eyes, can't you see? And having ears, can't you hear? And do you not remember?*- One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had done. His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone. There's so much we don't perceive as we should, so much we are blind to. And this blindness separates us from God. It frustrates the Lord Jesus; he is angry when those who have eyes to see (i.e. have been converted) still don't see.

8:19 *When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to him: Twelve-* The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers. John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

8:20 *And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to him: Seven-* The Lord intended them to see a connection between the *seven* loaves and the *seven* baskets full of fragments which they gathered. For each loaf, there was a basket of fragments. Perhaps His idea was that effectively, the people didn't eat the bread; each loaf was just broken into pieces by the Lord and then left on the ground by the crowd. The idea would be [as stated in John 6] that the bread provided represented the Lord and His message, which for the most part was discarded by the crowds, who were simply hooked on getting to see or feel a miracle.

8:21 *And he said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?*- On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus after two miracles relating to bread, they failed to see that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord.

The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it.

8:22- see on Mk. 5:1.

*And they went to Bethsaida. And they brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him-* Perhaps the "they" was the disciples, seeing that Philip was from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), and that despite the Lord having done many miracles in this village previously, they still had not repented (Mt. 11:21).

8:23 *And he took hold of the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village; and when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw anything-* Trying to do the miracle as privately as possible and using His saliva is very similar to the healing of the deaf man in 7:33. Again the idea, as noted there, was that the Lord wanted the healed man to subsequently 'see' Him; and to see in the cure something intimate between Himself and the Lord. The Lord's spirit and word was represented by His saliva. This was what was to give the man spiritual vision.

Ultimately, we will only truly see in the Kingdom (Is. 29:18; 42:6; 1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will know (see) face to face. We will see God face to face, i.e. understand Him. It follows therefore that in some ways we are blind, or partially sighted, now. This is indicated by the Lord's symbolic healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk. 8:23-26). Firstly, the man saw men as if they were walking trees. Probably he scarcely knew what a tree or man looked like. Yet he is described as receiving his sight at this stage (8:24 Gk.). And then the Lord touched his eyes again, and again he is described (in the Greek) as receiving his sight (8:25- same phrase as in v.24). This time he saw all things (Gk.) clearly. This surely represents the full spiritual vision of the Kingdom. According to this type, we are at the stage of seeing men as if they are walking trees, perhaps wildly guessing about some things, lacking the most basic sense of proportion. Perhaps when we speak so glibly about "eternal life" or being in the Kingdom, we are speaking as that partially healed blind man.

*8:24 And he looked up, and said: I see men. But I see them as trees, walking-* The healing of the blind man is unusual in that the healing was in two stages. Initially the man only "beheld men as trees, walking". As a blind man, he would have had very limited experience of people. He initially saw them merely as part of the landscape, as important to him as trees. But the aim of the miracle was to convict him of this, and lead him to understand people as more than trees, more than just part of the natural creation with as much meaning as trees. That man represented us all; part of coming to the light, of receiving spiritual sight, is to perceive the value and meaning of persons; to see the world of persons rather than a world of things. No longer will we divide people as the world does into winners and losers, successes and failures; rather will we see in each one we meet a potential brother or sister. For they have all been invited into God's family, insofar as we pass them the invitation.

Having a true, accurate self-perception and appreciating the tremendous significance of the true person as opposed to our mere personas... this affects our relation to others. We will seek to decode the images presented to us by our brethren, and relate to the Christ-man within them, to the real and true person rather than the persona they act out. Because we see the Christ within them, the real Duncan or Dmitry or Ludmila or Sue or Jorge... we will realize that relationships are worth fighting for. The world of unbelievers then becomes perceived as a mass of persons waiting to be born, to become born again after the image of Christ through their conversion and baptism.

8:25- see on Mt. 20:32.

*Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And his sight was restored, and he saw everyone clearly-* The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought

for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55), and perhaps here He healed the blind man in two stages so that he wouldn't be scared when he first saw people moving. "His sight was restored" is in some manuscripts "he was restored" (as AV). The same word is used of the restoration of the Kingdom (Acts 1:6), which was potentially possible for the Elijah ministry through John the Baptist to achieve (Mt. 17:11). The implication is that "in our lives, Your Kingdom comes". In a limited sense, we as persons become those under the dominion of the King, the Kingdom restored at least in our hearts and vision / outlook. And it is the vision which the Lord gives which enables us to see all men clearly, to see people as we should, to understand the world as a world of persons rather than vague objects we encounter or collide with as we stumble through life.

*8:26 And he sent him away to his home, saying: Do not even enter into the village-* The Lord is recorded in the next verse as going into villages to preach (:27). Perhaps the implication is that the man needed some time, however brief, to prepare him to be able to preach as his Lord did. Some time alone to just get used to seeing, to understand the world through his new eyes, before talking to others about what had happened to him. Paul too had time in the wilderness before his main preaching mission began, as did the Lord.

*8:27 And Jesus went with his disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he questioned his disciples, saying to them-* Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

*Who do men say that I am?-* This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:29). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

*8:28 And they told him, saying: John the Baptist-* Literally, *the* John the



Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

*And others, Elijah-* John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. See on Mt. 11:3. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

*But others, one of the prophets-* Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in Mt. 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-

existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account here. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

8:29 *And he asked them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

"Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in :28. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or *thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

*Peter answered and said to him*- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17

Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

*You are the Christ!*- The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are also juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death, it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on Mt. 16:14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11) etc. are all examples of this.

Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

8:30 *And he ordered them that they should tell no one about him*- The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels. "Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how

Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ. The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of Matthew 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

Matthew has: "That he was the Christ", or as AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

8:31 *And he began to teach them that-* The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

*The Son of Man must suffer many things-* The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

*And be rejected-* The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

*By the elders-* *Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

*And the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again-* Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there

were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

Mark, who as we have suggested was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Qualms of conscience about 'wasting time' can so often be part of a guilty fear of not having 'done' enough. The Lord Jesus was not beset by guilt, and a sensitive reading of the Gospels reflects the way that this ultimately zealous servant of the Lord never appeared to be in hurry. He had ample time to speak to the woman He met at the well (Jn. 4:1-26), to take time out with the disciples (Mk. 8:27), He had the leisure time to admire wild flowers (Mt. 6:28), comment upon a sunset (Mt. 16:2), to go through the lengthy process of washing the feet of His men (Jn. 13:5) and to be able to answer their naive questions without the slightest hint of impatience (Jn. 14:5-10)... and of course to walk some distance to find a place conducive to prayer (Lk. 5:16).

8:32 *And he spoke these things openly*- Mk. 8:32 adds to Matthew's record in saying that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in Mt. 16:20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

*And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him*- When He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

8:33 *But he, turning about and seeing his disciples*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way

the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*... if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

*Rebuked Peter, and said to him: Get behind me, Satan!*- When the Lord said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.



"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation, hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (Mt. 16:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in Mt. 16:24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

"Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in Mt. 16:24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in Mt. 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

The Lord "rebuked" Peter for seeking to stop Him die on the cross. But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] straitly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross

carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "straitly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

*For you are mindful of the things of men instead of the things of God-* Being a 'satan' referred therefore to a state of mind, centred upon human rather than Godly things. The idea of 'Satan' is therefore part of a huge parable, presenting carnal thinking as the great satan / adversary of men.

8:34- see on Gal. 6:10.

*And he called to him the crowd with his disciples, and said to them: If any of you wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me-* The Lord was addressing all, but He clearly had Peter particularly in mind. For Peter was the one who was going to deny the Lord, rather than deny Himself (s.w. 14:30,31,72). The Lord may have intended them to understand that carrying the cross, dying with Him, was going to mean in practice not denying Him, but rather denying themselves. And Peter failed to perceive this; and Mark is Peter's account of how he preached the Gospel, always pointing out his own failings.

8:35 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it!*- I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct

interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation. To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

*8:36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?*- As noted on :35, the context is of carrying the cross in preaching the Gospel. The world to be won is the world for Christ, rather than seeking to gain the world for ourselves.

Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What will it profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What does it [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

*8:37 For what should a man give in exchange for his life?*- Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: " Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV " soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other.* We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the

cross). In this context verse 38 continues: " Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

*8:38 For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels-* See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves so weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering

for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

# MARK CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you: There are some standing here, who shall in no way taste death, before they see the kingdom of God come with power-* The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

9:2 *And after six days-* Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

*Jesus took with him Peter, James and John-* Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to underestimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the rock*, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

*And brought them to a high mountain where they could be alone-* Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

*And he was transfigured before them-* The Lord's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that we should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18

s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistening white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

9:3 *And his garments became radiant, exceedingly white, whiter than any launderer could whiten them-* The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used



about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" (Mt.) is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them". The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. - "shew" is the same word translated 'to see' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the

new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on Mt. 17:5 *cloud*.

9:4 *And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus-* It was a "vision" (Mt. 17:9). They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 8. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:5 *And Peter said to Jesus: Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah-* Peter, who appears to be the one behind Mark's gospel, is not emphasizing his own superiority here, but rather commenting upon his own distance from the Lord's spirituality. For he presents his offer to put up a tent as being so inappropriate, now he perceived the glory of God which tabernacled in the flesh of the Lord Jesus.

Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to

say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

9:6 *For he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid*- It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

9:7 *And there came a cloud overshadowing them*- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very

personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

*And there came a voice out of the cloud: This is My beloved Son. Hear him-* This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear him" was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:8 *And suddenly, looking round about-* "Looking round" is in Matthew "lifting up their eyes". 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of Mt. 17:7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead... Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

*They no longer saw anyone with them, except Jesus-* In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to.

For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

9:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, he ordered them that they should tell no one about the things they had seen, until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead-* The things "seen" are called a "vision" in Mt. 17:9. Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him". It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't

want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

9:10 *So they kept these words to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant-* As noted on :1, Peter is again bringing out his own slowness to understand the Lord's most obvious teaching about His death; and on that basis, appeals to his audience to do better than him, and comprehend and respond far quicker than he had. This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (wilfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

Their question provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

9:11 *And they asked him: Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?-* The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9),

implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

9:12 *And he said to them: Elijah indeed comes first-* There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things". Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why do you baptize then, if you are not that Christ, nor Elijah?" (Jn. 1:25).

*And restores all things-* The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would

therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirke R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (*John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

*And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?*- Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

9:13 *But I say to you, that Elijah came, and they have also done to him whatever they wanted, even as it is written of him*- The Lord accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32-35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching,



with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

His question (as it is framed in Matthew) was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said..." something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

Mk. 9:12 adds to Matthew by adding: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

9:14 *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them-* This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

9:15 *And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed; and running to him saluted him-* They ran up to Him- and He had Peter, James and John with Him. Perhaps His face was shining with the glory He had been exposed to, as the face of Moses did. It is therefore commendable that the people ran to Him rather than shying away from Him as they did from Moses when His face shone, and as the soldiers did when His face likewise shone at His arrest in Gethsemane. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not

only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

9:16 *And he asked them: What are you arguing about with them?*- The Lord knew, but He wanted to highlight the inappropriacy of any arguments when in the presence of the Father's glory reflected in His Son. And we can take that lesson. The Greek for "arguing" occurs ten times in the New Testament, nearly always in the context of argument with the Jews. All such legalistic argument ought to fade away in the context of the Lord's glory and the certain hope of the Kingdom, of which the transfiguration had spoken- with the intimation of present transformation towards that end right now.

9:17 *And one of the crowd answered him: Teacher, I brought to you my son, who has a dumb spirit*- When the father of the dumb child brought him to *the disciples*, he tells Jesus that "I brought to *you* my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him; he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:28).

9:18 *And wherever it takes him, it dashes him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and pines away*- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation-

hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

*And I spoke to your disciples that they should cast it out, and they were not able-* They had no *dunamai* (possibility), in Matthew's record; Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:19 *And he answered them saying: O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I tolerate you?-* As noted on :17, the "faithless" here were the disciples, not the man; for he had some measure of faith. The disciples were at this point caught up in the faithless spirit of their generation, the world around them; just as we can be. When the Lord returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... show yourself to the world".

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding

generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2

Sam. 12).

- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.

- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).

- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).

- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

*Bring him to me*- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

9:20 *And they brought him to him, and when he saw him, immediately the spirit tore at him grievously and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth*- As noted on :18, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he

felt he really had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

9:21 *And he asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child-* See on Mt. 20:32. This question was perhaps to provoke the man to remember back through those difficult and tragic years, in order to elicit stronger faith and desire from him.

9:22 *And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us-* Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves.

9:23 *And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes-* The father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23 AV). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The same message is taught by putting together the fact that with God nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37), and the fact that nothing is impossible *unto us* (Mt. 17:20). God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature

of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as...so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

The word "believe" is omitted from many texts and from the NEV. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth".

It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

9:24 *Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!*- See on Lk. 1:13. It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. The father of the epileptic boy is the clearest example. He had asked: "help us" (:22), i.e. 'cure the child'. But he understood that this "help" depended partly upon his faith; he believed, as we should, that the faith of third parties can radically affect others (see on 2:5). And yet he realized that his faith was weak, and he asked the Lord to "help" that faith to be stronger than the native "unbelief" which is part of the human condition. Even faith itself can be "helped". We are not left unaided in climbing the mountain of belief. Faith in that sense is partially a gift from the Lord through the gift of His Spirit (Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 3:2). The Lord can succour [s.w. "help"] (Heb. 2:18), through the gift of His Spirit.

9:25 *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter no more into him*- There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today- e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia.



The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water—that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

9:26 *And having cried out and torn him much, it came out; and the boy became as one dead. So much so that the many said: He is dead-* I suggested on :18 and :20 that the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation at the last day. He now is as it were dead. He goes very still. He feels as if he has died. An then the Lord as it were resurrects him (:27). The whole essence of baptism was being lived out in him at this moment; he was dying to sin, taking its condemnation; and then arising with the Lord Jesus to new life.

9:27 *But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up, and he arose-* See on :26. This is exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

9:28 *And when he had come into the house, his disciples privately asked him: Why could we not cast it out?*- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse (in Matthew's record) that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment [in Matthew] that "*If you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed...*" was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

9:29 *And he said to them: This kind-* This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

*Can come out by nothing except by prayer and fasting-* They tried to do miracles without even praying about it. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party and the extent of their faith- both that of the man, and of the disciples.

The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it. Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on

emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

*9:30 And they went from there and passed through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know it-* See on Mt. 27:26; Lk. 9:44. He earnestly wanted time alone with the disciples in order to explain His death to them. This is why when He saw a crowd gathering, He quickly cured the child in order to stop further distraction (:25). We sense throughout the Gospels the Lord's dislike of crowds and His desire to privately teach those who wished to be close to Him; and how the essential burden of His message was of the need to share in His death, rather than getting cures and seeing miracles.

The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

*9:31 For he taught his disciples, and said to them: The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men-* Matthew uses the present tense- *He is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. His sufferings were ongoing, His crucifixion sufferings were a seamless continuance of His whole way of life and being during His ministry. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come... the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

*And they shall kill him, and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again-* Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third

day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

*9:32 But they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him-* Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

*9:33 And they went to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them: What were you reasoning about on the way here?-* The Lord knew already; He had very keen natural perception as well as God's Spirit without measure. Lk. 5:22 records another incident where the Lord asked men what they were reasoning about exactly because He "perceived their thoughts". He realized the value of verbalizing things. He wanted them to confess; to admit that in the light of Him explaining His death, they had been arguing about who should be the greatest, and who was the greatest. Perhaps the Lord's obvious interest in Peter led them to discuss whether Peter was in fact the greatest, commenting upon his evident impetuosity and other human weaknesses.

*9:34 But they kept quiet. For they had disputed one with another on the way about who was the greatest-* Whenever the Lord taught them about His death, they always seem to have started arguing amongst themselves; the tremendous significance of what He was saying was evidently lost on them (Mk. 9:31-34; 10:34-38). The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument.

*9:35 And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them: If anyone would be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all-* This 'sitting down' may have been some time later than the discussion in :33,34, because at this point Matthew says (Mt. 18:1) that it was they

who came to the Lord with the question about who should be the greatest. The Lord had asked what they had been talking about, knowing this had been the topic. They were silent. And He remained silent. That mutual silence was deafening. They thereby knew that He knew, and that they were wrong. And it was that lack of response from Him which prompted them to finally bring the question out into the open. He was indeed the master psychologist.

He was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an ellipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

9:36 *And he took a little child and set him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them-* In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"- presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of

discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people.

The disciples soon afterwards are framed as doing exactly the opposite to what the Lord had done, when they forbade the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving'

others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

"In the midst of them" is a phrase used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom. Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

So the Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

*9:37 Whoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives not me but Him that sent me-* To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom"

(Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on Mt. 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

9:38 *John said to him: Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us-* Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to



receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbade [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

*9:39 But Jesus said: Do not forbid him. For there is no one who shall do a mighty work in my name and then be able straight afterwards to immediately speak evil of me-* The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples (:38); although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua... answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted on :38, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it

was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

9:40 *For he that is not against us, is for us-* See on :39. If a person is not against the Lord personally (:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally (:39) is parallel here with not being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

9:41 *For whoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because you are Christ's- truly I say to you, he shall in no way lose his reward-* Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for charity. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to Mt. 10:41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "*these* little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 41 could effectively be a soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself. Or maybe the Lord is saying that the mistaken disciple of John would be accepted as one of the Lord's followers, and therefore any who supported him in his slightly misplaced ideals as a missionary for John would therefore still be rewarded. I say this because offering a cup of cold water was how travellers were assisted by local people along the road.

9:42 *And whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble-* The "little ones" of the context could refer to John's disciples, with their limited belief and understanding in the Lord, who perhaps refused to follow after Jesus because they disagreed with the worldly ways of His disciples. And so the Lord urges the twelve not to cause stumbling to those ones little in faith and understanding. See on Mt. 18:6.

*It would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea-* The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that they refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

9:43 *And if your hand causes you to stumble-* The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be 'If these things cause you to stumble others'; or, 'If these things cause you yourself to stumble'. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

*Cut it off-* I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how "the world", the Jewish religious system of the Lord's time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

*It is good for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands and to go into Gehenna- into the unquenched fire-* The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God's tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshiping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserably excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

9:44 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out-* Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where 'little ones' had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God's Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

9:45 *And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is good for you to enter into life lame, rather than having your two feet and to be cast into Gehenna*- Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life.

9:46 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out*- The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire and worms for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day). This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from

blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a “little one”, forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it’s quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

*9:47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out. It is good for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes and to be cast into Gehenna-* The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full

well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

9:48 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out-* This threat is repeated several times here. The Lord is emphasizing that condemnation is for real; there is not only an eternal future we may miss, but the experience of condemnation, whilst not eternal, is a significant factor to bear in mind and be influenced by.

9:49 *For everyone shall be salted with fire-* Having spoken of the destruction of the unworthy in Gehenna fire, the Lord went straight on to comment: "For every one shall be salted with (Gk. 'for the') fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted" (Mk. 9:48,49 AV). Unless we become a living sacrifice, wholly consumed by God's fire, laying ourselves down upon the altar, then we will be consumed by the figurative fire of Gehenna at the day of judgment. Again, there's no real choice: it's fire, or fire. See on Mt. 3:11; Lk. 15:24.

9:50 *Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another-* See on Rom. 12:18. The need for peace amongst ourselves as a community is brought out in the parable of the salt that lost its saltiness. Straight away, we're faced with a paradox- for true salt can't lose its saltiness, seeing that sodium chloride is a stable compound, free of impurities. Salt was a symbol in the Lord's teaching for having peace with one another. If we don't have this, we're not salt. If we're not any influence upon others, we're not salt. It's as simple as that.

The Lord realized that it was easy to have an apparent love and peace with our brethren, when actually we have nothing of the sort. In the context of His men arguing with John's disciples, the Lord told a small

parable, in which He made having salt in ourselves equal to having peace with our brethren (Mk. 9:38-40; 49,50). He warned that salt which has lost its saltiness looks just the same as good salt; but salt that has lost its saltiness is *nothing*, it's just a lump of substance. Surely He's saying: 'You may think you have peace and love for your brethren, when actually you don't; and if you don't have it, you're nothing, just a lump'. Not without relevance He mentioned that every sacrifice had to have good salt added to it. His point was that all our devotion and sacrifice is meaningless if it lacks the *real* salt of true love for our brethren. Which is exactly the teaching of 1 Cor. 13. Love is a matter of deep attitude as shown in the small things of life, not the occasional heroism of (e.g.) giving our body to be burned. The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is specifically fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6).



# MARK CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he left there and went into the regions of Judea on the other side of the Jordan. Crowds gathered around him again, and as was his custom he taught them-* The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- "there", in Judea "beyond Jordan" (Mt. 19:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

10:2 *And there came to him Pharisees, who asked him-* Presumably "there", beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they "also" came unto Him.

*Is it lawful for a man to send away his wife?-* The parallel record in Matthew 18 has the material arranged according to a chiasmic structure [see note there]. Within that structure, this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on Matthew 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to "put away", because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in Mt. 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife "for every cause". In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

*For any cause?-* The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently 'out of the blue'. If the question was simply as to which rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness'. But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided

giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]'. In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia* / assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus... but really, literally, for every cause, in every case...?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

*They asked this to test him-* Another hint that the source of 'testing' in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

10:3 *And he answered and said to them: What did Moses command you?-* As noted on :4, the emphasis may be on "command"; they were citing a concession for human weakness, "for the hardness of your hearts"; but the Lord is perhaps arguing that a concession is not a command in the legalistic sense they wished to interpret it. Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

10:4 *And they said: Moses permitted a man to write a bill of divorcement and to send her away-* They had missed the point, that a concession ["for

the hardness of your hearts"] is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

"A bill of divorcement", Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

10:5- see on Dt. 31:9.

*But Jesus said to them: For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment-* Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on Mt. 19:4 *Have you not read?*

10:6 *But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them-* It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

10:7 *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife-* The cleaving or clinging spoken of in Genesis is a process; this is an example of how God can work directly upon the heart and psychology of persons to unite them. To give up on the process is therefore to go against what is potentially possible. And those who seek to interfere in and block that intended process, be they parents or extramarital lovers, are equally guilty. The clinging together is part of how God joins married, believing couples together (:9).

10:8 *And the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh-* This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with "what God has joined together" and is not to be sundered.

10:9 *What therefore God has joined together*- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

*Do not let man*- By sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the 'little ones' by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can choose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the "little ones". And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

*Divide*- See on :7. The dividing can be by other parties in addition to the two parties to the marriage. We are not to "let" them do that. The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to "depart" or 'sunder' from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

10:10 *And in the house the disciples asked him about this matter-* We have recently read how again "in the house" the Lord had explained things further to His disciples (9:28,29, 33-37). This was His style; to provide deeper teaching to those who really wanted it.

10:11 *And he said to them: Whoever shall send away his wife and marry another, commits adultery against her-* The parallel in Matthew 19 includes the exception "for *porneia*", adding that not all can accept His standards here. The Lord here seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in Matthew 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in Matthew 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards. Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

10:12 *And if she herself shall send away her husband and marry another, she commits adultery-* The Rabbis in the Lord's time were split into two schools on the question of divorce. One school taught that divorce was available for any reason, whilst the other said that it was only for sexual impurity. The question was put to Jesus as to when He thought divorce was possible. It seemed that He was going to be forced to take sides with one of the two contemporary attitudes. But He cut clean through the whole thinking of first century Israel by basing his argument on the principles of Eden: God created man and woman, and joined them together; therefore, He reasoned, the ideal standard is that there should be no divorce for any reason, including adultery. This is typical of His

teaching; through radical and fundamental recourse to the Old Testament, His teachings cut right through all the conceptions and expectations which were present in the mind of first century Jewry as a result of their cultural conditioning. We too must cut through the cultural conditioning of our era. In the time of Jesus, Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands; some of the women of Herod's family got divorces like this. The Lord was aware of this, and commented upon this local social attitude, roundly condemning it: "If a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery". If the Lord was so unafraid to challenge local cultural attitudes towards women, why should we think that He merely went along with those local contemporary attitudes?

*10:13 And they were bringing to him little children-* This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in Matthew 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

*That he should touch them-* The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*And the disciples rebuked them-* This is such a theme, of the disciples barring those who wanted to come to the Lord. We think of the Syro-Phoenician woman and other children, and the "little ones" of John's disciples. Such attitudes provoke the Lord's anger with us (:14). And they were doing this yet again despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

*10:14 But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to*

*them: Permit the little children to come to me; forbid them not. For to such belongs the kingdom of God-*

The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for "receive" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

The value of persons felt by the Lord is made very obvious when we notice His attention to women, children, Gentiles and the mentally ill /

deformed. These three groups often occur together in the Rabbis' teaching. The very people who were not counted as persons, the Lord went out of His way to express value for. And in this He sets us an example. Children were counted as of little value- but the Lord spoke about salvation for children (Mk. 10:14), and of the need to become like a child if we are to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 18:3). This purposeful recognition of the value of *all* human persons was a radical and difficult thing in His surrounding culture. And so it can be in ours too.

10:15 *Truly I say to you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it-* The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used in Mt. 19:12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

10:16 *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them-* His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

10:17 *And as he was proceeding along the road, a man ran to him and kneeled before him, and asked him: Good Teacher, what shall I do-* This young man (Mt. 19:20) was a "ruler" (Lk. 18:18). To come to Jesus in a public place ["in the way"] and running- when rulers were supposed to never run in public but maintain decorum- all positively indicates a genuine belief in Jesus. Kneeling before Him was also a public sign of acceptance of Jesus as Lord. But he failed as so many do with respect to his wealth. He was a yuppie, a high flier, a rich young man who was also a "ruler". And he wasn't going to give that up; his 'sincerity' is shown by his sadness [RV "his countenance fell"] and his going away "grieved"



(:22). This walking away is an anti-climax, not the expected outcome of all the devotion displayed. But the account is structured in this unexpected way to highlight the extraordinary significance of a person's attitude to wealth, and how this can make all their other devotion meaningless.

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed (Mt. "good thing") could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven". This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

*That I may inherit eternal life?*- But Jesus had taught that the Kingdom of God on earth would be 'inherited' by the poor and meek (Mt. 5:5). If the man had thought that one through, he would've known the answer ahead of time. If he was rich and young, the chances are he had inherited his wealth- and he wanted to know how he could inherit eternity as well. He likely figured that money can buy everything- and in a strange way, the Lord was saying that the giving of wealth and inheriting eternity *are* in fact related, although actually ultimate 'goodness' and acceptance with God can't come from any such work of obedience.

"Inherit" eternal life suggests he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have eternal life*", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "*have*" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have

been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

10:18 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good save one- God-* The extent to which this man from Nazareth, who sneezed and slept and thirsted as we do, was really God manifest in the flesh... this needs sustained personal meditation. That from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew really came forth the words of Almighty God; to the extent that it had to be said that never man spake like this man; and He Himself could assure us that heaven and earth would pass, but not His words (note the links with Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)... that this man died for us... rose again, ascended... and now works His saving work for us, hour by hour. Mark records how a man once in an offhand way addressed the Lord Jesus as "good master". The Lord's response was to say that if the man *really* accepted Him as 'good' he ought to share His cross, and sell what he had and give to the poor. The real extent of Jesus' goodness will move us to deep personal response, if we truly perceive it. 10:20 "From my youth"- but he was a "young man" (Mt. 19:20). Note the Lord's grace- instead of being turned away by the man's youthful arrogance, instead the Lord perceives the positive in him and loves him for it (:21). See on Mk. 10:40.

The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false

doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

10:19 *You know the commandments*- The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

*Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother*- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

10:20 *And he said to him: Teacher, all these things have I observed from my youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up" (Mt.). He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection?

Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

10:21 *And Jesus observing him, loved him; and said to him: One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come [AV: "take up the cross and"] follow me-* "You lack" is s.w. to be destitute of. In response to the man's question "What do I still lack?" (Mt. 19:20). He lacked nothing materially, but therefore he lacked the important thing- treasure in Heaven. The word play involving 'lacking' suggests that spiritual wealth and material wealth are opposites; likewise to give away treasure on earth is to as it were transfer it to Heaven. All this underscores the point that we can't have both. All our material wealth is to be given away in order to get spiritual treasure (Mt. 13:44). "What you lack" is parallel to the phrase Mt. 19:21 records: "If you will be perfect / complete". The man could still have had a relationship with the Lord if he hadn't sold all; but he wanted perfection and went away from Jesus because he couldn't face up to the fact that he wasn't perfect, would be saved by grace and now by his own obedience. And so many 'perfectionists' have done likewise. It's perhaps because of the man's tendency to perfectionism that the Lord prefaced His answer to the question by saying that even He wasn't completely "good" as God alone is "good" (10:18). The humanity of Jesus is therefore, in a way, an answer to 'perfectionism'. Not that there is ultimately any such thing as 'perfectionism', for it cannot be in man to be perfect. Perfectionism is merely an arrogant illusion. The record in Mt. 19:16,17 brings this out clearer- "*Good* Master, what *good* thing shall I do... why do you call me "*good*"? There is none "*good*" but one, that is, God". The man thought that by his "good" deeds he could become as "good" as God, the only "good" One. And He walked away from Jesus because he was unable to accept that this is not in fact the case, and that even Jesus Himself stood as 'not good' compared to God; He stood 'perfect' with God by reason of the relationship He had with God, not solely on the basis of His good works. However, even total generosity and giving away of wealth will not bring total completeness. 'You lack one thing' appears to be an allusion to Ps. 23:1 LXX: "The Lord is my shepherd; not one thing is lacking to me". To take up the cross and follow the Lord Jesus as our shepherd, with the loss of material wealth this implies, is the essence of lacking nothing. For walking with Him is perfection, completeness, our everything.

The very fact that we want to rise up to the heights commends us to God. When the rich young man, in his zeal for righteousness, claimed: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth", the Lord didn't rebuke him for self-righteousness; instead, He beheld Him (with His head cocked to one side?), He took a long wistful look at Him, and *loved him* (Mk. 10:21). The Lord had a wave of warmth come over Him for that arrogant young man, simply because He appreciated the evident spiritual ambition which

was within him. It was for this reason that the Father so loved the Son. God caused the Lord Jesus to approach unto Him; "for who would dare of himself to approach unto me?" (Jer. 30:21 RSV). The Father confirmed the Son in His spiritual ambition, recognizing that very few men would rise up to the honour of truly approaching unto God.

The "one thing" lacking was to distribute his wealth, and to follow the crucified Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on Mt. 19:16 *What good thing*. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him.

Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

	"We have left all
"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor	
...and come, take up the cross	[no comment by Peter]
and follow me"	...and have followed you"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at several times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

"Take up *the* cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him- He speaks of "*the* cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between *our* taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our *attitudes*. "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Mt. 11:29). To take up the Lord's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Consider the contexts in which the Lord spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Matt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ- but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with the Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ. Israel were an empty vine, without fruit in God's eyes- because the spiritual fruit they appeared to bring forth was in fact fruit to themselves (Hos. 10:1).

10:22 *But this teaching saddened him, and he went away sorrowful-* Walking away from Jesus in sorrow is a picture from the scenes of the final judgment. In this case, the man rejected himself, he chose to walk away- just because he couldn't accept that he wasn't perfect. Literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from Mt. 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he

could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt. 19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in Mt. 18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

*For he was one that had great possessions-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

10:23 *And Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples: How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!-* "Have wealth" is paralleled, or expanded, in 10:24, with "them that trust in riches". To have wealth is to trust in it. Hence the danger of it- wealth militates against faith. Hence Paul warned "them that are rich in this world that they... *trust not* in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (Mt. 19:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

10:24 *And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus continued and said to them: Children! How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!-* The disciples were so immature that they thought wealth was a sign of Divine blessing. And were astonished to hear that it's really hard for wealthy people to be saved. Hence, in loving pity at their immaturity, the Lord addresses them as "Children...". See on Lk. 18:24.

10:25 *It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich*



*man to enter into the kingdom of God-* I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

The camel must shed its load of riches and goods, so that it can pass through the gate into the Kingdom. But we are doing that right now! We will pass through the gate into the Kingdom when the Lord returns (Rev. 22:14), and yet through shedding our materialism, we do it now. John puts it more bluntly and yet more absolutely: now, through the life of faith, we have the eternal life, in that we begin to live now the type of life which we will eternally live. We receive the Kingdom of God here and now, in that we receive the Gospel of the Kingdom; and if we accept it as a little child, we begin to enter it, now- in that the lives we live determine whether or not we will enter it at the Lord's coming. We are on our way into life! We have received the Kingdom, our names were written from the foundation of the world, and only our falling from grace can take that away. This is almost too good news to believe.

*10:26 And they were astonished exceedingly, saying to him: Then who can be saved?-*

They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Who *can* be saved?" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit

their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in Mt. 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

*10:27 Jesus, observing them, said-* The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

*With men it is impossible, but not with God-* The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

*For all things are possible with God-* Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained to, then God will still accept us.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is

even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

Having said that it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom- as hard as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle- the Lord comments that 'what is impossible with man, is possible with God' (Mk. 10:27). In first century Palestinian Judaism, this saying was a kind of figure of speech for describing a miracle. If any rich person gets into the Kingdom- it will be a miracle. That's what the Lord is saying. And He says it to us today. Generosity alone, of course, won't bring us into the Kingdom. It's not as if we can buy our way in. But there are major implications that our attitude to wealth is in fact a crucial indicator of whether or not we will be there.

Having explained "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom", the Lord went on to comment: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:25,27). It is impossible for a rich man to be saved, He seems to be saying. And as we seek to convert the rich and self-satisfied in the societies in which we live, this does indeed seem the case. But although on one hand it *is* an impossibility, yet not with God: for He desires to seek and save the rich too. And indeed He does, achieving what with men is impossible. And the Father seeks to impress His positive attitude upon us.

10:28 *Peter began to say to him: We have left all-* The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel here says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material here is strongly related to that in Mt. 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in Mt. 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a

wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

Was Peter really correct to say that he had really "left all"? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's..." (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he was a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

*And have followed You-* Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; purely for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshiping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves,

to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me-* This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

10:29 *Jesus said: Truly I say to you. Whoever leaves house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands for my sake and for the gospel's sake-* This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their

dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

*10:30 Will receive in return, in this present season, a hundredfold houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, and with them persecutions; but in the age to come, eternal life-* The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus. And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to

inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

10:31 *But many that are first shall be last and the last, first-* The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.

10:32 *And they were on the road heading up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was walking ahead of them-* This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. They were going "up" from Jericho, Mt. 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather

than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

*And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve aside-* The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*He began to tell them what was to happen to him-* Tragically He so often sought to explain to the disciples about the cross; and yet always they met His efforts either with silence, or with irrelevant changing of the subject, or even protest, in Peter's case. The tragic mismatch between the Lord's cross and the mind of the disciples is brought out in Mk. 10:32-40. Having set His face to go up to Jerusalem, the Lord "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid". The words imply that He took the lead and walked forcefully a few paces ahead of them in a startling manner. "If anything in the Gospels has the stamp of real and live recollection upon it, it is this". His mind was evidently dwelling in His forthcoming death, in which He may well have foreseen that He would be crucified with sinners on His right and left. But then two of the disciples respond to His prediction of the cross by asking that *they* should sit on His right and left hand in glory over the others. Here we see, on the Gospel writers own admission, the paucity of their effort to grasp the real message of the cross. May it not be so with us. May we at least strive to enter into His struggle, and be moved to a true and unpretended humility by it.

There was something in His body language during His last journey to Jerusalem which was nothing short of terrifying to the disciples: "They were amazed; and as they followed Him, they were afraid" (Mk. 10:32-34). All this came to a climax in His extreme sweating in Gethsemane as the great horror of darkness began to actually descend on Him (Mk. 14:33-42). Contrast this with the calmness of suicide bombers or other religiously persuaded zealots going to their death. The Lord- *our* Lord- was too sensitive to humanity, to *us*, to His *own* humanity, to His own sense of the possibility of failure which His humility pressed ever upon Him... than to be like that. See on Heb. 5:7,8.

10:33 *We will go up to Jerusalem-* This was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too. Or perhaps we are to conclude that like Abraham, they were following their Lord not knowing where they were going.

*And the Son of Man shall be delivered-* The Greek means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His



sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

*To the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death-* Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

*And shall deliver him to the Gentiles-* The Lord foresaw that the Jews would have to deliver Him to the Romans if their death sentence was going to be legally inflicted.

10:34 *And they shall mock him and shall spit upon him and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again-* The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament. And yet the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He as the master psychologist and chess player knew the moves which His chosen actions would elicit, and that may have been why He could predict these particular events in such detail.

10:35 *And there came near to him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying to him: Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask of you-* So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does our attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

Matthew places these words on the lips of their mother, Salome. But effectively the words were those of James and John. Divine inspiration reflects how God understood that completely. They tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is

unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that you should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in Mt. 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two... who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

10:36 *And he said to them: What would you wish that I should do for you?*- Matthew has: "What do you desire...". These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in Mt. 20:32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w.- Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to

verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

He had just been speaking of how He would die for them. James and John evidently didn't appreciate the wonder, the blessing, the honour of the fact that the Son of God would love them unto the end. All they wanted was the human blessing, in this life, of being able to tell their brethren that they would be *the* greatest in the Kingdom. "What would ye that I should do for you" - in addition to loving you unto the death, of loving you with a love greater than that of *anyone* else? Their minds were all too set on the present, the petty glory of here and now. But when they actually beheld the cross (Lk. 23:49 suggests James also did), they would have learnt their lesson. And so it was with Job. Throughout the core of the book, he consistently addresses God as 'Shaddai', the fruitful one, the provider of blessing. But in the prologue and epilogue, he calls God 'Yahweh'. It may be that He came to *know* the wonder of God's Name to the extent that he quit his perception of God as only the provider of material blessing.

10:37 *And they said to him: Grant to us that we may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand, in your glory-* This confirms that she had Mt. 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

When the Lord Jesus promised those who overcome that they would sit down with Him in His throne (Rev. 3:21), He was surely casting a glance back at the way His men had asked to sit at His right and left hand, in His

glory (Mk. 10:37). He knew He was promising a future glory far above what to them must have been the heights of their spiritual ambition.

They surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

*10:38 But Jesus said to them: You do not know what you ask-* The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?-* The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

*Or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?-* Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I [shall] drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and

yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- *we are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom. 6:3 that *we were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

In Gethsemane He spoke of drinking the cup of His final death and suffering. But earlier He had spoken in the present tense: "the cup that I drink of... the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mk. 10:38). The drinking of the cup of death was ongoing. Likewise there are several verses in Psalms 22 and 69 which are evidently relevant to both the Lord's life and also His final hours on the cross. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" is in the context of the cross, but is applied to an earlier period of the Lord's life (Ps. 69:9 cp. Jn. 2:17). "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" is another example (Ps. 69:8); it is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet it is elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. James and John pestered the Lord to give them glory in His Kingdom. He didn't refuse their request; He simply turned the question round to them: 'Can you really carry my cross? Don't be so obsessed with getting salvation out of me. Concentrate instead on carrying my cross, being baptized with my baptism, and then the corollary of that- sharing my resurrection- will follow in its own time'.

10:39- see on Gal. 3:27.

*And they said to him: We are able! And Jesus said to them: The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized-*

The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had

just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

Seeing even the Lord balked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, saying that they would drink His cup is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance

of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blasé spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

*10:40 But to sit on my right hand or on my left hand-* When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

*Is not mine to give-* A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

*But it will be given to them for whom it has been prepared-*

A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet we are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lives the the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14).

The altogether lovely manner of the Lord is shown in how He dealt with immature understanding and ambition amongst others. James and John wanted to sit on either side of the Lord in His Kingdom glory. Instead of telling them to be more humble, the Lord gently went along with them- so far. He said that this great honour would be given to "them for whom it is prepared" (Mk. 10:40). And whom is this? *All* those redeemed in Christ have that place "prepared" (Mt. 25:34). The immediate context speaks of the cross (Mk. 10:33,45), and it is this which prepared the places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). Thus the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Actually, all those redeemed in Christ will sit down with Him in His very throne- not just on the right and left side of Him (Rev. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord's subsequent parable about the places prepared in the Kingdom, and people being on the right *and left* hand of Him at judgment, with the rejected on the left hand, was perhaps His gentle corrective to James and John. But my point is that He was so gentle about the way He corrected their error. Actually twice before in Mark 10, the Lord had shown this spirit. The arrogant young man told Him that he'd kept all the commandments from his youth [and, get it, he was only a young guy anyway...]. And yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mk. 10:20). And then moments later in the record, Peter starts on about "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee"- and the Lord so gently doesn't



disagree, even though Peter's fishing business and family were still there for him to return to it seems, but promises reward for all who truly do leave all (Mk. 10:28-30). So just three times in one chapter, we see the gentle patience of the Lord with arrogant, small minded people, who thought they understood so much and were so righteous. They were nothing compared to Him. But the way He deals with them is indeed "altogether lovely".

*10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John-* This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:42). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

*10:42 And Jesus called them to him, and said to them: You know-* This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them.

*That they who are considered rulers of the Gentiles-* The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

*Lord it over them-* Gk. *katakuriuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather

than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full of words containing the compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte*, *synodos*, *koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

*And their great ones-* The *megas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

*Exercise authority over them-* They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

10:43 *But it is not to be so among you; but whoever would become great among you-* This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and

total *exousia* (see on Mt. 20:25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

When the disciples argued about who should be the greatest, the Lord replied in the present tense that "it *is* not so among you: whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister" (Mk. 10:43 R. V.). He expected them to live up to the righteousness which He imputed to them.

*Shall be your servant*- The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they.

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this,

Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

10:44 *And whoever would be first among you-* The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even*

as the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

*Shall be servant of all*- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

See on Phil. 2:7. It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus. And yet we are also to be slaves to all His people (Mk. 10:44), for the Lord Jesus *is* His people: they are His body. To serve our brethren is to serve the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus *expects* us to relate to Him as bond slaves. He speaks of how a bond slave can be working in the field all day, come home tired, and then be immediately commanded by the master to prepare his meal and only then get his own meal- and the master won't thank him, but just expects it of him. And the Lord Jesus applies this to His relationship with us. The Lord of all grace is, by absolute rights, a demanding Lord. He commented that we call Him Lord and Master, and we say well, for so He is (Jn. 13:13). If we are truly the bond-slaves of the Lord Jesus, we have no 'free time' for ourselves. Neither will we expect to have time for ultimately our 'own thing'. The craze for personal and social freedom which sweeps the modern world will leave us untouched. Ultimate freedom and total independence is not for us.

10:45 *For the Son of Man came*- If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that this is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

*Not to be served by others*- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (Mt. 25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

*But to serve*- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man *came*", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

*And to give his life as a ransom for many*- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self

control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45). In His death for Israel, He was "a minister [lowly servant] of the circumcision", i.e. the Jews (Rom. 15:8). Yet we *are* His ministers, His slave / servants. The same word is used for how the women and Angels ministered unto Him (Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41), and how He anticipated men would minister to Him (Jn. 12:26 Gk. cp. 2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). But both then and now, He came and has come in order to minister / serve us, rather than to be served by us; even though this is what we give our lives to doing. Yet He is still all taken up with ministering to us. He came more to serve than to be served. We are slaves, all of us, of the lowest sort. It's hard for us to realise the lowliness of being a Roman slave; and the sheer wonder of being made a free man, purely by grace. This is what *each and every one of us* has experienced. Servanthood / slavery should be the concept that dominates our lives; for we cannot be a servant of two masters (Mt. 6:24). We are to be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord Jesus and those in Him. See on Lk. 17:10.

10:46 *And they arrived in Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho-* Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is

that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

*With his disciples and a great crowd-* The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (Mt. 20:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

*Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside-* Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way".

10:47 *And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, and say: Jesus! You Son of David, have mercy on me!*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same



connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no

Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

10:48 *And many rebuked him-* This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*Saying that he should hold his peace. But he cried out more zealously: You, Son of David, have mercy on me!-* This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

10:49 *And Jesus stood still and said: Call him. And they called to the blind man, saying to him: Be of good courage! Rise, he calls for you!-* The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people. Through us. Their obedience to the command to go call the man is emphasized. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

10:50 *And he, casting away his garment, sprang up and came to Jesus-* His garment was likely all he owned. And he is therefore presented as being willing to forsake all in response to the call of Jesus, just as the disciples immediately forsake all and followed Him. 'Coming to Jesus' is the phrase just used of how the little children came to Him (10:14); and

again, there was a desire to forbid them. This native tendency we have to forbid others to come to the Lord must be watched carefully; and never allowed to be given formal expression in church policies which exclude some from ever coming to the Lord Jesus.

10:51 *And Jesus said: What will you have me do for you? And the blind man said to him: Rabbi- that I may receive my sight-* The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

10:52 *And Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your faith has made you whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed him in the way-* He "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your way*". The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here, for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has

been defined in Mt. 20:17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

# MARK CHAPTER 11

11:1- see on Mk. 7:32-35.

*And when they drew near to Jerusalem-* This might suggest that the gospel author was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

*To Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives-* 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree. Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

*He sent two of his disciples-* The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

11:2 *Instructing them: Go into the village in front of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat.*

*Untie it and bring it here-* The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this

was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required, according to Matthew. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

11:3 *And if anyone says to you: Why are you doing this? You are to say: The Lord has need of him; and immediately he will send him back here-* God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining

these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

11:4 *And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it-* Gk. "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

11:5 *And those that stood there said to them: What are you doing, untying the colt?-* This may have been part of a pre-arranged plan by the Lord. If indeed as suggested on :4 this was Herod's palace and colt, we can understand why the Lord wished to shield the participants in the plan. Perhaps He was seeking to irritate Herod by appearing to have stolen his colt, and appearing to usurp Herod's authority by entering Jerusalem upon it. For He gave His life, of His own device, so that He died at the time and place He did, and by crucifixion. His life was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18), nor was He overtaken by events; He was the master of the scene.

11:6 *And they said to them just as Jesus had said, and they let them go-* See on :5. For them to respond so immediately is unusual and unrealistic until we perceive that this was all part of a prearranged plan.

11:7 *And they brought the colt to Jesus, and put on it their garments; and he sat upon it-* Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (according to Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his

message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

*11:8 And many spread their garments upon the road, and others spread branches which they had cut from the fields-*

Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

*11:9 And they that went ahead and they that followed, cried, Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!-*

Hosanna means 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.



Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

11:10 *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*- They liked to believe that the Messianic Kingdom was now coming. But the Lord's parables and teaching about the Kingdom had repeatedly emphasized that the full establishment of that Kingdom was some way off, and the message of the Kingdom was to be lived in our attitudes whilst this secular life continues. Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

11:11 *And he entered into Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked at everything, it being now evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. Going to Bethany continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publicly explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death,

however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

11:12 *And the next day, when they left Bethany, he felt hungry-* Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

11:13 *And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves- for it was not the season for figs-* God is in search of man, and so is His Son. We surely all at times get depressed, feeling we are nothing and nobody, just used rather than needed. But just as we have our need to be needed, so does God, seeing we are made in His image and likeness. We see it all worked out visually when the Lord Jesus was starving hungry (Gk.), and saw a fig tree far away. He walked towards it, fixing His mind upon the tree. It wasn't the time for figs, but the tree had leaves, and He was so hungry, He'd have been prepared to eat the most immature, unripe figs (Mk. 11:12,13). This is an acted parable, of His search for man, for fruit upon us. The same imagery of a fig tree bearing fruit is used by the Lord in Lk. 13:6 to speak of His hope of spiritual fruit from Israel. But when the Lord finally arrived at the leafy fig tree, He found no fruit at all, and so He cursed it, and it withered. The same word is used about the withering of those rejected at the last day by the Lord Jesus- they will be withered, and then gathered up and burnt (Jn. 15:6). So as the Lord Jesus strode the long way towards the fig tree, focused upon it with all the focus and hope of a hungry man, so eager and hopeful to find fruit... so He is striding towards us with the same hope in us, of finding at least something, however immature, however unripe. But at least something. The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob... and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there". The "elect" are paralleled with "my servants". Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of

spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom.

The fig tree was symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord. His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down. "Leaves only" recalls the inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

11:14 *Jesus addressed it: Henceforth, no one will eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it-* Mk. 11:14,21,22 imply that Peter was amazed that something the Lord had predicted about the fig tree had actually come true.

Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God's threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don't somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many 'repentings' are "kindled together" as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). The fig tree would never bear fruit (Mk. 11:14). But Israel will blossom and bud and fill the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6); hence the fig tree bearing fruit when it has been condemned never to bear fruit is such a dramatic sign (Lk. 21:29,30.). The Lord spoke His words about Israel's future budding with full knowledge that He (and several OT passages) had condemned her to eternal barrenness. He knew, however, the paradox of grace.

If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the

fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

Matthew says there would be no fruit from the fig tree "For ever", for the *aión*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

*11:15 And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered into the temple and began to throw out those that sold and those that bought in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money exchangers and the seats of those that sold the doves-*

This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

Throwing out or [Mt.] 'casting out' is a verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12 and soon after this incident, in Mt. 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them

with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

Those who sold and bought in the temple refers to Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

The overthrowing of the tables was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

The traders were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anti-climax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind.

11:16 *And he would not permit anyone to carry any merchandise through the temple-* Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of

them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do. For all their claims that God's temple was holy, they were treating it like a public street by allowing porters to carry their goods through it rather than around it. It could be that the Jews permitted the carrying of goods through the court of the Gentiles, but not elsewhere. It's as if the Lord is saying that that court was to be treated as being as holy as the rest of the structure.

*11:17 And he taught and said to them-* The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*Is it not written-* The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house shall be called-* Luke uses the present tense, "*is called*". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*A house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!-* The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the

traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to be seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry (Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called..." a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It "shall be" a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The 'fulfilment' of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. 'Prophecy' really means the speaking forth of God's word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. "My house shall be called a house of prayer" had the extent of its possible fulfilment limited by the Jews turning the temple into a trading centre (Mk. 11:17).

11:18 *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought a way to destroy him. For they feared him, for all the crowd were astonished at his teaching-* Despite all this, they would very soon be screaming for His



blood. Their increased passion to destroy the Lord was, I suggest, exactly the response He had intended to elicit by parodying a triumphal entry.

11:19 *And every evening he left the city-* His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. He repeatedly did so to try to get the perceptive minority to realize what was really happening.

11:20 *And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots-* This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

This incident of the withered fig tree is an example of where Jesus didn't want us to perceive Him as too different from us. The disciples are amazed at the faith of Jesus in God's power. He had commanded the fig tree to be withered- but this had required Him to pray to God to make this happen. As the disciples looked at Him, wide eyed with amazement at His faith, very much into the "Wow!" experience, the Lord immediately urged *them* to "have faith in God... *whosoever* [and this was surely His emphasis] shall [ask a mountain to move in faith, it will happen]... therefore I say unto *you*, Whatsoever things *you* desire [just as Jesus had desired the withering of the fig tree], when *you* pray [as Jesus had done about the fig tree], believe that *you* receive them, and *you* shall have them". I suggest His emphasis was upon the word *you*. He so desired them to see His pattern of faith in prayer as a realistic image for them to copy. How sad He must be at the way He has been turned into an other-worldly figure, some wonderful, kindly God who saves us from the weakness and lack of faith which we are so full of. Yes, He *is* our Saviour, and the "Wow!" factor leads us to have a burning and undying sense of gratitude to Him. But He isn't *only* that; He is an inspiration. It is in this sense that the spirit of Christ can and does so radically transform human life in practice. Of course, we have sinned, and we continue to do so. For whatever reason, we are not Jesus. But our painful awareness of this [and it ought to be painful, not merely a theoretical acceptance that we are sinners]... shouldn't lead us to think that His example isn't a realistic pattern for us.

11:21 *And Peter, remembering, said to him: Rabbi, look at the fig tree which you cursed. It is withered away!*- See on Mk. 8:29; Jn. 21:7. After the denials, Peter again "remembered the word of the Lord". And it seems that Mark is Peter's gospel. This has the ring of truth to it, in that Peter is portrayed, for all his impetuosity, as one who meditated upon the Lord's words. Perhaps the Lord had in mind His parable of the seed which sprung

up and "withered" (Lk. 8:6 s.w.); Israel's initial response to John's preaching had withered. They were the withered branches which were now cast out of the tree (Jn. 15:6 s.w.). Peter is presenting himself as being somewhat foolish and unspiritual, in being surprised that the Lord's word had come true. He implies that he ought not to have been surprised at all.

11:22 *And Jesus answering said to them: Have faith in God-* We are asked to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48); to have the faith of God (Mk. 11:22 AVmg.). By faith in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we can attain these heights; but not in our own strength. In our every spiritual struggle and victory against the flesh throughout the day, we are playing out the finest and highest heroism that any playwright could conceive: the absolute underdog, the outsider without a chance, winning, at the end, the ultimate victory against impossible odds. Dear Peter exemplified how we so often behave, when he gasped at how deep was Jesus' faith, as he saw the fig tree withered in exact accord with the Lord's earlier words. But the Lord turns on Him immediately: "[*You*] have faith in God... *you* must believe, and whatever *you* ask in faith will happen, if you like me, see it as if it has happened at the point of asking for it".

11:23 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall say to this mountain: Be removed and thrown into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart but shall believe that what he said will happen- he shall have it -* See on Rev. 8:8. It was the Lord's radical usage of language which led to the huge, seething anger which He provoked, culminating in the demand for His death. He seems to have purposefully reinterpreted and reapplied symbols and ideas which spoke of Jewish national pride, and applied them to something quite different. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, not a war horse, and in order to die... led to so much anger exactly because He had subverted such a familiar and longed for hope and symbol. We have to remember the huge value of symbols in the first century, living as we do in an age when the written word has become paramount. For the illiterate, symbols and acted parables were of far greater importance than the written word. We may think of 'Jesus' in terms of His teachings recorded at a specific chapter and verse of our Bibles. To the illiterate first century Jew, they thought of Him in terms of what He *did*- His cleansing of the temple, His image of the temple mount being plucked up and cast into the sea. The Lord's teaching about the temple was especially subversive- for the temple played a "decisive role... in resistance toward Rome". It was "the focal point of the hope of national liberation, and hence was regarded as a guarantee of security against the pagans". But what does Jesus teach about the temple? It will be destroyed, His body shall be greater than the temple, it was to be a place of blessing for pagan Gentiles, because of Israel's wickedness the abomination would be set there, every place was hallowed ground, He

was the true priest, etc. According to the *Mishnah Berakoth* 9.5, the faithful were to wash the dust from their feet before entering it- and Jesus washed His disciples feet in likely allusion to this before they say down in a private room and broke bread with Him (Jn. 13:1-20). As the Lithuanian Jewish Rabbi Jacob Neusner commented about Jesus' institution of the 'breaking of bread': "The holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples". The Lord Jesus used the term "the blood of the covenant" at the last Supper, with reference to how Zech. 9:9-11 prophesied that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would be because of this "blood of my covenant". Yet the restoration / redemption which the Lord had in mind was not politically from Rome, but from sin and death through His blood. The temple had no great role in the Lord's teaching. By driving out traders from the temple, the Lord was effectively suggesting that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21, of how in the restoration there would be no Gentile traders there, was coming true in Him. And the elders of the Jews are thus paralleled by Him with the Gentiles. He speaks of how "this mountain"- and He must've been referring to Zion, the temple mount- was to be plucked up and cast into the sea of Gentiles (Mk. 11:23). And He was alluding to Zech. 4:6,7, which spoke of how the mountain of Babylon would be cast into the sea at the restoration- with the 'splash' expressed in the words "Grace, grace". This was to associate the Jewish temple system with Babylon- just as Revelation 17 likewise does. The Lord opened up a new universe of symbols; in an almost kaleidoscopic way, He twisted all the well loved symbols around. And when you mess with symbols, people get angry. Having lived in the Baltic States many years, I observed how inflammatory is the issue of messing with war memorials. Russians and Balts can slag each other off verbally all they wish, and people shrug. But mess with symbols, remove or rededicate a war memorial- and the crowds are on the streets. And this was, partially, what led to the fury with Jesus which led to His lynching. He who proclaimed non-violent revolution, the radical transformation of the inner mind into God's temple, Israel's true Messiah, was seen as the ultimate threat to all that it meant to be Jewish- all because His language and actions subverted the beloved symbols of the social club. When we experience this... we are sharing something of His sufferings.

There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles

represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Mark's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them - to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

The Lord's utter confidence in the power of prayer is reflected in the way He speaks to lepers, to waves of the sea, to blind eyes and deaf ears, commanding them to do things. Yet clearly this was a result of His own prayer to the Father. Yet He was so confident that what He had requested would really come true. And in Mk. 11:23 He challenges us to tell mountains to be removed. He doesn't tell us to ask God to move a mountain; rather does He teach us to talk directly to the mountain. It's been observed that Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'yes'; instead, in order to show agreement, the preceding words of the speaker are repeated. Examples are in Esther 5:7 Heb. and Gen. 18:15. Seeing that Biblical Hebrew reflects to us something of the mind of God, it seems to me that we're being taught by this to believe that what we ask for from God, we will receive; our request is the nature of the answer. Hence the need for care in formulating *what* we ask for, believing that God's 'yes' will be effectively a repeating back of our words to us.

Consider how the Lord taught ambition in prayer- He put before His men the real possibility of moving a mountain into the sea, if that was what was required (Mk. 11:23). This example wasn't off the top of His head; He was consciously alluding to Job 9:5, where Job says that God alone, but not man, can do something like moving a mountain into the sea. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, God alone can do it; but such is the potential power of prayer, that He will hearken to your requests to do such things- and do them'. The whole process of Nazariteship was to encourage the normal Israelite to have the ambition to rise up to the spirit of the High Priest himself; the restrictions governing Nazariteship were a purposeful echo of those regarding the High Priest. The way God describes Himself as depriving Israel of "wine or strong drink" (Dt. 29:6) throughout the wilderness journey is Nazarite language: as if in all their weakness and profligacy, God still sought to inspire them to rise up to the heights.

The Christian must "believe that what he says comes to pass" - present tense. He is to visualize the immediate fulfilment of what he asks for in the court of Heaven. Compare the RV and AV of Ps. 92:11 in this connection: "Mine eye also shall see [RV 'hath seen'] my desire... and

mine ears shall hear [RV 'have heard'] my desire". The confusion in the tenses is surely intentional- David really felt he had already received that which he prayed for. He shows this again by the way in which he uses tense moods perhaps purposefully ambiguously in Ps. 56:13. The AV has: "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling...?", whereas the RV renders it: "Hast thou not delivered my feet from falling?". Another example is in Ps. 18:44,47: "The strangers *shall* submit themselves... God [right now, by faith in prayer] subdueth the peoples". David perhaps perceived that the requests of prayer must also be some sort of statement that the prayer was answered already.

The Lord taught that we should believe that "what [we] say [in prayer] shall come to pass" (Mk. 11:23 RV). This is very much the language of God's word- what *He* says, comes to pass for sure. And so we're being invited to see *our* words in prayer as effectively like God's words; for if we pray according to His word, surely we will be heard. See on Jn. 15:7.

11:24 *Therefore I say to you: All things, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive them- and you shall have them-* This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

The experience of answered prayer inspires us to pray yet more. "What things soever ye desire, believe that ye [did] receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24 Gk.) can be read as meaning that we should remember how we received things in the past, and therefore we should have faith that the things we now desire really will be likewise granted. It is for this reason that the prayers recorded in the Psalms constantly look back to previous experiences of answered prayer as a motivation for faith and Hope: Ps. 3:4,5; 44:1-4; 61:5; 63:7; 66:18-20; 77:4-16; 86:13; 94:5,7-19; 116:1; 120:1,2; 126:1,4; 140:6,7. Jeremiah likewise (Lam. 3:55,56). And even the fact other believers had received answers to prayer inspired David's faith in prayer (Ps. 74:11-15; 106).

The close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfilment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit

'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

Even in His mortal life, the Lord was eager to as it were close the gap between Himself and His followers, so that they didn't feel He was an unattainable, distant icon to admire, but rather a true friend, leader, King and example to realistically follow. Thus when He cursed the fig tree, having prayed about it and firmly believing that what He had asked would surely come about, Peter marvelled: "Master, behold, the fig tree you cursed is withered!". The Lord replies by urging Peter to "Have faith in God. For truly I tell you, *whosoever* (and this is the stress, surely) shall say unto this mountain (far bigger than a fig tree) , Be removed be cast into the sea (a far greater miracle than withering a fig tree overnight), and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says will come to pass (referring to how the words of Jesus to the fig tree were effectively His prayer to God about it); he shall *whatever* he says. Therefore I say unto *you*, Whatever *you* desire (just as I desired the withering of the fig tree), when *you* pray, believe that you receive them, and *you* shall have them (just as I did regarding the fig tree)" (Mk. 11:21-24). Peter's amazement at the power of the Lord's prayers was therefore turned back on him- '*You too* can do what I just did, and actually greater things are possible for you than what I just did'. That was the message here- and He repeated it in the upper room, in encouraging them that "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12).

11:25 *And whenever you stand praying, forgive those you have something against; so that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses*- The Lord assumed that whenever we pray, we will include a request for forgiveness. Not only is this one of the few requests in His model prayer, but Mk. 11:25 reflects the same assumption: "*Whensoever* ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; that your Father... may forgive you" (RV). *Whenever* we pray we should be seeking forgiveness. And the Lord also implies that whenever we pray, we will almost always have something against someone else. For He knew well that human society is inevitably filled with misunderstandings and bad feelings against each other.

11:26 *But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses*- The conditions on which God's love and forgiveness operate was likewise stressed by Christ: "When ye stand praying, forgive... that your Father... may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:25,26). God's eagerness to forgive us is therefore reflected in His eagerness to see us forgive others. His desire to

make all grace abound towards us is something beautiful, something wondrous.

11:27 *And they arrived in Jerusalem. And as he was walking into the temple, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders-* Matthew notes he "entered" the temple. "Entered" is *erchomai*, and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

11:28 *They said to him: By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you authority to do these things?-* Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority? To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

11:29 *And Jesus said to them: I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things-* It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice. The sense of the Greek is not "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

11:30 *The baptism of John-* Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another



window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*Was it from Heaven, or from men? Answer me-* Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

The 'naturalness' of Jesus becomes all the more powerful when we grasp Biblically that Jesus is our representative; exactly because He was really, genuinely human, He is such a natural and powerful imperative to us in our behaviour. Take, for example, His perception of His own baptism. Surely why He went through with it was to show His solidarity with us, who would later be baptized. He lined up along the banks along with big time sinners, nobodies, dear old grannies, weirdos, starry-eyed youngsters, village people stuck in the monotony of a hand-to-mouth existence, all of them standing there probably half-naked... and took His turn to be baptized. When asked later to account for His authority, Jesus asked whether His questioners accepted John's baptism as from Heaven or from men (Mk. 11:30). This wasn't merely a diversionary question; it was dead relevant. His authority was [partly] because He had been baptized by John. This was how much John's baptism inspired Him. It meant so much to Him, to have been thus identified with us. And it was that very identification with humanity, as the "son of Man", that gave Him His authority.

*11:31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying: If we shall say: From Heaven- he will say: Why then did you not believe him?-* This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :33 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

*11:32 But if we say: From men- they were in fear of the people. For all truly held John to be a prophet-* Although we would all agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is quite possible that we fail to *feel* this as we might when we read it. The people "verily held John to be a prophet" (Mk. 11:32 RV) but they rejoiced only for a short time in the

light of his words. They rejected his most essential message- whilst still believing he was an inspired prophet. Or, thinking they believed he was.

*11:33 And they answered Jesus, saying: We do not know. And Jesus said to them: Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things-* See on :31. They knew in their hearts the answer to both their question and the Lord's question. Their sin in having Him crucified was therefore the greater; for they recognized His Divine authority, and perceived that "This is the heir...". Likewise the Lord rarely stated that He was the Christ or God's Son; He left that to be worked out by inference from His words and works. And this is why God's revelation to us in His word the Bible is as it is. There is no set of 20 bullet points to be grasped, no statement of faith preserved. We are to work things out by inference, for thereby our personal conviction of them will be the more powerful and personal.

# MARK CHAPTER 12

12:1 *And he began to speak to them in parables-* The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], *gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], *planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"], *built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], *but, behold, a cry of distress"*.

*A man planted a vineyard-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by

blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*And set a hedge about it-* The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

*And dug a pit for the winepress-* This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness

(Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

*And built a tower-* It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit. And He likewise provides us with an optimal environment for spirituality, much as we are tempted to think He has it wrong on some points.

*And rented it to husbandmen. Then he went into another country-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particularly careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth.

There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

12:2 *And at the season*- Matthew: "And when the harvest season drew near", a phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent*- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*To the husbandmen a servant, so he might receive from the husbandmen the fruits of the vineyard*- The prophets are God's servants (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord. But we wonder whether there was one initial prophet in view here? Matthew says there were two groups of servants, and this is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the "former prophets" and the "latter prophets".

12:3 *And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty handed*- Paul several times uses the word to express his fear that his preaching and pastoral labour had been "in vain" [s.w. "empty"], e.g. 1 Cor. 15:14. His aim, as our aim, was spiritual fruit in people, to see the fruits of the Spirit revealed in a convert. Where this is lacking we come away empty handed as it were, just like the Old Testament prophets. The parable

suggests that the more Israel were asked for spiritual fruit, the more angry and abusive they progressively became towards the servants who required that fruit from them. And so often, those who call others on their real spirituality are hated and finally destroyed by them.

*12:4 And again he sent to them another servant- and him they wounded in the head and handled shamefully-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. "Handled shamefully" is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised". The Old Testament prophets suffered aspects of what the Lord suffered at their hands.

*12:5 And he sent another- and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some-* Matthew adds stoning to these insults. There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

*12:6 He had one other, a beloved son. He sent him last to them, saying: They will reverence my son-* It is noteworthy that the parable of Mk. 12:6 has Jesus describing Himself as both a servant- the last servant- and the only beloved son of the vineyard owner.

Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds "My beloved Son". Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

"Surely they will reverence my Son" is the thought imputed to Almighty God in the parable, as He sends His only Son to seek for spiritual response in Israel. The parable frames God as almost naive in believing that although Israel had killed the prophets, they would reverence the

Word made flesh, and the speaking of God to them in Him. Yet of course God knew what would happen; but in order to express the extraordinary, unenterable extent of His hopefulness, He is framed in this way. Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then shalt you be ashamed... for all your wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The Father had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). The Lord Jesus reflected the Father's positive spirit in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son to feature the Heavenly Father as running out to meet the returning son, falling on his neck and kissing him... in *exactly* the language of Gen. 33:4 about Esau doing this to Jacob. The connection can't be denied; but what was the Lord's point? Surely He was willing to see something positive in the otherwise fleshly Esau at that time, He as it were took a snapshot of Esau at that moment... and applied it to God Himself, in His extravagant grace towards an unworthy Jacob. This was how positive minded the Lord was in His reading of even the darkest characters.

12:7 *But those husbandmen said among themselves-* That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him, there is no beauty that they should desire him*" (Is. 53:2)

*This is the heir!*- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet,



it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Come, let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours-* Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*12:8 And they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard-* Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order to Matthew: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him,

killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:10). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

12:9- see on Mk. 8:34-37.

*What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do?*- The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will the lord of the vineyard do?", those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What... to do... what I will do".

*He will come*- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 21:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

*And destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others*- The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least

impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

12:10 *Have you not read in the scripture-* They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The stone which the builders rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25). In the metaphor, the builders were supposed to use the stone, to manipulate it and use it as important material; and build a temple upon it. But they rejected the cornerstone, and so they didn't build a temple. That is what the metaphor implies. The Jews considered that the building of a temple was the work of Messiah; but they refused to build it, because they rejected Jesus as Christ. And so the Messianic Kingdom didn't come; there was no Messianic temple built by them, because they rejected the cornerstone.

*The same was made the head of the corner?-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

12:11 *This was from the Lord and it is marvellous in our eyes?-* In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... we will rejoice and be glad... we have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

12:12 *And they sought to arrest him; but they feared the crowd. For they*

*perceived that he had spoken that parable against them; and they left him and went away-* The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. Their "seeking" to arrest Him is the very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (Mt. 2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod. The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (Mt. 14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (Mt. 22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57). We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

*12:13 And they sent to him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, that they might catch him out in his teaching-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

*12:14 And when they arrived, they said to him: Teacher, we know you are truthful and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God-* See on Jn. 10:13. Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire. John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

Not caring about others' opinion was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording the actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

*Is it lawful-* This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

*To give tribute to Caesar, or not?-* The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

*12:15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them: Why do you test me?-* Matthew has "their wickedness". The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives. In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws. They should've

been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

*Bring me a denarius, that I may look at it-* The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

*12:16 And they brought it. And he said to them: Whose is this image and inscription? And they said to him: Caesar's-* He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him; and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His

signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

12:17 *And Jesus said to them: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled greatly at him-* The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

12:18 *And there came to him Sadducees (these say that there is no resurrection)-* The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego*, spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore,

when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be taken to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

*And they asked him-* Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

12:19 *Teacher, Moses wrote to us-* The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

*If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife behind him and leaves no children, then his brother should take his wife and raise up seed to his*



*brother-* The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

12:20 *There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died leaving no seed-* This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

12:21 *And the second took her, and died leaving no seed behind him, and the third likewise-* As noted on :20, this was clearly not a true story.

12:22 *And the seven left no seed. Last of all the woman also died-* She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :20). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

12:23 *In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? For the seven had her as wife-* The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

12:24 *Jesus said to them: Is not the reason you err that you do not know the scriptures, nor the power of God?*- Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know. Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly. The scriptures and God's power are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (Mt. 22:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

12:25 *For when they shall rise from the dead*- Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection" (Mt.)? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

*They neither marry, nor are given in marriage*- Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can* they die... they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die... shall be equal... shall be...'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).

*But are as the angels in heaven*-

The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of

Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

12:26 *But concerning the dead, that they are raised, have you not read in the book of Moses-* Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

*In the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him-* Comparing with Matthew's record, surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying...'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a

mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

*Saying: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?*— If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time— and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive “unto Him”. The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised— which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

*12:27 He is not the God of the dead but of the living*— This Greek construction could mean ‘Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living’. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean ‘Not the God the dead, but the living [God]’, alluding to the well known phrase “the living God”. If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: “For all live unto Him”. The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come— by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally “saved” at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead

"live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

*You do err greatly-* The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had "gone astray" (Mt. 18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

*12:28 And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing; and knowing that he had answered them well, he asked him: What commandment is the first of all?-* It is often claimed that this means 'Which type of commandment?'. But the Lord's answer suggests that He saw it as meaning 'Which specific commandment'. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest commandment "of all", which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on Mt. 22:37).

*12:29 Jesus answered: The first is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one-* The Lord Jesus taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:28: "*this* do...". See on Mt. 22:40.

The Lord was asked which was the first (i.e. the most important)

commandment; we would expect Him to just recite one of them, and to say 'Well, there you are, that's my answer; that's the first one, either numerically, or in terms of importance'. But in reply to this request to name just one of the ten commandments, He actually quotes two of them. There is no greater command (singular) than these *two*. So the Lord saw those two commands as one, the greatest, most important principle of our life before God. Yet He begins by speaking of the unity of God as expressed in His memorial Name, Yahweh your elohim, and says that *this* is what will lead to us loving God with all we have, and also to our loving our neighbour as ourselves. The Lord is saying that if we really appreciate this idea of the unity of God, that Yahweh is our God, then we will *therefore* love God, and also our neighbour. So what does it mean, to love our neighbour as ourselves? In the context of the Decalogue, the neighbour of the Israelite would have been his fellow Israelite, not the Gentile who lived next door to him. The command to love our neighbour as ourselves is elsewhere given an equivalent under the new Covenant: to love our brother or sister in the ecclesia as ourselves. Gal. 5:14 and James 2:8 quote this command in the context of ecclesial life.

The Lord said that the first, the most important, of the commandments was that God is one Yahweh. He didn't see this as an abstract doctrine. He saw the doctrine of the unity of God as a command, it demands behaviour in response to it. He saw the unity of God as part and parcel of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. Why? Surely He saw that the facts that God's Name is one, and all His people are in some way *in* His Name, mean that we must love others in that Name as much as we love ourselves and as much as we love God. Now apply this to the phenomena of Christian disillusion with the church. We are *in* God, and God is one. So we are all one with each other. Loving our neighbour in Christ as ourselves is placed parallel with loving God with all our heart, strength etc. This means that the main drive of our service to God should be devoted to loving our brother, our neighbour. All those who are baptized into the Name must be loved as we love ourselves. This in itself sinks the possibility of a 'desert island' existence. We just can't live alone. We can't quit on the brotherhood if we want to love God. And this tough, far reaching conclusion comes from knowing that God is one, and all in Him are therefore one.

12:30 *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength-* See on 1 Thess. 1:2. That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, you shall keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4

suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

*12:31 The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself-* This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don't actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord's teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

*There is no other commandment greater than these-* Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that "all the law", all the others, hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

*12:32 And the scribe said to him: Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, that He is one and there is no other but He-* In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh. We must love others who bear that Name "as ourselves", so intense is the unity between us. In some ways, we should lose the sense of our own self interest; we should somehow be able to have the same spiritual interest in others (for this is true love) as

we do for ourselves. So this sense of true selflessness which we would dearly desire is connected with an appreciation of the doctrine of the intense unity of God and of His Name, and of the glorious principle of God manifestation. By sharing the one Name, we are one together. See on Jn. 5:23.

12:33 *And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices-* The Scribe said that the most important commandment to love God "with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (Gk. 'in an intellect-having way'), He said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom". Notice how 'understanding' with the intellect is put higher in the list than loving one's neighbour. The fundamental thing is to correctly understand, and this will naturally lead to a life of practical love. Our surrounding 'Christian' world has inverted this order; love of neighbour has been placed above correct understanding of God. Because the Scribe answered in an intellect-having way, the Saviour said that He was near to the Kingdom. To reach the Kingdom therefore involves correct understanding. The words of Mk. 12:33 allude to a number of OT passages which likewise show the superiority of knowledge and practical service over sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Putting them together we find the following parallels:

To obey God's word	is better than sacrifice
To listen to God's word	is better than sacrifice
To show mercy	is better than sacrifice
To know God	is better than sacrifice
To be humble and just	is better than sacrifice
To understand God	is better than sacrifice

Understanding God, hearing His word, knowing God (all acts of the intellect) are therefore paralleled with practical things like loving out neighbour, showing mercy, justice etc. These practical things are an outcome of our correct knowledge of God.



12:34 *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him: You are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions-* A correct understanding of the Law and the sacrifices meant that a man was near the Kingdom (Mk. 12:34). The principles of the Lord's Kingdom, His rulership over men, were taught throughout the Old Testament. These very words about asking no more questions are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their wilful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

12:35 *And Jesus asked, as he taught in the temple: Why do the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?-* They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". But Matthew says He asked the Pharisees. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

12:36 *David himself said in the Holy Spirit: The Lord said-* Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

*To my Lord-* Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

*Sit on My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet-* The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

*12:37 David himself calls him Lord; and how is he therefore his son? And the common people heard him gladly-* Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58). The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? The Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence is He his son?*" (AV). The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary

*12:38 And in his teaching he said: Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and to have salutations in the marketplaces-* The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

*12:39 And the chief seats in the synagogues and chief places at feasts-* They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

*12:40 They that devour widows' houses-* The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was

'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

*And for a pretence make long prayers-* They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

*These shall receive greater condemnation-* There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

12:41 *And he sat down over against the treasury, and watched how the crowd threw money into the treasury; and many that were rich threw in a lot-* The many small coins they threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

12:42 *And there came a poor widow, and she threw in two small copper coins, which make a penny-* The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion. She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in.

12:43 *And he gathered his disciples, and said to them: Truly I say to you, this poor widow threw in more than all they that are throwing money into the treasury-* See on 2 Cor. 8:11,12. They were needed to be gathered together to hear this teaching; they had not noticed it, or not been impressed by what the woman did. So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievement. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded',

that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in :33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievement but in her attitude.

*12:44 For they threw in money they didn't need, but she though needy threw in all that she had- all her livelihood-* The Lord condemned the Pharisees for devouring widow's houses (Mk. 12:40), but then goes on to show how the widow who threw in all her wealth to the treasuries of the corrupt Pharisees had actually gained great approval in God's eyes by doing so (Mk. 12:44). Out of evil, good came. The Lord didn't just lament the cruel selfishness of the Jewish leadership. He pointed out how God worked through even this to enable a poor woman to please Him immensely. There is a wondrous ecology in all this; nothing is lost. Nothing, in the final end, can be done against the Truth, only for the Truth.

The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk. 12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records.

# MARK CHAPTER 13

13:1 *And as he left the temple-* This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (Mt. 23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

*One of his disciples said to him: Teacher, look what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!*- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

13:2 *And Jesus said to him: Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another. All will be thrown down-* This again expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is

ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, a house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

13:3 *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately-* The private enquiry was because the Lord had just stated something dangerously illegal. Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

13:4 *Tell us, when will these things occur, and what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?-* They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). The disciples (in their childish way) showed the Lord the greatness of the temple, and he commented that soon it would be destroyed. They asked the obvious question: When? Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions; he gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? and what shall be the sign when all these

things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of they coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. The Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but his real coming and the main ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

13:5 The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

13:9 When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

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*Take heed that no one lead you astray-* "Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

13:6 *Many shall come in my name, saying, I am he-* Coming in the name of the Lord, the "I am", was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ, is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

*And shall lead many astray-* Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed,



Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

*13:7 And when you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be disturbed. These things must take place, but the end is not yet-* The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

13:8 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run

up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

*And kingdom against kingdom-* It seems likely from Revelation that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land

promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

*There shall be earthquakes-* Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

*In various places-* The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy place". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount

would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

*There shall be famines-* There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in

the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

*These things are the beginning of the birth pains-* The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

13:9 *But be warned. For they shall deliver you up to councils, and in synagogues they shall beat you, and before governors and kings shall you stand for my sake, to bear witness before them-* The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the

synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism. They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

13:10 *And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations*- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then "the end comes". The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord's command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

"All the nations" is "in the whole world" in Matthew. The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means 'the inhabited', and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (Mt. 10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached "in", *en*, all the world, and not 'to' the whole world. This may envisage there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be

preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to



Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

13:11 *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial*- The very language of the Lord's final sufferings, which will be fellowshipped / experienced in the latter day tribulation (s.w. Lk. 22:54; 23:1,32; Jn. 18:28; 19:4,13).

*Do not worry beforehand about what to say*- A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would have specific fulfilment in time of persecution.

*Say whatever shall be given you in that hour*- "Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God still kept this aspect of

the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

*For it is not you that will speak but the Holy Spirit-* Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind this idea of not us by the Spirit speaking.

Mt. 10:20 says that the Spirit will speak "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. If we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

Luke adds here: "For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is

understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

13:12 *And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death-* Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

"Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

This prophecy did not have major fulfilment in AD70, at least not betrayal "unto death". The scale of the rift within families, unto death, was not

seen then within the Christian community. We are left to envisage a situation where family members are pressurized to hand over their other family members to death for the sake of their loyalty to Christ. This sounds like Islamist domination of areas, with this demand made; and that is developed further in Revelation.

13:13 *And you shall be hated by all for my name's sake; but he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved-* Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name's sake" is a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century. Those who endure the tribulation to the end will be saved in that they will be part of that unique generation which shall never die, but shall be "saved" by being changed to immortality at the Lord's return.

The Olivet prophecy as recorded in Mark 13 has many allusions to the sufferings of our Lord, thereby suggesting that our sufferings during the coming tribulation will make us fellowship the cross as never before. The whole idea of darkness, earthquake, open graves, rocks shaking etc, which we read of in the Olivet and other last day prophecies is evidently the language of the crucifixion. The description of suffering before "the end" comes (Mk. 13:7,13; Mt. 24:14) invites connection with Christ's death also being described as "the end", coming as it did after a period of suffering (Mt. 26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). This connection is strengthened by the way in which each record of the Olivet prophecy leads straight on into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. There is to be a "little while" between the death of those persecuted in the last days, and the coming of the Lord; using the very same word which John uses for the "little while" of the three days of the Lord's death (Rev. 6:11; Jn. 16:16-19). Rev. 12 speaks of how the dead bodies of the tribulation victims will rest for three and a half days, just as the Lord's body did. They will fully fellowship His death and therefore His resurrection. Similarly, the idea of all God's word being fulfilled by the Lord's death (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 19:28; Acts 3:18) follows on from the prophecy that all will be fulfilled at the time of suffering which heralds the second coming (Lk. 21:22). Mt. 24:13 commends those who endure to the end- of the great tribulation. The

same word occurs in Heb. 12:2,3 about Christ enduring the cross- we fellowship the cross during the last day tribulation. The word in Mt. 24:29 for "the tribulation" is used in Col. 1:24 about the afflictions of Christ. And as the Lord's critics could not find a way to answer Him, so in our tribulation, all our adversaries will not be able to gainsay us (Lk. 21:15). The Lord in Jn. 16:2,4,32 used the term "the hour" to refer both to the 'hour' of His own sufferings, and the 'hour' of tribulation for His people. He clearly saw what He was about to endure as being repeated in the latter day tribulation of those for whom He was about to die.

The other tribulation prophecies, notably in Revelation, are also shot through with allusions to Christ's passion.

"They shall deliver you up to the councils... beaten... rulers and kings for a testimony... brother shall betray the brother... turn back to take up his garment... false Christs...	As Christ to the Sanhedrin Christ buffeted Chief priests, Herod, Pilate Judas; Peter's denial? John Mark's linen garment Barabbas 'son of the father'
the sun shall be darkened... watch and pray... at even... at midnight... at the cock crowing... in the morning... find you sleeping"	As at the crucifixion "Watch with me"; Gethsemane Last Supper Gethsemane Peter's denials Trial and crucifixion Disciples in Gethsemane

13:14 *But when you see the abomination*- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the

prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

*Of desolation-* The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic

'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

*Standing where it should not-* In Jerusalem, on the temple mount; "in the holy place" (Mt.). On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

*(Let him that reads understand)-* The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that reads understand" Daniel's prophecies- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him... understand... let him... not go down... let him... not return... let them... flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses

the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up paying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works. See on Heb. 5:6.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *reads*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When you shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that makes desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When you shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "Let him...



understand" is paralleled with "*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]... *let him* that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

*Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains*- This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the

final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

13:15 *And let him that is on the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (Mt. 24:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

*Not go down, nor enter in to take anything out his house*- The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the

response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

*13:16 And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak-* The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left".

*13:17 But alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days!-* This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them... who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

13:18 *And pray that it is not in the winter*- The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel; and Mt. 22:22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

13:19 *For those days shall cause distress, such as there has never been similar, from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be again*- The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance: "The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3) "The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming. At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

13:20 *And except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved*- "Saved" here ("there should no flesh be saved") implies 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

*But for the elect's sake, which He chose, He shortened the days*- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. The days will be shortened for the elect's sake; for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring specifically to the group of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (Mt. 24:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (Mt. 24:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being

scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elect's sake the days until the second coming are shortened. And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days.

The Lord's description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: "Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake... he shortened the days" (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

For the elects' sake, the days to the second coming *will be* shortened (Mt. 24:22); but the Lord also said, perhaps in the same sentence, that the days *have already* been shortened (Mk. 13:20). This shows that God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion. See on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elect's sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue

with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

13:21 *And then if anyone shall say to you-* This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

*Look, here is the Christ! or Look! There he is!- do not believe them-* "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

13:22 *For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray (if possible) the elect-* The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet... and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (Mt. 12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (Mt. 16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (Mt. 24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous

"sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (Mt. 16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from Mt. 24:30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs" shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.



A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (Mt. 24:4,5,11). The need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

*13:23 But be warned, I have told you all things beforehand-* In place of the Olivet prophecy, John's gospel has the message about the Comforter. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord is present in our hearts with such reality that it is as if He were with us. All calls to go out and see Him here or there will therefore intuitively be found false by us. And the connection with the Comforter passages continues in this verse, with a clear link to Jn. 14:29: "And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe". The Lord was referring to the predictions of His sufferings and death; but here, the context is of the latter day tribulation. Those tribulations are to enable those who pass through them to fellowship with the sufferings and death of the Lord, that they might share in His immortality.

The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (Mt. 24:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

*13:24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened-* After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (Mt. 24:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

*And the moon shall not give her light-* Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-

10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; Joel 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity... men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

13:25 *And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken*- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

13:26 *And then shall they see the Son of Man*- In Matthew, when "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation

would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

*Coming in the clouds*- Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the

prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

*With great power and glory-* The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

13:27 *And then shall he send the angels-* The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the

call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send... Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (Mt. 23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them.

*And shall gather together his elect*- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on Mt. 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Mt. 13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

*From the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven*- Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the

same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on Mt. 24:31 *Power and great glory*.

13:28 *Now from the fig tree learn its lesson-* Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

*When its branch becomes tender-* The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and

these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet..." is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as... the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

*And puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near-* The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken

literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the



nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

13:29 *So you also, when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near- at the doors-* Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> "]

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for

sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

13:30 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away-* This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

*Until-* If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but

that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

*All these things happen-* AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

13:31 *Heaven and earth may pass away-* This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom

could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :30 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

*But my words shall not pass away*- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential *logos*. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

13:32 *But of that day or that hour- Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the Olivet prophecy: "Those days" (Mt. 24:19), "those days should be shortened" (Mt. 24:22), "the tribulation of those days" (Mt. 24:29), "the days of Noah" (Mt. 24:37), "the days that were before the flood" (Mt. 24:38). So the Lord isn't necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in Mt. 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because "you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes". When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that "the times or seasons" have been "set within [the Father's] own authority" (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord's return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour.

*Knows no one except the Father, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son-* There's a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated "knows", carries the essential idea of 'seeing' or perceiving. We are to "see" / know / perceive the abomination of desolation, and when we "see" / know / perceive "all these things, know that it is near". And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. The reason is made crystal clear in Mt. 24:42: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes". Mt. 25:13 repeats this: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes". The 'watching', therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (Mt. 24:43). But if he doesn't know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their 'watching' is not so

much a personal readiness for the Lord's coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of 'watching' the "signs of the times".

13:33 *Be warned, watch and pray. For you do not know when the time is-* This could be taken as a criticism, rather than stating a truism. It is true that we do not know the time of the Lord's return and therefore we should watch constantly. But we should consider the possibility that the last generation, as they pass through the tribulation, will in fact see prophecy fulfilling so accurately that they can foresee the Lord's coming. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the

time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils	As Christ to the Sanhedrin
beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch and	"Watch with me";
pray...	Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping	disciples in Gethsemane

13:34 *Like a man going on a journey; on leaving his house, he puts his servants in charge, each according to his assigned tasks. He also commands the gatekeeper to stay awake-* Each has his or her calling, and therefore we should each have a sense of authority because we realize this. We have a job to do, a mission to accomplish, and we have authority from the Lord Himself. For the Son of man gives to *each* of His servants both "authority" and his or her specific work to do (Mk. 13:34). See on Mt. 21:41.

His enthusiasm for us comes out in Christ's description of Himself as 'taking a far journey' away from us to Heaven. The Greek strictly means 'to leave one's own native people to go abroad'; with the implication that the Lord feels closer towards us than to the Angels. He is somehow away from home whilst absent from us. This is exactly the line of argument of Hebrews 1 and 2: Christ didn't come to save Angels, He came to save us, therefore He had exactly our nature and feelings, not theirs.

The "porter" was commanded to watch; and he represents us all (:37). Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets in the Old Testament parables of judgment were the watchmen

of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Do you speak this parable to us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although He didn't say so explicitly. Instead He said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Peter, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, rather than the hobby of trying to match current events with Bible prophecy.

*13:35 Therefore stay awake. For you do not know when the lord of the house comes, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning-* The motivation for watching, being away at the Lord's coming, is because we have a duty to the rest of the household. Pursuit of personal salvation is not of itself a very strong motivator. And we must be ever alert because we do not know when He shall return; for Bible prophecy is to be understood after the event, or whilst the event occurs, and is not intended to provide a timeline of future events.

The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road.

We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). See on Lk. 6:47.

*13:36 In case he comes suddenly finding you asleep-* The suddenness of the Lord's coming will only be felt by those who are asleep and as it were disturbed from their sleep. For those who are alert, His coming will not



have this 'sudden' and 'unexpected' aspect to it. The connection is clearly with the parable of the virgins; and yet despite this exhortation to stay awake, they are slumbered. The "wise" were only saved by their awareness that they were likely to run out of oil, their spirituality was not so solid, and they recognized that.

13:37 *What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!*- Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, this is the result of our awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return.

"Watching" is not only a guarding of one's own spirituality; the idea of guarding a house and the people and goods inside it suggests that our watching is of our brethren and sisters too. Elders "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17) in this sense. Christ's parable about the gate-keeper might at first suggest that the duty of watching is only with the elders; it is for *them* to watch and feed the flock, in the same way as it was the duty of the house manager to guard the house and feed the other servants (Mt. 24:43-51; Mk. 13:33-37). But that parable is intended for *all* of us; "Watch ye therefore (as intensely as that manager)... and what I say unto you, I say unto *all*, Watch" (Mk. 13:37). In other words, we are all elders, the command to watch for each other extends to each of us. And yet how really concerned are most of us about each other's salvation?

# MARK CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now it was two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might arrest him using trickery and kill him-* This could imply that they tried to arrest Him before the feast, but decided to delay their plans until after the feast (:2). But the Lord was master of the situation. His life was not taken from Him but He gave it, and psychologically arranged the situation so that He would die as the Passover lambs were slain. He therefore arranged the situation in Bethany to provoke Judas to go and offer to betray Him to the Jews, knowing they would immediately jump at this opportunity.

The same word for "arrest" is used four times in Mt. about the 'taking hold' of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:48,50,55,57). This 'laying on of hands' against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord's sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty*"- an allusion to the Lord's Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15). But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him "on the feast day", which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:2).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers' plans to kill Joseph.

14:2 *For they said: Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people-* Yet they did arrest the Lord during the feast; another indication that He manipulated the situation so that He gave His life as the Passover lamb. So they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :1. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

Their fear of an "uproar" indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (Mt. 27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

14:3 *And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table-* The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was

Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

*There came a woman with an alabaster vial of ointment of pure nard- very expensive. She broke the vial and poured it over his head-* Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely Mary inspired him.

The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (Mt. 27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she

even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness... this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

Mary's devotion to the Lord, based on the understanding she had, is truly inspirational. The original word translated "nard" is a foreign [non Greek] word, and appears to have originated far away from Palestine. The suggestion has been made that this bottle of nard belonged to some foreign royalty. The price of "more than three hundred pence" must be understood in terms of a penny-a-day employment rate for labourers (Mt. 20:2). This bottle would typically only be used at the burial of a king. Yet Mary dearly loved her brother Lazarus, and had only recently buried him. But she hadn't used the nard for *him*; hence perhaps the information is added that his body would be stinking after four days- implying such expensive nard had not been used in embalming *his* body (Jn. 11:39- the fact it's Martha who observes this may suggest she resented Mary for not using her nard for Lazarus, just as she resented how Mary didn't help her in the kitchen but instead sat at the Lord's feet). And the Lord Jesus perceived all this; for He commented to the disciples that Mary had "kept the nard for *my* burial" (Jn. 12:7). The Lord's reference to her 'keeping' the nard can be powerfully understood in the context of Mary not using it for her brother's burial, but rather deciding to keep it for His burial. This not only shows the clarity of Mary's understanding of the Lord's upcoming death. It also reflects how she would give her most treasured possession in an apparently senseless act of devotion to Him. She anointed Him because she understood Him to be Christ, the anointed one. But this is what we expect of a woman who won the accolade from the Lord that she sought after the "one thing" that really matters- which is Him and His word (Lk. 10:42). Our eyes have been opened to that same "one thing", and we too claim to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; and so to place devotion to Christ above family, above retention of personal wealth and value... is the intended issue of all this for us too.

14:4 *But there were some that had indignation among themselves, saying-* The indignation was among or "within" themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on 26:10 *When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered in commentary on :8, we can better understand their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

*For what purpose-* The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the *deja vu* of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

*Has this waste of the ointment been made?-* "Waste" is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (Mt. 20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

14:5 *For this ointment might have been sold for above three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her-* The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (Mt. 19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is

one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

*14:6 But Jesus said: Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work-* The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41; 10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

*Upon me-* The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

*14:7 For you have the poor always with you, and whenever you want you can do them good-* Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

*But me you do not have always-* We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the

poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it. "Always" is literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

We find an example of Paul holding up Mary Magdalene as our example in 2 Cor. 8:12, where he speaks of how the Lord although He was rich became poor for our sakes, and we ought to be inspired by this to generosity towards our poorer brethren. The connection with Mary Magdalene goes back to Mk. 14:7, where Jesus said that Mary *had* in fact given her wealth to the poor, by anointing Him, the poor one, the one who made Himself poor for our sakes.

14:8 *She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for the burying-* This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

Whether the woman of Mk. 14:8 really understood that she was anointing His body for burial is open to question. But the Lord's positivism graciously imputed this motive to her. See on Mk. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:11,12.

14:9- see on Acts 10:4.

*And truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world the gospel shall be preached, what this woman has done shall be spoken of as a memorial to her-* Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we



read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

This could mean that when the Gospel message is proclaimed in all the world at Messiah's return, then what Mary had done would be told [before God] that He may mercifully remember her for good at the judgment. This may sound a forced interpretation to Western ears and eyes, but we must remember that the idea of 'for a memorial' denoted being spoken of for good before someone, in this case, the judge of all. What follows from this is that there will be a direct link between our deeds today, and the judgment process of tomorrow [or later today]. What we have done will be told before God, and He will remember us for good. On one hand, works are irrelevant. We are saved by grace. On the other hand, there will be a certain 'going through' of our deeds before Him. Quite simply, there is a direct link between our behaviour and our future judgment. Nothing will in that sense be forgotten.

The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. Mark records how the Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached world-wide (Mark 16:15); but he surely intends this to be linked with his record of how the generosity of the sinful woman would be told "whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world" (Mk. 14:9). 'The Gospel' was therefore not just the basic doctrines of the Gospel; it was the whole record of the life and works of Christ. This is why each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. And the comment that wherever the Gospel was preached, her example would be preached (Mk. 14:9) is tantamount to saying that her action was to be the pattern for all who would afterward believe the Gospel. Note in passing that the Gospel was not intended by the Lord to be a mere set of doctrinal propositions; it was to be a message which included practical patterns of response to it, of which Mary's was to be always mentioned.

The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

14:10 *And Judas Iscariot, he that was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests, that he might betray him to them-* In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. I suggested on :1 that the Lord set up the whole scene, knowing that the apparent waste of so much money would deeply irk Judas and trigger the betrayal. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house. It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

14:11 *And they, when they heard it, were glad; and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him-* Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

14:12 *And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover, his disciples said to him: Where will you have us prepare for you the Passover to eat?-* Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.

We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. Reflect how the disciples, with all the petty pride of the practical man wishing to do something practical for the leader he adores, earnestly asked the Lord where to prepare for Him the Passover. He told them to find a certain man, and ask him where the Master would eat Passover *with His disciples*. He would show them an upper room furnished and already prepared. '*There*', the Lord added with His gentle irony, 'prepare for *us*, not just me but you as well, to eat. Even though I've already arranged it all, and I'm inviting *you* to eat with *me*, well, I understand you must feel you do your little human bit, so there *you* prepare; although I've already prepared it all'. 'What love through all his actions ran'. This was grace and understanding and accommodation of men *par excellence*.

14:13 *And he sent two of his disciples and said to them: Go into the city and there you shall meet a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him-* This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

14:14 *And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house: The teacher asks, where is the guest room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?-* The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

14:15 *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare it for us-* The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nissan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

14:16 *And the disciples went into the city and found as he had said to them. And they made ready the Passover-* As noted on :15, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

14:17 *And when it was evening he came with the twelve-* There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them.

14:18 *And as they sat and were eating, Jesus said: Truly I say to you, one of you shall betray me- even he that eats with me-* The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of *you*" would do this.

14:19 *They began-* The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later. Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him*?'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

*To be sorrowful-* It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

*And to say to him one by one: Is it I?-* Some texts read: "And another said, Is it I?". It is easy to assume that this "another" was Judas. But it has been suggested that in spoken Aramaic, "and another said..." would be a device for saying 'And I, I said...'. If Mark's Gospel is a verbatim

account of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, this would be so appropriate. Peter would be saying: 'All the disciples couldn't imagine it was them who would betray Jesus; and I, yes I also asked if it was me who would betray Him. I was so sure I wouldn't'. The record in Mark 14 then goes on to describe how Peter *did* effectively betray / deny the Lord.

The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

14:20 *And he said to them: It is one of the twelve. He that dipped in the dish at the same time with me-* The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish. "Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publicly pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

He lamented that His betrayer was one who had dipped in the dish with Him at the last supper. There was no way that this was meant to be an indication to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer- for they all ate the supper and dipped in the same dish. Hence His point was surely to foreground the awful fact that *it was a brother who had broken bread with Him* who would now betray Him. Ps. 41:9 laments that it was one who "ate of my bread" who betrayed Him. This is why the challenge "Lord, is it I?" echoes down to every communion service.

14:21 *For the Son of Man goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

*Even as it is written of him*- Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15. But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

*But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed!*- The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible

prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

*It would be better for that man if he had not been born-* "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and wilfully do evil.

14:22 *And as they were eating-* Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

*He took bread-* Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely

open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

*And when he had blessed it-* It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

*He broke it and gave it to them, and said: Take, eat-* The use of *didomi* ["gave"] is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

*This is my body-* He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give one's body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be



read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

14:23 *And he took a cup*- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Mark was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

*And when he had given thanks*- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drank weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

*He gave it to them and they all drank from it*- The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. Joachim Jeremias cites evidence that "By the time of Jesus, individual cups were used at the Passover meal", and yet Mk. 14:23 implies that He used only one cup, which was passed around amongst those at the last supper: "He took the cup [RV "a cup"]... he gave it to them: and they all drank of *it* [singular]". They didn't take up their own cups and drink- the Lord gave them His cup, just as He passes on to all in Him a participation in His "cup" of suffering and final joy. Reflect how deftly and determinedly the Lord must have "received the cup" (Lk. 22:17 RV), knowing what it represented; imagine His body language. Paul's references to "*the* cup" imply the same. This change was surely to indicate the unity that His death, His blood, His life, was to inspire amongst those who share in it. This, in passing, is behind my undoubted preference for not using individual cups at the memorial meeting. It would seem to be a returning to the Jewish legalistic tradition, however unintentionally. I have elsewhere commented upon the clear link between the death of Jesus and our unity. The memorial meeting is the supreme celebration of that unity between us. To deny a brother or sister participation in it is something serious indeed. Tragically, and it is a tragedy, we have tended to use the memorial meeting as a weapon for exclusion rather than as a celebration of our unity. Yet this was the intention, without doubt. Comparing Lk. 22:20 and Mk. 14:24 we find the Lord saying that the cup of wine was "for you poured out, poured out for many"- as if He wanted them to be aware at the memorial meeting that it was not only they who had been redeemed in Him. Likewise the Passover was essentially a remembering of the deliverance of a community, through which the individual worshipper found his or her personal salvation. This is why it is just not good enough to insist on breaking bread alone, or with no thought to the fact that all of us were redeemed together, as one man, as one nation, in Him. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is "derived from a verb meaning 'to eat'". That covenant was made with a community, the Israel of God; by eating the covenant meal we recall that collective covenant, that salvation of a community of which we are part- and it is appropriate therefore that it becomes a symbol of our unity within that community. The Old Testament idea of covenant is associated with words like *hesed* (kindness, love, devotion, grace), *emeth* (truth, integrity), *emunah* (faithfulness, allegiance). These are the characteristics associated with being in covenant relationship; and we are to show them to all others who are in covenant relationship, not just some of them.

14:24 *And he said to them: This is my blood*- Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn

away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

*Of the new covenant, which is poured out for many-* The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from

the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might have a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

14:25 *Truly I say to you: I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for

the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

*Until the day when I drink it anew-* This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

*In the kingdom of God-* The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it "until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that "In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time. Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing

our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged". Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat.

The Lord's promise that He would not break bread again until He did it with us in the Kingdom (Mk. 14:25) seems to require a literal fulfilment. In a non-literal sense He breaks bread with His people even now. Therefore His statement that He would not do it again until the Kingdom seems to refer to His literal taking of bread and wine. Likewise His promise that He would literally gird Himself and come forth and serve us at a future banquet has to be linked in with this (Lk. 12:37). If all the faithful are to be gathered together to a meal, and literally eat bread and drink wine with the Lord, this suggests all sorts of logistical and practical 'problems'. It is easier to understand that space and time will have different meanings at the judgment and after.

14:26- see on Jn. 17:1.

*And when they had sung a hymn-* Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

*They went out to the Mount of Olives-* The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as

something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

*14:27 And Jesus said to them: All of you shall fall away. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad-* See on Mk. 4:17. They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation. He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

*14:28 However, after I am raised up-* There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

*I will go ahead of you into Galilee-* This is the language of the shepherd

going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

This promise sounds very much like a conscious allusion to the Angel going ahead of Israel; as if Christ felt that He (through the Comforter Angel?) had taken over the role of the Angel that represented Him previously?

14:29 *But Peter said to him: Although all shall fall away, I will not!*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-instates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which



could only have been effected by a Divine, higher hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

*14:30 And Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, yes to you today, that this night-* Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

*Before the cock crows twice-* There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close. Crowing "twice" may mean that the cock would not need to crow twice, before Peter thrice denied Him.

*You shall deny me three times*- There is more detail about the denials in Mark because Mark appears to be writing for Peter; Peter's presentation of the Gospel emphasized his own failures. The Roman persecution of Christians required the converts to three times deny the Lord Jesus. Perhaps such emphasis is given to Peter's triple denials in order to encourage those who failed that test that their relationship with the Lord was not finished; and in fact they were in good company.

It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for 'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

14:31 *But Peter said emphatically: Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you*- Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

"I will not deny you" surely alludes to Mt. 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we

will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (Mt. 10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

*And they all said the same-* Mt. "Likewise also", using two words are used when one would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

14:32- see on Mk. 5:1.

*And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples-* The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

*Sit here while I pray-* The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and

then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not to* give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

The whole structure of Mark's Gospel seems designed for memorization- the material is arranged in triplets, and the sections have chiasmic structures [e.g. material arranged in the form ABA, ABCBA, ABCDCBA]. Even within the triplets, themes often occur in triplets- the three experiences in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42), Peter's three denials (Mk. 14:66-72), three wrong answers about the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:14-16; 8:28). The use of triplets and triplicisms is common in folk stories- to aid memorization. We shouldn't be unduly phased by the idea of the early Christians memorizing the Gospels. Even today in the Islamic world, students in religious schools are expected to memorize the entire Koran, which is roughly the same size as the entire New Testament. There are reports of this even being achieved by a seven year old.

14:33 *And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled-* As Moses took Joshua with him. AV: "He was amazed". The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac's at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question "Why have You forsaken Me?". This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

14:34 *And he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful even to death-* This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

The Lord's psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord's death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when we in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

*Stay here*- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

*And watch*- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples

here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

14:35 *And he went forward a little*- Lk. 22:41 "About a stone's cast", pointing us back to David's conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord's final conflict with sin.

*And fell on the ground, and prayed*- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven

strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

*That, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him-* See on Lk. 22:46. This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even to the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.



The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

Matthew records the Lord's prayer that the cup might pass from Him; here, that the hour might pass. Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

14:36 *And he said: Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; remove this cup from me-* "We cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into something of our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as "heavy" in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

*However, not as I will but what You will-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

14:37- see on Mk. 14:72.

*And he returned and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: Simon, why do you sleep?-* "Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

There are good reasons for thinking that Mark's Gospel record is actually Peter's; and in his preaching of the Gospel he makes ample reference to his own failures [he contains the most detailed account of the denials of

all the Gospels] and to the misunderstanding of his fellows. Both Matthew and Luke record that the Lord asked the three disciples 'Why are you [plural] sleeping?' (Mt. 26:40). It is only Mark who says that the Lord asked this of Peter personally, in the singular (Mk. 14:37). And compare Matthew's "Could you [plural] not watch with me?" with Mk. 14:37 to Peter: "Could you not [singular] watch?".

*Could you not watch one hour?*- Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house. Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4; 1 Acts 22:7 = 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

14:38- see on Acts 20:29,30.

*Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation*- The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16). The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (Mt. 24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records. "That you do not fall into" is addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the

Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

*The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak-* The Lord took a very positive view of his struggling, stuttering followers, especially in the run up to His death. His teaching had throughout emphasized the importance of the heart, and how thought and action are linked. Yet He appears to have made a temporary exception when He generously excused His disciples' sleeping in Gethsemane: "The spirit [mind] truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk. 14:38). The theoretical willingness of the mind does not usually excuse fleshly weakness, according to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that this statement of His, which for me gets harder to interpret the more one ponders it, is simply the Lord's generous, justifying impulse towards His weak followers. And He was feeling like this towards them at the very time when, in symbol and in essence, they had condemned themselves. For He 'comes' to them, finds them asleep, like the sleepy virgins in His recent parable, they were dumbfounded and unable to answer Him, just as the rejected will be at judgment day, and then they fled, as the rejected likewise will (Mk. 14:40,41,51). If these were His generous feelings for them, then... what comfort it is to know we follow the same Lord.

14:40 The disciples' sleepiness is excused in the statement "for their eyes were heavy" (Mk. 14:40), even though their falling asleep at that time was utterly shameful. Luke's record excuses them by saying they slept for sorrow- which isn't really possible. It's the grace of inspiration covering up for them. Yet He kindly says that their spirit is willing but their flesh was weak (Mk. 14:38); although elsewhere, the Lord rigorously demonstrates that mental attitudes are inevitably reflected in external behaviour, and therefore the difference between flesh and spirit in this sense is minimal.

The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

*14:39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words-* This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

*14:40 And again he returned and found them sleeping. Their eyes were very heavy-* It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

*And they did not know what to answer him-* Not only did the Lord Jesus 'answer' to the needs of others, but He Himself was a silent, insistent question that had to be responded to. He came and found the disciples

sleeping, and they didn't know what to *answer* Him (Mk. 14:40). His look, the fact that when facing super exhaustion and sleep deprivation He endured in prayer... this was something that demanded, and demands, an answer- *even if we can't give it*. He responds / 'answers' to us, and we have to respond / answer to Him. This is how His piercing sensitivity, coupled with the height of His devotion, compels the building of real relationship between ourselves and this invisible Man.

*14:41 And he returned a third time-* The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

*And said to them: Sleep on now-* The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :42 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

*And take your rest-* Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (Mt. 11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

*It is enough. The hour comes-* Mt.. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in Mt. 26:46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

*The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners-* Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (Mt. 17:22), to the chief priests (Mt. 20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But

now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

14:42 *Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby-* If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control, leading Himself to them- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself. Judas was leading the soldiers (Lk. 22:47); but the Lord was leading Himself toward them.

14:43 *And immediately, while he yet spoke, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd-* The appearance of Judas is as it were called forth by the Lord, who went to as it were meet Judas before he even appeared (:42). The Lord had set up the whole situation, and Judas was acting according to plan. The repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (Mt. 26:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 Gk. puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas...", to encourage us to re-live the incident. The crowd with Judas was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*From the chief priests and the scribes and the elders bearing swords and staves-* This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross.

14:44 *Now he that betrayed him had given them a signal, saying-* These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the

prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is *against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

*Whomsoever I shall kiss-* The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

*That is he. Take him and lead him away safely-* The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

14:45 *And when he arrived, immediately he came to him and said: Master, Master; and kissed him-* But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :46 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

14:46 *And they arrested him-* The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

*And took him away-* Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the

'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

14:47 *But one of the disciples that was standing nearby drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear-* Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and



healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

*14:48 And Jesus said to them: Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?*- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples ‘going out’ from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus ‘going forth’ to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

*14:49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching and you did not arrest me-* The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, “with you” (AV), not so much “with you” as ‘directly facing you’, sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove “that same is He”, was because the mass of armed men didn’t know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that “Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?”. The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed “the multitudes”, His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”. The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

*But this is done that the scriptures might be fulfilled-* This can be read as part of the Lord’s words, or the comment of Matthew. “Is happening” is

translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

There is a sense of compulsion associated with the cross. The Greek word *dei*, translated "must" or "ought", is repeatedly used by the Lord in reference to His death. He spoke of that death as the coming of His hour, as if always and in all things He felt a compulsion that He must die as He was to. Listing the references chronologically gives an impressive list: "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures *must be fulfilled*" (Mark 14:49). Three times in say 30 minutes, the Lord has stressed the compulsion of the cross.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders" (Mt. 16:21).

"And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and [*must*] be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21-22).

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he *must suffer* many things, and be set at nought" (Mark 9:12). These last three references all occurred within a day of each other, if not a few hours. The Lord at least three times was emphasizing how He *must* die the death of the cross.

"Nevertheless *I must* walk to day, and tomorrow, and the day following: for *it cannot be* that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)

"But first [i.e. most importantly, not just chronologically] *must he* suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (Luke 17:25).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man *must be lifted up*? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:32-34). When the Lord spoke of "*If I be lifted up*", there was no doubt about it. The idiom was correctly understood by the people as meaning: "I absolutely *must*". And for them this was a contradiction in terms: a "son of man" Messiah who *must* be crucified.

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover *must* be killed" (Luke 22:7).

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:15-17). Embedded in the context of prediction of the cross, the Lord described that act as being how He *must* bring His sheep unto Himself.

"But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that *thus it must be*?... For I say unto you, that this that is written *must yet be accomplished* in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me *have an end*" (Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37). See on Lk. 24:6.

14:50 *And all the disciples left him*- Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

*And fled*- Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

14:51 *And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him*- It is possible to argue that the young man who followed Jesus and then ran away was in fact Peter; it was Peter who "followed him" at this time (Mt. 26:58). Mk. 14:54 RV tells us after this incident that "*Peter* had followed him afar off". Peter describes himself in the third person a few verses previously: "A certain one of them that stood by drew a sword..." (Mk. 14:47 RV). And then we go on to read in v. 51 of "a certain young man" (RV). But when speaking of his denials, Peter records them in the first person- he totally owns up to them. All of Mk. 14:27-52 concerns Peter's part in the story, and then vv. 54-72 likewise. So it is likely that the record of the young man following disguised in a linen cloth is in fact referring to Peter too. So Peter followed, ran back, followed again, then ran away to Galilee, and

then followed again. This was how hard it was for him to pick up the cross of identification with Jesus and follow Him. And for us too.

14:52 *But he left the linen cloth and fled naked-* If indeed the man was Peter, then he was demonstrating that he was not in fact prepared to go to prison and death with his Lord, as he had so confidently claimed. He ought to have taken this as a warning against being so confident that he would not deny his lord.

14:53 *And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and there came together all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes-* This recalls Psalm 2; the Gentiles gathered together against the Christ in Jerusalem. Those pious men were no more than Gentiles.

14:54 *And Peter had followed him at a distance-* This following of Peter is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

*Right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire-* "Into" is the same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

Mt. "and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the

servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

14:55 *Now the chief priests and the whole council-* Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal. In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publicly in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

*Sought evidence against Jesus to put him to death, and did not find it-* The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (Mt. 10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

14:56 *For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree-* This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many

false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

*14:57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying-* Mt.- there were two. The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

*14:58 We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands-* They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

*14:59 But not even then did their testimony agree-* The utter weakness of the case is emphasized. They could not even agree amongst themselves as to what false story to give.

14:60 *And the high priest stood up in their midst and asked Jesus-* As a judge arises to give the verdict.

*Do you answer nothing?*- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

*What is this that these witnesses say against you?*- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on Mt. 26:5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave His life.

14:61 *But he held his peace and said nothing-* The High Priest 'answered' to this silence, according to Matthew. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

*Again the high priest questioned him, saying: Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death

penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

14:62- see on Mt. 24:28.

*And Jesus said: I am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven-*

The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who



wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

14:63 *And the high priest tore his clothes and said-* Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

*What further need have we of witnesses?*- Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

14:64 *You have heard the blasphemy. What think you?*- The spiritual culture of Almighty God is shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that. No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

*And they all condemned him to be worthy of death*- The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

14:65 *And some began to spit on him and to cover his face*- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only

command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

*Striking him-* Slapping Him. A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

*And saying to him: Prophecy!-* They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophecy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

*And the guards took him and beat him with their hands-* Men smote "the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with "strokes of rods". Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

14:66 *And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came-* Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

*One of the maids of the high priest-* Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to described the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him,	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple

	saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming

				themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And	

	had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

14:67 *And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!-*

14:68 *But he denied it, saying-* Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and

legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew-* Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

Bible minded Peter must surely have later reflected that he had said those very words: 'I know not this man'. He "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet he was able to repent and come back. Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'.



And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict. Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ. The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus. And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.

"Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. In Mk. 14:68 he records himself as having said: "I know, neither understand I what thou sayest". He stresses the nature of his own rejection of knowledge of the Lord. A similar awareness of the weakness of the flesh is found in 7:21: "From within, out of the heart of man...".

14:69 *And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!*- Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial. This is absolutely psychologically credible.

14:70 *But he again denied it. And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter-* John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :66. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

*Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean-*

From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there came the words of Almighty God. And yet He spoke them in the accent of a rural Galilean. We know this because Peter was identified as being one of the Lord's close disciples because of His accent (Mt. 26:73; Mk. 14:70). The dialect of Aramaic used in Galilee was a permanent topic of sarcasm in Jerusalem circles. There is a story in the Mishnah (bErubin 53b) which mocks how the Galileans pronounced words which began with a guttural [deep-throat] consonant. It ridicules how a Galilean in Jerusalem tries to buy something in a market but is mocked by the merchant: "You stupid Galilean, do you need something to ride on [*hamair-* a donkey], or something to drink [*hamar-* wine], or something to make a dress with [*'amar-* wool], or something for a sacrifice [*immar-* lamb]". What an essay in God's preference for using the things which man despises- that He should arrange for His Son to speak His words in the most humanly despised dialect of the ecclesia. In this context, it is interesting to note the debate over the original text of Mk. 5:41, where the Lord is recorded as saying the Aramaic words *Talitha kum* in the oldest manuscripts, but it seems this has been changed to the more grammatically correct *Talitha kumi* in later codices. *Kum* would apparently have been the slovenly Galilean way of speaking, whereby the masculine form of the imperative is joined to a feminine subject. It could be that the Lord spoke in the Galilean way,

technically incorrect grammatically- as a Londoner might say 'We was waiting for a bus' rather than 'we were waiting...'; or an Ulsterman 'how are yous all?' rather than using the more correct 'you' for 'you' plural. If this is so, we have another window into the person of Jesus. There was a naturalness about Him, an expression of the ultimate image of God in totally human form, which was so attractive.

14:71 *But he began*- The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

*To curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak*- Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not... neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation. This can be read as meaning that Peter actually cursed Christ, as well as taking an oath that he didn't know Him. Commenting on the verb form of *anathematizein* there, Raymond Brown comments: "[it] should be taken transitively with 'Jesus' understood as the object: Peter cursed Jesus and took an oath that he had no personal acquaintance with him" - R.E. Brown, *The Death Of The Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1994) p. 605. I find it significant that the most awful detail about Peter's denials is provided in Mark's record, which I have suggested elsewhere is in fact Peter's record of the Gospel, written up by Mark.

"This man" suggests he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

14:72 *And immediately the second time the cock crew. And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times. And as he thought upon it, he wept*- It is only Mark who records the two cock crowings at the time of Peter's denial. Peter wished to quietly emphasize the exactness of fulfilment of the Lord's words about his denial. Mark / Peter likewise record Peter's words as: "I neither know nor understand what you mean". The 'what' can apply to both Jesus personally as well as the general 'being with' Jesus. Peter is

admitting that He had denied having any understanding at all of the Lord- the Lord whose knowledge he now preached. One can imagine Peter's voice quivering as he recounted his Gospel story. Note how Luke says that all the disciples slept in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:45); but Mark [Peter] records how only Peter, James and John slept (Mk. 14:37).

"Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

# MARK CHAPTER 15

15:1 *And immediately in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole council, made their decision and bound Jesus and took him away and delivered him up to Pilate-* Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29). For "Took Him away" see on Mt. 26:57 *Led Him away*.

15:2 *And Pilate asked him: Are you the King of the Jews?-* Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*And he answering said to him: So you say-* Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

15:3 *And the chief priests accused him of many things-* The accusations

were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: " as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent". The LXX has: "Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job's experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always "greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice. The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother

was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments. And yet the woman was to be silent... as Christ was. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband". And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

15:4 *And Pilate again asked him: Have you no answer to make?*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on to say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being

understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

*See how many accusations they make against you-* The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; here and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

A theme of the whole record is that the Lord gave His life of His own volition. This must be remembered as we reflect upon the background to the crucifixion. His refusal to answer Pilate meant that Pilate had to pronounce Him guilty (Mk. 15:4)- hence his marvel at the Lord's silence, as if the Lord was willingly allowing Himself to be condemned.

15:5 *But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate marvelled-* This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62,63; see on Mt. 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record.



Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it''. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

15:6 *Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them-* The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the

book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

*Whomever they requested-* Or, "wanted" (Mt.). In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in Mt. 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (Mt. 26:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (Mt. 26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (Mt. 6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (Mt. 26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

15:7 *And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man named Barabbas-* Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.)). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

15:8 *And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them-* They hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Lk. 23:16, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

15:9 *And Pilate answered them saying: Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?-* This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at

baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

15:10 *For he knew that because of envy the chief priests had delivered him up-* Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

15:11 *But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, that instead he should release Barabbas to them-* The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon

turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

15:12 *And Pilate again answered and said to them: What then shall I do to him whom you call the King of the Jews?*- This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their wish* that Jesus be crucified. See on Mt. 27:21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

15:13 *And they cried out again: Crucify him!*- When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

15:14 *And Pilate said to them: Why? What evil has he done? But they cried out exceedingly: Crucify him!*- We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

15:15 *And Pilate, wishing to calm the crowd, released to them Barabbas and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a

slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions. Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't". All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every

involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

15:16 *Then the soldiers led him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole battalion-* We wonder how many of those soldiers later converted to the Lord's side. Because surely their degrading of Him was done with strong quirks of bad conscience.

15:17 *And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him-* The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment. We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple (Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord

was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

15:18 *And they began to salute him: Hail, King of the Jews!*- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'. J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and *kept on* saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.



15:19 *And they hit his head with a rod and spat upon him, and kneeled down in homage to him-* The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

15:20 *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own garments-* The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

*And they led him out to crucify him-* The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led

away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

15:21 *And they compelled a passer-by to carry his cross, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the countryside, the father of Alexander and Rufus-* Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that

he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else...until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

*15:22 And they brought him to the place named Golgotha, which means, Place of the skull-* See on Jn. 19:25. John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

*15:23 And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not accept it-* To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The

dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.

- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that we have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

15:24 *And they crucify him and part his garments among themselves, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take-* There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing

in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them. *By casting lots*- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation

just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.



Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four

actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which

He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

15:25 *And it was the third hour when they crucified him*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening

His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm...four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was

oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

15:26 *And the inscription of the charge against him read: The King of the Jews-* It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him... in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua  
 h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]  
 v and King- u'Melek  
 h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim  
 giving the Yahweh Name:  
 hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last

laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".

15:27 *And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right hand and one on his left-* Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is



seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into

Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "... the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

15:28 *And the scripture was fulfilled, which said: And he was numbered with the transgressors-* Perhaps the idea is that in the eyes of men, the Lord was considered just another dying criminal, counted along with the two thieves. The idea of numbering might refer to some legal report of the crucifixion being made, numbering three victims. The context of Is. 53:12 is that it was through being numbered with sinners that the Lord could bare their sin. This means that sin no longer totally separates man from God; because the Lord was so identified with sinful man, feeling as a sinner although he never actually sinned. But the Hebrew idea of 'numbering' is of preparing (s.w. Dan. 1:5,10; Jonah 1:17; 4:6,7,8). Through the crucifixion experience, the Lord was prepared for His role of identification with us; and this was visually exemplified by His death amongst the worst of criminals.

15:29 *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying: Ha! You that would destroy the temple and build it in three days-* The Christian life, as crucified with Christ, cannot be kept secret from the world. This is why the place of crucifixion was so public- it was near a road, for passers by spoke to the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:29), and Simon was a passer-by coming in from the field (Gk. *agros*, Lk. 23:26). The cross confronted people in their daily living, just as it should us today. Quintillian (*Declamationes* 274) records how crucifixions were always held in the most public places where crowds would gather. For us, if we are living the crucified life with Jesus, it cannot be done in a corner. See on Rom. 4:25.

This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort

from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

15:30 *Save yourself and come down from the cross!*- All the emphasis on *save yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

15:31 *In like manner also the chief priests mocked among themselves and the scribes, saying: He saved others. Himself he cannot save!*- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

15:32 *Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so we may see and believe! And they that were crucified with him ridiculed him*- "Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn.

6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

15:33 *And when the sixth hour had come, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour-* Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son.*

Mark's account of the crucifixion has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). See on Lk. 23:48; Jn. 19:25.

15:34 *And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?-*

The Greek seems to mean "Why *did* You forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi"? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close

to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

<b>14th Nissan</b>	<b>9p.m.</b>	<b>Last Supper</b>
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth hour" to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at the ninth hour* that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of

distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the

entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

### **God will not forsake His people if they are righteous**

"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the

God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

### **God will forsake His people if they sin**

"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)

"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It is finished*".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body,



her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin- bearing and sin- feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)-

exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of Israel", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)

"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)

"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)

The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).

The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The

'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "leave (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bore our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*")

"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

"Hide not thy face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.

"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become

realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him. Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But

the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink "that the Scripture might be fulfilled", or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

### Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', *in Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

15:35 *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said: Look, he calls Elijah-* They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

15:36 *And one ran and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a rod and gave it to him to drink, saying: Leave him be. Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down-* When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh...I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has

prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

*15:37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed his last-* Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry was the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

*15:38 And the veil of the temple was torn in two- from the top to the bottom-* The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). "From the top" indicates that this was done by God. He was no longer hidden behind ritual, stones and sacred space. The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

*15:39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw how he breathed his last breath, he said: Truly this man was the Son of God-* He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

*15:40 And there were also women watching from afar, among whom were both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome-* Perhaps when He crossed Kidron He would have thought back to how Asa had to separate himself from his mother in the very same place (1 Kings 15:13). The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the

mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth.

We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross. See on Jn. 19:25; Rev. 14:4.

15:41 *Who, when he was in Galilee, had also followed him and ministered to him; and many other women that also had come with him up to Jerusalem-* The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. The reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male.

15:42 *And when evening had come, because it was the Preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath-* This confirms that the Lord died at the same time as the Passover lambs were slain; just as He had planned. His "last supper" was therefore a Passover held in advance.

15:43 *Joseph of Arimathaea, a councillor of honourable rank, who also was looking for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus-* Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel. He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their



discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man; for only close family members could ask for the body. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It

seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out

from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

15:44 *And Pilate wondered if he were already dead, and called the centurion. He asked him whether he was already dead-* Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller (*The Bible As History* p. 356) explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). if the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed". It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile... is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?". In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death. Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth

me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 38:10; 73:26).

15:45 *And when it was confirmed by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph-* We get the impression that the one thing Joseph wanted was to be given the crucified body of the Lord. And we are each "given" just that, as memorialized in the communion service. His body is given for each of us, and we should realize that it ought to cost us every penny we have and all our standing in society.

15:46 *And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock-* Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

*And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb-* This apparently needless detail is added because the camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

15:47 *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where he was laid-* They didn't stay there long, but the camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

# MARK CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him-* As noted on Jn., Joseph had bought a huge amount of spices to anoint the Lord, far more than used even for the burials of the Caesars. But the women still bought some more. They too made their sacrifice, in order to anoint the Lord. This all arose from their abiding belief that He was Jesus the Christ, the anointed one; and their duty was therefore to anoint Him. Belief in the Lord Jesus as Christ can roll off the tongue and be apparently painless; but it demanded all for Joseph and the women.

16:2 *And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun was risen, they went to the tomb-* The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave

early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

16:3 *And they were talking among themselves: Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*- The women who came to the garden tomb weren't looking for the risen Lord; they came to anoint the body. But their love of the Lord was counted to them as seeking Him (Mt. 28:5). Here's an example of our prayers and needs being answered whilst we are yet speaking. They worried about what had already been sorted!

16:4 *And looking up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled aside*- "Looking up" enables us to see them walking with their heads down in sadness. The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water, the gift of the Spirit, which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

They apparently didn't see the Angel sitting on the stone who is mentioned in Mt. 27:2. Perhaps the Divine plan was that they ought to have been searching for the empty tomb and rejoiced on finding it; and believed without the revelation of Angels. But eventually they needed the Angelic revelations. We too can walk by Angels sitting on stones...

16:5 *And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed*- If "the right side" refers to where the Lord had lain, we are invited to see Him now as enthroned superior to Angels, with them at His right hand, subject to Him. This is visual representation of what Hebrews 1 states specifically.

16:6 *And he said to them: Do not be alarmed*- The idea is 'You do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because Mt. 28:8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

*You seek Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid him!*- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds to the other records "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

The idea may be that He is 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?". There is no hint that the women obeyed and went to see the place where the Lord lay. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused



(Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

*16:7 Go tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see him, just as he told you-*

Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "... as he told you... Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel.

The Lord's original plan to meet them first in Galilee was changed; for He appeared to them in Jerusalem after they had first disbelieved. He was so eager to see them; and their faith and obedience was weak. This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell...* The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in Mt. 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyse our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (Mt. 28:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:

- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

*16:8 And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid-* There has always been opposition to spreading the Gospel outside our own environment. Jonah was unwilling to take it to Nineveh, Israel failed miserably in their intended role as a missionary nation, and the apostles showed remarkable reluctance to obey the

command to take Christ into all the world in the first century. The women were told to go tell the disciples of the resurrection, but they went away and told nobody, Mark records (Mk. 16:7,8). The other records say that they did tell the disciples. There is no contradiction here; Mark's point is surely that they were reluctant to obey the great commission initially.

It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples... and they departed quickly... and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen... and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

After initially saying nothing, they did eventually tell the disciples. Matthew and Luke omit this disobedience to the Lord's command to witness. The record in a beautiful way both covers their weakness, and yet also brings it out. In fact resistance to the command to tell others, or being slow to fulfil it, is another theme of the resurrection accounts.

16:9 *Now when he had risen from the dead early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons-* One would have expected that the Lord Jesus would have first of all appeared to His dear mother, after resurrecting. His mother could so easily have taken this as yet another snub, similar to the way in which He had rebuked her for not knowing He must be in His Father's house, how He addressed her at Cana as "Woman" and asked her what He had to do with her; how He told those who informed Him that His mother was outside that all those who heard God's word were His mothers; how He said that His mother wasn't blessed for suckling Him, but rather, blessed were all those who heard God's word. And the way He chose to appear to the other Mary rather than His own mother could have

been taken by her as yet another snub. Yet these incidents weren't snubs. The Lord loved His mother, with a depth of passion and emotion that maybe we [and she] will never know. Yet He wanted the best for her spiritually. He wanted her to relate to Him for who He really was, not for who she perceived Him to be. It must have so hurt the Lord to work with her in this way. And so it is with His workings with us, as He seeks to bring us to know Him in truth. It must be hard for Him to bring distress into our lives. Yet with His dear mother, it worked. For the next we read of her, she is meeting with the rest of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and, according to how we read Revelation 12, the Lord Himself saw her as clothed with the sun in glory, responsible for the birth of Himself as the man child, who would bring the Kingdom of God on earth. She made it in the end.

Mary Magdalene was the least qualified to be a witness. Women's testimony was not accepted in the Roman world; and Mary had previously been seriously 'demon possessed', probably referring to mental illness. And in addition to that she had worked as a prostitute. Yet she was the one chosen by the Lord as His star witness. We should not therefore worry about our own apparent inadequacy as witnesses. The Lord delights to use our inadequacies in this work of witness.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

16:10 *She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept-* The account of the disciples' response to the realisation of the resurrection shows perfectly how men will rise above every barrier, both within them and without, to speak the good news of what they now realise to be absolute truth. Mary, bashful ex-hooker that she was, "went and told them that had been with him", the broken-down women "with great joy... did run to bring his disciples word", those on the Emmaus road "went and told it unto the residue", "the other disciples *therefore*" told Thomas, John told Peter "It is the Lord", and finally they all "went forth, and preached everywhere" the news of the resurrection

(Mt. 28:8; Mk. 16:10,13,20; Jn. 20:25; 21:7). The speed and spirit of the narrative pounds away at a major theme: The natural desire to tell others the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection. This same spirit of *urgently* passing on good news pervades the preaching recorded in Acts.

Note that the disciples are described as "weeping" for the loss of Jesus, the Greek word meaning specifically to weep aloud (Mk. 16:10). And yet the Lord appears to them in that state and upbraids them for not believing His words and for having *hard* hearts (Mk. 16:14). Faith is so crucial- and for all their *love* of Him, they didn't have much *faith* in Jesus. Are there similarities with ourselves? Do we on one hand love Him, and yet remain hard hearted to His words?

16:11 *And they, when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, disbelieved-* There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. They considered it "Idle talk" (Lk. 24:11), which means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy. Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways.

16:12 *And after these things he was manifested in another guise to two of them as they walked on their way into the countryside-* The two could well have been Cleopas and his wife Mary, who had been at the crucifixion (see on Lk. 24:13). We wonder why He appeared in various forms which as it were disguised Him. Perhaps this was because He wanted them to believe with a minimum of miracle; He wanted them, as He wants us, to join the dots and believe, rather than having His in-your-face revelation directly to as it were force belief. And maybe the lesson was also that the same Lord can reveal Himself to us in different ways and forms through the persons of various ordinary people. Note too that *morphe*, "guise" or "form", does not refer to His essential nature, but to His appearance and deportment. This is valuable to bear in mind when considering the usage of *morphe* in Phil. 2 "the form of God".

16:13 *And they went away, and told it to the rest, who did not believe them either-* Although the disciples accepted that Jesus had appeared to Simon, they didn't believe the account of Cleopas and his friend. The record emphasizes their refusal to believe- and then goes on to appeal to the hearers or readers of their message to learn from their slowness, and

to believe and be baptized (:16). Their stubborn refusal to believe is so emphasized.

16:14 *And later he was manifested to the eleven themselves as they were eating; and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those that had seen him after he had risen-*  
The Lord "upbraided" the disciples for their immaturity and unbelief concerning His cross and resurrection. The Greek word is always used in a very severe context of 'reviling' (Mt. 5:11; 11:20; 27:44; Rom. 15:3; 1 Tim. 4:10); it's a tough and abusive word. It appears out of place when applied to the Lord. Yet what it indicates is that the Lord was so angry with them for not believing the witness of the women. Discounting people's experience of Jesus merely on account of their gender or background was so angering to the Lord. And He's the same today.

A read through the Gospels reveals the deep frustration and anger of the Lord Jesus because of the blindness of the disciples. Mark's record brings this out especially. The following comments by the Lord, almost under His breath, were all made within a matter of days of each other: "Peter said, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand?... do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand? Perceive ye not yet... having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?... how is it that ye do not understand?... O faithless generation, *how long* shall I be with you? *how long* shall I suffer you? (with reference to the disciples' faithlessness)... the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth (i.e. responded) *again*, and saith unto them, Children ...and they were astonished out of measure... Jesus went before them: and they were amazed... and he took *again* the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen... Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask" (Mt. 15:17; 16:9; Mk. 8:18,21; 9:19; 10:1,24-32). Notice the stress on "how long" and "yet". The Lord clearly was disappointed at the slow rate of development. Their blindness was an agony to Him. Especially does this come out in His attitude to the disciples after His resurrection. The exalted Son of God, *the Son of God*, poured out His anger on those eleven men. You get the sense of them cowering before the presence of a super-human intellect, beneath a force of personality that could concuss men when turned against them. He *upbraided* them for their lack of perception, their lack of understanding (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:25). As I read the record of this, there's part of me that feels so sorry for them. Thoughts of sympathy skate through my mind: *they weren't a bad crowd... only ordinary men... just poor little human beings down here on earth... only men... only human beings... limited by their own nature*. But this wasn't how the Lord saw it at all. He was angry with them. The picture of the Son of God, the exalted Son of man with eyes as a flame of fire, upbraiding His friends, those he had died for... because they hadn't

understood something which he knew and they knew had been within their power to. The picture is awesome.

The experience of emotion on reflection at the Lord's sufferings can be yet another area where our spirituality isn't genuine. The scene of those 11 grown men mourning and weeping at the loss of their Lord makes me think 'They were a soft hearted lot really, behold how they loved him...'. But then the Lord appears to them and upbraids them for being *hard* hearted and indifferent to His words (Mk. 16:10,14). His upbraiding of them must have really hurt- for they must have been sure that they were anything but hard hearted towards Him.

The even greater commission to go into all the world with the Gospel followed straight on from Christ upbraiding the eleven "with their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mk. 16:14,15). That 'upbraiding' must have left them wallowing in their weakness. It would have been quite something. The Son of God upbraiding His friends. But straight on from that: "Go ye... go ye into all the world" (Mt. cp. Mk. shows "go ye" was said twice). And He told them to preach that those who believed not would be damned- after having just told them that they were men who believed not. Mark's record stresses three times in the lead up to this that they "believed not"; and then, he records how they were told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that. The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide was in fact alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the 'Gehenna' of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent "unto the nations...and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles". The rejection process glorifies God's righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men "out of all nations" (:20) to God, just as Israel's condemnation was an "instruction" unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace.

16:15- see on Mk. 14:9.

*And he said to them: You are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation-* The essential spirit of the great commission was "Go!", following on as it does from the repeated commands to "go" and share the glorious news that Christ had risen. And yet so many congregations of believers seem to stress instead "Come in to us!". And every manner of carrot is dangled before the public to entice them to 'come in' to some church event. But the emphasis was clearly, and should still be, upon 'going' to people. Our turning of 'Go!' into 'Come to us' is all part of a wider picture, whereby the group of hard core, desperate men who first followed Jesus, the whores, the gamblers, the mentally ill, the

marginalized women... have all been diluted into a religion of conformists, a spiritual bubble in which we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, and comfortably continue in the way of our fathers who were also members of the same church as we are.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. We are to preach to "all the world" (16:15)- the *kosmos*. In the last days, the Gospel will go to "all nations"- every *ethnos* (Mk. 13:10). The parallel record in Mt. 24:14 has Jesus saying that it must go to the whole world- *oikoumene*. What did He actually say? I suggest He used both words, in an emphasis of just how universal the witness would be: 'The Gospel will be preached in the whole *oikoumene*, yes, to every *ethnos*...'. This is all some emphasis- every creature (individual), in the whole world system, every part of society (*kosmos*), of every nation (*ethnos*), on the whole planet (*oikoumene*) was to have the message. And this is our unmistakable mandate. The number of different words used by the Lord was surely intentional.

As so often with reading the Gospels, it is profitable to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke the words which are recorded. "Go ye *into all the world* and preach the gospel to *every creature*". If only we could sense the intensity of desire, the deepness of spiritual meaning, which His voice would have conveyed. We *must* have the spiritual ambition to take the Gospel to the whole world- no matter how small our world may be. The world of our street, of our town, nation- and as far as we are able, the whole planet. Paul had this ambition, quite apart from any personal commission he received.

The great commission is framed in language which picks up on the descriptions of the Lord's own preaching earlier in His ministry. His idea clearly enough is that He will no longer be on earth; therefore His people must be 'Him' to the whole earth:

#### **The great commission to us**

Make disciples (Mt. 28:19)

Preach the Gospel, teach people (Mk. 16:15)

Proclaim repentance (Lk. 24:47)

Forgive and retain sins (Jn. 20:23)

#### **The personal preaching of Jesus**

Made disciples (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11)

Proclaimed the Gospel (Lk. 4:18), taught people (Mk. 6:30)

Proclaimed repentance (Mk. 1:15)

Forgave sins (Mt. 9:1-9; Mk. 2:1-12)



Retained sins (Jn. 8:21-24;  
9:41)

Witnessed to others in  
obedience to the great  
commission (Acts 1:8)

Cast out demons, heal (Mk.  
16:16)

Witnessed what he had seen  
and heard (Jn. 3:11)

Cast out demons (Mk. 3:15;  
6:7,13), healed (Mk. 6:13)

*16:16 He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieves shall be condemned-* In the very context of the Lord upbraiding them for their slowness to believe the Gospel of His death and resurrection, they were asked to go and teach others that he who didn't believe this same message would be damned (Mk. 16:15,16). Their witness, as it is recorded in the Gospel records, is therefore shot through with recognition of their own weakness. They record how Peter their leader was described by the Lord as a "satan" (Mk. 8:33). They were good fishermen- yet their records show that never do they record themselves as catching a fish without their Lord's help. In this they set a model for our witness; it must be shot through with a full recognition of our weakness, our own struggles to believe that which we invite others to believe. And the more real, the more credible. Not only did the Gospel writers portray their own weakness and slowness to believe; they write in such a way as to minimize their own personalities and presence. They don't continually harp on about the fact they were really present.

*16:17 And these signs shall accompany them that believe- in my name shall they cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues-* All the "they shall" clauses in :17 and :18 were fulfilled in various examples of Divine protection to the early preachers of the Gospel. "If they drink any deadly thing..." is worded in a conditional way, and we have no Biblical example of this happening, although traditions exist of various apostles being unharmed by poison.

*16:18 They shall pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no way hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover-* See on :17. In Old Testament times, God described His whole people as His anointed one, His Christ: "The Lord is a strength unto his people, and he is the saving strength of his anointed" (Ps. 28:8 RVmg.). The whole people were His anointed King, His Messiah, the anointed one. And so it is for all those today who are "in Christ". Thus the prophecy about Christ personally that He would tread upon snakes and wild animals (Ps. 91:13) is quoted as being fulfilled in the disciples, who 'were' Christ on their preaching mission (Lk. 10:19; Mk. 16:18).

Not being hurt alludes to the promise of how the restored Israel would be in Is. 43:2. Those somewhat confused men and women were now the new Israel.

*16:19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God-* The emphasis is therefore on the fact that the great commission was His last word to His people; after He spoke that, He was received into Heaven. We might expect to read that He 'ascended', but Mark's focus is on His being received into heaven. The ceremony of His 'receiving into heaven' is recorded in more detail in Revelation 4 and 5. Paul alludes here in saying that the Lord was received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16). The cloud which "received" Him (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:9) was therefore a cloud of glory. It was a sign of His acceptance by God, visible to the watching disciples.

The Ethiopic text brings out the reality more strongly: "Our Lord, the Lord Jesus" was received up to "his own Father". Our man is now there in Heaven, with His Father. He is God's right hand man, functioning as God without being God the Father Himself. As noted on Acts 7:56, the Lord is seated at God's right hand; but He stands up in passion and intercession for His people on earth. He is not in that sense sedentary, passively sitting.

*16:20 And they went and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen-* Luke has the disciples returning to Jerusalem and focusing upon praise of their ascended Lord; Mark focuses upon their obedience to the great commission, the Lord's last word to them. That witness was made, as ours should be, in a spirit of homage and praise to the Lord Jesus. And He who was now in Heaven worked with them in their witness. Any obedience to the great commission will result in a definite sense of the Lord's working with us, even if the form of confirmation of our word has changed from miraculous gifts to more subtle forms of Spirit manifestation. The same word for 'working with' is used in 2 Cor. 6:1, again in the context of evangelism, when Paul remarks that the Lord Jesus is a worker together with "us". The promise of His co-working with us is not therefore limited to the disciples who first heard Him.

## The New European Bible Commentary: Luke

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### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us-* "The things ["matters"]" believed are those of Acts 8:12, the things about the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. But the "things" of the gospel are the "things" of the gospel records. The gospels are transcripts of how e.g. Luke preached the gospel. So the gospel message, "the things" of the Gospel, are to be found in the gospels. The gospel is not a theology collected from the whole New Testament.

Luke saw the whole of the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

1:2 *Even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word-* The "many" of :1 who had tried to draw up a narrative of the Lord's life and work had handed their eyewitness accounts to Luke, who was now collating them. Perhaps Luke did this in preparation of evidence for Paul's trials at Caesarea and / or Rome. Luke says that the eyewitness accounts had been handed to "us". He may be using the 'royal we' [i.e. referring only to himself] or to a group for whom he acted as inspired secretary. So Luke's inspired Gospel was compiled from the testimonies of "those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word" (Lk. 1:2,3). Some of the events he records could only have been told him by women; and so the Spirit accepted their witness, and encouraged them to make it because God accepted their witness. Only women were witnesses of the Lord's burial- yet belief in His burial is listed by Paul as an essential part of the faith. Yet the only reason the early believers had to believe this was the testimony of women.

Luke saw the link between the Lord's death and His whole life when he says that they had been "eyewitnesses" of the Lord's ministry, using the Greek word for autopsy- Luke saw his record of the Lord's life as being an autopsy of His death (Lk. 1:2). Here we find what we shall often note throughout Luke's writings- the usage of medical language.

*1:3 It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus-* Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote (:4), one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account. Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how "Whereever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

*1:4 That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught-* The history of Jesus was something in which a new convert was "instructed" or [Gk.] catechized, as if the Gospel record was learnt by repetition. This is understandable given the largely illiterate nature of society at the time. Luke as a serious historian mentions his sources, describing them as "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word". The Greek *hyperetes* which translates "ministers" is the Greek form of the Hebrew *hazzan*. The word recurs in Lk. 4:20, about the "minister of the synagogue". The task of the minister was to look after the scrolls- "the chest with the books was brought in to the synagogue when required from an adjoining room and brought back there afterwards". Luke's idea is that instead of humping a bunch of scrolls around, the 'ministers' were the eyewitnesses who recited what they had heard of Jesus. But because they would die out, there was a need for people like Luke to compose documents which recorded their testimony.

*1:5 There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah, and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elisabeth-* Luke is careful throughout to present everything with detailed historical accuracy, and his inspired accounts have held up against the bitterest critics. Any uninspired account would surely have gaping holes in it which the critics would by now have exposed. For writing history of events over a 50 year period in those days would surely reveal errors of history, geography and other fact unless the account was inspired.

1:6 *And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless-* These words are applied to us all in Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:13. We are to have the serene spirituality, all down the years, of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias was "blameless" in God's sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered. Paul talks of being "righteous before God" in Romans, perhaps also borrowing this language; and he argues that we have this status only by faith in imputed righteousness. For of ourselves, none can be right before God. Nor of course can any man apart from the Lord Jesus claim to walk in the Father's laws "blameless". In God's sight / presence no man is justified (Ps. 143:2). It could be that this status was applied to them through their faith in forgiveness, in the implications of the promises to David and Abraham, which Zechariah so well understood according to his song of praise at the end of this chapter.

1:7 *And they had no child, because Elisabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years-* The record is deconstructing the common idea that the fruit of the womb would be given to the righteous, and withheld from the unrighteous. They walked blameless, as Job apparently did (Job 1:1), but still "trouble came".

1:8 *Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his division-* The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice. It was *whilst* Zacharias went about his service to the Lord that we was given the news that he would finally have a son. And we all find this true. As we enter more deeply and more passionately into the things of the Lord, so He leads us further into new understandings and fresh areas of endeavour. According to the AV of Gen. 24:27, it was whilst Abraham's servant was "in the way" of going God's path, that he was led by God to find the fulfilment of his mission in getting a wife for Isaac: "I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren". There is a similar idea in Acts 13:2: "And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them".

1:9 *According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense-* This honour was chosen by lot, and it fell upon Zacharias. And surely we have here an example of how the drawing of lots is at times overruled by God (Prov. 16:33). It was a tradition that no priest ever did this twice (*T. Bab. Yoma*, fol. 26. 1), and there were apparently 20,000 priests at this time. So Zacharias had waited all his life for this honour, and he was surely being nudged to see that he could also receive something he had waited all his life for, a child. This burning of incense had its reflection in the heavenly tabernacle (Rev.

8:3); or rather, the earthly tabernacle was a reflection of the heavenly. Hence *elohim* is used in the OT for both priests and Angels; the priests were to act as a copy of the Angelic system in the heavenly throne room. This is a common idea in Revelation, the comfort being that situations on earth are acted out in heaven, and through the operation of the vast Angelic system above us, man is not alone in this world. The incense represented prayer, not only of the people but of the offering priest personally; and Zacharias was being again nudged towards believing that his lifetime of prayer was actually getting through to God. But his disbelief of the answer indicates that he failed to perceive these things as intended.

1:10 *And the whole crowd of the people were praying outside in the hour of incense-* There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to the Lord's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). Joel 2:17 and many other passages suggest that the faithful remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days; for the events at the Lord's first coming are typical of those at His second coming. The prayer of the crowd was represented by the cloud of incense. But Zacharias failed to perceive as he might have done that the incense also represented his own personal prayers; he was too focused upon the external service, and the general concept of prayer, that he overlooked this.

1:11 *And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense-* Here we see the priest's offering of incense paralleled with the prayer of the people, and in reply to these prayers and those of Zacharias an Angel comes and stands at the right hand of the altar of incense to announce the granting of the peoples' request (for forgiveness), and Zacharias' request for a child, in the form of the birth of John and his ministry of reconciliation with God. The incense altar represented the offering of prayer- the Angel coming to stand at the right side of the altar indicates answered prayer. The command from the altar (of incense?) in Rev. 9:14 to the sixth Angel telling Him to loose other Angels was maybe from this same Angel of answered prayer. All these suggestions need very careful development, especially guarding against making the Angels rather than Jesus our mediator. There is only one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

1:12 *Zacharias was disturbed when he saw him, and fear fell upon him-* The contrast is with Mary, who after her initial surprise, rejoiced that an Angel had come to answer her prayers for the Messianic child. His fear was related to a sense of sin that had not been dealt with; even though as noted on :6, God counted him righteous. This is comfort indeed; that we may feel guilty for sin, fear before God in a wrong sense, when in fact we are counted righteous by Him. We can take false guilt [as opposed to the true guilt we at times need to feel].

1:13 *But the angel said to him: Fear not, Zacharias, because your prayer is heard; your wife Elisabeth shall carry a son and you shall call his name John-* "Fear not" is said so often when Angels appear to men, and we will likely need to hear those words when the Angels are sent forth to gather us to judgment. Divine presence convicts of sin, and yet we are of course just as much in that presence constantly.

Because God responds to our spirit, our overall situation, sometimes He does things which seem to be an answer of prayers which were not properly believed in by the person who prayed. Examples include: Gen. 30:16,17; Ex. 14:10,11 cp. Neh. 9:9; Ps. 31:22; Lk. 1:13. Belief and unbelief can quite comfortably co-exist in a man (Mk. 9:24; Jn. 12:39-43). These prayers were answered because God saw the overall situation, He read the spirit of those who prayed and responded appropriately, even if their faith in their specific, vocalized prayers was weak. Perhaps in similar vein, James 4:6 appears to teach that God will hear the prayers of the humble man when a proud man is praying at the same time; faith is not mentioned here. In the light of this we notice how all the prayers of Zacharias are called in the singular "your prayer".

1:14 *And you shall have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth-* The Angel hoped that "many" would perceive in John's birth the good news of Messiah's soon appearing; for the rejoicing was to be because of his significance in God's plan (:15). But did "many" rejoice in this sense? Perhaps as with many such predictions, it is stating a potential rather than an actual truth. "Joy and gladness" is a term only used elsewhere about all of us as we look forward to the Lord's coming (1 Pet. 1:8). Zacharias and Elisabeth are therefore set up as every believer. See on :16.

1:15 *For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord. And he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb-* Paul seems to have admired the humility John the Baptist manifested in his preaching. He knew he had been chosen from the womb for his mission, as John had been (Gal. 1:15 = Lk. 1:15). Paul was keen for others to copy John the Baptist, to find in him the inspiration which he too had found. So he encourages his Ephesians not to drink wine but instead be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)- the very language of John (Lk. 1:15). In other words, 'Be like that Spirit-filled zealot John rather than enjoying the sloppy pleasures of this life!'

"John did no miracle" (Jn. 10:41) and yet he was filled with the Spirit. The promises of our likewise being filled with the Spirit are often discounted because we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. But being filled

with the Spirit is not the same as having the ability to do miracles. John was filled with the Spirit from the womb; so the filling of the Spirit is not solely in response to our own efforts. The idea here is that God had a plan for John, and John chose to follow it and walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This is why Paul can lament that in one sense the Corinthians had been filled with the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1), they were not living according to the potential made possible by the gift of the Spirit which is purely on God's initiative. The same term "filled with the Spirit" is used of both John's parents (:41,67). This was a little family open to being filled with the Spirit, and so they were filled. The appeal to allow ourselves to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) shows we are to live open to and receptive of such filling.

*1:16 And many of the children of Israel shall be turned to the Lord their God-* "Many" – relatively- would be converted to the true ways of God by the work of John the Baptist, whilst numerically the majority of those who heard John's message eventually turned away from it, culminating in their crucifixion of the Messiah. See on Mt. 20:16. Or it could mean that many potentially could have been converted. Or many were converted- but fell away. This is the sense in which "many" is used in :14. "Many" were to rejoice at John's birth and significance before God. But how many did? "Many" potentially could have done.

The idea of hearts being turned to the Lord alludes to the intended work of the historical Elijah (1 Kings 18:37) which was to be achieved by the Elijah prophet who heralded Messiah (Mal. 4:6). This was only potentially true; Elijah only converted a minority. John the Baptist is prophesied as achieving this with "many"; but again, this did not happen. And so the prophecy is rescheduled for fulfilment in the work of the latter day Elijah prophet. As we go out into this world and meet apparent disinterest, we need to remember that potentially, people can respond. They are actually actively resisting what is potentially possible for them.

We note too that this passage and 1 Kings 18:37 speak of the Elijah prophet turning hearts to the Lord their God, whereas Mal. 4:6 speaks of hearts being turned in reconciliation within families, the fathers to the children and vice versa. This is the two-dimensional approach taken in the New Testament, especially in John's letters; reconciliation to God involves reconciliation with our brethren, and the two cannot be divorced from each other.

*1:17 And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord-* As noted on :16, if hearts turn to God then they turn to their own brethren. We cannot turn to God without turning to our brethren; baptism is into the body of Christ and not simply into a totally individual relationship with



the Father and Son. Latter day Israel will *turn* to the Lord their God, and part-and-parcel of this process will be the *turning* of the hearts of the fathers to the children (Lk. 1:16,17). When Israel earlier played traitor to their brethren, by doing so they broke their marriage covenant with God (Mal. 2:10); their attitude to their brethren was essentially their attitude to their Heavenly Father. Our God and our brethren simply can't be separated. Asa's broken relationship with God resulted in him 'crushing' the people at the same time (2 Chron. 16:10 AVmg.). See on Jn. 8:42.

Lk. 1:17 gives the Spirit's commentary upon Elijah's achievement. The "spirit and power" of Elijah had been to turn "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" and to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord". And yet Elijah felt his ministry had been a failure; that nobody had responded. And yet his achievement with a minority is used as a prototype for the later achievement of both John the Baptist and the latter-day Elijah prophet. There's a great encouragement for us here. We may feel our witness, our ministry, even our life's work- be it in formal preaching, in raising children, in seeking to be the salt of the earth- has been without fruit. But actually, according to the pattern of Elijah, we may achieve far more ultimately than we realize, even if the fruits are seen after our death. What's important, as it was in Elijah's life, is the spirit and power we personally develop and set as an example; even if concretely and materially we don't achieve what we aim to in the lives of others. It was in this sense that God used Elijah, and uses us. Elijah's own "spirit" was imperfect- elitist, judgmental, angry etc. But his more essential spirit was focused upon by a loving, positive Father. This comforts us in our immaturities, and encourages us to view positively our brethren who seem stuck within the parameters of their natural personality and cannot, it seems, overcome all weaknesses of their spirit.

John's ministry failed, in that he did not prepare much of a people for the Lord Jesus. They crucified Him. But it was potentially possible. "Prepared" in Greek carries the idea of to create or build; there is introduced here the idea of a new creation of persons who would have their existence in the new order predicated upon their faith in Jesus.

1:18- see on Lk. 22:45.

*And Zacharias said to the angel: How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years-* Mary likewise had this question as to "how shall this be", but the same words were spoken with a different attitude. She believed, but was naturally curious to know the mechanical side of how a virgin was going to conceive. Zacharias asked the same question but from a motive of unbelief. The same words may be found on different lips, but are judged differently by God. This shows how we should not judge others' words not least because we cannot judge, we cannot see to the heart which is behind the external words and actions. In this case, like us so often, Zacharias listed all the human barriers to the

fulfilment of God's word, and considered them more powerful than the word of God.

It seems Zacharias probably said far more than "How shall I know this?" when Gabriel told him he would soon have a son. It would seem the conversation went on for so long that the people outside wondered why he was staying so long. Presumably he remonstrated with the Angel with other, graciously unrecorded words, and thereby earned the punishment of dumbness. At the shores of the Red Sea, it seems Moses' faith wavered, and he prayed something at best inappropriate. All we read is God's response: "Why do you cry to me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Ex. 14:15). It seems again that Moses' "cry" isn't recorded- by grace.

1:19- see on 3 Jn. 11.

*And the angel answering said to him: I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you these good tidings-* Answers to prayer are uttered in the heavenly throne room, in the presence of God and the Angels. Zacharias had been demonstrating this by offering the incense which passed into the holiest place, visually teaching that prayer really does get through to the presence of God. But he failed to grasp the reality that *his* prayers actually were like this. And an Angel had been sent from that Heavenly presence to a man on earth with good news of an answer which had already been decided- and the man failed to believe it. This is the case with how the "good tidings" of the Gospel have likewise been issued and taken to men- and they disbelieve.

1:20 *And you shall be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season-* Again, the case of Zacharias is compared unfavourably with that of Mary who believed, and who opened her mouth in joyful praise after accepting the good news. His unbelief must have been stubborn and pronounced; as noted on :18, his words of disbelief must have been extended enough for the people to wonder why he delayed so long in the temple. The words of Zacharias were to be limited because he had not believed God's words. Therefore when his mouth was opened, he spoke God's prophetic words; his words were God's words.

1:21 *And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple-* As noted on :18, the delay was long because he had apparently argued back with the Angel in denial that his prayers of his youth really could be answered now. It took half an hour to burn the incense (Rev. 8:1-3); the long delay means that he may have argued back with the Angel for at least another half an hour.

1:22 *And when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, and he continued making signs to them and remained dumb-* He was unable to utter the blessing of Num. 6:23-27. His lack of faith therefore resulted in a lack of blessing for the people he served. The lack of blessing was surely a hint that something was wrong with Israel; they needed repentance and radical reformation.

1:23 *And it came to pass, when his time of service was ended, he went to his home-* This could suggest that he retired from the priesthood. The raising of John the Baptist and preparation for Messiah were perceived by him as more important than continuing the Mosaic rituals. "Ended" is the same word used for how Zacharias and Elisabeth were "filled" with the Spirit (:41,67). We surely have here a hint at the passing over from the ministry of the law to that of the Spirit.

1:24 *And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying-* To sleep with her on returning home was surely an act of faith. Perhaps this was why he went straight to his home (:23) rather than remaining in the temple. She "hid herself", perhaps by simply not going out of the house, in order to focus upon her relationship with the Father, and to avoid being caught up in all the inevitable gossip and conspiracy theories which would have arisen. The idea is that she hid herself because the Lord had done things to her.

1:25 *Thus has the Lord done to me in the days wherein he looked upon me, to take away my reproach among men-* She felt the Lord was looking upon her during her pregnancy; but she was blameless "before God", in His eyes / presence (:6). Yet the wonder of her status in His eyes was unappreciated as it might have been. We have the same problem. Her joy was that her "reproach among men" had been taken away, quoting the words of unspiritual Rachel in Gen. 30:23; we would think that she might instead have focused upon the huge significance of John in God's salvation purpose. But for all these human weaknesses, she and her husband were accepted before God.

1:26 *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth-* The "sixth month" was presumably of Elisabeth's pregnancy. She concealed her pregnancy for five months (:24) and then announced it. Mary would have heard this, and been given the potential encouragement that with God, pregnancy was possible. And having been thus prepared for her challenge of faith, the angel comes and gives it to her. We too are prepared for our challenges to faith, often by meeting or hearing of others who have likewise endured. God chose a poor village girl who dreamt of being Messiah's mother, not one of the

Jerusalem elite. The word "Nazareth" may mean nothing to us in our age, but in first century Israel it was a term of contempt, for nothing good ever came out of that town (Jn. 1:46). To that dumb mountain village, to an illiterate teenager, there came an Angel with the amazing news that she had been chosen to bear God's Son.

*1:27 To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary-* As she was a betrothed virgin, we can assume she was still a teenager; as most girls were married by 20. She was "of the house of David" and therefore her child would have in any case been the legitimate Davidic king of Israel. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context.

*1:28 And he came in to her and said: Greetings, you that are highly favoured, the Lord is with you!*- See on :38. Mary is set up as the representative and epitome of all Israel / the people of God should have been. She was the seed of David, the daughter of Zion from whom Messiah came. The "highly favoured... blessed" woman is the daughter of Zion of Joel 2:21-27; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:14,15; 9:9. She "rejoiced" as the daughter of Zion was to rejoice at the coming of her king. She was the "servant Israel", the "handmaiden" (the female form of "servant") who was now "holpen" by God (Lk. 1:54). "Blessed be the fruit (LXX offspring) of your womb" (Dt. 28:1,4) was the promise made to Israel- and these words are applied to Mary in Lk. 1:42. See on Rev. 12:5; Mt. 5:6.

Mary was "highly favoured"; yet the only other place the word occurs is in Eph. 1:6, where we are told that "He has made *us* accepted [highly favoured] in Christ". Thus in the thinking of Paul and the Spirit, Mary is to represent all of us.

Hannah's song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a *katalyma* on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the "inn" in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask *why* Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as "favoured" (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name 'Hannah'. The record

is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- 'Hail, Hannah-like one'. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel's bidding. She came to share God's perception of her as a woman like Hannah. 'Hannah' comes from the Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / 'Hannah-ed' by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah's song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world's perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting "Hail!", literally, 'rejoice!'. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:

1 Samuel      Luke / Magnificat

1:3	1:7
1:18	:38, 30
2:1	:46
1:11	:48
2:2	:49
2:4	:51
:3	:51
:4	:52
:8	:52
:5	:53
:10	:69
:26	2:52

:10 anointed LXX "His Christ"- the first occurrence of 'Messiah' in the O.T.

And there are plenty of allusions in the Magnificat to other parts of Scripture and well known Apocryphal writings, especially the Psalms, which Mary evidently had committed to memory:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has found gladness in God my Saviour;* Ps 35:9 Then my soul will find gladness in the Lord; It will take pleasure in His salvation. I Sam 2:1,2 (Hannah's hymn): My heart is strengthened in the Lord; My horn is exalted in my God...I delight in your salvation.

Hab. 3: 18 (Habakkuk's hymn): I shall find gladness in the Lord; I shall rejoice in God my Saviour.

*Because He has regarded the low estate of His handmaid-*

I Sam 1:11 (Hannah praying for a child): O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid,

Gen 29:32 (Leah after childbirth): Because the Lord has regarded my low estate.

4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman): God heard you're your handmaid and regarded my low estate, And considered my distress and gave me a son.

*For behold, henceforth all generation will call me fortunate-*

Gen 30:13 (Leah after childbirth): Fortunate am I, for all women call me fortunate.

*Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.*

Deut. 10:21 (Moses to Israel): He is your God who has done great things in you.

Zeph. 3:17: The Lord your God is in you, A Mighty One will save you.

*And holy is His Name,*

Ps. 111:9: Holy and awesome is His name.

*And His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.*

Ps 103:17:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him.

Psalms of Solomon 13:11: His mercy upon those who fear Him.

*He has shown His strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones*

*and has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.*

I Sam 2:7-8 (Hannah's hymn): The Lord makes poor and makes rich: He reduces to lowliness and he lifts up. He lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap He raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory.

Ps. 89:11(10- a hymn praising God's action for the Davidic king): You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: And by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies.

Sirach 10:14: He has put down the thrones of princes and has seated the humble before them.

Job 12:19: He has overthrown the mighty.

1QM xiv 10-11: You have raised the fallen by your strength, and have cut down the high and mighty.

Ezek 21:31 LXX (26 Heb.): Having reduced the proud to lowliness, and having exalted the man of low degree.

Ps 107:9: He has filled the soul of the hungry with good things.

*He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke unto our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever.*

Isa. 41:8-9: You, O Israel, My servant Jacob whom I chose, seed of Abraham whom I loved, whom I have helped from the ends of the earth.

Ps. 98:3: He has remembered His mercy to Jacob and His goodness to the House of Israel.

Psalms of Solomon 10:4: And the Lord will remember His servants in mercy.

Micah 7:20: You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Israel, as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

2 Sam. 22:51 (David's hymn at the end of his life) Showing mercy to His anointed one, to David and his posterity forever.

And a few more:

Luke

1:47 = Gen. 21:6

1:48 = Ps. 138:6 LXX; Gen. 30:13

1:49 = Ps. 126:2,3; 111:9

1:50 = Gen. 17:7

1:51 = Ps. 118:14,15.

1:29 *But she was greatly disturbed at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of greeting this might be*- She has a natural reaction of shock to the news, but unlike Zacharias, she gets over it and joyfully believes her ambitious prayers have been answered. "Cast in her mind" translates a word often used in Luke about people struggling within their minds to process the challenge of Christ, and coming down on the side of unbelief. Mary alone comes down on the side of belief (Lk. 3:15; 5:21,22; 12:17; 20:14). We all have these struggles, in which our faith and our unbelief struggle together. She wondered whether in fact the news was bad or good. And she came down to the obvious truth- that the Gospel of Christ is good news. Why should we wonder whether such positive greeting, "highly favoured... blessed" should in fact be a bad kind of greeting? We also have such language applied to us. The message of Christ is either the sickest trick- or what it claims to be, good news. Many refuse to believe it because we are wired to not believe good news, pure grace. But she is set up as an example to us all.

1:30 *And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary. For you have found favour with God*- The emphasis is that she *had* found favour with God, and she need not doubt the truth of those words of grace; see on :29.

When the LXX and Hebrew readings are combined, it becomes evident that the Angel is inviting Mary to see herself as the "daughter of Zion":

### **Zeph. 3**

Rejoice [LXX *chaire*], daughter of Zion (Zeph. 3)

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of you [*en meso sou*] (Zeph. 3)

### **Luke 1:28-31**

Rejoice [*chaire*]...[Mary] Notice how *chaire* is also addressed to the Daughter of Zion in Zech. 9:9, a passage also applied to Jesus in Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:14,15.

The Lord is with you [*meta sou*]. "The king of Israel" was a well known Messianic title. He was in the midst of Mary in the

	sense that He was now in her womb.
Do not be afraid, Zion (Zeph. 3)	Do not be afraid, Mary
The Lord your God is with / in you (Zeph. 3)- the Hebrew can imply 'in your interior parts', cp. the womb	You have found favour with God. We can perceive a double meaning now in Zephaniah's words- the Lord God was with Mary, but was also within her manifest in His Son.
The mighty one will save you (Zeph. 3)	"God my Saviour"- as if Mary picked up the allusions and responded to them.

Lk. 1:30 is alluded to in Heb. 4:16. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah.

1:31 *And you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus-* "You shall" may have the emphasis upon "shall"; her prayers for these things would indeed be answered. The whole language of conception, bringing forth, and the future tenses all combine to preclude the theory of any physical pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. He began, as a cell, dividing and subdividing until it became a foetus. And that was His personal beginning.

1:32 *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his ancestor David-* Again we note the future tenses, precluding any personal pre-existence of the Lord. "He shall be great" is what Zacharias had just been told in :15. The response of Mary and Zacharias is clearly compared and contrasted; and the illiterate teenage girl comes out presented as a far stronger believer than the legally obedient Zacharias. Mary's Biblical mind [for she alludes to Scripture with such felicity] would have figured that God had to be the Father of the Davidic seed; and a woman in David's line, just like herself, had to be the mother. But how that was to come about was of course a challenge to her faith.

1:33 *And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end-* The Lord Jesus will have a Kingdom, the house of Jacob, which shall have no end. According to Isaiah, "of the *increase*" of His Kingdom there will be no end; surely meaning that the Lord's domination of the believers' minds will grow and grow; our relationship with Him will grow progressively deeper. The Lord's kingship over Jacob would be eternal, uninterrupted. It has not therefore fully begun. "His kingdom" and "the house of Jacob" are paralleled. His



domain, over which He is King, is therefore essentially a group of persons.

1:34 *And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be, seeing I do not know a man?*- So great is the depth of Mary's perception that I am led to make the suggestion that she may have actually comprehended that Isaiah 7:14 required a virgin to be made pregnant by God, and she was anticipating this happening. I am led to this possibility by musing upon her question here. She had been told that she was to bear the Son of God, Messiah, but initially she is not told that this would be due to the Holy Spirit coming upon her. Her response is to ask how this will be possible, seeing she doesn't know a man. Yet she was engaged to a man, and engagements in Galilee rarely lasted longer than a year. The obvious deduction for her would have been to think that when her and Joseph married, their child would be Messiah. So why does she ask how it can be, seeing she doesn't know a man sexually? Is there not here the implication that she had picked up on the Angel's allusion to Isaiah 7:14 and realized that it required a virgin to conceive in order to make the Messiah both Son of God and son of David through a woman? And so she asks how actually this is going to come about; as if to say 'OK I understand it requires a virgin conception, but how physically is it going to work out?'. Most marriages were arranged marriages; she had been betrothed to Joseph, but was earnestly praying to be mother of Messiah, and yet she realized that it required a virgin conception. And yet soon, she would be married. She must have feared that her life was going to become just like that of any other woman. But now with ecstatic joy she realized that God had heard her, and intervened. She was to have a virgin conception before she got married to Joseph! It must have all seemed too wonderful to be true, and yet she believed. One can only be impressed at the speed and depth of her response to the Angel. The Lord's same ability was surely at least partly inherited from His mother.

1:35 *And the angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. Therefore also the holy thing which is begotten within you shall be called the Son of God*- The Holy Spirit came upon her, and so Mary's spirit was full of gladness (:35,47). She walked in step with the spirit (Gal. 5:25). Because she believed that really the child she would bear would be "holy", she can extol God as "holy" (1:35,49). She says that God "*Has done to me great things*"- she believed that what was promised would actually happen, to the point she felt it had already happened. Now this surely is the essence of faith.

The Angel's description of Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The LXX uses the

word for "overshadow" about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If Mary's mind had been alerted to this possibility, she would have seen the relevance of Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). For they are remarkably similar to the LXX of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam. 6:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of 2 Sam. 6:12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of 2 Sam. 6:15. If one combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we have the word of God becoming flesh and "tabernacling" among us in the womb and faith of Mary. If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed.

*1:36 And Elisabeth your kinswoman, she who was called barren, has in her old age also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month of her pregnancy-* Elisabeth only announced her pregnancy at the end of five months. So this may have been a second encouragement to Mary, that non-standard pregnancies are no problem to God. Or perhaps it was the first Mary had heard of it. The lesson is that meetings with others, or news about them, are providentially brought into our lives in order to encourage us in situations which are about to come upon us.

*1:37 For no word from God shall be void of power-* The various possibilities in translation offer various possible interpretations. The idea could be that Mary was not to worry about the mechanics of how God's prophetic words about the virgin birth and the birth of the Messianic forerunner would come about; there was and is power within the prophetic word to bring about its own fulfilment. This principle has wide relevance. Not least, we need not worry how all shall be fulfilled in the last days, nor seek to force fulfilment of prophecy; for the power of fulfilment is lodged within the prophetic word itself. But "void of power" can also simply mean "impossible". The only other time the Greek word occurs is in Mt. 17:20: "If you have faith... nothing shall be impossible unto you". The 'possibility' of the fulfilment depends partially upon our faith. And this would have been so appropriate to Mary, who had prayed in faith to be the mother of Messiah. The prophetic word is "possible", but it is made actual by our faith. When Mary says "Be it unto me according to your word" (:38) she is as it were enabling the fulfilment of that word. See on :45. This is not to say that God does not have sovereign possibility of Himself; but clearly His preference is to work within the parameters of human faith.

1:38 *And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it unto me according to your word! And the angel departed from her-* Mary had probably said and later sung to the Lord Jesus: "Be it unto me according to your word". In Mt. 15:28 we have the Lord addressing the Canaanite woman: "Woman....be it unto you even as you wish". The Lord had called His mother "Woman..." in Cana. That woman restimulated memories of His dear mother. We see here a window into His humanity, using language in reflection of how His mother had spoken to Him in childhood; and we see too Mary's abiding influence upon Him.

Not only did Mary see herself as representative of Israel [see on :28]; she also felt a strong connection between herself and her Messiah Son. Any woman would feel this connection and identity with her child; but in Mary's case, her child was the Son of God, Messiah of Israel. And she had the spiritual ambition to see herself in some way, thereby, as Messiah. Consider the evidence:

- Lk. 1:38 "the handmaid of the Lord" uses the Greek female form for "servant of the Lord", a clear title of Messiah.
- She appropriates words spoken in the spirit of Christ to herself: "You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: and by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies" (Ps. 89:10 cp. Lk. 1:51-53).
- She refers to herself in saying that God has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy; yet His Servant was Messiah, according to Isaiah's servant songs (Lk. 1:54,55).
- Lk. 1:28,42 "blessed among women" alludes to Jud. 5:24, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Lord's destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her. There is a parallel between Mary and the "fruit of your womb", they were both to be blessed together (:42), as if God recognized this link between the mother and Son. The fact He 'allowed' this, rather than just using a cold 'channel' for His purpose, is simply surpassing in its wonder.
- Her words of Lk. 1:47 "my spirit shall rejoice in God" allude to Ps. 63:11: "But *the king* shall rejoice in God; every one that swears by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped". Mary parallels herself with "the King", seeing herself as connected with Messiah.
- "The servant of the Lord" would rejoice in God: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God" (Is. 61:10), and yet Mary as the female "servant of the Lord" also rejoices, sharing the joy of her Son.
- Lk. 1:48 has Mary rejoicing: "All generations shall call me blessed", alluding to how in Ps. 72:17 "all nations shall call *him* [Messiah] blessed". Mary is equated with her son, Messiah, and she recognized this. He was part of her.
- Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the

mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah's exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* low estate with *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus?

- She appropriated the promises to Abraham's seed [which according to Gal. 3:16 is one man, Jesus] to her personally (Lk. 1:55).

1:39- see on Lk. 2:19.

*And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah-* One is hard pushed to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture (Gen. 19:32,34; 30:14,15; Ex. 2:1-10; Jud. 5:28-30; Ruth 1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17; 2 Kings 5:2,3). The narrative of the women at the tomb and the resurrection is another example (Lk. 23:55-24:4). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective.

Mary took the nudge from the Angel, to find encouragement at this time in the company of another believer who was going through a broadly similar experience. She would presumably have left Joseph at this time; and we see again his willing sacrifice in still marrying her despite this. To the worldly eye, it would look for all the world as if she had got pregnant whilst away in Judah, or had run off there after falling pregnant in Nazareth. But she was prepared for all that misjudgement of her, wanting to follow the Lord's leading in finding spiritual strength from a believer going through the same things, whose faith had also been amazingly rewarded.

1:40 *And entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elisabeth-* The usual girlie teenage thing would have been to go talk to her contemporaries about it. But not Mary. She went on probably the longest journey she had ever made, and probably alone, to see Elisabeth. She describes herself as the lowly, the hungry, who had been exalted and fed... whereas the proud and haughty had been disregarded. These words, and the evident allusions she makes back to Hannah's song, could be read as reflecting what had actually been wrought in Mary's own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her

years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy. Jn. 2:11,12 speak of three groups- the disciples, who believed, the brothers of Jesus who didn't (Jn. 7:5), and Mary, whose level of faith isn't commented upon. She stands alone. Recognizing this tendency to isolationism within her, the Father seems to have encouraged Mary to open herself up to Elisabeth, encouraging her that her relative was in a somewhat similar position, having been barren for a lifetime and now expecting a child. Although Elisabeth was somewhat distant from Mary, Mary immediately goes to see her, following the prompting of the Lord. The record is styled to show the experiences of the two pregnancies as parallel:

- "The virgin's name was Mary" (1:27) = "her name was Elisabeth" (1:5).
- Both were startled at the Angelic appearances (1:12,29), and were comforted not to be afraid.
- "You will call his name John... you will call his name Jesus".
- "He will be great... he will be great".
- "How am I to know this?", and the Angel responded; "How shall this be?", and likewise the Angel responded.
- Both were given signs- the dumbness of Zacharias, and the pregnancy of Elisabeth.
- Both John and Jesus are described as growing up and becoming strong (Lk. 1:80; 2:40).

This is not the only time when we see circumstances repeating between Bible characters. The similarities were to direct them back to former and contemporary examples, to find strength. And this is one of the basic reasons for Christian fellowship amongst believers. Yet it would seem that as time went on, Mary became more introverted, she stored up "all these things" in her heart and couldn't share them with others. Whilst due to her unique path this is understandable, it may be related to the loss of spiritual perception and activity which it seems set in after she gave birth to Jesus.

1:41 *And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the baby jumped within her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit-* The usual kicking within the womb [s.w. Gen. 25:22 LXX] was triggered by her being filled with the Spirit, just as the unborn child was filled with the Spirit within her womb (:15)- a good Biblical argument for the pro-life movement.

1:42- see on Lk. 1:28.

*And she lifted up her voice with a loud cry and said: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*- Elisabeth is repeating the words and ideas of the Angel in :28. Mary would have

realized that the Angel was indeed from God, and the same Spirit was speaking through Elisabeth as through the Angel. We see the Father's gentle grace in providing her with confirmation after confirmation of the strange and lonely path she was being led along.

*1:43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*- Elisabeth found mutual encouragement from Mary, although Mary had gone to her for encouragement. This is the mutual nature of true Christian fellowship. Clearly Elisabeth perceived that her son was to be the Elijah prophet, and Mary's was to be Messiah whom her son would herald. There was however no jealousy at all, as at times happens between pregnant women who believe they are bearing significant offspring, but rather just a sense of gratitude for the grace of it all.

*1:44 For when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby jumped in my womb for joy-* Elisabeth would have been greeted by Mary with the traditional "Shalom!", a wish of peace to her. And her sensitive mind perceived that that peace was the Messianic peace with God which would save Israel and the world.

*1:45 And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord-* See on :53. Mary at this point was an inspiration to Paul in his trial (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25). Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk. 1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. She made possible the prophetic word; see on :37. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order that the prophecies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).

In Jn. 20:29, Jesus unconsciously alludes to His mother's blessedness even after His glorification. Mary must have many times recounted the story of Elisabeth to Jesus, and His memory of it influenced His sentence construction even after His glorification. This gives a window into the extent to which we will be still who we are now in the Kingdom. Divine nature won't totally change who we are nor the influence of our parents upon us. This is a great encouragement to parents- who they influence their children to be, will be what they eternally will be. For Jesus alluded to the memory of His mother even in Divine nature.

*1:46 And Mary said: My soul does magnify the Lord-* See on :38 for the

allusions to Hannah's song. This is alluded to by Paul, when he uses the same Greek word in Phil. 1:2: "Christ shall be *magnified* in *my body / soul*". If this is a valid allusion, then "the Lord" is a reference to Jesus. In Lk. 1:43 Elisabeth had just described Jesus as "my Lord". And then Mary here parallels "the Lord" with "God my saviour / my Jesus". She understood how God was to be manifest in Jesus, as she parallels "my soul" with "my spirit"(:47). It's amazing that an illiterate teenager should have risen to such heights of understanding, probably without learning much at all from the local synagogue.

1:47 *And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. This rang in Paul's mind (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3). Mary's words "my spirit has rejoiced" are alluded to by Jesus unconsciously in Lk. 10:21 [the only time the Greek phrase "spirit... rejoices" is used]. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit" and thanked God that the humble not the wise had been chosen- showing exactly the spirit of Mary's words of Lk. 1:52,53, the words she had probably sung to Him around the house as a child. Unconsciously [?], the Lord Jesus was alluding to Mary His mother's attitude. Such was the Jesus-Mary relationship. Luke brings this out in his record in the connections he makes. Mary had an influence even on the Son of God- quite some encouragement to all parents and those who spend time with children as to the influence they have.

1:48 *Because He has looked upon the low estate of His handmaid*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Mary's quotations and allusions to the OT are nearly all from the LXX, and it is almost certain that she would have been familiar with some of the Apocryphal books bound up with the LXX at that time. Consider the words of 4 Ezra 9:45, where Zion speaks as a barren woman: "God heard your handmaid and regarded my low estate, and considered my distress and gave me a son". Clearly she saw herself as the representative of Zion. Moses told Israel that God "has done great things in you" [in her womb?] (Dt. 10:21). She felt that God had helped her as "His servant Israel"- alluding to Ps. 98:3 LXX "He has remembered His mercy to Jacob". Unto *us*, Israel, a son was to be given (Is. 9:6 cp. Lk. 2:11), but it was actually given to Mary. See on Lk. 1:28.

God recognized her "low estate" [humility] and exalted her above all women, just as He would His Son among men. He did not choose some well heeled Jerusalem girl, but a poor, barefoot teenager in despised Nazareth. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation ['low estate'] his judgment was taken away". It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: "He *humbled himself*". In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of His mother. She taught Him the life and the way of the cross.

Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again in Mt. 23:12: "Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus the Lord Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

*For from this time forward all generations shall call me blessed-* When Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was in Gen. 30:13: "The daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed", and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of herself. She was so humble to compare herself with the servant girl. Yet she also had in mind Prov. 31:28, where the virtuous woman is blessed by all. She saw herself as the virtuous woman who excelled all- yet she was so humble. She was the most highly favoured woman, but was so humble. It's hard to know your true value without being proud about it. It seems to me that we must learn to value ourselves far more, to love our neighbour as we do really love / respect ourselves, without being proud. The ability to see your own worth and value in God's purpose is crucial; we tend to be either proud, or too negative about ourselves. Mary was so spiritually ambitious to want to be the mother of Messiah, understanding He would be God manifest. Mary realized that her great honour was being given in response to her humility- God had regarded her "low estate", her humility. She was humble enough to know God had noticed her humility- and still not be proud about it. She had enough self-knowledge to perceive this. It's as if she is saying 'Thank you for taking note of my humility'. This is really a deep essay in humility- to recognize she was humble without being proud about it. And to be able to say it sincerely. Mary's humility was programmatic for Jesus on the cross; for there He humbled Himself that He might be exalted. This was the theme that, according to Phil. 2, was ever in His mind.

Later Scripture seems to allude to Mary's words of praise in Lk. 1 and set her up as a representative of us all. She speaks in Lk. 1:49 of her "low estate", alluding to Ps. 136:23, which describes us all in this way.



*1:49 For He that is mighty has done to me great things, and holy is His name-* The Magnificat shows that Mary had a fair appreciation of God's Names, in that she refers to Him as "He that is mighty", interpreting for us the Old Testament idea of El Shaddai, the God of fruitfulness [Heb. *shad* = 'breast']. Note how neither Mary nor the NT writers transfer the OT Hebrew titles of God, e.g. 'Yahweh', rather they interpret them. She sees her conception of the Son of God as an example of how "holy is His Name" (Lk. 1:49). The Lord Himself understood that "Hallowed be Your Name" is to be paralleled with the Father's will being done. The Name of God speaks of His actions; because He is who He is, He will articulate this in how He acts. This is why all His actions are understandable and broadly predictable in terms of the basic characteristics that comprise His Name. The Name is not just a word, a lexical item. And Mary perceived all this- that the Holy Name of Jehovah was to be manifested ultimately and supremely in the Son she would bear. For this is the climax of God manifestation. Because "Holy is His Name", she would bear a "holy thing" that manifested that Name. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby the plural form is used to reflect the greatness of a singular thing. Thus 'Jehovah Elohim', Jehovah who will be mighty ones, can be read as a specific prophecy of His definitive revelation in the 'mighty one' of His Son. And could it be that Mary grasped all this? I for one think she did.

*1:50 And His mercy is to generations and generations on them that fear Him-* The subsequent generations who would bless her would do so because through her Son, "mercy" was experienced. She perceived that Messiah would bring mercy to sinners, indeed to all; rather than just the re-establishment of Israel's political Kingdom.

*1:51 He has shown strength with His arm, He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Through the Lord, God "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Lk. 1:51). This is quoting from Gen. 6:5 LXX concerning the wicked imagination of man's heart at the flood. This is even more evidence that we can read the events of the flood as typical of two things; our salvation from the judgment upon sin, and also of the events of the last days, when that salvation will be physically manifested. We are in Noah's position; we can see clearly the judgments which must come upon sin.

Such a Bible minded woman inevitably had faith. For faith comes by hearing the word of God. Mary believed the Angel's words fully- hence her rejoicing. The aorist tenses of Lk. 1:51-53 seem the equivalent of prophetic perfect tenses in Hebrew- Mary firmly believes that what is still future is as good as happened. She had the faith that considers what has been promised to have actually happened. At that moment it was as if

God *had* scattered the proud, the rulers and the princes- even though this would only be achieved by the Lord's life, death and glorification (Acts 2:33; 4:24-27; 5:31).

1:52 *He has put down princes from their thrones and has exalted them of low station in life-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Despite all the undoubted spiritual perception in the Magnificat, she didn't have totally pure understanding. It seems from her allusion here to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel's prophecy about Messiah's restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of "Him whose right it is" as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future. Likewise "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" *may* imply [although not necessarily] that she hadn't grasped the implications that Messiah must be the result of a virgin birth, as per Is. 7:14. Yet for all this, she still had acceptability before God, and the required spiritual ambition to be Messiah's mother.

Mary perceived the importance of humility. Her song of rejoicing is a consciously arranged poem by her. It is in two strophes, each climaxing with the themes of lowliness / exaltation. She saw humility as the true exaltation, and the structure of her little song reflects this. She perhaps prepared the song in her mind as she walked down from Nazareth to the Judean hills to meet Elisabeth; there is a rhyme established by the last words of the four lines in Lk. 1:52,53: *thronon* with *agathon*, and *tapeinous* with *kenous*. In all this she reached a new paradigm for humility was a concept foreign to the first century mind. Strength, wealth and ability were to be demonstrated; to show strength by being humble was just unheard of. Only those who were forced into humble submission by the stronger were 'humble'. To clean the toilets when nobody else notices, and the host of other such opportunities for service in ecclesial life... this is the true humility, the real strength and exaltation before God.

1:53 *The hungry He has filled with good things and the rich He has sent away empty-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Not only was the Lord Himself influenced by His mother. Paul and Peter allude to Mary and her words in their writings. The hymn to Jesus which Paul wrote in Phil. 2 is full of themes taken from Mary's song- the same themes of God's manifestation in His Son, humiliation and exaltation, occur there. There are several connections between the accounts of the early preaching of the Gospel in Acts, and Mary's song of praise. Her words came to influence the brethren who stood up there and preached. Perhaps

Mary, who was meeting with them (Acts 1:14), sung the words to them and they all memorized it. Raymond Brown claims there are 18 words or items shared by the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:12-26) and the Magnificat [Mary's song of praise] (*The Birth Of The Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 p. 354). Mary had quoted Ps. 107:9 about how she had been filled with good things; but Zacharias quoted the next verse, Ps. 107:10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. And she should likewise influence us.

Mary felt that through her being granted the honour of bearing Jesus, the hungry had been filled. The Lord in Lk. 6:21 alludes to all this. He speaks of how blessed [=Mary] are the hungry who will be filled, using the same three words as in Lk. 1- *blessed* was Mary, the *hungry*, who was *filled* in her stomach. He states that there is a blessedness upon all of us who believe (Jn. 20:29)- just as His mother was proclaimed blessed for her belief (Lk. 1:45). Mary had felt that God had "Filled the hungry [i.e. their stomach, cp. the womb of Mary] with the good thing [Gk.]"- Jesus (Lk. 1:53). He calls Himself this good thing, using the very same Greek word in Mt. 20:15: "I am the good one"; Jn. 1:46; 7:12 [where the "good thing" is Messiah]. Her perception of Him became His. And so with us; if we perceive our children as future brethren, so, hopefully and prayerfully, they will be. Jesus could have sinned; He could have failed. But Mary right from His babyhood believed that He wouldn't. She believed in Him and in His successful completion of His destiny from when she first conceived Him. And surely this is a pattern for Christian mothers too.

1:54 *He has given help to Israel His servant, that He might remember mercy-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. As noted on :28, she saw herself as the "Servant" Israel. "Mercy" is a real theme with her; she saw Messiah as enabling mercy for multiple generations (see on :50). The fulfilment of the prophecies in Messiah she saw as a mercy, a grace, even though it was her faith which enabled them to work out as they did. "Given help" is literally to take hold of, and she is alluding to Is. 41:8,9 LXX, where God helps or takes by the hand His servant Israel; but this was only going to be possible through Messiah, her son, because she realized that Israel of themselves had refused Yahweh's outstretched arm towards them. She was very far from the nationalism which was tied up with Messianic expectation at the time. She saw Messiah as the channel for the grace and mercy upon Israel which their sinfulness required.

1:55 *(As He spoke to our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed for ever-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the seed of him*"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and

allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon the way that the things of the Gospel were all promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:8).

*1:56 And Mary stayed with her about three months and then returned home-* As noted earlier, she took lessons from Elisabeth's example. She too therefore hid herself during the early part of her pregnancy. She must have returned home just before Elisabeth gave birth (cp. :36), seeking to avoid the public eye by being present at the birth of John. It was presumably at her return that she was "found with child" (Mt. 1:18), as the end of the first trimester of pregnancy would have given her certain evidence that she was really pregnant.

*1:57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son-* "The time came" alludes to how the prophetic words "shall be fulfilled in their time" (:20).

*1:58 And her neighbours and her kinsfolk heard that the Lord had magnified His mercy towards her; and they rejoiced with her-* The idea of magnifying mercy is that we live by God's mercy, but in this open answer to prayer, that mercy was magnified, made the more visible before all. We can logically deduce from this that God's mercy is there even when prayer is apparently not answered; it is just that answered prayer magnifies that pre-existing and ever present mercy. We note the emphasis upon Elizabeth here- the time came for *her* to give birth, and the neighbours heard of God's mercy towards *her*, and they rejoiced *with her*. This is typical of Luke's inspired emphasis upon the importance of women; a secular account of those times would have focused upon how the famous priest Zacharias was now having a son etc. To claim the Bible is somehow against women is facile; it was far ahead of its time in being careful to honour both genders.

*1:59 And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child, and they would have called him Zacharias, after the name of the father-* 'John' means 'Yahweh's grace / favour'; "Zacharias" means 'Yahweh has remembered'. God did indeed remember the prayers of Zacharias; and 'remembering' when used about God is a Hebrew idiom used about God answering prayer. But Zacharias had not lived up to his name. Instead the prayer was heard by grace, and righteousness was imputed to Zacharias, as noted on :6. It was therefore appropriate that there should be a break with tradition, and the child named 'John' rather than 'Zacharias'.

*1:60 But his mother answered and said: No, he shall be called John-* One of Luke's themes is the equality and dignity of women before God. For a woman to stand up against her male relatives and take the decision about

the naming of a child, in defiance of tradition whereby a male firstborn child must have the name of his father, was quite something. Mary took encouragement from this by naming her child 'Jesus' rather than some form of 'Joseph'.

*1:61 And they said to her: There are none of your kindred that are called by this name-* This break with tradition was to reflect how God was beginning a new creation, in which family ties and names were of no significance. This was radical stuff for a kinship oriented society. We too, in our own times and over our contemporary issues, are asked to radically step out from societal expectations.

*1:62 And they made signs to his father, what he wanted him called-* The family, as noted on :60, were shocked that a woman could assert such dominance in this matter of naming the child. They refused to let her get away with it without at least some semblance of male agreement.

*1:63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, saying: His name is John. And they all marvelled-* Perhaps he had used the same tablet in explaining to his wife what had happened in the temple, and the need to name the child 'John'.

*1:64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed and he spoke, blessing God-* This recalls the opening of Ezekiel's mouth so that he too could speak prophetic words. The context was similar- of a sinful Judah facing judgment unless they urgently repented and accepted God's prophetic word. The idea of the tongue being loosed is another example of wrong medical ideas being used to express healing; and the same is done with the idea of demons. The immediacy of healing demonstrated that the naming of the child was hard for Zacharias, who would have been tempted to want his own name continued in his only son. But he overcame that struggle in faith and obedience to the Father's revealed word.

*1:65 And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea-* We might rather have expected 'joy'. But their secular joy turned to fear when they realized how close God was in all these things. And this in essence is why people struggle to believe the good news of the Gospel. The intellectual search is one thing, but coming face to face with 'John', Yahweh's grace, is quite another. And it is at that point that many turn away.

1:66 *And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying: What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him-* Mary and Elisabeth are likewise described by Luke as laying these things up in their hearts. There was clearly a psychological expectation amongst the people that John was going to be significant. Somehow they perceived that God's hand was with the child and was going to use him; they were being prepared to be potentially open to the message he would preach. The "hand of the Lord" being "with" people is the language of the exodus (Dt. 6:21; 7:8; 9:26 and often). There was a sense that deliverance from bondage was at hand through this man's ministry. But of course they failed to perceive that the bondage in view was to sin rather than to Rome; and the freedom was not immediate political freedom, but the priceless gift of freedom from sin and death.

1:67 *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying-* Just as Ezekiel's dumbness was ended by "the hand of the Lord" (Ez. 33:22) and he was able to immediately prophesy; it was the same hand of the Lord that was operating here (:66).

1:68 *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people-* Zacharias' song of praise was largely about the salvation to be achieved in the Lord Jesus, whom his son John was to herald. Zacharias therefore assumed that the work of John was going to be ultimately successful and thereby enable the Lord Jesus to appear and bring salvation. "He has visited His people" is a quotation from Ruth 1:6. The same miraculous creation of a family that happened to Ruth and the elderly Boaz was happening to the family of Zacharias. Zacharias understood the Divine visitation of Israel to be through the dawning of the Messianic sun of righteousness (:78; 7:16). He doesn't glory in his own son, but rather in Mary's son. This is an essay in how Christ-centeredness will displace our natural tendency to be self-centred. Mary would have taken great encouragement from this song; she would have recognized it was a Divinely inspired (:67) statement that John's birth guaranteed the birth of her son. The stress of the journey to Bethlehem, the lack of accommodation there etc. would have all been assuaged by meditating upon these Divine statements that the birth of John guaranteed, as it were, that of her son.

1:69 *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David-* This again is a reference to the Lord Jesus and not to John; for John was a Levite whereas the Lord was from Judah via David. Zacharias was focused not upon his own son and his natural joy, but upon the far greater spiritual things portended by it. We need to likewise not focus solely upon our own immediate family experiences but to see the far greater picture in the perspective of the Lord Jesus. The horn of David

was Yahweh's anointed or Christ, which would sprout fruit (Ps. 132:17). For David, Yahweh was the horn of his salvation (2 Sam. 22:3); the idea is that this Divine salvation would appear as a horn arising within the family of David. This is the kind of human and Divine fusion which was implied in the great promises to David about his seed; this seed would be God's son and also David's son. The only way that could be achieved was through the virgin birth. Zacharias would have reflected on these things, recalling that Mary was in the line of David. His own son John is not in view at all, for he was a Levite. The focus of Zacharias was so completely upon the Lord Jesus, Mary's son, rather than his own son. And he seems to have passed on to his son John this focus upon the Christ.

*1:70 (As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been since the world began)*- The promised Messianic seed was the message of all the prophets, and Luke concludes his Gospel with the Lord explaining these things from all the prophets to the two on the way to Emmaus. This is one of many points of contact between the opening and closing of the Gospel. The beginning of the world was seen as the time when the prophets began, presumably referring to Adam. The world and its beginning as presented in the Bible began then. All angst about the ultimate origins of the earth, previous creations, the process of creation etc. is all misplaced. We are asked to see the time when God's prophetic word began to be spoken as the beginning of the world.

The words could also be read as meaning that all the prophets somehow pre-existed at the beginning. This language of pre-existence is therefore not to be read literally, but in terms of them being within the Father's prophetic plan from the beginning. And this empowers us to better understand the language of the Lord's 'pre-existence'- not literally, but within the purpose of God.

*1:71 Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us*- See on Lk. 7:19. Clearly he understood Messiah as the One who would bring immediate relief from the Roman occupation. He'd misread, as many Jews do today, the Old Testament prophecies and types which involve two comings of Messiah, and the need for Him to firstly die the death of rejection. But all the same, we find no hint of condemnation, but rather of commendation, for this Godly man.

*1:72 To show mercy towards our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant*- This cannot mean that mercy was now given to the fathers, but that the fulfilment of the promised mercy to them had now come. This is why "mercy and truth" is a phrase used about the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers- the promised mercy had in truth been fulfilled, now in the utter "truth" which was and is Jesus Christ (Gen. 24:27; Ps. 98:3 and often in the Psalms; Is. 16:5; Mic. 7:20). The fulfilment of the

promises was in the Christ and not in John the Baptist; but the focus of Zacharias is totally upon the Lord whom his son would testify to.

1:73 *The oath which He spoke to Abraham our father-* The path to Abraham was understood as "mercy" (:72). Peter likewise interprets the promises to Abraham as being ultimately about the turning away of his seed from sin, and personal salvation (Acts 3:25,26).

1:74 *To grant to us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear-* The promises were "to us". "Salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the seed, by being baptised *into* Christ (Gal. 3:22-29). Then, all that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of us. Thus Zacharias quoted prophecies about the seed of Abraham and David as applying to all believers (Lk. 1:69,73,74). As noted on :72 and :73, the essential salvation promised in Christ was of mercy towards our sins. These are our enemies, from which we are to be delivered in Christ; we can serve Him now "without fear"- the fear of ultimate failure, of condemnation. The same word is used in 1 Jn. 4:18 of how we can now live without fear, secure in his love and salvation by grace. This is the good news of the Gospel. The idea of serving *without* fear is in conscious contrast to the repeated Old Testament commands for those under the law to serve God *with* fear (Dt. 6:13; 10:20; Josh. 24:14; Ps. 2:11 and often). It would have been a strange, novel and challenging idea; and yet it was in fact implicit in the promises to Abraham. This is the good news.

1:75 *In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days-* We read in :6 that Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless". But that holiness is now possible for all Israel, not just the Levites and dedicated religionists like that pious couple. And this holy walk in daily life and thought is motivated by the fact we are freed from fear of condemnation, the fear of ultimate spiritual failure; for we are saved by grace. This is a far stronger motivation than striving for obedience to any legal code, in the hope that we shall somehow one day be possibly saved by our obedience.

1:76 *Yes, and you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High-* We can imagine Zacharias now turning his eyes to his own newborn child. If he had received no more information than what is recorded, then he had done well to perceive that this child was the Elijah prophet, and therefore Mary's child was to be Messiah.



*For you shall go before the presence of the Lord to make ready His ways-* John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14). See on Mt. 20:23.

*1:77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the remission of their sins-* See on Mt. 3:11. The experience of forgiveness is a foretaste of salvation; as John's gospel puts it, we have eternal life now. Not in that we shall not die, but in so far as we live in the experience of sin forgiven, without fear of condemnation should the Lord return right now... for this is "salvation", the present experience of the great salvation to be brought to us at the Lord's second coming. And we can share this knowledge of salvation with others; Paul alludes to these words, showing that he was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Luke is the only evangelist to continue the quotation of Is. 40 to include the words "all mankind will see God's salvation". And he focuses especially upon the wonder of forgiveness (Lk. 1:77; 7:48; Acts 13:38). Only he records the parable of the prodigal (Lk. 15:11-32), and only he describes the great preaching commission as relating to "repentance and remission of sins" (Lk. 24:47).

The principles God will use in the final judgment are manifested now, and have been reflected in His previous judgments of men. In our very personal lives, there are foretastes of that future judgment. When we receive forgiveness we experience the essence of the future salvation (Lk. 1:77). Indeed, whenever man meets with God, whenever His ways have contact with those of men (which so often happens in the life of the believer) there is a judgment experience; His holiness, His demands, the imperatives which lay within His very being, reveal quite naturally our failures. The Hebrew word used to describe God's 'meeting' with men is also used in the senses of 'summoning' or gathering to a trial (Ex. 30:6). And positively, the *degree to which* we have responded to Him will be revealed by our meeting with Him.

*1:78 Because of the tender mercy of our God-* The fact that God has a "heart of mercy"- a lovely phrase- is His glory. It leads Him to glory in

overlooking sin. And on this basis John appealed to people to repent and claim that forgiveness, thus allowing God to glory. In the light of all this, one wonders in what tone of voice John spoke. The cold printed words in our Bibles can lead us to imagine him speaking in a gruff, austere manner.

*When the sunrise shall dawn upon us-* "The sunrising (AVmg.) from on high hath visited us" through the Lord's mission, fulfilling the prophecy of Mal. 4:2 about Him as the sun of righteousness in the first century, although it clearly has reference also to the greater dawning yet to come.

Many of the incidents in the first coming of the Lord Jesus are intended to point us forward to events which will happen at the his second coming. There is clear indication in the records of Luke 1 and 2 that there were a faithful remnant in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's birth, whose attitude points forward to that of the latter-day remnant at the time of His second coming. Whilst only Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna are mentioned, we can be sure that there were others in this group - Anna "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); "many" rejoiced even at the birth of John, on the understanding that he was Christ's forerunner (Luke 1:14). It is possible that the shepherds, too, were in this group, which would confirm the impression that the 'remnant' were in the lower ranks of society - Zacharias a superannuated priest, Anna a servant of the temple (Luke 2:37) - the equivalent of a modern office cleaner. This connects with the 'remnant' left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar being the poorest of the poor (2 Kings 24:15 cp. 25:11,12), and suggests a working-class Jewish 'remnant' in the last days.

There is much language used concerning the birth of Jesus which is easily applicable to His second coming. This in itself encourages us to see the record of those awaiting His first coming as typical of the last days. The birth of John and Jesus is described as God 'visiting and redeeming his people' (Luke 1:68); what better way of describing God's latter-day intervention? "The sunrising from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78 A.V. mg.) was Zacharias' comment upon God's purpose in John and Jesus, making an unmistakeable allusion to Mal. 4:2 concerning Christ's second coming being like the rising sun. Note how this sun rising is upon the righteous remnant of the last days (Mal. 4:12) - identifying Zacharias with them. The Angels rejoiced that through Christ's birth there was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), although this will only be fully done in the Kingdom. Simeon spoke of the baby Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32), although this will only be fully true after the second coming (Is. 42:6; 49:6). The remnant "looked for redemption (to

appear) in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); they could only have figured this out from realizing that the Old Testament 'kingdom' prophecies concerning Jerusalem, which we normally associate with the second coming, had a primary fulfilment in the birth of Christ.

John the Baptist commented that he preached repentance and baptized in Israel, *so that* the Messiah might be manifest to Israel (Jn. 1:31). His work was a pattern for the Elijah ministry of the last days. It could be argued that Messiah was only manifest in the first century because of the success of John's work- for large numbers were baptized of him. Could it be that the timing of the final revelation of Messiah likewise depends upon the success of the Elijah ministry in leading Israel to repentance? And what implications are there in this, if actually we are the voice of that ministry...

We can now scan the record for more detailed latter-day typology:-

- The remnant were in or around Jerusalem - as it seems the latter-day faithful will also be. They looked for Messiah to appear in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). If latter-day Jewry are persecuted to the extent that the only Jews left alive in the land are in Jerusalem (see previous studies, especially Chapter 8), then they, too, will expect Messiah to come to them in that same city. Note that the woman whose intense pleadings represent the prayers of the latter day remnant (Lk.18:2-8) "was in a city" - Jerusalem?
- They eagerly looked for the Lord's birth as a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, that through his seed "we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve (God) without fear" (Luke 1:74). Likewise the latter-day remnant will meditate how the Abrahamic promises concerning freedom from their (Arab) enemies are so relevant to them - perhaps due to the Elijah ministry turning their hearts to the Jewish "fathers", a phrase often used about the patriarchs who received the promises (Mal. 4:6).
- Israel in the first century were under the domination of Rome, the fourth beast of Dan. 7:23. In the latter-day application of this, necessitated by the image upon which the beasts are based standing complete in the last days, the fourth beast with its horns corresponds to the Arab coalition which will then dominate Israel.
- Some of the remnant had the Spirit gift of prophecy (Luke 1:41,67; 2:26,36). The latter-day remnant may also experience this - their old men (cp. Zacharias and Simeon) and young people (cp. Mary), may have the gift of prophecy around the time of the Lord's return - "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31).
- The shepherds watching at night while the Lord was born (Luke 2:8) echoes the Passover. There is good reason to think that the second coming may be associated with Passover time. The vision of Angels which they saw may correspond to the remnant in Jerusalem seeing a literal "sign of the (coming of the) son of man in (literal) heaven" (Matt. 24:30), composed of the Angel-cherubim. This "sign of the son of man

in heaven" must be alluding back to the literal portent which the shepherds saw in the sky, pointing to the Lord's first coming. Thus there will be no need to say "See here; or see there", because the Lord's return will be so evidently public (Lk. 17:23).

- Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6) amidst a corrupt Jewish world that refused to prepare itself for God's manifestation in Christ, despite the availability to them of God's Word, which clearly prophesied it. This recalls the description of Noah as being "righteous before God" (Gen. 7:1) in the context of the flood coming upon the world. We have earlier shown this to be full of reference to the last days.

- There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to Christ's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). We know from Joel 2:17 and many other passages that the remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days, as will spiritual Israel.

- The appearance of Angels before Christ's birth (Luke 1:12,26) is similar to their visiting Israel under persecution during the times of the Judges, bringing the news of deliverance from their Arab enemies through a 'saviour' ('Jesus').

- The conception of John (the Elijah prophet of the first century) preceded that of Christ - he was Christ's forerunner - there is therefore a necessity for this type to be fulfilled in the literal coming of the latter-day Elijah as a prelude to Christ's manifestation to Israel.

- The "joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14) of the remnant at Christ's birth will be but a dim foretaste of the ecstasy which the embattled remnant of the last days will experience at their Lord's return.

*1:79 To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace-* Without Messiah, Israel under the law were in darkness and under the shadow of death. This would have been hard for proud Judaism to swallow. The allusion is clearly to the Messianic prophecy of Is. 9:2, but sitting in "the shadow of death" means to live in the prospect of imminent death. And that is in fact where all humanity are situated- if only they would perceive it. For we are all terminally ill, on borrowed time, with an urgency to get out from under that shadow. The result of the Messianic sun would be to guide feet into the way of peace with God, living before Him without fear of death and condemnation because they are assured of their salvation in Him (see on :74,77). It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps into that way of peace; it is the Lord's work to guide human feet into that way. That guidance is by His Spirit, by grace.

*1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the desert until the day he appeared publicly to Israel-* The reference to "spirit" could be to the work of the Spirit, active in the formation of his character from his mother's womb (:15). God's Spirit and John's spirit are clearly connected here; and this is how the Holy Spirit works in our spirit /

lives too, through a collaboration, a conspiracy of the willing. Presumably at some point in his youth, John left his parents, or perhaps they died, and went to live "in the desert". He may have encountered the Essenes there, or even lived with them, for there are undoubted points of contact and allusion between his teaching and theirs.

## CHAPTER 2

*2:1 Now it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered-* Clearly the term "all the world" doesn't refer to the globe. Many errors of exposition have arisen from failing to perceive that such global language is not to be taken literally, but is relative to the context in which it is used. Perhaps we are to see in the Lord's birth the reckoning of all the world.

*2:2 This census first took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria-* Maybe Mary grasped the relevance of Ps. 87:6 LXX to the fact she gave birth to Messiah during a census: "In the census of the peoples, this one [Messiah] will be born there". The relevance of this verse to the Lord's birth may explain why Luke says that the census of Quirinius was part of a census of the whole world, which wasn't strictly true. But as all historians do, he presents the facts within the framework of his wider intentions and themes.

*2:3 And all went to register themselves, everyone to his own city-* As noted on :1, we have global language used here, within the framework of the general thematic impression which the inspired historian wishes to give (see on :2). Not "everyone" in the Roman empire, let alone a poor backwater like Palestine, would have gone to their birth place to be registered. It is also unclear why everyone had to physically go to their birth place for registration. Surely the tax registration census was of people where they were then living and working. Old people and children were surely not required to journey to their birth place just to be counted. But the impression is given that everyone went to their birth place, and then the Lord was born. There is no such thing as pure, factual history. Every record of events reflects the agenda of the historian; and this is true of the inspired historian Luke. The idea is that everyone has a birth place; and so did the Lord Jesus. His humanity is thereby emphasized.

*2:4 And Joseph also went from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and family of David)-* As noted on :3, it is unlikely that everyone literally went to their birth place for this tax registration. Perhaps Joseph had enough income to require this; although there is every indication of poverty in the family. Perhaps he wished to be carefully obedient to every human law as far as he could; and this meant that Mary went with him and therefore gave birth in Bethlehem, David's city.

*2:5 To enroll himself with Mary, who was engaged to him, being great with child-* It could be that this is recorded as a fulfilment of how Is. 53:12 had predicted that Jesus would be "numbered with the

transgressors". He was numbered amongst humanity, and was born where both Mary and Joseph were, in Bethlehem. "With Mary" could suggest that she too had been born there; otherwise we are left to assume that only the males had to register, and so Mary tagged along with him. If indeed Mary had also been born in Bethlehem, as is here implied, then this would reinforce the idea that the Lord was truly David's seed, and should have been the legitimate king of Israel by descent.

*2:6 And it came to pass, while they were there, the time came that she should give birth-* "While they were there" heightens the connection with the fact the Lord was born in Bethlehem, the birth place of His mother and adoptive father (see on :5). The time which came was that precise moment so carefully prepared and calculated by the Father; Gal. 4:4 surely alludes here in saying that "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman".

*2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn-* Jer. 14:8 was addressed to the Lord and Saviour of Israel, Jesus-Messiah: "Why are you like an alien in the land, like a traveller who stays in lodgings?". If Mary had made all these connections, the hurt of being told there was no room in the lodging, and having to give birth in a stable, laying her dear child in a cattle manger... would have been far less felt by her. These things would have thrilled and rejoiced her heart rather than hurt her, just as we can joyfully perceive how present sufferings are working out so analogous to a Biblical verse or character.

The whimpering, vulnerable *Son of God* was laid down in a cattle stall (Luke, the doctor who appreciated the need for hygiene, so emphasizes this: Lk. 2:7,12,16), because the other guests in that cheap hotel couldn't make space for a heavily pregnant woman (again, Luke the doctor would've sensed the shame of it). "No room for them in the inn" can also be translated "The inn was not the place for them" (Lucien Deiss, *Joseph, Mary, Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) p. 28). It had to be this way- the way of rejection, of poverty. God's children ultimately know no other way in this world. Did Mary see the link between her giving birth in a stable and laying Jesus down in a "manger" (Gk. *phatne*), perhaps with oxen and donkeys onlooking, and Is. 1:3 LXX: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the *phatne* ("manger") of its Lord (*kyrios* as in Lk. 2:11), but Israel has not known me".

The serene paintings of the scene do no justice to it. The whole setting would have been dirty, noisy and inappropriate for a birth place. The Lord was born into rejection, poverty and desperation; with Mary in a strange place, far from home and her relatives, having her first child so humanly alone. And the Father continues His same style of working to this day, through the things which man despises.

*2:8 And there were shepherds in the same region staying in the field and keeping watch at night over their flock-* It has been observed that the choice to reveal the good news of Christ to the shepherds first of all was surprising; for these too were the poorest of the poor, deprived [along with tax collectors] of Jewish rights. They belonged to the "most despised" of all social groups. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1969) p. 304; Richard Horsley, *The Liberation Of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives In Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) pp. 102-106.

The fact they were in the fields with their flocks shows clearly enough that the Lord's birth was not in December- for then the flocks would have been kept under cover and not in the fields.

*2:9 And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were terrified-* As noted on :8, shepherds were at the bottom of the social ladder; and there is a purposeful juxtaposition between them and the glory of God which shone about them. The picture is of them identified with the Angel which stood with them, so that the impression was given to an observer of a halo of glory shining about the despised shepherds. God's glory was identified with weak men, at the very bottom end of the social ladder; just as His Son was born in a stable amongst animals, and laid in a manger- the birth style of the lowest of the low.

*2:10 And the angel said to them: Be not afraid. For I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people-* Their fear was because of their own sense of unworthiness in the presence of the Lord's glory. But Luke has already begun the theme that the grace to be revealed in the Lord Jesus takes away our fear and sense of unworthiness (see on 1:74,77). And it continues with this assurance to the shepherds, that the good tidings of the Gospel are that "all people" [implying the Gentiles too] could serve God without fear. It is this which is the greatest joy, and which is good news indeed; that we need not fear God's condemnation because we are identified with His Son. Anything less than this would make the "Gospel" not so much good news, but rather just a worrying and burdensome weight of responsibility before God.

*2:11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord-* They were not to "fear" (:10), because a Saviour had been born. The salvation in view was therefore from sin and the fear which arises from it. This was a great theme in the song of Zacharias (see on 1:74,77). Salvation from the Romans was what everyone wanted, but the spiritual reality was far greater. "Christ the Lord" is an unusual phrase; the idea is that because of this great salvation, Messiah was to become the personal "Lord" and master of those shepherds. The



implication is surely that those shepherds, famed for their dishonesty, petty crime and disobedience to the Law, actually came to believe in the Lord Jesus.

2:12- see on Mt. 18:4.

*And this will be a sign to you: You shall find a baby wrapped in birth clothes and lying in a manger-* The "sign" that this great salvation was for real was in the very absurdity of a Divine saviour being born in the very lowliest of human situations, placed in a manger from where animals ate, born amidst the smell and sound and dirt of animal excrement. The whole thing had the hallmark of the Divine.

2:13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a crowd of the heavenly host praising God, and saying-* It's important to realize that praise isn't just singing or using musical instruments. In Hebrew the same word means both 'worship' and 'service' (*abodah*). The supposition that praise = music is deeply ingrained in many minds. Thus there is the common assumption that the Angels sang to the shepherds; but in fact they *spoke* their praise.

2:14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those in whom He is well pleased-* The peace in view was peace with God, resulting in a lack of fear of condemnation before Him (see on :10,11 and 1:74,77). This peace with God vertically also has a horizontal dimension. A major result of the existence of the Lord's work was unity amongst God's people. If we are not at peace amongst ourselves, then God is not well pleased. The One in whom the Father was well pleased was His Son (Mt. 3:17). Those who are "in Christ" are described therefore with the same language as He is described with. It is by being in Him that we find peace with God, and the grateful recognition and acceptance of this gives glory to Him.

2:15- see on Acts 8:4.

*And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to each other: Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us-* We assume they left their sheep in the field, willing to sacrifice their careers and livelihood for the sake of obedience to the word about the Lord Jesus. The Lord surely had them in mind when He later taught that He was like the shepherd who left His sheep unattended in order to go to the one all important sheep. He reasons as if He identifies with them and they with Him. It could be that these shepherds were keeping flocks which would later be taken to Jerusalem and sold as sacrifices; in which

case we wonder about how far they connected Messiah with the Passover lamb. They went to see the thing which they considered "has some to pass"; they absolutely believed the word spoken.

*2:16 And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger-* The baby was asleep and not feeding; the "sign" had been that they would find the baby in a manger, and this is what happened as they opened the door of the shed. Their response to the word "with haste" fits in with a major Bible theme- that the faithful respond to God's word and the Divine calling immediately and with haste.

*2:17 And when they saw it, they told people about the saying which was spoken to them about this child-* "The saying" was that about "the sign" (:12). It was indeed remarkable; that the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, should be born in the lowest way, in a strange place, to an unmarried teenager, without any human father present, with no money... and the baby was laid down to sleep in a cattle manger in a shed. And this great Messianic secret was revealed not to intellectually rigorous theologians or pious priests, but to a bunch of secular despised shepherds sitting one night on a hillside, interrupted from their lowlife gossip and chatter by a vision of Angels who told them of this great sign. This is absolutely God's way.

*2:18 And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds-* As noted in :17, "shepherds" were not the most credible of witnesses, and so people "wondered at" rather than "believed" the message. We notice how at the end of Luke, the chosen witnesses include women, who were not allowed to bear credible legal witness, and men who had just been disgraced by their public disloyalty to the Messiah they testified about. And this is why the likes of you and me have likewise been chosen as witnesses.

*2:19 And Mary treasured up all these sayings, pondering them in her heart-* When the shepherds came to worship, Mary pondered within herself what it all meant, as if she was now rather lacking in comprehension. Luke describes his Gospel as a compilation of eyewitness accounts. Where did he get the material from about Mary pondering things in her heart [2:19,51]? Was it from interviewing her himself? Or was her inward meditation and frozenness evident to others who on this basis told Luke?

We read that Mary "kept" God's words in her, yet the Lord in one of His allusions to His dear mother says in Lk. 5:38 that we must preserve or "keep" [s.w.] the new wine of the Gospel in us. The Lord saw His mother

as a pattern for us all. When He heard the comment "Blessed are the breasts which you sucked!", His comment is to draw attention rather to the spiritual side of Mary: "Blessed are they [like My dear mother] who hear the word of God and keep it". Thus He held her up as an example to them all; she shouldn't be marvelled at just because of the fact she carried the Son of God (Catholics take note) but rather because of her reflective and tenacious attitude to the word of God. Mary's song has so many Biblical allusions in it. Mary's Bible minded-ness was really quite something. The Greek word translated "ponder" (Lk. 2:19) comes from *syn*, "with", and *ballein*, "to throw", as if she combined Scripture with her experience of life, seeking to find her place in the mass of OT allusion and teaching which she was being presented with. Her every phrase has multiple allusions to Scripture, which in itself indicates a fair level of intelligence to think on so many levels simultaneously.

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months... all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

*2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it had been spoken to them-*

Again we see a connection between the beginning and ending of Luke's Gospel; for he concludes with the disciples praising God in the temple. These shepherds are presented as believers, as converts. They rejoiced in the fulfilment of what had been prophetically told them; and likewise the disciples at the end rejoiced when they perceived how the Old Testament prophetic word had been so accurately fulfilled in the things that happened to the Lord. The "things heard and seen", the "things" preached by the shepherds (:18), the "thing" told by the Angels (:15), all clearly look forward to the "things" concerning the Kingdom and name of Jesus which Luke later says were the basis of the apostolic preaching (Acts 8:5,12). The shepherds are being set up as examples of preachers, telling forth the "things" of the Gospel which they had personally experienced- even when they appeared so strange to secular ears, and were testified by those apparently least qualified to be witnesses.

*2:21 And after eight days, when he was circumcised, his name was called Jesus, which name was given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb-* The obedient naming of John as John rather than Zacharias no doubt encouraged Mary to be likewise obedient. For her son too had been given a name by an Angel before His birth. Our acts of obedience are likewise encouraged by our fellowship with other believers in similar situations who have likewise been obedient and responsive to God's word. We note the chronology; Mary's conception came *after* the Angel appeared to her. Presumably the conception only began after she had demonstrated her belief and desire to partner with God in this profound plan.

*2:22 And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord-* There was no Mosaic requirement to take a newborn child to Jerusalem, but despite their poverty, Mary and Joseph clearly tried to do the most they could for the Lord Jesus. Joseph's willing cooperation in all this is to be noted; for it was after all not his child. We can only conclude that he accepted the Lord's virgin birth and willingly went along with it- at least at that time. The Lord was perfect, without any barrier between Himself and the Father; "holy, harmless and separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). The purification ritual was not therefore to remove any sin from Him; it is no sin to be human, to be alive, and this must affect our view of what 'human nature' really is. For all we posit about it we posit about the Lord Jesus, who fully had our nature. The Greek translated "purification" here means literally a washing, and is used many times of how the Lord cleansed lepers and also sinners from their sins. The Lord did so knowing that He Himself had been likewise cleansed.

*2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)-* Again we note the medical

language of the day; for the womb is not literally opened by the birth of a firstborn child. The quotation from Ex. 13:2 concerns how the dedication of the firstborn was to be a reminder of how the slain lamb had saved the firstborn from death at the time of the exodus. The dedication of the firstborn was therefore to effectively say: 'This child ought to have died. It will not die, but will be dedicated to the Lord as a living death, a life lived out for Him and not for self'. And the Lord was therefore the supreme firstborn, to the point that "the firstborn" is a title for Him (Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23).

*2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord: A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons-* This was the sacrifice for the poor who could not afford an animal; and we have here a picture of their poverty. It was therefore all the more sacrificial for them to have made the journey to Jerusalem for this dedication, when this was not actually required by the Mosaic law. We must carefully note that the Mosaic legislation in Lev. 12:8 stated that the two birds were for the mother; there is no hint that they were a sacrifice for the cleansing of the human nature of the child born. They were for a sin offering and for a burnt offering. It could be fairly argued that they were not in fact necessary in the Lord's case, but Mary made the offering anyway and thereby the Lord's connection with sinful humanity was emphasized. It was for the same reason that He was baptized by John in a baptism which was "for the remission of sins"; not because He was a sinner, but to portray His unity with sinful humanity. They actually offered the birds, whereas Edersheim claims that at the time, the poor usually just dropped the coins which were the price of two birds into the temple coffers, and it was accepted as if the sacrifice had been offered. But Mary insisted on actually offering the birds. When the Lord paid such special attention to the widow woman casting two small coins into the same collection trumpets, He may well have thought of His mother doing the same at His birth, a coin for each of the two birds. Such restimulation is a profound window onto the total nature of His humanity.

*2:25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him-* Simeon waited for "the consolation (comfort) of Israel", referring to the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 40:1,2- and saw it have a fulfilment in the first coming of the Lord. "Simeon", the hearing one or 'the one who was heard', had heard God's word and looked for its fulfilment; and perhaps the idea is also that he had prayed for Messiah's coming, and had been heard. Therefore he was assured that his prayers would be heard, and he would see the Messiah. The consolation of Israel is therefore paralleled with Messiah personally (:26), just as "the hope of Israel" refers to the One for whom Israel hoped,

Jesus the Messiah. We should not over emphasize the material aspect of the Gospel; the implicit hope of eternity in God's Kingdom on earth is in fact secondary to the things about the Lord Jesus. He personally is the hope and consolation of Israel. This tendency is very human, and a reflection of our own deep reservations- to focus upon the material [the things of the material Kingdom on earth] rather than on upon a person, the Lord Jesus, with all the issues involved in a living relationship with that person. Israel at the Lord's time likewise had the emphasis misplaced- upon the material issues of freedom from the Romans, rather than upon the wonder of their King and Messiah coming to save them from their sins through self-sacrifice. The comfort / consolation which we need above all is the comfort that our sins shall not stand between God and us. The Lord refers to Himself as the comforter in Jn. 14-16, promising that the gift of His spirit would mean that His comforting presence remained with His people even after His physical departure.

*2:26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ-* The Spirit being "upon" Simeon (:25) did not make him infallible; but there had been a special revelation to him that his prayers for the coming of Israel's consolation, the Messiah, would be heard. And "Simeon" means just that, 'hearing', in the context of prayer being heard. Therefore he was comforted that he would live to see the Messiah.

*2:27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law-* Mary did not legally have to bring the Lord to the temple; she was poor, as reflected in her inability to offer a lamb but rather two cheap birds. It was a Divinely overruled coincidence that she happened to be in the temple courts at just the time that Simeon entered; Anna likewise (see on :38). This kind of coincidence is simply called being "in the Spirit", and the Spirit is no less active in our encounters and coincidences today. "The parents" is obviously an example of the Biblical record being written from the viewpoint of secular observers; the language of demons is similar. Joseph was not the actual parent, just as demons don't actually exist, but the language of human perception is still used. For language is in a sense a matter of human perception.

*2:28 Then he took him into his arms and blessed God, and said-* It was of "the Spirit" (see on :27) that Simeon recognized that this particular baby, held in the arms of a poor couple offering the poor person's sacrifice, without the fanfare which attended the dedication of babies from more wealthy families, was in fact the Messiah. And in this again we see how God operates, through the lowly and unnoticed by the world.

2:29 *Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word-* "Peace" usually refers to peace with God; we noted on the song of Zacharias that the Lord's birth was understood by the faithful as being essentially about the good news of peace with God through His work and death. Simeon felt he could die at peace with God because of Messiah; he clearly understood that He would atone for his sins.

This is all the language of Jacob being content to die after seeing Joseph. Joseph is simply one of the clearest types of Christ. There are many echoes of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (e.g. Gen. 46:30 LXX = Lk. 2:29,30).

2:30 *For my eyes have seen Your salvation-* 'Jesus', Yehoshua, is literally 'the salvation of Yah'. The 'seeing' of salvation alludes to how Israel were redeemed from Egypt through the slain lamb (Ex. 14:13); Simeon understood this to be representative of Messiah's victory against sin and all Israel's enemies. It is the fulfilment of the "mercy and truth" of the promises to the fathers which enables God's salvation to be seen by all the world (Ps. 98:3). Simeon's desire for the coming of Messiah was therefore rooted in a deep appreciation of the huge spiritual significance of His work and sacrifice, and not from any passing nationalistic desire to see Israel justified. He surely had Ps. 98:3 in mind, for he goes on to speak in :31 of how all the peoples of the world would 'see' what he was now seeing; he realized that he was typical of all who would later come to 'see' the Son.

2:31 *Which You have prepared before the presence of all peoples-* As noted on :30, Simeon has in mind Ps. 98:3, understanding himself as representative of all those worldwide in future ages who would 'see' God's salvation, His 'Jesus'. The translation here is difficult, and the idea is probably that he understood that this child was being prepared for exhibition in the presence of all the Gentile peoples; they in their time would see what he was now seeing. This idea is confirmed in :32.

2:32 *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel-* The light of Messiah was to be what Israel gloried in, and they were to share that light to the Gentiles. Here we have another reference to the great commission; the glorious light of Israel was to be revealed by them to the world. Simeon had in mind Is. 60:1-3, where Israel were to arise and shine just as their Messiah would. As the Lord said, "you are the light of the world", just as He personally was the light of the world. And because of that, the Gentiles would come to that light in Zion, just as Simeon had come into the temple and see the light. He is presented as representative of all future believers, and he himself perceived this.

*2:33 And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him-* There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. Again we have here an essay in His humanity. And there is another echo of the Joseph story. "The men marvelled" at Joseph's discernment. Ditto for the Lord Jesus- it is emphasized (Mt. 8:27; 9:8,33; 21:20, 42; 22:22; 27:14; Lk. 2:33; Jn. 4:27; 7:15). Mary had perceived that her son was God's Son, the Messiah; but clearly the extent of the prophetic implications of this were not fully perceived by her. Hence she marvelled at the Biblical allusions made by Simeon.

*2:34 And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother-*Addressing himself to the mother rather than the father is another of Luke's emphases upon the high status of women before God. Simeon surely perceived that this was a virgin birth, and Joseph was not the true father- hence he addressed Mary.

*Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against-* Simeon knew that the good news of Messiah's coming was to be balanced against the fact that the Old Testament taught that He would be the rock of offence over which many would stumble and be broken (Is. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). But he knew that many would rise up broken from that encounter into new life, and the "rising again" also therefore has reference to resurrection at the last day. He would be "spoken against", and yet out of that experience of rejecting Him, some would repent and rise again. Indeed, in 1 Pet. 2:8 Peter seems to assume that all believers will go through this- stumbling in spiritual failure, and yet rising again to new life in Him. Luke will go on in 20:18 to record the Lord developing this logic- He is a stone, and we either fall upon Him and join the community of the broken, or He shall fall upon us as members of this world, and grind us to powder in condemnation- clearly alluding to the stone of Daniel 2. Luke in Acts likes to use this idea of 'speaking against' for the opposition towards the message of the Lord Jesus and those "in Him", who were likewise spoken against; for all that is true of the Lord personally becomes true for we who are in Him (Acts 13:45; 28:19,22). We see in all this how the Lord works through our stumbling; there is hardly a strong believer I know who has not at some time seriously stumbled in their walk.

*2:35 Yes, and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed-*Mary's lack of perception caused her great pain. The way the Lord refers to her as "Woman" both in Cana was, apparently, an unusually cold way for a man to refer to his mother. He effectively rebuffed her in Cana for her lack of perception; He



responds to the woman who tells Him how blessed His mother is by saying that all who hear the word of God and keep it are equally blessed. And when His mother wants to speak to Him, He says in front of the whole crowd that His mothers are all who do God's will. And the final pain must have been at the cross, where in His dying words He tells her that she is no longer His mother, but she must now be the mother of John. Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk. 2:35- the Syriac text has 'a spear') may refer to her feelings on beholding the literal piercing of her son's side- remembering that He was pierced with "the staff of a spear" (2 Sam. 23:7), it went in so deep. The fact water as well as blood came out is further evidence that the spear penetrated deeply. Yet there is an allusion surely to Is. 49:1,2, where Messiah's mouth is likened to a sharp, piercing sword. Note how the passage has reference to Mary: "The Lord has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has he made mention of my name. And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword". Could it not be that Simeon foresaw how the Lord's words would pierce Mary to the quick? For in all the incidents above, she must have thought with a lump in her throat: 'But come on Jesus... I'm your *mum*... the one who knitted and mended your clothes as a child... how can you speak to me like that...?'. And as a sensitive, reflective soul she would have reflected and hurt deeply at these words.

The sword / spear that pierced the Lord pierced her heart, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The cross is therefore the ultimate source of self-examination. The Greek for "thoughts" means "inmost thoughts", and all 13 uses of *dialogismos* in the NT are negative- bad thoughts, vain thoughts, doubting thoughts. The five other references in Luke are all very pointedly like this (Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38). We all find self-understanding and self-examination difficult; and we find it hard to feel our sinfulness as we should. Yet the cross is the ultimate stimulus to self-examination, to conviction of sin, and then of salvation and the reality of grace and God's love. This same process happened for Mary "also". Over the years she had perhaps lost something of her initial humility, feeling that her exalted place in God's plan was due to some personal righteousness, and therefore the cross experience had to pierce her too, so that she too had the inmost thoughts of her heart revealed to herself. We have shown earlier how Mary so identified herself with her dearest Son that she felt in some way part of Messiah. Yet over the years of repetitive domestic life in Nazareth, the height of the call to be "in Christ", really part of Him and His work, must have been ground away. Yet at the cross, her soul was as it were pierced with the same sword / spear that pierced her Son. Ps. 22:20 prophesied how the Lord would suffer "the sword" on the cross, and 2 Sam. 24 had spoken of Him being filled with a spear. "A sword shall pierce through your own soul *also*" meant that as Mary was part of Jesus, so she must also share in His sufferings too. The proud and happy mother as she stood before Simeon

was so thrilled to be as it were "In Christ", connected with Messiah. But she had to be reminded that to share in His life is to share in His death- and it was only the actual experience of the cross which brought this home to her. And so with us, brethren in Christ, and rightfully proud of the high calling and association with Him which we have... there is a darker side to our being in Christ. It involves sharing in His death, that we might share in His life. Mary's achievement of this is perhaps reflected in the way the mother of the man child [Jesus] in Rev. 12 is persecuted after the pattern of her Son Jesus, and yet survives.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. See on 1 Cor. 11:32.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed*; and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

We should note that as Mary's soul was pierced at the death of her son, so was the Father's. For "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10) in its context speaks of the Father and not the Son. So in the Son's piercing, the Father and mother were likewise pierced. The Divine-human family were united at that tragic moment.

*2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity-*

Hannah's example not only influenced Mary, but also Anna's. 'Anna' is an unusual first century name; "of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE - 200 CE whose names are known, Anna [in Luke 2]

is the only one who bears this name" (Tal Ilan, 'Notes of the distribution of Jewish women's names in Palestine', Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 40 (1989) pp. 186,193). She therefore named herself this after Hannah, the Hebrew equivalent of Anna; she was inspired by Hannah's example of waiting and praying in the sanctuary for a child. For Anna, the coming of Messiah was equivalent to having her own child. Her hope for Messiah's coming was something which she felt personally. We too are awaiting the Lord's coming- but with anything of her intensity and feeling? She looked for redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:25,38), clearly alluding to the LXX of Is. 52:9: "The Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem". She saw the coming of that little baby as the redemption of God's people; she had the faith to see things yet unseen. The Hebrew for 'redemption' can imply 'with blood'- is it going too far to suggest that she perceived the need for that little baby to grow up and then shed His blood for Israel's redemption? Her father's name, Phanuel, is the Hebrew 'Peniel', meaning 'the face of God'. And 'Hannah' means 'God's grace'. Straight away we see a link to Num. 6:25: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you". The connection implies God's passionate joy at her attitude and existence. Her remaining in the temple was perhaps inspired by passages like Ps. 27:4, where David spoke of his desire to dwell in the temple all the days of his life in order to see God's beauty- which she understood in terms of His Son. And especially, Mal. 3:1, which speaks of the Lord's coming to His temple. We must ask ourselves what our Bible study and knowledge actually leads to. A study of Romans 6 may lead to baptism; but all God's word demands of us an actual and concrete response in the things of real life. She allowed the example of another woman, Hannah, to influence her, perhaps even to the point of changing her name; what of us?

*2:37 And she had been a widow eighty four years. She departed not from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day-* She "departed not" in the sense that she was regularly present for the morning and evening sacrifices and prayers. She "came up" to the temple to worship (:38) so she was not actually there all the time. Again we have the language of observed experience, as we have with demons. It appeared that she never left the temple, just as small children have the impression that their school teachers live at the school.

Men like David, Hezekiah and Daniel appreciated that God knew already. In a sense, all that will happen has happened; so prayer is an opening up of ourselves to God, a *service* ['worshiping'] of God (Dan. 6:16; Lk. 2:37), for His glory and for our benefit, rather than a means of communicating information to Him. Therefore they opened themselves up to Him, expressing their understanding that He knew the situation, and didn't present a long list of concrete requests to Him. Their relationship with Him went far beyond that kind of surface level. What of ours?

*2:38 And coming up to worship at that very same hour, she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all those that were looking for redemption in Jerusalem-* See on :36. The loyal band of Bible students in the temple expected redemption to appear in Jerusalem, presumably because of the Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2 concerning Christ being manifested in Jerusalem at His second coming and Kingdom. But their first century application of these was not wrong. "At that very same hour" reflects the same kind of Divine coincidence that we noted on :27. No meeting is by chance for those who are led by the Spirit.

*2:39 And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth-* Mary "performed [fulfilled] all things according to the law" in her dedication of Jesus. In doing this, she anticipated the spirit of the cross and whole ministry of Jesus, where He performed [s.w. fulfilled] all things of the law- Lk. 18:31; Jn. 19:28; 30; Acts 13:29. These passages each use the same three words for all things, law, and fulfilled. She brought the Lord up in the way of the cross; and He continued in that path.

*2:40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit. The parallel is with the growth of John the Baptist in 1:80, who was strong in the Spirit, and filled with the Spirit from the womb.

Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks likewise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning 'to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering'. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final 'perfection' of being able to say "I am".

*2:41 And his parents went up every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover-* It was only the enthusiasts who went to Jerusalem every year. The Mosaic command was that every male should appear; but Mary went too. Perhaps she was motivated by the example of her heroine Hannah, who also went up to the tabernacle each year (1 Sam. 1:7). We can conclude that Joseph was indeed a spiritual person, and that Mary supported him in this. For her to go to Jerusalem every year for the first 12 years of marriage indicates that she placed great priority on it; for she

would surely at times have been pregnant, yet she still made the pilgrimage.

*2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to the tradition of the feast-* There was no legal requirement for this; but they are presented as obedient to Jewish tradition.

*2:43 And when they had finished the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not-* "The days" which they "finished" may refer not to Passover but to the traditional dedication of a 12 year old boy. The Lord clearly wanted to remain in Jerusalem, and may well have arranged circumstances so that His parents would not initially notice His absence. He must have felt some need to do His true Father's business in His house at that time; perhaps He felt the need to make a first appeal to the Jewish leadership at that time.

*2:44 Supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and then they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances-* It has been speculated that men and women travelled in different companies, and so Joseph assumed the Lord was with Mary, and vice versa. But we cannot avoid a suspicion of negligence on their part, especially given that He was known by them to be God's Son.

*2:45 And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him-* The Lord gently rebukes them for not knowing that He would be in the temple; we note that they searched for three days (:46) before thinking to look for Him in the temple. Presumably He had made some comment to them about His need to remain three days in the temple, and they had not perceived His sense at all. This all paves the way for how His clear predictions of His three days disappearance in death were likewise not understood. His followers came seeking Him at that time, but in the wrong way and place. His clearly stated words at this time were not understood, just as His later words about His resurrection would not be.

*2:46 And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions-* The three days were clearly a significant period; see on :45. The Lord presumably slept rough, perhaps on the mount of Olives. By that age He would already have perceived much about His death and how it would all transpire, and wished to familiarize himself with the city where it would all happen. He is often portrayed later as sitting in the midst of His students; here, at 12 years old, the teachers are already His students. His asking of questions may not necessarily mean that He asked them

things He didn't know; it could refer to the rabbinic method of teaching by asking rhetorical questions, a style frequently used by the Lord.

*2:47 And all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers-* See on Acts 2:7. These men who were so impressed by His intellect and insight would have had amongst them some who 18 years later would have encountered Him again, and become filled with the same envy which perhaps began to well up within them even then. As He posed rhetorical questions to them, so they did to Him; and they were amazed at His answers. Despite this intellectual and spiritual supremacy which the Lord had as Son of God, His neighbours and family considered Him a mere carpenter and were offended when He indirectly claimed to be Messiah. We can deduce that He clearly held Himself back from revealing Himself as radically different from the rest of them. It would have been so frustrating and irritating to be so intellectually and spiritually more developed than others, and yet to say nothing, time and again, and relate with them on their level.

*2:48 And when they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him: Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you-* "Anxiously searching" is "sorrowing", using a word elsewhere used about despair and anguish for the loss of life (Lk. 16:24,25; Acts 20:38). She feared He was dead. But where, then, was her faith in the promise that He would have an eternal Kingdom...? The distraction of poverty, the demands of the other children, perhaps an unsupportive partner, self-doubt... all these ground away at her earlier spirituality and faith, just as happens to so many of us after baptism too.

"Why have you done this to us?" is a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture. Unlike 12 years previously, she is now using Scripture without correct context; but she has far from totally lost her spirituality.

Mary and Joseph were "astonished". She shared Joseph's amazement; and the word is only used of the amazement / incomprehension of the crowds- Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 10:26. Slowly she became influenced by the world's view of her son- not totally, but partially, to the extent that she lost that keen perception and height of spiritual ambition which she had earlier had. And so it can be for so many of us; the world

comes to influence our view not only of our own children, but of all things in spiritual life.

Mary scolds Him that his father [Joseph] and her have been seeking for Him. The surrounding world perceived Him as the carpenter's son (Mt. 13:55), the son of Joseph (Jn. 6:42). He was "as was supposed" ['reckoned legally?'] the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Even Philip perceived Messiah to be "the son of Joseph" even after he had accepted Him (Jn. 1:45). Hence Jesus gently rebuked her that He was about His true Father's business, in His true Father's house. Her description of Joseph as "thy father" is surely worthy of the Lord's rebuke. She had allowed the views of the world to influence her view of the Lord. "Is not this the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3) is paralleled in Mt. 13:55 by "the carpenter's son", and in Lk. 4:22 Joseph's son; everyone assumed they were His natural parents, the son of Mary & Joseph, and this came to influence her. Jesus told them that they should have sought Him in His true Father's house- and this may not only be a reference to the temple, but to the way in which they had assumed He was somewhere with the house / family of Joseph in the convoy; and perhaps they had gone round Joseph's relatives in Jerusalem hunting for Him.

*2:49 And he said to them: How is it you searched for me? Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?*- I suggested on :45 that the Lord had in fact told them that He was going to be in His Father's house, the temple, for three days. They had misunderstood or ignored His words; just as His followers would do to His later predictions of His three days 'disappearance'.

There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. The Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her (2 Sam. 13:20).

A window into the Lord's self-perception is given here in the record of His behaviour in the temple at age 12. Within the psychological matrix in which the young Jesus existed, as well as within the cultural norms of first century Palestine, it was rude for a 12 year old to retort to his mother: "Didn't you know I would be about my father's business?". It appears insolent towards Joseph too. But that statement, in the Lord's case, was

not a sin, nor a typically precocious childish comment- although it would've been on the lips of any other 12 year old. Instead it reflects an abnormal degree of detachment from His mother and step-father, and a remarkable statement as to how much He was Himself, how mature and strong was His sense of identity as the uniquely begotten Son of God.

A sense of compulsion was found in the Lord's whole life of service, leading up to the cross as it did (see on Mk. 14:49):

"Wist ye not that *I must be* about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 AV). "And he said unto them, *I must preach* the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). "He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

2:50 *And they did not understand what he spoke to them*- He had told them that He would be in His Father's house for three days. But they did not understand. And now they see plainly what has happened, they still do not understand. This is exactly the situation we find at the end of Luke's gospel, where the resurrected Lord [after three days disappearance] is still not understood.

Lk. 2:50 records that Mary "understood not", using the same phrase as is on the lips of the Lord in Mt. 13:13, speaking of those without who "hear not neither do they understand"; and ominously, Mary stood without and asked to see Jesus, only to be told that His real mothers were those women sitting around Him listening to His words. In passing, note how the disciples also often "understood not" (Mt. 16:12; Mk. 6:52; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34). And yet the Lord counted them as more understanding than they were. As with Mary. She "understood not" (Lk. 2:50) the clear enough statement that He was in *His* Father's house. And the Lord rebuked her for spending so long, three days, looking elsewhere when she should have perceived quicker that He was going to be in the house of His true Father. I take His words not as a sharp rebuff but rather more of grief, that Mary had known him so poorly, sad at her loss of perception.

2:51 *And he left with them and went to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and his mother treasured all these sayings in her heart*- It could be that she had pondered from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it. This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue



and on the basis of Old Testament exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. The Lord was "subject unto" Mary- to train Him for the time when we would be subject to Him as we are now (1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22; 5:24), and all the world subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 2:8). And so, wondrous thought that it is, the training of His mother has effect even now; with literally *all* subject to Him, He was prepared for this by having been subject unto His mother.

2:52- see on Mk. 6:2; Lk. 2:19.

*And Jesus developed both in wisdom and body, and in favour with God and men-* A Joseph allusion: "The Lord... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21). As noted on :40, Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected" or as we have it here in Luke, "developed", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks likewise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning 'to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering'. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final 'perfection' of being able to say "I am".

## CHAPTER 3

*3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene-* Luke's careful attention to historical detail is understandable if his Gospel was partly written for use in Paul's defence whilst imprisoned in Caesarea and / or Rome. And the material is also used specifically to seek to convert Theophilus.

*3:2 In the highpriesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness-* John came preaching the word (Mt. 3:1); and the word came to John. All witness and evangelism is a reflection of an ongoing mutual relationship between God and the preacher, mediated through His word. John's message of repentance (:3) was taken from the word of God in the Old Testament; and so the word of God which came to him was perhaps the command to begin his ministry. He had been in the wilderness from a young man, awaiting the call to begin his ministry. We have here another example of a man experiencing a period in the wilderness before starting his ministry; Moses, Paul and the Lord Jesus are other examples. And in essence the same is often the pattern in human life today.

*3:3 And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins-* Presumably this connects with Mt. 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

The two clauses in this sentence appear to be the wrong way around. We would expect to read that John came preaching baptism, and then baptized people. One way around the problem is to imagine that the second clause ("preaching the baptism...") is as it were in brackets, explaining that the baptism he performed was not Christian baptism but simply a sign of repentance and request for remission of sins. But Mt. 3:11 makes it explicit that his baptism *preceded* the call for repentance. "Baptize... unto repentance" alludes to the Isaiah 40 passage which offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on Mt. 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of

judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

The Greek *metanoia* ["repentance"] was used as a legal term describing the re-thinking of a sentence. Paul uses this figure in Romans to describe how we are condemned as guilty, but the sentence is re-thought because we are in Christ. Strong's lexicon claims that the word can mean "by implication, reversal of another's decision". Our re-thinking thus becomes God's re-thinking. In this we see something of the intimacy and connection between God and man achieved by human repentance. The legal metaphor continues in the word translated "remission"- the idea is of legal pardon or freedom from the accusation.

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: "They do *not* return to the Lord their God" (Hos. 7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God's estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with

her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:4 *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: The voice of one crying, In the wilderness make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight-* Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come, so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way of *the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way of *the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to

perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the "Lamb of God", a phrase the Jews would've understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

*3:5 Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked paths shall become straight, and the rough ways smooth-* John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah. God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ. Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

*3:6 And all flesh-* See on Mt. 3:3.

*Shall see the salvation of God-* John perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

*3:7 He said to the crowds that went out to be baptized by him: You*

*offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*- The ideas of fleeing wrath and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution... than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do.

The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude... ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience. But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the

marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance'. And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to be conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

*3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you, that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones-* The eagerness of John for the inculcation of faith is seen in the way He foresees the likely thought processes within men. "Begin not to say within yourselves...." (Lk. 3:8), He told a generation of vipers; and the Lord eagerly strengthened the centurion's faith when it was announced that faith was pointless, because his daughter had died. Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his

letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

"These stones" was said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim*, sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:9- see on Lk. 13:8; Col. 3:13.

*And even now, the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire-* John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (Mt. 3:13), meaning that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:10 *And the crowds asked him, saying: What then must we do?-* Luke phrases this in the same language he uses of the crowds who responded to Peter's preaching in Acts 2. The answer was the same- repent, accept Jesus as Messiah and be baptized. John saw the essence of the Christian gospel as just that, and it was essentially the same message taught by both John and Peter.

3:11 *And he answered and said to them: He that has two coats, let him give to him that has none, and he that has food, let him do likewise-* In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food. So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have... for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

3:12 *And there came also tax collectors to be baptized; and they said to*



*him: Teacher, what must we do?*- There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican and also records this- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

*3:13 And he said to them: Collect no more than what you have been ordered to-* John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers.

*3:14 And soldiers also asked him, saying: And we, what must we do? And he said to them: Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages-*

The nature of how demanding John was is reflected in his response to the soldiers and publicans. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding.

John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his

serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor... they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right...?

*3:15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether he was the Christ-*

*3:16 John answered, saying to them all: I indeed baptize you with water, but there comes he that is mightier than I, whose shoelaces I am not worthy to untie. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire-* The Greek for "mightier" is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22, where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously possessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire; this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words here spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy")

to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

"He shall baptize you" points up the contrast is between John baptizing unto repentance, and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between 'repentance' and 'the Holy Spirit'. I suggest that the idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower repentance and new-mindedness far more than what was achieved by unaided, steel-willed human repentance.

3:17 *Whose fan is in his hand, to cleanse his threshing-floor thoroughly, and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire-* John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done

ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel.

"He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

*3:18 With many other appeals he preached good tidings to the people-*  
The need to repent is in fact good news. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as Jesus preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:19 *But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for marrying Herodias his brother's wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done-* Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on Mt. 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus. John's example here raises the question of whether we should protest immoral behaviour in society. It could be argued that Herod claimed to be Jewish and therefore responsible to Divine law.

The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

3:20 *Also added this, that he locked John up in prison-* Even with very sinful men, their continual sins still register in the feelings of God. The way God progressively senses the weight of accumulated sin is reflected in His description of the Amorites' iniquity filling up (Gen. 15:16); or Israel marrying Gentiles "to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). "The iniquity of Israel is bound up, his sin is kept in store" (Hos. 13:12). God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins (e.g. 2 Kings 17:2). "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. And this doesn't only apply to His people; but to all sin, committed by anyone, anywhere. Thus Herod "added yet this above all" when he imprisoned John after also sinning with another man's wife. We have an uncanny ability to become numb to sin the more we see or do it. But not so Almighty, all righteous God. This is a feature of His nature that needs meditation.

3:21 *Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also having been baptized and praying, the heaven was opened-* The Lord's baptism was in his case not for forgiveness, but as a sign of identity with "all the people". And Luke in his words here recognizes that. Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord

saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

*3:22 And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily form as a dove, and a voice came out of heaven: You are My beloved Son-* Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.

*In you I am well pleased-* Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus. God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father. See on 2 Pet. 1:17. The voice had the same intonation as the voice on the mount of transfiguration; it was the voice of God Himself in person. The Father's 'pleasure' spoke also of His 'will'. His will was done, and His pleasure thereby achieved, "in" His Son; because of the Lord's internal state of mind. And this sets the path toward understanding our own status "in Christ".

*3:23 And Jesus, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age-* Thirty was the age at which priests began to minister; and yet Luke connects this with the Lord's beginning to teach. For the duty of priests was to teach.

*Being the son (as was legally reckoned) of Joseph, the son of Heli-* See on Lk. 2:49. The genealogies focus upon Joseph because Mary has already been stated to be the descendant of David, in his direct line. Giving the genealogies of Joseph is however a kind of concession to human weakness in not accepting genealogies through the mother; for Joseph was of course not the Lord's biological father. But even he could be traced as the rightful inheritor of Israel's throne had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph. And the genealogy is included for the sake of those who reckoned by law. And yet the record in Luke appears to effectively be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying Mary, the daughter of Heli; the

Talmud speaks with gross vitriol about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

The Talmud (*Treatise Bava Bathra*, 110a) claims that Mary the mother of Jesus was called the daughter of Heli. In this case we would then effectively have here the genealogy of Mary; and this is rather confirmed by the fact that Matthew's genealogy gives a man called Jacob as the Lord's grandfather, whereas Luke gives "Heli". Both can be correct, if one [i.e. Luke] is the genealogy of Mary as it were attached to Joseph, the "supposed" father of Jesus.

3:24 *The son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph*- This "Jannai" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the second, who reigned sixteen years.

3:25 *The son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai*- These are all identified by Philo as being kings during the period of the Maccabees.

3:26 *The son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda*- "Joda" or "Juda" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the first, in whom the kingly and priestly lines crossed, making him and his offspring 'king-priests'. This is how the Lord is portrayed, as a king who is also priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:27 *The son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri*- Lk. 3:27 in some versions describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). It could be that Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel.

3:28 *The son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er-* From verses 28 to 31 we have 20 names; Matthew for the same period has 14, demonstrating that the genealogies do not cover every generation; "son of" can mean grandson or descendant of. Those named are clearly for a purpose.

3:29 *The son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi-* The mention of a "Levi" could suggest that although this is the line through Judah, there was some intermarriage with the Levites; this made the Lord a king-priest, as required for the Messianic priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:30 *The son of Symeon, the son of Judas, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim-* We read of a Levi in :29; now of a Simeon, Judah and Joseph. And yet this is the genealogy through Judah (:33). We can assume from these names that the tribes intermarried. This was far from ideal and was not God's intention; and yet all this was in the genetic pool and background of the Lord Jesus. Yet none of these factors make us inevitable sinners, and the Lord overcame them as we can.

3:31 *The son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David-* The line is traced not through Solomon but rather through Nathan, named perhaps after the prophet Nathan who had rebuked David, and whom he so respected that he names a son after Nathan. Yet Nathan openly rebuked David for what he had done with Uriah and Bathsheba. This in the end led to deep respect.

3:32 *The son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon-* Boaz was unashamed to marry Ruth the Moabitess and raise up his seed to his relative, meaning that his inheritance would have to be further divided. This was at a time when the fields were split up into strips, as we also learn from the book of Ruth, and further subdividing the strips made farming difficult and unprofitable. The nameless relative who was closer to Ruth than Boaz refused to marry her because he didn't want to spoil the inheritance he was going to hand over to his existing children. And yet he who was so concerned about secular things and the good continuance of his name- found himself anonymous in the final account. It was Boaz, the one prepared to have more children and further subdivide his inheritance, who goes down in history as an ancestor of the Lord.

3:33 *The son of Amminadab, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah-* Perez was born by the strange and immoral set of events recorded in Genesis 38, whereby Judah's daughter in law Tamar acted as a prostitute to seduce Judah to get her pregnant- and Perez was the result. So often it seems that pre-existing background,



family and genetic issues all set up a person for spiritual failure. One lesson of these genealogies is that sin is not inevitable. The Lord Jesus had all this, and far more, in His ancestry- and yet He never sinned. We are a new creation in Him.

*3:34 The son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor-* This is a clear statement that the Lord was indeed the promised seed of the Jewish fathers. His humanity was critically important to the fulfilment of those promises.

*3:35 The son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah-* "Eber" has been suggested as the first occurrence of "Hebrew". The Lord is being presented as a well qualified Jew, despite the admixture of Gentile blood at many points. We note that it is Matthew, writing to Jews, who tends to mention the Gentile connections of the Lord's genealogy; whereas Luke, writing to Gentiles, doesn't emphasize them. Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate to them that indeed "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22); Gentile salvation was brought about by the Lord being Israel's Messiah and fulfilling the promises to the Jewish fathers.

*3:36 The son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech-* The apparent differences with the genealogy in Gen. 10:24; 11:12; 1 Chron. 1:24 are because Luke is following the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text. It is common for the New Testament writers to do this. We note that Shem's grandson was called Cainan; clearly there was intermarriage between the descendants of Noah, and the theory that different coloured human beings emerged from the three sons of Noah is simply fantasy.

*3:37 The son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan-* Luke is concerned with the facts of the genealogy; he could have done what people tend to do in presenting genealogies, and present the hero as continuing a prestigious line. Positive things could have been noted about Enoch and Methuselah, as we find when we read their histories in Genesis; but there is not a word about this. The great truth presented is that the Lord is truly the seed of Abraham and David, and really had our nature and connection with us all.

*3:38 The son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God-* The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogies of Jesus we find in Matthew and Luke were quite radical in this regard. For they traced the pedigree of Jesus back to God- as if He were the emperor. This would have made this

gospel record forbidden literature at some periods of the Roman empire and emperor cult.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness-* The Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing; and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

4:2 *Being tempted by the Devil for forty days. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were completed, he was hungry-* Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my [The Real Devil](#).

The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called "the devil". It was this same human weakness, the "Satan", or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

The temptations were controlled by God for the Lord's spiritual education. The passages quoted by the Lord to strengthen Himself against His desires ("devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs:

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no."	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 "Jesus led up of the spirit" "forty days" "in the wilderness". Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
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Deuteronomy 8:3. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord..."	"He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. "He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God".,
Deuteronomy 8:5 "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee"	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus the Lord showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by "wild beasts" because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

4:3 *And the Devil said to him: If you are the Son of God, command these stones that they become bread*- The first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left" (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of *God*..." by quoting Dt. 8:3

"*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

4:4 *And Jesus answered him: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone-* The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

#### **Deuteronomy 8**

v. 2 "The Lord your God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"

Forty years in the wilderness

v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".

The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)

"Man does not live by bread alone"

#### **Luke 4**

v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.

Forty days in the wilderness

The Angel made Jesus hunger.

Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.

v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him

into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

*4:5 And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time-* This was surely a vision or imagination of the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world" becomes those of the Lord Jesus. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here- within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:

- Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, "In a moment of time". There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 1:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Matthew 4:2,3 says that "when he had fasted forty days... the tempter (Satan) came to Him...". Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these

same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

*4:6 And the Devil said to him: To you will I give all this authority and the glory of them. For it has been delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will, I give it-* The Lord knew full well that "all things" (Mt.), the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

*4:7 Therefore, if you will worship me, it shall all be yours-* All the kingdoms of the world will indeed be the Lord's. This was the subtlety of

the temptation. The question was when and how that was to be achieved. The Lord knew that the cross must come before that crown. But the temptation would have been to try to circumvent that, and this is portrayed as falling down and worshipping self.

*4:8 And Jesus answered and said to him: It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve-* The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalizing Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

*4:9 And he led him to Jerusalem, set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here-* The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise 'set him' in Mt. 4:5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

*4:10 For it is written: He shall give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you-* The Angels were given "charge concerning thee" (Jesus)- in the court of Heaven, God's purpose was declared and His charge made clear concerning His Son (Lk. 4:10 RVmg.).

Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with



the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "You shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

4:11 *And on their hands they shall carry you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone-* Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen (Gen. 18:10).

4:12 *And Jesus answering said to him: It is said, you shall not test the Lord your God-* The Greek in Matthew effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

4:13 *And when the Devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a time-* The essence of all the temptations returned to the Lord, particularly in Gethsemane and on the cross. Every time we discern them returning, they are at the hands of the Jews- to become king immediately in Jn. 6, to come down from the cross. Which leads us to perceive that the 'devil' in the wilderness may have been manifested through the Jewish satan; the idea of the Jewish system as the great satan or adversary to the Lord and His later work is continued throughout

the New Testament.

*4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and the news about him went out throughout all the region-* This was no glorious entry into Galilee; He withdrew into Galilee (Mt. 4:12) after cleansing the temple (Jn. 2:13-22), taking the imprisonment of John as the sign to begin His ministry. He felt He was withdrawing, heavy in spirit at the loss of John the Baptist to prison, but in the eyes of the world, it was a triumphal entry (:15). "The power of the Spirit" may mean that He began doing miracles, thus accounting for news of Him spreading like wildfire, or simply that He was propelled by the leadership of the Spirit as we can be today.

*4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all-* The entry to Galilee could be that of Jn. 4:43, meaning that by this stage He had already turned water into wine at Cana (Jn. 2). The miracles had begun, but the 'glorifying' of Jesus is presented as in connection with His teaching rather than His miracles. This is an important theme- that His teaching was far more significant than His miracles. And that teaching we have recorded for us. It ought to elicit the same desire to glorify Him.

*4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read-* This suggests He had been a regular synagogue attender and reader, but somehow this time, as He read the Messianic prophecies, it was clear that He was the word made flesh. He was the One. He must have previously somehow contained the fact He was the Messiah, living His life of perfect obedience in a somehow obscured manner. Now, He let down the mask and revealed Himself for who He was.

*4:17 And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written-* The record is as it were of a video capture, focusing on every detail of His body language- He stood up to read (:16), the scroll was delivered into His hands, He opened it and He found the place in the scroll. All this is to present in more visual form what John states more enigmatically- the word was made flesh.

Although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew particularly to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived

out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

*4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are bruised-* The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.

Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off...and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent... *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

Isaiah 61 was the Jewish synagogue reading for the Day of Atonement and especially on the first day of a jubilee year, and it could be that the Lord is alluding to this when He said that "today" those words were coming true. Perhaps that day was a day of atonement. He was the means for atonement, on which basis the Jubilee was proclaimed; the good news of Messiah was not so much a political kingdom free from the Romans, but the good news of atonement for sin.

Christ means 'Messiah', the anointed one. He was anointed in order "to preach the Gospel"; and we too have been anointed insofar as we are in Christ, the anointed one (2 Cor. 1:21). Therefore as He was ordained a preacher of the Gospel to the world, we too share that honour (as we do all His honours, to some extent). He was anointed ('oiled') by God in order to give the oil of joy to His people; He shared His experience of anointing with us, and we must go out and do likewise (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18).

4:19 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*- See on :18. To preach **[proclaim]** the **acceptable year** of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall **proclaim** liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you: behold, now is the **accepted time**" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached **[proclaimed]**, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

4:20 *And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him*- "The word was made flesh" in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is reflected here, as noted on :17. Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation's eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father's word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. See on Lk. 4:36; Jn. 14:10.

4:21 *And he began to say to them: Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing*- It was fulfilled "today" in that it was on that day that He chose to remove the mask He had worn before His neighbours, and reveal Himself for who He was- the Messiah.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfilment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" or "hearing" as

standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

*4:22 And all bore him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said-* Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was so impressed with the words of His Son. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke, as in Jn. 7:46; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

*Is this not Joseph's son?-* Mary had clearly not shared with others what had happened around the Lord's conception. She had perhaps come to see Him as Joseph's son by the time she rebuked Him at age 12 in the temple, when she refers to Joseph as His father. She became influenced in her view of the Lord by the view of others. And we can take a warning from this. Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed 'father' on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. When He declared Himself as

Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized. He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

*4:23 And he said to them: Doubtless you will say to me this proverb: Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your hometown-* The nobleman's son had been cured in Capernaum, as recorded in John. "Heal yourself" could suggest the Lord had some illness or physical weakness. The language of Isaiah 53 is full of allusion to leprosy. He may have had the appearance of leprosy, some skin condition, whilst not having leprosy itself. This would speak much of the Lord's relationship with sin.

*4:24 And he said: Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own hometown-* We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris* ("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

*4:25 But of a truth I say to you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land-* See on James 5:16-18. We only learn of the length of the famine in the New Testament. Three and a half years is a period we often meet in the latter day prophecies- 1260 days, 42 months, a time, times [two times] and a half. This latter

day period is therefore flagged up as the time of the ministry of the latter day Elijah, as an appeal for Israel to repent.

*4:26 And to none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow-* In the context of :27, the implication would be that this woman too was a Gentile. Even at the start of His ministry, the Lord stressed Gentile acceptance. This was not simply because He realized Israel would reject Him and the door thereby opened to the Gentiles; but because He understood that the good news of the Hope of Israel was in fact good news for the Gentile world if they embraced that hope.

*4:27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian-* When Naaman's maid asserted that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy, this was not therefore based on experience. She had not even heard of Elisha curing any lepers in Israel. But she believed it was the kind of thing he could do.

*4:28 And they were all filled with anger in the synagogue as they heard these things-* There is a similar account in Mt. 13:55-58. If this is indeed a later, similar incident, then we marvel at how despite this rejection, the Lord later returned to give them another chance- and was treated likewise. Anger is demonstrated here to be rooted in a bad conscience. They realized the truth of who He was, but refused to accept it. And this leads to anger. Much human anger, although not all of it, is rooted in such bad conscience. And the anger is directed at the one[s] whose words have been rejected.

*4:29 And they rose up and threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong-* This was the punishment for a heretic. They knew He said the truth, but because it demanded so much of them, they claimed He was heretical. So many cries of 'heresy' and 'heretic' are psychologically rooted in a subconscious refusal to accept the truths presented. I suggest this is why there has been such a long tradition of hatred, anger and calling of 'heretic' against those who preach a non-Trinitarian Jesus. If He truly had our nature and therefore was not God, this demands so much of us. And men shy away from that and cry 'heresy' rather than be challenged as to what are the very high possibilities for we who share the nature the Lord had when mortal.

There may be an allusion here to Jephthah, who had been "despised and rejected of men" during the time of Israel's suffering. In this and many other ways he is a clear type of Christ. Jephthah reminded the "elders of Gilead" who were now seeking his help, "Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?" (Jud. 11:7). The Hebrew for "expel" is also

translated 'thrust out'; Jesus was 'thrust out' from his native town as Jephthah was from Gilead, perhaps a technical term for local excommunication from the city synagogue region. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for Christ's rejection. He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as the Lord was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41).

4:30 *But he passing through the midst of them went his way-* The Lord clearly had the ability to avoid capture and death. This explains why towards the end of His ministry He was not taken and killed earlier. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:17,18). So we see highlighted the fact that He could have avoided the cross, but chose not to- the essence of His wilderness temptations.

4:31 *And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath day-* He had been there earlier (:23), and cured the nobleman's son there. But Luke is writing for Gentiles, and so he mentions where Capernaum was located.

4:32 *And they were astonished at his teaching; for his word was with authority-* The synagogue minister gave the lesson or sermon, but invited members of the congregation to contribute their thoughts. The Lord's message would therefore have been brief, but so powerful that it astonished people. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

His authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of



God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

*4:33 And in the synagogue, there was a man that had a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice-* Notice that the man [singular] cried out in the plural ["us... we", :34], and then changes immediately back to the singular "I know you..." (:34). This is a classic case of schizophrenia- not literal demon possession.

*4:34 Leave us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! The Holy One of God!*- See on :33. Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

*4:35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt-* If as suggested on :34, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

This is recorded from the perspective of the onlooking crowd, with their beliefs and observations coloured by those beliefs. The video camera of the Gospel writer is as it were focused on them, and therefore the

language of demon possession is used. The Greek for "tearing" used in Mark at this point is literally 'to make gasp'. It is appropriate to an epileptic convulsion or fit. But these incidents are not the work of indwelling demons; for they can be managed by medication today. The convulsion is described in the language of the day, as if there was a struggle within the man, and then in the man's panting afterwards we are invited to imagine a spirit departing from him. There was no actual "unclean spirit" involved; the cure was of personality, as noted on :34, it was as if one of the man's less dominant personalities now left him. And that is the kind of healing which the Lord through the Spirit can work today.

*4:36 And amazement came upon all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying: What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out-* See on :32. We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching* had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

*4:37 And there went a rumour concerning him into every place of the region round about-* "Rumour" is literally "a noise". The word about the Lord Jesus went to "every place", every isolated dwelling. The Lord clearly used an economy of miracle, but He did so initially in order to publicize His Messianic claims and above all, His message. For we have noted above that He was using the miracles to exemplify and back up His message.

*4:38 And he rose up from the synagogue and entered into the house of Simon. And Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever-* The Greek literally means 'to be on fire'. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn't exist.

*And they made request of him concerning her-* Mt. 8:14 says: "And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying", as if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to- although Luke says they did ask Him. But they asked for what He already had noticed and knew all about. Mk. 1:31 states that "they [told] Him about her" and He responded. Surely the overall picture

is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

*4:39 And he stood over her and rebuked the fever; and it left her-* Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

*And immediately she rose up and served them-* Her response to her healing was to serve the Lord and His people. This should be the underlying motive why we ask for healing and good health- so that we can serve. And our response to the Lord's touching of us can never be passive- it involves some level of active serving. Perhaps the use of *diakoneo* looks forward to the office and practice of women being deacons, ministers, in the early church. For the church of any age is to be an extension of the men and women who followed the Lord Jesus in Galilee. There was a Rabbinic prohibition of women serving men at table, so this is yet another instance of the Lord and His people being driven by their desire to respond to God's grace to breaking accepted social norms about gender.

*4:40 And when the sun was setting, they brought to him all that were sick with various diseases; and he laid his hands on everyone of them and healed them-* The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing Sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

*4:41 And demons also came out from many, crying out and saying: You are the Son of God!-* The "many" had "various diseases" (Mk. 1:34). The "various diseases" demonstrated His wide ranging power; for healers tended to specialize in specific diseases, claiming power over particular [supposed] demons. But the Lord could heal all kinds of diseases. The purpose of the healings was not simply to meet human need, but to elicit a belief in Him as "Son of God". His miracles were always to back up His preaching.

*But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ-* "Allow / permit" is the same word translated "send forth". The idea could simply be that the Lord didn't send out these converts as 'sent forth' missionary apostles. "The demons" are put for the [supposedly] 'demon possessed' people. The focus is ultimately upon the person and not upon whatever was thought to be possessing them. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them.

*4:42 Now when it was day, he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought him and came to him, and tried to keep him from leaving them-* We continually notice the Lord's dislike of melodrama and large crowds. He was used to sustained personal contact with the Father, and the pressure of the crowds would have been unbearable for Him. He loved solitude with God. Many of us can relate to Him in this, and He thereby to us. But He worked with the crowds exactly because He saw their need, He as it were came out of Himself for their sakes and for the sake of God's glory.

*4:43 But he said to them: I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for this is why I was sent-* He did not want to be a mere miracle man. His focus was upon preaching the Kingdom, and so He departed rather than meet all the human need which He could have done. His approach ought to be programmatic for us; and too often the focus of our ministry has either been upon purely academic pushing of Biblical ideas at one extreme, or mere do-gooding for its own sake at the other.

Comparing with :19, the preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (2 Cor. 6:2). Rom. 14:17 seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now. See on Acts 8:12.

*4:44 And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee-* As with Paul's ministry, the openness of the synagogues to visiting teachers was well used by the Lord. "Went about... teaching... preaching... healing" (Mt. 4:23) is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).



## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *Now it came to pass, while the crowd pressed upon him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret-* As elsewhere in the Gospels, the Lord's focus is presented as being upon the disciples rather than upon the crowds. He sought to develop and teach a small body of serious converts rather than make mass conversions; the mass conversions were to be made by them, rather than Him personally. And Acts continues this theme.

5:2 *And he saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets-* The impression is that they were potentially ready to go 'fishing' for the Lord, but with His presence in the boat they were able to do it. "Fishermen" is literally, 'salty ones'. The Greek can equally mean 'sailors'. The Lord must have had this in mind when He said that they were "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). If we are likewise the salt of the earth in our influence upon others, we will find ourselves as the modern counterpart to those 'salty ones' who followed the Lord in His Galilee days.

5:3 *And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. And he sat down and taught the crowds out of the boat-* It was for all the world as if the boat belonged to the Lord. He was setting these men up to continue His preaching ministry. He sat in their place, so that they would take His place later. Teaching from a boat is in intended contrast with the idea that teaching could only take place within the synagogue. He surely would have been better standing up, so that His voice carried, and so that He could speak louder. But He "sat", as His style was, just as an adult gets down to the level of a child in order to talk with them.

5:4 *And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon: Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch-* The scene is purposefully repeated by the Lord after His resurrection. He wished them to see that He was the same essential Jesus both in His mortal life and also in His post resurrection glory. And the same Jesus who loved little children and so desperately wished human salvation is the same yesterday, today and for ever- including when we meet Him at judgment day. He had asked Peter to "put out" into shallow water, with Him in the boat teaching (:3 s.w.). Now He asks them to "put out" into deeper water, alone, without Him, to fish. This was an acted parable of how their calling was to share the Gospel with others as the Lord had done; His teaching was their fishing of men. Prior to His presence and entering of their lives, they could not have done this. But He was present on the shore. This is expressed in more abstract terms in Jn. 14-16, where the Comforter, the spirit of Jesus, is promised to all who will teach Him to others. He is with us just as really as He was in His mortal life. But they were to go fishing "for a catch", in the expectation of response. Our

witness too is not merely a witness for the sake of it, but is to be made in firm faith that there are fish / men out there to be caught. A "catch" is literally a 'bringing', the same word is used of how sick people were 'brought' to the Lord in 4:10. The drawing process depends partially upon our bringing of men into the Gospel net.

5:5 *And Simon answered and said: Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets-* See on :4 and Jn. 21:7. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless ["but"] (how much that hides!) at *your word* I will let down the nets". It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on a Walkman, have tapes of well-read Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a tape of Isaiah on his Walkman if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house). There *are* a handful of Christian homes where this spirit is truly seen.

It seems to me that the Lord asks each of us to do that which is

essentially difficult for us personally, something against the grain of our very nature and personal understanding of and position in life. This may explain why sometimes He asked those He cured to spread the message (perhaps the introverts, or those whose past lives had been notorious?), whilst others (perhaps the extroverts?) He asked to remain silent about what He had done. When the Lord asked Peter to go out fishing, for example, this was totally and exactly against every grain of Peter's natural self. He was a fisherman, he'd been fishing all night, he knew it was *absolutely* pointless to try again. He knew that a carpenter didn't know what a fisherman did. The Lord's request was a blow at the justifiable pride in his specialism which every working man has. If the Lord Jesus had asked let's say *Paul* to go out fishing, well, I guess he'd have obeyed with no real difficulty. But He asked Peter to do that, at that very moment, because it was a real cross for Peter to pick up. Likewise it would have seemed logical for Paul to preach to the Jews, and Peter to the Gentiles (note how the Gentiles approached Philip, from semi-Gentile Galilee, in Jn. 12:20,21). Yet in fact the Lord God used those men in the very opposite way, right against the grain of their natural abilities. He asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan. And Abraham was asked to do what was so evidently the hardest thing- to offer up his only, specially beloved son.

*5:6 And when they had done this, they caught a great many fishes; and their nets were breaking-* See on Acts 2:6. As explained above, the Lord was teaching them that they were to do His work of fishing men into the Gospel net. In the similar incident after the resurrection, their nets did not break. The Lord will somehow provide the resources needed for this work. And perhaps He was also encouraging them to follow Him and forsake their fishing business because He is absolutely able to provide any amount of fish. All human endeavour and desire for income can be dramatically overridden by the Lord if we devote ourselves to His work.

*5:7 And they beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink-* Paul seems to allude here in saying that the desire for wealth can drown believers (1 Tim. 6:9). The Lord is warning them not to allow their desire for wealth and good income to drown them;



rather they were to focus upon doing the work of the Gospel, and somehow all shall be provided.

It would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore was simply saying: 'You don't need to fish any more'. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn't break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord's presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. "Lovest thou me more than these?" was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman's dream. It could be that the question referred to them. 'Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish'. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for 'sinking' occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it's a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

*5:8 But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord - See on Jn. 21:7. The Father seems to have wanted Peter to make the connection between preaching and recognition of personal sinfulness quite early on. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" was followed by a commission to go preach the Gospel to Israel, just as Isaiah had been brought to the same point and then been sent on a like mission. The picture of the condemned is presented in Scripture in some detail. We are all condemned men and women before the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. If we are to be saved in that future day, we must judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination (1 Cor. 11:31). This means that we ought to have their feelings in some respects; as they will have no desire to go on living in the flesh, as they will so earnestly desire entry into the Kingdom, as they will then desperately not want to go back into the world... so we should feel now, grateful that for us there is entry into the Kingdom made possible. Thus Peter asked the Lord to depart from him (Lk. 5:8), with the very same words the Lord used about what He will say to the rejected (Lk. 13:27).*

"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" was capturing the spirit of Isaiah. But the Lord responded that he was not to fear, but now

"catch men". Peter's deep recognition of his sinfulness resulted in him being given a preaching commission. And in similar vein, Peter was given another commission to teach the word when he met the Lord after his denials (Jn. 21:15-17). In response to this he stood up and preached that forgiveness of sins was possible to all those that are afar off from God (Acts 2:39). As he did so, consciously or unconsciously, part of his mind must have been back in the way that on that shameful night he followed the Lord "afar off", and far off from Him, denied Him (Mk. 14:54). Peter's vision of the unclean animals in the net taught him that those people whom he considered unclean, he was to "eat", i.e. preach to and fellowship with. When he recounts the vision, he comments [in an account that is strictly factual in all other regards and without any embellishment]: "It [the sheet with the animals] came *even to me*" (Acts 11:5). He is expressing his unworthiness at being called to the task of preaching, just as Paul likewise expressed his inadequacy.

5:9 *For he was amazed, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken-* The huge catch of fish, which nearly drowned them, was what provoked Peter to confess how sinful he was. He felt therefore that his sin was in being materialistic, in being obsessed with that huge catch, thinking of all the money they could earn in the market by selling it. The gift of wealth elicited within him a sense of sinfulness; and it should likewise within us all.

5:10 *And so were also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon: Fear not. From this time forward you shall catch men-* See on Lk. 9:59; Jn. 21:2. "Catch men" is Gk. 'to catch alive'. This is an example of where what sounds like predictive prophecy is actually a command, which men are free to obey or disobey. The whole section about the temple to be built in Ez. 40-48 is another example. Peter was not to "fear" his tendency to materialism and his momentary failure in this matter. He was to move onwards from that and see that the greatest thing in life is not success in our business, but bringing others into the Gospel net, dragging them, with the help of our brethren ["partners" is *koinonos*, those we fellowship with], into the Kingdom.

5:11 *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed him-* They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. They powerfully learnt the lesson- that the Lord could give business success and wealth at ease. And therefore they in a moment left it all and focused on following Him. The "all" which they left included the huge catch of fish.

Peter on the shore doesn't say to the Lord that he had 'made a mistake' or cast the net on the wrong side etc.- he confesses that he is a "sinful man" altogether. Jesus taught that sin was no longer to be seen as a list

of specific actions which must be avoided in order to have a good conscience before God. The conviction of sin as God intends is far deeper than this. As the Lord makes clear, it's all about motives, what is inside the cup rather than what appears on the outside (Lk. 11:39). And we are to press on with the work of the Gospel, regardless of our previous failings in being distracted by issues of wealth and income.

5:12 *And it came to pass, while he was in one of the cities, that there was a man full of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, saying-* The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (:13). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

"Begging" is the Greek *parakleo*; and John's Gospel records at length the Lord's promise to be our *parakletos*, doing the work of comfort and entreaty, *parakleo*, for *us*. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord; both relate to each other in the same passionate way, in prayer [from our side] and in the Lord's gracious response [from His side]. The *parakleo* group of words are appropriate to both sides of the relationship.

*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean-* The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (:13). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

The man recognized that it was within the Lord's power to heal him, but he also recognized that the Lord's will is not always ours, as His longer term plan may require Him not to respond to our request in the immediate term. This is a great example to us. For he would have been aware that the Lord did not heal all human need which He encountered; He had just left Simon's house, apparently because He didn't want to cure all the crowds surely gathering there for healing.

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave

Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

*5:13 And he stretched forth his hand and touched him, saying: I will. Be made clean-* The Lord responds within the terms of the man's request: "If You will, You can make me clean". We note the man sought cleansing above mere healing; his spiritual need for cleansing was paramount in his mind. We likewise should ask for material blessings motivated by spiritual concerns. The Lord could have cured the man in multiple ways, but he chose to touch the man, making Himself technically unclean; although it could be argued that the cure was so immediate that it was therefore debatable as to whether the Lord had actually touched a leper or not. Surely He did it the way He did to provoke such questions; for the process of questioning led to them becoming the more aware of the fact that the Lord's touch had indeed cleansed the man. And the whole question of ritual uncleanness was of course put in the spotlight. The Lord was and is unafraid to associate with the very dirtiest of human conditions and situations. There was no revulsion from them, as there is not today. The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

*And immediately the leprosy departed from him-* The immediacy of the cure upon touching the Lord raised all kind of questions for the legalistic mind, as to whether the Lord was made unclean or not. The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease. In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done here. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

*5:14 And he ordered him: Tell no one, but go your way and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing according as Moses commanded, for a testimony to them-* The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a

great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

5:15 *However, the report went around concerning him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities-* Mk. 1:45 notes that therefore "Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but stayed in deserted places". If we put the stress on the word "openly", we are left imagining Jesus somehow disguising Himself in order to enter the towns. This is the reason why the Lord so sternly charged the healed man not to spread the news (:43); the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal

5:16 *But he withdrew himself into the desert and prayed-* Each healing took energy and spiritual power from the Lord (8:46). As noted on 4:42, the Lord was desperate for aloneness with God in prayer; for this was His source of being filled by the Spirit.

5:17 *And it came to pass on one of those days that he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who had come out of every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was with him to heal-* The power of the Lord was present to heal the Pharisees- but they would not make use of what was potentially made available. The text suggests that the healing was possible for the Pharisees. The healing in view was therefore spiritual healing; and the whole incident of curing the paralyzed man was therefore in order to potentially provide the religious leaders with spiritual healing. The Lord's work in our lives is likewise multifaceted. Things happen in order that others may be taught, as happened in the life and sufferings of Job- it was to convert and teach the friends rather than Job personally, who is presented as "perfect" both before and after the recorded sufferings.

5:18 *And men brought on a bed a man that was paralysed; and they sought to bring him in and to lay him before him-* The term for "brought" is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

5:19 *But not finding by what way they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went to the housetop and let him down through the tiles with*

*his couch, into the midst before Jesus-* This was all done in faith, and by doing this the Lord saw their faith (:20). Mk. 2:3 says they "carried" him, the term means literally to be taken up or away, and reflects the Hebrew term used for the bearing away of sin. And :20 confirms this association by stating that it was through the faith of the four friends that the man's sins were forgiven. This is the huge horizon of potential which there is for us in our efforts for others- we can even play a role in the Lord forgiving them their sins. This lifts the concept of pastoral work far beyond mere doing of good works.

*5:20 And seeing their faith, he said-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

*Man, your sins are forgiven you-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done

that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

5:21 *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason*-Matthew adds "within themselves". Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spoke within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to. We should deeply note at this point that the thoughts of men in their hearts are known to the Father and Son, and have been recorded publicly here in these records for many centuries.

*Saying: Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?*- The miracles of Jesus exposed the error of local views, e.g. of demons, without correcting them in so many words. Thus in Lk. 5:21 the Jews made two false statements: that Jesus was a blasphemer, and that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus did not verbally correct them; instead he did a miracle which proved the falsity of those statements. It was clearly the belief of Jesus that actions speak louder than words. He rarely denounced false ideas directly, thus he did not denounce the Mosaic law as being unable to offer salvation, but He showed by His actions, e.g. healing on the Sabbath, what the truth was.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

*5:22 But Jesus, perceiving their reasoning, answered and said to them-* Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]... these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts..." (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew



what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

*Why reason you so in your hearts?*- This was a rhetorical question. Why did they struggle with His offer of forgiveness? Because it required an acceptance of it from them, which in turn required repentance.

5:23 *Which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier for Me'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:24).

*Your sins are forgiven; or to say: Arise and walk?*- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

5:24 *But that you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at

the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

*That the Son of Man-* The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why Mt. 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins". If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

*Has authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to him who was paralyzed)-* He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "*all* power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins. I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him. But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ makes

you whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

"He said to him that was paralyzed" suggests He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

*I say to you, arise and take up your bedding and go to your house-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

*5:25 And immediately, he stood up before them, picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God-* Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him to go home (:24). He did it "before them [all]"- another hint that the miracle was for teaching purposes; the Lord was surrounded by people eager for healing, and instead He taught them. The immediacy of the cure, especially in response to the faith of third parties, was utterly unknown amongst those who had seen too many fake healers attempting to heal illness.

*5:26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God; and they were filled with fear, saying: We have seen strange things today-* This is a strange mixture, at first blush- glorifying God and yet being filled with fear instead of joy, describing the wonderful healing and forgiveness as "strange things". Why the barrier to joyful acceptance of the Lord's work? I suggest as noted on :22 that His offer of forgiveness demanded acceptance of it, and therefore repentance. And so they preferred to act bemused and confused, as many do to this day when faced with God's truth in Christ, preferring the search rather than the finding of the ultimate truth- that really we can be forgiven and faith rewarded in salvation and the ultimate healing of persons. On one hand, they knew it was all true, and "glorified God". But then their humanity kicked in. And we see this so often in folk today.

5:27 *And after these things he went and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and said to him: Follow me-* Matthew, according to Matthew's record. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi, strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (Mt. 9:3).

It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

"Follow me" means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

5:28 *And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him. It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

The Lord valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

5:29 *And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and of others that were dining with them-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. Given the religious significance of eating together, note the Lord's open table.

5:30 *And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying: Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?-* See on Lk. 7:39. To eat together had a religious dimension; the Lord was seen as fellowshiping sinners at His table in a radically open manner, just as we should. To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

The disciples were from very varied backgrounds; and Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

5:31 *And Jesus answering said to them: They that are in health have no need of a doctor, but they that are sick-* "Doctor" is literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are whole*'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (:32). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

The Greek word for "in health" is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

5:32 *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance-* He was implying, 'I came not to call those who believe they are righteous'. But Jesus spoke to them on their own terms, even though, technically, He was using language which was untrue. See on Lk. 19:23. The Lord is referring to the wicked Pharisees here as "the righteous... they that are whole". Yet they were not righteous. He was speaking of them according to how they saw themselves.

It was the disciples who had only recently been 'called'- because they considered themselves sinners, the sick who needed a doctor.

Consider how the Lord asks Zacchaeus to eat with Him- a public sign of religious fellowship in first century Palestine. This acceptance of the man for who and where he was, inspired Zacchaeus to then start changing his life in practice- he then offered to give back what he had stolen. When quizzed as to why He ate / fellowshiped with sinners, the Lord replied that He had come to call sinners to repentance. Think through the implications of this. He fellowshiped with those who were so weak within the ecclesia of Israel so as to bring them to repentance; His eating with them was like a doctor making a home visit. The religious attitude of the Pharisees was that one only fellowshiped someone who was repentant; whereas the Lord said that He fellowshiped with people to bring them to repentance. Note how in Lk. 19:1-10, the Lord offered salvation to sinners *before* they had repented. It's the same idea.

The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on Mt. 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

*5:33 And they said to him: The disciples of John fast often and make supplications, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees; but your disciples eat and drink-* Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

The implication was that they didn't even fast at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting. The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black

and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them. When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the shewbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the shewbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

*5:34 And Jesus said to them: Can you make the wedding guests fast, while the bridegroom is with them?*- He spoke of how that band of rough, mixed up men were filled with the joy of little bridesmaids because He was among them. Now this is an essay in imputed righteousness. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going (Mt. 11:12). And even after reprimanding them for their slowness of heart to believe, the record graciously says that they "believed not for joy"- although joy can never hinder faith.

John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.



The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom. Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

5:35 *But the days will come*- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22).

*When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; then will they fast, in those days*- The Gk. *apairo* ["taken away"] is a form of the Greek *pairō* which has just been used in Mt. 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "*they mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be

His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context here goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes "your voice to be heard on high". Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many

ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

*5:36 And he spoke also a parable to them: No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it upon an old garment, else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old-* The same phrase for "old garment" is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11. The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings like fasting was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples. The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :37. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

Jesus told this parable in the context of His eating with sinners- clothing and wine were part of the 'eating out' scene; He took whatever was around Him and made spiritual lessons out of it. To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapho*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibers are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement

and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

Old and new covenants cannot overlap. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way of legalism or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

*5:37 And no one puts new wine into old wine-skins, or else the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilt, and the skins will perish-* The new wine is a clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

The skins will be "burst", Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

"Spilt" is the same word used in Lk. 20:20 about the blood of the new covenant being "shed". We can crucify Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6), His death can be "in vain" for us (Gal. 2:21)- if we refuse to respond and be renewed, or trust in our own works. Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

5:38 *But new wine must be put into fresh wine-skins-* AV adds "and both are preserved", Gk. preserved from loss / ruin. There is a very real sense of loss to Jesus if His blood (the new wine) is as it were poured out in vain. There will be tragic loss both to Him and to the person who refuses to be wholly renewed. The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation. The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

5:39 *And no one having drunk old wine immediately then desires new wine; for he says: The old is good-* The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the 'old' ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority

who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very slow from a human perspective*.

The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. The picture of the new wine being "spilled" uses the same word as in Mt. 26:28 concerning the 'shedding' of Christ's blood. Again, how utterly, painfully accurate. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.





## CHAPTER 6

*6:1 Now it came to pass on a Sabbath that he was going through the grain fields-* The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbade fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312 (*op cit.*)). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

*And his disciples plucked the ears and ate, rubbing them in their hands-* See on Mt. 26:11. The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

*6:2 But certain of the Pharisees said: Why do you do what is unlawful on the Sabbath day?-* A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

*6:3 And Jesus answered them, saying: Have you not read-* Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*What David did when he was hungry, he and they that were with him?*-

The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

*6:4 How he entered the house of God*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

*And took and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?*- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had.

"Gave it to those with him" recalls how the Lord blessed the bread and gave it to those with *Him*. He was turning the ordinary bread of the people into the shewbread of the sanctuary. Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

*6:5 And he said to them: The Son of Man is lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

*Of the Sabbath-* The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord on the Sabbath". Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

*6:6 And it came to pass on another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered-* The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He had recently declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on Mt. 12:6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews". It's typical of Luke as a doctor to mention the medical details. God's Spirit worked through the natural perceptions and personalities of those who were inspired, and achieves a similar synthesis in working with us today. His right hand suggests his own strength and ability to act was withered.

*6:7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him closely, whether he would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against him-* A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them. Their false accusation of Him was especially seen at His trials. Pilate's question to them "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (Jn. 18:29) shows the Jews as the ultimate false accusers of God's Son. For it was because of their playing the ultimate role of the Devil, the false accuser, that the Son of God was slain. No wonder the ideas of 'Devil' and 'Satan' are often associated with the Jewish system's opposition of Christ and His people. The same Greek word for 'accuser' is five times used about Jewish false accusation of Paul in an attempt to hinder His work for Christ (Acts 23:30,35; 24:8; 25:16,18).

*6:8 But he knew their thoughts-* The Lord's ability to read minds and motives (5:22; Jn. 2:25) was partly given by the Spirit, but also an outcome of His own extreme sensitivity to humanity, and also His undoubted intellectual ability as God's Son. He was far ahead of all depth psychologists of later generations. I will suggest later regarding the triumphal entry that the Lord set up all the circumstances surrounding His death and apparent 'capture' by the Jews and betrayal by Judas; He therefore knew exactly the events which would follow, as the chess grandmaster foresees the game in advance. Rev. 2:23 states that the Lord to this day has this ability, even more enhanced by His Divine nature.

*And he said to the man that had his hand withered: Rise up and stand in the midst. And he arose and stood-* The Lord's miracles were performed for a range of reasons, quite apart from basic sympathy with the sick. He

often used them to teach lessons to the onlookers; and this explains the way He asked the man to cooperate in public display.

*6:9 And Jesus said to them: I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to destroy it?- See on Lk. 9:54,55.* The Lord said that to refrain from saving a man when it was in your power to do so was effectively "to do evil... to destroy" (Lk. 6:9 AV). This is how the Lord looks at our laziness and passivity- as active wrongdoing. Sins of omission are probably our greatest temptation.

Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others'

lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

6:10 *And he looked round about on them all, and then said to him-* The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you.

*Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored-* Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people. According to the textus receptus, his hand was restored whole as the other. This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

6:11 *But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus-* Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

6:12 *And it came to pass in these days that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God-* Luke alone records the all night prayer. How long have you ever prayed for at one time? Luke as a doctor was struck by the psychological intensity of the Lord in maintaining such lengthy contact with God Almighty. He presumably was praying for wisdom and blessing in this matter of ordaining the twelve, probably with special attention to the issue of calling Judas.

6:13 *And when it was day, he called his disciples-* He was in the mountain, so He called them up into the mountain, and they came down the mountain with Him (:17). In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us,

were now a new Moses. Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closeness to God.

*And he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles-* Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers. This is not the same incident as the sending forth of the twelve in Matthew 10. But we see how there were various tiers; the crowds, His disciples, the twelve supported by the ministering women; and within them, an inner core of Peter, James and John, with Peter set up as the leader. This kind of hierarchy of leadership was found in the Old Testament too, and is not inappropriate today, if managed with humility and servant-leadership as the dominant spirit. For total equality of role is just unworkable amongst any group of people, and attempts to enforce it often leave Christian communities without the leadership which people need, and the group becomes rudderless.

6:14 *Simon, whom he also named Peter-* Simon was anything but rock-like, but the Lord named him Peter, 'rocky'. He perceived the ultimate stability in Peter's faith, despite all the ups and downs he had. And He sees to the core of each of us too. Peter is always listed first in the lists of apostles, and was the one chosen to be the rock of the early church. But the Lord chose the one who seemed most inappropriate for that work. And so is again exhibited a major theme in the Lord's work amongst men and women like us, that the most inappropriate are often chosen for the job. For the Lord's power is made manifest through our inadequacy.

*And Andrew his brother, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew-* Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

6:15 *And Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot-* We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types, of whatever accent and formation.

6:16 *And Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became the betrayer-* "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small

village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

6:17 *And he came down with them and stood on a level place; and a great crowd of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases-* "Came down" heightens the similarity with Moses coming down from the mountain after receiving the law (Ex. 19).

6:18 *And they that were disturbed with unclean spirits were healed-*

6:19 *And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them all-* See on Lk. 16:1.

It seems that the apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to do certain acts, and after doing them they were as it were 'drained' of the Spirit, and had to be filled up again. Thus the Lord Jesus felt that something had gone out of Him after performing miracles (Lk. 6:19; 8:46). The non-miraculous work of God through His Spirit would seem to follow a similar pattern. We are "strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man", "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering" (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11). God strengthens us deep inside to have that *hupomonè*, that patient endurance, that energy to keep on keeping on. But this strengthening is according to our effort in the appropriate spiritual exercises, and the strength given is not ultimately permanent unless we continue responding to it. and it isn't only a N.T. phenomena; even in earlier times, they that waited on the Lord had their strength renewed, they mounted up on eagle wings, they were made to walk and not faint in God's ways (Is. 40:31). As God doesn't faint or weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). David felt that his youth was renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

6:20 *Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples, and said-* The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12). The Hebrew phrase "to lift up the eyes" is used very extensively about the Abraham family; and the Lord was the seed of Abraham. Most Bible characters have the term used at most once or twice about them; but the Genesis record emphasizes this characteristic of this family. It's as if we're being bidden to really visualize them as a family, and to enable

this we're even given an insight into their body language. Consider the emphasis on the way this family had of lifting up their eyes:

Lot lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:10)

Abraham lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:14)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and noticed the Angels (Gen. 18:2)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:4)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the ram caught (Gen. 22:13)

Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw camels coming on which Rebekah was riding (Gen. 24:63)

Rebekah, as part of a marriage made in Heaven, lifted up *her* eyes and saw Isaac at the same moment (Gen. 24:64)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the vision of the speckled cattle (twice recorded- Gen. 31:10,12)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw Esau coming (Gen. 33:1)

Esau lifted up his eyes and saw Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5)

Jacob's sons lifted up their eyes and saw the traders coming (Gen. 37:25)

Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin (Gen. 43:29)

Of course the classic epitome of this feature is when Abraham lifts up his eyes to Heaven and is asked to count the stars, and there and then believes God's word of promise that "so shall thy seed be". Yet *we*, as Abraham's family, his children by faith, are likewise asked [with the same Hebrew words] to lift up *our* eyes to Heaven and consider the stars, and take strength from the fact that their creator is our God (Is. 40:26; 51:6; 60:4). Surrounded by huge crowds, the Lord focused upon teaching the disciples. This was typical of Him, and occurred also at the time of the sermon on the mount.

*Blessed are you poor-* The poverty in view is spiritual poverty; those who wish to be spiritually rich but are not. It is no blessing to simply be poor materially; for such poverty can distract people from spiritual focus just as much as wealth can. Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

*For yours is the kingdom of God-* The Lord's prayer used the same phrase "Yours is the Kingdom" in addressing God. But "Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom of God". The Lord thereby assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken... the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will*



the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The similarities with the sermon on the mount are many; but this sermon is delivered on the plain. The Lord is repeating in the Jerusalem area what He had taught in Galilee.

6:21 *Blessed are you that hunger now; for you shall be filled*-According to the beatitudes, the hunger is a spiritual hunger after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6) shows the Lord clearly alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

*Blessed are you that weep now; for you shall laugh*- See on 1:53. Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The time of God's grace was extended to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10); and the laughter in view is therefore the utter joy of good conscience with God through His forgiveness.

6:22 *Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall reject you, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake*- 'Reject' is literally 'to drive away' (Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

This is quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. The implication is

that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised. Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon these verses. These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Lk. 6:22.

*6:23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for your reward is great in heaven. For in the same manner did their fathers treat the prophets-* Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel. The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Lord's teaching- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

*6:24 But woe to you that are rich! For you have received your consolation-* Is the "woe!" in Lk. 6:24-26; 11:42-52 an imprecation ['woe to'] or a lament ['alas!']? Luke has more to say about the "rich" than any other of the gospels. The implication is that the comfort is for those who are poor in spirit. The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). We noted on Matthew 4 that the Lord presented the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

*6:25 Woe to you, you that are full now! For you shall hunger. Woe to you*

*that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep-* The wealth, laughter and fullness refers to spiritual confidence of the type seen in the Jewish religious leadership. The gospel is good news for those who mourn for their sins, and hunger to be righteous. Those who considered themselves spiritually rich would experience the mourning and weeping associated with condemnation at the last day. Either we will mourn now in repentance, or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now...* turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). See on Mt. 3:11.

6:26 *Woe to you, when all men shall speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers do to the false prophets-* The Lord assumes that His followers will not be people of spotless reputation, but will be as unpopular as the Old Testament prophets. He was at this point largely appealing to secular, irreligious people who wanted to be spiritual but couldn't so far get their act together- rather than seeking to tweak the theology of those who claimed to be believers already. And this should be the focus of our outreach too. But just as in this verse He assumes His people will not be well thought of in society, so He assumes that they shall each one be as the true prophets of Israel. He reasons as if all His followers shall have a prophetic ministry.

6:27 *But I say to you that hear: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you-* We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *unloving*. This love of enemies is specifically exemplified in :35 as lending without expecting anything back. It's not usual for an enemy to try to borrow from us; but I suggest that the lending in view is that of forgiveness. For debt is so often used as a metaphor for sin.

It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in first century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it

was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). So the Lord within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

*6:28 Bless those that curse you, pray for those that mistreat you-* Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... despitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate] the terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The language is not so applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

*6:29 To him that hits you on the cheek offer also the other-* You singular. Time and again the Sermons on the Mount and Plain seem to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor... love your enemies... to him who strikes thee on the cheek...". Note how many times

there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually. The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

*And from him that takes away your cloak- withhold not your coat also-* The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgements and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life. It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it. The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

6:30 *Give to everyone who asks of you, from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back-* This parallels the Lord's teaching that we receive from God whatever we ask. But that is not to be taken literally. It is paramountly true in spiritual terms. 'Debt' is used as a metaphor for sin. The idea is used in :35 for forgiving sin. Likewise the Lord's teaching

here likely has context and parameters to it. The Lord is teaching not to resist evil; for the 'asking' of us is parallel to taking away our goods.

*6:31 And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise-* This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermons on the mount and plain. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment in Mt. 7:12: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

*6:32 For if you love those that love you, what praise do you have? For even sinners love those that love them-* Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank" (AV) or "praise"- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters. This speaks of receiving "thank" for making the conscious effort to love the unlovable. The Greek for "thank" or "praise" is *charis*, normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts.

*6:33 And if you do good to those that do good to you, what praise do you have? For even sinners do the same-* There is no *charis*, no grace, in loving those who love us; grace is found in doing good to those who do not do good to us. Too easily, believing communities can become self-

help clubs, whereby we do good to those who do good to us. And that is the way of the world, of secular society. The call of grace is to do good to those who are not of us, and who are against us.

*6:34 And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what praise do you have? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much-* As noted on :32 and :33, there is no grace [s.w. "praise"] in giving when we hope to receive back in this life. This is the way of secular society and groups within it. From whom do we receive grace or praise? Surely from the Father, the source of grace. Secular people do good (:33) and lend to others because they hope to receive again "as much", literally, the same kind of thing. Our spiritual investment is of an altogether different character. We will not receive back in this life from those we give to. But we are banking in Heaven, and at judgment day, will receive back the grace we are so desperately in need of. Then we shall receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5), according to the parable, the Lord will go through our good works to weak people and praise us for them. We will indeed "receive" for what we do, but not "as much", not in the same coin, not things of the same nature which we gave. There is a radical exchange going on- our lending to others, be it literally or in terms of the gift of forgiveness, time and grace, shall be recompensed- but not from them, and on a far more wonderful level.

*6:35 But love your enemies, and do good and lend, never despairing, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be sons of the Most High. For He is kind toward the unthankful and evil-* See on Mt. 5:45. The Lord sort to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. We must love our enemies "never despairing". To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt... never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus. Debt is a common metaphor for sin, being in need of forgiveness. The constant lending we are called to, not expecting repayment but all the same placing those lent to in an ever greater debt to us, corresponds more accurately with the experience of forgiving people than it does with lending of material things. To lend without hoping for anything back ["never despairing"] is quite some challenge. This appears to be the pattern of God's kindness; He is kind for the sake of it, with no hope of anything back. And yet what joy we must give Him when we form the habit of regular thanks before food, and seek to appreciate His kindness. Worthiness of the recipient is not the way of grace, and the teaching here is in conscious contrast to the Jewish idea, soon to be recorded by Luke, that a man was worthy of a miracle because he had been generous to a Jewish community (7:4). The paradox of this teaching is that although we should serve for nothing, with no hope for anything back, there will in fact be a great reward prepared for us. Although not in this life, nor in secular terms, as noted on :34.

6:36 *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*- Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave... be you therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11 RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself.

Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christian movement. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be merciful, even as your father [in heaven- AV] is merciful". To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

6:37 *Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven*- This confirms the suggestion so far made in commentary on this chapter; that the lending and giving in view is particularly that of forgiveness, unconditionally granted. For Paul, "judge not..." echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus it is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (:41). The commentary of James on this is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Lk. 6:37 and Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". See on Mt. 7:24. The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the



Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

We observe that not forgiving is parallel here to condemning and judging. We are setting ourselves up as judge of others if we refuse to forgive. Forgiveness is not the same as trust, but it is clearly required- otherwise we are condemning. If we assume that all our brethren shall be saved [and seeing we can't prejudge the judgment, we have to assume this, as Paul did about Corinth], then we assume that whatever sins they have committed against us will be forgiven. Therefore we must forgive them, acting in harmony with the Lord's position to them. In this lies the connection between not forgiving and condemning. If we refuse to condemn them, then we must forgive them. And the nature of the logic demands that we are to grant that forgiveness to any whom the Lord will not condemn, and so the forgiveness in view is to be granted without any angst about whether or not the person has repented. That is not for us to judge; it is for us to forgive. The logic of the whole argument requires this. There are passages which picture a person sinning against us and saying they repent and then being forgiven; but their purpose is to teach that we are to forgive when they do that, even if their repentance appears insincere; but we are not thereby taught not to forgive unless they repent. We are being presented in those passages with a theoretical situation, and told to forgive even if repentance seems sincere. But the logic here in Lk. 6:37 is to forgive in any case; for all "in Christ" are not condemned and therefore forgiven.

Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

*6:38 Give; and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For with what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again-* We are to give expecting nothing again, and we do not get such generous response to our generosity from men in this life. So I suggest the reference is to judgment day, and the "men" refer to Angels. As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment; for the language here is very much the language of judgment to come (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2). This association of "men" (angels) with the judgment is fitting, seeing that our guardian

angel will have been with us through every up and down of life, and shall come with the Lord Jesus to our judgment. See on Lk. 12:48.

We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

*6:39 And he spoke also a parable to them: Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?*- The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved.

6:40 *The disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is perfected, shall be as his teacher*- The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to endure persecution. He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality, and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (Mt. 10:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter, when he was "perfected" or matured- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me, as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition

and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

6:41 *And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye?*- The Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfected... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit". This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 42- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter is literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity... these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

"Consider not" is alluded to by James. James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

6:42 *Or how can you say to your brother: Brother, let me cast out the splinter that is in your eye- when you yourself do not perceive the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! Cast out first the beam out of your own eye, and then shall you see clearly to cast out the splinter that is in your brother's eye-* The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. Consider the story He told of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying:

'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation. See on Lk. 18:10.

6:43 *For there is no good tree that brings forth corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree that brings forth good fruit-* We take a third road of indifferent tolerance to far too many. Having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road. There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

Fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often

expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

6:44 *For each tree is known by its own fruit*- The Lord knows the evil hearts of people- but we can't see their hearts, and so we shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

*For from thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush do they gather grapes*- The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John

especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publicly on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may say to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as one's spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade... until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'-



out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

6:45 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate "good man" and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

*Out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good*- The heart is our wealth. This is the real gold and silver, the core value of a man's life- what we are thinking about. Spiritual mindedness is the essence of Christianity.

*And the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil*- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV

"wicked") generation" in Mt. 12:45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks-* Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life.

6:46 *And why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things which I say?*- In Rom. 2:13, Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

As with many aspects of doctrine, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes: "Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imaginable in the Roman Empire". Philip Yancey likewise: "As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan "Christ is Lord", a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath 'Caesar [the state] is Lord'" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 246). It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46). The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this

together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will shew Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

In 1 Cor. 13:2 Paul understands those who say "Lord, Lord" as saying it without really *knowing* Christ, and living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day.

6:47 *Everyone that comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you to whom he is like-* The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; these words of Jesus are set against the background of :27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. :41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. See on Jn. 13:13. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be

destroyed. The Greek for "many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

*Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders. One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you'.

The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "*Hear and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: "But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". "But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermons on the Mount and plain (see on Mt. 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on Mt. 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

6:48 *He is like*- Present tense. Matthew says he "shall be like"; the essence of judgment is now. We can discern the principles by which we shall be judged. The future tenses in Matthew's version imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is likened*", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

*A man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock-* This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel in Mt. 7 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting

through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day.

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10).

The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified,

according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. He had an ambition to preach the gospel to Gentiles even when this was felt by the other brethren to be an outrageous thing to do. Thus Lk. 6:48; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience. See on Mk. 13:35.

*And when the flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it; because it had been founded upon a rock-* The allusion is



clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do the will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self-gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them.

The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

"Came" is the same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment. If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them (Mt. 25:44).

The same house stood before and after judgment. Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

"Because it had been founded upon a rock" is surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

*6:49 But he that hears and does not do is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke- and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great-* The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

he Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went

through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

The collapse of time around the events of the judgment would explain this equation between the gathering and the judgment. The wicked will "immediately" feel that the house of their pseudo-spirituality has totally collapsed, as soon as the rain of judgment comes down (Lk. 6:49). The 'rain' will be a symbol of blessing for the righteous, and of judgment for the wicked. Likewise the cup of wine is another double symbol- of blessing, and of condemnation. Yet we know that there will be a *process* of condemnation- they will argue back with their Lord, expecting a reward for their good works... but underneath, "immediately" from their first knowledge of the Lord's return, there will be this sense of total collapse within them. The judgment passages which speak of the rejected apparently confidently demanding a place in the Kingdom in reward for their good works must be read with this fact as background.

The man who hears and does not appears to be building- he has the sensation of going some place in his spiritual life. He *did* dig a foundation- in sand, where it is easy to dig. But the Lord said that he built "without a foundation" (Lk. 6:49). Are we *really* hearing and doing- or just going through the motion of it, experiencing the sensation of appearing to do it? In the parable, the flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man

would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

Condemnation will be tragic- the ruin is "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 After he had ended all his sayings in the ears of the people, he entered into Capernaum-* The Lord was based in Capernaum and returned there after the public work of teaching the sermon on the plain and healing. The language of 'ending sayings' and the stress that the people heard what He said is somewhat solemn, as if the Sermon was a manifesto of the Kingdom which they had heard and were now responsible to.

*7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death-* It is tempting to think that this is the same incident as recorded in Mt. 8:5-13. But the differences are such that they preclude this. In Matthew, the centurion and the Lord are in direct contact, and not through mediators and messengers. The healing is from a distance, a Gentile centurion is involved, his sick servant is healed, the Lord is willing to enter the Gentile's house but each Centurion says that this is not necessary as they believe in the Lord's power to heal. So there were two centurions in the Capernaum area who both had sick servants whom the Lord healed. The similarity of wording between the two is understandable; one of the incidents happened first, and the second Centurion was inspired to faith and humility by the words and attitude of the first one. This is how faith spreads today too; a person sees in practice the words and faith of a person similar in position to themselves- and they are encouraged to do as that person has done.

The next pericope in Luke concerns the widow's son at Nain, and this also is not recorded elsewhere apart from in Luke. Indeed, most of Luke 7 is material unique to Luke. This strengthens the suggestion that this is not the same centurion as in Mt. 8 but is more unique material.

*7:3 And when he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, pleading with him to come and heal his servant-* It was common to approach another for favours through intermediaries whom it was thought would be impressive to the one being besought. The centurion clearly had faith in the Lord and yet failed to perceive the chasmic differences between Him and "the elders of the Jews"- the very class who rejected and crucified Him. So we can assume that the man's understanding of the Lord's message was minimal. And yet on the other hand, we must give due weight to his own later explanation as to why he sent the elders to the Lord- he says it was because he felt unworthy to talk directly with the Lord (:7). The man's faith progressed- from inviting the Lord into his house, to then realizing that such a visit was not necessary as the Lord had power to heal from a distance (:6). The qualities of humility and faith in this man are clearly set up as exemplary for all Gentile believers. For the aim of Luke's Gospel was to bring Gentiles to faith, and so this man becomes a parade example.

*7:4 And they, when they came to Jesus, pleaded earnestly, saying: He is worthy to have you do this for him-* The man protested that he was *not* worthy (:6), perhaps in conscious allusion to their words. The synagogue elders considered the man "worthy" by his works (:5), whereas the Lord saw him as "worthy" by his faith in the Lord's grace. The situation is set up as a cameo of the entire argument of Romans 1-8.

*7:5 For he loves our nation and he built our synagogue-* As noted on :4, they considered worthiness to come from generosity and loyalty to all things Jewish. But the point of the account is that it was his faith in the Lord Jesus, rather than these things, which was counted as significant. Theophilus, "lover of God", was the immediate audience for this Gospel; and his given name could suggest he too was a proselyte. Luke is perhaps trying to get him to identify with this centurion who likewise was a God lover, and whose example inspired the centurion in Mt. 8 to a similar faith. Luke was hoping that Theophilus would be likewise inspired. It was of course unusual for a Roman centurion to be a Jewish proselyte. The man must have taken issues of faith very seriously, and so his amazing faith in the Lord as Messiah is quite credible.

*7:6 And Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him: Lord, trouble not yourself. For I am not worthy that you should come under my roof-* See on Jn. 4:53. He was aware that Jews were not supposed to 'come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on Mt. 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant. The man's faith and humility progressed; for the Lord was now near his house, and he may as well let Him enter. But he clearly felt unworthy to have the Lord in his home and even to directly talk with the Lord.

*7:7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed-* His faith was absolute- the servant would be surely healed at the Lord's word. The messengers sent to beg the Lord to assist were not therefore sent in order to as it were persuade the Lord to assist by their fine oratory and arguments. That is maybe how they perceived themselves, and how others perceived it; but the simple truth was that the man felt unworthy to even talk with the Lord. His faith in Him as Son of God was therefore so deep.

*7:8 For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers; and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this. And he does it-* Like any good teacher, the Lord repeated His lessons. The disciples heard His commendation of the Centurion, who believed that just as he had men under his control, so Jesus had the whole cosmos under His control (Lk. 7:8-10); and they

learnt that lesson again as they sat awestruck in the boat soon afterwards: "What manner of man is this! For he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him" (Lk. 8:25). Clearly the centurion understood that the Lord was of immense power in His own right; He was surely appreciative that the Lord was God's Son, able to function for Him and with His power. He had thought through the issues. Perhaps He had heard the Lord's preaching in the Capernaum synagogue, which he had built. He felt a level of identification with the Lord; for he reasons that just as he has a servant whom he can command, so he wishes the Lord to treat *his* servant as *His* servant. He was inviting the Lord to take his own place as Lord and master of his family, and to have him as one of His soldiers, to come and go at His command, and to have his servant healed. The language of 'going' at the Lord's word of command is used elsewhere about casting out of demons. Maybe the centurion thought that the servant was demon possessed, and wanted the Lord to tell the demons to 'go'. In which case we can perceive that misunderstandings, even erroneous ones, having our science and language wrong, will not hinder relationship with the Lord if we have faith in Him.

*7:9 And when Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him-* He admired him [Gk.]. Here we see the humility of the Lord Jesus, that despite His own peerless perfection, He could admire the faith of a man who as a centurion was yet far from His own level of spirituality. Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at the extent of other's faith; the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. "No, not in Israel" suggests the Lord thought that Israel's faith was something *very* high; when their rejection of Him was the cruellest tragedy in their history. The Lord marvelled at the man's faith, and also at the extent of unbelief in others (s.w. Mk. 6:6). Given the Lord's tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion, demanding program, extreme loneliness etc., the fact He had the emotional energy to marvel is an essay in His extreme sensitivity, and how He let neither His spiritual mission nor His external circumstances stop Him from having such sensitivity regarding the spiritual state of others. In this we see a deep challenge to ourselves.

*And turned and said to the crowd that followed him-* The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

*I say to you, I have not found so great a faith, not even in Israel-* The Lord was and is actively searching for faith in people. He is the man looking to find a great treasure (Mt. 13:44), seeking to find a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46), finding a lost sheep or coin (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:4-9), finding weak and rejected workers to work for Him in His work (Mt. 20:6), wanting to find spiritual fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19), finding willing guests for His own wedding (Mt. 22:10)- any who believe in Him. As He meets so many disappointments, imagine His joy at finding *our* faith, incomplete and at times misplaced as it is. Surely in all this work of seeking and finding just a few He was living out His own command to seek, because we will find (Lk. 11:10). He seems to allude to the idea in telling the disciples to fish on the right side of their boat, and they would find (Jn. 21:6). The incident is replete with symbolism- the message surely is that we will find converts for the Lord, if we seek for them as the Lord did. We in our turn are searching to find the Lord (Acts 17:27); and He is seeking to find us. Hence the flash moment when the searching God and His Son meet searching man in conversion to Christ. Ultimately we are 'found' at the Lord's return (Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:14), but we are also 'found' by Him at the point of first faith in this life.

*7:10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant healed-* These 'sent ones' were converted; the apostles were intended to be challenged by the conversion of these other 'sent ones', just as we are intended to take lessons from the folks amongst whom we live in this world.

*7:11 And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him-* Perhaps He had some other reason for going to Nain; or maybe He went there to attend the funeral because the woman and her son were relatives. The crowd would likely have been nagging Him all the way to perform healings. His economy of miracle is remarkable.

*7:12 Now when he came near to the gate of the city, there was carried out one that was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and many people of the city were with her-* Luke's attention to women and the marginalized continues. This woman had no husband and now no son; she was without males in her life and thereby marginalized and despised. But the Lord comes to her, and becomes the ultimate saviour male in her life.

*7:13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her: Weep not-* We are given the impression that the Lord's plans of action were sometimes spontaneous. Realizing how she was now bereft of males in her life, He felt compassion for her and intervened. And yet if we enquire why He decided to take a journey to Nain, we conclude that it was specifically to attend this funeral and transform it. "Weep not" is itself



an invitation to faith in Him. Otherwise, it is a most inappropriate thing to say to a mother as she buries her son. She could only stop crying if she believed that the Lord could radically change the situation. And He could.

*7:14 And he came near and touched the coffin; and the bearers stood still. And he said: Young man, I say to you, arise-* The Lord spoke to the corpse of the widow's dead son as if it were already restored to life; see on Mk. 5:41. The touching of the coffin was all significant, for it made the Lord ritually unclean. And yet He touched it when in His own mind having proclaimed the man alive; there was therefore no defilement from a dead body because in fact the body was not dead. The Lord surely knew the kind of casuistic discussion of the legalism of the situation which would be provoked. And He was seeking to teach through the miracle that legalistic defilement is no issue to Him because He can transform defiling situations. He taught the same by touching lepers and sick people who were probably also ritually unclean. But He touched them at the point of healing, raising the legalistic question as to whether He had in fact touched the defiled, seeing that He spoke of dead and unclean things as if they had already come clean and alive to Him.

*7:15 And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother-* The idea of giving the man over to his mother would again imply physical contact between the Lord and the once dead man; and surely the mother embraced her son. The new life given by the Lord meant that concepts of defilement were changed; and it was this fear of defilement which had stymied the development of true spirituality within Judaism, just as it does within legalistic Christianity today. "Sat up" is literally to be sat up, suggesting the Lord lifting up the revived man to a sitting position. The Greek is only used in one other place, again by Luke, when Peter raises Tabitha and she sits up (Acts 9:40). This continues Luke's theme that the Lord's work and style of operation was continued in the ministry of His body of believers. Their work, as ours, was as if He was still on earth, present through them on account of the presence of His Spirit in the Comforter. And their whole style of working was therefore reflective of His.

*7:16 And fear took hold of all, and they glorified God, saying: A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited His people!-* See on Mk. 1:2. Juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. He touched the coffin- so that the crowd would have gasped at how unclean Jesus was, and how He had identified Himself with the unclean to the point of Himself appearing unclean. It was surely shock that made the pallbearers stop in their tracks. But then the Lord raised the dead man- and the people perceived His greatness, convinced that in the person of Jesus "God has visited His people". His humanity and yet His greatness, His Divine side if you like, were artlessly juxtaposed together. Hence prophetic visions of the exalted

Jesus in Daniel call Him "the Son of man". But again we notice another juxtaposition- of fear along with glorifying God. Why should they be fearful that God had visited them in His Son? The same idea has been used in Lk. 1:68,78 of how 'God visiting' is parallel with 'God redeeming' from sin. Why fear redemption and salvation? The only reason for such fear would be because they sensed that this visitation from God required their repentance and exposed their sin. The Gentiles were "visited" (s.w.) in order to take out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). The visitation of God in His Son required that people respond, and thereby become "His people". And this demanded too much for many in Israel.

*7:17 And this report about him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region-* The *logos* "went out"- similar language as used in John's gospel. It hardly refers to any personal pre-existence of the Lord. It seems that it was the spreading of this "report" which reached some of John's disciples (:18). The report in view could be of the resurrection in Nain, or that of :16- the idea that the Lord was indeed the promised Messiah or "prophet".

*7:18 And the disciples of John told him of all these things-* They heard the "report" that Jesus of Nazareth was "the prophet" (:16) and that the time of Messianic visitation had come. As noted on :19, the "report" may have been that the Lord was not so much Messiah as the Elijah prophet. This would make John's enquiry of :19 not so much a lack of faith but more of genuine confusion as to the Lord's prophetic identity.

*7:19 And John calling to himself two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, asking: Are you he that comes, or look we for another?-* Even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded

in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

And yet for all this, it could simply be that John had a crisis of faith in prison. It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (Mt. 11:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

*7:20 And when the men came to him, they said: John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask: Are you he that comes, or do we look for another?*- The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26. Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is

the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfilment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

*7:21 In that hour he cured many of diseases and illnesses and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight-* Again we are being shown that the Lord's miracles were for a teaching purpose; in this case, to give a lesson to John's disciples and to John himself, proving beyond cavil that the Lord was Messiah, Son of God, and not simply a prophet. The Lord did heal from genuine feelings of compassion, as seen at Nain; and yet Luke seems to always stress that this was far from the only reason. Here His miracles were done in order to intentionally fulfilling prophecies in Isaiah, and then asking John to accept that (see on :22).

*7:22 And he answered and said to them: Go and tell John the things which you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up-* See on Mk. 6:3; Lk. 15:7. They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord. The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfilment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in the parallel record in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

*The poor have the good news preached to them-* This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

The same passage alluded to in Is. 61:1 promised freedom and good news to the imprisoned- which was where John was at the time,

according to Mt. 11. The Lord was encouraging him in a hidden kind of way that He was aware of where John was, and there would be ultimate freedom from that prison in the Kingdom.

*7:23 And blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me-* Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that... therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

The Lord tried not to offend / stumble people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive as the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is

usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

*7:24 And when the messengers of John had departed, he began to say to the crowds concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*- The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see here the fulfilment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on Mt. 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

*A reed shaken with the wind?*- See on :41. The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are...

*7:25 But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Look, they that are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately, are in kings' courts*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4). The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas

had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

*7:26 But what went you out to see?*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see...' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

*A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet*- The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

*7:27 This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He *was* the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John *was* that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'.

*Of whom it is written: Look*- An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this *is* he".

*I send My messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you*- The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1:



"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniym*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

*7:28 I say to you, among those that are born of women- there is none greater than John-* The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

*Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he-* The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones'

were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

*7:29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John-* "Acknowledge" is the word for "justify". They justified God, rather than justifying themselves as the impenitent Jewish leaders did (s.w. 16:15). God is justified by our recognition of sin (s.w. Rom. 3:4). Achan likewise was asked to give glory to God by repenting (Josh. 7:19), as are Israel (Jer. 13:16). And in mutual response, God justifies us through imputing righteousness to us in the process of forgiveness (Rom. 8:33). So this comment that they acknowledged God's justice, or justified God, is stating that they repented. They had already been baptized by John, but that baptism was unto repentance; see on Mt. 3:3,11. He baptized in order to lead to repentance, not to as it were set the seal upon a suitably cleaned up life. And in these cases, they did now repent as hoped for. But what was it which they heard which provoked this? Perhaps it was realizing that John their baptizer was also imperfect in faith and understanding, and yet was being comforted that despite his crisis of faith in prison, the Father loved and accepted him. And this inspired those he had baptized to repent further.

*7:30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him-* Some had been baptized by him, so the reference is to the Pharisees and lawyers in the crowd at that time. God will fulfil His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will... then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

*7:31 And the Lord said: Unto whom shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like?*- The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist's work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John's ministry had been unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

*7:32 They are like children that sit in the marketplace and call to each other, who say: We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep-* See on Mt. 21:32; Mk. 1:4. The Lord's enthusiasm for Israel's response to the Gospel comes out again when the grace of Jesus likens Himself to a street kid in the market who really wanted to get a game going with the other kids. He offered to play funerals with them (through His appeal through John the Baptist), but they refused. He then offered to play weddings (through His Gospel of grace, joy and peace), but still they refused (Lk. 7:32). By all means connect this with another market place parable, where Christ (the servant) comes there to try to recruit labourers, on almost unbelievably good rates.

John's ministry was like children wanting to play funerals, and taking the initiative by beginning with mock weeping- but not getting any response. The Lord's ministry was as children wanting to play weddings, piping to the other children, who would not respond by dancing. Note that in Mt. 10:42 the Lord has likened His preachers to little children. Children were considered non-persons in society, and yet the Lord uses children in this parable as representative of His preachers. We note that although He likened them to children, He had to sternly warn them that they still needed to be converted and become *as* children (Mt. 18:3). We see Him so often imputing status to His followers which they had not in reality attained. This is to help us appreciate how He can impute righteousness to we who are not righteous. The parable of preaching here pictures children appealing to children. The commonality between us and our audience is very attractive and persuasive. We are humans reaching out to humans, indeed, children to children; the children called out (cp. calling out the Gospel) to "their *fellows*".

The marketplace was the town square. The Lord uses the same word in the parable of Mt. 20:3, where the call of the Gospel comes to men who are standing idle in the market place (s.w.). The picture is perhaps of society getting on with its existence, but the weak labourers and the children being left to one side, excluded from standard adult social and economic life. And it is to these that the call of the Gospel comes, in the midst of human busyness.

The Old Testament as well as the New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orchee-sasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekop-sasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never **stept**; we dirged for you, and you never **wept**'. We note that the Lord parallels the work of the children John's 'children' or disciples, and His. Although both of them were somewhat negative about each other, the Lord saw both groups of children as doing the same work, despite a different culture and even doctrinal emphasis. The division in the town square was between the children begging the others to respond, and the children of this world who didn't want to, in the midst of those who didn't even have ears to hear and were just getting on with their worldly business and never 'heard' the invitation from either group of children.

The Lord was speaking this whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour. He could say that just as John's preparation of the way had not been responded to on the level of the whole "generation" or society, neither had His more upbeat and joyful invitation been accepted. Note that the call of the Gospel is a call to engage with the preacher, to dance in response to the tune piped. Community and fellowship are all part of response to the Gospel; it's not about delivering truths to an individual who then accepts them and has no further relationship with the preacher. This is why the father-son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

*7:33 For John the Baptist came eating no bread nor drinking wine, and you say: He has a demon-* The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

*7:34 The Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and you say: Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!-* See on Mt. 11:19. The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton,

and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return, when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

The Lord was 'fond' [*philos*] of sinners; He liked them and their company. In this we see His greatness, for most spiritual people admit to finding the company of the unspiritual somewhat of a burden. But the Lord's spirituality was beyond that. Truly He is the sinners' friend.

*7:35 But wisdom is justified of all her children-* This could simply mean that both His and John's disciples would be justified in the end, despite their differences.

Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.

On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

*7:36 And one of the Pharisees requested him to eat with him. And he entered into the Pharisee's house and sat down to the meal-* As noted on :34, to eat together and to enter into a house was a sign of religious acceptance. Perhaps it was done simply to try to catch the Lord out by the presence of the sinful woman. Or maybe the Pharisee had a genuine interest.

*7:37 And a woman who was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that he was dining in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment-* The three anointings of Luke 7, Matthew 26 and John 12 are similar but different. Here the scene is in Galilee; but it inspired Mary to do something similar in John 12 in Bethany, which in turn encouraged an anonymous woman in Matthew 26 to do the same kind of thing near Jerusalem. Self sacrifice and devotion are examples which spread. This is the reason for fellowship in practice- to be inspired and encouraged together by human examples of responses to the same Lord. "A sinner" with no reference to any change could suggest that she was right at that moment still working as a prostitute.

*7:38 And standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment-* The weeping was presumably

for her sins, so ashamed that she stood behind Him, not facing His face. She believed that He was the Christ, the anointed one. And that understanding was not cheap nor painless for her; it motivated her to anoint the anointed one, the Christ, with her most valuable possession. Our belief in the most basic principles of the Lord and truths about Him should require likewise.

*7:39 Now when the Pharisee that had invited him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that touches him, that she is a sinner-* We note that the thoughts of a man within himself as he sat in his lounge many centuries ago... are recorded for us to this day. God notices all thoughts. When the woman touched the Lord, people reasoned that Jesus wasn't Messiah because He appeared not to know that He was being touched by a sinner. Yet this incident prepared the Lord for the time when He would be smitten and demanded to prophesy who smote Him, if He was the Christ (Lk. 22:64). At that moment, perhaps He thought back to this incident, realizing it had been a living out of the spirit of the cross, and it prepared Him for the final agony.

The Lord's response to Simon was not self-justification, but rather an enquiry as to how much Simon loved the Lord in response to the forgiveness of *his* sins (Lk. 7:39-48). And when the Pharisees criticized the disciples for mixing with sinners, the Lord's response was to appeal to them *personally* to repent (Lk. 5:30-32). And He went further in justifying His disciples, by answering another criticism of them by the Jews with the comment that unless they changed, they would be like old bottles broken by His new wine. *They* personally had to change- and they needed to focus upon that rather than criticizing others for their possible guilt by association.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as a person will excite real passion and feeling in response. Our reactions to the tragedy of the way He was rejected, and is rejected and mocked to this day, will be like those of the woman who was a sinner whom Luke records in Lk. 7. The Lord was invited to the home of a Pharisee, who clearly had only invited Him to insult and mock Him. For the Pharisee hadn't kissed Him, nor arranged for His feet to be washed- things which simply *have* to be done to an invited guest. And so that woman becomes passionate. She feels anger and hurt for the insult and rejection made against Jesus. She does what Simon the Pharisee didn't do- kissing Him, washing His feet. Having no towel to dry His feet, she let down her hair to use as a towel- and a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in front of men. She touches the Lord's body- something deeply despised, for the Greek and Hebrew idea of 'touching' has sexual overtones (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1), the Greek word 'to touch' also meaning 'to light a fire'. The ointment she carried between

her breasts denoted her as a prostitute- but she breaks it open and pours it on the Lord in repentance. Her attitude was surely: 'Yeah I'm a whore, you all know that. And yes, you're all gonna misunderstand me and think I am just madly coming on at this Jesus. OK, misunderstand me as you will, I don't care, I truly love Him as my Saviour, and there, I'm pouring out my ointment, I'm through with this Broadway life, I'm repenting, in the abandon of freedom from sin I now feel, I'm giving myself wholly to Him and His cause, mock me, be shocked and disgusted in your middle-class way all you like, but this is for real'. And this, it seems to me, is the response of everyone who truly comes to the Lord Jesus as a person, and feels for Him as a real person whom we have met in a real, valid encounter. The Lord responded to that woman by doing something which may not seem a big deal to us, but which was radical in first century culture. He criticized strongly the hospitality of His host. This just wasn't done, and still isn't. He was angry- because despite the woman's sincerity, they still labelled her as a 'sinner' (Lk. 7:39). He rebuked Simon through the parable of the two debtors, who owed 500 pence and 50 pence. As that woman went away "in peace", with her Lord passionately behind her and on her side, defending her to the world, so we too walk away from our encounters with Him.

*7:40 And Jesus answering said to him: Simon, I have something to say to you. And he said: Teacher, speak-* Like David, the Lord Jesus saw through peoples' actions to the self-talk behind it. He observed the body language of the Pharisee, despising the repentant woman; Lk. 7:39 records that the man "said within himself... 'She is a sinner!'", but "*Jesus answering said to him...*" (Lk. 7:40). The Lord perceived the man's self-talk, and responded to it. For Him, the Pharisee's unspoken words were loud and clear, and Jesus acted as if He was in a conversation with the man. He correctly read the man's silent disapproval as actually saying something, and responded to it as if in conversation. Of course we could argue that the Lord was empowered by a flash of Holy Spirit illumination to be able to read the Pharisee's mind; but it seems to me altogether more likely that it was His own sensitivity, His own perception of the other's self-talk, that enabled Him to know what was being silently said within the man's mind.

The parables of Lk. 7 and 14 were told during a meal- perhaps many of the others were, too. The Lord would have been a brilliant conversationalist, drawing out unexpected challenges and lessons from what appeared to be everyday facts. The implications of the parables are not pleasant- they would have soured some of His table conversations if they were properly perceived. And likewise with us as we read them in this age; these stories are indeed profoundly disturbing if understood properly and allowed to take their effect upon us. Yet for all their challenge, the parables of Jesus reveal how deeply familiar He was with



human life in all its daily issues and complexities. He artlessly revealed how He had meditated deeply upon the issues involved in farming, the problem of weeds, how much poor men were paid for a day's work, the desperation of the beggar Lazarus, problems faced by builders when laying foundations... He was and is truly sensitive and understanding of the everyday issues of our lives, and yet draws out of them something deeply challenging and radical. In this was and is His surpassing, magnetic brilliance. But the unanswered questions in the parables aren't all there is to them.

*7:41 A certain lender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty-* The Lord saw the hypocritical Pharisee Simon as being a man forgiven fifty pence, who therefore loved Him (Lk. 7:41). This shows the generous way in which the Lord reads people. In the same chapter, the Lord recognised that John the Baptist had suffered a crisis of faith. But He tells the crowd that John wasn't a reed shaken with the wind, an unstable believer (Lk. 7:24 cp. Is. 7:2), but the greatest of God's servants; He overlooked the temporary failure, and judged the overall spirit of John.

*7:42 When they had nothing with which to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?-* See on :47. The forgiveness was granted *when* they had nothing to pay. Spiritually, having nothing to pay means a person is at rock bottom. They recognize that they cannot pay back, cannot turn the clock back, cannot make things right again. All they can do is to throw themselves upon God's grace. This is the idea of :29. The desperate sinners justified God in repentance. We wonder if this prostitute was one of the group mentioned there.

*7:43 Simon answered and said: He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most. And he said to him: You have rightly judged-* There is a direct connection between amount of forgiveness and love for the Lord. And yet volume of forgiveness is also a matter of perception. Those who perceive the enormous extent of their sins and receipt of forgiveness are those who will love the Lord more. The woman's utter abandon towards the Lord was therefore because of this. Simon's minimalistic approach to the Lord was because he had little sense of personal debt to the Lord. The Lord's implication to Simon that he ought to have been more generous in entertaining the Lord is therefore another way of saying that he needed to repent the more and perceive the size of his debt.

*7:44 And turning to the woman, he said to Simon: Saw you this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wetted my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair-* It was rude to speak to a man without looking at them, let alone with back turned to the person and looking at a woman. The Lord is purposefully snubbing

Simon and demonstrating the huge respect He had for this prostitute. The Lord saw Simon the proud Pharisee as having been forgiven a little, and as loving Him a little (Lk. 7:44-48). This isn't how we would have seen that man. This is surely something more than generosity of spirit, even though the Lord certainly had this. His attitude reflects a hopefulness for Simon, an earnest desire for his salvation that only saw and imagined the best.

*7:45 You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet-* The Lord saw a connection between the way the sinful woman kissed Him much, and the way she "loved much" (Lk. 7:45,47 RVmg.). He then told a parable about her and Simon the Pharisee. His point was that they both owed Him money and He had forgiven the debt, but He was looking for an appropriate response from them. Yet there is no evidence that Simon had repented before receiving that forgiveness.

*7:46 My head with oil you did not anoint, but she has anointed my feet with ointment-* The Lord makes a clear allusion to Ps. 23 in saying that *she* had anointed His head with oil, and His feet with ointment. There, it is *God* who is said to have anointed David's head, and prepared a feast in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). The historical background for this Psalm is when David fled from Absalom, and God manifested in Barzillai prepared an unexpected feast for him, just the other side of the valley from where his enemies were. Perhaps Barzillai also anointed David's head with oil at the time. It seems the Lord saw God as now manifest in a woman- He, through her, anointed His head with oil. And she did it at a time when the Lord was sitting at a great feast. It could logically follow that it was likewise she who had prepared the feast for Him, explaining her presence in the home. And if, as we have suggested, Simon the Pharisee was her brother or father or relative, then this would make sense. The whole thing surely has the ring of truth about it. Thus the Lord saw God as personally manifested through a sex worker. This should quieten all our doubts as to whether God really could be manifested through such as us.

*7:47 Therefore I say to you, that her sins, which are many, are forgiven (for she loved much). But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little-* Paul seems to have seen this woman as one of his patterns when he speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than anyone, because of the depth of grace he had known (1 Tim. 1:14,15)- for she "loved much" because she had been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). In passing, was the Lord's comment "she loved much" an indication that He thereby knew how much she had sinned, without having the knowledge beamed into

Him, because He observed how much she now loved Him? In the parable which the Lord told comparing Simon and the woman, He made the comment that it was only "When they [realized that] they had nothing wherewith to pay" (Lk. 7:42 RV) that they were forgiven. He perceived how Mary had come to that point, at His feet, weeping, of knowing that she had nothing to pay. And Paul, and us, must reach that point if we are to find the motivation to "love much" in response.

He who is forgiven much, the same will love much (Lk. 7:41-50). The purpose of the Lord's mini-parable was not that the druggies, the hookers, the murderers will love Christ more than you or me. It was to teach that according to a man's *perception* of his sin, so he will love his Lord. All too often we serve Him because we have a conscience that we should do so; and yet the service He requires is service, even the senseless service of that forgiven woman with her precious ointment, simply because we *love* Him. And that overwhelming, overflowing *love* will only come from a true sense of our desperation. By knowing our desperation, we will know the Lord, we will know the grace and fathomless mercy which is so essentially *Him*: "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you... not according to your wicked ways" (Ez. 20:43,44).

7:48 *And he said to her: Your sins are forgiven-* This was not so much a pronouncement of forgiveness in response to repentance; rather is it a reminder to her that her sins really had been forgiven, an encouragement to her to believe that which was already true.

7:49 *And they that sat at food with him began to say within themselves: Who is this that even forgives sins?-* They *began* to say within themselves. But, presumably, they didn't verbalize it, when they easily could have done. Why not? Was it not that the anointing was an unspoken testimony that indeed, Jesus had forgiven her sins?

7:50 *And he said to the woman: Your faith has saved you. Go into peace-* Her faith is specifically her faith in forgiveness (:48) and the "peace" in view is therefore peace with God. This is what comes from faith (Rom. 5:1 s.w.). The woman therefore becomes representative of every believer.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the kingdom of God; and companying with him were the twelve-* The Synoptic Gospels use the same words for the activities of both the Lord Jesus and the disciples in respect of preaching, teaching, healing etc. Theirs was a shared ministry. Thus the Lord is recorded as "*showing* the glad tidings of the Kingdom", but in the same context He asks a new convert to go home "*and shew* how great things God has done" (:39), as if he were to continue the 'showing' of Jesus.

The Lord taught them how to preach by having them accompany Him as He went about preaching. We can too easily assume that the purpose of the Bible, or the teaching of Jesus, the doctrine of Christ, is merely and solely to impart information. We can underestimate the degree to which the immediate intention of doctrine, of Jesus, was the transformation of human life. Many of us have been educated in an environment where the aim of teaching is to bring people to know things that have no practical effect upon their lives; yet this is most decidedly not how we should approach the words of the Gospel. Our model of learning has been 'from jug to mug', i.e. there is the assumption that the teacher simply pours out their knowledge into the student's passive mental space. And then the student is tested as to the degree of retention of that knowledge. But as disciples, students, of the Lord Jesus, we are about something different. If the Lord were scheduled to give a class in one of our ecclesial halls, my sense is we would turn up with our video cameras, tape recorders, note books, pens and pencils. But when in reality He delivered the 'sermon on the mount', His listeners simply beheld a life lived, the reflection of His words in practice, "the word made flesh". He both preached *and* shewed the Gospel- in His life as well as His doctrinal teaching. And so it should be with our teaching of others.

8:2 *And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out-* Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to.

Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

8:3 *And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to them out of their means-* It is worth noting, though, that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus; and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

8:4 *And when a great crowd came together, and they of every city had come to him, he spoke by a parable-* "Came / gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish

values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

The Gospel records give more information about the day on which the Lord told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in His ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt. 12:22-13:23; Lk. 11:27; Mk. 4:10). Various types of people heard His words; the immediate context is that great crowds were gathered to Him. The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to the Lord's sowing when He first "went forth to sow" in His ministry.

The unusually large crowd were attracted to the Lord for various reasons, not least the hope of miracles. And He now tells them a parable to the effect that out of all those who encounter His word, only a minority would truly respond. Perhaps this parable is recorded out of all His teachings, because time proved it so true to that mass of humanity who heard Him preaching.

8:5 *The sower went to sow his seed*- The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "a sower" (followed by the AV), others "*the sower*" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went" is the word used several times of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... *for therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.), but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

*And as he sowed*- The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But

the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Matthew doesn't record that the Lord made a big issue about the seed- Luke's account records this: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

*Some fell by the way side, and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it-* The reason for the way side growth being so short lived was that the seed was "trodden down". This is a Biblical idiom for disdain and contempt (Jud. 5:21; Is. 14:19; 18:7; 28:3; Dan. 8:13; Mic. 7:10). A half-hearted response to the word, is effectively to tread it down in contempt. Yet such is the word's power that even a partial response to it results in some growth- although in the final analysis, even this is unacceptable.

Our witness must fundamentally be Christ-centred. The same Greek words are used about treading underfoot the seed of the Gospel, and treading underfoot the Son of God (Lk. 8:5; Heb. 10:29). Our knowledge of Him and living in Him are the essence of our witness. He is essentially our witness.

The fowls taking away the unfruitful plant is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn.15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry, fruitfulness due to the word and purging recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "birds" of the first century) is allowed by God. Thus Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven".

The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on

the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot- an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

First of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable in the same chapter speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is. 18:6; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by



the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither do you suffer them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

The seed was "devoured"; the same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

8:6 *And other fell on the rock*- The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

*And as soon as it grew*- Matthew- "immediately it grew". There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and the Gospels often note the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical

theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

*It withered away, because it had no moisture*- Because it had no depth (Mt. 13:6). John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). This connects the ideas of depth and moisture. These people

had only a surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of the Lord and His work; just as some can apparently respond to the Bible, and yet not really engage in relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

8:7 *And other fell amidst the thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it-* This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good seed brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (Mt. 13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in Mt. 13:22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

The next parable in Matthew explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up'; the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (Mt. 13:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

*8:8 And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold-* The next parable in Matthew is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant

bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:

- 1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.
- 2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and the Lord's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If you will be *perfect*...' sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. The Lord wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly the Lord sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

Growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we

can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible. The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

*As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear-* The Lord so wanted their response. The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our

brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that has ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of :9, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in :10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God".

There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

*8:9 And his disciples asked him what this parable meant-* The disciples' response would have been a cutting anti-climax for the Lord after his impassioned plea of :8. According to Matthew, this was His first parable, and it marked the Lord's turning away from Israel and focus upon the disciples. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

*8:10 And he said: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest the parables remain as parables; so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand-* The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is "given". Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to



construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

8:11 *Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God-* The word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems the Lord is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled.

The seed is the word; but "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another

reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

*8:12 Those by the way side are they that have heard; then comes the Devil-* The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter in Matthew is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

*And takes away-* The same word for "takes away" had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as responsible for the scattering of the sheep. Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

*The word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved-* Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the

story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

*8:13 And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy-* Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

*But these have no root, they for a while believe, but in time of temptation fall away-* It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

*8:14 And that which fell among the thorns, these are those that have heard-* One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a weed (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the weed category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

*But as they go on their way, they are choked-* Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone

wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

*With cares and riches and the pleasures of life-* In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world. There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

*And bring no fruit to maturity-* See on Lk. 15:31. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:15 *And that in the good ground are those with an honest and good heart, who having heard the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience-* See on Lk. 10:37. Paul tells the Hebrews and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36). The word/ seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. Thus connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit. It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an

ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

The good ground "accepts" (Mk. 4:20), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15) the word. In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (Mt. 13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32).

This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground.

8:16 *Nobody, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but puts it on a stand, so that they that enter may see the light-* See on Lk. 6:47. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) so that it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do



this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

*8:17 For nothing is hid, that shall not be revealed; nor anything secret, that shall not be known and come to light-* Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank.

The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life.

*8:18 Take heed therefore how you hear. For whoever has, to him shall be given-* This is a clear statement of the upward spiral which we can experience. What we 'have' in our commitment to His word will be added to. The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort and application to God's word, but through the gift /grace of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (Mt. 13:9). Mark speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adds to "shall be given" the idea of 'given in abundance'. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

*And whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinks he has-* See on Lk. 13:28.

The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the

Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

In the sower context, those who appear to have been committed to the word but have now fallen away (the seed on the rocks, wayside and amongst thorns) will find that their time of apparent commitment to it was nothing; they have nothing if they did not endure to the end, and what they appeared to have will be taken away from them.

8:19 *And there came to him his mother and relatives; and they could not come to him because of the crowd-* Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. In the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

8:20 *And it was told him: Your mother and your relatives stand outside, desiring to see you-* Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "your mother and your brothers are outside looking [seeking] for you", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for you"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary looked for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town,

back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

*8:21 But he answered and said to them: My mother and my relatives are these that hear the word of God and do it-* This refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith. It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

The parallel records speak of hearing and doing the will of God; Luke has "the word of God". We can too easily assume that every reference to "the word of God" is to the book known as the Bible. The Bible is indeed "the word of God", but the idea is used in other ways within Biblical language; and here it seems to mean the will or intention of God.

*8:22 Now it came to pass on one of those days that he boarded a boat, he and his disciples, and he said to them: Let us go over to the other side of the lake. And they cast off-* So often we encounter the Lord's desire for solitude, avoiding crowds and pressure to perform mass healings. His regular crossings of the lake were largely to avoid these situations. The constant outpouring of energy from Him accounts for the complete exhaustion of :23. In these things we see the Lord's utter humanity.

*8:23 But as they sailed, he fell asleep; and there came down a storm of wind on the lake, and they were filling with water; and were in danger for their lives-* Mt. 8:26 uses a word for "storm" which is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

The Greek for "sleep" could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be

gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

8:24 *And they came to him and woke him, saying-* Literally, to raise up. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

*Master, master, we perish! And he awoke, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm-* The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

Mark records that they actually said: "Don't you care that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first

century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves "Peace, be still". His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:25 *And he said to them: Where is your faith?*- See on Lk. 7:8. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness.

After having been awed by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

The question as to *why* they had little faith echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in what or whom?*'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

*And being afraid they marvelled, saying to each other-* A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

*Who then is this-* What sort of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons (*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

*That he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?-* The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

8:26 *And they arrived in the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee-* The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

8:27 *And when he had arrived upon the land, there met him a certain man out of the city, who had demons-* For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Matthew 8 and Mark 5. There are many incidents where evidently the disciples were with Jesus, yet the focus of the record is entirely upon Him, so awed were they by the magnitude of His personality, and so selfless were they (Lk. 8:27; 10:38-41; Jn. 11:15,20-57). They are appealing for others to believe on the basis that they are recounting the story of how they heard Jesus, and eventually, very slowly and falteringly, had also come to believe.

We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on Mt. 5:7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

*And for a long time he had worn no clothes and abode not in any house, but in the tombs-* A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they



had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3-4).
- Legion was always "in the mountains"- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.
- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob
- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?".
- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).
- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land".
- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mk. 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called "great things" (Ps. 106:21).

8:28 *And when he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said: What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me-*

He was one of the few who joined the dots and saw that the Lord was God's Son; yet he feared condemnation, which is what "torment" spoke of. It was his mental illness which was largely responsible for that paranoia about condemnation; and the Lord healed him of it.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons' (see on :2)- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29). "He [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "My name [singular] is Legion: for we are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with

the man's self-perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (Mk. 5:7).

8:29 *For he was commanding the unclean spirit to come out from the man. For oftentimes it had seized him, and he was kept under guard and bound with chains and fetters; and breaking the chains apart, he was driven by the demon into the desert-* Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the demon into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

He had "often" been restrained, in efforts to cure him. He therefore needed some assurance that the cure from the Lord Jesus was going to be permanent, and the rushing of the pigs over the cliff to their permanent destruction would have been a reminder of that.

8:30 *And Jesus asked him: What is your name?-* The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to

make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And he said: Legion. For many demons had entered into him-* Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the

comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So

often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analysed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon

possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

8:31 *And they begged him that he would not command them to depart into the abyss*- See on Acts 16:16. This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :28. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country*" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They begged him not to order them to go into the abyss*" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with

the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

*8:32 Now there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain-*  
Mt. 8:30 "Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding". The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The man saw himself as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them (Mt. 8:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. See on :8 for the man's paranoia about condemnation, although he believed in the Lord as God's Son and worshipped Him as such. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips.

*And they begged him that he would give them leave to enter into them. And he gave them permission-* Mt. 8:31 adds: "And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out". The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). Legion was obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (Mt. 8:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on Mt. 8:30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on Mt. 8:32). He correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring Legion that his fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day; and this addressed the man's paranoia about condemnation noted on :8. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. Legion had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he asked that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

*8:33 And the demons came out from the man, and entered into the swine, and the herd rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned-*  
Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent



episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

The madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behavior in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but

attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae.... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and

moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

8:34 *And when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and reported it in the nearby town and in the countryside-* "What had happened" was the cure of Legion; they came to investigate, and saw the cured man. As Jews they were not supposed to be keeping pigs; they realized they could say little against the Lord's action, for what they had been doing was illegal. It would have taken some time for the news to spread to "the city and in the country"; so we can assume the Lord sat with the cured Legion for some time, even days, teaching him further.

8:35 *And they went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man, from whom the demons had left, sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus; and they were afraid-*

When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind". His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

The "fear" of the people was perhaps related to their bad conscience about keeping pigs. The parable of the prodigal son associated Jewish pig keepers with those who needed to repent, and for whom the Father was eagerly waiting to welcome back home. Those people were in the same position as Legion; being now aware of the Lord's Divine power, but fearing condemnation. They actually needed the same basic healing which the Lord had given Legion in curing him of his complex about condemnation. Indeed the case of Legion speaks to so many believers today, who believe in and even worship the Lord as Son of God, but who are obsessed with a fear of final condemnation.

8:36 *And they that saw it told them how he that was possessed with demons had been healed-* Apart from the loss of their pigs, what had happened was good news. Fear of condemnation, to the point of paranoia, really could be cured by the Lord Jesus; the demons of doubt and fear really could be cast out, and the miracle of the destruction of the pigs was dramatic visual evidence of this. But when faced with this, the people feared and didn't want that good news.

8:37 *And all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into a*

*boat and returned-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in Mt. 8:31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (Mt. 8:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (Mt. 8:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (Mt. 8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (Mt. 8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.

Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

8:38 *But the man from whom the demons had left pleaded with him that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying-* Motivations for involvement in evangelistic work vary. This man was separated from his family and society, for he had been violent and abusive to them. It would have been far more convenient for him to just leave them and join the peripatetic ministry of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord realized that the healing of relationships was a fundamental outcome of acceptance of the Gospel; and He wished this process to at least be given a chance in this case. And so He established a principle which many have struggled to accept: ministry to family and local society is even more important than joining in mobile missionary work.

8:39 *Return to your family, and declare what great things God has done for you-* We must "do" the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21), but the Lord also 'does'

for us by His grace ("mercy"); our 'doing' is in response to His 'doing' for us. The same word is used in Jn. 4:1 (also Acts 15:17) of how the Lord 'did' or "made" disciples. That was the end point in view; the "great things" done were not just the cure, but the making of a disciple. Mary's praise that "He has done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids a man go home "and shew how great things God has done unto you".

*And he went his way, publishing throughout the whole city how great were the things Jesus had done for him-* This public preaching in the city and all the Decapolis (Mark says) rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

**Mk. 5:19**

Go to your *house*  
unto your *friends* [relatives]  
*tell* them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"-  
by personal demonstration to  
individuals]  
how great things  
the *Lord* [*i.e. God*] has done for  
you  
and how he had mercy on you.

**Mk. 5:20**

He goes to the *ten*  
*cities* [Decapolis]  
He goes to *strangers*  
He "*publishes*"  
  
how great things  
*Jesus* had done for him  
[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others

what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

There are some things in Scripture which are recorded in such a way as to promote meditation, and therefore they will always be ambiguous in terms of the actual interpretation which is sustainable. We can't *always* say "This word means X, this phrase means Y, therefore this verse means interpretation Z; and if you don't agree with that, you don't really accept the Bible". Because it is possible to say that about the interpretation of basic doctrine doesn't mean that we can adopt this attitude to the interpretation of every Bible passage. The record of the crucifixion is a good example of this. Or consider how it is recorded that some of those healed by the Lord *didn't* afterwards do what He said: one preached to his whole city rather than to his family (Lk. 8:39); another didn't obey the Lord's plea to not tell anyone else (Mk. 1:45). How are we to read these responses? Rank disobedience? Misguided zeal? Zeal in doing over and above what they were asked? You may have your ideas, and it is right that we should meditate upon these things and discuss them. But I suggest that ultimately they are left 'hanging' for the very purpose of promoting meditation and personal application, rather than being statements which shout for an obvious interpretation.

8:40 *And when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him. For they were all waiting for him-* The apparent disobedience to the command to focus upon his family was still worked with by the Lord (see on :39). The testimony of this healed man must have been so powerful.

8:41 *And there came a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue-* The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be

cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter. He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

*And he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged him to come into his house-* The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

Jairus begged the Lord to enter his house; this was seen as necessary for any healing. The contrast is with the Centurion who asked the Lord not to enter his home, but just to say the word.

8:42 *For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age; and she was dying. But as he went, the crowds crushed him-* See on Lk. 15:31. The Lord's rush to heal her was interrupted by a woman, whom He addressed [unusually] as "daughter". She had been sick for 12 years. And she was healed because of her faith. To the unspiritual man, this would have been nothing but an irritating interruption, to be sworn about under the breath. But to the spiritual man, there was ample encouragement here for faith; for another beloved daughter lay sick, and she was 12 years old, and she likewise could be healed by faith... The Lord's question: "Who touched me?" was therefore also a rhetorical device to spur faith in Jairus and his family. Who? Another "daughter", 12 years afflicted... It is only by our spiritual laziness in not providing that freewill input, that desire to understand, that crying for the knowledge of God which is in His word (Prov. 2:3-5), that this marvellous equation will fail. What greater motivation could each of us want in inspiring us to a total commitment to the word, rising early and staying up late to find that knowledge of God to overcome the sin which we hate? If we can only continue to desire to make the effort, to bruise the flesh more through that glorious word of God, then this spiral of growth will catch us up with ever increasing speed.

8:43 *And a woman who had suffered from chronic bleeding for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood upon doctors and could not be healed by any-* Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing. She has spent her livelihood not just on trying to get better, but on attempting to get out of a state of permanent ritual uncleanness.

This is another similarity with Legion, who had suffered from many failed attempts to cure his conditions. Getting 'worse and worse' is the picture of all people outside of Christ, and specifically of the spiritual state of Israel at the time (Mt. 9:16; 12:45; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:20). The Mosaic system of Judaism could not "better" humanity (s.w. Jn. 6:63; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 4:2; 13:9), just as she was not "bettered" (Mk. 5:26). Perhaps the implication is that the woman represented Israel, who like Asa had trusted in physicians rather than the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Job's 'friends' had many Judaist characteristics and reasoned in the same way as orthodox Judaism; and they were "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). The woman was bankrupt and desperate. This was how all were under the Law; the only answer was to throw themselves upon the Lord Jesus.

8:44 *Came behind him-* The scene is being developed from Mt. 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

*And touched the border of his garment; and immediately her bleeding stopped-* It was by the unclean touching the clean that she was cleansed; whereas in Mosaic ritual, the clean is always made unclean by touching the unclean. The Lord radically reversed all the fears of guilt by association.

Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness



cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Distraction</i>	<i>Resumed Focus</i>
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the

cross (Mk.  
8:31-34)

8:45 *And Jesus said: Who is it that touched me?*- This was a rhetorical question, designed to give the woman the opportunity to come out for the Lord before all. The Lord knew; for the woman felt she was no hidden from His eyes. She apparently "denied" along with all the others present. But the Lord was pushing her as He pushes us- to not have some secret flirtation with Him which exists just within our own brain cells, but to come out for Him before men, to His glory.

*And when all denied, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the crowds press upon you and crush you-* The gospels are transcripts of how the disciples spoke the gospel message. And yet they are shot through with the disciples' recognition of their own weakness, and thereby their message was the more appealing and convicting to their hearers. Here, they paint themselves as foolish and inappropriate; they record their mocking of the Lord in the same section in which they record the scorning of the Lord by unbelievers at the home of Jairus.

8:46 *But Jesus said: Someone did touch me. For I perceived power going out from me-* This gives an insight into the huge outflow of energy from the Lord when He healed people. As noted on Mk. 5:29, His healing of people was on account of His total identification with them; and each healing was a living out in essence of the cross even during His life. The Lord of course knew the woman had touched Him; but He didn't want her to just have a secret faith. He wanted her to 'come out'; and He engineers circumstance in our lives likewise, so that we have to become a city that is set on a hill.

8:47 *And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, declared in the presence of all the people for what reason she touched him, and how she was healed immediately-* As noted on :45, the Lord purposefully pushed her towards making a public statement for Him. We are a city set on a hill and likewise "cannot be hid". We see another connection with Legion, who feared condemnation and yet also fell before the Lord in worship. The Lord knew her history; but "the truth" to be told forth is a personal confession of our hopeless spiritual history, and the Lord's saving by grace. Yet she had initially "denied" the Lord's activity for her (:45). Perhaps this is included, as are Peter's denials, as comfort for those who under persecution did deny their Lord. He was still open to fellowship with them.

8:48 *And he said to her: Daughter-* Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

*Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace-* The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Your faith has made you whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

8:49 *While he yet spoke, there came one from the house of the ruler of the synagogue, saying: Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher-* We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. This again contrasts with messengers from the house of the Centurion asking the Lord not to come, but just to say the word for the curing.

8:50 *But Jesus hearing it, responded: Fear not. Only believe, and she shall be made whole-* Do not fear *but* believe shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so

important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful disease.

*8:51 And when he came to the house, he did not permit anyone to enter with him-* We see here the Lord's amazing force of personality when He wished to use it, just as He walked through the crowd in Nazareth who wished to throw Him off the cliff. He sent away the inquisitive crowd, just as He sent away the crowd after the miraculous feeding. He used the same power in commanding the mourners to leave the home.

The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13), came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

*Except Peter, John and James, and the father and mother of the girl-* Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn

when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

8:52 *All were weeping and bewailing her, but he said: Weep not. For she is not dead but sleeps-* The Angel repeated the same words to the women at the Lord's grave, as did the Lord to Mary: "Why do you weep?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Surely those women were close to the Lord at this time. The Lord used the same word choice before and after His resurrection, showing the continuity of personality between how we are now in the flesh, and how we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal, and how we are now is of critical importance eternally.

8:53 *And they laughed at him with scorn, knowing that she was dead-* This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

8:54 *But he, taking her by the hand, called, saying: Little girl, arise-* The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

8:55 *And her spirit returned and she rose up immediately, and he commanded that something be given her to eat-* The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry.

8:56 *And her parents were amazed, but he ordered them to tell no one what had been done-* See on Lk. 9:44. The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected to tell nobody what was done, even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he called the twelve together-* Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:2). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

*And gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases-* Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on Mt. 9:35.

9:2 *And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick-* The emphasis was upon preaching the Kingdom. The healings were secondary to that, and were to exemplify the things of the Kingdom. The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

9:3 *And he said to them: Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money. Neither have two coats-* Luke is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. His next words for them in :4 about staying until you move on appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His

law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. "Nor money"- Mt. "Nor brass for your purses"- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

*9:4 And into whatever house you enter, there stay and from there depart-* This appears to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on; see on :3. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, the Lord implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. In practice, this command was in order to develop relationships in families which would lead to the development of house churches, which was the Lord's preferred vision for His church, at least in the first century.

The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip "from house to house" (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

*9:5 And as many as do not welcome you, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them-* The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

*9:6 And they departed and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere-* They were obedient to the emphasis commanded them in :2; to preach firstly, and heal. The focus upon



villages rather than towns and big cities like Sepphoris is notable. We get the impression the Lord by all means sought to avoid controversy and conflict.

9:7 *Now Herod the tetrarch*- Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

*Heard of all that was done*- The Lord had recently used the same word in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

*And he was very worried, because of what was said by some, that John had risen from the dead*- The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins? The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

9:8 *And by some, that Elijah had appeared, and by others, that one of the old prophets had arisen*- As made explicit in Matthew 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another. By assuming the Lord was Elijah rather than Messiah, we see how they had missed the whole point of John's teaching; for he had been the Elijah prophet, heralding Messiah. And yet John had such popularity that Herod had been unable to murder him because of his mass

support (Mt. 14:5). The image of John was popular, John as religion; but his essential message went unheeded. And so it can be with us today; the image and religion of Christianity may be appealing to us to the point we identify with it. But the essential message of the Christ who should be at the core of it can be totally ignored or not even grasped.

*9:9 And Herod said: John I beheaded, but who is this, about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him-* Mk. 6:16 says that therefore Herod concluded this was John resurrected. Having killed John, Herod's conscience was haunted by him, and he was eager to see John alive again. He regretted murdering him; his subconscious desire was that John would somehow overcome that death and revive. And so he became convinced of the idea that John had reincarnated as Jesus. This explains why people can be so utterly convinced of after death experiences, reincarnation, ghosts, appearances of the dead etc. Such apparent experiences are a reflection of their own deep subconscious desire to see the dead again, to make death somehow not death. This is where the clear Biblical definition of death as unconsciousness is so challenging.

*9:10 And the apostles, when they had returned, declared to him what things they had done. And he took them and withdrew to a city called Bethsaida-* The Lord wanted to follow up with them about their experiences whilst preaching, and to develop their skills further. He wanted to be alone with them on their return from the assignment. But He is apparently frustrated by the crowds turning up (:11); indeed, this happens several times in the Gospels. It is all a deep insight into the depth of His humanity, with things not working out always as planned.

*9:11 But the crowds knew it, and they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and those that had need of healing he cured-* Possibly implying that some posed as being sick, and yet the Lord could discern whose need was genuine. How hard His life must have been, in that hard land. And how hard it *is* for Him, in this hard world.

To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them. But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

*9:12 And the day began to wear away; and the twelve came and said to him-* The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

*Send the crowd away-* Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50). They ask the Lord to send the multitude away, whereas He had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

*That they may go into the villages and countryside and lodge and get provisions. For we are here in a deserted place-* Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which

they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" (Mk.) may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

9:13 *But he said to them: You give them something to eat-* According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them...", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have you? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gob smacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall we find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

*And they said: We have no more than five loaves and two fishes, unless we go and buy food for all these people-*

Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations;

but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

If a labourer worked for a denarius a day during harvest season, we can conclude that their figure of 200 denarii was a year's wages for a working man. Like us so often, they focused on the size of the problem rather than on the Lord's ability to move absolutely any mountain.

9:14 *For they were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded later. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

*And he said to his disciples: Make them sit down in groups, about fifty in each*- "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set

up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty (Mk.), waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children.

9:15 *And they did so, and made them all sit down-* Vine comments: "Lit., like beds in a garden. The former adverb, by companies, describes the arrangement; this the color. The red, blue, and yellow clothing of the poorest orientals makes an Eastern crowd full of color; a fact which would appeal to Peter's eye, suggesting the appearance of flower-beds in a garden". If this were the case, then the allusion would be to the encampment of Israel in Num. 24:6: "As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Equally if the allusion is instead to military groups or companies, the idea is that this apparently random group of peasants, with all their shady biographies and legal uncleanness and lack of understanding, were the new Israel the Lord was forming; the new "hosts" of Yahweh of Hosts.

The 'making' to sit down could suggest nervousness within the crowd as to whatever was being done with them. The wonder of being provided for at the Lord's table is indeed hard to grasp.

9:16 *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven-* This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1. And the Comforter passages promise us that we can share His relationship with the Father, through the gift of the Spirit.

*He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd-* The aorist followed by the imperfect in "broke and gave" suggests He broke the bread once, and went on giving it out as a continuous act. This speaks of the Lord's one time death, and His continuous giving out of that to His people. The miracle of multiplication therefore happened at the moment of breaking the bread and His giving it out. This is indeed the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were



parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

9:17 *And they ate and were all filled*- "All" ate; and eating together at a banquet was a sign of religious fellowship. There were for sure some there who were Gentiles, unclean, or simply curious. They were "filled", perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full". The blessings of an obedient Israel were counted to this random crowd. By grace. They were "filled" superabundantly. The Lord's generosity is wonderful.

*And there was taken up of the leftovers twelve baskets*- Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("leftovers") that it filled twelve baskets, another implication that here were assembled the new Israel. The word for "baskets" here is a different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas. The Lord imparted a sense of ritual holiness to the otherwise random and unclean.

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

9:18 *And it came to pass, as he was praying alone, that his disciples joined him; and he asked them, saying- Erotao can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.*

*Who do the crowds say that I am?- This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do you say I am? (:20). "Say" translates lego which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.*

9:19 *And they answering said: John the Baptist-*Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

*But others Elijah-* John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

*And others, that one of the old prophets has risen-* Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God,

Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in Mt. 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

9:20 *And he said to them: But who do you say that I am? And Peter answering said: The Christ of God-* Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But who do you say that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His

disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things...and be slain, and be raised...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me... For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer...".

9:21 *And he ordered and commanded them to tell this to no one*- "Tell no man..." is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

9:22 *Saying: The Son of Man must*- The usage of *dei* ["must"] is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

*Suffer many things*- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

*And be rejected*- The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a

condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

*By the elders- Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

*And chief priests and scribes and be killed, and the third day be raised up-* Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

*9:23 And he said to all: If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me-* See on Mt. 10:38. In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross.

"Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins.

We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took

humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people.

9:24 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it-* Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?'".

9:25 *For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit his life?*- This threat rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man

advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

9:26 *For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his own glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels*- See on Rev. 19:10. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Lk. 9:26 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves so weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry

Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

*9:27 But I tell you a truth: There are some that stand here, who shall in no way taste death, until they see the kingdom of God-* The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in



preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 26 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 26 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:26). I note under Mt. 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in Mt. 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'? That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will "see" Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

*9:28 And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, that he took with him Peter, John and James and went up into the mountain to pray-* Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts

record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

9:29 *And as he was praying*- The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on Mt. 16:28. He started

praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

*The appearance of his face was altered-* Mt. "His face shone as the sun". The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into. The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

*And his garment became white and dazzling-* The same description used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes

in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

9:30 *And talking with him were two men, who were Moses and Elijah-* They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

9:31 *Who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem-* See on 2 Pet. 1:15. "In glory" suggests they were presented as it were already in the Kingdom, and from that kingdom perspective they talked with the Lord about His upcoming short term sufferings. We too must try to see our sharings in the cross as being in the context of the Kingdom. "Departure" is *eksodos*- Moses and Elijah had each experienced death at their *exodus*. And yet the Lord's *exodus* was all the more meaningful because it would enable the final delivery of God's people from the slavery of sin and death.

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*9:32 Now Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him-* "Saw his glory" is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see'; Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners.

The disciples' eyes were heavy in Gethsemane and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

*9:33 And it came to pass, as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus: Master, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three booths, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah-* Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself

had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

*Not knowing what he said-* It is possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

*9:34 And while he said these things, there came a cloud that overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered into the cloud-* Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud.

*9:35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is My Son, My chosen. Hear him-* This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old

Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear Him" was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:36 *And when the voice came, Jesus was found alone*- He was the word made flesh. The law and the prophets were fulfilled in Him, and so the voice of God as it were made Elijah and Moses to exit. Matthew says: "No one, save Jesus only". In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost cannot be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

*And they kept quiet and told no one in those days any of the things which they had seen*- "To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (Mk. 9:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to



appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

*9:37 And it came to pass, the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him-* This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally

similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

*9:38 And a man from the crowd cried, saying: Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son; for he is my only child-* Having only one child was unusual; perhaps the mother had died.

*9:39 And a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out-* The spirit and the person are parallel here; the person's behaviour was understood to be that of the supposed spirit. They failed to examine the behaviour or symptoms of a person as just that, instead they sought to explain it with reference to their theories of spirits.

*It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him-* Matthew and Mark speak of gnashing teeth and jumping into fire and water. Descriptions of the rejected come to mind as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... Likewise hitting himself was a sign of self-hatred, believing he was guilty of the beatings which were associated with the idea of condemnation (Lk. 12:47,48). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

9:40 *And I begged your disciples to cast it out-* He "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (Mt. 17:19).

*But they could not-* They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:41 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?-* He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation", again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world". See on Jn. 7:33.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament

words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the

darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).

- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

*Bring your son here-* The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

*9:42 And as he was coming, the demon dashed him down and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father-* As noted above, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he felt he really

had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

9:43 *And they were all astonished at the majesty of God. But while all were marvelling at all the things which he did, he said to his disciples-* Momentary faith and devotion to the Lord is worth little. No matter how impressive it might appear to others at the time, it is our long run

commitment to the Lord which matters. The Lord knew that these same people would be involved in His betrayal and death (:44); they who for the moment were marvelling at His miracle, correctly perceiving that it exemplified the majesty or rulership of God in His Kingdom.

*9:44 Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men-* He said that He would be, in the future, delivered up (Lk. 9:44); but the parallel Mk. 9:31 records Him saying: "I *am* delivered up". And Lk. 24:7 says that at this time, He told them that He *must be* delivered up. It is possible that He said all three things in one sentence, such was His emphasis: "I must be delivered up, I will be delivered up, in fact I am now being delivered up". He saw the future experience of the cross as being fulfilled in His daily experience of life.

The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message. See on Jn. 8:28.

*9:45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it, and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying-* They were rebuked later for being so slow to understand. A refusal to understand has a psychological basis. They didn't want to understand the predictions of His death because it meant death with Him, in essence if not in practice. So they would rather it just were not true. In response, God "hid" the understanding from them. We are confirmed in whichever way we wish to go in.

The Lord's teaching about the cross was "hid from them" (Lk. 9:45), much to the Lord's distress. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hid from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This is a picture of the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3).

*9:46 And there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest-* Straight after the Lord's descriptions of His death, so often there

are arose petty argument and jealousies. Just as happens with us, in the shadow of His cross which we meet to remember. His greatness there is to be so perceived that none of us will be at all interested in being "the greatest". The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument. Perhaps the Lord's clear choice of Peter as the leader was unpopular with them because of his impetuous ways and lack of leadership finesse. Or maybe they meant (as AV) who was to be the greatest after their Lord had died.

9:47 *But when Jesus saw the reasoning of their heart, he took a little child and set him by his side-* The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbade the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been off-putting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to



do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

*9:48 And said to them: Whoever shall receive this little child in my name receives me, and whoever shall receive me, receives Him that sent me. For he that is least among you all, the same is great-* To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom.

"He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown

up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbade [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

*9:49 And John answered and said: Master, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he follows not with us-* Luke inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us'. The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or

forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on Mt. 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

9:50 *But Jesus said to him: Forbid not*- The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples; although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua... answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted earlier, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

*For he that is not against you is for you*- If a person is not against the Lord personally (Mk. 9:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally is parallel here with being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

*9:51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for him to be received up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem-* The record alludes to the way Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem in judgment (2 Kings 12:17). The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. He set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there. He hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

*9:52 And sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him-* The idea of messages sent before the face to prepare the way is absolutely the language used about John's preparation for the Lord. The context here (see on :49,50) is of the Lord seeking to accept the disciples of John. So in order to promote unity between His disciples and those of John, the Lord speaks of His preachers as if they too are preparing His way before His face.

*9:53 But they did not receive him, because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem-* To be truly inclusive is hard. The Lord wanted to show His acceptance of the Samaritans, perhaps building on the converts made from the conversion of the woman at the well in Jn. 4. But the mere fact He was going up to Jerusalem at a feast time was enough for them to not receive Him; when He had just been teaching about His radical acceptance of all. For all His grace, they treated the Lord with a guilt by association mentality, quite oblivious that He was going to Jerusalem to die there for them, at the hands of the Jews whom they despised.

*9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said: Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?-* Time and again, the Lord responded to requests for *Him* to do something by reminding the requesters of *their*

responsibilities- e.g. 'Bring fire down on these guys! You have the Spirit, go on, do it, you surely can!' was responded to with a reminder that *you* don't appreciate what Spirit *you* have (Lk. 9:54,55). 'Send the people away... No, *you* feed them' (Lk. 9:12,13). 'Save us from this storm, Jesus, you miracle man!... Where is *your* faith?' (Lk. 8:24,25). Elijah is presented both here and in the Old Testament record as judgmental and lacking grace and love. He is presented as all head and no heart for people. He was used by God and had a heart for God himself, and the Spirit worked through him... but he was far from God in other ways and in need of rebuke.

9:55 *But he turned and rebuked them, saying: You know what kind of Spirit you have-* The incident in 2 Kings 1:10 of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit. And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. The Lord's comment that He had not come to *destroy* men's *lives* but to *save* them (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He has just said: Whosoever will *save* his *life* shall *lose* [s.w. *destroy*] it and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words *save, life, lose / destroy* are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don't know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men *destroy themselves* by seeking to *save* themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. The same point is actually made within the Elijah story too. In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped *after their manner-* a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times "judgment"; they judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated "cut" essentially means to gather. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. "Knives and lancets" is a phrase normally translated "swords and spears". They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them. Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to *destroy / lose* their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life *loses / destroys* it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will *save* it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / *destroy / lose* themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to *save* not *destroy*; to *save* the lost / *destroyed* (Lk. 6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke).

But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the Spirit, the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. If thy brother sin against thee, the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... See on Lk. 12:49-54.

9:56 *And they went to another village-* Rather than to the Samaritan village as originally planned. Clearly the Lord's original plan had to be changed because of obstacles to it created by the Samaritans allowing their prejudices to derail potential evangelism; and the Lord is like this so often. He set up great potentials, but allows others to destroy them. In this sense His purpose is open rather than predictive and prescriptive.

9:57 *And as they were going along the road, someone said to him: I will follow you wherever you go-* The question implies that it would only be possible to do this with the Lord's agreement. The Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and death on the cross; He knew that nobody could follow Him literally wherever He went. We note His gentleness; He doesn't say that, rather does He simply warn of the hardship of the way; and that His fate would be that of all who followed Him.

9:58 *And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head-* When the Lord spoke of the Son of man having nowhere to lay His head, He surely had His mind upon how His dear mother had told Him that when He was born, there was no place to lay Him, and His dear head had to be laid in an animal's feeding trough.

The Lord used language which challenged people. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which

dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). All three synoptics record how He summarily ordered His weary disciples to feed a crowd numbering thousands in a desert, when they had no food (Mt. 14:16; Mk. 6:37; Lk. 9:13). He criticizes the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- 'let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave'. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love. He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles, and invitation to drink His blood). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights.

*9:59 And he said to another: Follow me. But he said: Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father-* Following Christ, which is to carry His cross, is paralleled by Him with preaching His Kingdom (Lk. 9:59,60). To live out the essence of the cross, in daily self-control, unconditional kindness and forgiveness, patience with those who provoke us... this is the real witness (Lk. 9:23-26). If we don't preach, we aren't following Him. And if we do follow Him, it's axiomatic that we therefore preach Him. "From henceforth you shall catch men. And... they forsook all, and followed him" (Lk. 5:10,11) definitely parallels preaching with following the Lord. Following after Him is the way to be fishers of men (Mk. 1:17), and yet following Jesus is so often understood by Him as a call to carrying the cross. A focus on Him and the life of His cross leads to a catching of men for Him in a quite natural way.

The man was on the way to his father's funeral and yet the Lord expected him to immediately follow Him, and quit going to the funeral as he intended (Lk. 9:59). And He criticized the man for not doing this. Another who wanted to first "bid farewell" to his family was likewise criticized (Lk. 9:61). Even Elisha bid farewell to his family before following Elijah, and Elijah allowed him to do this (1 Kings 19:20)- but the Lord Jesus was more demanding. He described the disciples as a "perverse generation" because they didn't have enough faith to work a miracle (Lk. 9:41). His

demands and standards were and are very high; and we should never allow the extent of His grace to blind us to this fact, nor to assume that He is not serious about those demands.

The man who wanted to first attend his father's funeral was told that this wasn't good enough; although Abraham and Joseph did this. The man who wanted to go and say farewell to his family was told the same; although Elisha did this (Lk. 9:60,61). The Lord is surely saying that the commitment of such Old Testament giants was to be less than what He expected of those for whom He was to give His all. It isn't that He won't save a man who (in the parable) puts his father's funeral before the Lord's demands. But He expects the *ultimate* level of commitment from us. Likewise His Father had asked Abraham to offer his dearest: Isaac. This is the Father and Son with whom we have to do. His parables of Mt. 25 make the point that the rejected will be surprised at how hard He turns out to be: they didn't expect Him to judge sins of omission so seriously. Likewise the man who held on to his talent of the Truth seemed surprised when the Lord said that He expected more. The foolish virgins were likewise shocked to be told that actually they didn't know their Lord at all.

*9:60 But he said to him: Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and publish the kingdom of God-* This would have been more shocking to first century ears than it is even to ours. For to bury his father was the most elemental duty of a Jewish son- "in Jewish custom it came before other fundamental religious responsibilities like reciting the Shema". And the urgency about the preacher was to elicit a like urgency in the response of their hearers.

The principle of Nazariteship (explained in Num. 6) encouraged the average Israelite, regardless of his tribe, to in some way aspire to the High Priesthood. He could grow his hair long to imitate the High Priestly mitre, and he could chose to have the same commands concerning defilement by the dead and eating vine-products apply to him, as applied to the High Priest. The Lord applied this to all His followers, when He told the man who wished to bury his father to *not* do so, but engage instead in His work (Lk. 9:59,60). This would have sent the Jewish mind back to Lev. 21:1-11, where the High Priest could not be distracted from his service even by the death of his father.

*9:61 And another also said: I will follow you Lord, but first permit me to bid farewell to them that are at my house-* The urgency of the call to preach is taught by the way that the Lord called men to go preaching at the most inconvenient times for them- such as when they were in the midst of casting a net into the sea to catch fish during their workaday lives, or whilst Matthew was counting coins at his tax table. The Lord even insisted that a man not fulfil his most basic Jewish duty to bury his father-



but rather go and preach the Gospel *immediately*. The poignancy of all this becomes the deeper when we realize that in first century Palestine, burial took place on the day of death. The son had just that day lost his father, and was willing to miss the traditional six days of mourning to go preach for the Lord. But no, the Lord wanted him to go *there and then, immediately*. No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

9:62 *But Jesus said to him: No one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God-* It is amazing that with the clear command echoing in his ears, "neither stay in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed" (Gen. 19:17), Lot could ask leave to live in Zoar, a small city of the plain, and not go to the mountain. He clearly failed to appreciate the reality and seriousness of the Angel's coming- and this will certainly be a temptation to us in that moment when the typology of Lot is fulfilled in us. The only way to guard against this is by consciously living our lives now in awareness of the fact that now we have been called to leave the world and its ways, and therefore our whole life now should have the spirit which we will have when we leave this world when the Angel comes. This is confirmed by an oblique allusion which our Lord makes here to this Angelic command "Look not behind you", when He says that any who like Lot's wife "look back" are not "fit for the Kingdom of God". The context shows that starting to plough represents the start of our new life in response to the Gospel call- but the allusion to the Angel's words to Lot show that we should live our whole lives in response to that call as if we are on the way to the judgment, having been called away by the Angel.

The Lord spoke of following Him as being like a man ploughing by keeping his eye constantly and unswervingly on an end point- and that point is Him as a person. The account of Peter starting to drown exemplifies all this- when he took his gaze off the Lord personally, in order to notice how the wind was so strongly blowing some object [perhaps back on the boat], then his walk to Jesus started to come to an end (Mt. 14:30).

All the Gospels present the crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of their presentation of the Gospel. Luke's record is studded with references to the Lord's progress on that final journey up to Jerusalem; events took place "as they went in the way" (Lk. 9:57-62), as if they were incidental to the main aim of the record, which was to describe the final coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and death (Lk. 13:22).

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two ahead of him into every city and place, where he was about to go-* According to some texts, Luke records that the Lord sent out 72 preachers. The Jews understood that there were 72 nations in the world, based on the LXX of Gen. 10. Surely Luke's point is that they went only to the Jews, thus highlighting the gap between the disciples' understanding at the time, and the Lord's further reaching intention of a mission to the Gentiles.

The Lord sent out the 70 "before his face into every city to where he himself would come". They were heralds of His presence; and He goes on in this context to tell them that they were "as lambs among wolves"- i.e. they were like Him, *the* lamb- and that therefore "he that rejecteth you rejecteth me" (Lk. 10:1,3,16 RV). Yet significantly, having told the 70 to proclaim His face to the cities where He would come, we find the comment: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few [i.e. only 70]: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways..." (:2). Could this not mean that He would have travelled more extensively around Israel in His ministry than He did, but He was limited in the places He witnessed in by whether there were enough heralds to go there in advance and prepare the way? The dearth of workers meant that places He otherwise would have visited, He didn't- for it seems that He had a policy of only Himself working in areas where His men had broken the ground. And is there not some worrying relevance of all this for our work in *this* day, in *this* hard land...?

10:2 *And he said to them: The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He send out labourers into His harvest-* The Lord had to comment that the harvest was great, but the labourers [i.e. the disciples] were few or weak [Gk.]. And yet He delegated so much to them- authority, the power of miracles, the Gospel itself (Lk. 9:1-6), despite their weakness, and despite the fact much harvest was spoilt or not harvested by their weakness. They were His representatives to the world (:16)- and yet they still didn't know how to pray (Lk. 11:1). We marvel at the way the Lord used them, and yet we end up realizing with a similar amazement that the same Lord has entrusted His Gospel to us, with all our weakness and dysfunction.

The Hebrew writer asked his brethren to pray for him "that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:19). The amount of prayer seems significant. The Lord Himself seems to have asked the disciples to add their prayers to His in asking the Father to send forth more labourers into the over-ripe, unharvested fields (Lk. 10:2), which, by implication, He

alone couldn't satisfactorily gather. Volume of prayer is significant, although this is not to say that 'just' one prayer of faith is ineffective.

*10:3 Go your way. See, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves-* As He was the lamb of God sent forth for the salvation of men, so those in Him are sent forth with that same Gospel, as lambs. This was the language of the Jewish teachers about the role of Israel in the world; but the Lord is implying that His preachers are the new Israel, and the Jewish world is as the unbelieving Gentile world. Judah is spoken of as "One sheep attempting to survive among seventy wolves" (*Esther Rabbah* 10:11).

*10:4 Carry no purse, no wallet, no shoes; and greet no one on the way-* As we read the preaching of Jesus, one cannot but be impressed by the gravity of His message. He never spoke of His message, of His person and His Kingdom, in a take-it-or-leave-it way, as though it didn't matter how His hearers responded. And we ought to preach as He preached. He realized that how His hearers responded would determine the structure of their whole lives and what their eternal destiny would be. He urged His preachers to exchange no greetings on the road as they pressed on to take His Gospel to others. This would have been seen as most unusual and even offensive in first century Palestine. The people would have had their attention arrested by this- these preachers of the man from Nazareth had an urgency about them, a sense of utmost priority in the work they were about. They were to be known as men in an urgent hurry. They were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the Lord's ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

To not carry spare shoes is an allusion to God's miraculous provision for Israel in the wilderness. The preaching of the Gospel is a fundamental part of our wilderness journey. We are on a mission, a journey; and part of that mission is sharing the message with others.

*10:5 And into whatever house you shall enter, first say: Peace to this house-* The Lord raised everything to an altogether higher level. It was, for example, customary for Semitic peoples to greet each other [as it is today] with the words 'shalom!' or 'salaam!' ['peace']. But there was little

real meaning in those words. The Lord said that His peace, His 'shalom', He gives to us, not as the [Jewish] world gave it. Likewise He told His disciples to say "Peace be to this house" when they entered a home. Yet this was the standard greeting. What He surely meant was that they were to say it with meaning; and wish the household peace with God through His Son.

*10:6 And if a son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it, but if not, it shall return to you-* "Peace" meant peace with God; it had been John the Baptist's mission to guide the feet of Israel into the way of peace (Lk. 1:79). Very many had responded to John's message, but they failed to fully accept Jesus as Christ when it actually came to it. The mission of the apostles was likely to those who had responded to John; that would have been the logical program in any case, to go visit and develop interest amongst those who were already known to have responded to John the Baptist.

*10:7 And in that same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give. For the labourer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house-* See on Lk. 9:4.

Preaching is all about relationships. The Lord commanded to not go from house to house but rather build up a base in one home. I take this to mean that He saw the importance of relationship building in preaching, rather than a surface level contact with many people of the type achieved in more public addresses. He envisioned these houses as becoming the focus of house churches, which were to be the building blocks of the wider body of Christ.

Preaching is essentially about building relationships, not platform evangelism. The Lord taught that His preachers were not to go "from house to house" but rather to remain within an acceptive household and make that their base. In modern terms, I think we could interpret this as meaning: 'Focus on building relationships; don't build up a shallow relationship with a lot of people, but rather try to get deep with one household'.

The reference to eating and drinking what was offered, as noted on :8, would seem more likely to mean 'Accept their offer of table fellowship on whatever basis they offer it'.

The saying that "the labourer is worthy of his hire" is quoted as "Scripture" in 1 Tim. 5:18, on the same level of acceptance as the Old Testament. This indicates that the gospel records were in circulation in written form from an early stage after the events, and were accepted by the church as Divinely inspired. Higher criticism is simply wrong to claim that the gospels were written long after the events by men with dim memories.

As in all ages, it was common in the first century for religious teachers to expect payment. But here the Lord redefines that 'payment' as being no more than subsistence level.

10:8 *And into whatever city you enter, if they welcome you, eat such things as are set before you-* See on 1 Cor. 9:22; 10:27. I don't think the Lord simply means 'Don't be fussy about your food, be grateful for what's on your plate'. To eat together had religious dimensions. You ate together as a sign of fellowship. So I take the Lord to be meaning that they should accept whatever fellowship was offered to them, and work from within that setting to convince men of the truth of Christ.

10:9 *Heal the sick that are therein, and say to them: The kingdom of God comes near to you-* This again is the language of John's ministry; I suggested on :6 that the households being visited were those who had originally responded positively to John's message. The healing of the sick was to serve as an acted parable and exemplification of the gospel of the Kingdom.

10:10 *But into whatever city you shall enter and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets of it and say-* The language is very similar to that in 14:21, where Israelite rejection of the Gospel was to lead the preachers to go out into the streets of such cities- and drag in absolutely anyone they could find living on those streets.

10:11 *Even the dust from your city, that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God comes near-* Whether or not Israel accepted the Gospel, the Kingdom of God as it was in Messiah Jesus would still come. If the coming of the King and His Kingdom was not dependent upon Israel's acceptance of it, the implication had to be that the Gentiles would accept it, and therefore it would come.

The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38);

as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

10:12 *I say to you, it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city-* Jer. 20:16 has a graphic description of the people of Sodom screaming out in anguish, both mental and physical, as the judgments of God fell upon them: "The cry in the morning (when the judgments began, Gen. 19:23,24), and the shouting at noontide". This is in reality a picture of the rejected in the last days. And yet those who heard the Christian Gospel and rejected it will be resurrected to a worse judgment than Sodom. The degrees of judgment ("more tolerable...") reflect degrees of responsibility to God according to varying levels of knowledge. The Sodomites had seen Lot's way of life and presumably been told by him that their behaviour was wrong. Their refusal to repent means that "in that day" of the Lord's coming they will be resurrected and punished; but those who hear the Christian gospel and reject it shall have a far greater punishment than Sodom had or will have.

10:13 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes-* See on Lk. 19:42. The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is really the essence of grief and tragedy; and the Father and Son who know all possible futures must therefore feel so pained. The connection between grief and knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes. He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained wilfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

10:14 *But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you-* The Lord taught His preachers that if people rejected their message, *in that day* when they did this, "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city". But He repeats Himself later on: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the judgment* than for you" (Lk. 10:12,14 RV). "In that day" clearly refers to the day on which the preacher's message was rejected. But that day was effectively their judgment day.

10:15 *And you, Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades-* Some will be exalted and others brought down at the day of judgment ("come up higher... go down lower", 14:10). Capernaum was expecting commendation and exaltation at judgment day; but that was to be the very reason why she would be cast down to destruction. And in essence, that judgment process is ongoing whenever people hear the Gospel (:18).

As He sent the 70 away on their preaching mission, the Lord commented that Capernaum was exalted to heaven, and yet at the judgment would be thrust down to hell; and yet when they returned, He said that He had seen Satan falling from heaven to earth (Lk. 10:15,18), in anticipation of how it will at judgment day (Rev. 12). The connection is not co-incidental. He was countering the disciples' joy at the superficial response by saying that He has seen it another way; He had seen the Satan of the Jewish system already condemned, hurled from heaven to earth, by their rejection of the Gospel preached.

10:16 *He that hears you hears me; and he that rejects you rejects me, and he that rejects me rejects Him that sent me-* Here we see the Lord Jesus personally equated with His word in the Gospel, preached by His followers. Attitudes to that word are attitudes to Him. The rejection of some at the last day will be because they themselves rejected the Lord. They made the answer in their attitude to His word; in that sense those who "reject" (s.w.) the Lord are judged by His word at the last day (Jn. 12:48). Attention to His word is therefore critical. Whoever rejects us as we preach therefore rejects God (1 Thess. 4:8 s.w.).

10:17 *And the seventy returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!-* As noted on :9, the miracles were to back up the preaching of the word of the Kingdom; but the disciples failed to properly perceive this. They considered that the miracles they had done were of themselves the most impressive thing; whereas the Lord always gave priority to the preaching of the word over miracles, and Himself used an economy of miracle to get His message over. He therefore urges them to rejoice more in the fact that they personally will be saved in the Kingdom (:20).

10:18 *And he said to them: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven-* No sinful being can be tolerated in God's presence in Heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5: 4,5; Hab. 1:13). The Lord is using parabolic language - "as lightning fall from heaven" (AV)- so this "Satan" or adversary fell. Lightning comes from heaven in the sense of the sky, not as in the dwelling place of God. It doesn't literally fall from heaven to earth. Any attempt to link this with the prince of this world being cast out is difficult, because that happened at Christ's death (note "now" in Jn. 12:31), whereas this falling of Satan occurred during His ministry. According to popular thought, "Satan" is supposed to have fallen from heaven in Eden, so that he was on the earth at Job's time, yet Jesus is described as seeing this occurring at His time. Weymouth adds a marginal note on Lk. 10:18 in his translation of the Bible: "The thought is not that of Milton's rebel angel banished for ever from the abode of bliss". If an evil being and his host of followers fell down on to earth literally, why did only Jesus see it and not the disciples? Why is there no other record of this strange event? Falling from heaven is figurative of losing authority, e.g. it is used about the demise of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. See also Lamentations 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:53.

The apostles had just cured many people and were blinded by their great physical power over disease (:20). The real cause of illness and disease is our sin prone nature. That sin is the ultimate reason for illness is stressed in Mt. 9:12 and 12:11, where a sheep gone astray, a clear symbol of a sinner (Mt. 18:13), is equated with a sick man. The principle is summed up in Mt. 9:5 "Which is easier, to say, Your sins be forgiven you; or to say, Arise and walk?". Thus Jesus said, "I beheld Satan fall", i.e. "In My view the great thing was that the power of sin was being overcome". There must be a connection with the fall of Capernaum in :15. Is Jesus implying that "Satan", the ways of the flesh, which were so well exemplified in Capernaum, were being overcome? Notice that Capernaum was "exalted" in Jewish eyes. "Satan" often referring to the Jewish system, maybe Jesus is equating Capernaum with "Satan" and commenting how the sin which was at the basis of this system was being toppled by the preaching of the Gospel.

10:19 *See, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall in any way hurt you-* See on Mk. 16:18; Jn. 8:44. This is a promise repeated in the context of preaching the Gospel in Mk. 16:18. The gift of the Spirit continues to assist Christian preachers, but only in the first century was it manifested in such miraculous forms; and even then, only in specific times and places during the course of missionary work. Paul taking up a viper in his hand and being unharmed on Malta would be an example.

10:20 *Nevertheless, rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but*



*rejoice that your names are written in heaven*- This implies that their elation at being able to pull off miracles was wrong, or at best immature; rather should they have rejoiced that their names were written in Heaven; that the good news of future salvation in the Kingdom they preached was so personally true.

10:21 *In that same hour he rejoiced in spirit, and said*- This was the kind of rejoicing in spirit (cp. rejoicing about subject spirits in :20) which they should have had- a glorying in the Father's way of working with the simple and marginalized.

*I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father. For so it was pleasing in Your sight*- See on Lk. 1:47; 9:45. This is the standard Jewish thanksgiving before food: "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth...". We expect to hear thanks for food, but instead find praise for how the Father works with people by revealing truths to babes rather than the worldly wise. As was the case with the Samaritan woman, the Lord found the Father's working with other people His food and drink which sustained Him. And it can be so with us too. This is one reason for meeting together and sharing testimony of the Lord's work in our lives.

The disciples didn't have totally correct understanding; they believed in ghosts and demons, and were too maxed out on miracles (:20). But still the Lord rejoices in what has been revealed to them, the babes; and those same truths had not been revealed to the Jewish leadership who claimed to be wise and understanding. We note that truths are "revealed" by God in a sovereign way. It's not simply that whoever reads the Bible understands. There is a higher hand at work than that; the way of God's grace, revealing truths to the "babes".

10:22 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomever the Son wills to reveal Him*- Again as noted on :21 there is a distinct revelation of the Father to people through the Son. This can mean simply that in the Son, we see the Father reflected. And yet the language goes somewhat further than that, in saying that the Son chooses some to whom to reveal the Father. This is by the work of the Spirit of Christ, which refers both to the spirit of the character and personality of the Lord Jesus and also to how that spirit transforms human hearts, under His direction. "Knows" is in a continuous sense, implying that the Father and Son grow in knowing each other; the knowledge in view is the Hebraic sense of knowledge as relationship, rather than increments of factual knowledge. The "all things" delivered to the Son may be the power of salvation for all men.

Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context in Mt. 11 speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (Mt. 11:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our sinfulness and repent. And this is the "rest" from sin which the Lord speaks of in Mt. 11:28.

Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22 Gk.).

The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (Mt. 11:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method- the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in Mt. 11:28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

The revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (Mt. 16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

10:23 *And turning to the disciples, he said privately: Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see-* See on Lk. 7:9. As noted on :22, to have

the Son reveal the Father to us is the work of the Spirit, and is of grace. The idea of predestined calling is discussed by Paul in Romans in the context of explaining how the Spirit works. The fact we have been called to know Him is grace indeed.

10:24 *For I say to you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them-* The blessedness of :23 also relates to where we stand in human history. There was a desire amongst the Old Testament heroes to know more about the Lord Jesus; but then was not the time for the full manifestation now given. We who have the completed New Testament, and easy access to it, are perhaps even more blessed. This insight into 'blessedness' is helpful when in moments of depression we may consider that we lack blessing, and all we have are vague, dimly revealed ideas that somehow 'God loves me'. We can indeed count our blessings and name them one by one. And where we stand in history is one of them, according to the Lord's reasoning here. It may well be that we are blessed to be the generation which see the Lord's return- the only generation to never taste of death.

10:25 *And a certain lawyer stood up, and to test him, asked: Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?-* When the lawyer asked Jesus what he must "do to inherit eternal life", the Lord could have lectured him on salvation being by grace rather than works. But He doesn't; instead He tells the parable of the good Samaritan, running with the lawyer's misunderstanding for a while [as His gracious manner was]. The essential basis of inheriting eternal life is of course faith, but the Lord's answer to the question shows that we can safely conclude: 'Faith must be shown in our care for the salvation of this world if it is real faith'.

10:26 *And he said to him: What is written in the law? How do you read it?-* The Lord was not searching for a right or wrong answer, ready to respond to the effect that 'Ah well, you just misunderstood a bit, now let Me correct you'. His questions are nearly always rhetorical. Whatever the answer, the Lord would work with it.

10:27 *And he answered saying: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself-* He quotes Dt. 6:5 along with Lev. 19:18. Dt. 6:5 along with Dt. 11:13 was repeated by the Jews morning and evening, and was the text written in the phylacteries. But this zealous lawyer added Lev. 19:18 about loving neighbours.

10:28 *And he said to him: You have answered correctly-* We have eternal life insofar as the life that Jesus lived and lives, He will eternally live. If we live that life, we are living the essence of the life which we will eternally live. The lawyer asked the Lord what good thing he must do "to

inherit eternal life". The Lord replied that he must properly love his God and his neighbour: "this do, and you shall live". By living a life based on this, he would be living the life which he would eternally live (Lk. 10:25,28). And thus the Lord responds to the query about inheriting eternal life by changing the emphasis of the question- He replies by speaking of the life we should be living now.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do...". If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother.

*This do and you shall live*- The context is that the lawyer asked the Lord Jesus what he should do "to inherit eternal life" (Lk.10:25), and in a sense we ask the same question. But we mustn't be quite like him, in thinking that if we physically *do* certain things, then we will at some future point be given eternal life as a kind of payment; and nor should we think that the eternity of the Kingdom life is the most important aspect of our salvation. In Lk. 18:18 "a certain ruler asked him" the very same question: What he should do to inherit eternal life. The Lord's response was that if he kept the commandments in the right spirit, he would "have treasure in heaven". When the man found this impossible, the Lord commented how hard it was for the rich to "enter into the kingdom of God" (Lk. 18:24). So there is a parallel here between inheriting eternal life, having treasure in heaven, and entering the Kingdom. We are told that now is the time, in this life, for us to lay up treasure in Heaven (Mt. 6:20). So here and now it is possible to have treasure in Heaven, to have eternal life in prospect. In a sense we now have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11,13), in a sense we are now in the process of entering into the Kingdom. We have been translated, here and now, into the Kingdom (Col.

1:13). The very same Greek construction used in Col. 1:13 occurs in Acts 14:22, where Paul says that through much tribulation we enter into the Kingdom; in other words, entry into the Kingdom is an ongoing process, and we experience this on account of the effect of our trials. Entering the Kingdom is used to describe our response to the Gospel in Lk. 16:16: "The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presses into it". Unless we receive the Gospel of the kingdom as a child, we will not enter it; i.e. respond fully to that Gospel (Lk. 18:17).

In prospect we have been saved, we are now in Christ, and therefore the great salvation which he was given is therefore counted to all those who are in him. We shy away from the positive promises that we really can start to enter the Kingdom now, that we do now have eternal life in prospect. But this shying away is surely an indication of our lack of faith; our desperate unwillingness to believe so fully and deeply that our salvation really is so wonderfully assured. That eternal life dwells in us insofar as the eternal spirit of Christ is in us. And so as we face up to the sureness of these promises, we earnestly want to know what we must *do* to inherit this eternal life, to have this great treasure of assured salvation laid up for us now in Heaven. Of course we are saved by our faith, not our works (Tit. 3:5-7); yet our faith, if it is real, will inevitably be shown in practical ways.

10:29 *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbour?*- The Lord's open attitude towards Gentiles had provoked anger amongst the lawyers; hence this scribe had incorporated Lev. 19:18 into his standard quotation as to Jewish duty. He suspected the Lord considered the Gentile world as His neighbours. The man's pan for self-justification was going to be demolished by the Lord turning it all around to show that justification is by grace, not works- the very ideas which Paul states more specifically and theologically in Romans.

10:30 *Jesus answered and said: A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he encountered robbers who both stripped him and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead*- The wounded man is all of us- "a certain man" (Lk. 10:30) is a phrase more usually translated 'any man', 'whomsoever' etc. The idea of journeying downwards from Jerusalem to Jericho has some definite OT connections, not least with wicked King Zedekiah, who ignored repeated prophetic plea to repent and fled from Jerusalem to Jericho, only to be overtaken on the way by the Babylonians and sent to Babylon to condemnation (2 Kings 25:4). 'You're every one a Zedekiah', is the implication- but we've been saved from out of that condemnation by the Samaritan's grace. Another allusion is to the incident in 2 Chron. 28:15, where the captured enemies of Israel are marched from Jerusalem to Jericho, and yet by grace they are given clothes, food and water. In all these allusions, Jesus is radically reversing all the roles. The true people of God are the repentant enemies of the

people of God, the "thieves" who spoil the people of God are the Jewish elders (Hos. 6:1,29), the Divine Saviour is not a Jew but a Samaritan etc.

One of the many Old Testament quarries for this good Samaritan parable is found in 2 Chron. 28:15 (Another will be found in Hos. 6:1,2,9, which seems to equate the Jewish priesthood with the thieves which attacked the man. This was also Christ's estimation of them (Mt. 21:13; Jn. 10:1). This allusion would have been especially relevant in the first century context. Another connection will be found in 2 Kings 25:4). Here we read how Israel attacked Judah whilst Judah were apostate, and took them captives. But then they realized their own shortcomings, and the fact that Judah really were their brethren; then they "clothed all that were naked among (he captives taken from Judah), and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho...to their brethren". Now there is allusion after allusion to this scene in the Samaritan parable. Surely our Lord had his eye on this incident as he devised that parable. The point he was making as surely this: 'In trying to follow my example of total love for your brethren, your spiritual neighbours, remember your own shortcomings, and what the Lord has done for you by His grace; and then go and reflect this to your brethren'.

The helplessness of the injured man is a fine picture of our weakness. We can only accept salvation; there is nothing we can *do* to earn it. Hence the Lord warned those who *seek* to *save* their own lives (Lk. 17:33)- He uses the same two words to explain how *He* is the one who seeks and saves (Lk. 19:10). Acceptance of salvation is perhaps what faith is all about in its barest essence.

As the man was stripped and wounded, so identical language is used about the sufferings of the Lord on the cross (Mt. 27:28,29; Lk. 20:12; Zech. 13:6). As his would-be neighbours passed him by on the other side, so the neighbours of the Lord stood aloof from his stricken body on the cross (Ps. 38:11 AVmg.). Through this he can fully enter into our broken hearts, into our intense spiritual loneliness without him (if only we would realize it) and therefore he will come alongside us with a heart of true compassion. So because of his sufferings which we now behold, he can so truly, so truly and exactly, empathize with our spiritual state.

The description of the stricken man being "stripped" of his clothing uses the very same word, rarely used in the NT, to describe the 'stripping' of the Lord Jesus at the time of His death (Mt. 27:28,21; Mk. 15:20). Likewise the robbers 'left him' (Lk. 10:30), in the same as the Lord was 'left' alone by the disciples to face the end alone (Mk. 14:50 s.w.). The robbers "wounded him" (Lk. 10:30), a phrase which translates two Greek words, 'to lay upon' and 'stripes'. The cross was 'laid upon' Jesus (Lk. 23:26 s.w.); and we are familiar with the idea of the Lord being 'wounded' and receiving 'stripes' in His final sufferings (Is. 53:5). The

connection is surely that in the process of His death, the Lord came to know the feelings of the stripped and stricken people whom He came to save. No wonder He can powerfully "have compassion" upon us. And it's been pointed out elsewhere that the 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed.

It's easy to think that the focus of the parable is upon being like the good Samaritan; but the focus equally is upon seeing ourselves in the wounded man. The Lord's answers to questions nearly always seem to provide a simple answer to them, and yet more subtly turn them upon their head, and redefine the terms. The parable was told in response to the question "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?". One answer appears to be: 'Recognize you're the injured man. Accept the Good Samaritan's salvation; for the Law which you so love can't save you'. Indeed if read the other way around, the Lord's answer would appear to be 'If you want eternal life, you must *do* lots of good works, after the pattern of the good Samaritan'. But this would contradict the whole message of salvation by pure grace which was central to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that the parable is often interpreted that way- and it's actually the very opposite of how the Lord wished us to read it. No matter how much good we *do* to people along the way, this cannot give us the life eternal.

10:31 *And by chance a certain priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side-* The radical nature of the Lord Jesus is reflected in His teaching style. His parables work around what I have elsewhere called "elements of unreality". They involve a clash of the familiar, the comfortable, the normal, with the strange and unreal and radical. The parables are now so well known that their radical nature has been almost buried under the avalanche of familiarity. The parables begin by getting the hearers sympathetic and onboard with the story line- and then, in a flick of the tail, the whole punch line is turned round against their expectations, with radical demands. The story of a man travelling the Jerusalem-Jericho road alone would've elicited sympathy and identity with the hearers- yes, that road *is* awfully dangerous. And then the priest and Levite pass by and don't help. That was realistic- "priests and Levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple". The common people were anticlerical, and yes, they could just imagine the priest and Levite passing by. "Typical!" would've been their comment. They're all set up to expect the Messianic Jewish working class hero to stride in to the rescue. But... it's a despised Samaritan who stops and gives saving help. They had expected a Jewish Saviour- and Jesus, the teller of the parable, claimed to be just that. But... in the story, He's represented by a Samaritan. Remember that

Samaritans and Jews had no dealings, and people were amazed that Jesus would even speak with the Samaritan woman at the well. Even in desperation, a Jew wouldn't have wanted to be helped by a Samaritan. You had to be utterly desperate to accept such help. Moments earlier, the audience had been identifying with the injured Jewish man. But... were they really *that* desperate, did they appreciate their desperation to that extent, to keep "in" the story, and accept that that desperate man was really them? They wanted to be able to identify with the hero. But no, they had to first of all identify with the wounded, dying, desperate Jew. And only then were they bidden "Go and do likewise"- 'be like the Samaritan'. The Lord's initial audience would have been left with knitted eyebrows and deep introspection at the end of it. The whole thing was too challenging for many. They quit the parable, quit identifying with the story... just as we can when it gets too demanding. It's a tragedy that this amazing story, crafted in such a radically demanding way, has been reduced to merely 'Be a good neighbour to the guy next door, so long as it doesn't demand too much of you'- which is what the story has come to mean for the majority of professed Christians today. That of itself indicates a discomfort with the radical nature of the demands.

It's the same with Nathan's parable to David. It elicited David's sympathy- and then it was turned back on David: "You are the man!". But he didn't quit the parable. He acted on it, as we have to. The parable of the self-righteous older son is just the same. The parable's story line leads us to expect that the wayward son repents and is accepted back by his father. But then right at the end, the whole thing takes a biting twist. We suddenly realize that the prodigal son and the need to forgive your wayward son isn't the point of the story- for that's something which comes naturally to any father and family. The whole point is that the son who played safe, who stayed home and behaved himself... *he* is the one who ends up outside of the family's joy because of his self-righteousness. *He* ends up the villain, the lost son. Again, there'd have been knotted brows and an exit from identity with the story line. And the way generations of Christians have described the story as "the parable of the lost / prodigal son" shows how they [we] too have so often missed the essentially radical point of the story.

10:32 *And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side-* See on :31. When we analyse this good Samaritan parable, it becomes clear that we are not simply intended to do good deeds to people we meet, copying the Samaritan. We are also aptly represented by the wounded man; it is the Lord Jesus who is the good Samaritan. The Law of Moses, symbolized by the priest and Levite, came near to man's stricken condition, and had a close look at it. Lk. 10:32 (Young's Literal) brings this out: "Having been about the place, having come and seen...", the Levite passed on by. The Jews regarded



Christ as a Samaritan, so they would have immediately understood the Samaritan of the parable to represent Jesus (Jn. 8:48). The good Samaritan having compassion on the man and being moved to do something about him has echoes of the Lord's compassion on the multitudes (:33). His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

10:33 *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion-* The Samaritan "was moved with compassion" by the man's (spiritual) state. This is the same phrase as used concerning how Christ "was moved with compassion" by the multitudes. The connection with the good Samaritan parable would invite us to read the Lord's compassion as fundamentally *spiritual*. The reason for the miracles was to confirm the spoken word (Mk. 16:20), to lead men to see the wisdom of the message they were validating (Mk. 6:2). Are there any examples of Christ doing miracles for reasons unconnected with preaching? They often (always?) had symbolic meaning; and were designed to inculcate faith (Jn. 20:31) and repentance (Mt. 11:21). And in any case, His miracles were largely to benefit the Covenant people, or those closely associated with them. The apostles didn't do mass benefit miracles (e.g. feeding thousands of people) to back up their preaching in the Gentile world; even though they had the power to do "greater works" than did the Lord (Jn. 14:12). 'Charitable' giving ought to be *associated* with preaching, surely, if we are to follow the example of Christ's compassion with the multitudes. In practice, the work of providing welfare and conducting fresh preaching is done by the same brethren in the mission field.

The Lord Jesus "knew what was in man", not only by direct revelation from the Father and the Old Testament word, but also from His own observation of our own nature, both in Himself and the surrounding world. The sensitivity of Jesus is reflected in this realization which He reflects. As the Samaritan came near to the wounded man (the ecclesia), realized the extent of his problem (the ravages of sin) and was thereby moved with compassion, so Christ was motivated by His consideration of our position (Lk. 10:33,34); the Lord realized His humanity more and more, and progressively humbled Himself, achieving a progressively fuller identity with us by so doing, until He crowned it all by His death (Phil. 2:6-8). The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). See on Lk. 14:9.

10:34 *And came to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil*

*and wine, and he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him-* He "bound up his wounds", alluding to the manner in which Christ was to bind up the broken hearted (Is. 61:1). He cured those mental wounds by pouring in oil and wine, symbols of his word and his blood respectively. So the brutal beating up of that man, leaving him half dead, refers to the broken-heartedness which the sin of this world and our own natures inflicts upon us. Picture the scene on that Jericho road, the body covered in blood and dust, massive bruises swelling up, flies buzzing around on the congealed blood, face in the dust, frightened donkey neighing among the scrub somewhere. That is the very picture of our broken heartedness, the broken heartedness which Christ came to heal. The physical grossness of those wounds is a picture of our mental state. Yet the flesh deceives us that there is nothing really that wrong with our minds, with our natures. Yet there *is*, and we need to come to terms with it more and more completely, to realize our deep mental need for Christ's healing. Once we do this, we will be able to see the need, the urgent need, for his healing of our *minds* through his spirit, his perfect, clean mind, being in us. And how were those wounds healed? How are our mental wounds healed? By the Son of God tearing up his own garments to bandage up the wounds (how else did he do it?), and healing us with his blood and his word.

"He brought him to the inn" can also be translated "He led it [the donkey] to the inn". In this case, the Samaritan is acting as a servant, for it is the master who rides on the donkey and the servant who walks on foot, leading it there. Remember how Haman has to lead the horse on which Mordecai rides (Esther 6:7-11). All this speaks of how the Lord took upon Himself the form of a servant in order to lead us to salvation- when at the time we could do nothing, and had no awareness of the huge grace being shown to us. The Samaritan was of course making himself vulnerable to attack by robbers by doing this. But think through it some more. There was an eye-for-eye vengeance syndrome alive and well at that time. If a Samaritan turned up with a wounded Jew, it would look for all the world like *he* was responsible for the damage. It would be the first time a Samaritan was known to have done such an act of kindness. And he risks himself all the more, by staying at the inn, leaving, and then returning there, thus willing to face the inevitable suspicion that *he* had attacked the man, or was somehow involved in the incident. This risking of His own salvation was what the cross was all about. The parable gives a rare window into the Lord's self-perception on this point. And so for us- we may stay up all night serving someone's need, only to make ourselves irritable and impatient and more prone to sin ourselves the next day. And in any case, it's my experience that no good deed goes unpunished; we have to pay various prices for it in this life. In all these things we are living out the spirit of the Samaritan saviour.

Until the good Samaritan's return, the man was kept in the inn, with everything that was needed lavishly provided. Surely the inn is symbolic of the ecclesia; in the ecclesia there should be a common sense of spiritual improvement, of growing in health, of remembering our extraordinary deliverance, realizing our weakness, looking forward to seeing the Samaritan again to praise him for the wonder of it all. This ought to characterize our gatherings as the church. Who is the innkeeper? He may just be part of the furniture of the parable, as I have yet to find a convincing interpretation.

The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work...? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially... And yet we are left to reflect upon this. See on Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:32.

*10:35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, and said: Take care of him, and if you spend more, I, when I come back again, will repay you-* His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

The 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed. Our redeemer is of course the Lord Jesus. The redemption was 'paid' in His blood- which implies His putting us on *His* beast of burden and carrying us to the inn, where He paid the money, is a picture of His final sufferings which lead up to the actual shedding of His blood.

The parable of the good Samaritan explains how Christ took compassion on the stricken spiritual state of us His people, picked us up, made Himself vulnerable to attack by placing the man on His donkey, and caused us to be fully healed. The Samaritan was less vulnerable than the robbed man, on account of having a donkey. But he made himself even more vulnerable than the robbed man had been, in order to take him to

the inn. The picture of the wounded man straddled over the donkey and the Samaritan walking patiently alongside shows what easy prey they would have been. The whole process of the man's redemption by this Samaritan is an account of the cross of Christ (not least the pouring in of wine and oil). The implication is that through seeking to save us, Christ made Himself more vulnerable than He would have been if He sought only His own salvation. And the Samaritan's speed of progress was more than halved; he had to walk rather than ride, keeping the wounded man balanced on the donkey. This parable seems to reveal that Christ realized at least in some abstract sense that His concern for us in some ways made it more difficult for Him; although the reality was that the motivation for His victory was largely due to His sense of responsibility for us. The idea of him taking care for the man is expressed in the language of Ex. 21:19, which says that if a man wounds another, "he shall pay... and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed". This somewhat odd allusion (at first sight) surely indicates that the Lord took upon Himself the full blame for our stricken condition, presumably in the sense that as the second Adam He took upon Himself the guilt of Adam. This is why there are so many connections between His death and the effects of Adam's sin (e.g. the crown of *thorns*, the Garden etc.). The way Christ compared Himself to a Samaritan, half Jew and half Gentile, shows that especially on the cross, this is how He felt. He was mindful of both Jewish and Gentile aspects of His future body as He died. The Jews (and His own brothers, Ps. 69:8) treated Him as half Gentile (from a Roman soldier, the Midrash claims).

So we are as it were in the inn, thinking back to our salvation by that suffering Samaritan, the strangeness and yet the glorious *wonder* of it all. I'm sure we are meant to fill in the unspoken details in his parable. Of course the saved man would have re-lived time and again his wondrous salvation, how he had come to with the eyes of that man peering earnestly into his, the laying on the ass, and the slow journey to the inn. As Israel remembered their Passover deliverance through the Passover feast, so we lie on our sickbed in the inn, as it were, and remember our great salvation.

10:36 *Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to him that encountered the robbers?*- The Samaritan parable appears to be an example of the way the Lord left His parables open to multiple interpretations and reflections, all of which express aspects of the many truths He was expressing to us. We need to reflect who the 'neighbour' actually is. The parable is told in extension of the Lord's approval of the statement that to love God is to love our neighbour, and vice versa (:27). The Lord was explaining that what we have to 'do' to get eternal life is to perceive that *God* is our neighbour. This is and was a challenging idea. As challenging and provocative as when a black sister in southern USA said to me once 'Ya know, God's ma nigger'. She meant, 'God's my buddy, my

close one'. The turning point of the parable is in its end stress [as so often in these stories of the Lord]: "Which of these three... was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" (Lk. 10:36). Obviously, the neighbour was the Samaritan, whom we have shown to be symbolic of God and His Son. *This* is the answer to the question of the lawyer: 'And who is my neighbour?'. Answer: God / Jesus. The lawyer was wondering to whom he should do his good deeds. So he asks 'Who is my neighbour?'. He misunderstood the whole thing, as people do today. The Lord was turning the question around. Who is your neighbour? God / Jesus is your neighbour. You are lying there stricken. Your fellow lawyers and legalists / Priests / Levites can't help you. To receive eternal life, you must let God be your neighbour. *This* is the work of God, to believe on the one whom He sent (Jn. 6:29). This was the Lord's response to a similar question about what good works ought to be done. And the Samaritans were despised and rejected... yet the Lord chose them as a symbol of Himself. It's easy to under-estimate just how much the Jews despised Samaritans- "The Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life" (W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables In The Light Of Their Jewish Background* (London: SPCK, 1936) p. 102). We see the sheer bravery of the Lord in framing the parable as He did. He doesn't chose to speak of a good Jew helping a stricken Samaritan; it's the other way around. The watchful student will find up to 12 allusions in the Good Samaritan parable back to Hosea 6:1-10- which portray the Jews as the robbers, and God as the Samaritan saviour. It is none less than Yahweh Himself who "will bind us up... revive us... raise us up... come to us"- all the very things which the Samaritan did. In all this was a huge challenge to the Lord's audience- as to whether they would accept His grace. "Oil and wine are forbidden objects if they emanate from a Samaritan" (J.D.M. Derrett, *Law In The New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 220)- hence the challenge to the Jews in accepting the Lord's teaching. We in our turn struggle with the extent and purity of His grace.

But of course, we are intended to be the Good Samaritan too- in that we are to manifest and replicate the saving work of Jesus in our lives and in our interactions with people. There are details in the parables that need to be thought about, the story reconstructed. The Samaritan 'happened' to have "oil and wine" with him, i.e. medicaments for a wounded man (the wine would have been an antiseptic). And he was travelling alone, when people usually travelled in convoys. And the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they wouldn't even talk with them on the street (Jn. 4:9). So perhaps the Lord intended us to figure that the Samaritan was actually going to help one of his fellow Samaritans who needed attention, but on the way, he met one of another race in even greater need, and changed his plans in order to save him. In all this we have an exquisite example of the self-revelation of Jesus in His own parables- for He saw Himself as the

Samaritan. And for us too, the call to save often comes when we are on our way to do something else, at the most inconvenient moment, to people we would never have considered would need nor accept our help towards salvation.

The parable of the good Samaritan needs careful reflection before we see in it a command to concentrate on giving to the world. It is used as Biblical evidence for a social gospel. The Samaritan was "neighbour unto him that fell among thieves" (Lk. 10:36)- i.e. the story shows how he fulfilled the command to love our neighbour. We have shown above that this command refers to love for those related to the Covenant. The Samaritan represented Christ. The mugged man was those He came to save; not the world generally, for they have not all accepted His healing. We must go and do likewise; in showing the love of Christ to the world. But we have earlier defined that love as being paramountly *spiritual*, and relating to the work of the cross. The parable was teaching the inability of the Law to save man *spiritually*, not materially.

10:37 *And he said: The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise-* There's ample evidence that the despised Samaritan of this parable refers to the Lord Jesus. He was 'neighbour' to stricken humanity, he came near to us, binding up our broken hearts, and carried us to the haven of the ecclesia. "Go and do likewise" is therefore a real challenge to us: to have the same dedication for others' salvation as Christ had. His zeal to achieve God's plan of redemption should be ours. Remember how the good Samaritan parable is an exposition of how to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (:27). Every fibre of the Lord's mind and body was bent *for us*, for bringing about God's plan of redemption. He loved us, his neighbour, as himself. Because of this it is impossible to separate Christ from the work He came to do, i.e. our redemption. The point of the good Samaritan parable is to teach us that his same devotion to the work of conquering sin should be seen in us; our concern for the salvation of others should be as great as that for our own. We need to be totally filled with the idea of bringing about God's glory, of seeing the conquest of sin achieved through Christ. So all our strength, our mind, will be given over to the conquest of sin in ourselves, to the spreading of the Gospel to others, and to the binding up of the broken hearts of our brethren.

The preface to the good Samaritan parable is there in :27,28, about loving God with all our strength and our neighbour as ourself; and "this do, and you shall live" (eternally). To define this statement more closely, the Lord told the good Samaritan parable. "Go and do likewise" is referring back to :28, where the Lord commands the man "*this do*", i.e. loving God with all the heart, soul etc. So the example of the good Samaritan is a practical epitome of loving God with all the heart, soul etc.

To love our neighbour as ourself is to love God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind. Therefore the good Samaritan needs to represent us, although we are also the wounded man.

"Be going on, and do likewise", the Lord concluded (:37 YLT). Verse 38 appropriately continues: "Now it came to pass, *as they went*", in the same way as the Samaritan Saviour "as he journeyed" (:33) showed such energetic compassion, with all his heart and strength, to the stricken man. We must be able to use our own realization of our own desperate need for Christ's grace to motivate us to zealously devote ourselves to ministering to others. Our lack of zeal in this is largely due to our own failure to appreciate our own need, and the degree to which this has been satisfied by the Lord. He knew (and knows) the feelings of the stricken man.

Like most Jews, the Lord would have prayed the *shema* ("The Lord our God is one") upon rising and going to bed- just as He had a garment like that of the Pharisees, with the traditional tassels hanging from its edge (Mt. 9:20; 23:5). Yet He thought about what He prayed. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, He replied that it was the fact that God is one. He saw the unity of God as a commandment that elicited action; and He says [note His grammar] that this plus the command to love our neighbour is the [singular] great commandment (Mk. 12:31). And He again combines these two commandments in Lk. 10:27,37, saying that to love God with all our heart is parallel with loving our neighbour and showing mercy to him. He quoted two commandments as one, so deeply had He perceived that we can't claim to love God without loving our brother. How had He worked that out? Perhaps by daily reflecting upon what to many was merely a ritual saying of words. And we too read and have pass our lips, ideas which can work radical transformation in us *if only we will put meaning into the words* and reflect upon them. He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

A feature we need to bear in mind with all the parables is the almost constant stress on the end of the story as the part which makes the main point which the Lord is seeking to get over. Likewise the emphasis is often upon the last person mentioned in the story, the last action, the last words. Think of the parable of the prodigal; or how the Samaritan, the last man on the scene, is the example for us. "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37) invites us to go forth and be like the Lord Jesus in bringing salvation to others. Or the man who buried his talent and did nothing with it; the crux of the story is that indifference to our potential is so awful.

The parable of the sower focuses in the end on the good seed which brings a great harvest. The fact so much of the seed is lost is in itself an element of unreality- but the focus is on the fact that some seed brings forth wonderfully. And isn't this just the encouragement every preacher needs? That despite all the hard hearts, the initial responses that come to nothing, all is worth it because *someone* responds truly.

*10:38 Now as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house-* This incident is recorded perhaps to demonstrate the outworking of 'going and doing likewise' in the preceding parable (:37). But the 'doing' was not doing works, but rather listening to the Lord's teaching of salvation by grace and believing it.

The parable of the good Samaritan features Jesus as the Samaritan helping the stricken man, representative of us all. However, the parable is followed immediately by the account of the Lord visiting the Bethany home of Martha and Mary. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went via Bethany. The home where the sick man was taken was surely intended to be understood as that of Martha and Mary. The attacked man is called "a certain man", and then we read straight on that the Lord was entertained by "a certain woman", Martha (Lk. 10:30,38). The Samaritan "as he journeyed" came to the stricken man; and yet "as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village..." (Lk. 10:33,38). The Samaritan Jesus 'cared for him'; and yet Martha unkindly challenges the Lord 'Don't you care...?' (Lk. 10:35,40). The similarities aren't just co-incidence. Surely the Lord is teaching that whether or not Martha perceives it, she and Mary are actually the wounded man of the parable, and He is taking care of them, not vice versa as Martha thought, in the teaching He was giving them in their home. He was spiritually pouring in oil and wine. And yet Martha and Mary, especially in Martha's incomprehension of the Lord's spiritual and saving care for her, are set up as types of all of us who are saved and cared for in Christ.

The disciples literally did give up most of what they had and follow the Lord. And yet there were evidently others who responded to His teaching without doing this- Peter's family (Mk. 1:29); Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38); Simon the leper Mk. 14:3). They made use of the Lord's concessions to human weakness.

*10:39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word-* See on 8:27. "Also sat" is a positive comment on Martha; despite her obsession with hospitality, she also loved the Lord's words and was His disciple- 'sitting at the feet' is an idiom for being a disciple of a rabbi. What is challenging is that many Jewish teachers considered it better for the Law to be burnt than to be taught to a woman. But the Lord taught women, as He did the Samaritan woman;



and Martha and Mary were also amongst those 'at His feet'. This again is typical of how Luke emphasizes the Lord's radical acceptance of women and the marginalized.

10:40 *But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said: Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me-* We can so easily be like Martha, "distracted" even by the secular dimension to our supposed service of the Lord. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "distracted" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time. We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

"Do you not care?" is the language of the distracted disciples in the boat at Mk. 4:38. His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice. We note in Mk. 12:14 that the Lord was again accused there of 'not caring'. The most ultimately caring person was at times perceived as not caring; and when our care is ignored or misread, we can take comfort from this.

10:41 *But the Lord answered and said to her: Martha, Martha, you are anxious and disturbed about many things-* Nearly every one of the 19 occurrences of the Greek word for "anxious" is in the Lord's teachings *not* to take anxious thought but instead to focus upon the things of the Kingdom. The focus upon only "one thing" in life empowers us to handle the stress of "the many" secular things. Without that focus, life appears full of "many things" and the fact we cannot sufficiently multi-task leaves us stressed and distracted from that one thing which is needful.

10:42 *But one thing is needful. For Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her-* Martha was "anxious and disturbed about many things" (:41), but the Lord perceived that Mary was anxious and troubled about the "one thing" that was "needful"- and the context demands we understand this "one thing" as hearing the Lord's words. For her, as she sat there at His feet, it was an anxious and troubling experience. To hear the Lord's words is in this sense a troubling experience. Whilst we are saved by grace, the extent of the imperative within the Lord's teaching is without doubt 'troubling' to the sensitive believer in Him. For we cannot hear Him without perceiving the enormous imperative which there is within those words for the transformation of our human lives in practice. See on Phil. 4:6. The one thing that was needful is surely to be connected by the incident, also recorded by Luke, where the Lord tells the rich young man that he lacks "the one thing" (Lk.

18:22)- which in his case, was to give his wealth away. Yet Mary did this, when she poured out her life savings on the Lord's feet. Sitting at His feet, hearing His words, led her to anoint those feet. She chose "the one thing", of anxiously hearing His words, the lines in her forehead showing in intense concentration. And yet that learning of Him issued in something practical- she gave her life to Him in practice, by giving all she had to those feet. The rich young man lacked the one thing- for he was not then ready to give his life's wealth to the Lord. Moving the spotlight onto ourselves, we can hear, and yet do nothing. We can read our Bibles without the intensity of devotion which Mary had, and without there being any direct translation of what we hear and read into practice. We can be as the rich young man, intellectually impressed, and yet totally failing to accept the tremendous practical demands behind the most simple, basic teachings of the Lord.

Local Jewish culture stressed that the place of the woman was about domestic matters rather than spiritual ones. Yet in the incident of Martha and Mary, the Lord commended Mary for neglecting her domestic duties in order to concern herself with spiritual development. She sat at his feet, as if a student at the feet of a rabbi. As noted on :39, it's easy to forget that to sit at the feet of a Rabbi [and the Lord was called 'Rabbi'] meant to be a disciple of that Rabbi. And women... couldn't be disciples of a Rabbi. It was all radical stuff.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place-* Perhaps Bethany, following on from the context of chapter 10. But we have the impression as in Mk. 1:36 of the disciples finding Him praying, in some secluded spot; and wishing to have that same intimacy with the Father which exuded from Him. The Comforter promises us that same relationship with God as Father which the Lord experienced; and so He teaches them in practice how to move towards it.

*That when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples-* This means that this teaching of prayer is different to that recorded in Matthew 6. It would seem therefore that He replies to their request to share His intimacy with the Father by repeating an earlier teaching which [like us] they had not given due attention to. They knew John had taught his disciples forms of prayer, and they wanted one. The Lord is reminding them that He actually had given them one, but they had not paid attention to it. Or it could be that because John's disciples were well known for their prayers (5:33), the disciples of the Lord wanted a different prayer to that which the Lord had given them, one more in line with common Jewish prayer forms. And the Lord replies by repeating the prayer He had originally taught them, which they apparently weren't satisfied with. Again we see their immaturity, chronicled by they themselves in these gospel records, as an encouragement to their hearers and readers to mature more quickly than they had.

The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. There was therefore no need for Him to give another prayer. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

11:2 *And he said to them: When you pray, say, Father-* The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father" (AV, textus receptus). Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers.

His teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father (AV) may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century.

The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence... it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members... now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

*Hallowed be your name*- Hallowed / sanctified be Your name" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language. The Lord prayed this in Gethsemane; and it took Him so long to say these words that the disciples fell asleep.

*Your kingdom come*- It has been pointed out that "Your Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom. "'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated". And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye

[now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (Is. 2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come Your Kingdom, done Your will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever-greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom.

"Your kingdom come!" is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term "basileia", the first thing people thought of was the Roman "kingdom" or "empire". That is, "basileia" really meant "Roman empire" to most people who heard it... It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96). And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

11:3 *Give us day by day our daily bread*- This may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea

that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us here.

11:4 *And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation-* There is a parallel between "sins" and being "indebted"; probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that of burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on Mt. 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "O ye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Those "indebted" to us are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us... and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if we forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much... then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people... by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.

Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

"As we..." is a challenge. The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be



an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

*11:5 And he said to them: Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight and say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves-* A man finds a friend comes to him at midnight, wanting food. So he goes to *his* friend, notwithstanding the inconvenient hour, and asks for some loaves, but actually he's given whatever he wants. His want, his will, was to find sustenance for his friend / brother. And therefore his friend gives abundantly above all he asks or thinks, indeed, whatever he wants is provided. The promise of boundless response to prayer is therefore true, but in the context of seeking to help others. This parable comes straight after 'the Lord's prayer'. In Matthew's record, the prayer is followed by a reminder that we must forgive our brother, if we are to be forgiven (Mt. 6:14,15). So perhaps the friend coming to the man at midnight starving hungry, represents a brother sinning against us. Our response must be to go to the Father in prayer and seek forgiveness / spiritual food for our brother. And in that context, we will be given whatever we desire. Note that banging on the shut door is elsewhere a symbol of asking for forgiveness (Lk. 13:24,25; Mt. 25:10).

The parable of the man coming to his friend at midnight and asking for loaves (Lk. 11:5-13) occurred in the context of the Lord's teaching about forgiveness (see the parallel Gospels). Yet the terms of the parable are replete with reference to the Lord's return and judgment:

11:5 At midnight- the Lord comes "at midnight" in other parables (cp. Mk. 13:35)

11:7 Door now shut- the door is shut on those rejected, never to be opened (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25)

11:9 Knocking on the door in prayer, and the door is opened- the rejected knock on the door but it isn't opened.

Now, in this life, we knock on the door, knowing we are condemned, needing forgiveness, living out the situation of the rejected at the last day. But *now*, the door is opened. We are granted as much forgiveness as we need, which we accept shamefacedly and awkwardly, as the man receiving loaves at midnight for the visitor [note how Nathan describes David's lust for Bathsheba as a visitor arriving needing feeding].

The parable of the friend at midnight uses an element of unreality, but in a reverse way. The Lord paints the picture of a guest coming to a person who has no bread, and so they go and disturb their neighbour at midnight, asking for bread. The Middle Eastern peasant who appreciated the huge burden of responsibility to give food to a visitor would say that no, he couldn't possibly imagine that the person who was asked for food would say 'No'. He would not only give bread, but whatever was needed. And so it is with God. It's unthinkable, as unthinkable as it is in a Palestinian village to not be hospitable, that our Father will not answer a prayer for resources with which to help others. This has been my own experience time and again. And further, the villager would respond not just because it is his neighbour asking him, but because he realizes that the responsibility to entertain the needy person actually falls upon the whole community. And God too sees our requests for others as partly His personal and communal responsibility. However let it be noted that the poor neighbour asks only for bread- for the very bare minimum with which to provide for the need of another. And the richer neighbour responds with far more. Again, a pattern for our own prayers for resources with which to help others.

11:6 *For a friend of mine has arrived from a journey and I have nothing to set before him*- Perhaps those not from an Eastern background can never understand the pressing urgency of the hospitality culture; you *must* feed the visitor. It just has to be done. But he is poor, and he doesn't have any bread. So, he goes to his richer friend, friend number three, and wakes him up, disturbing the whole household, to ask him to give him some bread with which to entertain the first friend.

The friend who came on his journey with "nothing" is intended by the Lord to be understood primarily as referring to the disciples whom He had sent out on their journey with nothing ("take nothing for your journey", Lk. 9:3). When He told them to "eat such things as are set before you" (Lk. 10:8), He didn't just mean 'Don't be picky about your food'. He used the same word in Lk. 11:6 to describe how the faithful friend "set [food] before" his visitor. As they travelled around, the disciples were to be received in the way He was describing. Those in that early brotherhood of believers who received and supported them were to do so knowing that these brethren were in their turn responding to human need, and they could be fellow-helpers in the Gospel's work by showing hospitality. John says just the same: "Because that for his name's sake they went forth [alluding to the great commission to go into all the world], taking nothing *of the Gentiles* [i.e. the unbelievers]. We therefore ought to help receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth" (3 Jn. 7,8).

Does the 'traveller' needing sustenance of Lk. 11:6 refer to our sinful tendencies, in the light of 2 Sam. 12:4? Heb. 5:2 describes those in sin

whom the Lord saved as "out of the way". The same idea is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance.

11:7 *And he from within shall answer and say-* "From within" is always used in the Bible about the inner man, rather than meaning indoors. The Greek word occurs twice in the same context: "your *inward part*... that which is *within*" (11:39,40). Inside himself, he spoke to his friend: "Trouble me not". Yet that satan within him, that desire to be selfish, was overcome by his realization of his friends need, and *why* it had arisen. And if we have this same emboldened conscience to overcome our innate selfishness and ask of our Father *for the sake of others*, then we will see the work of the ministry will be provided by Him- that is His sober promise. Jn. 15:16 is one of John's versions of the great preaching commission: "I chose you and appointed you, that ye should *go* and bear fruit...whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you". The promise of support and help and answered prayer is again held out- in the context of preaching and ministering to the Gospel.

*Do not trouble me! The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and give anything to you?*- This gives further insight into how prayer is heard- the householder, God, is in His house (Heaven) with the door shut and his children with him in bed, and in order to get up- corresponding to God answering our prayer in the parable- the *whole* household, the children of God (a description of the Angels- Luke 20:35,36 etc.), have to be roused. Thus all the Angels are conscious of one specific action on our behalf. See on Lk. 15:6.

The man who knocks is answered, the Lord taught. He may have meant that all true prayer is answered in its essence, rather than its particularities. But for our purposes we note that the first knocks weren't heard. Only by continual knocking was the request responded to. And so "knock, and it shall be opened" doesn't just mean 'ask for something and you'll get it'. The first knocks produced nothing. It surely means 'Keep on and on knocking, driven to your utmost desperation and entreaty; *this* is what I call knocking'.

The Lord will one day come to *us* at midnight, and the unworthy will not open to Him (Song 5). And He right now stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). The rejected will know what it is like to stand knocking at the Lord's shut door and be unanswered (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25). He surely intended us to make such links within His teachings. The message is quite clear- those who can't be bothered to respond to the knocking of others, who refuse to feel for others in their desperation... these are the ones who will then come to know just how that feels, as in ultimate spiritual desperation *they* hammer at the Lord's door. From this it surely follows

that in our response to the desperation of others, we are working out our own eternal destiny. We are deciding whether or not the Lord will respond *to us*, as we lay there prostrate before Him at judgment, knowing our desperation whilst at the same time believing and hoping in His love and response. When we see others in their needs, the sister who can't get to meeting because nobody will baby-sit for her once in a while, the brother who just needs someone to talk to, someone to listen, an evening of someone's time, the man over there who is so lost in his Catholicism, that guy so addicted to his dreams of personal wealth, the woman back there hooked on dope, the single father with two spastic children, the grandmother left to bring up three children on a tiny pension in one room with broken windows and severe winters, the refugees streaming over that border day after day... we are confronted with these pictures daily.

They are knocking at our door, at midnight. And we would rather not be disturbed. We would rather acknowledge their status as our friends, our brothers and sisters, but make excuses as to why here and now we can't respond. To tell the friend that, well, give him bread tomorrow...this was quite inappropriate. It could have been argued that they didn't *need* bread right then. They could wait till morning. But the friend appreciated the *shame* and the *awkwardness* of his friend...his heart felt for him, and he responded. It isn't just dire material need we should feel for, therefore; but feel for others in the sheer humanity of their life situations, and have a heart willing to try to give them all they need in them.

11:8 *I say to you, though he will not want to rise and give anything to him, yet because he is his friend, and because of the man's persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs-* The knocking on the door is specifically a symbol of prayer. If we see our brothers need, even if we can do nothing physically to help (and so often, we can't); we will *pray* earnestly for them. If we truly feel for them, we will pray for them. The friend troubles his friend for help (Lk. 18:7), just as in another parable about prayer the desperate widow "troubles" the judge for a response (Lk. 18:5).

The poor neighbour asks with "importunity" (AV)- with shamelessness. He is confident of being heard and has no shame or hesitation to his request because he knows he really does have nothing to give the visitor. This is of course the prerequisite for prayer which will be heard. The Lord drives the point home that whoever asks in this way, receives. And yet the Lord addresses this comment to those who although "evil", knew how to give gifts to their kids. Surely the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees present, who prayed regularly. Perhaps He is saying that they had never really prayed the prayer of earnest desire, motivated by others' needs.

Because of his "importunity", the rich friend gave to him. The Greek translated "importunity" means lack of shamefacedness, lack of

reverence. The Greek word is *an-aidēia*: without *aidos*. What does *aidos* mean? It is used twice in the New Testament: in 1 Tim. 2:9 "shamefacedness", and in Heb. 12:28 "serve God acceptably with *reverence*". The man (who the Lord invites us to see as representing us) comes to the rich friend (cp. God) *wit out* this reverence. Now of course we should serve our God with appropriate reverence. But there ought to be times when we as it were rush to God, because He is our father and our friend, without that formality which our worship of Him might more usually include. Contrary to the ideas of popular religion, God is not merely something to be worshipped; He is Father and friend, the one to run to in time of urgent need *when that need arises from the requirements of His people and His work*.

Paul's writings are packed with allusions back to the Lord's parables. In his reference to the tale of the three friends, Paul seems to have understood just as we have done. Rom. 16:1,2 comments that the ecclesia should welcome "Phoebe our sister receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatever business she *has need* of you: for she has been a succourer of many". "Has need" is the same Greek word as in Lk. 11:8- the friend gave whatever *was needed* to the friend who arrived from his journey. And Paul says this should be done for Phoebe because she lived a life of giving out to others needs.

11:9 *And I say to you: Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you*- Jesus likens requesting things from God to a man asking a favour of his friend at midnight (Lk. 11:5,9). We are to see God as *our friend* to whom like Abraham, we respectfully and rather awkwardly present ourselves. And He sees us as *His* friends. There's a wonderful mutuality between a man and his God. As noted above, the guaranteed answer of prayers refers to the requests we make for others when we truly do not have the resources to provide for them. And this is true in spiritual terms; for so often we feel utterly lacking in ability to provide for the spiritual needs of those who come to us at midnight.

The connections with the Sermon on the Mount surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and

salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in Mt. 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel here in Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit".

11:10 *For everyone that asks receives*- Passages like this can be read to teach that every one who seeks in prayer, receives. This just isn't true in terms of the words of our actual requests being answered. But once we understand that God sees the spirit behind our words and answers this rather than the specific request, then these promises become more realistically believable; and the entire context is about asking for loaves for our needy visitor which we truly do not have to give him.

*And he that seeks finds*- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the

Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

*And to him that knocks it shall be opened-* This is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

The language of knocking and opening is used in other parables about spiritual acceptance with the Lord; it is this which He is also willing to provide us with, for others' sake.

11:11 *What father among you-* We can imagine Him looking around at them.

*If his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a snake?-* The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He

will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

There were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes. The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

11:12 *Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?*- See on :11. Eggs and small scorpions could look similar. But in the life of a mature believer, there is no possible doubt that every gift from the Father is good- ultimately. Our environments are all given us by Him to develop our spirituality, and not because He hates us or wishes us to suffer. The song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 makes the amazing point that the Father does all things possible so that we might bear fruit.

11:13 *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*- See on Mt. 7:11. Quite simply, we have to believe that prayer changes things. God can change the course of a nation's destiny, or even in a sense the whole course of the universe, because some finite, ignorant, sinful human being has the neck to fervently ask Him to. We are encouraged by the Lord to persist in prayer (Lk. 11:5-13). Elijah had to pray for rain seven times before the cloud came. Daniel prayed 21 days before an answer came. Why doesn't God answer immediately? Is it not simply because He sees it is for our good to develop this habit of knocking on Heaven's door with the same request?

The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors



elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfil his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

*11:14 And he was casting out a demon that was dumb. And it came to pass, when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke-* This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness (Mt.) and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness (Mt.) and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

*And the crowds marvelled-* This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

*11:15 But some of them said-* The Pharisees (Mt.). Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons. And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those

beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

*By Beelzebub the prince of the demons he casts out demons-* By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of

'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro*– "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*Archon*, "the first" ["prince"], would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

11:16 *And others, testing him, sought from him a sign from heaven-* They considered this to be a sign connected with the 'devil'. The Lord could have just walked away from such obvious blasphemers. But He works with them from whatever position they stated, and thereby sets us a huge challenge in dealing with difficult folks.

11:17 *But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them-* But they had "said" these things (:15). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (Mt. 12:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

*Every kingdom-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

*Divided against itself-* The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

*Is brought to desolation-* The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

*And a family divided against a family falls apart-* A divided house is the characteristic of Satan's house or kingdom, and it will fall- just as the house built on sand fell at the day of judgment. This is the strongest condemnation of any divided Christian community. The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

11:18 *And if Satan-* Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if Satan...*". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

*Also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub-* Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

Bible readers are familiar with the personification of sin as a man called 'Satan', the enemy. This symbolic man is in fact the antithesis of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we follow this theme through Scripture, it becomes apparent that we are just at the tip of an iceberg. This symbolic man has a kingdom and almost every attribute of the Lord Jesus and *His* Divine Kingdom of righteousness. Consider the similarities:

Satan has a Kingdom (Lk. 11:18)

The power and glory of which have been *delivered* to him by God, and which he can give to whomsoever he will (Lk. 4:6)

Angels (Mt. 25:41; 2 Cor. 12:7 Gk.)

The power of death (Heb. 2:14 cp. Hos. 13:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:6)

Power to condemn men (1 Tim. 3:6)

A judgment seat and system of rewards based on that of Christ (Mt. 6:1 cp. 2,16)

Condemned sinners are invited to the 'feast' of God's judgments and given suitable wedding clothes (Zeph. 1:7,8) in parody of the Kingdom (Mt. 22:2,3)

Is a father (Jn. 8:44)

Has children (Acts 13:10; 1 Jn. 3:10 cp. Heb. 2:13)

And a wisdom that is opposed to God's wisdom (James 3:15-17)

Armour (Lk. 11:22)

Power (Acts 26:18)

Spiritual "depths" (Rev. 2:24, s.w. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)

Seed which he sows (Mt. 13:39)

A throne (Rev. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:4)

A mystery (2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 2:24)

"Power... signs and... wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13)

Stands at the right hand of men (Ps. 109:6 cp. 109:31; 16:8; 110:1)

Is likened to lightening (Lk. 10:18 cp. 17:24)

Puts things in men's' hearts (Jn. 13:2 cp. 2 Cor. 8:16)

He is a son who will be "revealed" (2 Thess. 2:4), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:30, same Gk.)

He is "he that comes" (2 Cor. 11:4), a phrase so often used about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:19,20; Jn. 7:27,31)

He will be "revealed *in his time*" (2 Thess. 2:6), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:24)

"The god of this world" who emits a bright light into the hearts of men (2 Cor. 4:4 cp. 6)

Enthroned in God's temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

He has "works" (1 Jn. 3:8)

Figuratively comes down from heaven to earth in the last days (Rev. 12:12)

Has bread and wine of wickedness (Prov. 4:17)

His followers "hold" Christ, as the true disciples do (same words in Col. 2:9; Mt. 28:19 cp. Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57)

Will be 'apocalypsed' as Christ will be (2 Thess. 2:8).

11:19 *And even if I-* Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

*By Beelzebub-* 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

*Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?-* The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless. "By whom do your sons cast them [demons] out?" (Lk. 11:19) shows the Lord assuming for a moment that there were demons, and that the Jews could cast them out. He doesn't directly challenge them on their false miracles, their exaggerated reports of healings, nor on the non-existence of demons. He takes them from where they are and seeks to lead them to truth.

*Therefore shall they be your judges-* See on Rev. 16:15.

Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb.

11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

11:20 *But if I by the finger of God-* A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see Mt. 12:30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued

this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure.

*Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you-* The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

11:21 *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe-* The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong. See on Lk. 13:9. 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). Note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18).

11:22 *But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him his whole armour in which he had trusted, and divides his spoils-* The idea of the Lord binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It



speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by the Lord's death and resurrection.

The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of

righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death.

There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one

area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

Grasping this extensive theme helps explain the deep sense of paradox which is central to all serious self-examination. We are counted righteous, we are given spiritual gifts of righteousness now, and our self-examination reveals this to us; but we are expected to develop them (according to the parable of the pounds). Yet we also see that we are pathetically bound by our Satan, somehow held back from that life of righteousness which we would fain achieve. All these things were deeply foreseen and appreciated by the Lord when He constructed this parable of binding Satan. Christ in His own life has overcome Satan, and has graciously shared the various aspects of righteousness with the whole of His body. This is the very idea of the body of Christ; between us, over time, we will approximate to the perfect reflection of our Lord. We have each been given different aspects to develop, different parts of His personality. This explains the difference in emphasis which can be observed within the different parts of the present body, and also in the history of the body over time.

11:23 *He that is not with me is against me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against Me*' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: "He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us" (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord's cause, even if we're not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be 'not against' Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively 'not against' Jesus. If we're not whole heartedly with Him, we're against Him. That's how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

*And he that does not gather with me scatters*- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the

spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. People were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19:13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment.

11:24 *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says-* The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Luke's Gospel. Those not against who are for in 11:23 may well refer to John's disciples. The unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

*I will return to my house from which I came-* The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17). "Came [out]" is the same word used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

11:25 *And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order-* The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

11:26 *Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first-* "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first". However, "the last", the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It "is worse" and yet thus 'it *shall* be' for that generation.

11:27 *And it came to pass, as he said these things, that a certain woman out of the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which you did suck-* The woman was not merely making a passing comment, but alluding somehow to the repeated blessedness attached to Mary (1:28,42,48). Perhaps the Angel's words to Mary were already known and publicized; or perhaps this was a close relative whom Mary had told this to; or maybe Luke is just demonstrating the truth of the Angelic promise that all generations would call Mary "blessed".

11:28 *But he said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it-* The Lord shifts all focus away from considering Mary to be blessed just because she happened to be the physical channel used for His conception. Rather her blessedness was to be understood in terms of how she heard God's word and kept it, meditating upon it in her heart (2:19,51). Likewise we can take the warning that even if the Father clearly uses us as a channel, this doesn't of itself mean we are acceptable with Him. It is personal spirituality, of the kind Mary had, which is all significant.

Paul Wyny has spotted the following connections:

#### REVELATION 1

#### LUKE 11

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein. (v.3)	Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. (v.28)
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Seven spirits (angels) before the throne. (v.4)	Contrast – seven unclean spirits invited into the house. (v.24-26)
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The resurrected Christ – I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. (v.12-19)	The sign of Jonah the prophet. (v.29-32)
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The seven golden candlesticks.  
(v.12,13,20)

The parable of the  
lighted candlestick.  
(v.33-36)

The lesson for us is that the Lord even in His Heavenly glory alluded to His dear mother's attitude, and held her up as the pattern for all His people. She had an eternal influence upon Him. Even in His Heavenly glory, the incidents of that day in Lk. 11, and the example of His mother, remained with Him. This is surely a tremendous incentive to parents- their influence on their children may be a factor in how their children will eternally be. The Lord was alluding to how His mother had "kept" God's word in her heart in devout meditation (Lk. 2:51). He didn't say 'Blessed is *she* because *she* heard the word and kept it'. Rather, "blessed are *they*". He was surely saying: 'Don't just dumbly admire my mother, with some kind of distant, spectator admiration; she is the pattern for *all* of you. Follow her, make her the pattern of *your* life with respect to God's word, rather than just gasp at her example'.

11:29 *And when the crowds were gathering together to him, he began to say: This generation is an evil generation. It seeks after a sign-* Ahaz was likewise rebuked for seeking a sign instead of believing in faith the Messianic prophecies. The Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign *from Heaven*". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

*But there shall no sign be given to it-* The idea could be 'no further sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their

final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No *more* sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign *greater than* [that of Jonah]'.

*Except the sign of Jonah-* The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

11:30 *For even as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation-* As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the

Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

11:31 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here-* "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "stand up" in :32 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

11:32 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it-* We must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :19 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the



rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment (Luke 11:32), and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall "discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

*For they repented-* The Lord has explained that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned. But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

*At the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here-* This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

11:33 *No one when he has lit a lamp puts it in a cellar, neither under a bucket, but on the lightstand, so that they who enter in may see the light-* See on Lk. 8:16. We may wonder why the Lord at this point appears to be repeating so many elements from the sermon on the mount recorded in

Mt. 5-7. That sermon was given in Galilee; now He is near Bethany in the Jerusalem area (at the end of chapter 10). He is repeating His Galilean teachings for the southerners.

The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to first century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same;

notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

11:34 *The lamp of your body is your eye. When your eye is single, your whole body also is full of light-* This observation about single-mindedness ["healthy" = 'single'] follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (s.w.). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light. In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor.

Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

*But when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness-* A bad or evil eye was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22 AV). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean".

11:35 *Look therefore whether the light that is in you is not darkness-* See on 1 Cor. 4:4. A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to

wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

*11:36 If therefore your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it shall be wholly full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light-* The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a candle that has been lit and displayed publicly, giving light to us. He then continues that imagery in some rather difficult words. He says that in our lives, the eye is "the light of the body"- a good eye lets light and vision in, thus totally and fundamentally affecting how we are inside us, as persons. But if the eye is faulty, then there is darkness within. But when the eye is good and functioning, the whole person is "full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle gives you light" (Lk. 11:33-36). But earlier, He's defined Himself as the candle which gives light. He seems to be saying that our "eye", our perception of Him, is vital. And this is exactly the context of this passage- He's been lamenting how Israel haven't perceived Him for who He is. If we perceive Him rightly, if our "eye" is good, then our whole body will be filled with the light which comes from Him. But it all depends upon our image / perception of / eye for Jesus. Hence the vital and ultimate importance of understanding and perceiving Him correctly. The subject we're now studying actually couldn't be more important; for the correct perception of Him will fill our whole lives with light, totally affect our internal world-views, granting us an ability to understand and make sense of all around us and within us in the light of the person of Jesus. And if we don't perceive Him aright, our inner lives will be dark and formless, whatever external trappings of culture and knowledge we may have.

*11:37 Now as he spoke, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and he went in and sat down to eat-* Eating together had a religious dimension in the first century. But the Jews were more open in their view of fellowship than many are today. Clearly the Pharisee wanted to find fault, but he had no problem at this stage in eating with the Lord.

*11:38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner-* Rabbi Jose claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery". And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration. The Lord seems to have purposefully ignored

this tradition in order to provoke the inevitable conversation about it. The Lord Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". But He was no literalist nor legalist. He broke that principle in order to establish higher ones in this context.

11:39 *And the Lord said to him: Now you the Pharisees cleanse-* The Lord Jesus is described [using the same word for "cleanse"] as making others clean (Mt. 8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. They are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

*The outside-* The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord's earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside*, the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be 'so as to look good to others'. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal* attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

*Of the cup and plate, but your inward part is full of extortion-* The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous" (Mt. 23:28). Here Lk. 11:39 speaks of 'them' as their inward part: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the

likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

*And wickedness-* The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

11:40 *You foolish ones, did not He that made the outside make the inside also?*- Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. He created the aspect of external appearance, as well as the mind and "inward part" (:39). He perceives the precise interplay between appearances and internal reality- because He is creator and designer, not merely of our bodies, but of human psychology. To think we can hide our thoughts from Him is indeed "foolish".

11:41 *But give for alms those things which are within, and behold, all things are clean to you-* This textual reading [not supported by AV] would be saying that giving of alms is one of the external things which is not the essence. What is essential is to give our "inward part", our inner thoughts, to God. To be filled with *His* Spirit in *our* spirit. "To be spiritually minded" is the very and essential core of Christianity. No amount of giving money and external things can compensate for a deficit in this.

The AV reads as if giving alms makes all things clean. In Lk. 16:9, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is so important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. He made the point in so many words in Lk. 11:41 AV: "Give alms of such things as ye have (i.e. regardless of how small); and, behold, all things are clean unto you". Paul seems to have these words in mind when says that to the pure, all things are pure (Tit. 1:15)- as if he saw the epitome of purity as being in giving what we have. "The ransom of a man's life are his riches" (Prov. 13:8) likewise suggests that our attitude to riches is one of the things that decides our eternal destiny.

11:42 *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe-* The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

*Mint, rue and every herb-* These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop' would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the

Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who wilfully misunderstand Scripture, it's easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

*And neglect justice and the love of God; but these you should have done-* In line with the teaching in :41, it seems they thought that by such alms giving and tithing, they were excused from being spiritually minded within. "The inward part" of :40,41 is therefore a mind focused upon "justice and the love of God". To think justly of and for others is far more than making a material donation.

*And not to leave the other undone-* The Greek *aphiemi* occurs again in Mt. 23:38; 24:2: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate", and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house; not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

11:43 *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues-* They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of



His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

*And the greetings in the marketplaces-* The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

11:44 *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it-* A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required, and thereby led men into defilement rather than the purity which they so emphasized and demanded.

11:45 *And one of the lawyers answering said to him: Teacher, in saying this you reproach us also-* This particular lawyer perhaps said this in recognition of their sin. For the context is of the Lord accusing the Pharisees of hypocrisy; and the lawyer speaks up and says that actually, this was true of lawyers too.

11:46 *And he said: Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens-* John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (Mt. 11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

*Hard to bear-* The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden. If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.

*And you yourselves do not touch the burdens-* Mt. 23:4 they will not move or 'remove' them. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

*With one of your fingers-* The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

*11:47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed-* *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it

depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on Mt. 23:30 *Our fathers*.

11:48 *So you are witnesses and consent to the works of your fathers; for they killed them and you build their tombs-* "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

Mt. 23:31 "You are the sons of them that slew the prophets". The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

11:49 *Therefore also the Wisdom of God said-* This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature, possibly from an apocryphal book no longer known. The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts; perhaps by quoting Matthew's words here, Luke is treating them as "the wisdom of God". Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first

century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

*I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute-* "Send them" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

11:50 *So that the blood of all the prophets-* This stands for '*judgment for all the righteous blood shed*'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment for the sin*. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

*Which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation-* "Upon you", Mt. 23:35. One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant 'guilt for their death'. Soon the Jews

were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (Mt. 27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in Mt. 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same "this generation" as in Mt. 24:34. The Lord doesn't, therefore, mean 'The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled'. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn't fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn't repented, but because God's loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

11:51 *From the blood of Abel*- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

*To the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation-* The prophet Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch (as in Mt. 23:35) who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate inclusio with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

*11:52 Woe to you lawyers! For you took away the key of knowledge-*

The Kingdom therefore remained 'locked' to people. We see here that "knowledge" does play a role in coming to the Kingdom. The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in Mt. 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. They had "the key of knowledge" in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God's Kingdom by limiting their access to God's word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the

whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

*You did not enter in yourselves, and those that were entering in, you hindered-* As if they kept locked the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", Mt. 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", Mt. 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.

The same word for 'hindering' is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they are simply felt to be in a category [like "children" were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

*11:53 And when he got out from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press upon him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things-* They were experts in winding up a person; they rightly perceived that the Lord had passion and emotion, and they sought to play upon that by a series of provocatively worded questions and statements.

*11:54 Lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. They are presented as the robbers on the way to Jericho, lying in wait like bandits.

## CHAPTER 12

*12:1 In the mean time, when the many thousands of the crowd were gathered together, so much so that they trod one upon another, he began to say to his disciples first of all-*

As in the account of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, we get the idea of the Lord purposefully focusing upon the disciples, despite the presence of crowds of well over 10,000. His interest was in developing that small core, rather than getting superficial acceptance from thousands.

*Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy-* The disciples were overly influenced by the Pharisees. They were worried that the Pharisees were not happy with the Lord's teaching (Mt. 15:12). He had to warn them *above all* of the danger of the influence [yeast] of the Pharisees (Lk. 12:1 Gk.). And yet they still misunderstood Him- they thought He was talking about literal bread (Mk. 8:15,16). He encouraged His followers 'be themselves'. He spoke much of not being a *hupokrites*, an actor. Those who follow Him are not to act a part before others, as if all the world's a stage, being what others want in the audience of the world of eyes that surround us, acting as an actor does, merely to please others. He continued the image when He warned of not doing things "to be seen [Gk. *theathenai*] of men". Don't let them be a mere theatre audience to you- be yourself, living life in the constant presence of God's eyes, not man's. This was a major theme with the Lord. Paul likewise teaches us that every man should "be as he is" (1 Cor. 7:26 RV). This is why the Lord Jesus taught His men "first of all", i.e. most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy. This was a cardinal point in Christ's manifesto. We must ask whether it has this place in our discipleship. It can be that the ecclesial audience is a kind of theatre, showing gratitude for the pleasing entertainment of the speakers. Yet the opposite should be true- God is the audience, we are living bared lives before His gaze.

The Lord taught that hypocrisy was like leaven- once it begins in a community of believers, it so easily spreads and engulfs all (Lk. 12:1-3). In this context He went on to say that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed... whatever you have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light". It is so easy, and we have all done this, to say something about somebody, and ask our hearer not to repeat it. But even in this life, as well as at judgment day, what is spoken in the ear comes out on the housetops. In discussion about fellowship matters, divorce etc. we can so easily say one thing to one group of brethren and something quite different to another. But this, the Lord taught, is hypocrisy. Let us decide our principles and live and speak by them, in humility and sensitivity and simplicity. Because all will be revealed, both in this life and in the coming day of judgment, we ought to be without such hypocrisy.



The Lord taught His followers "first", or 'most of all', to beware of hypocrisy. For us, all the world is *not* to be a stage, and we are *not* to be merely actors upon that stage. Hypocrisy is that living out of a persona, acting, rather than being the person God created us to be. In the Lord Jesus men saw the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). There was perfect congruence between the person He presented Himself as, and the person He essentially was. This was why He could so easily touch the true person in others. And I think this is the meaning of the otherwise enigmatic insistence that the Cherubim's faces, their appearances, and 'themselves' were all one (Ez. 10:22). The Russian [Synodal] version translates this: 'Their view, was who they themselves were'. So often in our encounters with others there is no real dialogue, rather a conflict of monologues. This is why so many a debate between a Christian and a Mormon, e.g., has come to nothing; for perhaps both of them are merely showing one of their personas.

*12:2 But there is nothing covered up that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known-* See on Mt. 10:27.

Whatever we have spoken in darkness will be revealed for all to hear and know (Lk. 12:2,3)- our words will as it were be cited back to us before others in that day. The Lord says this in the context of warning us not to have the leaven of hypocrisy in the matter of our words- there's no point in saying one thing to one person and something different to someone else, because our words will be gone through at the judgment and will be open for everyone to hear. We should live, He implies, as if we are now before the judgment; speaking things we wouldn't be ashamed for anyone to hear. Note in passing how he says that hypocrisy in our words is like leaven, that corrupts and spreads within an individual and a community. Once somebody starts being hypocritical with their words, someone else does. Even every word of murmuring against each other will be judged; and hence, James points out, it is bizarre that we should be doing this with the judge standing before the door (James 5:9).

*12:3 Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops-* The reference to "closets" (AV) takes us back to Mt. 6:6, where He uses the same word to speak of how we should pray in closets and then we will be openly rewarded by the Father. The 'open reward' is clearly in the Kingdom (Mt. 6:4,18; Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). Could this not be saying, then, that in the Kingdom, the answers to the prayers we are *now* making will be openly proclaimed to all from the housetops? Hence there is an awesome connection between our feeble words of prayer now, and the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for

there is a time there for every purpose and for every work... for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "every". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. However, these verses must be considered in conjunction with those which speak of God's 'forgetting' of bad deeds on account of how people later chose to live. However, this need not mean that they are erased from God's infinite knowledge; all too often we perceive God's memory as a vast memory bank which can have our sins erased from it. But His knowledge knows no such bounds of human perception; yet He is willing not to hold those things against us, and to therefore count us as having never committed them.

Ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3). Note how Paul read the Lord's words here in this way – for he surely alludes here when he speaks of how "the hidden things of darkness" are "the counsels of the hearts" which will be revealed at His return (1 Cor. 4:5). The implications of this are awesome. The thoughts and intents of our hearts in this life will be eternally open and manifest in the eternal light of God's Kingdom. In that day, our brethren will see every one of our hidden thoughts. To live now according to the principle 'I can think what I like, but I won't act like it, for the sake of appearances to others' is therefore foolish. Who we are now in our hearts is whom we shall ultimately be revealed to be. So we may as well get on and act according to how we really think; for throughout eternity, what we think now will be manifest to everyone, seeing that a man *is* as he thinks in his heart.

12:4 *And I say to you my friends*- Assuring them that they had nothing ultimately to fear at the last day; for we are His friends. If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The laboured assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

*Do not be afraid*- The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :3- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment

therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel.

*Of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do-* Mt. 10:28 adds: "But are not able to kill the soul". "They" cannot touch our essential self. It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

12:5 *But I will warn you about whom you shall fear. Fear Him, who after He has killed has power to cast you into Gehenna. Yes, I say to you, fear Him!*- The fear of the eternity we might miss, condemnation, is to be infinitely greater than our fear of death in this life. The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the

punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

12:6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two very small coins? And not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God-* See on Mt. 10:29. Two sparrows were sold for one coin; and five were given for two coins. The sparrows were so little worth that one was thrown in for free. Yet the sparrows are represented in the presence of God (Gk.); even animals have their representative Angels there. This is 'how' in one sense a personal God sees and knows all things; because His Spirit / Angels are in His presence reporting all things to Him. At least this is how we are invited to perceive it. The sparrows aren't forgotten in the presence of God, and we are of more value than many sparrows (Lk. 12:6,7); Matthew has: 'Your Father feeds the sparrows; are you not of more value [same Greek as in Luke] than many sparrows?'; 'no sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing... you are of more value than many sparrows' (Mt. 6:26; 10:29,31). The sparrows being in God's presence is paralleled with His feeding them [Gk. 'to bring them up'] and being aware of what is happening to them on earth. God feeds / raises the sparrows through His Angelic messengers.

"An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbade prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think

twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others...

*12:7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered-* The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

*Fear not!*- The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

*You are of more value than many sparrows-* The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do

not fear is repeated and laboured throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and therefore confess Him openly (:8).

12:8 *And I say to you, every one who shall confess me before men-* Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

*Him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God-* See on Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:8; 1 Tim. 5:21. So close are the Lord and the Angels and such His respect and love for them, that it seems that Jesus will even feel ashamed or embarrassed before them when He comes to consider one of the unworthy at the day of judgement- Luke 12:8 implies that the same feeling of embarrassment and shame which the unworthy have now when backing out of preaching will be felt by Jesus when He looks on them at the judgement. And it is quite possible that one of the things which motivated our Lord to continue hanging on the cross was the thought of praising God in the midst of the Angels at His ascension: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation (of Angels?): I will pay my vows before them that fear Him".

But in the same way as the Angels minister condemnation, they also joyfully give eternal life to their faithful charges, on Christ's command at

the judgement- "him shall the Son of man also confess before the Angels of God" (Luke 12:8). This is perhaps the fact alluded to in 2 Cor. 10:18: "not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends (at the judgement)". To be commended implies to be commended *to* somebody- the Angels?

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words for "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 "If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus... you shall be saved". The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord uses the word *logos* with reference to the "words" of our preaching before men (Mt. 10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of 'assent', in that our *logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will "profess" His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will "profess" it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Lord's teaching here: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:

- Herod *confessed* [AV "promised"] with an oath" in front of witnesses to give Herodias' daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught

them (Acts 23:8)

- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publicly when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don't match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God's promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

According to the Lord's teaching here, he who refuses to make this public profession will not be accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before "My Father". Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before "My Father". Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that "Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV "acknowledges"] the Son has the Father also". Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

12:9 *But he that denies me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the



ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publicly. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It's tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who "Profess [s.w. 'confess'] that they know God, but in works *deny* Him". We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who 'denied' the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as 'confession', but the point is that it isn't necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him...

*In the presence of men shall be denied in the presence of the angels of God-* The Lord Jesus in the last day will confess, or witness to in a legal sense, for His people "before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8,9); and yet He uses the same language to describe how right now, He confesses us in Heaven in the presence of His Father (Mt. 10:32). Thus when we witness- or don't witness- to our relationship with Him, the Lord Jesus either confesses or denies knowledge of us before His Father. Right now. And this, therefore, is a foretaste of the final judgment. And we face these foretastes day by day in human life, as we encounter the choices of confessing or denying our Lord.

There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven “before”, or ‘before the face of’, the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually “before men”. As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It’s this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men*, not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witness about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

So whoever denies the Lord before men will be denied before the Angels. Two words are used here, the first weaker than the second. If we deny Jesus, He will utterly deny us before the Angels- what we do now on earth is even more strongly reflected in Heaven and at judgment day. The Heavenly response to our words and actions is out of proportion to our words. This surely inspires us in our daily words and decisions.

12:10 *And everyone who shall speak a word against the Son of Man*- The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure, including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The “son of man” here could refer to the Lord Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean ‘human beings’. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to

Jewish people at some point after the Lord's resurrection. The message may be: 'Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you'. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

*It shall be forgiven him, but to him that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven-* Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

12:11 *And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say-* The Lord wanted His truth to be witnessed by His people to the authorities in "heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. We too should not consider anyone anywhere beyond The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

12:12 *For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what you should say-* Luke's later volume records how indeed this happened to the persecuted apostles (Acts 4:8; 6:10; 7:2,53,55 and throughout the trials of Paul). But there is a very clear application to the events of the very last days, which the run up to AD70 prefigured. The allusion is to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. All these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. The gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6).

Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution.

12:13 *And one out of the crowd said to him: Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me-* The Lord replies by asking the man to think again about *who* had given Jesus authority- for if indeed God really had given Jesus authority, then the man ought *himself* to fear the judgment of Jesus- for as the Lord goes on to show in the parable of the rich fool, He has the power to reject those who are materialistic, exactly because He has such authority from God. The Lord is pushing the man to look at himself and think of himself at the end of his life and before the final day of judgment; and to cease paying a mere lip service respect to the authority of Jesus, but to take this for real, realizing what it means for his own personal responsibility.

The Lord's response was to tell the parable of the rich fool- a parable which ought to be seriously worrying for every one of us, rich or poor. He put the immediate argument between the brothers in the perspective of eternity; the eternity we may miss because we got too distracted with the immediate argument of the moment. And the Lord's basic message in this case was: "Be rich toward God. Give Him whatever you have". This cut right across the issues of life's unfairness, missing out on wealth, not getting our share of respect... to the essential question which should have made both brothers feel uncomfortable. Had they, have we, given all they had to the Lord's cause? We may lack the quick thinking or penetrating analysis required to make this kind of fast response when confronted by others' conflicts. But we can surely analyse our own conflicts, at our own pace, in the light of eternity; and regain perspective, even if our opponent fails to do this. We need to cut to the essence of why we are feeling as we are; pray for God to help you in this, for accurate self-examination is so hard. If we don't connect and engage with the core issues, then even if the immediate problem [e.g. the argument about the inheritance] is resolved, then other issues will still then arise. It will only be a matter of time. The more we focus on resolving just one conflict, the more we will realize that in fact we are dealing with a tangled web of multiple conflicts. We cannot change others, but we can come to understand ourselves, and to define and engage with the essential issues which we personally face in the whole conflict.

12:14 *But he said to him: Man! Who made me a judge or a divider over you?-* As noted on :13, this is not to be read as meaning 'I am not your judge, why ever would you think that?'. The answer to this rhetorical question is 'God'. The man was to quit worrying about material issues and

conflicts with his brother, and focus instead on his relationship with God. The Father and Son will indeed judge and divide between men at the last day- but on the basis of spiritual and not secular things. The ultimate judgment and division between men will be made on the basis of how they have handled such issues of judgment and division in their secular lives; and seeing we need His absolute grace in the time of the final judgment and division, we need to show it now. All such conflicts with our brethren are therefore a dry run of judgment day; we make the answer now. Note too the allusion to Ex. 2:14, whereby the Lord presents Himself as a new Moses.

12:15 *And he said to them: Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness. For a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses-* See on Lk. 17:32. As noted on :13 and :14, the true life is that to come, and that will be predicated upon how far in this life we have judged and divided rightly with secular issues now. The Lord seeks to prize apart the connection between a person and their possessions; a connection which has become the dogma of our materialistic age. The life, the personality, is to be seen as of paramount importance; 'Who "am" I?' is to be the question we return to time and again in our self-examination. The way of naming houses and lands in the name of the owner indicates the chronic degree of identification between possessions and personhood which there is in so many minds. But we are to make a great divorce in our minds between who we really are, and what we possess.

12:16 *And he spoke a parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully-* The aorist could imply that the ground was about to bring forth plentifully. The way the man talks about building bigger barns in order to store his "goods" suggests he is fantasizing about wealth, about actually getting a large harvest and turning it into goods; to spend time and labour demolishing existing barns and building greater when the intensity of harvest is upon him is foolish, and suggests an unreal fantasy about wealth rather than reality. Likewise his assumption that his harvest would be so huge that he could live from it for the rest of his life... is perhaps somewhat unrealistic.

12:17 *And he reasoned within himself, saying: What shall I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?-* Jesus pinpointed the crucial importance of self-talk in this parable of the rich fool, who said to himself that he had many goods, and discussed with his own "soul" or self the need for greater barns etc. If we at least realize that our self-talk is potentially our greatest adversary ['Satan'], then we will find the strength to move towards genuine spiritual mindedness, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (:15), and answered accordingly.

*12:18 And he said: This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones, and there will I store all my grain and my goods-* The Greek phrase for bestowing / gathering / storing into barns is to be found in Mt. 3:12; 13:30; Lk. 3:17- every time in the context of gathering God's people into God's Kingdom. This is what he should have been doing with his time and wealth. The barn represents the Kingdom. The man should've sought the things of God's Kingdom or barn, rather than his own, trying to build his own fake Kingdom here on earth (: 31). As noted on :17, the answer to the question "What shall I do?" ought to have been to devote himself to the Lord.

Solomon's obsession with building the temple and his own houses shows a massive attraction towards material things. Ecc. 2 chronicles how he crazily tried to accumulate every branch of material possession. Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "store cities" (2 Chron.8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc.2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc.2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "store cities". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

*12:19 And I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years-* see on Mt. 6:25; 1 Cor. 15:32. The rich fool reasoned that because he had had a big harvest, he would build bigger barns and relax, because he had enough to last him "many years" (Lk. 12:18,19). The unreal element here is that a harvest doesn't last many years, especially in a Middle Eastern climate with no way of effectively preserving it. And

the lesson, on reflection, is obvious. Riches don't last for ever, he who earns big wages puts them into a bag with holes in... and yet there is the genuine conviction that they will last much longer than they do. Another unreal element here is that the rich man is described as speaking *with himself*. It's hard for some cultures to appreciate how Middle Eastern culture is a collective affair. Decisions are taken through much discussion with other people. Likewise, the rich man plans out how to enjoy his wealth *alone*. There is no speech to his family; he invites *himself* to rejoice with *himself*. But all these unreal elements about this man signpost to us the loneliness, insulation and selfishness which is brought about by excess wealth and the increase of investments. It's so relevant to the 21st century. By the way, there's a word play going on here. The man whose land brings forth many things (*eu-phoreo*) and therefore wants to be merry (*eu-phraino*) is actually a fool- *aphron*- an *a-phron* person, a person without those things. All those things were "required" of him, as a loan is required. They weren't really his. And as so often, the parable is left hanging, with no actual response from the man. We have to imagine where the man's mind turned, what he thought... and take the lesson.

*Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry-* A direct quotation from Epicurean philosophers. The Lord is directly engaging with secular ideas current at the time. But no quotation marks or used, nor acknowledgment of sources given. Many of the Bible's 'difficult passages' are because of these kinds of allusions to contemporary phrases, ideas and literature, many of which are not preserved today.

For each aspect of true spirituality, there is a fake counterpart; an appearance of peace when a man has no peace with God; a semblance of prayer and Bible study when actually these are performed as exercises devoid of meaning. The pseudo-believer takes "ease" (Lk. 12:19) in his materialism; and yet this is the same word used about the true "rest" which the Lord gives in His ecclesia (Mt. 11:28). If we allow ourselves to be caught up in this, then we are effectively having our part in the spirit of antiChrist. There will not only be a fake Jesus, but there is already within our natures a shadow spirituality, which apes the real thing, and thereby seeks to persuade us that we can take the crown without the cross. In this lies the colossal practical relevance of this theme to the serious believer.

12:20 *But God said to him: You foolish one, this night is your soul required from you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?*- Gk. / RVmg. "They shall require of thee"- i.e. the Angels, to whom we shall give account at the day of judgment (:9). A similar, related Greek word is in :48- as God has given much to us, so "they"- the Angels- will require of us during the judgment process. But the exact same Greek word translated "required" occurs only in Lk. 6:30- we should

give to others and not 'ask again' of them. The connection teaches that insofar as we 'require' of others, so it will be 'required' of us. If we forgive freely without demanding repentance, so God will treat us; if we 'require again' of others in this life, so God will of us. In a sense our lives are required of us when we die in that our next conscious moment will be the judgment.

This is an allusion to various passages from the Apocrypha, especially Ecclesiasticus- as noted on :19, the Lord is again engaging with contemporary ideas.

"Prepared" is the same word as "prepared" in v. 47. We must prepare ourselves, our character and personality; we provide or prepare by being generous to others, v. 33. Because we do not have an immortal soul that is somehow recycled into us through reincarnation, our soul / life is given to us by God. In the parable of the rich fool, the Lord says that in the day of his death, his soul was "required" of him. The Greek word for 'required' means 'to ask back, to request to be given again'. The fact we have life [a 'soul'] makes us responsible to God; and at the judgment we will be asked to give that life back to Him with an account. And, as the parable shows, this utterly precludes a focus upon material acquisition. The Lord goes on to say that therefore we should take no anxious thought about what our soul will eat or wear- because our soul / life is in fact God's soul / life, and He will care for it until He takes it back to Himself (Lk. 12:22). The soul is greater than food and clothes (Lk. 12:23 Gk.). The wonder that we are alive, with God's life in us, should be far greater to us than what we feed or clothe it with. Because we can't take that life out of ourselves until God does, nor can we give it to another person, nor can we make our body / soul grow taller, *therefore* we should not take anxious thought for the material things related to it, which are all peripheral compared to the wonder of the fact that we have life from God: "why take ye thought for the rest [Gk. 'the things that are left over / extraneous']?" (Lk. 12:26). And to drive the point home, we are bidden "consider" (s.w. 'discover') the birds and plants, who are simply content with the life God has given them. This was the Lord's way of doing what Solomon did in Ecc. 3:17-20- showing that man and plants and animals are all possessed of the same God-given spirit / life. As Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7 make clear, the spirit / life is given by God to our bodies; it doesn't come from anywhere else. There is no reincarnation. And this is no painless Bible fact; it demands that we live lives that are *His*, and not lived out as if our spirit / life / soul is *ours*. The fact that God "holdeth our soul in life", a reference to Gen. 2:7, means that David wanted to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" (Ps. 66:8,9). This was the meaning of the basic facts of creation for David!



The man who built greater barns realized on the night of his death that all his laid up treasures could not be his after his death. And yet this is couched in the very language of Ecclesiastes. We can come to that attitude and understanding right now; and if we don't, we will come to it on our deathbeds or at judgment day. The parable of the pounds may be intended to describe our dealing with wealth. This is how it would have appeared to the Lord's first hearers.

12:21 *So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God-* Without in any way seeking to teach justification by works, it is also true that there are Bible passages which imply that there will be a reckoning up of a man's good works at the last day. The rich fool should have been "rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21); he should have hoarded up spiritual wealth and fruit against his last day rather than material things. Yet this of course will not have been consciously done; yet the judgment process will reveal the good works of the righteous to them and others.

"Rich towards" is a phrase only used elsewhere in Rom. 10:12, where Paul observes that the Lord is "rich towards" all believers. The fool had failed to perceive God's richness, or generosity, towards him; and so he was rich towards, or generous to, himself rather than God.

12:22 *And he said to his disciples: Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for life, what you shall eat. Nor yet for your body, what you shall put on-* This is all building up to the momentous challenge of :33 to sell what we have and give to the poor. The allusion is to how God provided food and clothing for Israel as they journeyed through the desert to the promised land.

The Lord' teaching is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk.

12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life. This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

12:23 *For the life is more than the food, and the body more than the clothing*- I noted on :15 that the Lord is teaching us to make a radical divorce between our life and our possessions. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the

present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

When the Lord taught that "the life is more than the food" which we worry about today (Lk. 12:23 RV), and "the body [which we shall receive] is more than the raiment", He surely means that our hope of eternal life, *the* life, the only real and ultimate life worth having, should eclipse our worries about today's problems of survival. Not worrying about food, drink and clothing, which God will provide, is likely an allusion to His provision for Israel during their wilderness journey to the promised land. And in this context the Lord encourage us: "Seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you... fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 12:31,32). If it is God's pleasure to give us the Kingdom, then surely He will give us all basic necessities until that time comes. Our certainty of being there thus greatly relieves us from earthly cares, compared to the person who has no such hope.

12:24 *Consider the ravens, how they do not sow nor reap. They have no store nor barn, but God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns are words repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at Mt. 6:25 and elsewhere that the Lord is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are

part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Things being "better than" or "of more value than" is quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

12:25 *And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to the measure of his life?*- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence. The same word for "add" occurs in Mt. 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them

rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

*12:26 If then you are not able to do even that which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?*- The least is to add age to our lives, even just a little bit. The Lord is arguing from the viewpoint that "life" is the most important thing we have. To add a fraction to its length is "the least"; and therefore concerns about what we do with that life is "the rest" which should not be worried about exactly because we cannot add length to our lives. This is an unusual but powerful argument against anxious worry. We cannot extend our lives; and therefore, given our inability, we shouldn't worry about "the rest" because we simply have no power to change it anyway. All we can do is to surrender our lives and existence into the hands of a loving Father and His Son.

*12:27 Consider the lilies*- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

*How they grow-* The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

*They do not toil, nor do they spin-* As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

*Yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these-*

It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer. This reference to Solomon is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. In this context He warns against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes- all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow... sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33)- clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was

consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was the Lord alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

12:28 *But if God does so clothe the grass in the field, which today is-* The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them. Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

*And tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more shall he clothe you-* The idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to

condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

*O you of little faith?*- The Lord tells the disciples that they are "of little faith" if they don't perceive and live by what He is teaching about God's care for the flowers. The 'faith' is surely faith in the simple fact that God lavishes His loving care upon us, just because, like a flower, we are here as His creation, in His eternal purpose. All flesh is as grass, and yet the Lord speaks as if God treats us as better than the grass "which is today in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Lk. 12:28).

The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

*12:29 And do not seek what you shall eat and what you shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind*- Clothes have been mentioned in :28. These are the three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them. God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and



varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

We are to firmly believe in His provision, without being in any sense "doubtful" about it. This lack of doubt will remove all materialism and concern about providing for our futures.

12:30 *For all these things the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knows you have need of these things-* God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to first century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. The difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

12:31 *Seek His kingdom-* Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :29,30. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Lord's prayer asked us to pray firstly for the things of His Kingdom; this reflects our priorities. I noted under Mt. 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's

message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

*And these things-* Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verses- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on Mt. 6:31.

*Shall be added to you-* The same word is used just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height.

12:32 *Fear not little flock. For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom-* See on 2 Cor. 8:9. The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn't indifferent. He wants us to be there. That's why He gave His Son to die. It's as simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son. The Lord Himself knew our basic tendency to disbelieve the certainty of our salvation when He comforted us here not to fear- and the implication is not to fear condemnation, not to fear exclusion from the Kingdom.

He spoke of us all as a little flock, fearing it is *not* the Father's pleasure / will to give us the Kingdom. In doing so, He was as ever drawing on the language of the OT. Joshua-Jesus encouraged Israel that Yahweh delighted / willed that they should enter the land (Num. 14:8); but instead, they were too caught up with doubts... doubt about salvation, about what they could eat and drink day by day, and the giants in the land. This is the very context in which the Lord was speaking- fearing "the nations of the world", doubting where food and clothes would come from,

just as Israel did (Lk. 12:22-29). Yet the pleasure / will of Yahweh is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross (Is. 53:10). Therefore we should not fear or worry about our lack of material things, because God is eager to give us His Kingdom. The certainty of salvation which we may have ought to mean that worry about all human things of this life becomes irrelevant.

*12:33 Sell that which you have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail-* The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (Lk. 14:33). Their claim to have left literally all and followed Him (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. To follow Him meant taking up a cross (Lk. 14:27).

He warns the crowd not to everlastingly worry about where the next meal was coming from; and then in that very context, tells *them* to sell what they have (Lk. 12:29-33). He wasn't just talking to the rich. He was telling the desperately poor to forsake what little they had, so as to seek His Kingdom. He probably didn't mean them to take His words dead literally (cp. cutting off the offending hand or foot); what He surely meant was: 'Resign, in your mind, the possession of everything you have, concern yourselves rather with the needs of others and entering my Kingdom'. No wonder those crowds turned round and soon bayed for His blood. See on Mt. 6:19.

The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

*Where no thief draws near nor moth destroys-* Or, "corrupt". James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it. Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our

spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. These words were spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

12:34 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also-* Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

12:35 *Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning-*  
Luke 12:35-39 speaks of the Master coming at night and then sharing the Passover meal with those who are "watching". Israel were told to 'watch' throughout that first Passover night (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), eating the meal with loins girded. Our Lord matches this with "let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning", referring to the virgins parable. Israel eating that meal together, huddled around the slain lamb, the oil burning lamps revealing their tense faces, is therefore a picture of what the new Israel should be like just prior to their deliverance.

12:36 *And be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks-* See on Lk. 17:31. How we respond to the Lord now is how we will respond at His return. Those who open to Him immediately will be saved. The wise virgins go immediately and are thereby accepted, whereas the foolish delay their response. The implication is surely that those who are ready to drop all and go when He knocks, will be saved. Our reaction in that split second of knowing 'He's back!' will determine our eternal destiny; it will effectively be our self-

judgment. And yet in this life too, the figure of the Lord knocking at our door is used to describe our response to Jesus in this life (Rev. 3:20). If there is no immediacy of response now, there will not be then.

The faithful watching for the Lord's return are here described as men waiting for their master to *return* from a wedding. But Christ's coming is also described as His coming *to* the wedding to marry the faithful. This difference may simply indicate that metaphor cannot be pressed too strictly or literally in the process of Biblical interpretation.

12:37 *Blessed are those servants, whom the master when he comes shall find awake*- Passover night was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), strongly suggesting "watching in prayer" (Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:27). Similarly those who are found "watching" at the Lord's midnight coming (cp. that of the Passover angel) will be found acceptable. The picture of Israel in their family units huddled together around the Lamb, desperately focusing their attention on that saving blood, watching and praying, examining themselves- this is us, right now. For there can be no serious doubt that the second coming is almost upon our generation.

Our attitude to the second coming decides whether we will be in the Kingdom. In this sense we are judging ourselves, right now; we are formulating the outcome of the judgment seat by our attitude now towards the second coming. The proof for this lies in a group of passages which suggest that everyone who truly loves the return of his Lord will be in the Kingdom. Of course, a true love of His coming is only possible if we hold correct doctrine, and if our faith and behaviour is mature enough to be able to look with quiet joy and confidence towards that day. Thus our Lord said that all those whom He finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast. And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with Him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord?

The foolish virgins knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance. At the second coming, the Lord knocked on their door, and they didn't answer immediately. They had decided their own fate by their dilatory response.

*Truly I say to you, that he shall dress himself for service and make them sit down to eat, and shall come and serve them*- The Lord's self-crucifixion spirit was seen not only in His life and then finally in His death and subsequent life; but who He was in His mortal life, He will *eternally* be. He is the same yesterday as today and as for ever. He will dress

Himself to serve us, as a servant, in His future Kingdom, reminiscent of how at the last supper and on the cross He in principle did the same (Phil. 2:7). Thus the spirit of the cross must be a way of life, and this feature of our characters will be seen in the Kingdom too.

The Lord's exalted view of the disciples is reflected in how He washed their feet. To wash the feet of guests was more menial than we might imagine. It was normal to provide water for the guest to wash his own feet. The Midrash *Mekhilta* on Ex. 21:2 taught that a Jewish slave should never be required to wash his Master's feet. But as a sign of extreme devotion and respect, some disciples of the most respected rabbis would wash their feet. Yet the Lord Jesus, having reminded them that He was indeed their Lord and Master, does this to them. And according to Lk. 12:37, He will do this again to us in His Kingdom, in that He will then tie a cloth around Him and come forth and serve us. It would seem the Lord was referring back to this prophecy when He tied a cloth around Him and washed the disciples' feet. This was how highly He thought of them; and that incident was an enacted prophecy of the attitude He will have to *us*, whom the 12 symbolize, even in the glory of His Kingdom. He surely totally redefined the nature of Lordship and respect.

The Master is so delighted that his servants are watching for Him that He immediately sits down and gets a meal ready for them, doing the serving Himself. There is an arresting element of unreality here. Would a Master really do this, at such an unlikely time at night, would he really serve himself, and would he really be so glad that the servants were waiting up for him? But these elements of unreality serve to teach the lessons: that the Lord will have unspeakable joy at His return because of our expectancy of the second coming, and He will surprise us by His glee and enthusiasm for us. See on 2 Tim. 4:8.

The master makes the servants "recline at table"; they are made to feel like the Master, by the Master Himself! This is what it means to be "in Christ". There's a kind of out of scale inappropriacy about the idea that if the Master comes and finds the servants awake, then He will gird Himself and serve them. Of course they ought to be awake! But it's as if He is so especially impressed by this fact. And we who live awaiting His return need to take note. And the idea of the master serving is of course the idea behind the description of the cross in Phil. 2:6,7. We should have the same awkward sense of wonder at the cross as we have when we recline at the breaking of bread. This implies that those who serve the emblems are in fact manifesting the Lord Jesus, and are actually of far greater significance than the president or the speaker. See on Lk. 13:7.

Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the

Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, he will "make us" sit down at a table, and he will come and serve us, knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom*" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. See on Lk. 18:17.

The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is wrong to think that the Lord was only humble in His ministry, but will return with almost bitter indignation. This is not so. He girded Himself and served His men in the days of His flesh (Jn. 13:4); and He will do *exactly* the same again, in the glory of His Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). That same essential humility of God and Jesus will be with Him; He won't have changed. It is His fundamental, eternal characteristic. The fear of God lest Israel would not attain the promised land ("lest peradventure...", Ex. 13:17) shows His humility, in being so concerned for the salvation of petty man; and that characteristic likewise will be His, right up to and through and beyond the day of judgment.

The Lord who will judge us knows us each individually. The question arises, 'Why would *all* the servants stay awake in order to open the door (Lk. 12:37)? Why not just the night watchman? The answer is that there is a totally unique and special personal relationship between this Master and *all* His servants.

*12:38 And if he shall come in the second watch and if in the third and find them waiting, so blessed are they-* We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the Truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). Yet Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience.

12:39 *But know this-* Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

*That if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming-* The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (Mt. 26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In Mt. 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

*He would have stayed awake-* The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations.

*And not have left his house to be broken into-* This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it is our family. The connection is to Mt. 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

12:40 *You also- be ready-* The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt.



24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in Mt. 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

*For in the hour you do not expect- the Son of Man comes-* The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near. "The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be... ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

12:41 *And Peter said: Lord, are you telling this parable aimed at us, or to everyone?-* See on Mk. 13:34; Lk. 13:1. Peter perceived that the parable was aimed at those who had responsibility for the Lord's house / family. He wondered whether it could really be so that he and those immature

disciples were really being spoken to as the elders of the new Israel; and he wondered whether actually the Lord meant that we are all elders. The Lord rarely answers questions directly, but lifts them to a higher level. And He does so here. He urges us each to take responsibility, and to grasp the urgency of living as if He will return any moment- knowing that this will mean giving an account for our responsibilities toward others.

12:42 *And the Lord said: Who then is the faithful and wise steward-* See on :41 and 1 Tim. 3:15. One aspect of spirituality leads to another. Thus the Lord commends the one who is watching for His coming, and then speaks of how those who are to be accepted at His coming are those busy preparing spiritual food for their brethren (Lk. 12:39,42). The implication is that he who is watching, truly watching, for the return will be busy about the brotherhood's needs; and in caring for them is our own personal preparedness. "Let patience have her perfect work... let brotherly love continue" sounds as if we must allow the process of righteousness inspired by spiritual acts of love and patience. We can obstruct that process (James 1:4; Heb. 13:1).

The Lord is replying to Peter's question as to whether we the hearers and readers are to assume that it is our responsibility to feed others in the household. The answer seems to be that yes it is, because this is what is naturally elicited by watching and being alert for the Lord's return.

Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of Mt. 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise

behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" (Mt. 25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

*Whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season?*- The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (Mt. 24:49), or feeding and caring for them (Mt. 24:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (Mt. 8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

12:43 *Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing*- 'Watching' is a major theme here in the context; but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing.

Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

In "Shall find" we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

12:44 *Of a truth I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has-* We each individually have this promise of being made ruler over *all* that Jesus has. The "all things" refers to the believers; a concordance study of these two words gives fair testimony to this. The ecclesia *is* the body of Christ, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Let us pause to exult in this fact; that Jesus *exists* for no one else except the believers. Each of us is promised by Him that He will make us ruler over "all that he hath", i.e. all the saints. We will each rule over each other because we will each be so closely identified with the Lord Jesus; yet in another sense there will be a hierarchy of spiritual glory in the Kingdom.

If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this. The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When the Lord comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

12:45 *But if that servant-* The parable of Mt. 25:26,30 likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of

this "servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant... the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

*Shall say in his heart-* The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

*My lord delays his coming-* There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehaviour is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of Matthew 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think

we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. The Lord's words here suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder"- recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn. 14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... until you are left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: you shall weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer you". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments-

those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

*And shall begin-* The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

*To beat the menservants and the maidservants-* Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter-day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in Mt. 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

*And to eat and drink and to be drunk-* His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord spoke of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life.

The man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. He is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep

his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter-day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish. This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others, whilst himself being guilty of the same things. He is transferring his guilt onto others, and punishing them with the punishment he subconsciously knows he deserves. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

12:46 *The master of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect, and at an hour he does not know*- The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When you shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is near... you *know* that Summer is near... *when* you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is near... when you therefore shall see (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when you see (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

This word *ginosko* is used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (Mt. 24:39). We are to "know" the time (Mt. 24:33 "know that it is near", "know this" Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time



in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

*And shall cut him into pieces-* Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

*And put him with the unbelievers-* The Lord will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers, his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left-hand side. They represent "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

12:47 *And that servant, who knew his master's will and did not prepare or did not do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes-* Beating with stripes was a synagogue punishment. The Lord is developing the idea that He a new Israel is coming into being. "Prepare" is the same word used of John seeking to prepare the way for Messiah's coming in terms of getting people morally prepared (s.w. 1:76; 3:4). Those who had heard John's message, been baptized and potentially prepared for the Lord's coming... would be beaten much if they refused to respond further and instead rejected the Lord, as many of John's apparent converts did. "Prepared" is the same word just used in :20 of the rich fool 'preparing'

for his wealth. The rich fool is therefore the servant who knew his master's will, but prepared for himself rather than for his Lord. Our efforts to 'prepare' for eternity are in step with the Lord's work through the Spirit to 'prepare' our places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3; Heb. 11:16 s.w.). We pray "Your will be done" (Lk. 11:2 s.w.) as a way of saying that we want the will of God, which is that we shall inherit our prepared place in eternity, to become our will; His preparation works therefore in tandem with our own. It is therefore a desire to 'do' the master's will which is a lead characteristic of those who shall be finally saved (Jn. 7:17).

*12:48 But he that did not know and did things worthy of stripes, he shall be beaten with few stripes-* We have here a clear statement of the principle that knowledge makes us responsible to judgment, being 'asked the more' at that day if we have been 'given much'.

"A fool's mouth is [will be] his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [i.e. condemnation at the judgment, Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6). By our words we may be *shouting out for condemnation*.

We all commit sin worthy of "stripes". The word is only found elsewhere in the gospels in 10:30, of the wounding of the man saved by the Samaritan. And that man is each of us.

*And to whom much is given, of him shall much be required-* The judgment will 'require' of us a life lived in accordance with the knowledge of the Lord's will which we have been given. This is helpful to bear in mind when considering whether those who know less than we do are in fellowship with the Lord. Many of them are- it's just that we have been given more knowledge, and more shall be required of us. The same word is used of how the Father seeks or requires fruit from His trees (13:6); the more effort He has made with them, the more fruit is required. And that seeking of response from us is ongoing now in the Lord's relationship with us; He in this sense searches for us until He finds us (15:6; 19:10; Jn. 4:23 s.w.).

*And to whom people commit much, of him will they ask the more-* Speaking of the principle of responsibility upon which our judgment will be conducted, the Lord hints at Angelic involvement in the judgment: "to whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48 AV). See on Lk. 6:38. We who are literate, living in an age of mass ease and technology, we who have the benefit of hindsight in looking back upon the development of God's purpose with this earth... have had much committed to us. And much is therefore required.

*12:49 I came to cast fire upon the earth, yet it is already kindled!-* The Lord wished that the fire He came to kindle had already been kindled. This may be an allusion to a common Latin saying at the time: *Nemo accendit nisi ipse ardet*, 'No one can kindle another unless he himself

burns'. In this case Jesus is likening Himself to a fire which ignites others; and yet He so wished that someone else had earlier come and been Messiah. Some of the Messianic passages describe Him being amazed that there had been no man, and He Himself therefore dressed for action and did the Messianic duty. It is an essay in His humility that He should have held such a view. It also reflects how there had been previous opportunities for Messiah to come.

The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now. The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is* hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4).

The disciples had wanted to bring fire down as Elijah had done, to consume their opponents. The Lord replied that His spirit is different; they didn't know His Spirit, without which, Paul says, "we are none of his". And yet still He patiently bore with them. However, He also says that He has come to send fire on the earth at the last day- an evident reference to Elijah. We could read the Lord's treatment of the disciples' request as saying 'The time to act like Elijah will come- but it's not now'. Likewise His comment that He came to bring division rather than peace. Elijah was renowned as the prophet who would turn the fathers to the children and bring peace in the land (Mal. 4:6; Eccles. 48:10). The Lord may be saying: 'You think, like some of the Jews, that I am a re-incarnation of John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet. I'm not. I'm the Messiah Himself. My spirit is different'. In that very context, the Lord stressed that He had a baptism to undergo, rather than to dispense to others as had John (Lk. 12:50). Perhaps the immaturity of the disciples was so great that they, former disciples of John, somehow believed that Jesus had turned into a re-incarnation of John. In this case, they would have been caught up in the surrounding world's view of Jesus- for there was much speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist *redivivus*. The way John in his gospel labours the point that John the Baptist "was not that light", i.e. Messiah (Jn. 1:8), perhaps is John's recognition that finally, they got it right. You can imagine him preaching in those early days: 'After John's death we thought at times that Jesus was some sort of reincarnation of John. But Peter got it right, and now, I'm just making it clear also what the truth was. He wasn't John the Baptist *redivivus* as so many thought. We were caught up a bit in that thinking; but we were wrong'.

The Lord Jesus spoke of how "I am come to send fire on earth [after the pattern of Elisha against apostate Israel]... I am come to give... division". He parallels the fire of condemnation with division. And yet He says that this figurative fire is "already kindled". If we are divided willingly, of our creation, then we stand self-condemned. This is how serious this matter is. I fear, really fear, that in the day of final account it may be that a brother or sister has lived separately from the world, believed all the right things, and yet his or her divisiveness means that they are condemned together with the immoral and the worldly.

The idea of fire from Heaven in Lk. 12:49-54 is associated by the Lord with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, the Lord Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. He sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be received up, and he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

*12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and great is my distress until it be accomplished!*- These words almost seem to be the Lord speaking to Himself. The immediate context is of judgment to come, and the divisive effect the Lord's work will have upon relationships. But *His* focus was upon His upcoming death for the salvation of His people. This was what He sought above all to 'accomplish'.

The cross was to the Lord a baptism He was being baptized with, it was not only accomplished in His physical death; the process was ongoing. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). The Lord's fear of death was, it seems to me, to a far greater extent than what even we experience- doubtless because He knew all that was tied up with *His* death and how much depended upon it. Hence His "distress" He spoke of how "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). See on Heb. 5:7.

*12:51 Do you think that I came to give peace in the earth? I tell you no,*

*but rather division*- Peace on earth was a feature of the messianic Kingdom. The Lord is emphasizing that His Kingdom had not yet come. Until then, there would be division between the kingdom people and the others. To be unwillingly caught up in a divided house / family is not, therefore, a sin or a sign of our personal condemnation. There must be schisms amongst us, that they might make manifest who the faithful are, by their attitude to them.

The Lord surely has in mind what He had commanded in Mt. 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted.

"Peace on the earth" is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to *take* peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

12:52 *For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three*- Salvation, as Robert Roberts so frequently said, is an individual matter. It is not a collective affair. Compare two passages within the Lord's teaching, which each use the same Greek words: "I am come to give... division. From henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three [i.e. sometimes they would be 2:3 and other times 3:2- there would be a series of disagreements over various issues]... a house divided against a house falls" (Lk. 12:52,52 cp. Lk. 11:17). What are we to make of this? Every divided house or Kingdom will "fall", i.e. be condemned at judgment day (s.w. Mt. 7:27; Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). And yet Jesus inevitably divides 'houses'. Surely the Lord is teaching that every Kingdom and family will fall, because it will be divided, and therefore the only hope of salvation is purely individual. This was radical thinking in first century Palestine, where the destiny of the extended family was held to be uniform; i.e., you would end up in the last day wherever your extended family did. But the Lord is cutting through all this, and teaching that salvation is a personal matter. No single extended family will, as a unit, avoid being divided by the result of the judgment. The Lord's teaching surely has some relevance to some Christian cultures

which can likewise give the impression that large, well established Christian families will almost automatically all be saved.

*12:53 They shall be divided, father against son and son against father-* Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

*Mother against daughter and daughter against her mother. Mother in law against her daughter in law and daughter in law against her mother in law-* Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new Kingdom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

*12:54 And he said to the crowds: Also, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, Here comes a shower- and so it comes to pass-* Showers are figures for the Messianic blessings. They were to perceive that His coming was imminent. This is all in the context, before and after, of forgiving our brother and living at peace. A joint focus on living as if the Lord's coming is imminent, reading life's signs to mean that we are living on the brink of His coming... this will enhance our relationship with our brother. For who, on their way to judgment day, is going to get into argument with his brother (:58).

*12:55 And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, There will be a scorching heat- and it comes to pass-* As noted on :54, they were to interpret life as meaning that the Lord's return was imminent- and live with their brother accordingly (:58). The "scorching heat" is the language of condemnation. As they could discern that such heat was coming in the weather, so they ought to be able to have a sense of the reality of the two destinies before them: condemnation, or the showers of Messianic blessing (:54). And awareness of these things would affect how they lived with their brother and remove all divisions- which is the context.

*12:56 You hypocrites-* Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive the fact

that there were definite outcomes to their lives, either showers of eternal blessing, or the scorching heat of condemnation. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

*You know how to interpret the signs of the earth and the sky, but how is it you do not know how to interpret this time?*- The "time" can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the reality of Christ, knowing that we stand before either eternal life or eternal death, very soon.

12:57 *And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*- We are to have an abiding sense of the imminent coming of the Lord, and the two possible outcomes it brings for us (showers of eternal blessing, or scorching heat of condemnation). If we have this perception, then we will judge rightly "for" or "among" ourselves. There will be no division amongst us (:51), only urgent forgiveness (:58)- which is the only 'right judgment' we can make.

The Lord warned the Jews that they were not discerning the signs of their times as they ought to- i.e. they were not paying heed to the imminence of the day of the Lord which was to come in AD70, and neither were they perceiving that Israel's king was in fact amongst them. He went straight on to tell them a parable about the need to agree with our brother, because they were on their way to judgment. He links these two themes, of their not discerning the signs of the times and their disagreement with their brother, with the question as to why they cannot judge rightly. He seems to be saying that their discernment of the reality of His coming in judgment was to be connected with their discernment of the need for love and forgiveness of their brother. The same basic link is found in Heb. 10:25, where we are exhorted to meet together and encourage one another "and so much the more, as you see the day approaching". See on Mt. 5:25.

12:58 *For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be rid of him. Lest he drag you to the judge and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall throw you*

*into prison*- See on :57 and Lk. 6:47. There is an urgency here- related to the fact that very soon, relatively speaking, we shall stand before judgment day and face either eternal showers of blessing, or the eternal death symbolized by the "scorching heat".

The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary; and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren. This would suggest that the Lord foresaw that getting along with our brethren would be a major part in the development process of His people; and as they draw closer to the day of meeting with Him, the more urgent is the need to settle their disputes, as He will be unsympathetic towards them. The Lord prefaces this parable by appealing for His people to 'judge righteously' because His judgment is about to come (Lk. 12:57 Gk.). By forgiving our brother and reconciling with him, we are judging righteously; we are in essence deciding our own judgment which is to be revealed at the Lord's return- see on Mt. 13:47.

The Lord taught that our focus upon Him and His return should affect how we feel about others, even our enemies. Lk. 12:54-59 continues a theme of living appropriately to a belief that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord pictures us as walking to meet our judge, along with our adversary. And His parable assumes that we will automatically be found in the wrong, the case will go against us; and so therefore we better make peace with our adversary and drop the case. We are walking towards the day of judgment, our meeting with our Judge. The bottom line is that we should not be walking to judgment day carrying with us a case against our brother. Drop it, whatever it is. At least, in our hearts. It's simply impossible to live at peace with all- Paul spoke from much personal experience of living at peace with others inasmuch as it depends upon *us*: "If it be possible, as much as depends upon you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Again, this doesn't mean that abuse shouldn't be challenged and exposed. It should be. But we as sinners shouldn't be walking to judgment day carrying with us the weight of a case against our brother.

12:59 *I say to you, you shall never get out, until you have paid the very last coin*- This could mean that the only reconciliation is in death, the last coin we have being our own life itself. This is the price for refusing to forgive and be reconciled. Whilst the Catholic idea of purgatory is incorrect, it could also be that judgment will be for our education; for it is for our benefit, not the Lord's, who already knows all things. And we can imagine those who have been unforgiving in this life learning the error of their ways, experiencing the dread prospect of condemnation before them, and then 'getting out' by grace. To live eternity in humbled



awareness of grace, and how they ought to have been more forgiving in this brief life.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices-* We see here Pilate's apparently total lack of conscience, which fits with the picture we get of him from other historical sources. Yet the Gospels present him as a man of finely tuned conscience who wriggled terribly and felt awful about allowing the Lord's death. There is no contradiction. He was as history states; but encounter with the Lord in His time of dying is enough to soften the conscience of even a Pilate. We should never think that anyone is too far gone, or is utterly insensitive to our message of a crucified Jesus.

13:2 *And he answered and said to them: Do you think that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?-* The Lord assumes here that all Galileans are sinners, but those Galileans might be supposed to be worse sinners. And yet the Lord was perceived and self-identified as a "Galilean". We have here an example of how the Lord identified with sinners and was within the 'sinner' category, without being a personal sinner.

13:3 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all in like manner perish-* He answers that *all* humanity are under danger of eternal judgment and they needed to start worrying about themselves rather than worrying about God's justice [or otherwise] with those Galileans. And the Lord follows this up with the parable of the unfruitful tree which by rights should be cut down, but He was urgently pleading for more time in order that it might bring forth fruit. In other words, the Lord's audience were to realize the intense urgency of *their* position rather than worrying about the justice of others' judgment. Their personal situation was so urgent, they really were to worry about bringing forth fruit, rather than being side-tracked by the issues connected with the suffering and possible judgment of *others*. It's not that these matters don't have importance; it was simply that those asking those questions of Jesus were in such a personally urgent position that they just had to get that right. And this seems to me most relevant to those who will not get personally themselves right with God because of their complaint about His justice with others. And Luke's record develops the theme yet further. In Lk. 13:23 we read of Him being asked the perennial question- why will only few be saved? His answer is simply to speak of the utter horror of personal rejection by the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment- knocking on the door, thinking this is your old friend's house, to be told "I never knew you". The idea is clearly to worry about the future which we may personally miss rather than debating the unsearchable issues of why, apparently, few will be saved. Same again with Peter's question as to whether the Lord's predictions of condemnation refer to the disciples or to the unbelieving world (Lk. 12:41)- the Lord's response was simply to speak about the need to personally be always prepared for the Lord's

coming. And so it is with us- don't worry about who may be condemned, worry about your own personal readiness and how you will respond in that split-second moment when we know for sure 'He's back!'.

"In like manner" may have had a literal element to it; for Josephus records how in AD70 the blood of the slain ran together with the blood of the sacrifices.

13:4 *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do you think that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem?*- Urgent response in view of coming judgment is a repeated theme in the teaching of Jesus. His servants are to wait in hourly anticipation of His return (Mk. 13:34-36; Lk. 12:36-38); the day of reckoning is even now at hand, all our guilt will be uncovered, and we should act now before it is too late (Lk. 16:1-8). We are as a guilty man about to be hauled to court, whose only way out is to make peace with his offended brother (Mt. 5:25,26). Unless we repent, a great tower is about to fall upon us. Jesus saw Divine judgment as something imminent, something which is essentially happening now, and therefore day by day we need to live accordingly. He insisted that any supposition that life will simply carry on as it is... was a fatal delusion. He piercingly dismantles our natural human assumption that life can be broadly maintained as it is or simply adapted a little. There is an urgent need to *change* and to keep on being *transformed* in the new life in Him. So the urgency of response is because the Lord is coming back soon, but also because He is right now our constant and insistent judge. Our generation particularly ought to have a sense of urgency. For I will go on record as saying that I do truly believe the Lord may very well come in our time. He is near, even at the doors. Written in our lives, as a neon sign in the black of our human lives, should be the simple reality: *Jesus Is Coming*.

13:5 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish*- In AD70, many were killed by falling masonry. But this is likely not the Lord's idea, for given the short lifespans of the time, those He was then speaking too largely died in their beds rather than in the calamities of AD70, some 37 years later. His point was that the common death of all men is no more nor less significant than the dramatic deaths of people in tragedies.

13:6 *And he spoke this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit thereon and found none*- The element of unreality is that there was a fig tree amongst vines. It has been observed that this was never done, because the fig would take up too much of the ground water, the shade of the fig tree would stop anything else growing, and the fig would attract birds which would eat the grapes from the vines. But Israel were God's special enthusiasm and He did this. The idea is perhaps that this tree was the special project of the man. In Matthew 21, the Lord uses the unfruitful *fig* tree as a springboard

for telling the parable of the vineyard. Israel were God's special concern and focus. His passion for them led to Him breaking His own principle, of not planting different seeds together (Lev. 19:19; Dt. 21:9 "do not sow a field of yours with two different kinds of seeds"). Likewise, the Father likens Himself in the prophets to a man who has divorced His wife (Israel) and yet still wants her to come back to Him, even though that was an abomination to Him. Or the Lord telling the one talent man that he ought to have lent out the money for interest, when this was forbidden by the Law.

Or it could be that the Lord is using the fig tree as it was used in Judaism- a metaphor for the religious leaders, in whose shadow their students sat. We would have soon ran out of patience with them; but the Lord's strong desire was that even they should be saved. And some of them did repent and accept baptism after the Lord's resurrection. He set us an example of hoping against hope for response even from the most unlikely; and it paid off.

13:7 *And he said to the vinedresser-* Again the unreality is emphasized; a *vinedresser* is asked to pay special attention to a solitary *fig* tree. See on :6.

*Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?-* The allusion is to the Mosaic principle that such fruit was only clean after three years. After the three years of His ministry, during the Lord's final six months, God suggested to Him that the nation of Israel be cut down (this is but one example of the private intercourses between Father and Son). The Lord knew when He must die soon; He had already steadfastly set His face to go to die at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). It seems to me that He knew He would be killed by the Jews in a few months' time. But He asks the Father to spare Israel for at least another year- as if to show that He knew they wouldn't accept Him even after His death, but He's saying to God: 'Give them a chance even after they kill me'. Those who think further along the lines suggested by the parable will see that in reality, Israel were not cut down by God for another 37 years. The implication is that this was due to Christ's pleading with God during those years for patience to be shown to the nation who rejected and crucified Him. The element of unreality in the story reflects the grace of Jesus- for it was unthinkable for a servant to argue back with his master, asking not to do what he had been ordered to do.

13:8 *And he answering said to him: Master, leave it alone this year also, I shall dig about it and fertilize it-* We have here another element of unreality, in that fig trees needed little attention compared to vines. But there was a huge effort made to get fruit from this fig tree, as if it were an almost idiosyncratic obsession of the owner. This speaks of the deep, passionate level of concern that there should be fruit.

The relationship between servants and master in the parables is also at times somewhat unreal. It's hard for us to imagine how slaves belonged to their masters and had to do their will and not their own. Yet in the parable of Lk. 13:7,8, the servant is commanded by his master to cut down the fig tree. Not only does the servant take a lot of initiative in saying that no, he will dig around it and try desperately to get it to give fruit; but, he says, if even that fails, then *you*, the Master, will have to cut it down... when he, the servant, had been ordered to do it by his master! This servant [the Lord Jesus] obviously has a most unusual relationship with the Master. He suggests things on his own initiative, and even passes the job of cutting off Israel back to God, as if He would rather not do it. And it's in a way the same with us. See on Lk. 12:37; 14:22.

The Lord of His own volition asked the Father not to destroy Israel at the time He planned, but to give them longer to repent. This was exactly the spirit of Moses' pleas for Israel. But this is not the same as 'relaying' the words of human prayers to God. This is undoubtedly how many of us conceive of Christ's intercessory role for us; but is this actually what Scripture teaches? Many of the relevant Scriptures which speak of Christ's activity for us before the Lord God are not in this context; they suggest that He of His own will prays to the Father on our behalf concerning things which are on His agenda for us, not ours. If we confess Christ before men, i.e. reveal Him to them, He will confess us, reveal us favourably, in the court of Heaven, before the Father and the Angels (Lk. 12:8).

This parable could suggest that the Lord's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

So often, the parables [as well as the Lord's teaching generally] appear to be Him almost talking to Himself. The Lord spoke of how it was His Father's plan to cut down the Jewish fig tree; but He asked His Father if it could remain for another year, until He had dug around it and spread dung by it (Lk. 13:8)- and *then* it could be destroyed, if there was still no fruit. The Lord Jesus was thinking here of His crucifixion- for this was the reason for the final cutting down of the Jewish fig tree. To dig was the work of a slave- recall how the disgraced steward felt ashamed to dig (Lk. 16:3). And to spread dung was the work of the very lowest slave. And yet this was how the Lord foresaw His death- becoming as the lowest slave. Yet His hope in doing this was that Israel would bear spiritual fruit. This, then, is to be the motivational effect upon us of meditating upon the Lord's ultimate servanthood in His death- spiritual fruit in *our* lives just *has* to be elicited by it, lest we too will be cut down.

He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, '*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father. The Lord was prepared to dig around the tree- and digging was the lowest, most shameful occupation (Lk. 16:3). Further, He would shovel dung, making Him unclean and despised of men. He so wanted fruit on Israel. This describes the intense effort of the Lord Jesus during the last six months of His ministry. His attitude was summarized when shortly before He died, He came hungry to a fig tree, expecting to find just the immature beginnings of fruit there, which He would gladly have eaten. But that particular tree had nothing on it. His deep hunger and willingness to eat anything reflected His willingness to find some spirituality from Israel. But He "found none", just as there was "not found" any of those Jews He healed who would glorify God (Lk. 17:18 s.w. Lk. 13:6). This longsuffering, patient, passionate desire for spiritual fruit in the Lord Jesus is presented as being even stronger than it was in His Father. No wonder John the Baptist misunderstood the extent of Christ's grace- he proclaimed that Jesus already had the axe aimed at the bottom of the trees (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), and was about to fell them. The situation truly demanded this- but actually the Lord Jesus waited three years for fruit, and when it didn't come, even then He pleaded with the Father not to fell the tree but let Him dig and dung it... We must factor all this into our understanding of Mt. 7:19, where the Lord apparently in a bland, matter-of-fact manner teaches that the tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be hewn down and burnt. This burning is ultimately at the judgment day; but all our lives He is earnestly seeking to develop spiritual fruit upon us; as in the parable of the sower, only those who produce totally nothing will be rejected. Of course our fruit must be the fruit that abides- the changes in personality which are permanent, the converts who remain, the forgiveness which is maintained on a felt level, the generosity never later regretted... But if there's even something of this, then it seems this is what the Lord is so eagerly seeking. Earlier, Israel were the vine and the

Lord Jesus the vinedresser (Lk. 13:7). But now we are the vine, and God Himself the vinedresser (Jn. 15:1). We are in good hands; and the Father and Son who through Biblical history showed themselves so sensitive to spiritual fruit are the very same ones who will meet us in the last day.

13:9 In the parable of Lk. 13:8,9, the Lord portrays Himself as even reasoning with God, who had decreed the Jewish tree be cut down in the third year of His ministry. He as it were persuades God to allow His efforts to continue for another six months, in desperate hope against hope that there would be some fruit of repentance. We, to a man and to a woman, would have given up on Israel, and would have somehow been gratified that the Father wanted to treat them like this. I would have turned to the Gentiles a long time before the Lord and Paul did.

13:9 *Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you shall cut it down-* Here we have another insight into the open-ended nature of God's purpose. His intention was to bring an end to the fig tree, either Israel or the Jewish leadership represented by the fig tree; but His Son argued for more time, and He agreed. The amazing extent and power of the Lord Jesus is further brought out in the story of the worker in the vineyard who can almost direct His boss- the Father- not to cut down the barren fig tree of Israel until it has more chance to bear spiritual fruit- "if not, *you* shall cut it down". Speaking to crowds of day labourers and farm workers, this would have struck them as strange- that this worker had such power over his boss. See on Lk. 11:21.

13:10 *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day-* This "teaching" would have been in the period when comments were invited; He was not a synagogue rabbi with His own local congregation. His continued teaching effort is an exemplification of His continuing work with the fig tree (:8).

13:11 *And a woman was there who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years; she was bent over and could in no way straighten herself-* Bullinger has some interesting comments upon the woman with an unclean "spirit of infirmity" (Lk. 13:11) that resulted in her being unable to lift herself up straight. "The negative is *me*, not *ou*; and is therefore subjective. She *felt as if* she could not do so... it appears, therefore, to have been a *nervous disorder*; and had to do with her *pneuma*" or mind. And yet she is described as having been 'bound by Satan'. The 'Satan' or adversary to her standing upright was her own mindset. And it was this spirit or mindset "of infirmity" from which the Lord released her. Here we clearly see the connection between 'spirits' and mental disorder or dysfunction; for 'spirit' in Scripture so often refers to the psychological mindset of a person.

The description of the woman has several links with the time of the Judges; there were two periods of 18 year domination (Jud. 3:14; 10:18), and they were likewise stooping in affliction and unable to stand up in

their own strength because of the power of their oppressors. She was a "daughter of Abraham" (:16), representative of Israel. All the judges / saviours of Israel pointed forward to the Lord as Israel's 'Jesus', Yah's salvation.

*13:12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her: Woman, you are free from your infirmity-* "Free" is literally 'let loose', and is also used of forgiveness. So often, the Lord's healings were acted parables of freedom from sin. She was 'freed' before the Lord laid His hands upon her. The two stages in the healing were perhaps to give her a chance to respond to His calling of her and then to believe in His promise of freedom / release. When she responded positively, then the potential was unleashed by His touch (:13). The same process is seen in His work with people today.

*13:13 And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God-* Again we note the Lord's usage of physical touch. This touch was technically unnecessary; in that He had just stated that she was freed from her weakness by His word alone (:12). But He wished to demonstrate His total identity with human weakness, which is one reason why He was baptized. This healing happened as the Lord was teaching in the synagogue (:10), so presumably He called the woman out of the audience to be cured. He presented the healing as an acted parable of the power of His word in human life.

*13:14 And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, answered and said to the crowd-* This anger was at the same time as the woman glorified God, presumably in words of genuine praise (:13). The Lord had healed the woman during the synagogue service as He was teaching, in order to demonstrate and exemplify the real power of His word. The synagogue ruler had never been able to do anything like it. The anger was therefore rooted in jealousy. The words and teaching of that man were nothing like those of the Lord. And so jealousy led him to latch on to the Lord's technical infringement of rabbinic law.

*There are six days in which men ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day-* The Sabbath was a day of "rest". The Hebrew word for "rest" means not only a cessation of labour, but literally a sending away, a departing; and it is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word used in :12 for how the woman had been set free, sent away, released from her burdens (:15). The Lord had in fact fulfilled the spirit of the Sabbath by this healing. The synagogue ruler either capitulated to the glorious Spirit being revealed in all this; or turned away into the anger and bitterness of legalism. And religious people today face the same choice when they encounter the gracious action of the Lord.



13:15 *But the Lord answered them and said: You hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath release his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away for watering?*- The Lord described His healing of her as losing her from a bond in order to lead her away to the water of life- this is the very cameo of all the redeemed in Rev. 7:17. "Release" is similar in meaning to the Hebrew word for "rest". The Lord had not only released or 'sabbathed' this woman, but was leading her away to the water of the Spirit filled life.

13:16 *And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond on the Sabbath day?*- As noted above, the Hebrew idea of 'Sabbath' was of release and freedom. It was appropriate for her to be healed on the Sabbath of all days.

The woman "had" a spirit which was associated with her being bent over (Lk. 13:11). She was not attacked by a "spirit" from outside of her, but she "had" this spirit within her. "Spirit" is commonly to be understood in Biblical usage as an attitude of mind. She had an attitude of mind which disabled her. And this spirit came from an adversary, a satan. And that adversary is explained in the context- the "adversaries" were the Jewish system who had so crippled the woman (:17). There is no explicit statement that "Satan", the adversary, controlled the "spirit". That has to be assumed by those who wish to see that idea, but the text itself doesn't support it. The Lord is not recorded as doing spiritual battle with Satan or any evil spirit; He simply said "Woman, you are free from your infirmity". He dealt directly with the issue of her illness. And it was "*your* infirmity", just as the woman "had" a disabling spirit. The source of her illness was within her, internal to her rather than having been imposed by some external, cosmic entity.

I have [elsewhere](#) outlined the connection between "Satan" and the Jewish opposition to Jesus; for they were the main adversary / satan to His work and that of the early church. The connection is made explicit in this passage- the Jews are called Christ's "adversaries" (:17), as if explaining who the 'satan' was who had 'bound' the woman. The woman's binding by Satan is connected with the fact she was "a daughter of Abraham", a Jewess. Why make this otherwise throwaway comment, that she was a Jewess? For we are led by the context to assume that obviously she was Jewish. The point surely is that the Jewish system had 'bound' this woman. I suggested [elsewhere](#) that many of the diseases the Lord cured had a psychological basis to them; His healing of minds was reflected in the healing of bodies from conditions which had been brought about psychologically. Just as He "loosed" the woman from her illness, so He "loosed" sinners from the burden of their sin [the same word is used in Mt. 18:27 in this connection, and is twice translated "to forgive" in Lk. 6:37]. It may've been that it was her sense of unforgiven sin which was the actual psychosomatic cause of her strange physical condition. The woman's physical condition- being chronically bowed down- may well have been her body reflecting how her mind felt, bowed down by the heavy burdens the Jewish

leaders placed upon her. And of course the Lord uses that very figure in describing the weight placed upon Jewish people by the teachers of Judaism (Mt. 23:4- "They bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders; but they will not move them with their finger"). The context of the miracle is that the Jews loosed their tied up animals on the Sabbath, and Jesus reasoned that He likewise could loose His sheep who had been bound or tied up by Satan. But who tied up the animals whom the Jewish leadership loosed? They themselves bound / tied them and loosed them. Jesus says that He looses / unties those whom Satan has tied up. He thus draws a parallel between the Jewish leadership and Satan, the adversary to His work. The unloosing was performed on the Sabbath- the very day whose Mosaic regulations the Jews had abused to burden people. Significantly, Jn. 5:18 uses the same word translated "loose" to describe how Jesus was accused of 'breaking' or 'unloosing' the Sabbath. He did not come to destroy the Law of Moses itself during His lifetime, but to teach Israel that the Jewish additional laws were to be unloosed. The same Greek word is used in other contexts of how Jesus through His death unloosed ['took down'] the wall of partition which excluded Gentiles (Eph. 2:10).

Without doubt there is a word play going on: "And ought [*dei* - must] not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound [*deo* - a form of *dei*, literally, 'must-ed'] for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond [*deis-mon*, another form of *dei*, this 'must-ing'] on the Sabbath day?". Who was it who had taught the woman 'You must this, that and the other; you must not this or that'? Was it Satan in the sense of a personal, cosmic being? Was it surely not the Jewish system who were 'must-ing' people? They, therefore, were the adversary in this context.

13:17 *And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him-* "Adversaries" suggests the Jewish opposition were His 'satan' or 'adversary'; see on :16. The synagogue ruler was not alone in being jealous. Shame was a huge issue in first century Palestinian society. We can assume that those who were shamed went away to scheme how they could destroy the Lord. The tension is clearly brought out between "the crowd" and the religious leaders. This was only six months before the Lord's death (:7). Yet this fickle "crowd" were to be so easily manipulated by the religious leaders to scream for the Lord's crucifixion. We see here how limited is the power of miracle to achieve abiding conviction in human hearts, and this explains why the Lord used miracles so sparingly compared to what He was capable of.

13:18 *He replied: To what is the kingdom of God like? And unto what shall I liken it?*- Perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile. The small seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom can produce a mighty tree in the Kingdom (Lk. 13:18,19). It is easy to under-estimate the power of that seed- the

Lord's parable seems to be making that point. I would seriously suggest that *all* of us ought to regularly study the basic doctrines of our One Faith for ourselves, personally. The writer told the Hebrews that he would have to lay *again* the foundation teachings of the Gospel, in order to renew them *again* unto repentance (Heb. 6:1-4).

13:19- see on Lk. 6:47.

*It is like a grain-*

Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a man would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a garden. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the garden and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

*Of mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden-* But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

*And it grew and became a tree-* The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the

unreal- a shrub became a tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. The entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

*And the birds of the sky lodged in the branches of it-* A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.

There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

The parables reveal how the Lord was so sensitive to us. He realized that his audience thought in pictures; and so He turned concepts and ideas into imaginable pictures in a truly masterful way. He wanted to radically change people; and He realized that the way to do this was not by a catechism, not by pages or hours of intellectual, abstract droning, but by helping them to relate real, imaginable life to the things of His Kingdom. Truly did W.H. Auden reflect: "You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences". The way the Lord Jesus constructed and taught His parables was indeed an art form, of exquisite beauty. He took ordinary, homely stories and introduced into them the elements of

unreality which we will explore in this study. By being so normal, He created the possibility of participation in the minds of His hearers; because they could relate to the very normalcy of the stories. And so when the unreal elements are perceived- e.g. the mustard seed becomes not just a bush but a huge tree- there is an element of surprise and joy. Out of, and indeed right within, the most ordinary things of life, there await for the believer the surprise and joy of 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' intersecting with their ordinary lives.

The Lord Jesus was highly sensitive to the gender division. He did not just ignore it. The parable of the mustard seed which a man planted is followed by that of the leaven which a woman hid in the meal (Lk. 13:18-21). Likewise in Lk. 15:3-10 Jesus speaks firstly of the joy of a man finding a lost sheep, and then of the joy of a woman on finding a lost dowry coin. He spoke of the lilies of the field which do not physically exert themselves in labour, as men must do, but also who do not spin (women's work). Christ spoke of the second coming as finding two men in the field and two women grinding at the mill. This parallelism of attention between men and women can be profitably followed through the Gospel records: Lk. 8:14,15 cp. Lk. 8:16,17; Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8; Lk. 4:24-27; Mt. 24:43-51 cp. 25:1-13; 24:40,41; Mt. 13:31-33 cp. Lk. 13:18-21. This approach contrasts sharply with the male-centred teaching approach of the contemporary rabbis and other religious leaders. Thus His parables were consciously designed to appeal to both men and women. Luke particularly seems to rejoice in observing how the Lord treated men and women in parallel. Both Martha and the male ruler lack one thing (Lk. 10:41,42 cp. 18:22); there are two parables on answered prayer for men and women (Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8); the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South are paired (Lk. 11:29-32); justice is for both male and female servants (Lk. 12:45,46); both men and women would be divided (Lk. 12:51-53); a woman and a man are both healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-16; 14:1-6); a 'daughter of Abraham' and a 'son of Abraham' are healed (Lk. 13:16; 19:9); the woman loses a coin, a man loses a sheep (Lk. 15:4-10). Indeed, a profitable study could be made of how the Old Testament prophets liken God to both male and female figures in tandem- e.g. "The Lord goes forth as a mighty man... I will cry out like a woman in travail" (Is. 42:13,14).

13:20 *And again he said: Unto what shall I liken the kingdom of God?- As noted on :18, perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile.*

13:21 *It is like the yeast which a woman took-* The good news of God's Kingdom, in both present and future aspects, is like yeast which works away *from the inside* of a man and *inevitably, by its very nature* makes a fundamental change. Because whoever really believes the doctrines of the One Faith and lives the life which they naturally bring forth, really will be

saved. Therefore we will have a sense of true unity with our brethren who believe as we do, whatever human barriers there may be between us. Therefore "the Faith" is linked with unity between believers (Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27).

This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew* p. 422).

*And hid-* The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publicly things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

*In three measures of flour, until it was all raised-* Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just

as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:22 *And he went on his way through cities and villages, teaching and journeying on to Jerusalem-* This was His final appeal to them. For at this point He was in the last six months of His ministry (:7).

13:23 *And one said to him: Lord, are they few that are saved? And he said to them-* See on Lk. 13:1. This question about the ultimate justice of God in saving only some has reverberated throughout the centuries. The Lord gives no direct answer, but instead urges us to strive to enter in to salvation ourselves (:24); as if these kind of philosophical questions are likely to derail us from ourselves entering salvation. The existence of such unanswered questions is purposeful in how God has set up our entire spiritual and mental existence. They are to humble us, and to lead us deeper in clinging on to faith and love of God by our faith rather than by our intellectual understanding. Clarity of understanding such questions would not lead to faith- or else the Lord would have given the answers. But He did not. The next verse goes on to note that there will be many who wish to enter the Kingdom, but all too late- for in this life they didn't want to. This provides helpful perspective to the question of why few shall be saved. One angle on it is that actually the majority don't want to be saved, and would not want to be saved even if they were given the opportunity or knowledge. And instead of accusing God of injustice, we should ensure we are not amongst them.

13:24 *Strive to enter in-* The idea of *striving* to enter the Kingdom, the need for such agonizing effort, meant an awful lot to Paul (1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It's fashionable these days to focus upon the certainty of our redemption in Christ and to ignore the warnings about apostasy. In Paul we see a brother who brought these two strands together; because his mind was so Christ and Gospels-centred. He personalized those Gospels, he must have kept thinking to himself 'Now this applies to *me*... it really does...'. What a brother. What an active mind, a mind which he knew had Christ living in it. The Lord answers the

question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24).

Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

*By the narrow door. For I say to you, many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able-* "Door" here means specifically an entry to a house, not a gate. Entry to the Kingdom is entry to a household, a family, a home. Salvation is not to be enjoyed only by us on an individual level; rather is it about membership of the saved community. And we begin that experience now. The picture of many people striving unsuccessfully to enter in through a door recalls the picture of the Sodomites seeking to find the door of Lot's house and being smitten down in condemnation (Gen. 19:11). Those men represent those who outside a shut door shall be condemned at the Lord's return. So it's not at all that some want to find the way in this life, but can't. Those who wish to find it can find it. The picture here is rather of condemnation at the last day.

"Many" of those who call Christ their Lord and who regularly break bread in his presence, where two or three others are gathered believing they are in his name, will find they are rejected, *and they just won't be able to understand why on earth they were rejected* (Lk. 13:24-27 cp. Mt. 18:20). Anyone who thinks the majority of believers must surely make it through to salvation needs to think again. Please God, we will- but "many" (the Greek can mean, but not always, 'the majority') will be in for this inexplicable (to them) rejection, when they were sure they'd lived a good Christian life. Those with spiritual problems are prone to reason that when judgment day comes, they will be able to just shrug their shoulders and walk away from their Lord to eventual death. However, there is every reason to think that the rejected will come to their spiritual senses then, and plead to be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Many will seek to enter into the Kingdom at the judgment but will not be able; and so we should strive now to enter into it. The implication is that if we strive to enter in now, we will enter in then. Everyone will so earnestly seek to enter the Kingdom in the last day, and the urgency of that coming day should be ours today. Ezekiel's prophecies so often make the point that experiencing God's judgments leads men to *know* Him; thus at the day of



judgment, the rejected will knock at the door of the Kingdom, knowing that they know Christ- to be told that although they may now know him, he doesn't know them. Thus the pain of rejection will be acutely mental rather than physical. Ezekiel is told to judge Israel, i.e. "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (Ez. 20:4). This is what condemnation will result in- a recognition of sin for what it is. "According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they [the ways and doings] judge thee" (Ez. 24:14). It will be self-condemnation, but they will then *realize* this in terrible detail.

The Greek for "many" often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

13:25 *When the master of the house-* The "master of the house" is representative of Jesus; and yet we are to be the "master of the house" in spiritually feeding our brethren (Mt. 24:43,45 RV). It is through us that He ministers to His household.

*Is risen and has shut the door, and you begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying-* This continues the allusion to the men of Sodom outside the locked door; see on :24. We are Christ to our brethren. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

*Lord-* The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here. The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (Mt. 7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Rom. 2:13 alludes here. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between

merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

1 Cor. 13:2 also alludes here. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

*Open to us!- he shall answer and say to you: I do not know who you are-* There is clear linkage with the parable of the foolish virgins in Mt.

25, who likewise end up outside the door, and their knocking is to no avail. "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord's return.

13:26 *Then shall you begin to say: We did eat and drink in your presence, and you did teach in our streets-* Their experience of Him teaching in their streets could suggest that it was first century Israel who are in view here; for the Lord has just been recorded as teaching in their streets (:22). This is confirmed by verse 28, where the particular rejected ones will find they have been replaced by the Gentiles.

13:27 *And he shall say: I tell you, I do not know from where you are-* From what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (Mt. 25:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

*Depart from me-* See on Mt. 25:36. The rejected will be told: "Depart from me"; and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it

departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. The foolish virgins go, or depart, to buy oil- using the same word with which they are told by their Lord to depart from Him (Mt. 25:9,41). They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

*All you workers of iniquity-* And yet they have just protested their association with the Lord, and in Mt. 7, all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage. In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

13:28 *There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth-* Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment. Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about

it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once faint would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

*When you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves cast out-* The rejected will see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom; as if somehow they see themselves from outside of themselves. What spirituality they thought they had they will see as it were taken away from them (Lk. 8:18 AV mg.). This will be the result of the judgment process. They will be convinced by the judgment process of all the ungodly deeds which they had not previously been convicted of, e.g. their hard words against their brethren (Jude 15). 1 Cor. 11:32 may also be a reference to the educative effect of judgment: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". The world's condemnation will be at the second coming; the judgment and chastening to which Paul refers must therefore be that of the last day. However, in the context he is making the point that our self-examination at the memorial meeting and our response to the chastening hand of God in our present life is in fact a foretaste of that final judgment experience.

Note that the Pharisees will be thrust out of the Kingdom at judgment, implying that in a sense they were part of it before its establishment. This is the huge tragedy of rejection.

13:29 *And they shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God-* The mention of the four compass points alludes to the promises to Abraham in Gen. 28;14. The true seed of Abraham were going to take the places of those the Lord is addressing here. And I suggest that this category are those symbolized by the fruitless fig tree of the parable which prefaced this teaching; and the fig tree within the vineyard of Israel perhaps referred specifically to the Jewish religious leadership. They are hereby declared not to be the true seed of Abraham. This paves the way for Paul's declaration that whoever is baptized into the Lord Jesus, Jew or Gentile, is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29).

"Sit down" is Gk. 'to recline'. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers (:28)- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk. 12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'.

13:30 *And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last-* In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact some who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom. Alternatively, we can read "last" here as referring to condemnation, which is what the Lord implies is the destiny of the religious leaders of first century Israel whom He is addressing.

13:31 *In that very hour certain Pharisees came warning him: Get out and leave here. For Herod wants to kill you-* The Lord's response that Herod was a fox (:32) suggests that He saw this as part of a plot. Herod was trying to force Him towards Jerusalem, where there was a better chance the Lord could be arrested and killed rather than in Herod's jurisdiction (23:6,7). The Pharisees were part of this plot, and they therefore brought this message to the Lord. But the Lord died exactly when and in what manner He chose; He was not overtaken by events. He was going to Jerusalem to give His life, it would not be taken away from Him.

We note that when Herod finally met the Lord, he found no fault in Him and no reason for the death penalty for Him (23:15). And yet Herod wanted to kill the Lord at this stage. There was something in the personal

presence of the Lord Jesus which touched even the hardest conscience; Pilate and Herod are parade examples.

13:32 *And he said to them: Go and say to that fox-* Herod was openly hateful towards the Lord Jesus amongst others. "Fox" seems a strange adjective to use for him, as it implies craft, deceit and hypocrisy. Perhaps the Lord is therefore referring to the way Herod was deceitful and fox-like within his own mind, denying the clear prods of conscience which he had felt from his first encounter with John the Baptist's message. Or as suggested on :31, the Lord was not going to be scared out of Herod's jurisdiction and therefore run off to Jerusalem to die there as a result of the plot laid by Herod.

*Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow; and on the third day I shall reach my goal-* The Lord is saying that He is not going to go away immediately. He had work to do, and on the third day He would leave Herod's jurisdiction, once he had perfected His work / reached His goal- which may be a reference to the resurrection of Lazarus. The language of course is appropriate also to His resurrection on the third day. He saw this situation as pointing forward to how His death would also be calmly met by Him, He would not have His life taken away by the likes of Herod but rather He would give it; and then in the resurrection of the third day, He would "reach my goal".

13:33 *Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following. For it cannot be possible that a prophet can die anywhere except Jerusalem-* The Lord did not take seriously Herod's threat to kill Him; because Herod only had jurisdiction in Galilee, and the Lord knew that He must die in Jerusalem. But "Jerusalem" may refer more specifically to the Jewish religious leadership, the condemned fig tree with which this section began. The Lord would then be saying that Herod's plan to scare Him into leaving Galilee and going into the jurisdiction of Jerusalem, so that He would be killed, was actually exactly the Lord's plan. There is no Old Testament prophetic requirement that Messiah or any prophet die in Jerusalem or at the hands of the Jerusalem leadership. But the Lord, as a prophet, had created that requirement, knowing it to be the Father's will. And He was going up to "Jerusalem" exactly to do that; He was doing so of His own freewill and not because He had been driven there from fear of Herod. A Herod had after all sought to kill Him in babyhood, and it had come to nothing.

13:34 *O Jerusalem!-* It was "this generation" which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? "Daughter of Zion" was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem's residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire;

or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord's feelings to the "Jerusalem" which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn't want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn't want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

*Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stones them that are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*- I suggested on :33 that "Jerusalem" refers not so much to the physical city as to the Jerusalem based religious leadership of Israel. He so wished to have gathered their "children", their converts and those they influenced; but He had had very limited success. The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (Mt. 21:35). Stoning was the punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

"The Lord builds up Jerusalem: he gathers together the outcasts of Israel" (Ps. 147:2) is alluded to by the Lord here, where He reflects how He would fain have gathered together the children of Jerusalem, "but you were not willing". The words of the Psalm speak as if this is what the Lord God is going to do. But Jesus understood it as being impossible of fulfilment if the outcast children would not allow themselves to be gathered. Likewise the statement that the Lord will build up Jerusalem was made in a restoration context; but again, it was dependent upon the Jews' obedience for its fulfilment. God was and is potentially ready to work with us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps most clearly seen in His attitude to Israel. So many of the parables refer in some way to the love of God and Christ for Israel; and their love for rebellious, indifferent Israel is the supreme example of pure grace. He felt towards them as a hen for her chicks. Here again is an element of unreality; a hen whose very own chicks won't be gathered under her wings. This seems to go right against nature; the pain of the rejected parent was there in the experience of the Lord. He wasn't just passively enduring the polemics of the Pharisees; they were His chicks, He really wanted them under His wings (cp. Israel dwelling under the wings of the cherubim). We must ever remember this when we read the records of Him arguing with them and exposing their hypocrisy. He wasn't just throwing back their questions, playing the game and winning, just surviving from day to day with them. He was trying to gather them, and their rejection of His words really hurt Him. Their reproach broke His heart; He didn't just brazenly endure it as we might the ravings of a drunken man (Ps. 69:20).



He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. "How often..." suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion's children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

We see the Lord's humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of the Lord in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God's saving care in the Old Testament.

13:35 *Look, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being "*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were "*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

*Is left to you desolate*- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 23, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there

was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment.

*And I say to you, you shall not see me-* The same words are used in Mt. 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when, or, until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

*Until you shall say-* When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

*Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord-* When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say "Blessed is he..."- as if the time of His return depends upon their 'seeing' / perceiving Him beforehand.

At the day of judgment, nobody will be passive and indifferent. Everyone will want to be accepted. All of us who come there will see there is only one way we want. Self-examination will be the order of the day. The virgins will knock on the door and plead for it to be opened. The first century Jews will say "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord".

They will want to be on Messiah's side then. None of us will be vacillating between total commitment and the lazy drifting of our human nature. And our judgment seat is going on now, today. "This splitting of the decision between only two alternatives may seem an over-simplification: we fondly think of ourselves as faced with a continuous range of possibility over which to decide, but in the ultimate that range may be broken down into a number of discrete two-way choices, each one a decision between good and evil" (Ralph Lovelock).

## CHAPTER 14

14:1 *And it came to pass, when he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching him-* The Pharisees liked to feast on the Sabbath, with the work done by Gentile servants or by non-observant Jews who were beneath their respect. This was clearly a set up situation. All the labour which went into preparing the meal had been done somehow within their legal parameters, but to heal would be outside them. They assumed that Jesus was soft hearted enough to want to heal the person immediately, hence the temptation for Him to 'work' on the Sabbath. This gives a window into the essential person the Lord was, and still is- compassionate, and wishing to immediately engage with our human needs.

14:2 *And before him was a certain man that had the dropsy-* This is another example, along with the language of 'demons', of how illness is described from its appearance to the first century beholders- even if their understanding and perception was wrong. For 'dropsy' was the language describing the man's appearance with drooping, saggy limbs and with the soft tissues sagging down because of excess body water gathered in them. The appearance, as they understood it, became the name for the disease. And they considered mental illness to be the work of demons, and so that language is used- without proving that demons actually exist.

14:3 *And Jesus answering spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?-* The Lord realized the sick man was a plant, placed carefully "before him" (:2) (and see on :4), and so He took the initiative. The Greek for "heal" means literally to wait upon, to serve. At the meal, there would have been servants waiting upon them- on the Sabbath. The Lord was doing the same, by healing. But that was held to be 'work'; thus the Lord exposed their double standards.

14:4 *But they held their peace. And he took him and healed him, and let him go-* Letting him go implies the man had been planted there, perhaps against his will; see on :3. 'Taking him' before healing him suggests again the Lord used physical touch. He could heal from a distance, but His preferred style was to emphasize His personal connection with those He healed. We sense His desire, to this day, to personally connect with people.

14:5 *And he said to them: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately draw him up on a Sabbath day?-* God Himself has an urgency for human salvation; the Lord drew a parallel between the man who rushed out to save his animal on the Sabbath, and His waiving of the Sabbath in order to save others. Indeed, the way He did His miracles on the Sabbath rather than waiting shows His sense of urgency; not a day could be wasted for the sake of human scruples. "Which of you shall have a son fallen into a well, and will not straightway

draw him up?" (Lk. 14:5 RV). Wells weren't that wide. Only a small child would fall down one. We can imagine the tragic situation in the home. "Benny's fallen down the well!". And everyone would go running. They wouldn't wait until the Saturday evening. Nor would they worry the slightest about infringing the letter of the law. And so, the Lord explained, that little boy was like the sick men and women, sick both physically and spiritually, whom He saw around Him. There was an *urgency* which He felt about them. And so there should be with us too. We can realize that this world is evil and vain; and yet we can still fail to perceive the tragedy of it all, and the urgency of our task to save at least some. The Father of the prodigal told the servants: "Bring forth *quickly* the best robe" (Lk. 15:22 RV). The indebted man was told to sit down *quickly* and have his debt reduced (Lk. 16:6). There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others.

The Lord's enthusiasm for the salvation of first century Israel (and us too) comes out in Lk. 14:5 RSV, where He likens the *urgency* of His mission to that of a man whose son has fallen down a well. He simply *must* get there, regardless of the Sabbath rules. And this, says the Lord, is His all-out urgency to save men. We have all fallen down the pit from whence we must be rescued (Zech. 9:11). As we distribute leaflets, place our adverts, talk to our contacts, strive in our own character development towards salvation; this is the verve of the Lord Jesus to save us. It is only the hardness of the human heart that can stand in the way of the mighty enthusiasm of the Son of God for our redemption. Hence the sense of hurt, sadness and frustration to the Master when men refuse His efforts, as typified in the story of the wonderful banquet that was inexplicably spurned by the intended guests (Lk. 14:16). In passing, note the connection of pulling a man out of a pit with Joseph and Jeremiah, types of the Lord's resurrection (cp. Ps. 40:2). When a man is pulled out of the pit at baptism, he is sharing the experience of the resurrected Lord. And the Lord is naturally so urgent that men should share that experience which He suffered so much for.

14:6 *And they could not answer these things*- Rom. 8:31 may allude here; what shall we say to these things? Psychologically, being intellectually silenced is a shameful experience- unless one surrenders completely to the new argument. The response of the Jews for the most part was to get angry and to hate the Lord yet more. But the Lord wasn't out to just win an argument; He wanted to convert them. And He knew that by silencing them, He was leading them to a point where they would either convert totally, or hate Him unto death.

14:7 *And when he noted how they chose out the chief seats, he told a parable to those that were invited, saying to them*- The Lord was a guest, but He took the stage. Having silenced His hosts, He goes further,

attacking the mindset of His fellow guests as well as His hosts. This was not because He was an aggressive, victory-oriented person. He wanted their repentance, and in this case, He saw this might be achieved by going on the offensive, forcing them to a point where they must capitulate to Him, or go away in bitterness, self-condemned, having themselves made the answer. And this is His style to this day.

*14:8 When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast, do not sit in the chief seat; lest a more honourable man than you be invited by him-* Elsewhere, the Lord had presented the invitation to His Kingdom as an invitation to the Messianic banquet. It ought to be obvious that we take the lowest seat in the light of such a gracious invitation. We sit there awed by the grace of being there in the ecclesia; all judgmentalism, superiority and criticism of others is so deeply inappropriate. We are to assume that the others are "more honourable". This is not a call to naivety, but rather to such a deep impression of our own experience of grace that we see others as better than ourselves. The Lord may mean us to assume that our response to His grace in calling us should instil in us an appropriate humility in secular life; as we take the lowest seat in the community of believers, so we take the lowest place in social life. The experience of grace is such that we are affected by it in every department of our secular and social lives. The chiefest in the Kingdom is the Lord Jesus; He is the "honourable" one, the same word translated "precious" about Him in 1 Pet. 2:4,6. The implication is that if we don't take the lowest seat, then we are taking the place which is the Lord's place. Any other choice apart from the deepest humility is an awful, Christ-surpassing pride, a taking of His place.

*14:9 And he that invited you shall come and say to you: Give this man your place. Then you shall be shamed into taking the lowest place-* The Lord teaches that if we're invited to a feast, we should take the lowest place, genuinely assuming the others present are more honourable than us; and we take our place at that table awaiting the coming of the host. Our attitudes to the seating and behaviour on entry to the feast will affect our eternal destiny- for when the Lord comes, He will make the arrogant man suffer "shame", which is a commonly used descriptor of the rejected at judgment day. The Lord goes on in that same discourse to explain what our attitude should be- He tells the parable of the great supper, to which those who were invited didn't pitch, and there was a desperate, last minute compelling of smelly street people to come in and eat the grand meal.

The shamed person who took the highest place is not thrown out of the feast; instead, he takes the lowest place. This could suggest that the judgment process is for our education. Those who were conceited and superior shall be eternally educated then. There may be a similar teaching

in the way that the labourers who worked longest and hardest 'learn' when the payment is given at the end of the day; but they retain their penny, their salvation. See on Mt. 20:11. There is therefore the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place- yet still within the family of God.

The public nature of the judgment experience is hinted at throughout the Lord's parables. The other guests at the Lord's table will see the man who took the highest place in the ecclesia taking now the lowest place- he has "shame" before their eyes, and likewise the believer who took the lowest place in this life will have praise for that humility from the other guests, as the Lord exalts him or her higher (Lk. 14:9,10). In this context the Lord proceeded to warn His followers not to be like the man who sets out to build a tower, but can't complete it- and therefore he has shame from those who behold it (Lk. 14:29). This is just another way of saying the same thing. There will be believers who grandly showed themselves to their brethren to be building something which actually they couldn't complete; and they will have shame before their brethren when the day of judgment reveals who they really are. All this, of course, has massive practical implications. If all will be ultimately revealed before our brethren in the last day, why try to act before them as someone we're not?

Yet on the other hand, the idea of the Lord Jesus returning and one of His guests having "shame" must surely refer, in line with other Biblical passages, to the shame of condemnation. 'And so therefore', the Lord continues, 'take that lowest place at the feast right now'. When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually referring to condemned King Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). If the "lowest room" is seen as the place of the shame filled condemned... then surely He's saying that we should consider ourselves as "condemned" now as we sit at the feast. And what feast does the Lord have in mind? Is He perhaps referring on some level to the breaking of bread, which is the Lord's supper / feast where we now each take our place? Should we not, therefore, be sitting there feeling [although this is only part of the story] condemned, and the lowest of all? Is that not *one* [and only one, be it noted] of the emotions elicited in us by the cross? The "feast" of the breaking of bread is clearly meant to be understood by us as a foretaste of the Messianic "feast" of the future Kingdom. And if we

genuinely feel we should have the least place there, we will reflect that in our taking the lowest place at the memorial meeting. In our hearts, we will sit there knowing we ought to be condemned.

The man lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually again referring to Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. This gives a fine, fine insight into His sensitivity to us. Indeed, several times the Spirit in the NT uses OT pictures of unworthy believers as the basis of a description of the faithful. See on Lk. 10:33,34.

14:10 *But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that has invited you comes, he may say to you: Friend, go up higher. Then shall you have glory in the presence of all that sit to eat with you-* The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it anew with us at the marriage supper (Mt. 26:29). The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat, strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23). He is right now enthroned as judge of our lives (Mt. 5:34; Ps. 93:2). We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it (Ps. 139:2); and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). "God is the judge: he puts down one, and sets up another" in His mind (Ps. 75:7)- although the final putting down and setting up will be at the judgment seat (the basis for the parable of the man being asked to go up higher). This same parable is also rooted in



Prov. 25:7: "Put not forth yourself in *the presence* of the king, for better it is that it be said unto you, Come up hither: than that you should be put lower in *the presence* of the prince". We are in the King's presence both in this life- when we chose where to sit- just as much as when He returns and re-arranges the seating. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Before His presence, we shall feel "the lowest" of all. And that is how we are to feel in this life. This outlaws any sense of superiority towards our fellow guests, our brethren, in this life.

The parable about taking the lowest seat sounds obvious to us. If a poor nobody is invited to the King's feast, he would naturally take the lowest place, with feelings of wonderment, awe, embarrassment, joy, quiet honour, excitement that he'd been invited, that he was somewhere too good for him, by grace. The element of unreality in the story is that the man arrogantly takes a high place, and has to be demoted at the coming of the King. There's something unreal about this. But there's the rub. This is exactly how we are behaving when we jockey for status and 'power' in the ecclesia [in whatever form], when we fail to consider each man better than ourselves to be. This is how absurd we're being. The way the Lord applies this to His church implies that we should consider each of the other invited guests as "great men" of nobility. This is the level of respect which He intends there to be amongst us for our fellow brethren. The parables of judgment truly touch the very core of our spiritual being.

14:11 *For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted-* See on Acts 5:31; 2 Cor. 11:7. So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? As noted on :9 and :10, we are to live now as if we are in the Lord's judgment presence, and all we seek is the lowest place in His Kingdom. When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom. Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of

ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it.* The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner... this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for ... he that humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9). See on Mt. 18:4.

14:12 *And he also said to him that had invited him: When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brothers and sisters, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, unless they also invite you and repay you-* The Lord gave His parable about how *He* has invited us, through the call of the Gospel, to a great supper. Quite simply, the very experience and wonder of having been invited to the Kingdom should lead us to likewise invite others. But further. If we have truly understood the implications of the Lord's gracious calling, if we have truly perceived our desperation, we will take *the* lowest place, considering ourselves the *lowest* and least worthy. And we will therefore go out and invite others of the same class to which we perceive ourselves to belong- the poor, the maimed and blind.

Our attitude to others will be reflective of our perception of God's grace in calling us- as we were invited by such grace, so we will invite others to *our* table who likewise cannot recompense us. If we are the blind and maimed invited to the Lord's table, we will invite the blind and maimed to our table. The extent of God's grace to us really needs to sink in. When was the last time *you* did an act of pure grace to others like this...?

The Lord Jesus described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well-known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshiping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life. To exclude people from His table is to seek to exclude people from His Kingdom.

14:13 *But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind-* There is a connection between Lk. 14:13 and 21. This is exactly

what the parable of :21 teaches that God does: "Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind". The basis of God's calling of us must be the basis upon which we relate to others. We cannot recompense Him, yet He shows us His gracious invitation. So we too must share ourselves with those who cannot give us anything. In this sense, we like our Father, serve for nothing in the sense of no personal, concrete gain. We must *be* gracious by nature, and just *be* as He *is*.

The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace. We need to appreciate too that in Palestine, to refuse an invitation to a feast was a major insult to the person who gave it. That the majority of people refused it would've been so hurtful to the host. And in this we see a picture of the pain of God, that the majority refuse His invitation. Therefore He is so happy when anyone *does* respond, even if they're down and out. And we should hold in our heart the tragedy of God, the pain of God, that so many have refused Him; and therefore never judge anyone as unsuitable who may respond to the invitation. We're making the invitations for *His* sake, not our own. And on this basis we 'bring in' those desperate types to the Lord's feast (:21). The same word is used about Barnabas 'bringing' the unlikely convert Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27), and later 'bringing' or introducing him to the Antioch ecclesia (Acts 11:26), the "other sheep" being 'brought' into the fold (Jn. 10:16), the blind man whom people thought was no good for Jesus being 'brought' unto Him (Lk. 18:40), the Samaritan 'bringing' the good-as-dead wounded man to the inn / the ecclesia (Lk. 10:34), all reflecting how the goodness of God leads / brings [s.w.] desperate sinners to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In our 'bringing in' of desperate people to the Lord's feast, we are vehicles for that grace of God which 'brings in' men and women to Him. Notice in passing that we invite people to the Kingdom feast without seeking a recompense from them- i.e. we should not expect anything from them, be it personal loyalty, money, respect etc. And if we don't get it from them, only then will we be rewarded / recompensed for our preaching at the last day. So it should be no surprise to us if as with Paul our converts turn against us and in no form 'recompense' us for calling them. Actually we should take comfort from this, as it is an encouragement that we will have our recompense at the last day.

*14:14 And you shall be blessed; because they do not have anything to repay you with. For you shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the*

*just*- The 'blessing' is defined as recompense at the resurrection, and not necessarily in this life. This inevitably is to be connected with how the Lord went on to say that we are the poor, blind, lame etc. who have been invited to the feast (:21). The point being, that if we perceive our own desperation and inappropriacy to be called to the Kingdom feast, then we will likewise invite others who are perceived *by us* as the lowest of the low, and otherwise unsuitable for a king's banquet table. So we are to reflect God's calling of us, the desperate, the down and outs, in our calling of others. A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society.

The recompense will be in the form of the nature of our eternity. How we shall eternally be is a reflection of what we have done for others, especially in terms of how far we have accepted them.

14:15 *And when one of his dinner guests heard these things, he said to him: Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*- We mustn't just like *the idea* of being in the Kingdom. We must seek it above all. The Lord told a parable about people invited to the Kingdom who all came up with different excuses as to why they couldn't come. This was in response to somebody remarking: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" - 'how great it would be to be in the Kingdom!'. And the Lord is replying 'Many of those given the real opportunity to be there actually don't want it that much at all. Don't just like the idea of being in my Kingdom, but make it the driving passion in your daily life, for which you'll sacrifice all'.

The Lord continues to turn the questions / comments back on themselves. A man comments how blessed will be the person to eat bread in the Kingdom of God; and Jesus responds by telling the parable about how in fact the majority of those who receive invitations to eat break in the Kingdom actually turn it down because of worldly distractions. Again the message is clear. 'Take your focus off the blessedness of *others* in the future Messianic Kingdom; but concern yourself with the very real possibility that you *yes you yourself* may actually turn down the invitation to be there because you're too caught up with the things of this world'. See on Lk. 14:25.

14:16 *But he said to him: A certain man made a great supper and he invited many-* "When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast" (:13) is clearly meant to connect with "A certain man made a great supper, and he invited (s.w.) many". Evidently the idea of eating with the Lord at His table connects with the breaking of bread. Our attitude at that memorial supper is in essence our attitude at the greater supper of the last day. We sit there with our Lord and with our brethren. We will sit there at the last

day with the deep feeling, like the handicapped beggars had in the parable: "I should not be here. Who am *I*, me, me with all my weakness, doing *here*?". If we sit likewise at the breaking of bread with that spirit, we will not even consider grabbing the best seat for ourselves; nor would it cross our mind to say to someone else sitting there "Hey you, what are *you* doing here? If *you're* here, I'm gone! Don't you dare take that bread and wine, you're not in fellowship!". Yet this is precisely the attitude of those who exclude their brethren from participation at the Lord's table; for the breaking of bread is a foretaste of the feast to come, and the Lord is teaching that our attitude to our brethren at it is in fact going to be reflected in how He deals with us at the latter day marriage supper. It seems so many of our exclusivist brethren are voting themselves out of their place at the Kingdom; although I believe God's grace is such that He has a place even for them.

14:17 *And he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were invited: Come. For everything is now ready-* See on Mt. 24:48. In the parable of the great supper, which is similar but not necessarily the same as that of the marriage feast, the servants going forth "at supper time" fits more naturally into the context of a preaching appeal just prior to the second coming than to the first century. The "supper", i.e. the Kingdom (Lk. 14:15; Mt. 22:2), is prepared, and at "supper time" - 'Kingdom time' - the appeal is made. "All things are now ready" (Lk. 14:17) explains the unmistakable sense of urgency in the commissions given to the servants to preach. This again indicates reference to an eleventh hour preaching campaign just prior to the second coming. The 'decorum of the symbol' suggests that the animals being killed for the meal would necessitate a brief period of invitation immediately prior to the feast, rather than them being on the table for 2,000 years. See on Mt. 24:14.

14:18 *And they all began to make similar excuses. The first said to him: I have bought a field and I need to go out and see it; I pray you excuse me-* See on Lk. 14:33.

There was a harder side to Christ. He was a demanding Lord. He told His disciples to forsake what they had and follow Him. They did. And apparently with no prefatory praise or introduction, He called them "you of little faith... fools... slow of heart to believe". Of course, He may have prefaced these criticisms with something softer (cp. His letters to the churches); but the Spirit has preferred not to record it. Often His parables warn that those who think He will understand their weakness, those who are too familiar with His softer side.

The parable of the great supper records men explaining to Christ why they can't *immediately* respond to Him, although they want to when it's more convenient: "I have bought a piece of ground, *and must needs* go and see it... I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them... I

have married a wife, therefore *I* cannot come" (Lk. 14:18-20). The implication is that they assumed that the servant calling them to the wedding (i.e. Christ) would understand that their excuses were quite reasonable; the man who pleaded marriage as his excuse would have been alluding to the Law's provision to have time off from the Lord's duties on account of marriage (Dt. 24:5). All these reasons were assumed to be quite reasonable, and the men sound as if they were confident that *of course* Christ would understand. The parable of the King's son records excuses which are more evidently unreasonable; some said they were going to work on their farm, when actually the banquet was going to be held in the evening (Mt. 22:5). There is a connection with the parable of Lk. 14, where the excuses seem more reasonable. But the similarity shows that as far as the Lord is concerned, *any* excuse, evidently irrelevant or apparently reasonable, is just not acceptable to Him. But the point of the parables is that as far as Christ is concerned, these were all just empty excuses, even the excuse that appeared to be based on a past concession to weakness. He's saying that the invitation to His Kingdom, to His very own wedding, must take priority over all the everyday things of human experience which we assume are so justified, and which we assume He will quite understand if we put in front of Him and His call. *Every reader* ought to feel uncomfortable on considering this. It's this category of Christian who will be so surprised when they are rejected: "Lord, Lord, open to us... When did we see you hungry..." (Mt. 25:11,44). They thought they knew Him, but He has never known them (Mt. 7:23). This idea of surprise at rejection is to be connected with that of brethren thinking (mistakenly) that of course the Lord understands their putting His call into second place. He is a Lord they hardly know in this life, despite what they think, and He will be the same at judgment day. There's a point to be made from the way they are so confident they know Christ, but He says He has never known them. They didn't live up to the demanding Lord they served. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him was evidently foreign to them. They thought their theoretical knowledge and outward works meant that Christ knew them. The worrying thing is, how many of us feel we have a two-way relationship with the Lord?

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 [as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40]. Note how there is surely an element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I..." maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... The parable of the wedding

feast has an inappropriacy in that for 'merely' rejecting the invitation to the feast and beating the messengers, the King dispatches an army to attack them- whilst the meal is as it were hot on the table ready to be eaten (Mt. 22:3-7). The point is that every rejection of the invitation, every mockery of the preacher, elicits an amazing anger in God.

Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the wedding feasts. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

"They all with one consent (s.w. 'agreement') began to make excuse" (s.w. 'reject') sounds like a conscious, national rejection of the message. The Jews will be judged by the word at the second coming (Jn. 12:48); but they were 'accused' (judgment seat language) by their rejection of God's word in the Old Testament during their lifetime (Jn. 5:45). The Jews in the parable "began to make excuse (saying)... I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18). The Greek word for "excuse" here is also translated "reject"- by excusing themselves from the requirements of God's word in this life, they were effectively rejecting themselves, as they will be at judgment. So as we read the word, we show our judgment. It could be that the reluctance of some to get down to reading the word is not simply because they lack time, but more subtly because they realize they are faced with God's judgments in it.

Israel had consented to be "bidden" to the feast; and according to Oriental practice, to accept an initial invitation to a feast was to commit oneself to respond to the final notice of it. But "they would not come", and yet despite this insult, their divine host had sent forth yet more servants to beg them to come. The Lord puts behind Him the insult of our rejections, and graciously pleads with us- even God pleading with men. The whole history of Israel is eloquent proof of this grace of God.

14:19 *And another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to test them. I pray you, have me excused-* The invitation had been given ahead of time, and they had agreed to attend. Feasts were held in the evening, and oxen weren't tested in the evening; and they were tested *before* being bought and not afterwards. The excuses are presented as pathetic and not sincere.

14:20 *And another said: I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come-* Marriage gave freedom from conscription to the army, but not to turning down a call to attend a wedding feast which they had already agreed to attend. As noted on :19, all excuses for not responding to the Lord's call are here presented as pathetic and quite obviously fabricated.

14:21 *And the servant came and told his master these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame-* The tragedy of the fact that the Jews by and large rejected the invitation of God meant that the servants are asked to "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes... and bring in [any who will respond]". The 'quickness' of the preachers is matched by the 'quickness' of the response of those who heard them in the first century. Now what this means is that if we as preachers have an urgency about our approach and our presentation of the message, then people will respond quickly. If we present the urgent good news as a set of academic propositions to be studied at length in the comfort of an untroubled conscience, then those who respond [if they do at all] will do so with the same laid back, cool, calculating attitude. Peter preached on Pentecost with a fire and passion which came from realizing the urgency of human need and Christ's salvation. And this is why, it seems to me, the people responded so quickly. They were baptized in a matter of hours after hearing the Gospel preached from his lips.

We in these last days are "the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind" who lay in the city streets (Lk. 14:21). Yet we are invited and led (the blind) or dragged / carried (the lame) into the great supper. For those who deeply meditated, the lame at the great man's table would have taken them back to lame Mephibosheth at David's table. His response to the invitation was to *bow*; think of a lame man bowing. How awkward it must have been, and how awkward he must have felt. "I'm a dead dog, from a family who cruelly hated you; why, why me?" was his response. And this ought to be ours. The awkward bow of that lame man, however embarrassing it was to watch for David in his glory, is a superb type of our attempts to respond to the inexplicable grace we have received from the Lord. He knows our weakness. Even though He taught plainly that 'the majority' (Gk; AV "many") of those He called would not be chosen, His parables often use percentages which imply that two thirds



(parable of the pounds) or half (parable of the virgins) *will* respond. This shows the love that hopes, in the face of the finest knowledge and foreknowledge of human nature which any man has ever had.

The usual excuse for not reading Scripture daily, or remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread as He asked, or meeting with brethren and sisters etc. normally goes along these lines: 'I've nothing against these things. But after all, we're only human beings, Christ understands that, He knows we have to get on with the things of this life'. To which so many passages in the Gospels reply: 'Yes, the Lord does know exactly what everyday human life is all about; and He expects you, in these daily things, to make decisions which *consciously* sacrifice what you could get for yourselves in life'. And to which Paul replies: "The love of Christ constrains us". The servant goes out and invites people to the supper. They each make excuses which on a human level seem perfectly reasonable. One man was on his way to inspect some land he had just bought; another man was on his way (Gk.) to prove his new oxen; if they were no good, he had the right to get his money back. It seems, humanly, a bit unreasonable to go up to a person right in the middle of doing something important in daily life, and say 'Now stop that, come to a supper'. The third man assumed the Lord would understand why *he* couldn't respond: "I have married a wife, and therefore (of course, as you'll appreciate) I cannot come". After all, even the Law said that a man was free from military obligations after his marriage. But "the master" was "angry" with those men. What Moses' law conceded to men, the Lord Jesus wasn't necessarily ready to concede (and His attitude to divorce was similar).

In the invitation to the Kingdom, "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind" are invited; with the implication that Christ will be "recompensed at the resurrection of the just". We don't recompense Him now by our works; we are lost sheep causing Him needless work and worry, wasting His goods and needing to get ourselves out of the problem (Lk. 16:1), needing His frank forgiveness for our huge debts (Mt. 18:24). As Job recognized, if we are righteous, we give nothing to God (Job 35:7). Our *unrighteousness* commends God's righteousness (Rom. 3:5). All things come *out of* God: "Who hath first given to him?... for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:35,36); it's give, give, give with God. We are the poor beggars sitting down at the great supper, unable to recompense. Of course, it depends where we put the emphasis. The parable which relates how Christ desires fruit from us is followed by that of the marriage supper, where it seems we are just asked to accept an invitation with humility (Mt. 21:34; 22:3). The point surely is that we are invited, for no reason, to the Kingdom, and we must accept with the humility that will accompany a recognition of such grace (Lk. 14:9). But

our experience of this grace will inevitably bring forth some spiritual fruit. Again, it seems we are intended to follow the story through, and visualize the inappropriate, uncultured conduct of these beggars at the table, causing so much unspoken embarrassment and pain to the generous rich man. The link with Is. 55:1-3 would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too). The preceding Lk. 14:8-11 describe us as sitting down at the feast in this life, until the host walks in and starts re-arranging the seating order (cp. the coming of Christ in judgment on His household). We are left to imagine the grabbing for food, the greedy, selfish eyeing up of the plates, the grasping, the lack of social skills, the lack of good conversation between each other, the occasional cursing under the breath, perhaps even throwing of food, the eager desire for wine, the lack of restraint. All in the company of the Master (God) and His servants (Christ and the Angels). And this, it seems to me, was the Lord's imagination of His immature ecclesia, feasting on the good things He has prepared for us. Can we not begin to enter just a little into the pain and acute embarrassment and sadness we cause to our gracious Host by the self-centredness of our natures, manifest as it is in spiritual terms so often? It's quite possible to become so spiritually selfish, so bent on our own salvation, that the whole spirit of the supper is lost. After all, the idea of a large supper is to inculcate a social spirit rather than just to provide individual feeding to each of the guests. How many times has it been reasoned in these last days: 'Sorry, I have to work out my own salvation, I just can't spare time and can't risk association with my weaker brethren...'. And the Lord Jesus, in His perfect way, saw this coming as in sunny Galilee He formulated His parables of grace.

Time and again His parables sought to justify His association with outcasts (Lk. 14:15-24; 15:1-32; Mt. 18:23-25; 20:1-15; 21:28-32). When the nobleman came to ask Jesus to cure his son, Jesus agreed; and the man went home. But it was only on the way home that he really believed. He came to faith spontaneously, and not because Jesus insisted on it. Or remember the woman who had had five men in her life, and presumably a number of children to go with each of them. Her face and body would have reflected the story of her life. She was living with someone not her husband. Jesus didn't tell her to break up with the guy. He knew full well that if a woman left her man, she had nowhere to go. Here was a woman who had been 'married' five times. Who would want her? There were children involved. Probably even her family had rejected her. Jesus accepted the real life situation, and human failure to rise up to higher standards. One wonders whether the very lack of specific demand from Jesus maybe motivated her to somehow normalize her life. The gentle way Jesus treated these cases shows not so much approval, but an understanding of the frailty of human nature. And this is what enabled

Jesus to be so unwaveringly committed to His own perfect standards, and yet be so natural and at ease with the lowest of the low.

14:22 *And the servant said: Master, what you did command is done, and still there is room-* See on Lk. 14:12. The servant seems surprised that after the crippled and blind beggars have been drafted in to the opulence of the feast, "still there is room". Quite simply, there are more places in the feast of the Kingdom than there are people willing to fill them! How encouraging is that thought! The same Greek word for "place" recurs in Jn. 14:2,3, where the Lord Jesus taught that He was going to die on the cross in order to prepare a place for us in His Father's palatial mansion. The effort made in preparing the feast therefore speaks of Christ's life, death and resurrection for us. And it's so tragic that most people don't want to know. So in a sense, "all you gotta do is say yes". Just accept the invitation; take the messengers for real. Although perhaps we are left to read in the detail to the story, that many a desperate beggar just couldn't grasp that the messenger was for real, and preferred to stay put. Maybe only the *truly* desperate thought 'Maybe there's some truth in it... I've nothing to lose'. The many places in God's Kingdom... are only for those who desperately want them. Those who make meaningless excuses about how busy they are, those who can't believe that really God could be true to His word and really give us beggars a place in His wonderful Kingdom... will by their own decision not be there.

Let's not under-estimate the struggle which there is to believe the simple fact that there are more places in the Kingdom than people willing to fill them; that really God is begging us to come in to the place prepared for us through the death of His Son. When we read of the Master telling the servant to "*compel*" the beggars to come in to the feast, it's the same Greek word as we find used in one of the excuses given for not going in to the feast: "*I must needs go and see*" (the field the man had supposedly bought that evening without ever seeing it) (Lk. 14:18,23). Just as our loving God, with all the power of His most earnest desire, can seek to *compel* us to accept His offer, so the power of our own flesh *compels* us the other way. The petty human issues had become so large in the minds of the people concerned that they ended up telling obvious untruths or giving very poor excuses to get out of attending; life had gotten on top of them and that was it. The story seems so bizarre; the refusal of such a wonderful invitation would've been the element of unreality which struck the first hearers. The point is that petty human issues, coupled with our lack of appreciation that we are down and out beggars, really will lead people to lose out on eternity. The other such element of unreality would've been the persistence of the host to fill the places with anyone, literally *anyone*, willing to come on in. It's not so much a question of 'Will we be there?' but rather 'Do we really want to be there?'. Because if we do, we shall be.

The servant reports to the master that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to first century ears: The servant has already done what the Lord had commanded him. No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But *this* servant *did*! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master so well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship possible between us and our Lord, especially in the area of preaching / inviting people to His supper. The initiative is in our hands, and as we come to know Him better, we come to know His mind, and to sense how He would react. We have His aims and desires as ours, and we are in harmony with Him without having to be told things in so many words. And of course for a master to serve his servants was unheard of (Lk. 12:35-38). But this of course was the wonder of what the Lord did for us, "as one who serves" (Lk. 22:27), defining for us our attitude to each other at the memorial table and in all aspects of our lives and relationships. See on Lk. 13:7.

We can also understand the servant as the Lord Jesus, reporting to the master [= God] that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. This servant not only had the unusual relationship with His master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but He somehow knew His master so well that He guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship between the Father and Son, especially in the area of inviting people to His supper [cp. salvation]. The point of all this is to demonstrate how the Lord Jesus has His influence upon the Father, and can at times change His stated purpose [e.g. with regard to the rejection of Israel- just as Moses did]. And this is the same Father and Son with whom we have to do, and whose matchless relationship is the basis and reason of our salvation.

14:23 *And the master said to the servant: Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come, that my house may be filled-* See on 1 Cor. 9:13. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek

implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter-day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

The parable of the great supper chronicles the preaching of the Gospel over time. There were three stages of appeal: "To them that were bidden" (the Jews in Israel), to those in the streets and lanes of the city (the Jewish Diaspora), and finally, in a spirit of urgency, the preachers are commanded: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:16-23; the same spirit of urgency in witness is to be found in the Lord's command to His preachers to cut the courtesy of prolonged greetings). Once the required number are in God's spiritual house, the feast will begin- and that feast represents eating bread in the Kingdom, at the second coming.

The language of 'going out' should be connected to the command to 'go and teach all nations'. The parable concerns the master of the house (God) commanding His servant (Christ); yet the connection with the preaching commission indicates that the commission given to Christ He fulfils through us, as demonstrated earlier in this study. The ever-increasing sense of urgency in the appeal to 'come in' ought to be reflected in our preaching in these last days.

Noah's ark is a well-known type of the salvation which humanity can find in Christ; and yet close analysis of the Genesis record reveals that there were some animals whom Noah had to bring into the ark and take them with him (Gen. 6:19; 7:2); and others who came to Noah and entered into the ark of their own volition (Gen. 6:20; 7:9,15,16). The same Hebrew is found in Gen. 8:9, about how the dove came to Noah of its own volition, and Noah welcomed her and took her into the ark. Putting all this together, we are to compel men to come in; and yet we are also to be there to welcome in the seekers who seek of their own volition. It's easier to do the latter; to put up a website, waiting there for some eager seeker to come and find. But we are also to compel people in, and to also bear in mind that there are some who will be attracted to the Gospel from selfish reasons, as the man who buys the field thinking that he can exploit it for his own benefit. These too we are to take on board and not turn away. Whilst people, with all their wonderful uniqueness, should never be pigeon-holed nor over-categorized... all the same, we need to consider the type of person we're dealing with as we plan out our approach. For if we seek them, we will consider who they are, and how appropriately we can engage them.

"Compel" is the same word used in :18, where the man excuses his lack of response to the Gospel by saying that he "must" or is compelled to go

and check out his new land. We are to help people see that the 'necessity' of secular things is to be replaced by the ultimate 'necessity' of responding to the call of the Kingdom.

The eagerness of the Lord to accept us, to find in us spiritual fruit, is perhaps reflected in the way that He begins inviting people of 'His' level to the feast of the Kingdom, but ends up lowering the bar as time goes on, to try by all means to get at least somebody in there. This theme of lowering the bar is perhaps continued in this same passage by the way the Lord says that His disciples must forsake / 'bid goodbye to' all that they had (Lk. 14:33). This is the same word found earlier in Lk. 9:61, where some time before, a potential disciple who first wished to go and "bid goodbye to" his family was judged as not suitably committed to the urgency of the task. But now, the Lord says that this is acceptable in His definition of discipleship. This Lord is our Lord.

"How shall they hear without a preacher?" It's impossible to hear without a preacher. Of course, God could beam the message into men some other way. But normally He chooses to work through human preachers. The preachers in the parable of the great supper are bidden "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled". The house of God's Kingdom is filled with people as a result of enthusiastic preaching.

*14:24 For I say to you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste my supper-* There may be the implication that the three people said "I cannot come" with the implication 'I can't come *right now*, but later'; and the Greek could bear such an interpretation. The master's comment at the end suggests that he knew these people would later turn up at the supper, but he would refuse them entry. There are often connections within the Lord's parables; in this case, the men who were so busy with daily life that they turned up at the wedding later would connect with the story of the other wedding guests who didn't have enough oil, and who *later* turned up at the wedding feast- again, only to be barred entry.

*14:25 Now there went with him great crowds; and he turned and said to them-* See on Lk. 7:9. The people eagerly following Jesus, and then He turns and tells them that actually God is coming after them with 20,000 men and they have only 10,000, and they on a personal level *urgently* therefore need to make peace with Him- because every minute now counts. Time and again, the Lord is urging people to look at themselves and their own position, not follow Him because they're part of a crowd who does, not hesitate from personal commitment because of never-never questions about cosmic ethics and Divine justice which are well beyond us... He forces the spotlight back on us, me myself and I, time and again. And His audience squirmed, just as they do today.

14:26 *If anyone comes to me, and hates not his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*- The Lord himself spoke of how He expected this of us; and He put it in language which He surely *knew* would arrest attention. He's a demanding Lord- and reflection on His life and death for us shows that He has every right to be so. Notice how the Lord Jesus uses the figure of polysyndeton- i.e. repeating the word "and" when there's no grammatical need to, in order to build up the impression of how many different people we must be prepared to break with. His message is plain: the Lord Jesus must come in front of every human relationship, or else we are not His disciples. And it isn't just human relationships that must be sacrificed; it's "houses... lands" (careers, cars, we might say) as well (Mt. 19:29). It has to be seriously asked whether our community, especially the younger generation, are prepared to be the Lord's disciples; whether they have given up these kind of things for His sake. He must be the *Lord* of our lives, the master passion and controller. Christ's love *constrains* us. *These* sorts of demanding words are so common in the Gospels that they almost slip our notice. There can be no serious doubt what He's saying: He has no room for passengers or part-timers. As far as He is concerned, it can't be a hobby.

14:27 *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple*- The Lord taught that unless a man was willing to carry his cross and forsake all that he had, he couldn't be His disciple. And He called them His disciples, even though they clearly didn't perceive the real nature of the cross, nor did they actually leave all that they had but retained some things. The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (:33). Their claim to have left literally all (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. Indeed, the parable of the unjust steward being specifically directed at the disciples (Lk. 15:1 cp. 16:1,9), it could appear that they had a special problem with lower-middle-class petty materialism (Lk. 16:9). Likewise Lk. 6 is spoken specially to the disciples, and it has much to say about materialism. The Lord was and is very generous to our weak efforts to rise up to His high standards.

Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "... the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him.

Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our attitudes.

14:28 *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have enough to complete it?*- Virtually nobody in the audience had ever planned to build a tower (Gk. 'castle'). So the Lord means 'If you were mega wealthy and had money to build a tower, wouldn't you even then be careful to understand the total cost in advance, lest even your wealth is all taken away by it?'. They were asked to imagine they were wealthy. The Lord was seeking to elevate their minds upwards to consider the great potential which they had. But all the same, they must count the cost; and realize that to build a castle / tower was beyond them. This is the implication of :31 and :33. Capitulation is required. Or it could be that the Lord is asking them as poor people to seriously calculate how much it would cost to build a tower / castle, and realize it was beyond them. Recognizing our spiritual bankruptcy, our inability to pay, and throwing ourselves upon the Lord- this is the same as forsaking all we have (:33).

14:29 *Unless, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish it, all that watch begin to mock him, saying-* See on Rev. 16:15. The only true foundation laid is the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 3:11). The potential builder must resign all plans for self-salvation, all efforts to lay his own foundation; and accept that of the Lord Jesus. Luke likes to use the Greek word for "finish" in relation to how all things were finished in the work of the Lord Jesus (12:50; 18:31; 22:37).

14:30 *This man began to build, and was not able to finish-* Earlier, the Lord had spoken of the shame of rejection at judgment day (:9). It would be witnessed publicly; the shame of the unworthy will be before the eyes of all their brethren (Rev. 16:15). If the tower / castle had to be built, then the man would have to urgently and desperately find a mega wealthy person who could enable him to do the job. And that person was the Father offering the wealth of grace in His Son.

14:31 *Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel, whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand?*- All the parables contain elements of unreality in order to make a point. This one speaks of a King coming in judgment upon another King who only has half the army which he has. The more powerful King is of course God. But we are likened to a "king" also, on His level in that sense, who has only half His strength. This is altogether such an under estimate of the Father's physical and moral superiority to us! The smaller army can of course



defeat the bigger army- but only with God's help, as various Old Testament examples make clear. The king must resign all attempts to win the battle in his own strength. "By good advice make war (Heb. 'a battle')" (Prov. 20:18); and the advice is to not even attempt it. The weaker king has it seems already embarked on journeying to the encounter; he has to display great humility in avoiding it by recognizing that he really hasn't got the strength to succeed.

14:32 *Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an ambassador and asks conditions of peace-* See on Rom. 14:19. Does the man with 10,000 men faced with the oncoming army of God with 20,000 men just recklessly go ahead, or does he seek reconciliation? There was surely an intended connection within the Lord's teaching concerning how the loving Father saw the prodigal son "afar off" in his sin and separation; and how the King [God] coming against man with 20,000 men in battle needs to be reconciled with whilst He is still "afar off" (Lk. 14:32; 15:20). God is both coming towards us in judgment; and yet also sees us 'from afar' in untold grace and desire to save. It is this wondrous paradox which makes the ultimate meeting of God and man so intense and wonderful. The 'harder side of God', the King coming in overpowering judgment against sinful man, is what gives power and poignancy to His final meeting with man as the Father meets the prodigal. See on Lk. 10:34.

14:33 *So therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple-* See on Lk. 12:22; 14:23; 21:3. The weak king who sends ambassadors asking for conditions of peace is understood by the Lord as the man who forsakes all he has in order for peace with God. This is the importance of forsaking wealth (Lk. 14:33), as the merchant did (Mt. 13:44-46), as the blind man left his garment (Mk. 10:50), as the widow threw in her two mites, rejecting the temptation to be 'prudent' and keep one for herself to use as capital for the future (Lk. 21:2), as Matthew "left all, rose up and followed" (Lk. 5:28), and as the disciples in that beautiful childlike innocence could say "Lo, we have left all...?" (Mk. 10:28). What this surely means is that in our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. See on 2 Cor. 6:10.

When the Lord speaks of leaving all and following after Him, He surely had in mind the well-known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me... and they left their possessions behind* in the town" (1 Macc. 2:27). And again the Lord seems to have had this in mind when He says that when He comes, His true people are to flee Jerusalem and not worry that their 'stuff' is in the

house' (Lk. 17:31). For an itinerant teacher like Jesus of Nazareth to offer his ideas and his interpretation of the Old Testament, and then have men following Him, was not out of place in first century Palestine. But the Lord twists the whole figure of 'follow me'. Unlike the other teachers, his teaching didn't lead to taking arms and fighting Rome. His men are to follow Him in wilfully taking up and carrying a cross, imitating His supreme human bravery in both His life and above all in His death, a bravery which He showed in facing sin in the eye and conquering every temptation, whatever the cost, whatever the human implication.

The Lord followed right on from the supper parable with the demand to hate one's own life, pick up their cross and follow Him, without which we cannot be His disciple. He also told the parable of God coming with a huge army to meet us who are far weaker- and our need to make peace with Him and forsake all that we have in order to follow Christ (Lk. 14:25-33). These radical demands of Jesus are in fact a development of His parable about the supper. For amongst some Middle Eastern peoples to this day, refusing the invitation to enter the banquet for such a meal- especially after having signalled your earlier acceptance of the invitation- was "equivalent to a declaration of war". And so the parable of *us* as the man going out to war against a far superior army suddenly falls into place in this context. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that doesn't renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). The renouncing or forsaking of all we have refers to the man with 10,000 soldiers renouncing what human strength he had in the face of realizing he was advancing against a force of 20,000. The picking up of the cross, the 'hating' of our own lives, the renouncing all we have... obviously refers to doing something very hard for us. But the context is the parable of the supper, where the 'hard' thing to understand is why people refused the invitation, why they just couldn't believe it was real and for them; or why they just let petty human issues become so large in their minds that they just couldn't be bothered with it. Simply believing that we will be there, that in all sober reality we have been invited to a place in the Kingdom, that God is compelling / persuading / pressurizing us to be there... this is the hard thing. This is the hating of our lives, picking up our cross, forsaking our human strength and surrendering to God.

"Whoever of you does not *renounce* all that he has cannot be my disciple". Renouncing is something we do in our hearts and deepest feelings and attitudes. Have we truly *renounced* it all? Even if there are still bank balances and pension plans and property deeds and cars and treasured possessions... made out in our name. Have we in our hearts *renounced* them? That they aren't *really* mine. I have no personal long term security from them, because they're *not mine*. I'm just holding in stewardship what God gave me. And the Lord Himself drives the point home- if we have any *other* attitude to these wretched things, these

*almost*-nooses around our necks, then we are *not* His disciples. It's one of the scariest thoughts for Christianity. The fearless, gripped-by-Jesus approach to life which we see in the early church is the very opposite of the passivity of our post-modern world. We are called to a passionate, emotional life; a life where we each have someone to save, someone to die for, to live for, to sacrifice our self for. And this approach to life will naturally take care of how we use 'our' money. It is the passion-less life which results in a mean, careful approach to the spending of 'our' resources for others. See on Acts 4:32.

The Lord appears to make discipleship dependent upon giving up our possessions and forsaking all we have. But it's quite apparent that His disciples didn't literally do that. Zacchaeus only gave away half of his possessions (Lk. 19:8); and other disciples of Jesus clearly retained their homes and some possessions. The Lord must therefore mean that He expects us to *in our minds* resign all personal ownership of absolutely everything which we have- even if those things remain, to human appearance, 'ours'. This is really a challenging thing, in this world of savings and acquisition.

14:34 *Salt therefore is good, but if the salt has lost its taste, with what shall it be seasoned?*- The Greek for "lost its taste" is literally 'to become foolish', and is so translated in Rom. 1:22. Salt is good unless it is not salty, when it is then useless; this means that salt has a very specific usage, and beyond that it cannot be used for anything. It can only be cast away as are the condemned (:35). The idea is that unless we achieve our Divinely intended role as the salt of the earth, then we are useless and will be condemned; we have no other possible usage in this world apart from that intended by God. The "therefore" connects with :33 about being a disciple, which involves leaving all as the disciples did and following the Lord (:33,27). The disciples followed the Lord in the sense of supporting and performing His missionary work. They were the "salt of the earth / land". Without them, "it", the land, would not be salted, as so much depended upon them; or the idea may be that if the disciples lost their saltiness, they could not be re-salted. If they turned away from their ministry, this would be a serious sin and they could not then be re-appointed to it (Heb. 6:5,6). If we are no influence upon the earth around us, then we have failed in our calling to be the salt of the earth, and will be condemned. We cannot be secret believers.

"Good" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. If salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if

salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use. This is a major statement about the ultimate vanity of all secular achievement and careers, compared to being the salt of the earth.

14:35 *It is useful neither for the soil nor for the manure heap, it is thrown away. He that has ears to hear, let him hear-* The fact there is no middle road is the most powerful imperative to total devotion. The Lord foresaw that it would be possible for His men to be as salt which had lost it's savour; to appear as His, but for this to have no practical effect at all; and such salt is to be "cast out" in the end. We *must* have influence upon others, or we aren't salt. Salt could be used for nothing apart from savouring things. We must fulfil our ministry, for otherwise we are of no practical use and will be "thrown away" in condemnation (Mt. 3:10; 5:30; 13:48; Jn. 15:6 etc.).

## CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Now all the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to him to hear him teach-* Unlike many preachers of high spiritual standards, the Lord was attractive to sinners. They flocked to hear Him, He ate with them and appeared to actually quite like their company. 'Drawing near' is a Hebraism for coming to a holy place for worship. The Lord in His very person was the holy place, and not the Jerusalem temple cult. The double mention of "him" indicating the spiritual charisma which the Lord holds over those desperately seeking righteousness

15:2 *And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying: This man receives sinners and eats with them-* The Lord was criticized for "receiving sinners" and eating with them. Instead of the usual and expected Greek word *dechomai*, we find here the Greek *prosdechomai*- He welcomed them *into fellowship*, symbolizing this by eating with them. This was an act which had religious overtones in first century Palestine. Notice that *prosdechomai* is used by Paul to describe welcoming a brother / sister in spiritual fellowship (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 2:29). The Lord fellowshiped people in the belief that this would lead them to repentance, following His Father's pattern of using grace in order to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He didn't wait for people to get everything right and repented of and *only then* fellowship them, as a sign that they were up to His standards.

The theme of eating continues after Luke 14- for Luke 15 contains parables told by the Lord in answer to the criticism that He ate with sinners (Lk. 15:2). He explained that He had come to seek and save the lost, and that was why He ate with them (Lk. 15:4 cp. Lk. 19:10, where He justifies eating with Zacchaeus for the same reason). Note how in the case of Zacchaeus, the man only stated his repentance after he had 'received' Jesus into his house and eaten with Him. This exemplifies how the Lord turned upside down the table practice of the Jews- He didn't eat with people *once they had* repented, but *so that* His gracious fellowship of them might *lead them to* repentance. The parables of Lk. 15 speak about eating in order to express joy that a person had repented and been saved- the eating was to celebrate finding the lost sheep, coin and son. But the Lord was saying that this justified His eating with not yet repentant sinners. Thinking this through, we find an insight into the hopefulness of Jesus for human repentance- He fellowshiped with them and treated them *as if* He were celebrating their repentance; for He saw eating with them in this life as a foretaste of His eating with them in His future Kingdom. He invited them to a foretaste of the future banquet. His fellowship policy was therefore to encourage repentance; and seeing He wished all to be saved, He didn't exclude any from His table.

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The parables of the lost coin and lost sheep invite the hearer to identify with the heart of the God who seeks His lost. But the final climax of this triad of parables is that of the lost sons. Here the audience has to place themselves in one of two camps- the self-righteous son who ends up not eating with the Father, or the prodigal who sins so awfully and then eats with the Father in the hushed humility which experience of His grace along can bring. The Jews were worried about whom they might eat / fellowship with, just as many in the body of Christ are today. But the Lord turned it all around- *you* are a serious sinner, you need to make that long walk home to the Father in your day by day repentance, and eat with Him by His grace. He is seeking *you* to eat with Him; the question of whom *you* eat with is utterly secondary to that.

15:3 *And he spoke to them this parable, saying-* This rubric is not used to introduce the parables of the lost coin and lost son which follow. It could be that the Lord intended us to consider the three parables as one.

15:4 *What man of you-* Although the parables have the appearance of simple stories, their essential meaning is only granted to the reflective and spiritually minded reader. Close analysis of the parables reveal that they often contain something in them that is arrestingly unreal; and in this is very often the crux of the message. Surface level reading and listening give the impression that they are simple, homely stories, obvious in their meaning. But they are not; otherwise all men would have understood them, and the Lord would not have spoken them *so that* Israel would hear but not perceive. The true meaning depends upon perceiving that there is an element of startling unreality within the story line, that flags attention to the real message. The parables therefore challenge our stereotypes and force us to re-examine cherished suppositions. Perhaps the most obvious signpost to this feature of elements of unreality in the parables is in that of the lost sheep: "What man of you..." would leave ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost one? Answer: none of you would do that. And perhaps likewise, "What woman..." having lost just one piece of silver would be so obsessive about finding it, and so ecstatic with joy upon finding it (Lk. 15:4,8)? Perhaps the answer is also meant to be: "Not one of you". Yet this is the Father's passion for saving the lost, and rejoicing over them

*Having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he finds it?*- The Lord's parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also the restoration passages of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31, which speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The Lord knew there would not be repentance by Israel. But He went to the fig tree seeking fruit, even though it wasn't the time for fruit (Mk. 11:13). He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest (Mt. 9:37). More than anything, preaching has taught me the immense value of the human person as an individual. The Lord's parable of the strange shepherd who leaves the 99 and gives his all for the one- the foolish one, the lost one, the antisocial one- is programmatic for me. The need is the call. If one person needs fellowship, forgiveness, love, the teaching of the Gospel, baptism, encouragement, re-fellowship, support, money, whatever... the value of them as an individual must be paramount. No matter what it costs us, how far we have to travel [in whatever sense], how much 'trouble' we get into, how foolish we look, how out on a limb we put ourselves. The value and meaning of the individual person was paramount in the Lord's teaching and example, and it must be in our worldviews too.

David leaving the sheep and going to fight Goliath recalls the parable of the Lord as the good shepherd leaving the flock and going to save the lost sheep. The shepherd goes alone at night up into the hills (cp. Isaac going to be sacrificed in the hills), and carries the lamb on his shoulder- as the

Lord carried the cross of our sins on his shoulder to redeem the lost sheep of mankind (Is. 53:6). This lost sheep parable is also picked up in 1 Peter 2:25: "For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls" (i.e. Christ the shepherd). But this in turn is quoting Is. 53:5,6: "All we like sheep have gone astray... but he was wounded (on the cross) for our transgressions", which is thus the parallel to the saving of the lost sheep. This interpretation of the lost sheep parable- i.e. that the shepherd going to save the sheep represents the Lord going to die on the cross- was first prompted by David leaving the sheep with the keeper to go and fight Goliath, representing Christ's saving us from sin on the cross. The leaving of the sheep with the keeper perhaps looks forward to the Lord's entrusting the disciples to the Father's care in those agonizing days while death parted him from them, as David's encounter with Goliath did. David's subsequent leaving of them altogether to go and live in the King's court clearly looks forward to our Lord's ascension to Heaven after His victory over the real Goliath.

15:5 *And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing*- At the time of Jesus, it was taught (*Mishnah Qidd* 4.14) that "A man should not teach his son to be a herdsman...for their craft is the craft of robbers". Shepherds weren't seen as kindly old men. They were seen as crafty and thieves. But the Lord chose that figure to represent Himself and the Father- even though the Old Testament likens God to the shepherd of Israel. The startling, unsettling figure [for the first century Jewish mind] was to demonstrate how it is the Lord's humanity that makes Him our saviour. Likewise, the likening of the Gospel to yeast would have been shocking; or to a mustard bush, which is a member of the cabbage family [rather, e.g., than to a fruitful vine or upright palm tree]. It is signalled to us that there is to be a strangeness to this new Kingdom about which Jesus spoke, a humanity and yet unusualness about it. It was hard for the Lord to explain to us the level of love for us which He would reach in the cross. So He told a story of a shepherd who so madly loves his sheep, whose life is so taken up by his job, that he would die to save one of them, and comes back triumphantly rejoicing when he has found the lost sheep. The average shepherd would have surely accepted that some sheep are lost, it's the luck of the game. But this shepherd who dropped all and ran off after one lost sheep was no usual shepherd. And the element of unreality in the story brings out the Lord's grace towards us. Note in passing how the man : sheep relationship portrays that between us and the Lord. As the sheep understood pathetically little about the shepherd's sacrifice to save it, so we too fail to appreciate the height of the fact that Christ died for us, as the shepherd for the sheep. We can be sure that the frightened sheep didn't bob along on the shepherd's shoulders, grinning all the way home. With his underside covered in faeces and mud, it would have struggled with the Saviour shepherd, fanatic almost in his passion to save the sheep. As he stumbled along the rocky paths, shoulders bowed down, hands against his chest clutching the



animal's paws, the shepherd would be the living imitation of the posture of the Lord as He carried the cross of our sins to Calvary. All this is a pattern of the almost fanatic effort we should expend to win back the lost.

The man who owned 100 sheep was rich. Shepherds were the lowest of the low. If you owned 100 sheep, you employed a shepherd to look after them and take responsibility for chasing the lost. But there's something unreal- the owner of the sheep is the one who is the shepherd. This actually is the point of the Ezekiel 34 passage upon which the Lord built the parable- having fired the unworthy shepherds of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, *I myself, even I*, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them ... I will bring them ... I will feed them ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ez. 34:11-15). The remarkable thing is that the owner of the sheep decides to become the personal shepherd, feeding, seeking, delivering, bringing the sheep *himself personally*. A Palestinian wealthy enough to own a whole flock of sheep simply wouldn't do this. He *always* hired someone else to do this- because being a shepherd was so despised. Behold the humility of God. But see too His personal passion for us. Hence the Lord's question: Which one of *you* would act like this? The Father and His Son take such passionate personal responsibility for us, that God was willing in Christ to shame and humiliate Himself in order to get us back into the fold.

### **Personal Responsibility**

There's also something odd about the way the Lord speaks of the shepherd: "*He* has lost one of them". Translations of the Bible into Semitic languages, especially Arabic, tend to read: "If one of them is lost" (passive). In the language and concepts of the Middle East, a speaker never blames himself. As in Spanish, they would not say "I lost my book"- rather, "the book went from me". Likewise "I missed the train" is expressed as "the train left me". And I would even speculate that preaching Christ in Arabic and even Hispanic cultures comes up against the problem of people strongly disliking taking ultimate responsibility, or to own up to the personal guilt of sin; the shifting of blame away from oneself is reflected even in their languages. And so when the Lord puts words in the shepherd's mouth whereby he takes direct responsibility for the loss of the sheep, this would've sounded strange even grammatically. Apparently to this day, it's hard to translate that actual phrase into Arabic. Likewise with the idea of the woman saying that she had found the coin which she had lost. The Lord is labouring how God, and God in Christ, feel an extraordinary personal responsibility for the lost.

15:6 *And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep*

*which was lost!*- The shepherd-owner calls his "friends" together. This surely refers to the clubs the Pharisees formed in villages, called the *Khaburim* ['friends']. They ought to have rejoiced to be eating with sinners, as the Lord was- but they wouldn't. The whole context of the three parables is the Lord justifying why he ate at home with sinners, thereby showing that He considered them as somehow 'in fellowship' with Him. The Pharisees wouldn't do this unless those people repented and learnt Torah in great depth. But the Lord is surely saying that He sees those men who ate with Him as the sheep which has already been brought home. He reflected the gracious outlook with which He saw people; and His hopefulness that by treating a person as if they had 'come home', then they would indeed do so. Probing this line further, the Lord Jesus speaks of the found sheep as being symbolic of the repentant. But the sheep did nothing- it was simply acceptant of having been found. To accept being found is, therefore, seen by the Lord as what He calls 'repentance'. Now surely that's grace- salvation without works.

The element of unreality is seen in the way the shepherd takes the sheep *home* and not back to the fold, inviting neighbours around to rejoice that his sheep had been found. The quite unusual joy and humanly inappropriate love of the shepherd for that sheep is of course there to signpost to us the "love beyond all reason" of the true shepherd for us. The way the lost sheep is brought home rather than returned to the fold was also perhaps some sort of allusion to the teaching of Dt. 22:1 that the lost sheep of your brother's must be returned to *him*. This would mean that our pastoral care should not simply be for our 'own' sheep, those for whom we have responsibility; but for the lost sheep of other 'pastors' who've not done their job. See on Jn. 10:12.

There is an element of unreality in the story of the lost sheep. And that unreality reflects the sensitivity of Jesus. The shepherd doesn't return the sheep to the fold, but takes it home and calls his friends around to see the dumb animal and rejoice (Lk. 15:4-6). The Lord knew we would frown a bit at this. He foresaw how hard it would be for us to rejoice in the return of a difficult sheep to fellowship.

This parable was told by the Lord to justify His eating with sinners. He justifies it by saying that He is holding a party over the finding of one lost person; and those sinners are His friends and neighbours. Truly He is the sinner's friend.

To carry a sheep on your shoulders, fighting and struggling with you, as you climb down a mountainside in the dark... isn't something which is usually done *rejoicing*. But this is the unusual, humanly inexplicable, *joy* which there is in the Father and Son when day by day they 'find' us and bring us back. And where would a shepherd usually take such a lost animal? Back to the flock, whom he's left in the wilderness. But then comes another unreal element. The shepherd takes the sheep *home to his*

*very own house*. This sheep had such extraordinary value to this wealthy man. He came back dirty and exhausted- he humiliated himself and made himself a fool in the eyes of the world, all because of this humanly senseless love and joy which he had over this lost sheep. And we have to fill in the details, answering the unasked but implied questions- what about the 99 left out in the wilderness? The story ends with them out of the house- paving the way for how the elder son is left standing outside of the house. Note how Lk. 15:3 speaks of the three parables as one, in the singular, "parable".

In respect of God's relationship with the Angels, it is interesting to note that there seems to be a theme in Scripture of all of the Angels being involved in each action one of them performs, due to the perfect unity that exists between them and God (see on Lk. 11:7,8; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Ex. 12:41). Thus when one of the Angels acts in our lives, all the others are conscious of it too. Consider how Luke 15 describes the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents; the man who found the lost sheep "calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me... when she (the woman) has found it (the lost coin) she calls her friends and neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me... likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repents". The man and the woman must therefore represent God manifested through our guardian Angel. The Angel physically leaves the presence of God in Heaven and then goes off to arrange circumstances to encourage the sinner to return. He then calls all the others together to rejoice "when He comes home" (into Heaven, into the multitude around the throne of God from which Angels go and return in obeying God's Word). The whole Heavenly household then rejoice together. Thus we read in Hebrews 1:14 that *all* the Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation". *All* the Angels are involved together in this work. All things in Heaven (the Angels) and on earth (the things they arrange on earth) are for our sakes!

15:7 *I say to you, that even so there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, than over ninety nine righteous persons, who need no repentance*- There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus spoke the words of God, and therefore His sayings can be interpreted at the deepest possible level; and yet at the same time, they were so easy to understand by simple, sincere hearts. The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three-beat line; the commission to the disciples in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly

sounding words. He uses three words which feature the guttural 'h': joy = *hedwa*; one = *hada*; sinner = *hateya*. In passing, I find this kind of thing evidence that we do have in the Gospel records the actual words of Jesus, and not a rough summary of them interpreted by many others, as modern theologians wrongly suppose. Our view of inspiration enables us to return as it were to the actual, living voice of Jesus in confidence. If the record of His words is sure and true, then we can go on to guess in what tone of voice He would have spoken, and seek to define in our own minds ever more features of the Son of Man. This thought alone I find so immensely inspiring- for we hear the real Christ speaking to us down the centuries. The Lord's teaching style thus reflected His recognition that He was speaking to the illiterate, and that many of those who followed Him would need to commit His words to memory; and so He spoke His words in a form which was memorable by them, as well as profitably dissectible by computer-aided intellectuals of our age. In this alone is a marvellous insight into both His genius and also His sensitivity to His audiences, from which we can take a lesson. But on a practical level, it is apparent that He had carefully prepared His sayings in advance, perhaps during His years up to age 30. I don't see His sayings as off the cuff bursts of wisdom, neither words merely flashed into His mouth by the Father. They were God's words, but carefully prepared by Him. He sets a matchless example to any would-be teacher in His church. Jesus spoke to the hearts of the people. He didn't use words like 'sin' very often. He uses *hamartia* ['sin'] in the Synoptics only 8 times, compared to 64 times in Paul's writings. Jesus wasn't talking theology, He didn't speak in abstract terms. Rather did He speak of evil fruit, lost sheep, lost coins, no good sons... because He was framing His message for the illiterate, who thought in images rather than abstractions.

15:8 *Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she loses one piece, does not light a lamp and sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it?*- Luke 15 contains two parables concerning repentance, where the restored sinner is in fact not repentant: the lost sheep and the lost coin. The Lord searches for them *until* He finds them; neither of them actually repent and seek to come back. Indeed, the coin is inanimate, it can't repent. It was actually the woman's fault that it got lost in the first place. Now all these are surely examples of hyperbole- a gross exaggeration to make a point. It isn't the Lord's fault that we stray. But He speaks *as if it is* in this parable, in order to make the point that He so strenuously seeks our return to Him. Likewise Yahweh likens Himself to a worthless husband who forsook His sweet wife of Israel in her youth (Is. 54:6).

God's need for man- as it were- is brought out in this parable. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8;

this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

It's been suggested that the lost coin was one of the woman's dowry coins, and thus the story speaks of how every lost person is a personal and deeply felt loss to God. However, this view has been criticized in that a drachma, which had the same value as a silver denarius, was the wage paid to a worker for one day's field work (Mt. 20:1-16). It was far less than the dowry coins. It could be that instead we have here a reference to a desperately poor housewife- who certainly had no dowry money left. The poor were so poor in Palestine at the time of Christ that they were selling their land, and many had become landless labourers. They worked for money, with which they bought food. The husband went far and wide searching for work; the Lord's parable pictures labourers waiting around for work. It's been calculated that on the basis of one denarius / day as wage, even if the worker worked 300 days / year, and had four children and a wife plus himself to support, this income would only enable them to buy enough bread to provide 1400 calories / family member / day. This isn't enough to sustain a person's ability to do manual work. Therefore mothers and children faced malnutrition, and the women tried to grow crops on waste land and did anything for money in order to buy bread. The smiling, full cheeked, charming Mediterranean woman with dowry coins around her forehead (beloved of those Sunday School books about Bible background) just wasn't the scene that the Lord had grown up in. The woman who'd lost her coin was searching desperately for it, because that was what she'd buy the kids food with. No coin, no food, whiny, hungry, sick kids. She needed, desperately needed, that coin; so that she could feed the hungry kids whom she loved and be the *de facto* domestic head which she was. And this is all a picture of God's *need* for the lost, His *need* for us, because He knows the feeding which that lost one can uniquely provide to His beloved family. And one wonders of course whether the Lord's parable wasn't drawn from real life incidents in His own childhood with Mary.

The lighting of the candle is a symbol of our conversion (Mt. 25:1; Heb. 10:32). Our lamps were lit by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:16; Heb. 10:32) for the purpose of giving light to the house. The Lord lights a lamp in order to search for his lost coin, that weak brother or sister that means as much to him on a deep, indescribably personal level as a woman's dowry money in the Middle East (cp. a wedding ring; Lk. 15:8). But the lamp he lights is

us. This is yet another example of his parables being intended to fit together. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words).

15:9 *And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying: Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost-* We note the Lord carefully balances the gender issue in these parables; the male shepherd is matched by the woman in the lost coin story. Such was His sensitivity to the value of all persons. As noted on :6, her joyful party reflects how all the Angels are aware of one lost soul being found. And the Lord is justifying His eating with sinners on the basis that they were His friends and neighbours. He was and is the sinner's friend. We recall how when the tax collector Matthew was converted, the Lord had a party to celebrate it along with other tax collectors (Mt. 9:9,10). When Cornelius called together His friends and neighbours to hear the Gospel, he was effectively presenting himself as the lost coin which had been found (Acts 10:24 s.w.).

If we imagine the woman who lost the coin, we sense something of her remorse and desperation as she searches the cracks in the floor for it. It could've been part of her dowry- all that she owned for herself, all that was her very own. Not even her body was hers- it was her husband's, to do what he wished with. But the dowry coins were hers- her very own. If the allusion were to one of these coins, it would speak of how much we mean to the Lord... that I, one of 6 billion, actually mean everything to Him, for whom I am His very own. But the allusion may also be to coins which the peasant women would keep bound up in a rag, close to their body. With this money, the woman would've had to feed the family for the next week or so. But... she'd let the rag come loose, and a coin had slipped out. In either case, we are to imagine the woman searching for it with a sense of remorse, taking responsibility that she was accountable for the loss. And this, we are invited to understand, is how the Lord feels for those who are lost. Notice how the woman searches *in the house*- presumably, she'd not been out of the house since she last had the coin. By filling out this little detail, we perhaps have a picture of how the Lord took responsibility, or felt responsible, for the loss of those 'within the house' of Israel.

15:10 *Even so, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents-* The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy.

15:11 *And he said: A certain man had two sons-* The man is not that wealthy; for he has only two sons and no other children are mentioned. This heightens the generosity of the father to the younger son, and the tragedy of the waste. The two sons may represent Israel and Judah.

As with most of the parables, the prodigal has a primary reference to the nation of Israel. The many Old Testament allusions bring this home without doubt. In practice, this means that the intensity of repentance which Israel will eventually manifest should be seen in our contrition at sin. In this lies a real challenge. The following allusions demonstrate that our Lord clearly intended us to make a connection between the prodigal and apostate Israel- and therefore with ourselves:

- The father falling on the prodigal's neck and kissing him sends the mind back to Joseph weeping on Benjamin's neck (another younger brother), typical of Christ's receiving home of a repentant Israel in the last days. As Joseph commanded his servants "Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready" (Gen. 43:16), so the father did likewise (:23). Both repentances were celebrated with a meal of fellowship (cp. the breaking of bread). Both the prodigal and the sons humbled themselves to the position of servants. Like the prodigal, Israel were often brought back to their spiritual senses by famine (Ruth 1:1; 1 Kings 8:37; Lk.4:25 etc.). His realization that "I perish with hunger" (:17) matches the description of Jacob in Canaan as "A Syrian ready to perish" (Dt. 26:5), dwelling in a land that was 'perishing through the famine' (Gen. 41:36). This affliction came upon natural Israel because of their 'murder' of Joseph / Jesus. The prodigal's profligacy is therefore to be seen as the crucifying of Christ afresh by the believer.

- The prodigal Israel went "into a far country" (Lk. 15:13) - a phrase normally used in the Old Testament concerning the Gentile lands of Israel's dispersion (Dt. 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41,46; 2 Kings 20:14; 2 Chron. 6:32,36). In passing, the "far country" of Lk. 19:12 and 20:9 should also refer to the lands of the Gentiles; *this* is where Christ has gone (as well as Heaven), and will return to Israel when they desire him to. As with so many of the parables, this one is packed with allusions to the Proverbs. The "far country" recalls Prov. 25:25: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country". Like many Proverbs, this is alluding to the Law- concerning how Israel would return from the "far country" of their dispersion upon their repentance. The sense of refreshment and exhilaration which this gives God should surely motivate us to repent, and also to encourage others to do so. Yet we need to ask whether we feel this same exaltation of spirit as God does "over one sinner that repents". It requires selflessness, and a real desire to see glory given to our Father.

- Our association of the prodigal with Israel in dispersion is strengthened by the mention that the prodigal "wasted" the Father's riches, the Greek meaning 'to scatter abroad'- suggesting that as Israel had wastefully scattered God's riches in the Gospel, so they too were scattered. Note

how the prodigal is pictured as ending up with the pigs- well known symbol of the Gentiles. As the Son's return to the Father was matched by His going out to meet the son, when Israel "return unto the Lord... then the Lord your God will... return and gather you from all the nations" (Dt. 30:2,3).

- The book of Hosea frequently presents prodigal Israel as the one who went astray from God, her loving Father and husband, committing adultery with the surrounding countries, with the result that God cast her off, leaving her to suffer in those very lands whose idols she had worshipped. Her sense of shame and knowledge of God's constant love then brought her to her senses (Hos. 2; 5:11-15; 6:1; 7:8-10). There can be little doubt that our Lord had his eye on this symbology when framing the prodigal parable. Hos. 2:7,8 is the clearest example: "She shall follow after her lovers... he shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold (cp. the father giving the son his substance), which they prepared for Baal". These blessings of corn, wine and oil are referring to the blessings for obedience promised in Dt. 28. The point is being made that these blessings were not immediately and totally removed once Israel started to go astray. This demonstrates how material 'blessings' are not necessarily an indication that we have favour with God. Consuming the Father's substance "with harlots" (:30) is therefore parallel to giving it to idols. The spiritual riches of being in covenant with God, as well as our every material blessing from Him, were frittered away by Israel. God's "hand" worked upon Israel to make them realize the seriousness of their ways (Hos. 2:10). This fact starts to plumb the depth of God's love- that even with those who have broken His covenant, God's hand is still working to lead them to repentance.

- Jer. 31:18-20 describe how Ephraim moans: "You have chastised me... turn me, and I shall be turned... after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed... I was ashamed... because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son?... since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still... I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord". We must not think from this that God just chose to turn Israel (the prodigal) back to him at a certain moment. It was because God "spake against him", through which the prodigal was "instructed", that he turned back.

- There is reason to see the family portrayed in the parable as being a priestly family- thus representing prodigal Israel, "a Kingdom of priests". The son did not ask for his share of the inheritance, but of "the portion of goods"- remember that Levites did not own any land. There is surely an echo of the curse on Eli's priestly family in the prodigal parable: "Every one that is left in your house shall come and crouch... for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray you, into one of the priests offices, that I may eat a piece of bread" (1 Sam. 2:36). The



Father had "hired servants", which takes us back to the reference in Lev. 22:10 to the priests having "hired servants" in their household, who would have performed the mundane work for them (cp. the Gibeonites). The prodigal was therefore asking to be admitted back into God's service, resigning all the spiritual superiorities he could have enjoyed through being of the priestly line. Similarly latter day Israel will be willing to be accepted by God as Gentiles, having resigned their trust in their natural lineage. Our attitude on repentance ought to be similar- just wanting to quietly, humbly participate in God's family for the joy of being close to Him. Further indication that the hired servants represent the Gentiles is found in the fact that they had "bread enough" (Gk. 'an abundance of loaves'), connecting with the Gentiles of Mt. 14:20 being "filled" (same word in Lk. 15:16) with the abundance of loaves created by Christ.

- The parable of the lost son complements that of the lost sheep earlier in the same chapter. "My people have been lost sheep", "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Jer. 50:6; Mt. 10:6; 15:24). A comparison of the parable with Hos. 7:9,10 indicates that most of Israel remain as the prodigal in the pig country: "Strangers have devoured his strength (cp. "devoured your substance"), and he knows it not... they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this". The illogicality of Israel remaining in their pathetic spiritual position is so apparent to us from this; yet we of the new Israel can also be crazy enough to go on living out of real fellowship with God.

The reason for presenting such a catalogue of evidence is to show that prodigal Israel's latter day repentance will be of a similar intensity of repentance to ours in this life. They will mourn and weep with a rare intensity of self-hate and self-knowledge- even as a father for his only son. Do we shed tears on repentance? Do we realize, as they will, how our sins brought about the crucifixion? Do we appreciate that our spiritual indifference and lack of perception means that we, like Israel, "did esteem him stricken", seeing no beauty in him (Is. 53:2-5) as we march through our lives, unthinking as to the power and beauty of the cross?

The younger son is presented as lacking wisdom and being disobedient to the law, as Judah in dispersion. "Whoso loves wisdom rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his substance" (Prov. 29:3) was clearly in the Lord's mind when constructing this parable. He evidently saw this proverb as applying to the same person in time of sin and repentance. Repenting and loving wisdom are therefore paralleled, showing again that repentance is not just a twinge of conscience, but involves coming to really know God. The prodigal wished to return home so that he could share in the loaves which the servants had "to spare", or (better), "had in abundance". This same word occurs in Jn. 6:12 concerning the bread which "remained", i.e. was in abundance, after the feeding of the five thousand. In that acted parable, the bread

represented the abundance of spiritual food which is in the spirit-words of Christ. It was this which the truly repentant sinner earnestly seeks, rather than a mere salving of conscience. "Whoso keeps the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shames his father" (Prov. 28:7) shows that such genuine repentance and knowing of God's wisdom is effectively reckoned as keeping the letter of the Law. "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causes shame, and shall have part of the inheritance" (Prov. 17:2) seems to also connect with our parable; implying that the wise son who was willing to be a servant was ultimately greater than the son who appeared to be technically obedient to the letter of the law. Likewise, the son desiring to be fed with the husks of the pig food may connect with Lazarus desiring to be fed with the crumbs from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). Yet Lazarus is representative of the repentant sinner who is ultimately justified. The degree to which God will so totally impute righteousness to us is indeed hard to come to terms with. But it is faith in this which will be our ultimate salvation.

*15:12 And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the inheritance of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them-* The somewhat sad picture of the loving Father dividing between his sons "his living", for them to go off and make what they will of, to either squander in the world or selfishly and self-righteously hoard to themselves, is a picture of the vast and genuine delegation to us by the Father. The Father has given us huge freewill and an amazing amount of self-determination. Divine delegation is one of His great characteristics as a Father. It would have been highly unusual for any father to agree to liquidate part of the family estate ahead of time, just so as to give in to the will of a wayward son who totally rejected him. And yet the father did this; he liquidated part of the family inheritance to give it to a son who wanted to openly quit the family. This is how much the Father is willing to give us the essential desires of our own hearts, how much He is willing to allow us to go our own way, so that we may serve Him of our own freewill.

For those Palestinian peasants, politeness and respect to your father was paramount. Even if you didn't obey your father, you had to be polite to him. Rudeness to your father or public disobedience to him was the worst thing you could do, and you shamed yourself. The Lord turned that understanding on its head in His parable of the two sons in Mt. 21:28-32. He taught that the *better* son was the one who rudely refused to do what his father asked, but later relented and did it. The Lord saw this son as better than the one who politely agreed, and yet never fulfilled his promise. Perhaps that parable needs reflection upon today, where 'nicespeak' has become paramount- so long as you say something nicely, what you actually are saying and what you *do* isn't so important. *How* we speak *is* of course important; but it can be exalted to the point where

words rather than real action become paramount. But that aside, the point is that both the sons were *extremely* rude to their Father. And he was the most loving, self-sacrificial dad that two kids ever could've had. We feel hurt for the lovely old boy. One element of unreality is that he only had two sons- a small family for those days. How tragic that both his sons went so wrong and rebelled against him. And we sense something of his hurt, our heart starts to bleed for him, and we think of *our* Heavenly Father's hurt. And then the penny drops- those two boys are us.

The younger son was more than rude in demanding his actual share of the inheritance immediately. He was effectively wishing that his father was dead. He had the neck to treat his lovely father as if he were already dead. There arose in Europe after the second world war the 'Death of God' philosophy and theology. We may distance ourselves from it in disgust, finding even the words grating and inappropriate, but let's remember that the younger son ends up the son who is found in the end abiding in the Father's house and joyful fellowship. This is how we have treated our wonderful Father. We know from the examples of Abraham (Gen. 25:5-8) and Jacob (Gen. 48-49) that the actual division of the inheritance was made *by the father* as his death approached. For the son to take the initiative was disgusting. Although the sons could have some legal right to what their father gave them before his death, they were strictly denied the right of actually having it in possession [i.e. the right of disposition]. This awful son was therefore each of us. And the father responds with an unreal grace. He agrees. He did what he surely knew was not really for the spiritual good of the son. And according to Dt. 21:7, the younger son's share was one third. But the father gives him *half*. The younger son turns it all into cash within a few days [the Greek for "gathered all" definitely means 'to turn into cash']. This would've meant selling the fields and property quickly- and the father would've had to give agreement for this and have been involved in the contracts. Buying and selling takes a long time in peasant culture- selling quickly would've meant selling very cheaply. It would've been the laughing stock of the whole area. The way the son sells the inheritance would've been a more awful and unreal thing in the ears of the Lord's first hearers than it is to us. Naboth would rather have died than sell his inheritance- even to the King (1 Kings 21:3). The lifetime's hard work of the father and family was wasted. And the father went along with it all. This was more than unusual; it would've been outrageous in the ears of the Lord's hearers. But this is the outrageous nature of God's grace. He must be so torn by our prayers- as a loving Father, wanting to give us what we ask for materially, whilst knowing it's not for our good... and sometimes doing so. The father made himself look a fool because of his enormous love for this obnoxious son who wished him dead, this young man who clearly thought solely in terms of 'Gimme the money and I'm outta here for good'. And he thought this with no thought to the huge damage he was bringing upon

the rest of the family. For they would've lost so much through losing half the property. We sense the pain of the father, of the family, and the selfishness of the son. And time and again we are breathless at the love and grace of the father.

Significantly, the son asked for his share of the property- not his inheritance. To receive inheritance carried with it responsibility, of building the house of your father, upholding the family name etc. But this son didn't want that. And the father could quite rightly have said 'No, you get the inheritance when you take the responsibilities that come with it'. But no, this son wants to quit with his lovely father and the whole family name. In that culture, to cut your ties with your home family, your inheritance, your land... was almost unheard of. It was almost impossible to do. But that's what this angry young man wanted. The incredible thing is, the father allowed him to do this! That element of unreality signposts the extent to which God allows us freewill, genuine freedom of determination- and how much it costs Him emotionally and as a person to do so. This is the frightening thing about freewill- how much it hurts and costs God to give it to us. This insight alone should lead to a far more careful and responsible use of our freewill. William Temple said somewhere, something to the effect that God gives us freedom even to reject His love. It's no good reflecting on the younger son and thinking 'But I'm not that kinda guy'. The whole point of the parable is that yes, we are. That's us. We're either like that son, or the self-righteous son who is left standing outside of the father's fellowship. Clearly enough, the God whom Jesus was revealing was *not* based upon some village patriarch. Freud rightly observed that many people's image of God is based upon their experience of human father figures. For the true believer however, the Lord Jesus is revealing a Father-figure radically different to anything they've ever met.

*15:13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered into money all he had, and took a journey into a far country; and there he squandered his inheritance in reckless living-* The same Greek word occurs in 1 Pet. 4:4 concerning Gentiles (and also the latter-day apostasy within the ecclesia?) living in "excess of riot". The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own

sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

15:14 *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want-* The prodigal "spent all", just as the diseased woman had "spent all" her living (Mk. 5:26), and now came to take hold of Christ's mantle of righteousness. This we do at baptism. Other similarities between the prodigal and that widow are to be found in *Studies In The Gospels* by H.A. Whittaker. It's bankruptcy, or bankruptcy. Paul spoke of spending and being spent in the Lord's service (2 Cor. 12:15), alluding to how the prodigal spent himself in dissipation. That sense of losing all must come- either in sin's service, or in that of the Lord. See on Mt. 3:11.

15:15 *And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs-* The son was attached to a "citizen of that country", perhaps a personification of the Biblical devil to which we are joined before conversion. He was made free from him the moment he started his journey back. He "was dead, and is alive again" is also baptism language (cp. Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:13). "He arose" from the pigs (Lk. 15:20) certainly implies new life and resurrection.

We don't like to think of ourselves as that thankless young man; but even more do we revolt at the idea that we were and are at times out there feeding pigs. Anyone who's travelled in the Middle East will know the annoyance of a beggar attaching themselves to you and just refusing to leave you. But watch how the locals deal with those types. They don't shout at them, or chase them. They will ask them to do something which is beneath even their dignity as a beggar to do. And they walk away shamefaced. I knew a brother who was a schoolteacher. The boss wanted to fire him because of his Christianity. The boss didn't say 'You're fired! Clear off!'. He simply transferred him to a remote village in the middle of nowhere. And so the brother did the only reasonable thing- he resigned. The young man 'joining' or 'gluing' himself to the rich Gentile citizen was like the beggar who glues himself to you, and you don't know how to shake him off. The pig owner told him to go and feed his pigs- thinking that this would surely be beneath this once-wealthy Jew who was hassling him. But so desperate was the young man, that he had to swallow every drop of pride, national and personal- and go do it. And he felt like a pig- he was willing to eat what they ate. *This* is the picture of our desperation

at every sin- but we need to feel it, if we are to experience the path back to the Father. In an age when sin is often more about the words you type on your keyboard than actual physical debauchery, this parable hits home hard. Of course it was pride which was in the way for the son, and it is swallowing pride which is the essence of repentance. And again, it was fear of shame that delayed the young man's return- fear of having to go through the *kezazah* ceremony of being officially disowned, fear of how the mob of young kids which roam every village street would whistle and shout and sing insults at him. And we need to pause and reflect whether we contribute to this significant barrier which surely hinders so many from returning to the Father's house.

15:16 *And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything-* The son was joined to a Gentile, and totally ritually unclean by working with the pigs. All hope of justification by the law was long gone.

15:17 *But when he came to his senses he said-*The sense that the prodigal had of having come to a complete end, realizing the ultimate wretchedness of sin, should be ours when we repent. The prodigal's repentance is ours. The prodigal among the pigs, rising up to return, should be a cameo of our repentances throughout each day. The allusion to the Septuagint of Prov. 29:21 shows how that despite having reached such an "end", there is still a way back: "He that lives wantonly from a child shall be a servant, and in the *end* shall grieve over himself". Yet we know that after that "end", the prodigal returned. The son 'coming to his senses' implies that his life of sin was madness, lived in a haze of semi-consciousness of his real spiritual self. This spiritual anaesthesia is *always* present when we sin. Yet it does not mean that God sees and feels our sins as we do; He has a constancy of spiritual awareness. An appreciation of this may help us in our struggle to sense the true seriousness of sin.

*How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, but I perish here with hunger!-* The prodigal's perishing with hunger and desperately needing bread suggests a connection with Jn .6:35: "I am the bread of life: he that comes to me (cp. the prodigal's return) shall never hunger... him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (cp. the receiving back of the prodigal). This coming to Christ is both ongoing and also specifically at baptism.

God hoped through the hope of Hosea that 'Gomer' would say "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than now" (Hos. 2:17). But Gomer / Israel would not; and so the Lord picked up the idea and puts it in the mouth of the returning prodigal son in Lk. 15:17.

15:18 *I will rise and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight-* His plan was to use the phrase

"I have sinned against heaven and against you"- but this is almost quoting verbatim from Pharaoh's words of insincere repentance in Ex. 10:16! He still failed to grasp that he was his father's *son*- he didn't 'get it', that *this* would be the basis of his salvation, rather than a master-servant relationship with his father based on hard work. It was the father's amazing grace which swept him off his feet just along the street from his father's home; it was the father's unconditional acceptance of him which made him realize what sonship and repentance was really all about.

15:19 *I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants*- The young man hadn't quite learnt the need for total grace when he decided to return home. He decided to return and ask to be made "as one of your skilled craftsmen" (Gk.- he uses *misthios* rather than *doulos*, the usual word for 'slave'). Presumably he figured that he could work and pay off what he had wasted.

15:20 *And he rose and went to his father. But while he was yet far away, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran and embraced and kissed him*- The Father's speed and zeal is captured by the repeated use of the conjunction "and": "His father saw him, *and* had compassion, *and* ran, *and* fell on his neck, *and* kissed him". The son's careful preparation of his request for mercy was needful for him, but not for the Father. This is a precise allusion to the spirit of Is. 65:24: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear". This is primarily concerning God's relationship with men in the Kingdom. Yet our daily experience of forgiveness now should give us a foretaste of the glorious sense of restoration with God which will be ours in the Kingdom.

There was a Jewish custom called *Kezazah*, 'the cutting off'. If a Jew lost the family fortune amongst Gentiles, he would be greeted at home by the whole family, who would break a pot and scream 'XYZ is cut off from his people' (Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005) p. 52). The family and community would have no more fellowship with the person (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) p. 102). Moulton and Milligan describe the record of a public notice by which parents declare their dissociation from their son who had wasted their wealth (J.H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary Of The Greek New Testament Illustrated From the Papyri And Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) p. 89). This is what the Lord's Jewish audience would've expected to come next in the story, when the son returns. But no! There is the very opposite. Law and traditional expectation and even human perception of justice is thrown away, as the father races along the street towards his son and accepts him. For an elderly man to run publicly was yet again an unreal element in the story- mature men always walk, at a slow and dignified pace. Not

gather up their robes and run, let alone publicly. Actually the Greek word translated "run" in Lk. 15:20 is that used about sprinting (1 Cor. 9:24,26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 12:1). Here again we see the self-humiliation of the father before men, as he expressed a radical acceptance. Even we from our distance expect there to be a 'telling off', a facing of the issues. But there isn't. The grace of God which meets the returning sinner leads him to repentance. It of itself, by its sheer magnitude, elicits the state of contrition which is indeed vital; but this is inspired by the huge initiative of the Father and Son.

The father's radical acceptance is the very basis of our salvation. It is challenging, supremely so. Perhaps we handle 'classic' repentance easier- someone does wrong, goes off for a long time, is out of sight and out of mind, comes back, asks for our forgiveness with tears and humility. It's actually psychologically hard to say 'No'. *That* kind of forgiveness is relatively easy. But what is so much harder is to show forgiveness and the nature of the father's love and grace time and again in daily life; to keep looking and hoping for the one who has offended us, ruined us, destroyed us, used and abused us... to be coming home. Actually I know virtually none amongst us who rise up to the father's love and grace in this. It remains a stark, sobering challenge to us all.

It needs to be understood that the father had to act as the village expected him to. They expected him to enact the *kezazah*, to hand the son over to them in some form for judgment, to make an example of this awful man. No village member is an island, all have to act within the expectations of the group. But the father breaks through all that. He again humiliates himself before the villagers by doing what he did. He likely angers them- for anger so often comes as a result of being confronted by the grace shown by others. We see it so often in the life of our spiritual community. Indeed, the Lord got at this in another parable, where He speaks of how some were angry at the extreme grace shown by the generous vineyard owner (Mt. 20:1-16).

The Father offered forgiveness without repentance to the prodigal son before there was any direct evidence of repentance- just a sign of general regret or desire to be in the Father's house. Indeed, it would see that the very fact the son *wanted* to return to the Father's house was quite enough to warrant his acceptance there- and the killing of the fatted calf. The Lord's zeal for our redemption and His enthusiasm to see us as righteous is brought out in the parable of the prodigal. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness, those that remember you in your ways... we have sinned... we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags... but now, O Lord, You are our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this



was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God. But the crucial point is: *how often* do we have such a true repentance? We repeatedly sin, that we admit. But how frequently is there this kind of repentance which calls forth such grace, to see us as so righteous when we are so unrighteous, the grace of Jesus so great, so free...? The parables so often allude to contemporary Jewish conceptions of grace, and show how God's grace is so far beyond them. The Father is watching for the return of the prodigal, even while the son was "far off" (Gk. *makron*); and this is the same word used about the "far (Gk. *makros*) country" where the son was (Lk. 15:13,20). The Divine eyesight sees the person who is far off in sin, and longs for their return. This was quite contrary to all Jewish and human notions of showing grace to those who return - *after* they return. There was a contemporary Jewish story about a son who wished to return to his father; and the father sends a message to him saying "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you". The Lord's parable showed how the care of the Father for His children is so far more than that. And He is there watching billions of cases, simultaneously... such is the passionate heart of God for the individual.

We must grow in our realization of the *enthusiasm* of God for our salvation. Consider how the Father ran unto the pathetic son and fell on (Gk. violently seized) his neck and kissed him (Lk. 15:20; the same Greek as in Acts 20:37). The Father restlessly watching for the prodigal's return matches the woman searching for the lost coin "till she find it" or the unusual shepherd who searches for his lost sheep "until He finds it" (Lk. 15:4,8,20). This involves God in huge activity- setting up providential encounters, nudging consciences through circumstance. The huge amount of 'work' is one thing; but the mental energy of concern and thoughtfulness is phenomenal beyond our comprehension. God rises up early seeking His people- rather like us somehow being able to wake up early in the morning without an alarm clock, because our internal clock is restlessly wanting to be up and on our mission for the day. In all this we are to manifest God- for we too are to seek and save the lost.

The elder brother in the prodigal story shows an unbelievably self-righteous attitude. Yet, this truly is the position of the legalists of Christ's day and this. The love of the Father [God] for the son [repentant Israel] is quite something. Would a father really rush out and kiss him, i.e. forgive him (Lk. 15:20 cp. 2 Sam. 14:33) without first requiring an explanation and specific repentance? For this unusual Father, the mere fact the son wanted to return was enough. And when the vineyard

workers refused to work and beat and killed the Owner's servants that were sent, the response we expect is that the Owner sends in some armed men and re-establishes control. But He doesn't. Why ever keep sending servants after some are killed? But this is the loving, almost desperate persistence of the Father for our response. This is what the parables of Israel teach. In the end, He does something humanly crazy. He sends a single Man walking towards them- His only Son. Or think of the parable of the older son. The loving Father divides all that He has between the two sons- and the son who remained at home therefore ended up with *all* that the Father had, seeing the younger son had blown the other half of it (Lk. 15:31). This was the extent of God's love for Pharisaic, hypocritical Israel. He gave them His all- the blood of His only Son. Elderly oriental gentlemen never run in public. But the Father will do so when the younger son returns. Such will be His joy, and such is His joy over every sinner who repents!

*15:21 And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no more worthy to be called your son-* The son admitted that he had sinned "in your sight", exactly as David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:4). In the same way as David openly recognized that he deserved to die, so the prodigal wanted to be made a hireling. Yet in reality, God did not take David's life, the prodigal was not allowed to even get around to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves.

*15:22 But the father said to his servants: Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet-* The prodigal was not allowed to even get around to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves. The honour bestowed upon the son by the father is totally unreal. Without the slightest sign that the son is now responsible, is truly repentant, has the right motives... the father gives him the best robe, which is what was done for the person whom a leader wished to honour above all (Esther 6:1-9). And the father gives the son his signet ring (cp. Gen. 41:41,42). All this, before the prodigal has in any way proved himself. All he's done is come home, still not wanting to be a son, just a craftsman; and he was only driven home by his desperation. Such is the huge significance attached by the Lord to our turning up home. And in our dealing with returning sinners, which is every one of us day by day, we should reflect the same attitude.

The record of the prodigal's treatment at the homecoming suggests that we are to see in this the sharing of Christ's personal reward with repentant sinners. Removing his rags and clothing him with the best robe

recalls Zech.3:4, concerning the very same thing happening to Christ at his glorification. Being given a robe, ring and shoes takes us back to Joseph/Jesus being similarly arrayed in the day of his glory (Gen. 41:42). This parable is rich in reference to the Joseph story, with Joseph's brothers typifying Israel and all sinners. But now there is a powerful twist in the imagery. The sinners (cp. the brothers) now share the reward of the saint (cp. Joseph). This is the very basis of the Gospel of justification in Christ, through having his righteousness imputed to us, so that we can share in his rewards. This will fully be realized at the marriage supper of the lamb, although it also occurs in a sense each time we repent, and live out the parable of the prodigal's repentance again. See on Rev. 6:11.

15:23 *And bring the fatted calf, kill it and let us eat and make merry*- The joyful homecoming and celebration feast after the prodigal's repentance then equates with the Messianic banquet. The fatted calf which was killed therefore connects with the "fatlings" which were killed for the marriage supper of the Kingdom in Mt. 22:4. And those Jews who refused the invitation to join in that feast easily equate with the elder brother. "Let us eat and make merry" is alluded to by the Lord in his later description of the marriage supper: "Let us be glad and rejoice... for the marriage of the lamb is come" (Rev. 19:7). "Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt. 25:21) is the equivalent in the parable of the virgins. There is good reason to think that our Lord consciously designed his parables to allude to each other, and thus build up a more complete picture of his teaching.

The context of the parable is set in :2. It was in response to the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus that he received sinners and ate with them. Jesus is replying by showing that the meal he ate with them was in the spirit of the joyful feasting occasioned by the finding of the lost coin, and the return of the prodigal. The prodigal's repentance is thus likened to those who were responding to Christ's gospel.

Compare "Slay and make ready" (Gen. 43:16). Joseph's welcome of his brothers is the basis of the prodigal son parable (Gen. 45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); in this case another line of interpretation opens up, with the father representing Christ, and the prodigal is the repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.

"The fatted calf" of Christ is 'killed' by God on our repentance in the sense that He is aware once again of the death of Christ whenever we are granted forgiveness. The spirit of Christ groans for us when we sin, as he did on the cross and in Gethsemane (Rom. 8:26). Thus God looks on the travail of Christ's soul when He bears our sins away from us (Is. 53:11). To crucify Christ afresh as it were puts Christ through the process of death on behalf of sin once again, but because the believer does not 'resurrect' to newness of life in forsaking the sin, neither does God 'visualize' the Lord's triumph over the sufferings of sin in the resurrection.

Such a person has left Christ suffering, travailing in soul, groaning with tears, without any triumph or resurrection.

15:24 *For this my son who was dead, is alive again! He was lost and is found! And they began to be merry-* The prodigal son was a favourite of Paul's. At least four times (Lk. 15:24 = Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13) he makes the point that he saw the repentant son as a type of every one of us: not just those who publicly disgrace themselves and go out of church life for a time.

As God took His repentant wife back to her former status, speaking of her once again as a virgin, so the Father emphasizes: "This *my son* was dead...". The prodigal was dead, but then became alive (:32), in the same way as baptism marks both a one-off coming alive with Christ, and also the start of a newness of life in which we are constantly dying to sin and coming alive to God's righteousness (Rom. 6:13). Our repentance and subsequent acceptability with God at our baptisms should therefore be on a similar level to our confessions of sinfulness to God after specific sins in our daily lives, and also related to our doing this at the day of judgment.

Yet in the daily round of sin and failure, it is sometimes difficult to sense the degree to which God is actively seeking our return, and willing to slay the fatted calf. The earlier parables of the lost sheep and coin show God actively working to find us; whilst that of the prodigal implies that He is not doing anything physical. Yet the clear connections with the preceding parables show that the woman zealously turning the house upside down must therefore be a figure of the mental energy expended by the Almighty in seeking out our repentance. In our semi-aware spiritual days and hours, before we 'come to ourselves', the Father's active mind is urgently seeking us. Surely this should motivate us in our stronger moments to be aware of the need *not* to sleep into the sleepy madness of spiritual indifference and sin. This indifference is effectively spending our substance with whores and riotous living. Prov. 29:3 is one of the root passages for the prodigal parable: "Whoever loves *wisdom* rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his *substance*". There is a parallel here between wisdom and the Father's substance; continuing a popular Biblical theme that God's spiritual riches are to be found in His words of wisdom. An indifference to the spiritual riches which we have been given in the word of Christ is therefore being likened to the prodigal squandering the Father's substance with whores.

It is hard to appreciate that this parable really is intended to be read as having some reference to our daily turning back from our sins- such is the emotional intensity of the story. Yet such is the seriousness of sin that we must see in it an ideal standard to aim for in this regard. The parable alludes to a passage in Job which helps us better appreciate this. The

prodigal's confession "I have sinned... in your sight", and his returning from spiritual death to life (Lk. 15:21,32) connect well with Job 33:24-30: "His flesh (of the forgiven sinner) shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth (cp. the prodigal): he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy... if any say (like the prodigal), I have sinned... and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God *oftentimes* with man". The prodigal's experience will often be worked out in our lives, the fatted calf slain time and again, and as such we will come to know and appreciate the Father's love even more.

The joyous feast around the fatted calf can therefore speak of the full fellowship with God which we enjoy each time we come to repentance. The return of Israel in Hos. 2 was one of the source passages for the parable. The feast at their return is there described as a betrothal feast. This is obviously a one-off act. Yet such is the constant newness of life which we can experience through continued repentance, that the feasts of joy which we experience can all have the intensity of a betrothal feast. In like manner our relation with Christ in the Kingdom is likened to a consummation which lasts eternally.

15:25 *Now his elder son was in the field*- The elder brother coming in from the field must be related to the parable about the servant coming home from the field in Lk. 17:7-10. The servant should then have prepared the meal, on the master's command, and then admitted that despite having been perfectly obedient, he was still unprofitable. The prodigal parable points the great contrast. *God*, while having every right to order the servant/ elder brother to prepare the meal, is the one who has actually prepared it. *God* asks the elder son to come and eat immediately after returning from the field, rather than ordering him to prepare the meal, as He could so justly have done. Yet despite God's boundless love, the elder son refused to act and think in the spirit of the Father's love.

*And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing*- A calf, dancing and music recall the scene on Moses' return from the mount (Ex. 32:17-19); the elder brother's response as he returned from the field and beheld this sight may well have been rooted in his attempt to place himself in Moses' place. He zealously protested at what he liked to see as rank apostasy when it was actually the display of the real spirit of Christ, in receiving back a lost soul. For all this, the lesson is never learned. Schism after schism have been experienced over this very issue of having repentant brethren take their place at the memorial feast. The bad grace and bitterness of the elder brother as he stormed away from the happy feast is seen all too often amongst us.

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother (K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable). There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (See e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world.

Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Millennium. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

*15:26 And he called one of the servants, and inquired what these things might mean-* Wondering what things might mean is an idea used by Luke several times, especially concerning Mary and others at the time of the Lord's birth. The ultimate meaning is grace in God's son. That was the meaning those earlier people were intended to come to, and it was the same for the prodigal.

*15:27 And he said to him: Your brother came, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound-* We are left to imagine in what tone of voice they replied. And whether in fact the elder son already knew what was going on, but was seeking to persuade some of the servants to adopt his perspective.

*15:28 But he was angry and would not go in; and his father came out and encouraged him-* The elder son would not 'go in' to the wedding (Lk. 15:28); and the Lord surely constructed that story to use a word which so often is used about going in to the Kingdom (in Matthew alone: 5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21). His point clearly is that those who don't enter into His Kingdom *chose themselves not to do so*, they keep themselves out of the Kingdom, because they cannot bring themselves to

show a true love to their brother. In the end, the very end, we receive our dominant desire.

To refuse a father's invitation to a family celebration was seen as totally unacceptable, rude, and a rejection of one's father. Hence the rudeness of the guests refusing the King's invitations. The older brother would usually have played a prominent role in such feasts. But this son refuses to attend. This would've struck the Lord's initial audience as incredibly rude. Remember how Vashti's refusal to attend her husband's feast resulted in her being rejected (Esther 1). What the older son did would've been seen as an insult to all the guests; and many fathers would simply have rejected and disowned their son for this, or at least, expressed significant disapproval. Indeed, this was expected of him by society and the other guests. But yet again, the father humiliates himself and breaks all Jewish norms and expectations of correctness and decency. He leaves the feast! For the host to walk out was yet again seen as totally rude to the other guests- it of course echoes the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and going off after the one lost sheep. The father doesn't go out and giving the arrogant, unloving, disobedient son a good talking to, as the audience would expect. Again, as so often, the Lord's parables set up an expectation- and then dash it. The father goes out into the darkness of the courtyard, and "entreats" his son (Lk. 15:28). The Greek *parakaleo* means literally to come alongside, as if the father is inviting the son to stand alongside him in his extension of grace. Perhaps Paul is making one of his many allusions to the Lord's parables when he uses the same word to speak of how he 'beseeches' his legalistic brethren (2 Cor. 5:20).

But all this grace is ignored by the elder son. He insults his father. It may not be so apparent to us, but it would've been picked up by the Lord's first hearers. A son should always address his father in this context with the term "O Father". But he doesn't. He speaks of his brother as "Your son" rather than his brother. He speaks of how the prodigal "devoured *your* living". And he speaks of how he has faithfully served his father *as a servant*- like his younger brother, he failed to perceive the wonder of *sonship*. His awful outburst is doing in essence what his younger brother had done some time before. He was saying that he didn't want a part in his father's family. The "living" or wealth of the family was no longer *his*. He wasn't going to respect his father as his father any more. He didn't want to be in the family, so he wouldn't go to the family reunion. That poor, dear father. And what is the father's response? He calls him his *teknon*, his dearly loved son. Notice how the more common *huios* is used for "son" throughout the story (Lk. 15:11,13,19,21,24,25,30). In the face of such awful rejection, he shows his special love. It's like the Lord giving "the sop", the sign of special love and favouritism, to Judas- as he betrays Him. There's a powerful lesson here for those of us who find ourselves irked and angered by legalistic, arrogant brethren who refuse to



fellowship with the rest of us. There was no anger and irksomeness in the father's attitude. He was only deeply sorry, hurt, cut up... but he so loved that arrogant elder brother. He goes on to say that he gives that son all that he has. But he could only actually do that through being dead! The father is willing to die for that arrogant older brother, whose pride and anger stops him wanting anything to do with his father, whom he has just openly shamed and rejected. And the father wants to die for him. This is to be our attitude to the self-righteous, the divisive, those who reject their brethren.

But of course, there's a real and obvious warning not to be like the older brother. It worries me, it turns me, right in my very gut, when I see so many refusing to fellowship with their brethren because 'He's in that church... they've had her back... she's divorced and remarried... he's never said sorry, his motives aren't right, she only said those words...'. And those attitudes are made out to be expressions of righteousness. It is not for me to judge anyone; I seek to love those who act like this with the love and grief of the father for the elder son. But they must be gently warned as to the implications of their position. By refusing to fellowship with the rest of the family, by making such a fuss about the return of the prodigals, they fail to realize that they are in essence doing what the prodigals have done; and they are de facto signing themselves out of the Father's family. The issues are that serious. The parable isn't just a story with a possible interpretation which we can shrug our shoulders at and get on with life. The Lord's teaching, His 'doctrine', was and is in these parables.

The lost son story finishes, as do the other stories, with a banquet of rejoicing- rejoicing in the father's love. But it's no accident that Luke 15 is preceded by the parable of Lk. 14:15-24, where we have another great banquet- symbolic of our communion in the future Kingdom of God. The connection is clear. We will "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" if we eat bread with the Lord in the banquets of this life. And yet *so, so often* it is said amongst us: 'I won't break bread there. They have X or Z... who is divorced... who's not repentant... they have Q from that fellowship attending there... I'm not going in there'. It is not for us to judge. And I do not do so in what I write here. But it is the fairly obvious teaching of the Lord here that if we won't eat bread with Him in joy now, if we won't celebrate His grace and love for the lost in this life, then we will not in the future banquet. His grace is likely large enough to cover even the self-righteous; but we need to realize the eternal gravity of our decisions and feelings about our brethren in this life. Especially must we come to see ourselves as the prodigal. If we plan on being in the Kingdom, we must identify ourselves with the prodigal, and not with the self-righteous elder son who is left outside of the Father's fellowship, because he placed

himself there.

15:29 *But he answered and said to his father: Look! For so many years I have served you, and I never transgressed a commandment of yours, and yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends-* He clearly represents the self-righteous Pharisees, who refused to eat with sinners. In the same way as the Jews refused to appreciate the spirit in which Christ was feasting with the repentant sinners who responded to his message (:2), so the elder brother refused to attend the celebrations. Thus he is set up as representative of hard hearted Israel; and all those in the new Israel who share his characteristics proclaim themselves to be aligned with the legalistic Pharisaism which failed to discern the real spirit of Christ when he was among them.

Yet the Lord is also talking obliquely to Himself. It was so much harder for the Lord to be as patient with sinners as He was, seeing that He Himself never sinned and experienced God's forgiveness. There is good reason to think that Jesus was speaking about the elder brother partly to warn himself. He was the favoured son, having the right of the firstborn. He alone could say to God "neither transgressed I at any time your commandment". The Father's comment "All that I have is yours" (:31) connects with the references to God giving *all things* into the hands of the Son. His constant abiding in the Father's house echoes Jn. 8:35: "The servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever". Our Lord seems to have been indirectly exhorting himself not to be like the elder brother, thereby setting us the example of framing necessary warning and rebuke of others in terms which are relevant to ourselves. If our perfect Master was so sensitive to His own possibility of failure, how much more should we be, ever analysing our attitudes to our brethren, "considering (ourselves) lest we also be tempted".

15:30 *But when this your son came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed for him the fatted calf-* Association with harlots is a common Biblical symbol of committing sin (see James 1:13-15); all our sins are unfaithfulness against Christ our husband. They are not just passing adulteries; the Spirit uses the even more powerful figure of harlotries. There are quite a number of other references in James to this parable, which indicate that the prodigal's experience can apply in an ongoing sense to the believer after baptism. The son '*spending all*' uses the same word which occurs in James 4:3 concerning the believer who 'asks amiss' (cp. the prodigal's request to his father), that he might "*consume* it (same word) upon (his) lusts". James 4:4 continues: "Ye adulterers... know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?". This is all prodigal language. The next verses then seem to go in their allusions, implying that the prodigal is ultimately far more acceptable than the elder brother in the ecclesia: "The spirit that dwelleth

in us lusteth to envy (cp. the elder brother)... God... giveth grace (forgiveness?) unto the humble... draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (cp. the prodigal's return being matched by the Father coming to meet him)... let your laughter (cp. the son's "riotous living") be turned to mourning... he that speaketh evil of his brother (is) *not* a doer of the law (as the elder brother thought he was), but a judge" (James 4:5-11).

The parables are full of almost incidental indications of how well the Lord knew our nature and how accurately He foresaw the future struggles of His body. He foresaw that the elder brothers would be self-righteous and unwilling to accept back into fellowship the repentant. Yet instead of making the father address the older boy with words like "You hypocrite! You yourself are disobedient! Get away from me, you callous hypocrite!", the Lord puts the words of grace themselves in the father's mouth: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). The Lord foresaw that the elder brethren's relationship with the Father would be damaged by their harshness. But in the way the story ends, I see real hope for the hard line, right wing Christian who condemns his brother, in the light of the Lord's teaching that we will be judged as we have judged. Wrong such brethren certainly are; but their Lord is gracious enough, it seems, to still work with them. In the same breath as the Lord warned that by our words we will be justified and condemned, and that we will have to account for them at the judgment, He also said that whoever speaks words against Him, He will forgive. I'd like to concentrate on other examples of where the Lord Jesus in His sensitivity foresaw this problem of dealing with apparently weak believers.

The prodigal son parable has as its end stress the problem of the self-righteous elder son. This is in fact the crux of the whole story. He refuses the invitation from his father to come in to the feast- an image used elsewhere in the parables to describe rejection of God's invitation. To refuse such an invitation was a public insult and rejection of his Father. He refuses to address his father as "Father" and refuses to call his brother "brother" [cp. "thy son"]. By breaking his relationship with his brother, he broke his relationship with his Father. As we do likewise. And the end stress of the whole wonderful parable is that we are left wondering how the story finished. The elder brother is left standing there, temporarily rejecting his father, wondering... whether to storm off into the evening darkness, or to turn back and go in to the feast and accept his brother. And this is really the essential point of the story, and the appeal which it makes to us. We may just mindlessly forget some disfellowship case of years ago, leave the decision to others, forget in our own minds that there is a brother or sister begging for our renewed fellowship and forgiveness. Yet it is exactly these issues and our response to them which

may decide our eternal destinies. And this was the end stress of the parable...

15:31 *And he said to him: Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours-* See on :29. Who does the father represent? The context for the three stories is the Lord Jesus justifying his eating with sinners. The fact that the father had received the sinful younger brother is phrased in the same way as the Pharisees' complaint about the Lord Jesus receiving sinners (Lk. 15:2 = Lk. 15:27). And each of the stories involve a closing scene featuring a joyful meal of celebration. The father would appear therefore to refer to Jesus; and yet clearly enough we are intended to see the father as also our Heavenly Father. I don't go for the primitive equation 'Jesus = God'. I'm not a Trinitarian. So I take this to be an exemplification of how "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their iniquities unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Notice in how many ways the father humiliates himself before everyone, and breaks all traditional Jewish expectations to do so. He gives the younger son what he asks, and more than the Law allowed; he runs to meet the son; he accepts the son; he leaves the banquet where he is the host in order to plead with his older son; he doesn't discipline either of his sons as expected. He makes a fool of himself time and again, upsetting Jewish rules and norms. And the younger son pestering the father to divide up the inheritance may indicate that the father was about to die. Likewise, when the father says to the older son that he gives him there and then all that is his... this is language only really appropriate if the father is about to die, or has actually died. Does not all this speak of the cross as the basis for the Father's love, grace and acceptance? That there, God was in Christ to reconcile us to Himself, not imputing sin to us... there the Father was humiliated in Christ, made a fool of, ridiculed. The Almighty God came this low... to the public shame and death of the cross. The suffering of God in the cross was all about rejected and unaccepted love; and so it is to this day.

Much homework awaits someone to work out all the times when the Lord was speaking *to Himself* in the parables, through the elements of unreality. Perhaps He saw Himself tempted to be like the elder brother in the Prodigal parable, who was "always" in the Father's house (as Jesus per Jn. 8:35) and 'everything the father has is his' is the very wording of Jn. 17:10. Or is it co-incidence that the only time the Greek word translated "choked" is used outside the sower parable, it's about the crowds 'thronging' Jesus (Lk. 8:14,42- note how they're in the same chapter and section of the Lord's life)? Was the Lord not aware of how the pressure of the crowds, whom He carefully tried to avoid, could choke His own spiritual growth? Was it for this reason that He begged those He cured not to generate big crowds to throng Him? And thus yet another layer of the Lord's mind and thinking will be revealed to us.

15:32 *But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found-* We are left, as so often, to imagine how the story finished. How hard it would've been for the younger son to live with the older brother! And one day, dear, darling dad would've died. The younger son would've had *his* sons, been called upon to uphold the family honour, make decisions in the village. We are left to imagine how his experience of grace would've made him judge differently to all others.

The three parables of the lost which climax in the parable of the lost son all depend for their power upon the many elements of unreality found within them; and the lost son parable requires us to fill in many details, try to finish the story, and to take due note of the crescendo of 'end stress' which there is. To appreciate the full power and import of these parables, we need to try to read them through the eyes of the Palestinian peasants who first heard them. Correct understanding of Scripture requires us to read it and feel it within the context in which it was first given. Bombarded as we are by billions of pieces of information each day, especially from the internet, we only cope with it all by letting it all fit into the worldviews and assumptions which we've adopted. Words and information and ideas tend to only fit in to what we've already prepared to house them, rather than us seeing *God's* word as something radically different, and allowing it to totally upset and change our cherished worldviews, constructs and approaches to life. God's word is still words- although they are inspired words. The problem with words is that we read or hear them, and interpret them within our frames of reference and culture. Take an example: "She's mad about her flat!". An American takes this to mean that she's angry and frustrated about the puncture / 'flat tire' which she has on her car. But in British English, the phrase would mean: 'She's really happy and enthusiastic about her apartment'. To understand what the speaker or writer means by those words, we have to understand their cultural background. And so it is with the Lord's teaching, aimed as it was to first century peasants.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he said also to the disciples-* The Lord Jesus without doubt focused upon the twelve disciples; they were His special love, His predominant concern. And when they came to write up their records of their experience of this amazing Master, they bring this out very much. He clearly chose them in order to impress His character upon them, and then left them to continue the witness to Him. Even in high society, surrounded by the elitist Pharisees, He spoke parables which were to them- even though the others heard (Lk. 16:1,14; 20:45). There is a repeated feature, in Luke particularly, of the Lord teaching the twelve in front of a multitude- as if the huge crowds were there just listening to what the Lord was speaking specifically to the twelve. When one of the crowd interrupts, the Lord quickly returns His focus to the twelve (Lk. 6:19,20 cp. 7:1; 12:1,13,22). For Jesus, the disciples were His focus and priority.

*There was a certain rich man, who had a steward; and the same was accused of wasting his goods-* The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have begged*, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward".

16:2 *And he called him and said to him: What is this that I hear of you? Render the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward-* See on 20:25. The parable of the unjust steward suggests that there are times in this life when we are called to give an account of our

stewardship- and how we react to those judgment calls is what will affect our ultimate destiny (Lk. 16:2). We have a tendency to consider God as passive to our failures and acts of righteousness, simply because His judgments are not openly manifest. We may forget that on, say, 6.6.96 we swore under our breath in anger... but God, in this sense, doesn't forget. The passage of time doesn't act as a pseudo-atonement for Him as it does in our consciences. The tendency for human beings to assume that God forgets our wrong actions and will never judge them is frequently commented upon in Scripture. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness", i.e. to judge them for it at a future date (Hos. 7:2). The day of judgment is likened to God 'awaking' (Ps. 68:1; 73:20). Not that He is now sleeping; but then, the principles of His judgment which now appear to lie dormant will be openly manifested. Peter warns that the condemnation of false teachers is given by God in an ongoing sense, and that damnation doesn't slumber (2 Pet. 2:3).

The 'unjust steward' was saved because he forgave others their debts after getting into a mess himself. He wasted his Lord's goods, as the prodigal did (Lk. 15:13 connects with 16:2). Seeing the prodigal represents all of us, the lesson is surely that we all waste our Lord's goods, therefore the basis of salvation is through our forgiving others as an outcome of our own faith in the Lord's grace. This is one explanation of why the parable of the steward flows straight on from that of the prodigal.

One of the most telling examples of an unfinished ending is to be found in the parable of the unjust steward. This is perhaps the hardest parable to interpret; but I suggest the thought is along the following lines. The steward has done wrong; but the element of unreality is that he isn't jailed or even scolded, it's just left as obvious that he can't do the job of steward any longer. The usual response of a master would be to jail servants for running up debts (Mt. 8:23-25). But the Master is unusually gracious. The steward now faces poverty, and so he takes a huge gamble. Before news of his fall is common knowledge, he urgently runs around to those in his master's debt and tells them that their debts are forgiven. His haste is reflected in the way he says "Write quickly... and you... ". He has to write off their debts before his master finds out, and before the debtors know that he now has no right to be forgiving them their debts. His gamble is that his master is indeed such a generous and gracious guy that he will actually uphold these forgivenesses or reductions of debt, and that therefore those who have received this forgiveness will be grateful to the steward, and be generous to him later, maybe giving him employment. The story reflects a theme of the other parables- how the servant knows and understands his master extremely well, and can guess his response. The way the servant invites the beggars to the feast even before his master has told him to do so is an example. But the power of the parable is in the unended story. Does the gracious Master indeed forgive those in his debt? And seeing he is impressed by how the steward

has acted, does he in fact re-instate him, impressed as he obviously is by this sinful steward's perception of his grace? From the other parables we are led to believe that yes, the Lord and Master is indeed this gracious. And of course we are to see ourselves in the desperate position of the steward, staking our whole existences upon His grace and love beyond all reason. For me, this approach to the parable is the only one which can make any sense of the master dismissing the steward for fraud, and then praising him for his apparently 'dishonest' behaviour in forgiving the debtors (Lk. 16:2,8). See on Lk. 10:34.

*16:3 And the steward said to himself: What shall I do, seeing that my master takes away the stewardship from me? I do not have strength to dig. To beg I am ashamed-* This continues the linkage with the ideas of the prodigal son parable which precedes it. The desperate son at rock bottom feeding the pigs is this disgraced steward. He is unable in his own strength to get himself out of this awful situation. He is ashamed to beg, rather like the son proposes to return to his father and ask to become a hired servant, so that he can repay his debt.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized; and in the context here in this parable, it is to madly forgive others. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (12:15), and answered accordingly.

*16:4 I have resolved what to do, so that when I am discharged as steward, others may receive me into their houses-* The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. And we are to take this same full blooded 'resolution'. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward"- He makes concessions to our weakness. We all live within parameters of personality and spiritual development which we should exceed but will not- because none of us shall attain total moral perfection in this life. Pride in various forms is typical of those kinds of parameters. This is not to suggest that



we are not to try; rather is this observation merely some comfort in our weakness.

The man envisaged having to declare bankrupt and losing absolutely all things, even his family- for he reasoned that if he forgave the debts of these debtors, they might have him as a family member, just allowing him to live out his days in their homes. It is this same spirit to which we should all be driven by the realization of our sin; willing to cast ourselves upon the mercy of our brethren, to live out our days in humbled fellowship with them.

*16:5 And calling to him each one of his master's debtors, he said to the first: How much do you owe my master?-* The steward knew how much they owed. Quite possibly, the debtors stated a reduced figure, or didn't come clean about every aspect of their debt. But whatever they acknowledged, however they wanted to see it- he forgave them. And this is a pattern for our forgiveness of others, knowing the inevitability of our own shameful judgment. Forgiveness does not involve an agreed version of events and issues. We are to simply and frankly and urgently forgive.

*16:6 And he said: A hundred measures of oil. And he said to him: Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty-* See on Lk. 14:5. "Quickly" is the essence of all this; knowing that our judgment is just around the corner, there is no time to be lost in forgiving others. The steward reduced the debt rather than totally writing it off. That may be merely the furniture of the parable, but perhaps we are left to imagine that the further he reduced the debt, the more likely they were to later accept him as a family member (:4). And maybe we are intended to deduce that he would have been better to offer them a total forgiveness rather than some negotiated settlement.

*16:7 Then said he to another: And how much do you owe? And he said: A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him: Take your bill and write eighty-* The man who owed oil was forgiven more than the man who owed wheat (100 reduced to 50, compared to 100 reduced to 80). Perhaps this reflects how our forgiveness is not of the frank and total measure of the Lord's, for in another parable we read of the Lord Himself frankly forgiving the total debt of His servant, rather than just reducing it somewhat. The steward had the power to act in his lord's name in reducing or even cancelling debt. Perhaps here we see here some reflection of the idea that what we unloose on earth is unloosed in heaven; our forgiveness of others is in a way accepted by God. How exactly this works out, and the mechanism and theology of it, is not explained. But there is some connection, however vaguely expressed, between our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of them. Whilst the steward is commended (:8), he could have totally forgiven them. We too tend to make limited deals of forgiveness with others, at least in our own minds; writing down

the debt of one more than for another. When we ought to scribble the whole thing.

*16:8 And his master commended the unrighteous steward, because he had done wisely. For the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light-*

There were times when the Lord used shock tactics to get His message over. He did and said things which purposefully turned accepted wisdom and understanding on its head. Thus He touched the leper, spoke of drinking His blood... and used leaven, the usual symbol for sin, as a symbol of the quiet influence of His Gospel. And His parables feature the same element. Because the parables are so familiar to us, we can overlook the fact that their true character is intended to be shocking and disturbing- they are most definitely not just comfortable, cosy, moralistic tales. Consider the way He chooses to take a lesson from a crook who fiddles the books. The 'hero' of the story was a bad guy, not a good guy. Yet the point of the story was that we must realize how critical is our situation before God, and do literally anything in order to forgive others. We can't let things drift- disaster is at the door unless we forgive others *right now*. Everything is at stake in our lives unless we forgive others. The parables didn't give simple teaching to those who first heard them. He used that form of teaching so that men would *not* understand Him; and even His disciples had to come to Him in order to receive the interpretations.

The way "the children of this world" are so zealous in forgiving others their debts so as to get themselves out of major trouble is an example to us, the Lord said. It could be that His comment that they were "wiser than the children of light" was a rebuke to the children of light- that those in the world are more eager to forgive, more zealous in their secular lives, than many of us are. The unjust steward in the parable of Luke 16 ran round forgiving others their debts, so that in his time of crisis and judgment he would have a way out of his own debt problems. And in the context of forgiving our brethren, the Lord holds him up as an example. But He laments that sadly, the children of this world are often wiser than the children of the Kingdom, i.e. the believers. I take this as meaning that the Lord is sorry that His people don't see the same obvious need to forgive each other, in view of their own inadequacies and the coming of judgment. The children of this world see the coming of their judgments and the urgency of the need to prepare, far more strongly than many of us do; we who face the ultimate crisis of sinful, responsible man meeting with an Almighty God.

The story of the indebted steward likewise stresses the importance of true forgiveness. The master commends the steward because he had told

others that their debts to his master were reduced. No *human* master would ever commend his steward for acting so irresponsibly. But the Lord Jesus does commend us for forgiving those who sin against Him, even though our forgiving of those indebted to us and Him is against all the laws of human common sense. See on Mt. 18:23.

16:9 *And I say to you: Make to yourselves friends by means of worldly riches; that, when they shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings-* The parable has been about forgiveness, following on from that of the prodigal son. But the Lord makes this parable have another meaning- concerning the need to use wealth wisely.

The Bible has a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality. So great is the Lord's emphasis about this, that He suggests in the parable of the crafty steward that if we use our worldly things prudently, when we spiritually fail, the fact we have used them wisely will bring us into the Kingdom. This implication that we can almost buy our way into the Kingdom is hyperbole. This is a device the Lord commonly used in His parables: an exaggerated statement to make a point. When He spoke of the good shepherd leaving the 99 good sheep to go chase the foolish one, this doesn't really mean that He does in fact leave us. He will never leave us. But so great is His love of the lost that it's *as if* He leaves us for the sake of finding them. Or the command to gouge out our eye if it offends us. This is a gross exaggeration; but our self-deprivation of those things which lead us into sin requires the same self-will and self-mastery. So here, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is so important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. See on Lk. 11:41.

We have nothing now, we own nothing, all we have is given for us to use wisely, so that when we fail (morally, in the failures of our lives), our use of these things may prepare the way for our entry into the everlasting place of the Kingdom. We fall so easily into the trap of thinking 'this is *my* money... *I* worked for it, saved it...'. It's God's money. The danger of materialism is to think it is *ours*. Israel were told that every seventh year they were to cancel debts, release each other from the debt they had; and yet it was "the *LORD's* release". You released a man from his debt, Yahweh released him. What it meant was that your money was Yahweh's money. He released the debt, you released it. In being generous spirited, then, and realizing 'our' money is God's, we are Yahweh-manifest. We are invited to see ourselves as the Levites- whose inheritance was Yahweh, and not anything material in this world. Relationship with God and the honour of doing His service was seen as the ultimate antidote to

materialism. Eliphaz seems to have perceived this when he told the wealthy Job: "Lay thou thy treasure in the dust... and the Almighty shall be thy treasure" (Job 22:24,25 RV).

There is no doubt that our attitude to materialism is a sure indicator of our real spiritual position. We are to make friends of mammon [riches] by giving it away, forsaking all we have- the implication being that riches / mammon are our spiritual enemy, no matter how little of them we possess. And yet we are surrounded as never before by a materialistic, money *loving* world.

16:10 *He that is faithful in a very little, is faithful also in much, and he that is unrighteous in a very little, is unrighteous also in much-* God Himself 'detests' the mammon which man so highly esteems (Lk. 16:13-15 NIV). A day will come when man *will* despise material possession. "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold... to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks... for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty" (Is. 2:20,21). But for us, today is the day of the Lord's coming in judgment. If we will be forsaking all we have in that day; we ought to now, in spirit. The parable of the unjust steward surely teaches that our attitude to the "mammon of unrighteousness" will determine our eternal destiny. The wealth of this world is called "that which is least... that which is another's [i.e. God's]" (Lk. 16:10,12 RV). We are told: "make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail [at the Lord's return], they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles" (Lk. 16:9 RV). There will come a day when money will fail, and when we will despise it for what it was- "that which is least".

16:11 *If therefore you have not been faithful in the handling of worldly riches, who will commit to your trust the true riches?-* Lk.16:11,12 draws a parallel between the "true riches" and "that which is your own"; both phrases, in the context, refer to our reward in the Kingdom. The true riches is the spiritual knowledge of God. In Christ are hid all the riches of God. David rejoiced at the truths of the word more than at finding great riches. We can look forward to a highly personal knowledge of God in the Kingdom; the riches of knowledge "which is your own". This is in the same sense as Rev. 2:17 speaks of each believer receiving a stone with "a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it". No other being will be able to enter into the personal knowledge of God which we will then have; as even in this life, it is scarcely possible to enter into another believer's spirituality and relationship with God. To some degree, the Kingdom will be something different for each of us, although this diversity will be bound together by the great unity of all being the

collective bride of Christ, and all manifesting the same God, all having the same "penny a day".

If we are faithful with the riches we have been given, *then* we will be given the true riches of eternal salvation. This "unrighteous mammon" is not our own, it is the wealth of "another man", i.e. God, just as the steward was dealing with money which was not his but his lord's; whereas in the Kingdom, we will have our very own "true riches". This is an altogether lovely idea. Whatever we have now is not ours; we come into this world with nothing, and at death we carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). We must give our all if we are to attain the Kingdom.

If we are faithful in how we use the things lent to us by God in this life, we will be given "the true riches". What we now have is "the Truth", because this is how the Spirit speaks of it. But Truth is relative, and the Truth God wants us to accept as Truth is doubtless designed by Him to be acceptable by mere mortals. But it isn't "the true riches" spoken of here. We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" (:12) in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. To me, those few words of Lk. 16:11,12 take me to the brink of understanding what the Kingdom will be about. We can go no further.

16:12 *And if you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*- See on :11. The time is soon coming when I will be given that which *is* my own- the things associated with being in the Kingdom. We are slaves now, owning nothing (1 Cor. 6:19), but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is yours..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions. See on 1 Cor. 6:19.

We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true

riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. The reward given will to some degree be totally personal. Each works out his *own* salvation, such as it will be (Phil. 2:12)- not in the sense of achieving it by works, but rather that the sort of spirituality we develop now will be the essential person we are in the eternity of God's Kingdom.

16:13 *No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else, he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money-* The Lord Jesus surely based His words on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah's 'truth' approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah's attitudes were far from Christ-like. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone 'in a journey'- a Hebraism for 'gone to the toilet' (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord.

Mammon is an "abomination" (:15)- a word associated in the Old Testament with idol worship. We are to not only be free of such idolatry, but despise materialism.

16:14 *And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him-* Scoffing at Divine wisdom recalls so many passages in Proverbs. They were "fools" for all their appearance of wisdom. They justified their love of money (:15), seeing their wealth as a reward for piety, just as the false gospel of wealth does today. They scoffed because they claimed that wealth was the reward for righteousness. But the rest of this chapter records the Lord's deconstruction of that position. They scoffed at the idea of reducing the debts of another- they would've tried to get out of the problem by some other way.

16:15 *And he said to them: You are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God-* As noted on :14, they justified their love of wealth by claiming it was a reward for righteousness. But the Lord says that wealth is abomination to God. He saw as it were the wealth in

their hearts, and hated it, treating it as an "abomination"- a term the Old Testament uses for idols.

*16:16 The law and the prophets were until John. From that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached-* This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13) in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

*And every man enters violently into it-* Just as the unjust steward urgently ran around trying to forgive others once he realized his own soon coming judgment, so John's declaration of judgment soon to come led repentant people to urgently dash into the Kingdom.

This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord here in Lk. 16:16; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7), and we are right now in process of entering the city of God's Kingdom. It's not that we have no idea as to whether we shall enter it, waiting for judgment day to inform us. We have a sense of purpose to us, being in process of entering now. We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12).

The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

*16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall-* Mt. 5:18 speaks of jot and tittle. Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed". The Lord is reminding them that they were under the Mosaic law. All their schemings to get around its more inconvenient requirements, in order to preserve and extend the wealth which they loved (:14), was in fact a breaking of the law which they were under.

*16:18 Everyone that puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he that marries one that is put away from a husband commits adultery-* The context here speaks of the need for forgiveness and a lack of materialism, which the Pharisees tried to cleverly get around by their various twists of the Mosaic law. Hence :17 has reminded them that they are still under that law. These two issues were particularly relevant to how and why they divorced their wives; and so this talk about divorce is exactly in context. And the next parable goes on to criticize them for their attitude to wealth. The divorce and remarriage in view is therefore specifically that practiced by the Pharisees, and is being criticized for not showing forgiveness and for being motivated by a love of wealth and its preservation.

*16:19 Now there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, dining sumptuously every day-* The context is of the need to hold feasts to celebrate fellowship with the dirty prodigal who had been licked by pigs in chapter 15. The Pharisees loved wealth (:14), and have been set up as the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal. Their dining whilst excluding Lazarus equates with the older brother refusing to have a feast with the presence of the dirty, smelly, unclean younger son. This exclusion went on "every day". The clothing in purple and fine linen



could mean that it is specifically Annas or Caiaphas the high priest who is in view. We marvel that the Lord would even bother to try to get him to see the error of his ways; but such was His desire that literally all men repented. Purple and fine linen recalls Babylon in Revelation 18:12, which in its first century application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult who were persecuting the Christians whilst enjoying huge wealth. Dining sumptuously" is the word used of the rich fool (12:19). The Lord is calling Caiaphas / Annas and the Jewish leadership no more than fools.

16:20 *And a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores-* The "gate" is s.w. "porch" as in the temple porch, Mt. 26:71. 'Lazarus' is a form of Eleazar- 'God is my help'. He was the helper of those excluded by the Pharisees of the temple cult.

16:21 *Desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores-* "Desiring" continues the linkage with the prodigal parable, where the prodigal 'desired' to be fed with pig food (15:16 s.w.). The rich man should have invited Lazarus to his feast just as the Lord invited sinners to his. And the same word is used of the Gentile woman who wanted to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of orthodox Jewry (Mt. 15:27).

16:22 *And it came to pass, that the beggar died; and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's breast, and the rich man also died and was buried-* "Abraham's breast" or bosom was a Rabbinic phrase referring to Paradise. The Lord is not teaching that the faithful literally go anywhere on death let alone to Abraham's breast; He is clearly using the terms and ideas which the Jews were familiar with, and telling a story within those frames of reference. Adam Clarke comments: "By the phrase, Abraham's bosom, an allusion is made to the custom at Jewish feasts, when three persons reclining on their left elbows on a couch, the person whose head came near the breast of the other, was said to lie in his bosom. So it is said of the beloved disciple, Jn. 13:25".

Carrying by Angels after death is not a Biblical idea, but again is alluding to apostate Jewish beliefs.

The way the Lord constructed His parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is proof enough that He Himself alluded to false ideas without correcting them, but rather in order to make a moral point within the faulty framework of understanding of His audience. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances of where a technically 'wrong' idea is used by God without correction in order to teach a higher principle. Thus an eagle doesn't bear its young upon its wings; it hovers over them. But from an earth-bound perspective, it would appear that [looking up], the eagle is carrying its young on its wings. God accommodates Himself to our earthly perspective in order to lead us to Heavenly things. He doesn't seek to

correct our knowledge at every turn, or else His end aim would not be achieved.

We assume too quickly that the Lord's reference to the Angels carrying Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham means 'straight after his death'. But not necessarily so. He died, was buried, and then at the Lord's return, the Angels will carry the faithful to judgment / the Kingdom- they will go forth and gather the elect. The rich man would only be thrown into Gehenna at the last day, as Jesus so often taught elsewhere. The only element of accommodation to, or parody of, existing Jewish beliefs was in the rich man asking that Lazarus be returned from the dead to warn his brethren. And this element is doubtless inserted into the story by the Lord as a prophecy of how even His resurrection would not convert those who did not truly listen to the Old Testament.

So serious is the tendency to material acquisition that the Lord uses a telling hyperbole in Lk. 16 (in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus): He implies that the rich man was condemned just for being rich. This is hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. And the point was, that being rich is *very likely* to lead you to condemnation. The rust of riches is likened to the fire of condemnation and rejection (James 5:3).

16:23 *And in Hades*- As noted on :22, the Lord used ideas current amongst the Jews for reward, i.e. "Abraham's breast", and here He likewise uses their ideas of what happened as punishment. But this doesn't mean He approved their ideas as true. Job 21:13 clearly explains what happens to the rich on death: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave".

*He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his breast*- Forget, for one moment, that 'the rich man and Lazarus' is a 'difficult passage'. Focus on how Lazarus is "in" Abraham's 'bosom' or chest. This doesn't mean literally inside it. He was 'in' Abraham's arms, on his chest; and this is explained to us in :25 as meaning that Lazarus was receiving "comfort" at the same time as the rich man was experiencing torment. Mic. 7:5 uses the same figure of being "in" a man's bosom to describe how a wife is held by her husband. And Lam. 2:12 uses it again to mean 'receiving comfort'. This is what the Kingdom will be like, especially immediately after our reward. For this is what the parable is about- the rich man will not be eternally tormented, his torment will be on knowing the reality of the fact that he stands there rejected. But while he is temporarily tormented, some poor beggar brother is getting comforted by Abraham. Both of them with Divine nature. Abraham holding the other brother to his chest and comforting him. And, in passing, this would interpret for us John's words in Jn. 1:18:

"The... son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (after His ascension). After His ordeal, Jesus was as it were receiving comfort from His Father. There was and is an emotional bond between them. And so there will be between us all in the Kingdom. The parable of Lk. 16 goes on to say that there will be those who will want to cross over from rejection to acceptance, and *also*- and note this- there will be some who will want to go the other way to save those in the group of the rejected- weeping, screaming, gnashing their teeth as they will be. But it won't be possible for them. Even in Divine nature, some of us will have the desire to do the impossible- to save those rejected. It will be rather like the Angels in the time of Ahab suggesting their plans of action to God, but they were all turned down except for one. To have Divine nature, as Angels do, doesn't preclude having emotional thoughts. Nor does it mean we will have 100% understanding of God's ways beamed into us.

16:24 *And he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame-* The rich man appeals to his physical descent from Abraham ("father Abraham"), but this is of no value. As Lazarus had begged crumbs, so now the man begs for drops of water. His hard heartedness to Lazarus is exactly related to his punishment.

In the day of judgment, that man will cry out "father... have mercy / pity on me", just as Lazarus used to cry out to him daily. The apparent terseness and indifference of Abraham's response in the parable is surely intended as a reflection of the attitude which the rich man had shown to Lazarus in his mortal life. A great gap had been *fixed* between the saved and the rejected; and the language begs the question, 'Fixed by whom?'. Clearly, by the rich man in the attitude he adopted in his daily life. For it would not be God who fixed a gap between the damned and the saved; through His Son He seeks to save and bridge such gaps. The lesson is that whenever we hear the voice of the desperate, we hear inverted echoes of our own desperation at the final judgment. And how we answer now is related to how we will be answered then. We make the answer now.

Note that the parable talks in terms of tongues, fingers etc.- bodies and not 'immortal souls' are in view. Note that only 11 of the 26 parables recorded in Luke are called "parables". This is clearly a parable and not to be taken as a literal description of things. G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (Penguin Books), p. 191 concludes that "the story of the wicked rich man and the pious poor man, whose fortunes were reversed in the afterlife, seems to have come originally from Egypt, and was popular among Jewish teachers. ...It was not the intention of Jesus to propagate a strict doctrine of rewards and punishments...or to give a topographical guide to the afterworld."

16:25 *But Abraham said: Son, remember how you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish-* "Son" reflects the Lord's pity and tenderness even towards the condemned. Or it could be that this continues the idea of the rich man appealing to Abraham as his father. Indeed he was a son of Abraham- but that was of no avail. Abraham is dead and not yet rewarded (Heb. 11:8,13,39,40) so the idea of Abraham being alive after death is all the language of the Jewish beliefs being used. In the same way the Lord spoke as if Beelzebub really existed, when this was a pagan god (Mt. 12:27 cp. 1 Kings 1:2).

16:26 *And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great gulf, so that they that would pass from here to you cannot, and none may cross over from there to us-* The eternal chasm between them was foreseen by the Psalmist: "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity [cp. the condemned goats]: but peace shall be upon Israel [the sheep, looking on at the rejection of the wicked]" (Ps. 125:5). Those who will want to cross the chasm then will be unable to (Lk. 16:26); the great gulf is fixed. In the context of describing the establishment of the Kingdom, we read that God's servants will eat, drink and rejoice, singing for joy of heart, at the same time as the rejected will be ashamed, hunger and thirst and howl for "breaking of spirit"- all the language of the rejected (Is. 65:13,14,17,18 RVmg.). It seems that this is a picture of the rejected watching the accepted eating with Christ as the Passover is eaten anew. Hence their howling and shame; for shame implies being naked in the presence of others. Thus the rejected will in some sense be in the presence of the accepted.

16:27 *And he said: Therefore I beg you father that you would send him to my father's house-* The point of the parable is at the end, and such 'end stress' is common in the parables. After death, there is no literal communication between the rewarded faithful and the wicked; these were all incorrect Jewish ideas which the Lord was using to construct a story which led up to His major point. He as God's messenger had indeed been sent to the father's house, the people of Israel and their leadership, with an appeal to urgently repent.

16:28 *For I have five brothers-* The High Priest Annas had five sons who each succeeded to the Priesthood,—Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Annas. These therefore were the brothers in law of Caiaphas, who appears to be the rich man in view.

*That he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment-* The fact that sin really does result in eternal death, and that death is really unconsciousness, there is no immortal soul, the Hebrew word *nephesh* doesn't mean that, leads us to preach the hope of

resurrection which we have. It must do- for otherwise we would be plain selfish. And it makes us realize for ourselves the decisiveness and finality of this life's decisions for the determining of eternal destiny. The hope of resurrection is the first and most basic need of our fellows. It was said of the 18th century British preacher Richard Baxter that "he preached as a dying man to dying men". Our mortality, and our appreciation of that of others, should lead to an intensity of appeal to them. Knowing the truth about death leads to a great desire to testify to others. Recall how the rich man in the parable, once he perceived the truth about the death state, earnestly wished to testify to his brethren and persuade them to believe (Lk. 16:28). Elie Wiesel tells how victims of the holocaust either facing death or reflecting upon it later, felt an overbearing desire to testify to others: "We [victims of the holocaust] have all been witnesses and we all feel we have to bear testimony... and that became an obsession, the single most powerful obsession that permeated all the lives, all the dreams, all the work of those people. One minute before they died they thought that was what they had to do". We don't- quite- have to go through those starings of death in the face to perceive death as we should; for the Bible has a lot to say about it, and if we accept the Biblical definitions, then we too will feel this strong compulsion to testify to others.

*16:29 But Abraham said: They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them-* The Lord's argument was that hearing the Old Testament was going to be more motivational to change than meeting the risen Jesus. In Jn. 14-16 He likewise seems to discount His personal presence; the disciples were so upset that He would not be physically with them, but He assures them that the presence of His Spirit in their hearts was going to be of far greater spiritual moment for them than His physical presence. Resurrected persons of themselves were not going to be a powerful source of persuasion to the Jews unless the hearers first of all respected Moses and the prophets. And this very thing, in which Jewish Orthodoxy were so proud, was actually their weak point. The Lord in Jn. 6:45 makes the same point; every man who had truly "heard" the prophets would come to Jesus as Lord.

*16:30 And he said: No father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent-* Reflect on what the Lord was really saying in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It was Abraham who showed the rich man how useless were human riches. The rich man thought that his natural ancestry was enough- he appeals to "father Abraham". But the point of the parable was surely that the rich man was not a true son of Abraham because he had been materialistic and had neglected the needs of his poorer brother. *This* was and is the implication of being a true son of Abraham.

16:31 *And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead-* See on Lk. 24:11. "Persuaded" is parallel with "repent" (:30). Repentance is a persuasion; whether it takes seconds, minutes or years, we are persuaded towards it.

The parable of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus surely carried with it the message that we ought to be generous to the poor; and that there is a need to do this in view of the judgment to come and sense of the future we may miss because of our selfishness in this life. The condemned rich man wanted to warn others of the need to be generous to the poor so that they would not be condemned. The Lord's comment was that it was His resurrection from the dead which was intended to "persuade" people of this (Lk. 16:31). Accepting the import of His resurrection therefore should result in our being "persuaded" towards a life of generosity to the marginal- just, of course, as the Lord's death and resurrection was God's grace to us, the marginal beggars in spiritual terms.

## CHAPTER 17

*17:1 And he said to his disciples: Stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!*- The context of chapter 17 has been an appeal to the Pharisees to accept the likes of the prodigal son and the beggar Lazarus, and not to make them stumble by refusing to have them present at their fellowship table- continuing a theme which began at the beginning of chapter 15. The Lord is urging the disciples not to have any part in the system which caused stumbling. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out (e.g. Mt. 18:7). But there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man.

*17:2 It would be better for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he was thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble-* As noted on :1, the "little ones" in view are the likes of the prodigal son and Lazarus. Our attitude to the spiritually "little", the spiritually vulnerable, is critical to our discipleship. And not having them at our table, like the elder brother of Luke 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, is to cause them to stumble. So often, those turned away from fellowship then stumble. And the woe pronounced is so great that we have to urgently enquire of ourselves whether we are in any way responsible for such exclusions. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation. The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share.

*17:3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him-* The context of :2 is that we must not make little ones stumble; and we make them stumble by not forgiving them, not welcoming them at our table, like the elder son of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, which forms the context for these words. This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed to ourselves* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'. But the Lord is not necessarily teaching

that we are to only grant forgiveness upon repentance; for the implication of much Bible teaching is otherwise. He may be setting us up to think that this is what He means, and then in :4 He challenges us by saying we should forgive even if repentance is so evidently insincere that effectively it is not repentance.

The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'. In Mt. 18:15, the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins... go and point out the fault... if he listens to you, you have regained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me very hard indeed to judge the level of another's repentance.

"See that you despise not one of these little ones" is how the parallel account puts it (Mt. 18:10). We offend people by 'despising' them, as the "rich man" did to Lazarus and the older brother did to the prodigal. To *not* seek others' salvation by forgiving them is to despise them. We may not think we are spiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are...if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation.

17:4 *And if he sins against you seven times in the day and seven times turns again to you, saying: I repent: You shall forgive him*- Peter found it hard to grapple with the idea that the degree or amount of sin was irrelevant. But "seventy times seven" indicated how far out he was. Even when a brother's repentance seems humanly unlikely (the 490th time in the day, the seventy sevens of Matthew, takes some believing!), we must still have that covenant mercy for him. Note that only a verbal repentance was required- and the Lord said that the forgiver was to just accept this, rather than demand evidence of 'forsaking' in physical terms. The Greek word for repentance is a compound meaning 'to think differently after'. Repentance is essentially a changed *attitude of mind*. This is why it's difficult to judge whether it exists within the heart of another person. and the Lord seems to be saying that we are not to judge the quality of another's repentance, which effectively means not demanding repentance before forgiving. We live constantly in need and receipt of mercy, every second of our existence. The New Covenant is often spoken of in the Old Testament as "mercy" and/or "truth". If we are *in* that Covenant, we are permanently living *in* grace/mercy. Mercy is not something which we just receive in the few moments while we pray for forgiveness. It is something constantly ongoing. We live *in* it. If we appreciated this, we would not see



our forgiveness of others as something we occasionally 'grant'; we will extend mercy to them constantly, as God does to us. So the Lord's apparent requirement for repentance before forgiveness in :3 is tempered by this explanation- that we are to forgive when repentance seems so insincere that it is not repentance. This is rather typical of His teaching style and usage of language and ideas.

*17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord: Increase our faith-* The disciples asked that as a community, their faith may be increased so as to forgive others as Jesus requires them to. They believed, correctly, that faith can be given directly by the Lord; and through His Spirit He likewise works on human hearts today too. The same word is used in Mk. 4:24 of how the Lord adds spirituality to those who have it. The Lord's response is that they should on an individual level realize that even if they were perfectly obedient, they were "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10)- and the only other time that term occurs on the Lord's lips is when speaking of how the unprofitable servant will be cast away to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 25:30). What He's saying is: 'Imagine condemnation. Being cast away as you stand before the judgment seat. That's you- that's what *should* happen, even if you "do" all. Get it- you're saved by grace, an amazing grace- respond to that, and forgiving others and zealous service will flow easily and naturally enough from that'.

*17:6 And the Lord said: If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this sycamore tree: Be rooted up and be planted in the sea- and it would obey you-* As noted on :5, the faith in view concerns the ability to accept and forgive others. And the Lord says that if they had faith, then the sycamore tree could be planted in the sea. Israel was then covered with sycamore trees (1 Kings 10:27) to the point that the tree became emblematic of Israel (Is. 9:10). By faith, they could extend Israel to the Gentiles, the sea of nations. The choice was either to be cast into the sea in condemnation for refusing to accept the spiritually little ones (:2), or to take the hope of Israel into the sea and plant it there, so that the sea of nations became as the land of Israel. 'Planting' is a metaphor regarding the teaching of the Gospel in 1 Cor. 3:6-8, and the parables of the 'planting' of a vineyard likely have the same sense. It was by faith, the disciples' faith in inclusivity and grace, that the gospel of the hope of Israel could be taken to the Gentiles. And the mustard seed is a symbol of the basic Gospel, which grows up into a tree giving shelter to the Gentiles (13:19). Here, it refers to their faith in grace, forgiveness and inclusivity toward others- which was necessary for them to take that Gospel to the Gentiles.

*17:7 But who is there of you, having a servant ploughing or keeping sheep-* Not all the disciples were dirt poor. Their fishing business employed hired servants. The parable about "one of you" having a

servant ploughing and preparing his food was spoken to the twelve. This continues the theme so far developed in the chapter; that we should have the love, faith and vision to be forgiving and radically inclusive of others. The disciples had asked for more faith to forgive effectively without repentance [when repentance is patently insincere]; and the Lord gives part of the answer in this observation that we are all desperate sinners. The motivation for radical forgiveness of others is because we recognize that even if we are fully obedient, we are "unprofitable servants"; and even the highest standard of behaviour, as was seen uniquely in the Lord, is simply what is expected of us as God's servants.

*That will say to him when he comes in from the field: Come immediately and sit down to eat-* We are not worthy to sit at the table of our master and eat. Eating together has been a theme of this entire section, beginning in chapter 15, where the Lord answers the objection that He eats with sinners. The elder brother of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16 refuse to eat with the likes of the prodigal son or Lazarus. To motivate us in not being exclusive and rejecting our brethren from the Lord's table, we are here reminded that our place at His table is by grace. For in no secular situation at that time would a servant ever eat at his lord's table as an equal, let alone have his master serve him there. And yet this is that the Lord Jesus does to us; this is the unique nature of His table.

*17:9 Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? I think not-* A master doesn't thank his slave for ploughing all day. When he comes home in the evening, the slave's job is to get the Master's food ready, and then when the Master has been looked after, he can get himself something. The Master has no need to thank (Gk. *charis*, s.w. to give "grace") the slave, and the slave expects nothing else. This is how the Lord sees our works; He expects us to serve Him for nothing, because of our role as His slaves, and not because we expect any gratitude, recognition or reward. We serve because we are His slaves. The parable teaches that absolute obedience should be the norm of our lives, not the exception, and that this is only what our Master demands and expects. From the way He told the story, the Lord framed our sympathy to be with the slave. But His point is that when we have done all, worked all day and then gone the extra mile in the evening, we should still feel unprofitable slaves, slaves who aren't much profit to their Master. The passive, unspoken *acceptance* seen between Master and slave in the parable should be seen between us and the Lord. There is no attempt by the Lord to ameliorate the Master : slave figure; "You call me master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (Jn. 13:13). And yet we are told that at the judgment we will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). This can not, therefore, be praise of our efforts at obedience; it will be praise for the status we are in on account of being in Christ, being counted as righteous as Him. The parable was spoken in the context of the disciples thinking

that God would be very happy with them if they forgave their brother seven times a day (Lk. 17:3-6). But the Lord is replying that things like this, which to us may seem going more than the extra mile, should be the norm; such heights of spirituality are only the daily ploughing of the field, and are only the obvious minimum which Christ accepts. He won't shew us grace ("thank") for doing this- with the implication that His grace is totally undeserved, not related to our forgiveness of others or other acts of obedience. The story paints the Master as being rather ungrateful and hard, to see his servant work so hard, then go the extra mile, and not utter a word of thanks. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, to the natural mind, that's how I am'. Christ says that the slave will not expect the Master to say to him "Sit down to meat", but will expect to be told, tired as he is, to gird himself and serve his Master (Lk. 17:7,8). The Lord's words here are surely intended to recall when He said that in the Kingdom He would make us each sit down to meat and come forth and serve us (Lk. 12:37). The point of the connection is to show that Christ's treatment of us in the Kingdom *will* be different from that of an ordinary Master, but we really, honestly shouldn't expect it; we should serve because we are His servants, not expecting any praise or response from him. And this experience of grace should motivate us to forgive whether or not the repentance seems sincere (:5). As it happens, He will give us all this in the Kingdom, but we shouldn't expect this at all. As the slave would have been dumbfounded if his Master did this, so should our response be in the Kingdom. What makes it difficult is that we *know* our Master is like this, that He's a most unusual Lord, one who washes our feet (Jn. 13:13,14); and the extraordinary relationship we have with Him ought to make us eagerly desire to show a similar service to our brethren, and to forgive them whether or not their repentance appears sincere.

The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word *charis*, usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" here. The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become slaves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done

what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

17:10 *Even so you also, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded of you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do-* It may be that this is taking us forward to the Kingdom; it is at the judgment that we 'do all' (Eph. 6:13), it is in the Kingdom that we will obey all the commandments (Ps. 119:6). This parable is a glimpse into the appreciation of grace we will have as we enter the Kingdom; once we are fully righteous, we will realize how unprofitable we are of ourselves (notice we may still feel in a sense "unprofitable" then). We will realize that all our service is only the repaying of the huge debt incurred by our sinfulness. *Then*, and perhaps only then, will we see works in their true perspective. This surely is the purpose of the judgment seat. We will walk away with the sense of wonder at the grace of Jesus that filled the one-hour workers as they walked away from the pay table with a day's wages.

The sin offering to be offered after the Nazarite vow had finished (Num. 6:14) suggests the principle of Lk. 17:10 was being taught even back there. There was to be no spiritual pride in commitment made apparently over and above God's minimal requirements. The language of "have done all those things which are commanded" recalls the language of the priests and Moses doing all things which were commanded them under the old covenant (Ex. 29:35; Lev. 8:36; Dt. 1:18). Lk. 17:10 would therefore be hinting that even complete obedience to God's law was not of itself enough to make a man profitable unto God, which was something Job likewise concluded (Job 22:2). And the legislation about concluding the Nazarite vow was teaching the same.

We shouldn't be discouraged if in our self-perception we see ourselves as serious sinners. We must say of ourselves that "we are unprofitable servants"- i.e. condemned, for this is how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Lord's thinking (Mt. 25:30). This is the finest paradox of all. If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). If we understand the seriousness of our sin, then forgiveness of others will come easier- and this is the purpose of the story (:5). If we realize our utter spiritual desperation, our worthiness of rejection, our betrayals of our Lord's love, if we condemn ourselves in our own judgment; *then* we will not have to go through this process when the Lord comes. Yet if we don't do this, Paul says, then we are drinking condemnation to ourselves at the last day. It's a powerful, terrifying argument. Such *must be*- not ought to be- our level of self-analysis and

knowledge of our desperation. If we so know our desperation now, we will not be condemned. Knowing and feeling our desperation is the key to so many Christian problems: monotony and boredom in spiritual life, problems with our partner, with our ecclesia, pride, a critical, ungrateful spirit, a lack of heartfelt praise, a reserve in witnessing. Even division amongst us would be outlawed by a true sense of our personal desperation. See on Lk. 6:42.

As slaves, we serve without expecting any thanks at all; and the service in the immediate context is forgiving our brother whether or not his repentance appears sincere. We do what is our duty to do by reason of who we are- sinners. The Lord spoke this in response to the disciples saying it was impossible for them to accept His teaching about unconditional forgiveness of each other (:5). Man's ingratitude is perhaps one of the hardest winds to weather, and it can so easily blow us off course in our service. But as the Lord's slaves, judged by Him alone, we didn't ought to look for recognition of our labours nor our forgiveness of others; neither should we demand apologies for *anything*. The Lord humbled Himself to wash the feet of His brethren, even though He was their leader (Phil. 2:4-11 is full of allusion to the foot washing incident, as if there the Lord exemplified the spirit of the cross). There may be brethren who consider it beneath them to talk to others or forgive others, who think it is not for them to help wash up or move furniture or all the host of other tasks that our gatherings require. But in these things lies the spirit of Christ. Paul didn't lord it over others, but was a fellow-worker with them (2 Cor. 1:24). It is one of the finest paradoxes: that he who is the greatest must be the servant of all. See on Mk. 10:45.

17:11 *And it came to pass, as they were on their way to Jerusalem, that he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee-* Time and again, the Gospel records reveal how the disciples manifest the Lord Jesus. There are several passages where the text is unclear, as to whether it should read, e.g., "*As they were on the way*" or "*As He went*" (Lk. 17:11 RV cp. AV). The textual confusion may reflect the unity between the Lord and His preachers. Even within the Gospels, incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same.

Even when He was heading away from Jerusalem during the course of that final journey, He's still described as going to Jerusalem. This was the degree to which His focus was upon His journey unto death; when He passed through a Samaritan village, His whole body language was as if He were going up to Jerusalem (9:53). And we are asked to have the same focus and sense of direction as we carry His cross.

17:12 *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men*

*who were lepers, who stood far away-* Reflect how the group of ten lepers huddled together, Jew and Samaritan together, their differences sunk in their common appreciation of their desperation. In deep seated humility, we can wait with unfeigned faith for the day of acceptance to dawn, serving with a true love, not interested in feuding with our brethren, thankfully partaking of the emblems with them, not forgetting *how* we were cleansed from our past sins (cp. 2 Pet. 1:9 RV- a sure allusion to the nine ungrateful lepers who forgot the wonder of their cleansing). If we remember how we were cleansed, then there will abound in us virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, culminating in a true love (so Peter's logic runs in 2 Pet. 1:5-9). For our desperation, the cross of the Lord Jesus, the frankness of the Father's forgiveness- these things will ever *live* within our grateful, gracious souls.

17:13 *And they lifted up their voices, saying: Jesus, master, have mercy on us!*- The grammar suggests they the many had one voice. And yet they included at least one Samaritan, with whom normal Jews would have nothing to do. The basis of our unity should be our desperation for grace and healing.

17:14 *And when he saw them, he said to them: Go and show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed-* The motive for this in 5:14 had been in order to make a testimony to the priests. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

The healing happened "as they went". There had to be an element of faith and obedience before the cure- in this case. For the Lord operated variously when it came to preconditions for healing.

17:15 *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God in a loud voice-* He turned back from going to the priests to thank the Lord, because he perceived that not only would he as a Gentile not get much audience with them, but because he saw that the Lord Jesus was far greater than the priesthood. He took the initiative in technically disobeying the Lord's commandment to come and thank the Lord. It was when he saw that he was healed that he praised God. The others presumably thought that their full healing would only be once they appeared before the priests. But the Samaritan perceived that the total power of healing was with the Lord and that the priests had no role to play in this. Being a Samaritan and therefore separated from the community of Israel made this perception somewhat easier for him, just

as those outside religious systems find it easier to perceive the direct hand of the Lord Jesus in their lives- once they encounter Him.

*17:16 And he fell upon his face at his feet, giving him thanks- though he was a Samaritan-* Jews and Samaritans had no dealings, and yet they lifted up their voices as one voice (:13 Gk.). They were united in their desperation, just as we ought to be. This is one of many hints that the work of the Lord Jesus was for non-Jews as well as Jews, and that the Gentiles would respond better to it. The command to go and teach "all nations" the Gospel seamlessly follows from all these hints throughout the Lord's ministry, and the disciples and the early church were all the more culpable for initially refusing to perceive it. But such is the power of assumed correctness of inherited positions, prejudice, nationalism and elitism- even within the hearts of otherwise sincere believers.

*17:17 And Jesus responded: Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?-* The Lord's response was to the Samaritan. The implication was that the Lord was deeply disappointed in the Jewish response, and in their consideration of the priestly acceptance of them as being far more important than gratitude to their healer-Messiah. And He wanted the Samaritan to know that indeed, Israel were not OK with God. The Lord Jesus was on that man's side and not, in that sense, approving of Israel just on the basis of their ethnicity. The question as to "Where are the other nine?" was a leading one. The answer was 'With the priests'. The implication was that they should have been with the Samaritan at the Lord's feet, and not, in the first instance, with those priests.

*17:18 Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?-* This comment seems more towards the disciples, or perhaps the Lord was just speaking to Himself. The Samaritan had returned to Jesus, glorifying God (:15). It would be far too simplistic to assume that Jesus as He stood there was God Himself. For no man can see God. Further reflection reveals a far profounder situation. By returning to Jesus in gratitude, the man was glorifying God. The worship and glorification of the Son is therefore to the glory of God the Father, as Phil. 2 makes explicit.

*17:19 And he said to him: Arise and go your way. Your faith has made you whole-* The healing had occurred "as they went" to the priests (:14). It could be that the Lord is saying that the man's faith had made him so whole that he didn't need to go to the priests. He was to go his way, back to his Samaritan community, as the living witness to the Lord's passionate care for non-Jews. Luke seems to stress the role of faith in the cures (7:50; 8:48). He also speaks more about Samaritans than any other gospel; perhaps because his material was partly aimed at converting Samaritans and other Gentiles.

17:20 *And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God comes, he answered them and said: The kingdom of God comes not with observation-* The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). "When will the Kingdom come?" was another perennial question- again answered by the Lord redirecting the entire enquiry. "The kingdom of God is within you... as it was in the days of Lot... one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (Lk. 17:34). 'Don't worry about the calendar date, don't let a fascination with prophecy distract you from the personal reality that whenever I do come, some will be left behind. Will that be *you*?'. See on Lk. 19:11. The implication could be that the Kingdom of God is hastened by action- by the repentance of Israel, the spiritual maturity of God's believing children, intense prayer, outreach to the Gentile world and other preconditions for the Lord's return. It will not be hastened by attempts to match current events with Bible prophecies- which perhaps is what the Lord refers to by "observation" here. It's as if He is warning against the obsession with latter day political prophecies which has stymied so much spirituality over the ages.

And yet "observation" translates a word which only Luke uses to describe how the Jews critically "watched" Jesus (6:7; 14:1; 20:20). They were actually looking at Him; the Kingdom was amongst them. They need not observe / look around / watch out for Messiah any further.

17:21 *Neither shall they say, Here it is, or, There it is! For the kingdom of God is among you-* The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God". And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now. "The kingdom of God is within you" (AV) is more correctly translated "the kingdom of God is *among* you" (see A.V. mg.). The context shows that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees (:20); the "you" therefore refers to them. They were certainly not Christian believers- the kingdom of God was not established in *their* hearts. The Jews were making a great public show of their zeal in looking for Messiah. In this passage, "the kingdom of God" seems to be a title of Messiah, seeing He is to be the king of the kingdom. Thus when the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Blessed is he (Messiah) that comes in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9,10). This parallels Messiah and "the kingdom". Thus John the Baptist preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he (Jesus) that was (prophesied)" (Matt. 3:2,3). So here, the Lord answered their question about "when the kingdom of God should come", by speaking about the coming of "the son of man". His point was that the Jews were making so much show of being on the look out for Messiah's coming, expecting Him



to be suddenly revealed in power, that they failed to realize that that Messiah- "the kingdom of God"- was already among them in the humble person of Jesus. Thus He warned them: "The kingdom of God (Messiah) comes not with outward show... behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20,21). A well known theologian, Joachim Jeremias, has come to the same conclusion: "The meaning 'indwelling in' can certainly be excluded. Neither in Judaism nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that the reign of God is something indwelling in men, to be found, say, in the heart; such a spiritualistic understanding is ruled out both for Jesus and for the early Christian tradition" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1972) p. 101). He goes on to draw out the parallel between Lk. 17:21 and Lk. 17:23,24: "Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you...And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it flashes out of the one part under the heaven, shines unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day".

The parallel is between the Kingdom of God coming at the return of Christ at the last day- and the Kingdom being 'within' or 'among' you. Jeremias suggests on this basis that "the Kingdom of God is within / among you" means 'The Kingdom of God will come among you suddenly and visibly, at the last day- so it's no good expecting it right at this moment now'.

Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God" (Lk. 17:21). And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

*17:22 And he said to the disciples: The days will come, when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you shall not see it-* Yet Jn. 8:56 implies it is always possible to see one of the days of the Son of man through faith in Him. As explained in Jn. 14-16, the promised Comforter would enable believers to always have the same sense of the Lord's presence as His followers had during His ministry. Is the Lord not hinting here that there will be a clouded spiritual vision amongst His latter day followers, even though they will "desire" this not to be the case? And can we not see uncomfortable similarities with our position and feelings today, realizing our vision is somewhat clouded, desiring for things to be different, but still not seeing...?

The Lord's coming is "the day of the Son of man"; and yet He speaks of the days of His ministry as the days of the Son of Man. The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. The same Jesus who was then in Palestine, speaking from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew, is essentially the same who shall return, likewise as judge, friend and patient saviour. Lk. 17:24-26 speaks of the "days of the Son of man" and refers them to three things:

1. The days of the Lord's ministry

2. The time leading up to His return
3. The day of judgment, of His actual second coming.

Putting these together, we come to the following conclusion: those living in the very last days will effectively be living with the actual presence of the Lord, it will be as if He has physically returned, although He has not done so. This may well be in order to provide encouragement to the persecuted saints in their latter-day tribulation; but it surely suggests that they will *know* that the Lord is about to return, that they are living in the days of the Son of man. The Comforter will be poured out, or accepted, so that the believers feel strongly the Lord's presence.

*17:23 And they shall say to you, Look there, or, Look here. Do not go, nor follow after them-* The Lord has been teaching that He is "amongst" them; there is no need to go looking for Him anywhere. But His thought moves on specifically to the time of His return. For the Lord repeats this warning in the Olivet prophecy. There will be false Christs and bogus claims that the Lord has returned. Spoken to the disciples, this suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

"Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that the Lord is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that His return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that the Lord is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

*17:24 For as the lightning shines from one part under the heaven to the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be in his day-* This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and

tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10:19; 11:22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

As the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analysing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment. The day of the Lord was right upon them, if only they would realize it; and they made the decision standing right there as to whether they would then be saved or condemned.

*17:25 But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation-* We wonder whether the Lord's tone of voice and body language changed; having talked of the glories of His second coming, He returns to the reality that He must be crucified by His people. The Lord's rejection by Israel is a major theme (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 8:31; 12:10; Lk. 9:22; 20:17; 1 Pet. 2:4,7 all use the same word). Any who struggle with rejection find an instant connection with the Lord. It has been given to us to "suffer for His sake", the same word used here for "suffer" (Phil. 1:29). His sufferings are reflected in our experience, that we might experience in practice the status of being "in Christ". The passages just listed mainly state that the Lord would be rejected by "the builders", by the "elders... priests... scribes". Now He extends that to all "this generation". They followed their religious leaders- to reject God's Son and all His love. This is the danger of following religious leaders without thinking things through for ourselves from God's word.

*17:26 And as it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man-* See on 2 Pet. 2:5-8. "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined elsewhere is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there

are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come on board. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.

- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.

- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the

judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.

- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

*17:27 They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all-* Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

The flood "came", Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (Mt. 24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark seven days before the flood (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong

covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

In *Contra Celsum* we read Origen justifying the Christian church against Celsus' criticisms that it is a church of poor, simple people. That the majority of Christians would be poor and simple was indeed the expectation of both the Lord Jesus and Paul. Yet Origen seeks to justify the Christian church as middle class and respectable, with respected intellectuals amongst its membership. It was and is this desire to be seen as worldly-wise and 'normal' which is the death-knoll for any revival of Christianity. It was this which led to the acceptance of the Trinity; and it is this which robs true Christianity of its radical nature and appeal today. Perhaps in our last days this lesson needs to be learnt as never before. The Lord's picture of the world of the last days is of a household eating and drinking, absorbed with being normal (Mt. 24:38; Lk. 17:27). But the Lord's point is that this very 'normal' behaviour done in the wrong spirit is what He finds so wrong.

17:28 *Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot- they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built-* There can be no doubt that the sexual aspects of Sodom's sins have great similarity to the moral filth of our present world. But significantly it was not this aspect which our Lord chose to highlight when speaking of how "the days of Lot" typified those of His return. Instead He spoke of those things which were more likely to ensnare His people: "*They* (as well as our present world) did eat, *they* drank, *they* bought, *they* sold, *they* planted, *they* built". Their obsession with daily activities without an awareness of God was as bad as their other sins; a point we would do well to be aware of. However, their eating and drinking must have been to gross excess- Ez. 16:49 defines "the iniquity of Sodom" as being "fullness of bread" among other things. Some lavish Christian lifestyles frequently feature "fullness of bread" - but because it is not perceived as a gross sin, this unhealthy similarity with Sodom slips by unchallenged. "They bought, they sold" suggests that Sodom was a major trading centre, rapidly increasing in wealth; "they planted, they built" implies a real boom town. Such success resulted in the people being proud and haughty (Ez. 16:49,50); the wealth created at the expense of others brought about "abundance of

idleness in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ez. 16:49). It is these aspects of Sodom which are so precisely matched by our self-centred, money mad world. As our Lord realized, it is these aspects which are most likely to ensnare the child of God. Yet Sodom's people were not completely unaware of their religious conscience. Jeremiah likened the false prophets of Israel to the people of Sodom, who effectively taught that sin was service to God, (Jer. 23:14). This is another hint that the people of Sodom had some degree of responsibility, as have latter day Israel whom they typify.

Lot is presented here as representative of the latter-day believers. But he was hardly strong in faith. He chose to live in Sodom, first pitching his tent near it and then getting a house within the city and even becoming a judge. His wife was consumed in the materialism of the city as were most of his children. He argued with the Angel about leaving Sodom and was only saved by grace; and even after that, he slept with both his daughters whilst drunk. And yet he was counted as faithful. All the virgins in the parable slumber and sleep at the time their Lord comes; when clearly the last generation is exhorted not to slumber but to keep awake. We can conclude that the last days will be a time of spiritual weakness for the church.

*17:29 But in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all-* Lot in his last days in Sodom was a type of the believers living in the world at the time of the end. Lot in those last hours was walking around the streets of that city trying to save his family, walking amidst angry, blind people who hated him, drunk on their own lusts. Walking those streets must have been an uncanny experience. But that is God's picture of the world of our day, and our own uncanny, almost charmed life amongst the sleepwalkers. The whole human experience is analogous to sleepwalking; we go through the motions of reality, but actually (as a race) we are spiritually asleep. The world around us are sleepwalking, in God's eyes. And we too should share His perspective.

The Lord initially has in view that Jerusalem is as Sodom, an equation the Old Testament prophets make several times. The need to leave Sodom referred to the need to break with the temple cult, and the Olivet prophecy urges the faithful to flee out of Jerusalem to the mountains to avoid her judgment. This is the language of "Babylon" in Revelation, which in its primary application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult. All who remained in it would perish; hence the appeal of the letter to the Hebrews to leave it and resist the temptation to return to it.

*17:30 After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed-* This commonly used phrase "Son of man" (Mt. 16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: "One like the Son of

Man came with the clouds of heaven". This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel's prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His "coming" is parallel with a period of time, "the days of the son of man".

The Son of man will be "revealed"; and yet the other references to the Son of man being revealed refer to the way He is even now revealed to His true followers by the Father (Mt. 11:27; 16:17 etc.). At the second coming, the real nature of God's Son, the essence of His character, will be revealed to all. At the very time that the Wicked One will be revealed, so will the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:8). In the way God judges man, His character is again glorified and revealed; for in the way He judges, His essential characteristics are revealed. It is therefore possible to see anticipations of the day of future judgment in how God has judged in the past- thus incidents like Adam and Cain's rejection, the Babylonian and Roman invasions and the subsequent condemnation of God's people, the flood... all these are prototypes of the future judgment. Take, for example, the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom. It is full of language elsewhere used about the judgment seat.

17:31 *In that day, he that shall be on the housetop with his goods in the house-* The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily



the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :36 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

*Let him not go down to take them away, and let him that is in the field likewise not return back-* See on Lk. 14:33. The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. When the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of

this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of Christ's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (Gen. 45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31).

17:32 *Remember Lot's wife!*- Lot seems to have gone to Sodom for material ends- our Lord holds up his wife as an example of those who love the materialism of this world more than the reality of his Kingdom. But the Angels speak of spiritually prepared people as being the only real possessions Lot had: "Whatever you have in the city, bring them out". "But his wife looked back from behind him" (Gen. 19:26) suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Our Lord comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of his coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk. 12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. Remember that the fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. Their exodus was at night- "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (Gen. 19:23), so she would have seen the flickering lights of the city in the distance. Compare this with how the virgins of Mt. 25 go out to meet their Lord at night.

"Remember Lot's wife" suggests that we should meditate upon her

position as it has especial warning for the last days. Her leaving of Sodom appears to have been due to the personal influence of Lot her husband, yet ultimately she failed to have that personal desire to obey God. It would not be pushing the type too far to suggest that the wives of latter day believers may feel that they can enter the Kingdom in the spiritual shadow of their husbands. One cannot help wondering whether she left Ur not through personal response to the promises but because the others were leaving. Doubtless her uncle Abraham would have led her and the whole family in regular prayer and meditation during the journey towards Canaan. But somehow the reality of the God of Israel was never allowed to touch her inner being, and the years of the soft life in Sodom would have sealed her spiritual state. It is hard to avoid making the point that many of us may be in a similar position. Gen. 19:14 RVmg. brings out the likely immediate background to her decision. Lot's sons in law "were to marry" his daughters. The Lord too perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Could it not be that the very day of the double wedding, they had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot's wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

*17:33 Whoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose it shall preserve it-* The Lord Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if his life consists in what he owns (12:15) and seeks to save it. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. The Lord had earlier taught that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in

the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. And so Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

*17:34 I say to you: In that night there shall be two men in one bed. One shall be taken, and the other shall be left-* Not only is the city of Sodom representative of the world of the last days, but Lot's calling out of Sodom by the Angels is typical of our being 'taken' by Angels to meet the Lord. In that day, "One will be taken, whilst the other will be left [behind]" [Lk. 17:34]. The Greek for "taken" is the same as in Jn. 14:3- the Lord comes again to *take* us to be with Him. Seeing this passage also speaks of the second coming, it seems to fit more logically that the faithful are taken away; and the rejected 'left behind'. The Greek word for "left" really has the idea 'sent away'. Whilst it's not the same Greek word, it is the same *idea* as in several pictures of the judgment- the rejected are 'sent away'; the idea of being 'left sitting' doesn't seem to be there. So in the very moment of the Lord's return, the essential division is made; the faithful are taken, whilst the rejected are "left", but their being "left [behind]" is actually their condemnation, their being sent away from the Lord.

*17:35 There shall be two women grinding together at the mill; one shall be taken and the other shall be left-* The present tense is used here: "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive. They were grinding using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. Perhaps the idea is that one [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left".

*17:36 There shall be two men in the field; one shall be taken and the other shall be left-* I suggested on :34 that the taking away is to salvation and those left behind are destroyed with the world, after the pattern of Lot being saved and his family destroyed. But a case can be made the other way around. The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (Mt. 24:39). The ambiguity in interpretation is intentional. For we are to reflect that we shall be taken or left, and to where shall we be taken, and for what shall we be left. "Left" in the Greek has a wide range of possible meanings

here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (Mt. 13:38). And in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (Mt. 24:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation. See on 1 Thess. 4:15.

*17:37 And they answered and said to him: Where, Lord? And he said to them: Where the body is, there will also the eagles gather together-* God sometimes uses language in a way which we may find embarrassing or inappropriate, reading from the distance of our age and culture, where there is an awkwardness at talking about the raw side of human nature. Thus when creating a mini-parable to explain the gathering of the responsible to him at the second coming, Jesus likens himself to a rotting carcass which will instinctively attract the eagles, representing the responsible. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. But within our use of language, it seems inappropriate to liken the Lord Jesus Christ to a decaying carcass. It seems similarly inappropriate to liken God's response to our prayers to an unjust judge who grudgingly answers requests (Lk. 18:1-7), or to repeatedly compare Jesus to a thief (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,33; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). It seems out of place to liken believers struggling to enter the Kingdom to violent people trying to storm a city by force (Mt. 11:12). The absentee landlords of Galilee were despised by all; and yet the Lord uses one of them as a figure for Himself (Lk. 20:9). Most stunning of all is Psalm 78:36,65,66: "They (Israel) did flatter Him (God) with their mouth... then the Lord awaked... like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts". This just isn't what we expect; to read about God being flattered by foolish men, and for Him to be likened to a drunken soldier who goes on the rampage kicking others in their private parts (this is alluding back to 1 Sam. 5:9). And the Lord likens His final appeal to Israel to casting dung around them (Lk. 13:8).

This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming

down from the sky of eagles upon the carcass- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcass in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcass or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. In Rev. 11:8,9 we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcass of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The Greek word for "carcass", *stoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcass as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcass (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". "Where, Lord?" may not necessarily mean 'to where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled; here the quotation would be from Dt. 28:26 "your carcasses shall be meat unto the fowls of the air".

So this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcass of Israel, or for the sake of the carcasses of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17). Yet here in Lk. 17:37 the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess.

4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

And yet the Lord may simply be saying that questions like 'Where?' and 'When?' are irrelevant. We shall be taken to judgment just as eagles find their way to the carcass, but we are to ensure that we are not that dead carcass.

## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *And he spoke a parable to them, that they should always pray and not lose heart, saying-* This comes straight after the teaching in chapter 17 about readiness for the Lord's coming; and continued, intense prayer is part of that preparedness. There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable. This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: "Brethren, be not weary (s.w. "not to faint") in well doing". What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: "Brethren, pray for us". And he concludes it with the same rubric: "Brethren, be not weary" (faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): "In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence (to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)... *wherefore* I desire that you faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations"; is he not implying 'You know how powerful prayer is, so don't faint in it, you know what struggles I'm having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent widow in the parable'. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

18:2 *There was in a city a judge, who did not fear God and had no regard for man-* The judge, representing God, lived in the same city as the widow, representing us (:3). The Kingdom of God is likened to a city which we are to enter. We are in a sense within it now, having entered through the narrow gate. The unjustness of the judge is setting up the final point of this parable; the end stress of the parable is that if this is how an unjust judge acts, then how much more sensitive is God to our cries for justice. But we are to note that Israel were commended to appoint judges who feared God (Ex. 18:21). The existence in Israel of judges who did not fear God was therefore a criticism of Israel as a whole. The judge did not "regard" man; the word means to respect to the point of reverence (s.w. 20:13; Mt. 21:37; Heb. 12:9). The implication is that God so respects us, that He, unlike this judge, is eager to hear our prayers. And we are to respect others likewise; the implication here is that if we fear / respect God, we will respect men who are made in His image. And disrespect of human persons is thereby disrespect of God.



18:3 *And there was a widow in that city; and she came often to him, saying: Give me justice against my adversary-* Note the Psalmists' joy that judgment is coming (Ps. 67:4; 96:12,13). The same spirit can be seen in the parable of the woman who keeps begging the unjust judge to open her case. She may have had her little piece of land taken away from her, whatever it was, she is confident she has a watertight case and this is why she so pesters the judge to judge her (Lk. 18:1-5). Now this is a powerful challenge to those believers who seem to *fear* the judgment process. David shows the same spirit in asking God to 'avenge my cause' (Ps. 35:23). There is the same confidence that by grace, he is in the right and longs for justice to be done. So much of Romans is dedicated to the images of the court room; we are justified, and we should be earnestly seeking the vindication of Spirit against flesh.

The parable speaks especially of faith in prayer in the last days before the Lord's coming (:7,8). The implication is that the woman, the church, is under persecution from a great satan / adversary; and her earnest prayers will elicit God's dramatic judgment and intervention in this earth. This is all very much the language of the book of Revelation.

Much of the pain felt by the spiritually abused focuses upon the issue of injustice. They were treated like *this*, but others are treated like *that*; *you* can't break bread in a church, but *he* can; *she* isn't allowed to attend the gathering but *he* is, and so forth. The Lord told a parable about a woman who repeatedly asked for 'justice', with the implication that she would only eventually find it at the Lord's return. But He went straight on to tell another parable, about the repentant man who beat upon his breast saying "God have mercy upon me, the sinner"; this man "went down to his house *justified*". The theme of 'justification' is thus a thread which continues from the woman demanding 'justification' (Gk.) against her abuser (Lk. 18:3). The Lord's point wasn't merely that justice will only be ultimately done at His return; but further, that we are all serious sinners, who have been 'justified' by God's grace; and this colossal-scale experience of receiving undeserved justice / justification should mean that we're not so concerned about receiving justice in human matters in this life. There cannot be perfection this side of God's Kingdom being established upon earth. To seek for perfection in relationships is perhaps reflective of a lack of faith or understanding relating to the Kingdom of perfection which is yet to come. One of the greatest things for me about that Kingdom is the unity and perfection of relationships which there will then be. It is, however, all so hard because the New Testament presents how the church should be- an ideal of loving, sensitive, caring relationships in the spirit of Christ. And this is very attractive to us. It's very hard, therefore, to face the reality that this great intention, this lofty possibility, has actually been left unachieved by the church. It's like reading the descriptions of God's house in Ezekiel 40-48. This wonderful temple could've come about in Ezekiel's time. The possibilities are given

in such great detail- but their fulfilment was quite simply dependent upon whether Judah wished to make it come real by living up to it (Ez. 43:10-12). And they chose not to. It's the same with the ideal "house of God" presented to us in the New Testament. Those who tend towards perfectionism find this very hard to cope with. It is indeed a tragedy, that so much Divine potential is as it were wasted, not realized, by our dysfunction. But none of this should take away from the personal reality of salvation and relationship with God which we each have. This is not to say that exposing abuse and dealing with it shouldn't happen. It should. But let's not feel that if justice isn't done, we are somehow without justice. We are the ultimately justified, and our standing before God's judgment seat is far more significant than our standing before that of mere humans.

First century Palestinian peasant courts have been described in some detail. They involved a mass of men shouting at the judge, who usually decided cases according to who gave the largest bribe. Women never went to court. It was a man's world there. This woman had no male in her extended family to speak for her. She had no money to pay a bribe. But still she went to court and sought to persuade the judge. In this element of unreality we see the bravery of prayer, the height of the challenge; that we who have nothing and no human chance of being heard, will indeed be heard. It would've struck the initial peasant hearers of the story as strange that above all the male shouting, somehow this heroic woman was heard- and was heard repeatedly. Again, we see an encouragement to prayer. And to liken powerful praying to a woman was in itself unusual in that male dominated age.

*18:4 And for a while he would not, but afterward he said to himself: Though I neither fear God, nor regard man-* The idea is that eventually there is response even from one who has no sensitivity to people nor fear of God; and how much more quickly and deeply will come the response from the just judge of all, who does "regard man" with great pity (Ps. 144:3).

*18:5 Yet because this widow troubles me, I will give her justice, lest she wear me out by her continual coming-* The connection is perhaps with the man of the parable in Lk. 11:8, who was so bold and confident in his request that he shamelessly 'troubled' the rich man to give him his request; and this too was explaining our confidence in prayer to the Father.

The widow by her continual coming in prayer 'wearied' the judge into responding; Strong defines this Greek word as meaning 'to beat and black and blue' (RVmg. gives "bruise"). It's a strange way of putting it, but this is another reminder of the intense struggle of prayer. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the

blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong). See on Col. 2:1. Again, the idea is that if the unjust judge is so sensitive to this woman's words, to the point he feels beaten up by them- how much more sensitive is the Father to our prayers!

The parable of the widow who keeps nagging the free-wheeling judge is rather humanly unlikely. Would such a tough guy really pay attention to the repeated requests of the woman? But although he considers himself independent of both God and men, he ends up being controlled by the widow. This reflects the immense power which there is in human prayer, and God's willingness to respond if we are importunate enough.

18:6 *And the Lord said: Hear what the unrighteous judge says-* Perhaps the fact the ungodly judge is worn out by the woman's requests is the element of unreality in the story; for usually, if she paid no bribe, she would not even get a hearing, let alone be repeatedly listened to. And it flags up the essential point of the parable, which is that God will be even more sensitive to us. The emphasis is on the word "unrighteous". The *righteous* judge is going to be even more sensitive and quicker to respond than the unrighteous judge. The justice of God as judge is emphasized throughout the Old Testament, and the Lord describes Himself likewise as a just judge who responds to what He hears [rather than to bribes or pressure from others in human society, Jn. 5:30].

18:7 *And shall not God give justice to His chosen, who cry to Him day and night?-* The unjust judge was worn down by the woman's repeated appeals. The implication is that God is far more sensitive and will therefore respond quicker. Even though His response may appear slow, compared to the magnitude of our request, His response is quick.

18:7- see on 2 Pet. 3:9.

The many connections between Revelation and the Gospels need to be followed up; the incidents in Christ's earthly experience seem to be woven by him into the fabric of the visions he gives John. The theme of persecution is especially common. The widow crying to God because of persecution represents the prayers of the "elect" or "chosen" remnant of the last days (Lk. 18:7 cp. Mk. 13:20). They will be asking for vengeance against the beast which is persecuting them, and thus this parable is the basis for the souls under the altar crying out for vengeance (Rev. 6:9). Christ's return is therefore the day of vengeance (Lk. 21:22; Is. 34:8; 61:2; 63:4) of his persecuted latter day ecclesia. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns

- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
  - The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.
- All these are latter day problems: abuse of "the little ones", self-righteousness and lack of real faith in prayer.

*Will He be slow to help them?*- God *will* shorten the period of time of trouble before His return (2 Pet. 3:9); and we read that He *will* also lengthen the period of grace (Lk. 13:6-9)... *if* His people ask Him. What He 'will' do perhaps should be read as what He *can* do. And this is why so much prophecy is conditional. Significantly, no other religion that I know contains this feature- of a God so passionate and so real that He will change His stated will and intention for the sake of His people's prayers.

The AV "though he bear long with them" is accurate. 2 Pet. 3:9 uses the same word in teaching that "The Lord... is longsuffering to us-ward" (AV) of the last days. This longsuffering of Jesus spoken of by Peter alludes to this parable of the persistent widow, whose continued requests should match our prayers for the second coming (the vengeance of our adversaries which she requested will only come then). "Though he bear long" (s.w. 'longsuffering') with us, "God shall avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him" (Lk. 18:7 AV). The "us" whom Peter refers to as experiencing the Lord's longsuffering ('bearing long') are therefore to be equated with "the elect" in their fervent prayers for the second coming. The days being shortened for the elect's sake therefore refers to the hastening of the second coming on account of the elect's prayers (Mt. 24:22). In view of the later references to Mt. 24, it is not unreasonable to think that Peter is consciously alluding to Mt. 24:22 concerning the shortening of the days for the sake of the elect's prayers, through his allusion to the parable of the persistent widow of Lk. 18:7.

18:8 *I say to you, that He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?*-

"Nevertheless", despite the fact God answers prayer, being far more sensitive to our cries than the unjust judge- it is still a question as to whether there will be faith in prayer in the last days, at the Son of Man's coming. Whilst the article is indeed used, "*the* faith" doesn't have to mean 'the set of doctrines which comprise the one faith'. It may refer to that, but the article may be used here simply for emphasis. Will He find faith, *the* kind of faith which there ought to be given His sensitivity to us? The implication is that the experience of answered prayer *ought* to develop faith, but such will be the spiritual perils of the last days and the lack of serious prayer, that there may well be no faith in the final generation. Lot has just been cited in chapter 17 as an example of the latter day believers- and he was weak in faith, although saved. Likewise even the five wise virgins of the parable are sleeping when they ought to have stayed awake for their Lord's return.

The theme of prayer continues. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.

*May we not give way to these latter day temptations!*

There is the real possibility that when Christ returns, none will hold the faith. Only eight people were truly watching when the flood came; and Peter cites this as an example for us at the time of Christ's return. No wonder there is such emphasis upon the need to watch. If we are the generation which will see Christ's appearing, we will be the only people who never physically die. And we will be those who welcome the Lord Jesus to this earth, who stand ready to welcome Him. This is an honour higher than we probably appreciate. No wonder there is this pressing need in these last days to watch our doctrine, our way of life, *to hold on* to the great salvation which we have been given in prospect.

*18:9 And he spoke also this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt-* The theme continues from the previous parable. There, the woman [representing us] prays for justice. "Justice" and "righteousness" are connected ideas in Hebrew and Greek thought. The woman wanted justice / righteousness; but she did not have it of herself. It had to be granted by a judge, and we are in relationship with the just judge, who alone gives justice / righteousness. Those who think they are righteous of themselves do not therefore fear God and they therefore despise men, just as the unjust judge did. The Pharisee who "treated others with contempt" therefore equates with the unjust judge of whom we have just read; and the woman desperately begging for justice is the tax collector begging for forgiveness, for rightness with God, who goes down to his house justified, with justice / righteousness, just as the widow went away with justice.

Paul alludes here when he says that the sentence of death we have within our bodies requires a bodily resurrection and transformation of the body far beyond our power to achieve; and therefore we cannot trust in ourselves, i.e. our own righteousness (2 Cor. 1:9). Rather must we cast ourselves upon God's grace.

The Lord was "despised", the same word here translated 'to treat with contempt' (23:11; Acts 4:11). Those despised by religionists are fellowshiping their Lord's sufferings; and the religionists by doing so are taking the side of His abusers.

*18:10 Two men went into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector-* Many of the parables feature two people; the self-

righteous, and the serious sinner. One saved, the other lost. The parable of the older and younger sons in chapter 15 is a clear example. We have it again here. If we don't identify with the serious sinner- then we have to identify with the self-righteous.

18:11 *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus-* AV "Prayed thus with himself". The OT idiom of prayer 'returning into one's own bosom' is surely the quarry from which the Lord dug His image of a man praying *with himself*. It isn't real prayer; it's one part of the brain talking to a black box in another part of the brain, that we call 'God'.

*God, I thank you that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector-* Luke uses the same term in recording how "the rest of men" would seek and find the Lord (Acts 15:17). Those despised as secular, non-religious and the hopeless sinners are the very ones whom the Lord came to save; rather than the self-righteous religionists. And these are the ones we should be reaching out to, rather than attempting to convert religionists from one flavour to another. The same word for "rest" has just been used in :9 for how the Pharisee despised "others". It means to put down, to set at nothing; and this is how the tax collector, and those in his category, are made to feel by the self-righteous. It's a big reason why secular folk who are searching for God won't attend church.

"Or even as" could as well be translated to the effect that "this tax collector" was the epitome of an extortioner, unjust and adulterer. And his deep penitence could suggest there might have been some truth in that accusation. But he, the "unjust", was the one who went away "justified" (:14). Luke was personal friends with Paul, and it could be argued that his Gospel record was preparation for Paul's later theological writings. The idea of the unjust being justified by faith through grace is exactly the theme of Paul in Romans and elsewhere.

18:12 *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get-* Fasting was only required by the Law on the day of Atonement; and tithing was only of cattle and agricultural produce. Obedience to law, and even exceeding legal requirements, was not the basis for justification; for it is the hopeless sinner who goes away justified (:14); as noted on :11, Luke seems to be preparing the way for Paul's later expositions on justification of sinners by faith and not legal obedience.

18:13 *But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: God, be merciful to me, the sinner-* Ps. 51:1 "Have mercy on me, O God..." is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David's prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us. In Romans 4, Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our pattern. We along with all the righteous ought to "shout for joy" that David really was forgiven (Ps.

32:11)- for there is such hope for *us* now. David is our example, and yet therefore the intensity of David's repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord's grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Paul alludes here and sees this man as himself (1 Tim. 1:15,16). See on Lk. 23:48.

Usually men prayed with hands crossed over their chest. But men even at funerals don't usually beat upon their breast: "The remarkable feature of this particular gesture is the fact that it is characteristic of women, not men". The man was quite exceptionally upset and in grief- because of his sins. Beating his breast suggested a blow to his heart, as if confessing himself worthy of death. And personal recognition of private sin wasn't a big feature of first century life. The Lord's initial audience would've been amazed at the contrition and grief which this man had because of his secret sins; and this is the lesson for us. The times of prayer in the temple coincided with the offering of the daily sacrifices. The man asks for God to 'have mercy on me' (Lk. 18:13). But he uses a different word to that in Lk. 18:38, where the same translation commonly occurs. *Hilastheti moi*, he says; and the noun occurs only in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10 to describe the atonement sacrifice. It seems the man was so extraordinarily moved by his own sin and the sacrifice offered. No wonder the same phrase occurs in Lk. 23:48 about people likewise beating their breasts in repentance when they saw the actual sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The humble man "smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner". "Be merciful" translates the word elsewhere translated "make propitiation", in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man's sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: 'Please God, make a propitiation for me' was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need... According to the Lord's own teaching, there are in some ways only two types of believer: either we are the self-righteous Pharisee, or the publican who beats his breast in self-loathing, hating his corrupt heart, begging for "mercy" [Gk. propitiation], confessing that he is *the* sinner (Lk. 18:13 Gk.). Paul, in one of his many allusions to the Gospels, reached the same height of contrition when he said, in total honesty, that he was "[the] chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15,16). James 4:9 tells some believers in the Jerusalem ecclesia that their joy ought to be turned to heaviness, implying the downcast look of the publican who could not so much as lift up his eyes to God. This man is held up by the Lord and James as some kind of hero and example to us.

The man who 'humbled himself' smote upon his breast in knowledge of his own sin and his Lord's grace. The Greek phrase occurs elsewhere only once, again in Luke's thought, in describing how those humbled by the vision of the cross beat upon their breasts (Lk. 23:48)- surely in

recognition of their sin and contrition before the grace of God outpoured. In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted.

18:14 *I say to you, this man went home rendered righteous rather than the other. For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, but he that humbles himself shall be exalted-* This is alluded to in 2 Cor. 11:7. Paul told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us. It was through refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians that he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted*- all language of the crucifixion (cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. We live in a world which has made the fulfilment of personal aims of paramount importance. It has affected the fabric of every society, and become embedded in every mind. To *live to serve*, to put oneself down that others may rise... this is strange indeed. John the Baptist had this spirit, for he rejoiced that he decreased whilst the Lord's cause increased. Paul likewise abased himself that others might be exalted, after the pattern of the cross. God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *ourselves*.

So we are taught here that he who humbles himself in prayer will be exalted. Paul perhaps had this in mind when he spoke of how the Lord Jesus on the cross humbled Himself that He might be exalted (Phil. 2). Real prayer is a humiliating experience, a true humbling of self after the pattern of the Lord's crucifixion. We really need to ask ourselves whether this is anywhere near true of our prayer life.

To come before "the throne of grace" is to come in essence before the judgment and before the cross of our Lord. Inevitably these things convict us of our desperation. The publican who beat upon his breast "went down to his house justified". Yet we were justified by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). That man's faith was consciously focused upon the Lord's sacrifice. We believe on Him who justifies us, through the blood of the cross (Rom. 4:5), and this faith is manifested through focusing upon the cross, and expressing it in prayer to be justified. The publican went home after prayer "justified rather than the other". It has been suggested that this reflects "a Semitic idiom which describes... an anticipation of his acquittal in the final judgment".

The language of justification ["rendered righteous"] as noted on :11 and :12 is preparing the way for Paul's inspired expansion of these ideas in Romans.



18:15 *And they were bringing to him even their babies, that he should touch them-* His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

The touching was understood as a form of blessing. The implication is that the Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*But when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them-* Just as they had turned away the little one in Matthew 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbade John's disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

18:16 *But Jesus called them to him, saying: Permit the little children to come to me, and do not forbid them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God-* The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uttermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this

kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

18:17 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it-* 'Be babes' Peter later exhorted, 'and grow as they do' (1 Pet. 2:2). The same word occurs here in Lk. 18:15 in description of the "infants" whom Peter rebuked. The Lord's response had been to tell Peter to be like them. And, having been humbled into learning something of a child's teachableness, a babe's desire for the sincere milk, Peter now asks others to learn the lesson.

The idea of "receiving" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt.25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

We will enter the Kingdom as shy children. It doesn't just mean that we must *now* be as little children, but more that we will enter the Kingdom as little children. For Jesus had just said that "of such is the Kingdom". Children unspoilt by the hardness of this world and this flesh... this is how we will be as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom. And we should live the Kingdom life now. See on Lk. 12:37.

The Lord perceived spiritual prompts in the ordinary things of everyday life. He saw in those children the qualities of those who would be in His Kingdom. Those kids weren't 'spiritual' in themselves. They were just Palestinian kids with well meaning, superstitious mums who believed in the power of the touch of the holy man. Yet, the Lord explained, that was no reason to disregard them. They should be seen as reminders of

spiritual qualities which should be in us all. And this was how He perceived everything in His daily round of life. He raised everything to an altogether higher level.

18:18 *And a certain ruler asked him, saying: Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him. The idea was: 'Give me a list of dos and don'ts, I'm game'. But the answer was ultimately: "Follow me" (:22)- 'don't worry about specifics, but have a spirit of life committed to following Me, bearing My cross'. For that is reward enough. Likewise Peter was interested in what the reward would be for having given things up for the Lord; and the final answer is really 'I'm going to die on the cross- please share that death with me' (Lk. 18:28-33 and parallels).

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:22). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words "shall I do"] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have eternal life*", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "*have*" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but

when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

18:19 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good, save one- God!*- The Greek may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question 'why do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

18:20 *You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honour your father and mother-* Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148. Paul's

references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

18:21 *And he said: All these things have I observed from my youth-* The record in Mt. 19:20 stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.  
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18:22 *And when Jesus heard it, he said to him: One thing you lack yet-* Matthew records that this was in response to his question: "What do I still lack?". And Lk. 18:22 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

*Sell all you have and distribute to the poor-* Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

*And you shall have treasure in heaven-* Alluded to in James 1:12. We note that the Lord treated each person differently. He approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that this rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

*And come follow me-* See on Mk. 10:21; Lk. 10:42. In the first century, family and the family inheritance was everything. The way the Lord asked His followers to reject family and follow Him was far more radical than many of us can ever appreciate. Likewise His command to sell everything and follow Him implied so much- for the Middle Eastern family estate was the epitome of all that a person had and stood for. And to be asked to give the proceeds of that inheritance to poor strangers... was just too much. It could seem, once one gets to know Middle Eastern values, that to abandon both family and the village home in favour of Jesus was just impossible- those things were more valuable to a Middle Eastern peasant than life itself. But still He asked- and people responded.

Consider the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

	"We have left all
"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor	

...and come, take up the cross

[no comment by Peter- he censored this bit out in his hearing of the Lord's words]

and follow me"

...and have followed you"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

18:23 *But when he heard these things, he became exceedingly sorrowful. For he was very rich-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.). Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

18:24 *And Jesus looking at him, said: How hard it shall be for those that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!-* Mk. 10:24 speaks of the man who trusts in riches; the parallel Lk. 18:24 speaks of him who *has* riches. To have riches is, almost axiomatically, to trust in them. This is the nature of wealth 'possession'. For the man who has / trusts in riches, he must bow down like the camel wriggling through the small gate on its knees, having shed *all* its mountain of goods. This parable was given in the context of the Lord's straight statement: "He that humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 18:14 cp. 25). As the camel rose up from its knees the other side of the gate, so within the Kingdom's gates, those who have shed their trust in possessions will likewise be exalted.

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:27). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

18:25 *For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God-* The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev. 22:14; 21:2; Heb. 13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. In these few words is our highest challenge in this age.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.* He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate. This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expository gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

Luke's writings bear the marks of a doctor writing; he uses exact medical terms. Luke's medical language is clearly seen in how he records the Lord's words about "passing through the eye of a needle". He uses the Greek medical term *belone*- a surgeon's needle. Matthew and Mark use the more domestic word *raphis* (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25).

18:26 *And they that heard it said: Then who can be saved?-* They were really so shocked (Mt.) that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and so we see how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Can be..." translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their



wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires.

*18:27 But he said: The things which are impossible with men are possible with God-* The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

The idea of possibility with God is lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

*18:28 And Peter said: We have left our own-* See on Lk. 14:27. The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

*And followed you-* Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

18:29 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you-* This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (Mt. 19:27). The Lord doesn't comment upon Peter's claim. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had. They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

*There is no one that has left house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake-* See on Acts 8:12. This list of things to be forsaken, with Matthew adding houses and lands, recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. And note that the Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Mt. 19:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

18:30 *Who shall not receive many times more in this time-* See on Mt. 10:27 for the allusion to Job. The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the

families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

*And in the age to come, eternal life-* These are the very words of the rich young man earlier in the chapter. The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

18:31 *And he took aside the twelve-* The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*And said to them: We will go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets about the Son of Man shall be accomplished-* Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid". They went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the

parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

18:32 *For he shall be delivered up to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and shamefully treated, and spat upon-* See on 1 Thess. 2:2. As noted on :15, this refers to the judgments upon Israel in Is. 50:2,6. The Greek for "delivered up" means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's providential protection to the powers of darkness. He has just spoken of how the Pharisee treated the tax collector shamefully, and the unjust judge had no shame in shaming those who needed justice. The Lord is asking them to see that He is the one identified with those weak, marginalized, sinful people; and will suffer at the hands of those in secular power just as they had done.

18:33 *And they shall scourge and kill him, and on the third day he shall rise again-* The scourging alludes to the punishments upon Israel in Josh. 22:13. Indeed so many of the judgments on Israel were experienced by Jesus on the Cross:

Hos. 2:3,6 = Mt. 27:27-29; Jn. 19:28

Josh. 22:13 = Lk. 18:33

Ps. 89:30-32; Is. 28:18 = Mt. 27:30

Ez. 22:1-5 = Jesus mocked by Gentile Roman soldiers, Mt. 27:27-31

Is. 50:2,6 = Mt. 26:67; 27:30; Lk. 18:32

Jer. 18:16 = Mt. 27:39

These similarities are too close to have been engineered humanly; if it is accepted that Jesus was crucified, it does not seem unreasonable to accept that the sufferings of Jesus described in the New Testament really did happen. It therefore follows that Jesus of Nazareth did bear the sin and judgments of Israel, and therefore He is their saviour-Messiah. Judaism struggles with this observation.

The Lord's detailed knowledge of His sufferings could have been beamed into Him, or He could have worked some of it out from Old Testament types and prophecies. But it seems to me that because He gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him by the machinations of others, He therefore arranged the entire scenario so that these things would happen.

18:34 *And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they did not understand the things that were said-* See on Lk. 9:45. Luke earlier notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden"

from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Matthew adds that there arose a controversy as to who should be the leaders in the new community; and when the Lord earlier explained His passion, Luke also adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

*18:35 And it came to pass, as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging-* Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they *left* Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He *left* Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and now the healing of a blind man as He *approached* Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics

like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

18:36 *And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant-* The idea is not 'Whatever is going on?' but rather is he enquiring of the significance of all this. There is a similar incident in Mt. 21:10,11, where part of the crowd ask: "Who is this?", and the other part answer back: "This is Jesus the prophet". They were trying to echo Ps. 24:8,10: "Who is this king of glory?" is answered by "The Lord strong and mighty". This was understood as how the crowds were to call to each other in the Messianic procession. Perhaps this man was attempting to have a part in what he believed to be a Messianic event; in this case, he would have accepted that the Lord was Messiah. He was inspired by previous healings of blind men in Mt. 9:27, who would have surely spread the message that they considered their healer to be Jesus the Messiah.

18:37 *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passes by-* As noted on :36, this could be understood as their participation in some Messianic procession, whereby one shouted "Who is this?" and the answer was then given. This would explain why the man addresses Him as "Son of David", a title associated with Messiah's enthronement.

18:38 *And he cried, saying: Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!-* These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured by the Lord on the outskirts a town, just as here the cure happened as He approached Jericho. They are also similar words to the healing of the blind men recorded after the Lord leaves Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind man had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Matthew and Mark, other blind men said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *departed* from Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to

his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby

restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

*18:39 And those who led the way rebuked him-* This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*Saying that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more: You son of David, have mercy on me!-* This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

*18:40 And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him-* The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people bringing others to the Lord. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

*18:41 What do you want me to do for you? And he said: Lord, that I may receive my sight-* The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He later asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will you that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the



epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Do you want to be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

18:42 *And Jesus said to him: Receive your sight; your faith has made you whole-* The Greek term for "receive your sight" is literally 'look up', and is the word used for how the Lord had a habit of praying to God with open, uplifted eyes. There is surely the hint that the gift of sight was to encourage the man in his relationship with God, and likewise "whole" suggests that the man as a person was now "whole". The miracle was a gift of spiritual things as well as literal sight; which is why the man now follows the Lord (:43). The 'gift of heavenly health' is by grace; the Lord is eager to act directly upon willing hearts to give us the spiritual energy to follow Him.

18:43 *And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God-* As the Lord left Jericho, two other blind men were healed and they too followed the Lord in the way (Mk. 10:52). So surely they had heard of His healing power from the testimony of this blind man who followed Him throughout Jericho and then out the other side. We notice that he witnessed to blind men; we most powerfully take the gospel to those in our situation, and not to those in far off lands of other cultures. This is to be done; but witness is essentially personal and is to those of our own background and

experience. And even before meeting those blind men, this man's praise of God influenced "all the people" to do likewise.

## CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And he entered Jericho and was passing through-* As noted at the end of chapter 18, the blind man healed on the Lord's approach to Jericho followed Him through Jericho, and led to the conversion of two other blind men as the Lord left Jericho. So we can imagine this healed blind man following the Lord as He passed through Jericho.

19:2 *And a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector, and rich-* Meyer suggests there was a profitable balsam trade in Jericho, which would have enriched the tax collectors. Lightfoot quotes evidence that such people were not allowed to be legal witnesses: "These are persons not capable of giving any public testimony, shepherds, exactors, and publicans". The same was true for women. And yet it was exactly these kinds of people and categories whom the Lord chose to be His witnesses. To this day, He delights in using those who have little human credibility nor ability as witnesses. In this sense our sense of inadequacy to witness is our adequacy; it is in fact the prime qualification. This incident is a natural follow on from the Lord's parable about the repentant tax collector and the Pharisee. Only Luke records that, and this historical account is also unique to Luke, so he appears under inspiration to be exemplifying how the parable worked out in practice. 'Zacchaeus' in Hebrew means 'pure'; he who was far from pure was justified by faith and grace, as was the tax collector of the parable.

"And rich" connects with the recently recorded teaching of the Lord that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom; but with God it is possible, and the conversion of Zacchaeus is again a worked example of this. It is only by deep conviction of sin and fellowship with the Lord personally that the rich can be led to part with their wealth.

19:3 *Was seeking to see who Jesus was; but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature-* The fact nobody made way for him is a tacit reflection of how his wealth had not bought him respect. As he was seeking Jesus, so the Lord was seeking him (:10). We see here the mutuality which there is between us and the Lord.

19:4 *And he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way-* The Lord likewise foreknew Nathanael when he was far off under a tree (Jn. 1:48). The similarity simply shows that the Lord works in similar ways in parallel lives. And this is the basis of our fellowship in Him- shared experience of the same style of the Lord's operation with us. Running ahead of a person and association with tree leaves can be seen as heralding the triumphant entry of Messiah. This will be recorded later in this chapter, but perhaps the idea is that the Lord saw His triumphal entries at this stage as being into the homes of sinners rather than into the Jerusalem temple.

19:5 *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house-* The Lord had taught His preachers to enquire who in a town was "worthy" and stay at their home (Mt. 10:11). He is forcing the conclusion that He can declare the unworthy to be worthy, just as the unjust tax collector of the earlier parable was declared just. This is all Luke's way of paving the way for his friend Paul's later expression of all this in terms of justification by grace and faith.

By calling Zacchaeus by name, when apparently they had never before met, the Lord was showing that He knew His sheep and was calling him by name (Jn. 10:3). He urges him to respond quickly, and this fits in with a major theme in Luke of quick response to the Lord, culminating in the apparently 'quick' baptisms recorded in Acts. Speed of response is not only appropriate to any call from the Lord, but unless we respond quickly, the flesh tends to kick in and reason us out of the response we need to make.

19:6 *And he made haste and came down-* The speed of his response is significant. Subconsciously, the message of Jesus which he had heard must have been working within him. When he then encountered the Lord, it all came together. The word was made flesh. There was something in Him which was and is incredibly compelling.

*And received him joyfully-* Luke is presenting Zacchaeus as the parade example of how whoever receives the Son receives the Father, and Luke in 9:48 recorded Him saying that and immediately commenting that "the least", the littlest, is the greatest. The "little" height of Zacchaeus may also allude to the Lord's recent ultimatum that the Kingdom must be "received" (s.w.) as a little one (18:17). The joy of Zacchaeus is that joy which is so often mentioned in Luke-Acts as accompanying true conversion. We note that the Lord alludes to His parable of seeking and finding the lost sheep in the context of what His 'finding' Zacchaeus (:10). When the sheep was found, the shepherd rejoices (15:5). This is the same word translated "joyfully". There is a mutuality between the Lord and His people; His joy is their joy.

19:7 *And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying: He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner-* Presumably Zacchaeus had been disobedient to the teaching of John the Baptist to "Exact no more than is appointed". Here was a totally secular person, uninfluenced by John's preparatory work, simply coming to the Lord because he sensed the truth in Him. "Lodge" suggests He spent the night there (s.w. LXX Gen. 24:23). Again we notice the guilt by association mentality of the people. Who you stayed with and ate with was seen as a religious act; and the Lord was doing this without any statement of repentance from Zacchaeus. It was by offering this kind of open, outgoing fellowship that the Lord sought and found Zacchaeus; and the repentance was elicited from that radical

acceptance. This was in marked contrast to the attitude that such signs of fellowship should only be granted once a person had cleared certain bars and demonstrated their spiritual level.

*19:8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord: Behold Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted something from anyone, I restore fourfold-* The rich young ruler has recently been told, recorded by Luke, to sell *all* he had and give to the poor. Zacchaeus offered half of his wealth to the poor. And this was acceptable. Or it could be that he means that half of his goods would be spent restoring what he had stolen, and the other half would go to the poor. The fourfold restitution seems far above that of the Jewish law (Num. 5:7), but apparently Roman law required fourfold restitution of stolen goods.

The way he stands and addresses the Lord could perhaps be Luke framing this as a public confession of faith and repentance, of the kind seen before baptism in the early church. Zacchaeus is being set up as a role model.

*19:9 And Jesus said to him: Today salvation has come to this house, as he also is a son of Abraham-* See on Acts 16:34. The stress on "house" was presumably to meet the criticism that He had entered the house (:7). But the "house" probably refers to the household. The family would see a huge drop in their wealth- and it was that which converted them to salvation. It was the very inverse of the claims of the prosperity gospel. It is as if Zacchaeus is being set up as the opposite of the rich young man of 18:23. When the synagogue excommunicated a man, he was stated to no longer be a "son of Abraham". The Lord is demonstrating His authority to utterly override all such statements that excommunication from a religious group means that a person is not in the wider community of God's true people. He sets Himself up as the ultimate deciding authority in a new Israel comprised of serious sinners and secular, non-religious types. Zacchaeus presumably continued in his daily work and therefore remained outside the synagogue system- but a "son of Abraham".

The Lord predicates salvation upon being a son of Abraham. But this man was Jewish already; the conclusion is that natural descent would not bring salvation, but rather a faith in Messiah as Abraham had, continuing the family characteristic. Perhaps Zacchaeus is called a son of Abraham in that he too repented of his self-centred materialism, walking away from much wealth to become a nomad.

*19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost-* See on Mt. 13:46; Lk. 9:54,55; 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:33. As noted on :7, the Lord extended fellowship to sinners in order to bring them to repentance; rather than giving it to them as a reward for attaining some level of understanding or spirituality. And this should be reflected in our open

approach to people. The allusion is clearly to the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep; the joy of the shepherd in that parable is described with the same word as the joy of Zacchaeus (:6; 15:5).

*19:11 And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear-* The question was: 'Will the Kingdom come really soon, like, in our lifetimes?'. Answer: the parable of the minas. Trade *your* personal talent- because there is such a thing as people being rejected at the last day because they didn't do this. See on Lk. 21:7. The disciples clearly thought that arrival at Jerusalem meant the appearing of the Kingdom of God in its political form. They had totally missed His teaching that Jerusalem meant death on a cross for Him; and that the gospel of the Kingdom is now about life lived under God's Kingship and dominion, rather than political freedom from the Romans. They had missed the obvious and basic point of His teachings because they would not budge from their preconceived theological and natural convictions. And this happens with so many today, and in some ways with us all.

*19:12 He therefore said: A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and then return-* The Lord has recently spoken of how we are to 'receive the kingdom' as a child if we are to enter it (18:17). The nobleman here refers to the Lord Jesus. He doesn't ask us to do anything which in essence He has not done. He received the Kingdom as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30), and He asks us to do likewise. This makes 'receiving the Kingdom' mean accepting that really, we shall be there. It is ours, even now. "Yours [God's] is the Kingdom", but it is given to the Lord Jesus "for himself", just as it is to us too. For us it is an ongoing experience- "we receiving a Kingdom... let us have grace" (Heb. 12:28).

The parable has some similarities with events recorded by Josephus. Herod Archelaus travelled to Rome in order to be given his kingdom; the Jews sent an embassy to Augustus, the Caesar, while Archelaus was travelling to Rome, to complain that they did not want Archelaus as their ruler; when Archelaus returned, he arranged for 3000 of his enemies to be brought to him at the temple, where he had them slaughtered. The palace of Archelaus was near Jericho, and as the Lord has just left Jericho, this would explain the allusion to him in this parable- perhaps the Lord was building on a passing discussion about Archelaus, ever eager to turn secular chit chat into spiritual teaching- just as we should be.

Absentee landlords were unpopular; and the accusation was that they reaped what they had not sown, demanding harvest which they had not laboured for. And the one mina man makes just this complaint. The Lord

presents Himself in this parable as a man deemed to be unreasonable and unpopular- when in fact this was not the case.

19:13 *And he called ten servants of his-* A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

*Gave them ten minas and said to them-* A mina or "talent" was worth 6000 denarii, or pennies. And a penny a day was the going wage for a worker in time of harvest, according to another parable. This is therefore in total about 20 years' salary. The element of unreality in this parable is that this was a huge amount of money to entrust in cash to only ten servants. And they are asked to "trade with this", to take the initiative, apparently without much prior instruction by their master. All is in their court. He has no mechanism in place to check up on them nor practically advise them on a day to day basis. They as slaves would not have been accustomed to taking much initiative. The only pattern they had was the example set by their master in *his* trading whilst he was with them. All this speaks of the huge and risky delegation that was and is made to God's people. In a personal sense, according to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14-16, the Lord is not absent from us. He is not distant, He is with us by His Spirit, so that He is just as really present with us as He was during His ministry on earth. But for the purposes of the parable, emphasizing the huge extent of freewill and initiative required from us, He is 'absent'. He doesn't tell them to simply keep his property intact and maintained. He asks them to proactively trade and increase His wealth. This idea vastly broadens our horizons. Such work is to be our career, the ideal, Divinely intended outlet for all our creativity, resources and abilities.

*Trade with this until I return-* How far His affairs prosper is dependent upon the zeal and initiative of us His stewards (Lk. 19:12,13; 1 Cor. 4:1,2). In this parable, the servants as a group are given the wealth, but they trade with it as individuals. This is a helpful way to view all that has been given to the community of believers. Division and argument between them, arguing over who has what, is a sure way to impede the overall intention of the nobleman who has so trusted us on both a collective and individual level. All the riches are hidden "in Christ" and are displayed in the entire unity of the body of Christ across both Jew and Gentile (Col. 1:27; 2:2). What has been given to the church collectively is the Holy Spirit, in order to build up the church and powerfully witness in the world. The one talent man is in denial of this, without the Spirit, and simply holding onto the mina without using it.

As a whole, the church of all ages will fully have manifested His character, His total riches. This is why it may be that the true church has been concentrated on different aspects of spirituality at different times. It also explains why the final date of the coming of Christ is in some way

dependent upon our spiritual development. And it also explains why the whole body of Christ is told collectively "trade until I return", using the Greek *pragmateuomai*, i.e. be pragmatic, be realistic, and develop these characteristics, so you may as a body reach the full reflection of Christ. See on Eph. 4:15.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his minas, and yet is also again called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). The point is, we must act now as men and women will do when they are on their way to judgment, and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren.

We notice that in this parable, the Lord hints nothing about His death. He simply says He is going away and shall return. This was a concession to their weakness; He had explained His upcoming death many times, and they had ignored it. He accepted their blindness to His death, and worked with it by not featuring His death as part of the parable. We too need to work with an acceptance of others' blindness on some points.

The same word for "trade" is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (Mt. 21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word will be used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what



the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:13) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to

be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

19:14 *But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying: We do not want this man to reign over us-* "They hated Joseph" because of his dream that one day he would reign over them (Gen. 37:4,8). The Lord Jesus likewise had problems with His brothers (Jn. 7:3); the Jews hated Him and would not have him reign over them even though they were potentially the citizens of His Kingdom. His Kingdom is that of the Father, and Israel at that time were His Kingdom. But because they refused His Son as King, they ceased to be the Kingdom of God (Ez. 21:25-27). The delegation gives no reason for their refusal; for there was and is no credible reason to refuse the Lord's kingship over men.

19:15 *And it came to pass, when he had returned, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading-* If we are to take the judgment figures literally, the question arises: Does the Lord know beforehand who will be accepted, and the degree of their reward? If we take the judgment figures to have a literal meaning, then it sounds as if He doesn't know. Lk. 19:15 suggests that perhaps He doesn't know; the Lord calls the servants "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading". He is ordained *to be* judge of all (Acts 10:42). However, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with all power given to him, this seems unlikely- although it must be remembered that in the same way as God is omnipotent and yet limits His omnipotence, so He may limit His omniscience. The shepherd sees the difference between sheep and goats as totally obvious. It needs no great examination. Surely the idea is that the judge, the omniscient Lord of all, will act at the judgment *as if* he needs to gather evidence from us and thereby reach his verdict. The parables give this impression because they surely describe how the judgment will feel to us.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and is called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. See on Mt. 13:47.

19:16 *And the first came before him-* He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. This will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to

Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality.

*Saying: Lord, your minas have made ten minas more-* The purpose of the judgment is for our benefit, to develop our appreciation and self-knowledge. This is perhaps reflected by the ten pound man saying that the Lord's minas had gained, had worked to create (Gk.) the ten he could now offer. The man who achieved five pounds uses a different word in describing how the mina given him had made five minas, while the men in Mt. 25:20,22 use yet another word to say the same thing. This is surely a realistic picture, each of the faithful comes to the same conclusion, that what spirituality they have developed and the work of the Spirit which they did is an outcome of the basic Gospel given to each of us at our conversion; yet they have used them in different ways and they express this same basic idea in different words.

All those who will be in the Kingdom will feel that really we should not be there, we don't deserve it, we will be hesitant to enter it and therefore Christ will have to almost make us go into the Kingdom. It's the same in the parables of Matthew 25, at the judgment Jesus will praise the righteous for doing so many good things, and then they will disagree with him, they will say 'No, we didn't do that, really we didn't', and He will say 'Yes, in my eyes, you did'. Their good works had not been consciously done. This is surely what the Lord was driving at in saying that our left hand must not know what the right hand does. We aren't to be self-consciously brooding on our own generosity. It would seem that with a spirit of amazement and surprise the man says 'Your minas gained [more] minas!'. It's the self-righteous, those who think they have done so much and therefore they must be in the Kingdom, who will be rejected.

"Made" translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it is used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found 'doing' care to his brethren (Mt. 24:46). And the word is twice used about 'doing' good unto the least of Christ's brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (Mt. 25:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It's worth noting that this teaching is alluded to in the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She "did it" (*poieo*, Mt. 26:12,13), she

"worked" (s.w. "traded") a good work ['trading'] on the Lord (Mt. 26:10). It's as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of 'absence' of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

This idea of using one's own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

19:17 *And he said to him: Well done, you good servant. Because you were found faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities-* 1 Cor. 4:2 speaks of us as stewards being "found faithful" in this life by our actions; there is a definite sense in which the Lord's judgment and assessment of our stewardship is ongoing in this life. The judgment process, from His perspective, is now. And "we make the answer now".

"In a very little" (*elachistos*) is the very same word found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated "the very least" of the Lord's brethren (Mt. 25:40,45). The minas we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what

we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the "few things", and how we shall be given "many things" to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centred merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord's work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally. Our care for the little one or two individuals now is related to how we shall care for whole cities in the Kingdom.

The parable describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities. This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

The reward was way out of proportion, both to what had been given, and to what they had achieved with it: ten cities! The Master's words almost seem to be a gentle rebuke: "Because you were found faithful in *a very little*, have authority over ten cities"; "you have been faithful over a *few things*, I will make you ruler over many things" (Mt. 25:23). The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms and parameters, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:18 *And the second came, saying: Your minas, Lord, have made five minas-* The faithful in the parable of the talents / pounds realize that

"your minas have made" what spirituality they can now offer Christ at the judgment. They understand that their growth was thanks to that basic deposit of doctrine delivered to them. Each of us have been given different aspects of Christ's character to develop from the same basic doctrines, and therefore we will each have an individual discussion with our Lord. We shouldn't think of the judgment as being a process which is more or less identical for each of us. This misconception arises from failing to recognize that our meeting with Christ is only *likened* to a human judgment court. The similarities aren't exact.

We are to "gain" or 'make' more for the Lord on the basis of what He first gave us. The Greek word translated "made" is elsewhere usually used about gaining men and women for Christ- a wife 'gains' her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1); Paul sought to 'gain' people for the Lord (1 Cor. 9:19-22); we 'gain' a lost brother by pastoral effort with him (Mt. 18:15). Be that going for a coffee with him, sending an email, trying to imagine his feelings and approaching him appropriately.

Significantly, the other usages of this word translated 'gain' are about the folly of gaining material wealth, even gaining the whole world. We can't be successfully about the Lord's business, of gaining folks for Him, if we are selling our soul to gain material things. That's the point. We were "delivered" talents by God. It's the same word used about how the Lord Jesus exhaled His last breath on the cross; how "that form of doctrine" was 'delivered' to us before baptism (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 15:3; Jude 3). We can't say we have no talents. Christ died for you, for me; He bowed His head towards each of us personally and gave us His last breath, the riches of His Spirit within us who stand before His cross.

19:19 *And he said to him: And you are to be over five cities-* See on :17. We think of how in the Kingdom, "five cities shall speak the language of Canaan and swear to Yahweh" (Is. 19:18). Such groups will be under the authority of someone who in this life traded their talents well. Again we note the total lack of proportion of the rewards; a faithful slave who took some initiative and was faithful during the master's absence becomes a ruler over cities. And this is the lack of proportion we shall experience. What this means is that every moment of human life today has huge and eternal significance, and will have moment far beyond anything we can now imagine. The gross lack of proportion doesn't mean that there is no relationship between the trading of this life and the nature of our eternity. There is; and that is the point. Our entire lives therefore should be bent toward spiritual things and the Lord's work. No longer can this be mere religion, a Sunday hobby, a social network. We are right now forging the nature of our eternity. The trading of the minas refers to our usage of the Spirit for the benefit of others, to God's glory. It is related to what we

shall be eternally doing; for our authority over the nations is in order to help them to glorify the Lord.

We have already been made ruler "over" and in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (Mt. 24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord's goods, over whole cities of persons in the Kingdom. We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now; for this is in essence what we shall eternally do on a far grander scale. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to be prepared for eternity.

There is an element of unreality in the parable of the minas: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few minas to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards. In that moment we will grasp the deep significance of all we did in this life. And we need to perceive that now. For at times it can appear that we live the lives which our secular neighbours live, smelling, eating, acting, experiencing more or less as they do; just that we have religious beliefs which they don't share. But this is an illusion. Our lives, decisions, attitudes, actions and spirit are freighted with an eternal significance which is not so in their lives.

The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth, just as in this parable of the minas; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our

limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "cities" of His Kingdom); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:20 *And another came, saying: Lord, behold, here is your mina-* So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his mina, but returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Behold, here is your mina" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn't ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn't spend it on himself, he wasn't like the prodigal son. But too late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You* have what *belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation.

*I kept it laid away in a piece of cloth-* The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

One of the Lord's pen pictures of the rejected included that of the man who thought that because he had preserved the mina (the basic doctrines



of the Gospel) intact, therefore he was entitled to a place in the Kingdom. We are left to imagine him half-proudly, half sheepishly, holding it out to the Lord (Mt. 25:25). But he should have traded with his pounds (Lk. 19:13 RV)- done something with it all. The crowds hung upon Jesus' every word and teaching; it was so fascinating for them, so wonderful (Lk. 19:48 RV); and yet they still crucified Him. Those words, those wonderful ideas, didn't pierce deep within.

In the culture of the orient, it was not usual for a person to keep money in a cloth. Their culture was to trade and barter with what they had. That a man should just bury such a talent was therefore unreal for the original hearers. The point of this unreality is surely that spiritual laziness is so bad. It was better to have traded and lost through genuine mistakes, through naivety, through the betrayal and deception of others, than to simply *do nothing*. I fear, really fear, that our Christian culture has bred for many of us a 'do nothing' culture- which is exactly what this element of unreality is warning against. We can delegate responsibility to church committees, to others, to our leaders; or we can do nothing out of fear, fear of making a mistake, fear of taking a risk, fear of what other brethren may think of us... all the time denying this principle of Divine delegation. And it might be added that the 'do nothing' man of the parable emphasized that the talent or money was not *his*; he returned to his Lord what was his ["your [singular] mina"]. In order to trade it, or even to put it in the bank and get interest, he had to take personal ownership of it. And this he failed to do. And it is just this that we are being asked to do by our Lord- that His truth, all that He has given us, is in a sense *ours* now, to be used on our initiative, for His glory and service. Indeed, the reward of the faithful will be to be given *more* of their Lord's riches in the Kingdom, with which likewise to use their initiative in order to bring Him glory. We are left to think how the story might have gone on- the faithful were given *more* talents and they go away and do, in the Kingdom age, what they did in this life- using what they were given for *His glory and service, on their own initiative*.

We are *expected* by the Lord to realize that our relationship with Him means total commitment to His cause. In this sense Jesus is a demanding Lord. Thus when He gave the talents to His servants, He doesn't tell them to trade with them; it seems that the one talent man is making this point when he says 'You gave me your money to look after, and I looked after it, I didn't steal it; you're unreasonable to think I should have done anything else with it, you're expecting what you didn't give'. And the Lord is; He expects that if we realize we have the honour of knowing His Truth, we should get on and do something with it, not just keep it until He comes back. He doesn't have to ask us to do this; He takes it as being obvious. The anger of the rejected man comes over as genuine; he really can't understand his Master. He's done what he was asked, and now he's

condemned because he didn't do something extra. He was a Lord that man never knew- until all too late. You can imagine how you'd feel if someone gives you some money to look after, and then expects you to have doubled it, although he didn't ask you to do anything with it.

19:21 *For I feared you*- Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I feared you". Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one mina man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my mina*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

*Because you are a hard man*- The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human

experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

*You demand what you did not deposit, and reap that which you did not sow-* He clearly didn't know nor love his master; or else he would not have had this inappropriate fear. He is accusing him of being a typical absentee landlord. But his master was not away enjoying himself. He had gone to receive a kingdom and to return and share it with his workers. The man who didn't develop as he should have done accuses the Lord of reaping what He didn't sow. But the Lord does sow the seed of the basic Gospel, as the parable of the sower makes clear. The point is that the unworthy fail to let that seed bring forth fruit, they fail to see that the Lord expects fruit from those doctrines they have been given. But they fail to see the link between the basic Gospel and practical spirituality; they feel he's reaping where He didn't sow. They are in denial of "the power thereof", whilst theoretically possessing it. The Lord will require his own, i.e. that which he has sown, the basic Truths of the Gospel, the gift of the riches of His grace, His Spirit, with usury (Lk. 19:23). The parable of the tiny seed moving the great mountain was surely making the same point; the basic Gospel, if properly believed, will result in the most far reaching things (Mt. 17:20 cp. 13:31).

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19:13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he 'knows' [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has 'known' [*eido*- which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still

feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being 'You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates'. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured...". The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

*And gathering where you did not scatter seed-* The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord 'reaps' or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him minas, 20 years' wages, \$1 million. And yet the man reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and

showered with all spiritual blessings... can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (Mt. 13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

19:22 *He said to him: Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant-* The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (Mt. 18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of Mt. 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" here does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned

the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

*You thought that I am a hard man, demanding back what I did not deposit, and reaping that which I did not sow?*- The Lord's response could actually be translated as meaning: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow...?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

*19:23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?*- The Lord may have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in Mt. 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mes'ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

The Lord will *receive or* collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

"My own [money]" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all*. This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... my own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God?* Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of your own have we given you" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.

Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that... is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. Very possession of the minas meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the

judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something*!

Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When did we see you...?" (Mt. 25:44). The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted.

The parables of the Kingdom speak of the eternal consequences of the judgment. The Lord will require His own at the judgment (Lk. 19:23). This



doesn't mean, as the one talent man thought, that He will require us to give back to Him the basic doctrines of the Gospel which we were given at conversion. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our lives at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord. See on Mt. 25:27.

19:24 *And he said to those that stood by: Take away from him the mina and give it to him that has the ten minas-* "Them that stood by" must surely be a conscious reference by the Lord to Zechariah's prophecy of the Angels as "these that stand by" Christ (Zech. 3:4,7); note that he too speaks in a judgment/reward context. If our Lord is referring to the Angels, then we have a fascinating picture of them taking away the opportunities given to the unworthy and granting them to the accepted. Their query of the amount of reward being given fits in with what we know about their limited knowledge, and the fact that our reward will be far greater than their present status (Heb. 1,2). Hence their reverent questioning of the extent of reward being given (:25) suggests that "them that stood by" somehow questioned the Lord's judgment; their sense of equality was not that of their Lord. They felt that the gloriously strong brother with his wonderful reward didn't need it to be made even more wonderful. "Them that stood by" could refer to the Angels, or to the way in which the judgment will in some sense take place in the presence of all the believers. The fact is, even with God's nature, it will be difficult to appreciate the principles of judgment which the Lord uses; and so how much more difficult is it today!

The man 'having' ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours". The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

19:25 *And they said to him: Lord, he has ten minas!-* See on Mt. 20:11. The "they" could be the disciples; or the Angels at judgment; or the faithful at judgment day who still do not fully understand all things. If it was the disciples who interrupted the parable, clearly not understanding it, we must compare this against how the Lord said that His parables were only not understood by the unbelieving Jewish world. So we see His grace

towards them, and their slowness to understand. If the "they" refers to saved believers at the last day, then we reflect that some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the elder son is apparently accepted in the Father's fellowship, although his attitude to his weak brother is so wrong (Lk. 15:31); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

19:26 *I say to you, that to everyone that has, shall be given*- This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in Mt. 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

*But from him that has not, even that which he has shall be taken away from him*- This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have minas, or not? He did, of course, have a mina; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (Mt. 21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (Mt. 22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused mina that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the mina- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the mina as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours". The Lord intended that we identify with the mina, rather than see it merely as His.

At judgment day, the rejected who have nothing will find that even what they have is taken from them. This surely means that the spirituality they appeared to have, what they thought they had, actually they never had, and even the appearance of it will be taken away from them. We can appear to have spirituality, when in fact we have nothing, nothing at all. The man who built his house on the sand had the sensation of spiritual progress; he was building, he was getting somewhere, apparently.

Likewise Israel were an empty [fruitless] vine, but they brought forth fruit- to themselves. In reality they had no fruit; but they went through the fruit-bearing process (Hos. 10:1). In Jer. 5:13, God mocks the false prophets as being "full of wind", or 'ruach'- with which His true prophets were filled. This play on words reveals that spirituality is either the real thing, or a being filled with wind in such a way that apes the true spirituality.

19:27 *But bring here my enemies, and slay them before me, those who did not want me to reign over them-* See on Rev. 14:10. We do well to try to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke these words. For in :41,42 He weeps over Jerusalem at the thought of her coming judgment. They did not wish to be under His Kingship; and so they will not be in His Kingdom. They made the choice.

It is fairly certain that time will be compressed at the judgment seat; there will therefore be no problem in such an individual discussion between each of the responsible and Christ. Several Bible passages suggest a going through of *works*; and yet we know that the basis of acceptability with God is not works but rather faith. The judgment of our works seems not to be related to as it were weighing up our salvation chances. For salvation is a gift, unrelated to works. That's what grace is about. But our use of our talents will be related to who and how we will eternally be.

A case could be made that the word "but" suggests that the one talent man is saved and doesn't share in the condemnation of the wicked which will happen at the final judgment. The 'going through' of works is therefore for our benefit, to teach us- not as a basis upon which the Lord decides worthiness. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23).

19:28 *And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem-* It was as if the Lord was determined Himself to trade His wealth, regardless of whether others did. And for Him, this required death in Jerusalem. We note His feature of walking ahead of them; we are left with the image of them following, setting us a pattern.

19:29 *And it came to pass, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet-* 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

*He sent two of the disciples-* The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:31), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

*19:30 Saying: Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here-*

The Greek words translated "tied" and "untie" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look

forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, Mt. 21:2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

19:31 *And if anyone asks you: Why do you untie him? You are to say: The Lord has need of him-* God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. See on :30.

19:32 *And they that were sent went away and found as he had said to them-* This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :30. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

19:33 *And as they were untying the colt, the owners of it said to them: Why do you untie the colt?-* This was all clearly part of a prearranged plan, as noted on :30. But there was a purpose in it. The Lord wanted them to ask the question as to why ever He was making a triumphal entry on a colt and not a charger. Perhaps the stress was on the word "colt", when perhaps a finer horse stood there. He wanted them to realize that He was deconstructing a triumphal entry.

19:34 *And they said: The Lord has need of him*- The usage of the term "the Lord" suggests that the owners were also believers. I suggested on :30 that they were believing members of Herod's household.

19:35 *And they brought it to Jesus, and they threw their garments upon the colt and sat Jesus on it*- Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

When they put their clothes on the colt and started mistakenly proclaiming Jesus as the triumphal Messiah entering Jerusalem to begin His political Kingdom, the Lord doesn't rebuke their misunderstanding. Instead, He defends them to the critical Pharisees (Lk. 19:35-37,40). He imputed righteousness to them, as He does to us today.

19:36 *And as he went, they spread their garments on the road*- Matthew says that "the crowd" did this. The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they waved palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" (Mt.) are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: 'If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass' (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

*19:37 And as he was now drawing near, at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying-* Jn. 12:16 specifically states that they misunderstood at this point. They were so ecstatic because they really believed that He was going to establish the Kingdom there and then. His previous parable about going away to receive the Kingdom had fallen upon deaf ears. The gospel records are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel; and continually they emphasize their own weakness and slowness to understand, thereby reaching out to their hearers, urging them as it were to do better than they had done.

*19:38 Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!-* As noted on :37, they thought that finally the Kingdom was being established. They failed to perceive that the Lord was mocking and deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, instead glorying in humility and the need to die on a cross in order to establish His Kingdom.

The Lord didn't turn round and correct them for their misapplication of Scripture. Neither did He reject them or call fire down from Heaven upon them because of their misunderstanding. He said nothing, and let the crowd live on in their misunderstanding and see His death – in order to teach them something about what was needed in order to enable the Kingdom. And the same 'long term' approach of the Lord is found in His dealing with the demons issue. The elder son in the parable falsely claims to God that he has never broken one of His commands; but although this is evidently untrue, the father (representing God) does not correct him in

so many words (Lk. 15:29–31).

God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). Thus Matthew records that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9). Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. We have seen that the accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

*19:39 And some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him: Teacher, rebuke your disciples-* Even though the disciples were so deeply mistaken and inappropriate, as explained above, the Lord always takes their side when they are under criticism. The same defensive, justifying Lord is ours too, and looks at our weaknesses and refusals to understand in the same way.

*19:40 And he answered and said: I tell you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out-* See on :39. Often Scripture alludes to or quotes other Scripture which may seem out of context, if we insist on seeing everything from our viewpoint of time. Thus Lk. 19:40 quotes Hab. 2:11 concerning the stones of apostate Israel crying out, and apparently applies it to the misguided acclamation of faithful men. Matthew particularly seems to quote Scripture which is relevant to the Lord's second coming as applying to His first coming. Indeed, the way the NT quotes the OT apparently out of context is a sizeable problem. There are times when we may quote or allude to the words of a Bible passage quite out of context, just because the words seem appropriate. And it seems the NT sometimes does just the same. Search and try as we may, the context seems just inappropriate. This may be explicable by understanding God to have the ability to take words from one time-context and insert them into another, in a way which to us is not contextual. *We* have no authority to do this; but *He* can. *He* can speak as if "the resurrection is past already"; but for us to do so is to deny the Faith.

*19:41 And when he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it-* His previous parable about slaying those who refused Him was therefore said



with deep sadness in His voice. 1 Pet. 2:12 defines the "day of visitation" as that of the Lord's return to earth to establish His Kingdom. But a similar idea is to be found in Lk. 19:41-44, where the Lord 'sees' or visits / views the city on 'this day'. See on Lk. 21:20-24.

*19:42 Saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes-* On :44 I will observe that the Lord has the potentials in view. The whole planned program of His death and the AD70 judgments could have been averted. The time of Zion's peace could have come there and then if they accepted Him on His true terms.

The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes (Lk. 10:13). He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained wilfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

*19:43 For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side-* These were the days that would come, when instead if they had accepted the Lord, there would have been days of peace, the Messianic Kingdom, when Israel would not be fenced in by Gentiles but would instead remove the barriers and go forth to the Gentiles with peace "on every side".

*19:44 And shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another-* The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for

them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law.

*All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation-* Because Jerusalem knew not "the time of your visitation", she didn't perceive the things of "her peace" "in this day" (:42), *therefore* days of destruction would come upon her in AD70. The implication surely is that had Jerusalem accepted Jesus as Messiah, the events of AD70 need never have happened, and His first coming could have been the day of "visitation" to establish God's Kingdom. Of course God's program functioned differently because this never happened; but that doesn't take away from the fact that it was truly possible.

All major events in God's purpose have occurred within the approximate period when true students of the word expected them to - the Flood, the desolation of Jerusalem and its rebuilding, the Lord's first coming, the events of A.D. 70 etc. are all good examples. How much more then with the time of the second coming and the consummation of God's purpose? "The Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto His... prophets" (Amos 3:7), and the purpose of their writing was so that we might understand. The Lord rebuked the Jews because they couldn't discern the signs that Messiah's first advent was with them (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44); and his first advent was a type of his second. The coming of judgment through the Babylonians was another type of the last days; and Israel were criticized for not perceiving the approach of that day, whereas "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming" (Jer. 8:7). This means that as the natural creation have an inherent knowledge of the seasons, so God's people should have a sense of the time of the Lord's coming. The Lord said the same when he spoke of how our internal awareness of the approach of Summer should correspond to our certain knowledge of the Kingdom's approach.

The grace of Jesus and His Father, so great, so free, was a challenge for even the Lord to express in any verbal medium. The way He spoke was grace itself. He wept over the men of Jerusalem, sorrowing that their destruction must come because "you knew not the time of your visitation". He could have quite well said: "because you have rejected me...". But His grace was greater than to say that. The utter inappropriacy of our salvation is brought out time and again in His teaching. The oil lamp with the bruised reed and smoking flax which annoyingly filled the house with smoke was nurtured and tolerated in hope by this Lord of ours.

19:45 *And he entered into the temple-* This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple.

This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

*And began to throw out those that were selling there-* A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles, where such trading was allowed to be conducted, as being as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that in Matthew the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. Sacrifices were therefore unavailable, because the Lord stopped the sale of them. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear. There needed to be no more sale of animals for sacrifice; for the Lord was paying the price, and was the final sacrifice.

19:46 *Saying to them-* The Lord several times quoted an Old Testament passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus here He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called a house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise",

leaving them to complete: "...that you might still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*It is written-* The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house-* Just as the "feasts of the Lord" are described as "feasts of the Jews", God's house becomes "your house" (Mt. 23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

*Shall be a house of prayer-* Luke uses the present tense, implying "is called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*But you have made it a den of thieves-* The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

19:47 *And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men of the people sought to destroy him-* I have argued elsewhere that the Lord gave His life, in the way and at the time He wished. It was not taken from Him. The role of His mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up enthusiasm for Him- and then purposefully self-deflate it, so that the people would turn against Him and empower the Jewish leaders to do what they wished, in getting him crucified that Passover. This verse notes the success of His plans. He really was the master psychologist, the chess grandmaster who foresaw every possible move, and accommodate them all within a program and progression of events which He was supremely in control of. This is one reason why He could predict with such detail the events to be associated with His death that Passover.

19:48 *But they could not figure out what they might do, because all the people so hung upon his words-* See on Lk. 19:13. The Lord's mass popular support is what had apparently stymied their desire to murder Him on previous occasions. I suggest His purpose behind the mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up that support to a crescendo, and then bitterly disappoint it. In this way, He left the Jewish leadership free to pursue their long held plans to destroy Him. And we observe too how unstable is human nature, how fickle is apparent devotion to the Lord... that the crowds could turn so quickly.

## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And it came to pass, on one of the days he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes with the elders-* Matthew says the Lord "entered" the temple to teach. "Entered" is *erchomai*, and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on. His teaching was the preaching of the Gospel- of the Kingdom of God. But His take on the good news of the Kingdom, as witnessed by multiple parables about the Kingdom, was that the principles of the future political Kingdom on earth must be lived now. All the people wanted was to see the Messianic Kingdom come literally. In chapter 19 we saw how He set up a mock triumphal entry to explain that this was not for now. And now He backs that up by explaining what "the Kingdom" at this stage was really all about in personal terms. Indeed, His view of the Kingdom was totally opposed to theirs. And so in His next parable, He explains that actually Israel must kill their king as they killed their prophets, in order for the Kingdom to come as they wished.

20:2 *And they spoke, saying to him: Tell us. By what authority do you do these things?-* Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at Mt. 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

*Or, who is he that gave you this authority?-* To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

20:3 *And he answered and said to them: I also will ask you a question. Now tell me-* It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will

have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :7 that 'We cannot know' (Gk.).

20:4 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*Was it from heaven, or from men?*- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

20:5 *And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say from heaven, he will say, why did you not believe him?*- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :7 that they answered that they couldn't tell was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

20:6 *But if we shall say, from men, all the people will stone us*- The punishment for religious heretics. They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and

temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

*For they are persuaded that John was a prophet-* And yet the Lord had said that "the men of this generation" held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

*20:7 And they answered that they did not know-* They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

*20:8 And Jesus said to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things-* He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

*20:9 And he began to speak to the people this parable-* 'From where do you get your authority? What is your exact nature and relationship to God?' was answered by the parable of the servants who refused to receive the Son and give fruit to the owner (Lk. 20:9-16). The Lord could've answered: 'My authority? From God, He's my Father, I had a virgin birth, you know'. But He wasn't so primitive. Instead He appealed to them to realize their own responsibilities to their creator and to accept His authority by giving fruit to the Father. The absentee landlords at times demanded fruit in lieu of repayment of debt. Perhaps the idea was that Israel were deeply in debt to God. Matthew 21 prefaces this parable with the one about the son who refused to even work in the vineyard.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], *gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], *planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"], *built a tower in its*



*midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Lk. 20 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], *but, behold, a cry of distress".*

*A man planted a vineyard-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. Matthew's version stresses that all has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*And rented it to husbandmen, and went into another country for a long time-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e.

Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in Mt. 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey"]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particularly careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

20:10 *And when the time came*- A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent*- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*To the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard; but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty*

*handed-* The prophets (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

20:11 *And he sent yet another servant, and him also they beat, and handled him shamefully, and sent him away empty handed-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25). The first servant could be the former prophets, the second servant the latter prophets; for Judaism strongly recognized this distinction. Beating, shaming, stoning and killing [according to Matthew's version] are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

20:12 *And he sent yet a third, and him also they wounded and threw him out-* Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. He was the last of the prophets; their ministry was until John the Baptist. Although we have just read that the crowds recognized John as a prophet (:6), in reality they didn't. They rejected his message of the true nature of Messiah. Mass enthusiasm for a Christian teacher is not the same as real belief and spirituality, and acceptance of the real spirit of Christ.

20:13 *And the lord of the vineyard said: What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be they will respect him-* God sent His Son to Israel, thinking "they will reverence him when they see him" (Lk. 20:13 AV). But Isaiah 53 had prophesied that when Israel saw Him, they would see no beauty in Him and crucify Him. Yet God restrained that knowledge, in His love and positive hope for His people. Likewise Jesus, it seems to me limited His foreknowledge of Judas. He knew from the beginning who would betray him. One of the 12 was a traitor. Yet Judas was His own familiar friend in whom He trusted. "It may be they...", Gk. *isos*, is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

"My beloved Son" means that the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son".

20:14 *But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned one with another, saying-* That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen.

37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him*, there is no beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

*This is the heir!*- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "You both know me, and you know whence I am... You neither know me, nor my Father... when you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours*- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ.

20:15 *And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?*-Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard

specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:17). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, which is the Kingdom, will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

*20:16 He will come and destroy these husbandmen-* The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy these husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naïve, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

*And will give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said: God forbid-* The Lord will give the vineyard to the others. And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (Mt. 21:43; Jn. 15).

The Lord's initial Palestinian hearers were well used to the scenario of absentee landlords. The parables of Israel would have been easily

understood by them. The landlords lived far away, were never seen, and sometimes their workers took over the whole show for themselves. The Lord's parable of the absentee landlord in Lk. 20:9-16 alludes to this situation. He sends messengers seeking fruit from the vineyard, but the tenants abuse or kill them, and he does nothing. When his son shows up, they assume that he's going to do just as before- ignore whatever they do to him. After all, they'd got away with not giving him any fruit and ignoring his messengers for so long, why would he change his attitude? He was so far away, he'd been in a "far country" for a very long time (Lk. 20:9), they didn't really know him. The Lord asked the question: "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). The obvious answer, from the context provided within the story, would be: "Judging on past experience, not much at all". But then the Lord presented the element of unreality in the story, as a sudden, biting trick of the tail: No, the lord of the vineyard would actually personally come and destroy them, and give the vineyard to other tenants. Even though his experience of having tenants farm his land had been a fruitless and painful experience that had cost him the life of his son. And it was that element of unreality that brings home to us the whole point of the story. The Father does appear distant and unresponsive to our selfishness, our rebellion, and our refusal to hear his servants the prophets. But there is a real judgment to come, in which He will personally be involved. And yet even His destruction of the Jewish tenants hasn't taken away His almost manic desire to have workers, in His desperate desire for true spiritual fruit. The parables of Israel surely speak encouragement to each of us. The parable of the absentee landlord has a telling twist to it. Absentee landlords who had never visited their land for ages, and found the people they sent to the property beaten up, would usually just forget it. They wouldn't bother. In the parable which draws on this, the Lord asks what the landlord will do (Lk. 20:15). The expected answer was: 'Not much. He got what he could, he was never bothered to go there for years anyway'. But *this* landlord is odd. He keeps on sending messengers when any other landlord would have given up or got mad earlier on. But God's patience through the prophets was likewise unusual. And then, when the tenants thought they must surely be able to get away with it because the Lord seemed so distant and out of touch... He suddenly comes Himself in person and destroys them. He doesn't hire a bunch of people to do it. He comes in person, as the Lord will in judgment. And instead of deciding he'd had his fingers burnt and giving up vineyards as a bad job, this Lord gives the vineyard to others- He tries again. And so the Lord is doing with the Gentiles.

20:17 *But he looked upon them, and said: What then is this that is written-* Mt. 21:42 "Did you never read in the scriptures". They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The stone which the builders rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

*The same was made the headstone of the corner?-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

20:18 *Everyone that falls on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whoever it shall fall, it will grind him to dust-* There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on Mt. 3:11.

A passage in Ps. 118 is referred to in Lk. 20:18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart. And one wonders likewise about Psalm 2- it is referred to so often.

20:19 *And the scribes and the chief priests sought to arrest him in that very hour, but they feared the people. For they perceived that he spoke this parable against them-* The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. The fear of the people was the reason why they didn't take the Lord. He realized this, and I suggested on chapter 19 that His mockery of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was calculated to turn the people violently against Him. He was the psychologist *extraordinaire*. By manipulating things in this way, the Lord held total control over His death and the timing and manner of it, so that His arrest and crucifixion were in fact His giving of His life, rather than it being taken away from Him.

20:20 *And they watched him and sent out spies, who pretended to be sincere-* Rightly had the Lord called them hypocrites. Their attempt at acting as sincere enquirers would have been laughable. All the way through, the Lord is presented as the one totally in control, with the Jews and Romans acting exactly as He had set them up to act.

*So that they might catch him in something he said; so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the Roman governor-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. We note they could *not* in fact catch hold of His words (:26). His death was not going to be because they outsmarted Him, but rather because He willingly set up a situation through which He willingly gave His life rather than it being taken from Him.

20:21 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, we know you say and teach rightly-* Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians with whom they were working in this plan (see Matthew) could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

*And show no favouritism to any person-* This was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did; for according to Matthew, they were working together with the Pharisees in this. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording his actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

*But in truth teach the way of God-* John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money?



Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

20:22 *Is it lawful*- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

*For us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

20:23 *But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them*- Mt. 22:18 says He perceived their wickedness. The wickedness could be their hypocrisy. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives.

20:24 *Show me a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord, according to Matthew. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (Mt. 22:16) brought it, not the Pharisees.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

*Whose image and superscription has it? And they said: Caesar's-* He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him (:25); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

*20:25 And he said to them: Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's-* The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

The memories of the Maccabean heroes and their rebellion were strongly in the minds and consciousness of first century Israel. Their exploits were recited yearly at the feast of Hanukkah. Yet the Lord purposefully subverts the history of the Maccabees. Mattathias had taught violent resistance to Gentile occupation in the slogan: "Repay the Gentiles in their own coin" (1 Macc. 2:68 N.E.B.). But the Lord alludes to this, at

least to the LXX form of the saying, when He advocated paying the Roman temple tax, giving the coin to them, and not violently resisting. See on Heb. 5:6.

*And to God the things that are God's*- The Lord taught that whatever bear's God's image must be 'rendered' to God, just as what bore Caesar's image must be rendered to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Seeing that the human body bears God's image, He was clearly teaching that we should 'render' to God our whole being in the course of our human lives. But the same idea of rendering to God is picked up in 1 Pet. 4:5, where we are told that in the final judgment, we will 'render' [s.w.] ourselves to God. By the way we live now, the manner in which we render to God all that is not Caesar's, we are effectively rendering to Him our judgment account. And so we also find this Greek word for 'to render' in Rev. 22:12; Mt. 16:27; 20:8; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Rom. 2:6- at the day of judgment, where we render ourselves to God, He will "give" [s.w. 'render'] to every man according as his works have been. We're rendering ourselves to God right now, here in this life. And He will render that back to us in the last day- for we are right now giving our account to God. And there are times in life where perhaps God specifically intervenes in order to give us a taste of that final day of 'rendering' of ourselves to God- hence in the parable of Lk. 16:2, the man is asked to 'render an account' of his stewardship [s.w.]. It may be through illness, tragedy, loss, the intense introspection of depression, conviction of sin... in these things we are led to a specific preview of the 'rendering an account' which lies ahead. And we should be grateful that we have such opportunities.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is

not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

"Should we give tribute to Caesar?" was answered with the comment that whatever has God's image on it should be given to God- and seeing we're made in God's image, the Lord was asking that they gave their very personal selves to God, every part of their mind and body- rather than worrying about the 'guilt by association' that might come from paying your taxes to Caesar (Lk. 20:23-25).

*20:26 And they were not able to catch him in what he said in the presence of the people, so they marvelled at his answer and held their peace-* The Greek for "catch him" is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, "before the people". But Luke speaks of the Jews doing these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as in the parable, the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet, and perceived that "this is the heir". But Matthew records that they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God.

*20:27 And there came to him-* Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

*Certain of the Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection-* The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. They *antilego*, spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be taken to heart by us. For there are

large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

20:28 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, Moses wrote to us-* Matthew: "Moses *spoke* unto us". The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

*That if a man's brother dies, having a wife but he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up seed to his brother-* The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up

seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

*20:29 There were therefore seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless-* This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

*20:30 And the second-* As noted on :29, this was clearly not a true story.

*20:31 And the third took her, and likewise the seventh also left no children, and died-* Instead of asking 'And who and where was this family?', picking up the obvious contradictions within the story, the Lord let all that go. He wanted to focus upon essential principles, rather than getting caught up in proving that His opponents were lying. He sets an example which so many of His followers have not well followed.

*20:32 Afterward the woman also died-* She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :29). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

*20:33 In the resurrection, whose wife of these shall she be? For the seven had her as wife-* The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

'Who will be married to whom in the Kingdom?' was well answered by the Lord, but His final cut was that God is the God of the living and "all live unto Him", i.e. the fact we are alive means we are responsible for our actions to Him right now- and we must be moved by that, rather than by speculation about the physicalities of how *others* may be in God's Kingdom (Lk. 20:33-38).

*20:34 And Jesus said to them: The children of this world marry and are given in marriage-* The Lord attacks their assumption that the Kingdom

will be a continuation of life as it is in this world, just minus some of the limitations and complications. That is not the case; "this world" is contrasted radically to "that world" (:35). Whilst we rightly look forward to seeing beloved family members again who were believers, we have to be aware that family relationships as we now know them are for "this world". The age to come will not be "this world" and its relationships somehow revived in a human sense. The question of the Jews was therefore a reflection of deep immaturity. And this was the context at the time- the Lord was being asked to set up a literal Kingdom in Israel, with Israel 'marrying and giving in marriage' in their own kingdom, totally independent of Rome. But His message was far beyond that. His Kingdom was to come in an age where all such things would be no more. The world of Lot and Noah's time married and gave in marriage right up until the day of judgment- and no longer, after that.

*20:35 But they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage-* See on :34. "Accounted worthy" means to be counted totally without blame and thereby totally worthy. I suggest this is another example of where Luke is preparing his readers for the Pauline explanations in Romans- that only through imputed righteousness, by faith through grace, can anyone be saved. The same word is used when Paul prays that God would count the Thessalonians "worthy" of their calling (2 Thess. 1:11). The Jews were assuming that they would be in the age to come, on account of their relation to Abraham by the flesh; and the Lord is saying that the only ones who shall be there are those counted totally worthy. The thoughtful hearer would have realized that this would mean that worthiness and righteousness had to somehow be imputed.

*20:36 Neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection-* Note the present tenses. They are most striking in Greek: "Neither *can they die...* they *are* equal to the Angels: and *are* sons of God, being sons of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die... shall be equal... shall be...'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it.

The Sadducees denied the existence of Angels (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on

the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

"We shall be as "the sons / children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees' idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

The fact Angels cannot die means they can't sin, for sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). This is therefore a fairly strong argument against immortal Angels being sinful.

20:37 *But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, when he called the Lord: The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob-* The Greek here says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).



If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

At the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14). And yet at this very time, the Lord says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God. This is indeed imputed righteousness.

God is His word (Jn. 1:2). Moses is likewise spoken of as if he is his word (Acts 15:21; 21:21; 26:22; 2 Cor. 3:18), so close was his association with it; just as we shall be judged by our words. The words and commands of Moses were those of God. "In the bush God spoke unto (Moses), saying, I am the God of Abraham... Isaac and Jacob" (Mk. 12:26; Mt. 22:31; Ex. 3:6). Yet Lk. 20:37 says that "that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when *he calls the Lord the God of Abraham*" etc. Yet this was what God said of Himself.

20:38 *Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. For all live to Him-* This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the

God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

"All live to Him" is the Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him. See on Rom. 14:8,9.

"All live to him" is a phrase used by the Rabbis concerning the existence of the faithful Jews as immortal souls in Heaven; Adam Clarke quotes several examples from Jewish writings. It seems the Lord uses their phrase in order to deconstruct it. Salvation is through being 'counted worthy' by grace (:35), the same idea as being counted as live "to Him", and depends upon the resurrection of the body (:35). It is not at all automatic, as would be required by the idea of immortal souls.

20:39 *And certain of the scribes answering said: Teacher, you have said well-* This was the kind of admission of defeat which was not typical of the Lord's enemies; perhaps these were the scribes of the Pharisees who did later believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:15).

20:40 *And after that they dared not question him anymore-* They dared not even try to engage Him in debate because He was as it were winning, and the crowds were realizing this. These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they

too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

20:41 *And he said to them: Why do they say that the Christ is David's son?*- The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it's easy to misinterpret this as Him now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For the Jewish leaders would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin.

Matthew records that the Lord addressed a question to the Pharisees about Messiah as David's son. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on Mt. 22:33 *When the multitude heard this*. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

20:42 *For David himself said in the book of Psalms: The Lord said-* Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the Tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

*To my Lord, Sit on My right hand-* Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son

of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of David through Mary.

20:43 *Until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet*- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself. And yet being at the footstool of the Lord doesn't have to mean being dominated by Him in judgment. It can refer to the great paradox whereby the Lord's enemies become His loyalest and most humble citizens, at His feet in submission, and thereby also at the Father's right hand of acceptance.

20:44 *David therefore calls him Lord, so, how is he his son?*- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

20:45 *And in the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples*- This is typical of how the Lord intentionally focused upon the disciples. The accounts of the sermons on the mount and on the plain have the same feature; the crowds are gathered, but the Lord addresses the disciples. He realized they were His only hope; the masses were fickle, and He focused upon those who were open to His real teaching.

20:46 *Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and love greetings in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

*And chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feasts*- They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that

we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

*20:47 Who devour widows' houses-* The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

*And for a pretence make long prayers-* They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

*These shall receive greater condemnation-* There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

21:1 *And he looked up and saw the rich men that were casting their gifts into the treasury-* He "looked up" because Mark notes He was sitting. As he looked up and saw Zacchaeus, so the same term is used here of how He looked upon this poor widow; who was clearly another one of His people known to Him ahead of time. The many small coins the rich threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

21:2 *And he saw a certain poor widow throwing in there two small coins-* She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in. The thin coins (Mk.) were what were typically thrown to beggars; we are left to conclude that she gave to God all that was given to her.

21:3 *And he said: Of a truth I say to you: This poor widow threw in more than all of them-* The Lord condemned how the Pharisees "devoured widow's houses"- and then straight away we read of Him commending the widow who threw in her whole living to the coffers of the Pharisees. It wasn't important that the widow saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and didn't 'waste' her few pennies; her generosity was accepted for what it was, even though it didn't achieve what it might have done, indeed, it only abetted the work of evil men.

The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion.

So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievement. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded', that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in Mk. 12:33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievement but in her attitude.

21:4 *For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on-* The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk.

12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records. To give from that which is over and above and remaining, "abundance", is not giving much at all really. "Out of her poverty" could suggest that it was her poverty which motivated her gift, as if to say that her greater generosity was not surprising, because she was poor; and in her case, total giving was motivated by her poverty. So it is poverty and not wealth which, as the Lord observed, motivates to the kind of radical giving which He seeks.

*21:5 And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said-* These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the adorning of a new temple with precious stones, comprised of the believers in Christ (Rev. 21:2,19). Their praise of the ostentatious "offerings" reflects how they had apparently failed to grasp the lesson about the real nature of offerings just given by the incident with the widow woman (:1-4).

The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

*21:6 As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another; all shall be thrown down-* This expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place'). The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when

they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

*21:7 And they asked him, saying: Teacher, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?*- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

If none of us can know the time of the Lord's return, the whole spirit of the Olivet Prophecy is hard to come to terms with. When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge stands before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run



up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent.

'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23). See on Lk. 19:11.

21:8 *And he said: Take heed you are not led astray. For many shall come in my name, saying: I am he, and, The time is at hand-* Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

*Do not be led astray by them-* "Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the

ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

*21:9 And when you shall hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified. For these things are necessary and must happen first, but the end will not be immediately-* The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced

Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (Mt. 24:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end" (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end

[s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

21:10 *Then said he to them: Nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is

the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

*And kingdom against kingdom-* It seems likely from Revelation that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

21:11 *And there shall be great earthquakes-* Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

*And in various places-* The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy place". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

*Famines and pestilences-* There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and

Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

*And there shall be terrors and great signs from heaven-* During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of paranoia will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau - representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon my people" (Ezek. 21:12). Likewise our Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel (Luke 21:11).

*21:12 But more significantly than all these things, they shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake-* "The synagogues... the prisons" - implying both a religious and civil persecution of the saints? The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles

[s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

The "persecution" is in Matthew "to tribulation", the "great *tribulation*" (Mt. 24:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them- to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and



uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

21:13 *It shall turn out to be your opportunity to give a witness*- This is Luke's equivalent of Matthew and Mark predicting that the Gospel will be preached to all nations. Luke's angle on this is that the preaching will arise out of persecution and fleeing from it- which is just what happened in the first century.

But the AV speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". What does this really mean? For me, the most satisfactory explanation would be that the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet.4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness.

21:14 *Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer*- They were to decide so definitely not to work out their answer ahead of time, because their answer or testimony was with God (:13). He had made an answer / testimony for them in the court of Heaven; and He would put that in their mouths at the right time.

21:15 *For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict*- This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into

the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

21:16 *But you shall be delivered up even by your parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they shall kill some of you-* This indicates that the persecuting power will infiltrate the ecclesias, as the Jews and Romans did to the early church in order to bring about their persecution. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "the son dishonoureth the father...a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ. See on Mk. 13:13.

"Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too.

21:17 *And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake*- This hating by all men may imply a world-wide persecution. Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name's sake" is a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

21:18 *But not a hair of your head shall perish*- Primarily concerning the disciples, seeing that some believers were to die for their faith in the period around AD70 (cp. :16). The figure of not a hair of the head perishing is used in the Old Testament concerning sudden deliverance from what seemed like certain death, e.g. Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45. This is fitting, seeing that "except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved" (Mt. 24:22). It is also the language of the faithful few among an Israel who wouldn't stand up and be counted being miraculously preserved from Babylonian tribulation (Dan. 3:27). There are many instructive parallels here with the latter day tribulation, which the majority of natural and spiritual Israel may try to avoid by some tokenistic acquiescence to the dictates of the King of Babylon.

We must lose our lives, one way or the other. If we lose them for Christ, we will find eternal life. If we keep them for ourselves, we will lose that eternal life. This teaching is picked up by the Lord in Lk. 21:16-18, in stating that some of His people would be put to death, but actually, not a hair of their heads would perish. Surely He was saying that yes, they would lose their lives, but in reality they would find eternal life. Those men and women who died on crosses, were burnt as human torches, were thrown to the lions... the Lord foresaw them, and implied that their sacrifice was *in principle* the process that must be gone through by each of us: a losing, a resigning, of our life and all the things that life consists of in everyday experience. Either we die to sin now, living out in practice the theory of baptism, or we will die to sin in rejection at judgment day; sin has its end in death (Ez. 21:25; Dan. 9:24), either now, or then. So we may as well die to the things of sin in this life.

21:19 *In your patience, you shall win your souls*- The idea may be that those who endure the final tribulation will be saved; they will be the only generation who will not die. For they will be immortalized at the Lord's return. The same group are in view in Mt. 10:22: "He that endures to the end shall be saved". Although it is the Lord who purchases / redeems ["wins"] our souls, we must play our part in this. It is our endurance in faith in His work for us which enables all this to become true for us in reality.

21:20 *But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is at hand*- Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfilment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfilment in AD70- the final fulfilment will be in our last days.

The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation, according to Mk. and Mt. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was

defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

21:21- see on Rev. 11:1.

*Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let them that are in the midst of her depart, and do not let them that are in the countryside enter therein-* As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by

doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" means that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has a latter day application. Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry.

This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only

area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

*21:22 For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled-* This is the day ["days" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great day] when vengeance will be poured out; God will take revenge on the system which has persecuted His natural and spiritual people (2 Thess. 1:8 s.w.). Revelation puts this in terms of the beast system receiving revenge for all she has recently done to the Lord's people. In a sense, "all" the written prophecies and words of God shall come to their final fulfilment in the Lord's return.

*21:23 Woe to them that are with child in those days, and to those nursing babies!-* This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them... who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

*For there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath upon this people-* Paul's later comment that "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16) suggests he believed that these words were being fulfilled completely at his time. But the Lord did not come, many aspects of the prophecy were left unfulfilled, and the complete fulfilment has yet to come.

"Great distress" could mean 'the greatest ever distress'. This would connect with Dan. 12:1- that immediately prior to the Lord's return, there will be a time of distress for Israel such as they have never experienced- far worse than the holocaust. The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

21:24 *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations*- The downtreading of Jerusalem during the tribulation, the "times" of the Gentiles, the three and a half year [1260 days, 42 months, "time, times and a half"] domination of the land, will be long enough for some Jews to be led captive into the "all nations" surrounding Israel who form the coalition of the beast. Such mass deportations would be performed in conscious imitation of the Babylonian and Assyrian dominations. The Greek word for "sword" is literally a dagger; we would have expected the more common word for sword to be used. But we recall images of Islamist extremists killing those whom they consider apostate by cutting their throats with the edge of a knife / dagger; and it seems this is what we can expect. The phrase is alluding to Jer. 21:7 LXX, where those in Judah who escaped the plagues and other calamities [which have also been mentioned here in Lk. 21] are then slain by the edge of the sword of the Babylonians. The Babylonian invasion clearly is the prototype of Jerusalem's latter day tribulation.

*And Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*- The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. This however is going to be particularly true of the final period when Jerusalem falls to the Gentiles and is trodden underfoot. When that downtreading is completed, then likewise the opportunity for Gentile response will close.



Zech. 12:3 is being alluded to: "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to here. Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arab neighbours of Israel, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies.

The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot*". This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

<b>Luke 21</b>	<b>Zechariah 14</b>
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfilment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments and had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This

suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

"The times of the Gentiles" are often taken to have finished in 1967. But at least three major problems arise with this:

- 1) The temple site, Biblical 'Zion', is still not totally under Jewish control due to the presence of the Mosque there.
- 2) "Trodden down" has clear links with Dan. 8:13 and Rev. 11:2, which describe the temple being blasphemously desecrated for certain periods of time. How can they have ended in 1967, seeing the 'Dome of the Rock' still stands there? And 1967 minus 2300 day/years (Dan. 8:13) or 1260 day/years (Rev. 11:2) do not appear to yield any significant starting points.
- 3) The times of Gentile opportunity, as some read it, are still with us now as much as they were in 1967. If anything, numbers of baptisms have mushroomed *since* 1967, notably in distant Gentile lands.

21:25 *And there shall be signs in sun, moon and stars*- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever".

*And upon the earth distress of nations*- The reference is to distress amongst the nations within the earth / land promised to Abraham. There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the neighbouring nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-Arab conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding inter-Arab conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the

righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem.

*In perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the waves-* The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX). It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

*21:26 Men will be fainting for fear in expectation of the things which are coming on the world-* We are to be in expectation of the Lord's return (s.w. 2 Pet. 3:12,13,14); the Lord comes on the unworthy when they are not expecting Him (Lk. 12:46 s.w.). The magnitude of the world's problems will block the vision of worldly people, so that they refuse or are rendered unable to look beyond them to the things of the Lord and His Kingdom "coming on the world".

*For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken-* The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning. And it is this which provokes chronic fear in the hearts of the worldly. The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

*21:27 And then shall they see-* In Matthew, when "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation

would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

*The Son of Man coming in a cloud-* Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in those days, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70

to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

*With power and great glory*- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

21:28 *But when these things begin to happen, look up, lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near*- Ps. 24:9 clearly states that when the gatekeepers of Zion lift up their heads [to God in truth], then the King of glory will come in. And the Lord here applies these words to His true

people of the last days- they are to likewise lift up their heads [so that] their redemption will draw nigh, or be hastened.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. un-bend), and lift up your heads" may suggest that the believers will be bowed down in bondage in some sense. Alternatively, we can read it simply as a command to stand up (as NIV), which would connect with the slumbering virgins, *none* of them standing ready to welcome their Lord as they should have been. It is evident from a close reading of the Olivet prophecy that the Lord is using his pronouns carefully. Sometimes He speaks of "ye", sometimes of "they". It seems that the "ye" refer to the disciples and the faithful remnant in the latter day ecclesia, and the "they" either to the natural Jews or to "the many" (majority) in the ecclesia who will fall away. "*They* shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud... when these things (leading up to the Son of man coming) begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up *your* heads" (Lk. 21:27,28). This may suggest that the majority, the "they" category, are shocked by the coming of the Lord, but the faithful minority stand up from their slumber and are expecting his coming.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. 'unbend'- as if the depression of the faithful is partly lifted by discerning the nearness of Christ's return), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh". These are words which can only apply to the last generation; and they self-evidently imply that therefore that last generation does know for sure that Christ is about to come. Just two verses later, the Lord spoke of how in the Spring "Ye see and know *of your own selves* that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh" (Lk. 21:30,31). There is an instinctive sense within us concerning the change of the seasons; and this will be the same in the minds of the faithful as they sense the Lord's return approaching. There will be no need for magazine articles expounding "signs of the times"; we will not need any man to say unto us "The time draweth near" because we will know *of our own selves* that the coming of Christ is near (Lk. 21:7,8 should be read in the context of v.30,31). The relationship between Solomon and his bride in the Song of Solomon is typical of that between Christ and His church; and significantly, therefore, she senses his approach, she hears his voice telling her that he is coming, even before she sees him (Song 2:8).

We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

21:29 *And he told them a parable: Behold the fig tree and all the trees-* Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable. Spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel is to be associated with spiritual fruit on "all the trees" within the Eden / earth / land promised to Abraham; this will be the fruit of the witness made to them all by the Elijah ministry and the two witnesses of Rev. 11.

21:30 *When they shoot forth, you see it, and know of yourselves that the summer is now near-* Or, "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the

eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

21:31 *Even so, you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near-* The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:



Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]"

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The Lord introduces his Olivet prophecy by saying that it was no use listening to those who said "The time draws near"- instead, he went on to say, 'You must personally match the spiritual and physical situation you find yourself in with what I'm describing'. And at the end of the prophecy, he hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Perhaps the very last generation *will* know the time of Christ's return. "Likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:31). As surely as trees bud and then Summer comes, so when we see the signs of Lk. 21:24-26 in Israel, we will know that the Lord is really at hand. It is only to the unworthy that the Lord comes unexpectedly. The majority of generations, including the disciples to whom Christ primarily spoke those words concerning not knowing the hour, have of course not known the day or hour. But there seems absolutely no point in the Lord giving us *any* signs if in fact the last generation cannot foresee with some certainty the time of His coming. Surely Yahweh has revealed all His plans to His servants the prophets? As a woman knows within herself the approximate time of childbirth although not the day or hour, so we should know that the day of new birth is approaching- so Paul's reasoning goes in 1 Thess. 5. He warns that for those who do not watch, the day of Christ's coming will be a day of

"sudden destruction... as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). Surely the picture here is of a woman whose time of delivery comes unexpectedly upon her, with complications that result in her dying in childbirth. As a woman who knows the time of delivery is very near will behave in an appropriately careful way, so will the faithful of the last generation who likewise know that the Lord's coming is nigh. The same mixture of seriousness and joyful anticipation will be seen in us too, who are watching and loving the appearing of Christ.

21:32 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away-* This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

*Until-* If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

*All things are accomplished*- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

21:33 *Heaven and earth shall pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the

Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :32 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

*But my words shall not pass away*- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential *logos*. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

21:34 *But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with partying, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly*- It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if

the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Even in the first century context, Paul has to use these same Greek words in warning the believers not to be caught up in drunkenness (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21). And "cares" is the word used in the parable of the sower; the thorns represented the cares of this life (Mt. 13:22). The appeal is therefore to those who have received the seed of the word, and have responded. Attempting to enjoy the good life will make believers no longer expectant of the Lord's return. "Unexpectedly" translates a Greek word only found elsewhere in 1 Thess. 5:3, of the "sudden destruction" which is to come upon those within the church who are saying "peace and safety". The attitude of "peace and safety" is therefore within the church rather than in the world; for it is here paralleled with eating and drinking without awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return. The state of the world in the very last days is going to be crying out for interpretation as a fulfilment of prophecy predicting the Lord's coming. And yet, it seems many within the church will be spiritually asleep and so engrossed with the good life that they do not perceive it. This is the distracting power of materialism and self-indulgence.

*21:35 For so shall it come upon all those that dwell on the face of all the earth-* As noted on :34, the unexpected nature of the Lord's coming is pertinent specifically to the believers who are engrossed with the good life and not aware of the imminence of His return. But they are associated here with all dwellers on the earth / land, for whom the Lord's coming will likewise be an abrupt, unexpected interruption. The dwellers on the earth / land in Revelation appear to specifically refer to those within the territory of the land promised to Abraham.

*21:36 But watch continually, praying that you may have strength to prevail against all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man-* See on Lk. 18:5; Rev. 8:1. It is by being continually aware of the Lord's presence, and the closeness of His coming, that we find moral strength to overcome. And this will be especially true of the final generation. Spiritual strength is clearly given in response to prayer and desire. The Lord doesn't simply advocate Bible study as the method for gaining strength.

"Prevail" or "escape" can mean 'to suddenly flee away from'- the same idea of sudden deliverance from persecution which cropped up in our notes on :18. Those who do not watch and pray will be unable to flee out of the tribulation, as Lot's wife was unable to. This idea of escaping connects with 1 Thess. 5:3 (this is just one of many links between the Olivet prophecy and Thessalonians): "When they shall say (in the ecclesia) Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them... and they shall not escape". The language of "peace and safety" is often used in the Old Testament to describe the calm words of Israel's false teachers, as they confidently asserted that all was spiritually well within Israel (Jer. 6:14; 5:12; 14:13; Mic. 3:5; Ez. 13:10; Dt. 29:19). Those who do not think that there is peace and safety in the ecclesia and who face up to the reality of 'watching and praying' to spiritually survive the last days, are those who will 'escape'.

Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. The 'struggles' of Moses in prayer are an example of this; through the desperation and spiritual culture of his pleading, he brought about a change even in God's stated purpose. See on Col. 2:1.

If our prayers really can help others on their salvation road- how we should use this! Remember Lot's deliverance for the sake of Abraham's prayers, whilst he unknowingly went about his daily life in those last hours. Reflect too how the Lord told us: "Pray ye may be accounted worthy to... be stood before the son of man". Not 'pray for thyself', singular, but for the whole community of the last days.

Angelic appearances to men have so often included an encouragement to "fear not" that we have every reason to imagine that those same words will be repeated to us when the angel calls. The Greek text of Lk. 21:36 further fills out the place of the angels in our judgment: "Pray always, that you may be accounted worthy... to be stood before the Son of man". This creates the picture of our guardian angel literally standing us up in acceptance before our Lord, as happened to Daniel. Ps. 1:5 can now take on a literal aspect: "The ungodly shall not stand [up] in the judgment". It is so fitting that the angel who is with us now in our every situation, will be with us in that supreme moment too.

Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost

unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must "watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

*21:37 And every day he was teaching in the temple, and every night he went and stayed on the mount that is called Olivet-* Perhaps He didn't wish to draw attention to the Bethany home. Or perhaps He found Gethsemane especially conducive to the prayer which filled His final nights. Maybe He wanted to reduce His journey time each day to the temple, in order to provide maximum teaching and final appeal to Israel. He must surely have had sympathizers within the city who would have let Him spend the night there. But He didn't wish to make them a target for the Jews, nor give them the appearance of some special blessing after all

the grief was over and He was glorified. He likely wanted to have the 12 with Him as much as possible, and it's unlikely such a large group could have been accommodated under one roof. And so they slept rough for those final nights, with Him using every moment in prayer, teaching and appeal.

21:38 *And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, to hear him-* The "early morning" eagerness for His teaching explains why He reduced His journey time to the temple each day by sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in Bethany (:37). Their attraction to His teaching was deep; for He carefully avoided doing miracles at this stage.



## CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover-* This clarification would have been unnecessary for a Jewish audience, so we can see that Luke was aiming at preaching to the Gentiles even before generally this was acceptable within the church. Taking the Gospel to those whom the main body of believers hold to be unacceptable is a lonely and visionary task.

22:2 *And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death, for they feared the people-* This 'seeking' to kill the Lord connects these orthodox Jews with Herod, who 'sought' to kill the Lord at His birth (s.w. Mt. 2:13,20). The seeking of the Jews to kill the Lord coincided with the seeking of Judas to betray Him to them (s.w. Mt. 26:16). In this sense the Jewish satan entered into Judas (:3). And the Lord was aware of all this; as noted on Mk. 14:1, He brought about the circumstances so that He died as the Passover lamb at that feast. He did so by provoking Judas to 'seek' to betray Him through the incident of the 'waste' of wealth at Bethany; when He knew that the Jews were also 'seeking' His death.

22:3 *And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve-* It was the Jewish 'satan' that put the idea of betraying Jesus into Judas' mind, so Lk. 22:2,3 implies: "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him...then entered Satan into Judas". See on :2. The Jewish ideas of an immediate Kingdom and the throwing off of the Roman yoke by a glamorous, heroic Messiah entered Judas, and caused him to become so bitter against Christ's Messiahship that he betrayed Him. The Jewish Satan, in the form of both the Jews and their ideology, was at work on the other disciples too: "Satan has desired to have you" (plural), Jesus warned them. Especially was the High Priest seeking Peter: "I have prayed for you (Peter – singular), that your faith doesn't fail you" (Lk. 22:31,32). Could Jesus foresee the Satan – High Priest later arresting Peter and his subsequent trial in prison? Throughout the first century, the Jewish and Roman Devil sought "whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Note how "enter" is used in a non-physical sense in Mt. 25:21: "Enter into the joy of your Lord", entering in at the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13), entering into another's labours (Jn. 4:38). 'Satan' enters a man's heart in the sense that "the lusts of other things enter in" (Mk. 4:19); in this sense we can "enter into temptation" (Lk. 22:46).

The link between Judas and the 'Devil' is brought out by a consideration of Luke's comment that Judas "sought an opportune time [*eukairan*] to betray Jesus" (Lk. 22:6). But Luke earlier used this word in Lk. 4:13 to describe how the "Devil" in the wilderness departed from the Lord "until

an opportune time" [*achri kairou*]. The Lord's victory in the wilderness prepared Him for the victory over the 'Devil' which He achieved in His final passion. Just as the temptation to 'come down from the cross' was a repetition of the temptation to throw Himself down from the temple. John's Gospel often repeats the history of the other Gospels, but in different language. In Mt. 26:46, the Lord comments upon the arrival of Judas: "Rise, let us be going; my betrayer is coming". But Jn. 14:30,31 puts it like this: "The prince of this world [a phrase understood as meaning 'the evil one', the Devil] is coming... Rise, let us be going". John is picking up the mythological language of the 'Satan' figure, and applying it to a real person with real attitudes and sinful intentions – i.e. Judas, who is presented as a personification of the 'Satan' / 'Devil' / 'Prince of this world' principle.

We can easily overlook the huge significance of Mk. 14:21 recording the Lord's words that Judas personally was guilty for betraying Him, and would suffer accordingly – even though Lk. 22:22 says that Judas did this because the Satan [i.e. the Jews] 'entered him'. *Whatever* that means, it doesn't mean that Judas nor anyone is thereby not personally responsible for their actions.

The translation of the Greek text in Jn. 13:2 has been problematic. "The Devil having put into the heart of Judas" doesn't quite do justice to what the Greek is really saying. The respected expositor and Greek student C.K. Barratt insists that strictly, the Greek means 'the Devil had put into his own [i.e. the Devil's] heart, that Judas should betray Jesus' (C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) p. 365. Barratt's view of the Greek is confirmed in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981) p. 131). This translation is almost impossible to make any sense of given the orthodox understanding of the 'Devil'. And so most popular translations ignore the obvious difficulty by glossing over the strict meaning of the Greek. Understanding the 'Devil' as the innate source of temptation within the human heart, the picture becomes clearer. The idea is surely that the thought of betraying Jesus began within the Devil-mind of Judas; he 'put the thought in his own mind', as if to stress how Judas conceived this thought totally of himself and within his own mind, just as later Ananias and Sapphira [in an analogous incident] 'conceived this thing within their heart'. So properly translated, Jn. 13:2 actually supports our general thesis about the Devil – it is stressing that the heart of Judas was itself responsible, that heart put the idea of betraying Jesus into itself – and nobody else was responsible. Note how the Lord addresses Judas as if Judas had full responsibility for his actions and control over them – e.g. "What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27), and Mk. 14:21 "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born". Those two passages alone surely make it clear that Judas was no robot,

no puppet on a satanic string. He had full responsibility and choice over his actions, hence these words of the Lord to him. Summing up, we are left with the question: Did *Judas* betray Jesus, or did *Satan*, working through Judas, betray Jesus? The answer, surely, is that it was Judas, and he must bear full responsibility for that.

22:4 *And he went away, and discussed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray him to them*- The Jews discussed amongst themselves how they might arrest and kill Jesus: "And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). Again we see a parallel between the Jews and Judas; the Jewish 'satan' entered into him (:3).

22:5 *And they were glad, and agreed to give him money*- Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

22:6 *And he consented*- This Greek word is usually translated "confessed", in the sense of repenting of sin. He may have assured them that He felt the Lord's movement was wrong and that he had been sinful to support it.

*And looked for an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the crowd*- Perhaps this was why the Lord chose to spend His nights sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in the home at Bethany or of sympathizers in Jerusalem. He was giving Judas the chance to betray Him. If we look for an opportunity to sin, the Lord in a way provides it in that He can 'lead into temptation' unless we pray not to be so led.

22:7 *And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed*- The Lord was aware that the Passover sacrifice was Himself. He wanted to die when the lambs were killed. And He did. His psychological manipulation of it all went perfectly. We can read "the day" of unleavened bread as meaning "the time", rather than referring to a particular period of 24 hours.

22:8 *And he sent Peter and John on an errand, saying: Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover*- This is the language of the 'preparing' of the Marriage Supper (s.w. Mt. 22:4). And yet at that meal, He explained to them how in fact He had been sent by God on a mission to "prepare" a place in God's Kingdom for them, and this preparation required His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2,3). They would later have reflected that their journey and efforts to prepare were representative of His own work for them.

22:9 *And they asked him: Where do you want us to prepare for it?*- Perhaps we are intended to see a veiled allusion to Dt. 16:2, where we learn that the Passover was to be kept in the place which Yahweh chose.

And they are asking the Lord where He has chosen to eat the Passover. Whilst He was and is not God, He functions as God and manifested Him in flesh.

*22:10 And he said to them: When you enter into the city, there you shall meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house to which he goes-* This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

*22:11 And you shall say to the master of the house: The Teacher says to you-* The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand (Mt.) would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

*Where is the guest room, in which I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?-* The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

*22:12 And he will show you a large furnished upper room. There make ready-* Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox more strongly. The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nisan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

*22:13 And they went and found as he had said to them, and they made ready the Passover-* As noted on :12, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

22:14 *And when the hour had arrived, he sat down with the apostles-* There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them. "Sat down" is "dining" in Matthew; the idea is of reclining.

Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the apostles" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

22:15 *And he said to them: I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer-* It was 'with desire that He desired' [a real emphasis] to eat the Passover with His men. He so wants us to break bread with Him; He so wants us to partake of and with Him. He abides in us and we in Him; see on Jn. 17:24.

22:16 *For I say to you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God-* The Lord told us that the Passover feast would "be fulfilled in (i.e. by?) the Kingdom of God". This is confirmed by the description of "the marriage supper of the lamb" in Rev. 19:9. Likewise the parable of Lk. 14 speaks of "a great supper" at the beginning of the Millennium. As we share this feast together now, we are acting out a parable of the feast to be kept at the Lord's return. In the light of this, how important it is to ensure that there is no bitterness and disunity at the breaking of bread meeting! To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed (cp. 2 Sam. 19:28). Remember that we are reaffirming our covenant. "This is the blood of the covenant" is a reference back to the blood of the Old Covenant being sprinkled upon the people, with their response of vowing obedience unto the end (Ex. 24:7). The solemnity of that distant moment should be ours, weekly.

22:17- see on Mk. 14:23.

*And he took a cup-* This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Luke was

aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

*And when he had given thanks-* Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drank weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

*He said: Take this and share it among yourselves-* "Among yourselves" carries the idea of 'among all of you'; Mt. "All of you, drink it". The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in Mt. 26:28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we

should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

*22:18 For I say to you, I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine from this time forward-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

*Until the kingdom of God shall come-* The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the

bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

*22:19 And he took bread-* Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

*And when he had given thanks-* It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

*He broke it-* Not referring to any breaking of His body, for not a bone of Him was broken, but rather to the sharing of every part of Himself with us all; one aspect of Him to this one, another to that one.

*And gave it to them-* The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

*Saying: This is my body which is given for you-* He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words



as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

*Do this in remembrance of me-* By inviting the disciples to share His cup and His baptism, He was offering them there and then a part in the life of self-crucifixion, which found its natural and final articulation in the death of the cross. He deftly poured out the wine as a symbol that His life was even then being poured out (Lk. 22:19).

The breaking of bread is intended as a special gift to us. Let it have its intended power. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19) is an inadequate translation of the Greek text – "the words do not indicate a mere memorial meal in memory of a man now dead, but strictly mean "making present reality" of Christ's saving death". So let the bread and wine truly be an *aide memoire*. That on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill outside Jerusalem, around 2000 years ago, Jesus died for me. Three days later, a man dressed as a working man, a humble gardener, walked out of a tomb, perhaps folded His grave clothes first, and saw the lights of early morning Jerusalem twinkling in the distance. And 40 days later ascended through cotton wool clouds and blue sky, with the necks and throats of watching disciples moving backwards as they gaped at the sight; and will just as surely come again, to take you and me unto Himself. These things, and the endless implications of them, are what will fill our minds if they impress us as having really happened. If we believe the Bible is inspired, it will have the result of what Harry Whittaker called "Bible television"; we will see these things as if they happened before our eyes.

22:20- see on Mk. 14:23.

*And the cup in like manner after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood-* The promises to Abraham were effectively the new

covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might have a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this

most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

*Which is poured out for you-* He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life.

"Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

*22:21 But behold, the hand of him that betrays me is with me at this table-* To be together at table meant to be in fellowship and mutual acceptance of each other; one ought to trust those with whom he sat at table. This was the huge significance of the Lord's open table policy, dining with questionable and unholy characters, thereby overturning all the religious hang-ups about guilt by association.

*22:22 For the Son of Man indeed goes-* The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

*As it has been determined-* Mt. "as it is written".

*But woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!-* The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

*22:23 And they began to question among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing-* "Is it I, Lord?" lead to them asking each other rather than being satisfied with the Lord's cryptic response. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he

asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

*22:24 And there arose also a dispute among them, as to which of them would be counted as greatest-* Even after the acted parable of the feet washing, there was still a strife amongst them about who should be greatest. They'd clearly not grasped the Lord's teaching and example about not worrying about what place we take at a dinner. It could be that they accepted the Lord's upcoming death, and were wondering which of them ought to replace Him. They had thereby clearly missed His teaching in Jn. 14-16, that although He was going away, He was coming again and would permanently be with them as Lord, master and leader through the gift of the Spirit.

*22:25 And he said to them: The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, and they that have authority over them are called Benefactors-* We must be aware that in helping people, be it in teaching them the Truth of Christ, or in materially supporting them in their needs, we must never allow our position of 'superiority' become a vehicle for abusing their person, however unintentionally. The Lord in Lk. 22:25 spoke of how in the world, "benefactors" have power over people. His idea seems to have been: 'If you show generosity in the world, you have authority over others; but you, after my example, must show generosity to others in humble acts of service but not expect authority over others as a result of this'. The giving of help or welfare in any form should therefore never become a source of control over another person. Their integrity and independence as a person must never be in this sense 'abused' by us or simply lost sight of, because we have helped them. Peter took due note of this teaching, repeating it in 1 Pet. 5:3.

*22:26 But you shall not be so, but he that is the elder among you, let him become as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that does serve-* Again, these words remained in Peter's mind and he faithfully teaches them to his converts in his letters. Perhaps Peter was especially sensitive to these words (see on :25) because he was the eldest among the group, and also the one who had been given a chief role at various times in the ministry. The Lord's words here were specifically directed at him.

The Lord was addressed as 'Rabbi' and to some extent acted like one. It was the well known duty of a rabbi's pupils to serve their teacher and do menial chores for him; the Jewish writings of the time and the Mishnah are full of references to this. Yet the Lord treated His 'servants' radically

differently- His behaviour at the Last Supper was just the opposite. And He even taught that He, the Lord of all, would be so happy that His servants were waiting for Him that He would "come forth and serve them" (Lk. 12:37). He was a most unusual "Lord and Master", one who served His servants, and whose death for them was His ultimate act of service.

*22:27 For which is greater, he that sits at the table, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at the table? But among you, I am he that serves-* The parallel record in Jn. 13:4-17 describes the Lord actually serving as a servant, when He was the greatest. This was John's way of showing how the word [in this case, the Lord's own words as recorded here by Luke] became flesh in Him.

*22:28 But you are those who have stayed with me in my time of trial-* The disciples' persistent failure to grasp our Lord's teaching must have been a great source of trial and frustration for Him. Despite His warnings about His coming sufferings, the disciples failed to comprehend this; perhaps partly due to Jesus Himself fluctuating between talking of his death in both literal and then figurative terms. In His time of greatest need of encouragement He found them sadly lacking in any real degree of spirituality beyond a fanatic allegiance to Him. And yet He graciously thanked them for continuing with Him in His temptations, even though they fell asleep. We can under-estimate how sensitive He is to our feeble spirituality, and how even the basic will to be loyal, no matter how much we fail in practice, means so much to Him. Yet their lack of comprehension must have been especially tragic, since one of the reasons for the gift of the disciples was to help Jesus through the pain of His ministry, and this was to culminate in the cross. After the Jews' first council of war against Christ, He prayed for strength and was answered by being given the twelve (Lk. 6:11-13).

The disciples slept in Gethsemane, despite being asked to stay awake and encourage the Lord in His hour of need (Lk. 22:45). Yet He thanks them for being those who continued with them in His temptations. When the Jews agreed at a council to kill Him, the Lord went to be alone with the twelve (Jn. 11:53,54). He took such comfort from them even though they did not or would not understand the reality of His upcoming death. He, like us, could only take such comfort from His brethren if He viewed them positively.

*22:29 And I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed me-* The Greek for "appoint" is always elsewhere used about a covenant. They had just celebrated the new covenant in the Lord's blood. Participation in that new covenant meant that for sure, a Kingdom had been covenanted to them. The cup of the covenant speaks the same assurance to us today. All that is true of the Son becomes true for all those in Him. As He has been covenanted a Kingdom, so have we. The certainty of the Kingdom

for Him is as sure as it is for we who are in Him. This takes some believing, but it is all part of our status "in Christ".

*22:30 So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel-* This is an allusion to the happiness of Solomon's servants as they sat down to food and wine; they listened to Solomon's wisdom as they ate. Lk. 14:15 speaks of us as happy servants. The idea is that the eating and drinking at the Lord's Passover table was to be repeated in the Kingdom to come. Joseph celebrated his brothers' repentance with a meal together, at which they sat in their proper places (Gen. 43:16). Likewise at the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9).

It was apparent that in the breaking of bread meetings, there had to be a host. The host was a vital figure. And yet herein lay the huge significance of breaking of bread meetings being held in homes- presumably the home of a richer believer- and yet it was the table *of the Lord*. *He* and not the master of the house was the host of that meeting. It's for this reason that it was unthinkable for any invited by grace to their Lord's table to turn away other guests- for it wasn't *their* table, it was the table of another One, and they were but guests. Attempts to bar others from the Lord's table in our own time are equally rude and deeply lacking in basic spiritual understanding. There are evident similarities between the breaking of bread experience and the marriage supper which we shall eat with the Lord Jesus in His Kingdom. The breaking of bread assembly is called "the table of the Lord"- and yet He says that we shall eat at "My table" at His return.

*22:31 And the Lord said: Simon, Simon, Satan has asked for you that he might sift you as wheat-* The fact an Angel was called 'satan' in Num. 22 and in Job's case means we can maybe have another look at Luke 22:31, where Jesus tells the disciples "satan has desired to have you (lit. 'demanded you for trial') that he may sift you as wheat". Wheat is normally a symbol of the righteous after a process of tribulation or judgement. The *satan* here could be an Angel, demanding them for trial from God, as Job's *satan* Angel did. The Lord's comment that *satan* had demanded to have the disciples, especially Peter is clearly based upon the experience of Job, whom *satan* also demanded. The Lord saw a similarity between Job and Peter, in that Job's sufferings were to be repeated in their essence in the experience of Peter. Only through that bitter weeping and reflection upon it, corresponding in the Lord's analogy to all that Job went through, would Peter like Job emerge triumphant. The Old Testament prophecies also give insight into the actual process of the betrayal. The Hebrew for "equal" in "a man my equal" (Ps. 55:13) is invariably translated elsewhere as 'price' or 'estimation'; possibly implying

that the Jews had set the same price on Judas' head (in the sense of a bribe offered to them) at one stage as they had on Jesus. The Jewish Satan seeking Peter and the other disciples ("Simon, Satan has desired to have you", plural) implies an organized attempt to subvert each of the twelve, perhaps by offering a financial reward for becoming a secret agent for the Jews. Judas having an equal price in the Jews' eyes as Jesus indicates how highly he was seen to rank among the disciples in the public eye- as important to the Jews as Jesus himself. This further strengthens the impression that Judas was highly esteemed by both Christ and the other disciples. It would appear that the love of this money was a significant factor in Judas' downfall; in the same way as Joseph's brethren were blinded by a money motive in betraying him rather than being interested in his death for its own sake. In addition, Judas' motives seem to have also been from being influenced by the thinking of the Jewish Satan, offering the chance of an immediate Kingdom. He is alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:19 (cp. Jn. 13:30) as the prototype of all who left the true faith to be influenced by Judaist doctrine. See on 1 Pet. 5:8.

It is noteworthy that the Lord had previously warned that the Jewish Satan / world would be actively trying to influence the disciples to stumble: "Woe unto the world (often referring to the Jewish world in the Gospels) because of the offences!... but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!... whoso shall offend one of these little ones (the disciples – Zech. 13:7 cp. Mt. 26:31) which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned" (Mt. 18:6,7). This invites comparison with "Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed... it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Mt. 26:24). Notice that this stumbling of the disciples at the hand of the Jewish world and its servant Judas was to be around the time of Christ's capture (Mt. 26:31); which is what Luke 22:31 is warning the disciples ("you" plural) about, and which proved to be so relevant to Peter in the hours after the Lord's capture. Further proof that "the world" that was to cause these offences was the Jewish world is found by comparing Mt. 13:38,41. It's also been pointed out that 'Satan desires to sift you as wheat' "is a proverbial expression" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 312). Schleiermacher therefore observes about this passage: "There is no intention to teach anything with regard to Satan or to confirm that older belief" (F.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Clark, 1999 ed.) p. 165).

There's also some evident allusion back to the record of Job in the Septuagint version. "The Lord said to the Devil, 'Behold I give him over [*paradidonai*] to you; only preserve his life" (Job 2:6 LXX). *Paradidonai* and related words are very frequently used of how the Lord Jesus was 'handed over' to the systems of the Roman and Jewish Satan (e.g. Mk. 14:41), and yet ultimately His life was preserved by God. Here in Lk. 22:31 we have the Jewish Satan desiring to have the disciples, just as



Job's 'Satan' desired. If the disciples grasped the allusion, they would perceive that they were to be as Job, and believe that ultimately the 'Satan' was under God's control, and through prayerful endurance they would come to victory as Job did.

22:32- see on Mt. 16:18; Lk. 22:3; Acts 3:19; 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Pet. 1:12.

*But I prayed for you, that your faith should not fail-* Not only did the Lord pray that Peter's faith wouldn't fail. He repeatedly made the point in the lead up to Peter's temptations that His disciples really *did* know Him, therefore they should never deny this (Jn. 14:7,17; 15:21; 17:3), and He taught them that all men *must* know they were His disciples, if they truly were (Jn. 13:35). He was trying to strengthen Peter against the trial He knew would come: to deny that he knew Him. Likewise we may try to strengthen those prone to specific temptation, but the power of it depends on their recognition of their own weakness, and whether they have ears to hear. It would seem Peter didn't, so confident was he of his own strength. Moses of his own freewill chose to intercede for Israel, concerning things which at the time they knew nothing about; things which were almost against their will, in fact. And this is the prototype of the Lord's mediation for us who know not what to pray for as we ought. Consider how he prayed for Peter when Peter didn't realize he was being prayed for.

*And when you have been converted, strengthen your brothers-* Paul referred to the Jews to whom he preached as his "brothers" (Acts 13:26), and it may be that Peter at least initially understood his commission to "strengthen your brothers" as meaning preaching to his unbelieving Jewish brethren (although the same Greek word is used by Peter regarding his work of upbuilding the converts, 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12). Gal. 2:8-10 informs us that Peter had a ministry to the Jews of the diaspora in the Roman empire just as much as Paul did to the Gentiles living in the same area (Gal. 2:8-10). Because the Acts record focuses more on Paul's work rather than Peter's doesn't mean that Peter was inactive. 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish converts living in the provinces of Asia Minor, and we can assume that Peter had spent years travelling around building up groups of believers based around the families of the individual Jews he had converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would seem from 1 Cor. 1:12 that Peter had made a number of converts in Corinth, and 1 Pet. 5:13 strongly suggests Peter lived for a while in "Babylon" and had begun an ecclesia there. Whether this be taken as a code name for Rome or as literal Babylon (where there was a sizeable Jewish community), this was somewhere else Peter reached. All through this remarkable life of witness, he was motivated by his own experience of the Lord's greatness, and His all sufficient grace toward him in his

weakness. And a similar life of powerful witness lies before any who are touched likewise.

The command to strengthen brothers is given again in the Lord's interview with Peter in Jn. 21. Three times He asks him: 'do you love me?', and three times he invites Peter to care for the lambs and sheep- to strengthen his brethren. The triple denial and the triple re-instatement and triple confession of love both occurred by a fire, a *charcoal* fire on each occasion (Jn. 18:18; 21:9) just to heighten the evident connection. Peter's conversion can therefore be equated with his response to the denials- the repentance, the realization of his own frailty, and desperate acceptance of the Lord's gracious pardon. Yet Peter invites his fellow elders: "feed the flock of God", repeating the Lord's commission to him, as if he saw in himself a pattern for each man who would take any pastoral role in Christ's ecclesia. The implication is that each man must go through a like conversion. And Peter points out that we are "a royal priesthood", as if he saw each believer as a priest / pastor. Peter is our example. We all deny our Lord, camouflage it and justify it as we may. We all stand in Peter's uncomfortable shoes. We do in principle what Judas did.

"When you are converted..." elicits the obvious response that Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But He also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn't conversion: it's a beginning, not an end.

22:33 *And he said to him: Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death-* Peter imagined himself going to prison and death "with you", walking alongside the Lord. But the reality of prison and death is that these things are faced alone. Walking with the Lord on the water, Peter could do it. But not alone. His impetuosity is indeed noticeable, but this should not make us unimpressed by his genuine level of dedication to his Lord. Peter did indeed go to prison and death with his Lord, but he was not then "ready" for that. That process of preparation was still ongoing.

22:34 *And he said: I tell you Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until you shall deny three times that you know me-* Peter's problem with the cross was perhaps at the root of his denials of the Lord. Before the cock crowed twice, he denied Jesus twice (Lk. 22:34). It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for

'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

*22:35 And he said to them: When I sent you out without purse and wallet and shoes, did you lack anything? And they said: Nothing-* We are to realistically grasp the fact that His mission and ministry is in fact ours. And the total insecurity, exposure to danger, misunderstanding, slander, sudden calls of God to change direction and move way out of our comfort zone etc. are all part of participating in the short term fate and eternal victory of the One whom we follow. His call to each of us to preach Him is radical. He sent out His preachers with *no* money, *no* food etc. He didn't tell them to go out without *extra* money, *extra* food nor clothes etc. He instead told them to take *none* of these things. Why? Surely because He wanted them – and us- to understand that the preacher of Christ is to be *totally* dependent upon His provision for them. It was a high challenge. When the disciples faltered at the Last Supper, the Lord told them that OK, if you have a purse, take it; if you want a sword for protection, then buy one. Surely He was saying, as He is to us today: 'OK, I want you to rise up to the spirit of My 'Let the dead bury their dead' and 'Take no money with you' exhortations. But if you can't, OK, take a lower level, but all the same, go forth and be My witnesses. *Please!*'.

*22:36 And he said to them: But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet, and he that has none, let him sell his cloak and buy a sword-* As noted on :35, the Lord could be saying that He had intended them to learn from their experience when sent out on the preaching tour by Him; but they had not. He clearly didn't intended them to take Him literally, because there and then they had no chance to go buy swords. And then Peter pulled out a dagger the Lord tells him that that is quite enough. I take this verse as a lament that they had not retained the lessons learnt; for the Lord foresaw how they were going to all dramatically fail in Gethsemane and the subsequent events.

*22:37 For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: And he was numbered with the transgressors-* The Lord was reckoned "with" sinners, but not as a sinner. And therefore there was no point in the disciples fighting to stop Him being numbered with the transgressors. The prophecy had its specific fulfilment at the crucifixion (Mk. 15:28).

*For what is written about me must have its fulfilment-* "Fulfilment" is not the best translation. AV "have an end" struggles towards expressing the idea of "to be finally settled" (Vine). We may have here another insight into the open nature of prophecy. The exact outcome and nature of events was variable to some extent; it depended to what extent the Lord wished to fulfil them. The prophecies came to be "finally settled"; and were then "fulfilled in me".

*22:38 And they said: Lord, look, here are two swords. And he said to them: That is quite enough-* Again their literalism reflects a lack of faith and understanding. He is telling them that there is no point in fighting, because He must be crucified in the spirit of Isaiah 53. As noted on :35 and :36, He was lamenting that they had not learnt the lesson, that no sword or wallet was necessary. He dismisses any attempt to use those swords by saying "That is quite enough".

*22:39 And he came out and went, as his custom was, to the mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him-* His custom for the last few nights of His life was to sleep there on Olivet; because He knew that Judas was wanting an opportunity to betray Him out of sight of the crowds. In the middle of the night in Gethsemane would be ideal; and the Lord set up this situation.

*22:40 And when he came to the place, he said to them: So that you do not enter into temptation, pray-* "The place" may refer to Gethsemane, where He often went (Jn. 18:2). But the language is reminiscent of Abraham and Isaac coming "to the place" of sacrifice. It was as if He saw that spot in Gethsemane as His place of death. Perhaps He did hope that a ram would as it were be provided; for He did pray there for the cup to pass from Him. It is a mark of His supremacy as a spiritual man that He was not solely focused upon Himself, but instead was concerned about the spiritual pressure on His men.

The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16).

*22:41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed-* "A stone's throw" is an allusion to David and Goliath near the brook.

Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39);

as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

22:42 *Saying: Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from me*- This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross.

"Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest

possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "even to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour... even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

*Nevertheless*- The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (Mt. 26:40) suggests not 'even just for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each

word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

*Let not my will, but Yours be done-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

*22:43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him-* See on Ps. 80:15. The son of man was "made strong" by the Father through Angelic ministration, as happened after the wilderness temptations. The strengthening may have been in order to pray to the Father "more earnestly" in :44. "Strengthening" is *enischuo*, literally, to in-strength, to in-possible. The same word *ischuo* is used in the Lord's lament that at this time, Peter, James and John "could" not watch in prayer (Mt. 26:40). They were not 'strong' because they had not allowed themselves to be 'strengthened'. To not make use of empowerment is therefore sinful. We have huge potential power available to us through the Holy Spirit, the direct succour of the Lord in our hearts (Heb. 4:15,16). To claim that this is not available is a serious false teaching.

*22:44 And being in anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground-* The mental intensity within His mind had physiological effects. His skin became thin and the sweat dropped as blobs. Only Luke the doctor notes this. This was the focus of a human mind upon God such as has never been seen. The shame is that the Lord's men drifted off to sleep whilst He was achieving it. What was He praying for? Perhaps there were no requests as such, but a mind locked in contact with the Father. For that is the essence of prayer. This is the strong crying and tears of Heb. 5:7. The whole condition was enough to have killed Him of itself; it was indeed sorrow unto death (Mt. 26:38). It would have left His skin very sensitive and thin- and that skin was now to be subjected to whipping, piercing and other abuse.

*22:45 And when he rose up from his prayer, he went to the disciples, and found them sleeping from sorrow-* See on Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:27. The manner of inspiration reflects how God sees His servants. Often the Spirit caused the Bible writers to portray God's children in an extremely positive way. Thus Lk. 22:45 says that the disciples fell asleep from sorrow, when in reality this was due to their lack of spiritual awareness and sense of spiritual urgency. Likewise, Lk. 1:18 records only a few (apparently harmless) of the many words which Zacharias doubtless said, not without strong disbelief, during the abnormally long time he remained in the temple. These examples illustrate how God looks so positively upon His children.

"Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his

Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

22:46 *And said to them: Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation-* Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

Without being ostentatious in the eyes of others, try to use a physical position in prayer which is conducive to concentration. There are Biblical examples of prayer standing, kneeling, sitting, sitting cross-legged, with hands uplifted... Remember how the Lord told the disciples to *rise* and pray; He could see that curled up as they were, they were more likely to nod off to sleep than intensely pray (Lk. 22:46). He had already told them to pray (v. 40), and doubtless they had obediently started praying, but had fallen asleep while doing so. "*Rise and pray*" surely suggests: 'Come on men, I told you to pray, but you can't pray lounging around like that!'. And I would bet many of us need the same words.

How He prayed is an example of the Lord's words being made flesh in His living. He taught His men to pray "Your will be done"; and in Gethsemane, He prayed those very words Himself, even though praying them meant an acceptance of crucifixion (Mt. 26:52). In that same context, the Lord asks His men to pray that they enter not into temptation (Lk. 22:46). He was asking them to pray His model prayer just as He was doing. His own example was to be their inspiration. I wonder too, in passing, whether the Lord's request at that time that the cup of suffering pass from Him (Mk. 14:35) was His way of praying not to



be led into temptation- for perhaps He momentarily feared that He would finally spiritually stumble under the burden of the cross? This surely is the meaning of the hymn that speaks of living more nearly as we pray.

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

*22:47 While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them-*This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*He drew near to Jesus to kiss him-* It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why Mt. and Mk. say that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

*22:48 But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?-* This was not to merely point out irony. The Lord didn't waste His words on throwaway remarks. This was a last minute, desperate appeal for repentance. The Lord's desire for Judas' repentance speaks volumes of His basic love; there was no vindictiveness, just a desire for the man's salvation. He is the same with each of us, and we should be the same to those who abuse us.

*22:49 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?-* Peter asked if he should strike

with the sword (Mt.) and then did so without waiting for a response. This is rather typical of us all. We assume Divine response, and thus play God.

Peter's objection to the Lord's going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn't go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to "smite with the sword" in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn't want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw "what would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns around, sees John following, and gets side-tracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end.

An essay in unquestioning loyalty to the Lord and Master is found in Lk. 22:49: "When they which were about him saw what would follow (i.e. arrest and attack), they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?". That grim-faced band of men standing in a protective circle around their Lord knew that they had no chance of victory against the mob with Judas, armed to the teeth as they were. Yet they were willing, to a man, to heroically sacrifice their lives- the inevitable result of starting a fight- as a token of loyalty to a man who humanly speaking was a lost cause, and whose demise seemed so unexpected to them compared to their hopes of a glorious Kingdom being established there and then.

22:50 *And a certain one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear-* Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd

with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

*22:51 But Jesus said: No more of this! And he touched his ear and healed him-* This is another example of where healings do not elicit faith. Judas and those men were so blindly committed to their path that even a plain miracle would not stop them. The Lord could have spoken the word, but He touched the man; another indication that He was totally in control and was giving His life rather than having it taken from Him.

*22:52 And Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?-* The same word used about Jesus and the

disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men who were coming against Him (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head-on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

22:53 *When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness-* The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

22:54 *And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance-* There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. As noted on Mk. 14:51, it seems that Peter was the young man who followed dressed in a linen cloth.

This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not

just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

22:55 *And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them-* Mt. "and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was

		also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing

				and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall	

			deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

22:56 *And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him-* For the significance of the firelight, see on Jn. 3:14-21. Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to described the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

22:57 *But he denied it, saying-* Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied"



Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*Woman, I do not know him*- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

22:58 *And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them. But Peter said: Man, I am not*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :55. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man, I am not*".

Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

*22:59 And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean-* Matthew says it was a group of men, Mark says it was a maid; Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

*22:60 But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew-* The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'.

This would make a total of six denials. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

**First denial:**

A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).

**Second denial:**

A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).

**Third denial:**

A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).

**First crow.**

Mark 14:68 (King James Version).

**Fourth denial:**

Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).

**Fifth denial:**

Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).

**Sixth denial:**

Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).

**Second crow.**

Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

*And he went out and wept bitterly-* There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that

Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:61 *And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter*- The "day of visitation" is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives).

*And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day*- "Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness. See on 2 Pet. 1:12.

Appreciating the extent of Peter's devotion to the Lord's words enables us to more fully enter into the man's spiritual and emotional tragedy when he denied the Lord. He paid no attention to His words of warning concerning Peter's own spiritual weakness. After that third cock crow, "Peter remembered *the word of the Lord, how* he had said unto him..."

(Lk. 22:61; "how" may refer to the physical manner in which Christ spoke to Peter, as well as to the content of his words).

*You shall deny me three times*- Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

22:62 *And he went out and wept bitterly*- Peter "went out" from the Lord. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep... but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now. See on Mk. 14:68.

here are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who

ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this.

Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:63 *And the men that held Jesus mocked him and beat him-* This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

22:64 *And they blindfolded him and questioned him saying: Prophecy-*

*who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophecy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such. See on Lk. 7:39.

*22:65 And many other things they spoke against him, reviling him-* "Blaspheming"; this was exactly the charge the Lord was being crucified for (s.w. Mt. 26:65), and so they blasphemed *Him*. We note how the Lord ahead of this had promised that all blasphemy against Him would be forgiven (12:10). Again, it seems the Lord foresaw these details of His death and sufferings; and forgave it ahead of time.

*22:66 And as soon as it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away into their council, saying-* They were careful to appear to obey their own laws and bylaws, whilst breaking God's law entirely. Again we have the impression of Psalm 2 being fulfilled, in the gathering together of Gentile powers against Messiah. The most orthodox and pious within Judaism were no more than Gentiles.

*22:67 If you are the Christ, tell us. But he said to them: If I tell you, you will not believe-* The Lord had been careful in His ministry not to specifically claim to be Messiah. Rather He had left His personality, words and works to leave those who encountered Him with the conviction that He was indeed Messiah. To simply 'tell' people truth doesn't mean they will believe; the word must be made flesh.

*22:68 And if I ask you, you will not answer-* As noted on :67, the Lord left individuals to be convicted in their own consciences. Formal telling and asking people will not elicit a response worth having; because the conviction is in their hearts.

*22:69 But from this time forward shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of the power of God-* The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in Mt. 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall

say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). The cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

*22:70 And they all said: Are you then the Son of God? And he said to them: You say that I am-* "You say..." shows how the Lord sought to elicit confessions from men in their own words. The Lord's sensitivity is revealed in how He comments upon the Jews' question: "Art thou then the Son of God?". He replies: "Ye say it because I am" (Lk. 22:70 RVmg.). The Lord perceived that men ask a question like that because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their question. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on (Lk. 23:9). He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

*22:71 And they said: What further testimony do we need? For we ourselves have heard it from his own mouth-* They themselves thus became the witnesses responsible for the Lord's death. Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty



of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

## CHAPTER 23

*23:1 And the whole company of them rose and brought him before Pilate-* Early in the morning, after an illegal night time trial. Their 'rising' may refer to a judge rising to give a verdict. They rose in condemnation of Him and went to Pilate to get the sentence carried out.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29).

*23:2 And they began to accuse him, saying: We found this man perverting our nation and forbidding giving tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ a king-* These were not the reasons for which they had condemned the Lord. The whole legal process was illogical and inconsistent from start to finish. The Lord had stated that tribute should be given to Caesar; no matter how well He had answered their earlier trick questions, they still decided He was guilty. He had also not stated that He was a king, except by implication; and He had carefully deconstructed any idea that He was in His lifetime a political king seeking His own kingdom.

*23:3 And Pilate asked him, saying: Are you the King of the Jews?-* Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*And he answered them and said: You say it-* Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self-control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His

ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

*23:4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds: I find no fault in this man-* We would have imagined that the talk of the Lord forbidding tribute to Caesar and proclaiming Himself a King would have led Pilate to at least pronounce some kind of guilty verdict. His insistence that there was "no fault in this man", especially as he was renowned for his lack of conscience, is all indication that he was deeply impressed with the Lord's righteousness, and even prepared to publicly defend it. According to John, it was only when the claim that Jesus was God's Son surfaced that Pilate felt the need to take the Lord aside to learn more. His reactions are very clear evidence of the Lord's self-evident righteousness and connection to the Father.

*23:5 But they were the more urgent, saying: He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee even to this place-* We sense their increasing desperation as the evident righteousness and innocence of the Lord was testified to by the clearly troubled state of Pilate's conscience.

*23:6 But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilean-* Again we see Pilate's troubled conscience. He dearly wished to palm off responsibility for this case, and he pricks his ears up when he considers that the Lord is a Galilean.

*23:7 And when he knew that he was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in those days-* As noted on :6, this was a reflection of Pilate's desperate conscience. For it was his responsibility and not Herod's to deal with issues in Jerusalem, and it was down to him to authorize capital punishment and not Herod. So sending the Lord to Herod was a desperate attempt to get out of the situation.

*23:8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad. For he had for a long time been desirous to see him, because he had heard about him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him-* Yet Herod had earlier desired to kill the Lord (Lk. 13:31). Again, we see the power of conscience at work in Herod; for he was more than fascinated by the Lord and wanted to personally hear His teaching and see His miracles. Instead of just passing the death sentence for a known trouble maker, these rulers were clearly aware that they were dealing with no ordinary case.

*23:9 So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer-* As noted on 22:70, the Lord preferred to be silent because the answer was given within the consciences of the questioners. The Lord perceived that men ask their questions because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their questions. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their

questions as the trial went on. He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

*23:10 And the chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him-* 'Devil' means 'false accuser'; here we have established the major theme which will dominate the later New Testament- that the Jews and Judaism was the great satan / adversary, the embodiment of false accusation against the Lord and all those in Him. They "stood by" Herod, identifying themselves with Him rather than with the Messiah of Israel.

*23:11 And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him, and dressing him in gorgeous apparel, sent him back to Pilate-* We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple as the Lord was (Mk. 15:17; Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti-Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

*23:12 And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day. For before they had been enemies-* This is phrased in terms of Ps. 2:1-3, where Messiah's enemies were to unite together against Him. The psychology presented here is absolutely true to observed human experience; a common focus upon a perceived enemy creates an illusion of unity, which then evaporates once the common enemy is no more. The same idea is to be found in the descriptions in Revelation of Israel's enemies uniting against her in the last days and then self-destructing. The unity between Jew and Gentile was to become typical of how the early church were persecuted in the same way as their Lord, as they fellowshiped His sufferings. The enmity may have been related to how Pilate had slain those of Herod's jurisdiction when they were offering sacrifices in the temple, mixing their blood with the temple offerings (Lk. 13:1,2). This shows Pilate's callous nature, and points up the power of the Lord Jesus in touching even a conscience like that.

*23:13 And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people-* This reflects the complete guilt of Jewry; from the common people through to their political and religious leadership. They too were "called together" against the Lord, just as Gentile power was united in Herod and Pilate.

23:14 *And said to them: You brought to me this man, as one that perverts the people; and I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him-* Pilate may have carefully chosen his word for "perverts". For it can also mean 'to bring again', specifically in repentance (s.w. Mt. 27:3 "brought again", Acts 3:26 and Rom. 11:26 "turning away" from sin). The Lord's mission was to turn Israel away from their sin. A man of Pilate's callousness was touched to insist time and again that the Lord was without fault. We should never therefore assume that anyone is beyond the reach of His spirit and personality. "No fault" is a phrase used three times by Pilate about the Lord (:4,14,22). This is one of Luke's tripilisms, designed so that illiterate people could remember it more easily.

23:15 *Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him-* Again and again, the otherwise conscienceless Pilate stresses the Lord's innocence. Neither he nor Herod had any worry about murdering innocent men. But the Lord's death worried them when they came up close to Him. Such is His power even today. We should never therefore write off anyone as beyond the power of the Gospel which is in Him. Herod had once wanted to kill John the Baptist, but now, encountering the One whom John had testified of, he had to admit the man's innocence.

23:16 *I will therefore chastise him and release him-* The crowd hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus, according to Matthew and Mark. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Luke here, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

23:17 *(For it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast)-* This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to

this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

23:18 *But they cried out all together, saying, Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas-* Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

They cried out "together", despite their individual pangs of conscience. We see here the power of group think and culture, leading individuals to behaviour and positions which are far beyond where they personally stand. No wonder we are warned to watch those groups with whom we identify and join.

23:19 *(One who had been cast into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder)-* Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of

the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

*23:20 And Pilate spoke to them again, desiring to release Jesus-* We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

*23:21 But they shouted, saying: Crucify, crucify him!-* When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

*23:22 And he said to them the third time: Why! What evil has this man done? I have found no cause of death in him. I will therefore punish him and release him-* Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified. "The third time" is another of Luke's tripilisms, a feature included in the record to enable the memorization of the gospels; and to emphasize the point, that even the callous Pilate really struggled to not allow the murder of an innocent and righteous man. Pilate's attempt to "just" punish the Lord was however only going to pique the wrath of the crowd, as they sensed the Lord's crucifixion slipping out of their grasp. And by saying this, Pilate was effectively robbing them of the choice as to which man should be released. So his desperate attempt to save the Lord only backfired upon him.

23:23 *But they were insistent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed-* Where and how did *their* word prevail? Surely in the conscience of Pilate. The implication is that there was a struggle within him between their voice / word, and another word- that of God, made flesh in the man before him.

23:24 *And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done-* The record here clearly states Pilate's responsibility; he gave sentence. We may excuse our misbehaviours on the basis that there would have been huge consequences if we had not... disfellowshipped that brother, rejected that sister. But our actions remain as they are. Circumstance will never be too overpowering that we have no option but to sin (Ps. 125:3; 1 Cor. 10:13).

23:25 *And he released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will-* The delivering of the Lord to the will of the Jews is all written from a human perspective. For it was by the determinate will of God, and not of man, that the Lord was handed over to death; and He Himself gave over His life, it was not in fact taken from Him. We have here a parade example of how things may appear one way from a secular standpoint, when they are in fact quite different from heaven's perspective.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak



specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

*23:26 And when they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it after Jesus-* Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else... until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His

flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming around', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

*23:27 And a great crowd of the people followed him, and women mourned and wailed for him-* As unworthy people wailed before Him on the cross (the Lord knew they would be condemned in the AD70 judgment rather than obey his words and flee the city), so they will wail (s.w.) before Him at the judgment (Mt. 24:30). The cross and the judgment are definitely connected. Men's feelings at the cross are a foretaste of our feelings before the enthroned, glorified Lord. And hence there is a connection between the breaking of bread, the judgment, the crucifixion, self-examination... it all comes together.

23:28- see on Lk. 7:9.

*But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children-* He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers. So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

23:29 *For the days are coming in which they shall say: Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!-* Josephus records that during the AD70 siege of Jerusalem, "one rich and noble woman, whose name was Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, being stripped of all she had, by the seditious, killed her own child, and dressed it, and ate part of it". In that day, the Lord's words would have been remembered. And this judgment would come upon those who had disobeyed the Lord's words to flee the city. The Lord is alluding to the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:53-57. Those women weeping for Him were in fact the disobedient who would be cursed. The emotion of a moment for the sake of the suffering Lord Jesus is simply not enough. We must challenge ourselves with this thought. The Lord is also quoting from the words of Jer. 19:9 about the sufferings which the Babylonian siege would bring upon Jerusalem. He had no problem in seeing the events of

the Babylonian invasion as relevant to His day, and we likewise can see the large bulk of Old Testament material about Israel's historical sufferings as likewise coming true in the last days. Revelation presents those sufferings in language absolutely loaded with Old Testament allusion.

*23:30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall on us, and to the hills: Cover us-* The Babylonian siege would be repeated in AD70 (Hos. 10:8); and these words are quoted about the feelings of the impenitent within the land of Israel in the last days, when every prophetic word shall come to its climax (Rev. 6:16). "Begin to say" could imply that the Lord was hopeful that they would repent. But Josephus says that during the AD70 siege "Hundreds of the Jews at the end of the siege hid themselves in subterranean recesses, and no less than 2000 were killed by being buried under the ruins of these hiding-places". In Rev. 6:16, the desire for the hills to fall upon them was because they sense that the wrath of the once crucified Lamb is even greater. The Lamb for sinners slain also has anger; He saw through the tears of those women, and was warning them of the huge price to be paid for what they were doing to Him.

*23:31 For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?-* He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'. "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his

quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example. If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord's self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: "I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish". And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men's minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

23:32 *And two others, both criminals, were led out with him to be executed-* Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting:

"plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (Mk. 15:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

*23:33 And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left-* Note the emphasis in the records on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. Golgotha possibly means 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem. "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas').

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into

Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "... the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other

men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen 'em? I seen plenty of 'em. I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this



man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity, would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He

purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the maldistribution of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres' leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so.

Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the

Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

23:34 *And Jesus said: Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they do-* The Lord prayed that the soldiers would be forgiven [without repentance] because "they know not what they do". The fact He asked for their forgiveness shows that they were guilty of sin, although they were ignorant of it- and had therefore not repented. How could they repent of crucifying Christ while they were actually doing it? They may well have regretted doing what they were forced to do by reason of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Thus Christ knew that forgiveness was possible without specific repentance and forsaking. The reply 'But that only applies to sins of ignorance!' is irrelevant- Christ's attitude still disproves the hypothesis that forgiveness can *only* be granted if there is a forsaking of sin. See on Acts 3:17.

Note the Lord's appreciation of the Fatherhood of God throughout His passion: Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44; Lk. 23:34,46. Throughout the Gospels, the Lord calls God His Father around 170 times (109 of them in John, as if he noticed this as especially significant). This was a real paradigm breaker for the Jews, who even from the 15 Old Testament references to God as Father, only understood His fatherhood in a national, not personal, sense. Yet the Son's relation to the Father has been passed on to us (Mk. 14:36 cp. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The closeness of the Father to the Son, prefigured by that between Abraham and Isaac, is something to be wondered at.

<b>The Seven Last Sayings Of Jesus From The Cross</b>	<b>Number of words in Greek</b>
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| 1. "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34)             | 12 |
| 2. "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43) | 9  |
| 3. "Woman behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!" (Jn. 19:26)                     | 4  |
| 4. "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)           | 3  |
| 5. "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28)  | 1  |
| 6. "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)  | 1  |
| 7. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46)                      | 8  |

The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. Perhaps it would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. The passion of the Lord's intercessions on the cross is matchless. He roared to God in His prayer, regardless of whether there was light or darkness (Ps. 22:1,2). He reflected there that His prayer was offered to God "in an acceptable time" (Ps. 69:13). And yet this very passage is taken up in 2 Cor. 6:2 concerning the necessary vigour of *our* crying to God for salvation. That the intensity of the Lord's prayerfulness and seeking of God on the cross should be held up as our pattern: the very height of the ideal is wondrous.

It is worth noting that if the Lord's seven recorded utterances are placed in the conventional chronology, the number of words He actually spoke can be seen to steadily decrease until the final utterance (although it should be noted that in our reconstruction, saying 3 comes before no. 2). Not only does this serve to illustrate the intensity of effort wrung forth from our Lord in His final utterance, but we also sense that He found physically speaking increasingly difficult.

"Father forgive them" were the first words said by the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems from the context that they were said soon after the cross was lifted up into a vertical position and dropped down into the hole prepared for it. Physically, this would have been the time of greatest shock and pain, as the body of Jesus came to rest with its full weight upon the nails, as they tore into the flesh and sinews of His hands and feet. As His nervous system began to fully react, He was in great pain and shock. And yet immediately His thoughts went to forgiving those who had brought this upon Him; and, as we hope to see, His thoughts were immediately with us, with the possibility of our salvation and forgiveness. In this we see a matchless example of being so concerned for the salvation of others, so taken up with a desire to show love to those who hate us, that the physicality of our own sufferings, however immediately and insistently they press, becomes totally relegated.

We must face up to a fundamental question: Who was it that the Lord was asking God to forgive? By eliminating who He did *not* pray for, we can come towards an answer. He did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

Forgiveness is related to repentance. There would seem little point in the Lord praying for the Roman soldiers to be forgiven. It would be rather like a believer praying for some youths to be forgiven for vandalizing a bus

shelter; to what point would this be? Would such a prayer really lead them towards salvation? Would it be an appropriate thing to pray for?

Throughout the Acts, both Peter and Paul accuse the Jews of having crucified the Lord, even though the Roman soldiers physically did it. Peter even goes so far as to say that it was their *hands* which placed Jesus on the cross and nailed Him (Acts 2:23- notice how their physical contact with the Lord's body is stressed in Mk. 14:46,53). The Roman hands which did this were effectively Jewish hands. Psalms 22 and 69 outline in some detail the things done to Christ on the cross. Some were done by the Jews, others by the Romans. And yet the same pronoun "they" is used, as if these things were all done by the same group of people. This further suggests that the Spirit saw the actions of the Romans as being attributable to the Jews. There seems no reason to think that the Roman or Italian nation were held guilty by God for the part they played in the death of His Son.

The Jewish people generally were punished because they saw the Son of God coming to their vineyard, and yet they killed Him, despite recognizing who He was. "This is the heir", they recognized (Mt. 21:38). Pilate *therefore*, because of the Jews, ordered the death of the Son of God (Jn. 18:40 cp. 19:1). They must take full responsibility for it. The Roman soldiers set Christ at nought (Lk. 23:11); but this very act (the same word is used) is counted to the Jews (Acts 4:11). The Lord Jesus shouted out to them that He knew that they realized who He was: "Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, You both know me, and you know from where I am" (Jn. 7:28). His allusion to the memorial Name ("I am") suggests that He recognized that they knew His Divine origin and manifestation of His Father's Name. The Lord was responding to their claim that they did not think He was Messiah (Jn. 7:27)- by saying 'You do know, deep inside, that I am He; but you won't face up to your conscience about it'. It was in this sense that Jesus frequently said in John's Gospel that the Jews did not know Him nor His Father. However, this does not mean that they did not recognize who He was. To "know" Christ in the Johannine sense is to believe in Him, not just to give Him cognizance. It would be a massive contradiction within the thinking of Jesus for Him to ask God to forgive the whole Jewish people *because* they didn't realize what they were doing. According to His parable of the men recognizing the heir and killing him, they did know, perfectly well, what they were doing. If indeed He was praying for the entire Jewish nation, His prayer went unanswered. He had said Himself that if the Jews did not repent and believe in Him, they would die in their sins; He said that an impressive three times (Jn. 8:21,24).

It seems that the Lord was in some way praying for those among the Jews who would later repent of what they had done. This suggestion must

almost certainly have some truth about it because of the way Peter alludes to Christ's words: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do". He seems to apply these words to the Jews, and uses them to encourage the Jews to repent and thereby take unto themselves the forgiveness which Christ's prayer had made possible: "And now, brethren, I wot that through (RV "in") ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers... repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:17,19 AV). Paul makes a similar allusion in Acts 13:26,27: "Men and brothers, children of the stock of Abraham... they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers (cp. 3:17), because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him".

There is a clear principle throughout God's self-revelation that ignorance does not atone for sin. "Father forgive them *for* they know not what they do" therefore does not mean that their ignorance plus Christ's prayer equalled forgiveness and therefore salvation. We have to conclude that He was saying 'They don't *now* know what they are doing, please forgive them on account of my death, they'll repent and realize later'. Despite Peter's allusion to Christ's prayer for their forgiveness, Peter still asks the Jews to repent so that they could be forgiven and saved. Therefore Christ's prayer for their forgiveness was not offered or answered in the sense that they would be forgiven without repentance. That forgiveness was only granted in prospect. They had to 'claim' it by their own repentance. However, it is still wondrously true that Christ understood that God was willing to grant forgiveness to people in prospect, even though they had not actually repented. If God is willing to do this, to forgive in hope of future repentance in response to such great grace, how much more should we behave likewise to each other. And yet we struggle with this, even though we each have received such grace ourselves.

The Lord's death was fundamentally for the salvation of Israel. His prayer was gloriously answered in that soon afterwards, 8,000 Jews were baptized (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Such is the power of anguished, heartfelt prayer for others- even when it seems there is no chance it will be heard. And such is the power of prayer for a third party. The Lord's attitude was not that they simply had to decide. He prayed they would be converted. It only applies to us insofar as we unite ourselves with the Israel of God. That minority within Israel who were crucifying Christ in ignorance ("they know not what they do") were the same category into which we fall. Christ praying on the cross for men to be forgiven ought to send the mind back to Is. 53, which prophesied that on the cross, the Christ would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and

rejected him (Is. 53:3). And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them". There seems no other real alternative.

And so we come to an awe-inspiring conclusion: the Lord was lifted up on the cross, and immediately His mind was full of us, all those who would repent and become the seed of Christ, full of our need, of the huge weight of all our sins. And He knew that through His death all that sin would be forgiven. It was by the Lord's one act of righteousness, one act of obedience, that we are justified (Rom. 5:18,19). He was obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and yet Heb. 5:8 and Phil. 2:8 RV imply that He only became obedient whilst He was actually on the cross. Was it that there, whilst hanging there, He more deeply perceived that really, this was indeed the only way to meet our need- and therefore He made that one-off act of obedience in death which Rom. 5:19 speaks about. And that supreme love for us, that willingness to die "for us", is still part of His wonderful character; for there He "loved us" [the love of Christ and the cross are so often connected ideas], and yet He still has that same "love of Christ" for us today (Rom. 8:35,37).

As soon as the cross was lifted up, despite the sudden searing pain, His mind was fixed upon our desperate need: "Father forgive them". Each one of us who have now believed down through the subsequent years was forgiven then, in that moment, of all our sins we would ever commit. Through one act of righteousness [i.e. the cross], we were justified (Rom. 5:18 RV). There was such intensity of achievement in those moments of His death. Here on earth, on a mere speck of a planet in the outer suburbs of a galaxy that is only one of about a billion such galaxies in the observable universe, what happened on the cross determined the future of that universe. For all things both in heaven and in earth were reconciled by the blood of the cross. And yet throughout the Gospels Christ had taught that the Father would only forgive those who themselves live a forgiving life. Yet at that time we had not repented; "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son" (Rom. 5:5-10).

Our Lord's prayer was heard; our sins, unrepented of, were forgiven, in prospect we were forgiven and saved. In the same way as Peter used the wonder of this to appeal to the Jews to repent, so we should heed the appeal. All our sins were forgiven as a result of that prayer; in prospect



we were saved. God for the sake of that prayer of Christ forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of Christ and the attitude of our Father.

The extreme seriousness of our position prior to our reconciliation with God is easy to underestimate. We were "enemies... sinners". We have seen that "Father forgive them" refers to both us and the ignorant Jews who were crucifying Christ. And yet in the first instance, the "them" referred to the Roman soldiers; *they* crucified the Lord, they parted His garments; and it is in that context that He asked for "them" to be forgiven. There is a certain relevance of Christ's words to those ignorant soldiers. And yet we have seen that they really refer to us, to all those who will truly repent of their sins. It follows that those soldiers represent us, as the Jews who rejected and despised Christ in Is. 53 represent us too. Truly do we sing that "We held him as condemned by Heaven", albeit in ignorance. The roughness and ignorance of those soldiers typifies our life before baptism. If we continue sinning, we crucify again the son of God, this time not in ignorance. The consequences of that are almost too fearful to imagine.

Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if Christ felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). Indeed, Is. 53:10 NIV describes the Lord's death as a "guilt offering". And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Him as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

"Father forgive them" was uttered with His mind on all our future sins, He foresaw them all, He felt them upon Him, He saw they could not be forgiven without repentance, and yet He asked the Father to forgive them as sins of ignorance, believing that we would repent in the future. No wonder Peter and Paul use these words of the Lord as the basis of their appeal to Israel to repent! And if we appreciate them, we will be inspired to truly examine ourselves, to realize our secret sins, to search the word in order to reveal our sins to us, to ask God after the pattern of David to reveal our weakness to us, to truly confess our sins, knowing that each

and every one of them was recognized by the Father and Son as Christ hung on the cross. Every one of them was a weight upon Christ, and every one of them was forgiven in the hope that we would later appreciate the wonder of such grace, and repent. This means that as with Israel in Acts 3, our repentance is what makes the cross of Christ powerful for us, it is what makes the victory of Christ all the greater if we accept it; for when we repent, "our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness", in the language of Romans.

In some sense, then, the Lord was aware of each of us and each of our sins as He hung there. "Forgive them" was wrung out of this deep appreciation. Just one word (in the Greek) expressed such intensity of appreciation of our need. It seems that as Christ hung on the cross He had a vision of the faithful. How this was achieved is hard to imagine, but it is not beyond the realms of Divine possibility that somehow Christ was made aware of each and every one of us, and each of our sins. Consider the following hints concerning the Lord's vision of His ecclesia on the cross:

- "*When* You shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11). "*When*" would suggest that the Lord had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.
- Psalms 22 and 69 describe Christ on the cross foreseeing "the great congregation" gratefully and humbly eating in memory of Him (cp. the breaking of bread), serving Him, inheriting Zion and declaring His righteousness and His victory on the cross to others down the generations. Let us remember this as we break bread and witness to Him (Ps. 22:30,31).
- On the cross the Lord saw all His bones, which represented the future members of His body (Ps. 22:17 cp. Eph. 5:30).
- The Lord prayed just before His passion in a way which would almost imply that He had some heightened awareness of the redeemed as a group: "...for them also which shall believe in me... that they also may be one".
- "For the joy that was set before him" the Lord endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). "Set before" can imply a vision, as if He saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes the Lord looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at your right hand are pleasures for evermore". He is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

The intensity of feeling behind those words of our Lord almost defies exhibition through the medium of human words or language. Heb. 5:1-7

describes the Lord on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes the Lord as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation.

*23:35 And the people stood watching-* The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

*And the rulers also scoffed at him, saying: He saved others-* A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

*Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, His chosen!-* All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

*23:36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him offering vinegar, and saying-* Matthew notes that the Lord refused to drink it after tasting it. The tenses imply that the offer was made continually.

To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He

knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't

drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that we have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

23:37 *If you are the King of the Jews*- His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

*Save yourself*- All the emphasis on *save yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

23:38 *And there was also a written notice above him: This is the King of the Jews*- It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted.

Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.

- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.

- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.

- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

- The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

23:39 *And one of the criminals that hung there hurled insults at him, saying: Are not you the Christ? Save yourself and us-* The man believed



Jesus was Christ, but he understood the Messiah as offering immediate salvation. And the Lord's whole teaching was that the Kingdom was about delayed gratification, coming to its full term in the future establishment of His Kingdom at His return and the resurrection of the dead. We learn from this that mere acceptance that Jesus of Nazareth was someone special, even very special, is no guarantee of salvation. It is His message, the word which was made flesh in Him, which has to be obediently believed.

*23:40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said: Do you not even fear God, seeing you have the same judgment?-* The thieves had the same judgment as the Lord Jesus; death on a cross. It was God who needed to be feared, rather than asking favours of Jesus as Messiah. And yet the second thief clearly believed the Lord was God's Son who would return as judge to establish His Kingdom. He displays therefore a fine appreciation of the relationship between the Father and Son. He urges the first thief to not ask favours of the dying Jesus, but to instead "fear God", appreciating that His Son was sharing in their deaths, and yet in the power of God would resurrect, and return in glory to judge men and establish His Kingdom.

*23:41 But we indeed justly. For we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong-* The cross is capable of interpretation as some kind of judgment seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: "Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross.

*23:42 And he said: Jesus, remember me when you come in your*

*kingdom*- Note the Joseph allusions- in prison with two malefactors (one good and one bad?) as Christ on the cross with two thieves (one good, one bad). "Remember me when it shall be well with thee" (Gen. 40:14) = "Remember me".

23:43 *And he said to him: Truly, I can say to you today right now, that you will indeed be with me in Paradise*- "Luke elsewhere uses "today" to refer to immediate salvation (2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 13:32; 19:9); "Luke's Gospel, then, insists that salvation is not simply a radically future experience but a thing of the present". Always in the OT, "I say unto you this day" was used as a Hebraism to bring home the utter solemnity of some great truth (e.g. Dt. 4:26,39; 8:19).

The thieves (and Barabbas) would have been tried along with Jesus; they would have been present at His trial. Roman law required that the death penalty be executed the same day as it was given. The crucifixion being quite early in the day, it seems almost certain that the four cases to be tried that day would all have been heard in the same room. The behaviour of the Lord must have really given those other three something to reflect on. An interesting point comes out of the Greek text of Lk. 23:39: "One of the criminals who were *suspended* reviled him" (Diaglott). Ancient paintings show the thieves tied by cords to the crosses, not nailed as was Christ. *Hanging* on a tree became an idiom for crucifixion, even if nails were actually used (Dt. 21:23 cp. Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39). If this were so, we see the development of a theme: that the whole ingenuity of man was pitted against the Father and Son. Christ was nailed, not tied; the tomb was sealed and guarded; the legal process was manipulated; the Lord was flogged as well as crucified.

It is all too easy for us to see the thief on the cross as a pawn in the game of the Lord's crucifixion. But there is real New Testament evidence that we are to see in Him our personal representative. Thus Paul challenges us to be "co- crucified" with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20 cp. 1 Cor. 11:1). To be crucified together with Christ immediately sends the imaginative mind to the thief on the cross- the one who was literally crucified together with Christ. It is doubtful if the Spirit in Paul would speak of 'co- crucifixion' without deliberate reference back to the thief. Our Lord matched the idea of the word "Kingdom" in the thief's plea with the word "paradise". Occurring only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to resist the conclusion that in Rev. 2:7, our Lord's mind was back in the agonizing conversation with the thief: "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God". It was to the thief on the cross, some years earlier, that Christ had made the same promise of paradise. It may be significant that Rev. 2:7 was specifically addressed to those who were zealous by nature, hating laxity, yet who had left their first love. The thief may well have been a

'zealot' who had once turned to Christ, but whose real faith had slipped away. But to any who overcome, the same promise of paradise is made.

It has often been pointed out that the brief words of the thief encompass all the basic beliefs of the One Faith. He believed in the sinfulness of man, the supreme righteousness of Christ, salvation by grace, the second coming and judgment seat of Christ, and the Kingdom. Yet not only did he believe those things as abstract principles. As he beheld, at close range, the sufferings of God's peerless son, the reality of those principles really came home to him. Perhaps he was a slave who had committed a relatively petty crime, but as a slave he had to be crucified. All prisoners and most condemned men feel keenly their relative innocence and the unfairness of it all. But with quite some pain he gasped: "...and we indeed justly". He came to deeply understand the basic principles, and appreciate their personal bearing to himself. He knew the basic principles of the true Gospel, but it was his co- crucifixion with Christ that made him grasp hold of them for dear life. Job too went through the same process, thanks to his typical suffering together with Christ: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). And us? The thief, not to say Job, represents us. If we are truly co- crucified with Christ, the basic elements of our faith will not be just a dry doctrinal skeleton. The coming of the Kingdom, the doctrine of judgment and the atonement, these will be all we live for! For they were all the thief had to live for, during his hours of co- crucifixion.

It is possible that the thief had a really deep Bible knowledge. "Remember me when you come in your Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: "But think on me when it shall be well with you...". Joseph went on to say "...here also have I done nothing that they should out me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of "This man hath done nothing amiss...". It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember thine handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of your handmaid... a man is risen to pursue you, and to seek your soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God: and the souls of your enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and have accepted your person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

It is recorded in the other Gospels that both the thieves "railed on" Christ, joining in with the crowd to "cast the same in his teeth" (Mt. 27:44). We must see the words of the repentant thief in Lk. 23 against this background. There he was, knowing the truth, having fallen away, now facing his death. In his self-centeredness, he grew bitter against the one he knew to be his saviour. Despite the difficulty and pain which speaking whilst crucified involved, he made the effort to lambaste his saviour, as well as he knew how. But as he watched the Lord's silent response, sensing the deep spiritual communion with the Father which was then happening, he experienced a wave of even greater anger and remorse—this time, against himself. 'I could have made it, I could have repented, but now it's too late. I've added insult to injury, I've blasphemed and mocked my only possible saviour, in this my hour of desperate need'. So he fell silent, whilst (we may infer) the other thief kept up his insults and selfish pleas for immediate salvation. And he watched the suffering saviour, literally from the corner of his eye. Remember, the thieves were crucified next to Jesus. Indeed one wonders whether the other thief had also once been a believer when he says "Art not thou the Christ?" (Lk. 23:39 RV).

Such was the holiness, the supreme righteousness of the Lord, that the thought grew within him: 'Perhaps even now, while I've got life, I could ask for forgiveness, and a place in the Kingdom?' We can be sure that he grappled within himself with this thought, before ever presenting it verbally to Jesus. He would have seen the Lord's demeanour under trial, and the beauty and graciousness of His character and essential being must have made a deep impact upon the thief. When he speaks about Jesus having "done nothing amiss", he is repeating what he had heard hours before (Mk. 14:56); and the Lord's confident words of Mt. 24:64 were still ringing in his ears when he spoke of wanting mercy when this crucified man came again in glory to establish His Kingdom (cp. Lk. 21:42). And yet this perceptive man had just blasphemed Jesus with all the vicious vitriol he knew ("cast the same in his teeth" is the forerunner of 'a kick in the teeth'). It was supreme faith in and appreciation of the love and mercy of Christ which led him to make his request. I see the very fact he could make that request as a wonderful triumph of human faith over the weakness of human flesh when afflicted. That request was born out of a healthy fear of God. Before speaking to Jesus, he rebuked the other thief: "Don't you fear God...?" (Lk. 23:40). Appreciating the enormity of his sin, the repentant thief had come to fear God, to imagine the day of judgment and condemnation of sin. We dare to imagine the nervous tone of voice in which he then spoke to Jesus: "Lord, remember me (i.e. for good) when you come into your Kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He was pleading for acceptance at the day of judgment, provoked to do so by a fear of God's coming judgments. This was surely a spiritual pinnacle.

The pain of his own sufferings, coupled with his close observation of the supreme holiness of Christ as he hung on the cross, had led him to appreciate his own sinfulness, and had inspired one of the greatest levels of faith in the mercy of Christ which mankind has reached. And so he received the ultimate assurance: You *will* be with me, in the Kingdom. The question of where the comma should be placed becomes irrelevant when we imagine how the Lord would have gasped for each word. There would, as it were, have been a comma between each word.

The thief was confident, in faith, that he would be heard. But how he would have hung upon every one of the quiet words which the Lord muttered in response, travelling over the few metres which separated them. "Verily I say unto thee this day: with me shalt thou be in Paradise" (Rotherham). We believe that to have been the emphasis in His words. 'Yes, I can really tell you, here and now, you will be in the Kingdom!'. Think of the spiritual ecstasy which would have come over the thief! God had caused him to triumph in Christ! He, the lowest sinner, had entered the highest rank of saints- those who have been directly assured that they will be in the Kingdom. Daniel, the disciples and Paul seem the only others in this category- along with the thief.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Mercifully, our Lord died abnormally quickly. Remember how Pilate "marvelled that he were already dead". Normally men lingered in agony for days before death. The thief lived a little longer. He would have seen Christ's death, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen"; the men taking the body from the cross. We can infer that he was still conscious when the soldiers broke his legs- if he was obviously dead, they would not have bothered. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already..." (Jn. 19:33) seems to imply this. The reason for breaking the legs was to stop the criminal having any chance of running away. Surely, amidst the waves of his pulsating pain, he would have marvelled at the way in which Christ was truly the lamb of God, seeing that "not a bone of him (was) broken". There he was, assured of the mercy of the Lord at judgment day, hanging on the cross, in physical agony which it is hard for us to enter into. In some ways, he continues to be a type of us. Whether we are dying of cancer, crippled with arthritis, emotionally trapped in a painful relationship, chained to a demanding job, we too can have every assurance of the Lord's mercy. "To him that overcomes", He has promised the paradise of the Kingdom, just as He did to the thief.

But like the repentant thief, our mind must be full of the vision of our dying saviour, triumphing in His holiness, freely confessing our sin and the justice of God's condemnation of it, thrilling with the certainty of our

Hope- of being in the Kingdom with Christ. Not for the repentant thief the increasing bitterness of the other man. As his bitterness grew, so the serenity and hope, and anticipation and joyful expectancy of the Kingdom rapidly increased for our crucified brother. The bitterness and disillusion of the world should not be ours, as the pain rages within and around us. Ours should be the strength and (somehow, amidst it all) *peace* of Christ's example. And the thief is alluded to later on in the NT as a symbol of us all. The Lord's promise to him that he would 'be with him' is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 and 1 Thess. 4:17 about us all.

*And they divided up his clothes by casting lots-* Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

23:44 *And it was now about the sixth hour; and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour-* The way the sun was eclipsed at the Lord's death is recorded in terms which clearly contrast with the prevailing view that at the demise of the emperors, the light of the sun was eclipsed. Both Plutarch (Caesar, 69.4) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 14.12.3,409) speak of eclipses of the sun at the death of Julius Caesar. The Lord Jesus in His death is thus being proclaimed as the true Caesar. Likewise Cassius Dio *History* 51.17.5) claims that at the fall of Alexandria

to the Romans, "the disembodied spirits of the dead were made visible". Similar claims were made for other Roman victories. And yet this is clearly put into context by the record that around the Lord's victory, the graves were opened and the dead actually came forth.

*23:45 The sun's light failing; and the veil of the temple was torn in the middle-* The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

*23:46 And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. And having said this, he breathed his last-* These were the final words of the Lord Jesus. It must surely be significant that this final statement addresses God as "Father", just as the first of His seven last sayings did ("Father forgive them"). He used the same title in His agony in the garden (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44). Putting those four passages together we can visualize the prostrate figure: "Father... Father... Father... Father". Evidently the Fatherhood of God was something which the Lord found extremely appealing and comforting. We have seen that if we place the seven last sayings of Christ chronologically, we find that the number of words Christ uttered runs 12-9-4-3-1-1-8. We have suggested that this indicates that Christ found speaking increasingly difficult on the cross. This final cry therefore involved supreme effort, every word was meaningful, and surely our Lord intended us to closely meditate upon the implication of every valuable word He uttered here.

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was not just saying something like 'Well, that's it, my life force is going back to you, Father'. We need to pause for a moment to consider exactly what we mean by the spirit of man. It is perfectly true that often, the spirit refers to the life force and / or the mind, and the soul refers to the physical body. However, this is not true in every case. Sometimes the soul basically means 'you / me, the whole person in every sense'. The soul and spirit are therefore interchangeable in this sense. The spirit / mind *is* the fundamental person, the soul, in that sense. The spirit which returns to God does not *always* refer to merely the life force; it can refer to the mind and personality too. Likewise the Spirit of God is not just naked power, but power that expresses His Spirit / mind. When the Lord Jesus commended His Spirit to the Father, He was offering Him not just the life force which

is in every animal and plant, but His character and personality too, the result of the supreme spiritual effort made throughout His life.

The Lord Jesus *commended* His spirit to the Father's hands. The Greek translated "commend" means literally to place beside, to lay down beside. The Lord Jesus had a sense that His character would not be forgotten by the Father, it would take its place beside the Father as it were, as He later would physically. This is not, of course, to give any support to the notion of disembodied spirits. Existence can only be in an animate, bodily sense. Yet the word "commend" in the Greek does suggest that Christ felt that the place He would soon take beside the Father was due to the fact that His spirit / mind had found acceptance with Him first. The Father's hands no doubt is an idiom for His care, His preservation (cp. Mt. 4:6). Christ was taking comfort in the fact that His character, those endless minutes of spiritual effort, of struggle to develop and preserve a spiritual mind, would surely not be forgotten, it would be preserved in the Father's hands.

We can go too far in reacting against the apostate dogma of the immortality of the soul. Whilst this is an evidently false doctrine, it is equally untrue that the Father forgets His children between the point they die and the resurrection. Therefore God thinks of Abraham as if he is still alive, speaking of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16,17). God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious, because "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all (His people) live unto him" (Lk. 20:36,37). Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously (and even doctrinally, according to some lectures on the state of the dead) that this is how God too sees the dead saints. But "all live unto him", the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of "the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters ("spirits") who reached a level of spiritual completion ("perfection") and were then absorbed into God's consciousness.

The hands of God are also connected with the Angels, the means by which God performs His actions. Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with the Messianic prophecy of Gen. 49:24 concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are



associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53). And yet He seems to have felt their absence when He complained that His God (His Angel?) had forsaken Him- or so He felt. Perhaps He felt that His spirit / mind was not being taken care of by them, that His mental being was being placed beside the Father, in the company of the surrounding Angels. Our struggle to remain aware of Angelic presence in the midst of intense pain and trial should surely be inspired by this; in His very last words, our Lord was demonstrating His awareness of His relationship to the Angels, and His belief that although they seemed so distant from Him in His agony, yet surely He believed that ultimately they would take care of Him.

There were several times in the Lord's ministry when He chose to escape from death. This adds significance to the fact that finally the Lord gave up His life rather than having it taken from Him. By His Divine power, He passed through the crowd who sought to throw Him over a cliff (Lk. 4:29). Several times the Lord withdrew from an area that opposed Him because He knew they sought to kill Him (Mk. 3:7; 7:24; 9:30; Jn. 4:1-3; 7:1-9; 10:40); and He almost goes into hiding from His persecutors for a while until the final reappearance in Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54). What all this means is that He could likewise have avoided His final death; but He chose not to, and in this sense He willingly gave His life rather than had it taken from Him. The death of human beings can be seen as a result of physical processes over which they have no control. They are killed, often against their will, or disease takes hold of them and eventually forces them to a point where they breathe their last. There is never a conscious giving up of the last breath as an act of the will. Death either occurs in a state of semi-consciousness or unexpectedly, in a moment. We usually, in the final analysis, cling to life at all costs, throwing our feeble best into the fight we have no chance to win. Truly did Dylan Thomas observe that men do not "go gentle into that good night" but "rage, rage against the dying of the light". The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether different- and the death of the thieves next to Him would have highlighted this. It is so often emphasized that He gave His life for us:

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" in itself suggests that the death of Christ was an act of the will

Christ gave His flesh for us (Jn. 6:51)

Moses and Elijah spoke of the cross as "the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31)- He would accomplish it to Himself, the Greek suggests.

The breaking of bread (a highly conscious act) recalls how Christ gave His body for us (Lk. 22:19)

Christ's death was the result of His obedience to God's command to die on a cross (Phil. 2:8)

Christ poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)

The Lord was at great pains to emphasize this aspect of His death, saying the same thing time and again: "I lay down my life for the sheep...therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life...no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself...this commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:15-18).

The death of Christ was therefore a conscious act of giving, it was not simply a result of being murdered by the Jews or Roman soldiers. No man took Christ's life from Him, He laid it down of Himself, i.e. of His own will. It is therefore apparent that Christ's death was not solely a physical result of being impaled on the stake. The fact He died abnormally quickly is proof enough of this. And it explains why the centurion when he saw how the Lord so cried out was by this fact persuaded that He was the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). That last outbreathing, that death as an act of the will, was something phenomenal. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that Christ was in a position to give His life at a certain point in time chosen by Himself. "He poured out his *soul* unto death" (Is. 53:12) suggests that the actual point of His death was a result of mental activity within the mind of the Lord Jesus. He was the servant who "*makes himself* an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). Physically this would be explicable by the way in which His life of intense physical and mental trauma had resulted in Him coming to an early death, quite probably through heart-related problems. "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38) suggests that the mental agony in the garden almost killed the Lord Jesus. Such was the intensity of His mind in His final suffering for us. Such was His awareness of our need, of the problem of our sins, and the majesty of God's righteousness. In the physical agony of crucifixion, it was only His will to live which kept Him alive. He was therefore able to keep Himself alive until He had said what He wanted to, and then He was able to consciously give His life for our sins, to offer *Himself*, as both sacrifice and priest, to the Heavenly Sanctuary. This means that Christ did not just hang on the stake waiting to die, and the process of death was mercifully speeded up by the Father. Every moment there was necessary for the perfecting of His character, making Him perfect through suffering,

and once He knew He had reached that point of total spiritual completeness, He was able to give up His life as a conscious act of love for us and sacrificial dedication to the Father. The strength of will power which enabled Him to give up His life force at a specific time is something to be marvelled at. Occasionally we glimpse it in His ministry; the way He sent the people away, walked through the crowds who wanted to kill Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59; 10:39), spellbound His would-be arresters, "suffered no man to follow him" (Mk. 5:37)- His strength of will and personality shines through.

The Lord Jesus 'commended' His spirit to the Father. The Greek *para-tithemi* means literally to place or lay down beside. *Tithemi* is the same word translated "lay down" when we read of Christ laying down His life for us. It is the word used to describe the palsied man being laid down at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 5:18), or the laying of a foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also translated to bow down. The point at which Christ laid down His life, bowing down before the Father, was therefore when He commended His spirit to the Father. When Christ "*yielded up* the spirit" (Mt. 27:50), He was commending His spirit to God, laying down His life for us. The Greek for "yielded up" is *para-didomi*, to yield or give beside, and is evidently related in meaning to *para-tithemi*, to commend, to lay down beside.

So the idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us therefore refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". And therefore, Paul goes on, fornication, covetousness, foolish talking etc. should not even be *named* amongst us, "but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4). That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which our earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later in the chapter: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now

this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

Another thought arises from Eph. 5:25,26. The Lord *gave Himself* for us in that final breath, "*that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing (laver, baptismal bath) of water by the word". This is the language of Tit. 3:5 concerning baptism and spiritual regeneration. Is it too much to believe that the Lord in His final moments had visions of men and women being baptized into His triumphant death, being regenerated by His Spirit / word, and thereby being saved?

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died... the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person.

When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We perceive the humility of God, fantastic concept that that is. No wonder then that we should lay down our lives for each other. No wonder than that we *must* achieve a true humility in service to each other. Christ (and God, in Him) laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

It seems likely that Peter was at the cross, and therefore his letters are packed with allusions to it. What he saw there had a lifelong impact upon him. He makes at least two allusions to the words of Christ on the cross, and bids us enter the spirit of it. "Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps... who... when he suffered, threatened not; but *committed himself* to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the same word as used about Christ commending His spirit to God in that final agony. *We are bidden enter His example and follow Him*. Christ overcame the temptation to react wrongly to His sufferings by *instead* committing Himself to God. This idea of laying Himself down for us was what enabled Him not to get bitter. The antidote to our own bitterness is likewise to enter this spirit of laying down our lives.

1 Pet. 4:13-19 likewise invites us to enter into Christ's final sufferings: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings... let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer (cp. the two thieves next to Jesus on the cross)... yet if any man suffer as a Christian (i.e. with Christ), let him not be ashamed (as Christ "despised the shame" on the cross, Heb. 12:2) ...wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God (as Christ did, Acts 2:23; Is. 53:10; Lk. 22:22) *commit* the keeping of their souls (same word as Christ *commending* His spirit to God) to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator". *We are bidden enter His example and follow Him*. I want to stress this point. The sufferings of Christ are so deep that we can shy away from them, gaping in incomprehension at the records without grasping this sense that we are invited to enter in to them. It has been suggested that since the Lord's last words were "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit", His first words on resurrecting would have been a continuation of the Psalm 31:5 which He had quoted: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth". But this verse was the usual evening prayer of Jews in the first century. It could well be that the Lord had prayed those words every evening of His mortal life, and said the rest of the verse each time He awoke. In this we see yet again that the cross was a living out of patterns and attitudes which He had already developed during His life. It also needs to be noted that David didn't say Ps. 31:5 on his deathbed, but rather it was an expression of his desire to commit his soul to the Father in gratefulness and praise. There was something of this in the mind of Jesus at His end.

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23:47 *And when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying: Certainly, this was a righteous man-* He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), "truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self-control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

23:48 *And all the crowds that came together to this sight, when they saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts-* Contemplation of the death of the Lord Jesus is intended to stimulate our self-examination and self-knowledge. Those who saw it "smote upon their breasts" (Lk. 23:48), an idiom only used elsewhere for true penitence and realization of personal sinfulness (Lk. 18:13). See on Mt. 27:5. The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. People 'beheld... the sight' (Lk. 23:48) - the verb *theoreo* and the noun *theoria* here suggest that people

'theorized', what they saw inevitably made them think out a response. See on Mk. 15:33.

The disciples kept changing the subject whenever the Lord started speaking about His death. As He hung in ultimate triumph and suffering on the cross, men came and looked, and turned away again (Is. 53:3; Lk. 23:48). The spiritual intensity of it couldn't be sustained in their minds, as it cannot easily be in ours. The more we break bread, the more we try to reconstruct Golgotha's awful scene, the more we realize this.

Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records. The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their "return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated 'to repent'. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that "all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this...returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross).

Appreciation of the cross will create unity between us; a common sense of failure, and yet also a common appreciation of the utter grace which we have been invited to behold and actually taste of. "All the people that *came together* to that sight" (Lk. 23:48) uses a word which really means to bond together in close association. This is the effect of the cross. Those

who stared in wonder, yearning for a deeper appreciation, were somehow bound together by their experience of the cross.

The people 'coming together to that sight' might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

*23:49 And all his acquaintances, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things-* The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. Mark's reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male. John says that the women were standing at the cross. To show such sympathy for the crucified could lead to their own arrest and crucifixion. They were perhaps asked by the Lord to draw back from Him. Or perhaps they are pictured here just before they summoned the courage to walk out across the no man's land between the crowd and the cross, to show their open devotion to the Lord.



It was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified. The way Joseph of Arimathaea is described as doing this is juxtaposed straight after the description of the Lord's natural family standing afar off from Him (Lk. 23:49,52). The effect of the cross had brought forth a new family in that the Lord had now broken all His natural ties, not least with His beloved mother.

*23:50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man-* He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

*23:51 (He had not consented to their decision and deed), a man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the kingdom of God-* The entire Sanhedrin had unanimously agreed to the deed, but Joseph's internal lack of agreement was noted by the Father and this apparently weak man now comes out openly, and is spoken of so highly in the inspired record.

*23:52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus-* Remember that it was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it

seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

*23:53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet been laid-* Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. He identified himself with the crucified Lord, and laid Him where his own body should be laid. He lived out the essence of baptism. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a

tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasize his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

*23:54 And it was the day of the preparation; and the Sabbath drew on-* Businesses would have been closing. John records that Joseph bought a huge amount of spices, more than what was used to bury the Caesars. The cost would have been huge. To raise the cash he would surely have needed to capitalize his own possessions. And he did all this as business was closing. He gave all in response to the Lord's death, without, it seems, any hope of future personal reward or resurrection.

*23:55 And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid-* It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and

hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord (:49) and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

23:56 *And they returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment-* The point is surely that this was the last Sabbath which needed to be kept. For the Lord's death had now ended the old covenant, the veil had been torn down. But they were ignorant of all that, and yet they were still loyally committed to the Lord Jesus, despite lacking full understanding. This is both comfort to ourselves, and also a lesson in tolerance towards others who likewise misunderstand aspects of the Lord's sacrifice but still love Him.

## CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared-* The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

24:2 *And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb-* The Angel

descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

*24:3 And they entered in, and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus-* The first reference to "the Lord Jesus"; His resurrection declared Him as Lord and Christ. They had observed where the body was laid, and so their surprise is the more understandable.

*24:4 And it came to pass, while they were wondering about this, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel-* Their "wondering" was reflective of their lack of faith and understanding, and they are gently rebuked for it in :5. They should have assumed that now on the third day, His body indeed would not be there as He had predicted. We get the impression that this was the first time they had seen the Angels; the Angel sitting on the stone in Mt. 28:2 was therefore invisible to them, and his words to them of Mt. 28:5 were perhaps at this point, rather than at the point of entry into the tomb.

*24:5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them: Why do you seek the living among the dead?-* The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that

seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Meetings with two separate Angels didn't make the women understand; now two Angels appear together and tell them the same words as the other Angels had said.

24:6 *He is not here, but is risen! Remember in what way he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee-* After He rose, the Angels pointed out this sense to His men: "...remember *how* [the Greek sense is: 'with what urgency'] he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6,7 AV). Like us, they heard and saw the compulsion, that Messianic *must*, but didn't really appreciate it. The Lord was no fatalist, simply reflecting that what was to be 'must' be. Rather He meant that it 'must' be and therefore He strove to fulfil it. There was no fatalistic compulsion about the cross- for He need not have gone through with it. But He 'must' do so for the sake of that indescribable compulsion to save us, to glorify Yahweh's Name, which He felt within Him. He reminded the two on the way to Emmaus: "*Ought* [s.w. 'must'] *not* Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). And consider Heb. 2:17: "Wherefore in all things it *behoved him* to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". It was in His death that the Lord's blood acted as a reconciliation for the sins of the people- an evident reference to the ritual of the day of atonement, which the same writer shows spoke so eloquently of the cross. And yet he was "behoved" to do this, it was an obligation He felt intrinsic within His very being. The same word occurs later: "And by reason hereof he *ought*, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man takes this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ..." (Heb. 5:3-5). See on Mk. 14:49.

24:7- see on Mt. 27:26.

*Saying that the Son of Man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again-* The Angels quoted the Lord's words, perhaps because they had been watching and listening



to Him throughout His ministry. The reference seems to specifically be to the Lord's words of Mk. 9:31, which the disciples had not understood because of their own obsession with who should be the greatest.

*24:8 And they remembered his words-* if the reference is to Mk. 9:31-35, they would have recalled how their lack of belief in and understanding of the Lord's words was because of their own obsession with who was to be the greatest amongst them.

*24:9 And returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the others-* Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so according to Matthew the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren.

*24:10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles-* Most of the references to Joanna occur within Luke's writings, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women. See on Lk. 8:2.

*24:11 And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them-* There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. "Idle talk" means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy.

Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. Luke's account of the rich man in the parable of Lk. 16 has several consciously-inserted connections with how he later describes the disciples:

Disbelief in the face of meeting the resurrected man (Lk. 16:31)	"They did not believe...slow of heart to believe" (Lk. 24:11,25,41)
Double mention of Moses and the prophets as proofs of resurrection (Lk. 16:29,31)	Ditto in Lk. 24:27,44
"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 16:31)	"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 24:46)
"They will repent" (Lk. 16:30)	Forgiveness of sins was to be preached because of Christ's resurrection, as Luke brings out in Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20.

Thus the tragedy and foolishness of the rich man in the parable is seen by Luke as applying to the disciples in their disbelief of the resurrection. And yet the purpose of Luke's Gospel, as all the Gospels, was to proclaim the need for belief in the resurrection.

*24:12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering about what had happened-* Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). "Myrrh...glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

The various records all use the same word for how Peter, John and Mary all 'stooped down' (Jn. 20:5,11) at this time; as if bowing before the resurrected Lord.

*24:13 And two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem-* Seven miles would have taken just over two hours to walk. The conversation would likely not have been very long, as the Lord was not walking with them the whole time. One of them was Cleopas (:18); and it could be assumed from :34 that the other was Peter, although perhaps an unrecorded appearance to Peter is there referred to. However I prefer to think this Cleopas is the same "Clopas" of Jn. 19:25 whose wife Mary stood by the cross. The other unnamed disciple would then refer to Mary his wife.

*24:14 And they discussed with each other about all the things which had happened-* "Happened" translates a Greek word which means literally 'to

walk together', just as they were doing; the idea is that they recognized that there was a meeting together of various threads, and they were struggling to understand what all the coincidences meant. The Lord had plainly stated His death and resurrection, and this alone made sense of the things they were noticing; but they failed to make the obvious connections. It was only when the Lord 'walked with them' that everything became clear.

*24:15 And it came to pass, while they talked and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near and went with them-* As noted on :14, there is a play on ideas here. Whilst they perceived how the various recent events 'walked together', the Lord Himself walked together with them. The lively intellectual dialogue suggested by "talked and questioned together" was likely between Cleopas and his wife Mary (see on :13); a great pattern for Christian marriage.

*24:16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him-* It seems that the eyes of the women were likewise kept from seeing the Angel seated on the stone in Mt. 27:2. The blinding and opening of eyes is typically in response to whether a person themselves wishes to open or close their eyes. They did not perceive the Lord because they didn't want to; and were confirmed in that attitude. "Kept" is too mild; the Greek is usually used of violent 'taking hold' or arrest of a person, especially of the Lord Jesus and His preachers by the Jews. perhaps we are to assume that it was the Jewish mindset which likewise had taken hold of their mental outlook and was stopping them from seeing the obvious fulfilment of the Lord's words.

*24:17 And he said to them: What communications are these you have one with another as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad-* Being challenged with this question stopped them in their tracks. And the Lord so often used, and uses, questions- in order to likewise stop us in our tracks, as we come to self-realization. The Lord's questions were rhetorical, because He wanted to elicit self-understanding. "Looking sad" is a word only found elsewhere about the Jewish orthodox in Mt. 6:16. As noted on :16, their eyes, their worldview and outlook, were influenced by them, they looked like them; and so refused to perceive the Lord.

*24:18 And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to him: Do you live alone in Jerusalem, and therefore do not know the things which have happened there recently?-* The zeal of Mary to be an obedient witness is remarkable. All Jerusalem knew the story of the risen Jesus still on "the third day" after His death- only someone totally cut off from society would have not heard this news, as Cleopas commented (Lk. 24:18 Gk.). If the whole of Jerusalem knew the story about the resurrected Jesus on the third day after His death, and the male disciples were evidently still

nervous and doubtful about everything, it must be that this tremendous spread of the news had been achieved by Mary and the women.

Even after His resurrection, in His moment of glory and triumph, the Lord appeared in very ordinary working clothes, so that He appeared as a gardener. The disciples who met Him on the Emmaus road asked whether He 'lived alone' and therefore was ignorant of the news of the city about the death of Jesus (Lk. 24:18 RV). The only people who lived alone, outside of the extended family, were drop outs or weirdos. It was almost a rude thing for them to ask a stranger. The fact was, the Lord appeared so very ordinary, even like a lower class social outcast type. And this was the exalted Son of God. We gasp at His humility, but also at His earnest passion to remind His followers of their common bond with Him, even in His exaltation.

*24:19 And he said to them: What things? And they told him the things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, that he was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people-* So often, if not always, the Lord's questions are to elicit self knowledge from us. "The things concerning Jesus..." is a term Luke's record will later use as a definition of the Gospel (Acts 8:12; 19:8). And the Lord will go on to expound to them "the things concerning" Himself (:27). But they knew these "things concerning" Him. They knew, but did not believe the reality of "the things" they knew. This progression from knowledge to belief is the essence of our conversion and reconversion.

*24:20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him-* Even at that early stage it was clear to all that the responsibility for the Lord's death was with the Jews and not the Romans. The very words for "delivered up to be crucified" were several times on the Lord's lips, predicting His fate. But He had always continued with the prediction that then after three days, He would rise again (:7; Mt. 20:15). They were repeating His words but had subconsciously removed the idea of resurrection from them. All was in place for the penny to drop- in realizing that now, after three days, the Lord had indeed risen and appeared.

*24:21 But we had hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Moreover besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass-* When the night seems darkest, dawn often breaks. And so it was again here; the passing of three days meant they assumed that His body had now decomposed. When in fact the passing of those three days meant that now was the time to expect His predicted resurrection.

The two on the way to Emmaus commented that they thought Christ would have "redeemed" Israel (Lk. 24:21). A.D. Norris makes a powerful

case for one of those two being Peter (*Peter: Fisher Of Men* p.109). The only other time the Greek word is used is (again?) by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:18,19, where he reassures his weary sheep that "Ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ"- as if to say 'it's really all wonderfully true! I too doubted it, as you know. But I know now that it is true; even I was redeemed, from the shame of those denials, and so much else. Believe it with me!'. After all the Lord had taught about salvation, the eloquent and yet simple explanation of salvation in the Kingdom through His death, Peter and the others thought that His cross ("precious blood") hadn't brought redemption. How weak their understanding was, how slow they were. And Peter again is gently prodding from his own example and pattern of growth: 'Can't you see the reality of it all? Or are you still as inexplicably slow to see it all as I was?'.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the 'chance' they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

The Jewish public looked for Jesus to release them from Roman bondage; but He patiently and repeatedly explained that His Kingdom was not of this world, rather would it come in a political sense at His second coming; and the essence of the Kingdom and liberation He preached was spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external. Yet the disciples didn't get it- they thought Jesus would've redeemed Israel there and then (Lk. 24:21). Their total lack of attention to the Lord's words is brought out by their lament that now was "the third day" after His death- when this ought to have been the very day they were looking for His resurrection!

24:22 *Further, certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb-* The disciples were "astonished" (Lk. 24:22) and "marvelled" (Lk. 24:12,41). The same two Greek words recur together in Acts 2:7,12, describing how the crowd to whom the disciples preached soon afterwards were likewise "amazed and marvelled". Perhaps this was how and why the disciples (and Peter especially) could achieve such a rapport with that crowd- because they had experienced those very same feelings when their faith and understanding was so weak.

24:23 *And when they did not find his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive-* The women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). They like the disciples later (Lk. 24:37) wished to spiritualize everything rather than face the fact that the real Christ had risen in

concrete and actual reality. The theological tendency to spiritualize the person of the Lord Jesus likewise has its psychological roots in a difficulty in believing the wonderful literal truths of the Lord's resurrection, current personal existence, and His literal return.

*24:24 And some of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even as the women had said. But him they saw not-* Luke stresses that they had failed to believe the chosen witnesses of the Lord's resurrection; they were caught up in the secular spirit of their age, which refused to accept female testimony. And all this paves the way to the commission for them, the one time disbelievers and doubters without excuse, to go out and tell the world to believe in the Lord's resurrection, warning that there was going to be condemnation for those who disbelieved their message (Mk. 16:16). Their appeal to men was therefore on the basis that they themselves had so miserably failed to believe. We note too that the claim that John saw and believed (Jn. 20:8) was perhaps only momentary faith that then dwindled; or maybe the idea was that he only later believed.

*24:25 And he said to them: O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!-* The Lord by contrast had been of quick understanding in spiritual things (Is. 11:3). Their slowness was inexcusable; it was related to a "hardness" of heart (Mk. 16:14). They ought to have connected the events experienced not simply with the Lord's own predictions, but with the words in "all" the prophetic scriptures about the sufferings and resurrection of Messiah. We might be inclined to think that it is a tall order to discern these things in "all" the prophets. But the Lord expected it of His men. Misunderstanding and blindness to the things of God's word are therefore presented here as worthy of rebuke by the Lord Jesus. Our insistence that 'I just didn't see it' is not of itself an excuse. This should provide us every motivation in our Bible reading. The Father and Son are eager to reveal themselves to us. We are asked to have active minds, ever sensitive to the implications of God's words; just as we would be to the words of the 'other' in any human relationship.

*24:26 Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and so enter into his glory?-* The idea of a suffering Messiah is somewhat veiled in the Old Testament, we might think. But the Lord expected them to see the obvious necessity of what had happened; that glory could only be entered through suffering. We note that the Lord felt He had 'entered glory' even before His ascension. And yet there is not a word about this in the historical account of His resurrection.

*24:27 And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them from all the scriptures, the things concerning himself-* This way of beginning in the prophets and explaining the "things concerning" the Lord Jesus was copied by Philip (Acts 8:35). Luke, who also wrote Acts, is seeking to develop the idea of a continuity of witness between the Lord

and all those in Him. "The things concerning" the Lord Jesus were the same things taught by Philip (Acts 8:12). "He interpreted for them" may be seen as an act of His grace; for He has just implied that they were unreasonably slow to have interpreted the prophets; He had expected them to interpret them as pointing to the things of His sufferings and resurrection. And so He does it for them here.

*24:28 And they drew near to the village where they were going, and he made as though he would go further-* We recall how the Lord appeared as if He would have walked past the suffering disciples in the boat, and how He surely pretended to be asleep in the midst of a storm in another boat. He has this style to this day, not responding immediately to requests, or appearing to be distant- in order to pique our desire for Him. And so it worked here; they responded by desperately urging Him to abide with them, to eat with them in their home- the ultimate sign of spiritual fellowship and acceptance. But this was provoked by His apparent distance from them and appearance of wanting to go away from them.

*24:29 And they urged him, saying: Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. And he went in to stay with them-* This is all very much the language of John's gospel about the Lord wanting to abide with people. We also have here presented the ideal image of a house church, with the Lord welcomed in and abiding through His Spirit. The Comforter passages assure us that the Lord's presence is just as much with us through His Spirit as it was in physical terms.

*24:30 And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to eat, he took the bread, and blessing and breaking it, he gave to them-* This is framed in the language of the breaking of bread service. It leads us to conclude that the 'breaking of bread' was simply an eating together; for to share food together at the same table was a religious act. Likewise Paul's sharing of food with his fellow passengers during the storm of Acts 27 is presented as a breaking of bread. Clearly the table was open to all, and was devoid of the fences placed around it by later Christian development.

*24:31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight-* The opening of their eyes is not to be taken as meaning that it was not their fault that they failed to perceive Him. For they are upbraided for being so slow of perception; but that hardness of heart (Mk. 16:14) was confirmed, as Pharaoh's was, by the Lord hardening their hearts. And that was only removed by grace.

He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking

and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

*24:32 And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the road, while he opened up the scriptures to us?*- Their hearts were burning, on fire, with the unexpressed sense that this just might be the Lord. The opening of their eyes is paralleled here with the opening of the Old Testament scriptures. But academic understanding, the gift of hearing correct interpretation, left their eyes still closed, although their hearts / minds were on fire. It was still by grace that their eyes were opened to the real implications of all that wonderful Biblical exposition; that of itself did not open their eyes. There still had to be that higher hand, that other element.

*24:33 And they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together, and those that were with them*- Note that the great commission to preach which follows was first given to "the eleven and those with him", i.e. the women. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of "the eleven and the women"- the same two groups. The great commission was not therefore solely given to the eleven. Their finding the "eleven" there rather precludes the otherwise attractive suggestion of Lightfoot and A.D. Norris that one of the two on the road to Emmaus was Peter. Likewise the two were told that the Lord had appeared to Peter (:34).

*24:34 Saying: The Lord has indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon!*- See on Mt. 17:1. The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. It was not until the meeting by the lake in Galilee in John 21 that the Lord raised Peter's denials with him. And this sets us an example in when and how to deal with issues. There is a time and place, and not always at first meeting.

*24:35 And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how he was known to them by the breaking of the bread*- The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. In like manner He was made known to the disciples "in the breaking of bread", perhaps because it was usual for the host to say the blessing before the meal, and yet Jesus the stranger, the guest, presumed to lead the prayer. We have established here the idea of the Lord's special manifestation at the breaking of bread meeting. He was and still is known to us in the breaking of bread.

*24:36 And as they spoke these things, he stood in the midst of them, and said to them: Peace to you!*- The Lord was aware of their sense of guilt



over deserting Him, and in not perceiving the obvious necessity of His resurrection. His first word to them was therefore an assurance of "peace", a term usually used in the Bible in the context of peace with God through forgiveness.

*24:37 But they were terrified and afraid, and supposed that they saw a ghost-* Yet again they are presented as lacking in faith and discernment; even the two who had just met the Lord in their own home. They preferred to think of Him as some disembodied spirit rather than face up to the amazing truth that He was before them in real, bodily, personal form. The theological tendencies towards belief in disembodied existence and the spiritualizing of the Lord's resurrection are likewise reflections of a basic lack of faith in the most challenging of realities; that the body of Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, and He exist now in a personal form, and shall likewise return.

*24:38 And he said to them: Why are you disturbed? And why do questions arise in your heart?-* "Questions" is literally 'reasonings'. 'It could be this, might be that... who knows for sure' is therefore exposed as at times an excuse for lack of faith in challenging realities. Noting this is not to say that all things Biblical are clear and capable of simplistic explanation. Rather is it a caveat against dodging the requirement of simple faith by complex reasoning. We think of the Lord's criticism of "the depths of satan as they speak" noted on Rev. 2:24. The disciples likely had considered all manner of conspiracy theories and wild possibilities, rather than face up to the simple requirements of faith. They had likewise been "disturbed" when they saw the Lord walking on the water and had again concluded it was a ghost (s.w. Mt. 14:26). They were intended to have learned from that failure, just as we too are taught by our failures and are expected to build upon them for greater tests yet to come. The Lord had urged them not to be "troubled" (s.w. "disturbed") in Jn. 14:1,27. He is now enquiring why those words of His had been ignored by them.

*24:39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see! For a ghost has not flesh and bones, as you see me having-* See on 1 Cor. 5:5. He is concerned at their excusing their lack of faith in Him by their various wrong ideas about disembodied existence. Here we see how theological error, such as belief in ghosts or an immortal soul, leads us away from simple faith.

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones*. In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in

every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is we who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The disciples thought the resurrected Christ was a spirit, a ghost. They returned to their old superstitions. Yet He didn't respond by lecturing them about the death state or that all existence is only bodily, much as He could have done. Instead He adopted for a moment their position and

reasoned from it: "A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have". The essence of His concern was their doubt in Him and His resurrection, rather than their return to wrong superstitions.

24:40 *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet-* He wanted them to handle Him; and John opens his letters in 1 Jn. 1:1-4 by saying that this was exactly what they had done. Their reticence to touch Him was perhaps due to their sense that by doing so they would have to jettison all beliefs in ghosts and disembodied existence. We too can refuse to even consider evidence because too much is at stake if it is true.

24:41 *And while they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them: Have you here anything to eat?-* The disciples are described as sleeping for sorrow, not believing for joy. Both their unbelief and their sorrow and failure to support the Lord in His time of need are not really excusable by either sorrow nor joy. And yet the Lord generously imputes these excuses to His men, such is His love for them. They are described as being "glad" when they saw the risen Lord (Jn. 20:20). Yet actually they didn't believe at that time- for Lk. 24:41 generously says that they "believed not for joy". And they assumed that Jesus was a phantom, not the actual, concrete, bodily Jesus. Placing the records together doesn't give a very positive image of the disciples at this time. And yet the record is so positive about them. The disciples are said not to have believed "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief. They slept, we are told, "for sorrow"- when they should have stayed awake as commanded.

One hallmark of the spiritual way of life is an indomitably *positive spirit*. Not a simplistic naivety, blindly hoping for the best in an almost fatalistic way. But as the Father and Son are so essentially positive, so will we be, if we absorb something of His Spirit. Thus the disciples are said not to have believed "for joy". But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief.

Joy isn't really a cause for disbelief. It's the grace in the inspired record which makes that excuse for them. They preferred to spiritualize everything, as many do today, rather than face the actual implications of a Lord who is for real. They accepted it was Jesus, and yet they still disbelieved. Note in this context how the women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). This incident of eating was to yet again reassure them that He was for real. Note how later on, by the sea of Tiberias, Jesus again ate before them- He had to keep repeating Himself to get it home to them, that He was for real. If those men, who had heard the many predictions of resurrection from the lips of the Lord Himself, found it hard to believe He

was for real when He stood before them- how understandably hard it is for us to grasp that He is for real.

24:42 *And they gave him a piece of a boiled fish-* Eating fish was something which they had likely seen Him do in their days together in Galilee. There was a continuity between His mortal life and His immortal life. The same Jesus who walked the streets of Galilee shall come again, and be essentially the same. For immortality does not swallow up basic personality; it is that which is in fact saved.

24:43 *And he took it and ate before them-* Taking and eating before the disciples is the very language of the last supper (Mt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24). He was replicating both the last supper and the meal He had just had with the two in Emmaus. Eating together was a sign of acceptance and religious fellowship; the Lord was and is demonstrating that He accepts us in that He shares food with us. The form of that food is not important; here He uses fish rather than bread.

24:44 *And he said to them: These are my words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things necessary be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me-* As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: "These are my words which I spoke to you", and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. His words were as it were of the same nature as the words of the Old Testament about Him. He didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh.

24:45 *Then opened he their mind so that they might understand the scriptures-* He had already opened the Scriptures to the two from Emmaus, and had opened their eyes. Now He does that to the whole group, and therefore does this a second time to the two from Emmaus.

Prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words. Thus "the Scriptures" prophesied Christ's resurrection after three days (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 15:3,4); but nowhere is this explicitly prophesied. It is implied in the spirit behind the types, e.g. of Jonah and Gen. 22:4. So as 'prophecy' is not just the words but the spirit behind them, so prayer is not just the words, but the spirit in the man's heart who prays, even if the words come out wrong. See on Acts 10:4.

24:46 *And he said to them: Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day-* This may be the rubric He used; quoting various Old Testament passages ["Thus it is written"]

and then explaining how they meant that the Christ should suffer and rise again. This is how our teaching should also proceed; quoting the actual text of Scripture and then offering interpretation of the words read.

24:47 *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem-* See on Acts 10:35,36. The parallel record to the preaching commissions of Mk. 16 and Mt. 28 is found in Lk. 24:45-47. There we read how the Lord explained to the disciples that their preaching of the Gospel "among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" was foretold in the Psalms and prophets. So the Bible student asks: *Where* in the Psalms and prophets? The Lord spoke as if the prophecies about this were copious. There do not seem to be any specific prophecies which speak of the twelve spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century. Instead we read of the Gospel being spread from Jerusalem *in the Kingdom*, and often the phrase "all nations" occurs in a Kingdom context, describing how "all nations" will come to worship Christ at Jerusalem (Ps. 22:27; 67:2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; 117:1; Is. 2:2; 66:18,20; Jer. 3:17; Dan. 7:14; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23). This selection of "Psalms and prophets" is impressive. Yet the Lord Jesus clearly interpreted these future Kingdom passages as having relevance to the world-wide spreading of the Gospel. "All nations" also occurs in many passages exhorting us to praise Yahweh among all the nations of this world. The reason for this is that God's glory is so great it should be declared as far as possible by us. 1 Chron. 16:24,25 is typical of many such verses: "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. *For* great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised... for all the gods of the people are idols". World-wide preaching is therefore an aspect of our praise of Yahweh, and as such it is a spiritual work which is timeless. Because the Kingdom is to spread world-wide, we should therefore spread the Good News of this coming Kingdom world-wide. In prospect- and no more than that, let it be noted- the Kingdom has been established in that Christ has all power in Heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). This is the language of Dan. 7:14 concerning the future Kingdom. The believer must live the Kingdom life now, as far as possible (Rom. 13:12,13). In the Kingdom, we will be spreading the Gospel throughout this planet. In this life too we should live in the spirit of the Kingdom in this regard.

The preaching of the Gospel was prophesied as *beginning* at Jerusalem, Jesus said. If this world-wide preaching abruptly finished at the end of the first century, to begin again at Jerusalem in the Kingdom, surely this would be prophesied in the Old Testament? The impression one gets from the Old Testament passages listed above is that the Gospel would begin to spread from Jerusalem, and would *go on spreading* until the full establishment of the Kingdom. This explains why Christ's command to get

up and go world-wide with the Gospel stands for all time. The command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations.

Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the twelve as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. See on Acts 1:1.

As the Lord appeals to all nations, so should we. The prophecies which He interpreted as referring to the church spreading the Gospel world-wide are specifically described as prophecies about Him personally (Lk. 24:44,47: "All things which were written in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning *me* ... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached..."). Thus the preachers of the Gospel would personally manifest Christ; which accounts for the special sense of His presence which they experience as they do this work (Mt. 28:20).

Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled. As if to bring this home, the New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfilment in the preaching of the Gospel today:

- Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) = the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfilment of the OT prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.

- Am. 9:11,12 had its fulfilment in the work of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18; 26:16-18).
- Likewise Is. 54:12 = Gal. 4:27; we extend the joy of the Kingdom to our hearers.
- Is. 52:7 = Rom. 10:15.
- Is. 11:10 = Rom. 15:12.

The apparent inappropriacy or lack of context of these quotations need not worry us. It is not that they have no future fulfilment. They evidently will have, at the Lord's second coming. But God sees that which shall be as already happening; His perspective is outside of our kind of time. The ecclesia's preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the world is effectively a spreading of the Kingdom to them; in that those who respond properly will ultimately be in God's Kingdom. But God sees through that gap between their response and the final establishment of the Kingdom; He invites us to see it as if we have spread the Kingdom to them. As we present the Gospel to men and women of all races, we are enabling the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. The more we preach, the more glorious is their fulfilment. This is the power of our Gospel and the preaching of it. Let's not treat it as something ordinary or optional or to be fitted in to our spare time.

Luke records how the Angel summarised the Lord's work as good news of great joy for *all men* (Lk. 2:10). The Gospel concludes by asking *us* to take that message to *all men*. Straight away we are challenged to analyse our preaching of the Gospel: is it a telling of "great joy" to others, or merely a glum 'witness' or a seeking to educate them 'how to read the Bible more effectively', or a sharing with them the conclusions of our somewhat phlegmatic Biblical researches? Whatever we teach, it must be a joyful passing on of *good* news of "great joy". The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord".* This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.

Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach /

proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off...and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent... *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

We can't have a spirit of meanness in our personal lives if we are proclaiming Yahweh's release. This is one of many instances where the process of preaching the Gospel benefits the preacher. The jubilee offered release from the effects of past misfortune and even past foolishness in decisions; and our offer of jubilee offers this same message in ultimate term. Incidentally, the Lord had implied that we are in a permanent Jubilee year situation when He said that we should "take no thought what you shall eat... Sow not nor gather into barns" and not think "What shall we eat?" (Mt. 6:26,31 = Lev. 25:20). There must be a spirit of telling this good news to absolutely *all*. And yet according to Luke's own emphasis, it is the poor who are especially attracted to the Jubilee message of freedom (Lk. 6:20-23; 7:1,22,23; 13:10-17). There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The "oppressed" or "broken victim" of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

To preach [**proclaim**] the **acceptable year** of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall **proclaim** liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you:



behold, now is the **accepted time**" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [**proclaimed**, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

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24:48- see on Lk. 1:45; Acts 5:32.

*You are witnesses of these things*- He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

Matthew and Mark record how the Lord told the disciples to go world-wide with the message of His death and resurrection; He commanded them to do this. Luke's account is different. He reminds them of His death and resurrection, and simply adds: "And you are witnesses of these things". Not 'you *will be*, I'm telling you to be, witnesses...'. The very fact of having seen and known them was of itself an imperative to bear witness to them. This is the outgoing power of the cross.

Lk. 24:46-49 records Luke's version of the great preaching commission given in Mk. 16 and Mt. 28. He doesn't record that the Lord actually told the disciples to go out and preach. Instead He says that the OT prophets foretold the world-wide preaching of the Gospel of His death and resurrection, "and you are witnesses of these things". It's as if He's saying, 'If you are a witness to all this, you must be a witness of it to all' (cp. Acts 1:8). If we are witnesses, we will bear witness; we will naturally. We have to; and note how Lev. 5:1 taught that it was a sin not to bear witness / testify when one had been a witness. This may well be consciously alluded to in the language of witness which we have in Lk. 24:48.

24:49 *And I will send to you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*- John's record shows that they disobeyed this, returning to Galilee in disillusion, where the Lord met them again. The disciples then returned from Galilee to Jerusalem and were given the great commission again, as recorded in

Matthew and Luke. The sending of what the Father promised refers to the Comforter, the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus in the hearts of His people, to such an extent that His physical absence is more than compensated for by this very real sense of His presence. Being clothed with heavenly power refers to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, given to the disciples to help them take the Gospel to all the world. This is why the implication is that once they had received them, they were not to remain in Jerusalem, but to leave the city and go into all the world. The clothing with miraculous power was the first century manifestation of the gift of the Comforter, but the Comforter was and is a gift for all time.

*24:50 And he led them out until they were as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them-* Whilst the disciples went from Bethany to the mount of Olives and there met the Angels, the point of ascension was from Bethany. It has been argued that Bethany counts as part of the mount of Olives, but checking out a map will indicate that this is a forced and desperate claim. He ascended from Bethany; and the next we know we read of them being told by Angels on the mount of Olives that the Lord shall return (Acts 1:12). I suggest they hurried the two miles to the highest point nearby to watch His slow ascent into Heaven. He is therefore pictured in the house church at Bethany, and ascending from there, with hands raised in blessing upon His church, as the High Priest of the new Israel (Lev. 9:22).

*24:51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven-* The blessing would likely have been that of Numbers 6:23, with uplifted hands (:50). And He ascended with those uplifted hands, still uttering blessing upon them. This is how He was to be imagined in Heaven, blessing us, His wondering but obedient people. He died on the cross with hands likewise uplifted, so we are invited to see Him living out the spirit of His death for us even in His ascension and subsequent heavenly glory.

*24:52 And they did homage to him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy-* Humanly speaking, they would have felt sad at His departure. But they had great joy. This is in exact fulfilment of the promise of the Comforter; that His physical departure would be more than compensated for by the gift of His spirit in their hearts which would result in His joy being within them. At His physical departure, this blessing was given to them.

*24:53 And were continually in the temple, praising God-* They continued to hold the wrong idea that the temple was somehow the sacred space where God was to be praised. Their misunderstandings did not however

mean that they were not legitimately in fellowship with the Father and Son. We have noted elsewhere that Luke's concluding words are connected with words at the opening of his gospel (see on :47). And here we have a clear connection with Anna, who was continually in the temple praising God (2:37). That woman is presented as representative of the disciples at this point, and thereby of the entire body of Christ, who are to be continually occupied in God's house with His service, based upon our experience of His Son.

## New European Commentary: The Gospel of John

### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *In the beginning*- John's Gospel expresses the same truths as the other Gospels, but in more spiritual and abstract terms. He chooses to record the Lord's more enigmatic and spiritual words, whereas the synoptics tend to record His plainer speaking. The Gospel records are transcripts of how men like John taught the Gospel message. John's Gospel was clearly aimed by him at Jewish people who were under the influence of pagan ideas and concepts which later morphed into Gnosticism. He uses the very terms they used, but redefines them. This takes some getting used to, and we are handicapped by not knowing the full range of terms he was seeking to redefine and reposition in a Christian context.

"The beginning" refers to the beginning of the Lord's ministry, both later in John (Jn. 2:11; 8:25 "the same I said unto you from the beginning"; 15:27 "You have been with me from the beginning"; 16:4 "These things I did not tell you at the beginning"; also 1 Jn. 1:1; 2:7,13,14,24; 3:11); and in the other Gospels too ("The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus", Mk. 1:1; "[we] who from the beginning were eyewitnesses", Lk. 1:2). But there can be no doubt that the allusion is to the creation at the beginning of the physical world; but John is to use that in order to describe the huge power unleashed through the Spirit in the creation of a new world, a world of persons reborn, what Paul later terms the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Comforter passages make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

But just as the Lord's words can be read on various levels, so the ideas of John's Gospel can be. "The beginning" translates a noun, *arche*, a word which can just as comfortably be translated 'the chief one'. And indeed it is translated similarly at times throughout the New Testament- "magistrate", "corner", "prince" etc. The ultimate "beginning", *arche*, chief one, was of course the Lord Jesus. Col. 1:18 is clear: "Who is the beginning [*arche*], the firstborn from the dead", of the new creation, the world of persons created in and through Him. So in the beginning, in the Lord Jesus, was the word, the *logos*, the message preached which had perfect congruence with His person. John's later writings also call Him "the beginning" (Rev. 1:8; 3:14; 21:6; 22:13).

The whole prologue is set out as a hymn. The New Testament is full of very high adoration for the Lord Jesus. Since those words and phrases were chosen under the inspiration of God, His Father, we would be better advised to stick with them rather than try to invent our own terms and analogies in order to express His greatness. The structure of the original text of the prologue to John's Gospel regarding the word, and also Phil. 2:9-11 regarding the exaltation of Jesus, are arranged in such a way that they appear to be hymns which were sung by the believers. Pliny the Younger (*Epistle* 10.96.7) writes of the Christians "singing hymns to Christ as to a god"; surely he had in mind these passages. It can often be that we adopt the very position falsely ascribed to us by our critics; and perhaps that's what happened here. The critics of early Christianity wrongly claimed that the Christians thought of Jesus as God; and this eventually became their position for the most part, *although it was not originally*.

### *Was the Word-*

The essential *logos* of the Gospel is the message of Christ crucified. There in the cross is the kernel of everything; there was the “beginning” of the new creation. John later speaks of the Lord Jesus as being the ‘faithful martyr’ in His death, and thereby being “the beginning [saw] of the [new] creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). The beginning was not only at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry; the essential beginning of the new creation was when the blood and water came out of His side. Yahweh Himself was totally bound up in the death of His Son. God was there with Him and in Him, to the extent that He was in Christ there, reconciling the world unto Himself. In this sense, the *logos* of Christ and the death of the cross “was God”. There the Father “was with” the Son [see notes under 16:25,32].

In Hebrew thought, it was quite common to speak of God as having an intention which was then fulfilled. Indeed, this kind of thing is found in the literature and epics of other Semitic languages. Thus the Exodus record records God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and then Moses' fulfilment of them. The prologue to John speaks of God's *logos*, His word or intention, coming to “flesh” in the Lord Jesus. This is classic Hebrew thinking, albeit written in Greek. We will demonstrate below that in Hebrew thought, a representative can be spoken of as being the person who sent them, or whom they represent. Thus the Hebrew way of reading John 1:1-14 would never come anywhere near interpreting it as meaning that ‘Jesus is God’. This is a result of not reading the passage against its Hebrew background.

### **“The word”**

Just look at the many times this phrase occurs in the Gospel records. It doesn’t mean ‘the whole Bible’. It means clearly enough and without any dispute ‘the Gospel message’ (e.g. Mk. 2:2; 4:33; 16:20; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 12:48; 14:24; Acts 4:4; 11:19). The Gospel was preached to Abraham in that it comprises the promises to Him and their fulfilment in Jesus (Gal. 3:8). That word of promise was “made flesh” in Jesus; “the word of the oath” of the new covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, “makes the son” (Heb. 7:28). This is just another way of saying that the word— of the promises, of the Gospel— was made flesh in Jesus. Note how in Rom. 9:6,9 “the word” is called “the word of promise”— those made to Abraham. The same Greek words translated ‘Word’ and ‘made’ occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54— where we read of the word [AV “saying”] of the Old Testament prophets being ‘made’ true by being fulfilled [AV “be brought to pass”]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The ‘word was made flesh’, in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was “*made...* of the seed of David according to the *flesh*” (Rom. 1:3)— i.e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for “made” and “flesh” only occur together in these two places— as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us. But note the admission of a leading theologian: “Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word... in terms which compel us to regard it as a person” (1).

### **" In the beginning was the word"**

John’s Gospel tends to repeat the ideas of the other gospel records but in more spiritual terms. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the message by giving the genealogies of Jesus, explaining that His birth was the fulfilment, the ‘making flesh’, of the promises to Abraham

and David. And Mark begins by defining his “beginning of the gospel” as the fact that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. John is really doing the same, in essence. But he is using more spiritual language. In the beginning was the word- the word of promise, the word of prophecy, all through the Old Testament. And that word was “made flesh” in Jesus, and on account of that word, all things in the new creation had and would come into being. Whilst John is written in Greek, clearly enough Hebrew thought is behind the words. “The Hebrew term *debarim* [words] can also mean ‘history’” (2). The whole salvation history of God, from the promise in Eden onwards, was about the Lord Jesus and was made flesh in His life and death.

Luke’s prologue states that he was an “*eyewitness* and minister of *the word*...from *the beginning*”; he refers to the word of the Gospel that later became flesh in Jesus. John’s prologue is so similar: “That which was from *the beginning*, that which we have heard, which we have *seen with our eyes*, that which we *beheld*...*the word* of life” (1 Jn. 1:1 RV). Jn. 1:14 matched this with: “*The word* was made flesh, and we *beheld* his glory”. John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: “This is a hard saying, who can hear him?” (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person. Luke’s Gospel makes the same point as John’s but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke’s Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: “A virgin betrothed to a man”. This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX “If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...”. The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context. He saw the whole of the OT as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account “of those matters which have been fulfilled” (Lk. 1:1 RV). And “those matters” he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of “the word”. The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

In passing, it is interesting to reflect upon the Lord’s comment that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in their midst. For this evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that “If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them”. The Lord was likening Himself (His ‘Name’) to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be.

In confirmation of all this, it has been observed that “The numerical use of *logos* in the Johannine writings overwhelmingly favours “message” (some 25 times), not a personified word; and elsewhere in the NT the use of “word” with genitival complement also support the message motif: “word of God” ... “word of the Kingdom” ... “word of the cross” ” (3). So our equation of “the word” with the essence of the Gospel message rather than Jesus personally is in harmony with other occurrences of *logos*. That said, there evidently is a personification of sorts going on. Personifications of the word of God weren’t uncommon in the literature of the time. Thus Wisdom of Solomon 18:15 speaks of how “Thine all powerful word leaped from heaven down from the royal throne”. Because “for the Hebrew the word once spoken

has a kind of substantive existence of its own" (4), e.g. a blessing or curse had a kind of life of their own, it's not surprising that *logos* is personified.

One way of understanding the prologue in Jn. 1 is to consider how it is interpreted in the prologue we find in John's first epistle. It appears that John's Gospel was the standard text for a group of converts that grew up around him; John then wrote his epistles in order to correct wrong interpretations of his Gospel record that were being introduced by itinerant false teachers into the house churches which he had founded. For example, " God so loved the world..." (Jn. 3:16) seems to have been misunderstood by the false prophets against whom John was contending, to mean that a believer can be of the world. Hence 1 Jn. 2:16 warns the brethren that they cannot 'love the world' in the sense of having worldly behaviour and desires. On the other hand, John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that " You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community " who have come to know the truth" (2 Jn. 1), i.e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. This thesis is explained at length in Raymond Brown(5) .

With this in mind, it appears that the prologue of 1 Jn. is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

<b>In the beginning was the word</b>	<b>What was from the beginning</b>
The word was with God	The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God
In [the word] was life	The word of life
The life was the light of men	God is light
The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh And dwelt amongst us and was manifested to us	This life was revealed
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven. That word was made flesh

(Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

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## Notes

(1) G.B. Caird, *Christ For Us Today* (London: SCM, 1968) p. 79.

(2) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 261.

(3) Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 164.

(4) C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1960) p. 264.

(5) *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) and in his *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). These are lengthy and at times difficult reads, and I can't agree with all the conclusions, and yet I'd heartily recommend them to serious Bible students. One pleasing feature of his writings is his frequent admission that Trinitarian theology is an interpretation of what the NT writers, especially John, actually wrote- and they themselves didn't have the trinity in mind when they wrote as they did. He comments on the hymn of Phil. 2 about Christ taking the "form of God": "Many scholars today doubt that "being in the form of God" and "accepting the form of a servant" refers to incarnation" [*The Community Of The Beloved Disciple* p. 46].

*And the word was towards God, and the word was Divine-* That is a strictly correct translation. The word of the Gospel, which is epitomized in the life and person of the mortal Lord Jesus, was Divine. John is writing for Jews, whose supreme focus upon God led them to ignore the possibility of His deep manifestation in other persons or things. John is emphasizing that the message of the Gospel, the life and person of His Son, is the essence of Him. To believe in God meant to believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. To reject that was to reject God Himself.

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By our words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of



God” are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11-15) and “the word of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is about God, just as the “word of the Kingdom” means the word which is about the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. “The gospel of God” means the Gospel which is about God, not the Gospel which is God Himself in person (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet. 4:17). So, the word of God, the word which was God, the Gospel of God, was made flesh in Jesus. “The word of Jesus” and “the word of God” are interchangeable (Acts 19:10 cp. 20; 1 Thess. 1:8 cp. 2:13); as is “the word of the Gospel” and “the word of Jesus” (Acts 15:7 cp. 35). The word wasn’t directly equivalent to Jesus; He manifested the word, He showed us by His life and words and personality what the Kingdom was like, what God is like; for the word which He “became” was about God, and about the Kingdom. He was the entire Gospel, of God and of His Kingdom, made flesh. He could speak of His words abiding in us (Jn. 15:7), and yet make this parallel to He personally abiding in us (Jn. 15:4,5; 14:20). “The word was God” can’t mean that the word is identical with God- for the word “was with God”, or “was in God’s presence”. The NEB therefore renders: “What God was, the Word was”. G.B. Caird suggests the translation: “In the beginning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God’s own being” (1).

In the person of Jesus, there was an uncanny and never before, never again experienced congruence between a human being and his words. And our witness should be modelled on His pattern- we should be the living embodiment of the doctrines we preach. The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren’t able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the ‘word’ of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn’t necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn’t have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh. It seems to me that many of us need to learn these things in our hearts; for our preaching has so often been a matter of literal words, Bible lectures, seminars, flaunting our correct exposition of Bible passages and themes. When the essential witness must be of a life lived, a making flesh of the word which is God. To ignore this will lead us into literalistic definitions of literal words, arguments about statements of faith, endless additions of words and clauses to clarify other words...whereas “the word” which the Lord Jesus manifested was not merely human words. There was far more to it than that. It was and is and must ever be a word made flesh. This is why nothing can replace personal witness and personal, one on one teaching as the way that conversions are really made. And yet increasingly we tend to try to use media to preach- TV, CDs, internet, video, tapes etc. There is nothing personally ‘live’ in all this; there can be no communication of truths through their incarnation in our own personalities. And yet this was how God communicated with us in His Son; and how we too reveal His word in flesh to others.

“The word was God”. The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had ‘heard’ from the Father. But this doesn’t mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words

which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person. And this, of course, was why the unbelieving Jews just didn't understand the literal words which He spoke. They asked Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person?

As the word of God, the message of God in flesh, Jesus was God's agent, and as such could be counted as God, although He was not God Himself in person. P. Borgen brings this out in an article 'God's Agent In The Fourth Gospel' (2). He quotes the halakhic or legal principle of the rabbis, that "An agent is the like the one who sent him", and quotes the Babylonian Talmud Qiddushin 43a: "He ranks as his master's own person". This, therefore, was how those in the 1st century who understood Jesus to be God's agent would have understood Him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, observed that popular Christianity "says simply that Jesus was God, in such a way that the terms 'Christ' and 'God' are interchangeable. But nowhere in Biblical usage is this so. The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God, it says that God was in Christ, it says that Jesus is the Son of God; but it does not say that Jesus was God, simply like that" (3). And he goes on to apply this good sense to an analysis of the phrase "the word was God" in John 1. He argues that this translation is untenable because: "In Greek this [translation "the word was God"] would most naturally be represented by 'God' with the article, not *theos* but *ho theos*. Equally, St. John is not saying that Jesus is a 'divine' man... that would be *theios*. The NEB, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, 'And what God was, the Word was'. In other words, if one looked at Jesus, one saw God"- in the sense that His perfect character reflected that of the Father (4). The lack of article ["the"] before "God" is significant. "In omitting the article before *theos*, the author intends to say that the Logos is not actually God but only... a divine emanation" (5).

#### Notes

- (1) G.B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 102.
- (2) In *Religions In Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 137-148.
- (3) John Robinson, *Honest To God* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 70.
- (4) *Ibid* p. 71.
- (5) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1971) p. 266.

1:2 *This existed, in the beginning, with God*- The word, not the Lord personally, existed in the beginning with God. As noted above, the essence of the Gospel was not made up by God at the time of Jesus, as John's Jewish audience tended to think. His purpose in His Son had been from the beginning; in whatever way one wants to read "the beginning". Be it the beginning of the Christian message or the beginning of creation. God is not making up His story as He goes along, as it were. That was the typical Jewish objection to the Gospel; that it is something new, and they preferred to stay with what they considered to be the original. The

point is that the original essence of God was the things concerning His Son and His Kingdom.

The Hebrew idea of being "with" someone can carry the idea of being 'in their presence'. 2 Kings 5:1,2 speak of how Naaman was "with" his master, and the RVmg. gives "before" or 'in the presence of' as a translation of this idiom. He is paralleled in the record with the maid who was "before" (RVmg.) her mistress, Naaman's wife. When we read that the word was "with" God, the idea is that the word was always before God, in His presence, in His perspective. Applied to an abstract idea like the logos, surely the idea is that God always had this plan for a Son before Him, in His presence / perspective.

The idea of a "word" being "with" God or even another person has an Old Testament background. Job comments: "Yet these things you have concealed in your heart, I know that this is with you" (10:13; NIV "in your mind"). Similarly Job 23:13, 14: "What his soul desires, that he does, for he performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with him". God's essential plans are therefore 'with Him', in this figure of speech. When those plans are revealed in words, i.e. they are openly verbalized, it would be true to say: "I will instruct you in the power of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal" (Job 27:11). Wisdom, personified as a woman, was "with God" before creation- it was not 'with' the sea, but it was 'with' God (Job 28:14; 8:22,30). To hold a plan in one's own mind is to have it 'with' them. The Hebrew text of Gen. 40:14 bears this out, when Joseph is begged: "Remember me with yourself". So for the essential purpose of God in His Son to be 'with' Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally 'with' God in Heaven. Note the parallel between the word of God and the work of God in Ps. 106:13: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel". Whatever God says / plans comes to concrete fulfilment; and the idea of a Son was always in His mind. That word became flesh, became real and actual, in the person of Jesus.

The basic idea in John 1 is repeated in Proverbs 8. In the beginning, there was a logos / word / intention with the Father. His 'idea' of having a Son was not thought up at the last minute, as some sort of expediency in order to cope with the unexpected problem of human sin, as some of the critics and false teachers of the first century taught. In fact, it wouldn't be going too far to say that John actually has Proverbs 8 in mind when speaking about the logos being in the beginning with the Father. Prov. 8:22-31 (ASV) reads: "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth; While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong, When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth; Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men".

The key issue is whether "wisdom" in Proverbs is in fact the Lord Jesus personally. A brief glance at Proverbs surely indicates that wisdom is being personified as a woman. Wisdom in Proverbs stands at the gates and invites men to come listen to her. She dwells with prudence (Prov. 8:12), and in Solomon's time cried out to men as they entered the city (Prov. 8:1-3). None of these things are intended to be taken literally. "Wisdom" is wisdom- albeit

personified. Wisdom was “possessed” by God- and yet the Hebrew word translated “possessed” is defined by Strong as meaning ‘to create’. When God started His “way” or path with men, He had principles and purpose. He didn’t make up His principles as He went along. And this was what was being said by John’s first century critics. Therefore John alluded to Proverbs 8 in explaining that the essential purpose of the Father was all summarized and epitomized in the person of His Son; and that *logos* was created / conceived by the Father from the very beginning. Note that Prov. 8:24,25 describes wisdom as being “brought forth” by the Father from the beginning. Again, God as it were hatched a plan. Even if we were to equate wisdom with Jesus personally, He was still created / brought forth from the Father. Somewhat different to the false Trinitarian notion of an ‘uncreate’ Jesus who ‘eternally existed’. Wisdom was the “master workman” (Prov. 8:30), or ‘the one trusted / believed in’ (Heb.)- in the sense that all of God’s natural creation was made according to and reflective of the principles of “wisdom”. John’s allusion to Prov. 8 shows that this “wisdom” was above all to be embodied and epitomized in God’s Son. From this it follows that the whole of the natural creation was designed with the Lord Jesus in mind. Somehow it speaks of Him; will be used by Him; and will in some sense be liberated and redeemed by Him from “the bondage of corruption” to share the glorious liberty of us God’s children (Rom. 8:21-24). And perhaps this is why we sense that the Son of God was strangely at peace with the natural creation around Him, and could so effortlessly extract deep spiritual lessons from the birds, flowers and clouds around Him. “Then I was by [Heb. toward] him” (Prov. 8:30) is the idea behind the Greek text of Jn. 1:1: “The word was [toward] God”. It wasn’t Jesus personally who was with God or God-ward; it was the word / wisdom / *logos* which was, and this was then “made flesh” in the person of the Lord Jesus. And this *logos* was the “wisdom” in Proverbs.

We’ve demonstrated that John’s Gospel begins with the idea that the “word” of God in the Old Testament was made flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus. But John actually continues that theme throughout his Gospel. He continually refers to things which the Jews saw symbols of the Torah- and applies them to Jesus. Examples include the bread / manna and water, and also light. The Assumption of Moses speaks of the Torah as “the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world”- and this is exactly the language of Jn. 1:9 about Christ. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discover that nearly all the phrases used in the prologue to John’s Gospel are alluding to what Jewish writers had said about the “Wisdom of God”, especially in Proverbs and the apocryphal writings known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (1). And they understood “Wisdom” to primarily refer to the Torah. For example, Jn. 1:14 RVmg. states that the Lord Jesus as the word made flesh “tabernacled amongst us”. Yet Ecclus. 24:8 speaks of Wisdom ‘tabernacling’ amongst Israel. *Skenoo*, the verb ‘to tabernacle’, is of course related to the noun *skene*, the tabernacle. As Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, God too came and lived with them in a tent- called the tabernacle, the tent where God could be met. The idea was that God wasn’t so far from them, He chose to come and be like them- they lived in tents, so He too lived in a tent. He didn’t build a huge house or palace to live in- because that’s not how His people lived. He ‘tented’ in a tent like them. This pointed forward to the genuine humanity of the Lord Jesus; for the human condition is likened to a tent in 2 Cor. 5:1. So rather than proving that ‘Jesus was God’, this whole prologue to John’s Gospel actually proves otherwise.

The language of pre-existence was applied by the Jews to the Torah and Wisdom, and so when John demonstrates that the ultimate Wisdom / Torah / *logos* / word which was from the beginning has now been fulfilled in and effectively replaced by Jesus, he’s going to reference

that same 'pre-existence' language to make his point. As an example, the Mishnah stated (Aboth Nathan) that "Before the world was made the Torah was written and lay in the bosom of God" (2). John's desire is that his fellow Jews quit these fanciful ideas and realize that right now, in Heaven, the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father (Jn. 1:18). He right now is the word-made-flesh. The uninspired Jewish writings spoke of the descent and re-ascent of Wisdom (1 Enoch 42; 4 Ezra 5:9; 2 Bar. 48:36; 3 Enoch 5:12; 6:3), and Philo especially connects Wisdom and the Logos. It seems that these wrong Jewish ideas found their ways into Christianity, and were taken over and wrongly applied to Jesus. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that John's 'Logos' passage in Jn. 1:1-14 is in fact a deconstruction of those wrong ideas; he alludes to them and corrects them, just as Moses alluded to incorrect pagan myths of creation and shows a confused Israel in the wilderness what the true story actually was.

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#### Notes

(1) This is shown at great length throughout Rendel Harris, *The Origin of The Prologue To St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1917).

(2) Cited in C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1953) p. 86.

1:3 *All things created came into existence on account of it; and without it nothing created came into existence*- The "it" can as well be translated "him". Speaking of the *logos* as a person was quite common amongst the Jews- and they in no way understood that God could have any other god in existence or equal with Him. One of the most thorough surveys of the *logos* theme concludes: "It is an error to see in such personifications an approach to personalisation. Nowhere either in the Bible or in the extra-canonical literature of the Jews is the word of God a personal agent" (1). It was the apostate Jew Philo who began to speak of the *logos* as "the second God, who is his *logos*... God's firstborn, the *logos*" (2). And it was this interpretation which obviously came to influence Christians desperate for justification of their idea of a Divine Jesus; but such justification is simply not to be found in God's word. All talk of a "second God" is utterly unBiblical.

However, whilst in a sense the *logos* was God's word, plan and intent personified, it became actual flesh / concrete reality in the person of Jesus. That God created and accomplished the physical creation by His word was an obvious Old Testament doctrine (Is. 55:11). By the time John was writing his Gospel [somewhat later than the others], the idea of believers being a new creation in Christ would have been developed in the early ecclesia (2 Cor. 5:17 etc.). The Greek translated "made by..." occurs often in John's Gospel. It clearly describes how the Gospel of the Lord Jesus 'made' new men and women; lives were transformed into something new. The phrase is used in the immediate context of John 1: "to become ['be made'] the sons of God" (1:12), in that grace and truth came ['were made'] by Jesus (1:17). "All things" therefore refers to the "all things" of the new creation. Note how Jesus came unto "his own things" (1:11 N.I.V.), i.e. to the Jewish people. "All things" which were made by him therefore comfortably refers to the "all things" of the new creation- which is just how Paul uses the phrase (Eph. 1:10,22; 4:10; Col. 1:16-20). Quite simply all of us, in "all things" of our spiritual experience, owe them all to God's word of promise and it's fulfilment in Christ. This is how totally central are the promises to Abraham! "All things were made by him"!

Consider other occurrences of "made by" in John's Gospel:

4:14 The water of the life of Jesus shall be ['made'] in the believer "a well of water springing up into everlasting life"

5:9,14 the lame man “was made” whole  
10:16 the believers shall be made (RV ‘shall become’) one flock  
12:36 may be [‘made’], RV ‘become’, “the children of light”  
15:8 So shall ye be [‘made’] my disciples  
16:20 Your sorrow shall be turned [‘made’] into joy.

All these examples speak of the creative power of the Lord Jesus in human lives, through the agency of the Spirit. This Spirit was poured out as a result of His sacrifice. The very same Greek words are used in 19:36 [cp. Lk. 24:21] in describing the cross: “These *things* were *done* [s.w. ‘made’]”. All things of the new creation were made on account of His cross.

"Apart from him not a thing came to be" (Jn. 1:3) is a phrase repeated by the Lord Jesus in Jn. 15:5, where He says that "apart from me" we can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The things that came into being in Jn. 1:3 would therefore appear to be the things of the new life enabled and empowered in Christ. In this sense Jesus can be described as the creator of a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), a new world, but a world of persons. The allusion is indeed to the power unleashed at the natural creation but the reference is not to that, but to the new world of believers in Christ. But in practice, it is the word of the Gospel, the message of Jesus, which brings this about in the lives of those who hear and respond to it. We are born again by the word, the “seed” of the living God (1 Pet. 1:23 RV mg.). In this arresting, shocking analogy, the “word” of the Gospel, the word which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, is likened to the seed or sperm of God. We were begotten again by “the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creations” (James 1:18). In God’s word, in all that is revealed in it of the person of our Lord Jesus, we come face to face with the imperative which there is in what we know of Him to be like Him. In this feature of God’s word, as it is in the Bible record and therefore and thereby as it is in and of His Son, we have the ultimate creative power, the dynamism so desperately needed by humanity, to transform our otherwise shapeless and formless lives. And in a multitude of lives, “All things were made by him”. As the Lord Jesus was sent into this world, so are we. We evidently didn’t personally ‘pre-exist’; and so we cannot reason that He did because He was sent by the Father. ‘Sending’ in Scripture can refer to being commissioned to speak forth God’s word (Is. 48:16; Jer. 7:25; Ez. 3:4,5; Zech. 2:8-11). Thus God is often described as sending forth His prophets. We too must allow ourselves to be sent forth as our Lord was, making the word of the Gospel flesh in us as it was in Him. For like Him, we personally are the message which we preach. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our probations as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as “the children of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord. The word of the Gospel is not, therefore, merely dry theoretical propositions; it elicits a life and a person. We will be changed; not just physically, but we will each be given our own, unique ‘body’, as Paul puts it. There will be eternal continuity between who we now become, and who we grow into throughout eternity. This is the amazing power of the word of the Gospel; for this is the seed, which transforms the essential you and me into a seed which will rise up to great things in God’s future Kingdom. In all this, the Lord was and is our pattern. “All things were made by him”.

#### Notes

(1) G.F. Moore, *Judaism In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1 p. 415.

(2) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 221.

1:4 *In it was life, and that life was the light of men*- "Life", *zoe*, in John's Gospel means spiritual life, the life which is eternal in the sense that it is the kind of life we shall eternally live. Many times, John records the Lord offering eternal life to us now. We shall of course die, but we can live today the life we shall eternally live. The "it" or "he" here is clearly to be understood as the Lord Jesus; He was "the word made flesh" according to :14, but even before :14 the idea is presented to us. The prologue to John's letter states that the Lord is "the word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1). The life was "in", within, the Lord Jesus in the sense of 5:26: "The son has life in Himself". "Eternal life... is in His Son" (1 Jn. 5:11,20). He was the life as He was the light; "I am the life... I am the light" (11:25; 14:6). His Spirit, His mind within, was the life which is to be the light of our whole existence. In this sense the believer in Him, through receiving His Spirit of life and living, has life within (6:53).

The real life was lived in the human Jesus. His life was the life which we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. It's why such a relatively large percentage of the New Testament is taken up with the four Gospel records of His life. It is that life which is the light of men, i.e. those who believe. For John goes on to lament that many in the Jewish world had refused that light and life. Indeed, they had sought to kill that life in crucifixion. The light of our lives is to be the life the Lord lived and still lives. Our focus is to be wholly upon Him. This is the essence of Christianity, Christ-ness; and not true theology in itself. The connection between the life and 'seeing' it is found several times later in John. Those who disbelieve in the Son of God do not "see life" (Jn. 3:36). His life is not their light. Those who follow Him have "the light of life" (8:12). John's Gospel consistently speaks of "life" being given to the believer by the Lord; but the "life" in view is His own life. This is another way of expressing the gift of the Spirit.

"The light" is used by the Lord in John's Gospel to refer to His living amongst men. His brief life in first century Palestine was the time when "the light" was seen by the world; but He urged men to believe in Him whilst they had that light. His life was the light- the believer will "have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12), the Lord's life. As long as He was in the [Jewish] world, He was the light to that world (9:5). They were to walk after Him whilst they had that light (12:35); "while you have light, believe in the light" (12:36). And yet there are clear statements that the light continues to shine now in the lives of the believers. The paradox is resolved by connecting it with the promise of the Holy Spirit comforter. The Lord comforted the disciples that although He was indeed physically leaving them, yet through the gift of His Spirit it would be as if He were still present amongst them. And so indeed the Lord was "the light" during His mortal life, lived amongst the darkness of men in Palestine. But that light continues to shine, in that He is present amongst the believers, and they live as if in the light of His presence. To join in the first century disciples in following the Lord Jesus, focused on living His life, having His Spirit, thinking His thoughts... is to "walk in the light". And that is the closest the NT ever comes to offering a 'basis of fellowship'; if we walk in the light, then we have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7), even if we may have differences of interpretation and theology. Or as Paul puts it, we are "of one mind" if we strive to have the one mind, that of the Lord Jesus. John's later work, Revelation, concludes by speaking of how the light of the Lord Jesus shines both now and eternally. Our living in the light of Him is what shall eternally continue, and defines the nature of our eternal experience. It is utterly critical, therefore, that in this life we come to a total focus upon Him.

1:5 *This light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot understand it*- As noted on :4, "the light" was the life lived within the mind of the Lord Jesus during His mortal life. But He shines on, in that those who follow Him in turn have His life and light within them, and thus become "the light of the world" just as He was. It is true in Him as well as in us, that we are the light that shines in the darkness (1 Jn. 2:8). But "the darkness" refused to understand it. Judaism therefore was "the darkness"; John saw no common ground between true Christianity, and those who rejected the Lord Jesus as the total and defining light of their path. They were in darkness; for not following Him means walking in the darkness, stumbling around with no ultimate sense of direction (12:35). And that is the Lord's opinion of all non-Christian religion. Those who preferred the darkness did so because they didn't want the light of the Lord's perfect character to reveal their sins (3:20,21). The darkness refers to hating ones' brother (1 Jn. 2:9,11), and Judaism hated their brother Jesus, as well as being characterized by bitter hatred amongst themselves, as witnessed by the various opposing sects within Judaism. To walk focused upon the life and character of the Lord Jesus means we are walking in the light, and hatred of our brethren will not characterize that walk. This is a sober warning to those who name the name of Christ but hate their brethren in Christ. They are clearly not focused upon Him and His light, having refused to receive His Spirit.

The allusion is clearly to how the light shone out of the darkness at creation. The Lord Jesus is therefore "light" to us in the sense that He illuminates. The initiative is His; we are the subjects of His action. This is the grace / gift of the Spirit. Paul understood the illumination of the light as something happening within the hearts of believers: "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). I have to emphasize- this is His action, performed by grace upon the hearts of His people.

3:19-21 and 12:32-46 [see commentary there] suggest that one level of meaning of Jesus as "light of the world" was that in the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion, He upon the cross was the light of a darkened world. The Lord was "the beginning of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14); each believer who enters the spiritual world is enlightened by the light of Christ crucified. The Lord on the cross is the epitome of all that He was and is; His life, His word / *logos*, His Spirit.

John's Gospel is full of reference to Essence concepts. It's been widely argued that John's language alludes to the threat of incipient Gnosticism, and this may be true. But it's likely that John was written quite early, even before AD70. In this case, when John speaks of light and darkness, children of light and darkness, the Jewish 'Satan' / adversary to Christianity as "the ruler of this world", he would also be alluding to these common Essene ideas. For John, following the light means following Jesus as Lord; the darkness refers to the flesh, the desires within us to conform to the surrounding world and its thinking. His point, therefore, is that instead of fantasizing about some cosmic battle going on, true Christians are to understand that the essential struggle is within the mind of each of us.

1:6 *It happened that a man of God was sent. His name was John*- AV "Sent from God", *para* God. The similarity of language was in order to emphasize that the in the same way as the Lord was sent from God, so was John. There is no way therefore that such language refers to any superhuman descent of a pre-existent being, because it is used of John the Baptist. Indeed



this is but one of many examples of where John's Gospel uses exalted language to describe the person of Jesus- but actually, if one looks out for it, John uses the very same terms about all of humanity. Here are some examples:

<b>About Jesus</b>	<b>About humanity generally or other human beings</b>
Came into the world (9:39; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37)	1:9 [of "every man"]; 6:14. 'Came into the world' means 'to be born' in 16:21; 18:37
Sent from God (1:6; 3:28)	3:2,28; 8:29; 15:10
A man of God (9:16,33)	9:17,31
'What I saw in my Father's presence' (8:38)	The work of ' <i>a man</i> who told you the truth as I heard it from God' (8:40)
God was His Father	8:41
He who has come from God (8:42)	8:47
The Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (10:37)	15:5-10; 17:21-23,26
Son of God (1:13)	All believers are 'the offspring of God Himself' (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:2,9; 4:7; 5:1-3,8)
Consecrated and sent into the world (17:17-19)	20:21
Jesus had to listen to the Father and be taught by Him (7:16; 8:26,28,40; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8)	All God's children are the same (6:45)
Saw the Father (6:46)	The Jews should have been able to do this (5:37)
Not born of the flesh or will of a man, but the offspring of God Himself	True of all believers (1:13)

1:7- see on Lk. 1:14.

*This one came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe in the light-* Potentially, all Israel could have believed in the light and been saved. John's mission could have been totally successful; but human beings were allowed their freewill, and so that potential wasn't realized. The Gospel of John is a transcript of his preaching of the gospel, and it seems that he was involved with preaching to converts of John the Baptist. He writes to his converts perhaps alluding to this by saying that although they had believed / received the witness of men, i.e. John the Baptist, they needed to accept that the far greater witness to the Lord Jesus was that given by God in the gift of the Spirit, the life of Jesus within them (1 Jn. 5:9,10,11). This general scene is not unknown today- those who say they are convinced Jesus

is the Messiah because He fulfilled prophetic witness about Himself; and yet they are apparently resistant to receiving the gift of His Spirit within them.

1:8- see on Lk. 12:49,50.

*John was not the light, but was sent that he might testify concerning the light-* As noted on :7, John was witnessing to the disciples of John the Baptist, and some of them apparently felt that he was an end in himself. They were not giving due weight to his message about the Lord Jesus; instead they were just approvingly focusing upon his calls for repentance and criticism of Jewish society.

1:9 *The true light, who by coming into the world enlightens every man-* The true light may refer to the Lord as the antitype of the *shekinah* glory which appeared in the darkness of the tabernacle. Judaism in moral darkness are thereby associated with the tabernacle system. The AV offers "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world". But whichever translation we choose, the parallel is still established between "the world" and "every man". The world is the world of believers. Those who enter that world of newly created persons are enlightened by the Lord Jesus as "the true light". This is something He does to them, and is not merely a function of their own academic study of Scripture. The same word is used of how the Spirit enlightens our eyes to perceive that which cannot be 'seen' by natural unaided faculty (Eph. 1:18; 3:9). We have been "enlightened" by the Spirit (Heb. 6:4; 10:32; 2 Tim. 1:10). And the same word is used of how we shall eternally be enlightened; but that process begins now (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

1:10 *He was in the world, and though the world had originated on account of him, the world recognised him not-* "The world" in :9 is the world of the believers. The world "originated on account of him" = AV "the world was made by him". The parallel is clear with "All things were made by him" (:3), and as noted on :3, the "all things" refer to the "all things" of the new creation. The phrase is used that way by Paul several times. "He was in the world" could likewise be understood as referring to the "world" of the new creation; for if the reference is to the literal world, then the statement seems too obvious to need making. The parallel in the prologue of 1 Jn. 1 would be John's reference to how the early believers had seen, touched and handled the word, the Lord Jesus. He had been amongst them. But then "the world recognised him not" appears to shift the reference of "the world" away from the world of believers, the new creation, to the Jewish world- defined in :11 as "His own", i.e. the Jewish people generally, or perhaps those of Nazareth in particular, who did not accept Him. At first blush, this may seem unacceptable to have two different meanings for "the world" within one verse. But I suggest the contrast is purposeful; the point being that there are two worlds in view, that of the believers or the new creation; and the Jewish world, who rejected the Lord. They were literally worlds apart; there was no overlap between them. And that is a theme of John's message.

John appeals for men to be baptized with the twice repeated personal comment: "...and I knew him not", in the very context of our reading that the [Jewish] world "knew him not" (Jn. 1:10, 31,33). He realises that he had withstood the knowledge of the Son of God, just as others had. See on Jn. 3:29.

Understanding "the world" as a world of persons rather than the physical world of material "things" is reflected in the way that John uses the term *kosmos*. So many interpreters have assumed that *kosmos* refers to the physical, literal world; whereas deeper reflection surely indicates that it refers rather to the world of *persons*. Thus "the world was made on account of Him [Christ], and the world did not know him" (Jn. 1:10; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) doesn't mean that Jesus created the literal planet; but rather that the world of persons was made on account of Jesus, but that world didn't know or accept / recognize Him. It is this "world" into which 'every believing man comes' (Jn. 1:18); and it is the "sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) which Christ bore- not the sin of the literal planet, but the sin of the world of persons who want their sins to be carried by Him. God sent His son into the world to save it, and loved this world through giving Christ for it (Jn. 3:16)- clearly referring to the world of persons rather than the physical planet. The Lord in Lk. 11:49-51 speaks of the creation of humanity as "the foundation of the world"- for He says that Abel was slain at "the foundation of the world"- i.e. of the world of persons. In the same way as these passages in John have been misread as referring to a literal, physical, concrete world, so we too tend to see this world more as a world of things than a world of persons. For seeing the world as a world of persons demands a huge amount from us, and the kind of sensitivity to humanity which leads ultimately to the death of the cross. The new creation was brought into being by the cross. The Jewish world's rejection of the Lord was crystallised in the crucifixion.

1:11 *He came to his own people*- This may specifically refer to the Lord's rejection by "His own" at Nazareth. The context here speaks of both the word which was "in the beginning", and of Jesus personally, whom John had witnessed to. Acts 10:36-38 RV puts this in simpler terms: "He sent the word unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by [in] Jesus Christ... that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth". The sequence and similarity of thought between this and John 1:1-8 is so great that one can only assume that John is deliberately alluding to Luke's record in Acts, and stating the same truths in spiritual terms: 'In the beginning was the word of the Gospel which was with God. And then John came witnessing to Jesus, and then the word as it was in Jesus came to the Jews...'. Paul pleaded with his fellow Jews: "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham...to us is the word of this salvation sent forth" (Acts 13:26 RV). Yet he also wrote that in the fullness of time, God "sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The Son of God was "the word of this salvation" / Jesus. "The word was God".

*And they of his own people rejected him*- The Greek specifically avoids stating that all His own people rejected Him; for the faithful minority accepted Him. "His own people" is a clear statement of the Lord's humanity, wedged within a context which is a hymn to His greatness. Frequently in the New Testament we meet this kind of juxtapositioning of language emphasizing Christ's humanity alongside terms which emphasize His Divine side. This is typical Hebraic logic, whereby blocks of material are placed next to each other, in order to create a dialectic between them which leads to the intended conclusion. Back in Exodus, we find Pharaoh's heart hardened by God, and yet him hardening his own heart. Greek thinking panics here- for it works by step logic, logically reasoning from one statement to another. There appears to our European minds to be a crisis of contradiction, which many find worrying. But the Hebrew mind is far less phased. Rather the two seeming contradictions are weighed up and the conclusion reached- e.g. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God confirmed him in this. The language used about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament is similar. John Knox got somewhere close to understanding this when he wrote that "we do not

experience the humanity and divinity of Christ in ways as separate as this language suggests; we are aware of them together". John's Gospel is maybe the most evident example. In the context of all the high, lofty language relating the Lord Jesus to the *logos*, that was God from the beginning, we read of Him coming "to his own", *eis ta idia*, his own heritage of people and place; and being rejected by "his own people", *hoi idioi*, the Jews of his time and setting (Jn. 1:10-12). It is the "son of *man*" who is spoken of as having descended from Heaven (Jn. 3:13; 6:62). Truly "the Christ of John is actually more human than in almost any of the other New Testament writings". So often does John's Gospel baldly speak of the Lord Jesus as "the man": Jn. 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5.

1:12- see on Jn. 3:3; 3:13.

*But whoever accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God-* "Accepts" or "receives" is the term used of receiving the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:17; 1 Pet. 4:10). The idea is not of our intellectually accepting truths, but of receiving what we are given. And we are given Him, His life, His Spirit; or as it is here expressed, the power or force to become God's children. This power is clearly that of the Spirit, given to those who show their belief in His Name by baptism into it. This gift of the Spirit is alluded to in the next verse, and the ideas here are developed further in 3:3-5 in talking of the birth of the Spirit rather than that of the flesh. Rom. 8:16 is clear that we become "the children of God" (same Greek words as here) through the work of the Spirit. John four times uses the term "children of God" when writing to his converts, those who had heard the gospel of John and been baptized (1 Jn. 3:1,2,10; 5:2). He saw them as God's children because the Spirit had worked in them to make them His.

1:13 *These were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God-* The context has spoken of the work of the Spirit in forging the children of God (see on :12); and these words are taken further in 3:3-5 where we find that birth of the flesh is contrasted to the birth of the Spirit which comes through water baptism.

The contrast between human will and God's will recalls the two kinds of "world" spoken of (see on :10). The Lord's death was as a result of Him being given over "to their [man's] will" (Lk. 23:25 s.w.), but the birth of the new creation was by the will of God. This phrase is frequently associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). We were born by the will of God, i.e. the death of the Lord fulfilling that will. The later references in John to the Lord coming to do God's will refer to His coming in order to die the death of the cross. John's account of how blood and water issued from the Lord's pierced side is an evident allusion to childbirth; he saw the ecclesia as being born out of the pierced body of the Lord at the time of His death.

1:14 *For this, the word became flesh, and indwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth-* The climax of this verse is "Full of grace [gift] and truth". The gift or grace of the Spirit was given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification. Here we have the explanation of "For this..."; the preceding verses have spoken of the gift of the Spirit, and this was made possible by the Lord's humanity, death and resurrection.

Because Jesus was the *only* Son of God, therefore He is *full* of the Father's grace and truth. Jn. 1:14 makes this connection between fullness and only Sonship. Because of the wonder of this, we should therefore hear Him, respecting and thereby obeying His word simply because of our appreciation of who He is and was- the Son of God (Lk. 9:35). And yet this description of Him as the begotten Son of God connects with how we have just read that we too are to be born of God and not of the flesh, if we accept the spirit of Jesus.

It seems that in the Lord Jesus alone we see the perfect fusion of "grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14); in Him alone mercy and truth met together, in His personality alone righteousness and peace kissed each other (in the words of the beautiful Messianic prophecy of Ps. 85:10). Somehow it seems that we both individually and collectively cannot achieve this. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ our Lord, without which we are "none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

"We beheld his glory" makes John's Gospel his personal testimony. It would seem that the Gospels were so clearly etched in the minds of the first century believers because the message of the Gospel was preached in the form of reciting a 'Gospel', a record of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is why 'gospel' as in the message and 'Gospel' as in the four Gospels are the same word, although this seems to be overlooked by many. The Gospel according to Matthew is the good news about Christ which Matthew preached and then wrote down. John of all the Gospel writers makes it openly apparent that his preaching of the Gospel is based around a recital of the things which he himself saw and heard in the Lord's life (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). His Gospel is full of what have been called "the artless notes of the authentic eye-witness" (e.g. his comment that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment"). John begins his preaching of the Gospel by saying that he had beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14)- and I suggest he was referring to how he beheld the cross and the Lord's manifestation of the Father's glory there (Jn. 17:24). The cross, the glory of the Lord shown there, was what motivated John's preaching, just as it should ours. The cross impels us to witness.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of the glory of God as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of

glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God’s* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory, because He is the express image of God’s personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the “Father of glory”, the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only “one glory” of God. That glory refers to the essential “self”, the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been “glorified”, and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and ‘are’ that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God’s glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

It’s evident to even the most casual reader that there are many connections between John’s Gospel and the Revelation. John’s later writing, just like Paul’s, was shot through with references to the Gospels. The same phrases and words are used. But the question is, What is the connection between them? One comment I have in answer to this is to observe that much of the language of the Gospel of John relating to the *present* status of the faithful is repeated in Revelation and applied to the faithful in their *future* glorification. This observation is best explained by examples:

#### **John’s Gospel**

God tabernacled amongst us in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14 RVmg.)

Rivers of water flow now in the experience of the believer (Jn. 7:38,39)

The manna / bread of life is given to the believer now (Jn. 6)

At the crucifixion, the prophecy of Zech. 12:10 was fulfilled when the Jews looked upon the Christ whom they had pierced (Jn. 19:37)

#### **The Revelation**

“The tabernacle of God is with men” at the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 21:3)

The river of water of life bursts forth once Jesus is enthroned upon earth in the future (Rev. 22:1)

Those who overcome will be given “the hidden manna” to eat at the Lord’s return (Rev. 2:17)

The same Zech. 12:10 passage is quoted in Rev. 1:7 and given a future application, to the response of the Jews at the Lord’s second coming.

I would suggest a chronological progression in Jn. 1:14:

“The word was made flesh”- His birth

“And dwelt among us”- His life

“And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth”- His death on the cross. Christ’s glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). John thus begins his Gospel with the statement that he saw the Lord’s death. However, it is also so that John “saw his glory” at the transfiguration; and yet even there, “they saw his glory” (Lk. 9:32) as “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish”. His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John’s many allusions to Moses’ experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son has *declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked, we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John’s tenses) displayed to us in the cross. Mark how the naked man, covered in blood and spittle, was there declaring God’s glory. Aaron the High Priest bore the judgment for Israel’s sins, in another anticipation of the cross, whilst arrayed in garments of glory and beauty (Ex. 28:30). And so was the naked Lord arrayed, for those with spiritual sight. Thus the word was manifested in glory through the cross; and thus 1 Cor. 2:1,2 links the crucified Christ with “the testimony of God”. See on Jn. 19:19.

The essential *logos* of God in Christ was articulated not only in the birth of the Lord, not only at the start of His, but supremely in His death. John’s Gospel is packed with allusion to Moses. Here the reference is to Moses cowering in the rock, beholding the glory of Yahweh and hearing the declaration of the Yahweh Name. Speaking of His forthcoming death, the Lord was to say: “And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). This second declaration of the Name was to be in His death. The same allusion back to the declaration of Yahweh in Ex. 34 is to be found in John 12:27-28: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again”. This second glorifying of the Name was surely in the Son’s declaration of the Name in His death. And this connects will with the evidence elsewhere presented that the Yahweh Name was closely connected with the Lord’s death, in that ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews’ in Hebrew would have used words, the first letters of which spelt ‘Yahweh’. John’s claim that he beheld the glory of God’s Son may therefore be a specific reference to the way he describes his own ‘seeing’ of the crucifixion in John 19:35: “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe”. He seems to be saying: ‘I saw Him there. I really and truly did’. He uses the same kind of language in 1 Jn. 4:14: “we have seen and do testify [cp. “his record is true”] that the Father sent the son to be the saviour of the world” in the cross.

“The only begotten of the Father” is a phrase nearly always used in the context of the Lord’s death (e.g. Jn. 3:16). The love of God was defined in the way the Lord laid down His life in death (1 Jn. 3:16); but it is equally defined in that “God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live” (1 Jn. 4:9). God sending His son into the world was therefore in His death specifically [see notes under 3:14-18]. And it was through this that life was won for us. As He hung covered in blood and spittle, as He gasped out forgiveness for His enemies, God’s Son as it were came into the hard world of men. The light shone in the darkness, and

the darkness did not and does not overcome it. There, the word, the essential love and grace and judgment and mercy of Yahweh, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us.

The common translation "dwelt" can give the sense that John is merely saying 'Jesus lived in Israel'; but there is far more to it than that. In clear allusion to his Gospel, John opens his first letter by speaking of the Lord Jesus, whom "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled [a reference to the taking down of the body and embalming?], of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness [cp. 19:35] , and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn. 1:1-3). The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26). And John exalts that they saw this, and now they too declare / manifest it to the world. One cannot behold the cross of Christ and not witness it to others. John says that he beheld "his glory". Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son *has declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked; we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. All of God's word was made flesh in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus. The very essence of Yahweh and all His self-revelation was epitomised there. Therefore when the Son of man was lifted up, men knew the truth of all God's words [see notes on 8:21-28].

The Lord was "full of grace and truth". Yet according to Phil. 2:7 RV, on the cross the Lord emptied Himself. Yet there He was filled with the essence of Yahweh's own character; for the RV of Ex. 34 stresses that Yahweh is a God whose name is *full* of grace and truth. On the cross He was emptied of self and yet totally filled. The fact that the word was made flesh in the crucifixion explains why the atonement is described time and again with metaphors, as if it is a struggle for language alone to convey what happened. In the person of the crucified Christ, the ideas, the language, the words... became real and concretely expressed in a person. There is far more revealed by meditation upon the cross than can ever be put in words. There, the word, all the words, were made flesh. It is possible to see the fulfilment of the idea of the word being made flesh in Pilate's mocking presentation of the bedraggled Saviour: "Behold the man!". Rudolph Bultmann commented: "The declaration 'the Word became flesh' has become visible in its extremest consequence". There in the spat upon Son of God we see humanity as it is meant to be; "the flesh", "the man" as God intended, unequalled and unmatched in any other human being.

John uses the same word for 'dwelling' in writing in Revelation of how the Father and Son shall dwell with men, and shall be their sole light, the only light that shines forth in their experience and existence. These ideas are all used here in 1:14 and the context regarding what He is doing now in the hearts of His people. This gift of His life is therefore a pre-



experience, a foretaste, of the life we shall eternally experience. In this sense we "have eternal life" now. We live the life we shall eternally live- His life. Paul puts in another way when he says that the Spirit is given to us as the foretaste or deposit guaranteeing our final salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

How exactly was the word made flesh in the person of Jesus? It was not simply a question of the nature of His birth. 'The word' was a title given to the Lord in recognition of His achievement in being and becoming the 'word made flesh'. It wasn't something which automatically happened to the Lord, as an irresistible process in which He played no part. The Lord's Old Testament allusions, His familiarity with and use of His Father's words doubtless had a lot to do with His becoming 'the word made flesh'. If Paul alluded to the words of the Lord Jesus once every four verses on average, it is to be expected that the Son of God quoted and alluded to His Father's word even moreso. And this is what we find, when we search the Lord's words for their allusions to the Old Testament.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

The level, depth and multiplicity of Old Testament allusions becomes the more amazing when we accept that these were spoken words, some of them clearly spoken unprepared and off-the-cuff. Literature can be crafted to pack multiple allusions. But when a speaker produces such a depth of allusion, one can only marvel at his intellectual depth. But with the Lord, it reflects His utter familiarity with the Father's word, grasping the real spirit of it all. He breathed it, thought it, spoke it, lived it. And in all He said, this was reflected. He truly was "the word made flesh". The following are just a few examples from the first words of Jesus; but the list can be continued. The simple fact is that on average, the Lord is alluding to the Old Testament at least 3 times in every verse! This means that every phrase of every sentence He is recorded as speaking- is alluding to His Father's word. It would've been like an orphaned son 'finding' his late father's words. He would read the words with such delight, and somehow eagerly pick up their sense in the way nobody else could.

#### *The Words Of Jesus*

#### *Old Testament Allusions*

Mt. 3:15 Suffer it to be so now: for  
thus it becometh us to fulfil all  
righteousness.

Ez. 18:19,21 fulfil righteousness

Mt. 4:4 It is written, Man shall not  
live by bread alone, but by every

Dt. 8:3 direct quote

word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God

Mt. 4:7 It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Dt. 6:16 direct quote

Mt. 4:10 Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Dt. 6:13 direct quote

Mt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Ps. 40:17; Is. 41:17; 61:1

Mt. 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: Is. 61:1-3; 66:2

for they shall be comforted. Is. 40:1

Mt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek: Ps. 37:11,20; Is. 60:21; Prov. 22:24,25; 25:8,15

for they shall inherit the earth. Gen. 15:7,8; Ex. 32:13

Mt. 5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Gen. 49:18; Ps. 17:15; 119:20; Jer. 23:6; Is. 45:24; 51:1; 55:1; 65:13

Mt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 2 Sam. 22:26,27; Ps. 18:25,26

Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Ex. 33:20; Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Is. 6:5; 38:3,11

If you follow through some of those allusions- and there are surely many more that I've not picked up- it becomes apparent that the Lord had a mind capable of operating on several different levels of allusion at once. So it was not simply that He was hyper-familiar with His Father's word. He had the intellectual ability, with all the intelligence of God's very own Son, to think and speak on several levels at once. Hence His words were absolutely *full* of God's thoughts and words. He was so fully and deeply "the word made flesh". And in analysing *from where* in the Old Testament the Lord quoted, we find that He had His favourite places- just as we'd expect from a genuine man. He appears to have been especially fond of the references to the "Servant" in the latter half of Isaiah; and also of the Psalms. He quotes from them both literally and freely, with all the confidence and appropriacy of a person who is thoroughly familiar with the text. But the way and extent to which He applied it all to Himself makes Him in very reality "the word made flesh".

It wasn't only in words but in actions too that the Lord was the word made flesh. The Lord Jesus lived life; He didn't just let events happen to Him. Much as I respected Harry Whittaker both as an individual and an expositor, I can never understand why throughout his

monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, he repeatedly makes the point that the Lord Jesus didn't go around consciously trying to fulfil Bible prophecy. My reading of the Gospels tells me that the Lord did do exactly this. The writers stress that He did action X or spoke word Y in order to fulfil Bible prophecy A and B. He consciously made the word flesh in Himself. A case can be made that He carefully planned out His ministry; He didn't just let events happen to Him. I don't find it hard to believe that He consciously engineered the timing of His own death to be at Passover time, after a three and a half year public ministry. He purposefully seems to have pressed all the buttons in Jewish expectations to lead them to revolt against the dashed expectations they had of Him. His actions in the temple could be read as almost asking to be killed. He knew what makes people tick and act to an extent we can't begin to understand. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:60). He laid down His life- it wasn't taken from Him.

*1:15 John testifies of him and cries out, saying: This was he of whom I said: He that comes after me is ranked above me! For he was senior to me-* The record of John urgently crying out is perhaps mentioned because John was preaching to some who considered John the Baptist as the saviour, and were focused upon him rather than the Lord Jesus. John's message repeatedly featured his statements that he was nothing and the Lord everything.

John's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4- Boaz told him that "I am after thee", but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

1:16- see on Eph. 3:19.

*Of his fullness we all received, with grace upon grace-* As noted on :14, the allusion has been to Moses nervously beholding God's glory and the declaration of His Name, Yahweh the God full of grace and truth. Moses was seen as the unapproachable acme of spirituality; but now all who have perceived the Lord's glory have seen as Moses did. And so much more. That fullness of the name declared in Ex. 34:4-6 ["A God full of..." grace and truth] has now been received by us. And it is piled on- grace upon grace. We are not like Moses merely beholding a theoretical statement of these things, but actually participating in them and receiving them, through the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is clearly in view as "grace" is used, 'gift', so often referring to the gift of the Spirit.

"His fullness" is literally 'His filling'. The word and idea is often used in the context of being filled with the Spirit. We have been filled with what the Lord Jesus was full of- the Spirit, the characteristics of the Name. Again, the idea of filling suggests something done to us, so long as we are open to it, rather than a self-filling by our own intellectual effort. If we are in the body of Christ, in that body we receive "the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Eph. 3:19 is specific that it is through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the "inner man", "in our hearts by faith", that we are "filled with all the fullness of God". Through the Comforter, the gift of the Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", "your joy may be filled up" (Jn. 16:24

s.w.); hence the Lord's disappointment that at that time, "sorrow has filled up your heart" (Jn. 16:6). He wished for that to be displaced by the filling of the Spirit, which would be of joy and not sadness. The Lord's spirit of joy would be filled up in the hearts of His followers, "within themselves" (Jn. 17:13). The reference is continually to internal filling, "within", rather than to the external miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Rom. 15:13 uses the same word: "The God of hope fill you [up] with all joy and peace... through the power of the Holy Spirit". The Lord ascended to Heaven and received the Spirit so that He might fill up all things of the new creation (Eph. 4:10). And thus Eph. 5:18 simply exhorts: "Be filled with the Spirit". We are to be open to it, and we shall be filled with it. The same word and appeal is to be found in Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:9; 2:10; 4:12. It is a major New Testament teaching that cannot be ignored. Hence John later appeals to his converts to allow themselves to be filled with joy (1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12).

The Father's whole spirit / attitude is of wanting to lavish grace. Our spirit likewise must not be mean- totting up the cost of all the things the visitors have eaten, etc. But God's lavishing of grace is not only in material things, but supremely in His patient forgiveness and salvation towards us. Are we super abounding in forgiveness, or do we grudgingly offer it only upon evident repentance from others? Such legalism is associated with Moses, but grace and truth, "grace upon grace", came by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:16). Grace is 'ever increasing' ("grace upon grace") in that as we grow in Christ, we perceive that grace more and more. God not only forgives, but He *delights* in doing so (Is. 62:14; Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love.

1:17 *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ-* The Lord is here presented as the mediator of a different covenant, with far superior blessing mediated. The contrast is between the law being "given", and the gift / grace of the Spirit 'coming'. We have not been given a set of commandments and left to get on with it. Grace and truth have come to us, and we saw on :16 that these things have entered within our very hearts. There are many Christians today who have received nothing from their religion but a set of commandments 'given' to them; they need to open themselves to allow the coming of grace into their hearts, the gift of the Spirit. We have just read that it was the personality of the Lord Jesus which was full of grace and truth (:14). But His personality, His Spirit, enters ['comes'] to us. For through the Comforter, the promised Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", He 'comes' to us, in the fullness of His personality and character (Jn. 14:18). John's later greeting to his converts "Grace be with you... in truth" (2 Jn. 3) was therefore no mere standard introduction to a letter; he believed that grace and truth really could enter them in abundance, and he wished this for them.

1:18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known-* "Made Him known" or [AV] "declared" is another allusion to the declaration of God's Name and the fullness of His character and glory in physical form to Moses (see on Ex. 32:30-32; Lk. 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). Again, all believers are positioned with Moses, who was denied his request to see God. But effectively, we have seen God in His Son; he who perceives / sees the Son has seen the Father. John parallels the word becoming

flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is a reference to the declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God.

John here makes clear allusion to Moses. This alludes to Moses being unable to see God, whereas the Lord now is cuddled in the bosom of the Father- such closeness, such a soft image, even now in his heavenly glory! The Lord declared God's character in His perfect life and above all on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Again, the making known or declaration of God is something done to us. And it is done to us by the Lord Jesus through His Spirit. We are given "the spirit of... knowledge in the revelation [declaring / making known] of Him" (Eph. 1:17).

1:19 *And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him: Who are you?-* We wonder if that delegation included the zealot Saul of Tarsus, for as noted elsewhere, he continually alludes to the words and character of John the Baptist. These priests and Levites had been sent from the Jerusalem Pharisees, with whom Paul was associated (:24).

1:20 *He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed: I am not the Christ!-* This is a play on ideas. We would rather expect: 'He denied that he was the Christ'. But John did not deny- i.e. that Jesus was the Christ; he proclaimed that *he* was not the Christ, but Jesus *was*. The same word for "confessed" is to be found in 9:22, where any who confessed Jesus as Christ was to be put out of the synagogue. It was this threat which kept many from believing openly in the Lord, and some were even led to deny the Lord Jesus as Messiah and instead claim to be followers of John the Baptist. But John points out that John the Baptist bravely refused to deny Jesus as Christ, he confessed Him as Christ.

John's Gospel features the Lord Jesus confidently stating "I am...". The context is set for this by the way John's Gospel begins by describing how John the Baptist said "I am not..." ("I am not the Messiah", Jn. 1:20; 3:28; "I am not [Elijah]", Jn. 1:21; "I am not worthy", Jn. 1:27. By confessing his own weakness, who he was not, John the Baptist was paving the way for the recognition and acceptance of Jesus. And our self-abnegation will do likewise.

1:21 *And they asked him: What then? Are you Elijah? And he said: I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered: No-* John knew surely that he was the Elijah prophet- for he consciously was preparing the way of Messiah and calling Israel to repentance. He was preaching in the very wilderness area from where Elijah had been taken up at the conclusion of his ministry; and he surely consciously chose to dress with the hairy garment and leather belt which had been Elijah's badge of office (1 Kings 1:8; 2:13,14). It's also been pointed out that the Essenes and other Jewish groups at the time taught self-baptism, whereas John was consciously baptizing people himself, as if he saw himself as specifically preparing them for something. The Lord Himself of course understood John to have been the Elijah prophet. And yet- John denies he is Elijah, but focuses instead on how he is but a "voice". I therefore conclude that his humility was such that he was totally downplaying his office- as if to say 'I am so much a mere voice, that effectively I'm not the Elijah prophet- the message I preach is

so far more important than the office I bear'. Those who bear 'offices' in the church of Jesus would do well to have his spirit. Perhaps this is why he seems to have made very few personal disciples- although thousands were baptized by him, having been so impressed by his message. The Epistles of Clement number his disciples at about 30; and Jn. 4:1 comments that the Lord Jesus made more disciples than John did. I take this as a fine reflection upon his selfless witness, focusing so much on his message rather than developing any personal following. He was 'the friend of the bridegroom', the one who arranged the marriage of the bridegroom and sought out the bride. And that, really, is what we are about too, with all the sense of dedication and earnestness which a such a person has when aiming to find a partner for one they know to be a truly good man.

*1:22 They replied to him: Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. How do you describe yourself?*- This recalls the concern of the local Roman governors to have some reason for sending Paul to Rome for trial. The Jewish angst about men like John the Baptist was not because they had done anything wrong, but because of the hard to define touching of conscience achieved by their preaching of the Lord. The AV "What sayest thou of thyself?" alludes to the way that a teacher was supposed to confidently introduce themselves and their mission in words which were uniquely theirs. The Lord alludes to this when He insists that He does not "speak of Myself" (12:49; 14:10) but only speaks the Father's words. Perhaps He learnt that from John's example, who refused to speak of himself but just quoted the Father's words (:23).

*1:23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord-* When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. See on Lk. 3:7.

"Make straight" translates a Greek word which without doubt means "immediate", or in old English "straightway". It is translated like this multiple times. The way for the Lord Messiah to come to Jerusalem in glory could have been made immediate if Israel had truly responded to John's message. There was therefore a passion and urgency in John's call for repentance. "The way of the Lord" is the term later used for the Christian path (e.g. Acts 18:25). The implication is that the Lord is ready to come any moment, is on His way to Zion- and the quicker we make His way "straight", the quicker He will arrive.

*1:24 These priests and Levites had been sent from the Pharisees-* As noted on :19, Saul may well have been amongst them. The message of John the Baptist would have been another of the goads of conscience which he was kicking against by refusing to accept the Lord.

*1:25 Again they asked him: Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?*- Like many today, they mistakenly assumed that to baptize people, you need authority. They also indicate their belief that before Messiah's revelation, there is to be mass baptisms of Jews. The command to all in Christ to go forth and preach-and-baptize (the

command is all one) would have been shocking to a first century Jewish audience, who believed that only Messiah Himself or “the prophet” could baptize (Jn. 1:25). The implication of the Lord’s command was that all in Him are in fact Him, in their preaching of Him.

John’s humility is brought out by the way John fields the question as to whether he is “the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?”. He could have answered: ‘I am the Elijah prophet’ - for the Lord Himself said of John that “this is Elijah”, with perhaps conscious reference back to this question (Mt. 11:14). But John didn’t answer that way. His reply was simply to speak of the greatness of Christ and his unworthiness to be His herald (Jn. 1:26,27). John’s humility is brought out yet further by reflection on the fact that he clearly baptized huge numbers of people, and yet also had a group of people known as ‘the disciples of John’. Clearly he didn’t intend to found a sect, and was so taken up with trying to prepare people for the Lord’s coming that he simply wished to lead them to some level of repentance and baptize them, without necessarily making them part of ‘his disciples’. John’s low self-estimation is seen in how he denied that he was “Elijah” or the “prophet” whom the Jews expected to come prior to Messiah (Jn. 1:21). The Lord Himself clearly understood John as the Elijah prophet- “this is Elijah” (Mt. 11:14). He said of John. John wasn’t being untruthful, nor did he misunderstand who he was. For he associates his “voice” with the voice of the Elijah prophet crying in the wilderness, and appropriates language from the Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 to his own preaching. His denial that he was ‘that prophet’ therefore reflects rather a humility in him, a desire for his message to be heard for what it was, rather than any credibility to be given to it because of his office. There’s a powerful challenge for today’s preacher of the Gospel.

*1:26 John answered: I baptize in water; but in the midst of you stands one whom you do not know-* The other Gospels all go on to say “I baptize in water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”. That latter teaching is pointedly omitted in John, and we wonder why, given the frequent references to the gift of the Spirit earlier in this chapter. Perhaps the idea is that those addressed in the synoptics were indeed baptized with both water and Spirit, but the group addressed here were baptized in water but rejected baptism of the Spirit, because they refused to know or recognize the Lord Jesus as Messiah. The gift of the Spirit involves the Lord Jesus being in our midst, and He was in their midst, but they did not know or recognize Him; rather like the Corinthians having the Spirit amongst them, but not being spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1).

*1:27 He that comes after me, his shoelace I am not worthy to untie-* Untying the shoelaces, or carrying the sandals, are idioms for ‘being a herald’. John doesn’t mean that he did not do this because he was not worthy to do so; he means that he was doing the work of a herald, which he was not worthy to do. His witness to the Lord is continually laced with his own confession of weakness and unworthiness. Given that his moral standards were apparently radically higher than those around him, such humility has much to commend it. It ought to be the hallmark set upon all our witness to the Lord, and it will make our appeal the more compelling. Perhaps John was somehow aware that any who would not carry the Lord’s cross with Him were “not worthy” of Him (Mt. 10:38 s.w.).

*1:28 This incident took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing-* Wherever this place was, it was “on the other side” of the Jordan river, on the East bank. We wonder why John chose to baptize there, rather than on the West bank. The other

name given in the manuscripts for this place is Bethabara, 'house of the ford / crossing point'. Perhaps John wanted them to perceive their baptism as a crossing over Jordan with Joshua / Jesus into a promised land.

Perhaps John's Gospel purposefully inserts the comment that John the Baptist baptized many people after stating that he was not worthy to be doing what he was doing as the Lord's herald. It is as if to draw a link between his humility, and the success in preaching which he had. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). How terribly wrong it is for missionary service to be gloried in and somehow a reason for those who do it to become puffed up in self-importance.

1:29 *The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, and he said: Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!*- John the Baptist beheld the Lord Jesus walking, and commented that He *was then*, as He walked, the lamb of God (with all the sacrificial overtones of that phrase), that *takes away*, right then, three years before the cross, the sin of the world. The essence of what the Lord did on the cross was in fact ongoing throughout His life. John saw every man as in the desperate, urgent intensity of Passover night, needing to identify with the slain lamb. John sees Jesus and says "Look! The lamb of God...". The three words for "see", "says" and "Look!" are uniquely repeated in Jn. 19:26, where again we have the lamb of God, now sacrificed, on the cross. "Takes away" is the word used by John to describe the cry of the Jews: "Away with Him!" (19:15). Here we see how human volition, however bad, is used within God's plan of salvation. The "world" whose sins are taken away is the world of believing persons, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Lord was thereby the creator of that world. The "world" simply cannot be understood as the literal universe. For it is persons who sin and whose sin is taken away by the Lord.

1:30 *This is he of whom I said: After me comes a man who is ranked above me. For he was senior to me*- Again we see John's repeated self-deprecation in presenting the Lord Jesus to others. John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is... essentially my superior- C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274. See on Jn. 8:58.

1:31 *I did not perceive him, but so he should be made manifest to Israel, for this reason I come baptizing in water*- John has just lamented that his audience do not know or perceive the Messiahship of Jesus (:26). Now he uses the same word in saying that he too did not know or "perceive Him". He is seeking to build a bridge between himself and his audience, admitting that he who is now heralding Jesus as Messiah did not at one stage "perceive Him", presumably referring to how whilst they were growing up and in their 20s, John did not perceive that the Lord was in fact God's Son. This shows that John did not spend his entire time from childhood to 30 years old in the deserts. He had met his relative Jesus of Nazareth in that period, but had not perceived Him as Son of God and Messiah. This itself is an artless testament to the Lord's perfection and humility; He who never sinned, neither by omission nor commission, was never perceived as anything unduly special. Not even by someone as



spiritually inclined as John, who would surely have heard the stories of the virgin birth from his mother Elizabeth.

One obvious encouragement to be hopeful in our witness is the Biblical implication that all men and women, potentially, have the possibility of responding to the Gospel. It was so in the first century- John the Baptist had the *potential* to convert all Israel, for He came "that all men through him might believe" (Jn. 1:7), so that Christ "should be made manifest to (all) Israel" (Jn. 1:31). The entire nation *could* have converted; but they didn't.

"That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias?" (Jn. 1:25). See on Mt. 17:11. For Israel to call upon themselves the Name of the Lord when they repent, it is fitting that Elijah baptizes them into His Name. Zech. 13:1 may hint at latter day baptisms among repentant Jewry: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David... for sin and for uncleanness". Israel will call upon themselves the Name of Yahweh our righteousness by being baptized into the Name of the Father and Son (Jer. 33:16).

1:32 *And John testified, saying: I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him-* As noted on :31, John did not perceive that his relative Jesus was God's Son. It was not until he saw the Spirit descending on the Lord that he realized that his relative Jesus was the Son of God. It was by the activity of the Spirit that he came to this perception. His earlier not knowing or perceiving who Jesus was thereby enabled him to build a common platform with the Jews who still would not know or perceive Him (:24 s.w.).

1:33 - see on Mt. 3:8.

*I would not have perceived him except He that sent me to baptize in water, He had said to me: Upon whomsoever you shall see the Spirit descend and remain upon him, the same is he that baptizes in the Holy Spirit-* As noted on :31 and :32, John was preaching preparation for the coming of Messiah without knowing who Messiah was. It was not until the Lord's baptism that he realized. We wonder why, therefore, he met Jesus with the comment that 'I have need to be baptized of You, and not You by me'. Maybe he said that out of deep respect of his relative Jesus as a better man than him, which again reflects his humility. For it was only after the Lord's baptism that the Spirit came upon Him, and John realized that this was the Son of God.

The Spirit descending *and remaining* upon the Lord was the sign that He was God's Son. The same word, often translated "abide", is used of how the Spirit is to both come and abide with all believers after they receive it at baptism. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was intended to come and dwell / remain within the hearts of the recipients (Jn. 14:17 s.w.). The gift of the Spirit is the proof that God abides / remains within us if we allow the Spirit to abide / remain within our hearts; and this is the proof that we are "the sons of God" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). The Lord's baptism is therefore intended to be programmatic for us all. All who are baptized receive the gift of the Spirit, which accounts for that zeal and verve within them after

baptism; but so many do not let it abide. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but by the time Paul wrote to them, they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:34 *I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God*- John's later references to our need to testify that Jesus is Son of God, to witness publicly to what we "have seen", is therefore all an appeal to follow the example of John in witnessing.

1:35 *The next day John was standing with two of his disciples*- Out of those who came out into the desert to be baptized, some remained with John and devoted themselves to his teaching. We must remember that not until he had baptized the Lord did John understand that He was the Son of God. We can better understand why his disciples needed to be properly baptized into Jesus in Acts 19; for if they were John's disciples before the Lord's baptism and had then returned from the desert, they would not have been taught that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

1:36 *And he watched Jesus as he walked and said: Behold! The Lamb of God!*- We sense here John's deep love and admiration of the Lord, watching Him from a distance and uttering words of adoration. Again we see his selfless spirit, asking his own followers to instead follow Him. John's usage of the term "Lamb of God" suggests he was one of the few who perceived that the Lord must die, and His blood was required to save Israel.

We can read of the cross, speak of it; and yet totally fail to realize the powerful imperatives which abound in its' message. Andrew and John heard John the Baptist call Jesus the "lamb of God", and followed Him, in apparent acceptance that He was the Messianic sacrifice. And yet in reality, they could not at that time accept the saying that Jesus was to die at Jerusalem in sacrifice, and that they were to shoulder His cross and follow Him there.

1:37 *And the two disciples, hearing him speak, followed after Jesus*- The followers of John went off and followed the Lord. This was just what John wanted. This is in sharp contrast to the gaining of personal following which so many Christian preachers have been guilty of. The two disciples were Andrew (:40) and presumably John, who always avoids mentioning his own name in his preaching of the Gospel which we have transcribed here in the Gospel of John. John's encouragement of others to "follow after Jesus" is therefore based upon his own personal example. And in this again we have a pattern for our witness.

1:38 *Jesus turned around, and observing they were following him, said to them: What do you seek? And they replied: Rabbi (we would say Teacher). Where are you staying?*- The disciples were asked: "What seek ye?", and they reply: "Where dwellest thou?". Remember that this is John, one of them, recording their response (see on :37). It's as if he's pointing out how inappropriate was their response to Jesus; rather like the record of Peter wanting to build a tent for Jesus, Moses and Elijah so they stay a bit longer. *They* had responded inappropriately- and yet they urged their hearers and readers to respond appropriately.

John is highlighting how they misunderstood. They asked where the Lord was abiding that night, thinking in terms of a physical house, and for a limited time- maybe just that night. But as John will demonstrate at length, the Lord abides not in houses, nor temporarily, but permanently in the hearts of believers through His Spirit. 'Abiding' is a major theme in John. Several times he records how the Lord Jesus 'abode' in houses or areas during His ministry (Jn. 1:38,39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6), culminating in the Lord's words that He would

still abide with them through the Spirit gift, but would physically leave them soon (Jn. 14:25). The repeated teaching of the Lord is that actually, He will permanently abide in the heart of whoever believes in Him. And all the stories of Him 'abiding' a night here or there prepare the way for this. Those hearts become like the humble homes of Palestine where He spent odd nights- the difference being that there is now a permanent quality to that 'abiding', "for ever". This is how close and real the Lord can come to us, if His words truly abide in us.

*1:39 He said to them: Come, and you shall see. They went therefore, and saw where he stayed; and they stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour-* As noted on :38, the Lord abides in hearts through the Spirit. But that will only be perceived if we ourselves come after Him, consciously following Him in our thinking and life decisions.

Consider the way that Jesus says: "Come and see"- and somehow Philip finds himself soon afterwards using those very same words when talking with his friend Nathanael: "Come and see" (:46). And so reflection upon the actual words of Jesus, a love of them, allowing them to abide in us, is a major part of what it means to be a Christian, a Christ-like one. Consciously or unconsciously, we shall begin to speak, think and reason as He did; to have His spirit in us, both developing it consciously, and being open to receiving it. This is where those red letter Bibles, which print the words of Jesus in red, are really a helpful focus for us.

In John, the Lord often invites men to "come" (Jn. 1:39; 4:16; 5:40; 7:37; 21:12); and members of "the bride" also, quite naturally and artlessly, invite others to "come" too (Jn. 1:41,45,46; 4:29). My point is that the natural response of the one who hears is to say to others "come". It won't be something which has to be done as a great act of the will, we won't need to be fed with ideas by some preaching Committee; he that hears will say, "Come".

*1:40 One of the two that had heard John and had followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother-* We wonder why in :35 and :37 "the two" were not immediately introduced to us in the narrative as Andrew and the disciple whom Jesus loved (John). I suggest it is in order to help us play Bible television with the scene, of men totally transfixed in observing the Son of God; all personal issues, even their names, became subsumed beneath He was and is all and in all.

*1:41 The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon; and he said to him: We have found the Messiah (we would say Christ)-* Andrew "found" Christ and then [s.w.] 'finds' his brother for Christ. What we hear and learn we naturally desire to spread to others. To immediately share ("the first thing he did") the good news about the Lord Jesus is something which comes absolutely naturally to those who find Him. It is this spirit which needs to be, and indeed can be, even in those who were as it were schooled into Christ through a Christian upbringing.

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Mark's record of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by him as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still

incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

1:42 *He took him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said: You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (we call him Peter)*- There is reason to think that like Paul, Peter is held up as a pattern for all who would afterwards believe. The way Peter is brought to Jesus and named by him has evident connection with the bringing of Eve [cp. the whole bride of Christ] to Adam [cp. Christ] to be named (Gen. 2:22,23 = Jn. 1:41,42).

"Son of John" is "Barjona", and could as well be read as 'Son of Jonah'. The Lord's comment 'Simon bar Jona' may have reflected His understanding that Simon Peter had the characteristics of Jonah even then. The incident of Peter being called to accept the Gentiles occurred in Joppa, where Jonah likewise had struggled with the problem of preaching to the Gentiles.

"Cephas" or "Peter" means literally 'rocky', and Peter of course is portrayed as anything but rock-like in his faith. He started drowning on the water, denied the Lord, was later influenced by the Judaizers to betray the principles of Gentile salvation by grace. But with righteousness imputed, he was counted indeed as a rock. He did endure to the end; and the Lord sees not as we do. He saw Peter's basic faith as solid and loved him for it; the temporary moments of weakness were insignificant in the final picture of the man. We too need to stop focusing upon the temporal failures of others and respect them for their continued faith; for so many fall away from their basic faith despite appearing the pictures of stable church members.

1:43 *The next day Jesus decided to go into Galilee; and he found Philip. Jesus said to him: Follow me*- Jesus 'found' Philip, and he in his witnessing 'found' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). Our finding of men for the Lord reflects His finding of us. The Lord realized His new converts were from Galilee; perhaps they even knew Him from His earlier life there. He may have fixed holes in their boats for all we know. But He realized that their faith would be deepened by having to witness to Him, and demonstrate their association with Him, in their home area. See on 2:1. The command to witness is largely for our benefit; for we become more deeply conscious of our faith when we have to explain it to others, especially family members and acquaintances.

1:44 *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter*- "City" is misleading. These fishing villages were just hamlets, collections of houses where most people were either relatives or related by marriage. A fair case can be made that many of the disciples were related to each other. See on :43.

1:45- see on Lk. 2:49.

*Philip found Nathanael and said to him: We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote! Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*- See on :41 for the significance of finding others for the Lord as a result of our being found by Him. Truly, God is in search of man; and so is His Son. As we distribute invitations to this world to know Him, He is not indifferent. He wishes their success. All the apparent disinterest in our witness is not met by Him indifferently, nor should we ever consider it a reflection of His displeasure or distance from us. The way Philip speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" suggests that they

had earlier known Him, but never had any clue that He could be the Messiah. John the Baptist likewise knew Him but didn't realize He was Messiah until the theophany after the Lord's baptism. In this we see an artless insight into the Lord's utter perfection; that despite never sinning, nobody had the slightest suspicion that He was God's Son or Messiah. He achieved His sublime perfection and the good deeds that went with it somehow incognito.

1:46 *And Nathanael said to him: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him: Come and see-* Like many primitive people, there was the sense that all people from a particular town or area are "not good". We have here an insight into the Lord's utter humanity; He was known as one "out of" Nazareth, He spoke and acted like a man from Nazareth. We can also reflect that His earlier history of having been born in Bethlehem was presumably unknown to people. Mary and Joseph had kept all that to themselves, and the Lord Himself had not spoken of it.

The teaching of both Old and New Testaments concerning the ultimate value and meaning of the individual person was radical stuff, so radical that it was rarely fully understood even amongst the people of God. For example, it was important to know where a person was from- because people from certain areas were understood as being a certain person. Hence the Jewish refusal to accept that Jesus could be Messiah, because He was from Galilee, and "out of Galilee arises no prophet" (Jn. 7:52), indeed nothing good could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46). This led to what we would call today stereotyping and racism. People didn't travel very far, and so this of itself reinforced some of the stereotypes. Horizons were extremely limited for the average person. Vergil could say that "to know one Greek is to know them all"; and Philo likewise made total generalizations about Egyptians in his writings. Paul refers to the common maxim that "Cretans are *always* liars... lazy drunkards" (Tit. 1:12)- but goes on to appeal to the Cretan believers to *not* be like that, to challenge and break the stereotype! It's the same with the Corinthians- the very term "Corinthian" meant a drunkard, shameless man. And yet it was in this very city that so many were called to the Lord, and He attempted to turn them away from that very stereotype they had been born into. And the very fact that the Son of God was from "that despised Nazareth" was the ultimate deconstruction of this understanding- that leaders, kings etc. could only come from some areas and not others. We need to ask ourselves whether we don't follow the same kind of stereotypes when we assume things about people- he's from *that* family, she's from *that* country, they're from *that* church / ecclesia... These attitudes deny the wonderful meaning and value of the individual of which our Lord showed us in His teaching, life, death and current work amongst us.

He was "despised and rejected of men", as Isaiah had foretold so long before. It's perhaps hard to feel from our distance the extent to which Galilee was despised by the Jerusalem Jews. Although Jerusalem to Galilee is only around 100 km., "only in exceptional circumstances will someone living in Jerusalem have travelled to the distant province of Galilee, as the *Life* of Josephus shows... a journey to Rome would be more likely for a better class Jerusalem dweller than one to provincial Galilee, which was the back of beyond... the people of Judaea despised the uneducated Galileans and were not particularly interested in this remote province". Yet it was exactly from *here* that the Son of God came! It was from the parochial, the ordinary, from the nothing special, that God's holy child came forth to change this world. So if you too feel a nobody, a cut below the rest, held back by your background... this is the very wonder of God manifestation. It's through you and me, the kids

from the backstreets, the uneducated, the duffers, the dumbers... that God Almighty reveals Himself to this world.

1:47 *Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, and said of him: Behold, a true Israelite in whom is no deceit!*- This is surely another case of imputed righteousness; for Nathanael had just discounted the Lord's Messiahship on the basis that He was unlikely to be a good man, seeing He hailed from Nazareth. The allusion is to Ps. 32:2 "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile / deceit". There is deceit in the spirit of every man; but imputed righteousness means that this is not the case for the believer before God.

The Lord's basic understanding of us is that we are to become brethren *in Him*. He ever sought to teach the disciples to not only worship and respect Him, but to rise up to emulate His example, and to act and feel as part of Him. When He saw Nathanael under the fig tree, He commented that here was a man who had the good side of Jacob, an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. But the Lord then goes on to liken *Himself* to Jacob, saying that Angels would ascend and descend upon Him as they had upon Jacob (Jn. 1:47,51). What He was basically trying to say to His new disciple was that 'You're like Jacob! But, I'm like Jacob too. And you will powerfully realize the significance of this a bit later on'. He was seeking always to build up an identity between Himself and His followers. This is so different to admiring a man as one admires a picture, and assenting to him as a leader. This is about a unique and intimate relationship, bonding and identity with Him. Nathanael no doubt puzzled over the Lord's enigmatic words, as we likely have also done. His enigmatic style was to provoke just such reflection, to lead Nathanael to realize the force of the identification with Him which the Lord was inviting.

1:48- see on Mk. 7:29.

*Nathanael said to him: How is it you know me?*- The Lord had not mentioned Nathanael's name; instead He had imputed righteousness to him (see on :47) and called him a man in whom is no guile, i.e. He had used a Messianic title (1 Pet. 2:22) about a man. So by asking "How is it you know me?", I suggest Nathanael is questioning how this man from Nazareth could talk of him in such exalted terms.

*Jesus answered: Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*- An Israelite dwelling under his fig tree is the language of Israel at peace with God, especially in the future Messianic Kingdom of God on earth (Mic. 4:4). The Lord is saying that even before Nathanael had been called to the Gospel, he had been foreknown and had been imagined as in the future Kingdom, written in the book of the redeemed from the foundation of the world. This predestination is an aspect of God's grace, as Paul explains in Romans 8. As noted above, the Lord had imputed righteousness to Nathanael, and asks him to respond to the fact that he had been chosen for the Kingdom from the beginning.

1:49 *Nathanael answered him: Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are King of Israel*- When the disciples first encounter Jesus, they heap upon Him the Messianic titles of Judaism: Rabbi, Messiah, the one described in the Law and prophets, Son of God, King of Israel. And yet the other Gospels bring out how Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God is in fact due to a special revelation from the Father, and was somehow a seminal point of faith and comprehension which Peter had reached (Mt. 16:16,17). Surely the point of the apparent contradiction is to show that over time, the disciples started to put meaning into words; the

Jewish terms and titles which they had once so effortlessly used, they came to use with real appreciation. We have shown elsewhere that a mature appreciation of the name and titles of the Father and Son is indeed a mark of spiritual maturity.

1:50 *Jesus replied: Because I said to you: I saw you underneath the fig tree- do you believe? You shall see greater things than these!*- Grasping the wonder of foreknowledge and predestination (see on :48) is indeed a reason to believe. But the wonders of our personal salvation are far smaller than the greatness of God's total activity in and through His Son (:51).

Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree when he was called to the Lord- and this was apparently the classic place where trainee rabbis sat and studied. If this is indeed the case, then the Lord's calling of him to be a disciple / follower was saying: 'Don't seek to be a rabbi. Be a disciple / follower of me, as a way of life, always'. Nathanael's focus was to be upon the wonder of God's work in His Son, rather than aiming to be a spiritual teacher of others. Our aim must be to make men and women sit at the Lord's feet and learn of Him themselves. Discipleship is to be what we are all our lives. Consider the contrast: 'disciples' in the schools of other rabbis expected to one day graduate and become teachers themselves, with disciples at *their* feet. But no, the Lord saw all of us, including those who have learnt of Him the longest and deepest, to always be disciples, awed by God's activity in His Son (:51).

1:51 *And he said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you. You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man-* See on :47 for the connections with Jacob, and Nathanael being a Jacob-ite.

The allusion to Jacob's vision of Gen. 28:18 is clear. That vision was to show Jacob the extent of Angelic care of Him- and this was repeated for Jesus. However, the context of v. 50 is that Nathanael marvelled at Jesus' knowledge. Jesus seems to be saying that they would see even greater spiritual revelation ("Heaven open") because of the ministry of the Angels to Him, ministering spiritual knowledge to Jesus to communicate to His disciples. This would imply that apart from directly ministering spiritual revelation to Jesus, the Angels also imparted specific 'physical' knowledge to Jesus- e. g. about Nathanael under the fig tree.

Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these... you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And Christ's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

"Hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" was a prophecy of what was to happen "hereafter", and it seems relevant to the cross. Heaven, in the sense of the Most Holy place, was opened by the veil being torn down at the Lord's death. By the blood-shedding of Jesus, the way into the Holiest was made manifest. There is evident allusion to Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching to

Heaven; and surely the Lord is saying that He is going to become the ladder to Heaven, linking Heaven and earth, when Heaven is opened by Him in the future. And that point was surely the crucifixion. Significantly, He says: "You will see...", another hint that the disciples, especially John, saw the crucifixion. They may well have "seen" in the Johannine sense of perceiving that there, unseen, Angels were ascending and descending in ministration. John also records how the Lord saw Himself as the gate / door (10:9), just as Jacob described what he had seen as "the gate of heaven". The stone upon which he slept, lifted up and anointed with oil to become the corner-stone of the house of God, Beth-el, was all prophetic of the Lord's death and rising up again (Eph. 2:20-22).

The theme of the Spirit is never far away in John's writings. "Greater things" is the language of what would happen when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was given (Jn. 14:12). The Lord foreknew Nathanael, but after His death the Spirit would be released [Angels ascending and descending] and under His command [upon the Son of Man] would be involved even more powerfully in the lives of God's children like Nathanael.



## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee-* I suggested on 1:43 that the Lord went to preach in Galilee because He wanted to take His new disciples back to their home areas and help them make public identification with Him before their families and friends. Chapter 1 closed with the conversion of Nathanael, who was from Cana (21:2). So the Lord's visits to Cana would have been to help Nathanael make a public witness and identification with the Lord.

*The mother of Jesus was there-*The incident at Cana shows her lack of perception of the true nature of her son's work at that time. The *mother of Jesus* is said to be *there*, and not to be *called*, as Jesus and his disciples were (Jn. 2:1,2), which suggests that she was following Him around, fascinated and prayerfully concerned as He began His ministry. He hadn't done any miracles before, so was she asking Him to begin His ministry with a miracle? She knew He had the power to do them- she had perceived that much. When the Lord speaks about His hour not having yet come, He is clearly alluding to His death. For this is how "the hour" is always understood in John's Gospel (Jn. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; 17:1). So Jesus replies to Mary's nudge 'make them some wine!' by saying that the time for His death has not yet come. He assumes that by 'wine' she means His blood. He assumes she is on a higher level of spiritual symbolism than she actually was. He wouldn't have done this unless He had previously communed with her on this level. But apparently she was no longer up to it. She was correct in expecting Him to do a miracle [for Cana was His beginning of miracles]; and she was right in thinking that the need for wine was somehow significant. But she didn't see the link to His death. Her perception was now muddled. Yet even at this time, she is not totally without spiritual perception. When she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. The world had ground her earlier spirituality away, but not totally. For it would in due time revive, to the extent that she would risk her life in standing by the Lord's cross, and then later join the early ecclesia (Acts 1:14).

2:2 *Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the marriage-* As noted on :1, they were invited, but Mary is said to be "there". The invitation confirms our suggestions in chapter 1, that the Lord was known to people in Galilee. He may well have known Nathanael, seeing that Nathanael was from Cana (21:2) and the Lord was invited to a wedding in Cana. He was known there- but all were surprised that the carpenter from Nazareth was in fact God's son and Messiah.

2:3 *When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine!-*

Although the Lord had never done miracles before He began His ministry, Mary sensed His ministry had now begun and that He could likely save the situation through a miracle. "Ran out of" translates a term elsewhere used about man's moral deficit before God, our need for Him (Mt. 19:20; Mk. 10:21- even after apparently keeping all commandments; Lk. 15:14; Rom. 3:23; 1 Cor. 12:24; Heb. 4:1; 12:15). These people were in moral need of the wine of the new covenant; but they didn't realize their need, nor all that was being done to meet it. This was to teach Nathanael who was from Cana (21:2- perhaps the invitation was because it was a member of his family getting married). For he had been amazed that the Lord had foreknown him, sitting under the fig tree. And he is being taught that on a far wider level, the Lord foreknows human need for His blood and life, and would provide even whilst they were yet sinners and ignorant.

2:4 *Jesus said to her: Woman, what have I to do with you?*- When He says “What have you to do with me?” (AV), He seems to be struggling to dissociate Himself from her; for the idiom means ‘How am I involved with you?’ (2 Kings 3:13; Hos. 14:8). It can be that “My hour has not yet come” can bear the translation “Has not my hour come?” (Jn. 2:4), as if to imply that, as they had previously discussed, once His ministry started, their bond would be broken in some ways. And yet Mary understandably found this hard to live up to, and it took the cross to lead her to that level of commitment to her son’s cause.

*My hour is not yet come*- This may refer to the ‘hour’ of the cross, whereby the true wine / blood would be outpoured, that which had been offered before being inadequate. The governor of the feast, cp. the Jewish elders, “knew not whence it was” (2:9), using the same words to describe how they knew not from whence was the Lord, and didn’t ‘know’ / comprehend to where He was going in His death (7:27; 8:14; 19:9). The Lord saw His giving of His life blood on the cross as prefigured by His provision of wine to ignorant people in Cana in their unknown need. But He transforms that which is most ordinary- water- into that which is the most refined, fine wine. His ultimate provision for human need was not prefigured by turning wine into water, as we would expect if He were some pre-existent God who became man. Instead, the most ordinary, water, is turned into wine. It was His humanity which enabled our salvation.

Perhaps when Jesus said to Mary “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn. 2:4 RSV), He was trying to get her back to spiritual mindedness and is frustrated with her low level of spiritual perception. He tries to lead her back to a higher level by linking the giving of wine with His hour which was to come, i.e. the cross. In Lk. 1 her song shows how spiritually perceptive she was- now she seems to have lost that. She is concerned with the immediate and the material rather than the spiritual. “Woman” was a polite form of public address, but apparently it was unusual for a man to use it to his mother. The Lord felt and stressed that separation between her and Him right now at the start of His ministry, coming to a climax at His death where He told her that He was no longer her son but John was. She must have been *so* cut by this, if indeed as I have suggested it was the first time He had said this to her.

2:5- see on Jn. 2:1.

*His mother said to the servants: Whatever he commands you, do it!*- This uses three Greek words which recur in Mt. 7:24,26: “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them”. Mary had heard these words but applies them in a more material way rather than the spiritual, moral way which Jesus intended. Is this another indication she had slipped from her teenage intensity and spirituality by the time His ministry began?

The theme of John’s writings is that “the word” which was in the beginning, the word of the Gospel, the word of command which brought forth all creation in the first place, is the same word that has been made flesh in Jesus, and which can likewise work a powerful new creation in the lives of all who allow that word to abide in them. Hence the emphasis of John upon the manner in which the *word* of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to bring about amazing miracles. Even Josephus noted this unique feature of the Lord’s ministry: “Everything that he

[Jesus] performed through an invisible power he wrought by word and command". It can be argued that all the historical incidents recorded by John are exemplifications in visual terms of the principles outlined in the prologue in chapter 1.

*2:6 Nearby there were six stone waterpots, placed there for the Jewish custom of purifications, each holding 75 to 115 litres-* The idea was that Mosaic purification ritual was not the answer to human need. The Lord's life and blood, encased as it were within the strictures of the Mosaic system, was what was required. Waterpots of that size were all made of stone; but the point is made to emphasize how the Lord was like the stone of Daniel's image, a stone cut out from the earth. It was His humanity which was so necessary in order to bring forth the wine of the new covenant. The wine was poured out from the waterpots into another vessel; there was no way the servants would pour directly into the cups from a 100 litre capacity stone waterpot, that no man could carry alone. So the source of the new wine was in a sense hidden; and John has been developing the point that although John and the disciples knew of Jesus, His humanity had shielded their eyes from knowing what was within Him.

We note the super abundance of wine. At least 600 litres was created, maybe as much as 700 litres. The Lord would have left them with the question: 'What ever is such a huge amount of wine doing in our waterpots? Who put it there? Didn't we see you all pouring water into the pots, as if preparing for cleansing from some major defilement?'. The answer would have been: 'This is Jesus of Nazareth...'.

*2:7 Jesus said to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them to the brim-* "To the brim" again speaks of the vastness of the provision (see on :6). We need have no fear that our sins somehow cannot be dealt with by the Lord's sacrifice. His provision is of a massive scale. The filling demands reference back to how "of His fullness have all we received" (1:16). Again we see how historical incident in John's Gospel is an exemplification of the principles with which he begins in his prologue. We are filled with His fullness, His Spirit (see on 1:16), so that we might bear out of ourselves to others in their unperceived spiritual need.

*2:8 And he said to them: Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it-* "Draw out" is only used elsewhere in speaking of how the Samaritan woman drew out water from the well, which symbolized the water of life which believers in Jesus could now draw out to meet the thirst of others, drawing from the Spirit deep within themselves (4:7,15). So the servants who 'knew' the Lord's work were to draw out His wine to the Jewish leaders, those in the best places of the banquet, as they are elsewhere described. They took or better 'carried' the wine, as John envisages his converts taking or carrying the message of Jesus to others (2 Jn. 10 s.w.).

*2:9 When the master of the feast tasted the water which had now become wine, and not knowing where it came from (but the servants that had drawn the water knew), he called to the bridegroom-* The contrast between knowing / perceiving and not doing so continues the message of chapter 1. The Lord's servants knew Him, but the Jewish world generally did not. The way the wine was to be taken to the master of the feast may speak of the Lord's desire to convert the Jewish leadership; and in chapter 3 He calls Nicodemus the master of Israel (3:10). The proximity to this account makes us wonder whether Nicodemus was the master of

this feast in Cana; at the very least, the Lord's appeal to this "master" was repeated in His appeal to "the master of Israel" in the next but one historical incident which John records.

2:10 *And said to him: Everyone serves good wine first, and when all have drunk freely, serves something inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now!*- The wedding feast at Cana had been going on for some time, to the point that men had drunk so much wine that they could no longer discern its quality. For *methuo* = 'to drink to intoxication', not simply "drunk freely". The Lord didn't say, as I might have done, 'Well that's enough, guys'. He realised the shame of the whole situation, that even though there had been enough wine for everyone to have some, they had run out. And so He produced some more- actually, over 600 litres of it. He went along with the humanity of the situation in order to teach a lesson to those who observed what really happened.

The Lord clearly had no problem in making wine at Cana. Would He have shared a mug of wine with the boys when, say, someone had a birthday? And therefore would a 21st century Jesus have shared a beer with His fellow workers? Now in my image of Jesus I'm not sure He would have done. But perhaps in your image of Him, He would have. Apart from the memorial meeting, I don't drink, and haven't done for many years. I know how in many cultures this seems to erect a barrier between me and those I seek to make contact with. But when Jesus made the water into wine, He provided about 180 gallons [400 litres] of it. At a time when surely some were already rather the worse for wear from alcohol- for the master of the feast pointed out that the best wine [i.e. with higher alcohol content!] was brought out only when people couldn't tell the difference, because they had "well drunk" (Jn. 2:10- Gk. *methuo*, 'to drink to intoxication'). I wouldn't have done that. At least, not to that extent- for you can be sure, they drank it all up. But He did, so comfortable was He with His humanity. And this perhaps was what made all kinds of people so comfortable with Him, prostitutes and old grannies, kids and mafia bosses, saints 'n' aints. We seem so often ashamed of being human, indeed, some have taken their understanding of 'sinful human nature' to the extent that it's almost a sin to be alive. Whatever we say about human nature, we say about our Lord. Let's remember this. But Jesus was happy with who He was.

2:11 *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, thereby revealing his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*- "Jesus... manifested forth his glory" through his miracles. His miracles therefore were a demonstration of the character ("glory") of God, not just to relieve human grief as he came across it. Therefore they are all capable of allegorical interpretation; there are seven miracles in John called "signs". Contrast how the glory of God was manifested to Moses, who peeped at it from the rock. Yet Jesus was the glory of God, higher than the Angel who actually manifested the glory.

The real Christ must be the concealed basic pattern behind a person. But one of the problems in seeking to build up an image of the man Jesus is that He Himself didn't proclaim so much about Himself in so many words. He never specifically announces that He is Messiah- that fact is stated by who He was in life. His miracles were a *phanerosis*, a rendering apparent, of His glory (Jn. 2:11). The glory of God is essentially His character (Ex. 33:18). The Lord started to reveal this, to let this show, after age 30- beginning, it seems, with His *arche-miracle* of making the wine at Cana (Jn. 2:11 Gk.). But even that was a revealing of His glory to only a few- because even the governor of the feast thought that it was the bridegroom, and not Jesus, who had somehow pulled out new supplies of wine. The guests were drunk (see on

:10). The revealing of His glory, spoken of by John in such startling terms as His arch-miracle, was in fact only to the disciples and perhaps a few others who perceived what had happened. This, I submit, is how to understand the Biblical references to the glory which the Lord Jesus had "from the beginning"- i.e. of His life and His ministry, but which was only made apparent later. Certainly until that point at Cana, He somehow restrained that glory within His very ordinariness- to the extent that people were utterly shocked when He stood up in the synagogue and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah.

The language of "He manifested forth his glory" is used of how He would do so on the cross, which was to be a greater manifestation of his glory (see on Jn. 1:14). The historical incidents in John so often are a foretaste of the Lord's final death; for He lived the Spirit of that death and self-sacrifice throughout His life.

*2:12 After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and brothers and disciples; and there they stayed for a few days-* "Went down" reflects the topography of the area, and is the kind of thing a genuine eyewitness like John would recall. The mention of His "brothers" being with Him could suggest that they initially followed Him, but then disbelieved in Him as the pressure got tougher (7:5); with James and Jude then returning to faith in Him after the resurrection. This meant that James and Jude had for a time left the faith; and yet were greatly used by the Lord in His early work in the church.

*2:13 The Passover of the Jews was at that time; and Jesus went to Jerusalem-* John repeatedly describes the Jews feasts and temple as being "of the Jews", whereas the Old Testament refers to them as "of Yahweh". The Jews had hijacked God's religion and made it serve their own ends. This is a stern warning for us all. Rarely is the Lord called simply "Jesus"; usually some title is added. But John juxtaposes his frequent references to the Lord's very high status with such statements of His utter humanity; in order to deliver the right balance in impression concerning the person of the Lord Jesus.

*2:14 And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at their tables-* These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anti-climax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest.

Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple. This cleansing of the temple was repeated at the end of His ministry; see on Mt. 21:12.

*2:15 He made a whip out of cords and drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables-* The Lord had the power to make them disappear. He could do all things. But His making of a whip and getting so physical with them, driving them out along with their cattle, all rather sounds like He was treating them as if they were in spiritual Egypt. The language recalls how the Egyptians treated the Israelites and then drove them out of their land to the Red Sea. So this was not simply unrestrained anger on the Lord's part; in the same way as the judgment wrath of His Father was also intended to bring about spiritual realization and a movement further in the correct direction. It was surely miraculous that the Lord was not seized and charged for this kind of behaviour. This of itself demonstrated to the thoughtful that His final arrest and crucifixion was only because He and His Father allowed it; in that sense, He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

2:16 *To them that sold the doves he said: Take these things away! Do not make my Father's house a market-* Doves were the offering of the poor. Mary would have bought doves for the Lord's presentation from the same or similar men, 30 years previously. The Lord doesn't tell them to charge reasonable prices for the doves. Even though they were a necessary part of Mosaic ritual, He demands that they been taken right away and not sold at all. This suggests that even then He saw Mosaic ritual as dispensable. And perhaps His idea was that sacrifices should not be bought for money, which turned spirituality into mere religion. The doves could be caught, or even brought with the worshipper on their journey to the temple. There was to be a more personal relationship between offerer and sacrifice than merely passing over coins to a merchant to meet the correct ritual requirement. This speaks to us today.

2:17- see on 14:29; Mk. 10:38.

*His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for Your house shall consume me-* This would have been an example of how the Comforter brought such things to their remembrance (14:26). He knew himself that "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Ps. 69:9); the same Hebrew word is used as in Lev. 6:10: "take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed". Even in His life, the Lord felt that He had reached this point of total consumption as a living sacrifice. A Psalm evidently relevant to the final crucifixion is applied to the Lord's behaviour; as if the disciples later realized that this early visit to Jerusalem was a living out in the Lord of the final one. As so often, the spirit of the Lord's final death was seen in Him and His ways throughout His ministry.

2:18 *The Jews therefore answered and said to him: What sign will you show us, seeing you do these things?-* Paul alludes to this when writing later that "the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). Perhaps he was amongst those Jews who asked this question; for Paul would have been living in Jerusalem at this time. Time and again, Paul's preaching and pastoral work reflects his own weaknesses, just as ours should. Cynical Israel asked exactly the same of Moses, in effect; superficially, "the people believed" (Ex. 4:31) after they saw the signs. The hollowness of Israel's 'belief' in Moses was matched by the experience of Christ. And yet they still both loved Israel to the end despite this desire for the visible and concrete rather than the internal and spiritual.

2:19 *Jesus answered and said to them: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up-* In what sense did the Lord raise up His own body? I think the answer lies in Jn. 5:19-21: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing; for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father". This makes it clear that all power and possibilities that Jesus had, were in fact given to Him by God. In fact, whatever God is spoken of as doing, it would be appropriate to speak of the Son doing it. This was and is the nature of their relationship. The one thing that it would seem God did for Jesus, in a way that Jesus could not do for Himself, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God. It is emphasized so many times that God raised Jesus from the dead. And yet it's as if Jesus almost enjoys making the point that even in the matter of resurrection, so connected is He with the Father, that in a sense, He raised Himself up- because whatever, literally whatever, God does, in a sense Jesus therefore does it too. This is why He could say

about His life in Jn. 10:18: "I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father". He was given this authority by the Father (1). But even in the very thing where it seems God would be separate from His Son- i.e. in resurrecting the Son- Jesus wanted to emphasize that in a sense, He was still united with the Father. Because the Father so loved the Son, that whatever the Father did, He wished His Son to somehow be associated with. And so Jesus can speak of how in that sense, He [Jesus] was involved in His own resurrection- even though the repeated and obvious Biblical emphasis is upon the Father resurrecting His Son back to life. We see this theme touched on again in Jn. 10:18, where the Lord teaches that He has received a commandment to lay down His life and take it again, and yet He says that He has been given the authority / empowerment to do this, and therefore He will not die merely because of being unable to avoid the machinations of His murderers. So we could conclude that He obeyed a command to die and rise again- but was empowered by God to do this.

Another consideration in Jn. 2:19-21 is that Jesus speaks specifically about the 'raising up' of His body as a tabernacle. The 'body' of Christ frequently refers not so much to His literal body as to His spiritual body, i.e. the body of believers. In a sense, it is Jesus who has raised them up.

## Notes

(1) It has been suggested to me by Chris Clementson that the Greek word *exousia* translated "power" or "authority" in Jn. 10:18 can mean 'privilege'- and this is a possible meaning given for the word by James Strong in his concordance. Other N.T. usage of the word definitely suggests 'power' or 'authority', but this idea of 'privilege' is worth bearing in mind.

*2:20 The Jews replied: Forty-six years was this temple in building, and will you raise it up in three days?*- The connection between temple and building is intended to recall how God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. The Lord was saying that if *they* destroyed the temple [cp. killing His body], then in three days He would raise it up. His idea was clearly that *they* would destroy the temple; but at His trial, this is turned around against Him to imply that He had threatened to destroy the temple. But the Jews were in fact guilty of what they considered the most heinous crime-the destruction of the temple. Their killing of the Lord Jesus therefore meant that their temple would be destroyed in AD70; and they were responsible for that rather than the Romans.

*2:21 But he spoke of the temple of his body*- I noted on :18 that Paul may have been present at this time, and he alludes to some of the Lord's words here in 1 Corinthians. We have another such allusion here; for the other time we read of the body as a temple is in 1 Cor. 6:19, where the indwelling of the Spirit means that our bodies become the temple. The Lord's body becomes ours, ours becomes His, through the presence of His Spirit within. What was true of Him becomes true of us, if we are truly "in" Him.

*2:22 When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spoke this, and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken*- This 'remembering' would have been the result of the function of the Comforter (14:26), which likewise works with us to illuminate Scripture so that we see its personal relevance. Unaided intellectual effort will

not achieve this. Which is why there is no direct link between academic Bible study and personal spirituality.

Both Matthew and Mark record how the people later mocked the Lord Jesus over His comment that if the temple were destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (Mt. 27:40; Mk. 15:29). This had also been an issue at the Lord's trial (Mt. 26:60). Yet John records that when the Lord actually said those words, the disciples didn't believe those words and actually forgot them until the time of the resurrection (Jn. 2:22). The implications of that are tragic. The Lord's critics remembered His words more than His disciples did. And as He stood there in the awful loneliness of His trial, and hung there in the desolation of crucifixion, and heard those taunts based around His earlier words... He would've known that His own men had forgotten those words and likewise disbelieved them. No wonder after the resurrection He raised the matter with them. My point in this context is that John's comment in Jn. 2:22 about the fact the disciples forgot those words until after the resurrection... is actually a conscious recognition by the disciples of their own tragic weakness in understanding and support of their Lord. And it is within their own preaching of the Gospel that they make this point. Our witness likewise should be shot through with allusion to our own moral fallibility.

*2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did-* Israel also saw signs and believed for a moment, but not for long. As noted on :24 and :25, such belief is merely surface level. But it is still noted for what it was; it was not insignificant. The Lord Himself learnt from this, so that when faced with the appeal to come down from the cross so that they would believe, He resisted. Faith comes by hearing God's word; not by seeing miracles. The miracles recorded by John were all object lessons, intended to visually enhance the message being taught, and were not performed simply to meet human need.

*2:24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he understood mankind-* Reflect a while on what is really being taught in Jn. 2:23-25: “Many *believed* on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. ‘believed’] himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for he knew what was in man”. When a person trusts / believes in the Lord properly, unlike those who believed only a surface level, then the Lord trusts Himself unto them. He believes in them as they have believed in Him. Paul often speaks of how the Lord has trusted / committed [s.w.] the preaching of the Gospel unto him (1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3). We believe, and therefore we speak forth the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:13).

Perceive the parallels within the Jn. 2:23-25 passage:

He knew all men = He knew what was in man

Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. ‘believed’] himself unto them = because he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man.

If we truly believe in Jesus, He believes in us, and we therefore bear witness concerning Him. If we don't truly believe in Him, He will not commit / trust / believe Himself unto us. But by grace we have truly believed. It is therefore axiomatic that we bear witness of Him. God has therefore trusted us with the job of preaching His Gospel. That He trusts us, believes in us, is a surpassing thought. If you trust someone completely with a task, to the point it is clear that now if they don't do it, it won't be done, they often respond with a maturity and zest which wouldn't be seen if they merely were given partial responsibility [children are a good example of this]. And so God has done with us.



There seems a purposeful ambiguity in how the process of calling upon the name of the Lord is described in the Greek text; it can mean both us calling upon ourselves His Name, and also His Name being named upon us by Him. Joel 2:32 says that all those whom *the Lord* calls will *call on His Name*, a prophecy fulfilled in baptism. In similar vein, the Lord Jesus lived, died and rose as the representative of all men; and those who know and believe this chose to respond by identifying themselves with Him in the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism, and subsequent life in Christ- they make Him their representative, as He has chosen to be theirs. They respond to His willing identification with them by living a life identified with Him. Likewise if a man truly believes in Christ, He will 'commit himself' unto that man- the very same word for 'believe in[to]'. We believe into the Lord, and He believes into us.

*2:25 And because he did not need any testimony concerning himself from any human being. For he understood what was in man-* See on :24. One repeated theme of the Gospel records is that "Jesus perceived / understood..." (Mt. 22:18). We read this so often. Now it could mean that a bolt of Holy Spirit informed the Lord of the contents of men's minds. But I prefer to think that He was so sensitive to people that somehow He was able to read minds, to read body language, to be perceptive to a very high degree (Jn. 2:24,25). And so as the mind and compassion of Jesus become ours, so it seems to me that we too will develop better people skills, become more perceptive of what a contact is really driving at, what their real hang ups are... what they really and truly seek and need. "He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:25) may be a description of how far the Lord got in this kind of thing; rather than an indication of some magical gift He was given. And so when I am asked 'How best to preach? What to say to people...?', there is no simplistic answer. It's a matter of who we are, of our own perception and reflection of Jesus and of others, not the specific form of words we may use. The Lord doesn't need testimony from us as men; but He asks us to make it. All the work of preaching and witness is therefore for our benefit; it is we who learn and have our faith deepened by articulating our faith to others. He Himself has no need of it in itself.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews-* There were no more than 5000 Pharisees. The chances are that Saul the Pharisee knew him, and the conversion of Nicodemus would have been another prod in Saul's conscience which he kicked against. I suggested on 2:9 that he may have been the "master of the feast" to whom the Lord's new wine was brought.

3:2 *The same came to him by night, and said to him: Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one can do the signs you do, except God be with him-* Although miracles do not lead to permanent faith, the Lord's miracles all the same demonstrated that He was from God. Even His hardest enemies could not deny that His Spirit could produce notable miracles (Acts 4:16). "We know..." may well be a tacit admission that even the Pharisees recognized the Lord's connection with God. The fact many Pharisees later "became obedient to the faith" would suggest that their madness against Him was a function of their bad conscience. "This is the son, come let us kill Him" likewise reflects their passive, maybe subconscious, recognition that He was from God.

Nicodemus says that he perceives that Jesus is "from God" because of His miracles. But the Lord replies that only if a man is born again can he see or perceive the Kingdom of God; and only if he is born again by baptism of water and spirit can he enter into the Kingdom. It's easy to overlook the fact that the context of the Lord's comment was about His being Messiah, and how men could perceive / recognize that. If we read "the Kingdom of God" as a title of Himself, all becomes clear. Through baptism, birth of water and spirit, we enter into Christ. He was then and is now, the very essence of the Kingdom; the ultimate picture of the Kingdom life. There was a perfect congruence between His message about the Kingdom, and His own character. And this is what will give our preaching of that very same Kingdom a like power and convicting appeal to men and women.

3:3 *Jesus answered and said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God-* "Anew" is literally 'from above'. Natural descent was not enough to see the Kingdom; which was a direct hit on the Jewish idea that by reason of birth they were the children of the Kingdom. Again we see a connection to the prologue; we are to be spiritually born not of the will of the flesh but "of God" (1:13).

Seeing the Kingdom is developed in :5 to "enter the Kingdom". The contrast between seeing and entering is clearly alluding to Moses, who was allowed to see the Kingdom but not enter it. The Lord is inviting His followers to imitate Moses- a very high challenge to those under the influence of Judaism, who considered Moses to be the unreachable pinnacle of human spirituality. The Lord gently makes this challenge by firstly inviting Nicodemus to become as Moses who saw the Kingdom- and then saying that actually, he could come to a higher status than Moses, and actually enter the Kingdom. We find here the Lord equating the promised land, which Moses saw but could not enter, with His Kingdom. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation. Note the parallel in Jn. 3:3,5: "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* [perceive] the kingdom of God... he

cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God". If we truly see / perceive the things of the Kingdom in this life, then we will enter it in the future. Israel 'saw' the land physically through the spies (Num. 13:18; 32:8), but were told that they would "not see the land" (Num. 14:23; 32:11; Dt. 1:35). Again, as in the Lord's teaching, 'seeing the land' is put for 'entering' into it. Knowing facts about the future Kingdom doesn't mean we will enter it. But really 'seeing' the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom will by its very nature change us into people who will enter it. For we will be living the essence of the Kingdom life right now. Israel through the spies went to 'see' the land (Num. 13:18), but could not *enter* it because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They didn't 'see' it in the sense of perceiving what God's Kingdom was all about. They only saw the physicality of the land; and this wasn't enough to enter it. The synoptics' formula that he who believes the Gospel and is baptized will be saved is matched by John in Jn. 6:40: "every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day". Believing the Gospel of the Kingdom is matched by seeing / perceiving the Son. This is the basis.

3:4 *Nicodemus said to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*- When Nicodemus asked "How can a man be born [again]...?", he wasn't being facetious. He was asking a genuine question, which we've all had in one form or another. Can a person really totally change? Aren't the influences of our past life, our humanity, simply too great to break totally? Aren't there human ties that bind, bind so closely that they can never be completely thrown off? "Truly truly I say unto you", the Lord replied, 'Yes'. There is a doctrine of a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), whereby we really can be made new people. This is a ladder to reach to the stars. We can overcome sin, bad habits and thought patterns. We may well think that we can't; the way was set, the die cast, the destiny mapped out, the genes determined; our background, upbringing, life path was as it was, and so we are as we are. But we *can* be made new. Sin need no longer have dominion over us, as Paul says in Romans 6; or as early Genesis put it, "you shall rule over [sin]" (Gen. 4:7).

The extent of grace is reflected in the Lord's teaching about being born again. A person neither begets nor bears himself; but the Lord says that this must happen. The born again person has to receive a new origin- evidently something we can't give ourselves. The new birth is therefore only possible through an acceptance of grace. Thus in Jn. 1:12,13 a parallel is drawn between "all who receive him" and those "who were born... of God". Going even further, 1 Jn. 5:1 and 1 Jn. 4:8 [noting the tenses and context] suggest that faith and love are the evidence of this new birth rather than the cause of it.

Dodd in *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* shows how constantly John is referring to Philo- e.g. Philo denied any possibility of spiritual rebirth, whereas John (Jn. 3:3-5) stresses how needful and possible it is in Christ. The very abstract views of Philo are challenged when John comments that the *logos* has become flesh- real and actual, handled and seen, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Clearly those to whom John was preaching were influenced by Philo and he seeks to address their issues. Philo claimed that the *logos* was an Angel- whereas John effectively denies this by saying that the *logos* became a real and actual human being. Those Christians who claim Jesus was an Angel- and they range from Jehovah's Witnesses to those who claim Jesus appeared as an Old Testament Angel- should all stand corrected by John's argument against Philo. In chapter 11 of his book, Dodd makes the observation that there was a tension between Jewish monotheism, and the many gods of

Greek mythology. He shows how these ideas were reconciled by bringing the gods into some kind of family relationship with each- thus Hermes and Apollo became sons of Zeus, and all were seen as emanations of the one God. This is highly significant for any study of how the Trinity came into existence- the stage was set for the idea of a small family of gods to develop, all supposedly emanations of one God. See on Jn. 5:39.

*3:5 Jesus answered: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!*- Tit. 3:5 clearly alludes here: "He saved us by the washing [laver] of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit". The gift of the Spirit associated with baptism is vitally necessary; water alone will not save. At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). See on 1 Cor. 12:13. As the prologue states, birth is not of ourselves; we were born not of the will of the flesh but of God (1:13). It is Christ, not the actual baptizer, who brings a person to new birth and actually does the moral washing of a person from their sins when they are baptized. Consider these simple parallels within John's Gospel:

<b>John 3:5</b>	<b>John 13:8</b>
Unless	If
One is born of water and Spirit	I do not wash you
He cannot enter into the Kingdom	You have no part in me

Not only does this reflect the crucial importance of baptism; it indicates that it is the Lord Jesus who does the moral washing of a person when they are baptized. Once we accept that, then *who* performs baptisms becomes irrelevant. And all the way through, we see His grace; our spiritual life and existence has its source in His activity and not our own.

*3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*- I have consistently noted that the ideas of the prologue are developed throughout John's Gospel. Here, the allusion is again to 1:13. Those in the new creation are born not of the will of the flesh but "of God", or as is stated here, "of the Spirit", seeing that "God is Spirit" (4:22). We had no say in our coming into existence, neither physically nor spiritually. It is for us to use the grace of life, both natural and spiritual, to the best of our ability. But the initiation of that life was not from us, it was of the Spirit. We did not come to the new creation through our own Bible study or good living. It was all of the Spirit. The idea here in :6 is that like produces like; he that is born of the Spirit is spirit. And yet this is true only potentially; the Corinthians received the Spirit but were later "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

*3:7 Do not marvel at what I said to you: You must be born anew*- Nicodemus considered himself spiritually mature, hence the appeal for him not to marvel that he must be born again. The idea that we must fundamentally change and be changed, become someone we were not previously, allow our innermost person to be radically reborn... is not really what established, middle aged, middle class people want to hear. And so the Lord had to urge Nicodemus: "Do not marvel...".

3:8 *The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit-* Nicodemus was from the mindset that we are masters of our own spiritual destiny; by dint of academic, syllable by syllable Bible study, poring over the ancient texts, we can forge our own path towards the Kingdom. But the Lord had told him that we must be born of the Spirit and not of the will of man; to be born of something implies process beyond our direct, conscious control and volition. What is born of the Spirit is spirit; for like begets like. If we are to be spiritual people and thus see the Kingdom, we are to allow to operate a process greater than ourselves, preceding the time of our conscious choices. Those born of the Spirit sense this; remember that in Hebrew, "wind" and "spirit" are the same word. Here, "wind" translates the same Greek word translated "spirit" in the same verse. As the wind comes from somewhere and goes somewhere, so the Spirit works to bring about our spiritual birth.

Those born of the Spirit cannot clearly define from where or how they came about, at least not in secular terms. If we ask ourselves how it is that at this moment, we believe... the answers are so nuanced that we cannot but avoid the impression that on a secular, material level, it is indeed all somewhat mysterious. In the first century, a person was understood in connection with who their parents and ancestors were. Hence some Biblical characters are referred to as the son of X who was the son of Y who was the son of Z. Plato summed it up when he said that good people were good "because they sprang from good fathers". This is where the genealogies of Jesus would've been so hard to handle for some- because Matthew stresses how the Lord had whores and Gentiles in His genealogy. And it's also where the New Testament doctrine of the new birth and the new family in Christ were radical- for it was your family and ethnic origin which were of paramount importance in defining a person within society. John's Gospel especially emphasises the great desire to know from whence Jesus came (Jn. 3:8; 6:41,42; 7:27,28; 8:14; 9:29)- and the lack of any solid, concrete answer. To say that God was quite literally His Father was just too much for most people to handle. And here we are being told that every one born of the Spirit is the same.

But birth of the Spirit depends upon 'hearing the sound' of the wind / spirit. This phrase 'hear the sound' is literally 'to understand the voice'. The same words are found in :29 of how John heard the Lord's voice; those who "hear the voice" of God's son shall live (5:25,28); His sheep "hear His voice" (10:3,16,27); those "of the truth hear My voice" (18:37); the Lord knocks, but He enters in to those who "hear My voice" (Rev. 3:20). Birth of the Spirit is not therefore completely arbitrary; there must be a hearing of the Lord's voice in His word. But even then, there is the mystery of grace attached to quite where the call came from, and to where we are being led. Just as the wind of the Spirit can be felt by its effects, but not concretely seen and defined.

Perhaps the idea is that Nicodemus heard the sound, recognized that this man was from God; but could not tell / discern further. The position of the Jews was that "we cannot tell" (Mt. 21:27 s.w.) the authority of John the Baptist and his message about Jesus as Messiah. The same phrase "cannot tell" was used by John in rebuking the Jews for not being able to tell or know the Messiah in their midst (1:26 "Whom you know not"); the Jews at the wedding could not tell from whence the new wine came (2:9 s.w.); and the Lord has just used the term in :3 about 'not seeing' the Kingdom of God unless we are born again. This all encourages us to read "You hear the sound but cannot tell..." as meaning 'Yes, Nicodemus, you recognize My miracles, but you are not allowing yourself to perceive from whence I am and to where I go'- and He came from God and went to God. Nicodemus didn't want to recognize the

intangible, the spiritual; to surrender the issues of the past and future to the movement of the Spirit, to grace.

3:9 *Nicodemus answered and said to him: How can these things be?*- The academic Old Testament scholar, the theologian, struggled to accept that the Spirit could operate like this. It was the struggle of head against heart, of visible against invisible, of secular against spiritual, of law against grace.

3:10 *Jesus answered and said to him: Are you the teacher of Israel and yet do not understand these things?*- "The teacher" could imply he held some specific office of theological teaching. The Lord seems to have expected Nicodemus to have figured out the Old Testament's teaching about the new birth (presumably from Ps. 51:10; Is. 44:3; Ez. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Ecc. 11:5). And the Lord castigates Nicodemus for not having figured it out. The very high standards which He demanded of His followers would only have had meaning if it was evident that He was Himself a real human who all the same was sinless. This was [and is] why the words of Jesus had a compelling, inspirational power towards obedience; for He Himself lived out those words in human flesh. The Lord of all grace was and is amazingly demanding in some ways. And He has every right to be.

Or it could be that the Lord is saying that if Nicodemus had studied Scripture as God intends, then he would have perceived that all is of grace and God's initiative, rather than of academic study.

3:11 *Truly, truly, I say to you: We speak that which we know and testify of that which we have seen; and you do not welcome our witness*- Note how the Lord changes pronouns: "I say to you, We speak...". He clearly identifies the preaching of His followers with His own witness. We are the branches, we make up the vine, we make up the Lord Jesus. Thus He spoke of "we..." to mean 'I...' here, such was the unity He felt between Himself and His men who witnessed for Him. He asked Saul "Why persecutest thou *me*?" (Acts 9:4), again identifying Himself with His people. But this leads us to wonder whether John is not also speaking here; for the Gospel records are transcripts of the original teaching of the Gospel by, e.g., John and his team. The only other time we encounter the term "our witness" is again in John's writings, describing his own witness as "our witness" in 3 Jn. 12. The "you" who are addressed as not receiving the witness would connect with those Jews referenced in the prologue, who saw the light but remained in the darkness through not accepting it. In this case, John is here addressing that category, the "you [who] do not welcome / receive our witness", in the hope of converting even them. But primarily of course, the reference is to Nicodemus. He accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was clearly "from God" because of the miracles, but he did not really accept the witness of the Gospel- for it asked too much of him. And here we have a direct attack upon all nominal, surface level Christianity that refuses to openly come out for the One who lived and died for them. Quiet, private admission that He was "of God" is not enough; and this is a theme in John's Gospel. In his context, the tendency was to inwardly accept the truths of Jesus as God's prophet, but remain within the synagogue system acting as if they were Jews and not Christians.

3:12 *If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*- What were these earthly things that Nicodemus did not believe? In the

same as Paul at times 'says things in human terms', so the Lord had likened the new birth to the earthly analogy of insemination, pregnancy and birth. Nicodemus failed to believe that; and so there was no point in telling him heavenly things. He needed to be born from above, from Heaven (:5); but there was no point telling him about the things of Heaven if he refused to believe and grasp the simple requirement for new birth, expressed as it had been in earthly language. The Lord is saying in more abstract terms what Paul had in view when he writes to his converts of how he cannot write to them of the meat because they can't even grasp the milk.

But I suggested on :11 that these words of the Lord may also be applicable to John personally in his preaching of the Gospel. He chooses to record the more heavenly, spiritual sayings of the Lord, whereas the synoptics record His more direct, earthly statements. These words would therefore be true of John too, as the Lord's representative. He had told his audience earthly things, explained the Gospel history just as [e.g.] Mark had done, in straightforward language. And they had not believed. So there was little chance they were going to now believe His presentation of the more Heavenly words of the Lord.

3:13 *No one has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven*- Moses' ascents of the mountain were seen as representing an ascension to Heaven; but he had not ascended up to the "heavenly things" of which Christ spoke. Consider the spiritual loneliness of rising to heights no other man has reached, as far as Heaven is above earth. John the Baptist recognised this (Jn. 3:31).

This man Jesus standing before them was saying [in figurative terms] that He was in Heaven, had been in Heaven, had ascended there. Surely His abrupt shift of tenses and places is to suggest the Yahweh Name being manifested in Him. The language of 'coming down' is classically used in the OT in the context of Yahweh manifestation in theophany; yet it often occurs in Acts in the context of the preaching of the Gospel, as if our witness is a manifestation of the Name (Acts 8:5; 10:21; 12:19; 14:25; 18:22; 25:6).

John's Gospel especially makes many references to the idea of Christ's judgment being right now. Why is this? John was clearly written sometime after the other Gospels. The early community of believers were expecting the Lord's return at any moment; but by the time John wrote, it was apparent that He hadn't returned as soon as they had hoped for. Perhaps his point was that much of what we are expecting at the second coming is in essence going on right now. The very 'coming' of Jesus was judgment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 16:28). Those who refuse to believe have already been condemned (Jn. 3:17-21). Whilst the other Gospels stress that we will receive eternal life at the second coming (Mk. 10:30; Mt. 18:8,9), John stresses that the essence of the life eternal is our present experience; we have passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24). We will be made children of God at the last day (Lk. 6:35; 20:36); but the essence of being God's children has begun now, when we are born again (Jn. 1:12). Yet John brings out his continuity with the other Gospels by speaking of both future and present condemnation (Jn. 12:48 cp. 3:18; 9:39); of future eternal life and present eternal life (Jn. 12:25 cp. 3:36; 5:24); and future resurrection and present 'resurrection' to new life (Jn. 6:39,40,54 cp. 5:21,24).

The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passages highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal

birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. In any case, He speaks of how "the Son of man" will do these things, and not 'God the Son', as would be required by Trinitarian theology. To suggest that Jesus as Son of Man literally ascended to Heaven and descended to earth during His ministry is surely literalism's last gasp. There are many allusions to Moses throughout John's record, as if both the Lord Jesus and John were seeking to impress upon the audience that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messianic "prophet like unto" Moses predicted in Dt. 18:15,18. Jewish writings of the time [e.g. *Wisdom of Solomon*] spoke of Moses' ascent of Sinai as an ascension into Heaven, descending to Israel with the Law (more references to this effect in Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) p. 100). This language is being picked up and applied to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus has just spoken of how believers in Him are to be "born from above" and "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3,5). However, the same Greek words for "born" and "Spirit" are found in Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35- in description of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate example of one "born of the Spirit". And yet John's Gospel applies the language of the virgin birth to believers. We have another example in Jn. 1:13- the believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"- i.e., they were born "of the Spirit". My suggestion is that the Lord Jesus is saying in Jn. 3:13 that of course, He is the only one fully born of the Spirit, the only one in Heavenly places; but the preceding context makes clear that He is willing to count believers in Him as fully sharing His status. Further, we need no longer complain that His virgin birth makes Him have some unfair advantages in the battle against sin which we don't have. The spiritual rebirth experienced by all those truly born again by God's word, His "seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), is such that we in some way are given all the inclinations towards righteousness which the Lord Jesus had by virtue of His birth.

"Even the Son of Man who is in Heaven" may be John's comment rather than the Lord's actual words. Any serious student of John's Gospel will have come across this problem of deciding what are John's inserted comments, and what are the actual words of Jesus (e.g. 3:13-17). The problem arises because the written style of John is so similar, indeed identical, to the style of language Christ used. The conclusion from this feature is that *the mind of John was so swamped with the words and style of the Lord that his own speaking and writing became after the pattern of his Master*. And he is our pattern in this. Not only are his comments within his Gospel exactly in harmony with the Lord's style, but also the style and phrasing of his own epistle reflects that of the Lord (e.g. compare Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 with 1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12). Perhaps he *so* absorbed the mind of the Master that he was used to write the most spiritual account of the Lord's life. In a different way, Peter also absorbed the Lord's words to the point that they influenced his way of speaking and writing (his letters are full of conscious and unconscious allusions back to the Lord's words). He seems to have noted some of the Lord's catch phrases, and made them his own (as an Englishman may say "I guess..." after prolonged contact with an American). Thus "of a surety / truth" was one of the Lord's catch phrases (Lk. 9:27; 12:44; 21:3; Jn. 1:47; 6:55; 8:31; 17:8), repeated by Peter in Acts 12:11.

3:14 *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted*



*up*- Perhaps these were the "heavenly things" which the Lord had intimated He wanted to tell Nicodemus of in :12.

It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the *serpent* represented Christ in this case. It was as it were a dead serpent; the Lord had put to death the power of sin within Himself. Moses "lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews "lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (8:28). Moses drew attention to the serpent and its power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses "lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ). The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. "There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)... look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men. The Hebrew word *nasa* translated "forgive" is also translated 'bear' as in 'bearing / carrying iniquity'. When God forgave, He bore / carried sin; and the idea of carrying sin is obviously brought into visual, graphic meaning in the literal carrying of the cross by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the Hebrew word *nes*, translated "pole" in the record of the bronze snake being lifted up on a "pole", is the noun for which *nasa* is the verb. The essence of cross carrying had therefore been performed by God for millennia, every time He forgave human sin. It's understandable, therefore, that He had a special manifestation in the final sufferings and death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

Jn. 3:13,14 link the Lord's ascension to Heaven, and His 'lifting up' on the cross. They were all part of the same, saving process. Likewise the atonement is a function of His death and resurrection combined; it was only the empty tomb that gave the cross any power at all. "Lifted up" is literally to exalt; His lifting up by His enemies was in their eyes His final disgrace, to die the death of the cross; but to spiritual eyes, it was His greatest exaltation. There are many similar things in life today which from a secular viewpoint may be a man's nadir, but which from a heavenly perspective are his greatest exaltation. The process of death itself is often an example.

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16).

3:13,14 follow straight on from the discourse about being born again. John very much saw the new birth of the believer as a coming out of the Lord's pierced side; this was what enabled the new birth [see under 1:1 and 1:13]. 2 Cor. 5:17 likewise speaks of the new creation in the context of expounding the Lord's death. "Lifted up" translates a Greek word usually translated "exalt", and is used about the Lord's exaltation after His resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Although "no man hath *ascended up* to heaven" uses a different word, the idea is

just the same. The word is usually used by John to describe the Lord's 'going up' to Jerusalem to keep and finally fulfil the Passover (2:13; 5:1; 7:8,10,14; 11:55; 12:20). John's comment that only the Lord Jesus has "ascended up to heaven" may therefore be a reference to both His crucifixion and ascension. His 'coming down' may have a hint of how John records His body being 'taken down' from the cross.

3:15 *That whoever believes may in him have eternal life*- Or, "Whoever believed in Him". 'Belief in Him' therefore specifically refers to looking upon the cross in understanding, and believing it, just as Israel had to look to the serpent to be saved from the death which was already in their blood stream. In John, 'seeing' is 'believing'. 'He' was and is His cross. There we see the epitome of Him. Jesus "by himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3) and yet it was by His cross and His blood that sin was purged. But He Himself was epitomized in His blood / cross. And so to believe in Him is to believe in Him crucified (Jn. 3:15,16). In the context, Nicodemus had claimed to kind of believe in Jesus in that he recognized the miracles must be of God. But the Lord is saying this is not enough; to believe in Him is to believe in Him as the crucified saviour from our personal sins and death sentence within our blood stream. God's so loving the world was in the giving of His son to die. His sending His Son into the world was specifically through the cross [see on Jn. 1:14- this is another development of the prologue]. One wonders whether we gaze enough upon the cross.

Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to gather people together to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus.

3:14-21 One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in its most crystallised form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's

comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain... an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the *ensign* / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for "light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the "fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the "light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of "light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life-* The having of eternal life in John usually refers to something right now. The context is how stricken Israel looked upon the serpent and were given life; but he who looks in faith upon the lifted up Lord Jesus shall receive *eternal* life. In its present sense, this means that through the Spirit we can begin to live now the life we shall eternally experience in God's Kingdom. But that life is based upon our comprehending in faith the crucified Lord Jesus. He there becomes the practical inspiration for the new life. For 'seeing' Him there means we can no longer be passive; every aspect of daily living and thinking is affected.

"God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" implies that the love of God for the world was channelled through the work of Christ. Note the import of the word "*so*" - not 'so much', but 'so, in this way...'. There are many connections between the love of God and the death of Christ, and it is easy to overlook them. For example, "God loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins... hereby ('in this') we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 4:10; 3:16). The love of God is "*in* Christ Jesus". Likewise, the love of Christ is so often linked with His death. Christ "Loved us, and washed us from our sins" (Rev. 1:5). He gave His life so that the world might have life (Jn. 6:51); and yet He gave His life for *us*. My conclusion is that the love of Christ was paraded for the whole world, especially the Jewish world, just as the serpent was available for all Israel. But only those who look to Him there in faith shall receive the life eternal. We thereby become

"the world", we who *to God*, from His perspective, constitute "the world" with which He deals. "The world" in John's Gospel often means the Jewish world. The Lord died for *their* salvation fundamentally (Gal. 4:5), and we only have access to this by becoming spiritual Israel through baptism. See on 1 Jn. 2:15.

3:17 *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him-* It was absolutely possible that all Israel could have been saved. It was through their rejection of this plan that they condemned themselves. God's intention in giving His Son was that the Jewish world might be saved, in the first instance. For that is the common referent of "the world" in John. But if we wish to apply "the world" to "the whole world", we must grapple with the question: Why, then, the masses of humanity who never heard the name of Jesus? My comment would then be that it was potentially possible for the whole world to hear, it was God's wish and intention; but it was the dysfunction of His church, and His refusal to intervene to force us another way, His commitment to honouring our freewill, which left those masses without the saving knowledge of Jesus. And the tragedy continues to this day.

3:18 *He that believes in him is not condemned. He that does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God-* Condemnation was not God's aim (:17); condemnation is therefore always self-condemnation. Whenever we encounter the message of salvation in Him, we face our judgment; and some even now are "condemned already" by their rejection of salvation in Him.

For we who believe, it is in this sense that in prospect we can be assured that we are saved by being in Christ. We can therefore live as "the sons of God, without rebuke... blameless" (Phil. 2:15) in God's sight (being so in the eyes of the world is almost impossible for a true believer!), in the same way as at the judgment we will be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable". It must be significant that the language of forgiveness in the New Testament constantly alludes to judgment: justification, appeal, counsel for the defence, advocate, accusation etc. are common ideas, especially in the Greek. The point of this may be to teach that the experience of forgiveness now does stand related to the judgment which we will receive at Christ's return. Thus if we are convicted of sin now, but aided by Christ as our advocate and therefore justified, we will have the same experience at the judgment seat.

3:19 *And this is the ground of condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light- for their works were evil-* Another reference to the prologue. But now "the light" is defined further as the lifted up Son of Man; perhaps the connection is in the way that a "light" was usually a torch, a fire lifted up, just as the serpent on the pole was lifted up. John is therefore speaking after the crucifixion; even after that, the Jews preferred darkness rather than to accept the crucified Jesus as light of their lives. Accepting Him there meant the new life, and an exposure of their works as evil. This is why people refuse the message of Jesus as light of their world- because morally it demands too much of them. Yet they excuse it as not getting the idea, misunderstanding, having genuine intellectual doubts. But here the Biblical reason is given, probing as it does to depths of the subconscious that are not knowable by the person themselves. The reason for not accepting the light is that men love darkness because their works are evil and they don't wish to have them exposed.

However, although these words are true of John's witness after the Lord's death, they are just as appropriate to the Lord Jesus, who was speaking them *before* His death to Nicodemus who had come to Him by night. Why by night? Because he feared openly demonstrating his faith. He would not come out in the light, because his works were evil.

The light coming into the world is parallel with God's son coming into the world in the cross [see on Jn. 1:5,9]. Men "came to that sight" and turned away from it (Lk. 23:48). Our natures likewise resist us concentrating upon the cross. Something in us makes our minds wander at the breaking of bread. There our deeds are manifested. Thus the breaking of bread naturally brings forth self-examination as we focus upon and reconstruct His death. There are our deeds reprov'd, and also made manifest. In murdering the Son of God, Israel showed how they hated the light; the same word is used in describing how "they hated me without a cause" (Jn. 15:25). John develops the idea in 1 Jn. 2:9,11, in teaching that to hate our brother is to walk in darkness; whereas if we come to the light of God's glory as shown in the cross, we will love our brother. The cross is the ultimate motivator to love our brethren; this was one of the reasons why the Lord died as He did (Jn. 17:26). The light of the cross is the light of all men in God's world (1:4). The Lord later associates His being the light of the world with following Him; and 'following him' is invariably associated with taking up the cross and following Him. To follow the light is to follow Christ crucified (8:12). He there is to be the practical focus of our lives. Recall how the prologue states that His light is to be our life, we are to live life in the light of Him; and more specifically, in the light of the fact He died for us.

*3:20 For every one that does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, in case his works should be reprov'd-* If men love darkness, they are not therefore passive nor indifferent to the light. They hate it. John uses the same word four times in his first letter, warning that those who claim to believe but hate their brother are still in darkness. The division is not, therefore, simply between those who claim to believe and those who do not. If we hate our brother, we hate the Lord Jesus whom he represents; we hate the light, we are not led by the light of Him crucified. For if we are so led, hatred of our brother will simply not happen. And this is how to overcome feelings of hatred against others; not to steel will ourselves not to feel like that, but to positively focus upon the crucified Lord as light of our lives.

The Greek phrase "come to" has been used in the context for how Nicodemus had "come to Jesus" by night (:2; stressed again in 7:50). But the Lord seems to be saying that he had not truly come to Him. And He locates the deep subconscious reason as a fear that his works should be reprov'd. And this for all time is the reason why people will not come to Him completely, regardless of all the excuses they make. On the surface, "all men came to" Jesus (3:26); but He later comments: "But you will not come to me, that you might have life" (5:40). The feeding of the multitude likewise features multitudes 'coming to Him', and the Lord using the same phrase in explaining that if they truly came to Him, they would never again hunger and would certainly be eternally saved (6:5,35,37,44,45,65). There is a major play on the idea of 'coming to' Jesus. The warning is against surface level coming to Him, as if trooping out to church; and coming in truth, in which case we shall be utterly assured of our salvation. And our coming to the Lord will be matched by His coming to us, right now in this life, through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. The same phrase is again used of this wondrous experience, where the Lord meets with man in man's own heart (14:18,23,28; 16:7).

Whenever God's Truth is presented to a man, the raw nerve of his conscience will somehow be touched. He is in God's image, and knows somehow he should respond to this. He may react by flinching away, covering up his weakness; He will not come to the light, lest his deeds are reproved. Or he may realise that he has been touched, and respond in humility. So often the introduction of the Gospel is treated by people with indifference: 'Oh, another leaflet', a woman may jovially respond when she's handed one of our tracts. But when she realises it's about Jesus... then, things will change. 'Oh, I see...' she may say, and her body language will change. She has been touched on the raw nerve. She may get angry because of this, or quickly change the subject- or let her conscience be touched.

3:21 *But he that does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God-* Remember however that John's Gospel is a transcript of his preaching the Gospel to people who had lived both before and after the Lord's death. Here he may be explaining why some in Israel accepted the light and others didn't. "The truth" is a phrase used about the covenant promises to the fathers- "the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which You promised to our fathers" (Mic. 7:20). Those who grasped the real implications of that covenant 'did the truth' and were looking for the light. I suggest this is the idea here, rather than the impression that people who did good works would find in the Lord Jesus a justification of themselves. The Greek is however difficult here, and one manuscript reads "that the work which is between God and him may be known".

But these words are also true for our later generations. John later defines 'doing the truth' as walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:6). A healthy conscience provides some foretaste of the final judgment. He who does truth comes to the light, "that his deeds may be made *manifest*" (Jn. 3:21), the reproof of a healthy conscience makes our failings *manifest* (Eph. 5:13) as they will be made *manifest* at the future judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim. 5:25). This is why Solomon when reflecting on the human seats of judgment so wished that God would *now* make men manifest to themselves, make them realize the animal depravity of their natures, because there would be a *future* judgment of every purpose and work (Ecc. 3:16-18). If we love darkness and refuse to come to the light that our deeds may be manifest (Jn. 3:20), then we will be returned to the darkness in the last day. Therefore willing self-examination and self-correction now, a true response to God's word, a realistic coming to the light- this means we will not be thrown into the darkness in the end. But the question of course occurs: do we *really* let God's word influence our behaviour to the extent that we *really* change? Or are we just drifting through the Christian, church-going life...? The children of God and those of the devil are now made manifest (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:10), even in the eyes of other believers (1 Cor. 11:19). His judgments are now made manifest (Rom. 1:19) in that we know His word, His judgments; in advance of how they *will* be made manifest in the future judgment (Rev. 15:4). We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat, but we are made manifest unto God (s.w.) even now (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

There's a clear connection here with how Nicodemus came out into the light after the crucifixion. Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as

Nicodemus was doing: "Men loved darkness... for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this.

*3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he stayed with them and baptized-* He did not baptize, His disciples did (4:2). We see here the idea developed that the Lord's witnesses are Him, in essence. And the same connection between Him and ourselves is especially seen and felt in the work of witnessing for Him.

*3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and people came to be baptized-* This is clear evidence that John was baptizing by immersion, seeing he chose a place with "much water". It appears this was a fairly remote place; as the Lord went to the top of a mountain to teach, so John seems to have required some effort to be shown by his listeners.

*3:24 For John had not then been thrown into prison-* This information is added perhaps to give the impression that right up until his arrest, John was teaching and baptizing.

*3:25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification-* Presumably because both the Lord and John were baptizing at the same time. 'Whose baptism is valid?' would have been the question. Full Christian baptism of the kind commanded in the great commission was into the Lord's death and resurrection, and the whole symbolism of burial and resurrection with Him required that it could only happen after He had died and risen. So the baptisms performed before that were not full Christian baptisms, but rather statements of repentance and a desire to receive cleansing / purification. If Israel had indeed repented then the path would have been prepared and the Lord could have come in glory. But many of those baptized turned around and crucified their Saviour.

*3:26 And they came to John, and said to him: Rabbi, he that was with you on the other side of the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him-* I suggested on :25 that the baptisms of the Lord and John were essentially the same. We get the impression that there were some loyalists to John the Baptist who were alarmed that the Lord was achieving more baptisms than he was. I noted earlier that John's Gospel was partly directed at those who clung to loyalty to John the Baptist even after his death. John's total disinterest in a personal following is therefore emphasized in John's Gospel.

3:27- see on Lk. 1:14.

*John answered and said: A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven-* The particular thing 'received' here was the Lord's apparent success in preaching. Those who came to the Lord were given to Him by God. John the Baptist understood what is later made explicit in John's Gospel; that nobody can come to the Son unless they are called by the Father (14:6).

3:28- see on Mt. 3:7.

*You yourselves can testify that I said: I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him-* It was only at the Lord's baptism that John the Baptist realized that Jesus of Nazareth, his relative, was in fact the Christ. But now, John is clearly stating that this Jesus is the Christ and they ought to follow Him instead. The Gospel of John is therefore making the point that those disciples of John who were still loyal to him rather than the Lord were out of step with John's own clear words.

*3:29 He that has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, that stands by and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. In this my joy is made full-* This is supreme Christ-centeredness in witness. His joy was made full to see the Lord, the groom, united with His bride- that group of uncertain, little understanding folks who were coming out to profess repentance of their sins. John's words remained with the Lord; for He later speaks of how His joy is fulfilled in the disciples, and their joy is fulfilled in Him (15:11; 17:13). The idea was not lost on John himself, who later writes to his converts that "my joy" is that they walk in truth, focused on the Lord Jesus (3 Jn. 4). All gathering of a personal following is here utterly precluded. Our work is to bring people to the Lord Jesus; and the mutual fulfilment of their joy in Him, and His in them, is to be the fulfilment of our joy. Hence Paul can reason that his eternal joy will be to see his converts eternally united with the Lord.

Although John preached the excellence of Christ, he didn't even consider himself to be part of the mystic bride of Christ; for he likens himself to only the groom, watching the happiness of the couple, but not having a part in it himself (Jn. 3:29). See on Jn. 1:10.

3:30- see on Eph. 3:8.

*He must increase but I must decrease-* John is surely alluding to the LXX of Is. 9:7: "Of the increase of his kingdom and peace there shall be no end, sitting upon the throne of David". John naturally hoped that Israel would indeed accept the Lord Jesus, and thus the glory could come to Zion over the road John the Baptist had prepared. This was not to be, although ultimately the eternal increase of His Kingdom shall indeed come upon this earth. And the prospect of that Kingdom should lead us to proclaim with thankfulness that "I must decrease". The things of His Kingdom and Name, which we profess faith in through accepting the Gospel, shall then be all and in all. Whilst we as persons shall eternally exist in our own unique form, the "I", the unpleasant ego, shall be no more. John was deeply mindful of his weaknesses and perhaps he had this ego in view.

3:31- see on Mt. 3:7.

*He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaks. He that comes from heaven is above all-* As noted on :30, John felt his own diminution in the face of the eternal Kingdom, and before the Lord Jesus. The higher we perceive the Lord Jesus, the less problem we will have with ego, the more attainable will be the idea of truly selfless service. Nicodemus and the Jews didn't understand earthly things,



and so they would not understand heavenly things (:12). This is a tacit admission that they did not [at that point] accept John's message, the earthly voice as opposed to the heavenly. See on :34.

3:32 *What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness-* "We" testify what "we" have seen and heard (:11); and John later writes that "we", he and his fellow disciples, testified to their converts what they had seen and heard (s.w. 1 Jn. 1:1,3). "No one" may mean 'very few'; the majority preferred the darkness. Or it could be that :32 is the recorded speech of John the Baptist, lamenting that although many had been baptized, not one of his disciples was accepting the testimony of what he had seen and heard at the Lord's baptism- the statement that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah and Son of God. But John picks up these words later in 1 Jn. to show that in fact all was not lost, as John had felt in his depression. For John and the disciples had received his testimony, and passed it on to their converts. In this case, John the Baptist would be a true Elijah-type prophet, for he too felt that he alone was faithful, when there in fact another 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Indeed, the next verse :33 is John the Gospel writer's comment to the effect that actually, some did receive his witness.

3:33 *He that has received his witness has certified that God is true-* See on :32. John in his depression thought that nobody had received his passing on of the vision he beheld at the Lord's baptism, connecting Jesus of Nazareth with Messiah and Son of God. But John the Gospel writer now adds that some had received John the Baptist's witness; indeed, John was one of them (1 Jn. 1:1,3). "Truth" is a concept associated with the promises to the fathers (Mic. 7:20). By accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the seed / Messiah promised to Abraham and David, the believer has certified God's truth, the truth of His promises of salvation. By accepting those words of God (:34) to be truly of God and fulfilled in Christ, we set or affix our seal to them- we undertake to have them as binding upon us in daily life. Accepting the proposition that the Bible is inspired is therefore not a merely academic thing, assenting to a true proposition. It has to affect our lives. And note the humility of God here- that human beings can affix the seal of validation to the truth of God's word. This works out in the way in which lives of obedience to God's word are actually an affixed seal and testament to the truth of those words. Thus it becomes our lives which are the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration and the truth of God's word of promise. We each have a personal seal, as it were, with our own personal characteristics on it; and we set to our seal the fact that God is Truth, that He is the God of our covenant ("Truth" is a word associated throughout the OT with God's covenant relationship with men).

3:34 *For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give him the Spirit by measure-* John was given the Spirit to speak as he did, but by specific measures. The Lord had the Spirit generally and constantly, not just measured out for some specific works. John sees a direct connection between the Lord's words and the Spirit. His words were directly inspired; and the Lord Himself states that His words are Spirit in 6:63. The "For he whom God has sent..." links back to the statement in :31 that John speaks of the earth, but the Lord from Heaven. The Lord's being "from Heaven" refers therefore to the fact that He had been given God's Spirit without measure in order to speak from Heaven, from God. There is no reference to any descent of some pre-existent Jesus from Heaven to earth. That is to miss the context and force a crude literalism on the clearly more abstract language being used here.

3:35 *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand*- We have just read that God so loved the world that He gave His Son (:16). That love for the world was focused through His love of the Son. The "all things" are those spoken of in the prologue- the all things of the new creation, of persons who believe into Him. We as believers are in His hand. Mt. 11:27 contains this thought too, when the Lord explains that the Father's giving all things to Him means that men can only know the Father if the Son reveals Him to them. The "all things" again refers to believers. John 10 expresses similar ideas; we are as the Lord's sheep safe in His hand and cannot be snatched away. This leads on to the assurance that we have right now the eternal life (:36).

3:36- see on Eph. 2:3.

*He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him*- When we read of "eternal life" being granted to us now, we are reading about "the life belonging to the age", i.e. the Kingdom of God in the future. The idea is that we can live the life which we will eternally live- right here and now. We can experience the quality of that life now. And if we don't... we don't have the guarantee of eternity in the Kingdom. For in spiritual terms, in terms of essential spiritual experience, there will be a seamless transition between the spiritual life we now enjoy, and that which we will experience in the future Kingdom. The location of that eternity will be on earth; and yes, there must be death, resurrection, judgment and immortalisation of our body. But those more 'physical' realities don't figure so deeply in the message which John is putting across in his record of 'the Gospel'. Notice how in Jn. 3:36, 'having everlasting life' is paralleled with 'seeing life'; to perceive and live what God's Kingdom life is all about, is in a sense to 'have' it.

For those who refuse to obey the Gospel, having heard it, then God's wrath will come and remain upon them right now, until judgment day. The idea is not that God is angry with all men and that wrath abides on everyone who is outside the Lord Jesus. These words are alluded to several times later in the New Testament, about the wrath to come upon the Jews, the "children of disobedience", in that they heard the Gospel and rejected it by killing God's Son (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:5; 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).

## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John-* When some want to see spiritual work in competitive terms, it's better to just not play that game at all, and move away or onwards. Making and baptizing disciples is the language of the great commission (Mt. 28:19). We are to follow the Lord's example in our own outreach; not merely baptizing but making men disciples, independent learners of Him.

*4:2 Although Jesus himself did not baptize but his disciples-* As noted on 3:22, the Lord is described as doing the baptisms, and indeed the Pharisees perceived it that way too (:1). Especially in the doing of His work of witness, we are counted as Him. We recall that at this stage the disciples still believed in ghosts, demons and the associated wrong ideas of immortal souls and disembodied existence. But still they baptized people. The Lord hardly made the bar very high, right from the start of His ministry.

*4:3 He left Judea and departed again into Galilee-* It could be that as today, numbers of converts and baptisms led to jealousy which soon morphed into violent opposition, and the Lord therefore withdrew from the Jerusalem area.

*4:4 It was necessary for him to pass through Samaria-* This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. See on Lk. 2:49. Pious Jews avoided travelling through Samaria; the Lord was demonstrating that He was not interested in the lines of separation drawn by the pious. The necessity however may have been because of some plot against Him arising from jealousy over the baptisms (see on :3), and so He took the route which He knew the Pharisees would not take for fear of defilement by the Samaritans. It is yet another window onto His humanity that He faced things like geographical and logistical necessity.

*4:5 Sychar, near to the parcel of ground which Jacob gave his son Joseph-* This place was rich in Jewish history; it was the parcel of ground purchased by Jacob, where Joseph's bones were buried (Josh. 24:32), and where Jacob had built an altar (Gen. 33:18-20), called 'The mighty one, the God of Israel'. Jacob had also conquered territory there with his own sword and bow, fighting the people of the land. Abraham had been there (Gen. 12:6), and Shechem ['Sychar'] was one of the oldest towns in Israelite history. But at the time of the Lord Jesus, it was inhabited by the despised Samaritans. It's rather like a town square with a war memorial and traditional British architecture in the United Kingdom- which is now inhabited by Moslem immigrants, with the Anglican church now turned into a Mosque. And one of the local women with a clearly immoral

background- was one of the Lord's star converts. And she in turn converts the local menfolk to Christ. Just as traditional white churches in the West would view the conversion of asylum seekers and recent darker skinned immigrants with suspicion and disgust, so we can imagine people responding to the Lord's conversion of this woman.

*4:6 Jacob's well was also there. Jesus, being tired from his journey, sat tired by the well. It was about the sixth hour-*Incident after incident in the mortal life of Jesus had echoes of the crucifixion to come. Consider how He met the woman at the well "at the sixth hour" (Gk.), He was thirsty, a woman got Him something to drink and encouraged Him in His work (Jn. 4:6 cp. 19:14,28). No wonder He spoke of His meeting with her as a finishing of the Father's work, which is the very language of the cross. He lived out the essence of the cross in that incident, just as we do, day by day.

The Lord's humanity is clearly indicated here. The sixth hour by Jewish time was midday; if Roman time, it was around 6 PM, when women went to get water. But the woman being separated rather from society may have come at midday, on her own.

*4:7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her: Give me a drink-* Jewish men, especially religious leaders, were not supposed to speak with women publicly- let alone with Samaritan women. Therefore we see here the Lord's open attitude and intentional breaking of such human taboos and barriers. The well was deep and the Lord had no rope or bucket; presumably the women brought their own equipment with them to the well. We see here His need; He had little strength, having walked all night, and He also lacked a rope and / or bucket to get water from the well. He in no way was "very God of very Gods".

*4:8 His disciples had gone into the city to buy food-* This doesn't necessarily mean that the Lord was left there alone. The disciples were likely more than "the twelve" [there were at least also Matthias and Joseph Justus present at this time, Acts 1:24-26]; and there were likely the ministering women too. Would they all really have gone into town to buy food and left the Lord exhausted and alone by a well? Surely some would have remained with Him. But there is also the possibility that the Lord sought time and space alone in prayer (as in Mk. 1:35; Lk. 6:12; 9:28). It could be that He told them all to go into the town, whilst He prayed alone, by the well. The Samaritan woman's appearance was therefore a direct answer to His prayers, which perhaps had focused upon the salvation of the Gentile Samaritans.

*4:9 The Samaritan woman replied to him: How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? (For Jews have no dealings with*

*Samaritans*)- The Lord's clothing and accent gave Him away as a Jew rather than a Samaritan. All through this record we see every evidence of His total humanity.

The woman of John 4 grew in her appreciation of Jesus, quickly. She addressed the Lord as: a Jew (4:9); "sir" (4:11); greater than Jacob (4:12); a prophet (4:19); the Christ (4:42); saviour of the world (4:42). M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies In The NT* Vol. 1 p. 113) has observed that Christ is progressively addressed as "Lord" as the NT record progresses; as if the community's perception of Him increased over time.

*Being a Jew*- The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9).

4:10 *Jesus answered and said to her: If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that said to you: Give me a drink, you would have asked of him and he would have given you living water*- The Lord's "living water", i.e. spring water, was offered in return for her well water. Surely this contrasts with Moses meeting his Gentile wife by a well; a relationship in which he gave her very little, and which was an indicator of a spiritual weak cycle in his life. The Samaritan woman immediately recognised Jesus as Jewish, just as Zipporah thought that Moses was an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19)- which is another comforting type of Christ's humanity.

"The gift of God" is clearly to be understood in John's thinking as the gift of the Spirit. The same phrase is used about it in Acts 8:20; 11:17; Rom. 5:15; Eph. 3:7. The living water is explained later as the same gift of the Spirit: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water. He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:37-39). But that gift of the Spirit would only be given after the Lord's glorification. He was not therefore offering the woman anything immediately; He had in view what could be given her once His work on earth was completed. He could give her the living water right then in the same sense as He could give eternal life immediately; the promise was as good as the receiving, so certain was His word of promise. I noted in commentary on Acts that the gift of the Spirit is presented as an evidence that Gentiles also have equal access to the Father seeing they received the same gift. Hence the significance of this promise to a Gentile that she could receive this gift which would meet the spiritual thirst which the Lord correctly perceived in her.

We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. And this is what we give out to others- for "he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water" for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: 'What would Jesus do...?'.

4:11 *The woman said to him: Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. From where then have you that living water?*- The well presumably required users to bring their own bucket or even rope. She had power over this exhausted Jew. But "living water" was known as the language of the Messianic age, and as a Samaritan, this woman would not have been unaware of it. I suggest that she is responding to the Lord's figurative language on the same level. How could this exhausted, very human Jew give this Messianic water- the well was deep, and spiritually speaking, it was very hard for Him to get it for her, surely... for after all... *He* surely was not the Messiah. His lack of a bucket to get the literal water was reflected in His obvious [to her] lack of ability to give the Messianic gift.

4:12 *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his cattle?*- She is alluding to Jewish ideas of how Messiah would be greater than Jacob but not greater than Abraham or David. Not only was this man not Messiah, but Jacob was "our [Samaritan] father", she had a right to drink of this well, so she reasoned, because she [unlike Jesus the Jew] as a Samaritan was the legitimate descendant of Jacob. But the Lord didn't rise to her provocations; just as we need to ignore the petty aggression, subtexts and barbs of others in order to bring them to the greater truth. So much religious and doctrinal controversy is hampered by this desire to correct the mistaken other on peripheral issues, and the essential issues are thereby overlooked and not engaged with.

4:13 *Jesus answered and said to her: Every one that drinks of this water shall thirst again*- The Lord doesn't argue with her over her take on descent from Jacob, even though she was wrong about it. He lost that battle to win the war. Even if the water in that well was hers and not His, it could not ultimately quench the human thirst for salvation. It is that thirst which our witness should address; we are perhaps "the salt of the earth" in that salt provokes thirst.

4:14 *But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up to eternal life*- The human thirst for the Spirit would be met

by the gift of the Spirit *within* our hearts. The water given would be the life eternal- the kind of life we shall eternally live. The reference is not to miraculous gifts, but to the ongoing gift of the Spirit within.

"With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Is. 12:3) is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted". The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others.

It was from the smitten rock that springing water came out. There is an endless inspiration in the cross, an endless source of that spirit of new life. And the influence of the cross cannot be passive; we will also give out living water, we will become as the smitten rock, and through our share in His crucifixion we will give out to others that same new and eternal life. But in the context of the Samaritan woman, the rock at that time was not yet smitten, the living waters of the Spirit not yet given as the Lord was not yet glorified.

Repeatedly, the Lord Jesus carefully worded His teaching in order to use the same words about Himself as about His disciples. He was the lamb of God; and He sent them forth as lambs amongst wolves; He was "the light of the world", and He stated that they too must be likewise. As He was the source of living water to us, so we are to be to others (Jn. 4:10,14). The Samaritan woman could be the source of living water to others, as indeed she was. John grasped this, by using even some of the language of the virgin birth about the birth of all God's children. It's as if even the Lord's Divine begetting shouldn't be seen as too huge a barrier between us and Himself. The wonder of the virgin birth is something which elicits the "Wow!" mentality; but the miracle continues into *our* lives.

4:15 *The woman said to him: Sir, give me this water, that I do not thirst ever again, nor come all the way here to get water-* I have earlier suggested that the woman perceived the Lord was using figurative language. And she now comes to believe that the exhausted Jew by 'her' well can actually give her this water. It was quite a trek from the town to the well; spiritually, she wanted an end to the apparently endless journey to quench spiritual thirst. In our terms, an end to the reading of endless

self-help books, hanging out on various 'spiritual' forums online; but actually have the Spirit within us.

*Whoever* drinks of the water of life will have *within* them a spring that also gives eternal life (Jn. 4:15). The purpose of a spring is to give water to men. The way the woman immediately led others to Him is proof enough of this. Experiencing the Lord's words and salvation *inevitably* leads to us doing likewise to others, springing from somewhere deep within. This was in fact one of the first things God promised Abraham when He first instituted the new covenant: "I will bless you (i.e. with forgiveness and salvation in the Kingdom)... and *you* shalt be a blessing", in that we his seed in Christ would bring this same blessing to men of all nations by our witness (Gen. 12:2,3). When the Lord offered salvation to the woman at the well, He spoke of how it would be a spring of life going out from her. She wanted it, but apparently just for herself. Therefore when she asked to be given such a spring, the Lord replied by asking her to bring her husband to hear His words (Jn. 4:15,16). Surely He was saying: 'If you want this great salvation for yourself, you've got to be willing to share it with others, no matter how embarrassing this may be for you'. In a similar figure, the Bible begins with the tree of the lives [Heb.], and concludes with men eating of the tree and there appearing a forest of trees-of-life.

4:16 *Jesus said to her: Go, call your husband and come back here-* See on :15. Receipt of the spring of the Spirit is related to our desire to want to reach out and share spiritually with others. It also requires repentance; and she needed to repent. The Lord wanted her right away to be a source of Spirit to others, hence He asked her to return to Him with her "husband". Although the Spirit was not yet given, He realized that in prospect it could still be granted in some form because He was certain that He would indeed fulfil His mission and be "glorified" so that the living water of the Spirit could be poured out.

4:17 *The woman answered and said to him: I have no husband. Jesus said to her: You said well that you have no husband-* We note the Lord's positivity. Bear in mind that in their languages, "man" and "husband" are the same word. He could have said 'Wrong. You are living with a man. Don't lie to Me. Fess up and admit it, and then we can go further'. But He turned it around positively. He commends her for saying she has no man in the sense of a husband. The Lord picks up her deceptive comment positively, agreeing that her latest relationship isn't really a man / husband as God intends. I find His positive attitude here surpassing.

4:18 *For you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truthfully-* See on :17. What was apparently an untrue, or less than fully truthful comment is turned around



positively by the Lord, to demonstrate His style of imputing righteousness. The woman was evidently a sinner; and the Lord made it clear that He knew all about her five men. But He didn't max out on that fact; His response to knowing it was basically: 'You're thirsty. I've got the water you need'. He saw her spiritual need, more than her moral problem; and He knew the answer. When she replied that she had no husband, He could have responded: 'You liar! A half truth is a lie!'. But He didn't. He said, so positively, gently and delicately, 'What you have said is quite true. You had five men you have lived with. The one you now have isn't your husband. So, yes, you said the truth' (Jn. 4:16-18). He could have crushed her. But He didn't. And we who 'have the truth' must take a lesson from this.

4:19 *The woman said to him: Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet-* Now she is sure that this exhausted, dehydrated Jew is more than a random guy sitting by a well, cadging a drink off a Gentile. Yet having been convicted by Him of a sinful life, even though He did it in the kindest possible way, she prefers to wiggle out of those personal issues by getting into theology. We know from Acts 8 that people from Samaria formed a significant part of the earliest Christian community. Yet all converts are prone to return to their former beliefs in some ways at some times. The Samaritan view of Messiah was likewise that he would be the re-incarnation of a prophet, specifically Moses (Jn. 4:19,25). It therefore seems likely that the idea of a pre-existent Christ / Messiah developed as a result of the early Jewish and Samaritan converts returning to their previous conceptions of Messiah. For these were less taxing to their faith than the radical idea that an illiterate Jewish teenager called Marryam in some dumb Galileean village actually conceived a baby direct from God Almighty. Uninspired documents such as the *Preaching Of Peter* and the *Gospel Of The Hebrews* also make the false connection between Jesus and a re-incarnated Moses, Elijah etc. Clearly enough, the idea of a pre-existent, incarnated Jesus had its roots in paganism and apostate Judaism.

4:20 *Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship-* Sin is serious. This is one of the most recurrent themes in the Bible. Yet with the characteristic blindness of human nature, it is one which fails to register with us as it should. 'Just' one sin in Eden led to death- and so much more than death. Time and again people missed the Lord's attempt to convict people of their sin. When He tells the Samaritan woman of the five men she'd had in her life, she responds by ribbing Him about whether God should be worshipped on Gerazim or in Jerusalem. She tried to move off the delicate issue of her morality into theological argument and strife about conflicting traditions (Jn. 4:18-20).

4:21 *Jesus said to her: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when*

*neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father-* The Lord had promised the gift of the Spirit *within*. This made all arguments about sacred space utterly irrelevant and at best obsolete. We sense His eager hopefulness for response when He said to the woman: "Believe me, woman..." (Jn. 4:21 GNB). Even though she was confrontational, bitter against Jewish people, and perhaps [as it has been argued by some] pushing a feminist agenda in an inappropriate way... the Lord sought for *faith* in her above correcting her attitude about theological things.

*4:22 You worship that which you do not know. We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews-* The Lord went along with her as far as He could, but as in our witness to folks, there comes a time when we have to put our foot down. Salvation was "from the Jews" in that the Messianic saviour would be from them. And the identity of the Messiah was the issue here. The Lord doesn't take away from the Samaritans the fact they worshipped; but they worshipped in ignorance without accepting Messiah as being a Jew rather than one of their re-incarnated prophets (see on :19). There is a very similar situation in Acts 17:23, where Paul declares to people the God whom they had worshipped in ignorance through sacrificing to "the unknown God". The "we" cannot refer to Jews generally; for they did not know the Father nor His Son (8:19,27). He meant "we" as in Himself and the disciples who were now regrouping around Him. "We worship *what*" we know could as well be translated "*who* we know". Acceptable worship of the Father was predicated upon acceptance of Himself as Messiah, the salvation of and from the Jews.

*4:23 But the hour comes and now is, when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such worshipers are who the Father seeks-* The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32 Gk.; 17:1; 19:27). Yet in a sense the essence of His death was ongoing throughout His life; the 'hour' was to come, and yet was. Then, through the cross, true worship of the Father in spirit and in truth was enabled, when the veil of the temple was torn down, and the system of Mosaic worship ended. I have noted above that the Spirit was only to be given when the Son was glorified; but that hour was then and was also to come; therefore in a sense the Spirit could be given even then.

The 'true' worship of the Father doesn't imply necessarily a 'false' worship prior to it; it is the 'true' in contrast to the shadow that had existed before it (cp. the true vine, the true manna). But the true worship was to be in the Spirit, in the heart, the place where the fountain of living water could be placed.

There are many examples of where God and man are portrayed as being in some kind of mutual relationship. Consider Jn. 4:23: "The Father seeks

such to worship Him". The Hebrew / Greek idea of 'seeking' God implied to worship Him. Understanding that, albeit through the mask of translation, we see that the Father is seeking seekers. We seek Him, He seeks us; and thus we meet. Men were found by Jesus, just as they were seeking to find Him (Jn. 1:39,43); there is an electric moment when the Lord and man meet. He seeks for us, and we seek for Him; and we find each other.

*4:24 God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth-*

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (Jn. 4:23) was spoken by the Lord early in His ministry. Even at that stage ["and now is..."], there were some worshipping in spirit and in truth. If the Lord is referring to the disciples, and if the "truth" in Jn. 4:24 is to be understood in theological / doctrinal terms, then "the truth" which they at that time possessed was very far less than what we might think today. The disciples at that time had many misbeliefs and misunderstandings; they believed in demons, were unclear about important aspects of the Lord's work, death and resurrection, and believed in ghosts. But they worshipped in spirit and in truth. However, I suspect that "spirit and in truth" doesn't refer to 'A spiritual attitude *plus* theological purity' (which none of us have anyway). That was how I once read the phrase. But "truth" would seem to me to refer more to truthfulness, and to reality as opposed to shadow- e.g. Jesus as the true light, the true bread refers not to His intellectual purity but to the way in which He was the fulfilment of the things of "the true tabernacle" as Hebrews puts it, and thus His truth / reality stood over against the shadows. In the context, the Lord is making a point to the Samaritan woman about where geographically God's house and place of worship should be- Zion or Gerizim. And as He often does, the Lord takes the question onto another level. 'The place of worship doesn't matter, the worship must be in spirit and in truth', i.e. the presence of God in the temple was to be ended, the Mosaic worship system with its need for geographical place and focus was about to end, and worship was to be internal, in the heart. And some, the Lord noticed, had already perceived that. So the context of Jn. 4:24 wasn't about the need for doctrinal / theological / intellectual truth. In Jn. 4:18 the Lord commends the woman because she "spoke truthfully / truly" about her marital state. As the Father was seeking "spirit and truth" worshippers, it was apparent to the disciples that the Lord Jesus was "seeking" this woman for God (Jn. 4:27). Her honesty meant she was beginning to worship in truth. And so He goes on to encourage her to worship God in spirit and truth[fullness]; her humble recognition of failure was the "truth" required for worship. But she needed to also accept the Spirit. She had the mind of David, who worshipped with 'truth in the inward parts' after recognizing his sin with

Bathsheba. Notice how David says that God 'desires truth in the inward parts' (Ps. 51:6), and the Lord seems to be alluding to that when He says that God desires worship in spirit [inward parts] and truth. The context of sexual failure is the same for both the Samaritan woman, and David. If my reading of the allusions to David and Ps. 51 is correct, then the Lord wasn't talking at all about "truth" in the sense of pure theology. Rather was He referring to the "truth" of confession of sin and worship with a humble heart. It is the desperately repentant person who will fall down and worship God (Mt. 18:26 s.w.); this is the "spirit and truth" worshipper. And such a spirit is ultimately "the truth" which we are to finally arrive at.

The Jews and Samaritans had the idea that all they needed to do was to occasionally visit a place of worship in order to have a relationship with Him. The Lord, as His manner was, cut right across this by saying that as God is Spirit, so the true worshippers would worship Him in Spirit. If we believe that God is Spirit, if all He does and says constantly expresses His Spirit, then our lives likewise must be of non-stop worship, not through going occasionally into a temple or ecclesial meeting, but in living a spirit of life that worships Him in every situation (Jn. 4:20-24).

### **"God is a Spirit"**

God's spirit is His power or breath by which His essential self, His being and character, is revealed to man through the actions which that spirit achieves. Thus "God is spirit", as Jn. 4:24 should be properly translated (see R.S.V., N.I.V.), because His spirit reflects His personality.

God is described as being many things, e.g.

- "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29)
  - "God is light" (1 Jn. 1:5)
  - "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8)
  - "The word (Greek *logos* - plan, purpose, idea) was God" (Jn. 1:1).
- Thus "God is" His characteristics. It is clearly wrong to argue that the abstract quality of love is 'God', just because we read that "God is love". We may call someone 'kindness itself', but this does not mean that they are without physical existence - it is their manner of literal existence which reveals kindness to us.

The spirit being God's power, we frequently read of God sending or directing His spirit to achieve things in harmony with His will and character. Examples of this are numerous, showing the distinction between God and His spirit.

- "He (God) that put His Holy Spirit within him" (Is. 63:11)
- "I (God) will put My spirit upon him (Jesus)" (Mt. 12:18)
- "The Father give(s) the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 11:13)
- "The Spirit descending from heaven" (Jn. 1:32)

- "I (God) will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17).  
Indeed, the frequent references to "the spirit of God" should be proof enough that the spirit is not God personally. These differences between God and His spirit are another difficulty for those who believe that God is a 'trinity' in which God the Father is equated with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Very importantly, a non-personal God makes a nonsense of prayer - to the point where prayer is a dialogue between our consciousness and a concept of God which just exists in our own mind. We are continually reminded that we pray to God who is in heaven (Ecc. 5:2; Mt. 6:9; 5:16; 1 Kings 8:30), and that Jesus is now at God's right hand there, to offer up our prayers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 9:24). If God is not personal, such passages are made meaningless. But once God is understood as a real, loving Father, prayer to Him becomes a very real, tangible thing - actually talking to another being who we believe is very willing and able to respond.

4:25 *The woman said to him: I know that the Messiah is coming (he that is called Christ). When he comes, he will declare to us all things-* The Lord had just declared to her all about her previous immoral life. So her statement here may not be scepticism, but rather daring to join the dots and make the connection that this tired, dehydrated Jew sitting before her was in fact Messiah.

4:26 *Jesus said to her: I that speak to you am he-* This is one of the clearest statements the Lord ever makes as to His self-identity. And even here, I suggest He is confirming as correct the woman's hunches about Him as being Messiah (see on :25).

4:27 *And upon this scene came his disciples, and they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman. Yet no one said: What are you seeking? Or, Why do you speak with her?-Seek for response in people.* As the disciples came upon the Lord talking to the woman by the well, it looked as if He were *seeking* something (Jn. 4:27). But they didn't ask what- for it was obvious. His body language reflected how He was *seeking* her salvation. He seeks the lost until He finds them, even now (Mt. 18:12; Lk. 15:8); as He looked up into the branches of the sycamore tree seeking Zacchaeus, He was epitomising how He came (and comes) to seek and save *all* the lost (Lk. 19:5,10). Our preaching to others isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24).

The Rabbis taught that a man should not salute a woman in a public place. For Jesus to talk to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn.4) was therefore an indication of his studied disregard of local tradition

concerning women when it clashed with spiritual principles. The incident was "a strange innovation on Rabbinic custom and dignity". The Talmud taught: "Six things are a disgrace to a disciple of the wise: He should not...converse with a woman in the street" (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth "Benedictions" 43b). A woman could only be alone with two men, never with one, and this was within a town; outside a town, she had to be in the presence of three men (Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 81a). But the Lord spoke to her alone. A woman could even be divorced for speaking to a man. "What conduct transgresses Jewish custom? If she...speaks with any man" (Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 7:6). There can be no doubt that the Lord didn't accept the prevailing view of women. The Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are recorded in an intentional parallel in John 3 and 4. The man doesn't get it, he fails to perceive the double entendre in the Lord's words, and struggles with their deeper meaning. The Samaritan woman gets it straight away, and even responds to the Lord with the same kind of language.

*4:28 So the woman left her waterpot and went away into the city, and said to the people-* She had once been rather proud that she had something to draw with, and the Lord didn't. Leaving her waterpot was a statement that now she had found the living water which quenched thirst, and she no longer needed the natural water. She specifically "said to the men" (as AV). Were these "the men" of her former life? Why go to men in particular? The same word is used in :29 about the "man" she had found who she thinks is the Christ. She went to those with whom she had sinned.

*4:29 Come, see a man who told me all things that I have ever done. Can this be the Christ?-* She tells the men with whom she had sinned (:28) that she has found a man who told her all about their sins. There were no secrets anymore; one man at least knew the entire story. And she believes she may well have found the Messiah. He let Himself be encouraged by her response to Him, even though her comment "Could this be the Messiah?" (Jn. 4:29) implies she was still uncertain. Raymond Brown has commented: "The Greek question with *meti* implies an unlikelihood" (*The Gospel According To John*, Vol. 1, p. 173). But we see throughout this incident how faith in Him as Messiah passes through stages- and of course John is appealing in his Gospel for others to likewise come to this faith to follow the path of this woman. She now understands Messiah as most importantly one who realizes our sins and can deal with them- rather than as some conquering hero. And this again was a necessary issue to emphasize in preaching in John's context.

*4:30 They went out of the city and came to him-* There was something in the frank witness of this sinful woman which was compelling. Just as

biography is always interesting to us fellow humans, so confession of sin and faith it has been dealt with in Christ is the most compelling witness. 'Coming to Christ' is very much the language of conversion.

*4:31 In the meantime the disciples pleaded with him, saying: Rabbi, eat-* The disciples are presented here as focused on the material rather than the spiritual and symbolic. And it is John himself writing or speaking the Gospel message in this way, like the woman, admitting his own weakness in order to bring others to the Lord.

*4:32 But he said to them: I have food to eat that you do not know-* Dehydrated at the well, very hungry, the response of the Samaritan woman revived His spirits to the point that the disciples assumed He must have been given a meal (Jn. 4:32,33). He goes on to say that working with a woman like that is His "meat" or food, the 'doing of the will of him that sent Me and to accomplish His work' (4:34 RV). Yet the will of God and accomplishing of His work was evidently the cross (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:9,10). In preaching to that woman and converting her, the Lord was living out the essence of the crucifixion that awaited Him. Preaching work isn't glamorous. It is a living out of the cross.

*4:33 The disciples queried each other: Has anyone brought him something to eat?-* As noted on :31, the male Jewish disciples are presented as lacking the spiritual perception of this female Gentile. The disciples in their own preaching of the Gospel, of which John's Gospel is a transcript, were admitting their own petty literalism. And urging others to not be as they had been.

*4:34 Jesus said to them: My food is to do the will of Him that sent me and to accomplish His work-* See on :32. After the Lord converted the Samaritan woman at the well, He commented to His disciples that such work was His food- "to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34). But soon afterwards He claimed that "the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me" (Jn. 5:36). It's tempting to think that the "works" He spoke of were His miracles- but the linkage with Jn. 4:34 suggests that they were also references to the change He achieved within people. These transformed people were His witness- and the Samaritan woman is a classic example. For when He had done the Father's work in her, she rushed off to witness to the world. In Jn. 6:28,29 the Lord seems to consciously steer us away from understanding His "works" as merely the miracles of e.g. feeding and physical healing. In response to the question "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He responds: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent".

The Lord saw His preaching work as a carrying of the cross. He spoke of

how His witness to the Samaritan woman was a 'finishing of the Father's work' (Jn. 4:34). The 'finishing' was clearly only accomplished upon the cross, when He cried "It is finished", and He "fulfilled" or [s.w.] "finished" the Scriptures (Jn. 19:28). Thus in His life, He lived out the essence of His future cross by witnessing to others. Like Paul, we need to grasp what this means for us in practice. Crucifixion was a public, painful, sacrificial act; and true effort in witness will be the same. And this is exactly why Paul can speak of "the preaching of the cross", the preaching which *is* the cross (Gk.). In His preaching to the woman at the well, the Lord saw Himself as 'finishing God's work' (Jn. 4:32,34). And yet John evidently intends us to connect this incident with the Lord's final cry from the cross which he records: "It is finished!". Only on the cross was the work finished; but by pushing aside His own hunger, tiredness and desire for solitude in order to convert that woman, the Lord even then was 'finishing the Father's work', in that in essence He was living out the spirit of crucifixion. And so with us; the life of ongoing crucifixion demands that we consciously push ourselves in the service of others. The finishing of the Father's work was accomplished in the cross- hence the final cry of triumph, "It is finished!" (19:30). But this meat was not appreciated by them in His lifetime. The work of sharing in Christ's cross should be our meat and drink, to the eclipsing of the pressing nature of material things. For this was the context in which the Lord spoke; His men were pressing Him to attend to His humanity, whereas His mind was filled, even in tiredness and dehydration, with the living out of the cross unto the end. As He was exhausted and dehydrated by the well, so He was on the cross. He saw that "meat" in the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He saw the connection between His cross and the conversion of that woman; thus "the meat... the will... [God's] work" was the cross, and yet it was also the conversion of the woman. The cross is essentially the converter of men and women, and thereby our crucifixion-lives are likewise the power of conversion.

4:35 *Do you not say: There are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white, ready to harvest-* If they lifted up their eyes, they would see a file of Gentile men headed by a fallen woman coming towards them. And this was the whiteness of the harvest. Grain turns from green to yellow to white. Those people who were apparently expressing an initial interest were seen by the Lord as ready for harvest. Be believed the process of conversion could happen that quickly. And His disciples, from that day to this, struggle to believe it. They want to first see some course of instruction and a socializing of converts into their community. However it must be also noted that harvest in Palestine typically began after Passover; so the Lord may be hinting that it was after His death that the harvesting would begin. But then on the other hand, He has said that His "hour" of death was right then, it was both coming and yet "now is" (see on :23). The way of the Spirit involves working outside of time as we



know it; as the essence of the hour of the cross was then, so the moment of sowing was also that of harvesting, the Spirit was not yet given because the Lord was not glorified, yet it could still be given; and so eternal life could be given now to people who remain still mortal.

The Gospel writers were preaching the words of the Gospels in response to their Lord's command to go preach. Yet Jn. 4:35,38 records them recognizing that they didn't appreciate how great the harvest was, and indeed the harvest was spoilt because of the weakness of the disciples. For the whiteness of harvest rather than it being yellow might hint that it was overdue for harvest. The Lord Himself was of the persuasion that people are more interested than His brethren may think. "You say 'Four months from sowing to harvest: the time is not yet'... [But I say that] the fields are already white for reaping. Already the reaper is taking his pay" (Jn. 4:35). Four months was the time reckoned proverbially for the sown seed to come to harvest in Judea. It seems that the disciples thought there had to be a gap between sowing and reaping, whereas the Lord is saying that people were more ready for harvest than His preachers thought. The Kingdom prophecies speak of a time when the sower shall overtake the reaper, i.e. there is immediate fruition of the crop planted. And so it was in the Lord's spiritual Kingdom; the seed had fruit immediately. And it can be the same with us- our insistence that there has to be a respectable gap between sowing the Gospel and reaping the harvest isn't a concept upheld by the Lord. There's more of a harvest out there than we think. And perhaps the relatively poor response to the preaching of Jesus in AD30-33 was because His disciples didn't do their part?

*4:36 He that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit to everlasting life; that he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together-* The reapers were the disciples (:38). If they reaped, they would receive wages, and the fruit of the converts they gathered would be that those converts received eternal life. Not just at the last day, but in the sense John's Gospel speaks of- receiving the gift of life after the pattern of the Lord's life, right now. The "wages" surely suggests that work with the likes of the Samaritan woman has its blessings in this life, as well as having eternal consequence.

The experience of preaching is in itself a foretaste of the future world-wide Kingdom. The harvest is both at the end of the age, according to the parables of Mt. 13, but also is ongoing right now (Jn. 4:36) as we gather in the harvest of converts. The Lord in Jn. 4:35,36 took this figure far further, by saying that the harvest is such that the interval between sowing and harvesting is in some sense collapsed for those who engage in preaching. The reaper was already collecting his wages; the harvest was already there, even though it was four months away (Jn. 4:35). This clearly alludes to the promises that in the Messianic Kingdom there would

also be no interval between sowing and harvest, so abundant would be the harvest (Lev. 26:5; Am. 9:13). And hence, we are impelled to spread the foretaste of the Kingdom world-wide by our witness right now.

The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works. There are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.). Those who reap the harvest of the Gospel will be rewarded with salvation (Jn. 4:36). Such work *isn't* just an option for those who want to be enthusiastic about it.

4:37 *For herein is the saying true: One sows and another reaps*- This is perhaps John's equivalent to the parable of the sower in the synoptics. The Lord is the sower. The Lord likened His preachers to men reaping the harvest. The implication is that He had done His work with the woman, and they were to now work with the crowd of Gentile men she was bringing to Him. He speaks of how they fulfilled the proverb that one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37,38). Yet this 'proverb' has no direct Biblical source. What we *do* find in the Old Testament is the repeated idea that if someone sows but another reaps, this is a sign that they are suffering God's judgment for their sins (Dt. 20:6; 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic. 6:15). But the Lord turns around the 'proverb' concerning Israel's condemnation; He makes it apply to the way that the preacher / reaper who doesn't sow is the one who harvests others in converting them to Him. Surely His implication was that His preacher-reapers were those who had known condemnation for their sins, but on that basis were His humbled harvesters in the mission field.

4:38 *I sent you to harvest that upon which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you are taking over their labour*- Harvesting what one has not worked for is the language of Israel receiving the promised land

(Josh. 24:13). The Kingdom blessings were to be understood spiritually-harvesting people for the Lord for whom they had done none of the hard, preparatory ground work. "Laboured" is used only elsewhere in John in :6 about how the Lord sat at the well "wearied" or 'laboured'; He had laboured, although He graciously includes others in His work, and He invited the disciples to now go reap the harvest for which they had not laboured. Perhaps the others who had laboured is some reference to an outreach toward Samaritans made by John the Baptist and his disciples. The language of taking over their labour would be appropriate to how the Lord's disciples were to build upon the earlier spade work done by John's ministry. Or perhaps the other labourers referred to the Samaritan woman and her initial group of converts; the idea would then be that the disciples ought to return to the area and secure a great harvest as a result of their witness. But such was their slowness to perceive the Lord's openness to Samaritan Gentiles that the disciples did not do this in time. To see themselves as taking over the labour of despised Samaritans was too much for them; their prejudices had been too great. And perhaps John records this in order to demonstrate the weakness of himself and his team, a lament over the potential they had let go.

*4:39 And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified: He told me all things that I have ever done-* The Samaritan woman at the well had a sense of shame and deep self-knowledge over her, as she realised that Christ knew her every sin. It was with a humble sheepishness that she confessed: "I have no husband", because she was living in sin. She was converted by that well. Immediately she "left her waterpot, and went her way into the city (the record inviting us to watch her from a distance), and saith to the *men* (significantly), Come, see a man... is not this the Christ?" (Jn. 4:17,28,29). There was a wondrous mixture of enthusiasm and shyness in those words: "Come, see a man...". It is a feature of many new converts that their early preaching has a similar blend. It is stressed that men believed because of the way the woman told them "He told me all that ever I did" (Jn. 4:39). He had recounted her past sins to her (4:18,19). And she now, in matchless humility, goes and tells her former life to her associates, using the very words of description which the Lord had used. He convicted her of her sins, and this conviction resulted in her unashamed witness.

We see how belief is predicated at times upon the word of a third party other than the Lord. We can bring people to faith, and also stumble them in their walk.

*4:40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they pleaded with him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days-* Coming to Jesus in John's Gospel means to believe in Him. They wanted Him to "stay" or "abide"

with them, a common theme in John of the Lord abiding in the hearts of believers. They are set up as model converts, in whom the Lord 'abode' after conversion. As John's Gospel later explains, this is achieved by Him through His Spirit, which means that He is present as really as if He were physically present with us. His abiding by the Spirit is a sign of acceptance, and His abiding with them at a time when a Jew like Peter could not go inside the home of a Gentile was surely a public indication of His acceptance of Gentiles. Peter and others who so objected to such fellowship after His resurrection were clearly forgetting, wilfully, the implication of such incidents.

4:41 *And many more believed because of his word*- Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by God's word; it's as if these Gentile converts are being set up as role models for all who should thereafter believe. Their belief was as valid as those who believed for the sake of the woman's testimony, that she had met a man who knew all of her sins, and was thereby, by implication, able to deal with them. This large scale conversion is significant because there is no hint that any miracle was done in order to provoke faith. It was conversion on the basis of the Lord's power to know human personal history and to forgive. It becomes even more programmatic for all who would afterwards believe.

4:42- see on Jn. 20:31.

*And they said to the woman: Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world*- They realized that the true Messiah was not Saviour solely of Israel, but of the *kosmos*, which John has defined in the prologue as the new world of persons who believe in Him. Acts 5:31 defines His 'salvation' in terms of Him giving both repentance and forgiveness to people; and this is exactly what the Lord had done to the woman and other Samaritans. He had given provoked in her repentance, and empowered her forgiveness. This is all the work of the Spirit.

4:43 *And after two days he left for Galilee*- Perhaps He wanted to give the disciples a break from attention, and so He went somewhere where He thought they would not have much acceptance nor attention (:44). But in the same way as during His working life the Lord could have made technical mistakes in His manual work, so here, things didn't turn out as He had perhaps intended. In John's Gospel more than the others we see the Lord's deep humanity, mixed with the highest terms of praise for Him.

4:44 *Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country*- As noted on :43, the Lord assumed He would not be welcomed there and He could have some quality time teaching the disciples in their native environment. The common proverb was repeated or testified to

with approval by the Lord. But things turned out not as He had expected (:45)- another window onto His humanity, as is the description of Galilee as "His own country". See on :48.

*4:45 So when he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all the things that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they also had gone up to the feast-* As noted on :43 and :44, this welcome was perhaps not what the Lord had expected. Their belief however was because they had seen miracles at the feast (2:23); unlike the Samaritans, of whom we have just read, who believed without having seen miracles.

*4:46 He came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum-* The Lord's return to Cana was perhaps as a follow up to His witness there previously. Perhaps He sought to try again with Nicodemus, whom I suggested on 2:1 was there. His attempt to follow up with individuals, despite the large scale of His ministry, is a reflection of the huge value the Lord attached to the individual.

*4:47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded that he would come to Capernaum and heal his son. For his son was at the point of death-* To make that 20-mile journey over mountainous terrain displayed quite some faith. Perhaps this nobleman was one of those who had encountered the Lord at the feast in Jerusalem (:45). The fact he came personally rather than send messengers or servants again indicates a genuine personal faith. The Greek is literally "come down to Capernaum", which reflects the topography (as 2:12); all encouraging confirmations that we are reading a genuine account rather than one fabricated for personal reasons.

*4:48 Jesus replied to him: Except you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe-* The Lord criticized the people for their refusal to believe apart from by seeing signs and wonders. In line with this, the Lord attacks Nicodemus' belief on the basis of the miracles, saying that instead, a man must be born again if he wishes to see the Kingdom (Jn. 3:2,3). But later He says that the disciples were being given miraculous signs greater than even healing to help them believe (Jn. 11:15); He bids people believe because they saw signs, even if they were unimpressed by Him personally (Jn. 5:20; 10:37; 14:11). Clearly enough, the Lord was desperate for people to believe, to come to some sort of faith- even if the basis of that faith wasn't what He ideally wished. And it's possible that His initial high demand for people to believe not because they saw miracles was relaxed as His ministry proceeded; for the statements that faith was not to be based upon His miracles is found in Jn. 3 and 4, whereas the invitations to believe because of His miracles is to be found later in John.

This challenges the attitude that sets a bar of faith and understanding over which people must first leap before we work with them.

I noted on :43 and :44 that the Lord had expected little response in Galilee, and yet there was response. In this we have a window onto His utter humanity. Likewise, perhaps in this comment that faith would only come from *seeing* miracles; for the nobleman did not see the miracle, but believed.

4:49 *The nobleman said to him: Sir, come before my child dies-* The man thought that the Lord's physical presence was required for the miracle. His faith was therefore incomplete, but all the same, the Lord worked with Him. And just as He does today with us, sought to stretch the faith of the man.

4:50 *Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your son lives. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way-* The man of course could have disbelieved; yet the Lord had done the miracle anyway. So the Lord was as it were desperately hopeful that his challenge to the development of the man's faith would work- and it did. And yet his faith was still immature; for although it is stated that the nobleman believed the Lord's words, it was only once his son was healed that he *really* believed (Jn. 4:50 cp. 54).

4:51 *And as he was going home, his servants met him, saying that his son lived-* They would have known that he had gone to Cana to seek the Lord Jesus and healing from Him. They were so thrilled that they began the 20 mile journey to meet Him. They met their master as he "was going down" (AV)- i.e. as he was coming down the final slope toward Capernaum. We wonder why they had delayed coming to him; perhaps they wanted to be sure the child had really recovered. All this has the circumstantial ring of truth to it which permeates the inspired records.

4:52 *So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. They replied to him: Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him-* If "the seventh hour" means 1 p.m. [assuming counting time from sunrise- although there are various possibilities; Roman time would have been 7 p.m.], then the man would have walked or travelled home through the night, arriving the next day, so that the servants spoke of "Yesterday". Travelling overnight was a risky undertaking as Galilee was full of road thieves. But he was so eager to see the result of faith. "Began to get better" is also an indication of incomplete faith; he imagined that the Lord's healing word would have only gradual effect, whereas the child had perhaps died and been resurrected at that time ["your son lives"]. In any case, the fever abruptly "left him" at a specific time and not as part of any gradual process of feeling better, as the nobleman with his limited faith had imagined.

4:53 *The father knew that that was the hour when Jesus had said to him: Your son lives. And so he and his household believed-* As noted on :50, the man's initial belief had not been strong; but now it became stronger. Or it could be that he had set himself the condition to the effect that if his son was really healed, then he would believe; and that condition was met. Christ saw that man's low level of faith, and took him where he was, with the result that he soon rose up to a higher level. The Lord must have reflected on the wide differences between the various levels of faith and commitment He encountered. Jairus besought Him to lay His hands on his daughter (Mk. 5:23); whilst the Centurion's attitude was "say the word only" (Lk. 7:6). His faith was undoubtedly on a higher level (Lk. 7:9), but still the Lord accepted the lower level of Jairus and worked with it. He was manifesting His Father in this. Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him.

The idea of whole households "believing" is common in the New Testament; the early church was largely a network of household churches.

4:54 *This was the second sign that Jesus did, when he had gone from Judea to Galilee-* There is a question as to whether this is the same miracle of the centurion's servant being healed in Capernaum which we have in Mt. 8:5 and Lk. 7:2. I would argue that they are similar, but different:

- (1) Here a 'king's man' pleads for his son; there a centurion for his servant.
- (2) Here he pleads in person; there the Jewish elders plead for him.
- (3) Here the father is probably a Jew; there the centurion is certainly a Gentile.
- (4) Here the healing words are spoken at Cana; there at Capernaum.
- (5) Here the malady is fever; there paralysis.
- (6) Here the father wishes Jesus to come; there the centurion begs him not to come.
- (7) Here Christ does not go; there apparently he does.

The similarity I suggest is that the faith of the Gentile centurion is presented as far stronger than that of the spiritually immature Jewish nobleman. The similarities suggest that perhaps that Gentile had heard of the healing of the nobleman's child, and was motivated by it to complete faith, just as we are motivated by accounts of faith rewarded in others' lives to ourselves have even stronger faith than in the cases we heard about.





## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem-* So often John describes what the Old Testament repeatedly calls "the feasts of the Lord" as "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own, just as so many do today.

5:2 *Now there is in Jerusalem-* It's worth noting the evidence that the entire New Testament was written before AD70:

- If any of the Gospels were written after AD70, their total silence as to that cataclysmic event is strange. The synoptics all record a prophecy of the events of AD70, and yet there is no reference by any of them to its fulfilment; whereas the Gospel writers aren't slow to comment on the way the Lord's words came true. Mt. 24:20 speaks of those events as being in the future- "Pray that it may not be winter when you have to make your escape". Surely there'd have been some reference to the fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy, if the records were written after AD70? Jn. 5:2 speaks as if Jerusalem and the temple area were still standing when John was written: "Now there *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool". The record of the Jews' proud comment in Jn. 2:20 that Herod's temple had taken 46 years to build includes no hint nor even presentiment that it had now been destroyed.
- Paul on any chronology died before AD70, so his letters were all before that. We need to marvel at the evident growth in spirituality and understanding which is reflected within Paul's letters, and realize that he grew *very* quickly.
- Hebrews speaks of the temple and sacrifice system in the present tense, as if it were still operating (note Heb. 10:2,11,18). The 40 years of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness are held up as a warning to an Israel approaching 40 years of disobedience after the death of Jesus (Heb. 3:7- 4:11). "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4) sounds like Nero's persecution hadn't started.
- The letters of Peter warn that a huge calamity is to come upon the Jewish churches, couched in terms of the Olivet prophecy. Thus they were written before AD70. 2 Peter also speaks as if Paul is still alive at the time.
- Acts stops at the point where Paul is living in his own house in Rome quite comfortably, and spreading the Gospel (Acts 28:30). And yet we know from 2 Tim. 4 that ultimately he died in Rome, presumably after being released and doing more work for the Lord. The obvious conclusion is that Acts was written before Paul died. Acts also implies that Jews were living at peace with Rome (Acts 24:2; 25:1-5; 15:13- 26:32)- a situation which didn't apply after AD70.

*By the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches-* The five porches could refer to the five books of Moses, the Torah, which failed to provide healing. "Bethesda" is obviously significant in meaning, because attention is called to the Hebrew name. The Hebrew

is literally *beth* [house] *chesed*, the Hebrew word usually translated "mercy" and about the nearest the Old Testament comes to speaking of "grace". But beneath the five porches of the Mosaic law, the Torah, there was no grace or mercy being found by those who sat beneath them. They hoped for it, but Israel did not find that which he looked for. "Bethesda" may well have been a kind of institution providing very basic care for the incurables and handicapped whose families would not care for them. Hence *beth*, "house", can mean both a house as well as a family. It really was a picture of stricken humanity, whom legalism couldn't help. Yet before them was the pool or "bath", as Adam Clarke suggests the Greek should be rendered. Immediately we make the association with baptism. There are Old Testament prophecies of how in the Messianic Kingdom, healing water would come forth from Jerusalem (Joel 3:18 etc.). The Lord was going to demonstrate that in His gift of the water of life, the essence of the future Kingdom was to be experienced right now. The sheep gate was on the east of the temple (Neh. 3:1,32; 12:39), from where Messiah was to enter in the day of His Kingdom (Zech. 14:4).

*5:3 In these lay a crowd of those who were sick, blind, lame, paralysed, waiting for the moving of the water-* The "sick" or "impotent" are those without power. The same word is used of how whilst we were all "without strength, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). They were waiting, just as Israel ought to have been waiting for Messiah. But the law was itself "impotent" (s.w. "sick"), unable to cure or change the human moral condition (Heb. 7:18 s.w.). The same word for "moving" is used of how the Jewish religion could not "move" the heavy burdens of legalism and human guilt before God (Mt. 23:4).

*5:4 For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and disturbed the water. Whoever was first to step into the pool, after the waters were disturbed, was healed of whatever disease he had-* The Bible records things at times from how they appear to men at the time; hence the language of demon possession and exorcism, even though the real existence of demons is denied in the Bible. Here we have another example. The Lord's miracle of healing the lame man at the pool was to show the folly of the Jewish myth that at Passover time an angel touched the water of the Bethesda pool, imparting healing properties to it. This myth is recorded without direct denial of its truth; the record of Christ's miracle is the exposure of its falsehood. Another example would be the Jewish myth that the High Priest's Passover address was a direct speaking forth of God's words; this wrong idea isn't specifically corrected, but it is worked through by God – in that Caiaphas' Passover words just before the crucifixion came strangely true, thus condemning Caiaphas and justifying the Lord Jesus as Israel's Saviour (Jn. 11:51).

5:5 *One man there had been ill for thirty-eight years-* The paralysed man had waited by the pool 38 years, waiting for someone to cure him. There was no cure in those 38 years- only in the word of Christ (John 5:5). Israel were actually in the wilderness for 38 years; the similarity implies Moses' leadership could not bring salvation, only the word of Christ.

5:6- see on Mt. 20:32.

*When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing he had been there a long time, he said to him: Would you be made whole?-* The Lord asks these basic questions in order to elicit in a person what is their greatest, dominant desire. Thus He asked a blind man what he wanted; He made as if He would have gone further on the walk to Emmaus, and appeared as if He would walk past the drowning disciples on the lake. He knows of course the answers ahead of time but He wishes to elicit in us an articulation of what is our dominant desire. The Lord is the same yesterday as today; He likewise brings us to realize what are our dominant desires. All sick people would say they wish to be cured, but actually for some it is not their dominant desire- especially after 38 years. He asked the question exactly because He knew the man had "been there a long time". Human nature develops coping mechanisms to the extent that our natural conservatism can mean that we do not actually have change as a dominant desire. And the Lord sought to elicit such desire in the man; perhaps He cured that man rather than the other long term residents of Bethesda because He knew that he alone really wanted to change.

5:7 *The sick man answered him: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed. As I approach someone else steps in front of me-* The man was totally focused on the myth. He felt his salvation could only be achieved by his own works and strength, of which he didn't have enough; and he didn't have the right friends, who could put him into the pool. He was looking for a helper, who would be with him all the time and would be ready to get him into the pool whenever the Angel supposedly came. He was looking for a saviour; not just for the coming of an Angel. Perhaps it was this dominant desire which the Lord was attracted to and felt he could work with.

5:8 *Jesus said to him: Arise, take up your bed and walk-* The nature of the healing in this case was a test of the man's respect of the Lord's spoken word. He could have argued back that no, he needed help to get into the pool when the Angel came. But he was looking for a personal Saviour and was willing to accept His word, and make the first movement to try to "arise". The command to take up his bed was also a psychologically intentional statement; the man would have walked off holding his mat in his hand, a powerful visual image that would have

remained in the memories of many. And he would have had to dispose of it somewhere, another psychological underlining to him of the reality that he was really cured. We see here the same sensitivity in the Lord which He still shows in His dealings with people today.

*5:9 And straightway the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day-* The immediacy of the Lord's cures has been noted on 4:52. Claims of healing typically required a period of time; but the Lord's miracles were total and instant rather than requiring periods of time to take effect. The man's obedience to the command to take up his mat and walk is noted; for as noted on :8, it was his obedience to the Lord's spoken word which was so significant.

*5:10 So the Jews said to him who had been cured: It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed-* The actual law of Moses did not condemn people for carrying their mat after being healed, but the Jews had come to assume that their fences around the Law were in fact the Law itself. And that is the problem with fences around laws; they come to be perceived as the law itself. Faced with the evident power of the Spirit, the legalist must either capitulate or madly insist upon the consequences which arise from infringement of the letter of their own laws. And we see such anger today elicited from legalistic minds when the Spirit is clearly operative. Baptize 50 people, and the legalistic mind will be angry rather than rejoicing that Christ is preached, insisting upon the consequences of breaking their own by-laws which they have in their own minds turned into God's laws. Fences around laws invite men to play God, and indeed they do so. As noted on :1, such people have hijacked God's law and way and turned it into their own.

*5:11 But he answered them: He that made me whole, the same said to me: Take up your bed and walk-* The man correctly reasoned that One who operated by the power of the Spirit was clearly above all human by-laws and religious regulations of mere men. The Lord had designed the nature of the cure to depend upon obedience to His word, which of itself required the man to break the Jewish regulations about not carrying a mat on the Sabbath. The Lord had intentionally provoked this conflict, because He saw that it was necessary in the ultimate spiritual path of this man. And He does the same with us, carefully tailoring experiences and conflicts in order that our faith might grow.

*5:12 They asked him: Who is the man that said to you: Take up your bed and walk?-* Their focus was not on the miracle, which they also considered "work", but on the specific command to carry a mat on the Sabbath. They

surely knew who it was- only Jesus of Nazareth did this kind of thing. They were looking for legal evidence from this man.

*5:13 But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place-* The Lord could have course orchestrated this miracle in any way He chose. But He did it in this way, leaving Himself anonymous, so that the man would be earnestly asking himself every moment: "Who is this man?". And that of course is the question which John's Gospel puts to his audience. For the man to truthfully answer the Jews' questions with "I don't know, He slipped away in the crowd..." would have likewise made the Jews ask themselves the same question, and reflect that Jesus of Nazareth was no standard miracle worker, but of an altogether higher order.

*5:14 Afterwards, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: Look, you are made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you-* The man had sought to express his gratitude by going to the temple, perhaps wondering whether he ought to offer a sacrifice for his cleansing. But the Lord was sensitive to the fact that ritual obedience to law can lead us away from the imperative which must be keenly felt- to sin no more. We can infer that his condition was a result of sin and his tendency was now to return to the sinful life.

The Lord told him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing (than those years of sitting by the pool) come upon you" (Jn. 5:14). That "worse thing" was rejection at the judgment- which, it could be inferred, would be like earnestly desiring salvation but not finding it. For that will be the fate of the rejected at the last day. None will be shrugging their shoulders, indifferent to the eternity they have missed.

*5:15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole-* As noted on :12 and :13, the Lord structured the miracle so that the whole style of it made it clear that it had been Him. So he was telling the Jews what they knew already in their consciences.

*5:16 And for this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath-* Some manuscripts add "and sought to kill him" (AV). They were seizing upon the Mosaic commands to kill the Sabbath breaker (Ex. 31:15; 35:2). This is the blind anger of those who think their religious organization is the only one God recognizes, and cannot cope with someone operating successfully outside of it. The same mindset is still seen today within Christian groups. "He did these things" translates an imperfect tense in the Greek which suggests the Lord habitually did miracles on the Sabbath. He was certainly seeking to provoke the Sabbath issue with the Jews, because here most clearly, they had hijacked God's laws and made their own fences around them equivalent to Divine law, thus playing God.

5:17- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

*But Jesus answered them: My Father works even until now and therefore I also work-* The cosmos hasn't been created, wound up by God as it were on clockwork, and left ticking by an absent creator. There are many Bible verses which teach that God is actively, consciously outgiving of His Spirit in the myriad things going on in the natural creation, every nanosecond He is sensitive to the needed input from Him- and He gives it. Therefore we are never far from Him. The Lord Jesus defended working for His Father on the Sabbath because God was also at work on the Sabbath.

That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

5:18 *For this cause the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath law, but he called God his own Father, making himself seem like God-* The Jews only had authority to ask the Romans to carry out a death sentence if it involved desecration of the temple; but their rage was such that they countenanced extra-judicial murder, as witnessed by Saul murdering Christians. It was a long stretch to say that claiming Divine Sonship was claiming to be God personally, and the Lord brings out their error in chapter 10. This is especially so as the Old Testament calls men "gods" and the term "God" was applied by the Jews to Moses. It is tragic indeed that standard Christianity through the false doctrine of the Trinity has made the same logical error. We must note that the Greek translated "seem like" means just that; it does not mean 'directly equal to' (it is translated "agreed together", Mk. 14:56,59). The same phrase is found in Phil. 2:6 where perhaps in allusion to this incident, Paul states that the Lord did not consider such 'equality with God' a thing to be even grasped at.

5:19 *Jesus therefore answered and said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: The Son can do nothing of himself but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever works He does, these the Son does in like manner-* The statement that He can do nothing of Himself is an answer to their mistaken idea that He was making Himself in some way equal to God (:18). "The works... The Son can do nothing *of himself*" recalls Moses' words: "All these works... I have not done them of my own mind" (Num. 16:28). The Lord was claiming to be as Moses, and a prophet greater than Moses; but not God.

This passage gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this- for no less than four times in Acts (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30) they refer to Jesus as the "holy child" of God. Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. And may we too "ceaseless... Abba, father, cry". The haunting melody of that hymn well expresses the utter wonder of it all, as we too struggle to find our true Father. The spirit / attitude of the Son of God should be ours, in that we like Him cry "Abba, father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). His spirit / attitude to the Father should be ours; He stressed that His Father is our Father (Jn. 20:17). Jesus acted and 'was' for all the world as if He had had His natural Father with Him from the start of His life. This was how close the Father became to Jesus; the extent to which He successfully 'found' Him; to the point that the 'mere' invisibility of that Father was not a major issue or barrier in their relationship. And so it should be for us, in the life of believing in that which is unseen, and in them who are invisible to us.

5:20 *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that Himself does; and greater works than these will He show him, that you may marvel-* As noted in commentary on chapter 4, the Lord did not consider that seeing miracles was a solid basis for faith. "Marvel" has connotations of disbelief; the more miracles which would be done, the "greater works" which the Lord would do through the apostles (14:12), would not so much create faith as lead them to marvel in incomprehension. The connection with the "greater works" to be done by the apostles is clear (14:12); they were empowered to do what the Lord had been shown needed to be done by the Father.

In Jn. 5:19,20 we read that the Son does (*poieo*) what He sees the Father doing, and the Father shows Him (*deiknumi*) all (*panta*) that He does. This is referring to Ex. 25:9 LXX, where Moses makes (*poieo*) the Tabernacle according all (*panta*) that God shows him (*deiknuo*). The reference of Jn. 5:19,20 is therefore to the Lord working with His Father in the building up of us the tabernacle... and *all* things God planned for us were revealed to the Son even in His mortality. What great wealth of understanding was there within His mind, within those brain cells... and how tragic that the head and body that bore them was betrayed and ignored and spat upon and tortured by men...

There is here what C.H. Dodd has called 'the parable of the apprentice': "A son...does only what he sees his father doing: what father does, son does; for a father loves his son and shows him all his trade". Now just imagine what that meant for the Lord Jesus, growing up with Joseph, who

appeared to be His father, learning Joseph's trade. Yet He knew that His true Father was God, and He was eagerly learning *His* trade.

*5:21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will-* The present tenses mean that the Son now gives life, and this is a development of the ideas of the prologue. The life given is the life of the Spirit, the power to live the kind of life the Lord Jesus lived. The same word is found in 6:63: "It is the Spirit that quickens"; so the Son "gives life" [s.w. "quickens"] through giving of His Spirit, the ability to live and think as He did and does. This promise is at the core of Christianity, of being like Christ. It is for all time. The Lord gave His life for us on the cross, but He gives His life to us in an ongoing sense. It is the Spirit of Christ in us now which shall quicken or make alive our mortal bodies in the process of resurrection to life at the last day (s.w. Rom. 8:11, see note there). He is a "quickening spirit" now as He shall be in granting the resurrection to life at the last day (1 Cor. 15:45).

Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas. Jesus Himself 'quickens' or breathes life into us (Jn. 5:21)- but His Spirit does this, in that His words 'are spirit' (Jn. 6:63). Again we see how His personal presence, His life and Spirit, are breathed into us through His words being in us. In the mundane monotony of daily life, doing essentially the same job, travelling to work the same route, the alarm clock going off the same time each morning... there can be breathed into us a unique new life through having His words ever abiding within us. And this 'quickening' in daily life now is the foretaste of the 'quickening' which we will literally experience at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22- 'made alive' is the same Greek word translated 'quicken' in Jn. 5:21; 6:63). If the Spirit of Jesus now dwells in us, then that same Spirit shall immortalize our mortal bodies into immortality at the Lord's return (see on Rom. 8:11). In this sense, receiving and living the Lord's Spirit now is receiving life, the kind of life we shall eternally live- "eternal life". The Son giving life now is therefore related seamlessly to how the Father shall give life at the resurrection to life at the last day.

*5:22 For neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son-* Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not



judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore, judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

In the context here, the Lord is warning the Jews who were seeking to kill Him that all judgment is actually His, and not theirs. He is their judge, and shall be their judge at the last day. His very presence amongst men was His judgment of them; the same word is used in 3:19 in stating that the judgment of the Jewish world was simply because the light of Christ had come into it.

*5:23 That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that does not honour the Son does not honour the Father that sent him-* The honour of the Son is on the basis of the fact that He is our judge (:22). The true glory to God was to be through the lonely rejection of the cross. He who quietly honours / glorifies the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49) in the life of self-crucifixion will be honoured / glorified by the Father quietly in this life, and openly in the age to come (Jn. 12:26); such is the mutuality between a man and his God. See on Rev. 7:9.

To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe

understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

5:24- see on Jn. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:14.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that hears my word and believes Him that sent me has eternal life, and comes not into condemnation, but has passed out of death into life-* In the immediate context, the hearing of the word alludes to the way the healed impotent man had heard the Lord's word and believed; see on :8. The same word for passing over from death to life is used when John writes to those who had been converted as a result of hearing his Gospel. He says that they know they have passed over from death to life because they live in love (1 Jn. 3:14). Hearing the Lord's word, living in the Spirit, which means living in love, as He loved, living with the spirit of life which He had and has... are all the same thing. "My word" is effectively "my life", His Spirit of life, as established in the prologue. Remember too that John is writing in Hebrew thought to Jewish people. Hebrews are those who have 'passed over', as Abraham their father did geographically so long ago. But the definition of the new Israel, the new Hebrews, are those who have passed over from the darkness of Judaism to live in the light of Christ. If we are walking in the light, with His Spirit, then we shall not be condemned. That judgment [s.w. "condemnation"] is for those who see but reject the light and prefer to remain in darkness.

*5:25 Truly, truly, I say to you: The hour comes and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live-* As explained above, if we have the spirit of Christ, we are living the eternal life. In that sense the resurrection has happened to us; but the physical transformation of our body from mortal to immortal is yet to happen, at the resurrection to life at the last day. And so He says that that hour comes and yet now is. Just as they shall come forth to life at the sound of the Lord's literal voice at His coming, so we come to spiritual life now as a result of hearing His word / voice. "Hearing" here implies more than literal hearing, but hearing with belief, just as 'seeing' in John means seeing and believing.

But the Lord's "hour" in John also has reference to His death. The judgment quality of the crucifixion is reflected by the way in which the Lord speaks of both the cross and the day of future judgment as "the hour" (Jn. 5:25-29). When the Lord taught that "the hour" is both to come and "now is", He surely meant us to understand that in His crucifixion, properly perceived, there is the judgment of this world, the end of this age for us who believe in Him, the cutting off of sin. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench by Pilate, as if He is the authentic judge, is further confirmation that in His Passion, the

Lord was truly Judge of this world.

The hour that was coming and yet was refers to the Lord's death. There, the voice of the Son of God was made clear. We have shown elsewhere how the Lord's blood is personified as a voice crying out. Those who truly hear that voice will be raised to life. The way the graves opened at His death was surely a foretaste of this. See on Jn. 16:25.

*5:26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son life in himself-* This seems to mean that because spiritual life is so inherent in the Son, He therefore has the ability to give that life or spirit to others. We cannot really give our lives to others in any literal sense because we do not have life inherent within ourselves, it is a gift. But the Father and Son have the life which is themselves, and can gift that to others.

5:27- see on Mk. 2:10.

*And He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is a Son of Man-* His humanity is His ability to judge us. We will then realize the extent to which He succeeded in every point where we realize we failed, despite being strapped with our same nature. And thus we will respect Him yet the more for His perfection of character, and for the wonder of the salvation that is thereby in Him. We cannot judge because although we too are 'sons of men', we have sinned. Any such judgment would be hypocritical. But the Lord can judge, because He had human nature, being the archetypical "son of man", and yet never sinned.

Even in His life, the Father committed all judgment unto the Son (:22). The Lord can therefore talk in some arresting present tenses: "Verily, verily, I say unto you [as judge], He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation". According to our response to His word, so we have now our judgment. He goes on to speak of how the believer will again hear His voice, at His return: "The hour is coming, and [also] now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". Our response to His word now is a mirror of our response to His word then. Hence the hour is yet future, and yet now is. 'The Son right now has the authority to execute judgment on the basis of response to His word. He will do this at the last day; and yet even as He spoke, He judged as He heard' [paraphrase of Jn. 5:27-30]. Because He *is* the Son of man, He even then had the power of judgment given to Him (Jn. 5:27). These present tenses would be meaningless unless the Lord was even then exercising His role as judge. When He says that He doesn't judge / condemn men (Jn. 3:17-21), surely He is saying that *He* won't so much judge men as they will judge themselves by their attitude to Him. His concentration was and is on saving men. The condemnation is that men loved darkness, and prefer the darkness of rejection to the light of Christ. Likewise Jn. 12:47,48: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I

judge him not: for I came not to [so much as to] judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me... hath one that judgeth him: the word [his response to the word, supplying the ellipsis] that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

*5:28 Marvel not at this! For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice-* The Lord repeatedly tells the cynical and unbelieving Jews of His day *not* to marvel / wonder, but to *believe*. Perhaps we're intended to read in an ellipsis to these passages: '[Don't only] marvel / wonder [but *believe*]'. John later used the same phrase himself in 1 Jn. 3:13- he was so influenced by reflecting upon the words of the Lord Jesus that His words became John's words. Our language and thought processes should be likewise changed as we come to have Christ in us, and His spirit becomes ours.

"The tombs" translates a Greek term rooted in the idea of remembrance; 'memorial tombs' or 'cenotaph' would be no bad translation. The "all" in view are therefore those within the 'memory' of God, the believers. This is established by the context, which has spoken of how all who now receive the life of the Spirit shall also rise to life in the last day. We who have heard His voice now shall again hear it at the resurrection. It is that word of command which is therefore presented here as the basis for resurrection to life, just as Lazarus is later depicted as coming out of the tomb at the sound of the Lord's voice, as a worked example of what the Lord means here.

*5:29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation-* The 'coming forth' is another connection with the resurrection of Lazarus, who was bidden "Come forth!" by the voice of the Lord Jesus. He was a worked example ahead of time of the Lord's teaching here. Although "life" and "condemnation" are ministered in this life according to a person's response to encounter with the Lord Jesus, their final outworking and moment will be at the resurrection of the last day. That is when immortality begins in a bodily, material sense.

*5:30 I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me-* This is another reflection of the Lord's humanity. Our will is not yet coincidental with God's; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer.

The Lord was and is 'seeking' the Father's will not in the sense that He is unsure of it, but in the Hebrew sense of 'seeking', i.e. respect and worship. The Lord's thinking or spirit is that of the Father. Therefore God's will is His will, and this is reflected in the way the Lord judges. Yet we bear in mind that God's will is for human salvation, that none be lost but all the called should be saved (6:39; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). And that same will is in the Son, who will judge according to this "will".

Am. 7:8 describes Israel's condemnation as a plumb line, a measurement and assessor, being applied to them. Here the figure of weighing up evidence is made to mean condemnation; so immediate is God's judgment. He needs no time to draw a conclusion; being outside of time, He can see a situation and make the judgment immediately, and implicit within the information gathering process. The Lord Jesus likewise judged as soon as He heard (Jn. 5:30). His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39).

5:31 *If I testify of myself, my witness is not true*- Having presented Himself as the ultimate judge, the Lord now changes the metaphor to say that He is a witness in His own trial. He requires witnesses to testify about Him. So He is now recognizing that He stands under the judgmental eyes of the Jews, and is presenting His witnesses in His defence.

5:32 *It is another that testifies of me; and I know that the witness which He testifies of me is true*- Codex Beza reads "You know...". The Jews had set themselves up as the Lord's judges. He calls God as a witness in His case (7:28; 8:26). The whole picture of the Father as a witness, the Son in the dock, and the Jews as judges... is all rather bizarre. Who were they to judge God and choose to reject His testimony to His own Son, when in fact they knew ["You know...", Codex Beza] in their consciences that God's witness was true. But this was what the Jews were doing. But in fact anyone who rejects the Lord Jesus as their judge when they encounter Him... is in fact judging Him, and thereby treating God as a witness whose testimony they can reject. The encounter with Jesus, the light of the world, can only really result in total surrender to Him and His cause. Any rejection of Him is to play God, to set oneself up as judge of God, and to remain in the darkness with only condemnation awaiting.

5:33 *You asked John the Baptist, and he has testified to the truth*- The 'asking' is presented by the Lord in the context of legal metaphor. They had as it were summoned John the Baptist to give testimony; not perhaps literally, but in that these Jews now judging the Lord were those who had gone out into the wilderness to hear John, and had asked who he was- and been directed by him to the Lord Jesus.

*5:34 Not that the testimony that I receive is from man; but I say these things so that you may be saved-* This is perhaps saying the same as Paul's references to 'speaking after the manner of men', putting things in human terms in order to persuade those who still thought as men (Rom. 6:19; Gal. 3:15). The testimony of John the Baptist wasn't relevant testimony when God Himself is called as a witness. But because the Lord wished even the salvation of these wicked, bitter, jealous men who even judged God Almighty... He put things in human terms. He reminded them therefore of the testimony of John the Baptist. The Lord wanted men to accept His Father's witness; but He was prepared to let them accept John's human witness, and actually this lower level of perception by them, preferring to believe the words of a mere man, would still be allowed by the Lord to lead them to salvation.

And we might well note that a great number of priests and Pharisees did in fact later get baptized; so the Lord's desire for their salvation did in fact pay off. We should learn from that never, ever to write off anyone as a hopeless case for the Gospel.

The Lord said that He didn't receive witness from men; but, because He so wanted men to be saved, He directed them to the witness of John the Baptist. This in essence is the same as the way in which some people believed the testimony of the Samaritan woman, but others said they only believed once they heard Jesus Himself, as they discounted the testimony of men / women (Jn. 4:42). And so in our day, the ideal witness is that of the Father and Son themselves directly through their word. And yet there are others who are persuaded not by that so much as by the testimony of others who have believed. This may be a lower level compared to the Lord's ideal position of not allowing the testimony of mere men; and yet He makes this concession, for the sake of His burning desire for human salvation.

5:35 - see on Mt. 3:11.

*He was the lamp that burns and shines, and you were willing to rejoice for a period in his light-* John's message was hard hitting, critical of his audience, and demanding radical repentance. And masses of people rejoiced in it. They liked the hard line, and were joyfully proud that they had apparently responded to it. But they had not come to total commitment to the Lord Jesus, so their apparent repentance was merely a psychological experience of no lasting value. There is true repentance, and surface level repentance. We must perceive the allusion here to the prologue. John "was not the light" in the sense that he was not Jesus personally (Jn. 1:8 RV); but he was in another sense "a burning and shining light" (Jn. 5:35) in that he like us was "the light of the world" on account of his connection with Jesus. We too are to be the light of the

world insofar as we are in Christ, who is the light of the world. Yet it could be said that the Jews rejoiced in the light of John the Baptist, but would not come to the true light, of the Lord Jesus.

"You were willing to rejoice for a period" sounds like John's version of the parable of the sower, where the seed is sown but some enthusiastically respond "with joy" only for a while and then fall away (Mt. 13:20). The sower parable therefore had an immediate reference to the lack of lasting response to John's ministry.

5:36- see on Jn. 4:34.

*But the witness which I have is greater than that of John. For the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify that the Father has sent me-* As noted above, the Jews sat in judgment on the Lord, and He calls as witness for the defence the Father's empowerment of His miracles. To ignore that testimony or judge it as not significant to the case of Christ was to judge God. Those works came to the final 'accomplishment' of the cross, when "it is finished". And His death there was the final testament to God's love, the light shining in darkness.

"The work that the Father gave me to finish... testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it [was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness of God was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord's blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.).

5:37 *And the Father that sent me, He has testified of me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape-* They, sitting as judges of the Lord Jesus, had refused to hear His testimony about His Son. God's testimony to his Son was in the works or miracles (:36). But although like Nicodemus the Jews had no choice but to accept they had been done, they refused to accept the testimony made by them. Hearing God's voice and seeing His shape allude to Moses; and the Jews would of course agree that Moses was supreme in Judaism, and indeed they had not heard God's voice or seen the outline of His personal shape [another argument for the existence of God in a corporeal form]. But the Lord's idea was that those who had heard His voice and 'seen' / perceived Him, had witnessed a theophany far greater than what Moses saw- the allusions are to the prologue again, where the similarities with Moses are outlined.

It could be of course that the Lord is speaking here by way of glaring contrast: Moses earnestly desired to see God's shape, to view Him, to

completely understand Him. This was denied him- but not Jesus. The similarity and yet difference between Moses and Jesus is really brought out here. And again, Moses is shown to be representative of sinful Israel; as he lifted up the serpent, so they would lift up Christ; as he failed to see the Father's "shape", so they did too.

5:38 *And you do not have His word dwelling in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent-* They searched the Scriptures (:39) but the word did not abide in them. The idea of 'abiding' is frequently associated with the abiding of the life, spirit and word of Jesus in the hearts of those who believe in Him. So I would read this as saying that because they did not believe in the sent One, therefore God's word, His seed, His Spirit, His life, did not abide in them; rather than reading it as meaning that if the Old Testament word of Moses abode in them, then they would believe in the sent One. I read it as suggested because the promise of the 'abiding' is clearly presented in John as a consequence which follows and not precedes believing in Christ.

5:39 *You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me-* This is so tragically true of so many Protestant groups today. Bible study is not necessarily the way to coming to the Lord Jesus. In fact, it was their academic approach to the Bible which actually stopped them coming to Him (:40). Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *Me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

We must see in that Man who had fingernails, hair, who needed to shave, who sneezed and blinked, the very Son of God; the Man who should dominate our thinking and being. And we must grasp the wonder of the fact that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew came the words of Almighty God. All that was true of natural Israel becomes a warning for us, Israel after the spirit. The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord's encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life". Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

C.H. Dodd throughout chapter 3 of his classic *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* gives ample reason to believe his thesis that John's Gospel was written [partly] in order to deconstruct the popular teachings of Philo in the first century- and there are therefore many allusions to his writings. Thus John records how in vain the Jews searched the Scriptures,



because in them they thought they had eternal life (Jn. 5:39)- when this is the very thing that Philo claimed to do. This approach helps us understand why, for example, the prologue to John is written in the way it is, full of allusion to Jewish ideas about the *logos*. How John writes is only confusing to us because we're not reading his inspired words against the immediate background in which they were written- which included the very popular false teachings of Philo about the *logos*. Thus Philo claimed that God had two sons, sent the younger into the world, and the elder, the *logos*, remained "by Him"- whereas John's prologue shows that the *logos* was an abstract idea, which was sent into the world in the form of God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus. See on Jn. 3:3.

The Lord was unlike any other Rabbi- He wasn't a verse-by-verse expositor of the Old Testament, neither did He like to argue case law. He told parables to exemplify and clarify His message- not in order to explain an Old Testament verse, as the Rabbis tended to. He drew lessons from nature in a way the Rabbis simply couldn't do. Rabbi Jakob, a first century Rabbi, stated: "He who walks along the road repeating the Law and interrupts his repetition and says: How lovely this tree is! How lovely this field is! To him it will be reckoned as if he had misused his life" (The Mishnah, *Pirke Abot* 3.7b). By contrast, the Lord stopped and looked at the flowers of the field and drew His teaching from them. The Rabbinic way was to write and study endless *midrashim* on Bible verses, a kind of verse-by-verse exposition. The Lord's approach was more holistic and natural. The word *Midrash* comes from *darash*, to search, and perhaps the Lord had this style of 'Bible study' in mind when He said: "Ye search [i.e. midrash] the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... [but] ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life" (Jn. 5:39). Neither the Lord nor myself are against careful Bible study. But the Lord was warning against the attitude that eternal life comes from midrashing the Scriptures, writing dry analytical commentary, labouring under the misapprehension that this somehow will give life. Eternal life comes from knowing the life of Jesus, for His nature and quality of life is the life that we will eternally live, by His grace.

They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. The Lord brought this out in Jn. 5:39, in saying that "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... and ye will not come to *me*, that ye may have life" (RV). Their Bible study did not lead them to Him. And is just as possible that we too can be Bible-centred and not Christ-centred. For to academically study a document and perceive its connections and intellectual purity does not require the living, transforming, demanding relationship which knowing Jesus does. See on Acts 13:27.

The Lord told the Jews to "search the scriptures" so that they would have the word of God and the love of God abiding in them (Jn. 5:38-42). They academically knew "the scriptures", but the voice of God, the presence of God, and the love of God this reveals, was simply hidden from them. They weren't *really* studying. But the Saviour also upbraided His very own men for their lack of true Biblical perception: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Lk. 24:25). Note that He did not upbraid them for not understanding His own clear prophecies concerning His passion; instead He rebukes them for not grasping the OT teaching about His death and resurrection. Yet if we try to prove from the OT alone that Messiah would die and resurrect, we are largely forced to reason from types. Even Isaiah 53 is only a prophecy of Christ insofar as Hezekiah (to whom it primarily refers) was a type of Christ. Stephen in Acts 7 resorts to typology to prove his points about the Messiahship of Jesus. The point is, the Lord expected those simple fishermen to have worked these things out, to have heard the voice of God in those OT types. And He upbraided them because they failed to do so.

5:40 *But you will not come to me, so that you may have life*- The Jews searched the scriptures, thinking that by their Bible study alone they would receive eternal life. But they never came to Christ that they might know the eternal life that is in Him (Jn. 5:39,40). They thought "eternal life" was in a book, a reward for correct intellectual discernment and exposition, rather than in the man Christ Jesus. And for all our Biblicism, we need to examine ourselves in this regard. For like Peter, we must be Christ-centred more than purely Bible-centred; we must see Him "in all the Scriptures", knowing that the whole word of God's revelation was made flesh in Him.

The gift of life, the life and living of Jesus, His Spirit, was not predicated upon academic Bible study. We could not ask for a clearer argument against the argument that God's Spirit is only active today through the so-called "Spirit-word". The "life" or Spirit given to those who "come to me" is a gift; and the Jews were in fact hindered from receiving it by their excessive Biblicism.

5:41 *I receive not glory from men*- We are commanded to honour or give glory to the Son (:23). So the Lord is not against being honoured. So He may be lamenting here that He is not receiving honour from those men, they were not believing in Him but rather judging Him. Of course, He may have meant as GNB "I am not looking for human praise", i.e., as much as looking for their belief in the Father's offer of salvation. Or maybe the Lord's point was that He received glory from the Father (2 Pet. 1:17), from God Himself, and so any human testimony to Him was of little value (Jn. 5:34). In this case the Lord is alluding again to their standing in judgment upon Him and requiring witnesses to testify.

5:42 *But I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts-* Understanding "the love of God" as the love we have for God opens up several passages. The Jews didn't have the love of God inside them, i.e. love for God, because they didn't have His spirit. Love is the ultimate fruit of the Spirit; there was no love in their hearts because they had no Spirit. All they had was an academic, slavish devotion to academic Bible study. But they had no heart, no Spirit and so no love for God. No wonder their Bible study didn't lead them to grasp the most fundamental theme of the Old Testament- that the Messiah was to be God's Son. But their lack of "love of God" doesn't mean God didn't love them. They *are* beloved for the father's sakes; as a Father always loves His wayward son. But they didn't have love of God in their souls. Paul's prayer that God would direct hearts "into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5) surely means that He would influence their consciousness to be more filled with an upsurging love of God, rather than meaning that God would bring them into a position where He loved their hearts.

5:43 *I come in my Father's Name, and you do not accept me. If another shall come in his own name, you will accept him-* This again connects to the prologue. The Jews did not accept / receive Him; but those who did receive Him, received the Spirit. This is the mutuality between the believer and the Lord; if we receive Him, we receive the gift of His Spirit. The Jews were more likely to receive another Messiah, because he would not ask them to receive the kind of all demanding spirit which the Lord breathed in to those who accepted Him. The Father had testified to His Son's claims by the miracles done; the Lord came in His Father's Name / authority (GNB) in the sense that the miracles showed that He was clearly of God, as Nicodemus accepted. A claimant with lesser credentials, who came only in his own name, was more likely to be accepted because there was less personally at stake.

5:44 *How can you believe, you who accept praise from each other, but do not seek the praise that comes from the only God?-* The 'belief' in view is surely belief in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Being in a self-regarding, self-congratulatory religious environment, even if it is nominally Christian, is not the way toward faith in the Lord Jesus. The Greek seems to carry the idea: 'Glory can only be given to God, whereas you want glory from each other, effectively making yourselves equal to God as you falsely accused me of. You cannot believe in God whilst you are playing God, wanting glory to yourselves rather than to Him'. It is such arrogance, petty pride and positioning in the eyes of others which stops millions if not billions from believing.

Because there is only one God, there is only one glory, one Name of God, one standard of spirituality, one judge, one justifier. Whilst men seek

glory and approbation and acceptance and justification from other men, they are denying the principle of one God. If there is only one God, we should seek His honour and justification, to the *total* exclusion of that of men. Hosea had revealed this truth earlier: "I am the Lord thy God... and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me... neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee [i.e. thee alone] the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. 13:4; 14:3). Because God alone can give salvation and mercy, therefore there is no space for worshipping or seeking for the approbation of anything or anyone else; for the receipt of mercy and salvation are the only ultimate things worth seeking. There is only one God who can give them, and therefore we should seek for His acceptance alone.

5:45 *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope-* They who were judging the Lord Jesus were now put into the dock. An Moses was called as witness against them. They were condemned by Moses' law. And God was the judge to whom they were accused. Their judgment of the Lord, requiring Him to call God and John the Baptist as witnesses, was effectively their playing God. For any such judgment is playing God. And such will have to face God Himself as judge.

5:46 *For if you believed Moses, you would believe me. For he wrote of me-* The allusion is to the way Israel were intended to believe Moses because of the "great work" of the Red Sea and Passover lamb deliverance (Ex. 14:31). God came to Israel personally in the thick cloud; the great theophany was so that Israel would believe Moses (Ex. 19:9). But they did not believe Moses; and Israel too were blind to the great theophany of God in Christ [see allusions to it in the prologue], and did not believe either Moses or Christ.

Disbelief of Moses and rejection of His writings as inspired (:47) was the cardinal sin according to Judaism. But the Lord accuses these men of it- men who spent their lives poring over the scrolls. Their rejection of the message of Moses meant they rejected Moses. They had wrongly assumed that devotion to the Bible assured them of acceptability with God. But to miss the message of Christ is to be left without God and effectively despising those writings. The essence of this conundrum is seen in many Christians to this day.

5:47 *But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe my words?-* This is John's equivalent to Lk. 16:31: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead". The Lord's resurrection is here paralleled with "my words". The risen Lord was and is His word to men. And in the Jewish context, it would only be accepted if they had firstly believed Moses. Of course, they would have been indignant at the idea that they did not believe the writings of Moses; they held a doctrine of hyper-inspiration of the text of the Torah,

whereby every letter was inspired and seen as full of meaning. But such a reverent view of the Bible text can lead to Bibliolatry, rather than to faith in the Christ who is witnessed to throughout that text.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias-* We get the sense of the Lord increasingly trying to retreat from attention. He had withdrawn from Judea to Galilee on the hunch that He would not be accepted in His home area; and was found wrong on that. Now, He goes to the other side of the sea, but the crowd follows Him. And then He goes up into a mountain (:3)- and sees a great crowd still coming to Him (:5). His patience and loving care for the masses is wonderful; when He really wanted a break from the attention.

6:2 *And a great crowd followed him, because they saw the signs which he performed on those that were sick-* As argued throughout chapter 5, the Lord's miracles were undeniably Divine and were as it were a legal testimony to His authenticity as God's Son in the court of public opinion. Even Nicodemus had recognized this. But from the way the Lord speaks later in the chapter, their motivation was for healing of sickness, for personal benefit rather than the bread of life.

6:3 *And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples-* This clearly echoes the description of the sermons on the mount and plain in Matthew and Luke. The message that He taught them all the hours it took for them to get hungry isn't recorded. But we can perhaps infer from the connections with Matthew and Luke that it was the same basic content- the manifesto of the Kingdom of God which was preached elsewhere.

6:4 *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand-* As noted on 5:1, "the feast of the Lord" had been hijacked by the Jews, so that it had become instead *their* feast. This is the problem- when mere religion swamps and takes over real spirituality.

6:5 *Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great crowd came to him, said to Philip: Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?-* The "therefore" apparently connects with the coming of Passover (:4). He saw a parallel between the provision of food for that crowd, and the provision of the Paschal lamb, Himself, for Israel's salvation. We wonder why Philip particularly is given this test (:7). The Lord saw perhaps that there were specific issues with Philip that could be addressed and perfected by the whole experience. Or it could be that because Philip was from the immediate locality where they were, Bethsaida (1:44; 12:21). And so the Lord asked him where the local shops were.

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding,

the Lord asked the disciples where “we” could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that ‘Jesus is the answer’ in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise. See on Mk. 11:20.

6:6 *And this he said to test him. For he knew what he would do-* So often the Lord's style with us is just the same. We are given testing situations and questions, purely for the development of our own faith and understanding. The phrase “knew what He would do” is similar to the idea that the Lord knew that He would die on the cross. And so again, the whole incident can be understood on at least two levels. The Lord knew He would make bread to meet their hunger; and He knew that He would on the cross be the bread of life to meet human hunger for salvation.

6:7- see on Jn. 14:8.

*Philip answered him: Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little-* We see here the dead literalism of Philip, and how faith sees in completely different terms to the detailed literalism of unbelief, which focuses on the dimensions of the problem rather than the possibility of solution. Energy so often goes into carefully calculating the difficulties, the height and nature of the mountain, rather than into faith that the whole situation can simply be moved.

Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that ‘...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!’. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: “The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. “not sufficient”, Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves” (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom,

right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him-* Andrew was also from Bethsaida (1:44), so he may have known the boy personally. The villages were very small and everyone would have known each other. The focus of this incident is upon relatively unknown disciples, Philip and Andrew, instead of the usual Peter, James and John.

6:9 *There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two fishes; but what are these among so many?-* Barley loaves were the food of the very poor (Ez. 4:12; 13:19), costing a third the cost of wheat (Rev. 6:6); and the Greek means 'little fishes'. It was all the very lowest of human provision which was turned into so much. The food provided is later interpreted by the Lord as His own flesh and blood, sacrificed to meet human hunger. The poorest, roughest of food was used to represent the Lord's nature and origins. It was God's blessing upon this which led to the abundant spiritual filling of all those who hungered for Him and His word.

6:10 *Jesus said: Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand-* The command to recline at banquet ["sit down"] was to set up the similarity with the Messianic banquet, to which the Lord provided an open invitation to whoever wished to hear His word. Who could "sit down" at a feast was a major issue with the Jews; only those from whom there would be no guilt by association were invited to recline together. But the Lord operated no screening process, and goes on to compare this feast with the breaking of bread and the final Messianic banquet. From our side of things, we are not to screen, the invitation to the Lord's feast in this life and that to come is to be offered by us without screening. "Whosoever will" is to be welcome. The only other time John uses the verb "sit down / recline" is in describing the scene at the last supper (13:12).

The mention of grass is to highlight the fact that Passover was about to begin, for grass is mowed in Palestine in April. Or it could be that the grass refers to hay from the recent mowing. The point is that this feast was the Lord's equivalent of the Passover feast, and later in this chapter He predicates salvation upon participating in it.

6:11 *Jesus therefore took the loaves and having given thanks, he distributed them to those that were sitting down. Likewise also the fishes, as much as they could eat-* Other manuscripts as AV add: "Distributed them to the disciples and the disciples to those that were sitting...". Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed



incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers. The visual image suggested of the Lord holding the bread in His hands, blessing and giving to the disciples is so clearly recollective of the scene at the last supper. "As much as they could eat" is unique to John, and emphasizes the super abundance of the Lord's spiritual provision.

*6:12 And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, so nothing goes to waste-* The language of 'filling' must be understood in John's Gospel as referring to filling with the Spirit. The Lord's body, His being, His Spirit, His life, His word, was to fill His people, mediated through the work of the disciples.

The gathering up is twice mentioned (:13). The same word is used of the gathering together of the Gentiles in one with the Jews (11:52). "Waste" is a word commonly used of the lost, of how the Lord wants none to perish. It is His will that none should perish, and that was the reason for His death (3:15,16 s.w.). The intention of His cross is therefore lived out in all our efforts to bring others to salvation, to keep them in the path, and not to "perish". All such efforts will have His special blessing and Spirit behind them. The Lord uses the same word in describing the food He had created as 'perishing' (:27; s.w. "goes to waste"). He is making the point that if the food was gathered then it would *not* perish. The allusion is clearly to the gathering of the manna, but the idea is that the food created represented something that would not perish, eternal life. The gathering in of the Gentiles is in view, but so is the simple fact that the broken ones, the fragments, are also to be saved. And the Lord has delegated that work of gathering them to us His disciples.

*6:13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten-* The twelve baskets clearly suggest the formation of a new Israel from the broken ones ["fragments"], through the work of the disciples. We recall how the Gentile woman wished to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of the Jewish Kingdom (Mk. 7:28). This again encourages us to see this ingathering of broken ones, that left over by the Jewish crowd, as symbolic of the ingathering of the Gentiles by the disciples taking the Gospel to the Gentile world- a commission they were terribly slow to perceive.

6:14- see on Jn. 12:42.

*When the people saw the sign which he did, they said: This is of a truth the prophet that comes into the world!-* The miracle of the loaves and

fishes made men see the similarity between the Lord and Moses, whom they perceived to have provided the manna (:32). Therefore they thought that Jesus must be the prophet like Moses, of whom Moses wrote. But the Lord goes on to explain that He was greater than Moses, because Moses' bread only gave them temporal life, whereas if a man ate of Him, he would live for ever; His words would give spiritual life which was part of that "eternal life" of the Father (6:49,50). The Jews thought that the prophet like Moses of Dt. 18:18 was a prophet equal or inferior to Moses. John's Gospel records how Christ was showing that the prophet would be greater than Moses. Martha understood that when she said that "the Christ... which should come into the world" (i.e. the prophet of Dt. 18:18) was "the Son of God", and therefore Jesus of Nazareth (11:27).

*6:15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself-* "Take him by force" could even imply kidnapping, taking Him away to be their puppet in a revolution against Rome. The Lord clearly felt the need for intense personal prayer at this time; the temptation to attempt to become an immediate Messianic King was great for Him, and this was a recurrence of the wilderness temptation to that same effect. John doesn't record the wilderness temptations, but he records how the same temptations returned to Him throughout His ministry, in fulfilment of the Synoptic observation that the devil of temptation departed from Him only for a while, implying it returned later.

Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough*?

*6:16 And when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea-* Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

*6:17 And they entered into a boat and were going over by sea to Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them-*

"Not yet" suggests, as hinted at in the synoptics, that He had promised to rejoin them. He wanted them to exercise their minds and assume that He would indeed keep His promise and come to them- but by walking on the water. His promise of returning to us likewise demands faith and a stretching of our paradigms. For the promise of the Comforter was that the Lord would indeed 'come to them', but through the indwelling of the Spirit. He was training them- trying to get them to consider the words 'I will come to you' as being capable of fulfilment in ways they could not previously imagine. He likewise works in educating us.

*6:18 And the sea was rising because of a great wind that blew-* The similarities with Jonah are apparent. The storm was to bring them to repentance, to make them appreciate their mission to the Gentiles which had been implicit in their gathering up the fragments dropped by Israel, and forming 12 baskets of a new Israel. But as with Jonah, they needed a near death experience in a storm to get them to perceive this.

*6:19 When therefore they had rowed about five or six kilometres, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were afraid-* They rowed rather than sailed because the wind was against them; and recall that in Hebrew thought, wind and the spirit are the same words. Their desire to run back home to Capernaum, away from this challenge to harvest the Gentiles, was resisted by the Spirit. Their fear of the approaching Lord Jesus was perhaps because they did subconsciously recognize Him, but feared a meeting with Him again, as they were fleeing from His work of grace towards the Gentiles.

*6:20 But he said to them: It is I! Be not afraid!-* It was not that they thought He was someone else, like a ghost. "They saw Jesus" (:19). So His assurance to them was that "It is I", the "I am" (Gk.), the One with the character and Name of God, who above all wanted their salvation. And there was no need to fear Him; He was their saviour. For salvation by grace is at the heart of the memorial Name "I am". "It is I" recalls many Old Testament passages where God declares Himself as Israel's saviour, the "I am", who also walks upon the waves of the sea and brings peace to the storm. The Lord was asking them to see in Him the human face of that saviour God, the manifestation of that Name in a human person; and to accept that for them it meant salvation, and they need not fear, even their own sins and rejection of the commission to the Gentiles.

*6:21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going-* John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee. Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation,

can we properly 'receive' Him? The Lord did not stop them from their plan to return home; He made the boat arrive immediately at the land where they intended going, "to which they were going away" (Gk.). This is typical of His ways with men; we are not stopped from our path, but His intervention on the way is such that with Him now with us, we see the end point so differently.

*6:22 On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea noticed that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone-* Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

The incident was intended to teach that the Lord's presence could be achieved without His literal presence at all times. This was to prepare the audience for the amazing promise of the Comforter, that through the Spirit, the Lord could be present as really as He had been during His ministry.

*6:23 (Some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks)-* John was himself a fisherman and knew Tiberias boats from those of Capernaum. This is typical of the inspiration process; personal knowledge is worked with through the process of inspiration. They came searching for Him, noting He had not got into the single boat the disciples used. They then went to Capernaum and found Him there- the miracle of His walking on the water was left for them to figure out, for there is more subtly in the Divine than to trumpet His achievements in a primitive way. The wonderful things He does for us today likewise need to be meditated upon to be perceived.

*6:24 When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus-* They assumed He was still somewhere in the area, since He had not gone in the boat with the disciples. They thought that His physical presence was required for miracles and blessing; hence the Lord left them to meditate upon His crossing of the stormy sea and presence in Capernaum, where in physical terms He could not have become immediately present without the Spirit.

Their "seeking" of the Lord was on a purely surface level. Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, "but have removed [our] heart far from me" (Is. 29:13). Only those who call upon Him "in truth", with "unfeigned lips" will be heard (Ps. 145:18). Men repeatedly 'sought for' the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:37; Jn. 6:26), but He told them to *truly* seek Him (Mt. 6:33; 7:7; Lk. 12:31). "Strive to enter in [now] at the strait gate: for many [at judgment day] will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Lk. 13:24). Our attitude to seeking the Lord now will be the attitude we have then. The emotion and reality of the judgment experience will not essentially change our attitude to the Lord. If we have "boldness" in prayer now (Heb. 4:16), then we will have "boldness in the day of judgment". How we feel to Him now is how we will then.

*6:25 And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him: Rabbi, when did you come here?*- Often we ask questions which disguise our essential question, which we are afraid to ask or verbalize. The real question was *how* He had come to Capernaum. But they covered this by enquiring *when*. In their hearts they must surely have sensed that He had also performed a miracle in terms of His presence. And He wished to stretch the thinking of His true followers on this point, leading them up to His paradigm breaking promise of the Comforter, His presence realized by the Spirit and without His physical presence. Their seeking and 'finding' Him was on a purely human level; see on :24.

*6:26 Jesus answered them and said: Truly, truly, I say to you: You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled-* They did not see the signs in the sense that they did not perceive the intended teaching of the miracle. They were focused purely on the immediate benefit of food. John records the Lord's discourse to the end we might see or perceive the sign of the miracle. The allusion is to Ps. 74:9 LXX, where Israel did not 'see their signs' because there was no prophet amongst them. They didn't see the sign because they failed to really perceive Him as the ultimate prophet. They claimed to see Him as the prophet (:14), but not in reality. The whole record brings out the tension between surface level spirituality and true faith.

*6:27 Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set His seal of approval-* The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He

tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, or crossing it by boat, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own.

The food which the Lord provided was His body and life, given above all upon the cross. He urges His hearers to labour to possess this, because this is the food that will abide in / into [Gk. *eis*] the life eternal (Jn. 6:27- AV 'endures unto' is a poor translation). The essence of having and 'eating' of the Lord's sacrifice now, is what eternal life is to be all about. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord was giving them His life, the eternal life. Absorbing Him, His sacrifice, the food which is Him, begins now... and in so doing, we are eating of the food / bread that will abide into the life eternal. He surely had in mind too the manna stored in the ark, which was eaten in the wilderness and yet abode / endured into Israel's life in the promised land. And that bread, of course, was symbolic of Him; it is the "hidden manna" which His followers will eat in the future Kingdom (Rev. 2:17). Eph. 1:17,18 puts it another way, by paralleling "the knowledge of [Christ]" with "knowing what is the hope of his calling... the riches of the glory of his inheritance". The blessed hope of our calling is not simply a life of bliss in ideal conditions, but more specifically it is the hope of 'knowing Christ' as person eternally, in all the glorious fullness of that experience.

*6:28 They replied to him: What must we do, that we may work the works of God?*- They ignored His challenge regarding accepting His life, by enquiring how they too could do miracles. This is the same wrong perspective which is characteristic of Pentecostalism: How can I do miracles?

The people had walked all around the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking around the lake. We like those crowds want to

concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true. He will come and live within us, if we eat of Him, if we are open to Him.

*6:29 Jesus answered and said to them: This is the work of God- that you believe in him whom He has sent-* God's work is understood in the context here as miracles. The people wanted to know how they might perform God's works, miracles like making free bread. And as was ever His style, the Lord turns the words of the question another way. God's work is that we believe. Human belief is therefore His work- which we must allow to happen to us, rather than seeking to do works. It's rather like David asking to build God a house, and being told that instead, God would build him a house- if he and his children allowed the way of the Spirit to operate. But this response was totally missed by the crowd- they wanted another miracle (:30), clearly in the hope that again they might materially benefit from it.

*6:30 They replied to him: What then will you do for a sign, so that we may see and believe you? What work will you do?-* The Lord could have spoken words similar to Heb. 11:1 to them- He could have corrected them by saying that actually, faith is not related to what you can see. You cannot "see and believe" in the true sense of belief. But the Lord doesn't do that. He says that He in front of them is the bread of God, miraculously given. And their critical tone changes: "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" (:34). This surely is our pattern- not to necessarily correct every error when we see it, but to pick up something the other person has said and develop it, to bring them towards truth.

The sign or miracle they wanted was of yet more free bread, in order to compare with Moses who had given Israel manna. They had been given that sign- but they wanted it again, that they might benefit from it. They were missing the point that the Lord was greater than Moses.

*6:31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: He gave them bread out of heaven to eat-* The Lord's reply shows that the "he" they had in view was Moses. They wanted Him to again demonstrate that He was the prophet like Moses (Dt. 18:18). But He was greater than

Moses, and the manna He would give was of salvation, and not temporary food for the day.

The living word of God which speaks to us each personally. In this sense, we are constantly being invited to place ourselves in the position of those who played a part in the historical incidents which that word records. The Jews quoted to the Lord Jesus: "He gave *them* bread from heaven to eat", to which the Lord replied [after the teaching style of the rabbis to which they were accustomed] by changing and challenging a word in the quotation they made: "It is not Moses who gave *you* the bread". He wanted them to see that the account of bread being given to Israel in the wilderness was not just dry history. *They*, right there and then, were as it were receiving that same bread from Heaven. See on Mt. 22:31; Heb. 11:4.

*6:32 Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father; who now gives you the true bread out of heaven-* They were so focused upon Moses that they failed to appreciate the operation of God through Him by the Spirit. This is the typical failure of religious people- to focus upon the structure, the means to the end, rather than perceive the ultimate source and end, that which is before and behind and beyond the religious structure or individual they are so focused upon. And we can take that message to ourselves.

*6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world-*

These words, and others like them, are misused to support the wrong idea that Jesus existed in Heaven before his birth. Trinitarians take these words as literal in order to prove their point. However, if we are to take them literally, then this means that somehow Jesus literally came down as a person. Not only is the Bible totally silent about this, but the language of Jesus being conceived as a baby in Mary's womb is made meaningless. Jn. 6:60 describes the teaching about the manna as a saying "hard to take in" (Moffatt's Translation); i.e. we need to understand that it is figurative language being used. The Lord Jesus is explaining how the manna was a type of himself. The manna was sent from God in the sense that it was God who was responsible for creating it on the earth; it did not physically float down from the throne of God in Heaven. Thus the Lord's coming from Heaven is to be understood likewise; he was created on earth, by the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary (Lk.1:35).

The Lord Jesus says that "the bread that I will give is my flesh" (:51). Trinitarians claim that it was the 'God' part of Jesus which came down from Heaven. But the Lord says that it was his "flesh" which was the bread which came down from Heaven. Likewise He associates the bread



from Heaven with himself as the "Son of man" (Jn. 6:62), not 'God the Son'. In this same passage in Jn. 6 there is abundant evidence that He was not equal to God. "The living Father has sent me" (Jn. 6:57) shows that He and God do not share co-equality; and the fact that "I live by the Father" (Jn. 6:57) is hardly the 'co-eternity' of which Trinitarians speak.

It must be asked, When and how did Jesus 'come down' from Heaven? The Lord Jesus speaks of himself as "he which cometh down from heaven" (:33,50), as if it is an ongoing process. Speaking of God's gift of His Son, the Lord said "My Father is giving you the bread" from Heaven (v.32 Weymouth). At the time the Lord was speaking these words, he had already 'come down' in a certain sense, in that He had been sent by God. Because of this, He could also speak in the past tense: "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven" (:51). But he also speaks about 'coming down' as the bread from Heaven in the form of His death on the cross: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v.51). So we have the Lord Jesus speaking here of having already come down from Heaven, being in the process of 'coming down', and still having to 'come down' in His death on the cross. This fact alone should prove that 'coming down' refers to God manifesting Himself, rather than only referring to the Lord's birth. This is conclusively proved by all the Old Testament references to God 'coming down' having just this same meaning. Thus God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, and 'came down' to save them through Moses. He has seen our bondage to sin, and has 'come down' or manifested Himself, by sending Jesus as the equivalent to Moses to lead us out of bondage.

### **A Devotional Appeal**

The Lord's language of coming down from Heaven can be understood from a very powerful devotional aspect. He reasons that because He had *come* down from Heaven, therefore, whoever *comes* to Him, He would never reject (Jn. 6:37,38). The connection is in the word "come". We 'come' to Jesus not by physically travelling towards Him, but in our mental attitudes. He likewise 'comes' to us, not by moving trillions of kilometres from Heaven to earth, but in His 'coming' down into our lives and experiences. If He has come so very far to meet us, and we come to Him... then surely we will meet and He will not turn away from us, exactly because He has 'come' so far to meet us. This theme continues throughout John's Gospel. "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62) is therefore not a reference to Him physically travelling off anywhere- He is saying that if people would not 'come' to Him in meeting, then He would withdraw the opportunity from them. He wouldn't stand waiting for them indefinitely. This explains the urgency behind His appeals to 'come' to Him. He had 'come down', and was waiting for people to 'come' to Him. He's come a huge distance, from the heavenly heights of His own spirituality, to meet with whores and gamblers, hobby level religionists, self-absorbed little

people... and if we truly come to Him, if we want to meet with Him, then of course He will never turn us away. For it was to meet with us that He 'came down'. This approach shows the fallacy of interpreting His 'coming down' to us and our 'coming' to Him in a literal sense.

And yet this Lord of all grace also sought to confirm men and women in the path they chose. He admitted that His comment about Himself being the manna which descended from Heaven was a "hard saying". And yet He goes straight on to say [perhaps with a slight smile playing at the corner of His lips] something even more enigmatic: "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62). Surely He is here choosing to give them yet another, even harder "saying"; and goes on to stress that His sayings, His words, are the way to life eternal (Jn. 6:63). For those who didn't want His words, He was confirming them in their darkness. And He did this by the mechanism of using an evidently "hard saying". Therefore to simplistically interpret the saying as meaning that the Lord had literally descended from Heaven through the sky just as literally as He would ascend there through the clouds... is in fact to quite miss the point- that this is a "hard saying". It's not intended to have a simplistic, literalistic interpretation.

Life was given to the world not only in the sense of eternal life. A way of life was shown to us, the only way of life- the life of the cross. It is a frequently found paradox in Scripture that life comes through death. The Lord's cross and resurrection are the prime example. However, it is not simply that His death opened the way to eternal life for us at His coming. It gives us spiritual life now, in that all that we do in our being and living should be motivated by the spirit of the cross. Each of the myriad daily decisions we take should be impacted by our knowledge of the cross. In this way, the cross gives life right now.

6:34 *They replied to him: Lord, always give us this bread-* "Always" or 'for ever' could mean that they simply wanted an eternal bread making machine to ease their material burden in their hand to mouth existence. But the sense of 'eternity' in their words leads us to wonder whether they were beginning to grasp His point. The Samaritan woman likewise starts off talking about literal water, and then comes to perceive that the Lord is offering an altogether different kind of water. It could be that the same shift in understanding, from the literal to the spiritual, is happening here too.

6:35 *Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. He that comes to me shall not hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst-* "The bread of life" was a Messianic term, and the Lord here makes one of His most direct claims to actually be Messiah. Several times the Lord stresses His personal identification with the manna / bread. But this was His flesh,

which He gave for the life of the world. The cross epitomised the man Jesus. Thus He could take the bread and deftly insist: "This is my body". There and then, He was to be identified with the slain body that hung upon the cross. In death, in life, this was and is and will be Him. But He was right then the bread of life. The essence of the cross was lived out in His daily life. And He was certain that He would be obedient to the final crisis of crucifixion, and would then and thereby become the ultimate "bread of life".

"He that comes to me shall never hunger" is a reference to men and women 'coming to' the cross to behold "that sight" of the cross, just as men came to the lifted up snake. But the Lord clearly has in mind how the believer in Him would be regularly fed, filled up with water so that "he that believes on me shall never thirst". The Spirit is given not just once, but in an ongoing sense we are filled up with it, if we are open to it. Only in a personal appropriation of the cross to ourselves can we find an inspiration that is utterly endless. No wonder the Lord insists we remember His cross at least weekly in the breaking of bread.

The Lord challenged us that if we truly eat His words, we'll never hunger or thirst; but 30 years or so later, He said that in the Kingdom, He will stop us hungering and thirsting (Rev. 7:16,17). He realizes that although we have it within our potential to live this kind of fulfilled spiritual life, in practice we will only get there in the Kingdom. The idea may be that we shall hunger and thirst for righteousness and spirituality now, but we are filled in this life by being incrementally filled up by the Spirit, as it is poured out in an ongoing sense. But the final ending of all such hunger is in the Kingdom, when we shall have Spirit nature, and our spiritual deficiency and need shall be no more.

6:36 *But I say to you: That you have seen me, and still you do not believe-* "Seeing" may be being used here as it is often in John- to refer to understanding. The Jews saw the Son coming to them and said "Come let us kill Him". They knew Him, and His relationship to the Father (7:28). But still they refused to believe. They wanted to be given the bread of life, Messiah, and He was standing before them. They had seen Him, and seen His creation of manna / bread, but still did not believe. Miracles do not produce lasting faith- that is one of the subtexts of John, especially relevant as he was preaching and ministering to converts in days when the miraculous gifts were disappearing.

6:37- see on Mk. 6:36.

*All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and him that comes to me I will in no way reject-* The language of 'coming to Jesus' is appropriate in the context to the Jews having made great efforts to come to Jesus,

walking around the lake or getting shipping in order to hopefully see another food miracle. The Lord is saying that those who truly came to Him in faith, as the Messianic bread of life, would in no way be rejected, never ever [the Greek is insistent upon this]. He will reject some at the last day, indeed Judaism generally would be cast out [s.w. "reject"] at that day (Lk. 13:28), and His death would cast out the prince of the Jewish world (12:31). But those who came to Him in faith He would not reject.

The Father has given all things of the new creation to the Son (3:35; 13:3), He gives the sheep to the Son (10:29; 17:11,24); the Lord was very aware of how the believers had been given to Him. In practice, this works out through how the Father gives individuals the ability to come to the Son (:65). The Father's gift is supremely the Spirit, the Comforter given by the Father (14:16); through this we come to the Son, and are finally given the ultimate gift of eternity. If we ask why one person comes to the Son and another doesn't, the answer is of course multi factorial, and includes issues of human freewill. But one element in the final algorithm of salvation is the gift / grace of God's calling. Paul uses this in Romans as a parade example of how salvation is of grace and not works.

The parable of the fig tree appears to show the Lord Jesus as more gracious and patient than His Father- the owner of the vineyard (God) tells the dresser (Jesus) to cut it down, but the dresser asks for another year's grace to be shown to the miserable fig tree, and then, he says, the owner [God] Himself would have to cut it down (Lk. 13:7-9). But in Jn. 6:37-39 we seem to have the Lord's recognition that the Father was more gracious to some than He would naturally be; for He says that He Himself will not cast any out, exactly because it was the Father's will that He should lose nothing but achieve a resurrection to life eternal for all given to Him. And the Lord observed, both here and elsewhere, that He was not going to do His own will, but rather the will of the Father (:38). And that will was to totally save all who wish. But that, by implication, was not necessarily the natural will of the Son. For He says in this context that He does not His will, but the Father's. Now this is exactly the sort of thing we would expect in a truly dynamic relationship- on some points the Father is more generous than the Son, and in other cases- vice versa. And yet Father and Son were, are and will be joined together in the same judgment and will, despite Father and Son having differing wills from one viewpoint. But this is the result of process, of differing perspectives coming together, of a mutuality we can scarcely enter into comprehending, of some sort of learning together, of a Son struggling to do the will of a superior Father rather than His own will, of conclusions jointly reached through experience, time and process- rather than an automatic, robot-like imposition of the Father's will and judgment upon the Son. And the awesome thing is, that the Lord invites us to know the

Father, in the same way as He knows the Father. His relationship with the Father is a pattern for ours too.

*6:38 For I came down from Heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me-* As noted on :37, the implication appears to be that the Father's will is to save, and so the Son will therefore not do His will, but the Father's- and never therefore reject any who come to Him in faith. This is huge assurance. The Father's will for our salvation is even stronger than that of His dear Son.

The Lord accomplished the will of God on the cross (see on Jn. 4:32-34). On the cross He came down from Heaven, there He manifested Yahweh in the greatest theophany of all time. The darkness over Him is to be read in the context of the OT theophanies which involved darkness at the time of the Lord's 'coming down'. But the Lord here speaks in the past tense. The essence of His cross was right then, before their eyes. In Him and His offer of free salvation, there was the assurance for all time to all men. He knew He would pass through the crucifixion experience, and that therefore the offer of life on account of His work was real right then and there.

6:39- see on Jn. 3:13.

*And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all which He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day-* The Father's will for our salvation was perhaps stronger than the Lord's, for it is in this context that He says that He was doing not His will but the Father's (:38). But human dysfunction and love of materialism is such that even the strength of God's will can be resisted by us. For in 17:12 the Lord speaks as if He has succeeded in spiritually keeping all those given to him, except Judas: "I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition". We have been given by the Father to the Son, with the express will that we should not be lost, and the end point of His care would be our resurrection to life at the last day.

"Lose nothing" is the phrase which has just been used about the gathering of the fragments, that none be lost (:12). The Lord's will that not one be lost is manifest through our gathering of them. And He died so that none might perish (3:15,16). He 'loses' none of His people in that He give us right now the life, the eternal life, which shall never 'perish' [s.w.] or 'be lost' (10:28). Those who live that life now are assured of being raised up at the last day. The outcome of the last day is therefore no unknown question; if we are living the eternal life now, then we shall be immortalized in order to continue doing so. But it is the nature of the life lived, rather than immortality of itself, which is of the essence.

6:40 *For this is the will of my Father-* The will of the Father is a major theme in John, perhaps to counter erroneous notions about this term in the communities to whom John was preaching and pastoring. The connection is again back to the prologue, where we learn that all in the new creation are spiritually born by the Father's will (1:13). This will was His desire for our salvation, and it meant the Lord's death in order to bring it to reality (4:34). The will of God is for our salvation; if we ask anything according to that will, with the end of salvation in view, then we shall be heard (1 Jn. 5:14). Doing that will, living according to the eternal life, is living according to the will of God (1 Jn. 2:17).

*That every one that sees the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day-* This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake. God's will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine. The comment that "Every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him [shall] have eternal life" (Jn. 6:40) is another allusion to the serpent lifted up on the pole, where everyone who "looked upon the serpent of brass... lived" (Num. 21:9). The 'having eternal life' is different to being 'raised up at the last day'. We are given the gift of life now, through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts whereby we live and think as He did and does. That is the essence of the life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom; and so we shall be changed into immortality to enable that life to be eternally lived.

6:41 *The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said: I am the bread which came down out of Heaven-* They understood the Heavenly bread as a reference to Messiah; and they doubted as to how a man they knew could in fact be Messiah. Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

6:42 *And they said: Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I came down out of Heaven?-* As noted on :41, they perceived clearly enough that the Lord was claiming to be Messiah. The crowd knew Him, and Joseph and Mary. Galilee was small, both in population and geography. The folks who lived around the lake would have all known each other, and would have also known the carpenter from Nazareth. That He should now miraculously feed them, and claim to be Messiah and Son of God... was all so hard for them to

grasp. It is a window onto the Lord's artless perfection that He could live amongst them for so long, never sinning neither by omission nor commission, and yet not be perceived as anything more than the son of a carpenter.

6:43 *Jesus answered and said to them: Murmur not among yourselves-* The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

6:44 *No one can come to me, except the Father that sent me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day-* See on :40- the drawing power is surely in the cross itself, for this is what draws all men unto the lifted up Christ (12:32 s.w.). There was and is a magnetism about Him there. And yet the Lord said this before His death, to people who had walked and sailed in order to 'come to Him'. Now He says that the real coming to Him requires the Father's drawing, or dragging, as the Greek means. Paul in Romans cites this idea of calling, of one called and another not, as a parade example of how salvation is by grace and not works. Yet the Father's work of drawing or dragging people to Himself is still effected through human agency. John uses the same word in describing how the disciples "drew" the net containing 153 fishes to shore (21:6,11), clearly symbolic of the great catch of the Gospel.

6:45- see on Mt. 12:18.

*It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught by God. Everyone therefore who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-* The drawing of the Father is through hearing and learning from Him, about His Son. "The prophets" who spoke of how all shall be "taught by God" do so in the context of prophesying about the Messianic Kingdom on

earth (Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 4:2). But the Lord applies these clearly future Messianic prophecies to the essential spiritual experience of the believer today; for we are now living the eternal life, the Kingdom life, the kind of life we shall then live.

The Lord Jesus often stressed that He was the only way to the Father; that only through knowing and seeing / perceiving Him can men come to know God. And yet in Jn. 6:45 He puts it the other way around: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". And He says that only the Father can bring men to the Son (Jn. 6:44). Yet it is equally true that only the Son of God can lead men to God the Father. In this we see something exquisitely beautiful about these two persons, if I as a non-Trinitarian may use that word about the Father and Son. The more we know the Son, the more we come to know the Father; and the more we know the Father, the more we know the Son. This is how close they are to each other. And yet they are quite evidently distinctly different persons. But like any father and son, getting to know one leads us to know more of the other, which in turn reveals yet more to us about the other, which leads to more insight again into the other... and so the wondrous spiral of knowing the Father and Son continues. If Father and Son were one and the same person, the surpassing beauty of this is lost and spoilt and becomes impossible. The experience of any true Christian, one who has come to 'see' and know the Father and Son, will bear out this truth. Which is why correct understanding about their nature and relationship is vital to knowing them. The wonder of it all is that the Son didn't automatically reflect the Father to us, as if He were just a piece of theological machinery; He made a supreme effort to do so, culminating in the cross. He explains that He didn't do *His* will, but that of the Father; He didn't do the works *He* wanted to do, but those which the Father wanted. He had many things to say and judge of the Jewish world, He could have given them 'a piece of His mind', but instead He commented: "*But... I speak to the world those things which I have heard of [the Father]*" (Jn. 8:26). I submit that this sort of language is impossible to adequately understand within the Trinitarian paradigm. Yet the wonder of it all goes yet further. The Father is spoken of as 'getting to know' [note aorist tense] the Son, as the Son gets to know the Father; and the same verb form is used about the Good Shepherd 'getting to know' us His sheep. This wonderful, dynamic family relationship is what "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", true walking and living with the Father and Son, is all about. It is into this family and wonderful nexus of relationships that Trinitarians apparently choose not to enter.

6:46 *Not that anyone has seen the Father, save he that is from God, he has seen the Father*- The Lord adds this as a foil or caveat to His teaching in :45 that the one who has learned of God comes to His Son. He means to say that total knowledge of Him is not possible, just as Moses could not



'see' the Father, neither can anyone claim to have fully 'seen' or perceived Him, except the Son. The point is to guard against the Jewish idea of justification by knowledge, as if 'learning' of the Father meant totally 'seeing' him. Such total, perfect knowledge is not necessary nor even attainable; what is of the essence is to allow ourselves to be drawn by the Father towards His Son.

The fact the Lord *had* seen God, as the One "from God", contrasts powerfully with how Moses could *not* see Him.

6:47 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes has eternal life*- The utter truthfulness of the Lord's promise to give us right now the life eternal is on the basis of the fact that He alone has "seen", completely perceived and understood, the Father (:46). The Father's will was totally about our salvation (:39,40). It was because the Son knew His Father's will that He could so solemnly protest that He was able and willingly eager to give eternal life to believers.

6:48 *I am the bread of life*- The emphasis is now placed upon "bread of life" rather than the Messianic term "bread of Heaven" because He wanted to explain how the believer has eternal life (:47). Bread must be eaten regularly; the idea is that we are regularly filled up with His life, His Spirit. But our spiritual life comes from eating Him. He is the source of life, rather than the entire text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation including the Chronicles genealogies.

6:49 *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died*- Judaism had the idea that Moses created manna and this was the ultimate miracle. But the Lord's bread gave life, eternal life, rather than just temporarily making life more bearable on a daily basis. We must ask ourselves whether we are using Christianity in the same way- a temporary boost in the daily grind, rather than perceiving the wonder of the life offered both now and eternally.

6:50 *This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die*- The idea is not that a man eats once and never hungers again. The gift of the Spirit, of the Lord's life, is ongoing, but is predicated upon eating of Him.

The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life. He could take the bread and say that "this *is* my body which *is being given* [Gk.] for you"; He saw His sacrifice as already ongoing even before He left the upper room. The cross therefore

manifested the real Christ, the One who had been giving of Himself throughout His life.

As the manna was regularly eaten of, so the Lord's cross should be our daily inspiration and food. We must ask whether we personally and collectively have appreciated this. We obtain eternal life from the cross in the sense that we see there the definition of the true life; the life of crucifying self, slowly and painfully, for others; of enduring injustice and lack of appreciation to the very end, of holding on in the life of forgiveness and care for others in the face of their bitterest rejection... we see there the life we must lead, indeed the only true life. For all else is ultimately only death. And it is "eternal" in its quality more than in its length, in that this is the type of life which will be lived eternally in the Kingdom. It is in this sense that John later comments that eternal life is "in" Christ (1 Jn. 5:11,20 cp. 3:14,15).

6:51 *I am the living bread which came down out of Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever. Yes! The bread which I will give is my flesh – given for the life of the world-* John's Gospel points out how the Lord often changed tenses so strangely- to the extent that many have concluded that some of the strange combinations of tenses are a result of John's later editing. But it could be that the Lord used past, present and future tenses in close proximity in order to show His manifestation of the Name. He is the bread which was, is and will be on the cross. He came, is coming down, and will come (Jn. 6:50,51). The hour was coming and yet "now is" (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:31,32). These mixing of tenses must have seemed strange to the hearers, and they read strangely in the tense-conscious Greek language. About 50 times in John's Gospel we read the phrase "I am" as having been on the lips of Jesus. And it gets more and more frequent as He nears the cross, as if He was aware of an ongoing manifestation of the Name which reached its climax there.

Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming. The sacrificial animals are spoken of as "the bread of your God" (Lev. 21:6,8,21; 22:25; Ez. 44:7 etc.), pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to alluding to the manna, the Lord must have been consciously making this connection when He spoke about himself as the bread of God. The only time "the bread of God" could be eaten by the Israelite was at the peace offering. When in this context the Lord invites us to eat the bread of God, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn. 6:51,52), He is looking back to the peace offering. But this is also an evident prophecy of the breaking of bread service. Many of the Jews just could not cope with what Christ was offering them when He said this. They turned back, physically and intellectually. They just could not

grapple with the idea that Christ was that peace offering sacrifice, and He was inviting them to sit down with God, as it were, and in fellowship with the Almighty, partake of the sacrificed body of His Son. But this is just what Christ is inviting each of us to do in the memorial meeting and in life generally lived in Him, to sit down in fellowship with Him, and eat of His bread. God really is here with us now. He is intensely watching us. He is intensely with us, He really is going to save us, if only we can have the faith to believe how much He loves us, how much He wants us to share His fellowship and know His presence.

The Lord taught the crowds to focus more on the gift of Him as a person and His sacrifice, than on the literal achievement of the Kingdom there and then. The Jews understood the coming of manna to be a sign that the Messianic Kingdom had come. Their writings are full of this idea:

- "You shall not find manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming" (Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 16:25)
- "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend...so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend" (Midrash Rabbah on Ecc. 1:9)
- "[The manna] has been prepared for...the age to come" (Midrash Tanhuma, *Beshallah* 21:66).

Yet the Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord's equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than eternity here and now...all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day.

There are evident parallels between Paul's account of the breaking of bread, and the Lord's words about the giving of His body. There is no record of the great preaching commission in John, but he does in fact record it in more spiritual and indirect ways. And likewise there is no account of the breaking of bread, but in fact he has already recorded the essence of it in the discourse about the bread and wine of life in Jn. 6:

Jn. 6:51	1 Cor. 11:24
The bread which I will give	This
Is my flesh	Is my body
For the life of the world	Which is for you

Note in passing how 'we' are 'the world' to Jesus. And He likewise should be our world, as we are to Him. The word of interpretation which the Lord Jesus spoke over the emblems was a reflection of the way the head of the family explained the meaning of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread to the participants during the Passover meal. But before His death, during His life, the Lord Jesus as it were proclaimed this word of interpretation over His own body. The conclusion is clearly that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. This explains why so much stress is made upon His "blood" saving us, when crucifixion was in fact a relatively bloodless death. It wasn't as if the Lord was killed by His blood being poured out. But it was the life which the blood represented which was the essential basis of our redemption. And that life was lived out over 33 years, not just in the 6 hours of crucifixion. All this means that the spirit of the cross must be lived out in daily life; not merely in occasional acts of heroism, nor only in occasional acts of commitment or religious duty, such as attending ecclesial meetings. The cross was and is a life lived.

The link between the Lord's death and the true word / voice of God is made in Jn. 6:51 cp. 63: the words of the Lord give life, whereas also His flesh "which I will give for the life of the world" on the cross would also be the source of life. The giving of His flesh was in essence His word to man; the word made flesh. This phrase, we have suggested elsewhere, also refers to the Lord's death rather than His birth. See on Heb. 12:25.

The Lord died so that the world may have life (Jn. 6:51); but only those who eat His words and assimilate the true meaning of His cross will share this life; therefore "the world" refers to all who would believe. It is for them (us, by His grace), not even for those who respond but ultimately fall away, that the Lord gave His all. We are "the world" to Him. Let's not dilute the specialness of His love and the wonder of our calling to these things. We ought to be deeply, deeply moved by the fact that we have been called into God's world, into His sphere of vision. He even created the different types of meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3); they were made for us, not the world, and therefore we ought to give thanks for our food with this realization.

6:52 *The Jews therefore argued with each other, saying: How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*- The argument being "with each other" suggests that some of the crowd correctly understood the Lord's sense, whereas others still read Him on a literal level, recoiling at the idea of cannibalism, eating raw flesh, which was so disgusting to the Jewish mindset. I suggest the Lord intentionally framed His words in this way in order to provoke, in order to deepen the rift between those who insisted

on reading Him literally, and those who grasped the spiritual sense of His words. And that is perhaps an explanation of why there are so many 'difficult passages' in the Bible; those who want to read them literally, without spiritual discernment, end up thinking that His flesh literally came down from Heaven. Those who read with a spiritual sense have no problem grasping His intended meaning.

*6:53 Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves-* There is nothing else of meaning in human experience. His life, as shown in His death, is the only true and lasting sustenance for the believer. As noted on :52, the Lord chose images which He knew would provoke the divide between the literalists, the unspiritual, and those with spiritual discernment. To drink blood was deeply obnoxious to Jews. But unless they would see He referred to His life, and allow that life or spirit to displace their own, then they would have no life in themselves. The life He offers, like the gift of the Spirit, is "in" or 'within' the heart and mind.

*6:54 He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day-* The assimilation of His life and person is to take over our lives, so that our life is His. And His life is eternal, and therefore we shall be raised at the last day to continue living it.

There is also evident reference here to the breaking of bread. In our absorption of the bread and wine into our bodies, we symbolise our desire to appropriate His life and death into the very fabric of our lives. It is a symbol of our total commitment to living life as He did, and as it was epitomised in His time of dying. The breaking of bread is therefore not something which can be separated from the rest of our lives; it is a physical statement of how our whole lives are devoted to assimilating the spirit of this Man.

*6:55 For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink-* "The true" contrasts with that which is not the real thing but only masquerades as such; the contrast is with the Mosaic symbols which could not give life. And that Mosaic system was perhaps spoken of by the temporal gift of bread the Lord had given the crowds the day before.

*6:56 He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him-* This mutual 'abiding' is at the utter heart of what it means to be in Christ, a Christian. We assimilate His life into ours, especially appreciating that the cross was the epitome and intensest summation of that life. It may be expressed in physical symbol by the breaking of bread, but the essence is of mental life lived in a way that has absorbed Him into us. This requires conscious effort on our part. Habits like prayer, reflection, meditation, Bible reading become a vital part of our daily experience. But

allowing His life to be in us is responded to by Him abiding in us. He abides in us through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts, the Comforter, the anointing abiding within us (14:17; 1 Jn. 2:27; 3:24 "He abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us"; 4:13).

One of the common Aramaic Passover sayings at the time of Jesus was: "Behold this is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers, let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover". The Passover Haggadah of today includes virtually the same words. It is evident that the Lord Jesus several times in the course of His life alluded to these words. He spoke of how all who were hungry, who were heavy burdened, should "come" unto Him. And the bread which He gave would constantly satisfy. The conclusion surely is that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. He lived out the essence of the cross in His life. Our carrying of His cross likewise speaks of life daily lived, rather than occasional heights of devotion or self-sacrifice.

*6:57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he that eats me, he also shall live because of me-* The Lord likens His relationship with the Father to our relationship with Him. The metaphor of eating suggests something regular and not simply a one time act. The Lord was regularly receiving the life or spirit of the Father as He progressed in daily relationship with Him, praying alone, meditating on His word. And we can have the same relationship with the Lord Jesus, receiving the same Spirit. The Father is "living" and not passive; His ongoing, outgiving relationship with His Son is to be reflected in our relationship with the Son.

*6:58 This is the bread which came down out of Heaven. Not as the fathers ate and died; he that eats this bread shall live forever-* "This is the bread" may have been spoken with the Lord pointing to Himself, or with some sign that He referred to Himself. Or He may have had in view the "life" of which He has just spoken in :57. The coming down out of Heaven is not to be taken literally, just as the manna didn't float down through the sky, but was of Divine origin. The life we can now live is that of God, that lived by the Lord Jesus in His mortal life; it is out of Heaven in that there is direct connection between that life we can live, and the life or Spirit of God in Heaven itself.

*6:59 These things said he in the synagogue, while teaching in Capernaum-* A synagogue has been unearthed in Capernaum which was called "the house of bread". He purposefully used such challenging language right there in the seat of Orthodox Jewish learning, in order to accelerate the process of choice in His hearers- to accept what He was offering, or remain 'safe' within a literal hearing of His words which would result in their utter rejection of Him. And the subsequent revolt against

Him, and the protestation of the disciples' loyalty to His words, shows that He succeeded.

*6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said: This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*- As noted on :59 and earlier, the Lord phrased Himself in such a way as to provoke a choice in the hearts of those who heard Him. They had just witnessed the miracle of the bread; but the claim He really was Messiah, and they could live for ever, with the life and spirit of God, was too much for them. For all time, the idea that miracles lead to faith is demonstrated as false. John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

There's something in our nature which shies away from the true Gospel because it's too good to believe. Paul had this struggle with the Jews, both in and outside of the church. They heard the offer of life from the Lord Himself, and rejected it: "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" (Jn. 6:60). It was just too good to believe. There is something in our natures which is diametrically opposed to the concept of *pure* grace. We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. See on Mt. 8:34.

*6:61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said to them: Does this cause you to stumble?*- The talk of :60 was therefore carefully out of the Lord's earshot. But He perceived that many were now stumbling; and I have suggested that He intentionally phrased Himself in such ways as to provoke such a decision. The murmuring of the disciples was influenced by the murmuring of the Pharisees; see on :41. It was the equivalent of Israel's murmuring against Moses (1 Cor. 10:10 s.w.).

*6:62 What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?*- I have suggested that the Lord spoke of eating His blood and body in order to deliberately provoke the audience to accept Him and His Spirit; or to remain on the level of the literal, meaning they would reject Him as heretical and weird. And so He now utters another such saying, which the unspiritual to this day also stumble over, thinking that He speaks of a literal ascent to literal Heaven where He had literally been before. But as noted earlier, literal pre-existence in a personal form in Heaven is not at all what He meant, nor what the Bible teaches. He was "with the Father" just as John the Baptist had been with the Father. He is rhetorically asking whether they would wish for this whole wondrous offer of salvation, this theophany of God coming down before them, to just abruptly end. For 'coming down' is the language of theophany. "Where he

was before" may refer to how He had been before age 30, when He gave no hint of His Divine origins. This point becomes more probable when we recall as noted on :42 that this crowd of people personally knew Him and His family, and felt He could not be God's Son nor Messiah exactly because they had known Him "before", in His life before His ministry. He would then be asking them: 'So do you want the wonderful offer and theophany to end, and me to just go back to being the Nazareth carpenter? Would you then feel better and less challenged?'.

6:63 *It is the spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing*- I suggested on :62 that their problem was with the fact that they had known Him after the flesh, as He was "before"; for they had earlier known Him and His apparent family of origin (see on :42). They were not a crowd of anonymous people; they knew Him personally from His life before His ministry had begun. He may be saying to the effect: 'I as you knew me after the flesh will not save you. Nor will the bread I gave you physically. It is my words, my spirit, which is now available, which will give you eternal life'.

*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life*- The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it.

Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord stated that when He had been lifted up on the cross, *then* the Jews would realize the truth and integrity of the words that He had spoken (Jn. 8:28). Again, the cross is presented as a confirmation of all the words / verbal teaching of the Lord.

"Bread" or manna was a phrase the Rabbis commonly applied to the Torah- e.g. they interpreted Prov. 9:5 ("Come, eat ye of my bread") as referring to the Law. And the Lord was clearly playing on and extending this idea in John 6. The Lord taught that in the same way as Moses gave



Israel manna, so He was giving them Himself, and His word. He defines the meaning of the manna in Jn. 6:63 as His words. He is inviting us to eat Him in the sense of His words; He is the word of God. Remember how Jeremiah says that he found God's word and ate it, God's word was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. Think too of the words of Job in 23:12, speaking as a type of Christ on this occasion: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food". We tend to think that as we eat physically, so we should eat spiritually. The point is often made amongst us that as we always find time to eat physically, so we should to eat God's word. But this is not quite what Job is saying. He says that we should relate to our spiritual food even *more* importantly than to our natural need for food. It's second nature for us to eat regularly, every day; we don't have to schedule time to eat, it flows naturally into our daily organization of life.

There are a number of similarities between the record of the gathering of the manna and that of the Passover. They could seethe the manna, as the Paschal lamb could be seethed. They were to gather the manna according to the size of their families, and the collection was to be organized by the head of the house. This is all the language of the Passover. The lamb represented Jesus, and so did the manna. The saving work of the lamb of God is further mediated to us through the medium of His word. In John 6 the Lord says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life; and He says the same about eating His words (v.63). So often the Lord says that we have got eternal life, here and now. He keeps on saying it in John 6.

The parallel between the Lord's word and His Spirit should not be taken as justification for believing in a so-called 'spirit word', and assuming that He is here exhorting us to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, including the Chronicles genealogies, in order to get His Spirit; as if Bible reading somehow equals getting the Spirit. The words spoken by the Lord refer specifically to His words, and not the whole Bible. This is not to in any sense decry study of the Bible. But here, the Lord is saying that the abiding of *His* words within us is associated with His Spirit abiding with us. Those words are the message of Him. We can understand why early Christian converts were required to memorize the Gospels, Mark especially. The word of Him, which John is teaching in this Gospel of John, was to abide in them. There may even be a suggestion that they were to repeat His words as recorded in the Gospels, for most converts would have been illiterate and without access to written versions of the Gospels. Having Him, His manner of life and being, ever before us... this is having His Spirit, eating Him, abiding in Him.

6:64- see on Jud. 16:13; Jn. 13:11.

*But there are some of you that do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him-* Many of the crowd had now walked away in disgust. But lest those who remained now thought that they were the chosen ones, the Lord warns that there were even some of them who did not.

The impression of a close spiritual relationship and subsequent shock on appreciating that Judas was a traitor that we see expressed in the Psalms is hard to reconcile with our Lord knowing Judas' motives from the beginning. Jesus knew from the beginning that some would betray him: "There are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto me of my Father" (Jn. 6:64,65). Our Lord knew that not all were called by God to be able to come to Him- He knew who would not believe. And yet He suppressed this knowledge in his love and hope for Judas- just as it could be that God limits His omnipotence and omniscience in His dealings with us [hence His sense of hurt, shock and genuine disappointment with human behaviour]. If this passage does imply Christ's knowledge of Judas' intentions (as Jn. 6:70 seems to), these words were spoken in the final year of the Lord's ministry, when Christ's sensitive spirit would have noticed the tell-tale signs in Judas. [Or is "He spake of Judas... that should betray him" (Jn. 6:70) a comment added by John, which would mean that Jesus was not necessarily thinking of Judas when he said "One of you is a devil"?].

The Lord was human, and there is a capacity within human nature to know something on one level and yet deny it in practice. Samson surely knew what Delilah was going to do to him, yet his love for her made him blind. And so it could be that on one level the Lord knew Judas' apostasy; and One of His sensitivity would likely have perceived anyway the man's dishonesty and wrong motivations. But His love and hope for him was such that He acted and felt with genuine surprise and shock when Judas actually did what the Lord foreknew he was going to do. We have here a profound window onto the Lord's humanity.

*6:65 And he said: For this cause have I said to you, that no one can come to me, except it be given to him of the Father-* As noted on :44, we must be "drawn" to the Father. But as Paul develops at length in Romans, the very existence of such things as calling and predestination indicate that the final algorithm of human salvation includes God's grace at a personal level. For not all are called. The calling is itself a gift, a term often used about the gift of the Spirit.

*6:66 Upon this many of his disciples withdrew, and no longer walked with him-* Just as today, the teaching that some are called and some are not (:65) makes some turn back. Already, many had turned away, and the Lord was left with a smaller crowd; and now many of them "withdrew".

But "withdrew" is literally 'to go back from', 'to go behind', and is also used of men following the Lord, behind Him. The same word is used of turning back, going behind; and also of going behind in the sense of following. This is intentional. The idea may be that it is not a question of literally following after Him, behind Him; but of following Him in the heart. Peter was taught this when he walked behind the Lord physically, but was told that if he were to really follow Him, he must take up the cross daily and follow. And John's Gospel ends with a play on the same theme, of following behind. The same word is used of how the Jews perceived that the whole Jewish world had gone behind Jesus (12:19); but in fact very few were really following Him. To not walk with Him, the light of the world, was to walk in darkness (12:35; 1 Jn. 1:6,7). And they did so because they thought it unreasonable that some are called and others are not (:65). They played God, and thus turned away from the greatest grace- of having been called to see and know Him.

*6:67 Jesus asked the twelve: Would you also go away?*- The large crowd had diminished twice, as the Lord purposefully provoked them with His language and ideas. Perhaps now only the twelve and a few others were left. And He asks them if they will also "go away", using the term used for their 'going away' from Him and seeking to return to their home area in Capernaum (see on :21).

*6:68 Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*- It was the Lord's "words", His use of language about drinking blood, ascending where He had been before, and about not all being called... which had caused the majority to go away into the darkness. Hence the significance of Peter's comment that His words were those of life eternal. His life was His words, and Peter was abiding with those words and that life. Peter was one of the few who really grasped the meaning of the Lord's miraculous provision of bread, and the discourse which followed. The Lord had said that He was the living bread, of which a man could eat and live forever. Peter's comment that only the Lord had the words of eternal life showed that he quite appreciated that it was the *words* of the Lord Jesus which were the essential thing, not the physicality of the miracle (fascinating as it must have been to a fisherman; Jn. 6:51 cp. 68).

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be

because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Again we have the same words, 'quicken' and 'his spirit'. And Paul says that our resurrection will have some similarities with that of our Lord- who was "put to death in the flesh but quickened by [on account of] the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). It was according to the spirit of holiness, of a holy life, that Jesus was raised and given eternal life (Rom. 1:4). What all this means in practice is that if we live a 'quicken' spiritual life now, a life modelled around what Jesus would have done or said in any given situation, then we have the guarantee that we will be 'quicken' in the Kingdom. Thus Rom. 8:2 speaks of "the law of the spirit of life in Christ". Having "the spirit" in our hearts is therefore the seal, the guarantee, of our future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

6:69- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

*And we have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God-* The people's real problem was that they could not accept a man well known to them as Messiah. Out of all the range of Messianic titles which Peter could have chosen, he chooses one which implies the Lord was God's "One", His begotten Son. The Lord must have been greatly encouraged, but He instead takes issue with Peter's statement that "we have believed and know...". For one of them did not. The implication could be that Judas did what he did not simply for money, but from a disbelief that Jesus was in fact Messiah and Son of God.

6:70- see on Jn. 6:64; 8:44.

*Jesus answered them: Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?-* As noted on :64, the crowd had progressively diminished as they all became offended at the Lord's words. Perhaps only the twelve remained, and the Lord didn't want them to think that even they were all going to abide. Even one of them was an opponent, a false accuser. Judas was 'chosen'; but being chosen is not of itself enough. We must make our choosing or election "sure" (2 Pet. 1:10- perhaps written by Peter with his mind on Judas).

6:71 *Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot; for he was the one of those twelve who would betray him-* Clearly the term "devil" doesn't refer to an Angelic being who fell off the 99th floor in Eden. The term is here applied to Judas, just as "satan" is to Peter. Perhaps this is another of the points of similarity between Peter and Judas, who in essence did the same thing in denying the Lord; and yet Peter's core faith triumphed and he repented, whereas Judas could not believe in the Lord's grace as Peter did.



## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him-* This is an exemplification in practice of how the Lord's life was not taken from Him, but He gave it at the time and in the manner which He Himself wished. He knew that if He went to Judea and walked openly, He would be killed. And He wished to die at Passover, not tabernacles (:2). This conscious self-giving of the Lord is hard to plumb, but it remains our constant pattern. Yet we note that the Lord did in fact teach openly at the feast of tabernacles. He did go into Judea. His reasoning may have been that He could be killed on the way, but He judged [rightly] that public opinion was sufficiently for Him that He would not be killed by the Jews within Jerusalem at the time of the tabernacles feast. This could have all been beamed into Him by the Father, but I prefer to imagine His own sensitivity and spiritual reasoning leading Him to these conclusions.

*7:2 Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand-* Again, what the Old Testament describes as "the feasts of Yahweh" are spoken of as the feasts of the Jews; the law of God through Moses became "their law", and the temple of Yahweh became the temple of the Jews. They had hijacked God's ways and turned them into their own mere religion.

*7:3 His brothers said to him: Depart from here and go into Judea, so your disciples may also see the works you do-* The disciples in view were presumably the Lord's sympathizers in Judea. "The works" refer to miracles. The Lord had been rejected by many exactly because the Galilean audience knew Him before His ministry began, and now He was claiming to be Son of God and Messiah, unwelcome public attention would be focused upon His family of origin. They therefore wanted Him to go to Judea, and taunted Him as to why He didn't do His miracles there too. Both his family and the men of Israel generally rejected David's claims to be able to save Israel (1 Sam. 17:28-30), and this pointed forward to the Lord's rejection by His brothers. Eliab's "Why camest thou down hither?" matches the Lord's brothers telling Him "depart from here".

*7:4 For no one does anything in secret while he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world-* This was another form of the temptation to "come down from the cross" and the wilderness temptations, to persuade the Jewish world by visible miracle. But the Lord's experience in chapter 6 had prepared Him for this; the miracle of the feeding had only led to men turning away from Him once it was explained to them. As explained on :3, the Lord's family didn't want all the public attention now given to them because of His claims to be God's Son and Messiah. They taunted Him that doing miracles in backwater Galilee was effectively being secretive; if He were indeed

Messiah then He surely would want to be "known openly", and so they urged Him to leave them and go to Jerusalem and manifest Himself openly to the Jewish world there. Just as the Lord's synagogue-influenced brothers wanted Him to show Himself openly to the world (Jn. 7:4), so did the disciples (Jn. 14:22). There was that hankering for Him to openly display Himself as the Messiah which Judaism had created within its own mind. This was all a repeat of the wilderness temptation.

Perhaps they were alluding to the Rabbinic idea that as Moses hid himself and then re-emerged from obscurity, so Messiah would. Rabbi Berekiah said: "As the first deliverer [Moses] was revealed, then hidden and afterwards appeared again, so will it also be with the last deliverer [Messiah]". John's record is clearly presenting the Lord as Moses in this sense.

In collective societies, where life was totally lived in the public realm and anything done 'in private' is seen as deviant (cp. Jn. 7:4; 18:20), shame was related to how *others* saw you, not your internal reflections and assessment of your guilt or innocence for things like private thoughts and unknown deeds. And there's every reason to think that the global village of the 21st century is an equally conscience-less place, where so long as you talk in nice speak and don't get caught actually *doing* anything society thinks is wrong, you can exist with no internal, personal conscience at all. Indeed, the word "conscience" originated from words which literally mean 'common / with others / knowledge'- conscience was collective, whereas the Biblical understanding of it is more on a personal level.

*7:5 For even his brothers did not believe in him-* The later New Testament records that they did later believe in Him. This would have required fair humility on their part. His behaviour in family life would have been perfect before God; no sins of omission nor commission. But the beauty of it all was that nobody perceived that. And it was His very humanity which stopped them believing in Him, just as it is His humanity which has been such a barrier to faith for so many, leading them to create false doctrines such as the Trinity in order to try to get over the problem, and thereby make Him the less challenging to we who share His same nature.

*7:6 Jesus replied to them: My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready-* "My time" surely refers to the time for Him to die on the cross. The phrase is only used elsewhere by Paul about "my time of departure" (2 Tim. 4:6), reflecting how he saw the Lord's death in his death, and thereby was confident in sharing in His resurrection. We need to have the same attitude. The word *kairos*, "time", can also refer to a specific time, i.e. a Jewish feast. It is used like this in Lk. 13:1 AV: "There were present at that season some...", the idea being that there is reference to some who were present [in Jerusalem] at that feast. So the Lord may mean that *His* feast, the one at which He was to die, Passover,

had not yet come. For the debate was about going up to the feast of Tabernacles, not Passover. But their feast was always prepared [NEV "ready"], for they were participating in the feast in a literal manner. The idea seems to be that the Lord's feast, the Passover when He was to die, was not yet prepared. He, and other factors, were not yet prepared. But for their feast of tabernacles, everything was ready for them and they might as well go to it at any time.

*7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify of it, that its works are evil-* The Lord's brothers were on the side of the Jewish world. They feared they would be hated by Jewish society because of their connection with the Lord, but He assures them that they have nothing to fear. Because it was His testimony against their evil works which was the basis for hate. The Lord did not specifically state that the works of the Jewish world were evil; but the phrase issued in 3:19 of how the Lord's life was such a light that the Jews shrunk back from it, preferring the darkness, lest His light reveal their works as evil. His life lived was therefore a testimony. Just as our most powerful witness is our life lived rather than words spoken or theology preached. The Jewish world hated the Lord's true disciples because they were not "of" that world (15:18,19; 17:14). Separation from the world elicits hatred from the world simply because we are different. This is basic human group psychology, to hate any outside the group or who leave the group. It has to be, therefore, that the true believer is hated by the world; we should not marvel at it (1 Jn. 3:13). Our positions are an implicit criticism and rebuke of them, which they 'hear' and respond to with hatred rather than indifference or the 'religious tolerance' which is the talk of the West at this time.

*7:8 You go up to the feast. I will not be going up to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled-* The AV adds "I go not up yet". Perhaps He is using spiritual language in order to confuse those who did not wish to spiritually perceive Him. He was going to the feast of tabernacles; but He means that He is not 'going up' to it in the sense of making His self-offering there at that feast, because His hour has not yet come for that. He knew He must wait until Passover for that. He may simply have meant that He perceived that He could be killed on the way to the feast, and so He was not going to go up at that time, because that was not the intended time for His death.

*7:9 And having said these things to them, he stayed in Galilee-* Perhaps He did not want to join the caravan of travellers going to the feast from Galilee, for this would have involved Him camping out with His family. They did not want association with Him, and He did not wish to force the issue. It was perhaps this gentle, sensitive policy which led to many of them coming to believe in Him after His death.



*7:10 But when his brothers had gone to the feast, then he also went to it, not publicly but as it were in secret-* The caravans descending upon Jerusalem for the feast were strictly organized according to families and towns of origin. The Lord did not wish to have to raise His earthly background because this would distract from His self-presentation as the One "from Heaven", of Divine origin, as emphasized in chapter 6. He therefore "in secret" joined the caravans, disguising His identity. There were many who would have been eager to use His presence amongst the pilgrims as an opportunity for staging a revolution and enthroning Him as king. Remember that this was one of His wilderness temptations, which returned to Him at times like this. His wisdom in avoiding such a situation is a mark of His recognition of His own frailty. He avoided temptation.

*7:11 The Jews searched for him at the feast, and asked: Where is he?-* This question "Where is he?" is recorded three times in John, and nowhere else in the New Testament (9:12; 20:15). The Lord's apparent absence was in order to elicit that question and a seeking for Him. His apparent absence and silence in the traumas of life is to likewise provoke in us the same question. I suggest in John's context this is all to add background to the momentous statements we have in the promise of the Comforter- that the Lord who was physically absent is present through His Spirit. His physical absence is not critical. And those who seek for Him shall find Him.

*7:12 And there was much murmuring among the crowds concerning him. Some said: He is a good man. Others said: Not so. He deceives the people-* The miracles done were clear enough, but still some thought He was a deceiver. Again John is making the point that miracles do not play a great role in eliciting faith. And this was a necessary point to be made, seeing John was writing at the time when the miraculous gifts were being withdrawn and phased out.

*7:13 Yet no one spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews-* Another theme of John is that belief in Jesus as Messiah and Lord must be openly stated. He records the examples of the healed blind man, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who 'came out' for the Lord. The Greek word for "openly" is used around 30 times in the New Testament for the 'openness' of the Lord's witness and that of the disciples. It is a characteristic of those who believe they are living the eternal life and have been filled with the love and Spirit of the Father and Son. But it is fear of our image before others which stymies that boldness. The same word is used of how the Lord spoke openly or boldly (:26); seeking those who heard Him to likewise be open and bold in coming out for Him. Joseph of Arimathea is presented as a secret disciple who "for fear of the Jews" did not come out

openly for the Lord (19:38 s.w.), and John uses the same term to describe how they the disciples were likewise living "in fear of the Jews" (20:19). It was the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection which results in the Acts record so often describing how they "spoke openly" of the Lord, now fearless of the Jews. The Lord's crucifixion and rising again should have a similar impact upon us.

*7:14 When the feast was half way through, Jesus went into the temple and taught-* "Half way through" is "in the midst", and the term is usually used not of time but of being in the midst of persons. His entry into the temple in the midst of Israel could have been seen as a triumphal entry, in preparation for what He planned to do at the next Passover feast. If the reference is to waiting half way through the eight days of the feast, then we see how the Lord was carefully calculating His impact. He knew that if He were to openly preach for eight days, He could be arrested or provoke a revolution. So He timed His appearance at the optimal time- to get His message over to as many as possible without provoking the events which would lead to His death. He of course planned His Passover appearances to lead to His death. We see here something of the degree to which the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He Himself carefully planned things rather than being a mute puppet in the Divine hand.

*7:15 The Jews marvelled, saying: How is it that this man has learning, when he has never had an education?-* As the Son of God, the Lord would or could have been an intellectual without compare. The fact He had not been educated would have been revealed in all the background checks they had run on Him. And His lack of education speaks of the abject poverty in which He had grown up- out working from a child rather than studying. But in the Lord we see a challenge for all time to the effect that lack of time, long hours, little cash, demanding domestic situations... are no ultimate barrier to developing God's mind and growing spiritually.

*7:16 Jesus answered them and said: My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me-* The Lord says nothing of how He had figured out Hebrew and Aramaic letters because of His own intelligence. Rather He says that His ability to teach when He was uneducated was yet another sign that He was sent from God with God's message. The differentiation made by the Lord here between Himself and the Father is yet another problem for the Trinitarian paradigm.

7:17- see on Jn. 8:43.

*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself-* Most of the audience were illiterate and had no access to the Hebrew scrolls of the Old Testament in order to check out whether the Lord's doctrine was of God or simply from Himself,

His own philosophy. The will of God is of our salvation and sanctification; this has been developed so far throughout John's Gospel. He who wishes above all things to live God's life, to have His Spirit, to live the life eternal with Him... they will intuitively know whether the Lord's doctrine is right or not. This intuitive element is in fact what leads to faith in the first place. There is a strong tendency to talk this down, and assume that it is by intellectual process that a person decides what is true or otherwise. But all appeal to intellectual process alone to decide 'truth' is flawed. For we are talking of spiritual things and not material. And legitimate intellectual process varies between persons. They may come to different conclusions about the same teaching which they analyse. And some are far more capable of intellectual analysis than others. There has to be something beyond intellectual process to decide truth. Here the Lord expresses this as a willing to do God's will, a heart for God, a desire for eternity. In a word, we must be open to the things of the Spirit. And then, the teachings make sense and there is an intuitive congruence between them and our own spirit.

*7:18 He that speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but he that seeks the glory of Him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him-* The Lord here discerns that all public teaching tends towards self-glorification. If a teacher is totally concerned with God's glory and not at all for his own glory, then he is of God. Indeed, the Lord here defines having "no unrighteousness" with not seeking one's own glory. He sees this principle as so fundamental that He considers that a person who seeks totally God's glory is therefore from God. This is a sober warning to all who teach publicly. Only the perfect, in whom is no unrighteousness, can say that they totally seek God's glory and not at all their own. There is in all of us [for none are without unrighteousness] a tendency towards our own self glory. This must be accepted, and struggled against. Nor should we seek to give glory to teachers. We must remember the principle here- that the Lord Jesus alone had no unrighteousness in Him, and therefore He sought only and totally God's glory in His teaching; and thereby He was validated as a teacher from God.

Seeking His glory is to be the essential issue in our lives. If we seek God's glory- i.e. the development of the attributes and characteristics of His Name- He will seek ours (John 8:50), and our glory is His glory. The Lord sought the Father's glory as the Father sought His glory (8:50). The word for 'seek' used here can imply 'worship'- we must worship this concept of giving glory to God in our lives. God's glory is His essential self (17:5), yet He is willing to give us His glory. He will not give His glory to anyone apart from His people (Is. 48:11). What higher honours can be revealed to us?

Fear of false teachers, even paranoia about them, is what has led to so much division in practice. The Lord Jesus tackled the issue of whether a

person is a true or a false teacher. He didn't make the division so much on the *content* of their teaching, as we usually do, but rather says that the true teacher is motivated by seeking the Father's glory, whereas the false teacher seeks only his own glory (Jn. 7:18). Yet it is the endless fear of 'false teachers' in terms of the *content* of their teaching which has led to so much division- and often the process of it seems to have led to self-glorifying individuals establishing their own followings. It is by their *fruits* that they are known / discerned, rather than the analysis of their *content* by intellectual process alone.

*7:19 Did not Moses give you the law and yet none of you does the law? Why do you seek to kill me?*- Jews sought the death penalty for a person who broke the Mosaic law; yet the Lord points out that they were not obedient to that law themselves. He had taught in 5:45 that Moses actually condemned them.

*7:20 The crowd answered: You are crazy! Who seeks to kill you?*- The crowd surely knew the Jews were plotting to kill the Lord; hence their fear of speaking openly about Him (:13). But the Lord did not get engaged in trying to persuade them of a different version of events and history. Instead He focused on the essence, which was their marvel instead of true faith (:21). "You are crazy" is literally 'you have a demon'. Unexplained illnesses, especially mental conditions, were understood as demon possession. And the Lord went along with that misunderstanding. Here too He doesn't stop to argue with them about their false theology of demons; His concern is with their deeper unbelief (:21).

*7:21 Jesus answered and said to them: I did one work and you all marvel because of it!*- The Lord said this in response to their denial that anyone was out to murder Him. He could have responded by giving quotations of words and statements both heard and reported. But He rarely answers questions on their own terms. Such point for point debating, striving to enforce one version of events upon another, virtually never succeeds in bring about understanding. Instead He comments further on how just one miracle had led to "marvel", to disbelief rather than belief; and had led some to plan to kill Him. He doesn't say 'I did a miracle, and some got so jealous they tried to kill Me'. Instead He argued that 'I did a miracle and *you* didn't believe as you should, you just marvelled'.

*7:22 Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses but of the fathers) and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man*- The crowd had not responded to the Lord's accusation that they broke the Law. But He knew that they were angry about that, filling their minds with lists of their own righteousness and legalistic obedience to laws. But again He rises above the temptation to comment upon their major disobedience in other areas. Rather does He seek to demonstrate that within the very legal structure of the Mosaic law, there was the requirement to break one law in order to

keep another. The reason for that was to drive the thoughtful Israelite to throw themselves upon grace, and to realize that justification could not be achieved by obedience to law.

*7:23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man completely whole on the Sabbath?*- As noted on :22, the structure of the Mosaic law was in order to make legalistic obedience impossible if one insisted upon a casuistic, literalistic reading of it. For one command resulted in another being broken. And the Lord is pointing the contrast between their cutting off a piece of flesh, and Him making a man completely whole- implying His cure of the lame man was a total cure of every part of the man's wasted body. The Lord rightly perceived their 'anger' with Him for doing a good work. The reference is back to how the healing of the impotent man led to the Jews seeking to kill the Lord (5:18). The implication is that on His current visit to Jerusalem, He had done no miracles. They were still remembering with indignation that previous incident. We see here how the Lord worked with an economy of miracle.

*7:24 Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment-* The Lord is still alluding to the incident in chapter 5, where He cured the impotent man on the Sabbath and the Jews plotted to kill Him. He had explained that He had done so because "My judgment is just" (5:30). These are the same words as used here in inviting the crowd to "judge righteous ["just"] judgment". John will later again emphasize how God's judgments are just (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). We are not to judge in the sense of condemning, pre-judging in an ultimate sense; but rather is the invitation to see things from God's perspective.

As recipients of God's grace through the experience of His way of working with us reflecting His character, we too must reflect those same characteristics to others. This is why we *must* judge- for in doing so, we have the opportunity to reflect God's character. We must judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24) in reflection of that of "the Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8). David was almost eager to replicate the principles of God's judgments in how he judged issues (Ps. 75:10 cp. 7; 75:7 cp. 2). And therefore Asaph poses the question to Israel's judges: 'Because God judges justly, why don't you?' (Ps. 82:1-3). As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the... fatherless and widow" (Dt. 27:79) because "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). Israel were to reflect God's judgments in their judgments.

*7:25 Therefore, some of those from Jerusalem asked: Is this not he whom they seek to kill?-* "Those from Jerusalem" knew that indeed the Jewish leadership wanted to kill the Lord. It was the crowd of visiting pilgrims from the provinces who seemed quite unaware of this (:20). The Lord could so easily have responded to the mocking claim that nobody sought to kill Him by arguing that yes, indeed there are such people here in Jerusalem, and you provincial folk are ignorant of that fact. But that is not His style, and such point blank confrontation should likewise be avoided by us. Instead as ever He cut to the essential spiritual point and issue.

*7:26 And lo, he speaks openly and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?-* They wondered whether the rulers had abandoned their well-known plans to kill the Lord because actually they now recognized Him as Messiah. The Lord's openness of 'boldness' of speaking was emulated by the disciples- the same word is used throughout Acts of their witness. He wished that His hearers would come out as openly as He had; for we learnt in :13 that His hearers feared to speak openly of Him as He did of Himself.

*7:27 However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is-* The Lord's claims had been researched, and it had been discovered that He was the son of a questionable woman called Maryam who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and the whole thing had been covered up. We note Mary [and the Lord] did not publicize His real history, His birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the wise men etc. Perhaps this was news indeed for those who first read or heard it in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. Thirty years earlier, the Jews had known full well the answer to the question 'Where does the Christ come from?'. They had given the correct answer- from Bethlehem, as stated in Micah. But now, their theology had changed and veered into mysticism, claiming that the origins of Messiah would be unknown. We see here a classic example of how theology changes in order to cope with inconvenient truths. The mysticism of the Trinity would be a parade example; it is an attempt to cope with the human Christ whose achievement of perfection within human nature requires much faith, and is a challenge to all of us who bear the same nature. And so the height of the challenge was blunted, the height of the demand minimized, by a slide into mysticism, abstracting the amazing concrete achievement into mere theological terms which are words with no weight in practice.

If He were really like us, then this demands an awful lot of us. It rids us of so many excuses for our unspirituality. And this, I'm bold enough to say, is likely the psychological reason for the growth of the Jesus = God ideology, and the 'trinity' concept. The idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus likewise arose out of the same psychological bind. The Jews wanted

a Messiah whose origins they wouldn't know (Jn. 7:27), some inaccessible heavenly figure, of which their writings frequently speak- and when faced with the very human Jesus, whose mother and brothers they knew, they couldn't cope with it. I suggest those Jews had the same basic mindset as those who believe in a personal pre-existence of the Lord. The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God. As John Knox concluded: "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both". His person and example aren't so much of an imperative to us, because He was God and not man. But if this perfect man was indeed one of us, a man amongst men, with our very same flesh, blood, sperm and plasm... we start to feel uncomfortable. It's perhaps why so many of us find prolonged contemplation of His crucifixion- where He was at His most naked and most human- something we find distinctly uncomfortable, and impossible to deeply sustain for long. But only if we properly have in balance the awesome reality of Christ's humanity, can we understand how one man's death 2,000 years ago can radically alter our lives today. We make excuses for ourselves: our parents were imperfect, society around us is so sinful. But the Lord Jesus was perfect- and dear Mary did her best, but all the same failed to give Him a perfect upbringing; she wasn't a perfect mother; and He didn't live in a perfect environment. And yet, He was perfect. And bids us quit our excuses and follow Him. According to the Talmud, Mary was a hairdresser [*Shabbath* 104b], whose husband left her with the children because he thought she'd had an affair with a Roman soldier. True or not, she was all the same an ordinary woman, living a poor life in a tough time in a backward land. And the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God and Son of Man... was, let's say, the son of a divorcee hairdresser from a dirt poor, peripheral village, got a job working construction when He was still a teenager. There's a wonder in all this. And an endless challenge. For none of us can now blame our lack of spiritual endeavour upon a tough background, family dysfunction, hard times, bad environment. We can rise above it, because in Him we are a new creation, the old has passed away, and in Him, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Precisely because He blazed the trail, blazed it out of all the limitations which normal human life appears to impress upon us, undeflected and undefeated by whatever distractions both His and our humanity placed in His path. And He's given us the power to follow Him.

*7:28 Therefore Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself. But He that sent me is true, whom you do not know-* The Lord's appeal was so emotional and direct because He knew that subconsciously, they recognized Him for who He was. They were in denial. They were so near to salvation, but so far. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20;

Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Him, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see Him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew Him for who He was, they saw Him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize Him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept Him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that He was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified Him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*7:29 I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent me-* The Son's knowledge of / relationship with the Father was partly because of His being God's Son, "from Him". He had a natural aptitude for the things of the Father. For all their searching of the Scriptures, they did not know God (:28). The Hebrew sense of 'knowing' is of relationship, rather than academic knowledge.

*7:30 Therefore they sought to take him, but no one laid his hand on him- because his hour had not yet come-* The upsurge of hatred against Him was not just because He claimed to be Messiah; for there were many who claimed to be Messiah and who were greeted with jovial scepticism. The anger was because as explained on :28, they did actually realize in their subconscious that He was both Messiah and Son of God. Their desire to catch and kill Him at that feast was somehow frustrated; He had an intended time to die, and it was not yet. The details are not given, but the overall picture is that the Lord's death was not achieved by the Jews just wanting Him out of the way, murdering Him. It was orchestrated by the Father, in response to the Son's desire to give His life.

*7:31 But of the crowd many believed in him; and they said: When the Christ comes, will he do more signs than those which this man has done?-* John is generous in crediting them with belief, because he goes on to explain that they were not completely sure if He were Messiah or not. And



they also predicated His Messiahship upon the number of miracles performed, whereas John's theme is that the Lord used an economy of miracle, and that the miracles in any case did not elicit lasting faith. Our view of others' immature faith ought to be similarly positive. For often our own faith is not actually much more mature.

*7:32 The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him-* There is fair emphasis upon the 'murmuring'. It was all very undercover. We may well ask, why the Jewish leadership minded so much that a claimant to Messiahship was so popular? Was it not that subconsciously, they felt it took away their power? They were playing Messiah, as men play God today. They didn't actually want Him to come because they had too much vested interest in Him actually not coming. Likewise there were those in Am. 5:18,19 who desired the day of the Lord, in words at least, and yet not really. We have to ask whether our desire for the Lord's coming is more than a matter of words, a respectably expressed public dissatisfaction with things as they are... when in real spiritual and psychological terms, we actually prefer all things to continue as they are.

*7:33 Jesus replied: Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go to Him that sent me-* The Lord's ministry was incredibly short. Three and a half years within the entire span of human history, and indeed, all existence and time as we know it.

The disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world".

The Lord Jesus has to say the same words to the Jews as He does to the disciples:

	<b>To the Jews</b>	<b>To the disciples</b>
<b>Phrase</b>		
"I am to be with you only a little longer"	Jn. 7:33	Jn. 13:33
"You will look for me"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33
"Where I am going, you cannot come"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33

Greek (unlike Hebrew) uses tenses in a very precise way. There are some real problems in understanding exactly why the Lord changes tenses so often, e.g. in Jn. 7:33,34: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go

unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am [we would expect: 'Where I will go / be'], thither ye cannot [not 'will not be able to'] come". He saw Himself as both with the Father, already glorified, and yet also still in mortal life. Another example is in the way He speaks of how the faithful *are* equal to the Angels, *being* the children of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36- in the context of explaining how 'all live' unto God)- we would rather expect Him to speak of how the faithful *will be* equal to Angels, *will be* resurrected etc. But He pointedly speaks in the present tense. He realized that He had not yet made the required sacrifice and broken the power of death in resurrection. But He also was confident in faith that He would achieve these things, and He looked at things from outside of time as we know it- from His Father's perspective.

*7:34 You shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, you cannot come-* This sounds like Moses ascending the Mount, leaving Israel behind him. Yet "Where I am" refers to the Lord's unity with God; the heights of His relationship with God connect with the physical ascent of Moses into the mount to hear God's words. "I will that they also... be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (17:24) alludes to the 70 elders sharing Moses' experience in the Mount (Ex. 24:70); it is as if the Lord is saying that His disciples really can enter into His relationship with God, we can be where He was spiritually in His mortal life. The Jews would seek that, and not find it. Their window of opportunity was incredibly brief. There is no evidence that they sought the Lord and didn't find Him in their mortal lives; I suggest the reference is to the awful time of condemnation at the last day, when they shall seek Him too late but not find Him. The window of opportunity we have in this life is very small. Every moment is of intense, eternal significance. This motivated the Lord to shout out and appeal for them to respond (:28,37); and we must likewise see our witness as having the same urgency.

John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come". He then went on to foretell how that out of His pierced side there would come the water of the Spirit. "Where I am" is parallel with "I am going...". He was going to the cross, but He speaks as if He was there right then at that moment. The cross was ongoing in His life. His going unto the Father was how He understood going to the cross (13:1,3 make the connection clear). Later, the Jews would recollect Golgotha's scene and seek Him, but not find Him. There was a time for them to accept the cross, but there would come a time when they would not be able to accept it. This surely cannot refer to their mortal lives; for whoever comes to the Son, He will in no

wise cast out. So it presumably means that at the judgment, as they wallow in the wretchedness of their condemnation, they will recall the cross and wish desperately to appropriate that salvation for themselves. They will seek Him, but be unable then to find Him.

*7:35 The Jews queried among themselves: Where will this man go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the diaspora among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?*- Where He was going, as noted above, was to the cross, to the Father, and to His "I am" relationship with Him. As noted earlier, they actually understood on one level what He meant. The possibilities they offered as to His intended meaning were really a smokescreen to cover over their own bad conscience. For they both knew Him and from where He had come (:28). So they knew where He was going to, for He had said He was going to where He came from. And again we see the Bible revealing core human psychology to us. Misunderstanding is so often psychologically motivated. It wasn't that they simply failed to make the right intellectual connections in order to accept Him. Accepting Him is not therefore something which some 'get' and some 'don't get' with no further culpability. The apparent misunderstandings and misconnections are all a reflection of a determined desire within, not to accept Jesus of Nazareth as Lord of our lives.

*7:36 What is his meaning when he said: You shall seek me and shall not find me; and, Where I am, you cannot come?*- As noted on :35, they knew His meaning. This is why there is no recorded response of the Lord to their questions. Instead we read of the Lord's impassioned plea to come to Him (:37). He had spoken of their condemnation at the last day, how there would come a time when they would seek and not find Him, and not be able to come "Where I am", with the Father- even though they would then dearly wish to. And people today likewise pretend they do not see the possibility of future condemnation, the reality of their answerability at the last day... they may shrug it all off with nonchalance and raise various questions, as if to say that the interpretation of all these things is far from clear and who can be sure... But this is all a smokescreen for their own bad conscience, their own realization [well beneath the realms of conscious awareness] that in fact these things are true.

*7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying: If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink-* "The last day" suggests the Lord saw this as a preview of judgment day; and they could even now come to Him and drink. The invitation to drink from Him is to be connected with the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, where the water offered was of the Spirit. The gift was for all those who realized their Spiritual thirst. The self-satisfied religionists were not those who

hungered and thirsted to be righteous. This is John's equivalent of the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, that those who long to be righteous would be filled. Those who thirst for the Spirit will be given it. And the water given, the spirit of life given, was "eternal life" in that this is how we shall eternally live.

7:38- see on Jn. 1:14.

*He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water-* The connection is again with the teaching to the Samaritan woman at the well. The water given was of the Spirit, and would provide springs of living water of the Spirit in an ongoing sense to the believer.

But clearly the idea is also that those who receive the Spirit become a source of Spirit life to others: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the Messianic Kingdom, rivers of spring water will come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special preaching campaigns (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities for evangelism to others. But here the Lord speaks as if we have no option but to bubble out the water of the Spirit to others.

There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Living water was to come out of the smitten rock. When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. He paralleled His 'smiting' on the cross with His glorification (Jn. 7:38). And He elsewhere seems to link 'glory' with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19). The Hebrew idea of 'glory' means that which is lifted up; and thus His references to His death as a lifting up suggested that He saw His death as His glory. And we with

Isaiah and with John and the Lord Himself should find in the glory and terror of the cross the vision which will endlessly inspire our ministry. Ps. 96:10 in some LXX versions reads: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigned from the tree". What would have looked like the utter, pathetic humiliation of the Man from Nazareth was in fact His glorification, His moment of triumph and victory; just as the pathetic death of a poor saint may be their glorious triumph over their mortality. And He there was and is our King. And this has implications for us; we were constituted a people over whom God reigns by the cross (Rev. 1:5 Gk.). Because of His utter victory there, He becomes our all controlling Lord, King and Master. We are no longer free to do what we want. This is why baptism into His death is an acceptance of His Lordship, of His will being the command of our lives.

7:39- see on Jn. 12:24,28.

*He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified-* Some manuscripts read "The Holy Spirit had not yet been received". This parallels the Spirit and the Holy Spirit- once the emphasis upon the word "yet" is appreciated. "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. 3:16) is matched later in the same epistle by "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you" (1 Cor. 6:19). See on Rom. 8:26. No great difference can be argued between "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit".

The Lord invites His audience right then to receive the water of the Spirit, and yet John notes that the Spirit was not then given. Clearly the Lord was speaking of future realities as if they already were. The gift of the Spirit in view was that within the human heart, within the "innermost being" (:38 NIV). This gift is not therefore referring to miraculous gifts. The power of internal transformation was therefore the gift of the Spirit given at the Lord's glorification. And the activity of the Spirit in transforming human minds into His mind is therefore His glorification.

*7:40 Therefore some of the crowd, when they heard these words, said: This is truly the prophet!*- "The prophet" (also in :52) is clearly a reference to "the prophet" like Moses, i.e. Messiah. There are many other allusions by John's record to the Dt. 18:18 passage: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him". References to the Son only speaking what the Father commanded Him are to be found in Jn. 4:25; 8:28; 12:49. John perhaps emphasizes that at this time, the Lord did no miracle. It was by hearing "these words" that they were persuaded He was a prophet. There was something about His claims which was intuitively attractive and credible; see on :17.

*7:41 Others said: This is the Christ. But some said: What! Does the Christ come out of Galilee?*- As noted on :27, the Jews had changed their theology over the last 30 years regarding the origin of Messiah. In any case, some were sold on the idea that geographical origin must produce people of a certain character- a common source of prejudice in first century Mediterranean society. No matter what else was done by the Lord, if He were from Galilee- then they would not accept Him. Their prejudices were stronger than the argument of miracles. Their predispositions were so strong that they were not open to any spiritual argument.

*7:42 Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was born?*- It seems that the Lord, along with Mary and Joseph, had somehow kept His origins from Bethlehem a secret. One would expect to read Him making a big point about His origins from there, in order to back up His claims to Messiahship and in order to answer the objections to His Messiahship on the basis that He was from Galilee. But He doesn't. It was not His style to get involved in horns-locked debate in this manner, overpowering arguments by dismantling them. He hardly appeals to Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled. The Gospel writers do at times, but the Lord does not. He as He was, His personality, His lack of sin... this was who He was and it was persuasive enough to those who were spiritually minded. He could so easily have made capital out of the fact He was born in Bethlehem, and Messiah was prophesied as coming from there. But He doesn't, and I find profound the way He doesn't even rise up to the opportunity now offered Him to do so. Fulfilment of Bible prophecy on some point or other was not His style. Instead He asks those who were thirsting for spirituality to come to Him, and have springs of the Spirit open up within their innermost being. And there was a powerful credibility about Him which did not depend upon argumentation about His Bethlehem origins.

There are very few direct statements from Jesus about Himself- e.g. He never actually says He had a virgin birth, nor does He explain that He was born in Bethlehem as required by Micah 5:2. He left people assuming He was born in Nazareth (Jn. 7:42).

*7:43 So there arose a division in the crowd because of him*- Division over the Lord's origin and credibility has always been. John emphasizes this (s.w. 9:16; 10:19). He is not a source of unity amongst people generally; only those who are of His Spirit find themselves united with each other. All others find themselves bitterly divided over Him. This is why a divided church is not the Lord's church, at least on a collective level. The net which caught the 153 fishes was not 'divided' despite the large number (21:11).

*7:44 And some of them would have taken him; but no one laid hands on him-* Again we sense that those who wanted to kill Him could not do so because His death was a function of His self-giving, and the Father's empowerment of the process. It was not yet time, and so somehow, all the plans didn't come to anything. And further, when His arresters came close to Him, there was clearly something unusual about Him to the extreme. The "some" refers to the officers sent by the priests and Pharisees to arrest Him (:45). The implication is that as they pushed through the crowds to arrest Him, the power of His words somehow repelled them and made them retreat.

*7:45 The officers went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them: Why did you not bring him?-* This was surely the only time they had been sent to arrest someone but had felt stopped from doing so by the power of His words, so that they had to beat a shamefaced retreat back through the crowd and thence back to those who had sent them.

*7:46 The officers answered: Never has a man spoken like this man!-* As noted on :44 and :45, it was the power of the Lord's words alone which stopped these officers from arresting Him. This is a theme we have noted in John- the power of the Lord's word and personality, even when no miracles were being done by Him. This was necessary for John to underline seeing he was writing at around the time when the miraculous gifts were fading. The repetition of "man" suggests that they perceived Him as unique amongst men, whilst being man, because of His words. He was a man, with a message which was clearly from God- somehow fused with the texture of His personality in a way and to an extent that no other messenger of God had ever been.

*7:47 The Pharisees therefore answered them: Are you also led astray?-* The officers could have given any number of reasons why they had not managed to arrest the Lord. But they spoke the truth. The Pharisees considered Him a deceiver (s.w. :12) and yet the Lord and John often warn that it was the Jews who were the great deceivers, leading astray the converts. John's language allows no middle ground between Judaism and Christianity. One is a deceiver, the other is the truth; and both consider the other to be deceitful.

*7:48 Have any of the rulers believed in him, or any of the Pharisees?-* Truth, and the true identity of Messiah, was posited by them on who else had believed in Jesus as Christ. If no rulers or Pharisees had done, then whatever miracles were done or words spoken, He could not be Messiah. And this is the problem with so many to this day- they will only believe, or claim to believe, if others do; and if those others are suitably respectable. They judge the person of Christ by those who follow Him.

And whilst that is understandable on a secular level, the idea of John's Gospel is that we are to be impressed by personal encounter with the Lord, and respond to Him regardless of whether others have, or which others have. This is how the Gospel ends, with the idea that we are to personally follow the Lord whether or not others do.

*7:49 But this rabble, which does not know the law, are accursed!-*

"Rabble" was a technical term used by the Pharisees for the mass of Israel, whom they considered apostate. "Accursed" is their allusion to the cursing promised for all who were not completely obedient to the law. The same word is used by Paul when he quotes that cursing, probably alluding to this incident, which he may well have been present at: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do all things that are written in the book of the law". The Pharisees were implying that they were completely obedient to the law; but the Lord has just demonstrated that the law is structured in such a way that to obey one commandment, e.g. to circumcise a child on the eighth day, could break a legalistic interpretation of another, e.g. to not work on the Sabbath.

*7:50 Nicodemus (he that had earlier come to him by night, being one of them)-* This continues the theme noted on :13 of the secret believers slowly coming out in the open. He was "one of them" at this stage.

*7:51 Said to them: Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and knowing what he is doing?-* He is alluding to how the Jews proudly considered that the provision of Roman law to only judge / condemn after giving the accused a hearing was in fact based upon Jewish law. He appeals to their national pride in order to save the Lord's life. However, there is no specific statement in the Law of Moses requiring this principle to be followed. Nicodemus may well be alluding to rabbinic law which required that a death sentence [using "judge" in the sense of condemning to death] could only be asked for after a man had appeared before the Sanhedrin and been condemned by them.

7:52- see on Jn. 1:46.

*They answered and said to him: Are you also of Galilee? Search the scrolls and you will see, that no prophet is to rise from Galilee-* They were in fact wrong, for Jonah [a great type of the Lord Jesus] was from Galilee. But the record has more spiritual culture than to point out this obvious error. We are left to perceive it, and the silence regarding their ignorance becomes the more powerfully deafening exactly because the obvious point is not made. The Jewish leadership were trying to paint the Lord as supported only by some of the Galilean pilgrims who had come up to that feast of tabernacles. Their damaged consciences are revealed in their over



sensitivity to merely being asked to apply their own law to the case of Jesus of Nazareth. They jump to the conclusion that Nicodemus is also on the Lord's side and must therefore also be Galilean. Recall how Peter is unmasked as one of the Lord's followers because of his Galilean accent.

7:53 *At that, each of them went home-* As noted on :52, the glaring error in claiming that no prophet is from Galilee, when Jonah was from there, is left without comment. The implication is that alone at home, away from the group mentality, they would have reflected upon that error. And thought about Jonah, who the Lord had said was a sign to them about His own death and resurrection (Mt. 12:39). The Sanhedrin now broke up; the members returned to their own homes in the various towns of Palestine, without having made a formal conclusion about how to proceed with the case of Jesus of Nazareth.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Jesus went to the Mount of Olives*- This may be in contrast to the Sanhedrin members going back to their own homes (7:53); the Lord by contrast slept rough on Olivet.

8:2 *And early in the morning he again went into the temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down and taught them*- "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives... he came again into the temple, and all the people (i.e. the leaders and the crowd, see context) came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them" (John 8:1,2). This is framed to recall Moses coming down from Sinai: "The Lord came (down) from Sinai (manifest in Moses)... yea, he (God) loved the people (in the fact that) all his saints (Israel) are in thy (Moses') hand (as we are in the hand of Christ, Jn. 10:28-30): and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words... the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel (i.e. both leaders and ordinary people) were gathered together (to Moses)" (Dt. 33:2-5).

Sitting down and teaching may simply be stating the obvious, for many rabbis taught sitting down. But given the large crowd and the need to project His voice, we wonder why it is so stressed. Surely given the situation and size of the crowd, most teachers would have stood. But the Lord was totally focused upon seeking the Father's glory (see on 7:18) and totally not upon His own glory as a teacher; and this may have been reflected in His choice at this point to teach sitting, on the level of His immediate audience, rather than standing.

8:3 *And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery; and having placed her before him*- This was surely a set up. The Lord was apparently obligated to agree that she should be stoned. But this was against Roman law, which only considered recommendations from the Sanhedrin for death sentences in the case of desecration of the temple. The woman was used as a pawn; her feelings were unimportant to these men, bent as they were upon finding a case against the Lord. And of course the guilty male was not brought to Him for judgment.

8:4 *They said to him: Teacher. This woman has been caught in the very act of adultery!*- Seeing it was early morning at the end of the Tabernacles festival (:2), we assume she had been dragged fresh from her sin into the temple.

8:5 *Now, in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?*- They were seeking to set the Lord either against Moses or against Rome (see on :2).

8:6 *And this they said to test him, so they might have some reason to accuse him*- I have explained in *The Real Devil* that the Jewish opposition

to the Lord and His church is often described as "the devil" or "Satan". They were quite literally false accusers and were ever looking for false accusations to make, seeking to spin situations so that they could accuse the Christians to the local authorities and get them shut down.

*But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground-* He could have been doodling, or have done so just from plain male awkwardness before a naked woman. In these suggestions we see so clearly His humanity. If this is so, then there would have been an artless mix of His Divinity, His utter personal moral perfection, and His utter humanity. Embarrassed in front of a naked woman, crouching down on His haunches, doodling in the dust... that, it seems to me, would've been the ultimate conviction of sin for those who watched. It would've been surpassingly beautiful and yet so challenging at the same time. And it is that same mixture of utter humanity and profound, Divine perfection within the person of Jesus which, it seems to me, is what convicts us of sin and leads us devotedly to Him. Maybe I'm wrong in my imagination and reconstruction of this incident- but if we love the Lord, surely we'll be ever seeking to reconstruct and imagine how He would or might have been.

But the way He challenges them with their personal sins (:7) suggests He was writing their sins in the dust, or perhaps their names: "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth" (Jer. 17:13). Or He could have been using a well known way of communicating deafness. Hence AV adds, with Codex Beza: "As though he heard them not". He would have been thereby saying that He was deaf to the accusations, possibly alluding to Messiah as the deaf servant who was morally perfect (Is. 42:19). Just as we are commanded not to be interested in hearing about others' sins, neither is the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps He meant that He was deaf to their accusations, because they too were sinners. If He wrote their sins, then they were written in the dust, only temporarily. They too could be brushed out by the Lord with ease; and they too were but dust.

*8:7 But when they continued asking him, he stood up and said to them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her-* The trick of the question had been to get the Lord to agree to what the Romans would have called extra-judicial murder. Here, the Lord asks them to be obedient to the Mosaic law and stone her- but adding the rider that only if they were "without sin". He is introducing a dimension not found in the Law of Moses- that we cannot actually judge with integrity because we too are sinners and deserve death. He was of course also addressing Himself, for He was the only one "among you" who was "without sin". He could have thrown the first stone, leading others into condemning the woman; but He would not, because He sought to save not to condemn. The Lord viewed obedience to such laws as voluntary. The fact there was a command to do something doesn't mean that we

must do it; there are other factors. This is and was impossible for the legalistic mind to get around. The way to the Father is not by such casuistic obedience, but through the Spirit.

8:8 *And again he stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground-* The second writing on the ground may have been of their sins, perhaps writing them next to the names of the men which He had written earlier (:6). The record seems to imply that it was the way Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust which convicted the accusers of the adulteress in their consciences. As He kept on writing, they one by one walked away. It's been speculated that He was writing their deeds or names there, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy of how the names of the wicked would be written in the dust (Jer. 17:13).

8:9- see on Mt. 27:5.

*And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, to the last; and Jesus was left alone with the woman, with her still standing in the middle-* It can be no coincidence that the Lord Jesus is described as being "left alone" only twice in the New Testament, and they are both within a few verses of each other: "They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was *left alone*, and the woman standing in the midst" (Jn. 8:9)... "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not *left me alone*; for I do always those things that please him" (Jn. 8:28,29). He was not alone because the Father confirmed Him in the judgments He made (Jn. 8:16). What is the meaning of this connection? As the peerless Son of God stood before the repentant sinner, with all others convicted by their consciences to one by one slink away from His presence, He was left alone with His perfect Father as well as the repentant woman. Jesus saw in that scene a prefiguring of His death on the cross. There, lifted up from the earth, He was left alone with the Father, a repentant sinner [the thief], and again, one by one, the condemning onlookers smote their breasts in conviction of their sin and walked away. The cross was "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31). There men and women are convicted of their sin and either walk away, or take the place of the humbled woman or desperately repentant thief. This alone should impart an urgency and intensity to our memorial services, when through bread and wine we come as it were before Him there once again, facing up to the piercing reality of our situation as sinners kneeling before the crucified Son of God. One aspect of the loneliness of the cross was that simply the Lord's righteousness set Himself apart from humanity- and He so

intensely felt it: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). Yet it was the loneliness which drew Him to the Father. For the isolated believer, the loneliness of being in some sense more righteous living than e.g. your alcoholic husband, your atheist daughter, the materialistic women at work...is a burden hard to live with. Yet in this, we are sharing something of the cross of our Lord. And if we suffer with Him, we shall also share in the life eternal which He was given. Being "left alone" with the Father and your humbled, repentant brethren is a sharing in the cross of the Son of God. This is the gripping logic, the promise of ultimate hope, which is bound up with the sense of spiritual loneliness which is in some ways inevitably part of the believing life.

*8:10 And Jesus stood up and said to her: Woman! Where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?*- There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make the connection here to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is every one of us. His question "Did no one condemn you?" was rhetorical, in order to help the point be underlined to her- that all are sinners, and she should not feel nor fear the condemnation of men, for they too are sinners, equally condemned. The healing she needed was partly to do with this; for the shame of condemnation at the hands of her religious elders was utterly traumatic. And the Lord removed that, as well as assuring her of her acceptability before God.

*8:11 And she said: No one, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From this time forward, sin no more*- He was the only one without sin who could stone her; but He chose not to, He chose to not obey the Mosaic commandment to stone her. Thus by obeying the spirit of the law He broke the letter, at least in the legalistic, casuistic understanding of the Pharisees. To judge sin is not absolutely essential, as many legalistic Christians today seem to think. Not walking in darkness in the next verse [12] connects with the "sin no more" spoken to the woman. We are each in her position.

*8:12 Again Jesus spoke to the crowd, saying: I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life*- The Lord's subsequent teaching in this chapter is allusive to the incident with the woman taken in adultery, so I would not be supportive of any attempt to exclude that section as uninspired. "I am the light of the world" alludes back to the prologue; the life the Lord lived is to be our light, which we live by and understand life according to. Hence here we

read of the "light of life". Life lived any other way is lived in darkness. John's letters develop the thought in practice by saying that if we live in hatred towards our brother, we walk in darkness. Such a hateful life is lived because the heart is focused upon the life of Jesus, His Spirit, His life, doesn't live within us. Having the light of life may be another way of saying what we read in Mt. 5:14: "You are the light of the world". In His light we become light to others.

The teaching of Jesus was very much centred around Himself. Other religious teachers tend to say 'This is the truth, these are the ideas I have put together: follow them'. But Jesus says: "I am the truth; follow *me*". His formula was not "Thus saith the Lord", but rather "Truly, truly *I* say unto you...". The personal pronoun forces itself upon our attention as we read His words:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to *me* shall not hunger"

"I am the light of the world; he who follows *me*..."

"I am the resurrection and the life... whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"

"I am the way and the truth"

"Come to *me* ... learn of *me*".

He called people to Himself- to come to Him, learn of Him, follow Him. He knew, too, that the example and achievement of His death would exert a certain magnetism upon men and women: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself". He is drawing them not primarily to a church, to a statement of faith, to a 'truth'...but to Himself.

The "light" was a lifted up torch of fire, exactly as He was to be lifted up on the cross (see on Jn. 3:19-21). But He saw Himself as there and then lifted up as the light of the world. The principles of the cross must be the light, the only light, of our lives. When the Lord speaks of Himself as the light / burning torch of the Jewish world, He continues: "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody follows the sun when they walk- so the "light" referred to is hardly the sun. Surely the reference is back to the fiery pillar in the wilderness, which gave light by night so that the Jews could walk in the light even when darkness surrounded them. And there's an upward spiral in all this. If "the light" is specifically a reference to God's glory manifested through the crucifixion, then this must provide the background for our understanding of Jn. 12:35-50. Here the Lord teaches that only those who walk in the light can perceive who He really is, and "the work" which was to be "finished" on the cross. It is the light of the cross which reveals to us the essence of who the Lord really is... and this in turn leads us to a keener perception of the light of the cross. Which in turn enables us to see clearer the path in which we are to daily walk.

Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johannine

references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46) The light of the Gospel is not just light which we behold and admire for its beauty; it is a light which by its very nature opens the eyes of blind people (Jn. 8:12)!

Many passages in John speak of the believer as being in a state of constant spiritual strength; e.g. "he that followeth me shall never (Gk.) walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). These kind of passages surely teach that God does not see us on the basis of our individual sins or acts of righteousness; He sees our overall path in life, and thereby sees us as totally righteous or totally evil. Thus Proverbs contains many verses which give two alternative ways of behaviour, good and evil; there is no third way. Thus, e.g., we *either* guard our tongue, *or* we speak rashly (Prov. 13:3). At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5).

8:13 *The Pharisees replied to him: You testify of yourself. Your witness is not true-* As noted on :12, the Lord did indeed focus heavily upon presenting Himself as the life to be lived, the light to be followed. The Pharisees were judging the Lord, and they claimed that He had no witnesses to testify for Him apart from Himself. See on :17

8:14- see on 1 Jn. 5:9.

*Jesus answered and said to them: Even if I testify of myself, my witness is true. For I know from where I came and where I go; but you do not know where I come from, nor where I go to-* This appears to contradict His statement in 5:31 "If I testify of myself, my witness is not true" (the same words are used in the Greek). Likewise "You do not know where I come from" contradicts 7:28 "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself". Few commentators have engaged with these intentional paradoxes. I suggest the Lord is probing the fact that in their consciences, they knew He came from God. Their confidently proclaimed, quasi logical legalistic arguments were but a smokescreen to disguise their inner voice of conscience. So I suggest His sense is: 'Even if I am My own witness, My witness is true because both I and you know from where I came- from God!'. "You do not know where I come from" is allusive to their own position expressed in 7:27: "When Messiah comes, nobody knows from where He comes". Their claim to not

know where He came from was in fact an admission that they accepted He was Messiah.

8:15 *You judge after the flesh. I judge no one*- Their legal language of 'witnesses' reflects how they were judging Him in the sense of condemning Him. He condemned nobody- and the context is His refusal to condemn the woman taken in adultery. This connection further strengthens the case that the incident with the woman is the basis of His later teaching here, and should not be removed from the text.

8:16 *Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and He who sent me*- "I judge no one, yet even if I do judge..." recalls His argument that He did not testify of Himself (5:31), and yet even if He did... (:14). 'Not A, but sometimes A' is a common construction in Semitic languages as it is in several Eastern European languages to this day. "Not A" doesn't mean 'Never ever A'. Their judgment "after the flesh" (:15) is contrasted with how He judges with God's judgment, i.e. 'after the Spirit'. His judgment "is true" because He seeks the Father's will, which is of human salvation (5:30 and context). Any condemnation uttered by the Son is made having done God's will to the full, i.e. to save men rather than condemn them. Condemnation is therefore only for those who have refused the will of God for them, His will for their salvation.

8:17 *Even in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true*- "Your law" could mean that He considered that God's law had now been hijacked by them, just as the house of Yahweh had become the temple of the Jews, the feasts of Yahweh had become the feasts of the Jews. The requirement of two witnesses is to be found in Dt. 17:6; 19:15; but the Lord carefully changes "two witnesses" to "two men". His point is that the witnesses to Himself are more than men; He has God Himself, and Himself as Son of God.

8:18 *I am he that testifies of myself; and the Father that sent me testifies of me*- If the witness of two *men* was acceptable, then the Lord argues that the testimony of God Himself and of Himself as God's Son was far more conclusive.

The Lord's sense of authority helps explain His mysterious logic in Jn. 8:17,18. The Jews accuse Him of bearing witness of Himself, and that therefore His witness is untrue. The Lord replies that under the Law, two witnesses were required in addition to the accused person. And He argues that He is a witness to Himself, and His Father is too: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness". But this was exactly their point- He was bearing witness of Himself, and therefore



"thy witness is not true" (Jn. 8:13 RV). Yet His reply seems to have silenced them. Clearly the authority attached to Him was so great that effectively His bearing witness of Himself was adequate witness.

The Lord often began His statements with the word "Amen" - 'truly', 'certainly', 'surely... I say unto you...'. Yet it was usual to *conclude* a sentence, prayer or statement with that word. But the Lord *began* His statements with it. And this feature of His style evidently caught the attention of all the Gospel writers. Mark mentions it 13 times, Matthew 9 times, Luke 3 times and John 25 times. And it should stand out to us, too. Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. The Lord's extraordinary sense of authority was not laughed off as the ravings of a self-deluded 'holy man'. For the crowds flocked to Him, and even hardened guards sent to arrest Him had to give up on the job for the humanly-flimsy excuse that "never man spake like this man". And it is that very sense of ultimate authority which amazingly comes through to us today, who have never met Him nor heard His words with our own ears. This is the power of the inspired Gospel records, yet it is also testimony to the extraordinary, compelling power of the Personality which is transmitted through them.

8:19 *They replied to him: Where is your Father? Jesus answered: You know neither me, nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also-* There seems to be a verbal connection at least between the Jews' mocking question of Christ "Where is your father?" (Jn. 8:19) and Saul's "whose son is this youth?" (1 Sam. 17:55); David was indeed a type of the Lord. On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But it is a theme of John's Gospel that one can see and not see, hear and not hear, know and not know. The appeal is to actualize that knowledge, to follow the likes of Nicodemus in allowing our encounter with the Lord to take over our lives, so that we know Him not theoretically, as propositions, but in the Hebrew sense of 'knowing', i.e. being in an ongoing relationship with. We can note here that knowing the Father is predicated upon knowing the Son. It is encounter, experience and relationship with Him which leads us to know the Father; He is the way to the Father. Archaeology, creationism, science, arguments from nature and logic... will not provide lasting relationship with the Father. All is predicated upon the Son.

8:20 *These words spoke he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no one took him- because his hour had not yet come-* Again we see

that the Lord only died because the Father and Himself allowed it to happen; His life was not taken from Him against His will, He gave it freely. "The treasury" was in the Court of the Women, the busiest and most public place in the temple (hence the public show of giving money at that place), with the Hall Gazith where the Sanhedrin met right next to it. Yet even there, in the busiest thoroughfare, "no one took him". It was here where it seems the Lord often sat and taught (Mk. 12:41, note the Greek tense there). We might perceive from this choice too that He was eager to get His message to the women; for the treasury was within the Court of the Women.

8:21- see on Jn. 7:33.

*He replied again to them: I go away, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come-* There is never a time in mortal life when a man cannot seek the Lord and find Him; indeed, many of the Pharisees were later baptized, according to Acts. So this time of seeking and not finding must refer to the last day. They could not come to the relationship He had with the Father because He was going away, they were going to kill Him on the cross, and would never after that find the humility to repent. For they need not die in their sins, if they accepted that "I am He" (:24).

"I go my way" was to the cross. He was and is the way, the cross is the only way to the true life, both now and eternally. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4) further cements the connection between His "way" and the cross. From here up to :25, the Lord twice seeks to confront them with their sin, and yet they ignore this matter and get lost in speculation about His more cryptic statements. And this is why a man can spend hours or even a lifetime in 'Bible study' and come out with a conscience untouched as to his personal sin. Because humanity has a terrible way of footnoting the Lord's conviction of our sins and getting endlessly lost in striving about words and their interpretations.

8:22 *The Jews replied: Will he kill himself? Because he said: Where I go, you cannot come-* The Lord's death was not suicide, but it was also not a cessation of life as a result of murder. For He gave His life, and it was not taken from Him. I have argued throughout that subconsciously, they knew the truth about Him; of His origin and upcoming death and ascension to the Father. Here they come very close to stating that truth, even cloaked in apparent jest and scepticism.

8:23 *And he said to them: You are from beneath. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world-* "Not of this world" cannot mean that He personally pre-existed in Heaven before His birth, for He uses the same phrase as to how His followers were not of this world as He was not

(17:14). His Kingdom was "not of this world" (18:36). He was very much "in" this world, as He states often in John 17:11,12,13 etc. His being "from above" referred to how He was in relation to the world, rather than His literal origins. It was this which meant that they did not perceive His language correctly.

8:24 *I replied to you, that you shall die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins-* As explained on :21, this dying in sins refers to their final destruction in "the second death" at the last judgment. But they could avoid it, by accepting Him as the "I am". Just as He so often uses the term, *ego eimi*, "I am..." (e.g. :23). In :21 He seems to say that because they would crucify Him, they would die in their sins. But they could still have repented of that. His sense was therefore that by doing such a huge sin, they were going to find repentance hard, and He knew many of them would not come to it, for it would require too much sacrifice of vested personal interest and standing. And thus at the last day, they would die in their sins, seeking Him all too late at that day (:21).

8:25 *They replied to him: Who are you? Jesus said to them: Even that which I have spoken to you from the beginning-* Most of His messages are hidden in His lifestyle and in the way He treated people. He left it to those who watched Him to see how the word was being made flesh in Him. In this sense Jesus' words really were eminently deeds. He was the word made flesh. When the Jews asked Him "Who art you?", He replied: "How is it that I even speak to you at all? I have many things to say...When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:25,28 RVmg.). Jesus didn't have to speak anything about Himself; He was the word made flesh, His deeds and above all His death would declare who He was. This self-proclamation that didn't require any self-advertisement or even self-explanation was so wonderfully unique to Jesus. Thus Peter says that a wife should convert her husband without needing to speak a word- and there we have something of the same idea.

We have here yet another allusion to the prologue. The word spoken from "the beginning" was the person of the Lord Jesus as exhibited and spoken from the beginning of His ministry- not of the present creation.

8:26- see on Jn. 6:44.

*I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you. However, He that sent me is true, and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world-* Even when making the profoundest claims to be God's Son, sent from God and destined to ascend to Heaven, the Lord in

the same context emphasizes His humanity- e.g. in Jn. 8:26, having spoken of His origins, Father, and destiny, He stresses that *He* has much He'd like to say and judge of His generation, but He could only share what His Father had taught Him to speak. This was a very pointed presentation of His humanity, and He made it lest His hearers think that He was altogether other-worldly.

How the Lord heard things from the Father is not defined. It could have been from His own study of the Father's word mixed with direct revelation. Is. 50:4 may suggest early morning teaching sessions in communion with the Father: "The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary: He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught". Jn. 15:15 states that all He heard from the Father, He declared to the disciples. The things He heard were therefore nothing more than what He told them during His ministry, and which we can read in the Gospels. It was not that He had huge revelations of material which remained private between Him and the Father. What He was told, He told them. It was enough to motivate them, as it was to motivate Him. And it should be enough for us too. This of course heightens our need to apply ourselves to His words as found in the Gospels.

Consider how here and in 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas here He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. See on Lk. 9:44; Jn. 14:10. Again in allusion to the prologue, the word was made flesh, completely actualized in a person and a life lived (1:14).

8:27 *They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father-* On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But again we see the difference between knowledge on a theoretical level, and on the level of true understanding and relationship.

8:28- see on Jn. 5:36; 6:63; Jn. 20:28.

*Jesus continued: When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me-* The Jewish conscience about the cross is predicted by the Lord here. But the Jews generally were not subsequently persuaded that Jesus was indeed Messiah, bearer of the "I am" Name of God. Potentially, in their consciences, they *did know* that He was, once they crucified Him. The words of Jesus were of course true. But they didn't confess that faith, because they suppressed it in their conscience. This is why to this day there is this Jewish conscience about the cross.

And it's why conversion to the Lord Jesus cannot be far from the heart of every Jew. They perceived the manifestation of the great "I am" there, Yahweh Himself, but unless they gave themselves to it in total commitment, they would die eternally. Eternal life therefore depends upon an appreciation of the cross. For this reason, the atonement must be the central doctrine of the Gospel, and those who believe it must feel it and know it personally if they are to be saved in the end. This is why 20:27-29 seems to show that the Lord understood the essence of faith in all His people as meaning that they would discern and believe the marks in His hands where the nails were. The cross would confirm all He had spoken. There the words of Jesus were made flesh (1:14). In the lifted up Jesus, we see all His words, God's words, brought together in that body.

He predicted that when He was crucified, then His people would believe on Him; yet "As he spake these things, many believed on him", there and then (:30). There was such congruence between His message of crucifixion and His actual life, that people believed there and then, even before seeing the actual crucifixion. His life was a crucified life, and it elicited faith in those who perceived this.

In many discussions with Trinitarians, I came to observe how very often, a verse I would quote supporting the humanity of Jesus would be found very near passages which speak of His Divine side. For example, most 'proof texts' for both the 'Jesus=God' position and the 'Jesus was human' position- are all from the same Gospel of John. Instead of just trading proof texts, e.g. 'I and my father are one' verses 'the Father is greater than I', we need to understand them as speaking of one and the same Jesus. So many 'debates' about the nature of Jesus miss this point; the sheer wonder of this man, this more than man, was that He was so genuinely human, and yet perfectly manifested God. This was and is the compelling wonder of this Man. These two aspects of the Lord, the exaltation and the humanity, are spoken of together in the Old Testament too. A classic example would be Ps. 45:6,7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever [this is quoted in the New Testament about Jesus]... God, thy God, hath anointed thee [made you Christ]". It was exactly because of and through His humanity that His glory, His 'Divine side', was and is manifested. His glory was 'achieved', if you like, not because He had it by nature in Heaven before His birth; but exactly because He as a human of our nature reflected the righteousness of God to perfection in human flesh. Thus "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn. 8:28)- the 'I am' aspect of Jesus was manifested at the point of His maximum humanity. Thus He was 'made sin for us' so that we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). It was only because the Word was made *flesh* that the glory of God was revealed (Jn. 1:14).

"I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28). "The

Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of myself" (Num. 16:28 LXX).

*8:29 And He that sent me is with me. He has not left me alone. For I always do the things that are pleasing to Him-* This idea of not leaving but present with is repeated by the Lord in His promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The Father's presence was by the Spirit, and the Lord wishes to share His relationship with the Father with us. His presence however was due to always pleasing the Father. The Lord's sense of being forsaken on the cross (Mt. 27:46) was therefore because He so identified with our sins that He was identified with those who were not pleasing to the Father, and so felt the lack of His presence. "Pleasing" is a reference to doing the Father's pleasure or will. That will is explained in chapter 5 as being for our salvation. All the Lord did was for the end of our salvation. And to that end He had the Father's presence through the Spirit always with Him; just as we will, if human salvation is our constant focus.

We are the witnesses in the same way as the Lord Jesus was the word made flesh- in His very person, He was the essential witness and message. When He said "I do always those things that please [God]", it is recorded that "As he spake these words, many believed on him" (Jn. 8:29,30). There was something real and credible. He was His words made flesh.

When the Jews lifted up Christ in crucifixion, then they would know that the words He spoke were the words of God, that the Father had not left Him at all, and that Jesus had done "always those things that please Him" (Jn. 8:28,29). Surely this implies that His death, His dead body motionless there, was in fact some sort of word of testimony, a voice from God. Note too that when He looked as if He was forsaken by God, it was apparent that He was not. The Jews had jeered at Him as He still clung on to life, implying that God and the prophet Elijah had now abandoned Him- clearly, they mocked, He was not the Son of God. But when He was lifted up by them- i.e. in death- the lifeless body must have spoken to them of something. Somehow [and the earthquake and darkness doubtless confirmed this], there was the very real presence of God evident in the scene once He had died. The Centurion realized that "truly, this was the Son of God"- and from these prophetic words of the Lord, it appears that the Jews generally had to face the same conviction. This is the sort of paradox God delights to use- the humanly hopeless and God forsaken, the lost cause, becomes the very convicting proof of just the opposite- that we are *not* forsaken. In all this there was the word of the cross.

*8:30 As he spoke these things, many believed in him-* Many of the Jews believed on Jesus as Christ- but He rebukes them for not being His "

disciples indeed", not really having the freedom which a true acceptance of this Truth will bring, not really being children of Abraham, still living in sin, not really hearing His word, and passively wanting to kill Him (Jn. 8:33-44). Yet He spoke all these criticisms to those whom the record itself describes as believing in Him (Jn. 8:31). It's as if the Spirit wants to show us that belief in Christ can exist on a completely surface level. Earlier on this chapter I have noted that one can know Him but not really know Him; and here, one can believe but not really believe. He says they were Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37,56); but almost in the same breath, He says they weren't anything of the sort in spiritual reality (Jn. 8:39).

*8:31 Jesus replied to those Jews that had believed him: If you abide in my word, then are you truly my disciples-* This credits some of the Jews with believing on Jesus- and yet the Lord goes on to show how they didn't 'continue in His word', weren't truly confirmed as His disciples, and were still not true children of Abraham. Yet it would appear God is so eager to recognize any level of faith in His Son that they are credited with being 'believers' when they still had a very long way to go.

The idea that the Gospels are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel becomes more obvious when we start to probe how the Gospels would have originated. As accounts and rumours about Jesus and His teaching began to spread around, some would have been sceptical. Those who had met Jesus would have wished to persuade their neighbours and friends that really, what they had seen and heard was really so. People who had met Jesus would share their impressions together and reflect upon the striking things He had said and done. The beginnings of the Gospels were therefore rooted in preaching the good news about Jesus. The Lord speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). I suggest this refers in the first instance to the new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His words abiding in us. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious... for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. See on 1 Jn. 2:24.

Jn. 8:30,31 records how He spoke about how the Father was with Him, "that I am he", with full reference to the Yahweh Name. As He spoke the

words, it was evident that they were more than words, they were an expression of the truth that was in this Man. He was the word made into flesh. People are tired of words, of language... which in any case doesn't convey as well as we may think any lasting impression. People need to see what we believe lived out. They need to see, e.g., that our understanding of the representative nature of Jesus issues forth in our praying and in our feeling for this man "whom having not seen ye love". And perhaps this is why it can be observed that Jesus almost never "went out of his way" to help people but rather walked along and helped the people He met in His path.

8:32- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free-* The Lord and the Gospel writers seem to have recognized that a person may believe in Christ, and be labelled a 'believer' in Him, whilst still not knowing the fullness of "the truth": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which had believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:31,32). Clearly the Lord saw stages and levels to discipleship and 'knowing the truth'. The truth makes free; and yet it is Jesus who makes free (Jn. 8:32,36). The Truth in the person of Jesus, not just in our perception of doctrines in intellectual purity, is what liberates our personhood. "The truth" is defined in :34 as meaning being made free from sin. Following Him, as His followers / disciples (:31), means that we are made free from sin as we walk in the light of His life. Freedom from sin is no longer attempted by steel-willed struggle against hot temptation; but as part of a way of life in the Spirit of the life the Lord Jesus lived. We will 'do the truth' in that we begin to live the only ultimately true and free life- the life He lived. Truth and freedom are popular ideas in religion, everyone aspires to them; but the ultimate truth is the life of the Lord Jesus, and freedom from sin.

Therefore the Lord Jesus told the truth to this world in the sense that He was sinless (Jn. 8:47). Likewise in Jn. 17:19 He says that He sanctifies Himself, so that "the truth", i.e. His perfect life and death, might sanctify us; so that His freedom from sin might become ours. This was His telling of truth to men. By continuing in the word of Jesus we will know the truth (Jn. 8:31,32)- not so much that we will attain greater doctrinal knowledge, but that our lives will reflect our knowledge of Jesus who is "the truth". The truth sets us free; the Son sets us free (Jn. 8:32, 36). "The truth" is therefore a title for Jesus. Mere academic knowledge alone cannot set anyone free from sin; but the living presence and example and spirit of life of another Man can, and does. And so in Jn. 14:6 the way, truth and life are all parallel- truth is a way of life; "truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21 RV), we are to "do the truth", to walk in it (3:21; 1 Jn. 1:6,8; 2:4; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3). This is all empowered by the gift of the Spirit of



Jesus, the Comforter, "the spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26), which guides us into truth (16:13)- not in an intellectual sense, but guiding us into the way of life and being which is "truth", which is freedom from sin. For the Spirit is the truth (1 Jn. 5:6); the gift of the Spirit empowers us to live "in truth", according to the life and spirit of Jesus.

The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to choose for themselves. He was Himself supremely free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was the red heifer "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin by Christ through "freedom" (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be 'used' to love others (Gal. 5:13). He didn't spell things out to His followers in the detailed way many religious leaders do. And yet it is surely related to a sense one gets from re-reading the Gospels that Jesus was in tune with nature. He so often uses examples and parables grounded in a perceptive reflection upon the natural creation. He spoke of the carefreeness of birds and other animals; and yet He had the shadow of the cross hanging over Him. The way He was evidently so relaxed with people is a tremendous testimony to Him, bearing in mind the agony ahead. All this is what makes and made Jesus so compelling. On one hand, an almost impossible standard- to be perfect, as the Father is. And yet on the other, an almost unbelievable acceptance of fallen men and women. He didn't criticize those who came to Him. He Himself was the standard by which their consciences were pricked, and yet not in such a way that they were scared away from Him. This mixture of high standards and yet acceptance of people wherever they were is what we all find so elusive. The fact none of us get it right is what turns so many away from our preaching. How compelling He was is shown by how He polarized people- He sought to provoke a final decision in people for or against Him personally- not a yes or no to a particular dogma, rite or law. His compelling power is associated with the sense of urgency which there was in His teaching. The Lord repeatedly spoke of His return as being imminent- and surely His intention was to inspire in us a sense of urgency about His return, a living for His kingdom today rather than delaying till tomorrow.

8:33 *They answered him: We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to anyone. What do you mean, you shall be made free?*- The life of freedom from sin is predicated upon living with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, and not physical descent. "Truth" came by Jesus Christ, as the prologue states (1:17); and that truth is defined here as the life in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, free from sin.

8:34 *Jesus answered them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Everyone who commits sin is the servant of sin-* For all their detailed Bible study, they were servants of sin. To habitually live in sin ["commits" in the ongoing sense] is because we serve sin and have not been set free. Not sinning is not therefore just a question of white-knuckled struggle against temptation; it is more about an allowing of the Lord Jesus to free us from sin by His Spirit.

8:35 *And the servant does not stay in the house for ever. The son stays forever-* The Lord tweaks the metaphor a little, to argue that sinners are servants of sin; but the Lord is making us free from that servitude, turning us into freedmen, permanent members of the actual household. This metaphor of freedom from slavery is used heavily by Paul in his later explanations of the meaning of the Lord's death. A slave might spend his life in slavery within a household, but could never actually enter the family. The Son is master of the household, for ever.

8:36 *If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed-* As noted on :34, Paul also uses this metaphor of redeeming us from slavery to sin into free and actual members of the household family. But he sees this as an outcome of the crucifixion and resurrection. The Lord at this stage was confident as to the outcome of His mission.

8:37 *I know that you are Abraham's seed. Yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you-* The Jews could be described as both Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44). This connects with the theme that the Jews on one level knew who the Lord was, and on another, did not. In John, one can see but not really see; believe but not really believe. The Lord Jesus described the unbelieving Jews as having Abraham as their father, and yet He also said that they weren't the real children of Abraham. They appeared to believe in Him, but effectively denied Him (Jn. 8:37,39,56). Like Israel, we can have an appearance of faith, an assumption that we believe because we are through baptism the children of faithful Abraham, when the real, house-on-the-rock faith is unknown to us.

The Jews thought that they were righteous because they were the descendants of Abraham. The Lord Jesus therefore addressed them as "the righteous" (Mt. 9:12-13), and said "I know that you are Abraham's seed" (Jn. 8:37). But He did not believe that they were righteous, as He so often made clear; and He plainly showed by His reasoning in John 8:39-44 that they were *not* Abraham's seed. So He took people's beliefs at face value, without immediately contradicting them, but demonstrated

the truth instead. We have shown that this was God's approach in dealing with the pagan beliefs which were common in the Old Testament times. His attitude to demons in New Testament times was the same; His God-provided miracles made it abundantly plain that illnesses were caused by God, not any other force, seeing that it was God who had the mighty power to heal them.

The argument was that if they were Abraham's seed they would not be seeking to kill the pre-eminent seed of Abraham, Messiah. "My word" had no place in them; and that word was therefore His self-proclamation of Himself as the seed of Abraham, a proclamation made through His life and character rather than any specific statement that "I am Messiah". "My word" therefore refers not to the whole Bible, nor to any specific spoken words of the Lord; but to His whole life and being, which was His word to men. His word was the Father's word (14:24), just as the prologue had declared the word, which was all about Jesus, to be God. His word was Him, His spirit, His life, His spoken words- which were to abide within them (:31).

*8:38 I speak the things which I have seen with my Father, and you also do the things which you heard from your father-* The parallel indicates that being 'with the Father' was not to be understood in a literal sense. It was not that He heard words from God in Heaven which He then transported to earth, just as they did not hear words from a literal being called the devil in some underworld. He spoke not only what He heard, but what He 'saw' with the Father. His life and teaching was a reflection, an articulation in words, of what it meant to see the Father. Moses had been denied that honour, but the Son 'saw' the Father and reflected it to us in the 'word' or *logos* which was His life.

*8:39 They answered and said to him: Our father is Abraham. Jesus said to them: If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham-* When the Jews proudly said "Abraham is our father!" (Jn. 8:39) they were showing the very same spirit as Ishmael- in persecuting Isaac / Jesus. They were proclaiming themselves to be the seed by the flesh but not of the Spirit nor according to the promise in Isaac. See on Jn. 12:31. Intentionally, the Lord was saying that in one sense they were the seed of Abraham (:37) but in another sense they were not. Likewise they knew Him, but in another sense didn't know Him. The work of God is to believe in His Son (6:39), and it seems the Lord had that idea in view here. He appealed for them to be like Abraham in his belief in his Messianic seed.

*8:40 But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do-* "The truth" has been defined earlier as a way of life free from sin, the life of the Lord Jesus, His Spirit, living now the eternal life; see on :32. "The truth" that the Lord "told" them was not in learned lectures of courses of dissertations, but in

the life lived which was a reflection of all He had heard and seen with the Father.

8:41 *You do the works of your father. They said to him: We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, even God-* They insisted that God and not "the devil" (:44) was their father. By insisting upon this, they were condemning themselves. For they sought to kill the Lord because He claimed to be God's Son. And now He had cleverly led them to make the same claim about themselves. He didn't do this to score debating points; He really wanted them to realize that in condemning Him, they were condemning themselves. They were furious that He should imply they were not full Israelites, of Abraham. "Born of fornication" was how the Jews referred to the descendants of Abraham through his other partners apart from Sarah, such as Hagar and Keturah.

8:42 *Jesus said to them: If God were your Father, you would love me. For I came forth and am come from God. For neither have I come of myself, but He sent me-* It is impossible to love God without loving His Son, Jesus (Jn. 8:42); and 1 Jn. 5:1,2 is alluding to this, saying that this principle means that we can't love God without loving *all His* sons, those who are in Christ, the Son of God. Christian disillusion with Christianity is disobedience to this. If we think we can love God while disregarding His sons, we are making the same mistake as the Jews; they confidently thought they could love God and disregard His Son. And this faulty logic led them to crucify the Son of God.

The fact that Jesus was humanly fatherless has been extensively commented upon by Andries van Aarde. He points out that: "Against the background of the marriage arrangements within the patriarchal mind-set of Israelites in the Second Temple period, a fatherless Jesus would have been without social identity. He would have been excluded from being called a child of Abraham, that is, a child of God. Access to the court of the Israelites in the temple, where mediators could facilitate forgiveness for sin, would have been denied to him. He would have been excluded from the privilege of being given a daughter in marriage". Behold the paradox. Because He was the Son of God, He was written off by Israel as not being a child of God; because He was *the* seed of Abraham, He was rubbished as not being a son of Abraham. We can now understand better how He could attract other social outcasts to Him; we have another window into the fact He never married; we appreciate more deeply the significance of His offering forgiveness and fellowship with God to those who were outside of the temple system. He could offer a new social identity to people on the basis that He knew what it was like to be without it. All this is confirmed in the Biblical record. This is why the Jews accused

the Lord of being both not a "child of Abraham" and also illegitimate" (Jn. 8:42), a "sinner" (Jn. 9:16). And He was also called a "Samaritan" (Jn. 8:48). According to the Mishnah, "... they are the people of uncertain condition, with whom one may not marry: those of uncertain parentage, foundlings and Samaritans". Refusing to declare Joseph as His father meant that the Lord would've been unable to marry, at least not any girl from a religious family. See on Jn. 19:9.

8:43 *Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word!*- They could not, it was not in their power [Gk.] to hear His *logos*, and so how He spoke, the language He used, was as it were foreign to them. They were not empowered to hear His *logos*, which according to the prologue was Him, His life and spirit, because they did not allow the movement of the Spirit in their hearts. And this is why people today cannot understand the Lord's teaching; it is because they refuse to accept His *logos*, His life and person coming into their lives as the light of their thinking and practice. And so His words / speech remain a jumble to them. Interpretation fails them, because they were refusing to hear Him as a person, His *logos*.

Intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a resistance to having our lives disturbed in a moral sense. How many have started studying true doctrine, only to draw back, perhaps unconsciously even, because they sense that this stuff is life-changing, and altogether too demanding for them to handle in practice? This inextricable link between doctrine and practice is brought out by the Lord in Jn. 7:17: "If any man willeth to *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine...". My expanded paraphrase of this would be: 'If you want to do right before God in practice, then you will discern between right and wrong doctrine, because true doctrine leads to true practice. If you really want to be *doing* the right thing, then God will lead you to true doctrine'. And not long afterwards, the Lord hammers home His point: "Why do you not understand my speech [teaching]? Even because you cannot hear [i.e. accept] my word" (Jn. 8:43).

That refusing to believe or understand truth has a moral basis is brought out by the Lord's comment in Jn. 8:46: "If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?". He surely implies that it's not hard in itself to believe and accept His words as true- but He explains that the Jews didn't believe because they preferred to believe the words of the "devil". The "devil" speaks his own language (Jn. 8:44 NIV), the Lord says, and the Jews preferred to hear *that* language because it was actually their own language. They did not "understand my word" because they preferred to do 'their own lusts' (Jn. 8:43). Those 'lusts' are paralleled with the language of the devil- which is exactly what 'the devil' refers to in so many Biblical contexts. The point of all this is that misunderstanding God's word is because we prefer to hear the language of our own self

talk, our own lusts, the Biblical 'devil'. "The lusts of the [devil] it is your will to do", the Lord commented (Jn. 8:44 RV). This was their "language", and therefore any other language which was not of their own self talk was 'foreign' to them. And in this we have the essential basis for why people misunderstand the Lord's words today.

The Lord's cryptic manner of speaking at times yielded "hard sayings"; and yet He utters most of them in conversation with His critics. Thus having said that "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death", and the Jews predictably responded with misunderstanding and confusion, He goes straight on to utter an even harder saying: "Your father Abraham... saw my day, and was glad". And they again come back at Him with the anger born of misunderstanding. And so He rounds off the episode with a yet harder saying: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:51-58). In all this He was using "hard sayings"- which have come down to us as 'wrested scriptures, 'difficult passages'- in order to drive the unbelievers further down the downward spiral. And He does the same today, with the same passages. Because the Jews didn't "hear my word / logos", therefore they couldn't understand His speech, i.e. the words as individual words which He spoke (Jn. 8:43). They stumbled over each word, as a child struggling to read a text way too advanced for her. Because they didn't hear His logos, the essence of Him. This is why the simplest minds which firmly understand the logos, the essential idea, the bigger picture, don't find the "hard sayings" to be hard for them, they aren't stumbled by them. But the word-by-word theologian does stumble at them, if he doesn't believe the simple logos of Jesus.

8:44- see on Hos. 6:7.

*You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies-* The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'Devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the Devil" is a "liar" – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" – clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the Devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose

name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "child of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel. There are many other connections between the serpent and the Jews; clearest is Isaiah 1:4 "A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters". This is describing Israel in the language of Genesis 3:15 concerning the serpent. Thus the Messianic Psalm 140:3,10 describes Christ reflecting that His Jewish persecutors "have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips... let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire" (referring to the falling masonry of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?). It is quite possible that Christ's encouragement to the seventy that "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Lk. 10:19) has a primary reference to their ability to overcome Jewish opposition during their preaching tour.

We all personally struggle to accept basic Bible teaching about generosity, materialism and money. Think of what the Hebrew word "Cain" means- for he is alluded to by the Lord as the epitome of the "devil", the "murderer from the beginning", the archetypal sinner (Jn. 8:44- perhaps because Adam and Eve's sin was forgiven, whereas Cain was the first impenitent sinner). "Cain is defined on the basis of a double Hebrew etymology, as 'possession' (from *qana* = acquire) and 'envy' (from *qana* = be envious)". Personal possession is almost- almost- inextricably linked with envy, and led to the lies and murder for which Cain was noted by the Lord. To have a strong sense of our personal 'possessions' will lead us into the same sins. Indeed, it's the epitome of 'the devil'. The concept of 'private property' is indeed a myth. For we die, and leave it all behind.

Ensure that all you are saying to yourself, even if it's not about spiritual things, is at least truthful. This is where this great theme of truth starts and ends. Ideally, our self-talk should be of Jesus, of the Father, of the things of His Kingdom. Of anything that is just, true, of good report... Yet our self-talk is closely linked to what Scripture would call the devil- the constant fountain of wrong suggestions and unspiritual perspectives that seem to bubble up so constantly within us. The devil- the Biblical one- is "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44). And untruthfulness seems to begin within our own self-talk. I would even go so far as to almost define the devil as our own self-talk. And it's likened to a roaring, dangerous lion; a cunning snake. And it's there within each of us. The control of self-talk is vital. And the Biblical guidance is to make sure it is truthful; for lack of truthfulness is the root of all sin. The account of the wilderness temptations is in my opinion a wonderful window into the self-talk of the Lord Jesus. He set the example there, of dealing with internal temptation by a self-talk based solidly on the truth of God's word. Sin is normally committed by believers not as an act of conscious rebellion, but rather through a complex process of self-justification; which on repentance we recognize was the mere sophistry of our own self-talk. This is why

truthfulness is the epitome of the spiritual life. To deny ever being untruthful is to deny ever sinning. We all have this problem. It's why the assertion of Jesus that He was "the truth" was tantamount to saying that He was sinless. Only thus is He thereby the way to eternal life.

For those who believe in an orthodox devil, bear in mind that the use of the pronoun "he" does not indicate that the Devil is a person. "Wisdom" is personified as a woman house-builder (Prov. 9:1) and sin as a paymaster paying wages (Rom. 6:23). Human lust is personified as a man who drags us away to enticement. If it is accepted that sin and sinful tendencies are personified, there should be no problem in imagining that persona being given a name – "Satan", the adversary. There is no specific reference here to the serpent in Eden. We sin because of the lusts that begin inside us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14; Jer. 17:9). Our evil heart – the real Devil – is the father of our lusts and sins. "The lusts of your father" the Devil, are thus the same as the lusts of our evil heart – the Devil. The Devil is a murderer. But "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die – but as angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) they are therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them. As noted on Mark 4:15, the children of the Devil are those who obey their evil desires – the real Devil. The Jews had not literally seen a person called the Devil; the Lord was clearly using figurative language. They were *of* the Devil in the sense that "you do the deeds of your father" (:41), i.e. they continued the family likeness. If the Devil is a murderer then he isn't immortal, for in commentary on this verse John later explained [as if there had already arisen misunderstandings in the time between John's Gospel and epistles]: "No murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). Angels are immortal (Lk. 20:36), so therefore this "murderer" wasn't a 'fallen Angel'.

The Devil, the desires which are in our heart forming and stimulating an evil inclination, has the characteristics of the serpent, but it does not mean that the serpent was the Devil itself. The serpent was "subtil" (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3); this may well be behind the description of the Jews consulting "that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). The serpent in Eden was the prototype of the Jewish system; their killing of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy that the seed of the serpent (sin manifested in the Jews, Mt. 12:34; Lk. 3:7, in its primary meaning) would wound the seed of the woman, Christ, in the heel (Gen. 3:15).

John 8:44 is also a reference to Cain, the first murderer – "he was a murderer from the beginning" (Gen. 4:8–9). He "abode not in the truth" as he was the father of the seed of the serpent who corrupted the true way of worshipping God. The letter of John often alludes to the Gospel of John, and 1 John 3:12,15, is an example; it confirms this interpretation: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (i.e. the Devil – Mt. 13:19 cp.



Mk. 4:15) and slew his brother...Whosoever hateth his brother (as Cain did) is a murderer". However, it is also true that John 8:44 alludes to the serpent as well. The serpent told the first lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4); he did not abide in the truth; he was a murderer in the sense that he brought about the death of Adam and Eve. "He is a liar, and the father of it". Cain was not a super-human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man. He characterized sin, the Devil. The way in which the fire consumed Abel's offering but not Cain's is paralleled by the fire burning up Elijah's offering but leaving those of the apostate Jewish Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18:19-40). This would associate Cain with apostate Jews, i.e. the Jewish Devil.

Note: "...he is a liar, and the father of it". The Lord Jesus does not say "he was a liar". If we tell a lie, it is a result of the Devil, in the sense of our evil desires prompting us – not due to any force outside of us. Lying is one of those things that Jesus lists in Mk. 7:15,21-23 as not entering a man from outside him, but originating from within him. The Devil is the 'father' of lies in the sense that they originate from within us – which is where the Biblical Devil is located.

"When he speaks a lie" – when someone lies, it is not a super-human person called the Devil standing in front of him, it is the Devil, in the sense of the man's evil desires speaking to him. "Deceit" – i.e. lies – proceed "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mk. 7:21-22).

8:45 *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me*- Truth is what makes a person believe the speaker. But the Jews did not believe exactly because the Lord told them "the truth". The "truth" in view is not therefore intellectually pure exposition. They did not believe because they were dominated by sin, "the devil", and sin is essentially a lie. So their sense of truth and error was inverted. "The truth" as explained on :32 was the Lord's sinless life, His Spirit; hence He challenges them in :46 as to who could convict Him of sin. "The truth" He told was that He was sinless. They did not want to believe that; it demanded too much, that a man of their nature could be sinless, and that His Spirit could enter them and transform their lives so as not to be servants of sin.

8:46 *Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?*- As noted on :45, "the truth" was the Lord's sinlessness. They could not accept that, because it demanded too much of them. So much of the Trinitarian theological fog cast over the person of the Lord Jesus is psychologically rooted in a refusal to be so challenged; that our nature is capable of far more than we like to think; and that His spirit can be our spirit.

8:47 *He that is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you do not hear them, because you are not of God*- If they were the children of God, then the Father's words would be naturally discernible. There would be an

intuitive sense toward them. In this we see the upward spiral of spirituality which belief in God's word creates. In the same discourse the Lord reasoned "If you continue in my word... you shall know the truth (the word- Jn. 17:17)" (Jn. 8:31,32). Note that believers in the Lord Jesus are here called "of God", just as the Son was "of God"; not in that they literally descended from Heaven, as required by the pre-existence idea; but in that they were His children rather than the children of this world.

8:48- see on Jn. 8:42.

*The Jews answered and said to him: Say we not well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?*- Perhaps the emphasis was upon "you". They complained that the Lord was casting aspersions about their purity of descent from Abraham (see on :41). Now they suggested that *He* was in fact the one of questionable descent from Abraham. Their 'research' of His family of origin had led to this aspersion- that Mary and / or Joseph had Samaritan connections. The Lord purposefully framed Himself as a Samaritan in the parable of the good Samaritan; perhaps they wilfully misinterpreted that as meaning that He was in fact a Samaritan.

It has been widely recognized that John's Gospel often refers to the same themes found in the Synoptics, but in different language and from a different perspective. The account of the virgin birth as the word being made flesh is one such example. Another would be the effective repeating of the great commission in different terms. Yet another would be the description of water baptism as being born of water (Jn. 3:3-5). The accounts of casting out demons which we have in the Synoptic Gospels are not found in John – not in so many words. But I suggest that the essence of it all is there in John, too. The battle between Jesus and the 'Devil' is referred to there frequently. He is accused of being in league with the Devil (Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20); but He labels His critics as being of the Devil (Jn. 8:44). And in that same passage He redefines their view of "the Devil" as being a question of doing sinful "desires". Judas is portrayed as being "of the Devil" (Jn. 6:70,71; 13:2,27). John speaks of an epic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, truth and error, faith and unbelief, God and evil / sin. In this struggle, the forces of evil have no real power over the Lord Jesus; He is greater than them and overcomes them to such an extent that they are effectively non-existent for those in Him. The Synoptics speak of the opposition to Jesus as being from Scribes, Pharisees etc. John describes this opposition as the Jewish 'Satan' or adversary to the Lord. John presents the opposition to Jesus from the Jews as being symbolic of evil and sin itself. Effectively, the more literal accounts of the Synoptics are saying the same thing – that the Lord showed that the power of God is so great that effectively, demons don't exist as any realistic force in the lives of both Jesus and His

people. John puts this in more epic and symbolic language – the forces of evil were overcome and revealed to be powerless by the Lord Jesus, ultimately expressing this through His death. And perhaps that's why John's Gospel doesn't speak of the Lord casting out demons – because his record has made it clear enough that effectively, those things don't exist.

8:49 *Jesus answered: I do not have a demon. I honour my Father, and you dishonour me-* When He was wrongly accused of being a Samaritan, Jesus did not deny it (Jn. 8:48,49 cp. 4:7–9) even though his Jewishness, as the seed of Abraham, was vital within God's plan of salvation (Jn. 4:22). Even when the Jews drew the wrong conclusion (wilfully!) that Jesus was "making himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:18), Jesus did not explicitly deny it; instead He powerfully argued that His miracles showed Him to be a man acting on God's behalf, and therefore he was *not* equal with God. The miracles of Jesus likewise showed the error of believing in demons. But here He does baldly deny the accusation that He 'had a demon' and was mad; because such dishonour of Him personally was a dishonouring of God. Attitudes to the Son were a statement about the Father. He therefore implies that by dishonouring Him, they were not honouring the Father; whereas He was all about honouring the Father. He is explicit in 5:23 that honour of the Son is honour of the Father, and vice versa. One cannot therefore claim to be honouring God when they are not honouring His Son. This means that all non-Christian religions are not offering any legitimate relationship with God the Father; for they do not honour His Son.

8:50 *I do not seek my own glory. There is One that seeks and judges-* God is seeking our salvation, and our glory in the true sense. If we believe this, we will not seek our own glory. The Father loves us, and is seeking out an eternal future for us, optimal for us personally. He is not simply passively prepared to grant us eternity; but is seeking our glory. The wonder of this means that like the Lord, we shall not seek glory of men, because it is God who wants to give us glory (5:41). This amazing Father who seeks our glory is also our judge; His judgment will be in accordance with His seeking out of glory for us. We need not therefore fear Him and His judgment.

8:51 *Truly, truly, I say to you: If a man keeps my word, he shall never see death-* 1 Jn. 2:4-6 defines keeping the Lord's word as keeping His commandments, walking as He walked, abiding in Him, living with His Spirit. We shall therefore live the kind of life we shall eternally live; we live the eternal life now, and in this sense we shall never see death in the sense of eternal death. We shall die, but not rise again. Death itself will be perceived differently by us, if our hearts are ever with Him who conquered death, and is the resurrection and the life. If our view of death

itself, the unspoken deepest personal fear of all humanity, is different... we will be radically different from our fellows.

*8:52 The Jews said to him: Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets, but you say: If a man keep my word, he shall never taste of death-* Again, they misunderstand His use of language. By "death" He refers to eternal death; there is "death" and "the second death"; but they did not perceive that difference. Just as unspiritual people can read God's words in the Bible and find it all a haze of contradiction and uncertainty, because they are not reading in a spiritual way. The Lord had promised that those who kept His word would never "see death"; but they misquote Him as saying that they would never "taste of death".

*8:53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died, and the prophets who died? Whom do you make yourself?-* The Lord was not making Himself anything, because it was the Father who was glorifying Him (:54). The Jews perceived that offering eternal life was making those who received it greater than the prophets and Abraham who had died. The Sadducees disbelieved any resurrection; the Pharisees, according to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, believed in existence as an immortal soul. Their views of immortality and "eternal life" were deeply wrong; they considered Abraham to be permanently dead. They didn't understand that he must rise again to inherit the land promised to him for an eternal possession. The Lord was teaching a resurrection of the body to eternal life, for those who lived that eternal life now in that they had His Spirit and lived His life.

*8:54 Jesus answered: If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, whom you say is your God-* As the Father glorified the Lord, so He seeks out the glory of all his children (:50). If the Father was truly their Father, then they would perceive that the Lord was already being glorified by the Father. Again, there is an appeal to an intuitive sense which was lacking amongst the Lord's critics. These appeals to intuitive sense all reference the work of the Spirit and a person's acceptance or rejection of it.

*8:55 You have not known Him, but I know Him-* There are two different words used here. They did not know God, but the Lord had seen Him. The allusion is to Moses who desired to see God and could not. And the Lord implies that He all the time was seeing God, not just for a passing moment, but walking in the light of knowing Him.

*And if I should say I know Him not, I shall be like you, a liar; but I know Him and keep His word-* The statement that He 'saw' God was deeply blasphemous to the Jews. He was tempted not to make it, knowing the

persecution and anger it would create. But to do so would be to lie. To see / know God was to keep His word, living according to God's word.

8:56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and rejoiced-* This is surely an allusion to how he laughed [for joy] at the promise of Isaac. He "gladly received the promises" (Heb. 11:17 RV). And realizing that through baptism the promises are made to us ought to inspire a deep seated joy too. The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham "saw" ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that Jesus could say "Before Abraham was, I am". He appreciated that God's promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been "before Abraham was", had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, "the word (of promise) made flesh".

It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham 'saw the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off" (Gen. 22:4), there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham *saw* the fulfilment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham *saw* His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be *seen*'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

8:57 *The Jews replied to him: You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?-* Again they did not follow His reasoning. The Lord had said that Abraham had seen Him, not that He had seen Abraham. He was not saying that He was older than Abraham- obviously He was not older than Abraham. We observe that their guess at the Lord's age placed Him somewhat older than He was. Days and nights spent in prayer and

focus upon the Father and others would have been reflected in His face and body; such was His humanity.

8:58 *Jesus said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: I am of higher status than Abraham ever was-* When the Jews mocked Him for saying that He had seen Abraham, the Lord didn't respond that of course that wasn't what He meant; instead He elevated the conversation with "before Abraham was I am" (AV). These words are often misapplied to teach that the Lord Jesus existed before Abraham did. However, closer investigation reveals the opposite to be true. He did not say 'Before Abraham was, I was'. He was the promised descendant of Abraham; we make a nonsense of God's promises to Abraham if we say that the Lord Jesus physically existed before the time of Abraham. The context is the discourse with the Jews concerning Abraham. As far as they were concerned, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. The Lord Jesus is saying "I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham". As they stood there, He was the one to be honoured rather than Abraham. He is saying 'I am now, more important than Abraham ever was'. It is possible to understand "before" in Jn. 8:58 with some reference to time, in the sense that before Abraham existed, Christ had been in God's plan right from the beginning of the world. It was because Jesus was "before" Abraham in this sense that he was "before" him in terms of importance. But the more comfortable reading is to understand "before" as referring to importance rather than time. In 2 Sam. 6:21 there's a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour.

"I am" may indeed be a reference to the Divine Name which Jesus, as the Father's Son, carried (Jn. 5:43). But "I am" is also used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9 with no apparent reference to the Name. The same Greek words are also used by Asahel in the LXX of 2 Sam. 2:20. Jesus and the Father were "one" and so for Jesus to bear the Father's Name is no reason to think that 'Jesus = God'. Note however that the unity between Father and Son spoken of e.g. in Jn. 10:30 is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same. And sharing such unity it is quite appropriate for them to share the same Name. A related misunderstanding is often applied to the comment of John the Baptist about Jesus- that "He was before me" (Jn. 1:30). John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me,

because he is... essentially my superior" (C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274).

8:59 *Therefore they took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple-* They wanted to kill Him for blasphemy, as in 10:31,33; for He had just alluded to the "I am" Name of Yahweh. Perhaps He miraculously avoided them (as in Lk. 4:30), or maybe as in:20 the very public spotlight upon them somehow held them back from stoning Him to death. It has been suggested that the stones were the stones left around as a result of the temple construction project. Again we see that the Lord gave His life, and it was not taken from Him.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth*- The same terms for "passed by" is used in the preceding 8:59. As the Lord was 'passing by', more like quickly rushing away from His persecutors and would-be murderers, He takes time to heal a blind man, with quite a lengthy process. He didn't allow His own fears and self-preservation instinct to make Him so self-centred that He didn't notice and engage with others' physical and spiritual needs.

9:2 *And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?*- The section begins with the issue of sin and blindness, and ends with it (:41). D.A. Carson's commentary on John lists Talmudic citations which show that the Jews considered each disability to be the result of specific sin; to be born blind was listed as the result of the mother committing adultery (hence their claim he was born in sin, 9:34). This connects the incident with the previous chapter, as does the phrase "passed by" in 8:59; 9:1. The Lord is consciously seeking to challenge the Jews' false theology at the points in which it was devaluing to the human person- He wasn't seeking theological controversy for the sake of it. See on Jn. 9:6. Their question assumes that being born blind was an outcome of sin- their question was 'whose sin?'. As ever, the Lord attacks the terms of the question and lifts the issue far higher. He now dismantles the connection between sin and blindness.

9:3 *Jesus answered: Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be revealed in him*- The Lord isn't saying that they were not sinners, but that the issue of how a person got in the situation they were in wasn't the essential issue. We can learn a lesson from that, for so often, we like to focus on past behaviour as being so significant in present suffering. But the Lord urges us not to have that perspective, but rather to see the present suffering as an opportunity for God's works to be revealed within a person. "The works of God" is a phrase previously used in John's Gospel for miracles. The Lord is saying that the unleashing of power within the man was as great as the performance of any miracle, including healing from literal blindness. "*In him*", rather than on or through him, suggests that the manifestation of God was to begin *within* the man, and the essential miracle was to be on his internal spiritual vision, through the work of the Spirit within him.

The Lord refused to get caught up in the philosophical questions about 'Why suffering?'. Instead He saw the simple reality of human suffering as a call to do God's work; the disciples like so many were caught up on the 'fairness of suffering' question to the extent that they didn't perceive the extent of human need and try to do something about it.



"But that the works of God should be manifest in him, I must work..." (Gk.) would suggest that God has prepared potential 'works' but we must do them; if we don't, they will not be done. This is perhaps the sense of 9:4- we only have limited opportunity to do this, life is brief, the night comes when no man can work. If we don't use those opportunities, they are gone forever, and the works God potentially enabled will not be performed. Yet time can be frittered away today as never before.

'Revealed or "manifested" within him' may mean that the whole drama of blindness and healing happened so that God's work could be revealed within the man's heart. In this sense the Lord manifested God's Name to His disciples (17:6), His life, *the* life, was manifested in the hearts of His followers (1 Jn. 1:2). All that happens physically, externally in our lives is so that internally we might perceive spiritual things.

9:4 *We must work*- We are lights in the dark world (Mt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15), because we are in Christ, the light of the world (Jn. 9:5). Notice how in the preceding verse, Jesus said spoke of how "I must work the works of him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4 AV), yet the RV reflects the manuscript difficulties by giving "We must work". Could it be that the Lord said: 'I must work, we [you in me] must work'? The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

*The works of Him that sent me, while it is day. The night comes, when no one can work*- In the prologue, the night is the darkness of Jewish unbelief, and the light is that of the person of the Lord Jesus and His life. The coming of the night therefore refers to the Lord's death, the temporary extinguishing of the light by the darkness. There would be no works / miracles doable then, so the Lord was keen to bring light to people whilst He could. And likewise people only had a very short frame of opportunity to be in the light. Perhaps the Lord was speaking in a kind of soliloquy when He mused that "the night comes, when no man can work", and therefore man should walk and work while he has the light (Jn. 9:4, quoting Ecc. 9:10). He was speaking, in the context, not only of His own zeal to 'work' while He had life, but also applying this to His followers.

9:5 *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*- The Jewish world only had the chance to see the light whilst the Lord was with them. His presence, His light, would continue for the believers in Him, but as the

prologue puts it, the light shone [briefly] in darkness but they did not accept it. The Lord Jesus calls both Himself and us "the light of the world". He is "the light of the world" whenever we, who are in the world, are His light to people.

9:6 *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay*-D.A. Carson's commentary on John cites Talmudic evidence that there were specific regulations against ploughing (cp. rolling spittle in the dirt), kneading (the clay), anointing and curing on the Sabbath. In this case, the Lord was purposefully seeking to provoke issues with the Jews regarding their false theology- see on Jn. 9:2. The paradox was that the man was made yet further blind in order to have his sight restored. Commentators note that putting saliva on weak eyes was common in the first century; the Lord's point was that *His* saliva, Him, His word, the word that was Him, His Spirit (for His words were His Spirit, 6:63) mixed with human flesh, the dust of humanity, could achieve permanent cure. The anointing with saliva was usually accompanied by some imprecation, cursing Satan or appealing to the gods. The Lord did none of that; instead, He mixed His saliva with the dust of humanity and there was permanent cure.

9:7 *And said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). He went away therefore and washed, and went home seeing*- In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus is the one "sent" from God- He has just stated this in 9:4. The Siloam pool therefore represented washing / baptism in Him, becoming the 'sent one' just as He was. The cure was not immediate; it required washing. This speaks of how baptism was to be the requirement for the giving of the Spirit, the new psychology, the new vision, the new worldview.

9:8 *His neighbours and those that had seen him previously, as a beggar, said: Is this not he that sat and begged?*- He "went home" (:7) but perhaps he had not been home for a long time, hence the difficulty in recognizing him. "Neighbours" may well imply 'relatives'. His blindness had cut him off from his family, a situation made worse by all the myths about blindness being a punishment for sin. His cure therefore potentially enabled the re-establishment of relationships within his family, just as it can mean in lives today.

9:9- see on 9:27.

*Others said: It is he. Others said: No, but he is like him. He said: I am he*- He repeated the "I am" used by Jesus in Jn. 8:58, because God's Name was now being manifested in him. As Jesus was the light of the world, so should we be. His usage of "I am" is perhaps recorded intentionally, in order to demonstrate that usage of the term did not make

a man God Himself, but rather spoke of the manifestation of God's Name through him. Trinitarian apologists need to accept this point more readily.

9:10 *They replied to him: How then were your eyes opened?*- Perhaps they wondered whose saliva and with what incantation his eyes had been opened. They were clearly struggling to believe that such a miracle could have been done.

9:11 *He answered: The man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to Siloam and wash. So I went away and washed, and I received sight-* "The man" is yet another indication of the Lord's humanity. He was well known- He was a public figure in Jerusalem. He was known as "the man called Jesus"; He never gave any encouragement to see Him as anything other than a man, and certainly not as God. But consider how the healed blind man grew in his appreciation of the Lord: a man (Jn. 9:11), a prophet (:17), the leader of disciples (:27), a man sent from God (:33), and finally, one to be worshipped as God is worshipped (:38). Because we've gone up one level in our appreciation of the Lord, don't think that we're there. Progressive growth in appreciation of Him should be true of us too. This experience of a growing appreciation of the Lord is in fact a foretaste of the Kingdom; for this will feature an everlasting growth in appreciation of the Lord's excellence (Is. 9:7). For us, that process has already begun. When Christ comes, we will say in that day "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: *this is the Lord*; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Is. 25:9). It doesn't mean we'll turn into Trinitarians. It means we will behold and marvel at the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to an extent hidden from mortal eyes.

9:12 *And they said to him: Where is he? He said: I do not know-* The questions 'Who is He?' and 'Where is He?' are commonly provoked in John's Gospel. The first hearers of the Gospel were encouraged to see themselves as these unbelievers, asking these same questions, and coming to faith. We are invited to enter into the feelings of all present then- that the Lord was not physically present, but clearly He was somewhere, and had power and authority beyond the level of any human miracle worker or quack doctor.

9:13 *They took him that was previously blind to the Pharisees-* "They took" may imply they marched him off, whether he wanted it or not. They considered the Pharisees as the judges of truth in these matters; the evidence before their eyes they didn't want to see nor judge. They, like many today, based their judgments upon what others thought.

9:14 *Now it was the Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes-* The man's relatives and neighbours knew that the Pharisees would consider such healing to be working on the Sabbath. Even quack doctors were not allowed to work on the Sabbath, and they

thought they had a great opportunity to get the Lord in trouble- One who had clearly done nothing but good to this man. No good deed goes unpunished, in our experience; and in those moments when we lament that fact, we find fellowship with our Lord's experiences.

9:15 *So the Pharisees asked him how he received his sight. And he said to them: He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed and I could see-* Perhaps the man was at pains to point out that this was no quack doctor miracle involving putting saliva on weak eyes; because he actually had to wash to remove the Lord's saliva before he could see. The further shutting of his eyes with clay was to underscore the point that he had to become yet more blinded before he could properly see.

9:16 *Therefore, some of the Pharisees said-* We notice it was only "some" of them who said this. Some Pharisees later believed and became Christians, and it is a theme of John that there was a significant sense amongst the Jews that the Lord was Messiah. His crucifixion was a result of the suppression of conscience, and of an embittered minority leading a majority to do the unthinkable, as so often happens in human societies.

*This man is not from God, because he keeps not the Sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was division among them-* This division amongst the Pharisees even at this stage, relatively near to the Lord's crucifixion, shows how His destruction was the result of a weak minded majority, overly sensitive to their image, being lead to do the unthinkable evil. For the Pharisees as a group numbered no more than 5000 throughout the Roman empire. And even they were divided about the Lord. In :18 the language of 'belief' is even credited to them; but they still crucified the Lord. And so often this sad scenario plays out amongst religious people; fear of image and possible corollaries leads a majority to do evil which they would not otherwise have done.

9:17 *Therefore they said to the man born blind: What do you say concerning him, in that he opened your eyes? And he said: He is a prophet!-* The Gospel records are full of questions posed about the person and nature of the Lord Jesus. "What do you think about the Christ?... What do you think? Is He worthy of death?... What do you think... about the portrayal of the Father and son in various parables..." (Mt. 21:28; 22:42; 26:66; Jn. 11:56). And we have another example here. In teaching his Gospel, John would have laboured these questions- 'What do you say concerning Him?'. It is hard for some of us to get a second naiveté and enter into the feelings of a secular person, or a Moslem or Buddhist, as they read the Gospels for the very first time. These questions are powerful, and they would have been powerful to the audiences to which the Gospel records were first read or recited.

"He is a prophet!" was the response of the Samaritan woman (4:19). Miracles were understood as the validation of a prophet (6:14). There was no doubt the man considered that this miracle marked out the Lord as one sent from God. The Pharisees were seeking to elicit the answer "I think He is Messiah!" so they could excommunicate him (:22). But the man didn't think that, at this stage. He had no knowledge about the Lord Jesus beyond the fact that He had done a miracle. We see here grace- that the Lord took the initiative to work in a man's life to bring him to faith, before the man had any faith or the knowledge upon which to base faith.

9:18 *The Jews did not believe him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called his parents-* The implication is that they did believe once they were satisfied that he had indeed been born blind. See on :16.

9:19 *And asked them: Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?-* The implication was that the parents were lying. They asked the questions in a legal style, pressuring the parents to disown their son. This is so often the outcome of legalistic religion, when religious leaders have a point to make and have no thought for the collateral damage to human relationships caused by their obsession in proving someone else wrong.

9:20 *His parents answered and said: We know that this is our son and that he was born blind-* We sense their nervousness in answering up before this kangaroo court. They feared more than anything the social exclusion which would come as a result of excommunication.

9:21 *But how he now sees, we do not know. Or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him! He is of age. He shall speak for himself-* The Jews considered that any over 13 years of age were "of age" to answer for themselves in such cases. Surely they had been present at his "home" when he first returned with the amazing information about "the man called Jesus" and how his eyes had been opened by saliva and washing. They surely were aware of this information, and likely believed it in their hearts. But unlike their son, they feared excommunication. They would not come out openly in confessing faith, or even in accepting the simple reality that the Lord had performed a miracle. This theme of open confession rather than secret acceptance is significant in John, for he was probably using his Gospel record to preach to other Jews who were likewise cowed by the synagogue system into not openly confessing their faith.

9:22- see on Jn. 12:42.

*These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had agreed already, that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he*

*should be thrown out of the synagogue*- The fear of excommunication has stymied so much spirituality and faith over the centuries. John's initial audience were facing the same problem. "The Jews had agreed already" on this policy, but it was only some of them who forced it through; see on :16 and :18. This policy was apparently dropped when thousands of Jews were baptized into Christ at Pentecost, and remained within the synagogue system. The Lord however predicted that the time would come when this policy would again be enforced, and His followers would be excommunicated from the synagogues (16:2). And so it happened. Hebrews was apparently written to the last remnants of the Christians in Jerusalem, the majority of whom had caved in and returned to Judaism because of this policy.

Excommunication from the synagogue meant total social isolation; such a person could not buy from or sell anything to another Jew. The language of the mark of the beast in Rev. 13:17 is virtually quoting from Jewish synagogue excommunication language. Whatever later applications the beast has, John saw it in terms of the evil system of Judaism, based upon Jerusalem, the city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, persecuting the saints and having its total destruction in the events of AD70.

The "man born blind" in John 9 was an eloquent type of the believers: the unclean one had the spittle (word / spirit) of the Lord Jesus mixed with dust (flesh) and placed on his eyes. Then he had to go and baptize himself at Siloam, and then his blindness was lifted. It is stressed, really stressed (12 times in 32 verses) that the man was "blind"; as if to emphasize how totally blind we are before our "washing", and how blind the unsaved world is. The result was that the man was "put out of the synagogue" (Jn. 9:22)- and the very same phrase is used about all the other first century Jewish believers (Jn. 16:2). They were to go through exactly what he did. The Lord Jesus was well known for His many miracles of curing blind people (Lk. 7:21,22; Jn. 10:21; 11:37); it was as if he healed this affliction especially. All these miracles were surely acted parables of His work in saving men from the spiritual blindness of their earlier life. The figure of blindness being lifted is truly a powerful picture of what happened at our conversion. From then on, we began to see (i.e. understand) for the first time. We began to understand something properly for the first time. We were *blind* beforehand. Previously, all our 'knowledge' was just perception, passing through paradigms.

9:23 *Therefore his parents replied: He is of age, ask him!*- Despite knowing the facts about their son's healing and the association of "the man called Jesus" with it, they refused to openly testify to what they knew. Fear of religious excommunication has led many over the centuries to put religious acceptance by others far before truth and basic family relationships.

9:24 *So they questioned the man that was born blind a second time, and said to him: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner-* The demand to "Give God the glory" was an admonition to repent and tell the truth (Josh. 7:19). But the man refused to take false guilt, piled onto him by his religious elders. There is true guilt, the guilt we should feel for actual sin; and false guilt, which is placed upon us by others. The man refused to take this, as we should. To receive grace is no crime.

9:25 *He answered: Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see-* We see here how little the man knew about the Lord. Yet the Lord worked in his life to bring him to faith, before he believed. This is grace itself. It also puts a stop to all Pentecostal claims that faith is required before miracles can happen. The Lord's cures were by the power of the Spirit, and were not some form of faith healing, which requires the healed person to focus their minds in faith.

9:26 *They replied to him: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?-* Playing the role of prosecutors, they asked him the same questions, hoping his answers would contradict themselves. But truth was on the man's side and his account was consistent. He refused to be brow beaten by them, unlike his parents.

9:27 *He answered them: I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Would you also become his disciples?-* His styled was copied by the Lord Jesus- 10:25. As Jesus was the "I am", so this man too manifested God and uses the same phrase *ego eimi*, 9:9. They would have considered his attitude to be some form of contempt of court. He rightly perceived that they had been told the truth but did not 'hear' it. He is unconsciously repeating the Lord's own comment that they could not understand His speech because they did not hear His word (8:43). We can only respect the man; for he appeals to them to "become His disciples". If they would wish to become disciples, then he would repeat his testimony. But he wouldn't waste his breath for any other reason. As noted on :17, these questions are recorded in the way they are because they are the questions a person is being asked as they first hear the Gospel of Jesus. 'Will you also be His disciple?'

9:28 *And they reviled him and said: You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses-* The man could hardly be described as a disciple of the Lord as he knew so little about Him. And yet his challenge to them to become the Lord's disciples (:27) was understandably read by them as meaning that he was a disciple of the Lord. Just as 'belief' is credited to people in John's Gospel when they still have major problems in their faith, so this man is presented as a disciple when he knew hardly anything. It

was by their questioning of him that he came to articulate his own understanding and faith.

*9:29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know from where he came-* Yet they were claiming that nobody would know from where Messiah came; their position here flatly contradicts the statement in 7:27: "However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is". The sensitive reader is left to perceive this; neither the Lord, nor John the narrator, makes big capital of this glaring contradiction in their position. That is not the way of the Spirit, and it will not be fruitful for us to use this style either- even though religious debate is full of this kind of thing.

Guilt by association is deeply ingrained in the human psyche- it's one of the most obstinate parts of our nature with which we have to do battle. We tend to assume that people are like those with whom they associate. The association of God's Son with us just shows how totally untrue that assumption is- and He went out of His way to turn it on its head by associating with whores and gamblers. You can see an example of the guilt by association mentality in the incident of the healed blind man here. The Jews accused Jesus of being illegitimate- they mocked the former blind man about his healer: "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" (Jn. 9:29). When the healed man stands up for Jesus, the Jews get really mad with him: "You were completely born in sin!"- i.e. 'you're illegitimate' (Jn. 9:34). But the record reveals that the Jews knew the man's parents and had just spoken with them (Jn. 9:20). Clearly the mentality of these learned men was: 'You follow a bastard; so, *you* are a bastard'. Simple as that.

*9:30 The man answered and said to them: This is the marvel! You do not know from where he came, even though he opened my eyes-* The man may be alluding to their position that none would know from whence Messiah comes (7:27). But his reasoning was that since they accepted a miracle had been done, why then did they not perceive that this man was from God? Even Nicodemus thought as much, although he would not at that time confess it (3:2). The years of blindness had not been wasted on this man. He had thought things through and displays a fine command of logic and spiritual insight, although he knew nothing of the Lord Jesus.

*9:31 We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone be a worshiper of God and does His will, him He hears!-* Paul Tournier in *The Meaning Of Persons* perceptively comments: "We become fully conscious only of what we are able to express to someone else. We may already have had a certain intuition about it, but it must remain vague so long as it is unformulated". This is why anyone involved in preaching, public speaking, writing or personal explanation of the Gospel to someone else will know that *they* have gained so much from having to state in so many



words what they already 'know'. And in the course of making the expression, our own understanding is deepened, our personal consciousness of what we believe is strengthened, and thereby our potential for a real faith is enhanced. Tournier's observation is validated by considering the record of the healed blind man in Jn. 9. Initially he says that he doesn't know whether or not Jesus is a sinner, all he knows is that Jesus healed him. But the Jews force him to testify further, and in the course of his witness, the man explains to them that God doesn't hear sinners, and so for Jesus to have asked God for his healing and been heard... surely proved that Jesus wasn't a sinner. He was sinless. The man was as it were thinking out loud, coming to conclusions himself, as he made his bold witness (Jn. 9:31,33).

*9:32 Since the world began it has never been heard of a man born blind having his eyes opened-* There are no O.T. accounts of a born blind person being healed; this was specifically the work of God (Ps. 146:8) and His Messiah (Is. 35:5). The healed man seems to have been aware of this and therefore came to the conclusion that his healer must be Messiah. It wasn't that he believed and therefore was given the benefit of healing; by grace, God first of all healed him and this grace, reflected on and believed, led him to faith in Christ. The man was coming to see that his healing, of a man born blind, was an indication that the Kingdom of God was breaking in amongst men.

*9:33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing-* Truth is arrived at by different paths. The Lord had clearly stated that He could "do nothing" apart from the fact He was empowered by the Father (5:30). The man arrived by reflection at the very positions which the Lord had Himself taught, although it seems he had never heard the Lord's teaching. Or perhaps he had heard some garbled versions of the Lord's message, and now he was joining the dots and all was making perfect sense.

*9:34 They answered and said to him: You were altogether born in sins, and you teach us! And they excommunicated him-* By saying he was born in sin, they were admitting that he had indeed been born blind- for they believed blindness was a result of the mother's sin (see on 9:2). Yet they had refused to believe that he had been born blind (9:18,20). Thus the Lord worked to even move them onwards in their faith; He gave up on nobody (cp. His efforts to witness to the priests by asking the cleansed leper to offer a sacrifice for cleansing). They had insinuated that the Lord was illegitimate because His family origins were unclear, and their 'guilt by association' mindset led them to assume that as the Lord was, so was anyone who openly stood up for Him. We can make this same basic human psychological error so easily, especially when it comes to religious issues. They excommunicated for believing Jesus was the Messiah (:22).

The man did not believe that, but they took his criticism of them as meaning he did. Their logic is continually exposed as false- to those who join the dots. The contradictions are not explicitly exposed. They claimed he was illegitimate, when his parents had just given sober legal testimony that he was their legitimate son. But the way of the Spirit is not to make capital out of the contradictions in others' positions. Such contradictions are left to work on the conscience.

*9:35 Jesus heard that they had excommunicated him; and on finding him, he said: Do you believe on the Son of God?*- Perhaps the Lord wondered whether the man's logical and spiritual process had led him to conclude that "the man called Jesus" was in fact Son of God. As noted on :17 and :27, John's Gospel is full of questions which would have jumped out at the initial hearers- 'Do *you* believe on the Son of God?'. The man is clearly set up as representative of all who would afterwards believe. John's Gospel was written, and the "signs" such as the healing of the blind man were recorded, so that others would make this very same confession of faith in the Son of God (20:31). John urges his converts to continue their 'belief in the Son of God' (1 Jn. 5:13). Surely he is alluding to this man as the prototype of all the Christian converts.

*9:36 He answered and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?*- When the blind man asks Jesus to tell him who the Son of God is, I don't think it was because he didn't recognize Jesus to be Messiah. He was surely saying 'Tell me more about Him / you, that I may believe properly' (Jn. 9:36). The Lord Jesus didn't give a doctrinal exposition. But instead He just tells the man to keep looking at Him and hearing Him. And in the next chapter, the Lord says that His sayings and His works are the same thing (Jn. 10:32,33,38)- whereas the Jews kept making a distinction between them. They said that His words, not His works, were the problem. His works, they said, were OK. But not His words. And Jesus tells them to "*believe* the works" - for they are His words to men. Thus the Lord showed that His actions were His words made flesh.

The blind man asked about Jesus: "Who is he, that I may believe on him?". True belief depends upon having the true image of Jesus. The goal of conversion to Him is love from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). To know Him properly leads to love within us. 1 Jn. 3:22 brackets together believing in His Name and loving one another. Again and again we say: images and understanding of Jesus matter.

*9:37 Jesus said to him: You have both seen him, and he it is that speaks with you-* 'Seeing' in John means 'understanding in faith'. The Lord is saying that the man has indeed figured things out correctly. In literal terms, the man had to be first given the gift of sight in order to see the Lord. And there was a spiritual equivalent. There is an element of calling, of enlightenment by the Spirit (Eph. 1:18); so that within the final algorithm of human salvation, there is the factor of God's grace. This is

why Paul starts talking about predestination and calling in Romans; they are parade examples of how salvation is by grace and not of works nor of human tenacity or correctness of Biblical interpretation. These things are not outside of the algorithm, but they are not the only factors, lest salvation be of works and human ability.

*9:38 And he said: Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him-* This is a climactic moment. The once blind man realizes that this man standing before him is in fact God's Son. These are the very words of the man of Mk. 9:24, of Martha in Jn. 11:27 and effectively of Thomas in 20:25. The whole incident is definitely set up to present the man as a prototype of all who come to faith in the Lord. The significance of the man's confession is that it was made in the presence of the Pharisees (:40); he openly confessed his faith before the Jewish world, which again was intended to be a pattern for all.

*9:39 And Jesus said: For judgment I came into this world, that they that cannot see may see, and that they that see may become blind-* Remember the Lord had cured the man by first making him more blind. His judgment of the world, in blinding them, was still done in the hope that they would come to sight. Saul's blindness leading to his conversion and washing in baptism was surely allusive to the Lord's teaching here. Receiving sight was a result of judgment. The man was made to realize that his blindness was symbolic of judgment for sin, although the Lord had no interest in the history of or guilt for that sin. It was through that judgment that the man came to see.

"They that see" may require an ellipsis to be read in, to the effect 'those who think that they see'. Or the Lord may be alluding to the way that on one level, they did 'see' that He was from God, but because they had refused to follow the Spirit's leading, they were blinded so that they could not further perceive Him.

The Lord's very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (this is again alluding to the prologue's description of the Lord as light). Bright light shows up every shadow. Whenever men were in Christ's presence, they were judged. The very presence of His light amongst men was their condemnation (Jn. 3:19; 5:27; 12:31; 16:8,11). In this sense He could say that for judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39).

*9:40 Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and said to him: Are we also blind?-* As noted on :39, they considered that they 'saw' and were not spiritually blind. The Lord had said that they were blinded- not from birth, but blinded by Him, as a result of the process of

refusing to believe what on one level they had 'seen'. They sensed they were the ones being referred to as blind- and yet they considered themselves the most spiritually perceptive in Israel.

9:41 *Jesus said to them: If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say: We see, therefore your sin remains*-There was a difference between being born blind, and being blinded. The Lord has said that they were in the category of those who had been blinded, because they had seen but not believed (:39). It was because they refused to accept this that their sin remained. The implication was that being cured of blindness, receiving spiritual sight, meant forgiveness of sin; but blindness meant that sin remained. It is only by walking in the light of the Lord Jesus, with the eyes of the Spirit, that sin no longer remains in our lives. John develops this point in his later pastoral appeals to his converts to not remain in sin if they were really in the light. Living in the light of His presence and with His life ever before us as our life... means that we will not remain in sin. Blindness in the sense of genuine ignorance is not therefore reckoned as sin by the Lord. It is refusal to 'see' what we have 'seen' that makes us culpable for sin; it is this kind of blindness that is associated with condemnation (2 Pet. 1:9).

## CHAPTER 10

10:1-see on Mk. 13:34.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that enters not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber-* The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The material in John 10 follows straight on from the incident in chapter 9, where the Lord had sought out the healed blind man and brought him into the fold, in the teeth of the terrible behaviour from Israel's false shepherds.

The Lord will go on to define Himself as the only door into the fold. He is speaking in the context of the healed blind man being excommunicated from the synagogue in 9:34 and the threat of excommunication for any who believed in Him in 9:22. This was a major issue at the time and also for the communities to whom John was preaching his Gospel.

The Lord is saying that He is the only way into the fold, and therefore the threats of excommunication are irrelevant; especially as they were made by unbelievers in Him, who were only apparently within the fold by illegitimate means. This is all comfort to those who are excommunicated for whatever reason. So many lose their faith or spirituality because of it, but the Lord is saying that the definition of who is within the fold is not in the hands of the men who practice this evil. For He is the door, and whoever enters by Him shall be saved and is within the fold. Those who excommunicate have not really known the spirit of Christ, and so their claims to authority are illegitimate. They were thieves and robbers- in that the Jewish leadership were covetous and were using religion as a source of money. Elsewhere the Lord speaks of "the thief" coming to rob the master's household (Mt. 24:43) and in the first instance He may have had in view the Jewish attempt to take over the Christian movement. He had labelled the temple "a den of thieves" (Mt. 21:13). And Israel chose a robber rather than the Lord Jesus (Jn. 18:40; Mt. 27:38). The "thieves" who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable may well refer to this same category of Jewish religious leaders (Lk. 10:30).

10:2 *But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep-* The Lord was both the door and the shepherd. But the context in chapter 9 is of people the parents of the blind man being so fearful of the religious leaders. The Lord is perhaps saying that any spiritual shepherd will have entered the fold through the door, which is Him. Only those who have become in Christ are shepherds; the Jewish converts need not fear nor

respect any others who claimed to be shepherds, and that included the entire Jewish religious leadership at that time.

*10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens the gate, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his sheep by name and leads them out-* As noted on :2, the Lord is speaking in the context of the excommunication of the blind man by the Jewish religious leaders. He is teaching that the only legitimate shepherds in God's flock are those who have passed through Him, the door. "The gatekeeper" may be another reference to the Lord; He is the One who allows the legitimate shepherd access to the flock. They need not therefore fear excommunication, because those practicing it were not legitimate shepherds, and instead were the incarnations of the false shepherds of Israel which the Old Testament condemns. But we could also understand the gatekeeper as representing John the Baptist, who responded to the voice of the Lord Jesus (3:29), and who opened the way for the flock to enter through the Christ-door into the new fold.

The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, whereas the Jewish leadership had shown many times over that they did not understand the Lord's speech because they did not hear His word (8:43); they were continually misunderstanding His language. The events and dialogues of chapter 9 were proof enough of this; the flock should not therefore respect the voices of these men, seeing they did not hear the Lord's voice. Indeed, the Lord considered that the flock of Israel at that time were without any shepherds apart from Himself (Mt. 9:36).

The Lord knows each of His sheep and has given us a unique name. This is a picture of the very personal relationship between the Lord and each of His sheep. We hear His voice in different ways, for He speaks with a different intonation to each of us. This is not to say that false teaching is not false teaching; but all the same, each sheep has a different, although not contradictory, nuance of understanding the Lord's voice. The idea of being known by name recalls Yahweh's statement to Moses, that He knew him by name (Ex. 33:12,17). The Lord is encouraging the flock that each of them could have no less an intimate relationship with the Father and Son as Moses had. No longer should they see Moses as some unreachable climax of spirituality; they could all reach that level of intimacy, through the Lord's work and word.

If we respond to the Lord's voice, then we are 'led out' by Him; a word used of Israel's being led out of Egypt and through the wilderness. But the word is also used of the leading by the hand of the blind man in Mk. 8:23, and I have shown that this teaching in chapter 10 is clearly developing the themes of chapter 9 where a blind man was cured. The leading of the sheep is by the Lord's voice. The place of His word can never be underrated.

10:4- see on Mt. 16:22-25.

*When he brings out all his sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice-* The personal knowledge of every sheep (:3) is stressed again by the "all". The connections continue with the preceding chapter, as "brings out" translates the same Greek word translated "excommunicate" in 9:34,35. Unlike the false shepherds, the Lord doesn't drive out as punishment and leave the sheep alone. He leads His sheep out by going before them, and not by driving from behind or scaring them with sheepdogs. The image of the Lord going ahead with the disciples following Him connects with the idea of the Lord carrying His cross and bidding us follow Him on that last walk. John's Gospel concludes with the disciples following the Lord Jesus, focused upon Him solely. And the same image is used when He says that after His resurrection, He would "go before them into Galilee" (Mt. 26:32; 28:7).

John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. The Lord Jesus "*putteth forth* his own sheep by name" (Jn. 10:4); the same word is used by Him in Lk. 10:2 concerning how He *sends forth* workers to reap converts in preaching. Each of those He calls has a unique opportunity ["by name"] to gather others to Him.

The idea of 'following' Jesus is invariably associated with the carrying of the cross. Why do this? Because of the voice / word of Jesus, of who He is, of His Spirit. This must be the ultimate end of our Bible study; a picking up of the cross. For there we see God's words made flesh.

10:5 *A stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him. For they do not know the voice of strangers-* This is again an appeal to the intuitive sense within those who are of the Spirit; they instinctively discern those whose voice is not of God. The Lord puts it another way in 7:17, where [see note there] He explained that whoever has a heart for God's will can intuitively sense true and false teaching.

Remember that it was in full knowledge of the disciples' impending collapse of faith and feeling from Him, that the grace of Jesus confidently spoke of how His men would not follow "a stranger... but will flee from him". But the disciples fled from their Lord in Gethsemane, as He knew they would (from Zech. 13:7, cp. Mt. 26:31) at the time He said those words. He knew that He must die for the sheep who would scatter each one to His own way (Is. 53:6). "The time comes... when you shall be scattered, every man to his own" (Jn. 16:32); and true enough, they all fled from Him (Mt. 26:56). But in Jn. 10 He spoke of His followers as calm, obedient sheep who would not scatter if they had a good shepherd (Jn. 10:12); even though He knew they would. The Lord's way of imputing such righteousness to His followers seems to be brought out in Jn. 10:4 cp. 6: "The sheep follow Him: for they know (understand,

appreciate) His voice... this parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake", i.e. they didn't know His voice.

*10:6 This parable spoke Jesus to them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them-* This 'not understanding' seems an exemplification of His words in :5 that the true sheep will not follow the voice of strangers; and likewise, those who were not the Lord's sheep would not understand His voice. However, there is a purposeful ambiguity about who it was who "did not understand"; for that comment is often made about the disciples. As noted on :5, they did in fact "flee" from the Lord Jesus instead of remaining faithful to Him. Even although they did not understand His voice as they should have done, still He counted them as His sheep. This was grace itself.

*10:7 Jesus then said to them: Again, truly, truly, I say to you: I am the door of the sheepfold-* The statement in :23 that the Lord was teaching in Solomon's Porch appears to apply to all the material in this chapter; for the same themes of sheep and folds continue seamlessly. The ideas of a "fold" and that of the "courts" of the temple are very similar. Solomon's Porch was as a colonnade area that ran along the east side of the court of the Gentiles. There was a sign warning that any Gentile going further into the temple court was liable to death. The Lord surely alludes to these courts as He was standing right next to them- teaching that being in Him was the only source of entry into the fold / court, and that He was creating only one court / fold. The various courts, of the women, of the Gentiles etc. were to all be merged into the one fold / court, into which He alone gave exclusive access.

*10:8 All that came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them-* Messiah was "he that comes", the 'coming one'. These others who 'came before Me' could refer to false Messiahs. It was their teaching which meant they did not persuade the sheep to follow them; and again the Lord appeals to an intuitive sense that the sheep have as to whose is the true voice. And He clearly locates the motives for these false Messiahs and teachers as being materialistic- "thieves and robbers". The false teachers as mentioned both in the Gospels and epistles were teaching as they did for money or personal gain.

*10:9 I am the door. By me if anyone enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture-* The going in and out is hard to interpret. I suggested on :8 that the Lord was standing near the divide between the court of the Gentiles and the further courts; He was alluding to them in His talk about creating one fold, and He being the door of entry into the fold / court. I suggest this is the best understanding of going in and out freely- no longer passing a sign threatening death for going



further, if you were a woman or a Gentile. No longer going out, looking at the excluded ones in another court, feeling more righteous than them by reason of ethnicity or gender. But going out and in is also a Hebraism for leadership. Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well-known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep. So the idea may be that true shepherds of the new flock would be believers in Christ, the door, and only through Him would enter in and lead the flock. For the Lord is emphasizing the danger of false shepherds, of the kind who had excommunicated the blind man, the sheep, of chapter 9.

Ex. 38:18 describes the curtain over the door of the tabernacle in similar language to how the veil hiding the Most Holy is described. The Lord Jesus is the door of the tabernacle through which we enter at our conversion. By doing so we also enter, in prospect, through the veil into the Most Holy of eternity and Divine nature.

10:10 *The thief only comes so that he may steal and kill and destroy-* Again the Lord is stating that the motive of the false shepherds was solely materialistic. And because of that, they ended up spiritually destroying the flock. The allusions are clearly to Ezekiel 34 and the condemnation of Israel's greedy, destructive shepherds.

*I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly-* The life more abundant refers to the gift of the Spirit, the gift of His life lived in us, whereby we have His presence. Belief on the Son means that we "have [everlasting] life" right now (3:36; 5:24; 6:47,54; 1 Jn. 5:12,13). And that life shall eternally endure; it is the kind of life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom. Yet the gift of this life was made available by the Lord's death. It was the smitten rock that gave abundant, springing life. "I am come" seems to refer to His 'coming down' on the cross, as if it were already happening. Think for a moment of *how* the death of a man on a stake, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, irritated by flies and barking dogs... could actually give us life "more abundantly"? What was the process, what *is* the process, going on here? What's the connection between that dying man, and a transformed life in you and me today in the 21st century? Surely the connecting power is that the spirit / disposition of the Lord there and then has an inevitable, transforming influence upon those of us who believe in Him; the super-abounding grace and generosity of spirit that was in Him there, which was epitomized in the hours of public, naked exhibition... can't fail to move our spirits to be likewise. Paul speaks of this when He says that God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, by the spirit / power / disposition that works in is (Eph. 3:20). That power, that spirit, is

surely that of the crucifixion of Christ. For we cannot be passive to it, if we really 'get it'. It is a power that "works in us". See on 2 Cor. 8:7.

10:11- see on Jn. 13:36-38.

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep-* It was through His death that the abundant life was created for the sheep; see on :10. Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num. 27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so the Lord gave His life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. "The good shepherd" may well have been a Rabbinical title for Moses; the Lord therefore was saying "I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this". In a sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in that he was excluded from the land *for their sakes* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolise how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of the Lord's for us. The Lord Jesus likewise died the death of a sinner; He was "forsaken" in the sense that God forsakes sinners, whilst as God's Son He was never forsaken by the Father.

The Lord's life was laid down on the cross, and yet in another sense He was laying it down in the process of His mortal life, in which He gave His life to us. Yet in the shepherd metaphor, He laid His life down for the salvation of the sheep from danger. He was temporarily slain by the wolf seeking to attack them; and He was slain by the Jews. They were the wolves attacking the flock just as Paul foresaw the Judaist attacks on the fledgling ecclesia as being the attacks of wolves upon sheep.

10:12 *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them-* The disciples were indeed scattered when the shepherd, the Lord Jesus, was smitten. The analogy suggests that He died fighting for their protection. He temporarily died and they were scattered by the wolf of Jewish persecution. But His resurrection led to a gathering together of all His true people, in the face of the wolf's persecution. This general picture is developed in John's later writing, Revelation, where the beasts persecute the sheep; and whatever later application that has, the initial application was to Jewish persecution in the first century.

All this implies that the Lord, the good shepherd, saw the wolf coming. He didn't flee, but fought with this ferocious beast until the death. He says that if He had not done this, the sheep would be scattered. The struggle between Christ and the devil / flesh was therefore at its most intense on the cross, in His time of dying. The cross was not only a continuation of His struggle with the (Biblical) devil. It was an especially intensified struggle; and the Lord foresaw this fight coming. There is an element of unreality in this story that serves to make two powerful points. Firstly, no normal shepherd would give his life in protecting his sheep. The near fanaticism of this shepherd is also found in Am. 8:4, which describes the Lord as taking out of the mouth of the lion the legs or piece of ear which remains of the slain sheep; such is the shepherd's desperate love for the animal that now is not. The love of Christ for us on the cross, the intensity and passion of it, is quite outside any human experience. Hence the command to copy His love is a new commandment. And secondly, wolves don't normally act in the way the story says. They will only fight like this when they are cornered, and they aren't so vicious. But the point the Lord is making is crucial to us: the devil, the power of sin in our natures as manifest in the Jews, was far more powerful than they thought, and the struggle against it on the cross was far harder than we would think. And there's a more tragic point. In the short term, the sheep *were* scattered by the wolf, even though Christ died so this wouldn't happen. And Christ knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain. Not only is the shepherd unreal. The sheep are, too- once we perceive the link back to Ez. 34:17-22. They tread down the good pasture so others can't eat from it; having drunk clean water themselves, they make the rest of the water dirty by putting their feet in it; and the stronger sheep attack the weaker ones. This isn't how sheep usually behave! But these sheep are unusually badly behaved. And they are symbols of us, for whom this unusual shepherd gave His life. See on Lk. 15:5.

10:13 *He flees because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep-* Again the Lord is saying that the Jewish shepherds were motivated solely by money, their "hire". There may be here an allusion to Judas, who "did not care for the poor" (s.w., 12:6).

The Gospel writers three times bring out the point that people perceived that the Lord Jesus didn't "care" for people. The disciples in the boat thought that He didn't care if they perished (Mk. 4:38); Martha thought He didn't care that she was left in an impossible domestic situation, doubtless assuming He was a mere victim of common male insensitivity to women (Lk. 10:40); and twice it is recorded that the people generally had the impression that He cared for nobody (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14). And yet the Lord uses the very same word here to speak of the hired shepherd who cares not for the sheep- whereas He as the good shepherd cares for them so much that He dies for them. I find this so tragic- that the most caring, self-sacrificial person of all time wasn't perceived as that, wasn't credited for it all. The disciples surely wrote the Gospels with shame over this matter. It points up the loneliness of the Lord's agonizing last hours. And yet it provides comfort for all unappreciated caregivers, as spouses, parents, children, servants of the ecclesia... in their suffering they are sharing something of the Lord's agony. The Lord's "care" for the sheep led Him to lay down His life for them; but people thought that He did not "care" for His sheep. Each time the Lord heard this accusation, He must have reflected that actually He cared so much for them that He was laying down His life. Love unperceived is one of the hardest things to live with, and discourages many from abiding in the life of love. In those moments of discouragement we can remember the Lord, whose love was likewise unperceived, and continues to be in millions of hearts to this day.

The Lord even saw the unconverted and the unreached as His potential sheep. He criticizes the "hireling" who has "no concern for the sheep" (Jn. 10:13) with the same expression as is used in Jn. 12:6 to describe how Judas was "not concerned for the poor". He parallels "the sheep" with the "poor" whom He and His group sought to help materially as best they could; He saw those crowds, whom we would likely have dismissed as just of the "loaves and fishes" mentality, as potential sheep.

10:14 *I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me-* Again the Lord is imputing righteousness and perception to His followers; for He lamented that although they had been with Him so long, they still apparently did not "know" Him (14:9). And yet 'knowledge' is being used in the Hebraic sense of relationship. His relationship with His sheep is mutual.

10:15 *Even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep-* His mutual relationship with the Father, the Hebrew sense of both sides 'knowing' each other, was to be reflected in His knowing His sheep and them knowing Him (:14- a theme developed at length in chapter 17).

There is and will be something dynamic in our relationship with the Father and Son. The Lord Jesus spoke of how He 'knows' the Father and 'knows' us His sheep in the continuous tense (:14,15)- He was 'getting to know' the Father, and He 'gets to know' us. And this is life eternal, both now and then, that we might *get to know* the one true God and His Son (Jn. 17:3). The knowing of God and His Son is not something merely academic, consisting only of facts. It is above all an experience, a thrilling and dynamic one. I am the good shepherd, and know (Gk. 'am getting to know', continuous tense) my sheep, and am known (*being known*) of mine. As the Father *knoweth* (is knowing) me, even so know I (I am getting to know) the Father". The relationship between us and our Lord will therefore be one of progressive upward knowledge, as He has with God. Thus a state of ultimate knowledge of God will not be flashed into us at the moment of acceptance at the judgment. For this very reason, the Kingdom cannot be an inactive state. God is dynamic. For us to grow in His knowledge will be a continuously dynamic process. It is pointed out in John's Gospel that those who will truly know God will not fully know Him now, in this life. Thus the blind man in 9:12 said that he did not know where Jesus was; Thomas likewise said that the disciples did not know where Jesus was going 14:5,7); in 4:32 the Lord Jesus said that He had meat which we do not know of. Those who said (in John's Gospel) that they *did* know Jesus, often found that they did not. Thus the Lord said that the Samaritans worshipped what they did not know (4:22), although they were convinced that they did. Nicodemus thought that he knew Jesus, when he did not (3:2); the Jews thought that they knew whence Jesus was (7:26); "now we know that you have a demon", they boasted (8:52); "we know that this man is a sinner" (9:34)- and how wrong they were. Those who accepted they did not fully know the Lord Jesus will spend eternity coming to know Him (17:3).

It was due to His *knowing* that the Lord gave His life. Knowledge, in its active and true sense of relationship, does have a vital part to play. Otherwise spirituality becomes pure emotion alone. To "follow after righteousness" is paralleled with "to know righteousness" (Is. 51:1,7). To know it properly is to follow after it.

10:16- see on Jn. 17:23.

*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd-* I suggested earlier that the Lord was saying these things standing by the court of the Gentiles, and the idea of the 'fold' is associated with that of the 'courts', for Jews, Gentiles and women. The Greek for "fold" is translated "court" in 18:15; Rev. 11:2. The true fold or court was only one, and entered into through the Lord Jesus. Instead of

threatening death to those who crossed into the wrong courts, the Lord was the door through which *life* was offered. *This* fold may have been said with a motion toward the inner court. The women, Gentiles, the unclean and outcasts were to be brought, in obedience to His voice, and moulded into one flock with only one shepherd. The 'bringing' preceded the 'hearing My voice'. It's not that the Lord has given us His written word and whoever figures it out becomes part of the flock. He brings people, called by grace; and then it is over to them whether they further 'hear His voice'. Revelation develops the idea where we have a vision of the Lord as a shepherd leading His flock, on account of being Himself a lamb. But that vision refers to the Kingdom age. It could be argued from the force of "they shall *become*..." that the Lord is working to bring together His sheep into one fold, but that final unity will only be achieved at His return. The present divided state of the flock is therefore envisaged, although the Lord works to bring down the barriers between sheep and sheep.

Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10). When the Lord spoke of His people as being raised up put of the stones, as living stones, He surely had Neh. 4:2 in mind- where the stones of Zion are described as reviving, coming alive, at the restoration. The second coming is to be the restoration *again* of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), as if the first restoration is to be understood as a type of that to come.

The way in which we are seen by God as if we are already saved on account of our being in Christ is also explicable by appreciating His timelessness. Rom. 8:29 says that the whole process of our calling, justification and glorification all occurred at the foundation of the world. In God's eyes, those of us in Christ are already saved and glorified. The Lord spoke of "other sheep I have" (Jn. 10:16) when at that time we never existed. Likewise in God's eyes there was only one resurrection, that of the Lord Jesus. The resurrected Lord is compared to the sheaf of first fruits (1 Cor. 15:20), as if those in him rose with him and were glorified together, in God's eyes. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had this in mind when he said: "I *am* the resurrection".

*10:17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it again-*

The idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. He did not die, as most men do, against their will, fighting for the continuation of life at all costs; in the words of Dylan Thomas, dying men "Go not gentle

into that good night / But rage, rage against the dying of the light". The Lord died by breathing out the last breath in His lungs, His spirit, toward His disciples. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final out breathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died...the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work

well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story, alluding to Jn. 10:17: " Hereby perceive we the love of God (cp. "For this reason the Father loves me", because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

*10:18 No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. This command I received from my Father-* See on :17. He had the right ["authority"] to receive His life again, from the Father, for the Father raised the Son. The resurrection process means that the life we had before resurrection, in our mortal life, is that same life we shall live eternally. And the Lord was our pattern. In this sense we live the eternal life now, living the kind of life, spiritually, which we shall eternally live. Note that He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... *I am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand.

*10:19 Because of these words, again a division arose among the Jews-* The Lord's presence amongst men does cause division; that is quite a theme of the New Testament. Families divide, and even amongst the Jews there was division over Him. And yet as the New Testament clearly teaches and historically testifies, His presence amongst believers forges a unity of a unique nature, powerful enough to convert the world. This is all foreseen in the prologue, where the separation between light and darkness which occurred at creation is used as representative of the fundamental division which must occur between believers and disbelievers in the light. This principle affects who we marry, what we watch and think about, our associations on absolutely every level of thought and practical existence.

*10:20 And many of them said: He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to him?-* Madness was attributed to demon possession, and the language of casting out demons often effectively refers to curing mental



illness. But "has a demon and is mad" suggests two separate, if related, things. This group of accusers were not simply saying that the Lord was mad. They were implying that His supposed possession by a demon meant that He was on the side of the cosmic enemies they supposed existed- and therefore, His words were madness. "Listen" here implies listening favourably. Clearly amongst the Jewish leadership there were some like Nicodemus and Joseph with some level of belief in Him; but it is a theme of John's Gospel that men must come out for the Lord, and not simply hold a level of quiet, positive view of Him somewhere deep within their hearts.

10:21 *Others said: These are not the sayings of one possessed with a demon. Can a demon possessed person open the eyes of the blind?*- The Lord's miracles were used with economy, but they were necessary in order to demonstrate beyond doubt that the Lord was from God. This was especially necessary in a society where only a few % were literate, and there was no easy access to the Old Testament scrolls for personal study. And the miracles were self-evidently good; the suggestion that the Lord was an agent of some supposed 'Satan' or evil empire was absurd if He was using His supernatural powers to do good.

10:22 *It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem*- John's material almost exclusively records what the Lord did and said around the time of the Jewish feasts.

10:23 *It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple along Solomon's porch*- As noted earlier, the material which follows is seamlessly connected with the theme of shepherd and sheep earlier in this chapter. So I suggest that this is read as a general positioning statement for the material both before and after this point in the chapter. I have earlier pointed out the similarities between the idea of a "fold" and of the 'courts' of the temple, for women, Gentiles and Jews. The Lord was standing at the division between the courts of the Gentiles and Jews, and His language of creating only one fold, entrance to which was only through Him, must be read in this context.

The Bible does use (at times) the language of the day, contemporary with the time when it was first inspired. Jn. 10:23 speaks of "Solomon's colonnade", but as the NIV Study Bible correctly points out, this was "commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon's time". But the error isn't corrected. The language of the day is used, just as it is concerning demons.

10:24 *The Jews surrounded him and said to him: How long do you hold us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*- A theme of John's

Gospel has been that the Jews did know that the Lord was Messiah, but their dislike of the light, and all it demanded, meant they didn't believe in Him. Hence His answer to this apparent desire for plain clarification was that 'You do not believe' (:25). It's basic human psychology that we put off accepting truth under the smokescreen of needing more information. This is why some will apparently 'search for truth' all their lives- because they don't want to accept the truth they have found, as it demands too much of them personally.

The Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person? See on Jn. 16:30.

He had indeed spoken plainly to them- the crowds use the very word in remarking that the Lord spoke plainly / boldly (7:26). He Himself reflected that He had spoken plainly to the Jewish world (18:20). But the disciples too seem to have felt that the Lord was not "plain" in His speech (16:25,29). The reason for 'not getting it' is not because the information has been presented in a hazy manner, or because the intellectual processing of it is too demanding for the hearer. The message of the Lord was plain. But it was the pre-existing sense of self-preservation, of keeping one's own way of life and thinking intact, which meant that the hearers complained about lack of clarity. The Lord predicted His death and resurrection in great detail, in language which could never have been plainer. But the disciples were slow of heart to believe it. The simple message of the Lord Jesus, as explained in the prologue, is light compared to darkness; and it demands our all. Every part of life and thought has to be surrendered to it. And so hearers usually choose to misunderstand, or beg off with excuses about 'not enough information'. John alludes to this issue of speaking plainly when he tells his converts that the Lord's plainness, boldness, is to become ours (1 Jn. 5:14). Life becomes so simple once we have surrendered to Him as the light, and wholeheartedly walk in it.

10:25 *Jesus answered them: I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify of me-* See on :24. There was no unclarity in the Lord's message, and the miracles done were beyond question His authentication as having come from God. Of course, they'd have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His "works", His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was "the [plain] word" which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection. See on Jn. 14:10. John uses *ergon*, "works", for far more than miracles; effectively

the term means 'way of life' in 3:19-21; 6:29; 8:39,41; 1Jn. 3:12). The Lord's being and person, as well as His miracles, was His testimony to men, just as ours should be. It is not publicly performed good works [cp. miracles] which have lasting power in their testimony, but the works of a life worked or done in the Lord.

10:26 *But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep*- Belief was related to accepting the Lord's words (:27). Those words, His claims, were and are to be accepted without concrete proof [and there is no such thing as concrete proof or else faith would not be faith]. The claims of His person are presented as they are in the Gospel and clearly in the Gospel records. Once they are accepted, then we are His sheep, and are led further if we wish to follow further. It is not that there is something magic in the words of the book called the Bible which creates faith. For many read it and do not believe. The idea is that the words and salvation promises of the Lord Jesus are heard or read, and accepted. The leap in faith is taken. And then all starts to make sense. The Samaritan woman is a case in point. No miracles were done to back up the Lord's claims. She simply believed them.

10:27- see on Mt. 19:28.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me*- The Lord takes the initiative in speaking His word to men, but they must still respond in following; and this is how He 'knows' them, in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship. The "voice" they hear is His words, the essence of Him; not the Bible in its entirety, but "My words". The Lord's references to "My words" in John must be understood as a reference to Him, the news about Him, His Spirit, the essence of Him as a person. Although His words were the words of God, for the word was God as explained in the prologue, that is not to say that "My words" refer to the Bible as a whole. That would be a confusion of category; rather like saying that Mercedes are cars; but not all cars are Mercedes.

The Hebrew word for 'hear' is also translated 'obey' (Gen. 22:18; Ex. 19:5; Dt. 30:8,20; Ps. 95:7). We can hear God's word and not obey it. But if we *really* hear it as we are intended to, we will obey it. If we truly believe God's word to be His voice personally speaking to us, then we will by the very fact of hearing, obey. The message itself, if heard properly and not just on a surface level, will compel action. We can *delight* to know God's laws and pray daily to Him, when at the same time we are forsaking Him and His laws; if we are truly obedient, *then* we will *delight* in God's law (Is. 58:2 cp. 14). We have a tendency to have a love of and delight in God's law only on the surface. John especially often uses 'hearing' to mean 'believing' (e.g. Jn. 10:4,26,27). And yet the Jews 'heard' but didn't believe. We must, we really must ask ourselves:

whether we merely hear, or hear and believe. For we can hear, but not really hear, if we lack the "obedience of faith".

The Lord knows His sheep according to whether they follow Him, i.e. whether they take up His cross and follow Him. The question of cross carrying therefore reveals a man to his Lord for what he is. And it also reveals the Lord to His would be followers for who He really is. His words, that which is seen and heard in Him, is a call to follow Him to the cross.

10:28 *And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand-* The gift of eternal life is in the present tense, in that the Lord gives His spirit to us, the kind of life we can eternally live. "They shall never perish" refers to the condemnation of the last day; if we continue living the Kingdom life now, we shall not be condemned. If the Spirit of the Lord Jesus abides in us now, that same Spirit shall energize our bodies after the power of an endless life (Rom. 8:11).

The eternal type of life being given is an ongoing process. Consider the repeated parallelisms in the Lord's teaching:

Labour / work, as Israel worked to gather manna, as the crowds walked around the lake to get to Jesus	For the food that gives eternal life
Believe in me	Receive eternal life
Eat me daily, eat / absorb my body and blood, the essence of My sacrifice; have this as your real food and drink in life	Receive eternal life
Come to me, having heard and learnt of the Father	Never hunger, never perish, receive eternal life
Behold the son, believe on him	Receive eternal life
"I am", God manifested in the person of Jesus	The bread that gives eternal life
The manna of Christ	Gives eternal life
Jesus came down from Heaven [i.e. manifested the Father]	Gives life unto the world

By Jesus doing God's will	I get eternal life for you ("the world" of believers)
By giving His blood to drink and flesh to eat	Gives eternal life
The Spirit and words of Jesus	Quickens / gives eternal life

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).

This unreal shepherd not only dies for the sheep but gives them eternal life, making them eternal sheep (Jn. 10:28). We'd understand it more comfortably if He spoke of giving His life for people, and then them living for ever. But He speaks of giving eternal life to a sheep, who wouldn't have a clue what that really entailed. But that's just how it is with us, who by grace are receiving an eternal Kingdom, the wonderful implications of which are beyond our appreciation, due to the intrinsic limitations of who we are as sheep. See on Jn. 15:15.

The context of chapter 10 is the shameful treatment of the blind man by the Jewish shepherds in chapter 9. The Lord is assuring His flock that if they hear His voice, then He will preserve them from any robbers who seek to grab them for themselves.

10:29 *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*- The gift of the sheep was before the Lord called the sheep with His voice / word, and they responded. This reference to the gift of the sheep surely speaks of the predestination, foreknowledge and calling which Paul cites in Romans as the parade example of God's grace. The Father being greater than the Son means that the Lord's assurances of *His* protection and eternal salvation are made yet the more sure, because the Father was greater than Him but upholding the same passionate desire for our preservation unto salvation.

10:30 *I and the Father are one*- The protective, saving hand of the Son is that of the Father, for they both have the same will and determination for human salvation. This is the context of their being "one", in purpose and function rather than in person and nature, as wrongly supposed by Trinitarian thinking. In chapter 17, the Lord envisages the unity between the Father and Son being that between all His people, and between themselves and the Father and Himself. Clearly, the unity spoken of is not any support for the confused theology of Trinitarianism.

10:31 *Once again the Jews took up stones to stone him*- This was anger on the spur of the moment; there had been no trial, no verdict issued; and the Jews could only recommend the death penalty for the Romans to carry out. I suggest that their excuse that He was blaspheming was a cover for the fact that their consciences had been pricked by the Lord's challenge that belief in Him meant they were the Father's sheep and would be protected unto life eternal. And if they didn't believe- they were not the Father's flock at all.

10:32- see on Jn. 9:36; 17:20.

*Jesus said to them: Many good works have I shown you from the Father. For which of those works do you stone me?*- I noted on :25 that "works" refer not only to the miracles but to the Lord's whole life. But here the reference appears to be to His miracles, and the Lord's logic appeals to those who had likewise concluded that a bad man could simply not do such wonderful miracles unless God was intimately with Him. The Lord's miracles were "shown to the Jews just as the Father had "shown" Him which works to perform (5:20 s.w.). The idea surely is that the Lord did not merely encounter human need and use His power to resolve it; for He offered walked by such need without intervening. Rather He was shown miracles to perform, and did them accordingly, in an attempt to show the Father to the Jews. However in 14:8,9 we see that the disciples had failed to perceive this 'showing' of the Father to them. Their belief and perception was very weak, but the Lord still worked with them to perfect what they had- just as He does with us.

10:33 *The Jews answered him: For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself as God!*- John's Gospel records many interactions between the Lord and the Jews. Every single time they misunderstand Him and wrongly interpret His words and positions, often intentionally in order to make an accusation against Him. And so it is here. Trinitarians have to assume that this time, they got it right- that the Jews correctly interpreted Him; whereas the Lord Himself stated that they did not understand His words (8:43). Not only would such a reading be quite out of step with the emphasis upon the Jews' misunderstandings of the Lord, but He Himself goes on to

demonstrate that their claim was inappropriate because men can be called "God", and He was only claiming to be the *Son* of God.

10:34 *Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law: I said, you are gods?*- "Your law" is another example of how God's law had become their law; His feasts were now "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked His way and turned it into their own religion. The Lord Jesus is really saying 'In the Old Testament men are called 'gods'; I am saying I am the *Son* of God; so why are you getting so upset?'. The Lord Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called 'gods'. And yet the context is critical of those judges; to bear the name of 'God' didn't mean one was acceptable to God. And it is no accident that the Lord chose to quote an example of where Israel's leaders bear God's Name but are apostate. He was turning the tables on the Jewish leadership who were accusing Him of claiming to be God. It was in fact they who bore the name of God- and yet were to be condemned for not responding to the word / *logos* of God which had come to them.

10:35 *If he called those men gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken)*- As noted on :35, the apostate leaders of Israel were the ones who bore the Name of God. The word / *logos* of God had come to them in that as pictured in the prologue, the *logos* of God in Jesus of Nazareth had 'come' to Israel and they had rejected it. The word of God came to the Old Testament judges of Israel [the context of Psalm 82] in that they were to judge according to His word. The Lord may have in mind the LXX of 2 Chron. 19:6 where the judges of Israel are warned to judge rightly, because the *logos* of God is with them, had been given them, to judge rightly. The same idea is found in Dt. 1:17 where again the judges of Israel are warned in the LXX to judge according to the *logos* of God and not reject it in favour of human sympathies. In this sense perhaps Heb. 4:13 speaks of being judged by the *logos* of God. In the person of the Lord Jesus, the *logos* of God had come to the judges of Israel- and they were refusing to judge rightly because of their own agendas and personal investments.

The Lord adds that "the scripture cannot be broken" or dissolved / unloosed, quoting a common Rabbinical saying found often in the Talmud. The Lord didn't mean that 'the Bible doesn't contradict itself', because there are contradictory statements in the Bible, and God often teaches through paradox. And the Mosaic law part of Scripture has indeed been unloosed in Christ; the word is used by John of how the Lord unloosed the Sabbath legislation (5:18). The Lord had used the very same word in 7:23, arguing that in order not to break or unloose the Law of Moses, the Jews circumcised boys on the Sabbath- but thereby they broke or unloosed the laws about the Sabbath. So He is using their own misplaced

ideals, quoting their own maxim about Scripture not being broken, appealing to their claim that such paradoxes could not be countenanced. If indeed there was to be no possible contradiction between Scripture verses, then they were trounced. Logically, the case was watertight. Bible verses, Scripture, state that men carry the Name of God. And condemn such men, because the *logos* of God came to them and they did not judge according to it. And so there was no reason to stone a man, even if he claimed to carry God's Name. And further, the Lord was not stating that, rather was He claiming to be God's Son. And further; by not judging according to the word / *logos* which had come to them, it was they who were breaking or unloosing Scripture, leaving God's word broken by them, in that they judged by the outward appearance rather than by the word which demanded right judgment on their part. And if indeed Scripture could not be broken, they could not walk away from the fact the word had come to them. The passage of time would never take away their responsibility to respond to that word.

10:36- see on Jn. 17:20.

*Do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world: You blaspheme, because I said: I am the Son of God?*- As noted on :34 and :35, the Lord was not claiming to be God; the accusation was misplaced and a wilful misinterpretation. His claim was to be the Son of God. However, that claim is nowhere recorded. It was insofar as the word was made flesh that He proclaimed the Father in a way that only the begotten Son could do. His life was therefore effectively the statement that He was God's Son; but He never actually uses those words in any recorded speech in the Gospels.

We have here a brief and rare window into how the Lord perceived His life before age 30. The Lord Jesus says that He was "consecrated" [as a priest or High Priest], and then sent into the world, at age 30. That's how He looked back and understood those 30 years of mundane village life- a process of consecration, of purifying, of preparation. He saw that none of the multitude of daily frustrations was without purpose- it was all part of His preparation. And perhaps we'll look back on these brief years of our humanity in the same way. But the point is that the Lord's mundane life before 30 was actually an active preparation of Him for service.

10:37 *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not*- Here and in :38 the Lord seems to countenance and encourage a level of belief which was simply an acceptance that the Father was working through Him; even if they disliked Him personally, and His personality and Galilean background, or other trappings of His humanity, were simply too obnoxious to them. John's Gospel positively and generously reports that many "believed" in Him perhaps in this way. And yet John's Gospel also emphasizes the need to ultimately come out for Him, and to accept that He as a person, with all His humanity, was and is the only light of life. So



I would conclude that the Lord was eager for them to at least accept His "works" or miracles as being done from God; for He knew that with that level of acceptance, He could go further and work with them towards a higher level of commitment. His work with Nicodemus would be a case in point.

10:38 *But if I do them, though you do not believe me, believe the works; that you may know and understand, that the Father is in me and I in the Father-* See on :37 for discussion of this apparently lower level of faith being encouraged. The Lord had just quoted Psalm 82 about these men, implying they as the judges of Israel stood condemned. But He didn't want them to stay like that; He urges them toward at least some level of faith that the miracles He was doing were indeed from God.

This verse parallels knowing and believing, as in 17:8. Jn. 10:38 in the AV has the Lord Jesus beseeching men to "know and *believe*", whereas the RV/ NEV has "know and *understand*". Understanding was not therefore related to academic prowess in interpreting Scripture; the Lord was challenging their Jewish supposition that knowledge of itself was so critical. Instead He is saying that the real understanding or knowledge is belief in Him. To know Him is to believe in Him; that is the understanding required. And the illiterate masses could in any case not attain much academic understanding of Scripture at that time; but they could understand / know / believe in the Lord Jesus.

10:39 *Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands-* He wished to die at a specific point, at a Passover; and as stated in :17,18, He gave His life and it was not taken from Him. He therefore had the power to avoid arrest and stoning; the fact He used it at times like this underlines the fact that it was indeed His love and self-control which kept Him on the cross, rather than the nails. He could have come down from the cross and avoided it in the form it was. He had that power, and had exercised it at times like this. Truly He gave His life for us; it was not taken from Him.

10:40 *He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained-* Perhaps we see here the Lord's sentimentality, which is a legitimate part of human nature. He returned to the place where He was baptized, far from anywhere, to meditate. And again we note that "at the first", the beginning, is used in John for the beginning of the Lord's ministry, as made clear in the prologue.

10:41- see on Gal. 3:5.

*Many came to him. And they said: John did no miracle, but everything that John said about this man was true-* Several times during his ministry Elijah did spectacular miracles to confirm the validity of his message. The fact that "John did no miracle" is perhaps recorded in order to show that he was not the supreme fulfilment of the prophet who would come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17), i.e. doing similar miracles to those of Elijah. John could have been the Elijah prophet in fullness, for in a sense he was Elijah; but Israel would not. We see here how potentials are set up, which may never be realized because of our weakness or that of others. The Holy Spirit was upon John from the womb; but he did no miracle. Here we see encouragement for us- that the activity of the Spirit in our lives, which John's Gospel continually alludes to, doesn't require that we perform miracles. It is very wrong to assume as Pentecostalism does that the Spirit = miracles; just as it is so wrong to assume that because the miraculous gifts are no longer available, therefore the Holy Spirit is not given to men today. Perhaps this observation about John doing no miracle is purposefully included in John's Gospel because he was writing at a time when the miraculous gifts were disappearing, but there was an urgent need to accept the Holy Spirit in the sense of the internal strengthening which is critical to the Christian life.

10:42 *And many believed in him there-* The fact many came to Him (:41) and believed is maybe another example of how the Lord went away to seek solitude, but the crowds still followed Him. Perhaps hearing Him speak at the spot where He had been baptized inspired the crowds to also believe and be baptized. This remains the abiding power of the example He set in being baptized Himself.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha-* The 'sickness' is emphasized (:1,2,3,6). Presumably he had only recently fallen sick (the Lord heard about it at this time, :4,6). Otherwise, the question is raised as to why he had not been cured when so many other "sick" people had been cured by the Lord and His disciples. Lazarus is introduced as a sick man from Bethany, which was also the home town of Martha and Mary. Why not introduce him immediately as the brother of Mary and Martha? Here we have an example of where the Gospel writers operate as a cameraman, focusing on a particular aspect of a person. The focus is hereby placed upon the man Lazarus and his human situation, he stands as an individual in need rather than being presented as someone defined by his family members. This is of course how the Lord looks upon each of us- as independent individuals, even if society looks at us in terms of our being defined by our relatives and social situation.

11:2 *And it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick-* The anointing of John 12 is after this; so presumably it is the anointing by the "woman in the city who was a sinner" of Luke 7 which is in view. And that woman was Mary, a repentant prostitute. The fact the Lord and His men often stayed at her family home in a poor out of town dormitory settlement ["Bethany" = 'house of the poor'] would surely have elicited all manner of gossip. A very interesting picture of Mary emerges when the pieces of the Biblical jigsaw are put together.

11:3 *The sisters therefore sent to him, saying-* The "therefore" may refer to the fact that it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord (:2). They knew that He knew and recognized her love for Him and total devotion to Him. On that basis they feel confident to ask His action for a third party. For Lazarus himself could not pray to the Lord- but He is open, as today, to the requests of third parties.

*Lord, he whom you loves is sick-* This is *phileo*, whereas the Lord loved them with *agape*; see on :5. There was no request for specific action, just a statement of the problem. David's Psalms so often simply inform God of the situation, rather than suggesting specific answers. In this case, the Lord read their unspoken desire- that death would not triumph. Although they had not articulated it, verbalization isn't required. The Lord read their spirit and responded. And this is why the events of Jn. 11 are alluded to in Romans 8, where we read of the Lord's intercession for our groanings and unspoken desires through absorbing them into His own spirit.

11:4- see on Jn. 1:14; 13:32.

*But when Jesus heard it, he said: This sickness is not unto death-* But it obviously was, humanly speaking. Again we see how the Lord is using language and seeing things differently to those around Him. He was trying to get the disciples to perceive a difference between the death of a believer in hope of resurrection, and "death" in the sense of total, permanent loss of existence. For He goes on to say plainly that "Lazarus is dead". Through this apparent contradiction, the Lord was seeking to help them develop a realization that death is not ultimately death for those associated with Him. But as so often, the disciples failed to catch on. Yet later in the discourse, He again seeks to encourage Martha to believe that His promises of life beyond death actually have application in this life too.

*But for the glory of God-* The glory of the Son of God was and is the glory of God. The Lord stated that the sickness of Lazarus "is not unto death, but for the glory of God". That sounds like a predictive statement. But it seems to have been conditional. For one thing, that sickness did lead to the death of Lazarus. But notice the Lord's later comment to Martha when her faith wavered in the possibility of immediate resurrection for Lazarus: "Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn. 11:40). But the Lord isn't recorded as actually having said that. What He had said was that the sickness of Lazarus would reveal the glory of God, in a way as dramatic as an Old Testament theophany, when God's glory was literally revealed in visible terms. But He had intended Martha to understand the conditionality of that statement- i.e. 'If you can believe Martha, Lazarus can be saved from that sickness and its effects, and thus glory will be given to God'. But again, we see the Lord's grace. She didn't have that faith. She was concerned that even the taking away of the grave stone would release the odour of her brother's dead body. But Jesus didn't say 'Well Martha, no faith on your part, no resurrection of Lazarus, no glory to God this time'. By grace alone, He raised Lazarus. He overrode the conditionality. And so it must happen so often, and so tragically unperceived, in our lives.

*That thereby the Son of God may be glorified-* This is very much the language of the glorification of God's Son through His death and resurrection (Jn. 12:23; 13:31; 17:1). But the essence of His experience on the cross was worked out in His life before that time came. Perhaps this was why the Lord specifically waited two days where He was, knowing that the time it took to get to Bethany would occupy another day, so that Lazarus would be resurrected after three days in the grave wrapped in graveclothes, as He was to be. Perhaps His reference to "twelve hours" and walking through a day or night is to be understood as alluding to how far away they literally were from Bethany (:9). The "four days" in the grave of :17 could refer to two full days and two partial days. The Lord wanted to see Himself in Lazarus, and He arranged situations to that end; just as He desires to see Himself in us all, and allows suffering

and delays His responses to that end. This is the essence of Christianity- being made into the *morphe* or form / image of the crucified, resurrected and victorious Christ; being made conformable unto His death, that the power of His new life might be seen in us (Phil. 3:10).

11:5 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus-* This is *agape*. The sisters had said that Jesus 'loved' Lazarus, using *phileo* (:3 "He whom you love"). They considered Him a friend with *phileo* love, but He actually loved them with *agape* love. We may consider the Lord Jesus to be on our side because He has fellowshiped with us and helped us out in times of need. But the essence of His love is *agape*, the love of the cross, so far above how we perceive His love for us in more material, earthly terms.

11:6 *When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he therefore stayed two days longer in the place where he was-* The "therefore" perhaps relates to His *agape* love for them introduced in :5. It was because of this love that He allowed Lazarus to die; because He had a longer term, loving plan for their ultimate salvation. Spirituality can affect third parties; in this case, Lazarus was raised because of Martha and Mary's faith. And so it can be that our prayers and intercessions for others can bring about some degree of salvation for them which otherwise wouldn't happen. We also see that the Lord can delay things, not least His second coming, because He is working along with human freewill in order to achieve a greater glory for the Father. His delay in responding to prayer and entreaty is not because of inattention or deafness; rather is it because He has a far wider purpose, to an even greater glory than providing instant response to our needs.

11:7 *Then after this, he said to the disciples: Let us go into Judea again-* He had specifically withdrawn from Judea because the Jews sought to kill Him, and His game plan was to die not then but at the Passover. Remember that He gave His life of Himself in His own time and of His volition (10:17,18).

Although the disciples marvelled at His miracles at the time He did them, they seem to have doubted at times whether He was really that super-human. When He said "Let us go up to Judaea again", they respond like He is crazy: "Goest *thou* [you singular] there again?" (AV), they respond. They feared the Jews would kill Him, even though they had seen Him walk through the Nazareth crowd who tried to throw Him over a cliff.

11:8 *The disciples said to him: Rabbi, only a few days ago the Jews wanted to stone you; and you want to go there again?-* The implication of how the disciples reason is that they were unaware that Lazarus was seriously ill. Perhaps the messenger delivered the message to the Lord Jesus alone. He didn't share the news with the disciples. They would've wondered what His game plan was, making them stay two more days where they were. We likewise don't know His full game plan with us, and

there are inexplicable delays and sitting around in the same place, in various ways; but one day we shall understand why this was. And even in this life, as in this case, we may come to understand later. Although they had seen the Lord walk through aggressive crowds and lynching situations, they feared that He would die. We see here how they had zoned out to the Lord's frequent predictions of His upcoming death. Rather should they have been wondering whether these words were the sign that the Lord's predicted death was now to happen. But like Peter in Matthew 16, they wish to discourage Him from death.

11:9 *Jesus answered: Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world-* The Lord is replying to the disciples' apparent concern that *He* is risking His life by going again into Judea. But His response challenges *their* fears, by assuring them that if they 'walk in the light', "the light of the world", they will 'not stumble'. All these ideas are used elsewhere in John concerning the walk of *the disciple* in the light of Christ, the light of the world. He thereby perceives that their concern about *His* suffering and death is actually because they are concerned about themselves. Elsewhere, Peter expresses concern about the Lord's prediction of His death, that "this shall not be unto you" (Mt. 16:22). But again the Lord's response is to encourage Peter to follow Him, carrying His cross. Our barrier in considering the physicalities of the Lord's crucifixion may likewise not simply be because we love Him and fear to see again His sufferings; but because unconsciously, we realize that His death is to be ours. And we would rather not focus upon His death, for it is to be ours. The Lord is encouraging them here that if they are focused upon Him, walking in the light of Himself, then they will not stumble spiritually, and can also confidently walk into Judea, to Jerusalem and even to death itself, knowing that most importantly, they will not spiritually stumble. No test will be so great as to make us fall spiritually: "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

11:10 *But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him-* In John's letters, there are many allusions back to John's Gospel. This is an example. The reason for the connections is because the gospel of John is as it were a transcript of John's preaching of the Gospel; it became written down as a text for the basic instruction of John's converts. Once communities of believers had been baptized and established on this basis, John then wrote letters to them. And it is understandable that he would base his appeals for Christian living on the facts of the Gospel message which the converts had first learnt in the Gospel of John. The allusion to Jn. 11:10 is in 1 Jn. 2:10,11: "He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the

darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes". The context of Jn. 11:10 is about a beloved brother, Lazarus, brother of sisters Martha and Mary. John is surely making the point that if the Lord and the disciples had not gone to raise Lazarus, because they feared for their own wellbeing, then this would effectively have been hating their brother. Here we see powerfully presented the full extent of sins of omission; to not respond to the need of Lazarus, citing fear of the Jews, would be to effectively hate that brother. And we all likely need such exhortation as to the real import of omitting to do what we could. The Lord walked those 12 hours to Bethany with the disciples following, willing if necessary to "die with Him". And the context in 1 Jn. 2 also alludes to this: "He that says he abides in him, ought also walk even as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6).

*11:11 These things he spoke, and after this he said to them: Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep-* I suggest on :19 that the presence of "the Jews" at the funeral suggests Lazarus had not 'come out' for the cause of Jesus as he might have done. But the Lord still considered Lazarus as His "friend", a term used for those He accepted as His disciples (Jn. 15:13-15; 3 Jn. 14).

Jesus believed that He had already raised Lazarus back to life and so He was now asking him to come out of the grave. Presumably there were just seconds in it- He raised Lazarus, and then, invited Lazarus to come out. Jesus spoke to Lazarus as a person speaks to another living person. He didn't invite the immortal soul of Lazarus to reunite with the body. He raised Lazarus from the dead- that was the miracle. Jesus said that He 'awoke Lazarus out of sleep'- not reunited a 'soul' with a body.

*11:12 The disciples replied to him: Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover-* The Lord Jesus speaks of sleeping in death, and going to resurrect Lazarus; they understand 'sleep' as literal sleeping, which they think will cure Lazarus. Time and again, we sense how the Lord's thinking was out of step with those closest to Him. His mother asks Him to make more wine, and He replies that His hour [of death] has not yet come; she thinks of literal wine, whereas His thought is on the blood which wine represented. He tells Nicodemus to be born again, and the man thinks He means entering again into his mother's tubes. He tells the disciples that He has food to eat which they don't know about, referring to the work He was doing with the Samaritan woman- and the disciples think someone has brought Him literal food without their knowledge. As the Son of God, the Lord was of super high intelligence, and this was particularly acutely honed when it came to spiritual things. Those with above average IQ frequently experience frustration, angst and existential loneliness as they have to exist amongst the mass of smaller minded folk who comprise humanity generally. Yet the Lord clearly rose above all that, because despite this spiritual and intellectual distance, He was naturally attractive

to children and to the poorest and simplest of society. And in this He sets us an example, if we struggle with a sense of distance between ourselves and others. See on 11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly*.

11:13 *Now Jesus had spoken of Lazarus' death; but they thought that he spoke of Lazarus taking rest in sleep*- See on :12. Constantly, the figurative is taken literally by them, and they only think of the secular rather than the spiritual. This was just as the Jewish leaders did. So it is not that the disciples understood the Lord better than they did; they had the same misunderstandings as the Jews, but somehow believed in Him. This observation is proof enough that intellectual clarity of understanding is not the same as faith.

11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly: Lazarus is dead*- See on :12 *Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover*. Was there a sense of frustration in the tone of the Lord, that they hadn't 'got it' when He had spoken of Lazarus sleeping? I like to think not, but rather the gentleness of a parent explaining something a second time but in more simple language. It makes a good exercise to think what tone of voice the Lord spoke in whenever we read His reported speech. We also sense a relief amongst the disciples, that now their Lord was talking to them on their own level. We get the same feeling at Jn. 16:25,29: "These things have I spoken to you in figurative language. The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father... His disciples said: Now you speak plainly". John's Gospel records the Lord speaking in "figurative language", to the point that the Jews demanded He tell them "plainly" whether He was Messiah (Jn. 10:24); the other Gospels tend to focus on His 'plain speaking', and the same word is found in Mk. 8:32 for how Jesus "spoke plainly" (AV "openly"). In this sense, the Lord insisted that He had 'spoken plainly' to the Jewish world (Jn. 18:20). Higher critics like to imagine that the words of Jesus recorded in John were never spoken by Him because they are so different in tone to those recorded in the Synoptics. It could appear that we are being presented with two different personalities, the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptics. I don't accept this; rather does the evidence in John suggest that He spoke in two different styles, "figurative" [which John tends to record] and "plainly", and the disciples struggled to understand the "figurative" parts. Just as we do. But see on :16.

11:15- see on Lk. 8:27.

*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe*- The Lord's joy was that the disciples would believe. So His joy was that He had not been there, because He knew that His resurrection of Lazarus would develop their faith. And He did this even though He wept for the loss of His friend Lazarus which was temporarily required for this.



So the Lord Jesus seems to have purposefully not gone to Lazarus immediately, knowing that the longer he remained dead, the greater would be the impression made upon the disciples when they saw the miracle He planned to do (Jn. 11:15). He was even glad that Lazarus died- even though He wept over the loss of His friend. Thus His joy, which He invites us to share, is not mere personal joy- it was the joy for the sake of others' spiritual growth.

The Lord knew that His love of Lazarus was such that had He been present, He would have stopped Lazarus from dying. We have here another insight into His humanity. He knew that His emotions would have led Him to do the cure. From a distance He still could have cured Lazarus, for distance was no barrier to His healings, His physical presence wasn't required (Lk. 7:7-10). So the Lord is recognizing that His human senses and emotions would have been such that He would have cured Lazarus, but because they were not exercised so strongly, by reason of His not being physically present, He therefore restrained Himself and allowed Lazarus to die. And He was "glad" about that, because the resurrection of Lazarus would result in their 'believing'. Again we see how there are levels of faith. The disciples already believed; but He saw that their faith would increment to another level on witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus. Martha knew that if Jesus had been physically present, her brother would have been healed: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (:21). We can understand this as meaning that she knew Him well enough to know that His pity would have been so deeply aroused by the sight of the terminally ill Lazarus that He would have cured Him. In this we see another insight into His humanity. His followers certainly didn't think He was God Himself. But see another possibility on :21.

*Nevertheless let us go to him-* The meaning of the "nevertheless" is hard to find, unless we follow the reasoning presented above about physical presence; see 11:15 *I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe*. Although the Lord's physical presence wasn't required for the miracle, nevertheless, He wanted to go there and raise Lazarus in front of them all- "so that you may believe". In this case, as often in the Gospels, the Lord was speaking a word more to Himself than to His listeners; the "nevertheless" was relevant to His own deep awareness that He could merely say the word, and Lazarus would rise from the dead. The language of "let us go to him" implies that His dead friend was alive; which is how He looks at all who have fallen asleep in Him. For all live unto God (Rom. 4:17,18).

11:16 *Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples: Let us also go, that we may die with him-* See on :14. There is no record that the Lord corrected the disciples' misunderstanding that He was going to commit suicide in order to "go unto" Lazarus. He let events

take their course and allowed the disciples to reflect upon the situation in order to come to a truer understanding of His words. He was willing to accept their simple devotion, despite their lack of understanding. And surely He looks at misunderstanding folk today in the same way; and that includes all of us in some ways.

When the Lord spoke of going to Lazarus, they thought He was going to commit suicide. They hoped He would redeem Israel in glory, there and then. But such was their devotion to Him as their Saviour, even though they didn't understand how He was going to work it out, that Thomas solemnly ordered them, as they huddled together out of the Lord's earshot: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16). I imagine dear Peter solemnly nodding in agreement, thinking of his wife and dear children back in that fisherman's cottage. But he was serving for nothing, for sheer love of his Lord. And he was prepared to die for Him, even if it meant receiving nothing of the present benefits he thought Jesus of Nazareth might bring for him. And yet the Lord demands such devotion from all of us. The tired servant can labour all day for Him, but immediately he returns, the Lord expects him to *immediately* prepare a meal, and doesn't expect to thank us. As it happens, He elsewhere intimated that He will praise us at the judgment, He Himself will serve us (Lk. 12:37). But the attitude of serving for nothing, for no thanks even, must be with us now, in this life.

"Let us also go, that we may die with him" is yet another example of the disciples being out of step with their Lord, understanding Him on a more human, literal level when He was speaking on another level. But John's Gospel was written, under inspiration, by John. By recording all these examples of the different levels between the Lord and His followers, he is expressing what the Synoptic writers state more directly- that the disciples did not understand. And this was and is a great comfort to those encountering the Gospel for the first time today. Complete understanding is not required of disciples, but rather simple faith. There is no record here that the Lord corrected their misunderstanding, indeed in most of the incidents where they misunderstand, He doesn't specifically correct them, but rather left time and the Father's further leading to clarify the point to those who were thoughtful and reflective. The same can be seen in His attitude to the language of demons.

11:17 *So when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in his tomb for four days-* "He found" could possibly suggest that He was unaware Lazarus had been dead so long. Perhaps He had intended to perform the resurrection three and not four days after the death of Lazarus, in order to encourage them all to believe that He too after three days would rise again. But see on :4 *That thereby the Son of God may be glorified.* The period could refer to two full days and two part days.

11:18 *Now Bethany was near to Jerusalem, about three kilometres away-* This is the reason why many of "the Jews" came to the funeral (:19), and confirms our suggestion under :19 that "the Jews" were the Jewish leadership, specifically the Jerusalem leadership.

11:19 *And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother-* "The Jews" refers to the Jewish leadership, and suggests that Lazarus had not been cast out of the Synagogue. Perhaps Lazarus had not stood up for Jesus as he might have done and was therefore still popular amongst the Jewish leadership; yet still the Lord loved him. Remember that the disciples feared going to Judea because "the Jews" sought to kill the Lord, and they only went to Bethany because they were willing to die with the Lord there.

11:20 *Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him-* This is all very much the language of the Lord's second coming especially as described in Mt. 25:6: "Look! The bridegroom! Come out to meet him". John's Gospel continually repeats the Synoptic material, but presents it differently. And the similarity of language in this case leads us to think that the connection is intentional. That Mary 'stayed' would therefore appear to reflect badly upon her. The parable of Mt. 25:6 is about the response of different groups of *young women*, and both Martha and Mary were presumably young, unmarried women. Perhaps Mary simply plays the role of the foolish virgins who didn't respond immediately, but came later. The resurrection of Lazarus was clearly a foretaste of the resurrection at the last day: "Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again. Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live". The similarities with the last day judgment scenario are so many that it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are being consciously referred to.

*Jesus was coming-* Literally, "Jesus is coming". The present tense suggests this is to be read as reported speech. Again, the perspective of the Gospel writers can be seen to change very quickly.

*But Mary stayed in the house-* Luke notes the tension between Martha and Mary over domestic issues. She perhaps remained in the house because she wished to meet the Lord without her dominant sister. Or perhaps the whole incident is being recorded as a foretaste of the Lord's resurrection; some disciples ran out to see the risen Lord whilst some remained in the house.

11:21 *Martha said to Jesus: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died-* This level of faith, which required the literal presence of the Lord in order to perform healing, contrasts unfavourably with the faith of others, even Gentiles, who believed that the Lord's physical presence

was not required for His miracles to be performed. But the Gospel records present the key believers as having been weak in faith during the Lord's ministry- surely as encouragement to others to believe.

11:22 *And even now, I know that whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you-*

Martha understood the Lord's power to help, and she prayed to Him (Jn. 11:22 cp. 16:23). But she didn't make the obvious, blindingly desperate request which filled her heart: to bring Lazarus back to her. She simply stated that the Lord could do all things. And she knew He would read her spirit, and see what she wanted.

"Even now" hints that she did wonder if the Lord could even now raise him. Martha's hope that the Lord just might raise Lazarus was not based simply upon a vague whim that the Lord might just do her a favour this time, on this issue. "Even now", *kai nun*, was a phrase she had previously heard on the lips of the Lord as He sought to explain that the realities of His future Kingdom were also capable of some present experience: "But the hour comes *and now is* [*kai nun*], when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit" (Jn. 4:23). And most significantly Jn. 5:25: "The hour comes and *now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live". So her vaguely expressed request was actually a result of her attention to the Spirit words of the Lord Jesus. And thus she was in harmony with the movement of the Spirit, and the Lord's Spirit was therefore aligned with her spirit in intercession before the Father- as Romans 8 makes explicit. The powerful lesson is that prayer is heard not because of how we verbalize things, the word choice we achieve- for that would be some kind of paganism, whereby certain words elicit Divine responses. As we read in this context in Romans 8, "we know not how to pray as we ought". "The Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV) looks upon the spirit, the deepest heart desires, and responds to them rather than to our clumsy attempts to formulate those deep desires as words and sentences.

She wasn't asking for a resurrection, she left it to the Lord to decide how best to respond; and in doing so reveals a parade example to us all. Clearly it was her unspoken, vaguely conceived and unverbilized desire that the Lord would raise Lazarus immediately. And the Lord (as explained in Romans 8) took this unspoken desire of her spirit and revealed it to the Father. Romans 8 says that He does the same for us today.

"Whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you" are the very words the Lord elsewhere used urging *us* that whatever *we* ask will be *given* (Mt. 21:22; Jn. 16:23). Perhaps her emphasis was upon the word "you". Martha clearly felt an inadequacy in prayer. Like us, she wanted the Lord to do it all for her. The whole story reveals that such feelings of

inadequacy are unnecessary. Because her spirit, her deepest heart desires, were what the Lord would raise Lazarus, and this was indeed read by the Lord as prayer.

11:23 *Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again*- The Lord is purposefully ambiguous about the timing of the possible resurrection. He could have meant 'right away', or, 'at the last day'. That ambiguity was to elicit a response from Mary, to make her too wonder what His reference was to. And the Lord leaves things hanging at times in our interactions with Him and reading of His word- in order to exercise our own faith and reflection.

11:24 *Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*- First century Judaism generally believed in immortal souls, passage to Abraham's bosom etc. The fact Martha didn't believe this was surely due to her attention to the Lord's teaching about the resurrection of the body. She is quoting verbatim the Lord's laboured emphasis upon how He would "raise up" believers in Him "at the last day"- the same Greek words are used (Jn. 6:39,40,44,54). Perhaps Martha had been present at the incident in John 6, or probably the Lord repeated His teachings in different places, and she had heard this teaching and absorbed it into her deepest belief system.

But the Lord was perhaps hoping that His ambiguity would provoke her to state that she believed the Lord could raise Lazarus immediately. But she didn't quite get there, and so the Lord takes her there in :25 by speaking of how He *is* the resurrection.

11:25 *Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life*- Here and in :26, the Lord seeks to develop the idea that the language of latter day resurrection and salvation at "the last day" is in fact applicable to life in Him right now. Under :22 *Even now* I suggested that Martha had heard the Lord's discourses on this theme earlier, and was even quoting from them. But now He asks her whether she really believes it- because if she does, then she may indeed entertain the idea that it was possible to raise Lazarus immediately.

*He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live*- A repeat of the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6:58 about how those who eat the Christ manna shall live and not die. Martha had already alluded to His teaching on that occasion in her reference to being raised again at the last day. Now the Lord is trying to take her further, as if to say: 'And what did I go on to say? I spoke later on in that same discourse about 'life' in Me as a present experience... that ought to confirm your hope and faith that I could raise Lazarus even now'. Likewise the Lord's description of Himself in this verse as "the life" uses a phrase only found in Jn. 6:51, where He speaks of His flesh giving "the life" to the believers. And this is how He seeks to work with us, always leading us on, and so patiently and in such hope that we

will 'get it'. We read or hear His word, and then we encounter another part of His word which is Him gently prodding us to reflect upon the word we previously heard or read. This all helps us understand why regular Bible reading and reflection on His word is such an important part of our daily walk with Him.

11:26 *And whoever lives and believes on me shall never die*- "Lives" therefore comes before 'believing'. Yet in the preceding verses, the Lord has spoken of 'living' as if He meant 'life at the last day as a result of resurrection': "... he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. But the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live, can be lived right now. "Whoever lives" therefore refers to whoever has His life in them and continues that life of believing.

He is suggesting that this 'life' can be lived now, and if we have it, and continue to believe in Him, then we will literally "never die". Again, the Lord is encouraging Martha to believe that in some sense the resurrection life can be experienced now. And He is doing this, in the immediate context, to deepen her faith in the Lord's possibility to raise Lazarus to life- so that He could indeed raise Lazarus from the dead in response to her faith, rather than solely from the motive of His own personal compassion. And He works in this same multi-level way with millions of people simultaneously... the extent of His activity is breath-taking.

*Do you believe this?*- Is not the implication that Lazarus was raised partly because of *her* faith...?

11:27 *She said to him: Yes, Lord. I have believed*- Implying she had taken a one-time specific act of faith; the very specific confession of faith which John's Gospel was seeking to elicit in its audience.

*I have believed you are the Christ*- This is in answer to the question as to whether she believed that "He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live" (:25,26). She still dare not make the specific statement that she believes in life after death. On one hand, we could read her answer negatively, as if she fails to make the answer the Lord was trying to elicit- that yes, she believed in Him as the resurrection and the life, both now and at the last day. On another hand, we could read her answer positively, in that instead of saying she believed in a future gift of life, both in this life and the next, she simply says that she believes in Jesus as the Christ, making no presumption about getting any personal blessing out of that belief, and content with whatever He in His wisdom may give her. We noted this when considering how the sisters simply informed the Lord of Lazarus' grave sickness, without presuming to ask for His specific resolution of the issue (:3).

*The Son of God, He that is to come into the world*- Every believer likewise 'comes into the world' (Jn. 1:9- the same Greek words are used). There is

therefore no requirement to interpret this as meaning that the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed and literally came from Heaven to this earth. The Lord had spoken of how He 'came into the world' (Jn. 3:19; 9:39), and again Martha is quoting His words. Whilst Mary is framed as the one who loved hearing the Lord's words, clearly Martha likewise loved His words and based her faith upon them.

11:28 *And when she had said this, she went away, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Teacher is here-* Or, the Master. A nice insight into how the earliest disciples spoke of the Lord Jesus to each other when not in His presence.

*And calls you-* The same word is used for how the Lord 'called' Lazarus out of the grave (12:17). This develops the theme that the essence of resurrection happens in the Lord's interactions with those He calls to Himself. See on :25 and :26. The call to Mary was therefore in essence the same call to Lazarus, to come from death to life.

11:29 *And she, when she heard it, arose quickly and went to him-* As noted on :28, the response to the call in this life reflects our response to the call to life in the last day. Hearing the call, quickly responding and coming to the Lord immediately is surely being presented as a template for all John's audience to follow. The hearers would have been challenged by these words to themselves respond- just as we should be.

11:30 *(Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha met him)-* All the communication being through messengers, privacy would have been hard to achieve. The Lord wanted to meet Martha and Mary alone, as far as possible, because He sought to develop their faith away from "the Jews" who were swamping the home. And He was also aware that "the Jews" sought to kill Him; that may have been another consideration, or at least, He was being sensitive to the fears of the disciples.

11:31 *The Jews then who were with her in the house and were consoling her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there-* This means that the tomb was located the same side of the village as where the Lord entered. He was therefore left waiting somewhere near the tomb. Therefore the question 'Where have you laid him?' (:34) was likely rhetorical.

11:32- see on Lk. 19:42.

*Therefore, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died-* She repeats the words of Martha, suggesting they had said this to one another in conversation beforehand. And she too

displays the limited faith that assumes only the Lord's literal presence could achieve miracles, and that healing from a distance was impossible. The way she repeats the same words as her sister, and with the same understandable anger / frustration with the Lord that He had not come quicker [for the messenger would have returned with the news that the Lord had not followed him back to Bethany immediately]... this all adds to the sense that we are indeed reading words actually spoken, and feelings really felt.

*11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping-* This is the same word used for the [same?] women weeping before the stone which covered the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:11,13). Clearly the Lord saw the whole scene as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection, and He sought to use the similarities to inculcate faith in His resurrection.

*And the Jews also weeping who had come with her-* The grief of "the Jews", even though they "sought to kill Him", still stirred parallel emotions within the Lord. For He had our nature, and such sympathetic response to others' grief is natural. And yet the Lord felt this psychological response even for His enemies; and in this we see the core love for them which was at His heart. His ability to respond even now to our emotions and tears, as He did toward Stephen at his time of dying, all makes Him a living Lord and matchless mediator.

*He groaned in the spirit and was disturbed-* Their weeping, just like ours, provokes a reflection deeply within the Lord. He groaned "in Himself" (:38); He took their grief deeply within Himself. This is again a reflection of His humanity; for it is normal to absorb the emotions of those we love deep into ourselves. But He is the Son of God, and Romans 8:26 clearly alludes to this incident by saying that "the Spirit" (a title of the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18) intercedes even now with groanings which cannot be uttered. He is the same today as yesterday. The Greek translated "disturbed" is twice used in John of the Lord's feelings as He faced the cross (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). So clearly did He see the whole incident as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection. And it was an existentially lonely feeling, because He uses the same word to urge His followers: "Let not *your* [and this perhaps is where the emphasis was] be troubled" (Jn. 14:1,27). This deep troubling / disturbance was felt uniquely by the Lord. We need to be aware that the Lord knew what He would do- He knew that within maybe as little as ten minutes, the sisters would be ecstatic with joy as they met their resurrected brother. For me, this knowledge would have mitigated against entering into their emotions of grief. But His unity with them, His love, was such that He all the same wept for their tears. With us too, He knows that we shall eternally rejoice, relatively soon. And yet He still enters fully into our grief of the moment. Such is His love. Truly, man is not alone. God is with us, right now, through His Emmanuel.



11:34 *And said, Where have you laid him?*- Was this a rhetorical question, perhaps in order to focus them on the deadness of their brother as a prelude to the wonder of his resurrection? See on :31. Or is it a reflection of how the Lord had limited knowledge? The same word is repeatedly used of how the Lord's body was "laid" in the tomb (Mt. 27:60; Mk. 15:47; 16:6; Lk. 23:53,55; Jn. 19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). But the Lord also often uses the same word, at least in John, for how He 'laid down' His life (Jn. 10:11,15,17,18; 15:13). Again, the Lord is developing the idea that life is laid down both in death and during this mortal life; that the power of new life might break through into our mortal flesh, both now and through the resurrection of the body to the life eternal. Consciously or unconsciously, Mary uses the same original words in enquiring where the Lord's body has been laid (Jn. 20:2,13,15). Surely she must have seen the similarities, as the Lord intended. He knew she would one day soon be asking where *His* body had been laid, and He lovingly, gently sets her up for this.

*They said to him: Lord, come and see*- Again, the Lord is setting her up to see the similarities at the time of His resurrection; for in response to the same question, as to where the body had been laid, the same answer would be given by the Angel who represented Jesus: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Mt. 28:6). But it's all the other way around; the words of Jesus ("Where have you laid him?") become the words of Mary, and the words of the Angel who represented the Lord Jesus become Mary's words ("Come and see"). By so cleverly and profoundly setting this up, the Lord sought to demonstrate the connection between Him and her and all those who seek His body; His words become her words, her words become His words. He would soon make this explicit when speaking of how His words were to abide in His people, so that their will and His were the same, and therefore whatever they asked would be granted without needing His formal intercession (Jn. 15:7).

The Greek thinking minds who read the New Testament were sadly divorced from the Hebrew background which is the backdrop for God's revelation in the Bible. In the lead up to the AD381 Decree of Constantinople, which declared Trinitarianism as the only acceptable form of Christian faith, Gregory of Nazianzus preached a series of sermons in defence of the Trinity. He dealt with the two blocks of Biblical evidence as saying that e.g. in John 11:34, Jesus resurrected Lazarus by His Divine nature, and then wept in His human nature. Gregory utterly failed to appreciate Hebrew thought; he ended up splitting up the Lord Jesus effectively into two persons, rather than seeking to harmonize the two strands which there were within the one person of Jesus.

11:35 *Jesus wept*- He of all men knew the reality of future resurrection at the last day, and He knew what He was going to do. So why then did He

weep? He saw how unnecessary was their grief, how misguided. For He knew what He was going to do. And yet He wept with them because His heart bled for them, because He shared their grief (on whatever basis it was) to the extent that He too wept with them. And the love of Christ will constrain us to have His bleeding heart (2 Cor. 5:14). We may be tempted to think that our griefs and sorrows are too petty for the Lord to engage with. Our feelings are reflected in His, quite simply because He loves us.

11:36 *The Jews said: Look how he loved him!*- They perceived His love as *phileo* love, whereas the inspired record says that the Lord's love was of the *agape* quality (:5). The misunderstanding of the Lord's love was and is tragic. Some see this as evidence of a parallel between *phileo* and *agape*, but I would argue against that position. If they are interchangeable terms, then why use them both. Rather I suggest we see His *agape* as being misunderstood as the far lower level of *phileo* love.

11:37 *But some of them said: Could not this man, who opened the eyes of him that was blind, have also caused that this man should not have died?*- Here we see yet another point of connection with the Lord's crucifixion; for "the Jews" made similar accusation as justification for their demand that the Lord "come down from the cross". The line of argument they were presenting, introduced by the ominous words "But some of them...", suggests that they may have been sarcastic and cynical in saying that the Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man. But we see again some sort of division amongst "the Jews"; the Lord's grief was evidently genuine, indicating He has a good friend and good man (:36). But others chose to find any excuse to disbelieve Him.

11:38 *Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave*- The whole process of mediation takes place within the Lord's mind, with the sort of groanings He had as He begged the Father to raise Lazarus (Rom. 8:26 cp. Jn. 11:38), and as on the cross He prayed with strong crying and tears for our redemption (Heb. 5:5 cp. Is. 53:12). The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today. That same passion and intensity of pleading really is there. This is why the state of our mind, our spirit, is so vitally important; because it is this which the Lord Jesus interprets to the Father. The Lord's Spirit struggles in mediation with crying and groaning (Rom. 8:26), as He did for the raising of Lazarus. There is a further connection with Heb. 5:5, where we learn that the Lord prayed on the cross with a like intensity. And this Lord is our Lord today. He can be crucified afresh, therefore He has the capacity for struggle and mental effort.

*And a stone lay across it*- The same word used about the stone that lay over the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:1). The whole incident was to provoke faith in the Lord's resurrection after three days were fulfilled. But the disciples didn't 'get it', and John may be making that point- that they failed to

believe, to take the lesson from the resurrection of Lazarus which was clearly a foretaste of the Lord's. This is part of the wider theme of the Gospel writers emphasizing their own slowness and weakness of faith- which likely made them the more compelling and credible.

11:39 *Jesus said: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, said to him: Lord, by this time the body stinks. For he has been dead four days-* Female concern about taking the stone away from the tomb was another point of contact with the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's body did not "see corruption" because of the huge amount of expensive spices placed upon it, but with Lazarus, the body was already decomposed. The contrast with the Lord's corpse was perhaps to make the point that *His* body did not "see corruption". And although our corpses do "see corruption", this is no barrier to resurrection.

11:40 - see on Jn. 11:4.

*Jesus said to her: Did I not say to you, that if you believed, you should see the glory of God?-* The Lord Jesus encourages us to see ourselves as Moses. This is without doubt an allusion to Moses' experience of seeing God's glory- an experience which in Jewish eyes marked Moses out as the greatest man who had ever lived. The veneration in which Moses was and is held in the Jewish world is hard for Gentiles to enter into. A glance through rabbinical commentaries on the Pentateuch will illustrate this well. And here was the Lord Jesus saying that through faith in him, we can share the experience of Moses, we can rise to the spiritual heights of the man who spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

We are being invited to be equal to Moses, seeing from the cleft in the rock the awesome majesty of the perfection of Christ's character; the full glory of God. But do we appreciate his righteousness? Paul likewise invites us to behold with unveiled face, as Moses did (2 Cor. 3:18 RV), and thereby, just from appreciating the glory of Christ's character, be changed into the same glory. Note too how in Rom. 11 we are each bidden "behold the goodness and severity of God"- a reference to Moses beholding all the goodness of Yahweh. We are in essence in his position right now (Ex. 33:19).

John's Gospel contains several references to the fact that Christ 'shows' the Father to those who believe in him, and that it is possible to "see the Father" and his glory through seeing or accurately believing in him as the Son of the Father (Jn. 11:40; 12:45; 14:9; 16:25). Moses earnestly wished to see the Father fully, but was unable to do so. The height which Moses reached as he cowered in that rock cleft and heard God's Name declared is hard to plumb. But we have been enabled to see the Father, through our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. But does an appropriate sense of *wonder* fill us? Do we really make time to *know* the Son of God? Or do we see words like "glory" as just cold theology?

Martha clearly believed Lazarus was now decomposed, and it would make a smell if the stone over his tomb was rolled away. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" was the Lord's response (Jn. 11:40). Clearly she didn't have that faith. So, on one level, she shouldn't have seen God's glory revealed in the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:4). And yet we read straight away that then, Lazarus was raised- despite Martha's 'unworthiness' of it. Such was the Lord's love for them all.

11:41 *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said: Father, I thank you that you have heard me-* The way the Lord characteristically lifted His eyes to Heaven to pray reflects His complete unity of spirit with the Father, with no barriers nor issues of guilty conscience standing between them. Even before the body of Lazarus emerged, the Lord knew that He had been heard. He had earlier spoken of doing the works / miracles which He had seen / been shown by the Father (5:20,36). We get the impression that the Father had shown the Lord this "work", and He was totally confident that it would be performed. It was of course a huge encouragement to the Lord that He too would emerge from the grave.

11:42 *And I know you hear me always, but because of the crowd that stands around I said it, that they may believe you did send me-* Said what? The past tense suggests the reference is not to His word of command to Lazarus to "come forth", for He had not yet spoken that. Was the reference therefore to His command "Take away the stone" (:39)? Was it to His "groaning"? But this was "in the spirit... within Himself", not publicly stated. I suggest that the "it" which He "said" was in prayer to the Father. The Father always heard Him, He did not need to ask for specific things in order to get them, for the Spirit was given to Him without measure. Perhaps He is saying that in this case, He had specifically prayed to the Father, and received a positive response- in order that the crowd might realize that indeed He had been sent by the Father. But there is no record of any prayer prayed publicly by the Lord in front of the watching crowd. Maybe He meant that He had already said "it" in prayer to the Father and been answered, and He was now going to say publicly "Lazarus, come forth"; but that also is hardly a public prayer to the Father. The GNB tries to avoid the problem by offering a more vague interpretation of the tense: "I say *this* for the sake of the people here". But this seems questionable in terms of the Greek grammar. My conclusion is therefore that the prayer to the Father was private, but the raising of Lazarus would have been seen by the thoughtful amongst the crowd as clearly an answer to the Lord's private prayer. Such resurrection could only come from God, and seeing it was done at the hands and word of Jesus, it followed that He had therefore prayed to the Father for it. In this way, the Lord demonstrated that the essence of prayer was within

the heart of the believer, whereas at that time prayer was generally conceived as a matter of public activity, with words spoken out loud. It's the same lesson as taught by Hannah's silent prayer. This is why the Lord *says out loud* in the audience of the crowd that He "said it" for the sake of the crowd. John's Gospel draws a distinction between "the crowd" and "the Jews", the Jewish leadership. The Lord's intention was that both groups would be converted (recall His desire that the cured leper made a witness to the priests), but the resurrection of Lazarus was aimed at converting the masses- "because of the crowd I said it". The Jewish leadership were not likely to reflect upon what the Lord had said and done, because their hearts were hardened. But "the crowd" contained at least some open minds.

So it seems to me that Jesus had asked / commanded / said to the Father to resurrect Lazarus. Jesus believed that this had happened. And so, in utter faith, he thanks the Father for raising Lazarus- even though Lazarus was still silent in the grave and there was at that point no actual physical evidence Lazarus had come back to life. But then Jesus says, believing so firmly the prayer had already been answered 'OK Lazarus, well, come out and see us then' [my paraphrase!]. The whole point was to demonstrate that "I am the resurrection and the life", to confirm Martha's faith that indeed there would be a resurrection "at the last day" (Jn. 11:24,25). It wasn't to demonstrate that Jesus could reunite 'soul' and body- it was to prove a resurrection.

*I know you hear me always*- Both David and Christ panicked when they felt their prayers weren't being answered; they felt that this meant they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-4; and consider too 17:15; 24:5; 27:4,8). Clearly they understood answered prayer as a sign of acceptability with God. the Lord knew that God *always* heard Him. When apparently God didn't hear His prayer for deliverance on the cross, He for a moment supposed that He'd sinned and therefore God had forsaken Him.

Lazarus had died, and the evident desire of Martha was to see her brother again, there and then. But she didn't go running to the Lord with this desire. She simply and briefly stated her faith in the Lord's limitless power to resurrect, and her knowledge that He could use the Father's power as He wished. He read her spirit, He saw her fervent desire. And He responded to this as if it had been a prayer. He groaned deeply within Himself, and wept- not the tears of grief, as the Jews mistakenly thought (note how throughout the record they misunderstand what is really going on), but the tears which go with the groaning of serious prayer (Jn. 11:33-39). Having done this, He comments: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me *always*". Because His spirit, His mind, was in constant contact with the Father, His prayers /

desires were always communicated to Him, and always being heard. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" could almost imply that the Lord prayed for something, and then, after some interval, the answer came. We have an exquisite insight into the Lord's mind and the highly personal relationship between Father and Son in the words that follow: "I knew (not 'I know') that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe". This almost certainly was not spoken out loud; this is a very rare and privileged glimpse into the unspoken communication between the Son and Father. The Lord seems to be adding this almost in half apology, lest it should seem that He prayed for Lazarus' resurrection, the answer came, and He then thanked the Father for it. It seems that this would be too primitive a sequence of events. He says that He *knew* that His request had been granted, and His utterance of thanks for the answer was for the peoples' benefit: that *they* might perceive that whatever the Son asked for, He received from God. But in reality, the Lord's thoughts to the Father seem to suggest, it wasn't a question of His prayers being accepted and answered. His Spirit, His thoughts, were one with the Father, and therefore it was not that His thoughts were considered, accepted and then God granted the request. What He thought was the prayer and it was the answer all in one. His 'mediation' for us is in the sense that He is the Lord *the Spirit*. There is no barrier (and was not any) between His mind and that of the Father.

11:43 *And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice*- Yet another connection with the crucifixion; for this was how the Lord ended His mortal life, crying with a loud voice (Mt. 27:46,50).

*Lazarus, come out!*- The Greek is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for the Lord calling men to come 'here' to Him and follow Him in service (Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22). This was also His personal intention for Lazarus. Again we have the hint that Lazarus may not have been a full believer at the time (see on :19). And the miracles were not done simply to meet human need as the Lord encountered it- for He walked past so much of it, without addressing it. The intention was that those cured or assisted would come to Him in faith. Our good works and social welfare outreach should therefore likewise be intimately connected to evangelism and not done for their own sake.

11:44 *He that was dead came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him go away*- "Grave clothes... napkin" are all yet again reminiscent of the Lord's burial and release from death; the same word for "napkin" is used in Jn. 20:7. His emergence, when so tightly bound, was also of itself a miracle; and it may have been an encouragement to the Lord Jesus, who may likewise have been interested to know how He would emerge from bound graveclothes. The command

to "loose him" also had a deeper hint within it; "the Jews" were to release people like Lazarus and allow them to come to the Lord and walk thereafter in freedom. But it was ultimately the Lord who not only healed and resurrected, but also loosed men from bondage to what which was associated with death- the Jewish system. The same word is used for unloosing the Jewish legislation in 5:18 and 7:23.

11:45 *Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to Mary-* I have tried to demonstrate in this exposition that "the Jews" referred to the Jewish leadership, and "the crowd" are mentioned separately to them in John's Gospel (the definition of "the Jews" begins in Jn. 1:19). The Lord had intended this miracle to specifically convert some from "the crowd" (see on :42). But it appears that His expectations were proven wrong, for actually it was some from "the Jews" who believed. He was after all of human nature. Likewise we noted on Jn. 4:44 that the Lord had expected no response from His own "country" but actually there was response. If even the Lord found that some responded whom He didn't expect to, we must surely approach our own witness in a spirit of mere sowing, not attempting to foresee the response.

*And saw what he did, believed in him-* Faith of course is ideally believing without visual evidence (Heb. 11:1), and the Lord lamented that many wanted to 'see' before believing (Jn. 4:48). The example of Thomas, demanding to see before he believed, is surely recorded in a negative light (Jn. 20:25), leading the Lord to pronounce blessing on those who have not seen yet believe (Jn. 20:29). But all the same, such lower level 'belief' is still counted to folk, by the Lord of all grace who is so enthusiastic to notice human faith on whatever level. This serves as an encouragement to us, to view positively those with apparently weak faith; and also, to not think that our faith is so weak that our Lord doesn't notice it. So again we see evidence that some of "the Jews" believed in the Lord- but would not 'come out' for Him until after His resurrection. The thousands baptized a few weeks later on Pentecost were all devout Jews "dwelling in Jerusalem", and we wonder whether these were those who at various times in John are described as having 'believed in Him' but had not openly confessed Him. Public baptism was an ideal way to do so. It would also explain why they were converted so quickly, and clearly were struggling with conscience issues.

11:46 *But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done-* Again and again, the Jews were divided by the Lord's work. Even resurrection from the dead would not persuade them; perhaps it was to the resurrection of Lazarus that the Lord referred in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:31). There are some for whom the opinion of others, especially religious leaders, is paramount. They can be shown the clearest truths, such as the resurrection of Lazarus, or the clear teaching of Scripture- and it means nothing, because

they have elevated their religious leaders to an absolute position. We read these things in the Bible because we encounter the same psychologies today.

11:47 *The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said: What will we do? For this man does many miracles-* The idea in the Greek is that if He is 'doing' so much, then what are we 'doing' in response. Again the Jews have to admit the Lord was indeed doing miracles, as Nicodemus stated at the start of the Gospel. We learn from this that miracles alone will not convict a person of faith; but we also see that clearly they were responsible toward God now that they had seen them. The most aggressive people, in a given context, are those who know they are wrong and are desperately seeking to destroy the evidence which is too inconvenient for them. And so those who encounter the Lord have to either capitulate to His claims, or go away as did the Jews in bitterness and wild attempts to destroy the evidence and inconvenient truths- no matter how much they disguise all that beneath nice speak.

11:48 *If we leave him alone, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation-* Like so many, they resisted the powerful claims of the Lord upon them because of their own petty vested interest. Just as so many will not sacrifice their family relationships or business or living place for the Lord's sake. Their *topos*, "place", could be the Jerusalem temple; but their essential fear was that they would lose their own "place". They recognized that belief in the teaching of Jesus meant that no priesthood or religious leadership such as theirs was in fact necessary. Which means that to return to such a system is to not follow the true teaching of Jesus. Yet they disguised all this under the excuse that the Lord's miracles would get Him a mass following, which would lead to a revolution which the Romans would crush, resulting in their loss of all their vested interests. This kind of logic is so typically human. If this respecting Jesus of Nazareth... then A could happen, then B might happen, and then the unthinkable might happen- I lose my "place" in society and the eyes of men. This is why the New Testament records the Lord's claims being acted upon immediately, with believers being baptized straight away. Response to the Lord needs to be quick, before the mind of the flesh kicks in with its delaying tactics and endless chains of 'what if...'.

11:49 *But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them: You know nothing at all-* The Mosaic High Priest did the job for life, but the work had been reduced by Judaism into a much coveted position which was shared each year. The thrust of the argument seemed to be that they 'knew nothing' of the real threat posed- which was the whole Jewish nation "perish" in some terrible holocaust which would aim to destroy every Jew within Palestine. Caiaphas argues that they "knew nothing at all" compared to what really could happen; not just *they* would



lose their place, but every Jew in Palestine would be murdered by the imagined Roman response to a Messianic revolution. This was taking their 'what ifs' to the ultimate moment. It was extremely unlikely that the whole Jewish nation would perish because of any Roman response. And the Old Testament promises would surely not allow that to happen; although Caiaphas had no faith in them to reason like this. He was of course leading up to his decision that one man must die so that Jewry did not perish completely.

11:50 *Nor do you take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, so that the whole nation does not perish*- The paradox of course was the Lord's death was so that all who believed in Him, the new Israel, would "not perish". Caiaphas seems to be arguing that they had not even considered the idea of killing the Lord in order that the Jewish people "not perish". "Expedient" is the same word used by the Lord in saying that His death was "expedient" in order that the Holy Spirit be sent and God's people be saved (16:7). So whilst the reasoning was that of Caiaphas, the words came out in a way which spoke clearly of the Lord's death.

*That one man should die for the people*- Adam Clarke claims that "This saying was proverbial among the Jews"; it was an allusion to the scapegoat slain on the day of Atonement. It was the High Priest's duty to slay the scapegoat; and here he says that the Lord's death was to be seen as just that.

*Not perish*- The same Greek phrase is used by the Lord about how faith in Him will mean that individuals will "not perish" (Jn. 3:15,16; 6:39). He saw salvation on an individual level, whereas Judaism and Caiaphas wrongly thought of salvation as being a concept applicable only on a *national* level. And yet the death of Jesus was primarily for Israel; and that whole nation need not have perished, due to the cross. Here we see the depth of grace; their rejection of Him, their doing of their Saviour to death, was actually the means for their salvation. We would have made it the basis of their condemnation, were we in the Father's position. But potentially, it was the means of their salvation. But such grace was incomprehensible to them. The whole nation, or many of them, *did* perish. And thereby we learn that the extent of the Lord's victory is dependent upon our response to it; so much was made possible through it, but human response is still required. John evidently intended us to see the connection with his earlier comment that the Lord was lifted up *that whosoever believeth on Him* should "not perish" but have eternal life.

11:51- see on Jn. 5:4.

*Now this he said not of himself-* An example of where the power of inspiration is such that men were moved to speak far beyond their own personal understanding or intention.

*But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation-* The terms he used and the logic followed was all as it were put in his mouth. But "the nation", the true Israel, was thereby redefined as those who believe in the Lord and accept His death for them.

*11:52 And not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad-* This may have been added by John. Or perhaps it was the vision of Caiaphas that the Lord's death would enable Judaism to rally their troops as it were, and the diaspora Jews would return to Jerusalem as the Rabbis taught, and establish an independent Kingdom in Palestine.

The Lord Jesus died as He did in order that all who benefit from His cross should show forth the love, the glory and the Name of the Father and Son, and thus have an extraordinary unity among themselves- so powerful it would convert the world (Jn. 17:20-26). This theme of unity amongst us played deeply on His mind as He faced death in Jn. 17. He died that He might gather together in one all God's children in that His death would enable the giving of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of His people; and the result of spiritual mindedness would be unity between persons. Those who advocate splitting the body, thereby showing the world our *disunity*, are working albeit unwittingly against *the most essential intention of the cross*, and declare themselves to not have received the Holy Spirit. And in this, for me at least, lies an unspeakable tragedy. The atonement should create fellowship. His death would create a new synagogue- for "gather together" translates *sunago*. But it would be a meeting of minds, based around Him and His cross; rather than in a building cantered around a religion and human priesthood.

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children. Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our ecclesial experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive nature. Again, the basis of our unity is a sustained, individual appreciation of the cross.

*The children of God that are scattered abroad-* The Lord uses the same word in predicting that initially, His death would result in His sheep being

"scattered abroad" (Mt. 26:31; Jn. 16:32). Response to His death therefore involves a scattering, in order for each man to individuate; and then a coming together in the profoundest unity of the cosmos. We see this in the experience of Paul, who spent three years in the wilderness after his conversion, out of contact with the big name brethren of the time; and then became the most passionate preacher of unity in Christ.

11:53 *So from that day forward, they took advice how they might put him to death-* AV "Took counsel together". The element of 'together' is implied in the Greek. But Jn. 18:14 uses the same word to say that "Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people". One individual gave the advice or 'counsel', but the decision was formally taken by a committee under his influence. This is how apparent 'democracy' so often works in religious groups; the voice of a dominant individual speaks through an appearance of group speak, supposed peer review and joint 'decision making'. Comparing the two passages, it would seem that Caiaphas indeed played a hugely significant role in the Lord's death. This would therefore justify him being called the "prince of this world" and the significant adversary / satan who is associated with the Lord's death.

11:54 *Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but departed from there into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there he stayed with the disciples-* The Lord gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him. We therefore see Him here consciously acting in a way which took control over the timing of His death.

*Ephraim-* "Fruitful". The blessing on Ephraim spoke clearly of the acceptance of Gentiles through him: "The younger brother shall be greater, and his seed shall become the fullness of Gentiles" (Gen. 48:19 Heb., cp. Rom. 11:25). This is in the context of :52, which speaks of how Gentiles also would be gathered together by the Lord's death.

11:55 *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand; and many from the countryside went to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover-* This would have included the Lord's family from Nazareth. The Jewish ritual of purifying oneself before Passover is alluded to by the requirement to 'examine ourselves' before breaking bread, the Christian equivalent of the Passover feast. Again, Passover is no longer a feast "of Yahweh", but "of the Jews". They had hijacked God's law and turned it into their own religion.

11:56 *They looked for Jesus, and spoke one with another, as they stood in the temple: What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?-* Every male should come to the Passover; so they wondered whether He would break the Law because He was clearly going to be arrested and

maybe killed. They were apparently assuming the Lord would enter the temple, and so they were watching as to whether He would enter it.

11:57 *Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, they were to inform them, so that they might arrest him-* Yet, remarkably enough, nobody did perform such a betrayal. Except one of those in the Lord's very inner circle... The fact nobody else apparently did so is surely a reflection of how the Lord was deeply respected- up until the moment of His refusal to give people the Kingdom now.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead-* The "therefore" is significant. We are each called to witness; and there is no way out. That witness flows out of our deeply personal experiences. If we won't make that witness, then God will work in our lives to bring us to a position where we have no choice but to do so. This was how the Lord worked with the family of Lazarus. The Jews had commanded "that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it" (Jn. 11:57). And "Jesus *therefore...* came to Bethany" (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that "much people of the Jews learned that he was there" (Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. *Therefore* Jesus came to Mary and Martha's home. Why? So that they could no longer keep secret their faith in Him. The meal they put on was not just female, standard hospitality. It was, in this context, a brave public declaration of their identification with this wanted man. And the way in the last week of His life the Lord chose to sleep there each night was surely done for the same reason: to lead them to open identity with His cause and His cross. "Much people therefore of the Jews knew that he was there" (Jn. 12:9). And so with us, the Lord brings about circumstances so that our light can no longer remain under a bucket.

The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14

speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

The similarities between the anointing record in Lk. 7 and those of Jn. 12 etc. require an explanation. Could it not be that the Gospels are showing us that the intensity of Mary's faith and love at first conversion was held by her until the end of the Lord's ministry? We need to ask ourselves whether the fire of first love for Him has grown weak; whether over the years we would do the same things for Him, feel the same way about Him, cry the same tears over Him... or have the years worn our idealism away?

12:2 *So they made him supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat and ate with him-* Given the obsession of Martha with serving in an earlier incident (Lk. 10:40), we can assume she continued

doing what she liked doing, but with a more spiritual attitude than before. The Gospels several times use eating as a proof of resurrection; perhaps to prepare us for the idea of eating at the Lord's table in celebration of His resurrection. His ongoing eating with us at the communion service is likewise a testament to His resurrection.

12:3 *Then Mary-* RV "Mary therefore". In gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus, "Mary therefore" anointed the Lord 'for his burial'. It was as if she perceived that the resurrection of Lazarus was only possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus which was soon to come. But after the Lord's death, her faith in His resurrection seems to have taken a nose dive. Mary's response to 'the gardener' reveals that despite it being the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene wasn't apparently open to the possibility that the Lord had risen. Yet surely she had heard Him specifically, categorically predict His death and resurrection. One can only conclude that she was so consumed by the feelings of the moment that she like us failed to make that crucial translation of knowledge into felt and real faith. As with us as we sit through Bible studies and revel in our own perception of Scripture, her so fine and correct understanding was suddenly without power when reality called.

*Took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair-* Peter's letters are packed with allusions back to the Gospels. When he writes that to us, the Lord Jesus should be "precious" (1 Pet. 2:7), he surely has in mind how Mary had anointed the Lord with her "very precious ointment" (Jn. 12:3 RV). He bids us to be like Mary, to perceive "the preciousness" (RV) of Jesus, and to respond by giving up our most precious things, mentally or materially, in our worshipful response to Him.

The question arises as to why Mary anointed the Lord's feet, when anointing is nearly always of the head. The only time the foot of anything was anointed was in Ex. 40:11, when the pedestal / "foot" of the laver was anointed in order to consecrate it. This pedestal was made from the brass mirrors donated by repentant prostitutes (Ex. 38:8 = 1 Sam. 2:22). In this there is the connection. Mary the repentant whore wanted to likewise donate way she had to the true tabernacle and laver, which she perceived to be the Lord Jesus. Her equivalent of brass mirrors was her pound of spikenard. And it could be that she had been baptized at her conversion, and saw the Lord as her laver. And this was her response- to pour all her wealth into Him. She anointed him for His death- for she perceived that it was through death that the Lord would fulfil all the OT types of the laver etc.

*And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil-* Yet every one of the 11 OT references to a house being filled refers to the temple being filled with the Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:3,4; 43:5; 44:4). John's sensitive use of language is

surely seeking to draw a parallel. She was glorifying the Name by her gift, senseless as it may have seemed in the eyes of less spiritual people. There is a definite connection between spikenard and what incense was made from. What may seem to have no practical achievement in the eyes of men can truly be a sweet smelling savour to God. We need to remember this at times in bearing with our brethren's efforts for Him. To judge them in a utilitarian way is to fall into the same error as the disciples did. The efforts of others are described later in the NT in the same language- the same word for "odour" occurs in Phil. 4:18 to describe the labour of believers which is "well pleasing to God". The way Mary anoints the Lord with spikenard is surely to be connected with how earlier she had washed His feet with her tears. The spikenard was "precious" (Jn. 12:3 RV), not only in its value materially, but in the way Mary used it in some kind of parallel to her tears. She perceived the preciousness of her tears, her repentance, her grateful love for her Lord. And any tears we may shed in gratitude of forgiveness are likewise so precious in His sight

*12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one that would betray him, said-* The other Gospels say that it was some of the disciples who said this. The disaffection of one disciple to this day so easily influences others, to the point that their words are effectively the words of the disaffected, bitter individual who stands behind them.

*12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?-* This kind of secular approach to spiritual devotion is of the flesh and not the Spirit. What is done with money and how it is done is all on one level; the essence is of devotion to the Lord. A denarius was the penny paid for a day's hard work (Mt. 20:2). The figure of 300 denarii may therefore be a round figure referring to the money earned in a year. The implication is that the disciples had a common fund from which they donated to the poor; such almsgiving was common in first century Palestine, and for the Lord to have pointedly not given alms would have been controversial. We note that He had the power to totally heal the sick, provide food and transform the material lives of people. But He used a great economy of miracle. He must have allowed this small scale poor fund to continue for the sake of developing the attitudes of the donors amongst His disciples- rather than for the sake of what the donations would achieve. There are many principles which arise out of reflection on these things, living as we do in a grossly unequal world.

*12:6 Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it-* The Lord evidently knew how Judas was taking money out of the bag. As the Son of God He was an intellectual beyond compare, and sensitive and perceptive beyond our imagination. And He noticed it; and yet said nothing. He was seeking to save Judas and He



saw that to just kick up a fuss about evident weakness wasn't the way. If only many of our brethren would show a like discernment. As noted on :5, the whole existence of this Poor Fund was not because it was effective in alleviating human need [the Lord had the power to achieve that by direct intervention]- but in order to develop the attitudes and devotions of the disciples.

Judas' lack of "care" for the poor uses the same word as recently used in 10:13 about the false shepherds who cared not the flock. So the point is being made that the Lord's disciples were now the shepherds of the new Israel- but there was a bad shepherd amongst them as there had been amongst Israel of old. And those poor beggars, requiring alms, were the Lord's "flock".

12:7- see on Mk. 14:53.

*Jesus replied: Leave her alone* - This translates a Greek phrase which essentially means 'to forgive', and it is usually translated like this. The Lord isn't just saying 'leave off her, let her be as she is'; He is saying 'Let her be forgiven', which is tantamount to saying 'let her express her gratitude as she wants'. The root for her gratitude was her sense of forgiveness. This heightens the connection between Mary and the woman in the city who was a sinner of Lk. 7.

*She intended to keep it for the day of my burial-* But Mary's beloved brother Lazarus had only recently died, and been embalmed. Yet she had not used her precious possession for that, but rather kept it for her Lord's burial. Mary Magdalene's understanding of the Lord went far beyond that of anyone else at the time. The record of Mary after the crucifixion has many links back to the woman of Luke 7. She *came to the sepulchre*, to wash the dead body with her tears, for she *went to the grave, to weep there*, and to *anoint it with the ointment* she had prepared. It's as if in her anointing of the Lord she really did see forward to His death and burial. And yet her initial motivation in doing it all was gratitude for what He had done for her through enabling her forgiveness. The Lord's power to forgive was ultimately due to His death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 5:31; Lk. 24:46,47). Yet Mary believed there and then that all this would happen, and thus she believed in His forgiveness. Her second anointing of the Lord has within it the implication that she somehow perceived that her adoration was motivated on account of the death that He was to die. "It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial" (Jn. 12:7 New Century Version). The RV of Jn. 12:7 gives another suggestion: "Jesus therefore said [in response to Judas' suggestion she sell the ointment and give him the money to distribute to the poor], Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying". Mary Magdalene had kept the precious ointment to anoint Jesus with when He died; and yet Judas was pressurizing her to sell it. And yet she used at

least some of it then. This would indicate that she perceived Him as good as dead; she alone it seems perceived the frequent implications in His teaching that He was living out an ongoing death. She fully intended to pour the ointment on His dead body, but she did it ahead of time because she wanted Him to know right then that she understood, and that she loved Him.

The argument of Judas for efficiency, central administration etc. is contrasted most unfavourably with her personal, simple and deeply felt emotional response to the Lord's death. She did it at supper time (Jn. 12:2). In Jewish culture of the time, a meal together had religious significance. It could be that she so dwelt upon the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6 that she perceived the broken bread of the meal to be symbolic and prophetic of His upcoming death. Her generosity and totality of response to His death was therefore inspired by what we would call a breaking of bread, which made real to her yet once again the endless implications of His self-sacrifice.

12:8 *The poor you have always with you, but me you do not have always-* We note the Lord's grace and wisdom in not confronting Judas about his petty theft. Rather did the Lord focus upon protecting the dignity of Mary. His allusion is clearly to Dt. 15:11: "For the poor will never cease out of the land, therefore I command you, saying, You must surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and to your poor". The context of this statement is that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poor in the land (Dt. 15:4), but because of their disobedience which Moses foresaw, there were commandments about being generous to the poor. So perhaps there was a hidden message here to Judas, if he perceived it. If he were to be obedient, then he would not be poor, he would be blessed, and there would be no need for petty theft. The Dt. 15 passage also has the context of urging generosity to the poor, and not in any way seeking to get around it, nor begrudging any gift to them: "You must surely give to him, and your heart must not be grieved when you give to him" (Dt. 15:10). This was precisely what had happened- Judas and all the disciples were grieved at Mary's generosity. But clearly "the poor" was Jesus Himself personally. We see here not only an insight into the Lord's personal poverty, but also into how He perceived Himself as the poor in spirit. For Biblically, "the poor" refers not simply to the financially hard up, but to the depressed, the poor in spirit. The Messianic Psalms feature David describing himself as the "poor man", although the context of many of them doesn't refer to material poverty but to David's poverty of spirit at the time. We see therefore that the Lord of the universe can totally identify with the feelings of "the poor". Though He was rich, He made Himself a pauper for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9 Gk.). That doesn't seem true in financial terms, for the Lord was never at any point financially rich (although one can speculate as to what happened to the gifts of the

magi), but rather is the reference to the Lord's poverty of spirit and depression.

*12:9 The common people of the Jews learned that he was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead-* This confirms the contrast in John between "the Jews", referring to the Jewish leadership, and "the common people". Another possibility is that John uses it specifically for those who were inhabitants of Jerusalem. Perhaps it was the literal smell of the powerful perfume which brought the people to the knowledge of the Lord's presence in that home. The resurrected Lazarus would have been a hugely powerful exhibit in favour of the Lord's power and message of life in Him.

*12:10 But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death-* This is the classic response of those who refuse to capitulate; they try to destroy or nullify the evidence and all the inconvenient truths. Those who don't wish to believe in the Father and Son are full of such desperation. Jealousy and fear of losing position, converts and vested interest leads to a crazed attempt to denigrate and deny the validity of another's faith or witness. Lazarus had done nothing wrong- he was simply the subject of a resurrection. The fact the highest leaders of Judaism wanted to give him a death sentence simply reflects how corrupt they were.

12:11- see on Jn. 12:42.

*Because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus-* The idea of the Greek is that they 'withdrew'; understanding "the Jews" as the Jewish leadership, there is no evidence they actually did this at this stage, but rather that they secretly believed. If as suggested on :9, "the Jews" refers to the Jerusalem Jews; then these people would have been amongst those who came out openly for the Lord at Pentecost. Perhaps here we see how inspiration records the weak faith and commitment of others in generous, positive terms (e.g. the disciples 'sleeping for sorrow'). The tragedy is that the Jewish leadership condemned the Lord to death when 'many' of them believed in Him. This is a classic feature of human beings once they get into groupings together; a group position is upheld even when the majority are against it, and even when the position is the most terrible of all, in this case, the killing of God's Son. Again we note how the Lord had thought that some from "the crowd" would be converted (see on 11:42), when what happened was the opposite; the crowd, of whom we read in 12:12 (RV and some manuscripts "*the crowd*"), were those who violently turned against Him, and the converts were made from within the Jewish leadership. The Lord was human, and misplaced hopes and inaccurate

suppositions of the immediate future are all part of being human.

*Many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus-* The chief priests wanted Lazarus put to death simply because “many of the Jews went away” from the synagogue because of him, and it would have meant the tithes were lost or at least put in jeopardy. And this cannot be ruled out as a major factor why they wanted Jesus out of the way too, and why they persecuted the early church so fiercely, seeing that thousands of tithe-paying members were being turned against them.

*12:12 The next day, a great crowd that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem-* On the triumphal entry, see on Mt. 21:1-8. John's chronology suggests that the triumphal entry took place once there were gathered together a mass of people who were pro-Jesus, because of the witness made by the resurrection of Lazarus. I have repeatedly emphasized that events did not overtake the Lord; He used His own planning and awareness of human psychology, as well as the Father's direct power, to orchestrate things so that He gave His life precisely when and how He did. It was not taken from Him, He laid it down (see on 10:17,18). So it could be that the Lord raised Lazarus, knowing that such a spectacular miracle would provoke support for Him and also the desire to kill Him at all costs. And He orchestrated the triumphal entry in order for it to be a total come down and dashing of Messianic expectation for all who apparently supported Him, so that they would turn against Him and empower the Jews to crucify Him.

*12:13 Took the branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, and cried out: Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!-* It has been so often pointed out that the crowd who welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna!” were the very people who days later were screaming “Crucify him!”. It's been suggested that the crowds were comprised of two different groups; those who shouted “Hosanna!” were those who had come up from Galilee, and the Jerusalem crowd shouted “Crucify Him!”. But Jn. 12:13 and Jn. 19:14,15 seem to encourage us to make a connection between the two scenes, for “the crowd” *shouts* both times- firstly “Hosanna!”, and then “Crucify Him!”. Personally I am convinced it was the same basic crowd. They were a classic witness to the fickleness of human loyalty to God's Son. And remember that only a few months after Jerusalem slew Him, the leaders of the Jews feared that “the people” would have stoned them if they acted too roughly with the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:26). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when “there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1). But this leads to questions, questions which aren't answered by a simple acceptance of humanity's fickleness. Why this *anger* with Jesus, a man who truly went about doing good, caring for little children, impressing others with the

evident congruity between His words and His person? How could it have happened that the anger of His people was so focused against Him, leading them to prefer a murderer as against a Man who clearly came to give life, and that more abundantly...?

*Branches of palm trees-* They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm fronds. These were a symbol of Jewish nationalism- hence the palm appeared on the coins of the Second Revolt (AD 132-135). Back in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple altar, palms were brought to the temple (2 Macc. 10:7); and Simon Maccabeus led the Jews back into Jerusalem with palm fronds in 1 Macc. 13:51. The crowd were therefore welcoming Jesus, expecting Him to announce His Messianic Kingdom there and then. The "Hosanna!" of Jn. 12:13 was used in addressing kings in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It meant literally "Save *now!*". They wanted a Kingdom there and then. His whole interpretation of the Kingdom, extensively and so patiently delivered for over three years, had simply failed to register with them. It seems that only after the crowd had started doing this, that the Lord consciously dashed their expectations by sitting on a donkey.

12:14 *And Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat upon it- as it is written-* The Lord sat upon the donkey, to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's King would come to them "humble, and riding upon a donkey"- not a warhorse. And, moreover, Zechariah says that He would come commanding peace [and not bloodlust] *to the Gentiles*, with a world-wide dominion from sea to sea, not merely in Palestine. Those who perceived the Lord's allusion to Zechariah 9 would have realized this was what His acted parable was trying to tell them- the Lord Jesus was not out to destroy Rome but to bring peace to them as well as all the Gentile world. A humble, lowly king was a paradox which they could not comprehend. A king, especially the Messianic King of Israel, had to be proud and war-like. The crowd must have been so terribly disappointed. He purposefully abased Himself and sat upon a donkey. This Jesus whom they had liked and loved and hoped in, turned out to totally and fundamentally *not* be the person they thought He was- despite Him so patiently seeking to show them who He really was for so long. He had become an image in their own minds, of their own creation, convenient to their own agendas- and when the truth dawned on them, that He was *not* that person, their anger against Him knew no bounds. The Russian atheist Maxim Gorky commented, in terrible language but with much truth in it, that man has created God in his own image and after his own likeness. And for so many, this is indeed the case. The image of Jesus which the crowds had was only partially based on who He really was. Some things they understood right, but very much they didn't. And they turned away in disgust and anger when they realized how deeply and basically they had misunderstood Him. They angrily commented: "Who is this son of

man?" (Jn. 12:34). In that context, Jesus had not said a word about being "son of man". But they were effectively saying: 'What sort of Messiah / son of man figure is this? We thought you were the son-of-man Messiah, who would deliver us right now. Clearly you're not the type of Messiah / Christ we thought you were'. All this would explain perfectly why the awful torture and mocking of Jesus in His time of dying was based around His claims to be a King. The crown of thorns, the mock-royal robe, the 'sceptre' put in His hand, then taken away and used to beat Him with, the mocking title over His body "This is the King of the Jews", the anger of the Jewish leaders about this even being written as it was, the jeers of the crowd about this "King"- all this reflects the extent of anger there was with the nature of His 'Kingship'. All the parables and teaching about the true nature of His Kingship / Kingdom had been totally ignored. The Lord had told them plainly enough. But it hadn't penetrated at all... The Lord was not only misunderstood by the crowds, but His very being amongst men had provoked in them a crisis of conscience; and their response was to repress that conscience. As many others have done and do to this day, they had shifted their discontent onto an innocent victim, artificially creating a culprit and stirring up hatred against him. Their angry turning against Him was therefore a direct outcome of the way He had touched their consciences. Such tragic misunderstanding of persons occurs all the time, to varying intensities. One frequently finds married couples with such anger against each other that it seems hard for an outsider to appreciate how two such nice people could be so angry with each other. The source of that anger is often traceable to a misunderstanding of each other during courtship. Each party built up an idealized or simply incorrect image of the other; and once they really got to know the other, in the humdrum of daily life, there was a great release of anger- that the spouse was not the person the other partner had imaged. The goodness of who they really goes unperceived and is readily discounted- simply because they don't live up to the mistaken image which the spouse had of them in other areas.

12:15 *Fear not, daughter of Zion! Look, your King comes, sitting on an donkey's colt-* The colt would not have been broken in; it would have careered all over the place in a most unseemly way. It would be like a president elect driving through the streets of his capital city in an old, backfiring two door economy car- rather than a brand new Mercedes. But this humility was the special sign that was to be looked for ["Look...!"]. It was the sign that the faithful remnant ["the daughter of Zion"] would take encouragement from. Those who looked only for immediate Messianic blessing would be bitterly disappointed and let down; but that was the Lord's design.

12:16- see on Jn. 14:29.

*These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified-* This is associated in John with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:39). The suggestion is surely that the Holy Spirit enabled them to understand the significance of events during the Lord's ministry. The Comforter was promised to enable them to do this, and in this sense the Comforter brought about the Lord's glorification (Jn. 16:14; Acts 3:13). In a sense, the Lord was glorified in the events of the cross (Jn. 13:31,32 "Now is the Son of Man glorified"). And yet the perception of that glory was only achieved by the disciples some time later.

*Then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him-* The Comforter brought things to their attention and helped them see the significance and meaning in the Lord's words and actions. For it was after all His personal presence in the hearts of the disciples. That same power and gift of the Spirit is for all time, and can have the same effect upon us.

The purpose of prophecy such as Zechariah 9 is that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear, not that we shall be able to predict the future:

- The disciples did not expect the Lord Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16).

- "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (Jn. 14:29).

- Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22).

12:17 *The crowd that was with him, when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, made testimony-* As noted on :12, I would say that the Lord psychologically orchestrated the flow of events which would lead to His death. "The crowd" who were the basis of His triumphal entry, who were stirred up in wanting Him to "save now" ["Hosanna!"], were the crowd who had been motivated by their experience of Lazarus' amazing resurrection. It was their manic enthusiasm which led the Jews to panic and seek to murder the Lord at all costs. When their expectations were dashed by the whole style of the triumphal entry, this same crowd then turned violently and disappointedly against the Lord, and this fitted in perfectly with the Jewish plot to kill the Lord without problems from the masses. Yet the whole thing was orchestrated by the Lord- for He gave His life, when and how He wished; it was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:18 *For this cause also the crowd went and met him, for they heard that he had done this miracle-* As noted on :17, John is stressing that the crowd so manic for the Lord to "save now!", who welcomed Him into Jerusalem, was the crowd motivated by the resurrection of Lazarus. This was all planned by the Lord; He was winding them up to a peak of popularist support for Him, and then through the triumphal entry being the very opposite of their hopes, in fact a mocking of traditional Messianic expectation... He was setting them up to then turn against Him. See on :12 and :17.

12:19 *The Pharisees complained to one another: You see that you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him-* As noted on :12 and :17,18, the Lord intended His miracle to have this effect. He intended the Jewish world to momentarily turn after Him whilst their leadership became the more committed to murdering Him at all costs; so that if He then disappointed the masses of the Jewish world, then His demise would be brought about. In all this we see the Lord scheming to give His life for us, because He loved us. It was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:20 *Now there were certain Greeks among those that went to worship at the feast-* These were presumably proselytes, like the Ethiopian eunuch, who had travelled to Jerusalem in order to keep Passover as far as they could. Perhaps the Ethiopian eunuch was present at this time amongst them. This would explain why Philip was sent to baptize him, for this group approached Philip at this time (:21).

12:21 *These went to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him: Sir, can we see Jesus?-* The Gentiles perhaps approached Philip because he was known to be from an area which was mocked as being largely Gentile. When men asked "We would see Jesus" (AV), He responded by giving a prophecy of His death (Jn. 12:21)- just as the broken bread *is* Him; His death is the essence of Him. To know Him crucified was and is to know Him. He continues by saying that if a man lost his life for Him, then that man would be with Jesus where He is. Those who want to know where Jesus is, to see Him, have to die His death (Jn. 12:25,26). The fact the disciples did *not* appreciate His death meant, therefore, that they didn't really appreciate *Him*. And they so openly stress this in their Gospels.

12:22 *Philip went and told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus-* Andrew and Philip occur together in Jn. 1:45; 6:7,8; Mk. 3:18. Such friendship between two of a group of twelve is normal, and is another evidence that the Gospel records are true to reality accounts.

12:23- see on Rev. 7:9.



*Jesus told them: The hour comes that the Son of Man should be glorified-* It can be inferred from :23 that the Lord perceived that His hour had come to lay down His life when He was told that there were Gentiles who wanted to "see" [Johannine language for 'believe'] Him. It was as if this were the cue for Him to voluntarily lay down His life. The conversion of the whole world was a major reason for the Lord's death; and thus there is the inevitable connection between His death, and the need to take the knowledge and power of that death to the whole planet.

Through John's Gospel, the Lord inspired an awareness that the *essence* of His coming, the day of judgment and the future Kingdom was in fact to be realized within Christian experience right now. John's Gospel brings this out clearly. The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion. In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now. As John Robinson put it, "the Last Assize is being accomplished in every moment of choice and decision... Judgment Day is a dramatized, idealised picture of every day".

The Synoptics record several references to "the day of the Son of Man" as the day of His second coming. But in John, this becomes the time when the Son of Man is glorified- which refers both to His death, and to the subsequent glorification through the giving of the Spirit into the hearts of the believers. For this was the effective 'coming' of the Lord to the believers, as they await His literal return. This is only one of many examples of where the language and events of Matthew, Mark and Luke are alluded to and expressed by John in more spiritual and abstract terms. Here are some examples:

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The Synoptic Gospels	John's Gospel
Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom	Jn. 20:21,23
the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus	Jn. 1: 1-14
The great preaching commission	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV

Lk. 16:31	"If you believe not (Moses') writings, how shall you believe my words?" (Jn. 5:47). This is John's equivalent of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which concluded with the same basic point (Lk. 16:31).
The transfiguration	Whilst there is no account of the transfiguration in John, he repeatedly stresses how the Lord manifested forth His glory and was glorified. For John, the Lord's whole life was in a spiritual sense a form of the transfiguration experience which the synoptics described.
The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in the synoptics becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's 'confession', shortly before Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.	In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas' confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?
The need for water baptism The account of the breaking of bread	Jn. 3:3-5 John's version is in John 6:48-58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It

<p>The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.</p> <p>The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.</p>	<p>seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.</p> <p>John expresses this in more abstract language: "The word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).</p> <p>John's Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but "became flesh" when He was born of Mary.</p>
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The transfiguration is recorded in the synoptics, and their records include the idea that it happened "after six days" (Mk. 9:2). John speaks of the same theme of Christ manifesting God's glory, but he sees it as happening not just once at the transfiguration, but throughout the Lord's ministry and above all in His death. Interestingly, John's record also has the idea of the Lord manifesting the Father's glory after six days. The Gospel opens by describing events on four successive days (Jn. 1:19,29,35,43), and then we read that "the third day" [i.e. six or seven days after the story has begun], Jesus "manifested his glory" (Jn. 2:1,11). Again in Jn. 7:37, it was on the last great day of the feast of Tabernacles, i.e. on the 7th day, that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself. Perhaps too we are to pay attention to the six days mentioned in Jn. 12:1, after which the Lord was crucified and manifested the Father's glory.

12:24- see on Mk. 14:35.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: Except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* - Gk. 'The grain'. Vine observes that this was spoken to some Greeks (:20); it was "addressed to Greeks, familiar with the Eleusinian mysteries... the risen Dionysus in the freshness of his second life was conducted from Athens to Eleusis in joyful procession. An ear of corn, plucked in solemn silence, was exhibited to the initiated as the object of mystical contemplation, as the symbol of the god, prematurely killed, but, like the ear enclosing the seed-corn, bearing within himself the germ of a second life". Here we have an example of the Lord speaking to people in terms which they could relate to. He of course didn't believe the Eleusinian mysteries were true, just as He didn't believe in demons, but He alludes to their incorrect

ideas in order to realign their thinking towards God's power in Himself. We likewise are to engage with this world in their own terms and language, in order to lead them to the better way.

In the parable of the sower, the Lord likened the preaching of the Gospel to a seed falling onto various types of ground, good, stony, etc. In all the synoptics, the account of the sower parable is recorded at length; and within that parable, the Lord emphasizes this falling of the seed onto the ground. Likewise He likens response to the Gospel message to "a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth... but when it is sown..." (Mk. 4:31,32). But the Lord clearly understood the image of a seed falling into the ground as prophetic of His forthcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:23-25). The connection in His mind is surely clear- the preaching of the Gospel is a form of death and crucifixion, in order to bring forth a harvest in others. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

*It abides alone-* The Lord Jesus died a lonely death. Loneliness is a part of sharing in the crucifixion life. The Lord hinted at the loneliness of the cross in saying that the seed falls into the ground and 'dies' "alone"- but then brings forth much fruit as a result of that alone-ness (Jn. 12:24). The High Priest entered alone into the Most Holy place with the blood of atonement (Heb. 9:7). Any stepping out of the comfort zone is an inevitably lonely experience, just as the crucifixion life of Jesus was the ultimately lonely experience. For nobody else knows exactly how you feel in e.g. turning down that job, giving away those savings, quitting that worldly friendship, quietly selling something...

*It bears much fruit-* He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7:39 to the Holy Spirit being given through the Lord's death (His 'glory'), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in prospect we have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

The fruit brought forth depends upon our freewill bringing forth of that fruit: "I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit [s.w. 12:24], and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:16, as in the parable of the

sower, Mk. 4:8). The more fruit we bring forth, the more His work and death is glorified. And the language in 15:16 of *going* and bearing fruit is surely John's version of the great preaching commission recorded in the Synoptics.

Here the Lord assumes that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should *go* [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit. Likewise the Lord had earlier linked the life of cross carrying with bearing witness to the world around us (Lk. 9:23,26). As His witnesses we bare His cross as well as share His glory. See on Jn. 17:20.

12:25 *He that loves his life*- "Life" translates *psuche*, "soul". This is surely the Gospel of John's equivalent of the parable of the rich fool, who so loved his own soul but lost it: "I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods..." (Lk. 12:19). But here in John we see that the Lord half spoke that parable to Himself; if He refused the cross, He would be loving His own soul, trying to be briefly rich for himself in this world.

*Loses it*- As so often, the Lord was clearly half talking to Himself here. For in the immediate context, it was His life which was to be lost, or could be temporarily kept if He were to refuse the cross. We are right now losing our lives if we love ourselves. The final judgment is likened to a winnowing process. But right now, according to Ps. 139:3 RVmg., God winnows our path [our daily living], all day ("my path") and every evening (at my "lying down"). "The Lord sat as king [in judgment] at the Flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (Ps. 29:10 RV); He is just as much sitting in judgment now as He was at the flood, which is a well-known type of the judgment to come. He speaks of our death in the context of His death. Baptism is a statement that we are prepared to identify with His death as the guiding principle for the rest of our eternal existence.

*He that hates his life in this world, shall keep it to everlasting life*- The Lord carefully doesn't speak of 'losing' life and then receiving it. Instead, He speaks of keeping life and that life becoming everlasting. As He made clear in the events and teaching of the resurrection of Lazarus in Jn. 11,

death for Him was not death. The important thing was the kind of life we now live; for He is often recorded by John as teaching that we can live the eternal life right now. We can live the kind of life we shall eternally live. Note that we 'keep' our current spiritual life eternally; we will eternally be who we are spiritually today. In this lies the paramount and eternal importance of spiritual mindedness and character development.

12:26- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

*If anyone desires to serve me, he must follow me-* Whoever serves [Gk. 'is a deacon of'] the Lord Jesus must follow Him, and the idea of following Him is usually connected with His walk to death on the cross (Jn. 12:26). We are all asked to follow Him, it is all part of being His disciples, and so we are all asked to be 'deacons' in this sense. Our service is of *each other*; to walk away from active involvement because of personality clashes etc. is to walk away from true, cross-carrying Christianity. In unfeigned humility, let us by love serve one another, and in so doing know the spirit of the Lord who served, and thereby share together His exaltation.

I have suggested that John's Gospel record had a missionary intention and background. It was the transcript of how John preached the Gospel to a particular Jewish interest group, and he backed it up by his three letters which are full of allusion to the Gospel. The Greek for "serve" here is elsewhere translated "use the office of a deacon". There could well be a specific localized point being made to the Johannine community of converts- any desiring to be a deacon in the church community must be aware that such service is all about sharing in the spirit of the Lord's cross. Truly, "If anyone serves me [as a deacon, in this initial context], the Father will honour him". Honour is what church servants receive (1 Tim. 5:17)

*He must follow me-* "Follow me" is usually used by the Lord in the context of taking up the cross and following Him. True service is cross-carrying. It cannot be that we serve, truly serve, in order to advance our own egos. It is all too easy to "serve" especially in an ecclesial context without truly carrying the Lord's cross.

*And where I am, there shall also my servant be-* Where He was right then was at a place where He saw so clearly the cross beckoning, and desperately wished there might be another way. When there was not. We can know something of the spirit of His cross. We can be where He was and where He is, in spirit. The life of cross carrying, devotion to the principles of the cross, will lead us to be with Him always wherever He leads us. In John 12:24-26 losing life as the Lord lost His, serving Him, following Him, being "where I am" are all parallel. "I am" can legitimately be read as an allusion to the Yahweh Name, and this was manifested supremely in the Lord's death. The sense is therefore that where "I am"

would be, i.e. on the cross, to there those who follow the Lord will also come.

*If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him*- It makes an interesting exercise to compare all the Lord's references to "My Father" and to "The Father". So much of what He says about His relationship with "My Father" He says about our relationship to "The Father". He was seeking to inculcate an awareness of what He finally states in so many words in Jn. 20:17- that His Father is our Father. His relationship with the Father can be replicated in ours with the same Father, through the spirit of adoption which makes us His dear sons too.

12:27 *Now is my soul disturbed*- The same word used about the Lord's disturbed soul at the death and resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:33). He saw in the death and resurrection of Lazarus a foretaste of His own, hence His groaning in spirit.

*What shall I say?*- This is often read as the Lord meaning: 'Shall I say 'Save Me from this hour?', as if He is going through various options of possible prayer. But He does indeed ask to be saved from the hour. Therefore I see this as Him wondering how to find the right words with which to verbalize His emotions. The language of the Lord's intercession with groanings which cannot be spoken (Rom. 8:26,27) clearly alludes to His groanings at the resurrection of Lazarus and now as He faces His own death. In that very context, Paul says that we [too] know not how to pray as we should (Rom. 8:26). The Lord also was at that place.

*Father, save me from this hour?*- Jesus seems to have prepared His words before praying them. But it appears He decided against praying that. The question mark isn't required by the Greek. The sense is 'save me *out of* this hour', and we read in Heb. 5:7 that the Lord prayed this and was heard because of His groanings in prayer. So this was not just a prayer He contemplated praying. He prayed it, and it was answered in His resurrection.

12:28 *Father, glorify your name*- The Lord Jesus struggled in Gethsemane between "save me..." and "Father, glorify Your name". The glorifying of the Father's Name meant more to him than his personal salvation. Likewise Moses and Paul [in spirit] were prepared to sacrifice their personal salvation for the sake of Yahweh's Name being glorified in the saving of His people (Ex. 32:30-34 cp. Rom. 9:1-3).

When He addressed God as *abba*, 'dad', the Jews would have been scandalized. But this was the experience He had of God as a near at hand, compassionate Father. He purposefully juxtaposed *abba* with the Divine Name which Jews were so paranoid about pronouncing: "Abba, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28). This was nothing short of scandal to

Jewish ears. And we are to pray as the Lord prayed, also using "Abba, father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Seeing it was unheard of at the time for Jews to pray to God using 'Abba', Paul is clearly encouraging us to relate to God and pray to Him as Jesus did (cp. Jn. 20:17). The Lord made a big deal of calling God 'Abba', even forbidding His Jewish followers to use the term about anyone else (Mt. 23:9).

The Lord Jesus prayed out loud: "Father, glorify Your name". A voice came from Heaven saying that God had already done this and would do it again. And the Lord told the listeners that this response came not for His sake, not really as an answer to His prayer, but for their sakes, that in the apparent 'answer' to His words, they might see the power of prayer and the extent of the Father's relationship with the Son (Jn. 12:28-30). But He knew that the prayer had already been answered before it was prayed. And even with us, answers can come not necessarily for the sake of the answer, but to demonstrate other principles. Likewise the Lord asks us to pray for the Kingdom to come, not because this means that a certain number of prayers will change the date, but surely because the process of petition for the Kingdom is for our benefit.

"Father, glorify your name" could have been a request for the whole crucifixion and resurrection event to start there and then. It would only be natural for any genuine human to wish for it to start and be done with. There is good reason to understand that in those wretched hours of crucifixion, God was especially manifested to the world. There was a matchless, never to be surpassed partnership between Father and Son on the cross. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). There the Lord Jesus manifested and declared the Father's Name, His essential character, to the full (Jn. 12:28; 13:31,32; 17:5,6,26). The Lord's references to 'going to the Father' referred to His coming crucifixion. That was where the Father was, on the cross. In the very moment of His death the observing Centurion gasped, twice: "*Truly* this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46). There was something so evidently Godly in that death. God was so near.

"Hallowed be your name" isn't merely an ascription of praise- it's actually a request for God to carry out all the implications of His Name in practice. When we sing praise to God's Name, we ask for it to be glorified- and here is where praise isn't mere painless performance of music. Once we bring the Name of God into it, we're actually asking for action in our lives. Jesus Himself prayed that part of His model prayer- "Father, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28)- and soon afterwards He could comment that in His death, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified" (Jn. 13:31). Thus in the Lord's case, a request to glorify God's Name lead Him ultimately to the cross.



The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. Thus God was "glorified" in the judgment of the disobedient (Ez. 28:22; 39:13), just as much as He is "glorified" in the salvation of His obedient people. God glorified Himself in redeeming Israel, both in saving them out of Babylon, and ultimately in the future. Thus He was glorified in His servant Israel (Is. 44:23; 49:3). There are therefore both times and issues over which the Father is glorified. He was above all glorified in the resurrection of His Son. Each of these 'glorifications' meant that the essential Name / personality of the Father was being manifested and justified. The glory of the Lord Jesus was that of the Father. He was glorified in various ways and at different times within His ministry (e.g. Jn. 11:4); but He was also glorified in His resurrection and exaltation (Jn. 7:39). As the Lord approached the cross, He asked that the Father's Name be glorified. The response from Heaven was that God had already glorified it in Christ, and would do so again (Jn. 12:28). At the last Supper, the Lord could say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (Jn. 13:31). And yet various Scriptures teach that the Son of man was to be glorified in His death, in His resurrection (Acts 3:13), at His ascension, in His priestly mediation for us now (Heb. 5:5), in the praise His body on earth would give Him, in their every victory over sin, in every convert made (Acts 13:48; 2 Thess. 3:1), in every answered prayer (Jn. 14:13), and especially at His return (2 Thess. 1:10)... So the glorification of the Lord Jesus wasn't solely associated with His resurrection, and therefore it wasn't solely associated with His nature being changed or His receiving a new body. In each of these events, and at each of these times, the Name / glory / personality of the Father is being manifested, justified and articulated.

*I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again-* The Name was glorified in the Lord's perfect life, and would be supremely in His death. There, in the nakedness, blood and spittle of the cross, the Name of God was declared. And yet the Name is glorified in that the characteristics of God are declared in the willing response of people ("Who shall not fear You and glorify Your Name?", Rev. 15:4 s.w.). But here, God speaks of how He will glorify His Name; the revealing of His characteristics in people is not only over to them to achieve; God through the Spirit will do His part in bringing this about.

12:29 *The crowd that stood by and heard it-* They heard the "voice" from Heaven (:28). Significantly, Jn. 3:29 has spoken of John the Baptist as 'standing and hearing' [same Greek words] the Lord's voice. The voice came for their sakes (:30), so we are led to imagine this crowd as containing believers, perhaps prepared by John the Baptist's preaching.

"The crowd" had heard God's voice; to turn away from His Son was to totally deny His personal appeal to them. And yet this "crowd" were the very group who soon were to turn against the Lord and cry for His crucifixion, because their expectations of Messiah had been dashed.

*Said that it had thundered. Others said an angel had spoken to him-* This is all the language of Old Testament theophany, especially to Moses. The Lord is clearly being established as greater than Moses, and they are being called to be a new Israel obedient to a new covenant.

12:30 *Jesus responded: This voice has not come for my sake, but for your sakes-* To hear the actual voice of His Father might seem the ultimate encouragement to the Lord. After all the years of abstraction, of praying to the Father and reading His voice in His written word... to finally hear His actual voice would seem to be a case of faith gloriously and triumphantly turned to sight. But the Lord emphasizes that hearing the Father's actual voice was not for His sake. It did not as it were encourage Him. We are reminded of Elisha being so sure there were Angels surrounding him that he asked for only the eyes of his servant to be opened to behold them (2 Kings 6:17). And so we are set up for the momentous teaching about the Comforter which is to come in chapters 14-16. Physicalities like seeing or hearing a person are on a very low level. The presence of the Comforter in our hearts will actually be more significant than having the Lord's literal presence. And likewise, the manifestation of the Father in the Son is far more than hearing His literal, physical voice. This is a huge challenge to us. To read the Bible and have the Spirit operative in our hearts, and the Lord's presence there, as of the word made flesh, is *more than* actually hearing the voice of God almighty.

12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world-* The coming of the voice was to encourage that crowd that the Lord was indeed of God, and that the Jewish world which had such a pull on them [against Him] was actually under judgment, just as He had proclaimed. The Lord plainly described His death as "the judgment of this world". Because there was "no judgment" in the ultimate sense as there was no justice, therefore the Lord Jesus died on the cross (Is. 59:15,16). This was the ultimate judgment of this world. There the Lord God, through His Son, acted as judge in condemning sin (Rom. 8:3).

*Now shall the prince of this world be cast out-*

The "prince of this world" is described as being "cast out", coming to the Lord Jesus, having no part in Him and being "judged", all during the last few hours before Christ's death (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). All these descriptions seem to fit the Jewish system as represented by the Law, Moses, Caiaphas the High Priest, Judas and the Jews wanting to kill Jesus, and Judas. Note that "the prince of this world" refers to Roman and

Jewish governors in 1 Cor. 2:6,8. At the Lord's death the Mosaic system was done away with (Col. 2:14–17); the "bondwoman", representing the Law in the allegory, was "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). "The prince of this world" is described, in the very same words, as being "cast out" (Jn. 12:31).

### **Caiaphas?**

Wycliffe in archaic English renders Mt. 26:3: "Then the princes of priests and the elder men of the people were gathered into the hall of the prince of priests, that was said Caiaphas". The "world" in John's Gospel refers primarily to the Jewish world; its "prince" can either be a personification of it, or a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas' equivalent name in Hebrew could suggest 'cast out'; his rending of his priestly clothes at Christ's trial declared him "cast out" of the priesthood (see Lev. 10:6; 21:10). "This world" and its "prince" are treated in parallel by John (12:31 cp. 16:11) – just as Jesus, the prince of the Kingdom, can be called therefore "the Kingdom" (Lk. 17:21). Colossians 2:15 describes Christ's ending of the Law on the cross as "spoiling principalities and powers" – the "prince" of the Jewish world being "cast out" (a similar idea in Greek to "spoiling") would then parallel this. The Jews "caught" Jesus and cast Him out of the vineyard (Mt. 21:39) – but in doing so, they themselves were cast out of the vineyard and "spoiled" by Jesus (Col. 2:15).

If indeed "the prince of this world" is a reference to Caiaphas, then we have to face the fact that this individual is being singled out by the Lord for very special condemnation, as the very embodiment of 'Satan', sin and its desires, all that was then in opposition to God. This is confirmed by the Lord's comment to Pilate that "he that delivered me unto you has the greatest sin" (Jn. 19:11 Gk. – "greater" in the AV is translated "greatest" in 1 Cor. 13:13; Mk. 9:34; Mt. 13:32; 18:1,4; 23:11; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26). It was Caiaphas and the Jews who "delivered" Jesus to Pilate to execute (Mt. 27:2,18; Jn. 18:30,35 s.w.). But the Lord speaks as if one person amongst them in particular had delivered Him to Pilate – and that specific individual was Caiaphas. If Caiaphas had the "greatest sin" in the crucifixion of God's son, we can understand how he is singled out by the Lord Jesus for such description as the "prince of this world". A number of expositors have interpreted "the Devil... that had the power of death" in Heb. 2:14–17 as an allusion to Caiaphas.

### **Judas and "The prince of this world"**

There are points of association between "the prince of this world" and Judas; I suggest, because Judas was the agent of Caiaphas and the Jewish world. After Judas left the upper room we get the impression that Jesus started to talk more earnestly and intensely. Immediately after Judas went out Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified... Little

children, yet a little while I am with you... Hereafter I will not talk much (longer) with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Jn. 13:31,33; 14:30). Because He knew Judas would soon return with his men, Christ wanted to give the disciples as much instruction as possible in the time that remained. This would explain the extraordinary intensity of meaning behind the language used in John 14–17. After He finished, "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, *cometh*..." (Jn. 18:3); "The prince of this world *cometh*", Jesus had prophesied, epitomized in the person and attitude of Judas. Christ had told the disciples that "the prince" "hath nothing (cp. no part) in Me" (Jn. 14:30). Not until Judas appeared with the men would the disciples have realized that he was the betrayer (see Jn.18:3–5). Jesus knew this would come as a shock to them, and would lead them to question whether they themselves were in Christ; therefore He warned them that Judas, as a manifestation of "the prince of this world", had no part in Him any longer. For "the Devil" of the Jewish authorities and system, perhaps Caiaphas personally, had put into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2). The whole Jewish leadership were the "betrayers" of Jesus (Acts 7:52) in that Judas, the one singular betrayer, was the epitome of the Jewish system and the agent of Caiaphas. The prince having nothing in Christ suggests a reference to Daniel 9:26: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing (A.V. margin – i.e. have no part): and the people of the prince that shall come (the Romans) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". Thus it was the Jewish world as well as Judas which had nothing in Messiah, and the system they represented was to be destroyed by another (Roman) "prince that shall come" to replace the (Jewish) "prince of this world". The occurrence of the phrase "prince" and the idea of having nothing in Messiah in both Daniel 9:26 and John 14:30 suggest there must be a connection of this nature.

Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus because he was bought out and thus controlled by the Jewish 'Satan'. The fact that Judas was "one of the twelve" as he sat at the last supper is emphasized by all the Gospel writers – the phrase occurs in Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:47 and John 13:21. Thus later Peter reflected: "he was numbered with us (cp. "one of the twelve"), and had (once) obtained *part* of this ministry" (Acts 1:17), alluding back to Christ's statement that "the prince of this world" ultimately had *no* part in Him. Similarly 1 John 2:19 probably alludes to Judas as a type of all who return to the world: "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (cp. "Judas, one of the twelve"). Judas is described as a Devil (Jn. 6:70), and his leaving the room may have connected in the Lord's mind with "the prince of this world" being cast out. Those who "went out from us" in 1 John 2:19 were primarily those who left the Jewish ecclesias (to whom John was largely writing) to return to Judaism, and they who left were epitomized by Judas. 2 Peter 2:13,15 equates the Judaizers within the ecclesias with Balaam "who loved the

wages of unrighteousness". The only other time this latter phrase occurs is in Acts 1:18 concerning Judas.

### **"Cast out"**

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins; thus apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10).

"Cast out" in the Old Testament at times refers to Israel being cast out of the land for their disobedience (cp. Lk. 19:45). This was what was to happen to the first century Jews. The Law itself was to be "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). The idea of being cast out recalls the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord commented concerning the end of the Mosaic system: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (Jn. 8:35). The description of apostate Israel as being "cast out in the open field" with none to pity them except God must have some reference to Ishmael (Ez. 16:5). Galatians 4:29-30 specifically connects the Law with Hagar, and the source of this passage in Isaiah 54:1-7 concerning the calling again of a forsaken young wife who had more children than the married wife has similarities with Hagar's return to Abraham in Genesis 16. After Hagar's final rejection in Genesis 21, she wandered through the Paran wilderness carrying Ishmael – as Israel was carried by God through the same wilderness. The miraculous provision of water for Israel in this place is a further similarity, as is Ishmael's name, which means 'God heard the cry' – as He did of His people in Egypt. Thus Hagar and Ishmael represent apostate Israel, and both of them were "cast out". Romans 9:6-8 provides more confirmation: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel... but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God". Paul's reminder that the seed was to be traced through Isaac, and that the apostate Israel of the first century were not the true Israel of God but the children of the flesh, leads us to identify them with Ishmael, the prototype child of the flesh. In the same way, Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12).

12:32- see on Jn. 3:14-21; 19:13.

*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself-* The Lord's lifting up on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah's prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection

between the Lord's lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment. See on Jn. 19:37.

The Lord foresaw that if He were lifted up, He would *thereby* draw all men [men of all types, of all nations and languages] unto Him in truth (Jn. 12:32). And a brief reflection upon the effect of the cross in human lives will reveal that this has indeed been the case. The cross was an instrument of torture; yet it inspires men to write hymns of praise about it [e.g. "When I survey the wondrous cross..."]. Men have never written hymns of praise to the guillotine or hangman's rope. Nor have men made small relics of an electric chair and glanced towards them for inspiration at hard times.

*From the earth*- Gk. *out of* the earth. The reference is not only to the lifting up in crucifixion, but to the lifting up in resurrection and then ascension glory.

*All men*- "All men" would be drawn together unto the crucified Christ (Jn. 12:32). There is a theme in John's Gospel, that there was disunity amongst the Jews whenever they rejected the message of Christ crucified (7:43; 9:16; 10:19- which implies this was often the case). Conversely, acceptance of His atonement leads to unity. The crucified Son of Man must be lifted up by our preaching before the eyes of all, so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (Jn. 3:14,15). "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32)- but we draw men by our spreading of the Gospel net, preaching to "all men". Thus the extent of the Lord's achievement on the cross depends upon our preaching of it.

*Whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28).

The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The "ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people (Is. 11:2); and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14). See on Jn. 17:21.

12:33 *But this he said to signify by what manner of death he should die-* The Lord intended to die by crucifixion. "Should", *mello*, has a strong flavour of intention and self-purpose. This was the manner of death He chose. He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and yet that death was also of His own device. This gives even more significance to "the cross"; for it was His own intention to die that way. He could have legitimately sacrificed Himself in many ways; for He gave His life totally of Himself and it was not taken from Him. But He chose this cruellest and most public form because He so wanted to appeal to men and women to repent. May we respond to it and not shrug and walk on by.

12:34- see on Jn. 12:13.

*The crowd asked him: We have heard out of the law that the Christ abides forever; and how do you say: The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?*- This same "crowd" had been enthused by the resurrection of Lazarus and were welcoming the Lord as Messiah on the basis that He would establish an eternal Messianic Kingdom there and then. As explained on :12 and elsewhere, the Lord purposefully deflated their expectations. They were in love with an image of Him and not He Himself; and when He brought that to their attention, saying that He had come to die and not start a political Kingdom; it had the desired effect. They turned against Him. "Who is this Son of Man?" can imply 'We don't need a Son of Man Messiah of *this* kind'. A crucified Messiah was anathema to them, so much so that they actually went and got Him crucified.

12:35 *Jesus replied to them: Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness does not overtake you. He that walks in the darkness does not know where he goes-* He had earlier spoken of Himself as the light of the world, meaning a torch lifted up, just as the snake was lifted up on a standard pole. And He had spoken this in evident anticipation of the manner of His death. Yet He speaks as if He was in His life the light of the world, by which men must walk; the prologue introduces this theme. His life exhibited the spirit of His final death. And this is the light, lifted up, by which we must live. There can be no sense of direction to life unless it is guided by the principles of the cross- we will know not whither we go. For those whose lives seems a long tunnel, through reason of their jobs or family burdens, let His cross enlighten our darkness. The light of His example was literally

only to be with them a few more days before He would die. The darkness which could overtake them was that of Judaism, according to the prologue; and John's letters define that darkness as hating our brother. For those Jews to not accept the Lord as their Messiah and to crucify Him, and then persecute His followers, is all not living in love towards our brother. This is to live in darkness.

*12:36 Believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light-* Our belief in any statement of faith should be just that- a statement of our living faith, rather than a mere statement of our intellectual, academic, theoretical opinion. Our lives and personalities above all are our individual statement of faith. The doctrine of the cross, of the Gospel, of the man and Lord Christ Jesus, is to be the centre of not merely our mind and reason, but at the core of our actual life and conscience. For we become like what we believe in- if we believe in the light, we become children of light (Jn. 12:36). The Lord had stated that "you are the light of the world", just as He was "the light of the world". If we walk by His light, we shall in turn become light in the darkness- which in John's first context referred to the darkness of the Jewish world.

*12:36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light-* This is an intensely urgent appeal to the crowd who had apparently believed in Him. The Lord had set them up to turn against Him (see on :12) but all the same, He begs for them to not do the psychologically inevitable- and to believe in Him.

John's later interpretation of this is in 1 Jn. 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin". The light is ultimately God, but we see His light reflected in the face of the Lord Jesus. Walking in the light refers to the Lord's desire that they make the most of every minute of His mortal company. Soon the light would be taken from them, in that He would die. He urges His followers the same way in Jn. 11. By walking with Him in the light, believing in Him, walking as He walked, they would become sons of light, true believers. But 1 Jn. 1:7 is saying that we who never met the Lord Jesus can walk in the light as much as those who walked with Him in Palestine two millennia ago. And that is indeed the promise of the Comforter- that although He was to be taken from the disciples in death, the ministry of the Spirit would mean that He was as real to believers as He had been to the disciples who literally touched and watched Him. This is quite the challenge to us all. That man is not alone; God with us, in Christ, walks that close, as if literally with us.

*Jesus spoke these things, then he departed and hid himself from them-* He had just spoken of Himself as the light of the world, which must be viewed and walked in, but having said that, He hides Himself. The idea is



that He is the light to those who seek Him, who find where He is 'hidden'; the metaphor of light doesn't mean that He is shining like the sun, obvious to all. He is- but in the spiritual world and heart of the believer.

*12:37 But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him-* This was the identical experience of Moses, described in just the same language (Num. 14:11). And this was despite His desperate appeal to the crowd to truly believe in Him (see on :36).

*12:38 So that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, when he spoke: Lord, who has believed our report?-* The prophecies of Isaiah 53 had fulfilment in the Lord's life as well as in His death. His crucifixion in that sense was the essence of His life. His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. "Who has believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38). "He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, the Lord Jesus bore the sin of the world. He was glorified in His death (although the world didn't see it that way), as well as in His life (Jn. 12:23,29). The Jews refused to believe in Jesus whilst He was still alive- and yet by doing so, John says, they fulfilled Is. 53:1: "Who hath believed our report". But the "report" there was clearly the message of the cross. It's as if John applies a clear prophecy about the cross to people's response to Jesus during His lifetime.

Jn. 12:38 parallels our preaching or "report" of the Gospel with the Lord Jesus, the "arm of the Lord", being 'revealed' through us. The body of Christ thus witnesses to itself by simply *being* Christ to this world. This is the essence of our calling and of our lives- to manifest / reveal the Christ.

*And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?-* "The arm of the Lord" is the Father's operation in human individuals and society. Only those who accept the crucified Messiah will perceive that. For it is through the crucified Saviour that God works in hearts and minds and whole groups of people. But that is only revealed to believers in the cross. Those who 'believe the report' about the crucified Lord Jesus see the arm of the Lord revealed.

*12:39 Because of this they could not believe, because Isaiah also said-* In Jn. 12:39-42 we find John quoting the words of Isaiah about how Israel would not believe the message of Jesus: "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes... *nevertheless* even of the rulers many believed on him" (RV). "Nevertheless" shows the wonder of it all; despite clear prophecy that they would not believe, some of them did. The Lord's hopefulness paid off. And so can ours. It is not that God doesn't want people to believe;

but those who refuse His voice, who will not see with their eyes, are blinded so that they will not see. They are confirmed in their attitudes.

Here the Lord combines quotations from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, applying them to His cross. There He was lifted up in glory, with the power to both convict Isaiah of his sinfulness and also inspire his service of the Gospel. Yet Is. 53:1 also applies to Israel's refusal to hear the "report" of the Lord's miracles. The Lord saw His death as summing up the message of all the "works" of miracles which He had done, at least those recorded by John. This opens up a fruitful line of investigation of the miracles; they all show something of the spirit of the cross, and find their final fulfilment in the cross. In 4:34 [see notes there] He had spoken of His death as the final, crowning "work" of His ministry. If men understand the cross, then they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and are converted.

*12:40 He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts, and turn, so that I should heal them-* As noted on :39, this blinding of Israel is not because God wanted to. It was because He was confirming them in attitudes they had themselves adopted. Seeing / understanding is paralleled with believing; the understanding in view is simple belief in the Lord Jesus. This would then lead to the Lord's healing- which speaks in the context of a healing of hearts, the kind of thing spoken of in the beatitudes. So belief / understanding / seeing leads to the Lord's action on the heart, in the healing of human hearts or minds. This speaks of the work of the Spirit in the hearts and psychology of the believer. "Turn" is 'be converted / turned'. The work of turning a heart around is a matter of the spirit, and happens when one believes. We see here a difference between initial belief, and the process of conversion / turning and healing of the heart which is done by the Lord in response to belief. Note that these words of Isaiah are quoted five times in the New Testament (Mt. 13:13; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Acts 28:26). This is a major teaching which we need to give due weight to.

*12:41 These things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him-* The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to

Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet He saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

12:42- see on Rom. 10:9.

*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue-* Why then did they turn so quickly against Him? The answer, I suggest, lies in the way that they misunderstood Him. They liked Him; the Jewish authorities despaired even just prior to His death that "the world is gone after him", because so many of the Jews were [apparently] "Believing in him" (Jn. 12:11,19); His popularity seems to have resurged to an all time high on his final visit to Jerusalem. The crowds liked some aspects of the idea of this man Jesus of Nazareth; they are described in John's Gospel as "believing on him", and yet John makes it clear that this was not the real belief which the Lord sought. John makes this point within Jn. 6:14,26: "When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world... Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled". The crowd appeared to respond and perceive the significance of the sign-miracles; but the Lord knew that they had not properly understood. They apparently "believed", but would not confess Him before men (Jn. 12:42)- and such 'confession' is vital for salvation (Rom. 10:9,10 s.w.). For all their liking of Jesus and some of the things that He stood for, they willingly closed their hearts to the radical import of His essential message of self-crucifixion, of a cross before the crown, of a

future Kingdom which inverts all human values, where the humble are the greatest, the poor in spirit are the truly rich, the despised are the honoured...

Any who openly confessed Jesus as Messiah were put out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22). The chief rulers are described as believing on Christ (Jn. 12:42), even though their faith was such a private affair at that time that it was hardly faith at all. The positivism of Jesus counted them as believers. Perhaps Jn. 1:12 alludes to them: "*Whoever* accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God". The "*whoever*" would then be implying that even if their faith was so weak that they would not publicly confess it, all the same they were counted as God's children. Yet we could read Jn. 12:42 the other way- belief alone is not enough, there must be public confession. It could be that we are to see a parallel between not confessing and not believing. We were called and converted *so that* we might give light to others. These Jewish leaders who believed wanted praise / glory of men (:43), and this desire to receive praise from men was exactly what led men *not* to truly believe (Jn. 5:44). The expository choice before us is purposefully ambiguous- was the 'faith' of these leaders accepted, or was it nullified by their refusal to 'confess'? The ambiguity is to exercise our own consciences, as we naturally look within to enquire whether we have simply believed but not confessed... for we all will have a tendency to do this. In any case, there was a terrible outcome of not confessing their faith publicly- the condemnation and crucifixion of God's Son. Whether or not their faith was counted as acceptable, this was the outcome of not confessing it. And it is John who demonstrates how Joseph and Nicodemus 'came out' publicly after the Lord's death. See on 12:46 *So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.*

Note the grace reflected in the record here, where we read that some Jews were credited with having believed in Jesus, even though they did *not* confess Him (Jn. 12:42), presumably because those who confessed Jesus as Christ were excommunicated from the synagogues (Jn. 9:22). Those will not confess Jesus are antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3)- and yet the inspired record is so eager to note that these weak 'believers' were still believers, and their weak faith appears still to have been credited to them. This is a comfort to us in the weakness of our faith- and yet also a challenge to us to accept weak believers as believers. It seems that the record is prepared to accept that some achieved a valid faith in Jesus, even though they didn't confess Him. And yet there are abundant reasons for understanding that unless we witness to our faith, it isn't a faith that's worth much. And yet the record still accounts these who didn't testify as they ought to have done as 'believers'. This is a comfort for us in those times when we know we chose a far lower level than we should have done, and simply kept quiet about the wondrous hope within us. Perhaps

the idea was and is that an initial belief can be worked upon by the Lord, in order to bring it to open confession. We see several examples of this in John's Gospel, e.g. Nicodemus. And perhaps multitudes of these secret believers 'came out' in baptism on the day of Pentecost a few weeks later.

12:43- see on Jn. 4:14.

*For they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God-* The cause of unbelief and refusal to see / understand is not because a person doesn't 'get it' intellectually, or they fail to rightly process the information received. Disbelief is here blamed upon pride; a desire for glory to themselves from men, rather than as men giving glory to God, and seeking His glory above all. No amount of clever intellectual argument or accommodation with the latest science will elicit faith. Unbelief is not because of not being able to answer academic arguments. It is because of human pride.

12:44 *And Jesus cried and said: He that believes on me does not believe on me, but on him that sent me-* The crying out of the Lord was a reflection of His earnest desire that they should believe. He knew that those who had welcomed Him with cries of "Hosanna!" would turn against Him. And He urges them to really believe, and to realize that their rejection of Him was a rejection of God. Not because He was God Himself, but because the Father was manifest in the Son.

12:45 *And he that sees me, sees him that sent me-* Again, seeing is used to mean understanding and believing. To see God was instinctively known by all Jews to be impossible. But as noted on :30, such physical seeing of God or His Son, or literally hearing His voice, is irrelevant. The spiritual 'sight' of Him and sense of the Son's presence through the Spirit is worth far more than that. And to see the Son was and is to see God; not literally, but because the Son manifests the Father.

12:46 *I have come into the world as light-* This is how the prologue opens the Gospel, with the Lord personally represented as light shining in the darkness of the Jewish world. His 'coming into the world' was insofar as He revealed the light, and that only happened at the start of His ministry at age 30. This was when He came into the world. He was not the light of the world as a new-born baby desperate only for milk. His point of 'coming' into the world is defined as when He was the light of the world, which was at the beginning of His ministry. As He was sent into the world, so are we sent; and there is no question in our case that we were sent literally from Heaven to earth. Trinitarian thinking is very shoddy when it comes to verses such as these.

*So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness-* What in practice does this mean, to have Jesus as our light, and not to be remain

in darkness? John's letters allude to this and in clear practical terms inform us that not loving our brother is abiding in darkness (1 Jn. 2:9,11). We cannot claim to believe in Jesus, to have Him as a merely intellectual light of correct theory- and not love our brother. Perhaps this explains the question raised in the commentary on :42 as to whether the unconfessed, very private and theoretical 'faith' of many of the leaders was acceptable. Because it was not confessed, it resulted in their condemning and crucifying God's Son- the deepest depth of not loving our brother.

12:47 *And if anyone hear my sayings and keep them not, I judge him not. For I came not to judge the world but to save-* For judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39), although He Himself came not to judge so much as to save (Jn. 12:47; "not" is also used in the sense of 'not so much to... but rather to...' in 2 Cor. 7:12: "I did it not [so much] for his cause ....but that our care...". Likewise in Mk. 10:45, the Lord came not *so much as* to be ministered unto, but to minister. He was and is ministered unto, but His focus is upon *His* ministering to us: Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). God said He judged His people 'according to their way... according to their judgments I will judge' (Ez. 7:27 LXX). A man's way, freely chosen, is his judgment. We truly 'make the answer now'. The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection.

12:48- see on Lk. 14:18; Jn. 3:13.

*He that rejects me and receives not my sayings has one that judges him. The word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day-* Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. They crucified Him because they rejected the words He spoke from God (Jn. 12:48). The language of rejection is used both about the Jews' crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 17:25; Mk. 12:10) and their rejection of His words. Thus Heb. 6:5,6;10:28,29 connect despising the word with crucifying Christ afresh. As the prologue explains, He was the word made flesh. To not receive His sayings [*rhema*] meant that His *logos* ["word"] would judge them. His teachings had an essential *logos* to them. And that singular word is spoken of in :49 and :50 as God's singular "commandment"- the offer of eternal life in His Son (see on :50).

12:49 *For I spoke not from myself, but the Father that sent me, He has given me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak-* Just as the Lord's miracles were revealed to Him by the Father ahead of time (5:30), so were the words which He should teach. To reject the Lord's words was to therefore reject God's word; and as the prologue states, "the word was God". To reject His words is to reject Him. Judaism

was so deeply into theism, it was so God centred, that such ideas were repugnant to them. But this is what they were doing by rejecting His word as it was in His Son. The "commandment" is singular, and parallels the singular *logos* or word of :48.

12:50 *And I know that His commandment is everlasting life. The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me: So I speak-* "The commandment" is surely put for all that the Lord said and spoke (:49). It was His *logos* (see on :48). His words and person were an imperative to respond to; He was in Himself a command to be obeyed in following Him in total surrender. To believe in Him was the everlasting life. The commandment, the *logos*, was and is to believe in Him and receive everlasting life, in the sense of allowing Him to live in our lives. All He spoke was summed up in that. To refuse that eternal life meant therefore to remain in eternal death, and that would therefore be the outcome of the final judgment (:48).

## CHAPTER 13

*13:1 Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour had come-* I argued on 12:12 and throughout chapter 12 that the Lord arranged the exact point of His death; for He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (10:17,18). He wanted to die at that particular Passover feast, which explains why John records how at other feasts, the Jews tried to kill Him but He somehow avoided them. The implication here in 13:1 is that the coming of Passover meant that the Lord knew His hour of death and glory had come.

*That he should depart out of this world to his Father-* The Lord saw His death as an exodus, as He had been taught at the transfiguration. And He saw the whole process of death, resurrection, 40 days on earth and ascension as a going to the Father. His prayer that the Father not take His disciples "out of the world" could be understood as asking that their lives, for the time being, be preserved; they should be "kept from the evil" (Jn. 17:15). For He understood departing out of the world as a reference to His death. And yet the word for 'departing' is used of how believers in Him depart or pass from death to life, right now (5:24; 1 Jn. 3:14). The essence of His experience becomes ours if we walk in the light of life we have seen and known in Him.

The language of departing from this world to the Father is a quotation from a common Rabbinic claim that these were the words of Moses before he died (Targum on Song of Solomon i. 1, 7, Bereshit Rabba, sect. 96. fol. 84. 1. and Debarim Rabba, sect. 11. fol. 245. 2). The Lord clearly understood Himself as the greater than Moses (Dt. 18:18). Without any doubt there is also reference to the well-known [at the time John was writing] Jerusalem Targum on Dt. 32: "And when the last end of Moses the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from the world...".

*Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end-* His love for His own during His ministry is part of His final love for them unto the end. The essence of His self-giving for them throughout His life was seamlessly continued in His death. "His own" is another allusion to the prologue, where the Lord comes to "His own" and they do not receive Him; but others do (1:11,12). Israel becomes redefined; no longer are "His own" His own kith and kin of Israelites, but those who receive Him.

The 'love to the uttermost' here can of course be applied to the crucifixion. But the Lord at this point felt He had now departed from this world (17:11 "I am no longer in the world"), and so it could be that the following account of the foot washing is to be understood as a preview of the Lord's death on the cross. The grammar of the whole verse implies that "Before the feast of the Passover... He loved them to the end", as if the 'love to the end' was before the feast, before His death. When did He loved them to the end? Before the Passover. That is the idea. The last



supper therefore becomes the love feast, the exemplification of His love unto the end; and it is to be felt like that by us as we partake to this day.

The Lord's conscious attempt to develop the twelve appears to have paid off to some extent, even during His ministry. For there was evidently some spiritual growth of the disciples even during the ministry. There are indications that even before the Lord's death, the disciples did indeed progressively grasp at least some things about Him. John's Gospel is divided into what has been called 'The book of signs' (Jn. 1:19-12:50) and 'the book of glory' (Jn. 13:1 and following). In the book of signs, the disciples always refer to the Lord as "rabbi" or "teacher"; whereas in the book of glory, they call him "Lord". We have seen in other character studies how spiritual maturity is reflected in some ways by a growth in appreciation of the titles used of God. Although Jesus was not God Himself, so it seems was the case in how the disciples increasingly came to respect and perceive the Lordship of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we see the love of Christ directly, openly displayed. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond. He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). "Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us (in that) he hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.).

13:2- see on Lk. 22:3.

*And during supper, when the Devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him-* "Supper" is literally 'a supper'; not 'the feast' as we would expect if this was indeed the Passover feast of 14 Nissan. It was a Passover supper, but kept earlier and perhaps in a slightly different way. The whole style in this section suggests that when certain conditions were fulfilled, then the Lord could die on the cross. I have suggested on 12:12 that the Lord arranged the entire scenario, as He gave His life as He did of His own choice of time and place. The account here reads as if the Lord knew that Judas had in his heart to betray Him, and so knowing this, He acts out the essence of His future service for others on the cross by washing the disciples' feet. He knew this would offer Judas the chance to repent, but if he would not, then it would be the psychological trigger for Judas to go off and hand Him over to the Jews. And that is indeed how it worked out.

"The devil" in the New Testament, including in John's writings, refers to organized, systemic opposition to the Lord's person and work, and in the

first instance refers to the Jewish opposition. I have exemplified this at length in *The Real Devil* especially section 2-4, 'The Jewish Satan'. The thought to betray the Lord had been put into the heart of Judas by the Jewish opposition, who were the great 'satan' [adversary] and false accuser ['devil'] with regard to the Lord and His work. This explains why when 'satan entered into Judas', he goes to the Jewish leadership to arrange the betrayal (Lk. 22:3-6). It could even be that "the devil" here is to be paralleled with "the prince of this [Jewish] world" whom I have suggested on 12:31 had specific reference to Caiaphas the High Priest, who is presented as the one who came up with the specific scheme to kill the Lord (see on 11:49).

The reference to "Simon's son" would be appropriate if the reference is to the Simon the Pharisee of Lk. 7:40, in whose house Mary Magdalene had previously anointed the Lord. I noted on 11:2 that the woman who was a sinner who anointed the Lord in Simon's house was Mary Magdalene. The fact she had access to the meal table suggests she was a close relative. And Judas was the son of Simon. We therefore can conclude that Judas was a relative of Mary, Martha and Lazarus; perhaps even their brother. This would explain his anger at her wasting of family wealth by anointing the Lord in chapter 12 (see on Mt. 26:14). If the family had Pharisee connections, then this would explain why "the Jews" came from Jerusalem to their home in Bethany, as they were relatives.

*13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God-* This may seem axiomatic, but the text seems to be saying that as He sat at supper, the Lord had a deep sense of utter certainty that He was from God and was going to successfully accomplish what lay before Him, and this 'go to God'. The "all things" refer to the believers (Eph. 1:22); He had earlier spoken of the Father having given Him the sheep, who were safe in His hands (10:28,29). He was deeply aware that we were in His hands, and He must now go and die for us.

*13:4 Rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel-* He dressed Himself as He would for the crucifixion, naked but for a loincloth, with His outer clothing taken away, as John's crucifixion account emphasizes. Phil. 2 seems to allude to the descriptions here of the Lord progressively setting aside all human trappings in order to humble Himself to serve and thence to actually die the death of the cross for us. "Laid aside" is the same term used for the Lord's giving over of His life (10:11,15,17,18; 15:13; 1 Jn. 3:16).

*13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded-* This was the work of the lowest slave, and Phil. 2 alludes to this in saying that the Lord took upon Himself the form of a slave- not in adopting human nature, but in His mental attitude in the lead up to the cross, and in His

final death there. The record is as it were zoomed up close upon the Lord, with every action recorded. This action of foot washing is seen as highly significant; it was the essence of his death. And it was, as suggested on :1, the epitome of love unto the end. The usage of water could look forward to baptism, but the idea is that He does something to the disciple- His death was not just something to be emulated. It is His action upon us; as a result of it, the Spirit was to be given, whereby He would cleanse / sanctify the disciples. But the outpouring of water is used as a figure for the outpouring of the Spirit which would come as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39). John's crucifixion record notes how the Lord's death resulted in water issuing from His side toward the disciples; and here, the towel from His side is used to wash the disciples' feet. The gift of the Spirit is in view, and connects with the frequent references to our sanctification or being made clean by the Spirit. The mention of the basin is perhaps to recall the Mosaic rituals whereby blood and water were taken from a basin to sanctify the priests. This motley crew of mixed up men were being declared the priesthood of the new Israel, and the prayer of chapter 17 is full of allusion to the theme of sanctification. This, it must be emphasized, is something done to a willing person, and not done by themselves. This is the picture of the Lord's activity in our lives through the Spirit.

13:6 *When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him: Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*- The Lord had taught that when one was invited to a feast, they should take the lowest seat. It seems that at the last supper, Peter did just this. There would likely have been petty jealousy over who sat next to Jesus, and there may have been a desire to sit closest to Him as a sign of faithfulness to their beloved teacher. John was clearly sitting next to Jesus, as he was able to have his head on Jesus' breast. And the fact the Lord dipped in the dish at the same time as Judas may imply that Judas was also next to Him. It's tempting to imagine John at Jesus' right hand and Judas at His left. But it seems Peter was the last to have his feet washed. Jesus "came to Simon Peter" to wash his feet, and when he had done so, He commented that now, all His men were clean (Jn. 13:6). This implies to me that Peter was sitting at the end of the couch, furthest away from Jesus. He certainly wasn't that close to Jesus, because he had to signal [Gk. 'to nod'] to John to ask the Lord who the betrayer was (Jn. 13:24). So I conclude from all this that Peter took the lowest seat at that feast- in conformity to what the Lord had taught them earlier. And I imagine it would have been especially difficult, as the order of seating at the Jewish Passover was a classic opportunity to demonstrate a pecking order within a group of friends or family. But despite taking the lowest seat, Peter's pride objected to the Lord washing His feet. The Lord had taken more than the lowest seat at the table; He had shown Himself to be the lowest slave who was present but not seated even at the table.

13:7 *Jesus answered and said to him: What I am doing you do not comprehend now, but later you shall understand-* This would appear to be an allusion to how the Comforter / Holy Spirit would give them understanding of the Lord's words and ministry. The Holy Spirit was not yet given (7:38,39), so the sense of His work would still be not fully understandable.

13:8- see on Jn. 3:5.

*Peter said to him: You shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him: If I do not wash you, you have no part with me-* The critical importance of washing could speak of how baptism is connected to salvation. But "no part with me" is surely alluded to by Paul in writing that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is "none of His" (Rom. 8:9). The sanctifying work of the Spirit is clearly in view, bearing in mind that "wash", *nipto*, has ceremonial associations; it spoke of sanctification for priestly service. And to accept that sanctifying work of the Spirit requires a humility which Peter initially struggled with. Resistance to the idea of the internal work of the Spirit is likewise associated with pride and self-confidence in the flesh.

13:9 *Simon Peter said to him: Lord, wash not only my feet but also my hands and my head-* Peter got the Lord's drift, and wanted not only cleansing of his feet, his path in life; but of his actions [hands] and head [thinking].

13:10 *Jesus said to him: He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you-* This is surely suggesting that all baptized believers ("washed") were like the priests, who firstly washed their bodies and then their hands and feet, before entering on service (Ex. 30:21). "He who has bathed" could be about the only discernible hint that the disciples had been baptized. But they needed to be born of water and of the Spirit as well. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread and acceptance of the sanctification of the Spirit which Peter seemed to want to avoid.

"You are clean" is developed in 15:3, where the Lord teaches that we are clean by the word He spoke. But here, the cleansing is on account of His death and sacrifice. His death and work of saving is His "word" to us. His "word" is not therefore necessarily a reference to His actual sayings, but is used as it is in the prologue, for His whole being and message which was lived out in His person; for the word was made flesh in Him, supremely in His death on the cross.

The importance of self-examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at here. This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord's meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same. Whilst forgiveness itself is not mediated in any metaphysical sense by the memorial meeting, it is nonetheless a vital part of the life of the forgiven believer. When Peter didn't want to break bread, the Lord reminded him that he who has been baptized / washed is indeed clean, but needs periodic feet-washing. This, surely, was a reference to the breaking of bread (Jn. 13:10). The same word for 'wash' is found in Jn. 15:2, where we read of how the Father washes / purifies periodically the vine branches. Could this not be some reference to the effect the breaking of bread should have upon us?

13:11 *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said: Not all of you are clean-* The cleansing was not therefore simply a question of being baptized; for Judas had presumably been baptized along with the others. But he had not allowed the sanctifying work of the Spirit within him, and was therefore not cleansed or sanctified within.

The Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross. Thus we read of the Lord Jesus being silent before His slaughterers, being led out to death as a sheep (Is. 53:7). But this idiom is used about Jeremiah to describe his wilful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ.

13:12 *So when he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and sat down again, he said to them: Do you comprehend what I have done to you?*- The putting on of His clothes speaks of His resurrection after the death on the cross which His washing their feet spoke of. The sitting down would then correspond with His sitting down at the right hand of the Father after His work had been accomplished (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). "Do you comprehend...?" was presumably asked with the implication that 'No, you do not- because if you did, you would be on your knees washing each other's feet (:15)'. If we comprehend the Lord's work, we shall do likewise, living out the essence of His cross for others.

13:13 *You call me teacher and lord, and you say well; for so I am*- The Lord reasons that He is no mere teacher of ideas and doctrine, as the Jewish rabbis were. He was their teacher by example, and they therefore ought to fall to their knees in washing each other's feet (:15). He was the word made flesh; His word was not just what He spoke, but His example and very being (see on :10). To call Jesus 'master' and 'Lord' was meaningless unless the pupils *did* what He said; so closely were His words associated with action, a word made flesh. See on Mt. 7:22.

13:14 *If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*- His teaching was therefore not so much by spoken words but by example. He was His word made flesh. His example was to be taken as His word to His disciples. Because Jesus is Lord and Master, and because He is our representative in every way, therefore all that He did and was becomes an imperative for us to follow. They called Him "Lord and Master", but *wouldn't* wash each other's feet. Like us so often, they had the right doctrinal knowledge, but it meant nothing to them in practice. They failed to perceive that "my word" referred to His whole being and personality rather than the words which came from His mouth in teaching sessions. To know Him as Lord is to wash each other's feet, naked but for a loincloth, with all the subtle anticipations of the cross which there are in this incident. "Wherefore [because of the exaltation of Jesus] [be obedient and] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [i.e. in humility]" (Phil. 2:12).

We would so dearly wish for the suffering Christ to be just an item in history, an act which saved us which is now over, an icon we hang around our neck or mount prominently on our study wall- and no more. But He, His cross, His 'last walk', His request that we pick up a cross and walk behind Him, the eerie continuous tenses used in New Testament references to the crucifixion- is so much more than that. If He washed our feet, we *must* wash each other's. Everything He did, all He showed Himself to be in character, disposition and attitude, becomes an imperative for us to do and be likewise. And it is on this basis that He can

so positively represent us to the Father: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16).

13:15 *For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you-* The 'doing' of the Lord was to die for us in service (14:31). The height of the challenge is so high- to have the cross as our pattern, and not just something to be looked to with thanksgiving. This challenge transforms all departments of human thought and action. The immediate context of course was the Lord's attitude to His brethren at the last supper; and this should be reflected in our attitude to others at the breaking of bread. That so many of His disciples have lost their way here is tragic, for closed table policies and exclusion of His people from the table is the very opposite of His example.

13:16 *Truly, truly, I say to you: A servant is not greater than his lord, neither is one sent greater than he that sent him-* To act as if the Lord's attitude at the last supper and on the cross is *not* our example is effectively to consider ourselves greater than Him. If our Lord and master acted and thought as He did- we His servants can do nothing else; we are to be as the Master (Mt. 10:24,25; Lk. 6:40). If we do not emulate the spirit of feet washing and death on the cross, then we are pronouncing ourselves greater than Him. The logic requires an urgency in seeking by all means to follow His example. The apostles were those sent; and the Lord frequently refers to Himself as the One sent, and the Messianic servant. He as the sent One was therefore also living out the essence of the Father who sent Him. To have acted otherwise would have suggested He was greater than the One who sent Him, the Father. See on :20.

13:17 *If you know these things, and if you do them, you will be blessed-* The Lord sensed the tension between knowing and doing. To know but not do would not lead to being happy / blessed. And this is the root cause of a lack of joy amongst many believers; they know but do not do. The doing, of course, is radical- to be the lowest servant, to wash the feet of others, living out the spirit of the cross. To know this but not do it is to not attain happiness. The only path to Christian joy is to surrender all in the emulation of the Lord's spirit in these ways. The Lord had concluded the sermon on the mount with a similar challenge, to do what we know (see on Mt. 7:22). The "things" immediately in view here in John 13 were the spirit of foot washing, of radical servanthood, and death on the cross. But these were all a fulfilment in practice of the various principles outlined in the sermon on the mount.

13:18 *I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen; but the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me-* I have suggested on 12:12 and elsewhere that the Lord arranged the entire scene in order to die by crucifixion at that Passover. It

could be that He means here that He knew Judas whom He had chosen; and He chose him to perform the role of betrayer which He knew was necessary in order to bring about the intended final scene. But that is not to say that Judas had no choice in the matter; he did, and the Lord urged him against his path. But He also knew the outcome, and in that sense knew the betrayer whom He had chosen for this role. He was led to plan things as He did by Scripture, which required that one who ate His bread would then betray Him. And so He set things up so that an offended Judas would be present at the last supper, and then do the act of betrayal.

The implication is that Judas had a heel to crush the Lord with, as if Judas was the seed of the woman and He was the seed of the serpent due to His close association with sin and sinners. However, it has also been pointed out that "To show the bottom of one's foot to someone in the Near East is a mark of contempt"- E.F. Bishop, *Evangelical Times* Vol. 70 p. 331. The non-violent resistance to evil and the message of grace led Judas to despise the Lord; and the outpouring of the precious ointment upon Him appeared senseless to the materialistic Judas. His despite of the Lord was therefore a factor in his betrayal.

Ps. 41:9,10 is quoted from the LXX in Mk. 14:18,21. Yet Jn. 13:18 quotes the same passage from the Hebrew text, with a slight difference. Which was inspired? Surely, both sources of the original were accepted as worthy of quotation. So from this evidence alone we should be wary of concluding that the differences between LXX and the Hebrew text are mutually incompatible. See on Acts 15:16.

13:19 *From this time forward I will tell you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe that I am he-* This refers to the Lord's prediction of Judas' betrayal. He knew that later, they would reflect on all things and perceive that the Lord was master of the whole situation. He had set up the entire stage, including with one of His disciples betraying Him, in order to bring about the end which *He* intended- that He would be crucified that Passover. His total mastery of the scene (see on 12:12) was a declaration of the Yahweh Name, "I am", and a sign of His identity with the Father.

We also see here the intention of prophecy- not in order to predict the future in detail, but so that when things happen, we perceive that they were exactly foretold. This needs to be remembered- for so many attempts to foretell sequences of political events heralding the Lord's return have been proven wrong, and have ended up damaging faith rather than building it up. Bible prophecy is not, therefore, to be appealed to in order to support faith, unless we are pointing out how predictions or required scenarios have already been fulfilled.

13:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that receives whoever I send receives*



*me, and he that receives me, receives Him that sent me-* The Lord has just reasoned that if He has washed their feet, and they are sent by Him, then they are to do likewise (:16). In doing as He did, their witness was a manifestation of Him. And more than that, of the Father who had sent Him. See on :16. In this sense, God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world to Himself. The 'receiving' in John's writings speaks of receiving a message. The assumption is that the message we preach will be "Him", centred upon and about Him. Those who accept the Lord Jesus at our word thereby receive the Father too. So much hinges upon our witness. We represent so much- even God Himself.

*13:21 When Jesus had said this, he was disturbed in his spirit, and testified: Truly, truly, I say to you: One of you shall betray me-* The Lord has just spoken of how His followers are representatives of Him and thereby of the Father; and attitudes to Him are attitudes to the Father. Perhaps this was why He was so upset, remembering that what Judas was doing to Him was in effect to God, and there would be such terrible judgment for it.

The Lord was able to attract all kinds of sinners to Him, when those who are spiritually marginalized tend normally to steer away from those who exude righteousness but no humanity. He was real, He really was who He appeared to be, there was total congruence between His words and actions; and He encouraged others in the same spirit to simply face up to who they were. And He would accept them at that. Yet He was real and human; although there was this congruence between His words and actions, consider how His spirit was "troubled"; "now is my soul troubled" (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). Yet He goes on to use the same word to exhort the disciples hours later: "Let not your heart be troubled" (Jn. 14:1, 27). Was this inconsistency, "Do as I say, not as I do"? Of course not. The strength and power of His exhortation "Let not your heart be troubled" was in the very way that His heart *had been troubled* but He now had composed Himself in calm trust in the Father. And Peter remembered that, as he later in turn exhorted *his* flock to not be troubled nor afraid under persecution (1 Pet. 3:14).

*13:22 The disciples looked at each other, wondering of whom he spoke-* We see here the ability of Judas, as of all men, to disguise real motives. The others had absolutely no inkling that Judas would betray the Lord. This stands as a warning for all time not to attempt to judge who is sincere and who is not amongst the Lord's people. We cannot judge not least because we *cannot* judge. They were so unable to do this that having looked at one another, wondering who it was, they concluded that it might be them- for after trying to decide which of them it was, they began to ask Him "Is it me?" (Mk. 14:19). We simply cannot tell the wheat from the weeds.

"He spoke" is a continuous present tense- 'Of whom He is speaking'. This change of tenses in the Gospels is to enable to us to relive the situation, playing as it were Bible television with the record.

13:23 *There was at the table reclining on Jesus' chest one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved-* John's Gospel is the personal testimony of the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Not that John was loved any more than the others- his point is surely that 'I am one whom Jesus so loved to the end'. He describes himself as resting on Jesus' bosom (Jn. 13:23); yet he writes that Jesus is now in the Father's bosom (Jn. 1:18). He is saying that he has the same kind of intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus as Jesus has with the Father. Yet John also records how the Lord Jesus repeatedly stressed that the intimacy between Him and the Father was to be shared with all His followers. So John is consciously holding up his own relationship with the Lord Jesus as an example for all others to experience and follow. Yet John also underlines his own slowness to understand the Lord. Without any pride or self-presentation, he is inviting others to share the wonderful relationship with the Father and Son which he himself had been blessed with. John knew his Lord. He repeatedly describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). Doubtless John was aware that Jesus loved all His people; but John is surely exalting in the fact that the Lord loved him personally.

13:24- see on Jn. 13:6.

*Simon Peter motioned to him, and said to him: Tell us who it is of whom he speaks-* This all has the ring of truth to it. He would not have called across the table to John, but could easily have motioned with his eyes and other non-verbal language. We have an example here of non-verbal communication being counted as words- for the motioning was in effect saying to him the words. This is significant because the references in John to the Lord's "word" or "words" are not necessarily referring to His literally spoken words; but to all the other communication from Him that went on. For He as a person and character was His word, as the prologue begins by explaining.

13:25 *He leaning back, as he was on Jesus' breast, said to him: Lord, who is it?-* As noted on :23, John saw his own intimate relationship with the Lord as reflected in how close the Lord was to His father (1:18). We could infer from 21:20 that John's close access to the Lord was a cause of jealousy for Peter.

13:26 *Jesus answered: It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it. When he had dipped the morsel, he had given it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot-* The motive of the question had surely been 'Tell us who it is, and we shall stop him forcibly'. But the Lord is saying that they were too late; He had chosen Judas to do this job. And yet the "morsel" may refer to the prized portion of the bread which a father would give to

a favoured child at the Passover feast. It could be read as a sign of the Lord's special love and care for Judas. He so wanted him to repent. But it was the sign of the Lord's extreme love for him, to the point of apparent favouritism, which made Judas then go out into the darkness and betray the Lord. This was all according to the Lord's plan, but there was still the absolute possibility for Judas' repentance. The Lord's psychology was superb; He knew the things of the human spirit. He realized that the special exposure to His love would make Judas either collapse in repentance, or harden him in his fell purpose. And this is true throughout John's Gospel; encounter with the Lord as the only light of the world made men either live in that light, or recoil deeper into their darkness. And Judas was the parade example.

*13:27 Then after Judas had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him-* As noted on :2, the devil and satan, the false accuser and adversary to the Lord's cause, refers in the immediate context to the Jewish system. It could be that a representative from "the satan" entered into the upper room, and Judas went out with him, as if doing some errand. This would make good sense in the context of :29. Or it could be that as elsewhere, "satan" refers to the great adversary, sin within. And in the face of the Lord's supreme and special love for Judas, Judas was faced with the choice to accept it or be hardened by sin, personified as the great satan / adversary to all human spiritual endeavour.

The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial* love for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

*Jesus said to him: What you are about to do, do quickly-* I somewhat doubt that the Lord meant 'Please, get it over with quickly, don't draw out the agony for Me'. That seems out of character with the Lord, and certainly with the nature of John's highly spiritual record. So we can assume that the Lord wished for Judas to repent, and He urged him to do

so quickly, knowing that human nature ever seeks to procrastinate, and thus lose the power of decision against the flesh. In this case, "you are about to do" would suggest that Judas was on the verge of repentance, and the Lord urges him to go all the way with it quickly. But it could be that the Lord perceived that Judas had sold himself completely to the evil he had allowed to develop within him; and He is now encouraging Judas in the path he had embarked upon.

13:28 *Now no one at the table knew for what reason Jesus spoke this to Judas-* This is an open admission from John that they did not understand at the time, but now they did- all confirming the truth of the Lord's promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to bring all things to their remembrance and understanding.

13:29 *Some thought because Judas had the money bag, that Jesus said to him: Buy what things we have need of for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor-* This supposition would rather support the idea suggested on :29 that a member of the Jewish 'satan' came into the upper room, requesting Judas' attention. We can maybe infer that Judas had gone out with the money bag in his hand. For we know that he kept the money bag, from which the group made donations to the poor. So we imagine Judas leaving the room clutching the bag, hence the supposition that he was going to buy something or donate to the poor. The association between Judas and money is very clear; although his motivations were multi-factorial, Mt. 26:15 is clear that Judas went to the priests and asked what they would give him if he betrayed the Lord to them. It may seem incredible that a man would do such evil for money; but we constantly see the power of covetousness and materialism leading men to throw away life eternal. The power of these things is great indeed.

13:30- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:62.

*He then having received the morsel went out immediately into the night-* There seems an echo of how Esau "for one morsel of meat sold his birth right" (Heb. 12:16). The immediate and the visible is so powerfully attractive, so powerful that it can lead men to throw away their spiritual birth right and betray God's peerless Son. "Went out" is a term later used by John to describe all those who went out from the community of John's converts- back into the darkness of Judaism, just as Judas did (1 Jn. 2:19). Judas is not, therefore, any special case. He is representative of an entire class of people, indeed, all those who turn away from the Lord's love.

13:31- see on Jn. 12:28.

*When he was gone, Jesus said: Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him-* With Judas gone, the Lord sensed that all those gathered around Him were to be ultimately and eternally saved by the sacrifice He was about to make. That was the final glory to God which He sought. In this we see the importance of all preaching and pastoral work; this shall climax in the glorification of the Father in the Son.

But the Lord had in view the way that He was about to die. This would be to the glory of God, just as the death and resurrection of Lazarus had been to the glory of God in His Son. The Lord knew that the exit of Judas to the Jewish 'satan' was now going to set in process the final train of events which would lead to His crucifixion.

*13:32 And God shall glorify him in Himself, and will glorify him immediately-* The second stage of the glorification was presumably in the events of the resurrection. However the idea may simply be as in GNB: "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once". The idea is that the glory of the Son is that of the Father and *vice versa*, God Himself would glorify the Son just as the Son had Himself glorified the Father; even though both Father and Son have their own glory.

"In Himself" could be translated "by Himself"; and the "immediately" may mean that the time was soon coming when this mutual glorification was going to happen, in a spiritual intercourse between Father and Son which was the most sublime moment of all time and space. No wonder the translation is difficult, for the ideas are the profoundest to ever be expressed in language. The mutual glorification of Father and Son speaks of the Lord's death and resurrection; the mutual quality and nature of it is hard to plumb and express, hence the difficulty in both translation and interpretation at this point.

The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from

the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him". What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

13:33- see on Jn. 7:33; Mt. 18:6.

*Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek me, but as I said to the Jews, where I go, you cannot come. So now I say to you- "As I said to the Jews" [as well as to you] suggests they were far more influenced by the Jews than they should have been. The Lord has explained the deep spiritual intercourse and mutual glorification between Father and Son which was to be achieved on the cross. And there, into that profound mutual unity with the Father, they could not go. It was a communion unenterable by the disciples at that time.*

13:34 *A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. Even as I have loved you, you also love one another- "As I have loved you" is another example of how the Lord spoke of His impending sacrifice as if He*

had already achieved it in His life. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end in His death (13:1). 15:12-13 says the same: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Only the cross can be a strong enough power to inspire a love between us quite different to anything known in previous times; a love so powerful that it in itself could convert men and women. The newness of the commandment was to love as the Lord loved us.

The Greeks had various words for love, *agape* (a rather general word, used in the LXX); *eros* (referring to the physical aspect) and *phileo*, referring (for example) to the love of parents for children. These terms had loose definitions and are almost interchangeable in their OT (LXX) and NT usage. But then the Lord introduced a whole new paradigm: "A new commandment I give unto you, That you love (*agape*) one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). To love as the Lord loved was something fundamentally new, and He chose one of the available terms and made it into something else. He chose a rather colourless word in the Greek language: *agape*, and made it refer specifically to the love of God and Christ towards us, and also to the love which their followers should show to each other. 'This is *agape*', He says: 'This is My redefinition of that word, which must enter your new vocabulary'. It is true that *agape* and *phileo* are apparently interchangeable in some places; but the Lord's redefinition of love, His placing of new meaning into old words, still stands valid. Not only does the Lord give 'love' a new flavour as a word. He above all showed forth that quality of love. He turned man's conception of love on its head. Thus He plugged in to the Pharisee's debate about who could be identified as their neighbour- by showing, in His Samaritan parable, that we must make ourselves neighbours to others.

13:35- see on Acts 4:13.

*By this shall all men know you are my disciples- if you have love for one another-* The Lord has just redefined "love" as the love He was showing by dying for them, epitomized in the foot washing incident. If His followers could do this for each other, then the witness would be made to "all men". Christian love must be distinctively different from any other profession of 'love' made by others. That is a great challenge; and it is only capable of fulfilment by being motivated by the Lord's love. It will be a witness powerful enough to convert the world. Indeed, this is John's version of the great commission- see on Lk. 22:32. The Lord's death was to result in a unity between us that would lead the world to understand Him and the love the Father has for Him (Jn. 17:21,23); and yet through the loving unity of believers, the world knows *them*, that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). We are an exhibition to this world of the relationship between the Father and Son. Hence our behaviour is so crucial. For if we

are divided and unloving, this is the image of the Father and Son which we are presenting. It is also therefore sadly true that if all men do not see love for one another, then we are in fact not the Lord's disciples. This makes so many forms of cranky denominationalism self-condemned as non-Christian.

13:36- see on Jn. 21:18,19.

*Simon Peter said to him: Lord, where do you go? Jesus answered: Where I go, you cannot follow now, but you shall follow afterwards-* As noted on :32 and :33, the Lord was going to the cross, but to an unenterable mutual intercourse between Father and Son which would be to the profoundest glory of them both. This was unenterable by the spiritually immature disciples at that stage. The Lord was indeed telling Peter that he was not yet able to die for Him, but He would do so ultimately. But the essence of "Where I go" was to this intimate unity with the Father which was unenterable by the disciples at that stage. But the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would mean that the Lord's prayer of chapter 17 could and would come true- that the depths of His unity and mutual glorification with the Father would become true for them too.

The question is "Where are you going?", in the context of the Lord going to the cross. Yet later, the Lord pointed out that "Not one of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" (Jn. 13:36; 16:5). Clearly enough the Lord's point was that Peter had enquired about the cross, but not really enquired. Peter took 'Where the Lord is going' as referring to a literal place, or His death. But as noted on :32 and :33, where the Lord was going, as He understood it, was the most profound unity between Father and Son. And is it that same with us? That we wish to know of the cross, but we are not *really* enquiring as to it, as the personal and spiritual implications are too great for us? It wasn't that Peter was unaware of the cross and the Lord's teaching about it; it was rather that he [and we] failed to let the realities sink home and failed to appreciate the deep spiritual implications of it all. The Lord had clearly taught Peter that He must lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11)- but Peter wished to sacrifice his own life to save Jesus' having to do this (Jn. 13:36-38). So great was Peter's barrier to the idea of the Lord Jesus having to die. And we too run into this same barrier with the cross of Christ; it's why, e.g., we find it so hard to make an extended study of the crucifixion, why people walk out of movies about the Passion of Christ half way through, why we find it hard to concentrate upon the simple facts of the death of Christ at their memorial meetings...

13:37 *Peter said to him: Lord, why cannot I follow you even now? I will lay down my life for you!*- Peter understood where the Lord was going as



meaning 'to His death'. But the Lord had in view the intense spiritual intercourse with the Father and mutual glorification which would arise from that death (see on :32 and :33). His death was far more than death *per se*, it was a profound glorification of the Father. Peter's loyalty and desire to physically die for the Lord is commendable, but the record shows that he was rather missing the point and spiritual perspective of the Lord's death. When he says "Though I should / must die with you" (Mt. 26:35), he uses the word elsewhere translated "must" in connection with Lord's foreknowledge that He must suffer the death of the cross. Peter knew that he must share the cross- but the flesh was weak. When it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake" (Jn. 13:37). He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

Just before His death, the Saviour spoke of going to the Father, and coming again in resurrection (Jn. 13:36,37 cp. 14:28; 16:16,17; 17:11). He somehow saw the cross as a being with God, a going to Him there ('going to the Father' in these Johannine passages is hard to apply to His ascent to Heaven after the resurrection). When in this context He speaks of *us* coming to the Father, He refers to our taking up of His cross, and in this coming to the essence of God (Jn. 14:6 cp. 4, 13:36). See on Jn. 19:19.

13:38 *Jesus answered: Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you: The cock shall not crow, till you have denied me three times-* As noted on:37, Peter had rather missed the point anyway. The Lord was 'going' not to simply die *per se*, but into the profoundest spiritual glorification process with the Father which Peter was too immature to enter. But the Lord goes along with Peter's literalism, and gently points out to him that he was not even up to dying with Him, let alone entering the spiritual things which were implied in the Lord's death and where He was 'going'. The issues relating to the Lord's words to Peter here are discussed on Mt. 26:34,35.

## CHAPTER 14

14:1- see on 17:3.

*Do not let your heart be disturbed-* John has used this very phrase for a troubled or "disturbed" heart in describing the stress felt by the Lord as He faced the eternal issues of human salvation which were before Him (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). That is enough emphasis for us to safely conclude that the Lord meant- and means- that He is taking our stress and "trouble" about salvation onto Himself, and we need not worry about. For all the issues concerning whether we shall be saved were carried by Him. And it is surely alluded to when He urges them after His resurrection not to be "troubled" (Lk. 24:38). "Let not your heart be troubled" is an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:32, where Israel were not to fear Goliath because of the salvation which would be achieved through David.

*Believe in God, believe also in me-* For first century Jews, belief in God was taken as natural and normal. If they believe that He is from the Father and one with the Father in a functional sense, then they should believe also in Him. And the belief in view is faith in salvation (see on :1).

The Lord's goodbye address in Jn. 14-16 has many connections with those of Moses and Joshua, in which they expressed fear that after their death there would be a mass falling away within Israel, and their guise of spirituality would give way due to their lack of a real faith. This further indicates the weakness of the disciples. Our Lord's speech was shot through with doubt of the twelve and recognition of the weakness of the disciples, which needs tabulating to show its full force:

- |    |          |   |
|----|----------|---|
| 14 | :2       | "If it were not so" - implying they doubted   |
|    |          | "If I go... I will come again" - using logic to answer their implied doubt.   |
|    | :5       | "We know not whither Thou goest"  |
|    | :7       | "If ye had known me"  |
|    | :9       | "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me?"   |
|    | :10,11   | "Believest thou?... believe me"   |
|    | :14      | "If ye shall ask..."  |
|    | :15      | "If ye love me... if ye loved me, ye would rejoice...if a man love me" (v.28,23)                                    |
| 15 | :4       | "Abide in me... no more can ye, except ye abide in me... without me ye can do nothing...if ye abide in me"          |
|    | :9,14,15 | "Continue ye... ye are my friends, if ye...I have called you friends" - implying 'But you've got to live up to it'. |

- :17        "These things I command you" - emphatic, desperate warning
- :20        "Remember the word"
- 16 :1        "That ye should not be offended"
- :5        "None of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou?" - implying Jesus was disappointed that they hadn't. "Sorrow hath filled your heart" (v.6) seems a similar rebuke.
- :24        "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask..."
- :31        "Do ye now believe? (said almost sarcastically)... ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" - cp. Joshua and Moses questioning Israel whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away.

"Let not your heart be troubled... neither let it be afraid" (:1,27) repeats Moses' final encouragement to Israel to "fear not, neither be dismayed" (Dt. 31:8; 1:21,29; 7:18). Inheritance of the Kingdom was assured- if they believed.

I think it is worth all of us pausing to ask the most basic question: Do we *really* believe that God exists? "Those who say that they believe in God and yet neither love nor fear him, do not in fact believe in him but in those who have taught them that God exists. Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, any anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-idea, not in God". The Jews must have been shocked when the Lord told them to "believe in God" (Jn. 14:1 RVmg.). For there were no atheists amongst them. What the Lord Jesus was saying was that their faith was in the God-idea, not in the real God. For if they believed the Father, they would accept His Son. We must ask whether we feel any real passion for Him, any true emotion, any sense of spiritual crisis, of radical motivation... See on Acts 16:34.

There are many other references in the Upper Room discourse to Moses- without doubt, Moses was very much in the Lord's mind as He faced His end. Consider at your leisure how Jn. 14:1 = Ex. 14:31; Jn. 14:11 = Ex. 14:8. When the Lord speaks in the Upper Room of manifesting the Father and Himself unto the disciples (Jn. 14:21,22), He is alluding to the way that Moses asked God to "manifest Yourself unto me" (Ex. 33:18 LXX). The Lord's allusion makes Himself out to be God's representative, and all those who believe in Him to be as Moses, receiving the vision of God's glory. Note that it was that very experience above all others which marks off Moses in Rabbinic writings as supreme and beyond all human equal. And yet the Lord is teaching that that very experience of Moses is to be shared *to an*

*even higher degree* by all His followers. It would've taken real faith and spiritual ambition for those immature men who listened to the Lord that evening to really believe it... And the same difficult call comes to us too.

The command not to be troubled is also an allusion to "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them" (Dt. 1:41). Yet the contrast is with Moses, who fain would have gone ahead into the promised land to prepare the place, but was unable.

14:2- see on Lk. 14:12.

*In my Father's house are many dwelling places*- This is a form of the verb 'to abide' which features so frequently in John's record. The Father and Son seek to abide in the believer through the Spirit, deep in the heart of the believer (:17; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). In this sense, each believer becomes like one of the rooms or cubicles around the temple, each used by a different priest. Insofar as the Spirit abides in us now, we are the temple of God, we are the new priesthood, and are therefore called to active service for others to His glory.

*If it were not so, I would have told you*- The offer of salvation is so repeatedly stated by the Father and Son throughout the Bible that we are left with a terrible choice: Either it is true, or God is the worst deceiver. And if that were the case, the Lord as the obviously good man would have told us. This awful choice points up the amazing truth- that God really wishes us to be saved and assures any and every believer of the certainty of salvation.

*I go to prepare a place for you*- The abiding Spirit was only given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39), and He will go on throughout the Comforter discourse to make this point. He was going to the cross, and to the intense mutual glorification of Father and Son there of which He has just spoken in chapter 13. He is speaking here in response to Peter's question as to where the Lord Jesus was now going to disappear to, i.e. in death. "I go to prepare a place for you" alludes to the idea of Moses and the Angel bringing Israel "into the place which I have prepared" (Ex. 23:30).

And it is also surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was "taken away" from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the 'taking away' of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is 'taken away' from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord's wedding to us.

14:3- see on Lk. 17:34; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 4:15.

*And if I go and prepare a place for you*- The Lord's death and glorification on the cross [in God's eyes], being lifted up in glory from God's viewpoint, was in order to release the Spirit. This was symbolized by the water which came from the Lord's side, and His breathing His last breath / spirit toward the weak and fearful disciples. He had asked the disciples to "prepare" the Passover meal for them (s.w. Lk. 22:12). And now He demonstrates the mutuality between Him and His followers by saying that He was now going to prepare a place for *them*, an abiding place, on account of actually being the Paschal lamb.

*I will come again*- The coming again refers therefore to His resurrection, and the spiritual intimacy with His followers which the gift of the Spirit would enable. There is of course

some reference to the second coming, but the Lord is to go on now to explain that His physical coming and presence were to be experienced in spiritual essence by His presence amongst them through the Spirit. The way He was going was to the cross- not to Heaven. There our place was prepared. He “came again” in resurrection.

The fact we sin and fail inevitably militates against a robust faith that “we will be there”. The Lord predicted how Peter would deny him; but went straight on to assure the shocked and worried disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled [because some of you will fail me]: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you... if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 13:36-14:3). These wonderful words of assurance were in the very context of predicting the disciples’ failure. It’s as if the Lord is saying: ‘Don’t let the fact that you will fail me shake your faith that I will never fail you, and I will save you in the end, despite your weakness and collapses of faith’.

*And will receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also-* This speaks of the spiritual intimacy which would be achieved through the gift of the Spirit released by the Lord's death. His death was enabling or preparing the abiding place by the Spirit in every believers' heart. "Where I am" is a distinct present tense. His being so united with the Father, able to lift up His eyes to Heaven and pray with no senses of barrier, was to be shared with the believers on account of the gift of the Spirit released through His death. This idea of His relationship and unity with the Father being shared with us is the great theme of His prayer of chapter 17. Where He was in His relationship with the Father would be ours. He would 'receive us unto Himself'- a phrase so intimate that it implies the closest form of marital union. It is used of taking a woman unto oneself in marriage (Mt. 1:20,24). "Unto myself" is the very phrase He used in 12:32 of how the cross would draw all the men of the new creation "unto me". This drawing unto and into Himself is all the work of the Spirit, an outflow of His work on the cross. The idea is not at all of going to be with Him in Heaven, but of being personally connected with Him; being received unto Himself is to be drawn unto Him on the cross. Again there is a connection with the prologue, where Israel generally did not "receive" Him, but those who did were given the Spirit of adoption, His grace / gift, His fullness (1:11,12,16 s.w.). The Jewish world refused to receive the gift of the Spirit (:17 s.w.). The same word is used of the receipt of the Spirit through His death (7:39; 20:22 "receive the Holy Spirit"; 1 Jn. 2:27 "the anointing which you have received"). There is a mutuality in all this; we receive Him, and He receives us (:20 s.w.). The receipt of the Spirit enables us to be received unto and into Himself, to be with Him where He was with the Father as He spoke those words. To deny the Spirit's operation is to miss out on the relationship with the Lord Jesus which is the essence of Christianity.

14:4 *And where I go, you know the way-* He had often told them of His forthcoming death, but rarely if ever about His ascension to Heaven. Where He was going clearly refers to the cross. The Lord seems to have imputed their future maturity to them at a time when they still didn't have it. 'You know where I go', He told them (:4,5)- when, as they themselves responded, they didn't. He said that they knew the Spirit of Truth, whereas the Jewish world didn't (14:17)- because “in that day you shall know...” (14:20). And this approach will help us with our immature and frustrating brethren; we need to impute to them that spiritual maturity to which we must believe they will rise.

14:5 *Thomas said to him: Lord, we do not know where you go. How do we discern the way?*- See on :4. Here we have our typical problem- we know the way of the cross, but in practice we don't know- or rather, we don't want to know. The disciples were confused as to where the Lord Jesus was going and to where He was leading them. His response was that He was and is "the way". C.H. Dodd in *The Interpretation Of John's Gospel* p. 412 suggests the meaning of Jn. 14:4,5 as: "You know the way [in that I am the way], but you do not know where it leads", and Thomas therefore objects: "If we do not know the destination, how can we know the way?". The Lord's response is that He is the way. That's it. It's not so much the destination as the way there. The excellency of knowing Christ demands of us to walk in His way, to know Him as the life right now, to live His life, to be in His way. The way is the goal; 'You don't need any further horizons than that, than me, right now'. This is totally unappreciated by the prosperity Gospel.

14:6- see on Jn. 13:37.

*Jesus said to him: I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me-* The way to the cross had been lived out by the Lord throughout His life. And that too is "the truth". "The way" was to the cross, and there we find and see the only true kind of life. That "way" of crucifixion life leads us to the Father, just as the Lord understood His death on the cross as a going to the Father. Because the cross so supremely manifested the Father, there we find Him, if we will live the life of Christ crucified. Yet if we keep His commandments, the Father and Son come to us (14:23), and we come to them. The cross enables a mutuality of relationship between us all. Note too that "the way" is now another term for "the cross". They were asking where He was going; was He going to die on a cross? And He replies that "I am the way"- that they ought to have realized that His whole way of life was a cross carrying, and so of course, He would be literally going to die on the cross; He would follow His "way" to the end.

"I am *the* way" may allude to the one great way of Proverbs. The whole way of life which leads to the Kingdom, the things we do, our deepest thoughts, our daily decisions; these are all "the way" which leads to the Kingdom; and yet Christ is "the way". This clearly means that all these things, the very essence of our being, the fibre of our thought processes, the basis of all our works; must be the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact God's ways and principles are unchanging encourage our self-examination; for there is always the rock of God and His way against which to compare our ways. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

14:7- see on Jn. 17:7.

*If you had truly known me, you would have truly known my Father also. From this time forward you will truly know Him and will have seen Him-* The Lord tells the Father in 17:7,8 that the disciples have known Him and the Father, unlike the Jewish world who had not known Him (16:3). Here we see a wonderful principle revealed: The Lord speaks so positively to the Father about us, imputing righteousness and levels of commitment to us which we do not currently have. They would truly know and see the Father through the work of the cross and the gift of the Spirit which would open their eyes to the Son and thereby to His Father.

14:8- see on Dt. 5:4,5.

*Philip said to him: Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us-* The Lord replies that He is the manifestation of the Father. This is the language of Ex. 33:18 LXX, where Moses likewise asks God “show Yourself to me”. The answer was in the theophany on Sinai, with the Name of Yahweh declared, as full of grace and truth. This, according to Philip’s allusion to it, is what we see in Jesus. And this is why the prologue in Jn. 1 speaks of the Lord Jesus in terms of the theophany of Exodus, that in His personality the full glory of the Father dwelt. Philip was the one who commented that “two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient*” for the crowd to eat and be filled. Yet he now uses the same, relatively uncommon, Greek word some time later, when he says that if he could see the Father, it would ‘suffice’ him (Jn. 6:7; 14:8). Perhaps John intended to bring out the growth in Philip; he now perceived that the bread created by the Lord for the crowd was indeed representative of the bread of life, the Lord Jesus who was the manifestation of the Father. The Lord had taught in Jn. 6:35 that He was the bread, and He bade His followers ‘see’ Him; and Philip had absorbed the point, even though, as the Lord makes clear, Philip still did not ‘see’ Him as he ought.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Father was evidently intended by Him to be a very real, achievable pattern for all those in Him. The prayer of chapter 17 makes this clear, for the Lord there prays that we would share His relationship with the Father, or as He has just said, we would be with Him where He then was in relationship with the Father. He wasn't an aberration, an uncopiable, inimitable freak. John's Gospel brings this out very clearly. The Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father, the Son knows men, men know the Son, and so men know both the Father and Son (10:14,15; 14:7,8). The Son is in the Father as the Father is in the Son; men are in the Son and the Son is in men; and so men are in the Father and Son (Jn. 14:10,11; 17:21,23,26). As the Son did the Father's works and was thereby "one" with Him, so it is for the believers who do the Father's works (Jn. 10:30,37,38; 14:8-15). Whilst there obviously was a unique bonding between Father and Son on account of the virgin birth, the Lord Jesus certainly chooses to speak as if His Spirit enables the relationship between Him and His Father to be reproduced in our experience.

14:9 *Jesus said to him: Philip, have I been with you such a long time, and still you do not truly know me? He that has seen me has seen the Father. How do you ask: Show us the Father?*- Although the Lord speaks quite toughly to them at this point, as noted on :7, He is totally positive about them in talking with the Father about them (17:7,8). They did not truly know Him nor the Father, and yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did “know” Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn’t then “know”, but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that “In that day you shall know” (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to “know” Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively. For to love someone is to impute things to them which we only hope for. That is the simple basis of the 'imputed righteousness' of which Paul writes in Romans.

14:10 *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in me does His works-* John’s Gospel especially seems to speak of the “words” and “works” of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which

was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, as the prologue stated (1:14); issuing in the works / actions of this man who was "the word made flesh". See on Jn. 8:28. The Lord is encouraging us to see beyond the miracles or "works"; all of His words, works, miracles, character, spirit, personality were summarized in Him as a person. There was perfect congruence between Him as a person and all that He said, did and showed Himself to be. He was as He has just stated "the truth", the word made flesh. The appeal to let His words abide in us does not therefore only imply that we are to memorize His recorded words and endlessly recycle them in our minds. Although there may well be an allusion to the idea of memorizing the Gospel records. It is more a question of allowing Him to dwell or abide within us, with all His spirit, words, personality and essence of His being. For this would be the Hebraic understanding of a man's "word".

14:11- see on 14:1.

*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake-* He wanted them to perceive the indwelling of the Father in Himself, and His mutual abiding in the Father, because this was the very thing which He was promising them- to share His relationship with the Father, to come to be where He now was with the Father (:3). The prayer of John 17 and the promises of the effect of the Comforter all speak of the same possibility.

As noted on 10:38, the Lord was willing to accept 'belief' if it was simply at the level of accepting that His miracles ["works"] were from God; in the hope that He could take such faith further. Yet here He seems to be saying that belief in Him as a person, was the same as believing in Him for the sake of His miracles. He as a personality, as a character, was the most powerful witness, at least equal to that witness provided by the miracles. To encounter Him without miracles ought to be persuasive enough, and we see this from the conversion of the Samaritan woman, who believed He was in the Father without seeing miracles.

14:12- see on Mk. 11:24; Jn. 17:20.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father-* As noted on :10 and :11, "the works" of the Lord refer not only to His miracles but to all that He was. His going to the Father on the cross would release the gift of the Spirit (7:39). This was and is fundamentally a gift of internal strengthening in the heart, although it had issue in miraculous works for the disciples in the first century context.

It may be the Lord had in mind that the disciples through having the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would do greater works than He had done. But this raises the question of what is meant by "greater". It could mean "more", numerically. But the Greek word specifically carries the idea of being older, more mature- e.g. "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (Jn. 8:53) in the context means 'Are you older than Abraham?'. So He could be saying that the disciples would do greater works" in the sense that collectively between us we would reveal to an even greater or mature extent the works of God. Because there must be a connection in His thought with Jn. 5:20, where alone elsewhere we meet the phrase "greater works": "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he shew him, that ye may marvel". The greater works that the Father showed the Son



were the works which the believers in Christ were to perform subsequent to the Lord's resurrection. The "works" are the works of God Himself. The community of believers in Christ are doing His works, acting as God would do if He were a human being living on planet earth, and in this sense we are doing greater works than what Jesus personally did; for He was 'only' one person, and we are many. And Jesus was aware of this. He explained repeatedly that the works He did were the works which God did (Jn. 5:36; 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). As God showed Him the works He was to do, so He showed those works to the world in which He lived (Jn. 10:32). Paul therefore states that there are good works which are prepared in Heaven for us to fulfil: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In a sense, all the works were finished from the foundation of the world, it's for us to go out there today and perform them (Heb. 4:3). Practically this means that as we contemplate "good works", we can be assured that somehow God will provide all that's needed for them to be performed. Our little faith so often stops us from performing them because we doubt whether we have the resources, the time, the money, the ability... whereas instead the need should be the call, and we should approach them in confidence that this is indeed God's will for us to do His works here on earth. For He has prepared both them and us to fulfil them.

The works of the Father and Son are defined in 6:29 as believing on the Son whom the Father sent. This is what it means to do the works of God. We could therefore read these promises as John's version of the great commission- to take the Gospel into all the world, and to trust that we shall be empowered by the Spirit to do this.

Another take on all this is that the potential enabled by the Spirit was never fully lived up to by the disciples, just as it is not with us. The Lord's promise that whatever the disciples asked, they would be given seems never to have been fully realized in them (Jn. 15:16). Likewise the 'prophecy' here that they would do greater works than done by the Lord, once they received the Comforter, and possibly the promise that they would be taught "all the truth" about "things to come" (Jn. 16:13), were all likewise promises / prophecies whose potential it seems the disciples never fully rose up to.

14:13 *And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son-* This is not a blank cheque promise. I suggested on :12 that the works of God were to bring others to faith in His Son, for that is how they are defined in 6:29. It is in that context that whatever we ask for will be ultimately provided. The connection with the great commission in the Synoptics is in the promise that "all power" would be given to enable this work to be done (Mt. 28:18). The laboured emphasis upon "in my name" here and in :14 would then connect with the command to "preach in his name" with the promise of the Spirit to empower them in that work (Lk. 24:47,49). Whilst we do not now have the miraculous gifts, the essence of this remains powerfully true. All shall be provided, the Spirit works in non-miraculous ways, if we ask for empowerment to glorify the Father in the Son through bringing others to Him. My own ministry is proof enough of that.

14:14 *If you shall ask anything in my name, that will I do-* This repeats word for word the assurance of :13; but as noted there, it is in the context of doing the "works" of the Father, which are bringing others to faith in His Son (6:29).

14:15- see on Jn. 17:6.

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*- As noted earlier in this chapter, the Lord is ever alluding to the last speech of Moses in Deuteronomy; here the appeal to "keep my commandments" sets the Lord as greater than Moses, mediating a new law to a new Israel; for "keep the commandments" reflects a major identical theme in Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:16. The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6).

But the Lord's commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3); it is not that we have been given a whole set of detailed regulations similar to the 613 given by Moses. It is not hard to be obedient to His commandments, 1 Jn. 5:3 implies. The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by 15:17: "These things[plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5).

God is His word, as the prologue states (Jn. 1:1); to love God is to love His word. If we love His Son, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all too easy to see our relationship with God and His Son as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can. In our seeking to know an infinite God, we will of course fail to see or appreciate the spirit of all His words. But He appreciates this. Yet in a sense our attitude to His word is an indication of our state of 'in-loveness' with God. Reading His word will not be a chore, a mountain to be grimly climbed and achieved each day; it will be a vital and natural part of our daily life, as natural and spontaneous as our desire to eat; and even *more so* (cp. Job 23:12).

14:16 *And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever*- Another Comforter / intercessor implies that the Lord Jesus was the first Paraclete [as confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1]. Yet Moses was the foremost intercessor for Israel, and is actually called 'the Paraclete' in the Midrash on Ex. 12:29. But the idea is that the Lord was only physically with them for so long; the Comforter would mean that His presence was with them "for ever". Any attempt to confine the work of the Comforter to the first century is

therefore ill founded. For the contrast is with how the Lord physically was with them for only a period; but the Comforter, His abiding presence, would remain with them "for ever".

14:17 *The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive. For it neither sees him nor knows him. You truly know him, for he abides with you and shall be in you-* This is clarified when we appreciate the allusion to the prologue. The Jewish world did not receive the Lord Jesus, and therefore did not receive His Spirit; but those who did received power to become God's children, and the grace / gift of all His fullness (1:11,12,16). "You truly know him" was not then true; as noted on :9 and :10, the Lord is imputing knowledge to them which they did not have at that very moment. We too need to see the spiritual potential in people, rather than relating to them how they are at this given moment.

Likewise the Spirit of truth, so named because it would guide them into all truth (16:13), "abides with you" right then. Although the Spirit was only poured out at the Lord's glorification on the cross (7:38,39), this was so certain that the Lord perceived that potentially, the Spirit was within them already. This is the scenario in Corinthians, where they had been given the Spirit potentially, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); and it is the case with many believers today who have not perceived the potential of the Spirit within them.

The promised Spirit "shall be in you"; it speaks fundamentally of an internal power, guiding into truth (16:13), which is a matter of the mind rather than miraculous external gifts. The Lord has just defined Himself personally as "the truth", so the promise is not so much of intellectual purity of understanding as relationship with Him; for "truth" is a Hebraism for relationship. It is only the Western mindset which would see in "truth" here a reference to academic, intellectual purity of understanding.

14:18- see on Mt. 18:6.

*I will not leave you desolate as orphans. I will come to you-* The Lord has just addressed them as "little children" (13:33), and senses their panic that He is leaving them. He assures them that He will come to them, just as He has stated in :3; that coming to them would be to receive them for ever to Himself through the ministry of His abiding Spirit. The allusion is to the way the Rabbis spoke of their disciples being left orphans after the Rabbi died. But the Lord's death would not be like that, but the opposite. His death would lead to His abiding personal presence and continual teaching of His disciples deep within their hearts. It is this allusion which explains the emphasis upon the Comforter providing continued teaching to the disciples. The discourse about the Comforter is inserted it seems in place of the Olivet prophecy, which in the Synoptics forms the Lord's promise of literally coming back. John's Gospel was written after them, and he is perhaps addressing the concern that the Lord had not returned, and might delay His return, by reminding them that the Comforter enabled the Lord's presence to be with us just as really as when He was literally present. There is an understandable desire in every true believer for the Lord's literal return; but we must be careful that our enthusiasm for it does not become so obsessive that we fail to sense His very real coming to us now in the Spirit. It is unfortunately significant that some of those most obsessive about the signs of the times fulfilling Bible prophecy and pointing to the Lord's imminent return are in fact those who also deny the operation of the Spirit today.

14:19 *Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you will see me. Because I live,*

*you shall live also-* The Lord carefully uses a present tense: "I live", not "I will live". His life was going to become their life because He would give them His spirit of life. The Lord would no longer be visible to the Jewish world; but He would be 'seen' by the disciples because the gift of the Comforter would be such that His presence was as real as if He were physically present.

14:20- see on Jn. 17:7.

*In that day, you shall truly know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you-* The "truth" in to which they would be guided by the Comforter, "the spirit of truth", would not be intellectual purity of understanding, but the knowledge or seeing of the Father and Son. And they would also "know" that "I [am] in you". This promise is often alluded to by John when later writing to the converts made from hearing or reading his Gospel record. For he writes about "hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13; also alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:3,5; 3:19; 4:6). So the knowledge that the Son dwells in us is from the experience of the Spirit. "That day" therefore refers to the day when the Spirit would be given, and they would 'see' the Lord ever before them and have His personal presence within them (:19).

14:21- see on Jn. 14:1.

*He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he that loves me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him-* I suggested on :15 that the plural "commandments" refers to the singular commandment to love which is paramount to Christianity. And the connection between commandment and love is continued here. To love one another as He loved us, keeping the commandment[s], is to love the Lord. And John later makes this explicit, in explaining that love of the Lord and love of each other are related and inseparable. The commandment[s] must be both 'had' and kept. To love those in Christ was a commandment which the Jewish world did not 'have' in that they did not accept it, and not only killed God's Son but persecuted and hated all who believed in Him. John's letters refer to those who hate their brother, and the reference is primarily to the Jewish persecution of their Christian brothers. Obedience to the command to love one another is effectively a loving of the Son, which is a loving of the Father; and in response the Son will love us in manifesting Himself to us. This self-manifestation of the Lord to those who love Him and His brethren is again through the ministry of the Spirit. It is paralleled in :23 with coming to the believer and abiding ["make our abode"] with him. "Manifest myself" is the word used of the manifestation of the risen Christ in Acts 10:40, and of the appearing of resurrected people of Mt. 27:53. John uses a related verb about the 'showing' of the Lord to the disciples after His resurrection (21:1,14). The evidence of the resurrection is not therefore in the literal visible appearance of the risen Lord to believers, but in His appearance or manifestation to them by the Spirit. In this sense His life is manifested or shown to us (1 Jn. 1:2 s.w.). This is why His resurrection, His life, His living again, can never be proven in Euclidean terms; it is a matter of experience. No amount of apologetics can prove the Lord rose from the dead, that a living body emerged from a cave on the outskirts of Jerusalem; and yet this is the cornerstone of the whole Christian faith. It is proven by His resurrection manifestation to those who accept His claims and live in His love, and whose lives are His life, His living. This may appear a circular argument, and so it is, in secular, human terms. But the transformation of life elicited by it, in radical love for each other, is to be the exhibit which cannot be argued against.

14:22- see on Jn. 7:4.

*Judas (not Iscariot) said to him: Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?-* They were far from understanding. His manifestation to the believers was because they had accepted Him and His claims, and were obeying His commandment to love each other. The Jewish world had not received Him, and so the internal manifestation of the Spirit could not be experienced by them. In simple terms, they did not love Him (:23).

14:23 *Jesus answered and said to him: If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our home with him-* The Jewish world did not accept the light of the Lord Jesus, as the prologue emphasizes. The manifestation of the Lord would be through His Spirit in the hearts of those who loved Him, and also loved their brethren, i.e. 'kept His word', His singular commandment of loving each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). See on :15. John's letters put this in so many words by saying that if we love the Father and Son, then we will love other believers. Here the Lord says that if we love Him, then we will "keep my word", which is the singular commandment to love one another. In that life of love, the Father and Son will 'come' to us by the Spirit, as explained on :3, and abide with us on a permanent level ["make our home"]. Not just in moments of emotional connection with them, but on a permanent basis.

14:24 *He that does not love me, does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me-* The words which are to be kept, as noted on :15, refer to the singular commandment to love each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). If we do not love the Lord, we will not love our brethren. And that word, of radical love, is the word of the Father. He is love, in that sense. This interpretation is confirmed by John's later interpretation of these words in 1 Jn. 4:16: "And we know and have believed the love which God has toward us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him". See on :31, where again, keeping God's commandment meant simply loving Him, unto death on the cross for His people.

14:25- see on Jn. 1:38.

*These things have I spoken to you, while still with you-* The Lord predicted His personal presence amongst them through the Spirit before He left them. He didn't leave them to just experience His presence through the Spirit. That experience would remind them that this was precisely what He had predicted. And yet He realized that at that time, they did not understand. But the coming of the Spirit would make clear what He meant. These words spoken about the Comforter, spoken at that moment whilst still with them, were the words which would be recalled to their mind by the Comforter (:26).

14:26 *But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember all that I said to you-* The Spirit was "in my name" in that it would be as if the Lord was literally with them. The Lord was aware that His teaching about the Comforter could not then be understood by them; and so He assures them that the Comforter would make them remember these words about the Comforter and then all would be plain to them; see on :25. It could be that the Comforter had a specific role in

recalling literally all the Lord had spoken to them, so that the Gospel records could be written under inspiration. But the connection with :25 suggests to me that the Lord had in view His specific teaching about the Comforter.

14:27 *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Let not your heart be disturbed, neither let it be fearful-* “Peace’ [‘shalom’ - the usual Semitic greeting] is my farewell to you” is an example of how He seems to have almost purposefully delighted in using language in a startlingly different way. There are times when the Lord Jesus seems to have almost coined words. The gift of the Spirit would be the source of peace with God, which is how "peace" is commonly used in the Bible. Therefore they need have no fear before God, troubled thoughts about the outcome of judgment day; see on :1. The peace given would affect their heart; the gift of the Spirit in view was primarily internal, in the heart. "My peace" refers to the peace which the Lord had with the Father, with no barriers. This is another way of saying what He does so often in this section- that the Spirit was enabling them to have the same relationship with the Father which He had. His *shalom* [peace] was not as the [Jewish] world could give it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

The Lord's commission to His preachers comes along with a promise that He would “be with [them] always”. This is perhaps Matthew's equivalent to John's promise of the Comforter, who would abide with the Lord's people for ever. The promise of Holy Spirit support in the work of fulfilling the great commission is not necessarily fulfilled in the ability to do miracles etc. It was in the first century, but not today. Yet the promise that “I am with you always, even [as you fulfil my commission to preach] unto the ends of the world”, is surely fulfilled in the promised Comforter, who is to ‘abide with us for ever’. What does this mean? The Comforter clearly refers to the personal presence of Jesus, even though He is not visibly with us:

<b>The Comforter</b>	<b>The Lord Jesus</b>
Will come into the world	Jn. 5: 43; 16:28; 18:37
Comes forth from the Father	Ditto
Given by the Father	Jn. 3:16
Sent by the Father	Jn. 3:17
The spirit of truth	The truth Jn. 14:6
The Holy Spirit	The Holy One of God Jn. 6:69
The disciples would know / recognize the Comforter	As they knew / recognized Jesus Jn. 14:7,9
Would remain within the disciples	Jn. 14:20,23; 15:4,5; 17:23,26
Declares things to come	Jn. 4:25,26
Bears witness, against the world	Jn. 8:14; 7:7
Not accepted by the world	Jn. 5:43; 12:48
Unseen by the world	Jn. 16:16

Because of this, the Lord made a clever word play by saying that “‘Peace’ [*shalom*] is my farewell to you” (Jn. 14:27)- when ‘Peace’ was what you said when you met someone, to say ‘Hello’. His farewell in the flesh was His ‘hello’, in that His personal presence would be with them. This Comforter, this personal presence of Jesus, is given *especially in the context of fulfilling the great commission to take Him to the whole world*. He will be with us, there will be a special sense of His abiding presence amongst us, because we are witnessing “in Him”, and our witness is a shared witness with Him. Any who have done any witnessing work, not necessarily missionary work, but any witnessing to Him, will have felt and known His especial presence, as He promised. And we live in a time similar to that when John’s Gospel was written- a time when the church were disappointed the Lord had not returned as quickly as they thought He would, when the eyewitnesses of Jesus in the flesh were not with them any longer. John’s point is that through the Comforter, it’s as good as if Jesus *is* here with us; and he brings out in his gospel how things like the judgment, eternal life, the coming of Jesus etc. all essentially occur within the life of the believer right now.

14:28 *You heard how I said to you: I go away and I come to you. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father. For the Father is greater than I-* As explained on :3, the going away was to the cross and the coming to them through His abiding presence in the Comforter. "If you loved me" may seem rather severe, seeing they were willing to die for Him. But their sorrow rather than rejoicing at His departure was actually because in real spiritual terms they did not love Him; they wanted Him to remain for their own sakes. If they loved the essence of what He and the Father stood for, they would have rejoiced at His departure, for it meant the giving of the Comforter which would glorify the Father and Son so much more than if He did not depart. "The Father is greater than I" may mean that the Father's glory was far greater an issue than the Lord's death or presence with them- the issues they were immediately concerned about. To love the Son was to love the glorification of the Father, who was greater than Him. They should therefore have rejoiced at the teaching that He was going away in order to come to them in the power of the Comforter. The same word has just been used of how "greater works" were to be done when the Comforter was given (:12), on account of the Lord's going to the Father on the cross. The "works", the miracles, would glorify the Father and Son (2:11; 11:4,40). The cross itself would glorify the Father and Son (12:41).

14:29- see on Jn. 12:16.

*And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe-* The purpose of prophecy isn’t to specifically predict the future, but so that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear. The disciples did not expect Jesus to enter into Jerusalem “sitting on an ass’s colt” in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16). Likewise with prophecies such as “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord’s own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, “his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said” (Jn. 2:17-22). Such later clarification of the Lord's words and actions was all part of the ministry of the Comforter to the disciples (:26).

14:30 *I will no longer say much to you. For the prince of the world comes; but he has no claim on me-* There was a Rabbinic tradition that the whole world was under the power of the

Angel of death which controlled Egypt at the first Passover, but had no dominion over Israel. They referred to this Angel as the *Sar ha-olam*, and at the time of Jesus the phrase "Prince of this world" would have been understood as referring to this Angel. This is how the Lord's use of the phrase would have been understood. He described the "prince of this world" - the Angel of death and darkness- as coming to him and finding nothing in Him. This would be alluding to the Angel of death at the first Passover (and Jesus was speaking at Passover time) coming to each house and finding nothing worthy of death there because of the blood of the lamb on the lintel. Jesus may have been using the 'language of the day' as He did regarding Beelzebub and demons, but the consistent fitting of the type implies Jesus believed the Rabbinic idea was at least partially correct, in that the whole world apart from Israel was under the control of a specific Angel. However, spiritually Israel were not under the protection of the blood of the lamb because they rejected Christ. The "prince of this world" Angel would therefore destroy them too. I have suggested on 12:31 that this prince refers to leader of the Jewish system, Caiaphas. This man, the very epitome of apparent spirituality, who had dominion over Israel, was being compared to the Angel of evil which the Jews believed had dominion over the Jews' enemies but not over the Jews. The Lord is turning it all around, to show that actually the Jews were like the Egyptians, and were under the domination of a leader who would not preserve them from the destruction now coming to them.

The Jews believed that the *Sar ha-olam* had no claim upon the Jews who were the true Israel, covered by the blood of the Passover lamb. The Lord is saying that *He* is that true Israel upon whom Caiaphas and his evil system had no power. This is the force of "he has no claim on me". The Angel whom the Jews thought would not touch them because of the other Angels hovering over them (the real idea of the word 'Passover') to protect them from the destroying Angel, was going to destroy them; the protecting Angel which hovered over them and led them through the wilderness was "turned to be their enemy"- i.e. to be the destroying Angel (Is. 63:10), the *Sar ha-olam*. And that destroying Angel was operating on earth through his human representative, Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world.

14:31 *And he comes so that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, thus I shall now do. Arise, let us leave here-* The prince of the Jewish world would come to take the Lord away to death, epitomized in his agent Judas, who 'came' to the Lord with the forces of the Jewish world to arrest Him (18:3). It was through reflection on all this that the Jewish world would "know" the Lord's sincerity, His love for the Father. That was however only potentially true, for even His death, with all the internal contradictions and evil within the Jewish system which were thereby exposed, did not bring all the Jewish world to know Him. "That the world may know" is an allusion to David's words just before the victory over Goliath.

The Lord's obedience to the Father's commandment was His love of the Father. Again we see a connection between love, and keeping commandment. I have suggested on :15 and :24 that the keeping of the Lord's commandment means loving our brethren unto the death of the cross, as He loved us. Here we see the same idea- the Son obeyed the Father's commandment by loving Him, unto death on the cross.



## CHAPTER 15

15:1- see on Lk. 13:8.

*I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman*- The Lord Jesus in John's Gospel describes Himself in terms of the "I am..." formula. Each time, He was referring back to the burning bush revelation of Yahweh as the "I am"; and by implication, the Lord's audience are thereby placed in the position of Moses, intended to rise up in response as he did. This parable is in the direct context of the promise of the Spirit. This is expressed here as the Father's constant activity as our husbandman, seeking to elicit spiritual fruit from us. And likewise our partaking in the vine means that we receive the sap, representing the Spirit, without which we are "none of His" are dead, unable to bring forth fruit.

"The true vine" suggests that the community in view is the true one compared to a false one; and the false vine was the community of Israel: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it in this land" (Ps. 80:8).

In this parable, the mediation of the Spirit is envisaged as being provided collectively, to the whole vine. If we opt out of realistic mixing with each other, we are effectively resigning from Christ. For He *is* His brothers and sisters. He didn't say 'I am the trunk and you are the branches', He said 'I *am* the vine, and you are the branches'. We *are* Him, His body. Our attitude to our brothers and sisters is our attitude to Him. We cannot claim to love God if we don't love our brother. It's as simple as this.

The Father is the husbandman, and is noted for His long patience in waiting "for the precious fruit" (James 5:7). Every bit of spiritual development is so precious to Him. To hinder it by our attitude to others, or enforcing situations which are going to limit the development of spirituality in others, is deeply displeasing to God and frustrating of His purpose and work for people.

The same word is used by the Lord in the synoptics concerning the parable of the husbandmen in Mt. 21; Mk. 12 and Lk. 20. This is surely John's take on that parable. The Jewish husbandmen had failed to develop fruit for the Father, and had been replaced by other husbandmen. But ultimately, the owner of the vineyard also becomes the husbandman. He is manifested through our efforts to be husbandmen. If we consciously seek to develop spiritual fruit in others then we will experience God's especial blessing and empowerment of our efforts.

15:2- see on 2 Cor. 4:4.

*Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit*- The removed branch which was not cleansed refers initially to Judas, who had now left them, as he was the one of them who was not clean / cleansed (13:10). Bearing the fruit of the Spirit is absolutely essential; Paul puts it another way when he writes that if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are "none of His". The Lord Jesus here speaks of how we as shoots on the vine tree are either 'cut off' in rejection, or 'trimmed / purged' to be more fruitful. There is a paronomasia here in the Greek text [i.e. a play on similar sounding verbs]- *airein* and *kathairein*. The point being that the purging process works through condemning oneself now; by going through the realization of our

condemnation now, we are thereby purged so that we avoid condemnation at the day of judgment.

The fruit to be produced is the fruit of the Spirit- which is all internal attributes, elicited by the sap / Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit (that which the Spirit produces) is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23). Nine qualities gathered as one cluster, just as on a grapevine.

As also to be noted on the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, God does all He can to ensure that we have an optimal environment for bearing spiritual fruit. So often we complain that if only we were in this or that situation, then we would bear more fruit. But He knows best. The cleansing, spoken of in this Upper Room context, must be understood in the context of the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet, whereby they were cleansed, but not all (13:10); for Judas was not cleansed internally. His comment that feet needed regularly washing may refer to some regular cleansing by the Lord, of which He again speaks here. 'Cleansing' may refer to internal cleansing of the heart; the pure / cleansed in heart (Mt. 5:8), those cleansed "within" (Mt. 23:6), and the internal work of cleansing the heart and conscience is that of the Spirit, operating within the heart of believers.

15:3 *Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*- How does the Lord's word cleanse? It is inadequate to suppose that by reading the whole Bible, we are somehow internally cleansed. The same word is used in 13:10 of how they had been cleansed, but not all- for Judas was excepted. Yet he had heard the word, as spoken words- but was not cleansed. As ever in John, the prologue helps us toward understanding. "The word was made flesh", and was "in the beginning" of His ministry, and "was God". The reference is not to all the recorded statements of the Lord Jesus, as if we are to read and recite all the red letter words in a New Testament and thereby be cleansed by the exercise. I have suggested elsewhere that the Gospel records were indeed intended to be memorized. But "the word" is the Lord Jesus as a person, in the flesh, as the personality which was the sum total of all His words, miracles, work, personality and character. The word of John 1 was the light of men, in which they should live. *Logos*, "word", like *rhema*, is used to translate the Hebrew *dabar*. These terms, however, are used to refer not just to words, but to actions and persons. *Dabar* is used to refer to far more than spoken words; but to things and causes. When the Lord speaks of "My word", He means not simply His recorded statements, but He Himself, the summary of all His being and personhood. "The acts [*dabar*] of David" (1 Chron. 29:29) means not simply his words, but his acts and whole life story. "The things [*dabar*] which your eyes have seen" (Dt. 4:9) referred not to words heard, but to experience; and this is a common usage, speaking of event as a "word". In Hebraic thought, a 'word' is a thing done and not merely words as in lexical items. "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes [*dabar*]" (Dt. 4:21) doesn't refer to words so much as to the sake or cause of a person. The Lord's "word" must be understood in this Hebraic sense, far wider than simply His recorded speech as it stands in the Gospels. This is why He speaks of "My word[s]"; the word / *logos* / *dabar* which was Him. His reference is not to the words of God in the Bible, but to the word which was Him. Dt. 26:17 records that Israel had chosen Yahweh to be their King; but the Targum on this says that they had appointed the word / *logos* of God to be their king. The *logos* of a person is them, with all their actions and events; and thus the word of the Lord Jesus refers to He Himself, just as "the word was God" in the prologue.

We therefore at this point note the singular, "word", not "words" as we would expect if His utterances were in view. References in the plural to His "words" may well be an example of

the Hebrew plural of majesty- the one great word / *logos*, which in John's writing can be none other than the Lord personally. We are cleansed by Him, by His blood, His work, and His sacrifice of a uniquely perfect life. The association of cleansing with His sacrifice is a common New Testament theme.

15:4 *Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me-* The Lord's common Upper Room theme of 'abiding' in Him uses the same word as Moses used when exhorting his people to 'cleave unto' God (Dt. 10:20; 11:22 LXX). This abiding involved loving God and keeping His commandments- all ideas which occur together in Dt. 13:4; 30:20. The branch can only bear fruit if it receives the sap which is in the whole tree. This sap represents the Spirit, which is why this parable is found wedged in between the promises of the indwelling of the Comforter. Abiding in the Lord means Him abiding in us, which He does through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (1 Jn. 3:24 etc.). The disciples were going to be tempted to turn away from the Lord; but He urges them to abide, because there can be no fruit of the Spirit on us unless the Spirit abides in us and brings forth those fruits. This is also a vital perspective on the claim that non-Christians produce spiritual fruit. The fruit brought forth by the Spirit, spiritual fruit, is indeed just that; and unless we are abiding in the vine, in the Lord Jesus, and He in us, then we simply cannot bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

The man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that kills an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart.

15:5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing-* He is the whole tree; He does not say that He is the trunk, and we the branches. To leave the tree is to leave Him; and He is His body, the entire community of believers. And severed from me, He said, you can do nothing, in spiritual terms. Much as some think they can. And in the end, like a slow cancer, the brother or sister who was offended by whatever, will eventually die in that they leave the vine of Christ. It is from the body of Jesus that there comes nurture and nourishment, supplied by every member of the body (Eph. 4:16). And we, all of us, are the body of Christ. To cut ourselves off from it, formally or informally, openly or deep within our hurt hearts, is to deprive ourselves of the nourishment which He is willing to give through our brethren. And likewise to try to exclude others from it is serious indeed; for so many who are disfellowshipped or excluded then fall away from true spirituality. It follows from this figure that not *all* our brethren are no good. There's a lot of goodness out there- those who give up lands, houses, parents etc. for the Lord's sake *will* find within His ecclesia a hundredfold of these things. But we will only share in these things if we are willing to look at the positive side in our brethren. For in many things we also offend others. Yet we know well enough we basically are sincere and willing to give to others. And as we expect others to relate to that good side in us, so we should to others. Nobody in the brotherhood is totally, purely evil- at least, seeing we cannot judge in that sense, we should not think that of any. We have to

assume that each of our brethren is secured in Christ, and will be in the Kingdom. They have the Christ-man formed in them, however immaturely.

15:6- see on Mt. 13:6; Rev. 14:10.

*If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned-* The language of branches being severed from the vine is used in Romans 11 about how *God* can do this in judgment. But it is He who can do this, and not us. We are the branches, not the husbandman. Those who choose not to abide in the Lord shall wither. In the primary context, the Lord had Israel in view, the fig tree which "withered" and would then have to be burnt (s.w. Mt. 21:19). The Lord had this figure in view when He spoke soon afterwards, on the way to the cross, of Israel as a withered tree about to be burnt up in AD70 (Lk. 22:31).

But Israel then, as many today, are living out their own condemnation; they will be "thrown out" or [s.w.] "cast away" at the final judgment (Mt. 13:48; Lk. 14:35) in response to their conscious decision not to remain in the Lord, in the vine; and refusing the sap of the Spirit. It is they rather than the Lord who have chosen their fate.

15:7 My words- see on Job 22:27,28.

*If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you-* I have suggested elsewhere that the Lord's "words" refer not so much to His recorded statements, those printed in red letters in some Bibles; but rather to the whole essence of His being and personality. For He was "the word made flesh", as the prologue states (1:14). The reference is not to the entire Bible, but specifically to the words of the Lord Jesus. If He abides in us, we will ask what *we* will, and it will be done. Yet only if we ask according to *God's* will can we receive our requests (Jn. 15:7 cp. 1 Jn. 5:14). The implication is that if the word that is Him dwells in us, our will becomes that of the Father, and therefore our requests, our innermost desires, are according to His will, and are therefore granted. It is by the Spirit that He abides in us (1 Jn. 3:24). His Spirit, His word, His way of thinking, is His will, which is the Father's will. If we have Him within, then our will shall be the Father's, and we will intuitively ask for only what we know is His will. We will not as it were be guessing, asking for lists of things in the hope that we shall hit on some points where our will and His coincide.

In our age, the Bible is indeed a valuable source for growing in knowledge of His will. The word of the Gospel becomes "united by faith with them that hear it" (Heb. 4:2 RVmg.). Through the medium of our response to God's word, our will becomes united with His. Therefore the word was what directed and motivated David's regular daily prayers (Ps. 119:164); they weren't standard repetitions of the same praises or requests, but a reflection of his Biblical meditation. He asks God to hear his prayers because He keeps God's word (Ps. 119:145,173). He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. He even goes so far as to draw a parallel between God and his own "reins" or inner self- both of them "instruct me" (Ps. 16:7). His inner self was so absorbed into the reality of God. He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. In successful prayer, therefore, our will merges with that of

the Father. His will becomes our will; and *vice versa*. By this I mean that *our* will can become *His* will in that He will hear us and even change His declared will [Moses several times achieved this during the course of his prayer life]; prayer really does change things. Our will becomes God's just as His becomes ours. There is an awesome mutuality between a man and his God as he kneels at night alone, praying and asking for the very things which are now God's will.

15:8- see on Jn. 12:23-26.

*Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so shall you be my disciples-* They were fearful that the Lord was going away, and they were being left "orphans", pupils without a Rabbi. But the promise of the Spirit means that He will be present with us just as much, and even more so, than when He was physically present as their teacher. He envisaged them, and all believers, continuing to be disciples, and Him through the Spirit being their continued teacher. The "fruit" in view is what Paul later terms "the fruit of the Spirit", the fruit brought forth by the Spirit, through our allowing the Lord to operate in us. It is the Father's will that we should bear much fruit, because it glorifies Him; and this is the end result of all the Lord's teaching, and of our being His disciples. We may think that if only our life situation were different, then we would be the more spiritually fruitful. But the Lord is clear that it is the Father's will, and His will, that we should be fruitful. As taught in the parable of the vineyard of Isaiah 5, all has in fact been done to provide us with an optimal environment in which to bring forth fruit.

The Father is glorified in our fruit bearing; but it is a major theme of John that it is the cross of Christ which brings glory to Him. The connection is in the fact that a true response to the principles of the cross brings forth true spiritual fruit. The glory of God is His Name and the characteristics associated with it; and we will bear these if we respond to the spirit of the cross. In this sense the Lord Jesus could say that through His death, He would be glorified in us (Jn. 17:10). By beholding and perceiving His glory on the cross, we glorify Him (Jn. 17:24,10).

15:9 *Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love-* Abiding is achieved through the Spirit abiding within us (1 Jn. 3:24); it is through the gift of the Spirit accepted within our hearts that His love is shed abroad within our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We abide in Him, in His love, and His love abides in us. And we therefore shall live in love to others. If we do not love our brother, we do not abide in Him nor He in us (1 Jn. 3:14). These allusions in John's letters seem to be saying that abiding in His love means loving each other, those others who are also in Him. This idea is continued in the next verse, speaking of how abiding in the Lord's love means keeping His commandment, of loving our brethren.

15:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

*If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love-* I suggest that the plural "commandments" is a Hebraism, a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment. And that is defined clearly in :12- the singular commandment is to love one another as He loved us, to death on

the cross. This effectively means: 'If you love one another, then you shall abide in My love'. Which is just what He has said in :9 (see note there). "His commandments" and "the [singular] commandment" are paralleled in 2 Jn. 6. The Father's commandment likewise is the same. For the Lord taught that all the Father's commandments are summarized in the idea of loving God and thereby our neighbour; see on Mk. 12:31. Any other reading of this verse is likely to veer towards treating the Lord's commandments as another list of statutes, similar in principle to the 613 given by Moses; as if He grants His love conditional upon our legal obedience to some extended moral code of behaviour. If this were the case, given our disobedience and weakness, we shall never know His love. And His love is not conditional upon legalistic obedience in this sense.

15:11- see on 1 Jn. 1:4.

*These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full-* The filling up of joy means that something will be done to us within our hearts; for that is where "joy" is experienced. 'Filling up' is the language of the ongoing filling of the Spirit, which is the context of this whole section in chapters 14-16. The Lord's spirit, His way of being and thinking, His mind, included "joy". He wished to give His spirit to us, so that His spirit might become ours; and thereby His joy would be within us. His "joy" is expressed in the Gospels as joy over a lost sheep being found (Lk. 15:7), the joy of finding people for the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44), the joy of seeing others enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:21). What He rejoices in, we shall. His joy shall be in us in that we share His spirit, His attitude and mindset (17:13). John himself experienced this when he wrote of having joy that his converts were abiding in Christ; and he could think of "no greater joy" (3 Jn. 4).

15:12 *This is my commandment: That you love one another, even as I have loved you-* As noted on :10, this singular commandment is spoken of in the Hebraic plural of majesty as His "commandments", plural. This in one 'word' is the essence of His message, His *logos* to men. We are to love each in on ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in this century. "By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11). As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord has spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us, which is to love as the Lord loved us. For the next verse will define love as the love of the cross.

15:13 *Greater love has no one than this: That a man lay down his life for his friends-* This is a truth accepted in every human society, and many men have laid down their lives for their friends. What is unique about the Lord's love-unto-death was that He died for us whilst we

were yet enemies, and not His friends (Rom. 5:8); He took the initiative in loving us through the death of the cross (1 Jn. 4:10,19). We only love, because He first loved us. As noted on 10:11, the Lord did not have His life taken from Him, He gave it of Himself, to the point of controlling the very period and moment at which He died, consciously out breathing His last spirit toward us. And so the Lord's "greater love" was in that He died for us whilst we were not actually His friends but enemies (Rom. 5:10 "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"). He *called us* friends; that is the huge force behind those words in :15. He took the initiative, calling us friends when we were enemies; and died for us. We show ourselves to be His friends by accepting His love, and living in that love toward others (:14).

15:14 *You are my friends, if you do the things which I command you-* For "friends", we could read 'The ones whom I love', for that is how the Lord has just defined love, as laying down life for friends (:13). The things commanded are quite simply to love our brethren as the Lord loved us (:12); that singular commandment is spoken of in the plural in :10 as a Hebraic plural of majesty, the one great commandment, the one great thing commanded. The Lord is not saying: 'I shall love you, if you first love Me, and demonstrate that by keeping a list of a few hundred commandments I have given you'. That would be to totally miss the point. We love, because He *first* loved us (1 Jn. 4:19); it was not that we loved God, but that He loved us in giving His Son (1 Jn. 4:10). The Lord has died for us, showing us that "no greater love" (:13). We abide in that love if His spirit abides in us, and we likewise live in love, doing the great thing He commanded both by word and example- to love as He did.

15:15- see on Jn. 16:12.

*No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you-* As noted on :13, the uniquely "greater love" shown by the Lord was that He died for us when we were still enemies (Rom. 5:10); but He *called us* His friends. His intense hopefulness in our response accompanies all our efforts to invite others to accept His love and consciously befriend Him who so befriended them. The "no longer" suggests that in His death on the cross, they will see the final revelation of God, the quintessential declaration of all that He had heard from the Father, made known to them. There is no hint here that He now is going to declare the future to them. Now they were going to understand what their Lord and friend had done; for the Comforter was to open their understanding to the things of the cross, to the meaning of it all. This explains how things were going to change in their understanding, from being servants just obedient for the sake of it to a Master they respect and obey but do not really understand, to friends who now have been shown the innermost essence of their Master. As noted on 16:13, the Comforter was to make known to them the things which were coming, the things of His death on the cross. He would show them plainly of the Father, in His death on the cross and the Comforter unpacking that death to them (16:25). Or as Paul puts it, the gift of the Spirit opens our eyes to understand the depth and height of our Lord's love for us (Eph. 1:18; 3:18,19). And His love was declared in essence in the death of the cross.

Friendship is exactly the language God uses about Abraham- because He was His "friend", He showed Abraham what He was going to do (Gen. 18:17-19). But the things to be done here refer to the cross (see on 16:13). To the Lord's first hearers, a slave was defined by his

or her obedience to the master's commands. The Lord says that His followers are His friends, who do His commandments- but they're not slaves. He seems to be saying that they were indeed His slaves- but a new kind of slave, a slave who whilst being obedient to the Master, was also His personal friend. It's lovely how the Lord speaks of such well known ideas like slavery, and shows how in the humdrum of ordinary life, He gives an altogether higher value to them. See on Jn. 10:28.

He has just reminded them that they call Him Lord, and rightly so, and therefore His washing of their feet was what they must do (Jn. 13:13). Earlier, He had rebuked them for calling Him "Lord" but not *doing* what He said (Lk. 6:46- this is in a speech directed at the disciples- Lk. 6:20,27,40). And yet He told others that His disciples *did* His word (Lk. 8:21). He was so positive about them to others, even though they did not *do* the consequences of calling Him Lord [e.g. washing each other's feet- instead, they argued who was to be the greatest]. Perhaps when the Lord says that He will no longer relate to them as a Lord, with them as His servants, but rather simply as their friend, He is tacitly recognizing their failure, and preparing Himself to die for them as their friend rather than as their Master. And yet, as the Divine economy worked it all out, it was exactly through that death that they exalted Him as Lord and Master as they should have done previously.

15:16- see on Mk. 4:8; Jn. 14:12.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. So that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you-* This is alluded to in 1 Jn. 4:10,19- it is not that we loved God and He responded, but He loved us. We were out seeking for the Lord Jesus and found Him as a result of hard Biblical scholarship. He found us; indeed Paul cites the whole question of choosing, calling and predestination as the parade example of God's grace through the work of the Spirit. His choosing of us is the supreme example that it is not of works, nor intellectual ability, but of grace through the Spirit. "You did not choose me, but I chose you... out of the world" (:16,19) corresponds to the oft repeated theme of Moses that God has chosen Israel "out of all peoples" (Dt. 7:6 RVmg.), by grace (Dt. 4:37; 10:15; 14:2).

It is not as if the Lord Jesus has said to us: 'Would you like me to die for you on the cross, to gain your salvation?'. Because then we could say 'No, don't do it for me', and we would be free of obligation. But He has taken the initiative. He has already died for us, He suffered for me, He won my redemption. And He has called me to know this and respond to it. I *can't* say, with eyes even only half open to the cross, 'No, I don't want what You did for me. Take it away, no, I don't want it'. He has done it. He has called me. I can't say I don't want it. And for you too. We have not chosen Him of our own decision; He has chosen us, and asked us to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16). Reflected upon, this is one of the most tremendous imperatives which we have to a dedicated life of response to the principles of His cross: justifying the weak, showing a spirit of grace amidst hatred, imbibing the word, being concerned for the salvation of others amidst our own agonies, enduring apparently endless tribulation (notice, and circle in your Bible, all the occurrences of the word "and" in Mk. 15 A.V.)... that principle that *nothing else matters* apart from our response to His love, so great, so free. The whole horror, pain and tragedy of the cross was surely to show us that *He loved us far more than we have ever or will ever love Him*. And yet He asks us to accept His love, to respond to it, to love Him and in that love, show forth His character to others. With shame at the paucity



and poverty of our own devotions, we can do little else but respond as fully and as best we can.

The twelve evidently saw Jesus of Nazareth as a Rabbi, their special, lovable, somewhat mystic teacher at whose feet they sat. But the disciples saw Jesus within the frames of Judaism. "What does this mean? He tells us..." (Jn. 16:17) is similar to a familiar Rabbinic formula. But of course Jesus was far more than a Rabbi, and He laboured to change their perceptions. For example, He stresses many times that *He* chose *them* to be His disciples (especially Jn. 15:16-19)- whereas in Judaism, it was always disciples who chose a Rabbi: "Jesus chose the disciples, but the students of the rabbis almost always chose a teacher". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

The language here is very much that of ordaining to priestly service, just as in chapter 17 the Lord will talk about sanctifying His followers, as if they are Levites, and sending them out to do Divine service in the work of the great commission, calling others to His grace. We find this same theme of a new Israel being created in the usage of "ordained [Gk. *etheka*] you". C.K. Barrett shows that *etheka* reflects the Hebrew *samak*, and that the Lord's phrase alludes to the ordination of a disciple as a Rabbi. Those guys must've looked at each other in shock. They who were barely literate, and knew how very human they were, whose small minds were creaking under the burden of trying to understand this Man they so loved... were being ordained as Rabbis, by a man who'd just washed their feet, which was what disciples usually did for their Rabbis. But yes, the Lord challenged them and us to have a far higher estimate of His opinion of us...

"I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go forth* and bring forth fruit... that whatsoever you shall ask of the *Father* in *my name*, he may give it you" is full of connection with the world-wide preaching commission; and in this context, *whatever* we ask to this end will be given. All will be provided for our mission; if it is indeed solely for His mission that we are making request. Lack of resources has never therefore ultimately and truthfully hindered any sincere attempt to obey the great commission. I can personally testify to that and so can many.

The fruit brought forth is therefore in converts. The 'remaining' [s.w. 'abiding'] of the fruit would then refer to the converts abiding in the Lord and He in them through the Spirit, which would then be alluded to by John when he writes that he has no greater joy than to know that his converts abide in the Lord (3 Jn. 4). This is the branch and fruit abiding in the vine.

15:17- see on Eph. 1:5.

*These things I command you, so that you may love one another*- This doesn't mean 'I command you to love one another, so that you may love one another'. The idea rather is that

all the "things" the Lord had taught, in the word or commandment which was Him as well as in His actual words, were summarized in the need to love one another. This was and is the essence of Him, His word made flesh. See on :17.

15:18 *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you-* The "if..." is perhaps a reflection of the Lord's hope that the Jewish world would be persuaded by the witness of the disciples' love and unity- although elsewhere He clearly envisaged their being cast out of the synagogues and experiencing evil at the hands of the Jewish world. And yet in that word "if..." we see reflected His positivism and hopefulness for others, which is to be part of our spirit too, if we have received His spirit. The hatred of the world has been explained by the Lord as a result of their resistance to the message preached (7:7). I suggested on :16 that the Lord is here repeating the essence of the great commission, to go into the world and bring forth fruit for Him. The comment about love in :17 would then be suggesting that our love for each other will back up that witness, as the Lord envisaged in chapter 17. And now He comforts His future preachers that they are to expect opposition to their witness, but in that experience they will know Him and share His spirit, for that was His experience too.

15:19 *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you-* This is basic psychology; those who come "out of" a system are hated by that system. But the hatred is specifically because the disciples would preach to the world and seek to convict them of sin (7:7). The talk about love and hatred here is alluded to by John when he urges his converts not to hate each other, especially in 1 Jn. 4. By hating our brother, we are as the world. For that is what the world does. And John presents a chasmic divide between the believer and the world. To hate our brother is to place ourselves on the side of the world. John was writing for Jews and to Jewish converts; the pull of the Jewish world, the synagogue, was every strong. And he is reminding them that the Lord saw a huge divide between His followers and that world, a world which was fast heading to its destruction in AD70.

15:20 *Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also-* The Lord has just taught that He treats His followers not as servants but friends; and yet here He addresses them again as servants. But I suggested on :15 that His idea was that they are His servants whom He treats as intimate friends, revealing absolutely bare all that He is and stands for, and dying for them. From how the Lord speaks here, serious opposition to the preaching of His word is absolutely to be expected. A merely social Gospel, a doing good works in the hope somebody might somehow notice and come to the Lord, will not have this effect. Our preaching of Him means that there will be the parallel made here between "my word" and 'your word'. His word was the essence of Him, the light which challenged the darkness of men; and we shall meet the same response as He did. But it is that plain presentation of Him which will lead people to Him, rather than the supposed social Gospel of good works alone. For that is not a uniquely Christian statement, in that many folks do good works. 'Keeping My word' meant receiving life eternal (8:51,52), and the Father and Son making their dwelling in the heart of the hearer (14:23); this is the profound message we have for men.

15:21 *But all these things will they do to you for my name's sake, because they do not truly*

*know Him that sent me-* John later speaks about those who fulfil the great commission as going forth for His name's sake (3 Jn. 7). Throughout this section, the Lord is speaking about the need to follow the great commission and preach forgiveness and repentance in His name (Lk. 24:47). If His Spirit, His word and essence, abode in them, then they would experience the same opposition which He did. Their 'not knowing' the Father who sent the Son would be the basis of their hatred of the preachers. On the other hand, to know the Father is to have relationship with Him, and love His children. John's letters develop this same theme; to not love is to not have a relationship with the Father.

*15:22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin-* We see here that hearing the word is the basis for responsibility to judgment. The 'coming' of the Lord was not a reference to some descent from Heaven to Palestine on planet earth; His coming to the Jewish world was in His words spoken to them. And as He was sent into the world, so He was sending His disciples. The fact they were without excuse issued in a hatred for the preachers who had spoken to them- for that is the context here in :23 and :21. All the synoptics use the word translated "excuse" about the Jewish leadership making a "pretence" of spirituality (Mt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47). And this is John's version of that. He states specifically what the synoptic writers do not- that the "pretence" of external religion was in fact to cloak [AV] or hide their sin. The synoptics state that for a "pretence" the Jews made long prayers, but they do not specifically state what was being cloaked or covered over. And here, the Lord states it was "sin". So often, religious behaviour is used in order to cover our sin from our own eyes. We must remember that we are all prone to the psychology of religious behaviour. The Lord 'spoke to them' about this; and they no longer had that cloak, for He had removed it and demonstrated that He saw through it. Their works were evil (7:7) and He had urged them to address their internal issues instead of covering their evil thoughts with external acts of obedience. And their response was to hate Him.

*15:23 He that hates me hates my Father also-* The attitude of people to the Son is their attitude to God. The Jews of course considered that they loved God, but hated His Son. And the Lord is saying that this cannot be the case. And again John builds on this in a pastoral sense in 1 Jn. 4, arguing that if we hate our brother, then we hate the Father and Son. It was an awful thing to accuse an Orthodox Jew of hating God; their whole life was so apparently God-centred. But our attitudes to His Son and all His children are our attitudes to Him.

*15:24 If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father-* This parallels the statement in :22 that it was because the Lord had "spoken" to them that they "had sin". His spoken words were paralleled with the works He did amongst them. As John especially makes clear, all those miracles were "signs", were a word to men. This confirms our earlier suggestion that the references to "my word[s]" in John are talking about the essence of the Lord's self-declaration and declaration of the Father, rather than literally referring to His recorded lexical items, the sentences printed in red letters in some Bibles. The "works" were so that they could see the Son, and thereby the Father. The miracles were not therefore random acts of kindness to meet human compassion; for the Lord walked past many cases of human need without responding. They were specifically designed to enable men to see / understand / know / believe in the Son and Father. We also learn from this that the Jews through the miracles did in fact perceive who the Lord was, hence the hatred for Him which arose from a bad conscience. Throughout the Joseph record there is the unwritten sense that the brothers had a niggling conscience that Joseph might be alive. This typifies the

underlying Jewish conscience towards the Lord Jesus. They knew Christ as Messiah, but blinded themselves to the fact (Jn. 6:36; 9:41; 15:24 cp. 14:7).

15:25- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

*All this happens so that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law: They hated me without a cause-* "Their law" rather than 'God's law' is another reflection of how they had hijacked God's word and ways and turned it into their own religion; the feasts of the Lord and house of the Lord had become the feasts of the Jews, and the temple of the Jews. "They hated me without a cause" (Ps. 35:19; 69:4) surely refers to their crucifixion of Him "without a cause" as reflected in the collapse of the legal case against Him. Their own law ["their law"] admitted there was no cause for death. He died purely because of their hatred. He again seems to use the past tense to describe His yet future death. These men would see the Father and Son, which has to be connected with John's recurring theme that in the cross men saw what Moses so wanted to see- Yahweh Himself manifested.

The Messianic Psalms quoted about hatred of the Lord without a cause imply that this hatred was especially seen in His death. And yet the Lord has said that our sharing in His Spirit will mean that we too shall be hated if we witness "in Him", in His Name. This means that in our experience of opposition and hatred, we are sharing in His crucifixion experiences. He there becomes each of us. He was indeed our representative, and we are His too. Our experiences therefore provide a bridge between Him there, many centuries ago, and us today. We thereby in an experiential sense come to "know Him", and Him in His time of crucifixion. And if we thus suffer with Him, we shall also live with Him, eternally.

15:26 *And when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me-* The opening of this verse, "And..." or "But...", suggests a direct connection with what has preceded. There we have been told one of John's versions of the great commission. The Lord envisaged that believers in Him would go forth into the world and bring forth fruit, but would encounter the same hatred from the Jewish world which He had experienced. His anticipation of persecution for His witnesses (:20) is the background for this renewed promise of the Comforter. It is this context of persecution which provides the appropriacy of the language of *parakletos*. The Spirit would testify of the Lord Jesus; yet the disciples personally were to do so. They would have the Lord's Spirit within them, and so their witness would be in the power of the Spirit.

The *parakletos* / Comforter is literally 'one called alongside', and this title is appropriate to the idea that the Lord is physically leaving them, but His presence will abide with them through the Spirit. It is as if the Lord is physically with us, as if He has come alongside us. The legal aspects of the word, referring to an advocate, may have been appropriate to the context of persecution. The association of the Comforter with "testimony" continues the legal association.

There is a definite link between the power of witness and the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that bears witness; and yet we are the witnesses. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are not in view, although in the first century context, they were a visible manifestation of possession of the Comforter. The Spirit bears witness in us in that the spirit of Christ, the joy, peace, love which we show as individuals and thereby as a community, gives as much credibility to our

witness as did the performance of miracles in the 1st century. And so Paul told the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance". The "assurance", the power of confirmation, was in the credibility which the Spirit of Christ in their examples gave to their preaching of the word. And likewise in 1 Cor. 2:3-5: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God".

"He shall testify of me" reflects a masculine term in the Greek. But the object referred to is the Holy Spirit, which is neuter. This apparent mismatch of gender in Greek grammar is intentional; for the Lord is saying that the Spirit will enable them to have His personal presence in their hearts, to the point that the neuter "Spirit" is effectively Him, a male; so really can He be in us by the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit would be their testimony (:27). It is our spiritual character, the evidence of the Spirit within us, which is the real and compelling witness to this world.

15:27 *And you also shall testify, because you have been with me from the beginning-* This was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

14:26 and 16:12 likewise associate the work of the Comforter with the testimony of the disciples, who had been with the Lord from the beginning of His ministry. There was a special sense in which the Comforter was relevant only to the disciples, the first eye witnesses from the beginning of the ministry. But the connections with other teaching about the gift of the Spirit lead us to conclude that as with all New Testament teaching about the Spirit, the essence is for all time, although the miraculous manifestation was only for the first century. These passages (here and in 14:26; 16:12) make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

The whole purpose of the Lord's life was that He should "bear witness" unto the Truth of the Father (Jn. 18:37). But John also records the Lord's expectations that all in Him should likewise "bear witness" (Jn. 15:27). And as John recounted the Gospel [of which the Gospel of John is a transcript], He stresses that by doing so he is 'bearing witness', living out the work of the Lord who lived as the faithful and true witness to men (Jn. 3:11; 19:35; 21:24 cp. 18:37).

### **The Comforter: An Angel?**

The point has been made by several expositors that as Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God's Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension. The gift of the Holy Spirit was to be

"within" the disciples; but it could be feasible that this was superintended by an Angel. The following thoughts are presented more for reflection; I am undecided about the matter. It could be that the Lord is alluding to Jewish ideas about a *paraklete* Angel and deconstructing them; urging His people to forget Jewish angelology and have His direct personal presence in their hearts through the Spirit. But for the record, here is a summary of the reasons for thinking that the Comforter may have some reference to an Angel:

- Is. 63:7-11 describes the Angel that guided Israel through the wilderness as the "Holy Spirit" - which is the Comforter.
- The Comforter was sent in God and Christ's Name (Jn. 14:26)- the Angel was sent in God's Name (Ex. 23:21)
- The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide (16:13), be a judge (16:8) and prophesy (16:13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God's ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God's Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them.
- The Comforter would "shew you things to come" (Jn. 16:13)- fulfilled by the Angel giving the Revelation to John.
- The Angel testified to the churches (Rev. 22:16)- "the Comforter... shall testify of Me" (Jn. 15:26).
- The references in Acts to the Holy Spirit as a person would then be easier to understand - e.g. "The Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas. . ." (Acts 13:2). Similarly the frequent occurrences of the ideas of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit together fall into place if the Holy Spirit has some degree of reference to a personal being in the form of an Angel. The error of the doctrine of the trinity is not in identifying the three common forms of God manifestation (i.e. through God Himself, Jesus and the Holy Spirit Angel), but in the inter-relationships between them which it proposes. This idea is worth applying to our understanding of the baptismal formula.
- The work of the Comforter Angel may have been confined to the first century, in the same way as the Angel was particularly evident to the ecclesia in the wilderness during the initial Exodus period. Thus the words 'Angel' and 'Spirit' are obviously interchangeable in the book of Acts (e. g. 8:26,29; 10:3,19,20).
- The Angel in Revelation "like the son of man" (i.e. representing Him but not Him personally) would then be this same Comforter Angel representing Jesus (Rev. 1:11 cp. 22:13,8,16). He carried the titles of Jesus, who carried the titles of God- e. g. "Alpha and Omega".
- The Comforter is called "the spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls literature, this phrase describes an Angelic Spirit who is the leader of the "good forces" and 'in whom' the righteous walk [*Testament of Judah* 20, 1-5]. The Aramaic translation of Job, and the targums on it, uses the term *prqlyt* to describe the Angelic spokesman [the *malak melis*] who makes a testimony in Heaven in Job's defence (Job 16:19; 19:25-27; 33:23).
- Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet* (AGJU, 1963), brings out many connections between the Comforter and the Angel 'Michael the Spirit of truth' in contemporary Jewish writings.
- When we read of the "spirit of the Lord" snatching away Philip, it seems logical to interpret this as the same Angel already mentioned earlier in the chapter (Acts 8:26,29,39). But this Angel is defined as the Lord's Angel- and the Lord in Acts is nearly always the Lord Jesus. Clearly we are led to understand the Lord Jesus as being associated with a specific Angel.

- "Ye have an unction from the Holy One (the Comforter/ Holy Spirit), and ye know all things" (1 Jn. 2:20) is clearly alluding to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14:26; but "Holy One" is Angelic language, as if the Holy One was also an Angel.

- The tongues sitting like flames of fire on the apostles at Pentecost was an Angelic manifestation; the Angels can be made "a flame of fire".

- Jude 5 reminds the new Israel of the first century that Israel of old had been condemned due to their provoking of the wilderness Angel- a warning that takes on special power once it is recognized that the very same Angel was leading the early church.

- Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains many references to the Angel of Israel. He uses examples from Israel's history in which they rejected those who were types of Jesus- e. g. v. 9,10,22,25. It follows then that v. 35 must refer to this same aspect of Moses as a type of Christ being rejected. "This Moses whom they renounced... even him God sent to be a ruler and a redeemer with the hand of that Angel which appeared to him in the bush" (Diaglott). Israel resisted the work of the Angel supporting Moses, and so years later they were also rejecting the support of the same guardian Angel for the teachings of Jesus and His disciples, the greater than Moses. So v. 51 stresses "ye do always resist the Holy Spirit (the title of the Comforter Angel in Is. 63): as your fathers did, so do ye". Their fathers resisted the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century were doing just the same.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *These things have I spoken to you, so that you should not be made to stumble-* The context goes on to speak of excommunication from the synagogue. The Lord perceived that religious excommunication created a strong possibility of stumbling; and so it is to this day. He says this in the context of His promise of the Comforter, His presence amongst and within the believers. His argument is that if that is felt and experienced by believers, then being disfellowshipped from some human group will not at all affect them. The wonder of His abiding presence will be far greater than the trauma of being excluded from some human group or society. And that truth remains wonderfully true today, the ultimate comfort through all church politics and exclusions performed by those who thereby proclaim that they do not have the Spirit.

The discourse in the upper room was intended by the Lord "to prevent your faith from being shaken" or, literally, 'scandalized' (Jn. 16:1). And yet He uses the same word to predict how "This night you will all be scandalized because of me" (Mt. 26:31). He knew they would stumble, or be 'scandalized'. Yet He hoped against hoped that they would not be; so positive was His hope of them. And exactly because He was like this, the pain of their desertion and stumbling would have been so much the greater. And the Lord who is the same today as yesterday goes through just the same with us, hour by hour.

16:2 *They shall put you out of the synagogues. Yes, the time is coming, when whoever kills you shall think that he offers service to God-* See on :1. The coming time or hour in John's Gospel refers usually to the Lord's death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20,21; 12:23,27). In the crises of persecution we face, we are sharing in His death, that His life might be ours too.

Realizing the need of each believer for the brotherhood will lead us to be more than careful before ever evicting anyone from our association. Indeed, forced expulsion from any social group is highly damaging to the victim. The Lord appreciated this when He said that when His followers were cast out of the synagogues, then they would be likely to stumble (Jn. 16:1,2). They were excommunicated exactly because of their faith in Him; and yet He foresaw that in the aftermath of that rejection, emotionally, sociologically, economically, they would be likely to stumble. Eviction of anyone from our fellowship ought therefore never to be done lightly, if ever. For by doing so, we are likely to make them stumble from the path to eternity; and nobody would want such a millstone around their neck at judgment day. We may in this life appear to be 'keeping the truth pure', 'doing the right thing'- but the Lord will judge the effect we had upon another's path to Him.

Initially, as we see from e.g. John's Gospel, the core issue in Christianity revolved around simply believing in Jesus. But soon, as we see from John's letters, it became important to counter wrong beliefs *about* Jesus. As controversy over interpretation developed, it was almost inevitable that the arguments led to exaggerations on both sides. We see it happen in political arguments today- the supporters of candidate X respond to criticisms of him by painting him as more exalted, wonderful and even Divine than he really ever could be. And as they do so, the critics become even more virulently against them. This is the nature of controversy. And as the Jews began expelling Christians from their synagogues (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and inventing many slanderous stories about Jesus, it was inevitable that those without a solid Biblical grounding in their faith would *react* rather than *Biblically respond* to this- by making Jesus out to be far more 'Divine' than He was.



The apostate among God's people, both in Old and New Testaments, sunk to the most unbelievable levels, but sincerely felt that they were doing God's will. These things included killing righteous prophets (Jn. 16:2), turning the breaking of bread service into a drunken orgy (1 Cor. 11:21), and turning prostitution within the ecclesia into a spiritual act (Rev. 2:20). For believers to come to the conclusion that such things were the will of God surely they were not just misinterpreting Scripture. There was an extra-human power of delusion at work. We have seen in the above verses that God is responsible for this kind of thing. Note that the Bible knows nothing of a super-human devil who does all this.

The early believers were initially members of the synagogues, and Paul always visited the synagogue services in his travels. Peter and John went up to pray in the temple at the ninth hour along with everyone else (Acts 3:1). Early ecclesial meetings were based upon the synagogue system (James 2:2). The Lord didn't tell them to leave because they might catch some 'guilt by association'. He knew that if they forthrightly preached the Truth, they would be excommunicated: "the time will come when they will expel you from their synagogues", He had foretold; as if He expected them to stay there until they were chased away. Those who reject the Lord Jesus will treat us likewise (Jn. 15:18-21). However, it must be said that the Lord was perhaps making some concession to the weakness of His new people by allowing them to remain members of the synagogue system, and keep parts of the Law. As the New Testament period progressed, the Holy Spirit through Paul increasingly urged upon the believers the need to cast out the bondwoman of Judaism, to trust completely in grace not law. Consider, too, Paul's command in 1 Cor. 11:14 that brethren do *not* wear head coverings in ecclesial meetings. Assuming this to have been a universal principle which he intended to be followed in all ecclesias [and the reasons he gives are based upon universal principles], this was really signalling an exit from the synagogues, where men *had* to attend with covered head. Now they could no longer go on attending the synagogues to fulfil their Christian worship; they had to realize the extent of the implications of the Lordship and Headship of Christ, as the image and glory of God. Yet sadly, the brethren increasingly returned to the synagogues rather than separated from them.

16:3 *And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me-* The idea is 'because they have refused to know'. They had been given the chance, as explained at the end of chapter 15, but had rejected it. And their bad conscience overflowed in personal anger. Not knowing the Father and Son was the reason why they killed the Lord (Acts 13:27,28). Because they killed Him, we must expect persecution at their hands, if we are in His Name and share His spirit. John stresses that because they knew not the Father nor Son, they crucified Jesus (15:21). And yet on another level they *did* know the Son and Father, especially when they saw His death (8:28). Even the Centurion was convinced that "truly, this was the Son of God". And even before that, "Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). They knew, but chose not to know. And this was the psychological cause of their extreme anger.

16:4 *But these things have I spoken to you, so that when the time comes, you may remember what I told you. And these things I did not say to you from the beginning, because I was with you-* The "things" presumably concern the persecution which they were to experience, and the supportive presence of the Comforter as their defence. The Lord did not begin His

teaching of the twelve by telling them of their likely sufferings; and His personal presence with them involved their 'keeping', both spiritually and in terms of physical safety (17:12; 18:9). Now He was departing, He would still be with them, in that the presence of the Comforter, His spirit in their hearts, would be as real as if He were personally with them. "The time / hour comes" is used in John normally concerning the hour of the Lord's cross. But now the Lord uses the term about the time of *their* sufferings, extending the idea that His Spirit, experience and destiny is to be theirs; or as the synoptics record it, they would pick up His cross, sharing in His sufferings.

16:5 *But now I go to Him that sent me; and none of you asks me, Where do you go?*- Peter had asked that very question (see on 13:36-38). But he had asked it only from concern about himself and the disciples; not from interest in where the Lord was actually going. Real interest in the Lord Jesus can so often only be a form of self-interest and even self-preservation.

16:6 *But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart*- We sense the Lord's disappointment that they did not grasp that His departure meant the glorification of the Name, and the receipt by them of the Comforter. All they could think of was His physical presence not being with them, and they were filled with sorrow rather than with the Spirit. And yet the whole of the Lord's last discourse to the twelve reflects His positive view of them- at the very time when their commitment to Him was in some ways at its lowest ebb. For they all forsook Him in His hour of need. He comments that they are filled with sorrow because of their misunderstanding about His departure from them. But He goes on to liken this sorrow to the sorrow of a woman in labour, who forgets that sorrow as soon as her child is born (Jn. 16:6, 20-22). In the analogy, the travailing woman is the disciples, and the new born child is the resurrected Jesus. For "then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord". Their 'sorrow' was thereby interpreted by the Lord as their longing and striving towards His resurrection. But this is a very positive way of interpreting their sorrow. Their sorrow was based on their misunderstanding (Jn. 16:6). Yet the Lord saw that deep underneath that sorrow, even though they didn't perceive it themselves, they were actually yearning for His resurrection. This helps explain the slight mismatch in the metaphor; for "sorrow" is not an emotion really associated with a woman facing labour pains; rather, anxiety, stress and fear. But the Lord as it were makes the analogy fit, because He wants to positively represent their sorrow and hope that something positive comes out of it.

This was all partly due to His penetration of their psychology, but it also reflects the simple fact that He certainly counted them as more spiritual than they actually were. He tells them to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full", having just defined their future joy as the joy of seeing Him risen from the dead (Jn. 16:24,22). But did they ask to see His resurrection? Not as far as we know; for He upbraids them with their slowness to believe His predictions of resurrection. But despite all that, He said that they *would* have that joy which would come from asking to see Him risen from the dead. They didn't ask for this, but they would still have the joy. Why? Because He perceived them to have 'asked' for what they didn't actually ask for in so many words. He read their basic inner yearning for Him as a prayer for His resurrection, even though they were far from understanding that He would ever rise again once dead. It's rather like God saying that the righteous remnant in Jerusalem had shaken their head at the Assyrian invaders and laughed at them in faith- when this was certainly not the case on the surface (Is. 37:22). And this Lord is our Lord today, interpreting our innermost, unarticulated desires as prayers to the Father (Rom. 8:26,27).

16:7 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. I will send him to you-* "It is expedient" is the very phrase used by Caiaphas in saying that it was expedient that the Lord die (11:50). The parallel is clearly between His 'going away' and His death, confirming the suggestion that His talk of 'going to the Father' refers specifically to His crucifixion and not only to the ascension to Heaven. The Lord sees a major purpose of His death as being the giving of the Comforter, His spirit. When he breathed His last, and blood and water flowed out from Him, He was giving His spirit toward us, the confused and misunderstanding disciples. This is the connection between His death and the gift of His spirit to us. Our understanding and acceptance of this gift of the Spirit is therefore crucial; it is in fact what He died for, it is the gift of His life given to and into us.

"I will send him to you" uses the same word frequently used of how the Father sent the Son, and the Son sends us. But here, the Son will send the Comforter to us. He explained in 8:29 that "He that sent me is with me; the Father has not left me alone". The sending of the Son involved His being given the Father's presence. And in His sending of us into the world, in fulfilment of the great commission, He sends us as the Father sent Him, but He also sends us with His presence. The language of 8:29, "not left alone... with me" is exactly that which the Lord uses about His presence with us through the Comforter. That presence however is specifically associated with our mission, the purpose for which we have been sent. The great commission in Mt. 28:20 comforts us that "I am with you always"; and here in John's version of that commission we find that the Lord's presence refers to the gift of the Spirit, empowering our mission, guiding us to correct understanding, spiritually keeping us from falling, and mediating to us the sense of His personal presence. The theme continues into the Lord's prayer of chapter 17, where He speaks of how He has sanctified us, as Levites, and sent us forth on this great commission. Therefore the work of the Gospel, the fulfilment of the great commission, is to be utterly central to our Christian lives. The way it is solemnly placed at the end of the synoptics is proof enough of this.

16:8 *And he, when he comes, will convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment-* Just as the Lord convicted the world of sin (7:7; 15:22), so we will do so if the Comforter dwells in us, the presence within us of the Lord Jesus through the Spirit. We shall continue His work through our witness in the power of the Spirit / Comforter (15:26,27). The legal dimension to the word *parakletos* is here referred to. Our advocate will also be the prosecutor of the world. It is on our witness that the world is convicted of sin, because they heard the Gospel from us, through our obedience to the great commission, but rejected it [as made clear in 15:22].

16:9 *Of sin, because they do not believe in me-* The Jewish world was convicted of sin through the Comforter-filled disciples witnessing to the Jews about their sin in rejecting the Lord. The implication of this statement is that when we preach Christ to people, they actually realize the truth of what we say, at least on a subconscious level [no matter how well they disguise it]. Otherwise, why would they be convicted of the sin of unbelief? The principle has been outlined in 15:22, that hearing the spoken word of the Lord Jesus is to be left with no excuse for sin. This is a huge encouragement in our preaching to an apparently disinterested world. Their disinterest is a guise, however unconscious, to attempt to cover their deep disease at their rejection of the call they are receiving. And more often than we may think, our message cuts through that guise, that cloak (15:22), and touches hearts.

16:10 *Of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you see me no more-* To convict the Jewish world of righteousness is a strange idea, making little sense until we see the allusion to Is. 64:5 LXX, which describes Israel's righteousness as abomination. They would be convicted concerning their righteousness- that it was empty. It would be clear from the witness of the Comforter, the spirit of Christ within the preachers, that they were counted righteous by grace; and all the legalistic rightness of Judaism, and indeed the world in any time or place, is but filthy rags.

16:11 *Of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged-* Just as "righteousness" in :10 refers to the false righteousness of the Jewish world, so here. The Lord has many times been wrongly judged by the Jewish world (7:24), coming to a climax in the way that Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world, judged the Lord as worthy of death. The witness of the Comforter, the Spirit-filled witness of the disciples, would demonstrate this to the Jewish world.

"The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The Lord was judged by Caiaphas and other princes of this world, but He in fact stood before them as the judge and condemned them. And yet it is *our* witness, empowered by the Comforter, which is to convict the world of judgment. We take the spirit of the Lord's cross before the world, and it convicts them.

16:12 *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now-*

The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which the prologue in 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh.

16:13 -see on 1 Jn. 4:1; Jn. 14:12.

*However, when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth. For he shall not speak from himself; but whatever he shall hear, these shall he speak-*

"The Spirit of truth" is in reality "the spirit of Christ", making His presence near and real just as if He were literally with us. So "the truth" is again a reference to the Lord Jesus personally,

the truth of Him who is "the truth", rather than a reference to the academic 'truth' of a particular set of theology. "All truth" would be going far too far if it refers to intellectual truth, for nobody could ever claim to have "all truth" in that sense. It makes little sense to talk of being "in" truth in the sense of theological truth. The language is far more appropriate to a person, the Lord Jesus.

"Guide" is the language of a Rabbi teaching or guiding his disciples by teaching (s.w. Mt. 15:14; 23:16; Lk. 6:39; Acts 8:31; Rom. 2:19). The disciples were concerned that their Rabbi was leaving them and they would be without a teacher (see on 14:18). The Lord is assuring them that His teaching presence would continue amongst them through the presence of the Spirit, the Comforter.

"He shall not speak from himself" recalls the Lord's claims that "I speak [not] from myself", but from what He heard from the Father (7:17; 8:28; 12:49). The Comforter is personified and spoken of in exactly the terms of the Lord Jesus because He wished to emphasize the idea that the presence of the Spirit would be as if He personally was with them, teaching them as He had done as their Rabbi on earth.

*And he shall declare to you the things that are to come-* There could be a reference here to the giving of the book of Revelation, but the hour to come in John's Gospel, the even "to come", is clearly the Lord's death. The meaning of that would be declared to them by the Spirit. They did not then understand what the Lord was doing, but they would do so afterwards- when the Spirit revealed it to them.

*16:14 He shall glorify me; for he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you-* The Spirit would be the medium of communication between the Lord and His followers. The context here is of teaching, of the disciples continuing to be taught by the Lord from Heaven through His Spirit (see on :13). "What is mine" would therefore refer to the understandings given to the Lord by the Father, which were now going to be in turn transmitted to His followers by means of the Spirit. And that process would be to the glorification of the Lord Jesus. For they would understand Him and His achievements so much deeper. This is the same word used in 16:25 of how the Lord would declare or shew to them plainly of the Father. He was to do this in His death for them, but that death would be unpacked by the Lord's work within them through the Spirit.

*16:15 All things, whatever the Father has, are mine. Therefore I said: that he shall take of mine and declare it to you-* These "all things" which the Father has refer to the things which would be declared to them (:14), and those things centre in the Lord Jesus. All those things in that sense were 'Me', the Lord Jesus. For the prologue states that the *logos* of Jesus is God, in the sense that the entire purpose and plan of God is centred in His Son. The focus of the Father upon His Son is significant beyond appreciation. The Son was "all things" to the Father; and the things of the Son, and thereby the "all things" of the Father, were to be declared to the believers by the Spirit.

*16:16 A little while, and you will see me no more; and then a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father-* The first "little while" refers to the time remaining until His death (7:33; 13:33). The second "little while" is until the point when they would 'see' Him because He goes to the Father. The 'seeing' in view is the vision of the presence of Jesus

which arises from the gift of the Spirit which would be given as a result of the Lord's death. His going to the Father could refer to ascension; but that was not when the Spirit gift was given and they 'saw' Him. It was not through his ascension that the gift was enabled, but rather through His death. And it is to His death that "I go to the Father" refers elsewhere in John. The second "little while" I suggest refers to the period from His death until the receipt of the Comforter and the full seeing of Him then. He is of course presenting a purposeful paradox; that His going away was in fact when they would 'see' Him. This 'seeing' was the understanding of Him and experience of His presence which would be possible through the Comforter. Elsewhere in John, beholding or seeing the Son doesn't refer to physically seeing Him, but rather to understanding and believing in Him (Jn. 1:14,29,36,50; 6:40; 12:21; 14:9,19; 17:24 etc.). The Lord surely meant: 'Soon, you will no longer see / understand / believe me... but, in the end, you *will* understand / believe in me'. And John, the author or speaker of this Gospel record, was one of those being referred to. So he, and all the disciples, would've been appealing to people to see / understand / believe in Jesus, whilst openly telling them that they themselves had once lost that understanding / belief which they once had, even though they regained it later.

"If I go... I will come again... A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to my father" (Jn. 14:3; 16:16). This may refer to Moses going up and down the mountain, disappearing from Israel's sight, and then returning with the covenant- to find Israel worshipping the golden calf. Perhaps this refers to the Lord's disappointment that they did not perceive the wonder of His resurrection.

The New Testament speaks in challenging terms of how real is to be our relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Lord's enigmatic words of Jn. 16:16 indicate just *how* close the Comforter was to make Him come to His people once He was in Heaven: "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me [*theoreo*, to physically see]: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me [*horai*, to know or understand, to spiritually 'see'], because I go to the Father". It could be argued, *contra* my position just stated, that the "little while" in each clause is one and the same. In "a little while" they would not see Him physically, but exactly because He would be with the Father, He would send the Comforter, and enable His people to 'see' Him in the sense that John usually speaks of in his Gospel. This 'seeing' of Jesus, this perception of Him, is effectively a 'seeing' of the Father.

16:17- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

*Some of his disciples questioned each other: What is this that he said to us? A little while and you will see me no more; and then a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father?*- Their questions were presumably said out of the Lord's earshot, for He perceived rather than heard their questions (:19). His sensitivity of Spirit was such that He could perceive the hearts of men, without necessarily receiving some bolt of direct revelation as to what they were thinking. And His sensitive spirit is given to us. See on :16 for comment about the "little while".

There are two different words for "see" used here, and at first blush they seem rather strange. But that was purposeful, as the Lord wished their minds to work upon this immense idea of His absence meaning His presence through the Spirit. The first means 'to discern' and the second more literally 'to see'. In a little while He would die and they would not discern / see Him, they would not understand; but then they would 'see' Him when He went to the Father.

The presence of the Son through the Comforter would be as real as if they were literally seeing Him; and this huge challenge comes down to us today.

16:18 *They said: What is this that he said? A little while? We cannot decipher what he said-* They struggled over which period He had in view, and whether there were two 'little while' periods or whether they are referring to the same period. See on :16. The Lord was speaking in such a way that they would mull over His words. For the truth He presents here is so utterly profound and demanding that it cannot be accepted or perceived by just reading or hearing a few words and grasping the idea. The gift of the Spirit would mean that He would be amongst them just as really, and even moreso, as He had been in His physical presence.

16:19 *Jesus perceived that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them: Do you inquire among yourselves what I said? A little while and you will see me no more, and then a little while and you shall see me?-* See on :17 regarding the Lord's perception. The Lord may be rebuking them for asking *among themselves* for the answer to the paradox, rather than asking *Him*. Very rarely in the Gospel records does the Lord respond directly to the questions He was asked. He replies at a tangent, sometimes directing the questioner away from the question to more significant issues, or answering the question in terms of higher principle rather than focusing just on the specific case in question. And His response here is the same.

16:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy!-* As noted on :19, the Lord's response to the question about what "a little while" meant is typical of how He tends not to directly answer questions. He wanted them to reflect about what He meant; He wanted them, like us, to personally come to realize the momentous truth that through the Spirit, He will be as present with us as He physically was with the disciples during His ministry, teaching us as He taught them, under the trees and in the courtyards of Galilee. Instead He re-focuses their minds on the trauma immediately ahead. The Gospels do not record the disciples weeping and lamenting the Lord's death whilst the Jewish world rejoiced, but that is what happened during the days the Lord lay dead. Their sorrow is read here positively by the Lord as sorrow for the loss of a loved one. But in reality, their sorrow was also because of dashed hopes, as the disciples on the way to Emmaus clearly reveal. Their sorrow was also partly because of disappointment. But the Lord wishes to interpret their sorrow positively, and therefore turns it into the idea that their sorrow was that experienced by a woman just before giving birth. But as noted on :21, that is to force a simile, for "sorrow" is not really the dominant emotion or feeling of a woman in advanced labour. The way the Lord forces the simile is a reflection of how He was simply so positive about the weakness of the disciples' understanding. And we must have His positive spirit in all our dealings with our fellow disciples, never cutting them off because they lack understanding, faith or sufficient attention to the Lord's words; but ever hoping that they shall develop, and accepting what understanding they do have in a positive way; seeing the glass half full rather than half empty.

16:21 *A woman when she is in labour has sorrow, because her hour comes; but when she has delivered the child, she does not remember her anguish, because of her joy that a child is born into the world-* The coming hour is spoken of in John as the hour of the Lord's death. Although the Lord is addressing the disciples, as so often in His teaching, He is speaking to Himself too. For He was the one about to go through physical pain, to the end the child of the church should be born into the Jewish world- a world which would not accept it, as the drama of Revelation 12 makes clear, in its immediate first century application. Judaism used this

very metaphor to speak of Israel's sufferings immediately prior to the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The Lord is alluding to this, saying that His Kingdom is to come in the form of the birth of the church, but only as a baby, which must grow into the full maturity of His Kingdom on earth to be established at the second coming. His joy in us now means that He does not "remember" the anguish of the cross. The pain of the cross was therefore His bearing of the pain of Israel. The Lord is going along with the Jewish understanding of the metaphor, in that He is alluding to Is. 26:16-21 where we meet the ideas of a "little while", the last day, the hope of resurrection and the metaphor of a woman in labour. And John was writing immediately prior to the pains of AD70 and Christian persecution/. The Lord had taken those pains into Himself in His crucifixion sufferings, and could absolutely relate to them.

The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8). Yet the faithful just before His coming would also be like a woman in travail (1 Thess. 5:3), with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of the disciples in realizing the Lord had risen and would be eternally present with them through the Comforter (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off at the last day. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man...shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14). See on Mt. 3:11.

16:22 *You now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take away from you-* It is tempting to connect this joy with the joy of the disciples when they met the risen Lord and literally saw Him again (20:20). But the joy in the heart which would never be taken from them is really a stronger reference to the coming of the Comforter to abide with them for ever; this was when and how they 'saw' the Lord in the sense John's Gospel uses the term, to mean understand / believe. The Lord's literal resurrection and the joy they had on literally seeing Him is presented as the joy that shall be with all who have received His abiding presence in the Comforter. That joy cannot be taken from them; but the joy of literally seeing Him would soon fade when He ascended, if the joy in view is simply that of literally seeing the risen Lord. The joy at seeing Him which does not fade is only possible if His presence abides permanently, and that is the work of the Comforter, making Him present to us as really as if He were physically with us. "Your heart shall rejoice" is a direct quotation from Is. 66:14 LXX about the permanent joy of the Kingdom age. This is not to say that the Kingdom has now come. The idea is that through the work of the Comforter we experience the life eternal, the permanent joy of the Kingdom age is known in our experience of His abiding presence now.

"I will see you again" reads strangely; we would rather expect "You will see me again, so don't be sad". He sees us again, in that He comes to us. And He knows / sees us, as well as us seeing / knowing Him. Gal. 4:9 may have this idea in view, teaching that it is not so much a question of us knowing God, but of Him knowing us. Likewise, we did not choose Him, but He chose us (15:19).

16:23 *And in that day, you shall ask me no questions-* As noted on :22, the experience of abiding joy and seeing the Lord is all Kingdom language, in that the Comforter enables us to live the eternal life, the Kingdom life, right now. This explains why "that day" is a phrase commonly used to refer to the last day (2 Tim. 1:12,18 etc.). "That day" in essence comes to all who receive the Comforter, and thereby have the Lord's permanent presence. In 1 Jn. 2:18



John speaks as if the believers are right now in the last day / hour; not only in that they are expecting the second coming at any minute, but in that the last day is in essence being experienced by them.

"Ask me no questions" can be translated "ask me nothing". The idea is that His relationship with the Father will be ours; we will relate directly to the Father as He did and does, because we are "in my name", possessing the Comforter which is sent in His name. If we insist on the sense of 'ask me no questions', the idea could be that because we know the Father and Son through having relation with them, we will not be full of questions (1 Jn. 2:20). Our base experience of relationship with them will mean that 'hard questions' are of no particular angst to us. We know the things of our salvation (15:14,15), and that is enough. Any other questions are of far secondary importance. All struggles about apologetics, questions about the conflict between current science and the Bible, all become utterly subsumed beneath the reality of knowing the Father and Son in the sense of having ongoing relationship with them. The questions in the immediate context concerned the Lord's going away and coming again. The Comforter would explain those questions; and we note that the meaning of the Lord's death, resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit were not understood by the disciples until after His resurrection and their receipt of the Holy Spirit Comforter. The Comforter works likewise with us, unpacking the meaning of these things- for the Lord was far from the only man to die through crucifixion. The personal import of *His* death and resurrection and gift of His Spirit has to be personally experienced; theology can only go so far. And that is the work of the Comforter.

We recall that towards the end of His ministry, the Jews ceased asking the Lord questions (Mt. 22:46). This was because things had come to such a pitch that the Lord had answered everything and presented Himself without doubt as their Saviour and God's Son. The choices left were to believe in Him, or turn against Him blinded by a bad conscience. The Lord seems to be alluding to that position, saying that the disciples were also going to be in a position where they totally believed in Him and needed answers to no more questions, for the answer was already clear.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: If you shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name-* The intimacy of relationship between Father and Son is to be experienced by us on account of the Comforter. We will sense His will and pray accordingly, and receive. "In my name" is another way of saying that because we are in Christ and He in us, we shall directly dialogue with the Father just as He did and does. He will no longer be a mediator, in that sense. The language of His intercession which we encounter later in the New Testament is all concerning His attainment of salvation for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), and the contexts do not refer to some kind of mechanical transaction being performed between Son and Father every time we pray for some request. We who were enemies have now been reconciled to God in Christ, as Romans 5 teaches. The Lord's work of mediating between God and man is therefore for those who have yet to be reconciled; for us it is done, we already live as reconciled to God.

Moses reached something of that intimacy; he cried to Yahweh to take away the frogs, "and Yahweh did according to the word of Moses" (Ex. 8:12,13); the requests of prayer become almost a command to God; by His grace, we will ask what we will and He will do it for us (Jn. 16:23). W.E. Vine makes the point that the Greek here implies a superior asking an inferior to do something. Not only is this an essay in the humility of God's self-revelation, but it surely shows how if we seriously believe in the power of prayer, what we request really

will be given. "Thou shalt also decree a thing (in prayer) and it shall be established unto thee" (Job 22:28). Rev. 9:13 portrays prayer as a command to the Angels. The prayer of command is to be found in the well known words of Ps. 122. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem", David exhorts. And the response [made so much clearer when the Psalm is sung]: "Peace be within thy walls... I will now say, Peace be within thee" (Ps. 122:6-8). The way peace is 'commanded' to be in Jerusalem by those who pray is because they so believe that the answer will surely come.

The wonder of the resurrection would totally affect our attitude to asking for things, the Lord taught in Jn. 16:23,26. "In that day [of marvelling in the resurrected Lord], ye shall ask me nothing... if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you [RV]... in that day you shall ask in my name...". What are we to make of all this talk of asking and not asking, in the 'day' of the resurrected Lord Jesus? My synthesis of it all is this: Due to the sheer wonder of the resurrection of the Lord, we will not feel the need to ask for anything for ourselves. The gift of freedom from sin is enough. Because if God gave us His Son and raised Him from the dead, we will serve for nothing, for no extra 'perks' in this life; and yet, wonder of wonders, *if* we shall ask, in His Name, we will receive. But we must ask whether the implications and wonder of the fact of the Lord's resurrection have had such an effect upon us...?

16:24 *So far you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be made full-* By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new creation (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled. This doesn't simply refer to the joy of receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name. See on 17:13.

16:25 *These things have I spoken to you in figurative language-* This explains why the Lord did not directly answer their question concerning what He meant by "a little while"; see on :18,19.

*The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father-* God was especially in Christ at His death. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

John's references to the hour coming nearly always refer to the crucifixion. The plain showing forth of the Father was in the naked body of His crucified Son; there, all the theory which Jesus had taught was exemplified in stark, plain terms. The Father was ultimately revealed. Is. 64:1-4 had foretold: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence... For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him". This latter verse is quoted in

1 Cor. 2 about how the "foolishness" of the cross is not accepted by the wise of this world. Only the humble and spiritually perceptive eye of faith realized that there in the naked shame of Golgotha, God Himself had rent the heavens and come down, as all the faithful had somehow, in some sense foreseen and yearned for. There, in the battered body of Jesus, was God revealed to men.

As noted on Jn. 2:4; 4:21-23 and 5:25-29, the hour that was to come is a reference to the cross. There, we see and hear the preaching / word of ['which is', Gk.] the cross. There on the cross, there was no allegory. There we were shown plainly the Father. He went on: "Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (16:32). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. Philip had just asked to be shown the Father, just as Moses had asked (14:9,10). And the Lord is saying that in the cross, they will see plainly of the Father. And perhaps therefore we are to understand 17:24 as meaning that Jesus prayed that the disciples would physically see and spiritually understand His cross: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". "I am", "my glory", given by the Father, and the lamb slain from "the foundation of the world"... this is all language of the cross.

And yet the showing plainly of the Father is spoken here in the context of assuring the disciples that although He, their Rabbi, was to be taken from them, His teaching of them would continue and intensify through the ministry of the Comforter in their hearts. The showing plainly is to be connected with the promise that the Comforter would guide them into all truth (:13), and then they would have no more questions (:23).

The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet the disciples got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" (*parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke to *them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

16:26- see on Mt. 6:13; 1 Pet. 2:5.

*In that day you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you-* The Lord has just explained that "in that day" when they possess the Spirit, they will not need to go to the Father through the Lord. They will have the same relationship with the Father which the Son had and has; see on :23. They would ask the Father on account of being "in Christ", in His Name, baptized into it and abiding in it with the presence of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. The Lord will not in some mechanical sense pray to the Father with our

words but expressed in different language, with a nudge, as it were, for Him to respond positively because we are the Lord's. We shall be in direct relationship with the Father.

This unity of Spirit between us, the Son and the Father explains an apparent contradiction in the Lord's discourse in the upper room: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *me* anything (being) in my name, that will I do (Jn. 14:13,14 RV)... If ye shall ask anything of *the Father*, he will give it you in my name... and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:23,26 RV). Who do we pray to? The Father, or the Son? Who 'does' the answer to our prayers? God, or Christ? The context of the Lord's words was that "the Father is with me... I am in the Father, and the Father is in me... the Father abiding in me doeth the works", even as the believers are in the Son and in the Father, as they are in us. This means that the question of who to pray to is on one level irrelevant. Our spirit bears witness with their Spirit, and there is only one spirit. This unity of the believer with the Father is only made possible through the Son, and so our formal prayers should be addressed to God not with "in Christ's Name" tagged on to the end of them [for that smacks of ritualism], but on account of our being in Christ, we can have a direct relationship with the Father. But the essence of prayer is not formal request. To pray "in my name" could mean 'in union with me'; yet Christ was at one with the Father. "He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27) without us verbalizing our spirit in formal prayer. In the same way as the priests helped / assisted the Old Testament worshippers rather than actually offered their prayers or sacrifices, so with the Lord Jesus. Paul spoke of how he would be helped "through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus" (Phil. 1:19 RSV). Their prayers ascended directly to God, but the response was helped by the spirit of the Lord Jesus which was to be given them in the Comforter; and because He is so sublimely at one with the Father, this means that the help will surely come. The rapport between our spirit and His Spirit is again reflected by the way Rom. 8:6,27 use the same phrase, "the mind of the spirit", to describe firstly the mind of *our* spirit, and then, the mind of the spirit of the Lord Jesus. We will no longer need Christ to ask the Father for us, we will be able to have a direct relationship with the Father in prayer. We will not need to be like the disciples, who in their immaturity asked Jesus to pass on their requests to God (Jn. 11:22). He sees our spirit anyway, He knows our need anyway; this knowledge doesn't depend on the Lord's mediation. The advocate, the Comforter, identifies with the one he helps, stands next to him, knowing his case fully. But as Christ is our advocate, so we should be to our brethren ("comfort" in 2 Cor. 2:7 is s.w. 1 Jn. 2:1). This doesn't necessarily mean that we interpret our brother's words to God, but rather than we pray for our brother, in our own words; we are with our brother, supporting him, knowing his weakness. So on one hand we have a direct relationship with the Father. On the other, the Lord Jesus is our vital, saving advocate with Him. I don't think these two aspects can be reconciled by re-translation or expositional juggling. The fact is, through what the Lord achieved, we theoretically don't need His mediation any longer. He was our High Priest to bring us to God on the cross. He no longer needs to enter into the Holiest Place (cp. heaven) to gain our atonement, for this He did once for all (Heb. 9:26). We should be able to pray with the earnest intensity of Elijah or Moses, who prayed without an intercessor, and were heard. But where we lack that intensity, the Lord Jesus holds up our feeble 'groanings' before the Father. Likewise He is our 'advocate', although theoretically a righteous man doesn't need an advocate. John almost writes as if 'Of course, you won't sin, but if very occasionally you do, Jesus can act as a powerful advocate for you'. And yet in reality, He is acting in the advocate role for much of our sin-stricken lives.

16:27 *For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from the Father-* The Comforter, the gift of the Spirit in their hearts, would enable them to have the same relationship with the Father which the Son enjoyed in His mortal life. This is the repeated request in the prayer of chapter 17. The Lord does not therefore need to persuade the Father to be loving and generous in response to us; He Himself and of Himself *loves us*. Our love of the Son is read by the Father as love of Him, because we believe that the Jesus we love is His Son, 'come from the Father'. John later extends this logic, distilling it to mean that if we love the begetter we love also the begotten- and applies this to how therefore we cannot claim to love God but not love His spiritually begotten children (1 Jn. 4:1,2). "The Father Himself loves you" is a phrase we need to bear in our hearts always. We do not need the Lord to as it were get us on His right side; He Himself directly loves us, and all our brethren too.

The Lord's statement that "You... have believed that I came out from God" elicited agreement from the disciples: "[Yes], we believe that you came forth from God". But to that He responds in :32: "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, is now come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and shall leave me alone". Although they didn't really fully believe, He said that they did. He wasn't so in love with them that He was blind to their failures. But He was all the same so positive about their practically non-existent faith. And what's more, He goes on to tell the Father His positive perspective on their faith: "They...have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:8). But the Lord had only just been telling the disciples that they *didn't* really believe that He had come out from God...! Yet He counted them as if they did, and reflected this to the Father in prayer. And this is surely how the Lord feels and speaks about us to the Father today.

16:30- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

*Now we are sure that you know all things, and do not need anyone to question you. By this we believe you came from God-* They do not say to the effect that 'Ah, now we understand everything!'. They realized they did not, but were now satisfied that the Lord did understand and know all things. And here we have comfort to us in our questioning of Him; the comfort is not that we know the answers, but that there are answers, and He holds them. "By this we believe you came from God" may be reported as another example of a confessional formula; the hint is to readers and listeners to make the same confession in their hearts.

The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person.

16:31- see on Jn. 17:6.

*Jesus answered them: Do you now believe?*- This recalls how Joshua and Moses in their goodbye speeches questioned Israel as to whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away. See on Mt. 28:10.

However, a fair translation, supported by NIV and Leon Morris (*John* p. 631) is: "You now believe!". In this case, He rejoiced at their faith despite knowing that they would be weak in faith (:32); in the same way as John's Gospel positively records all confession of faith in the Lord, despite noting how weak that faith was subsequently shown to be.

16:32- see on Jn. 10:5.

*Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and you shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me-* The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. See on Jn. 19:19 concerning the special presence of the Father with the Son on the cross.

Each of them ran off to their own little family, to safeguard their own petty little human possessions, and left Him alone; alone, when He most needed some human comfort and compassion, a wave from a friend in the crowd, a few silently mouthed words, a catching of the eye, perhaps even the courtesy of a brief hand-shake or clap on the shoulders before the 11 ran off into the night, the word 'thank-you' called out as He stumbled along the Via Dolorosa. But nothing. They cleared off, they got out, every man to his own. And the pain of betrayal with a kiss by a man He was gracious enough to think of as His equal, with whom He had shared sweet fellowship (Ps. 55:13,14). And to hear Peter's cursing, perhaps cursing of Him; his denial that he'd ever known the guy from Nazareth. And yet in the face of *all this*, the Lord went on: He laid down His life *for us*, we who betrayed Him, scattered from Him, hated Him, did Him to death in the most degrading and painful way our race knew how. In the face of rejection to the uttermost, He served us to the end, even to death, and even to the death of the cross.

The response of the disciples to the Lord's arrest was to flee; and at the time of His resurrection, which in faith they ought to have joyfully expected, they quite literally 'went fishing'. The powerful point is made that the church was built upon the foundations of men weak in faith, who were openly discredited and who themselves, in the Gospel records, preached their own weakness. And yet they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem pictured in Revelation. This stands for all time as an encouragement to all in their weakness.

"The Father is with me" is recorded here in this context of weakness; for the Lord later cried from the cross that the Father had forsaken Him (Mt. 27:46). Perhaps this obvious tension is introduced here to show that human crisis of faith is not necessarily sinful, for the Lord experienced it.

16:33 *These things have I spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good courage; I have overcome the world-* This promise of personal "peace" comes straight after the prediction of their collapse of faith and shameful

abandonment of the Lord. "Peace" in the Bible usually refers to peace with God. He is saying that despite their failure, He had foreseen it and His death would deal with it, and the gift of the Spirit would involve the gift of peace in their hearts, despite their sin and weakness. They could therefore find peace with God despite their failure; and despite their tribulation in the Jewish world, particularly that which would come in the last days and AD70(Mk. 13:9), their peace with the Father and Son would make them courageous and strong in the face of all rejection by the Jewish world, in which they would have tribulation.

The Lord had "overcome" the Jewish world, and every form of this world; and He frequently uses the word in His letters to the churches in Rev. 2,3, encouraging us likewise to overcome. His spirit is to be ours. John too rather likes this word "overcome", using it of how his converts had "overcome the wicked one" and the [Jewish] false teachers (1 Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4). "The wicked one" is therefore, in the first context, the Jewish world which the Lord overcame. This is why the terms "satan" and "devil" and other such titles are used about the Jewish world so often; see my chapter 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*, chapter 2.



## CHAPTER 17

*17:1 These things spoke Jesus-* The idea is that after having given the discourse just recorded in the previous chapters, the Lord prayed this prayer. In discussing the Lord's teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16, we have noted that He speaks of this gift as He Himself, coming in the first instance to the disciples who had been with Him "from the beginning" and who were to convict the Jewish world of sin by their witness, in the strength of the Comforter; and yet we have also seen that the promised Comforter is essentially an internal strengthening given to all believers. These three themes are all summed up in the Lord's prayer of John 17. The prayer falls easily into the same three categories; prayer for Himself (:1-5), for the disciples (:6-19) and for all believers (:20-26).

*And lifting up his eyes to Heaven, he said-* The significance of this is that the Lord has spoken of how the Comforter would enable believers in Him to have the same kind of relationship with the Father which He had enjoyed in His mortal life. And His prayer goes on to emphasize this. The fact He could pray to God in Heaven with no sense of barrier is a profound visual indicator of the totally open nature of that relationship; and His intention is that we share the same relationship with the Father as He did.

Indeed we must ask why the record of this prayer, the Lord's longest recorded prayer, this unique insight into His relationship with the Father, is placed at this point. Why do we not have transcripts of other, earlier prayers to the Father earlier in the account? I suggest it is because it follows on from the Lord's promise that through the presence of the Spirit, believers would share His relationship with the Father. And in this prayer, we see something of what that relationship involved.

*Father, the hour comes. Glorify Your son, that the son may glorify you-* The coming of the predetermined hour for His death did not make the Lord fatalistic, merely submitting to the Father's will. Not the hour had come, He prayed to the Father. Our sense of God's utter sovereignty should lead to prayer and action, as it did with the Lord; rather than mere resignation to His will. The Lord was lifted up on the cross, and 'lifted up' is the Hebrew idea for glorification. The Lord saw the whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as glorification; He did not break the process down into chronological segments, for He looked at it from outside time as we know it. It was by or for the glory of the Father that the Lord was raised from the dead (Rom. 6:4), so the glorification process includes both death and resurrection. The purpose of His glorification was for the Father's glory, and Paul alludes to this in teaching that the whole process of the Lord's humiliation and glorification was "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). The language and concepts simply cannot be fitted in to the Trinitarian paradigm.

The echoes of Deuteronomy in the Lord's goodbye speeches shouldn't be missed; for Moses at this time truly was a superb type of the Lord Jesus. Deuteronomy concludes with two songs of Moses, one addressed to the Father (Dt. 32), and the other to his people (Dt. 33). It is apparent that the Lord's final prayer in Jn. 17 is divisible into the same divisions- prayer to the Father, and concern for His people. It has been observed that the prayer of Jn. 17 is also almost like a hymn- divided into seven strophes of eight lines each. It would appear to be John's equivalent to the record in Mk. 14:26 of a hymn being sung at the end of the Last Supper.



The prayer is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

*17:2 Even as You gave him authority over all flesh, so that he should give eternal life to all whom You have given him-* The connection between the universal authority of the Lord and the need to preach it is made in Jn. 17:2,3 AV: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, *that* he should give eternal life to [men]... and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". The great commission says that because He has power over all flesh, therefore we must preach Him to all flesh (Mt. 28:18,19). Jn. 17:2 says that because He has this power, He can give men eternal life through the knowledge of Him. But that giving of eternal life is through the process of our obedience to the great commission to go out and offer it to all flesh. The extent of our obedience to the preaching commission is the extent to which eternal life is given to men. Their eternal destiny is placed in our hands. The authority to save all men and women has been given to the Lord, but the extent to which this becomes reality depends upon our preaching it. And yet the gift of eternal life cannot be limited to the gift of immortality at the Lord's return; for throughout John, the gift of the life eternal is a present experience. The Lord gives us His life, through the gift of His Spirit into our spirit and living. It is this which we offer to "all flesh", and it shall surely have its issue in the gift of immortality at His return.

17:3- see on Jn. 10:15; 1 Jn. 1:3.

*And this is everlasting life, that they should know You, the only true God, and him whom You sent, Jesus Christ-* As noted on :2, the gift of eternal life refers not only to immortality at His return. The meaning of this idea in John is that we can live that eternal life now. And so He defines what it is to life eternal life now- it is a knowing of the Father and Son, using 'knowledge' in the Hebraic sense of relationship with. The idea is not that if we have true academic, theological knowledge about the Father and Son, we shall get eternal life at the last day as a kind of reward for being so smart. That was the Rabbinic understanding; but the Lord turns it on its head, by saying that the knowledge of Father and Son, the life lived in relationship with them, is a gift, given right now, to those who believe (:2).

The Lord usually speaks of Himself in the third person- e.g. "the son"; but here in Jn. 17:3 He refers to Himself in prayer to the Father as "Jesus Christ", as if He was consciously aware of how we would later see Him, and aware that His words were being recorded for us.

He will say to many in the last day that He has never known them, for they never knew Him- for all their pure doctrine and good works. Life eternal is about knowing God and Jesus (Jn. 17:3)- and the Greek word here doesn't mean to merely know in an academic sense, but to know intimately and personally in relationship. Only if we *really* see / perceive the Son will we be saved; "you have seen me and yet believe not" the Lord told the Jews, warning them that only those who see the Son *and* believe in Him will have eternal life (Jn. 6:36, 40). If we

really know the Son then we will likewise know His love and sacrifice is enough to truly grant us the life eternal. If we truly see the Son and believe in Him, then we will know that we (will have) eternal life- because His grace, His love, His desire to save will be so clearly evident to us through the study and knowledge of His personality. If we know Him, we will be sure of our salvation; for we are living now the kind of life which we shall eternally live, the eternal life given right now to believers through the Spirit. We will be humbly confident that in the very, final end- we will be there. There is therefore the factual, doctrinal 'knowledge' or 'seeing' which by grace has been granted us. But beyond that there is the true seeing and believing into the Man Jesus, with the definite Hope which that brings. If we *truly* know Him we will count literally all else as loss (Phil. 3:8). We should not be in the faith, labouring towards the Kingdom, just so that we personally can have eternal life at the end of it. "Eternal life" in John's Gospel refers to knowing and understanding God now, rather than simply to infinity (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20).

The "... know you" is in the continuous tense. It speaks of relationship. It is simply not so that if we attain a set level of knowledge of God and His Son, then we shall be rewarded with immortality at the last day. The 'knowledge' in view is ongoing, incremental, and therefore refers to a relationship. This point has been sadly missed by those who insist on teaching converts theology about God and Jesus, baptize them once they have attained a level of facility with it which the teacher sets, and then tells them to hold on to those understandings and hope to get immortality for it at the last day. This verse has tragically been misread to support such a view. But it teaches something quite different- to be knowing, in a continuous tense, is a gift from God; and is the definition of the gift of life eternal. That eternal knowing will of course continue eternally, throughout the Kingdom. As God is infinite, it will take eternity to get to know Him. Life eternal both then as now will be all about getting to know God and Jesus. David saw the Kingdom as a time of *enquiring* after God in His temple (Ps. 27:4). According to Jn. 17:3 and its various Old Testament foundations, to know God is to live for ever. Eternal life is all about knowing His Name. Hos. 6:2,3 LXX puts it like this: "We shall rise [from the dead] and live in His presence, and have knowledge; we shall press forward to know the Lord". If we start knowing God now, and press ever forward to know His Name yet more... we have started the essence of the life which we will eternally live. And of course 'knowing the Lord' involves a personal union with Christ, experience and relationship with Him, of which intellectual knowledge is only a part. For in John's Gospel, seeing, knowing and believing are related; "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:7-9) is paralleled with "If you believe in God, believe in me" (Jn. 14:1). We start the process of knowing the Father's Name in this life; and in this sense we embark upon what will be for us [by His grace] the experience of the eternal life.

The new covenant promised that all God's people would know Him (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11). By baptism into the Lord, that new covenant is made with all believers. The knowledge promised is therefore a gift, part of the covenant promise, the equivalent of the word to Abraham that "I will be their God", in personal relationship / knowledge with each member of the seed. This promise of knowing God begins to be fulfilled when each believer is given that knowledge / relationship. It is not the case that on the basis of acquired theological knowledge, a believer receives some blessing. Rather is the knowledge of God a gift from Him to us, in the sense of relationship with Him, in which it is more significant to be known by Him rather than to know Him academically.

17:4 *I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You gave me to do-*  
The Lord sees His death and resurrection as His glorification of the Father (:1). And yet He

knew that in essence, He had accomplished or finished that work during His mortal life. His final cry "It is finished / accomplished" was of course significant, but the essence of His sacrifice had been made in His personality and life amongst men before that. In 4:34 He spoke of His accomplishing the Father's work as still ongoing; and an example of it was [in that context] the saving of the Samaritan woman. His work was the Father's work, which was bringing men to faith and the experience now of eternal life. His life was the pattern for that eternal life, and now His life was at an end, He could say that He had completed that work.

17:5- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And now Father, glorify me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was-*

The idea of 'apocalypse' alludes to this Jewish idea of predestined things 'existing' in Heaven with God; for 'apocalypse' means literally an unveiling, a revealing of what is [in Heaven]. In this sense the believer at the resurrection will receive what was already laid up in store for him or her in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; Mt. 25:34). Because of this, Hebrew can use past tenses to speak of that which is future (e.g. Is. 5:13; 9:2,6,12; 10:28; 28:16; 34:2; Gen. 15:18 cp. Acts 7:5). Things can thus "be" before they are created: "They are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). And thus when the Lord Jesus speaks of the glory which He had with God from the beginning, there is no suggestion there that He therefore existed in glory from the beginning. He didn't ask for that glory to be restored to Him, as trinitarianism demands; instead He asked that the glory which He already had in the Divine purpose, be given to Him. Significantly, there is a Greek word which specifically refers to personal, literal pre-existence: *pro-uparchon*- and it's never used about the Lord Jesus.

To understand this verse, we must enquire what the Bible means when it speaks about "glory". The glory of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai- and what he heard was the declaration of God's Name or character, that Yahweh is a God full of grace, mercy, truth, justice, judgment etc. (Ex. 33:19; 34:6,7). Jesus alludes to what happened at Sinai by saying that He has "glorified you... manifested your name" (Jn. 17:4,6) before the foundation of the Jewish world, which was at Sinai. Whenever those characteristics of God are recognized, manifested or openly shown, God is glorified. In this sense, God is the "God of glory" (Ps. 29:3 etc.). He is totally associated with His Name and characteristics- it's not that He just shows those particular attributes to men, but He Himself personally is someone quite different. He *is* His glory. And this is why Jn. 17:5 parallels His glory with God's very own "self".

That glory of God was of course always with God, right at the beginning. He hasn't changed His essential characteristics over time. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. As John begins his Gospel by saying in the prologue, the essential "Word", *logos* of God, His essential plans, intentions, personality, was in the beginning with Him. It was "made flesh" in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), in that the Lord Jesus in His life and especially in His death on the cross revealed all those attributes and plans of God in a concrete, visible form- to perfection.

The request of Jesus to be glorified is therefore asking for the Name / attributes / characteristics / glory / word of God to be openly revealed in Him. Surely He had in mind His resurrection, and the glorifying of God which would take place as a result of this being preached and believed in world-wide.

But in what sense was this the glory which Jesus had with God before the world was? The “glory” of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character, at the beginning of the Jewish world. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life “that glory which was with [the Father]” when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness.

There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father’s personality, it’s not a mirror personality, but it’s the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God’s glory as being the Son’s glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah’s vision of God’s glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son’s glory (Jn. 12:41).

The glory of God is His “own self”, His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title “God of glory” is applied to the Lord Jesus, “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God’s* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory, because He is the express image of God’s personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the “Father of glory”, the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father’s glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him”.

What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only “one glory” of God. That glory refers to the essential “self”, the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been “glorified”, and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons who reflect and ‘are’ that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). The outline of God’s glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. That glory was with God from the beginning. The Lord Jesus was in the mind and plan of God from the beginning. It was God’s original plan to

resurrect and glorify and justify His Son. And in Jn. 17:5, the Lord is asking that this will happen.

The glory which the Lord Jesus had “before the world was” is connected with the way that He was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20), the way God promised us eternal life (through His Son) before the world was (Tit. 1:2). 2 Tim. 1:9 speaks of us as being called to salvation in Christ “before the world began”, He “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). In the same way as we didn’t personally exist before the world began, neither did Christ. Indeed 1 Cor. 2:7 speaks of *us* having some form of glory with God “before the world began”. It’s the idea of this “one glory” again- God’s glory existed, and it was His plan to share it with His Son and with us; and He speaks of those things which are not as though they are, so certain are they of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). In Jn. 17:5, the Lord Jesus is ‘pleading the promise’ of these things. We have noted that the Lord speaks of His whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as one item- going to the Father, glorification. He doesn’t break it down into chronological segments, and likewise His talk of glory before is spoken from the Divine perspective, outside the limitations which our kind of time places upon our language.

We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of ‘pre-existence’ was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be ‘with God’ didn’t mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn’t mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God with her “favour”. The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed”. The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the “Throne of Glory” pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn’t have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was “foreknown” before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being “foreknown”- the Greek word used is the root of the English word ‘prognosis’. If God ‘foreknew’ His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being ‘foreknown’. Otherwise the language of ‘foreknowing’ becomes meaningless. He goes on to say that the faithful were ‘God’s’ (:6), who were given to the Lord. This is another example of speaking of things which were not as though they were.

17:6 *I manifested Your Name to the men whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were and You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word-* The manifestation of the Name has echoes of the Angel manifesting the Name to Moses; here, the Lord is as the Angel, and the disciples are likened to Moses, which was a huge challenge to a mindset which considered Moses as the untouchable pinnacle of spirituality. But His manifestation of the Name was far greater than had happened then. We note that “Name” effectively means ‘the whole person’, all they stand for, characteristics, history and essence of being. The manifestation of the Name in the person of the Lord was throughout His life, but it would come to an intense climax in His manifestation of it on the cross (:26). It was not made to the Jewish world, but to those who had come out of that world, rather like Moses going out of the congregation of Israel in order to behold the manifestation of the Name to him.

As noted on :5, the Lord is here speaking to the Father, and as such has His perspective on time and existence. He speaks of the men whom the Father had given Him, as if they had always existed. They were given to Him, just as "the work" was given Him (:4). That "work" was therefore the salvation of those given Him, those foreknown and predestined to that call. The men having been given out of the Jewish world recalls the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed your word, and kept your covenant" (Dt. 33:9, cp. "they have kept your word"), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between the Lord and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

The idea of the manifestation of the Name recalls the prologue's statement in Jn. 1:14 that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the *logos* of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person ("flesh") of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in "the world" didn't perceive it (Jn. 1:14).

"They have kept your word" is the Lord speaking positively to the Father about His followers, just as He does concerning us today. The Lord's High Priestly prayer of intercession in John 17 [so called because of the way He speaks of 'sanctifying Himself'] reveals how positively He felt about the disciples- even though He knew and foretold that they were about to betray Him, deny Him and leave Him alone in His hour of greatest human need. His grace towards them here is quite profound. He describes them to His Father as those who "have kept your word"- referring to His own parable of the good ground, those who keep the word and bring forth fruit with patience (Lk. 8:15). Again, He tells His Father about them: "They have believed that You did send me" (Jn. 17:8). But He had just upbraided them for their *unbelief* in Him (Jn. 16:31), and would do so again in a few days' time (Mk. 16:14). Yet He presents His weak followers to the Father as so much better than they really were; and this is the same Lord who mediates for us today. Likewise, the Lord assures the Father that they were not "of the [Jewish] world" (Jn. 17:14,16), even though as we have shown in these studies, they were deeply influenced by the Jewish world around them. Perhaps the Lord looked ahead to the day when they would be spiritually stronger, and yet He presents the immature disciples to the Father from the perspective of how He hoped they would one day be. Thus He says that He has already "sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18)- but this was only done by Him in its fullness *after* His resurrection. He speaks of how He was glorified in them before the [Jewish] world (Jn. 17:10)- when He knew Peter was about to deny Him and shame His whole cause and mission. But surely the Lord looked ahead to the hope He had in Peter and all of them, that they would go out into the world and glorify Him. Indeed, the whole prayer of Jn. 17 reveals how the Lord presented them to the Father as men who in many ways they simply were not. When they say "We believe... that you came forth from God", He comments: "Do you now believe?" and predicts their scattering. Yet in prayer to the Father, He says that they did believe "Surely... that I came out from thee" (Jn. 17:8,25). Their faith was anything but "sure". Likewise, we have shown above that they failed to really perceive His death, and thus failed to perceive the essence of *Him*. In the face of this tragedy, this frustration and pain, the Lord could calmly tell the Father: "I am glorified *in them*" (Jn. 17:10)- in they who understood so little, indeed who refused to understand. Even worse, the Lord had just been telling them that they didn't really love Him fully (Jn. 14:15,23,28). And yet He speaks to the Father of them as if they are *so* committed to Him.

The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6). Perhaps by this He simply means that they loved Him and thereby the Father, rather than claiming any particular level of obedience for them.

*17:7 Now they know that all things, whatever You have given me, are from You-* As noted on :6, there was much they did not know / understand / believe, which is the sense of 'knowing' in John. The Lord imputed more understanding and faith to them than they really had. The Last Supper discourse showed clearly enough that they didn't understand or "know" (Jn. 14:7,9; 16:5,18). Yet here, He uses the perfect tense of the verb 'to know' when He says "Now they have come to know..." . It's almost as if He increasingly imputed things to them which were not yet so, as increasingly He faced up to the reality and implications of His death for them. The disciples didn't "know" the things the Lord spoke to them about His origin and purpose- they only "knew" them after the resurrection (Lk. 18:34; Jn. 10:6; 12:16; 13:7). Jn. 14:7,9 is plain: "If you had known me... yet have you not known me", He tells the disciples. And yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did "know" Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn't then "know", but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that "In that day you shall know" (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to "know" Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively.

The things given the Son were the disciples (:6). Perhaps the sense is that they now realized and believed that they had been given to the Son by the Father, and were therefore 'with' the Father.

17:8- see on Jn. 16:27; 17:6.

*For the words which You gave me I have given to them, and they received them, and knew as a truth that I came forth from You; and they believed that You did send me-* The connection with the prologue is in the way that the Jewish world did not receive the Lord as a person, but the disciples did. "He" as a person is hereby paralleled with His words.

The Lord told the Father that He had given the disciples His words, "and they have received them" (Jn. 17:8). This is evident allusion to the editorial comment in Dt. 33:3 about how all Israel received God's words through Moses. Likewise "I manifested thy name... they have kept thy word" (Jn. 17:6,26) = "I will proclaim the name of the Lord... they have observed thy word" (Dt. 32:3; 33:9). One marvels at the way the Lord's mind linked together so much Scripture in the artless, seamless way in which He did.

Their 'receiving' of the Lord's words should not be read as meaning that they reviewed all His recorded speech, as it were the 'red letter' sections of the New Testament, and accepted them as true or reasonable. The prologue defines the disciples as those who received "Him" (1:12; 13:20). There is a common parallel between Him personally and His words (5:43; 12:48). His words are put for Him as a person, as noted elsewhere. They received not just His spoken words but all His "fullness", the "testimony" of His person, His spirit (1:16; 3:33; 14:17). They received 'Him' in the sense of allowing Him into their hearts and lives, allowing Him to

fill them and abide in them. This is not quite the same as intellectual acceptance of words spoken as true and reasonable. Hence the same word is used about the receiving of the gift of the Spirit in the innermost being (7:39; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 1 Jn. 2:27).

17:9- see on 1 Tim. 2:2.

*I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for those whom You have given me; for they are Yours-* The disciples were given to the Lord out of the Jewish world, as the Levites were. As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14), so are the believers. The Levites represent us (Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between the Lord and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful. His statement that He prayed not for the Jewish world recalls the command to Jeremiah not to pray for the Jewish world of his day, for they had spurned multiple chances and now had to face judgment.

The Lord Jesus worked through individuals. His strategy was not so much to win the multitudes for His cause as to firmly found the faith of a few women and 12 men who would then take His message to the world. The men He chose were like us- impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, burdened with all the prejudices of their environment. Their mannerisms were probably awkward and their abilities limited. But He prayed for them, as we should for those converts the Lord grants us, "not for the world" [perhaps, not *so much for the world as for*] those few whom the Father had given Him out of the world. Everything depended upon them, for "through their word" the world was to believe (Jn. 17:6,9,20). With all the powers of the universe at His command, the Lord could have chosen a programme of mass recruitment. But He didn't. They were to follow Him, so that later they would become fishers of men on a larger scale than He chose then to work on (Mk. 1:17). They would later bear witness because they had been with Him from the beginning (Jn. 15:27). In the few years they were with Him, those men learnt of Him

17:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

*All things that are mine are Yours, and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them-* His comment that "I am glorified in them" was evidently said in hope and faith that they would glorify Him- for before His death He "was not yet glorified" (Jn. 7:39). Indeed, Jn. 12:16 suggests that the disciples only "glorified" Him after the resurrection, once they remembered and understood His words and actions properly. It was through "bearing much fruit" that the disciples would glorify Him (Jn. 15:8)- and they evidently hadn't started doing that. Indeed, from when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the Father was indeed glorified in Him- but not through the disciples, who ran away in denial of their Lord (Jn. 12:28; 13:31). And yet the Lord Jesus confidently asserts to His Father, to God Almighty, that He was glorified in the disciples (Jn. 17:10). As noted on :6, we see here how positive He was in prayer to the Father about His followers.

17:11 *I am no more in the world; but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them whom You have given me in Your Name, that they may be one, even as we are one-* As noted on 14:2,3, the going to the Father meant going to the cross. His presence with the



Father meant that the Father would "keep" them just as the Lord had "kept" them whilst physically present with them (:12). This 'keeping' was and is achieved through the gift of the Spirit, keeping hearts and minds faithful. Those begotten by the Spirit are thereby "kept" from the wicked one and sin generally (1 Jn. 5:18; 2 Thess. 3:3), "preserved [s.w. "kept"] in Christ" and from falling (Jude 1,24), kept by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us (2 Tim. 1:14). This 'keeping' is part of a mutual relationship, for often we read of the need to 'keep' the Lord's words.

There are many points of contact between the Lord as the seed of the woman in the garden of Gethsemane and Eve in the garden of Eden- e.g. "Those whom you gave me" recalls Adam's "the woman which Thou gavest Me" (caused me to be sinful in Your sight- as we did to Jesus on the cross in the same garden). Not least there is the contrast between the struggles against temptation which took place in the same garden.

1 Jn. 3:23 associates believing on the Name with loving each other; and in Jn. 17:11 Christ prays that God will keep us all as one *through His own Name*. So often God's Name is associated with unity. God's Name is connected with His being "the Holy *One*" (Is. 29:23; 47:4; 54:5; 57:15; 60:9; Ez. 39:7). God being the Holy *One* is a further statement of His unity. Of course, we are speaking of ideal things. False doctrine and practice, the uncertainty of knowing exactly who carries God's Name, these and many other limitations of our humanity make it hard to achieve the unity which this theory speaks of. But the unity we do achieve is a foretaste of the Kingdom; unless we *love* this idea of unity, we will find ourselves out of place in the Kingdom. "In *that day* there shall be one Lord, and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ...one baptism, one God"; in other words, Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today. See on Jn. 5:23; Mk. 13:32. There are several connections between there being one Name of God- one set of principles with which He identifies Himself- and unity between believers. David had his people exalt God's Name "together", in unity (Ps. 34:3). The fact that there will be one Lord and His Name one in the future will inspire unity amongst the whole world. By being kept "in the name", we are made one (Jn. 17:11)- by sharing in and developing that unique set of characteristics that comprise God's Name / personality, unity between us is enabled by the love, forgiveness, justice etc. which we will show.

The account of the tabernacle labours the point that the whole house of God, this huge but delicate structure, was held together by "clasps of brass to couple the tent together, that it might be one" (Ex. 36:18 and often). "That it might be one" is alluded to by the Lord when He prayed for His people, "that they might be one" (Jn. 17:11,21-23). The record of the tabernacle stresses how the system was based around a mass of boards, tenons, curtain couplings etc. God's dwelling place, His house, hangs together by millions of inter-personal connections. "Out of church Christians", in the sense of those who think they can go it alone in splendid isolation, are totally missing the point. We are encouraged to see the allusion by realizing that "Holy Father... righteous Father" (Jn. 17:11,25) was a form of address which the Lord had in a sense lifted from Moses when he addresses God as "righteous and holy" (Dt. 32:4 LXX).

17:12 *While I was with them, I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition, so that the scripture might be fulfilled-* As noted on :11, the 'keeping' here refers to spiritual keeping in the Way and in all the things bound up in the Father's Name. The Lord had done this whilst physically with them, and now He was leaving them, He asks the Father to continue that keeping. His going to the Father meant the giving of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to the believers; and this was and is the means by which we are kept or guarded in the things of the Name. The only one the Lord had not 'kept' or spiritually preserved was Judas. This of itself shows that the keeping in view is spiritual preservation, a matter of the heart; and this is therefore the arena of operation of the Father's keeping, guarding work, performed by the Spirit given into the hearts of believers.

The Hebraism 'the son of...' referred to a person having the characteristics of what they were 'the son of'. Judas acted like a condemned person, and so he was one. The fulfilment of Scripture may not simply refer to specific predictions about Judas the betrayer, such as Ps. 109:8. The upcoming fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures was to be in the Lord's death, and the idea may therefore be that Judas chose to be as he did, but this was used in God's wider plan in order to fulfil the Scriptures in the Lord's death.

17:13 *Now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves-* The Lord was aware that His private prayer was being spoken publicly, out loud, and the disciples were listening and a transcript of it would be read by all generations afterwards. He spoke the prayer so publicly because He wanted them to see what His relationship with the Father was like, and to have that same relationship with the Father. He wanted them to have 'His joy' in relationship with the Father experienced within them / us. The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new creation (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled (16:24). This doesn't simply refer to the joy of receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name.

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, "my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", "my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

17:14 *I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world-* The Lord's gift of "Your word" surely doesn't mean that He presented them with a copy of the Bible, as it were. "I... give" are words found on the

Lord's lips in John concerning His gift of the Spirit (4:14), of Himself on the cross as the bread of life (6:51), His glory (:22) and of His "example" in Himself and the person He was (13:26). The gift He gave in the immediate context was of the Comforter (14:16,27). God's word was "made flesh" according to the prologue, in the person of Jesus (1:14). Again, as noted earlier in John, "word" refers not simply to the literal Bible, but the expression of all a person is. God's "word" to men was in His Son, and the Lord had given Himself to the believers.

The disciples don't record much of the opposition they personally received. But here the Lord tells the Father that the Jewish world "hated" the disciples; in fulfilment of His comment that the Jewish world would "hate" any who testified of its wickedness (7:7). John develops this idea in a pastoral context in saying that it is the world who hates the Lord's people, and any who hates his brother in Christ is therefore of the world (1 Jn. 2:9,11; 3:15; 4:20). This all implies that the community of believers to whom John wrote had hatred against their brethren, and this marked them out as being of the Jewish world and not in fact believers at all. And the same powerful logic must be applied to all hatred within the church.

*17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out from the world, but that You should keep them from the evil-* The association of "evil" with "the world" is clear. And in John, "the world" usually refers to the Jewish world. Clearly it was Judaism which was the source of "evil" for the early Christians, explaining why it is referred to as the great "satan" / adversary in the later New Testament. It's observable that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed most parts of His model prayer in His own life situations. "Your will be done... Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4) were repeated by Him in Gethsemane, when He asked for God's will to be done and not His, and yet He prayed that *the disciples* would be delivered from evil. It is as if He prays the "Lord's prayer" for them; "keep them from the evil", although they should have been praying this for themselves. And there are times when we likewise almost have to pray prayers for others which they ought to be praying themselves.

The Lord reasoned that by remaining in the world, as He had been in the world, they could be the light of the world. He therefore speaks of the day when they shall be cast out of the synagogues (16:2), which was spoken of by some Rabbis as being cast out of the Jewish world. He wanted them to remain as long as they could, and here He prays that the Father will enable this to happen- that they should not be taken out of the Jewish world. We see here His complete lack of any 'guilt by association' mentality.

*17:16 They are not of the world even as I am not of the world-* He Himself made the point that if His Kingdom- i.e. the people under His Kingship- were of this world, then they would fight for Him (18:36). And that is exactly what they tried to do in Gethsemane! They acted then as if they were indeed "of this world" by trying to fight for Jesus physically. And yet the Lord saw through to their inner spirit, and presented this to the Father as their being actually not of this world. The Lord's Heavenly origins, being "not of the world", are here imputed to His followers. His language of being from above and not from beneath therefore says nothing about any supposed personal pre-existence, or descent from Heaven to earth in some primitively literal sense. For all such language He applies here to His followers too.

To be "of the world" is later defined in 1 Jn. 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the

world". The Jewish world in which John's Jewish converts lived, for all its apparent righteousness and sanctimony, was structured around the lusts of the flesh and pride.

17:17 *Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth*- The reference is to how the Levites were sanctified (1 Chron. 23:13 Heb.). The Levites were initially consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal to rid Israel of apostasy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's "holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). They sanctified themselves to God, and He sanctified them. Through His allusions to this, the Lord was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the Israelite community they knew; for it was deeply apostate. So often, the Lord is speaking of the development of a new Israel, with new Rabbis and Levites taken from the ranks of very ordinary and dysfunctional people who had believed in Him.

The teaching here is complemented and explained by :19: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth". They were sanctified in Him; because the Lord was supremely sanctified, holy in character, He was fitted for Divine service *par excellence*. And all that was true of Him was to be true of those in Him, as Paul later develops. They were sanctified because they were in Him, the supremely sanctified One. So "Sanctify them in the truth" is parallel with being sanctified on account of being in Him. "The truth" is therefore a reference to Himself personally, as in 14:6. And that is confirmed by the statement: "Your word is truth". The prologue is clear that the Divine word was the Lord Jesus personally, made flesh in Him. The "word" of God in His Son refers to all we have seen and known of Him in Christ. That is the ultimate "truth" by which we are to live. It is nothing but shoddy Biblical workmanship which superimposes the words "Your word is truth" over pictures of open Bibles. The Bible is indeed God's word and is true. But that is simply not in view here. God's word in John is clearly the Lord Jesus personally, who is "the truth". If the Lord intended us here to understand God's word as the Scriptures which comprise the Bible, He surely would have used some other term apart from *logos*. And how can we be sanctified by a book, even an inspired one? It is simply not so that Bible reading of itself makes us sanctified. Verse 19 is quite clear that we are sanctified through being "in Christ", on account of *His* sanctification.

17:18 *As You sent me into the world, even so I send them into the world*- The Son was "sanctified and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). And yet we too are sanctified (Jn. 17:17,19), and likewise sent into the world (Mk. 16:15). The basis of our sanctification is our being in Christ (see on :17,19). The priestly service which is in view in the term 'sanctified' is therefore that of taking the Gospel to the world. As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world [Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21 - this is again John's equivalent of the great commission]. God sent forth Christ to save the world, and likewise we are sent forth in witness (Gal. 4:4 cp. Mt. 9:38; 22:3; Acts 13:4). As He was sent into the world, so He sent us (Jn. 17:18).

We note again that the language of sending into the world is applied to us as well as to the Lord. It simply does not mean that He pre-existed and was somehow sent from Heaven down to earth in some metaphysical sense. For that is not how *we* are sent into the world.

"The world" in John often refers to the Jewish world. John is presenting the great commission in terms of going into the Jewish world as the Lord was sent into it. Whilst the great commission is universal in scope, we should not miss this initial intention- to go out and bring the Jewish world to faith in the One first sent to them with the Gospel.

17:19 *And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth*- The Lord's death was the final act of sanctification in His holy life. If we venture to enquire how exactly He achieved what He did, what His motivations were... we are entering holy ground. But here He states that He did it "for their sakes", so that we might be sanctified in Him, "the truth" (see on :17,18). His vision, however, was that we would not simply be 'saved' but 'sanctified', which as explained on :17 is a clear allusion to priestly service. He sanctified Himself so that in Him, we would be sanctified- to do priestly service. And the service particularly in view, as noted on :18, was to be sent into the world to save others. We are therefore expected to be proactive in our response to Him. Quite simply, if we behold and believe the things of the cross, we will respond.

17:20 *Neither for these only do I pray, but for those also that believe in me through their word*- The word preached was in order that others like us "believe in me". The content of the word preached is therefore the Lord Jesus and belief into Him. He personally, and not solely the results of the salvation He achieved ["the Kingdom of God"], is to be the focus of the word preached. As noted on :18 and :19, the Lord has in view that the sanctification of the believers will be so that they can do priestly service- which is to take the Gospel to the world.

In the same way as John matches the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus with a more spiritual interpretation in Jn. 1, so he likewise refers to the great commission, expressing it in more spiritual terms throughout his gospel. I bring together here some comments that have been made elsewhere in this commentary, to show the number of allusions:

- Jn. 10:32: "If I be lifted up from [RVmg. 'out of'] the earth, will draw all men unto me". Straight after the Lord's death and resurrection the great commission was given, to bring all men unto Him and His cross.
- God sanctified / consecrated the Lord Jesus and sent Him into the world (Jn. 10:36). But this sanctification was through His death on the cross (Jn. 17:19). The Lord was sanctified on the cross and sent into the world in the sense that we His people would be impelled by His cross to take Him into all the world. *We* would be sent into all the world in His Name.
- As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world (Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21)- the very language of the great commission. Jesus 'came down' to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and 'all men' saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.
- In Jn. 12:23-26, the Lord foretold aspects of His coming sacrifice: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit [spoken in the context of potential Gentile converts]. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it... if any man serve me, let him follow me". Here the Lord goes on to assume that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should go [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross,

as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit.

- The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time “shall become one flock” (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be “perfected into one, that the world may know” (Jn. 17:23 RV). As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. And once the fullness of unity is achieved, our communal way of life will have hastened the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3).

- Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. I would suggest that John’s Gospel does in fact record the great commission, but in different and more spiritual words: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God’s forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: ‘I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don’t fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven’. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. “Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” becomes the equivalent of “he that believeth not shall be damned”. Note that the Greek for ‘retain’ strictly means ‘to hold / bind’, and that for ‘remit’ means ‘to loose’. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: “...so shall ye be my disciples...that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide”. The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher’s obedience to his Lord’s commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men’s hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).

- “These are written [“in this book” of John’s Gospel] that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ...and that believing ye may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31 RV)- belief, life, “in his name”, these are all references to the great commission. It’s as if John is saying that he fulfilled it by the writing and preaching of his Gospel record. John’s equivalent to an appeal for baptism may be his concluding appeal to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and as a result of that belief, to receive life “in his name” - into which we are baptized.

John’s record of the great commission is not merely found at the end of his gospel. When John records how the disciples were to proclaim “the word” to the world (Jn. 17:20), he is surely intending connection to be made with how “the word” had likewise been made flesh in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14); and how it was that same “word” which Jesus had given to His men, just as His Father had manifested that word through Himself. Our witness is to be in our making flesh of the word in real life, just as it was in the Lord.

17:21- see on Jn. 13:35.

*That they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe You did send me-* As noted on 14:2,3 and throughout the Comforter discourse, the Lord intended that the relationship He had with the Father ("where I am") would be experienced by all those who received His Spirit. The unity in view here is expressed in a slightly ambiguous way because it is two-fold. Unity between the believer and the Son and Father; and thereby unity between each other, between preacher and convert, and convert and convert. This would be achieved through being together "in us", as the Son and Father mutually indwelt each other. The source of this indwelling was the Spirit; 1 Jn. 4:13 alludes here: "Hereby we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of his Spirit". Those who resist the idea of the indwelling Spirit are invariably not at one with their brethren, and thereby not at one with the Father and Son. For it is through the mutual indwelling of the Spirit that He is in us and we in Him; and thereby we are all one with each other.

The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death. "For their sakes I sanctify myself [in the death of the cross]... that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:19,21). The glory of God would be the source of this unity in Christ (Jn. 17:22); and that Name and glory were declared supremely on the cross (Jn. 12:28; 17:26). The grace, mercy, judgment of sin, the goodness and severity of God (Ex. 34:5-7)... all these things, as demonstrated by the cross, bind men together. And thus in practice, both a too strict and also too loose attitude to doctrine and practice, an unbalanced understanding of the glory of God, will never bring unity.

This unique unity, the "unity of the Spirit", brought about by the indwelling of the Spirit (see on Eph. 4:3), will be so compelling that the world, initially the Jewish world, would believe that the Father sent the Son. It would be apparent that this unity had been created by Jesus of Nazareth, who therefore was no ordinary man, but the One supremely sent by the Father. In this thought we see continued the many allusions in this section to the great commission. The sanctification of the Son, the indwelling of the Spirit, unity between us and with the Father... all this was to be harnessed in the work of winning others for His cause.

We naturally ask why, therefore, the world, both our world and the Jewish world of John's time, have not all believed. It could be that they do not believe simply because as with the witness of the Lord, they for the most part choose to disbelieve it and reject it, lest their lives be too disturbed. But it could be that the dysfunction of the church, which is characterized by its disunity rather than unity, has meant that the potential conversion of the world to Christ has not happened.

17:22 *And the glory which You have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one-* The glory given to Moses was nothing compared to that given to the Lord. By beholding that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus, it shines off from our faces too (2 Cor. 3:18). The glory is potentially given, but it is only by beholding it in the face of the Lord that it becomes real for us. The faces of the disciples at that time, as they watched the Lord praying, were anything but glorious. They fled from Him, and went fishing instead of being

enthused by His resurrection. But so much was made potentially available to them. The glory that would soon shine from the Lord's face when He was arrested was theirs, already.

"The glory" has associations with the Name declared at Sinai, and now even moreso in the person of God's Son. Connect :6,8,22: "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me... I have given unto them the words Thou gavest Me... the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". Indeed, so much was "given" to the believers by the Lord. He gave them the essence of Himself, His Spirit; the prologue says they were given "power to become the Sons of God" (1:12). The idea of the gift of glory is associated with the gift of the Spirit in Eph. 3:14-18 where the same words are used and again connected with unity between those who possess the Spirit: "I bow my knees to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He would *grant* ["give"] you, according to the riches of His *glory*, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints". The gift of glory therefore sums up everything- the very essence of the Father and Son, their word, their Spirit, the Name. The receipt of those things will issue in unity between us. In this sense the gift of "glory" is what enables our unity both with the Father and Son as well as with each other.

*17:23 I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know You did send me and that You have loved them just as You loved me-* The unity envisaged was a process; the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and they in us, is by the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:13). But as noted earlier, we are progressively filled with the Spirit, it is not a one-time gift. And there is therefore this process of perfecting into one. It could be that once the believing community are truly filled with the Spirit and one with each other, that they will finally convince the [Jewish] world of the Father's love. John alludes here in later writing that love between believers is the sign of this perfecting process developing: "If we love one another, God dwells in us ["I in them and you in me"], and His love is perfected in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). It is not God's love of itself must be perfected or matured; as we mature in love to each other, and thereby unity, His love is declared in an ongoing sense. The idea of our love being perfected and thereby the outcome of God's love being perfected is quite a theme (1 Jn. 2:5; 4:12,17,18).

We have suggested elsewhere that the great commission is repeated in John's Gospel but in more spiritual language. The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. As the Gospel spreads worldwide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. It could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated.



This almost uncanny sense of unity is referred to in Eph. 4:3 as "*the* unity"; although, as Paul shows, the *keeping* and experience of that unity is dependent upon our patience with each other and maintenance of "the one faith" (i.e. the unifying faith that gives rise to the one body). This unity is potentially powerful enough to convert the world. Through it, "the world may know", "the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21,23). And yet, in Johannine thought, "the world may know" was a result of the Lord's death (Jn. 14:31), and yet also of the love that would be between His people (Jn. 13:35). The Lord's death would potentially inspire such a love between His people that their resultant unity would let the world know the love of the Father and Son. Paul alludes to all this when he says that because of the new unity and fellowship between Jew and Gentile, "all men (would) see", and even to the great princes and powers of this world would be made known by the united church "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-11). The miraculous Spirit gifts were given, Paul argues, to bring the Jewish and Gentile believers together, "for the perfecting (uniting) of the saints", into "a perfect man", a united body. And thus, once Jewish and Gentile differences were resolved within the ecclesia by the end of the first century, the gifts were withdrawn.

The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. And it could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, unity in the church broke up, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated. Seeing the great commission is to be powerfully obeyed in our last days, we simply *must* learn the lesson.

17:24- see on Jn. 7:34.

*Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which You have given me. For You loved me from before the foundation of the world-* The glory given before the foundation of the world (:5) is paralleled here with God's love for His Son at that same time. These terms such as "glory" and "love" are all parallel, and do not require too much specific definition. To behold or perceive the Lord's glory, which was the Father's glory, was to "be where I am", which was the whole intention of His death. For He died so that His Spirit would be given to us, that where "I am" in His relationship with the Father, there we might be also (14:2,3). To be where He was meant to behold or perceive the glory; to perceive in Him, a 33 year old Palestinian Jew, of a certain blood type and plasma, son of a hairdresser from a Nazareth back street, covered in blood and spittle on a Roman cross, on a day in April, on a hill just outside Jerusalem, tormented by flies... the sublimest glory of God.

It could be that His request is therefore specifically that His disciples should be with Him at the cross- "I will that where I am, there they may also be" (Jn. 17:24 RV- hence John's emphasis that he really did behold Him there). He so wishes for us to at least try to stand with Him there and enter into it all. See on Lk. 22:15. But more than physical presence, He desired that they would perceive the crucifixion as the manifestation of glory, after the pattern of the theophany of Exodus 34.

Love before the foundation of the world is a reference to the description of Moses as having been prepared in God's plan from the beginning: "He prepared me [Moses] before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant" (*Assumption of Moses* 1.14). Once we appreciate this and other such allusions to popular Jewish belief about Moses, then the passages which appear to speak of personal pre-existence are easier to understand. The Jews didn't believe that Moses personally pre-existed, but rather that he was there in the plan / purpose of God, and with the major role in that purpose, from before creation. The Lord was applying those beliefs and that language to Himself, showing that He was greater than Moses. But by doing so, He wasn't implying that He personally pre-existed.

"That they may behold my glory" connects with the statement in the prologue that they *did* behold His glory, as if to say that the Lord's request here was indeed granted. His glory was especially manifested in His death. "Where I am" and His future glorification are linked into one and the same event, even though the glorification was not then apparent. This use of language is to be connected with the way John's Gospel speaks several times of the hour coming, and yet having already come (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:32). I have suggested that all these references have application to the Lord's death.

He tells the Father in prayer: "I will [NEV "desire"] that they... be with me" and yet elsewhere in the same prayer He says "I *pray* that..." (Jn. 17:9,15,20). Our will is essentially our prayer, just as His will was His prayer. If our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. And yet our will is not yet coincidental with His; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer. The Lord Jesus is the great example in all this. The implications of our will becoming God's will, of the sacrifice of our natural will, are enormous. Our will is the thing we cling to the most, and only give up at the very last. Our will alone is what we truly have, our dearest thing- and we are called to sacrifice it. I see in the OT significance of the blood poured out far more than merely our physical life force- rather does it further symbolize our essential will.

17:25 *O righteous Father, the world did not know You; but I knew You, and these knew that You sent me-* The Jewish world rejected the light of the person of Jesus, as stated in the prologue. By rejecting Him they rejected knowledge of / relationship with the Father. The Lord balances the idea of 'knowing God' with 'knowing that You sent Me'. He is aware that the disciples still have not fully known Him nor the Father (14:8-10). But He sees in their recognition that He was sent from God the potential for further development, into knowing the Father. His words here are therefore an indirect request, rather than a mere statement of fact. He wishes that through the Spirit, they would progress from knowing that He was sent from God, to fully knowing the Father. We recall how Nicodemus is presented as initially recognizing that the Lord was "from God", but coming to fuller faith through the experience of the cross.

17:26 *And I declared to them Your Name, and will declare it, so that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them-* The second declaration of the Name was in the

cross. On 19:19-22 I note that the Name was particularly declared upon the cross, and that the title over the cross in Hebrew was comprised of four words, the first letter of each spelling the YHWH Name. All the words of God, the essence of His Name, were summed up in that death. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me... I have declared unto them thy name" (:8, 26). "I have proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Dt. 32:3 LXX) was surely in the Lord's mind; Moses did that just before his death. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love, which is at the core of the Name. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, so that the love of God would be within us. "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.). The death of the cross was therefore the very definition of love; love is a crucifixion-love, a conscious doing of that which is against the grain of our nature. We *must therefore* respond by showing that love to our brethren. It is not an option. To be unloving is to deny the very essence of the cross of Christ.

The idea of indwelling love again alludes to the indwelling of the Spirit, which was given to us through the Lord's surrender to us of His spirit on the cross. It is through the Lord's indwelling of us in this way that we love one another as He loved us. This is why John's letters have so much to say about love, and about how hatred of our brethren is a sign that we are not spiritual, are not indwelt by the spirit of the Son.

## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where there was a garden into which he and his disciples entered-* We have the impression that having offered Himself to the Father in speaking those words of prayer in chapter 17, the Lord now purposefully went forth "unto the Father". It was as if He had planned it all; He knew that Judas would guess that he would likely spend the night in that garden, and would be on the lookout for Him there to have Him arrested discreetly. And so He went to that very place. His life was not taken from Him, He gave it of Himself (10:18); the whole situation and timing of His death was brought about by His supreme perception of human psychology, and He thereby arranged the whole scene, getting the stage perfectly ready for the actors to walk on and act exactly as He had set them up to.

18:2 *Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, also knew the place. For Jesus often met there with his disciples-* As noted on :1, the Lord went there because He knew Judas would guess that He would go there to spend the night. And the Lord was right; Judas was hanging out there with a band of soldiers, guessing the Lord would go there. We note in passing that the Lord was unlike any other great teacher; He literally spent nights sleeping rough. Surely there were some who invited Him to stay at their place, and it would not have been impossible for them to have slept where they kept the last support or to have walked out to Bethany. But the Lord went to Gethsemane because He knew that Judas would guess He might go there.

18:3 *Judas along with a detachment of temple guards whom he had been given, and the servants of the chief priests, and the Pharisees, arrived there with lanterns and torches and weapons-* As noted on :1,2, Judas went there because he guessed that the Lord would spend the night sleeping rough there, rather than walk out to Bethany or stay with other sympathizers in Jerusalem. The Lord knew he would think like that, and went along with the plan which He Himself had set up. He was not overtaken by events and murdered; rather did He give His life just when and how He wished, setting up the entire situation which would enable Him to die as the Passover lambs were being slain, on that particular Passover, by crucifixion, at Romans hands but at the behest of the Jews, with the masses turned against Him as well as their leaders. As noted on the triumphal entry, this was why He set the crowds up to be bitterly disillusioned in Him by His inversion of all their values and expectations. Judas had prepared the men, on the off chance he would be right and the Lord would indeed go and sleep rough in Gethsemane that night. He must have been so glad his bet paid off, and the men with him would not have wasted their efforts; for a *speira* "detachment", was about 200 men, and some of the chief priests themselves were present (Lk. 22:52). But he was fulfilling the exact plan of the Lord. Hence RV "*Judas therefore...*". It was all set up by the Lord. They came with lanterns and torches, despite the full moon of Passover, because they assumed He might hide somewhere in the Kidron ravine once He saw them coming. But the Lord went out and gave Himself over to them.

18:4 *Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek?-* As noted on :1-3, the Lord had set up the entire situation, and it was going exactly according to His plan. So it was knowing how His plan was going to work out that He went forward to surrender to them; we should not at all read this as any kind of fatalism and grim submission to inevitable events which were overtaking Him. Just as the ending of our lives, through illness or old age, is not to be met in this way, but rather as a conscious giving of life to the Father.

"Whom do you seek?" is again another question which jumps out of the record to challenge all hearers and readers; as if to say 'And whom do *you* seek?'. He knew they knew, and that they knew that He knew... So why ask the question? It was surely to elicit in them the words and understanding that 'We seek Jesus'. For these are the words the Gospel writers place on the lips of those who wished to believe in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). The Lord's desire to witness to all men, to attempt to save even His persecutors, stands as all time a challenge to us to emulate in evangelism and by all means seeking to share the Gospel with all. Paul in his trials caught the spirit of all this, in attempting to even convert his judges.

18:5- see on Mt. 26:75; Jn. 18:17.

*They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth-* As noted on :4, the Lord had elicited from them the statement 'We seek Jesus', which is associated with belief in Him. He was by all means seeking to convert them even at that dark hour.

*Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them)-* The Lord was a well-known public figure in Jerusalem. The way Judas kissed the Lord to identify Him to them may however indicate that some of these Roman soldiers were not aware of Him. "I am he" was clearly a reference to the Yahweh Name. He had put the position in their mouths: 'We seek Jesus'. And in answer to that search, He presented Himself as the fullness of God manifest in flesh.

18:6 *When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground-* His declaration of the Yahweh Name (see on :6) was accompanied by some kind of theophany, so that they fell to the ground, just as Saul did before the encounter with the glorified Jesus. To now arrest 'the man with the face of God' was going to be difficult for them; it would involve a wilful denial of the obvious.

18:7 *Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth-* As noted previously, the Lord was seeking to convert them, eliciting from them the statement that 'We seek Jesus', which is elsewhere found on the lips of believers in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). But now they had seen His face flash with the glory of God, and had fallen to the ground before Him, He urged them not to do the apparently psychologically inevitable, but to stop in their tracks and continue seeking Him in truth. This desire to convert them, to help them even at that late stage to pull out of their nose dive to condemnation, reveals so much about the whole spirit of the Lord.

18:8 *Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way-* So often we read that the Lord told the Jews that He was God's Son, but they refused to believe. The same words are found in 10:25: "I told you and you believed not". And so it was now; the Lord had told them, shown them through the theophany that "I am", but they refused to believe. He had set up a situation whereby they were going to do to Him what they knew was wrong, and they knew He realized that. And so He asks them for a small favour- to let the disciples go free. Again, His understanding of human psychology was magnificent. He so knew and knows us, and we can therefore in all ways be assured that His judgment will be just, and will take into total account every psychological nuance and factor when judging us.

18:9 *That the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one-* This suggests that the Lord's 'keeping' of the disciples in His lifetime was physical as

well as spiritual (17:12), and this explains why when speaking about their forthcoming tribulation at the hands of the world, He assures them that His physical departure will not mean that He will not continue to "keep" them; see on 16:4. For He would do so through the ministry of the Comforter, the advocate, the legal counsel for the defence.

18:10 *Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus-* The Lord knew that Peter had a sword / knife hidden in his garment when in Gethsemane. But He did nothing; He didn't use His knowledge of Peter's weakness to criticise him. He knew that the best way was to just let it be, and then the miracle of healing Malchus must have more than convinced Peter that the Lord's men should not use the sword. For their Master had healed, not murdered, one of the men sent to arrest Him. The Lord perhaps knew what Peter would do, for it was not hard to guess, knowing his temperament. The healing of Malchus' ear was therefore planned; for usually the Lord did not address human need but only did His "works" as a witness to His Heavenly origins; John's Gospel records this several times. The miracle was therefore yet another desperate appeal to those arresting Him to not go ahead with their plan. They did so having witnessed directly the Lord's Divine authentication. They were totally culpable, although they would have later given the excuse that they had followed a multitude to do evil; for to break ranks at that stage was indeed difficult.

18:11 *Jesus said to Peter: Put the sword into its sheath. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?-* In prayer earlier, the Lord had totally accepted the cup, despite asking for it to be removed (Mt. 26:39). So Peter's resistance to the idea of the Lord drinking the cup was in fact shared by the Lord, but He consented. We see here yet another of John's cameos of the Lord's utter humanity and connection with men. Peter had intended to kill Malchus, and only by dodging the blow aimed at his head did he survive, although the sword blow removed his ear. For all time we see that violent resistance to evil is not the Christian way.

18:12 *So the detachment of temple guards and their chief captain and the magistrates' attendants of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him-* The word for "detachment" could mean there were a few hundred armed men present; so Peter's attempt to murder Malchus was futile. But he may well have known Malchus, for John knew the high priest, whose personal servant Malchus was. It is not impossible that Peter aimed for him in particular to settle some old perceived score.

18:13 *And led him to Annas first. For he was father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year-* All through the record, we see the Jews' disobedience to the law. A high priest was to be for life, and there were not to be joint high priests nor agreement they could have power just for a specific period. Likewise weapons were not to be carried at the time of the feasts, but these men were armed.

18:14 *It was Caiaphas that had counselled the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people-* The record in John places particular blame upon Caiaphas, who is called "the prince of this [Jewish] world", who had particular responsibility for the Lord's death. This statement placed here implies again that it was Caiaphas who was behind it all.

18:15 *Simon Peter followed Jesus-* The Lord had specifically told Peter that he could not follow Him (13:36). If Peter had given due weight to the Lord's words and not overrated his

own strength, he would not have followed, and led himself into temptation too great for him. This basic tendency to assume we shall not give in to temptation is very much part of us as humans, and in the Biblical record we have so much encouragement to face up to the fact and humble ourselves in recognizing it.

*And so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest-* John, the disciple beloved by his Lord, brings out the apparent paradox- that he was 'on friendly terms with the High Priest', the great 'satan' of the early Christians, Caiaphas being presented as "the prince of this world" with especial responsibility for the Lord's death; and yet also 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. When John knew full well that the Lord Jesus had taught that a man cannot be friends of both Him and of the persecuting world. Again we see the Gospel preachers / writers bringing out their own weakness as a platform upon which to appeal to other weak people to likewise believe as they had done. Quite how it was that John knew Caiaphas isn't clear; it could be that his family fishing business provided salt for the temple and therefore he knew Caiaphas from business dealings. If indeed Salome was John's mother and also the sister or relative of Mary the Lord's mother, then he may well have had priestly connections in the family.

*18:16 But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door-* If John was known to the high priest and his servants, he would have been known as a disciple of Jesus. His identification with Peter as his friend was therefore a quite obvious invitation for everyone to assume that Peter was also a disciple of the Lord. And just a few hours ago, he had attempted to murder Malchus, who would have been known to all in the yard. Any denial from Peter about his association with the Lord, let alone claiming he had never heard of Him, was doomed to failure. If only he had not followed, accepting the Lord's warning of 13:36 that he could not follow Him yet, he would have gotten into the wretched situation he did. And we can retro analyse our own failings in just the same way.

*18:17 The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!-* Again the challenge comes out of the record to all hearers and readers: 'Are you one of this man's disciples?'. Although the Lord was not standing amongst them, all the talk was about "this man". Again we see His utter humanity. That the girl would speak like this is utterly credible and again reminds us that the Biblical record is true. These words were actually said, these things really happened.

The failure of Peter is effectively emphasized by the very structure of the Gospel accounts. John frames the interrogation of the Lord as happening alongside the interrogation of Peter. The Lord peerlessly and bravely witnesses to the Truth, and is condemned to death for it; whilst Peter flunks the issue time and again to save his own skin. Whilst the Lord unflinchingly declares His identity before the High Priest, Peter is presented as doing anything to deny his identity as a disciple. Peter's denials are presented by the records as if in slow motion, for the reader to gaze upon in detail. Peter's denial "I am not" is placed by John in purposeful juxtaposition to the Lord's brave self-identification in Gethsemane: *ego eimi*, "I am" (Jn. 18:5,17). And yet this 'setting up' of the leader of the early church as a failure was done by the early church writers, ultimately inspired as they were! The Gospel writers were *glorifying* in their weakness and their Lord's supremacy. They were standing up for their unity with Him by grace, but openly and pointedly proclaiming the vast mismatch between them and Him.

18:18- see on Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:32.

*Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself-* The extra information about the fire being of charcoal coals was in order to highlight the similarity with the Lord's later appearance to Peter, again by a charcoal fire, where the three denials are as it were undone by three assertions of loyalty. "The servants and the officers" refers to the very same group who had just arrested the Lord in the garden. In the full Passover moon, they would surely have discerned Peter, and known that it was he who had tried to murder Malchus their colleague. These background factors made Peter's attempts to deny the Lord all the more hopeless, just as hopeless as trying to defend the Lord against a few hundred armed men by trying to kill one of them. Peter is thereby presented as not simply hot-headed, but rather simple, not thinking through the obvious outcome of situations. And yet he, the one with simple loyalty and the sins of a simple man, was the one chosen to establish the Lord's church. The record thereby appeals to the simple, that the Lord's way and even responsibility in His church is for them too.

18:19 *The high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his teaching-* The Lord knew that Peter was out there in the yard and would deny Him three times. And yet when asked about His disciples, He speaks so positively about them (see on :21). The legal ground for condemnation was the Lord's claims in relation to God and the destruction of the temple. These were all issues directly connected with Him personally rather than His disciples, who were in any case not present to answer for themselves. So it could be that the questioning about them was a way of humiliation before coming to the actual allegations. He had converted a rag tag band of fishermen and simple folk like Peter, who had now fled from the garden. He had made no disciples, apparently. And the masses had turned against Him because of His purposeful disappointment of their Messianic expectations in His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The cross is realistically intended to be lived out in daily experience. The record of the crucifixion and trials of the Lord are framed in language which would have been relevant to the first hearers of the Gospel as they too faced persecution and suffering for their faith. John's account of the interrogation of the Lord by the Jewish leaders, accusing Him of being a false prophet, was surely written in the way it was to provide encouragement to John's converts [the "Johannine community" as theologians refer to it] to see how their court appearances before the Jews were in fact a living out of their Lord's cross. They too were to 'speak openly to the world' and 'bear witness to the truth before the world', living out the cross in the way in which they responded to the great commission.

18:20 *Jesus answered him: I have spoken openly to the world. I often taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together, and have never spoken in secret-* Again we see how "the world" in John refers specifically to the Jewish world, "all the Jews". From what the Lord says here, He did not teach one thing in public and another more secretly to the disciples. He did not give them special knowledge which the masses were forbidden. As taught so often in John, the Lord was the open manifestation of truth to all; He was the light, shining in darkness. There was nothing "secret" about what He stood for. He likewise asks us to be a city set on a hill, which cannot be kept secret (Mt. 5:14), being the light of the world as He was. Our witness to Him should likewise be open and direct; so much of the 'social Gospel' approach is indirect and amounts to doing the same good works



done by unbelievers, without the direct and up front manifestation of the light which was characteristic of the Lord's witness.

18:21 *Why do you ask me? Ask those that have heard me what I spoke to them. Behold, these know the things which I said-* The Lord was rather critical of the disciples when speaking directly with them, especially concerning their lack of understanding and recall of His previous teachings. But in prayer to the Father in chapter 17 and now in talking about them to others, He is extremely positive about them; just as He is about us with all our weaknesses of understanding and behaviour. He states here that those who heard Him, His disciples (:19), could tell anyone what He had taught. He is setting up a parallel between His teaching and that of the disciples, knowing that soon they were to continue His teaching work in the world.

Peter would have reflected how his denial had been in spite of the fact that the Lord had prayed he wouldn't do it- even though He foresaw that Peter would. Just a short time before the denials He had commented, probably in earshot of Peter and John, "ask those that have heard me, what I spoke unto them". Perhaps He nodded towards them both as He said it, to encourage them to speak up rather than slip further into the temptation of keeping quiet. He had used the same phrase earlier, just hours before: "These things have I spoken unto you" (Jn. 16:33).

18:22 *And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying: Do you answer the high priest so?-* "Struck" is the word used in the LXX of the Messianic Is. 50:6 "I gave my cheeks to blows". Perhaps, in the spirit of giving His life and not having it taken from Him, the Lord offered his cheek; although see on :23. This was totally unprovoked; perhaps the officer was over eager to ingratiate himself to the high priest. Or perhaps he was Malchus, or some other beneficiary of the Lord's healing work who wanted to demonstrate that he was not a secret Jesus sympathizer.

18:23 *Jesus answered him: If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil, but if well, why do you hit me?-* The Lord did not literally 'turn the other cheek', as we might have expected if He intended us to take His words of Mt. 5:39 literally. His words were aimed at helping that officer come to believe in Him; to ask himself whether the Lord had ever at any time spoken evil. He wanted the man to realize that his behaviour in hitting Him was dictated by a desire to please others; the Lord was inviting the man thereby towards freedom in Him.

18:24 *Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest-* The 'hearing' was very early in the morning; the appearance before Annas was a kind of pre-trial hearing, which was not required by any law. Presumably it was done in an attempt to give the impression of having done everything in a hyper correct legal sense. We see a theme in the record of the Jews being so careful to give an appearance of legal obedience whilst they were breaking the most major principles of both Divine and Roman law.

18:25 *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples? He denied and said: I am not!-* As noted on :17, His "I am not!" compares unfavourably with the Lord's statement "I am", and shamelessly open declaration of Himself as He always had. The "also" could imply that the conversation had turned around others who were the Lord's disciples. John was known to the high priest, and presumably to his entourage, in that he had got the girl to allow Peter in to the compound. The talk would naturally have turned to how John was one of his disciples- and then quite naturally, to his

friend Peter. As noted on :18, Peter displays quite some simple-mindedness in not seeing that denial was pointless and deeply unconvincing.

18:26 *One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?*- Caiaphas and his entourage were riddled with nepotism; there were not even 10,000 people living in Jerusalem, according to Joachim Jeremias, and many who worked in a certain sphere would have been surrounded with friends and relatives as co-workers. And again, Peter ought surely to have realized that he was now inside a locked compound with a crowd of people who were friends and relatives of the very crowd whom he had just confronted in the garden. His situation was hopeless, and as noted on :18, his basic intelligence cannot be highly rated in allowing himself into that situation. But from that simple man came the baptism of thousands and the establishment of the Lord's church.

18:27 *Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew*- John's account of Peter's denial of the Lord is to me very beautifully crafted by him to reflect his own weakness, lest the focus be left purely upon the failure of Peter. He [alone of the evangelists] records how he knew a girl who kept the door to the High Priest's palace, and how he was even known to the High Priest. He speaks to the girl, and she lets Peter in. Then, she recognizes Peter as one of the disciples, that he had been with Jesus, and he makes his shameful denial. But John's point is clearly this: he, John, was known to the same girl, and to Caiaphas- but they never accused *him* of having been with Jesus. Because they sadly didn't make the connection between John and Jesus. Yet when they saw Peter- they knew him as an upfront disciple of Jesus. And when Peter ran out in fear and shame, John remained in the High Priest's palace- unrecognized and unknown as a disciple of Jesus. The door girl must have realized that John and Peter were connected- because John had asked her to let Peter in. But she never made the accusation that John also had been one of Jesus' followers. In all this, John reveals his own shame at his lack of open association with the Lord. Significantly, Acts 4:13 records how the Jews later looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publicly, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publicly and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord.

18:28 *They lead Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium; but it was early, and so they did not enter into the Praetorium, that they might not be defiled and might eat the Passover*- Again we see the extreme hypocrisy of men so caught up with legalistic obedience, whilst committing the worst crime of all time. "Early" is the term used technically of the fourth watch, 3-6 a.m. The appearance before Annas was clearly staged, a show trial if ever there was one. "In capital cases, sentence of condemnation could not be legally pronounced on the day of trial"; and many other such legal requirements were broken. The fear of defilement was through contact with the Gentile soldiers who were abusing the Lord. "That they... might eat the Passover" is surely proof enough that the last supper was a Passover-like meal, but not "the Passover" of the 14th Nissan. The Lord is portrayed as developing a new Israel, with a new priesthood and different central symbols; He was able to change and reinterpret the Passover with ease.

18:29 *Pilate went out to them, and said: What accusation do you bring against this man?*- He went out to them as they would not go in to him lest they defile themselves. The inspired

record hangs together with great credibility down to the finest details. Pilate faced the same problem as Paul's judges faced. It was simply not clear what this man's crime was.

18:30 *They answered and said to him: If this man were not an evildoer, we should not have delivered him up to you-* The Jews were careful not to be too specific, because they knew that they had no concrete case against the Lord. Peter lived the rest of his life under the deep impression of the events of this time, which occurred whilst he was denying his Lord. He uses the same word in 1 Pet. 2:12: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation". "Visitation" is literally 'the day of looking at', using the same word as used about how the Lord turned and looked at Peter after his third denial. Peter's idea is that just as the Lord was falsely accused of being "an evildoer", so would all those in Him. His sufferings are therefore not to be viewed from a distance, but taken into our lives; our experiences result in our being connected with Him in His time of crisis. The Greek word for "evildoer" used here only occurs four other times in the New Testament, and all of them are in 1 Peter. Consciously or unconsciously, the things of the Lord's passion were in Peter's heart, as they should be in ours.

18:31 *Pilate replied to them: Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law. The Jews said to him: It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death-* Pilate is repeatedly presented here as on the back foot, and nervous about dealing with the Lord. He is portrayed in history as utterly conscienceless. And so he probably was- but the person of the Lord Jesus is such that it provokes the conscience of every person, even those who appear to have no religious interest nor conscience. The fact is, every human being has a conscience, because it is intrinsic to our being human. And as noted on 15:22, our preaching of the Lord Jesus penetrates directly to that conscience. Pilate is a great example of this. The Jews had already judged the Lord as worthy of death, but their ability to execute people had been taken away from them, meaning that they had to pass over such cases to the Romans to decide, and to execute if they considered legitimate.

18:32 *That the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should die-* The Lord designed to die by crucifixion and yet also at the hands of the Jews. He therefore arranged things so that the plan to kill Him, and the responsibility for it, was squarely with the Jews; and yet it was to be the Gentiles who put Him to death, and through crucifixion. He therefore set Himself up to be so hated by the Jews on account of their rejection of Him that they would desire to kill Him; and to effect that, they would have to hand Him over to the Romans, who would then kill Him by crucifixion. This was all the Lord's design, part of His wilful giving of His life and not having it taken from Him (10:18), not being overtaken by events, nor in that sense murdered. He was master of the entire situation from start to finish, arranging it all so that the players all exercised their own freewill, and did what they did despite His personal efforts to lead them to repentance.

18:33 *Pilate therefore went into the Praetorium and called Jesus, and said to him: Are you the King of the Jews?-* The Jews were seeking the death penalty on the basis that the Lord was setting Himself up as a king in opposition to Caesar. And yet according to their law, this was not a capital offence, in fact it was no crime at all. Their whole legal and logical case against the Lord had no consistency nor integrity at all.

The records are in fact written in such a way as to encourage us to re-live the crucifixion process as it were in slow motion. The record of the trials likewise is written in a way which

encourages us to imagine it and live it out in our imaginations in slow motion. Donald Senior has pointed out how John's account of the trial scenes alternate between what is happening "inside" and "outside":

- (1) "Outside" - The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, Jn. 18:28-32
- (2) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 18:33-38
- (3) "Outside" - Pilate declares Jesus innocent, 18:38-40
- (4) "Inside" - The Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus, 19:1-3
- (5) "Outside" - Pilate again declares Jesus not guilty, 19:4-8
- (6) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 19:9-12
- (7) "Outside" - Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion, 19:13-16.

18:34 *Jesus answered: Do you say this of yourself, or did others tell it to you concerning me?*- The Lord was interested in the conversion of even Pilate, just as Paul was for his judges. The Lord of course knew the answer to His question- Pilate was saying this because others had told him. And yet He wishes Pilate to genuinely ask himself the question in his own heart: 'Who really is this Jesus? Is He a King?'

18:35 *Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you to me. What have you done?*- Pilate avoids the question just as the Lord avoids Pilate's question. This is not a typical interaction between a judge and the accused. The Lord is taking the initiative and seeking by all means to persuade Pilate, who instead of pushing for an answer to his question about "Are you the King of the Jews?" moves on to another question. Perhaps he did not push for an answer because he knew in his own conscience that before him stood a true, Divine King. And he did not wish to dwell on the question 'Who are You?' because in his conscience he knew. Pilate distances himself from personal guilt in the matter by saying that it was the Jews who had delivered the Lord to him, and he was not a Jew and so had had no part in it. This protestation of innocence by an otherwise conscienceless man, even when he sat in the position of power, all indicates how the Lord was touching even his conscience.

18:36 *Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from here*- I suggested on :35 that Pilate was persuaded in his conscience that the Lord was indeed a Heavenly King, and he did not push for answer to his question about the Lord's kingship because in his heart, he knew the answer and wanted to move on. As a judge he had every right and necessity to not let the accused avoid a question. But he allows the Lord to not answer on that point. Perceiving this, the Lord now returns to this theme of His kingship, using His next opportunity to speak to return to it, even though what He says about it is not an answer to the question just addressed to Him ["What have you done?"]. The fact He claimed to have a Kingdom was a sign that He considered Himself a King. But it was not a Kingdom in the secular sense, and was not characterized by fighting for Him. But His servants just *had* tried to fight, to this very end! Thus He imputed righteousness to His men and was very positive about them to others.

18:37- see on Jn. 15:27.

*Pilate replied to him: Are you a king then? Jesus answered: You say that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end I came into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice*- Pilate as a Roman procurator cannot let this claim to kingship go without comment. For Caesar was to be accepted as the only king in any

form. Again we see the Lord as psychological master of the whole situation. Pilate had not stated that the Lord was a King; but He perceived that this was in fact what Pilate had come to believe. See on :31,33,36.

The Lord told Pilate in the context of His upcoming death that He had come into this world to bear witness to the truth- and this was the basis upon which His Kingdom stood. And the cross was the supreme witness and exhibition of the truth. The Lord personally was the truth, the light; His person was a testimony to truth. His Kingdom, the community who accepted Him as their King, were those who heard His voice, who accepted the word which was Him as a person. In 12:27, the cross is again "this cause" for which He came. His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God.

18:38 *Pilate said to him: What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them: I find no crime in him!*- The famous question "What is truth?" is another example of how phrases are used in the gospel records which as it were jump off the page and confront all hearers or readers. We all must ask this question, and visually, we can perceive that the Lord standing in front of such a questioner was Himself the answer. For He is presented in John as "the truth". The implication could be that Pilate perceived this, for his rhetorical question is immediately followed by his conviction that there was "no crime in him". The conscienceless Pilate would have had no problem in agreeing to execute a troublemaker; for he is recorded as ordering the murder of random people for no good reason at all. But here he sees no crime in the Lord and is careful not to behave like this. Clearly, his conscience had been touched.

18:39 *But you have a custom, that I should release to you one prisoner at the Passover. Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?*- Matthew and Mark make it clear that Pilate was surprised they did not want the Lord released, and he remonstrated with them as to how they could wish the Lord crucified when He had done nothing wrong (Mk. 15:14). It seems that Pilate misjudged the mood of the masses; he assumed they were all pro-Jesus. He was not aware that the Lord's parody of the triumphal entry had dashed their Messianic hopes, and they were now very angry with Him. Pilate had assumed that this whole thing was just a matter of envy on the part of the priests (Mk. 15:10). Pilate's offer to release the Lord was an attempt to drive a wedge between the masses and the Jewish leadership; but he failed to realize that the leadership had persuaded the masses and they were themselves disillusioned with the Lord.

18:40 *Therefore they cried out: Not this man but Barabbas! (Now Barabbas was a bandit)*- Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb... for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy

and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus—that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery; those locked in the dark dungeon see great light, etc.

## CHAPTER 19

*19:1 So Pilate had Jesus scourged- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back. It seems from the synoptics that Pilate did this in the hope this would placate the Jews and he would not need to crucify Him. Again we see the power of encounter with the Lord to touch the hardest conscience.*

*19:2 And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple garment-* The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment.

*19:3 And they came to him, and said: Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands-* Note the continuous tenses. The Lord's experiences of suffering are depicted as going on and on, as if in endless waves. When we get that sense in our far smaller sufferings, we are fellowshipping Him there and then. The striking was "upon the cheek", according to some texts. The otherwise strange paradox of Mic. 5:1 was fulfilling: "They shall strike the judge of Israel upon the cheek". He stood there as their judge; throughout all His sufferings and final death, He was in fact supremely in control, as their judge. For of this period He had stated: "Now is the judgment of this world", and He was the judge. See on :13.

*19:4 Pilate went out again to the Jews, and said: Look, I bring him out to you, so you may know that I find no crime in him-* Again we see the hard conscience of Pilate touched by the encounter with the Lord, putting this otherwise callous man on the back foot. Again we note that Pilate "went out... to the Jews", lest they be defiled by as it were coming in to a Gentile house; recall Peter's reticence at entering the home of Gentile Cornelius.

*19:5 Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And Pilate said to them: Behold the man!-* This was indeed sarcasm; the Lord stood there as a pathetic and bedraggled figure. But Pilate said it not so much out of spite toward Him, but as a desperate attempt to again persuade the Jews that he had humiliated this man sufficiently, and there was no point in crucifying Him. Yet again we see the desperation provoked in that hard man's conscience.

The mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by the Lord as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. As Son of God, He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

*19:6 When the chief priests and the servants saw him, they cried out: Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Take him yourselves and crucify him. For I find no crime in him-* Pilate's repeated statement that he found no crime in the Lord was unwise from a secular point of view; for he was publicly going on record as saying he was authorizing the crucifixion of an innocent man. The only reason for saying this was because he was making a

genuine protest of conscience. The Jews likewise had a conscience. The more Pilate drew their attention to His innocence, the louder and more insistently they cried for His crucifixion. This of itself indicates the unease of their own consciences. All concerned are presented as culpable, rather than just doing a job. We see here how submission to the crowd mentality, following a multitude to do evil, is still absolutely culpable before God. And in our similar situations we must be ever aware of this. For we like sheep go astray, led into sin by reason of our part in the herd... but we still go astray, and for those sins committed like sheep, the Lord had to die as He did.

19:7 *The Jews answered him: We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God-* The Mosaic death penalty for false prophets / teachers did not exactly correspond with the charge laid against the Lord, of being God's Son. We note that their issue was not that He claimed to be God. If they felt they had any real evidence for that claim, they would have surely used it now. But even they realized, as Trinitarians ought to, that the Lord was not claiming that. He had clarified their claim to that effect in chapter 10, stating that no, He was only claiming to be the Son of God. And such terms could be used about men without being in the least blasphemous.

19:8 *When Pilate heard this he was even more afraid-* If this were any other case, Pilate would likely have shrugged or even laughed. Just another nutty person with delusions of grandeur. But the great fear that came upon him is indication that he subconsciously joined the dots and realized that this claim was indeed true. Yet again, we are encouraged that encounter with the Lord touches the consciences of the hearers. And we can therefore preach Him knowing that for all the apparent show of disinterest, we are touching people. And that is why people's body language changes distinctly when they are handed a tract about Him; if it were advertising something to buy, or a show at the local park, their body language is quite different.

19:9 *And he went back into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus: Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer-* Pilate took the Lord back inside, away from earshot of the Jews, to ask Him more about this "Son of God" claim; for it had touched his conscience. This question is strange. It leads nowhere really, if asked from a purely secular perspective. I suggest that the conscience of a man as hardened as Pilate was being touched, and he sensed that the Lord was indeed from God, or had Divine origins. Hence his question. The Lord's silence was because His whole personality was an answer to the question, for He had shown in His life and showed in His whole personality that He was God's Son.

Because the Lord was so excluded from society (see on Jn. 8:42), He would have been so focused upon His Heavenly Father. And that would have been felt and perceived. Reflect how the Centurion muttered: "Truly this was the Son of God". The Lord's creation of a new family was radical then; and it's just as radical today. In passing, the Lord must have been so tempted to say that Joseph was his father. It would've made things *so* much easier for Him. Just as we are tempted to effectively deny our Heavenly Father, and act like we're just the same as this world. According to the rabbinic writing *Qiddushin* 4:2, a fatherless person must remain silent when asked "Where are you from". And this is exactly what Jesus did when asked this very question here in Jn. 19:9. This refusal to call Joseph His father cost Him His life. He refused to call Himself the son of Joseph. Indeed, E.P. Sanders makes the point that the fatherlessness of Jesus not only meant that He would not have been counted as a child of God or son of Abraham; because of these exclusions, He would have been put in the category



of “a sinner”. If Joseph did indeed abandon Mary, she would have been classified as “a whore”, and Jesus would have been the “son of adultery”, putting Him in the same “sinner category”. In this we see a wonderful outworking of how God having a son resulted in that Son being counted as a sinner, even though He was not one. He was treated as “a sinner”, and thereby He came to know how we feel, who truly are sinners.

*19:10 Pilate said to him: Why do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the power to release you and have the power to crucify you?*- Even on a secular level, the situation was such that actually Pilate did not have that power. He either capitulated totally to the Lord's cause, or allowed his supposed "power" to be overridden by the circumstance and manipulation from the Jews. And the Lord had precisely set up the whole situation, so that Pilate would have to crucify Him- although built into the whole game plan there was the genuine appeal to Pilate and the possibility that he would repent and become a Christian. We marvel at how it all worked out, remembering that this Lord is our Lord, and works in a similar way in our lives- directing and manipulating circumstance, whilst leaving the players concerned completely free to repent and come to Him. Those parts of our life path which we don't understand are simply the bits where His arrangement of things is so complex that it is beyond our comprehension. But the end result in view is our salvation.

*19:11 Jesus answered him: You would have no power against me unless it was given to you from above. So the man that delivered me to you has the greater sin-* As noted on :9, the Lord made no comment about who He was, for it was obvious. But He does respond to this issue of power. The one who delivered the Lord to Pilate was Caiaphas, and he here is credited with the greatest culpability for the crucifixion. This would explain why he is earlier spoken of as "the prince of this [Jewish] world", singled out for particular judgment. Although Judas betrayed / delivered / handed over the Lord to the Jews, it was Caiaphas who handed Him over to Pilate. The similarity of the language is to demonstrate that Caiaphas also handed over / betrayed the Lord, and was even more culpable than Judas. In this sense, the devil / satan, the great adversary to the Lord, Caiaphas and the system he represented, had used Judas as a tool. By making the point that Caiaphas had greater sin than Pilate, the Lord was as it were comforting Pilate; demonstrating that it was He and not Pilate who was in complete control of events.

The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18). Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate “you would have no power against me” was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about Rome becoming mighty “but not by his own power”. Or how His crucifixion “near to the city” (Jn. 19:20) connected with Jerusalem thereby being guilty of His blood (Dt. 21:3).

It is inevitable that to someone of His intellectual ability as the Son of God, to a man with His sense of justice and with His knowledge of the Jews and their Law, everything within Him would have cried out at the protracted injustices of His trials. He had the strong sense within Him at this time that He was hated without cause, that the Jews were "my enemies *wrongfully*" (Ps. 69:4). "Are you come out as against a thief...? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and you laid no hold on me" (Mt. 26:55). "Why do you ask me? Ask them which heard me... If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why do you

smite me?" (Jn. 18:21-23). All these indicate a keen sense of injustice. It must have welled up within Him when He saw the servant come with the bowl of water for Pilate to solemnly wash his hands in. Yet His response was one of almost concern for Pilate, lest he think that the guilt was *solely* on him (Jn. 19:11; cp. His concern for Judas' repentance, Jn. 13:27). The Lord did not just passively resign Himself to it with the sense that all would have to be as all would have to be. He struggled with the injustice of it all. Some form of anger even arose, it would seem. This fact must have pushed Him towards that dread precipice of sin. His possession of human nature and the possibility of failure meant that there were times when He was much nearer sin than others. But He didn't just keep away from the precipice, as He didn't spare Himself from being tired and tested by the crowds and thereby drawn closer to the possibility of spiritual failure. He came into this world to show forth the Father's glory, and to do His will was His meat and drink. This hangs like a tapestry to the whole crucifixion event.

19:12 *Upon this, Pilate sought to release him*- The Lord had told him that he did indeed have "sin" over this matter, although Caiaphas had greater sin. And there was something in Pilate that didn't want to sin or be held guilty by the power "from above" (:11) which was clearly involved in all this.

*But the Jews cried out, saying: If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone that makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!*- On one hand, there was Pilate's desire not to sin or be held guilty before God. On the other, there was the manipulation of the crowd, the desire to retain office, and not offend our secular superiors. And that voice, as with so many, was more powerful than the voice of the *logos* of encounter with Jesus.

19:13 *When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha*- The judgment seat of Christ is not a means by which the Father and Son gather information about us, consider it and then give a verdict. It will be for *our* benefit. Our behaviour is constantly analysed by them and 'judged'. The idea of sitting upon a judgment seat or giving judgment doesn't necessarily involve the idea of weighing up evidence. To 'judge' can mean simply to pronounce the final verdict, which the judge has long since known; not to weigh up evidence (consider Mt. 7:2; Jn. 3:18; 5:22; 7:24,51; 8:15,16,26; 16:11; 18:31; Acts 7:7; 23:3; 24:6 Gk.; Rom. 2:12; 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 10:30; 13:4; 1 Pet. 4:6; James 5:10,22). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17).

It is grammatically possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: "And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel". See on 1 Pet. 2:23. This would fit in with how it was as "the judge of Israel" at this time that the Lord was smitten on the cheek; see on :3. Now was "the judgment of this world", and the Lord was judge.

The whole account of the crucifixion in John shows how the Lord gave His life up of Himself; the Jews and Romans had no power to take it from Him, and throughout John's

accounts of the trials and crucifixion, it is apparent that it is the Lord and not His opponents who is in total control of the situation. Even though 'the [Jewish] Devil' is seen as a factor in Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:27,30), it is clear that Jesus was delivered up [s.w. 'betrayed'] by the "determinate counsel [will] and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It wasn't as if God fought a losing battle with a personal Satan in order to protect His Son from death. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench, as if He is the authentic judge (Jn. 19:13), is an example of how the Lord Jesus is presented in John as being totally in control; His 'lifting up' on the cross is portrayed as a 'lifting up' in glory, enthroned as a King and Lord upon the cross. Likewise 'Gabbatha' means an elevated or lifted up place; the Lord there was lifted up too, that He might draw all believing eyes toward Him. Other examples of John bringing out this theme of the Lord being in control are to be found in the way He confronts His captors (Jn. 18:4), questions His questioners (Jn. 18:20,21,23; 19:11), gets freedom for His followers (Jn. 18:8), and makes those come out to arrest Him fall to the ground.

The mention that Jesus stood before Pilate "in a place that is called the Pavement" (Jn. 19:13) reminds us of Ex. 24:10, where Yahweh was enthroned in glory on another 'pavement' when the old covenant was made with Israel. The New Covenant was inaugurated with something similar. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) would have been easily perceived as an allusion to the way that Yahweh Himself as it were dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1). And yet the Lord Jesus in His death was the "[place of] propitiation" (Heb. 2:17), the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). In the cross, God met with man and communed with us, commanding us the life we ought to lead through all the unspoken, unarticulated imperatives which there are within the blood of His Son. There in the person of Jesus nailed to the tree do we find the focus of God's glory and self-revelation, and to this place we may come to seek redemption. See on Jn. 19:19.

19:14 *Now it was the preparation of the Passover*- And indeed the Passover lamb was being prepared by these awful sufferings. The Lord's last supper was therefore a Passover-style meal, but not the Passover of 14 Nissan.

*It was about the sixth hour, and he said to the Jews: Behold, your King!*- Pilate really ought to have figured by now that if he wanted to keep his job and placate the Jews, he had to crucify the Lord. But still his desperate conscience tried to get the Lord released. He was indeed being sarcastic by presenting the bedraggled figure of Jesus as King of the Jews. He was desperately reasoning that they could hardly accept such a figure as their king. Their response of :15 is evidence that they considered Pilate's words as an attempt to get them to rethink their obsession with crucifying the Lord.

19:15 *They cried out: Away with him! Away with him!*- The Greek means literally 'to lift up'; again the Lord would have taken encouragement from the fact that effectively His crucifixion was a lifting up in glory, from God's perspective. And He had used the same word in saying that His life was not to be taken "away" from Him, but He would give it of Himself (10:18). He was total master of the situation. And there are times when others may apparently have power over us, where we appear to be victims of a total collapse situation all around us, or circumstances are going to take us away, maybe from life itself. But if we are consciously giving our lives to the Lord, then we are not being swamped or taken away by circumstance, but like the Lord, remain masters of our life's path.

*Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered: We have no king but Caesar!-* This recalls how Israel rejected God's Kingship for that of a human king. This public statement of loyalty to Caesar was exactly what the orthodox Jews objected to making. But they made it now because of their utter obsession with destroying Him. Such obsessions, born out of a bad conscience, result in all principles being thrown to the wind.

19:16 *Therefore he delivered him to them to be crucified-* Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

19:17 *So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha-* They "took" or Gk. 'received' Him; but the prologue states that they received Him not (1:11).

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread

was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6). The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' or even 'The skull of Gol[iath]' may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull (1 Sam. 17:54). "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have

seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

“The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar”. This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

*19:18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one and Jesus between them-* He is presented as King of criminals of the basest kind; see on 18:40.

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: “They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one” (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them “two others” (Jn. 19:18) and “... the legs of the first and of the other” (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker"). The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could

ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did. Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. The text suggests there may have been a gap of minutes between them arriving at the place and the actual nailing. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this... or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm... four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you,

he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with



this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the maldistribution of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief, He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are

going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

19:19 *Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And there was written: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*- Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhv

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.
- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.
- The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

See on Mt. 26:65; Jn. 1:14; 3:14; 8:56; 13:37; 16:25,32; 19:13; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:20.

19:20- see on Jn. 19:11.

*This title many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek-* As noted on :19, the Jews objected to the Hebrew title because the first letters of the four words used spelled the memorial Name, YHWH. The point is made here that crucifixion was public. If we are to die with the Lord, and share His cross, then our commitment to Him likewise must be public. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. The tendency in our age is to be secret Christians, showing sympathy for His cause from behind our screens. But the essence of Christianity is to make a public declaration as the Lord did; and John's Gospel has a theme of secret believers either turning back to their surrounding world, or coming out openly for the Lord.

19:21 *The chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate: Do not write, The King of the Jews; but that: He claimed, I am King of the Jews-* Pilate seems to have sincerely believed that the Lord was indeed Israel's king and Son of God; throughout 19:1-15 I have pointed out his struggle with his own conscience. This insistence of writing the title as he did was perhaps a rather pathetic attempt to make at least some statement of support for the Lord.

19:22 *Pilate answered: What I have written I have written-* As noted on :19, perhaps an allusion to the YHWH Name, 'I will be that I will be', which was spelled out by the first letters of the four Hebrew words used for the title.

19:23 *The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout-* This was all prefigured in how Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison (Gen. 39:13). Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked.

There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be

demanding by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's...in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

19:24 *They said to each other, Let us not tear it but cast lots for it, to determine whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which said: They divided my garments among them, and for my robe they cast lots-* The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross. Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered

“disputes” amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The prophecy quoted is Ps. 22:18, where the Psalmist speaks as if he is observing the parting of his garments before his own eyes. This had an incredibly accurate fulfilment in how the Lord from His impaled position was able to view this happening before Him.

*19:25 These things the soldiers did. There was standing by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene-*

The Torah required “two or three witnesses” (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn’t, although later Jewish law did. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	<b>Cross</b>	<b>Burial</b>	<b>Resurrection</b>
<b>Matthew</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, “the other Mary”	Mary Magdalene, “the other Mary”
<b>Mark</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
<b>Luke</b>			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus’ mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion (“His mother’s sister”) is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman’s name becomes clear; she would have been John’s own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore “behold your mother” meant he was to reject *his* mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions...must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: “There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem”. Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture

by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself “the little”, just as Saul changed his name to Paul, ‘the little one’, from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord’s victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- “among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary”. Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord’s upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It’s not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as ‘coming up’ (the idiom implies ‘to keep a feast’) with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now “the mother of James...and of Joses”. The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: “Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him”. Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always “the mother of Jesus”. Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time “Mary the mother of James” rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God’s confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark’s account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John’s record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19:22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John’s charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end... and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all. John began his gospel by saying that the word was manifest and flesh and he saw it- and I take this as a reference to the Lord’s death. Through this, a new family of men and women would be created (Jn. 1:12). See on Lk. 23:48.

19:26 *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother: Woman, behold your son!*- Unearthed victims of crucifixion seem to have been impaled on stakes about 10 feet high. The cross would not have been as high as 'Christian' art usually represents it. The feet of the Lord would only have been about 4 feet above ground. His mother and aunt stood by the cross- the tragedy of His mother being there needs no comment. She would have seen the blood coming from the feet. Her head would have been parallel with His knees. His face marred more than the sons of men (Is. 52:14), sore from where His beard had been pulled off (Is. 50:6), teeth missing and loose, making His speech sound strange, fresh and dried blood mixing... and His mother there to behold and hear it all. She must have thought back, and surely He did too; for He was only a man. Mother around the house as a child, mending clothes, getting food, explaining things, telling Him

about Simeon's prophecy, of how a sword would break her heart as well as His. This isn't just emotional speculation. Ps. 22:9,10 emphasizes the Lord's thoughts for His mother and His babyhood with her: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou keptest me in safety (AVmg.- a reference to Herod's persecution) when I was on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". The temptation would have been to go on and on. Was I too hard on her in Cana? How I must have stung her when I said "Behold *my mother* and my brethren" are these half-hearted, superficially interested people (Mt. 12:49). She was the best mother I could have ever had. Like any man would think. And He was a man. Not a mere man, but a man. I wonder if He said those words of breakage, of severance, between Him and her, because these feelings welling up within Him were affecting His concentration on the Father.

"*But* there stood by the cross..." makes the connection between Mary and the clothes. It seems that initially, she wasn't there; He looked for comforters and found none (Ps. 69:20- or does this imply that the oft mentioned spiritual difference between the Lord and His mother meant that He didn't find comfort in her? Or she only came to the cross later?). His lovers, friends and kinsmen stood far off from Him (Ps. 38:11), perhaps in a literal sense, perhaps far away from understanding Him. If Mary wasn't initially at the cross, John's connection between the dividing of the clothes and her being there would suggest that she had made the clothes. In any case, the four women at the cross are surely set up against the four soldiers there- who gambled over the clothes. Perhaps the other women had also had some input into the Lord's clothing.

If indeed Mary and the few with her came from standing far off to stand by the cross, they were sharing the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus: 'In the light of the cross, nothing, nothing, absolutely *nothing* really matters now. The shame, embarrassment nothing. We will stand for Him and His cause, come what may'.

I can only ponder the use of the imperfect in Jn. 19:25: 'There were standing' *may* imply that Mary and the women came and went; sometimes they were there by the cross, sometimes afar off. Did they retreat from grief, or from a sense of their inadequacy, or from being driven off by the hostile crowd or soldiers, only to make their way stubbornly back? Tacitus records that no spectators of a crucifixion were allowed to show any sign of grief; this was taken as a sign of compliance with the sin of the victim. He records how some were even crucified for showing grief at a crucifixion. This was especially so in the context of leaders of revolutionary movements, which was the reason why Jesus was crucified. This would explain why the women stood afar off, and sometimes in moments of self-control came closer. Thus the Lord looked for comforters and found none, according to the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. And yet His mother was also at the foot of the cross sometimes. For her to be there, so close to Him as she undoubtedly wished to be, and yet not to show emotion, appearing to the world to be another indifferent spectator; the torture of mind must be meditated upon. Any of these scenarios provides a link with the experience of all who would walk out against the wind of this world, and identify ourselves with the apparently hopeless cause of the crucified Christ. The RV of Jn. 19:25 brings out the tension between the soldiers standing there, and the fact that: "But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother...". The "but..." signals, perhaps, the tension of the situation- for it was illegal to stand in sympathy by the cross of the victim. And there the soldiers were, especially in place to stop it happening, standing nearby...

John taking Mary to his own home *may* not mean that he took her away to his house in Jerusalem. In any case, John's physical home was in Galilee, not Jerusalem. "His own (home)" is used elsewhere to mean 'family' rather than a physical house. This would have involved Mary rejecting her other sons,



and entering into John's family. Spiritual ties were to be closer than all other. This must be a powerful lesson, for it was taught in the Lord's final moments. Whether we understand that John took Mary away to his own home (and later returned, Jn. 19:35), or that they both remained there to the end with the understanding that Mary was not now in the family of Jesus, the point is that the Lord separated Himself from His mother. The fact He did this last was a sign of how close He felt to her. She was the last aspect of His humanity which He had clung to. And at the bitter end, He knew that He must let go even, even, even of her. Jn. 19:28 speaks likewise as if the Lord's relationship with His mother was the last part of His humanity which He had to complete / fulfil / finish. For it was "after this", i.e. His words to His mother, that He knew that "all was now finished".

And yet another construction is possible. It would seem that John *did* have a house in Jerusalem. Mary was John's aunt, and so she was already in his 'house' in the sense of family. This might suggest that the Lord didn't mean John was to accept Mary into the family, as they were already related. It is reasonable to conjecture that perhaps He sent her away to John's house, for *her* benefit. He didn't want her to have to see the end. For me, if I had been in His situation, I would have preferred to die with her there. At least there was the one and only human being who knew for sure, and He knew she knew for sure, that He was the Son of God. She was the one, on earth, that He could be certain of. She had pondered all these things for 34 years. And He knew it. But if He sent her away for *her* benefit, we have yet another example of the Lord rejecting a legitimate comfort; as He rejected the pain killer, the footrests, the opportunity to drink before He asked for it ...indeed, the cross itself was something which He chose when other forms of obedience to the Father's will may have been equally possible.

The thoughts presented here concerning Mary offer several possibilities, not each of which can be what really happened; not least concerning the question of for how long she stood by the cross. But this, to my mind, doesn't matter. Each man, yes, each and every one of us, must go through the process of the cross in his own mind, and thereby be inspired. These are only thoughts to help on the way. The whole record is designed, it seems, to provoke reverent meditation. One can only, for example, meditate in a vague way on what Mary's feelings will be when she rises from the sleep of death to see her son. As we will recognize Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, so surely she will have that sense that "this is my boy". Reflecting upon the Lord's relationship with His mother as He died leads us a little deeper into His tension and ineffable sadness which the cross crystallized. His soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that Christ's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality. Thus He jumped at His mother's request for wine as being a suggestion He should die there and then (Jn. 2:4). So many men reached their most intense at the end of their lives: Moses spoke Deuteronomy, Paul and Peter wrote their finest letters then. And the Lord was matchlessly superb at His end. He reached a peak of spirituality at the end, to the point where He showed us, covered in blood and spittle and human rejection as He was, what the very essence of God really was. He declared the Name of Yahweh in the final moments of His death.

A mother always feels a mother to her child. That's basic human fact. The way the Lord as it were ended that mother-child relationship with Mary thereby carries all the more pain with it. The way the Gospel records refer to Mary as the mother of others amongst her children, e.g. "Mary of James"

(Lk. 24:10) shows the Gospel writers paid tribute and respect to this break that had been made. Perhaps this explains why the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, chose not to identify themselves as the brothers of Jesus- Jude calls himself the brother of James (Jude 1), and James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus (James 1:1). In this way they both reflected the way that human relationship to Jesus now meant nothing at all.

It's been observed by many that what a man needs most as he dies... is not to face death alone. To have someone with him. The way the Lord sent Mary and John away from Him at the very end is profound in its reflection of His total selflessness, His deep thought for others rather than Himself. It also reflects how He more than any other man faced the ultimate human realities and issues which death exposes. He wilfully faced them alone, the supreme example of human bravery in the face of death. And He faced them fully, with no human cushion or literal or psychological anaesthesia to dilute the awful, crushing reality of it. Remember how He refused the painkiller. And through baptism and life in Him, we are asked to die with Him, to share something of His death, the type and nature of death which He had... in our daily lives. Little wonder we each seem to sense some essential, existential, quintessential... loneliness in our souls. Thus it must be for those who share in His death. I'm grateful to Cindy for a quote from a wise doctor, Kurt Eissler: "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him". How inadvertently profound that thought becomes when applied to the death of our Lord, and to us as we imagine ourselves standing by and watching Him there. "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him".

We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Son of God, to truly begin to enter into them. The least we can do is to meditate upon their different facets, and begin to realize that if the cross really does come before the crown, then we can expect a life which reflects, in principle at least, the same basic agonies. The relationship between the Lord and Mary brings home two crystal clear points: Firstly, the sheer human pain and pathos of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and those near Him; and secondly, the way in which He had to sacrifice His closest human relationship for the sake of His devotion to God.

There is something ineffably, ineffably sad about the fact that the mother of Jesus was standing only a meter or so away from Him at the foot of the cross. Absolutely typical of the Biblical record, this fact is recorded by John almost in passing. This is in harmony with the way the whole crucifixion is described. Thus Jn. 19:17,18 seems to focus on the fact that Jesus bore His cross to a place called Golgotha; the fact that there they crucified Him is mentioned in an incidental sort of way. Mark likewise: "And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments..." (Mk. 15:24). In similar vein the agony of flogging is almost bypassed in Mt. 27:26: "and when he had scourged Jesus...".

Simeon had early prophesied Mary's feelings when he spoke of how her son would be "spoken against" and killed: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul *also*" (Lk. 2:35). This means that the piercing of Christ's soul was felt by His mother at the same time. And so we picture that woman in her 50s at the cross, with a lifetime behind her of meditating upon God's words, meditating upon the strange road her life had taken, a road travelled by no other woman, keeping *all* these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51; implying she didn't open up to anyone), a lifetime characterized by a deep fascination with her firstborn son, but also characterized by a frustrating lack of understanding of Him, and no doubt an increasing sense of distance from His real soul. Recall how when Mary asked Jesus for wine at the feast, He saw in her mention of wine a symbol of His blood. She asked for wine, on a human level; and He responded: 'Woman, what have I to do with you, can't you see that the time for me to give my blood isn't yet?'. They were just on quite different levels. It seems almost

certain that Christ was crucified naked. If we crucify him afresh (Heb. 6:6), we put him to an "open" or naked (Gk.) shame. The association between shame and the crucifixion is stressed in Ps. 22 and Is. 53; and shame is elsewhere connected with nakedness.

We know that the Jews felt that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier; this is recorded to this day in the Mishnah. They had earlier taunted Him about this (Jn. 8:19). Translating into dynamic, modern English, it is not difficult to imagine the abuse they shouted at Him as He hung on the cross. Their mocking of His claim that God was His Father was doubtless related to this. And there can be no doubt that their scorn in this direction would have fallen upon Mary too. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt. Ps. 22:9,10 were among Christ's thoughts as He hung there: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". If dying men do indeed think back to their childhood, His thoughts would have been with His mother.

She had sought Him *sorrowing* when He was 12, all her life she had been plagued by this problem of knowing He was righteous, the Son of God, her Saviour, and yet she didn't fully understand Him. How deeply would the pain of all this hung over her as she watched Him in His time of dying. Doubtless she had (on the law of averages) lost other children, but this one was something special. She was a woman a real mother, and her special love for Jesus would have been noticed by the others. This probably had something to do with the fact that all her other children had rejected Christ as a "stranger", i.e. a Gentile; perhaps they too believed that this Jesus was the result of mum's early fling with a passing Roman soldier (Ps. 69:8). Inevitably people would have commented to Mary: "He's a lovely boy, isn't he". And although one doesn't sense she was arrogant in any way, her motherly pride would have risen. For He was a lovely boy, ever growing in favour with men, rather than falling out of favour with some over the petty things of village life. Remember how we sense her motherly pride surfacing at the wedding in Cana. At the cross she would have recalled all this, recalled Him as a clinging 5 year old, being comforted by her in childhood illnesses, recalled making and mending His clothes- perhaps even the cloak the drunk soldiers were gambling over. And as she beheld Him there, covered in blood and spittle, annoyed by the endless flies, alone in the darkness, evidently thirsty, with her helpless to help beneath- surely her mind would have gone back 34 years to the words of the Angel: "He shall be great". "He shall be great". And then the mental panic to understand, the crying out within the soul, the pain of incomprehension of death.

There is a great sense of pathos in those words of Jesus: "Woman behold thy son". It sounded first of all as if Jesus was saying 'Well mum, look at me here'. But then she would have realized that this was not what He was saying. We can almost see Him nodding towards John. He was rejecting her as His mother in human terms, He was ceasing to be her son, He was trying to replace His sonship with that of an adopted son. The way He called her "Woman" rather than mother surely reflects the distance which there was between them, as He faced up to the fact that soon He would leave human nature, soon His human sonship would be ended. In passing, note how He addresses God at the end not as "Father" but "My God"- as if His sharing in our distance from God led Him to feel the same. Hence

His awful loneliness and sense of having been forsaken or distanced from all those near to Him. "Behold thy mother ...behold thy son" suggests Jesus was asking them to look at each other. Doubtless they were looking down at the ground at the time. We get the picture of them looking up and catching each other's eye, then a brief silence, coming to understand what Jesus meant, and then from that hour, i.e. very soon afterwards, John *taking* Mary away. We are invited to imagine so much. The long, long discussions between them about Jesus, punctuated by long silences, as they kept that Passover, and as they lived together through the next years. Above all we see the pathos of them walking away, backs to Jesus, with Him perhaps watching them.

All this would have contributed to His sense of being forsaken. The disciples forsook Him (Mt. 26:56), His mother had now left Him, and so the words of Ps. 27:9,10 started to come true: "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God... when my father and my mother forsake me". All His scaffolding was being removed. He had leaned on His disciples (Lk. 22:28), He had naturally leaned on His mother. Now they had forsaken Him. And now His mother had forsaken Him. And so He pleaded with His true Father not to leave Him. And hence the agony, the deep agony of Mt. 27:46: "My God, my God, Why hast *thou* (this is where the emphasis should be) forsaken me?". The disciples' desertion is a major theme, especially in Mark 15 (written by Peter, the most guilty?). The young man followed, but then ran away; Peter followed, but then denied (Mk. 14:51,54); all the disciples fled (:50); Joseph and Nicodemus denied Him (:64). By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in the hospital the night before the operation, in the nursing home as death looms near, or in any great moment of crisis. The Lord needed, desperately, His men with Him. Hence the hurt, undisguised, of "could you not watch with me one hour?".

Col. 2:11-15 describe the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus as His 'circumcision'. The cross did something intimate and personal to Him. Through the process of His death, He 'put right off the body of his flesh' (RVmg.). He shed His humanity. The saying goodbye to His mother, the statement that she was no longer His mother but just a woman to Him, was, it would seem, the very last divesting of 'the body of his flesh'. It seems to me that such was His love of her, so strong was His human connection to her who gave Him His human connection, that the relationship with her was the hardest and in fact the final aspect of humanity which He 'put off' through the experience of crucifixion. And this is why, once He had done so, He died.

There cannot be any of us who are not touched by all this. We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. What can we expect but a sense of pathos in our lives, broken and sacrificed relationships, the loss of the dearest of human love. There seems to be a growing group of believers in their 20s -50s, some happily married, well blessed with the things of this life, who seem to preach a gospel of happy-clappy belief, of tapping each other under the chin and speaking of how much joy and happiness their religion gives them. And those who don't experience this are made to feel spiritually inferior. Yet that 'other' group are, world-wide, growing into the majority of the body of Christ. A real meditation upon the cross of our Lord and the frequent exhortations by Him to share in it places all this in perspective. We must suffer with Him if we are to be glorified with Him in His Kingdom. The joy and peace of Christ which is now available is the joy and peace which He had in His life, a deep joy and peace from knowing that we are on the road to salvation. Know yourselves, brethren and sisters. Search your lives. If we are truly, truly trying to share the cross of Christ, if we are beginning to know the meaning of self-sacrifice, of love unto the end, we will know the spirit of Christ on that cross, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen". We will be able to share His mind, to know the fellowship of His spirit, of touching spirits with Him. And in that is joy and peace beyond our ability to describe.

19:27 *Then he said to the disciple: Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home-* I take the comment that John therefore took her to his own [home] as meaning His own house, back in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). The same construction is used in Jn. 16:32 cp. Acts 21:6 as meaning house rather than family. "Took to" is a verb of motion as in Jn. 6:21. His feelings for her were so strong, so passionate, that He saw it could distract Him. He wanted to stay on earth with her, and not go to His Heavenly Father. This accounts for His again using the rather distant term "Woman", and telling her that now, He wasn't her Son, John was now, and she wasn't His mother, she must be John's mother. And many a man has chosen to leave mother for the sake of the Father's work, as Hannah sacrificed her dear Samuel, to be eternally bonded in the gracious Kingdom to come. And even if one has not done this in this form, there is scarcely a believer who has not had to make some heart wrenching break with family and loved ones for the Lord's sake. Only His sake alone could inspire men and women in this way.

19:28 *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now finished, so that the scripture might be accomplished, said: I thirst-* This wasn't just ingenious thinking on the spur of the moment. Victims lived for around two days on the crosses, but this was only due to a regular supply of liquid being handed up to them. One wonders if the person who organized the drink was one of the relatives of the thieves, or perhaps His own relatives. Surely His mother and aunty and Mary had come prepared to do all they could for Him in this final agony. They knew what the relatives of the crucified had to do. The thieves had probably received liquid already during the ordeal. But our sense must be that the Lord didn't. Perhaps His mother even suggested it, with an inward glance back to the sweet days of early childhood: "Do you want a drink? I can get you one". But as He refused the painkiller, as He refused to push down on the footrests, so He refused to quench His thirst.

Note that the sponge was placed on a hyssop plant, which is only 50cm. long at the most. This is internal evidence that the cross was quite low, and the Lord's feet only a few feet above the ground. The Lord Jesus began to quote Psalm 22 in His final moments on the cross, and He earnestly desired to complete the quotation. He asked for something to wet His throat so He could complete the last few verses. This indicates not only His earnest desire to say out loud "It is finished" with all that meant, but also the level of His thirst. Every word He spoke out loud was an expenditure of effort and saliva. He was intensely aware of this. He realized that unless He had more moisture, He just would not be able to speak out loud any more. And yet He so desperately wanted His last words to be heard and meditated upon. His sweat in the Garden had been dropping like blood drops; the nervous tension of bearing our sins sapped moisture from Him. There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12), as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

The Psalms, especially 22, indicate the extent of His dehydration- largely due to the amount of prayer out loud which He did on the cross ("The words of my *roaring*"). Heb. 5:7 speaks of His strong crying and tears (again an expenditure of moisture) while on the cross; and Rom. 8:26 alludes to this, saying that our Lord has the same intensity in His present

mediation for us. The physical extent of His thirst is expressed by that of Samson, when in an incident typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, he nearly died of thirst in the midst of a spectacular victory (Jud. 15:18). A perusal of that incident will enable us to enter into the thirst of our Lord a little more.

The Messianic Psalms also speak of the great spiritual thirst of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings. The intensity of His physical thirst therefore reflected His spiritual thirst, His desire to be with the Father, His desire to finish His work and achieve our salvation. We are better able to imagine His physical thirst than His spiritual thirst. Yet we are surely intended to see in that physical thirst a cameo of His desire for spiritual victory, His thirsting after God's righteousness.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been me meat...while they continually say unto me (on the cross), Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:1-3). Christ's thirst was to come and appear before God. Appearing before God is Priestly language. Now He appears in God's presence in order to make mediation for us (Heb. 9:24), and He will appear again as the High Priest appeared on the day of Atonement, bringing our salvation. This means that Christ thirsted not so much for His own personal salvation, but for ours; He looked forward to the joys for evermore at God's right hand (Ps. 16:11)- i.e. the offering up of our prayers. How this should motivate us to pray and confess our sins! This is what our Lord was looking forward to on the cross. This is what He thirsted for.

"O God... my God (cp. "My God, my God")... my soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1)- cp. Christ as a root growing in a spiritually dry land on the cross (Is. 53:1)

"I stretch forth my hands unto thee (on the cross): my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land" (Ps. 143:6).

The thirsty land surrounding Christ on the cross represented spiritually barren Israel (Is. 53:1; Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as Christ really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins:

"Thou shalt serve thine enemies... in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Dt. 28:48). This is an exact picture of Christ on the cross. And Paul likewise alluded to this language when describing his own sufferings for the sake of taking the Gospel to Israel (2 Cor. 11:27), as if he too felt that he was a sin-bearer for Israel as Christ had been. This is to be understood in the same way as his appropriating to Himself the prophecies concerning Christ as the light of the Gentiles. This is so relevant to the cross.

"They shall not (any more) hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:10) occurs in the context of comforting Israel that they will no longer be punished for their sins.

"Ye are they that forsake the Lord... therefore... ye shall be hungry... ye shall be thirsty... ye shall be ashamed" (Is. 65:11,13). This too is exactly relevant to the cross.

"Let (Israel) put away her whoredoms... lest I... set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3).

"I will send a famine in the land, not a... thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord... in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Am. 8:11,13).

This literal and spiritual thirst which was a punishment for Israel's sins came upon the Lord Jesus. He genuinely felt a thirst for God, He really felt forsaken, *as if* He had sinned, He truly came to know the feelings of the rejected sinner. And because of this He really is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us in our weakness, to enter right into the feelings of those who have gone right away from God, as well as those who temporarily slip up in the way (Heb. 5:2).

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19:29 *Nearby was a vessel full of vinegar. So they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon a hyssop stick, and held it to his mouth-* As noted on :28, the hyssop stick would not have been more than 50 cm. long at the most; so the Lord was not that high above the ground, contrary to the impression given by Catholic architecture, with crucifixes lifted far above the ground.

19:30 *When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said: It is finished! And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit-* The suggestion is that His humanity was such that He needed at least some moisture in order to utter His final words. That perhaps is all there is to His request for a drink.

All crucified men bow their heads on death. The record of this therefore suggests that He lifted up His head to the Father, and then nodding His head towards His people, gave His Spirit towards them- those who had walked out across the no man's land between the crowd and the soldiers, those who stood there declaring in front of all their allegiance to this crucified King. Yet the spirit of Christ is essentially the mind and disposition of Christ rather than an ability to perform miracles etc. The power to be like Him is passed to us through an inbreathing of His example on the cross. In this sense, the Lord's lifting up in glory on the cross enabled Him to impart His Spirit to us (Jn. 7:37-39). Notice that Christ gave up His last breath of His own volition- the withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this. This cry *was* the giving up of the Spirit. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. As He wasn't pushing down on the footrests, breathing was agonizingly difficult. I suggest He took one last great breath, with head uplifted, the nails tearing at that sensitive nerve in His hands as He did so, and then He felt His heart stop. In that last two seconds or so, He expired in the words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". Thus He *gave* His life- for us. The centurion, when he saw *how* He died (Mk., NIV), believed. The display of self-mastery, of giving, of love so great, *so* free, was what made that man believe (perhaps he was Cornelius?). It has been observed that the phrase "He gave forth His spirit" is unique; death isn't described like that in contemporary literature. "Nowhere in antiquity is death described as the giving forth of one's spirit" (I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (New York: Alba House, 1989) p. 131).

This was a final victory cry. The spirit of the New Testament is that the cross was a pinnacle

of victory, not of temporal defeat. There is no way that Christ was just muttering the equivalent of 'Well, that's it then'. "It is finished" encompassed so much. That tiny word "it", not even present in the Greek or Aramaic which Jesus actually spoke, compasses so much; the whole purpose of God. So we ask the question: *What* was finished? The key to this question is in Jn. 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do". "The work" is therefore parallel with Christ's glorification of God. "It is finished" therefore reflects Christ's appreciation that He had now totally glorified His Father. But we need to ponder what exactly it means to glorify God. The glory of God refers to the characteristics intrinsic in God's Name; thus when Moses asked to see God's glory, the attributes of the Name were declared to him. Christ understood that in His death He would manifest God's Name / character to the full, although of course He had also manifested it in His life: "I have declared unto them (the believers, not the world) thy name, and *will declare it*" in His forthcoming death (Jn. 17:26).

It is a major theme of John's Gospel that God was glorified in the death of the Lord:

"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" at the cross (Jn. 12:28)

"Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (i.e. the achievement of God's glorification was internal to Jesus, within His mind, where characteristics are found). If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" on the cross (Jn. 13:31,32)

"And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self (i.e. your fundamental being and character) with the glory which I had with thee...I have manifested thy name" (Jn. 17:5,6).

"I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it" on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Christ's perfect character is only appreciated by the believers, and therefore it is only to them that God's Name / glory / very own self is revealed by Christ's example. It was to us that God's glory was finally revealed in the death of Christ. To those who wanted to see it, there was almost a visible righteousness exuding from Christ in His time of dying. "Truly this man was the Son of God... Certainly this was a righteous man" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46) was the response of the Centurion who was "watching Jesus"; and collating the Gospels, it seems he said this twice. "It is *finished*" implies that Christ's manifestation of the Father was progressive. He was "made *perfect*" by His sufferings, only becoming the author of our salvation when He had finally been perfected by them (Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9). This surely teaches that Christ died once He had reached a certain point of completeness of manifestation of the Father. If we accept this, we should not think of Christ just hanging on the cross waiting to die. He was actively developing His manifestation of the Father's characteristics, until finally He sensed He had arrived at that totality of reflection of the Father. Likewise in our carrying of the cross we are not just passively holding on until the Lord's return or our death. We should be actively growing; for surely we only die once we have reached, or had the opportunity to reach, a certain point of spiritual completeness. This may well explain why some believers die young relatively soon after baptism; they reach their intended completeness, and are therefore taken away from the grief of this life. The perfection of Christ's manifestation of the Father was steadily progressing until at the point of death He completely manifested Him. Thus at Christ's most forlorn and humanly desperate point, utterly exhausted, with no beauty humanly that we should desire Him, utterly despised, rejected and at best misunderstood by every human being, the Lord Jesus at that point was supremely manifesting the Father; He was manifesting God's very own self at that point when He cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:5). It is axiomatic from this that the Gospel of God will be generally rejected by men. The Lord foresaw that His cross would be the final consummation



of God's plan in that He at times almost spoke as if He saw His death as His glorification. Thus He speaks of the cross as a going to the Father (Jn. 16:16,17,28). The description of Him as the snake *lifted up* in the wilderness is in the context of Christ ascending to Heaven (Jn. 3:12-14), as if the lifting up of the snake was a reference to both the crucifixion and ascension of the Lord.

At the point the Lord expired, He laid down His life. So close was the link between Father and Son at this point, so deeply was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that John could later comment: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He* laid down His life for us: and we ought (in response) to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). The love of Christ and the cross are paralleled in 2 Cor. 5:14. To behold Christ there at the end, to imagine the sound of those words "It is finished", to begin to sense Christ's spiritual supremacy at that point, should deeply motivate us. Christ loved us with a love which was love "unto *the end*" (Jn. 13:1)- the same word translated "finished" in "It is finished". As Christ said that, His love for us was complete, it was love unto the end, love right up to and beyond the limits of the concept of love. And we are actually asked to imagine that love, the growth of it for us until it was finished, perfected in the laying down of His life- and respond to it.

The Lord thought as much: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it (in his forthcoming death, cp. Jn. 12:26): *that* the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). "In this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16). Herein was the definition of love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His son for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10). By beholding the finished perfection of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of Christ will dwell in us, and the love of God will be deeply in our hearts. There is almost a mystical power in reflecting upon the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross; somehow by beholding His glory, His matchless display of God's righteousness at the end, we will start to reflect that glory in our very beings. "We all, with open (RV "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory (moral attributes, the peerless character) of the Lord (Jesus), are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit (mind and influence) of the Lord (Jesus)" (2 Cor. 3:18). Time and again is it stressed that the Lord did all this "for us". Jn. 10:14,15 link His knowing of us His sheep, and His giving His life for us. It was because He knew us, our sins, or kind of failures, who we are and who we would be, and fail to be... that He did it. And knowing our brethren, building understanding and relationship with them, is how and why we will be motivated to the same laying down of life for them.

But the work finished by the Lord Jesus was not just the faultless display of God's characteristics. The Son's manifestation of the Father was to the end that we might be saved (a point fundamental to an appreciation of the Gospel). The work that Christ ended when He cried "It is finished" was the execution of the whole will of God; for the work that He finished was God's will: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of... my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn. 4:32,34). The will of God is that we might be sanctified, counted as righteous, and ultimately given salvation (1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 10:10). "I came down from heaven... to do... the will of him that sent me... and this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:38-40). God's will is that we should "see", i.e. understand, the

righteousness of Christ, and believe that this will be imputed to us, and thereby we can be saved. To have an appreciation of the righteousness of Christ is therefore something absolutely essential for us to develop.

To achieve that fullness of righteousness and salvation for us meant more to the Lord Jesus than physical food; His great physical hunger in John 4 was bypassed by the fact that He was bringing about the salvation of a fallen woman. He had a baptism, i.e. a death and resurrection, to be baptized with, and He was "straitened until it be *accomplished*" (Lk. 12:50), the same word translated "finished" in Jn. 19:30. He agonized throughout His life, looking ahead to that moment of spiritual completion. The more we appreciate this, the more we will be able to enter into His sense of relief: "It is finished / accomplished". And this too should characterize our lives; ever straining ahead to that distant point when at last we will attain that point of spiritual completeness. The incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was recognized by Jesus as but a cameo of His whole life; our salvation through His perfect manifestation of the Father was the end in view, it was this which was all consuming for Him. He was not motivated solely by a desire *firstly* for His own salvation, as some of our atonement theologians have wrongly implied. His meat and drink was to do the Father's work and will, which was to save us through imputing Christ's righteousness to us. This is what motivated His obedience, His perfection; it was our salvation which was the last thing in His human consciousness as He cried "*It is finished*". His attitude, both at the start of His ministry and in His approach to His death, was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God... by the which will we are sanctified (counted righteous) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" ultimately finished when the Lord cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30; it alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would "finish transgression... make an end of sins... make reconciliation for iniquity... bring in everlasting righteousness... and to anoint the Most Holy", as if a new sanctuary were being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. "It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

Ex. 40:33 describes how Moses "reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); "So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for "reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's "seed" being glorified in the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect. Surely, surely this should inspire us to have the confidence that this is still how He sees us, both individually and

collectively? The mystery of God will ultimately be "finished" in the Kingdom (Rev. 10:7); and yet on the cross Christ could see that effectively "It is finished" at that point, in that the way had now been made absolutely certain. So confident was the Lord in the power of His sacrifice, so great was His sense of purpose and achievement! And nothing has changed with Him until this day.

"It is finished" has some connection with the Lord loving His people "to the very end" (Jn. 13:1- *eis telos*). To the end or completion of what? Surely the Lord held in mind Moses' last speech before he died. Then, "Moses had finished writing all the words of this Law in a book, even to the very end (LXX *eis telos*)" (Dt. 31:24). It was Moses' law which was finished / completed when the Lord finally died. Again we marvel at the Lord's intellectual consciousness even in His death throes. The fact He had completed the Law was upmost in His mind. This alone should underline the importance of never going back to reliance upon that Law, be it in Sabbath keeping or general legalism of attitude.

Putting all this together, we see our Lord realizing that He had achieved the perfect reflection of the Father's glory, His character; He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do. He knew that the perfection of that manifestation which He had achieved would be imputed to us, and therefore He looked forward to us as if we were perfect, He foresaw our salvation, He saw us in the Kingdom. It is quite possible that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom. It can be noted that Christ's working of the work of God is associated with His miracles. Each of them was part of the work which the Father had given Him to finish (Jn. 5:36). The Lord's miracles were not motivated by a desire to do solve the need of this present evil world; they were "signs" which spoke of the Father's character; they were a progressive manifestation of the glory of the Father in order to deepen the faith of the disciples (Jn. 2:11). This is why each of them can be seen as deeply parabolic, teaching so much about the character / glory of the Father. Any temporal physical help which they provided was only an incidental by-product.

The progressive nature of the Lord's manifestation of God's glory through the miracles is suggested by Jn. 2:11: "This *beginning* of miracles did Jesus... and manifested forth his glory". Likewise Matthew's Gospel has at least four references to the fact that the Lord "finished" or "ended" revealing God's words (Mt. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 "It is finished". His words were a manifestation of the Father's glory / character. Thus in Jn. 17 the Lord associates His manifestation of the Father's Name / glory with His (progressive) giving of the Father's words to the disciples. Thus at the very end He must have felt that now He had reached the end of that progressive revelation, now He was manifesting the fullness of God, a God who *is* love- as He hung naked, covered in blood and spittle, totally misunderstood, deserted by His superficial disciples. At that point He was fully, fully, completely, manifesting the Father.

In His final physical agony, the mind of our Lord was full of thoughts of our salvation. Such was the extent of His devotion to us. It has taken us hundreds of English words to just begin to enter into the intensity of spiritual thinking which was going on in the mind of our Lord. And yet He asks us to share His cross, to run our whole life with endurance even as He endured on the cross (Heb. 12:1,2), to personally enter into His sufferings; to be likewise

filled with an overpowering concern for the salvation of others and the reflection of God's character in our own. It seems that Paul was able to enter into the mind of the Lord Jesus in this. "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9), your finishing, your rearing up as a perfect tabernacle; this was Paul's attitude to spiritually weak Corinth. "I have *finished* my course" (2 Tim. 4:7) uses the same word as in Jn. 19:30 ("It is *finished*"). 2 Tim. 4 has a number of other allusions to Christ's final sufferings. As the Lord felt He had finished the work just before He actually had (Jn. 17:4), so did Paul in 2 Tim. 4; He felt He had entered into that sense of finishing which his Lord had on the cross. Our aim is to be perfected, to come to the full knowledge of Christ, "unto a perfect man (a finished man; the same word as in "It is *finished*"), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13). As our Lord moved towards that point of ultimate spiritual completeness, so do we too. At last we will attain that perfection, at last we too will know the feeling of "It is finished" - as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

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19:31 *The Jews, because it was the preparation day, and so that the bodies should not remain on the cross upon the Sabbath (for the day of that Sabbath was a high day), asked of Pilate that their legs be broken so that they might be taken away-* Dt. 21:23 forbade bodies of those accursed by God from hanging overnight. Again, we see their masking of their awful consciences by legalistic obedience to God's laws and their own fences around those laws. This is what legalism is- a mask for a bad conscience over more fundamental failures. When hard line legalists are exposed as caught up in major sin, we should not be surprised. It is in fact to be expected that their legalism is but a cover for a guilty conscience in other areas.

John is at pains to point out that the Passover was coming on, as if he wishes us to be aware that the last supper was not the Passover, and the breaking of bread service was not the same as the Passover, but based upon it. He is ever seeking to show his Jewish readers that a new Israel, with new symbolisms and meanings, has been created. That Sabbath is here called "a high day", literally, 'the day of that Sabbath was great' (as in 7:37). Perhaps here John is implying that the Lord's death made this the greatest Sabbath; and thereby removed the need for literal observance of it.

19:32- see on :18.

*Therefore the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other that was crucified with him-* The legs were broken so that the victim could no longer rest their weight on the *sedile*, the piece of wood protruding from the cross on which they could rest their weight in order to get temporary relief and yet prolong their sufferings. The strange reference to "the first and... the other" may invite us to consider that "the first" was the repentant thief.

19:33 *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they did not break his legs-* He was so evidently dead; it was absolutely plain to the world that the Lord had died. Any ideas of a swoon theory are stopped dead in their tracks by this. He was not even worth a hammer blow to the legs, because He was so evidently dead.

19:34 *However one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and*

*water came out of his side*- The great theme of John has been that the Lord died in order to give us His life, His Spirit. That life, that spirit, has been likened to water in the account of the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4, and also in 7:38,39, where we learn that the Spirit was to be given at the Lord's glorification. His death was central to that, indeed His lifting up on the cross could be read as a lifting up in glory from God's perspective. The life blood and water which flowed out from Him, having breathed His breath / spirit outward towards His misunderstanding and unspiritual disciples, all speaks of the gift of His life and spirit toward us. The gift of His life to us means that it lives within us, which is what is achieved by the gift of the Spirit to each believer. The connection is being made with the smitten rock out of which there flowed spring water for God's people (Ex. 17:6). The water in John chapters 4 and 7 represents the gift of the Spirit made possible by the Lord's death. His Spirit was Him; the Comforter passages have explained that the coming of the Spirit was effectively His coming to His people. This is why 1 Jn. 5:6 explains that the Lord Jesus personally came to the believers through the water and the blood. The fountain of water and blood, representing His Spirit and His life, represented Him personally coming to His people.

A connection of thought arises from the word "pierced". Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the

blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

*19:35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe-* It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. There are links between the concept of 'truth' and the cross. In Ps. 60:4 God's Truth is displayed on the banner (s.w. "pole", on which the snake was lifted up). John struggled with words, even under inspiration, to get over to us the tremendous truth and reality of what he witnessed at the cross. God is the ultimate Truth, and the cross was the ultimate declaration of His Truth. John's speaking and writing up of his Gospel was his testimony; and the Comforter passages have stressed that the Spirit bears witness through our witness. In the account of the Lord's death, the Spirit is appealing to all who hear of it.

"That you may believe" predicates faith upon acceptance of the fact the Lord really died. It is by Him there that we believe in God (1 Pet. 1:21). Apologetics do not give faith, and in that sense they are largely a waste of time, and at best a poor crutch for faith. We are invited to look at the death of the Lord on the cross- and believe, believe all that is implied in it. This may be scoffed at as intellectually weak, what is called 'fideism'. But it is what the Bible teaches and it is simply true to observed experience. We either believe He died as He did, with all the Biblically recorded claims about the significance of that death- or we do not. If we do believe, and those who do not believe in it are struggling against their consciences, then all falls into place; we come to Biblical "faith".

*19:36 For these things happened so that the scripture might be fulfilled: A bone of him shall not be broken-* The prophecy of Ps. 34:20 about not a bone of the Lord being broken is here clearly applied to Him. But the context is clearly about all of us- any righteous man. The preceding verse speaks of how the Lord delivers the righteous man out of all his tribulations- and this verse is applied to other believers apart from the Lord Jesus in Acts 12:11 and 2 Tim. 3:11,12. The chilling fact is that we who are in the body of the Lord are indeed co-crucified with Him.

We are the Lord's body, of His flesh and bones (Eph. 5:30). Crucifixion was designed to torture the bones; and yet none was broken. We suffer in Him, but shall not be finally broken. As the Passover lambs were being killed, the Lord died; and it was critical that not a bone of the Passover lambs be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12). John seems so keen to point out that the Lord died as the Passover lamb, and Paul perceives this when stating that He is "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). For no bone of the Lord to be broken, the nails driven through His hands [the Greek can refer to the arms or wrists too] would not have been large, and would probably have been driven through the 'Destot gap', the set of nerves in between the large

wrist bones. The pain would have been intense at that point. The rough hammering of the nails through that point would have paid no attention to detail; but those hammer blows were Divinely guided so that no bone broke. And this would have been even more amazingly guided for the nails driven through the feet not to break a bone. It was only by the Lord refusing to relieve the pain by pushing down on the *sedile* that He avoided breaking any bones.

19:37- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And again another scripture says: They shall look on him whom they pierced-* The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. The Jewish world was judged then by Him. There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The prophecy of Zech. 12:10 concerning looking on the pierced Messiah is quoted in Rev. 1:7 concerning the judgment seat; and yet in Jn. 19:37 concerning the cross. See on Jn. 12:42. Looking on Him there is what they shall do in the condemnation of the last day. And standing before Him there, beholding Him, we know our judgment too; for He died for us who believe in Him, that whoever looks toward Him in faith shall be saved. It is as simple as that.

The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how the Lord's death was and is effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

19:38 *And after these things Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews), asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. Therefore he came and took his body away-* John's Gospel emphasizes how secret believers either turned back to the surrounding world, or were provoked by the cross to 'come out' in full faith. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience. It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's

death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre". The text records that they desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self-hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

19:39 *And there came also Nicodemus, he who came to him at the first by night; but now he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds 45kg weight-* Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials



of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. No. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues... would have considered crazy. But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil". Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he "waited for the Kingdom of God" when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom. We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord's body would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted. There is significant extra-Biblical information about Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus' daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.

The life of radical grace is infectious. Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely the nature of Mary's giving inspired that of Nicodemus. Paul likewise writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise.

19:40 *So they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as it is the custom of the Jews to bury-* As we will note in chapter 20, the way the linen cloths and napkin were found still wrapped neatly is significant. For the myrrh would have made the linen stick to the Lord's body like glue. He did not have to fight His way out of them, nor was He somehow extricated from them by sympathizers and the corpse removed. Rather His very emergence from those cloths was itself part of the miracle of resurrection. The surrounding customs involved removing body parts; and the Romans burnt their dead. Only the Jews buried the entire body.

19:41 *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb wherein no one had lain-* Twice it is stressed that the tomb was near to where the Lord died (:42). Perhaps the Lord would have known that He would be buried there, and would have perhaps viewed the tomb from His elevated position on the cross. The Father provided encouragement to the Lord throughout His traumas, as He does to us in ours in ways great and small. The tomb had had no previous contact with a dead body, and so was ritually clean. This may be of no final consequence, because the Lord had been ritually defiled in about every way possible, but John maybe mentions this to try to make his Jewish audience as comfortable as possible. We too are to state truth as it is, but also be all things to all our hearers, as Paul was.

19:42 *There, because of the Jews' preparation day, they laid Jesus (for the tomb was nearby)-* See on :41. Again John emphasizes that the Passover was coming on and therefore the last supper had not been a Passover meal. He is writing to and for Jews who were ever tempted to remain or return to Judaism. His point is that feasts like Passover had had their total fulfilment in the Lord's death. The way John, as a Jew writing to and for Jews, speaks of "the Jews' preparation day", along with other references to "the Jews", shows the chasmic gulf which he felt there to be between Christianity and Judaism.

## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb-* Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- “O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory” (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord’s teaching, that her brother’s resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father’s glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord’s teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has “wisdom” as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord’s feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as “the wisdom of God”. She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early” (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

John’s record seems to reflect how he saw parallels between himself and Mary in their witness to the resurrection. They both “came to the tomb” (Jn. 20:1,4), stood outside, “stooped” and looked into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11), “beheld... saw” (Jn. 20:5,12). Yet Mary was the first to see the risen Lord. The testimony of a woman didn’t count in the 1st century world, and yet God chose her to be the first witness. In doing so, He was teaching that the work of witness and the sheer power of what we are witnesses to can transform the most hesitant and inappropriate person into a preacher of the irrepressible good news, even with the whole world against them. It’s as if John is saying in his account of the Gospel that Mary was in some ways his pattern; he and her were to be connected. He wasn’t ashamed to thus identify himself with the witness of a woman. Ps. 68 is prophetic of the Lord’s death and resurrection. Verse 18 is specifically quoted in the New Testament about His ascension. Verse 11 predicts that: “The Lord gave the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host”. This primarily concerns the publishing of the Lord’s resurrection, although the imagery is based upon the singing of Miriam and the women of Israel after the Red Sea deliverance. Clearly enough, women were to play a major part in the witness to the Lord’s resurrection. This was shown by the women being commanded to go tell their brethren that the Lord had risen indeed. And yet there is ample evidence that it was women who in practice

were the more compelling preachers of the Gospel in the first century ecclesia. The simple fact is that God delegated to women the duty of witnessing to what was for Him the most momentous and meaningful act in all His creation- the raising of His Son from the dead. He was clearly making a point- that those whose witness this world may despise, are those He uses. And in this we can take endless personal encouragement, beset as we are by our own sense of inadequacy as preachers.

John's record presents the resurrection through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She went alone to the tomb while it was yet dark. This doesn't contradict the other accounts, which pick up the story at sunrise, when all the women were together there.

*20:2 She ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!-* Mary Magdalene was the first believer to call Jesus "the Lord"- despite His repeated teaching that this was His true position. They had called Him "Lord and Master" but not *the* Lord. Her example soon spread to her less perceptive brethren- for they likewise soon were speaking of Him as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:25; 21:7). Although the resurrection made Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), yet to her, it was as if He was risen and glorified already. This is an indication to me that she did really believe He would rise, but her humanity, her grief, the intensity of the moment, led her to act and speak as if this wasn't the case. Consider all the descriptions of Jesus as "the Lord" even during His ministry; so certain was He that He would indeed be made Lord and Christ- and realize, how the fact Mary Magdalene too called Him "Lord" before seeing the proof of His resurrection indicates that she shared this perception.

*20:3 Peter with the other disciple therefore went out and went to the tomb-* Given the disrespect of women as witnesses, we see a humility here in them not only taking her seriously, but running in response to her word (:4). They set an example for all church leaders, one which was all the more radical in their age.

*20:4 They ran there together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb-* Here we have another of the unusual usage of tenses which is characteristic of the Gospels. The imperfect here should be translated "they were running", inviting us to play Bible television with the narrative, seeing it unfolding before our eyes, seeing them running. John is displaying humility in recording that he outran Peter, running faster because he was perhaps younger or fitter; and yet going straight on to say that although he may have been faster in human terms, he was far slower than Peter in spiritual terms, for Peter was the first to enter the tomb and see the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (:5,6).

*20:5 Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not enter-* Each of the Gospel writers reveals a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. The preaching of the twelve disciples is really an admission of their own weaknesses. For example, John mentions that when he and Peter arrived at the tomb, he [John] "did not go in", but Peter did, and therefore believed before he did. We see here John's gentle humility, and reflection in his own preaching of how he esteemed others better than himself, and of stronger faith. John says that "he saw and believed", but goes straight on to say that he at that time did not understand that Jesus must rise from the dead (:8,9). He surely means that he *later* believed, but not right then.

*20:6 Simon Peter arrived behind him and entered into the tomb, and he saw the linen cloths lying there-* Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). The state of the linen cloths was what provoked John's faith (:8); for

it is John who notes the huge quantity of myrrh used to embalm the Lord's body, and "myrrh... glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

*20:7 And the napkin that had been upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself-* As noted on :6, for napkin to be rolled up meant the body had miraculously come out of them; for the myrrh would have glued them to the body in such a way that a person reviving and fighting their way out of the wrappings would have torn them; and they were neatly rolled up, not torn.

It does us good to reflect soberly and deeply upon the events of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. To reconstruct in our own minds what really happened, that we might know Him the better. That on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, 1970 years ago...there really was a man lead out to crucifixion. And that three days later, in a dark tomb, a tightly wrapped body came to life, and in a microsecond was standing outside his burial garments. The only sound would have been of the graveclothes collapsing or subsiding as the support of the body inside them was removed. The napkin wrapped around His head (cp. Jn. 11:44) would suddenly have become a crumpled turban. The clothes would have been like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged. John saw the linen clothes "lying", but according to one authority the Greek word can apparently stand the translation "collapsed". That John saw the clothes "lying" is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence- 'He saw, as they were lying [or 'collapsed'], the linen clothes'. John also records his deep impression that the head napkin was not with the other clothes, but by itself. Apparently it was normal practice to bind the body and the head in graveclothes, but not the neck. It could be that John is saying that he was most struck by the way there was a slight gap between the collapsed body bindings and the head napkin- the gap where the neck of Jesus had been. This head napkin was "wrapped together", but here we can with fair confidence say that the Greek word means more 'twirled'. The word aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty napkin still preserved. And so John saw the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, and the shell of the head cloth, with a gap between the two where the Lord's neck had been. And John "saw [this] and believed". Now of course it is possible to reconstruct the whole scene otherwise. What I am saying is that in our personal following of the Lord we love, we each need to try to reconstruct for ourselves how it would have been. The artless style of the inspired records encourage us in this- one only has to compare them against the fantastic Apocryphal Gospels, with their descriptions of Jesus bursting from the tomb in power and glory, to see in the most obvious terms what is inspired and what isn't.

*20:8 Then the other disciple also entered, he who had arrived first to the tomb; and he saw and believed-* To see and believe is another challenge which comes out of the text to readers and hearers, to do just the same. To see with the eyes of faith, and believe. But John is credited with believing, when he did not yet understand the Biblical basis for the Lord's resurrection (:9), and his immediate return to his own home (:10) is presented as an action of unbelief when we compare this with 16:31,32, remembering that John rarely repeats phrases in his record unless he intends us to connect them: "Jesus answered them: Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home". So John may be saying that his faith was weak, it was momentary. And that would explain the odd phrase used in the Greek; for "believed" has no object as Greek

grammar would require. It is not implied *what* he believed in; although that nuance cannot really come through in English translation.

20:9 *For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead-* As noted on :8 and :9, this confirms the impression that John's 'belief' was momentary. However, a more generous interpretation is possible. It could be that John means to demonstrate here that faith in the risen Lord does not necessarily depend upon knowing or understanding the Old Testament texts which require Messiah's resurrection. For that requirement and implication is indeed there, but is hardly apparent to a casual reader or hearer; bearing in mind that most were illiterate and had no easy access to the scrolls. In this case, John would be appealing to Gentiles and illiterate Jews, the mass of first century society- and encouraging them that faith in the risen Christ is possible without any background of Old Testament theology and familiarity.

20:10 *So the disciples went away again to their own home-* As noted on :8, this is an allusion to 16:31,32, which says the disciples would do this because they did not really believe. John is appealing for faith in the empty tomb but explaining how his initial faith was momentary, and not based upon a Biblical understanding of the necessity of the Lord's resurrection. By implication he is appealing to his audience to have a faith stronger than his had initially been; and this is a very powerful way to appeal for faith from an audience.

20:11 *But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping. So, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb-* Mary "stood without", and yet the same word is used in a rather negative context elsewhere in the Gospels: Lk. 8:20 Mary and Her brethren standing without; Lk. 13:25 the rejected "stand without" with the door closed, seeking for their Lord; Jn. 18:16 Peter stood at the door without. It's as if she was in the shoes of the rejected. And yet she is graciously accepted in a wonderful way by the risen Lord. And she is our representative. Her weeping likewise could be read negatively; for she ought to have gone to the tomb after three days with full faith and joy in expectation that the Lord had risen as He promised. Hence His question to her as to why she is weeping (:13,15). As noted earlier in this chapter, the Gospels are full of self-criticism of themselves as writers and their fellow disciples, stressing their weakness, and slow struggle towards the faith they now urged men and women to accept.

20:12 *And she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain-* The scene is described in terms which recall the cherubim on either end of the "mercy seat", the blood stained cover of the ark of the covenant which Hebrews sees as so strongly representative of the Lord Jesus. As those cherubim were, it is emphasized, of the same material as the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18,19), so the now invisible Lord was of their nature; hence His association with them as noted on :13.

20:13 *And they said to her: Woman, why do you weep? She said to them: Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him-* This comment on her weeping could be taken as a rebuke; see on :11. The Lord will soon repeat verbatim these Angelic words to Mary: "Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel's words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with the Angels especially after His resurrection; see on :12.

20:14 *When she had said this, she turned herself around and saw Jesus standing there; but did not know that it was Jesus-* She apparently perceived they were Angels (:12); but her focus on the Lord was so great that she was not impressed with that. All she wanted was Him. The later New Testament frequently tackles the Jewish obsession with Angels, to the point that the Christian Jews were losing their focus upon the Lord Jesus. And here in visual terms John addresses that issue, by presenting Mary as so focused upon the Lord that even meeting two white Angels was of no interest to her compared to her focus upon Him.

Jewish women were not supposed to talk to men in public. The fact that Mary addresses the man whom she thinks of as “the gardener” shows how her love for Jesus, her search for Him, led her to break out of gender roles. She perceived that through His death, there was now neither male nor female, but a new kind of family (Jn. 20:14,15).

It is emphasized that Mary Magdalene beheld the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40)- the same word is used about how she came *to see* the sepulchre (Mt. 28:1); and now she *saw* Jesus standing (Jn. 20:14). People beheld the spectacle of the crucifixion (Lk. 23:48) and repented, smiting their breasts in recognition of their sinfulness. She was representative of us all. John’s Gospel is full of references to the crucifixion, and especially the idea of ‘seeing’ / perceiving its’ real meaning. The prologue invites us too to be amongst those who “beheld his glory”. “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (Jn. 6:40) connects with the idea of looking unto the bronze snake (which represented Christ on the cross) and receiving life. “And he that seeth [on the cross] seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:45,46). Note again the linkage between seeing and believing; which Jn. 3 applies to belief in the crucified Jesus, as Israel had to believe in the bronze snake on the pole. The light of the world was defined in Jn. 3 as the light of the cross. In seeing / perceiving Christ on the cross, we perceive the essence of God- for the Father was so intensely manifested in the Son. There, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The emphasis on Mary Magdalene being the one who beheld the cross, the one who perceived the things of the Lord’s death and resurrection, is surely to set her up as our example. For we can look at the cross without perceiving the glory and wonder it all, neither perceiving the urgency of the imperative in the things which were so uniquely crystallized there. She, the one with former 'demons' and a sinful past, and a mere woman, in the eyes of her world, is set up as a pattern for all who shall see the Son in faith.

20:15 *Jesus said to her: Woman, why do you weep?-* This could be understood as a rebuke, seeing she ought to have known that after three days the Lord would rise again. See on :11. Note too that the Lord repeats the Angelic words to her, showing His connection with them now by nature; see on :12,13.

*Whom do you seek?-* This is another of those questions which fly out of the page to challenge every reader or hearer; whom do *we* seek? He was still the same Jesus. The Lord was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke the bread. How He broke a loaf of bread open with His hands *after* His resurrection reflected the same basic style and mannerism which He had employed *before* His death. Not only the body language but the Lord's choice of words and expressions was similar both before and after His passion. He uses the question "Who are you looking for?" at the beginning of His ministry (Jn. 1:38), just before His death (Jn. 18:4) and also now after His resurrection. And the words of the risen Lord as recorded in Revelation are shot through with allusion to the words He used in His

mortal life, as also recorded by John. See on Jn. 21:5,20. "Whom do you seek?" are words He had used three times in His ministry (Jn. 1:38; 18:4,7). He used words which she ought to have recognized as a catch phrase of the Lord, and thereby have realized that it was the Lord speaking to her. She did, eventually, make the connection; she lived up to the spiritual potential which the Lord realized in her. She replies by exclaiming: Rabboni! When three years earlier the Lord had "*turned* [as He did again to Mary]... and saith... What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi...' (Jn. 1:38). And now Mary sees the similarity which the Lord has set up, and joyfully realizes the reality of His resurrection through it.

*She, supposing him to be the gardener-* That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

*Said to him: Sir, if you have taken him from here, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away-* Mary addresses the gardener as "sir", but this is the same Geek word [*kurios*] as is translated "Lord" a few verses earlier, when she describes Jesus as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:2,15). It seems to me that she half knew that this person standing there was Jesus. She was half expecting it. "They have taken away the Lord" (:2) almost sounds as if she felt Him to be alive and already made Lord and Christ. But the sheer grief of the situation distracted her from seeing that it was really Him. In this kind of thing there is, to me at least, the greatest proof of inspiration. It is all so real and therefore credible. She couldn't dare believe that her wildest hope of every grieving person was actually coming true. And in this we surely see some echoes of the slowness to believe that we have actually made it which it seems there will be after the judgment seat experience.

Her desire to remove the Lord's body may appear strange, seeing He had been buried in an expensive new tomb. She was surely not thinking straight anyway, for it would have been hard for a woman to carry the heavily embalmed corpse of a man on her own. Where did she intend taking it? I suggest she had no concrete idea. She wanted *Him* for herself; the point of the record is that her focus was so completely upon Him. And in that she is our example, and her disorientation and impractical ideas are exactly what we would expect of someone in that mental situation. The verisimilitude of the narrative comes over so strongly.

20:16 *Jesus said to her: Mary-* The Lord's intonation and voice was just the same before and after His resurrection and change of nature. This is a profound reflection of how He is the same today as yesterday and forever.

*She turned-* She had turned away from the Angels and had looked toward the Lord, but assuming Him to be a gardener, she has turned away again, and is speaking without looking at the one she is addressing. This again presents a realistic picture both of her disorientation, and also of her desire to focus on nothing and nobody apart from her Lord. In this she is set up as our example.

*And said to him: Rabboni! Which is to say, teacher-* This was her instant response; and so we can assume she uses the title for the Lord which she usually used, and which reflects how she related to Him. He had been for her above all her Rabbi, her teacher. And the Jews



considered it wrong for a woman to be taught the Law; yet the Lord was for her above all her teacher. This strong perception of Him as teacher explains their terrible concern that He was leaving them, and they would be without a teacher; hence the comfort that the Holy Spirit would empower them not only with a sense of His personal presence, but also would teach them as He had done personally. See on 14:18.

20:17 *Jesus said to her: Don't keep touching me; for I am not right now going to ascend to the Father-* She thought that the Lord was about to ascend to the Father, understanding His previous references to 'going to the Father' as referring to an ascension through the sky to Heaven. But the Lord comforts her that she doesn't need to keep grabbing hold of Him to stop that ascension, for He was not planning on doing so immediately at that moment. This intense dislike of the idea of His ascension and desperate desire for His physical presence reflects how she totally hadn't understood His entire teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16. It was expedient for them that He went away to the Father, because then they would receive the gift of the Spirit, His abiding presence in their hearts which would be as if He were physically present with them, and even more profound. But the Lord is gentle, and doesn't apparently make that obvious point to her. Despite her serious inattention to His words and inadequacy of understanding on that point, He urges her to go and tell the simple good news of His resurrection to others. This is the essence of the good news, and a person can believe and preach it regardless of whether they correctly understand everything else in the Lord's teaching. Mary is the parade example of encouragement in this.

*But go to my brothers and say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God-* And she obeyed: she “went and announced...” (:18). This is the first time the Lord refers to the believers as His "brothers". He wishes to emphasize His connection with us despite the experience of resurrection and immortalization; and perhaps He felt that a new family relationship had now been forged through the gift of the Spirit working in their hearts, "the spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), now enabled by His death.

Putting this alongside the other gospel records, this is all in the context of the disciples being commanded to take the good news of the risen Lord to all men. Surely Mary is being set up as an example of obedience to that command. She overcame all her inhibitions, the sense of “Who? Me?”, the embarrassment at being a woman teaching or informing men in the first century... and as such is the pattern for all of us, reluctant as we are to bear the good news. “Among the Hebrews women only had limited rights and above all could not act as witnesses”. And yet, the Lord chose Mary to be the witness to His resurrection to His brethren. He turned societal expectations on their head by setting her up as the bearer of the good news to them. Why? Surely to shake all of us from the safety of our societal and human closets; that we, whoever we are, however much we feel inadequate and ‘this is not for me’, are to be the bearers of the Lord’s witness to all men.

She was not to tell them ‘Jesus is going to ascend...’. She was to use the first person. Why? Surely because in her witness she was to be to them the voice of Jesus. And so it is for us all; we are witnesses in Him, we are Jesus to the eyes both of our brethren and this world. It was so significant that a woman should be chosen to make this witness, for women were not a valid witness in Judaism (Mishnah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1.8). Those who feel an intrinsic inadequacy are made adequate for this work of witness. And Mary's previous mental illness (Mk. 16:9) and immoral lifestyle likewise seriously dented her credibility on a secular level.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene alone perceived [from Ps. 110?] that the Lord must ascend after His resurrection- for surely this was why she kept clinging on to Him after He rose, fearful He would there and then disappear Heavenwards. And therefore the Lord comforted her, that there was no need to cling on to Him so, for He was not just then going to ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17). But another reading of this incident is possible, once it is realized that the OT associates clinging to another's feet with making a request of them (2 Kings 4:27).

Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brothers" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God. He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

20:18- see on Mk. 3:14.

*Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples: I have seen the Lord! And she told them that he had said these things to her-*

Mary went to tell others "what she had seen and heard" (Jn. 20:18), and John in one of his many later allusions back to his Gospel uses these very words about all the apostles- "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:1,3). He and the other brethren took Mary as their inspiration in the work of witness, as should we.

Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them. By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen "a vision of Angels" (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord's appearance to them as them having "seen a spirit" (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To 'spiritualize' is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to JW's, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the 'laws' of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed. See on Mk. 16:9.

"I have seen the Lord" is consciously alluding to Jn. 14:19 and Jn. 16:16, where the Lord had prophesied that all the disciples would see Him. It's as if John saw her as the representative of them all. Further evidence of this is found in the way John records the Lord as saying that He calls His sheep by name, and they recognize His voice (Jn. 10:5)- and by then recording how Mary Magdalene was the one who recognized the Lord's voice when He called her name (Jn. 20:16), as if she represents all the Lord's sheep. A woman rising early and searching for the Man whom she loves, asking the watchmen whether they have seen him, then finding him, seizing him and not letting him go... this is all the fulfilment of Song 3:1-4, where the bride of Christ is pictured doing these very things. Mary Magdalene is therefore used by John as a symbol for all the believers, or at least for the Jewish Messianic community searching for

Jesus. Compare too the Lord's reassurance of Mary Magdalene with language of Is. 43:1 to the whole community of believers: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name..."

20:19 *When it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and for fear of the Jews, the doors were locked where the disciples were; and Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them: Peace to you-* The AV better reflects the Greek: "Where the disciples were assembled", or literally, 'synagogued'. The same phrase is used of church gatherings (Acts 20:7). They were unwelcome in the synagogues and persons of interest to the Jews; and so they by default became their own synagogue. But without a Rabbi / teacher. The Lord's appearance in their midst as it were gave life to their synagogue / church. He fulfilled His promise that where two or three were gathered together for His sake, He would come into their midst. The standing "in their midst" is emphasized in :26. But it is John who will later use the same word in describing how after the Lord had been slain He was represented in Heaven as a freshly slain lamb possessing the Spirit standing "in the midst" of the Heavenly elders (Rev. 5:6). That was Heaven's reflection of that very humble situation on earth, where the illustrious elders of Heaven were reflected by the frightened, weak disciples in whose midst the Lord stood. But they were to become the elders of the new people of God, with representative Angels before the throne of God, in the court of Heaven. Our weak situations on earth have their far more glorious reflections in the Heavenly throne room.

The wishing of peace was no mere formality. It was another way of wishing them peace with God through the gift of the Spirit.

20:20- see on Lk. 24:41.

*And when he had said this, he showed to them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord-* There is no mention of His feet, although crucifixion victims were usually nailed there too. Perhaps this was because in order not to break a bone of Him, the nails had not left major holes there. Their 'gladness' was in partial fulfilment of His word that their sorrow would be turned into joy when they 'saw' Him again, but I have suggested that the joy in view there more fully referred to the joy of His presence through the receipt of the Comforter in their hearts to replace His physical presence. It seems that they saw the Lord, but were not persuaded it was Him until they had seen the marks in side and hands. Mary was persuaded without being shown these. The record is continually emphasizing their weakness and slowness of faith. We also see the depth of their belief in disembodied spirits, a totally unBiblical belief. But such doctrinal failure was no reason for the Lord to break relationship with them, and neither should it be for us.

20:21- see on Jn. 17:20.

*Jesus again said to them: Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, even so send I you-* The gift of peace was no passing formality. To be given the Lord's attitude of mind, the peace He had with the Father, was part of the promised gift of the Spirit (14:27); and here we go on immediately to read of the Spirit being given (:22). That gift was therefore primarily something internal, mental, psychological, in the heart; for that is where peace exists, especially peace with God of the kind the Lord enjoyed.

Again we have a Johannine version of the great commission. As the Lord was sent into the world, so are we. This parallel means that His 'sending into the world' cannot be harnessed to support any mistaken notion of personal pre-existence or coming from Heaven to earth at birth; for as He was sent, so are we. The synoptics record the risen Lord sending the disciples to preach Him and His resurrection; just as He was sent forth to testify of Himself. They are promised the strength of the Spirit to make that witness; here they are given "peace" and the gift of the Spirit (:22). And yet the disciples were weak and fearful at this time, hence the repeated assurance of "Peace unto you!". We too receive the same commission against a backdrop of feeling so inadequate and lacking of resource to fulfil it.

20:22 *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit-* The gift of the Spirit was not and is not a once-off phenomenon, given just once in the experience of the believer. The New Testament records the believers being filled with the Spirit on various occasions, and the exhortations to allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit are proof enough that it is given in an ongoing sense. Paul says that the Corinthians had received the Spirit at baptism, but he urges them to now be spiritual, to receive it and be filled with it again. There is therefore no chronological issue with the fact that Luke places a giving of the Spirit by the risen Lord at a slightly different point in the narrative.

The breathing of the Lord recalls His breathing His last breath toward the disciples at His death; "breath" and "spirit" are the same idea. The Spirit given is therefore fundamentally the spirit of Lord Jesus, His breathing, His life. Any manifestations of it through miraculous gifts in the first century are incidental to the essential idea- which is that His breathing, His living, the spirit of His mind, is given into ours and becomes ours as it displaces all human thinking and 'spirit' within us.

20:23- see on Lk. 11:4.

*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained-* Grammatically, the "any" refers to any type or class, rather than 'any individual'. This encourages us to understand this as John's version of the great commission to take the Gospel to all kinds of people; see on :21,22. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God's forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: 'I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don't fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven'. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. "Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" becomes the equivalent of "he that believeth not shall be damned". The disciples did not go out into the world and tell some people that they were forgiven and others that they were not. There is no historical account of them doing that at all. Rather we see them going out into the world preaching the good news of forgiveness for any who wished.

Commentators have noted that the language of retaining here is similar to how the Rabbis spoke, and the basis upon which they either excommunicated or 'received into fellowship'.

The Lord is saying that this power is not in their hands, but is in the hands of the preacher of the Gospel. And instead of stipulating who is in and out, they should take the Gospel of God's radical acceptance to the world. This is a powerful challenge to latter day Judaists within Christian churches who think in exactly these categories of receiving into fellowship or putting out of fellowship. That same mentality likewise misses the focus now placed by the Lord on taking the message of fellowship with Him out into the world, and leaving God to decide who finally is 'in' or 'out' on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of His offer.

The Greek for 'retain' strictly means 'to hold / bind', and that for 'remit' means 'to loose'. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: "...so shall ye be my disciples... that ye *should* go [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide". The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher's obedience to his Lord's commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6). 20:24 There's meaning in the fact that Thomas' other name, Didymus, is given (Jn. 20:24). 'Didymus' means literally 'the double', presumably implying he was a twin. But 'Didymus' is a form of the same Greek word we find in Mt. 28:17, describing the 'doubt', literally the doubleness, i.e. the double mindedness, which there was in the disciples. Again, the element of doubt and lack of faith is being emphasized.

20:24 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came-* His surname 'the twin' could hint at his suffering from the dual nature we all have when it comes to matters of faith; we can believe and yet disbelieve. Perhaps his absence from the group was related to his strongly expressed disbelief.

20:25 *The other disciples told him: We have seen the Lord! But he said to them: Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe-* When John records Thomas as saying "If I do not see... and put my finger... I will never believe", he is connecting back to the Lord's very similar words: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (Jn. 4:48). It's as if John is bringing out the weakness of faith in his friend Thomas, the struggle there was to believe, knowing it would elicit a chord in his hearers, thus building a bridge between the hearers and the preacher. And John goes on to record that there is a greater blessing for those who believe, not having seen the Lord, than there is for preachers like himself, who had believed because they had seen and touched the Lord (Jn. 20:29). It's as if John shows the utmost humility before his audience, imputing to them greater faith than he had. And Peter does likewise, alluding here when he says that his readers love the Lord, although they [unlike he] had never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

20:26 *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said: Peace to you-* For the significance of His 'standing among them' see on :19. They still weren't obedient to their risen Lord- they didn't go immediately into Galilee. They remained at least eight days in Jerusalem, until the Lord Jesus appeared to Thomas there. The fact they met a week later, taking 'an eight days' as a week by the Jewish inclusive method (Mt. 17:1 cp. Lk. 9:28), suggests they had already begun meeting regularly together. His special presence during their gatherings may speak of His presence at communal gatherings of His people, although the Comforter presence is ever present in the heart of every individual believer.

20:27 *Then he said to Thomas: Reach here your finger and see my hands, and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and be not faithless but believing-* His finger was the appropriate size to enter the nail wounds, and his hand the right side to enter the spear gash in the Lord's side. "Do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer" (Gk.). And then He pronounces to Thomas: "You have [now] believed" (Jn. 20:29, Syriac text). It's as if John is challenging his hearers and readers in the same way, and setting up his buddy 'doubting Thomas' as their pattern. John makes the point that Thomas didn't initially believe the 'preaching' of the Gospel of the resurrection by the other disciples; just as John anticipated some would not accept his account of the same Gospel on first hearing. And again, "be not faithless but believing!" jumps out of the text to challenge each of us, as do so many questions and exclamations in John's Gospel.

20:28 *Thomas answered and said to him: My Lord and my God-* Although Thomas' exaltation "My Lord and my God!" may appear an off-the-cuff gasping out of praise, can I suggest there was far more to it than that. I suggest he was alluding to or quoting Ps. 35:23: "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, my God and my Lord". The Lord Jesus had indeed arisen and stirred up in resurrection, and Thomas realized that it was to his judgment. When we look closer at the Psalm, it seems to reveal something of the thoughts of the Lord Jesus. He had desired God to awake to *his* need. And now Thomas shares those same thoughts, through his relationship to Jesus. And this is a very Johannine theme; that the relationship between Father and Son is to be shared by the believers, on account of the way they relate to the risen Lord Jesus. Or perhaps Thomas had Ps. 91:2 in mind: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my fortress, my God; in him will I trust". When Thomas addressed Jesus as "My Lord and my God", he was likely alluding to the way the Emperors [Domitian especially, according to Seutonius] demanded to be called " *Dominus et Deus noster*" - Our Lord and our God. Thomas was saying something radical- he was applying to the Lord Jesus the titles which those living in the Roman empire were only to apply to Caesar. And our exaltation of the Lord Jesus should be just as radical in practice. Further, note that Yahweh Elohim is usually translated in the Septuagint '*Kyrios, ho theos mou*'- Lord, my God". Am I going too far in thinking that Thomas saw in the risen Jesus the fulfilment of the Yahweh Elohim name? He would thus have been fulfilling the Lord's prophecy in Jn. 8:28: "When you lift up the Son of man, then you will realize that I Am...". Finally the disciples were grasping that "All men may honour the Son just as they honour the Father" (Jn. 5:23). Thomas' expression of praise was thus blasphemy to both Jews and Romans. A true perception of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus leads us to a unique position which cannot be accepted by any who are not truly of Him.

Again and again we have to emphasize that we read the Biblical documents at a great distance from the culture in which they were first written. It was quite understandable for a person to carry the name of their superior, without being that superior in person. And so it was and is with the Lord Jesus. To give just one of many possible confirmations of this: "[In 2 Esdras 5:43-46]... God's spokesman, the angel Uriel, is questioned by Ezra as though he were both Creator and Judge [which God alone is]. Ezra uses the same style of address to Uriel ("My lord, my master") as he uses in direct petition to God. This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology [i.e. the study of who Christ is]". The acclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God!" must be understood within the context of first century usage, whereas Paul says, many people were called Lord and "god" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). If we're invited by our manager "Come and meet the president", we don't expect to meet the President of the USA. We expect to meet the

president of the company. The word "president" can have more than one application, and it would be foolish to assume that in every case it referred to the President of the USA. And it's the same with the words "Lord" and "God" in their first century usage. Hence a Jewish non-Trinitarian like Philo could call Moses "God and king of the whole nation" (*Life Of Moses* 1.158)- and nobody accused him of not being monotheistic! Significantly, there is in the New Testament the Greek word *latreuo* which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words [especially *proskuneo*] used about the worship of believers (Rev. 3:9, Daniel (Dan. 2:46 LXX), kings of Israel etc. (1 Chron. 29:20 LXX)).

20:29- see on Lk. 1:45.

*Jesus said to him: Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed-* We naturally tend to think of ourselves as the referent here. And indeed we are. But the tenses here read strangely if future generations are in view; for then we would need something like 'not seen yet will then believe'. He implies there were others at that time who had not seen but had believed. The Lord knew there were some who had heard His promise of resurrection after three days, and believed it- although they had not seen Him. This means that the disciples were spiritually second class citizens at that point, even amongst the body of believers. Some had not seen and believed He had risen; they had seen, but doubted- despite the great blessing of having the Lord appear to them. This again highlights the point being made throughout all the Gospels; the disciples were weak, even amongst the other believers; and yet they came through in the end, and were used by the Lord to found His church. Peter alludes to this passage when encouraging his converts that they had not seen and yet had believed, using the same words (1 Pet. 1:8). He writes that fully aware that he was one privileged to have seen and yet whose faith was weak, and who literally 'went fishing' in disillusion even after having seen the risen Lord. The phrase 'blessed for having not seen but have believed' is found in the Rabbinic writings concerning proselytes. John continues his theme of a new Israel being developed, suggesting that the new Israel was based around the "twelve" [cp. the twelve tribes of Israel], and proselytes would be joined to them.

20:30 *Many other signs Jesus did in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book-* The context is of :29 stating that some believed without seeing the risen Lord, whereas the disciples saw Him but doubted. Here that self-critical spirit continues, with John admitting that the Lord not only appeared to them but did many signs in their presence, witnessed by them- making their slowness to believe all the more reprehensible. John concludes by saying that he has written down these signs so that "you", his audience who had not seen but whom he hoped would believe, might be better than him and the disciples- believing in what they had not seen.

20:31- see on Jn. 17:20.

*But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name-* See on :30. John's Gospel was written for the specific purpose of bringing others to faith- like most of the New Testament, it is essentially a missionary document. The gospel preached by John is what is transcribed here. We must ask

then whether any other theology is actually part of the Gospel message. Jn. 20:31 makes it clear that the purpose of John's Gospel was to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ: "This has been written in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, holding this faith, you may possess life by His name". C.H. Dodd comments: "The tense of the verbs... the aorists... would necessarily have implied that the readers did not so far hold the Christian faith or possess eternal life". The gift of eternal life in John refers to the present receipt of the gift of the Spirit, the life and spirit of life lived by the Lord Jesus, the life we shall eternally live. This is why life is "in his name". There may be reference to baptism into His Name, but the "name" of a person refers to the summation of their character and being. Life is lived in "His name", living, thinking, feeling and acting as He did and does.

"That ye might believe" implies John intended his readership to be unbelievers rather than believers in the first instance. Jn. 19:35 implies that the community for whom John was writing had John as the basic source of their knowledge about Jesus, and was highly respected as their spiritual father. 'John' is therefore his inspired write-up of the Gospel he had taught his converts, and therefore it has various specific features highly relevant to them. Acts likewise seems to be written as a preaching document, recording the speeches of basic apologetics which were made to both Jews and Gentiles. The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. John seems to suggest that he chose which miracles to record so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn. 20:31). The implication is that he wrote his Gospel with the intention of it being used as a preaching document.

The Gospel records are transcripts of the original preaching of the Gospel delivered by e.g. Matthew or John. Thus John wrote down his gospel "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (Jn. 20:31). His first letter was written, it seems, to the converts which his Gospel preaching had made: "I write these things to *you who believe in the name of the Son of God* so that you may know that you have eternal *life*" (1 Jn. 5:13). It has even been suggested that John was writing in order to win converts to Christianity from a specific synagogue somewhere in the Diaspora. Another suggestion is that John is aiming at converting Samaritans or at least, a group of Gentiles perhaps associated with a synagogue. For John records how Samaritans came to Jesus, how "the world" includes them and not just Jews (Jn. 4:42); how physical descent from Abraham is irrelevant now (Jn. 8:33-41); how the true Israelite is anyone who has been born again (Jn. 1:47; 3:3-8), and John stresses that the true sheep of Jesus for whom he died are not just Jews (Jn. 10:16; 11:51,52). John records Jesus' explaining that He has already done the sowing, but the reaping of the Samaritans / Gentiles is up to us the reapers (Jn. 4:35-38). The lesson is that we must each preach the Gospel to others in a way that is relevant to them, not compromising the basic message, but articulating it in ways that connect with their needs and situation. The New Testament is simply full of encouragement and example in this.

But it could also be that John was writing to confirm the faith of those who had heard his preaching of the Gospel and been baptized. For they would have largely been illiterate and would need some way of being reminded of that in which they had believed. It is possible to translate: "That you may continue to believe".



## CHAPTER 21

21:1 *After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and he manifested himself in this way-* Mt. 28:10 sounds as if the Lord Jesus intended not to reveal Himself to the disciples until they met in Galilee. The fact He did so earlier shows that He changed plans, perhaps out of concern for their very weak faith, or perhaps simply from an overpowering love of them and desire to be with them. Jn. 21:1 stresses that He revealed Himself to them in Galilee *again*, as if the necessity for this was somehow shameful; and Jn. 21:14 notes this was the third time that the disciples as a group saw the risen Lord. Perhaps the degree of their unbelief was unexpected even to the risen Lord.

Perhaps this incident fulfils the Lord's intention to meet them on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16); but the planned meeting never happened because instead of going to the prearranged meeting place on a mountain there, they went fishing. Their going fishing might imply that they just returned to their old business. Meeting the risen Christ still didn't have a permanent effect upon them. This follows straight on from the blessing just pronounced upon those even at that time who had not seen but had believed; the disciples saw multiple times but still 'went fishing'; see on 20:29.

21:2 *There was together Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and another two of his disciples-* As noted on :1, the 'going fishing' incident was shameful. The Lord had already appeared to them twice, and they had arranged a meeting on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16). But now they just go fishing, as if in disinterest or continued disbelief. Perhaps this is why the group who did this are named and shamed, by themselves, as it were.

The Gospel writers each conclude their message with some reference to their own incredible slowness to believe the very Gospel which they were now preaching to others. Between them, the preaching of the twelve makes it clear that they saw the risen Lord in Jerusalem, at least twice, were commissioned as preachers of that good news... and yet returned to Galilee in disbelief and resumed their previous occupations. And of course they recall their Lord's rebuke of them for their slowness and blindness. Truly they were appealing to their hearers on the basis of their own humanity and weakness of faith. They weren't painting themselves as immaculate, never doubting believers. They were so strongly portraying their humanity, knowing that they were appealing to men and women who were equally human and frail of faith.

21:3 - see on Mk. 10:28.

*Simon Peter said to them: I am going fishing. They said to him: We will go with you. They went out and entered into the boat, and that night they caught nothing-*

John perhaps especially brings out their blindness at this time. He describes how they were fishing on the lake, having given up, it seems, their faith in Jesus, despite His appearances to them. Yet John describes that incident in language which evidently alludes to the account in Luke 5 of the Lord's first call to them by the same lake, whilst they were fishing. Consider the similarities:

- They have fished all night but caught nothing
- The Lord tells them to cast their nets
- They obey and catch many fish
- The effect on the nets is mentioned

- Peter reacts emotionally, and in both records is called 'Simon Peter'
- The presence of "the sons of Zebedee" is mentioned both times (Jn. 21:2; Lk. 5:10)
- Jesus is called 'Lord'
- The same Greek words are used for climbing aboard, landing, the nets etc.

The point being that John is saying: 'Durr! We were so dumb, not to realize the similarities more quickly! *Of course it was Jesus!* But we were so, so pathetically slow to accept it. After the encounter by the lake in Lk. 5, Jesus made us fishers of men. But we refused to be, initially. So He had to re-commission us yet again after this second incident'. John uses the verb *helkein* to describe how they 'drew' the nets to land- the same word used elsewhere by him for people being 'drawn' to Jesus (Jn. 6:44; 12:32). He is recognizing that they had had to be re-taught the call to be fishers of men, because they had pushed off to Galilee in disbelief and disobedience to the great commission to go and catch men. Perhaps John records Peter being asked the same question "Lovest thou me?" three times, in order to show how terribly slow they all were to accept the teachings of the Lord which now they were asking others to accept.

Peter is presented as the leader of the group, and is mentioned first in the list (:2); as if to demonstrate that the one who led them fishing, in disbelief and disobedience to the command to meet in a mountain nearby (Mt. 28:16), was the very one who became the leader of the early church. Again and again, the weakness of the disciples is emphasized in their own preaching; for the Gospel records are transcripts of their preaching to others. The details of them walking to the shore and getting into the boat are recorded in detail because John wishes us to imagine the shameful incident.

21:4 *But when day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach. The disciples did not know that it was Jesus-* The record has twice described the Lord as 'standing' among them in His two appearances to them in the locked room in Jerusalem. His form should therefore have been familiar to them. If we enquire why exactly they were so slow to fully believe, despite all the evidence and appearances, there is no immediately apparent answer. It could be that they so deeply believed in ghosts and disembodied spirits that they struggled to believe in His bodily resurrection; in which case we see that false theology and worldviews can militate against a true faith in the Lord Jesus. Or it could be that as John has shown with His references to how the Lord's miracles failed to convert the Jews, literal miracle and 'seeing' are not of themselves abidingly persuasive. John was writing for those who had not seen but had believed; and he is perhaps developing the point that their lack of literally having witnessed the resurrection is no excuse for disbelief. For the disciples literally saw the Lord in several appearances, but failed to be motivated thereby to a lasting faith. They too had been given the Spirit (20:22), but still failed to believe; just as the Corinthians were given the Spirit but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Comforter was to make the Lord even more persuasively present in the hearts of believers than any physical presence; so perhaps John labours the point that physical meeting of Him was only inspirational to faith at the time, just as the miracles had been; lasting faith was from other sources.

21:5 *Jesus called to them: Boys, have you something to eat? They answered him: No-* Here we have a rather nice indicator of the Lord's conscious effort to show His 'humanity' even after His resurrection. The risen Lord of heaven and earth calls out to the disciples over the lake, calling them "lads". The Greek *paidion* is the plural familiar form of the noun *pais*, 'boy'. Raymond Brown comments that the term "has a colloquial touch... [as] we might say

‘My boys’ or ‘lads’ if calling to a knot of strangers of a lower social class”. Why use this colloquial term straight after His resurrection, something akin to ‘Hey guys!’, when this was not His usual way of addressing them? Surely it was to underline to them that things hadn’t changed in one sense, even if they had in others; He was still the same Jesus. Likewise the term for "something to eat" is unusual, and perhaps colloquial for 'Any nice grub'. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. See on Jn. 20:15.

The question was to recall His question to them, as to whether they had food to feed the multitude. The implication then was 'No, but You can provide any amount of food'. He was seeking to stir their memories and to recognize Him, as well as through the clear similarities with the earlier fishing incident noted on :3. He knew that provoking them to join the dots and see the picture was going to be far more powerful than a direct appearance to them. And that is so relevant for all today who have not had any appearance to them of the risen Lord, but all the same believe.

21:6 *And he said to them: Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find. There they cast their net; and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fish-* The 'drawing in' of the nets here and in :11 implies the drawing in of the Gentiles, from all nations. It is the same word as in Jn. 12:32: "When I am lifted up from the earth [in death], I shall *draw* all men unto myself". The nets were not torn [*schizein*] in that there must be no division amongst true preachers of the Gospel who all teach the same basic Gospel- contrast this with how John frequently mentions the *schizein* which occurred amongst those who would not fully accept the Lord's message (Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). And likewise we can learn that all human resources will be provided in order to fulfil the great commission, no matter how they are stretched apparently beyond their natural limit. The 153 fish caught in the net may refer to 153 being the total number of species of fish recognized by the Greek zoologists. The Lord's cross will draw all men- i.e. men from all nations- unto Himself through our preaching, through our undivided drawing in of the nets. This means that true believers will be found to have come from every nation; the Gospel must therefore go to them all and make converts. This has only been achieved in recent times, and is a sure sign of the Lord's soon return. It shows however that basic belief in the Gospel is what is required; for no one Protestant denomination has won converts from every single nation.

The drawing in of nets is used by the Lord elsewhere as a figure for His return and judgment- only when they are all drawn in can the bad fish be cast away. So the conclusion has to be faced: there must be fish caught in the net, i.e. men and women who have responded to the true Gospel, amongst "all men", every species of humanity, before the Lord's return. If we are convicted that we teach the true Gospel, then it follows that there must be true Christian communities amongst "all men" before the Lord returns; and thus His return will be hastened by our establishment of those groups. When the Gospel goes into all the world, then shall the end come.

The disciples were unable to draw in the catch, representing response from "all nations", on their own. They needed the help of their brethren. The Lord prayed in John 17 that our unity would convert the world, and perhaps this is being again said here in more visual terms.

21:7- see on Acts 11:17.

*That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: It is the Lord!*- The presentation of John and Peter together by John always seems in the end to Peter's glory. Here again, John is the first to realize, but Peter the first to act.

*So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat about him (for he was naked) and threw himself into the sea-* Peter's casting of himself into the sea uses the same word as just used for the casting of the nets in :6. Perhaps Peter perceived that the nets represented them, and they should be out preaching, gathering in men rather than fish; and with characteristic zeal and repentance, he cast himself into the sea as he had just cast the net into the sea. He thereby recognized that he was part of that net that should be catching men, in obedience to the great commission. Peter's wrapping of himself in his outer coat before swimming was at best clumsy. Again we get the impression of someone rather uncoordinated or not thinking through implications. And yet such was the man chosen to lead the early church.

Peter knew the Lord Jesus had risen, and he had met Him and been “glad” when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn't. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

When Peter realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore, this was at least the third time he had met the risen Lord. But when John says “It is the Lord”, Peter throws himself into the water to rush to Him as if it's the first time they have met after the denials. Surely it was a higher appreciation of what Christ's Lordship entailed that suddenly struck him at that moment, and he now rushed eagerly to Him, believing surely in His gracious forgiveness. No wonder in a month or so's time he was appealing for men to repent and accept forgiveness on the basis that really, Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ convicted Peter (and all men) of both their sinfulness (as they see themselves in the peerless light of His moral majesty) and also of the reality of His forgiveness. “I am a sinful man, *O Lord*” (Lk. 5:8) is a case in point. A case could be made to argue that Peter's use of ‘Master’ tends to be at times when he is weak or doubting (Lk. 5:5; 8:45; Mk. 11:21); whilst he saw Jesus as a master who simply gives directives to His slaves, there was not such great inspiration to faith. But the utter and surpassing Lordship of Jesus had quite a different message. Peter's perception of Jesus as ‘Lord’ climaxed when he perceived that “It is the Lord!” whilst fishing on Galilee after the resurrection. His sense of the greatness of this more-than-man led him to do something counter instinctive and even absurd- he adds clothes before jumping into the water to swim to Him, in order to be attired as best he could be before Him. It would seem that He was imitating the body language of the Lord when He washed Peter's feet- he tied a towel around Him [s.w. as Peter wrapping his outer garment around him, Jn. 13:4,5 cp. 21:7].

*21:8 But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from the land, only about meters from shore), dragging the net full of fishes-* The distance given is about 90 meters. For Peter to swim this with his outer garment would have been quite exhausting for him, and he would have arrived before the Lord panting.

21:9- see on Lk. 22:32.

*So when they reached the shore, they got out of the boat; and saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread-* Again by a charcoal fire (s.w. only 18:18), the three fold “do you love me?” probed Peter’s three denials, and the threefold commission to “feed my sheep” confirmed his total re-instatement to grace. Fish and bread was exactly what the Lord had miraculously provided in 6:9. They were continually being directed back to incidents in the gospels in order to demonstrate to them that the Lord was the same then, after His resurrection, as He had been during His ministry.

Anyone who has reflected on any length of ecclesial experience will realize the truth of the fact that so many of our spiritual exercises in preaching and pastoral work are in fact for *our* benefit, although we may feel that they are only for the benefit of others. This is especially true of preaching: the disciples laboured so hard to catch all the fish according to the Lord's command, but when they reached land with all the fish, they found the Lord already had fish and prepared them for breakfast. All the labour for the fish was for their benefit: not because the Lord needed fish (cp. converts); He already had His.

Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, the Lord thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21:9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. He knows how to cook fish and unleavened bread. The Lord Jesus was male, and yet in so many ways He combined feminine sensitivity with His almost heroic, classic masculinity, as the King, warrior, brave captain who gave His life for His friends. You see it even after the resurrection- He cooked a meal for the guys as they were out fishing (Jn. 21:9). From our cultural distance it's not immediately obvious, but in first century Palestinian terms this was so obviously the work of a woman. The men fished, the woman sat on the beach preparing food for the hungry workers when they returned off night shift. But it was a man, a more than man, the exalted and risen Lord of the universe, who chose and delighted to do this very feminine, thoughtful and sensitive action of service. The incident isn't merely an insight into the Lord's humility even after His resurrection. It speaks of how He incorporates in His person both male and female characteristics, as the ideal and perfected humanity, the Man fully and ultimately in the image of God. And there are other examples in His life. He perhaps rejoiced to lead His disciples to the breaking of bread through setting up the sign of a man carrying a pitcher of water- which was evidently women's work. The way the Lord held John to His breast at the last supper is likewise a classic female image.

21:10 *Jesus said to them: Bring some of the fish which you have now taken-* This detail is significant. Breakfast was ready, with His fish and bread on the fire. But He asks them to contribute *their* fish, so that the breakfast finally enjoyed included both their fish and His; even though 'their' fish had actually been brought to them by the Lord. We think of His teaching of bringing His sheep together with other sheep not of this fold, making one fold. The fishing incident clearly spoke of the great commission, and of how He would work together with them, so that the final harvest was a joint result of their work and His provision. They alone caught nothing, but with His help, they caught 153 fish, the number of species of fish which were understood to exist.

21:11 *Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken-* Again we see the enthusiasm and yet clumsiness of Peter; the Lord had asked for "some of the fish", and Peter

drags the entire net full of 153 fish to the Lord. Although 153 is the numerical value of "sons of God", 153 was the number of species of fish which were understood to exist in the sea. This wrong idea was used by the Lord. These men were fishermen, who thought they knew all about fish; and He uses their incorrect science to make His point. With His help, they could bring representatives of all nations into the Gospel net. He would send fish to them; and we need to sense this too rather than preaching in our own strength, praying daily for the Lord to send people to us. The unbroken net speaks of how in the power of the Spirit, we will be provided with the resources, fully stretched as they may be, in order to fulfil His bidding in the great commission.

21:12 *Jesus said to them: Come. Break your fast. And none of the disciples did inquire of him: Who are you? Knowing that it was the Lord-* This meal looked forward to the Messianic banquet, which will be as a result of our obedience to the great commission with the Lord's direction and blessing. The Lord had to tell the disciples after the resurrection to "Break your fast" (Jn. 21:12 RV). Despite the Lord having appeared to them as recorded in John 20, they were fasting for the dead. No wonder the Lord urged them to break that fast. But the point is made, by John himself, as to how terribly slow they were to believe in His resurrection. As this was the third time He had appeared to them (:14) and they had disobeyed His command to meet them on a mountain in Galilee, instead returning to their fishing, I would have been minded to rebuke them. But there is no word of rebuke from the Lord, but rather a command to fish, and a using of them in His service. There are times when disciplining a person or again rebuking them is futile; treating them as partners and asking them to get involved in the Lord's work is the more effective way of developing their faith. And the Lord uses that method here.

He typically avoided making direct statements about who He was, notably before Pilate. His whole person and behaviour was Him, He was His word or proclamation made flesh in Himself. He had no need to proclaim His Divine Sonship in so many words; it was evident. And we see this beautifully effected here.

21:13 *Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise-* Again this was to recall how He had distributed bread and fish to them in the feeding of the 5000. The implication was that they were to distribute that bread and fish wider; and perhaps they literally did so, seeing they had 153 large fish in their net. Again the Lord is seeking to point out that who He was in His earthly ministry was who He continued to be after resurrection. The process of immortalization will not obliterate personality; who we are now is who we shall eternally be. This points up the eternal importance of development in this life of personality and character, the spirit, spiritual formation.

21:14 *This was the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after he had risen from the dead-* The synoptics appear to record other appearances, so this must mean that this was the third time recorded in John that Jesus revealed Himself to them all together as a group at one and the same time. The same word for "manifested" is used when John later writes that "the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness..." (1 Jn. 1:2). He has in view the resurrected Lord of life, whom they saw and handled. But the witness they were making to this 'manifestation' included a recognition in the resurrection accounts that they had been so slow to accept that 'manifestation' of life which they now urged others to accept. Again we see a humility in their witness, which would have made them very convincing and approachable as preachers and teachers.

21:15 *So when they had broken their fast, Jesus said to Simon: Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Feed my lambs-*

The Lord Jesus had already met Peter at least twice since His resurrection, but hadn't raised the obvious issue of Peter's denials. And now He does it only *after* He has first eaten with Peter. We must bear in mind that to eat together, especially to take bread and give it to others, implied acceptance and religious fellowship (the scene here is reminiscent of the breaking of bread, the same words for 'bread', 'take' and 'give' are found in Mt. 26:26). The Lord firstly fellowshiped with Peter and only then moved on to probe the issue of his disloyalty, after having first affirmed His abiding love for Peter. This is a pattern for us in dealing with others' failure. The human tendency is to demand all is resolved between us before we can move on together, but the Lord was wiser than that. He had tried to arrange circumstance to provoke Peter to himself engage with the issue- for the triple questioning, the triple invitation to work for Him, all took place by a fire of coals- just as Peter's triple denials had. We see clearly portrayed here the gentle, seeking spirit of the Lord.

"Do you love me?" was a question for Peter's benefit, not in order to give the Lord information which He didn't have. His great sensitivity to Peter led Him to foresee the obvious question in Peter's mind: 'Has He forgiven me?'. And the Lord is saying that Peter knows the answer insofar as Peter knows how much he loves Jesus, on the principle that whoever loves much has been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). The allusion back to that incident in Luke 7 is confirmed by the way that the phrase 'to love more' occurs elsewhere only there, in Lk. 7:42: "Which of them will *love* him [Jesus] *most* [s.w. "more"]". Jesus had already forgiven Peter; the answer to Peter's concern about whether he had been forgiven was really 'Yes you have, if you believe it; and if you believe it, you will love me, and according to how much you love me, you will know how much forgiveness you have received'. In all this, we see the careful sensitivity of the Lord Jesus to His people, foreseeing and feeling our doubts and fears, our questions; and responding to them in a profound way.

"You know that I love you" was met by the Lord with the comment that Peter must feed His sheep. This wasn't so much a commandment / commission, as the Lord explaining that Peter's love for Him personally would be reflected in the degree to which Peter loved the Lord's sheep. John grasped this clearly, when he underlines throughout his letters that we cannot have love for God without loving our brethren. The Father and Son are to be identified with their people.

"Do you love me more than these?" is grammatically ambiguous. The reference could be to the nets and ships, or to Peter's other brethren. On both fronts, Peter needed provoking to self-examination. For he was proud of his profession and too eager to return to Galilee and get back to work; and he had boasted earlier that "Though all men deny you, yet I will not". There are purposeful ambiguities in some parts of God's word, not every sentence is intended to have a final 'right interpretation' which stands for all time; the ambiguities are to provoke our self-examination.

21:16 *He said to him, a second time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Tend my sheep-* In the first two engagements, the Lord asks Peter if he 'loves' [*agape*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he

'loves' [*phileo*] Him. In the third engagement the Lord asks Peter if he really 'loves' [*phileo*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he does *phileo* Jesus. To argue that *phileo* and *agape* are interchangeable is to miss the point here; indeed, this whole exchange would surely show that they are not. And if they are, then we wonder why the two words are used as if there is a difference. Only surface level reading would suggest they are interchangeable. For *agape* is the otherwise colourless Greek word which has been chosen in John to refer to the Lord's love for us, the new commandment being to love *as He loved us*. Peter hasn't yet grasped that, and can think only in terms of *phileo*, the love of human friendship.

*21:17 He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he asked him a third time: Do you love me? And he said to him: Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him: Feed my sheep-* As noted on :16, Peter has responded to the question about whether he has *agape* for the Lord by saying that he has *phileo*. The Lord now in the third exchange as it were gives up trying to get Peter to respond to *agape* with *agape*, and probes whether he really has the *phileo*, the love of human friendship, which he professes. The Lord doesn't make any claim as to whether Peter does or doesn't have the *phileo* he professes; His response is that love for Him will be reflected in love for those in Him, His sheep. This is brought out in John's letters, where love for the Father and Son is only legitimate if we love their spiritual children, the Lord's sheep.

Peter was full of a simple, pure love for the Lord as he stood before Him. And he wanted to assure the Lord of that. But the Lord's response seems to be that love for Him is not the passion of a moment. It is shown by loving our brethren, His sheep, over a lifetime of service- as Peter went on to do.

Peter is asked to feed [give food to] the lambs (:15); then pastor / shepherd the mature sheep (:16); and now to feed [give food to] the mature sheep (:17). John took this as a command for him and to us all, for he alludes to it in his spiritual care for the young men [cp. lambs] and the more mature ["fathers"] in 1 Jn. 2:14 (Catholics are wrong to assume these words apply only to Peter). The point is that mature sheep still need feeding as they did when they were lambs, although they also need shepherding.

*21:18 Truly, truly, I say to you: When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go-* This follows straight on from the command to Peter to show his love for the Lord by how he treated the Lord's flock. The Lord seems to be saying that He knows that Peter does love Him, and that Peter will indeed give his life to caring for the Lord's sheep- and because of this, Peter will finally suffer and die, as the Lord did. This prediction of Peter's future suffering for the sake of his work for the Lord's flock is therefore the Lord's way of saying that yes, He does accept that Peter truly loves Him- because He knows how He will suffer for his love of the Lord's people.

Consider how the Lord's words to Peter here about girding himself would have offered him tremendous comfort in Acts 12:8, if he appreciated them; see note there. Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to "follow me". Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that "you do not wish". The Lord foresaw that Peter's unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal 'Acts of



Peter'. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: '*Domine, quo vadis?*'- 'Lord / Master, to where are we going?' (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be.

In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn't able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter's problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called, the question of *Quo Vadis?* Only then, at the very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down.

If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us. And for us, *Quo Vadis?*

21:19 *Now this he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him: Follow me-* After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die. He would be carried, as the Lord was carried to the cross. But his death would "glorify God" (as the Lord's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life, and got distracted by his issues with John.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of first century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him.

21:20 *Peter, turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following- he who had leaned back on his breast at the supper and asked: Lord, who is he that betrays you?-* Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got

distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: “What is that to you? You- follow me”. This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33).

And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life. John’s Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John’s Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord’s opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keeping on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of ‘follow me’ is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John’s Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that “hereunto were you called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call “Follow me”, and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion.

21:21 *Peter therefore seeing him, said to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do?*- There is a fatal fascination with the question of why some weren’t called. But who are we as the clay to argue with the potter’s grace? John’s Gospel closes by addressing this question. Peter was following Jesus, walking behind Him, in response to Jesus’ command to follow Him. But John was also following Jesus, and Peter turned around, turned back from following Jesus [just as he lost his focus on Jesus when he was walking on the water towards Jesus]... to notice John was also following. The fate of others, the nature of their following or not of Jesus, is not [in this sense] directly our concern; our focus must be upon single-mindedly following Jesus as we by grace have been called to do.

21:22 *Jesus said to him: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow me*- If Peter had to die the death of the cross, he wondered what John would have to suffer. The Lord’s reply is that if John were not called to be a martyr, but lived without tasting death until the Lord’s return- what was that to Peter? He ought to still “Follow me”. The Lord may

be speaking literally, or using hyperbole in order to make Peter realize that absolutely nothing in the path or destiny of another man should distract him from *his* path. And we can well take that lesson; for so many stumble in their following of the Lord, or staying on the path intended, because of obsessions with others.

*21:23 This saying therefore went forth among the brothers, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he should not die, but: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you?*- We have a window here onto how easily there could arise misunderstandings in an illiterate community, going only on the reported speech of the Lord, passed around by memory and repetition. Hence the need for the Spirit to inspire definitive Gospel records as we have them, correcting such errors which would inevitably arise. We also note John's title for the believers as "the brothers". A new family relationship had been born due to the Lord's resurrection and continued spiritual life amongst them.

*21:24 This is the disciple that testifies of these things and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true-* The Gospel of John is the eyewitness account of John- he says that he testifies to all he has written. The "we" presumably refer to the elders of the Johannine community, the converts he had made, who as it were published his Gospel. If so, they would only have known that his witness was true because of the work of the Comforter, the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in their hearts enabling them to discern truth about Him. Alternatively, the "we" would refer to the other disciples, who alone had been with the Lord and John from the beginning of His ministry, and who could testify that John's account was true.

*21:25 And there are many other things which Jesus did, which if each one of them should be written down, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written-* The books written parallel the personal witness made of :24. The Lord had done so much in so many lives, that if each person were to write down their account, then "I suppose" the world could not contain the records. "I suppose" reads strangely as it stands; John is hardly one for using throw away terms such as "I guess...". The Greek literally means 'to make as oneself'. The idea may be that each one in whom the Lord Jesus had done things could write a witness as John had done in his Gospel record; and the world could not contain so many books of witness. But "the world" in John is nearly always the Jewish world; and so often, he alludes back to the prologue. His conclusion of the Gospel is surely a place where he would allude to the prologue. There we read that the Jewish world did not "receive" the testimony or *logos* of the Lord; and "contain" here can also mean "receive" [s.w. "All men cannot receive this saying", Mt. 19:11]. So the idea may be that the Jewish world would in no way receive all the testimonies made. This however would be a rather negative way to end. We have detected allusions to the great commission so often in John. Perhaps the idea is that the world, both the Jewish world and the *kosmos*, could and should be flooded with books of witness from those in whose lives the Lord had done things. For He "did" [s.w. "made"] disciples of men (4:1 s.w.), doing or making people whole (5:15 s.w.). Their 'books' would be like John's book of witness in his Gospel record; but all slightly different. This, then, would be the taking of the Lord Jesus into all the world, by personal witness of what He had done in human lives.

## ACTS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The former account-* Gk. *protos logos*. When John begins his Gospel with the idea of the *arche logos*, he is perhaps saying the same thing. The *logos* was the word or account of God's purpose in Jesus. Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote, one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account (Lk. 1:3,4). Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with Christ's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry.

Regarding the initial intention of Luke-Acts, see on 21:19.

*I made-* This is the same Greek word used in the next clause, concerning all that Jesus began to make or "do". The work or doing of Jesus is continued through the written record of that work- that seems to be the idea.

*O Theophilus-* A case could be made that Luke's account in his Gospel and in the Acts actually emphasizes how wealthy and middle class people came to the Lord- e.g. Joanna wife of Chuza, Cornelius the Centurion; Dionysius; Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus. Perhaps a reason for this was that he dedicated his works to the "noble" [Gk. 'well born', 'wealthy'] Theophilus (Acts 1:1). Luke, it seems to me, was writing to Theophilus because he wanted to convert him. And so he gives other examples of wealthy people who had also converted. He was urging the middle class to allow the radical call of Christ to reach to them. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

*Concerning all that Jesus began to do and to teach-* Reading Luke and Acts through together, it becomes apparent that the author [Luke] saw the acts of the apostles as a continuation of those of the Lord Jesus. This is why he begins Acts by talking about his "former treatise" of all that Jesus had *begun* to do, implying that He had continued His doings through the doings of the apostles (cp. Heb. 2:3, Jesus "began" to speak the Gospel and we continue His work). See on Acts 2:6; 2:7; 8:40. Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the 12 as they walked around

Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

*1:2 Until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandments through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen-* The day the Lord was taken up, He gave one commandment to the apostles, related to their possession of the Holy Spirit: to go into all the world with the Gospel. But why does Luke speak in the plural, "commandments"? It could be that here we have one of many examples of Hebrew idiom being used by the Jewish writers of the New Testament, even though they wrote in Greek. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby something is put in the plural (e.g. "deaths" in Is. 53:9) to emphasize the greatness of the one thing (e.g., *the* death, of Messiah). Could it not be that here we have something similar? The one great commandment is to go into all the world with the Gospel. We are the light of this world. We, the candles, were lit so that we might give light to others. Our duty is not merely to inform others of our doctrinal position, but to gain, win or catch [as fishermen] our fellow men for Christ.

*1:3 To whom, after his suffering, he also showed by many convincing proofs-* Acts 1:3 says that the Lord showed Himself to be alive to the disciples "by many infallible proofs". The suggestion is that they simply didn't accept Him as He stood there before Him; they failed to grasp that He was for real. They gave Him food to eat to check Him out; and He again ate before them in Galilee on His initiative.

*That he was alive, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking about the kingdom of God-* The Greek is literally: 'Speaking about the things concerning the Kingdom of God'. And this is exactly how the content of the Apostolic preaching is described in Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:31. Clearly what the Lord taught them became the basis of their teaching to others. They were a continuation of Him on earth, just as our witness should be likewise. It could even be that "the things concerning the Kingdom of God" became a technical term for a body of material which the Apostles taught, having heard it directly from the Lord during those 40 days.

*1:4 And, being assembled together with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem-* Rendered by AVmg. and RVmg. "eating together". We can note the association between eating and proof of resurrection; and also the idea of fellowship together. In the first century, to eat together was to fellowship together. It would seem that the command to remain in Jerusalem was given whilst 'eating together', in instruction at the breaking of bread meeting. That meeting continues to be the place where we receive instruction from our Lord, if we approach it in that spirit.

*But to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you heard from me-* Presumably referring to the promise of the Comforter made in the Upper Room.

1:5 *For John indeed baptized with water, but soon you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit*- The implication is that they had all been baptized by John the Baptist; his work of preparing the way for the Lord succeeded with that small group, even if it failed nationally. The contrast is between *with* water and *in* Spirit. I suggest therefore that the baptism in the Spirit refers to something internal and psychological, the gift of the Spirit in human hearts promised as "the comforter" in Jn. 14-16, which in some cases in the first century was manifest by visible external signs.

1:6 *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him*- The imperfect means they kept on asking.

*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*- Once the Gospel is preached world-wide, then the end will come (Mt. 24:14). And so the Lord replied to the question: 'When are you coming back?' by telling the questioners to go and preach the Gospel (Acts 1:6,8), as if the preaching of the word and the timing of the second coming are related. Likewise in the Olivet prophecy, the Lord gave them some signs of His return but told them that firstly, i.e. most importantly, the Gospel must be preached to all the world (Mk. 13:10)- implying that it is spreading the Gospel world-wide, not looking for the fulfilment of signs, that will bring about His return. Surely this would associate the exact timing of the Lord's return- for which He and the Father are ever eager- with the time when we have satisfactorily spread the Gospel far enough. When the harvest is ripe, then it is harvested. The Lord has to delay His coming because of the slowness and immaturity of our development; in these ways we limit Him. And it isn't enough to think that if we merely preach world-wide, therefore the Lord's coming will automatically be hastened. It is the bringing forth of fruit to His Name that is important to Him.

The disciples' request to know exactly when the Kingdom would be restored ('When will Ez. 21:25-27 be fulfilled?') was met with a promise that while they would never know the exact date, that was immaterial as they would possess the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit soon (Acts 1:7,8)- implying that what they would do with them would be a primary fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which they were enquiring about.

1:7 *And he said to them: It is not for you to know times or seasons*- There is clearly a difference between them. *Chronos*, "times", is at times used to mean 'delay'; and *chairos*, "seasons", is also translated "opportunity". There would appear to be reference here to the variable nature of the Divine program; there are delays, extensions, and preconditions which must be fulfilled, and therefore opportunities for hastening or realizing the day of the Lord's coming. But by the same token, there is apparently no calendar date set for it.

*Which the Father has set within his own authority*- Or, power. The Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not

the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death.

*1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth-* When the watchman of Is. 21:11 calls out "What hour of the night [will it come]?" (RVmg.) the answer is "Turn ye" (RV). This is when it will come- when Israel turn again in repentance. This is alluded to in Acts 1:7,8 and Mk. 13:28-33, where the answer to the question 'When will Jesus return?' is basically: 'Preach to Israel; lead them to repentance. That's when the Lord Jesus will return'.

*The Gospel* was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "you are witnesses... you will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

The possession of the Holy Spirit in the first century was possessing "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5), showing that at that time there was a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. Thus in answer to the question about whether He would then fully restore the Kingdom of God, our Lord basically said: 'When, exactly, you can't know. But you will receive Holy Spirit power coming upon you (Acts 1:8 AVmg.) and will spread the Gospel world-wide

from Jerusalem; which is tantamount to saying that in a limited sense the Kingdom is coming right now, although when it will finally be fully established is not for you to know'. Further support for this is found in our suggestion elsewhere that Kingdom prophecies like Is.2 were fulfilled to some degree in the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century.

The record of the Acts is a continuation of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach as recorded in the Gospels (Acts 1:1). The preachers were witnesses *of Jesus* (Acts 1:8). The logical objection to their preaching of a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Just as the Lord strangely said that His own witness to Himself was a valid part of His overall witness, so our lives are our own witness to the credibility of what we are saying.

When we read of how we are to be "witnesses" to all the world, a look under the surface of the text shows that the Greek word 'martyr' is being used (Acts 1:8). We're all martyrs. Augustine said that "The cause, not the suffering, makes a genuine martyr". That needs some reflection and time spent processing that profound observation. In his play *Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot defines a martyr as one "who has become an instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom". We can all enter into the definition of witness / martyrdom in this sense, insofar as we are 'in' the suffering Christ, even if in practice we may never be called to take a single blow to our body as the result of our witnessing.

Samaria is perhaps mentioned specifically because of the earlier command not to preach there during the Lord's ministry (Mt. 10:5).

"To the remotest part of the earth" need not be a reference to the great commission. It could be that this prediction had a specific, one-time fulfilment at Pentecost, where the Gospel was witnessed to Jews from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to Jews from the very ends of the earth / land promised to Abraham. If we understand the "earth" in a literal, global sense, then the Apostles didn't achieve this. They were told that the coming gift of the Holy Spirit would enable them to make this witness, and the most comfortable fit for the fulfilment of this is to simply read on in Acts and learn how the gift of speaking in the languages of the Jewish diaspora was given to them. They indeed achieved the intended witness on the day of Pentecost to Jews from the very areas predicted here in 1:8.

1:9 *And when he had said these things, as they were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight*— surely it was a cloud of Angels not water droplets. But so it looked to them standing on earth, and the record is written from that perspective. We find this so often in the Bible- the language of creation in Genesis 1 is an example, as are the references to 'demons'.

1:10 *And while they were looking earnestly into heaven as he went, two men stood by them in white clothing*- Of the 14 usages of the Greek word here used for "looking earnestly" in the NT, 12 are by Luke. This is what we would expect with Divine inspiration- the personality and word choice of an individual still comes through noticeably in the written



word, the writers were not zombified; and yet the overall product also uses words chosen by the Spirit, and is the Spirit's work and infallible.

1:11 *Who also said: You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven-* Why address them in this way? What was significant about them all being Galileans? We note that the Jewish audience of Acts 2:7 remarked likewise- "Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?", and Peter's Galilean accent could not be disguised in the courtyard. The records emphasize that the Lord was also considered a Galilean (Mt. 26:69; Lk. 23:6). Yet Galilee was despised. Perhaps the Angels were encouraging those men not to worry about their own inadequacy, lack of culture or erudition. Instead of just gaping at their vanishing Master, with thoughts of ethnic inadequacy arising in them, they were being encouraged to go out and make the witness which the Lord had asked of them. And the Angels were comforting them that their humble origins were full well known to God, and would not hinder them in their work for Him.

*Shall return in like manner as you saw him going into heaven-* The same Jesus who went into Heaven will *so* come again *in like manner*. The record three times says the same thing. The "like manner" in which the Lord will return doesn't necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the "like manner" to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord's people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will 'see' Him at His return "in like manner" as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day.

1:12 *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near to Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey-* In obedience to the command to remain in Jerusalem until they were given the Spirit (:4). I suggested on Lk. 24:50 that the Lord's ascension was from Bethany, and that perhaps they had gone out to the nearby mountain to see if they could still see Him.

1:13 *And when they arrived, they went into the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James-* The definite article suggests this was a well-known, specific meeting place. We note how Peter is always placed first in the lists of disciples. He, the most unstable and apparently least qualified for leadership, was the one chosen by the Lord as the leader of the pack. And He works with the same style today.

1:14- see on Acts 2:42.

*These all with one accord-* There are a number of words and phrases which keep cropping up in Acts, especially in the early chapters, which are kind of hallmarks of that early ecclesia. "With one accord" is one such. We begin in Acts 1:14: "These all continued with *one accord* in prayer". Then 2:1: "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all *with one accord* in *one place*". Now over to v.46: "Continuing daily *with one accord*... breaking bread... with... *singleness of heart*". And on to 4:24: "They lifted up their voice to God *with one accord*". Now to 5:12: "They were all *with one accord* in Solomon's porch". There is another example in 15:25 too. So it's quite obvious, then, that the fact the early ecclesia was

"with one accord" in those early, heady days is stamped as a hallmark over this record. But this phrase "with one accord" is also used in Acts about the united hatred of the world against those early brethren and sisters. The Jews ran upon Stephen "with one accord" (7:52), those of Tyre and Sidon were "with one accord" (12:20), "The Jews made insurrection against Paul with one accord" in Corinth (18:12), and at Ephesus the mob "rushed with one accord" against Paul (19:29). The same Greek word is used in all these cases (and it scarcely occurs outside Acts). It's quite obvious that we are intended to visualise that early ecclesia as being "with one accord". But we are also supposed to imagine the world around them "with one accord" being against them. The difference between them and the world was vast. The world was actively united against them, and thereby they came to be strongly united with each other.

*Continued earnestly in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers-* Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

*1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons) and said-* Is that all the Lord's miracles and ministry in Jerusalem had converted? It was from that apparently slender response that Christianity was born. So paucity of response to our message should be no discouragement. The AV is more literally accurate here: "the number of names together were...". This phrase recalls the description of the numbering of Israel in the OT, especially in Numbers 1, where the phrase "the number of names" occurs many times. Here was a new Israel formed, and being numbered so that they could go forward and inherit the Kingdom. See on 3:7.

*1:16 Brothers-* The believers are addressed as "brothers" here and in Acts 15:13; and yet the same phrase is then used about an unbaptized crowd of people who were listening to the Gospel being preached (Acts 2:29; 3:17; 13:26,38). It is also used in addressing those who in no way believed the Gospel (Acts 7:2; 22:1; 23:1,5). We note that Paul was called "brother" by Ananias even before he was baptized (Acts 9:17; 22:13); and Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 8:7-13 seems to suggest that he saw "every man" as his "brother", and sought not to put a stumbling block in the way of any and every member of the general public, whom he also calls "brother". This was surely because the early brethren had learnt the lesson taught to Peter; that they were to see all men as potentially cleansed in Christ, seeing that Christ died for all, and individuals are to be invited by us to accept that cleansing- in Peter's case, through extending table fellowship to them. The simple picture is that the early church was not so hung up as we may be today regarding whom they addressed as brother.

*It was necessary that the Scripture should be fulfilled-* Peter is quoting here from the Lord's recent words in Lk. 24:44, that the Scriptures must [s.w. 'necessary'] be fulfilled about Him.

*Which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David-* A classic statement concerning the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

*Concerning Judas, who was guide to those that took Jesus-* The way Judas led the armed men to take or seize Jesus in Gethsemane was etched in Peter's memory; the shock of realizing Judas' betrayal would have been enormous.

*1:17 For he was numbered among us and received his part in this ministry-* Alluding to Is. 14:10 LXX, where the King of Babylon is described as a star which fell from the sky and is met by the kings of the earth, who comment that he was now "numbered with us". The disciples saw Judas as the "guide" or leader of those who killed Jesus (:16), and saw him as having left leadership amongst the Lord's people for a place of leadership amongst the people of His enemies. This helps us better understand how Judas is described as 'satan', the adversary, and how he is presented as personified evil.

*1:18 Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out-* See on Mt. 27:7. The way Judas "burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18) may not be only a description of a bungled suicide. "Bowels" is elsewhere *always* used figuratively. One wonders whether it doesn't also describe how he fell down headlong, as Saul did when he knew his condemnation, and burst asunder within him, and poured out his heart in desperation, in the very pathetic little field he had bought for the price of the Son of God. In an utterly terrible figure, Ezekiel describes the condemnation of Israel as them being a woman trying to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). This was and will be the extent of self-hatred and desperation. She will be alienated from her lovers of this world, and God's mind will be alienated from her (Ez. 23:17,18,22). The utter aloneness of the condemned is impossible to plumb.

*1:19 And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, so much so that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood-* "What will you give me...?" suggests that Judas' motive was partly financial. And all he could buy with it was a muddy clay field which became worthless, which nobody else wanted to own anyway. The suicide of Judas and the way he had bought or been given a field for his evil work became known to all. It was impossible for the Jews to disguise the fact that what they had done was known by all, and all their plotting had not been blessed but had come to an unpleasant and embarrassing end. They really had no option but to repent and accept the risen Lord; but their pride was too great. "Akeldama" has been linked to the name of the field where the young men of David and Saul died in their own blood when they tried to take the Kingdom immediately in the wrong way (2 Sam. 2:16). We note that the Aramaic "Akeldama" was the "proper tongue" of the Jerusalem dwellers. They would have claimed to be true Hebrews; but in truth they were part Gentile in God's eyes, hence their true language is called Aramaic. It was the "dwellers at Jerusalem" who later repented and were converted by Peter in chapter 2; their consciences began to be touched by hearing of the tragedy of Judas, and how deeply unblessed was all connected with him.

1:20 *For it is written in the book of Psalms: Let his habitation be made desolate and let no one dwell therein, and his office let another take* - The condemnation of Jewry for crucifying Christ in Ps. 69:25 ("let *their* habitation be desolate") is quoted in the singular about Judas in Acts 1:20. What was true of Judas was also true of Israel in general; in the same way as the pronouns used about Judas merge from singular into plural in Ps. 55:13-15 ("a man mine equal... let death seize upon them"), as also in Ps. 109:3 cp. v.8.

Psalm 109 is a prophecy of Christ's betrayal and death (:8 = Acts 1:20). The satans ("adversaries") of the Lord Jesus which the Psalm speaks of (:4,20,29) were the Jews, and the specific 'Satan' of v. 6 was Judas. Psalm 55:13-15 foretells Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It speaks of Judas in the singular, but also talk of his work as being done by a group of people – the Jews, in practice: "It was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together... let death seize them (plural), and let *them* go down quickly into hell" (cp. Judas' end). Likewise the other prophecy of Judas' betrayal also connects him with the Jewish system: "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread (cp. Jesus passing the sop to Judas), has lifted up his heel against me. But You, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them" (Ps. 41:9,10). Thus Judas is being associated with the Jews who wanted to kill Jesus, and therefore he, too, is called a Devil. Both Judas and the Jews were classic 'devils' due to their surrender to the flesh. This is further confirmed by a look at Psalm 69. Verse 22 is quoted in Romans 11:9,10 concerning the Jews: "Let their table become a snare before them... let their eyes be darkened". The passage continues in Psalm 69:25: "Let *their* habitation be desolate; let none dwell in *their* tents". This is quoted in Acts 1:16,20 as referring specifically to Judas, but the pronouns are changed accordingly: "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas... Let *his* [singular] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and *his* bishopric let another take".

Ps. 109:8 is quoted in Acts 1:20 concerning Judas, suggesting that the preceding v.6 reveals Christ's thoughts about him: "Set Thou a wicked man over him: and let satan stand at his right hand", implying that Jesus prayed for the Jewish satan to help or co-operate with Judas (which is how the idiom of standing at the right hand is used in Ps. 109:31). This is tantamount to not praying that Judas would overcome the advances of the Jews which the Lord would have been aware they were making. But he could encourage Peter that he had prayed for him to resist these advances (Lk. 22:32). The whole of Ps. 109 is a prayer requesting the punishment of Judas, asking God to confirm him in his supreme apostasy: "Let his prayer become sin" (Ps. 109:7). The last section of the Psalm (109:22-29) describes Christ's sufferings on the cross in language that has many connections with Ps.22 and 69; and as with them there is a sudden breakthrough at the end into looking forward to praising God "among the multitude" (Ps. 109:30), as there is in Ps. 22:22. This may mean that it was on the cross that the enormity of Judas' sin was fully realized by Christ, although he had previously recognized it to some degree before the cross (Jn. 19:11; Mt. 26:24).

1:21 *Therefore, of the men that have been with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us*- Only two men fitted the requirement. But we hear nothing of either of them in the Gospel records. That demonstrates that when we read of "the twelve" experiencing various things, being in the boat with Jesus, the breaking of bread, the feeding miracles etc., there were at least these two men also present- and probably many others at various points of the ministry, although only these two individuals were consistently present all the time.

1:22 *Beginning from the baptism of John, to the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection-* This means that Joseph and Matthias were also present at the last supper; this is one of many reasons for rejecting the idea that the supper was a closed table strictly for the twelve. Without wishing to be unduly critical of the disciples at this point, it is surely so that a witness of the resurrection was all the same a witness, whether or not they were confirmed as such. One is a witness of what they have seen, regardless of whether they are officially appointed as such. This is one of several reasons for having some unease at the path taken here and the drawing of lots, to the point that I feel we cannot reliably also draw lots to decide whom to appoint.

1:23 *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus; and Matthias-* The problem with democracy and choices by lot is the selection of the candidates. "Put forward" is the word for "appointed". They decided on the candidates. Perhaps they were the only two who fitted the criteria of :22; but it seems it was the disciples themselves who chose those parameters for choice. The whole incident seemed unnecessary; we never hear of these brethren again in the record. We do note however that Peter is described as "standing up with the eleven" (2:14), suggesting they stood as a group of twelve and therefore the replacement disciple stood with them at that point.

1:24 *And they prayed, and said: Lord, you who knows the hearts of all men, show us which of these two is the one whom you have chosen-* It could be argued that giving God a binary choice like this was as it were forcing His hand, and therefore the result was invalid. And we don't hear any more about Matthias, with the term 'disciple' and 'apostle' being used about a far wider community than the original 'twelve', as if the significance of having been in the 'twelve' was somehow lessened as the ministry of the Spirit developed.

1:25 *To take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place-* The contrast is with his "place" in the ministry mentioned at the beginning of the verse. The rejected have their own individual condemnation, because so much of the pain of it will be because of their own personal reflection on "the place" they might have had, compared to "the place" of condemnation and rejection.

1:26 *And they cast lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles-* As noted on :21,22 and :23, the whole process here seems somewhat lacking in solid Biblical and procedural support, and would in my judgment be unsafe to use as justification for using lots.

## ACTS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place-* Literally, "was being fulfilled" (RVmg.). The Mosaic feast of Pentecost was a prophecy looking forward to what was now happening in the Christian dispensation. In commentary on 11:17, I discuss the possibility that the disciples were themselves baptized at this time and received the Spirit as a result of that. The mention of "one place" deepens the impression of their unity.

2:2 *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting-* This seems to be intentionally contrasted with the fact they were sitting in the "upper room" of that house. Perhaps the idea is that the activity of God with the apostles was to be seen throughout the entire house / body of believers. Or maybe the allusion is to the glory of God filling the entire house of Solomon's temple. The body of Christ was now the temple, and God had accepted it by filling it with His Spirit.

2:3 *And there appeared to them tongues like fire, separating and resting upon each one of them personally-* The tongues were not fire, but "like fire" because of the reddish colour of the human tongue. This was a visual reflection of how the gift of speaking in human languages was being given to each of those present. It is probably unwise to assume that this fulfils the prediction that the Lord would baptize with Spirit and fire- because the tongues were not of literal fire. See on Acts 2:45.

2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them to speak-* The imperfect means that the Spirit kept on giving them. Throughout the ministry of each one present, they were given multiple times the ability to speak forth the Gospel in languages different to their native tongue.

2:5 *Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men, Jews from every nation under heaven-* See on :9. The Greek means to live permanently. These were diaspora Jews who had retired to Jerusalem and would have been living there throughout the Lord's ministry and had probably encountered John the Baptist and perhaps some had been baptized by them. The "multitude" (singular in the Greek) of them who were gathered together (:6) therefore refers to this group of retirees, rather than to the general public. We can understand why Peter specifically accuses this group of having responsibility for the crucifixion of the Lord- because they as the 'elders' in age and authority had allowed it. The later appeal was to them and to their children [Jews still living in their family homes in the diaspora], and to all who were afar off- either the Gentiles, or all Jews in the diaspora, not just the children of the Jerusalem retirees.

2:6 *And at this sound the crowds came together-* "The multitude". The Acts record repeatedly describes the converts as "the multitude of the disciples" (2:6; 4:32; 5:14,16; 6:2,5; 12:1,4; 15:12,30; 17:4; 19:9; 21:22), using the same word to describe the "multitude of the disciples" who followed the Lord during His ministry (Lk. 5:6; 19:37). There is no doubt that Luke intends us to see all converts as essentially continuing the witness of those men who walked around Palestine with the Lord between AD30 and AD33, stumbling and struggling through all their misunderstandings and pettiness, the ease with which they were distracted from the essential... to be workers together with Him. See on Acts 1:1.

*And they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language-* Gk. *dialektos*, meaning that the language was heard with perfect local pronunciation; and another evidence that the gift of speaking in languages ["tongues"] was intelligible human language and not the mumbo jumbo of Pentecostalism.

*2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying: Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?-* Luke describes the "amazement" at the preaching and person of Jesus (Lk. 2:47,48; 4:36; 5:26; 8:56; 24:22), and then uses the same word to describe the "amazement" at the apostles (Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). See on Acts 1:1. Galileans were noted for their heavy accent and grammatical mistakes. Yet exactly those people, the least qualified as linguists, were chosen to perform the greatest linguistic miracle of all time.

*2:8 And how is it each of us heard-* The miracle was therefore in their hearing as well as in, or perhaps apart from, the words coming from the mouths of the speakers-in-tongues.

*In his own native language-* Gk. *dialektos*, see on :6.

*2:9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia-* The list of nations here seems to be designed to go around the compass from Jerusalem, giving the impression that people from the whole world had heard the Gospel. They were from "every nation under heaven" (:5). Paul surely alludes to this when he writes later that "the Gospel was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). I suggest he is referring here to Peter's work on Pentecost; and in commentary elsewhere, especially on chapter 20, I will suggest that Paul struggled not to be jealous of Peter's success at Pentecost. So how he writes in Col. 1:23 is giving full credit to Peter in a commendable way. The Old Testament predictions that the message of Messiah would go into all the world was thereby fulfilled, in a sense. But it didn't involve any missionary activity in the sense of travelling throughout the world. People from various nations were living permanently in Jerusalem, and the Gospel being preached to them was counted as the Gospel having been preached to every creature under heaven. In our day, we too have a commission to take the Gospel to every nation; but given then phenomena of international migration, we can witness to the Lord Jesus in cities like London, New York, Paris, Sydney... and thereby be counted as having taken the Gospel into the whole world. And in the same spirit, the Lord surely counts internet witness the same.

*2:10 In Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes-* The fact proselytes were baptized is evidence that there were Gentiles baptized before Cornelius. The early believers were however terribly slow to grasp the simple truth that the Gospel should go to all nations. But the Lord kept nudging them towards realizing this, and the baptism of proselytes is an example. We experience the same kinds of nudges towards grasping those things which ought to be obvious to us if we respect the Lord's word.

*2:11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our language-* The miracle was also in the hearing / perception of the listeners, as well as in the nature of the language proceeding from the mouths of the language speakers.

*The mighty works of God-* Only used elsewhere in Lk. 1:49 concerning the mighty things done by God in His Son.

2:12 *And they were all amazed and were perplexed, saying to each other: What does this mean?*- “Perplexed” is Gk. 'doubted'. Contrary to modern Pentecostal claims, the gift of tongues did not of itself inspire faith in the hearers; these still doubted, and others passed it off as alcohol freeing a person up to use talents [languages, in this case] which were normally dormant.

2:13 *But others mocking said: They are filled with new wine!*- Seeing the miracle was in their hearing as well as in the mouths of the apostles, this was no possible reason. But this is the length to which some will go to deny the Lord's action in human life. A reason, *any* reason, has to be given to explain it away.

2:14 *But Peter, standing with the eleven*- Peter stood up along with the eleven others; thus the record accepts that Mathias had been accepted and that the entity known as 'the twelve' had been reconstituted. We read of "the twelve" in Acts 6:2. However we do not read further in Acts after 6:2 of "the twelve" so it would appear they played no official role in the later development of the church.

*Lifted up his voice and addressed them: You men of Judea and all that dwell in Jerusalem, let this be understood by you, and listen to my words*- It would have become public news in Jerusalem that the man who nearly killed Malchus had slipped in to the High Priest's yard, and just got out in time before they lynched him. And the fool he had made of himself would for sure have been exaggerated and gossiped all round. Jerusalem would have had the small town gossip syndrome, especially at Passover time. Every one of his oaths with which he had disowned his Lord would have been jokingly spread around in the three days while Jesus lay dead. But then Peter's preaching of the Gospel after the resurrection reached a pinnacle which probably no other disciple has reached, not even Paul. No one individual made such huge numbers of converts, purely on the basis of his words of preaching. Nobody else was *so* persuasive, could cut hardened men to the heart as he did, and motivate them to be baptized immediately. He brought men far more highly educated and cultured than himself to openly say from the heart: “What shall we do?”, in the sense: ‘Having done what we’ve done, whatever will become of us?’. And of course Peter had been in just that desperate position a month ago. He was just the man to persuade them. And yet on the other hand, there was no man more unlikely. The rules of social and spiritual appropriacy demanded that someone who had so publicly denied his Lord keep on the back burner for quite some time. And Peter of all men would have wished it this way. See on Acts 10:35,36.

2:15 *These*- See on 2:18 *My handmaids*.

*Are not drunk as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day*- See on 2 Pet. 2:13. Peter's speech of Acts 2 was made in response to a mocker's comment that the speaking in tongues was a result of alcohol abuse (Acts 2:13,14). We would likely have told those men not to be so blasphemous, or just walked away from them. But Peter responds to them with a speech so powerful that men turned around and repented and were baptized on the spot. Or it could be that the comment that they sounded drunk was made in jest, and Peter responds likewise tongue in cheek- for surely he must have known that men can be found drunk at 9 a.m. Is. 5:11 laments how some in Israel were drunk in the morning, so the possibility was not so obviously absurd as Peter might appear, at first blush, to be suggesting. This would then become an example of answering a fool according to his folly.



2:16 *But this is the fulfilment of that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel-* Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a linear chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfilment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples). These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfilment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [i.e. you are seeing a fulfilment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]... and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]... the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?], before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21).

Typical of the NT writers, Peter doesn't quote from the Masoretic [Hebrew] text, but from the Septuagint, and in Joel 2 there are significant differences. And yet Peter adds and changes things even from the LXX. The inspired writers don't quote exactly, and often mix interpretation with quotation.

2:17 *And it shall be in the last days, says God-* The phrase doesn't have to necessarily refer to the last days before the Lord's second coming. It could equally refer to the last days of some other period- in this case, the Mosaic system. But the phrase is of course ambiguous- exactly because the Lord's second coming could have occurred then, but the various required preconditions were not met. The LXX also has as the Masoretic Text: "Afterward". "The last days" would appear to be Peter's inspired interpretation.

*I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams-* A prophecy apparently about "all" here has a specific fulfilment in a limited group. Other Biblical references to "all" must likewise be understood; from God's perspective, the believers are "all things" to Him.

2:18 *Yes, and in those days will I pour out My Spirit on My servants and on My handmaids, and they shall prophesy-* In order to see a fulfilment of this at that time of Pentecost, surely there were female believers who also began speaking in foreign languages- although that is not recorded. Often the NT quotes the OT selectively, omitting words and phrases which were not relevant to the fulfilment. The fact the "handmaids" and "daughters" (:17) are mentioned would surely mean that there were women also given the gifts at this time. The fact this is not specifically recorded is yet another example of how the records are so abbreviated. The fact women aren't recorded as publicly preaching at this time is no reason

to think they did not. Likewise the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy meant that there were both old and young men preaching (:17). The "all" who were "together in one place" (2:1) were those who received the gifts, all within the house; not just the apostles. However, 2:7 records the impression that "all" who were speaking in foreign languages were from Galilee. The women / sisters in view were therefore presumably also from Galilee. Peter "and the eleven" stated that "these are not drunk" (:15)- rather than 'We are not drunk'. The use of "these" suggests that there were others apart from 'the twelve' who were preaching with the Spirit gifts. It was a shameful thing for a Jewish man to talk publicly to a woman, let alone for her to read the Torah, and for a woman to publicly preach God's word would have been nothing short of scandalous. In this we have a challenge to our own sense of inadequacy in witness; women, Galileans, the illiterate and poorly educated... were those used by God to make history's greatest and most effective public witness to Christ.

*2:19 And I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke-* Blood, fire and smoke columns suggest Mosaic sacrifices, in which the blood had to be poured out and then the carcass burnt. God's judgments are described as Him having a sacrifice (Jer. 46:10), and here the AD70 judgment of Jerusalem is surely in view. This is the language of Mt. 24:5-7 about the same event.

Thomson (*Land and the Book*, vol. 2, p. 311) suggests the allusion in this passage is to the whirlwind sandstorms, which are appropriate figures of Divine judgment: "We have two kinds of sirocco, one accompanied with vehement wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sandcloud, through which the sun, shorn of his beams, looked like a globe of dull smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested that strong prophetic figure of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Wonders in the heaven and in the earth; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran I have seen a score of them marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resemble pillars of smoke."

*2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, that great and notable day-* Language clearly relevant to the day of the second coming. The conclusion is quite clear- that day could have come in the first century, but it didn't. What was potentially possible didn't happen because Israel didn't repent. And so it has been delayed until our 'last days'.

*2:21 And it shall be that whoever-* It seems that the early brethren chose to understand the Lord's universal commission as meaning going out to preach to Jews of all nations, and they saw the response of Acts 2 as proof of this. And yet "all nations" is used about the Gentiles in all its other occurrences in Matthew (4:15; 6:32; 10:5,18; 12:18,21; 20:19,25). Such intellectual failure had a moral basis- they subconsciously couldn't hack the idea of converting Gentiles into the Hope of Israel. They allowed themselves to assume they understood what the Lord meant, to assume they had their interpretation confirmed by the events of Acts 2... instead of baring themselves to the immense and personal import of the Lord's commission to take Him to literally all. We too can read Scripture and assume we understand it, and thereby skip over massive implications for us.

*Shall call on the name of the Lord-* Joel 2:32 seems to prophesy of multitudes calling upon the name of the Lord in the 'last days'. The preliminary fulfilment of this in Acts 2:21 must surely be repeated in the ultimate 'last days'. And it may be that it is multitudes of Diaspora Jews who respond, as it was in Acts 2... The description of "the remnant" being saved out of Jerusalem and mount Zion, the temple mount, may mean that they go into the temple area in the last days to seek safety as the Jews did in AD70, and this is where they are at the moment of the Lord's intervention. Joel 2:32 must have had its primary fulfilment in the redemption of this remnant, and it therefore has an application to the salvation of the latter-day Jewish remnant out of Arab-occupied Jerusalem: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord (i.e. truly pray for deliverance in faith, perhaps through calling upon themselves the Lord's name through baptism into Christ) shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 19:30,31 for the mention of those two terms) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah and his prophets), and in the remnant...". This passage is quoted in a different context in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13, but this does not preclude its application to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem in the last days. This New Testament usage is regarding how a convert should eagerly call upon himself the Lord's salvation/deliverance from sin in Christ. This should therefore be done with the same sense of urgency and desperate intensity as the persecuted remnant of the last days will do, like their counterparts within Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time.

*Shall be saved-* The quotation from Joel has spoken of an outpouring of Spirit gifts, followed by a time of trouble in the land, and then the coming of the great day of the Lord. The immediate context of this offer of salvation was therefore regarding saving from the destruction which was to come upon Israel and Jerusalem specifically. Peter later appealed for people to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to save themselves from [the judgment to come upon] that wicked generation (:40).

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to "sink" into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question 'Who will be the greatest?', that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. "sink"] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don't swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were "tossed" or 'tormented' (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be "tormented" in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter's salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: "Save me!". Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to "save [themselves]" by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

*2:22 You men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God, by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in the midst of*

*you-* The crowd being addressed were Jews who were permanently living at Jerusalem; the crowd had all met the Lord Jesus and seen His miracles.

*Even as you yourselves know-* These Jerusalem residents had known in their conscience that Jesus was indeed "attested by God" as Messiah. Like Paul at this time, they were kicking against the goads.

*2:23 Him, being delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God-* Perhaps Peter is addressing the sense some of the Jews had that the Lord's death was according to God's will, and therefore they were the less guilty.

*You by the hand of men outside the Law, did crucify and slay-* Although it was Roman hands who crucified the Lord, Peter reminds the Jews that God judged it to have been effectively their hands. Their sin was not mitigated against by the fact that others had done it, when they planned it.

*2:24 Whom God raised up, having loosened the pangs of death; because it was not possible that he should be held by it-* Quoting Ps. 18:5 LXX. There are some passages which imply the Lord Jesus was somehow conscious during His three days in the grave. Evidently this was not the case. And yet the resurrection loosed the birth-pangs of death. Those three days are likened to labour, in the Lord's case bringing forth life through death. Yet He was dead and unconscious. But to the Father, He saw things simply differently. Sometimes God speaks from His timeless perspective, at other times His words are accommodated to us. Likewise from the Father's perspective, the spirit of Christ went and preached to the people of Noah's day at the time of His death. Yet this didn't happen in real time in such a way.

*2:25 For David said concerning him-* David is one of the major OT types of the Lord Jesus. The words of David in Ps. 16 are quoted in Acts 2:25,29 concerning Jesus: "I have set the Lord always before me... he is at my right hand... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption". These are words describing David's feelings about his own death and resurrection; and yet so identified was he with the Messiah, that they are quoted as being directly true of Jesus. But Acts 2:29 also quotes these words with a slightly different spin- in that David saw the Lord *Jesus* always before him, and it was this sense that stabilized him. This could only have been true in that David understood all his feelings and present and future experiences [e.g. resurrection, not being suffered to corrupt eternally] as being typical of the Lord Jesus. He so understood himself as a type of the One to come that he saw this person as ever with him. This is the extent of the typology. 1 Chron. 17:17 in Young's Literal has David saying: "Thou hast seen me as a type of the man on high" [i.e. Messiah]. David describes himself at ease with clearly Messianic titles such as 'the Christ', 'the man raised on high', and then goes on to speak of the Messiah who *is to come* on the "morning without clouds", admitting that "verily *my* house is not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:1-5). This is only really understandable if we accept that David consciously saw himself as a type of the future Messiah. The main reason why there is so much deep personal detail about David is because we are intended to come to know him as a person, to enter into his mind- so that we can have a clearer picture of the mind and personality of the Lord Jesus. This is why the thoughts of David, e.g. in Ps. 16:8-11, are quoted as being the very thoughts of Christ (Acts 2:27). So Christ-centred was David's mind that he "*foresaw* (not "saw" - disproof of the pre-existence) the Lord (Jesus) always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved" (Acts 2:25). David was obsessed, mentally dominated, by his imagination of Christ, so much so that his imagination of his future descendant gave him

practical strength in the trials of daily life. Small wonder we are bidden know and enter into David's mind. Likewise the book of Genesis covers about 2000 years of history, but almost a quarter of the narrative concerns Joseph; surely because we are intended to enter into Joseph, and thereby into the mind of Christ.

*I saw the Lord always before my face-* With David we should be able to say that we see the Lord [the Lord Jesus] ever before our face, so that we will not be moved by anything. However, we could also interpret the quotation as David solely talking about the future feelings of Jesus; the "Lord" in view would therefore be the Lord God.

*For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved-* The Lord Jesus felt God was at his right hand; but He is now on the Father's right hand. We see here a mutuality between Father and Son.

*2:26 Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope* - Literally, to dwell in a tent. The idea is that death is merely setting up a tent to pass the night in, until the day of resurrection dawns. David said that just because "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding", therefore he wanted to be as generous as possible in providing for the work of God's house (1 Chron. 29:14-16). So sure is the hope of resurrection that the Lord interpreted God being the God of Abraham as meaning that to Him, Abraham was living. Death is no barrier to God's continuing identity with His people. His faith in the resurrection is so sure that He speaks of death as if it is not. And in our weakness, we seek to look beyond the apparent finality of death likewise. Because David firmly believed in a resurrection, "my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; moreover also my flesh shall tabernacle in hope" (Acts 2:26 RV). His whole life 'tabernacled in hope' because of what he understood about resurrection. This was and is the power of basics. Yet we can become almost over-familiar with these wonderful ideas such as resurrection.

*2:27 Because You will not leave my soul in the grave, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption-* The women's devotion to the Lord, coupled with Joseph and Nicodemus going to such extraordinary lengths to have the Lord speedily buried in a new tomb, with more spices than were used for the burial of the Caesars, ensured that the Lord's body did not corrupt after three days. We note that Martha assumed that after three days, a corpse had usually started to smell because corruption was so advanced. However, the lack of corruption of the Lord's corpse was not 'allowed' by God, even if He worked through the freewill devotions of the Lord's loving followers. Given the Jewish belief and experience that after three days a corpse has seriously decayed, perhaps the reason the Lord remained dead for three days in order to demonstrate that His resurrection was indeed a miracle and not some quick resuscitation.

*2:28 You made known to me the ways of life, you shall make me full of gladness with Your countenance-* "The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the mortal and the immortal Jesus.

Acts 2:28 quotes Psalm 16 concerning Christ's resurrection and ascension: "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance". So Christ's fullness of joy was to see God's face, and

He has left us His joy (John 15). This was "the joy set before Him", and it is ours too. This is our fullness of joy, to see God's face, spiritually in this life, and physically in the future. After asking us to let His Words abide in us, Jesus said He had told us that so that our joy might be full (Jn. 15:7,11). So the effect of the Word and of true repentance and turning to God is the same as seeing God's face- it should bring that same fullness of joy. Other passages make the same connection between the Word and God's face shining upon us- e.g. Ps. 119:135 "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy statutes".

*2:29 Brothers, I may say to you freely about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day-* The Greek for "freely" means boldly, confidently, openly. This was a characteristic of Peter's public speaking (Acts 4:13,31), and it is used frequently in the New Testament of our boldness. We must ask ourselves whether we experience this; such a characteristic arises from trust that truly, we have been forgiven and will by grace live eternally. The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet they got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" (*parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke to *them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

*2:30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body he would set one upon his throne-* Some manuscripts add *according to the flesh*. This expression, *kata sarx*, is a very clear statement of the humanity of the Lord Jesus and His lack of personal pre-existence- seeing He was the fruit of David's body or, as the Greek literally says, his hip or creative power. Acts 2:30-33 says that our Lord's exaltation in Heaven fulfils, albeit primarily, the promise to David of Christ reigning on his throne. This is confirmed by 2 Sam.7:12 saying that God would "set up" David's seed to have an eternal Kingdom; and "set up" in the Septuagint is the same word as "resurrect", as if in some way the promise would be realized after Christ's resurrection.

*2:31 He foreseeing this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in the grave, nor did his flesh see corruption-* This may mean that David foresaw and consciously spoke about the death and resurrection of his great descendant, Messiah. But inspired writers can also state things whereby they speak of and 'foresee' things which they themselves do not fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12). Therefore we need not read these words as having to mean that David personally understood all the things about the Christ of which he spoke / wrote.

*2:32 This Jesus did God raise up, of which we are all witnesses-* The "we" presumably refers to the group of 120 of Acts 1; the "we", including men and women, who were witnessing with the gift of languages.

*2:33 Therefore, being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear-* John repeatedly records Christ's description of the cross as Him being "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14; 8:18; 12:32,34). But Peter uses the very same word to describe Christ's exaltation in resurrection

and ascension (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Looking back, Peter saw the cross as a lifting up in glory, as the basis for the Lord's exaltation afterwards. At the time, it seemed the most humiliating thing to behold. It was anything but exaltation, and Peter would have given his life in the garden to get the Lord out of it. But now he saw its glory.

The Greek for "poured out" is often used about the shedding of the Lord's blood. It was on account of His sacrifice that the Holy Spirit was shed. That seems to be the connection. The miraculous dimension of the gifts, in this case the understanding of languages, was a specific thing at a specific time. But the power of spiritual regeneration, the spirit / power of holiness, continues to be poured out in the lives of believers. Paul speaks as if the outpouring was valid for all, not just those at the day of Pentecost: "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:5,6).

An appreciation of the Lord's exaltation will in itself provoke in us repentance and service (Acts 2:33-36). A vision of the exalted Lord Jesus was what gave Stephen such special inspiration in his final minutes (Acts 7:56).

*2:34 For David did not ascend into Heaven-* But it was Jesus who did; He, as David's 'lord', is sitting at God's right hand, and so it has to be Him and not David who is now in Heaven. This statement clearly disproves the idea of the faithful going to Heaven at death. Peter is tackling Judaism's tendency to think that whoever Messiah is or was or shall be, he is in any case inferior to the likes of Moses and David. Peter reasons that the fact David spoke of his 'lord', i.e. Jesus, being at the right hand of Yahweh therefore meant that Jesus was in Heaven. For that is where God's throne is.

*But he himself said: The Lord said to my Lord, sit on My right hand-* Peter uses Scriptures like Ps. 110 and 118 in exactly the same way as he heard the Lord use them (Acts 2:34 = Mt. 22:44; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7 = Mt. 21:42). A list could be compiled for Peter's allusions to the Lord as I have for Paul's. It may be that Peter's difficult reference to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19) is a reference to Is. 61 in the same way as Christ used it in Lk. 4:18. This point is meaningless without an appreciation of the extent to which Christ's words featured in the writing and thought of Peter.

*2:35 Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet-* The context is Peter's appeal for those who crucified the Lord to repent. They were His "enemies"; but once they became a footstool for His feet, then He would return. Therefore Peter appealed for their repentance, apparently understanding being 'a footstool for His feet' as meaning they would put themselves at His feet in obeisance. The Lord's footstool is the place where His worshippers come (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Is. 66:1-3). The Father was willing to "make" His Son's enemies, those responsible for His death, into His worshippers. But they had to do their part, in repentance and acceptance of the activity of His Holy Spirit. Heb. 10:13 adds the detail that the Lord Jesus is eagerly looking for [AV "expecting"] His former enemies to become His footstool- and then He will return. This is why witness to Jewish people is so deeply significant in God's program.

*2:36 Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified-* Peter's growth of understanding of Jesus as 'Christ' grew. He declared Him as this during His ministry (Jn. 6:69), and also as 'Lord', but he preached Him as having been *made* Lord and Christ after the resurrection (Acts 2:36). He saw the Lord's status as having changed so much, even though he used the same words to

describe it, and therefore he responded the more fully to Him. He so often refers to the Name of Christ, which had now been given Him (Acts 4:12 RV)- as if this new Name and the redemption in it was the motive power for his witness. Jesus had been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11). But Peter uses each of these titles as if they had been given to the Lord anew, after His resurrection. And indeed they had been. They were no longer just appropriate lexical items for Peter to use; they were the epitome of all that the Lord was and had been and ever would be, all that He stood for and had enabled. And he preached them to men as the basis upon which salvation and forgiveness was now possible. See on Acts 5:31.

2:37- see on Acts 2:12.

*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart-* The NT emphasizes the power of the cross, and the horrendous fact that we are really asked to share in His sufferings (e.g. Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:1,13; Rev. 2:10). The Acts record seems to bring out how the Lord's people shared in the Lord's mortal experiences (e.g. Acts 4:7 = Mt. 21:23,24). The early converts were "pricked" (Acts 2:37), using the same word as in Jn. 19:34 for the piercing of the Lord's side. Paul speaks of how in his refusing of payment from Corinth, "I made myself servant unto all", just as the Lord was on the cross. In accommodating himself to his audience, "to the weak became I as weak", just as the Lord was crucified through weakness. In our preaching and in our ecclesial lives, we articulate elements of the Lord's cross in our attitude to others.

*And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: Brothers, what shall we do?-* Luke is fond of using this Greek phrase in recording the response provoked by encounters with the Lord Jesus and the message about Him (Lk. 3:10,12,14; 6:11; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18; 19:48; 23:34; Acts 4:16; 9:6; 10:6; 16:30; 22:10). This is therefore a most significant phrase for Luke. His preaching of the Gospel (for Luke-Acts are missionary documents) was to provoke this question in us too- what shall we do?

*2:38 And Peter said to them: Every one of you should-* This might seem somewhat redundant, but remember that Peter was faced by a crowd of at least 3000 people. He sensed the tendency towards group action, being baptized because that was what the crowd was doing. And so he seeks to remind them that repentance is a very individual response to our own sins and God's salvation in Christ. And the same caveat needs to be sounded in communities which [quite rightly] raise their children in the Christian faith, surrounding them with those of similar background.

*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins-* This language is intentionally reminiscent of how Luke earlier described the work of John the Baptist four years ago, which would have been well known to these Jerusalem Jews: he preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:3). Perhaps they had been baptized by John- for "all Jerusalem" were baptized by John. But that was not Christian baptism, which was only instituted after the Lord's death and resurrection; and there was no subsequent gift of Holy Spirit made accessible by that baptism. So maybe the emphasis was upon "in the name of Jesus Christ". Those baptized by John were baptized into Jesus in Acts 19:1-5.

Repentance is a very complex and personal issue. There is no evidence that each of those people gave a theological statement of their understanding.



The appeal to "be baptized" is asking us to let something be done to us; and the ultimate doer of baptism is the Father and Son. Israel's crossing of the Red Sea was a prototype of Christian baptism; the people were baptized into Moses, as we are baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 10:2). "They were baptized" again suggests they were baptized by someone- God. If the idea was that they had of their own volition put themselves under water, the Greek [and English] would be different- something like 'They baptized themselves into Moses'.

*And you shall receive the gift-* Rom. 5:16 and 6:23 describe salvation as "*the* gift"- inviting comparison with "*the* gift" of the Spirit in Acts 2:38. The only other time in the NT that we read of 'receiving' 'the gift' is in Rom. 5:17, where believers receive the gift of imputed righteousness and grace, i.e. salvation. And Acts 2:39 seems to be quoting Joel 2:32 concerning salvation as if this is what the gift of the Spirit was. Peter's reference to the promised gift being to those "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". Eph. 2:8 also describes the gift as being salvation, saying that "by one Spirit (this gift) we all have access to the Father" (2:18). This is further validated by the fact that Eph. 2:13-17 is also alluding to Is. 57:19: "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace... (who) came and preached peace to you which were far off". Ps. 51:12,13 draws a parallel between possessing God's holy Spirit, and benefiting from His salvation.

*Of the Holy Spirit-* The repeated use of definite articles suggests that a clearly defined gift was in view. The promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift is surely referring to the promises of the Comforter in John 14-16. These promises contained the prospect of internal activity in the heart of believers, to the extent that they would as it were have the Lord Jesus literally present with them. Whilst the manifestation of the Spirit's presence was initially through visible phenomenon such as speaking in foreign languages, the essence of the gift is of internal strengthening to righteousness. And it is clearly alluded to in the later New Testament. "that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:16-21; see too Eph. 1:17-19). "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21,22). "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). "...So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). The idea of Spirit that was promised naturally connects with the promise of the Comforter, and with Peter's statement that baptism will receive the promised gift of the Spirit. These passages are all about the internal work of the Spirit- not miraculous gifts. The Comforter passages have a similar aspect to them: "The Father... shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever [this sounds like something permanent, not only for two generations]- the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*... I will come to you (Jn. 14:16-18)... But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember ['to put in the mind', Gk.] all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you (Jn. 14:26,27)... the Comforter, the spirit of truth (Jn. 15:26)... the Comforter... will convict (Jn. 16:7,8)... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth... he shall declare to you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall

take what is mine and shall declare it to you" (Jn. 16:13,14). The Comforter, the Holy Spirit or "spirit of truth" is therefore associated with internal psychological processes in the mind of the believer. John's letters allude to the promise of the comforter, and speak as if it is being experienced by John's readership, both then and now. This of itself means that the Comforter was not just referring to miraculous gifts given to the apostles; it has a far wider reference. The following are John's later commentary on the Comforter passages: "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all these things... the anointing which you received of him abides in you [cp. Jn. 14:17 "the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*"]... even as it taught you, so you are to abide in him (1 Jn. 2:2,27)... hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us (1 Jn. 3:24)... it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... He that believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself (1 Jn. 5:6,10)... the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true" (1 Jn. 5:20). All this activity of teaching us, giving us understanding, helping us abide in Christ- this is the work of the Comforter Spirit. All this desperately needed spiritual activity is the gift promised to those who are baptized.

2:39 *For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to him-* Peter's maiden speech on the day of Pentecost was a conscious undoing of his denials, and consciously motivated by the experience of forgiveness which he knew he had received. Having been converted, he was now strengthening his Jewish brethren. He went and stood literally a stone's throw from the High Priest's house, and stood up and declared to the world his belief that Jesus was and is Christ. Peter also preached in Solomon's Porch, the very place where the Lord had declared Himself to Israel as their Saviour (Jn. 10:33; Acts 5:12). Peter at the time of his denials had been "afar off" from the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:58; Mk. 14:54; Lk. 22:54- all the synoptics emphasize this point). Peter's denials would've been the talk of the town in Jerusalem. So when in Acts 2:39 he says that there is a promised blessing for "all" that are far off... I think he's alluding back to himself, setting himself up as a pattern for all other sinners to find salvation. That's perhaps why he talks of "all" [those others] who are [also] "far off" [as he had been]. He could've just spoken of "they" or "those" who are far off. But the use of "all" may suggest he is hinting that the audience follow his pattern. This, in Peter's context, makes the more sense if we see *one* of the aspects of the promised Spirit blessing as that of forgiveness and salvation- as in Acts 3:25,26, the blessing was to be turned away from sins. See on Acts 3:26; 1 Pet. 2:25; Lk. 5:8.

As shown on :38 *The gift*, "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". This is speaking of Gentiles; Peter was inspired to preach that the ministry of the Spirit was for the Jerusalem Jews, their children [who lived in the Gentile world, in the locations from which they had come to spend their retirement in Jerusalem, i.e. the Jewish diaspora]- and to the Gentiles. But it's clear from the Cornelius incident that Peter still failed to grasp the import of the words he was preaching- just like us.

2:40 *And with many other words he testified and encouraged them, saying: Save yourselves from this crooked generation-* "Lord, save me", Peter had cried when drowning. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But

the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

"This crooked generation" is the term used of how John the Baptist's mission was to make that "crooked" generation "straight" (Lk. 3:5). His mission failed, although it could have potentially succeeded. And so that generation were judged. God sees the world as actively evil: "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), under His condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32); he that is not with the Lord Jesus is seen as actively against Him, not just passively indifferent (Lk. 11:23). It is absolutely fundamental that our separation from this world is related to our salvation. The act of baptism is a saving of ourselves not only from our sins, but also from "this untoward generation" in which we once lived (Acts 2:40). But let us note that the essential demarcation 2000 years ago was between the believer and the world, not believer and believer.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

2:41 *They that received his word were baptized*- Peter appealed to Israel: "Hear these words...", and then went on to quote a prophecy of how the Lord Jesus would be raised up [i.e. after His resurrection], "and him shall ye hear" Acts 2:22; 3:22,24). The record adds that the crowd received Peter's word and were baptized (Acts 2:41), whereas elsewhere in Acts men and women receive the word of the Lord Jesus. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are

to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us.

*And there were added in that day-* Converts are described as being added to the church, and yet also added to Christ; the play on ideas seems deliberate (Acts 2:41,47 cp. 5:13,14; 11:24).

*About three thousand people-* Luke gives progress reports on the early Christian mission in quantitative terms, as if analysing the success of the work and possibly suggesting how it could be done even better (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:10; 19:26; 21:20). The examples in Acts of preaching the Gospel and baptizing those who believed it are united in suggesting a very short period of time, and immediate baptism- the same hour of the night, in the case of the Philippian jailer, or the very same day, in the case of thousands on the day of Pentecost. The list is impressive: Acts 2:38-41; 8:12,13,36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5.

2:42 *And they continued earnestly-* The same word is used of how *we* must “continue” in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2), i.e. follow the example of the early ecclesia in prayerfulness. The disciples had “continued” in prayer after the Lord’s ascension (Acts 1:14), and now their converts continued in prayer too. Note in passing that we continue in the pattern of those who convert us. Thus to start with, Simon “continued with Philip” (Acts 8:13). This means that who *we* are affects the spiritual quality of others. The same word is used several times in Acts (1:14; 2:42,46; 6:4; 8:13). The great concern of all missionary enterprises is that the converts will “continue”, and Luke is therefore at pains to record that the converts did indeed “continue”, initially at least.

*In the apostles' teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and the prayers-* Acts 2:42 speaks of the experience of *koinonia* in the breaking of bread, praying together, and the apostles' teaching about Christ. But these are not the only aspects of *koinonia*; and these things are all centred around the person of Jesus. In summary, *koinonia* means to share *in* and not simply *with*. At your leisure consider the usage of the word in this connection in Lk. 5:1; Heb. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 11:17; 2 Cor. 6:14; Rev. 18:4; Mt. 23:30. We are “in fellowship” with each other in the sense that we share in the same reality. So all who wish to share in that reality [Christ, in the Christian context] are “in fellowship” with each other. Paul often speaks of *koinonia* in giving- the sense being of giving to or participating in a project or entity outside of yourself. 1 Cor. 10:16-20 speaks of how sharing in a feast implies your sharing in the Lord you are celebrating- the emphasis is vertical rather than horizontal. The concern is whose feast you are attending or engaging in- which entity you are fellowshiping, Christ or an idol. With whom you do this, laterally, isn't in view here.

Phil. 2 exhorts believers to be of “one mind”, but that one mind is later defined in the chapter as being the mind of Christ on the cross. Again, the basis of unity between believers is their common share in Christ, especially in His death- there is never any implication that a theological statement of position is to be the basis of their unity. If this were the case, then we would expect to see this specifically stated. Instead, as in 1 Cor. 10, the unity between believers is on account of their individual participation in the mind and work of Christ.

Acts 2:42 in the AV has strongly influenced the thinking of many who uphold a closed table, due to reading back into a Bible verse the impression given by the AV and assuming it therefore supports a traditional approach to fellowship: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”. The impression is

given by the AV that the duty of baptized believers is to continue believing the “doctrine” as in the theological positions of the apostles, and to only fellowship and break bread with those who believe the same. But on that basis it ought to be impossible to also pray together with those of different doctrinal persuasions- and that is not usually insisted upon by closed table theorists. However, the Greek text of Acts 2:42 is poorly translated by the AV. The *didache*, or “doctrine”, refers not to theological propositions but to the act of teaching by the apostles. The mass of 3000 newly baptized converts were taught further by the apostles, in line with how the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20 had commanded the apostles to go and teach the good news of Christ’s resurrection, baptize people into it, and then teach them further. We have in this section of Acts 2 the classic obedience to that commission. Indeed, the mention of people present from “all nations” encourages us to understand Acts 2 as Luke’s account of how the great commission was initially obeyed; and his version of it in Lk. 24:47 says that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, beginning at Jerusalem”. There are pointed references in Acts 2 and 3 to repentance, remission of sins, baptism into the name, and all this beginning at Jerusalem with the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower the preachers (cp. Mk. 16:17). Clearly Luke is presenting the fulfilment of the great commission. The reference to the new converts hearing the teaching [AV “doctrine”] of the apostles after baptism is the direct fulfilment of the command of Mt. 28:20 for the apostles to further teach converts after baptism. Hence the CEV translates Acts 2:42: “They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together”.

*2:43 And fear came upon everyone; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles-* The “fear” was perhaps because people now realized that indeed, Israel had crucified their King. And society as a whole, each of them, had some responsibility in this. They perceived how they were faced with the ultimate issues of eternity. Only total capitulation to God’s way in His Son could lead them to serve God *without* fear, as envisaged by Zacharias, Simeon and others when they first encountered the Divine plan in His Son.

*2:44 And all that believed were together and had all things common-* 3:1 goes on to explain the summary of Acts 2:42. The new converts continued listening to the teaching [AV “doctrine”] of the apostles and continued in fellowshiping with them- not in the technical sense of being “in fellowship” as opposed to being “out of fellowship”; for this would require us to read into the text our usage of those terms. They continued “hanging out” with the apostles, continued in their presence and company, as eager students with their teachers. The Greek for “fellowship” is *koinonia*, and the root word *koine* occurs in Acts 2:44- they had all things “in common”. This is how they fellowshiped or common-ed together; they pooled their possessions and had them in common, or, as the AV will have it, in “fellowship”. In fact, the idea of *koinonia* or “fellowship” in the New Testament is most commonly used about the sharing of material resources rather than theological agreement (Rom. 12:13 “contribute”, Gal. 6:6 “share all good things”, Phil. 4:15 and throughout 2 Corinthians in the context of appealing for assistance or fellowship for the poor saints at Jerusalem). Acts 2:46 then speaks of how they attended the temple together, and broke bread in homes. This is the further explanation of how the new converts are described in Acts 2:42 as continuing in the apostles’ teaching [they went to the temple to hear it, as this was likely the only venue large enough to hold the crowd], and they continued in breaking of bread- by doing it in homes. For there was no church building available to do this as a group of 3000. And the nature of the “breaking of bread” is further defined in Acts 2:46- it involved a joyful eating together. The breaking of bread was therefore in the form of a collective meal, continuing the connection established by Jesus between His open table collective meals, and the “breaking of bread” in memory of Him. Acts 2:42 speaks of the new converts continuing together in

“*the prayers*” (ESV and Gk.). Acts 3:1 goes on to define what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer. What they had in common was praying together in the Jewish temple prayers. But those prayers were attended by many Jews who didn’t believe in Jesus. What that goes to show is that you can perform a religious act of fellowship with unbelievers, but enjoy true Christian fellowship with God’s true people who are amongst them. From the very start, Christianity started with an “open” attitude to fellowship with the unbelieving Jews. If there really is some guilt by association principle to be operated in Christianity, surely we’d expect to see it outlined right at the start.

We can now summarize the above in tabular form:

Acts 2:42	How it worked out in practice
And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching]	Having heard the basic Gospel and having been baptized, they continued hearing the apostles’ teaching, as the apostles obeyed the great commission- to preach the basic Gospel, baptize, and then teach further (Mt. 28:19,20). Acts 2:46 therefore speaks of how they attended the temple together in order to learn more from the apostles’ teaching
And fellowship ( <i>koinonia</i> )	Acts 2:44- they had all things “in common”, Gk. <i>koine</i> .
The breaking of bread	Acts 2:46- this involved a joyful eating together in house groups
“ <i>The prayers</i> ” (ESV and Gk.).	Acts 3:1 defines what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer.

The unity between believers at the breaking of bread is brought out in Acts 2:42, where we read of the new converts continuing in:  
the teaching of the apostles,  
the fellowship  
the breaking of bread  
the prayers.

It could be that this is a description of the early order of service at the memorial meetings. They began with an exhortation by the apostles, then there was “the fellowship”, called the *agape* in Jude 12, a meal together, and then the breaking of bread itself [following Jewish Passover tradition], concluded by “the prayers”, which may have included the singing of Psalms. The performance of this feast was a sign of conversion and membership in the body of Christ. This is how important it is.

Some of the Roman leaders initially pushed the idea of Plato, that all land should be state owned and be given up by individuals to the state. Yet Acts 2:44; 4:32 use language which is directly taken from Plato’s *Republic*: “All things common... no one called anything his own”. The early church was seeking to set up an idealized alternative to the Roman empire!

2:45 *And they sold their possessions and goods, and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had need-* The Holy Spirit appeared to the apostles as “cloven / parted tongues” (Acts 2:3), giving to each man what each needed (Eph. 4:8-13). In response to this, we read that the apostles sold their possessions and “distributed [s.w. “cloven”] to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:45). Likewise Paul speaks of how God gave the Spirit gifts to every member of Christ’s body, so that there was no part which “lacked” (1 Cor. 12:24). And he uses the same idea when telling the Corinthians to give their excess funds to provide grace / gifts for their brethren who “lacked” (2 Cor. 8:15). The simple picture, which even in different circumstances abides for us today, is that God’s thoughtful and specific generosity to us, His giving us of unique gifts as we ‘have need’, should lead us to materially assisting those likewise who ‘have need’.

Material giving to the Lord’s cause was associated with the breaking of bread in the early church (Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor. 16:1,2), after the pattern of how every male was not to appear empty before Yahweh (Heb. ‘to appear for no cause’) at the Jewish feasts (Dt. 16:16). We cannot celebrate His grace / giving to us without response. Because Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, they were to be generous to their brethren, and generally open handed (Lev. 25:37,38). This is why the Acts record juxtaposes God’s grace / giving, and the giving of the early believers in response (Acts 4:33 cp. 32,34-37). The bread and wine of the drink offerings were to accompany sacrifice; they were not the sacrifice itself. And likewise the spirit of sacrifice must be seen in us as those emblems are taken. The Laodiceans' materialism resulted in them not realizing their desperate spiritual need for the cross (Rev. 3:17,18); Lemuel knew that riches would make him ask "Who is Yahweh?"; he wouldn't even want to know the Name / character of the Lord God (Prov. 30:9). The Jews' experience of redemption from Haman *quite naturally* resulted in them giving gifts both to each other and to the poor around them (Es. 9:22). "You shall lend unto many nations" has often been misread as a prediction of Jewish involvement in financial institutions and banking (Dt. 28:12). But the context is simply that "The Lord shall open unto you *His* good treasure, the heaven to give the rain of your land... and *you* shall lend unto many nations". If God opens His treasure to us, we should open our treasures to others, even lending with a spirit of generosity, motivated by our experience of His generosity to *us*. Because Yahweh had redeemed Israel, they were not to be petty materialists, cheating others out of a few grams or centimetres in trading. The wealth and largeness of God’s work for them should lead them to shun such petty desire for self-betterment.

Distribution as each “had need” may mean that people weren't given just because they asked, but according to their need, as judged by the elders.

2:46 *And day by day, continuing earnestly with one accord in the temple-* The way Jesus forewarned the disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) surely implies He assumed they would maintain synagogue attendance until they were cast out, rather than removing themselves in obedience to Christ. By remaining as far as they could, they were the salt of their world; and we see in Paul’s ministry how his synagogue attendance gave him many opportunities to witness to the Gospel. The Lord warned His disciples that they would be scourged in the synagogues (Mt. 10:17). But synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn’t

intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues.

Even from within the New Testament we can soon perceive that first century Judaism was full of both theological and practical errors- the immortal soul, heaven going, ascending to "Abraham's bosom" after death, hell fire, a personal Satan, literal demons, a Kingdom of God based around the violent resistance of evil and military conquest of the Romans in the first century; and above all a serious misunderstanding of Jesus and the whole concept and nature of Israel's Messiah.

*And breaking bread at home-* Luke's writings (in his Gospel and in the Acts) give especial attention to meals and table talk. Societies tended to distinguish themselves by their meal practices. Who was allowed at the table, who was excluded- these things were fundamental to the self-understanding of persons within society. So when the Lord Jesus ate with the lowest sinners, and Peter as a Jew ate with Gentiles... this was radical, counter-cultural behaviour. No wonder the breaking of bread together was such a witness, and the surrounding world watched it with incredulity (Acts 2:42,46; 4:32-35). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Acts 2:42,46,47 speak as if it involved eating a communal meal together. If we can accept that the original "breaking of bread" was indeed a meal, it would seem almost axiomatic that access to the "bread and wine" as in the "emblems" would have been open. For would the early brethren really have said: "You're welcome to eat everything on the table except the unleavened bread"? Or would they really have invited those present to pray and worship with them before and after the meal, but not while they were praying for and taking the bread and wine? There is no hint even that this was the case.

The record of the body of Christ in the New Testament begins with descriptions of the Lord preaching in houses. The word 'house' occurs a huge number of times in the Gospels, especially in Luke's record. He seems to have been very sensitive to the way the Lord entered into homes and did things there. We can be sure that these homes became house churches after His resurrection. The establishment of the church began with the believers gathering in the temple, but breaking bread "from house to house" (Acts 2:46 Gk.). Fellowship in Christ is about this family sense of community. In practice, the early body of Christ was a fellowship of house churches. They preached and worshipped both in the temple and "in every house", i.e. every house church (Acts 5:42).

Acts 2:46 (NKJV) records how the early brethren broke bread with "simplicity of heart"; and we likewise, in our memorial meetings and in our lives, must unswervingly focus upon Him and the colossal import of His cross.

Almost every major New Testament description of the Lord's coming and what He will bring with Him is also given an application to our experience in this life: the Kingdom of God, eternal life, salvation, justification, sanctification, perfection, glorification... and of course, judgment. All these things shall come; but the essence of them is being worked out in the life of the believer now. All this is brought to our attention whenever we attend the breaking of bread. That "table" at which we sit is a picture of the future banquet and table in the coming Kingdom. The "gladness" which accompanied the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46) is the same word used about the "rejoicing" at the future marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7) and the



Lord's return (1 Pet. 4:13; Jude 24).

Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world was in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29).

*They took their food with gladness and singleness of heart- Metalabein* literally means to "receive one's share in". In this context we read that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved". The repetition of "day by day" suggests a connection between the daily conversion of unbelievers and the daily breaking of bread meetings. And in extensive missionary experience I have observed that those who witness a breaking of bread meeting tend to find themselves drawn into the things of the Lord Jesus.

*2:47 Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved-* Those who heard the message wanted baptism immediately; they had been convicted by the preacher of a Christ-centred message, not just intellectually teased (Acts 8:36; 9:18). Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch, the crowds at Pentecost... were all baptized immediately. The Lord added *daily* to the church (2:27; 16:5)- they didn't tell candidates for baptism to wait even until the next Sunday, let alone for a few months 'to think it over'. They understood the first principle: baptism is essential for salvation. Believe or perish. They saw the absoluteness of the issues involved in the choice to accept or reject the Son of God. "Beware, therefore..." was their warning to their hearers (Acts 13:40). They made no apologies, they didn't wrap up the message. They taught the need for repentance more than seeking to prove that they were right and others wrong (although there is a place for this in our witness in the right contexts). They made it clear that they were out to convert others, not engage in philosophical debate or the preaching of doubtful interpretations.

## ACTS CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now Peter and John were going into the temple-* See on 2:46.

*At the hour of prayer, at the ninth hour-* The time of the evening sacrifice. Their presence for this indicates they were fairly serious in their connection with Judaism still.

3:2 *And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those entering the temple-* He had been daily laid there for around forty years (Acts 4:22). The Lord Jesus surely passed Him by, for He told the Jews that He had taught them daily in the temple; but He didn't heal him. Perhaps his faith hadn't grown to the required level; or maybe the Lord consciously left this work for His followers to do. For Acts is the account of all that the Lord *began* to do. The man apparently recognized Peter and John; because when he saw them, he asked them for assistance. They were known as Jesus-followers.

3:3 *Seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for alms-* If he was daily laid at the temple gate, he presumably would have seen the Lord and His disciples many times as they entered the temple- which had been a frequent occurrence. There is no evidence that the man believed. And we note the Lord must have walked by him many times without healing him. His focus was not on simply meeting human need of the moment.

3:4 *And Peter, looking straight at him (as did John) said: Look at us-* See on Acts 14:9. The lame man responded, and the people were amazed at the subsequent miracle. But Peter then tells them: "You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? or *why do you fasten your eyes on us* [i.e., why do you 'look on us'], as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Servant Jesus" (Acts 3:12,13). I wonder if Peter was here publicly acknowledging an inappropriate turn of phrase, when he had asked the lame man to 'Look on us'- and immediately, he humbly and publicly corrected himself, redirecting all glory and all eyes to the Father and Son.

3:5 *And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them-* His motivation was material. He is an example of how the Lord through His Spirit at times just comes into a person's life, taking all the initiative, rather than responding to their apparent seeking for Him.

3:6 *But Peter said: Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!-* Peter later alludes to this in a way that means he saw that man as typical of all his converts: "Knowing you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life" (1 Pet. 1:18). Life before conversion for us all was as vain as the man sitting there lamely begging for silver and gold, in a temple structure unable to save him. See on 3:7.

Peter told the lame man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"; but the healing was because of *Peter's* faith in Christ's Name (Acts 3:6,16). The Jerusalem Bible makes this apparent: "It is the name of Jesus which, through our faith in it, has brought back the strength of this man". The RV has: "By faith in his name hath his name made this man strong"- as if the power of the name of Jesus is waiting to be activated by human faith.

*3:7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength-* The word is used of the strengthening of the early converts, also by the Spirit (Acts 16:5 "So the churches were strengthened in the faith"). Again the idea is that the man was representative of the wider ecclesia; see on 3:6.

Luke has a favourite Greek word, often translated "forthwith... immediately" (Acts 3:7; 5:10; 9:18; 12:23; 13:11; 16:26,33). This is quite some emphasis; and Luke uses the very same word a lot in his Gospel, as if to show that the speed and power and achievement of the Lord's ministry is continued in that of His ministers now (Lk. 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44,47,55; 13:13; 18:43; 19:11; 22:60). The word is scarcely used outside Luke's writing, although using different words, Mark also notes the speed and immediacy of the Lord's ministry. And Luke uses many other words to stress the speed and urgency and fast moving nature of the Lord's work. They are worth highlighting in your Bible; for our ministry is a continuation of that of our early brethren (Acts 9:18-20,34; 10:33; 11:11; 12:10; 16:10; 17:10,14; 21:30,32; 22:29; 23:30).

Peter understood what it was to be in Christ. All that he did, all that he preached and taught by word and example, was a witness to the one in whom he lived and had his being. As he reached forth his right hand to lift up the cripple, he was manifesting how the right hand of God had lifted up (in resurrection) and exalted His Son and all those in Him (Acts 3:7). Likewise, he took Tabitha *by the hand* and then *lifted her up* and "presented her alive" (Acts 9:41), just as the Father had done to His Son. When Peter "stood up" after his conversion (Acts 1:15; 2:14), he was sharing the resurrection experience of his Lord. And now he reflected this in his preaching to others. As God stretched forth His hand to heal through Christ (Acts 4:30), so Peter did (Acts 9:41). And he includes us all in the scope of this wondrous operation: for as God's hand exalted Christ, so it will exalt each of us who humble ourselves beneath it (1 Pet. 5:6).

*3:8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God-* This reads like Dr. Luke's medical observation of the progressive steps of the recovery - leaped up, stood, walked, leaped. But it's also as if we are invited to play Bible television, focused up close on the man. The language is clearly appropriate for the eyewitness account which it is. The result of healing lame people in Acts 3:8; 14:10 was that they *leaped* (this is emphasized) and walked, praising God. This seems to be couched in the language of Is. 35:5,6 concerning lame people leaping and praising God; a prophecy we normally apply to the future Kingdom.

"He entered with them into the temple" even though he was likely in a state of ritual uncleanness due to his previous disability. He leaped into the holy place; the joy of conversion naturally overriding all legalistic considerations.

*3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God-* This is twice emphasized (:8). Luke has used the very same phrase four times in his Gospel, regarding praise of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:13,20; 19:37; 24:53). Luke's Gospel was volume 1 compared to his volume 2, the Acts of the Apostles. But he develops the theme that the acts of the apostles are effectively the acts of the risen Lord Jesus (see on Acts 1:1). And so this kind of device is typical of Luke- things he ascribes to the Lord Jesus in his Gospel he applies to the work of the believers in Him in Acts. The man's response, "praising God", was exactly the response of

people to the historical Jesus. It was as if through Peter's work, the Lord Jesus was manifested. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:11 *The portico called Solomon's*.

3:10 *And they recognised him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*- Some commentators claim that next to this gate was a notice forbidding Gentiles and the unclean to go further. His location for forty years at the entrance to the temple (4:22) perhaps reflects Israel's being kept out of the promised land for the same period. He represented what could have happened to all Israel. The word for "wonder" is only used to describe the wonder at the miracles of the Lord Jesus; and it is used only by Luke (Lk. 4:36; 5:9). Again, Peter the healer is being presented as the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. The word for "amazed" is likewise used (Lk. 5:26). See on 3:9 *Praising God*.

3:11 *While he clung to Peter and John*- So often in this narrative, we see the essence of events of the Gospels now being repeated in the experience of the Lord's followers. In this case, the similarity is with how the healed man of Lk. 8:38 dreaded the idea of being parted from his healer, the Lord Jesus.

In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus in the boat was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

*All the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded*- There was a crowd mentality here; everyone got involved in a stampede towards Peter. Their mentality and direction was dictated by a group psychology rather than individual faith. The word only occurs later in the New Testament in Peter's letter, where he writes of how Gentiles "think it strange that you do not *run with them* in the same flood of dissipation" (1 Pet. 4:4). The similarity was that Peter reflected how a crowd can stampede towards the symbols of Jesus, and yet stampede in the way of sin. But it's individual faith that the Lord searches for.

"The portico called Solomon's", Gk. 'which *is* called Solomon's'. This suggests that the Gospel of Luke was written whilst the temple was still standing; otherwise a past tense would have been used. This is one of many reasons for thinking that the Gospels were written early rather than later, certainly pre-AD70. The Gospel records and Acts are the transcripts of histories which were orally distributed to begin with, and then written down under Divine inspiration soon after they began circulating- and not many decades after the events, as the critics wrongly claim. The scene here is reminiscent of that in the Gospels, when a crowd of people gathered around the Lord Jesus in the same porch (Jn. 10:23). And again, we see Peter

and John presented as the manifestations of Jesus on earth, just as we are; repeating in essence the situations encountered by the historical Jesus. See on 3:9 *Praising God*.

3:12- see on Acts 2:12.

*And when Peter saw it, he addressed the people: You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? Or why fasten you your eyes on us, as though by our own power or reverence towards God we had made him walk?*- "Marvel" implies some doubt. The men who marvelled and doubted whether Peter was anything more than a magic man were within a few hours believing and being baptized (Acts 3:12; 4:4). We noted on :11 that there was a group psychology operating here, but there is never any attempt to judge the sincerity of motivation in those apparently coming to Jesus. There is a speed and power and compulsion that pounds away in the narrative. The preaching of a God hurt by sin, passionately consumed in the death of His Son, feeling every sin, rejoicing over every repentance and baptism... this was something radically different in the 1st century world, just as it is in ours. And such a God imparted a sense of urgency to those who preached Him and His feelings and ways and being, a need for urgent response, a need to relate to Him, which was simply unknown in other religions. The urgency of man's position must be more up front in our witness. Christianity went wrong in the 2nd century AD because the church abstracted God and His being into nothingness, to the point that the urgent import of the true doctrines was lost in practice. May this not be the case amongst us.

Peter is urgent to explain that 'this isn't me- it's Jesus'. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:9 *Praising God*. Peter knew that he was standing very close to where he had denied the Lord. And he knew that his audience knew. He felt he was not holy nor 'reverent' to God as he should be. Peter repeatedly uses this word, translated "holiness" or "Godliness", in appealing for his converts to develop this very attribute (2 Pet. 1:3,6,7; 3:11). And yet he states here that he is not sufficiently 'holy' or 'Godly'. It is this humility and recognition of failure which gave Peter's preaching and pastoral appeals the power they had.

3:13 *The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus*- Yet Peter and John did the Lord's work with this man of their own volition. The healing of the man was the glorification of the Lord. His glorification was thereby dependent for its extent upon the efforts of His people in practice. And that principle is true today. Peter understood it well; hence he urges the people not to glorify him, but the Lord Jesus. He holds himself up as an example to his converts in that he alludes to this incident in 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11,14, where he says that the good works of his converts can glorify God (s.w.).

*Whom you delivered up*- The word used for the betrayal of Judas. What he did was in essence what all Israel did; he was the epitome of Israel, influenced by the Jewish satan.

*And rejected before the presence of Pilate*- "Rejected" is the same word translated "denied" and is used repeatedly about the denials of Peter, in the presence of the Lord's trial and at the same time as the Jews rejected or denied their Messiah (Mt. 26:70,72). Peter was preaching this message a stone's throw from where he had denied / rejected his Lord. And he knew that they knew what had happened. Peter was therefore appealing to the Jews on the basis that he himself has very publicly done what they had done.

*When he had determined to release him-* *Krino* means to judge; he had judged to set Jesus free. This is exactly the situation which Paul found himself in later- he was judged by the Romans and judged that he should be set free, but he chose not to use that in order [as he perceived it anyway at the time] to spread the Gospel to the world [by appealing to a hearing in Rome]. Perhaps these words and form of expression of Peter became programmatic for Paul and led him to the decision he made, consciously seeking to follow his Lord's steps to the cross. I will develop the point later that Paul was very deeply influenced by Peter's words and ministry.

3:14 *But you denied-* The point is twice made (:13), just as it is twice recorded that Peter denied the Lord (Mt. 26:70,72) at the same time as they did. See on Acts 3:13 *Rejected...*

*The holy and righteous one, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you-* These words are elsewhere used about John the Baptist (Mk. 6:20), the Lord's forerunner; and also about the believers, who are to be likewise (Rev. 22:11), rather than simply admiring His holiness from a distance. He and all about Him is to be programmatic for us.

3:15 *And killed the prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses-* The blame is clearly placed by God on the Jews and not the Romans. Conspiracy to murder was counted by Him as the murder itself. Gk. 'the author' of life. The contrast is with Israel's desire for a murderer, a taker of life (:14).

3:16 *And by faith in his name-* Gk. *the* faith, maybe hinting that it was 'the faith' of the Gospel which inculcated faith in the apostles. But whose faith was Peter referring to? The beggar appears to have just been opportunistically begging for money from Peter (Acts 3:3). It was surely by *Peter's* faith that the man was healed, and not by his own faith. For Peter didn't invite the beggar to have faith in anything. And Peter explains to the Jews that he had made the man to walk not through his own power (Acts 3:12). So here again we have an example of a third party being healed as a result of another man's faith (see on Mk. 2:5).

Trust or faith in God comes from not trusting upon human understanding, but upon the understanding [s.w. meaning, knowledge, wisdom] that is God's (Prov. 3:5). In this lies the importance of truth in Biblical interpretation. So understanding, correctly perceiving meaning, true wisdom... are related to having a real faith. The Proverbs go on to plead for correct understanding, because this will be the source of a Godly life of faith in practice. There is therefore a connection between "faith" in the sense of belief, and the fact the essential doctrines of Christianity are called "*the* faith"; the noun "the Faith" and the verb 'to believe / have faith' are related. This is because a true understanding of the one Faith will inevitably lead to true faith, and therefore works; for faith and works are inseparable. This relationship is brought out in Acts 3:16: "His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong... yea, the faith which is in Him (Christ) hath given him (the healed man) this perfect soundness".

*His name has made this man strong, whom you see and know-* The same word used about the strengthening of the churches and all believers (Acts 16:5; 1 Pet. 5:9). The man is being presented as representative of all converts.

*Yes, the faith which is through him, has given him this perfect soundness-* The man appears to have been given ideal health throughout his body. Otherwise, he would have been

unable to leap, after being forty years in that condition (4:22). Again, the man is set up as symbolic of the total change possible in the believer.

*In the presence of you all-* Just as Peter and John testified because they were witnesses of the Lord's resurrection, so the audience had also seen a 'standing upright' of a man well known to them; and they also ought to believe and testify. Peter is seeking to share his experience with his audience, building a bridge between him and them, inviting them to share his path- rather than baldly presenting theological truths to them and leaving them to respond as they wished.

3:17 *And now-* These are not just redundant words. The sense may be that although they crucified the Lord knowing full well what they were doing, *now*, by God's grace, that could be counted as having been done in relative ignorance. This is the amazing extent of imputed righteousness.

*Brothers-* Peter again is bridge building, having made the point that they had denied their Messiah just at the same time and place as he had done (see on Acts 3:14).

*I know that in ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers-* It had been generous spirited of the Lord to pray on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". He may have meant they were relatively ignorant, or it may be that He felt they were so blinded now that the recognition of Him they once had had was now not operating. And Peter, who probably heard with amazement those words from the cross as he beheld the Lord's sufferings, found the same generous spirit to men whom naturally he would have despised: "In ignorance you did it" (Acts 3:17 cp. Lk. 23:34).

The generosity of the Father and Son to humanity is awesome- so eager are they for our repentance. God so pleads for Israel to return to Him in Hosea and Isaiah that He almost takes the blame onto Himself, cooing over His people as having been tossed and afflicted- when it was His own judgment of them that caused it. And I think this explains the difficulty of Acts 3:17-19, where Peter appeals to the Jews to repent, because they had murdered the Lord Jesus "in ignorance". The Lord's own parables explained that they did what they did with open eyes- "this is the heir, come let us kill him!". Yet in God's passionate desire for their repentance, He appears to view their awful sin in the most gracious possible light.

Paul uses the same word to reason that the Gentiles too had sinned in ignorance, but now must repent because of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 17:30). This is another example of Paul consciously modelling himself and his preaching on Peter. Considering that Peter was an illiterate fisherman, mocked by the Jerusalem intelligentsia as speaking without grammar... and Paul was the intellectual Jewish rabbi trained in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel... this indicates so much humility in Paul. Although I will later develop the possibility that Paul actually pretended to Peter to such an unhealthy extent that he failed to focus as he might on his ministry to the Gentiles, and sought rather to emulate Peter's to the Jews.

3:18 *But the things which God foretold-* It's as if Peter is trying to encourage them not to see their sin as too great to allow them to now come to the Lord Jesus. This is one reason why he appears to overstate their relative "ignorance" in :17. And here too, he seems to be presenting them with another window on their sin- that it was foretold by the prophets and had been necessary in God's plan of salvation, just as in the case of the sin of Joseph's brothers. We too encounter folks who truly feel that their sin presents too big a barrier between God and themselves. It's a fine balance, between preaching to convict people of sin

[rather than socializing them into a social club], and on the other hand, encouraging them that that sin is not an insurmountable barrier.

*By the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled-* It was their spoken words which were inspired; but there is no specific guarantee that the written form and transmission of them was likewise inspired. Their mouths, and not the pens of every scribe who wrote the words, were inspired by God- even though it would be fair to say that the preservation and transmission of their written words was the work of 'providence', and the Spirit of God in some way also at work. Because the Bible is the only Divinely inspired book there is, this can lead us to seeing the book as some kind of icon; it is the only 'thing' we have in our experience which is directly from God. Realizing, however, that the original autographs alone were inspired can help us see the Bible we read for what it is- the living, albeit translated and passed down, word of God Himself.

*3:19 Therefore repent and be converted-* Not 'repent and convert'. The conversion, grammatically, is performed by another party. The repentance is what enables the process of conversion to be performed upon the repentant person who now wishes to change. Repentance is therefore a mental re-thinking, not a rearrangement of human life to be without sin and failure. The parallel is with Peter's earlier preaching in Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". "Be converted" implies an action upon the heart of the repentant hearer of the Gospel; the parallel in 2:38 is to receive the gift of the Spirit, a holy spirit or mind being developed in the believer. I gave reasons on 2:38 to understand this gift to essentially refer to the internal work of the Lord on repentant hearts- or as Peter here puts it, being converted. The same word translated "converted" is found in the description of John the Baptist's work in Lk. 1:17 as being to turn or convert the hearts of people. This same work is now being done by the risen Lord, through His Spirit. Acts 11:21 speaks of this work of conversion as being done by the Lord's hand, and the Old Testament parallels God's hand with His Spirit; it is His instrumentality, and not man's: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and were turned [s.w. 'converted'] to the Lord". Likewise Acts 28:27 parallels conversion with the act of the Lord healing hearts: "Be converted, and I should heal them". Conversion is the healing action of the Lord on human hearts who are open to it, rather than a steel-willed cracking of expositional and theological riddles in the Bible text and vainly attempting to brutally conform one's own life to that text. Conversion is also a matter of the heart in 2 Cor. 3:16, parallel with the Lord removing a veil which He has placed over the Jewish mind.

And again, it was Peter, the preacher himself, who had sinned against his Lord and had been "converted" on his repentance, with the result that he was not strengthening the Lord's sheep (Lk. 22:32 "When you are converted...", s.w.). Truly, Peter's address is shot through with reference to his own failure, repentance and restoration by grace. He reminds his sheep of how they are now "returned" (s.w. 'converted') to the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:25), just as he had been. My point is that the 'conversion' was by another hand than his own steel will.

In the context of Israel's latter day repentance, we read some admittedly strange words: "(The Jews) have... not believed, that through your (Gentile believers) mercy, they also may obtain mercy" (Rom. 11:31). Could this not mean that Israel's reconciliation to God is partly dependent on our "mercy" in preaching the Gospel to them? And now consider Peter's words to Israel: "Repent... and be converted, that (firstly) your sins may be blotted out... and (secondly) he shall send Jesus Christ" at the second coming (Acts 3:19,20). Does



this not suggest that Christ's eager desire for the second coming is limited by our preaching to Israel?

*So that your sins may be blotted out-* Applying the language of David's forgiveness for the murder of Uriah to all Israel (Ps. 51:1). David's forgiveness by grace is often set up as programmatic for the way all believers, and all Israel, can be treated (see Rom. 4:1-4).

*So that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord-* The second coming is clearly dependent upon Israel's repentance for crucifying the Lord. The seasons / times refer to those of Acts 1:7, the second coming. This is why the Lord said that there was no such defined 'time' for it, but rather they were to get on with converting Israel. There are preconditions, involving Israel's repentance in response to our preaching to them; but not a calendar date. "Times of refreshing" is the age of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, probably alluding to Is. 28:12: "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing...".

"From the presence of the Lord" is literally from His face. Luke is connecting with what he recorded in Lk. 1:76; John the Baptist's ministry was to herald the presence / face of the Lord being revealed. But his ministry failed on a national level; the essence of John's appeal is however to be continued by Christian witness to the Jews in all ages, and when it finally succeeds, the Kingdom age shall come from the presence of the Lord. See on 3:21 *The time of the restoration*.

3:20 *And that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, Jesus-* "That He may" shows that there is no calendar date set for the Lord's return; rather is the most significant condition for it that Israel repent. And this ought to be the focus of much of our ministry.

3:21 *Whom the heaven must receive until the time of the restoration of all things-* The reference is again to John the Baptist's ministry, which was intended to restore all things (Mt. 17:11 s.w.). By witnessing to Israel to repent we are continuing the essence of John's ministry and when complete, the restored Kingdom of God shall come on earth. See on 3:19 *From the presence of the Lord*. The Bible often alludes to popular literature and understandings of the time, in order to deconstruct it. Plato was popular in the first century, and his writings spoke of a final "time of the restoration"; it's as if this social dream was being alluded to, and reinterpreted as being the Kingdom of God on earth. The following reference to how the prophets have been since the beginning of the age may well be a deconstruction of the then fashionable way of quoting the ancient Plato as wisdom, as if he were effectively a prophet. For the Christian, it was the writings of the prophets and not Plato which were to be authoritative; and rather than Plato's 'restoration of all things', there was the hope of God's eternal Kingdom on earth.

It was quite possible that the full Messianic Kingdom could have been established in the first century, depending upon how the Jews responded to Christ's Gospel. All things were ready for the feast, representing the Kingdom, and the Jewish guests invited- but their rejection of the offer resulted in a 2,000 year delay while the invitations were pressed home on equally laid back Gentiles (Mt. 22:4). Similarly, Peter understood that the Lord must remain in Heaven "until the times of restitution of all things (cp. Mt. 22:4), which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"; but he felt, under inspiration, that

"all the prophets... as many as have spoken (note the emphasis; cp. "all His holy prophets"), have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:21,24), i.e. the days of the first century.

*Of which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, that have been since the world began-* Luke uses the same sentence in Lk. 1:70. We have here an example of the language of pre-existence- and yet the prophets did not literally exist at the world's beginning. And neither did the Lord Jesus.

*3:22 Moses indeed said: A prophet like me shall the Lord God-* Peter had been reminded of the prophecy of Dt. 18:15 when he was told to "hear Him" at the transfiguration. But Peter had there fallen down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet here in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

*Raise up for you-* This 'raising up' is understood by Peter as referring to the Lord's resurrection (:26 "God, having raised up His servant..."). That hardly seems to be the context of the original Old Testament quotation. But the New Testament often quotes the Old without attention to context; just as Jewish midrash [interpretation] quotes Bible verses out of their context in order to explain other verses. Context is not always the key to Biblical interpretation; the Spirit which inspired the OT also inspired the NT, and therefore OT words and phrases are at times taken hold of in the NT and given a new meaning which is not at all in harmony with the context surrounding the original OT text. However, whether *we* are justified in doing this is doubtful- for one could then make any text mean whatever we wish by taking it out of context. We are the readers and interpreters of the text and not the inspired authors. This is not to say that sometimes, indeed often, the surrounding context of the original text is irrelevant. Harry Whittaker excelled at demonstrating how a verse from a Psalm was applied to the Lord Jesus in the NT, and then returning to the original Psalm and showing how so much else there was also relevant to the Lord's experiences. But I'm saying that this is not always how the Spirit interprets the OT.

*From among your brothers [like unto me]-* A clear statement of the Lord's utter humanity, perhaps alluding to how the sacrificial Paschal lamb was to be taken out "from among" the flock.

*You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you-* An example of where prophecy is not merely prediction, but also a command. Insofar as obedience is a function of human freewill, prophecies like this are therefore open to some element of failure or having their fulfilment reframed by the extent of human obedience. Ezekiel's prophecies of a glorious temple to be built by the returning exiles would be a classic example. The words of the great commission allude to this well-known Messianic prophecy- the preachers were to go "teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). The Lord thereby invited Israel to see Him as the prophet like unto Moses who was to be obeyed.

*3:23 And it shall be, that every soul that shall not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people-* Those who would not accept Jesus as Messiah were to be "destroyed from among the people", using a very similar phrase to the LXX of Gen. 17:14, where the uncircumcised man was to be "cut off from his people". Col. 2:11 speaks of circumcision as another type of baptism, in that only the circumcised were in covenant with God: "The uncircumcised... that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Gen.

17:14). We either "cut off" the flesh, or God will cut us off. The circumcision / baptism allusion was really saying 'Accept Christ or perish'. The language of destruction "from among the people" connects with how the Lord Jesus was also "from among the people" (:22). Exactly because of His humanity, He is our appropriate judge; or as John records it, He has authority to execute judgment exactly because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

3:24 *Yes, and all the prophets*- According to Acts 3:21,24, *all* the prophets speak of Israel's latter day repentance and the subsequent return of Messiah.

*From Samuel*- Samuel was not the first person to act as a prophet, a forth-teller of God's word. Why single him out as the starting point for the ministry of the prophets? Perhaps in reflection of the Jewish saying that Samuel was chief of the prophets. The connection with Moses (:22) may intend us to understand 'The law and the prophets'. Or perhaps because his mother was the first to specifically predict the Messiah in so many words (1 Sam. 2:10,35). But see on 3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets*.

*And those that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days*- The reference could be to the "times of the restoration" of :21, which Peter believed to be breaking in upon them with the conversion of some Jews. He was disappointed in his expectation; for the conversions didn't continue, and many of the Jewish Christians fell away. And so the preconditions required for the full restitution of all things weren't met, and it was delayed until our days.

3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets*- This phrase refers to the schools of the prophets (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3; 4:1; 5:22; 6:1; Is. 8:18). Samuel was seen in Judaism as the *rabban* or founder of the schools of the prophets. This would explain the choice of Samuel as the 'first' of the prophets in the preceding verse. The schools of the prophets were seen as for the elite within Judaism. But Peter is saying that now all who believe the prophetic words about Jesus as Lord and Messiah are no less the schools of the prophets; this was what the fledgling churches were to be likened to. Isaiah had spoken of his school of the prophets as he and his sons (Is. 8:18), but this is quoted in Heb. 2:13 about all in Christ.

*And of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham: And in your descendant shall all the families of the earth be blessed*- 'Sons of the covenant', *b'nai b'rith*, was and still is a reference to the elite within Israel, just like "sons of the prophets" referring to the schools of the prophets. So again, the distinction is being collapsed between the masses and the religious specialists. All believers are spoken of later in the New Testament as priests, even the High Priest, and now as the very elitest of the prophets and "sons of the covenant". No longer could believers consider themselves one in a mass of attendees, one in an audience; but instead, each of us is of intense significance in God's prophetic program. But according to Gal. 3:27-29, even a Jew could only become a son of the covenant by baptism into Christ. But Peter speaks as if his audience were just this. He is assuming they will agree to believe and be baptized into Christ.

3:26 *To you first*- Along with the reference to all tribes / families of the earth being blessed as Abraham's seed (:25), the idea is clearly that Gentiles too can participate in this great Jewish salvation which is in the Jewish Messiah. But as is made clear in the Cornelius incident in Acts 10, Peter was far from understanding this at the time. The fact he made this hint here about Gentile salvation, if not a clear statement about it, is proof that he was speaking a Divinely inspired message and not just his own personal understanding. Perhaps this is why it

is Peter who later makes the point that the inspired prophets spoke things which they did not themselves fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12); he had himself experienced such a thing with regard to the Gentiles.

*God, having raised up His servant, sent him-* Peter taught that “God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him” to preach to the Jews (Acts 3:26). Yet the Lord Jesus personally resurrected and ascended to Heaven, having ‘sent’ His followers into the world. Yet because all in Him are so fully His personal witnesses, representative of Him as He is representative of them, in this way it’s true to say that the Lord Jesus personally was “sent” into the world with the Gospel message after His resurrection. And by all means connect this with Peter’s difficult words in 1 Pet. 3:19- that by the spirit of Christ, Christ ‘went’ after His resurrection to preach to those imprisoned. By our sharing His Spirit, we are Him ‘going’ and preaching. In this sense the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). And because Peter was alluding to the ‘sending’ of the great commission, he goes on to say that the spiritually imprisoned to whom we preach are saved by the baptism we minister in fulfilment of the great commission, in the same way as the ark saved people in Noah’s day.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was *sent* to preach blessing and forgiveness to Israel. But after His resurrection, He sent His men to preach this message. His witness became expressed through, and therefore limited by, His preachers. When they wilfully misunderstood His commission as meaning preaching to Jews from all nations, rather than taking the message to the whole planet literally, His work was in that sense hindered and His intention delayed. Remember that the Rabbis taught that salvation was impossible for Gentiles: “For the heathen nations there will be no redemption”, so reads the Targum on Ex. 21:30. Like us, the early Jewish converts were influenced by their backgrounds and their limited world views. Until the Lord brought experiences to bear which, when responded to, taught them what is now the obvious meaning of His words- that we each have a duty to take the good news of Him to the whole planet.

*To bless you-* There is strong connection between forgiveness and blessing. Peter was speaking to the unspoken fears of his guilty audience. Forgiveness was possible in Christ.

*In turning every one of you away from your sins-* The promised blessing was not simply of forgiveness. It was of 'turning away' from sin. This is the equivalent of what Peter preached in Acts 2; he appealed for repentance and baptism, so that the gift of the Holy Spirit [or mind] could be experienced. Here, he appeals for repentance and belief [implying baptism], so that they would know the blessing of being turned away from sin. For what we really need is not simply forgiveness, but the power not to repeat the sin; a new psychology, a new mind, a force higher than ourselves to turn us away from sin. And this is exactly what is promised here. Rom. 11:26 likewise speaks of how the Lord Jesus would "turn away [s.w.] ungodliness from Jacob" when Israel enter the new covenant; but that new covenant is now made with all who are baptized into Jesus. Rom. 11:26 is quoting from Is. 59:20, but the next verse goes on to say that this shall be effected by Yahweh giving the covenant promise of His Spirit upon His people and their children (Is. 59:21). The gift of the Spirit is therefore a turning of us away from sin. I noted under 2:39 that the promise of the Spirit "to you and your children" is also alluding to this same passage. Israel in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:26 s.w.); the arena of this 'turning' is within the human mind. And it is exactly there where we need the Lord's operation; and it is this which is included in the gift of the holy spirit or mind which is enabled by commitment to Christ.

When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will ‘turn away’ sinners from their sins, he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to “put up again” his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Peter’s appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sang his ‘Maschil’ (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. See on Acts 2:39.

We must remember that baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the blessings of forgiveness, of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and God's turning us away from our sins are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

## ACTS CHAPTER 4

*4:1 And as they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees-* The basis of their work was that they were the equivalent of the Levites who kept guard at the gates of the temple, in order to prevent the unclean from entering. They were defining the Jewish Christians and their message of healing as that which was unclean.

*Came upon them-* This is a common word in Luke-Acts. The Jews had likewise 'come upon' the Lord also in the same temple (Lk. 20:1). Luke is developing his point that the Lord's experiences and sufferings are repeated in those of believers in Him, especially in their work of representing Him in their witness. That principle applies to this day, and is a bridge between Him there so many centuries ago, and us here today.

*4:2 Being greatly annoyed because they taught the people-* See on 5:21 *Taught*. Not only are there links between Acts and Luke, as if the preaching of the apostles continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, but often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from the other Gospel records too (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

*And proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead-* By being "in Jesus", by baptism into Him, His resurrection becomes ours. And this was their message. The Sadducees who made the arrest denied resurrection, and it was endlessly irritating for them to see the growth of the Christian movement centred around faith in the resurrection both of Christ and ultimately of all believers in Him. The Gospels present the Pharisees as the great opponents of the Lord's work, but some of them converted to His cause. His criticism of them had related to matters of personal conduct, and some clearly accepted this and repented. But the Sadducees were under direct attack regarding a doctrinal matter, and it seems harder to repent of a theological wrong turning than of personal behaviour issues.

*4:3 And they arrested them-* Literally, 'they laid hands on them', as in 5:18. Exactly the same phrase is used about the arrest of the Lord (Mt. 26:50). Again, the experiences of the Lord's preachers are framed in terms of His experiences, especially at the time of His death. His cross therefore ceases to be something to be gazed at from a distance, but rather is the fullest and most complete reflection of our experiences; in that light, we can begin to attach meaning to event, which is the existential struggle of every human soul. Man's search for meaning comes to no higher moment than in seeing in our experiences those of God's beloved Son.

*And jailed them until the next day; for it was now evening-* 'Arrested them and jailed them' is repeated in Acts 5:18. Clearly their experiences now were intended to be learnt from and were consciously repeated again, just as a good teacher repeats lessons for students. This is why there is a sense of *deja vu* in our lives; it is the same Lord active in teaching us.

4:4- see on Acts 2:12.

*But many of those that heard the word believed-* Acceptable decisions to believe can therefore be made having only heard the word preached orally. The very same Greek sentence is to be found in Jn. 5:24: "He that hears My word and believes... has everlasting life". Yet again, the preachers of the Lord Jesus are presented as Jesus personally, preaching as He preached and thus continuing His witness in the world.

*And the number of the men came to be about five thousand-* In addition to the 3000 earlier baptized at Pentecost.

*4:5 And it came to pass that the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem-* This is how the Sanhedrin were referred to; they are specifically called the Sanhedrin in :15. Again we see the experience of the apostles being portrayed in terms of that of the Lord Jesus in His final sufferings. Such gatherings together to consider miracle workers were occasionally held, in the spirit of Dt. 13:1-5. The doctrine of the miracle worker was considered. Luke records three other times when the Sanhedrin met to consider the Christian preachers: Peter and the apostles (Acts 5:27), Stephen (Acts 6:12), and Paul (Acts 22:30). Each time they are presented as re-living what they did to the Lord Jesus. God was really knocking on the door of their conscience. This was presumably their first Sanhedrin gathering after the condemnation of the Lord; the places of Joseph and Nicodemus would have been conspicuously empty, and perhaps others too.

There is evidence that after around AD30, the Sanhedrin stopped meeting in the temple and met in the city of Jerusalem. We note the accuracy of the record. Any uninspired writer would have either omitted such detail, or made some historical or locational blunders. But there are none in Acts and the critics only reveal their intellectual desperation in the false claims they make to the contrary. The gathering together of these people in Jerusalem sounds as if the Psalm 2 prophecy of the Lord's enemies being gathered together against Him was now again coming true- for His preachers were Him.

*4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas-* Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. Caiaphas was the high priest, but Annas had been the high priest ten years beforehand and was the power behind Caiaphas. The inspired record recognizes that by calling him the high priest. Another alternative is that the Jews at the time considered that anyone who had been the high priest would always be called "high priest" as a title.

*And John-* Perhaps Johanan ben Zaccai; or the 'Jonathan' son of Annas who was briefly High Priest AD36/37. This latter would strengthen the impression given that this was a group of family friends and buddies.

*And Alexander-* Alexander Lysimachus, who according to Josephus "was one of the richest Jews of his time, who made great presents to the temple, and was highly esteemed by King Agrippa... He was brother to the famous Philo Judaeus, and father of Alexander Tiberius, who married Bernice, the daughter of Agrippa the elder, and was governor of Judea after Cuspius Fadus".

*And as many as were of the family of the high priest-* Note the lack of mention of Gamaliel by name. Luke is seeking to present the decision makers as a group of family and friends, "as many as were of the family of the high priest".

*4:7 And when they had set them in their midst, they enquired-* The apostles surely recalled watching how the Jews had placed a sinful woman in their midst, and then she had been vindicated by the Lord's judgment and wisdom (Jn. 8:3,9 s.w.).

*By what power, or in what name, have you done this?-* It was inconceivable for them, as it is for many legalistic religious thinkers today, to think that individuals could have an experience with the Lord and on their own initiative serve Him, empowered by Him in their ministry.

The religious types expect any religious work to be done in the name or authority of some organization.

*4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: You rulers of the people and elders-* The mention of the Holy Spirit is surely to demonstrate how exactly were the Lord's words being fulfilled: "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them, and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak. For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you" (Mt. 10:17-20).

*4:9 If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed-* See on 4:5 *Their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together.* The same word for "good deed" is only in 1 Tim. 6:2; all believers are benefitted by the good deed done for us in Christ. Our good deeds are a response to the ultimate good done to us.

4:10- see on Acts 10:35,36.

*Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel-* This could mean far more than 'be informed'. It could be an appeal for the Sanhedrin to 'know' Christ. The ambition in preaching shown here is inspirational. Peter's hope was that the Sanhedrin who had recently condemned the Lord to death, and indeed all Israel, would know Christ. We see the same spirit in the Lord's desire to make a witness to the priests (Mt. 8:4); and in Paul's attempt at his similar judgment to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). Indeed, this may be one of several examples of where Paul was inspired by Peter to the extent that he even consciously pretended to him, and this even went too far, in that he neglected his own ministry to the Gentiles in order to emulate Peter's to the Jews. Peter took seriously his previously stated belief that when Israel accepted Jesus as Christ, He would return, the Kingdom times of refreshing would come with the sending of the Lord Jesus. And so he realistically dreamt of converting all Israel. We could all do with this spirit of ambition in witness, rather than lamely informing people of our positions, certain nobody will be interested.

*That in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in him does this man stand here before you healed-* He stood before them as if in the witness box.

*4:11 He is the stone that was rejected by you the builders-* Gk. 'set at nought'. The same word used by Luke of how the Lord was 'set at nought' by Herod (Lk. 23:11). But Peter says that the Jewish leaders had done this, just as He says that it was their hands, and not so much those of the Roman soldiers, who crucified the Lord. Repeatedly, the Lord's death was blamed on the Jews. Our arrangement of things is counted as having done it.

*Which has become the cornerstone-* There could be no evidence of this apart from if a temple was now standing upon that stone. And there was such a temple- comprised of a few thousand believers. The existence of the church, the body of Christ, was the witness to Christ which was before the eyes of the Jews in the first century. We, as the body of Christ, likewise are witnesses to the resurrected body of Christ.



4:12- see on Acts 2:36.

*And in no other is there salvation; for-* Gk. *the* salvation, the Messianic salvation and Kingdom of the Old Testament. This is another form of the word translated "made whole" in :9. His 'salvation' was representative of the salvation of all men.

*Neither is there any other name-* According to Acts 4:12, there is no salvation "in any other name"; this is the name "wherein we must be saved" (RV). And the early chapters of Acts stress this theme of being "*in Christ*" (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV); yet all these things that are possible for those "*in Him*" require us to be baptized *into Him*. See on 2 Cor. 5:20.

The message they preached had an exclusive nature to it- it was radical preaching: 'this is the truth, and nothing, nothing else on this earth'. Throughout the Roman empire, there was the concept of *religio*- the gods were thought to bless the empire if the empire worshipped them, and therefore everyone was expected to participate in the state religion. However, in addition, they were quite free to practice their own religions *as well*. But here, Christianity was intolerant. They preached that there was *no other name* apart from Jesus through which we might be saved- a direct and conscious attack upon the 'religio' concept. Christ had to be accepted as Lord in baptism, in contradistinction to 'Caesar is Lord'. A Christian could only serve one of two possible masters. He had to love one and hate the other. The whole idea of "the Kingdom of God" was revolutionary- there was to be no other Kingdom spoken of apart from Caesar's. But our brethren preached the Gospel of the Kingdom *of God*. And those who openly accepted these principles were inevitably persecuted- expelled from the trade guilds, not worked with, socially shunned, their children discriminated against.

*That is given among men under heaven-* This is a persistent but unfortunate translation across many English versions. *En anthropos* is the same phrase in Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who shall confess me *before men*". The giving of the Name among or before men was in the form of the confession or witness made by the preachers who preached in His Name. Luke has earlier used the term about how the Gospel speaks of God's good will "before men" (Lk. 2:14); but that good news must be placed "before men" by the preachers in order for it to be realized in practice.

*Wherein we must be saved-* An appeal for baptism "into" Christ for salvation. 'Our' salvation was therefore prefigured in the making whole or saving [s.w.] of the crippled man (:9 s.w.).

4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they realised that they had been with Jesus-* The Jews looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publicly, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publicly and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord. They saw their "boldness", and realised they had been with Jesus; for the very same Greek word is used in description of the Lord's "boldness" in witness (Mk. 8:32; Jn. 7:26; 11:14; 16:25,29; 18:20), and on the cross (Col. 2:15). Peter was an uneducated fisherman. Who was he to appeal to Jerusalem's intelligentsia? He was mocked as speaking *a-grammatos*, without correct grammar and basic education even in his own language (Acts 4:13; AV "unlearned"). The way his two letters are so different in written style can only be because he wrote through a scribe (2 Peter is actually in quite sophisticated Greek). So most likely he couldn't write and could hardly read. So humanly speaking, he was hardly the man for the job of being the

front man for the preaching of the new ecclesia. But not only did his Lord think differently, but his own depth of experience of God's grace and appreciation of the height of the Lord's exaltation became a motivating power to witness which could not be held in. We all know that the way God prefers to work in the conversion of men is through the personal witness of other believers. We may use adverts, leaflets, lectures etc. in areas where the Gospel has not yet taken root, with quite some success. But once a community of believers has been established, the Lord seems to stop working through these means and witness instead through the personal testimony of His people. We all know this, and yet for the most part would rather distribute 10,000 tracts than swing one conversation around to the Truth, or deliberately raise issues of the Gospel with an unbelieving family member. If we recognize this almost natural reticence which most of us have, it becomes imperative to find what will motivate us to witness as we ought, *a-grammatos* or not. The fact they spoke *a-grammatos* (Gk.), without proper grammar, the fact they weren't humanly speaking the right men for the job... all this meant nothing to them. The height of the Lord's exaltation and the salvation this enabled just had to be shared with others.

Peter's confidence in preaching to the wise of this world in his *a-grammatos* way is continued in the way his letters stress that the only true knowledge is that of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5,6; 3:18). He was writing in response to the Gnostic heresy that *gnosis*, knowledge, enlivens the eternal spark within man until a man's knowledge becomes his 'immortal soul'. Peter didn't leave this for the more erudite to combat. Like an illiterate peasant farmer unashamedly challenging atheistic evolution, Peter powerfully made his point.

The credibility of a person depended not so much on them but upon their status and place in society- thus the witness of women, slaves, children and poor people was discounted. We see it happening in the way that the preaching of Peter and John was dismissed by the elders because they were of low social status (Acts 4:13). And yet these were the *very* types of people which the Lord Jesus used as His star and key witnesses in the very beginnings of Christianity!

There was something about Peter and his fellow fishermen which made even the most unsympathetic make a mental note ("took knowledge" AV) that they had been with Jesus of Nazareth. This was the fulfilment of Jn. 13:35, which using the same root word, teaches that the (Jewish) world would "know" the twelve as the Lord's men *if they reflected His love*. So there must have been something in the love that somehow shone between those men as they stood there before that court, which in a manner impossible to describe, revealed them as Christ's. This same, difficult-to-describe sense will exude from every one who is the Lord's, in whatever context we are in.

"Been with Jesus" recalls "You also shall bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27). It was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

4:14 *And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it*- The word is only elsewhere used, again by Luke, when recording the Lord's Olivet prophecy about the last days: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to *contradict*" (Lk. 21:15). The second

coming could have been in the first century; but the various preconditions weren't met, and so it was delayed until our last days. But the record here is framed to indicate that in the arraignment of the apostles before the Jews, there was a fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy.

*4:15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they took advice with one another, saying-* How did Luke know the contents of this secret conversation? It could have been by a flash of direct Divine inspiration; and yet God always seems to prefer to work through some human mechanism. Perhaps some members of the Sanhedrin did indeed convert to Christ as Peter had hoped; and shared the account of what had happened with Luke who included it in his record, albeit under inspiration.

*4:16 What shall we do to these men?-* It is Luke (and not the other evangelists) who earlier records how the Jewish leadership held such councils and said the same words about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:11; 19:48). Again and again, he is making the point- that in our preaching of the Gospel, we find the situations and experiences of our Lord repeating in our lives. We are thereby in Him, and He in and with us.

*For indeed a notable miracle has been done through them-* True, legitimate Holy Spirit miracles cannot be denied even by the cynical critics of Christianity. The claims to perform them today sadly and pathetically fail this test; for the claimed miracles can easily be denied and are not admitted as "notable" even by those looking at them with open minds. But this legitimate miracle could not be denied even by the critics, and they even admitted so themselves.

*It is obvious to all-* The Greek *phaneroo* is usually used in the sense of 'manifestation'. Paul uses the same words in saying that through his witness in prison, the Gospel had been made manifest to all (Phil. 1:13). This is one of many examples of where rabbi Paul saw himself as following the steps and leading of illiterate fisherman Peter.

*All that dwell in Jerusalem-* A specific reference to how 3000 of the 'dwellers in Jerusalem' had been baptized by Peter on Pentecost.

*And we cannot deny it-* See on *A notable miracle*. Miracles of themselves can be seen and recognized but will not inevitably persuade people to believe.

*4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us warn them, that from this time forward-* The Greek means to threaten. It's the same word used of how Saul / Paul threatened the Christians (Acts 9:1); seeing he was in Jerusalem at the time, it would seem likely that he played a part in these threats. Presumably the threats were quite scary. The disciples asked the Lord Jesus to "behold" those threats and to give them boldness to not be swayed by them (Acts 4:29).

*They are not to speak to anyone in this name-* The Jews later forbade Paul to speak to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). Yet it was Paul, it seems, who had been involved in forbidding these early disciples from speaking the Gospel. What he had done was done to him; not as punishment, but in order to help him grow spiritually himself, and also in relationship with his brethren. Those he had persecuted, and their families, would also notice that he had in fact suffered so much of what he had done to them, and this would in turn have eased their relationship with Paul and acceptance of him as a brother.

4:18 *And they called them, and ordered them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*- This was only really of power and relevance if in fact Peter and John were still considered to be synagogue members. Likewise with Paul's beating with rods, which was a synagogue punishment (2 Cor. 11:25). Clearly the early believers remained within the apostate system of Judaism until they were thrown out of it; they were not required by the Lord to stop attendance in an apostate system as a condition of fellowship with Him. Forbidding them to teach sounds very much like forbidding them to stand up in the synagogue and give their opinion on Scripture- a right which was open to all synagogue members, and one which Paul so often used in order to introduce the Gospel to the Jews.

4:19 *But Peter and John answered and said to them: Whether it is right in the sight of God*- Luke has used this phrase earlier when saying that Zacharias and Elisabeth were 'right before God'. We too can focus upon Biblical characters and make them programmatic for our life decisions, wishing to emulate them in the decisions we face. The seven previous New Testament references to the presence / sight of God are all in Luke.

*To listen to you rather than to God, you must judge*- This is quite rightly the flagship proof text for the Christian refusal to obey Governments in ways which break God's commandments. "To listen" suggests that Peter saw God's word as living and speaking to him in an ongoing sense, just as much as those Jewish leaders were speaking to him. He had made the judgment to listen to God and not men, and he invites them to make a similar judgment.

In saying this, Peter is showing that he had learnt the lesson of the transfiguration, "hear Him". So he told the Jewish authorities that he had to hear God's word rather than theirs.

4:20 *For we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard*- The basis of the Lord's exaltation was the resurrection. When asked why he preached when it was forbidden, Peter didn't shrug and say 'Well Jesus told me too so I have to'. His response was: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard". It would have been like saying that, say, sneezing or blinking was a sin. These things are involuntary reactions; and likewise, preaching is the involuntary reaction to a real belief in the Lord's death and resurrection. His preaching was a 'hearkening unto God', not so much to the specific commission to preach but rather to the imperative to witness which the Father had placed in the resurrection of His Son. When arrested for preaching a second time, Peter says the same. I'd paraphrase the interview in Acts 5:29-31 like this: Q. 'Why do you keep preaching when it's forbidden?'. A. 'Jesus has been raised, and been exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, "for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins". We have to obey the wonderful imperative which God has placed in these things: to preach this wondrous message to those for whom so much has been made possible'. It's not that Peter was the most natural one to stand up and make the witness; he spoke *a-grammatos*, but it was somehow evident from his body language that he had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). In rebuking the false teachers, he likens himself to the dumb ass that spoke in rebuke of Balaam- i.e. he felt compelled to make the witness to God's word which he did, although naturally, without the imperatives we have discussed, he would be simply a dumb ass. He told the Sanhedrin that to make true Christians agree not to preach was simply an inappropriate suggestion, because "*we cannot but speak*" out- it was something which went part and parcel with the experience of the risen Lord Jesus. Peter was not just an illiterate fisherman; so many of his words and phrasing indicate a thorough familiarity with the Greek Old Testament. Here, he seems to have Num. 24:13 at the back of his mind; Balaam says that although Balak is forbidding him to speak, he cannot but speak what God has inspired him with, even if it is intensely unpopular with those around him. Of course, the

Christian preacher is not inspired as Balaam was, but the principle is the same: it is impossible to keep quiet, because of the very nature of what we believe and who we are. John had the spirit of Peter when he wrote (in one of his many allusions to Peter's words) that what they had heard and seen, that they declared / witnessed (1 Jn. 1:1,3), as if hearing and seeing / experiencing Christ inevitably lead to witness. Peter also seems to allude to Am. 3:8: "The Lord Yahweh has spoken- who can but speak it forth?". The speaking of Yahweh was in the death and resurrection of His Son, and our hearing of these words puts us all in the same position as the Old Testament prophets. This is something which once heard simply has to be spoken forth. If we have really grasped the Gospel, there is no way we can hide it. We are immediately made a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

"We saw and heard" is a phrase which occurs often in the Gospels. It was not simply a case of repeating words heard. Those words were backed up by experience, what they had seen and known in the Lord Jesus. He was the word of hearing made flesh, made actual and visible. So often, the content of preaching tends to be unbalanced- more on experience ['seeing'] than the word heard, or vice versa.

*4:21 And they, when they had threatened them further, let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people-* The same words used of how no cause of death was found in the Lord at His trial (Acts 13:28). Again, the experiences of the apostles, like our own, were arranged to enable them to enter into the experiences of the Lord. The phrase is only again used about how no cause of death was found in Paul (Acts 23:29). This is one of many examples of where the ministries of Peter and Paul are framed as being so similar. They were to take encouragement from each other, thereby realizing that the same Heavenly Lord was working through both of them in their parallel ministries to Jews and Gentiles. Paul perceived this in Gal. 2:8: "For he that worked through Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, worked through me also to the Gentiles". Our lives are also structured in parallel with others, both in the Biblical record and contemporary to our times. This provides the basis for fellowship now; and also makes the Biblical record of past believers a living word to us, preparing us for eternal fellowship with them in God's Kingdom.

*For all men glorified God for what was done-* Luke uses this term of how the shepherds glorified God after seeing the baby Jesus (Lk. 2:20). But "saw and heard" in the previous verse :20 is also used by Luke of how the shepherds "saw and heard". Again Luke is demonstrating that the incidents of the Gospel records repeat in essence in the experiences of those who follow the Lord in later years.

*4:22 For the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was done-* A strange way to put it, if simply referring to 'the healing'. The healing was a *semeion*, a sign, of healing. The man was representative of all Israel; hence the mention of his age. For effectively, Israel were 40 years in the wilderness, unable to enter the promised land without Joshua-Jesus. Just as the man was left lame at the entrance to the temple for the same period.

*4:23 And being let go, they came to their friends, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them-* The ecclesia was a growing family; the apostles returned 'to their own' when they came out of court (Acts 4:23 Gk.). Each baptism was and is a birth into *our* family. Visiting brethren were *gladly* received, as one would receive a relative; it was the logical thing to seek out the believers in a town and stay with them (21:7,17; 27:3; 28:14; 3 Jn. 5).

*4:24 And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said-* All the believers, hearing what the disciples had been told by the priests and elders, immediately each made the connection with Psalm 2, and all came out with it at once. This is an example of the spontaneous fellowship of the Spirit, based around both God's word and also common experience. Such fellowship experience is not based on documents or agreements.

*O Lord, you that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them-* Quoting from Ps. 146:6. The Psalm goes on to exult that "Yahweh frees the prisoners" (Ps. 146:7), which is what had just happened in that the apostles had been set free (:21 'Let... go'). Paul uses the same reference to Yahweh as creator of heaven, earth and sea and all that is in them (Acts 14:15)- another example of Peter's influence upon Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul imitated Peter partly from respect, partly from perceiving that his ministry was parallel to Peter's; and partly from a desire to pretend to Peter's ministry to the Jews.

The prayer of Acts 4:24-31 speaks of the God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in it- a classic Jewish liturgy used in the temple prayers. The point being, such prayers didn't have to be made in the temple through the Jewish priests. Further, there is extra-Biblical evidence (from Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian) that the third, sixth and ninth hours were the times for prayer amongst the early Christians- but these were the very hours of prayer in the temple! One major obstacle for Jewish minds would have been their perception that prayer and worship were to be carried out in the Jerusalem temple. This would have been a particular barrier for the many Jews in Jerusalem who converted to Christ. Whilst initially it appears the believers did attend the temple services, it is also significant that Acts repeatedly brings out the parallels between prayers and worship performed in the *temple*, and those performed in the ordinary homes of believers. Some passages about worship in the temple appear to be in parallel with others about such worship in homes. Luke seems to emphasize how important was the home as a place for prayer. Cornelius is presented as praying at home at the ninth hour, which was the hour of temple prayer (Acts 10:3,30). This would have been so hard to accept to the Jewish mind- that your own humble home [hence Luke stresses meetings and prayers *in homes* so much] was the house of God. It had been so drummed into the Jewish mind that the temple was "the house of prayer" (Is. 56:7; 60:7 LXX)- but now they were faced with the wonderful reality that their own home was that house of prayer. Only those brave enough to really reach out for a personal relationship with the God of Heaven would have risen up to this challenging idea. And yet the very height and thrill of the challenge inspired so many to do so.

*4:25 Who by the Holy Spirit-* A classic statement of the Divine inspiration of David's Psalms.

*And by the mouth of our father David your servant, did say-* Ps. 2:1,2, a prophecy about opposition to Jesus personally, is here appropriated to those who preach Him, because they are in Him.

*Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things?-* It is a theme of the Apostolic preaching in early Acts that the Jews are paralleled with the Gentiles in their responsibility for the Lord's death. This was doubtless to counter the thought that the blame could be put upon the Romans. In order to bring about repentance and conversion, the Jews had to allow themselves to be fully convicted of their individual and national guilt. So often we as small people assume that the guilt for wrong behaviour is somehow on a group level.

But we as individuals empower the group decisions, and this was never clearer than in the Lord's death. The Lord makes a similar allusion to Psalm 2 when He assures Paul that He will deliver Paul "from the people [of Israel] and the Gentiles" (Acts 26:17). This again is encouraging Paul to understand that his mission to the Gentiles was parallel to Peter's to the Jews, and the same deliverance would be given him, and Psalm 2 would be true for Paul as it had been for Peter here in Acts 4, and as it was ultimately for the Lord Himself. Yet it seems Paul didn't totally take the point, because he veered towards pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than taking encouragement from it in his own ministry.

4:26- see on Acts 9:15.

*The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ-* The disciples understood this to refer to the Lord Jesus (:27) and yet they quote it about their experience before the assembled elders, who were also "gathered together" (:6, s.w.). Thus the early brethren appropriated prophecies of Jesus personally to themselves as they witnessed to Him (also in Acts 13:5,40). The same Greek words are also used in Luke and Acts about the work of Jesus and those of the apostles later; and also, the same original words are used concerning the deeds of the apostles in the ministry of Jesus, and their deeds in Acts. Thus an impression is given that the ecclesia's witness after the resurrection was and is a continuation of the witness of the 12 men who walked around Galilee with Jesus. He didn't come to start a formalised religion; as groups of believers grew, the Holy Spirit guided them to have systems of leadership and organization, but the essence is that we too are personally following the Lamb of God as He walked around Galilee, hearing His words, seeing His ways, and following afar off to Golgotha carrying His cross.

In arguing that both Jew and Gentile were gathered together against the Lord (God) and His Christ on the cross, Peter thus makes a connection between the Father and Son on the cross. Those who reproached Jesus there reproached the Father (Ps. 69:9).

The cross of Christ is the gathering point for His people (see on Jn. 12:32; 17:21). But it is also associated with the gathering together of all God's enemies (Acts 4:26). Even Herod and Pilate were made friends at that time (Luke 23:12). The cross divides men into two united camps; they are gathered together by it, either in the Lord's cause, or against Him. The crucifixion was the judgment seat for this world (Jn. 12:31). Likewise the day of judgment will be a gathering together, either against the Lord (Rev. 16:16; 19:19), unto condemnation (Jn. 15:6); or into the barn of His salvation (Mt. 13:30). And likewise, in anticipation of the judgment, the breaking of bread is a "gathering together" either to condemnation or salvation (1 Cor. 11).

4:27 *For truly in this city-* Mentioned because Psalm 2 suggests that the gathering together against the Lord would occur in Jerusalem.

*There were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles-* Herod claimed to be Jewish, so perhaps Peter sees in this the fulfilment of Jew and Gentile gathering together to destroy the Lord. We recall that Pilate was unwilling to crucify Him; but all the same, he did it, and Peter very much considers that to be Pilate's guilt. So arguing that we sinned but against our will, making excuses kilometres long, doesn't finally justify us.

*And the people of Israel-* Peter's appeals were for individuals to repent. But he emphasizes the collective guilt of all Israel. He was seeking to convict individuals of the serious sin of empowering a collective decision, helping them to see that a member of the crowd still shares the guilt of the collective crowd. And on this basis, individuals were indeed convicted of their sin and baptized into the One they had effectively crucified.

4:28 *To do whatever Your hand and Your counsel foreordained to happen-* The fact the Lord's death had been in some sense predetermined by God and was according to His will did not in any sense mitigate against personal guilt; see on :27 *The people of Israel*.

4:29 *And now Lord, look upon their threats, and-* They were surely inspired by the praying of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:16 using the same words. And these examples ought to specifically fire our prayer life, too. We can discern how their thinking developed; in :25 they perceived the relevance of Psalm 2 to the Lord's trials and to their own. But they then recalled the historical application of Psalm 2 to Hezekiah surrounded by the raging Assyrians within Jerusalem. Meditating upon him, they remembered his prayer- and that too became an inspiration and pattern for their prayer. This is how familiarity with the Bible text works in practice; this is what the mind of the Spirit is about.

*Grant-* They believed that psychological attitudes such as boldness could be given. It was and is a gift of the spirit / mind.

*To your servants-* They spoke of themselves as God's servants in the same breath as they speak of Jesus as being His Servant (Acts 4:29,30). They realized that all that was true of the Servant was true of them too.

*To speak Your word with all boldness-* This prayer for a spirit / attitude of mind, involving faith, disregard of consequences and confidence, was given- for in :31 we read that "when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit; and they spoke the word of God with boldness". That holy spirit which was given them was surely more a spirit / attitude of mind. And such psychological strengthening of the human spirit is available and experienced today. The shaking of the place, presumably by an earthquake, was to reflect the movement or out surge of power / spirit which was going on. It was a reflection in visible terms of the internal empowering going on within their minds, in response to their sincere prayer.

4:30- see on Acts 3:7.

*While You stretch out Your hand to heal-* As the apostles preached (:29), in parallel the Lord would stretch out His hand in doing miracles. The miraculous gifts were to support the preaching of the word by the apostles- a specific thing at a specific time. The stretched out hand of God was a Hebraism speaking of God's covenant with men. The same phrase occurs in the LXX of Num. 14:30 and Neh. 9:15 "the land for which I stretched out My hand to establish you upon it" (see too Ps. 55:20). As the apostles presented God's outstretched hand through teaching the Gospel, so He Himself would stretch out His hand in appealing to Israel through doing miracles. Yet the majority of the 150 or so times in the LXX we read this phrase about God's hand stretched out, it is His hand stretched out to judge sin. Hence the significance of asking God to stretch out His hand *to heal*, when Israel deserved His hand



stretched out yet again in judgment. The miracles were therefore to be seen as a special sign of God's grace to Israel at this time.

The stretching out of the Lord's hand to save is clearly allusive to what He had done to Peter as he sunk into the waves on Galilee that night. But now, Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others.

Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

*That signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus-* This is strictly speaking a just about legitimate translation of *pais*, but the word basically means 'a boy'. "Servant" would really be the translation of *doulos*, and this is the word used about the Lord in the 'servant' passage about Him in Phil. 2:7. The AV is not far off with "holy child". Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. Jn. 5:19 gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this and perhaps reflect it in this otherwise rather strange title for the Lord.

4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together-* Presumably by an earthquake. But they were unharmed. The same scenario is found when Paul was in trouble with the authorities in Philippi. In response to his midnight prayers, the place was shaken by an earthquake (Acts 16:26 s.w.). Paul was hereby confirmed in seeking to emulate Peter's ministry; for now something beyond his conscious imitation occurred, i.e. an earthquake after prayer, which reinforced his understanding of his ministry as being based upon Peter's. His willing taking humble Peter for his example was an essay in humility. See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness.*

*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit-* The situation is intended to recall that in Acts 2. Here, they are gathered together in one place, presumably that same upper room. They prayed, and were filled with Holy Spirit. I suggested on 4:29 that this was more in the form of internal strengthening. But I think it was also in chapter 2, but there was visible manifestation for emphasis. In this case, the more physical manifestation of the Spirit was in the earthquake. We also observe that being filled with the Holy Spirit was an experience which had to be repeated; they had been filled with it in chapter 2, and were now filled with it again. It gave specific strength at specific times.

*And they spoke the word of God with boldness-* See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness*. When Paul is recorded as speaking the word with boldness (Acts 13:46) and praying that he would speak the word boldly as he ought to (Eph. 6:20), surely he was allowing himself to be inspired by Peter's example and consciously seeking to follow it. This huge respect for Peter by Paul is a powerful essay in humility. For they were from very differing social, cultural and educational backgrounds; in secular terms, Paul the Roman citizen was born far higher than Peter the Galilean fisherman.

4:32- see on Acts 2:44.

*And the full number of those who believed were of one heart-* Sitting there in Babylonian captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (Ez. 11:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind or heart between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and it was only accepted by those who turned to Jesus Christ in accepting the new covenant in Him. Their being of "one heart" after baptism was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In the hearing of offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel's words, and deciding whether or not to remain in cushy Babylon, or make a painful and humanly uncertain aliyah to Zion.

*And soul-* The phrase only occurs again in Phil. 1:27, where Paul writes that having "one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel" is an outcome of a way of life appropriate to "the gospel of Christ". Such unity, encompassing now around 5000 people, was a psychological phenomenon. It was only possible on account of joint belief in the Gospel. It is a lack of focus upon that basic Gospel and working together for it which allows all manner of issues to creep in which then cause disunity.

*And not one of them said that anything of the things which he possessed was his own-* As a result of this, many sold what superfluous things they had. But those who didn't, we later learn, had their possessions and lands stolen during the persecution of the Hebrew believers that soon followed (Acts 11:19 cp. Heb. 10:32-34). God took back what He had lent them, even before their death. Their realization that they owned nothing was not just a temporary height of enthusiasm; they appreciated a principle which was true before, then and now. That principle applies today just as much as it did then.

In the early church, "not one of them *said* that any of the things which he possessed was his own". I wonder- and maybe I'm clutching at straws and justifying us all- if the emphasis is upon the word "said". Their *attitude* was that they didn't personally possess anything. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are to buy and sell and deal in this world, as if we didn't really buy anything or gain a thing, as if it's all somehow performed by us as in a disconnected dream. See on Lk. 14:33. This attitude that nothing is personally ours is a great

freedom- from worry about what we have, about security, changes of values, and from coveting what we might be able to own.

*4:33 And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all-* This is paralleled with "great [s.w.] grace" being with them. *Charis*, "grace", means a gift, and is often used about the gifts of the Spirit. We may simply be learning that there were great gifts of Holy Spirit power to perform major miracles. But the parallel between "great power" and "great grace" may mean that the disciples appreciated very deeply God's grace given to them, and this gave a convicting power to their witness to it. John the Baptist had the grace of God "upon" him (Lk. 2:40 s.w.) but "John did no miracle". So this passage doesn't have to refer to miraculous support of their testimony. Our experience of grace will likewise give great power to our witness. This is why the most powerful preachers are often those who perceive the most deeply their experience of grace.

The early brethren had seen and known Jesus, despised, hated, dropping from exhaustion in the boat, slumping dehydrated at a well, covered in blood and spittle, mocked in naked shame. And now they knew that He had risen, that He had been exalted to God's right hand so as to make the salvation of men possible, and surely going to return. They spoke this out, because they knew Him. And yet through the Gospels and with the eye of faith, we know Him too. And this must be the basis for our witness.

*4:34 For neither were there among them any that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold-* The referent is to the great multitude of 5000 believers (:32); not just to the apostles, for the sellers put the money at the feet of the apostles. Whether 5000 people really did sell all their property in a relatively short period of time... is somewhat doubtful. Surely we are being presented with an idealized picture of the early church, just as inspiration at times presents a positive take on things, e.g. the early Kingdom of Solomon as recorded in 1 Kings.

"Sold them" is the same word translated "things which he possessed" in :32 is to be found in Lk. 12:33 "Sell that which you have and give alms". This verse was surely hammering in their conscience as they sold their goods. The implication is that they realized the capital quickly. But in the East, especially in the first century, no commercial transaction was done quickly. They would have sold for low prices; reflecting their radical devaluing of possessions. There was no specific command given to them to sell their goods, or at least, the Acts record doesn't record it. Rather was their motivation 'just' one word from the Lord Jesus in Luke's Gospel. This should be the power to us of 'just' one recorded word from the Lord, now staring at us from a page of thin paper or a screen, the radical demands of 'only' one verse...

"Brought the proceeds" is Gk. 'carried the value'. As they apparently sold things quickly, payment was likely not only in coinage but in material goods, which they brought to the apostles.

*4:35 And laid them at the apostles' feet-* The same words in Greek used about how God would *make* (s.w. "laid down") His Son's enemies a stool for His feet. Peter has just been

preaching this in Acts 2:35, and I commented there that being at the footstool meant worship and repentance. Peter quotes the passage in an appeal for Israel to repent and come to the stool of the Lord's feet. So it could be that following hard on from this idea being preached, the new converts saw the apostles as the manifestation of the Lord, and brought the symbols of their humanity to His feet. Such giving up of materialism is indeed part of repentance and truly coming on our knees to the Lord.

*And distribution was made-* The apostles had before them a huge and unexpected pile of precious metals, coins, garments and other items of value. And now they had to distribute them. The word occurs in describing how the Lord gave the loaves to the apostles and they distributed them to the crowds (Jn. 6:11). He led them, as He does us, through one experience in His service in order to prepare them for another.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet now, after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word here in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

*To each-* Welfare aid is best given directly to the needy person by the donor, rather than through their representatives.

*According to anyone's need-* Not according to what they were asked to give, but in response to need.

*4:36 And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (we say Son of exhortation)-* An example of the Biblical record going along with the incorrect perceptions of faithful men is to be found in the way the apostles nicknamed Joseph as 'Barnabas' "under the impression, apparently, that it meant 'son of consolation'. On etymological grounds that has proved hard to justify, and the name is now generally recognized to... mean 'son of Nabu'". Yet the record 'goes along' with their misunderstanding. In addition to this, there is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left- even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11).

*A Levite, a man of Cyprus by race-* Levites weren't supposed to own property; so they owned land outside the territory of Israel. He realized that this was just getting around God's intention. But how quickly he managed to sell it is remarkable. Perhaps he sold the title deeds for a knockdown price to someone in Jerusalem. Note that although Barnabas was Jewish, he is identified as "a man of Cyprus by race". This explains why there were devout Jews, Hebrew speakers, living in Jerusalem- who spoke of how they heard the Gospel in their own languages in which they were born.

*4:37 Having a field, sold it; and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet-* Perhaps he was motivated by how all Judas could buy for his pieces of silver was a field. He

too had a field, held illegally before God. And he wanted to get rid of it quickly. He brought money [cash] for it to the apostles, whereas :34 speaks of others carrying the proceeds of what they sold [as if those proceeds weren't simply cash]. I would conclude from this that he sold the title deeds quickly, for a cheap price, to someone in Jerusalem. Otherwise we are to imagine him sailing to Cyprus, finding a buyer, and then returning- which at the speed business was done in the East, would've taken maybe a year. The field however may not have been in Cyprus.

## ACTS CHAPTER 5

*5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession-* As others in the community did (the same words are used in Acts 4:34). Ananias and Sapphira wished to appear like them; for without doubt they would have been praised and commended by all for such selfless giving.

*5:2 And with his wife's knowledge-* The initiator of the act and doer of the deed was Ananias; he alone brought the money to the apostles, for his wife was not with him at that time. But Sapphira was likewise punished because the essence of the sin was pride, and she shared in this.

*Kept back part of the proceeds, and brought only a part of it-* Gk. 'to keep for oneself'. It is translated "petty thieving" in Tit. 2:10. But who was the theft from? All he had belonged to God. His sin was therefore in assuming that what he had was really his; and anything he gave to God was a gift, and the rest he could legitimately keep as his. But as Peter points out, the money remained 'his' in the sense that God had delegated those funds to him. His sin was therefore not so much in keeping a part for himself, but in giving the impression of greater devotion and sacrifice than was actually the case. This lie, or as the Greek means, 'deception', resulted in his death. It's a sober lesson- not in generosity, but in never giving the impression to our brethren of a greater level of sacrifice than in fact we have made. And we have all likely failed at this point at some time to some extent.

*And laid it-* This translates *tithemi*, which is the same word translated "conceived" in :4 "you have *conceived* this thing in your heart". I suggest the connection is in the way that Ananias and Sapphira imagined how they would lay down the money at the feet of the apostles, with others watching... the sober nodding in agreement, the kind words of approbation, the tears of gratitude from the poor, the body language of respect from the apostles... all these things were their motivation. They laid up in their heart that moment of laying down the money at the feet of the apostles. Their sin was not theft or fraud- but pride.

*5:3 And Peter said: Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart-* Peter could plead with men, both in and out of the Faith, with a credibility that lay in his ready acceptance of his failures, and his evident acceptance of his Lord's gracious forgiveness and teaching. Consider how he tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart (Acts 5:3), alluding to what everyone full well knew: that Satan had desired to have him too, and in the denials he had pretty well capitulated (Lk. 22:31,32). Peter's disciplining of Ananias, so soon after his own deference to the pressures of Satan as opposed to those of the Lord, would have been done surely in subdued, saddened and introspective tones.

*To lie to the Holy Spirit-* Gk. 'to deceive'. See on 5:2 *Kept back*.

*And to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?-* To make the generosity look credible, the amount they kept was probably not that great. And yet people betray their Lord and throw away their eternal life for very small sums of money.

*5:4 While it remained, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your power?-* When they sold their property, the Holy Spirit's comment in Acts 5:4 was that the money was "their own" and "under their own power" [Gk. *exousia*]. They could have chosen to give all or part of that money to God. It was theirs and not God's, the implication was. This is a startling insight. What wealth we have has been genuinely entrusted to us by

the Lord, and in that sense it is indeed 'ours', under our power. Yet we are to realize that of course as those under the sphere of God's rulership / Kingdom, we are under *His* 'exousia'. Absolutely *all* power of *exousia* in any part of Heaven or earth has now been given to the Lord Jesus (Mt. 28:18; Jn. 17:2; Col. 2:10). And yet He has given "authority" or *exousia* to us His servants, and will judge us on His return as to how we have used this (Mk. 13:34; Jn. 1:12). We need to make this connection- that although He has delegated to us wealth, and placed it under our power or *exousia*, if we are truly part of His Kingdom, we are to give back the *exousia* or power / authority over our wealth to Him.

*How is it you have conceived this thing in your heart-* Acts 5:3 provides an example of the connection between the Devil and our sins. Peter says to Ananias: "Why has Satan filled your heart?". Then in verse 4 Peter says "Why have you *conceived this thing in your heart*?". Conceiving something bad within our heart is the same as Satan filling our heart. If we ourselves conceive something, e.g. a sinful plan, then it begins *inside us*. Note that when Peter speaks of how Ananias has "conceived this thing in your heart" he's alluding to the LXX of Esther 7:5, where the wicked Haman is described as one "whose heart hath filled him" to abuse God's people (see RV). Note in passing that the LXX of Esther 7:4 speaks of Haman as *ho diabolos* [with the definite article] – a mere man is called "the Satan". It's been suggested that 'Satan filling the heart' was a common phrase used in the first century to excuse human sin; and Peter is deconstructing it by using the phrase and then defining more precisely what it refers to – conceiving sin in our heart, our own heart filling itself with sin. But about "conceived", see on 5:2 *Laid it*.

*You have not lied to men, but to God-* He had, of course, lied to men. We must read in an ellipsis here: 'You have not [so much] lied to men, but [also] to God'.

*5:5 And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down-* Both Ananias and Sapphira fell down at the apostles' feet (:10)- exactly the place where they had laid their money. Truly, they perished along with their money. Perhaps Peter reflected on this to the point that he told Simon Magus that his money would perish with him (Acts 8:20). What God wanted was them- not their appearance of giving money. With reflection I am personally convinced that Peter's words to Simon were indeed a result of reflection upon how Ananias and Sapphira had fallen down at his feet, upon their money [or at least, Ananias did].

*And breathed his last; and great fear came upon all that heard it-* This apparently spread in the three hours after Ananias died. So we can assume it refers to the Christian community. "Great fear" is a phrase elsewhere used several times in the New Testament for fear of condemnation. If my analysis of the reasons for Ananias' judgment is correct, then this is understandable- because we have all at some times and in some ways sought the approbation of our brethren, and given an appearance of spirituality and self-sacrifice which is beyond where we really stand. Ananias died for this. No wonder an appropriate fear spread amongst the believers, as it does in our hearts too when we think of the holiness of God and totality of His demands upon men. This of course lays the groundwork for a marvelling, grateful acceptance of God's patient grace towards us.

*5:6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up-* Perhaps a technical term referring to a group of young men who did the practical things in the church. Paul refers to a similar group when he writes of "the messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23).

*And they carried him out and buried him-* A fairly rare word is used for “carried”, occurring only 7 times in the New Testament, three of them here in this incident (:6,9,10). It cannot surely be insignificant that the word is used again in such close proximity to this incident, in describing the result of it- the sick were “carried out” and placed at Peter’s feet (:15 s.w.), so close to him that the shadow cast by his body fell on them. Being carried to the feet of Peter might seem a risky undertaking, given what he had done. But here we behold both the goodness and severity of God. The harder side of God attracts; when His judgments are in the earth, then and thereby shall men come to Him. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira at the hands of Peter did not drive people away; rather did it bring people closer to Peter and the Lord he represented. This is why “judgment to come” is part of the Gospel message; a vaguely defined message of a fuzzy love and candy for the kids will not of itself be attractive to people. There is another side to life, to God and to His Son; and every human being subconsciously knows that. And directly engaging with it, and finding that through all that, God is love... is what makes the Gospel so compelling, and what reached to the very soul of even Felix and almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 24:25; 26:28).

*5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after when his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in-* But in the three hours after her husband died, the news spread around (:5). We wonder therefore where exactly Sapphira had been. As she approached Peter, nobody apparently told her ‘By the way, your husband just got slain by Peter because he lied about the money’. Indeed, it would appear from :6 that Ananias was buried immediately, for Peter tells her “Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out” (:9). Perhaps she went to Peter privately. But it’s a good question for eager, imaginative Bible students: ‘Where was Sapphira in the three hours after Ananias died?’.

*5:8 And Peter said to her-* Gk. ‘Peter answered and said to her’. What he said to her was therefore a response. But there is no record of what she said. Perhaps she said nothing; but came in to the apostles giving the impression she had generously given to the Lord, seeking their approbation.

*Tell me whether-* We can only speculate as to the tone in Peter’s voice. Was it the even tone of the prosecutor asking a question which he knew would decide the fate of the accused? Or was there in his tone some hint of pleading for her repentance, as if to say ‘Did you *really* sell the land for that much?’. The question itself should have made Sapphira guess that something was up, and that they had been busted. In that split second, she had the choice between life and death; and it was her pride which made her choose death by lying.

*You sold the land-* You plural. Although Ananias sold it, it was counted as if she had too.

*For so much. And she said: Yes, for so much-* Pointing to the coins at his feet.

*5:9 But Peter said to her: How is it you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?-* I have suggested that pride was the key motive for the sin. But Peter’s comment suggests another factor. Perhaps they doubted whether Peter truly had the Spirit, and so they had decided to test this. However, it could be that here we have a case of sin being described in terms of what it really is, even though how the sin is now described would be denied by the sinner. He wanted to show her what their pride and lying really amounted to- a putting of God’s Spirit to the test. The language of testing God is replete with reference to Israel’s failure in this. They tested God in the wilderness (Dt. 6:16; Ps. 78:18,41,56; 106:14); and this led to



their exclusion from the promised land. In essence, Ananias and Sapphira had repeated Israel's sin. Despite all the evidence both to them and to Israel in the wilderness, that God's Spirit was indeed possessed by the leaders of His people- still they wanted to test whether it really was. But of course it all depends on motive- Gideon tested the Spirit, twice; Paul went against Spirit guidance in continuing his journey to Jerusalem. The same words are also used about how he tested going into Mysia, but the Spirit didn't allow him to (Acts 16:7). But what they did appears to have been a conscious, sceptical testing of whether the Lord was really amongst them or not.

*Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out-* This suggests that Peter suspected she would be impenitent. The young brothers were waiting in expectation of dealing with her corpse; or perhaps "the feet" suggests Peter had heard their footsteps returning from having buried Ananias. We also sense that she was alone with Peter, without the presence of others- as if to try to make the temptation to pride and maintenance of face and image somewhat less. She could have quietly confessed to Peter; but her pride was strong, unto death. We note how in the early church, there was the power of the Spirit to smite with sickness, and also to heal from it; and here we see there was even the power to slay with death.

*5:10 And she fell down immediately at his feet and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her next to her husband-* "At his feet", where the money had been placed. See on 5:5 *Fell down*.

*5:11 And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things-* See on 5:5. The phrase "great fear" is nearly always used in a negative context by Luke, and usually with a commandment not to fear following it. Luke records how the message of the Lord Jesus was to empower God's people to serve Him "without fear" (Lk. 1:74); and John writes that such fear should be "cast out" in the experience of those who have the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:18). We conclude therefore that this is a hint at weakness in the church.

*5:12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders done among the people-* It could be that they literally used their hands to do miracles, in obedience to the command on the great commission, that they would lay their hands on the sick (Mk. 16:18). But the phrase can equally mean 'by the instrumentality of...', as if to emphasize it was the Lord using them, rather than them doing anything of their own power.

*And they were all gathering together in Solomon's porch-* The point of mentioning this might be because the miracles were done there, at their public meetings. This public nature of these dramatic healing miracles is a far cry from the claims of healed headaches in backstreet church halls made by Pentecostalism. But why the specific mention of "Solomon's porch"? Perhaps because it was Stephen who would later point out that it was Solomon who built the temple, although that was not God's ideal intention; His desire was to dwell in the hearts of His people, not in buildings made with human hands. Solomon's porch was supposed to be the only original part of Solomon's temple which had survived. The porch was not large enough for the whole church, so the "they" who gathered there presumably refers to the apostles. However, Solomon's porch was open to Gentiles and the unclean too- and that was most likely the reason why they gathered there. The Lord was slowly working on Peter's conscience regarding including the Gentiles and the unclean; for Peter would have noticed how such folks were listening to his preaching there. The Lord likewise prods us through

meetings and situations, and then makes His direct appeal to us, as happened with Peter in the matter of Cornelius.

*5:13 None of the rest dared join them, although the people held them in high esteem-* Who is this group of people? They are put in contrast with "the people", who respected the apostles and many of whom now believed (:14). Luke has spoken of such a group in describing how the women told the news of the Lord's resurrection "to the eleven and to all the rest" (Lk. 24:9 s.w.; also in Mk. 16:13 "They went and told it unto the rest, neither did they believe it"). Just recently in Acts, Luke has spoken of "the rest of the apostles" (Acts 2:37). I suggest this may be a technical term for the inner circle of believers who had followed the Lord before His death. Paul speaks of "the rest" as if they were a group which did not include Peter: "The rest of the apostles, the brethren of the Lord and Cephas" (1 Cor. 9:5). It could be that this group were scared by what had happened because they realized that they too had in some senses not been totally honest before the Spirit of God in whatever way; just as any sincere believer will read the account of Ananias and Sapphira and likewise have a sense of fear. This group are painted in distinction from the crowds generally, who respected Peter even more and increasingly believed, as we read in the next verse. This is an essay in the humanity and weakness of the Lord's followers at the time.

Another possibility is raised by considering the meaning of 'join them'. The implication could be that Ananias and Sapphira were part of a group who wished to attain to the inner circle of leading apostles. But with their death, the rest of those like Ananias and Sapphira no longer pretended to joining with the leading apostles.

*5:14 And many more believers-* The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus actually serves as an attraction to the serious believer. The lifted up Jesus draws men unto Him. When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as many as heard these things". Many would have thought His attitude hard; this man and woman had sold their property and given some of it (a fair percentage, probably, to make it look realistic) to the Lord's cause. And then He slew them. But just afterwards, "believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:12,14). The Lord's harder side didn't turn men away from Him; rather did it bring them to Him. And so the demands and terror of the preaching of the cross did likewise. The balance between His utter grace, the way (e.g.) He marvelled at men's puny faith, and His harder side, is what makes His character so utterly magnetic and charismatic in the ultimate sense. Think of how He beheld the rich man and loved Him, and yet at the same time was purposefully demanding: He told Him to sell all He had and give it to beggars. Not to the work of the ministry, but to beggars, many of whom one would rightly be cynical of helping. It was a large demand, the Lord didn't make it to everyone, and He knew He was touching the man's weakest point. If the Lord had asked that the man's wealth be given to Him, he may have agreed. But to beggars... And yet the Lord made this heavy demand with a deep love for the man.

*Were added to the Lord-* The RVmg. speaks of them being added "to them", i.e. the believers who comprised the body of Jesus. Baptism is not only entry into covenant relationship with the Father and His Son; it is also baptism into the body of Christ, i.e. the body of believers (1 Cor. 12:13). This is where self-baptism shouldn't be used too liberally. Thus the record in Acts describes baptisms as believers being "added" to the body of believers (Acts 2:41,47); but also as them being "added" (s.w.) to the Lord Jesus (5:14; 11:24). It is therefore appropriate that there are other members of the body of Christ present at baptisms; baptism is

entry into relationship with the community of believers, as well as into a personal relationship with Christ.

Note that the Lord Jesus added converts to the church (Acts 2:47), but here, they are added to the Lord Jesus (NEV, AV). In this we see the direct connection between the Lord Jesus and His church; as Paul expresses it, the church is the body of the Lord Jesus.

*Crowds of men and women-* Gk. "Both men and women". Religion in the first century was largely the domain of men; the inclusiveness towards women would have made Christianity almost unique amongst contemporary religions.

5:15 *So much so-* This is picking up from the end of :12. Verses 13 and 14 are a parenthesis, and some versions place them in brackets. What had been done by Peter in the temple area, they believed could be done outside it. Again the Lord was developing the thought in their minds that actually there was nothing so special about that temple, not even Solomon's portico, the part of the structure believed to date back to Solomon's time. What was achieved in the temple area could be achieved on the streets...

*That they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by-* See on 5:6 *Carried him out*. The scene recalls that of Mt. 14:35: "And when the men of that place recognised him, they sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick". In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him.

*At the least his shadow-* Perhaps in reference to how the mustard seed of the Gospel would become a tree under whose shadow unclean birds would come (Mk. 4:32 s.w.). The sick people were likely all ritually unclean, as were those who carried them. But it was exactly these types who were cured.

*Might fall on some of them-* Gk. 'overshadow'. As Peter had been overshadowed [s.w.] by the Lord's glory, so now he was called to reflect that same glory (Lk. 9:34). What we benefit from at the Lord's hands often becomes ours to share to others.

5:16 *And there also gathered crowds from the cities round about Jerusalem-* This is a phrase taken from the Old Testament, describing how these towns were the centres of idol worship (2 Kings 23:5) and therefore the specific target for Divine judgment (Jer. 1:5). Now, grace was being poured out upon them.

*Bringing sick people and those that were vexed with unclean-* This is word for word a sentence Luke used earlier about the Lord's healing ministry (Lk. 6:18). The point is being developed that the work of the believers in Christ is a continuation of His ministry as He walked around Palestine; and in essence, even if the form differs, that is what we are doing today. This is why the daily reading and reflection upon the Gospel records provides a key to attaching meaning to event and circumstance in our daily lives; for we are intended to be Him in this world.

*And every one of them was healed-* The scale of healing here is perhaps the greatest of any time in history. There seems nothing analogous in the Lord's ministry; He appears to have worked with 'an economy of miracle'. This healing outbreak was the fulfilment of the promise that when possessed of the Comforter, "greater works than these shall you do" (Jn. 14:12). "Greater" could mean more in number- and that was certainly the case here. "Every one" was healed- there were no failed healings, in marked contrast to the claims of Pentecostalism. This suggests that the healings were not dependent upon the faith of the individual, but were a pure outpouring of grace.

*5:17 But the high priest rose up-* Again, precisely the words used of how "the high priest rose up" and condemned the Lord to death (Mt. 26:62). The apostles did the miracles they did of their own freewill. They chose to identify with their Lord and continue His work. And now the same Lord responds by bringing about circumstances beyond their control which confirmed their identity with His death and sufferings. The same happens with us; we make freewill choices to identify with Him, and He on a larger scale arranges circumstance to confirm that identity, to make us know His sufferings and the power of new life in His resurrection.

*And all they that were with him-* Likewise the same word is used of how the whole multitude of the Sanhedrin 'rose up' and handed over the Lord to Roman punishment (Lk. 23:1). The 'rising up' may reflect a Hebraism meaning 'to rise up in giving sentence'. We note how the same word is used of how Gamaliel 'stood up' to give his opinion (:34).

*Which is the sect of the Sadducees-* We read that Gamaliel, a Pharisee, also "stood up" (s.w.) and urged a more lenient approach with the preachers (:34). Perhaps this was partly a reflection of the way the two groups loved to take opposing positions to each other.

*And they were filled with jealousy-* Jealousy of the receptive audience of others was what caused the Jews to so hate the Christian preachers. The same words are used of how the Jews were filled with jealousy when they saw the crowds responding to Paul (Acts 13:45), and this would seem to me to be an example of the Lord confirming Paul in seeing the similarities between his ministry and that of Peter. It was jealousy which led to the Lord's crucifixion (Mt. 27:18); and jealousy of others' success in preaching has likewise led many in the body of Christ to similar abuse of their own brethren.

*5:18 And arrested-* Literally, 'laid hands on'. See on 4:3 *They arrested them*.

*The apostles and put them in prison-* Gk. the public or "common" (AV) prison. That point is mentioned perhaps to draw out the similarities with the Lord's sufferings, in that the Jews handed Him over to the Roman authorities for punishment; and the Jews here did likewise, handing over the apostles to the Roman public prison.

*5:19 But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said-* Exactly the same happened to Peter again in Acts 12. This experience in Acts 5, like many of ours, was to prepare Peter for a future, greater experience when he was released from prison in Acts 12. Peter thought he was dreaming, and only realized he was in reality when he "came to himself" (Acts 12:9,11). Perhaps he had been dreaming, or exploring in his subconscious, this previous release from prison. Again we see the verisimilitude of the Biblical record; it is all so psychologically credible. And again, Peter's experiences were repeated in Paul's life when the prison doors were shaken open by the earthquake at Philippi.

This triple opening of prison doors recorded in Acts is of course allusive to the passage in Is. 61:1 which speaks of the Lord Jesus through the Gospel opening the prison doors to a humanity bound by sin. Those early preachers like Peter and Paul were being made to personally realize the radical, liberating power of the Gospel they were preaching.

*5:20 You go and stand and speak in the temple to the people-* A reiteration of the great preaching commission.

*All the words of this life-* It was Peter who had earlier used this phrase in confessing that the Lord Jesus had the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68). Now Peter is being told to go and speak them forth, at whatever risk to himself, if he really believes what he has said about the words of life. This connection with Peter's statement in Jn. 6:68 would explain the otherwise odd phrase "*this life*". It's as if the Lord is reading Peter's mind and saying: 'Yes, you said that My words are the words of eternal life- so go and preach the words of this life'. And of course it was the Sadducees who denied eternal life and resurrection. Another approach is to understand "*this life*" as referring to this present mortal life; the only other usage of the phrase is in 1 Cor. 15:19 "If in this life only...". In this case, the Angel was asking them to go and tell people the meaning of this life.

*5:21 And when they heard this-* Demonstrating their immediate response to a difficult request.

*In the morning they entered into the temple and taught-* Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people (Acts 4:2), in the belief that they were a new priesthood: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The existing priests felt that their role was being challenged. The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets.

*But the High Priest came and they that were with him, and called the council together and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought-* He "came" into the place of meeting of the Sanhedrin? Because :25 implies that they did not personally witness the apostles preaching and were not present with them. The senate was "of the children of Israel", the wayward sons of Jacob, and not the assembly of Yahweh.

*5:22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, saying-* The assistants to the Jewish leadership. It was probably the same men who arrested the Lord, bound and abused Him and who had been with Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest's house (Jn. 18:3,12,18,22). They would have been waiting there for instructions from the High Priest, and they were likewise at his disposal now. They may have been the very men who had heard Peter's fearful denial of his Lord. And now, they were the ones who saw his fearless witness. The source of the change in this man would have exercised their minds, and was surely part of the reason why the Lord told Peter to go back to the temple and continue preaching, knowing that these were the men who would be sent to arrest him or bring him out from the prison. Whereas we would have wished these men every curse for how they treated the Lord, His way was different. He sought to work in their consciences in order to bring them to recognize Him.

*5:23 We found the prison shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors, but when we had them opened, we found no one within-* If nobody at all was in the 'prison', the 'prison' may therefore refer to a small arrest room. Or perhaps the language is like this to make the whole situation is so similar to the Lord's resurrection. For it was men from the same group of soldiers and officers, who were under the control of the Jewish leadership, who had guarded the Lord's tomb. And His body had all the same disappeared. They were being led to realize that the Lord's followers were like Him; they were as His body. And the Lord works in the lives of our contemporaries to potentially make them perceive the same about us.

*5:24 Now when the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the upshot of all this would be-* Surely the same captain of the temple who had negotiated with Judas about betraying the Lord (Lk. 22:4), and who had come to Gethsemane to arrest Him (Lk. 22:52). And note how it is only Luke of all the Gospel writers who uses this term. Luke is making the connection- the apostles were fellowshiping their Lord's sufferings. Then, they had run away from Him and saved their skins. Now, they were experiencing what He did whilst they had hidden somewhere. And it would seem it was the same man or men involved. Surely the Lord was knocking at the door of conscience. His multi-layered, patient work on the hearts of men is wonderful to discern, and that same Lord is just as active today.

*5:25 And there came someone that told them: Behold, the men whom you put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people-* In exact obedience to the command to go and stand and teach in the temple (:20). It was usual for rabbis to *sit* and teach; the Lord Himself *sat* and taught in the temple (Jn. 8:2 cp. Lk. 5:3). But the Lord asks them to *stand* and teach. Perhaps He wanted them to show that they were not pretending to the rabbis; and that their teaching was radically different, with no pretension to any authority on the part of the teacher.

*5:26 Then went the captain with the officers and brought them, but without violence-* Implying they asked the apostles to come with them, and they did without protest; following the spirit of their Lord, whose final sufferings are constantly alluded to in the record here.

*For they feared the people, lest they should be stoned-* Luke twice uses this phrase about their experience in trying to liquidate the Lord (Lk. 20:19; 22:2). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). This is the fickleness of human support.

*5:27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying-* Gk. 'stood' them, the same word used of how the apostles stood and taught; and they continued to stand and preach at their trial.

*5:28 We strictly ordered you not to teach-* The same words used of how the Lord strictly ordered Peter, James and John not to speak of the things they saw at the transfiguration until after He had resurrected (Lk. 9:21). Now that He had risen, that 'strict order' was from the Lord to teach... and so the 'strict order' from the High Priest sets him up as a kind of anti-Christ. And there was no way that the Lord's people could do anything else than speak forth their experiences of Him.

*In this name-* For them, authority was so important. Likewise the Lord had been asked by what authority He taught and cured. And it is likewise difficult for many today to see beyond mere religion and denominationalism, and realize that individuals who have experienced the Lord will therefore teach Him purely on their own private initiative.

*And yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and-* The reference in the next phrase to guilt for blood makes us think that they were alluding to the two references to how wicked Manasseh "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Condemning the righteous in Biblical terms and through out of context Scriptural allusion is therefore no new thing.

*Intend to bring this man's blood upon us-* Consider how the disciples responded to the High Priest rebuking them for preaching; he claimed that they intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon them. The obvious, logical debating point would have been to say: 'But *you* were the very ones who shouted out 'His blood be upon us!!' just a few weeks ago!'. But, Peter didn't say this. He didn't even allude to their obvious self-contradiction. Instead he positively went on to point out that a real forgiveness was possible because Jesus was now resurrected. And the point we can take from this is that true witness is not necessarily about pointing out to the other guy his self-contradictions, the logical weakness of his position... it's not about winning a debate, but rather about bringing people to meaningful repentance and transformation.

*5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said: We must obey God rather than men-* Something the Jews often said in excusing themselves from obeying various demands of the Roman empire. Peter is trying to reason with them in language they would understand and which had fallen from their own lips in other contexts. The specific obedience to God he had in mind was in preaching the Gospel. He uses the same word a few verses later in saying that the "Holy Spirit... God has given to those that *obey* Him" (:32). What he meant was that the Spirit had been given to those who obey His command to preach. Peter was alluding to the great commission, which promised the disciples the gifts of the Spirit in their preaching work which was their obedience to that commission.

5:30- see on Acts 4:20.

*The God of our fathers-* A common phrase in the Apostolic preaching (Acts 3:13,25; 7:2,45; 13:17; 26:6). They were not seeking to alienate their audience, but rather to bridge build with them, pointing out what they had in common and seeking to build further from that.

*Raised up Jesus-* His resurrection is an imperative to preach. When Peter is asked why he continues preaching when it is forbidden, he responds by saying that he is obeying God's command, in that Christ had been raised. There was no specific command from God to witness (although there was from Christ); from the structure of Peter's argument he is surely saying that the fact God raised Christ is *de facto* a command from God to witness to it which must be obeyed. The resurrection of Jesus is itself the command to preach.

*Whom you slew, hanging him on a tree-* But the Greek separates the slaying and the hanging on the tree. Earlier, Peter had thought that following Christ to the end could be achieved in a quick, dramatic burst of zeal- for surely his desire to "smite with the sword" in Gethsemane was almost suicidal, and yet by doing so he thought that he would fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Christ's sake. He learnt the lesson, that crucifixion is a way of life rather

than just dramatic death; for he said that the Jews had slain Christ *and* hung Him on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). This seems strange- that they should have killed Him and then hung Him on the tree. Peter has in mind the practice of hanging an already dead criminal on a tree as a warning (Dt. 21:23). Paul appears to make the same mistake in Gal. 3:13, where he too says that the lifting up of Christ on the cross was typified by the lifting up of the already dead body of a criminal. Christ was not dead when He was lifted up- physically. But first Peter and then Paul came to understand that His death was actually in His way of life- so that He was as good as dead when lifted up. He was the dead bronze snake of the wilderness; the flesh had been put to death by a daily life of crucifixion.

Perhaps the distinction implies the 'slaying' was an ongoing process in His ministry, crowned by the final hanging on the tree. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians; as if the body was already dead when it was lifted up on the tree; for he quotes the Mosaic law regarding the body of a dead criminal being displayed on a tree as if it was descriptive of the Lord's death (Gal. 3:13 cp. Dt. 21:23). The veil symbolized the flesh of the Lord; and yet in it was woven scarlet, a symbol of His blood and sacrifice (Ex. 27:16), which permeated His mortal life. The lesson is that the cross is a daily way of life. The Lord taught this when He asked us to take up the cross daily: to live each day in the exercise of the same principles which He lived and died by. Let's not see spiritual life as a survival of a few crises, as and when they present themselves. It's a way of life, and the principles which lead us to the little victories (when we scald ourselves with hot water, when we dirty a newly washed shirt...) will give us the greater ones also, when (e.g.) we stand before a tribunal, or face death in whatever form.

5:31- see on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36.

*Him did God exalt*- The same word is used about the lifting up of the Lord on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). God sees time differently to us; He knew the lifting up of His dear son was the basis of His future exaltation. And so the same word is used about His lifting up and His exaltation.

*With His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour*- This could mean 'to His right hand'; for it is there that He is Prince and Saviour. These are ongoing jobs- for the Lord is indeed an active Lord, ruling and saving His people. He is a "Prince", the same word translated "author" in Heb. 12:2- He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He initiates faith, by giving not only forgiveness but repentance to people; and works out the whole process of their transformation and salvation.

*To give repentance to Israel and remission of sins*- Man cannot truly know God and be passive to that knowledge; he must somehow respond to the God he sees so abundantly revealed to him. And so it is with an appreciation of the height and nature of the exaltation of the man Christ Jesus. This motivates to repentance and conversion, and therefore the man who has himself been converted by it will glory in it, and hold it up to others as the motive power of their salvation too. Acts 5:31 is a clear example. "We are witnesses of these things"- in the sense that Peter himself was a witness to the repentance and forgiveness brought about by God's resurrection and exaltation of His Son. Earlier Peter had preached Jesus of Nazareth as "made... both Lord and Christ", and when they heard *this*, when he reached this climax of his speech in declaring that Jesus was now made *kurios*, the Greek word that would be used to translate Yahweh, *then* they were pricked in their heart and repented and desired association with Him in baptism (Acts 2:36-38). Later he boldly declared: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men [i.e. no



other name given to any man as this Name was given to Jesus], whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Peter had once struggled with the teaching of the Lord that whoever humbled himself would be exalted (Lk. 14:11). Now he joyfully preached the height of the Lord’s exaltation, knowing that by so doing he was testifying to the depth of His humility in His life. Now he valued and appreciated that humility (his allusions to the Lord’s washing of feet in his letters is further proof of this).

Notice that repentance, and not just forgiveness, was 'given' to Israel. A change of mind was given; and this surely is the gift of a holy spirit or mind. See on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36. But the recipient of the gift still had to respond. In Elijah's time, God turned Israel's heart back to Him, but they still had to return to Him (1 Kings 18:37). Jeremiah was an example of making good use of the gift of repentance: "Surely after that I was turned, I repented" (Jer. 31:19). The early believers spoke constantly in their preaching of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:21,23; 3:13-15; 5:30,31). The logical objection to their preaching a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Paul in Galatians 2:20 echoes this idea: "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not *my* life, but the life which *Christ lives* in me". The spirit of the risen Christ lived out in our lives is the witness of His resurrection. We are Him to this world. The cross too was something which *shone* out of their lives and words. They sought to convict men of their desperation, the urgency of their position before God, the compelling nature of the cross, that they were serious sinners; that a man cannot behold the cross and be unresponsive, but rather must appropriate that work and gift to himself through baptism. The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). May I suggest there needs to be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later.

Our Lord ascended to Heaven *so that* opportunity of repentance might be given to Israel (Acts 5:31), and *so that* He might give the Holy Spirit gifts to men (Eph. 4:8-13 cp. John 14-16 explaining how Jesus departed *in order* to receive the Comforter). It follows that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given largely in order to convince Israel of the Gospel; and so too around the period of the second coming?

Note that it was repentance that was given on account of the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Not simply forgiveness. The gift of the Holy Spirit that was given on His exaltation was a mental, internal power; it was and is the power to repent. Those who do not repent are therefore stubbornly resisting God's powerful desire to see us change. See above on *With His right hand*.

5:32 *And we are witnesses of these things*- Reading carefully, Peter says that he is a witness not only of the resurrection, but of the fact that Jesus is now at God's right hand and from that position of power has enabled forgiveness. How could Peter be a witness to *that*? For he hadn't been up to Heaven to check. Quite simply, he knew the extent of his own forgiveness. And so he therefore knew that truly, Jesus had ascended and was there in a position of influence upon Almighty God, to enable forgiveness. His own cleansed conscience was the proof that his belief in the Lord's ascension was belief in something true. And yet we ask: does our belief that Christ ascended really have this effect upon us?

Luke concludes by recording how the Lord reminded His men that they were “witnesses” (24:48); and throughout Acts, they repeatedly describe themselves as witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39,41; 13:31; 22:15,20; 26:16). This is quite some emphasis. This Christ-centeredness should also fill our self-perception; that we are witnesses to the Lord out of our own personal experience of Him. They were witnesses that Christ *is* on God’s right hand, that He really *is* a Saviour and source of forgiveness (5:32); because they were self-evidently results of that forgiveness and that salvation. They couldn’t be ‘witnesses’ to those things in any legal, concrete way; for apart from them and their very beings, there was no literal evidence. They hadn’t been to Heaven and seen Him; they had no document that said they were forgiven. They were the witnesses in themselves. This even went to the extent of the Acts record saying that converts were both added to the ecclesia, and also added to Christ. He *was* His ecclesia; they were, and we are, His body in this world.

We are “witnesses [on account of our being] in him” (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). We are His epistle to men and women; His words of expression consist in our lives and characters (2 Cor. 3:3).

*And so is the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those that obey Him- See on 5:29 We must obey God rather than men.*

*5:33 But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart and decided to kill them-* They had been reminded that the Lord Jesus was now giving repentance to Israel; He was working in the hearts of Jewish people to bring them to repentance. And they were resisting. No wonder they were cut to the very bone of their conscience. The same word is used of how they were again “cut to the heart” by Stephen’s appeal to them (Acts 7:54). And they responded the same way- they desired to liquidate the messenger, to destroy the channel of the message. But the message remained. To be twice “cut in half”, as the Greek means, would have left them psychologically shattered. They either repented, or became murderous in their hatred of the preachers.

*5:34 But a Pharisee in the council- See on :17 The Sadducees.*

*Named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while-* Paul had been his student. Yet Paul differed from him regarding the Christians, for he was for persecuting and destroying them rather than following his teacher’s advice of leaving them alone (:38). This difference with the respected Gamaliel was surely one of the many goads in Paul’s conscience that was intended to lead him to accept Jesus as Christ.

*5:35 And he said to them: You men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men-* See on 5:39 *You might be found to be fighting against God.* There is a repeated theme of local authorities being nervous about punishing the Christians (19:36; 22:26; Mt. 27:19). And this was in an age where conscience was not well developed, and there was little justice nor fear of prosecuting people on insufficient evidence. There was simply a sense that somehow God was in all this; and the insistent persecution of the Lord and His people was therefore carried out against all the pricks of conscience, with Saul of Tarsus being the parade example. There is often likewise an undefined sense in our contemporaries that we are somehow of God.

*5:36 For before these days Theudas-* The two examples chosen are of charismatic men who attracted followers. Gamaliel is saying that these men should be compared to Jesus of

Nazareth, and their followers to His disciples who were now under trial. Gamaliel therefore perceived that the disciples were following a leader- it was that obvious. But the leader was nowhere to be seen. Gamaliel is therefore admitting the possibility that Jesus may have risen from the dead and therefore had attracted followers. The fact he did not close off that possibility completely, and even the Sadducees who denied a resurrection agreed with him (:40,17), is all evidence enough of how the consciences of them all were being pricked. We would rather expect the Sadducees to have responded: 'Well yes, those men were visible men here on earth who attracted a following, but these disciples of Jesus are following a man who doesn't exist, seeing we killed Him and the dead do not rise'. But even they whose advertised position was that there could be no resurrection of anyone... went along with the reasoning and did not make the logical comeback on it. Such was the pressure upon the consciences of these men. No wonder Paul and some of them gave in to it, in accepting that indeed, Jesus had risen.

*Rose up-* The same word used of the resurrection of the Lord. Again, note that Gamaliel is not closing off the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth had risen; he is saying that others 'rose up' but in time, came to nothing; and so as far as he was concerned, the jury was still out as to whether Jesus had risen or not. The force of his logic was enough to make the Sadducees, who denied any resurrection, agree with him (:40). And his loyal student Paul was provided with yet another goad in his conscience concerning Christ- for his respected teacher was telling him that it was best to not rule out the possibility that Jesus had risen.

*Claiming to be somebody-* Luke uses the same words in describing the accusation that the Lord claimed to be the Christ (Lk. 23:2). The similarities are clearly being drawn between the Lord, and these two false leaders.

*And a number of men, about four hundred, joined him-* This clearly echoes Acts 4:4: "The number of the men [the same Greek words are used] was about five thousand".

*He was killed-* Same word used about the slaying of the Lord Jesus.

*And all who followed him -* The language used of those persuaded by the cause of Jesus.

*Were dispersed and came to nothing-* In contrast to the stress in Acts upon the unity of the Christians.

*5:37 After this man, there rose up-* See on :36 *Rose up*.

*Judas of Galilee, in the days of the census-* Jesus of Galilee also 'appeared' in the days of the census, as only Luke records. Gamaliel is drawing similarities between these men and Jesus- and leaving the verdict open for the time being, as to whether He had really 'arisen' and whether following Him was the right thing to do.

*And drew away some of the people after him-* Exactly as the Jews claimed Jesus had done. The Greek translated "drew away" is used again by Gamaliel in the next verse: "Keep away from [s.w. "drew away"] these men". He may be implying that their interest in these men and their invisible Master was in fact leading them to follow Him, to be drawn away after Him. This was an astute psychological observation; he perceived the process going on within his pupil Saul of Tarsus, and he was absolutely correct.

*He also perished and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad-* This was exactly what happened to the rank and file followers (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19). But Acts 8:1 records that when Saul's persecution led to the 'scattering abroad' of the disciples, the apostles did *not* scatter. And it was the apostles who were under judgment and are the reference of Gamaliel at this point. Saul was desperately seeking to prove his teacher Gamaliel correct by consciously seeking to scatter the followers of Jesus; but he did not succeed in scattering the apostles. And Gamaliel had reasoned that if this did not happen, then this whole thing was likely of God. The way the apostles didn't scatter was therefore another goad in Saul's conscience.

*5:38 And now I say to you, Keep away from these men and leave them alone-* See on :37 *Drew away some of the people after him.*

*For if this counsel or this work is of men-* Gamaliel's reasoning made a deep impression on Paul; for years later he uses the same word in saying that he declared the "counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Gamaliel had reasoned that this "counsel" was either of God or man; and clearly it was of God. And Paul recognizes this by alluding to his teacher's words. The unusual position of Gamaliel, therefore, was surely a goad in Saul's conscience. Saul would have carefully noted and thought about his words. Luke has used the same idea in describing the "counsel and deed" of the Jewish Sanhedrin in condemning the Lord to death (Lk. 23:51). Gamaliel is now addressing the Sanhedrin... and so he may be suggesting that the 'counsel and work' of the Sanhedrin is being compared against the 'counsel and work' of the apostles, and only time will tell who is of God and who of man. Again, we must note that Gamaliel is open to persuasion that the Sanhedrin may be wrong; he does not condemn the apostles, rather does he urge leaving them alone and leaving time to judge. This very significant position would have irked and concerned Paul deeply, and developed his conscience for Christ. On the basis upon which Gamaliel reasons, I personally would consider it likely that he converted to Christianity. Whilst this appears impossible to prove, it is [incidentally] the position held within the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, where he is revered as a saint. "According to Photius, he was baptized by Saint Peter and Saint John, together with his son Abibo (or Abibas, Abibus) and Nicodemus. The Clementine Literature suggested that he maintained secrecy about the conversion and continued to be a member of the Sanhedrin for the purpose of covertly assisting his fellow Christians".

*It will fail-* The same Greek word translated "overthrow" in :39. Gamaliel had surely heard the Lord's prediction of the overthrow [s.w.] of the temple and the Judaism of His day (Lk. 21:6). Again, Gamaliel is heightening the stakes- either Christianity will be overthrown, or the temple will indeed be overthrown as the Lord Jesus had predicted. This heightening of the stakes, and leaving the verdict open, was psychologically a path towards conversion to Christianity. And Paul was goaded down that path, as I suspect Gamaliel himself was.

*5:39 But if it is of God, you will not be able-* Gamaliel summarized the issue as being whether it was Judaism or Christianity which was of God or of men. I have mentioned already that Gamaliel is leaving the question open, rather than condemning the Christians; and that this was something which would have deeply exercised the conscience of his pupil Saul. The way Gamaliel's words deeply entered Paul's consciousness and conscience is reflected by the way in which he later alludes to those words. The choice between being of God or man is reflected in Rom. 2:29, where Paul reasons that a true Jew has commendation "not of men but of God". This is framed in exactly the terms Gamaliel uses here. This phrase "of God" is very widely used by John in his Gospel and letters, e.g. "We know that we are of

God, and the whole world lies in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19). John of course was one of the apostles referred to by Gamaliel; and John too would have heard these words of Gamaliel, and was triumphing in the fact that things had worked out to show that indeed, Christianity was "of God".

*To overthrow them- See on :38 It will fail.*

*You might be found to be fighting against God-* Paul would have heard these words, and struggled with them, seeing they came from his respected teacher. He would have realized that indeed he was fighting with God- or as the Lord put it, kicking against the goads. The allusion is surely to Jacob, whose fighting with God in the form of an Angel is therefore read here in a negative light. These "men of Israel", descendants of Jacob / Israel, were not to be followers of Jacob in his negative aspects.

5:40 *They took his advice-* It was unusual for Sadducees to take advice from a Pharisee in this way. See on :17 *The Sadducees*. The sense that these men might in fact be of God was very strong. Again, the Lord was working on their consciences in an attempt to save even them.

*And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go-* The same word used about the beating of the Lord, probably at the same hands (Lk. 22:63). Paul uses the same word about how he 'beat' the Christians "in every synagogue", and that surely included in Jerusalem (Acts 22:19). His anger at the attitude of his teacher Gamaliel would have been given full vent in beating the Christians. Perhaps Paul even whipped Peter at this time. For Paul was Gamaliel's former pupil and was present in Jerusalem at this time. This would explain his deep respect for Peter and what appears to be a desire to follow Peter's ministry, in witnessing to the Jews, rather than in developing his own ministry to the Gentiles as the Lord intended. See my comments throughout Acts 20 for more on this. It also makes the more wonderful Peter's reference to Paul as his "beloved brother" (2 Pet. 3:15).

5:41 *They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name-* We get the picture of them walking out from those sour faces ['presence'], singing and rejoicing. The Sanhedrin had commanded that they be beaten- so when we read of them departing from the Sanhedrin, this was in order to be beaten. And they went to that beating rejoicing. If indeed Saul was one of those who did the beating [see above], and his involvement in the stoning of Stephen makes it likely he was, then this would have been a sight which stayed with him for life. And it would exactly explain why when Paul was beaten at Philippi, he went to prison and sang hymns in the cell. He had probably seen the apostles going to their beating with joy and rejoicing. And he was determined to emulate those fine brethren, especially considering that he himself had been the one who frequently administered such beatings / floggings to Christians (22:19).

There are about 70 references to there being joy of faith amongst the early brethren. It was undoubtedly a characteristic of the community, despite the moral and doctrinal failures amongst them, the turning back to the world, the physical hardship of life, and direct persecution from the authorities. There was a joy of faith in conversion and in beholding it (Acts 2:41,46; 3:8; 5:41; 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; 1 Thess. 1:6). Letters to new converts like the Philippians reflect this theme of joy, even though it was written from prison. Paul and Silas could sing in prison. The earlier brethren rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41). Paul rejoiced daily in the fact the Corinthians had been

baptized (1 Cor. 15:31). Many a photo taken at baptism reflects this same joy amongst us today. Sower and reaper rejoice together (Jn. 4:36). To hold on to the Truth was described as holding on to the rejoicing of the hope unto the end (Heb. 3:6).

5:42- see on Acts 2:46.

*And every day, in the temple and at home-* The Sanhedrin were clearly powerless to stop them. But the question arises as to why they felt so powerless? They had twice rebuked them and threatened them... And we wonder whether their lack of power in this case was related to the strange power of conscience which they all had working within them- that in fact, these Christian men were right and they were wrong. Seriously wrong.

*They did not cease to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ-* Perhaps the emphasis is on the word "not". They did not cease as they were asked to in :41.

## ACTS CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose-* Luke records how the converts were repeatedly “multiplied” (6:1,7; 9:31; 12:24), using the very word for the ‘multiplying’ of Abraham’s seed as the stars (7:17; Heb. 6:14; 11:12). Every baptism he saw as the triumphant fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, even though many of those who ‘multiplied’ later turned away. The same word is used again of the multiplying of the new Israel in 6:7, and Stephen surely alludes to this in saying that when Israel “multiplied” in Egypt (Acts 7:17 s.w.), then persecution arose. He is likening the Jewish leadership, with all their strict piety, to Pharaoh. And Saul noticed this point, and on repentance, makes the same point in Romans- that the hardening of the hearts of the Egyptians was as the hardening of Israel’s hearts. Paul so often alludes to the reasoning of Stephen in his speech.

*A murmuring amongst the Greek speaking Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were-* This word is used in later appeals for believers not to murmur (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:10). It is murmuring between believers, quiet comments and negative insinuations, which so often stops the powerful advance of the Lord’s cause. There were dirty politics in the church. The Greek speaking Jews and the Hebrew speaking Jews within the ecclesia started arguing over welfare payments in Acts 6. It was the old tension- the liberals against the orthodox, with the orthodox unwilling to give much of the welfare collection to those they perceived as more liberal. This squabble was tackled by Stephen, and the record then goes on to describe his murder, almost implying that it was Judaist Christians within the synagogues who set him up for this. After all, there was big money involved- Jews were used to paying 10 or 20% of their wealth to the temple, and if this was now going to the ecclesia, with thousands baptized, there could well have arisen a power struggle over who controlled it. It could well be that the division between Paul and John Mark was over this matter; after they had baptized the first Gentile in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, John Mark went back to the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 13:13). Acts 15:38 RV speaks of how he “withdrew from them from Pamphylia”, hinting at spiritual reasons for his withdrawal. It must also be remembered that Christianity was a new, unregistered religion in the Roman empire, increasingly subject to persecution and discrimination. Judaism was registered and tolerated. It was so much easier to remain under the synagogue umbrella, to deny the radical demands of the Lord Jesus, and to accept Him half-heartedly, in Name but not in reality.

*Neglected in-* Acts 6:1 makes the point that aid to the poor widows was cut off or impaired, because the other believers were arguing amongst themselves. It would appear that the Hebrew Christians went to the temple daily (Acts 2:46), whereas the Greek widows wouldn’t have done (Acts 7:48,49). So the common theological disagreement about how far the Jewish Law should influence Christian life- resulted in old and needy ladies in the ecclesia suffering. This discrimination would suggest that there was strong dislike of even a whiff of Gentile influence, even amongst the leaders of the church. To accept Gentiles was going to be a very radical thing for them.

*The daily distribution-* Acts 6:1; 2:44; 4:34 imply there were large numbers of very poor people in the church. The Jerusalem ecclesia is an example of how rich and poor were united together. There were clearly wealthy members- Simon of Cyrene owned a farm (Mk. 15:21). Barnabas sold lands (Acts 4:36). Ananias and Sapphira had land. And then there were the middle class. Mary owned a house in Jerusalem and had at least one servant (Acts 12:12-17). Levi was a tax collector wealthy enough to throw a large banquet, implying he had a large

home (Mk. 2:13-17). James and John had a fishing business in Galilee that employed day labourers. And then there were the poor. The Lord Jesus and the apostles healed the beggars and diseased, who presumably became members of the church. James the Lord's brother was presumably a carpenter, poor like the Lord was. And yet he was the leader of the early church. Unlike many other religious movements, early Christianity drew its members from right across society; and one of the poorest was their leading light! This unity, as we have so often said, would have been their biggest single advertisement. And yet the Acts record artlessly says so little about social or economic class distinctions- precisely because they were not important. Any uninspired writer would have made great capital of this phenomenal feature of the early church.

*6:2 And the twelve summoned-* The appointment of a successor to Judas was therefore apparently acceptable. But it has to be noted that "the twelve" as a group play no further significant role in Luke's account of the early church.

*The full number of the disciples to them-* Literally, 'the multitude', a reference to how the converts had multiplied (:1 s.w.).

*And said, It is not fitting that we should-* The same Greek word translated "pleased" in :5. The attitude of the twelve matched that of the crowd of converts.

*Forsake the teaching of the word-* The Greek says just "the word of God", but from :4 it is clear that we are required to read in an ellipsis. God's word is here put for the teaching of it. If God has spoken, and we accept the Bible as His word, then we are thereby obligated to speak it forth (cp. Am. 3:8). The twelve were very sensitive to the way in which administrative issues and addressing petty divisions can hinder the proclamation of God's word; and time and again, this has sadly happened in communities since. But they refused to be side-tracked.

*And instead handle finances-* Gk. 'serve at tables'. The reference could be to literally serving food. But the Greek for 'tables' is also translated 'bank' with allusion to the tables of bankers. Whichever translation we prefer, the point is that they considered that their teaching of the word was far more important than any practical issue relating to welfare. So often, missions become so focused upon the provision of welfare that the teaching of the word is side-lined; the discussion and energy is all about how and what kind of food to provide in a soup kitchen, rather than teaching the word to the folks who come along. The utter primacy of the teaching of God's word is here clearly established.

*6:3 Therefore, brothers, choose from among you seven men-* James 1:27 may allude here. James defines the essence of Christianity as 'visiting' the fatherless and widows. But the Greek word occurs also in Acts 6:3, translated 'to look / search out'. We are to actually search out others' needs, go to them, imagine what they might be in need of and supply it- rather than waiting to be confronted by those needs. It was of course exactly in this sense that God 'visited' us in the gift of His Son.

*Of good repute-* The qualifications here are alluded to later in the New Testament with regard to who should be appointed to serve in the churches. The early church was not therefore seen as a historical anomaly, a once off phenomenon, but rather a detailed role model for all future churches.



*Full of the Spirit and of wisdom-* Bezalel and his helpers who constructed the tabernacle are likewise described (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31,35). The allusion is intended to teach that it was the community of Christian believers, the people, who were now the new tabernacle or temple (cp. 1 Kings 7:14) which the Lord was now constructing. Stephen went to his death for upholding this belief.

*Whom we will appoint to this duty-* There were no democratic elections. The multitude, the mass of believers, were to somehow come up with seven candidates, and the apostles 'appointed' them, presumably by their Spirit gifts confirming the choices.

6:4 *But we will continue earnestly in prayer-* These are the very words used about the believers generally continuing in prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46). This is true leadership- the style of prayer of the leadership was copied by their converts. We must ask whether our elders are setting such patterns in prayer life.

The early elders of the Christian church decided that they were spending too much time on practical matters with the result that they weren't finding enough time for prayer (:4). And so they made a major re-arrangement to enable them to devote more time to prayer. Let this point sink in: so important was prayer in the early community that the seven deacons had to make arrangements for the practical running of the ecclesia so that they could give themselves more time for prayer; prayerfulness was more important than petty administration. Husbands and wives abstained from sex for short periods so as to more powerfully pray individually (1 Cor. 7:5).

*And in the service of the word-* A phrase used in contemporary literature to describe how the synagogue minister made pupils memorize Scripture texts. See on Acts 20:35.

6:5 *And the decision pleased the whole crowd; and they chose Stephen, a man-* "Decision" is Gk. *logos*, translated "word" at the end of :4. The idea may be that the word preached and taught guided the multitude in choosing the seven.

*Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch-* The Greek can equally mean 'filled by faith'. Faith to some extent is a gift from God. The amount of faith in Stephen seems related to the extent of the miracles he did (:8); which would suggest his fullness of faith was on his own account, and also shows that the doing of miracles was related to faith in those doing them.

These names are all Greek. But it was common for Jews to have both Hebrew and Greek names, so we shouldn't too quickly conclude that the appointed brethren were all Greek speakers; that would have hardly been wise in the resolving a dispute between Greek and Hebrew speaking Jewish believers.

6:6 *They set them before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them-* See on :3 *We will appoint*. Laying on of hands speaks of the passing on of Spirit abilities or blessing from one who possesses them to another (8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; Num. 27:18; Dt. 34:9). The apostles who had Spirit gifts to do work they judged they had no time to do therefore passed them on to the deacons. But they prayed first. The idea is not that they had some power which they gave to others. They prayed- and God gave the power to the deacons. For the Father and Son are the source of such spiritual gifts.

There is therefore no power in the believers of themselves; hence prayer occurs together with the idea of laying on hands in most of the references listed above.

*6:7 And the word of God increased-* Again, God's word is put for the preaching of it (:4); such is the imperative within His word to preach it. The apostles had given a conscious focus upon preaching God's word and giving this work utter supremacy over welfare and administrative issues (see on :2). Now this was rewarded. "Increased" is an allusion to the parables of the mustard seed and the sower, where the sown seed of the word 'increases' (Mt. 13:32; Mk. 4:8). This begs the question as to how that seed would grow further after this initial good response.

*And the number of the disciples-* These regular updates about numbers suggest that some kind of record was kept of the numbers baptized.

*Multiplied greatly in Jerusalem-* The large number of converts in Jerusalem laid the basis for the Jerusalem ecclesia, although they kept meeting in the temple initially. Nearly all these converts, being from Jerusalem, would have seen and heard the Lord preaching previously- and rejected Him. We must ever remember that those who hear our message and apparently reject it may very well respond later.

*And a great many of the priests-* This was a wonderful fruit to the Lord's endless efforts for these types. In the last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin...but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. And earlier in His ministry, He had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true.

The Lord's example is to be ours; He spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith...a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests

were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us.

*Were obedient to the faith-* This is ambiguous- it could mean obedience as response to faith, in which case it may refer to baptism; or it could mean obedience to the set of propositions which define the one faith. Because doctrine and practice are linked, the Gospel is something to which man must be obedient- it isn't merely a set of academic propositions. It results in "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Probably the greatest temptation for all of us, in all stages of our spiritual career, is to be like Israel of old: to *know* the Faith, on an abstract, surface level, but not to really *believe* it in our hearts, and therefore not to act in the way God intends. Paul was aware of this difference; he spoke of us as those who believe *and* know the Truth (1 Tim. 4:3).

6:8 *And Stephen, full of grace and power-* Or, "Full of faith" (AV). See on :5 *Full of faith*. "Grace", *charis*, is so often associated with the gift of the Spirit. And this is the same "grace" in essence promised to all in Christ. Grace is a major New Testament theme, and it is deeply associated with the gift of the Spirit. This is a central part of the Christian experience which we cannot deny by simply assuming it refers solely to the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit experienced in the first century.

6:9 *Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen-* These were probably Jews [or their children] who had been taken to Rome as slaves and then been made free on the basis that they were Jews. They were therefore very sensitive to any possible problem with Rome and anything which meant that they were to cease identifying as Jews and identify instead as something else, in this case, the followers of the Lord Jesus and citizens of His invisible Kingdom. Opposition to the Gospel is often from those who perceive, even subconsciously, that they have something to lose, or that their historical positions will have to be rejected.

*(Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen-* Cilicia is where Paul was from. One wonders if he was involved in some way with these people.

6:10 *They were not able to withstand-* A clear fulfilment of the Lord's prediction in the Olivet prophecy: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). The preceding context of Lk. 21:12 is relevant to what had just happened to the disciples: "They shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake". The Olivet prophecy of 'the last days' could therefore have come true in the first century- it didn't, because the preconditions for the Lord's return were not fulfilled, particularly with respect to Israel's repentance.

*The wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke-* This is one of a series of connections between the sufferings of Stephen and those of the Lord Jesus:

#### **The Lord Jesus**

Acts 2:22

Luke 4:22

Mark 12:13

Luke 20:20

Matthew 26:59

#### **Stephen**

Acts 6:8

Acts 6:10

Acts 6:11

Acts 6:12

Acts 6:13

Matthew 26:61  
Matthew 26:65  
Mark 15:20  
Mark 14:62

Acts 6:14  
Acts 6:11  
Acts 7:57,58  
Acts 7:56

6:11 *Then they secretly induced men to say-* The record of what they did is clearly alluding to how Jezebel set up men to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy (1 Kings 21:10,13). Later in the book of Revelation, Jezebel appears to be the basis for the description of the Jerusalem temple and its associated Judaism and apostate Jewish Christianity.

*We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God-* This is parallel with "blasphemous words against this holy place and the law" (:13). They had made 'God' equal the temple and the law. The external trappings of their religion, even the ultimately true religion, had become as a god to them. We can so easily do the same.

6:12 *And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes and came upon him and-* The first reference in Acts to the masses being poisoned against the Christians. Again we see how fickle people are.

*Seized him, and brought him into the council-* This again is the language of the Olivet prophecy about the situation in the 'last days' (same words used in Mk. 13:11; Lk. 21:12). The prediction there was that when they were "brought" to councils etc., they should not worry what they were to say, because the Spirit would teach them what to say. We can therefore view Stephen's speech in Acts 7 as not premeditated but directly inspired by the Spirit in response to his having been "brought" into the council.

6:13 *And set up false witnesses, who said: This man does not cease to speak-* Their case was based around the fact that the Christians had been asked to refrain / cease (Acts 5:28) but Stephen had ignored this. The continued case against the disciples was in defiance of Gamaliel's advice; and he was seen as one of Judaism's most revered ideologues, even during his lifetime. The council had initially agreed with his advice (5:40). This strange going against his advice after agreeing on it, to the point of one of Gamaliel's star pupils orchestrating the stoning to death of Stephen, was and is psychologically noteworthy. There was a power of irrational fear and anger at work, which was clearly rooted in a subconscious recognition that in fact, they were wrong and the Christians were correct. Saul was finally honest and owned up; but it would seem that many others of his peer group spent their rest of their miserable, bitter days kicking against the goads of their conscience. And so it can be today; the anger of religious people is never ameliorated in time, because it is rooted in a fundamental wrong turning in their thinking, and they lack the humility to admit it. And this accounts for the masses of bitter, self-righteous religious folks who go to their deathbeds upholding positions and truths over some curious quirk of thinking, or regarding separation from some supposed false teacher, all because they cannot allow a Damascus road to happen; all because their pride is too great to let them admit that they were wrong.

*Blasphemous words against this holy place and the law-* See on :11. Paul was doubtless deeply involved in setting up Stephen's condemnation. And it is no mere coincidence that he was accused in the same city of Jerusalem of profaning "this holy place" (Acts 21:28 s.w.). This is not mere poetic justice, what goes around coming around. Rather was this one of

many Divinely arranged echoes of Stephen's sufferings in the life of Paul- for Paul's education and spiritual maturity. For after all, he and Stephen shall live eternally together.

6:14 *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place-* The same word used in the accusation against the Lord that He intended to destroy the temple (Mt. 26:61). The Lord's trial was only recent history; it should have been apparent to those men that they were repeating exactly the same pattern of events and accusations against Stephen as they had done against Jesus of Nazareth. And surely they must have feared, albeit unspokenly, that likewise their best efforts to silence the strange power behind these men would also come to nothing. The accusation in a sense was true, because the same word is used by the Lord in the Olivet prophecy, speaking of how the Jerusalem temple was to be 'destroyed' [AV "thrown down"]; and the commander of the armies of judgment was the Lord Jesus, according to other teachings.

*And shall change the customs which Moses delivered to us-* Paul was later accused of teaching Jews not to walk after the "customs" delivered to Moses (Acts 21:21 s.w.). Again, Paul was being led to fellowship with Stephen; just as we are brought to understand the feelings and positions of those whom we have hurt in previous years.

6:15 See on Acts 7:22.

*And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him-* The same word is used of Stephen's eyes fastened upon his Lord in Heaven (Acts 7:55). When we too are the focus of others' hate, or even if that is how it feels or appears; we are to in turn focus upon the Lord above who sees and knows all.

*Saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel-* Within Judaism, seeing the face of an Angel was felt to be inappropriate for sinful man, and likely to lead to death. Hence Jud. 6:22: "Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!". The implication may be that they felt most unworthy; and they had to drown that sense of guilt by an ever deeper obsession with legalism and casuistry. And their anger understandably grew the greater, even unto death, as they were in the presence of this manifestation of God's glory. The obvious image is of Moses, whose face shone with the glory of the Angel, before an Israel who condemned him. And so these men, the leaders of Israel, were as it were looking upon Moses and condemning him. For there is no reason to think that the glory just shone momentarily from the face of Stephen; rather is the implication that as those committee men sat there in their seats, they were beholding the glory shining from Stephen's face throughout. And hence he begins his defence by speaking of "the God of glory"- that same glory shining from him- and emphasizes Israel's rejection of Moses.

### **Saul, Paul and Stephen**

As well as John the Baptist, it would seem that Stephen likewise had a deep impact upon Paul. Stephen's condemnation had been because he had reminded the Jews of the fact "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool" and therefore the temple was not ultimately relevant (Acts 7:48,49). Yet only a few brief years later, Paul was using the very same words and logic on Mars Hill in Athens. It has been observed that Hebrews particularly has enough conscious points of contact with Stephen's words that it would seem that the author was very familiar with Stephen's words:

Acts [Stephen]	Hebrews
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7:2,55	1:1-3; 2:10
7:2-5	11:8
7:2	11:1-31
7:9-36	3:16; 11:21,22
7:38	11:1-29 cf. 4:1-3
7:46	9:11,24 cp. Is. 66:1,2
7:39-43,52	3:7-12
6:14	ch. 1-6

Stephen's speech (and perhaps other, unrecorded words of Stephen) became imprinted upon Paul's mind and consciousness. In writing to the brethren he had once persecuted, both consciously and unconsciously Paul was reflecting Stephen's words. A clear example is found in the way Stephen describes Israel as "thrusting" Moses away from them (Acts 7:39); and Paul is the only other person in the New Testament to use this same Greek word- to describe how although Israel thrust God away from them, yet God did not thrust [AV "cast away"] His people from Himself (Rom. 11:1,2). The even unconscious influence of Stephen upon Paul is reflected in the way he speaks of himself as "born... brought up... educated" (Acts 22:2,3)- using the very terms Stephen uses in Acts 7 about Moses. See on Acts 7:43.

## ACTS CHAPTER 7

*7:1 And the high priest said: Are these things so?*- The "things" were the accusations of blasphemy against the temple and Mosaic law. Actually Stephen doesn't comment on those issues directly, although he does develop the theme that God has relationships with people in any place, and doesn't require a temple for that fellowship with man. Rather is Stephen's focus upon Israel's historical rejections of the Lord's prototypes; and it was this which led to the explosion of bad conscience anger which led to Stephen's death. But his murder was therefore not related to the "things" of which he was initially accused.

*7:2 And he said: Brothers and fathers, listen*- Stephen did not consider the Jews to be somehow not his brethren. This open approach to fellowship with the Jews, despite their misunderstandings and misbelief and aggression, is surely a challenge to all who insist on rigid lines of fellowship demarcation.

*The God of glory*- See on 6:15. In his famous final speech, Stephen evidently had humming in his mind the theme of the glory of God. He begins by saying that "The God of glory appeared...". God heard that speech, and read his mind. And responded in an appropriate way- for to give Stephen final strength to face death, God made His glory appear to Stephen (Acts 7:55). And so it can be for us- although it all depends what we have humming in our hearts. The context of Stephen's speech is his defence against the accusation that he was blaspheming the temple. The Jews considered that God's glory was uniquely located within that building; even though there is no evidence that the shekinah glory was visible at that time. Stephen's response is that God's glory was apparent to Abraham in Gentile Mesopotamia, outside even the limits of the land promised to Abraham. There is the implication in the language of 'appearance' that Abraham had some kind of a vision of the cherubim glory of Yahweh, although Genesis is silent about that.

*Appeared to our father Abraham*- Stephen was not merely witnessing against these men. He was appealing for their repentance, and does so by building bridges over what was common ground- in this case, having Abraham as their common father. See on 7:19 *Our race... our fathers* and 7:26 *Gentlemen...*

*Before he dwelt in Haran*- See on :4.

*7:3 And said to him, Leave your land and your kindred*- Pointedly omitting mention of "your father's house". Gen. 12:1 records that the Lord had told Abram to leave his country, kindred *and* his father's house, but goes on to say that "So Abram departed" from *Haran* "as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4). The implication is that the command which he was given in Ur, was repeated to him in Haran, with the additional information that he must now also leave "your father's house". Stephen is making the point that Abraham's 'obedience' was counted to him by grace; righteousness was imputed to him, when he had a shaky start in his faithfulness. For he left because his father's family also left... not because he actually was obedient to the Divine call.

*And go into*- Gk. 'come here into'; as if God was already there in Canaan.

*The land which I shall show you*- According to Heb. 11:8, Abraham embarked on the journey not knowing or [Gk.] 'understanding' where he was going. Accurate knowledge of the literal details of the Kingdom whither we are headed is not therefore the issue here; rather is it simple faith in response to God's calling. This is what is required at the start of the journey;

for Abraham is held up as the pattern for us all. Only later was Abraham 'shown' the land. The same word is used of how the devil of the Lord's own thoughts / temptations 'showed' Him the future Kingdom of God on earth (Mt. 4:8). Revelation of Divine truth is therefore progressive; after some time leading the disciples, the Lord then 'shewed' them the details of His sufferings (Mt. 16:21 s.w.), and after His resurrection 'shewed' Peter more details (Acts 10:28 s.w.) and 'shewed' latter day events to His followers (Rev. 1:1; 4:1 s.w.). Indeed there are seven references in the visions of Revelation to believers being 'shewn' things. Even the Father's 'shewing' of things to His Son was progressive (Jn. 5:20). We are not, therefore, to require of those just beginning their journey a comprehensive grasp of the things which have been 'shewn' to us who have been on the road of faith for some time already.

*7:4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran-* Stephen begins by pointing out that the father of Israel, Abraham, was himself weak in faith in response to the promises. He was asked to leave his family and homeland in Mesopotamia- but he didn't. His father took him and emigrated from Ur. And only when his father died did Abram move on further. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was 23 years in Haran. "From thence... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.). But if God had *forced* him to be "removed", Abram's response to the promises would not be held up for us as the great example of faith which it is. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response being confirmed by God. *God* removed him through repeating the promises to Abram in Haran, and the providential fact that Terah died there. The fact that Abram "dwelt" in Haran, despite his call to leave, with his kindred and father's house shows a slow reaction to the command to leave those things and go to the unknown land, which by now Abram must have guessed was Canaan- or at least, he would have realized that Canaan was en route to it.

*And from there, when his father was dead-* Instead of doing as he was told and breaking with his father and immediate family, Abraham was only obedient by default. His father died, and he moved on. And there is historical evidence that there was war at the time and many left Haran in any case due to push factors; rather than Abraham being obedient to the simple words of God.

*God sent him into this land, wherein you now dwell-* The Greek word is only used once again in the New Testament, and again by Stephen, in speaking of how God 'carried away' apostate Israel into captivity (Acts 7:43). The connection may imply that Abraham was not at his strongest when God carried him away into Canaan. Whatever, the point is surely clear enough that Abraham did not go of his own freewill obedience to Canaan, in response to God's clear command to him. Rather did God's grace as it were pick him up and take him there. This was an Old Testament example of God's Spirit working in the lives of His people to bring about their obedience; and it was that same gift of the Spirit which Peter offered to Israel at this time, speaking of how God would give them not only forgiveness but also even repentance itself- a mental attitude.

*7:5 And He gave him no inheritance in it, no, not enough to set his foot on it, and He promised that He would give it to him in possession and to his seed after him, when he had no child-* The Jews were therefore wrong in thinking that their dwelling in Palestine was some kind of fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. For God keeps His promises, and Abraham must therefore be resurrected to receive the inheritance in the Kingdom when it is established on earth at the Lord's return. He didn't get anything in this life, because he had to even buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah.



*7:6 And God spoke in this way-* Because Stephen is changing the pronouns of the original quotation, and also summarizing the essence of what God was saying. Here we have an example of how extra words and verbal devices had to be used in the absence of anything like square brackets. But Stephen is also mixing quotation with interpretation, as was and is the Jewish way of using Scripture.

*That his seed should live in a strange land, and that they would bring them into bondage and-* Remember that Stephen is seeking to demonstrate that God's presence is independent of sacred spaces such as the temple or land of Israel. Heb. 11:9 surely alludes here by saying that Abraham "went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land" (ESV). These are the same Greek words translated "strange land". For Abraham, the land of Israel was as a foreign land. And here Stephen speaks of Egypt as a strange / foreign land. The confusion is because in a sense, whilst the land is inherited by Abraham, the whole earth is a foreign land to God's people- including the geographical territory of Israel.

*Treat them badly-* The same word as in :19. But this is the term which is used about how the Jews abused the Christian preachers (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). What the Jews were doing to Stephen put them in the position of the Gentile Egyptians, persecuting the true Israel of God.

*Four hundred years-* The idea is that it would be unreasonable to suggest that God had no fellowship with anyone amongst His people for such a long period as four hundred years. And yet they were away from the supposed sacred space of the land promised to Abraham.

*7:7 And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God-* This is added because Stephen appears to be summarizing the essence of God's word rather than making verbatim quotation.

*And after that shall they come out and serve Me in this place-* This is neither a quotation from the Hebrew [Masoretic] text nor from the standard version of the Septuagint. The text of Gen. 15:14 reads: "Afterward they will come out with great wealth". Apparently Stephen is alluding to Ex. 3:12: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain". Perhaps this is why the 'quotation' is introduced by the otherwise strange comment that "God spoke in this way" (:6). The essence of what Stephen understood God to say is quoted as if it is actual quotation. This kind of thing is common in Rabbinic exegesis. And yet why does Stephen change "this mountain", of Sinai, to "this place", a phrase commonly understood to refer to the temple? The point was that God could be served on a mountain, outside of Palestine, just as much as in the Jerusalem temple. For debate about the temple is the context of the whole speech.

*7:8 And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begat Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs-* Covenant relationship with God doesn't depend upon sacred space, temples, holy land etc.

*7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Joseph-* Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of the Lord. And Luke has recently used the same word to describe how it was jealousy which led the Sanhedrin and Jewish leadership to oppose the Christians (Acts 5:17).

*Sold him-* Just as the Lord was 'sold' for 30 pieces of silver.

*Into Egypt-* This is one of a number of aspersions that the Judaism of Stephen's day was no better than Gentile Egypt, the persecutor of God's true Israel. Or it could be that we are to see the brothers as representing the Jews, and the selling or 'handing over' of Joseph into Egypt speaks of how they handed the Lord over to the Gentiles.

*But God was with him-* God being *meta* Joseph is an echo of 'Emmanuel', God with [*meta*] us (Mt. 1:23 cp. Jn. 3:2).

*7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions-* The same word used of how the brothers experienced "affliction" during the famine (:11), which brought them eventually to repentance concerning Joseph. God likewise works in our lives, so that we realize first-hand the results of our actions against others. Those who shun and disfellowship and misuse others so often end up having the same done to them; not because God operates some measure-for-measure system of judgment, but rather because He seeks our spiritual growth and sensitivity towards others. What the Jews did to Jesus they were to experience themselves, in essence, in order that they might identify with Him and realize what they had done to Him by feeling it themselves- and repent. But sadly, the Jews of the first century did not respond, even in the afflictions of the Jewish war. Yet Stephen clearly saw Joseph as representative of himself; for he says that Joseph had been given "wisdom", just as Stephen had been. Stephen's hope was that his afflictions at the hands of the Jews would lead to their repentance, and his closing words reflect that hope for them. He had clearly learned deeply from his Lord's example on the cross.

*And gave him favour and wisdom-* The same words used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 2:52). Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of Christ, and also seeing in Joseph a representation of himself, who was likewise given grace and wisdom. Perhaps this was how Stephen's thought process developed; seeing similarities between himself and Joseph, to whom wisdom was also given, and who was also abused by his brethren; and then realizing that Joseph was a type of the Lord's sufferings. And thereby Stephen was led to the realization that the Lord in His sufferings and death was truly his representative.

*Before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt-* The Lord is described with the same word, as "Governor" (Mt. 2:6). Joseph's exaltation was therefore typical of the Lord's.

*And all his house-* A term used about God's house in Heb. 3:2,5, which the Lord Jesus is now "over". The multiple similarities in phrasing between Hebrews and Stephen's speech have led some to suggest Stephen as the author of Hebrews, especially as it appears to be addressed to the Jerusalem ecclesia, or is perhaps a transcript of a sermon given there.

*7:11 Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance-* Note the focus on these two areas. The entire region was affected, according to Genesis; for peoples from all surrounding nations [not just Canaan] came to Egypt to buy corn. The intention may be to parallel Egypt and Canaan because of the theme Stephen is developing, that there is no holy land or place; and Israel is as Egypt. See on 7:6; 7:7 *After that shall they come out and serve Me in this place* and 7:9 *Into Egypt*.

*7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers the first time-* The laboured emphasis upon Joseph being recognized only the *second* time is to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus would be recognized by the children of Jacob / Israel the

second time. We might be able to reason back from this type and conclude that the first time the brothers came to Egypt, they were intended to repent of their sin and recognize Joseph; but their lack of repentance meant that their eyes were as it were closed from perceiving him. The similarity with the Lord Jesus and Israel is of course acute.

*7:13 And at the second time-* The Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth is hard to explicitly prove from the Old Testament, without recourse to typology. Even Isaiah 53 describes the sufferings of Hezekiah, who was typical of Jesus. Thus Stephen's defence of his belief in the Messiahship of Jesus rests largely on typology – e.g. the fact that Joseph/Jesus was rejected by his brethren at first (Acts 7:13).

*Joseph was made known to his brothers-* Quoting Gen. 45:1 LXX.

*And Joseph's race became manifest to Pharaoh-* Joseph had first been introduced to Pharaoh as a Hebrew (Gen. 41:12). But what the term "Hebrew" meant to Egyptians isn't clear; it could mean just 'one from beyond'. The "race" of Joseph presumably refers to the fact he was one of Jacob's sons; and the Jacob family had already become famous as far as Egypt. Yet Joseph had concealed his connection to that family. It may have partly been because of shame at their behaviour, and their disavowal of all the Godly principles which Joseph believed in. Or it may be that because God had performed a psychological miracle on Joseph in making him 'forget his father's house' (Gen. 41:51), he simply did not identify himself as from the Jacob family. Stephen may be making the point that when Joseph, like the Lord Jesus, was recognized by his brethren, he was at the same time recognized by the Gentile world likewise for who he really was. And the same will be true at the latter day repentance of Israel; Rom. 11:15 comes to mind: "For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

Perhaps this continues Stephen's theme of demonstrating that the fathers of Israel were themselves weak in faith. Two of the greatest types of the Lord's mediatory work are Esther and Joseph. Esther was perhaps ashamed to reveal that she was a Jewess because of her people's behaviour, but given their desperate need she did reveal it in order to plead with the King for their salvation. And only when Joseph really had to use his influence to save his brethren did "Joseph's race become manifest unto Pharaoh" (Acts 7:13 RV). Does the Lord experience the same sort of embarrassment mixed with an urgent sense of our desperation, in His present mediation for us?

*7:14 And Joseph sent and called to himself Jacob his father and all his extended family-* Stephen has been developing Joseph as a type of the Lord Jesus. He sees significance, therefore, in Joseph-Jesus 'sending', *apostello*, as it were, by the means of apostles; and thus calling Jacob and his brothers to himself. Even in the last minutes of his life, Stephen saw himself as part of this desperate appeal of Joseph-Jesus to the children of Israel. We all have a great example in Stephen's desire to 'call to Jesus' even his persecutors.

*Seventy five people-* The Hebrew text at Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5 and Dt. 10:22 has '70'. But the LXX has 75. The difference is because some extra sons of Joseph's children Ephraim and Manasseh are recorded in the LXX; they are listed in 1 Chron. 7:14-21: Ashriel, Machir, Zelophehad, Peresh, sons of Manasseh; and Shuthelah, son of Ephraim. Joseph's sons were all half Egyptian; his wife was the daughter of a pagan Egyptian priest. Stephen may be reminding the Jews that their fierce claims to ethnic purity were a nonsense; because the very early fathers of the Jewish people were not ethnically pure, but mixed with Gentile blood

from the start. Another possibility is that we have 66 people recorded in Gen. 46:8-26; but if we include the wives of Jacob's sons, we have 75. I calculate nine wives on the basis that Joseph's wife was already in Egypt; and the wives of Judah and Simeon were dead. So we may have here an encouragement to see the value of women, as equally counted amongst the 'founding fathers'. Or the 66 people may need to have the nine sons of Joseph added to them; these are mentioned only in the LXX of Gen. 46:27 "And the sons of Joseph born in Egypt were nine souls".

*7:15 And Jacob went down into Egypt-* Stephen is developing the point that holy land or sacred space is not required for fellowship with God. Hence the Jewish obsession with the temple space was inappropriate.

*And he died, he and our fathers-* Acts 2:5 has recorded that there were large numbers of Jews from the diaspora who had come to live permanently at Jerusalem in order to die there; and many of them had been baptized. Stephen is making the point that the Jewish fathers themselves died outside the territory of the land promised to Abraham. Clearly those early Jewish Christians were still struggling with the idea that holy space was no longer to be seen so literally, but was now centred in the person and activity of the Lord Jesus.

*7:16 And they were carried back to Shechem, and laid-* The focus is very much upon their bodies, because the final fulfilment of the promises to Abraham involved a bodily resurrection of these men in order to eternally inherit the land promised to them.

*In the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem-* The following possibilities have been suggested: "(1) Abraham bought a cave and field in which it stood (Genesis 23:17). (2) Abraham bought another sepulchre, but it is not stated that he bought the field in which it stood (Acts 7:15,16). (3) Years later, Jacob bought a parcel of ground (Joshua 24:32) or a parcel of a field (Genesis 33:19). This was, in all probability, the very field in which Abraham's second sepulchre stood, as this field once belonged to the same owners though they may have been miles apart". We note that despite the shameful behaviour of Jacob's sons to Hamor, God brought about some degree of reconciliation. This gives hope to all who feel stuck, perhaps by their own fault or that of their brethren and relatives, in situations where reconciliation appears impossible.

*7:17 But as the time of the fulfilment of the promise which God made to Abraham drew near, the people grew-* The Greek says simply "the time of the promise" drawing near- putting 'the promise' for 'the fulfilment of the promise', so sure are God's promises of fulfilment.

The promises to Abraham received their major primary fulfilment at the Exodus. Seeing that their ultimate fulfilment will be at the second coming, it follows that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was typical of this. Or we can read this as meaning that the Abrahamic promises had their potential fulfilment at this time, involving a resurrection to eternal inheritance of the land- but Israel failed to meet the preconditions, and so their fulfilment was reinterpreted and rescheduled, just as was to happen as a result of their rejection of the Lord Jesus.

*And multiplied in Egypt-* See on 6:1 *Multiplying*.

*7:18 Until there arose another king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph-* Just as the Jews did not know the Lord in crucifying Him (Lk. 23:34 s.w.).

7:19 *The same dealt craftily with our race*- Again Stephen is seeking to bridge build with his audience by stressing what they had in common; see on :2 *Our father Abraham*.

*And ill-treated our fathers*- In fulfilment of the prediction mentioned in :6, where the same Greek word is translated "treat them badly". Luke uses the word of how the Christians were persecuted by the Jews (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). Again the Jews are being likened to the pagan Egyptians.

*Casting out their babies so that they might not live*- As the Jews cast out the 'baby' Christian converts from the synagogues. But the command of Pharaoh was that the people themselves should cast their baby boys into the Nile; the abuse of the Hebrews was in that they were made to cast their own babies into the river; the Greek grammar here supports this. See on :21.

7:20 *At this time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair; and he was nourished three months in his father's house*- The word is only used in Heb. 11:23, also about Moses. It means just that- handsome, good. The idea that it means 'fair towards God' is speculation, and at best interpretation rather than translation. It seems a wilful twist of the Greek *asteios*, a word related to *astu*, a city, and meaning literally 'urbane'. Twisting *teos* ['God'] into *asteios* is just not permissible; and if we are to read 'fair to God' then quite simply the Greek would be different. It seems to be the equivalent of Ex. 2:2, where Jochebed noticed Moses was "a goodly child", the Hebrew *tob* meaning no more than 'good' or 'nice' and with no hint of 'to God'.

7:21 *And when he was cast out*- A related word to that used in :19 "casting out their babies so that they might not live"; see note there. The picture here presented is of Jochebed being technically obedient to the commandment to cast her baby into the river; by gently laying the child in an ark in the river. And it seems that no sooner had she done so, committing the baby to God's care, along walked Pharaoh's daughter and picked him up out of the water. Stephen describes the 'putting out' of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel (Ez. 16:5; Ex. 2:3 LXX). Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was.

*Pharaoh's daughter took him up*- She called him 'Moses' because she had drawn him out of the water (Ex. 2:10). But the Hebrew *mashah*, 'drawn out', is used in the sense of deliverance. And this is from whence *Mosheh* ['Moses'; the same consonants are in both words]. Indeed, the idea of being drawn out of waters means just that (Ps. 18:16). So we are to imagine the baby about to drown, and the princess saving his life.

*And nourished him as her own son*- Moses would therefore have been next in line to the throne; and he gave up all that for the sake of trying to save a bunch of down and outs who didn't appreciate him anyway.

7:22 *And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*- Moses and Daniel were in such a similar situation; Daniel appears to have slipped away into the shadows whenever he was promoted to greatness in Babylon, and surely he took inspiration from Moses. There are similarities intended to be discerned between our lives and those of others; and we are to respond. Paul says he was "*taught* according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3) by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he

uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was "*learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Paul perceived his Jerusalem education as equivalent to that received by Moses in Egypt; he saw the very doyen of Judaism as no better than pagan Egypt. And Stephen [through his allusions] likewise had several times suggested that Judaism was no better than paganism. This speech had a huge effect on Paul, even though Stephen would not have noticed anything at the time.

"The wisdom" is Gk. *sophia*. The same word is used in the construction which is translated "dealt craftily" in :19; the wisdom of Egypt was to persecute the Hebrews.

*And he was mighty in his words and works*- The very phrase used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 24:19). If Moses was indeed handsome (see on :20) and also mighty in words and works, he really would have been very eligible as the next Pharaoh, being the Pharaoh's adopted grandson. Moses really did despise so much worldly advantage for the sake of the far less glamorous calling of God. "Mighty in his words and works" is very much the language which has been used to describe Stephen himself in 6:8-10. Stephen took comfort from the rejection of Moses, and saw himself in Moses' experiences. This is how we too can make Biblical history a living word to us. Indeed, the Biblical examples which Stephen selects include Joseph who were rejected by the children of Israel despite his "wisdom" (:10), and Moses who also had "wisdom" [of the Egyptians] but was rejected by Israel- and wisdom was the great characteristic of Stephen (6:10). The way God made Stephen's face to shine as if he were an Angel (6:15) is effectively showing how God confirms Stephen in feeling as Moses; for the Angel's glory shone off the face of Moses too (Ex. 34:29).

"I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words) ... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10); this is how Moses felt he would be perceived, although actually he was formally quite fluent when in the court of Pharaoh (Acts 7:22). Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words". Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism.

*7:23 But when he was nearly forty years old*- It is worth trying to visualize the scene when Moses was "full forty years old" (AV). It would make a fine movie. The Greek phrase could refer to Moses' birthday, and one is tempted to speculate that it had been arranged that when Moses was 40, he would become Pharaoh. Heb. 11:24 says that he refused and chose- the Greek tense implying a one off choice- to suffer affliction with God's people. It is tempting to imagine Moses at the ceremony when he should have been declared as Pharaoh, the most powerful man in his world... standing up and saying, to a suddenly hushed audience, voice cracking with shame and stress and yet some sort of proud relief that he was doing the right thing: "I, whom you know in Egyptian as Meses, am Moshe, yes, Moshe the Jew; and I decline to be Pharaoh". Imagine his foster mother's pain and anger. And then in the end, the wonderful honour would have been given to another man, who became Pharaoh. Perhaps he or his son was the one to whom Moses was to come, 40 years later. After a nervous breakdown, stuttering, speaking with a thick accent, clearly having forgotten Egyptian... walking through the mansions of glory, along the corridors of power, to meet that man, to whom he had given the throne 40 years earlier.

*It came into his heart-* God clearly moved Moses to deliver Israel. We see here yet another example of how God can operate directly upon the hearts of men, giving ideas, motivation and even repentance.

*To visit his brothers the children of Israel-* 'Visit' is a Hebraism for identifying with, and also saving. It is through the Lord's representative sacrifice that God ultimately visited and saved His people. Ex. 4:31 is clear that *God* visited His people at this time; yet He was strongly manifested in Moses, so that what Moses did and desired to do was a manifestation of God. It is Luke who has recorded already how the work of the Lord Jesus was God's visiting of His people (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16); and he later speaks of how God visited the Gentiles through the work of Peter (Acts 15:14). So often, the words of Stephen are alluded to later by Paul, who would have watched and listened with eagle intensity to Stephen's words here- and on his conversion, sought to live in the spirit and reasoning of the man he murdered. Paul uses Stephen's phrase here when he speaks of his decision to go 'visit his brothers' where he had previously preached and suffered (Acts 15:36). Such a decision was at great personal risk; for he had faced death and persecution in those cities. His brave desire to return was perhaps motivated by Moses' brave decision to visit his brothers, at the cost of losing all things in his secular life and endangering his life. But the thought of following Moses in this was first stimulated by Stephen talking about it. And this is how our lives also work out; we may hear a brother talking about a Bible character like Moses, and it later inspires us in a radical, significant life decision.

"When Moses *was grown*, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens... when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren... by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. " ...[Moses] *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh... *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-28). Moses could have been the next Pharaoh; according to Josephus, he was the commander of the Egyptian army. But he walked away from the possibility of being the richest man on earth, he "refused" it, because he valued "the reproach of Christ" and the recompense of the Kingdom to be *greater* riches. Yet what did he know about the sufferings of Christ? Presumably he had worked out from the promises of the seed in Eden and to the fathers that the future Saviour must be reproached and rejected; and he saw that his own life experience could have a close association with that of this unknown future Saviour who would surely come. And therefore, it seems, Moses counted the honour and wonder of this greater than the riches of Egypt. Both Paul and Moses rejected mammon for things which are abstract and intellectual (in the strict sense): the *excellency* of the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, and the Kingdom this would enable. Living when we do, with perhaps a greater knowledge of the Lord's victory and excellency, our motivation ought to be even stronger.

7:24 *And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed-* It was God who delivered Israel from their Egyptian oppressors (1 Sam. 10:18); but He did so through Moses. Yet Israel would only be oppressed by Gentiles if they were disobedient to the covenant (Dt. 28:29,33, and the word is often used about their punishments at Gentile hands during the period of the judges). But despite that, the God of all grace through Moses avenged His people who were justly suffering for their sins. Stephen is

seeking to remove from Israel any sense of national pride at their Exodus from Egypt, and instead see it as a parade example of God's pure grace through the raising up of a Saviour in Moses, who looked ahead to Messiah. And yet the profound truth was that it was through the 'oppression' of that Messianic Suffering Servant on the cross that Israel's salvation would be enabled (Is. 53:7). And no wonder then that the brief summary of the Gospel in Acts 10:38 uses the word to summarize the work of the Lord Jesus as delivering the oppressed. Stephen, or the Lord speaking through Stephen, was appealing to the audience on all levels. There were many Rabbinic-trained minds there like Saul's, who thought constantly on the level of Scriptural allusion, type and antitype. And these words of Stephen, spoken in perhaps his last minutes of mortal life, succeeded in converting at least Saul.

*Striking the Egyptian*- The same word used of how the Jews 'smote' the Lord with death (Mt. 26:31). The point is being developed, as with the language of 'oppression', that it was through the Lord's smiting that He smote the oppressors of His people.

*7:25 And he supposed that his brothers understood*- "Supposed" translates *nomizo*, connected to the noun *nomos*, 'law'. The Law of Moses ought to have brought Israel to perceive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour; but for whatever reason, they failed to make that connection.

*That God by his hand was giving them deliverance*- Moses' hand. But God had told Moses at the bush: "I will stretch out *My hand*, and smite Egypt..." . Moses had yet to learn the meaning of God manifestation through men; Stephen is bringing out the weakness of the fathers, even Moses.

*But they understood not*- Another phrase of Stephen's that stuck in Paul's mind to the end of his days; for on arrival in Rome he lamented that the Jews "understood not" (Acts 28:26 s.w.). Stephen's speech is a superb example of powerful preaching that left ideas and words in the minds of his hearers that remained for decades afterwards. The Lord had many times lamented that Israel "understood not"; we can therefore infer that Israel could have accepted Moses' deliverance the first time. But they thrust him away from them, and there was a 40 year hiatus in the plan of Israel's redemption. This was reflected in Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and then the possibility arising around AD70 for them to accept Him again. It seems from the New Testament that the apostles clearly hoped for that; but again they refused the possibility, and another, longer hiatus has been interposed.

*7:26 And the following day he appeared to two of them* - God sent Moses to be their saviour, pointing forward to His sending of the Lord Jesus to redeem us. Moses came to Israel and "shewed (Greek '*optomai*') himself" to them (Acts 7:26). Yet '*optomai*' really means to gaze at, to watch a spectacle. He came to his people, and gazed at them as they fought among themselves, spiritually and emotionally destroyed by the oppression of Egypt. He invited them to likewise gaze upon him as their saviour. This surely prefigures our Lord's consideration of our sinful state. As he grew up in Nazareth he would have thought on this a lot. The same word for "appeared" is used of the Lord's appearances after His resurrection, specifically to the 'two' on the road to Emmaus. Luke has used the word in Acts 1:3 of how the Lord 'appeared' after His resurrection for 40 days. And it is the same word used of how the risen Lord appeared to Saul soon afterwards (Acts 9:17; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:8). Surely Saul made the connection.



*As they were fighting-* 'Striving'. The same word is used of how the Jews strove amongst themselves over the issue of Jesus as Messiah (Jn. 6:52). The same striving was going on within the consciences of men like Saul and Gamaliel who were listening to Stephen.

*And tried to reconcile them-* Paul grasped the point, for in his later letters he writes much of how the Lord's work and the outcome of His death was fundamentally the ministry of reconciliation between persons. To glorify, create and perpetuate division between brethren is to miss the point of the Lord's work.

*Saying, Gentlemen, you are brothers-* Literally, 'men'. They were not to be mere men in their relationship with each other, they were to remember that they were brothers and act accordingly. See on :28. Several times Stephen has appealed to the fact that he and the Jews were brothers, with common ancestry; see on 7:2 *Our father Abraham*. But just as the point was lost on Israel at the time of Moses, so it was in Stephen's day; for they stoned him all the same.

*Why do you injure each other?-* The same word has just been used of how the Egyptian injured the Israelite (s.w. "suffer wrong"). By oppressing and injuring our brethren, we are acting as Egypt. This was a finely reasoned appeal to Stephen's brethren not to treat him likewise. And given the kind of minds listening to him, continually accustomed to such a way of reasoning from Biblical words and precedents, the appeal would have struck home. Especially with Saul.

*7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong-* The same word as "injure" in :26; see note there.

*Thrust him away-* This incident was typical of Israel's attitude to Moses in the wilderness years (:39 s.w.). And again, the listening, angry Paul was deeply impressed by the logic. He got the point, that Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus; and he uses the same word in saying that Israel had thrust away the Gospel of Christ (Acts 13:46), although he also marvels at how although they had done this, God had not 'thrust away' His people Israel (Rom. 11:1,2). God has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

*Saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?-* Again there was the question of authority. This was a big issue with the Jews of the first century in their criticisms of both the Lord and His preachers. Stephen is demonstrating that it was this concern with authority which had led Israel to initially reject Moses. The Lord Jesus of course is described with the same words, as the ultimate ruler (Rev. 1:5) and judge. Luke clearly connects with these words by being the only evangelist to record the Lord's comment: "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Lk. 12:14). The answer was, 'God'. The parallels were clearly being developed by Stephen between Moses and the Lord Jesus, and they would not have been lost upon his audience.

*7:28 Would you kill me-* Moses had made no threat at all. He had come to save his brethren, not kill them. Later, Israel liked to suppose that Moses and God Himself were some kind of psychopaths who had led them out of Egypt intentionally to murder them in the desert. Legion feared the Lord had come to torment rather than save him (Mt. 8:29). The disciples feared that the Lord didn't care that they perished in the storm (Mk. 4:38). Here we have a psychological phenomenon; the saviour is feared to be a destroyer by those he seeks to save.

This has been observed from various angles in many studies and observations. The reason is that the group to be saved do not believe that the saviour can save them; and they justify that disbelief by thinking that actually, they are correct in disbelieving him- because actually, he is a deceiver and wishes to kill them. This is why strong opposites of reaction are produced by the challenge to faith which there is in the person of Jesus and in the Gospel. It is why messengers of that Gospel and of Jesus are so strongly slandered by those who disbelieve that Gospel. It is why nobody can stand on some passive middle ground when they encounter the Lord. Here too is the explanation for Saul's manic reaction against the Lord, and then such a strong reaction the other way. The very way we are wired means that we respond to salvation either in trust, or in strong reaction the other way. In our witnessing to men and women, we often meet the claim that folks are undecided or indifferent. However politely stated, that is in fact an excuse for unbelief.

*As you killed the Egyptian yesterday?*- The Hebrew assumed that Moses was going to treat him too as he would an Egyptian. The Hebrew had failed to realize the unique identity of himself as a Hebrew and not as a mere man. See on :26 *Gentlemen, you are brothers*.

*7:29 And Moses fled at this saying and went to live in the land of Midian*- Ex. 2:14 says that "Moses was afraid, and said, Surely this thing is known". But Heb. 11:27 gives a different perspective: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king. For he endured...". See on Heb. 11:27. It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. Moses is described as having "endurance" at the time he fled from Egypt (Heb. 11:27), even though in the short term his faith failed him at the time and he fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Yet God counted him as having that basic ability to endure, even to endure through his own failure and weakness. *This* is what God looks at, rather than our day-to-day acts of sin and righteousness. Stephen emphasizes the weakness of Moses to seek to lead his audience away from national pride and an idolizing of Moses; he wished them to see the prophet greater than Moses, Jesus the Messiah, as indeed greater than Moses. In Judaism, there was and still is a tendency to perceive Moses as the acme of spirituality, far greater than Messiah.

*Where he begat two sons*- Neither of whom did he circumcise; and their mother was a non-Israelite. Such a person would have been excluded from the synagogues by Moses' spiritual descendants. Again, Stephen is portraying the weaker side of Moses in order to lead his listeners to a position where they sought the greater than Moses.

*7:30 And when forty years were fulfilled*- The language of 'fulfilment' suggests that God planned the 40 years ahead of time. The suggestion seems to be that God gave them this period as a punishment- for not accepting Moses the first time. Stephen and the early apostles appear to have had the idea that likewise, a 40 year period was being given to Israel to repent after their rejection of the Lord. But even when that was fulfilled, they still refused to repent. The idea of years being fulfilled is using the words used in the LXX for the 70 years judgment upon Judah which was fulfilled (2 Chron. 36:21,22; Jer. 25:12). This confirms us in understanding this period as a judgment upon Israel; their sufferings in Egypt were prolonged by their refusal to accept Moses' deliverance.

*An angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai*- The point being once more that sacred space is not only in the temple nor only in the territory of the land of Israel. The wilderness where Moses kept sheep for 40 years was also the same area where he shepherded

Israel for the next 40 years. 40 years is a long time; during it, Moses went from being a handsome young man, next in line for the throne, eloquent in words and works... to a man broken by 40 years of manual work in the cruel desert, stuttering, having forgotten Egyptian, needing a spokesman. And then, he was ready for God to use as the greatest leader of His people apart from the Lord. Monotonous experience over decades can be used by the Father to prepare us for another stage of life; whilst we cannot attach specific meaning to event at the time it happens, we can rest assured that there is meaning to event, even if it takes 40 years to realize it.

*In a flame of fire-* The appearance of the Spirit as flames of fire on the heads of the apostles thereby connected them to Moses; and the Jewish opposition to them made those learned religious men no better than the Egyptians.

*In a bush-* It is Luke who uses this word in recording how the Lord made the point that figs and grapes, the classic symbols of Israel under blessing, do not come from such thorny bushes (Lk. 6:44). But it was there, in that context and negative associations, that Yahweh revealed Himself as Israel's saviour through Moses. And He had done the same in the Lord Jesus whom Israel now likewise despised.

*7:31 And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to observe-* "Wondered" translates a Greek word which is often used in a negative sense concerning people lacking faith and insight when they should have had it. Another reference to Moses in weakness, preparing the way for presenting Jesus as Messiah as the greater than Moses.

*There came the voice of the Lord-* Actually of an Angel (:30). But the Angel was spoken of as if it were God, in that it was speaking God's voice. In this lies the basis for a correct understanding of the highly exalted nature of the Lord Jesus; not God Himself in a Trinitarian sense, but the supreme manifestation of Him.

*7:32 I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob-* The Angel spoke those words; and it would be fair to say that in reality, the patriarchs conceived of God in terms of His Angel. Jacob is quite clear about this in Gen. 48:15,16.

*And Moses trembled and dared not look-* This is in intentional contrast to the way in which he later spoke face to face with the Angel, as a man speaks with his friend (Ex. 33:11); and with how he had the ambition to ask to see God's own glory (Ex. 33:20). The point is that Moses grew spiritually in closeness to the Angel who manifested the Father. And it was such growth in relation to the Lord Jesus which Stephen was urging. See on :34 *Come*.

*7:33 And the Lord said to him, Take off the shoes from your feet-* Stephen says that this request came *after* God had introduced Himself as the God of Abraham etc. (:32). But the order is apparently different in Ex. 3:5,6: "Take your sandals off from your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground.

Moreover he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". It could be that the "he said" is to be understood as 'He *had* said'. But another alternative is that Stephen was inspired to understand that God introduced Himself twice to Moses; and the first time Moses didn't comprehend it. This would fit with Stephen's point that Joseph was made known to his brethren the *second* time; and Moses likewise was accepted by Israel the second time he came to them. And now Stephen would be saying that

Moses himself only grasped the manifestation of God in the Angel at the second time. All this of course was prodding the Jewish conscience about their rejection of their Messiah the first time; but at His second appearing, the 'second time'... they will accept Him.

*For the place upon which you stand is holy ground-* Literally, in the Greek, 'the holy land', the phrase beloved of Jews to describe Israel. Stephen was speaking in the context of arguing that the temple was no longer required for worship, house meetings were just as valid; and so he makes the point that a spot of scrubland in the Sinai desert was just as much the holy land as the territory of Palestine and the temple mount itself.

*7:34 I have surely seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them; and now-* Their groaning was heard by God as a prayer; He sees situations as prayer. Otherwise, if prayer is simply words, then those who are better able to verbalize would have more powerful prayers. But ability to verbalize isn't the necessary thing in order for God to hear prayer.

*Come, I will send you into Egypt-* Gk. 'come here'. The Angel in the bush invited Moses to come closer to Him, whereas Moses "dared not look" (:32). It was his own intimacy to God which would be the basis of Israel's salvation; hence the paradox of "Come [here], I will send you [away] into Egypt". As noted on :32 *Moses trembled and dared not look*, Moses grew in relationship and intimacy with that Angel, just as he grew in ability to save Israel.

*7:35 This Moses-* Israel hated him, they thrust him from them (Acts 7:39); due to their provocation he failed to enter the land. He had done so much for them, yet they bitterly rejected him- "this Moses", as they called him (Ex. 32:1,23 cp. Acts 7:35). But when God wanted to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, he pleaded for them with such intensity that he achieved what few prayerful men have: a change (not just a delay in outworking) in God's categorically stated intention.

*Whom they refused, saying: Who made you a ruler and a judge?-* The same word used of Israel's denial or refusing of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:13,14). The loneliness of Moses as a type of Christ in showing this kind of love must surely represent that of our Lord. They went to a height which was generally beyond the appreciation of the men among whom they lived. The Spirit seems to highlight the loneliness of Moses by saying that at the same time as Moses *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Israel *refused* him (the same Greek word is used; Heb. 11:24; Acts 7:35). He was rejected by both the world and God's people: for 40 long years. As Israel envied Moses for spiritual reasons (Ps. 106:16; Acts 7:9), so they did Christ (Mt. 27:18), after the pattern of the brothers' spiritual envy of Joseph (Gen. 37:11). Spiritual envy leading to persecution is quite a common feature in Biblical history (Job, Jeremiah, Paul...). And it isn't absent from the Christian experience either.

*Him God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer, by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush-* "Ruler and judge" becomes "ruler and deliverer". God fundamentally and essentially wishes to deliver / save rather than to judge. Although Israel rejected Moses as their ruler and deliverer, "the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer". They didn't want to be saved from Egypt through Moses, and yet God did save them from Egypt through Moses. Israel at that time were exactly like us; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we were redeemed in prospect from a world we didn't want to leave. We were saved- and are saved- almost in spite of ourselves. That we were predestined to such great salvation is one of redemption's finest mysteries.

*7:36 This man led them out-* The grammar here might suggest that the completed 'leading out' was after the 40 years journey, and the AV reflects that. Our path in spiritual life is likewise a leading of us out of Egypt; it is not all achieved at the moment of crossing the Red Sea / baptism. The lead up to the Red Sea crossing was just as much a part of the leading out process. This is why separation from the world and unto the things of the Kingdom is an essential part of our salvation process. And it's why that process will involve progressive disillusion and bad experience with the world.

"He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs... in the wilderness forty years" (AV); yet Ex.12:41; 33:1 say that the bringing out of Israel was at the Red Sea. These two 'bringings out' of Egypt (the flesh) are experienced by us, firstly at baptism, and secondly in actually entering the Kingdom at the second coming. Our bringing out from the Kingdom of darkness into the sphere of God's rulership only occurs in prospect at baptism and must be confirmed at the end of our wilderness wandering.

*Having done wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years-* This confirms that the 'leading out' was both from Egypt and at the end of the wilderness journeys. The wonders done at the exodus were in essence done throughout the 40 years. Thus the cloud in which they were baptized at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1) continued with them for 40 years. Their baptism in this sense was ongoing, and this idea is repeated in the discourse on baptism in Romans 6.

*7:37 This is the Moses who said to the children of Israel-* Implying 'Moses would have believed in Jesus as Messiah if he were here today'.

*A prophet like me shall God raise up to you from among your brothers -* A clear statement of the Lord's humanity. As the Passover lamb had to be taken out from among the flock, so the Messiah was taken out from amongst His brothers. And Stephen has just stressed that Moses was a man ("This man...", :36). Messiah was to like him. Yet there was an initial possible fulfilment of this prophecy in Aaron, whom Moses was told would be his prophet (Ex. 7:1), and who was literally one of Moses' brothers. Aaron could have been the Messiah figure, but failed. Again we are introduced to the idea of conditional prophecy; which was highly relevant to Israel at that time. If they accepted Jesus as Messiah, then prophecies would be fulfilled- but if they did not, then those prophecies would have another and more difficult [for Israel] outworking.

*7:38 This is he that was in the congregation in the wilderness-* The ecclesia, the church. We find Moses as a type of Christ also presented as representative of Israel, and therefore able to completely sympathise with them in their physical afflictions and spiritual weaknesses. Thus the Spirit says (in the context of presenting Moses as a type of Christ) that Moses was "*in*" (not "*with*") the ecclesia in the wilderness", stressing the way in which he was in their midst rather than distanced from them. The Lord Jesus is portrayed in Acts as very much "*in*" the church, active and present just as much as Moses was. Paul's later reasoning in 1 Corinthians 10 about the church in the wilderness is yet another example of how the reasoning of Stephen remained with him over the years, and he developed the ideas.

*With the angel-* Acts 7:38 (especially the Diaglott translation) speaks as if the Angel was physically present with Moses on the journey, and was as much in the congregation as Moses was: "He (Moses) was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the Mount Sina and with our fathers". In passing, this implies that it was the same Angel

(Michael) who gave the promises to Abraham, who gave the Law, and who went with them through the wilderness. Truly He is the Angel connected with Israel! Stephen's point was that like the Angel in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus was no less 'in' the early church although mostly invisible.

*That spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers-* But their 'fathers' didn't want the Angel to speak with them directly, and wanted Moses alone to meet God on Sinai. This was the stock they were descended from; and it was no pedigree to be proud of. Stephen is implying that the descendants of those 'fathers' were likewise not willing to listen to the voice of God; or as Hebrews puts it, they turned away from Him who spoke from Heaven (Heb. 12:25- Hebrews might have been written by Stephen).

*Who received living words to give to us-* God's word is unlike any human word; it has the ability to speak to subsequent generations directly in their context. In this sense, the words given to Moses were also given to Stephen's generation, and spoke to them of Jesus. Just as the record of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel is God speaking to us today (Hos. 12:4). Moses trembled and Sinai shook and the people fled when they heard God's word. "God's voice was heard at Sinai: the same voice spoke in the Psalmist's words. But the appeal stands written in Scripture and therefore Paul can say that "Today" is a time with limits, but it was yet "today" when the Hebrews was written and Paul repeats the word of the Psalmist as God's voice to the Hebrews of his day. It is significant that Paul immediately adds that "the word of God is living and powerful". The words he quoted were no dead message but God's living voice... The exhortation "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord" was God speaking "unto you", says Paul to the Hebrews. Is it less so to sons of any generation?" [John Carter, *Delight In God's Law*, pp. 232,233]. Heb. 12:5 alludes to this idea of a living word by speaking of an Old Testament passage as 'reasoning' (R.V.) with us. The Lord Jesus spoke of how the spiritual man is to live by every word which proceeds (present tense) from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4); as if He perceived God's words written in the book of Deuteronomy to be "proceeding" from God's very mouth in an ongoing sense. Moses speaks of how God says to each dying man "Return, you children of men" (Ps. 90:3)- as if Moses understood to speak the words of Gen. 3:19 to every man who dies. Likewise the Lord spoke as if the Jews of His day ought to be *hearing* Moses and the prophets speaking to them in urgent warning (Lk. 16:31); yet despite studying their words syllable by syllable, the Jews didn't in fact perceive it was a living word speaking to them directly and urgently. Abel, through the account of him in Scripture, "is yet spoken of" (Heb. 11:4 AVmg.). Isaiah was prophesying directly to the hypocrites of the first century, according to the Lord in Mk. 7:6 RV. There is an active quality to the words we read on the pages of our Bibles. The passage in the scrolls that said "I am the God of Abraham" was "spoken unto *you* by God", Jesus told first century Israel (Mt. 22:31). Note in passing how demanding He was- expecting them to figure from that statement and usage of the present tense that God considered Abraham effectively still alive, although he was dead, and would therefore resurrect him. Although God spoke to Moses alone in the mount, Moses stresses that actually God "spake unto *you* in the mount out of the midst of the fire". The word of God to His scribes really is, to the same gripping, terrifying degree, His direct word to us (Dt. 4:36; 5:45; 10:4). This explains why David repeatedly refers to the miracle at the Red Sea as if this had affected him personally, to the extent that he could ecstatically rejoice because of it. When Dt. 11:4 speaks of how "the Lord has destroyed [the Egyptians] unto this day", it sounds as if we are to understand each victory and achievement of God as somehow ongoing right down to our own day and our own lives and experience. Thus Ps. 114:5,6 RV describes the Red Sea as even now fleeing before God's

people. And thus because of the records of God's past activities, we should be motivated in our decisions now.

*7:39 Our fathers would not be obedient to him-* The early church was "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7 s.w.). Again Stephen is demonstrating the weakness of 'our fathers', whom the Jews were so proud of.

*But thrust him from them and turned back in their hearts to Egypt-* Stephen stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was "thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews "thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses; their hearts, their thinking, was back in Egypt, reminiscing about Egyptian food... Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, these feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably unaware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and "the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom.

"Turned back" suggests an anti 'conversion', which is how the word is elsewhere translated. We meet the word again in :42, where in response to this turning back, God in response likewise turned back from Israel. There is a mutuality in response between God and man, and yet overarching that there is also His grace and continued enthusiasm to save even those who turn away from His offer.

*7:40 Saying unto Aaron-* Their desire for the golden calf was part of their mental return to Egypt; it was surely an Egyptian idol deity.

*Make us gods-* They made a singular calf, but understood it as a plurality; a many-in-one god. This is classic paganism, and is reflected in the false doctrine of the Trinity to this day.

*That shall go before us-* The constant, visible presence of the cloud and fire leading them failed to register. Visible miracles seem to have little effect in bringing people to spirituality. They wanted to be led back to Egypt and needed a leader through the trackless waste to get back there. Yet they had leadership going before them through the desert towards the promised land. Clearly, people choose a form of leadership which they perceive will lead them to where they themselves want to go. If the Bible and the living word of the Lord Jesus are our chosen guides, then we are to follow wherever they lead, rather than choosing leadership which takes us where we ourselves would wish to go in the short term. So many struggles over church leadership today come simply back to this.

*As for this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him-* Their concern was that the trackless desert required a guide. They wilfully chose to

ignore the fire and cloud leading them, and chose instead to focus on the man who was their leader. This happens today; people excuse not following God's word and Spirit direction because of their issues with the human leadership. Luke may be making a connection with the way he uses the same word for 'led out' in speaking of how after His resurrection, the Lord led His people as far as Bethany and then ascended to Heaven, becoming their invisible leader (Lk. 24:50).

7:41 *And they made a calf in those days*- The days Moses was in the mount.

*And brought a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands*- A phrase used about idols several times; :43 stresses that they "made" the idols. Trust in our own works is therefore a form of idolatry; Stephen is saying that although the Jews were strictly against idols, their justification by works was a form of idolatry, just as it can be today. The doing of works becomes an addiction and a form of justification rather than simple faith in Christ. They "rejoiced" in what they had made, whereas earlier at the Exodus they had rejoiced in God's grace of salvation towards them.

7:42 *But God turned and gave them up to serve the host of heaven*- On their journey to Canaan, the Israelites worshipped idols. Because of this, "God turned, and gave them up (over) to worship the host of heaven... I gave them up to the hardness of their hearts" (Acts 7:42; Ps. 81:12 AVmg.). God reached a stage where He actually encouraged Israel to worship idols; He confirmed them in their rejection of Him. And throughout their history, He encouraged them in their idolatry (Ez. 20:39; Am. 4:4). God will confirm us today in whichever way we chose to go. See on :39 *Turned back*.

"Gave them up to serve" implies that God held them back from worshipping the idols they had carried with them. But then He withdrew this psychological restraint. This is evidence enough that God is able to work in the hearts of men in order to hold them back from sinning, as He did even with gentile Abimelech. This is one of the many functions of His Holy Spirit; their behaviour is specifically described in :51 as resisting the Holy Spirit.

*As it is written in the book of the prophets: Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?*- Stephen pointed out, by the inflection which he gave to his OT quotations, that Israel's service of God was meaningless because at the same time they worshipped their idols: "*Have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?*". This was a rhetorical question. They offered the sacrifices, but actually they didn't. And what is the difference between "slain beasts" and "sacrifices"? Aren't sacrifices only slain beasts? The point is that the animals they gave were only slain beasts; nothing more, not real offerings, not real, acceptable sacrifice. "They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth it not" (Hos. 8:13). And likewise we can dress up our devotions with the appearance of real sacrifice when there is nothing there at all.

7:43 *You took up the tabernacle of Moloch*- Ezekiel 20 describes how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea; indeed, they lugged a whole pagan tabernacle system with them through the wilderness, in addition to the true tabernacle (:43,44). This of course is a warning to us who were as it were baptized also at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1). Are we carrying two tabernacle systems with us [or more] on our wilderness journey?



*And the star of the god Remphan, figures which you made to worship-* See on :41 *The works of their hands.* These were in contrast to the "figure" of the tabernacle (:44). It was an anti-tabernacle which they carried, just as all false religion is a fake imitation of the true and just as the anti-Christ is not a person so much against Christ (although he is that), but a fake imitation of Him.

*And I will carry you away-* As they had carried their idols. There is a mutuality between God and man in how God responds to human sin.

*Beyond Babylon-* Paul's relationship with Stephen becomes even more acute when we reflect upon how Stephen says that Israel were taken into judgment to *Babylon*. He is quoting here from Amos 5:26, which in both the LXX and Masoretic text says that Israel were to go "to Damascus". Why does Stephen purposefully change "Damascus" to "Babylon"? Was it not because he knew there were many Christians in Damascus, and he didn't want to speak of 'going to Damascus' as a figure for condemnation? And yet *straight afterwards* we are reading that Saul 'went to *Damascus*' to persecute and kill the Christians there. It's as if Saul was so infuriated by Stephen's subtle change that he wanted to prove him wrong; he would 'go to Damascus' and not be condemned, rather he would condemn the Christians there, and make it *their* place of judgment. This suggestion may seem farfetched. But we have to remember the Pharisaic way of reasoning and thinking. Every phrase of Scripture was so valuable to them, and major life decisions would be made over one nuance of the text or interpretation of it. No wonder that in later life, Paul alludes to his dear friend Stephen so much. What a joy it will be to see them meet up in the Kingdom.

*7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, even as He who spoke to Moses-* The contrast is with the tabernacle of Moloch which they also carried with them. The "testimony" implies an evidence, a witness. There was no such witness in the false tabernacle. This is the word commonly used for the testimony or witness of the early preachers (Acts 4:33 and often in Paul's letters). This testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was ignored by the Jews of Stephen's day just as Israel in the wilderness preferred the witness of Moloch's tabernacle which was in fact not a witness at all, for it was a silent assembly of materials and nothing more. The hint was that this was all the Jerusalem temple now amounted to, for the Lord had left that house desolate; the glory had departed from it. To draw a parallel between the Jerusalem temple and the tabernacle of Moloch was a radical thing to do. No wonder Saul and his colleagues were cut to the heart and beside themselves with anger.

*Appointed-* The tabernacle of Moloch was not "appointed" by God. Saul was paying attention to every word; for the Lord then appeared to him and "appointed" *him* to do the work of *His* tabernacle (Acts 22:10 s.w.). And by doing so the Lord was inviting Paul [and all of us] to see Moses not as an icon to be worshipped from a respectful distance, but as a realistic pattern for our own path.

*That he should make it according to the figure that he had seen-* See on :43 *Figures which you made.*

*7:45 Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought into the land with Joshua-* Joshua is the same Hebrew word as 'Jesus'. Joshua-Jesus and the "fathers" brought in the tabernacle into the place previously possessed by Gentiles. I suggest that the tabernacle now referred to people, God's dwelling place. The Lord used the same word, so Luke alone records, of how

those previously excluded from the temple were to be 'brought in' by Him and His servants (Lk. 14:21). The 'fathers' therefore equate with the servants of Jesus; the tabernacle is the new system of worship. Paul was later accused of bringing in Gentiles to the temple (Acts 21:28,29 s.w.). As the "fathers" along with Joshua-Jesus brought the tabernacle into the holy space of the land of Israel, so the early Jewish Christians along with the active Lord Jesus were to bring Gentile converts into the new holy space- not a literal space, but the temple of God's invisible church and spiritual temple. It was all just too much for the listening Judaists. That those fishermen believers-in-Jesus could be equivalent to the "fathers", that the crucified Jesus was as the historical Joshua, that the Gentiles were as the ark, that holy space no longer counted... it was all too much. The intensity and depth of Stephen's allusions were increasing as he progressed in his apparently innocent recounting of Israel's history. And when men are spiritually and intellectually cornered, they descend to personal attacks, in this case to the extent of throwing Roman law to the winds and picking up stones to stone Stephen to death with.

*When they received possession of the nations that God thrust out before the presence of our fathers-* Stephen has just drawn a parallel between the early Jewish Christian preachers, many of them illiterate manual workers, and the "fathers" at the time of Joshua-Jesus. And now he says that the Gentiles were cast out before them; the implication was that the Judaist elders were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of Canaan, who were now being cast out of the holy space. The Lord had literally cast out such persons from the holy space of the temple. Saul's conscience was badly goaded at this point; but the point was not lost on him. For in the years of his repentance, he wrote of how just as Gentile Hagar was "cast out", so Judaism had been cast out from God's true family (Gal. 4:30).

*To the days of David-* At first blush, a strange detail to add; that the process of casting out the Gentile tribes from the land was only completed by David, many generations later. The "fathers" hadn't done the job; they were not the peerless elders Judaism liked to imagine. And it was David, a clear type of Messiah, whose "son" was to be Messiah, who actually completed the job. The Lord Jesus was likewise doing the same- completing the job of casting the Judaists out of God's holy space because He had redefined that holy space.

*7:46 Who found favour in the sight of God-* The grace he found was in that he was given the honour of being the 'father' of Messiah; the Messianic promises of 2 Sam. 7:12-14 were given to David. Luke forces the point home by using the very same words as to how Mary "found favour in the sight of God" (Lk. 1:30), and was chosen to be the woman through whom the Messianic promise to David came true.

*And asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob-* David's desire to "find" a temple for God was matched by how he "found" (s.w.) grace with God. As we learn in 2 Sam. 7, God turned around that desire to 'find' something for Him by saying that He would 'find' something for David, namely the Son of God, the Jewish Messiah, being directly a "son of David". Stephen is setting up the position that all the argument about the temple as holy place was deeply and Biblically misplaced; because God wanted to give Israel His Son, rather than have a temple. And the Judaists were back in the initially mistaken mindset of David, focusing on the physical temple rather than the spiritual house centred in God's Son, the true temple. Stephen clearly read negatively Solomon's insistence on building a physical temple.

*7:47 But it was Solomon who built Him a house-* Stephen was accused by the Jews of blaspheming the temple. In reply, he gives a potted history of Israel, emphasizing how the

faithful were constantly on the move rather than being settled in one physical place. He was subtly digging at the Jewish insistence that the temple was where God lived. In this context, he refers to Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light. He says that David tried to find a *tabernacle* for God, "*But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as says the prophet, Heaven is my throne... what house will you build me?*". This cannot mean 'God no longer dwells in the temple as He used to before Christ's death', because the reason given is that the prophet Isaiah says that God cannot live in houses. This reason was true in Isaiah's time, before the time of Christ. It would seem that Stephen is politely saying: 'Solomon made this mistake of thinking that God can be limited to a physical building. You're making just the same mistake'. And he goes on to make a comment which could well allude to this: "You do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers (including Solomon) did, so do you" (Acts 7:51). Further evidence that Stephen saw Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light is provided by the link between Acts 7:41 and 48: "They made a calf... and rejoiced in *the works of their own hands*... howbeit the Most High dwells not in temples *made with hands*". The word "made" is stressed in the record of Solomon's building the temple (2 Chron. 3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2 Chron. 2:7,8). Things made with hands refers to idols in several Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). Significantly, Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands in 1 Chron. 29:5. And it may be significant that the words of Is. 66:1,2 concerning God not living in temples are quoted by Paul with reference to pagan temples in Acts 17:24, and concerning the temple in Jerusalem by Stephen. The building of the temple became an idol to Solomon. Human motives get terribly mixed.

7:48 *However-* Stephen read Solomon's building of the temple negatively; see on :47. It was even an example of resisting the Holy Spirit (:51).

*The most high dwells not in houses made with hands-* Note that it was God's clearly expressed wish that He should *not* live in a physical house (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 7:48; 17:24). Yet He accommodated Himself to human weakness in wanting a physical house in which to worship Him; He came and lived (in a sense) in just such a house. In the same way, He did not wish Israel to have a system of human kingship; but when they insisted upon it, He worked with them through it. Just as He does with our wrong decisions.

*As said the prophet-* Again the quotation from Is. 66:1,2 is not exact but a summary of God's intended sense, quotation mixed with interpretation, as was the habit of Jewish rabbinic interpreters. But the context of Isaiah 66 is of God's final message to Judah, telling them that now God is not interested in their rebuilding of Solomon's temple, because as the sun began to go down on the prophets, He was now going to focus upon relationship with individuals rather than a formal temple presence.

7:49 *The Heaven is My throne-* See on :48 *As said the prophet*.

*And the earth a footstool for my feet-* As noted on Acts 2:35, God's footstool is the place where He is to be worshipped. His worshippers on earth are therefore in view here, and not the literal planet earth in a geographical sense. God wanted hearts as His footstool, not anything physical.

*What manner of house will you build Me? says the Lord; or what is the place of My rest?-* This is a rhetorical question. The sense is not 'You cannot build Me a house'; rather is

it a question- what kind of house do you think I want? And the answer was: A dwelling place in hearts who believe in God's Son. Likewise "what is the place of My rest?" is rhetorical. The *topos* or holy space is not the Jerusalem temple nor the land of Israel; it is in the hearts of believers in God's Son. Hebrews 4, whether written by Paul or Stephen, surely alludes to this point by using the same word for "rest" in describing how Christians are entering the "rest" but Judaism is as Israel fallen in the wilderness, who did not enter into the rest promised.

*7:50 Did not My hand make all these things?*- God lives in what He "makes", and not in temples made by human hands (:48). Through the agency of the Spirit, God was and is preparing human hearts to be His 'making'. Paul repeats this reasoning in Acts 17:24 and 2 Cor. 5:1; Stephen's very last words before his death struck home and reaped a great harvest in the heart of that angry man called Saul who was listening. And whoever wrote Hebrews, be it Paul or Stephen, says precisely the same (Heb. 9:11,24). The similarities between Hebrews and Stephen's speech are many, and they are not just verbal similarities. It's as if Stephen's thoughts have been developed further. I would therefore suggest that Hebrews is not Stephen's letter; it appears to be a further development of his last words. The appropriate author, although we cannot be dogmatic, would seem to me to be Saul / Paul. The verbal similarities have led some to assume it must be Stephen; but it makes more sense to me to realize that this was written by someone who had memorized and developed Stephen's speech throughout his life. And Paul is to me the compelling candidate.

*7:51 You stiffnecked-* The reference is to how God wished to destroy a "stiffnecked" Israel and make of Moses another people of God (Ex. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9). The message contained in that one word "stiffnecked" was lengthy and powerful. The only other time we read of being stiffnecked and uncircumcised in the same verse is in Dt. 10:16; and again there is the point made that circumcision is of the heart more than the flesh: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked". This was an appeal to Israel. Stephen's allusion shows that he was not merely imprecating against the Judaists who surrounded him. He was appealing to them to change, so that they might enter the land of God's Kingdom. His hopefulness, up to his last words in this world, is amazing. His passion to save at least some of those hard hearts paid off, with the conversion of the worst of them, Saul, to become one of the Lord's greatest servants. See on "hearts and ears" below. "Stiffnecked" is formed from the word *sklero*, "hard". The Lord uses just that word in telling Saul that it is "hard" for him to kick against the goads. A stubborn ox is literally stiffnecked. The Lord saw that this whole reasoning about being stiffnecked and uncircumcised had struck home in Saul's heart. And so He continues the allusion in further appealing to him. He does the same likewise with us in life and the encounters with verses in His written word which He leads us to.

*And uncircumcised-* To call the circumcised Jews uncircumcised, when circumcision was for them the sign of Divine covenant, was just too much. Stephen is now making explicit what he has been saying earlier by way of allusion and implication- they were no more than Gentiles. And again, the listening, fuming Saul was deeply touched; for later he writes of how circumcision is a matter of the heart and not of the flesh; indeed, this is quite a theme with Paul (Rom. 2:28,29; Eph. 2:11; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). Each time he thought and wrote about it, he would've remembered how the dying Stephen had made this point, and how furious he had been to hear it. We see in Paul's references to circumcision how he had not only taken note of Stephen's words, but had taken the reasoning further. Seeing Hebrews is so full of reference to Stephen's words *and developments of his reasoning*, it seems to me that Paul is the likely author; and the letter is addressed to Hebrews, perhaps to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who would have known Stephen.

*In heart and ears-* They "stopped their ears" (:57). They refused the appeal Stephen was making to circumcise their hearts and ears, even at that late stage. Circumcision was to be not only of the heart, but of the ears. Circumcision of ears may seem a strange idea, at first blush. Stephen is saying that the sign of covenant relationship with God is how we hear; as his Lord had taught, "Take heed how you hear" (Lk. 8:18; again, it is Luke who records this). The circumcised ear will hear God's word; and the relevance of this otherwise throw away word "ears" is in that Stephen has been appealing to the Jews from the basis of Israel's well known history. He was asking them to hear that familiar Scripture with circumcised ears; and they refused. At least, right then at that moment they did.

*You do always-* This could just mean 'earnestly, strongly'. But the idea of regular resistance to the Holy Spirit could refer to their refusal to hear the real Spirit of God's word as they regularly read it and encountered the incidents from Israel's history in their Bible study. For the Holy Spirit was the agency behind the writing of the Bible. See above on "hearts and ears".

*Resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you-* See on :42 *Gave them up to serve*. The allusion is to Is. 63:10 LXX: "But they disobeyed, and provoked his Holy Spirit: so he turned to be an enemy, he himself contended against them". This resistance of the Spirit as we read the word of the Spirit, refusing to see the points the Lord is making to us, can be our failure too. The Jews were so proud of being descendants of the "fathers". But as demonstrated throughout this commentary, Stephen has been pointing out the weakness of the Jewish fathers, and he appeals to them to now have a different Father- God.

*7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?-* Stephen here and in :51 speaks of "your fathers" whereas earlier in his address he spoke repeatedly of "*our fathers*" (Acts 7:2,11,12,15,19,38,39,44,45). But having tried to build that bridge between himself and his audience, by speaking of their common ancestry, he now makes the appeal for radical change- to disown what those fathers *did*. Saul, who was intently listening, was guilty of persecuting the Christians (Acts 22:4 s.w.). And the Lord continues Stephen's appeal to him by asking him on the Damascus road: "Why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4,5 s.w.). Note that every prophet was persecuted- even if we don't read about (e.g. Jonah- although maybe it was Jewish persecution which disinclined him to preach to Gentiles).

*And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One-* Peter had used the same word in Acts 3:28: "The things which God foretold [s.w.] by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled". Stephen may be taking this further in suggesting that the reason they killed such prophets was because the message of a suffering, dead Messiah was so deeply unacceptable to the Jews. Stephen is demonstrating that the Jews' implacable hatred of Jesus of Nazareth was therefore seamlessly in line with the attitude of an Israel whom God had rejected. The message of Christ crucified cannot be received dispassionately; it forces a reaction, either of humbled acceptance, or anger, even passive anger, but all the same anger- because the human conscience has been touched in a way nothing else can touch it. And that anger is directed at the one who brings the message, for he or she is the human face of Jesus to them. It is Luke alone who records how the Lord Jesus on the cross was "the just [one]" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.).

*Of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers-* Judas the singular betrayer was an embodiment of all the Jewish opposition. I suggest this is the key to understanding how the 'satan' or adversary of Jewish opposition entered into Judas. I develop this theme further

in 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*. The Jews doubtless rationalized the Lord's death by feeling that the Romans had done it. But the early preachers repeatedly lay the blame for it upon the Jews; hence Stephen says that they had each one murdered their Messiah; for he speaks of "murderers" in the plural. This demonstrates that 'going along' with a seriously wrong position can be counted by God as actually performing the crime.

*7:53 You who received the law as it was ordained by angels-* That Angels gave the Law is clear from Dt. 33:2 LXX; Ps. 68:17; Gal. 3:19 and Heb. 2:2. But why mention it? Perhaps because the listening Jews were seeing Stephen's face as if were an Angel (Acts 6:15). As Israel turned away from the law given by Angels, so they were turning away from the new covenant being presented to them by an Angel.

*And did not keep it-* That Jewish audience were convinced they were obedient to Torah. To be told they were not, because they didn't accept their own Messiah... was the last straw. For the argument here is that to reject Jesus as Messiah was to break the Mosaic law; for obedience to that law was intended to bring people to Messiah. Note that the Mosaic law was designed to bring people to Christ not so much through studying the various types of Christ it contains, but through practically seeking to obey it. That process would bring people to accept Jesus as the Christ; but the fact they didn't mean they had not properly kept it. Paul was influenced by these words of Stephen when he wrote that the circumcised do not keep the law [s.w., Gal. 6:13].

*7:54 Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart-* See on Acts 5:33 "Cut to the heart".

*And they ground their teeth at him-* Such language must surely connect with the oft repeated description of the rejected gnashing their teeth at the judgment (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30); as if those Jews acted out their own rejection by their attitude to the word in this life. Judgment is ongoing now, in its essence. As Stephen's enemies "gnashed on him with their teeth", his Biblical mind would therefore have raced to Job 16:9, describing the behaviour of the wicked towards the faithful: "He tears me in his wrath, who hates me: he gnashes upon me with his teeth". The context goes on: "Now, behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on high" (v. 19). Surely Stephen had thought ahead to this, for as his enemies gnashed their teeth against him, "he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). He looked up to Heaven and saw His witness, faithful and true, standing there as he expected.

*7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit-* This is twice earlier stated of Stephen (Acts 6:3,5). Those passages suggest this was a permanent characteristic of Stephen (as Acts 11:24 "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit"). So whilst this phrase could mean that Stephen was given a special gift or revelation of the Holy Spirit in his time of final crisis and death, it could also mean that it was because of his Spirit filled life that he saw visibly what he had previously only seen by faith- his Lord Jesus standing at God's right hand in Heaven. Likewise if we live a spiritual life, hour by hour, then that same Spirit is powerfully available to us in our times of crises.

*Looked up earnestly into heaven-* See on 6:15 *Fastening their eyes on him*.

*And saw the glory of God-* This made Stephen equal to the revered prophets like Elijah, Moses and Ezekiel who had seen such visions of the cherubim and beheld the shekinah glory. What was so desperately and obviously absent from the Jerusalem temple was just this- the shekinah glory. It was what the Jews so earnestly wished they could see there. But God's presence and fellowship was simply not with them. But Stephen now saw it- and not in the holy space of the temple's holy place either.

*And Jesus-* It is normal in the New Testament to describe the risen Jesus with some title, such as "*the Lord Jesus*". The simple "Jesus" directs attention to His humanity; and Stephen reflects this by referring to Him as "the son of man" (:56). The Lord's humanity was a great encouragement for Stephen in his most desperate human need, just as it is for us. This is a powerful practical outcome of understanding that the Lord was of our human nature and not "very God". I have observed that whenever the humanity of the Lord is spoken of, His highly exalted status is often juxtaposed with it. So many proof texts misused by Trinitarians are located right next to the clearest statements of the Lord's humanity. And so the reference to "the son of man" is not merely a statement of His humanity, but is an allusion to the Daniel 7 vision of the "son of man" coming in judgment in the clouds of Heaven (as Stephen saw Him in the "glory of God").

*Standing on the right hand of God; and he said-* In his time of dying, Stephen saw the Lord Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). But about 13 times in the New Testament, the point is made that the Lord *sits* there, unlike the Mosaic priests who *stood* (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus was passionately feeling for Stephen; and He just as emotionally and passionately feels for us in our struggles. This alone should lift us out of the mire of mediocrity. Prayer will have meaning and power. It won't just be the repetitious conscience-salver it can descend into. Many of those 13 NT references to the Lord being seated at the right hand of God are in Hebrews; and this again encourages us to see Hebrews as Paul's deeper reflections upon Stephen's speech. This would especially be the case if the Jews in the council actually saw something of what Stephen saw.

7:56- see on Acts 2:33-36.

*Look, I see the heavens opened-* The implication is that if they lifted their eyes, they too could see what Stephen was seeing. It was a desperate appeal for their repentance in his final seconds. He so wanted them to see the Lord Jesus as he saw Him. Stephen's passion for the conversion of his enemies is simply matchless. They refused- rather like the earlier elders of Israel were invited to witness the theophany of God coming down on Sinai, but refused; asking Moses to go alone and hear and see it.

*And the Son of man-* See on :59,60 and :55 *Jesus*.

*Standing on the right hand of God-* The allusion could be to a witness or judge standing. As the human judge condemned Stephen- presumably by standing up to condemn him as usually happened in law courts (Acts 7:56 cp. Is. 3:13)- the Lord Jesus stands up in the court of Heaven as intercessor for Stephen. And this happens time and again in our lives, as and when and if we suffer the abuse of human condemnation and misjudgement. Although condemned by an earthly court, he confidently makes his appeal before the court of Heaven (Acts 7:56). Doubtless he was further inspired by the basic truth that whoever confesses the Lord Jesus before men, He will confess him before the angels in the court of Heaven (Lk. 12:8).

Hebrews- and I have suggested this letter is Paul's extended reflections upon Stephen's speech- invites us to see Christ as *sitting* there in Heaven, unlike the nervous High Priests of old on their annual entry into the Holiest *standing*. The fact Stephen saw the Lord *standing* at God's right hand suggests that He arose from His usual position, caught up, as it were, in the passion of mediation for His suffering servant. Robert Roberts began his life of Christ in *Nazareth Revisited* with the simple statement that "Christ is real". Indeed He is real in our lives, actively passionate for us, just as He was for Stephen. And we must ask with the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his final writings at the time of death in a Nazi prison: "Who is Christ for us today?".

7:57 *But-* I suggest this means that they ignored Stephen's appeal to 'behold' the vision of the risen Lord which he was seeing. The power and reality of the Lord Jesus was subsumed beneath a wave of legalism and anger at injured positions and the desperate desire to deny that... they might just have been wrong. And so the real Christ has been obscured, it seems to me, to so many angry legalists, even Christian ones.

*They cried out with a loud voice-* Not, as we might expect grammatically, 'with loud voices' in the plural. They were united, and that unity is stated later in the verse- they "rushed upon him with one accord". Just as Pilate and Herod, and the warring Jewish factions, were united in the condemnation of the Lord Jesus. Their unity, and crying out with a loud voice as the Lord did on the cross, all makes them a kind of anti-Christ, a synagogue of satan. The very words are used of how Stephen "cried with a loud voice" (:60). They were no longer merely folks who held a different theological view; their conscious rejection of God's appeal in Christ made them an utterly false system which merited only complete destruction.

*And stopped their ears-* See on :51 *Heart and ears*.

*And rushed upon him with one accord-* The very same words used of how the Jews did the same to Paul and his brethren (Acts 19:29). This means that what Saul and his then brethren did to Stephen, was done to Paul. He came to realize how it felt. And the Lord leads us to the same realization, not to punish us, but to lead us to self-understanding and eternal unity with our brethren whom we have hurt.

7:58 *And they threw him out of the city and stoned him-* The very words used by Luke about the Lord's experience at the hands of His own brethren in Nazareth (Lk. 4:29) and of how the Son is thrown out of the vineyard and killed in Lk. 20:15. Baptism identifies us with the Lord's death, and thereby His sufferings become replicated in all of us who are in Him. Stephen quotes his Lord's dying words as his own dying words, reflecting his grasp of what was going on- he was indeed sharing his Lord's sufferings with which he had willingly identified throughout his life in Him. So the 'throwing out of the city' was arranged by God to stimulate Stephen to see the similarities between him and his Lord, just as such events are brought into our lives, clearly beyond our control. But then we must use our own freewill to develop that identification, and Stephen does this by quoting the Lord's dying words as he himself died. Although the stoning of Stephen was clearly done in hot blood and with no regard to local law nor to Biblical law, the Jews still wanted to show obedience to the principle of stoning the condemned outside the camp. I have repeatedly drawn attention to the similarities between Acts 7 and Hebrews, which I suggest is Paul's reflection upon Stephen's words and example, and presented initially to the Jerusalem ecclesia. The appeal to go forth with the Lord Jesus "without the camp" (Heb. 13:13) surely continues this impression; we are to be followers of Stephen insofar as he was of the Lord Jesus. If indeed 'St. Stephen's gate' in



Jerusalem is correctly located where Stephen was taken through to his death, he would have been dragged over the Kedron and through the garden of Gethsemane, thus encouraging his willing identification with his Lord's final sufferings. See on :60 *knelt down*.

*And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul-* The implication is surely that Paul was responsible for the stoning, or facilitated it in practice. Paul later was stoned unto death (Acts 14:5), and through this he learnt how his actions to Stephen had actually felt. This was far more than a poetic justice for the sake of it; it was to enable Paul to understand himself and the meaning of his own positions and actions. The Lord works likewise in our education. There is another allusion from Hebrews here- we are surrounded by a great crowd of "witnesses" and should therefore 'lay down' everything that impedes us from doing the Lord's work (Heb. 12:1). These are the same Greek words as used here about the witnesses who laid down their clothes. Paul had been one of those witnesses. The laying aside of garments recalls Aaron's death on Mount Hor, and there may be the hint that they were now resigning their priesthood and spiritually dying, outside the promised land.

7:59 *And they stoned Stephen-* Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." in 1 Cor. 13:3 is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt.

*As he called upon the Lord-* The impact upon Saul must have been psychologically colossal, for he then goes out to kill and persecute all who called on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:14 s.w.). The Lord Jesus was working with Saul's conscience; for when He confronts Saul on the Damascus Road, He uses the same words to invite Saul also to 'call upon himself the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 22:16).

*Saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit-* I have suggested in my commentary on Hebrews that Hebrews was originally a transcript of a sermon at the breaking of bread meeting at the Jerusalem church, turned into written form. That audience would have known Stephen well. Hebrews is full of allusions to Stephen's speech, and my suggestion is that it was not Stephen writing to his own church before his death, but rather Paul expanding upon Stephen's speech. As the bitterly angry Saul, keenly listening to Stephen and grasping his every allusion, he would have felt the goads of Scripture sticking into his conscience. He remembered every word, and after his conversion, he took Stephen's thoughts further. Hebrews, I suggest, is his development of Stephen's words and ideas. The historical characters mentioned by Stephen are also mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11. Paul draws his sermon in Hebrews towards a conclusion by speaking of how we as Christians have come into association with "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22,23). It seems to me certain that Paul had Stephen in mind at this point, a clearly 'just man', who had asked the Lord Jesus in Heaven to receive his spirit, as one of "the spirits of just men made perfect", and whose name as a martyr was for sure "enrolled in Heaven".

Realizing, sensing how he was living out the sufferings of his Lord... all this really motivated Stephen; when he asked for forgiveness for his tormentors and asked for his spirit to be received (7:59,60), he was so evidently reflecting the words of the Lord in His time of final agony and spiritual and physical extension. It is Luke who brings out the similarity (Lk. 23:34,46). He died in prayer for his enemies, crying out with a loud voice, commending his spirit to Jesus as Jesus commended His to the Father... He saw the similarities between his sufferings and those of the Lord; and therefore he went ahead and let the spirit of the Lord Jesus live in him. In addressing the Lord Jesus as "Son of Man" (:56), Stephen is the only person outside the Gospels to use the phrase. Perhaps it was because in the time of his sufferings, Stephen felt especially keenly the comfort of the Lord's humanity and the representative nature of His sacrifice. He personalized those words of the Lord which he already well knew, and made them his own. This is the intended end point for each of us- to know the spirit of Christ in His time of dying. It's just that we each have different paths to lead us there.

*7:60 And he knelt down*-Luke uses these very words of how the Lord knelt and prayed in Gethsemane, a stone's throw distant (Lk. 22:41). Clearly he is making the connection between the Lord and Stephen, who was stoned to death and thereby a stone's throw distant. I have suggested that Stephen was dragged through Gethsemane on his way to the stoning- see on 7:58 *They threw him out of the city*. The Lord brought this to Stephen's mind, and he did his part in responding by imitating his Lord there in Gethsemane. Kneeling down, literally 'bending the knee', is the language of worship. Stephen died in worship of his Lord, whose death and last sufferings he had now come to know and identify with. By keeling down instead of lying in a self-protective position, he was giving his body maximum exposure to the stones. Like his Lord on the cross, His devotion resulted in his physical sufferings being shorter than otherwise would have been the case. I have explained elsewhere that the Lord's refusal to press back on the *sedile* of the crucifixion pole hastened His death. Almost all Stephen's sufferings and words have some issue in Paul's experiences; some similarities were brought about by the Lord's hand in his life, others were a result of him consciously imitating Stephen. Luke uses precisely the same Greek words to record how Paul knelt down and prayed in Acts 20:36. Consciously or unconsciously, Paul was again imitating his hero and entering his experiences which Paul had brought upon him.

*And cried with a loud voice*- See on :57 *cried with a loud voice*.

*Lord, do not charge them with this sin*- The sins of the wicked are written down against them, to be discussed with them at the judgment. "Charge them not with this sin" certainly sounds as if Stephen expected that individual actions of human sin will be raised with them at the day of judgment. And yet the wonder of it all, is that our prayers now for our enemies can result in their not being charged with those sins. We are in that sense called to do the work of the advocate, to reflect the saving mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus in our prayer life right now. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon what will be raised with them at the judgment- for that's what Stephen prayed for in his time of dying. And are we to think that his wonderful prayer went unanswered? He prayed with a loud voice so that they would all hear- for they were standing a stone's throw away from him, and there would've been much noise from their screaming and the thud of stones. He died in the hope that his obtaining of forgiveness for them would result in their repentance. And it worked wonderfully, at least in the case of Saul. As Saul wasn't throwing the stones nor gathering them, his attention would have naturally been fixed upon the person and words of Stephen.

*And when he had said this, he fell asleep-* This suggests that he died as an act of the will; he said his last words and died. In this we see another striking similarity with the Lord's death; He too made His last sayings, begging for Israel's forgiveness, and breathed His last. The impression we get is that like the Lord, Stephen's total desire was for Israel's repentance. And he died with that desire, falling asleep when he knew he had done what he could.

## ACTS CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And Saul approved of his execution*- Paul warned the Romans that those who “have pleasure” in (Gk. ‘to feel gratified with’) sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used here for his own ‘consenting’ or ‘approving’ the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. ‘Feeling gratified with’ such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can’t watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others’ sins.

*And there arose on that day*- Clear evidence that Stephen's speech was the psychological motivator for the anger now unleashed within Saul and his companions.

*A great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem, and except the apostles, they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*- Luke uses the word for ‘Diaspora’ to describe how the brethren were “scattered abroad” (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19); he saw this persecution as turning them into the new Israel. The entire membership of the Jerusalem ecclesia was scattered; the way we read of them numbering thousands by the time of Acts 21:20 suggests that to avoid persecution those who remained reconciled themselves with the temple, becoming a sect of Judaism, presumably with the tithe and temple tax going to the temple rather than to the ecclesia. These “thousands” of Acts 21 were probably largely converted since the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The original Jerusalem ecclesia had gone and preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19,20), which wasn’t what the later Jerusalem ecclesia supported. Indeed, Acts 11:22 goes straight on to record that the Jerusalem ecclesia sent representatives to find out what was going on. In order to escape further persecution, the Jerusalem ecclesia threw in their lot with the temple and orthodox Judaism. Finally Paul wrote to the Jerusalem ecclesia, as recorded in Hebrews. He sorrows that they fail to see the supremacy of Christ over Moses, and that despite initially enduring such persecution and loss of their goods (during the early persecutions), they had lost their real faith in Christ. The fact they weren’t *then* being persecuted indicates they had reconciled with the temple. They needed to hold on, to keep the joy of faith they once had, rather than become hard hearted, judgmental, works-centred. But they didn’t listen.

When the Romans began persecuting the early church, only the leaders were seized, while crowds of obvious Christians went unpunished. This was perhaps because paganism was utterly dependent on its elite, and most cults could easily be destroyed from the top. This explains a few Bible puzzles- why devout men could carry Stephen to burial and yet be unharmed; why the apostles could remain in Jerusalem [they were seen as unlearned and ignorant fishermen] whilst the others in the Jerusalem ecclesia had to flee (e.g. the great company of priests who became obedient to the faith). And yet Christianity spread yet further. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63-64) expresses surprise that the “tribe of Christians” [indicating their unity] had not disappeared after the death of their founder, “the [so-called] Christ”. Unlike other religions, the faith of the followers was not in the leaders- if the organization and leaders were taken away, would our church continue? The early church did- and flourished. We must beware lest our system of elders and organizations doesn’t take

away our individual commitment to preach and personally care for people, and especially for the brotherhood. First century Christianity was a mass movement, rooted in a highly committed rank and file; and therefore it had the advantage of the best of all marketing techniques: person-to-person influence. This in the end is how we can preach far more effectively than through mass meetings or organized campaigns [not that I am saying not to hold these].

*8:2 And devout men buried Stephen-* A term only used of the "devout men" living in Jerusalem who were baptized by Peter and who formed the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 2:5; Lk. 2:25). These men had emigrated to live in Jerusalem in their retirement. To now have to flee was significant for them. Presumably some of them remained, and it was of these "devout men" that some bravely identified with Stephen in order to claim and bury his corpse.

*And made great lamentation over him-* Luke uses the word about the lamentation made over the Lord at His death (Lk. 23:27). As demonstrated throughout the commentary on the end of chapter 7, Stephen's death was modelled consciously upon the Lord's death. And the mourners surely recognized that, therefore mourning for Stephen as they did for the Lord.

*8:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.*

*But Saul treated the church shamefully, entering into every house-* "The church" is paralleled with "every house" [church]: "Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house". That's a very significant parallel. Those house churches in sum were the church of Christ in Jerusalem; the ecclesia met in house churches but gathered together in the temple, the only place big enough to hold them all. The same thing happened at Rome and Corinth, where there seem to have been various house churches which met together occasionally for larger gatherings.

*Dragging out men and women and putting them into prison-* Paul was himself dragged to his death by the crowd (Acts 14:19 s.w.). He was being made to realize what he had done to others; and this is how the Lord seeks to educate us, not simply bring about 'measure for measure' in our lives for the sake of it.

*8:4 Therefore those who were scattered-* Gk. 'the diaspora'. They were diaspora Jews who had come back from their dispersion to live in Jerusalem. But now they were again a diaspora, but of the Jerusalem church.

*Went about preaching the word-* Acts 11:19 informs us that these brethren went as far as Phenice and Cyprus preaching the word. Most of the Jerusalem church were comprised of the 'devout men' from throughout the Roman world who had come to end their days at Jerusalem, and now had been baptized into Christ by Peter. It's logical to assume that Saul's persecution prompted them to return home- and thus the Gospel spread.

*8:5 And Philip went down-* This is how any journey from Jerusalem was described. Travellers went 'up' to Jerusalem and thence 'went down'.

*To the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ-* Defined in :12 as the things about His Name and His Father's Kingdom. This term 'preached Christ' is clearly parallel to the statement that they 'evangelized the *logos*' (:4). The essential word / *logos* of God was seen to be the Lord Jesus personally. This indeed is how John began his preaching of the Gospel, as transcribed in the gospel of John.

*8:6 And the crowds, when they heard and saw the signs which he did, gave heed-*

The same word is twice used about how previously they had 'given heed' to Simon (:10,11). Illiterate people inevitably follow human teachers, and the record here is therefore psychologically credible. They had once had Simon as their teacher, but now they gave their minds and attention to Philip. We note that Lydia likewise 'gave heed' to the Gospel message, but her heart was opened by the Lord so that she did this (16:14). That mental desire to open the mind to the message is therefore ultimately given by the Lord and is part of His calling of people. The people had given attention to Simon because he apparently did miracles, but when they saw far more credible miracles done by Philip, they believed him. This was one reason why the power to perform miracles was given in the first century- they were necessary to grab the attention of illiterate people who previously had paid attention to whoever did the most compelling miracles. This was, after all, the only criteria for credibility which the illiterate masses had. There was no written word which could be read to them, for the New Testament was not written. See on :23. The miracles were therefore a message; for they were heard as well as seen. The miraculous Spirit gifts and miracles were clearly a specific thing at a specific time- to back up the preaching of the Gospel in the first century.

*With one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip-* There was evidently a crowd mentality- every person in the crowd had the same mindset towards Philip's preaching at that moment. Now it seems to me that we would likely judge such momentary, mass response as mere passing emotion. But God is more positive- the record which He inspired counts it to them as real belief, just as the "crowd" who followed the Lord are credited with faith, even though soon afterwards they were doubting Him. That indicates to me not only the hopefulness of God for human response to His grace, but also His willingness to accept people.

*8:7 For from many of those that had unclean spirits, the unclean spirits came out,*

*crying with a loud voice-* The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics". It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the Devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons. We need to ask *who* cried with a loud voice. The 'spirits', or the sick person? The person, surely. But the record says the 'spirits' cried. We are intended therefore to read 'spirits' as referring to the sick persons; just as John's invitation to 'test the spirits' (1 Jn. 4:1) means 'test what these teachers are teaching', rather than asking us to grab hold of 'spirits' out of the ether and test them.

*And many that were paralyzed or lame were healed-* This balances the first part of the verse, which speaks of 'unclean spirits' departing. The idea seems to be that there was major healing, of both mental and physical illness. The healing of such persons is described in the very language used of the Lord's healings of the same categories (Mt. 15:30; 21:14). As Luke begins Acts by saying, He began such work, and His representatives continued it; as we do in essence to this day.

8:8 *And there was much joy in that city*- One gets the impression from the second century writings that the joy dropped out of Christianity; and yet the joy of the converts, and the urgent need to retain that first joy of conversion, is a major theme in the NT (e.g. Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3). This strange joy must have been a major factor in confirming the Gospel as authentic. The very phrase "great joy" is used about the result of the Lord's resurrection (Mt. 28:8; Lk. 24:52); the miracles being done were enabled by His glorification, and were in essence *His* action in the world, performed through His followers. Whilst we do not possess the miraculous gifts today, He is in principle operating in the same way today, through we who are in Him.

8:9 *But there was a certain man Simon by name, who previously used sorcery in that city*- Exactly the same phrase is used in introducing Ananias in Acts 5:1. And the context is identical- after dramatic developments in the Lord's work, there was human failure from an individual. And so things are to this day in His work.

*And amazed the people of Samaria*- The same word used of how Simon himself was "amazed" (:13). He was made to realize how others had been made to feel by his *false* claims; just as Paul was made to realize and share the feelings of those whom he had persecuted. This is all part of the Lord's education of those He seeks to save, and He works like that to this day.

*Boasting that he himself was somebody great*- Here we see the difference between the apostolic style of healing, and that of magicians. He claimed his powers were invested in himself, to the point that he gave the impression that "This man is the great power of God" (:10 AV). The apostles repeatedly claimed that what they were doing was not of themselves, but was the result of the risen Lord working through them. We too must be careful here; whatever truths we share with others, whatever we do for others, is all the Lord working through us; it is not of ourselves. Our aim is to be tools for His working and operation, rather than building up any personal respect or following for ourselves. And so much Christian leadership has miserably failed at this point.

8:10 *To him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying*- See on 8:6 *Gave heed*.

*This man has that power of God which is called Great*- AV is better: "This man is the great power of God". See on :9.

8:11 *And they gave heed to him*- See on 8:6 *Gave heed*.

*Because for a long time he had amazed them with his sorceries*- Illiterate people are inevitably going to be impressed by the miraculous, and this was why the early preaching of the Gospel was backed up by visible miracles. But as Robert Roberts put it, there was "an economy of miracle". The Lord could have done far more than He did by way of miracles. But in this case in Samaria, all that was necessary was to budge the psychological stranglehold which Simon magus had over the people.

8:12 *But when they believed Philip as he was preaching*- It is helpful to read Luke and Acts following straight on. It is evident that Luke saw the apostles as continuing the work of preaching that Jesus personally performed. One of the most evident connections is the way in which Luke ten times uses the word *euangelizo* to describe the Lord's witness; it occurs only

one other time in the other Gospels. And yet Luke uses the word 15 times in Acts to describe the witness of the apostles. He clearly saw them as continuing the *evangelion* of Jesus. As Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom as He walked around Israel in the late 20s of the first century (Lk. 4:43; 8:1; 9:11; 16:16), so His men continued the very same witness (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

*The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ-* “The kingdom of God’s sake” (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

*Both men and women were baptized-* When the Samaritans believe the things Philip preached, they were immediately baptized. Baptism is seen as part and parcel of belief. The Lord’s words that whoever believes-and-is-baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16) are surely being alluded to; for He too put baptism as part of initial belief in the news about Him. The impression is clearly given that baptism followed immediately upon belief and is part of believing. It therefore follows that once somebody confesses their faith in the Lord, they should immediately be baptized into Him. Any delay in this is due to an unspoken perception that *de facto* baptism is an entry rite into a human group, and all the club rules of that group must be learnt and adhered to first. But in the New Testament, baptism was the natural outcome of faith.

“Men and women” is noted because religion tended to be the preserve of men; the critics of early Christianity mocked the way that it was so attractive to women. Yet the call of Christ was no hobby level religion; it was a radical offer of salvation to humanity, women included.

8:13- see on Acts 2:42.

*And Simon also himself believed, and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and seeing signs and great miracles done, he was amazed-* It was probably clear that Simon's motivation was less than sincere, but they still baptized him. Simon appears to have been an onlooker at the baptisms of Acts 8:12, and “himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip” (Acts 8:13). Here we see again how belief and baptism were so closely connected. We see here another fulfilment of the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20- the basic Gospel was to be preached, people baptized, and then they were taught further. This seems the sense of how the convert Simon “continued with Philip”, for to ‘continue with’ someone was an idiom for being a student of them (Mt. 15:32; Jn. 8:31; Acts 2:42; 14:22; 15:35; 18:11; 19:10; Phil. 1:25; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19). In Simon’s case, one gets the feeling that his motives for baptism were likely almost visibly suspect from the start; he saw the opportunity for financial gain. But that was no reason to not baptize him. We can never know the motives of those who seek baptism. Over the course of a few thousand baptisms I have arrived at the simple conclusion that it’s so often those who appear to be so well motivated, so brimming with knowledge and zeal, who don’t stay the course. And it’s those whose motivation would appear suspect- getting baptized because the boyfriend is baptized and from an established family of believers, or from the apparent motive of material benefit- who despite many traumas and difficulties in their lives, endure to the end. And it is endurance to the end which is of the essence. Simon’s baptism should surely sink for all time the ‘forbidding of water’ to people because we doubt their motives. We barely know our own motives, so how can we pronounce with confidence upon the



motives of other hearts, to the point of denying them baptism? For *Amazed* see on :9 *Amazed the people of Samaria*.

8:14 *Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem-* According to 8:1 the majority of the Jerusalem church had scattered, and only the apostles remained there. It was therefore quite a sacrifice to send away Peter and John, who were surely amongst the leadership seeing they had been in the Lord's inner circle. But this was the importance they attached to missionary work and strengthening new converts.

*Heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them-* This is the same phrase as used in the parable of the sower, about the ground which receives the word but then ceases to respond well (Lk. 8:13). They so believed that parable that they sacrificed Peter and John to go and try to strengthen those who had responded, lest they fall away. They knew full well from the parable that those who initially respond are prone to fall away, and they took proactive initiative in order to try to stop this happening. Our reading of Scripture must not be left on a mere level of correctly interpreting it; we are thereby empowered and required to go out and do things in response.

8:15 *Who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit-* I have argued on :14 *Received the word of God* that the motive for the visit was in order to strengthen the new believers against falling away. What those converts desperately needed was internal strength against temptation, so that their receiving the word would result in bringing forth fruit rather than them becoming one of the types of bad ground in the sower parable. And this was exactly why the apostles made the effort they did to go there and pray for them, placing their hands upon them, so that the Holy Spirit would be given them. There was likely a visible, external evidence of the receipt of the Spirit, but this is not actually mentioned here. The receipt of the Holy Spirit is described in :20 as "the gift of God". This is surely the same gift as referred to in Acts 2- the power of righteousness, of spiritual help and power. We note that the apostles had to make effort so that others could receive this gift, and they prayed for them to receive it. In this we see the power of third party prayer and efforts for others' spiritual strengthening. There is a power available to us all which in some cases is dependent upon the freewill efforts of our fellow brethren. This is the ultimate motivation to travel, worry about and pray for the spiritual strengthening of our brethren.

8:16 *For as yet it had not fallen upon them-* The idea of the Greek word translated 'fallen' is to seize; the language is surely more relevant to a mental seizure than anything physical. And this, I suggest, is the essence of the Holy Spirit gift- a mental, psychological invasion of the willingly opened mind of the believer.

*These had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus-* This continues the differentiation made in Jn. 3:3-5 between birth of water, and of the Spirit. Baptism alone will not save us; there must be spiritual regeneration afterwards. This was taken so seriously that Peter and John were sent to the new converts to help them towards achieving this. We must note the danger of perceiving baptism as an end in itself, the final point reached after mastering a set of doctrine. It is only a beginning, and the essence is of the Spirit.

8:17 *Then they laid their hands on them-* We must remember that very many times, 'laying hands on' is a Hebraism for seizing someone. Admittedly, the Greek word used for such violent seizure is different to that used for laying hands on someone for healing or blessing. But the idea is the same, and it seems that there developed this specific technical term in the

early church for 'laying hands on' in order to bless. We have just read that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon, or seized [Gk.] these new converts; and so the apostles 'laid their hands upon' them so that the Holy Spirit would seize them. Whilst the words are not the same, the idea clearly is. The laying on of hands was therefore a visible reflection of the Spirit's seizure of the willing recipient. I noted on :16 that this language and imagery of 'seizure' is more appropriate to the Spirit as a mental, psychological force. This, I suggest, is what is in view, more than the ability to perform miracles. Such miraculous manifestations were indeed seen, but these were to demonstrate the power of the mental energy of transformation that had now been made available to the convert.

*And they received the Holy Spirit-* They received God's word (:14), but not the Holy Spirit. The primitive equation of word and spirit made by some, speaking of the so-called 'spirit-word', is therefore unrealistic. We read of the Holy Spirit being 'given' by the ascended Lord (Jn. 7:39), but it appears that this gift was still mediated through the prayers and efforts of other believers, and the willingness of the recipient to receive it. For it is apparent that unless Peter and John had prayed, travelled to Samaria and laid hands on these believers, they would not have received the Spirit. It would seem that it was outside the scope of Philip's calling to do this. But *lambano*, 'receive', can imply that the converts had to themselves make a conscious decision to receive it, in the same way as the Spirit will not come into our hearts unless we are open to it. The Lord's request to the apostles 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn. 20:22) can be read as a request for their openness, rather than just stating the obvious, as if to say, 'Well I'm giving you the Holy Spirit, here you are, receive it'. Rather I suggest the sense is 'Please, receive it, go on, take what I am offering you'. 2 Cor. 11:4 criticizes the Corinthians for not receiving the spirit of Jesus but rather "another spirit", implying that receipt of the Spirit requires freewill decision making on the part of the recipient. So often, *lambano* means to consciously decide to take or receive something; it does not have to mean that the Spirit just comes upon the recipient in any case. Examples include Mt. 8:17; 10:38; 12:14; 21:35; 22:15; 26:52; Lk. 20:28.

8:18 *Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying-* The gift of the Spirit was surely the same as in Acts 2, which I have reasoned was a gift of internal spirituality. The same words for 'Spirit' and 'given' are to be found in other passages which clearly relate it to an internal power working within the human mind: "The love of God is shed abroad *in our hearts* by the *Holy Spirit* which is *given* unto us" (Rom. 5:5). "[He has] sealed us and *given* the earnest of the *Spirit* in our *hearts*" (2 Cor. 1:22). "He would *give* you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His *Spirit* in the *inner man*" (Eph. 3:16). "God did not *give* us a *spirit* of fearfulness, but of... a disciplined *mind*" (2 Tim. 1:7). It's unclear whether or not that gift was accompanied by the reassurance of physical manifestations in this case. But the essence of it was just as it is today- the power of internal transformation, which is what every convert so desperately needs.

8:19 *Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit-* Simon didn't ask for the Holy Spirit himself, but rather the authority ["power"] to give it to others. He had been used to being perceived as the power of God (:10), and despite his new religious milieu as a Christian, he wanted that to continue. This kind of thing is observable amongst power hungry pastors today, who clearly do not see personal spirituality as significant, so drunk are they on power.

8:20 *But Peter said to him: May your silver perish with you-* The man was identified with his wealth, as so many are today. See on 5:5 *Fell down*. "Perish" translates a Greek word later to be often used by Peter, in the sense of the destruction of condemnation at judgment day (2 Pet. 2:1,2,3,7,16). When the Lord returns and judges this world, there will finally be left no silver, no wealth, and no people who identified with it. Although Peter was telling Simon that he would not at this point be saved but rather condemned along with his money, he urges him to repent and pray, knowing that the verdict of condemnation can be changed whilst we have life (:22). At his denials, Peter had himself experienced that status of being condemned; he had gone out from the Lord's presence and wept bitterly, just as the rejected will do at the last day. But he had repented. And so now he is sharing that experience with others. He would not, therefore, have said these words with any disinterested shrugging of the shoulders; he had personally been through this process of condemnation and salvation out of it. And he dearly wished Simon, his namesake, to do likewise.

*Because you have thought to obtain the gift of God with money-* The Greek can equally carry the sense, as in the AV, that he thought that God's gift could be purchased with money. In this case, Peter is seeing right through Simon's game plan. He wanted to have the power to pass on the gift, because he foresaw that he could then charge money for giving it to others.

8:21 *You have neither part nor share in this matter-* "Matter" is *logos*, usually translated "word", and used in the context about the word of the Lord which the Samaritans had responded to (8:4,14,25). "Part" is often used about a 'part' in an inheritance. Simon was not in line to share in the promised inheritance, which all true believers were experiencing and would experience. And neither was he any elder in this new community; for "share" or "lot" is a reference to the LXX of Num. 26:55 which speaks of the lot of the priests in service. Simon had no part in the work of the new priesthood / leadership, nor did he even have a part in the general inheritance of all believers. The Greek words for "part... share" are often used together in Deuteronomy (LXX) concerning how the Levites had no part nor share in the inheritance of Canaan (Dt. 12:12; 14:27,29; 18:1). They are also used together in Col. 1:12, of *partaking* in the *inheritance* of the saints. Simon had no inheritance in the word of the Kingdom. Another possibility is that a "part" refers to what is purchased, and "share" or "lot" is what is distributed freely; as if to say that Simon had no part in the word / *logos* / intention of the Gospel, whether by purchasing it or by being given it freely.

*Because your heart is not right before God-* Quoting Ps. 78:37 LXX about Israel in the wilderness, whose heart was in Egypt, whatever appearance they gave of journeying with God. This quotation, along with the previous allusions in this verse to Simon not having his inheritance in Canaan, rather suggests that Simon was Jewish. He had a Jewish name, after all, and was acting like Israel of old. The conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 is surely framed as "the conversion of the Gentiles", and it was this baptism which provoked the debate about the inclusion of the Gentiles. We can assume therefore that the Lord considered Samaritans as Jews; and the Samaritans practiced circumcision and considered themselves to be part of God's covenant people. My point is that these Old Testament allusions would not have been lost upon Simon, being a Jew.

"Before God" is literally 'in the face / presence of God'. Our innermost thoughts and subconscious motives, as in Simon's case, his fantasy of selling Holy Spirit to Christians, are directly before the face of God Almighty, which face we cannot currently come before in our own flesh.

8:22 *Therefore, repent*- Peter had used the same words earlier in addressing the crowd in Acts 3:19, appealing for them to "repent therefore and be converted"; in Acts 2:38 Peter had urged repentance in order to obtain forgiveness. Now he encourages the baptized Simon to repent and be forgiven. The call to repent and convert is as real both before and after baptism, for Simon had been baptized. Conversion, as Peter himself had learnt, is ongoing. This incident is proof enough that baptism alone will not save us; there is no such thing as 'once saved always saved'.

*Of your wickedness*- This is later defined as the thought of his heart. For the sake of thoughts, a man can be condemned. That is the message here, and the Lord made it equally clear. In this we see the supreme importance of being spiritually minded.

*And pray to the Lord, that perhaps the thought of your heart shall be forgiven you*- He had not just thought something, he had offered money in order to be able to pass on the Spirit gifts (:18,19). But the essence of his sin was a heart matter, what he was imagining, the likely future he envisaged, of him being given money in return for giving Spirit gifts. See on :20.

8:23 *For I see*-Perhaps Peter perceived the thought of Simon's heart by direct Spirit revelation; or maybe he himself perceived it. It's likely Peter's own perception was confirmed by the Spirit.

*You are poisoned by bitterness*- Simon's problem wasn't simply a love of money. He wanted the power of the Spirit gifts because of bitterness- the bitterness of envy (James 3:14). I suggest therefore that he was envious of the Christian preachers who had replaced him as the ones to whom people gave attention (see on :6 *Gave heed*). So his motivation was envy as well as greed. Bitterness is likened here to a snakebite- it spreads to influence every part of a person's thinking. We are surrounded by examples of this. Heb. 12:15 may carry the same idea, speaking of a root that bears bitterness in one person and thereby defiles many. Bitterness spreads like venom.

*And held captive by iniquity*- Literally, in the bonds of iniquity. The same word is used of how believers are likewise held in the bonds of peace and righteousness. People are 'bonded' in sin or in righteousness. We are confirmed one way or the other, and 'held' in those positions- although it's possible to break out of them.

8:24 *And Simon answered and said: Pray for me to the Lord*- Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32). As with his preaching, Peter's pastoral work was shot through with an awareness of his own failure and taste of his Lord's grace. The lack of energy in our collective care for each other is surely reflective of a lack of awareness of our sinfulness, a shallow grasp of grace, and a subsequent lack of appreciation of the need to lay down our lives for the brethren, as the Lord did for us. Jesus Himself encouraged Peter to see things this way, in that He arranged circumstances so that Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32).

There is no record as to whether Peter did pray for Simon. This is one of those things which is purposefully left hanging in the Biblical record, in order to exercise us. Can we pray for others to be forgiven? To what extent can our prayer be a factor in their forgiveness? There is a degree to which this is indeed a factor (e.g. Mk. 2:5), but to what degree...?

*That none of the things which you have spoken come upon me-* Did Peter list various terrible judgments which the record doesn't state? Or are "the things" a reference to Peter's comment that Simon right then was "poisoned by bitterness and held captive by iniquity"? I suspect the latter. Because it is typical of those in that position that they will refuse to recognize that this is in fact how they are. They see this state as something which could happen to them, but they aren't there yet. All sin is addiction, to some extent; and this is the classic mindset of the addict or alcoholic.

*8:25 Therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord-* Perhaps this refers specifically to what they testified to Simon. But it would seem it has a wider reference. "Testified" is a legal term for a witness in court. Whenever someone hears the word of the Lord, they are as it were in the dock before Him; and their hearing of His word is the witness spoken by the preacher. The outcome of their case, in a sense, depends upon how they have responded to that testimony. The use of this language is a powerful example of how knowledge of the word brings responsibility.

*They returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans-* Presumably, in Samaritan villages surrounding Jerusalem. The parable of the good Samaritan suggests that there were Samaritans in the Jerusalem area. They had found such good response in the city of Samaria itself (:5) that they followed the Lord's leading, in realizing that all Samaritans were good ground for the Gospel. It's rather like preaching to Latvians in the UK after having a great response to the preaching of the word in Latvia. We are intended to use our initiative to follow where the Lord leads. Acts 10 presents the conversion of Cornelius as the first Gentile convert. The ethnicity of the Samaritans was a moot question; they were seen as half Jews. The Lord had spoken of the Samaritan leper He healed as a "stranger" or Gentile (Lk. 17:11,18; note it is Luke again who records this). The disciples should have grasped immediately from the great commission that they were to take the Gospel to the Gentiles; but they didn't. The Lord therefore led them gently to that conclusion, by giving them great response amongst the half-Jewish Samaritans. We too are led to the right conclusions and directions in our lives- if we correctly respond, stage by stage, to how the Lord patiently teaches us by the encounters and experiences He gives us in life.

*8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying: Arise and go toward the south-* A literal Angel? Or perhaps a messenger sent to Philip, to whom he faithfully responded.

*To the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza-* This appears to echo the parable of the good Samaritan, which had been programmatic for the decision to preach to and accept Samaritans as recorded in the previous verses. For *Gaza*, see on :27 *Treasure*.

*The same is desert-* There is a theme in the New Testament that major response to preaching is often unexpected. The disciples were told to cast the net on the other side, when they were convinced there would be no response. Philip was told to go onto a road, probably in the heat of the day- when nobody was travelling. His willingness to go, to do at least something, resulted in an amazing response. This is exactly why predicting response to preaching is well-nigh impossible. It's why the geographical spread of the Gospel is so hard to explain when it is humanly analysed.

*8:27 And he arose and went-* In response to the command 'Arise and go' (:26). Luke so often uses this phrase. As Joseph and Mary arose and went immediately in response to a command, so did Philip. Immediacy of response was important to Luke; and he notes it in other terms in

describing the immediacy of response to the Gospel and acceptance of baptism. Our flesh always seeks to delay our response, in the hope we may not have to fully make it in the end; whereas those whose hearts really perceive our call will respond immediately.

*And a man-* Gk. 'behold, a man'. We are invited to be with Philip, noticing the man from afar; and thereby sense his wonder at how faith had been rewarded. He had gone into the desert at midday in response to the Lord's strange request; and now, he saw why.

*From Ethiopia-* The disciples were being progressively opened up towards accepting that the Gospel must go to the Gentiles. They had been given great response amongst the Samaritans, who were at best half-Jews. And now a proselyte from Ethiopia was baptized. All this was leading up to the conversion of the totally Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10, which is presented as the opening of the door to the Gentiles. Of course, the disciples ought to have understood from the Lord's own teaching that the Gospel was now for all nations. But He worked with them in their slowness to understand that, accepting and gently working with their limited vision and cultural and historical resistances; just as we should with others, and exactly as the Lord does with us. Response from the leaders of Ethiopia was a feature of the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 68:31; Is. 45:14; Zeph. 3:10). Although that Kingdom was not established in a literal sense upon the earth, it was being made clear to the disciples that the essence of it, with the lame walking and the blind seeing, was already with them. The same 'now but not yet' is seen in the Lord's work today just as clearly.

*A eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians-* The spiritually perceptive amongst the disciples would have reflected that Jeremiah's faithful friend Ebedmelech was an Ethiopian (Jer. 38:7-12); and his name meant 'Servant of the king'. Here was another servant of the king / queen of Ethiopia. If Ebedmelech could have a place amongst the Old Testament faithful, why not Ethiopians of Philip's day? Again we see how the Lord was gently but quickly leading His people towards acceptance of the Gentiles. Those who refused that leadership and continual psychological nudging were refusing the movement of the Spirit in their lives by resisting the obvious conclusion: Gentiles could be accepted in the family of God just as well as Jews.

*Who was over all her treasure-* "Treasure" translates a non-Greek word, *gaza*. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It's a strange word choice, at first blush. Likewise when we encounter the same word as a proper noun in :26 to describe the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, we wonder why that description is given. For the Ethiopian was travelling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and defining the road as the part that lead to Gaza begs the question as to why that point along the journey is emphasized. The connection is clearly intentional. The man was burdened with the responsibility of managing great wealth, and he was now beginning his journey home, full of those thoughts one has on coming to the end of a vacation and realizing that it's now back to work. He was going back to his wealth, to his *gaza*, which he had been placed over. The idea of being placed over wealth is to be found in the Lord's parable of Mt. 25:21,23, where the same words are used as here; we are placed over the Lord's wealth. I think the allusion is teaching us that all the cares of this world regarding our employment and the management of wealth, be it great or small, is utterly eclipsed by our conversion to the Lord and the responsibilities we now have in *His* service. For we are servants of the King, the King of the cosmos, and are put in charge over *His* amazing wealth, which we are to manage for *Him*.

*Had come to Jerusalem to worship-* He was a proselyte, but as a eunuch and effectively a Gentile, would have been unable to enter the temple for "worship". His worship would therefore have been in his heart and outside the temple. He was a prime candidate for the Gospel, just as all God loving but excluded persons are.

8:28 *And he was returning, and sitting in his chariot-* A similar word to 'converting'. He had only just begun his journey back to Ethiopia; he had not yet reached even Gaza. He would have been full of thought and sadness as to how his physical condition and ethnicity disallowed his full worship. And likely he had felt keenly the proud superiority of the Jewish religious leaders, which left him feeling humiliated. But this being brought down by the rejection of others was all part of his 'converting' to the Lord in spirit and truth. And the Lord above saw his feelings and felt for him, just as He does with all such folk to this day.

*Was reading the prophet Isaiah-* Perhaps he had bought a copy of the scroll. Such scrolls were hard to come by, especially for a Gentile eunuch, and were very expensive. Perhaps he had just bought it on his visit. And he knew Hebrew. His desire to draw close to God was very serious. And God notices likewise today all who truly love and seek to understand His word.

8:29 *And the Spirit said to Philip-* A reference to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18? Or the Spirit as an Angel? Or an internal prompting? I would opt for an Angel, perhaps the Comforter Angel, which effectively was the Holy Spirit in the early church. See on 8:39 *The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*.

*Go near and join this chariot-* The language of 'joining' is another prompt towards fellowshiping with Gentiles; the same term has been used for how believers 'joined themselves to' other believers (Acts 5:13; 9:26; 17:34). It became a lesson for Peter, who uses the term for how it was not seen as lawful for a Jew to 'keep company' or 'join himself to' Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Peter learnt from Philip's experience. For 'chariot' is put here for the entire entourage, who would have been Gentiles. Such a prominent man would not have travelled alone. His commanding the chariot to stop in :38 surely means he asked those driving the horses to stop. "Go near" translates the same word used by Peter in explaining that a Jew could not 'come unto' non-Jews (Acts 10:28). Philip was being led to the same experience as Peter by an Angel or "the Spirit" telling him to 'come unto' non-Jews. Philip's experience would have been an example to Peter. We see how the Lord works in a parallel way in different lives, and we are to take lessons and inspiration from this. It is this feature of His working which is the basis for true Christian fellowship; our meetings together are not therefore to be to chatter about the state of the nation and lament the weather, but rather to share our experiences of the Lord's hand, so that we might take encouragement from the fact that He is at work according to a similar pattern in other lives. For man is not alone, even amongst our fellows there are parallel lives from which we are to take warning and encouragement. Her breast cancer, your broken leg, their bereavement... we perceive as the workings of the same Lord towards similar ends.

8:30 *And Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said-* Sensing the Lord was leading him, Philip was eager to respond. Running is a Hebraism for response to God's word (Hab. 2:2; Dan. 12:4). We too need to sense where we are being led and enthusiastically respond in order to be led further.

*Do you understand what you read?*- Our Bible reading can be so easily performed on a merely surface level, skimming over words without letting their real import be felt at all. Fred Barling truly observed: "Through long familiarity we have come to read [the Bible] with a phlegm and impassivity which are in sharp contrast to the amazement felt by those who came into actual contact with Jesus, and by those who first read these accounts". Philip realized this when he quizzed the eunuch, with a play on words in the Greek: "Do you understand what you read?" . *ginoskeis ha anaginoskeis?* 'Do you really understand, experientially, what you are understanding by reading?'.

8:31 *And he said: How can I-* This suggests, in the Greek, that "I am not able". And God recognized this, by sending Philip to explain. It would seem from this that it isn't possible, or is very unusual, for a person to understand the Gospel purely through their own Bible reading. The implication is that an existing believer is required to explain it, to embody the theory in practice. This reflects how God (who can teach or save anyone as He wishes, how He wishes) prefers to work through the mechanism of the body of Christ, the church, in order to do this. It is His intention that the message of Christ be spread by those who model Christ. We can wrongly assume that Bible study alone is required to reveal the Gospel to a person. It can do, but marooned on a desert island with only a Bible we would be unlikely to find Christ- unless someone revealed Him to us.

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). This clearly states that (as a general rule) it is impossible to believe in Christ without a preacher. The Ethiopian eunuch was the classic case of this. It is perfectly possible that Rom. 10:4 alludes to this, implying that this man's case was typical [and notice the connections between Acts 8:37 and Rom. 10:9]. Likewise the Lord Jesus spoke of "them also which shall believe on me through *their* (the preachers') word" (Jn. 17:20)- not through their unguided Bible reading. If all we had been given was a Bible, most of us would simply not be where we are today, spiritually. If I had started reading from Genesis, I don't think I'd have got much beyond Leviticus before giving up on the Bible. Yet there are some who have made it through, from Genesis to Revelation. And their testimony is even more emphatic: "Without doubt I needed someone to guide me, I was just crying out for all the pieces to be put into place" , in the words of one such recent convert.

*Unless someone guides me-* The LXX frequently uses this word for the Divine guidance of Israel in the desert. And here was the eunuch also in a desert, but wondering where the guidance would come from. He had God's word in the form of part of the Bible; but putting a Bible in a man's hand is not always enough. There is some other element required, and God in His wisdom has set things up like that so that our guidance is not a result of unaided intellectual effort, and requires fellowship with other believers at some level.

*And he begged Philip-* Another similarity with Peter's experiences, for we go on to read how Peter was 'begged' (s.w.) to go to Joppa and heal the half Gentile Dorcas (Acts 9:38).

*To come up and sit with him-* The wealthy, powerful man was 'sitting' in his chariot, at the centre of his entourage (:28 s.w.). We notice the new equality between the two men; Philip climbed up to him, and they sat together. This is the effect which the Gospel has upon people.

8:32 *Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led-* This changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was led (this isn't in the Hebrew



text). The impression given of His passivity is another indication that He was giving His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. There is great emphasis on the Lord being led (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). The eunuch felt he too was being led; Luke uses the word to speak of the convert to Christ being led to the inn by the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:34), and it is used of Peter being first led to Christ (Jn. 1:42), of the sheep being led to the Lord's fold (Jn. 10:16), of sinners being led to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and the many sons being led to glory (Heb. 2:10). So the eunuch saw striking similarities between himself and all that was written of the Messianic figure in Isaiah. We could say that he saw in the Christ his representative. But he needed to make some conscious act of identification with him, which is why the appeal for baptism into Him was so natural and was exactly what he needed to hear.

*As a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb-* Having been so recently in Jerusalem for worship, these images were fresh in the eunuch's mind. Those animals were representative of some greater reality- and now he was figuring that that person whom they represented was also in turn representative of himself.

*Before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth-* One simple reason the Lord was silent before His accusers was because He was utterly scared in the face of death. His silence wasn't merely because of an iron willed biting of the tongue; it was also a result of the same humanity which sweated great drops in Gethsemane as He begged not to die. The sheep-Messiah was "dumb", literally, without a voice. Just as the eunuch was in Judaism. He too had been unable to "open his mouth" in the worship formalities because he was excluded from the temple on account of his physical condition and ethnicity.

8:33 *In his humiliation-* The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled Himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled Him* (Acts 8:33). I suggest the eunuch felt humbled by his visit to Jerusalem; but the word can also mean 'depressed'. He was depressed at the seeming impossibility of drawing close to God within the strictures of Judaism.

*Justice was denied him-* The eunuch's exclusion from the temple for reasons beyond his control seemed unjust. So he was both depressed and also frustrated at the injustice. And now he was reading of another depressed man who was also denied justice.

*Who can declare his generation?-* The eunuch was likewise without children and impotent. What attracted him to this Messiah figure was the similarity he was between this saviour figure and himself. He too was humiliated / depressed, just as this saviour was. This is the compelling attraction of the representative nature of the Lord's sacrifice, that He as a man with our nature and experience gave Himself as the sacrifice which we can identify with. No wonder, then, that the conversation with Philip moved to baptism, and the eunuch wanted to make that necessary identification with the Lord Jesus in that way.

*For his life is taken away from the earth-* Perhaps the depression / humiliation of the eunuch was to such a degree that he felt suicidal, or at least, he despaired at the purpose of his life if he were to remain excluded from God. And now he was reading of another man whose life was taken away. In passing, the Lord makes the point that His life was not taken away from Him (Jn. 10:18- same words used), but rather He gave it of His own will. We see here how God is not a literalist when it comes to the use of words and ideas. The critic would cry

'Contradiction!'. But it's nothing of the sort. Instead we see here a truth stated- that His life was taken away. But the Lord saw deeper than that, and explained that His wilful giving of His life was to such an extent that in effect, the taking away of His life was not a taking away of life from Him. For He freely gave His life of His own volition.

8:34 *And the eunuch said to Philip: I beg you, of whom does the prophet speak?*- This urgency to understand whom the prophet spoke of was a reflection of the man's need to identify himself with that man. This is why baptism, as that act of identification, flowed on so naturally.

*Of himself, or of somebody else?*- The Greek translated "or" is very wide in meaning. The sense could equally be 'Of himself as much as about somebody else?', or 'Of himself and also somebody else?', or 'Of himself but also of somebody else?'. I have tried to demonstrate that all aspects of Messiah read by the eunuch were relevant to himself. So I would argue that the 'somebody else' he had in view was himself. His reasoning was not that the prophet was perhaps talking about himself but he was additionally a type of Messiah. That would be to read into these words the kind of thing *we* are accustomed to seeing in the Old Testament. The eunuch was a eunuch and was feeling strong connection with this figure he was reading about. So strong, that he asked whether he was correct in feeling that this prophecy was about the Messianic prophet figure and also about himself. We could wish for no clearer statement of the representative nature of the Lord's being and sacrifice.

8:35 *And Philip opened his mouth*- This surely must connect with the usage of the same phrase in :32 about the Lord Jesus, who in His time of death "did not open his mouth". It was as if Philip was manifesting the Lord Jesus; the eunuch had been reading of a figure like him who died, whereas now Philip represents that figure as alive. The desire for baptism at Philip's hands into that dead and resurrected figure was therefore quite natural.

*And beginning from this Scripture*- As He 'began' in the prophets and expounded "in all the scriptures the things *concerning himself*" (Lk. 24:27), so those in Him "*began* at this Scripture, and preached... *Jesus*".

*Preached Jesus to him*- Our early brethren preached a person, even a personality cult- based around the man Christ Jesus. They preached a Christ-centred Gospel, to the extent that the preaching of the entire Gospel is sometimes summarised as "preaching Christ" (Acts 8:35; 5:42; 28:31). They preached a Man, a more than man, who has loved us more than we loved Him, and more than we ever can love Him. In this there is an imperative for response. It's not the same as demanding obedience merely for the sake of a good time to come.

8:36 *And as they went along the road, they came upon some water; and the eunuch said: Look, water!*- The preaching of "Jesus" involved the message about baptism. There was more content in 'preaching Jesus' than literally just saying 'believe in Jesus'. Or it could be argued that the message he had read of the death and resurrection of the human Lord Jesus, whose experiences were representative of his own, naturally led to a desire to identify with Him. And perhaps the eunuch had seen Jews being baptized into Jesus during his stay in Jerusalem; and perhaps the brethren had refused to baptize him because he was a Gentile. The initiative in requesting baptism was clearly from the candidate; infant sprinkling is therefore no way Christian baptism. The act of baptism is therefore a response to the message of the Lord's death and resurrection. For baptism by its nature is designed as an identification with those things, rather than a sign of assent to a theology we have heard and accepted. This is

what the great commission envisaged- preaching the message of Christ's death and resurrection, baptizing people into that, and then subsequently teaching them "all things that I have commanded you".

*What is stopping me from being baptized?*- The Greek word is generally used in the context of forbidding people, Gentiles especially, from coming to Christ. Peter uses it in reasoning that baptismal water could not be forbidden for the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:47; 11:17). The Ethiopian may well have come up to the temple, searching for the God of Israel, and was now returning depressed at his rejection by Judaism. But now he finds acceptance in Christ. He is described as "a man from Ethiopia" (:27), and not a diaspora Jew. Luke has written of diaspora Jews in chapter 2, so it's rather surprising he doesn't mention the fact if the man indeed was one. However, the fact he was reading Hebrew could suggest he was a Jew, or at least, a very serious proselyte; and the conversion of Cornelius later, in Acts 10, is certainly set up as if it was the opening of the door to the Gentiles. But all the same, eunuchs weren't allowed into the temple; so even if this man was a Jew, he was an excluded one. The fact he was a senior minister in a gentile Government would also suggest he was not that devoted to Judaism externally, although in his heart he was, and had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and learnt to read Hebrew.

*8:37 And Philip said: If you believe with all your heart-* Philip is putting the question back to the candidate. It was not for him to judge the state of the man's heart; only the eunuch knew his own heart. The decision regarding readiness for baptism was therefore left with the candidate and not the baptizer. There is no example in the apostolic preaching of candidates being turned down by the preachers. We notice that the question as to whether the eunuch believed "with all [his] heart" was answered by the eunuch with no reference to his heart; rather simply, "I believe". He knew he believed, but rarely is faith 100%. And the eunuch had the humility to recognize that, and Philip accepted that. Belief is frequently stated to be in the heart, and the passages in the later New Testament which state that may well be alluding back to the eunuch as a model convert to be emulated by us all. Belief, therefore, was not mere attendance at the temple nor simply external acceptance of religion. It was deeply personal, in the heart which only the believer knows. This may sound obvious to us, but it was a radical concept amongst the religions of the day and also within Judaism.

*You may-* The Greek *exesti* occurs 32 times and is 28 times translated "lawful" in the context of arguments about the Mosaic law. Surely the eunuch had encountered the objection so many times whilst in Jerusalem: It is not lawful for you to come into the temple, or even, perhaps, to be baptized. Now Philip is being led to understand that the spirit of the Law did indeed encompass a personal like the eunuch, despite his physical condition and ethnicity. For if Philip simply meant 'Sure, you can...', other words would more comfortably have been chosen.

*And he answered and said: I believe-* The impression is given by the record that he really couldn't put the Scriptures together at all; his first comment to Philip was that he couldn't understand the Scriptures because he had no teacher (Acts 8:31). The way Philip opens his mouth "and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35) suggests the man had no prior understanding of "Jesus". Philip's message obviously included baptism, because the Ethiopian on his initiative asked to be baptized when he noticed some water on their journey. Philip did not refuse him, but said that he could do so if he believed with all his heart (Acts 8:37). The fact Philip requested the man to ask *himself* that question would imply that Philip did not know the state of the man's heart. He didn't say "Yes, Mr. Ethiopian, I can read your heart and I see you believe, so, yes, you can". The Ethiopian's confession that "I believe that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) is clearly presented as sufficient for the man to be baptized. One excuse for not following the example of baptisms found in Acts is to argue that no extensive interview or theological teaching was necessary because the apostles knew the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit gifts. That of course is an argument from silence. Nowhere is that explicitly stated in the context of baptism. But the example of the Ethiopian rather suggests that Philip did not know the man's heart, rather did he leave the man to decide the state of his own heart.

*That Jesus Christ is the Son of God-* It would be hard to argue that anything much more is required to make a baptism valid. Belief in Jesus as God's Son becomes the quintessential statement of faith in Jn. 9:35; 20:31 and 1 Jn. 5:5. If acceptance of a detailed package of theology was essential for the validity of baptism, then surely the New Testament would be specific in giving examples of this. But the evidence is quite the opposite.

8:38 *And he commanded the chariot to stop-* See on :29 *Go near and join this chariot.*

*And they both went down into the water-* This along with the description of them coming "up out of the water" (:39) is sure evidence that baptism was by immersion. And it has been well observed that nobody crosses a desert without water bottles. They surely had some water, which would have sufficed if baptism were by sprinkling.

*Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him-* It is stressed twice that both of them went into the water. We see here the unity between preacher and convert, which we also noted on :31 *Sit with him.*

8:39 *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip-* This would suggest that "the Spirit of the Lord" was not an internal prompting but the Spirit working through an Angel. The 'snatchings away' recorded in the Bible often imply the involvement of an Angel. The Alexandrian MS renders: "The Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch, but an angel of the Lord snatched away Philip". This would parallel the Angel's work with that of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was equally active in work in both their lives. "Caught away" would have recalled how Ezekiel was snatched away from Jerusalem to Gentile Babylon (Ez. 3:14); and the Apocryphal story of the transportation of Habakkuk, who was supposedly like Ezekiel taken up by the hair of his head, and carried from Judea to Babylon. Again the suggestion is that Philip now went to preach to Gentiles.

*And the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing-* The temple centred Judaism of the time would have found it hard to get their head around how a person could go off and have a relationship with God with no access to holy space and without the further presence of their rabbi / teacher. It's likewise difficult for those who perceive the body of Christ to be limited by a particular church or attendance within a denomination. The idea that a person can be baptized and live in isolation with their Lord is hard for them to accept. There is fairly strongly documented evidence that there was a Christian movement in Ethiopia from the first century, so we can conclude that the eunuch preached there on his return.

8:40 *But Philip was found-* Elsewhere I have suggested that it's helpful to imagine the Biblical records as being filmed by some Divine cameraman who changes perspective and at times zooms in and zooms out, and changes angle. In this record we have seen Philip looking at the chariot, focusing upon the eunuch, running to the chariot entourage and joining himself

to it, then climbing up into it and sitting with the eunuch. Now the word "found" suggests an almost aerial perspective, looking down upon Palestine and 'finding' Philip in Ashdod / Azotus.

*At Azotus-* Ashdod. It is given its Gentile name because the suggestion is that after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip began preaching to Gentiles. He preached along the coastal strip from Ashdod to Caesarea, an area well known for the many Gentiles living there. Both he and Peter were led to the same conclusions by different routes. This impression is confirmed by the way that Cornelius was at Caesarea (Acts 10:1), and his conversion is presented as the opening of the doors to the Gentiles. Both Philip and Peter ended up open minded to Gentiles in Caesarea by different routes. We so often find this- believers are led to the same changed positions and the same truths by different paths but by the same Lord.

*And passing through that area, he preached the gospel to all the towns, until he came to Caesarea* - Luke describes the Lord and His followers as 'passing through' and teaching as He went (Lk. 2:15; 4:30; 5:15; 8:22; 9:6; 11:24; 17:11; 19:1,4); and employs the same word to describe the preaching of the apostles in Acts (8:4,40; 9:32,38; 10:38; 11:19,22; 12:10; 13:6,14; 14:24; 15:3,41; 16:6; 17:23; 18:23,27; 19:1,21; 20:2,25). See on Acts 1:1. His witness becomes that of all those in Him. We are Him to this world.

## ACTS CHAPTER 9

*9:1 But Saul, yet breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest-* Saul here is portrayed as a beast, perhaps the personal epitome of the beast system of Revelation which persecuted God's people during the first century. AV is incorrect in rendering "breathing out"; the Greek here means to inhale, not to exhale. The idea is that he breathed in a mental atmosphere of threats and murder. This is a helpful way of describing our mindset- we can breathe in our own words and wrong intentions, as Saul did here. The "yet" suggests that his fury at Stephen's arguments continued... but the depth of his hurt was really the depth to which his conscience had been prodded by the goads of the risen Christ.

The Damascus road experience surfaces time and again in Paul's writing and self-consciousness (Rom. 10:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:1,16,17; 15:8-10; 2 Cor. 3:4-4:6; 5:16; Eph. 3:1-13; Phil. 3:4-11; Col. 1:23-29). It is no mere pointless repetition that results in Luke recording Paul's conversion three times in Acts (Acts 9,22,26). Special attention is being paid to his conversion, because he is being set up as the model of all Christian conversion.

9:2- see on Acts 22:19.

*And asked from him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues-* The implication is that the Christians were to be found in the synagogues. This is yet further evidence that the Lord never required His followers to 'break fellowship' with the synagogue system, apostate as it was in doctrine and practice. He clearly had no concept of 'guilt by association'.

*That if he found any that were of the Way -* How the Christian community is described in 19:9; 22:4; 24:22. Yet "the way" is a title of the Lord Jesus personally. The community were so identified with Him personally that one of His personal titles became the name given to the community which manifested Him and was based around Him.

*Whether men or women-* This is emphasized three times (8:3; 9:2; 22:4).

*He might bring them bound to Jerusalem-* See on 9:14 *To bind*. It was specifically in Jerusalem that Saul had done so much evil to Christians (:13). Presumably the level of torture and death which Saul wanted to inflict couldn't so easily be done in Damascus, but he could get away with it in Jerusalem; hence he wanted to bring the Christians to Jerusalem. Paul later admitted he had murdered Christians during the period before the Damascus road incident: "And I persecuted this Way to the death [meaning, he murdered them], binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). The way of getting the Christians into Roman prisons could only have been through false accusation. For the Jews didn't have their own prison system. Or perhaps we are to understand the Greek for "prisons" in 22:4 in its more literal sense of 'cages', in which Christians were sometimes burnt. The question, of course, is how Saul got away with doing this when the Lord's own trial and death had highlighted how the Jews themselves did not have the power to put people to death, and needed Roman agreement to do so. It could be that this changed after the death of the Lord Jesus; or it could be that a blind eye was turned, as the Christian converts were seen as anti-Roman in their beliefs and practices.

The binding and bringing of Christians from one city to another, along with other references to Saul's abuse of Christians (26:10,11), was predicted clearly in Mt. 23:33-36: "You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Therefore,

look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. That upon you may fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land... all these things shall come upon this generation". This reads as a prediction of Saul's personal behaviour. And yet the apparently inevitable judgment for doing these things did not come upon Saul. Here again we see how judgment can be stated, without any conditions or mitigating factors being explained at the time [just as Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days]- and yet the judgment can still be altered. And in Saul's case, the Lord worked hard to avoid having to bring it upon him. We wonder how many others He likewise worked with, but they didn't respond... The scope of His activity amongst men is wonderful.

9:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.

*And as he journeyed, it came to pass, that he drew near to Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him-* The idea is of flashing, and suggests this was a vision of the Cherubim, similar to what Ezekiel saw (Ez. 1:4). See below.

*A light out of Heaven-* Paul's conversion-commissioning experience on the Damascus road has many similarities with the commissioning of Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of glory, heard "a voice of one that spoke", fell to the ground, resisted the commission, received Divine assurance, rose up by Divine invitation and was prepared for his commission by signs and wonders. The difference was that Paul says he saw the glory of the risen Christ. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh, as the Lord Jesus wasn't in physical existence and hadn't resurrected at his time. But essentially, it was the same glory- for the glory of the Father is now fully invested in the Son (Rom. 9:23; Phil. 4:19). Ezekiel saw at the head of the vision of glory "the likeness of a man". He calls this figure the *Kavod*, the glory of God (Ez. 1:29). Although Jesus was not in physical existence at Ezekiel's time, I suggest that Ezekiel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. John 12 says that Isaiah likewise saw the glory of the Lord Jesus when he saw a similar vision of glory in Isaiah 6. James 2:1 speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory". Christ is "the Lord of glory", reflecting the glory of God (Col. 1:27; Heb. 1:3). When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be.

Theologians debate whether the Damascus road experience was Paul's conversion, programmatic for each of us, as he says in 1 Tim. 1:16 and 2 Cor. 4:6; or whether it is a specific, unique calling to be a preacher of the Gospel, and therefore is couched in terms of the call of Ezekiel and other Old Testament prophets. In Galatians 1, Paul clearly understood what happened as being his specific call to a preaching ministry. I would say that Saul's conversion was also a call to a preaching ministry; and that our conversion is also a calling to a ministry no less significant than that of the Old Testament prophets.

9:4 *And he fell upon the earth and heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Clear evidence that the body of Christ is as it were the Lord Jesus

personally. Whatever is done to us is done to Him. Nearly 10 times we read Paul saying that he had 'persecuted' Jesus; he was deeply aware of it. And he surely had his past in view when he urged: "Bless them which persecute you; curse [them] not" (Rom. 12:14). He likely remembered those whom he had maimed and murdered blessing him and not cursing him, and he realized that he was reaping the blessings of their grace.

9:5- see on Acts 23:1.

*And he said: Who are you, Lord? And he said: I am Jesus whom you persecute-* Paul was told by Jesus that all those whom he had persecuted were in fact Jesus personally (Acts 9:5). And this idea of the believer being so totally bound up with his or her Lord continues with Paul throughout his life. Thus he takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally).

*It is hard for you to kick against the pricks-* This is omitted in some manuscripts. It's easy to assume that this means that Saul earlier in his life had been as an animal kicking against the goads, causing him much pain; and thus we can read this as a comment from the Lord about the tortured conscience of Saul. And this may be a valid reading. Paul had grown up in Jerusalem and would have probably been amongst 'all Jerusalem' who heard John the Baptist; he would've surely met the Lord Jesus during His times in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John the Baptist, as I demonstrated at length in *Paul and Peter*. His anger against the followers of Jesus was therefore psychologically understandable if in fact he was angry with himself for resisting his conscience about Jesus personally. In fact, his persecution of Christians was a classic case of transference; he transferred his anger against himself onto the symbols of what was the root of his anger- Jesus.

But on :3 I discussed the question of whether the Damascus road experience was a conversion or [additionally] a receipt of a preaching commission. If we look at it from the aspect of being a commission to a preaching ministry, then we could understand these words not so much as the Lord comment upon Saul's past life, but rather a word of guidance to him about his future ministry. He was taking on the yoke of Christ, and was to plough a straight furrow for Him; any kicking against the goads would be painful for him. In other words, the Lord is encouraging Saul to accept the ministry and not try to wriggle out of the direction the Lord is going to lead him in. However, the comment that it is hard to kick against the goads is made directly in the context of asking Saul why he was persecuting the Lord Jesus. It would appear part of the appeal for him to repent of what he was intending to do in Damascus.

9:6 *But rise and enter into the city, and you shall be told what you must do-* The obvious question is why the Lord didn't tell Saul immediately of the need for repentance, baptism and a life of service. Perhaps He did, but it's not recorded. But maybe it was [and continues to be] His preferred method of working to use a human mechanism in explaining His will. He had Ananias in view already for this work. And he wanted Saul to meet with one of those he intended to abuse, and learn the Lord's requirements from him. If these were the only words of response which the Lord made, then Saul's obedience to the Lord's word would have been tested. On arrival at Straight Street, Damascus, he was presumably taken to a suitably hard-line Jewish Orthodox household. He must've wondered whether it was all for real; for no further instructions were given. Until Ananias bravely turned up on the door of a household he probably knew were bent on his destruction. The very same words for "[he shall] tell you



what you must do" were used by the Angel in telling Cornelius that he must go to Peter and Peter would tell him what he must do (Acts 10:9). We see here the same Divine footprint; and again, we note the Lord's preference to work through human mechanisms in order to reveal His Truth to men. The Ethiopian eunuch correctly noted that he couldn't understand the Bible unless someone should guide him. Often the theoretical case has been presented of a man on a deserted island with only a Bible. Would he figure out the Gospel for himself by his Bible reading? Maybe. It would have to be theoretically possible. But my sense both from Biblical history and observed experience is that God would parachute someone onto the island to explain the Bible to the marooned man.

*9:7 And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless-* They stood, whilst Saul fell to the ground because of the light. The awesomeness was only felt by Saul, otherwise the others would have fallen to the ground too.

*Hearing the voice but seeing no one-* After Saul arose, he too saw no man (:8 AV). The implication is that Saul did see the Lord Jesus during this vision. Paul says this explicitly in 1 Cor. 15:8.

9:8- see on Acts 13:11.

*And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened-* We are to imagine the other men opening his eyelids, but not restoring his sight. Those men would have been hard-line orthodox Jews; and the message was clearly that Judaism could open eyes but not reveal the light of life and true spiritual vision.

*He saw nothing, and they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus-* AV "no man". See on :7 *Seeing no one*.

*9:9 And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink-* To help him identify with the Lord's three days in the grave. He was thus prepared to make the formal step of identity with His death and resurrection through baptism. This was how the Lord worked with the Ethiopian eunuch, and with people today too- they are led to identify with the experiences of the risen Lord, and then baptism as identity with His sufferings and victory becomes the logical next step. Note that it is experience rather than doctrinal instruction alone which prepares for this act of identity.

*9:10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him-* 'Named' could imply that he had received the name 'Ananias' as his Christian name, in line with the practice attested in the New Testament of Christians taking another name on conversion. The name would literally be translatable as 'God's grace / gift', equivalent of the Hebrew 'Hannah'. He was addressed by his name, "Ananias", and he responds [in the Greek] "Behold, I". As if to say 'Yes, that's me- the one who is by God's grace'. His understanding of grace was now going to be tested- he was to go to the man who had come to abuse him, who was currently living in a household that were presumably agreeable to Saul's evil plans- and share God's grace with that man.

*In a vision: Ananias. And he said: I am here, Lord-* The active Lord Jesus likewise appeared to Saul in a vision at this time (:12). He is no less active today, working simultaneously in the lives of multiple people around the clock, worldwide.

9:11 *And the Lord said to him: Arise and go-* Just as Saul had been told to 'Arise and go' into Damascus (:6). This is no mere literary flourish, nor simply the stamp of the same human author. Just as similar experiences were shared by Peter and Cornelius, and similar language used about them both, so here too, Ananias and Saul are being worked with by the same Lord in the same way; and the similarities between them were in order to bind together the preacher and his convert (see also on :12). The same similar hand at work can be felt between believers today, and is one of the things which creates the bond of fellowship between them, knowing that the same Lord has left the same Divine footprint in working with both of them. This of course is only realisable if both believers share with each other their experience of the Lord- and don't merely meet at church to chat about the weather and the state of the nation. Both Paul and Ananias had the choice as to whether to 'arise and go', and they both responded. Luke so often uses this phrase. Yet there was an element of choice before both those men. One side could have let the ball drop. But they both responded, with magnificent result.

*To the street which is called Straight-* See on 13:10 *The right ways*.

*And enquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For he prays-* This is the same word used for how the men of Cornelius came enquiring for Cornelius, who had also been praying (10:19,21). Again we see the same Lord operating in the lives of Saul and Cornelius, according to a similar pattern. Those same similarities of pattern can be seen between our lives and those of other believers, and it is on this basis that we can be a comfort to each other (2 Cor. 1:3-8). Presumably the household were supportive of Saul's abuse campaign against Christians. So the name Judas was appropriate, obviously recalling Judas Iscariot, and again presenting Judas Iscariot as the epitome of the Jewish system who crucified the Lord.

9:12 *And he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight-* Saul is spoken of as "one named Saul" (:11), another attempt to present Saul and Ananias in parallel; see on 9:11 *Arise and go*.

9:13 *But Ananias answered: Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did-* In typical human style, Ananias assumes he knows the situation down here on earth better than the Lord, whom he perceived [as we do in our weakness] to be somewhat distant and ignorant. But we locals do not in fact see the full picture at all... and this is where faith comes in.

*To your saints at Jerusalem-* 'Saint' means a holy one, but holiness also carries the sense of separation *unto* as well as separation *from*. The Hebrew idea is of consecration. The believers there were consecrated by the Lord Jesus unto specific service. And it is in this sense that we are all saints- we all have a specific service which we are commissioned to perform in the Lord's service.

9:14 *And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind-* And to take them bound to Jerusalem (:2). Paul later uses the same words to describe how he is going "bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem" (20:22), and to prison, suffering and maybe death there. He realized that he was living out the same experience he had inflicted upon others, and it was "the Spirit" which was bringing this about. God's providential hand, the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, the Angels [call it what you will] works likewise with us, so that we appreciate the impact of our actions upon others. And yet Saul actually never took anyone bound from Damascus to

prison, suffering and death in Jerusalem. But he intended to. And so we can reflect that what we *intended* to do to others in essence happens to us; for the thought is counted as the action, and we are being led to understand the meaning and implications of our own thinking and intentions.

*All that call upon your name-* Saul was therefore asked to be baptized and also call upon himself the Lord's Name (22:16). His baptism was not merely an act of identity with the Lord Jesus, but with the body of Jesus whom he had been persecuting.

9:15 *But the Lord said to him: Go your way. For he is a chosen vessel to me-* The Lord spoke of Paul even before his conversion as "a chosen vessel unto me". The words "chosen" ['elect'] and "vessel" recur frequently in Paul's reasoning in Romans 9-11, where he argues that *we* are chosen vessels, elected / chosen by grace (Rom. 9:22,25). It's as if Paul is warning us not to see him as a special case, a piece of Divine artwork to be admired in passing; but as a very real example of how God is just as powerfully at work with *us*. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). But surely Paul had the Lord's words here in mind in 2 Cor. 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthly vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves". And the preceding verses are also full of allusion to the Damascus road, speaking of God shining into our hearts with the knowledge of Jesus. "A chosen vessel" refers to how "The Holy One of Israel... has chosen you [Messiah]" (Is. 49:7 RSV). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

*To bear my name-* Paul was to bear Christ's name to the world *in that he* would suffer great things for the sake of that Name (Acts 9:15,16). His sharing in the Lord's sufferings was the bearing of the Name before men. The Greek word for 'bear' in Acts 9:15 is the same used in Lk. 14:27 about bearing the cross. To bear His name to the world is to bear His cross. The record of the disciples' persecution for the sake of their witness is studded with references to their preaching being *in* the Name of Jesus (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV). Whoever heard them heard Jesus (Lk. 10:16). The prophecy of Psalm 2 concerning how "the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ" was appropriated by the preachers to themselves even though it is elsewhere applied to the crucifixion (Acts 4:26).

*Before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel-* Therefore the reference to Paul being the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter going to the Jews may not mean that they had such distinct roles. That may have described a local or temporary situation.

9:16 *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake-* There seems no record of the Lord as it were informing Saul of the details of his life ahead of time. The idea may rather be that throughout the course of his life, he would come to realize the sufferings of Christ through sharing the sufferings he had brought upon the Christian believers. Ananias had just spoken of the believers as those who bore the Lord's name (:14), and so the idea here may be that Saul was to experience the sufferings he had brought upon those who bore the Lord's name.

Right at his baptism, Paul realized that the Lord Jesus intended to make Paul fellowship the spirit of his experience on the cross (Acts 9:16). Later, Paul speaks of how he is "filling up what is lacking" in the aim Christ had set him: to fellowship the crucified Lord Jesus (Phil.

3:10). As the sufferings of Christ (i.e. his ability to relate to them) increasingly abounded in Paul (2 Cor. 1:5 Gk.), so did his comfort and certainty that he would be in the Kingdom; because he knew that if he suffered with Christ, he would share his glorious resurrection (2 Cor. 4:11,12). As we grow, therefore, our realization that we are progressively sharing the sufferings of Christ should increase; our understanding of the memorial meeting (which reminds us of this) will deepen, as we appreciate more what it means to take the cup of his pain. The need and simple beauty of the breaking of bread becomes more logical; taking those emblems becomes in a sense more difficult, yet more sobering and comforting. The point is that as we grow, the centre of our attention will increasingly be the Lord Jesus and his cross.

*9:17 And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, said: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road upon which you travelled, has sent me, that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit-* As with Cornelius, Saul received the Holy Spirit before baptism. This is one of a number of similarities between the two men and a parade example of how the Lord works in a similar way with different people.

*9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales-* A classic example of how doctor Luke uses first century medical language.

*And he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized-* The Greek text adds 'immediately'. To receive sight immediately is a phrase only used elsewhere by Luke, in describing the healing of the blind man near Jericho: "Immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God" (Lk. 18:43). This man was seen by Luke as representative of Saul. But that blind man asked the Lord to heal him. We wonder whether doctor Luke perceived that subconsciously, this is what Saul had been asking for; or perhaps during the three days blindness, this was indeed Saul's prayer. Or perhaps his idea is that Saul's conversion and healing was an act of grace; what was done to the blind beggar because the man asked for it, was done to Saul without him asking for it. Whatever, the proud young Pharisee Saul was spiritually no more than a blind, possibly Gentile, beggar by the roadside. The blind man encountered the Lord on a road- just as Saul had done on the road to Damascus (Lk. 18:35). And if the blind man was indeed Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46), 'the son of the unclean', we see an inversion of Saul's proud sense of his genealogy (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

*9:19 And he took food and was strengthened, and was several days with the disciples that were at Damascus-* Saul was named after the historical King Saul, also being from the tribe of Benjamin. On Saul's last fateful night at Endor, having learnt of his unalterable condemnation, Saul likewise "took food and was strengthened" at the hands of the witch. Saul was being made to see the similarities- that he was as good as condemned, like Saul on his last night; but had been saved by Ananias, 'the grace of God'. The connection with the historical Saul accented the pure grace of God towards him.

*9:20 And immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God-* No fewer than 15 times do we read of Paul "preaching Jesus". His message focused around a living person, more than over dry theology. Gal. 1:16 describes this as God being pleased to reveal His Son in Paul. Paul had the Son of God within he; he had the spirit / mind

of Christ. And it was this which gave credibility and power to his preaching Jesus as the Son of God. And God eagerly manifested Himself and His Son through this.

*9:21 And all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is this not he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name? And he had come here for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests-* The same word translated "made havoc" or "destroyed" is found in Paul's reporting of these words in Gal. 1:23: "They only heard say: He that once persecuted us now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc!". They said that he made havoc of believers; and also that he made havoc of "the faith". This reflects how closely identified were Christians with their "faith". They were living embodiments of their statements of faith. There was no such in those days as cultural Christianity, living out an inherited position. You were your faith. And so it should be today.

*9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus-* But he repeatedly uses the same word, particularly in his later letters, to describe how *Christ* strengthened him (Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17).

*Proving that this is the real Christ-* This is a strange way to put it; it's as if Paul himself was standing there showing in his person, Christ Himself. The Greek for 'proving' means 'to put together'; it may be that what was being put together was not so much OT prophecies and Jesus, but rather Paul and Jesus. Preaching is a revealing to men of the Christ that is within us; this is what witnessing in Christ is really about, rather than pushing bills or placing press adverts or writing letters. Not that any of these things are to be decried, but the essence is that we from deep within ourselves reveal Christ to men. This is why those who witness to Him, as only those in Him can, testify to His especial presence in this work. The promise that "I am with you always" was in the context of being near the preacher as he or she witnesses.

*9:23 And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him-* The very language used of the Jews' plans to kill the Lord. Paul was already starting to fellowship the sufferings of his Lord, just as we all must do. In this reality we find a bridge between Him there two millennia ago, and us today. He is now icon to be gazed upon, but rather a real individual whose sufferings and experiences are ours in essence. And this connection is what gives meaning and significance to the events in our human lives.

*9:24 But their plot became known to Saul-* The same word used of how the Jews later plotted against Paul (Acts 20:3,19; 23:30). Through this, he was going through his Lord's experiences at the hands of the Jews. We too are brought to fellowship aspects of the Lord's sufferings, day by day.

*And they watched the gates day and night that they might kill him-* 2 Cor. 11:33 says that Aretas the governor of Damascus did this. As with the Lord's death, the Jews persuaded Gentile rulers of the need to destroy God's people.

*9:25 But his disciples took him by night and lowered him down the wall in a basket-* He made converts very quickly- another indication that conversion can happen very soon after hearing the basic Gospel. This invites comparison with David escaping from king Saul's persecution in 1 Sam. 19:12. Saul had been named after king Saul, and like him, he had persecuted David-Jesus. Saul / Paul saw the similarity, and the Lord worked with him in this by putting him in a situation where he was replicating *David's* behaviour; and getting a taste of Saul's persecution. He was being helped to see his behaviour from outside of himself; and

the Lord works with us likewise. Paul perhaps therefore recalls this incident as one of the most humbling he had ever experienced (2 Cor. 11:33). Further, we note that it was the disciples, whom he had intended to abuse and kill, who let him down over the wall. As they held the rope, he realized that his life was in the hands of those whom he had plotted to torture to death.

*9:26 And when he came to Jerusalem, he decided to attach himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple-* The similarities with the Cornelius and Peter situation continue, in that Peter explained that it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'attach himself' to a Gentile (10:28). Saul the Jew was treated as a Gentile- and this, again, was used in the Lord's ecology and larger, wiser game plan in order to make Paul sympathetic to providing fellowship to Gentiles. For he had now learnt what it felt like to be excluded from fellowship with one's Jewish brethren.

*9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus-* The Greek suggests he physically took him by the arm or hand. The psychological likelihood of the record here is so very strong and imaginable. We are reading of events which truly happened.

*9:28 And he was with them-* The "them" with whom Paul was with refers to the apostles, the leadership (:27).

*Going in and going out at Jerusalem-* A Hebrew idiom for leadership.

*9:29 Preaching boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spoke and disputed against the Greek speaking Jews, and they that were seeking to kill him- Preaching... spoke... disputed-* These are all different preaching styles. Sometimes there was simple, joyful proclamation of the good news (*euaggelizein*), sometimes patient comparison of the OT Scriptures (*suzetein*, Acts 9:29, *paratithestai*, 17:3, *sumbibazein*, 9:22); at other times there was the utter defeat of the listener by argument (*sunchunein*, 9:22). This is a far cry from the blanket attitude to 'the world' which our preachers so often show. There is a place for intellectual argument; belief is a matter of the mind as well as the heart.

He "preached boldly" as he had done in Damascus. Bold preaching was a characteristic of Paul, and this particular Greek word which means 'bold preaching' is used so often to describe his style (Acts 9:27,29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Eph. 3:12; 1 Thess. 2:2). But this points up the deep significance of Paul's request that others join him in prayer that he may be bold in preaching (Eph. 6:19,20; Phil. 1:20 s.w.). He didn't find it easy, and his request for prayer that he might achieve imply that he wasn't a natural at this 'bold preaching'. We shouldn't assume that those who have the limelight in Gospel preaching are in fact confident extroverts, naturally brave and bold. Not all are; some only achieve that through prayerful struggle with their deep sense of inadequacy. And Paul was one of them.

"Disputed" is the very same word used for how this same group, Greek-speaking Jews, "disputed" with Stephen (Acts 6:1,9). Seeing it was Saul who had arranged the murder of Stephen, this cannot be coincidental. The Lord was again seeking to bring Saul to enter into the experience of another, whom he had effectively killed. But there is a slight difference- it was these Greek speakers who disputed with Stephen in Acts 6, whereas here it is Saul who

apparently takes the initiative and disputes with them. Perhaps he consciously wanted to stand up for Stephen, or wilfully sought to enter into Stephen's experiences and life's struggles. This was and is repentance indeed- seeking to know the mind of the one you have hurt.

He was purposefully trying to convince those who wanted to kill him. Again, Saul was truly motivated by his own recent experience; those whom he had sought to kill were now his brethren, and he marvelled at the grace of men like Ananias, the epitome of 'God's grace' [as his name meant], and those brethren who let him down over the Damascus wall. And he wished to reflect that same grace that he had been shown. There are principles here for all time, meaning that this is no mere history for us. He tried to preach to and persuade those who wanted to kill him- rather than keeping away from them. He knew so well that those *he* had wanted to kill had taken great risks in order to preach to and persuade *him*. And he was trying to do likewise.

9:30 *And when the brothers knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea-* As the brothers likewise took Saul and saved his life by letting him down over the wall of Damascus so that he might flee elsewhere. As he was let *down* over the wall, so the brothers took him *down* to Caesarea. The impression is created of Paul's human salvation being in the hands of those he had only recently sought to abuse and kill. Straight away we go on to read about Cornelius in Caesarea (10:1); and one wonders whether he met Paul and was one of his first converts. We have noted throughout these notes the points of contact between Paul and Cornelius.

*And sent him to Tarsus-* Literally, they 'apostle' him. He went where they sent him, so he was under their control. Perhaps they thought that just as the Lord Jesus consciously went to preach in the home towns of the disciples, so a convert ought to preach in his hometown. And so they sent him on a mission to Tarsus, his hometown. We know that his nephew was sympathetic to him, and one likes to think that he converted at least his sister and nephew.

9:31 *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up-* This was because Saul was no longer persecuting the church; the implication therefore is that he had actively persecuted the Christians throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. This means that the Samaritans baptized by Philip in Acts 8, and the groups in Galilee who remembered the Lord's time there... all were terrorized by Saul.

*And walking in the fear of the Lord-* They had been in fear of Saul's persecution (:26 s.w.). Now he wasn't persecuting them, instead they feared the Lord Jesus. They had been distracted from fearing Him by their fear of Saul.

*And in the comfort of the Holy Spirit-* A reference to the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, promised in John 14-16. One role of the Spirit is simply to comfort, and here we see clearly that it works on an internal, psychological level- i.e. in the human heart.

*It multiplied-* The connection is between the 'walking' of the church, focused now on the Lord rather than fear of Saul- and the growth of the church. Church growth is therefore made relative to the 'walk' of the church members.

9:32 *And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all regions, he came also to the saints that dwelt at Lydda-* This suggests that Peter went on a pastoral circuit throughout all the

areas where there were believers. This would have been in response to the Lord's command to him to tend His sheep and lambs.

9:33 *There he found...*- See on :35.

*A certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed-* What is the significance of this period? Depending on when we date Saul's conversion, it could be that it was eight years ago that the man had first begun to hear the Gospel from John the Baptist. He had been sick all that time, as he resisted the message.

9:34 *And Peter said to him: Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed. And immediately he rose-* But of course it was Peter standing there healing him. He was Christ-manifest in his witness, just as we should be. Peter had observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But here in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ heals you", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:35 *All that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord-* Another example of where "all" refers to all those in God's purpose rather than literally 'all men'. This incident is recorded as an exemplification of what we have just read in :31- that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church was multiplied at this time. The Greek translated "turned" is indeed translated 'to convert', but also 'to turn back'. Perhaps the "all" refers to all the believers in those areas, who had somewhat fallen away as a result of fearing Saul rather than the Lord; but after that miracle, of curing Aeneas who was maybe one of the saints at Lydda (:32,33 "there he found"), they all turned back to the Lord. Note how fresh conversion to the Lord as a result of Peter's miracles is described differently in :42: "It became known throughout all Joppa; and many *believed* in the Lord".

Mass conversions to the Lord's flock at Sharon sounds like the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 65:10 "Sharon shall be a fold of flocks". The essence of the Kingdom was coming true in the preaching of the Gospel, as it is today; and we await the physical manifestation of all this in the literal return of Christ to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

9:36 *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds-* She was therefore clearly well known to both Jews and Gentiles, hence she had the two names. Dealing with her was therefore an incident which prepared Peter for the challenge of chapter 10- to reject the Jewish idea that having Gentiles into your house was wrong. Note how the widows came into the house and spoke of the clothing which *Dorcas* [her Greek name] had made (:39). But Peter then goes to her corpse and addresses her by her Hebrew name, Tabitha (:40). So there were Jews and Gentiles in the same house; and the Holy Spirit worked through Peter to bind them all together in faith, joy and praise. This was clearly to prepare Peter for the challenge of going into the home of Cornelius. We note the obvious similarity with Cornelius, of whom the same was said as for Tabitha: "Full of good works and charitable deeds". See on :38. The Lord is very gentle, and leads us stage by stage towards deeper understandings. We should likewise be sensitive to the fact that the folk we mix with, in the world and also in the church, will not immediately 'get it' about things. As we have been gently led through Divinely controlled experienced from one understanding to another, so we



must recognize that others are at different points in their journey. And we are to reflect them the same patience as the Lord has shown us.

*9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick and died, and when they had washed her-* Why mention this detail? Was it to recall her baptism, which gave her the hope of bodily resurrection?

*They laid her in an upper room-* Luke brings out her identification with the church, the body of Christ, which was so associated with 'upper rooms' in its earliest days.

*9:38 And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him: Come to us without delay-* This is so similar to what Peter was to experience with Cornelius; messengers sent to him, urging him to come without delay. These events were intended to prepare him for the Cornelius experience; see on :36.

*9:39 And Peter rose and went with them. And when he had arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him, weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made, while she was with them-* The widows would have likely been poor, and their clothes had been made by Dorcas. So they were showing their own clothes.

*9:40 But Peter sent them out, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning to the body, he said: Tabitha, rise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up-* When Peter resurrects Dorcas, he asked the weeping crowd to depart before he raised her- exactly repeating the Lord's procedure when He raised Jairus' daughter. Note how she is laid in a chamber, she is spoken to by Peter, she opens her eyes and sits up, and Peter presents her alive and asks for her to be given food. All this was evidently parallel to what Peter had been especially invited by Jesus to come and witness when He raised the girl during His ministry. The events Peter had been witnessed had been especially arranged so that when they repeated themselves in his future life, he was able to see the similarities and act as a true follower and mimicker of his Lord. The way he put everyone out of the room, turned to the body and said "Tabitha, arise", and she rose up, is exactly the way the Lord acted (Acts 9:40 cp. Lk. 8:54). Consciously or unconsciously, his very body language and words reflected those of the Lord.

9:41- see on Acts 3:7.

*And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive-* The very words used about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:3). Acts continually presents the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as being reflected in the experiences of His body on earth, the church.

*9:42 And it became known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord-* An exemplification of the introductory statement to this section in :31, that the activity of the Holy Spirit at this time led to the numerical growth of the church.

*9:43 And it came to pass, that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner-* Peter had been urgently called to Joppa whilst visiting Lydda (:38). The Joppa visit was apparently unplanned. He raises Tabitha, many are converted as a result- and so he stays there for some time in order to follow up on the new ecclesia. This reflects his openness to

the movement of the Spirit and willingness to go wherever led. No wonder 1 Cor. 9:5 mentions how Peter 'took around' his wife.

## ACTS CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Regiment-* Comprised of Italians and true Romans. The man could not have been more Gentile.

10:2 *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much charity to the Jewish people and prayed to God always-* The point has often been well made that doing all these things was not enough. Faith in Christ and baptism into Him was what was required; and yet his good deeds were not ignored by God. They were responded to by sending Peter to him to teach him the Gospel. Note too that devotion to God was still possible despite being an army officer. There is a significant silence regarding Cornelius leaving his job after baptism. There is a purposeful silence here in the record, to provoke our reflections. Because such matters are indeed a matter of very personal conscience.

10:3 *About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God, who came to him and said: Cornelius-* In 10:3,22,25 an Angel 'comes in' to Cornelius and gives him hope of salvation, and then Peter 'comes in' to Cornelius and explains that hope in more concrete terms. Peter was acting out what his guardian Angel had prepared for him to do, just as Israel had to follow the leading of the guiding Angel in the wilderness. We too must as it were follow our Angel.

10:4 *And he, fastening his eyes upon him and being afraid, said: What is it, Lord? And he said to him: Your prayers and your charity have gone up as a memorial before God-* The allusion is to the offering of incense and sacrifice. And Cornelius didn't have to be a Jew in the temple to do this. He could do it in his own home and life situation. Note the parallel between prayer and charitable giving. Prayer is not simply words; God reads human actions as prayer, too. And mere words alone are not of themselves prayer, otherwise whoever is the better wordsmith has the greater access to God. And that is not the case; some people are wired better as regards words and verbalizing. We note too that an unbaptized person was still listened to by God, and his good deeds still registered with Him. The scale of God's observation and sensitivity to humanity is so huge as to be beyond our comprehension. Cornelius had his generous gifts responded to in the same way as his prayers- in that Peter was sent to teach him the Gospel and baptize him. This suggests that our good deeds are seen as an expression of our essential self, and are treated as prayers. Yet those good deeds are not in themselves verbalized requests. It is also doubtful whether Cornelius was specifically praying for more knowledge and the opportunity of baptism. But this is how his prayers were interpreted by God, and this passive though unexpressed desire was interpreted and responded to. Prayer is likened to incense coming up before God. But so also is the almsgiving of Cornelius; his good deeds expressed a fine spirituality in his heart, and this was counted by God as prayer. Prayer is seen as an incense offering (Ps. 141:2); but the generosity of Mary (Jn. 12:3), the work of preaching (2 Cor. 2:16); living "a life of love" (Eph. 5:2 NIV); giving money to the needy (Phil. 4:18) are all seen as a fragrant incense offering. The act is the prayer. Mary's anointing was to be seen as a "memorial" (Mk. 14:9), but the only other times this word is used are in connection with the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10:4, cp. the OT idea of prayerful people being God's 'rememberancers'). Likewise, prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words.

10:5 *And now send men to Joppa*- The sense of the physical presence of the Angel was shown in Peter's case in the matter of Cornelius. Acts 10:5 says that the Angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask for Peter, whilst the same Angel ("The spirit", v. 19) tells Peter in v. 20 that *He* has sent the men. This awareness of the Angel is perhaps continued when Peter says in :33 "we are all here present before God"- i. e. before the Angel which both he and Cornelius were conscious had led them together. See on Gen. 18:10.

*And fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter*- This is the same word used to describe how believers 'called upon [themselves] the name of the Lord'; they surnamed themselves by His Name. The Lord had given Simon a new name, and the idea of having a 'Christian name' was popular amongst the early Christians. We have been given a new identity, unique to ourselves, by the Lord who has called us; and will have the new name written upon us eternally at judgment day. We can conclude that our unique and new identity / personality is being forged in us throughout this brief life, and will be permanently stamped into our eternal nature at the last day. In this lies the eternal significance of character development- for who we become now, is who we shall eternally be.

10:6 *He lodges with someone called Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side*- Peter later explains that it was not possible for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile (:28). So we can safely assume this Simon was a Jew, but not a very observant one, seeing he worked daily with the skins of unclean animals and blood. Being there must have provoked Peter to wonder about whether the Law really had to be kept so strictly; and living by the beach, he would have wondered whether the Lord's work actually extended overseas, beyond Israel. All these things were gently arranged by the same loving Lord who guides our spiritual path too. Peter was being led along the road towards leaving law-keeping, rather like Elijah having to depend for his life upon meat brought by unclean ravens. "If a tanner married without mentioning his trade, his wife was permitted to get a divorce. The law of levirate marriage might be set aside if the brother-in-law of the childless widow was a tanner. A tanner's yard must be at least fifty cubits from any town" (Farrar, *Life and Work of St. Paul*).

The AV adds: "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do". This phrase is much loved of Luke. Saul and the jailor said the same (Acts 9:6; 16:30), as did the crowds at Pentecost. The point is that encounter with the Lord Jesus means that we can never again be passive; we are to do something.

10:7 *And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his household servants*- Luke uses this term about Angels speaking to Moses and Philip (7:38; 8:26). Gentile Cornelius was no less a significant player in God's unfolding purpose.

*And a devout soldier of them that served him continually*- "Devout" means just that; the word has a religious overtone of piety. To place the word together with "soldier" may seem an oxymoron; it could seem inappropriate, at first blush, to imagine that a Roman soldier could be "devout". Here we have an intentional challenge of stereotype. Those we might consider to be in a status which precludes spirituality may indeed be spiritually devout. "Devout" is the Spirit's comment through Luke upon this man. Clearly Cornelius' search for the Lord had not been a private matter; he had spread it to those closest to him in his family and workplace. As the Gospel spreads to the secular and unchurched, such challenges to stereotype are frequent in our day.

10:8 *And having related all things to them, he sent them to Joppa*- His search for God was

not conducted secretly, behind a computer screen or on a mobile device. He was quite open about it. Likewise notice how he called together his relatives and friends to hear Peter's message (:24).

*10:9 Now the next day, as they were on their journey, and drew near to the city, about the sixth hour-* Jesus removed prayer from being mere liturgy into being a part of real, personal life with God. The way Peter prays at 12 noon (Acts 10:9), and how Paul urges us to pray *all the time* (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) are therefore radical departures from the concept of praying at set times, three times / day.

*Peter went upon the housetop to pray-* He 'went up', and the same word is used of how the prayers of Cornelius 'went up' (:4). The parallels between Cornelius and Peter are extensive. They both prayed regularly, and during one of those regular prayer sessions, they received visions. The same Angel was at work with both of them. Thus a solidarity was developed between the preacher and the convert; and we see this so often in our own lives too. We of course fail to attach meaning to event, but we can rest assured that the events in our lives are all part of a wider plan and potential purpose, which may or may not work out or become clear to us in this life. Because we and / or others fail to respond as we might, sometimes things are as it were left hanging, in that event appears therefore not to have achieved its possible meaning or intention.

*10:10 And he became hungry and desired to eat, but while they made the food ready, he fell into a trance-* His hunger, like the Lord's hunger as He came to the fig tree, spoke of the Lord's desire to save and have fellowship with ['eat with'] the Gentiles. The Jews in Simon's home were preparing clean food for Peter [cp. preparing Jewish people to hear the Gospel], but then Peter's hunger was offered another method of satiation- in the eating of *unclean* food.

*10:11 And he saw the heaven open and a certain vessel descending-* The very same phrase occurs in Jn. 1:51, where the Lord predicted that the disciples would see "heaven open": "I say unto you [plural], Hereafter you [plural- all the disciples] shall see heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man". Whatever that enigmatic prediction meant, it surely was being given some application to the opening of 'heaven' to "all men", including Gentiles, thanks to Angelic work. And Peter saw Heaven open, and an Angel... and the equivalent of 'ascending and descending' was surely in the descent and ascent of the sheet containing unclean animals. The context of Jn. 1:51 is the Lord's observation that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed" (Jn. 1:47). Maybe His intention was to teach the disciples that actually, 'heaven' was to be opened to non-Israelites too, and Jacob lying on Gentile ground that night with Angels ascending and descending upon him was some kind of foretaste of the body of Christ in future times. The opening of the 'heaven' of the Most Holy place at the Lord's death clearly gave the message that now the way into the holiest was open to all. Peter would also have recalled how the heavens were opened (same words used) at the Lord's baptism, and the dove / Holy Spirit 'descended'. Now he saw heaven opened, and was to see the Spirit descending upon Gentiles. They were, therefore, Jesus- the body of Christ, upon whom the Spirit first descended. Ezekiel likewise saw heaven opened and entered into a vision, whilst sitting with the captives in gentile Babylon (Ez. 1:1); thereby encouraging Peter that he was no less significant than the revered Old Testament prophets.

*As it were a great sheet-* The word strictly means a sail. Perhaps this was an echo from Peter's fisherman past, an image coming back in his dreams. And it was maybe an image recently impressed in his mind as living next to the beach, he would have seen boats at sea. Maybe this image was used to teach Peter that now the disciples should go overseas by boat to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. If Sigmund Freud were amongst us, with his theories of dreams, he would likely have suggested that this aspect of the dream was an example of Peter's inner conscience and unexpressed awareness speaking to him- in this case, that the Gospel should indeed go to the Gentiles. And yet the dream was given by God, ultimately- perhaps using all these images, from whatever sources, in order to deliver the message to Peter.

*Let down by four corners upon the earth-* Another example of Luke's medical language, as this was the term used for the ends of bandages.

*10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted animals, and creeping things of the earth and birds of the sky-* This translation is misleading. The idea is that every kind of four-footed animals were there, looking forward to how "all men" were to be encompassed in God's saving purpose.

*10:13 And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter. Kill and eat-* This could as well be understood as the language of sacrifice; the animals were killed and then the offerer ate part of them, to demonstrate his identity with the animal. Likewise see on :35 *Is acceptable*. Peter's killing and eating was obviously symbolic of the acceptance of the Gentile converts; Paul's words in Rom. 15:16 surely allude to this incident and use the same sacrificial language, as if to say that he shared Peter's mission: "That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit". Peter's work with the Gentile Cornelius was sanctified by the Holy Spirit in that the Spirit descended upon them before their baptisms. If "kill and eat" indeed refers to sacrifice, Peter's shock is even more understandable; he was being asked to not merely eat unclean food, but to actually offer it as a sacrifice to God.

*10:14 Peter said: Not so, Lord. For I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean-* The figure of 'eating' is being used in this incident to speak of fellowship. This confirms the impression we have throughout the New Testament- that eating together was seen as an act of fellowship. The open table manners of the Lord Jesus are therefore the more worthy of notice- eating with sinners and eating together in the feeding miracles with thousands of people, including some Gentiles. An example of relevant Old Testament quotation is shown when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals. He replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how Ez. 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

10:15- see on Acts 10:35,36.

*And a voice came to him again the second time: What God has cleansed-* The unclean animals which Peter saw in the vision represented all the Gentile world (Acts 10:15,28). They had already all been potentially "cleansed" by the blood of Christ, but He was dead in vain,

the cleansing achieved for nothing, unless the likes of Peter took the message to them. The more and the wider and the more powerfully we do this, the more we enable the cross of Christ to be victorious, to achieve its end, the more 'worthwhile' as it were was the Lord's sacrifice.

*Do not call common-* The fact we can be guilty of causing others to stumble means that we can limit God's gracious plan for them. By refusing to preach to the Gentiles, Peter was 'making common' what God had potentially cleansed (Acts 10:15 RV). We can spiritually *destroy* our brother, for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15); we can undo the work of the cross for a brother who would otherwise be saved by it. We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Sam. 2:24; 1 Kings 16:19).

Peter was told not to call or make common that which God had [potentially] cleansed; but the Greek is always elsewhere translated to defile or to make unclean. 'Don't make unclean what God's made clean' is the idea. By refusing table fellowship to people, we are proactively making them unclean- we are treating them as if the cleansing work of Christ has no possible connection to them. And so often, people end up acting and believing according to how others act toward them in such matters of spirituality. They simply walk away from the table from which they were excluded, and from all that is represented upon it... That is the observed reality in thousands of cases. David felt that being cast out of the community of Israel was effectively saying to him "Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. 26:19). Nobody probably ever said those actual words to him, but this verse captures well how people so often read rejection from the people of God- they do indeed tend to go off and serve other gods. It is those who cast them out who will have to answer for having caused their stumbling.

*10:16 And this was done three times; and immediately the vessel was received up into heaven-* This surely connects with the triple instruction to Peter to feed the Lord's sheep. He was being taught that in practice, this would mean offering Gentiles to the Lord. And yet although Peter was the one chosen to lead the way in accepting the Gentiles, he was given a ministry to the Jews whereas Paul was given the Gentile mission to oversee (Gal. 2:9). Why was this? Perhaps Peter's inner struggle with accepting Gentiles was recognized, and he was given an easier way of service which was more within his comfort zone? Or perhaps Peter was initially the apostle to the Gentiles, but the Lord changed over the roles of Paul and Peter for some reason? Or perhaps Gal. 2:9 speaks of a specific missionary endeavour at one time, for which Peter focused on the Jews and Paul on the Gentiles?

We note that the unclean animals, representing Gentile converts, were "received" in heaven.

*10:17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate-* On 10:9 *Peter went upon* I sought to demonstrate that the Lord's providential hand was creating a parallel between Peter and Cornelius, just as He does between brethren today. The language of these men of Cornelius 'standing before the gate' and earnestly knocking is precisely the same language as we find in the account of *Peter* knocking at the "door of the gate" after his release from prison: "He came to the house of Mary... there many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognised Peter's voice, she did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside and told everyone that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:12-14). As he stood there, Peter was being put into the shoes of those men who had stood before his gate and knocked. Providence does this in our lives many times, as the Spirit seeks to bind us

together in one close-knit body. When the Jewish disciples initially wouldn't let Peter in... he must have seen the similarity with how things could have worked out, had he likewise left those Gentiles outside, holding to the Jewish tradition of not having Gentiles into your home.

10:18 *And called and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, were lodging there-* They carefully and obediently repeat the words of the Angel in :5.

10:19 *And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said to him: Look, three men seek you-* This seems typical of the Spirit's operation to this day. Those who think about their experience with the Lord are led to further revelation and paths of action. The same words are used of how whilst Joseph likewise "thought on these things" (s.w.), he had a vision directing him further (Mt. 1:20). "The Spirit" may well refer to the same Angel who was active with Cornelius. Acts 11:11 says that the men called for Peter "immediately" after the vision ended; but here in 10:19 we have the information that Peter thought on the vision after it ended, and only then did the men call for him. His 'thinking' on the vision was therefore brief, but as soon as he did, the answer came. *The Spirit-* An Angel, see on :5 *Send men*.

10:20 *So rise, and get downstairs-* Gk. 'go down'. This is the same word translated "descending" in :11. As God had 'come down' to Peter and to save the Gentiles, so Peter was in turn to 'come down'. Hence the word occurs again in :21, emphasizing Peter's obedience. We really can be part of God's program in saving others; as He comes down to the excluded, so we are to likewise.

*Without doubting. For I have sent them-* The phrase occurs only here (also in 11:12) and in James 1:6, where we are bidden to ask in faith "without doubting". This might imply that Peter was being encouraged to pray for the acceptance of the Gentiles and go forward in doing so "without doubting". As already outlined in these studies, there had been hints galore that such inclusion was what the Lord wanted. Even if the reference is not to prayer, the Lord recognized that Peter had doubts- and He urges Peter not to have them. His attitude was not that Peter should have accepted the plain statements of his Lord, that Gentiles worldwide were to be included in God's plan; nor that Peter should just accept the way he was being led. Instead the Lord tenderly appreciates Peter's doubts and prejudices, and urges him to overcome them. This should be our template in dealing with those who still 'don't get it' or 'won't get it' over various issues which are obvious to us.

"Doubting" translates *diakrino*. The same word is used about the Jewish brethren who then "contended" with Peter over his table fellowship behaviour (Acts 11:2- *diakrino* again). The repetition of the word like this in the record seems to rebuke those who contend with others about their table fellowship policy; for Peter had been told *not* to contend / judge in this matter, and yet those legalistic brethren did that very thing. "You can't break bread with us because you break bread with those we don't approve of, even though you are our brother in Christ..." seems to smack of just the same disobedience. But as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; open table fellowship brings people to Christ, as it did Cornelius, whereas closed table fellowship drives people away. At least initially, this was recognized by the brethren in Acts 11 and they too changed their closed table policy.

10:21 *And Peter went down to the men and said: I am the one you seek. Why have you come?-* This is full of allusion to the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:56; Jn. 18:4-6). There is perhaps no exact sense in the allusions; but they reflect the fact that the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection so indelibly impressed Peter that he reflected it both



consciously and unconsciously. Likewise with us- even our body language should reflect our experience of such great salvation in so great a Saviour.

10:22 *And they said: Cornelius a centurion, a righteous man and one that fears God, and who is praised by all the nation of the Jews, was instructed by a holy angel of God to summon you to his house and to hear words from you-* Yet Peter didn't know what he was to say. When he arrived, he asked them: "I ask with what intent did you send for me?" (:29). So he went with the visitors, confident God was leading him, but with no set piece speech prepared to read to them. We likewise are to follow the Spirit's leading in the Gospel's work.

10:23 *So he called them in and lodged them. And the next day he arose and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him-* Just as Peter's 'coming down' reflected the 'coming down' of the Lord in the world's salvation (see on :20), so this 'calling them in' reflects the calling in of "as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Peter had spoken those words, thinking of the wide range of Jews being called to salvation. But now he would have realized that the Lord's call was to all men and women; and he was the one being asked to 'call them in' to the house of the Jews.

10:24 *And the next day they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and his near friends-* See on :8. The same words are used in Luke's record of the parables of the lost; in a home, friends and neighbours are "called together" (Lk. 15:6,9). Cornelius was the lost who was being found, but he was also reflecting the joy of the Lord in Heaven by calling together his friends and neighbours into his home.

10:25 *And when it happened that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet and did homage to him-* The Biblical examples of this kind of thing demonstrate the typical way that human beings tend to equate the message with the messenger. Cornelius so respected the message that he thought the messenger was wonderful and worthy of his respect. The reverse side of this equation is particularly destructive- the messenger is equated with the message. And therefore any disillusion with the messenger (or community of messengers) results in a corresponding collapse of faith in the message. Yet the message is the good news about God, the Lord Jesus and their Kingdom- not about the messenger. John the Baptist wisely described himself as merely a voice; and that is all we are. The truth and wonder of the message we pass on does not of itself mean that we are pure. Solomon made this mistake, assuming that his mere possession of wisdom made him somehow spiritually invincible, leading him to make concessions for himself which resulted in his final destruction.

10:26 *But Peter raised him up, saying: Stand up-* The occurrence together of the words "raised up" and "stand up" recalls incidents in the Gospels (Mk. 9:27; Lk. 6:8). Peter would have observed the Lord 'raising up' and then making 'stand up' the sick boy of Mk. 9:27; and he would have seen this as his pattern. We earlier observed how Peter's healing of Tabitha reflects the Lord's body movements and language. This sets us a challenge in our Christianity, our following and absorption of Him. It should be to the point that the actions and even body movements of the historical Jesus are so imprinted upon us that we are literally influenced by His Spirit.

*I myself am also a man-* These are the very same words on the lips of the Centurion in Mt. 8:9 and Lk. 7:8: "I am a man". One wonders whether this Centurion was in fact Cornelius or in some way connected with him. In this case, Peter would be quoting the words of Cornelius back to him, assuring him that he too was exactly who he was. We notice how the essence of this incident repeated in Paul's ministry, when in Acts 14:15 Paul has to assure the crowd that "We are men...". Again, Paul was being brought to understand Peter by going through similar experiences.

*10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many gathered together-* There is a strange emphasis upon the idea that they were talking as Peter went in to Cornelius' home. It was that crossing of the threshold which was so significant; and the idea was that they did it whilst Peter was teaching the Gospel to the Gentile householder. The need to take Christ to others was what gave Peter strength to cross that significant boundary line. It was whilst doing that work of teaching that he found himself crossing the line, and thereby realized it was but a line in the sand. So many times, going out and teaching the Gospel, and then 'going with' the convert on their new journey, has been the means of radical change in the thinking of the preacher.

*10:28 And he said to them: You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew-* If the 'law' in view was that of Moses, then Peter is sharing his struggle with the fact God had changed His law. Yet the idea of a Jew not sharing table fellowship with a Gentile nor entering his house was not Biblical; these were the 'laws' of the Jews rather than of God or Moses.

*To join himself or come to-* These are the very words used about Philip coming to and joining himself to the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:29). The Lord worked in educating His followers using different means. Peter needed a vision; Philip was taken out into a desert away from peer pressure and simply told to connect with a Gentile. Yet both men ought to have figured that the Lord's work and teaching had ended the divide anyway. But they didn't, and He patiently worked with each of them in personally tailored ways in order to bring them to the same truths. He works likewise today. The level and intensity of His activity is simply colossal.

*One of another nation; and yet to me God has shown that I should not call anyone common or unclean-* Gk. 'not purged'. It could be argued that Peter has in view here those purged in Christ. For not all men are 'clean' or 'purged'. Therefore I am inclined to think that Peter means 'If someone, anyone, including a Gentile, is cleansed by baptism into Christ-who am I to say they are not cleansed / purged?'.

*10:29 Therefore also I came without objection, when I was sent for-* Peter says he went with them because he had seen the vision, and then the messengers from Cornelius knocked on his door. He felt that was providential and an answer to the mysterious vision he had seen. But he describes this in 11:12 as "the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting / judging". Perhaps the Spirit did not give him a specific word, to the effect 'Yes, go with them!'; but rather the Spirit arranged circumstances so that it was not hard for Peter to figure 'Well I guess I am meant to go with these strangers'. Likewise when Luke says that the Spirit stopped Paul preaching in Bithynia (16:7), we are not to assume that he had a specific word from the Lord about it; probably circumstances worked out in such a way where he figured that 'This is not meant to be'. And the Spirit works no less actively in our own lives in these ways.

*Therefore, I ask with what intent did you send for me-* See on :22. "Intent" translates *logos*; we could translate: 'For what word / logos did you send for me?'. Luke has used this phrase before in recording how the people exclaimed at the teaching of the Lord: "What a word is this!" (Lk. 4:36).

*10:30 And Cornelius said: Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house, and a man stood before me-* The Angelic vision to Cornelius is presented as a direct response to his fasting and prayer. But what was he praying for? Perhaps specifically for acceptance amongst God's people and closer relationship with Israel's resurrected Messiah? Or was it that his prayers were interpreted as being for these things in essence, even if there was no specific, verbalized request for them made? For this is how many of our 'prayers' are answered; the essence is perceived and answered.

*In bright apparel-* The idea is of a good robe, rather than the glistening garments of Angels; "a gorgeous robe" (Lk. 23:11; James 2:2,3). This person may have been the Lord Jesus rather than an Angel.

*10:31 And said: Cornelius, your prayer is heard and your charitable acts are held in remembrance-* It's doubtful Cornelius was specifically praying for a person to guide him to baptism into Christ and an understanding of the Christian Gospel. But the essence of his spirit was discerned and counted for prayer. Note that "prayer" is singular- his various requests and devotions amounted to one essential prayer. This is a great comfort to all who feel that in prayer, they cannot somehow get the words out right, or nicely enough. It is the deepest spirit of a person which is discerned by the Father and Son, and counted as prayer. See commentary on the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11.

*In the sight of God-* The same term is used in :33, to describe how they were all present "here in the presence of God". The generosity of Cornelius was noted in the very presence of God; and yet Cornelius realized that that presence of God was also here on earth. The repetition of the ideas demonstrates how the presence of God was no longer to be thought of as simply in the Jerusalem temple; the good deeds of a Gentile were in God's presence, and that same Divine presence was to be found in the home of a Gentile.

*10:32 Therefore-* The plan to bring Peter to baptize Cornelius was all part of a Divine response to the prayers and good works of Cornelius. It was not simply the sovereign movement of God towards Gentiles. It was a response to that man's prayer and spirituality. Note that good works, in this case, regular giving to the poor, had high significance and partly elicited the Lord's response to the man. Although we likewise note that good works alone cannot save; it was encounter with the Gospel and faith in Christ which was so essential.

*Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. He lodges in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea side-* This is military language, as if Peter was already part of the military household of Cornelius. This is the whole theme of the record- that fellow believers are in a new family relationship.

*10:33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Therefore, now we are all here in the presence of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord to say-* Cornelius had just said that he had seen an Angel standing "before me" (:30, s.w. "in the presence of"). He had been in the presence of the

Angel, and he felt that that had now happened again. He felt the literal presence of the Angel who had appeared to him. But "in the presence of God" is the same phrase as has been used to describe how the prayers and works of Cornelius had come into "the presence of God" (:4,31). It is as if God's presence had come to earth; the sheet had been let down from Heaven to earth.

10:34 *And Peter opened his mouth and said: Of a truth I perceive that God-* Peter was so powerful as a preacher, always alluding to his own weaknesses of behaviour and understanding. Consider this example here: "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears him and works righteousness, is accepted with him [Peter alludes here to Old Testament passages such as Dt. 1:17; 10:17; Prov. 24:23 and Is. 64:5]. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel... that word, you know" (Acts 10:34-37). Peter is saying that he only *now* perceives the truth of those well-known Old Testament passages. He is admitting that the truth of his Lord's criticism of him, that he had been so slow of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken. And yet Peter masterfully goes on to show solidarity with his readers- he tells them that they too had already heard "the word" and yet now they like him needed to believe the word which they already knew. In doing this, Peter is bridge building, between his own humanity and that of his hearers. And the wonder of it all is that it seems this happened quite naturally. He didn't psychologically plan it all out. His own recognition of sinfulness quite naturally lead him into it.

*Is no respecter of persons-* Later, Peter reminds his Jewish readers that their prayers ascend to a Father "who without respect of persons judges according to *every* man's work" (i.e. Jew or Gentile, 1 Pet. 1:17). He was asking them to learn what he had so slowly and falteringly come to accept. In this was the power of his pastoral appeal- for the things he teaches are all what he had himself come to accept after much failure and struggle.

10:35 *But in every nation-* Peter's grasp of the extent of Christ's Lordship was reflected in the scope of his preaching. He had known it before, but understood it only to a limited extent. It seems that he preferred to understand the commission to preach "remission of sins *among* all nations" as meaning to the Jewish diaspora scattered amongst all nations (Lk. 24:47)- notwithstanding the copious hints in the Lord's teaching that His salvation was for literally all men. He preached forgiveness (s.w. remission) *to Israel* because he understood that this was what the Lord's death had enabled (Acts 5:31). It was Israel who needed forgiveness, because they had crucified God's Son- this seems to have been his thinking. Peter applies the word "all" (as in "to all nations") to his Jewish audiences (Acts 2:14,36; 3:13; 4:10). But he was taught in the Cornelius incident that because Christ is "Lord of *all*", therefore men from *every* (s.w. "all") nation can receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:35,36). He makes the link back to the preaching commission in Acts 10:43: *all* in *every* nation who believe can receive remission of sins (s.w. Lk. 24:47)- as he was commanded to preach in the great commission. He came to see that the desperate need for reconciliation with God was just as strong for those who had not directly slain His Son; for, Peter may have mused, all men would have held him "condemned by heaven" if they had been Jerusalem Jews. And he realized that Christ was truly Lord of all, all men, everywhere, and not just of a few hundred thousand Jews. And with us too. The wider and the higher our vision and conception of the ascended Christ, the wider and more insistently powerful will be our appeal to literally all men. Yet Peter had heard the Lord's words, when He had asked them to tell all nations, and when He had prophesied that His cross would draw all men unto Him. And his comment that "unto you *first* God, having raised up His Son, sent him to bless you" (Acts 3:26) suggests he suspected a wider benefit from the resurrection than just Israel. But all this knowledge lay

passive within him; as with his understanding of the cross, he just couldn't face up to the full implications of what he heard. But it was his recognition of the extent of Christ's Lordship that motivated him to make the change, to convert the knowledge into practice, to throw off the shackles of traditional understanding that had held him from understanding the clear truth of words he had heard quite clearly. An example would be the words recorded in Mk. 7:19 RV: All meats were made clean by Christ. But Peter had to be told: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15). He had to be taught to simply accept the word he loved, with all its implications. We too can skim over Bible phrases and verses, assuming our previous understanding of them is correct.

*He that fears Him and works righteousness-* A reference to Cornelius as a Gentile God-fearer who did good deeds.

*Is acceptable to Him-* Whoever truly works righteousness "is accepted" with God right now, as well as at the final judgment. Some faithful men experience condemnation for their sins now, with the result that they repent and therefore at the day of judgment will not receive that condemnation. The language of being 'acceptable' may be a continuation of the language of sacrifice which began with the invitation to "kill and eat" (see on :13). For the same Greek word for "acceptable" is found in Phil. 4:18: "A sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God".

10:36 *The word-* The definition here of the word of the Gospel includes the basic facts of the Gospel story as recorded by the Gospel writers. Issues of finer theology are not directly part of that Gospel. Here, "word" translates *logos*. It is spoken of as the "message" [AV "word"], *rhema*, in :37. It could be argued that *logos* and *rhema* are therefore dynamically interchangeable in practice. Or it could be that we are to understand that God sent a *logos*, a message with an intention beneath its words... and the words of that message, the more literal *rhema*, was preached.

*Which he sent-* The idea of a word being sent from God to earth clearly isn't literal. Likewise the language of the Lord Jesus, as the embodiment of that word being 'sent' doesn't imply any personal pre-existence or literal passage from Heaven to earth.

*To the children of Israel-* The Gospel was initially intended for Israel, but that message was that Israel's Messiah was "Lord of all", Jews and Gentiles.

*Preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he being Lord of all!)-* The text is saying that God is the preacher; He was and is preaching, through His Son. Our preaching is therefore an identification with Him. We are His representatives, and we have Him behind us in what we are doing.

10:37 *That message you yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judea-* Even Gentile soldiers on duty in Palestine knew the basic message of the Lord Jesus, so widespread was the message. If Peter could reason that the content of the Gospel was common knowledge in Palestine, we can hardly imagine the Gospel to be much more than the life and teaching of the historical Jesus. All theological matters could not then have been in view; and the definition and content of the Gospel surely didn't change after the time of Cornelius.

*Beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached-* There is a strong NT emphasis on the Galilean origins of the Lord, His message and the whole Christian movement. Yet Galilee was despised. The point is being laboured that the origins of

Christianity were in that which was despised by men. Every Jew would expect a Messianic movement to begin *from Jerusalem*. But Christianity is presented as having its genesis in despised, half-Gentile Galilee.

10:38 *About Jesus of Nazareth. How God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the Devil. For God was with him-* The Lord was empowered to do miracles to demonstrate to illiterate folk that "God was with Him"; but He was Immanuel, God with *us*; in that God was with Him, and He is with us. The Lord Jesus did not heal every sick person in Palestine. The healing of "*all* that were oppressed by the Devil" therefore suggests that we understand "the devil" here as referring not simply to the source of illness which needed healing. The healing was of "*all*" who were under the power of sin and who wanted freedom from that. So again we see a connection between the devil and sin.

10:39- see on Acts 5:30.

*And we are witnesses of all things which he did-* The Lord therefore was never much out of the view or hearing of the disciples. This implies a significant lack of privacy for Him, making more acute His need to go away in prayer alone. Truly He 'came down' and in that sense 'dwelt amongst men'; and men of such limited perception and vision, so constantly out of step with His thinking, language and direction.

*Both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. Whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree-* Peter points out the difference between the disciples and "the Jews" generally. He clearly felt that difference, and reflecting upon it would've made the more logical and natural his sense of solidarity with Gentile believers in Jesus.

10:40 *Him God raised up on the third day, and gave him to be revealed-* God didn't parade His resurrected Son personally before the eyes of the world. But He resurrected Him in order that He should be openly revealed (Gk.). This is the connection between the resurrection and the imperative to preach the resurrected Lord; the great commission is therefore directly in the context of spreading the news that the Lord has risen. So in this sense, the Lord risen and alive was paraded before men- but in the form of His body, the church. The same word is used about Christian preaching in Rom. 10:20: "I was made manifest ['revealed']". This open revelation was through the witness of the church.

10:41 *Not to all the people-* As noted on :40, God's plan was that the open revelation of His Son was through the believers, rather than through some public parading of the resurrected body of Christ.

*But to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead-* Table fellowship with the risen Lord thereby empowered them to be witnesses that He is indeed alive. And the experience of breaking bread with Him now should lead to the same conviction- we know He is alive because we sat at table with Him, and thereby we are empowered to be witnesses of Him to the world. This explains the intended connection between the communion service and public witness; to turn it into a closed door private members club is to sadly miss the point.

10:42 *And he ordered us to preach to the people-* "Ordered" would be better translated 'commanded'. The reference is likely to the great commission. But Peter therefore

misunderstood that as being a command to preach "to the people", i.e. the Jewish people. The great commission had commanded the disciples to preach; the fact Peter adds "to the people" suggests he is adding his interpretation to the Lord's actual words, until he assumes that that interpretation was part and parcel of the Lord's own words. Adam made the same mistake in Gen. 3:3, and all Bible readers and students are inclined to. Peter seems to be saying that the Lord had commanded him to preach to the people of Israel, but that he had been led to now preach to Gentile Cornelius. But actually Peter had yet to join the dots, and realize that actually the requirement to share the Gospel with the Gentiles had been hinted at throughout the Old Testament and was to be found plainly in the actual teaching of the Lord Jesus. It wasn't a change of plan by the Lord at the time of Cornelius; rather was it Peter [and the other disciples] being so slow to understand the basic meaning of simple words, just as they had failed to accept the Lord's clear predictions of His own death and resurrection.

*And to testify that this is he who is ordained by God-* Note the legal language. It's as if we have been given a subpoena; we have to testify that we have met Him. And the world is our judge. It is our duty to persuade them, sceptical as they are, of the utter truth of our case, and that life and death eternal depend upon judging it rightly. But the metaphor has a double twist; we are on trial, but we are testifying that actually this risen Jesus is "the judge of the living and the dead".

*To be the judge of the living and the dead-* This could mean that when He returns, the Lord Jesus will raise the responsible dead and judge them, along with "the living" who are alive at the time of His return. Or it could be saying that He is right now the judge of all living, and also of all who have died, seeing He has their records and has already formulated His judgment of them. This latter option would make better sense of the present tense used- He *is* the judge, rather than 'He shall be one day the judge...'.

10:43- see on Acts 10:35,36.

*To him all the prophets bear witness-* It is quite a challenge to find this message explicitly taught in all the Old Testament prophets. "The prophets" may be a reference to the section of the Old Testament scriptures known as "the prophets", as if to say that the essence of the message from that section was forgiveness for Israel in Messiah's Name. Or "the prophets" may refer to the New Testament prophets, the forth-tellers of the word of the Gospel. This would make better sense of the present tense- all the prophets were right then giving witness to this message.

*That everyone who believes in him-* Jews and Gentiles.

*Receives forgiveness of sins through his name-* The same word used of how they "received" the Holy Spirit (:47). Repentance, forgiveness and inner transformation is what the Spirit gift is all about. The visible manifestations sometimes noted were to demonstrate to observers that really, those who had converted to Christ really were legitimate.

10:44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit-* Whilst Peter spoke of receiving forgiveness (:43), the Holy Spirit came on them all. This suggests that the gift of the Spirit is repentance and forgiveness; any external sign of it, such as speaking in tongues, was a mere external attestation of that internal change.

*Fell-* The same word used of how Peter fell into a Spirit vision (:10); the outpouring was to underline that these Gentiles were just as much within the realm of God's operation as Peter. Hence he observed that the Spirit had fallen on them as on the Jewish believers (11:15).

*On all them that heard the word-* The language of the parable of the sower for positive response to the word. The gift of the Spirit was not an arbitrary 'zapping' but in response to the hearing of faith.

10:45 *And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed-* Peter had just quoted Old Testament scripture regarding how all the prophets taught that "everyone", literally 'anyone', who believes in Messiah receives forgiveness. And that 'anyone' embraced Gentiles. But when "even... Gentiles" were given the Holy Spirit as a sign of their acceptance by God... the Jewish believers were utterly amazed. Again, we see how the meaning of the most basic and simple words in the Bible can be so hard to accept and therefore to understand- because we carry with us so much baggage of presupposition and assumed understanding.

*Because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles-* The pouring out of the Spirit elsewhere refers to an internal process of renewal (Tit. 3:5,6; Rom. 5:5; the same words are used for 'pouring out'). But in the context here, it was critical that Peter and the Jewish brethren were aware of this. And you can't usually know what's happening in the heart of another; therefore in this case, there was a visible manifestation of the Spirit's activity. The Greek for "poured out" is usually translated "shed" with reference to the shedding of the Lord's blood. One achievement of His death was the shedding of the Holy Spirit; His mind / Spirit, His breathing and thinking, became available to all who are in Him. For His death was His ultimate act of identification with us.

10:46 *For they heard them speak with tongues-* Probably in Hebrew, which would have been deeply impressive to the Jewish Christians present.

*And magnify God. Then said Peter-* The Greek means just that. We can make God greater, increase or magnify Him, in that He has delegated His work to us and it is over to us how far we extend it.

10:47 *Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we?-* The word means 'accepted'. Peter had been taught that God *accepted* *whoever* believed in Him, regardless of their race. But now Paul had to remind Peter that truly, God "*accepteth* no man's person" (Gal. 2:6). The same Greek word was a feature of the Cornelius incident: whoever believes *receives*, accepts, remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and they *received*, accepted, the Holy Spirit as well as the Jewish brethren (Acts 10:47). With his matchless humility, Peter accepted Paul's words. His perceptive mind picked up these references (and in so doing we have a working model of how to seek to correct our brethren, although the success of it will depend on their sensitivity to the word which we both quote and allude to). But so easily, a lifetime of spiritual learning could have been lost by the sophistry of legalistic brethren. It's a sober lesson.

The case of Cornelius (Acts 10:47) shows the urgency of baptism; Peter didn't report the case back to the elders, he went ahead immediately with it. Acts 10:36-43 usefully record "the word" of the Gospel which had been sent to Israel and which the Gentiles could now also believe: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about



doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name". This "word" of the Gospel has several allusions to the great commission- "we are witnesses" is Lk. 24:48, and Peter clearly felt he was fulfilling the great commission when he says that he is preaching because after the resurrection, Christ "commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God". Peter's comment that "to Him all the prophets bear witness" was doubtless said with his mind on how after His resurrection, the Lord had expounded where He was to be found in the prophetic writings. The Gospel which the great commission required to be taught and baptized into is therefore summarized in "this word" which is summarized here by Peter. It was a brief message about the person of Christ, His death and resurrection, His forthcoming return in judgment, and our need to repent and receive forgiveness by association with His Name.

"Can anyone withhold" is the same word used by the Lord to rebuke the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

10:48 *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days-* Implying Peter himself didn't perform the baptisms, so that there would not arise any cult following of the baptizer.

## ACTS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now the apostles and the brothers that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had-* Does this mean that the conversion of Cornelius was understood as representative of the conversion of the Gentiles? Or were there a number of Gentile converts apart from Cornelius- e.g. Tabitha, the Ethiopian eunuch, and it was to these that "the Gentiles" refers to here?

*Received the word of God-* See on 8:14 *Received the word of God.*

11:2- see on Acts 10:20; 15:5.

*And when Peter had arrived in Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision-* This term seems to refer not simply to circumcised Jews, because the majority of the church was Jewish. Rather would it seem to refer to those within the church who thought that circumcision was essential for salvation.

*Criticized him, saying-* The Greek *diakrino* can equally mean to enter judgment with. It's as if they set themselves up as Peter's judges before a church which had turned into a court of law. This so easily happens to this day.

11:3 *You went in to men uncircumcised and ate with them!-* It's easy to assume that the arguments about "regulations about food" (Heb. 13:9) in the first century hinged about what *types* of food should be eaten, i.e. whether the Mosaic dietary laws should be observed or not. But the angst about "food" was more passionately about *with whom* you ate. Peter explains in Acts 11:3 how utterly radical it was for a Jew to eat with a Gentile. Bearing this in mind, the way Jew and Gentile Christians ate together at the Lord's supper would've been a breath-taking witness of unity to the watching world. And yet ultimately, Jew and Gentile parted company and the church divided, laying itself wide open to imbalance and every manner of practical and doctrinal corruption as a result. The problem was that the Jews understood 'eating together' as a sign of agreement, and a sign that you accepted those at your table as morally pure. The Lord's 'table manners' were of course purposefully the opposite of this approach. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho* 47.2-3) mentions how the Jewish Christians would only eat with Gentile Christians on the basis that the Gentiles firstly adopted a Jewish way of life. And this is the nub of the problem- demanding that those at your table are like you, seeing eating together as a sign that the other has accepted your positions about everything. The similarities with parts of the modern church are uncanny.

To enter in to a house was itself a religious act; the word is used repeatedly about how Peter entered in to the home of Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:24,25,27 use the word three times); and Peter was accused by the legalistic brethren of having not only eaten with a Gentile but also of "entering in" to his home (Acts 11:3). Likewise Lydia felt that Paul could only enter in [s.w.] to her home if he had judged her to be faithful to the Lord (Acts 16:15,40). But the assumption is made in 1 Cor. 14:23,24 that the doors of the ecclesia should be open to even unbelievers who wished to "enter in", with all that implied. James 2:2 uses the same word twice in describing how both rich and poor strangers were 'coming in' to "your assembly", and being given different treatment by the assembled believers. The point is, they "came in"- there was no barrier to them. The church and its table was open.

Peter ate with the uncircumcised- and got into trouble with the Judaist brethren exactly because the Law had forbidden the uncircumcised from eating the first Passover (Acts 11:3).

The Jews had put a [very large!] hedge around this law by forbidding Jews from eating with Gentiles period. Yet Peter was taught that this was wrong- and he ate with Gentiles, it seems even before they were baptized. But the point is, he had been taught by the vision that all the old Mosaic category distinctions of clean / unclean, circumcised / uncircumcised, had now been ended. It seems this was as large a challenge to the church in the 1st century as it is in the 21st. It was by eating with Gentiles that Peter openly demonstrated that God had accepted Gentiles (Acts 10,11). In first century Judaism "meals... were principal expressions within Judaism of what constituted purity. One ate what was acceptable with those people deemed acceptable" (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (London: Doubleday, 2000) p. 473). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Eventually Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12). But he had learnt to eat with Gentile brethren in Acts 11:3; he had justified doing so to his brethren and persuaded them of its rightness, and had been taught and showed, so patiently, by his Lord that he should not make such distinctions. But now, all that teaching was undone. There's a lesson here for many a slow-to-speak brother or sister- what you start by passively going along with in ecclesial life, against your better judgment, you may well end up by actively advocating. It can be fairly conclusively proven that Mark's Gospel is in fact Peter's.

11:4 *But Peter began to explain it all to them in order-* Peter didn't claim to be the rock upon which the church was built; he didn't demand respect for his position, but humbly recounted what had happened on a factual level. His humility here is impressive.

11:5 *I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down even to me-* "Even to me" is a wonderful reflection of Peter's humility. He was under the strong impression of his denials, and how he felt he was the last who ought to have been chosen to receive this invitation to openly accept the Gentile converts. But this is how the Lord works; He chooses the humblest, the most humbled, through which to develop His work and to be at the frontiers of new movements of His Spirit.

11:6 *Looking at it closely, I saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the sky-* The very same word used of how the servant girl looked carefully at Peter on the night of the betrayals (Lk. 22:56). Only Luke uses this word. He is making the connection, and revealing how perhaps even subconsciously, the experience of his failures was ever present in Peter's speaking and thinking. And exactly because of this, Peter was the one used by the Lord in this major extension of His work.

11:7 *And I heard a voice saying to me-* The only other person recorded as saying this phrase in the NT is Paul, recounting how the same Lord had appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 22:7; 26:14). Paul took the humble Peter as his role model, just as we should.

*Rise, Peter, kill and eat-* This is sacrificial language. Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar; this uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching. And this connects with how Paul speaks in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of.

11:8 *But I said: Not so, Lord-* Perhaps Peter sought to remind everyone that at the last

Supper, he had likewise told the Lord not to wash his feet; and earlier, he had likewise disagreed with the Lord about His intention to go up to death in Jerusalem. Peter is emphasizing how he had been out of step with his Lord. And on this basis, he became one of the greatest pastoral figures ever to be seen in the body of God's people.

*For nothing common or unclean has ever entered into my mouth-* Comparing this with what he is recorded as saying at this juncture in Acts 10:14, it seems he twice stated his objection to the Lord's request. Hence the voice came twice to him.

11:9 *But a voice answered the second time out of heaven-* Perhaps it came twice because Peter twice stated his objection to obedience- see earlier on this verse.

*What God has cleansed, do not make common-* The idea seems to be that God had potentially cleansed Gentile individuals, making the cleansing sacrifice of His Son relevant to them; but by not preaching to them or accepting them, they would be made unclean by the sin of omission of the members of the Lord's body who refused to accept them. We see here how much has been delegated to us; and the deep significance of sins of omission in the lives of others. It's simply not the case that if we do not accept or preach to someone, then God somehow will find another way. Rather has their salvation been placed in our hands, and if we mess up, then it won't happen.

11:10 *And this was done three times-* This could mean that each time, Peter twice resisted the command (see on :9). Which would mean a total of six refusals, really quite some resistance to the Lord's will. Peter's obedience was therefore as it were the seventh time around. He presents it this way in order to assure his audience that he absolutely can understand their resistance to the idea of accepting Gentiles.

*And all were drawn up again into heaven-* The word is only elsewhere used in the New Testament, again by Luke, in Lk. 14:5, speaking of how just as a donkey or ox would be 'pulled up' on the Sabbath, so the Lord was likewise willing to 'draw up' those in need of salvation. What's significant is that the donkey is an unclean animal and the ox is a clean animal. The Lord's subtle point in the example given was that the urgency of salvation eclipsed legal distinctions between clean and unclean. The 'drawing up' of the unclean into Heaven therefore spoke of God's saving acceptance of them; but this had to be operationalized here on earth by His representatives.

11:11 *And then three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Caesarea to me-* Just as the Angel 'stood before' both Cornelius and Peter in his vision (10:30). Peter was to perceive that those Gentiles standing before him were effectively the Lord standing before him; to refuse them was to refuse his Lord. And that same principle must be applied to all cases where men and women stand before us, seeking our acceptance into the people of God.

11:12 *And the Spirit told me to go with them-* How the Spirit told Peter isn't clarified; it could have been through the circumstance of the vision he had just received; or a direct word from a Spirit-Angel; or an internal word of command. I'd go with the first option. "To go with them" renders a Greek word meaning 'to fellowship with'; and the point was, that the Spirit had told Peter to do this. Hence he explains that previously, it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'go with' Gentiles.

*Making no distinction-* The same word is used in Acts 15:9: "He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith". But this is also the same word used in 11:2 of how the Judaist Christians "debated with" Peter about his acceptance of Gentiles. Those Judaists made a distinction; but the Spirit did not. This is an age-old church situation- the Spirit leads some to accept a previously excluded group, and the conservatives will not accept them. Whilst it appears that the conservatives had no option but to accept the evidence of God's movement, the history of the early church, and the constant reference to the theme in Paul and Peter's letters, all indicate that in the end, the conservatives just couldn't accept this. And that Jew-Gentile, conservative-liberal tension was what led to the church dividing and becoming apostate. The same has been seen in my own denomination. It should be noted, however, that the command not to make a distinction is within the context of not refusing those whom God has accepted. This is not to say that we no longer can tell right from wrong, retreating to a position where everything is but a shade of grey. The same phrase 'making no distinction' is used as a criticism of some believers for failing to make a moral distinction when they should have done (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:29; Jude 22).

*These six brothers also accompanied me-* The picture is presented of Peter and the Jewish brethren travelling with the Gentiles, when such mingling with Gentiles was against Jewish practice. Yet he did so because the Spirit had bidden him do so.

*And we entered the man's house-* Strictly against Jewish practice (10:28).

11:13 *And he told us how he had seen the angel-* The definite article suggests a specific Angel; the same one who had been working with Peter. He is called a "man" in 10:30; Angels appear as men, and in this case, the Angel surely represented the man Christ Jesus.

*Standing in his house and saying: Send to Joppa and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter-* The Jews were not supposed to enter into the houses of Gentiles (10:28). The fact the Angel entered into the house of Gentile Cornelius was therefore significant. If the Lord is fellowshiping with a person, then we also should be. This makes a nonsense of any fellowship position which recognizes a person as walking with the Lord, but refuses to fellowship them.

11:14 *Who shall speak to you words, whereby you shall be saved, you and all your household-* Belief is essential for salvation, and yet belief must have some intellectual basis; there must be some knowledge to be believed before faith can exist. Therefore it is utterly impossible to divorce understanding from ultimate acceptability. This is because the vital virtue of faith is rooted in understanding.

11:15 *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit-* Acts 15:9 explains that the whole incident demonstrated that there was no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, in that the hearts of the Gentiles had also been purified as a result of their faith. But Peter couldn't see into the heart of those Gentiles. There was therefore a visible manifestation of the Spirit given, in order to demonstrate to him that indeed, the Spirit was active inside the minds and hearts of these Gentiles. The giving of miraculous manifestations of the Spirit was therefore for a specific purpose at a specific time, which is how the miraculous gifts of the Spirit had always been used previously. The point is, belief in Christ is followed by Divine response, in that the Spirit is then made available to purify the heart / mind of the believer. This is one strong reason to be baptized. Those who are baptized often openly testify of this sense of

God's presence within them; but unless they make use of it, it truly becomes a case of 'use it or lose it'.

*Fell on them-* See on 8:16.

*Even as on us at the beginning-* The beginning of the Christian movement is here pinpointed as being at Pentecost. Hence the Cornelius incident can rightly be called the Pentecost of the Gentiles.

11:16 *And I remembered the word of the Lord-* The word recorded in Acts 1:5; the remembering of the Lord's word was an example of the promised work of the Comforter (Jn. 14:26). When dealing with this tricky ecclesial situation which arose over the admission of the Gentiles, Peter had truth and right on his side. But in his account of what happened to the elders, he constantly makes allusion to his own failures. "I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said..." is an unmistakeable reference to his remembering of the Lord's word all too late after his denials. It's as if he was saying: 'And there I was again, not remembering the Lord's word, not facing up to what it obviously implied, almost denying Him again by hesitating to accept these Gentiles'. He comments that the vision of the unclean animals came "even to me", as if he was the least worthy to have been involved with this work.

*How he said that John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit-* The "you" referred to the disciples; the fact Gentiles had now been baptized with the Spirit meant that they were no less, spiritually, than the first disciples who journeyed with Jesus in Galilee. The 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' in the context would seem to refer to an internal purifying of the believer by the Spirit which was begun around the time of their water baptism (Acts 15:9). They were to be given a holy 'spirit' or mind / thinking.

11:17 *If then God gave to these the same gift as He also gave to us-* I suggest the gift they all essentially received was that of the purification of their hearts by the Spirit (Acts 15:9). And this is the same promise of the Spirit which is available to us too. It is true that both the apostles and the Gentile converts spoke in tongues, but I suggest that this was the external manifestation of the more essential internal change which was being effected.

*When we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ-* This reading may not be correct. The AV is equally faithful to the Greek in omitting the idea of 'when...': "us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ". If the idea of 'when we believed...' is indeed correct, the suggestion would therefore be that the apostles only fully believed in the Lord Jesus at Pentecost. It could be argued that as Jesus was only made Lord and Christ at His ascension (Acts 2:36), and therefore the disciples could only believe in Him as Lord and Christ after that point. Pentecost was the time chosen for them to make public their faith; I would not be surprised if they were all baptized in water at Pentecost, and then the Spirit came upon them in their hearts, and was publicly manifested in terms of the miraculous gifts. If this were indeed the case, the power of Peter's appeal to be baptized and receive the Spirit would've been so much more powerful- if indeed the preachers had themselves just been baptized and received the Spirit. Receipt of the Spirit is connected with water baptism throughout the New Testament; it comes at the point of belief. And the disciples received it at Pentecost. The implication would therefore be that this was when they were baptized. But admittedly the record is strangely silent about their baptism. Remember that Christian baptism, into the Lord's death

and resurrection, could only have been performed after His resurrection. Indeed, His command to be baptized was only given after His resurrection. So at some point after His resurrection, the disciples would have been baptized. Pentecost seems a reasonable option; otherwise, they would have been baptized but apparently not received the gift of the Spirit until Pentecost. The objection that their baptism isn't recorded is fair enough; but that problem remains, whichever view one takes of the timing of their baptism.

Growing appreciation of the excellency of the Lord Jesus was also a feature of Peter's spiritual growth; he was the first to coin the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 11:17); although *never* did he call the Lord simply "Jesus" (indeed it seems that none of the disciples addressed and rarely spoke about Jesus without giving Him a title). Trace through the path of Peter's growth on appreciation of the Lord's greatness: Mt. 16:22 (*arguing* with Him!); Acts 2:36; 10:36; 11:17. When Peter realized he was looking at the risen Christ standing on the shore, he exclaimed, with evident appreciation: "It is *the Lord*" - not 'Jesus' (Jn. 21:7). And even though he had to swim to meet Him, Peter cast his fisher's coat about him to cover his bare arms and legs. He realized the greatness which attached to the Man from Nazareth on account of His resurrection. After the pattern of Peter, some of the early brethren likewise reached this appreciation of the Lord's excellence *and the importance of it* as the climax of their probations; for many were slain simply because they insisted on calling Jesus of Nazareth "Lord", when Nero had insisted that *he* be called 'Lord' (cp. Acts 25:26). Those brethren (and sisters) died with the confession of Jesus as *Lord* on their lips- and more importantly, deep in their hearts.

*Who was I, that I could oppose God-* Peter challenged the legalistic brethren of his day with the question: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (Acts 10:47). The Greek word translated "forbid" presents a theme worth paying attention to. Peter uses the same word when he says later that if he had not baptized those Gentiles, then he would've been "withstanding" [s.w. "forbidding"] God Himself (Acts 11:17). This is serious. By forbidding people baptism we are forbidding God, because it is ultimately God through His Son who is the baptizer of people, thus inducting them into His people. This thought alone should make it very difficult for any of us to ever forbid baptism to someone who wants it. Great judgment is stored up for those who forbid others to preach the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:16). Diotrephes forbade brethren from fellowshiping with other brethren (3 Jn. 10)- and was roundly condemned for doing so. The disciples were rebuked for forbidding children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14)- this was 'much displeasing' to Jesus (Mk. 10:14, Gk. 'much much-grieved'); for forbidding the disciples of John the Baptist, with their alternative understandings of some things (Mk. 9:38); no man who works in Christ's Name should be forbidden, although the disciples evidently thought such a person should be forbidden (Mk. 9:39); the Jews are condemned for forbidding [s.w. "hindered"] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52; note that to make the way to entry hard and difficult, creating hoops which must be passed through, is effectively forbidding a man entry); the Eunuch's question as to what forbade him to be baptized was answered by Philip eliciting a simple confession of faith from him, that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 8:36).

The grace of God is manifested to the world through the preaching of the ecclesia; and in this sense, God has allowed His ability to manifest this Grace to be limited according to our effort in witness. Peter could have chosen not to baptize Gentiles; and if he had done so, he would have withstood God, like the Pharisees he would have frustrated the counsel of God (Acts 11:17). As in the Song of Solomon (1:8), the bride [the church] follows the sheep [believers]

to find the shepherd [Jesus]. The sheep lead others to the shepherd. God has “manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me” (Tit. 1:3).

*11:18 And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying: Then to the Gentiles also has God granted repentance to life-* This shows that He is active in developing our desire to repent; "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The same words were used by the apostles when teaching that God had "granted repentance to Israel" (5:31). That statement was not untrue, but now they recognized that they had only seen and preached a partial picture; for the gift of repentance was now rightly perceived as being to the Gentiles too.

God clearly works, potentially, on the hearts of people. In our moments of repentance, both at baptism and on the many subsequent occasions, it is hard to believe that in prospect God's enormous Spirit power has really prepared a way for us to be totally spiritual. Israel on Carmel with Elijah were in a similar position; thus Elijah prayed "Hear me, O Lord... that this people may know... that You have turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). He meant: 'They don't realize that you are so willing for them to repent, that in prospect you have touched their hearts and made them do it; answering my prayer dramatically may motivate them to make the necessary freewill response in repenting, so that the spiritual help you have made available in prospect, can be theirs in reality'. Even the frankest comparison of ourselves with that motley crew of hardened apostates should inspire afresh the belief within us that God is willing that all His people should continually come to repentance.

The road to eternal life involves repentance. Recognition of personal sin is utterly fundamental to salvation.

*11:19 Now those who were scattered-* The use of *diaspeiro* suggests that the scattered Christians were now the Israelite *diaspora*; they were the true Israel of God. The Greek literally means 'to be sown widely'; and indeed the seed of the Gospel was spread through this enforced migration.

*Because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch-* see on Acts 8:1.

*Speaking the word to no one except Jews-* They clearly assumed that the command to take the Gospel into all the world and to "every creature" referred to Jewish people worldwide. We too can read in an ellipsis into a section of God's word, so confident are we that our subconscious assumptions are the correct interpretation.

*11:20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they reached Antioch, spoke to the Gentiles also, preaching the Lord Jesus-* Why was it specifically here that the persecuted Jewish believers began to share the word with the Gentiles? The term used for "Gentiles" here can also mean 'Hellenists', i.e. Greek speaking Jews. Perhaps it was initially to them that they preached, but the ethnicity of these people in Antioch was unclear, and so it became impossible to divide full Gentiles from Greek speaking Jews- and thus the Gospel was spoken to the Gentiles. According to Plumptre, "It was a centre of vice, featuring the harlot-priestesses of Daphne and Apollo who on occasions engaged in public ceremonies "stripped of clothing". Heathenism in its most vulgar and debasing forms dominated the life of the people". One can assume therefore that there would have been Jews there who had intermarried with Gentiles; and yet in this immoral city, the



Gospel took off. Antioch became as it were the Jerusalem of the Gentile church. But it's rather like a church being founded in some deeply immoral area of a modern city; again, the Lord's choice is strange at first blush. It would've been so hard for the Jewish conservative Christians to accept that there had been mass conversions of Gentiles in such a place.

11:21 *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed-* The Lord's hand, His activity, resulted in people believing. Again we see that His outreach and grace towards men means that we are not left unaided as we face the choice between faith and unbelief. The Lord's hand works on the hearts of men, to give them faith and repentance (:18).

*Believed and turned to the Lord-* These are two separate things. The equivalent is maybe "The Corinthians believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The turning to the Lord would then refer to water baptism. Or the reference may be to the psychological activity of the Lord in turning hearts and minds to Himself. The same word is used in 3:19: "Repent... and be *converted*". After belief and baptism, there comes the process of conversion. It is something done to us by the Lord, as much as us seeking to make concrete changes ourselves. It is the duty of the preacher to turn people to the Lord (s.w. 26:18), and yet we must ever be aware that this is also His desire; and His spirit is at work seeking to turn our audience to Himself. "The hand of the Lord" seeks to do this; and any who remain unconverted, not turned to Him, have therefore resisted His hand, His operation in their lives and hearts. Only by wilfully closing the eyes and heart can someone disallow the Lord from converting / turning their heart to Him (28:27 s.w.). We must remember this when struggling with the problem of those who do not believe. Their unbelief is multifactorial, but one element of the equation is that the Lord has worked to try to win them.

11:22 - see on Acts 8:1.

*And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem-* The metaphor of the body is used for the local church, rather than the global body of Christ. It seems Paul's extended usage of the metaphor has the same reference.

*And they sent Barnabas as far as Antioch-* The Jerusalem ecclesia told Barnabas to go only as far as Antioch; he didn't tell them how wrong they were to boss him around. He went beyond Antioch to Tarsus, took Paul, and then went down to Antioch (:22,25). In the end, whilst we must respect those who deserve it, we are personal servants of the Lord who died for us, and we must follow Him according to our personal conscience. The lesson from this is that we should seek to be as positive as possible in the midst of this tension between right and left- especially in the way we write or speak about the problems. We should seek to move the Gospel forward, whatever unhappy disagreements there are between those already baptized.

11:23 *Who, when he had arrived and had seen the grace of God-* The idea is not simply that Barnabas saw how kind God had been in accepting the Gentiles. The gift [*charis*, s.w. "grace"] of God would have referred to the gift of the Spirit. With Cornelius, the receipt of the Spirit gifts by him was proof enough to the Jewish brethren that his conversion was *bona fide*. And so it was the same in Antioch- when Barnabas saw the evidence of the *charis* of God, the work of the Spirit, then he was assured that the conversions were valid.

*Was glad-* There is a play on words here. *Chairo*, "glad", is similar to *charis*, "grace" or "gift". The joy of Barnabas was exactly because the Gentile converts had been given the gift

of the Spirit, which was the proof of their legitimacy as converts. When those who have formally held a privileged position open the doors to others, it's a hard thing to be truly glad that you have lost your position of privilege. The joy of Barnabas and other Jewish brethren therefore indicates their utter humility and genuineness.

*And he encouraged them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord-* The Spirit gift of cleansing the heart must be responded to; 'use it or lose it' would be the appropriate slogan. Having seen evidence that they had received the gift of God, Barnabas urged them to do their part in maintaining that way of thinking / spirit.

11:24 *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit-* He was the right person to exhort the new converts to retain the gift of the Spirit, because he had done so himself, and was full of it. We also see that being full of the Spirit involved some personal effort- his 'goodness' was related to his being full of the Spirit. The gift is given by grace- but must be retained by our wilful decision to abide with the Lord.

*And many people were added to the Lord-* Luke likes to use this word "added". In 2:41,47 we read of converts being added to the church; here, they are added to the Lord. He is His church. The word *prostithemi* means literally to lay beside; it is used in describing how David was buried, being laid beside his fathers (13:36). For a convert to be laid beside the Lord suggests baptism, with all its symbolism of death and burial together with the Lord.

11:25 *And he went to Tarsus to seek out Saul-* The implication is that Saul / Paul had retreated within himself, returning to obscurity in his home town. Barnabas knew that Saul had the potential to do far more than that, and went to try to find him. We too need to make such efforts to encourage others to live up to their callings. Perhaps Barnabas was motivated by the fact that the amazing spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles had arisen as a result of Saul's persecution of the Christians (:19). Perhaps Saul was consumed with "over much sorrow" for his sins, and Barnabas wanted him to understand how wonderfully God had worked through them.

11:26 *And when he had found him-* Luke describes the work of Barnabas in terms of seeking (:25) and finding. It is Luke who records the parables of seeking and finding (Lk. 15:8). In those parables, it is the Lord Jesus who seeks and finds. But He works through His body on earth; in this case, Barnabas. Yet Barnabas used his own initiative in order to seek and find Saul.

*He brought him to Antioch-* This suggests Saul's relative passivity, implying that it was the initiative of Barnabas which resulted in Saul coming to Antioch.

*And it came to pass, that for a whole year they were gathered together with the church and taught many people-* The "they" grammatically appears to refer to Saul and Barnabas, hence the GNB: "the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group". This establishment of the Gentile mission centre in Antioch was due to Barnabas taking the initiative and going to search out Saul and bring him to Antioch. "The church" and the "many people" appear to have been two separate groups- the two brethren engaged in both pastoral and outreach work. This would have been in response to the call of the great commission, to teach the simple Gospel, baptize people, and then teach them all the Lord had commanded.

*And there in Antioch the disciples-* All Christians are disciples, 'learners'; the twelve men who followed the Lamb of God around Galilee, with all their misunderstandings and lack of faith, were and are symbols of us all. The focus was upon Him, not each other. We are all learners of Christ, taught by He Himself (Eph. 4:20,21). And we are to make all men into disciples (Mt. 28:19 RV); to make them learners of Jesus too.

*Were first called Christians-* It has been suggested that this was initially a term of insult and mockery. They were Christ-centred, and so were mocked as being 'the Christ-folk'. However, the term is used as a self-designation of the community by Peter (1 Pet. 4:16 cp. Acts 26:28). Or it could be that we can read this as meaning that they first gave themselves this name of 'the Christ folk'. In this case, yet again we see that the early community was centred around Jesus as the Christ, around a living person, rather than around a set of theories and abstract interpretations. Another option is that it was Paul and Barnabas who first coined the term. The Codex Bezae reads: "And hearing that Saul was at Tarsus, he departed, seeking for him; and having found him, he besought him to come to Antioch; who, when they were come, assembled with the Church a whole year, and instructed a great number; and there they first called the disciples at Antioch Christians". "Called" translates a word which usually refers to a Divine call; so another option would be that there was direct Holy Spirit revelation that the believers should brand themselves with the term 'Christian'. This needs to be given due weight by those who name the name of Christ but refuse to be called Christians.

*11:27 Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch-* One of them predicted a famine which would affect "all the world" (:28); yet the Antioch brethren gathered funds to send to Jerusalem to relieve "the believers that lived in Judea" (:29). Inevitably one wonders whether these prophets asked for material support in view of the predicted famine. And yet if they were predicting a world-wide famine, which would affect Antioch as much as Jerusalem, why was support only sent for the brethren in Judea / Jerusalem? Perhaps it was in order to demonstrate unity with different brethren of a different culture and ethnicity, and was therefore done in absolute selflessness, seeing that Antioch was presumably going to suffer as well.

*11:28 And one of them, named Agabus, stood up-* The Greek form of the Hebrew 'Hagab', meaning 'locust'. Locusts were understood as bringers of famine; so certain was the prophetic word, that the person bringing it was seen as the fulfilment of it.

*And foretold-* Gk. 'signified'. It could be that Agabus didn't simply predict a famine, but gave a symbolic vision which was interpreted as meaning that a famine would come.

*By the Spirit that there would be a great famine-* We have here a powerful example of what it means to believe the prophetic word. These brethren were so convinced that the prophecy would come true that they decided there and then, ahead of the predicted famine, to gather welfare for those who would be affected by it. There appears to be an allusion to Joseph, who so believed the dreams he interpreted about the seven years of famine that he arranged the gathering of welfare in order to cope with it. The coming of 'great famine' was a sign of the end of the age in the Olivet Prophecy (Lk. 21:11). We see how the stage was set for the Lord's coming in the first century; it was Israel's lack of repentance, and a paucity of evangelical zeal amongst the believers, which meant that His return was delayed. Until we learn the lesson.

*Over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius-* This only came true in a limited sense. Perhaps the massive wider reference was to flag attention to the way that this famine could fulfil the prophetic requirement of famine in many strange places (Mt. 24:7). I suggest that the extent of this famine wasn't effected, because the human conditions weren't right to allow the Lord to return.

11:29 *And the disciples, every man according to his ability-* Paul uses the same words in appealing to the Corinthians to likewise contribute for the brethren in Judea "every man according to" his opportunity (2 Cor. 9:7). He was thereby appealing to Corinth to follow the pattern of the Antioch ecclesia. Patterns of generosity are to be observed and imitated; for we take strength and patterns in giving from the example of others. There is also a reference to the parable of the talents- each were given according to their ability, and were to trade them. Here, the talents given is applied to whatever material resources we have.

The Mosaic Law countered the idea that only the rich can be generous. The purification after childbirth and the cleansing of the leper allowed a lower grade of offering to be made by the very poor- to underline that *no one* is exempted from giving to the Lord, no matter how poor they are. Consider the emphasis: "Every man shall give *as he is able*... he shall offer *even such as he is able to get*... then the disciples (consciously motivated by these principles?) *every man according to his ability*, determined to send relief [one gets the picture of a convoy of brethren going to Jerusalem, carrying a little bit of meal from Sister Dorcas, a few coins from brother Titus...] ... let *every one of you* lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (Dt. 16:17; Lev. 14:30,31; Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2).

*Decided to send relief to the believers that lived in Judea-* First century people were relatively passive to disasters compared to Western people today. A famine was an act of God, of nature, and it had to be accepted; the idea of one ethnic group taking up a collection for another one in another place who were suffering from famine was a real paradigm breaker. And that's just what Paul engineered, in arranging for the Gentile converts to take up such a collection for the Jewish believers in Palestine who were suffering famine.

11:30 *Which also they did-* This may appear redundant, until we realize that it is a common human tendency to 'decide' to be generous, but not actually do it. These brethren decided and also did it. And that is noted in the inspired record.

*Sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul-* This seems a wise pattern to follow in providing welfare relief.

## ACTS CHAPTER 12

12:1 *About that time-* The time of chapter 11, when the brotherhood in Judea were threatened with famine, and the Gospel was spreading to the Gentiles. It seems the persecution of the Jerusalem leadership was used by the Lord to encourage the Gentiles to take responsibility- for the Jewish leadership of the early church was then straight away put under pressure. This is how intricately the Lord coordinates situations in our lives and collective experiences.

*Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church-* This Greek phrase is often used about the leadership laying hands on the Lord Jesus. The church were fellowshiping the sufferings of their Lord, just as we do in essence; hence the same language is used. This is also the phrase which is used in the Olivet prophecy, only in Luke's account of it, about how in the last days, hands would be laid on the believers (Lk. 21:12). Luke clearly saw this action of Herod as fulfilling that prophecy. All was set up for the Lord's coming in glory; the signs which depended upon God for fulfilment all came true. But Israel's lack of repentance and the lack of evangelical zeal to take the Gospel world-wide meant that the human preconditions weren't met, and so His coming has been delayed until our last days.

12:2 *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword-* Several commentators claim that the phrase 'to kill with the sword' means beheading. James was the first recorded martyr for the faith; and again (see on :1), Luke is recording this framed to show that the Olivet prophecy was coming true. The Lord had predicted that James would drink of His cup (Mt. 20:22,23), and so it happened. It's worth noting that there is no record of anyone being raised up to replace James and to thereby maintain the number of the 12. This gives the lie to Catholic claims of an apostolic succession.

12:3 *And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And those were the days of unleavened bread-* Luke uses the same word in recording how the Lord was 'seized', and "Peter followed afar off" (Lk. 22:54). Now, the implication is, after a period of following the Lord, it was Peter's turn to experience His sufferings more directly. There are many similarities with the Lord's sufferings- e.g. it was to "please the Jews" (:2). Hence the comment: "And those were the days of unleavened bread". It was Passover time- the very time of the Lord's sufferings. We too are led to fellowship with the Lord's sufferings, and our familiarity with the records of them will help us to perceive this more quickly.

12:4 *And when he had taken him-* A word repeatedly used about the Lord's being 'taken' by the Jewish opposition (Jn. 7:30,32,44; 8:20; 10:39; 11:57). Again, we see the development of the theme that the Lord's final sufferings were being replicated in Peter.

*He put him in prison-* Surely to test Peter's confident claim that he was ready to go to prison and death for his Lord (only recorded by Luke- Lk. 22:33). The Lord likewise has a way of testing our confident claims about our loyalty to Him. It's worth noting that Herod had earlier arrested John the Baptist and 'put him into prison' (the same words are used; Mt. 14:3), again in order to please another party- in that case, Herodias. That similarity would have led Peter to suspect that Herod would likewise behead him in prison as he had John. Our sufferings are so often in terms and tones similar to those of others, and this is because we are to take strength from them and to see that we are not alone.

*And delivered him-* A word so often used about the handing over of the Lord to death.

*To four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover-* The Greek for 'squad' refers to a group of four soldiers; four such squads meant 16 in all.

*To bring him out to the people-* The Greek word Luke uses about what was done to the Lord (Lk. 22:66).

12:5 *Therefore Peter was kept in the prison; but earnest prayer was offered to God-* The guarding of Peter in prison is placed in opposition to earnest prayer being offered; as if worldly forces were in struggle with spiritual ones, and the spiritual prevailed. "Earnest" is literally 'unceasing', and the word is only used elsewhere by Peter, in appealing for unceasing love within the church (1 Pet. 4:8). He would have recalled how unceasing prayer had been offered for him- and he urged the church to show such love to others.

*For him by the church- Huper*, translated "for", is what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation" (Dorothee Sölle, *Christ The Representative* (London: S.C.M., 1967) p. 69). Our prayer for others is effectively our representation of them before the throne of Heaven and the Divine court. And this of course is exactly what the Lord Jesus has done and continues to do for us; mediating *huper* us, as our representative. What He has done for us, we are not to merely lamely accept; we are to do the same in essence for others. And the clearest way we reflect it is through prayer *huper* others, feeling with them and for them, and bringing those feelings before the Father in prayer for them.

12:6 *And when Herod was about to bring him out, that same night-* This reflects how the Jewish day began at sunset. That night was the day in which Herod intended to 'bring him out' to death. In this kind of careful congruence we see evidence of inspiration and every verisimilitude. The language of 'bringing him out' naturally recalls the trial of the Lord Jesus before His death.

*Peter was sleeping-* A great essay in faith and the peace which comes from it. For it seemed obvious that that night would be his last, and death awaited him in the morning.

*Between two soldiers-* Recalling the Lord's death between two thieves.

*Bound with two chains-* The record gives much detail about Peter's binding and guarding by the soldiers. We learn there were four squads of four soldiers guarding him (:4), there is the apparently unnecessary repetition of the fact he was guarded (:5), and now we learn that he slept with a separate chain connecting him to a separate soldier. All that was humanly possible had been done, to ensure there was no escape. All this sets the scene for the amazing deliverance wrought by the Lord that night. Significantly, the Lord overruled it that Paul was later likewise bound with two chains (Acts 21:33); encouraging Paul to see his ministry as parallel to that of Peter. However, as I have elsewhere suggested, Paul seems to have pretended to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than accepting that his ministry was to be parallel to Peter's, but not identical with it. See on 12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*. It's also noteworthy that Peter later chose to describe the essence of condemnation as being in chains, in darkness, awaiting judgment (2 Pet. 2:4). He surely wrote that with recollection of how he had been left in exactly the same position that night in prison- and been saved out of it.

*And guards before the door were guarding the prison-* Another example of apparently excessive detail about the guarding. See on *Bound with two chains*. It also recalls the guards

guarding the Lord's tomb. This is the second time in Acts that the "guards before the door" have been rendered powerless (Acts 5:23 uses the same Greek words).

12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*- Exactly as happened to Paul (Acts 27:23); see on 12:6 *Bound with two chains*. Luke uses the same language as in Lk. 2:9, where the Angel of the Lord stands by the shepherds and again, the light shines. It's unclear what exact point Luke is trying to make by demonstrating the similarity. Perhaps it was that the Lord was demonstrating to Peter that the events of His life were being replicated in Peter's; just as they are in the experiences of all who are in Christ.

*And a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying: Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands*- Yet another similarity with the Lord's crucifixion. The Greek verb translated 'strike' is usually used in the New Testament with the sense of striking with a fatal wound. This makes the next phrase so significant: "... and woke him", AV "raised him up". The similarities with the keepers / guards being stricken helpless at the resurrection and the glory of the Lord shining... all this was to help Peter to understand that the essence of the Lord's death and resurrection was being worked out in him. We note the subsequent disbelief of the male disciples as they fearfully prayed in a locked room, contrasted with the faith of a woman [Rhoda]; this was clearly looking back to the situation at the Lord's resurrection. His death and resurrection are being continually lived out in our experience too; baptism is a signal that we are prepared for that ongoing participation in His death and resurrection.

12:8 *And the angel said to him: Dress yourself and put on your sandals*- When the Angel told Peter this, he was alluding back to the Lord's words to Peter, that when he would be old, others would gird him and carry him to his death (Jn. 21:18). The Angel was therefore saying that the time of Peter's death had not yet come. The lesson is, that the amount of comfort and reassurance Peter took from the Angels' words would have been proportionate to the degree to which he had meditated on his Lord's prophecy. And so with us. See on :10 for another example.

*And he did so. And he said to him: Wrap your cloak around you and follow me*- "Follow me" is a phrase used 18 times elsewhere, and always about following the Lord Jesus. Peter struggled with this- he was told to stop trying to persuade the Lord against death on the cross, and instead to follow Him; and at the end of John's Gospel, Peter again has to be reminded of the need to follow his Lord. So here we are surely to perceive the Lord Jesus speaking through the Angel at this point; the call to follow Him comes to us in the most unusual circumstances.

12:9 *And he went out and followed*- This might imply that the following and the going out were separate things. Peter's willingness to get dressed and leave the cell was a test of his faith. The commands to dress were likewise not simply the Angel's thoughtfulness because of the cold of the night which Peter would experience. Rather was it all a test and development of Peter's faith and obedience.

*And he did not perceive that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he was seeing a vision*- This was precisely the position of the prayerful believers that same night (:15); and again, it was only after the opening of a door that they believed (:16). Peter was weak in believing that his prayers that night were being answered right before his eyes; and his awareness of his failure surely helped him to be patient with the failure of his own

brethren that night. For at a prayer meeting, they received the answer to their prayers- and dismissed it as 'madness', as a mad woman seeing a vision. Which was precisely what Peter had done. So often, human weakness repeats between believers; and this is also under the hand of providence. It is intended, surely, to enable us to achieve patient forgiveness and fellowship with each other.

12:10 *And when they were past the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city-* There is huge variation in the amount of detail in the Biblical records. Many years of the lives of men like Peter aren't recorded; but here we have the finest details of a few moments of his life. This is to help us play Bible television with the material; so that we can attempt to reconstruct and relive this wonderful scene.

"The iron gate that leads into the city" was likely what was known as "the prison gate", and this gate is mentioned only one other time in the Bible. Neh. 12:39 records that it was at this gate that the celebrating Israelites met and sung praise to God when Jerusalem was finally revived under Nehemiah. As noted under 12:8 *Dress yourself and put on your sandals*, Peter would have taken encouragement from this, as he doubtless felt full of praise himself, according to whether or not he picked up the allusion to the Nehemiah record. So many things in our lives likewise are nudges and hints towards Biblical accounts- but if we fail to perceive them, then those things remain in the large mass of apparently irrelevant and unexplained furniture in our lives.

*This opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel departed from him-* Whilst walking with the Angel, Peter must have thought that nothing possibly could go wrong for him; but the Angel continued with him, it was just not visible. The 'leaving' was therefore just from his earthly perspective.

"Passed on" implies literally 'to follow'; the situation is replete with reference to the Angel opening the iron gates of Egypt at Passover time and leading Israel out. Further, the idea in :11 that "the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting" alludes clearly to the Lord sending an Angel to deliver Israel from Pharaoh [= Herod] and the Egyptians [= the Jews]. This all gives the impression that this was yet another level of conversion for Peter; again he was being 'converted', brought out of Egypt to light, just as we too have various levels of conversion, and the essence of baptism becomes an ongoing daily experience.

12:11 *And when Peter came to himself, he said: Now I know of a truth-* This Greek phrase, and the idea of 'knowing of a truth', is quite common in the Bible (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Jn. 4:42; 6:14). The idea is that there are things we know, but experience brings us to know them of a truth. Job heard by the hearing of the ear, and then through his sufferings came to see it all for real as personal truth. This is why the knowledge of the Gospel learnt before baptism is merely knowledge; it is through the Lord's personal program for us in subsequent life, that that knowledge is known by us in truth. And we must be patient as others are led along that same path of converting mere ideas, theology, lines in a statement of faith, into personal truth. See on 12:12 *Considered*.

*Now I know of a truth, that the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting-* Peter was delivered from prison as a result of the Angel being "sent forth"- from the court of Heaven, by the prayers of the other believers at their prayer meeting (Acts 12:11 RV). When those same believers



commented: "It is his Angel" (:15) they were perhaps not mocking Rhoda; rather they were thanking God that Peter's guardian Angel had indeed been sent forth due to their prayers. See on :10 "Passed on".

12:12 *And when he had considered the thing*- The Greek doesn't mean this, but rather means 'to know'. We can pass through an experience, but now 'know' it until we have processed it with faith. See on 12:11 *Now I know of a truth*.

*He came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark*- Peter later refers to John Mark as his [spiritual] son (1 Pet. 5:13). We sense here therefore the deep family relationships forged by our experience in Christ.

*There many were gathered together and were praying*- Do we hold such all night prayer meetings? To pray all night requires quite some psychological stamina. However, note the difference between "gathered together" and "praying". They came together to be together in their thoughts about Peter, "and were praying" at that gathering, but not necessarily every minute of the night. The powerful lesson is that even these highly committed believers were of limited faith- for when the answer to their night of prayer knocked at the door, they laughed at anyone who thought such an answer was possible. We too must ask whether we pray in the real hope of answer; or whether our praying is more for our benefit.

12:13 *And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer*- Probably a Gentile name, perhaps reflecting her origin from Rhodes. We have a hint here of how Gentiles were already amongst the inner circle of the early church; and how they had more faith than their senior Jewish brethren. In any case, we find another similarity with the Lord's resurrection- that it was a woman who first believed in His deliverance from the iron gates of death, whilst the senior apostles didn't believe and mocked her as mad, just as they did Mary Magdalene. See on :15 *Confidently affirmed*.

12:14 *And when she recognised Peter's voice*- The similarities with Peter's betrayal of the Lord are clear. Again, he is standing at a gate; and again, a servant girl recognizes his voice without clearly seeing him. And she "told everyone" that it was Peter. The parallels are such that we wonder whether Rhoda was in fact the servant girl who recognized Peter by his voice in the High Priest's courtyard. In this case, we have yet another wonderful example of how the Lord works through human weakness and betrayal of His Son; for through that whole shameful incident, that young woman was brought to faith in Christ, as she witnessed the amazing repentance of Peter. It was his weakness and the way he dealt with it which persuaded thousands on the day of Pentecost; and perhaps amongst them was a young Gentile servant girl called Rhoda.

*She did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside*- Another connection with how 'mad' Mary ran to the same disciples with joy that the Lord had been delivered. The similarities are such that we can conclude that this repetition of circumstance was in order to test the disciples; and again they failed, as we do so often.

*And told everyone*- The language of the great commission, about telling everyone the good news of the Lord's deliverance from the gates of death.

*That Peter stood before the gate*- The language of the risen Lord standing before the door, about to return, if His followers believed in Him enough (James 5:9).

*12:15 And they said to her: You are mad-* The believers gathered together to hold a prayer meeting for Peter's release. Their prayers were answered; he stood outside, knocking on the door. But they simply didn't believe it. They couldn't conceive their prayer was answered. They mocked poor Rhoda and told her to go back and watch the door and not disturb them any more while they prayed for Peter's release. And having mocked her, they got back on their knees and asked again for his release. We can pray, in faith apparently, but with no very deep faith that the answer in actual reality will happen or may already have been granted.

*But she confidently affirmed that it was so-* The only other time this Greek word occurs is again in Luke's writing, when describing how the girl in the courtyard confidently affirmed that Peter was Peter (Lk. 22:59). For me, this clinches the identity of that girl with Rhoda; see on :13 *Rhoda*.

*And they said: It is his angel-* The early church clearly believed in the [Biblical] concept of guardian Angels who represent us and can therefore be understood to appear as us before the court of Heaven.

*12:16 But Peter continued knocking-* Strikingly similar to the appeal to keep on knocking so that the door will be opened (Lk. 11:9,10). The figure of knocking is also used about the Lord Jesus knocking on the door of His church (Lk. 12:36; Rev. 3:20). And thus faithful Peter was to be understood as representative of the risen Lord Jesus, as we have pointed out earlier in this exposition.

*And when they had opened, they saw him and were amazed-* The strength of the Greek word reflects upon their lack of faith in the prayers they had just been offering. The word is translated "mad" in Mk. 3:21 and 2 Cor. 5:13. The obvious inversion of ideas is in the fact that they had just accused Rhoda of being mad (:15). It was they who were, as it were, mad. And again, Luke is bringing out the similarities with the Lord's resurrection; for the same group of male disciples were "amazed" (s.w.) by the testimony of the women who had met the risen Lord (Lk. 24:22).

*12:17 But he, motioning with the hand to hold their peace, declared to them how -* Paul is twice recorded as doing the same (Acts 13:16; 21:40). Was this a reflection of how he had unconsciously absorbed the example of fisherman Peter and so sought to emulate it? Or was he consciously pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews- rather than focusing upon being himself and focusing on the very different ministry the Lord had given him?

*The Lord had brought him out of the prison-* When the Angel 'brought Peter forth out of the prison', this is recorded as "the Lord" (Jesus) doing so. He worked through [one specific?] Angel.

*And he said: Tell these things-* The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brothers...". Here in Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Tell these things... to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. Peter specifically said: "Tell these things to James and to the brothers"- just as the Lord had told the women to go and tell *Peter*, and the brothers. Peter perhaps saw James

in the same position as he had been in. From our own experience of faithlessness and weakness, we are able to appear to others.

*To James and to the brothers-* There seem to be a number of unconscious allusions by Peter back to his own failures- and this is an example. It was an allusion to the women being told to go and shew the news of the resurrection to the brethren *and Peter*, who was then in spiritual crisis. Those words, that fact, was ingrained upon Peter to the point that he unconsciously builds it in to his own words. Here the same Greek words are used by Peter as by the Lord: "Go shew these things... to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection.

*And he departed and went to another place-* The way Peter beckons to the disciples to hold their peace, declares how the Lord had brought him out of the prison and death, tells them to go and shew these things to the brethren and then goes "unto another place" is a reflection of the Lord's behaviour after His resurrection (cp. Mt. 28:19). Consciously and unconsciously, confirmed by providence, Peter was living out the fact he was in Christ; he was showing the risen Lord to men and women by his words and actions.

12:18 *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small anxiety among the soldiers about what had become of Peter-* Again, a similarity with the Lord's resurrection.

12:19 *And when Herod had searched for him and not found him-* This sounds as if Herod personally searched, presumably going to the prison personally.

*He examined the guards, and commanded that they should be put to death-* This has echoes of the punishment of those entrusted with the murder of Daniel.

*And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there-* Herod had intended to kill Peter because he wanted to please the Jews (:3). But he invested so much in what originally was just a political move, that he became obsessed with it. And now it backfired, he took it so personally that he moved his residence out of Judaea to Caesarea. This is how our human minds degenerate; an insincere decision or policy adopted becomes a personal obsession, and then when we are shown to be fighting against the Lord's way, there is hurt pride which results in destruction.

12:20 *Now Herod was highly displeased with those at Tyre and Sidon-* "highly displeased" translates a Greek term which seems to mean 'to prepare war'. Hence they "asked for peace". The incident naturally recalls the Lord's parable of the mighty King who must be asked for peace, referring to how we must make peace with Him; and again we note that it is Luke who records this (Lk. 14:31). The connection may be to demonstrate that Herod was acting as God; and this is stated in so many words in :22. The way Blastus serves to reconcile Herod and these people would then look forward to the Lord's work between God and man.

*They came with one accord to him and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace-* Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world were in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29). The two women of

Proverbs both have surface similarities; folly parodies wisdom. Thus the words of the adulteress drip honey and oil (Prov. 5:3), just as those of wisdom do (Prov. 16:24). Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom.

*Because their country was fed from the king's country-* Tyre and Sidon were city states belonging to Syria, with no agricultural land. They were therefore dependent upon food supplies from Herod's territory. Perhaps the famine of 11:28, or at least, the famines associated with the last days of AD70, led to tensions over food supplies.

12:21 *And upon a set day-* Perhaps a Jewish feast day, or a day of religious significance, upon which Herod wished to present himself as a Divine figure.

*Herod dressed himself in Royal apparel-* Literally, 'the clothing of the Kingdom'. He was wilfully playing God.

*And sat on the throne and delivered an oration to them-* In imitation of the Lord sitting on His judgment throne [*bema*] specifically refers to a judgment throne, and giving his verdict as if it were the Lord's.

12:22 *And the people shouted: The voice of a god and not of a man-* They clearly perceived that Herod wished himself to be perceived as Divine, and so they went along with his wish; for they desired peace with him. Roman emperors and leaders frequently presented themselves as Divine figures; and Revelation brings out the tension between accepting Jesus as Lord, and being part of the Roman empire with its cult of emperor worship. We may never go this far in brazen blasphemy, but we are all tempted to 'play God'. And we are also all in situations where at times, folks glorify *us* when the glory needs to go to God; and it is imperative that we remind others of our humanity. Paul and Peter were several times in such situations, and their eagerness to assure others of their humanity was perhaps partly in order to avoid the kind of condemnation which came upon Herod.

12:23 *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give God the glory-* It would appear that he did not die immediately, because his death is described as through being "eaten by worms", presumably a reference to some kind of cancer. Perhaps this method of death was chosen rather than instant death in order to give him a chance of repentance.

*And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last-* Not literally. Rather is this the language of the day being used to describe illnesses such as cancer which were not then understood. There should be no surprise, therefore, that the language of the day for mental illness is also used in the Bible. This explains the usage of 'demon possession' in the Gospels.

12:24 *But the word of God grew and multiplied-* The number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus "the word of God" is put by metonymy for 'the response to the word of God', as if the word will inevitably bring forth response. We must believe, really and truly, that the word

will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. It's also possible to speculate that the multiplication of God's word might refer to a growth in the availability of the written, inspired word of God in the form of the Gospel records, which were likely starting to appear in written form about this time.

The contrast is surely with how the people had claimed that Herod's voice was the word of God and not of man (:22). Here we see God's extreme sensitivity to attitudes to His word. The point is being made that the mimic of God's word soon fell silent, whereas God's true word grew. Our attitude to God's word in the Bible should reflect His understandable sensitivity to His word; just as we too are sensitive if others pay no attention to what we are saying or our efforts to communicate with them.

*12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their service-* The AV says that Paul 'fulfilled his ministry'; and he can use the same two words in telling Archippus to ensure that he too fulfils *his* ministry (Col. 4:17). Surely Paul is setting himself up as a pattern, and inviting his brother to follow it. The specific "service" in view was the taking of donations from Antioch to Jerusalem (11:30). Having done this once, it became Paul's desire to do it again, when he attempted to gather donations from Asia for a Jerusalem Poor Fund. The record may be making the point that Paul was in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's deliverance from prison; this experience was intended to cultivate his faith, ready for the times when he would be imprisoned.

*Taking with them John whose surname was Mark-* The cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). Some changed their Hebrew names into the Latin forms when they went on mission work into the Roman world: Silas became Silvanus, Saul became Paulus, Joseph Barsabbas became Justus (Acts 1:23); and hence we read of "John, whose other [Latin] name was Mark" (:12,25). We have here an example of becoming all things to all men in our witness to the world.

## ACTS CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers-* The prophets 'spoke forth' God's word under inspiration, and the teachers relayed, distributed and interpreted this.

*Symeon that was called Niger-* Perhaps the same person as Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross (Mt. 27:32). Simon is listed here next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd. Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, "called Niger", a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that all His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church.

*And Lucius of Cyrene-* Perhaps one of the men of Cyrene converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) who fled to Antioch from the persecution in Jerusalem.

*And Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul-* The mention of Herod's title was perhaps to demonstrate how the Gospel had spread amongst the elite, and also within the circles of those who had been so bitterly opposed to it. This is a tacit reference to the immense power of the message.

13:2 - see on Acts 18:18.

*And as they ministered to the Lord-* All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was *as* Barnabus and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was *as* the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the

book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll (2 Chron. 34:14).

*And fasted-* Perhaps for guidance as to how to further progress the Lord's work. For the response to this fasting was to call Barnabas and Saul to go forth. Have you fasted for such guidance in your own ministry?

*The Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul-* Paul uses the same word to describe how he had been 'set apart' for his missionary work from before creation (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). Now the time had come for that ancient plan to be realized. But Paul had the freewill not to respond to it. He was not bound to go forth in his missionary work just because it had been planned from the beginning. There are for each of us good works prepared for us to execute in our lives (Eph. 4:10), but we do them by our own freewill. There are many such works, and many individuals, who do not respond. And in this must be the tragedy of God; that He has arranged the potential for us to perform or achieve much for Him, which is not performed because of our dysfunction or unbelief. We are never better than when we are fluently responding, open to God's intentions for us, and sensing His willing us forward in the service He intended for us.

*For the work-* Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching: "I *work a work* in your days, which ye will in no wise believe though *a man* declare it unto you". And so when we read of the *men* Barnabas and Saul being sent out on the *work* of the first missionary journey, we are to see an allusion back to Hab. 1:5 (Acts 13:2; 14:26). And yet that passage went on to say that the work would not be believed. Yet hoping against hope, they embarked on the missionary journey. Cyprus didn't respond, initially- as they had expected. But soon their positive spirit was rewarded, and converts were made, against all odds.

*Unto which I have called them-* In Acts 16:10, the same word is used of how Paul proved or concluded that he had been called to preach the Gospel to Gentiles. The implication could be that he somehow doubted his calling- he would far rather have been the apostle to the Jews. Later in this exposition I seek to demonstrate that Paul struggled with his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles, preferring rather to fill Peter's role. The parable of the talents suggests the Lord has specific hopes and callings for each of us, and man is never better than when he is working at those callings with the Lord's every support and blessing.

13:3 *Then, when they had fasted and prayed-* It was as they did those things that the Lord opened the way for Barnabas and Saul to depart on their missionary journey. Yet the process continued. This is the spirit in which we should live life in His service.

*And laid their hands on them, they sent them away-* The next verse says that they were "sent forth by the Holy Spirit" (:4), thus drawing a parallel between the "prophets and teachers" in Antioch and the Holy Spirit. Whilst we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, it is also so that we are to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), following the Lord's leading in His service. The laying hands upon the missionaries may therefore have been more than simply expressing unity with them, but could have been a granting of Holy Spirit to them, empowering them for the task ahead of them. In the Old Testament, hands were laid upon the sacrificial animals as a sign of identity, and we should not think that every 'laying on of hands' was in order to impart a blessing of Holy Spirit power; it was also simply an act of identity with the person.

13:4 *So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit-* See on :3.

*Went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus-* Judaism spoke of going up to Jerusalem and going down from it. But that concept is now transferred to Antioch, the centre of the early Christian mission at this time. This is another hint that Jerusalem was no longer the 'mecca' of God's people.

From Seleucia, Cyprus would have been visible from there on a clear day. So far as we know, the Holy Spirit had stated that there was a specific work for Barnabas, Saul and John Mark to do; but it's unclear to what extent they had to work out the plans and itinerary on their own initiative. Seeing that Cyprus was visible from Seleucia, it might have seemed the obvious first destination in an attempt to take the Gospel over the seas. And Barnabas was from there; perhaps they concluded that this was the logical overseas destination for the Gospel.

13:5- see on Acts 4:24-30.

*And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God-* Literally, the *logos* of God, which is the Lord Jesus. "The word of God" was a common Old Testament term for the prophetic word spoken through the prophets, but that had now come to a climax in the word about Jesus.

*In the synagogues of the Jews-* The movement of the Spirit was clearly for Saul to go "far hence unto the Gentiles", but he immediately begins his missionary work on arrival at the capital, Salamis, as he sadly continued it- with a stubborn obsession with preaching to the Jews, when this was Peter's work.

*They had also John to assist them-* Gk. 'to be their minister'. There was typically a minister or assistant attached to the synagogues, and so the impression may be that Saul and Barnabas were effectively taking over as the rabbis of the synagogues, and John Mark was their minister. Or perhaps the idea is that Saul preached as a Rabbi, and John Mark was his minister.

13:6 *And when they had gone through the whole island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet-* Perhaps to point out that the predictions of Luke 21 about the scenario in the last days was being fulfilled. He claimed to be "Bar Jesus", literally 'son of Jesus'; perhaps he actually purported to be the returned Jesus. Such a false Christ and false prophet surely met the terms of the Olivet Prophecy; again we see that the conditions were ripe for the Lord's return, but He didn't come because the human factors failed. Israel didn't repent, and the church became divided and lacking the Spirit. We must ask whether our last days will be different.

*A Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus-* Again we sense the focus, if not obsession, with engaging with Jews; see on :5.

13:7 *Who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of understanding-* See on 13:12 *The proconsul... believed.*

*The same summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God-* We can speculate that through Sergius Paulus trying to get the preachers into trouble with the proconsul, the Gospel was preached on a high level and with success. For Elymas was "with"



Sergius Paulus, as if he had influence over him; and therefore under this influence, Sergius Paulus summoned the missionaries. But the plan of Elymas badly backfired; encouragement that no weapon formed against the work of the Gospel will ultimately succeed.

13:8 *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) opposed them-* The scene is reminiscent of Satan, the Arabic adversary of the Jews, standing before the Angel with Joshua-Jesus the priest standing on the other (Zech. 3:1,2). The impression is given of the proconsul being preached to by Paul, whilst Elymas tried to persuade him otherwise. The similarity is appropriate because "Elymas" appears to be an Arabic word, from the Arabic *elim*, 'the wise', and he was likely an Arab. The scene also recalls the Egyptian magicians 'opposing' Moses before Pharaoh.

*Seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith-* The same Greek word is found in :10, where Elymas is accused of 'perverting' the "right ways of the Lord". The word seems to specifically mean to misinterpret; we have the impression that as Paul preached to the proconsul, Elymas stood there eagerly saying 'Ah, but what they really mean by that is *this...*'. These two verses state that both the listener [Sergius Paulus] and the message were 'perverted'. The listener is thus identified with the message; as in the parable of the sower, the Gospel takes lodgement within a person, and they become identified with it.

13:9 *But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him-* It can be no accident that Saul appears to have changed his name to 'Paul', "the little one", at the time of his first missionary journey. His preaching of the Gospel was thus related to his own realization of sinfulness, as reflected in his name change. And so it has ever been. Saul becomes Paul in so many lives. True self-abnegation, recognition of our moral bankruptcy, our desperation, and the extent of the grace we have received... these two paradoxical aspects, fused together within the very texture of human personality, are what will arrest the attention of others in this world and lead them to the Truth we can offer them.

### Saul and Paul

Various expositors have noticed the links between Saul and Paul. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was directly matched by 'Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Christians?'. The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution was surely to remind him of what King Saul had done to David (1 Sam. 19:12). They were both Benjamites, and perhaps his parents saw him as following in Saul's footsteps. And it seems Paul was aware of this. The implication is that by Acts 13:9 Paul consciously changed his name from Saul to Paul ('the little one'). It is difficult to avoid seeing the link with 1 Sam. 15:17: "When thou wast little (Heb. 'the littlest one') in thine own sight", God anointed Saul and made him the *rosh*, the chief, over Israel. Maybe Paul's parents intended him to be the *rosh* over Israel; and it seems he would have made it had he not been converted. I suggest that 1 Sam. 15:17 rung in Paul's mind. He saw how he had persecuted Christ, as Saul had David. He saw the self-will within him as it was in Saul. Yet he went on to see the tragedy, the utter tragedy, of that man. He saw how pride had destroyed a man who could have achieved so much for God. And he determined that he would learn the lesson from Saul's failure (as he determined to learn the lessons from those of John the Baptist and Peter). So he changed his name to Paul, the little one. What influence his sustained meditation on one Old Testament verse had upon him! It affected some basic decisions in his life; e.g. the decision to change his name. There was a time, according to the Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 15:17, when Saul felt he was 'the littlest one' (as demonstrated in 1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22). This was so, so pleasing to God. Saul at that moment,

captured as it were in a snapshot, as the obvious, anointed King of Israel hid among the baggage, knowing in his heart he was no way suited to be the leader of God's Israel, was Paul's hero. And Paul alludes to it when he says he is less than the *least* of all saints, *least* of the apostles, chief of sinners (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15- note the progressive realisation of his sinfulness over time). He earnestly resolved to be like Saul was at the beginning. When he describes himself as "anointed" (2 Cor. 1:21) he surely had his eye on 1 Sam. 15:17 again; when Saul was little in his own eyes, he was anointed. Paul tried to learn the lessons from Saul, and re-apply Saul's characteristics in a righteous context. Thus Saul was jealous (1 Sam. 18:8; 19:1), and Paul perhaps had his eye on this when he describes himself as jealous for the purity of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2). "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) is surely a reference back to Saul's *disobedience* (1 Sam. 15:22).

13:10 *And said, You son of the devil*- The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'Devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the Devil" is a "liar" – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" – clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the Devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "son of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel.

"You son of the Devil" is implying he was a tare sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:38).

*You enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and all villainy, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*- Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come (Lk. 3:4), so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

"The right ways" is literally, the straight streets. The same word is used of the street called "Straight" where Paul was baptized (Acts 9:11). That street was chosen in order to demonstrate to Paul how his new life was to be walked along a straight way or street, towards the Kingdom; remembering how John the Baptist's mission had been to make straight [s.w.] the Lord's paths or roads (Mt. 3:3).

13:11 *And now, the hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind-* This foreshadowed how the rejected will be sent to a mist of darkness (2 Pet. 2:17). Thick darkness is associated with God's judgment (Is. 8:22; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)- and recall how the judgment of darkness upon Egypt was so severe that human movement required 'groping' (Ex. 10:21). Perhaps there will be a literal element to this in the experience of the rejected. Be that as it may, the utter *pointlessness* of life without God will be so bitterly apparent. And yet they would not face up to it in their day of opportunity.

*Not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand-* It is possible that this was so that he had to be led by the hand (Acts 13:11); it is all so reminiscent of Paul's own experience in 9:8 that it would seem he was consciously seeking to replicate his own conversion in the life of another man. And this is, indeed, the very essence of preaching from a grateful heart. He saw the power that worked in Him as working in all of us (Eph. 3:7,20). Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that you should know his will" (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction.

13:12 *Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord-* Paul's name change from Saul to Paul occurred whilst in Cyprus- where he met Sergius Paulus and preached the Gospel to him (Acts 13:7). It would seem that Paul took the name of this Gentile to represent how his work with the Gentiles had become so fundamentally a part of him. From there, Paul went to Antioch and preached there. Why did he do that? Bruce Chilton has pointed out that there is archaeological evidence in Antioch that Sergius Paulus of Cyprus was in fact from there and there are plaques and inscriptions recording how he had funded things in the town (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 117). The guess is that this man became Paul's patron for a while, and sent him to preach the Gospel to his family in Antioch; hence, as the custom was, Saul of Tarsus took the name of his patron. And perhaps reflecting upon how this was all so providential in spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, Saul kept that name. The providence of the situation becomes the more interesting when we reflect that as a Roman Governor, bound to perform pagan rituals and be loyal to Caesar, Sergius Paulus may never himself have accepted the faith. The way John Mark returned to Jerusalem at this point (Acts 13:13) may simply be because he considered that all this was too much- following what appeared to be a whim of chance and calling it God's hand. For Antioch [not Antioch on the Orontes] was in the backwoods of Asia Minor, and it would've seemed crazy to go into such a distant and insignificant area all because of a 'chance' meeting with a generous Roman Governor.

13:13- see on Acts 6:1.

*Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem-* John Mark was an example of one 'brought up in

it' (almost) who made it real for himself in the very end. His mother Mary owned the home where the first ecclesia met in Jerusalem- he would have known all the leading lights, the doubts, the joys, the fears, the debates of the early church. Barnabas was his kindly uncle, who took him on the first missionary journey with Paul. Cyprus was OK, but once they landed at Perga, Paul insisted on leaving the coast road and going up the dangerous road to preach on the uplands; and Mark quit, scared perhaps to risk his life that far. And so he went back to his mum in Jerusalem, and the safety of the home ecclesia. And no doubt he was warmly welcomed home, as the Jerusalem ecclesia by then were beginning to consider Paul as apostate. But over the months, things changed. John Mark wanted to go again, and his uncle Barnabas encouraged him. But Paul would have none of it. That rejection must have sorely hurt Mark; and we hear nothing more of him for about 15 years. Then, when Paul was in prison, he starts to get mentioned. He is called there Paul's "fellow-prisoner" (Col. 4:10), as if he too had been imprisoned for his bold preaching. To Philemon, Paul writes that Mark is his "fellow-worker"; and in his last days, he begs Mark to come and see him (2 Tim. 4:9-11). Peter also, probably writing likewise from Rome ["Babylon"] mentions Mark as his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13), and tradition has it that Mark wrote down Peter's Gospel. So the young brother who possibly had been made flabby by the nice background, eventually made it real for himself in the end.

*13:14 But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day-* This again sounds as if this focus upon the Jews was customary for Paul. And yet the work to which he had been called by the Holy Spirit was specifically to the Gentiles (:2). But in tension with that, Paul's obsession with Israel comes out repeatedly. Maybe this has something to do with how this verse opens with "But...".

*And sat down-* The cameraman is as it were zoomed up close upon them. Or perhaps the significance of their 'sitting down' was that they sat down as if they were members of Judaism, exercising their rights.

*13:15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent for them, saying-* The synagogues read the Law and prophets according to a reading planner, rather like *The Bible Companion*. Paul's opening words refer to Dt. 1:31 LXX, which was the lesson for the 44th Sabbath in the year, around July / August; the corresponding second lesson from "the prophets" for that Sabbath was from Is. 1:1-27, from which Paul also quotes when he alludes to Is. 1:2 LXX.

*Brothers-* They treat Paul as if he is one of them. The invitation to give such a major discourse could have been because Paul purposefully gave the impression that he was still an orthodox thinking Jewish rabbi- see on *And sat down* (:14). Much of the Jewish anger with Paul was because he later turned out to not be Judaist any longer, despite giving that impression in order to get an audience with them. If he had focused on his Divinely given mission to the Gentiles, he wouldn't have got into all these kinds of problems.

*If you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak-* 'Barnabas' meant 'Son of encouragement', so it would seem likely that the synagogue elders knew of his presence and were kindly alluding to it. One wonders if [contrary to what I have just suggested above] these elders were in fact Messianic believers in Jesus, or at least sympathetic to that Way. That would explain the rather odd description of them 'sending' [*apostello*] to Paul and Barnabas to give a word of encouragement to the congregation. Perhaps there was a veiled allusion to the Lord Jesus being the consolation [s.w. 'encouragement'] of Israel (Lk. 2:25).

13:16 *And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand, said-* The same words used about Peter (Acts 12:17). Luke seems to be developing the parallels between Paul and Peter; but it is also possible that Paul is emulating Peter.

*You men of Israel and you that fear God-* Referring to the 'God fearers', the Gentile proselytes. Paul's sensitivity to this group may be reflected in his opening reference to "this people" rather than 'our people'; we can imagine Paul saying this whilst looking at the benches where the Gentile proselytes were sitting. Paul also directs his words to the Jews, by speaking of "our fathers"; thus modelling for us an inclusive approach in our witness and teaching.

*Listen-* The idea of the Greek is an appeal to understand, to 'get it'. The early brethren preached looking for a response. They were preaching toward decision, for conversion. The Lord taught us that He will make His followers fishers of men; and fishers catch something, they aren't fishermen if they just offer a bait indifferently. Paul taught that his hearers should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20). The address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia has three parts, each marked by an appeal to the listeners. Clearly it has been planned in advance, and was an appeal for response (Acts 13:16,26,38). These preachers weren't shy in asking men and women to decide for or against the love of God in Jesus. They challenged men to do something about the message they had heard.

13:17 *The God of this people Israel chose our fathers-* Paul's entire speech is based upon Stephen's in Acts 7 [see commentary there]. It was that witness from Stephen which had converted Saul / Paul; and he reflects that fact by likewise witnessing to others.

*And exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm He led them out of it-* The prophets are clear that Israel worshipped idols in Egypt, and were not very responsive to God's salvation plans for them. The reference to exalting them therefore draws attention to God's grace towards Israel.

13:18 *For about the time of forty years-* See on :19 *About four hundred and fifty years.*

*As a nursing father He carried them in the wilderness-* Another reading is 'He suffered their manners in the wilderness' [as AV]. This would again be drawing attention to God's patient grace towards His people. But the allusion to Dt. 1:31 LXX encourages us to follow the 'As a nursing father' option. The idea of a father carrying and feeding his baby child is one which creates sympathy for the father; and Paul may have this in mind. For he was going on to appeal to Israel to consider that they had slain God's only begotten Son.

13:19 *And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan-* There were ten nations in the land (Gen. 15:19-21), but seven of them were destroyed (Dt. 7:1). This combination of ten and seven is repeated throughout the descriptions of the latter day beast dominating the land of Israel with seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7). I suggest that this means that not all of the ten horns will conflict with Israel; perhaps only seven of the ten nation confederacy dominating latter day Israel will be destroyed.

*He gave them their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years-* There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1, which gives four hundred and eighty years, although the LXX there says 440- hence "about 450 years"). Sometimes the Bible is

not precise. Under inspiration, the Hebrew writer seems to have forgotten the exact quotation, or to have been deliberately vague, when he speaks of "one in a certain place testified" (Heb. 2:6). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty". Surely this is to show that God is God, not man. His word is not contradictory, but in ensuring this, God does not sink down to the level of a man who wanted to produce an apparently faultless book, carefully ensuring that every figure exactly tallied. He has a spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is behind the many Bible paradoxes which we meet. The reading of the AV suggests judges were given for a period of about 450 years. Other readings are as in the NEV. Significantly, the period from the call of Abraham to the death of Joshua was likewise 450 years, suggesting that God works according to a plan and structures 'ages' according to a masterplan which climaxed in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2).

13:20 *And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet-* The judges all made the deliverances they did because they themselves made the effort to deliver Israel. But their freewill was worked through by God, who raised up or "gave them" these judges. Here again we see the perfect synthesis between Divine will and human freewill.

13:21 *And afterwards they asked for a king; and God gave to them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin-* God responds to human desire, even if the desire is wrong. He gives us our heart's desire. And all the desire of Israel was upon Saul (1 Sam. 9:20). This is something more than a deep respect for human freewill on God's part. The fact is that we are confirmed in our desires; those who love the things of God's Kingdom above all else shall surely be there. If a place in the Kingdom is truly "all our hope and desire", it shall be granted. "All them that love His appearing" and in their hearts long and wait for Him- shall not be disappointed. This feature of God's dealings with men means that spiritual mindedness is of uppermost importance. What we really desire in our heart of hearts, our dominant desire, shall be granted. And God gave them a King whom He foreknew and told Israel would be bad for them. But He respected their desire.

*For the space of forty years-* The OT doesn't mention how long Saul reigned. Paul inserts this detail perhaps to demonstrate how God had given Israel various periods of testing and opportunity- for in :18 he mentions that they were 40 years in the wilderness. The period is realistic because Saul's son was 40 when he was placed on the throne when Saul died (2 Sam. 2:10).

13:22 *And when He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, to whom also He bare witness and said: I have found David the son of Jesse-* The 'removal' was when God 'raised up' David. But that point was some time before Saul's death. God makes a plan, decrees a course of action, but there is often a gap until it is fulfilled. He thus describes Himself as both planning and fulfilling His plans. That gap is perhaps to enable repentance even at an apparently late stage.

*A man after My own heart, who shall do all My will-* Perhaps David was only after God's own heart at the time Samuel anointed him? David was, in God's opinion, a man after His own heart, who fulfilled all His will. Yet this is the God whose ways are not, and cannot be, ours. Yet this is how humble He is, and how positive His view of a faithful servant. We also

note that not all men do [or "fulfil"] God's will. He searches for and 'finds' men who will. God's will is revealed in His word- which is why attention to the Bible is so important. The Lord Jesus is often described as the one who did the Father's will (the same Greek words are used- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31).

*13:23 Of this man's seed-* The false doctrine of the physical 'pre-existence' of Christ before birth makes a nonsense of the repeated promises that he would be the *descendant* of Eve, Abraham and David. The early preachers emphasized that Jesus was "of David's posterity" [Gk. *spermatos*- Acts 2:29-31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8]. If He were already existing up in heaven at the time of these promises, God would have been incorrect in promising these people a descendant who *would be* Messiah.

*Has God according to His promise-* The promise to David is not specifically cited here. What has just been quoted is God's comment upon David, that he would fulfil all His will, seeing he would have the mind of God. Perhaps Paul took this as meaning that as David was imperfect, therefore that comment was effectively a promise that a seed of David would fulfil the requirements of having the mind of God [which Paul says the Lord Jesus did, in Phil. 2] and fulfilling God's will- which the Lord did to an ultimate extent (the same Greek words are used about Him- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31). Ezekiel's prophecies about "David" ruling over God's people at the restoration clearly mean 'one of the seed of David', and Paul may be reasoning in the same way here.

*Raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus-* This 'raising up' of Jesus began at the end of John's ministry (:24) and therefore doesn't specifically refer to the Lord's resurrection, although there is clearly the hint of that too.

*13:24 After John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance-* Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking. Having been raised in Jerusalem, surely Paul as a young man would have heard John's preaching. It was the source of the goads against which he later kicked. Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others, and an example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28).

*To all the people of Israel-* This usage of "all" is hardly literal. If John's witness was counted as reaching "all Israel", we can understand the fulfilment of the great commission as likewise meaning that the Gospel must go to *people from* all nations, rather than to every individual.

As John preached repentance with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, so did Paul, with exactly that same sense (Acts 13:24,25 = 17:3; 20:21; 26:20).

13:25 *And as John was fulfilling his ministry, he said: Who do you suppose I am? I am not he! But look, there comes one after me-* It could be argued that John's ministry failed, in that people did not widely accept Jesus as Messiah but crucified Him. John's ministry was as children sitting in the marketplace appealing for Israel to mourn, but they would not. And yet John played the part he was called to play, and in this sense he fulfilled his ministry. Many ministries or lives may appear to have failed, but actually the believer played their part and fulfilled their ministry. The response of others, or success or failure of response to our message, doesn't of itself indicate whether we fulfilled our ministry or not.

*The shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to untie-* To untie another's sandals was an idiom for being his forerunner or herald. So John is not denying that he was the one who untied the Lord's sandals- but he is saying that he was not worthy to do the work he did. This is exactly the kind of humility to be associated with all witness work.

13:26 *Brothers, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us-* Here, and several times in this sermon, Paul seems to be repeating Peter's style of 3:17. He was deeply impressed by Peter; the question is whether he followed his example out of humble deference, or partly because he pretended to Peter's chosen role as the apostle to the Jews.

*Is the word of this salvation sent-* 'The *logos* of this Jesus'. That the Lord Jesus personally is in view here is confirmed by the next verse talking of how the Jews "knew Him not" and 'condemned Him' (:27). The personal pronoun is usually used after the person has been defined. The 'he' in verse 27 clearly refers to Jesus; and so the reference to Him is surely here in :26 in the phrase "the word of this salvation". Acts 10:36 speaks of the Lord Jesus as the word sent from God.

13:27 Consider the intensity of allusion to the records of Christ's death and resurrection in Acts 13:27-38:

<b>Acts</b>	<b>Gospels</b>
13:27	Lk. 24:27
13:28	Mt. 27:72; Mk. 15:13
13:29	Mt. 27:59
13:30	Mt. 28:6
13:38	Lk. 24:47

Thus Paul's early recorded preaching was basically a commentary on the Gospel records of Christ's death and resurrection (as was Peter's).

*For they that dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers-* This phrase is used in Acts about those responsible for the Lord's death who then repented (Acts 1:19; 2:5,14; 4:16). This group are therefore being held up as an example to the Jews in the synagogue where Paul was preaching.

*Because they knew Him not, nor the voices of the prophets-* Jesus personally is paralleled with the word of the prophets; for as explained under :26 *The word of this salvation*, Jesus is being presented as the word of the Jewish prophets made flesh. Paul was preaching just after the reading of the prophets- and he was seeking to persuade his audience that the words just read had become flesh in the person of Jesus. He speaks of their "voices" rather than merely their words. They had heard the words, but not felt and perceived that these were the actual



voices of men who being dead yet speak. They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. See Rom. 9:27; Jn. 5:39.

*Which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him-* Paul was preaching at a time when the voices of the prophets had just been read in the synagogue- he was appealing to his audience to be different from the respected Jerusalem Jews, who had heard the same readings read, and yet condemned God's Son to death. Paul was ever quick to press home the similarities between his present audience and previous precedents.

13:28 *And though they found no cause of death in Him-* Saul / Paul would have taken intense legal interest in the trial. He was fully aware that in fact they did claim that there was a cause for death; He was "guilty of death" for blasphemy (Mt. 26:66), and on this legal basis they asked Pilate to execute Him: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die" (Jn. 19:7). Paul says the opposite- that they found no cause of death in Him. Paul is not making any mistake here- rather is he correctly reading the hearts of the Jews. They knew there was no cause of death in Jesus- although they said that there was. Paul is seeking to demonstrate that the voice of inner knowledge and conscience is so easily overridden by group think, by psychological obsession rooted in jealousy, by the power of conservatism, the terror of realizing we have been seriously wrong, the desperate clinging to pride... And he realized that the same subconscious psychological battle was going on in the minds of those listening to him. And he warns them through drawing attention to those who had likewise refused to accept Jesus as Messiah.

*They asked Pilate to have him slain-* The Greek means to earnestly beg. The only other three occurrences of this idea of 'begging Pilate' are all about Joseph begging Pilate for the Lord's body (Mt. 27:58; Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:52). Yet Joseph was a Sanhedrin counsellor, one of those who had condemned the Lord to death- for although he didn't agree with it, the Sanhedrin decision was unanimous (Mk. 14:64). So Joseph was one of those who on face value begged Pilate to crucify the Lord; and yet also begged Pilate for His body, something only done by closest family, and a sign of Joseph's public identification with Jesus and His cause. This continues the theme developed in commentary on the first half of this verse :28. A person can say or do something when in fact their inner convictions are otherwise. Both Joseph and the Jerusalem leadership knew in their hearts that Jesus was innocent and actually the Messiah. But they acted otherwise. Paul is speaking here to Jews assembled in synagogue. He knew there were many similarly struggling hearts before him in the audience, and his use of psychology and history in making his appeal is masterful.

13:29 *And when they had fulfilled all things that were written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb-* The "they" who did this amounts to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, whom I have argued in commentary on :28 were in Paul's mind in his flow of thought at this point.

13:30 *But God raised him from the dead-* This is a bald statement of fact. Paul gives no evidence; and he is not recorded here as mentioning the obvious fact that he himself had met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road. This would be another example of where evidence is not required for faith; the simple facts of the Gospel are powerful of themselves to persuade the hearers.

13:31 *And he was seen for many days by those that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people-* It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

13:32 *We bring you good news-* The Gospel is stated to be in the promises made to the Jewish fathers, just as Paul states in Gal. 3:8. The good news, or Gospel, was strictly speaking in the fulfilment of the promises, through the resurrection of Christ. It is a knowledge of that reality, rather than of the wording of the ancient promises of it, which is the essence of the Gospel.

*Of the promise made to the fathers-* Paul saw a singular promise as having been made to all the Jewish fathers; and it had its fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection.

13:33 *That God has fulfilled the same-* There was a degree to which the promises to Abraham were fulfilled in the Lord's resurrection. This is not to say that they have no fuller realization in the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the future. But their fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection was surely in that the promised "blessing" to all peoples was actualized through that event; for the "blessing" is interpreted in Acts 3:25,26 and Galatians 3 as the spiritual blessing of forgiveness and grace. And here in :34 we have an explicit connection made between the Lord's resurrection and "blessings".

*To our children-* AV "To us their children". If the other textual reading is correct, are we to suppose that Paul had children?

*In that He resurrected Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm: You are My Son, this day have I begotten you-* This text has multiple fulfilments in the New Testament; proof enough that prophetic fulfilments are not singular. Bible prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

13:34 *And as for the fact that He raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way: I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David-* See on 13:33 *God has fulfilled the same*. The blessings associated with David are surely the blessings of grace and forgiveness; for he speaks of himself in reflecting "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1), and this is applied to all who believe in Christ in Romans 4. The quotation is from Is. 55:3, which offers the returning exiles a new covenant of forgiveness and radical, gracious acceptance- described as "the sure blessings

[LXX] of David". That new covenant was spurned by Judah, and yet can be accepted by us today. It could be that Paul and Isaiah are using "David" in the way it is used in the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel and in Jer. 30:9, where it refers to David's promised Son, the Messiah. Or it could be that the blessings of David refer to the promise made to him of Messiah, whose eternal Kingdom on earth would only be possible through the extension of grace and mercy to those who would inhabit it. The 'setting up' of David's seed in resurrection was part of the blessings of David, and so these blessings can be said to have come true on account of the Lord's resurrection.

Not seeing corruption was humanly achieved by the huge amount of spices used in the burial of the Lord Jesus. Some have complained that the weight of spices was more than even used to bury the Caesars. This extravagant freewill outpouring of love and respect for the crucified Lord was therefore the way the Father used to fulfil His prophetic word.

*13:35 Because He said also in another Psalm: You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption-* Paul's reasoning and usage of Psalm 16 is identical to that of Peter in his Pentecost address in Acts 2:29-31. There is good reason to think that Paul heard that speech live; and it was one of the goads in his conscience which the Lord asked him to stop going against. Paul's humility is seen in the way that he learned from fisherman Peter, and had clearly reflected upon Peter's line of argument.

*13:36 For David, after he had in his own generation served the will of God, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption-* The AV suggests that David served his own generation, according to God's will. We wonder why Paul mentioned this. Perhaps the idea is as expressed in Hebrews- that the Lord Jesus serves not only one generation because of his mortality; rather, His resurrection to immortality makes Him the eternal "servant" of all generations. The Lord had had to remind the Jews that David was inferior to Messiah, because Judaism had a tendency to reason that Moses and David were in any case greater than the Messiah figure (Lk. 20:44). Paul does the same here, pointing out the inferiority of David to Messiah.

*13:37 But he whom God raised up saw no corruption-* As noted on :36, the superiority of Messiah over David had to be emphasized to a Jewish audience. The 'not seeing corruption' does not have to refer to the Lord's physical body being somehow preserved from corruption by embalming. He saw / experienced no corruption after His resurrection because He was immortalized. Psalm 16 expresses David's personal hope of resurrection out of the grave, where he envisaged "my flesh shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9). But he understands this as being possible because of what he writes in Ps. 16:10: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will You allow Your holy one to see corruption". "My soul" and the Messianic "holy one" are related, paralleled, but not identical. David would not remain in the grave because Yahweh's Holy One, Messiah, would not see corruption. David did "see corruption", as Paul and Peter state clearly. But David perceived that through identity with his great son, Messiah, he would be resurrected on account of Messiah's salvation from death. And we make that association through baptism into His death and resurrection. We too, as well as David, can therefore have remission of sins and resurrection proclaimed to us in the Gospel (:38).

*13:38 Therefore, be it known to you, brothers, that through this man is proclaimed to you the remission of sins-* The preaching of the man Paul was in effect the preaching of the man Christ Jesus. Because the Lord's resurrection enabled forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), Peter therefore on this basis makes an appeal for repentance and appropriation of the Lord's

work for men through baptism into His death and resurrection (Acts 2:31-38; 3:15,19 "therefore"). And Paul here likewise: "He, whom God raised again... through [on account of] this man [and His resurrection] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:37,38). Because of the Name the Lord has been given, salvation has been enabled (Acts 4:12 cp. Phil. 2:9). "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26); "the God of our fathers raised up Jesus... exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give (i.e. inspire) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness" (Acts 5:30,31). The fact of the Lord's resurrection has obtained forgiveness of sins for all who will identify themselves with it through baptism into Him; and this is why it is thereby an imperative to preach it, if we believe in it. The disciples were told to go and preach of the resurrection of Christ, and *therefore* of the required responses this entails: repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and baptism (Lk. 24:46). Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13).

13:39 *And through him, everyone that believes is declared righteous in all things in which the law of Moses could not declare you righteous-* Better, "in Him". This is exactly what Paul expounds at such depth to the Romans; in Christ we are counted as Him, His righteousness is imputed to us, and this covers all our sins and disobediences to any Divine law, including that given through Moses. This justification, counting as righteous by grace through faith, was not on offer within the Mosaic structure. The force of "everyone..." is that it included Gentiles, which is what attracted them to this message (:42).

13:40 *Therefore beware, lest that which is spoken in the prophets comes upon you-* Prophecies of judgment can come true at any time if there is the required 'condition' of disbelief and disobedience. The prophecy didn't *have* to come true for them; but they should "beware" lest it did.

13:41 *Behold you despisers, wonder and perish. For I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no way believe, even if someone declares it to you-* By rejecting justification by faith through grace, they were in effect despising God's grace, considering their own works were better, rather like the man in the parable who thought he didn't need the wedding garment provided because his own clothing was better. This prophecy stated that even when the Gospel was declared to some, they would not believe it. And yet Paul still declares it; knowing that God's purpose is open insofar as every person who hears the Gospel has genuine freewill.

The Hebrew text reads to the effect "Behold you Gentiles"; but this is quoted by Paul about the orthodox Jews. Paul is doing just what Stephen did in the speech of Acts 7 which so convicted Paul in his conscience; he demonstrates that the most nationalistic Hebrews were spiritually no better than the Gentiles whom they despised. The original context of the Habakkuk 1:5 quotation is the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. Paul saw the parallels with the coming destruction of the temple by the Romans. But just as the threatened destruction of the temple could have been averted by Jewish repentance in the past, so it could have been in the first century. Hence :40 "Beware therefore lest...". Jewish repentance could have brought on the second coming; but they did not. Paul has asked them to repent in :38, and here he is implying that if they do not, then the Jewish system and temple cult were going to be permanently destroyed.

13:42 *And as they went out, they pleaded that these words might be spoken to them the next Sabbath-* The "words" included the stark warning of condemnation with which Paul concluded in :41. The harder side of God attracts; the reality of the issues before us, of eternal life and eternal death, attract attention in a way which a 'softer' approach cannot. And the Gentiles were attracted by the logic of the idea of righteousness imputed by grace through the faith of literally any human; see on :39.

13:43 *Now when the meeting of the synagogue was dismissed, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, urged them-* The apostles weren't interested in just giving good advice, but rather good news. They were pressed in their spirit, that they *had* to appeal to men (Acts 13:43; 18:13; 26:28; 28:23; Gal. 1:10). They persuaded men, convinced and confounded the Jews, reasoned, testified and exhorted, disputed and converted (8:25; 18:13,19,28; 2:40). In short, they *so* spoke that multitudes believed (14:1).

*To continue in the grace of God-* Paul and Barnabas realized that the idea of grace is attractive at first encounter, but to continue believing it is demanding, and has to be consciously continued in. For if by grace we are indeed counted righteous and shall surely be saved- this demands every fibre of our being in response. And the later New Testament letters are full of examples of how believers failed to continue under grace but turned to various forms of legalism. We have to continue in His kindness / gentleness (Rom. 11:22 s.w.). And that is harder than it might seem, because to abide in that constant sense of sin forgiven and certain salvation demands so much of us, in that we cannot be passive to it, nor treat these things as a mere part of our religious hobby. The *charis*, grace / gift of God, often refers to the gift of the Spirit given to believers after baptism. The Corinthians received it, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); it could be received in vain if the believer denied the Spirit or refused to be led by it. So it could be that those who heard in the synagogue were baptized, and received the gift of God- and had to be encouraged to continue in it.

13:44 *And the next Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God-* This huge attendance was not because of miracles, carrots offered or the hope of personal benefit. It was because of the immense power of the ideas presented- justification, total righteousness, by grace through faith; for everyone, literally everyone. The Gentiles enthused about this to others, and it is by personal witness that people come along to meetings and are converted.

13:45 *But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy-* The success of other preachers can elicit the most powerful jealousy, as it does to this day. "The Jews" here refers surely to the Jewish leadership, as the term often does in Luke-Acts. The experience of such jealousy places us in the direct fellowship of the Lord Jesus. For it was jealousy about "the crowds" which led to His persecution unto death.

*And contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul and blasphemed-* Gk. 'cursed'. The Jews of Antioch in Pisidia cursed Paul and his message, drove him out of the city, and then travelled 180 km. to Lystra to oppose his preaching there. This is the behaviour of bad conscience, rather than secular people just irritated with religious evangelism. Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,619; 17:5-9,13,14; 18:6,12-17; 21:27-36; 23:12-25).

Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having “killed both the Lord Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins” (1 Thess. 2:13–16). These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great ‘Satan’ to the cause of Christ in the first century.

*13:46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said: It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing you thrust it from you-* See on Acts 7:27 *Thrust him away*. One phrase of Paul's in Acts 13:46 combines allusions to two verses in Matthew (Mt. 21:41; 22:8). Those verses are close to each other. As Paul thought about Mt. 21:41, he would have gone on to Mt. 22:8, and then brought them both together in his allusion-ultimately controlled by the Spirit, of course.

*And judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the gentiles-* Not only are we living out *our* judgment by how we preach; by presenting the Gospel to people we are effectively bringing the judgment to them. Paul commented how those who rejected his preaching judged / condemned themselves to be unworthy. The Jews by their attitude to the word “judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life”; and we too can anticipate the judgment seat by the same mistake. The preacher stands in the ‘highways’ (Mt. 22:9)- ‘the place of two roads’, the Greek means, i.e. the place where two roads divide. This is what our taking of the Gospel to people means. They are given their choice. We bring the crisis of the judgment seat right in front of them, and they make their choice.

*13:47 For so has the Lord commanded us: I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost part of the earth-* Isaiah's prophecies of Christ being a light to the Gentiles in the Kingdom were fulfilled in Paul (Is. 49:6 = Acts 13:47; and is Is. 49:4 also a prophecy of Paul's thoughts? “I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought... yet surely my judgment is with the Lord”). Paul noticed the prophecy that Christ was to be the light of the whole world and saw in this a commandment to him to go and preach Christ world-wide. He read “...for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider” (Is. 52:15) as a prophecy which required him to fulfil it, by taking Christ to those who had not heard (Rom. 15:21). All that is prophesied of Christ is an imperative to us as His body to action. Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Paul takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. Because everything said about Christ is a commandment to all of us who are in Him. What would Jesus do, who would He be, if He lived in your street, did your job, was married to your partner, mixed with the guys *you* mix with? The answer to that is our mission. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us.

Believers worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies. Thus Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk.

1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order that the prophecies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles.

13:48 *And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God-* The Gentiles may refer specifically to those Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue (:43). To be taught that the Jewish Messiah was the light of all people, and justification was possible in Him and not through legal obedience, triggered real joy amongst them. Paul prayed for the word of the Lord to be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1 same phrase), and those prayers were heard here. We glorify God's word or *logos*, His essential purpose in Christ, by believing it.

*And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed-* This phrase was that used by Judaism regarding how all the faithful people of natural Israel were those "ordained to eternal life", comprising "everyone that is written to eternal life, in the book of life". But the phrase is as it were subverted here to refer to Gentiles who believed in the Lord Jesus. It is meant to be read as the opposition to the statement that the Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (:46). But whilst there is freewill as to whether we believe or abide in the Lord Jesus or reject Him as the Jews did, there is also an element of predestination, of having been "ordained" to believe. For "all men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2); faith "is the gift of God" and thereby a proof of how His grace saves us rather than our works (Eph. 2:8).

13:49 *And the word of the Lord was spread about throughout all the region-* The joyful response and wide publication of the Gospel is strongly emphasized in these verses. But we hear nothing more of the church in Pisidian Antioch; perhaps we are left to conclude that they were an exemplification of the parable of the sower, where there was zealous, joyful response initially which then quickly withered when persecution arose (Lk. 8:13). The reference to persecution in :50 suggests that Luke may be making a conscious allusion to his record of the sower parable. The converts here were in the category of the seed sown upon the rock. This would explain why they were given especial warning to "continue" in their faith (:43).

13:50 *But the Jews incited the religious women of high standing and the leading men of the city-* These women may have been Jews, or at least Jewish proselytes. Josephus claims (*The Jewish War* 2.20.2) that "In large towns and cities in which Jews abounded, the wives of the men in high position among the heathen were much inclined to the Jewish religion"; this would explain the connection between them and the leading males of the city.

*And stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district-* This persecution was apparently successful in withering the faith of the once joyful believers who had responded so quickly and enthusiastically to the Gospel; see on :49. The collaboration here between the Jewish leaders and powerful Roman leaders was typical of how the 'satan' / adversary operated against the early Christians, just as it was such a joining of the forces of evil which led to the Lord's death. The expulsion from the district may refer to some formal ban on Paul ever re-entering, similar to what seems to have happened at Thessalonica (see on 1 Thess. 2:18).

13:51 *But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium-* The way Paul shook off the dust of his feet against those who rejected his preaching was surely an almost unconscious reflection of the attitude which the Lord had enjoined upon his men; but there is no evidence that Paul was given the same commission (Acts 13:51 cp. Mt. 10:14). Jews were supposed to shake off Gentile dust from their feet on returning to the promised land; again, Paul is treating these orthodox Jews as if they are Gentiles. The idiom of shaking out is used in Neh. 5:13 to mean a shaking out of covenant relationship with God; by refusing the new covenant, those Jews were effectively ending their relationship with God, despite their zeal to keep the old covenant.

13:52- see on Acts 8:8.

*And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit-* The Ethiopic text reads "the apostles", as if Paul and Barnabas are in view. To be filled with implies external agency; the Lord filled them with joy, through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore here refers to an internal psychological power, which in this case gave joy. The Spirit gift is given to each believer at baptism, but there are clearly specific moments when believers are filled with it further. The allusion here is clearly to the Lord's command to rejoice under persecution (Mt. 5:12); that is an attitude and action which has to be consciously adopted. But this is confirmed and encouraged by the action of the Spirit within us to give joy. The spirit is effectively our mind and attitude; the Spirit /mind of the Lord Jesus is therefore being replicated in our minds. As "Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 10:21), so are we "fill[ed]with all joy and peace by means of... the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). This is "the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "For God's Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives" (Rom. 14:17).



## ACTS CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue-* see on 17:1,2.

*And spoke in such a way-* Paul *so* spoke that men believed. Presentation *is* important. Yet, his speech was “rude... contemptible... not with wisdom of speech” (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17 AVmg.). Yet it was because Paul *so* spoke that men believed. He spoke God’s Truth in his own words, with no pretensions, with no attention to a smooth presentation; and the more real, the more credible. Because he spoke things as they are, right between the eyes, without posing as anyone apart from the real, human guy Paul... therefore men believed. He came over as credible and convinced, and he inspired others to this end.

*That a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed-* This occurred within the synagogue, so presumably the "Greeks" were Gentile proselytes or Hellenic, Greek speaking Jews.

The record gives the impression that after just one synagogue address, many Jews and Gentiles who were present "believed", and belief and baptism are presented in Acts as part of the same process. This happened it seems after just one address. For there is no hint that there was any period of extended instruction here. This is the power and simplicity of the Gospel.

14:2 *But the unbelieving Jews-* Yet these Jews would have been far from atheists. But their unbelief in Jesus as Lord leaves them classified as unbelievers. Here we see proof enough that all religions, even Judaic ones, do not lead to salvation. We also see here a classic pattern in Paul's work- he immediately goes to the synagogue, irritates the Jews, although converting some of them, and those Jews then make trouble which damages his work with the Gentiles. Chapter 17 records the same pattern almost word for word. I suggest that if Paul had instead followed the Lord's command and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focused solely on the Gentiles- then his life would've been much easier, and his intended ministry to the Gentiles would have been far more fruitful. But this is how it so often is when we do not follow the path the Lord intends for us; even though He will work with us in the other, less ideal paths we choose.

*Stirred up the Gentiles-* The Greek word only occurs a few verses earlier, in the same context (Acts 13:50). As noted above, the impression is being created of a pattern of behaviour. Paul immediately targets the Jews in the synagogue on his arrival in a town, and those Jews there who reject his message stir up the Gentiles against Paul's mission, thus making his intended mission to the Gentiles so much harder to operate.

*And poisoned their minds against the brothers-* Gk. *kakoo psuche*, literally they evil spirited- providing proof enough that evil spirits are not radically free entities swanning around the cosmos, but refer to the internal human spirit.

14:3- see on Acts 17:34.

*Therefore they stayed there for a long time speaking boldly in the Lord-* Boldness is a repeated characteristic of the early preachers, but their boldness was "in the Lord", it was a true sense of being brethren-in-Christ which gave them that boldness.

*Who bore witness to the word of his grace-* This was the purpose of the miraculous gifts in the first century- to back up the verbal preaching of the Gospel at a time when there was no written New Testament available.

*Granting-* Implying they asked for the miracles to be done? The gifts were not possessed continuously by the apostles, they were for specific things at specific times.

*Signs and wonders to be done by their hands-* The Lord Jesus was the doer of the works, but He worked through the hands of those in Him.

14:4 *But the crowd of the city was divided; part held with the Jews and part with the apostles-* This reflects how widespread was the Jewish slander campaign. Nobody in the town was left untouched by it.

14:5 *And when there was an attempt by the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers, to treat them shamefully and to stone them-* This clearly alludes to the parable of the wicked husbandmen; the same word is used (Mt. 22:6). And Luke uses the word about what was done to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 18:32). In the work of witness, we are as Christ to the world and share in His sufferings, that we might share in His life. There is nothing glamorous about missionary or evangelistic work; it is on one hand a sharing in the Lord's sufferings, seeing that the cross was itself the greatest preaching of all time. 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of the preaching which is the cross (Gk.).

14:6 *They became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding region-* Carefully following the Lord's instruction to flee persecution rather than wilfully be martyred (Mt. 10:23). Several times, Paul has to be bundled away from such persecution by the disciples; he had the Semitic fanaticism when it comes to religion, and was not against violent death for the Christian cause. But the Lord didn't want His followers to serve and die for Him from such impulses of religious fanaticism. The wisdom of the Lord's command is here demonstrated in that the Gospel now spread as a result of their 'fleeing'- to "the surrounding region".

14:7 *And there they preached the gospel-* The Acts record notes so often that after persecution, Paul continued preaching in fresh areas. This is no small testament to the spirit of 'keeping on keeping on' which is to characterize all Christian endeavour. But it also reflects another theme of Acts- that persecution only led to the geographical spread of the Gospel.

14:8 *Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled since birth and had never walked-* Again Luke is alluding to the Lord's words he has recorded in his volume 1, the Gospel according to Luke. This time, to Lk. 18:27: "The things which are impossible [s.w. "could not use"] with men are possible with God". The Lord's ministry in Palestine was being continued by those in Him, just as it is today. We too need to daily read the Gospels and perceive how in essence, the spirit of those incidents and teachings are continuing in our experience daily.

14:9 *The same listened to Paul speaking. Paul looked at him intently-* Why is this detail mentioned? Are we intended to think that Paul was seeking to emulate how Peter had done just the same before healing a man in a similar condition (Acts 3:4 s.w.)? Both men were lame from their mother's womb. Both stood up and leaped (Acts 3:8). In this case, we

have another piece of incidental evidence for thinking that Paul was trying to copy Peter, and this led to his obsession to get to Jerusalem for a Pentecost feast in order to preach to the Jews assembled there, hoping he would repeat Peter's conversion of 3000 people in one day. It was this desire to emulate Peter's ministry which somewhat derailed Paul from the focus the Lord wished him to have on the Gentiles rather than the Jews.

*And perceiving that he had faith to be made whole-* Faith was not always required for miracles to be done. We think of the healing of Malchus' ear and other examples. But in this case Paul required faith, because he realized he was continuing the Lord's principle spoken of in Lk. 18:27 (see on :8). There, the Lord had taught that with faith, what is impossible, impotent, unable to be used by man- can be used.

14:10- see on Acts 3:8.

*Said with a loud voice: Stand upright on your feet! And he leaped up and walked-* See on 14:9 *Paul looked at him intently*. The leaping and walking of the lame is expressed in terms of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:6. The preaching of the Gospel was demonstrated to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God which is to come upon earth; and our witness also has something of that about it.

14:11 *And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the language of Lycaonia: The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*- The meaning is surely that Paul and Barnabas didn't understand this, but when they saw the garlands and sacrifices brought to them, then they realized- this is the force of the "but" in :14. The gift of languages was therefore not continually available to the apostles; indeed it could be argued that that gift enabled them to speak in those languages, or for the listeners to understand; but not necessarily for them to understand what was spoken to them. Hence in speaking of the practical usage of the gift of tongues in 1 Cor. 14, Paul says that the gift of interpreting tongues was also required. In any case, that was not available here, and so the point is established that the gifts were for highly specific purposes at specific times, and were not continually available for the usage of believers.

Note that the idea of gods coming to earth as men is a classic pagan belief; and yet it is seen mixed in to Trinitarian theology, with their belief in a pre-existent Christ and a literal 'coming down' of the Lord from Heaven to earth. Indeed, so common was the idea, and so close to it is the language of 'coming down' in John's Gospel, that it could be argued that the NT language is consciously alluding to this wrong idea and showing that this is not the case with the Lord Jesus, but rather His 'coming down' from Heaven was in terms of His manifestation of God rather than anything more literal, as the pagans believed. Standard Christian belief in a physically pre-existent Jesus has therefore missed the point, and taken on board the very pagan ideas which the NT is arguing against.

14:12 *And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker-* This would suggest that Barnabas was the more personally imposing in appearance than Paul (cp. 2 Cor. 10:1,10). For this is how they (along with their Greek equivalents Zeus and Hermes) are presented.

14:13 *And the priest of Jupiter, whose temple was before the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and would have done sacrifice with the crowds-* We see in this incident the basic human desire to worship and to turn men into gods. We see it theologically, in the desire to turn the human Jesus into "very God of very Gods" as the Trinity incorrectly states. We see it

in secular folk idolizing sports stars and musicians as their gods. The correct channel for this religious instinct is through the Lord Jesus to the Father, guided by His word.

14:14 *But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their clothes and ran in among the crowd, crying out and saying-* A set of clothes was one of the most valuable things a person possessed at that time. To tear them was a sign of real and genuine grief and passion. This was how strongly Barnabas and Paul felt about any glory being given to them rather than to the Father and Son; and their strong position should be reflected in our attitudes. We are not to glorify ourselves.

14:15 *Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you-* Literally, of the same sufferings. If Paul was indeed deformed in some way (as tradition claims), then the point would have been that they too were not of perfect health, they also suffered. We note the emphasis on how similar they were to their audience; they ran in *amongst the crowd*, and were of the same sufferings "with you". This is the basis of all preaching work- that we are one with our audience and not above them. Exactly because they were 'one of us', they could make the appeal of the Gospel. As the Lord Jesus was and is our representative, so we are His representative to men, whilst being 'one of them', 'one of us'. This is why we shouldn't be afraid to show chinks in our armour, to admit our humanity, and on that basis make appeal to men: that I, as one of us, with all your humanity, your doubts and fears, am appealing to you to grasp that better way. When Paul wrote that if anyone was weak, he was weak, he seems to be saying that they could match their spiritual weakness by his own. This is why personal contact *must be* the intended way to witness.

*And bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them-* Literally, we evangelize to convert you. The aim of our preaching should be to convert, not simply to half-heartedly, lamely inform the public of the particular set of convictions held by our denomination or local church. Having a clear and defined aim is critical in interaction with others in order to evangelize them. The idea is the same as in 17:30; in the past, the Gentiles were [for the most part] allowed to do as they wish. But now, all the world is commanded to be obedient and repent, through the fulfilment of the great commission by the church.

14:16 *Who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways-* This is another angle on God dealing mainly with the Jewish people during those past generations. Rather than seeing this as unfair, one could take the view that in fact God "allowed" the other nations to do what they wanted- which if asked, would have been their preferred option. They got what they would've wanted if asked by God. The question of 'Why didn't God call nations other than the Jews in Old Testament times?' was obviously going to arise with the Gentiles. Paul addresses this same issue in Acts 17:30, saying that "the times of this ignorance God winked at". He seems to be taking the approach that the Old Testament Gentiles generally need not fear judgment. The same approach may be helpful when we are asked concerning the fate of those who did not know the Gospel.

14:17 *And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness-* AV "gave us rain...". I suggest that the "us" refers to Paul and Barnabas and faithful Israel. Paul is saying that *you* are in a position of worshipping idols, but *we* (Paul and

Barnabas) are appealing to you to change, and believe in the true God- not in ourselves. What was God's witness to the Gentile world? An obedient Israel. That, at least, was His intention. That obedient Israel should have blessing of fruitful seasons, food and gladness. These are all terms taken from the Old Testament descriptions of how God would bless *Israel* (not the Gentile world) if *they* were obedient. Jupiter was the god of the air and responsible for rain; Mercury was responsible for food. But Lycaonia (14:6) was famous for droughts and famine- the references can be found in standard commentaries (Vine, Matthew Henry etc.). Jupiter and Mercury had *not* given those Gentiles these blessings. But Yahweh, the one true God, had given these things to faithful Israel. Thereby He was a witness to those Gentiles, that they should accept the God of Israel. Paul is saying 'God let you Gentiles live as you wished. But obedient Israel were intended to be His witness to you- *they* received rain, fruitful seasons, food and gladness from their God, Yahweh. But *you* didn't- your Jupiter and Mercury were unable to give those blessings to you. So don't treat *us* as gods, quit your idols, and turn to the one true God of Israel'.

This naturally raises the question: To what purpose then was that witness, seeing at that time His plan was with the Jews and not the Gentiles? Perhaps we can infer from this that if anyone really thought about creation, they would have perceived God's witness and come to Him. Ps. 19:1-4 appears to say the same: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the expanse above shows His handiwork. Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world". This last verse is quoted in Rom. 10:18 in order to prove that "Whoever believes in him shall not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile" (Rom. 10:11,12). Paul interprets the "whoever" as meaning that both Jew and Gentile were witnessed to even in Old Testament times, and therefore there ought to be no barrier at all to taking the Gospel to Gentiles. Without access to the Bible or the witness of Israel and their religion, we can only conclude that God's level of acceptance of Old Testament Gentiles was quite low in terms of detailed knowledge. Admittedly there are few if any examples recorded of such Gentiles in Old Testament times coming to perceive the witness of creation and respond to it. But it would be a weak argument from silence to say there were no such cases. For the Old Testament is the history of God's old testament or covenant, which was with Israel.

14:18 *Even with these words the people were scarcely restrained from offering sacrifice to them-* We see here the immense strength of the human urge to sacrifice. We see it in the success of the televangelists who appeal for donations- and get them- on the flimsiest of foundations. God's insistence that all sacrifice be offered *to Him* is not Him as it were seeking to dominate us humans. Rather is He explaining how to channel that propensity to sacrifice which we have. In the modern world, it seems that the willingness to sacrifice has been submerged somewhat beneath the chronic egoism and hedonism of our age. Suicide bombers and the like are seen by many Westerners as utterly inexplicable beings; but the desire to sacrifice is in fact a strong part of us, and is more logically and comfortably accepted by other cultures. Our knowledge of the Father and Son provides us with the ultimate way to channel and express it; although we may well need to get in touch with this self-sacrificial part of ourselves first.

14:19 *But there came Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds-* The same words used of how the Jews "persuaded the crowds" to crucify the Lord (Mt. 27:20). Again, we see circumstances being arranged so that Paul entered into the crucifixion sufferings of the Lord. The same goes on in the lives of all who have committed

themselves to identity with Him. And we naturally wonder what Saul / Paul was doing at the Lord's crucifixion; seeing he was then living in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel, he very likely was one of the Jews involved in 'persuading the crowds'. The same word for "persuaded" has just been used about Paul's preaching (Acts 13:43), and continues to be used about it. We are given the impression that Paul persuaded the crowds one way, and then the Jews persuaded them another way. Paul must have bitterly lamented the fickleness of the crowds; but in so doing he was sharing the experience of the Lord Jesus. For the crowd who shouted "Hosanna!" and wanted Him as their Messianic King were soon shouting "crucify Him!", due to their persuasion by the Jews. The miracles both of the Lord and Paul clearly had no lasting power in persuading the crowds. The ministry of miracles never really achieved much, and Pentecostalism ought to take due note of that. How Paul must have wished for mass literacy amongst the people, and for some written record of the Gospel readily available to his audience, which could be their abiding source of persuasion. And in our days we have just that, although human fickleness is no less.

*They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead-* They stoned Paul and then dragged him out of the city, implying they were disposing of his corpse. He was either really dead (and was resurrected), or extremely damaged and apparently lifeless. The Mosaic principles about the guilt of death within a city come to mind; they had blood on their hands before both God and the men of the Roman authorities. But Paul never seeks to prosecute them for their behaviour. Paul was stoned and dragged out of Lystra as dead- presumably they didn't want him to die within the city limits as they were under Roman jurisdiction. Yet, hobbling and bleeding, he returned into the city to witness. And it was here in Lystra that he made one of his greatest converts, Timothy (Acts 16:1). And when Paul asks us to follow him, he is speaking in the context of his life's work and preaching. He is our pattern, to be lived out in spirit within the confines within which God has placed us.

14:20 *But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up-* Anistemi can be used of resurrection. The way he rises up and walks off, when he had been considered a lifeless corpse just minutes before, rather suggests that this was indeed a resurrection. The disciples stood around about him, rather than seeking to minister to his wounds or resuscitate him. This sounds like trying to hold some kind of funeral service. If indeed Paul died and was resurrected, then it is a reflection of his humility that he never seems to specifically refer to this in any later passages of self-justification.

*And entered into the city, and the next day he went with Barnabas to Derbe-* If indeed Paul had been dragged out of the town to the rubbish dump where corpses were burnt, and then he returned alive and well into the city and spent a day there- this would have been a powerful witness to resurrection. And the Jews would have feared to touch him. He would clearly have been seen as "in Christ", whose death at the hands of the Jews and subsequent resurrection he had been preaching. His return into the city (rather than departing immediately) may have been for similar reasons as to why he did the same after release from prison at Philippi. The community he was leaving behind would have at least some mystique and respect attached to them which would save them from future persecution, at least for some time. We see here Paul's utter selflessness and constant concern for his converts. The way Paul returned to Lystra to confirm the disciples (:21), despite having been stoned and maybe killed there, speaks volumes about him.

14:21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch*- This word is that used in Mt. 28:19 about the making of disciples in response to the great commission. Paul clearly saw the commission as applying to himself; this surely disproves the contention that the great commission was only given to the eleven disciples to whom it was originally spoken. For *Lystra*- see on :20.

14:22 *Confirming the souls of the disciples*- 'Confirming' might seem an activity more relevant to the spirit of disciples, to their minds, rather than their 'souls'. But often the words soul and spirit, *psuche* and *pneuma*, are used almost interchangeably. It is too simplistic to argue that the spirit refers to the human mind or spirit, and 'soul' refers to the material person or body. That distinction is at times valid, but not always. "Confirming" occurs only four times in the NT and always in Acts. Such follow up pastoral visits were clearly part of Paul's missionary strategy as they should be of ours.

*Exhorting them*- *Parakleo* means to beg, to strongly ask. But it also has the sense of 'comfort', although this is not the most common sense in which it is used in the 108 occurrences in the NT. The challenge, the asking to continue in the faith is actually a comfort; the height of the calling, the focus on the ideal, is itself a comfort.

*To continue in the faith*- Paul was a Jew, thinking in Hebrew terms, and steeped in the Old Testament language. And many of his converts were either Jews or Proselytes. The other two NT occurrences of the word likewise reflect the Old Testament idea of continuing in the covenant. Israel did not continue in that covenant (Heb. 8:9), and that covenant cursed all who did not continue in all things written in the Mosaic law (Gal. 3:10- written by Paul to converts in this very area where he was urging them to continue "in the faith"). The contrast is therefore between continuing [or trying to continue] in obedience to Mosaic law, and continuing in the faith in God's saving grace in Christ.

*And that through many tribulations*- Paul is fond of allusion to the parable of the sower, and he clearly has in mind the need to continue as good soil, and not to be in the category of those who fall away from faith because of tribulations (Mt. 13:21). Those tribulations *must* come, he is saying. Christianity is no insurance policy against tribulation, but rather a way of attaching meaning to it. Perhaps he also had in mind the Lord's simple statement that "in the world you shall have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33); it is inevitable. Stephen had twice used the word in his speech (Acts 7:10,11), and consciously or unconsciously Paul was maybe recalling that. Paul himself had brought tribulation upon Christians (Acts 11:19; Heb. 10:33, so again he was experiencing what he had done to others (the word is also used of Paul's sufferings in Acts 20:23; 2 Cor. 1:8; 6:4; Col. 1:24)- just as we do. Paul may also have in mind the predictions in the Olivet prophecy that there was to be great tribulation just before entry into the Kingdom of God at the Lord's return. In this case, we have another hint that he expected the Lord's return imminently, and spoke and reasoned accordingly, as we should do.

We must have tribulation, either in the condemnation of the judgment (Rom. 2:9), or now- in order that we will enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We must bear the burden either of our sins (Am. 2:13; Is. 58:6; Ps. 38:4) or of the Lord's cross (Gal. 6:4 etc.). We will experience either the spiritual warfare of the striving saint (Rom. 7:15-25), or the lusts of the flesh warring in our members, eating us up with the insatiability of sin (James 4:1; Ez. 16:28,29).

*We must enter into the kingdom of God-* The sense is that we are now entering into the Kingdom, but through tribulation. The Lord had spoken of entering the Kingdom through the narrow gate, and Paul is putting meaning into those words, explaining that the narrow gate means tribulation. His own experience of stoning and perhaps death at Lystra exemplified what he was getting at.

*14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting-* The Greek means literally to stretch the hand upon. It is only elsewhere used in 2 Cor. 8:19 of how the church chose Timothy to travel with Paul. Some argue that the hand stretching refers to voting, but this seems to me to be reading in modern principles of democracy; there is no evidence that democracy in the form of voting was what God ever used. Probably it means that they simply chose some elders, and there is no evidence that the Spirit guided them in this in any supernatural sense. But the point is that they didn't leave the new churches with no leadership structure- they created one. "Elders" literally means an older person; but all the believers were relatively young in the faith. Like many modern missionary situations, they did the best they could in terms of choosing wisely. But they didn't tell the new congregations that they were to just take everything in turns and muddle along; they appointed elders. Because like it or not, people need leadership. Given that they probably didn't know the candidates that well, and most were at the same stage of immaturity in faith, we can understand why they "prayed with fasting" about this. They took most seriously the future wellbeing of these groups; they didn't just baptize them and leave them.

*They committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed-* Given the difficulties in choosing elders, we can understand why they just gave them over to the Lord Jesus as their good shepherd. For as passing missionaries there was little else practically they could do. Paul uses the same word in committing the elders to the Lord in Acts 20:32. Paul saw the Lord Jesus as a very real entity and personage to whom he could hand over [Gk.] these new converts. We might infer that Paul felt he had personal responsibility for them, but now he had to leave, he handed them over to the Lord Jesus.

*14:24 And they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia-* Perhaps the idea is that they travelled through Pisidia, spreading the message. They had visited the area before (13:13), so perhaps they were following up with contacts there.

*14:25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga-* They had passed through Perga before, but without apparently preaching there. We get the sense that Paul was eager to cover ground missed out in his previous pass, so driven was he by the idea of geographically distributing the word to all.

*They went down to Attalia-* Perga was a port, but up the river from Attalia, from where longer distance vessels would be departing. These details all add credibility to the record. If Acts is a forgery from an uninspired person, it would've had to be created early on in the 2nd century at least. And the chances of not making a major geographical or historical bloomer would be almost zero. Such small incidental true-to-reality local details confirm us in confidently accepting the Bible as Divinely inspired and therefore true.

*14:26 And from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been committed to the grace of God-* Paul "committed" the elders to the Lord in :23, but he himself had been committed by elders. All pastoral and preaching work is some reflection of our own experiences; it cannot therefore be solely prepared for by missionary training courses and the



like. The Lord works to prepare people, and they are to reflect their own experiences in their work for Him. The same phrase "committed to the grace of God" is used about the sending of Paul and Silas on their later missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Perhaps as noted on :23 about the idea of 'committing', the brethren felt (as we often do) that we can do nothing more materially for others in a given situation; we pray for them and commit them to God's grace. As the missionaries sailed away on a dangerous mission, this sense of commitment of brethren to God's grace would have been natural. It's hard to specifically, neatly define what was understood by "the grace of God". We can only be guided here by how Luke used the term in his volume 1, the gospel according to Luke. "The grace of God" was upon Mary (Lk. 1:30) and John (Lk. 2:40), although he did no miracles. The term is used as if it means 'the general operation of God' in Acts 11:23, God's grace worked through Paul's working (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7), and it was *epi* the Corinthians, it worked around them (2 Cor. 9:14). We can frustrate God's grace by not going the way He leads us (Gal. 2:21). God's grace appears to all men in that the sphere of His operation somehow affects all (Tit. 2:11). The Lord Jesus died by God's grace, i.e. according to His plan (Heb. 2:9 in context). It is indeed true that 'grace' refers to undeserved favour / gift and often refers to forgiveness and salvation; and the word meaning essentially a gift it is at times used in the context of specific gifts of God's Spirit. But it would seem that the term has a wider sense of simply the realm of God's activity, which is of course motivated by His grace.

*For the work which they had fulfilled-* We read in Acts 12:25 likewise of Paul fulfilling a ministry; of John the Baptist fulfilling his race (Acts 13:25). The sense is that God gives a specific task to be done, and we are to fulfil it. The Lord Jesus ascended so that He might fill all things of the church here on earth (Eph. 4:10). The parable of the talents likewise teaches that each believer has been given specific things to do. We need to pray that we will perceive what these things are; because man is never better than when he has a distinctly defined aim and has the wind of the Spirit at his back helping him to fulfil them. Paul felt that his preaching work was a stewardship he had been given and by achieving it, he was fulfilling the word of God (Col. 1:25). The "word of God" in view there would then refer to a specific word of command from God to Paul to preach the Gospel to the Colossians. Hence the specific command to Archippus to take seriously his ministry and fulfil it (Col. 4:17).

*14:27 And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them-* This is the consistent and commendable emphasis of Paul; that he was not working in his own strength but God was working through him. The language is identical to that in Acts 15:4; the apostles reported back on their activities rather than being free radicals in the world.

*And that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles-* The language of God opening doors was familiar to Christians, as the Lord had taught that God opens doors to those who knock. But is there any reason to think that there were believers begging for the Gentiles to be included in the hope of the Gospel, and God responded to their prayers? There is hardly any. Peter and the other early brethren were shocked even at the idea of eating with Gentiles, let alone baptizing them. So we are to conclude that God by grace gave an answer to a prayer that had not been prayed. Or, as I prefer to think, the Father perceives our unspoken, unverbilized, not formalized desires, even our unconscious ones- as prayers. And responds to them.

Paul uses the metaphor of a door being opened in writing that a great door had been opened to him personally at Ephesus and Troas (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12); and he prayed for doors to

be opened so that he could preach to people (Col. 4:3). So, to continue the metaphor, the door had been opened to the Gentiles, but Paul (the Jewish rabbi) felt so identified with his Gentile audience that he felt as if the door had been opened *to him* personally. This is what evangelism is all about- identity with our audience, and leading them in essence along the same path of faith which we have been led down by grace.

14:28 *And they stayed no little time with the disciples*- According to some chronologies, there was a five-year period between this time and the council of Jerusalem of chapter 15. Truly we only get a few incidents from the life of all Bible characters.

## ACTS CHAPTER 15

15:1 *But some men came down from Judea and taught the brothers: Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses-* “Custom” is Gk. *ethos*. This is a major problem in missionary work: the existing believers tend to expect that converts will not only accept the Gospel but also the ethos and culture of their existing community. And this is where this ancient argument about circumcision has so much to teach modern missions.

*You cannot be saved-* The very same Greek phrase is used by Paul when he calls out in urgency during the storm: “Except these abide in the ship, *you* cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31). Surely Luke’s record is making a connection; the legalists taught that it was time to quit the rest of the community unless they got their way, for the sake of their eternal future; and Paul responds by teaching that our salvation depends upon us pulling together against the desperate situation we find ourselves in. It’s as if the salvation of Christ’s body depends upon it staying together. As time went on in the first century, the gap between the Jewish and Gentile elements, the right and the left wing, the legalists and the libertines, got ever wider. The tension got stronger. But nobody won. The Jewish element returned to the Law, and forgot all about the saving grace of Jesus. The Gentile element mixed even more with the world and its philosophies, and forgot the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. They ended up formulating blasphemous doctrines like the trinity, which nobody with any awareness of the Jewish foundation of the Father and Son could possibly have entertained. And so the faith was lost, until it was revived again in those groups who again interpreted Christianity in terms of “the hope of Israel”.

15:2 *And Paul and Barnabas argued and debated with them; consequently Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders to resolve this question-* “Argued” is far too mild a translation. The word is always used elsewhere about major riot, specifically of rioting caused by the Jews. This is how deeply held is the belief that converts must conform to the pre-existing ethos and culture of the existing Christian community. From our perspective and distance, the argument seems so unnecessary, and the Biblical evidence clear as daylight that circumcision is not required for entry to the new covenant. Many of our fiercely debated divisive issues are looked at in the same way by converts living far removed from our place and culture; and believers of other ages would look at them likewise.

15:3 *Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the believers-* Given our notes on :1, this is a true sign of spiritual maturity: to rejoice in the accession of others to our community of faith, when the newcomers are of a radically different ethos and culture to our own. “Great joy” is a phrase used four times by Luke; it was a characteristic of the early church.

15:4 *And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all things that God had done through them-* This is intentionally similar to the report about their arrival at the Antioch ecclesia in 14:27: “And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”. The careful repetition of event and report in Acts 10 and 11 gives the impression that Peter likewise carefully reported to the elders. They were all under the deep sense that God was working through them; no preacher is to be praised for themselves. We are all instruments and being used by the Father. We are absolutely nothing of ourselves.

In Acts 15 the representatives of the ecclesias reported to the whole church at Jerusalem, not just the elders. There seems to have been a series of meetings: initially, the group from Antioch who raised the problems being discussed met with the elders, who met together in a second meeting to consider it all, involving “the whole assembly... the whole church” (:6,12,22). Then there was perhaps a third meeting where “the whole assembly” was also present. And this is why “the apostles and elders *with the whole church*” (Acts 15:22) agreed a solution. It wasn’t a top down decision imposed upon the congregation. They all participated. This parallel between elders and the assembly is even found in the Old Testament- e.g. “Let them exalt him also in the assembly of the people, And praise him in the assembly of the elders” (Ps. 107:32). The “assembly of the people” and that of the elders is paralleled.

*15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying: It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses-* One of the major themes of Acts is how right from the beginning, there was a struggle within the body of believers. And Paul’s letters repeatedly address the problem. The Jewish believers polarised around the Jerusalem ecclesia, and tended towards a keeping of the Law of Moses. They couldn’t really accept that Gentiles could be saved, and saw themselves as a sect of Judaism (“the sect of the Nazarenes”). They were called “the circumcision party” (Acts 11:2), and “the sect of the Pharisees-who-believe-in-Jesus” (15:5). The Lord had foretold that His true people would soon be thrown out of the synagogues and persecuted by the Jews, just as they had persecuted Him. But these brethren so accommodated themselves to Jewish thinking that this didn’t happen. However we cannot but be impressed that some amongst the Lord’s sworn enemies, the Pharisees, came to believe in Him. His hopefulness for them therefore paid off [we recall his hope that the cured leper could make a witness to the priests, Lk. 5:14]; whereas we would likely have given up with them as hopeless cases. There were very few Pharisees, relatively speaking; 5000 at the most and maybe as few as 1000. That a significant number became Christians therefore shows the power of the Lord’s example, and reflects quite some humility amongst these men. So let’s not think that their legalism about circumcision reflects total unspirituality amongst them.

Ironically, the Greek word for ‘heresy’ is the very word used to describe those divisions / ‘sects’ which should not be amongst us (see its usage in Acts 15:5; 24:5). To divide the Lord’s body is itself a heresy; and yet it is so often done in order to protect His body, supposedly, from heresy. Yet the difference between the heresy and the heretic is often fudged. The person gets attacked rather than their beliefs. So often we’ve seen this happened. A brother may, e.g., have views of the interpretation of prophecy which are found obnoxious by some. Yet the criticism of him will tend to get personal; his character is besmirched, because it’s felt that this is justified because he [supposedly] has ‘heretical’ views.

Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (John the Baptist’s followers) were all converted into Christianity (Acts 6:7; 15:5; 19:1-5). There is no specific statement that they dropped all their previous understandings; indeed Acts 15:5 shows that there were Christians who still called themselves “Pharisees”. The uniting and defining feature was their common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, baptism into Him and commitment to Him. The “one faith” referred to the believers’ faith in one and the same person- the one Lord, Jesus (Eph. 4:4-6), rather than only one set of doctrinal propositions about Jesus being “the faith” and all else being apostate. Given the breadth of doctrinal belief within the synagogue system, it’s highly significant that

the Lord assumed His followers would remain within that system until they were cast out. He established no principle of leaving a community because one disagrees with some of their theological tenets. He in fact taught the opposite; that there is no guilt by association by such things, and His emphasis was on the heart and human behaviour being transformed. It seems to me a romanticizing of the New Testament evidence to suggest that the early church was totally doctrinally united, but was soon fractured by doctrinal declension from a specific set of doctrines and interpretations which were set in stone by the apostles. Rather the amazing unity of the church was and is remarkable in that it was achieved *despite and in the face of* those differences. What split the church was fleshly behaviour, which in turn utilized doctrinal differences to justify the various divisions.

*15:6 And the apostles and the elders gathered together to consider this matter-* There is a distinction made between "the whole church" and "the apostles and the elders" (:22). The issues were of such a nature that they required mature discussion and decision making, but the outcome of the deliberations was shared with and agreed by "the whole church". There are some spiritual issues which it is not appropriate to as it were put to the decision of mass democracy. The resulting letter was signed by "the apostles and elders and brethren" (:23). The idea of a private meeting of the apostles and elders may fit Paul's account of the meeting in Gal. 2:2, where he says he put the matters "privately to them that were of reputation", and not publicly.

*15:7 And when there had been much debate-* Peter impetuously would have wanted to state his highly significant personal experience in this matter; but he wisely and humbly curbed himself. Although Peter had clearly been the leader of the very early church, he seems now to be eclipsed by James; and although he was "chosen" by God out of all the other apostles to introduce the Gospel to the Gentiles, yet those same 'senior brethren' are described as 'choosing' [the same Greek word] brethren other than Peter to be involved in this work of incorporating the Gentiles (:22,25). A lesser man than Peter would not have taken well to losing the leadership; he spent the rest of his life as a humble pastor, perhaps of a very small group, and according to the Lord's own prediction, died a violent death.

*Peter rose up and said to them: Brothers, you know that a good while ago-* But it was not so long ago. Perhaps he was trying to give the impression that the Gentile circumcision question had been settled far back in time and there was no need to be raising it. But that is a typical political tactic- and it's not the only example here. This is why the Council of Jerusalem ultimately failed, with Paul later writing advice quite contrary to the agreements reached. There simply wasn't total honesty about the positions held, and whilst on one hand the factions were united by a common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, the issues added to that by the legalists were such that true unity was never going to be possible. And the same scenario has been worked out multiple times, even if the exact issues and contexts differ.

*God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe-* Again, the "by" reflects how Peter saw himself as merely an agent, an instrument in God's hands.

15:8- see on Acts 26:22.

*And God, who knows the heart-* The only other time these words occur is on the Lord's lips in Lk. 16:15, warning the Pharisees that God knows their hearts. And Peter is saying these words to Pharisees who now had believed in Jesus (15:5). He's reminding them, perhaps, of who they had been, of what corrupt hearts they had once had. The Lord had known all about that, but worked to accept them and draw them in to His fellowship. And the same Lord knew the hearts of sincere Gentiles, and was seeking to save them too.

*Did bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did to us-* This is legal language. It's as if God is being called as a witness, and the exhibit provided is the fact that He gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentile converts as a sign of their acceptance- before they were even baptized, and without requiring their circumcision. But who, then, was the judge? The brethren there present at that meeting. And the whole question was therefore wisely presented by Peter as effectively judging God. And in fact that is what any of us are doing by questioning which believers in Christ are acceptable with God. We are relegating Him to a witness, and placing ourselves in His place as judges. This idea is continued in :10: "Why do you now put God to the test?", the Greek meaning to examine or scrutinize. This would then continue the legal metaphor- with the suggestion that it is quite inappropriate to examine the exhibit of God's acceptance of Gentiles in this way.

15:9 *And he made no distinction between us and them-* The same word was used when Peter was told to go with the Gentile visitors "without doubting" (10:20; 11:12), i.e. making no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

*Cleansing their hearts by faith-* This may be a comment upon their receipt of the Holy Spirit (:8). Whilst their speaking in languages was an outward sign of the Spirit's operation, the essence of the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to internal cleansing (see on 2:38). Their hearts were cleansed by the gift of the Spirit- on the basis of their *faith*, not their circumcision. Peter had been told that he was not to make any difference between clean and unclean as defined by Moses, because God had now cleansed the unclean (s.w. 10:15; 11:9). Clearly the unclean animals he had seen represented the Gentiles.

15:10 *Therefore, why do you now put God to the test-* There is the possible suggestion in Acts 15:10 that God was 'tempted' to re-enstate the law of Moses, or parts of it, in the first century, seeing that this was what so many of the early Christians desired to keep. That God is so eager to work with us should in itself be a great encouragement. Or the Greek can mean that they were testing or scrutinizing God inappropriately. See on :8 *Bare them witness*.

*Putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?-* The Lord Jesus came to place a light yoke upon His followers. Not only were the Judaist brethren acting in the place of the Lord Jesus by putting a yoke on others, rather than bearing it themselves; but the yoke they were placing was heavy and unbearable. A yoke makes the burden lighter by sharing it with others who are under the yoke. The fellowship requirement [in this case, circumcision] was therefore a yoke. The Lord's yoke was light in that His fellowship is and was open, and not based upon meeting legalistic requirements.

15:11 *But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as them-* Note that Peter cried out "Lord, save me!" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he

followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And so now here in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren.

Grace, *charis*, basically means a gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was the means of their salvation. The reference is not therefore to the visual manifestations of that gift in miraculous terms; for those died out. But the gift / grace of the Lord was the basis of salvation. It is therefore not only available today, but deeply necessary for salvation; for without the spirit of Christ "we are none of His".

*15:12 And all the crowd kept silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating what signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them-* This could mean that the crowd were not so silent when listening to Peter. The miracles performed by the Lord through Barnabas and Paul were also "signs"- of His acceptance of the Gentiles. It is a common theme in Acts that the Spirit worked miracles in order to demonstrate the acceptance of the Gentiles.

*15:13 And after they finished speaking-* God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were overruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds"- just as men had to John.

*James replied, saying-* A good case can be made that James was written as a follow up to the Council of Jerusalem- there are some marked similarities [James 2:5 = Acts 15:13; James 2:7 = Acts 15:17; James 1:27 = Acts 15:29]. See on 15:23 *Greeting*.

*Brothers, listen to me-* The AV and some manuscripts add "Men and brethren". This could refer to the addressing of both the entire church ("men"), and the elders ("brethren"). Throughout Acts 15 we are reminded that the decisions reached were taken by the church congregation *and* the elders- rather than elders imposing a position upon the congregation.

*15:14 Simeon has related how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name-* The conversion of Cornelius was certainly understood as the sign that the Gentiles were to be accepted. This would imply that Cornelius was the first public Gentile conversion by the apostles, which would mean that the Ethiopian eunuch was either a Jew or a proselyte effectively counted as a Jew. After all, he was reading Isaiah in Hebrew, having

visited Jerusalem on pilgrimage, when Philip preached Christ to him. It is Luke who three times records that the ministry of the Lord Jesus had been God visiting His people Israel (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 cp. Acts 7:23- God visited Israel to redeem them through Moses). No other evangelist records this. Now he is making the point that God was visiting the Gentiles. This did not remain with Paul as some mere theological nicety. The same word is used of how straight away, he decided to go and visit the Gentile converts (15:36). God's visitation of man in Christ quite simply means that we literally go visit others, in pastoral and preaching work. We have mentioned how the letter of James appears to be on one hand an extended commentary upon the Acts 15 decisions, which James had a major part in. His comment on 'visiting' is that we should "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). The "unspotted from the world" would then be his form of the agreement made that Gentiles could be accepted but they must keep "unspotted from the world" by avoiding the fornication and idolatry of the world. James would therefore specifically have in mind 'visiting' *Gentile* widows; and we recall that the issue of discriminating against Greek speaking widows was one of the issues his church had faced in Acts 6:1. Again, God's visitation of men, seeking to take out a people for His Name, must be reflected in our reaching out to others in practice, both materially and spiritually.

*15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets-* There was a 'symphony' [Gk.] between Biblical revelation and the position they were being led to adopt; and there is nothing more comforting and beautiful than to know that a position is solidly underpinned in Bible teaching and Biblical precedent.

*As it is written-* In Am. 9:11 LXX.

*15:16 After this things I will return-* This is hard to interpret; the idea seems to be that after the crucifixion, God 'departed' for a time but now was returning to men in calling the Gentiles.

*And I will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen-* Not the temple of Solomon, although the language of rebuilding is relevant to a temple rather than to a tent. "In that day (of the future Kingdom- v.14) will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen" (Amos 9:11)- a clear future Kingdom prophecy, but quoted about the building up of the first century church in Acts 15:14-16.

*And I will build again the ruins of it-* He is surely saying that because the house of David has been rebuilt, therefore it is now O.K. to help the Gentiles "seek after the Lord". James perceived that firstly the Gospel must go to the house of David, the Jews, and once they had responded, then it would go to the Gentiles. Perhaps the Lord had the same principle in mind when He had His preachers to not [then] preach to Gentiles but instead [at that stage] concentrate on preaching to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5). Yet the primary fulfilment of Amos 9 is clearly in the last days- then, after Israel have been sifted in the sieve of persecution amongst the Gentiles in the latter day holocaust, the tabernacle of David will again be 'rebuilt', the Gentiles will turn to the Lord, and then "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper... the mountains shall drop sweet wine... and I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel... and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land" (Am. 9:13-15). Surely what we are being told is that there must be a repeat of what happened in the first century. What happened then, in the repentance of a minority in Israel, the spread of the Gospel to the world and then the Lord's 'coming' in AD70... this must all be repeated on a far greater scale. Thus some in Israel must repent in the last days,



after the pattern of the 1st century. This will bring about the great latter day gathering in of the Gentiles at the establishment of the Kingdom, when the whole Gentile world will seek to come up to Zion (Is. 2:3; 19:23; 11:10; 51:4,5; 60:3,11; 66:20; Zech. 8:21).

*And I will raise it up-* An apparent reference to the resurrection of Jesus. He had spoken of His resurrection as a rebuilding of the temple (Jn. 2:19,20).

A note is perhaps necessary about *how* the NT writers quoted from the LXX. Because often it appears they don't quote exactly from the LXX text. The classic example would be the way Amos 9:11,2 is quoted in Acts 15:16-18. The argument of James actually hinges on the LXX reading as opposed to the Hebrew [Masoretic] text reading. 'All the nations' were to have God's Name called upon them, whereas Is. 63:19 describes the Gentiles as people upon whom God's Name had not [then] been called. Yet this 'quotation' is actually a merger of the Amos passage with several others (Is. 45:21; Jer. 12:15; Hos. 3:5). That's why James introduces the quotation with the comment that he is quoting "the prophets" (plural). The quotation is more like an interpretation of the text- which was how the Jews were used to interpreting the OT texts. Their principle of exposition, called *gezera shawa*, linked together Bible texts which used the same language. One of the texts which James incorporates into his 'quotation' is Jer. 12:16 LXX, which speaks of how converted Gentiles will be "in the midst of my people". Yet this very phrase occurs several times in Lev. 17 and 18, where we have the commands for how the Gentiles who lived amongst Israel should behave (Lev. 17:8,10,12,13; 18:26). They were told that there were four areas where their lifestyle had to conform to Jewish practice. And these are the very four areas, in the same order, which James asks the Gentile Christians to obey! Clearly, then, the decree of Acts 15, commanding the Gentile Christians to e.g. not eat blood, had as its context how Gentile Christians should live 'in the midst of' a Jewish Christian ecclesia. This is the limitation of the context. From this little exercise in exposition we learn how carefully and intricately the early brethren expounded the OT. Yes, they used the LXX, but they used it in such a way as to bring out practical points, searching always for Bible precedents for the situations they found themselves in. They set us quite some example, especially considering that James, the Lord's brother, would have been a manual worker and artisan as the Lord was; perhaps he was scarcely literate. And yet he reached such heights of exposition and wisdom purely from a simple love of God's word and attention to its detail. See on Jn. 13:18.

15:17 *So that the residue of mankind may seek after the Lord-* The remnant of men, a reference to the remnant of Israel who would accept Jesus. This group are distinguished from "And all the Gentiles".

*And all the Gentiles who are called by My name-* Those who called upon themselves His Name by baptism into it. The tense is chosen to maybe reflect how God already knows His people and had already called the Gentile converts by His Name. This was encouragement to the preachers to go out and fulfil His work with the Gentiles which He had already potentially enabled. This sense is confirmed by the comment in :18 that "[God] makes these things known from of old". He is now making them known ["makes"], but they had already been long planned. This encourages us to preach to the Gentiles "upon whom my name is [Amos says 'has already been'] called". The Name is called upon us by baptism; yet in prospect, in potential, the Name has already been called upon the whole world. But it is for us to go and convert them. This explains why Paul is spoken of as having been a convert before he actually was. Paul was as an ox bound to a yoke, kicking against the goads. But it was as if he was already bound into Christ's light yoke. He wrote that he bore in his body the marks of the

Lord Jesus. He seems to be alluding to the practice of branding runaway slaves who had been caught with the letter F in their forehead, for *fugitivus*. His whole thinking was dominated by this awareness that like Jonah he had sought to run, and yet had by grace been received into his Master's service. But the figure implies that he already was a slave of Jesus at the time of his 'capture' in conversion.

*15:18 Said the Lord, who makes these things known from of old-* See on :17. "Of old" is literally "From the beginning of the age". The idea was that God's plan for the Gentiles was evident, reading between the lines, right from the beginning of His "age" of work with Israel.

*15:19 Therefore my judgment is that-* The legal language of a judge arising to give a verdict. This is in line with Peter's earlier warning not to have God as the provider of witness and to judge Him wrongly; see on :8.

*We do not trouble-* But the Judaizer brethren did 'trouble' the Gentile believers (:24). Later references in the NT to the converts being "troubled" may well refer to the activities of these Judaizers (Acts 17:8; 2 Cor. 4:8; 7:5; Gal. 1:7; 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:2; 1 Pet. 3:14).

*Those from among the Gentiles that turn to God-* Seeing there were few atheists in the first century, we wonder why he doesn't say 'turn to Christ'. He was speaking to Jews, and was using Judaism's language of a Gentile becoming a proselyte and 'turning to [Israel's] God'. But he is saying that becoming a proselyte now meant baptism into Christ, rather than attempting to keep Mosaic laws and visiting the temple in Jerusalem.

*15:20 But that we write to them, that they abstain-* The word is elsewhere used, probably in allusion to this agreement, about abstaining from idolatry, fleshly lusts and immorality (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:22; 1 Pet. 2:11). I suggest therefore that all the prohibitions were of a moral nature. To eat non-kosher food is not an issue of immorality; so my sense is that this must be understood as part of a prohibition here against involvement in idol worship. It's not right for a young unmarried couple to sleep with each other before marriage, but I don't think "fornication" as used here has that in view. Rather are all these things part of idol rituals- fornication would specifically referred to the use of temple prostitutes as part of the worship rituals. Fornication and the blood laws were therefore elaborations upon "the pollutions of idols". So we could read it as meaning: "Abstain from the pollutions of idols: [i.e.] from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood".

*From the pollutions of idols-* Only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food.

*From fornication, from what is strangled and from blood-* The Mosaic law required that animals be killed by their blood being poured out.

*15:21 For Moses from generations of old has in every city those that preach him, he being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-* At first blush this may seem rather a disconnected reason for the previous arrangements. The key is in the phrase "in every city". The Gentile converts were foreseen as coming from "every city". James foresaw that there would be Jews living in every place where Gentiles were baptized; and he sought not to give them any reason for stumbling. Note that the synagogue system is described as preaching Moses. They were creating a cult following around a man, rather than acting as a conduit to bring people to God and His Son.

*15:22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers-* The Bible doesn't teach the total equality of role amongst all believers. There are leaders- but they are still among their brethren.

*15:23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and the elders, brothers, to the brothers-* Although writing from a position of authority, they emphasized that they were brothers writing to brothers.

*Who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia-* The scope of the agreement was local to these areas. Judea is not mentioned, neither is there any general clause governing Gentile converts everywhere. This is maybe why Paul advised the Corinthians differently about issues relating to blood. It's also a reason why we should not seek to obey the letter of the legislation here about blood. This agreement was for a limited time and geographical scope.

*Greeting-* See on :13 *James*.

*15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard that some who went out from us have disturbed you with words, subverting you, to whom we gave no commandment-* The phrase "who went out from us" is exactly that used by John concerning the Judaists in his context, and he uses the term to imply that by going out from the body of Christ they had left Christ (1 Jn. 2:19); and the allusion is to Judas going out from the disciples into the darkness and off to the Jewish leaders to betray the Lord. They "disturbed" the believers, and Paul uses the same word about "some that trouble you [s.w.] and would pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7; 5:10). This is all strong language. This is the severe danger of legalism. It seems that these brethren had falsely claimed the authority of the Jerusalem church, and their aim was to 'subvert you', to carry them away- back to the Jerusalem temple cult.

*15:25 It seemed good to us, having come to one accord-* The idea is that they were unanimous. It seems unlikely that they were, and subsequent NT history shows that the Judaizer group continued their work of 'troubling' the Gentiles with their demands. So this would seem another example of where the Council of Jerusalem is recorded very positively, differences were papered over, an impression of unanimity was given, and therefore the Council ultimately failed to solve the underlying issues.

*To select men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul-* Luke always mentions Paul first. But here Luke is recording the letter sent by the Jerusalem brethren, who would have known and respected Barnabas longer than Paul; and so I see here an incidental evidence that the Divinely inspired Luke is indeed accurately recording real events and written words.

*15:26 Men that have risked their lives-* The Greek can equally mean that they had handed over their lives.

*For the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-* Bearing the name of Christ is in itself an imperative to witness it. Thus "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" is used as a metonymy for 'the

preaching of Christ' (Acts 15:26; 3 Jn. 7; Mt. 24:9 cp. 14). We are baptized into that Name and thereby it is axiomatic that we become witnesses to it.

*15:27 Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth-* Appropriate because many were illiterate and there may have been concerns as to whether what was being read from a scroll was in fact accurate.

*15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things-* There is such a thing as compromise in spiritual life. The compromise of Acts 15 about the demands placed upon the Gentile believers was an example. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that the Mosaic food laws had no binding at all upon Christian converts; and yet "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to endorse the compromise reached in Acts 15:28. The laws agreed there as binding upon the Gentile converts in Acts 15:29 are in fact the so-called Noachic or Primeval Laws, considered by some orthodox Jews to be binding upon all the sons of Noah. That interpretation of what God said to Noah is itself stretched and hardly on a solid Biblical foundation- but God was willing to go along with it in order to make concessions required so that there would at least be some human chance of unity in the early church.

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit" suggests that their conclusions were somehow confirmed by the Spirit. How exactly this happened isn't stated. But we note that in :32, Judas and Silas used the Spirit gift of prophecy to tell the Gentile converts the same message. It could be of course that as with Nathan initially assuming that his message to David about the temple was inspired from God when it wasn't, so these brethren may have assumed their conclusions were supported by the Holy Spirit. The way that Paul later contradicts the ruling about food offered to idols might suggest that in fact, they were simply assuming [as too many folk do today] that their own process of reasoning was correct and was therefore confirmed by the Holy Spirit. At best we can observe that no mechanism for that confirmation is recorded here.

*15:29 That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols-* Out of the four forbidden things, this is the one which differs from what was originally agreed. In :20 they had agreed to write forbidding the Gentile converts "pollution of idols". But this changed to "thing sacrificed to idols" (although the word is only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food). What they agreed to write was not written- an interpretation of it was written. And it is exactly at this point that Paul's advice to the Corinthians differs appears to differ from that of the Jerusalem Council as here recorded. For he writes that there is nothing wrong of itself with eating things sacrificed to idols. Perhaps he considered that the decree of Jerusalem only affected limited geographical areas and wasn't binding on his mission [see on :23]; or that he considered the whole agreement to have failed to such an extent that it was null and void; or he perhaps considered that it was all dirty church politics and he was giving inspired advice which contradicted it.

*From blood, from things strangled and from fornication. From which if you keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Farewell-* Note that the Western Text [*Codex Bezae*] of Acts omits "things strangled", leaving us with three basic laws about idolatry, fornication and bloodshed. In this case we would see an allusion to an uninspired passage in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 5) which taught that the captivity in Babylon came about "on account of idolatry, fornication and bloodshed". In this case we would see God willing to compromise and accept the terms which were familiar to the orthodox Jewish minds, rather than merely telling them that their Mishnah was uninspired and so often hopelessly incorrect.

15:30 *So they, when they were sent off-* This alludes to the custom of accompanying a person on the first stage of their journey as a sign of solidarity and acceptance of them. The delegation had the full support of the Jerusalem church.

*Went to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter-* There is a need for transparency in these things; and so the letter was delivered and read in front of everyone. Remember that many would have been illiterate. They did not "deliver the letter" until the congregation had been gathered together, in order to stop any chance of gossip after some had read the letter and others hadn't. These are the kinds of basic wisdom that are needed in pastoral and mission work.

15:31 *And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the encouragement-* The Judaist visitors had obviously worried the believers with the possibility that their salvation could be in question and actually impossible. Hence their joy when they learned that they were acceptable with God.

15:32 *And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets-* See on :28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit.*

*Encouraged and strengthened the believers with many words-* The idea is of confirmation. The context is confirming them that as Gentiles they really were OK with the Lord without circumcision. When we read of Paul and Silas going throughout Syria and Cilicia "strengthening the churches" (:41), the same word is used; and presumably the confirmation provided was again about this issue of Gentile acceptability. We note that Syria and Cilicia are the two specific regions to whom the letter from Jerusalem was addressed (:23).

15:33 *And after they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers back to those that had sent them-* The 'sending off' was a custom demonstrating acceptance and blessing of the mission; see on :30.

15:34 *It seemed good to Silas to stay there-* Again we see the human element in the preaching decisions of the early brethren. Despite Holy Spirit guidance, they made decisions which "seemed good" to them. The same word is used in :22,25 and :28. This is a fair emphasis all within the same chapter. There could be the hint that the decisions of the Council were simply what seemed right to them at the time, although they claimed some unspecified Holy Spirit confirmation of their thinking. This would again explain why Paul's inspired guidance to the Corinthians about meat offered to idols seems to contradict the position of the Jerusalem elders.

15:35 *And Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also-* "Teaching" may refer to teaching the converts; and "preaching" to evangelism. "The Lord" in Luke-Acts usually refers to the Lord Jesus; the Gospel records would not have been widely distributed, and many people were illiterate. So the teaching and preaching of the Lord's word as recorded in the Gospels would have been vital.

15:36 *And after some days Paul said to Barnabas: Let us return now-* The Greek word used here is that usually translated 'to convert'. It could be that Paul was suggesting that they go and 'convert' their converts, understanding that there are levels of conversion, as the Lord had taught and exemplified in Peter (Lk. 22:32).

*And visit the believers in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare-* See on :14.

15:37 *And Barnabas wanted to take with them John also, who was called Mark-* The Greek really means 'to advise'. And Paul got mad and had a division about even the suggestion! This is not Paul at his best, but the incident is so typical of many divisions in the church.

15:38 - see on Acts 6:1.

*But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia-* The Greek word and position in the clause suggests '*that one*', reflecting Paul's contemptuous attitude. The Greek idea is of apostasy. But Paul speaks of apostasy from *him*, rather than from the Lord. This is not Paul at his best. Like many of his brethren to this day, he considered a personal departure from him as being apostasy. Likewise he laments how all in Asia had turned away *from him*; whereas the Lord Jesus wrote letters to those in Asia, clearly acceptant of them as His beloved brethren. Personal differences don't thereby declare a divided-from brother to be therefore and thereby no longer a brother of the Lord. It could be, however, that John Mark had separated from them for spiritual reasons, perhaps falling under the influence of the Judaizers.

*And had not gone with them to the work-* Paul's dislike of Mark was for deeper reasons than just surface irritation. This is quoting the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 30:22, where "all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, said, Because they *went not with us*, we will not give them ought of the spoil". Why does the Spirit make this connection? Is it not suggesting that Paul, zealous soldier of David / Jesus as he was, was in those early days in some sense a man of Belial, bent on achieving his own glory in preaching, and unwilling to share it with anyone who wasn't spiritually or physically strong enough to do it as he was (cp. the weaker followers of David)? If this is the case, then this is a far, far cry from the Paul who wrote his letters some years later, begging Timothy to come to encourage him, and letters in which the care of all the churches weighs down his soul daily, coming upon him as he woke up each morning (2 Cor. 11:28); the Paul who repeatedly encourages the weak, treating weak and strong as all the same in many ways, until he eventually attains a level of selfless devotion to his weak brethren that is only surpassed by the Lord Himself.

15:39- see on Acts 13:12,13.

*They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus-* The "contention" between Paul and Barnabas is described in a word which occurs only thrice elsewhere. In Heb. 10:24, a more mature Paul speaks of how we should consider one another to "*provoke* unto love and good works". Surely he wrote this with a sideways glance back at his earlier example of provoking unto bitterness and division. Likewise he told the Corinthians that he personally had stopped using the miraculous Spirit gifts so much, but instead concentrated on developing a character dominated by love, which was *not* easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Spirit seems to have recognized Paul's change, when Acts 17:16 records how Paul's spirit was "stirred" at the spiritual need of the masses, and thereby he was provoked to preach to them; rather, by implication, than being provoked by the irritations of weaker brethren.

15:40 *But Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brothers to the*

*grace of the Lord*- The commendation of Paul's mission by the Antioch brethren could suggest that they took Paul's side in the dispute. But despite being seen as having done the right thing by conservative brethren, Paul's later allusions to the incident suggest he later realized that he had done wrong, and the approbation of his brethren didn't make it right before God.

15:41 *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches*- See on :32 *strengthened the believers*. The Greek for "strengthening" is from the root for 'establishing'; the word is used both of the Lord establishing His people, and of the preachers and pastors establishing them. Any work we do to build up others has the Lord working through and with us.

## ACTS CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he went also to Derbe and to Lystra; and a certain disciple was there, named Timothy-* Being half Jewish and having a Gentile name, this was a typical case which would have been hard to legislate over given the legalistic mindset of the Judaizers which has just been brought before us in chapter 15. And 'Timothy' means 'Dear to God'; the Gentiles were equally beloved.

*The son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek-* Her name was Eunice, and his grandmother Lois also had believed before her (2 Tim. 1:5). Lois and Eunice are Gentile names, so we might conclude that they were not very observant Jews, indeed Eunice had married a Gentile which would have severed her from orthodox Judaism, neither had she circumcised her son; and yet from a child they had taught him the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). They loved the word of God but were not seen as having made the grade in terms of their religion. So many of the Lord's people are like that.

16:2 *Well reported of by the believers that were at Lystra and Iconium-* This would imply Timothy was from Lystra (:1 is unclear whether he was from Derbe or Lystra).

16:3 *Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him-* Literally 'to go forth', the word used about missionary endeavour in fulfilment of the great commission to 'go forth' (Lk. 9:6; 3 Jn. 7).

*And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek-* Remember that this follows hard on the decision made in chapter 15 not to demand circumcision. But an agreed position can still not be followed because of the higher principles of not causing others to stumble. There are several examples in the NT of where Paul could have taken a certain course of action, or insisted on acceptance of a certain doctrinal position, knowing that Truth was on his side. But he didn't. Thus the council of Jerusalem established that Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, but straight afterwards Paul circumcised Timothy in Lystra out of consideration to the feelings of the Jewish believers (Acts 16:1-3). He could have stood on his rights, and on the clear spiritual principles involved. But he stepped down to the lower level of other believers (e.g. by keeping some of the redundant Jewish feasts), he made himself all things to all men that he might try to save some, and by so doing stepped up to the higher level in his own spirituality.

16:4 *And as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which had been determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem-* Presumably just the four forbidden things related to idol worship. Or were there more?

16:5 *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily-* Implying baptisms were being done daily, immediately a candidate was ready (not left to the weekend for convenience!). The same reference to daily increase is to be found earlier in Acts. The increase in number was related to the [temporary] resolution of the tensions within the community over the question of the Gentiles. Schism between believers is the greatest disadvantage for the Gospel, and contrariwise, as the Lord laboured in His prayer of John 17, our unity should be enough to convert the world.



*16:6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia-* Paul writes to the Corinthians of how he had been given areas in which it was potentially possible for him to preach in (2 Cor. 10:13), and he didn't enter into those areas which had either already been preached in, or which were another brother's responsibility. This seems to suggest that God does indeed look down from Heaven and as it were divide up the world amongst those who could preach in it. This is why Paul perceived that he had been 'forbidden' from preaching in some areas [e.g. Macedonia] and yet a door was opened to him in Achaia. Likewise he felt he had been forbidden [s.w.] to preach to Rome until the time of Rom. 1:13. This language is allusive to the way in which the Lord forbade Israel to conquer certain areas on their way to the promised land (Dt. 2:37). The point is, between us, our preaching is a war of conquest for Jesus, pulling down strong holds and fortresses as Paul put it; or, as Jesus expressed it, taking the Kingdom by force, as stormtroopers. How the Spirit achieved this 'forbidding' isn't clear, although the same word is used in 1 Thess. 2:16 about how Jewish opposition 'forbade' Paul preaching to Gentiles. But even this, for which the Jews were culpable, was used by the Spirit in the bigger picture of God's purpose.

*16:7 And when they came to the border of Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia-* The Greek really means to put to the test. Having been forbidden or hindered from preaching in Asia, they realized they were being led to some areas but not others. And so when they thought of preaching in Bithynia, they set up various tests to see if their way was to be made prosperous there or not. The spirit of Jesus, perhaps their own spiritual mindedness, didn't permit them to go there. Perhaps they learnt the lesson and therefore likewise purposefully didn't preach in Mysia (see on :8).

*But the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them-* Living according to the spirit / mind / example of Jesus will mean that we naturally find the answers to some of the practical dilemmas which may arise in our lives. Could it not be that the spirit of Jesus, a life lived after His pattern, compelled them to (let's imagine) go to visit a sick child and this meant they missed the transport leaving for Bithynia?

*16:8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas-* They could not have avoided it, seeing it was impossible to get to Troas without passing through Mysia. Presumably the idea is that they did not preach there. Perhaps the Spirit forbade them, as in Bithynia (see on 16:7).

*16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing-* Having been led away from two areas and realizing they should learn the lesson and leave a third one alone (see on :8), they were now directed to where the Lord wished them to work. He could have sent them there immediately, but He wanted them to work out and reflect upon His will and processes (see on :7 *attempted*); and once they had got through that, He gave them clear direction. This would explain the immediacy of their response once they finally received clear direction (:10). The same sort of thing happens in our lives if we allow ourselves to be led by Him and be in relationship with Him.

*Urging him and saying: Come into Macedonia and help us!-* *Parakleo* is literally 'to call near', AV 'praying him'. The man was standing- the position of begging and pleading in intercession (as the Lord Jesus for Stephen). "Help" is the same word used in Heb. 2:18 for the help provided by the Lord Jesus in prayer as our intercessor. The language is of prayer- and it's as if Paul and Timothy are in God's place being prayed to and begged by the Lord Jesus. In a sense, we manifest God in our

preaching; we are Him to this world. And the need is the call; we too encounter such calls, if we are sensitive to them.

*16:10 And when he had seen the vision, immediately-* Paul and the apostles were urgent in their preaching. When Paul received the go ahead to preach in Macedonia, he “immediately endeavoured” to go there, even not waiting for Titus to join him, such was his urgency (Acts 16:10; 2 Cor. 2:12,13). And the response of people to these urgent preachers was therefore quick too. Men who began doubting and cynical were pricked in their heart, they realized their need, and were baptized within hours (Acts 2:12,37).

*We sought to go into Macedonia-* This could mean that Luke was now present with Paul; or it could be that he is including here the inspired diary of another companion of Paul.

*Concluding that-* The idea is of proving, putting together (s.w. Acts 9:22). By assessment of evidence and testing situations and hypotheses, Paul drew a conclusion. And we are likewise required to interpret God's actions in our lives, rather than expecting a bolt of revelation or specific calling. Although at times Paul did have this kind of thing, in his preaching work he was clearly left to join the dots himself in many ways. See on :7 *attempted* and :9 *A vision*.

*God had called us to preach the gospel to them-* Paul 'assuredly gathered' that "the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them" (Acts 16:10 AV). The Lord calling is usually used concerning His calling of men to understand and obey the Gospel. Perhaps Paul is saying that the reason why we are called is to preach, and in this context he realised that the people *he* was to preach to, were the Macedonians. He later reminisced: "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak (i.e. preach)" (1 Thess. 2:4).

If we don't shine forth the light, both in the world and in the household, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were called. Perhaps this is the meaning of Acts 16:10, where Luke says that they preached in Macedonia because they perceived that "the Lord had called us *for* (in order that) to preach the gospel (in this case) unto (the Macedonians)". Whether such an interpretation appeals or not, there are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.).

*16:11 Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace and the day following to Neapolis-* A nautical term for sailing before the wind. But wind is the same Hebrew idea as 'spirit'. They were as it were led directly by the Spirit on their journey, confirming the process of 'concluding' we discussed on :10. Recall too how they had been forbidden to preach in two or three places before this; now, everything is going so directly and clearly under the Lord's direction by the Spirit. The allusion may be to the way the cherubim of Ezekiel's vision moved in a straight manner. And the account of Saul's conversion is replete with reference to the commissioning of Ezekiel. The Spirit, working through Angels, cherubim and all manner of means, confirmed Paul in the direction he had worked out as being necessary to take.

*16:12 And from there to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony; and we stayed in this city for some days-* The teaching, conversion and baptism of the Philippians took only "some days"; the jailer would have at best only had a

brief exposure to Paul's message before meeting him in prison. Likewise Paul was only in Thessalonica "two Sabbath days" and in that time he had to work night and day to support himself and his team. The impression is that the pre-baptismal teaching was brief. Colonies were "another Rome transferred to the soil of another country" (Vine). This explains some of the language in the letter to the Philippians, emphasizing that our citizenship is a heavenly one (Phil. 3:20), when Philippi had been established as a "colony" for Roman citizens.

*16:13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by a river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women that had gathered-* When Paul is described as going "forth without the gate" to preach in Philippi (RV), this is the very language of Heb. 13:12 about the Lord going forth without the gate, carrying the cross, and bidding us follow Him. For Paul, to preach was to carry the cross of Christ, and so it must be for us. A river was an attractive place for Jews to worship because of their need to perform ritual washing. Paul's message of baptism was therefore particularly appropriate.

*16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God-* Or, a Lydian. Perhaps she was a Jewess from Lydia, or a Gentile from Lydia who had become attracted to Judaism. Archaeological remains indicate a guild of dyers and purple traders there. She would have been accustomed to the use of *baptizo* in her work.

*Heard us-* The imperfect, 'was hearing', could suggest she overheard the preaching rather than sat attentively purposefully listening to it. Otherwise we would expect the Greek word for 'listening' to be used here; but it isn't.

*Whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul-* This is clear enough evidence that the Lord works directly on the human heart / perception, quite above the power of His written word itself. Her 'giving heed' to the Gospel was because the Lord had opened her heart. It's not as if the Lord faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving us the choice of responding to what we read / hear or not. He goes further than that, reaching across the table, and compelling some to have open hearts to His word. Luke has spoken earlier of how the Lord opened the hearts of the disciples / apostles to understand the word of God (Lk. 24:31,32,45). That again is evidence enough that God's word is not simply self-explanatory; the eunuch rightly observed that he couldn't understand it unless a man guided him, and the Spirit operated by sending Philip to do this; the disciples had their hearts opened by the Lord to understand the Scriptures, and Lydia's heart was opened to give heed to the Gospel. This 'extra' factor is reflective of God's grace; without it, salvation would simply be for those intellectually astute enough to correctly interpret the theology of the Bible. But the presence of that 'extra' factor (in the Lord opening hearts to the Gospel) is the mechanism by which He calls. And as Romans demonstrates, the fact He calls one but not another is a parade example of His grace, and how salvation is by grace and now by theological prowess.

The same word for "to give heed" is in 8:6 about how people gave heed to the Gospel which Philip preached. Presumably it would be fair enough to conclude that the Lord likewise assisted their hearts to this end.

16:15 *And when she was baptized-* The conversion of Lidia is spoken of in a sub clause: “And when she was baptized...”. There is no statement that she believed what Paul had spoken; merely that she listened with interest and was baptized. The implication is that belief and baptism are part and parcel of the same thing. There is certainly the impression that the period of Lidia’s teaching was quick. To argue that she may have been instructed for several days is an argument from silence. The impression given by all the accounts of baptism is that it was the initial response made by people once they believed a basic outline of the Gospel.

*And her household-* The way of the world was that the whole household converted to the religion of the head of the house. And yet the call of Christ was to individuals. Therefore when we read of whole households converting (Acts 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:11,16; 16:15 Rom. 16:10) we must assume that they had resisted the temptation to mass convert, and that Masters had the humility to *not* demand of their slaves and family members that they just blindly follow them. This request would have been axiomatic to their preaching of the Gospel; and yet it would have been a radical departure from how family heads around them behaved.

*She urged us, saying: If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. So she persuaded us-* Entering houses and eating together was seen as having a religious dimension to it, as Peter mentioned when accepting Cornelius' invitation. There were present at least Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, as this is a 'we' passage. For a woman to invite a group of previously unknown men into her house was scandalous and would have begged all kinds of gossip. But the culture in Christ was and is at radical variance with that of the surrounding world.

16:16 *And it came to pass, as we were going to the place of prayer, that a certain slave girl met us-* See on 16:15. We can imagine the gossip this provoked as Lydia, her family and the foreign men walked to the river. Note that after baptism, she continued to attend the religious meeting place she had attended previously. The Lord spoke of how the time would come when His followers would be cast out of the synagogues, but following Him did not immediately require ceasing attendance at synagogue, despite the terribly wrong theologies preached there.

*Who had a spirit by which she predicted the future and who brought her masters much gain by fortune-telling-* Acts 16:16–18 are the words of Luke, under inspiration: “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of Python met us” (Gk.). As explained in the footnote in the Diaglott version, Python was the name of a false god believed in during the first century, possibly the same as the god Apollo. It was believed that the ‘spirit’ of Python took over the ‘immortal soul’ of the person being possessed. Seeing that the Bible strongly opposes the idea of an immortal soul, there is no way that a spirit of Python can possess anyone. So Python definitely did not exist, but Luke does not say the girl was ‘possessed with a spirit of Python, who by the way, is a false god who does not really exist...’. In the same way the Gospels do not say that Jesus ‘cast out demons which, by the way, do not really exist, it is just the language of the day for illnesses’. The demons cast out of Legion went “into the abyss” (Lk. 8:31 Gk.); the pagan concept of the abyss is a nonsense, yet if we believe that the record of Legion’s cure teaches the existence of demons, then we must logically believe in ‘the abyss’ too.

16:17 *The same following after Paul and us was crying out, saying: These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!-* There

was clearly a literal element to this, because Paul turns and addresses the girl (:18). But the language of following Paul is elsewhere used to mean that people accepted his teaching (Acts 13:43). It may be that we are intended to understand that she accepted the Gospel.

*16:18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, being greatly disturbed by it, turned and said to the spirit: I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very moment-* Paul didn't allow himself to be irritated. The tragedy of mental illness grieved him; the tragedy of the way in which some people have an all too *partial* knowledge of Gods truth. And his grieving for her didn't merely result in him preaching the Gospel to her; he did something concrete to help cure her.

*16:19 But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold of Paul and Silas-* Circumstances repeat within our lives, as they did for Paul. Because exactly the same complaint was made at Ephesus, with the same persecution; and the same Greek words are used to describe it (19:24,25). Paul was intended to learn from the events at Philippi so he could cope with those at Ephesus.

*And dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers-* Paul was likewise 'dragged' in Jerusalem (21:30). Yet he had himself 'dragged' Christians out of their house churches, along the streets and into prison (8:3). He would have been enabled to feel for those he had thus treated. We too are brought to realize how others felt as a result of our actions, not so much as a punishment for us, but in order to lead us closer to the spirit of Christ and to His Kingdom.

*16:20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said: These men, being Jews, are disturbing our city-* This disrespect was rooted in the fact that these Jews had probably only recently arrived, as a result of Jews being cast out of Rome (Acts 18:2).

*16:21 And advocate customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans-* In both Thessalonica and Philippi, strong opposition arose to the preaching of the Gospel because it was held that it was preaching another King, Jesus, in opposition to Caesar, and that the obligations of this new religion were at variance with the Imperial Cult (Acts 16:21; 17:7). In a sense, these allegations were true. Christianity taught that the convert became a member of a new, spiritual Israel. It was irrelevant whether he or she was a Jew, Roman or Gentile. And the convert had to act inclusively rather than exclusively towards other converts. It must have been hard for a Roman citizen to willingly become as it were a 'citizen' of 'spiritual Israel', a 'member' of the despised and captive Jewish race. To not participate in the cult of emperor worship was serious indeed; Roman citizenship could be lost over this matter. Pliny wrote that Christians were therefore "unable by temperament or unwilling by conviction to participate in the common activities of a group or community". They were seen as any true living Christian is: a bit weird, unsociable, aloof from worldly pleasure, and thereby a silent critic of those who indulge. "The Christian would not attend gladiatorial shows or games or plays. He would not read pagan literature. He would not enlist as a soldier, for then he would come under orders that might conflict with his standards and with his loyalty to Jesus Christ. He would not be a painter or sculptor, for that would be to acquiesce to idolatry. Nor would he be a schoolmaster, for then he would inevitably have to tell the immoral stories of the pagan gods. The Christian had better steer clear of business contracts, because they required the taking of oaths, which the Christian abjured. They had better keep out of administrative office because of the idolatry involved... and so on". The

Romans considered anyone outside the Roman world or who rejected Roman manners and laws as being a barbarian; and yet the Gospel appealed to Roman citizens to reject these very manners and laws. Thus Ramsay comments: "To the Romans *genus humanum* meant not the human race in general but the Roman world, men who lived according to Roman manners and laws; the rest were enemies and barbarians. The Christians, then, were enemies to civilised man, and to the customs and laws which regulated civilised society... they introduced divisions into families and set children against their parents".

Jews were allowed to make proselytes of other nations, but not Roman citizens, who were not to be religiously preached to by any other group within the empire. Therefore the command to take the Gospel to literally all men, including Roman citizens, was hard to obey. This explains the double complaint that the Roman citizens were being asked to both receive *and* obey the message of Christ. Receiving them, being preached to, was also a matter of offence, as well as the content of the message.

*16:22 And the crowd rose up together against them; and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten-* The obvious question is why Paul didn't reveal his Roman citizenship at this stage in order to avoid the flogging. He does reveal it afterwards, but seeing flogging could be fatal, there must have been a major reason why Paul went through with it when he didn't need to. One can only speculate: he wanted to show solidarity with Silas; he wanted to put the authorities in a position where they were in his debt and would allow the fledgling ecclesia to meet unhindered; he was simply stubborn and angry and wished to embarrass his enemies.

*16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them-* This doesn't mean that they personally flogged them. They 'laid' in the sense of laying a penalty upon them. The actual flogging was likely done by the jailor; hence his desire to wash their damaged bodies after his conversion, and his deep sense of fear before them afterwards. When we read that the jailor "having received this order" (:24) put them into the inner prison, the "order" was the sentence of flogging which he was ordered to inflict, and he may well have carried it out in the inner prison.

*They threw them into prison-* Exactly what Paul had done to Christians, after flogging them (26:10).

*Ordering the jailor to guard them carefully-* Especially securely. There seemed to be a fear that Paul would seek to escape; hence having received such a charge, the jailor put them in the inner prison, the most secure zone, probably underground with no access to the outside. Or it could be that the magistrates wanted these men to die in custody, and 'guard them extra carefully' could have been a nod to abuse them. See on :24 *Shackles*.

*16:24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in shackles-* The Greek is literally "the wood". This was an instrument of torture having five holes, four for the wrists and ankles and one for the neck. The same word is used for the cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). Again we see how the experiences of believers in Acts, and Paul especially, were a sharing in the sufferings of their Lord. Just as ours are.

*16:25 But about midnight-* The stocks were an instrument of torture which would have made

sleeping impossible. It could have been that they might have died that night in that dark cave... if the earthquake had not happened.

*Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God-* Literally, they were praying in singing hymns. Let's not forget that hymns are prayers being sung. The musical issues surrounding them can so easily distract from this realization.

*And the prisoners were listening to them-* The fact no prisoners ran away (:28) may mean that they were converted by that evening of witness. See on :26.

*16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened-* The work of the Lord Jesus is described in exactly these terms, of opening the prisons and releasing those who are bound (Lk. 13:16; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11; 1 Pet. 3:19). The fact all the prisoners had their bonds unfastened would maybe suggest they were all converted, at least potentially they were given freedom in Christ; see on :25 *The prisoners*.

*16:27 And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open-* More language appropriate to the saving work of Jesus in opening the prison doors.

*Drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped-* If prisoners escaped during an earthquake, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that the jailor would therefore be executed for negligence of duty. He had a fair chance of survival. We are therefore left with the impression that this man was perhaps very proud, or committed to his job to the point that he was his career and his career was him, with his family meaning little to him; or perhaps just overly emotional; or maybe new to the job and reacting poorly in a crisis. We meet all these types of people in life, and tend to assume they would not be good candidates for the Gospel. But this man was.

*16:28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying: Do not harm yourself! For we are all here!-* Every other usage of the phrase 'to do harm' is always in a moral sense, of sinning (Rom. 7:19; 9:11; 13:4; 2 Cor. 5:10). We can therefore in this case conclude that suicide would have been a sin; although God's forgiveness of that sin is another issue.

*16:29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas-* Fear of his fate before God for having tortured His servants, and having all the same been shown such grace in that his prisoners hadn't run away.

*16:30 And brought them out and said: Sirs, what must I do to be saved?-* He doesn't ask for baptism, suggesting he was unaware of the need for it. This was a highly emotional situation; anyone at the very point of suicide is in a very unstable position. Many today would have told the man to calm down and consider the issue of baptism once things were a bit calmer in his life, urging him not to take such a decision on the cusp of emotion and perceived desperation. Let alone to baptize all his family when he himself was taking the decision under such psychological and circumstantial pressure. But the Biblical example here is quite the opposite to how many would judge today. "What must I do?" is a common phrase recorded by Luke. All encounter with the Lord Jesus and His message provokes this sense, that we can no longer be passive, but must *do* something in response. "Sirs" translates *kurios*,

and maybe we are to perceive that Paul and Silas were manifesting the Lord Jesus to the jailor.

There is no record of his apology or desire for forgiveness from them for what he had done to them (see on :23). He rightly perceived that the essence of his sin was against God and he needed to be right before Him, knowing that what he had done required judgment, which he now realized he needed to be 'saved' from.

16:31 *And they said: Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved-* In :34, he believed in God. A theme of Acts is that the work of the Father and Son are paralleled (e.g. 16:31 cp. 34; 15:12; 26:17 cp. 22). They are working *together* to achieve our final redemption. The concept is wondrous.

*You and your household-* This focus on his family may have been to psychologically assist him to get over his suicidal thoughts.

16:32 *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all that were in his household-* The "household" would have included children, slaves and distant relatives. The man was wealthy. "The word of the Lord" was the message of the Lord Jesus; the kind of material eventually transcribed and published as the Gospels of the Lord Jesus. Paul clearly had in mind that his "household" could respond; for he commands the jailer that if *he* believed, then he *and* his household could be saved. This makes us wonder whether this man and his household had been known to Paul previously. Or it could be that Paul perceived that because of the faith of one individual, a whole family could be saved- although they too had to respond to the Gospel. Hence he preached it to them.

16:33 *And at that hour of the night he took them-* The earthquake occurred at "midnight" (Acts 16:25); Paul and Silas spoke "the word of the Lord" to the jailer, and "that same hour" (Acts 16:33 AV) he washed their stripes and he and his family were baptized. The exact referent of "that same hour" is difficult to determine, but the grammar would seem to imply that within one hour the jailer heard the word of the Lord from Paul and Silas, washed them, and he and his family were baptized. All in the midst of the aftermath of a major earthquake. The record seems to be using "that same hour" to highlight the urgency of baptism [it should be done even in the midst of an earthquake, at night]; and the speed at which it could occur ["that same hour"]. After this, the jailer took Paul and Silas into his home and prepared a celebratory meal; and then day broke, the magistrates sent an urgent message requiring Paul and Silas to be released (Acts 16:34,35).

*And washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized-* The Greek *louo* specifically refers to complete washing of the body, rather than anointing just some parts of the body, for which the NT uses a different word. Literally, he washed them from their wounds, i.e. the blood and damage from the stripes was over their entire bodies. Their baptizing of him after this is another example in Acts of deep connection and mutuality between the convert and the converter.

16:34 *And he brought them into his house-* Therefore the teaching of the Gospel to his family in :32,33 was done outside the house; presumably in the ruins of their house and yard. The house they entered would have been severely damaged.



*Set food before them, and rejoiced greatly with all his family-* Whole households were converted (Acts 10:2; 16:34; 18:8; Col. 4:15), and the earliest Christian meeting places unearthed were rooms in the homes of rich believers. And with us too, the success of our community depends upon God's Truth first and foremost being the centre of family life, with the joy of faith permeating it. Household conversions were a major feature of the first century spread of the Gospel (e.g. Lydia- Acts 16:15; Crispus- Acts 18:8; Priscilla and Aquila- Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Nymphas- Col. 4:15; Onesiphorus- 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19; Philemon- Philemon 2; "the elect lady", 2 Jn. 10; the home at Troas- Acts 20:6-8). Clearly 'house' was used in the first century as a kind of shorthand for 'house church'. They knew no other pattern of gathering. There was almost an assumption that if a man converted to Christ, his 'house' also would. Hence we read that Cornelius would be told words "whereby thou and thy house shalt be saved" (Acts 11:14). The same phrase was repeated to the jailor at Philippi (Acts 16:31). It's emphasized four times in three verses that the Gospel was preached to his house, and his whole house responded (Acts 16:31-34). The Lord likewise rejoiced in Zacchaeus' conversion, that salvation had come to that man's house (Lk. 19:9). He assumed that Zacchaeus would quite naturally persuade his 'house'.

*Having believed in God-* He was unlikely to have been an atheist [atheism wasn't very common in the 1st century]. But he grasped for the first time the real import of a real and relevant faith in the one true God as a personal being. See on Jn. 14:1. We probably need to read in an ellipsis here: He believed in God's grace and salvation, which is in His Son Jesus.

16:35 *But when it was day, the magistrates sent their officers, saying: Let those men go-* Word may have got to them from Lydia or other converts, that Paul was a Roman citizen. But note :38 "they feared when they heard that they were Romans". So perhaps news of the strange security of the prisoners and conversion of the jailor had already reached them and they didn't wish to as it were get in trouble with God.

16:36 *And the jailor reported the words to Paul, saying: The magistrates have sent word to let you go. Therefore come out and go in peace-* After baptizing the jailor and eating at his home, Paul and Silas had returned to jail. The temptation to flee must have been very great, and in the aftermath of the earthquake they could well have got away. The fact they returned to the jail indicates Paul had another agenda here, and he doggedly stuck to it. His subsequent usage of the situation would confirm this- he allowed himself to suffer so much in order that the ecclesia there could get off to a good start in terms of being shielded from legal persecution. Our efforts for the newly converted are made in this same spirit.

16:37- see on Acts 22:25.

*But Paul said to them: They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men that are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison, and now they want to throw us out secretly? No!-* Silas also was a Roman citizen, and so we must note too his willing submission to suffering he could otherwise have avoided. We note too the absence of Timothy and Luke, who were apparently also in the area at the time; perhaps Paul allowed them to slip away, fully intending to use his citizenship to establish a situation in which the new converts would be left alone by the authorities. We may learn from that that needless suffering was avoided in such a case.

*Let them come themselves and bring us out-* This may have been said with a fleck of pride and annoyance; and yet the evidence provided above indicates that this was exactly according

to Paul's game plan. He wanted to be flogged so that he could then pull out the card of his Roman citizenship. He almost did the same in Acts 22:29. And God confirmed him in that plan by bringing about the earthquake that very night, something which Paul in no way could have contrived. Likewise the conversion of the jailor was all a strengthening of that plan- to get the authorities relatively onside with the Christian movement. Or perhaps the jailor had earlier expressed interest in the Gospel and Paul was by all means seeking to witness to him, and again his plans were confirmed by the sending of the earthquake. In these things we learn how God operates with men to this day- we make plans in His service, and He confirms and enables them by sending situations [like the earthquake] which are well beyond any human contrivance.

*16:38 And the officers reported these words to the magistrates-* As the jailor reported words in :36. All this sending of verbal messages by the hand of messengers would mean that in accordance with Paul's intention, the word about the situation was spreading around.

*And they feared when they heard that they were Romans-* See on 16:35 *Let those men go.*

*16:39 And they came and pleaded with them, and when they had brought them out, they asked them to go away from the city-* Paul doesn't obey immediately; he goes to Lydia's house. This could be read as his native argumentative, awkward temperament shining through; or additionally, as also part of his game plan to demonstrate that the house church at Lydia's home was to be openly connected with the Christian movement, and now to be left well alone by the authorities, in case they made a formal complaint about the treatment of the men whom they had lodged.

*16:40 And they went out of the prison-* Luke, or the inspired companion, was not in the prison with them and may have bravely remained in Philippi to provide support to the fledgling ecclesia.

*And entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the believers-* The New Testament speaks of households run by women: Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:14,40); Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11). These women were presumably wealthy widows or divorcees who hadn't remarried. We are left to speculate whether they were in some way the 'leaders' of the house churches which met in their homes. Women are described as ruling households in 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5. The woman of Prov. 31 clearly had autonomy within the private sphere of the household, even though the husband was the public leader. Seeing Christianity was initially a house-church, household religion, we are left to wonder how much women actually led house churches, especially seeing that the majority of early Christian members appear to have been women. The wall paintings [frescoes] found in the Christian catacombs around Rome are highly significant for our present study. The significant ones for our purposes are the catacombs of Priscilla on the Salaria Nuova, Callixtus on the via Appia Antica, and that of Domitilla on the via Ardeatine. They feature in places scenes of female Christians raising cups, with the inscription *agape* over them. Some show a woman occupying the central place in the meal, with a large cup in her hand, with the other women looking at it intently. Some of the frescoes [there are many of them] show women dressed as slaves doing this in what appears to be a wealthy home. These frescoes seem to me indicative of how groups of slave women formed house churches, and faithfully kept the breaking of bread. Some frescoes show the women sharing the bread and wine with children around the table; one shows a woman holding a scroll, as if she is reading Scripture to the others. One fresco features a woman holding a cup of wine inscribed *nobis*- 'for

us'. Some frescoes show men in the group, but the woman in the centre, as if she is leading the meeting, or as the host of the household.

*They comforted them and departed-* We naturally think that it was Paul and Silas who were in need of comfort, with their lacerated backs and aching muscles after hours in the "stocks". But here we see Paul's spiritual greatness; *he* comforted *them*, probably not least over the material losses they had suffered as a result of the earthquake.

## ACTS CHAPTER 17

*17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica-* Having been seriously abused in Philippi, Paul continued. He recognizes this when later writing to the Thessalonians, commenting that despite the shame suffered there, he continued boldly preaching, and thus arose the ecclesia at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:2). Keeping on keeping on is a hallmark of not only the true preacher but of all spiritual endeavour.

Apollonia was in Illyricum, and Paul later comments that he preached there (Rom. 15:19), so we can assume he didn't merely pass through but witnessed to the Gospel there too.

*Where there was a synagogue of the Jews-* Gk. *the* synagogue. It has been claimed that there was no other synagogue in Macedonia, although there may have been smaller Jewish prayer houses or meeting places (as in 16:13). It has also been conjectured that there were no Jewish communities in Amphipolis and Apollonia. The impression is therefore given of Paul focusing upon preaching to the Jews, making a specific focus upon the largest concentration of Jews in Macedonia. Amphipolis was the capital of Macedonia, and Paul had been beckoned to preach in Macedonia; the city was the most strategic in Greece and would've been the logical place to concentrate upon in order to fulfil a mission to Gentile Macedonia. But he is presented as passing through this capital city, where the largest concentration of population was, and homing in on Thessalonica. See on 17:2 *As his custom was*.

*17:2 And Paul, as his custom was-* Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, and yet he repeatedly focused upon the Jews. Many of his sufferings were as a result of this; if he had served as the Lord intended, many of these issues would likely have been avoided. But the Lord still worked with Paul; and that is a lesson for us. I have noted elsewhere that the travel details provided by Luke are not incidental; the wind / spirit was so often against Paul as he travelled to Jerusalem, and so often with him when he travelled towards the Gentiles.

*Went in to them-* Paul uses the same word in telling the Thessalonians that the testimony of other converts showed "what manner of entering in we had unto you" (1 Thess. 1:9; 2:1 AV). Clearly the 'going in' to the Thessalonian synagogue has more than some literal descriptive reference to Paul passing in through the doors of the building. The word is used several times in Acts of Paul's 'entering in' to various homes, towns and synagogues. The Lord Himself 'entered in' to synagogues and taught (emphasized by Luke in his first volume, e.g. Lk. 6:6). Thus Paul was manifesting the person of the Lord Jesus in his preaching, just as we likewise are Him to this world; for the Lord Jesus 'enters in' to His people (Jn. 10:1,2; Rev. 3:20 s.w.). Our entering in to people and communities with the Gospel is a reflection of God's outgoing entering in to our lives in Christ. This is why there must be a sense of proactive, outgoing entering in to others in our witness, rather than a passive 'witness by example' alone.

*For three Sabbath days and reasoned with them from the Scriptures-* The simplicity of what Paul preached can be seen from reflecting how he was only three weekends in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), but in that time he converted and baptized pagans and turned them into an ecclesia. Given the long hours worked by people, his number of contact hours with the people would've been quite small. He then had to write to them in 1 Thessalonians, addressing basic questions which they had subsequently asked, such as 'What will happen to dead believers when Christ returns?', 'When will Christ return?'. The level of their instruction before baptism must have been *very* basic. It is rare today to see such focus upon the urgency

of baptism. Yet I submit that if we have the spirit of the early church, we will be pushing baptism up front to all we meet. And this was one of the first century keys to success.

So Paul stayed a few weeks or months in cities like Lystra and Thessalonica, returning, in the case of Lystra, after 18 months, and then again a few years later. Here in Acts 17:2, he spent three consecutive Sabbaths in Thessalonica, baptized the converts, and then didn't come back to see them for about five and a half years (Acts 20:1,2). How were they kept strong? By the good shepherd, by the grace of God, by the Father and Son working with Paul. He seems to have drilled them with the basics of the Gospel and the life they needed to live, ordained immature elders who were literate and able to teach the word, and then left them what he repeatedly calls "the tradition", a document or set of teachings relating to practical life in Christ (1 Cor. 11:2,23; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2; 3:14; Tit. 1:9). It was perhaps the simplicity and brevity of the message that was its strength in the lives of the early converts. Their lives were based directly upon reflection upon the implications of the basic elements of the Gospel. It is today amazing how simple men and women remember and reflect upon the things taught them even verbally, and show an impressive appreciation of them when they are visited again after some months or years. Interestingly, Corinth had the most evident problems and immaturity, even though Paul spent 18 months there, whereas ecclesias like Philippi which he established far quicker seem to have been far sounder. It therefore follows that length of pastoral work is not necessarily related to spiritual strength

17:3- see on Acts 13:24,25.

*Explaining and proving that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead-* The idea of a suffering, murdered Messiah is hard for Jews to accept to this day. Paul sought to persuade them from the Old Testament that this was indeed a requirement for the true Messiah. Once that is established, it becomes easier to connect Jesus of Nazareth with the Biblical picture of Messiah. Jesus thus becomes the Christ.

*Saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ-* Paul could describe his own preaching as "this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you...", as if Jesus was right there before their eyes, witnessed through Paul. As the Lord was Paul's representative, so Paul was Christ's. The idea of representation works both ways: we see in the Gospel records how the Lord experienced some things which only we have; and we show aspects of His character to the world which nobody else can manifest. Likewise Paul could tell the Galatians that in him they had seen Jesus Christ placarded forth, crucified before their own eyes (Gal. 3:1). Paul knew that when people looked at his life, they saw something of the crucifixion of the Lord. The Galatians therefore accepted him "even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).

17:4 *And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas, as did many of the devout Greeks-* First of all there must be an intellectual understanding if there is to be conversion. Men were "persuaded", not just emotionally bullied (Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8,26; 28:23,24). The intellectual basis of appeal is made clear in the way we read of accepting 'truth' as well as accepting the person of Jesus. Thus converts believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-13), acknowledge truth (2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 1:1), obey truth (Rom. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:22 cp. Gal. 5:7), and 'come to know the truth' (Jn. 8:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 1 Jn. 2:21). Preaching itself is 'the open statement of the truth' (2 Cor. 4:2). And so it is perfectly in order to seek to intellectually persuade our contacts.

*And not a few of the chief women-* Paul had to later remind the Thessalonians that he isn't preaching because he wants to take money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12). There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica who accepted the Gospel (Acts 17:4 Western Text), and no doubt gossip spread from this.

*17:5 But the Jews, being moved with jealousy, taking along some wicked men from the market place and having assembled a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people-* Jealousy was the leading reason for the Jewish crucifixion of the Lord, and also of their persecution of Paul. The surrounding of a house by an inflamed mob and wanting to "bring them out to the people" recalls the situation of the Angels in Lot's house in Sodom. Isaiah described the Jerusalem cult as Sodom, as does Rev. 11:8. The Jews were acting in a similar way.

*17:6 And when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brothers before the rulers of the city, crying: These that have turned the world upside down have come here also-* This is a tacit recognition of the extent and power of Paul's ministry; he and his team had "turned the world upside down". They had hardly done so the Roman world, but they had indeed done so to the Jewish world. And in that observation we have a basic insight into human psychology; we tend to assume that 'our' world is the entire world. Time and again, the Roman authorities responded to the Jewish accusations that they could see no wrong in Paul. But for these bitter minded opponents, their immediate world was the whole world. The "rulers of the city" are called the *politarchs*; exactly the correct word, in comparison to the word used for the governors of Philippi which was a colony, whereas Thessalonica was a "free city".

*17:7- see on Acts 16:21.*

*Jason has received them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus-* Paul in the face of every discouragement could preach that "there is another king, Jesus". This was the core of his message; not so much that there *will be* a coming King in Jerusalem, but that there *is* right now a King at God's right hand, who demands our total allegiance. The Acts record associates the height of Jesus with a call to repentance too. This is the message of Is. 55:6-9- *because* God's thoughts are so far higher than ours, *therefore* call upon the Lord whilst He is near, and let the wicked forsake his way. Because the Father and Son who are so high above us morally and physically are willing to deal with us, *therefore* we ought to seize upon their grace and repent.

*17:8 And they agitated the crowd and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things-* The rulers were agitated when they heard that this was a question of the destabilization of the Roman empire; Pilate was likewise agitated by the crowd in handing the Lord over to death. Time and again, Luke is emphasizing that the sufferings of the Lord are replicated in spirit in all who are in Him.

*17:9 And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go-* Jason and the others had to pay a bond, guaranteeing their keeping of the peace. This is another indication that not all the early Christians were dirt poor. We recall how Felix often summoned Paul, hoping to get a bribe out of him (24:26). Jason had presumably also bound himself in his bond to not accommodate Paul and to get him to leave the city- hence the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away (:10).

17:10 *And the brothers immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night to Berea; who when they arrived there, went into the synagogue of the Jews-* The immediate sending away may have been a condition of the bail paid in :9. There were several times when brethren sent Paul away from danger- as if he himself would have remained. The way situations repeat in our lives is all evidence that the Lord's hand is at work with us, and nothing is random event in our experiences. We note that Paul immediately enters the synagogue and preaches, when many would have been suffering post-traumatic stress and would have felt unable to face Jews in a synagogue let alone preach to them. But Paul's love was greater than that.

17:11 *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so-* The "examining" probably speaks of daily visits to the synagogue where the Old Testament scrolls were kept, asking to examine them. Paul would have been preaching from the Old Testament, quoting from memory. And they would have wanted to check out his quotations and their context in the actual scrolls. It was "therefore" that they believed (:12), for faith comes by hearing the word of God. It was their attitude to God's word which meant that they received the word with such *prothumia*, "predisposition", to believe. Paul's message of Jesus as Christ meshed perfectly with the scriptures which they so respected.

17:12 *Therefore, many of them believed, including Greek women of high standing and many Greek men-* Lydia in Philippi was a wealthy woman, trading in luxury garments ("purple"), and a female head of household. The attraction of the Gospel for wealthy women has been often commented upon in the historical literature. We are left to imagine wealthy sisters marrying poorer brethren, or remaining single, with all the scandal attached to it in the first century world, pining for children, comforted only by each other and the surpassing knowledge of Jesus their Lord.

It is worth noting that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus (Lk. 8:3); and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

17:13 *But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there, likewise stirring up and inciting the crowds-* This is another indication of the organized Jewish opposition to Paul's mission. Paul's proclamation was of the Messiah according to the Old Testament scriptures- for the Bereans compared his message against the Old Testament scrolls (see on :11). If he had been teaching some Eastern philosophy, they wouldn't have bothered. But it was his supposed subversion of their sacred documents which was so infuriating to them.

17:14 *Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there-* This is exactly what happened in :10. This desire to send Paul away was not for his personal safety as much as for their own safety. And so there was only a very short period of contact time with Paul; and again, belief and the baptism which goes with New Testament belief all occurred after a very brief encounter with the message. Paul it seems would have stayed longer, so eager was he to proclaim the Gospel further and strengthen the converts. If he had done so, their faith may have become stronger; for we read nothing further of any ecclesia in Berea. Silas and Timothy therefore risked their lives by remaining, so important did they perceive the work of strengthening converts to be. And we also should give and risk all for the sake of strengthening such babes in Christ.

17:15 *But they that escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy (that they should come to him with all speed), they departed-* The escort was not only for Paul's safety, but perhaps to ensure that he really did leave Berea. "Escorted" is literally 'to bring to the spot'. We sense here the fear of the new converts. It seems that Paul only gave instruction for Silas and Timothy to join him after he had arrived in Athens. We could read this :15 as a summary of events, and then :16 explains why this situation came about. Paul was immediately struck by the idolatry, made a witness, which had some response- and he needed help. He was a man alone in Athens. And so he asked for Silas and Timothy to immediately come to him.

17:16- see on Acts 15:39.

*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols-* God can work directly within the mind of men, psychologically provoking them. He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and the Jewish leadership to enable the restoration, and there are many other Old Testament examples (1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16; Ezra 1:1,5; Jer. 51:11; Hag. 1:14). Some of these involve the provoking of the spirit of total unbelievers. How much more will God provoke the spirit of those who are open to His leading. Paul's own spirit was provoked by all the idol worship, for he had a heart that bled for human salvation. And God's Spirit works with our spirit, time and again.

17:17 *So he reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and the religious persons, and in the marketplace every day with those that met him-* Paul says himself that he was not an eloquent speaker; and the Corinthians were acutely aware of this. And yet it was through his public speaking that many were converted in places like Athens. The lesson is clear- God uses us in our weaker points in order to witness powerfully for Him. Uneducated Peter was used as the vehicle with which to reach the intelligentsia of Jerusalem- and you and I likewise in and through our very points of weakness are likewise used to reach people.

17:18 *And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also encountered him. And*



*some said: What will this babbler say? Others: He seems to be a preacher of strange gods! Because he preached Jesus and the resurrection-* “A preacher” is Gk. 'a setter forth'. It is clear that we are to seek to relate to our audience in a way they can relate to. Using their terms, shewing our common binds with them. Paul did this when he was faced with the rather mocking comment that he was a “setter forth” of a strange God. He replied that he ‘set forth’ to them the One whom they ignorantly worshipped (Acts 17:18,23 RV). He seized upon something they all knew- the altar to the unknown God- and made his point to them from that. And he picked up the noun they used for him and turned it back to them as a verb.

*17:19 And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying: May we know what this new teaching is, which is spoken by you?-* There were many passing preachers who turned up in Athens and tried to get a hearing. But the audience physically dragged Paul off to the Areopagus to ensure he had the widest audience for his message. There was therefore something in his message, probably reflected in him as a person too, which was unique and powerfully compelling. Our message too must be fearlessly presented as the unique thing it is, rather than ever seeking to soften the edges so that it appears more acceptable to secular hearers. It is the baldness of the message which attracts, rather than any sophisticated packaging.

*17:20 For you bring certain strange things to our ears. Therefore, we would like to know what these things mean-* As noted on :19, there was about every possible philosophy and religion being pedalled in Athens. But there was something startlingly new and "strange" in Paul's message about the crucified, resurrected Jesus who now demands our total commitment, far beyond the realms of religious curiosity or hobby level theology. There is no hint that Paul used miracles to grab attention here; it was the power and nature of the Gospel message which struck such a deep chord with the hearts of the hearers.

*17:21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers living there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing)-* As noted on :19 and :20, there was something radically gripping in the message of this Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and resurrected. The hearers were used to a diet of new things, they were not conservatives, they were wide open minded. Therefore the fact they were so gripped by this new message is all the more a testament to its power.

*17:22 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said: You men of Athens, I perceive you are very religious in all things-* Although as mentioned on :19-21, Paul's message was a stark presentation of the Gospel in Christ, he still tried to bridge build with his audience. He appealed to their sense of being religious. He commends them for what they themselves were proud of- their religious interest. But his message then sought to take them on from that common starting point, in explaining that the dead and now living Lord Jesus required a following far beyond such religious curiosity.

*17:23 For as I walked along, I observed the objects of your worship; and I found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. Whom you worship in ignorance, Him I proclaim to you-* Paul's positivism is a wonderful thing to study. When he met people believing in “the unknown [Gk. *agnosto*] God”, he didn't mock their agnosticism. He

rejoiced that they were as it were half way there, and sought to take them further. His position regarding the Sabbath and observance of the Law is a prime example of his patient seeking to bring men onward.

*17:24 The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands-* Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men.

*17:25 Neither is He served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life and breath and all things-* That God needs nothing is something very hard for the standard religious mindset to grasp. The whole psychology of works, of legalism rather than acceptance of grace, is rooted in this assumption that God is in need. Instead, He is a giver, a gifter, the very core idea of *charis*, "grace"; and He dearly wishes us to receive that gift. The reasoning used here was absolutely relevant to the Judaist mentality too. Note that God gives life and breath to all things- every breath taken by every organism is consciously out given by Him, rather than the assumption that somehow God wound the world up on clockwork and leaves it running without any conscious input from Him.

*17:26 And He has made from one, every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times set for them and the bounds of their habitation-* "One blood", according to some manuscripts. This surely invites us to accept Adam as the first man, and Eve was the mother of all living human beings.

*17:27 That they should seek God; so that they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us-* How does geographical distribution etc. lead to men seeking the Lord? We must draw near to Him (Ps. 73:28); and yet He is already near, not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27). David often speaks of drawing near to God, and yet he invites God to draw near to him (Ps. 69:18). Yet David also recognizes that God "is" near already (Ps. 75:1). I take all this to mean that like us, David recognized that God "is" near, and yet wished God to make His presence real to him. Truly can we pray David's prayers. So often, prayer is described as coming near to God (Ps. 119:169 etc.)- and yet God "is" near already. Prayer, therefore, is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present.

*17:28 For in Him we live and move and have our being- as some even of your own poets have said: For we are also his offspring-* Many New Testament quotations of the Old Testament- many of those in the early chapters of Matthew, for example- are picking up words and phrases from one context and applying them to another, often slightly changing them in order to fit the new context. Paul himself did this when he quoted the words of the poet Aratus "We are all the offspring of Zeus" about our all being the offspring of the one true God.

Paul quoted from Greek poets, famous for the amount of unbiblical nonsense they churned out, in order to confound those who believed what the poets taught (Tit. 1:12; Acts 17:28). What we are suggesting is epitomized by Paul's response to finding an altar dedicated to the worship of "The Unknown God", i.e. any pagan deity which might exist, but which the people of Athens had overlooked. Instead of rebuking them for their folly in believing in this,

Paul took them from where they were to understand the one true God, who they did not know (Acts 17:22–23).

Paul sought by all means to close the gap which there inevitably is between the preacher and his audience. Thus in Athens and Lystra he mixes quotes from the Greek poets with clear allusions to God's word. His speeches in those places quote from Epimenides and Aratus, allude to the Epicurean belief that God needs nothing from men, refer to the Stoic belief that God is the source of all life... and also allude to a whole catena of OT passages: Ex. 20:11; Gen. 8:22; Ecc. 9:7; Jer. 5:24; 23:23; Is. 42:5; 55:6; Ps. 50:12; 145:18; 147:8; Dt. 32:8. This was all very skilfully done; surely Paul had sat down and planned what he was going to say. He tries to have as much common ground as possible with his audience whilst at the same time undermining their position. He wasn't baldly telling them their errors and insisting on his own possession of truth; even though this was the case. He didn't remove the essential scandal of the Gospel; instead Paul selected terms with which to present it which enabled his hearers to realize and face the challenges which the scandal of the Gospel presented. And Paul's sensitive approach to the Jews is just the same. *If we are out to convert men and women, we will be ever making our message relevant. If we tell the world, both explicitly and implicitly, that we don't want to convert them, then we won't. If we want to convert them, if we earnestly seek to persuade them and vary our language and presentation accordingly, then we will.*

17:29 *Being then the offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine is like gold, or silver, or stone, something crafted by art and the imagination of man-* If we truly realize that we are made in God's image, then we will not worship any idol. Thinking this through, there is the implication not that humanity alone is made in God's image; *nothing* else is His image. Yet idolatry, in all its forms and guises throughout history, is based around the supposition that those idols are in fact an image of God and as such demand worship. God has revealed Himself through *people*, not through things which they have created.

17:30 *Therefore, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands men that they should all everywhere repent-* Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment. On account of the Lord's resurrection, God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- again, a reference to the great commission. But God's command of men to repent is only through our preaching of that message. Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and

baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this.

17:31 *Inasmuch as He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained; of which He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised him from the dead-* Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13). We who were dead in sins were “quickened together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5). If we believe in Christ’s resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation. Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can’t wilfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord’s glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

The very fact that judgment day will surely come is therefore in itself a *command* to all men to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- and therefore it is a command to preach repentance. The resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance “to all men”. But how? They hadn’t seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men? Surely in that we are the risen Lord’s representatives “to all men”, and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God’s plan for them. In the same way, the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn’t see the risen Lord Himself (Mt. 16:4). But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. At the Lord's resurrection, a day was appointed for human judgment, and therefore a knowledge of the Lord's resurrection means we are accountable to that day, and must therefore repent and prepare. It is by this logic that Paul argues that the Lord's resurrection is a guarantee that judgment day will come. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord... [which involves that] we shall all [therefore] stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written... Every knee shall bow to me [as Lord and judge]..." (Rom. 14:9,10).

We will be judged by or in the man Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31 R.V. Mg.). This means that the very fact Jesus didn't pre-exist and was human makes Him our constant and insistent judge of all our human behaviour. And exactly because of this, Paul argues, we should right now repent. He is judge exactly because He is the Son of man.

17:32 *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said: We will hear you concerning this yet again-* It was particularly the message of future resurrection and judgment which put an end to their religious fascination with Paul's message. The Lord's resurrection can be ours; He wishes to live in and through us, through His Spirit. And no man can have stood before the cross of the Lord and then walk away with a shrug, assuming he shall not have to stand judgment with eternal consequence for his response to the Man who hung there for him. When the audience started to get a whiff of the reality of these things, they pulled out of the dialogue, and didn't want to hear any more. Rather like Israel begging not to hear any more of God's words, as they were too demanding for them.

17:33 *Thus Paul went out from among them-* Paul's initial message had been so provocative that men had literally dragged him to the Areopagus in order to explain himself at more length and to a greater audience (:19). The comment that he "went out from among them" may mean that he was as it were released, once they were challenged with the personal implications of believing in and committing to a resurrected Jesus, whose Spirit living in His people demanded all of their living and thinking.

17:34 *But some people joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them-* Men heard Paul's preaching and joined or 'clave' unto *him*, as they did to other preachers (Acts 17:34; 5:13); but conversion is a cleaving unto *the Lord Jesus* (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 6:17 Gk.). Thus Paul "spoke boldly in the Lord [Jesus], which gave testimony unto the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). To this extent does the preacher manifest his Lord.

## ACTS CHAPTER 18

18:1 *After these things he departed from Athens and went to Corinth-* He had become involved in Athens with intellectual and philosophical arguments, and now Paul turns away from that and goes to pagan, working class Corinth- the very opposite ground for the Gospel. Several times he asks the Corinthians to recall the way he first arrived in Corinth and determined to only preach Christ, the raw, crucified Christ, without philosophy and intellectual argumentation. He was led to that attitude by his experiences of long philosophical debates in Athens which produced relatively few converts.

The "these things" may refer to some unrecorded trauma Paul suffered. Because 1 Cor. 2:1-3 is clear: "I brothers, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling". The "trembling" may refer to the shakes of malaria. But it more likely refers to his trembling with fear. His "weakness" uses a word which refers usually to physical illness; he uses it of how his co-workers were "weak" or sick, and he had to work to support not only himself but them too (Acts 20:34,35). He did that perhaps recalling how he too had been weak when he came to Corinth. Perhaps he left Athens because of illness and the climate at Corinth was more conducive. See on :9 *Fear not*.

18:2 *And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla-* "A Jewish guild always keeps together, whether in street or synagogue. In Alexandria the different trades sat in the synagogue arranged into guilds; and St. Paul could have no difficulty in meeting, in the bazaar of his trade, with the like-minded Aquila and Priscilla" (Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*).

*Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; and he went to them-* The 'Babylon' of Revelation in its first century reference had relevance to Rome and also to Judaism, as I have argued elsewhere. If we accept an early date for Revelation, then the command to come out from Babylon would have meant leaving Rome (Rev. 18:4); and the emperor's decree would have encouraged obedience to this. The situation was analogous to the historical command for Jews to leave Babylon; the decree of Cyrus encouraged their obedience. God can manipulate geopolitics to help His people to conform to His wishes for them.

18:3 *And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they worked together-* The rabbis all had a trade. Hillel was a wood-cutter, and Shammai was a carpenter. That Paul had such a trade shows how he was indeed a rabbi before conversion. Paul reminded the Corinthians that as he had been amongst them, so he was at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians: "Even to this present hour we [as before when present with you in Corinth] both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place; we toil, working with our own hands" (1 Cor. 4:11,12). Accommodation for manual workers who are refugees has never been very stable; he continued then as when he was in Corinth to have no stable living place.

*For by trade they were tentmakers-* Reputed as a low paying and not respected trade. The way Paul used it to pay for his own expenses plus those of his companions (20:34) means he would have worked very long hours. The trade was despised amongst Jews because the tents

were often made of goats hair, involving work with unclean animals. This would have prepared Paul for understanding that the Jewish laws of unclean animals were condemning him as unclean. Peter was prepared the same way, when he stayed for a while with Simon the tanner, who also worked with blood and unclean animal skins. Further, when a tent pole was lifted up and the canvass spread upon it, it was spoken of as a 'crucifixion'. So the Lord's hand was preparing Paul for his Christian conversion and work amongst the Gentiles; this would have been one of the prods of the goads in his conscience before accepting Christ in Damascus. And the same would have been true for Aquila and Priscilla. All this is a great encouragement for those in low paying and despised employment- the Lord works even through that in preparing us for His service.

Paul at times seems to have had money, enough for Felix to try to get him to pay a bribe, and to rent a house in Rome large enough to receive a large number of Jews. But at other times it seems he was living on the limits, needing to work to pay his way, and here he was driven to flat sharing with manual workers who were refugees / asylum seekers.

18:4 *And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Gentiles-* According to the Western text of Acts 18:4, Paul "inserted the name of the Lord Jesus" at the appropriate points in his public reading of the Old Testament prophecies. This was after the pattern of some of the Jewish targums (commentaries) on the prophets, which inserted the word "Messiah" at appropriate points in Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering servant (e.g. the Targum of Jonathan on the Prophets).

Acts 18:4,5 implies that when Paul first came to Corinth, he concentrated on his tent making business, and confined his preaching to arguing with the Jews at synagogue on the Sabbath. But when Silas and Timothy came, their presence made him "pressed in the spirit" to launch an all-out campaign. No longer was he the self-motivated maverick. He needed the presence of others to stir up his mind and prod him onwards. He admitted to those he converted in Corinth as a result of this campaign that such preaching was against his will, he had had to consciously make himself do it (1 Cor. 9:17). Indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself had had to appear to Paul in a vision and encourage him not to suppress his preaching on account of his fear of persecution (Acts 18:9). Therefore he later told the Corinthians that he feared condemnation if he gave in to his temptation not to preach (1 Cor. 9:16). See on Acts 27:21.

18:5 *But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ-* Other manuscripts read "pressed in the spirit". The ambiguity may be because it was Paul's meditation on the word which pressed his spirit to realize that Bible study cannot just continue as a passive activity; it leads to the conviction that we must witness that word to others. And the arrival of his fellow workers emboldened him in this conviction.

18:6 *And when they opposed-* The same word used by Stephen, Paul's great exemplar and hero whom he so often alludes to, when he said that the Jews, including Paul at the time, were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) insofar as they were resisting the otherwise irresistible spirit of Stephen (Acts 6:10). Again, Paul was being made to enter into the feelings and situations of those he had earlier persecuted; not as punishment, but more in order to help his own spiritual growth, and to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in

the Kingdom. For now *he* knew what it felt like to have your audience resisting the Spirit through which one speaks.

*And reviled him-* This is the word otherwise translated 'to blaspheme'. Paul had made the Christians blaspheme the name of the Lord Jesus under torture; and now he was being taught what it feels like to be blasphemed / reviled, for it happened to him.

*He shook out his garments-* This is the language of Ezekiel doing the same to the apostate Jews of his day (Ez. 5:3), and sets up the allusion to Ezekiel as a watchman in the next phrase. But it is also precisely the language of Nehemiah in Neh 5:13: "I shook out my lap and said, So may God shake out every man from His house and from His work". This action here symbolized God's breaking of covenant with Judah; to have them under the wings / skirts of His garments spoke of acceptance into covenant relationship, and to shake them out of His garments spoke of the ending of that relationship. But we ask whether Paul had the right to declare the breach of God's covenant relationship with Israel, or at least, with those Jews in Corinth. I veer towards the thought that Paul took too much upon himself in making this allusion; it seems very much a hot blooded response, and he did not take seriously his vow at this time to turn away from the Jews in favour of his Gentile mission.

*And said to them: Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent-* Blood being on their own heads rather than Paul's is straight out of Ez. 33:4, and his shaking of his garments was an allusion to what Ezekiel did in Ez. 5:3. The idea of being a watchman seems to have fired his preaching zeal, Ez. 3:18; 18:13 cp. Acts 18:6; 20:26. And yet this outburst seems to also be a flash of unspirituality. For later, Paul realizes that he may be condemned if he doesn't preach the Gospel; he realized that he perhaps *wasn't* free of his duty of preaching. Yet for all his "from henceforth I go unto the Gentiles" , Paul *still* preached to the Jews (Acts 18:8; 19:8); which would suggest these words were said in temper and perhaps unwisdom. He himself seems to recognize this when he wrote to Timothy at the very end of his life of how we must with meekness instruct those who oppose themselves (2 Tim. 2:25), whereas his own response to those who "opposed themselves" (Acts 18:6) had been to say, without meekness, that he was never going to 'instruct' Jews ever again.

*From now on I will go to the Gentiles-* But this was precisely what Paul had been commanded at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:21 "I will send you... unto the Gentiles"; see too Acts 26:17). Yet Paul doggedly insisted on going to the Jews, and I will argue in commentary throughout Acts 20 that Paul's refusal to fully accept his commission, and his dissatisfaction at leaving the Jewish ministry to Peter, resulted in much hardship for him. The Lord still worked through Paul's insistence on a different path to that the Lord intended, he remained within the Lord's game plan, but on as it were a plan B. Paul had earlier had another such moment, when he declared that now he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46,47). And yet these were just temporary realizations of his intended mission and his mistake in focusing on the Jews; like us so often, in the moment of failure and having our plans exasperated, we realize our true calling; and yet like Paul, we slip back into our own preferred path rather than that ideally chosen for us by our Lord.

18:7 *And he departed from there, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house was attached to the synagogue-* Paul's desire was clearly to still preach to the Jews, despite his outburst, and his temporary realization that indeed he had been sent not to Jews but to Gentiles. And yet the Lord worked through Paul's misplaced zeal; and He has much experience of doing that with His people to



this day. Because straight after Paul's turning away from the Jews, he goes to stay in the house of Justus, presumably because he had fallen out with his previous place of accommodation because of his outburst; and previously he had been staying with Jewish Christians Aquilla and Priscilla. Maybe we can infer that they didn't agree with his outburst, and so he upped and left (although :18 notes they later were together again). But the lodging he found was with a man called Justus, who just happened to live in the house next door to the synagogue. And this meant him talking to the guy next door- who happened to be the ruler of the synagogue. And he was persuaded of Christ, which tied Paul in again to the work of ministering to the Jews. But this happened right after Paul's indignant declaration that he was quitting working with the Jews. He surely knew Crispus, the synagogue ruler, because Paul had been arguing in the synagogue every Sabbath for some time (:4). But the ruler of the synagogue turned the corner and came to faith in Jesus as Christ- right after Paul's outburst against working with the Jews. This was obviously intentional within the workings of the Spirit [or providence, as some prefer to say]. I have explained in commentary on chapter 20 that Paul was wrong to focus on the Jews, when he was intended to work with the Gentiles. But because he subconsciously wanted to continue this focus, despite his emotional outburst here to the contrary, therefore the Lord confirmed him in the ministry he himself chose, although that was very much the Lord's plan B for Paul. Each day, therefore, it's really a case of 'Where do you want to go today in My service?'; and we will be confirmed in the path chosen. The important thing is that quite simply we love God and want His glory and desire to serve Him with all we have all we are, with no self-seeking or jealousy issues. We will then come to the right paths of service and be propelled along them; but if in our weakness we choose less than ideal paths of service, we will all the same be confirmed in them. For man is not alone, neither are we ever rejected from the Lord's game plan with us for so long as we are alive in this world.

18:8 *And Crispus- See on :7 He departed from there...*

*The ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his family-* It was common for the household to follow the religion of the head of the family. But the call of Christ was to individuals, and Paul in 1 Cor. 7 speaks to situations where a marriage was divided between believer and unbeliever. So the records of whole household baptisms, all at the same time, every member of the household, with not even one remaining in the previous religion, are hard to square with the idea of individual calling and each responding at their own time. Especially when there was a culture of a household following the religion of the family head. My conclusion would be that there was no compulsion or conscious pressure placed on the household members to be baptized into Christ; but they all chose to be. That said, their motives would inevitably have been mixed, and they would have been under psychological pressure to follow the rest of the group. Despite this, there is no evidence that the early preachers sought to investigate the detailed knowledge or motivation of baptismal candidates; they simply baptized anyone who desired it in such missionary contexts. It is true that there is reason to think that one of the Gospel records was learnt by some of the candidates, but this would not have been universally the case.

*And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized-* An exemplification of how faith came by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). It seems strongly likely that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, so he would have had this example in mind when he wrote those words in Romans 10. But "the word of God" refers therefore not to the entire Bible but to the message of God in the Gospel of His Son.

18:9- see on Acts 18:4,5.

*And during the night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul: Do not be afraid-* Quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus to the disciples: "Fear not... you shall catch men" (Lk. 5:10). What the disciples feared was their inadequacy as preachers; and the same context is here with Paul. We see here a humility in Paul which his argumentative and emotional temperament may otherwise hide. His fear was also of physical harm, for the corresponding comfort was that nobody was going to hurt him (:10). Paul's fear of physical harm is again comforted by the Lord during the shipwreck (Acts 27:24). This fearful side of Paul makes the more impressive his continuation to Jerusalem, knowing that prison, beating and maybe death awaited him; it means his willing enduring beating at Philippi when he could have avoided it was the more gracious. He was not some macho fanatic who was genuinely fearless of death. In fact, it seems, quite the opposite. Paul spoke of his arrival in Corinth at this time as being "In weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). The trembling may have been connected to the "fear".

Paul says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

*But speak out and do not keep silent-* Gk. 'be dumb'. We have noted so many conscious connections between the gospel of Luke, and this 'Volume 2' in Acts. Here, the connection is clearly with Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, whom Luke records as being told not to be afraid; and is then told that he will be dumb [s.w. "keep silent"] and not be able to "speak" [s.w. "speak out"] (Lk. 1:20). Paul's mind was soaked with the Gospel records; he alludes to them at least once in every three verses of his letters. So he would have grasped the point the Lord was making: If he would not preach, then he would be effectively faithless in the Lord's promise, as Zacharias had been.

18:10 *For I am with you-* A word for word quotation from the assurance given in the great commission (Mt. 28:20). The specific promise made in the commission that the preachers would take up snakes and remain unharmed was fulfilled in Paul on Malta beach. We see here that the Lord intended the great commission for Paul- and not merely, as some still claim, for the eleven apostles to whom He first addressed it. And we too are to see it as binding on us all. This is also one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures [here Is. 43:5] are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

*And no one shall attack or harm you-* But we must square this with the fact that 18 months later, "the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat" (:12). Maybe the Lord meant that there would be no such behaviour until Paul had reached the Lord's "many people" in the city; perhaps that rising up against Paul was the sign for him to leave, and yet he stubbornly remained there after that "for many days" (:18). "No one shall attack" sounds like God's promise to Israel, that whilst they were busy in His service keeping the feasts, they would not be attacked (Ex. 34:24); it was for as long as Paul was doing the Lord's work with His people that the protection would last. So the attack on Paul and beating of Sosthenes (:17), who had become a Christian (1 Cor. 1:1), clearly was "harm"- and a sign, therefore, to leave. Yet just as Paul refused to accept Spirit direction in

warning him not to go to Jerusalem, so it seems that here too he would not follow the Spirit's leading.

*For I have many people in this city-* This was only potentially true. If Paul had run away because of the opposition, they would not have become the Lord's people. Exactly because of this, the Lord tells him to endure. Likewise if the harvest is not gathered, it spoils- because the labourers have not done their work.

18:11 *And he lived there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them-* The *logos* of God is the Lord Jesus. This information comes after the accounts in the previous two chapters of Paul being quickly hounded out of towns by the Jewish opposition. Perhaps Paul assumed this would happen, hence the Lord's special encouragement to him that that history was not quite going to repeat itself so quickly (:12). The Corinthian letters indicate that there was indeed Judaist undermining of Paul's work there, but they failed to close him down immediately as they had in the other towns.

18:12 See on :10 *no one shall attack...*

*But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat-* See on :11. The "one accord" of Jewish opposition is presented by Luke as the opposite of the "one accord" which characterized the early Christian community. There is in fact no in between position; we are either united with the world, or with the Lord and His people. Gallio is mentioned in inscriptions as the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca, tutor of Nero. Luke's history is flawless, as we would expect from an inspired record.

18:13 *Saying: This man persuades men to worship God-* Time and again we see that what irked the Jews most of all was that Paul was successful in persuading others of his beliefs. The Jews were missionaries, eager to make proselytes and to gain followers amongst the Jews. Jealousy at another's apparent success in evangelizing their positions remains to this day an envy unto death. I have argued at times, especially in commentary upon chapter 20, that Paul too was partly driven by a jealousy complex against Peter's conversion of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost. And as it were in response to that, the Jews are envious of Paul's successes and persecute and kill him because of it. This was not so much a punishment of Paul, but rather a method through which Paul was intended to come to understand himself, to be more purely motivated in his witness, and to not envy Peter.

*Contrary to the law-* The law they had in mind was the law of Moses; for Gallio throws their case out of court because there is no question of infringement of Roman law, and tells them that they are arguing about infringement of "your own law" (:15). Paul was being treated as he and the Jews had treated the Christians- by seeking to get the Romans to judge and punish others for breaking their perception of the law of Moses.

18:14 *But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews: If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of criminal villainy, O you Jews, it would be logical that I should bear with you-* Gallio's judgment here that Paul had done nothing legally wrong was repeated by him later, especially when he first talks with the Jews in Rome. Paul spent some years in prison and was finally killed- when he had done nothing legally wrong. And that had been established in court cases such as these. Given Paul's logical mindset and tendency to legalism, this would have been so painful for him to come to terms with. The rules of justice

and logic were not being followed- and he was being condemned wrongly. He uses many of these concepts in writing to the Romans, arguing that we are sinners who *have* done wrong and who therefore should rightly die, but the rules of justice, ethics and logic have all been turned upside down by God's grace in Christ- and we have been pardoned and blessed with the hope of eternity. Paul was therefore writing all this partly to himself. He likely developed those thoughts initially as a way to cope with his deep sense of injustice about how his case was treated. And the Holy Spirit developed his thinking further and led him to express those thoughts in written form under Spirit guidance.

18:15 *But if they are questions about words and names-* The disagreement with Paul was about "names", and surely the Name in view was that of the Lord Jesus, whose Name the apostles preached, baptized into and emphasized. But 'name' effectively means 'authority', and in whose authority they were preaching was a big item for the Jews. And it is with legalistic minds to this day. For some, it's a monstrosity to think that an individual on his own initiative can preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. But that is the spirit of individual response to the great commission.

*And your own law, look to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these matters-* The Old Testament frequently speaks of the law as God's law, and the feasts as His feasts. But in the New Testament we read of the feasts and law of the Jews. They had hijacked God's way on this earth and made it effectively their own petty religion; and the church has largely done the same today.

18:16 *He drove them from the judgment seat-* The account of Gallio driving the Jews away from his judgment seat is maybe to enable to us to imagine the scene at the last day. "Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark (cp. the rejected cast to outer darkness) and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them" (Ps. 35:5,6). "The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind (spirit- the Angels made spirits) driveth away" (Ps. 1:4; Job 21:18).

18:17 *And they all laid hold on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things-* Perhaps another name for Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue whom Paul had recently converted (:8). Or perhaps Crispus had been forced to resign, and had been replaced by Sosthenes; or maybe there was more than one ruler of the synagogue in office at the same time. To do this job whilst being a Christian would have been very difficult if not impossible. Cornelius, Daniel and his friends, the soldiers John baptized and others found themselves in positions of employment or authority which were hard to maintain in view of their spiritual beliefs. We do not read of them resigning, nor of resignation being demanded before accepting them as believers; but we simply notice that in due course, Daniel and his friends faded from the scene of authority, and Crispus likewise. This is surely a pattern for our pastoral response to folks who find themselves in these situations upon conversion. Sosthenes was a co-author of the later letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), so he too converted; and even at this stage, was beaten for his identity with the Christian movement.

18:18 *And Paul, having stayed after this for many days, took his leave of the believers-* See on 18:10 *No one shall attack...*

*And with Priscilla and Aquila-* Mentioned because they appear to have had a temporary parting of the ways; see on 18:7 *He departed from there*. But see too on :19. Such things happened and still happen.

*Sailed to Syria, having shorn his head in Cenchrea. For he had made a vow-* Such vows were usually made in thankfulness for deliverance; or it could have been a Nazirite vow. These vows were typically ended in Jerusalem on a feast day. In commentary on chapter 20 I develop the idea that Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem because he dreamt of converting mass numbers of Jews there as Peter had done on Pentecost. I suggest that his obsession was misplaced, in that it was partly fuelled by jealousy of Peter, and was in disregard of the Lord's will that Paul focus on Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. So his voluntary vow, requiring a trip to Jerusalem at the end of it, may have been a device he developed to give him an excuse to be in Jerusalem at a feast. See on :21.

I suggest that the vow may well have been of Naziriteship. Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazirite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Naziriteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazirite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazirite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazirite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazirite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazirite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

18:19 *And they came to Ephesus; and he left them there, but he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews-* I suggested on 18:7 and 18:18 that Aquilla and Priscilla had some tensions with Paul after his outburst against the Jews; he left living with them and went elsewhere to lodge. But they reconciled to the extent that they travelled together now towards Jerusalem. But now in Ephesus they again appear to differ. And the difference was over Paul's going into the synagogue and arguing with the Jews. Paul was slipping back from his vow to focus on the Gentile mission and once again giving way to his obsession with the Jews. Perhaps they felt that he was wrong in this, and so despite being Jews themselves, they didn't go to the synagogue with Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that the Holy Spirit kept prodding Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and leave the Jewish mission to Peter; and he was wrong to insist on making the Jews a priority. Perhaps Aquilla and Priscilla had had Spirit revelation about this and were therefore in disagreement with the way Paul insisted on going against it.

I say this based on the force of the "but" or "for" in the next clause; he left them because he went into the synagogue. It can hardly mean that he left them in Ephesus and moved on elsewhere, because he left them and then went into the synagogue in the same town and preached. This tension between Paul and Aquilla and Priscilla is sadly typical of him;

someone of Paul's temperament would have been "a difficult bloke" to get along with when he encountered those of his own level of ability. His closest and most loyal friends are described by him as the "weak" whom he had to work to support (Acts 20:34,35). This rather makes sense; those types would have found in him a tower of strength, and if he funded them then this would have reinforced their loyalty to him.

18:20 *And when they asked him to stay a longer time, he did not consent-* "Asked" translates a Greek word meaning to beg. He turned them down because of his obsession with getting to Jerusalem for Pentecost. I have elsewhere suggested that this was rooted in a fantasy to repeat Peter's mass conversion of Jews at that feast. Yet the situation is analogous to the time when the Lord was begged to remain longer in an area, but would not agree because He had to preach the word to other cities (Lk. 4:42,43). We note again that it is Luke who records this in volume 1 of his work. The experiences of Paul, like our own, were modelled around those of the historical Jesus. But we also see here the hint that Paul's desire to get to Jerusalem was in order to preach; and he had been specifically told that Jerusalem would not accept his preaching (Acts 22:18). He had been sent to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews; but still he insisted on going his way.

18:21 *But took his leave of them, saying: I will return again to you if God wills. He then set sail from Ephesus-* Some texts add: "Saying, I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem". We sense here his obsession with getting to Jerusalem; see on :18. There is no evidence that Paul did in fact go up to Jerusalem as he planned at this stage. See on :22. His plans to go there were frustrated; it was the Lord's intention that Paul preach to the Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. And yet Paul still didn't get it; for he again pushes to go up to Jerusalem to keep a feast, Pentecost (19:21). The Holy Spirit warned him not to do this, but he still pushed ahead. The way his plans were frustrated at this earlier stage was surely a lesson he failed to heed.

18:22 *And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch-* We read of how Paul went on from Ephesus to Caesarea, and then "he went [up] and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch". It could be argued that going up and coming down is how visits to Jerusalem are spoken of; but why the ambiguity? Why is not his arrival in Jerusalem mentioned? The more comfortable reading would be that he travelled nearly 1000 km. from Ephesus to Caesarea, on the coasts of Palestine, only 120 km. from Jerusalem; but then some unspecified situation arose which frustrated his plans, and he turned north and headed to Antioch up the coast road; or even sailed there. The silence about any visit to Jerusalem is significant, especially seeing that he refused to stay longer in Ephesus despite the need to- because he was so set on getting to Jerusalem for the feast. Some versions paraphrase as 'Went up to Jerusalem' but that is not in the original. It's hard for interpreters to understand that Paul could have come all the way to Caesarea and not 'gone up' to Jerusalem as he planned. But I have explained that it was not the Lord's will that he went to Jerusalem to preach, and so the plan was frustrated. *Anabaino*, 'went [up]', doesn't have to mean 'to Jerusalem', although it is sometimes used like that. It is used of Joseph 'going up' to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:4), going up to a housetop, a tree or mountain (Lk. 5:19; 9:28; 19:4). Likewise *katabaino*, "went down", doesn't have to refer to a leaving Jerusalem. It is used about going down from other towns (Jn. 2:12; 4:51; Acts 7:15; 8:15; 14:25).

18:23 *And having spent some time there, he departed and went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, in that order, strengthening all the disciples-* Perhaps the frustration of Paul's plans to visit Jerusalem at feast time (see on :22) led him to realize that indeed, the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. And so in repentance, Paul spent time strengthening the Gentile converts he had already made. There is no reference to him going into the synagogue in each town and arguing with the Jews, as was the pattern on his missionary trips. We just read that he did pastoral work with the converts. Paul twice 'turned to the Gentiles', which is what he was intended to have focused upon in his ministry; but each time we see him fall back into his obsession with Jerusalem and witnessing to the Jews. This weakness came to its full term in the way he refused repeated Spirit warnings against going up to Jerusalem, and suffers the consequences.

Paul is recorded as having passed through Galatia and Phrygia in Acts 16:6; presumably he made converts and established churches there. The fact this isn't recorded indicates how very abbreviated are the records we have. The incidents which are recorded are clearly for our learning. According to the note in the AV at the end of 1 Timothy, Paul wrote that letter from Laodicea in Phrygia. The converts in Phrygia may have been originally a result of Peter's work, for there were Jews from Phrygia baptized by him at the time of Acts 2:10. Given my comments elsewhere about Paul's feelings towards Peter's work, this would have been all intentionally arranged by the Spirit in an effort to re-direct Paul's focus towards the Gentiles. He was being made to understand that if he insisted on ministry to the Jews, then he was treading on Peter's ground and at best playing second fiddle to his ministry, rather than developing his own intended ministry with the Gentiles.

We read this word "strengthening" four times in the NT, all in Acts (Acts 14:22; 15:32,41; 18:23). Conscious programs of pastoral strengthening of the converts were an essential part of the church's missionary strategy, and it must be so today too.

18:24 *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the scriptures-* The Greek suggests 'an orator'. Perhaps this was why some in Corinth preferred him to Paul, whom they found relatively unrefined in his style (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:10). The Acts of the Apostles focuses largely on Paul and Peter, and after chapter 15, exclusively on Paul. This brief mention of the work of Aquilla and Priscilla with Apollos is the only example of the focus moving away from Paul. I have argued that Paul's obsession with preaching to Jews, especially at Jerusalem, was not in line with the Lord's ideal intention for him- which was that he should preach to the Gentiles. He ought to have remained at Ephesus, given the level of interest there and the request for him to remain there. But he goes off towards Jerusalem; and then, Apollos comes on the scene. And it is Aquilla who converts him. We may imagine that Paul would have been on the same level as Apollos, fluent in the Scriptures and eloquent in dialogue. But Paul was being taught that although he maybe appeared on paper the ideal person to convert Apollos- that was not the Lord's way. He uses human weakness rather than our ability. I suggest that Paul considered that he was far better qualified to operate the ministry to the Jews than illiterate Peter. He, surely, was more suited to the Gentiles, being from half Gentile Galilee, and mocked by the Jerusalem Jews as being without grammar when he spoke. But the Lord knew what He was doing when He directed Peter to go to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. And through the conversion of the eloquent Apollos by Aquilla rather than Paul, He was seeking to teach Paul this. This kind of thing happens in our lives many times, and we likely also fail to perceive the teaching process or accept the lessons.

18:25 *This man had been instructed*- Literally, 'catechized'. Luke's community were instructed or learned by rote the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 1:4). This was how the Gospel was spread in the 1st century especially amongst the illiterate. The Gospel records were memorized. Perhaps the form of the Gospel record which Apollos had was incomplete, an early version; for "he knew only the baptism of John". That could mean however that he only recognized John's baptism and did not consider baptism into the Lord Jesus and receipt of His spirit to be necessary (see a similar case in 19:1-5).

*In the way of the Lord*- A nice description of the Gospel. It is all about the way of the Lord Jesus, the way He took and the way we are to follow in. This is also reflected in how the early Christian community is called "the way".

*And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John*- Although his knowledge was lacking, he is commended for acting with integrity according to the knowledge he had. Cornelius would be another example. These cases show that God does indeed take notice of those who love but misunderstand His Son; but He rewards their diligence and integrity by revealing His fuller truth to them. The principle of Phil. 3:15 is important: "Let us therefore, as many as are mature, be thus decided; and if in anything you are otherwise decided, this also shall God reveal to you". Spiritual maturity involves tolerance of others whilst they too are on the same journey we were earlier on, and continue upon.

"Being fervent in spirit" is Gk. *the Spirit*. The idea of being fervent in the Spirit suggests a degree of freewill control on his part, rather than the Holy Spirit just as it were zapping Apollos. So the reference to *the Spirit* suggests the Holy Spirit, but his 'fervency' suggests his own human spirit; but God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The only other time this phrase "fervent in spirit" occurs is in Rom. 12:11, where Paul exhorts us all to be like this. Paul may mean: 'Emulate Apollos!'.

18:26 *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue*- It is surely intentional that we read of Paul doing this in that same synagogue in Ephesus, soon afterwards- "he [Paul] entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly" (Acts 19:8 s.w.). Was not Paul here consciously emulating Apollos, as he bid the Romans do (see on :25 *Being fervent*)? Apollos was an erudite Jew who knew the Scriptures well and could use them powerfully- just like Paul. But I wonder whether just as Paul sought to emulate Peter's mass conversion of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, so he seeks to copy Apollos. Apollos was a convert of John the Baptist, and soon afterwards, at the time of 19:1-5, Paul meets others in Ephesus who likewise were Jews converted by John but needed teaching the complete Christian message; and he baptizes them. Those men were most likely associates of Apollos; Apollos had planted, and Paul just did the last stage in baptizing them. But always, when it comes to preaching to the Jews, Paul is left playing second fiddle and building on another man's foundation. And he would have resented that. The point was, he should have concentrated on the mission which the Lord had for him, which was to the Gentiles. We too can mis-focus our lives by seeking to emulate others in their ministries, rather than perceiving and focusing upon our own unique ministry.

*But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately*- Appropriate language to use, seeing the preparing of the Lord's way was a major part of John the Baptist's message.



18:27 *And when he decided to go into Achaia-* Where Corinth was. Apollos is mentioned as being at Corinth in 19:1.

*The brothers encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he helped them who through grace had believed-* He helped / inspired the other believers in that he publicly converted others; thus an upward spiral of converting was initiated. "Who through grace had believed" suggests that faith is a gift, for *charis*, grace, essentially means a gift, and is often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise Lydia's heart was opened to believe the Gospel (Acts 16:14).

18:28 *For he powerfully refuted the Jews publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ-* Part of the 'help' which he gave the believers was by publicly vindicating their faith before those who opposed them.

## ACTS CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country, came to Ephesus and found some disciples-* Jn. 1:41,43,45 use the same words for how the Lord Jesus at the start of His ministry 'found disciples', who were likewise students of John the Baptist. We note that despite their misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge, they are still referred to as 'disciples'; they were committed to learning, which is the essence of the word 'disciple'. We also observe that Paul, like us, was manifesting the style and actions of the Lord's ministry in his own. The connection with the Lord's calling of the first disciples on the shores / coasts of the lake is strengthened by considering how Paul is described as having passed along the *meros*, translated "coasts" in the AV ["upper country"] to find those disciples.

19:2 *And he said to them: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him: No. We have not even heard-* The aorist implies 'we did not hear', i.e. at the point of baptism.

*That there is a Holy Spirit-* As followers of Moses and John the Baptist, they were surely aware of the concept of Holy Spirit. We must fill in the ellipses surely required by the context- "there is [gift of] the Holy Spirit", remembering that the Spirit was not poured out until the Lord's glorification. Jn. 7:39 likewise says that "the Holy Spirit was not yet", i.e. the [outpouring of] Holy Spirit. Perhaps what they meant was that they were aware that John had spoken of an outpouring of the Spirit as a result of the Lord's work, but they had not heard whether this had yet happened. After all, they had encountered John some years ago in Palestine and were now in Ephesus, maybe cut off from news of the progress of Christianity.

19:3 *And he said: Into what then were you baptized? And they said: Into John's baptism?-* The Acts record presupposes that baptism is part and parcel of belief. Paul has spoken of "When you believed" (:2) as if this was a one time specific event in the past, rather than a drift of interest towards Christianity. That one time point of "belief" was their baptism.

19:4 *And Paul said: John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people-* How could Paul so confidently quote John's words? Admittedly it could have been the result of a flash of Spirit inspiration. Or it could also have been that he had heard John preaching, which would have been the source of the goads sticking into his conscience... and he constantly alludes to John's words and personality throughout his letters.

*That they should believe in him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus-* On hearing this, they were baptized (:5); again we see baptism as being part and parcel of belief. Faith was not and is not a position we drift into; God in His wisdom introduced the rite of baptism so that there is a conscious, specific moment of accepting that faith as our own.

19:5 *And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus-*

These men had not been baptized with Christian baptism, which is into the death and resurrection of Christ. The command for baptism into His death and resurrection was given after Christ had risen from the dead. It could be argued therefore that this is not an example of adults once baptized [by immersion] into the Lord's death and resurrection being rebaptized. That approach would appear to be the correct line of interpretation once due weight is given to the fact that they had not received the Holy Spirit; surely there is an intended allusion to Jn. 7:39: "He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to

receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given, as Jesus had not yet been glorified". The Greek idea behind "not yet been given" is similar to the men's words in the Greek of Acts 19:2, where "We did not hear whether there *be* any Holy Spirit" carries the idea 'We didn't hear that the Holy Spirit is present / has been given'. The men had surely heard of "Holy Spirit", but they were unaware it had been given. The connection with Jn. 7:39 could suggest they were actually ignorant of the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus- hence their need for Christian baptism. Their ignorance of the coming of the Spirit is painted, according to the connection with Jn. 7:39, as ignorance of the fact Christ had been glorified. If these men had been baptized by John but were now in Ephesus, it's quite possible they had left Palestine soon after their baptisms and were ignorant of what had subsequently happened to Jesus until Apollos had now told them. "Into [Gk. *ek*] what were you baptized?" (Acts 19:3) would therefore carry the implication that they had not been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ; their answer comes across rather lamely: "Into John's baptism". The necessary answer was "Into Christ's death and resurrection", but they are forced to reply somewhat ungrammatically- that they had not been baptized *into* anything much at all, apart from into John. There could even be the implication that they had not been baptized by John himself, but "into John's baptism" by some disciple of John. Acts 19:5,6 sounds as if they were unaware that John had taught the people that they must believe [and be baptized] "into Christ"; and when they understood that this had been his message, then they were baptized into Christ. They had had the idea in their minds that they must make a change, but it would seem they were ignorant of what John had actually taught about Jesus.

Again and again it must be remembered here that John's baptism wasn't Christian baptism; it was to prepare the way for Christ and baptism into Him. Paul explains that John's teaching was intended to lead men to believe "in" or "into" Christ [Gk. *ek* again- he stresses this twice in Acts 19:4]. When the men understood that, they were "baptized into [Gk. *ek*] the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). Baptism *into* Christ is here presented as part and parcel of belief *in* Him. Baptism is assumed in the New Testament as being part of belief. This incident leaves us with the clear impression from the use of the term *ek* , into, that they had been baptized into John and had been ignorant of Christ's death and glorification. Their immersion "into John's baptism" had not therefore been Christian baptism at all.

The connection between baptism and receipt of the Spirit also cries out to be understood within the context of Acts to the great opening example of baptism in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". I have elsewhere suggested that the "gift" in view there was that of forgiveness and spiritual blessing in Christ. The baptism [or, rebaptism] of Acts 19 did not of itself give the Holy Spirit gifts; these came as a result of Paul laying his hands upon the newly baptized people. This would've been a situation analogous to that in Acts 10, where the Gentiles who were baptized exercised miraculous Spirit gifts straight afterwards in order to demonstrate that the decision to baptize them had in fact been correct.

19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied-* What foreign language did they speak? I have mentioned previously the possibility that the gift of languages was in order to cement unity between Jews and Gentiles by enabling them to speak in each other's languages. One therefore wonders if these men were in fact all full Jews, or whether the gift of languages in this case was the ability to converse in pure Hebrew.

19:7 *And they were in all about twelve men*- Being twelve of them, and called disciples, they could be presented as a kind of parallel brotherhood to the community of Christian disciples.

19:8- see on Acts 18:6.

*And he entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months*- “Boldly” is a common word in the New Testament. We are to be bold before the throne of grace, and our confident assurance of salvation means that we are bold in our witness to others about that good news.

*Reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God*- We wonder why there is no mention of the things concerning the Lord Jesus, as these two elements seem to go together in the Acts account. Perhaps this group were already persuaded that Jesus was Messiah, but were ignorant of the things of the Kingdom. Those “things” were surely the same “things concerning the Kingdom” which the Lord Himself had taught; and those things were found in His parables of the Kingdom, which were about life now under God’s kingship, rather than information about the physicalities of the Messianic Kingdom to be established on earth at His return.

19:9 The Western text here adds that Paul preached in Ephesus from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.- the siesta period. Whilst working with his own hands to support himself, he somehow persuaded men and women to break their usual sleep pattern to come and hear him. F.F. Bruce has commented that more Ephesians were awake at 1 a.m. than 1 p.m.

*But when some were hardened and disobedient*- Paul maybe recalled this case when he wrote to the Romans of how some Jews were hardened when they rejected the message of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 9:18 cp. Heb. 3:8,15).

*Speaking evil of the Way before the crowd, he departed from them*- This is typical of how when men cannot answer the truth of Christ presented to them, they then attack the messengers on a personal level. Paul’s way of dealing with this slander campaign was to just remove the converts as far as he could from exposure to it.

*And separated the disciples*- The same ones as in :1?

*Reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus*- First century preaching wasn’t merely bald statement of facts nor a pouty presentation of propositional Truth. A very wide range of words is used to describe the preaching of the Gospel. It included able intellectual argument, skilful, thoughtful use and study of the Scriptures by the public speakers, careful, closely reasoned and patient argument. Their preaching is recorded through words like *diamarturesthai*, to testify strenuously, *elegcho*, to show to be wrong, *peitho*, to win by words, *ekithemi*, to set forth, *diamar*, to bear full witness, *dianoigo*, to open what was previously closed, *parrhesia*, to speak with fearless candour, *katagellein*, to proclaim forcefully, *dialegesthai*, to argue, *diakatelenchein*, to confute powerfully. The intellectual energy of Paul powers through the narrative in passages like Acts 19: “Disputing and persuading... disputing daily... Paul purposed in the spirit... this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people”.

19:10 *And this continued for the space of two years, so that all those who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles-* Because Ephesus was visited by many from the surrounding area and was a transport hub.

19:11 *And God did special miracles by the hands of Paul-* The idea is 'uncommon miracles'. All true miracles are "special" and far from common; so the idea would be that his miracles far outclassed any done by the idol cults, rather like the miracles performed by Aaron outclassed those of Pharaoh's magicians.

19:12 *So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick-* Perhaps during the course of his work as a tentmaker, otherwise the choice of the word 'apron' is hard to understand. The point is perhaps that it was out of spirituality in his daily working life that blessing came to others.

*And their diseases left them and their mental illnesses were cured-* This reflects the language of the day, presumably shared even by doctor Luke, which held that disease was caused by some internal beings which could enter or leave the human body.

19:13 *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had manic illnesses, saying: I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul proclaims-* It was common in the first century for there to be travelling preachers. Hence 2 John speaks of welcoming the itinerant Christian preachers if they shared the belief that the Lord "came in the flesh". "Manic illnesses" suggests that it was mental illness in view; and it is these which were generally referred to as the work of demons in the first century, and therefore cure of mental illness came to be described in terms of spirits departing or being cast out. The incident demonstrates that simply the name "Jesus" is not powerful of itself (:15); it has come to be used as a kind of talisman in some Pentecostal circles. It is His power to heal hearts which is of the essence here. The form of pronunciation of a name is irrelevant.

19:14 *And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this-* There is no historical record of any chief priest called Sceva, and it seems unlikely that his seven sons would all be itinerant exorcists, equivalent of modern day Roma in parts of Eastern Europe. Again, as with the language of evil spirits, things are being recorded from the perspective and understanding of people at the time, without correction.

19:15 *And the maniac answered and said to them: Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?-* The sick man on one level 'knew' Jesus and recognized Paul; on that level of personality, the man was a believer.

19:16 *Then the man who had the mania jumped on them and subdued and overpowered all of them, so they fled out of that house naked and wounded-* "Overpowered" is the same word used in :20 about how God's word, the Gospel, "grew in power". This confirms the impression that the man was representative of believers who had identified themselves with the word of the Gospel.

19:17 *And this became known to all that dwelt at Ephesus, both Jews and Gentiles; and fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified-* The name of the Lord Jesus had been used by the exorcists, but it was lacking in power unless pronounced

in faith by Paul. So humanly, it was more the case that Paul was magnified over the exorcists; they both used the same formula and name of Jesus. But it only 'worked' when Paul used it. But it is a major theme of Acts that all glory was given not to the preachers but to the Lord Jesus whom they served and were identified with.

19:18 *Many also of those that had believed came-* After seeing what happened to the sons of Sceva, it would appear that some who had 'believed' went up to a higher level of commitment. This would seem to imply that despite having 'believed', perhaps with the same level of shallow conviction as some 'believed' in the teaching of Jesus during His ministry, their faith wasn't so deep. They were taken up to an altogether higher level of commitment, resulting in 'confessing and declaring', and quitting their involvement with magic. "Many that were now believers" there (RSV) "came and confessed and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men... so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed" (Acts 19:18,19). The language here seems to be intended to connect with the description of baptism in Mt. 3:6, where converts confessed and shewed their deeds *at baptism*. The way the Ephesians made their statement "before all men" again recalls the concept of baptism as a public declaration. Yet the Ephesians did all this *after* they had believed. It would seem that we are being invited to consider this as a re-conversion, a step up the ladder. The context is significant. Some who had pretended to be believers and to have the Holy Spirit are revealed for who they are: "they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all... dwelling at Ephesus. And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified". The fact that the Lord Jesus is so essentially demanding, the way in which ultimately He will judge insincere profession of His Name- this motivated the new Ephesian converts to take their relationship with Him seriously (compare how the Lord's slaying of Ananias and Sapphira also inspired a great desire to associate with Him, Acts 5:11-14).

*Confessing-* There are many connections between Luke's Gospel and his second volume here in Acts. The reference here would be to the Lord's comment recorded only by Luke that whoever confesses [s.w.] Him before men will be confessed before the Father in Heaven (Lk. 12:8). Note that their confession was before all men (:19). Luke saw that confession as not simply at baptism; because these were believers who were now 'coming out' at a higher level of conversion. Here, they confess their sins; in Lk. 12:8 they confess 'Jesus'. To confess Him therefore involves confessing sin. Perhaps Paul had this incident in view when he later wrote of how confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).

*And declaring their sinful deeds-* God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds" - just as men had to John.

19:19 *And not a few of those that practised magical arts-* Grammatically, the "those" would refer to those of :18 who were believers who now 'came out' in confession of sin after their conversion. It would therefore appear that some were baptized who still continued practicing

magic, but now they were persuaded to break with it. We again see here the openness of the apostles towards baptizing people, even when their lifestyles were less than perfect.

*Brought their books together and burned them-* The Greek word here is elsewhere always translated 'to profit' (16 times). The loss was their profit, in spiritual terms.

*In the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver-* See on :18 *Confessed*.

19:20 *So the word of the Lord-* In contrast to the word of all the books they had just burnt.

*Spread widely and grew in power-* The same word used about the growth of the seed of the word on good ground (Mk. 4:8) and the growth of the tiny mustard seed of the Gospel (Lk. 13:19). This is Luke's way of signalling that there was good ground in Ephesus, and the burning of the expensive books was a sign of the fruit and power of the tiny seed of the Gospel in practice.

19:21 *When these things were accomplished-* Gk. 'fulfilled'. Perhaps we are intended to understand that these things had fulfilled the parables of the seed of the Gospel growing.

*Paul purposed in the Spirit-* This could mean that he in his own spirit decided to go to Rome via Jerusalem (although "*the Spirit*" is hard to interpret like this); and the Beza codex confirms this approach: "He resolved, or determined in himself". But it could be that he conceived the idea [that is a valid translation of the Greek], and the Spirit of God confirmed him in it. The intentional ambiguity of the text is perhaps to lead us to the conclusion that Paul's spirit and God's Spirit were in agreement over the idea Paul had conceived. And yet the Spirit likewise warned him in every city of the consequences of this course of action. We see here how God is prepared to confirm us in whichever course of action we ourselves choose. In our early days in Christ, we agonize over which decision to take. But so often, it's not the decision but the motives behind the choice which are important; and God can equally confirm us in the choices made, whatever they are. It could be argued that all the drama he had in his life as a result of appealing to Caesar could have been avoided if he had chosen the freedom made possible for him. But he appears to have become almost obsessed with the idea of getting to Rome to witness there. His desire to go via Jerusalem first was in order to take the collection money there for the Jews- money raised from collections amongst the Gentile churches. It would likewise seem from 2 Corinthians that this plan was obsessive with Paul, and it badly backfired in Corinth; and his plans for visiting Corinth had to be changed because they simply hadn't raised the funds (1 Cor. 16:5-9 cp. 2 Cor. 1:16,23). And yet God worked with all this, with the Lord Jesus assuring Paul that he would get to Rome (Acts 23:11); although Paul observes that his desire to "see Rome" had been frequently hindered (Rom. 10:13). Maybe this was God working to try to stop Paul, as the Spirit so often warned him not to go there. And so we see how the Spirit can work on two poles, as it were, in the lives of His servants; on one hand confirming us in the way we choose, on another, seeking to preserve us in a better way.

*To go up to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying: After I have been there, I must also see Rome-* But actually he had written to the Romans that he would drop in to see them on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:23). Spain was his real ambition, to preach the Gospel in "the regions beyond" (2 Cor. 10:16 and context)- not Rome. But Acts 19:21 gives the impression that Rome was the end of his vision.

19:22 *And having sent into Macedonia two of those that assisted him, Timothy and Erastus, he stayed in Asia for a while-* Perhaps to prepare the way for his coming there (:21). Or perhaps Paul sensed the terrible persecution which was to break out in Ephesus, and sent timid Timothy away from a situation which could have been unbearable for him. Perhaps this was the visit to Corinth by Timothy which Paul wrote about in 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10. In which case Paul's love for the Corinthians was such that he allowed himself to be without personal assistants in order for a pastoral trip to be made to them. Maybe he needed personal assistants ("that ministered unto him", AV) because of failing health.

19:23 *And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way-* "The way" was an accepted description for Christianity (9:2; 22:4; 24:14). The allusion was perhaps to "the way to the tree of life", which had been guarded by the Cherubim since Adam's expulsion from Eden. In this case, unlike many religions both ancient and modern, Christianity is not an end in itself. There is in Christianity the most clearly articulated and emphasized end point, far more definitely stressed than in any other religion. The end of the Way is the tree of life, partaking of God's fullness for eternity, seeing good and evil with His eyes of love and grace. We already partake of these things, but the way stretches so much further ahead.

19:24 *For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business to the craftsmen-* These icons were bought by visitors and worshippers and placed in homes as good luck charms. The usage of icons in the Catholic and Orthodox churches is clearly the result of such paganism getting mixed with Christianity. I have explained on 1 Timothy that the Artemis / Diana cult came to influence the Christian church in Ephesus, and much of the language used there and the issues addressed must be understood in the Diana cult context.

19:25 *He gathered them together, with the workmen of similar occupation, and said: Sirs, you know that by this business we have our wealth-* He admitted that their religion was nothing less than a business. Those working in the shrine and icon business were a numerical minority within the city; but we see here how a disaffected minority can make huge trouble for the Lord's people. We see too how self-preservation and the basic love of wealth and stability of income can lead men to do deeply evil things.

19:26 *And you see and hear, that not only at Ephesus but throughout most of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and led astray many people, saying that they are no gods that are made with hands-* Note the irony, that they 'turned away' (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26). There is a tacit recognition here of the extent of Paul's witness. He was seen as the ringleader of the Christians (24:5), a man who had turned the world upside down (17:6); and here he is known as one who had persuaded people of the Lord Jesus "throughout most of Asia". The claim of the Roman Jews never to have heard of him was therefore untrue. Although Paul was empowered in his ministry by the Lord, he also on the human level still had to achieve it all by his own freewill. And he was in no way forced to do what he did. He chose to. "The power of one" in his case was remarkable. And we each have far greater potential than we like to admit.

19:27 *And not only is there a danger that this our trade will come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana will be made of no account, and that she whom all*



*Asia and the world worships should even be deposed from her magnificence-* Evidence of Diana worship has been found in Egypt and Eastern Europe; so the idea is that [people from all] "the world" worshipped her. Again, they admit that their religion is no more than "our trade". Religion was and is big business.

*19:28 And when they heard this, they were filled with anger and cried out, saying: Great is Diana of Ephesus!*- Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so they were angry. It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4). We note how pagan gods were local in worship and supposed sphere of influence- Diana was "of Ephesus", and the Jews considered Yahweh the God of Israel alone, and the likes of Jonah even thought that His presence was limited outside the land of Israel. The Christian message of a loving Father involved with "all men" as their saviour was therefore radical in its huge, global scope.

Their anger was related to shame that their god had been exposed as a fake. There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be.

*19:29 And the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel-* The archaeological remains suggest it would have held up to 56,000 people.

*19:30 But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him-* Such a huge audience [up to 56,000- see on :29] was seen by Paul as a supreme opportunity for preaching. He did not count his life dear to himself, so that he might obey the ministry he had received, to preach to the Gentiles. The disciples blocking of his desire is to be read along with the various times the disciples bundled him away from a city where persecution had broken out, when he himself was clearly minded to remain. Their motivation was not simply

because they wanted him to survive to fight again another day, but because they feared for their own safety if Paul continued to provoke things by his continued public witness.

19:31 *And some also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent word to him, pleading that he not venture into the theatre-* The Gospel had won friends in high places, even among the Asiarchs. The Lord Jesus is the representative of all men, and therefore appeals to all. This is why Christianity was and is unique in its appeal to people from all social strata and backgrounds. See commentary on the list of names in Romans 16.

In Paul's inspired thought, on the cross the Lord "gave himself" for us (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14). And yet he uses the same Greek words to describe how are to 'give ourselves' for our brethren (2 Thess. 3:9), to 'give ourselves' in financial generosity to their needs (2 Cor. 8:5), and in Acts 19:31 we meet the same phrase describing how Paul 'gave himself' into the theatre at Ephesus, filled with people bent on killing him, taking the conscious choice to risk his life in order to share the Gospel with others. In this I see a cameo of how the choice of preaching the Gospel is in fact a conscious living out of the Lord's example on the cross. Paul was discouraged from doing so by his friends and brethren; and yet surely he had his mind on the way the Lord 'gave himself' for us in His death, as a conscious choice, and so he brushed aside his reserve, that human desire to do what appears the sensible, safe option... in order to bring others to the cross of Christ. And day by day we have the same choice before us.

19:32 *Therefore, some cried one thing and some another. For the assembly was in confusion and most did not know why they had come together-* "Most" or "the majority" were shouting in passion but were unaware of the real issues behind it. Majorities are often like this; which is why democracy is not something advocated in the Bible [but rather good leadership].

19:33 *And they brought Alexander out of the crowd, the Jews putting him forward; and Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made a defence to the people-* Perhaps the coppersmith of 2 Tim 4:14 who later did Paul much evil by turning against him.

19:34 *But when they perceived that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*- One side of the theatre was steep rock, and this would have added a distinct audio effect to their voices, making them as it were one voice.

19:35 *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: You men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Diana and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?-* Religion and locality were connected in the ancient world. The town clerk was arguing that all Ephesians were of course worshippers of Diana by reason of being Ephesians. The whole city kept Diana's temple. Hence he addresses them as [Gk.] "Ephesians!". Indeed, most people even today are born into a religious position. This is where the call of Christ is so radical, making all things new in the minds of those who break out of their natural, birth positioning on spiritual issues.

19:36 *Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash-* The town clerk was arguing, very cleverly and diplomatically, that the commotion was an indication that they were in doubt about their religion. He wanted them to calm down by all means, and hence argues that the relationship of Diana with the Ephesians cannot be sensibly denied and so they should stop getting so agitated as if it could be denied.

19:37 *For you have brought here these men, who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess-* Perhaps the talk on the street was that this was what Paul had done; especially as Jews had a reputation as temple robbers, justifying themselves with the thought that the gods didn't actually exist (see on Rom. 2:22). The town clerk wanted by all means to calm the situation and so he saw the need to make it clear that Paul had not robbed the Diana shrine. Paul had criticized "gods made with hands" (:26); but the clerk reminds them that their belief was that Diana had fallen down from Jupiter, and her image was therefore 'obviously' not made with hands. And so Paul was not blaspheming Diana.

19:38 *Therefore, if Demetrius and the craftsmen that are with him have a matter against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse one another-* The court days were right then in session.

19:39 *But if you seek anything about other matters, it shall be settled in the regular assembly-* The clerk was eager to calm things by taking the sting out of the situation; so he suggests they raise the matters in the correct legal manner. The clerk acts with the sagacity we would expect of such a leading figure; and Luke's record reflects that. It really has the ring of truth to it; this is exactly how a smart town clerk might try to defuse such a situation.

19:40 *For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion-* The local authority was in fear that there could be questioning of what had happened, and so they wanted there to be peace- which meant, the new church being left alone. Likewise, Demetrius was in danger for his life if the matter were investigated further- for raising a mob and making an illegal such gathering was a capital offence. So he too would drop the issues against the Christians. The same happened in Philippi- Paul manipulated the situation to mean that the local authorities would be worried about being charged with wrongly treating a Roman citizen, and therefore they just wanted the Christians to exist quietly and without persecution or fuss made about them. And that of course is what the Lord wants for us too.

19:41 *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly-* The *ekklesia* could as well be translated "church". And *apoluo* ("dismissed") has a wide range of meaning; it is elsewhere translated to release or set at liberty. There may be the possibility of understanding this as meaning that as in Philippi, events worked out to mean that the ecclesia was at least initially not persecuted by the local authorities.

## **Wrestling Wild Beasts at Ephesus**

In the context of talking about our hope of bodily resurrection at Christ's return, Paul says that this hope was what had given perspective to his wrestling with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). The context surely requires that we understand this as referring to how he had been in danger of losing his physical life because of this wrestling, but he endured it with a mindset which looked ahead to the resurrection of the body. The wrestling with wild beasts, therefore, appears to be a literal experience which he had, rather than using 'wrestling with wild beasts' in a figurative sense. There was at Ephesus an amphitheatre, and we also know that there were cases where convicted criminals were forced to fight wild animals; if they killed the animal, then they went free. It seems this is what happened to Paul. He speaks in 2

Cor. 1:8-10 of an acute crisis which he faced in Asia (and Ephesus was in Asia) which involved his having been given a death sentence, and yet being saved out of it by “the God who raises the dead”. This emphasis on bodily resurrection is the same context we have in 1 Cor. 15:32. As he faced his death in 2 Tim. 4:17, Paul reminisced how the Lord had earlier saved him “out of the mouth of the lion”; and the context there is of literal language, and we are therefore inclined to consider that he was literally saved from a lion in the arena at Ephesus. This also helps us better understand his earlier reference in Corinthians to having been exhibited as a spectacle, as a gladiator at a show, “appointed unto death”, in the presence of God and men (1 Cor. 4:9). Note that despite this traumatic experience, Paul chose to continue at Ephesus even after that, because he saw a door had been opened to him for the Gospel, despite “many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:8,9). We who are so shy to put a word in for the Lord in our encounters with people ought to take strength from Paul’s dogged example in Ephesus.

But when Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of his death sentence experience in Ephesus, he does so in the context of having reasoned in the previous verses of how whatever we experience, we experience so that we may comfort others: “[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so in Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer”. These verses are profound in their implication. Whatever we experience is according to God’s plan, so that we might use that experience in order to strengthen others. We all share in Christ’s afflictions, but “in Christ” we experience comfort, insofar as others within the body of Christ mediate His comfort to us. However, the whole process only functions if we open ourselves up to others, understanding their experiences and sharing with them the strength which we received when we went through the same things in essence. No life is of course identical; few believers have experienced what Paul did in Ephesus. And yet he says that he wanted to use that experience in order to comfort those in Corinth who in essence were going through the same thing. We live in an age where mankind is in retreat, retreat back into himself. The online life tempts us to interact only as far as we wish and as often as we wish, and this has led many to retreat into themselves. Likewise interaction at meetings of the body of Christ can so often focus only around surface level issues. We don’t expose ourselves, and others don’t expose themselves to us. Within such a spirit of isolationism, we can never allow the body of Christ to function as God intends. We will fail to find ultimate meaning in our experiences; for Paul teaches clearly that they happen to us in order that we may share the fruits of them with others. This is why so many alcoholics and other addicts who do the 12 step courses tend to fail on the very last step- that they hereafter vow to spend the rest of their lives sharing what they have learnt with others. And so they retreat back into the mire of mediocrity and into the old patterns of existence and coping.

This line of thought explains why within Biblical history, it’s apparent that circumstances repeated in essence within the experience of God’s children. Ezekiel was asked to eat unclean food by God, and he found it so hard to get his legalistic head around it; Peter likewise. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted there for 40 days to reveal what was in His heart- just as Israel had been for 40 years. It also explains why once and if we can dig beneath the facade of normality which we all tend to cover our faces with, we find there

are others who have experienced amazingly similar experiences to ourselves. And the extraordinary similarity of experience is in fact designed by God; because these are meetings and connections made in Heaven. We are here for each other, and all we experience is in a sense for others. This opens another window onto the meaning of personal suffering; another take on the eternal question “Why?”. There’s an element to it which isn’t for our benefit at all, but for others. Take Job. That man was “perfect” and solidly with the Lord at the start of the book, and he is the same at the end of the book. The purpose of his sufferings was perhaps not therefore simply for his own personal development; but for the conversion of the three friends. The palsied man was palsied and was healed so that others might learn that the Son of Man had power to forgive sins (Mt. 10:6-9).

We too easily assume that nobody else could ever understand our life path, the way we have taken. We too quickly consider that others have a charmed life. Some seem to have great health and family relationships, money, security and spirituality. But in fact beneath all that veneer there simply has to be in every life lived in Christ an awful co-suffering with Him. People in Christ go through the most awful, unspeakable agonies. Every one of us does. Nobody gets off light. It just seems to our limited vision that some do. We all wrestle with wild beasts at Ephesus, and are saved out of the mouth of the lion. Whatever the Corinthians were enduring, it was in essence “the same suffering” as Paul endured in that arena. And there should therefore have been a meeting of minds; the basis of our fellowship is largely intended to be our common *experience* in Christ. Ideas and theories tend to divide; experience unites. And what people need far more than anything else, than any smart expositions or mental gymnastics with Scripture, more than money, is the simple comfort of Christ’s love. We have each received that comfort ourselves in our life experiences; and we are to make the functioning of Christ’s body effective by getting out there and sharing that comfort with others. For this is how, mechanically as it were, on the ground, in reality, “we [who] share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, in Christ share abundantly in comfort too”.

## ACTS CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And after the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them he said farewell and departed for Macedonia-* The same happened at Philippi; at a time when Paul would be the one needing the encouragement from the local brethren, he instead encourages *them*.

20:2 *And when he had gone through those regions-* This implies a prepared pastoral itinerary, just as Peter did in Acts 9:32.

*And had given them much encouragement, he came into Greece-* Gk. many words [*logos*]. The same phrase is used of how Judas and Silas gave 'many words' of prophetic encouragement, i.e. the gift of prophecy gave them words to say (15:32). And so here too, probably the Spirit gave Paul the words needed for each of the groups he visited.

20:3 *There he spent three months-* Paul had three periods of three months in his missionary work (19:8; 20:3; 28:11). Our lives work according to a Divine program, even if at the time it's hard to always discern this. We think of the three periods of 40 years in the life of Moses.

*But as he was about to set sail for Syria-* Such last minute changes of plan indicate that Paul had great autonomy in his travel choices. The red lines on maps showing his journeys rather disguise the freedom of choice which he had, and exercised.

*He was informed that the Jews planned to ambush him, so he decided to return through Macedonia-* Perhaps also related to the fact he was carrying the collection for the poor believers at Jerusalem.

20:4 *Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea, accompanied him-* These seven men who accompanied Paul and Luke were presumably also in order to provide some level of security seeing they were carrying the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. At no other point do we read of so many travelling with Paul. Seeing that all Asia turned away from Paul, these may have been his only close friends. He was by no means universally accepted in the early church.

*And of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus-* Aristarchus was a solid friend and co-worker, who enters the record at 19:29; supported Paul on the journey to Rome (27:2), laboured with him (Philemon :24), and ended up in prison with him in Rome (Col. 4:10,11). Tychicus was sent by Paul to confirm the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21,22), Colossians (Col. 4:7,8) and those in Crete (Tit. 3:12). Most people in the first century never travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace, so this geographical mobility was unusual. Tychicus was perhaps one of Paul's most trusted and well used co-workers.

Paul had commanded Timothy to remain at Ephesus when he left for Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). Presumably he had very few trusted brethren he could take with him, and he was desperate for men to be with him at this time, so he recalled Timothy to his side. Again we see a change of plan, the kind of thing the Corinthians later mocked Paul for. Again we see the degree to which Paul's missionary plans were largely left to his own initiative, with God confirming him in them, rather than being told where and when to go.

Sopater was perhaps a relative of Paul (Rom. 16:21).

20:5 *These had gone ahead earlier, and were waiting for us at Troas-* The use of “us” shows that Luke has now rejoined Paul.

20:6 *And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread; and in five days came to those at Troas, where we stayed seven days-* It took them only two days previously (16:11,12), and I suggested there that this was because the wind of the Spirit was behind them. But the whole plan of going to Rome via Jerusalem was not ideally what God wanted; the Spirit witnessed against it in every town along the way, and the wind / spirit was against him right from the start. The wind was likewise against the journey to Malta; and the nautical details at 28:13 [see note there] show that even from there to Rome was against the wind.

20:7 *And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart the next day; and prolonged his speech until midnight-* Paul is presented as a man in a rush- to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. He was using every hour of the night to deliver his teaching. And this led to Eutychus falling from the window. Yet again we get the impression that everything went wrong on this journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome. It was not God's ideal plan for Paul, and yet he insisted upon it. And God went along with him. God is open to man; He may know the trillions of possible futures we face, and agonize over our poor decision making; but we are not out of His game plan altogether by making them. He will still work with us. But we shall "have trouble in the flesh" as a result; life doesn't go well, the blessings for obedience, the peace possible in Christ, is not realized on a human level. Frequently young believers come to me to discuss a plan to marry an unbeliever, e.g. a Moslem. I cannot say that they are out of God's game plan if they go ahead. But life will not go well, and the path to the Kingdom will be so much harder for them- even though God works with them through the Spirit on that path they chose to take. For He passionately wishes their salvation. When Paul sailed the same route before, it took him two days, with the wind of the Spirit behind him; he had a straight course, alluding to the straight path of the feet of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. But now, it took him five days, with the wind against him. Finally Paul achieved his aim, with God's help; he survived at least one shipwreck on the journey, and probably the time he spent a day and night in the sea was also sometime on this journey to Jerusalem (2 Cor. 11:25). And there he was in Rome. But in prison. And he died there. Festus and Agrippa had truly commented that if it were not for his dogged insistence on appealing to Caesar, he could have been set free (Acts 26:32). His loss of freedom was terribly painful for him: "Apart from these chains..." (Acts 26:29). God of course used Paul's time in prison, and his prison letters are proof enough of that. And he did spread the Gospel throughout the Roman soldiers there and even into Caesar's palace: "The things which happened to me have turned out for the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds made Christ manifest throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and further, most of the believers in the Lord, being made confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14). God will use our less than ideal choices; for without the saving action of God's Spirit, Paul's body would have been washed up on the shores of Malta, or he would have fallen down dead on the beach from the viper sting.

“Intending to depart the next day” is language reminiscent of Passover; awake all night, with lamps burning (:8), and ready to leave the next day, breaking bread together, re-living the first Passover. Seeing this was just after Passover time (:6), we wonder if Paul was re-enacting a Passover meal with these Gentile believers.

20:8 *And there were many lamps*- We note the public, open nature of their meeting. They were in accord with the Lord's teaching that we are lamps lit and visible to the world.

*In the upper room where we were gathered together*- Luke is surely purposefully connecting with the disciples at the first breaking of bread in an upper room (Lk. 22:12), and then being in the upper room gathered together after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:13). The point is made that the gathering together in breaking of bread, at any distance in time or space from those early gatherings, is a continuation of them in essence. The same point is made by Luke's preference in Acts for describing the believers as "the disciples", as if their [and our] walk in Christ is a continuation of the way the early disciples followed Him in person around the streets and lanes of first century Palestine.

20:9 *And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus*- Gk. 'well fated'. As with many Bible names, the name seems so appropriate to the person. It could be in his case that he was given this name in the community after his resurrection. And yet it could also be that God arranged the naming of such people in advance as a reflection of how He knows the destiny and future experiences of each of His people from birth.

*Who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep, and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead*- A cameo of Paul's attitude is presented when Eutychus falls down from the window; Paul likewise runs down afterwards and falls on him, on the blood and broken bones (:9,10). The language of Paul's descent and falling upon Eutychus and Eutychus' own fall from the window are so similar. Surely the point is, that Paul had a heart that bled for that man, that led him to identify with him.

Believe that you really will receive; avoid the temptation of asking for things as a child asks for Christmas presents, with the vague hope that something might turn up. Be like Paul, who fell upon the smashed body of Eutychus with the assurance: "Trouble not yourselves [alluding to his Lord's words' in another upper room]; for his life is in him" (Acts 20:10).

20:10 *But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him*- In conscious imitation of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34). "Bent over" is literally "fell on him" (AV) or 'stretched upon him'. Paul was clearly imitating Elisha's resurrection of the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:33-35)

*Said: Don't be alarmed*- Using the same word, in the same context, as the Lord Jesus in Mk. 5:39: "Why make you a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeps... immediately the girl got up and began walking... and they were immediately overcome with amazement". We see here how Paul had so absorbed the Gospel accounts into his very being, so that his actions were a reflection of the One recounted there, the One Paul so admired and sought to imitate. And in that we see a pattern for ourselves in our Christ-focused Christianity.

*For his life is in him*- The Greek in :9 means that he really was dead. So seeing there is no 'immortal soul', Paul presumably meant that the source of new life was within the dead man, i.e. because of his faith, Paul would raise him from the dead. Paul's confident statement that "his life is in him" was presumably uttered in faith. We can only speculate whether the miracle



20:11 *Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten-* It's a hard job for those who wish to separate the open 'breakings of bread' performed by Jesus and Paul from the "breaking of bread" as in our Christian ritual of remembrance of Christ's death. They would have to argue that 'breaking bread' is used in different ways in the New Testament. Contrary to what their position requires, "" Breaking of bread" was not a standard Jewish designation for a full meal, but only for the ritual act that initiated it" (John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000) p. 91. This is confirmed in Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) p. 131). The Emmaus disciples were particularly struck by the way in which Jesus blessed and broke the bread (Lk. 24:30-35), showing that 'breaking bread' isn't used to simply refer to any kind of eating. Note how Luke comments on Paul's "breaking bread" at Troas: "After he had broken bread *and eaten*" (Acts 20:11). 'Breaking bread' isn't equal to simply eating any old meal. Likewise the word *eucharistesas* is associated with the "giving thanks" for the bread and wine at the breaking of bread (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; Acts 2:46); but this isn't the usual word which would've been used to describe giving thanks for a meal. That would've been *eulogia*, equivalent to the Hebrew *berakah*. The word *eucharistesas* seems to have a specific ritual, religious sense (as in Rom. 14:5; Jubilees 22:5-9); some argue that it means to give thanks *over* something, in this case the bread, rather than to simply give thanks *for* e.g. a meal. It is therefore highly significant that this is the word also used for Christ's breaking of bread to the 5000 strangers, Gentiles and semi-believers in the desert, and Paul's breaking bread with the sailors on the doomed ship (Jn. 6:11,23; Acts 27:34-36). This strongly suggests that we are to see in those incidents a spiritual, ritual 'breaking of bread' rather than a mere sharing of food.

*And talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed-* "Talked" is a more informal word than the word translated "talked" in :7, which implies a more formal discourse. This subtle difference is again true to observed experience and confirms we are reading a genuine eyewitness account; for after an incident like that of Eutychus, everyone would have felt the more relaxed with each other and with Paul. It is in this sense that experience unites, and doctrine left at mere ideas tends to divide.

20:12 *And they brought the lad alive and were greatly comforted-* The chronology presented suggests that Paul preached, Eutychus fell, Paul ran down and resurrected him, Paul returned upstairs, continued preaching, and then they brought Eutychus up to him. This demonstrates how miracles and material assistance were utterly incidental to the essential focus of Paul and the apostles- which was the teaching of the Gospel. Sadly, so many branches of Christianity have maxed out on the material blessings and lost the focus there was and should be- on the teaching of the Lord's word and salvation in Him.

20:13 *But going ahead to the ship we set sail for Assos, there intending to pick up Paul. For so had he arranged, he intending to go-* Intending... arranged... intending- The repetition of the Greek word underlines how these brethren were left to use their own initiative in arranging things, with all the uncertainties of travel, especially given the limited information there was available for travellers.

*By land-* A distance of around 20 miles compared to 45 miles by sea. Why did Paul again split his party? Perhaps there was real danger of ambush because of the money they were carrying for the poor believers in Jerusalem. The splitting of the group would have given a better chance of some of the funds getting through if the worst came to the worst.

20:14 *And when he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and came to Mitylene-* "We took him aboard" could suggest that Paul was weak and had to be helped aboard.

20:15 *And sailing from there, the following day we arrived off Kios, the next day we crossed over to Samos and the day after we came to Miletus-* Kios was the nearest to a 'resort island' in the ancient world; and we note that they did not stop there.

20:16 *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend time in Asia. For he was in a hurry, hoping to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost-* Paul clearly tried to keep the Jewish feasts, as part of his being as a Jew to the Jews. But the Jewish feasts were also a unique opportunity to witness the Gospel to diaspora Jews from all over the empire who came there. But Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. If Paul had left such witness to Peter, as the Lord surely intended, he wouldn't have needed to rush to Jerusalem, nor suffered all he did. Again we get the impression that Paul ran into some of his difficulties because of an obsession with involvement with Israel which was not God's intended path for him. It was all the same reckoned to him as service to the Lord, and the Lord worked with him in it- just as He does with us in our less than ideal choices in His service. But see on :24 *Finish my race*.

20:17 *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church-* Instead of going there himself, he gathered together the local elders in one place. Paul was trying to save every day, in order to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Again we see his pressing obsession with getting there in order to witness to the Jews gathered there. "Elders" is a term effectively equivalent to "bishops" here (:28).

20:18 *And when they had come to him, he said to them: You know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia-* But had all those elders been with Paul from his first day in Asia? Or is the idea that his reputation for sincerity was so solid that they therefore knew this? "Set foot in Asia" is alluding to Josh. 14:9 LXX: "Surely the land where you walked ['set foot'] shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have wholly followed Yahweh my God". He saw the conquests he made for the Gospel as being part of his inheritance in the promised land; he would eternally enjoy it, and the more he took in this life, the more he would have eternally.

*After what manner I was with you-* The speech is clearly based upon Samuel's final address of 1 Sam. 12:3. The similarities suggest that Paul felt that his audience were likewise going to turn away from the true God and wish to become like the nations around them, with visible leadership. And the corruption of Christianity shows that his fears were well founded, for this is indeed what happened. True Christianity comprised with paganism and imported pagan ideas such as the trinity and immortality of the soul.

*All the time-* Codex Bezae adds here "for three years". AV "At all seasons". Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, and his language in 2 Timothy has many allusions to his own behaviour whilst at Ephesus. He spoke at Ephesus of how he had preached the word "at all seasons" (Acts 20:18 AV)- and he tells Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim. 4:2); Paul had taught what was profitable to others (Acts 20:20); and this was to be Timothy's pattern (2 Tim. 3:16 RV). As he spoke to the Ephesians of the time of his departure, hard times to come and the need to use God's word to build us up (Acts 20:29,32), so he told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul in writing to Timothy was consciously holding himself up as Timothy's example in the context of Ephesus.

*20:19 Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind-* The idea is of bondage in slavery. Yet Paul also used this word when telling the Romans that although he did indeed serve the Lord, this was *in his mind*, and he says here it was with "all lowliness of mind"; but in his flesh, he still served the law of sin (Rom. 7:25). His service "with lowliness of mind" was therefore on the basis that he realized that in reality, he still at times served the principles of sin. Paul uses the same term for "lowliness of mind" when he wrote to the Ephesians exhorting them to have such a mind (Eph. 4:2). So what he here told the Ephesian elders about himself, he later asked all the Ephesian believers to emulate.

Lowliness of mind is one of a number of allusions to Moses: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly" (Acts 20:20)... Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things" (Acts 20:30). "The man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). The humility / lowliness of Moses really fired Paul. As Moses likewise warned in his farewell speech that false prophets would *arise* - and should be shunned (Dt. 13:1).

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19 "lowliness"; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

*And with tears and with trials which befell me-* The tears of Paul were part of his service to the Lord; that is the force of the word "with". Those caught up in grieving processes need not think that this is all selfish; it can also be part of active serving the Lord.

*By the plots of the Jews-* The same word used about this in :3.

*20:20 You know how I did not hesitate-* The Greek word means to draw in, and is used about furling / taking in sails. Paul had arrived after a sea voyage, during which he would have observed this and heard the word multiple times. And so he uses it. This is exactly true to life in human language usage, and confirms we are reading words which were really said. The word is used in :27 about his lack of hesitation in revealing to them the whole advice of God; the implication is that he was tempted, as we are, to only tell people those aspects of God's revelation which we think they can cope with or which will be attractive to them.

*To declare to you anything that was helpful-* The Greek carries the idea of 'profitable' [as AV]. Paul is here addressing the elders from Ephesus, and the same word is used to describe how the converts in Ephesus had burnt their magic books of profit (19:19). Paul had shown them how to really profit, spiritually; and that had involved a loss of secular profit.

*And taught you in public, and from house to house-* Luke used the same phrase "house to house" in Acts 2:46 to describe house churches. Surely Paul was recalling how he had taught the Ephesian church both "publicly", when they were all gathered together, and also in their house churches. Aquila had a house church in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), and so did Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16,18; 4:19). Another indication of this structure within the Ephesian church is to be found in considering how Paul wrote to Timothy with advice, whilst Timothy

was leading that church. Paul advises him not to permit sisters to wander about “from house [church] to house [church]” carrying ecclesial gossip (1 Tim. 5:13).

20:21- see on Acts 13:24,25.

*Testifying*- A legal term, implying that whenever a person encounters the call of the Gospel, they stand as it were right now before God's judgment seat. Paul develops this metaphor very strongly in Romans.

*Both to Jews and to Gentiles repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*- Gk. *the repentance* [in some manuscripts]. Perhaps a technical term used amongst the Christians, showing the importance they attached to this step prior to baptism.

20:22 *And now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem*- See on 9:14. Consider the following passages in the Spirit's biography of Paul: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" and therefore he preached to them (Acts 17:16). In Corinth, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:5). "Now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22) is difficult to divorce from the previous passages. It may be that the Holy Spirit confirmed the desire of Paul's own spirit; but I am tempted to read this as yet one more example of where he felt overwhelmingly compelled to witness. "Paul purposed in the spirit... to go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). It was as if his own conscience, developed within him by the word and his experience of the Lord Jesus, compelled him to take the Gospel right to the ends of his world. His ambition for Spain, at a time when most men scarcely travelled 100km. from their birthplace, is just superb (Rom. 15:24,28).

"Bound in the spirit" implies, grammatically at least, bound in his own spirit. There is therefore the intended contrast with the *Holy Spirit*, the spirit of *God*, in :22. The contrast could lead us to think that it was not God's intention that Paul go to suffering and death in Rome via Jerusalem. But Paul bound himself to do this, and his obsession with provoking the Jews resulted in this- when he was surely intended to leave the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focus on being the apostle to the Gentiles.

*Not knowing the things that shall befall me there*- But the Spirit clearly witnessed about the suffering awaiting him (:23). Maybe Paul meant that he was not recognizing them, and was going to go ahead anyway; or maybe he meant that he accepted the sufferings predicted would happen, but he was unsure what the final outcome would be beyond them. However, he speaks with confidence of taking the Gospel to Jerusalem and Rome, suffering notwithstanding; so I would tend to come down on the side of him reasoning that he doesn't know / recognize these predicted sufferings nor the implied message- that he should not attempt the journey.

20:23- see on Acts 21:4.

*Except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city, saying that imprisonments and afflictions await me*- Philip prophesied by the Holy Spirit about Paul: “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hand of the Gentiles”. They “shall” do this, he said. And many other prophets said the same (Acts 20:23). “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:11,12). Those brethren evidently understood the word of prophecy as

conditional- its' fulfilment could be avoided by Paul not going to Jerusalem. Indeed, there were prophecies that said he should *not* go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Yet Paul went, knowing that if he died at Jerusalem then the will of God would be done (Acts 21:14). All this surely shows that prophecies are open to human interpretation; they can be seen as commandment (e.g. not to go to Jerusalem), but it all depends upon our perception of the wider picture.

This was quite some witness to Paul, and he chose to go against it. Two of the testimonies are recorded (21:4,11). God is open to us, He leads us one way, but in some cases He is willing for us to go another, and works with us on that path too. Yet the same word has just been used by Paul, in saying that *he* witnessed / testified the Gospel to all men (:21). He is apparently making a play on ideas here, reflecting the tension between Spirit guidance to go to Jerusalem, and Spirit guidance not to. He is saying that the Spirit [of Jesus] testifies of the dangers, and he testifies to Jesus. The courtroom language again suggests a balancing of testimonies here. And the resolution, as in so many apparently difficult decisions, is that there is no right or wrong in a moral sense; rather does it all depend on our motives, and the Lord through His Spirit is waiting to confirm us, leaving us to choose the path between the guidances received.

The same word used for "afflictions" is used about the persecution and suffering Paul had inflicted upon Christians earlier (Acts 11:19). Again, we see Paul experiencing all he had done to his brethren; not to punish him, but to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom, teaching him about himself and the result of his desires and actions. Paul uses the word often to describe his own "afflictions", and reasons that afflictions are inevitable, and should not be allowed to hinder our path towards salvation. So it may be that he reasoned that such afflictions were inevitable, whichever path he chose- to Jerusalem, or not.

20:24- see on Acts 18:18; 28:31.

*If only I may finish my race*- Paul has used this very phrase about the work of John the Baptist (13:25). Paul had likely heard John's preaching, as he had grown up in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John, and sees his own ministry as parallel to John's, and he clearly too encouragement from this. Writing from Rome at the end of his life, Paul uses the same language: "I have finished my race" (2 Tim. 4:7). I have suggested that going to Rome was not necessarily what God had in mind for Paul, but he set himself that aim. He clearly envisaged starting an ecclesia there- but by the time he wrote to the Romans, he had learnt that there actually was already one there. But so when he knew he was going to die there, he felt he had achieved the race set before him- even though he partly set it before himself. It could be that "my race" and "the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel" are not parallel expressions. "My race" was what Paul had personally set before himself- to witness to diaspora Jews at Pentecost, and thence to go to Rome. Yet the whole plan went rather wrong; the wind was contrary to him to start with (:5), and this was how the whole thing went. The taking of Gentile money to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem was deeply problematic. And he ended up not making a great witness in Jerusalem. There is no evidence he made a great witness that Pentecost; and we suspect he simply wanted to emulate Peter, who had converted thousands at Pentecost. He shouldn't have had this desire to equal Peter; he should have left the ministry to the Jews to Peter. And the Spirit warned him against the whole mission in every town on the way. The whole journey to Rome was traumatic, compared to the ease with which Paul had sailed earlier when he was on a mission clearly intended by God. God brought Moses through it, but surely he must have seen himself in the

captain who refused Paul's Spirit guided advice not to make the journey because "I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage" (Acts 27:10).

Paul spoke of his "departure" (Phil. 1:23), how he must finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24); and he knew his time had come; he could speak of having reached "the time of my *departure*" (2 Tim. 4:6). The level of self-knowledge he had as he faced the end is remarkable. Yet it really is possible for each of us; for his glorious race to the finish is our pattern. Despite his surface sadness and depression, Paul was finishing his course *with joy*.

*And the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus-* The Greek *lambano* translated "received" is not the most comfortable word choice if Paul intended us to understand that he had been given a ministry by the Lord Jesus. *Lambano* far more carries the idea of taking or even grasping; Paul took the ministry from the Lord. Again, we sense the interplay of ideas between Paul being led by the Lord's Spirit, and on the other pole, Paul's own spirit prodding him to decide the path of his own ministry. Paul's ministry was to be the apostle to the Gentiles ("I am the apostle of the Gentiles; I magnify my ministry [AV "office"]", Rom. 11:13). This did not therefore require him to go to Jerusalem and attempt to match Peter's preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. But he forged ahead anyway... Perhaps by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, he had learnt something of his error; for he writes that if we have a ministry, then let us get on with that ministry (Rom. 12:7 "...or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry"). And from prison in Rome, when he finally got there, he writes to others and encourages them likewise to focus on *their* ministry (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5). He should have focused on his given ministry, to the Gentiles, rather than getting so obsessed with doing Peter's work of ministering to the Jews. He always went directly to the synagogue to preach in almost every town he entered; and suffered because of it, for it was the Jews who formed the main opposition to his work. If he had ignored them, some of these problems may not have arisen. The collection for the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem had so many problems; he ended up having to go against his own principles and take wages from other churches in order to fulfil that "ministry" (2 Cor. 11:8). That could imply that in order to make up the funds which the Corinthians had promised but not donated, Paul had to take wages for his spiritual services from other churches. And there is no record of any enthusiastic acceptance of the gift in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:31 implies the Jewish brethren may have flatly refused to accept it), nor of Paul even making it on time to Jerusalem for Pentecost, nor of him converting anyone much in Jerusalem when he did get there.

*To testify to the gospel of the grace of God-* Paul therefore considered that his journey to Rome via Jerusalem at Pentecost, when the city would be filled with diaspora Jews, was necessary for the spreading of the Gospel. But of course the question is, whether that journey to Rome via Jerusalem was the particular way, or path of the race, which the Lord Jesus had commanded Paul. He seems to have decided that it was. But his ministry was to testify to the Gospel; how and where he did it was surely over to him. And the Lord Jesus clearly wanted Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and Peter on the Jews. So the path to Rome was due West; but Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem first. And it was that which caused him so much grief.

Some years later at the end of his life he could write that "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7). He didn't let anything distract him- and our age perhaps more than any other is so full of distractions. In his time of dying (at which he wrote 2 Timothy), John his hero was still in Paul's mind. Paul speaks of finishing his course (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), using a word only used elsewhere concerning John finishing *his* course (Acts 13:25).

It could be argued that at his conversion, the Lord Jesus predicted the sufferings Paul would endure for the Gospel, but did not give him a set of specific commandments which he was to fulfil in his ministry. And Paul's conversion is typical of that of each of us. Paul's letter to the Romans is a literary fulfilment of a requirement "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God". Paul was inspired to write that letter; and it could be argued that there was therefore no need for him to literally go to Rome. He insisted on it, and the Lord led him there- but he was never free to preach there, he was imprisoned. Note how this idea of testifying to the gospel of God's grace is maybe parallel to "proclaiming the kingdom of God" in :25. The good news of God's Kingdom, His Kingship, is the good news of His grace.

*20:25 And now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God will see my face again-* Did he know through a direct Holy Spirit revelation to himself? It was as if the Holy Spirit was telling him the consequences, but he still chose to go that path, and so the Spirit told him that therefore the consequences would really happen. But we must give due weight to the fact that Paul later wrote to Timothy at Ephesus that he hoped to shortly visit him there (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:14), and he planned on visiting Philemon at Colossae (Philemon 22); and that he did visit Miletus again, which was only 40 km. from Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:20). Paul was inspired to write those words to Timothy and Philemon; there was at least the possibility that he could visit Ephesus, despite here in Acts 20:25 saying that it was certain that he would not see the Ephesian elders again. Presumably he had been directed to that thought by the Spirit [unless it was purely presentiment, which he had wrong]. My suggested reconciliation of this would be that this kind of thing is perfectly in line with the working of the Lord's Spirit which we have noted throughout this chapter; in that the Lord's plans with a person can change, in accordance with their own freewill decisions and desires. One path opened up to Paul was that he would not see them again; but perhaps he repented of his obsession with preaching to Jews in Jerusalem, his pretending to Peter's role, and his desire to "see Rome" almost for the sake of it. And because of that repentance, it became possible for him to return to Ephesus, or at least to that region. This is not to be scoffed at as the Lord being somehow not serious, just as Nineveh's lack of destruction after 40 days is not to be mocked. Rather is this a profound reflection of God's sensitivity to human freewill, and His amazing respect of it.

20:26- see on Acts 18:6.

*Therefore I testify to you this day-* The language of testimony, especially regarding innocence from blood, continues the legal metaphor we noted earlier. He rightly perceived that the essence of judgment is going on right now. He felt that he was on trial for murder- the murder of all men. And he protests his innocence by saying he has truly witnessed to all men. This is a powerful lesson in the extent of sins of omission. If we omit to share the Gospel of life with men, then we have effectively caused their death, even by murder. That of course is the message of Ez. 33:6, which Paul is alluding to here. He felt as the Old Testament prophets; but his potential guilt was not just before Israel, but "all men", seeing the Gospel is intended for "all men" and the Lord's death is the potential salvation of every man.

*That I am pure from the blood of all men-* By preaching, they were freed from the blood of men; evidently alluding to how the watchman must die if he didn't warn the people of their impending fate (Ez. 3:18). In line with this, "*necessity is laid upon me... woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel*" (1 Cor. 9:16). It could be argued that Paul felt so truly and absolutely forgiven that he could say that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). Yet as he said that, he must surely have had the blood of Stephen on his mind, trickling out along the

Palestinian dust, as the clothes of the men who murdered Stephen lay at Paul's feet as a testimony that *he* was responsible for it. But he knew his forgiveness. He could confidently state that he was pure from that blood. Righteousness had been imputed, the sin covered- because he was in Christ. We are covered with His righteousness, and therefore have a share in His victory; and yet it also means that we must act as He did and does.

Paul was guilty of the murder of Christians. But his conscience was cleansed in Christ (Heb. 10:22), and he felt cleansed or pure from that blood. He had already stated that he was pure from the blood of the Jews, and therefore he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6 s.w.). His insistence that he is now pure from the blood "of all men" could mean that he felt pure also from the blood of the Gentiles. And yet he continued by all means trying to preach to the Jews and Gentiles; his angry comment in 18:6 about turning from the Jews to the Gentiles was surely said in hot blood or perhaps temporary realization that his focus on the Jews was uncalled for; seeing he continued his focus on the Jews and his rushing to Jerusalem to be there for Pentecost. However, Paul's faith in his conscience being cleansed in Christ was, it seems, not total. For he speaks here and in 18:6 as if his preaching work was the cleansing of his conscience; and at the end of his life he feels that he has a "pure conscience" because he has "served" God (2 Tim. 1:3). So in psychological terms it could be argued that Paul's guilt over his past murders, the blood that was on his hands, led him to try to cleanse himself from it by a lifetime of works, in preaching the Gospel to others, both Jew and Gentile. Perhaps his dogged insistence on preaching to the Jews was because most if not all of the Christians he had murdered would have been Jews. It would also explain why immediately after his conversion, he begins manic preaching, willing to give his life for it; which explains why several times in his ministry, starting from Damascus, the brethren had to get hold of him and take him away from danger to his life. This happened enough times to give us the impression that he was as it were looking for a bullet. His insistence on making the Jerusalem-Rome journey, when the Spirit witnessed that he would suffer deeply if he did so, was perhaps something similar. See on 28:19 *I was compelled to appeal to Caesar*.

In the phrase "The blood of all", "Men" is added by the translators. The reference may be to the Lord's words which Luke had earlier recorded: "The blood of all the prophets shall be required of this generation" (Lk. 11:50). Again, Paul appears to be seeking to get out of condemnation for the blood of all the prophets by preaching to the Jews of that generation, rather than throwing himself upon the Lord's blood to cleanse his conscience.

20:27 *For I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole counsel of God*- The same word as in :20; see note there. Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3). The reference is clearly again to Luke's first volume, where he records how the Jews "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" by refusing baptism from John (Lk. 7:30). The same Greek words are used. Maybe his addition of the word "whole" reflects the fact that John did not then preach the complete counsel of God because the Lord had not then died or resurrected. Having grown up in Jerusalem, Paul would have heard the preaching of John, and presumably refused baptism from him. He had rejected the counsel of God- and now he was declaring it to others as a basis for his own 'cleansing'. It could be argued that this was simply an appropriate response from Paul given his failure earlier. But psychologically, it could be seen as a way of dealing with his own abiding guilt- through preaching. And *when* this was fulfilled, as he saw it, by preaching on Pentecost in Jerusalem, replicating Peter's success, and preaching in Rome, capital of the known world... *then* he could speak of his cleansed conscience as he faced death (2 Tim. 1:3).



20:28 *Take heed to yourselves*- "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9)- further evidence Paul is being presented as some kind of Moses of the New Covenant [without denying that the Lord Jesus fits this role pre-eminently]. "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3) is being alluded to here, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

*And to all the flock*- All pastoral work for others must begin with us personally first of all. The same word is used in Mt. 7:15: "Take heed of false prophets", especially Jewish ones: "Take heed of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt. 16:6,12; Lk. 12:1; 20:46 s.w.). Paul uses the phrase again about wariness about Jewish teachers (1 Tim. 1:4). Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these assembled elders were from, that some would give heed to false teachings (1 Tim. 4:1). And this is the further context here (:29). "Take heed to yourselves" is word for word what Luke alone twice records the Lord saying to the disciples in Lk. 17:3; 21:34. Again we see how the disciples in first century Palestine were not to be seen as historical icons, far away in space and time; but as living examples to be emulated.

Put two passages from Paul together in your minds. He tells the Ephesian elders to "take heed to yourselves" before adding "and to all the flock". To Timothy likewise: "Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching [of others]" (1 Tim. 4:16). Clearly enough, Paul saw that who we are is related to the effectiveness of our preaching. The preacher is some sort of reproduction of the Truth in a personal form; the word made flesh. The Truth must exist in us as a living experience, a glorious enthusiasm, an intense reality. For it is primarily *people* who communicate, not words or ideas. Personal authenticity is undoubtedly the strongest credential in our work of communicating the message.

*In which*- The elders are themselves part of the flock and not separate from it.

*The Holy Spirit has made you bishops*- It was Paul who ordained these elders in Ephesus, straight after their conversion. His choice of the men must have been simply on the basis of what appeared to him; for it's hard to really know the hearts of men and their ultimate suitability for eldership. Yet the Spirit apparently confirmed Paul's spirit, his own judgment. The fact they were "made" or given [*tithemi*] to be bishops didn't mean they were to make no human effort. They had to "take heed" to themselves and the flock, and feed the flock. Again we see how God's Spirit works with the human spirit. They were not turned into mere puppets. In this case, what they fed the flock, and how they fed them, was their choice and down to their initiative and effort, which they needed to be encouraged in.

*To feed the church of God*- Feeding is also a metaphor for ruling; eldership in the church was not simply on account of having been given an office, but in practice it is demonstrated and actualized through teaching / feeding the flock.

*Which he purchased with his own blood*- The motivation to care for others is because the Lord died for His flock. Our attitude to others is therefore to be an extension of His abiding and saving care for them. We aren't motivated simply by what He did for us, but by the fact He did so much for others and thereby seeks their salvation; and we are to play our part in achieving the work intended by His death. "Purchased" translates a word which means to literally go around doing; the idea is of a purchaser going around looking at items before

buying one. Here we see the Lord in search of man, just as God in Jeremiah likens Himself to Jeremiah running around the streets of a city looking for men who would hear His word. God is in search of man, through His Son; and men, some men, are in search of God. This explains the sense of spark and mutuality when we meet, with all the Angels rejoicing over one found person.

Whose blood is in view in "His blood"? There are several NT passages which make an explicit link between God and Jesus in the context of the salvation of men. Phrases such as "God our Saviour, Jesus..." are relatively common in the pastorals (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3,4; 2:10 cp. 13 and see also Jude 24; 2 Pet. 1:1). Acts 20:28 even speaks in some versions as if God's blood was shed on the cross; through 'His' blood the church was purchased; and yet Paul told the very same Ephesian audience that it was through the blood of Jesus that the church was purchased (Eph. 1:6,7); such was the extent of God manifestation on the cross. These and many other passages quoted by Trinitarians evidently don't mean that 'Jesus = God' in the way they take them to mean. But what they *are* saying is that there was an intense unity between the Father and Son in the work of salvation achieved on the cross. The High Priest on the day of Atonement sprinkled the blood eastwards, on the mercy seat. He would therefore have had to walk around to God's side of the mercy seat and sprinkle the blood back the way he had come. This would have given the picture of the blood coming out from the presence of God Himself; as if *He* was the sacrifice.

This passage records Paul predicting the apostasy that was to come upon Ephesus; but he pleads with the elders to take heed and watch, so that his inspired words needn't come true. Here we again see the openness of God.

20:29 *I know*- By direct Spirit revelation, the Spirit gift of knowledge; because in 1 Tim. 4:1 Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these elders were from, that there had been "express" Spirit revelation that some would 'take heed' to false teaching.

*That after my departing*- Paul warned the new Israel that after his death ("after my departing") there would be serious apostasy. This is the spirit of his very last words, in 2 Tim. 4. This is exactly the spirit of Moses' farewell speech throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and throughout his final song (Dt. 32). "After my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves" (Dt. 31:29). "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9). Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3).

*Fierce wolves*- As noted on :28 *Take heed*, he likely had Jewish false teachers in view. It was consistently the Jews who are presented throughout Acts as coming and disrupting Paul's missionary work after he had made converts. It was Jewish wolves whom the Lord had in mind when He warned the first disciples to "take heed... of wolves" (Mt. 7:15; 10:16; Lk. 10:3).

*Shall enter in among you and will not spare the flock*- This sounds like a fifth column within the new churches, as if they actually became members and worked from within; those referred to in Gal. 2:4 as false brethren who had been smuggled in, or in Jude 4 as the "certain people who have crept in secretly".

*20:30 And from among you, men shall arise speaking twisted things-* The Greek can mean morally as well as simply doctrinally apostate. And this was the nature of the 1st century apostasy- teachings which appealed to the flesh, justifying immorality in the name of spirituality. The letters to the churches in Rev. 2 and 3, especially to Ephesus, are clearly tackling this problem.

*To draw away the disciples after themselves-* Hardly any false teacher or divisive person would admit (not even to themselves) that this is the motive for their heresy. But Paul here puts his finger on the real reason for division- people wanting a following and therefore inventing some curious teaching which they present as vitally important. 'Drawing away' suggests the disciples were drawn away from one person to another; and the One whom disciples should be following is the Lord Jesus, the disciple's Lord. The early disciples walked "after" Him (Mt. 4:19; 10:38; 16:24 and so often, s.w.). The danger of schism is that the flock are no longer Christ centred but following men and their teachings. Loss of personal focus on the Lord Jesus is the observable result of all division.

*20:31 Therefore be alert-* The apostasy which on one hand was predicted by the Spirit did not inevitably have to happen. The elders were being charged to stop it happening. It's rather like the statement that in 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. Although there were no conditions attached to the message, like much Old Testament prophecy, it was not a foregone conclusion. There were other possible futures which obedience could elicit and actualize. His prophecy, certain of fulfilment as it sounded, didn't 'have' to come true. Likewise the Lord categorically foretold Peter's denials; and yet tells him therefore to watch, and not fall into the temptation that was looming. Peter didn't *have* to fulfil the prophecy, and the Lord encouraged him to leave it as an unfulfilled, conditional prophecy. He warns him to pray "lest ye enter into temptation" (Mk. 14:38)- even though He had prophesied that Peter *would* fail under temptation.

*And remember that for three years-* This means that right from the beginning of Paul's preaching in the area, he had warned them that the whole thing was very prone to fall apart because of the wolves he could foresee entering the new flock. To warn new converts of this kind of thing always seems an anti-climax, a possible discouragement to them after the joy of conversion. But Paul's aim was not merely baptism but for converts to get to the Kingdom of God, and so he saw the need to warn them right away of the difficulties ahead.

*I did not cease to warn every one-* The Greek definitely means 'each of you', rather than a more general 'everyone', which would have been expressed quite differently in Greek. He presumably was referring to the assembled elders.

*Night and day with tears-* For literally three years, to each and every one of the assembled brethren? This sounds to me like a Semitic exaggeration, and is probably not to be read literally. But Paul's tears at the prospect of anyone turning away... are a great challenge. It's all too easy to shrug off the apostasy of others from the way as being their fault. But Paul had a clear sense of the future they would miss and the judgment to come. He wept for even the possibility of it happening to his beloved converts. Truly Paul served his Lord with many tears (:19); and 2 Cor. 2:4 pictures Paul weeping over his parchment and ink as he wrote to Corinth. The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)

- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)
- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island... and an island never cries". The very emotional centre of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ... surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others... these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

*20:32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace-* Paul had elsewhere commended new converts and elders to the Lord Jesus (14:23 s.w.). So "the word [*logos*] of His grace" may be a reference to the Lord Jesus, rather than meaning 'the Bible'. The only other reference to the word of grace is also in Luke, and we should therefore be guided by this in interpretation, seeing that Acts follows on from the Gospel of Luke. The reference is in Lk. 4:22 where the words of the Lord Jesus are described as words of grace. In an illiterate society, the converts would only have the memory of the gospel records as their source of understanding of Christianity, apart from inspired utterances given by 'prophets'. The tendency would have been to memorize a Gospel record before baptism (as early church tradition says was required of converts)- but then to forget it. Paul is urging these brethren to continually recite those Gospel records, the words of grace which came from the lips of the Lord Jesus, as Luke himself had taught his own converts in his Gospel record. It was this which would shield them from errant ideas being propounded by false prophets claiming they were speaking from the Lord directly.

*Which is able to build you up-* Paul uses the same word in writing to these Ephesians later (Eph. 2:20), saying that they had been built up upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, and His apostles and prophets, i.e. the inspired speakers forth of His words, men like Luke and the other inspired Gospel writers. This is why a daily reading or reflection upon the Gospel records remains to this day necessary for those who would be disciples indeed.

*And to give you the inheritance among all those that are sanctified-* This is very much the Old Testament language of Israel's conquest of Canaan and receiving the inheritance amongst their brethren. The Kingdom Paul preached was the same- the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth based upon Israel. Paul is quoting here from the words of the Lord Jesus to him at his conversion: "To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). Paul very often speaks of his Gentile converts as "sanctified", and in doing so he surely had in mind the vision given to Peter, showing him that the Gentile converts were indeed sanctified. It was clearly necessary

to continue to remind the Gentile converts that they really were sanctified, for the Jewish 'wolves' would be telling them that they weren't. And Paul likely had to keep reminding himself of the wonder of Gentile acceptance.

The words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

20:33 *I coveted no one's silver, or gold, or apparel*- This is the spirit of Moses in Num. 16:15: "I have not taken one ass from them". Paul maybe also had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: "We have wronged no man... we have defrauded no man". Coveting these three things was precisely the sin of Achan (Josh. 7:21). Perhaps the point of the allusion was to say that calamity was awaiting the new Israel; the great victory over Jericho would soon give way to defeat. This would be due to the 1st century equivalent of Achan- but Paul was not Achan. It would not be his fault.

Wealth in those days was reflected in clothing, hence the warnings about the power of moths to destroy such wealth (Mt. 6:19; James 5:2).

20:34 *You yourselves know that these hands*- Paul told those Ephesian elders, beset as they already were with the evident beginnings of apostasy: "*These hands* (showing them) have ministered unto my necessities... I have shewed you all things, how that *so labouring* you (too) ought to support the weak (implying Paul worked at tent making not only for his own needs but in order to give support to the spiritually (?) weak), *and to (also)* remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (:34,35). Paul seems to be unashamedly saying that those words of Jesus had motivated his own life of service, and he had shown the Ephesians, in his own life, how they ought to be lived out; and he placed himself before them as their pattern. The Lord Jesus recognized, years later, that the Ephesians [whom Paul was addressing] had followed Paul's example of labouring motivated by Christ as he had requested them to; but they had done so without *agape* love (Rev. 2:3,4).

*Have provided for my necessities*- See on 28:10 *Such things as we needed*. This could well have been said with a fleck of pride, which the events of 28:10 sought to remove from him.

*And for those who were with me*- Paul had a profession, as all trainee rabbis did. But his co-workers apparently didn't, or couldn't use it over the three years he was in the area. We might be able to infer from this that they were untrained men, who were therefore likely illiterate. Paul could so easily have reasoned that his talents were better used in preaching and pastoral work, than in working in order to support others. His ability to earn enough money to support a group of people, as well as doing all his ministry work, is a testament to his wise use of time, and also his strong dislike of a salaried ministry. We note a possible contrast with the attitude of the twelve in Acts 6:2: "It is not fitting that we should forsake the teaching of the word of God and instead serve tables".

20:35 *In all things I gave you an example, that so labouring you should help the weak*- "The weak" may refer to "those who were with me" (:34). Perhaps they could not work like he did because of physical or mental or spiritual weakness. The Greek for "weak" is particularly used of the physically weak; Timothy appears to have been like this, being frequently sick and weak (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul's co-workers were therefore weak, unable to support themselves, and those whom man might despise. The way they travelled alone such

great distances in dangerous circumstances is therefore even more to their credit, and to the credit of Paul's patient belief and hope in them.

*And to remember the words that the Lord Jesus spoke-* Paul's attitude, working at manual work in order to support others, was motivated by continual reflection on the Lord's words. And he asks them to copy him in this. Note how he reminds the Ephesians to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said..."; not, 'how it is written' (for the Gospels were in circulation by this time). He jogged their memory of one of the texts they ought to have memorized. I suggested above on :34 that they were likely illiterate. See on Acts 6:4.

*Saying: It is more blessed to give than to receive-* These words are unrecorded in the Gospels. But the same Greek words for giving and receiving are found in the Lord's advice to missionaries in Mt. 10:8,9: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor brass for your purses...". Paul has just spoken of not coveting gold or silver. It may well be that the Lord added at this point: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". Paul saw his working in order to 'give' to the weak mission workers as being a form of missionary service in itself. Paul implies he repeated these words of the Lord time and again as his source of motivation, and he asks the Ephesians to do likewise... and we can take the appeal to ourselves.

20:36 *And when he had thus spoken-* The "thus" leads us to think that the prayer was therefore not asking to receive personally anything but glorifying God's giving and seeking for blessing on continued efforts to give of the Gospel. "He knelt down" translates Greek words meaning literally to give the knee. His 'giving' was therefore of praise, in this context, rather than begging to receive.

*He knelt down and prayed with them all-* They prayed as well as Paul.

20:37 *And they all wept freely, embraced Paul and kissed him-* Literally, 'fell on his neck and kissed him'. This is word for word the words Luke records as having come from the lips of Jesus in the parable of the father meeting the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20). But it appears out of context. I have discussed elsewhere how there are at times allusions and quotations from earlier Scriptures which appear out of context. But that is no necessary requirement within the Semitic usage of literature; Jewish midrash so often lifts Scripture out of context and applies it to another context, and the Bible writers at times do the same. It is an incidental evidence of the same mind at work in the Scriptures, and of how soaked were the minds of the early believers with the words of Jesus.

20:38 *Being sorrowful most of all because of his statement, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship-* It was a commonly reported practice for the brethren to go on the first stage of a journey with their fellow brethren; this Greek word is used only in this context, nine times (Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6,11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13).

## ACTS CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara-* Luke so often mentions these details. Remember that the Hebrew words for 'spirit' and 'wind' were identical. I have argued that Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem and focus upon ministry to the Jews was not the Lord's ideal intention for him; that was Peter's task. But having decided to do it for the Lord, the Lord worked with him. Just as God did regarding a physical temple and system of human kingship.

21:2 *And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail-* The idea is that they saw or noticed one. "We went aboard and set sail" could imply it was just about to leave; they arrived just at the last minute. As noted on :1, the Lord was confirming Paul in the path he had chosen, whilst warning him that such a course was not ideal and would be problematic. Whatever choices we make, they are confirmed by the hand of providence; which is what gives intensity of meaning to all our choices.

21:3 *When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria-* The kind of eyewitness language and detail we would expect. The Bible is either inspired or a clever forgery, and if the latter, then these kinds of eyewitness details would have been hard to invent by a later hand. Especially bearing in mind that there was little experience of long distance travel.

*And landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo-* Nothing is chance in our lives. The seven days it took to unload and probably sell the cargo was used to visit the ecclesia there. This likewise [see on :1 and :2] was clearly meant to be, and reflects the higher hand that works in the lives of those who seek to serve the Lord.

21:4- see on Acts 20:23.

*And having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and these said to Paul through the Spirit-* It's not clear whether the Spirit directly said that Paul should not go to Jerusalem, or whether this was their interpretation of what was revealed to them. Reading the text as it stands, Paul's going to Jerusalem would have been rank disobedience. But it seems to me that he was being told of the consequences of his plan, and yet he continued in it, and the Lord worked with him in that choice. We encounter the same conundrum today when we are told 'The Bible says that...'. There's a need to make a differentiation between the specific text of the Bible, and human interpretation of it. It was 'they' who told Paul not to go to Jerusalem- not the Spirit directly.

*That he should not set foot in Jerusalem-* Paul was clearly told by the Spirit that he "should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4 AV). Yet Paul chose to go up to Jerusalem, with the Holy Spirit warning him against it in every city he passed through (Acts 20:23; 21:11). What are we to make of this? Was a spiritual man like Paul simply out of step with the Spirit on this point? Maybe- in the light of all we've seen above. It's possible to get fixated on a certain project and ignore God's clear testimony. Or it could be that Paul knew the Lord well enough to realize that although God was telling him what would happen, he could still exercise his own love for his brethren to the maximum extent. For it was for love of his brethren and his dream of unity between Jew and Gentile that he personally took the offerings of the Gentiles to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In Rom. 15:31 Paul asks the Romans to pray concerning his visit to Jerusalem "that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe". He was in struggle with God, wrestling God as Jacob did. On one hand, Spirit guidance was clear; but he believed that through prayer and human effort, a different outcome to that stated by the Spirit might be possible.

*21:5 When our time was up, we departed and went on our way, and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, until we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed-* The very same scene as at Troas. And Paul had stayed there seven days too (:4 cp. 20:6). The period of seven days in Tyre was because of the itinerary of the ship they were on (hence "when our time was up"). Clearly the Lord's providential hand was at work helping Paul to see that He was working with Paul according to a pattern. We too can perceive similarities between events within our lives; the meaning attached to those events may not be immediately clear, but all the same we come away with the abiding impression that life is not random event but somehow, somewhere the Lord's hand is there with us.

*21:6 And we went on board the ship, and they returned home-* The pathos of the scene here has absolutely every mark of the eye witness account. We can almost imagine Luke as he was writing, remembering the last waves and hugs, the last sights of each other, as they walked away from the mooring, and Luke and Paul walked the entrance plank onto the ship.

21:7- see on Acts 4:23.

*And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them one day-* The entire journey emphasizes how Paul looked up the believers in every town he visited, even though they were likely unknown to him personally. The bonds of Christian fellowship were and are strong.

*21:8 And the next day we departed, and went to Caesarea-* AV "We that were of Paul's company". This idea is found in 13:13 "Paul and his company" (AV). We should not therefore assume that only Luke accompanied Paul; there were other unrecorded brethren as well.

*And entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him-* The seven deacons of Acts 6:5 were appointed to minister practically to the poor in the Jerusalem church. But because of his ground breaking work with the Ethiopian eunuch, he was respected as "the evangelist". He clearly had more than one calling. We note he was now living at Caesarea, not Jerusalem, perhaps as a result of persecution in Jerusalem, or tensions within the Jerusalem ecclesia regarding Gentiles. Perhaps he had quit the church politics of the Jerusalem ecclesia and retired to Caesarea and focused upon raising his four daughters in his house church, and they had responded well to their upbringing.

*21:9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied-* This is surely intended to recall the prophecy of Joel, that this kind of thing would happen in the last days. The prophecy has already been quoted in Acts 2. Yet it speaks clearly of the last days. Again we see that from God's side, He had enabled the last days and establishment of the Kingdom on earth in the first century. But it was a lack of response by natural and spiritual Israel which led to the major delay until our last days.

Understanding Corinth ecclesia as a series of house churches explains Paul's comment to the Corinthians that he ordained his guidelines to be practiced in all the ecclesias (1 Cor. 7:17)-



i.e. the house churches that comprised the body of Christ in Corinth. He gives some guidelines for behaviour that appear to contradict each other until we perceive the difference between the commands to house groups, and commands about the 'gathering together' for special breaking of bread services. The role of women is a classic example. 1 Cor. 14:34 says that women should keep silent 'in ecclesia' [AV "churches" is a mistranslation]- i.e. a sister shouldn't teach at those special breaking of bread meetings when the house churches 'came together' (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20). And yet within the house groups, it's apparent from other New Testament accounts and from what Paul himself writes, that sisters did teach there (1 Cor. 11:5). Thus in the house church of Philip, there were four women who 'prophesied', i.e. spoke forth the word of God to others (Acts 21:8,9). This to me is the only way to make sense of Corinthians- otherwise Paul appears to be contradicting himself.

*21:10 And as we stayed there some days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus-* Jews spoke of going up to Jerusalem, and coming down from it. So this is not meant in a geographical sense. "Agabus" meaning locust or grasshopper, he may have been a wandering prophet, going around giving Divine messages as required; the type in view in 2 John, who was to be welcomed and supported by the Lord's people as he travelled around.

21:11- see on Acts 20:23; 21:4.

*And coming to us and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own feet and hands, and said: Thus said the Holy Spirit: So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles-* The kind of acted parable beloved of Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 22:11; Is. 20:1-3; Jer. 13:1-7; Ez. 4:1-6). The Lord had predicted that Peter would meet his end by having his hands and feet bound (Jn. 21:18), and we wonder whether Paul again was consciously trying to emulate Peter by seeking the same end.

*21:12 And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem-* Yet Luke stayed loyal to Paul and accompanied him to Rome, although he felt Paul was not taking the right course. We too can rightly stick with our brethren even if we feel it is plain that their path is less than ideal.

*21:13 Then Paul answered: What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus-* "Why make you this ado and weep?" (Mk. 5:39) is unconsciously alluded to by Paul here. If this is a conscious allusion, it seems out of context. But as an unconscious allusion, it makes sense.

21:14- see on Acts 20:23.

*And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying: The will of the Lord be done-* I don't take this as a mere passing comment of resignation. Rather did the brethren perceive that Paul was being shown the consequences of serving the Lord one way, but chose to do the Lord's will in another way- by going to Jerusalem and pursuing his mission to the Jews which the Lord preferred Peter to focus upon. They accepted Paul's choice and wished for the Lord's will to be further developed. Paul was not in that sense going against the Lord's will, but doing it. It would be "done" by the choice he made. We wonder whether Paul wrote

to the Ephesians, using the same words, thinking of his own struggles to understand not only the Lord's will, but how he could best fulfil it: "understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can *also* do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

*21:15 And after these days we took up our baggage-* Paul took up his baggage at Ephesus and went on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15 RV); the baggage would have been the bits and pieces raised by the donors to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. Those who couldn't send money had sent what little they could spare in kind- presumably clothes and even animals, or goods for re-sale in Jerusalem.

*And went up to Jerusalem-* This must be understood in the context of how the "we" had repeatedly urged Paul *not* to go up to Jerusalem. They went with him from loyalty to a friend and brother who had taken a path they did not consider wise; but still they travelled it with him. And we can take a lesson from that. The whole picture records the disciples loyally going up to Jerusalem with the Lord, despite their deep misgivings as to His wisdom in doing so.

*21:16 And there went with us also some of the disciples from Caesarea, bringing with them-* Some texts read 'brought us to', which makes sense if Mnason had a house in Jerusalem where he lodged the group.

*One Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge-* Perhaps this was as it were his Christian additional name, given as a sign of respect for how long he had held the faith. Such terms, like "the evangelist", reflect a culture of respect and "honour to whom honour" amongst the early believers, which we would do well to copy. Likewise perhaps the mention of the fact he was "from Cyprus" might be in respect of the fact that like many Jerusalem Levites, he had had land there, in order to 'get around' the legislation about Levites not owning land in Israel, and had sacrificed it for the Lord's sake. Given the brevity of the records, there can be surely no incidental, pointless addition of background material. Such details surely have meaning, even if we cannot in our age and at our distance immediately discern it.

*21:17 And when we arrived in Jerusalem-* Luke was a Gentile (so Col. 4:11 implies). Note how the other Gospel writers speak of the *sea* of Galilee, whereas the more widely travelled Luke refers to it only as a lake. While Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years, Luke was a free man (Acts 21:17; 24:27). It seems that during that period, Luke may have spent the time travelling around the areas associated with Jesus, interviewing eye witnesses- especially Mary, the aged mother of Jesus, from whom he must have obtained much of the information about His birth and Mary's song. His preaching of the Gospel in Luke and Acts is made from his perspective- the fact that salvation is for all, not just Jews, is a major theme (Lk. 2:30-32; 3:6; 9:54,55; 10:25-34; Acts 1:8; 2:17).

*The brothers received us gladly-* This appears in contrast with the spirit of :18. So perhaps the "brothers" in view were those in Mnason's home; see on :16.

*21:18 And the following day Paul went with us to James; and all the elders were present-* Presumably there were now no other apostles present in Jerusalem or they would have been mentioned. They had either fled persecution, been cast out of the church over the

Gentile issue [note Philip, one-time deacon of the Jerusalem church, was now running a house church in Caesarea], or were away on missionary work.

21:19 *And when he had greeted them, he related one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry-* Such an orderly presentation of missionary history was made with Luke present (:18 "us"). Surely here we have a hint as to the historical background to the book of Luke-Acts. Luke and Paul presented it as an explanation to the Jerusalem elders; hence Luke opens Volume 1 by saying that he is presenting an orderly chronological account of Gospel events. But as always, the emphasis is upon what God and His Son had done through them. This is a major theme of Luke in Acts [see on 1:1]- that the Lord was working through the ministries of His people. It would also explain why the focus of Acts is upon Paul when clearly there were other preachers also active. The book was initially an explanation and account to the Jerusalem elders of the work of Paul- for it was he whom they were so concerned about. Paul had no accountability to them- if at all, he would have been accountable to the Antioch ecclesia from whence he had initially departed to the mission field. But he graciously goes along with their concerns.

21:20- see on Acts 8:1.

*And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said to him: You saw, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those that have believed; and they are all zealous for the law-* Paul uses the same words in his defence, stating that he like them had been zealous for the law, but had been persuaded otherwise by the Lord Jesus (22:3; also in Gal. 1:14 about his former life in Judaism). The implication could be that the same crowds baying for his blood were in fact the crowds of the ecclesia of Jerusalem Jews who had accepted Christ. This was the degree to which the church slid back into Judaism; and is an essay in the power of legalism in the church. It can develop to fanatic extents, calling for the death of brethren of Paul's calibre. It may also be that by using this term about his former life, Paul was tacitly recognizing that his political compromise to those brethren had been wrong- see on :21 and :22. He had given the impression of being "zealous for the law", and now he plainly states that zeal for the law was the characteristic of his pre-Christian life, and he had changed as a result of encountering the Lord Jesus.

21:21 *And they have been informed concerning you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses-* Paul's intended mission was to the Gentiles and Peter's to the Jews. But here we have a fair summary of what Paul actually did; and it wasn't the Lord's ideal wish. If only he had followed the Lord's intention, then this whole situation with the Jerusalem ecclesia and the subsequent events which led to his arrest and imprisonment... simply wouldn't have happened. We too can save ourselves much grief by going the Lord's intended way for us.

*Telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to our customs-* Paul should have quietly pleaded guilty, because his letters show this was indeed his position. But in a desperate attempt to placate the legalists, he went along with them- resulting in a chain of events which led to his imprisonment. We too need to be honest with our brethren about our positions regarding fellowship issues and other hot topics of our times, even if we know they strongly disagree. Attempting to compromise and misrepresent our positions is not only dishonest but results in much grief all around. Brethren assume we have a position which we do not- and then get bitter with us when they realize we actually don't hold the position which we apparently espoused for the sake of political peace. Whilst a degree of pragmatism is

required in all human relationships, we must learn the lesson from Paul at this point- for his pragmatism and resignation of principle led to a chain of events which was seriously damaging for him and the Lord's work. If he had not then gone into the temple to demonstrate his Jewish orthodoxy, the riot, arrest and subsequent imprisonment would never have occurred. See on :20 *Zealous for the law*.

21:22 *What then? They will certainly hear you have come-* The whole thing smacks of the kind of church politics which have blighted the body of Christ in our age. The elders feared the imagined reaction of others, and so they asked Paul to do something which was more a result of their fears than their genuine convictions; and Paul gave in, leading to serious damage to his ministry as he lay incarcerated for years as a result of the chain of events which then happened. And in the end, the Jerusalem church slid into the apostasy of legalism and returned to Judaism. Nothing good came out of all that fearful compromise.

21:23 *Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow-* The "therefore" reflects how urgently they felt the need to placate the Judaists. Paul did what he was told, even although it was wrong and based around pleasing men. I sense he made this misjudgement not because he was browbeaten by these brethren, although he was pretty much alone before them; but because he like them was desperate at all costs to ingratiate himself to the Jerusalem church and reconcile and convert the temple cult. Those desires became such an obsession that they clouded his better judgment. The "vow" was apparently a Nazirite vow.

21:24- see on Acts 18:18.

*These take and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses-* Paul was clearly not poor at this time; or probably it was known that he was bringing funds to Jerusalem on behalf of the Gentile churches. See the note on "baggage" on :15. It was considered a work of piety to relieve needy Jews from the expenses connected with short term Nazirite vows, as Paul does here. Adam Clarke notes: "It was also customary for the richer sort to bestow their charity on the poorer sort for this purpose; for Josephus, *Ant. lib. xix. cap. 6, sec. 1*, observes that Agrippa, on his being advanced from a prison to a throne, by the Emperor Claudius, came to Jerusalem; and there, among other instances of his religious thankfulness shown in the temple, Ναζαραιων ξυρασθαι διεταξε μαλα συχνους, he ordered very many Nazarites to be shaven, he furnishing them with money for the expenses of that, and of the sacrifices necessarily attending it". The idea of the Jerusalem poor fund was that Paul would relieve needy believers who had been affected by recent famines. But we get the impression that this noble intention got caught up in church politics; the funds were spent on temple sacrifices to prove that poor Jewish Christians had achieved legal obedience in ending their vows, and Paul was publicly demonstrating his support of such legalism.

*That they may shave their heads; and all shall know that there is no truth in the things of which they have been informed concerning you, but you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law-* Note how hurtful this must have been, since Paul was bringing funds for their ecclesia which he had collected at the cost of damaging his relationship with the likes of Corinth. He meekly obeyed, perhaps it was playing a part in the politics in the church, although he had written to the Colossians and others that there was no need for any to be circumcised nor keep the Law, indeed these things were a denial of faith in Jesus. Paul later uses the same word to describe how we are to 'walk' not according to the Law but the Spirit (Gal. 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16); perhaps this was written from prison with a glance back at the

fact that he was imprisoned exactly because he had attempted to impress others by how he walked according to the Law, which had led to the riot and his subsequent incarceration. He likewise uses the term 'keeping the law' in a negative sense in Rom. 2:26 and Gal. 6:13.

*21:25 But concerning the Gentiles that have believed, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication-* The "we" could suggest that this was the same group of elders as at the time of the Acts 15 agreements. But that was now some years ago, and surely some of those brethren had died. So the Jerusalem elders were arguing from a position of inherited authority, claiming that they had effectively done what their predecessors had done. This is a dangerous attitude as it resigns personal responsibility and principle. Paul had written to the Corinthians that food sacrificed to idols could be eaten; so he should have now said up front that he no longer accepted that point, or at best, considered it to apply only to a limited circle of Gentile converts.

*21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them-* He 'kept going into the temple' (Gk.). "The days" were seven days (:27). Whilst the law did not stipulate a minimum term for a Nazirite vow, there is evidence that usually the minimum term was 30 days. So this vow was not being done for very genuine reasons but rather just to demonstrate Paul's loyalty to the law and Jerusalem temple cult. And Paul along with the four men made this vow ("himself along with them"). The whole thing smacks of tokenism rather than sincerity, and Paul suffered for it, in that the sequence of events triggered by it affected the rest of his life.

*21:27 And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd-* Paul had only recently arrived from Asia; it could be that a group of Jews followed him not only from city to city in his missionary work, but had even followed him to Jerusalem. This was the extent of Jewish opposition against his ministry to them.

*And laid hands on him-* God has recorded Paul's life in Acts in such a way as to show the similarities between him and Christ; thus the Spirit records that men "laid hands on" Paul, just as it does concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:50).

*21:28 Crying out: Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law, and this place, and moreover he brought Gentiles also into the temple and has defiled this holy place-* We can read this as conscious slander. But see on :29 *They supposed*. I suggest they rehearsed their fears and [il]logical deductions in their minds to such a point that they became actually convinced this had happened. They saw him with one Gentile, and assume that Gentile had been brought into the temple; and that therefore the other three men seen with him in the temple were therefore also Gentiles. Josephus claims that Gentile entry into the temple was a capital offence. It would've been highly unlikely that Paul would even have got Gentiles beyond the Jewish temple guards. The whole conclusion was improbable in the extreme. But this is where legalistic quasi-logical deduction and supposition lead to.

The accusations they make against Paul are the very ones which were being made by the Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem ecclesia (:21). This is another reason for thinking that the crowds of Jerusalem Jews baying for Paul's blood included legalistic, Judaistic members of

the Jerusalem church. If, as I currently believe, Paul wrote Hebrews from Italy (ponder Heb. 13:24), then we see his utter grace in even bothering to reason with them and urge them not to return to Judaism.

*21:29 For they had previously seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian-* Seeing the Jews who made the problem were from Asia (:27), they perhaps were from Ephesus and knew Trophimus.

*Whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple-* “Supposed” is the verb *nomizo*, a form of the noun *nomos*, 'law'. Their legalistic reasoning led them to over interpret facts and draw endless apparently logical conclusions- but they came to a false conclusion as a result of their legalistic devotion to logical deduction. The same mentality is seen in legalists today, who seem highly prone to all manner of conspiracy theories and irrational deductions.

*21:30 And all the city was moved-* The same word used later in accusing Paul of creating dissension (24:5). A division caused by others about Paul was thus made Paul's fault. People likewise falsely accuse the Lord Jesus, and His followers, of causing division when they are merely at the centre of division made by unbelievers.

*And the people ran together, laid hold on Paul and dragged him out of the temple-* The very same words used about what happened to Paul in Philippi (16:19). Circumstances repeated in his life, as they do in ours, reflecting the same Divine hand at work with us in different places and situations down the years, but always with the same hallmarks.

*And immediately the doors were shut-* Both into the court of the Gentiles, and also from there into the court of the Israelites, thus cutting off Paul from any help. The door into the temple would therefore likely have had to be broken down by the Gentile Romans to get to Paul- all full of symbolism! The Roman guard was stationed in the tower of Antonia on the North West of the temple area, and they would have seen what was going on in the court of the Gentiles from above.

*21:31 And as they were seeking to kill him-* Paul's physical sufferings over the course of his ministry were significant. They would already have inflicted major damage on his body before the soldiers saved him from death itself. And there would have been the psychological damage inflicted after each trauma.

*News came to the chief captain of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar-* In the tower of Antonia. See on :30 *The doors were shut*.

*21:32 And he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul-* From the tower of Antonia overlooking the court of the Gentiles. The details given here are all so internally cohesive that it's hard to doubt that this is the true word of God and no clever fabrication of a later hand.

*21:33 Then the chief captain came near, laid hold of him and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he was and what he had done-* Fulfilling the prophecy of Agabus in 21:11. There is no other record of those words being fulfilled. The chains were therefore presumably on his hands and feet as Agabus had predicted, rather than

to two soldiers as many suppose. Hence he was "carried" into the Antonia castle (:34). Again the internal cohesion of the record is nothing short of Divinely inspired.

21:34 *And some among the mob shouted one thing, some another; and when he could not know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the fortress of Antonia-* "Shouted" is the word used by Luke for the shouting for the Lord's crucifixion (Lk. 23:21). As with each of us, Paul was brought to know the essence of his Lord's sufferings.

21:35 *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob-* This is religious legalism come to its full term. The mob was pushing forward the ones in front in a mad desire to kill Paul, regardless of his Roman protection.

21:36 *For the mob followed after, crying out: Away with him!-* Again, Paul like us was being taught the Lord's crucifixion experiences (Lk. 23:18; Jn. 19:15).

21:37 *And as Paul was about to be brought into the fortress, he said to the chief captain: May I say something to you? And he said: Do you know Greek?-* The soldier was so persuaded that his assumption about Paul being an Egyptian was correct that he was shocked. A theme of the whole incident is the dogmatism arrived at from false inference and illogical deduction and presupposition, by both Jews and Gentiles.

21:38 *Are you not that Egyptian, who some time ago stirred up sedition and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were terrorists?-* Josephus mentions this incident and gives the figure of 30,000 (Wars 2.17, 6 and 13,5; *Antiquities* 20. 8,10). This is reason enough to accuse Josephus of gross exaggeration and to question his reliability.

21:39 *But Paul said: I am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beg you, please let me speak to the people-* This seems rather proud, especially when we learn that Tarsus was famed for being a proud city. She inscribed upon her coins: "Tarsus, the Metropolis, First, Fairest and Best" (W. Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 25).

21:40 *And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with the hand to the people; and when there was made a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying-* The silence may have been from surprise that Paul had been given this privilege of addressing the crowd. We sense Paul's great zeal to use every and any opportunity to get the gospel over to the largest possible audiences. We would likely not have risked more exposure and provocation.

## ACTS CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Brothers and fathers, hear the defence which I now make to you-* This was the very phrase used by Stephen in Acts 7:2, with Saul onlooking. As noted on Heb. 1:1 and throughout Acts 7, Stephen's speech converted Paul, and he alludes to it throughout his life. He saw that he was now fellowshipping Stephen's sufferings. But we note too his respect toward the Jews, who had done so much evil to him. He so wished to save them, and the desire to save others is rooted in a basic respect of them as persons. Another reading is possible, however. To address the Sanhedrin as "brethren" has been described as "almost recklessly defiant" (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel". But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

22:2 *And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet; and he said-* It might seem that it was impossible that Paul, having been beaten and in chains, guarded by soldiers, could make a hand gesture, say a few words in Hebrew, and quell a raging crowd (Acts 21:31-34; 22:2). Yet it was because he spoke to them in Hebrew, in their own language and in their own terms, that somehow the very power and realness of his personality had such an effect. It reminds us of how the Lord could send crowds away, make them sit down...because of His identity with them, His supreme bridge building.

22:3 *I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel-* It is quite possible that Paul heard most of the speeches recorded in the Gospels, and saw many of the miracles. The reason is as follows. Every faithful Jew would have been in Jerusalem to keep the feasts three times per year. Jesus and Paul were therefore together in Jerusalem three times / year, throughout Christ's ministry. It can be demonstrated that many of the miracles and speeches of Jesus occurred around the feast times, in Jerusalem. Therefore I estimate that at least 70% of the content of the Gospels (including John) Paul actually saw and heard 'live'. Another indirect reason for believing that Paul had met and heard Jesus preaching is from the fact that Paul describes himself as having been brought up as a Pharisee, because his father had been one (Acts 23:6). Martin Hengel has shown extensive evidence to believe that the Pharisees only really operated in Palestine, centred in Jerusalem, where Paul was "brought up" at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Hengel also shows that "brought up" refers to training from a young child. So whilst Paul was born in Tarsus, he was really a Jerusalem boy. Almost certainly he would have heard and known much about Jesus; his father may even have been amongst those who persecuted the Lord. See Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: S.C.M., 1991).

*Instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are this day-* Paul says he was "*taught* [NEV "instructed"] according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was "*learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Remember he heard Stephen's speech live. Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism. As Moses *consciously* rejected the opportunity for leading the 'world' of Egypt, so Paul probably turned down the chance to be High Priest. God maybe confirmed both him and Moses in their desire for humility by giving them a speech impediment (the "thorn in the flesh" which Paul was "given", 2 Cor. 12:7?).

22:4- see on Acts 9:2 *Bring them bound to Jerusalem* and Acts 26:10,11.



*And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women-* Paul is admitting here to murder, which would have been extrajudicial. He could surely have been prosecuted for this, but he makes the admission because he was so deeply convicted of his sins. And it was this which gave his witness such credibility, and made the audience know in their hearts that what he was saying was all true- hence their mad anger. He admits his actions were against women too... and the memories of the victims would have flooded his mind as he made the admission.

*22:5 As also the high priest does bear me witness, and all the council of the elders. From whom also I received letters to the brothers and journeyed to Damascus, to bring them also that were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished-* Paul was called "brother" even before his baptism, and even after his baptism, he refers to the Jews as his "brethren" (Acts 22:5,13). Of course, he knew all about the higher status and meaning of brotherhood in Christ; but he wasn't so pedantic as to not call the Jews his 'brethren'. He clearly didn't have any of the guilt-by-association paranoia, and the associated standoffishness it brings with it, which have so hamstrung our witness to the world.

*22:6 And it came to pass, that as I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me-* In the same way as Paul would've been trained to write and present an encomium (as he does in Gal. 1), so he would've been trained in the rhetoric of how to make a public defence speech. There was a set format for defending oneself, as there was for the encomium. And in his defence speeches recorded in Acts, Paul again follows the accepted order of defence speeches- but his *content* was absolutely radical for the first century mind. Quintilian in his *Instructions To Orators* laid down five sections for such a speech- and Paul follows that pattern exactly. There was to be the exordium [opening statement], a statement of facts (*narratio*), the proof (*probatio*), the refutation (*refutatio*) and the concluding peroration. The speeches were intended to repeatedly remind the judges of what in fact was the core issue- and Paul does this when he stresses that he is on trial (*krinomai*) for "the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6; 24:21; 26:6,7,8). Yet as with his use of the encomium format, Paul makes some unusual twists in the whole presentation. It was crucial in the set piece defence speech to provide proof and authorized witness. Paul provides proof for the resurrection in himself; and insists that the invisible Jesus, a peasant from Galilee, had appeared to him and "appointed [him] to bear witness" (Acts 26:16; 22:15). That was laughable in a court of law. Yet the erudite, cultured, educated Paul in all soberness made that claim. Aristotle had defined two types of proof- "necessary proof" (*tekmerion*), from which irrefutable, conclusive conclusions could be drawn; and "probable proof", i.e. circumstantial evidence (*eikota / semeia*). Paul's claim to have seen Jesus on the Damascus road was of course circumstantial evidence, so far as the legal system was concerned- it could not be proven. Yet Paul presents this as his *tekmerion*, quoting it as the irrefutable proof in his defence (Acts 22:6-12; 26:12-16). Luke elsewhere uses this word and its synonym *pistis* to describe the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:3; 17:31). Paul's point of course was that the personal transformation of himself was indeed *tekmerion*, irrefutable proof, that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. And so it should be in the witness which *our* lives make to an unbelieving world. Significantly, Paul speaks of the great light which his companions saw at his conversion, and his subsequent blindness, as *eikota*, the circumstantial evidence, rather than the irrefutable proof (Acts 22:6,9,11; 26:13). Now to the forensic mind, this was more likely his best, 'irrefutable' proof, rather than saying that the irrefutable proof was simply he himself. Yet he puts that all the other way around. Thus when it came to stating 'witnesses', Paul doesn't appeal to his travelling companions on the road to Damascus. These would've surely been the obvious

primary witnesses. Instead, he claims that "all Judeans" and even his own accusers "if they are willing to testify", are in fact witnesses of his character transformation (Acts 22:5; 26:4,5). The point is of tremendous power to us who lamely follow after Paul... it is our personal witness which is *the* supreme testimony to the truth of Christ; not 'science proves the Bible', archaeology, the stones crying out, prophecy fulfilling etc. It is we ourselves who are ultimately the prime witnesses to God's truth on this earth. All this was foolishness in the judgmental eyes of first century society, just as it is today. Our preaching of the Gospel is likewise apparent foolishness to our hearers, like Paul it is not "in plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1-7), even though, again like Paul, many of us could easily try to make it humanly plausible. Paul's credibility as a preacher was in his very lack of human credibility- he was hungry and thirsty, poorly dressed, homeless, having to do manual work (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27); he was the powerless one, beaten, imprisoned and persecuted (1 Cor. 4:8-12; 2 Cor. 6:4,5). It's hard for us to imagine how unimpressive and repulsive this was in first century society. And yet it was exactly this which gave him power and credibility as a preacher of Christ's Gospel. And he sets before us a challenging pattern.

*22:7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

*22:8 And I answered: Who are you Lord? And he said to me: I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute*- The fact Paul addressed Jesus as "Lord" suggests he knew the answer already, and had subconsciously recognized Jesus of Nazareth as Lord. For the presentation of Him as "Lord" had been a major part of the early witness of Peter, which Paul would surely have heard. Paul was kicking against the pricks of conscience; he knew, therefore, that Jesus was Lord. And amongst the crowds of apparently disinterested sceptics we encounter in our witness, there are surely people who are in a similar position; hiding behind their blasphemy and inappropriate jokes about the Lord Jesus the fact that they have been convicted of Him as Lord in some deep part of their subconscious. See on :10.

*22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, but they did not understand the voice of him that spoke to me*- They heard a voice (9:7), but didn't understand the content of the words spoken. The idea may be that it was in a language which Paul was empowered to understand, but they were not. But these men were like Paul, haters of the Christians. The same Greek phrase for "not understand" is used of how the Jews did "not understand" the message of the Lord because they chose not to (Mt. 13:13; Jn. 8:43,47; they did not understand Moses so they would not understand the risen Lord, Lk. 16:31; Nicodemus could not understand the voice of the Spirit, Jn. 3:8). And Paul's audience did likewise; they refused to hear or understand further and screamed for him to stop speaking the word to them (:22 s.w.). Perhaps they too could have potentially been converted, but they refused to understand.

22:10 *And I said: What shall I do Lord? And the Lord said to me: Arise and go into Damascus, and there you shall be told all things which are appointed for you to do-* The repetition of the word "Lord" suggests that Paul was convicted of Jesus as Lord already before His appearance to him; see on :8. And we note that Ananias also addressed Him as "Lord" (9:13). We wonder why the Lord did not immediately tell Paul what he was to do. The answer is as in many such questions- He prefers to work through some human mechanism wherever possible. The encounter with Ananias was all part of the required conversion process; for Ananias was a well-respected Jew who had also come to Jesus. And Paul needed to meet him and hear from such a person the need for baptism. In 9:12 we learn that Paul had seen a vision of Ananias restoring his sight; perhaps that vision was whilst with the Lord on the Damascus road.

22:11 *And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand by those that were with me, I came into Damascus-* I suggested on :9 that the men with Paul could also have been converted. They saw the same light (:9), but were not blinded by it. The implication is that Paul was more sensitive to it than they were. And they would later have reflected how it was they who effectively led Paul to Jesus by leading him to Damascus.

22:12 *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there-* Ananias was a committed Christian, but was carefully obedient to the law. His faith and understanding was therefore immature, but this did not mean the Lord didn't accept him as a significant believer and tool in His purpose. There were clearly Jews within Damascus who were collaborating with Paul; but even they had to respect Ananias. He was therefore just the right person to be used for Paul's conversion; see on :10. Or perhaps it was the case that all the Jews in Damascus were respectful of Jewish Christians like Ananias, and Paul and his group were imposing upon them an aggression which was not what they themselves were persuaded of.

22:13 *Came to me; and standing by me, he said to me: Brother Saul, receive your sight. And in that very moment I looked upon him-* Paul had received a vision of Ananias doing this (9:12). So when news came that Ananias had come to visit him, he knew this was all according to plan; hence he comments that "in that very moment" the healing occurred. Perhaps Ananias was one of those Paul planned to murder or imprison.

22:14 *And he said: The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth-* Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that you should know his will" (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction...

22:15 *For you shall be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard-* There was some content therefore to what Paul had "seen and heard". Paul was jubilant that the prophecy was coming true right before their eyes and ears, as he now witnessed to so many of what he had seen and heard. "Witness" continues the reference to Stephen; for the word is used of him in :20. As noted on :1, Paul was fully aware that he was to follow in Stephen's footsteps. What a bond those two shall have in God's Kingdom!

22:16 *And now why do you delay?-* The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). There needs to

be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later. This is why baptism was up front in their witness, for it is for the forgiveness of sins; thus in 22:16 they appealed for repentance and baptism in the same breath.

*Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name-* The language of washing away of sins refers to God's forgiveness of us on account of our baptism into Christ. In some passages we are spoken of as washing away our sins by our faith and repentance (Acts 22:16; Rev. 7:14; Jer. 4:14; Is. 1:16); in others God is seen as the one who washes away our sins (Ez. 16:9; Ps. 51:2,7; 1 Cor. 6:11). This nicely shows how that if we do our part in being baptised, God will then wash away our sins.

*22:17 And it came to pass, that when I had returned to Jerusalem and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance-* The whole argument was that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple. He now says that he had frequented the temple, and whilst praying there he had received a vision telling him to preach to Gentiles (:21), although "far hence" from the Jerusalem temple. Whilst answering the false allegation that he had brought Gentiles into the temple, Paul was associating Gentiles with the temple. This could be read as an unnecessary provocation on his part. But he wanted them to see that the God whom they believed abode in the Jerusalem temple had a program of including Gentiles amongst His people. Psychologically, we would have maybe thought it was better to just avoid the connection between Gentiles and the temple. But we sense Paul is fearless and utterly prepared to follow Stephen to death; he did not count his life dear unto himself, as witnessed by all the times the brethren had to bundle him out of a town before he was lynched, knowing that of himself, he would have remained and endured it.

*22:18 And saw him saying to me: Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not welcome your testimony concerning me-* And yet Paul always appealed first of all to the Jews, despite his emotional turning unto the Gentiles at one stage. Even by Acts 28:17, he started preaching "to those that were of the Jews first" (RVmg.). The principle of "to the Jews first" was paramount and universal in the thinking of Paul. And despite the Holy Spirit repeatedly warning him not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22,23; 21:11), he went there. He hoped against hope that even in the light of the foreknowledge that Israel would reject the Gospel, somehow they might change.

*22:19- see on Acts 26:10,11.*

*And I said: Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those that believed in you-* Paul recounts in Acts 22:19-21 how first of all he felt so ashamed of his past that he gently resisted this command to preach: "I said, Lord... I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed... and he said unto me, Depart... unto the Gentiles" . The stress on "every synagogue" (Acts 22:19; 26:11) must be connected with the fact that he chose to preach *in the synagogues*. He was sent to persecute every synagogue in Damascus, and yet he purposefully preached in every synagogue there (Acts 9:2,20). His motivation was rooted in his deep recognition of sinfulness. Likewise Peter preached a hundred metres or so from the very place where he denied the Lord.

*22:20 And when the blood of Stephen your witness was shed, I also was standing by and approved, and guarded the robes of those that slew him-* Consented. Paul warned

the Romans that those who “have pleasure” in (Gk. ‘to feel gratified with’) sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used for his own ‘consenting’ unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. ‘Feeling gratified with’ such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can’t watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others’ sins.

*22:21 And he said to me: Depart! For I will send you far from here to the Gentiles-* As noted on :17, Paul is making the point that the God of the temple wanted Gentile inclusion; but he had been sent to achieve this “far from here”; he had not brought Gentiles into the literal temple, but into the symbolic, more essential one.

*22:22 And they listened until this word, and then they lifted up their voice and said: Away with such a fellow from the earth! For it is not fitting that he should live-* As noted on :17 and :21, the association of Gentiles with the temple was too much for them. “They” had a singular “voice”; they were united in hatred. This is why Luke likes to draw a parallel between how both the Christians and their enemies were of “one accord”. We are caught up in a spirit of unity either for or against the Lord. The Jews had the power to ask for the death penalty for someone who desecrated the temple, and they perceived that Paul’s comment here as ground upon which to demand that penalty; they correctly understood him to mean that he had been sent to the Gentiles to include them in a more figurative temple.

*22:23 And as they cried out and threw off their cloaks and threw dust into the air-* The throwing off of their cloaks was exactly what had happened when Stephen was stoned to death; and those cloaks were laid at Paul’s feet (7:58). As noted on :1 and elsewhere, the Lord was arranging for Paul to go through in essence the situation with Stephen. Those old enough to remember Stephen’s stoning would have later reflected at how a higher hand was replicating Stephen’s experience in Paul’s; and this would have been an appeal to them for their repentance.

*22:24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the fortress, bidding that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him-* This indicated a hunch that Paul was not really telling the complete story, and there was some other agenda that he had not explained, given the extent of Jewish anger with him. Luke emphasizes how the Roman authorities were constantly nonplussed at the extent of Jewish opposition to Paul (e.g. 18:15; 25:19). But Paul had told the whole story; what the Romans were witnessing was the power of a bad conscience, and how the upsetting of traditionally held ideas unleashes irrational anger.

*22:25 And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by: Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?-* Paul seems to enjoy putting the wind up the soldiers by waiting until they had bound him for torture before asking, surely in a sarcastic way, whether it was lawful for

them to beat a Roman citizen. The fact he asked the question when he knew full well the answer is surely indicative of his sarcasm. The chief captain commented, under his breath it would seem, that it had cost him a fortune in backhanders to get Roman citizenship. Paul picked up his words and commented, with head up, we can imagine: "But *I* was free born"- I was born a citizen, never needed to give a penny in backhanders to get it either. Surely there is an arrogance here which is unbecoming. And it was revealed at a time when he was in dire straits himself, and after already being in Christ some time. It may indicate that he was tempted to adopt a brazen, almost fatalistic aggression towards his captors and persecutors- what Steinbeck aptly described as "the terrible, protective dignity of the powerless". One can well imagine how such a mindset would start to develop in Paul after suffering so much at the hands of men. Compare this incident with the way he demands the magistrates to come *personally* and release him from prison, because they have unfairly treated him (Acts 16:37).

*22:26 And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain and told him, saying: What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman-* We read (almost in passing) that Paul five times was beaten with 39 stripes (2 Cor. 11:22-27). Yet from Acts 22:26 it is evident that Paul as a Roman citizen didn't need not have endured this. On each of those five occasions he could have played the card of his Roman citizenship to get him out of it; but he didn't. It wouldn't have been wrong to; but five times out of six, he chose the highest level. It may be that he chose not to mention his Roman citizenship so as to enable him access to the synagogues for preaching purposes. The one time Paul didn't play that card, perhaps he was using the principle of Jephthah's vow- that you can vow to your own hurt but chose a lower level and break it.

*22:27 And the chief captain came and said to him: Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said: Yes-* There was no tangible proof that a person was a Roman citizen in moments like this. Paul was being asked to affirm that he was, and he does.

*22:28 And the chief captain answered: With a great sum of money I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said: But I am Roman born-* The chief captain may be admitting that he paid a large bribe for citizenship, for it could not normally be bought for money. Paul's openness regarding his extrajudicial murdering of people (see on :4) elicited a similar openness from this captain. And our openness can likewise elicit the same from others, as we move towards authentic relationship with each other.

*22:29 Then those that were about to torture him withdrew from him immediately; and the chief captain also was afraid when he knew that he was a Roman, because he had bound him-* The captain only "knew that he was a Roman" on the basis of Paul's verbal statement. There was obviously something about Paul and the whole situation that had an uncanny ring of truth to it.

*22:30 But the next day, desiring to know with certainty why he was accused by the Jews, he released him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set him before them-* As noted on :24, there was a struggle to understand how exactly religious ideas could elicit such a rage against a person, if there was truly no other aspect to the case. What the Romans were dealing with was the power of bad conscience; and it was made the worse by Paul admitting he had had such a bad conscience, but had resolved it by surrender to Christ. The gathering together of the chief priests and

council was all reminiscent of the scene at the Lord's trial and condemnation. All the way through Paul's life, and our lives, we are being brought to fellowship the Lord's sufferings. Being "set before them" recalls what had been done not only to the Lord (Lk. 22:66) but also to Peter and John (Acts 4) and Stephen (6:12). In our fellowshiping of the Lord's sufferings, we are led also to understand other believers and to pass through in essence what they did. And this in practice becomes the basis of our fellowship with them.

## ACTS CHAPTER 23

23:1 *And Paul looked straight at the council, and said: Brothers-* To address the Sanhedrin as “brothers” has been described as “almost recklessly defiant” (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel”. But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

*I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day-* The Lord Jesus Himself informs us that Paul kicked against the pricks of his own conscience (Acts 9:5). And in any case, Paul elsewhere says that his good conscience actually means very little, because it is God's justification, not self-justification through a clear conscience, which is ultimately important (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It seems Paul was aware of his weak side when he comments how despite his own clear conscience, God may see him otherwise (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV); and surely this was in his mind. So how true were Paul's words in Acts 23:1? It seems that he said them in bitter self-righteousness. Soon afterwards he changes his life story to say that he had always *tried* to have a good conscience (24:16).

The Greek word translated “conscience”, *sun-eidesis*, means literally a co-perception. It implies that there are two types of perception within the believer- human perception, and spiritual self-perception. The conscience that is cleansed in Christ, that is at peace, will be a conscience that keeps those two perceptions, of the real self and of the persona, in harmony. What we know and perceive humanly, is in harmony with we spiritually perceive. Our conscience, our co-perception, our real self, makes sense of the human perceptions and interprets them in a spiritual way. So, a young man sees an attractive girl. His human perception signals certain things to his brain- to lust, covet, etc. But his co-perception, his conscience, his real self, handles all that, and sees the girl's beauty for just simply what it is- beauty. Job before his ‘conversion’ paralleled his eye and his ear: “Mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it” (Job 13:1). He was so sure that what he heard was what he saw; he was sure that his perceptions were operating correctly. But later, he comes to see a difference between his eye and his ear. He says that he had only heard of God by the ear; but only now, he says, “mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5). He had heard words, but, he realized, he'd not properly ‘seen’ or perceived. Finally, he had a properly functioning ‘conscience’, a co-perception. What he saw, was what he really heard.

Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. It's therefore unreliable (1 Cor. 4:4). And yet there is Bible teaching concerning the need to live in accordance with our 'conscience', and the joy which is possible for the believer who has a clear conscience (e.g. Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:18-22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:21). This must mean, in the context, the conscience which God's word has developed in us- it cannot refer to 'conscience' in the sense of our natural, inbuilt sense of right and wrong; because according to the Bible, this is hopelessly flawed. The fact the "conscience" is "cleansed" by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) proves that the Biblical 'conscience' is not the natural sense of right and wrong within our nature; for our nature can never be 'purged' or 'cleansed', the believer will always have those promptings within him to do wrong. The cleansed, purged conscience refers to the new man that is created within the believer at baptism. This new 'conscience' is not just a sense of guilt which is invoked on account of not living an obedient life; it is also a conscience which positively compels us *to do* something, not just threatens us with a pang of guilt if we commit a sin.



*23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to strike him on the mouth-* The claim to a good conscience before God was seen as blasphemy. This provides a window onto understanding how radical were Paul's teachings to the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem that their conscience was washed and cleansed in Christ, and they could with boldness enter the Holiest. The idea that we can really be totally right with God in Christ is repellent to those who seek justification by works and legalism. This striking was another fellowshipping of the Lord's sufferings before the same kind of crowd (Jn. 18:22).

*23:3 Then Paul said to him: God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?-* Paul's words here were surely said in the heat of the moment. Yet even in hot blood, not carefully thinking through his words (for this doesn't seem the most appropriate thing to come out with!), Paul was still unconsciously referring to the Gospels (Mt. 23:27 in this case). Having started on the wrong footing by this statement, it was perhaps this arrogant mood which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall" (23:3-6). It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest" is to be read as Paul claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers.

*23:4 And they that stood by said: Do you revile God's high priest?-* Those who stood by were presumably the Jewish temple guards, and they would have been moving towards physically beating him as they said those words.

*23:5 And Paul said: I did not recognize, brothers, that he was high priest. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people-* It was perhaps Paul's anger and arrogance which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall". It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that Paul is claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers. The quotation of "You shall not speak evil of a ruler" from Ex. 22:28 is parallel with the statement that God was not to be blasphemed. The Mosaic judges were judging on behalf of God. Clearly, Paul's judges were not doing anything of the sort. And yet Paul goes along with the misapplication of the verse in order to demonstrate his familiarity with the law.

23:6- see on Acts 22:3; Acts 22:6.

*But when Paul noticed that one part was Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council-* Paul had to cry out or "shriek" over the noise of anger at his having cursed the high priest.

*I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee! Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question-* He says things like "I am a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6), not "I was a Pharisee

and now repudiate their false doctrines”. Paul’s general attitude was akin to that of his Lord, in that he was not hyper careful to close off any opportunities to criticize him. This fear of and sensitivity to criticism is something which seems to have stymied parts of the body of Christ. Paul here was behaving very humanly; the Pharisees present did not believe the Lord had risen, but Paul expressed his faith in this fact in terms of his being a Pharisee. And of course Paul was now no longer a Pharisee. But in a few nanoseconds, his sharp mind thought up a way out of his problem by hinting that he was victim of a Sadducee plot because of his previous Pharisee connections. This was untrue, but Paul was desperate for a way out.

Paul saw himself as two people. Consider how this dualism is to be found in many places:

### **The Natural Paul**

Paul could say: “I am a Pharisee...I am a man which am a Jew” (Acts 23:6; 21:13,39; 22:3; 2 Cor. 11:22) Circumcision and being Jewish has ‘much advantage’ (Rom. 3:1,2). “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel” (Phil. 3:5). He argues that all Jews are “the seed of Abraham”, including himself, by birth (2 Cor. 11:22).

“We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:15)

### **The Spiritual Paul**

But he also stresses that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” because only “the children of the promise”, those baptized into Christ, are counted as the seed (Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 9:8). The spiritual Paul is neither Jew nor Gentile. The ‘gain’ of being personally Jewish Paul counted as loss (Phil. 3:3-7). His circumcision meant nothing (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 7:19). “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit... and have no confidence in the flesh [i.e. the fact of literal circumcision, see context]” (Phil. 3:7)

This contrasts sharply with Paul’s whole message that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and both groups are all equally sinners (Rom. 3:9,23). He speaks of “theirs is the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship... theirs are the patriarchs” (Rom. 9:4,5). He clearly dissociates himself from Jewry. He had to *become like a Jew* in order to save them, although he was Jewish (2 Cor. 9:20). He carefully kept parts of the law (Acts 18:18; 21:26; 1 Cor. 8:13). To the Jew he became [again] as a Jew; and to the Gentiles he became as a Gentile (1 Cor. 9:20). He acted “To them that are without law, as without law...”. He was “dead to the law” (Gal. 2:19) He was a Jew but considered he had renounced it, but he became as a Jew to them to help them. He saw no difference between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:27-29) but he consciously acted in a Jewish or Gentile way to help those who still perceived themselves after the flesh. “...(being not

	without law to God, but under the law to Christ)” (1 Cor. 9:21).
I am carnal (Rom. 7:14)	But in Christ he was not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.)
No flesh may glory before God (1 Cor. 1:29)	Paul, in his spiritual man, as counted righteous before God, could glory (Rom. 15:17).
“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect”	“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect...” (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is ‘perfect’, and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not “already perfect”, he admitted.
“I laboured more abundantly than they all...	... <i>yet not I</i> , but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10)
God set the apostles <i>first</i> in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 12:28)	God set the apostles <i>last</i> in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9)
“I live...	... <i>yet not I</i> , but Christ liveth in me [the new ‘me’]... I [the old ‘me’] am crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20)
“I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office” (Rom. 11:13). He considered himself rightfully amongst the very chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 12:11).	He “supposed”, the same word translated “impute” as in ‘imputed righteousness’, that he was amongst the chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 11:5). He knew this was how his Lord counted him. But he felt himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

23:7 *And when he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided-* This was exactly as Paul had intended, in order to get him out of the rod he had made for his own back by cursing the high priest (see on :5).

23:8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees believe in both-* Perhaps Paul had developed the idea of the Lord's resurrection by speaking of the appearance of Angels there, and of how the risen Lord is present through His Spirit in the lives of believers. Or perhaps he emphasized that he knew the Lord was risen because the Spirit had revealed this to him; and the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road had been perceived by some as the appearance of an Angel in glorious light (hence the words of the Pharisees in :9). All the speeches in Acts are abbreviated. Paul may

have framed his words in ways which he knew would provoke the differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

23:9 *And there arose a great clamour; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees stood up and argued, saying: We find no evil in this man. What if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel?*- As noted on :6 and :8, Paul expressed his faith in the Lord's resurrection in terms which made out that the whole problem was because he believed in resurrection, Angels and spirits. He had no belief in disembodied spirits, but he expressed his convictions in terms which suggested he did. This was Paul at his most human, desperate to get out of the problems caused by his anger and arrogance in cursing the high priest.

23:10 *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the fortress-* The Pharisees were presumably physically protecting Paul from the Sadducees. Again we see the power of religious ideas, and the anger unleashed when traditional positions are questioned; see on 22:30. The trial may have been held in the hall within the temple precinct where Gentiles were not allowed to enter, but which was in full view of the Roman soldiers in the Antonia tower. Hence the watching soldiers rushed down into the holy space to rescue Paul. And thus Gentiles entered the temple as a result of Paul's witness. This very fact made the entire case against him (of having brought Gentiles into the temple) rather baseless.

23:11 *And the following night the Lord stood by him, and said: Take courage, for as you have testified concerning me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome-* Whilst Paul comes over as angry and fearless in cursing the high priest, after the event he was weak and fearful of what would become of him. To such an extent that the Lord appeared directly to him. The comment that Paul would also testify in court in Rome as he had in Jerusalem would have been reflected on by Paul. His appeal to Caesar was therefore his way of as it were forcing the fulfilment of these words.

23:12 *And when it was day, the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul-* They had been up all night planning Paul's murder; and Paul had sensed that, for that same night the Lord had appeared to Paul to encourage him (:11).

23:13 *And more than forty persons participated in this conspiracy-* These men would have been motivated by the account given them by the Sadducees of the words said in court that day. Josephus mentions that ten Jews made a similar vow in attempting to murder Herod. But forty of them did so to kill Paul, such was the power of a bad conscience and religious fanaticism.

23:14 *And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said: We have bound ourselves under a great curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul-* Such vows unto death could be lifted by the elders, according to the Talmud. They clearly intended to kill Paul quickly.

23:15 *Now then, you with the council petition the chief captain to bring him down to you, as though you would judge his case more exactly; and we, before he comes near, will be ready to slay him-* Knowing that he would be under guard, they were willing to give their lives to end Paul's life. This is how deeply the power of jealousy can work, especially when religious

conscience has been touched. The fanaticism of some Christians today to eliminate false teachers [as they perceive them] is in the same spirit.

*23:16 But Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, and he went and entered into the fortress and told Paul-* The ambush plan was surely kept as secret as possible. We can therefore assume that this young man was close to the Pharisees, seeing Paul was from a Pharisee family. He would have been involved enough with them to be party to this top secret knowledge, so we can assume he was not a publicly committed Christian. But still he played a part in saving Paul's life. He was presumably known as Paul's relative seeing he was allowed access to Paul. Perhaps this boy like Paul had been sent from Tarsus to be schooled in Pharisaic Judaism in Jerusalem, and due to mixing in those extreme circles he had heard of the plot.

*23:17 And Paul summoned one of the centurions, and said: Take this young man to the chief captain; for he has something to tell him-* "Young man" is vague, but from the way the captain took his hand (:19) we could assume he was quite young, a boy. Paul had been assured that his life would be preserved (:11); but he still did what was humanly prudent to save his life at this point. We note again how the Lord works through weak human mechanisms in order to work out His saving purpose; just as the boy who provided the loaves and fishes was necessary for the great miracle to be performed.

*23:18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said: Paul the prisoner summoned me, and asked me to bring this young man, who has something to say to you-* Perhaps the rather simplistic, almost childish title "Paul the prisoner" stuck in Paul's mind, for he uses about himself with pride in his later letters (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phil. 1:7).

*23:19 And the chief captain took him by the hand, and taking him aside asked him privately: What is it you have to tell me?-* As suggested on :17, the taking by the hand would suggest the young man was no more than a boy.

*23:20 He said: The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him-* We have read earlier in this chapter of how "the Jews" were bitterly divided over the case of Paul. Perhaps the idea is that they had now agreed amongst themselves, all convinced that for whatever reason and regardless of theological issues, Paul had to be killed.

*23:21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for your consent to their request-* The forty men who had made the oath had now grown to "more than forty". Extremism is contagious. We ought to harness that in a positive sense; for our commitment to the Lord and His principles is a form of extremism in our postmodern world. And it ought to influence our brethren likewise.

*23:22 So the chief captain let the young man go, ordering him: Tell no one you have told these things to me-* We get the impression that the captain really wanted to help Paul. Perhaps he was sorry for him, realizing that Paul was basically innocent but was being hounded to death by an irrational group of people who were simply jealous. Or it could be that he was another closet Christian, or with sympathies that way. We can construct a positive picture of Paul's persistently good treatment at the hands of many of his guards and imprisoners, with

the exception of the special case at Philippi. Somehow God worked through all the negatives in order to reveal His own gentleness and care for His suffering servant.

23:23 *And he summoned two of the centurions and said: Make ready two hundred soldiers to go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, at the third hour of the night-* At least 470 soldiers on horseback ("spearmen" = 'cavalry'), were needed to protect Paul from 40 bitter maniacs. It was the sudden movement at 9 PM that night which was effective in resolving the situation; for the Jews were awaiting a response in the morning regarding their request to have another meeting with Paul. They were not expecting him to be moved that evening.

23:24 *And provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Felix the governor-* By sending Paul to Felix, the captain was washing his own hands of the problem. Felix was renowned for brutality and according to Tacitus "governed with all the authority of a king, and the baseness and insolence of a slave".

23:25 *And he wrote a letter after this form-* We wonder from where Luke got the text of the letter. It could of course have been given to him by a flash of direct inspiration from God; but as conjectured earlier, it might have been that the captain was sympathetic to Paul and later shared a copy of the letter.

23:26 *Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings-* The letter was presumably written in Latin, but we read it here in Greek. "Claudius" was his Roman name, taken on obtaining his citizenship; "Lysias" is a Greek name, so perhaps he was originally from Greece.

23:27 *This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, when I intervened with soldiers and rescued him, having learnt that he was a Roman-* Lysias omits to mention that he had almost scourged Paul. He only learnt that Paul was a Roman citizen after rescuing him; so we see Lysias wishing to portray himself as having behaved with an integrity which was not in fact the case. The motive for rescuing him was presumably because he didn't want a riot in Jerusalem which could easily arise after a lynching.

23:28 *And desiring to know the cause why they accused him, I brought him down to their council-* As noted on 22:30, Lysias was genuinely at a loss as to why the Jews were so vehemently against Paul. Lysias could have asked Paul's side of the story and left it at that, but he obviously thought that under examination by the Jews, some more reasons might emerge. But they didn't- it was the power of a bad conscience, people who subconsciously know that the greatest truth is on the side of another, and who therefore seek to persecute them with untellable rage because of it.

23:29 *I found him to be accused about questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or imprisonment-* The accusation was that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. This was a capital offence. But they had not specifically accused him of that before the Romans; and so Lysias wrote that he had not even been accused of anything that carried the death penalty. The questions of the Jewish law were questions of interpretation of it, with Paul arguing that it pointed forward to the Lord Jesus and the Jews forced to deny it... with their denial making the predictions of Messiah the more true.

23:30 *And when it was told that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you, ordering his accusers also to speak against him before you-* Lysias avoids saying that he personally was told, ever seeking to avoid responsibility.

23:31 *So the soldiers, as commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris-* The 35 mile journey from Jerusalem, if started at 9 or 10 p.m. (:23), would have taken all night by horseback.

23:32 *But the next day they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the fortress-* As noted on :31, they would have arrived at Antipatris in the morning. But Caesarea was another 26 miles from Antipatris, although the road was through flat plains, whereas from Jerusalem to Antipatris was through rocky territory ideal for an ambush.

23:33 *And they, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also before him-* The 26 mile journey from Antipatris to Caesarea would have taken several hours by horseback, and Paul had been travelling all the previous night on horseback. He may not have been accustomed to horseback travel and would have arrived sore and exhausted, in addition to the traumas he had suffered in recent days from those who had got close to killing him by beating.

23:34 *And when he had read it, he asked of what province he was; and when he understood that he was of Cilicia, he said-* "What province" could mean 'what kind of province', i.e. whether senatorial or imperial. Cilicia was an imperial province, attached to the province of Syria. So Felix realized that he had a duty to hear the case.

23:35 *I will hear you fully when your accusers also have come; and he commanded him to be kept in Herod's palace-* The Romans required the accusers to face the accused in person. The *praetorium* referred to the guardroom attached to Herod's palace.

## ACTS CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus; and these gave evidence to the governor against Paul-* These strict Jews hired a Gentile orator to help make their case. We will note on :2 that he uses language and approaches which no Jew should use. But these Jews, who would not even eat with gentiles and condemned those who did, sacrificed their own religious principles for the sake of destroying someone who threatened those principles. The same contradictions can be seen in the behaviour of all manner of religious extremists [including Christians]. If principles are taught by God Himself and His word, then these are to be abided by; the end [of defending them] cannot justify breaking them.

24:2 *And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: Seeing that by you we enjoy much peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight-* Tertullus follows the standard pattern of such a speech, beginning by praising the judge, as Paul does. The reference to peace was because Felix had succeeded in ending the fighting between Syrians and Jews in Caesarea, and had greatly reduced the brigand bands who roamed the countryside. "Foresight" is really "providence" (as AV); and alludes to how Caesar and his officials were seen as the source of providence within the imperial cult. Roman coins often carried the slogan *Providentia Caesar*. But God is the source of providence for His people. So to say this ought to have been unthinkable for a true Jew. But the Jews used Tertullus and were happy to give up their scruples for the sake of trying to get Roman power on their side in order to destroy Paul, Yahweh's servant. This is typical of how religious people can so easily forget and contradict the most elemental principles of their religion because of hate obsessions against those who have tweaked their consciences.

24:3 *We accept it in all ways and in all places, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness-* The historical records of Felix, especially those of Tacitus, portray him as very far from "excellent". Such flattery is tedious, and :4 is almost worded so as to give the impression that Tertullus himself knew he was being tedious.

24:4 *But, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us-* The Greek for "courtesy" means kindness / fairness / mildness. The historical Felix was anything but any of these. Paul also opens his speech with the traditional praise of the judge, but he is far more realistic and honest. And it was that which contributed to Paul making Felix tremble.

24:5 *For we have found this man to be a plague, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes-* Paul was known throughout the Roman world; so the claim of the Roman Jews to have not heard of him was either untrue or meant that they did not recognize Paul. "Sect" has connotations of division; they were accusing Paul of being a sociopathic destroyer of their religion because he was causing division. And every shade of politics, every dictator, every stamp collectors club and religious denomination... have had this reasoning. The most awful abuse of a person who differs is justified on the basis of maintaining unity. Anyone who thinks out of the box or is 'different' is painted as someone who is destroying the group through creating disunity. The great paradox is that those who seek to destroy such people are themselves the ones causing disunity and fragmenting their society.

24:6 *Who moreover tried to profane the temple. We laid hold on him, and we would have judged him according to our law-* Profaning the temple was a capital offence; the Jews could



ask the Romans to apply the death penalty for such cases. The Jews had raised riot against Paul by claiming that he had actually profaned the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. He had not done so; and now they reduce the charge to claiming that he had attempted to do so.

24:7 *But the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands-* The Jews were complaining that Lysias had over reacted, using violence against the Jews who had "laid hold" on Paul.

24:8 *Commanding his accusers to come before you. You will be able, by examining him yourself, to gain knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him-* The charge of profaning the temple was just one of a number of "things of which we accuse him".

24:9 *And the Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that these things were so-* "The charge" singular presumably refers to that of trying to profane the temple (:6). This was hard to prove to the degree required to get Paul the death sentence. Their whole case was extremely weak, and clearly motivated by chronic personal jealousy. It is the inspired record which speaks in the singular, "the charge", whereas the accusers speak in the plural ("all these things", :8). But they didn't boil down to any specific charge apart from that about the profaning of the temple.

24:10 *And when the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul answered: Inasmuch as I do know you have been for many years a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defence-* Speeches of this nature had a section devoted to praise of the judge. Tertullus spent a long time attempting to butter up Felix with vain praise. Paul is far more to the point, noting the qualification Felix actually had, rather than attempting to flatter the judge. All the way through we get the impression that Paul was more interested in using the trial in order to make a witness, rather than to just win his case.

24:11 *You can verify that it was no more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship-* The accusations that Paul had been involved in long term agitation in Jerusalem and the temple could not have been true, since Paul had only arrived in Jerusalem 12 days previously. Paul still uses the Jewish idea of going 'up' to Jerusalem. And yet he elsewhere argues that sacred space is within the heart and of the Spirit, and is not now concerned with localities. But he seems to have had a great respect of the Jerusalem Jews and so wished to convert them; whereas the Lord had intended that his focus instead be upon the Gentiles.

24:12 *And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city did they find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd-* Paul had only been in Jerusalem a few days anyway (:11). It was the Jews, and not him, who had disputed and stirred by crowds, both in Jerusalem and in other cities, as Luke has recorded in Acts. So the emphasis may be upon "me"; it was not Paul, but the Jews who had done these things.

24:13 *Neither can they prove to you the things of which they now accuse me-* There was no evidence that Paul had brought any Gentile into the temple, nor that he even intended to do so. Paul comes over as very convinced that he is right and cannot be proven wrong; which was why his chain and time in prison was so frustrating for him, seeing he was so convinced of his innocence.

24:14 *But this I confess to you, that after the Way, which they call a sect, I serve the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the*

*prophets*- Paul can be sensed here almost panting after the chance to make a witness to the Gospel on a fairly high level, to both Jewish and Roman leaders. "The Way" was a term used to designate the Christian movement. Paul argues that it was not a divisive sect, because "the Way" involved belief of everything written in the law and prophets. Believing them does not of course mean 'obeying' them; for the issues of interpretation were so critical. People may insist that they "believe" the same source documents or God, but this does not mean that they are all going to be saved. For as demonstrated in this case, the critical issue is belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Belief in God alone will not save. Salvation is in Jesus, Yah's Salvation.

24:15 *Having hope toward God, which these people also look for, that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust*- Paul stops short of implying that his Jewish enemies would be saved; but he says that "these people" were looking for a resurrection at the last day. Bearing in mind the issue between Sadducees and Pharisees over this very issue, it would seem that those who were taking the active part in the prosecution of Paul were Pharisees and not Sadducees. And yet at his previous trial, it was the Pharisees who had stood up for Paul. We see how fickle people are; and how the fact Paul was a former Pharisee was what drove the Pharisees to hate him even more. Another possibility is that Paul was still trying to exploit the tension between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection issue.

24:16 *Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always*- see on Acts 23:1. A personal focus upon the man Christ Jesus ought to lessen the degree to which our faith is focused upon the church, without making us out of church Christians. We need to toughen up, to realize more keenly the self-discipline and self-sacrifice which following the man Jesus requires of us. Paul "exercised" himself in his spiritual life (Acts 24:16), the Greek word *asko* being the source of the English word ascetic. It should not be that our Christianity gives us merely a headful of vital truths but a life unable to fend off sin. We must translate our doctrines into the practice of a transformed life. On-our-knees prayer, fasting, real sacrifice of time, money and human possibilities... this is what the life of Christ is about. This, too, is what forges real personality.

24:17 *Now after some years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation*- The Jerusalem Poor Fund had been a major preoccupation of Paul, as witnessed especially in 2 Corinthians. "After some years" could suggest he had not been in Jerusalem for "some years" and should not therefore be accused of a program of stirring up trouble there. Paul had reasoned with the Corinthians that he was careful to be 'whiter than white' in handling their contributions, and that others and not himself would bring them to Jerusalem. But here he chooses to argue that *he* brought the offerings- because that angle of truth was more convenient in his legal case. Perhaps it is left as hanging question as to whether he was right or wrong to handle truth in the way he does.

24:18 *Whilst doing this, they found me purified in the temple, with no crowd, nor with uproar; but there were certain Jews from Asia*- Paul emphasizes his legal obedience; he did not profane the temple, he was ritually clean ["purified"] in the temple. This sounds very much like a 'boast in the law', and confirms my earlier suggestion that his whole agreement to go through the purification rituals was a quite wrong tokenistic obedience to laws he had argued were obsolete. Once a political rather than spiritual approach is taken to issues, then a whole sequence of decision making is sparked off which makes it ever harder to pull out of the 'political' thinking and revert to spiritual perspectives.

24:19 *Who should have been here before you and to make the accusation, if they had something against me-* The "Jews from Asia" who had first made the false accusation were likely Jews who had followed Paul from Asia to Palestine in order to continue dogging and upsetting his ministry. What was done in Jerusalem is of exactly the same style to what the Jews of Asia had done in Asia- following Paul around, falsely accusing him, stirring up crowds against him, and pressurizing the Roman authorities to imprison or execute him.

24:20 *Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council-* Again, Paul's broad picture of total innocence is going too far. He says that he did nothing wrong during his trial "before the council" apart from shouting out that he was on trial because of his stance on resurrection. But of course he had shouted that out to deflect attention from the wrongdoing he had actually done "when I stood before the council"- which was to curse the judge. Given the religious implications, this was very serious contempt of court and was indeed "wrongdoing".

24:21- see on Acts 22:6.

*Except it be for one statement that I cried standing among them: Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day-* There was actual wrongdoing by Paul in that courtroom; see on :20. His 'admission' of an 'error' in raising the resurrection issue is nothing less than a blind, distracting attention from the real issue about his contempt of court in cursing the judge.

24:22 *But Felix, having more accurate knowledge concerning the Way, adjourned the proceedings, saying: When Lysias the chief captain shall come, I will decide your case-* The "accurate knowledge" of Christianity had spread to high places; for Felix knew all about it. He seemed careful therefore not to judge this case with the brash haste for which Tacitus says he was famous. He delayed it until Lysias could come and testify. But Lysias was only a witness to the 'contempt of court' issue as Paul stood before the Jewish Council; and not to the original issue, which was that Paul had supposedly profaned the temple. That was the capital offence which the Jews were trying to push, and it should have been thrown out of court.

24:23 *Then he gave orders to the centurion, that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty; and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs-* Felix knew the Gospel, with "accurate knowledge" (:22). He had some conscience; and he therefore allowed Paul a very liberal regime in prison. There were clearly Christians in the area who were friendly towards Paul, who provided for his needs there- in contrast to how in 2 Tim. 4 we get the impression that the local church in Rome did not finally care for Paul in prison at the end of his life. Paul had boasted earlier that his "own hands" had "ministered unto my necessities [needs]" (20:34); and now he had to rely upon others to minister to his needs. This was all part of the same humbling process which we all pass through until we reach the acme of humility which the Lord has in view for us by the end of our lives. Felix is presented by Tacitus as being conscienceless; but the Gospel had power to reach even the most hardened heart, even if it is not positively responded to. Later, "Felix trembled" at the further challenge of the Gospel which Paul presented to him.

24:24 *But after some days, Felix came with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and listened to him speak about faith in Christ Jesus-* Harry Whittaker [*Studies in the*

*Acts of the Apostles*] cites historical evidence to the effect that Felix had only recently married her, and she was only 17.

24:25 *And as he reasoned about righteousness, self control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid, and answered: Go away for now. When I have a convenient time I will call for you-* The very fact of judgment to come is in itself a demand for righteousness and temperance. Felix realized this and trembled, in anticipation of rejection at the judgment. As the Lord had explained in Jn. 5, when a man hears the word of the Gospel, he hears the call to go to judgment. And if he rejects it, he rejects himself from the Lord's presence in the future. Likewise Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent.

24:26- see on Acts 17:12.

*He hoped meanwhile that money would be given to him by Paul. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him-* Clearly Paul at this stage was not without access to money. When he first arrived in Rome, he was able to rent a house. At other times in his ministry, he had to work night and day at Thessalonica in order to support himself. The same wide range of experience, in financial and other areas of life, is often seen in the lives of believers. It was all part of Paul being taught (along with us) to "know" how to live in plenty or in want, that we might be spiritually developed. Our range of experience in life as believers is therefore typically far wider, at least in psychological terms, than that experienced by unbelievers in whom the Spirit is not at work in this way.

24:27 *But after two years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to gain favour with the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison-* Paul so often expresses frustration with his "chain", obviously thinking that he could have achieved far more for the Lord if he were free rather than imprisoned. We too chafe at the ties that bind in life. But in the bigger picture, all is for a purpose in our spiritual path. Unlike his time in Rome, we have no recorded letters written by Paul in these two years. He may have written some which are unrecorded; or it might be that during that time he was able to develop the ideas which he later expressed in his letters written from Rome. Tradition states that he and Luke spent this time composing the gospel of Luke and parts of Acts. Perhaps he needed that breather in his life's path. We may feel we need such breaks, but it is better to let the Lord give them to us than make the assumption that we can map out our own spiritual path.

## ACTS CHAPTER 25

*25:1 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went to Jerusalem from Caesarea-* Time is not really a healer. The bitterness felt against Paul and his work meant that the Jews immediately approached the new ruler concerning the case, just three days after he had assumed office.

*25:2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews presented the charges against Paul; and they petitioned him-* As noted on :1, time had not healed them of their bitterness. Indeed, time can only make bitterness and jealousy grow even worse. This is why the Lord urges us to immediately try to resolve issues with our offended brethren; the idea that time heals is really a justification of our native laziness and preference not to address issues.

*25:3 Asking a favour against Paul, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way-* Two years previously, they had attempted the same kind of thing. Perhaps their previous plans and place of ambush were still in their minds; as noted on :1 and :2, time does not heal bitterness and jealousy, especially when it is religiously motivated. The "favour" they wanted was to sentence Paul, to pass judgment upon him (:15).

*25:4 However Festus answered that Paul should be kept in custody at Caesarea, and that he intended to go there soon-* As we see from :9, Festus was not against holding a trial for Paul in Jerusalem. His refusal was therefore related to his awareness of the planned ambush. The Greek behind "should be kept" really is a statement of existing fact; the response was that Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea and that therefore was where the trial should be held.

*25:5 Therefore, said he, let those that have authority among you come with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him-* Festus had only just taken on the job of governor. His willingness to deal with this case within the first weeks of his appointment indicates he sensed some urgency to deal with it. This is perhaps a testament to how passionate the Jews were regarding the question.

*25:6 And when he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went to Caesarea; and the next day he sat on the judgment seat and commanded Paul to be brought-* Given the precise nature of Luke's style, we wonder why the vague "eight or ten days"; perhaps Luke was relying on various sources for his information. Here we see the interface of Divine inspiration with human writing. Luke gathered his information sources, and the overall recording of it all is inspired. But in God's wisdom, this particular detail is left vague. Another possibility is that "eight to ten" meant 'eight full days', as Jews reckon part of a day as a day. The fact he immediately opened the case the day after arrival, when he was new to the job and must have had a mass of administrative issues to attend to, is again a reflection of how urgently he perceived Paul's case as needing attention. The two year delay had clearly irritated the Jews and Festus wished to demonstrate that he was proactive in dealing with issues.

*25:7 And when he had arrived, the Jews that had come from Jerusalem stood round him, bringing against him many and grievous charges which they could not prove-* The impression is that as soon as Paul entered the court room, the Jews started yelling accusations, and even standing around him in an intimidating manner. Courts then were rather different to the orderly and sober proceedings of today. This gives insight into the Lord's parable of the

widow woman pleading with the judge for attention to her case; she would have had to insistently shout her cause over the noise of others.

*25:8 While Paul said in his defence: Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I sinned at all-* Paul was somewhat playing with words here. For his letters and teaching was full of language which was purposefully against the imperial cult, as was the Lord's language of the Kingdom of God; indeed, Paul did preach loyalty to another King and another Kingdom than Caesar's. And whilst he had not offended against the law of Moses, apart from in cursing the high priest, he had indeed offended against "the law of the Jews". He may of course still be referring to the law of Moses, but alluding to how it had been hijacked by the Jews. Similarly, the Old Testament "temple of Yahweh" and "feasts of Yahweh" are described as "the temple of the Jews" and "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's laws and religion and turned it into their own religion, just as many have done today.

*25:9 But Festus, desiring to gain favour with the Jews, answered Paul and said: Will you go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?-* Festus had sought to be proactive in dealing with Paul's case for the same reason. And he knew that they wanted to see Paul tried in their holy city. He didn't want any ambushes on the way (see on :4), but he was willing to agree to a Jerusalem trial.

*25:10 But Paul said: I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I should be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as you also very well know-* Paul's appeal to Caesar seems to have been quite unnecessary, and again it seems to have been the outcome of bitter exasperation and almost pride: "I ought to be judged", as a Roman citizen..."no man may deliver me...", "as thou very well knowest"; the response of Festus seems to be appropriate to Paul's arrogance: "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar thou shalt go" (25:10-12). The word used to describe Paul's "appeal" is that usually translated "to call on (the name of the Lord)", perhaps suggesting that this was whom Paul should have called in, not Caesar. I have elsewhere suggested that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome and making a witness there. He had also been told by the Lord that he would one day witness there, as was his desire. Having been two years in prison, it must have seemed an impossibility to ever get there, especially with increasing age and health issues. His appeal to Caesar was therefore calculated and not made in hot blood. And yet it was a path to further imprisonment and eventual death; when he could have been set free, as Festus comments later. But his entire journey to Jerusalem had been against the Lord's advice; and the train of events which transpired from it was not so much judgment / punishment as consequence of action.

*25:11 If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying, but if none of these things are true of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar-* Paul clearly understood that "the wages of sin is death" and that he was "chief of sinners". He had indeed committed many things worthy of death, not least extrajudicial murder of Christians. We get the sense therefore that he was speaking in hot blood, furiously angry with the Jews and with how Felix and Festus favoured them over him. His appeal to Caesar was not without forethought and correct motivation, but it was also mixed with anger and frustration. Human motivation is rarely pure.

*25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered: You have appealed to*

*Caesar. To Caesar shall you go-* This "council" was not the Sanhedrin, but rather the group of advisors called "assessors" who sat with the governor in such trials. Festus could have quashed Paul's appeal to Caesar; he had the power to, especially as there was no clear case against Paul. Perhaps Festus saw in this appeal a nice way out for him; for it would be a lengthy process, and the Jews would have to make representation somehow in Rome. He had not condemned nor released Paul, so the Jews could have no reason to be angry with him.

*25:13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the King and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus-* The continued record of days passing, and in :14 of "many days", is perhaps to help us sense Paul's frustration at the constant waiting and delaying. Agrippa was the son of the Herod who had been smitten by God for his pride in 12:20-23. Bernice was the sister of Drusilla, the teenage wife of Felix; and also the sister of Agrippa. They were rumoured to be in an incestuous relationship. It is ironic that such immoral people were the judges of others' morals. And that is the weakness of all human systems of justice and judgment. We are not to judge simply because we actually *cannot* judge; in essential terms, we are not morally above those we judge.

*25:14 And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the King, saying: There is a certain man left as a prisoner by Felix-* As noted on :13, the endless passing of "many days" and apparently endless delays would have been deeply frustrating for Paul. We too can see life as an endless series of frustrations, assuming that normal life, better life, is around the corner. But the Spirit is working constantly in our lives, so that we can realize that every moment is being used just as much as any other moment.

*25:15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, asking for sentence against him-* The Bible is a highly abbreviated record of the history and words of God's people. We wonder why so much attention is given in this part of God's inspired word to repeating facts the record has already given us, especially when they might not appear to add anything to the teaching. That of course may just be appearance- in that we have not noticed various gems of understanding and spiritual insight. But it can also be that the long drawn out accounts here of Paul's judicial process may be to help us to enter into his sense of frustration.

*25:16 To whom I answered that it is not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone, before the accused has the accusers face to face, and has had opportunity to make his defence concerning the matter charged against him-* The 'giving up' refers to the death sentence. The Jews surely knew this, but seeing the Sadducees were the richest people in Jewish society, it could be that they had attempted to bribe Festus to try Paul in Jerusalem in his absence, seeing he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Here therefore he is explaining that he had upheld Roman tradition and justice.

*25:17 Therefore, when they gathered here, I did not delay, and the next day sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought-* Festus is emphasizing his proactive approach, in contrast to how Felix his predecessor had left the case on ice for two years.

*25:18 Concerning whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge of such evil things as I supposed-* Surely Festus knew that the case against Paul was weak. And he had already met with the accusers in Jerusalem ahead of the trial in Caesarea, so he was surely aware that the accusations were weak. But he gives the impression to Agrippa that he was

surprised. This kind of less than total honesty is seen throughout Paul's trials, and also in Paul's responses. Perhaps one purpose of the extended narratives of the trials is to leave us with this impression- that human justice is flawed and is therefore not ultimate justice, and only God's justice is ultimate. Paul writes so much in Romans about justice and chapters 1-8 are so full of legal terminology that we wonder whether in fact Paul wrote Romans during his imprisonment in Caesarea.

*25:19 Rather they had certain questions against him of their own religion and of one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive-* Festus perceived that the nub of the issue with Paul was not connected to the original case, i.e. that he had supposedly brought Gentiles into the temple. Rather did the whole Jewish anger with Paul revolve around his attitude to the Lord Jesus and the claim of His resurrection. This was and is utterly critical to any Christian life, and all other issues flow from that. Festus and any secular mind would be confused as to how the issue of a man being dead or alive could make such a huge argument arise. The fact it did make such a difference for the Jews is therefore a testament to their bad conscience; subconsciously, they sensed that the Lord had risen indeed, but their denial of it led them to untold anger with Paul who was living proof of His resurrection. It was Paul's transformed life, which they were all aware of, which was a great evidence that the Lord had risen and worked through His Spirit in the lives of His people; and they needed to destroy that evidence.

*25:20 And I, being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these matters-* As noted on :19, the secular man is indeed perplexed as to how the possible resurrection of a Palestinian Jew some years back could really be such a critical issue. By offering to hand Paul over to a Sanhedrin trial, Festus was tacitly saying that Paul had done nothing wrong by Roman law, and so his crimes were a matter of breaking Jewish ritual laws. By handing him over to Jewish jurisdiction, Festus was washing his hands of the case. The fact that he could legally hand him over to Jewish legal judgment is an admission that Paul allowed himself to be counted within the synagogue system. He mentions his five beatings by the Jews in 2 Cor. 11:24; but such synagogue discipline could only be administered to those within the synagogue system. This was the price Paul paid for seeking to be all things to all men, for identifying with his target audience in order to convert them. It could be argued that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews (which was Peter's calling); and he could have avoided so much grief in his life if he had followed that calling and stopped endlessly seeking to convert Jews.

*25:21 But when Paul had appealed to be kept for the decision of the Emperor, I commanded him to be kept until I should send him to Caesar-* Festus may be suggesting Paul was deeply unwise here. For Festus could close the Roman side of the case, and leave Paul to accept some symbolic punishment at the hands of the Jewish court in Jerusalem. The fact Paul insisted on remaining within the Roman sphere of justice meant that he risked Roman judgment and a death penalty if found guilty. And so it worked out. His obsession to get to Rome and witness for Christ was what led, humanly speaking, to his further imprisonment and final demise. But the Lord was working through that, even if it were not His ideal intended path for Paul.

*25:22 And Agrippa said to Festus: I also would like to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, you shall hear him-* The desire to speed things up is again apparent; the trial was set for the next day.



25:23 *So the next day, when Agrippa had arrived and Bernice, with great pomp, they entered into the place of hearing with the chief captains and principal men of the city; and at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in-* "Paul" is presented in contrast to the great pomp and power of the men he stood to be judged by. The fearlessness and verve of Paul, his refusal to be cowed by the power and pomp of flesh, is a wonderful testimony to the power of the Spirit within Paul.

25:24 *And Festus said: King Agrippa and all men who are here present with us, you see this man, about whom all the crowd of the Jews made appeal to me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying that he should not live any longer-* "You see this man" recalls "Behold the man" at the Lord's trial. The idea was 'You see what a bedraggled specimen of humanity these Jews are making such a fuss about'. "The crowd of the Jews" is a term of disdain, especially bearing in mind that it was the Jewish leadership who were accusing Paul.

25:25 *But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and as he appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him-* A Roman citizen had the right to ask for his case to be heard by the emperor, but the local authorities had the power to veto that. It is therefore all the more significant that although Festus considered Paul had done nothing wrong, he still allowed the appeal to Caesar to stand. He obviously ran the risk of being accused of timewasting by sending a case to Rome for judgment which clearly should be thrown out of court. It was Paul's passionate desire to get to Rome, and to at last get out of confinement at Caesarea. The Lord too intended Paul to witness at Rome, knowing this was Paul's dominant desire. And so against all sense, Festus agrees to send him there. The only possibility is that he considered that doing this would be a neutral outcome for him; for anything less than Paul's dead body would not placate the Jews, and yet Festus had a conscience, as he knew the Gospel well, and didn't want to go down that path. So in this complex web of less than honest and ideal motivations by all concerned, Paul included, the Lord worked His will.

25:26 *But I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write-* Festus was hoping that Agrippa might observe some legal issue which would justify sending Paul to be tried at Rome; and hoping that having Agrippa's approval of the appeal to Rome would make his action seem more credible. I suggest the simple truth was that Festus wanted to send Paul there in order to salve his conscience. He did not want to kill Paul to placate the Jews because of that conscience, but he also didn't want to upset the Jews by releasing Paul or appearing to not be proactive. In all this we see the power of the Gospel in probing deepest conscience. If we preach the Gospel, we are touching the conscience of our hearers, for all their bravado of disinterest.

25:27 *For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, without specifying the charges against him-* As noted on :25 and :26, Festus did not have to send this prisoner to Rome. He had every right to turn down the appeal as mere timewasting, and hand the case over to the Jews to judge, whilst disallowing any death penalty. For the original charge of profaning the temple had now been dropped, and that was the only one of their charges which had the possibility of the death penalty. Agrippa must likewise have considered it strange that Festus

was so insistent on sending the prisoner to Rome; and again, it was only his own piqued conscience which made him want to hear the man himself.

## ACTS CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And Agrippa said to Paul: You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence-* "For yourself" may be a reference here to how Paul defended himself, and did not use any advocate or legal team. We recall how the Jews had made use of one, Tertullus, to make their case in an earlier trial. Paul was using these trials as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel and not just to defend himself. We can sense his eagerness as he makes his case for Christ.

26:2 *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before you this day concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews-* Agrippa was Herod Agrippa the second. The whole Herod family had had the Gospel witnessed to them. Herod the Great was told of the birth of the Lord by the wise men and Jewish scribes; his son Antipas and granddaughter Herodias were witnessed to by John the Baptist; his son Agrippa the first had killed James and tried to kill Peter because their message had tweaked his conscience; and now his son Agrippa II was being witnessed to by Paul. This was a family the Lord surely tried to appeal to. Again we sense Paul's eager using of these trials as an opportunity to witness; as his appeal to Caesar had been accepted, he could have actually refused to testify in this trial. But he eagerly used the opportunity to witness by all means, and we need to take some of that spirit with us in our lives.

The codex Beza adds at this point: "taking courage, and receiving comfort by the Holy Spirit". In this case, Paul is directly alluding to his Lord's promise to provide the right words to say in times of public witness under persecution such as this (Mt. 10:18-20).

26:3 *Epecially because you are expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Therefore, I beg that you hear me patiently-* "Hear me patiently" is an allusion to the LXX of Prov. 25:15: "By long patience is a prince persuaded". Paul had the spiritual ambition to even try to convert Agrippa. We too need that ambition, never writing people off as unreachable by our witness. Agrippa "the prince" is perhaps framed in terms of this verse when he is recorded as replying using the same word as in Prov. 25:15: "You almost persuade me to be a Christian" (:28).

26:4 *My manner of life from my youth, which was from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, do all the Jews know-* The Jews who were accusing Paul had personally known him in his Pharisee days. They were personal witnesses of his transformation.

26:5 *Having knowledge of me from the first (if they are willing to admit it) that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee-* The Jews were unwilling to admit [Gk. 'be legal witnesses in court'] that they knew Paul's past. For it was his radical transformation which was in fact the great witness to the utter truth of Paul's case. By denying it, they were witnesses against themselves. They were in denial of his transformation, which was the proof of the things he taught about the Lord Jesus. And likewise, presentation of true theology alone in our age will convert very few. It is the truth of it seen in our lives which is the compelling witness.

26:6- see on Acts 22:6.

*And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers-* This is another statement to the effect that the Christian Gospel offered the same sure hope

which the promise to Abraham and the fathers offered to Abraham and his singular seed. The Lord's death had opened the scope of that promise to whoever wished to associate with the seed. Paul is arguing that the accusations against him are really all about the promise God made to the Jewish fathers. The Jews were therefore accusing God far more than himself.

*26:7 To which our twelve tribes earnestly serve night and day, hoping to attain the promises. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king!*- "Night and day" refers to the evening and morning synagogue services, where the promises to Abraham were alluded to or repeated. Paul goes on to explain that the hope of attaining the promises implied belief in a resurrection; for the promises of eternal inheritance, blessing etc. had clearly not been obtained and could only be obtained by immortalization. The Sadducees amongst his accusers would of course take issue with this, as they denied the resurrection and argued that the promises gave hope only in this life. Hence their manic materialism. But Paul doesn't appear to raise that point; his appeal at this point was to his judges, seeking to convert them, rather than seeking to expose the obvious lines of weakness in the position of his opponents. And this needs to be remembered in all our witness; that we are seeking to convert to Christ, rather than merely exposing logical error in those who are against us.

*26:8 Why would any of you think it incredible that God raises the dead?*- If we have really died and resurrected with the Lord, we will be dead unto the things of this world (Col. 2:20; 3:1). This is why Paul could imply that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him (Acts 26:8 ff.). This was "the power of his resurrection"; and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren't just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

*26:9 I truly thought that I should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth-* The "thought" connects with the challenge of :8 as to why any should "think" resurrection to be incredible. Paul is saying that his changed thinking could be replicated in them also changing their thinking about the Lord Jesus.

*26:10 And this I did in Jerusalem, and I shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them-* "This I did" shows that his "thought" of :9 became action; he is recognizing the truth of the Lord's teaching that thought is action. The repeated account of Paul's conversion in Acts, when the record is highly abbreviated otherwise, is because Paul is set up as the parade example of all conversions to Christ (1 Tim. 1:13-18).

*26:11 And in all the synagogues I often punished them-* I am convinced that a major reason for the success of the early church was that they weren't paranoid about issues of fellowship and guilt-by-association; they were simply radical preachers. They preached an exclusive message, but they wished to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The Lord Himself taught that the time would come when His followers would be disfellowshipped from the synagogues. But He doesn't teach them to leave the synagogues, even though first century Judaism was both doctrinally and morally corrupt. Acts 26:11 would seem to imply that there were Christians "in every synagogue".

*Trying to force them to blaspheme-* Gk. 'necessitated'. It could be claimed that it is never 'necessary' to blaspheme; for some died under torture, not accepting any way out, and thus shall receive a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). But Paul takes a more gracious view here;

he recognized that the torture he had applied left the Christians with no other human choice but to blaspheme the name of Jesus, and he takes full blame for this. See on 1 Tim. 1:13.

*And being furiously enraged at them, I persecuted them even in foreign cities-* Paul's progressive appreciation of his own sinfulness is reflected in how he describes what he did in persecuting Christians in ever more terrible terms, the older he gets. He describes his victims as "men and women" whom he 'arrested' (Acts 8:3; 22:4), then he admits he threatened and murdered them (Acts 9:3), then he persecuted "the way" unto death (Acts 22:4); then he speaks of them as "those who believe" (Acts 22:19) and finally, in a crescendo of shame with himself, he speaks of how he furiously persecuted, like a wild animal, unto the death, "many of the saints", not only in Palestine but also "to foreign [Gentile] cities" (Acts 26:10,11). He came to appreciate his brethren the more, as he came to realize the more his own sinfulness. And this is surely a pattern for us all.

26:12- see on Acts 22:6.

*Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests-* These were the very men who were accusing him, and he is now stating that they were involved as accessories to extrajudicial murder and torture. "Thus I journeyed" invites his audience to imagine the rabid thinking which dominated his mind; the psychological change in him could only have been achieved by external agency. And that agency was the spirit of the risen Lord.

26:13- see on Acts 22:6.

*But at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those that journeyed with me-* The repeated "O King" is because Paul was specifically seeking to convert Agrippa. His spiritual ambition in attempting this is an encouragement to us all in our witness to those who seem so unreachable by the Gospel we preach. "Shining around me" suggests the light was not shone down from Heaven as in a beam; but that the Lord Himself stood near Paul, next to him. The word literally means 'to be a halo around'. Paul was in this sense sanctified, made a saint, through standing with the Lord. Those with him could have responded to this grace too, but chose not to. "And those that journeyed with me" would suggest that the Lord sought to bring them from darkness to light also, but they refused to understand the word spoken, although they heard it.

26:14 *And when we had all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the cattle prod-* The idea is that Paul understood the voice that was speaking; whereas the men with him heard the voice but chose not to understand. Perhaps Saul had been observing oxen ploughing along the road to Damascus, hence the usage of that analogy. The Lord's question as to "why" Saul so persecuted the believers in the body of Christ was left unanswered. The answer was that Paul's bad conscience was leading him to denial, and that denial was expressing itself in unreasonable anger. And the Jews who were persecuting Paul were in just the same situation. They knew in their consciences that Jesus of Nazareth had been their Messiah; "this is the heir, come let us kill Him" was how the Lord's parable explained it. That guilty conscience meant a desire to eliminate those like Paul who had at first denied it and then accepted it. They were driven by the very same psychological factors which Paul was driven by.

26:15 *And I said: Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus whom you persecute-* The question "Why?" was answered by Saul with the question "Who are you, Lord?". This

may not have been a request for information. It is perhaps in the spirit of Jacob's meeting with Angel, wrestling God as Saul had done, and then asking the Angel's name as Jacob did (Gen. 32:29). As the Lord Jesus called Saul by name, so the Angel gave Jacob a new name, Israel. And it could be that although unrecorded, the Lord then changed Saul to Paul. To ask someone's name can be understood as a Hebraism for recognizing their greatness or superiority.

*26:16 But arise, and stand upon your feet-* This is a quotation from Ezekiel's experience, having seen the glory of God and being asked to go and witness it to an Israel who would not listen because they preferred Babylon (Ez. 2:1,2).

*For to this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness both of the things in which you have seen me, and of the things which I will reveal to you-* "A servant" is literally, a slave. The apostles in their letters usually open by reminding their readers that they are slaves of the Lord Jesus- this is how they saw themselves. Paul was called to be a slave of the Gospel (Acts 26:16; Gk. *hypereten*- a galley slave, rowing the boat chained to the oars). There were slaves who were made stewards or managers ['bishops'] of the Master's business, but essentially they themselves were still slaves.

*26:17 Delivering you from the people of the Jews and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you-* Paul was therefore confident that he could not be ultimately destroyed by the union of Jews and Gentiles now gathered against him. But we must factor in here that eventually, the Lord did not deliver him from Gentile power and he died under Nero's persecution. The promise of deliverance was therefore in order that he might conduct his intended ministry; but when that ministry was over, then he was in fact delivered to the power of Gentile persecution and execution.

*26:18 To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light-* The Lord Jesus seems to have encouraged Paul to see Moses as his hero. Thus he asked him to go and live in Arabia before beginning his ministry, just as Moses did (Gal. 1:17). When he appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he spoke in terms reminiscent of the Angel's commission to Moses at the burning bush: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the (Jewish) people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to...turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance... Whereupon... I (Paul) was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:16-19). Moses was promised that he would be protected from Pharaoh so that he could bring out God's people from the darkness of Egyptian slavery ("the power of Satan"); going from darkness to light is used by Peter as an idiom to describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which the new Israel should emulate (1 Pet. 2:9). Moses led Israel out of Egypt so that they might be reconciled to God, and be led by him to the promised inheritance of Canaan. As Moses was eventually obedient to that heavenly vision, so was Paul- although perhaps he too went through (unrecorded) struggles to be obedient to it, after the pattern of Moses being so reluctant.

Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23).

God's manifestation of His word through preaching is limited by the amount of manifestation His preachers allow it. Through the first century preaching of the Gospel, men and women

were "turned from darkness to light... *that* they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified" (Acts 26:18).

*And from the power of Satan to God-*

There are some clear contrasts drawn here:

To open their eyes	(They were blind).
To turn them from darkness	to light.
From the power of Satan (sin)	unto God (cp. 1 Jn. 1:5).
(Unforgiven)	receive forgiveness of sins.
(Gentiles without inheritance by faith in "the hope of Israel")	them (the Jews) that had access to sanctification by faith.

Ephesians 4:17–20 almost seems to directly allude back to this passage in Acts 26:18: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ...". Being under the power of Satan is therefore a result of having an empty, vain, fleshly mind (i.e. the Satan of evil desires in our mind having full power) and being ignorant, without understanding. Matthew 13:19 says that Satan (cp. Mk. 4:15) has power over a person because of their lack of understanding of the Word. Ephesians 4:17–20 is referring to the same thing as "the power of Satan" defined in Acts 26:18. "To open their eyes" implies to have the eyes of understanding opened (cp. Eph. 1:18).

Acts 26:18 implies that it was "the power of Satan" that stopped the Gentiles from sharing the inheritance of the Gospel which was preached to the Jews in the promises (Gal. 3:8; Jn. 4:22). "Satan" is often connected with the Law and the Jewish system. Maybe this is another example. Note too the allusions in this verse to Is. 42:6,7: "I... will... keep you, and give you for a... light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house". This equates the power of Satan with a prison house, and the Law is likened to a prison in Gal. 3:23 and 4:3.

There are allusions in Acts 26:18 to the Jews' crucifixion of Jesus: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53); "Satan" (the Jews) has desired to have you" (Lk. 22:31), Jesus warned the disciples at the last supper.

The previous verse (Acts 26:17) shows the Lord Jesus strengthening Paul to be brave in his mission to the Gentiles – "delivering you from the [Jewish] people, and from the Gentiles". Jesus Himself was "delivered to the Gentiles" (Lk. 18:32–33) for crucifixion by the Jews, and Mk. 15:15 implies Jesus was delivered to "the people", too. The phrase "the people" frequently occurs in the crucifixion records. It is as if Jesus is saying: 'I was delivered to the

Gentiles and (Jewish) people because of My preaching; I am now commissioning you to preach, facing the same battle against (the Jewish) Satan and man's blindness to the Word of God, due to his love of the flesh, as I did; but I will deliver you from the Gentiles and Jewish people, rather than deliver you to them, as I was. You are going to spend your life going through the same experiences as I faced in My last hours'. Thus, in yet another way, we can understand how Paul could say "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20).

*To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me-* Salvation is *not* a purely personal matter. It is part of a shared experience, something we obtain a part in. Christ *is* His body. He doesn't exist separate from His body; for all existence in the Bible is bodily existence. And *we* are His body. He is us. Likewise we are the branches of the Christ-vine (Jn. 15). Because we are all in the one body of Christ, therefore we are intimately associated with the other parts of the body.

26:19- see on Acts 13:9.

*Therefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision-* "Disobedient" is literally 'not persuaded'. Paul is saying that he was not unpersuaded by the Lord's appearance. And this is the same word used by Agrippa in :28, when he says Paul has almost persuaded him to become a Christian. Paul was witnessing from his own experience of being persuaded by the Lord; and he wants to persuade others.

26:20- see on Acts 13:24,25.

*But declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to their repentance-* It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul here made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching.

Paul preached that men "should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:18-20). As with Mt. 21:28-31, this refers primarily to baptism. "Repent and turn to God" surely matches "Repent and be baptized" in Acts 2:38. Turning to God is associated with baptism in Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 1 Thess. 1:9. Following conversion, our works should match the profession of faith we have made. But there is no proof here for the equation 'Forgiveness = repentance + forsaking'. The "works" seem to refer to positive achievement rather than undoing the results of past failures. Works meet for repentance are fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:8 cp. Lk. 3:8). We have shown that there are different degrees of fruit/ repentance which God accepts, and that this fruit is brought forth to *God*, and that its development takes time. We cannot therefore disfellowship a believer for not bringing forth fruit in one aspect of his life.

16:21 *For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me-* The "cause" was that they had been called upon to repent, and their refusal to do so was leading them to try to kill Paul. This is how conscience works. We seek to eliminate the persons or issues causing our guilt, and which summon us to repentance. The opposition to Christian preaching is exactly because it is [or should be] a call to repentance.



26:22 *Therefore, having obtained the help that is from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should happen-* "The help that is from God" was the gift of the Spirit, both in cleansing Paul psychologically from his past, and in empowering him in his life's work of witness. Paul testified to the Lord Jesus (e.g. Acts 26:22; 1 Cor. 15:15 s.w.), and He in turn bore witness to the [preaching of] the word of his grace (Acts 15:8). In Paul's witness lay His witness. The reference to "small and great" is yet another hint that Paul is witnessing specifically at this time to "the great", his judges. And Paul insists that he is saying nothing radically new, and therefore Judaism ought to have no problem with him teaching what was in their own Scriptures.

26:23 *That the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles-* Elsewhere, Paul took a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although here in 26:23 he applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. And when on trial, Paul explained *his* preaching to the Jews "and then to the Gentiles" as being related to the fact that he had to "shew" the Gospel to them because Christ rose from the dead to "shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:20,23). In other words, he saw his personal preaching as shewing forth the light of Jesus personally.

The RV offers another slant on this. The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

We have suggested elsewhere that Paul was first called to the Gospel by the preaching of John the Baptist. He initially refused to heed the call to "do works meet for repentance". But, fully aware of this, he preached this very same message to others (Mt. 3:8 cp. Acts 26:20).

26:24 *And as he thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice: Paul, you are mad. Your much learning is turning you mad-* The loudness of the voice was surely a statement of the depth of unease within his conscience. Again, we see a basic psychological lesson: the louder a person shouts down another, the louder is the internal voice of their own disquiet at the truth being presented. Luke uses the same term in describing how the Jews "with loud voices" demanded both the Lord's crucifixion and the death of Stephen, who had likewise touched their consciences (Lk. 23:23; Acts 7:57). The reference to "much learning", much reading of words, may be a reference to how Paul perhaps had begged for the scriptures to be brought to him in his confinement, and he spent his time for those many months poring over the parchments. We recall how he begged Timothy to bring him such scrolls when imprisoned in Rome.

26:25 *But Paul said: I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but speak words of truth and soberness-* Point blank disagreement with a powerful judge who is shouting at you isn't a

smart thing to do. But Paul was there to witness, to seek to convert his judges, rather than to justify himself. If he were out for self-preservation, as are most men who stand in the dock, he would have let this accusation go unchallenged. But Paul is alluding to how he had been "exceedingly mad" before his conversion (:11); and now he was sane.

*26:26 For the king knows of these things, to whom also I speak freely. For I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him. For this has not been done in a corner-* Paul is really out to convert the king; he says that the king knows the truth of all he is saying, and appeals for him to be honest to his conscience and not kick against the goads. The king was of course appraised of the situation with Paul- everybody knew that. So "none of these things is hidden from him" more naturally refers to the truth of the appeal Paul is making to him.

Paul exhorts us to speak 'freely' in our preaching (2 Cor. 3:12), just as he himself "spoke freely" in his witness to Agrippa. He there is our pattern. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves. "Having, then, such hope, we use much freedom of speech" in preaching (2 Cor. 3:12 YLT).

Despite this direct and emotional appeal, Paul still framed it in terms understandable by his audience; "this has not been done in a corner" is a quotation from Plato.

*26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe-* This suggests that Paul in full flow, even shackled and in prison clothes, had a fleck of arrogance and aggression in his presentation. He was challenging the very conscience of his king and judge. To ask a personal question like that of your king-judge was just not to be done in court. It would be judged today as contempt of court. But Paul was not standing there in self-defence, but for witness, all out to persuade towards faith in Christ. And that is what our witness should be; not self-defending our theological positions, but earnestly seeking to persuade towards faith in our hearers. How did Paul know that Agrippa believed the prophets? Was there an awkward silence in response to his question? Or was Paul being purely rhetorical, hastening on to say that he knew or recognized that Agrippa claimed to believe the Jewish prophets. We can assume that Luke's highly abbreviated account of the trial has left out frequent quotation from the prophets by Paul, in order to demonstrate that the Lord had to die, rise again and be witnessed to by the members of His glorified body.

*26:28 And Agrippa said to Paul: You almost persuade me to become a Christian-* Paul was not against using persuasion; he didn't just 'preach the truth' and leave it for others to decide. Agrippa commented: "With but a little [more] persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little [persuasion] or with much, not only thou but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am" (Acts 26:28,29 RV). Paul wasn't against using persuasion to bring men unto his Lord, and neither should we be. He didn't just make a lame witness to true propositions and leave it to his audience to believe or disbelieve it.

Agrippa's words "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" may have been muttered as an aside; and they may have been a total departure from how a king-judge is supposed to act in court. The power of Paul's testimony was such that even he had to admit the effect it

was having upon him. We can be encouraged that the message we preach is of huge power in the consciences of others, regardless of all the apparent disinterest. If you stand on a street corner handing out fliers advertising a product, people will be mildly polite in covering their disinterest. But when they see it's about religion or Christianity... their body language often changes. And if they read further what is on the tract, their response is utterly unlike the response observable in a person reading a flier advertising a product for sale.

*26:29 And Paul said: I will pray to God, that whether in a little time or a longer time, not you only, but also all that hear me this day might become as I am (apart from these chains)-* This was Paul's whole intention. His ambition to make converts knew no bounds. He wasn't only going for Agrippa... he wished the entire audience, including the Jews, would follow his example and path of conversion. They too could stop kicking against the goads of their own consciences and be released into the wonderful freedom of the bondservants of the Lord Jesus. "Apart from these chains" is one of several times when Paul's deep frustration with his situation cannot help but come through. He wasn't appealing for release- for he had appealed to be heard by Caesar, knowing this meant yet more prison time. He made that appeal in order for the Gospel to spread; but he paid a great price for it, willingly. For his "chains" were a deep frustration to him. But he was willing to endure them longer, so that the Gospel could be spread on the very highest levels of the world in which he lived.

*26:30 And the king rose up and the governor and Bernice and they that sat with them-* The rising up of the judge was to signal that the proceedings were over. We are left with the impression that there was no summing up speech by the judge; just a hasty and abrupt end to the proceedings, with Paul having had the last word in :29, in appealing for conversion. The abrupt ending of the court proceedings is a powerful testimony to the power of Paul's witness. He had so touched the consciences of his judges that the trial was ended in a moment. Surely no other accused person has ever achieved anything like this in human history; bearing in mind that his judges were the most powerful political rulers in his area.

*26:31 And when they had withdrawn, they spoke to each other, saying: This man does nothing worthy of death or of imprisonment-* We can imagine them chatting things over later that evening, over coffee [or whatever], as it were. Again Luke is making the point that Paul chose to appeal to Caesar because he wanted to visit Rome in order to witness to the Gospel there, and perhaps he had some idea of getting Christianity legally recognized as a religion just as Judaism was. Perhaps we should give due weight to the present tense, "does nothing"; there obviously had to be some reason given in the documentation accompanying Paul's case, but the reasons given would have to result to alleged past behaviour rather than anything ongoing. The anti-Christian legislation of Nero was yet to come. Agrippa and Festus obviously didn't want their private chat with each other broadcast; and yet here it is, recorded publicly for all generations. Perhaps Luke initially got his information from Agrippa or a source close to him. Perhaps he became a secret believer. In 28:18 Paul speaks as if it were common knowledge that Agrippa and Festus would have released him had he not appealed to Caesar. Or perhaps inspiration beamed this information into Luke. He is obviously drawing parallels with how the Roman powers found no fault in the Lord Jesus, but Jewish insistence all the same led to His death. It could be another way of emphasizing that Paul's imprisonment and final demise was ultimately the fault of the Jews and not the Romans. They truly were the great satan / adversary to the Lord's work in the first century- and are often referred to as such. The extended record of Paul's trials demonstrates that Claudius Lysias,

Festus and Agrippa all concluded Paul was innocent; but it was Jewish envy and political machinations, therefore, which kept him imprisoned.

26:32 *And Agrippa said to Festus: This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar-* See on :31. Again the connections are with the Lord's death; Pilate was determined to set the Lord at liberty (Acts 3:13 s.w.), but the Jews machinated so that Roman power was overridden. Surely Paul perceived the connections at the time, and would have taken great encouragement from realizing that his sufferings were those of his Lord. And we are to understand our life experience likewise. Paul was so frustrated by the "chain" of his imprisonment, and we are left to wonder whether he would have been better not to appeal to Caesar, not to force through the fulfilment of the Lord's words that he must bear witness in Rome, and allow the Lord's word of promise to come true in His own way and time. This may have allowed him a few more years of powerful ministry. Looking back at our own lives, we can see how the paths taken could have been so much more effective if we had not tried to force things through in our own strength.

## ACTS CHAPTER 27

27:1 *And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan Regiment-* The Beza codex adds that Paul was handed over to Julius the very next day after the trial before Agrippa. The theme of haste noted in chapter 26 continues. Luke uses the pronoun "we" very frequently in this chapter; the events clearly left a deep mark upon him. It is a fine testament to his loyalty to Paul that he continued with him through all this. Julius may well have been present at the trial before Agrippa; and none present there would have been unmoved by Paul's witness. Indeed, most of the centurions mentioned in the New Testament came to faith in Christ. The "other prisoners" may have been men condemned to death who were to die in sport as gladiators to entertain Caesar. Julius clearly realized Paul was different to them.

27:2 *And embarking in a ship from Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the places on the coast of Asia, we put to sea; Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us-* "Adramyttium" means 'the house of death'. We are set up to expect the account to be a parable of salvation- and we are not disappointed. Aristarchus had been with Paul throughout the two years of his imprisonment (20:4) and now went with Paul to Rome, where he was his "fellow prisoner" and co-worker still (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24). This kind of huge commitment between persons is only genuinely elicited by our relationship in the Lord Jesus. The huge interpersonal commitment of Christian marriage is another example.

27:3 *And the next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and refresh himself-* "Refresh" translates Greek which suggests he may have been ill. Perhaps Paul's weak health was one reason why Luke the physician travelled with him. This would have been Paul's first taste of freedom for over two years, having been imprisoned all that time in Caesarea. To get to Sidon in one day meant they had a very good wind- for it was 70 miles. The believers there may have been converted in the wake of the Lord's visit to that area in Mt. 15:21.

27:4 *And putting to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary-* Luke repeatedly uses correct nautical terms in the account, presumably picked up by him from discussion with the sailors. The whole record has the ring of truth to it, as we would expect from the inspired word.

27:5 *And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia-* Some commentators suggest "Myra" is another name for Smyrna. According to the Lord's letter to them in Rev. 2:8, they were the only one of the seven churches to whom He had nothing negative to say. They were strong in the faith, although facing problems from the Jew who were of "the synagogue of satan". Paul's journey to Rome is characterized by meetings with other Christians all the way. Yet there is no mention of any such meeting here. Perhaps the situation with the Jew there was too explosive. Or perhaps he didn't know them personally, or for whatever reason, they didn't meet up; rather like Abraham and Melchizedek sharing the same faith but apparently not having much to do with each other in their lives although they were both genuine believers.

27:6 *And there the centurion found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy; and he put us*

*onboard-* How would a ship from Alexandria be sailing to Italy via Myra? It could be that there had been a major storm which had blown it seriously off course; and this was a Divinely intended warning to the sailors not to tempt providence by risking storms further. We see here how God works; He warned the sailors through Paul as well as through this incident not to attempt the journey, and yet when they insisted, He still worked through their wrong choices- as He does in human life today. And we can add into this nexus Paul's prayer for a "prosperous journey" to Rome (Rom. 1:10). The essence of this prayer was heard ultimately, in that Paul arrived alive; but not in the sense that Paul had perhaps intended. And likewise with so many of our prayers. See on :10.

*27:7 And when we had sailed slowly many days and had come with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone-* The problems with severe winds ought to have been a warning that the wind of the Spirit was not blessing this voyage; but the sailors weren't perceptive to that. The continual information about the winds makes us think of how God makes His Angels winds / spirits (Ps. 104:4).

*27:8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea-* The fact Paul speaks to Titus with such authority regarding matters in Crete suggests he had been instrumental in starting the work there. For he is careful not to get involved in any pastoral work which was the responsibility of others, and he did not build upon others' foundations (2 Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:20). His mission and vision was to begin the Lord's work afresh in each place- no bad policy for any true missionary. But when was Paul in Crete? The only time mentioned is during his journey to Rome, when they stayed for a short time near Lasea (Acts 27:7-9), but because it was such a small place and not much fun to spend the Winter in, the sailors wished to sail further along Crete towards the larger port of Phenice (Acts 27:12). It was whilst trying to sail there that they got blown right off course and ended up on Malta. It would seem that during the stay near Lasea at the inlet known as Fair Havens, Paul preached in Crete. It would have been no more than a village. And from that work there arose churches throughout Crete, for Titus was to "appoint elders in every city". They were pushing towards Rome, and so they surely would not have spent long at Fair Havens. And yet there is a strange turn of phrase about their stay there in Acts 27:9: "Now when much time was spent...". The modern versions seek to avoid the difficulty by suggesting that much time had been spent on the journey overall; but the Greek really suggests that they had spent "much time" at Fair Havens. They hadn't, really. But it was a significant amount of time from God's viewpoint, because as a result of this witness, several churches developed. And the witness began in a remote village, a mere anchorage rather than a harbour, near Cape Leonda, from where they had to walk five miles to the nearest shops in Lasea, itself little more than a village by modern standards. And from that remote spot the Gospel spread throughout the island. This to me has the hallmark of the divine.

*27:9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them-* Pliny records that long distance sailing was supposed to finish on the Day of Atonement; and seeing that this was the only Jewish feast which involved fasting, it is likely that they set sail just after the day of Atonement (so the Greek implies). The Day of Atonement was on the 10th day of the seventh Jewish month. We can assume that they left Lasea (:8) on about the 12th day of the seventh month, just after the day of Atonement on the 10th, when navigation was supposed to cease. But three days later (:19), Paul and Luke were throwing overboard the loose tackling of the ship, in the midst of the storm. This would have been the fifteenth day of the seventh month; exactly when the feast of

Tabernacles began. This feast lasted seven days (Ez. 45:25 styles it "the feast of the seven days"). During that period, Paul and Luke were probably fasting, and doubtless sharing in the fear which gripped that vessel. It was obviously impossible to keep the feast. The sensitive Jewish-Christian mind of the first century would immediately have picked up on this; and if he (or she) grasped the idea that these events were parabolic, they would have seen in this the powerful demonstration that in the ship of Christ it is impossible to go on keeping the Mosaic feasts.

*27:10 And said to them: Gentlemen, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives-* As noted on :6, God works with human prayer and decision making, even when it is less than ideal. The Lord had told Paul that there would be loss of life; but thanks to Paul's prayer, no life was lost (:24,44). Just as the destruction of Nineveh didn't happen, because God is so sensitive to human prayer and repentance.

*27:11 But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul-* The owner was presumably being paid well for the journey and so was eager to get the contract; he therefore wanted to move on quickly, even if it was just down the coast a bit. "Gave heed" translates better as to believe or be persuaded by. Luke uses the phrase six times earlier, of how people believed or were persuaded by the things spoken by Paul. It could be that he is being presented as effectively disbelieving God's word as spoken by Paul. By the end of the journey, surely this centurion came to believe God's word and convert.

*27:12 And because the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbour of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and to winter there-* Verse 12 in the AV says that their temporary harbour "was not commodious" to stay in, so they left, "if by any means they might attain to Phenice". Given the parable of salvation being worked out here, I just don't think it's accidental, or irrelevant, that this very phrase was used by Paul a few years (or months?) later, once he got to Rome and sat down to write to the Philippians. He wrote of how he struggled to know the real spirit of Christ's self-crucifixion, having counted all the things of this life as dung, losing them all so that he might know the real mind of the crucified Christ, "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*" (Phil. 3:11). The horrific memory of the shipwreck would have stayed with him all his days. Under the Spirit's guidance, he would have recalled the spirit in that ship, as they all set sail if by any means they might attain unto Phenice. That run down old town of 'Fair Havens', its name promising what it certainly wasn't, full of lonely old men sitting in cheap tavernas... it must have been some depressing place, to make the sailors take the risk of sailing further on in such unpredictable weather. We might be able to imagine or remember towns like that which we know. And that run down ghost-town, Paul said, was typical of how we should see our lives in the world, worth making any sacrifice to leave, if by any means we might attain to a better resting place.

*27:13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close inshore-* As noted on :11, the decision is painted in terms of refusing God's word as spoken by Paul, and instead seeing their own way in their own strength; they seized / forced [Gk.] *their* purpose or will, rather than God's. It could be argued that Luke perceived that Paul himself had rather failed in this area, and these

sailors did likewise. The whole experience was to show the triumph of the grace of God's will over all human strength and device.

27:14 *But after a short time there beat down a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo-* This record of Paul's shipwreck is written in a way which is not just a narrative of certain historical events. All through there are phrases and ideas which connect with other Scripture. If you look at this whole story from a macro perspective, as it were half shut your eyes and just see the general outline, some bells should start ringing. There were a group of sailors, with an immensely spiritual man in their midst, caught in a freak, unexpected storm which threatened their life, filled with panic and desperation. Then the spiritual man stands up in their midst and inspires them with his words, and on his account they are saved by God and miraculously reach land. Our minds go back to the storm on Galilee, with the Lord Jesus standing up in the midst of those terrified men. And when we analyse the record in detail, we find this similarity confirmed. "A tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" 'beat' (Gk., AVmg.) against the ship (:14). The same Greek word for "beat" occurs in Mk.4:37, in the record of the Galilee storm. The disciples' comment must have been echoed by Paul's fellow passengers: "What manner of man is this...?" . Closer study of Mk. 4:37-41 reveals many links with Jonah's experience; and Acts 27 also has connections with this, admittedly different ones.

Euraquilo is also called Euroclydon, as AV. The Greek *clydon* is used in the Septuagint for the storm Jonah was in (Jonah 1:4).

27:15 *And when the ship was caught, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and were driven along-* As noted on :11 and :13, one feature of this account is the grace of God in saving people who have tried to force through their own path in their own strength. They were rendered increasingly helpless, until they finally cut off the ropes of their lifeboat / skiff and surrendered themselves completely to God's grace, casting themselves into the water [cp. baptism, in this parable of salvation]. They had to give way to the wind and be driven by it; and remember the connection in Hebrew between wind and spirit. They were driven to salvation by the Spirit, thanks to the prayer and witness of Paul amongst them. "Caught" uses the same word used in 8:39 of how the Lord's Spirit caught away Philip. They "were driven along", just as the prophets were driven along by the Spirit (s.w. 2 Pet. 1:21). They could not turn their faces to fight against that wind / spirit. This is not to say that human freewill plays no part in the final equilibrium of our salvation. But on the other hand, unless God brings us to that salvation, we are too weak of ourselves to get there by a sequence of correct freewill decisions made from the steel of our own will. And in this case, salvation would be by works rather than grace.

27:16 *And running under the lee of a small island called Clauda, we were able, with difficulty, to secure the skiff-* The skiff / lifeboat was rowed parallel to the ship in order to ensure that it was not going to hit rocks; for the ship was hugging the coast as close as possible. "Secure" is literally 'to become masters of'. The whole account reflects the struggle of human strength for mastery being subsumed beneath the power of God's spirit, driving people to realize that human strength cannot save.

27:17 *And when they had hoisted it up, they used supports to undergird the ship; and fearing that they would be cast upon the Syrtis sandbar, they lowered the sail and so were driven by*



*the wind-* "Driven" is the same word as used in :15; as noted there, the whole parable of salvation here speaks of being driven towards it, albeit through a terrifying journey at times. The theme of human strength and ingenuity failing them is repeated here- they had to hoist up the lifeboat. The supports or ropes used to undergird the ship were again their human strength and wisdom; finally, they did not save the ship from being broken up.

27:18 *The next day as we were being violently tossed by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo-* The record of Paul's shipwreck is described in language which clearly reflects the LXX description of Jonah's sea voyage (here, these words = Jonah 1:5); to suggest that like Jonah, Paul was also fellowshiping the cross. Paul made a supreme effort to fellowship the Lord Jesus, to absorb the spirit of Christ deeply into his own mind. God confirmed him in his efforts, by working in his life to give him circumstances which recalled the experiences of Christ, and which thereby encouraged him to do this even more successfully. The progressive lightening of the ship by throwing everything overboard (:18,38) is a clear link back to Jonah 1:5. On the Lord's own authority, we can interpret Jonah as a type of Christ, who saved the ship's crew (cp. the church) by jumping overboard to his three day death (cp. Christ). Thus the boat passengers in both Jonah and Acts 27 represent ourselves, and their physical rescue points forward to our spiritual salvation. See on :34 and :44.

27:19 *And the third day with their own hands they threw overboard the tackle of the ship-* "Tackle" is translated "great sheet" in 10:11; they were presumably using this in addition to the sail in order to try to get some control over their direction. And now they were without even that, and totally at the Lord's mercy as to their direction.

27:20 *And when neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was now taken away-* One of the signs that they were nearing the end of their ordeal was that "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared". Now this sounds very much like Lk. 21:25-27: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the... stars... the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear... then look up... then shall they see the Son of man coming". The parable of salvation is developed by all the references to "saved" (:31,34,43,44; 28:1,4).

27:21 *And after they had been without food for a long time-* On the voyage to Rome, it was only after much "abstinence" (AV) that Paul openly preached to the crew and other prisoners- as if he struggled against a shyness in public testifying. See on Acts 18:4,5. Yet as Paul stood on that cold, windswept deck, shouting above the noise of the wind, you get the picture of a man whose magnetism was fully effective on that rough crowd of seamen and prisoners. Such was his authority that a word from him resulted in them ditching the lifeboat; the only human chance of salvation. Once they did that, they were completely dependent on the spiritual vision of this extraordinary man Paul. See on :36.

*Paul stood in the midst of them and said: Gentlemen, you should have listened to me, and not have set sail from Crete and gained this injury and loss-* It is difficult for us to imagine what that fortnight in the storm was like. Verse 21 speaks of the "harm" [[NEV "injury"]] which they experienced, using a Greek word which is usually used about mental harm or damage. They were deeply perplexed in mind and body. Their helplessness amidst the fury of those winds is brought home by the Spirit: "We let (the ship) drive... and so (we) were driven... being exceedingly tossed with a tempest...no small tempest lay on us (i.e. smothered us)... we

were driven up and down in Adria". Our brief life of probation is described in widely different terms by the Spirit. Here we get the idea that it is a totally horrific experience, full of fear, first of one thing (e.g. of grounding on quicksands), and then of another (being broken on rocks). In other places our experience of life now is likened to a plodding on through the wilderness, in others to a short sharp battle, in others to the monotonous tramping out of corn by an ox, the patient waiting of the farmer, or the lonely, dogged endurance of the long distance runner. And in yet other passages we are promised a life of "all (possible) joy and peace through believing", dashing on from victory to victory, more than conquerors, caught up with the ecstasy of the triumphant march in Christ, all our lives long. We must see our experience of spiritual life in holistic terms, we mustn't just emphasize one of these aspects. The way these different aspects all merge together in our spiritual experience is, to me, one of the most wonderful things about a balanced life in the Truth. An unbalanced approach will lead to us doggedly clinging on to the doctrines of the Truth, rejecting any suggestion that there should be an element of spiritual rapture and ecstasy in our lives. Or it may lead to an over emotional, watery sort of spirituality which reacts against any hint that we ought to be gritting our teeth and holding on to our faith, fearing the ferocious satan of our own evil natures.

*27:22 And now I encourage you to be of good courage. For there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship-* The way in which Paul twice encouraged them "be of good cheer" (:22,25) as they huddled together breaking bread is also quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus, in the same context (Jn. 16:33); and remember that Jesus also said those words when the disciples were struggling in another great storm (Mk. 6:50). See on :34,35.

*27:23 For this night there stood by me an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve-* "Whose I am" was understood by Paul to be on the basis that he had been purchased for His service by the sacrifice of His Son (1 Cor. 6:19,20). He may well have explained that to them. His idea was that as a bound prisoner, he was still serving his God, and therefore that God would protect him, because he was on a mission for Him. Even within apparent constricture as a result of the ties that bind us in life situations, we are still on the Father's active service. We wonder why an angel appeared, when at 23:11 it was the Lord Jesus Himself who appeared to Paul and encouraged him that he would surely bear witness at Rome. Perhaps the pagan mariners were more likely to accept the idea of an angel appearing, as a messenger of the gods, than to accept the direct appearance of the Lord Jesus to Paul. The focus here upon God rather than the Lord Jesus was perhaps in order to witness to the pagans in terms they could more easily relate to- which were to God rather than His Son. Paul's words here are surely alluding to those of Jonah in a similar situation (Jonah 1:9). There are plenty of other Jonah allusions in the chapter. Paul realized that this storm was in a sense for his sake; even though it could be argued from a more human viewpoint that it was the fault of the misjudgement of the crew and owner. We too at times may wonder whether a certain situation is our fault, or debate whose fault it is. The answers are never clear; the question is too nuanced. Especially when God's hand is involved. And so here too, the storm was in a sense for Paul's sake, but also for the potential salvation of all on the boat.

*27:24 Saying: Fear not Paul. You must stand before Caesar-* The Angel was repeating the Lord's words to Paul of 23:11. We are left to imagine the Lord Jesus in heaven itself with the Angels around Him, aware of His words and visitation of Paul; and now repeating their Lord's words. I have argued earlier that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome to witness to

Christianity. And the Lord took on board that wish, and although the path taken by Paul to achieve it [through appealing to a hearing by Caesar] was not ideal, He still went along with Paul and would enable it, through all the trauma of the shipwreck.

*And God has granted you the lives of all those who sail with you-* As God gave Paul all the men who sailed with him, so we have been given to the Lord Jesus. Of those whom God gave the Lord Jesus, He lost none (Jn. 17:12). This verse is clear evidence of salvation for the sake of third parties (as Mk. 2:5 and often).

*27:25 Therefore gentlemen, be of good courage. For I believe God, that it shall be even as it has been spoken to me-* Mary was an inspiration to Paul in this (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25). The Angel spoke on God's behalf and Paul reflected on the memory of the words spoken that night, and believed. Perhaps the implication was "I believe God's word- and I am now asking you to do so also". Faith means believing in the Divine word of promise; if they could believe this word, then they should then believe His word of promise in His Son.

*27:26 But we must be cast upon a certain island-* The Lord's partial revelation of truth is not Him playing hard to get, as it were. He didn't tell Paul that the island was called Malta. He led Paul, as He led Abraham and ourselves, in baby steps. And this withholding of information wasn't because the sailors had never heard of Malta. Some of them would have done, for Valetta was a known harbour in the Roman world (as is evident from the fact that a ship called in there next shipping season, 28:11). It was the part of Malta they arrived at which was unknown to the sailors.

*27:27 But when the fourteenth night had arrived, as we were driven to and fro in the sea of Adria, about midnight, the sailors sensed that they were drawing near to some land-* The "But" shows that faith in the promise of Divine deliverance was being sorely tested; two weeks went by with no answer. The assurance of salvation wasn't given the night before they came near to Malta; it was given two weeks beforehand, to test their faith in the word of promise. And in essence that is how God operates with us; for His salvation is articulated to us through the words of promise to Abraham which were confirmed in the new covenant. The mention of "the fourteenth night" and "midnight" all recall the language of the Passover deliverance; hence Paul's invitation to them to partake in a breaking of bread meeting, in imitation of the Passover meal (:35).

*27:28 And they sounded and found thirty meters; and after a little space, they sounded again and found twenty five meters-* This is exactly the progressive depth of St. Paul's Bay in Malta to this day; an impressive evidence of the accuracy of the Biblical record.

*27:29 And fearing that we should run aground on the rocks, they let go four anchors from the stern and wished for daylight-* Given the strength of the storm, it might seem unlikely that four anchors could hold the ship. But St. Paul's Bay in Malta is characterized by clay and not sand. The account has every whiff of credibility. "Wished for daylight" could be translated "prayed for the day to come"- replete with latter day references. But the immediate reference is surely to their prayer [inspired by Paul's example, and praying presumably to the God Paul had taught them of] that the boat would not break apart that night, until the daylight came and they could see how they could best get ashore.

On that last night, the sailors prayed for the day to dawn (v.29 Gk., RVmg.). "The day" is an idiom for the Kingdom in Rom. 13:12. This fits in alongside the many other connections between intense prayer and the second coming. If we *know* Christ, then we will long to share his glory, we will long to see his beauty with our own eyes. So *are we* praying earnestly for the day to dawn? Or are we just content with the knowledge that it will come, like a slow train coming? Those men prayed for the dawn so intently because they knew that if the winds blew for much longer, they just couldn't hold on, they would be swept away. They feared "lest we should be cast on rocky ground" (Acts 27:29 RV)- replete with reference to the parable of the sower. There are many indications that the body of Christ will be weak and sickly when he returns.

*27:30 And as the sailors were seeking to abandon the ship and had lowered the skiff into the sea, under pretence that they would lay out anchors from the foreship-* It was on the very last, fourteenth night, that some in the ship lost their faith in Paul. They tried to get away from the ship in the lifeboat, "under colour as though they would have cast (more) anchors out" (v.30 AV). The Greek for "under colour as though" is always used elsewhere in the context of spiritual pretence, especially in prayer (Mk. 12:40; Mt. 23:14; Lk. 20:47). Under the appearance of trying to make the salvation of the others more certain (by casting more anchors), these men were trying to leave the ship because they honestly thought that the rest of them stood no chance. Is there here some prophecy of how just prior to the Lord's return, some will try to leave the body of Christ, under the appearance of spiritually strengthening the rest of us? But the watchful Paul spotted what was going on, and somehow got them to abandon it.

27:31- see on Acts 15:1.

*Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers: Except these stay in the ship, you cannot be saved-* This sounds like the Lord's words of Jn. 15:6: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth..." . But there is a twist here in :31; as if our all remaining together in the Christ-ship is somehow related to our collective salvation. We see here the evil and collective damage of division, of trying to go our separate ways to salvation, thinking only of ourselves.

*27:32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off-* As noted earlier, salvation was achieved for these men after all human hope was abandoned. As they saw the skiff drifting away from them, disappearing beneath the waves, they would have realized their only hope was in Paul's God and in His word of promise. We likewise are led in our lives to the point where all human strength fails, and we cast ourselves upon the Lord's salvation promise with total faith and trust. The record has much to say about this skiff, which functioned also as a lifeboat. They had trusted in it to keep them from hitting rocks as they hugged the coast at the start of their voyage; and now it appeared their only hope of escape. But they now cut off the ropes and let it drift away. There was no discernible practical reason for doing this; it was done in response to Paul's command that salvation was only to be had in the ship and not in the lifeboat (:31).

*27:33 And while the day was dawning, Paul pleaded with them all to take some food, saying: This day is the fourteenth day that you wait and continue fasting, having eaten nothing-* As

noted on :27, the emphasis on "the fourteenth day" was to draw connections with the Passover deliverance, on account of Moses (cp. Paul- Heb. 11:28) and the blood of the lamb. Paul was presenting himself as Moses and the meal he offered them was like the Passover meal. But he wanted them to perceive the power of the invisible slain lamb. The fact they had been fasting may have been because they were all desperately praying to their various gods, just as the sailors with Jonah did. The challenge to stop fasting to those gods and take the Passover was therefore a religious challenge to them.

*27:34 Therefore, I beg you to take some food. For this is for your health-* When Paul tells them to eat food "for your health", he uses the Greek word normally translated "salvation". The whole incident is a parable of salvation. See on :44. The gods they were fasting to (see on :33) could not save.

*For not a hair shall perish from the head of any of you-* I get the feeling that there are times when Paul consciously alludes to Christ's words, and appropriates them to himself. For example, here we read of how he promised them that "not an hair (would) fall from the head" of any of them, just as the Lord promised His disciples (Lk. 21:18); see on :22.

*27:35 And when he had said this and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat-* The uncanny appeal and authority of Paul is brought out when we consider the implication of this: Paul prayed in the presence of them *all*, all 275 of them, presumably mustered on the deck, and then solemnly ate in front of them, passing the food on to them. See on :43.

Paul's 'breaking of bread' on the doomed ship in Acts 27 is described in terms evidently designed to recall the "breaking of bread" service. On the 14th night (cp. the 14th Nisan), Paul took, blessed, broke and shared the bread- all terms associated with the "breaking of bread" in a religious sense. Further, the word *eucharistes* is used here in :35 to describe Paul's giving of thanks, and this is the word elsewhere used about the breaking of bread service. This is not the usual word used for simply giving thanks for a meal, but has religious overtones. "I urge you to take some food" uses *metalaibein* which literally means not to just "take" but to "receive one's share in"- the same express used by Luke in describing the early breaking of bread meetings in Acts 2:46. We can immediately perceive a witness element to this "breaking of bread". Paul was surrounded by people who were despairing of their lives, who had not eaten for some time either because of seasickness or from fasting to various gods for safety. And in the midst of those people he proclaims Christ to them through the breaking of bread, urging their participation, and thereby using the breaking of bread just as the Lord Jesus did- to draw people further into God's plan of salvation.

The same Greek words for "break bread" are used in the healing miracles, where Jesus broke bread and gave it to the crowds (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and for how Jesus took bread and broke it at a meal with the Emmaus disciples (Lk. 24:30); those two words are also used to describe how Paul 'broke bread' with the passengers and crew onboard ship (Acts 27:35). So the evidence would seem to be that the meals of Jesus [which were open to all, sinners included] were of the same category and nature as the memorial meal known as "the breaking of bread"- for the same phrase 'breaking bread' is used (Mt. 26:26; Acts 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). The same rubric of taking bread, blessing and giving to the disciples is found in the feeding miracles as in the Last Supper, and in the Lord's post-resurrectional eating with the couple in Emmaus- as well as in Paul's exposition of the Christian "breaking of bread" which we have in 1 Cor. 11. Mark's Gospel seeks to draw a parallel between the Lord's

feeding miracles and the last supper “breaking of bread”. In each account, there is the same action recorded: Taking, blessing, dividing and giving out (Mk. 6:41-44 cp. Mk. 14:22-25). That same four fold theme is to be found in the “breaking of bread” which Paul shared on the stricken ship in Acts 27:33-37, where we note that how he “gave thanks” is described using the verb *eucharisteo*.

27:36 *Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves*- His repeated exhortation "Be of good cheer... be of good cheer" (:22,25) was taken to heart by them: "Then were they all of good cheer" (AV). And like a father with sick children, Paul got them, against their will initially, to sit down to a good wholesome meal.

27:37 *And in all we were two hundred and seventy six persons on the ship*- This may be a reference to some taking of an inventory of all on ship, so that they could work out who if any had perished once they got to land. Such a head count would have been the responsible thing to do knowing that they were soon going to have to issue an "abandon ship" order. But it could be argued that this was a lack of full faith in the Lord's word of salvation which Paul had shared with them.

The significance of 276 isn't immediately apparent. It is a triangular number, triangle of 23. And many of the numbers in the New Testament are also triangle numbers. But I have constantly drawn attention to the fact that this is a parable of salvation, and those in the ship represent the redeemed. I am therefore inclined to go with the alternative reading of 70 provided by the Western Text; for 70 is the number of the Gentile nations in Gen. 10 and the number of bullocks offered for the ingathering ritual. Joseph A. Fitzmyer explains: "The Western Text, MS B, the Sahidic version, and Epiphanius [310-403] read rather: “we were about seventy persons.” This Western Text reading seems to have risen from a dittography of the *omega* on the dative *ploiō*, “ship,” after which the cipher for 76 was written so that it was combined with *s* (= *diakosiai*, “two hundred”) and taken as the adverb *hōs*. Other readings: MS A reads “275,” and MS 69, “270.” (*The Acts of the Apostles (Anchor Bible)*, p. 779). This also solves the problem of such a large number of people on the boat, which was carrying grain rather than masses of passengers. 70 people is a more realistic number of people for Paul to address and break bread on a deck in the midst of a storm. For they "all" heard him. There would have been logistical problems for him to simultaneously address 276.

27:38 *And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea*- They were now throwing away their last food, and the wealth they had. For the owner of the ship was onboard, and to lose the ship and cargo was his ruin. But this too is part of our path towards final salvation- to abandon absolutely everything, left with not even anything to eat, no wealth, just us, and barely with the clothes they stood up in as they crawled up the Malta beach. "Eaten enough" recalls the Lord's feeding of the crowds, also a form of a breaking of bread service. The hint could be that they were fed to the full; and we hope that they continued their faith experience unto salvation at the last day.

27:39 *And when it was day, they did not recognise the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, and they took counsel whether they could drive the ship upon it*- The description of Malta as a “land which they knew not” (Acts 27:39 AV) is evidently similar to the account of Abraham going to a land which he knew not (Heb. 11:8,9). The land was a strange” land,

just as Malta was perceived as a “barbarous”, i.e. pagan, land (Acts 28:2). As soon as it was day, we read in v.39, they grounded the ship and swam to land, reaching their salvation at daybreak. This fits in to place alongside the many links between the second coming and daybreak. The men somehow sensed (“deemed”, :27) that they were approaching land. It is quite likely that the spiritually aware will have a sense of the nearness of Christ's return. Christ too referred to this when he spoke of how in the Spring we have an innate sense that Summer is coming; so, He reasoned, you will be able to sense my return. Now if we really *know* Christ, have a real two-way, ongoing relationship with him, as a pupil-disciple to his teacher-master, then we will surely have this sense. “They *drew near* to some country” really implies that they were being drawn near; the Greek word is always used elsewhere about the believer drawing close to the Lord. 1 Pet. 3:18 is the best example: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins... that he might *bring us* (same word) to God”. Now in our typology that would suggest that in some way Christ guides us into the Kingdom, helps us through the last lap. Watch out for other types and hints that this is the case. And talk about it to some dear old brother in his late eighties who’s known the Lord all his days.

And so finally, there they were, crawling up the shore on Malta, the waves breaking over their heads, the backwash pulling them back, but struggling on up the beach in the early hours of that morning, cold and soaked, perhaps with hypothermia setting in, but brimming over with the joy of their miraculous salvation. Now that is the picture, in this type, of our salvation. As we enter the Kingdom, we will be at our most bedraggled, the weakness of our natures will then be made fully apparent to us. “They knew not the land”, only once they were saved did they know the name of it (27:39; 28:1). As Abraham went forth into a land which he knew not, so in many ways we do not know much about the Kingdom, our salvation.

The sailors [=us] even at the very end disbelieved the prophecy that the ship would be destroyed- for they sought to “bring the ship safe to shore” (Acts 27:22,39 RVmg.). Even for the wise virgins, the coming of Christ awakes them from their spiritual slumber. Unless the days are shortened, even the elect will be carried away with the ways of the world (Mt. 24:22). If we can really see the spiritual dangers of the last days, if we can sense our real spiritual state, we will realize that we urgently need the coming of Christ, for the simple reason that we are all so weak spiritually that we will effectively lose our faith unless he's back soon. And in response to the elect's prayers, the days will be shortened. The Lord will help us through the final lap.

27:40 *And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosing the bands of the rudders; and hoisting up the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach-* The progressive abandonment of all human strength and hope of salvation continues. They had cut off the lifeboat, given up their last food [the wheat] and now they loosed the bands which they had earlier girded the ship with, abandoned their anchors, and were now left totally at God's mercy unto their salvation. This is all a parable of the Lord's ongoing work in our salvation.

We note the comment “To the wind”. The records of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome contains many references to winds being contrary. But at the very last part of the voyage to Malta, the wind saved them. It blew behind them. All the information about the wind must be understood in the context of the fact that the Hebrew and Greek words for wind and spirit are the same. The Spirit of God withstood Paul's plans; but still He saved Paul, and

now the wind blew behind Paul to achieve God's way of saving Paul, even though his chosen path was not the ideal. The Spirit still enabled him.

*27:41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground-* The desperate situation of Paul and those with him therefore points forward to an awful time of tribulation for the believers just prior to being 'saved' into the Kingdom. This climaxes in coming to the place where two seas meet (Acts 27:41)- surely a reference to the judgment seat. There, it becomes apparent what is to 'remain unmoveable' and what is to be 'broken' or dissolved. These very same Greek words occur in 2 Pet. 3:10-12, about the breaking up or dissolving of all things at the Lord's return; and of the unmoveable quality of the Kingdom which we shall receive, when all other things have been shaken to their destruction and dissolution (Heb. 12:27,28).

*And the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves-* Several times we read about them using the anchors. Then in :41 we read of the forepart sticking fast and remaining "unmoveable" . There are connections here with Hebrews 6:19, which speaks of the hope of the Gospel as "an anchor of the soul... which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" . The idea of Christ as a forerunner, the firstfruits, is surely to be connected with "the forepart" of the vessel remaining unmoveable. As they crawled up the shore on Malta, Paul and the others would have looked back to that unmoveable bow of the ship; perhaps they went to see it the next morning, as it stood proudly amid the calmed waters. That sight would have stayed with Paul; perhaps the Spirit used that memory when it inspired Paul to use the same Greek word (the only other occurrence in the NT) in Heb. 12:28: "We receiving a Kingdom which *cannot be moved*, let us *hold fast* " (AVmg.), as the bow of the ship "stuck fast" . This is all further proof that we should see the incidents of Acts 27 as parabolic of deeper spiritual things.

*27:42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape-* The soldiers had still not come to full faith. Paul had told them that God's will was that he should get to Rome; killing him at that stage was going against God's declared will. Even in the face of every evidence that Paul was God's man, they thought only of their immediate problems and fear of answerability to those above them if the prisoners escaped. The word translated "plan" is used by Luke of the plan / will to murder the Lord Jesus. But God's will was to again triumph over human will, as this whole account of the shipwreck demonstrates so often.

*27:43 But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stopped them from their purpose, and commanded that they who could swim should throw themselves overboard first and get to land-* According to 2 Cor. 11:25, Paul was in the 'swimmers' category.

Paul's magnetism [which represents that of the Lord, whom he represented in this parable of salvation] is most clearly shown by the Centurion being willing to allow all the prisoners to make their own way to land, rather than allow Paul to be killed. Of course our mind goes back to how the jailor at Philippi was literally on the verge of suicide because he just *thought* that his prisoners had escaped (actually, none of them had). Yet among those 275 desperate men, there must have been some who secretly despised Paul. The Centurion "kept them from *their purpose*" of killing Paul. This may suggest that even in their personal



desperation, some of the men on that ship were prepared to kill Paul, due to their own sense of inadequacy, and jealousy of his spirituality.

*27:44 And then the rest, some on planks and some on other things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safely to land-* Young's Literal Translation brings out the correct sense of Acts 28:1: "They, having been saved...". They escaped safely to "*the* land" (:44 Gk.), symbolic of the Kingdom. As noted often throughout this chapter, the whole incident is a parable of salvation. "All escaped" suggests that there was a roll call, and the figure of 276 was found (but see on :37). Salvation by clinging on to planks and the tree trunks used to construct the boat obviously connects with salvation through the tree / cross of the Lord. The casting into the sea may look forward to baptism, through which final salvation is arrived at. Through so much trauma in our lives, much of our own making.

## ACTS CHAPTER 28

28:1 *And when we had escaped-* Luke was on the ship. "Escaped" translates the Greek word usually used for salvation; there is clearly a sense in which the entire account of the shipwreck was seen as parabolic of the journey to salvation.

*Then we knew that the island was called Malta-* 'Land of honey'. In this case, the parabolic aspect of the shipwreck continues, with Malta becoming symbolic of Canaan.

28:2 *And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome-* Reflecting Luke's adoption of the common Roman idea that 'natives', non-Greeks who had not been brought into the Roman empire, were typically unkind and aggressive to strangers. Likewise the beliefs of the Gospel writers about demons and mental illnesses are reflected in the record without immediate, direct correction.

*Because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold-* The record holds together internally in a way that only a Divinely inspired account could. For it was because of the cold, as it was Winter, that the viper had hibernated and was mistaken in its frozen form for a stick; and it came to life near the heat of the fire.

28:3 *But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself onto his hand-* An old man, probably with sight problems and / or various other 'thorns in the flesh', it was not for him to run around gathering sticks for the fire. And in their culture, gathering of firewood was the work of women and children. But we see so much about his personality from the fact he did so.

Before a fire (at the burning bush), Moses experienced a rod becoming a snake and a snake becoming a rod. The similarities are intentional, confirming Paul that he, a shivering old man with no dry clothes to his name, was in fact seen by God as being as significant as Moses. Paul's letters reveal that he keenly perceived the similarities between himself and Moses- especially in his letter to the Romans. He was now on his way to Rome; and the Lord is confirming Paul in that perception.

28:4 *And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to each other: No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped from the sea-* The fact was, Paul was indeed a murderer, of Christians. The whole incident then becomes a testament to God's grace; he should have died then, justice would not permit him to live, he was in the grip of the snake of sin- but was saved by grace. This living parable was exactly what Paul had written to the Romans about grace in his relatively recent letter to them. We see here the Lord's providential action to help Paul perceive the living truth of what he had expounded in theory. 'Justice' translates *dike*, rightness, which is a major theme of Romans. Likewise the Lord works with us, to help us appreciate in reality the things we are taught in theory.

*Yet Justice has not permitted to live-* Acts 28:3–6 describes how a lethal snake attacked Paul, fastening onto his arm. The surrounding people decided Paul was a murderer, whom "vengeance suffers not to live". Their reading of the situation was totally wrong. But Paul did not explain this to them in detail; instead, he did a miracle – he shook the snake off without it biting him. The Lord Jesus did just the same in relation to the commonly held ideas about demons.

*28:5 However he shook off the creature into the fire and was unharmed-* Paul's calmness is wonderful. He truly believed the assurance of 27:24 that he would reach Rome. Paul's calmness may also have been on account of his belief in the promise of the great commission, that in discharging this, the Lord's people would be unharmed by poisonous snakes and would be able to take them up, just as Paul did here (Mk. 16:18).

*28:6 But they expected that he would have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but when they had waited a long time in expectation and saw nothing amiss came to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god-* We see again the fickleness of people; one moment, Paul was a murderer who deserved to die, minutes later he was a god, in their eyes.

*28:7 Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days-* Inscriptions with this title have been unearthed on Malta.

*28:8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. Paul came in to him and prayed, and laying his hands on him, healed him-* Word for word, Luke is repeating the descriptions of Ananias coming in to Paul, praying, laying his hands on him, and healing him (Acts 9:12,17). Paul is consciously reflecting the grace shown to him at the time of his conversion, many years ago. We too need to abide under the impression of the grace shown to us- and reflect it to others all our lives long. The beauty of this incident is that it would seem to me that this reflection of God's grace was made artlessly and unconsciously by Paul. See on 28:10 *They put on board*.

*28:9 And when this was done, the rest also that had diseases in the island came and were cured-* Note Luke's humility as a doctor. He would have been far better qualified than anyone on the island, and he likely rolled his eyes at the hygiene levels and nonsense medical theories entertained by the folks on that undeveloped island. But he was left ignored- the folk came to Paul, and were healed better than Luke could ever have healed them. Yet his focus is all upon the Lord's operations through another man, Paul. Luke the professional doctor is left merely noting it all down, playing no recorded part in the whole scene. And his record never betrays a single hint of hurt pride at his exclusion.

*28:10 They also honoured us with many honours; and when we sailed away, they put on board-* Gk. 'they laid upon'. It's the same word used for how Paul had laid his hands upon the father of Publius (:8). I explained there that Paul in turn had been copying what Ananias had done to him. And now, the people reflect the grace Paul had shown to them. This is the ripple effect of grace; the grace of Ananias [meaning 'the grace of God'] to Paul was reflected by Paul to the local people of Malta; and those people then reflected that grace to Paul and those with him.

*Such things as we needed-* The same word is used by Paul in boasting that his own hands had provided for things he needed, his "necessities", and also the needs of those with him (20:34). But now Paul is being humbled; as a prisoner, he can no longer provide for his necessities nor those of the people with him; they are provided by God by the grace of the wild pagans.

*28:11 And after three months we set sail in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered on the island, whose sign was Castor and Pollux-* Their original ship was originally from Alexandria, so it is likely that the sailors knew Malta. It was only the area they approached

which was unknown to them. As noted on 27:26, they were specifically not told what the name of the island was- in order to elicit faith. From Malta to Italy is not so far, but these other sailors wouldn't risk it over the Winter season; highlighting the folly of the sailors in attempting to reach Italy all the way from Palestine at that time. The twin brothers Castor and Pollux were the patron deities of sailors. Perhaps the fact is mentioned to highlight how the gods were unable to save after what they had all experienced. It was likely that images to them had featured on the original vessel that was lost; the spiritually perceptive would have realized that they really could not save.

28:12 *And landing at Syracuse, we stayed there three days-* There is historical evidence of Christian churches in Sicily from the late first century, and we can assume that they arose from Paul's witness there during this brief visit.

28:13 *And from there, we circled round and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli-* This is all evidence that the journey encountered yet more problems. Syracuse to Rhegium is a straight journey; but they circled around to get there. The same word is translated to wander. From Rhegium, they had to sail north to Puteoli; but a *south* wind blew, meaning they were sailing against the wind. As explained on 20:6, Paul's journey to Rome was against the wind / spirit all the way through. God went along with his desire to serve Him in this way, but Paul made the way hard for himself and encountered consistent opposition, in one sense, from God's Spirit / wind.

28:14 *There we found believers and were encouraged to stay with them seven days. And so we came towards Rome-* This is what true fellowship in Christ is about. Given the uncertainties of travel, they weren't expecting Paul; but he sniffed them out, and he stayed with them. We see the same spirit in :15.

28:15 *And from there the brothers, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and The Three Taverns. Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage-* When some members of the Rome ecclesia (who were rather weak, 2 Tim. 4:16) came to meet him at Appii, Paul took courage at the very sight of them; one gets the picture (from the Greek) of him seeing them, recognizing who they were, and feeling a thrill of courage go through his soul (Acts 28:15; note how Luke says "he" rather than "we", as if emphasizing that Paul was more encouraged than he was by these unknown brethren showing up). Here was no self-motivated old brother, indifferent to what his younger and weaker brethren could do for him by way of encouragement.

28:16 *And when we entered into Rome, Paul was permitted to live by himself, with the soldier that guarded him-* The same word in :3 for how once again, Paul was allowed as much freedom as possible, so that he could continue his mission as best he could.

28:17 *And it came to pass, that after three days he called together those that were the leaders of the Jews; and when they came together, he said to them-* One can only be impressed by the way that within only three days of arriving in Rome after an awesome journey, Paul began preaching by inviting the local Jews to come to him. He would have had so much else to attend to surely, quite apart from getting over the trauma of the journey. However, the speed with which he invites the Jews to him could also be judged to be reflective of the unhealthy obsession he had been nursing for some years to preach to the Jews in Rome. See on :20.

*Brothers, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers-* This appears to be presenting things in a way in which the Jews might be impressed. The fact is, Paul had taught against the customs [Gk. *ethos*] of the fathers. And that was why the Jews were mad with him. But Paul appears to come over wide eyed and innocent... and he may have overstated his case. Because circumcision was after the *ethos* of Moses and Paul taught this was not required for Gentile converts (Acts 15:1); the Jerusalem Jews had specifically complained that Paul taught Jews not to 'walk after the customs' (Acts 21:21).

*I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans-* We have to read in an ellipsis here; from [the hands of] Jerusalem [i.e. the Jerusalem, temple leadership] into the hands of the Romans.

28:18 *Who, when they had examined me, desired to set me free-* This may have been an exaggeration, in harmony with his exaggerated statement of innocence regarding the Jews in :17. Felix left Paul in prison in order to please the Jews (Acts 24:27) rather than trying to free him. If it were not an exaggeration, then Paul's insistence on going to Rome seems to reflect an obsession on his part, as often discussed in commentary on chapter 20.

*Because there was no cause for putting me to death-* The fact Paul died at Rome was therefore the more tragic, and suggests his insistence on going to Rome, despite the Spirit urging him not to, led to an earlier end to his ministry than perhaps was intended by the Lord.

28:19 *But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar. Not that I had something of which to accuse my nation-* This internal compulsion was from *his* spirit, and not the Lord's Spirit. It is the same word used about how he compelled Christians to blaspheme and murdered those who refused (26:11). The obsessive compulsion he felt about going to suffering and death at Rome via Jerusalem was therefore psychologically a reflection of his guilt over compelling the Christians to blaspheme. More psychoanalysis of the situation within Paul on 20:26 *I am pure*.

28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me-* The word translated "reason" as that translated "cause [of death]" in :18. Paul may mean that the whole reason he had appealed to Caesar was in order to get to Rome and preach to the Jews there, which is why as soon as he could on arrival in Rome he called for them. If only he had focused on his ministry to the Gentiles, and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, so much grief would have been avoided. He set himself the goal of preaching to Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost and Jews in Rome, capital of the world. And yet there were few Jews left in Rome- because Claudius had recently expelled Jews from Rome (18:2). So again, as explained in detail in comments on chapter 20, Paul's whole mission to Rome via Jerusalem just didn't work out. The money he collected for the Jews in Jerusalem caused huge problems and may never have been accepted by them; the wind was against his sailing all the way; there is no record of any successful witness by him in Jerusalem and maybe he missed the Pentecost feast; and here he admits his reason for appealing to Caesar was in order to preach to Jews in Rome. But they had been chased out of Rome, for the most part. And according to 28:28, Paul is disappointed at the response of the Jews and tells them it is better to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Which is what he was intended to do anyway.

*And speak with me-* Paul realized the methodology we use with people can affect their conversion. And he knew that personal contact was by far the best. "For this cause therefore did I entreat you to *see* AND to speak with me" (Acts 28:20 RV). He called men to have a

personal meeting with him, rather than just to hear the theory. Not just to hear him, but to *see* him... for we are the essential witnesses. Paul could have written to the Jews in Rome from prison, but he realized that true witness involves personal contact wherever possible.

*For because of the hope of Israel-* Or, "him for whom the people of Israel hope" (GNB). Messiah is certainly the Old Testament fulfilment of passages which speak of Israel's hope. Israel / Jacob's hope of Messiah was the hope of his life; "I have waited for Your salvation", 'Your Jesus', he commented (Gen. 49:18). Jacob describes the Christ as "the stone of Jacob / Israel" (Gen. 49:24); Jacob's physical stone had been overturned, rested upon, set up and anointed (Gen. 28:13-15); perhaps at the end of his life, Jacob thought back to that incident and saw in that stone a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps he even saw that the anointing, the 'Christ-ing' of the Stone would be after its raising up; he foresaw that the Lord Jesus would be made the Christ, the anointed, in the fullest sense by the resurrection (Acts 2:36). "The hope of Israel", or "he for whom Israel / Jacob hopes", is another title of Christ (Acts 28:20 cp. Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Joel 3:16); he was the one for whom Jacob / Israel hoped. And his hope is the hallmark of all the Israel of God. It may be that Paul used the phrase with reference to Jacob's Messianic expectations, seeing that in the essentially parallel Acts 26:6 Paul speaks of the hope of the promise made to the fathers. Thus Paul saw "the hope of the promise" as being "the one for whom Israel / Jacob hopes", i.e. Messiah (Jer. 17:13; Joel 3:16). Like Jacob, Paul saw the promises as essentially concerning the spiritual blessings achieved in Christ, rather than merely 'eternal life in the land of Israel'. His exposition of the promises in Gal. 3 follows the same pattern.

*I am bound with this chain-* As in 26:29, Paul's resentment about his limited freedom comes through.

28:21 *And they said to him: We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor did any of the brothers come here and report or speak any evil of you-* This total silence about Paul may have been because a person disfellowshipped from the synagogue ceased to exist, and was as it were dead and non-existent. But if they admitted that the sect of Christianity was well known (:22), then surely the name of Paul also was well known? They may however be responding in kind to Paul's rather untrue claim that he had done nothing wrong by Jewish customs (:17). It was surely axiomatic that if he had really done nothing to offend the Jews, then he would not have been delivered by them to the Romans.

28:22 *But we desire to hear of you what you think. For as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against-* If the sect of 'Christianity' was known empire-wide but we take on face value what the Jews say about Paul, that he was unheard of, then a rather different picture of Paul emerges than what many now hold. Today, the words 'Paul' and 'Christianity' go together, and he is perceived as the world's best known Christian. But we must not read back our current perceptions of him into the historical Paul. If indeed [and see on :21] what the Jews say about Paul is true on face value, then we are left with the conclusion that Paul was just a small cog in the large entity of 'Christianity'. The New Testament focuses upon him and the relatively few churches he founded, and records his letters to them. But Christianity was apparently an Empire wide force, according to the comment by the Jews of Rome recorded here in Acts 28:22. Yet Paul was unheard of in Rome. Paul would therefore appear to be one of many missionaries, but the Spirit chose to record so much about him because he was set up as a model for all believers. However, there are good reasons for thinking that the total number of Christians at the time of Paul's death was not much more than 20,000. Paul therefore would indeed have been a significant figure

within the community, and the blank response of the Roman Jews was therefore reflective of their view of Paul rather than of actual reality. Or it could be [and I am just discussing possibilities in this entire comment] that the actual words of the Jews are not specifically denying knowledge of Paul, but denying that the Jewish leadership had any issue with Paul.

“Spoken against” is the word used about Jews speaking against Christians; Paul has just used the word in this context (28:19) and it is used elsewhere about them (Acts 13:45; Rom. 10:21). So the Roman Jews surely meant that although the leadership had not informed them about Paul, they were aware that Jews everywhere spoke against Christianity. Luke is now ending Acts, and by saying that the church was “spoken against” he is connecting with how he started volume 1 of his work, by recording that the Lord Jesus personally would be “spoken against” (Lk. 2:34 s.w.). All that is said against the church is said and done against the Lord. The Lord Jesus is His church; that is a major theme of Luke-Acts.

*28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number. To whom he expounded the matter, testifying of the kingdom of God-* Paul must have been blessed with quite a large house to accommodate so many guests. Or it could be that the record is written from Paul's perspective; relatively “many” came. Bear in mind that all Jews had been expelled from Rome not long previously.

*And persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning until evening-* Literally, ‘the things around Jesus’. And thus we have again “the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus”.

*28:24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved-* But this is not the usual word used for faith. It more suggests an acceptance. There is no record here of any baptisms, and Paul hardly seemed to be encouraged by the response because he then quotes Isaiah's condemnation of Israel and turns to the Gentiles.

*28:25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed-* The impression is given that they walked out of the meeting arguing amongst themselves, rather than some of them rejoicing in any newfound faith. The picture is repeated in :29- they left, arguing amongst themselves.

*After Paul had made this final statement: The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying-* A classic explanation of the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

*28:26 Go to this people and say-* Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9, which his Lord had also quoted about Jewish blindness; and he quotes it in the same way as the Lord Jesus did (Lk. 8:10). Thereby Paul reflects the degree to which he had thought through the Lord's reasoning and made it his own- an example to we who read the Gospels in this age. This is the art of Christ-centred life; to see that the situations we find ourselves in recall in essence those which the Lord faced, and to respond as He did.

*By hearing you shall hear and shall in no way understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no way perceive-* It was and is the whole process of engaging with Scripture which confuses those who do not want to understand it. This is why the Bible is so confusing to so many- it is written in such a way as to confuse those who do not come to it with a desire to understand and respond. Think too of the tone of voice in which Paul said this; he was

willing to sacrifice his salvation for Israel's, and his heart's desire was that the Roman Jews to whom he wrote Rom. 9:2 and Rom. 10:1 would be saved. And now he finally encounters them- what disappointment and sadness he would have had, and not angry frustration at their refusal to 'get it'.

*28:27 For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart; and should repent, and I should heal them-* Paul alludes to the parable of the sower more than to most of the Lord's parables, and here he clearly has in mind the Lord's quotation of the same scripture in Mt. 13:15. We have an insight into how Paul's mind took the Lord's words and the way he used Old Testament scriptures, assimilated it into himself, and met situations with the same approach.

*28:28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles-* See on 28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me.* Paul had earlier turned unto the Gentiles and given up with a mission to the Jews (Acts 13:46). This was as God intended- Paul was to preach to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. But Paul had slipped back, and continued going to the Jews. And now in Rome, with his dream of witnessing to Jews in Rome fulfilled, he saw how wrong he had been. The Jews there were generally disinterested, and he realized again the wisdom of God's intention for him- to preach to Gentiles. And yet God still worked with Paul, for a few Jews apparently did believe due to his presence there. But the letter to the Romans reflects the fact that there were already Jewish Christians in Rome... Paul's desire to go and preach to Jews there appears even more on the side of the stubborn and the obsessive than anything really necessary in the Lord's service. "Sent to the Gentiles" uses the same words which Paul admits were said to him by the Lord at his conversion: "The Gentiles, to whom I send you" (Acts 26:17). Surely Paul must have been reflecting that although he had now achieved his obsessive desire to get to Rome to preach to the Jews... actually the Lord had been right at the beginning of his whole ministry. He was intended to go to the Gentiles. And instead he had sought to emulate Peter and go to the Jews. It was too much for rabbi Paul to accept that illiterate fisherman Peter could convert thousands of orthodox Jews at Pentecost; Paul yearned to do the same and even outdo Peter. He so wanted to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost and then go on to the Jews in Rome. Now he realized that the Jews there were not that responsive, and that his mission really must be to the Gentiles. It was a shame that like us, he spent a lot of grief on things he could have avoided if he had followed his Lord's preferred ministry path for him.

*And they will hear-* The same words used about how the Gentiles 'heard' the Gospel in accepting it (Acts 13:48); it was at that time that Paul had said he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). It seems that he repented of his focus upon the Jews; but soon he was back to his obsession with them. That was but a temporary realization. The idea of the Gentiles 'hearing' is used of how the Gentiles 'heard' the word through Peter's preaching of it (Acts 15:7 s.w.). And it was this jealousy issue with Peter which seems to have been at the root of much of Paul's dysfunction. At the very end of his life, perhaps in his last few days, Paul writes of how at his trial he was able to make a witness that meant "that through me the message might be fully proclaimed; and so all the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17). This is the same word for "hear". So it seems that Paul went to his death believing that although he had been mistaken in focusing upon the Jews, the Lord was merciful to him, and he died accomplishing the mission the Lord had originally intended for him at his conversion- witnessing to the Gentiles, and them 'hearing'.



*28:29 When he had said these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves-* This is the same picture presented as in :25. Paul at great length to earnestly persuade them of Christ, but they argue amongst themselves and walk out of the door disputing with each other, thereby side-lining Paul.

*28:30 And he stayed two whole years in his own hired dwelling-* Paul, like many Bible characters, had access to wealth. Recall how Felix hoped to get money from Paul (24:26).

*And welcomed all that visited him-* That may sound rather unnecessary to record, until we observe that nearly every time the Greek word is used, it speaks of receiving people on a spiritual level. Paul practiced open table fellowship, welcoming all; at a time when it was obnoxious for Jews and Gentiles to be together in homes. This, for Paul and for so many others, is the sign of spiritual maturity- genuine spiritual openness to others instead of defending the exclusive island of one's own territory and interpretations.

“That visited him” is Gk. 'came in unto him'. The same word is used of how Paul had gone in unto the houses of Christians to torture and kill them (Acts 8:3). Now the whole story was reversed, by grace.

*28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ-* But his letter to the Romans places the emphasis upon the reign of grace. He speaks of how grace "reigns", as if grace is the dominating, ruling principle in the lives of those who have now sided with the Kingdom of God rather than that of this world. Testifying the Gospel of God's grace is paralleled by Paul with testifying about the Kingdom- and he says this again in a Roman context (Acts 20:24,25).

*With all boldness-* Paul saw the Lord's "boldness" as an imperative to him to likewise be "bold" in preaching (Eph. 6:19). We all find it hard to be bold in witness, and yet in this as in all spiritual endeavour, 'thy fellowship shall make me strong'. A deeper sense of the presence of Jesus, a feeling for who He was and is, a being with Him, will make us bold too. Even Paul found it hard; he asked others to pray for him, that he would preach "boldly" [s.w.] as he ought to (Eph. 6:19); and their prayers were heard, for in his imprisonment during which he wrote Ephesians, he preached boldly (Acts 28:31 s.w.); indeed, boldness characterised his whole life (Phil. 1:20 s.w.). In passing, we note how Paul felt spiritually weaker than he was; he felt not bold, when he was bold; and we see how the admission of weakness to others and their prayers for it can grant us the victory we seek.

*No one forbidding him-* Paul uses the same word to speak of how the Jews forbade or hindered his preaching to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). His entire ministry had been characterized by Jewish opposition and hindrance to his work. This period was the only one where he could preach without any hindrance; and it was because he was at last doing what the Lord had intended for him from the start, witnessing to the Gentiles, rather than arguing with the Jews and giving free reign to his various psychological issues relating to them.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle*- Time and again Paul brings before us the fact he really is our example; thus he begins his Roman epistle with a description of himself as Paul... called to be an apostle, separated...", but soon goes on to point out that the Romans were "*also* the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1,6).

Apostle literally means one who is sent, and is translated "he that is sent" in Jn. 13:16. It could be argued that all who have received the great preaching commission [which is all of us] have received in essence the same calling and apostleship which Paul did- and he therefore can hold himself up to us all as an example, seeing we have in principle received the same calling which he did. He uses the term "apostle" in Rom. 16:7 concerning brethren who were imprisoned with him who were clearly not amongst the apostles originally chosen by the Lord Jesus. He says in 1:5 that *we* have received apostleship because our Lord rose from the dead; because He rose, all in Him are sent to take that good news to others. And he uses the same word for 'calling' in :6, suggesting his calling and apostleship are to be ours.

*Set apart for the Gospel of God*- A reference to Acts 13:2 where Paul was separated to go on a missionary journey; although he felt he had been separated unto this from the womb (Gal. 1:15). God has likewise separated each of us unto certain callings, but only later in our lives is this made apparent to us.

Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazarite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Naziriteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

1:2 *Which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures*- Abraham

was a prophet (Gen. 20:7) as was Sarah (Ps. 105:15). In line with Gal. 3:8, Paul may have the patriarchs in mind here.

1:3 *Concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh-* "Born" is literally 'made'. Gk. *ginomai*, to be made, come into being- a nail in the coffin for the idea of a personal pre-existence of Christ. The same Greek words translated 'Word' and 'made' in Jn. 1:14 occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54- where we read of the word [AV "saying"] of the Old Testament prophets being 'made' true by being fulfilled [AV "be brought to pass"]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The 'word was made flesh', in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was "*made...* of the seed of David according to the *flesh*" (Rom. 1:3)- i.e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for "made" and "flesh" only occur together in these two places- as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us.

1:4 *Who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord-* More strictly, "the resurrection of the dead". "From" would require *ek*, which isn't present. The Lord's resurrection is in this sense ours, and ours is His. There is in this sense only one resurrection- that of the Lord.

1:5 *Through whom we received grace and apostleship-* 'We' is usually used by Paul in Romans regarding him plus his readership, i.e. all of us. We are all sent ones, apostles- see on 1:1.

*To obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake-* A reference to the great commission, which was enabled and necessitated by the Lord's resurrection. John speaks of preachers going forth to preach for His Name's sake (3 Jn. 7). We are not to merely inform them, but preach aiming towards a response- our apostleship, our being sent ones, is "for", *eis*, elsewhere translated "to the intent that". We should preach towards a response, expecting the ultimate obedience of at least some of our audience. In 6:16 Paul specifically associates obedience [s.w.] to the Gospel with baptism- this should be our initial aim and focus in witness. Peter likely does the same in 1 Pet. 1:2,22.

Paul makes a number of allusions to the great commission, in which he applies it to both himself and also to us all. The weak argument that it was 'only for the disciples who heard it' evaporates when it is accepted that Paul wasn't one of the 12, and yet the commission applies to him. Rom. 1:5 RV is an example: "...through whom we have received grace and apostleship, for the obedience to the faith among all the nations, for his name's sake". These words are packed with allusion to the great commission. And Paul is not in the habit of using the 'royal we' to refer solely to himself. He clearly sees all his readers as sharing in just the same calling. The early preachers travelled around "for his name's sake" (3 Jn. 7), even though they were not in the original band of disciples. Having alluded to the great commission, Paul goes on in this context to rejoice "that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:7 RV). He saw their example of faith in practice as being the witness that fulfilled the great commission; and goes on to speak of his sense of debt to spread the word to literally all men, hence his interest in preaching at Rome (Rom. 1:14,15).

And here we have our example; “as much as in me is”, we should each say, we are ready to spread the Gospel as far as lies in our power to do so.

Collective societies are all about submission and obedience to those above you in the hierarchy- yet repeatedly, Christians are exhorted to be obedient and submissive to the Lord Jesus and the new community in Him (Rom. 1:5; 6:16,17; 2:8 etc.). And even within the new community, Paul's own example showed that acceptance in the eyes of those who appear to be the pillars of the society of Christ is also of little ultimate value if they have fallen away from the understanding of grace (Gal. 2:9). To keep using the word "radical" doesn't do justice to the colossal change in worldview that was required on conversion to Christ. Reflecting on all this, it seems to me that the reason the Jewish people crucified their Messiah was above all because He so powerfully turned their whole worldviews upside down- and they just couldn't handle it, just as so many families today turn against the one who truly turns to Christ.

1:6 *Among whom are you also called to be Jesus Christ's-* We are also called to be apostles- see on 1:1.

1:7 *To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ-* “To all” means not just the leadership. Paul valued everyone, including the illiterate majority of the ecclesia to whom the letter would be read out loud, and upon whom the complexity and depth of much of his argument in this letter would likely have been lost.

1:8 *First-* the most important thing for Paul was that those he had expended spiritual effort for were strong in the faith. We sense the same in John's letters of 2 and 3 John. Our focus should be on helping others reach the Kingdom.

*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world-* The fact we praise God and come directly to Him *dia*, through the Lord Jesus, does not mean that our words come to the Father through the Son as if He were a sieve or telephone line. We come direct to the Father *dia*, on account of, for the sake of, the work Christ achieved. The following are a few of many examples which give the flavour of *dia*: John was put in prison *dia Herodias*, for the sake of Herodias (Mt. 14:3); the Pharisees transgressed the commandment of God *dia*, on account of, through, their tradition (Mt. 15:3); the disciples couldn't heal *dia*, for the sake of, their unbelief (Mt. 17:20); the Angels of the "little ones" *dia*, for their sakes, behold the face of the Father (Mt. 18:10); because the Pharisees pretended to be pious they would *dia*, on this account, receive greater condemnation (Mt. 23:14); the faithful will be persecuted *dia*, for the sake of, Christ's name (Mt. 24:9); *dia* the elect's sake, on their account, the days will be shortened (Mt. 24:22). "I thank my God *dia* (through) Jesus Christ my Lord" (Rom. 1:8) doesn't therefore necessarily mean that Paul prays to God 'through' the Lord Jesus as some kind of connecting tunnel; he thanks God on account of, for the sake of Christ. The very same Greek construction occurs a few chapters later: "Who shall deliver me...? I thank God, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 7:24,25). He thanks God that his deliverance is possible on account of the Lord Jesus.

1:9 *For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son-* Frequently Paul uses the word "Gospel" as meaning 'the preaching of the Gospel'; the Gospel is in itself something which *must* be preached if we really have it (Rom. 1:1,9; 16:25; Phil. 1:5 (NIV),12; 2:22; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5; 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8). The fact we have been given the Gospel is in itself an imperative to preach it. "When I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:12 RV) has the ellipsis supplied in the AV: "to preach Christ's Gospel" [although there is no Greek word in the original there matching 'preach'] .

*How unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers-* The idea of the Greek word is of remembrance. Paul was bringing others to remembrance before God. Paul is surely alluding to Is. 62:6,7: "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth". Paul saw the Gentile believers in Rome as spiritual Jerusalem. It's not that God forgets and needs reminding, but rather that by our prayers for others we as it were focus His special attention upon them. Paul several times states that he is day and night, continually in prayer for others. He likely had the Isaiah passage in mind; his brethren in Christ were now for him the Jerusalem upon whom his hopes were set, rather than upon the physical city as had been the case in Judaism.

There is a mutuality between God and His children in prayer. We 'make mention' of things to God (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:2; Philemon 4). The Greek word used has the idea of bringing to mind, or remembering things to God. And He in response 'remembers' prayer when He answers it (Lk. 1:54,72; Acts 10:31 s.w.). What we bring to our mind in prayer, we bring to His mind. Those who pray for Jerusalem "keep not silence"- and therefore they give God "no rest" (Is. 62:6,7). But the Hebrew word for "keep not silence" and for 'give no rest' is one and the same! There's a clear play on words here. If we give ourselves no rest in prayer, then we give God no rest. His Spirit or mind becomes our spirit or mind, and vice versa. And hence the telling comments in Romans 8 about our spirit / mind being mediated to God in prayer through Jesus, in His role as 'the Lord the Spirit' (Rom. 8:26,27). Yet God Himself had stated that He will not rest nor hold His peace for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1). Yet His doing this is conditional upon His prayerful people not allowing Him to rest due to their prayers.

"Unceasingly... always" is a double repetition to emphasize how constant was Paul's prayer for others. In case it seemed he was exaggerating, he calls God as a witness. His prayerfulness- the hours spent on his knees and the amount of mental energy in daily life- was amazing, and inspirational.

1:10 *Making request, if by any means now at length I may succeed by the will of God to come to you-* Or, "A prosperous journey". Realize that prayer may be answered in totally unexpected ways. Paul prayed that he would have "a prosperous journey" in coming to see the Romans (Rom. 1:10). Little could he have realized, sitting in Corinth as he wrote, that the answer would involve many months of imprisonment in Jerusalem, a shipwreck that lead to an ecclesia in Malta... and so much other grief. But from God's viewpoint, the prayer was answered. See on Rom. 1:14.

Paul felt that his prayers could influence or at least engage with God's will; he prayed that he might at some time [Gk.] be helped by God on the road [AV "have a prosperous journey"] to visit the Roman believer. He asks this not 'If it be God's will' but he asks this might be so *en* or in the will of God. He didn't see God's will as something to be passively accepted but rather engaged with in prayer.

1:11 *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to strengthen you-* Paul so longed (the Greek is very intense, s.w. "lust") to see the Romans so that he could give them some spiritual gift. Why was his physical presence so necessary in order to give this gift? Perhaps he refers to a literal laying on of hands which would've been necessary to impart the Spirit gifts? But that gift was so that they might be "established", confirmed and set in their way. Was there, therefore, a gift of spiritual confirmation which could only be given by the literal physical presence of Paul? Or was the miraculous gift he intended to impart intended to be a part of establishing them as group?

1:12 *That is: that I with you may be comforted in you-* Some manuscripts add "However". Paul didn't want it to appear that he was viewing himself as superior to them in imparting a spiritual gift to them, so he goes on to speak of how spiritual strengthening is a mutual experience in which he also would benefit from them.

*Each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine-* The mutual faith, which seems to suggest that their strength of faith would affect Paul's faith and his faith would affect theirs. Hence the value of positive spiritual fellowship in Christ.

1:13 *And I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that oftentimes I intended to come to you (but have so far been hindered), that I might have some fruit in you also, even as in the rest of the Gentiles-* "Hindered" is s.w. 'forbid' in Acts 16:6, where he was forbidden to preach in Asia. It seems Paul often worked against situations where He was forbidden to go somewhere- he still preached in Asia, still went up to Jerusalem, and still insisted on going to Rome. See on Rom. 1:15.

1:14 *I am debtor-* Paul had a debt to preach to all men. But a debt implies he had been given something; and it was not from "all men", but rather from Christ. Because the Lord gave us the riches of His self-sacrifice, we thereby are indebted *to Him*; and yet this debt has been transmuted into a debt to preach to all humanity. Reflection upon His cross should elicit in us too an upwelling of pure gratitude towards Him, a Christ-centeredness, an awkwardness as we realise that this Man loved us more than we love Him... and yet within our sense of debt to Him, of ineffable, unpayable debt, of real debt, a debt infinite and never to be forgotten, we will have the basis for personal response to Him as a person, to a knowing of Him and a loving of Him, and a serving of Him in response. If we feel and know this, we cannot but preach the cross of Christ. In Rom. 1:14 Paul speaks of his "debt" to preach to both "Greeks and Barbarians" as the reason for his planned trip to Rome- for in that city there was the widest collection of "Greeks and Barbarians". And yet he later speaks of our 'debt' [Gk.] to love one another (Rom. 13:8). The debt of love that we feel on reflecting upon our unpayable debt to the Father and Son is partly an unending 'debt' to loving share the Gospel of grace with others, to forgive the 'debts' of others' sins against us. We have a debt to preach to the world; we are their debtors, and yet this isn't how we often see it (Rom. 1:14). Time and again we commit sins of omission here.

*Both to Greeks and Barbarians*- Paul felt a debt to preach to them, the total savages [from his perspective]. And so on the way to Rome, God arranged for him to be shipwrecked on Malta, and thus meet and convert such Barbarians- for the word occurs only four other times in the NT and two of them are in describing the people whom Paul met on Malta (Acts 28:2,4). See on Rom. 1:10.

*Both to the wise and to the foolish*- the Greek word is elsewhere always translated “fools” in the AV, and has the idea of stupidity, foolishness. Paul the intellectual felt a debt to preach to those who would have exasperated and irritated him in normal life.

1:15 *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome*- Gk. 'As much as is in me'. A window into the totality of Paul's desire to spread the Gospel and upbuild the believers. But the phrase could also indicate an obsession with going to Rome, as was noted by Agrippa (Acts 26:32). See on Rom. 1:13. The “you” in the context is the believers in Rome. Paul wanted to build them up in their faith on the basis of the preaching of the basic doctrines of the Gospel. Thus there is a special emphasis in this letter on the implications of basic doctrine, as explained in our introduction to the letter on Romans 1:1.

The doctrines of the Gospel are power to all those who have already believed. Paul was going to Rome to visit the believers, and wanted to upbuild them by discussing the doctrines of the Gospel with them.

1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believes- to the Jew first and also to the Greek*- Paul knew that his salvation partly depended upon not being ashamed of Christ's words before men; hence his frequent self-examination concerning whether he was witnessing as he should. Thus when he declares that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, he is expressing his certainty of salvation; he is implying that therefore Christ will not be ashamed of him at the judgment (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16 = Mk. 8:38). When Paul warns Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel, he is therefore exhorting him by his own example (Rom. 1:16 s.w. 2 Tim. 1:8,12). Note the theme of not being ashamed in 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16.

Paul could say that "the preaching of the cross *is* (unto us which are saved) the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Not 'it was when we were baptized'; the power of that basic Gospel lasts all our lives. To the Romans likewise: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (i.e. I don't apologize for preaching the same old things): for it is the power of God unto salvation... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith (i.e. faith gets built up and up by that basic Gospel)" (Rom. 1:18). The Galatians needed to keep on 'obeying the Truth' as they had done at baptism (Gal. 3:1); conversion is an ever ongoing process (cp. Lk. 22:32). It is "the faith which is in Christ", the basic Gospel, which progressively opens up the Scriptures and enables them to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

1:17- see on Rom. 4:13.

*For therein is revealed a righteousness of God-* a kind of righteousness which is given from God, given by Him; and Paul will go on to explain that is “of God”, given from Him to us, by our faith in Him and in the simple fact that He has indeed given us this gift in Christ.

*From faith to faith-* Having spoken of how the faith of the Romans is spoken of throughout the “world”, Paul goes on to comment that the preaching of the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God “from faith to faith”, or “by faith unto faith” (Rom. 1:17 RV). The righteousness of God is surely revealed in human examples rather than in any amount of words. Could Paul not be meaning that the faith of one believer will induce faith in others, and in this sense the Gospel is a force that if properly believed ought to be spreading faith world-wide? This means that spreading our faith is part and parcel of believing the Gospel. Whatever, there is here clearly inculcated the idea of an upward spiral of spirituality- from faith unto [yet more] faith. Faith, like unbelief, is self-confirming.

*As it is written: But the righteous shall live by faith-* the quotation from Hab. 2:4 is in the context of human pride: “Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith”. Paul is interpreting this verse as talking about faith in righteousness being imputed to us, which leads to us being just or justified before God. The practical result of this is humility- for we realize through this process that we have absolutely nothing to be “puffed up” about. Our uprightness isn’t because of our own works but because of God’s righteousness being imputed to us by grace through faith.

*1:18 For the anger of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men-* it will be revealed from Heaven at the Lord’s return, and yet in a sense, judgment is now, God’s feelings about sin aren’t restrained or passive until judgment day, they are revealed even now.

*Who hinder the truth in unrighteousness-* Or, “hold”. The point has been made that the Greek word for “hold” can mean ‘to hold down’ in the sense of repressing the Truth. But apart from the fact that Truth can ultimately never be held down, the word does carry the possible meaning of holding fast, possessing, retaining, and is translated like this in places. It could be that there were some in the Roman ecclesia who did indeed possess the Truth, but did so in unrighteousness- and thus God’s wrath was especially against such people. This would fit in with the impression we have from the other NT letters, including those of the Lord Jesus to the churches in Revelation, that there was serious, gross misbehaviour going on in the early churches- and Rome would be no exception. This group of people were those to whom God had shown the truth about Himself (1:19). The following verses go on to allude to Israel’s perversions in the wilderness- and they were a people who knew God rather than ignorant Gentiles. This group know God but don’t glorify Him (1:21).

If we insist on understanding ‘hold’ as meaning ‘hold down the [conscience of] the truth’ on account of their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18 Gk.), we can connect this with the statement that when this group come to know God, they darken their foolish hearts (1:21). And so it was with the preaching of the Gospel in Acts. Those who heard it were pricked in their conscience: some responded by wanting to kill the preachers (Acts 5:33; 7:54); others followed their conscience and accepted baptism (Acts 2:37). We too have our hearts pricked by the Gospel- and we either effectively shut up the preaching, or respond.



1:19 *Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it to them-* “Known” is Gk. *gnostos*. This may be a strike at incipient Gnosticism; for Paul says that such knowledge, such *gnosis*, is showed to people *by God*. There are only some things which God makes known to us about Himself; we do not have the total truth about God, we see but parts of His ways and hear only a little portion of Him (Job 26:14). Our perception and definition of “the truth” needs to bear this in mind. Absolute truth claims aren’t simply ignorant, they lead to all manner of relationship breakdown, arrogance and deformation of spirituality both in ourselves and others.

1:20 *For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen-* a paradox, seeing the invisible. Such vision is only by faith. In the context, Paul is referring to those responsible to God. They are those who ‘see’ by faith, they are therefore inexcusable. One can have faith, even the faith that sees the invisible, and yet still ‘not get it’. See on Rom. 8:19.

*Being perceived through the things that are made.* The translation here is difficult. The invisible things of God are clearly seen in the things He makes- but the only other usage of the Greek word is in Eph. 2:10: “We are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus”. The idea could be that the things of God are made visible, the abstract things of His power, personality and Name are made concrete and tangible- in us His people. We are living witnesses to His power and Divinity.

*Even His everlasting power and Divinity- that they may be without excuse-* A legal term. The court of Divine judgment is sitting right now, and we who are His people are without excuse for our sin. Paul is building up slowly towards the crescendo of presenting us all as serious, inexcusable sinners, who can be saved by grace alone.

1:21 *For although they knew God-* Only those who ‘know God’ have the potential to give Him glory and true thanks; but the problem is that some can know God and yet not go forward from that point to glorify God. Knowledge of God isn’t therefore an academic matter in itself; it leads on to gratitude towards Him and glory of Him.

*They did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him-* To “honour” here is to praise. Fundamentally praise is mental appreciation of Yahweh's Name, seeing His characteristics expressed in all things around us, e.g. food, weather, situations in life etc. Knowledge of God (and this doesn't *only* refer to abstract doctrine, but to an awareness of how He works and expresses Himself in our lives) is therefore proportionate to the quality of our praise (Rom. 1:21).

*But they became futile in their thinking-* Or 'Imaginations', Gk. *dialogismos*. Their internal dialogues with themselves, the internal self, the mind at its deepest and most personal level, became vain- when the true knowledge of God should have made them so much more

dynamic, purposeful and productive. The focus of the Bible is so often upon the 'heart', the most intimate and internal thought processes.

*And their foolish hearts were darkened-* The foolish heart of Israel was darkened / blinded, the Greek implies (Rom. 1:21). God gave them a mind which wanted to practice homosexuality and lesbianism (v.28), and therefore they received a recompense appropriate to the delusion which they had been given (v. 27 Gk.) . Note that their punishment was to be given and encouraged in homosexual tendencies (diseases like AIDS are the result of upsetting nature's balance rather than the recompense spoken of in Romans 1). Christian men in the first century gave themselves over to sexual immorality (Eph. 4:19), and therefore God "gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:24,26,28). "Blind yourselves and be blind", God angrily remonstrated with Israel; yet God had closed their eyes, confirming them in the decision for blindness which they had taken themselves (Is. 29:9,10 RVmg.). Later in Romans, Paul speaks of the Jews as the ones whose hearts were darkened (Rom. 11:10).

1:22 *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools-* "Became" implies that this is all talking about the people of God, who once were wise, but *became* fools. S.w. Mt. 5:13 about the salt "which loses its taste", lit. 'becomes foolish'. However it is God who makes worldly wise people foolish (1 Cor. 1:20 s.w.), just as in v. 21 it is God who darkens eyes. There's a downward spiral, in which God is active and the dynamic within it.

1:23- see on Rom. 5:12.

*And exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God-* Again a paradox is presented- the incorruptible, unchangeable God is changed by mere men. Perhaps the point is that the glory of God, the extent to and form in which He is glorified, is to some extent in our hands. We can in this sense deface His image by the distorted reflection of it which we give. Note how they turned the image of God into the image of man; whereas the Lord Jesus, as a man, became in the image of God (Phil. 2:7). The implication from Paul's reasoning is that whatever we worship becomes God to us, and therefore we have re-cast God into that image. In a world of obsessions, we are to 'worship' God alone, and not reduce Him to the petty things which people waste their devotions upon.

*For the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted animals, and creeping things-* The commands concerning Israel's behaviour after they had settled in the land form a large chunk of the Mosaic Law, and thus these were only relevant to the younger generation and the Levites who were to enter the land of promise (note how only those who were numbered and over 20 at the time of leaving Egypt were barred from the land; the Levites were not numbered). This younger generation were in sharp contrast to those aged over 20 at the Exodus. The extent of spiritual despair and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of the children born to them then (Josh. 5:5,6), thus showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant. There is good reason to believe that Romans 1 is a description of Israel in the wilderness; notice the past tenses there. Rom. 1:23 charges them with changing "the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like... to four-footed beasts, and creeping things", clearly alluding to Ps.

106:20 concerning how Israel in the wilderness "Changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass" by making the golden calf. The effective atheism of Rom.1 is matched by Ps. 106:21 "They forgot God their saviour". The long catalogue of Israel's wilderness sins in Ps. 106 is similar to that in Rom.1. "Full of envy" (Rom. 1:29) corresponds to them envying Moses (Ps. 106:16), "whisperers" (Rom. 1:29) to "murmurers" (Ps. 106:25), and "inventors of evil things" (Rom.1:30) to God being angered with "their inventions" of false gods (Ps. 106:29). Because of this "God gave them up" to continue in their sexual perversion and bitterness with each other even to the extent of murder (Rom. 1:27,29). A rabble of about 2 million people living in moral anarchy with little law and order, driven on in their lust by the knowledge that God had rejected them is surely a frightening thing to imagine. The emphasis on sexual sin in Rom.1 is paralleled by 1 Cor. 10 stressing the frequent failure of Israel in the wilderness in this regard. Against such an evil and God forsaking background that young generation rebelled, to become one of the most faithful groups of Israelites in their history. As such they set a glorious example to the youth of today in rebelling against a world that mocks any form of true spirituality.

*1:24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves-* "Gave them up" is s.w. Acts 7:42, where God turned from Israel because of their apostasy and "gave them up" to worship idols. Again, God works with His sinful people by propelling them in a downwards spiral. In this context He did this by giving them over to their own sexual lusts, which resulted in their dishonouring their own bodies. God can confirm people in their sexual lusting; and by implication, He can also hold people back. The perversions of homosexuality spoken of in v. 26 are all this come to its ultimate term- when people are made to feel that they were 'born gay'. Unbridled sexual lust leads to self-harm, a sin against self, in the sense that such behaviour is a dishonouring [Gk.: shaming, despising] of one's own body. This suggests that the body naturally has honour- Paul is attacking the view that the body is evil and to be despised, that God is angry with human flesh as flesh. We take that glory and honour away from our bodies by sexual misbehaviour. Paul uses the Greek word for 'dishonour' only once more in Romans, in 2:23, where he says that sin is a dishonouring *of God*. To dishonour ourselves, our own body, is to dishonour God. For we are made in His image and likeness. Lack of self-respect, an incorrect understanding and perception of who we are, is what so often leads us to sin.

*1:25 Because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie-* These people once held God's Truth, but exchanged it for a lie. The same word occurs in 1:26, where we read that women changed / exchanged "the natural use into that which is against nature". Sexual sin, not least lesbianism, is a lie. The born gay argument, along with the argument that we can sexually sin and it's all going to be OK, is one of the greatest lies.

*And worshiped and served the created rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen-* The context of this verse, both before and after, speaks in a sexual context. The 'created thing' may refer to the human body- for worshipping the created thing is parallel with dishonouring the human body in v. 24. Praise and worship should be directed ultimately to God; sexual immorality seeks to break the connection between God and the human body, the awareness that the human being is made in the image of God. Treating people merely as bodies is to sever them [in our minds] from their connection to God. By perceiving their

connection to God, we will never treat humans as merely bodies; nor will we perceive ourselves in that way either. The Creator is to be blessed by us for ever- and so we should start living like that now, rather than praising things He has created for what they are in themselves.

1:26 *For this cause God gave them up to vile passions-* “Vile” is s.w. ‘dishonour’, 1:24. The dishonouring of bodies by homosexuality and sexual immorality is a result of allowing ‘dishonourable’ lusts / thoughts to be worked out in practice; the performing of mental fantasy in the flesh. Paul teaches that God propels those who wish to give free reign to their fantasies- He gives them over to their own lusts. Paul is using the example of homosexuality as part of a build up to a crescendo of demonstrating the depth of human depravity, and the subsequent depth of God’s grace. He demonstrates the seriousness of human sin by showing that God pushes people downwards in a downward spiral of lust, if this is what they themselves truly wish- and Paul cites homosexualities as the parade example of this, whereby God so confirms sinners in their lusts that they even feel that what is truly “against nature” is in fact normal and natural.

*Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature-* These things are "against nature" (1:26); it is therefore impossible that by 'nature' some people are born with these "vile affections". "Nature" is used in Romans in the sense of "God's creative order". It would be inappropriate and even cruel of God to create men with natural desires and then tell them that these are in fact not natural, and He holds them guilty for having them. "Nature" (Gk. *physis*) was used in contemporary Greek in the context of the God-designed, natural intention for heterosexual relationships; Strong suggests it refers to “natural production (lineal descent)”- Paul may be referring to how homosexuals can’t reproduce. Plutarch speaks of "union contrary to *nature*"; Josephus comments that "The Law recognizes no sexual connections except for the *natural* union of man and wife". *Physis* is rendered "by birth" in Gal. 2:15 RSV. The homosexual is behaving "against nature", against the way in which he was born. Seeing Paul makes no distinction between different types of homosexuality, it is clear that he presents homosexuality as "against nature", against the order of our birth and the Genesis creation. This disallows the speculation that some people are born homosexual 'by nature'. If we accept this, we must see in Rom. 1 a distinction between different kinds of homosexuality. And yet this distinction is totally absent. It makes an interesting study to observe how gay 'Christians' wriggle on the hook of Romans 1. Their explanations are so mutually contradictory and logically flawed that it is evident that they are 'getting around' and 'explaining away' a passage which simply flattens their position. Thus some of them claim that in Romans 1 Paul is only condemning homosexual prostitution, because he was ignorant of any other kind of homosexuality. This implies that had Paul known of the concept of homosexual orientation, he would have written differently. This is a denial of Paul's inspiration, and as we demonstrated in the first section of this study, to reject the inspiration of the Bible is effectively a rejection of God. On the other hand, it has been claimed that "nature" in Rom. 1 refers to natural orientation, and what Paul is saying is that it is wrong for born homosexuals to change to heterosexism, and vice versa. However, this is assuming that Paul and the Bible are aware of the notion of homosexual orientation. In this case, the other Bible passages which condemn homosexuality outright do so in the full knowledge of the supposed 'fact' that some are born homosexual, and yet they make no reference to this fact (even if it is granted that Romans 1 does). If this were the case, these people are condemned for who they are by birth. The whole situation would then be morally and logically fallacious.

We just have to accept that there can be no getting round the fact that the Bible does not recognize the concept of being 'born gay'. Homosexuals are behaving "against nature", against God's intended order at creation, and are thereby perverts of His way. The Greek *para* ("against") means just that. Thus Paul's accusers complain that he "persuadeth men to worship God *contrary* (para) to the law" (Acts 18:13); false teachers create divisions "*contrary* (para) to the doctrine which ye have learned" (Rom. 16:17).

1:27 *And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another*- Paul speaks of how sinful behaviour ends up in people doing things 'contrary to nature'; and yet he uses a similar phrase to describe how being 'grafted in' to the true hope of Israel, with all it implies in practice, is likewise "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26,27 cp. 11:24). We walk against the wind, go against the grain, one way or the other in this life. And, cynically speaking, it may as well be for the Lord's cause than for the flesh. See on Mt. 3:11. The recompense refers not to AIDS but to God's confirming of homosexuals in their sin to the extent that they believe it is natural and somehow coded into their bodies.

*Men with men working unseemliness and receiving in themselves that reward of their error which was due*- "Error" is s.w. deception. Homosexual sin is therefore the result of deception. Earlier Paul has said that God has given over homosexuals to their own lusts, to the point they believe that their sin is natural; here he says that homosexuals have been deceived. The deception is also by God, just as He sends "strong delusion" [s.w. "error"] upon those who don't love the Truth, so that they believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:11).

1:28- see on Rom. 1:21.

*And even as*- the context is the last clause of 1:27, that homosexuality is an appropriate punishment for the sin of homosexual lust. Paul here repeats that point- that God gave them over to that kind of "reprobate mind". That God 'gave them' this mindset is laboured three times (1:24,26,28).

*They refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not appropriate*- The same Greek words only in Rom. 10:2, where Paul says that Israel do not hold or retain the knowledge of God. So here in 1:28 Paul seems to have his mind on Israel again, who didn't any longer retain or hold God in their knowledge, and so their zeal became not according to knowledge (10:2). Of course the Jews would've insisted that they *were* mindful of God, they didn't become atheists, far from it. But God wasn't held in their knowledge, He wasn't the defining reality in their thinking. *Retain* is the Greek word 'echo'- our minds should be an echo of God's. Even in this life, those who will be rejected have "a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28)- they have the mind of the rejected, the unaccepted [this is how the Greek word is used in every other occurrence in the NT]. The mindset the rejected have in that awful day, is the mindset which they have now. This is how important our thinking is. Our thoughts, the thoughts of yesterday and today and tomorrow, will either accuse or excuse us in the last day, when God shall judge us according to our "secrets", our inner thinking (Rom. 2:15,16).

The context of Rom. 1 is the power of the Gospel. Paul's discussion of homosexuality is part of his demonstration that there is an antithesis to Gospel power; namely, the power of sin. He develops this theme later in chapters 7 and 8, where he shows that the compulsive, ever growing power of sin in the unbeliever or apostate is the antithesis of the power of the Spirit at work in the faithful believer. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce this theme, and Paul is citing homosexuality as an example of the power of sin at work within men, as the antithesis to the power of the Gospel. He makes the same point in 1 Tim. 1:9-11. Paul argues that homosexual desire is God's punishment for men's sinful lusts. The point is being repeated at least three times, such is the emphasis:

<b>What men did</b>	<b>What God did</b>
Thought they were wise	Made them fools
"Became vain in their imaginations"	Darkened their foolish heart (1:21)
Had evil "lusts of their own hearts"	<i>Through</i> these lusts God gave them over to dishonouring their bodies between themselves
Changed God's truth (i.e. His word, Jn. 17:17) into a lie	Gave them vile affections which resulted in them committing homosexual acts
They refused to acknowledge the claims of God (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.)	God gave them a mind "void of judgment" between right and wrong (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.), so that they committed homosexual acts
Homosexually lusted for each other	Gave them an appropriate punishment for their error, i.e. homosexual desire.

It is clear from all this that God does something to the minds of men who justify homosexual lust; He makes them lust even more, and they therefore commit homosexual acts, and He then makes them want even more of such gratification. This is a classic example of the downward spiral an apostate believer enters; God pushes such people into ever increasing confirmation in their evil way. The fact homosexuals feel convinced they were born like it is an example of God confirming these people in their desires. It must be noted that the text of Rom. 1 is largely concerned with attitudes of mind; people have homosexual lust in their minds, and God confirms this by giving them a homosexual mindset. This shows that it is not enough to simply abstain from homosexual acts; the homosexual mindset is in itself sinful. "The lusts of their own hearts" is paralleled with "to dishonour their own bodies"; "vile affections" with lesbian *acts*; "a reprobate mind" with *doing* those things which are abhorrent. For this reason alone it is impossible to accept the reasoning of Rom. 1 and also believe that some people are created by God constitutionally homosexual, with these "vile affections" as part of their natural fabric. It has been pointed out by many commentators that Paul in Rom. 1 is alluding to passages in the Wisdom of Solomon; and those passages are saying that God confirms men in the unrighteous desires they have chosen to follow. God often punishes men by turning them over to their sin completely. For example: "In return for their foolish and

wicked thoughts which led them astray to worship irrational animals... thou didst send upon them a multitude of irrational creatures, that they might learn that one is punished by the very things in which he sins... therefore those who lived unrighteously thou didst torment through their own abominations" (Wisdom 11:15,16; 12:23). Rom. 1:29-31 associates homosexuality with a descending spiral of all sorts of other sins: envy, murder, inventors of evil things etc. This confirms that homosexuality is part of a general picture of sinfulness which is in opposition to the system of righteousness developed by the Gospel.

1:29 *Being filled-* by God.

*With all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity-* One can only be filled with murder if we understand murder here as an attitude of mind, in the sense of 1 Jn. 3:15- hating our brother is murder. The context is speaking of how God is doing things to the *mind*, the mental attitude, of sinners.

The extent of spiritual despair, despondency and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of their children (Josh. 5:5,6), showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant with them. There is good reason to think that Rom. 1 is a description of Israel in the wilderness. Rom. 1:23 accuses them of changing "the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to... four-footed beasts, and creeping things", clearly alluding to Ps. 106:29 concerning how Israel in the wilderness "changed their glory (i.e. God) into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass" by making the golden calf. The effective atheism of Rom. 1 is matched by Ps. 106:21: "They forgot God their saviour". The long catalogue of Israel's wilderness sins in Ps. 106 is similar to that in Rom. 1. "Full of envy" (Rom. 1:29) corresponds to them envying Moses (Ps. 106:16), "whisperers" (Rom. 1:29) to "murmurers" (Ps. 106:25), "inventors of evil things" (Rom. 1:30) to God being angered with "their inventions" of false gods (Ps. 106:29). Because of this "God gave them up" to continue in their sexual perversion and bitterness with each other, even to the extent of murder (Rom. 1:27,29). They were a rabble of about 2 million people living in moral anarchy, driven on in their lust by the knowledge that God had rejected them. The children of that generation who later turned out faithful- indeed the generation that settled Canaan were perhaps the most faithful generation in Israel's history- must have had to violently rebel against the attitude of the world and older generation around them.

1:30 *Whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, proud, boastful, inventors of evil things-* the mind is creative, inventive, and must be channelled positively rather than towards the invention or creation of sinful things. Note that the origin or creation of evil in the sense of sin is within the human being, not in some cosmic Satan figure.

*Disobedient to parents-* this may appear a lesser sin compared to those which surround it. But Paul several times does this- listing what some would consider an apparently minor sin within a list of what some would consider major sins- to demonstrate that the apparently minor sin is indeed that serious.

1:31 *Without understanding-* This translates the Greek *asunetos*; "covenant breakers"

translates *asunthetos*. The alliteration between the words is common in the Bible, and suggests that the Bible was recorded in such a way that it could be easily memorized by the initial hearers- for the majority of believers over history have been illiterate.

*Covenant breakers*- “Covenant breakers” and “without natural affection” may be understandable in a moral, sexual context. For in 1:27 Paul has written of homosexuality as a leaving of the natural intent of the body.

*With natural affection, unmerciful*- “Implacable”, Gk. ‘without [accepting a] libation’ suggests that unforgiveness, or being “unmerciful”, is as bad as all manner of major sexual sin listed in the same list. Yet so often those sins remain unforgiven by those who consider themselves more spiritual than those who fail in such areas; yet such unforgiveness is of the same category as the grossest moral failure. Gk. ‘without an offering’, i.e. unwilling to accept a sacrifice in order to grant peace. This is a clear allusion to what God does for us; indeed most of the terms in v.31 are the very opposite of what God does in the atonement. His reconciliation of us must be the basis for our lives and mental attitudes.

1:32 *Who, knowing the ordinance of God*- the relevance of this verse is to those who know God’s judgments, those who are responsible to Him. Those described in Rom. 1:32 know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind “void of [an awareness of] judgment” (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. Tit. 1:16 AVmg. uses the same word to describe those who “profess that they know God” but are “void of judgment”. We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts.

*That they that practice*- Gk. keep on practicing, in an ongoing way.

*Such things are worthy of death*- Some of the “things” listed in the preceding verses might appear to some to be minor sins. But they are “worthy of death” if we live in them. We need to think through that list in 1:29-31. Disobedience to parents, lacking “natural affection”, not being faithful to a covenant, implacable, not showing mercy- any one of those “things” if lived in as a way of life is “worthy of death”. Refusing to fellowship one’s brethren, refusing to forgive, ignoring elderly parents... is “worthy of death”.

*Not only do the same, but also give approval to them that practise them*- “Give approval to” is Gk. ‘to assent to’, ‘to feel gratified with’. We can so easily ‘feel gratified with’ those who commit those sins through vicariously participating in them through watching and reading of them, and psychologically feeling gratified by the sin. Paul seems to be speaking here directly to the online entertainment generation... Paul may have written this with his memory upon how when Stephen had been stoned, he had stood there looking on and “consenting” with the murder, stone by stone- without throwing a single stone himself (s.w. twice, Acts 8:1; 22:20).

Paul warned the Romans that those who “have pleasure” in (Gk. ‘to feel gratified with’) sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he



uses the very word used for his own 'consenting' unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. 'Feeling gratified with' such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can't watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others' sins.

Paul reels off an awful list of sins in Romans 1, and builds up to a crescendo at the end of the passage. We're left waiting, with dropped jaws, for him to come out with some yet more awful sin. And Paul fulfils that expectation by listing the sin of having pleasure in those who commit sin (Rom. 1:32). Immediately we who are not grossly perverted and immoral are shaken from our seats. For in our generation like no other, one can secretly view sin, in movies, novels and on the internet, and vicariously get involved with it whilst not 'doing it' with our own bodies. This sin really is serious. It tops and caps and concludes the list of awful sins. And yet the whole section goes on to talk about the danger of condemning others for such sins (2:1). It could be that Paul is suggesting that by condemning others, eagerly exploring their sins in order to pass condemnation upon them, we are thereby gratifying ourselves through vicarious involvement in those very sins. In this case, the psychology presented would've been 2000 years ahead of its time.

Those described in Rom. 1:32 know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind "void of [an awareness of] judgment" (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. Tit. 1:16 AVmg. uses the same word to describe those who "profess that they know God" but are "void of judgment". We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Therefore you are without excuse*- s.w. only in Rom. 1:20, where lesbians and homosexuals are described as “without excuse”, inexcusable. The whole point is that those who are judgmental, in the sense of condemning ahead of time, are in the same category. The point is very powerful and telling. Perhaps Paul purposefully talks about lesbianism in Romans 1 because he knows it will shock and encourage his readers to condemn lesbians etc., and thus he has set them up for ‘condemnation’. Remember that Paul isn’t merely playing mind games with his readership- he’s building us up to a crescendo of conviction of sinfulness, which will form the backdrop for the good news of God’s amazing grace; and this, rather than ranting about sin for the sake of it, is the theme of Romans. “Inexcusable” is a Greek legal term, without defence / legal answer to make. As if whenever we judge others, we are ourselves standing condemned and speechless at the judgment seat of God. The rejected in the last day will be speechless, without any legal answer to make (Mt. 22:12). If we judge others, then we right now are condemning ourselves, speechless and ashamed before the Divine judgment seat. In this sense “wherein”, or insofar as, we judge others- we condemn ourselves. We “do the same things”, not literally, but insofar as by being judgmental or unmerciful (the context is Rom. 1:31), we are sinning in the same category of mortal sins which they are; for judgmentalism is as bad as the list of major moral failures Paul has been listing at the end of Romans 1.

*O man, whoever you are that judge*- Paul is writing with at least some reference to himself personally. To be judgmental and feel spiritually superior to others would’ve been frequent temptations for him. Paul often writes assuming his readers’ response being in a certain way. Here he assumes that having read his talk of lesbianism and a whole catena of other sins in 1:29-31, that we will be shaking our heads and judging those sins. But here in 2:1 he plays on that expected response from us [“Therefore...” is without referent unless it is to our assumed response to 1:29-31] and basically says: “Thou art the man!”. He confidently asserts that we who judge [in the sense of condemn] are doing the same things. He may mean that we all at times commit the sins of 1:29-31 and so are guilty. Or he may be saying that the very act of judging / condemning others is as bad as ‘doing those same things’. We must of course ‘judge’ in the sense of having an opinion; but to condemn people in the way that only God can is just as bad as lesbianism or whatever other sin in 1:27-31 we may wish to condemn.

*For wherein you judge another*- the implication could be that if you condemn a person for a sin [in the sense of prejudging God’s personal condemnation of them], then you are counted as having performed the very sin which you so despise and condemn.

*You condemn yourself! For you that judge practise the same things*- By condemning others we are as it were playing judge, and whilst at it, we’re reading out our own sentence of condemnation. The practical result of all this must be faced- there will, presumably, be some otherwise good living, upright Christian folk who come to the day of judgment and are condemned to darkness and gnashing of teeth simply because they in their brief lifetimes condemned some of the other sinners who are with them thrown out into condemnation. It may appear bizarre- hardened sinners like lifetime perverts and lesbians are there on the left hand side of the judgment seat along with the upright, righteous pillars of church life who never smoked, got drunk, had a telly or broke the speed limit. But they condemned their

sinful brethren, those with whom they share condemnation. And that's why they are there. This reality needs far more than some passing grunt of approval or sober nod of the head from us as we consider it. All this is not to say that we in this life can't tell right from wrong- that's the point of v. 2. We are indeed sure of what the judgment of God is about these gross sins, but we are sure of what *God's* judgment is- and that, surely, is where the emphasis should be: "the judgment of *God*".

We *know* right now the principles on which God will judge us. We can judge what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10- judgment day language). We can judge / discern those things which are excellent in His eyes (Phil. 1:10). We are *sure* of what the judgment of God is going to be against persistent sinners (Rom. 2:2); and yet if we condemn them, we can be equally sure that even now we are condemned of ourselves, seeing that if we condemn, we will be likewise (Rom. 2:1). The wrath of God is right now revealed, constantly disclosed, against sin (Rom. 1:18).

It is difficult to read Rom. 2:1 without seeing an allusion to David's condemnation of the man who killed his neighbour's only sheep: "Thou art inexcusable, O man, *whosoever thou art* that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself". Surely Paul is saying that David's massive self-deception and hypocrisy over Bathsheba can all too easily be replicated in our experience.

*2:2 And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those that practise such things-* Again, it is only the believer, the person who knows God's word, who is aware and certain of the judgment of God. We can be certain that judgmentalism, lack of mercy and all the moral sins in the list at the end of Romans 1 will all lead to condemnation; yet we still do them, especially the sin of condemning others. This is the paradox Paul is bringing out- that we can be sure, intellectually and spiritually persuaded, that sin [including judging and being unmerciful to others] will result in condemnation- but this doesn't seem to mean we stop doing them. This is all part of Paul's build up to the crescendo of conviction of human sinfulness which so urgently necessitates our acceptance of God's grace.

"Practice" is Gk. 'to practice continually', rather than occasional failure. "Judgment... against them" is language of the law court, whereby a judgment [the contents of the judgment, rather than the act of judgment; a noun rather than a verb] is read out *against* a person. The oft made distinction between the person and the sin doesn't seem Biblical- God's judgment is against persons, not abstractions. It is individuals and not concepts which come before God's judgment.

*2:3 And do you think (O man who judges those that practise such things-* There is the strong sense in human nature that 'this won't happen to me, yes it will happen to most people who do that, but not to me'. This aspect of our nature is at its most acute when it comes to committing sin. Others will die, for sure, truly, definitely, for doing those things (2:2)- but I will not. No wonder the sin within us is at times described as 'the devil', a liar, a deceiver. Yet this whole process of thought is described here as a 'reckoning' [AV "thinkest...?"], a process of discussion with ourselves. But it all takes place deep in the subconscious; for we don't literally have this kind of conversation with ourselves. We see here how the Bible tackles sin at its root- deep in the heart, within the subconscious thought processes, rather than blaming some supernatural cosmic dragon. Such an explanation is utterly primitive and has no praxis, compared to the Biblical definition of sin and the devil.

*And yet you do the same*)- I suggested under 2:1 that this may refer to *effectively* doing the same, by condemning the individuals.

*That you shall escape the judgment of God?*- Gk. 'to flee'. The rejected will ultimately flee from God's presence at judgment day. Paul appears to be playing on that idea- they think they can run away from it, and in the end they shall run from it in condemnation. All the same, apart from this word play, Paul is highlighting the basic human tendency to think that 'It won't happen *to me*. I can do the same as *they* do, they may suffer the consequences of it, but in my case, I will not'. Paul is addressing himself to our deepest psyche and internal thought processes: "Do you think [*logizomai*, to reason out] this [within yourself], O man...?". This sense that 'I in *my* case can get away with it and not pay the price' is especially pronounced in spiritual matters; the idea is that we can sin and not die because of it. The psychology of criminal behaviour has emphasized this facet of the human mind, but in fact we all have it.

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so unwillingly.

2:4 *Or do you despise the riches of his goodness*- We can despise God's grace if we condemn others; for who are we to say that God in the end will not save the sinners of 1:26-31? By condemning others [which is the burden of 2:1-3] we are despising God's grace, limiting it, counting it as not very powerful nor wonderful. And by condemning others we fail to realize that God's limitless grace and goodness- the very grace we wish to limit by condemning others- is in fact leading us personally to repentance from the sins which will in their turn condemn us too.

*And forbearance*- Gk. self-restraint. God restrains Himself by His grace. Not condemning us is a struggle for Him, and we despise that characteristic of His, ignore and downplay His marvellous internal struggle, if we simply write people off as 'condemned'.

*And longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you*- Gk. 'is leading you', continuous present- all the while we are despising His grace, thinking others can't possibly be saved by it, He by grace is trying to patiently lead us to repentance. The only other time in Romans the word is used is in Rom. 8:14, where we learn that all the children of God are "led by the spirit of God" [just as God leads, same word, His children unto glory, Heb. 2:10]. This leading is therefore specifically to repentance, to actual concrete change in our lives in specific areas, not just a general sense that we are 'led on the journey of life'. It's amazing that God tries to lead even the self-righteous, proud and judgmental of others to repentance. In Rom. 8:14 we read that all God's true children are led of the Spirit. Here in Rom. 2:4 it is the goodness, the kindness, the grace of God which leads us- to the end point of repentance. We are being led somewhere- to change, not just led on some road to Wigan Pier, to nowhere, led for the sake of being led... a journey for the sake of a journey. It's common to speak of 'being on a journey', but the question is, are we arriving anywhere, are we coming to radical change, *metanoia*, or not?

*To repentance-* from being judgmental? For that is the context of 2:1-3.

The context of Paul's challenge about whether we despise God's rich grace is his plea for us not to be judgmental and unmerciful. If we consider our brethren condemned by God and refuse to show them mercy and sympathy, then we are despising God's goodness; we're saying that all the riches of His grace aren't enough to save that person. Thus our condemning of others is effectively a limiting and despising of God's saving grace. All the time we are despising God's grace like this, God's grace is leading [continuous present tense] *us* to repentance of the sins which shall condemn *us*. The implication is that focusing upon judging others results in little attention to one's own need for repentance. This would explain why those so publicly judgmental of others are so often exposed in due course as having hypocritically harboured some secret vice or moral failure in their own lives.

Psychologically, this situation develops because their focus is so upon the failures of others that they perceive "sin" to be something purely external to themselves.

Paul summarises his argument of Romans chapters 1 and 2 by saying that there he has accused / charged (in a legal sense) all men and women, Jews and Gentiles, of being "under [judgment for] sin" (Rom. 3:9 Gk.). With typically devastating logic, he has demonstrated the universal guilt of man. Twice he stresses that whoever we are, we are without excuse (1:20; 2:1). All men have a conscience which is dynamically equivalent to the specific knowledge of God's law; in this sense they are a "law unto themselves" (2:14- although this phrase is used in a different sense in modern English). "By nature" (Strong: 'native disposition, constitution') they have the same moral sense that God's law teaches. This is why human beings have an innate sense of right and wrong- it's why, e.g., there is protest at ethnic cleansing. God is understood / perceived by what He has created, namely our own bodies. But through, e.g., sexual perversion, man has distorted the image and glory of God which he was intended to be, and has worshipped the created body rather than the creator (1:20-23). Fashion, adverts and power clothing all do this, as well as the present obsession with sexual expression. The Lord Himself taught that because we are in the image of God, therein lies an imperative to give our bodies to Him. The goodness of God can lead *all men* to repentance (Rom. 2:4). God has set a sense of the eternal in the human heart (Ecc. 3:11 AVmg.). An awareness of judgment is alive as a basic instinct in people. God is "not far from every one of us...forasmuch as we are [all] the offspring of God" (Acts 17:27-29- stated in a preaching context), being created in His image.

*2:5 But after your hardness-* Judging / condemning others is because of hardness of heart. *Hardness* implies that the mortal sin being spoken about is a hardness of heart, a condemning of others (2:1-3). Later in Romans, Paul associates hardness of heart with Pharaoh, who was in turn hardened by God in response to his own hardness.

*And impenitent heart-* Continuing impenitently condemning others' impenitence is what will lead to our condemnation; for so long as we continue condemning, we are treasuring up condemnation to ourselves. The paradox is huge and crucially relevant. The wrath and indignation for which these people are condemned (2:8) is surely wrath and indignation against those whom they condemn, claiming to have the "wrath" of Divine condemnation against others, a wrath which only properly belongs to Him. God is leading people to repentance (2:4), but some remain impenitent. In this they fight against God. He leads people by His grace to repent of their judgmentalism and condemnation of others, but not all accept His leading.

*You treasure up for yourself anger-* Every continuance in condemning others and being unmerciful is a treasuring up of condemnation in the last day, adding to it bit by bit. Each act of condemnation, each incident of rejecting others, is as it were heaping up a piece of condemnation for ourselves in the last day. Our life is a laying up of treasure against the day of judgment (Mt. 6:19,20). The Greek *orge* translated “wrath” is elsewhere translated ‘anger’, ‘indignation’. These are exactly the feelings of those who condemn others- anger and indignation. There is therefore a direct, proportionate correspondence between human condemnation, anger and indignation against the weakness of their brethren; and the anger, indignation and condemnation of God against those who condemn in this way.

*In the day of anger-* your wrath with others now (2:8) is going to be related to God’s wrath against you at the last day. Again the implication is that it is because people have shown wrath, i.e. Divine condemnation, that they will suffer wrath in the day of wrath which is to come. The point is that the day of judgment is the day of God’s wrath, not ours; and the day for wrath is then, and not now. It will be “revealed” only then- not now. The emphasis is upon the judgment and wrath being “of God”, then- and not of man, nor now in this life.

*And revelation of the righteous judgment of God-* the Greek means ‘the verdict’, the judgment given. This will not be decided upon at the last day- it has already been created in this life, and we have created it ourselves- for we are our own judges. What happens at the last day is that it is revealed. The day of judgment is a metaphor- a human court sits down to assess evidence and pass a verdict. This isn’t the case with Divine judgment, as God knows the end from the beginning, and isn’t passive nor unaware of human behaviour and the reasons for it- all at the very time it occurs.

There are several allusions to Job in Romans, all of which confirm that Job is set up as symbolic of apostate Israel. A simple example is Elihu’s description of Job as a hypocrite heaping up wrath (Job 36:13), which connects with Paul’s description of the Jews as treasuring up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5).

2:6 *Who will render to every man according to his works-* The emphasis is perhaps on “will”, for Paul is addressing the subconscious mentality that we ourselves can escape judgment (see on 2:3). “Render” is the same word translated “to give account”- we shall “give account” at the day of judgment (Mt. 12:36; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5), “render” [s.w.] to God the fruits of our lives (Mt. 21:41). So God’s rendering of account to us is really our rendering of account to Him- we are our own judges, we are working out the verdict now by our attitudes and actions. “Render” is ‘to give account’. It would seem that in some sense, there will be a ‘going through’ of all our deeds, and an account given by God related to each of them. How this shall happen is unclear (e.g. through the past flooding before our eyes like a movie, which is frequently stopped for us to comment upon). But in some sense it will happen, in that not one human deed performed or thought by those responsible to Divine judgment will as it were slip away unnoticed. This isn’t only sobering, but also comforting. It is God who will render to each person their account- therefore we should not sit as judges (the context of 2:1).

The judgement of works must be squared against the fact that we each receive a penny a day, salvation by grace. Our salvation itself is by grace, but the nature of our eternity, how many cities we rule over, how brightly we shine as stars, will be appropriate to our deeds in this

life. Or it may be that in the context here, the “deeds” which will be judged are our condemnation of others. This, as explained in 2:1-3, is as bad as the “deeds” being condemned by us; and so there’s a telling appropriacy in styling such condemnations “deeds”, as if they are the actual deed performed.

*2:7 To them that by patience in welldoing-* s.w. “deeds” in 2:6. Yet how can the right deeds be rewarded with eternal life, given Paul’s teaching about salvation by grace rather than works? Surely the answer is in the fact that salvation itself is by grace, the “penny a day” of the parable which all believers will receive; but our works aren’t insignificant, and they will be judged and will affect the nature of the eternal life, the salvation, which by grace we shall be given. Or it could be that the “well doing”, the ‘good deeds’, spoken of here are in fact a non-judgmental, merciful life. The good deeds are what we avoided doing, i.e. condemning others, which is the theme of this section of Romans.

*Seek for glory and honour and incorruption-* Or “immortality”. To those who earnestly seek for perfection, who would so love to be given moral perfection, who would so love never to sin again- they will be given eternal life in that state. Note the difference between the “immortality” which we seek, and the “eternal life” which we are given in response. The Greek for “immortality” is also translated “incorruption”, “sincerity”- it has a distinct moral sense to it. If we seek to live in moral incorruption, if our desire to be in the Kingdom of God is because we so yearn to live without sin and corruption- then we will not only be given that but also an eternity of life like that. But the essence is to seek to live in moral incorruption- and then the eternity will come as a natural part of that.

“Glory and honour” are terms frequently applied by Paul to the Lord Jesus. The righteous seek *His* glory and honour, and shall be given eternal life in which to do so. Or should we seek glory, honour- for others? For love doesn’t seek her own things (1 Cor. 13:5 s.w.). Paul could write of how he ‘sought’ others’ salvation (2 Cor. 12:14). Paul tells the Hebrews [if he indeed was the author] and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36).

*2:8 But to them that are factious-* The section is talking about those who condemn others (2:1) and who are unmerciful (1:31). It is this which creates faction-for if one person condemns another, they expect others to condemn them too, and cause faction over it. It’s significant that causing faction by being judgmental is chosen here as the epitome of wrong doing- despite Paul having spoken of sins such as lesbianism in the context. His argument seems to be that condemning those who commit such sins and causing faction over the matter is in fact a far worse sin. To be contentious – to be divisive, endlessly creating strife (Gk.), is the very epitome of those who will not be saved. Yet sadly, contention against other believers is falsely painted as ‘spiritual strength’. This category of people are later in this verse called indignant and angry- confirming the view that this group are people within the ecclesia who are angry, indignant and contentious against others whom they judge (2:1-3 sets the context). *Do not obey the truth-* As we have shown in comments on 2:2 that Paul has in view here those who know the Truth. The emphasis should therefore here be placed upon their disobedience to the Truth which they know. And that Truth requires mercy, grace and non-condemnation to be shown to sinners. That is obedience to the Truth. Or “the truth” may be a reference to the Law of Moses, as in Rom. 2:20; 3:7? Or to the Gospel, as elsewhere in Paul’s thought.

*And do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, anger and indignation-* Paul introduces the paradox he develops so strongly in chapter 6- that we are slaves, and we obey either the flesh or the spirit. For all our fiercely claimed independence, we are presented by Paul as slaves with only two possible masters to whom we can yield obedience. What's telling in the figure is that the 'master' of the flesh is actually our own internal passions of wrath, indignation, unrighteousness. "Obey" is from a Greek word which really means to persuade. We are persuaded either by our own anger, or by the Truth of the Gospel. The same word recurs in 2:19.

As commented on under 2:5, it is those who condemn others who do so with indignation and wrath, thus heaping upon themselves Divine wrath and indignation at the last day. We all have latent wrath and indignation within us- but we are not to obey those passions in a wrong way. When we encounter the sinfulness of others, it seems that indignation and wrath are aroused and this leads some to condemn others. But if we obey those passions- we shall receive God's wrath and condemnation.

The rejected will want to be accepted. "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (quoted in Rom. 2:8 re. the judgment). Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:27,28).

2:9- see on Rom. 2:23.

*Tribulation-* We have the choice of tribulation now for the sake of living the truly Christian life (e.g. Mt. 13:21), or tribulation at the hands of God and His Son and their Angels at the last day. *Tribulation* was exactly what the apostate Christians were trying to avoid will come upon them at judgment day. The 'persecution' or 'chasing' is perhaps a reference to the Angel of the Lord chasing the rejected like chaff away from the judgment seat- the Angel will "persecute" the rejected along dark and slippery paths (Ps. 35:6).

*And anguish-* lit. 'narrowness of room'. They will have no place to run, compared to the sense of largeness and freedom which will be [and is with] God's accepted people. The anguish will not just be upon 'men' but upon every individual *psuche* (s.w. heart, life, mind) of man who has been disobedient. The suggestion is that the punishment will be psychological, a mental trauma.

*Upon every soul of man that works evil-* 1:32 has warned that those who don't so much do the evil but vicariously agree with it are just as culpable. The 'doing' is therefore as much mental as physical.

*Of the Jew first and also of the Greek-* Because the Jews have or had greater responsibility to Divine judgment?

2:10 *But glory and honour and peace to every man that works good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek-* The Greek word for "honour" really refers to money, a financial price. There could be an allusion to the parable of the talents, whereby the faithful receives the one talent which the unfaithful hadn't used (Mt. 25:28). The 'working good' in the context of 2:1-3 is not condemning our brother.



2:11 *For there is no respect of persons with God-* i.e. both Jew and Gentile will be accepted in God's Kingdom. The spirituality of the Gentile believers will be rewarded just as much as that of Jewish believers. That the Jew-Gentile equality is such a theme in Romans would suggest that the ecclesia featured both Jews and Gentiles- hence Paul's many OT allusions in Romans, whilst at the same time making it clear in places that he is specifically addressing Gentiles ["ye Gentiles"].

2:12 *For as many as have sinned outside of law shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law-* i.e. in condemnation at the last day? For this is how the word is used in Jn. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 13:4. "Judged" is being used in the sense of "condemned". Not only those who knew the Mosaic law will appear at judgment day; some will be condemned there because of their disobedience to that law, but others will be condemned because of disobedience to other principles.

Watch out for the use of figures of speech. How we interpret the Bible accurately depends upon grasping these. Ellipsis and metaphor are the most common. Ellipsis is where as it were a gap is left in the sentence, and we have to fill in the intended sense. Thus: "For as many as have sinned without law, shall perish also without [*being judged by*] law" (Rom. 2:12).

2:13 *For not the hearers of the law are just before God-* there would have been a great tendency in the first century as in our own to think that regular attendance at a place of worship and simply hearing God's law read was enough for salvation.

*But the doers of the law shall be justified-* Yet Paul elsewhere teaches that no works can bring about justification, it is not of works but of faith in God's grace. I've observed several times in these notes so far in Romans that Paul tends to use the idea of 'doing' with reference to mental attitudes rather than deeds. Or it may be that Paul is here quoting a rabbinic maxim, and agreeing with it only so far- to demonstrate that even passive religionists are all the same liable to a very real condemnation.

Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel.

2:14 *For when Gentiles that do not have the law-* Gentile believers in Christ. There's no article- it's not a reference to *the* Gentiles as a whole.

*Do by nature the things of the law, these not having the law, are the law to themselves-* Nobody seems to be naturally obedient to "the things contained in the law", rather is obedience and spirituality an hourly struggle. It's therefore tempting to seek to interpret this verse in the light of the immediate context- which is condemning some [Jewish?] members of the Rome ecclesia for doing that which is "against nature", i.e. lesbianism and homosexuality (Rom. 1:26). The Gentile believers *in that context of homosexuality* were "by nature" doing God's will in that area. Again, we see Paul teaching that nobody is 'born gay', such behaviour is not natural. Perhaps it is in this context that we can understand the rest of 2:14 and 2:15, which seem to suggest that conscience naturally rebels against such things. This is indeed the natural reaction to such perversion.

It's easy to get discouraged in our preaching by the apparent lack of response. But all the witnesses that we make, the points we get across, the bills we distribute, adverts we place...

the people who receive them *don't* treat them as they would say a commercial advertisement. *Everyone out there has a religious conscience*- let's remember that. They know, deep down, what they ought to be doing. And our preaching invites them to do it. If there is no immediate conversion, well don't worry. *You have touched peoples' hearts* by your witness. Paul describes our witness in terms of the burning of aromatic spices during the triumphant procession of a victorious general, in our case, the Lord Jesus. His victory train goes on and on and on; and each generation of preachers is the aroma. But in Paul's image, the aroma strikes the bystanders in only one of two ways: some find it pleasing and life-giving, whereas others find it nauseating and deadly (2 Cor. 2:14-16). The point is, the fragrance of our witness penetrates *everywhere* (2 Cor. 2:14), and it is an odour which *cannot be ignored*. It is either repulsive, or life-giving. Our hearers will react in only one of those two ways, whatever their apparent indifference to us.

2:15 *In that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith*- Along with the witness of God's law, their conscience also happened to agree with God's law about homosexuality. 1 Cor. 4:4 warns that our conscience isn't so reliable as to justify us at the last day; but in the 'natural' revulsion of the conscience against homosexuality, conscience is a joint witness with God's law. Again, it's apparent that Paul didn't believe the 'born gay' story.

*And their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them*- Gk. 'logismos'. The internal words, the conscience, accused or excused [both are legal words] the behaviour; our internal words 'bear witness' as in a court, for or against us. Judgment is ongoing; and we are at times our own accusers.

2:16 *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ*- The focus upon our innermost thoughts and words spoken only within our own minds continues when we read that God will judge the "secrets" of men in the last day. It's our thoughts which are the essence of us as persons. These will be judged- and the context of 2:1-3 is of internal attitudes like judgmentalism being worthy of condemnation at the last day. *According to my [preaching of the] gospel*- the Gospel as preached by Paul includes judgment to come as part of the good news. But the teaching about the judgment seat of Christ is only good news for those sure of their redemption in Christ, those who are now suffering, those who now in their thoughts and hearts are with the Lord but are condemned by others... for the day of judgment will be a turning of tables, a replacing of the external with the internal.

2:17 *But if you [singular] bear the name of a Jew*- It's as if Paul is in the middle of giving a lecture and then suddenly addresses himself to one individual in the audience.

*And rely upon the law*- The Greek idea is of remaining. Again it seems Paul is addressing himself to Christian Jews in the Rome ecclesia who had chosen to remain in the Mosaic law.

*And boast in God-* As in 2:23, a reference to Jewish glorying in having and obeying the Mosaic law. But Paul uses the same word another three times in Romans, about how "we" boast in our reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:11), in the hope we have of salvation (5:2), and also in our humiliations which prepare us for that time (5:3). Our witness to others is part of this confident boasting about God's grace. But we can only confidently boast of salvation and reconciliation if by faith we have assured ourselves that these things are present realities, and not merely possible futures for us.

Paul's rebuke of the Jews in Rom. 2 for their reliance on a mixture of worldly wisdom and that of the Mosaic law has many similarities with Job:

### **Rom. 2:17-23**

"Thou art called a Jew... and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and triest the things that differ (AVmg.), being instructed out of the law;

and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an

instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?

Thou that preacheest a man should not steal... commit adultery... (worship) idols... dost thou?

Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law dishonourest thou God?"

### **Job**

A fair description of Job before his trials. Cp. Job's constant reasoning with God about things which differed from his previous concept of God; "Doth not the ear try words?" (12:11)

"I was eyes to the blind" (29:15)

"Thou hast instructed many ... thy words have upholden him that was falling... but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest" (4:3-5).

These were the 3 main things of which the friends accused Job.

Elihu, on God's behalf, says that Job's boasting of his righteousness implied God was doing wickedly in punishing Job (34:10)

Their belief that they possessed such great wisdom led the Jews to be self-righteous, in that they reasoned that if they were wicked, then their wisdom would reveal this to them. Job and the Jews were in this sense similar.

2:18 *And know His will and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law-* The very same Greek words which were spoken to Paul at his conversion by Ananias (Acts 22:14). This is yet another example of where Paul's conversion experience is alluded to him constantly, consciously and unconsciously, throughout his writings. Paul goes on to talk about how this individual Jew of whom he speaks could approve or prove or judge / discern excellent things- this surely is an allusion to the rabbinical process of casuistic interpretation of Scripture with which Paul had been brought up, and which dialectic is so evident in his Christian writing and reasoning. Surely the individual Jew whom Paul started addressing in

2:17 is in fact Paul himself. Perhaps he also has in mind the Lord's teaching (using the same Greek words) in Lk. 12:47, where in the context of responsibility to final judgment, the Lord warns that those who know His will shall be punished more severely than those who don't. Hence Paul's earlier comments about "to the Jew first".

2:19 This verse and 2:20-23 sound so similar to Paul. He is the Jew out of the audience whom he starts addressing in 2:17. Like Peter, his teaching of others is shot through with reference to his own failure and salvation by grace; and he is at pains to apply the exhortations, appeals and warnings he makes to himself personally.

*And are confident you yourself-* persuaded. The same word is [mis]translated "obey" in 2:8. There we read that we are persuaded either of the Gospel, or by anger, judgmentalism etc. Who did the persuading? Presumably Paul's own pride and / or the peer opinion of others in the Jewish peer group.

*Are a guide of the blind, a light to those that are in darkness-* This and the other similar phrases here and in 2:20 were all used by the Rabbis to describe their attempts to make Gentiles into Jews by proselytizing. However each phrase can equally be understood with reference to the true preaching of Christ as the light of the world. As the Lord was the light of those that sat in darkness (Mt. 4:16), so Paul writes as if all the believers are likewise (Rom. 2:19).

Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness. See on Mt. 13:16.

2:20 *A corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth-* "Instructor of the foolish... teacher of babes" are Rabbinic terms used for Rabbis and Jewish orthodox missionaries bringing forth 'babes' of Gentile converts to Judaism. Such people had the "form of knowledge and truth" [another Rabbinic phrase] in the Jewish Law. Paul's hypothetical "O man" (2:1) is narrowing down to himself; for very few if any of the initial readership of Romans would've been former Rabbis, let alone Rabbis involved in missionary proselytizing. The only Christian former Rabbi and travelling proselytizer we meet in the New Testament is Paul himself. The allusion by Paul to himself rather than pointing the finger at any of his readership would've set them at ease, that there were no hidden messages nor hints that he was addressing a specific situation or person in Rome. He was applying his principles to himself, and by so publicly doing so he appeals to each of his readers to likewise personalize the principles to ourselves.

2:21 *You therefore that teach another, don't you teach yourself?* - Paul was teaching the Romans. Thus the allusion to himself is clear- he who teaches others must teach himself, must apply to himself the principles which pass his lips so easily. He may be referring back to his theme in 2:2,3- that we have a tendency to assume that Divine truths aren't relevant to us

personally, that punishment for sin and condemning others isn't, actually, going to come *on me*, although we know it will surely come *on others*. And so Paul is saying that he too must be aware of this- that he places himself in the audience of those whom he is teaching. See on Rom. 3:19.

*You that preach a man should not steal, do you steal?*- Stealing was felt to be a crime which could and should be openly, publicly rebuked.

*2:22 You that say a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?*- Sexual double standards is perhaps the most obvious example of hypocrisy. Remember the context of this passage- the list of awful sexual sins at the end of chapter 1 lead Paul in to a discourse on the sin of condemning others for their sins, his point being that to do so was a despising of God's grace; and that by condemning others for their sin we are in fact guilty of that same sin. And so Paul could be meaning that if we condemn individuals for adultery, it is as if we have ourselves committed adultery, for this would be in harmony with what he has taught earlier in this section (see on 1:32).

*You that dread idols*- Jewish Rabbis like Paul were well known for their obsession with making any image of God.

*Do you rob temples?*- The theme which connects the three examples given by Paul is that of stealing, taking that which isn't yours. 'Do you steal?' (v.21) connects with 'Do you commit adultery?' because adultery is a stealing of that which isn't yours but which belongs to your neighbour (1 Thess. 4:6); and robbing temples is likewise stealing. Stealing was and is seen in the Middle East as the social evil and crime which could be shouted out against the most. Indeed in many cultures there is some equivalent of the English "Stop thief!".

Temple robbery was something Jews were accused of (Acts 19:37)- according to Josephus they were renowned for it, justifying it on the basis that the gods who 'owned' the treasures did not in fact exist (*Antiquities* 4:8, 10). So it's appropriate Paul would choose this example- condemning others, in this case for idolatry, but to our own personal advantage.

*2:23 You who boast in the law*- Again, this is surely a reference by Paul to himself, who boasted of his Jewish roots and knowledge of the Law. The Jews boasted in God (2:17 s.w.) and in His law. Later in Romans Paul talks of how the Christian believer boasts in God on account of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:11 s.w.; AV "joy in God"). The Jewish boast in God was proven empty because of human sin and hypocrisy; whereas the Christian can boast in God because s/he is confident in His grace in Christ.

*Actually dishonour God through your transgression of the law*- The same word has been used by Paul in Rom. 1:24 about homosexuals dishonouring their bodies. Relentlessly, Paul repeats his point- the apparently grosser sins such as homosexuality are just as bad and 'dishonouring' as those who know the Law, even boasting of it, and yet condemn others for sins like homosexuality.

There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his

underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28).

The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so "they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:27,28). It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4).

The chapter has been arguing against judgmentalism and condemning of sinners. This is perhaps the rank breaking of the Law which Paul is talking about.

2:24 The Jews were so sensitive to honouring God's Name that they wouldn't even pronounce it. And yet their hypocrisy led to it being blasphemed world-wide. This is Paul's point- that hypocrisy is as bad a sin as the crudest, most widely spread blasphemy.

*For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, even as it is written-* In Is. 52:5, where God says that Judah in Babylon had caused His Name to be blasphemed, but (the prophesy continues) because of that He would reveal His Name to His people as it is in His Son, and they would ultimately accept Him and thus the blasphemy of God's Name would cease. Yet Paul is writing in Romans to Jewish Christians. Clearly they had not really grasped Christ as intended.

2:25 *For circumcision indeed profits, if you be a doer of the law; but if you be a transgressor of the law-* The corollary of this is that Christ will "profit" [s.w.] nothing if we chose to be circumcised (Gal. 5:2). The analogy of a wedding ring is perhaps helpful to explain Paul's sense here. A wedding ring, a ritualistic external token, is helpful as a sign of marriage; but if one breaks the marriage covenant, the wedding ring [cp. Circumcision] becomes bereft of meaning and just a pointless external physicality.

*Your circumcision has become uncircumcision-* Humanly speaking in the first century, this was impossible. Once the flesh was cut off, this was irreversible. But in God's opinion- and that surely is Paul's point- circumcision no longer counts if the covenant which defines the

Law is broken. The Jew is therefore as the Gentile, the circumcised becomes uncircumcised because the Law, the old covenant which defined the whole relationship, has been broken.

2:26 *If therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?*- Throughout Romans, the point is made that the Lord *counts as righteous* those that believe; righteousness is *imputed* to us the unrighteous (Rom. 2:26; 4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24; 8:36; 9:8). But the very same Greek word is used of *our* self-perception. We must count / impute ourselves as righteous men and women, and count each other as righteous on the basis of recognising each other's faith rather than works: "Therefore we conclude [we count / impute / consider] that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law... Likewise reckon [impute] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 3:28; 6:11). We should *feel* clean and righteous, and act accordingly, both in our own behaviour and in our feelings towards each other.

The readership in the Roman ecclesia appears to have been mixed, Jew and Gentile. The Gentile world of darkness doesn't keep the righteousness of the Law. "The uncircumcision" here must surely refer to the uncircumcised Christian believers, especially those in the Roman ecclesia. Indeed, "the circumcision" in Acts 10:45; 11:2; Tit. 1:10 and Gal. 2:12 refers to the circumcised *believers in Christ*; and so it's likely that here in Romans it has the same meaning. The Gentile believers were counted as Jews, under the new definition of 'Israel' which there now was in Christ: "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

2:27 *And shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge you-* The Christian Gentile believers, who were uncircumcised, would judge / condemn the Jewish Christian believer who trusted in keeping the letter of the Law and in his circumcision rather than in Christ. They would 'condemn' them in that at the last day, those rejected will as it were be compared against other human beings and be relatively 'condemned' by their example (Mt. 12:39-41). Paul has been emphasizing the need not to condemn our brethren (2:1 etc.)- he's saying that it is God who will use us to condemn others, of His choosing, at the last day judgment. The very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27), just as Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7) and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

"Shall not uncircumcision (i.e. the Gentiles)... judge thee (first century Israel), who... dost transgress the law?" (Rom. 2:27) is an odd way of putting it. How can believing Gentiles "judge" first century Jews who refused to believe? Surely there must be some connection with Mt. 12:41, which speaks of Gentiles such as the men of Nineveh rising "in judgment

with this generation (first century Israel), and shall condemn it: because they repented...". I can't say there is a conscious allusion being made here. But the similarity is too great to just shrug off.

We may again need to read in an ellipsis when we read that uncircumcision fulfils the Law. The Gentile Christians fulfilled [the essence of] the Jewish Law. This was a paradox- the Law demanded circumcision, so how could the uncircumcised fulfil the Law? Another explanation is to understand that they 'fulfil the Law' in that God counts them as having done so. And as soon as we think about fulfilling the Law, our minds surely go to the fact that the Lord Jesus was the One who fulfilled the Law by His life of perfect obedience. And Rom. 8:4 makes the point that the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled "in us" because of the fact that the Lord Jesus died His representative death for us. Thereby, His righteousness is counted to us. He, the circumcised, perfect keeper of God's law, died as our representative. If we identify with Him by faith and baptism into Him, then women and uncircumcised men alike are all counted to be as Him. And in this way, uncircumcised, disobedient, law-breaking believers in Christ will as it were condemn those who have attempted to justify themselves by the circumcision ritual and obedience to the letter of the Law.

*Who with the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the law?*- "Letter" is Gk. *gramma*, s.w., "Scriptures". Neither the Scriptures nor circumcision in themselves make a person break the Law of Moses. So we must read in an ellipsis here. By trusting in our obedience to these things we can put ourselves in a position where we are coming before God on the basis of justification by our own obedience rather than our faith in Christ. In this lies the danger of 'Biblicism' when it's used the wrong way. If we are obsessed with obedience to the letter of God's Word and external, ritual signs such as circumcision, then we shall end up condemned as law breakers- because perfect obedience to God's word is actually impossible.

*2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh*- This was a radical, hard hitting statement. And coming from a Hebrew of the Hebrews like Saul of Tarsus, it really was stinging. Self-identity in the Mediterranean world of the first century was all tied up with who one was externally. The new identity in Christ challenges our self-perceptions to the absolute core.

Rom. 2:28 explicitly states the principle of our real spiritual self being hidden, by saying that the true believer will "inwardly" (same word translated "hidden" in 1 Pet. 3:4) circumcise his heart. The works of the flesh are "manifest", but by inference those of the Spirit are hidden (Gal. 5:18,19). Mt. 6:4,6,18 gives triple emphasis to the fact that God sees in secret. He alone truly and fully appreciates our spiritual self. This is sure comfort on the many occasions where our spirituality is misunderstood, both in the world and in the ecclesia. Yet it also provides an endless challenge; moment by moment, our true spiritual being is known by the Almighty, "Thou whose eyes in darkness see, and try the heart of man". The spiritual man which God now knows ("sees") and relates to, will be what He sees at the day of judgment. God dwells in "secret", i.e. in the hidden place, as well as seeing in "secret". God is a God who hides Himself (Is. 57:17) due to human sinfulness. If we fail to see the spiritual man in our brethren, this must be due to a lack of real spiritual vision in us. It is human sin which is somehow getting in the way.

*2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter*- It was indeed a radical thing for Paul to re-define self-identity from the



outward and visible to the internal and invisible. External appearances were and are what define a person, both within society and to him or her self. By becoming “in Christ”, this all changes- radically. “Inwardly” is the same word translated “secrets” when we read a few verses earlier that God will judge the secrets, the internal things (Rom. 2:16). This is what He looks upon.

It’s significant that circumcision was in any case a private matter. The Canaanite tribes each had various markings or tattoos, usually on the face or somewhere public and visible, just as some African tribes do today. It was immediately obvious that the person was from whatever tribe. God’s people, however, had a body marking on the most hidden and intimate place on a man’s body, which was not on public display. This in itself reflected how relationship with God was and is something intimate, personal and not immediately visible, in a sense, to the world around us. We who line up in a supermarket look, smell, talk and chose our shopping in a virtually identical way to the world around us. Our separation unto God is internal, intimate and not externally visible. Note that Paul has been talking about not judging; and from that he moves on to talk about circumcision. The connection is in the fact that we cannot judge others because we can only view them externally; God will judge the “secrets” (2:16), the internal things, because the sign of our covenant connection with God is by its very nature internal and personal to the believer and God. We cannot possibly, therefore, judge others- for we see only the visible and external.

Circumcision under the new covenant doesn't refer to anything outward, visibly verifiable. For now "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29)- seeing we can't judge the secret things of others' hearts, how can we tell who is circumcised in heart or not? The 'sealing' of God's people today, the proof that they are the Lord's (2 Tim. 2:19), is not anything external, but the internal matter of being sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), or being sealed with a mark in the mind / forehead, as Revelation puts it (Rev. 7:3; 9:4).

*Whose praise is not of men but of God-* We will be praised by God in that He will ‘go through’ all our good deeds, when we fed the hungry and visited those in prison (Mt. 25:36). He will rejoice over us, glory in us, in the way that only a lover can over the beloved whom He views through eyes of love, counting perfection to us in His eyes (1 Cor. 4:5). This is the real meaning of being ‘Jewish’- for Paul is making a word play on the word ‘Jew’ coming from ‘Judah’, the praised one (Gen. 49:8).

## ROMANS CHAPTER 3

3:1 *What advantage then has the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision?*- Whilst accepting Paul's Divine inspiration, I have always found the logic of this and the next few verses to be difficult and twisted. It's as if Paul wishes to say something nice about the Jews to as it were keep on board the Jews in his audience, having spoken against the significance of natural Jewishness so strongly in 2:27-29. But what he says there isn't quite compensated for by the reasoning he now comes out with- or so it seems to me. If natural descent is so irrelevant and Jewishness has been redefined, what real advantage is there, then, in being ethnically Jewish? "Advantage" translates a Greek word which is a superlative meaning more 'pre-eminence', 'exceeding abundance'. Paul appears to say that the Jews do have indeed such a superlative position; whereas elsewhere in this context Paul speaks as if the Jews are as sinful as or even more sinful than the Gentiles, and that both are "under sin" (Rom. 3:9). Both need baptism into Christ to be the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29). Paul's claim that their amazing blessing and advantage is because the Law was given to their fathers seems to strangely contradict the Law being elsewhere described as "weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9), "weak through the flesh", whose glory was nothing, as dirty garments, compared to the excellency and surpassing wonder of Christ. I therefore suggest in the light of all this that we may be justified in reading Paul's words in Rom. 3:1,2 as a kind of sarcasm: "What superlative, amazing pre-eminence then has the Jew! Or what profit at all is there in being circumcised! Much every way, indeed! The important thing to note is that the oracles of God were firstly given to them..."- and then Paul builds on that point to speak of Israel's disobedience to those commandments, leading up to his crescendo of convicting Jew and Gentile as desperate sinners who must throw themselves upon God's grace.

3:2 *Much every way! First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God-* "Entrusted" is Gk. *pisteuo*, God had faith in Israel (3:3), in giving them the commandments. He believed in them. The God who can know the end from the beginning allowed His emotion of love to take such root in Him that He as it were allowed His omniscience to be limited, just as He at times limits His omnipotence; and He desperately believed in them. For loving someone elicits also faith and hope in them.

3:3 *For what if some were without faith?*- Israel never adopted atheism nor did they ever inform Yahweh He was no longer their national deity. Yet for all their professions of faith and loyalty to the temple cult, God viewed them as unbelievers. Or it could be that Paul's implication is that they did not believe in Christ, in their Saviour Messiah.

*Shall their lack of faith make of no effect the faithfulness of God?*- God's faith and hope in His people. See on Rom. 3:2. The awkward translations can make us miss the wonderful point here: Israel's unbelief didn't abolish [Gk.], do away with, make of no effect [AV], God's faith in Israel. Here we see His love, His grace; a faith and hope in a weak other party which can only come from very deep love. They didn't believe in Him, but He didn't stop believing in them.

"Some" Jews didn't believe (Rom. 3:3); the majority, actually, but the Father is more gentle than that. The whole tragic history of God's relationship with Israel is a sure proof of His essentially positive character. Right at their birth by the Red Sea, the Almighty records that

"the people feared Yahweh, and believed Yahweh, and His servant Moses" (Ex. 14:23). No mention is made of the Egyptian idols they were still cuddling (we don't directly learn about them until Ez. 20). Nor do we learn that this "belief" of theirs lasted a mere three days; nor of the fact that they rejected Moses, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. "There was no strange god" with Israel on their journey (Dt. 32:12); but there were (Am. 5:26). The reconciliation is that God counted as Israel as devoted solely to Him. The Angel told Moses that the people would probably want to come up the mountain, closer to God, when in fact in reality they ran away when they saw the holiness of God; almost suggesting that the Angel over-estimated their spiritual enthusiasm (Ex. 19:21-24 cp. 20:18). Likewise the Angel told Moses that the people would hear him, "and believe thee for ever" (Ex. 19:9). Things turned out the opposite. At this time, God saw no iniquity in Israel (Num. 23:21).

*3:4 God forbid. Yes, let God be found true-* Paul is continually using legal language. Let God be found [in a legal sense, through legal, forensic analysis] true [Gk.] and faithful by man's judgment of God. The amazing statement in 3:3- that God remains faithful even when we are not- is hard to believe. Paul understands our internal doubts as to the extent of God's grace as man effectively putting God in the dock and trying the veracity of His claims. In one of the finest paradoxes of all, Paul will go on in Romans to use this very legal language to describe how God the judge as it were turns it all around, puts man, us sinners, in the dock, and justifies us the humanly unjustifiable.

*But every man a liar-* In that our false accusations against the real extent of God's saving grace are exposed as untrue and lies.

*As it is written: You must be justified in Your words-* God comes through the trial of His grace by doubting man as justified, declared right. And yet this very term is what Paul uses to describe how God declares us righteous in *His* judgment of us. We judge God, but in the end, God judges us.

*And must prevail when You come before judgment* [Gk.] - Prevail or "overcome" is the legal word for winning a case in court. It is our doubts as to the extent of God's grace, that He abides faithful even throughout our unfaithfulness, which is effectively our bringing God to court, to judgment. Paul is here quoting Ps. 51:4, which were David's words of reflection upon his sin unto death, and God's forgiveness of him. He reflected that he had sinned *so that* God might be justified when He is brought to judgment by us. Again we are up against an amazing grace. God uses our sin, our doubt of His forgiveness, in order to declare Himself yet more righteous when He is put in the dock to answer against our false charges: 'Is He really able to forgive me *that*? Will He really not hold *this* eternally against me? Will I *really* be saved, sinner that I am? Can God really accept *me* after what I have done, all I have failed to do as I should, all I have not been...?'. These are the kinds of questions with which we accuse God. Effectively the case against God's grace is that He will *not* actually forgive, justify and save weak sinners. And He gloriously wins the case against us. And He even uses our sin, as He used David's (who becomes a figure of us all), in order to prove this to us and to the world. And so, in a matchless logical *tour de force*, Paul triumphs in 3:5: "Our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God", just as David sinned *so that* God's righteousness would be declared.

*3:5 But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God-* see on Rom. 3:4 “And overcome...”. God commends His love to us in that when we were still sinners, Christ died for us, the just for unjust (Rom. 5:8). Thus on all sides we have God’s saving love commended to us- by our own unrighteousness on the one hand, and by God’s self-commendation of His desire to save us through giving His Son to die for us, taking the initiative whilst we were as yet unborn and still from His perspective “sinners”. The Greek for “commend” means literally to place beside, e.g. Lk. 9:32 “the men that *stood with him*”. God and man come to stand together in that court room. Our unrighteousness and His righteousness stand together. The accused [God] comes to stand together with the accusers [our doubts, sinful man]; and then the roles change, God becomes the accuser and we become the accused, and He through His love comes to again stand with us, having condemned and yet then justified us. Truly, even under inspiration, Paul is lost for words: “What shall we say?”.

David recognized that God works through our sinfulness- he is effectively saying in Ps. 51:4: ‘I sinned so that You might be justified...’. These words are quoted in Rom. 3:4,5 in the context of Paul's exultation that “ *our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God* ” - in just the same way as David's did! Because God displays His righteousness every time He justifies a repentant sinner, He is in a sense making Himself yet more righteous. We must see things from God's perspective, from the standpoint of giving glory to God's righteous attributes. If we do this, then we can see through the ugliness of sin, and come to terms with our transgressions the more effectively. And Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our supreme example in this. We along with all the righteous ought to “shout for joy” that David really was forgiven (Ps. 32:11)- for there is such hope for us now. David is our example. And yet the intensity of David’s repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord’s grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Notice too how Ps. 51:1 “Have mercy on me, O God...” is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David’s prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us.

*What shall we say? Is God unrighteous who visits with anger? (I speak after the manner of men)-* “Visits with anger” is another legal term, ‘to judicially afflict’. God would not be and is not wrong to press the case against our sin to its final term- vengeance, wrath, as will be seen at the final judgment. Would He be wrong to do this to us? Of course not.

*3:6 God forbid. For then how shall God judge the world?-* God will indeed take vengeance, press the legal case to its ultimate end, in condemning the unbelieving world. The judgment against sin cannot be minimized just because we know that it will not in fact be meted out upon those who believe in Christ- see on Rom. 3:5. I prefer to translate this verse as an exclamation: “Because how much [i.e. ‘how severely!’] shall God judge the world!”.

*3:7 But if the Truth of God-* the profound truth of Rom. 3:4, that God is willing and eager to save sinners, to remain faithful when we are unfaithful (3:3).

*Through my lie abounded to His glory-* this is the same idea as in 3:5, that our

unrighteousness actually commends the righteousness of God. Every man is a liar, a false accuser of God's grace (3:4) in that we all doubt the reality of God's saving grace for me personally. And Paul focuses on himself- he along with every man is one of those liars. Yet his doubt, his false accusation of God's saving grace, only abounds unto God's glory, in that God will and is finally justified in all this by forgiving, justifying and saving us.

*Why am I also still judged as a sinner?*- A reference to how his opponents judged him as a sinner. But as he elsewhere says, we are to pay no attention to how men judge us, because the only judgment worth anything is God's (1 Cor. 4:3). If we are judged and justified by God, so what how men judge us?

*3:8 And why not do evil that good may come? (As some people slanderously charge us with saying-* Paul's opponents repeated the gossip ["we be slanderously reported"] and fabricated primary evidence that they had actually heard Paul say ["and... affirm"] that therefore we should sin so that blessing would come from God. Note the legal language again- they were as it were putting Paul in the dock and making affirmations against him. Vilification is something which every preacher and teacher of the Gospel has to put up with, and we shouldn't be surprised when we encounter it. Paul speaks of such slanderers and word twisters in very tough terms: "Whose damnation is just". This of course is in the context of his having just pointed out that the legal condemnation of the unbelieving world is just and right. He perceived his critics within the ecclesia as actually being in the unbelieving world. He also sees their damnation as a present thing- human behaviour is played out before the judgment seat of God right now. It's not that He is unaware of it and will only consider it at the future judgment seat. Slanderous words and fabricated evidence against God's children is seen as an 'affirmation' made in the Divine court- and it will be judged with damnation.

*Their condemnation is just*)- To God, slanderers and false teachers within the ecclesia already are given their condemnation (Rom. 3:8). "The Lord shall judge the people... God judgeth (present tense) the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day... he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows" (Ps. 7:8,11-13). God is now judging men, and preparing their final reward. For the wicked, the arrow is prepared in the bow, the sword is sharpened- all waiting for the final day in which the present judgments will be executed.

3:9- see on Rom. 2:4.

*What then? Are we better than they?*- RV "in better case", do we have a better legal case than them? The "they" could be the Gentiles- as if Paul is saying that we Jews have no better case than the Gentiles. In this case our retranslation of Rom. 3:1 [see there] would be the more justified- for Paul would be saying that actually Jews have no real advantage over Gentiles. But the "they" contextually would more comfortably refer to the unbelieving world (3:6). We have no better case than them, because both Jew and Gentile are all sinners.

*No, in no way. For we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Gentiles-* To legally accuse,

RV “laid to the charge”. It is in fact God who does the accusing; but Paul for a moment sees us as on His side, accusing all humanity, ourselves included, of sin.

*That they are all under sin-* Paul alludes here when he says that “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). And yet he also draws the contrast between being “under the law” and now after baptism being “under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Paul sees himself from outside himself when he says that he has legally accused all men of being sinners- and he includes himself in that mass of humanity. Repeatedly, he wishes to emphasize that he too is a sinner and not, as the teacher, somehow separate from sinful humanity. He sets a great example to every teacher and preacher in the ecclesia. For he previously warned against the human tendency to assume that what happens to all men will somehow not happen to *me* (Rom. 2:2,3).

Paul speaks of both Jew and Gentile as being “under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9 RSV) – which in itself suggests that he saw “sin” personified as a power. If sin is indeed personified by the Bible writers – what real objection can there be to the idea of this personification being at times referred to as ‘Satan’, the adversary? It has been argued that Paul was well aware of the concept of dualism which the Jews had picked up in Babylonian captivity, i.e. the idea that there is a ‘Satan’ god opposed to the true God; but he reapplies those terms to the conflict he so often describes between flesh and spirit, which goes on within the human mind.

3:10 The quotation from Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3 is about the fools who say in their heart that there is no God. Yet Paul applies this to every one of us, himself included. What he’s doing here is similar to what he does at the end of Romans 1- he speaks of the grossest sins such as lesbianism and reasons that we are all in essence guilty and condemned as serious sinners before God. Here he quotes passages which speak of effective atheism and applies them to us all, himself included- even though atheism was abhorrent to the Jews, and Paul may have seemed the last person to be an atheist. But the ‘atheism’ of Ps. 14:1 occurs within the psychological thought processes of the human mind- the fool says in his heart that there is no God. In the context of Romans, Paul is arguing that we call God a liar when we disbelieve His offer of justification and salvation. To deny this is to effectively say in our hearts that there is no God. If God is, then He is a Saviour God. To deny that He will save me is effectively to say He doesn’t exist; for a God who won’t save me may as well not exist. Far too many people claim some level of belief in God’s existence, but in their hearts deny Him, in that they personally doubt whether His promised salvation is really true for me.

3:10 *As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one-* The “none righteous” connects with the fact that the Gospel is for both Jew and Gentile (:9). The Jews were not “the righteous”, as Judaism loved to claim, because there is no single righteous person except the Lord Jesus. ‘Righteousness’ is a major concept in Judaism. “The righteous” is a term often used about faithful Jews. But Paul is saying that not one of them is righteous. All stand in need therefore of God’s imputed righteousness, which is given by faith in the Lord Jesus and location within Him. The source passage of the quotation in Ps. 14:1-3 is saying that from God’s viewpoint, He sees none righteous- even though Judaism declared their saints “righteous”, this was not God’s judgment. We note that Paul is quoting rather freely from the Septuagint; quotation and interpretation are so often combined in Paul, as was the custom of the rabbis. The context of Psalm 14 appears to be of thanksgiving for salvation by grace, a salvation that was not deserved, seeing all men are sinners. And this of course is exactly Paul’s context.

3:11 *There are none that understand-* In the context, understands, perceives, the reality that God will really save me. But not understanding is paralleled with sinning; ‘understanding’ in

Hebrew thought referred to relationship. Thus to sleep with a woman was to 'know' her. This is not a lament over all the misguided theology and wrong interpretations of the Bible; rather is it a lament that sin has damaged the relationship of every man with his God.

*There are none that seek God-* Translating the Hebraism for 'to worship'. Nobody really grasps the reality of personal salvation and falls to the ground in worship as they should. If we would only let ourselves go and realize that His desire to save me is greater than my failure, that my sin is no barrier to His grace- we would be the most ecstatic and profoundly devoted worshippers of Him. But actually nobody really is like this, for their faith is not total and therefore their worship cannot be either, whatever outward appearance of ecstasy and profound expressions it may appear to have, in lyrics and music.

3:12 *They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable-* although quoting still from Ps. 14:1-3, the idea is very similar to "we like sheep have gone astray" (Is. 53:6). We sin because of our group mentality, the influence of others is so strong upon us, we sin because we are sheep who follow the rest of the flock rather than stand alone against sin. Peer pressure is simply far stronger than we can ever imagine. In the context, Paul is reading "all" and "together" as meaning that both Jew and Gentile have alike gone astray, united and undivided in their joint sinfulness, no matter how they may culturally differ in the flesh.

*There is none that does good, no, not so much as one-* The Greek word essentially means profitable, useful. The contrast is with how we are all become "unprofitable"- none is profitable to God. It's not that nobody ever does any good deed; rather the idea is that we are like the vine tree, not useful of ourselves to God (Ez. 15:2-6) unless He justifies us and makes us useful in His service.

3:13 *Their throat is an open tomb, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips-* The connection is surely with how Paul has said that all men, himself included, are liars (3:4,7). Yet the lie he had there in view was the lie that God will not save me, will not and cannot justify me as He has promised. And in this we falsely accuse God, putting Him in the dock. Paul talks of this in the harshest of language here, as if we are poison spitters, the seed of the serpent, in how we speak against God. This is a theme with Paul- to use exaggerated and extreme language about our disbelief and sinfulness.

Because of God's abhorrence of sin, sins of ignorance were still counted as offences against God, requiring atonement. This should really humble us- *if we are sensitive to this fact*. It therefore follows that we should lift up our voice for understanding of God's ways, for ignorant sin is still sin to Him- even though His judgment of us may possibly take into account our level of appreciation. In this context we should also be aware that God remembers unforgiven sin. Over time we can forget that we cursed our wife on 6.6.96 or whenever and never bowed down in repentance. But He doesn't. The haziness of our memories can work as a kind of pseudo-atonement for us. With Him there is no distinction between past and present and future. The sin remains before Him. By the law comes the knowledge of sin *to men*, but this doesn't mean they aren't culpable for those sins before God (Rom. 3:20; 7:7)- for sins of ignorance still needed atonement. "Sin is not imputed when

there is no law” (Rom. 3:13) most likely means, in this light, that it is not imputed by those who do the sin. But God still notices... We only have to consider the passion of Peter's appeal to Israel in Acts 3:17-19: "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did your rulers... repent ye *therefore*". His Jewish hearers would immediately have spotted the allusion back to the Mosaic protocol about what to do when you and your rulers realized you'd committed sins of ignorance. But the sacrifice required was now not an animal- it was the sacrifice of a broken heart and a baptism into Jesus.

It should be noted that verses 13-18 are quoting from the Septuagint of Psalm 14- they aren't found in the Hebrew text. Time and again the inspired New Testament writers quote from the LXX rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text, often preferring the LXX over the MT, and in this case accepting the LXX addition of verses which the MT omits. It's hard to gauge the wider significance of this. The LXX versions of the genealogies in Genesis would, e.g., not support the contention that the Genesis 1 creation occurred 4000 years before the birth of Christ.

3:14 *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*- This and Rom. 3:16 especially could be appropriate to the descriptions of the rejected at the day of judgment. The idea being that we are all rejected, for we are all sinners; but by grace, the believers in Christ have been declared righteous. We seem to have Paul declaring the sinfulness of humanity in the most graphic terms he can- quoting verses which immediately trigger the reaction: "But that's not quite true of me. I may be a sinner, but I don't do *that*", e.g. cursing and blaspheming all day long. I think this is intentional; for Paul writes very sensitive to his audience's likely reaction. It's similar to how he speaks about the grossest moral sins such as lesbianism in chapter 1, and then proceeds to count us all guilty in essence. It's a powerful device to try to highlight to us all the extent of human sinfulness.

3:15 *Their feet are swift to shed blood*- Paul may be quoting this and applying it to us all in the sense that he gave full weight to the Lord's teaching that the hateful thought is as bad as murder. Or he may be wishing to shock us with the extent of our sinful position (see on Rom. 3:14).

Eliphaz thought there were only a few very sinful people in the world (Job 15:35); but His words are quoted by the Spirit in Is. 59:4 concerning the whole nation of Israel; and this in turn is quoted in Rom. 3:15-17 concerning the whole human race. This same path of progressive realization of our sinfulness must be trodden by each faithful individual, as well as on a communal level.

3:16 *Destruction*- Gk. 'a dashing to pieces', perhaps an allusion to how the stone of Messiah's second coming would dash the kingdoms of men to pieces at His return (Dan. 2:45; Rev. 2:27). But sinners are going now in way of such destruction. Damnation begins now- in the way of life people chose to live.

*And misery are in their ways*- The wretchedness of the condemned. But remember Paul is



applying this to us all, as apart from Christ we are all sinners, even now living out our future condemnation. Yet Paul uses the very word about himself in Rom. 7:24: “O wretched [s.w. miserable] man that I am...”, going on to exalt that Christ has saved him from that position, that misery, the misery of the condemned sinner. What is true of all humanity is true of Paul too- he repeatedly emphasizes his own personal share in the condemned human situation.

3:17 *And the way of peace have they not known*- Remember that Paul is writing to Christians who have known God’s ways, convicting them that they with him are, naturally speaking, condemned and the most wretched of sinners. “Peace” in Paul’s thought nearly always refers to peace with God through forgiveness and salvation in Christ. It is this which they have not known all the time they refuse to really believe that they have been forgiven and justified in Christ.

3:18 *There is no fear of God before their eyes*- Again, the language appropriate to the most hardened, atheistic blasphemer is being applied to all men, including Paul and all in Christ. This is Paul’s attempt to shock us into a deeper realization of how serious our position is as sinners. He has already convicted us of in essence being lesbians and homosexuals in chapter 1; he has applied the language of atheists to us in Rom. 1:28; 3:10. And now he as it were crowns it all by quoting a description of the very dregs of human society, who live with no fear of God, and applying it to us- we who fear His judgment and condemnation in our faithlessness that His grace is enough to save us. It’s a paradox- if we fear God’s judgment, not believing in His grace, then we are categorized along with those who have *no* fear of God.

Although I have argued that Paul is quoting from the LXX of Psalm 14 here in Rom. 3:13-18, it would seem that this verse is also quoting Ps. 36:1: “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes”. This has a strange appropriacy. David says that the sin of the wicked is speaking within *his* [David’s] heart. This is the same spirit in which Paul is applying the descriptions of the very worst of humanity and admitting that in essence, this is what is going on within *his* heart and within the heart of every man. Truly, bad man only do what good men dream of.

3:19 *Now we know that whatever things the law said, it speaks to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped*- “The law” here seems to be used in the Rabbinic sense of ‘the OT scriptures’. There seems no sense if Paul is saying that the Law, the Scriptures he has just quoted, speak only to those “under the law”, and that therefore the whole world is condemned and guilty before God. I think we have to read in some ellipses here; the Message seems to get it right: “This makes it clear, doesn’t it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about others but to us to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place!”. This would be continuing the theme of 2:2,3- that we are not to give in to the human tendency to assume that the consequences for all men because of sin will somehow not come upon us personally. See also on Rom. 2:21.

Those verses Paul has just quoted, speaking of the worst of sinners, apply to us all (3:9,10). Paul realizes we are prone to respond that no, that’s not quite me... I’m not *that* bad. And so

he has warned: "Whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about *others* but to *us*" [The Message]. The intention is that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God". The Greek for "stopped", according to Vine, refers to "the effect of overwhelming evidence upon an accused party in court". It is the speechlessness of the rejected of which the Lord speaks in Mt. 22:12. Each of us should so know our sinfulness that we really feel as if we are standing at the judgment seat of Christ and have been condemned. We, along with all the world, "become guilty", become sentenced [Gk.] before His judgment seat, right now. Only by having some sense of this will we be able to have any emotion of relief, joy, gratitude, praise, exaltation etc. at the wonder of having been declared right, accepted, by God's grace in Christ.

We can however interpret "the law" as the Law of Moses. Its' purpose was "so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Paul is quoting here from Ps. 63:11: "the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped". He's reasoning that because we're all sinners, we're all liars- for untruth is the essence of sin. We are not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren... we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the terms of that covenant. And the Law of Moses convicted all God's people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses- we shut our mouths, convicted of sin.

*And all the world-* Rom. 3:19 (A.V.mg.) defines "all the world" as those "subject to the judgment of God" - which is only the responsible. The Lord Jesus took away the sin "of the world", but the Jews died in their sins; "the world" whose sins were taken away is therefore the world of believers. "Every knee shall bow to me... every tongue shall confess... so then every one of us shall give account" (Rom. 14:11,12) is another example- 'all men', 'every man' means 'every one of us the responsible'. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" (Tit. 2:11)- certainly not to every human being that has ever lived; but to the "all men" of the new creation. For not "all men" will be saved. The Lord tasted death "for every man" (Heb. 2:9)- for every one who has a representative part in His sacrifice through baptism. Christ "reconciled the world" in that He obtained forgiveness for us (2 Cor. 5:19)- we are "the world" which was reconciled, we are the "all things" purged by His blood (Heb. 9:22). 1 Cor. 4:9 seems to make a difference between "the world" and "men", as if Paul is using "the world" here as meaning 'the world of believers'. The Lord was "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6), although it was only us, the redeemed, who were ransomed by Him out of sin's slavery (Lk. 1:68; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 8:13; Rev. 5:9; 14:3,4). The "all flesh" upon whom the Spirit was poured out in the first century was clearly enough a reference to those who believed and were baptized (Acts 2:17).

*May be brought under the judgment of God-* Sodom being a type of latter day events, it is not surprising that Scripture provides a wealth of detail concerning Sodom. The Genesis record summarizes what we glean from later revelation by saying that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen. 13:13). "Before the Lord" recalls the earth being "corrupt before God" prior to the flood (Gen. 6:11), another clear type of the last days. Indeed their sin being "before the Lord" may hint that Lot (or Abraham?) had preached

God's requirements to them, and therefore they were consciously disobeying Him. Thus Rom. 3:19 speaks of the world becoming "guilty before God" (AV) by reason of their having the opportunity to know God's word (cp. Rom. 2:12,13).

3:20 *Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin-* "Because" is AV "Therefore". Because we are convicted sinners facing condemnation, no good works we do in other areas can change the outcome nor displace the sins we have already committed. 'Just' one sin brings death, as evidenced by the sin of Adam and Eve. "Guilty before God" in 3:19 is reflected by "[not] justified in His sight" in 3:20. Because we are already standing dumbstruck and declared guilty before Him, we cannot be now declared right, it can't all be made OK, by doing some other good works according to that same system of law parts of which we broke. If you murder your neighbour and stand in court condemned for it, you can't put it all right by then doing the good deed of mowing your other neighbour's lawn and taking his garbage to the dump. Indeed, trying to obey "the law" in one aspect isn't going to declare us right when that same system of law condemns us. The only possible way to 'get right' would be to somehow get to the judge through another paradigm than obedience or disobedience to the law. And this is exactly what Paul is building up to. For the Judge of all the earth Himself thought up such a way. Seeing that "by the law is the knowledge of sin", or as 1 Cor. 15:56 puts it "the strength of sin is the law", a way simply has to be found for our salvation which doesn't depend upon our obedience or disobedience to the law.

3:21 *But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets-* "A righteousness of God" is a poor translation which is out of harmony with the context of 3:20 [see there]. The idea is that the justification of God, the way God sets a person right, without reference to the law, outside the paradigm of law- is in fact revealed (RV "has been manifested", already) within the Old Testament prophets and the Law of Moses itself. The Old Testament scriptures are described with yet another legal term- they are right now witnessing in court, attesting. It's as if we stood in the dock condemned and silent before God; but then the very law which we had broken and the Scriptures themselves take the witness box- and offer a way for us to be declared right.

3:22 *Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all them that believe. For there is no distinction-* God's way of putting us right operates through our faith in [RV, Gk.] Jesus Christ, which Paul will later define more concretely in chapter 6 as baptism into His death and resurrection; for this is what constitutes in the first instance our believing into Christ. Whoever, any human being, who believes into Him will be counted right by God. And therefore "all", "any", who believe will be saved, there is no difference or distinction between them in terms of their being Jew or Gentile. The same word is used in this connection in Rom. 10:12.

3:23 *For all have sinned-* the context suggests that the enormity of our condemned position before God should mean that we do not uphold any human distinctions between us, e.g. on ethnic grounds. Perceiving the enormity of our sin, how we are all in this together, and the wonder of God's saving grace, ought to be the most powerful inspiration to unity known to humanity. The "all" who have sinned could refer to 'all believers in Christ' which is the

subject of the preceding verse 3:22; and 3:24 suggests that this same “all” are those who are justified freely by His grace.

*And all fall short of the glory of God-* We have all already sinned [aorist past tense] and we do now [present tense] fall short of God’s glory, i.e. the complete perfection, the glory of God which was seen in the person of His Son (2 Cor. 4:6). God declared His glory to Moses in terms of His character (Ex. 33:18 cp. Ex. 34:4-6). We fall short of that perfection of the Father’s character which was revealed in its fullness in His Son. Heb. 12:15 uses the same Greek word for “come / fall short” in warning lest any man “fail / fall short of the grace of God”. We come far short of God’s glory, but we are not to fall short of His grace whereby the righteousness of His Son, His glory, is counted to us and we are thereby declared right with Him. Jewish writings such as the Apocalypse of Moses 20.2 and 21.6 claimed that Adam “came short of the glory of God” by his sin in Eden; Paul is clearly alluding to this and is saying that Adam is everyman, we each are as Adam in Eden, with the tidal wave of realization breaking upon us as to the seriousness and eternal consequence of our so easily committed sin. It must be remembered that the Jewish writings frequently paralleled Adam with Israel [N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) pp. 18-40 for documentation]. But Paul is arguing that Adam is every single human being, not just Israel. For Adam was created well before Israel, and all humanity are his offspring, not just Israel. The universal experience of sinfulness therefore leads to the offer of God’s grace to all types of human being, not just Israel; and there will be an ensuing unity between those who believe in this grace, regardless of their ethnic background.

The Bible itself continually reflects a distinction in the mind of God between the person and the behaviour, the sin and the sinner. When we allow ourselves to be offended and to offend others, we have ceased to make that differentiation. We so easily equate the person and their behaviour, and thus they offend us. Consider how we are in the habit of saying: “We’re all sinners”. You may think I’m being pedantic, but Rom. 3:23 says otherwise- that “all have sinned”. And there’s a slight and subtle difference. We have committed sin, and therefore we can be called sinners. But the Biblical focus is on the action committed rather than the branding of the person with a label.

*3:24 But are justified freely by His grace-* Gk. ‘without a cause / reason, as a gift’. We are justified, declared right in our court case, for no reason. This declaring right is therefore by the purest grace imaginable. The same word is used of how we should freely, without a human reason, preach the Gospel (Mt. 10:8; 2 Cor. 11:7); our receipt of such a “free” salvation should naturally inspire us to share it with others in the same spirit. Any form of charging for the Gospel, getting personal benefit or glory out of sharing it with others, is absolutely outlawed. The free nature of the grace we have received must be reflected in our sharing it with others in the same spirit; God’s giving to us has to be translated in our giving to others. Sharing the Gospel isn’t, therefore, an irksome duty, something we salve our conscience with, something we are asked to participate in by a church leadership team; but a natural personal outflowing of the free gift we have received.

*Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus-* We are declared right here and now, we receive redemption in that our sins are forgiven (Eph. 1:7); but redemption is in fact a

process, culminating in the redemption of our body at the return of Christ, the final change from mortality to immortality in a corporeal, literal sense (s.w. Rom. 8:23), in “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

3:25 *Whom God set forth* -“Whom God put forward as a place of atonement by his blood” (NRSV margin) seems to be the right sense. The reference is to the mercy seat, not to the sacrificed animal. Vincent comments: “The word is used by Herodotus of exposing corpses (v. 8); by Thucydides of exposing the bones of the dead (ii. 34)”. The sense of public display is picked up later in the verse in the word “declare”. Crucifixion is by its very nature a public event. There was once a doctor in Paraguay who spoke out against human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge by torturing his teenage son to death. The local people wanted to stage a huge protest march, but the father disallowed them and chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son’s body as it was when retrieved from jail- naked, scarred from electric shocks, cigarette burns and beatings. And the body was displayed not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked prison mattress. This public display of a body was the most powerful witness and incitement possible. And the public nature of the display of God’s tortured son was for the same basic reason. “He was manifested, that he might put sins away” (1 Jn. 3:5) could suggest that in His atoning death, ‘He’ was manifested. There God set forth Jesus in His blood, for all to see and respond to (Rom. 3:25 Gk.). There the real essence of Jesus was publicly shown forth. And there we come to know what love is (1 Jn. 3:16).

*To be a propitiation*- The Greek word doesn’t *have* to mean “mercy seat” / atonement cover, with reference to the ark, even though this is how it is translated in Hebrews. The idea is essentially a place of atonement or the atonement victim, the sacrificed animal. Instead of that place of blood sprinkling been hidden away on the top of the atonement cover, the ark of the covenant within the Most Holy Place which the High Priest saw only once per year, God through the cross set forth publicly, He declared, the place of atonement to be in the very publicly displayed blood of His Son. The public nature of crucifixion therefore was appropriate. The Son of Man had to be, therefore, “lifted up” (Jn. 3:14) so that He could and can be believed in. Rom. 3:25 states that the Lord in His death was “set forth to be a propitiation”. Graham Jackman comments: “Though the primary meaning of the word ‘set forth’ (*protithemi*) seems to be that of ‘determining’ or ‘purposing’, another sense, albeit not in the New Testament, is said to be that of exposing the bodies of the dead to public view, as in a lying in state”. See on Mk. 15:29.

*Through faith in his blood, to show His righteousness in the passing over of the sins done previously*- See on “set forth”. But the word also carries the sense of setting forth evidence, proof. The legal flavour could possibly suggest that the blood of Christ, His death upon the cross, is brought forth as a proof in the court case that actually, we really have been declared in the right. Whilst Christ’s death was multifactorial, it would be true to say that God could have saved us any way He chose, without being forced, as it were, to have a begotten Son who was publicly crucified. Maybe He did this because He so wishes us to believe, and He wanted to commend His love in all its depth and costliness as publicly as possible, so that we would indeed perceive and believe it.

God's method of declaring us right deals with the sins "that are past", for which we stand condemned before His judgment seat with no way to make amends; and also "at this time" (3:26), right now, we are declared righteous by status, declared in the right, if we are believers into Jesus.

*In the forbearance of God-* We shall all be saved by the forbearance of God, hence we should not deny to others the forbearance of God. Hence in Rom. 2:4 the same word is used, in stating that those who condemn their brethren are despising the forbearance of God, in that they are assuming that His forbearance can't apply to the person whom they have condemned. If we are saved by God's gracious forbearance, it's not for us to deny this to another.

*3:26 For the showing of His righteousness at this present time-* See on Rom. 3:25.

*That He might Himself be just-* the whole process of justifying sinners is achieved without infringing upon the justice and integrity of God. Quite how... isn't explained (although I am aware of many attempts to explain it, but they all seem to fail). I think we are asked to accept this on faith.

*And the justifier-* God's plan of declaring us right takes care of our past sins (Rom. 3:25), right now "at this time" declares us right, and will justify us at the coming day of judgment.

*Of him that has faith in Jesus-* It's rare for Paul to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ as simply "Jesus" with no title. Perhaps he is trying to bring out the simplicity of it all- that by believing in the very human Jesus, a man of our nature with one of the commonest names amongst first century Palestinian Jews, i.e. 'Jesus', we really can be declared right before God.

*3:27 Where then is the glorying? It is excluded-* The Jewish boasting about obedience to the Mosaic Law of Rom. 2:17. If we are saved by grace, any feelings of superiority are excluded. "It is excluded" is a mild way of translating the aorist- the sense is that boasting has once for all been cut off, ended, excluded; by the death of Christ, and by that moment when we believed into Christ, and stood declared righteous before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul must refer to boasting in a wrong sense, a boasting in our works and obedience; for he uses the word quite often in his letters of his boasting of God's grace, and of the faithfulness of other brethren which had been inspired by that grace (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:4; 11:10,17).

*By what manner of law? Of works?-* Boasting in the sense of feeling superior to others hasn't been excluded by law, i.e. it's not that we no longer boast because there's a law that says 'You shall not boast'. It has been cut off by the law or principle of salvation by faith rather than works. This simple reality, that we really are saved, not by works but by faith in God's grace through Jesus, is so powerful that it quite naturally excludes boasting.

3:28- see on Rom. 2:26.

*We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law-* The legal sense of the word refers to the summing up of a court case. Here again, Paul assumes the role of judge. The summary of the case is that a man is declared right by God on account of his faith in God's grace and the blood of Christ. This is "without", quite apart from, any acts of obedience to law.

*3:29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also-* Paul brings out the practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith in God's grace. Seeing that all men are sinners, and the basis of salvation is our faith in His grace through the blood of Christ- there can be no basic division between believers. God becomes "the God" of those He has saved, that seems to be implication- and so He isn't the God of only the Jews.

The Roman concept of *religio* allowed each subject nation to have their own gods, so long as the cult of the emperor was also worshipped. But Rom. 3:29 states that the God of Israel was the one God of the Gentiles too. This is in sharp distinction to the way the Romans thought of the god of the Jews as just another national deity. Caesar was king of many subject kings, Lord of many conquered and inferior lords. In this we see the radical challenge of 1 Tim. 6:15,16: that Jesus Christ is the *only* potentate, the Lord of Lords, the King of all Kings.

*3:30 Since God is one-* The belief which the Jews held most dear; they felt that their monotheism divided them from the rest of the world. But it is the fact that there's only one God which binds together Jew and Gentile believers in Christ; for that one God justifies each human being on the same basis. The seriousness of our personal positions and the wonder of His saving grace is such that any ethnic difference between us becomes irrelevant.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: "If so be that God is one... he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV). Unity amongst us is inspired by the fact that God seeks to be one with us, exactly because He is Himself 'unity', one in Himself. The Rabbis have always been at pains to point out the somewhat unusual grammar in the record of creation in Genesis 1, which literally translated reads: "One day... a second day... a third day", rather than 'One day... two days... three days', as we'd expect if 'Day one' solely referred to 'firstness' in terms of time. "The first day" (Gen. 1:5) therefore

means more strictly 'the day of unity', in that it refers to how the one God sought unity with earth. "*Yom ehad*, one day, really means the day which God desired to be *one* with man... the unity of God is a concern for the unity of the world".

*He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith*- The Greek words *ek* ["by"] and *dia* faith [AV "through"] may simply be being used in parallel, meaning effectively the same thing, as they are in Gal. 2:16. "The circumcision" refers to Jewish Christians who believed; "the uncircumcision" is perhaps also a technical term, in this context, for believing Christian Gentiles.

3:31 *Do we then make the law of no effect through faith? God forbid. No, we establish the law*- Consider where the same word is used in the context of showing that the Law has indeed been 'made void' or done away: Rom. 7:2, we are "loosed" from the Law, "delivered from the Law" (Rom. 7:6), the Law was "done away" (2 Cor. 3:11), "abolished" (2 Cor. 3:13), "done away" (2 Cor. 3:14), "abolished... the law of commandments" (Eph. 2:15). Clearly enough, the Law is indeed "made void"- by the death of Christ. The emphasis should therefore be on the fact that it is not *us* ("we"), who made it void. We as lawbreakers have no right to simply abrogate Divine Law, to void it because we broke it and we want to avoid the consequences. It can only be done by the Divine lawmaker and His Son. Our faith in Him and His saving grace doesn't mean that *we* make the law void; we by our sinfulness and acceptance of it do in fact establish or 'make to stand' Divine law. Paul is anticipating the objections of his Jewish audience- that he was teaching that sinners could merely abrogate the Law they had broken. We sense how on the back foot Paul was- his critics must have been persistent, and his stress level must have been very high by constantly seeking to anticipate their objections and parry them [did he actually need to have done this?]. By believing in God's grace in Christ and not trying to get justification from keeping the Law of Moses, we are in a strange way fulfilling the "righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). It may be that Paul here is using "law" as a reference to the Old Testament scriptures generally, which he has been quoting so freely to prove his point (he uses "law" like this in Rom. 3:19,21; although "law" in the first half of 3:31 seems to refer to the Mosaic Law specifically).

"Think not that I am come to destroy ("to make void", Darby's Translation) the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17) has some kind of unconscious, hard to define link with Rom. 3:31: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law". The Greek words for "destroy" and "make void" are different; yet the similarity of phrasing and reasoning is so similar. I can't pass this off as chance, yet neither can I say there is a conscious allusion here. There is, therefore, what I will call an 'unconscious link' here.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 4

*4:1 What then shall we say-* Paul's frequent "What then shall we say to this?" occurs at least 5 times in Romans alone (Rom. 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14,30)- and this is the classic phrase used by Jewish teachers at the end of presenting their argument to their students. Seeing then that Paul writes in a rabbinic way, as if He is giving a stream of *Midrash* on earlier, familiar writings [e.g. the words of Jesus or the Old Testament], we should be looking for how he may quote or allude to just a word or two from the Lord, and weave an interpretation around them.

*About Abraham our forefather-* Paul was writing to Jewish and Gentile believers. Yet he speaks of "our" father as if he's writing mainly to Jews here- but see on Rom. 4:11. Alternatively, it could be that Paul in wishing to be as personal as possible in addressing his readers is referring to Abraham as "our father" in the sense that he personally was Jewish. Paul in this section is now exemplifying what he has taught so far in Romans from the example of Abraham. This whole 'Abraham' section is written in the style of Rabbinic Midrash, with Gen. 15:6 as the verse being expounded. Paul's point is that Jewish and Gentile believers can trace themselves back to Abraham because the family likeness is in faith not circumcision. Jewish proselytes were forbidden to call Abraham "our father" (C.K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (New York: Scribner's, 1962) p. 31.).

*According to the flesh-* The same Greek phrase is used five times in Romans 8 in the negative sense of "according to the flesh". The suggestion may be that walking according to the flesh rather than the Spirit was related to placing meaning on the fact that Abraham was a fleshly ancestor. Being or emphasizing ones' Jewishness was therefore related to *unspirituality*, whereas the Jews thought that being Jewish was a sign of spirituality. Paul's style was so radical, but then so are the demands of the grace which has saved us.

*Hath found [KJV]-* In the context of Rom. 3:27,28, what has he found to boast / glory about? The answer is- nothing, according to his works.

*4:2 If Abraham was justified by works-* As the Jews said he was. Jubilees 23:10: "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well pleasing in righteousness". Indeed some of the Jewish writings claimed Abraham never sinned.

*He has something to boast about-* Alluding to Sirach 44:19, which says about Abraham in the context of his good works: "None has been found like him in glory". This allusion to and deconstruction of other writings is something which Paul does quite often- and probably even more frequently, if we had access to more first century texts from which to perceive his allusions. Significantly, Sirach is in the Apocrypha, but Paul evidently disagrees with the book and shows it teaches wrongly about Abraham. This would possibly confirm the Protestant tradition of rejecting the Apocryphal books as inspired, although the recorded words of men in the canonical books are also of course quoted and deconstructed. But the quotation from Sirach is from the actual words of Ben Sira, which are claimed to be directly inspired.

*But not before God-* Before the judgment throne of God, of which Paul has been speaking in chapter 3, especially 3:19. He demonstrated there that all humanity, Abraham included, stand shamed and speechless before God. The idea that Abraham was sinless is therefore disputed strongly by Paul. The Greek phrase “before God” occurs several times in Romans. Because we are justified by faith, we have peace “before God” [AV “with God”, Rom. 5:1]. The practical section of Romans brings out what we ought to do, therefore, with that position- Paul prayed for Israel “before God” (AV “to God”, Rom. 10:1), and he urges the believers to likewise pray “before God” (AV “to God”, Rom. 15:30). If we are justified, declared right before God by grace, then as we stand there in His presence with His gracious acceptance, we ought to from that place beg His mercy for others. This is the practical outcome of the courtroom parable. We stand there accepted, with the judge lovingly smiling at us in gracious acceptance, with nothing now laid to our charge, declared right with God; and what should we then do? We who have peace before God should whilst before God, beg Him for mercy upon others. Job is really a working model for us in all this. He said the *wrong* things about God, as Elihu points out on God’s behalf; and yet before God’s awesome throne he was declared right, as if he had spoken what was right; and then he prays for his friends.

4:3 *What did the Scripture say..?*- The Bible as a living word continues to speak with us, in part of an ongoing dialogue between God and man.

*And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness-* The Greek word for “counted” occurs very often in this section. Significantly, Rom. 3:28 says that we are to conclude [s.w. “count”] that we are justified by faith rather than works. We are to view ourselves, impute to ourselves, as God does. His view of us is to be our view of ourselves. The Septuagint uses this word with regard to sacrifices [symbolic of Christ’s death on the cross] being “reckoned” to a person (Lev. 7:18; Num. 18:27,30); and of Shimei asking David not to “reckon” his guilt to him, to judge him not according to the obvious facts of the case (2 Sam. 19:20). The Old Testament is at pains to stress that Yahweh will *not* justify the guilty (Ex. 23:7; Is. 5:23; Prov. 17:15). This is where the unique significance of Jesus comes in. Because of *Him*, His death and our faith in it, our being in Him, God can justify the wicked in that they have died with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), they are no longer, they are only “in Christ”, for them “to live is Christ”. They are counted as in Him, and in this way sinners end up justified.

Abraham's weakness at the time of the Genesis 15 promises is perhaps behind how Paul interprets the star-gazing incident in Rom. 4:3-5. He is answering the Jewish idea that Abraham never sinned (see on Rom. 4:2). He quotes the incident, and God's counting of righteousness to Abraham, as proof that a man with no "works", nothing to glory before God with, can believe in God to "justify the ungodly", and thereby be counted righteous. Understanding Abraham's mood as revealed in Gen. 15:1-4 certainly helps us see the relevance of all this to Abraham. And it helps us see Abraham more realistically as the father of us all... and not some Sunday School hero, well beyond our realistic emulation. No longer need we think "Abraham? Oh, yeah, Abraham... faith... wow. But me... nah. I'm not Abraham...". He's for real, truly our example, a realistic hero whom we can cheer and pledge to follow. For Abraham is an example to us of God's grace to man, and a man in all his weakness and struggle with God accepting it and believing it, even when he is "*ungodly*",

rather than a picture of a white-faced placid saint with unswerving faith:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:1-5).

It is in the very struggle for faith that we have that we show ourselves to have the family characteristic of Abraham. That moment when the "ungodly", doubting, bitter Abraham believed God's promise is to be as it were our icon, the picture we rise up to: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6,7). The struggle within Abraham at the time is brought out by Paul in Rom. 4:18-24, which seems to be a kind of psychological commentary upon the state of Abraham's mind as he stood there looking at the stars in the presence of God / an Angel ("before him [God] whom he believed", Rom. 4:17): "Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead".

It may be that Abraham realised his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory... (but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not, but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness". Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, recognizing he only had moments of faith, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba. It would actually appear that Paul is writing here, as he often does, with his eye on deconstructing popular Jewish views at the time. Their view of Abraham was that he was perfect, "Godly" in the extreme- and Paul's point is that actually he was not, he was "ungodly", but counted righteous not by his acts but by his faith.

4:4 *Now to him that works*- the same word for "works" is used in Mt. 25:16, where we are to trade or 'work' with our talents and will be judged for the quality of that working. The point surely is that we will be saved by grace, not works; and yet our works in response to that grace will be judged, and will determine the nature of the eternity, the salvation, which we enjoy- reigning over 10 or five or two cities etc. By a sublime paradox, the "work" we are to

do is to believe in Jesus (Jn. 6:28-30). So here in Rom. 4:4 we have to again read in an ellipsis: "He that [trusts in] works [for his justification]".

*The reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt-* The only other time the word occurs in the New Testament is in the request for our debts [i.e. sins] to be forgiven (Mt. 6:12). We are in debt to God, to suggest He is in debt to us is bizarre- as bizarre as thinking that we can be justified by our works rather than His grace.

*4:5 But to him that works not, but believes in Him-* The content of Abraham's faith was in the promise just given him that he would have a great descendant, the Lord Jesus, who would become many. The content of our faith in Christ which results in justification is the same. Note that Abraham wasn't presented with a complex theology of Christ which he had to say "yes" to. He was presented with very simple facts concerning Jesus- that He would be the future descendant of Abraham, and through connection with Him, blessing would be received and eternal inheritance of the earth. This is the same basic content of the faith in Christ which we are asked to have.

*That justifies the ungodly-* Abraham, whom the Jews argued was sinless and Godly because of his works (see on 4:2). The word is used about gross sinners (e.g. Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 4:18). Again, Paul is using extreme language to demonstrate how serious is sin; a man like Abraham whom we would consider a Godly man was in fact ungodly- because he was a sinner.

*His faith is reckoned for righteousness-* Paul comments that he persecuted the Christian church "zealously" (Phil. 3:6). He was alluding to the way that Phinehas is described as 'zealous' for the way in which he murdered an apostate Jew together with a Gentile who was leading him to sin (Num. 25). Note that the Jews in Palestine had no power to give anyone the death sentence, as witnessed not only by the record of the trial of Jesus but Josephus too (*Antiquities* 20.202; *BJ* 2.117; 6.302). Paul was a criminal murderer; and he had justified it by saying that he was the 1st Century Phinehas. Ps. 106:30 had commented upon the murder performed by Phinehas, that his zeal "was accounted to him for righteousness". This sets the background for the converted Paul's huge emphasis upon the fact that *faith* in Jesus is what is "reckoned for righteousness", and it is in *this* way that God "justifies the unGodly" (Rom. 4:3-5; 5:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul is inviting us to see ourselves as him- passionately obsessed with going about our justification the *wrong* way, and having to come to the *huge* realization that righteousness is *imputed* to us by our faith in the work of Jesus.

*4:6 Even as David pronounces blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness-* The Greek idea is of 'beatification', making a man into a saint. This exalted language, the kind of thing the Rabbis did only for stellar examples of spirituality like Abraham and David, is actually the process which happens to every man who believes in Christ.

I've often asked myself *how* exactly the Mosaic Law led people to Christ. Was it not that they were convicted by it of guilt, and cried out for a Saviour? "The law entered, that the offence

might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that... grace might reign... unto eternal life by Jesus" (Rom. 5:20,21). This was the purpose of the Law. And thus Paul quotes David's rejoicing in the righteousness imputed to him when he had sinned and had no works left to do- and changes the pronoun from "he" to "they" (Rom. 4:6-8). David's personal experience became typical of that of each of us. It was *through* the experience of that wretched and hopeless position that David and all believers come to know the true 'blessedness' of imputed righteousness and sin forgiven by grace. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1), David wrote, after experiencing God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba. But Paul sees this verse as David describing "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6). Each of us are in need of a like justification; therefore we find ourselves in David's position. The Spirit changes Ps. 32:1 ("Blessed is *he* whose transgression is forgiven") to "Blessed are *they*" (Rom. 4:7) to make the same point.

*Apart from works, saying-* In that there was no defined sacrifice for David to offer to atone for the murder of Uriah and adultery. We stand speechless and defenceless before the judgment seat of God in the same way. Again we see Paul urging us to accept the depth of our sinfulness- the position of a man guilty of adultery and murder is that of each of us.

*4:7 Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered-* This is perhaps the thread of connection between the examples of Abraham and David. Abraham believed God's promise of blessing (which the New Testament interprets as forgiveness and salvation, e.g. Acts 3:25,26); he received the blessing for no works he had done, but simply because he believed. David likewise received a similar blessing- just because he believed.

*4:8 Blessed is the man-* Connects with "blessed are *they*" (4:7). David becomes representative of us all.

*To whom the Lord will not count sin-* A double negative in the Greek, He absolutely will not count us as sinners!

*4:9 Is this blessing then pronounced upon the circumcision, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say, to Abraham his faith was counted as righteousness-* Is paralleled with "righteousness" in the second half of the verse. Paul's reasoning is that Abraham was uncircumcised when he received this blessing of righteousness, therefore circumcision is irrelevant. But the implication is that Abraham received the blessing, the righteous standing, immediately upon his belief, right there and then. Because the crux of the argument is that he received these things whilst uncircumcised. We therefore should be able to rejoice here and now that we right now are counted righteous before God's judgment throne.

*4:10 How then was it counted? When he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision but in uncircumcision-* The question is how, and not when. How, in what manner was righteousness reckoned- obviously not thanks to circumcision.

4:11 *And he received the sign of circumcision-* Circumcision was a sign given as a testament or seal to the faith Abraham had before he was circumcised, the faith which justified and saved him. Circumcision itself, therefore, was nothing to do with his justification. Paul appears to be labouring his points somewhat, but he was up against a colossally strong Jewish mindset that considered circumcision itself to be what saves and defines a person as God's. The "seal" which we now have is in our foreheads, Rev. 9:4, a mental attitude, a seal stamped within our hearts by God's Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30); as such it is invisible, an internal condition rather than an external mark in the flesh. But what exactly is it? Surely if we believe the good news which Paul has been explaining, that we stand ashamed and condemned before God's judgment seat but are then declared righteous, justified and saved, standing there in the very presence of God clean and justified- this will make an indelible psychological mark upon the person who believes this. 'Once saved always saved' is too primitive a teaching- we can fall from grace. But all the same, if we have really and truly experienced this great salvation, we have the mark of it, the seal of it in our hearts, and it will become evident in our thinking and speaking and behaviour in this world. Whatever we do subsequently with this grace, our experience of standing justified before God will leave as I put it, an indelible psychological mark upon us. This is what I suggest is the sealing of which the New Testament speaks. And it has to be inevitably observed that many who bear the name of Christ would appear by the way they reason and act to simply not have that indelible psychological mark upon them. Which is the value of Romans, working through the mechanics of salvation in this dense, intense manner, to bring us to the point where we too are convicted, converted and can stand rejoicing "before God", declared right.

Another angle on this is that the circumcision which we receive is to be connected with baptism (Col. 2:11-15). The cutting off of the flesh is therefore achieved by Christ operating directly on our hearts, rather than by the midwife's knife. In this case, baptism likewise would be a "seal" upon our faith in God's righteousness being counted to us in Christ; and it is this faith which is the essence of our salvation. However, Romans 6 seems to place baptism as more than a mere piece of physical symbolism of the same value as circumcision; it is the means by which a believer believes into Christ and thus becomes "in Christ", thereby having His righteousness counted to them. 1 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermes and other early Christian writings likewise speak of baptism as the "seal" upon Christian faith.

*A seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be counted to them also-* Because Abraham is their spiritual father. Here we see the power of example. Abraham inspires our faith, and so the amazing grace of righteousness being counted to us happens, in one sense, because of him- because he opened the paradigm, of being declared right before God just because he believed. The crucial family likeness in the Abraham family is therefore faith, not marks in the flesh placed on the male members of the tribe. This of course was blasphemy for the Jews to hear... In this sense therefore, Abraham was father of "all" the believers in Rome, both Jew and Gentile. Connection to him should therefore create unity between ethnic groups rather than exclusivity.

4:12 *And the father of circumcision to those who are not only of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had whilst he was*

*uncircumcised*- See on 4:1. Walking in the steps of Abraham suggests that his journey of faith from Ur to Haran to Canaan becomes typical of the walk of every single believer towards salvation in the Kingdom, a journey only motivated by our faith that we will be there, that we are declared right before God in Christ. Abraham walked by faith- but the content of that faith, Paul is arguing, was faith in justification by God. Likewise we will not get very far in our walk to the Kingdom if we fail to believe that we are already right now justified and right with God; we aren't walking to judgment day in the vague hope that we will inherit the Kingdom, walking to the Kingdom to see if we shall enter into it. We walk [Gk. 'march'] in faith, faith that we are already declared right before God, that ours is the Kingdom, and we are walking there to obtain it, just as Abraham took his steps toward Canaan not to just have a look at it and see if he would obtain it, but rather believing that it already was his. The Greek word "steps" is in fact a form of the word 'arrival'; we are walking to the Kingdom and yet we have in a sense arrived there.

Lk. 19:9 = Rom. 4:11,12. If you have real faith, you'll be like Zacchaeus. You'll have his determination, his unashamedness to come out in the open for Christ your Lord.

4:13 *For the promise to Abraham and his seed*- The Greek really means an announcement. It's not a vague possibility, the 'promises' to Abraham were an announcement that he would inherit the Kingdom. The promise Paul refers to was given to Abraham because of, *dia*, on account of, his being declared right with God by faith in Gen. 15:6. Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind the promise of Gen. 22:17,18. Having been declared right with God, Abraham was then promised that he personally would be heir of the world- the implications of being right with God, counted righteous, were thereby fleshed out and given some more tangible, material, concrete form. He would therefore live for ever, because he was right with God; and the arena of that eternity would be "the world".

*That he should be heir of the world, did not come through the law- but through the righteousness of faith*- Abraham was only explicitly promised the land of Canaan, not the entire planet. Perhaps Paul is interpreting the promises that his seed would comprise "many nations" and that he would bring blessing on "all the peoples of the earth" (Gen. 12:2,3 etc.). In this sense, they would become his, and he would thereby inherit them. Thus Is. 55:3-5 likewise implies that Abraham's promised inheritance was therefore not only the land of Canaan but by implication, the whole planet.

God promised Abraham a very specific inheritance in Canaan. And yet this promise seems to be interpreted in later Scripture as referring to the *world-wide* Kingdom which will be established at the second coming (e.g. Rom. 4:13 speaks of how Abraham was promised that he would inherit the world; Ps. 72 and other familiar prophecies speak of a world-wide Messianic Kingdom, based on the promises to Abraham). One possible explanation is found in Psalm 2, where the Father seems to encourage the Son to ask of Him "the *heathen* [i.e., not just the Jews] for thine inheritance, and the *uttermost parts of the earth* [not just the land of promise] for thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). Could it be that due to the Lord's spiritual ambition, the inheritance was extended from the Jewish people to *all* nations, and from literal Canaan to all the earth? This is not to say, of course, that *fundamentally* the promises to Abraham have been changed. No. The promise of eternal inheritance of Canaan still stands as the basis of

the Gospel of the Kingdom (Gal. 3:8), but that promise has been considerably extended, thanks to the Lord's spiritual ambition.

Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but the works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". Through his correct response to the early promises given him, Abraham was imputed "the righteousness of faith". But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given "the promises that he should be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men "from faith to faith", up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17).

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*4:14 For if they that are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of no power-* The huge importance attached to faith in Gen. 15:6 would be pointless if obedience to the Law was what guaranteed the promise of inheritance the world- as Jewish theology taught about Abraham. The promise of the Kingdom would become irrelevant because Paul has demonstrated in Romans 1-3 that all men, Abraham included, are sinners, law breakers, and condemned before the judgment seat of God. Nobody would therefore inherit the promised Kingdom, and so the promise of it would have been pointless- see on 4:15.

*4:15 For the law works anger; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression-* The wrath of Divine condemnation. Because nobody keeps God's law fully, therefore the law brings those under it to condemnation. Another way has to be found if we wish to be declared right and not condemned. To say that the law creates [AV "works"] Divine wrath upon men is another example of Paul using purposefully radical and controversial language to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and the utter folly of hiding behind legal righteousness. Law creates the possibility of "transgression", a conscious crossing over the line. Sin is one thing; but transgression is what brings liability to receiving the wrath of God, because if we know His law and cross over it, then we are the more culpable. This difference between sin and transgression is at the root of a great Biblical theme- that knowledge brings responsibility. And this was particularly relevant and concerning, or it ought to have been, to a Jewish audience so keen to attain rightness with God through obedience to law.

*4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure-* God's promises are sure from His end, in that He will not break them. But the promised inheritance of the Kingdom would never be a very sure promise if it depended upon human acts of obedience to come true. But because salvation is by our faith in God's grace, declaring us right quite apart from our works- therefore we are sure of entering that Kingdom, and in this sense it is grace which makes the promise sure. The certainty of our future hope and present salvation is therefore precisely in the fact that it doesn't depend upon our works. All the time we think it does, the promise of salvation will not appear to us to be at all "sure".



*To all the seed-* the fact salvation is by pure grace to sinners means that any person of whatever ethnic background may believe in it and accept it. The result of that is that there should be no spiritual difference between ethnic groups such as Jew and Gentile in Rome. And today, our common experience of utter grace, each of us accessing it by faith, should be the basis for a powerful unity.

*Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham-* There is an intended ambiguity in the phrase “the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16); this ‘ambiguous genitive’ can mean those who share “the (doctrinal) faith” , which Abraham also believed; or those who have the kind of belief which Abraham had. Like Abraham, we are justified by *the* faith in Christ; not faith in Christ, but more specifically *the* faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). The use of the definite article surely suggests that it is our possession of the same doctrinal truths (the Faith) which Abraham had, which is what leads to faith in Christ and thereby our justification. The *life* Paul lived was by *the* Faith of Christ; not simply by faith, as a verb, which is how grammatically it should be expressed if this is what was meant; but by *the* Faith (Gal. 2:20).

*Who is the father of us all-* see on Rom. 4:1.

4:17 (*As it is written, A father of many nations have I made you*) *before Him whom he believed, God, who gives life to the dead-* This continues the language of our standing “before God” in 3:19,20 and being condemned there for our sins, and yet also being declared righteous there by His grace and our faith in that grace. The first part of v. 17 is in brackets, correctly in my opinion. Abraham was declared the “father of us all” (4:16) before God, as he stood as it were in God’s judgment presence and was justified, declared right- God then considered him as the father of us all, naming things [AV “calling”] which didn’t exist as if they did. Abraham the ungodly was counted as Godly; we who were sinners, disobedient to the law, were counted as obedient; and thus God as it were saw Abraham before His presence not merely as Abraham, but as representative of so many others who would likewise believe in God’s grace and be thereby justified.

*And called things that are not, as though they were-* This is exactly what Paul has been arguing all through his letter so far. God calls the unrighteous righteous, counting righteousness to those who believe, who are themselves not righteous. “Calls” strictly means ‘to name’, and the reference would initially be to the way God called Abram as Abraham, as if he already was the father of the people of many nations whom God foresaw would believe in His promised grace just as Abraham had done. God saw us then as if we existed, in the same way as He sees us as righteous even though we are not. The idea of calling things which don’t exist into existence also has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation- creating people spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn’t have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

Because God is not limited by time, He speaks of things which do not now exist as if they do, because He knows that ultimately they will exist (Rom. 4:17). This explains why the Bible speaks as if Abraham is still alive although he is now dead; as if the believers are now saved in God's kingdom, although "he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Mt. 10:22); as if Israel were obedient to God's word (Ps. 132:4 cp. Ex. 19:5-6), when they will only be so in the future; as if Christ existed before His birth, although he evidently only existed physically after his birth of Mary.

Our comprising the Kingdom to some degree is understandable seeing that God speaks of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). Thus Abraham and those believers who have died are described as 'living unto God' in prospect, because He can foresee their resurrection (Lk. 20:38). It is to this that Rom. 6:11 refers: "Reckon yourselves (i.e. in prospect)... alive unto God through (having been resurrected with) Jesus" in baptism. In the same way as in prospect we should reckon ourselves resurrected to eternal life, unable to give service to sin any longer, so in the same way we are now in the Kingdom. Careful attention to the tenses in 1 Cor. 15:20 indicates the same logic; by His resurrection Christ has "become the firstfruits of them that slept"- not those 'who are sleeping', but "that slept", seeing that because of their Lord's resurrection they also are alive in prospect. Similarly if Christ had not risen "they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor.15:18), implying that now they are not perished. The practical meaning of all this is that we should live now in the same joy and righteousness as if we were in the Kingdom. "The day (of the Kingdom) is at hand: let us therefore... walk honestly, as in the day" (Rom.13:12,13), i.e. as if we are now living in the Kingdom which is soon to come.

4:18 *Who in hope believed against hope* – see on Rom. 4:19. The first "hope" may be human hope- and Abraham as a sinner was in a hopeless situation. Yet he believed and thereby shared in God's hopefulness for us, seeing himself as God saw him- as declared right. "Against" could equally be translated "beyond". Beyond human hope, Abraham had hope. This is the essence of the Gospel- having no hope in our own strength, standing condemned and speechless before God, but believing in His hopefulness for us. His faith in this instance was that he would indeed become a father of many nations. He didn't just believe that he was declared right with God, but that really and truly there would be people world-wide who would likewise believe and become his seed. In this sense he believed in God's hope. We likewise need to share in the hopefulness of God for people rather than being negative, cynical and defeatist about people just because so many chose not to respond.

*To the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to what had been spoken: So shall your seed be-* Because of Sarah's faith, "therefore sprang there... so many as the stars of the sky in multitude" (Heb. 11:11,12). Those promises to Abraham had their fulfilment, but conditional on Abraham and Sarah's faith. Gen. 18:18-20 says that the fulfilment of the promises was conditional on Abraham teaching his children / seed the ways of God. Those promises / prophecies were "sure" in the sense that God's side of it was. Rom. 4:18 likewise comments that Abraham became "the father of many nations" precisely because he *believed* in this hope. Yet the promise / prophecy that he would be a father of many nations could sound as if it would have happened anyway, whatever. But it was

actually conditional upon Abraham's faith. And he is our great example exactly because he had the possibility and option of *not* believing in the hope he had been offered.

4:19 *And without being weakened in faith*- s.w. "impotent", Jn. 5:7; the word is usually used with the sense of sickness or weak health. Abraham was physically impotent, perhaps even seriously ill and weak at the time the promise was given- but not impotent or weak in faith. The idea of the Greek is that Abraham didn't weaken in faith as he observed / considered his body. We showed in our introductory comments that the theological first half of Romans has many connections with the practical second half. Thus we meet this very same phrase "weak in faith" in Rom. 14:1,2- where we are told to accept those who are "weak in faith". This connection would seem to be a tacit admission that not all in the ecclesia are going to rise up to the faith of Abraham, even though he is to be the father of us all, in that we share that same family characteristic of faith. Thus on one hand Paul sets Abraham before us as a vital, crucial pattern- not an option, a nice idea, but a role model whose faith must be followed, in whose faithful steps we are to walk. And yet he accepts that not all in Christ will rise up to his level of faith- and we are to accept them. The same word for "weak" is used in Rom. 5:6- whilst we were weak [AV "without strength"], Christ died for us. We therefore are to accept the weak, even as Christ died for us in our weakness. We share something of His cross in accepting those who are spiritually weaker than ourselves. Yet so many refuse to carry His cross in this matter, because their own pride stops them accepting those weaker in the faith than themselves.

*When he considered his own body, now as good as dead (he being about one hundred years old)*- He didn't fix his mind upon (Gk.) the fact his body was dead (i.e. impotent) and unable to produce seed (Rom. 4:19). He wasn't obsessed with his state, yet he lived a life of faith that ultimately God's Kingdom would come, he rejoiced at the contemplation of Christ his Lord; and he filled his life with practical service. He wasn't obsessed with the fact that in his marital position he personally couldn't have children when it seemed this was what God wanted him to do; and this was very pleasing to God. Gen. 17:1 says he was 99, so he was in his 100th year.

*And the deadness of Sarah's womb*- So often we allow the apparent weakness of others to become a barrier to our faith. 'She'll never change... she just isn't capable of that'. But Abraham not only believed that *he* could do it, but that the apparent obstacle of another's weakness was also surmountable by the word of promise.

There are some implied gaps within the record in Gen. 15:5,6: God brings Abraham outside, and asks him to number the stars [gap]; then He tells Abraham "So shall thy seed be" [gap]; and then, maybe 10 seconds or 10 hours afterwards, "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness". Those 10 seconds or 10 hours or whatever the period was, are summarized by Paul as how Abraham "in hope believed against hope" (4:18). His no-hope struggled against his hope / faith, but in the end his faith in God's word of promise won out. "According to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be" implies to me that he kept reflecting on those words: "So shall thy seed be" (three words in Hebrew, *ko zehrah hawya*). And we too can too easily say that we believe the Bible is God's word, without realizing that to just believe three inspired words can be enough to radically change our lives and lead us to eternity. I'm not sure that Abraham's ultimate belief of those three words *ko*

*zehrah hawya* just took a few seconds. According to Paul, he "considered... his body"- he reflected on the fact he was impotent (see Gk. and RV). *Katanoeo*, "consider", means to "observe fully" (Rom. 4:19). He took full account of his impotent state, knowing it as only a man can know it about himself. And he likewise considered fully the deadness of his elderly wife's womb, recalling how her menstruation had stopped years ago... but all that deeply personal self-knowledge didn't weaken his faith; he didn't "waver", but in fact- the very opposite occurred. He "waxed strong through faith... being fully assured that what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform". As he considered his own physical weakness, and that of his wife, his faith "waxed" stronger (RV), he went through a process of becoming "fully assured", his faith was progressively built up ("waxed strong" is in the passive voice)... leading up to the moment of total faith that so thrilled the heart of God. And so it can happen with us- the very obstacles to faith, impotence in Abraham's case, are what actually leads to faith getting into that upward spiral that leads towards total certainty. Abraham's physical impotence did not make him "weak" [s.w. translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:3,7] in faith- it all worked out the opposite. For his physical impotence made him not-impotent in faith; the very height of the challenge led him to conclude that God would be true to His word, and he would indeed have a child. For when we are "weak" [s.w. "impotent"], then we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Thus the internal struggle of Abraham's mind led his faith to develop in those seconds or minutes or hours as he reflected upon the words "So shall your seed be". He "staggered not at the promise" (Rom. 4:20), he didn't separate himself away from (Gk.) those three Hebrew words translated "So shall your seed be", he didn't let his mind balk at them... and therefore and thereby he was made strong in faith ("waxed strong in faith" Rom. 4:20 RV). This process of his faith strengthening is picked up in the next verse: Abraham was "fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). There was a process of internal persuasion going on- leading to the moment of faith, which so thrilled God and was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. And of course Paul drives the point home- that we are to have the faith of Abraham. As he believed that life could come out of his dead body ("dead" in Rom. 4:19, with a passive participle, implies 'slain'), so *we* are to believe in the resurrection of the slain body of the Lord Jesus, and the real power of His new life to transform our dead lives (Rom. 4:23,24). Gal. 3:5,14 puts it another way in saying that if we share the faith of Abraham at that time, we will receive "the promise of the spirit through faith", the enlivening of our sterile lives. And this takes quite some faith for us to take seriously on board; for as Abraham carefully considered the impotence of his physical body, so we can get a grim picture of the deadness of our fleshly lives. These ideas help us understand more clearly why the Lord chose to be baptized. He understood baptism as a symbol of his death (Lk. 12:50). Rom. 6:3-5 likewise makes the connection between baptism and crucifixion. The Lord knew that He would be crucified, and yet He lived out the essence of it in His own baptism.

4:20 *But instead, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief*- "Did not waver" is Gk. *diakrino*, to judge. Abraham didn't judge God by doubting, analysing, forensically investigating, the promise made- finding all the possible reasons why it might not be true for him. This continues the idea of Rom. 3:4- that man effectively puts God in the dock and prosecutes Him for false witness and unreal promises, the accusers being the doubts of God's grace deep within the human mind. Abraham didn't do this. The word occurs only one other time in Romans, in the practical section, in Rom. 14:23: "He that doubts [s.w. 'stagger'] is damned if he eat". If we are truly Abraham's children and don't doubt God's promises, we will have a strong conscience, not worrying that eating this or that or failing to keep some ritual will result in our losing God's grace.

*But grew strong through faith, giving glory to God-* Gk. ‘was / became strengthened’- by whom? By God? In this case we would see God’s grace yet more apparent, in that Abraham was justified by his faith in God’s grace, but God Himself partially empowered that faith. This would be an example of how faith is part of an upward spiritual spiral, the dynamic in which is God Himself- a theme with which Romans begins, when Paul talks about going “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). Exactly the same term is used about Paul after his conversion- he “increased the more in strength” and confounded Jewish opposition to the Gospel (Acts 9:22). As so often, Paul provides himself as a parade example of what he’s preaching. Significantly, Paul elsewhere comments that it is Christ who strengthens him within his mind (Phil. 4:13 and context; other examples of the same word applied to Christ’s strengthening of Paul are in 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:17; and Heb. 11:37 says that the faithful of old were “made strong” in their faith, by God). We are thrown up yet again against God’s grace. We can be saved by grace if we believe in that grace, but the Lord is willing to even strengthen us in that necessary faith. See on 4:21 “fully persuaded”, where again God is the persuader of human faith. Abraham therefore gave the glory to God, because it was God who had strengthened his faith and the whole thing comes down to God’s grace in every way, for which we can only glorify Him. Paul uses the same phrase for ‘giving glory to God’ as in Lk. 17:18, where it is a Gentile rather than the Jews who give glory to God for what He has done for them- and surely this is another of Paul’s many allusions to the Gospel records.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

4:21 *And became fully assured that what He had promised-* By whom? Surely by God. This continues the theme of ‘was strengthened’ in 4:20 [see note there], that although God’s saving grace is accessible to us by faith, He also plays a part in developing that faith. This of course lays the basis for Paul’s later comment in Romans upon predestination as being an indicator of God’s pure grace. For He doesn’t just start talking about predestination without a context- he cites it as an example, or another window onto, God’s grace.

We have earlier commented that the doctrinal section of Romans [chapters 1-8] has many connections with the latter, practical part of Romans; and we’ve demonstrated that several verses in Romans 4 contain phrases which recur in Romans 14. “Fully persuaded” occurs elsewhere in Romans only in Rom. 14:5, where Paul urges that each of us, like Abraham, should be “fully persuaded in [our] own mind” about the matter of Sabbath keeping. The implication isn’t so much that each of us should just be certain that we are fully persuaded of our position- that would be to state an axiom needlessly- but surely the point of the allusion to Abraham’s full persuasion in Rom. 4:21 is that if we have been fully persuaded of God’s salvation being by pure grace and not works, then we will not be concerned about keeping days or indeed any other ritual in order to gain His acceptance. That same principle can be applied in our church lives, in forming our approach to matters of external ritual [e.g. head coverings for sisters, or dress codes at church meetings] which in our generation may be a live issue, as Sabbath keeping was for the Rome ecclesia of the first century.

*He was able also to perform-* It may seem obvious that anyone who believes in the God of

the Bible will believe that God Almighty is truly almighty, and is capable of doing what He has promised. And yet when it comes to believing that He is able to save me despite my sins and regardless of my works- we all baulk. Abraham believed, that God was able to do what He had said. To save him, without works. The only other time the Greek phrase translated “able to perform” occurs is in Lk. 1:49, where young Mary exalts that the God who is able has performed great things for her. Perhaps Paul is setting her up as our example. That barefoot and pregnant, illiterate young woman (a teenager, probably), who took God at His word. Paul maybe has the same sense in mind when he comments that the God who cannot lie has promised us eternal life (Tit. 1:2). John in characteristic bluntness puts it so clearly: “This is the promise that He has promised us: eternal life” (1 Jn. 2:25). To doubt that we shall receive it is effectively calling Him a liar. We are between a rock and a hard place. We must either face up to the wonder of our salvation, or do the unthinkable- call God a liar, one incapable of doing what He has said. Sarah likewise “judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb. 11:11). There again we meet the idea of putting God in the dock. We judge Him- as either faithful, or unfaithful; able or unable; almighty or impotent, a god of nice ideas and fair words which have no cash value in the weakness and desperation of our human, earthly lives. The Greek translated “promise” can be used in the context of a legal assertion about oneself (although it isn’t used within the NT in this way). God is in the dock, making the promise, the assertion about Himself, His very own self, that He will give us eternal life. And we judge Him- as speaking the Truth, the most ultimate truth of the cosmos, of history- or as lying under oath to us. Faced with a choice like that, we have no real choice but with Abraham and Sarah “judge Him faithful who has promised” (Heb. 11:11).

4:22 *Therefore also it was counted to him for righteousness*- This word occurs so many times in Romans 4. Abraham’s faith that God would give him the promised blessing and salvation was counted to him as righteousness, with no reference to Abraham’s works or sins. The word recurs in the practical section of Romans just once- in Rom. 14:14: “To him that counts anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean”- although there is nothing “unclean in itself”. God counts us as clean, not unclean. The person who is always paranoid about this that or the other being unclean, the need to separate from this brother or that sister for their uncleanness, hasn’t been filled with the positive spirit of our Father, who rejoices to count unclean persons as clean. This isn’t in any way to blur the boundary between clean and unclean, sin and righteousness. Rather is it the logical connection between Rom. 4:21, speaking of God calling sinners as righteous; and Rom. 14:14, which warns that men have a tendency to count / impute things as unclean rather than clean. Cleanness or uncleanness is a matter of perception, seems to be Paul’s message. For “there is nothing unclean in itself”. Likewise sin and righteousness are matters of God’s perception; for sometimes a man can do something which is counted a sin, other times the same act can be counted as righteousness. Yet God is eager to count us as clean; and we should have that same positive, seeking, saving spirit.

4:23 *Now it was not written for his sake alone*- Where was it written? In some unrecorded Scripture? In God’s heavenly record book? Or is the allusion to the finality of the legal case now concluded, that ‘it was written’ in the sense of legally concluded, under the hammer, so to speak? The suggestion is that right now in this life, if we really believe God’s offered salvation, or perhaps, *for so long* as we believe it- we are written down as declared right before His judgment. In this case, Paul is interpreting the comment in Gen. 15:6 “And it was imputed unto him for righteousness” as a writing in Heaven, the court secretary writing down the outcome of the case. The Jews taught that justification would only be at the future day of

judgment (see D. Moo, *Romans* 1-8, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991) p. 293). Paul is teaching that in fact we can be justified, declared right with God, here and now; and we ought to be able to know and feel that.

*That it was counted to him-* This appears to be a pointless repetition of the same phrase in the preceding 4:22. Paul keeps on and on repeating it to try to impress upon us the sheer wonder of it all- that we are counted righteous when we are not.

4:24 *But for our sake also, to whom it shall be counted-* In that Abraham was being consciously set up as our example; and the record of Abraham's justification by faith is purposefully designed, Paul seems to be inferring, to inspire us to a similar faith.

*Who believe in Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead-* Our faith is that God will justify us by His grace. But as Paul will now go on to show (see on 5:1), that position of being declared right with God will be articulated in our being given eternal life. This means in practice that we will be resurrected as Jesus was, and given eternal life. So our belief in God is a belief in the God of resurrection, who resurrected Jesus our representative, in whom, through faith and baptism into His death and resurrection, we shall also be resurrected to eternal life.

4:25 *Who was delivered up for our trespasses-* An allusion to the LXX of Is. 53:12: "He was handed over because of their sins". The Gospel accounts of the crucifixion give special emphasis to the moment of the Lord being handed over to those who would crucify Him. Paul is going on to show the mechanics, as it were, of how God has chosen to operate. His scheme of justifying us isn't merely a case of Him saying 'So you are declared right by Me'. He can do as He wishes, but He prefers to work through some kind of mechanism. We are declared right by God although we are sinners; which raises the obvious question: So what becomes of our sins? And so Paul explains that by talking about the crucial role of the death of Christ. Because He was of our nature, He is our representative. Although He never sinned, He died, yet He rose again to eternal life. Through connection with Him, we therefore can be counted as in Him, and thereby be given that eternal life through resurrection, regardless of our sins. In this sense, Jesus had to die and resurrect because of our sins.

*And was raised for our justification-* This also is an allusion to the LXX of Isaiah 53, this time to Is. 53:11, which speaks of "the righteous servant" (Jesus) "justifying the righteous". The repetition of the word "righteous" suggests that on account of the Lord's death, and resurrection, His righteousness becomes ours, through this process of justification. But how and why, exactly, does Christ's death and resurrection enable our justification? Paul has explained that faith in God brings justification before Him. Now Paul is explaining how and why this process operates. Jesus died and rose again to eternal life as our representative. If we believe into Him (which chapter 6 will define as involving our identification with His death and resurrection by baptism), then we too will live for ever as He does, as we will participate in His resurrection to eternal life. Our final justification, being declared in the right, will be at the day of judgment. We will be resurrected, judged, and declared righteous- and given

eternal life, never again to sin and die. This is the end result of the status of 'justified' which we have now, as we stand in the dock facing God's judgment.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 5

*5:1 Being therefore justified by faith-* There's a noticeable change of style beginning at Rom. 5:1. Paul starts to talk about "we", as if he assumes that he has won the argument in chapters 1-4 and taken his readership with him- they along with him are now, as it were, believers in Christ. Instead of the focus on "justification" which there is in chapters 1-4, the end result of God's work for us is generally replaced with the word "life", i.e. eternal life, occurring 24 times in chapters 5-8. Chapters 5-8 of Romans form a definite section. The words "love", "justify", "glory", "peace", "hope", "tribulation", "save" and "endurance" all occur in Rom. 5:1-11 and also several times in Rom. 8:18-39. These passages form bookends [an 'inclusio' is the technical term] to the material sandwiched between them. Paul is going on from us standing before Divine judgment declared right, justified by our faith in God's promise of grace. That salvation will be and is articulated in terms of life, eternal life, life lived both now and in its fullness after we again stand before the final judgment seat of Christ.

*We have peace with God-* It's hard to avoid the conclusion that God has written His word in such a way as to leave some things intentionally ambiguous. He could just have given us a set of brief bullet points, written in an unambiguous manner. But instead He gave us the Bible. Given that most of His people over history have been illiterate, they simply couldn't have been able to understand His word in an academic, dissective, analytical sense. Take Rom. 5:1- it could read "Let us have peace" (subjunctive) or "We have peace" (indicative). The difference is merely the length of a vowel, and this would only have been apparent in *reading* it, as the difference wouldn't have been aurally discernible when the letter was publicly read.

*Peace* here refers to our being right with God, rather than a calmness in life generally. Such a thing isn't promised to Christians but rather the very opposite. "Peace with God" cannot be experienced if we are continually doubting whether or not we shall ultimately be saved. We should be able to say that if the Lord were to return right now, by grace, we believe that we shall surely be saved; for we are right here and now justified before God's judgment seat. Therefore we experience right now "peace with God".

*Through our Lord Jesus Christ-* previously Paul has pointed out that God has set us right with Him simply if we can believe that He would do this. But increasingly, Paul points out that *how and why* this is- He does this on account of the work of the Lord Jesus.

*5:2 Through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand-* may be continuing the judgment image of chapters 3 and 4, in which we are left standing in the dock before the judgment of God, and by grace are declared right when in fact we are sinners. And we stand there before God's judgment, very much in grace. The language of 'access into' suggests that "this grace" is a situation, a 'place', a status, in which we are now permanently located. "Access into... wherein we stand" is a phrase used in classical Greek about entering a royal presence (Moo, *op cit.* p. 300 gives examples). So the idea is very much of our standing in the august judgment presence of God acceptable by status. This point needs to be more than intellectually noted; it must be our real and felt experience that we are not one moment in an acceptable status with God, and then next we slip out of it- through

inattention, insensitivity, or downright selfish rebellion on our part. We are in a relationship, married as it were to Him, bearing His Name, and thereby in a permanent status. Perhaps we can be so foolish as to leave that status, but we certainly don't drift in and out of it insofar as we sin or avoid sinning in the course of daily life. The very nature of the "grace" status which we are in means that we are declared right, OK with God, in spite or and even in the face of our sins.

*By faith into this grace wherein we stand and in which we rejoice-* Standing before God justified means that in the judgment day to come at the Lord's return to earth, we will be accepted and given eternal life in God's Kingdom. We are to rejoice (Gk. 'boast') in that hope quite naturally- for Paul doesn't exhort us to rejoice in the hope, he simply states that given our position of grace, we, naturally, rejoice in hope. If we cannot say "Yes" to the question "Will you be accepted before the judgment seat of Christ?", then I fail to see that we can rejoice in hope. To rejoice in hope means that we have accepted God's judgment of us now- and His judgment is that we are acceptable to Him, that even now, "it's all OK". If we are to boast in this hope- and the Greek translated "rejoice" definitely means that- this would imply that we can't keep quiet about such good news. We simply have to share it with others.

*In hope of the glory of God-* Our hope to participate in this glory, which is associated in Mt. 6:13 with the future Kingdom of God on earth, connects with what Paul has earlier reasoned in Rom. 3:23- that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We who have been declared right can now rejoice in the prospect of participating in that glory, that glorious eternal future, which we fell short of by our sins. We commented under 3:23 that Paul is referring to writings such as the Apocalypse of Moses, which claimed that Adam had fallen short of God's glory in Eden, but the hope of the Messianic age would be Adam's restoration to the glory intended in Eden (Apoc. Moses 39.2-3). Adam is everyman- a theme now to be developed specifically here in Romans 5.

*5:3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance-* "Sufferings" is s.w. Rom. 2:9, where we read that "tribulation" will come upon the rejected, faithless sinner at the day of judgment. Paul no doubt had in mind "the tribulation" which the Olivet prophecy and other NT Scriptures predicted would come upon the faithful in the first century. But the connection with Rom. 2:9 suggests that he saw that in a sense, we are condemned for our sins now, and as he explains in Romans 6, we die to sin, in baptism we take fully the condemnation for sin, and we rise again as new people, like the Lord Jesus, who are not under condemnation. Indeed the same word for "tribulation" occurs in Rom. 8:35, where Paul exalts that tribulation, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril and the sword cannot separate us from Christ's loving acceptance; and most if not all of those terms are applied elsewhere in Scripture to the rejected at the day of judgment. The condemnation for sin- our sins- will not separate us from Christ's love, and we shall be saved all the same. If this idea of "tribulation" as part of the condemnation process for sinners is indeed somewhere in Paul's mind (for this is how the word is used in 2 Thess. 1:6; Rev. 2:22), he would be saying that as a result of experiencing in our lives the condemnation for sin, we come through enduring the process ["patience", *hupomone*] to 'pass the test' (Rom. 5:4, AV "experience" is a terribly poor translation), and through that we come to a sure hope in acceptance at the last day and a feeling unashamed (Rom. 5:5), despite knowing we are on one hand condemned sinners.

"Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace... let us rejoice... let us also rejoice in our tribulations" (Rom. 5:1-3 RV). If we really feel justified due to righteousness being imputed to us, then this will give us a joyful perspective on all suffering. For the reality that we are counted righteous will mean that all tribulation "under the sun" is not so ultimately meaningful; and thus we will find all joy and peace through believing.

*5:4 And endurance produces character, and character produces hope*— See on Rom. 5:3. "Experience" translates a Greek word elsewhere translated 'to put to the proof', and meaning 'to pass the test'. We are going through the future judgment process right now- by passing through "tribulation", living out the consequences for our sin, but in faith in God's acceptance of us- we pass the test. The future day of judgment isn't our ultimate test or putting to the proof; our faithful acceptance of salvation by grace today, right now, is our crucial testing or proving.

*5:5 And hope does not put us to shame*- A significant theme in Paul and Peter (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6).. The believer in Christ will not be ashamed at the last day judgment, with which "shame" is so often associated for the rejected (Dan. 12:2; Lk. 14:9; Jude 13; Rev. 16:15). If we have confident hope that we will not be rejected but will be saved at the last day, that we will not be ashamed then- therefore nothing in this life should make us feel ashamed, not even our own sins, for the shame of them is taken away by God's declaring us right.

*Because God's love*- Gk. *hoti* isn't necessarily causative but it can be demonstrative. Paul may not therefore mean that we are unashamed *because* the love of God is in our hearts; he may mean that we are unashamed, as the final end result of God's justification process, we stand before Him uncondemned, not in shame as are the rejected sinners; and *therefore* the love of God becomes shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This latter option is how I interpret *hoti* here, because Paul has been building up all throughout the letter to the reason why we are unashamed at judgment- it is because we are declared legally right before God's judgment by God the judge of all, due to our faith in His grace which operates through Jesus. Nothing has so far been said about the Holy Spirit in our hearts being the basis for this unashamed position. Our standing before God justified, declared right, forgiven, accepted at judgment, rejoicing in sure hope of eternity in the glory of God's Kingdom- this leads to the love of God filling our hearts. His love for us elicits our love for Him, and it fills our hearts.

*Has been poured into our hearts*- Tit. 3:6 uses the same word to speak of how God's grace has been "shed abroad" abundantly upon us. The word is of course frequently used about the shedding of Christ's blood; because of God's colossal gift to us, of His Son, bringing about our justification if we believe in Him... then in due turn, the awareness of God's love is likewise shed into our hearts. Whether we have really believed and accepted the good news is answerable by whether or not we feel and know God's love to have been shed abroad, to have gushed out, into our hearts. Paul gives the hint several times in Romans 1-8 that this situation is not drifted into; the idea of gushing out or shedding suggests a one-time moment when this happened. 'Justification', the being declared legally right, is always spoken of grammatically as if this is a one off defined event which happened to us at a moment in the past. This

moment is defined by Paul in Romans 6 as baptism, when we become “in Christ”. Note that he is writing to Roman Christians who had already been baptized and believed in Christ- rather than seeking to convert unbelievers. They may well not have felt any watershed moment at their conversion or baptism. But Paul’s whole point is that even though they may not have felt it emotionally, this is actually how it is in reality, and we can now appreciate it and feel the wonder of the status into which we entered, even if it was unappreciated by us at the time. It is this feature more perhaps than anything else which makes this letter so relevant to we today who read it, who like the Romans have already believed, been baptized- and yet likely fail to appreciate the huge implications of the position we have now entered.

*Through the Holy Spirit which has been given unto us-* the whole argument so far in Romans has said nothing about the Holy Spirit. Note the comments under “Because...” above. This isn’t teaching that the Holy Spirit zapped our hearts and therefore all these wonderful things are true. We are unashamed, at the end of the process outlined in Rom. 5:3-5, because we stand at judgment day even now uncondemned, not ashamed as the condemned are, because of our faith in God’s grace. This is how we come to be unashamed- not because the Holy Spirit zapped us. It is God’s grace, justification, which has been given unto us. We could read in an ellipsis here, as often required in reading Romans, and understand this phrase as referring to how the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts ‘by what the Holy Spirit has given unto us’. This would associate ‘the Holy Spirit’ with the power of God by which He has orchestrated and executed this entire wondrous plan of His.

Serious meditation upon the Lord's work ought to have this effect upon us. Can we really see his agony, his bloody sweat, without a thought for our response to it? It's impossible to passively behold it all. There is something practically compelling about it, almost in a mystical way. *Because* “Christ died for the ungodly”, because in the cross “the love of God” was commended to us, *therefore* “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5,6,8). As the smitten rock gave out water, so the smitten Saviour gave out the water of the Spirit. This link between the shedding of the Lord’s blood and the shedding of love in our hearts is surely because an understanding and relation to His sacrifice brings forth in the believer a response of love and spirituality. As the love of God was shown in the cross, so it will be reflected in the heart of he who truly knows and believes it.

5:6- see on Rom. 4:19. Paul in Rom. 5:6-8 lays out a three point logical case for the supremacy of God’s love. Each of those three verses ends with the Greek word “die”, to stylistically emphasize the step logic.

*For while we were yet weak-* The Greek word is pronounced as-then-ace; “the ungodly” translates a Greek word pronounced as-eb-ace. Bearing in mind the generally illiterate nature of Paul’s primary readership, such literary devices which assisted memorization of the text are common in the NT. Christ died for us before we had anything at all to commend us. He didn’t await our faith or repentance and then die for us, but He died for us in order to inspire those very things. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were “without strength”, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 = Rom. 5:6). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak [“without strength”] and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt.

26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

*In due time*- The Greek could imply 'at just the right time'. Perhaps God's wrath was set to destroy the earth by the time of Christ, but He came and successfully did His work at the right time. But perhaps the idea is more that Christ died for us "at that very time" when we were weak and ungodly. He died for us in the hope of what we could potentially become through exercising faith; and our sacrifices for others, not least in the work of preaching and nurturing, are made in the same spirit. They are made whilst the objects of our attention appear immature, non-existent or unbelieving.

*Christ died for*- All that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes in some sense, at some time, true of each of us who are in Him. It's true that nowhere in the Bible is the Lord Jesus actually called our "representative", but the idea is clearly there. I suggest it's especially clear in all the Bible passages which speak of Him acting *huper* us- what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation" (1). Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon define *huper* in the genitive as meaning "'for', 'in behalf of', 'for the sake of' someone (2). When used in the sense of representation, *huper* is associated with verbs like 'request, pray, care, work, feel, suffer, die, support'. So in the same way as the Lord representatively prays, died, cares, suffers, works "for" us, we are to do likewise, if He indeed is our representative and we His. Our prayers for another, our caring for them, is no longer a rushed salving of our conscience through some good deed. Instead 2 Cor. 5:15 becomes our motivation: "He died for (*huper*) all [of us], that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for (*huper*) them". We are, in our turn, to go forth and be "ambassadors for (*huper*) Christ... we pray you in Christ's stead (*huper* Christ), be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Grasping Him as our representative means that we will be His representatives in this world, and not leave that to others or think that our relationship in Him is so internal we needn't breathe nor show a word of it to others. As He suffered "the just for (*huper*) the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18), our living, caring, praying for others is no longer done "for" those whom we consider good enough, worthy enough, sharing our religious convictions and theology. For whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died *huper* us (Rom. 5:6). And this representative death is to find an issue in our praying *huper* others (Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11), just as He makes intercession *huper* us (Rom. 8:26,34). We are to spend and be spent *huper* others, after the pattern of the Lord in His final nakedness of death on the cross (2 Cor. 12:15). These must all be far more than fine ideas for us. These are the principles which we are to live by in hour by hour life. And they demand a huge amount, even the cross itself. For unto us is given "in the behalf of Christ [*huper* Christ], not only to [quietly, painlessly, theoretically] believe on Him, but also to suffer for (*huper*) his sake" (Phil. 1:29). In all this, then, we see that the Lord's being our representative was not only at the time of His death; the fact He continues to be our representative makes Him our ongoing challenge.

*The ungodly*- connecting with how we read in Rom. 4:5 that by faith, the ungodly are declared right with God. And the context there suggests Abraham was along with us all in

that category of “ungodly”. Elsewhere, “the ungodly” are those who specifically will be condemned at the day of judgment (1 Pet. 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:7; Jude 15). We stand in the dock before God’s judgment and are condemned. We aren’t just the passive, the rather lazy to respond to God- we are, every one of us, “the ungodly”, the condemned. But Christ died for *us*, so that we might be declared right, become de-condemned, have the verdict changed right around.

*5:7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous man! Perhaps for the good man some one would even dare to die-* This verse feels like it’s quoting some saying or verse from some other writing. The sense may be that for a righteous man [the Greek phrase is used in this part of Romans to refer to Jesus as the perfectly righteous one] it’s hard to die *huper* him [“scarcely”- Gk. ‘with difficulty’], to save him- for he isn’t in need of saving; but for a good man, humanly “good” rather than morally righteous, some would “dare” (Gk. ‘be bold’) to die. True as this observation may be, the whole point is that Christ died for us when we were “sinners”- neither morally righteous, nor humanly ‘good guys’ who might inspire their buddy to die for them.

*5:8 God commends His own love toward us-* The Greek translated “commend” means to set down beside, in contrast to, over against. And it’s in the continuous tense. God keeps on doing this. But what is His love so continually laid down against? Surely against our sins and failures. But it keeps on being commended through the fact that Christ died for us, whilst we were still sinners. Christ died once only, and so the continual commendation of this fact is in that continually, we perceive the wonder of it all. Our unrighteousness commends God’s righteousness (Rom. 3:8).

*In that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us-* This shows the greatest example in the cosmos of taking the initiative, of seeking to save others when there is no appreciation from them *at the time* of what you are doing. This is an endless inspiration in child rearing, preaching and pastoral work. Tragically, the simple words “Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8) have been grossly misunderstood as meaning that Christ died instead of us. There are a number of connections between Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15 (e.g. v. 12 = 1 Cor. 15:21; v. 17 = 1 Cor. 15:22). “Christ died for *us*” (Rom. 5:8) is matched by “Christ died for our *sins*” (1 Cor. 15:3). His death was in order to make a way whereby we can gain forgiveness of our sins; it was in this sense that “Christ died for us”. The word “for” does not necessarily mean ‘instead of’; Christ died “for (because of) our sins”, not ‘instead of’ them. Because of this, Christ can “make intercession” for us (Heb. 7:25) - not ‘instead of’ us. Neither does “for” mean ‘instead of’ in Heb. 10:12 and Gal. 1:4. If Christ died ‘instead of us’ there would be no need to carry His cross, as He bids us. And there would be no sense in being baptized into His death and resurrection, willingly identifying ourselves with Him as our victorious representative.

*5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the anger of God through him-* If He died for us whilst we were unborn and before we had repented of our sins; if right now we are counted right before God’s judgment seat; then we can confidently expect to being saved from “the wrath” (Gk.), the condemnation at the last day. Note how Rom. 5:1 spoke of justification by our faith; here, by “His blood”. His blood shed for us only becomes powerful and of any value *if we believe*. It’s a tragedy that His sacrifice for us goes

wasted unless we [and others] believe. “Much more then” seems to be rejoicing in playing some kind of logical game of extension, which continues in 5:10.

In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was, as we have shown elsewhere, a type of the final judgment.

We are justified by many things, all of which are in some way parallel with each other: the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9), grace and the redemption which there is in His blood (Rom. 3:24), our faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16), the name of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11), by our confession of sin (Ps. 51:4; Lk. 18:14). All these things revolve around the death of the Lord Jesus, the shedding of His blood. This becomes parallel with the name of Jesus, “Christ”- because the cross presents us with the very essence of the person of the Lord Jesus. But it is also parallel with the spirit or mind / essence of God. Because in that naked, bleeding, derided body and person, in that shed blood, there was the essence of all that God was to us, is to us, and ever shall be for us. It was the cross above all which revealed to us the essence of God Almighty. And it is the cross, the blood of Jesus, which elicits in us the confession of sin which is vital for our justification.

The idea of a Saviour dying for us (5:8) and God's wrath being turned away by His blood is all very much the language of “noble death” found in the stories of the Maccabees, which Paul had been brought up on. The idea was that the Jewish martyrs in their struggle against the occupying power had shed their blood “to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty” against Israel (2 Macc. 7:37 – 38); and thereby reconciled God with His people. But Paul is deconstructing these ideas, fiercely popular as they were amongst first century Jews. Paul's point is that the wrath of God is against all human sin, and that the Lord Jesus through His willing death, rather than the Jewish heroes through their death in battle, had brought about reconciliation and the turning away of God's wrath. Note in passing how the Maccabees spoke of their martyrs having reconciled God, whereas Paul's emphasis is upon how God has reconciled *us*- the change was not of God but of His people.

5:10 *For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son-* In the argument so far, Paul has talked about justification, declaring us right in a legal sense. Now he talks about us being reconciled- as if the impartial judge becomes personally reconciled to us as we stand in the dock. G.E. Ladd has made the informed comment that the surrounding first century religions didn't speak of reconciliation, because they didn't offer nor even conceive of the personal relationship between God and man which Christianity does (3). The need for such personal reconciliation has been implied by Paul earlier, in talking of God's “wrath” against sin (Rom. 1:19-32; 2:5). So the legal declaring of us as right is going to have a more personal aspect between us and our judge; if we are now justified, His wrath is no more, and we become reconciled on a personal level. Note that Strong defines the Greek for “reconciled” as meaning ‘to change mutually’. This raises the whole question as to whether God in some sense has changed as a result of His relationship with us, just as a person changes when they marry or have a child. Seeing that God “is Spirit” and isn't

therefore static, it would seem to me that there is an element of growth associated with His present nature. Hence we read in the continuous tense of the Father growing to know the Son and vice versa (Mt. 11:27). This 'growth' or change within God Almighty as a result of the supreme God of the cosmos being reconciled to a few specks of dust and water on this tiny planet... is not only awesome of itself, but a testimony to the colossal consequences of the reconciling work of His Son. "Being reconciled" is clearly a state- for 2 Cor. 5:18 likewise rejoices that we have been reconciled to God in Christ, yet 2 Cor. 5:20 goes on to appeal to the Corinthians to therefore "be reconciled to God". This idea of living out in practice who we are by status is perhaps the essence of Paul's practical appeal throughout Romans.

*Much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life-* i.e. His resurrection, in that our personal salvation depends upon resurrection from the dead and being given eternal life. This is the significance of our baptism into His death and resurrection. His resurrection, His life, must become ours today.

We must beware lest our theories of the atonement obscure the connection between salvation and *life*- both His life and ours. Having been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus, we are "saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10). This is not only a reference to His resurrection. When He died, He outbreathed His breath of life towards His people who stood beneath the cross. His death, and the manner of it, inspires us to live the life which He lived. And this is the eternal kind of life, the life we will eternally live in the Kingdom with Him. His death was not solely the merit that supplies forgiveness. The cross was His life the most fully displayed and triumphant, forever breaking the power of sin over our street-level human existence by what it inspires in us. Our lives, the ordinary minutes and hours of our days, become transformed by His death. For we cannot passively behold Him there, and not respond. We cannot merely mentally assent to correct doctrine about the atonement. It brings forth a life lived; which is exactly why correct understanding of it is so important. We are inspired to engage in His form of life, with all the disciplines of prayer, solitude, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation in the Father's word which characterized our Lord's existence. For His cross was the summation of the life He lived. We quite rightly teach new converts the need for attending meetings, giving of time and money to the Lord's cause, doing good to others, Bible reading. But over and above all these things, response to the cross demands a life seriously modelled upon His life.

*5:11 And not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation-* It's not all jam tomorrow, a hope of resurrection from the dead in the future. We joy right now, because through Christ "we have now received the atonement", s.w. "reconciliation", the reconciling spoken of in v. 10. The courtroom 'declaring right' or innocent goes much further- we become personally set right with the Judge Himself. The whole world has in a sense been reconciled to God, but we are those who have "received" that reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).

*5:12 So through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, for that all sinned-* This opening word "so" carries much meaning. It is picked up again in Rom. 5:18, the intervening verses being in parenthesis. It almost seems that Adam sinned in order that God's grace might be the more powerfully revealed.



In the New Testament we find Paul writing, as a Jew, to both Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Christ, and yet were phased by the huge amount of apostate Jewish literature and ideas which was then floating around. For example, the book of Romans is full of allusions to the "Wisdom of Solomon", alluding and quoting from it, and showing what was right and what was wrong in it. Wisdom 2:24 claimed: "Through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it". And Paul alludes to this, and corrects it, by saying in Rom. 5:12: ""By one man [Adam- not 'the devil'] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned". This is one of many such examples. Jude does the same thing, quoting and alluding to the apostate Book of Enoch, correcting the wrong ideas, and at times quoting the ideas back against those who used them.

In the same way as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, Israel at the time of Achan (Josh. 7:1,11) etc. were reckoned as guilty but were not personally responsible for the sins of others, so the Lord Jesus was reckoned as a sinner on the cross; He was made sin for us, who knew no sin personally (2 Cor. 5:21). He carried our sins by His association with us, prefigured by the way in which Israel's sins were transferred to the animal; but He personally was not a sinner because of His association with us. The degree of our guilt by association is hard to measure, but in some sense we sinned "in Adam" (Rom. 5:12 AVmg.) In the context of Rom. 5, Paul is pointing an antithesis between imputed *sin* by association with Adam, and imputed *righteousness* by association with Christ. In response to the atonement we have experienced, should we not like our Lord be reaching out to touch the lepers, associating ourselves with the weak in order to bring them to salvation- rather than running away from them for fear of 'guilt by association'?

The difficulty we have in understanding our sinning somehow "in Adam" may be the result of our failure to appreciate the extent of corporate solidarity in Hebrew thinking. This has been documented at great depth in H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (4). This corporate solidarity (even if "corporate personality" is a bridge too far) doesn't mean that we personally sinned with Adam or are directly culpable for his sin. Adam is everyman- the Hebrew "adam" means just that, man. The concern expressed by many as to why babies and the mentally unaccountable still die is a valid one, but I don't think it's solved by postulating that they sinned "in Adam". Paul is writing to Christians in Rome, and he is explaining why *they* die. The question of infants isn't in his purview here. Likewise when he talks about "death" in Romans, he seems to often have in view the second death, the permanent death to be meted out at the judgment seat to those condemned for their sins, rather than 'death' in the general sense. Such death, condemnation at the last day, passes upon us all, but all in Adam in this sense are also those who are now in Christ. It is this apparent paradox which can lead to the almost schizophrenic feelings for Christians which Paul explains in Romans 7. The apparent parallel drawn between those "in Adam" and those "in Christ" would suggest that those "in Adam" whom Paul has in view are not every human being, but those now "in Christ" who have also been, and still are in a sense, "in Christ".

Paul emphasized that it was by one male, Adam, that sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12)- in designed contrast to the contemporary Jewish idea that Eve was to be demonized as the *femme fatale*, the woman who brought sin into the world. Thus Ecclesiasticus 25:4:

"From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die". Paul is alluding to this and insisting quite the opposite- that Adam , the male, was actually the one initially responsible. Paul can hardly be accused of being against women! Another example of Paul's conscious rebellion against the contemporary position of women is to be found in Rom. 5:12: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin". This is an intended rebuttal of Ecclesiasticus 25:24: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die". This allusion is one of many reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired. The idea that women were second class because Eve, not Adam, was the source of sin was widespread. Tertullian (*On Female Dress*, 1.1) wrote: "You [woman] are the first deserter of the Divine law... on account of your desert, that is, death, the Son of God had to die". And Paul is consciously countering that kind of thinking.

### **Adam: The First Sinner**

The classical view of the fall supposes that as Eve's teeth sunk into the fruit, the first sin was committed, and soon afterwards Adam followed suite, resulting in the curse falling upon humanity. What I want to discuss is whether the eating of the fruit was in fact the first sin. If it was, then Eve sinned first. Straight away, the Bible-minded believer comes up with a problem: the New Testament unmistakably highlights Adam as the first sinner; by *his* transgression sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). So sin was not in the world before *his* transgression. The ground was cursed for the sake of *Adam's* sin (Gen. 3:17). This all suggests that Eve wasn't the first sinner. The fact Eve was deceived into sinning doesn't mean she didn't sin (1 Tim. 2:14). She was punished for her sin; and in any case, ignorance doesn't mean that sin doesn't count as sin (consider the need for offerings of ignorance under the Law). So, Eve sinned; but Adam was the first sinner, before *his* sin, sin had not entered the world. We must also remember that Eve was deceived by the snake, and on account of this was "(implicated / involved) in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). "The transgression". Which transgression? Surely Adam's (Rom. 5:14); by listening to the snake she became implicated in Adam's sin. The implication is that "the transgression" was already there for her to become implicated in it by listening to the serpent. This is the very opposite to the idea of *Adam* being implicated in *Eve's* sin.

So I want to suggest that in fact the eating of the fruit was not the first sin; it was the final physical consequence of a series of sins, spiritual weakness and sinful attitudes on Adam's part. They were mainly sins of omission rather than commission, and for this reason we tend to not notice them; just as we tend to treat our own sins of omission far less seriously than our sins of commission. What happened in Eden was that the garden was planted, Adam was placed in it, and commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The animals are then brought before him for naming; then he is put into a deep sleep, and Eve is created. *Then* the very first command Adam and Eve jointly received was to have children, and go out into the whole earth (i.e. out of the Garden of Eden) and subdue it to themselves (Gen. 1:28). The implication is that this command was given as soon as Eve was created. There he was, lying down, with his wife beside him, "a help meet"; literally, 'an opposite one'. And they were commanded to produce seed, and then go out of the garden and subdue the earth. It would have been obvious to him from his observation of the animals that his wife was physiologically and emotionally designed for him to produce seed by. She was designed to be his 'opposite one', and there she was, lying next to him. Gen. 2:24 implies that he should have cleaved to her and become one flesh by reason of the very way in which she was created out of him. And yet he evidently did not have intercourse with her, seeing that they failed to produce children until after the fall. If he had consummated his marriage with her,

presumably she would have produced children (this deals a death blow to the fantasies of Adam and Eve having an idyllic sexual relationship in Eden before the fall). Paul saw Eve at the time of her temptation as a virgin (2 Cor. 11:2,3). Instead, Adam put off obedience to the command to multiply. There seems an allusion to this in 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul says that married couples should come together in intercourse "lest Satan (cp. the serpent) tempt you for your incontinency". Depending how closely one reads Scripture, there may be here the suggestion that Paul saw Adam's mistake in Eden as not 'coming together' with his wife.

But Adam said something to Eve (as they lay there?). He alone had been commanded not to eat the tree of knowledge. Yet when Eve speaks to the serpent, it is evident that Adam had told her about it, but not very deeply. She speaks of "the tree that is in the midst of the garden" rather than "the tree of knowledge". She had been told by Adam that they must not even touch it, even though this is not what God had told Adam (Gen. 2:16,17 cp. 3:2,3). So we are left with the idea that Adam turned to Eve and as it were wagged his finger at her and said 'Now you see that tree over there in the middle, *don't you even touch it* or else there'll be trouble, O.K.'. She didn't *understand*, he didn't *explain* that it was forbidden because it was the tree of knowledge, and so she was deceived into eating it- unlike Adam, who understood what he was doing (1 Tim. 2:14). Adam's emphasis was on not *committing the* sin of eating the fruit; he said nothing to her about the need to multiply and subdue the earth. There are similarities in more conservative Christian groups; e.g. the father or husband who lays the law down about the need for wearing hats without *explaining* to his wife or daughter *why*.

The next we know, Adam and Eve have separated, she is talking to the snake, apparently indifferent to the command to *subdue* the animals, to be their superiors, rather than listen to them as if they actually had superior knowledge. When the snake questioned: "Yea, *hath* God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree..." (Gen. 3:1), Eve was in a weak position because Adam hadn't fully told her what God had said. Hence she was deceived, but Adam wasn't.

So, *why* didn't Adam tell her more clearly what God had said? I would suggest that he was disillusioned with the wife God gave him; he didn't have intercourse with her as he had been asked, he separated from her so that she was alone with the snake. "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree..." (Gen. 3:12) seems to reflect more than a hint of resentment against Eve and God's provision of her. Not only was Adam disillusioned with Eve, but he failed to really take God's word seriously. Romans 5 describes Adam's failure in a number of parallel ways: "transgression... sin... offence... *disobedience* (Rom. 5:19)". "Disobedience" translates a Greek word which is uncommon. Strong defines it as meaning 'inattention', coming from a root meaning 'to mishear'. It is the same word translated "neglect to hear" in Mt. 18:17. Adam's sin, his transgression, his offence was therefore not eating the fruit in itself; it was disobedience, neglecting to hear. That this neglecting to hear God's word seriously was at the root of his sin is perhaps reflected in God's judgment on him: "Because thou hast hearkened unto *the voice of thy wife*..." rather than *God's* voice (Gen. 3:17). Adam's sin was therefore a neglecting to seriously hear God's word, a dissatisfaction with and effective rejection of his God-given wife, a selfish unwillingness to leave the garden of Eden and go out and subdue the earth (cp. our natural instincts), and a neglecting of his duty to multiply children in God's image (cp. preaching and pastoral work). All these things were sins of omission; he may well have reasoned that he would get around to them later. All these wrong attitudes and sins of omission, apparently unnoticed and uncondemned, led to the final

folly of eating the fruit: the first sin of commission. And how many of our more public sins are prefaced by a similar process? Truly Adam's sin was the epitome of all our sins. Romans 5 points an antithesis between Adam and Christ. Adam's one act of disobedience which cursed us is set off against Christ's one act of righteousness which blessed us. Yet Christ's one act was not just His death; we are saved by His life too (Rom. 5:10). Christ lived a life of many acts of righteousness and refusal to omit any part of His duty, and crowned it with one public act of righteousness in His death. The implication is that Adam committed a series of disobediences which culminated in one public act of commission: he ate the fruit.

There are three lines of argument which confirm this picture of what happened in Eden which we have presented. Firstly, Adam and Eve were ashamed at their nakedness. Perhaps this was because they realized what they should have used their sexuality for. Eating the tree of knowledge gave them knowledge of good (i.e. they realized the good they should have done in having children) and also evil (the capacities of their sexual desire?). Adam first called his wife "woman", but after the fall he called her "Eve" because he recognized she was the mother of living ones (Gen. 3:20). By doing so he seems to be recognizing his failure of not reproducing through her as God had originally asked him. The way they immediately produce a child after the fall is surely an expression of their repentance.

Secondly, it seems that God punishes sin in a way which is appropriate to the sin. Consider how David so often asks God to take the wicked in their own snare- and how often this happens. The punishment of Adam and Eve was appropriate to the sins they committed. What Adam wasn't bothered to do, i.e. have intercourse with his woman, became the very thing which now every fallen man will sell his soul for. They ate the tree of *knowledge*, they *knew* they were naked, and then Adam *knew* Eve (Gen. 4:1); this chain of connection certainly suggests that sexual desire, whilst not wrong in itself, was part of the result of eating the tree. There is an artless poetic justice and appropriacy in this which seems simply Divine. What they couldn't be bothered to do became the very thing which has probably generated more sin and desire to do than anything else. Adam was to rule over Eve as a result of the fall- the very thing he wasn't bothered to do. Eve's punishment was that her desire was for her husband- perhaps suggesting that she too had no desire for Adam sexually, and therefore was willing to delay obedience to the command to multiply. They were both driven out of the garden- perhaps reflecting how they should have left the garden in obedience to God's command to go out and subdue the natural creation to themselves. Because Adam wasn't bothered to do this, even when it was within his power, therefore nature was given a special power against man which he would never be able to overcome, and which would eventually defeat him (Gen. 3:17-19). This all shows the logic of obedience; we will be made to pay the price of obedience even if we disobey- therefore it is logical to obey.

Thirdly, there seems evidence that the eating of the fruit happened very soon after their creation. Eve hadn't seen the tree before the serpent pointed it out to her (Gen. 3:6); and consider that they could eat of all the trees, but not of the tree of knowledge. But what about the tree of life? This wasn't forbidden, and yet had they eaten of it, they would have lived for ever. We are told that this tree brings forth fruit every month (Rev. 22:2); so presumably it had not fruited, implying the fall was within the first month after creation.

The practical outcome of what happened in Eden is that we are to see in Adam's sin an epitome of our essential weaknesses. And how accurate it is. His failure was principally due to sins of omission, of delaying to do God's will because it didn't take his fancy. Time and again Biblical history demonstrates that sins of silence and omission are just as fatal as sins of

public, physical commission (e.g. Gen. 20:16; 38:10). To omit to hate evil is the same as to commit it (Ps. 36:4). Because David omitted to enforce the Law's requirements concerning the transport of the tabernacle, a man died. His commission of good didn't outweigh his omission here (1 Chron. 15:13). The Jews were condemned by the Lord for building the sepulchres of the prophets without erecting a placard stating that their fathers had killed them. We have a debt to preach to the world; we are their debtors, and yet this isn't how we often see it (Rom. 1:14). Israel sinned not only by worshipping idols but by thereby omitting to worship God as He required (1 Sam. 8:8). Adam stayed in the garden rather than go out to subdue the earth. Our equivalent is our spiritual selfishness, our refusal to look outside of ourselves into the world of others. Because things like disinterest in preaching or inattention to subduing our animal instincts are sins of *omission* rather than commission, we too tend to overlook them. We effectively neglect to hear God's word, although like Adam we may make an appearance of half-heartedly teaching it to others. And even when we do this, like Adam we tend to focus on *avoidal of committing sin* rather than examining ourselves for the likelihood of *omission*, not least in our lack of spiritual *responsibility* for others. Because of his spiritual laziness, Adam's sin led Eve into deception and thereby sin, and brought suffering on untold billions. His sin is the epitome of ours. So let us really realize: none of us sins or is righteous unto ourselves. There are colossal ramifications of our every sin and our every act of righteousness on others.

5:13 *For until the law sin was in the world*- This could be Paul's way of countering the objection that his teaching that it was the Law of Moses which brought condemnation (Rom. 4:15) wrongly implied that there could have been no death before the Law.

*But sin is not imputed when there is no law!*- We do not have to appear at the day of judgment and answer for our sin if we didn't know God's Law, and we broke it in ignorance. Sin is not therefore imputed to those who are not under law, for whom effectively there is no such law.

5:14 *Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression*- Paul is demonstrating that the whole world is under sin, even those who don't know God's law. They die because they themselves sin, albeit in ignorance, and because of their relation to Adam. He's building up the picture of every single human being as having a desperate need for forgiveness and finding the answer in Jesus- who therefore is the Saviour designed and intended for all people, not just Jews.

*Who is a figure of him that was to come*- A phrase the Jewish writings used about Moses, but which Paul tellingly reapplies to the Lord Jesus (5). Paul's letter is densely packed with allusions to Jewish writings- and this explains some of the apparently awkward grammatical constructions and some of the otherwise strange phrases, often using words and concepts which don't occur in the rest of Paul's writings. Instead of spilling ink trying to exactly understand some of the phrases in Romans- and this letter has produced more tortuous, unhelpful, highly abstracted commentary than any other- it may be wiser to assume that those difficult passages are in fact allusions to extant Jewish writings or thinking contemporary with Paul, which at present we are unaware of.

*5:15 But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift-* This begins an extended comparison and contrast between the results of Adam's sin and disobedience, and the grace [s.w. "free gift"] given as a result of Christ's obedience. This is all in demonstration of the comment in 5:14 that Adam- or more specifically, "Adam's transgression"- was a type of the Lord Jesus. The type works not only by similarity but by inverse contrasts. By doing so, we see how God rejoices in showing grace, almost playing intellectual games to demonstrate how much greater and more abundant is His grace than the power of sin. And this is done in order to persuade us, the doubting readership, of the simple reality- that His grace is for real, and we really will be and are saved and secure in Christ.

*For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ-* The point of similarity here is that just one person can affect many. We may doubt that the obedience of one man, the Lord Jesus, 2000 years ago, can really have much to do with you and me today. That it all happened, I don't think we seriously doubt any more than we doubt standard historical facts. But a man hanging on a stake of wood on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, just outside a Middle Eastern city... can He really do anything for all of us here today? We may never articulate it, say it in so many words. But that is at least our unspoken, unverballed, unformulated, under the bedcovers nagging doubt, the bane of our deepest spiritual psychology, the fear of our soul, the cloud that comes betwixt as we look up at the steely silence of the skies, or gaze at the ceiling rose as we lay upon our bed. Paul tackles that doubt (and Romans 1-8 is really a tackling of human doubts about God's grace) by quoting the example of Adam. Through 'just' one, death and suffering affected many. If Adam is proof enough of 'the power of one'- then how much more is Jesus?

*Abound to the many-* The Greek means to superabound, to be lavished, to be poured out in over abundance. The "gift" which so abounds is surely a reference to the language of Mt. 25:29, where at the final judgment, he that has shall be given to yet more, "in abundance" [s.w.]. Yet our receipt of that grace in this life is a foretaste of that superabundance we are yet to receive. Superabundant generosity characterizes God. We note that when the Lord multiplied the loaves and fishes, there superabounded 12 full baskets and then seven full baskets (Mt. 14:20; 15:37). Why the apparent over creation of food? For what purpose was there such waste? Why is the same strange word for superabundance used both times? And why is it used in *three of the four Gospels* when this incident is recorded (Lk. 9:17; Jn. 6:12,13; Mt. 14:20; 15:37)? Surely to give us the impression of the lavishing of God's gift, His grace, when He provides for His children. We have experienced the same from Him, and should be like this towards others. Paul often uses the word in 2 Corinthians in appealing for generosity to poorer brethren; he speaks of how God's grace has superabounded, and how we also ought to superabound in kindness and generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8). We will eternally know the truth and reality of all this, because we will not only be given eternal life, but life "more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). We must ask ourselves to what extent we show that same quality of super abundant grace to others.

*5:16 This gift is unlike the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment came because of one man to condemnation-* The result of the legal case, the final verdict. This is contrasted with "the gift", as if the judge hands down the verdict but then proffers us the gift of being declared

right. The verdict can mean at times the actual execution of the punishment (as in Rom. 2:2,3; 3:8; 1 Cor. 11:29,34). In this sense, we were actually condemned- not threatened with it and let off.

*But the free gift came out of many trespasses to justification- Dikaioma, s.w. "righteousness".* The free gift of salvation apart from our works actually inspires righteousness- performed in gratitude for salvation, rather than in order to attain salvation. Or we could still read the word as referring to a decree which counts us as right, reversing that of condemnation.

The contrast is between the one man who brought the verdict of condemnation upon many, by one sin [for Adam is everyman]- and the one man, Jesus, who brought the verdict of being declared right for many people who had committed many sins. The paradox is that 'just' one sin lead to the condemnation of mankind, but our many sins lead to us being declared right- by grace. The reasoning here indirectly suggests that Christ was also "a man" as Adam- and certainly not a god.

*5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned on account of the one man-* This again highlights the superabundance of the grace received. By Adam's sin, we became reigned over by death; by Christ, we sinners, we who are like Adam, not only become free from death and shall live eternally, but we shall "reign", as rulers in God's future Kingdom (Lk. 19:19; Rev. 5:10). Note the contrast so far in these verses is between Adam and Christ, and between Adam's sin and... Christ. We expect the connection to be between Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness and obedience. This is the connection made later, but for now, we simply read of Christ as the counterpart to both Adam and Adam's sin. It wasn't so much one act of obedience which countered Adam's one sin; rather was it a life lived, a character developed, a person, rather than a single act of obedience, as perhaps implied by the legalism of Judaism, whereby one sin could be cancelled out by an act of obedience. The reality however is that Adam's one sin was no mere casual infringement which had no significant consequence- 'just' one sin leads to all the death and suffering which Adam's sin brought. Our sins are to be understood in the same way. Adam must have held his head in his hands as he stood somewhere eastward in Eden, and sobbed to the effect "My God, what have I done...", and from tear filmed eyes looked out upon a creation starting to buckle and wrinkle. If we accept Paul's point that Adam is everyman [5:12], that whilst we suffer because of what he did, this is because we would have done the same if in his shoes... then we will feel the same for our falls, our slips, our rebellions, our sins.

*Much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life on account of the one man, Jesus Christ-* For the Macedonians "the abundance of their joy... abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:2). Their joy for what the Lord had done for them, for the "abundance" [s.w.] of His grace and giving to them (Rom. 5:17), led to their giving to the poor.

Throughout Romans 5, Paul makes a seamless connection between the reign of God's grace now, and our future reigning in the literal Kingdom of God to be established materially upon earth at the Lord's return: Grace reigns *unto* eternal life, i.e. the result of the reign of grace now is eternal life in the future (Rom. 5:21)... and thus "the ones receiving the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness in life *will* reign through the one, Jesus

Christ" (Rom. 5:17). Elsewhere, Paul clearly understands the idea of future reigning as a reference to our ruling in the future Kingdom of God. This is a very real and wonderful hope which we have, and is indeed part of the Gospel. "Israel" means something like 'God rules' (Gen. 32:22-28); His people are those over whom He rules. We therefore are under His Kingdom now, if we accept Christ as King over our lives.

Rom. 5:17,21 draws a parallel between Adam's sin and ours. His tragedy, his desperation, as he looked at his body, at his wife, with new vision; as his wide eyes wandered in tragedy around the garden: all who fall are in that position, eagerly reaching out to the clothing of the slain lamb.

*5:18 So then. As through one act of sin the judgment came to all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came to all men to justification of life-* This verse could be ended with an exclamation mark and be read as a summary, exclaimed in joy and wonder, of the preceding argument. "Justification of life" could be a legal term concerning how a person condemned to death has received "life" through being declared right.

Perhaps we feel that our preaching somehow lacks a sense of power and compulsion of others. Try explicitly telling them about the cross. The apostles recounted the fact of the cross and on this basis appealed for people to be baptized into that death and resurrection. There is an impelling power, an imperative, in the wonder and shame of it all. Joseph saw the Lord's dead body and was compelled to offer for that body to be laid where *his* dead body should have laid. In essence, he lived out the message of baptism. He wanted to identify his body with that of the Lord. He realized that the man Christ Jesus was truly his representative. And so he wanted to identify with Him. And properly presented, this will be the power of response to the preaching of the cross today. "Through one act of righteousness [the cross] the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Rom. 5:18)- yet "all men" only receive that justification if they hear this good news and believe it. This is why we must take the Gospel "unto all men" (surely an allusion to the great commission)- so that, in that sense, the wondrous cross of Christ will have been the more 'worthwhile'. Through our preaching, yet more of those "all men" who were potentially enabled to live for ever will indeed do so. This is why the Acts record so frequently connects the preaching of the cross with men's belief. Negatively, men do not believe if they reject the "report" of the crucifixion (Jn. 12:38,39).

*5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience-* Adam's sin of commission (i.e. eating the fruit) may well have been a result of his sins of omitting to go forth out of the centre of the garden and multiply. By one man's inattention (Rom. 5:19 Gk.) sin came into the world.

*The many were made sinners-* Gk. 'to appoint, ordain'. It's not that we as innocent people [which we are not anyway] were turned into sinners because someone else sinned, far away and long ago. Rather were "all men"- and Paul uses this term to emphasize how Jew and Gentile are in the same position- put into the category of Adam, of sinners, of guilty, of flesh. But the good news is that there can be a category change- if we can be "made sinners" we can likewise be made righteous.



*Even so through the obedience of the one man shall the many be made righteous-* A reference to the crucifixion, or to a life of obedience? Significantly, Paul writes in Romans of baptism as being “obedience” (Rom. 1:5; 6:16,17; 15:18; 16:26, also Acts 6:7). It’s as if by obeying the command to die with Him by baptism into His death, we are associating with His actual obedience to death in the cross. The Lord spoke of having been given a specific “command” by the Father to die on the cross (Jn. 10:18), which would encourage us to interpret His “obedience” here as His obedience to death on the cross.

*5:20 Now the law was added to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more-* “Was added / entered” is s.w. only Gal. 2:4, where the Judaizers ‘sneaked in’ to the church. Why exactly Paul uses such a word isn’t altogether clear to me, nor to any of the many expositors I’ve read.

In the context, “the trespass” [singular] refers to the specific sin of Adam- “the offence of the one man” (5:18). The Law was intended on one hand to bring life (Rom. 7:10); it was “holy, just and good”. But the effect of it in practice was to accentuate sin, and this result of human failure was also somehow under the overall hand of God. He on the one hand cannot be held guilty of leading men into sin by creating the concept of Divine law; for that Law which He gave was ordained to bring life. Yet He worked with and through human weakness, so that in the bigger picture, the result was that the Law convicted men of their sin *so that* God’s grace could superabound, abound yet more than sin abounded. God uses sin, and doesn’t just turn away from human failure in disgust; and in this we see a huge lesson for ourselves, we who are confronted on all sides by serious human failure.

Paul knew the ‘abounding’ aspect of the Father, when he wrote of how God does exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). How many times have we found that we prayed for one thing, and God gave us something so very much better? I see a kind of similarity with the way that God brought in the Law “that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly” (Rom. 5:20). God set up a situation in order that in due time, He could lavish His grace the more. One almost wonders whether this is one of the reasons why God allowed the whole concept of sin to exist at all. After all, the God of boundless possibilities surely had ways to achieve His ends without having to allow a concept like sin in the first place. Seeing there is no personal Satan, the intellectual origin of the concept of sin surely lies with God. And perhaps He chose this simply as a way of being better able to express His amazing grace and love to sinners. Having lambasted Israel for their sins and described in detail their coming judgment, God then makes a strange comment, apparently out of context with what He has just been saying: “And therefore will Yahweh wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for Yahweh is a God of justice; blessed are all they that wait for him” (Is. 30:18). God appears to be saying that He delays His actions, that He brings judgment, that He sets Himself *so far* above us- just so that He can get to show yet more mercy to us. Perhaps Joseph was manifesting God in the way he worked out that slow and detailed scheme of dealing with his sinful brethren... it has always seemed to me that he drew out the process just so that he could lead up to a climax of pouring out his maximum grace to them. Whilst the way seems long, “blessed are all they that wait for him”. God is even spoken of as concluding (Gk. ‘shutting up the eyes’) of Israel in the sin of unbelief, “that he might have mercy” upon both them and the Gentiles (Rom. 11:32).

### **Romans and the *Wisdom of Solomon***

Seeing Romans 1-8 is Paul's inspired exposition of the nature of sin and the Gospel, it's surely surprising that he makes no mention of the words Satan or Devil, let alone 'fallen Angel'. He lays the blame for sin quite clearly upon us and our weakness in the face of internal temptation. And Paul speaks of the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve as if he accepted it just as it is written – he makes no attempt to say that the serpent was a Lucifer or fallen Angel. In fact, closer analysis shows that Paul is consciously rebutting the contemporary Jewish ideas about these things as found in *The Wisdom of Solomon* and other writings. We must remember that in the first century, there was no canonized list of books comprising the "Old Testament" as we now know it. There was therefore a great need to deconstruct the uninspired Jewish writings which were then circulating – hence the many allusions to them in the inspired New Testament writings, in order to help the Jewish believers understand that these writings were uninspired and to be rejected.

The flood of apostate Jewish literature in the first century and just before it all have much to say about Adam's sin (e.g. the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*), and I submit that Paul writes of Adam's sin in order to deconstruct these wrong interpretations. Wisdom 2:24 claimed: "Through the Devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it". This is actually the first reference to the idea that a being called 'the Devil' envied Adam and Eve and therefore this brought about their temptation and fall. Paul rebuts this by saying that "By one man [Adam – not 'the Devil'] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). This is evidently an allusion by Paul to this wrong idea – and he corrects it. The allusion becomes all the more legitimate when we appreciate that actually Paul is alluding to the *Wisdom of Solomon* throughout his letter to the Romans. This book glorified the Jewish people, making them out to be righteous, blaming sin on the Devil and the Gentiles. By way of allusion to it, Paul shows how the Jews are de-emphasizing sin, not facing up to the fact that all of humanity are under the curse of sin and death, and all therefore need salvation in Christ. This same basic emphasis upon personal responsibility, not blaming others for our sins, not seeing ourselves as pure and everyone else as the problem, is just as relevant today – surrounded as we are by false theologies that make us out to be basically pure, shifting all blame onto a 'Devil' of their own fabrication. It should be noted that this way of alluding to contemporary writings and correcting them is common throughout Scripture – I've elsewhere given examples of where Jude and Peter do this in relation to the Book of Enoch, and how Genesis 1–3 does this with the views of creation and origins which were common at the time the book of Genesis was compiled.

Wisdom of Solomon 13–14 criticizes the Gentiles for idolatry and sexual immorality. And Paul criticizes the Gentiles for just the same things in Rom. 1:19–27 – in language which clearly alludes to the Wisdom of Solomon. It's as if Paul is reviewing the Wisdom of Solomon and placing a tick by what is right (e.g., that Gentiles are indeed guilty of idolatry and immorality), and a cross by what is wrong in the book. E.P. Sanders has observed: "Romans 1:18–32 is very close to the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish book written in Egypt. Paul's reference to 'images representing... birds, animals or reptiles' (Rom. 1:23) points to... Egypt. Birds, animals and reptiles were idolized in Egypt, but not commonly in the rest of the Graeco-Roman world" (E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1996) p. 113). The point of the reference to these things would therefore simply be because Paul is alluding to, almost quoting, the Wisdom of Solomon.

### Paul's Other Allusions to the Wisdom of Solomon

Having spoken of how “the destroyer” destroyed the Egyptian firstborn, Wisdom 18 goes on to speak of how this same “destroyer” tried to kill Israel in the wilderness, but the evil “destroyer” was stopped by Moses: “For then the blameless man made haste, and stood forth to defend them; and bringing the shield of his proper ministry, even prayer, and the propitiation of incense, set himself against the wrath, and so brought the calamity to an end, declaring that he was thy servant. So he overcame the destroyer, not with strength of body, nor force of arms, but with a word subdued him that punished, alleging the oaths and covenants made with the fathers (Wisdom 18:21,22). Paul in 1 Cor. 10 alludes to this – showing that “the destroyer” was sent by God to punish Israel’s sins. The author of Wisdom speaks as if “the destroyer” is some evil being victimizing Israel – and Paul appears to correct that, showing that it was the same “Destroyer” Angel who protected Israel in Egypt who later slew the wicked amongst them. Wisdom 19 makes out that all sins of Israel in the wilderness were committed by Gentiles travelling with them – but Paul’s account of Israel’s history in 1 Cor. 10 makes it clear that *Israel* sinned and were punished.

It should be noted in passing that 1 Cor. 10:1–4 also alludes to the Jewish legend that the rock which gave water in Num. 21:16–18 somehow followed along behind the people of Israel in the wilderness to provide them with water. Paul is not at all shy to allude to or quote Jewish legends, regardless of their factual truth, in order to make a point [as well as to deconstruct them]. God Himself is not so primitive as to seek to ‘cover Himself’ as it were by only alluding to true factual history in His word; He so wishes dialogue with people that He appears quite happy for His word to refer to their mistaken ideas, in order to enter into dialogue and engagement with them in terms which they are comfortable with. Another example of allusion to Jewish legend is in Rev. 2:17, where the Lord Jesus speaks of giving His people “of the hidden manna” – referring to the myth that Jeremiah had hidden a golden jar of manna in the Holy of Holies at the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, which then ascended to Heaven and is to return with Messiah. Jesus doesn’t correct that myth – He as it were runs with it and uses it as a symbol to describe the reward He will bring. He adds no footnote to the effect ‘Now do understand, this is myth, that jar never really ascended to Heaven nor will it come floating back through the skies one day’. Perhaps this is why the New Testament often quotes the Septuagint text, even where it incorrectly renders the Hebrew original – because God is not so paranoid as to feel bound to only deal in the language of strictly literal truths. If first century people were familiar with the Septuagint, even if it is a poor translation of the Hebrew original in places – well OK, God was willing to run with that *in order to engage with people in their language*. And this approach is very helpful in seeking to understand some of the Biblical references to incorrect ideas about Satan and demons.

It seems to me that Paul’s allusion to wrong Jewish ideas in order to deconstruct them is actually a hallmark of his inspired writing. Ecclesiasticus is another such Jewish writing which he targets in Romans; Rom. 4:1–8 labours the point that Abraham was declared righteous by faith and not by the Law, which was given after Abraham’s time; the covenant promises to Abraham were an expression of grace, and the ‘work’ of circumcision was done *after* receiving them. All this appears to be in purposeful allusion to the words of Ecclus. 44:21: “Abraham kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with Him”.

## Allusions From Paul's Letter to The Romans to The Wisdom of Solomon

	Romans	Comment
<b>The Wisdom of Solomon</b>		
Wisdom 4:5 The imperfect branches shall be broken off, their fruit unprofitable, not ripe to eat, yea, meet for nothing [concerning the Gentiles and those in Israel who sinned].	Romans 11:17–20	Israel as an entire nation were the broken off branches; Gentile believers through faith in Christ could become ingrafted branches.
Wisdom 1:13 For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living.	Romans 1:32; Romans 5,7	Death is “the judgment of God” – death does come from God. It doesn’t come from “the Devil”. It was God in Genesis who ‘made’ death. Death comes from our sin, that’s Paul’s repeated message – death isn’t something made by the ‘Devil’ just for the wicked.
Wisdom 1:14 For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth: [in the context of the earth / land of Israel]	Romans 1,5,7	Paul makes many allusions to these words. He shows that all humanity, including Israel, the dwellers upon the earth / land of Israel, are subject to sin and death. Paul argues against the position that God made man good but the Devil messed things up – rather does he place the blame upon individual human sin.
Wisdom 8:20 I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. Yea rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.	Romans 3,7	As a result of Adam’s sin, our bodies aren’t “undefiled” – we will die, we are born with death sentences in us. “There is none good” (Rom. 3:12); “in my flesh dwells no good thing” (Rom. 7:18)
Wisdom 10:15 She delivered the righteous people and blameless seed from the nation that oppressed them.	Romans 9–11	Israel were <i>not</i> blameless; “there is none righteous, not one” (Rom. 3:10).
Wisdom 12:10 But executing thy judgments upon them by little and little, thou gavest them place of repentance	Romans 2:4	“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). Paul’s argument is that it is God’s grace in not immediately punishing us as we deserve which should lead us to repentance.
Wisdom 12 raves against the Canaanite nations in the land, saying how wicked they were and stressing Israel’s righteousness – e.g. Wisdom 12:11 For	Romans 1,2,9–11	Paul uses the very same language about the wickedness of Israel

it was a cursed seed from the beginning;  
neither didst thou for fear of any man  
give them pardon for those things  
wherein they sinned.

Wisdom 12:12 For who shall say, What Romans  
hast thou done? or who shall withstand 8:30–39;  
thy judgment? or who shall accuse thee 9:19  
for the nations that perish, whom thou  
made? or who shall come to stand  
against thee, to be revenged for the  
unrighteous men?

Wisdom 12:13 uses the phrase  
“condemned at the day of the righteous  
judgment of God” about the  
condemnation of the Canaanite tribes.

Wisdom 12:22 Therefore, whereas thou Romans 2:1–  
dost chasten us, thou scourgest our 4; 11:28;  
enemies a thousand times more, to the 14:4  
intent that, when we judge, we should  
carefully think of thy goodness, and  
when we ourselves are judged, we  
should look for mercy.

Wisdom 13:1 Surely vain are all men Romans 1,10  
by nature, who are ignorant of God, and  
could not out of the good things that are  
seen know him that is.

Wisdom 12:26 But they that would not Romans 1  
be reformed by that correction, wherein  
he dallied with them, shall feel a  
judgment worthy of God.

Wisdom 12:27 For, look, for what  
things they grudged, when they were  
punished, that is, for them whom they  
thought to be gods; now being punished  
in them, when they saw it, they

*Wisdom* marvels at how God judged  
the wicked Canaanites. But Paul  
reapplies this language to marvel at  
God’s mercy in saving the faithful  
remnant of Israel by grace. Paul’s  
answer to “Who shall accuse thee  
[Israel]?” is that only those in Christ  
have now no accuser (Rom. 8:34).

Romans 2:5 Paul stresses that *Israel* will be  
condemned at the “day of the  
righteous judgment of God” (Rom.  
2:5)

Romans 2:1–Paul says that Israel are the  
“enemies” (Rom. 11:28); and that  
judging is outlawed for those who  
are themselves sinners. Paul’s case  
is that we receive mercy at the  
judgment because we have shown  
mercy rather than judgment to  
others.

Romans 1,10 *Wisdom*’s implication is that the  
Gentiles are vain by nature, but  
Israel aren’t, because they aren’t  
ignorant of God, and see Him  
reflected in the “good things” of His  
creation. Paul contradicts this. He  
says that *all* humanity is “vain... by  
nature”; Israel are “ignorant of  
God” (Rom. 10:3); and it is  
believers in Christ who perceive  
God from the things which He has  
made. Indeed, it is Israel who are  
now “without excuse” because they  
refuse to see “the goodness of God”  
[cp. “good things”] in the things  
which He has created (Rom. 1:20–  
30).

It is *Israel* and all who continue in  
sin who are worthy of judgment  
(Rom. 1:32). It was *Israel* who  
changed the true God into what they  
claimed to be gods (Rom. 1:20–26).

acknowledged him to be the true God, whom before they denied to know: and therefore came extreme damnation upon them.

Wisdom 13:5–8: For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably the maker of them is seen. But yet for this they are the less to be blamed: for they peradventure err, seeking God, and desirous to find him. For being conversant in his works they search him diligently, and believe their sight: because the things are beautiful that are seen. Howbeit neither are they to be pardoned.

Wisdom 14:8 But that which is made with hands is cursed, as well it, as he that made it: he, because he made it; and it, because, being corruptible, it was called god.

Wisdom 14:9 For the ungodly and his ungodliness are both alike hateful unto God.

Wisdom 14:31 For it is not the power of them by whom they swear: but it is the just vengeance of sinners, that punisheth always the offence of the ungodly.

Wisdom 15:2 For if we [Israel] sin, we are thine, knowing thy power: but we will not sin, knowing that we are counted thine.

Wisdom 15:3 For to know thee is perfect righteousness: yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality.

Romans 1,2 It is Gentile Christians who ‘found’ God (Rom. 10:20). It was they who were led by the beauty of God’s creation to be obedient to Him in truth (Rom. 2:14,15). It was Israel who failed to ‘clearly see’ the truth of God from the things which He created (Rom. 1:20).

Romans 1:23 It was Israel who changed the glory of the true God into images made by their hands and called them gods (Rom. 1:23)

Romans 4:5; 5:6 Paul argues that Christ died for the ungodly before they knew Him (Rom. 5:6); God justifies the ungodly not by their works but by their faith (Rom. 4:5)

Romans 5 Paul argues that the offence of man is met by God’s grace in Christ, and not dealt with by God through taking out vengeance against sinners. It was the “offence” of Adam which was used by God’s grace to forge a path to human salvation (Rom. 5:15–20). As “the offence” abounded, so therefore did God’s grace (Rom. 5:20).

Romans 3 Paul argues that we *all* sin – it’s not a case of ‘we don’t sin, because we are God’s people’ (Rom. 3:23). And knowledge isn’t the basis for immortality, rather this is the gift of God by grace (Rom. 6:23). Paul leaves us in no doubt that there’s no question of “*if* we sin”; for we are all desperate sinners, Jew and Gentile alike (Rom. 3:23). And our sin really does separate us from God and from His Son; we are “none of His” if we sin (Rom. 8:9 – cp. “we are thine”). We are not automatically “His... even if we

Wisdom 15:7 For the potter, tempering soft earth, fashioneth every vessel with much labour for our service: yea, of the same clay he maketh both the vessels that serve for clean uses, and likewise also all such as serve to the contrary: but what is the use of either sort, the potter himself is the judge.

Wisdom 15 often laments that the Gentiles worship the created more than the creator Romans 1 and 2

Wisdom 18:8 For wherewith thou didst punish our adversaries, by the same thou didst glorify us, whom thou hadst called. cp. Romans 8:30

Wisdom 18:13 For whereas they would not believe anything by reason of the enchantments; upon the destruction of the firstborn, they acknowledged this people to be the sons of God. cp. Romans 8:14

As for the ungodly, wrath came upon them without mercy unto the end: for he knew before what they would do... For the destiny, whereof they were worthy, drew them unto this end, and made them forget the things that had already happened, that they might fulfil the punishment which was wanting to their torments” (Wisdom 19:1,4)

sin”. Paul speaks of how both Jew and Gentile are equally under sin; whereas *Wisdom* claims that there’s a difference: “While therefore thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies [i.e. the Gentiles] ten thousand times more” (12:22).

*Wisdom* mocks the potter for making idols – Paul shows that God is the potter and Israel the clay, and they will be discarded like an idol. For they became like that which they worshipped. Paul uses the same language as *Wisdom* here – he speaks of how the Divine potter uses “the same clay to make different types of vessels.

Romans 1 and 2 make the point, using this same language, that Israel as well as the Gentiles are guilty of worshipping the created more than creator

The “us” who have been “called” and are to be “glorified” are those in Christ – not those merely born Jews.

The true “sons of God” are those in Christ, the Son of God; for not those who merely call themselves “Israel” are the children of God, as *Wisdom* wrongly argues (Rom. 9:6)

What *Wisdom* says about the Gentile world and Egypt, Paul applies to Israel in their sinfulness. And he stresses many times that the result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not “torments” in the way the Jews understood them.

“Wrath... without mercy” is a phrase Paul uses about the coming condemnation of those Jews who refused to accept Christ (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8). Paul uses the idea of foreknowledge which occurs here in *Wisdom*, but uses it in Romans 9 and 11 to show that foreknowledge is part of the grace of God’s

predestination of His true people to salvation. It is the Jews who reject Christ who are “worthy” of death (Rom. 1:32) – not the Gentile world. No wonder the Jews so hated Paul!

5:21 *So that as sin reigned with the result of death-* Or, Gk., *in death*. We have changed masters and also changed our Kings. Our status has changed, but we must still try to live out that status change in practice- hence “let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it” (Rom. 6:12). Grace reigns as King right now, in that Christ reigns- and thereby we are right now in the sphere of His Kingdom.

*Even so might grace reign through righteousness with the result of eternal life-through Jesus Christ our Lord-* In that God’s grace operates through the ‘mechanism’ of God and Christ’s righteousness being counted to us, so that we are counted as righteous, justified. And this comes to its ultimate term in physical, literal terms in our being given eternal life at the final judgment.

Grace, and the forgiveness it brings, reigns as a King (Rom. 5:21), in the sense that the real belief that by grace we are and will be saved, will bring forth a changed life (Tit. 2:11,12). The wonder of grace will mean that our lives become focused upon Jesus, the one who enabled that grace. Grace will be the leading and guiding principle in our lives, comprised as they are of a long string of thoughts and actions. And as with every truly focused life, literally *all* other things become therefore and thereby of secondary value. The pathway of persistent, focused prayer, the power of the hope of glory in the Kingdom, regular repentance... day by day our desires are redirected towards the things of God.

You cannot have abstract diabolism; the evil desires that are in a man’s heart cannot exist separately from a man; therefore ‘the Devil’ is personified. Sin is often personified as a ruler (e.g. Rom. 5:21; 6:6,17; 7:13–14). It is understandable, therefore, that the ‘Devil’ is also personified, seeing that ‘the Devil’ also refers to sin. In the same way, Paul speaks of us having two beings, as it were, within our flesh (Rom. 7:15–21): the man of the flesh, ‘the Devil’, fights with the man of the spirit. Yet it is evident that there are not two literal, personal beings fighting within us.

Paul makes a seamless connection between the reign of God’s grace now, and our future reigning in the literal Kingdom of God to be established materially upon earth at the Lord’s return: Grace reigns *unto* eternal life, i.e. the result of the reign of grace now is eternal life in the future (Rom. 5:21)... and thus “the ones receiving the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness in [this] life *will* reign through the one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). The idea is that if grace reigns in our lives, then we will reign in the future Kingdom.

## Notes

(1) Dorothee Sölle, *Christ The Representative* (London: S.C.M., 1967) p. 69.



- (2) W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1957).
- (3) G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993 ed.) pp. 450-456.
- (4) H.W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).
- (5) For documentation see Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966) pp. 80,81.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 6

6:1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*- Paul says he had been slanderously accused of teaching this (Rom. 3:8). He's here not only answering that false charge, but more positively, analysing what our response should be to the great grace in which we now stand. In doing so, he expounds in more detail how we come to that position of being "in Christ", what "the obedience of faith" means in practice. And he's quite clear that this faith in Christ is expressed in the act of baptism.

Paul didn't just decide to write about baptism in Romans 6; the classic exposition of baptism which we find there is within a context. And it's not an appeal for people to be baptized- it's written to baptized believers, appealing for them to live out in practice the "in Christ" status which they had been given as a result of their baptisms. If we really feel the result of our baptism, we will not "continue in sin". Martin Luther used to overcome temptation by taking a chalk and writing *baptizatus sum*- 'I am baptized'. And therefore we simply cannot continue in servitude to sin. As Karl Barth put it in his needle-sharp analysis of baptism's implications: "Baptism recalls me to the service of witness, since it recalls me to daily repentance" (Karl Barth, *Dogmatics In Outline* (London: S.C.M., 1972 ed.) p. 151). It should be noted that allusions to baptism in Paul's letters are in passages where Paul is trying to correct misunderstandings about unity and way of life (Rom. 6; 8:12-17; Gal. 3:27-4:6; 1 Cor. 1-4, 12). The early brethren had a tendency to forget the implications of baptism. And so it is with us all today. Entering the body of Christ by baptism means that our sins are in a sense against our own brethren, our spiritual body, as well as against the Lord personally. Like the prodigal, we realize we sin against Heaven and men.

### **The Implications Of Baptism**

One of the reasons for baptism is perhaps so that we realize that we can't just drift into relationship with God; there must be a concrete point at which we decide for Him and His Son. The whole thing is so counter-instinctive, as Naaman discovered- to get wet, with all the awkwardness of it being so public, to be exposed and vulnerable to the view of others, to be dipped under water by another person... it's not exactly painless and effortless. Commonly enough, the New Testament speaks of baptism as a calling upon the Name of the Lord. This must be understood against its Hebrew background- *qara' beshem Yahweh*, which originally referred to approaching God in sacrifice (Gen. 12:7,8; Ps. 116:4,17). God placed His Name upon places in order to make them suitable places for sacrifice to be offered to Him (Dt. 12:4-7,21; Jer. 7:12). Baptism was thus seen as a sacrificial commitment to Yahweh in solemn covenant.

Further, in the first century, such baptisms were required of Gentiles who wished to become proselyte Jews and thus enter "Israel". For orthodox Jews to submit to baptism demanded a lot- for it implied they were not by birth part of the true Israel as they had once proudly thought. The Jews thought of Israel in the very terms which Paul applies to Jesus: "We Thy people whom Thou hast honoured and hast called the Firstborn and Only-Begotten, Near and Beloved One" (*The Apocalypse Of Ezra* 6.55-58 (London: S.P.C.K., 1917 ed.) p. 47). The New Testament uses these titles to describe the Lord Jesus Christ- and we must be baptized into Him in order to be in His Name and titles. The Lord Jesus was thus portrayed as Israel idealized and personified, all that Israel the suffering servant should have been; thus only by baptism into Christ of Jew and Gentile could they become part of the true seed of Abraham, the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The act of baptism into Christ is no less radical for us in our

contexts today than it was for first century Jews. All we once mentally held dear, we have to give up.

### **Our Relationship With God**

Being baptized into the Name has quite some implications. In Hebrew thought, you called your name upon that which was your personal property- hence a wife took on the name of her husband because he placed it upon her. By baptism into the Name of the Father and His Son, we become their personal property, their woman, upon whom they have unique claims and obligations. Baptism in this sense is a kind of marriage contract with none less than the God of the universe. We can't drift into relationship with God; God has designed the whole experience of baptism so that we once and for all make a choice, to be with Him and not this world, to be in Christ and covered in Him, rather than wandering in the rags of our own righteousness and occasional half-hearted stabs at real spirituality.

There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. According to the Bible, baptism is essential to salvation; yet we can't draw hoops around God and limit His salvation ultimately. The completeness and reality of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought to not let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. In this sense baptism is essential to salvation *from our perspective*. It can be that much of our preaching somehow fails in urgency and entreaty. We seem to be in places too expository, or too attractive with the peripherals, seeking to please men... or be offering good advice, very good advice indeed, background Bible knowledge, how to read the Bible effectively... all of which may be all well and good, but we should be preaching good news, not good advice. The message of the cross is of a grace and real salvation which is almost too good to believe. It isn't Bible background or archaeology or potshots at interpreting Bible prophecy. It is the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world... and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. If we think there could be other paths to salvation, then we wouldn't preach Christ as we do. The zeal of the early brethren to witness for Him was because, as they explained, there is no other name under Heaven whereby we may be saved. People do not drift into covenant relationship with God; they have to consciously chose, and God has instituted baptism as a means to that end; to force a man or woman to a conscious decision and crossing of boundaries. And this is why we preach towards baptism, with an eye on future conversion, knowing that baptism is essential to salvation.

Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master,

what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it.

*6:2 God forbid! We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live in it?*- The idea is of living in the sphere of sin, identifying ourselves with being "in Adam" rather than the sphere of "in Christ". Romans 6 is talking about being in one of two spheres- in the flesh, and in the Spirit; in Adam, or in Christ; continuing in condemnation, or rejoicing in our justified status in Christ. It is actually impossible for us to 'live in sin' for a moment, because we are no longer "in" that sphere or position.

Baptism is a change of masters- but we are still bondslaves, not of sin, but of God. The implications of this figure may not be immediately apparent to the modern mind. We are totally committed to the Master- this is who we are, bondslaves. In Gen. 44:9, being dead is paralleled with being a slave; and there appears a parallel between being a bondsman and dying in Gen. 44:9,17. Indeed, Romans 6 draws the same parallel- death to sin is part of being a slave of Christ. The very fact we are baptized means we should not continue in sin, seeing we are dead to it (Rom. 6:2). This is one of the most basic implications of a first principle which we live in ignorance of most of our days.

*6:3 Or are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*- A common appeal of Paul's in his letters (Rom. 7:1; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13). His earnest desire was that his readership would appreciate the real import of what they knew in theory.

Galatians was one of Paul's earlier letters. In it, he speaks of his own baptism: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live" (Gal. 2:19-21). Years later he writes to the Romans about *their* baptisms, in exactly the same language: "All of us who have been baptized... our old self was crucified with him... the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:1-10). He clearly seeks to forge an identity between his readers and himself; their baptisms were [and are] as radical as his in their import. Note how in many of his letters, especially Galatians and Corinthians, he switches so easily between "you" and "we", as if to drive home the fact that there was to be no perception of distance between him the writer and us the readers.

*6:4 We were buried therefore with him through a baptism into his death-* Gk. *dia* baptism. It is through baptism, on account of it, that we are "in Christ" and associated with the saving death of the Lord Jesus. This is how, mechanically, as it were, we become "in Christ". The use of *dia* here demonstrates the colossal importance of baptism.

"Therefore we *are* buried with him by baptism into death... knowing this, that our old man *is* crucified with him" (Rom 6:4,6). Every time someone is baptized, the Lord as it were goes through His death for them again. And yet baptism is an ongoing process, of dying daily. We are in Christ, connected every moment with the life and living out of His cross.

We *are* dying with Him, our old man *is* crucified with Him because His death is an ongoing one. "It is Christ that died... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom 8:34-36). According to Isaiah 53, He on the cross was the sheep for the slaughter; but all in Him are *all day long* counted as sharing His death, as we live out the same self-control, the same spirit of love and self-giving for others, regardless of their response...

*That like as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father-* This doesn't mean that some bright light as it were hauled the body of Jesus out of the grave. The glory of God is essentially His character and attributes; when Moses asked to see God's glory, He heard the essential character of God proclaimed. Christ was raised from the dead *dia*, for the sake of, this glory. He perfectly revealed it in a life and personality which was totally like God's, omitting no aspect of righteousness and not committing any sin. He gave His life for us, to become our full representative; and therefore it was appropriate that He be raised again, for the wages of sin is death, but He had done no sin. His same perfection is counted to us, if we believe in Him and into Him through "the obedience of faith" in baptism. And it is on this basis that we too shall rise again. Paul mentions this aspect of the Lord's resurrection to explain to us something more about *how and why* immersion into His death and resurrection can lead to *our* resurrection. We must consider that His resurrection is in fact going to be ours exactly because His righteousness is counted to us, and therefore, *dia*, that, for the sake of it, we took shall be raised to life eternal.

The theory of Him only 'acting out' reaches its nadir when we come- as each Christian must- to personally contemplate the meaning of the dead body of Jesus. That lifeless corpse, in contrast with the immortal God who cannot die, was surely the ultimate testament to Christ's total humanity. God did not die for three days. The Lord Jesus did. His subsequent resurrection doesn't in any way detract from the fact that He was really dead for three days. Indeed, His resurrection would also have been a cheap sham if He had actually not been really dead, with all that death means. We too, in our natural fear of death (cp. Heb. 2:15), come to that dead body and wish to identify ourselves with it, so that we might share in His resurrection. Baptism is a baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3-5). It's more than some act of vague identification with the dead and resurrected Jesus. We are "buried with him", literally 'co-buried' (Gk. *syn-thaptein*) with Him, inserted into His death, sharing the same grave. If His death was not really death, then baptism loses its meaning, and we are left still searching for another Saviour with whom we can identify in order to rise out of the grave. Jesus Himself was baptized in order to emphasize our identity with Him: "Now when *all* the people were baptized, and Jesus *also* had been baptized..." (Lk. 3:21).

Our experience of grace means "that we should serve in *newness* of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). We don't *have* to serve God in the sense that He grants us salvation by pure grace, not by works. The blessing of the Lord has nothing added to it by human toil (Prov. 10:22 RVmg.). But just because we don't *have* to do it, we do. This is the power of grace; it doesn't force us to monotonous service, but should be a wellspring of fresh motivation, to do perhaps the same things with an ever fresh spirit. The pure *wonder* of it all needs to be felt- that *for nothing but pure faith* the Lord will grant us eternal redemption for the sake of the Lord's death and resurrection. Which is why Rom. 6:4 says that because of this, and our appropriation of it in baptism, we therefore live in *newness* of life, a quality of

life that is ever new. Through His death, a new and living way is opened (Heb. 10:20). We share the ever fresh life which the Lord lived from His resurrection. It does us good to try to imagine that scene- the Son of God, coming out of the grave at daybreak. He would have seen the lights of Jerusalem shimmering away in the distance, a few kms. away, as everyone woke up and went back to work, the first day after the long holiday. Getting the children ready, caring for the animals... it was back to the same old scene. But as they did so, the Son of God was rising to newness of life, standing alone in the fresh morning air, with a life that was ever new, with a joy and dynamism that was to know no end... His feelings are beyond us, but all the same, distorted by our nature, by our spiritual dysfunction, into *our* lives *His* life breaks through.

*So we also might walk in newness of life-* The similar passage in Tit. 3:5 speaks of how "according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (see note there). This regenerative power is from the Spirit working within our minds, making life ever new as the Spirit is progressively poured out. Paul will develop this further in chapter 8.

*6:5 For if we have become united with him-* Gk. 'planted together'. The image appears to be of two seeds growing up together out of the ground. To parallel Christ with us in this way is arresting; that we, so far behind Him, our Master, King and hero- should actually be seeds and tender plants growing up next to Him. The suggestion could be that Christ is still growing, His life is a newness of life, an ever fresh experience, a growth, which goes on eternally; and we are growing together with Him. And that growth has started even now. The initial planting under the earth is symbolized by going under the water of baptism.

*In the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection-* The reference could be to baptism itself as the likeness of His death. But perhaps the idea more essentially is that our death to sin is a copy, a "likeness", of Christ's death to sin (6:10). It's an elevating thought- that we are seeking to copy His death in our daily death to sin. Not only through our rejecting of temptation, but our recognition that we are in a state of being dead to sin and its demands, because we are counted right before God by our faith in His grace. "Likeness" is used in the LXX in the frequent warnings not to make an image or likeness of any god, let alone Yahweh (Ex. 20:4; Dt. 4:16-25; Ps. 106:20; Is. 40:18,19). The reason for this prohibition becomes clearer in the New Testament; the ultimate likeness of God is in His Son, and we are to create the likeness of His Son not as a mere physical icon, but within the very structure of our human personality and character. In this we as it were die with Christ (6:8)- not just in the dirt and heat of battling and resisting temptation to sin, but in that we have identified ourselves with Him there, we are in the sphere of Christ rather than Adam. What we do with our thoughts, our spare time, what our aims and ambitions are in life, where our heart is- is within the Christ sphere rather than the Adam sphere, the spirit rather than the flesh. We are in the "likeness" of Christ's death by baptism, and He is in the "likeness of [our] sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3)- thereby showing the mutuality between Him and us, and how representation and response to it is two-way. He is like us, and we therefore seek to become like Him.

God forbid that for us, the cross should be a mere art form that we admire from afar. We are to be intimately connected with the spirit of the Lord as He hung there. In baptism, we are to

be ‘incorporated with him in a death like his’ (Rom. 6:5). The Greek word *symphytoi* speaks of a symphony, in which we and the Lord in His time of dying are united together. Likewise Rom. 8:29 and Phil. 3:21 speak of being ‘fused into the mould of his death’. He, as He was there, is to be our mould. The strange ability of the cross to elicit powerful response in practice is one way in which the blood of Christ sanctifies us. His sacrifice not only brings forgiveness for past sins, it is the inspiration to a sanctified future life.

*6:6 Knowing this-* see on Rom. 6:3. As in 6:9, “knowing” these things means more than factual knowledge; Paul is driving home the practical implications.

*That our old man-* the contrast between the old man and the new man is similar to that which Paul draws in 1 Cor. 15:45 between the “first man”, Adam, and the “last” man, Christ. Therefore I suggest that the “old man” here is a reference to our status in Adam; by baptism we pass from that status to that of the “new man”, Christ. Eph. 4:22-24 exhorts baptized believers to put off the old man and put on the new man- i.e. to live out in practice the change in status which occurred in baptism. “The new man” comprises Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10,11)- connecting with how Gal. 3:27-29 explains that baptism into Christ likewise gives us a status of “in Christ” which thereby obviates any difference between Jew and Gentile. If “the old man” refers to our status in Adam which has now ended, been crucified, then we need no longer be phased by the fact that no baptized believer manages to totally avoid sinning; none of us have put to death the old manner of life in totality. All our days we seek to respond to the change of status which has occurred, living appropriate to that change.

*Is crucified with Him-* the very pinnacle of the Lord’s achievement, which we tend to gape at from an awed distance reflecting that ‘I would not, could not, possibly, have done that’, is counted to us insofar as we are in Christ. “Is crucified” is a translation which misses the point- the Greek speaks of this as a one time act which we did with Christ, rather than any ongoing identity with the crucifixion through our sufferings over the course of our life. That one time point of identity was surely baptism, when we were counted as in Christ, changed status from Adam to Christ, and His crucifixion was counted to us as if we had died there. This interpretation is in context with Paul’s argument in Romans; he’s not merely saying that our sufferings in fighting sin bring us identity with Christ’s crucifixion, or that thereby we know something of the spirit of the crucified Christ. For we are so, so far behind Him. And our paltry efforts fall far short, and certainly would not entitle us to a resurrection. By our being counted as dead, even crucified, with Christ, because we are seen as “in” Him, we will be thereby also resurrected with Him in that we will share in His resurrection life just as we were identified with His death. Indeed, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. We died with Him (6:8), were crucified with Him (6:6), buried with Him (6:4), raised with Him (Col. 2:12; 3:1); are seated with Him in Heaven (Eph. 2:16), are simply “with” Christ in life today (Rom. 8:17,29), and so will eternally be “with the Lord” Jesus (1 Thess. 4:17).

*That the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin-* Is the body of sin done away with at the day of judgment? Or is it now; for therefore we no longer serve sin, and that surely is our status now. It’s a case of ‘now but not yet’. Paul speaks of how the life / living of Jesus is now manifested in our “mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11). So we still have “mortal flesh” now. It will only literally be no more at the Lord’s return. This

could require the next clause to be translated “that from then onwards [i.e. after the day of judgment] we shall no longer serve sin”. However, this phrase could be returning back to this life- with the idea being that because at the day of judgment our body of sin will be destroyed, and this was guaranteed by our baptism into Christ, we therefore shouldn’t serve sin, in having sin as our master. We are no longer in that sphere, under that domination- but instead under the domination of Christ and within His sphere. Note the difference between the “old man” being crucified and the “body of sin” being therefore, henceforth, destroyed. The old way of life [which is how Paul uses “the old man” in Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9] is dead, we have changed status, living as “the new man”, Christ. This will come to its physical manifestation in the destruction of our physical body and the gift of the new body at the day of judgment.

*6:7 He that has died is set free from sin-* is virtually quoting Rabbinic writings. However in the Talmud there is the statement that “when a man is dead he is freed from keeping the law” (*B. Shabbat*, 151 B). Paul provocatively replaces “law” with “sin”. Not that God’s law is sinful in itself, but he has been emphasizing that the Law is associated with sin because it as it were magnifies sin and leads to the conscious crossing over of a Divine line which results in sin being imputed to man. However, “freed” here translates the usual word for “justified” or acquitted. A slave can no longer serve a master after the death of the slave. And this is how God counts us.

*6:8 But if we died with Christ-* In baptism into Christ’s death. Paul is writing to baptized believers; his thought is therefore ‘Since we died with Him’.

*We believe that we shall also live with Him-* yet the fact someone has been baptized doesn’t necessarily mean that they do at this point believe that they will live with Christ. Paul surely means that if we really accept the reality of what happened at baptism, this must influence our faith now- that we shall therefore live with Him eternally in the future, and we therefore shall live with Him and in Him, within the sphere of His life, right now. The logic here is powerful, intense, and cutting. It can’t be squirmed out of. If we really were baptized into His death- then we [almost] have to believe that we will also live with Him, because He didn’t stay dead but rose to life. The power of baptism, therefore, is that it reminds us subsequently in our lives of the simple fact that therefore, as Christ died and lives, so I too “shall”, I really will, “live with Him”.

*6:9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more-* “We believe that we shall live with Him” (6:8) because we know that Christ was raised from the dead. To believe that He rose from the dead is therefore no painless intellectual matter. If He rose, and if I really died with Him, then I shall for sure live with Him. Because He is me and I am Him; He in me and I in Him. This is what Paul is saying, amidst our own doubts and fears about our moral failures trying to shout him down.

*Death no more has dominion over him-* If death and sin have no more dominion over Christ, they have no dominion over us, and therefore we are to live as if sin has no dominion over us (6:14).



6:10 *For the death that he died, he died to sin once*- This apparently obvious fact is added to develop the argument that because He totally isn't under the power of sin and death any more, we who are in Him are likewise free from it, totally and utterly- by status. And seeing His death isn't ongoing, our freedom from sin should likewise be ongoing.

*But the life that he lives, he lives to God*- The fact that even now, the Son of God lives "unto God", to His glory, for His sake, unto Him... is a sure proof that He isn't "God" in any Trinitarian sense. But just as His life is constantly and in every dimension "for God", so we also should be living unto God now (6:11)- not a hobby, a part time religion, but a devotion to His sphere in every aspect of our existence.

The life that He lived and now lives, and the death that He died, become ours (Rom. 6:10 RV). We identified with that life, that death, at baptism. But it's an ongoing thing. We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. The Lord Jesus died and rose as our representative. Therefore we live out His life, His death, His rising again to new life; and so as we sing, "into *my* life *your* power breaks through, living Lord". And this is what we give out to others- for "he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water" for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the newness of life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: 'What would Jesus do...?'. The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life.

Throughout the New Testament, there is a clear link between the preaching of the cross, and men and women being converted. There is a power of conversion in the image and message of Christ crucified as our representative. Man cannot remain passive before this. Baptism is an appropriation of His death and resurrection to ourselves. This is why the response to the preaching of the cross in the 1st century was baptism. And the response doesn't stop there; it continues, in the living of the life of the risen Jesus in our lives after baptism: "For the death that he died, he died unto sin... the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to dead unto sin but alive unto God [because you are] in Christ [by baptism into Him]" (Rom. 6:10,11 RV). The death Christ died for us, the life He lives, are all imperatives to us now.

6:11- see on Rom. 2:26; 6:10.

*Even so count yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*- "Count" translates the common Greek word for "impute". As God imputes Christ's righteousness to us, we are to count ourselves, perceive ourselves, feel ourselves, as really like that. Hence the emphasis- "you also yourselves", we, us, are to see ourselves as God sees us, rather than merely accepting that He wishes to see us as He chooses to see us. His opinion of us in the ultimate reality for us- and we are to share that view.

Paul's emphasis is not so much that baptized believers will be resurrected when Christ returns, true as this is and important within his overall argument; but rather that having been raised with Christ, the new resurrection life of Jesus breaks through into our lives right now.

Elsewhere Paul likewise talks of our participating in glory right now (2 Cor. 3:16), whereas the ultimate glory is yet to come and the transformation of our bodies (Phil. 3:21).

6:12 *Therefore do not let not sin reign* - We are to live out in practice the status we have in Christ. "Sin shall not reign over you" (6:14); but we must therefore make an effort to not let sin reign. Likewise in Rom. 8:9,12: "You are not in the flesh... do not live according to the flesh".

*In your mortal body*- Having said that "the body of sin" is to be destroyed (6:6) and that we are to live in the sphere of Christ rather than Adam, we have changed masters and should live and feel like that, Paul reminds us that our body is still mortal- reminding us that we are still awaiting the change of body which is to come at the final judgment when Christ returns.

*That you should obey the lusts of it*- There are within the human body the natural passions / desires to sin, "the passion of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). They aren't sinful in themselves- for the Lord Jesus was sinless and yet had our same "mortal body". But the fact they are the source of sin and are within our bodies explains why there is such a strong connection between sin and our bodies, leading to expressions such as "the body of sin" (6:6) and "sinful flesh" (8:3). But this isn't to say that the body is itself sinful or that it's somehow a sin to be human.

6:13 *Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness*- "*Instruments*" is s.w. armour, weapon (Jn. 18:3; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4). We are called to fight, to serve in the army- of either sin or Christ. No passivity or wavering between the positions is therefore possible. We have changed sides. See on 6:23.

*But present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness to God*- The aorist tense could suggest a one time presenting of ourselves- at baptism? And if we didn't appreciate at the time of our baptism that this is what we were doing, we can do it now. Maybe that explains the otherwise difficult to translate tense usage here.

6:14- see on Rom. 6:12.

*For sin shall not have dominion over you*- Yet we still sin. But Paul is again talking about our changed status- sin is not now our Lord, our master; instead, Jesus is. *Kurieuo* ("have dominion") is clearly intended to contrast with *Kurios*, the usual Greek word translated "Lord" with reference to the Lord Jesus. See on Rom. 6:9. The Lord Jesus rose again *so that* He might be our Lord, s.w. "dominion", over us His people (Rom. 14:9). "Shall not" can be translated as "Sin will not have dominion" (ESV)- so that it's not a demand that we stop allowing sin to dominate, but rather an exaltation that the "sin" sphere of things will not in the end have dominion in our lives, because we are in Christ.

*For you are not under law, but under grace-* This would've been more radical to Jewish readers and listeners than we may appreciate; for Judaism's big issue has always been that the Law is required in order to curb or restrain sin, and that societies without the Law are more sinful than those influenced by it. But here Paul is saying that if we forget about the Jewish Law and live as believers justified by pure grace, this will have more practical power in delivering a man from sin's dominion than any attempt at obedience to a legal code. "Under" was appropriate to slaves 'under' a master. We are 'under' grace as our master rather than law. The strength of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56); if the law isn't our master, then sin likewise isn't our master, and therefore sin will not ultimately dominate us.

6:15 *What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law but under grace? God forbid!-* See notes on "under..." at 6:14. If we are under grace rather than law, then we will not be counted by God as sinning. We declared right, justified. Paul may mean there that we are not *counted as* continual sinners [even though we believers do keep on sinning, sadly], because we are under grace as a master rather than law. Or he may mean that those truly under grace don't keep on sinning, because the wonder of their position inspires them not to. This contrasts sharply with the Judaistic view that it is the Law which curbs sin. Paul is arguing the very opposite: that leaving the sphere of Law and coming under grace will actually curb sin.

6:16 *Do you not know, that to whom you present yourselves as slaves to obedience, his slaves you are whom you obey? Whether of sin to death-* See on 6:13. The obedience would seem to be a one time obedience- in baptism- an obedience to a form of doctrine delivered to them (6:17). "The obedience of faith" which Paul spoke of in Rom. 1:5 he now interprets as baptism. Note the parallel between faith and obedience in Rom. 10:16.

Paul expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ. There's an example in Rom. 6:16: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are... whether of sin... or of obedience?". This is alluding to Mt. 6:24 concerning not serving two masters. Paul is surely saying: 'Come on, this is Matthew 6, you can't serve two masters! That principle ought to be firmly lodged in your heart!'. In terms of Paul's argument about which status or sphere we are in, his point is simple: you can only be in one sphere or the other, either under law or grace, sin or obedience. It's therefore impossible to continue sinning. in God's view [and it's His view of the matter which is the only thing worth anything]- because we are either justified in Christ, or not justified and condemned sinners. The tree brings forth either good or bad fruit (Mt. 7:18)- in that we are "in" either the good tree or the bad one. Paul deploys this argument to answer the objection that we may as well continue sinning- he's saying not merely that we ought not to do that, but rather that ultimately we *cannot* do that, because we are either under sin or under obedience. Notice that he personifies "obedience" as a slave owner, to whom we now belong. The two slave masters in view here are called "sin" and "obedience". We are clearly to identify "obedience" with the Lord Jesus. And Paul has just written about the singular and spectacular "obedience" of Jesus in dying for us on the cross (see on Rom. 5:19). This act made Jesus to be Lord and Master for us. We are obedient to His obedience, as it were. Which is the whole idea of baptism- we are buried together with Him, we die with Him, His death becomes ours, and thus His obedience unto death is ours.

*Or of obedience to righteousness-* The end result of our serving “obedience”, i.e. the Lord Jesus, is righteousness. But Paul’s argument has been that all our righteousness is as filthy rags, and righteousness has to be imputed to us. The end result of being under “obedience”, in Christ, is that righteousness is imputed to us, we are declared righteous, justified, as we stand before the final judgment. Lack of attention to Paul’s argument and the meaning attached to the terms being used in Romans can lead the casual reader of this verse to think that by acts of obedience we become righteous- and that is the very opposite of what Paul has been teaching all along.

6:17 *But thanks be to God, that whereas you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching which was delivered to you-* This must be interpreted in the context of Paul’s insistent theme that we have changed masters, changed status. “Handed over” could be an allusion to handing over a slave from one master to another- the form of teaching would therefore refer to the form or mould to which we are exposed under our new master, the Lord Jesus. In this case it would refer to post baptismal rather than pre baptismal teaching. Alternatively he may be referring to the fact that the teaching or doctrine of Christ had been delivered or handed over to them from Christ Himself (s.w. 1 Cor. 11:2,13; 15:3). However, it should be noted that Paul says that the baptized believer is handed over to the doctrine / teaching of Christ- and not the teaching to the believer. Perhaps the contrast is with Rom. 2:20, where we read of the “form of knowledge and of truth in the law [of Moses]”. We have been handed over to the form or mould of teaching which is in Christ rather than Moses.

Paul’s writing that he thanks God for their change of status was maybe to encourage his readers to understand the degree to which in very deed they had changed status- because they seemed to doubt it, as we too tend to.

We are frequently spoken of as being slaves of God. At baptism, we changed masters (Rom. 6). Yet the implications of being a bond-slave are tremendous. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. And we cannot serve two masters. There’s a powerful, powerful logic here. We are either slaves of ourselves, or slaves of God. Ultimate freedom to do ‘what we want’ is actually not possible. So we may as well take the path of slavery to the Father and Son. Unless we firmly accept this, life will become motion without meaning, activity without direction, events without reason.

The doctrines we believed at baptism were a 'mould of doctrine' (Rom. 6:17 Gk.)- they define the person we turn into. The calling of the Gospel is ongoing- it's not that we hear the call, respond to it, and the call in that sense ceases. There is a set of doctrines which Eph. 4:4-6 calls "the one faith"; which Rom. 6:17 calls "that form of doctrine" to be believed before baptism; "the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

“Repent ye and believe the Gospel” (Mk. 1:15) might seem to be in the wrong order- for surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does. But the point is, life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place. Thus Rom. 6 teaches that we were once servants of sin... and we expect the

sentence to conclude: 'But now you are servants of righteousness'. But it doesn't. We were once servants of sin but now we have obeyed the form of doctrine delivered to us... and are *therefore* servants of righteousness. The service of righteousness is a result of accepting "that form of doctrine", perhaps referring to an early catechism or statement of faith taught to baptismal candidates, summarizing the power of the Gospel.

"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (Jn. 8:34), but those in Christ are counted as not being the servants of sin, but of Christ (Rom. 6:17). The connection with Jn. 8:34 makes this tantamount to saying that they are reckoned as not committing sin.

6:18 *And being made free from sin*- An allusion to 1 Sam. 17:8,9? This would imply a manumission, a payment of a price by some gracious person to free a person from slavery. Note that the image isn't of one slave master buying a slave from another master. It's of genuine freedom being bought for the slave, by grace. But "being then made free", because of this, the freed slave decides to become a slave of the gracious Saviour who paid for their release. Being a slave of Christ is therefore described in 6:19 as a freewill yielding of our bodies, every part of them, to His service. 1 Enoch 5:7,8 and other Jewish writings spoke of 'freedom from sin' coming in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan; but Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* - see on 1 Cor. 10:11. [J. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) pp. 248-259. The same phrase occurs with the same meaning in the Testament of Levi 14.1.]

*You became slaves to righteousness*- The change of status is so great that there can be no real question about who in practice we should serve. By status we are the servants of righteousness- but that is not to say that we don't at times in our humanity serve sin in practice. We have yet to become in practice who we are in status. The language of 'being made free' and 'being made slaves' suggests the power of an external process working upon us; and that is the work of the Spirit.

6:19 *I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your human nature; but as you presented your limbs as slaves of uncleanness and iniquity, now present your limbs as slaves of righteousness unto holiness*- In Paul's case, being all things to all men meant that at times He sacrificed highest principle in order to get through to men; he didn't just baldly state doctrinal truth and leave his hearers with the problem of whether to accept it. He really sought to persuade men. He magnified his ministry of preaching to the Gentiles, he emphasized the possibility of Gentile salvation, "If by any means I may provoke to emulation ['incite to rivalry'] them which are my flesh [the Jews], and might save some of them" (Rom. 11:13,14). This hardly seems a very appropriate method, under the spotlight of highest principle. But it was a method Paul used. Likewise he badgers the Corinthians into giving money for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the basis that he has boasted to others of how much they would give (2 Cor. 9:2), and these boasts had provoked others to be generous; so now, they had better live up to their promise and give the cash. If somebody promised to give money to charity and then didn't do so, we wouldn't pressurize them to give. And we wouldn't really encourage one ecclesia to give money on the basis of telling them that another ecclesia had promised to be very generous, so they ought to be too. Yet these

apparently human methods were used by Paul. He spoke “in human terms” to the Romans, “because of the infirmity of your flesh” (Rom. 6:19 NIV); he so wanted to make his point understood. And when he told husbands to love their wives, he uses another rather human reason: that because your wife is “one flesh” with you, by loving her you are loving yourself. ‘And’, he reasons, ‘you wouldn’t hate yourself, would you, so – love your wife!’. The cynic could reasonably say that this is pure selfishness (Eph. 5:29); and Paul seems to recognize that the higher level of understanding is that a husband should love his wife purely because he is manifesting the love of Christ to an often indifferent and unappreciative ecclesia (5:32,33). And yet Paul plainly uses the lower level argument too. It is possible to discern an element of human appeal in some Biblical statements. Thus the Spirit encourages husbands to love their wives as themselves, because effectively they are loving themselves if they do this (Eph. 5:29). Yet we are also warned that a characteristic of the last days will be a selfish loving of *ourselves*. Paul speaks of how he puts things “in human terms” (Rom. 6:19 NIV); e.g. he suggests that fear of the judgment alone ought to at least make us sit up and take our spiritual life seriously (2 Cor. 5:11), even though the tenor of Scripture elsewhere is that this shouldn’t be our motivator.

We should note that Paul is almost apologizing for his metaphors, as if he had put something too crudely. His metaphors are ‘humanly’ quite acceptable- from the courtroom, slavery etc. Given the height and wonder of the grace we are considering, any metaphor, any similitude, any language- is inadequate and even borders on the inappropriate. And note that Paul is writing all these things, both the metaphors and the apology for them, under Divine inspiration.

The changeover from the downward spiral to the upward spiral ought to have begun at baptism; but as with some of the Roman believers in the first century, a believer can slip back into the downward spiral: “Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness” (Rom. 6:19 NIV). The life of sexual impurity is an “ever increasing” downwards path; the endless quest for new relationships and sexual novelty doesn’t need to be described.

Rom. 6:19 speaks of how the ever increasing downward spiral of obedience to sin is turned around at baptism, so that we begin an upward spiral of obedience to righteousness. God does good unto those that are good, but leads those who turn aside even further astray (Ps. 125:4,5). Those who are “[born] of God” are able to hear and understand God’s words (Jn. 8:47)- and baptism is surely how we are born of God (Jn. 3:3-5). This seems to open up the possibility of yet higher growth once we are baptized- it’s all an upward spiral, like any functional relationship.

Rom. 6:19-23 makes the contrast between how serving sin leads to ever increasing sin, whilst serving Christ results in ever increasing righteousness. We are all too aware of the upward (downward!) spiral of sin- we well know the feeling of losing our spiritual grip for an hour, day or week, and sensing how sin is ever increasing its hold over us. But by our union with Christ in baptism it is quite possible, indeed intended, that we should get into an upward spiral of obedience, in which one spiritual victory leads to another.

6:20 *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness-* Gk. ‘not a slave of’. Again Paul is labouring the point that one cannot serve two masters. And he does so in a way which makes us think: ‘That’s stating the obvious! Why are you repeatedly stating the obvious?’. He does this because it’s not obvious to us that we really are servants of “righteousness” rather than “sin”. We wonder whether we are really counted as righteous or not. Note here that the names of the two slave masters are “sin” and “righteousness”- in Rom. 6:16 they were “sin” and “obedience”. We are slaves of Christ, He is our righteousness, and it is counted to us; so “righteousness” is an appropriate title for Him, “the Lord our righteousness”.

6:21 *What fruit had you at that time...?*- There was no fruit in slavery; it was existence, rather than a life lived.

*In the things of which you are now ashamed? For the result of those things is death-* Shame is associated with condemnation at the final judgment. We recognize we are condemned sinners, and feel the shame for that. The verse could be punctuated: “What fruit did you have then? That of which you are now ashamed”. This is the great paradox in the Christian experience- feeling condemned for sin, and yet believing in our new status, that we are declared right before the judgment seat of God.

6:22 *But now being made free from sin, and having become slaves of God-* See on 6:18. We were made free from slavery, rather than being bought by a slave master from our previous owner. But we chose to become His slaves out of gratitude for His grace. The same Greek is found in 1 Cor. 9:19: “I have *made myself a slave* to all, that I might gain the more”. The idea is that made ourselves servants / slaves, having been made free from our old master. The two slave masters are now called “sin” and “God”.

*You have your fruit unto holiness- and the result is eternal life-* But Paul’s whole intention of writing to the Roman church and ministering to them was so that they would bear fruit (Rom. 1:13 cp. 15:28). If we truly understand that we are no longer in “sin” but the servants of God, in His sphere of things and His acceptance, then we will bear fruit in practice, it simply has to be like that, it’s inevitable. The idea of bearing fruit is connected in the context to baptism into Christ. Jn. 12:24 records the Lord likening His death to a seed falling into the ground, going as it were into a grave under the soil, but rising again and bearing fruit. Again- all that is true of the Lord Jesus is true of us who are in Him. Paul has been saying that we were planted together with Him (6:5), buried with Him, rose with Him- and as He is the plant that bears fruit, so are we. We therefore aren’t being exhorted to bear fruit, so much as being told that we have our fruit- for we are in Him. And naturally, this means we will try to live in practice as we are by status. But by status, we do now have our fruit- His fruit- and the end of all this will at the final judgment be “everlasting life”. And yet it is quite legitimate to read the Greek here as meaning that living a spiritually fruitful life now is the “eternal life”- an idea in harmony with the repeated promises in John’s gospel that we can right now live the kind of life we shall eternally live.

6:23 *For the wages of sin is death*- Used specifically of pay given to soldiers (Lk. 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7; and every usage in the LXX is in this connection- 1 Esdra 4:56; 1 Macc. 3:28; 14:32). This would continue the military analogy which was used in Rom. 6:13- of presenting our limbs as armour, weapons [Gk.], to King Sin. See also the military term in Rom. 7:8.

The *wages* of sin and the *gift* of God are here contrasted. "God" and "sin" are the names of the two slave masters in 6:22. We noted under 6:22 *you have your fruit* that the everlasting life will be the end result of our service, given at the day of judgment at Christ's return. It may be that we are intended to visualize the wages of sin being paid at the same time. In any case, all believers, all servants of God, will die in any case. This isn't the wages of sin. Surely the "death" that is in view here in 6:23 is the second death at the day of judgment.

Asaph laments how the wicked seem to be so prosperous, and then remembers that one day God will awake. More than this, he comes to see that "they... *shall* perish: thou *hast* destroyed them... how are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they *are* utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:27,19). The wages of sin *is* death (Rom. 6:23)- not 'it will be death at the judgment', it *is* right now the response God makes to sin. Because God is without time, the judgment has effectively happened to them. We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23).

*But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*- Remember that the context of this whole section in Romans is that of becoming *in* Christ by baptism *into* Him. This is what associates us with the gift of eternal life.

Our natural man, the devil, is a personification of sin. He cannot be reformed; he can only be destroyed by death. "The wages of the sin: death" (Rom. 6:23 Diaglott) seems to suggest that Rom. 6:23 is not saying that we die for each specific sin we commit (you can only die for one sin anyway, because we only have one life); rather is it saying that the end of the natural man, "sin", the devil within us, is death. Therefore we must associate ourselves with the man Christ Jesus, both in baptism and in our way of life, so that the personification of Christ within us will be clothed with a glorious bodily form at his return.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 7

7:1 *Or are you ignorant brothers-* This continues the appeal to the baptized believers in Rome to not be ignorant of the implications of the things which they have believed and signed up for by baptism into Christ. See on Rom. 6:3.

*For I speak to men who know the Law-* This could suggest that this section is addressed to those within the ecclesia in Rome who knew the Law, i.e. who were Jews. There were Gentiles in the church (Rom. 1:5-7,13-15) for whom that phrase wouldn't be appropriate. Chapter 7 could therefore be considered as an appeal to the Jewish subgroup within the Roman church. The language of '*becoming* dead to the law' in 7:4 would only be appropriate to those who had once lived under it, i.e. Jews.

*That the law has dominion over a man for as long as he lives?-* An allusion to common Rabbinical teaching that the only Jew exempted from keeping the Law is a dead Jew. Paul has been arguing in chapter 6 that we really did die in baptism. Therefore, we are dead- and the Jews themselves taught that a dead man didn't need to keep the Law.

### Romans 7 (about the Law)

#### Romans 6 (about sin)

"Sin shall not have (anymore) dominion over you: for you are not under the Law" (:14)	"The Law has dominion over a man... as long as he lives" (:1)
"Dead indeed unto sin" (:11)	"She is loosed from the Law" (:2)
"Being then made free from sin" (:18)	"She is free from that Law" (:3)
"As those that are alive from the dead... you have your fruit unto holiness" (:13,22), having left sin.	"You should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (:4), having left the Law.
"Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (as a result of sin having dominion over you)" (:13,14)	"When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members... but now we are delivered from the law" (:5,6)
"Therefore... we also should walk in newness of life" (:4)	"We should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" of the Law (:6)

7:2 *For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives; but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband-* It's tempting to interpret this as a reference to the death of Christ ending the Law. But that interpretation runs into problems in 7:3, for there the woman- the body of believers- is married to "another man". See note on 7:4. Or it could be that Paul is seeking to make the simple point that the death of one person can free another person from a law / legal obligation; which is what happened in the death of Christ.

7:3 *So then if, while the husband lives, she be joined to another man-* "Be joined" doesn't translate the usual Greek word for marriage. *Ginomai* has a wide range of meaning; the idea

may be of her sharing with, being with, another husband at the same time as she is married to her first husband. Rather than making any specific point about marriage (see on 7:4), Paul may be showing that it's not possible for a woman to have two husbands at the same time- "man" as in "another man" is the same Greek word translated "husband". This is being said in the context of seeking to persuade us how impossible it is for us to be in covenant relationship with the two spheres or positions [of law and grace, condemnation and justification] at one and the same time. This is both a comfort and a challenge to us.

*She shall be called an adulteress; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she is joined to another man-* "Shall be called" uses a Greek term usually used about a Divine statement, i.e. she will be called *by God*.

7:4 *Therefore...*- connects back to 7:1. The point being made in 7:2,3 is that death means a person is free from keeping the Law. Paul isn't here teaching about the nature of marriage nor the conditions under which he considered remarriage could occur; his theme is that death frees us from the Law. And more precisely, it was by the death of another that the woman had been freed from a law- that law no longer applied to her, not because she had died, but because another had died. This is the significance of the death of Christ in freeing us from the Law.

*My brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ-* This is to be interpreted in the light of Col. 2:14, which also in a baptism context speaks of the Law being nailed to the cross. But it was the body of Christ which was nailed to the cross. If we are baptized into His body by baptism, nailed and crucified with Him, then the Law is dead to us too.

*So that you should be joined to another-* the metaphor is mixed and almost impossible to consistently interpret- demonstrating if nothing else that logical consistency wasn't of paramount importance to the Bible writers nor to the God who inspired their words.

*To him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God-* We are now freed from the Law, and are free to marry Christ and bring forth fruit, children, unto God. The fruit of the Spirit is what will last beyond the span of our lifetimes, just as the desire for us to have significance beyond the grave is part of the motivating factor in the desire to have children. The Greek for 'bring forth fruit' occurs four of its eight times in the New Testament in the parable of the sower. The good seed of the Gospel is to bring forth fruit in us. Yet this doesn't mean that Bible reading somehow brings forth fruit; it is our active intercourse and union with the Lord Jesus as a person which brings forth the fruit.

There is a frequent association of sin (the Devil) and the Mosaic Law throughout Romans (this is not to say that the law is itself sinful – it led to sin only due to human weakness). A clear example of this is found in Romans 6 talking about us dying to sin and living to righteousness, whilst Romans 7 speaks in the same language about the Law; thus "he that is dead is free from sin... you (are) *dead indeed unto sin*" (Rom. 6:7,11) cp. "You also are

become *dead to the Law*” (Rom. 7:4). Other relevant examples are tabulated above on Rom. 7:1.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is surely the Lord Jesus (Jn. 12:24)- our eternal destiny is decided upon our response to Him and His teaching. We are bidden believe in or into Jesus. Belief involves the heart; it doesn't mean to merely give mental assent to some propositions. It must in the end involve believing in a person, with all the feelings and emotions this involves. We are married unto the Lord Jesus, in order that we might bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4). All spiritual fruit is therefore an offspring, an outcome, of a living, daily relationship with the Lord Jesus. This is how crucial it is to know Him.

*7:5 For when we were in the flesh-* In the sphere of the flesh. The NIV “sinful nature” is a poor translation; no change of nature occurred when we were baptized. Rather did we cross over from one status to another, from flesh to Spirit. We still possess the same “mortal flesh” as we did before conversion.

*The sinful passions, which were through the law, worked in our limbs to bring forth fruit to death-* The Greek word translated “passions” is usually rendered “sufferings”. Sinful passions are their own suffering. The word is only used again in Romans 8:18, speaking of how “the *sufferings* [s.w. “emotions”] of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed”. The sufferings of this life are, for us, the sufferings related to sin.

*7:6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held-* “Discharged” is the same Greek word translated “loosed” in 7:2: the woman is loosed from the law of her husband. The suggestion is that Paul’s audience had been married to the Law and now remarried to Christ because the Law had as it were died. This confirms our suggestion [see on 7:8] that Romans 7 is aimed at Jews who had once been associated with the Law but were now in Christ. The death of the Law is made parallel with the death of Christ, in that He nailed it to the cross, in the sense that He embodied the Law by perfectly obeying and fulfilling it. The intention of the Law was that if fully obeyed, it would lead to a perfect man- the Lord Jesus. In this sense it was “ordained to life”. In this sense “the Law” and the person of Christ can be legitimately presented in parallel as they are by Paul here.

*So that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter-* Spirit... letter are likewise contrasted in Rom. 2:29 and 2 Cor. 3:6. It can be that we perceive even our service of God as the same old scene- the same round of daily Bible reading (although, why not try reading from another version or in another language?), the same cycle of church meetings and Bible schools. The same faces, the same issues. But our experience of grace means “that we should serve in *newness* of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). We don’t *have* to serve God in the sense that He grants us salvation by pure grace, not by works. But just because we don’t *have* to do it, we do. This is the power of grace; it doesn’t force us to monotonous service, but should be a wellspring of fresh motivation, to do perhaps the same things with an ever fresh spirit. The pure *wonder* of it all needs to be felt- that *for nothing but pure faith* the Lord will grant us eternal redemption for the sake of the Lord’s

death and resurrection. Which is why Rom. 6:4 says that because of this, and our appropriation of it in baptism, we therefore live in *newness* of life, a quality of life that is ever new. Through His death, a new and living way is opened (Heb. 10:20). We share the ever fresh life which the Lord lived from His resurrection. It does us good to try to imagine that scene- the Son of God, coming out of the grave at daybreak. He would have seen the lights of Jerusalem shimmering away in the distance, a few kms. away, as everyone woke up and went back to work, the first day after the long holiday. Getting the children ready, caring for the animals... it was back to the same old scene. But as they did so, the Son of God was rising to newness of life, standing alone in the fresh morning air, with a life that was ever new, with a joy and dynamism that was to know no end... His feelings are beyond us, but all the same, distorted by our nature, by our spiritual dysfunction, into *our* lives *His* life breaks through.

*7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! However, I had not known sin, except through the law. For I had not known coveting, except the law had said: You shall not covet-* Philo and other Jewish writings taught that covetousness was the origin of every sin. James 1:15 may allude to this idea by saying that covetousness [s.w.; AV "desire"] gives birth to sin.

Although sin exists amongst people who don't know God's law, we come to "know" sin by the Law. The Greek *ginosko* translated "know" has a wide range of meaning; the idea could be that Paul had not known sin in the sense of not being responsible to Divine judgment for it- until he knew the Law.

Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:16). He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: "As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has "all manner of concupiscence"). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end". Paul's progressive realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God's law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. In one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he faced his death, he wrote to Timothy that he was "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had

in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful “to me *the sinner*” (Lk. 18:13 RVmg.). “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” is rooted in the Lord’s words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11; 1 Tim. 1:15).

*7:8 But sin, grabbing an opportunity through the commandment-* A military term, referring to establishing a base camp. This continues the image of sin as a military leader (see on Rom. 6:23).

*Worked in me-* In direct opposition to the common Jewish idea that the Law curbed sin. Indeed the Talmud in *b. Qidd. 30b* claimed that God said at Sinai: “I created the evil desire but I also created the Torah as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand” (1). Paul is arguing from experience- both Israel’s over the years and his own- that the reverse is true. The very existence of commandment tends to lead to that commandment being broken, as every parent soon learns (or re-learns) in the parenting process.

*All manner of coveting-* AV “concupiscence”. In gripping autobiography, Paul relates the innocent days when (as a child) he lived without the knowledge of law and therefore sin. But then, the concept of commandments registered with him; and this “wrought in me all manner of concupiscence” (Rom. 7:8). “Concupiscence” is a conveniently archaic word for lust; and in the thinking and writing of Paul, the Greek *epithumia* is invariably used in a sexual context. See on 2 Cor. 12:7.

*For apart from the Law, sin is dead and powerless-* This connects with the fact that through baptism into Christ, we are “dead indeed unto sin” (Rom. 6:11). Sin depends upon the law for strength; but the Law died with Jesus; He fulfilled it perfectly, He achieved the intention, for Him, the Law was indeed ordained to life (Rom. 7:10). If the law is really dead, then sin is powerless- for those who are in Christ, who fulfilled the Law. It’s almost too good news; that the end of law means the end of the power of sin. This was all especially radical for Jewish ears. The ‘death’ of the Law is a strong concept- and it challenges not only Sabbath keepers, but all of us who think that surely obedience to Divine law must have some role to play in our salvation.

A case can be made, especially from Rom. 7:8-10, that the whole of Rom. 7:7-25 is Paul talking about Israel- we have shown in notes on Rom. 7:1 that Paul is speaking in this section specifically to Jews. In this case, Paul would have so identified himself with Israel that he speaks in the first person, as if he personally ‘is’ them. He so loved his people that he saw all Israel’s history personified as it were in himself. Another approach to bear in mind is that it was quite possible in first century literature to use *ego*, the first person singular, as a literary or rhetorical device without any reference to the author’s personal situation. Thus it could be argued that the “And if I...” phrases in 1 Cor. 13:1-3 are an example of this, rather than Paul talking about himself (2).

The way in which Adam is to be seen as everyman is exemplified by how Paul speaks of his own spiritual life and failure in terms of Adam's encounter with sin in the form of the serpent. Note the allusions to Adam's fall in Rom. 7:8–11: "But sin [cp. The snake], seizing an opportunity in the commandment [singular – there was only one commandment in Eden], produced in me all kinds of covetousness [the essence of the temptation to eat the fruit]... I [as Adam] was once alive apart from the law [Adam was the only person to ever truly exist for a time without any law], but when the commandment [singular – to not eat the fruit] came, sin sprang to life and I died [as Adam], and the very commandment that [seemed to] promise[d] life [cp. The hope of eating of the tree of life] proved to be death to me. For sin [cp. the snake] seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me [s.w. 2 Cor. 11:3 about the serpent deceiving Eve] and through it killed me". Note how Rom. 7:7–13, with all the Adam allusions, speaks in the past tense; but in the autobiographical section which follows in Rom. 7:14–25, Paul uses the present tense – as if to suggest that both Paul and by extension all of us live out the essence of Adam's failure. He was everyman, and his salvation through the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus, can be everyman's salvation if he so chooses. But in our context we note the pointed – and it is pointed – omission by Paul of any reference to a Satan figure.

*7:9 And I once was alive apart from the law-* Paul presumably refers to his earliest childhood or babyhood, when he wasn't accountable to the Law. 7:9,10 appear to be alluding to God giving the Law to Israel. See on 7:8. In this case, Paul is speaking of himself in solidarity with Israel; for it could never be really said that a Jewish child was once without the Law. Indeed, first century Judaism emphasized this point- that Jewish children are under the Law (3). Throughout Romans 1-8, Paul is provocatively seeking to answer potential Jewish objections and strengthen the case of Christ's Gospel against them. We have pointed out many examples of how he alludes to and deconstructs contemporary Jewish writings and opinions, sometimes at the cost of writing in a way which is apparently obtuse and difficult for Gentile readers to understand. And yet he now openly identifies himself with his beloved people. This, surely, is our pattern in seeking to persuade others- to identify with them, rather than merely lecture them. It almost seems that in the same way as Adam is set up as everyman, so Paul wishes himself personally to be seen as every Jew. The way he elsewhere describes himself as a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" with impeccable Jewishness would confirm this (Phil. 3:5). See on Rom. 7:11.

*But when the commandment came-* A reference to Paul's Bar-Mitzvah, or his attaining the age of responsibility to God.

*Sin revived-* The only other time the word is used in Romans is in Rom. 14:9, where we read of the Lord's resurrection as Him 'reviving'. Clearly the personified 'sin' here is being set up as the very antithesis to the Lord Jesus.

*And I died-* A reference to being in the dock before God, tried and condemned as a sinner. So certain is that sentence of ultimate death that it was as if Paul had died. This interpretation is, I suggest, in keeping with the previous metaphors in Romans with regard to death. So instead of tending to life and blessing, and curbing sin, the Law instead accented sin and led to the condemnation of death.

*7:10 And the commandment, which was intended to life-* This presumably implies that perfect keeping of the law would have resulted in a person living the life of God, the kind of life which will be lived in the eternal life (which might also be implied in Lev. 18:5 cp. Rom. 10:5; Ps. 19:7-10; Ez. 20:11; Lk. 20:28). Death for such a person would therefore be necessary because of their relation with Adam, but would in another sense be unjust, in that they had not sinned. The perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus therefore required His resurrection. His eternal life wasn't given to Him by grace, but He was entitled to it by obedience. He had no pre-existent eternal life; He was given eternal life because of His obedience. And His life is counted to us who are "in Him" by grace. See on Rom. 7:12.

*This I found to be to death-* "Found" is s.w. Rom. 7:18,21. Paul obviously examined his life and therefore can speak of what he had found / discovered about himself. This level of self-knowledge is surely our pattern... for the unexamined life isn't life but mere existence.

*7:11 For sin, grabbing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it- slew me-* Alluding to Gen. 3:13: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate". The allusion is to Adam and Eve in Eden. In chapter 5 (and see on Rom. 3:23), Paul has repeatedly taught that Adam is everyman. And now he includes himself in this, by applying the language of the failure in Eden to himself. Likewise his finding the commandment ordained to life becoming the means of death (7:10,13) may reference Gen. 2:16,17. Yet whilst Adam is indeed everyman to Paul, Adam was perceived as Israel in much Rabbinic writing; and Paul saw himself as the personification and epitome of Israel (see on Rom. 7:9,10). The Greek translated "deceived" really means to seduce. How did sin seduce Paul through or by means of the Law of Moses? Surely in the sense that Paul fell for the temptation to justify himself by means of obedience to that Law. But because he didn't keep the Law perfectly, he was therefore condemned to death, and in a sense, received the sentence- and in that sense sin by means of the Law "slew" Paul. The only other time the word for 'deceived / seduced' occurs in Romans is in the practical section, which in this case again alludes to this doctrinal section: "[the Judaizers] by fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple", as the serpent deceived Eve (2 Cor. 11:3 s.w.). Just as Paul deceived himself, fell to the seductive idea that we can be justified by works of obedience to the Law, so the Judaizers were teaching the same. By so doing, they were sin personified- they were doing the work of "sin"- using the attraction of obedience to a legal code to seduce believers into a position where they were in fact going to be condemned to death- because under that sphere, there can be no justification, no declaring right, for those who have in even one sense infringed Divine law. It's all a complicated yet powerful way of saying that we simply must not and cannot be in the sphere of relying upon works; which means we have to just accept the gift of salvation by grace, much as all within us cries out against it.

*7:12 Thus the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous and good-* Paul hastens here to emphasize that the Law itself isn't sinful or wrong in itself; it is indeed "holy, just and good" (a common Jewish description of their Law); but the knowledge of any legal code creates accountability for sin. Only in that is there the connection between the Law and sin. The Law was "ordained to life", and I have suggested under 7:10 that this could mean that perfect obedience to the Law would have led to living the life of God, to moral perfection. The Law could not of itself give eternal life, in that it could not undo the mortality which was

to pass upon all Adam's descendants. The Law sought to inculcate a culture of kindness toward others and devotion to God. Significantly, the Lord Jesus is described in the same words- the Holy and Just One (Acts 3:14), as if He was such on account of the way His obedience to the Law developed such a character.

*7:13 Did then that which is good become death to me? God forbid! But sin was shown to be sin, by the way it worked death in me through that which is good; and thus through the commandment, sin became shown as indeed exceedingly sinful-* There was no actual change in the Law, in that it didn't once offer life and then changed to offer death. The Law was of itself holy, just and good- but it was used [by God?] to make sin "appear" as sin, to accent and highlight sin for what it is; and through man's failure to keep the Law, sin was indeed shown to be an exceedingly great sinner (this is how the Greek behind "might become exceeding sinful" can be translated"). I find it significant that in Paul's sustained personification of sin in these passages, he never once uses the terms "devil" or "satan". He clearly saw the problem as human sin, which he personifies because one cannot have abstract "sin", in that according to the Bible, sin is committed by and within the minds of personal beings, and in no other realm or dimension. It's appropriate therefore that sin be personified.

We must doggedly hold on to the interconnections of thought within Paul's argument in Romans. Chapters 1-5 convict all of sin, demonstrating that works can in no way save us. Chapter 6 then outlines how we can be saved; through association with Christ through baptism and a life "in Christ", which will result in God seeing us in the exalted way He does. Chapter 7 basically goes on to say 'But, of course, you'll still sin, even though chapter 6 has explained how God doesn't look at that side of you if you truly try to live "in Christ" '. Paul says many things about his life in Rom. 7 which seem to consciously connect with his description of life before baptism in Chapter 6 (e.g. 7:13 = 6:23; 7:14 = 6:17; 7:23 = 6:12,13; 7:24 = 6:6; 7:25 = 6:16,17). The reason for this is that after baptism, we have two people within us; the man of the flesh, who totally dominated our pre-baptismal life, is still within us; but (as Chapter 7 so graphically shows) he is now in mortal conflict with the man of the Spirit, with whom we identify our real selves. Chapter 8 then goes on to encourage us that despite this conflict, sin is dead in Christ, and if we are in Him, then this is really how God sees us. Therefore Rom. 8 stresses that our state of mind is so crucial; if we are led of the Spirit-man, then we are assured of salvation at that point in time. Rom. 9-11 then appeals specifically to Israel to accept the glorious truth of all this, and then Chapters 12-16 show the practical response we should all make. Recognizing the existence of the new and old men within him, Paul can speak in Rom. 7 as if he is two different people; "I myself serve the law of God", but "my flesh" serves sin. Likewise David asked God not to hide His face from him, David *personally*, (Ps. 27:9; 69:17; 102:2; 143:7), but to hide His face from David's *sins* (Ps. 51:9). And one wonders whether the way the records of the Lord's temptations are written implies some similar recognition by the Spirit of the two 'men' within the Lord.

*7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal-* But "in Christ" he was not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.). Again he has in mind states, positions, spheres. "Carnal" is literally 'fleshly'. He points up the contrast between the flesh and Spirit. We cannot get into the 'Spirit' sphere by obeying the Law, even though the Law is "spiritual", given by and of the Holy Spirit. The way to get into the sphere or status of the Spirit isn't by obedience to a spiritual Law, because we keep failing to be obedient. We enter the sphere of the Spirit by



baptism into Christ, “the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). He is “the Spirit” in that He embodies the Spirit of God- and therefore this is His title in Rom. 8:26. And Romans 8 will argue further that it is by our acceptance of our new status by grace, believing that we really are “in Christ” and justified by God’s grace, that the Spirit will work in our lives; so that we are indeed in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

*Sold unto sin-* As if he was a slave to the “sin” master. This is how the word is used in Mt. 18:25 and many times in its LXX usage. Yet in chapter 6 he has exalted that in Christ, we died to the power of sin (6:2) and are not under sin (6:18,22). So what does Paul mean? He may mean that he *had been* sold under sin; maybe using a literary rhetorical device which is relevant to the unredeemed Jews rather than himself personally; maybe he is at this point totally identified with Israel and is personifying Israel under the Law without Christ; or is it that he is admitting his personal failure to walk the talk he has outlined so eloquently in chapter 6; or is he recognizing that although we have changed status and masters with our real self, the inward man who delights in God’s law (7:22), we are still human and that human side of us still sins? My own suggestion is that Paul is here quoting a phrase from Rabbinic writings, although it would seem that the source has been lost to us. This would be in keeping with his style throughout Romans 1-8. He would then be using the Jewish writings themselves to demonstrate the misery of the human position without Christ; and this would fit in with the way at times in Romans 7:7-25 he appears to be consciously personifying Israel.

7:15 *For why I do what I do, I do not understand-* Gk. to know, recognize, perceive, approve. The word has a wide range of meaning, so interpretation cannot be too forcefully pressed here, but the idea may be that Paul is sharing his impression that the sinful things he does, he performs almost unawares, almost unconsciously, and he may be alluding to the image of slavery- mindless obedience, actions performed as automatisms. This is not to justify nor minimize human sin, but to rather make the point that it is performed within the context of being a slave to sin; and by status, we have changed masters. Note that Paul concludes this section by saying that in his mind he serves as a slave the law of God, whilst with his flesh he is still the slave of sin (Rom. 7:25). Yet all the same, we are ultimately “in Christ”, with no condemnation possible, because we serve Him (Rom. 8:1).

*For I do not do what I intend-* AV “would”, which means ‘to will’, and occurs frequently in this section (Rom. 7:15,16,18,19,20,21). Paul is saying that what he wills to do, he simply lacks the will to do; he laments the weakness of his will in being obedient. The interlude about the election of Israel in Romans 9-11 practically exemplifies the theology of Romans 1-8; and this theme of Paul’s weak will is commented upon in Rom. 9:16: “So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy”. It’s not that salvation is only for he or she who somehow finds within themselves some steel will against sin. It is not of him that wills, but of God’s grace. Were it a question of steel will, it would be a matter of works; but due to our change of status, it isn’t a matter of steel, but rather of God’s grace and our acceptance of it. In fact, Rom. 9:18 goes further, and states that it’s not a question of *our* will but of God’s will. Some He has mercy upon, as He wills; others He hardens, as He wills. And we in Christ are for sure those whom He has ‘willed’ to have mercy upon. And as exemplified by the choice of unspiritual Jacob over nice guy, man of the world Esau- that Divine will in election simply doesn’t depend upon works. Otherwise it wouldn’t be grace; indeed, the whole concept of predestination and Divine calling regardless of works is raised

by Paul to demonstrate the principle- that it's not by works or lack of them that we are acceptable to God.

*But instead I do what I hate-* This contrasts with the triumphant passages in Romans 6 which speak of our change of status from being under sin to being under Christ. That contrast is surely intentional. We could say that Paul is now in chapter 7 talking of our practical experience, of how things are on the ground. They're bad; sin is strong and we are weak. But he emphasizes this in such a graphic manner in order to point up the wonder of the fact that all this notwithstanding, we are by *status* justified, declared right before God, have left the sphere of the flesh and are in that of the Spirit. The reality of present failure makes our changed status all the more wonderful. Perhaps another comfort from all this is that if we truly *hate* sin (cp. Rev. 2:6) rather than love every moment of it, then we are somehow on the right track and are in fact like Paul within the sphere of the Spirit in our hearts.

Paul's autobiographical passage in Romans 7, where he describes his sinfulness and the results of it, is actually expressed in terms of Adam's fall in Eden. So many phrases which he uses are lifted out of the LXX of Genesis 3. The evident examples are: "I would never have known what it is to covet, if the Law had not said, You must not covet [cp. Eve coveting the fruit]... when the command came... sin [cp. the serpent] beguiled me... to kill me... sin resulted in death for me by making use of this good thing... who will rescue me now from the body of death?". Adam is presented to us as 'every man'; and so Paul applies this to himself, and yet through the allusion to 'every man' in Adam, he sets himself up also as our example.

7:16 *But if I do what I would rather not do, then I agree that the law is good-* Gk. 'to speak together with'. The very fact we struggle against sin, we have a will not to disobey the Law, is in fact speaking together with the Law, agreeing that it is good. Whilst in the primary context Paul is writing to Jewish Christians with the Mosaic Law in view, the principles are the same for any Divine law at any time. The comfort is that if we feel we 'would not' sin / break the Law but end up doing so, then actually, we are speaking in unison with the Law, we are not actually in disagreement with it.

7:17 *So now it is not I that do it-* The same Greek as in Rom. 6:9, where "no more" means 'not any longer', as in Rom. 7:20. For those in Christ, like Paul, our sins are no longer done by us but are considered as committed by the old man, the Adam, the status, sphere and person we are no longer identified with. We are to understand our sins as somehow separate from the real me, the 'me' with whom we finally identify. 'It's no longer me, but sin who sins' seems to be the idea... as if Paul is dissociating himself from himself; and that's a position which surely all true believers can identify with.

*But the sin which dwells in me-* An allusion to the Jewish concept of the *yetser ha ra*, the inclination to evil. The Rabbis taught that this can be curbed by the Law. But Paul is saying that the Law actually empowers this inclination, and the victory is through God's gracious counting of us as right in Christ. See on 7:19 *the good that I would-* a reference to the supposed good inclination in man, the *yetser ha tob*. The very idea of sin dwelling within me suggests that "sin" and "me" are different categories, even if they are related.

7:18 *For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing*- The idea could be ‘I have come to realize’. Do we analyse our own sinfulness as deeply as Paul did? See on Rom. 7:7.

*For the will to do good is present with me*- Surely an allusion to the disciples in Gethsemane, with willing spirits but weak flesh (Mt. 26:41). They were in the wrong, their weakness in stark contrast to the watchful, sweating Lord Jesus as He struggled against sin. And Paul invites us to feel the same. The Greek for “present” occurs only here and in Rom. 7:21. It means literally ‘to lie near’ and could have in mind the language of Gen. 4:7, where sinful Cain was encouraged that a sin offering lay near him, outside the door, ready for him to confess his sin over and sacrifice.

*But to actually do*- Paul confessed to an inability to translate his will into action. Yet in 7:25 he will soon rejoice that he had found the answer in Christ, which we have consistently interpreted as a reference to our being “in Christ” by status in Him. The Greek for “perform” occurs later in Romans, where Paul glories of the many things “which Christ has wrought [s.w. ‘perform’] by me” (Rom. 15:18). For that not to be a statement of pride nor trust in the works which Paul has so often exposed as valueless before God, we must understand Paul as totally committed to the idea of Christ working or performing through him. He has finally found “how to perform” the works he had so wished to- by believing totally in his “in Christ” status, feeling the extent to which he was now at one with Christ, and thereby sensing the extent to which Christ was working His works through him, the works he would love to have performed whilst under the Law, but found himself simply not strong willed enough to perform.

*What is good is not present*- In the context must surely refer to the Jewish Law which was the “good [thing]” (Rom. 7:12,13,16). There was no “good thing” within Paul’s flesh, no natural tendency to fulfil that Law; and so he found no way to totally obey that Law as he had so desperately wanted to in his youth.

When Paul laments that he cannot find “how to perform that which is good”, he is speaking about the Law of Moses. For the context of Romans 7 repeatedly defines the Mosaic Law as that which is “holy, just and good... the law is [the] good [thing]”, the law of God in which Paul delighted (Rom. 7:12,16,22). The “no good thing” which dwelt within Paul was therefore a description of his inability to keep the Mosaic Law, rather than any reference to human nature- for the “good thing” has just been defined as the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:18). But all this was to create the lead in to the realization that now in Christ, there is now no condemnation.

7:19 *For the good which I would like to do I do not do*- A reference to the supposed good inclination in man, the *yetser ha tob*, which the Rabbis said was strengthened by the Law (see on 7:17). Paul seems to be saying that this good inclination is a myth, or if it exists, it has little cash value in the battle against temptation. The way of escape is through God’s grace in Christ. W.D. Davies demonstrates beyond cavil that Paul in this section of Romans is constantly alluding to and critiquing the Rabbinic ideas of the *yetser ha tob* and the *yetser ha*

ra (4). “The good” must connect with the same word being used in Rom. 7:12,13 to describe the Law of Moses as “good”. Paul so wished to be perfectly obedient to the Law- but found it impossible.

*But the evil which I would not do, that I practice-* The same words are to be found in Paul’s warning that Divine condemnation, “tribulation and anguish”, awaits every man who ‘does evil’ (Rom. 2:9). Paul was so aware that his sin did in fact merit the term “evil”, and condemnation before God’s judgment; and he practiced it, he is not referring to an occasional slip up. The more we appreciate the extent and implications of our sin, the deeper will be our sense of relief and glory at the wonderful way we are ‘declared right’ by God.

*7:20 But if do what I would not wish to do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me-* See on Rom. 7:17. He sees fit to repeat the teaching of v. 17, so important is this- that we are not to identify our real self with our sinful side. The old self is dead in baptism, as explained in chapter 6.

*7:21 So I find then a principle-* A “law”, which often in the context refers to the Law of Moses. Paul may mean ‘I find then with respect to the Law’. He could conceivably be using “law” merely in the sense of “principle.

*That evil is present, although I wish to do good-* The same word has just been used in 7:18, where the desire to do good is likewise “present” or lying next to Paul. The impression is of the two desires, to do good and to do evil, are lying next to Paul; he must decide which one to take up, but he almost automatically seems to pick up the “evil”.

*7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man-* Hating the evil, delighting in God’s law, yet finding oneself doing exactly what we don’t wish to do... all this is exactly the experience of believers in Christ today. We really are in Paul’s position, and have every reason to share in his later positivism- for it is based on the fact that we don’t do the works we need to, yet we are saved by grace.

Paul had an amazing commitment to unity in the brotherhood. One could say that it was this which led him to his death, and certainly to political self-destruction in the politics of the early church. For his desire to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians was humanly speaking a loser- the Jewish converts simply would not give up their allegiance to the synagogue, with all the political and economic benefits this involved; nor would they really accept Gentiles. And Gentiles were never going to accept Jewish observances, indeed Paul knew this to be spiritually wrong. I submit that the whole epistle to the Romans is an exposition of the Gospel which has Jewish-Gentile unity as its underlying burden. This becomes apparent in the opening chapters. This to me is the key to understanding Romans 7. There Paul opens his heart and speaks frankly of his own inner conflicts. He says that he delights in [keeping] the law of God, yet he has a principle within him which seeks to make him captive to the law of sin (Rom. 7:22). I suggest he may be referring to his love, as an ex-Pharisee, of the Law of Moses, but this leads him to desire to keep the whole Law, including the *halakah* [the

ordinances of the Rabbis]. He speaks of his struggle to both ignore the Jewish laws, and yet keep them. He concludes that he cannot keep them adequately, and so he surrenders to justification by faith in Christ alone. I read Paul as saying that he initially accepted justification in Christ, but then after his conversion he went through a period of seeking to keep the Law, and "sin revived". And so he strongly concluded that he must throw himself solely upon Christ's grace.

1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of the spiritual man within us as "the hidden man of the heart... a meek and quiet spirit". This confirms that this "man" is the personification of a spirit, or attitude of mind. Thus our real spiritual person is "hidden". The world therefore cannot understand us, or be truly close to the believer who has the spiritual man utmost in their heart. The Gospel itself is a "mystery" ('something hidden'), yet this hidden mystery is the dynamic power in our "hidden man" of the Spirit. All that is hidden will be openly revealed in the Kingdom (Mt. 10:26). The inward man of Rom. 7:22 is what is so important; yet the LXX in Lev. 3:14-16 uses the same word to describe the fat surrounding the intestines, which God appeared to so value in the sacrifices. It was not that He wanted that fat in itself; but rather He saw that fat as representing a man's essential spirituality, that which is developed close to the heart, unseen by others, but revealed after death.

7:23 *But I see*- Gk. to behold, view. Paul is speaking as it were from outside of himself, or more accurately, from outside of the hopeless sinner whose behaviour and weakness he so laments. This device serves to indicate the degree to which he chose to be identified not with that 'person', but with the man Christ Jesus to whom in his mind, in his deepest heart, he belonged and ultimately identified with. Looking at our position this way, it becomes apparent that what I would term 'ultimate identity' is the ultimate question of our whole existence- who in our hearts do we identify with, wish to be with, love rather than hate? Christ, or sin? We see in this whole passage the very clear answer in the case of Paul. I can say at this time, it's clear in my own case. And I know it is in that of so many believers.

*A different law in my limbs*- Paul speaks of a battle between two laws. A battle is usually unto death, but in this case, Paul is taken captive, and captives taken in battle [if they were spared] always entered slavery. So Paul implies he is in slavery- at least, in the flesh. The 'law' is perhaps that of 7:21- the principle that whenever he would do good, there is another reasoning which appears next to ["present" AV] that desire to do good. And this principle invariably wins. But we are tempted to see an association between that law / principle and the Law of Moses. For the very same word is used, and if Paul simply meant 'principle', he could have used such a word in Greek.

*Warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my limbs*- A related word is used in James 4:1, about lusts warring in our bodies. The existence of such warring isn't wrong in itself, it's part of being human; it's which side wins the battle which counts; and even more so, which side we in our deepest hearts identify ourselves with.

7:24 *Wretched man that I am!*- The Greek word is elsewhere used about the feelings of the

rejected before God's judgment (James 5:1; Rev. 3:17), likewise in the LXX (Is. 47:11; Mic. 2:4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:15). Paul feels as if he is even now standing before the judgment seat of God, and is condemned- yet suddenly he rejoices that he is in fact amazingly saved by Christ. This is the very theme of the earlier sections of Romans- that we are suddenly declared right, justified, as we stand condemned in the dock before God. This lends weight to the suggestion that Romans 7 is indeed autobiographical of Paul, declaring the process of his own conversion, yet telling the story, as it were, in terms which present him as personifying every Jew under the Law.

*Who shall deliver me*— The same word occurs in Romans in the excursus about Israel in Rom. 11:26- where Christ is “the deliverer” who comes to deliver hopelessly sinful Israel, whom Paul embodies in this section in Romans 7.

*Out of the body of this death?*- Yet Paul has argued at the beginning of Romans 7 and elsewhere that just as the body of the Lord Jesus died on the cross, so every believer has already died with Christ. And yet clearly Paul still feels trapped within the body, with all the temptations which are part of being human.

Romans 7 and 8 are so opposed to each on surface level reading. At the end of Romans 7, Paul is lamenting ‘Oh wretched man that I am!’. At the end of Romans 8, he is rejoicing in the utter certainty of salvation, apparently lost for words [even under inspiration] to gasp out the wonder of it all. So huge is the difference of spirit that expositor after expositor has concluded that this must all be read biographically- as if in Romans 7 Paul is speaking of his life before conversion, and goes on in Romans 8 to describe his life afterwards. But Greek tenses [unlike Hebrew ones] are precise. The tenses in Romans 7 make that a very strained reading. Paul is saying that he *right now* feels utterly frustrated by his constant doing that which he doesn't want to do, his apparent inability to do good, and his wretchedness. I submit that the two chapters dovetail together. It was only through the appreciation of personal sin which we meet in Romans 7 that Paul could reason through to the paean of praise and confidence which he reaches by the end of Romans 8.

The Bible has so much to say about death, depicting us as having a “body of death” (Rom. 7:24). And yet humanity generally doesn't want to seriously consider death. Yet death is the moment of final truth, which makes all men and women ultimately equal, destroying all the categories into which we place people during our or their lives. If we regularly read and accept the Bible's message, death, with all its intensity and revelation of truth and the ultimate nature of human issues, is something which is constantly before us, something we realistically face and know, not only in sickness or at funerals. And the realness, the intensity, the truth... which comes from this will be apparent in our lives.

*7:25 Thanks be to God- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*- In the sense that we can become “in Christ” and all that is true of Him becomes true of us.

*So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin-*

The classic statement of personal identity, the climax of the whole exclamation of relief, the answer to all the spiritual frustration and anguish of this chapter. He himself, his real self. Identified with being a slave of God; but his flesh continued to serve sin.

### Notes

(1) See E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979) Vol. 2 pp. 425-428.

(2) Other possible examples from the NT and from throughout contemporary writings are given in R.H. Gundry, *The Old is Better: New Testament Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) pp. 229,230 and J. Lambrecht, *The Wretched "I" and Its Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) pp. 73-91.

(3) See S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) Vol. 2 p. 771.

(4) W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948) pp. 19-27.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 8

8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*— Referring back to the idea of Rom. 5:16,18, which are the only other places in the NT where the word occurs. We have been declared right before God's judgment; there is now no condemnation any more. Even though in Rom. 7:24 Paul has been saying he feels the wretchedness of condemnation as a sinner (see note there).

*Who walk not after the flesh*- Added by AV. Too easily the wonderful promise that there is no condemnation for those in Christ can become muted by this apparent rider, that we must walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. Yet Paul has been lamenting throughout the preceding chapter 7 that he walks after the flesh. His argument throughout the letter so far has been that although we continue committing sin, by status we are in Christ. The condemnation, the adverse verdict, has been removed. We are justified, declared righteous. And this is because we are located "in Christ". Paul is surely aware of the apparent contradictions and tensions within his argument- so he's surely foreseeing our objection, that we still walk after the flesh. And he states that we who are in Christ Jesus do not walk after the flesh. It's not a condition- as if to say 'There is no condemnation for us who are in Christ *if* we walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh'. For this would make salvation contingent upon our 'walking', our works- and his whole argument has been that salvation is by grace and not works. Those who walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh is therefore a description of, rather than an exhortation to, those who are in Christ. His Spirituality is counted to them. By status we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, and this is confirmed by the Spirit dwelling in us (Rom. 8:9). Rom. 7:5 likewise speaks of our being "in the flesh" as something in the past, our previous status. Another possibility is that "walk after" here describes not to a total way of life, but rather a following after, an inclination towards, rather than a final arriving at the destination. And that again fits in so precisely with our position as believers in Christ today- as Paul has been saying in Romans 7, we incline after, follow after, dearly aspire to, the things of the Spirit; even if we don't attain them as we would wish.

8:2 Paul starts to speak here in chapter 8 about the Spirit. He has explained that we are declared right by God, even as we stand in the dock condemned; he has said that we must believe this, and that faith in this rather than any works is what makes it true for us. He has then started to explore the mechanics of how it all works out- that we believe "into Christ" by baptism into Him, whereby we are counted as Him; and so we have changed spheres, positions, identities, from "sin" to "Christ". He has observed that this doesn't mean that we don't sin, and he laments the power of sin within him, always eager to point out the Law has strengthened sin rather than helped us overcome it, and that therefore grace is the all important basis of our salvation. He characterizes the two positions or spheres in various terms, and in chapter 7 he starts speaking of them as "flesh" and "spirit". He observes that there is in himself a struggle between the two, but his real self definitely identifies himself with the Spirit rather than the flesh. Being in the Spirit is the same as being "in Christ", and "the Spirit" is a title of Christ in Rom. 8:26,27. Romans 8 now proceeds to explore the function of "the Spirit" in more depth.

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free*- The spirit of life in Christ sets us free from sin (Rom. 8:2); but Gal. 5:1 simply says that "Christ" has set us free [the



same Greek phrase] from sin. The Man Christ Jesus is His “spirit of life”; the man and His way of life were in perfect congruence. They always were; for in Him the word was made flesh. Rom. 6:18,22 explain simply that we are “made free from sin” by baptism into Christ. Here we are given more detail; we were made free from the principle of sin and death, the law which Paul had observed at work within him in chapter 7, that our sinful desires are stronger than our spiritual intentions, and therefore “in the flesh” we are condemned to death. Our slavery to this principle has been overcome by “the spirit of life in Christ”. Rom. 6:18,22 says that we were simply freed from sin by becoming “in Christ” by baptism and belief into Him. Rom. 8:2 is saying that this operates, is effectual, by “the spirit of life in Christ”. This could mean that the spirit of life which was in the Lord Jesus Christ as a person- the perfection of spirit or character which was His, which was like God- is counted to us by our status “in Christ”. It could also, or alternatively, mean that this status we have is as it were mechanically made effective by the work of the Spirit, which sanctifies us before God. It’s not so much that the Spirit enters our hearts and makes us righteous, for in chapter 7 Paul has been lamenting how we still sin and are in one sense still enslaved to sin. Rather it could be that “the Spirit” works in our lives to make us sanctified before God, rather than in the realities of daily life. The “sanctification of the Spirit” which we read of elsewhere in the NT (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:29; 1 Pet. 1:2) would therefore refer to *how* God counts us as righteous, as in Christ, with a spirit like His. In this sense Christ is made unto us sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). It’s by the working of the Spirit. We can on one hand simply accept that God counts us as righteous, as Christ, because we are “in Him”. But probing further as to how, mechanically as it were, this is the case- the answer is, ‘Through the work of the Spirit sanctifying us, making us holy in His sight’.

Paul’s writings are packed with allusions to the Jewish ideas about the “ages” ending in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan. Paul was correcting their interpretations – by saying that the “ages” had ended in Christ’s death, and the things the Jewish writings claimed for the future Messianic Kingdom were in fact already possible for those in Christ. Thus when 1 Enoch 5:7,8 speaks of ‘freedom from sin’ coming then, Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* (Rom. 6:18–22; 8:2).

*From the law of sin and death-* As lamented in Rom. 7:23,25. The law of sin there refers to the principle of sin within us that keeps on beating us, winning the struggle against our weak spirituality. But *even this* has been overcome because of the status we have “in Christ” and by the work of the Spirit this involves.

The New Testament develops the theme of ‘living in the spirit’. We can often understand ‘spirit’ in the NT to mean the dominant desire, the way of life, the essential intention, the ambience of a man’s life. The idea of life in the Spirit is often placed in opposition to that of living under a legal code. We are asked to live a way of life, rather than mere obedience to a certain number of specific propositions. And yet whilst we are free from legal codes, we aren’t free to do as we like. We are under “the law of the spirit” (Rom. 8:2), “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). The law of Christ isn’t only His specific teaching, but the person of the real, historical Jesus. This is the standard of appeal which should mould the spirit of our lives. We must live “according to Christ” (Rom. 15:5; Col. 2:8), and the character of Jesus is the basis of Paul’s appeals to us to live a spiritual life (Rom. 15:3,7,8; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:2,25; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Thess. 1:6).

8:3 *For what the law-* Obedience to the Law.

*Could not do-* S.w. in Romans only at Rom. 15:1: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the *weak*”, those who ‘can not’. The connections between the doctrinal and practical sections of Romans are so frequent that this link too is surely intended. The “weak” Paul had in mind were therefore the Jewish believers who still trusted in the Law; patience with the legalistic, acceptance of those whose faith in Christ’s grace is weak, bearing with the ungracious, is really the test of our Christ-likeness. For He does this with us so very often.

*In that it was weak through the flesh-* “Weak” is s.w. Mt. 25:36 “sick”. Our attitude to the weak / spiritually sick is our attitude to Christ personally- because amazingly, they especially represent Him. “Weak through the flesh” is surely alluding to the essence of what Paul has been writing in Romans 7- that our flesh is so weak. The implication is that our weakness is related to an attitude that keeping the Law would lead to justification. And this in turn confirms my suggestion that Romans 7 is a section specifically written to first century Jewish converts who had once been under the Law of Moses. The same word occurs in Rom. 5:6- when we were “without strength”, weak, Christ died for us. Our weakness, our spiritual weakness, is therefore no barrier to God’s love and Christ’s devotion to us. Amazing, but true.

*God, sending His own son-* The connection with Phil. 2:7,8 suggests this ‘sending’ was specifically in the crucifixion. Likewise God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die on the cross (Jn. 3:16).

*In the likeness of sinful flesh-* This seems to be parallel with “in the likeness of men” and “in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:7,8). “Sinful flesh” refers therefore to ‘sinful humanity’, rather than implying that we are sinful and offensive to God simply by reason of being human beings. The spotless lamb of God had full human nature, He looked like a man because He was a man, and therefore He looked just like the same men who regularly perform sinful actions. Whatever we say about ‘human nature’, we say about the Lord Jesus- for He bore our ‘nature’ and yet was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. It’s actually very hard to Biblically define what we mean by ‘human nature’; it’s not some intrinsic piece of ‘sin’ that somehow is metaphysically ingrained into us, upon which the wrath of God abides. So I prefer to speak rather of ‘the human condition’ to avoid this impression. In passing, let’s get it clear that Rom. 8:3 doesn’t speak of something called ‘sin-in-the-flesh’. Students as varied as John Carter and Harry Whittaker [in *The Very Devil*] have faithfully pointed out that this is neither grammatically nor contextually correct. The Lord Jesus condemned sin; and where and how did He condemn it? In “the flesh”, in that He too lived within the nexus of pressures and influences of this sinful world. He appeared just another man, so much so that when He stood up and indirectly proclaimed Himself Messiah, those who knew Him were amazed; because He had appeared so very ordinary. Truly He was in “the likeness of sinful flesh”, yet without personal sin. See on 2 Cor. 7:1.

It could even be argued from Rom. 8:3 (“in the likeness of sinful flesh”) that the Lord Jesus

appeared to be a normal sinful human being, although He was not a sinner (see on Jn. 2:5,10). This would explain the amazement of the townspeople who knew Him, when He indirectly declared Himself to be Messiah. Grammatically, "it is not the noun "flesh" but the adjective "sinful" that demands the addition of "likeness"" (1). He appeared as a sinner, without being one. Of course we can conveniently misunderstand this, to justify our involvement with sinful things and appearing just like the surrounding world, in order to convert them. But all the same, it was exactly because the Lord Jesus appeared so normal, so closely part of sinful humanity, that He was and is our Saviour and compelling example. I have elsewhere argued that Rom. 8:3 is alluding specifically to the Lord's death, where He was treated as a sinner, strung up upon a tree like all those cursed by sinful behaviour, although in His case He was innocent. Rom. 8:3 speaks of the Lord Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" in order to achieve our redemption. The Greek word translated "likeness" elsewhere is used to express identity and correspondence- not mere external 'appearance' (consider its usage in Rom. 1:23; 5:14; 6:5; Phil. 2:7). Scholars, even Trinitarian ones, are generally in agreement on this point. Two examples, both from Trinitarian writers commenting upon this word in Rom. 8:3: "Paul consistently used "likeness" to denote appropriate correspondence or congruity. Thus Paul affirmed Jesus' radical conformity to and solidarity with our sinful flesh (*sarx*)" (2). "The sense of the word (likeness) in Rom. 8:3 by no means marks a distinction or a difference between Christ and sinful flesh. If Christ comes *en homoimati* of sinful flesh, he comes as the full expression of that sinful flesh. He manifests it for what it is" (3). The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self... in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'.

"For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin" (Rom. 8:3) – cp. Gal. 4:4–5, "Made of a woman, made under the Law (cp. "sinful flesh") to redeem them that were under the Law". The drive of Paul's argument in its primary context was that having been baptized, they should leave the Law, as that was connected with the sin from which baptism saved them – it introduced them to salvation by pure grace in Jesus. The Hebrew writer had the connection in mind when he wrote of "*carnal* ordinances" (Heb. 9:10; 7:16). To be justified by the Law was to be "made perfect by the flesh", so close is the connection between Law and flesh (Gal. 3:2,3). "We (who have left the Law)... have no confidence in the flesh (i.e. the Law). Though I might also have confidence in the flesh..." (Phil. 3:3–4), and then Paul goes on to list all the things which gave him high standing in the eyes of the Law and the Jewish system. These things he associates with "the flesh". See on Col. 2:14.

"Likeness" is s.w. Rom. 6:5, we are planted together in the "likeness" of Christ's death. His being made like us is to be responded to by our being made like Him, starting in a baptism into His likeness.

"Sinful flesh" has just been used by Paul in Rom. 7:25 [also Rom. 7:5], in lamenting how in our 'flesh' status, we seem to so easily serve sin as our master. The Lord Jesus had our nature, the same struggle against a tendency to unspirituality, egged on by living in a social environment where sin is everywhere and ever present.

*And for a sin offering-* The Greek *peri hamartias* “is the Septuagint’s technical term for the sin offering” (4).

*Condemned sin, in the flesh-* As a judicial action, the passing of sentence, s.w. Mk. 14:64 “they all condemned Him to be worthy of death”. This is how and why there is no condemnation for those in Christ (8:1). In the earlier chapters of Romans, Paul likened us as standing ashamed and condemned in the dock before the judgment seat of God; but then declared right, justified, by grace. And if we believe in that grace, it shall be true for us at the final judgment. But here the image changes slightly- for it is “sin”, not just ourselves personally, which was condemned on the cross by the fact that Christ died there as a human who never yielded to sin. Remember that someone or something can be “condemned” by someone else in the sense that that person shows the condemned party to be in the wrong in comparison with their behaviour, e.g. Noah condemning the world around him (Mt. 12:41,42; Lk. 11:31,32; Heb. 11:7). It was perhaps in this sense that the Lord condemned sin by His sinlessness and obedience unto death. The context of this phrase “condemned sin” in 8:3 is to be found in 8:1- there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ”, and Paul is explaining why- because not only have they been declared right, but as “in Christ”, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. He was not only uncondemned by sin, but He went onto the offensive- and condemned sin.

8:4 *That the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us-* Paul explores how in fact we have been declared righteous, justified in a legal sense. All that is true of Christ becomes true of those who are in Him. He perfectly fulfilled the Law, and I have suggested earlier that this in a sense entitled Him not to have to die. No longer was Adam literally everyman; there was one Man, the Lord Jesus, who did not sin like Adam did. The righteousness or “requirement” of the Law was ultimately love, love unto death, even the death of the cross. Both “love” and Christ’s death on the cross are elsewhere stated to be the fulfilment of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). We who have broken the Law are counted as in Christ, and therefore we are counted as having fulfilled it to its’ ultimate term- love unto the death of the cross. The passive verb form of “might be fulfilled” suggests that we are reading here about something being done for or in us; the fact it is fulfilled “in us” rather than *by* us confirms that we aren’t reading here some exhortation to do the righteousness of the Law, but rather a statement about what has been fulfilled in us- by the representative death of Christ for us and our identification with it. Thus we are changed by status from being condemned lawbreakers to being counted as having ultimately fulfilled it. In a clearly parallel passage in terms of thought, 2 Cor. 5:21 says that God made Christ “sin” for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”. The Law was fulfilled in the perfect character of the Lord Jesus and finally in His death. Baptism into death means that we are counted as having died with Him- and therefore we too fulfilled the Law to perfection.

*Who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit-* cannot mean, given the context, that our righteous ‘walk’ fulfils the Law- for we stand condemned by it. Rather is this again a reference to the two spheres of life- flesh and Spirit, Adam or Christ, out of Christ or in Christ, condemned or justified. We are to “walk”, to practically live, in the sphere of the Spirit. I am inclined to interpret the idea of “walk after” as meaning ‘to be occupied with’, as the Greek is indeed elsewhere translated in the AV. If our orientation is around the Spirit and

not the flesh, then we are demonstrating that indeed our change of status has been for real. Because we are “in Christ”, the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us insofar as it was fulfilled in Christ and has been counted to us.

Paul states that because of the Lord's death "as an offering for sin", thereby the 'commandment ["requirement" RVmg.] of the Law is fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:3,4). But in the practical part of that same letter, Paul defines the requirement / commandment of the Law to be one thing- simply "love" (Rom. 13:10). Love as God understands it is that we keep or fulfil His commandments (1 Jn. 5:3). What, then, is the connection? How could the Lord's death on the cross lead to the fulfilment *in us* of the Law's commandment / requirement of love? Quite simply, because it is now impossible for a man to be passive before the cross, and not to be inspired by Him there towards a life of genuine love. Paul isn't simply making some mechanistic, theological statement- that the cross fulfilled the Law, because it fulfilled all the types etc. It fulfilled the Law in that the Law intended to teach *love*; and the cross and dying of the Lord Jesus is now the means by which we can powerfully be inspired to the life of love which fulfils the entire Law.

8:5 *For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh*— Where our mind is becomes the crucial definition of whether we are in the Spirit status or that of the flesh. The definition of ‘minding’ the things of God or of the flesh is therefore important. The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter for ‘savouring’ the things of men rather than God (Mt. 16:23); Phil. 4:10 translates the word as ‘to care for’, Col. 3:2 as ‘affection’. Being spiritually minded isn’t therefore a question of not sinning- for Romans 7 has made it clear enough that believers do continue sinning after baptism and yet can still confidently rejoice in hope of the final redemption. It’s rather a question of wanting spiritual things, loving them, savouring them, having them in our heart, just as Paul could say that in his heart he loved and rejoiced in God’s law, although in practice he continued sinning. This I believe is where most believers stand. So loving, admiring and delighting in spiritual things, but feeling bad because their flesh still so easily gives way to temptation. That failure isn’t excusable, for Paul began Romans by pointing out that the perfect, sinless Lord Jesus all the same lived in our flesh.

*But they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit*- As in “after the flesh”, the Greek word *kata* is used. This really means in this kind of context ‘to be concerned with, to be around, in the sphere of’. This is exactly the idea we have been trying to express- we are to be concerned with, have in our hearts, the Spirit rather than the flesh.

8:6 *For the mind of the flesh is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*- The definition of ‘walking after’ the flesh or spirit spoken of in 8:5. If we are in the sphere or realm of the Spirit, of Christ, then we will think about those things in our hearts. If we have believed, known to be true and felt the truth of those things which Paul has so far explained- we will have these things uttermost in our hearts, be enveloped by them. I take what Paul writes here to be a description of our status, rather than a command to be spiritually minded rather than carnally minded. For by status we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit (8:9). This fits the context of the argument so far in Romans- which has always been about a change of status, and our living in ever growing appreciation of that status change that has occurred. The mind of the flesh “is death”, here and now; whereas the mind or *phronema* of

the Spirit “is life” here and now. *Phronema* means the inclination, the purpose, the intention. It doesn’t mean that we will consciously think of spiritual things all the time (not that this is any bad aim or desire). Rather our intentions, inclinations, should be to the Spirit and not the flesh.

*8:7 Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be-* This is defined in 8:5,6 as the mindset which inclines to flesh rather than Spirit; that reads trashy novels rather than God’s word; than thinks of money and cars and holidays and restaurants and fine clothes and expensive jewellery... rather than the things of God’s people and His service. That willingly thinks about banality rather than the things of Jesus and the Spirit. That doesn’t really think much about the things of God’s Kingdom but rather the things of this world. This kind of mindset is hatred towards God. So says Paul. This is the mindset of those who are in the flesh status, who mind the things of the flesh (8:5). Note that Paul is here talking mindsets, not total sin nor total righteousness. This kind of mindset of the flesh can never be “subject” to God’s law, His principles, His Spirit. It is self-centred rather than God centred. Yet the same Greek word for “subject to” occurs in Rom. 8:20, where we read that we have been subjected beneath the state of vanity which there is in this fallen world, and yet we in Christ have been subjected to this in hope. The point is, whatever sense we have of being ‘subjected under’ the things of the flesh and indeed this present world, this is involuntary. It’s not what our real self would wish for. We have subjected ourselves under the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3), become servants to that wonderful concept that His righteousness has been imputed to us. We find ourselves therefore in subjection to this righteousness and yet involuntarily living in subjection to the sinful state we find ourselves in.

*8:8 And they that are in the flesh-* Not so much in status, for we are all still “in the flesh” in the sense Paul describes in Romans 7. Paul is surely speaking of being fleshly minded, having a mindset which is of the flesh not the Spirit. This simply cannot please God.

*Cannot please God-* The Greek definitely suggests that God Himself has emotions which can be excited. And this is an amazing idea- that we here on earth, so very far from Him in so many ways, can touch the heart of God. Notice that the other references to ‘pleasing’ in Romans are to pleasing our neighbour (Rom. 15:1-3)- our attitude to God, and His pleasure in us, is related to our attitude to our neighbour and our pleasure in him or her.

8:9- see on Rom. 6:12.

*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit-* By status, by position. Note from 1 Cor. 3:16 that believers, even those who have the gifts of the Spirit, can still be “carnal” or fleshly in some aspects of their actual behaviour. Hence Paul must be talking here in positional terms.

*If the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his-* This could imply that Paul doubted whether some of his readership really were in the sphere of the Spirit. However, this would contradict the entire tone of this section and the argument

so far- that all those baptized into Christ must be considered by us as unquestioningly “in the Spirit”. It would also jar with the otherwise positive tone Paul takes towards the Roman believers, speaking in 8:12 as if “we”, he and his readership, are all in the same status. “If so be” can be read quite comfortably as meaning ‘Seeing that’. This is how it is translated in 2 Thess. 1:6, “*Seeing that* it is...”. We can be assured that our status is “in the Spirit” rather than “in the flesh” by the fact that the Spirit dwells in us. If we don’t have the Spirit of Christ, then we are not “his”- and the Greek for “his” would I suggest better be translated “Him”, or even “He himself”. We are reckoned as Christ Himself because we are in Him by faith and baptism into Him. His Spirit is counted as our spirit, in the sense that His character, His personality, His totally obedient mind, are counted as ours. So we aren’t so much as reading that we had better ensure we are spiritually minded and have the mind of Christ; we are being assured that we can be sure we are “in Him” because we are counted as Him, His perfect mind and character, His spirit, are counted as ours. Hence Paul can write with such confidence that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). We do not in fact think like Him, at least, our mind and spirit are not of themselves like His were and are. But His mind / spirit is counted to us, because of our status in Him. And “the spirit of God” is paralleled with the spirit of Christ in the sense that Jesus was perfectly like God in the way He thought, felt and acted. And this is counted to us. We thereby have also the mind of God counted to us- the family spirit is counted to us as we have been adopted into that family of Father and Son (Rom. 8:15).

8:10 *And if Christ is in you*- Note the parallel with the spirit of God and the spirit of Christ (8:9) and “the spirit” later here in 8:10. Paul is now exploring what it means to be “in Christ”. It’s not just that we opted into Him through baptism; He is in us as much as we are in Him. “Christ in you” is an idea Paul elsewhere uses (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). The exposition of the Spirit which follows in Romans 8 is further insight into what it means to be “in Christ”, to be declared right by God, and to believe it insofar as believe into Christ by baptism. The words “in” and “Christ” have been frequently used already by Paul in describing us as “in Christ”. But there’s a mutuality in our position- we are in Him, but He is also in us. Whilst we need exhortation to live as “in Him”, Paul here isn’t exhorting us- rather is he rejoicing in our status, and seeking to persuade us of it. “If Christ be in you” shouldn’t be read as something uncertain- the idea is clearly “Seeing that Christ is in you”.

*The body is dead because of sin*- Because we are in Christ and He is in us, our body is counted as His dead body. The idea has been common throughout Romans 6- because of our baptism into Him, we are “dead to sin” (6:2), “he that is dead is freed from sin” (6:7), “truly we are dead to sin” (6:11). It’s as if the day of judgment has come already for us- it was the day of our baptism into Christ. We have sinned and so were counted as if we had already died. How did we die? In that we symbolically connected ourselves with the death of Christ. In going under the water, therefore, we not only align ourselves with Christ’s death; we also state our recognition that we have sinned, and that sin brings death. Through doing so, we are enabled to rise again with Christ- as if our final, literal justification in resurrection to eternal life will just as surely take place. In this sense, it can be said that baptism is related to salvation. Not that dipping in water as a ritual can itself save anyone, but because that association with the death and resurrection of Christ really does save- involving as it does a willing recognition of our sinfulness and just condemnation, and only thereby resulting in a part in the resurrection. All this indicates the importance of repentance before baptism; it outlaws any kind of infant baptism, and likewise any attempt to claim a consciously

performed baptism into the Lord's death and resurrection, after repentance, is in any sense invalid and requires rebaptism by other hands.

*But the Spirit is life because of righteousness-* This surely uses "righteousness" in the way it has been earlier used in the letter, with reference to the righteousness of Christ which is reckoned to all those in Him. It is from the Spirit that we shall reap life eternal when Christ returns (Gal. 6:8), but through association with the death and resurrection of Jesus in baptism, His righteousness really is counted to us. But as His spirit is counted to us, so in a sense it does actually become our spirit- as Paul has been saying in Romans 7, although in the flesh we sadly do sin, yet in our spirit, which is the spirit / mind of Christ, we delight in God's law.

We feel at home with Paul's matchless confession of his innate tendency to sin, so strong that "When I would do good, evil is present with me... how to perform that which is good I find not". Yet it is no accident that this dire recognition of the seriousness of our spiritual position in Romans 7 should lead straight on to Romans 8, one of the most positive passages in all Scripture. It is instructive to trace the parallels between these two chapters. For example, Paul's lament "I am carnal" (Rom. 7:14) is matched by "To be carnally minded is death" (8:6). His argument in Romans 6-8 runs along these lines: 'We are all carnally minded by nature; but Christ had our nature, yet achieved perfection. If we are in Christ by baptism and by His spirit/disposition being seen in us, then God will count us as Christ, and will therefore raise up our bodies to immortality, as His was'. The fact we still retain the old nature in this life means that we will be aware of the tremendous conflict within us between flesh and spirit. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin" (Rom. 8:10). Paul obviously didn't mean that we would not have the power of sin active in our natures any more- the preceding chapter 7 makes that crystal clear. The obvious connection with Rom. 6:11 explains the point: "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin". The apostle recognized his own innate sinfulness and spiritual failures which were solely his own fault ("When I would do good...", Rom. 7), yet he was confident of salvation (Rom. 8). This was because he intensely believed in Christ's perfection, and that he was in Christ, and that at baptism he had received the condemnation of death which he deserved. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). There is the certainty of salvation.

8:11 *But if the Spirit-* Seeing Paul is talking about positions, status, and rejoicing so positively about it all, it seems appropriate to choose the equally valid translation "Seeing that the Spirit...".

*Of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you-* As often in the NT, the Spirit of God is paralleled with the spirit of Christ which was mentioned in v. 10 and previously. Interpretation becomes difficult largely because of the very wide range of meaning in the word "spirit". I don't mean so much that the same word has many different meanings, but rather that within that one word is a range of meaning. God's "spirit" refers to both His power and His mind, His thinking, His attitude, His character, personality. All He does is a reflection of His mind, just as human actions, the use of human 'power', is a reflection of the spirit within the person. Hence to think thoughts is judged by God as if the action has been done. The spirit of God and the spirit of Jesus are therefore parallel- because Jesus was at one



with the Father. Yet as His prayer of John 17 demonstrates, that unity of spirit between the Father and Son is now shared with us who are in Him. It was the Spirit of God which raised up Jesus from the dead, and that same spirit / disposition of mind is counted to us, and is indeed in us- Paul has said this in Romans 7, where he rejoices that despite his lamentable practical failures, in his heart, in his spirit, in his deepest person, he is without doubt with God and delights in His ways. Paul, and all true believers, have a heart [or, a spirit] for God- despite the failures of the flesh. So the spirit / personality of Jesus- which is and was the very essence of righteousness- is counted to us, as if we are Him; and yet in our deepest selves, as believers, His spirit *is* in fact *our* spirit. Because this spirit within us is the spirit of Jesus and God, we can be assured of a resurrection like Christ's- for the spirit of God raised up Christ from the dead, and we have identified with that hope through baptism into His death and resurrection. The spirit / mind of God is also His power; not naked power, like electricity, but a power which is at one with His mind, which acts in congruence with what He really thinks and is, without posturing or hypocrisy. It's therefore the case that since that spirit dwells in us- because we are in Christ and His spirit is counted as ours, and because we have a spirit / heart for God as outlined in Romans 7- therefore we shall surely be raised from the dead as Christ was. This is what Paul has said in Romans 6; but he explains here on what basis that happens. It happens on the basis of the spirit of God, or the spirit of Christ, which is counted as ours, and which is in fact actually ours within our deepest heart, the weakness of the flesh notwithstanding. The spirit of God is not just a mental attitude, it is also His power, and it was that same spirit which raised the dead body of Christ from the dead. And it shall do the same for us at the last day. The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). The NT describes our final redemption as our "soul" and "spirit" being "saved"; our innermost being, our essential spiritual personality, who we *really* are in spiritual terms, will as it were be immortalized (1 Pet. 1:9; 1 Cor. 5:5). This means that our spiritual development in this life is directly proportional to the type of person we will be *for evermore*. If, for example, we develop a generous spirit now, this is "a good foundation" for our future spiritual experience (1 Tim. 6:19). This is a stupendous conception, and the ultimate fillip to getting serious about our very personal spiritual development. Our mortal bodies will be changed to immortal, Spirit nature bodies according to the Spirit which *now* dwells in us (Rom. 8:11 Gk.). The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

*He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you-* Paul's expectation and assumption seems to have been that Christ would return in the lifetime of his readership, and that instead of dying and being resurrected, they would come before the judgment seat of Christ in their current mortal bodies, and then be changed. He hints at the same when he speaks of how mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and our present "vile body" shall be "clothed upon" but not, he hopes, dissolved in death (2 Cor. 5:4). How could Paul, writing under inspiration, make an apparent mistake like this? I suggest that he was writing *as if* the return of Christ was imminent, because that is how we should live; part of the Christian life is to live as if we expect His

return imminently. Another option is that perhaps the second coming was indeed scheduled for the first century; but the failure of various human preconditions resulted in this not happening and it being deferred [perhaps issues like the repentance of Israel, the spiritual maturity and unity of the body of Christ, or their spreading of the Gospel and making converts from all nations].

8:12 *So then brothers, we are debtors-* Note the positive tone Paul takes towards the Roman believers, speaking here as if “we”, he and his readership, are all in the same status. Given the wonderful certainty of our salvation, we can’t be passive. The Greek translated “debtor” is usually translated ‘sinner’ in the sense of having a debt to God. Paul has said that his debt is to preach the Gospel to others [1:14 s.w.]. The fact we truly shall be raised to eternal life, have been counted right, as having the spirit of Christ Himself- cannot be merely passively accepted. We have a debt to live appropriately, and one aspect of that debt is to share the great hope with others. And in our personal lives we likewise cannot be passive to this great salvation. We must make some realistic effort to bring our life spirit into conformity with the spirit and works of the Father and Son. We cannot go on living for the flesh, just indulging ourselves.

*But not to the flesh, to live after the flesh* - This verse is really saying the same as Rom. 6:1- we cannot continue living fleshly lives on the basis that we shall be saved by grace anyway. This is a repeated concern of Paul’s- that his bold, positive message that we who are in Christ shall be saved by grace regardless of our works could so easily be misunderstood, leading to passivity and sin rather than the vigorous, joyful practical response which is really the only thing we can do if we really ‘get it’. The practical section of Romans uses the same word in saying that Gentile believers have a debt to help their poorer Jewish brethren (Rom. 15:27). Be it in preaching the Gospel or in practical care for others, we are paying back our debt to God through paying to others- as if the debt to Him has been transmuted, and we are to pay Him back through giving to others, both spiritually and practically.

8:13 *For if you live after the flesh-* Paul happens to use this same phrase ‘to live after’ in describing his life ‘living after’ Judaism (Acts 26:5). As he has implied elsewhere in his argument, to live according to law, hoping for justification by works, is in fact not spiritual but fleshly. Again, the point is made that legalism doesn’t defend the law and curb sin, rather does it encourage unrighteousness and spiritual failure.

*You must die-* Note the change from the otherwise positive spirit earlier in this section [“we”]. As all believers have the “mortal body” of which Paul spoke in Rom. 6:12, it would seem that Paul is here threatening some kind of spiritual death; or, ‘you shall die eternally at the coming day of judgment’. He starts to balance out all his positive talk with this warning that we cannot just continue in sin, unaffected by the change in status and justification we have received by grace. Perhaps Paul here is alluding to the serpent’s lie: “You shall *not* surely die”, and putting the record straight again.

*But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body-* See on Rom. 8:14 *led by the Spirit*.

*You shall live-* Yet the whole tenor of Paul's argument has been that it is not by steel willed battle against the flesh that we shall attain the life eternal. He laments in Romans 7 that we simply don't have that strength of ourselves, but rather are we saved by our status in Christ. We "shall live" only because of the life of Christ being given to us at our resurrection, because we are in Him. The deeds of the body are therefore 'mortified' not in our own strength- as Paul makes clear in Romans 7, we simply lack the power to do this- but on account of the Spirit. We are made dead to the law by our participation in the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4 s.w.). Here in 8:13 we learn that we mortify the flesh by "the Spirit". The spirit of Christ in this sense *is* Christ personally. Hence "the spirit" is used as a title of Christ later in this chapter (Rom. 8:26,27). "The spirit" isn't defined, i.e. as to whose spirit it is- because the spirit / mind of God is that of Christ and is that which is to be found in the believers. So I suggest the idea is that we shall live "if", or 'because of the fact that', the Spirit- the Lord Jesus- puts to death the deeds of the flesh in that we are in Him, and in Him was no sin, no deed of the flesh. His death on the cross is counted as our death- several usages of the Greek verb "mortify" used here are actually speaking of the death of Christ on the cross (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). And significantly, the word occurs a little later in Romans 8- "For [Christ's] sake we are killed ['mortified'] all day long, we are counted [s.w. imputed, reckoned as] the sheep for the slaughter [i.e. Christ on the cross]" (Rom. 8:36). So we are counted all day long as mortified, put to death, with Christ; for we are counted, 24/7, as being in Him, counted as the sacrificial lamb. His dead body becomes ours. It is in this way that through / on account of our being in "the Spirit", "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18), we have the deeds of our flesh put to death. As Romans 7 labours, this doesn't mean that we will not commit the deeds of the flesh. But we have identified ourselves with Christ, with His body, and in this sense those deeds of the flesh are rendered meaningless.

8:14 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God-* The Greek may not imply mere guidance but something stronger- the Spirit leading us where *it* chooses. The same word is used about animals being led. It is the Spirit which mortifies the deeds of the body (8:13) more than us doing so. We want to know, of course, whether we really are "in Christ", whether we really have His spirit. The phrase "led by the spirit" is found only in Lk. 4:1, where the Lord Jesus was led by the spirit into the place of testing. Perhaps the connection is intentional. As Jesus the son of God, the prototypical child of God, was led by God, into testing, to the cross, and to resurrection- so it will operate in our lives and lead us, who are also the sons of God. The overall impression may be of allowing the Spirit, which operates in the lives of all in the sphere of the Spirit, to lead us and do things in our lives. We who have a heart for God have surely sensed God leading us, over and above our own will; and as Paul goes on to develop, this may involve elements of predestination and Divine calling which were over and above our own will to control. Sensing these things, this Divine leading, is an encouragement that truly we are God's sons, as Jesus was supremely- for the spirit of the Father works in us His children. In the context, Paul has been arguing that for those in Christ, His death becomes theirs. The Greek word for "led" is repeatedly used about the 'leading' of God's Son to His death (Lk. 22:54; 23:1,32; Jn. 18:28; 19:4,13), "led as a sheep to the slaughter" (Acts 8:32). We have commented under 8:13 that 8:36 speaks of all those in Christ as likewise being "the sheep for the slaughter". Every detail of the Lord's death and sufferings becomes ours. "Led by" could just as well be rendered "led *in* the Spirit", with reference to Christ as "the Lord the Spirit". This would suggest that our status "in Christ" means that we are going to be treated like Him- led as He was, to testing, to the death of the cross, to resurrection. Paul many times

during his trials was “led”, just as Christ was. This same Greek word occurs many times in the Acts record regarding Paul. He wrote here from personal experience.

*These are children of God*- not in the sense that the Spirit makes us sons of God, but that the children of God are characterized (among other things) by the Spirit leading them. “Sons of God” would’ve been understood by the Jewish readers and hearers as a phrase referring specifically to Israel (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 3:19; 31:9; Hos. 11:1); Paul’s emphasis is that now all in Christ and within the sphere of the Spirit are now God’s children, regardless of their ethnicity. But above all, all who are “in” the Son of God (Rom. 8:3), in Christ by baptism, are likewise therefore “sons of God”. The spirit that was in Christ must therefore be in us, or rather, be allowed to work in and with us. This phrase is preparing the way for the appeal to be conformed to the image of God’s Son which is coming up in Rom. 8:29.

Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing (Lk. 4:1); and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16).

8:15 *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again*- “Bondage” is associated with the Mosaic law in Gal. 4:24; 5:1; Heb. 2:15. They received the Spirit at baptism, as all believers do; but it was not a spirit of fear.

*To fear*- The contrast is between bondage [slavery] and adoption; and therefore between fear and ‘crying Abba, Father’. The fear Paul has in view must surely be the fear of not being good enough, the phobia about rejection at the day of final judgment. This fear of rejection is associated with bondage to a legalistic system, of obeying rules in order to seek acceptance with God. Such a system is itself bondage, slavery. And the image of slavery has been used by Paul with reference to slavery to sin. Once again, he associates sin with legalism and attempted justification through obedience to the Law- for this is where that mindset leads in practice. The implication seems to be that although Paul’s readership had received the “spirit of adoption”, yet they still feared. Paul is seeking to convince them of their high status in Christ, and to perceive, to the point of it affecting their feelings [e.g. of fear or otherwise], that really- it’s all true. The good news that seems too good to believe is really as good as it sounds.

*But you received the spirit of adoption*- The fact we have become sons of God [see on Rom. 8:14] by means of being in Christ, the Son of God, means that God will send His Spirit into our hearts, to make us more natural members of the family we have now joined by status. Gal. 4:6 thus speaks of how “God sent forth the spirit of *His* Son into *our* hearts”. Thus *our* hearts have to become transformed to be like that of *His* Son. This can be so successful that we even call to God as Abba, daddy. Note that the Spirit and our hearts are connected- this Spirit works on the human heart, miraculous gifts aren’t in view here. The NRSV renders: “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’, it is that very spirit bearing witness” (8:15,16). The feeling we have toward God as Abba is proof enough that He has sent His Son into our hearts. The obvious question is begged: Is that how we feel? God wants us to feel like that towards Him. We can and should be able to! This is one of the most bottom line

questions for us as believers; not what theological position we have on this or that point, not what precise statement of faith we follow with what clarifications or caveats, addendums or amendments; not whom we fellowship; not how smartly we have lived our lives even. But whether we really feel to God as Abba, Father. If it takes a woman three divorces or another man 10 years in prison or another a lifetime's battle with alcohol- this is the end point to which we are being brought. This is the "witness" that we really are God's dear children, if we feel like that toward Him, if we can call Him "Abba, daddy" just as the Son of God did in prayer. If we do, then "the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (8:16). And Gal. 4:6 becomes so true of us: "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father". Roman law legislated that the adopted child took over the full identity of the adoptive father; what was true of that family became legally true of the adopted person- a concept which was apparently foreign to Greek and Jewish culture, but the concept would've been appreciated specifically by the Romans. The idea is similar to the concept of righteousness being "imputed".

There is only one Spirit- the spirit of God, of Christ, of the true believer, of adoption- is all the same. The statement here that those in Christ received "the spirit of adoption" must therefore surely be paralleled with the frequent comments elsewhere in the NT that the believer has "received" [s.w.] the Spirit at conversion, just as the apostles "received the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 7:39; 14:17; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:33,38; 8:15,17; 10:47; 19:2; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2,14). Whilst the apostles had their receipt of this gift confirmed by miraculous displays of Holy Spirit gifts which have now been withdrawn, the assumption is clear from that list of verses that after "the hearing of faith" and baptism into Christ, the Spirit was "received" (Gal. 3:2 etc.). Baptism was seen as bringing about the receipt of this gift (Acts 19:2; Gal. 3:14 cp. 27-29). When we became "in Christ" at baptism, we were counted as Christ. Just as He called God "Abba", so we can. The way Jesus addressed God in this way is wonderful, indeed beautiful. It almost seems inappropriate that this personal relationship of the Son to the Father, calling Him "Daddy", should be observed by us even; and yet now Paul says that it has been applied to *us*, seeing we are truly "in Him". We have received such an extraordinarily realistic "spirit of adoption" that really, as Jesus was God's Son, so are we. Through the work of the Spirit, even the virgin conception and birth of the Lord Jesus is now no barrier between Him and us; for in essence, our spiritual rebirth and adoption as God's children is such that we too are God's very own children just as He was. Our excuse for not fully following Him is that 'Well He was a bit different to us, you know... virgin birth and all that'. If we grasp what Paul is saying, this now has far less validity. For the same Spirit which caused the virgin conception is what has birthed each believer, and through the spirit of adoption we too can feel towards God as "Abba", just as His Son did. The unity between Father and Son has now been realized between the Father and all His children; the prayer of John 17 to this effect has now been answered. At least, potentially, and if we will accept the answer. And yet, it has to be said that we do not feel to God as Jesus did. The Lord Jesus could not have written the bitter lament about spiritual failure which we find in Romans 7. As we have often concluded, the answer is that we are asked to believe that really we are indeed "in Christ", and seen, counted and felt towards by God as if we really are His beloved Son.

*Whereby we cry*- "Whereby" can be rendered "in whom". Because we are in Christ, we have His spirit, God's Spirit. We "cry"- in allusion to how in Gethsemane, the Son of God "cried" to God as "Abba". He there really can be our pattern. The Greek for "cry" really means to scream or croak- the idea is very much of a baby or young child crying out to "daddy".

*Abba, Father*- In prayer, we address God as Abba, Father- precisely because “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). I take these passages to refer to the way successful prayer involves the spirit / will of a believer becoming united with the Spirit / will of the Father and Son. Gal. 4:6 says that it is the Spirit of Jesus who prays to God “Abba, Father”; but Rom. 8:15 says that it is us of course who pray to God “Abba, Father”. We are not slaves but God’s very own dear children. The spirit / will / mind of the Lord Jesus is therefore seen as the mind of the believer. And thus Paul could write that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ who lived in him (Gal. 2:20). The whole of the new creation groans or sighs in our spirit; and Jesus, the Lord the Spirit groans in prayer for us too. God’s Spirit is to dwell in us, right in the core of our hearts (Rom. 8:11; Gal. 4:6). “We cry Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into our Lord’s intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as “heavy” in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about Christ in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36). I have wondered, and it’s no more than me wondering, whether it could be that Rom. 10:9,13; Acts 22:16 and the other references to calling on the name of the Lord at baptism imply that the candidate for baptism made the statement “Jesus is Lord!” after their confession of faith or just before their immersion, and then they shouted the word “Abba! Father!” as they came out of the water, indicating their adoption as a child of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Biblical prayers rarely request things; if we ask according to God’s will, we will receive (1 Jn. 5:14); and yet if God’s word dwells in us, we will ask what we will, and receive it (Jn. 15:7). Thus if our will is purely God’s will, we will receive answers to every prayer. That our will can be God’s will is another way of saying that our spirit can be His Spirit. This is why several passages speak of how God’s Spirit witnesses with our spirit (Rom. 8:15,16,26; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). It’s why the early church sensed that not only were they witnessing to things, but the Holy Spirit of God also (Acts 5:32; 15:28). His Spirit becomes our spirit. Who we are as persons is effectively our prayer and plea to God. This conception of prayer explains why often weeping, crying, waiting, meditating etc. are spoken of as “prayer”, although there was no specific verbalizing of requests (Ps. 5:1,2; 6:8; 18:1,2,3,6; 40:1; 42:8; 64:1 Heb.; 65:1,2; 66:17-20; Zech. 8:22). The association between prayer and weeping is especially common: 1 Sam. 1:10; Ps. 39:12; 55:1,2; Jn. 11:41,42; Heb. 5:7, especially in the Lord’s life and the Messianic Psalms. “The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer” (Ps. 6:8,9) crystallizes the point. *Desire* is also seen as effectively praying for something (Rom. 10:1; Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 9:14). Weeping, desiring, waiting, meditating etc. are all acts of the mind, or ‘spirit’ in Biblical terminology. There is therefore a big association between our spirit or state of mind, and prayer. The spirit (disposition) of Christ which we have received leads us to *pray* “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). “Praying in the holy spirit” (Jude 20) is to be seen in this context. Prayer is part of the *atmosphere* of spiritual life, not something hived off and separate- it is an expression of our spirit. Thus there are verses which speak of many daily prayers as being just one prayer (Ps. 86:3,6; 88:1,2); prayer is a way / spirit of life, not something specific which occurs for a matter of minutes each day. The commands to “pray without ceasing” simply can’t be literally obeyed (1 Thess. 5:17). “Watch and pray *always*” in the last days likewise connects prayer with *watchfulness*, which is an attitude of mind rather than something done on specific occasions. This is not to say that prayer *in no sense* refers to formal, specific prayer. Evidently it does, but it is only a verbal crystallization of our general spirit of life.

8:16 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God-* See on 8:15 *spirit of adoption*. The Greek can be read as “The Spirit himself bears witness *to* our spirit, that we are the children of God”. But the idea seems to be of a joint witness- our spirit is in fact *the* Spirit, and bear witness [in a legal sense] that we are really God’s children. As we have observed several times, there is only essentially one Spirit- God’s, Christ’s, the believer’s, are all the same spirit. Paul uses the same idea in Rom. 9:1, where he asserts that his conscience [and he may as well have said his spirit, for the idea of essential, inner personality is the same] bears joint witness [s.w. 8:16] with the Holy Spirit. God’s personality, His Spirit, is congruent with the person who has a spirit / heart for God. This meeting of minds between God and the believer is what confirms to us that we really are His children. Being His beloved children isn’t dependent upon our moral perfection- we must keep remembering that we are reading the words here in their context as the extension of what Paul was saying throughout Romans 7:15-25.

Paul here reverts to the image he used in chapter 3, of us for a moment acting as the judge (3:4), deciding whether God’s promises and claims about us are in fact true, or lies. Our own spirit and God’s Spirit bear legal witness- to whom? To us as the judges. They both testify, that really we are the children of God. Not only is the spirit of Christ, His righteousness, counted as ours; but God’s spirit / mind really is ours in experienced reality. Thus we are joint witnesses in the box together, and v. 17 will develop this theme- joint heirs, joint sufferers, and thus jointly glorified together. All because of our connection with Him, we are counted as Him. Note how Paul seems to be aware of the huge doubt there would be about these things in the hearts of the baptized believers to whom he writes; and such doubt is with us today. Hence the enormous relevance and power of what he writes, and the need he felt to appeal to detailed intellectual argument in order to prove his point time and again. Imputed righteousness is given us on the basis of our faith. This means that insofar as we can believe all this is true, so it will be. In this sense “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). We are His dear children (Eph. 5:1), the pride and joy of Almighty God, counted as wonderful and righteous by Him. Personal Bible reading and reflection are so important; for there the individual finds the essence of God’s will and strives to make it his or her very own. This is how we can come to understand Rom. 8:16, which says that in prayer, God’s Spirit bears witness with our spirit that is within us. Thus even although “we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: “The subject-object scheme of ‘talking to somebody’ is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to”. It’s perhaps the thought behind Mt. 10:20: “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”. This is why Paul can thank God that he finds himself praying constantly for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)- because he recognizes that not only can we influence God by our prayers, but He influences us in what we pray for.

8:17 *And if children, then heirs- heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ-* Very much the ideas of Gal. 3:27-29, where Paul taught that baptism makes us the children of God and joint-heirs with Christ of what God promised Abraham. For all that is true of Christ becomes true of us. If He was the seed of Abraham, then so are we; and what was promised to the seed personally thus becomes true for us all. Again, Paul is seeking to explain to the Romans the significance of their baptisms. The law taught that the firstborn was to have a double portion

above his brethren. But we are made joint-heirs with Christ, the firstborn (Rom. 8:17). This is yet another paradox of grace. Likewise in the parable of the prodigal son, both sons receive equal inheritance, rather than the elder son getting more.

*If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with him-* Again, “if so be” is a misleading translation. This phrase is common in this part of Romans. It can indeed mean “if so be”, but the idea is equally of “seeing that...”, “although...”- and this is how it is commonly translated elsewhere. The good news Paul is teaching is almost unbelievable, too good news- and it was for the translators too, who for the most part have chosen to give a ‘conditional’ feel to the message by inserting all these “if...” statements as if they are conditions. But this impression contradicts the colossal positivism which Paul has, positivism expressed in the face of his own admission of failure in Romans 7; and such translation also fails to give due weight to the idea of positions, status “in Christ” as opposed to in Adam, which is so fundamental to Paul’s argument. Because we are in Christ, we are joint heirs with Him; and seeing that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified with Him in that we will share in His resurrection. This is the very teaching of Romans 6:3-5; baptism into His death and resurrection means that for sure we will be resurrected as He was. Note that we co-suffer with Christ right now- which suggests that He also in some sense suffers in this life, the essence of His cross is lived out in His experience even now, as He suffers with our sufferings, and we with His. The only other time this Greek word for co-suffering occurs is in 1 Cor. 12:26- we co-suffer with the sufferings of other members of the body of Christ. This is one way in which “we suffer with Him”- to have an empathetic mind. Whilst we must strive for this, Paul’s point is more that we do suffer with Him, because we are in Him; just as in Romans 6 he has demonstrated that we suffered, died, were buried and rose again with Christ, because we are “in Him”. The suffering and groaning of which Paul speaks in Rom. 8:17, 22-26 could have specific reference to the ‘groaning’ he has just been making about his inability to keep the Mosaic Law. Our helplessness to be obedient, our frustration with ourselves, is a groaning against sin which is actually a groaning in harmony with that of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who makes intercession for us with the same groanings right now (Rom. 8:26). Indeed, those groanings are those spoken of in Heb. 5:7 as the groanings of strong crying and tears which the Lord made in His final passion. In this sense, the Spirit, the Lord the Spirit, bears witness with our spirit / mind, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). This clinches all I am trying to say. Our inability to keep the Law of God leads to a groaning against sin and because of sin, which puts us into a unity with the Lord Jesus as our Heavenly intercessor in the court of Heaven. But that wondrous realization of grace which is expressed so finely in Romans 8 would just be impossible were it not for the conviction of sin which there is through our experience of our inability to keep the Law of God. Our failure and groaning because of it becomes in the end the very witness that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). God thereby makes sin His servant, in that the experience of it glorifies Him.

8:18 *For I reckon-* S.w. to count, impute. As God counts us as in Christ, imputing us as having suffered and died with Him, we too in our turn must impute this to ourselves; and if we do, then we will realize that if our present sufferings are in fact seen by God and imputed by Him as being a part in the sufferings of Christ- then we can truly rejoice in the certainty that we will surely share in His resurrection life. If God counts us as He does, we should count ourselves that way too, and have feelings and emotions which are appropriate to such an exalted position.



*That the sufferings of this present time-* Elsewhere Paul emphasizes that if we are “in Christ”, then His sufferings become ours in the same way as His glory and victory become ours too. The tribulations of Rom. 8:35 could therefore be understood specifically as aspects of Christ’s sufferings, with Rom. 8:36 likening us in our sufferings to the sheep for the slaughter, which spoke of Christ facing the cross. See on Rom. 7:5. The only other time in Romans that Paul uses the word here translated “sufferings” is in Rom. 7:5, where he speaks of “the motions [s.w. sufferings] of sin”. He may be implying that even the sufferings caused by our sins are part of the sufferings which connect us to Christ- for His sufferings were directly because of His bearing of our sins. This is a very profound thought- that even the sufferings of our sins serve only to connect us to the sufferings of Christ, in a mutual bond; for He suffered because of our sins. And for those in Him, our connection with His sufferings is the guarantee of our resurrection to glory with Him.

*Are not worthy to be compared with the glory-* The contrast between present suffering and future glory is common in Jewish texts. But they all tended to emphasize that the individual who does righteousness will receive personal glory (e.g. Apocalypse of Baruch, 2, 15:8). Paul is saying that the glory to which we look forward is a sharing in the glory of Christ in a material way. This glory exists now in that Christ exists glorified, but that glory must yet be revealed in us literally (1 Pet. 5:1).

*Which shall be revealed in us-* The “glory” is something internal, rather than referring to some unusually Divine light or cloud of shekinah glory, as imagined by 1st century Judaism and many others today. The Greek for “revealed” carries the idea of revealing, taking the lid off something to expose it. We are in Christ and He is thereby in us- the whole thing has a mutual quality to it. He dwells in us not only in that His righteous character, His spirit, is counted to us- but in actual fact, it is placed within us. This is the “spirit” which Paul will go on to claim is in fact within us. It doesn’t mean we are thereby made righteous in our actual thoughts and actions- for he has bitterly lamented in Romans 7 that this isn’t actually the case. At the day of judgment, when we share in the Lord’s resurrection just as surely as we have in this life shared in His sufferings, that glory, that spirit, that personality within us shall be revealed openly. Perhaps Peter uses flesh and spirit in the same way that Paul does, when he says that believers are “judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet. 4:6), just as Jesus was likewise judged (1 Pet. 3:18). We are considered by our peers as mere human beings, they may even judge us for the kind of failures in the flesh which Paul admits to in Rom. 7:15-25. But God judges us according to the “spirit”, the fact that the spirit / character of Christ is counted to us, and in some hard-to-define sense is in fact latently placed within us. And this of course is how we should seek to perceive our weak fellow believers.

8:19 *For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revealing of God's children-* This could imply that the believers aren’t really revealed for who they are in this life. This shouldn’t encourage our hypocrisy nor the idea that we can be a believer whose faith is invisible to the world; but it’s some comfort too. Because we look, smell, speak and act identically, for the most part, to the unbelievers around us. The huge difference in status and position has to be perceived by faith alone in this life. This “manifestation” is the same word as used in 8:18, “revealed”- see notes on 8:18. The whole of creation is somehow looking

forward to the revelation of the Christ that is within us. Christ, the spirit of Christ, is concealed deep within our flesh and will be manifested at the last day, even though we as it were feel the baby kicking, as Paul describes in Rom. 7:15-25 when he speaks of the two persons struggling within him. On a different scale, we are as it were concealed deep within the creation, as the seed, the germ, which will sprout forth into the full Kingdom of God when Christ returns. All that is material and fleshly, this present system, will no longer conceal the Christ within us personally, and on a global scale it will no longer conceal *us*, who we really are. This element of hiddenness explains why we simply cannot judge others. Here in this closing section of Romans 1-8 there also seems a connection of thought with the opening section of Romans 1-8, where Paul wrote of how the invisible things of God which were as it were hidden within creation are in some sense declared to those who know God (Rom. 1:20)

8:20- see on Rom. 8:7.

*For the creation-* Given the way Paul writes of “they” as opposed to “ourselves” in 8:23, the creation here perhaps refers to all peoples (or maybe even, all created things) apart from the believers.

*Was made subjected to vanity-* The connection with the opening of the entire section in Romans 1 continues. There Paul used the same word to describe how sinners ‘become vain’ (Rom. 1:21). They willingly glory in the fallen state of creation, seeking out every opportunity to gratify sinful desires. Although we are indeed “subject to vanity”, we don’t need to in our own turn ‘become vain’. If we can be made free from the daily grind in order to serve God, let us choose it. Let’s not fill our minds and lives with the things of basic human existence, gathering food, reproducing, indulging sexual desire. In one sense, as part of God’s creation, we are subject to vanity- and perhaps that’s why Paul uses the same word in the practical section of Romans to say that we “must needs be subject” to worldly powers (Rom. 13:1,5). By doing so we accept how things are in creation at this time. The idea of submission is quite a theme in Romans. Our natural mind, the status / person “in Adam”, isn’t submissive to God’s law and never can be (Rom. 8:7); the natural creation, of which our fleshly, human side is a part, is subject, in submission to, vanity. Yet we are to submit ourselves- our real selves- to God’s righteousness (Rom. 10:3).

*Not of its own will-* This continues the parallel between the believer in Christ’s fallen and weak state, and the state of the entire creation. Again, this is a development of the theme of Rom. 7:15-25- that we sin because of our weakness in dealing with the state we find ourselves in, but our sin isn’t wilful- it is in fact committed not willingly, “that which I would / will not” (Rom. 7:19).

*But by reason of Him who subjected it in hope-* A reference to God. This is a major deconstruction of the popular idea of ‘Satan’, who was and is supposed by many to be the one who has tied the world down under the consequences of sin. But it is *God* who has done the subjecting, and therefore He has done it “in hope”, which He will be the One to bring to realization.

8:21 *The creation itself also*- Ultimately, the creation will share the deliverance which we personally experience now and shall experience in its final term at the Lord's return. The *whole* of creation earnestly looks forward to the manifestation of the sons of God. The whole of creation was made "subject to vanity, not willingly" - it was not their fault that the curse came upon them. "The *whole* of creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together", longing to share in the manifestation in glory of God's spiritual creation. The sadness and bitterness of the animal creation is due to their longing for that day of "the glorious liberty of the children of God" in which they will share.

*Shall be delivered*- the same word has been used by Paul in speaking of how even now, we have been delivered from slavery to sin and death by becoming "in Christ" (Rom. 6:18,22; 8:2). The same word is also used about our having been made free from slavery to the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:1), which connection could suggest that the "creation" here has some specific reference to the entire Jewish system.

*From the bondage*- Gk. 'slavery'. The idea of being in slavery to sin and the Law has been common in Paul's argument so far. The believer in Christ is saved from such slavery- and God's long term plan is that the entire creation will share in this redemption too.

*Of corruption*- Used by Paul in Col. 2:22 with special reference to the Law of Moses. But he also uses the word in explaining how our present corruptible body shall be changed to incorruption when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:42,50). The whole creation will be changed and redeemed as we personally will be. In this sense the work of the Lord Jesus will bring about the creation, or re-creation, of a new earth without the results of Adam's sin. His achievement on the cross in this sense saved the world and not just the believers.

*Into the liberty of the glory of the children of God*- The redemption and freedom from corruption which the believers shall experience will be experienced by all of creation. When at the end of Romans 11 Paul appears to rejoice in the totality and universality of Divine redemption in Christ, he may well have this in mind. Not that all human beings who have ever lived will be saved, but rather that the whole of creation, in a physical sense, will be saved / delivered just as the believers will have been. Our freedom is 'of glory' in the sense touched upon in Rom. 8:18- the glory of the character of Christ which is latent within us but which is yet to be revealed openly. Paul always uses the Greek word used here for "liberty" to exalt how believers in Christ have been set free from the Jewish law (1 Cor. 10:29; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 2:4; 5:1,13). He clearly has this at least as a subtext in his argument here, encouraging us to wonder whether by 'all of creation' he has in view "all Israel". In this case, his argument would be brought to its full term in Rom. 11:26, when he exalts that finally "all Israel shall be saved". When Paul speaks of "all [AV "the whole"] creation" in Rom. 8:22, this is the same word translated "all" in Rom. 11:26. They will finally share in the blessed redemption made possible by the Messiah whom they crucified, they will also experience the glorious liberty from sin and the Law which was the strength of sin, which was exalted in by those like Paul whom they persecuted and reviled. For it is those who received Jesus as Christ rather than rejected Him as did the Jews, whom the NT styles "the children of God" (Jn.

1:12). In this sense, Paul in this very context notes that the Jews under the Law are not the true “children of God”- but the believers in Christ are (Rom. 9:8).

This “liberty” in which the NT so frequently exults (Lk. 4:18; 1 Cor. 10:29; Gal. 2:4; 5:13; James 1:25; 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:16) will be fully revealed in the freedom of the Kingdom: “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). As it will be then, so now: we will not be free to do what we like morally, but within the context of God’s covenant, we are free, totally and utterly free, in our service of Him.

8:22 *For we know that the whole creation* – Gk. “all” creation, s.w. Rom. 11:26 “all Israel”. See on Rom. 8:21.

*Has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now*- Groans together with whom? Perhaps the idea is that creation together, all parts of it, groan together. But I suggest the groaning is together with us and the Lord Jesus. The Greek for “groan” is used about the groaning of the Lord Jesus in intercessory prayer in Mk. 7:34. The believers in Him likewise groan in awaiting the change of our nature which shall come at Christ’s return (2 Cor. 5:2,4). This is the groaning we have heard throughout Romans 7:15-24, groaning at the hopelessness of our position as sinners. Paul perceived [“for we *know*”, Gk. ‘perceive’] that he wasn’t alone in his groaning, but there is even within the natural creation some premonition that a redemption is yet to come, and a groaning in discontent at the present situation. Thus he didn’t perceive nature as at peace with itself, as many today naively imagine. Rather is it groaning with us. And if we follow up Paul’s hints that “all creation” has some reference to “all Israel”, their groaning which he perceived would have been in terms of ‘not having found that which they sought after’, as he put it in Rom. 11:7; they sought righteousness but didn’t find it (Rom. 9:31). They were looking for the right thing in the wrong places and by the wrong way. And yet their groaning, our groaning, the groaning perceived in the natural creation, are in fact but birth pangs- we groan and travail in pain together. The birth which this leads to is the new day of God’s Kingdom, the final birth of the Spirit which believers in Christ have experienced in prospect through baptism. And again, Paul’s sub textual reference to the bankruptcy of the Law to save is still there, for the only other time he uses this word for “travail” is in his allegorical comment that Judaism is barren and doesn’t travail, and yet the true Zion is in travail, groaning to bring forth many children (Gal. 4:19,27). And yet he is perhaps hinting that just as the Jews subconsciously knew that Jesus was Messiah [“this is the heir, let us kill him”], so the Jewish system was in fact groaning and travailing towards the bringing forth of faith in Christ. The same idea of travailing in birth pangs is to be found in the descriptions of the situation just before the return of Christ (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:3). The significance of Paul’s emphasis that this is happening ‘right up until now’ might then be a hint that he expected the return of Christ imminently. However, as previously touched upon in this exposition, it could be that Paul believed we should live as if the return of Christ is imminent; he therefore interpreted prophecy, Scripture and contemporary situations in that manner, just as we should. The groaning of creation and of ourselves also is therefore but the prelude to something far better- the actual birth at the second coming of Christ. My own interpretation of the radical changes in natural phenomena on earth at this time is that it’s all an indication that creation is indeed groaning, now as never before, in a subconscious pleading for the Lord’s return.

The groaning and travailing could be a reference to natural disasters and the animal violence which there is within this fallen world. Our groanings, our struggling in prayer, is transferred to God by the Lord Jesus groaning also, but with groanings far deeper and more fervently powerful than ours (Rom. 8:22,23 cp. 26). See on Rom. 8:17; Col. 2:1. Romans 8 teaches that there is in fact just one Spirit; the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God, and is "the Spirit" in the believer (Rom. 8:9-11). There is "one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4). If the will of God is in us, if His will is embedded in our conscience, we will ask what we will, what our spirit desires, and it will be granted. This is because if our Spirit is attune with the Spirit of God and of Christ, our desires, our wish, is transferred automatically to Him. Whatever we ask being in the name of Christ, being *in* His character and the essence of His spirit, will therefore be done (Jn. 15:16). It doesn't mean that saying the words "I ask in the name of Christ" gives our request some kind of magical power with God. It must surely mean that if we are in Him, if His words abide in us, then we will surely be heard, for our will is His will. We are guaranteed answers if we ask in His name, if we ask what we will, if the word dwells in us, if we ask according to God's will... all these are essentially the same thing. If we are truly in Him, if the word really dwells in us, if our will has become merged with God's will, then we will only request things which are in accordance with His will, and therefore we will receive them. Thus the experience of answered prayer will become part of the atmosphere of spiritual life for the successful believer. The Lord knew that the Father heard Him always (Jn. 11:42). It is for this reason that the prayers of faithful men rarely make explicit requests; their prayers are an expression of the spirit of their lives and their relationship with God, not a list of requests. It explains why God sees our needs, He sees our situations, as if these are requests for help, and acts accordingly. The request doesn't have to be baldly stated; God sees and knows and responds. This is why Romans 8 appears to confuse the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ in the believer, and Christ himself as "the Lord the Spirit". Yet what Paul is showing is that in fact if we are spiritually minded, if our thinking is in harmony with the Father and Son, prayer is simply a merger of our Spirit with theirs; the idea of prayer as a means of requesting things doesn't figure, because God knows our need and will provide. The whole creation *groans*; we ourselves *groan* inwardly; and the Spirit makes intercession with *groans* that can't be uttered. Clearly enough, our groans are His groans. He expresses them more powerfully and articulately than we can. It has been observed: "As I read Paul's words, an image comes to mind of a mother tuning in to her child's wordless cry. I know mothers who can distinguish a cry for food from a cry for attention, an earache cry from a stomach-ache cry. To me, the sounds are identical, but the mother instinctively perceives the meaning of the child's nonverbal groan. It is the inarticulateness, the very helplessness, of the child that gives her compassion such intensity". In deep sickness or depression it can simply be that we find formal, verbalized prayer impossible. Ps. 77:4 speaks of this: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (formally, to God). It's in those moments that comfort can be taken from the fact that it is our spirit which is mediated as it were to God. Tribulation is read as prayer- hence even the Lord's suffering on the cross, "the affliction of the afflicted", was read by the Father as the Lord Jesus 'crying unto' the Father (Ps. 22:24). This is sure comfort to those so beset by illness and physical pain that they lack the clarity of mind to formally pray- their very affliction is read by the Father as their prayer.

8:23 *And not only the creation but we ourselves*- A fair emphasis by Paul on the fact that our groaning are in some sort of harmony with the groaning of all creation. If we understand 'all creation' as "all Israel", Paul's emphasis on the commonality of our groaning together would be as if to say 'Jews and Christians aren't that far apart really; we are united by our

groanings'. And he argued the same at the opening of his argument in Romans 1-3; that Jew and Gentile are united by the desperation of their sinfulness, their common need for redemption.

*Who have the firstfruits of the Spirit-* I have explained earlier that Paul is teaching that the spirit or personality / mind of Christ is counted to us by imputed righteousness; but more than that, the Spirit of Christ is actually placed within us, although that spirit of Christ which dwells within us is latent, hidden beneath the flesh and failures of which Paul speaks in Romans 7. As we are in Christ, so He is in us, indwelling us by His Spirit. Clearly enough, the resurrected Christ is the firstfruit (1 Cor. 15:20,23), and we shall only be the firstfruits "afterward... at his coming". Yet because all that is true of Christ is true of we who are counted in Him, we too are the firstfruits. "The Spirit" could refer to Christ personally, "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RVmg.).

*Groan inwardly-* Paul writes this in explanation of his groaning within himself which is outlined in Rom. 7:15-24.

*As we wait eagerly for-* The Greek rather carries the idea of expecting. For if we are in Christ, His sufferings counted as ours and ours as His, then our ultimate salvation is assured. We are therefore expecting it, rather than waiting to see what shall happen at His return.

*Adoption as children and the redemption of our bodies-* Continuing the image of adoption which was introduced in 8:15. We have already received the spirit of adoption. We are adopted unto God for the sake of our being in Christ, the supreme Son of God (Eph. 1:5). We are God's adopted children in that we are in Christ, the ultimate child of God. But as has been lamented in Romans 7, our body, our flesh, is still as it is, unredeemed, and in practice unable to be subject to God's law. We with Paul and with all creation, groan for redemption from this situation. Gal. 4:5 speaks of the death of Christ as being required "to redeem that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons". The ideas of redemption, adoption and "sons" are repeated. So although we have attained such adoption as God's sons in that we are in His Son by status, we long for the physical manifestation of that redemption which we have received- and we groan for it. Note that "the adoption of *sons*" isn't sexist language; it is as sons that we are adopted rather than as daughters or androids because we are counted as in God's Son, Jesus, who happened to be male. We are counted as Him. The status we have received in Him is one of redemption, we are labelled as it were "redeemed". We in Christ have already received this redemption by grace (Rom. 3:24). He is "redemption" and we are in Him (1 Cor. 1:30). Consistently Paul speaks of 'redemption' as being "in Christ" (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and we have been baptized into Him and are counted in Him, as Paul has laboured throughout Romans so far. But our bodies still need that redemption, and we await / expect it at the Lord's return. Eph. 1:14; 4:30 likewise speak of "the day of redemption" as the second coming of Christ, and yet urge us to believe that we "sealed" by our receipt of the Spirit, as a guarantee, that this day will really come for us. The "spirit" referred to is the same as here in Romans 8- the indwelling of Jesus personally within all them who are "in Him", and the counting of His spirit to them by imputed righteousness.

Just as our minds have received the spirit of adoption, so our bodies will be transformed at the final judgment into a body like that of Jesus (Phil. 3:20,21).

8:24 *For in hope were we saved; but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*- “In hope were we saved” is better translated as “saved in hope”. God’s grace and the blood of Christ, believed in by faith, are what saves, rather than hope of itself. We have been saved, but in hope- for the fullness of salvation will only be revealed when Christ returns. As commented under 8:23, we have been redeemed, but the redemption of the body is our expectation at the second coming. Note that the Greek for “hope” means a confident expectation- the English ‘hope’ tends to carry a somewhat less confident flavour of meaning, the implication being that we ‘hope for the best’ rather than confidently await. But because we are saved in Christ, our hope is certain. Likewise the Greek translated in this section as “wait” better translates as ‘confidently await’. We’re not waiting to see what happens, but rather awaiting with confidence what must surely come for us- the redemption of our body. Anything less than this approach wouldn’t have left Paul pulling out of his groaning within himself of Romans 7 with the confident cry of rejoicing, the scream in the night, of Rom. 7:25- that he has indeed found the way of escape and deliverance through Christ. Jesus personally is “our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1). And we are in Him. But we don’t physically see Him yet, nor physically have we seen the redemption of our bodies. We therefore wait, or await confidently, the fulfilment of the hope which is now reserved for us (Col. 1:5).

8:25 *But if we hope for what we do not see, then we with patience wait for it*- Why does Paul labour his point here- that we don’t have [“see”] what we know is coming for us, therefore we must patiently wait for it? Maybe to encourage patience in the waiting- perhaps the crux of his argument in these verses is on the word “patience”. But maybe he is back to addressing the old worry which he know lurks in every reader: Why, then, am I still such a sinner right now, today? Given that reality, how then can I so confidently await the future redemption? And Paul’s answer is that yes we have been redeemed, but no we don’t see that redemption physically, no, we don’t yet see it, but we are patiently awaiting it in confidence. Despite all our weakness and failure in the flesh. Our waiting is paralleled with the awaiting of all creation for the manifestation of God’s children [the same word is used in Rom. 8:19,23,25]. The New Testament associates this ‘waiting’ with the faithful awaiting of Christ’s return (s.w. 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Yet here in Romans we are awaiting the manifestation of ourselves as the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). Christ is us and we are Him, if we are in Him and He in us. His manifestation or ‘coming’ (s.w. 1 Cor. 1:7, we wait for the manifestation / coming of Christ) will be the same as the manifestation of the sons of God, all those who are in Him. His manifestation will therefore be ours; His glory shall be manifested in us in that day [s.w. Rom. 8:18] just as He personally shall be manifested. And thus we read that in a sense, Christ shall return with all those who are in Him with Him; for the faithful shall be snatched away to meet Him in the air, as clouds (1 Thess. 4:17), and then He shall come to earth with clouds, of the faithful believers (Rev. 1:7). In this sense the second coming of Christ is likened to the new Jerusalem, the spotless bride of Christ, coming down from Heaven to earth (Rev. 21:2). His manifestation is ours, for all that is true of Him is true of us. Our *hupomone* [‘joyful endurance’, AV “patience”] in awaiting the return of Christ is therefore possible because we are awaiting our redemption. We can only joyfully await His coming [and *hupomone* can carry an element of ‘joy’ within the wide flavour of its meaning] if we are confident that His coming means our redemption rather than our judgment to condemnation. If our attitude to the return of Christ is that we shall only then find out, only

then will our destiny be sorted out- then we are of all men most fearful and uncertain. But clearly enough for those in Christ, His revealing physically to the world shall be our revealing. His coming is going to be ours. “For thee he comes, His might to impart, to the trembling heart and the feeble knee”.

8:26 *And in like manner*- A phrase hard to interpret in this context. The sense may be more of “And even moreover”, “even so”; “And now guess what, even more...” might be the dynamic sense. That apart from us having a wonderful hope which we confidently await, it’s not all jam tomorrow. The spirit, both as the Lord the spirit, i.e. Jesus personally, and also as His spirit which indwells us, is actively at work even now.

*The Spirit also*- A title for Christ personally. See on Rom. 7:14.

*Helps our infirmity*- “Helps” occurs in the LXX of Ex. 18:22 and Num. 11:17, where Moses is the one helped. Paul is suggesting that each believer can rise up to the pattern of Moses; he was no longer to be seen by Jewish believers as some distant, untouchable, stellar example of devotion. He was a pattern that through the Spirit could be realistically attained; although the point is being cleverly made that he too had weakness that needed Divine help. Paul made it a credo of his own life, and urged other believers to follow his example in this, that he would labour to support [s.w. help, Rom. 8:26] the weak (Acts 20:35). For we are all weak, and helped only by grace. But the Greek word Paul uses for ‘helps’ also carries the meaning of ‘to participate in’. It clearly has this sense in 1 Tim. 6:2, “partakers [participators in] the benefit”. The Spirit participates in our infirmities and thus helps us; just as we should seek to empathize as far as we can in the infirmities of others, both practical and moral. The “infirmities” Paul has in mind would seem to be the infirmity of spirit he laments in Rom. 7:15-24; our moral weakness. The same word is used of how the Lord Jesus in His ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Is. 53:4 that on the cross He would ‘take our infirmities’ (Mt. 8:17). These “infirmities” according to Is. 53:4 were our sins, but sin’s effect is manifested through sickness. The moral dimension to these “infirmities” has already been established by Paul in Romans, for in Rom. 5:6 he uses the word to describe how “when we were yet *weak* [s.w. ‘infirm’], Christ died for the ungodly; and he explains his sense here as being that “when we were yet *sinners*” (Rom. 5:8). Jesus as the Lord the Spirit engages with our infirmities, on the plane of the spirit, the deep human mind and psyche. What He did on the cross in engaging with our moral infirmity He did in His life, and He continues to do for us in essence. He does not turn away in disgust at our infirmities, rather through His Spirit within us He engages with them, perhaps deep within our subconscious, beneath our conscious will. The allusion to Mt. 8:17 seems certain- for there we read the same word for “infirmities” and “took” is *lambano*, a form of which is used by Paul in saying that the Spirit “helps” our infirmities. We are therefore led to understand “the Spirit” as a title of Christ personally. That title is used, however, because of the fact that in this context, His Spirit, His personality, is within us, He personally indwells us within our spirit; as we are in Christ so He is in us. His strength is perfected through our weakness (s.w. “infirmities”; 2 Cor. 12:9). He knows even now the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15; 5:2). If the Lord Jesus so engages with our weaknesses, we therefore ought to unhesitatingly “support the weak” [s.w., 1 Thess. 5:14].

*For we do not know how to pray*- Mt. 20:22 = Rom. 8:26. This is an example of where



appreciating the links with the Gospels opens our understanding of Paul's letters. Paul is implying that we are like the mother of Zebedee's children, in that when we pray, we know not what we ask for in the sense that we don't *appreciate* what we ask for. I know what to pray for: my redemption, and that of others. Read wrongly, Rom. 8:26 implies we haven't the foggiest what on earth to ask God for. But we *do* know what to ask for; the point is, we don't *appreciate* what we are asking for, just as that woman didn't appreciate what she was praying for when she asked that her two boys would be in the Kingdom.

A related word for "pray" is used in this same context by Paul in Rom. 9:3, where he says that he "could wish", s.w. "pray", that he himself were condemned by God so that Israel might be saved. His allusion is to Moses' prayer that he would be excluded from God's book rather than Israel be excluded from the Kingdom. But Paul learnt the lesson from how God responded to Moses- that He doesn't accept substitutionary sacrifice. Paul is admitting he too doesn't know how to pray for Israel as he ought, but he leaves their salvation in the hands of their Saviour, whilst so earnestly desiring it in his own spirit.

*As we ought-* We don't seem to have within us to pray as we *ought*, i.e. as we [s.w.] 'must'. It's not that we just don't know what to pray about; we don't pray as we ought to / must, and yet our gracious Mediator makes intercession with unutterable groans. And the older Paul can lament his failures to preach as he "ought", as he *must*, and therefore he appeals for prayer that he will witness to the Gospel as every believer of it *must* (Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4).

*But the Spirit Himself-* A clear reference to Christ, whose spirit indwells us and is in dialogue with *our* spirit on some unconscious level. Our innermost spiritual desires are thereby transferred to God by our Heavenly mediator. And our innermost desire is to be right with God, to obtain salvation, deliverance from this body of death and life of spiritual failure. Now we can better understand why all we are reading here flows on naturally from his groaning of spirit in Romans 7. The Lord Jesus indwells us, His spirit perceives the spiritual groaning of our spirit, and transfers it as it were to Himself; for if we are in Christ, then He is in us. And His intercession for us is in that sense successful; our salvation was obtained on the cross thanks to His own groaning in spirit there, and this guarantees that He will obtain it for us [the idea of 'intercession', we have noted, includes that of 'obtaining'].

*Makes intercession for us-* A return to the legal metaphors. The Lord Jesus is our interceder, the counsel for the defence, and also an emotional witness, pleading with groanings to the judge in support of our case. The Greek for "intercession" cannot be taken too far, but it is derived from the verb 'to obtain'. The obtaining of our salvation, the winning of our case, was achieved on the cross, in the groanings of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the stake; but in essence, He groans for us still in intercession, and in doing so, His groaning are in sympathy with our groaning for salvation. The type of groanings of spirit of Rom. 7:15-24 become the groanings of our Heavenly intercessor. He is not separate from our frustrations at our failures; He takes them fully on board. The crucial thing is that we have them; that we can read Rom. 7:15-24 with empathy and know that 'That's me'. Which I believe most readers of these words can indeed say.

*With groanings-* Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". One might think from Heb. 5:7 that the Lord Jesus made quite a noise whilst hanging on the cross. But Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. No doubt the Lord Jesus was praying silently, or at best quietly, as he hung there. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved on the cross for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father. Heb. 5:7 describes Christ on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation. The suffering and groaning of which Paul speaks in Rom. 8:17, 22-26 is in my view a reference to the 'groaning' he has just been making about his inability to keep the Mosaic Law [see on Rom. 7:18]. Our helplessness to be obedient, our frustration with ourselves, is a groaning against sin which is actually a groaning in harmony with that of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who makes intercession for us with the same groanings right now (Rom. 8:26). Indeed, those groanings are those spoken of in Heb. 5:7 as the groanings of strong crying and tears which the Lord made in His final passion. In this sense, the Spirit, the Lord the Spirit, bears witness with our spirit / mind, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). This clinches all I am trying to say. Our inability to keep the Law of God leads to a groaning against sin and because of sin, which puts us into a unity with the Lord Jesus as our Heavenly intercessor in the court of Heaven. Because of this, we are declared justified, there are no credible accusers, and the passionate intercessor / advocate turns out to be the judge Himself. Thus through our frustration at our own failure, we are led not only to Christ but to the certainty of an assured salvation. But that wondrous realization of grace which is expressed so finely in Romans 8 would just be impossible were it not for the conviction of sin which there is through our experience of our inability to keep the Law of God. Our failure and groaning because of it becomes in the end the very witness that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). God thereby makes sin His servant, in that the experience of it glorifies Him. How God works through sin is revealed in the way that although God always provided food for Israel in the wilderness, He 'suffered them to hunger' for 40 years, in order to try to teach them that man lives not by bread alone, but by God's word (Dt. 8:2,3). The Jews in the wilderness despised the food God gave them as worthless (Num. 21:3); they went hungry not literally, but in the sense that they despised the manna of God's provision. And He allowed them to have that hunger, in order that He might [try to] teach them about the value of His word. He didn't simply punish them for their ingratitude. He sought to work through it in order to teach them something. Even the process of rejection results in the victims coming to 'know the Lord'.

*Which cannot be uttered*- In the same way as our inner groanings for salvation, for deliverance from how we are, are unspoken, rarely verbalized (although Rom. 7:15-24 is a fine exception), so His intercession for us isn't in human words, it's a dialogue of the Spirit with God, a meeting of innermost minds. Our sinfulness and desire to be free from it is articulated through the spirit of God's perfect Son, to the mind or spirit of God Himself. Intercession, therefore, isn't a question of translating words which we say in prayer into some Heavenly language which is somehow understandable to God, rather like a translator may interpret from one language to another. It is our spirit which is perceived for what it is and articulated before God. This explains why both in Biblical example and in our own experience, our unspoken, unformulated desires of the spirit are read by God as prayers and responded to. I devote a whole chapter in my analysis of "Prayer" to exemplifying this Biblically, but we should also know it from our own experience. Desires which we had, above all we asked or thought, are read by God as prayers and responded to. Paul gives an example of this in saying that Elijah made intercession to God *against* Israel (Rom. 11:2,3), when clearly it was his thoughts in this context which were being interpreted as prayer. Perhaps the statement that the Lord Jesus intercedes for us without human words, in terms which "cannot be uttered", is intended as a comfort to those who feel they're 'not good at praying' because they don't know how to put it all in words. Verbalization skills are hardly a prerequisite for powerful prayer- because some people are more verbal, better with words, than others. Rom. 8 speaks of the importance of being spiritually minded, and then goes on to say that our spirit, our deep inner mind, is transferred to God by Christ, called by His title "the Lord the spirit" , *without* specifically spoken words. This is surely proof enough that the Lord does not mediate our prayers as an interpreter would, from one language to another, matching lexical items from one language with those from another. "We know not what to pray for", so the Lord Jesus reads our inner spirit, and transfers this on a deep mental level, without words, to the Father. The whole process of mediation takes place within the Lord's mind, with the sort of groanings He had as He begged the Father to raise Lazarus (Rom. 8:26 cp. Jn. 11:38), and as on the cross He prayed with strong crying and tears for our redemption (Heb. 5:5 cp. Is. 53:12). The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today. That same passion and intensity of pleading really is there. This is why the state of our mind, our spirit, is so vitally important; because it is this which the Lord Jesus interprets to the Father. The Lord's Spirit struggles in mediation with crying and groaning (Rom. 8:26), as He did for the raising of Lazarus. There is a further connection with Heb. 5:5, where we learn that the Lord prayed on the cross with a like intensity. And this Lord is our Lord today. He can be crucified afresh, therefore He has the capacity for struggle and mental effort. The Greek for "groanings" in Rom. 8:26 also occurs in Mk. 7:34: "Looking up to heaven, he *sighed* and saith unto him, Ephthatha". The sighing of intense prayer by the Lord was His more spiritually cultured reflection of the number one desire of that man's spirit, as was His groaning and tears for Martha's desire to be granted, and Lazarus to be raised. It has been wisely observed that the language of Christ's mediation can be quite misunderstood. The picture we should have "is not that of an orante, *standing* ever before the Father with out-stretched arms... pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God... but that of a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request". The description of Christ groaning in spirit to transfer our spirit to God (Rom. 8:26) is a reflection of the fact that we groan for redemption and the coming of the day of the liberty of God's children (Rom. 8:22,23), when what is guaranteed by "the firstfruits of the Spirit" which we have, will at last be realized. "All things work together for good" to this end, of forgiveness and salvation. It certainly doesn't mean that every story ends up happily-ever-after in this life. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to

the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end. Because there is only "one Spirit", even the terms "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ" can be paralleled because they are manifestations of that same one Spirit: "Ye are... in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you... the Spirit is life... if the Spirit of (God) that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you... the Spirit (Christ, 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:18 R.V.) maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:9-11,26). See on Jn. 7:39.

8:27 *And he that searches the hearts-* A clear reference to God, whom many Bible passages present as the One who searches human hearts. God knows and recognizes what the Lord Jesus is 'saying' because He Himself anyway knows the true state of our hearts, searching our motives and the inner thoughts which lay behind the external actions and words which are judged by men. Hence we can be judged [harshly] by men according to the flesh, but justified by the God who knows our spirit (1 Pet. 4:6). The 'searching' of human hearts is also done by the Lord Jesus (s.w. Rev. 2:23), as well as by God. And their findings are of course congruent. In this sense, the intercession of the Lord Jesus is "according to God" [Gk.], or "the will of God" [AV], or to fill out the ellipsis another way, 'according to the searching of God too'.

*Knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus], because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God-* God who knows our minds knows the mind of Christ too. Because His mind is our mind, His Spirit is intertwined with, in dialogue with, reflective of, our deepest spirit in our inner, spiritual person. The hearts / minds of the believers are in this sense the mind of Christ; for due to our status in Him, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Thus the mind of Christ as He comes before the Father in intercession for us is at one with God's mind, as well as at one with our mind. In this we begin to see the profound depths, or something of them, of what it means to be "in Christ", and how, mechanically, if you wish, reconciliation is achieved between God and man through Christ. The Lord Jesus does not just transfer our words to God as pieces of language. Seeing that we do not know how to properly express ourselves to God, He transfers the thoughts of our spirit to God (Rom. 8:26,27). It is in this context that Paul encourages us to have a spiritual mind in our daily life; because that is relayed to the presence of God by the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit". Therefore our whole lives can be a life of prayer, lived out in the presence of the Lord God. However, we are encouraged to pray with our human words as well; indeed, Scripture is full of examples of men doing just this.

8:28 *And we know that to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose- all things work together for good-* A reference to the eternal "good" of the Kingdom age, i.e., 'so that we might enter the Kingdom'? The future Kingdom is called "good things" in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. *All things work together for good* doesn't mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don't. We are asked to carry the Lord's cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return. "All things" may refer to "all creation" in Rom. 8:22, as if to say that everything in the

whole of creation works together for our ultimate “good”. But that “good” must be defined within Paul’s usage of the term in Romans; and he doesn’t ever use it in the sense of material good in this life. Consider how he uses the word: “Doing good”, righteous behaviour (Rom. 2:7,10); “a good man”, a righteous man, maybe in reference to the moral purity of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:7); “no good thing dwells within me... the good that I would do, I do not” (Rom. 7:18,19). Remember that Paul is writing Romans 8 in commentary upon and extension to his lament in Romans 7 that he cannot do the good that he would. Now he is taking comfort that in the bigger picture, man is not alone in creation; all things in this world are somehow working together within God’s master plan so that we shall in fact do good, be righteous; both in our lives in Christ today and ultimately for eternity in God’s Kingdom. For those who “love God”, who in their innermost beings delight in God’s law, somehow life works out, albeit in a very complex way, so that we may do that which is good, and have the goodness of Christ’s righteousness eternally counted to us. Despite having lamented that he himself fails to “do good” as he would wish (Rom. 7:19), Paul urges us all to “do good” in the practical section of Romans. We are to cleave to the good, overcome evil with good, do good, be wise to that which is good and simple concerning evil (Rom. 12:2,9,21; 13:3; 16:19). Clearly Paul doesn’t wish us to understand his frustration with his human condition as any excuse for giving up the effort. And the indwelling spirit of Christ seeks to orchestrate all things in the whole of creation to work together so that we may succeed in that doing of good. Snow in Latvia or flash floods in Australia may be brought about by cosmic forces which operate exactly so that we may... help up that old man who has slipped on the ice, take in that family who lost their home. And of course it all works out far more subtly than this, hour by hour. God has begun a “good work [s.w.] in us” and will bring it to completion in the day of Christ’s return (Phil. 1:6). And all things in the whole of creation are somehow orchestrated to that end. Thus at baptism we were created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10). And He gives us “all sufficiency to abound to every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8), we are sanctified and prepared [Gk. ‘provided for’] to perform every good work God intends for us (2 Tim 2:21); fully equipped by God to do every good work in His purpose for us (2 Tim. 3:17). Each time in these verses, the Greek word for “good” is the same as in Rom. 8:28. All this puts paid once and for all to the idea that we can do no good work because we don’t have the money, the life situation, the resources. We have every sufficiency to do those good works intended for us; but we must “be ready to every good work” (Tit. 3:1), prepared to grasp the moment, living in the spirit of *carpe diem*. And thus we shall be ‘established’ in every good work we put our hands to (2 Thess. 2:17), none shall ultimately harm us if we follow after performing these good works (1 Pet. 3:13), we shall be made perfect or completed “in every good work in the doing of His will” (Heb. 13:21). All things work together for good especially when the “good works” are in the context of assisting others towards the Kingdom. Paul’s concise summary of us in this verse as those who “love God” recalls 1 Jn. 4:20,21; 5:2- we only love God when we love others. The uncommon Greek word translated ‘work together’ is to be found in the great preaching commission in Mk. 16:20, where it is observed that the Lord Jesus ‘worked together with’ those who sought to preach the Gospel in all the world. This appears to be a comment upon the Lord’s promise that in this work of preaching the Gospel, He would be with His preachers unto the end of the world (Mt. 28:20). Whilst this can be understood as the end of the age, it seems to me that the Lord is saying that in taking the Gospel to the whole world, He will be with them in it, right to the ends of the world- be it in witnessing to Amazonian Indians or to your unbelieving family in a run down apartment block in Moscow or London or New York. We are workers together with Him in the work of saving others (2 Cor. 6:1); yet all things in all creation are also working together to this end. By becoming part of that huge operating system, dynamized as it is by God’s Spirit, we will experience God working with us. Somehow,

resources become available; somehow we meet the right people. But all this happens if we are those who “love God”. If our love for Him and the furtherance of His glory in human lives is paramount, then we will naturally find ourselves part of this positive, triumphant system which always is lead in triumph in Christ. Paul uses the same Greek word translated ‘work together’ in the practical section of Romans, where he three time speaks of his brethren as his ‘workers together’, or co-workers (Rom. 16:3,9,21). I suggest that Paul has in view here that he was co-working with those brethren as co-workers with God. The co-working he refers to doesn’t simply mean that these brethren worked together with Paul. They were co-workers in the sense of being like Paul, co-workers- with God. All this isn’t only encouragement to those faced with decision making on a large scale- e.g. a mission organization wondering if they have the resources to open a new front of work, or provide significant care to a needy group. More personally, it applies to each of us. We each have good works before ordained that we should walk in them, live a way of life which achieves them (Eph. 2:10). We need to ask the Lord to reveal what they are, to review our station and place within life’s network and perceive them, remembering that “the unexamined life isn’t worth living”, and seek to go for them. The idea is commonly expressed that for now, I shall work in my career, in my business, and then I shall have the resources to serve God as I vaguely imagine I could in some specific way. Manic capitalism has succeeded in commodifying everything, turning everything into a price tag. But the good works God has in mind for us aren’t usually of that nature. Kindness, acceptance, comfort, forgiveness, interest in others’ needs and sufferings... these are the essence of being as Christ in this world. This is Christianity, Christ-ness, being like Christ. For He achieved all He did “with a minimum of miracle” as Robert Roberts put it, and with hardly any cash behind Him. And so all this working together towards ultimate “good” shall be possible and is possible, for those who in the core of their hearts truly “love God”. This is another allusion, surely, to Romans 7:15-24, where Paul is saying that in his heart he loves God, but is frustrated by his flesh. I have no doubt that most of you my readers are in this category- of loving God. The Jewish mind would’ve been jogged by the reference to ‘loving God’ to the classic definition of loving God- to love Him with our heart and mind (Mt. 22:37). And this is exactly what Paul is saying he does in Romans 7, delighting in God’s law in his mind, despite serving sin in his flesh.

Here Paul starts to introduce the concept of calling, election according to God’s purpose. He doesn’t just start talking of Divine calling and predestination without a context. His whole message in Romans 1-8 is that we are saved by grace; and the fact there is some element of predestination and calling over and above our will and works is solid proof that salvation is by grace- and that we who know we have been called, in that we have heard the call of the Gospel which contains that call, really are those who have been chosen to live eternally. Again and again, the message Paul preaches here is too good news. We struggle to qualify what he is saying, to allow our works and obedience a greater factor in the final algorithm of Divine salvation. But time and again we return to the question- why do I know all this, why am I reading these words, hearing this call, when so many others have lived and died without it? Why is it that I ‘get it’ about God, but my brother or my sister was never interested from babyhood? Why me, why her, why you, and not the guy next door? For all our philosophy, wise cracks and clever words, there is no abidingly satisfactory answer. It is of God’s grace and not of ourselves. Paul specifically connects our calling with God’s grace in 2 Tim. 1:9: “Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His purpose and grace”. Note how the ideas of calling, grace and God’s purpose all run together here as they do in Rom. 8:28. The “purpose of God” is further defined in

Rom. 9:11 as not depending upon human works. We were called because we were called, by grace, quite independent of what works we would or would not do. Eph. 1:11 says that we are “predestinated according to the purpose of [God]”. The whole idea of calling according to a predetermined Divine purpose means we are predestinated. We need not struggle over whether we have been called or not. The call, the invitation to the Kingdom, is in the Gospel. Any who hear it have been called. If I invite you to an event, you are invited, you are called to it. Lest there be any doubt, Paul began Romans by assuring us that we are called just as surely as he was (Rom. 1:1,6,7). He opens 1 Corinthians the same way- speaking of his calling and then using the same word to describe how his readers are likewise the called (1 Cor. 1:1,2,24). The calling of God is “without repentance” in the sense that we can never be disinvented, become ‘uncalled’ (Rom. 11:29). And if we are called, then we are predestinated (Eph. 1:11). Whilst calling doesn’t mean final acceptance with God- for we must make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10), to not be saved at the last day would require us to have wilfully fought against the predestined desire of God to save us, to have reasoned against destiny. Paul’s great theme in Romans 1-8 is that we are “in Christ” by status through having believed into Him by baptism. This connects with this theme of calling according to the Divine purpose, because God ‘purposed His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Eph. 3:11). If we are in Him, then we are in God’s eternal purpose, we will continue eternally because God’s purpose for us is eternal. We would have to wilfully reject that status if we are to somehow come out of that eternal purpose. Being “in” God’s purpose means that His purpose, His will, His Spirit, is to become ours- hence Paul can use the same word to speak of his “purpose” in life (2 Tim. 3:10).

“According to His purpose” can be applied to the first clause of the verse, “all things work together for good” within the overall purpose of God to save us. It doesn’t have to modify the idea of our calling. Joseph stands as a pattern for us all. When Paul wrote that all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28), he was echoing how in all the grief of Joseph’s life, the rejection by his brethren, the cruel twists of fate [as they seemed at the time]... *God meant it for good* (Gen. 50:20). This same wonderful process will come true in our lives- for they too are equally directed by a loving Father. God’s whole purpose, according to Paul, is that we should become like His Son-and to this end all things are directed in God’s plan for us (Rom. 8:28,29). To achieve the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” is the ‘perfection’ or maturity towards which God works in our lives. As we read of Him day by day, slowly His words and ways will become ours. The men who lived with Jesus in the flesh are our pattern in this; for the wonder of the inspired record means that His realness comes through to us too. Time and again, their spoken and written words are reflective of His words, both consciously and unconsciously.

8:29- see on Rom. 6:5.

*For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained-* We are called for sure, therefore we were predestinated for sure, and therefore we personally were foreknown. To the Jewish mind, it was the prophets and Messiah who were personally foreknown. And Paul uses this shockingly exalted language about each of us, reasoning back from the basis that we know we have been called. His logical path is irresistible, at least intellectually. But in practice it amounts to an almost too good news. We were predestinated to be saved, to be part of God’s eternal purpose, a plan for us which shall last for ever. It would require a battle of wills

against God, a conscious, wilful desire *not* to be in that purpose any more, to make us no longer a part of that purpose. No wonder we should strive to spread the invitations to that Kingdom far and wide, to call people to the Kingdom. We who have heard and accepted that call are even now part of a plan, a purpose, which shall last eternally- this is the significance of God's purpose with us being an "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). This may explain why often we feel that God is indeed working with us, that we are part of some far bigger cosmic plan, but we're not sure exactly where it's going to end. All we can do is to play our part in that purpose as enthusiastically as possible, knowing that we are playing a part in some unseen purpose, which shall have eternal consequences. Why was the train cancelled, the airport closed by snow? So that for those who wish to be part of God's purpose, who "love God", we had time to make a phone call to brother X or pay a visit to sister Y or stay the night with family Z, so that we might play some part in encouraging them towards God's Kingdom? We cannot see it clearly, but we sense something of God in these things, even in death itself. The situation gets the more complex, the waters muddled, in that both we and others can at times and in some ways not respond as God intends, or not as far as He intended. And so the eternal purpose is in a sense thwarted, God's intentions delayed or forced by human failure to be rescheduled, reinterpreted, fulfilled in other ways or at other times. But all the same, we continue to play our part as best we can, as far as we can, loving God with our whole heart, soul and mind, not on a hobbyist, part-time level; and so we shall eternally continue.

*To be conformed to the image of His Son-* This is parallel to our being fully born into the family of God, of which the Lord Jesus is the firstborn. Whilst the process of being formed after the image of Christ is ongoing in this life, it will come to full term only at our final birth of the Spirit when we enter God's Kingdom (Jn. 3:3-5). The Greek for "conformed" is used only in one other place, in Phil. 3:21, where we read that at Christ's return, our vile body shall be "fashioned like unto" [s.w. 'conformed'] the now glorious body of Christ. The conforming is therefore referring to our final change of nature at Christ's return, even though the conforming process begins in this life (Rom. 12:2). The end point, therefore, isn't so much eternal life, but to be like Christ, the Son of God. Paul has been arguing that we are counted as Christ now, His character, personality and spirit are counted to us. But finally we shall be changed into persons like unto Christ Himself. But the form of Jesus to which we shall be con-formed in that day is the "form" which He had on earth- for Phil. 2:6 speaks of the Lord Jesus as having "the form of God" at the time of His final spiritual climax in the death of the cross. This *morphe* or "form" refers not to His 'very nature', as Trinitarians wilfully misinterpret this passage, but rather to the image of God mentally. Who Jesus was in His time of dying was in fact "God"; not that He 'was God' then, but in that His character and spirit finally matured to an exact replica of who God is in essence. And this is who or what we are counted as today- for all in Christ are counted as Him. And this is who we shall be conformed to in the final triumph at the day of His coming. Our calling is to be like Him; not simply to have eternal life in God's Kingdom. More essentially, the call of the Gospel is a call to be like Him in this life, and to then be finally made like Him. The parables which explain the good news of the Kingdom therefore speak of how life can be lived now, in forgiveness, service, kindness etc. This is the good news of the Kingdom life; the good news isn't simply an invitation to live eternally in a future Kingdom on earth; rather is it the good news of a form of life that can be lived now and shall eternally be lived to its intended fullness. When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with



unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be. See on Acts 9:3. Martial described a crucifixion victim [in *Liber Spectaculorum*]: "In all his body was nowhere a body's shape". We are to be "conformed to the image of [God's] son" (Rom. 8:29)- to share His *morphe*, which was so marred beyond recognition that men turned away in disgust (Is. 52:14 cp. Phil. 2:7). The mind that was in Him then must be in us now (Phil. 2:5).

*That He might be the firstborn among many other children-* Because we shall be made like Him morally, we will have the essential family characteristic: moral perfection. We will thereby become God's children also, as He was and is. We shall become His "brothers" in that we have been counted as Him now, and then shall be made like Him. So the language isn't thoughtlessly sexist, rather is it reflective of how we shall be made like Him. Through the resurrection, Christ became "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15,18; Rev. 1:5); the same Greek phrase for "all creation" is to be found in Rom. 8:22. The idea may be that ultimately all creation somehow will follow this same path to glory, to ultimate reconciliation with God. And yet Col. 1:23 uses the same phrase in this context to speak of how the Gospel has been preached to "all creation", in fulfilment of the great commission to take the Gospel to "all creation" (Mk. 16:15 same phrase). "Firstborn among many brothers" here in Rom. 8:29 therefore becomes parallel to being the firstborn of "all creation" in Colossians 1. In the end, "all creation" will be God's redeemed children. And we will only be there because someone went out into our world and preached the Gospel to the "all creation". In this lies the eternal significance of calling others to that Kingdom by obeying the great commission.

8:30 *And whom He foreordained, those He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified, and who He justified, these He also glorified-* This is partially a recapitulation of the argument of Rom. 8:29; a repeating for emphasis of something which is almost too good news to believe. We were called because we were predestinated; and Paul has earlier outlined in his argument that we who are in Christ have been "justified", declared right, at the judgment seat of God. We haven't yet been glorified, in that our bodies haven't yet been changed, the final day of judgment hasn't yet come. But Paul uses the past tense as if it has already happened. This 'prophetic perfect' was a Hebrew style which was quite grammatically acceptable, even if it may seem strange when translated into other languages such as Greek or English. Paul's point is that if we are in Christ, declared right before God's judgment right now, then we can be assured of final salvation, the glorification of the body- should Christ return at this moment, or if we should die at this moment. For tomorrow of course we might throw it all away. But we are not to worry about tomorrow in that sense; we can rejoice here and now that we are saved and are as good as ultimately saved and in the Kingdom. We have already been predestinated, already called, already justified- and therefore in prospect, already glorified. Yet again, Paul succeeds in making us gasp for breath, struggling as we do with the too good news of the Gospel. It is the Lord Jesus who has now been "glorified" (s.w. Jn. 12:16; Acts 3:13); and seeing that all that is true of Him is now true of us who by status are now "in Him", it can be also said that we have been in this sense already glorified. Perhaps the practical section of Romans connects to this verse when we read in Rom. 15:6,9 that the Gentiles shall glorify God for His mercy; because He has glorified us, we are to glorify Him.

“Also glorified” is true from God’s standpoint, outside of our kind of time. For that glory has yet to be revealed in us (1 Pet. 5:1).

8:31 *What then shall we say to these things?*— Paul returns to the rhetorical, legal style which he used earlier in Romans. The phrase could be an allusion to a legal one; as if to say to the accused or to the jury: ‘What then do you say to these things?’. We are invited to be the jury at our own trial. The evidence that we shall be saved is devastating; nothing can be said against it. Or it could be that Paul is in the place of the defence, going on the attack against the prosecutor. What can be argued against all this evidence? And there would have to be silence. The case is set in concrete. The arguments simply cannot be answered. Paul has previously thrown down the challenge after some of his previous depositions of evidence in this very public case of God’s Gracious, Certain Salvation vs. All Human Doubts And Fears. Four times he has challenged: What then shall we say to this (Rom. 3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7)? And there can only be silence. But Paul’s rhetorical style is almost aggressive; he is the counsel for the defence who is on the offensive rather than the apologetic and defensive. But it seems Paul isn’t satisfied with winning the case. He drives it home now in the final verses of this chapter in a kind of *tour de triumph*, a victory lap before all of creation. He is exalting, both intellectually and emotionally, in God’s grace and the certainty of our salvation. But he’s not exalting just for the sake of it; he is aware of his own cries of frustration with his own failure which he voiced in Romans 7, and he is aware of how cautious and weak in faith are we his readers, who struggle to believe the goodness of this good news, this Gospel of grace. And so he has to hammer it home. “What shall we then say to these things?”- i.e. ‘what form of words, of ‘saying’, is adequate response to them?’ (Rom. 8:31; Paul uses that phrase seven times in Romans, so beyond words did he find the atonement wrought in Christ). Words aren’t symbols sufficient for our experience of God’s grace and love; all commentary is bathos, like trying to explain a symphony in words; we experience a collapse of language. What remains, I suppose, is to live, to exist, in the sober knowledge of this grace, to never lose sight of them in our hearts; and all the rest, the rest of life and living and all the decisions and responses we are supposed to make, will somehow come naturally.

*If God is for us, who can be against us?*- The songs of the suffering Servant are applied to us in Rom. 8:31, where Paul exalts that “if God be for us, who is against us?”- alluding to Is. 50:8 “The Lord God is helping me- who is he that would convict me?”. If we are in Christ, we like Him cannot be condemned. In the legal context, if the judge of all is legally “for us”, then there effectively is no accuser, nothing and nobody standing against us. It’s as if Paul has rightly guessed his readers’ response: ‘OK Paul, I have nothing to say against your argument, but all the same you don’t know what a sinner I am, what a line of sins I have waiting there to condemn me’. And Paul’s exultant answer is that if God is “for us”- and he has demonstrated this time and again, that God quite simply wants to save us- then nothing and nobody, not even our own sins, can ultimately stand against us. The idea of God being “for us” is repeated twice elsewhere in Romans. In Rom. 5:8 we read that God commended His love toward us in that Christ, His Son, died “for us”. This is the extent to which God is “for us”. And in Rom. 8:34, Christ makes intercession “for us” to God the judge; and yet God the judge is also “for us”. All this legal language is only metaphor, and all metaphors break down at some point if pushed too far. If in this case we push it too far, we would end up saying that God is somehow unjust, His sense of legal justice lacks integrity and so is worthless in an ethical, moral sense. However, the broad brush impression is that in the

highest, ultimate court analysis of our case, both the judge and the counsel for the defence are passionately “for us” on a personal level. In God’s case, He was “for us” to the extent of giving His Son to die “for us”, for the sake of our sins and failures for which we are in the dock. Col. 2:14 uses the same phrase to describe how the Mosaic Law which was “against us” has been taken out of the way through Christ’s death; and Paul has argued that the strength of sin is in the Law. If that is taken away, then sin will not have power in the lives of those who are “in Christ”, in whom such law and legality is now no more. As an aside, it should be noted that when the Lord told John to “Forbid not; for he that is not against us is for us” (Lk. 9:50 Gk.), He could have been referring to God; as if to say that we don’t need to as it were defend Him against possible impostors, because God Himself is the One who is not against us but for us. In this case, here in Rom. 8:31 we would have yet another of Paul’s allusions to the Gospels; his point would be that if God is for us and not against us, then nothing at all nor anybody, not even ourselves and our sins, can be against us.

8:32 *He that spared not His own son*- Perhaps alluding to how God commended Abraham for not having spared his son (Gen. 22:16). As noted on Rom. 8:31, God our judge is “for us” in that He gave His own Son to die “for us”, for our sins. The idea of God not sparing people is usually used in the sense of ‘not sparing them from condemnation’, and it is used like this twice elsewhere in Romans (Rom. 11:21 [twice]; 2 Cor. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4,5). The Lord Jesus bore our sins in that He identified with them; and the Old Testament idea of sin bearing meant to bear condemnation for sin. As the representative of we who are sinners, He in some sense died the death of a condemned man; His final cry “Why have You forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46) was surely rooted in the Old Testament theme that God will forsake sinners but never forsake the righteous. He felt *as* a sinner, although He was not one. The language of God not sparing His own Son could be read as meaning that God treated Him as condemned, in the sense that the Lord Jesus was to such an extent our representative. If this is the correct line of interpretation, then Paul would again be tackling our objection that we are such awful sinners that perhaps his fantastic news of grace still doesn’t apply to us personally. And he would be answering it by saying that because we are in Christ and Christ in us, Christ died as our representative, deeply identifying with us as characters and persons and thereby with the sinfulness and failure which is such a significant part of us. And therefore as our representative He died and rose again, so that we might be able to believe ‘into Him’ and thereby share in His resurrection and glorification.

God ‘spared not’ His own son is alluding to the LXX of Gen. 22:16, where Abraham spares not his son. The Greek phrase is elsewhere used about God not sparing people when He assigns them to condemnation (Rom. 11:21; 2 Cor. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4,5). The Lord Jesus knows how not only sinners feel but how the rejected will feel- for He ‘bore condemnation’ in this sense. We should be condemned. But He as our representative was condemned, although not personally guilty. He so empathized with us through the experience of the cross that He came to *feel* like a sinner, although He was not one. And thus He has freed us from condemnation. When Paul asks in Rom. 8:33,34 ‘Who can accuse us? Where are those people? Who can condemn us, if God justifies us?’, he is alluding to the woman taken in adultery. For the Lord asked the very same rhetorical questions on that occasion. Paul’s point is that we each one are that woman. We are under accusations which we can’t refute. The Lord never denied her guilt; but He took it away. The Lord comforted her that no *man* has condemned her nor can condemn her, and He who alone could do so, instead pronounces her free from condemnation.

*But delivered Him up for us all*- The Greek is three times used in Is. 53 LXX about the handing over to Jesus to His death. The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment.

*How shall He not also with Him freely give us all things*- If so much was given to us by the death of Christ, if God gave His Son for us, then how much 'easier' is it for Him to give us absolutely anything. For nothing compares to the gift of God's Son to die; this is the ultimate gift from God to man. To give us eternity and forgiveness for our sins is in far less than the gift of the blood of His Son. And further, if God gave us His Son in order to save us, in order to "give us all things"- is it really feasible that having given us His Son *so that* He might "give us all things", He would then *not* "give us all things"? Again, Paul's logic is intrusive and powerful. We may shut the book, stop reading or listening, but the force of the argument silently echoes within our narrow and fearful minds. God did "not spare" His Son- by contrast, He "freely gave" Him [Gk. 'to grace with'], His Son was indeed "all things" to God, His only and beloved Son. Seeing God gave us Him, it's obvious that He is going to give us the things which that gift was given in order to make possible. "Shall He not with Him also" could be a reference to the resurrection- if God gave us so much in the *death* of His Son, think how much more was achieved and given to us through His resurrection. "With him" could be read another way, however- as referring to how Christ will meet the believers "in the air", and they shall come "with him" to judgment (1 Thess. 4:14), with Him their judge clearly "for them". However we must remember Paul is driving here at our fears that our sins are too great for the good news, however good it is, to be true for us personally. The Greek translated "freely give" is a form of the word *charis*, grace, and is often translated "forgive". It's the same word used in Lk. 7:42, where God 'frankly forgives' all the sins / debts of His

servants. Perhaps Paul has this in mind. If God gave up His Son to die for us, in order to achieve forgiveness for our sins, then rather obviously, surely, He will “frankly forgive” or “freely give” us forgiveness for all things, all and any sin. We shouldn’t think that this is somehow harder for God than to give us His Son to die for our sins. He has already done that. And so giving us the forgiveness which Christ died to attain isn’t therefore so difficult. If we are in Christ, then God has “quickened us together with Him, having forgiven us [s.w. “freely give” in Rom. 8:32] all trespasses”. The “all things” of Rom. 8:32 can thus be understood as “all our trespasses”. And so Paul goes on to triumph in Rom. 8:37 that we are conquerors in “all things”, over all our sins, because we are in Him that loved us.

8:33 *Who shall lay anything to the charge*— Again, legal language. Where is our accuser? Can anyone accuse us of anything? No, insofar as we are “in Christ”. The allusion is to the Gospels, to the way the Lord Jesus could calmly challenge: “Which of you can convict me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46). If He could not be seriously accused of sin, neither can we. The records of the Lord’s trials are perhaps also in view here- for the accusers failed to produce any case which held together (Mk. 14:59). All this takes on striking relevance to us, as we stand in the dock before the righteous judgment of God- and are declared right, without any credible accusers. This of course is only possible because we are “in Christ”. The only other time the Greek for ‘lay to the charge’ occurs is in the records of Paul’s own trials, where again no credible accusation was found against him (Acts 19:38,40; 23:28,29; 26:2,7). As so often, Paul is reasoning from his own personal experience. He knew what it felt like to stand in court and see your accusers’ case just crumble before your eyes. He makes the point in his own defence that there is no proof of anything of which he is accused, and that significantly the witnesses against him aren’t even present in the courtroom (Acts 24:13,19)- all very much the scene of Rom. 8:33. And he says this is true for each one who is in Christ. God is the prosecutor- yet He is the one who shall search for Israel’s sin, and admit that it cannot be found (Jer. 50:20). God is both judge, advocate for the defence, and prosecutor- and this is God *for us*, the guilty! Rom. 8:33,34 develops the figure at length. The person bringing the complaint of sin against us is God alone- for there is no personal devil to do so. And the judge who can alone condemn us is the Lord Jesus alone. And yet we find the one ‘brings the charge’ instead being the very one who justifies us, or as the Greek means, renders us guiltless. The one who brings the charge becomes this strange judge who is so eager to declare us guiltless. And the judge who can alone condemn, or render guilty, is the very one who makes intercession to the judge for us- and moreover, the One who died for us, so passionate is His love. The logic is breathtaking, literally so. The figures are taken from an earthly courtroom, but the roles are mixed. Truly “if God be for us [another courtroom analogy], who can be against us” (Rom. 8:31). This advocate / intercessor is matchless. With Him on our side, ‘for us’, we cannot possibly be condemned. Whatever is ‘against us’- our sins- cannot now be against us, in the face of this mighty advocate. Let’s face it, the thing we fear more than death is our sin which is ‘against us’. But the assurance is clear, for those who will believe it. With an attorney for the defence such as we have, who is also our passionate judge so desperate to justify us- even they cannot stand ‘against us’. Rom. 8:33 states that there is now *nobody* who can accuse us, because none less than God Himself, the judge of all, is our justifier in Christ! And so whatever is said about us, don’t let this register with us as if it is God accusing us. Not for us the addiction of internet chat groups, wanting to know what is said about us or feeling defensive under accusation. For all our sins, truly or falsely accused of, *God* is our justifier, and not ourselves. And thus our consciences can still blossom when under man’s false accusation, genuinely aware of our failures for what they are, not being made to feel more guilty than we should, or to take false guilt. This is all a wonderful

and awesome outworking of God's plan of salvation by grace. If *God* is our justifier, where is he that condemns us, or lays any guilt to our charge (Rom. 8:33,34)? And yet in family life, in ecclesial relationships... we are so quick to feel and hurt from the possible insinuations of others against us. We seek to justify ourselves, to correct gossip and misrepresentation, to "take up" an issue to clear our name. We all tend to be far too sensitive about what others may be implying about us. All this reflects a sad lack of appreciation of the wonder of the fact that we are justified *by God*, and in His eyes- which is surely the ultimately important perspective- we are without fault before the throne of grace, covered in the imputed and peerless righteousness of the Lord. Paul, misrepresented and slandered more than most brethren, came to conclude: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me [right now] is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The judge is the justifier, according to this argument. Paul is not justified by himself or by other men, because they are not his judge. The fact that God alone is judge through Christ [another first principle] means that nobody can ultimately justify us or condemn us. The false claims of others can do nothing to ultimately damage us, and our own efforts at self-justification are in effect a denial of the fact that the Lord is the judge, not us, and therefore He alone can and will justify. When a man is under accusation, his conscience usually dies. He is so bent on self-defence and seeking his own innocence and liberation from accusation. And we see this in so many around us. But for us, we have been delivered from accusation, judged innocent, granted the all powerful and all authoritative heavenly advocate. Rom. 8:33 states that there is now *nobody* who can accuse us, because none less than God Himself, the judge of all, is our justifier in Christ! And so whatever is said about us, don't let this register with us as if it is God accusing us. Not for us the addiction of internet chat groups, wanting to know what is said about us or feeling defensive under accusation. For all our sins, truly or falsely accused of, God is our justifier, and not ourselves. And thus our consciences can still blossom when under man's false accusation, genuinely aware of our failures for what they are, not being made to feel more guilty than we should, or to take false guilt. This is all a wonderful and awesome outworking of God's plan of salvation by grace.

*Of God's chosen ones? It is God that justifies-* The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are "God's elect". The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, "mine elect, in whom my soul delights" (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "mine elect" clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow "in" the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are "God's elect"? If we are baptized into Christ, "mine elect", then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for "It is God that justifies".

8:34 *Who is he that condemns?*- There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make

the connection to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is the dead ringer of every one of us. The legal allusion is definitely to the judge, the one who will pass sentence. The question is "Who is?" rather than "Where is?". It's not that God, the judge of all, abdicates His judgment throne and ceases to tell right from wrong. There is an integrity in His judgment. The answer of course is that it is *God* who is the One who passes sentence. The rest of the verse goes on to speak of the Lord Jesus as our intercessor at His right hand. The point is, that God the righteous judge is going to take notice of the pleadings of His Son, whom He gave to die for our forgiveness and redemption. The idea of condemning must be seen in the context of Rom. 8:3, where we have just read that it is sin which is condemned by God, and He has already condemned it, in the crucified flesh of the Lord Jesus. "Sin" is condemned; we are not condemned. The point clearly is that it is our status "in Christ" and our disassociation from "sin", as strongly as Paul disassociated himself from "sin" in Rom. 7:15-23, which is the means by which we are saved, and not only saved but declared right.

*It is Christ Jesus that died, yes rather, that was raised from the dead-* This is said in the context of the comment that it is God who judges. It's not that the death and resurrection of a person of itself can change the mind of God or lead Him to not condemn us, in some mystical way. We are saved by the Lord's death and resurrection in that we can identify with it by baptism into His death and resurrection, and be counted as Christ, the Son of God. It is this which affects how God judges us. There seems to be a link made between the Lord's death and the judgment in Rom. 8:34: "Who is he that judgeth / condemneth? It is Christ that died...", as if *He* and His death are the ultimate judgment. The Old Testament idea of judgment was that in it, the Lord speaks, roars and cries, and there is an earthquake and eclipse of the sun (Joel 3:16; Am. 1:2; Jer. 25:30; Ps. 46:7; Rev. 10:3). Yet all these things are associated with the Lord's death.

*Who is [moreover] at the right hand of God-* Note the double use of the idea of "moreover". Paul is building up his logic towards the final crescendo- that we are in fact saved from condemnation in Christ. This is classic Paul. The death of God's Son for us would be enough to persuade God the Judge of all. But further, He rose again; and we who are in Him are counted likewise to have died and risen again, as Paul has laboured in Romans 6. So, for sure we are saved. But yet further, God's risen Son is now at His right hand, pleading for us! I suggest that the sequence here of "Died, rose again, alive at God's right hand interceding for us" is somehow repeated in Rom. 14:9: "Christ both died and rose and revived". In this case the "revived" would be a reference to the fact that He not only resurrected but is alive and active for us in mediation. In this sense, perhaps, "we are saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10). Being at the right hand was the position of favour, of honour. The point in this context is that if God so deeply respects His Son- and the theme of the Father's genuine respect of His Son is a beautiful theme in Scripture- then surely He will be very open to the Son's work for us. The suggestion has been made that the Greek for "right hand" is from the root word "to receive", and in this verse the idea that Christ stands to receive is balanced with the comment that from that position He makes intercession or request for us His people. He is in the supreme place to receive- and He asks from there for us to be counted as in Him.

*Who also makes intercession for us-* See on Rom. 8:27. We should not think that whenever we sin, we have an intercessor in Heaven who can gain forgiveness for us and set us back

right with God. The whole argument in Romans is that we are “in Christ” by status and are counted as Him; all that is true of Him becomes true for us. It is not that we are in Christ one moment and then out of Him the next, to be brought back into our “in Christ” status by His intercession. For if this were the case, the implication would be that we were perfect when we were ‘being good’; and if one happened to die at a point of weakness, then we would be eternally damned. God’s way is more profound. We are counted permanently as “in Christ” by status, and in this sense we have already been redeemed, and are simply awaiting the physical articulation of that redemption at the Lord’s return. The imagery of the Lord Jesus as a priest offering Heavenly sacrifices is metaphor, and as such is limited. The position between Him today, His work for us, and the work of the Mosaic priests is not completely analogous. We do not need a Levitical priesthood because the Lord Jesus has replaced that, but this is not to say that He is exactly for us what the Levitical priests were for sinful Israel. For what, then, does the Lord Jesus make intercession? I suggested under Rom. 8:27 that the intercession involves a transference of our mind, our spirit, to that of the Lord Jesus as He sits before God. In this sense the intercession of the Lord Jesus for us personally has an eternal quality to it (Heb. 7:25) in that our spirit, the essence of who we are, continues in the mind of the Lord Jesus even after we die; just as the memory or spirit of those we love lives on within us after their falling asleep. We are eternally positioned before God, thanks to the intercession of the Lord Jesus. However, it cannot be denied that the Greek for “intercession” does indeed carry the idea of obtaining something. It is used here in the very context of stating that the intercession is made at the “right hand” of God, the place of receiving (see commentary above). Paul uses a related word to that translated “intercession” in saying at another judgment seat that he has “obtained help from God” (Acts 26:22). Perhaps he said that fully aware that he in fact had a Heavenly intercessor, a true counsel for the defence. The same word for “obtain” which is part of that translated “intercessor” occurs in the context of our obtaining salvation and resurrection to life (2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 11:35). It is this which has been interceded for and obtained for us by the Lord Jesus, seated as He is at the right hand, the place of receiving, of the Judge of all. In this sense His intercession has that eternal quality to it which we earlier observed (Heb. 7:25). And yet even this idea, that the intercession is for our salvation, still seems to be a too simplistic summary of what Paul really has in mind here. The Lord’s intercession for Stephen in his time of dying was surely not simply for Stephen’s salvation. Rather it seems to involve a representation of our spirit, our deepest essence of thought, feeling, personality and life situation, before the Father; intercession for our salvation; and also for other things which are on the Lord’s agenda for us, and which we in this life may always be ignorant of.

The pregnant phrase *huper hemon* may mean simply “for us”, but *huper* could suggest the idea of over and above, beyond us, more than us. In this case, there would be connection with the thought recently expressed by Paul that although we know not how to pray for as we ought, the Lord Jesus as “the Lord the Spirit” makes intercession for us, beyond what we can verbalize. And of course the idea would freely connect with Eph. 3:20, where Paul exalts that the Lord Jesus can do “exceeding [Gk. *huper*] abundantly above [Gk. *huper* again- the sense of ‘beyond’ is very strong here in the Greek] all we ask or think, through the power that works in us”. The wonder of it all will literally take us eternity to appreciate. Our innermost desire is for salvation, to serve God, to be as the Lord Jesus, to achieve His glory, both in our own characters and in all of creation. This, yet again, is the significance of Rom. 7:15-23, that despite our failings and weakness, these are indeed our core desires. And it is this spirit of ours which is transferred to the Lord Jesus and understood by the Father and Judge of all.



And in response to those desires, even now, there is a power working within us to do and be for us, to work in and for us, things beyond our wildest dreams and spiritual fantasies.

Rom. 8:34,35 suggest that the love of Christ, from which we cannot be separated, is manifested to us through His intercessions for us. He doesn't offer our prayers to God all the time; He is our intercessor in the sense that He is always there as our representative, and on this basis we have acceptability with God, as we are in Him. This is proof enough that intercession is not equal to merely translating our prayers into a language God understands. We offer our prayers ourselves to God, as men have ever done. We are, in this sense, our own priesthood. We offer ourselves to God (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5). He Himself made only one offering of Himself; He does not offer Himself again. If He were on earth, He would not be a priest. It is the fact we are in Him that makes our offerings acceptable. Many passages concerning mediation refer to the Lord's mediation of the new covenant through the atonement God achieved through Him. None of them associate His mediation with the offering of our prayers to God. Indeed, several passages suggest that the actual fact of the exalted Lord now being in heavenly places, and we being in Him, is in fact the intercession necessary to bring about our redemption- rather than His translating, as it were, of our actual words (Rom. 7:25; 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1). The references to intercession likewise never suggest that Christ intercedes in the sense of offering our prayers to God. "Intercession" can be read as another way of describing prayer; this is how the term is invariably used (Jer. 7:16; 27:18; Rom. 11:2; 1 Tim. 2:1). Thus when Jeremiah is told not to intercede for Israel, this meant he was not to pray for them; it does not imply that he was acting as a priest to offer Israel's prayers to God. Nowhere in the Bible is the idea floated that a man can offer another man's prayers to God and thereby make them acceptable. The Greek for "intercession" essentially means to meet a person; prayer / intercession is a meeting with God. There is evidently nothing morally impossible about a man having direct contact with God in prayer without any priest or 'mediator'; the Old Testament abounds with such examples. The fact we are called upon to make intercession for others is surely conclusive proof that "intercession" means prayer, not relaying the words of another to God (1 Tim. 2:1). This meaning of intercession needs to be borne in mind when we consider its occurrences in Rom. 8. There we are taught that we know not what to pray for as we ought; the Lord Jesus makes intercession for us- i.e. He prays for us- not with words, i.e. not transferring our human words into God's language, not shuttling to and from between us and God as it were, but with His own groanings of the spirit. We don't know how to pray, so Christ prays (intercedes, in the language of Rom. 8) for us.

8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*- The "who?" may be a reference to God, because the "who?" of Rom. 8:33,34 was God. But the point there as here was that seeing God is the only One who can do such things, then we can rest assured that they will not happen. Because God, for the sake of His Son, will not do these things. We are "in Christ" by status, and what happened at baptism is not breakable by anything human. We cannot be separated from Him by all the calamities listed in this verse, an 8:36 goes on to remind us that this cannot happen because we are counted as the slaughtered Lamb, the Lord Jesus. The Greek for "separate" is usually used about divorce (1 Cor. 7:10,11,15; Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9). Only if we chose to as it were divorce from Christ can we be separated from Him. Only we can make that choice- no human situation in our lives is to be interpreted as meaning that Christ has withdrawn His love from us. Reading the list of awful tribulations which follows, we are to understand that the love of Christ does not, therefore, guarantee that we will not

suffer in this life. Indeed, as Rom. 8:36 will go on to show, we as “in Christ” must be prepared to be slain with Him all the day long, so as to live with Him. “The love of Christ” frequently refers to His death for us. The fact He died for us should be enough to persuade us that having loved us so much, no human tribulation could possibly be interpreted to mean that He in fact doesn’t love us. And yet people stumble from their faith in Christ because of tribulation, as the parable of the sower makes clear. Why this happens is partly because they have failed to be focused daily upon the cross- that He there, then, did that *for me* today. This, then, is our challenge- to view all of life’s tragedies, pain and unfairness through the lens of the simple fact that the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me, and I as a man or woman in Him shall therefore live eternally.

*Shall tribulation-* See on Rom. 5:3; 8:18. The word used in the parable of the sower and also about the tribulations of the last days before Christ returns (Mt. 13:21; 24:9,21). Only through such tribulations shall we enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). Significantly, Paul uses the word earlier in Romans, in speaking of the tribulation which shall come upon the rejected at the last day (Rom. 2:9). It’s either tribulation then, or now. In this sense we can glory in tribulation, knowing it is the guarantee that we are really in Christ (Rom. 5:3). Hence in the practical part of Romans we are exhorted to patiently endure tribulation (Rom. 12:12).

*Or anguish-* Again, the same word used in Rom. 2:9 [“anguish”] about the distress of the rejected in the last day. We must experience it now, or then. Paul uses this word again in 2 Cor. 12:10, along with words similar in meaning to the list here in Rom. 8:35, in saying that we experience distresses “for Christ’s sake”, for the sake of the fact we are in Him and must have a part in His sufferings.

*Or persecution-* The same word is used in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:21), to which Paul seems to be making allusion in Rom. 8:35. Many of the words in this list are appropriate to Paul’s personal sufferings for the sake of His being “in Christ”. He too was persecuted (Acts 13:50; 2 Tim. 3:11), distressed etc. The list of his sufferings in 2 Cor. 12:10 includes this word and others in the list here. Again and again, Paul writes as if talking to himself, and as such sets himself up as the parade example of what he means.

*Or famine-* Lack of food. Again, this word is in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:27. Perhaps Paul has specific reference to the famine which there was in the first century which affected the believers (Acts 11:28). And again, famine is to be one of the latter day tribulations (Mt. 24:7).

*Or nakedness-* Lack of clothing. Again, this word is in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:27.

*Or peril-* This word is only used elsewhere in the list of Paul’s own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:26.

*Or sword-* Note that Paul envisaged his readership as likely to suffer from the sword. And yet in Rom. 13:4 he speaks of the first century authorities as using the sword to execute God’s will against those who do wrong. This would lead us to interpret Rom. 13:4 as having specific and limited reference in time and space, perhaps only to the Rome ecclesia at a certain point in time and in some aspects of justice. Nothing, whatever, can separate us from

the love of Christ towards us in His death (Rom. 8:35). His cross is therefore the constant rallying point of our faith, in whatever difficulty we live through. The resolve and strength we so need in our spiritual path can come only through a personal contemplation of the cross.

This list is to be understood in the context of Rom. 8:36, that we are counted as in Christ, the slaughtered lamb, and therefore all His sufferings we expect to be somehow articulated in our own lives, just as His resurrection life also shall be. In the first century context, this list was the kind of ‘par for the course’ which anyone could expect who had signed up to be counted as “in Christ”. Twenty centuries later, the list may be more subtle, but nonetheless as painful. For the cross of Christ is the cross of Christ. The forms in which we share it may vary over history and geography, but the essence shall remain. Shall divorce, betrayal, cancer, false accusation- separate *us* from His love? They should not, but rather be seen as a very real sharing in His death and sufferings, from which we shall just as surely arise into new and eternal life. There are many connections between Romans the visions of Revelation. The whole court scene presented here in Romans 8, whereby the accuser of Christ’s brethren is now no longer in court, he and his case ‘thrown out of court’, is naturally reminiscent of the scene in Revelation 12. There, the accusers of Christ’s brethren are likened to the great Satan, the personified power of sin in its political manifestation, and this is also thrown out of ‘heaven’, out of the Heavenly court / throne room. The fact that *sin* has been conquered by Christ and ‘thrown out’ is therefore the guarantee that whatever oppressive sinful powers are now in authority, they in their turn will likewise be cast out. It’s only a matter of time now- because sin in its essence has been cast out already. This explains the seamless way in which Paul now moves on from speaking of how the power sin has been nullified to talking of how therefore and thereby, all human opposition to God’s people is now ultimately powerless.

8:36 *Even as it is written: For your sake we are killed all the day long, we were deemed sheep for the slaughter*— See on Rom. 8:13. The key word in this verse is “deemed / accounted”. Because we are counted as Christ, the lamb slain (and the allusion here is definitely to Isaiah 53), then we should not be phased by our experience of His cross in this life. Indeed we should expect it. We cannot look passively at the cross. It must change how we see ourselves. It must radically affect our self-perception and self understanding. For we are in Him. It was us who hung with Him there, and who hang with Him still in the tribulations of life. For we are to account / impute ourselves as the sheep for the slaughter, i.e. the Lord Jesus, for whose sake we are killed all the day long in the sharing of His sufferings (Rom. 8:36); with Paul, we “die daily”, because we are in Christ. And if we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). To see ourselves as in Christ, to have such a positive view of ourselves, that the essential ‘me’ is actually the sinless Son of God, is almost asking too much of men and women living with all the dysfunction and low self-worth that seems part of the human condition.

8:37 *No*- Paul seems again to be interpreting his readers’ response. ‘Surely it can’t be right that if we are in Christ, then we will suffer so much? Aren’t all these terrible tribulations the sign that we are rejected by God rather than accepted by Him?’. And Paul answers that “No!”- in fact the way that we lose in this life is a sign that we have won, and more than won- we have become “more than conquerors”. Truly “I feel like I win when I lose” can become our credo in spiritual life.

*In all these things-* Every time they happen to us, they are the proof that we have therefore already won, in the very thing wherein it seems we have ‘lost’. The sense here is very much what we meet in the sermon on the mount- that we are to rejoice when we are persecuted, attacked and abused, because in that moment our reward is very great in Heaven.

*We are more than conquerors-* See on Rom. 8:34 “for us”. Again the word *hyper* is used; there is the idea of being over and above conquerors. There is something superlative about the great salvation which there is in Christ. We don’t just scrape in to God’s Kingdom and sit there in humble gratitude for eternity thinking how blessed / lucky we were. Not at all. We are in Christ, and all that is true of Him is now and shall eternally be true of us. We are crowned as conquerors- and “more than [*hyper*] conquerors”. There’s something ‘hyper’ about the nature and quality of our salvation. It is all so hyper abundantly above all we ask or think. And it begins now, and in this sense we have some sense, at least a gasp from a great distance, of the ‘hyper’ nature of it all. Paul surely has in mind how the Lord had comforted His people that “I have overcome [s.w. ‘conquer’] the world” (Jn. 16:33). We are counted not only as overcomers just as Jesus was; but hyper-conquerors, hyper-overcomers. John alludes to this passage in his Gospel record when he comments in his letters that *we* have overcome the world because of our belief into Jesus (1 Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4,5). Clearly John like Paul perceived the believer into Christ [involving baptism into Him] as having the same status as Christ; if He has overcome, so have we. There is also a legal connotation to the word translated “conquerors”. The same word has been used in Rom. 3:4 to describe how God ‘overcomes’ when He is put in the dock and judged by human disbeliefs in His declared plan of salvation. Paul is now drawing his treatise to a conclusion. He began with us as sinners in the dock, accused by our own sins. He has argued that we have been declared right because we are in Christ; not simply ‘let off’, but declared right. We have won the case; the whole thing has been turned around. We the condemned are now the justified, we leave the courtroom as conquerors, as having legally overcome when we were judged; all, of course, because we are in Christ. We are right now more than conquerors through Christ (Rom. 8:37); and yet to he who overcomes [s.w. conquers] the Kingdom shall be given (Rev. 3:21). This doesn’t mean we can sit back and do nothing. And so Paul goes on to exhort us not to be overcome [s.w. conquered] of evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who (or what) *can* be against us?”. Paul caught the gloriously positive spirit of all this, and reflected it in his fondness for words with the *hyper-* prefix (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 7:4; Phil. 2:9; 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:10; 4:6; 5:13; 2 Thess. 1:3). God is not passively waiting for us to act, indifferently offering us the possible futures of salvation or condemnation according to our deeds. He earnestly desires our salvation, He wills and wishes us into the upward spiral of relationship with Him; He has given us spiritual potential and strength.

*Through Him that loved us-* The love of Christ is often specifically related to His death for us on the cross. We can only become “in Him” because He was so fully our representative, including in death itself. All this wonderful schema of salvation and justification of sinners, counting them as if they are Christ, could only come true because of His death. This was and is the central point of all things; it is not simply so that Christ as a person is the central means by which all was made possible, but more specifically it was His love unto death which was and is that central point.

8:38 *For I am persuaded*- Just as we also need lengthy persuasion as to the ultimate truth that we are saved in Christ, so Paul too had gone through this process of persuasion. The same word is often used to describe how Paul “persuaded” people to continue trusting in God’s grace rather than in their own works (Acts 13:43; 18:4; 19:26; 26:28; 28:23; 2 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 1:10)- indeed, persuading people seems to have been a hallmark of Paul’s preaching. Yet Paul persuaded others on the basis of how he himself had come to be persuaded; and this will be the characteristic of any truly effective preacher of the Gospel.

*That neither death nor life*- In Rom. 8:35 Paul has argued that no suffering nor disaster in our lives can separate us from “the love of Christ”. Now he starts to talk in more cosmic terms, leading up to the same conclusion- that we cannot be separated or divorced from God’s love for us which is “in Christ”. For those “in Christ”, nothing can stand in the way or change that status; only we can decide to file for divorce / separation. If we die- we shall be raised again. More tellingly, however, we may fear that “life” can separate us from God’s love; Paul may refer to ‘the tribulations of life’, but he may also have in view the way we can mess up in our lives. But not even that can separate us from God’s love for those who are “in Christ”. In what sense could *life* separate us from God’s love? Surely only in the sense of sins committed in human life. Yet even these cannot separate us from the love of God which is so ready and eager to forgive us. This is the extent of grace; that not even sin, which on one hand separate from God, can actually separate us from the love of God in Christ. We are often plagued by a desire to separate out the things for which we are justly suffering, and things in which we are innocent victims. We struggle over whether our cancer or her depression is our fault, or whether we only got into unhealthy behaviours as a result of others' stressing us... etc. This struggle to understand the balance between personal guilt and being a victim of circumstance or other people makes it hard for some people to free themselves from guilt. Seeking to understand is especially acute when we face death, suffering, tragedy, or experience broken relationships. How much was I to blame? In how much was I merely a victim? My determined conclusion is that it is impossible, at least by any intellectual process, to separate out that suffering for which we are personally guilty, and that suffering which we are merely victims of. The cross of Jesus was not only to remove personal guilt through forgiveness; all our human sufferings and sicknesses were laid upon Him there. Our burdens, both of our own guilt and those which are laid upon us by life or other people, are and were carried by Him who is our total saviour.

*Nor Angels, nor principalities... powers*- I have argued elsewhere that Paul and the New Testament do not support the Jewish ideas of sinful Angels operating in various hierarchies and dimensions. Indeed, I have argued in *The Real Devil* that Paul consciously deconstructs these ideas. But for now Paul is prepared to allude to them, as if to say ‘Whatever you fear, whatever you believe is out there, however you believe it is in the cosmos- the wildest fears of your worst nightmares about the spirit world are not going to get in the way of God’s love for those in Christ’.

*Nor things present nor things to come, nor powers*- Whatever present crises you face, and whatever you may yet face. Knowing we are secured in Christ enables us not to fear the future. For even death itself, and all that may lead up to it, emotionally or physically, are

unable to affect our “in Christ” status. “Things to come” may refer to the expected latter day tribulation.

8:39 Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ, as revealed in the cross (Rom. 8:39). The idea of the love of Christ nearly always refers to the cross. And yet the same word occurs in Heb. 7:26, to remind us that the Son of God is “separate from sinners”. Here again is the paradox. We are sinners. And yet we cannot be separated from He who is personally separate from sinners. Again, the conviction of guilt is required so that we can know His saving grace. But it’s possible to understand this contradiction as just that- a contradiction. The Lord Jesus is separate from sinners; but nothing shall separate *us* from Him, although we are sinners. This can be seen as yet another of the many irreconcilable paradoxes which express the purity of God’s grace. We have elsewhere commented upon the way that God angrily speaks of permanently rejecting His people, and yet says in the same breath almost that He has not and will never reject them, because of His tender love for them.

*Nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord-* “Height” and “depth” may refer to creations supposed to exist beneath the earth or above the heavens. But no created thing can obstruct God’s feelings for us in Christ. Because we are human we tend to view life in a materialistic way; what is visible and concrete assumes huge importance for us. But no created thing can get in the way of God’s love for us- perhaps, the implication being, because this God who so loves us is Himself the creator of all things. Therefore no created thing, in any dimension, in this world nor any other world or dimension, can affect His feelings for us.

In exalting about the wonderful power of God in human life through Christ, Paul exalts that “neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come: nor height (Gk. *hypsoma* – the highest point a star reaches) nor depth (Gk. *bathos* – the abyss from which a star rises), nor any other creature, are able to separate us from the love of God” (Rom. 8:38,39). “The position of the stars was supposed to affect human destinies. ‘Whatever the stars may be supposed to do’, Paul says, ‘they cannot separate us from God’s love’” (5). Likewise by referring to “any other creature”, Paul seems to be saying that there is no reality, nor even any supposed reality in heaven and earth, that can separate us from God’s loving power. It seems to me, given the facts that Paul doesn’t teach the existence of a personal Satan / demons and so often deconstructs the common ideas about them, that Paul is effectively saying here: ‘Even if you think these things exist, well they are of utterly no power and consequence given the extraordinary and ultimate nature of God’s power’. And so the argument is wrapped up. God’s love for us who are “in Christ” is part and parcel of His love for Christ Himself, His dearly beloved Son. We will be saved, because we are in Christ. And totally nothing and nobody, not even our own humanity and failure, can separate us from Him and His love.

## Notes

- (1) F.F. Bruce, *Paul And Jesus* (London: S.P.C.K., 1977) p. 78.
- (2) Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 79.
- (3) Vincent Branick, “The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God”, *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 47 (1985) p. 250.
- (4) Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement*

*Metaphors* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).  
(5) A.M. Hunter, *Romans* (London: S.C.M., 1981) p. 87.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 9

9:1 As explained in the introduction to this commentary, Romans is very thematic. The first eight chapters outline a theology of grace, intended to bind together the Jewish and Gentile elements within the membership of the church at Rome. Chapters 9-11 present God's dealings with Israel as the parade example of His grace and way of working. Chapters 12-16 then draw on the preceding chapters in appealing for practical behaviour motivated by the theology there outlined.

*I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit-* Paul is about to make a momentous personal statement in :2 and :3, reflecting a level of love which is hard to believe a man could reach- being prepared to offer his eternity for the sake of Israel. He says that his own conscience is corroborated by the Holy Spirit, that this is indeed how he feels. For in 1 Cor. 4:4 he states that whether or not our conscience is clear in a matter is not of ultimate importance; it is the Lord's judgment of our position which is all important, as human awareness of internal conscience can be faulty. I have noted on 2 Cor. 5:11 and elsewhere that Paul felt that the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers ought to influence the conscience. And here he states under Divine inspiration that what he is now writing is indeed true and confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

9:2 *That I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart-* This is the spirit of Jeremiah, who likewise suffered at the hands of a Gospel-resistant Israel, but loved them to tears. The rejection of the Gospel by others should not be met by indifference on our part. Any who have a real sense of God's glory and the tragedy of any man's rejection of the cross will feel likewise. Paul uses the same word for "sorrow" in writing of his pain at Corinth's rejection of the Gospel (2 Cor. 2:1,3), and we note that Paul may well have been writing to the Romans from Corinth. Paul had these feelings "in Christ" (:1) because he was manifesting the Lord's emotions towards Israel.

9:3 *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh-* One of the (many) agonies of Paul's soul was that he felt that his brethren did not appreciate the depth of love which he had for them. Israel certainly didn't; and he loved them to the same extent as Moses did, willing, at least in theory, to give his *eternal salvation* so that they might be saved (Rom. 9:3). The more (Gk. 'the more-and-more-abundantly') he loved Corinth, the less they realized his love, and the more they turned away from him (2 Cor. 2:4; 12:15); and he so earnestly wished (Gk.) that the believers in Colosse and Laodicea appreciated how much he spiritually cared for them (Col. 2:1). "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" was the spirit of Moses, in being willing to give his own physical and eternal life for the salvation of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32). Paul is here rising up to imitate Moses at perhaps his finest hour- willing, at least in principle, to give up his eternal life for the sake of Israel's salvation. The extent of Paul's love for natural Israel does not come out that strongly in the Acts and epistles; but this allusion to Moses says it all. The RVmg. renders Rom. 9:3: "I could pray...", more clearly alluding to Moses' prayer that the people might enter and he be rejected. Yet Paul perceived that God would not accept a substitute offering like that; and hence he says he *could* pray like this. In essence, he had risen to the same level. Likewise he wrote in 1 Thess. 2:8 RV that he was "well pleased [i.e. theoretically willing] to impart unto, you not the gospel of God only, but our own souls, because ye were dear unto us". He perceived the difference between mere imparting of the Gospel in preaching, and being willing to give ones' soul, ones salvation, because of a heart that bleeds for others. No wonder Paul was such a convincing preacher, with such love behind his words.



Paul was willing in theory to give up his salvation for them, even though he knew that in actual fact this is not the basis on which God works. He emphasizes that he is not using mere words: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not [note the double emphasis], my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1-3). The Holy Spirit confirmed that what he felt in his conscience for them was in fact valid; this really was the level of devotion Paul reached for a nation who systematically worked for his extermination, and even more painfully, for the infiltration and destruction of his lifetime's work. The Jewish infiltrators had indirectly had their effect on Corinth, who mocked and denigrated the Paul who would have laid down his life for them. And yet time and again he calls them his brethren, he sees them as an innocent Eve in Eden, about to be beguiled by the snake of the Jewish infiltrators; he sees them as a chaste virgin. But remember how they denigrated him, in the cruellest ways. Yet his love for them was surpassing. If indeed Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, his experience with the Corinthians prepared him for this momentous statement to the Romans about Israel.

*9:4 Who are Israelites, whose is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises-* We note that Israel were God's "adopted" son; not His only *begotten* Son. This would have been a sideways swipe at Jewish emphasis upon ethnicity as a basis for being God's children. All the glory, covenants etc. were given initially to Israel; which is why the tragedy of their rejection of the Christ who was the focal point of all these things was the more tragic. Paul is writing here not so much as to glorify Israel as to explain why he felt the deep sense of tragedy for them which he did as expressed in :3.

*9:5 Whose are the fathers and of whom is Christ, as concerning the flesh, who is over all. God be praised forever! Amen-* The praise of Christ as being so exceedingly "over all" was a swipe at the Jewish tendency to consider Messiah as inferior to the fathers such as Abraham and David. The Lord tackled the same mistaken view by reminding the Jews that David referred to Messiah as his "Lord" (Mk. 12:37); the "Son of David" was in fact David's Lord and master. "Of whom is Christ" is a clear statement that the Lord Jesus came 'out of' the Jewish fathers as the promised seed of men like Abraham and David. In no way can the idea of a personal pre-existence of Christ be supported Biblically, the evidence is all against it.

*9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel-* This is an allusion in terms of ideas, although not lexical items [words], to the grand encouragement of Is. 55:11 that God's word shall not return void but will accomplish His purpose, even if in different ways than those initially intended. God's word of salvation in Christ same to 'something' through the redefinition of Israel as those who accepted His grace in Christ. "For they are not all Israel that are of Israel" was a quotation from right wing Judaism in condemnation of their weaker brethren; but Paul is effectively saying that it is they who are condemned in these terms.

*9:7 Neither, because they are Abraham's seed are they all children, but: In Isaac shall your seed be called-* Physical descent from Abraham did not make anyone the true "children" of Abraham; because Ishmael also was the seed of Abraham, but was not his "child" in the sense that he did not walk according to the faith of Abraham in his future Messianic seed. That promise was fulfilled through Isaac. So within the statement "In Isaac shall your seed be called" there is the implication that the "seed" of Abraham is to be understood in two senses- referring to the literal children of Abraham, and secondly, specifically referring to the

Messiah. Abraham's true seed was therefore one man- the Lord Jesus. Only those "in Him" were the seed to which the promises had reference.

9:8 *That is: it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as the seed-* See on :7. Fleshly descent from Abraham did not make one a member of the seed of promise. That seed was one person- the Lord Jesus. And only identity with Him makes a person part of the promised seed. This connects with all Paul has written in chapters 1-8; that acceptability with God is on the basis of being in Christ and being thereby counted as Christ, who alone is the promised seed. Galatians 3 makes these points again in very clear language.

9:9 *For this is the word of promise: According to this season will I come and Sarah shall have a son-* The 'coming' of God was in the son of Abraham and Sarah; God 'came' in Christ supremely. In no way did the promised seed literally come down from some pre-existent state in Heaven; He too was conceived on this earth, and through Him God 'came' to His people.

9:10 *And not only so, but Rebecca also having conceived by one, by our father Isaac-* "Conceived by one" is hard to make sense of. Perhaps the idea is that Rebecca was Isaac's only wife. But the next verses speak of how out of two children, the choice of which one was to be the seed was made on the basis of predestination. Both Jacob and Esau had the same one father; but one was chosen and the other wasn't. Abraham had children by various women (Hagar, Keturah and Sarah at least); Isaac had children by only one woman. So there was no question about whether Esau and Jacob were in the right line, as it were. But the point was, a choice was made by predestination and calling.

9:11 *For the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him that calls-* As noted on :10, Paul is defining the 'seed' as being not according to fleshly descent [for both Esau and Jacob were from the same father and mother], but according to calling and predestination independent of the works they did. For the Genesis record frames Jacob as being inferior to Esau in his works. This historical interlude about Israel in Romans 9-11 is in exemplification of the theology outlined in chapters 1-8. There we have read that works do not save a person; it is by God's grace. And the obvious exemplification of grace is in the very existence of concepts like predestination and calling (Rom. 8:30). Struggle with these concepts as we may, the simple point is that salvation is not by works nor intellectual ability or good fortune to correctly understand the text of Scripture. This is what predestination implies. One is called and the other isn't, even when the works of one [Jacob] are not much to boast of, and the one who is not called [Esau] comes over in the record as a far nicer, more forgiving kind of guy than the one who was called.

9:12 *It was said to her: The elder shall serve the younger-* Esau is presented as the stronger of the two; but he was to serve Jacob. The calling was not of works nor of human strength. We note here that Paul apparently brushes by the blessing of Isaac to the intent that one day, Esau would rise above his brother Jacob and cast off the yoke of servanthood which the earlier statement of the Angel had required (Gen. 27:40). Whilst the record of those words is inspired, we have there an example of where a man spoke as he felt was required, and the content of his words was not inspired because it was at variance with God's own word. We can reflect further that Jacob and Rebecca did not believe the Angelic words of blessing, thinking they must make them come true through their own works- which resulted in the fair mess up of much of Jacob's life. The Angelic word was a word of grace that should have just

been accepted; no works could bring it to fulfilment. And this too is the exemplification of what Paul has written at such length in chapters 1-8.

9:13 *Even as it is written: Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*- The point has been fairly made that the Hebrew in Mal. 1:2,3 can mean that God loved Esau less, rather than "hated". But that possibility of meaning is not reflected in the quotation here; and Paul is unafraid to tweak Old Testament quotations in order to give the better sense. Perhaps he goes with the term "hated" in order to set us up to indignantly protest that something isn't write here. And he then proceeds to deal with that in the following verses, which teach that we ought to focus on the wonder of the fact that the unworthy Jacob has been loved, and we can share in that love by identification with the seed; and in any case, it is not for us to question God, but rather simply accept His grace. This is the answer to those who experience endless *angst* about the fate of those who have not heard. No answer is given. We are taught by the whole problem to praise God for the grace He does show to some, and learn our humility before Him in accepting those things which seem so deeply unfair. The context of Mal. 1:2,3 is God appealing to Judah to not refuse God's love towards them, seeing it has not been shown to all. And that challenge and appeal comes through to us in all our struggles concerning the morality of God.

9:14- see on Rom. 13:12.

*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!*- As noted on :13, the apparent hatred of God towards Esau is set up to test our response. To protest against it is to say that God is unrighteous, and this is a possibility we are not to even entertain. His predestination of one but not another, loving one and hating another, is in fact His righteousness. And again, Paul has written in chapters 1-8 of God's ultimate rightness in imputing His righteousness to us- when we do not deserve it. This problem is here placed before us from a different angle- God is 'right' and 'righteous' to love Jacob and hate Esau. Even if all within us cries out against such a position as being immoral and unfair- by our human standards. Likewise, His imputation of righteousness to the unrighteous seems immoral and unfair. But the whole glorious situation is set up to test our obedient acceptance of His grace.

9:15 *For He said to Moses: I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*- This quotation from Ex. 33:19 concerns the manifestation of the Yahweh Name. The fact God makes a sovereign choice to save some and not others is actually the most fundamental part of His very being as revealed to us. This whole concept of calling some and not others to salvation is presented in Romans 8 as the parade example of God's grace, and that such grace is the basis of salvation and not works. 'What happens to the rest?' is of course the question God foresees shall arise, and He carefully says nothing about it. Exactly because He wants us to focus upon His grace and accept that it is indeed beyond understanding and against all that we have known in any other aspect of human life and thinking.

9:16 *So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy*- God's statement that "I will have mercy" means that it is *His* will which saves men, and not the will of man ["him that wills"] and all the works done as an outflow of human will. His mercy is therefore operative on a level above human will / volition and works ['running']. It is God and not man who does the 'running' for our salvation.

9:17- see on Phil. 2:15.

*For the scripture says of Pharaoh-* When we read His word, we hear His voice. 1 Kings 13:21 speaks of us hearing "the mouth of God". Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord" (2 Chron. 36:12). His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Thus "Scripture" is put for "God" (Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8) and vice versa (Mt. 19:4,5). When we speak and preach God's word, we are relaying God's voice to men, and should make appropriate effort to deport ourselves as the ministers of His word and voice- not to mention diligently ensuring that our expression and exposition of His word is correct and not fanciful. We are to speak / preach "as it were oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11 Gk.). We are His voice to men in our preaching of His word.

*For this very purpose did I raise you up, that I might show in you My power, and that My Name might be published abroad in all the earth-* The question of those that are not called and who are hardened is presented from the perspective of God's purpose to save those whom He has called. The publishing of God's Name throughout all the earth is the Old Testament language of the Kingdom of God on earth (Dt. 28:10; 1 Kings 8:43; Ps. 66:4; 83:18; 102:15; Zech. 14:9) and is repeated in Rom. 15:9. The earlier quotation from Malachi in :13 goes on to explain that the loving of Jacob and hating of Esau will climax in all the Gentiles seeing God's Name in all the earth (Mal. 1:11). Somehow- and the process is as yet hidden from us- the saving of some and not saving of others shall result in God's Name being published throughout all the earth. This in a limited sense happened when Israel were redeemed from Egypt and Pharaoh was destroyed, but the final reality of it will be in the salvation of God's people at the time of the Kingdom of God on the whole earth.

9:18 *So then He has mercy on whom He wishes to, and hardens who He wishes-* The emphasis is upon the wishing or willing of God. The will of God is for our salvation- that is the repeated theme of the New Testament. There is another side to that will- in that He does not save all. Some He hardens. But the will of God is for *our* salvation, and the death of His Son to that end was the deepest articulation of that will (Heb. 10:7,9). That is the Biblical emphasis and we are out of step with God's will for us if we chafe against that with the pretensions of *our* will. The Bible revealed God's will as being opposed to human will; and our will is to doubt and walk away from the way His will operates. The question of 'What about the unsaved?' is purposefully built into human experience as an exercise for us in this regard.

In the same way as Pharaoh hardened his heart, so natural Israel have done (11:7). Those Jews who refused grace in Christ are therefore as Egypt and are not the true people of God, and will receive Egypt's condemnation. Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God also hardened his heart. And it is this latter aspect which is focused upon here, in exemplification of how the Spirit works on human hearts, as explained in chapter 8.

9:19 *Then you will say to me: Why does He still find fault? For who withstands His will?-* Seeing we are so often exhorted to do God's will, and we have freewill not to, it is apparent that indeed God's will can be withstood. The same word is used of Elymas and others resisting the Gospel (Acts 13:8; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:15) and Paul will go on to use the word in saying that some do indeed withstand God (Rom. 13:2). God does not "find fault" with those

whom His will forces to rebel against Him. But in :20 Paul doesn't make that perhaps obvious rejoinder; rather he says that it is not for us to question God.

It seems that Judaism was arguing that the Jews were chosen and therefore must be acceptable to God. But Paul deconstructs this by making several links with Job, whom he appears to read as initially having the same wrong attitudes as did the Jews:

### *Romans 9*

:19 "Thou (the Jews) wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault (with Pharaoh and the Jews)? For who hath resisted His will? The Jews were saying that it was God's pre-ordained purpose that they should be His people, therefore their behaviour was excusable.

:20 "O man, who art thou that disputest (AVmg.) with God"

:14 "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" . The context is that the Jews were saying that their Calvinistic view of predestination allowed them to sin yet still remain God's people.

### *Job*

"He is... mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself (NIV "resisted" ) against Him, and hath prospered?". Job's reasoning is similar to that of the Jews- effectively he too is asking why God is finding fault with him (9:4).

This is what Job desired to do: "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments... there the righteous might dispute with Him" (23:4-7 cp. 9:3).

By Job saying "It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself in God" because he is either predestined to salvation or not, Job provoked the comment from Elihu "Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity" (34:10). The link between this and Rom. 9:14 shows that Job had the same mentality as the Judaizers, and was thus also shown the blasphemous conclusion to which his reasoning led.

*9:20 No, O man; who are you to answer back to God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it: Why did you make me thus?*- See on :19. There are plenty of legitimate answers to the complaint that God is forcing people into sin and therefore He is being unreasonable. I suggest that Paul purposefully throws up an obviously illegitimate objection, to which we as readers are already formulating good answers before we reach :20. But our eager expectations that Paul will trounce such objections is purposefully disappointed by what we are to consider the even greater mega argument- that it is not for us to answer back to God. The allusion, as mentioned on :19, is to Job and his friends answering back to God when they should have fallen silent [well before they did]. That is the abiding impression we have at the end of the

book of Job- that Job has fallen silent, laying his hand upon his mouth, but he should have done this far earlier. And Paul asks us to do the same.

9:21 *Or has not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?*- The obvious Old Testament allusions are to Is. 29:16; 64:8 and Jer. 18. In all these passages, Judah considered that God had been unreasonable. They were not correct- the answer could so easily have been that they were in the situation they were in because of their sins. But as here in Romans 9, the answer instead is that they are but clay in the hands of the potter. It is God who has the "right" to use clay as He wishes. The whole humanist objection to this is that *we* have 'rights'. It is a humbling thing to learn that as God's children, our only 'right' is to an eternal grave; nor do we have any 'right to life'. All is of grace, of gift. In this age of obsession with 'our rights', it's so hard to accept God's perspective- that His will and right is supreme, and our personal focus should be more upon our own wrongs rather than our rights. "The same lump" repeats the teaching of :10, that from one couple came Jacob and Esau, and one was a vessel to honour and another to dishonour. And in any case, we are only being made into "vessels"- for the Father's use in His house. Paul surely wrote this with his eye on how he himself was a "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15 s.w.). Yet he had to exercise freewill to be part of that purpose and Divine intention. The same words are used in 1 Thess. 4:4 where Paul urges his converts to deport themselves appropriately for those who are vessels of honour by acting with "sanctification and honour". He uses the same words in appealing to Timothy to act likewise as a vessel of honour (2 Tim. 2:20,21). Divine choice is one thing, but nobody is being forced to be righteous. We are to respond to the grace of His calling. Paul has earlier taught the Romans that they are to seek for honour, and those who 'work good' shall indeed receive it (Rom. 2:7,10). Here in Romans 9 we are asked to understand that in the perspective of God having actually chosen us for that end- and He didn't choose everyone. The fact we were called to this end and others weren't should be accepted in gratitude, and responded to- rather than complaining about the philosophical issues arising from some others not having been called.

9:22 *And so what if God is willing to show His anger and to make His power known, enduring with longsuffering vessels of anger prepared for destruction*- The fact some will be destroyed at the last day can be seen from a positive viewpoint; it means that God is amazingly tolerant of them right now. Perhaps his tolerance is so long because he even seeks their repentance, as it seems He did with Pharaoh. Again, the existence of this class of unsaved, condemned persons is to highlight His grace towards us. It's rather like asking why there are so many uninhabited planets and life forms on earth which shall not be saved. It is to give backdrop to the wonder of the grace which has invited *us* to salvation in God's Kingdom. The showing of God's anger is balanced by His making of His power known. The same word translated 'make known' is found in :23- God will make known the riches of His glory to us who are saved. The showing of God's anger and long endurance of those He shall destroy is therefore in order to highlight and emphasize His power and grace made known to us.

9:23 *And that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy*- The existence of the vessels for destruction is in order to provide context for the glory of the vessels who receive mercy. "Make known" translates a word which means 'make to understand'. Then we shall understand- at the last day, when the riches of glory are realized upon the saved. Then we shall perceive how the whole thing worked out for *His* glory, and in great richness of that glory. In that day, we will learn by the condemnation of the wicked. The very existence of "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" is in order to "make known the

riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy". After the experience of Divine judgment, "ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem"; and yet these are exactly the words used to describe how God will be 'comforted' after the judgments (Ez. 5:13; 14:22). We will come to share God's perspective through our experience of the judgment process. It will teach us to be like Him, to see things from His viewpoint. As a result of it, the struggles we have over "why...?" not all are saved will be resolved.

*Which He beforehand prepared for glory-* Our place in God's Kingdom was "prepared" from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Heb. 11:16 s.w.), although it was the Lord's death which prepared the place for us (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). But it is up to us to accept it; places in that Kingdom were "prepared" for Israel but they declined the invitation (Mt. 22:4 s.w.). This is the tragedy- eternity is prepared for some who refuse it. The depth of the tragedy of itself urges us to do all we can to spread the Gospel and strengthen those who have responded.

9:24- see on 1 Thess. 4:7.

*Even us, whom He also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles?-* Again we note the connection with the earlier teaching about calling in Rom. 8:30, where the concept of calling is given as an example of how salvation is by grace. That calling pays no regard to ethnicity; for whoever hears the invitation is in that sense called to the Kingdom. Therefore it is not the case that only Jews were called; for the Gospel was being heard by non-Jews as well.

9:25 *As He said also in Hosea: I will call them My people, who were not My people; and she that was not beloved shall be called beloved-* The 'calling' here in Romans means 'calling to hear the Gospel'. The context of Hos. 2:23 is that Israel, like Hosea's faithless wife Gomer, were not God's people but would again be called "My people". But that 'calling' is through the calling of the Gospel in Christ. In fact Hos. 2:23 is alluding to the fact that Gomer had become pregnant with a child [indeed, children] by another man whilst married to Hosea, and Hosea had named the child Lo-Ammi, 'Not my people'. But as Hosea dreamed of adopting the child as fully his and accepting Gomer again, so God did for Israel. But as things were never really resolved between Hosea and Gomer, neither were they between God and Israel on a national sense. But Paul perceives that the desire to call a 'not My people' as 'My people' would be fulfilled through the calling of individuals of all ethnicities to be God's people. Hosea's plans for Gomer and Lo-Ammi were rooted in pure grace, stemming from deepest love. Likewise God will impute righteousness to those whom He calls, so that the not loved wife becomes the beloved wife, and the illegitimate children are counted as "My people". Here again we see connection to the preceding theological arguments about imputed righteousness in Romans 1-8. Israel shall again be counted as the beloved wife, and the illegitimate children counted as legitimate- for all who respond to the call.

9:26 *And it shall be, that in the place where it was said to them: You are not My people, there shall they be called children of the living God-* The illegitimate child of Gomer, Lo-Ammi ["not my people"] would be adopted by Hosea, through his imputing righteousness to his wayward family. It is tempting to interpret "the place" as Jerusalem. But there is no particular reason for thinking that there is some geographical reference in view. The quotation from Hos. 1:10 uses the Hebrew *maqom*, which often refers to the holy place, the temple. It is in the temple of God, which now refers to the church, that the new children of God are adopted and accepted.

9:27 *And Isaiah cried out concerning Israel*- Paul perceived through the Spirit that Isaiah *cried aloud* with passion the idea that although there were many people theoretically "of Israel" in that they were the seed of Abraham, only a remnant of them would be saved. And Paul implies that this holds true in our dispensation too (Is. 10:22 cp. Rom. 9:27). One can sense how much Paul felt the passion of God's word. It wasn't just black print on white paper to him. Thus he speaks of how "Esaias is very bold, and saith... Esaias also *crieth* concerning Israel..." (Rom. 9:27; 10:20). Paul had meditated deeply upon Isaiah's words, even to the point of considering the tone of voice in which he first spoke them. See on Acts 13:27.

*Even if the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is only the remnant that shall be saved*- Again we have the idea of two seeds of Abraham. Those who are indeed "as the sand of the sea", fulfilling the promise about the multiplication of Abraham's seed, are not thereby saved. Salvation is for the remnant; see on :6. Truly not all Israel are of Israel.

There may also be particular reference to the saving of Israel in the last days. The Isaiah quotation is from Is. 10:20-23, which says that in the context of the Assyrian invasion, "the remnant of Israel", those who survive it, will trust in the Lord alone and "in truth", i.e. in covenant relationship with Him. It seems that all others of natural Israel will perish in the latter day holocaust upon Israel. (as in Is. 4:2-4). This language of the remnant 'returning' unto the Lord is quoted here about the repentance of the Jewish people and their turning to Christ. Israel were intended to repent because of Sennacherib's invasion (Is. 37:31,32), and then "the consumption" of God's plan could have happened. But the prophecy has been reinterpreted with reference to Israel in the last days, repenting finally as the result of the latter day Assyrian invasion. Isaiah 10 speaks of how Israel's affliction by Assyria leads them to repentance; a "remnant shall return... unto the mighty God" (Is. 10:21)- and the "mighty God" has just been defined in Is. 9:6 as a title for the Lord Jesus. This will be a result of God using the Assyrian invader to "make a consumption... in the midst of all the land" of Israel (Is. 10:23). The "yoke" of Assyria "shall be destroyed because of the anointing" (Is. 10:27)- i.e. the coming of Christ, the anointed one, in response to the remnant returning unto Him.

9:28 *For the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short*- This seems to mean that God's word of salvation shall be fulfilled by the actual salvation of God's people at the last day. But the intended time period will be shortened- as a display of God's grace. This becomes apparent by comparing Rom. 9:28,29 with Matthew 24:

Matthew 24	Romans 9
v. 22 "For the elect's sake	The seed preserved by the Lord of hosts / Angels (:29)
Those days shall be shortened	v. 28 "He will finish the account (of Israel's sin), and cut it short in righteousness: because a short(ened) work will the Lord make upon all the earth (land)"
...[or else] there should no flesh be saved"	v. 29 "as Sodom"

Romans 9 is quoting from Is. 28:22, which is about "a consumption, even determined upon the whole land... from the Lord God of hosts (Angels)". Thus the Angels planned to destroy



Israel even more terribly than they did in AD70, but the "determined" "days" of "consumption" were "shortened" because the Angels- other ones apart from the destroying Angels?- had preserved a faithful seed or remnant, which is the theme of the section of Romans where the quotation from Is. 28 occurs. And there must be marked similarities in the last days too. "The remnant" of Israel will be saved, those who believe in Jesus, "For the Lord will execute his word upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short... as Isaiah hath said before, Except the Lord of sabaoth had left us a seed [i.e. the remnant] we had become as Sodom" (Rom. 9:28,29 RV). This associates the shortening of the last days with the salvation of the Jewish remnant. Paul is surely expanding the Lord's own words, that the days will be shortened "for the elect's sake". And that "elect", according to Paul's inspired exposition, are the Jews who repent and accept Jesus in the last days. Quite simply, the quicker we get the remnant of Israel to repent, the quicker the Lord will be back. The bigger message, in the context, is that the shortening of intended time periods is another example of the operation of grace in bringing about final salvation.

9:29 *And, as Isaiah has said before: Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had become as Sodom and had been made like Gomorrah-* Paul makes the point that for the sake of the tiny group of Jews who did still hold and practice the truth, Israel would not suffer the judgments of Sodom in totality (Rom. 9:29 cp. Is. 1:9). This would indicate that there will also be a latter day Jewish remnant which will stop the faithless Israel of today receiving the judgment of permanent destruction. But in the context of Romans, the point is that the remnant themselves are "left" as such; it is God's grace which preserves them faithful and acceptable. Not human works. God "left" a remnant of faithful believers in apostate Israel. Whilst their faithfulness was obviously a result of their own spiritual effort, God 'leaving' them from apostasy suggests that He was also active in preserving them from it too. The record does not speak of them saving themselves from it. Is. 1:10 goes on to state that in fact, Judah *are* as Sodom and Gomorrah: "Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!". But by grace, the remnant are "left" by Him so that they are *not* treated as Sodom and Gomorrah. This is again a great example of how righteousness is imputed to people by grace, and how the grace / gift of the Spirit works to keep the saved abiding faithful. This is why Rom. 8 speaks so much of the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of believers; this is why the remnant are "left", maintained in faith, so that although they are as Sodom (Is. 1:10), they are not seen as Sodom (Is. 1:9).

9:30 *What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith-* The whole situation with Jews and Gentiles is being presented here as an exemplification of how salvation is by grace. Verse 31 speaks of following after "a law of righteousness", so here we need to read that in too- the Gentiles "followed not after [a law of] righteousness". Gentiles who were ignorant or disinterested in the Law of Moses which was holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12 s.w.) end up righteous- because that righteousness is imputed to them by faith in Christ whereby they are counted as Him.

9:31 *But Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law-* In contrast to the Gentiles who believed in Christ, Israel did not obtain righteousness before God through the law of Moses. They did not arrive at the righteousness of faith, because the Mosaic law offered no righteousness on the basis of it being imputed by faith. Instead, there had to be obedience. And we are too weak to attain total obedience to it.

9:32 *Therefore because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works, they stumbled at the stone of stumbling-* Attaining righteousness by attempted obedience to a set of laws requires no faith. And if the game is simply obedience to rules, then there is no real need for the Lord Jesus and the wonderful offer of being counted as Him, if we believe into Him. And thus He becomes a stone of stumbling.

9:33 *Even as it is written: Look, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence-* This uses the same Greek words as found in Rom. 14:13, where we are exhorted not to lay [s.w.] a stumblingstone [s.w.] nor rock of offence [AV "occasion to fall"] in our brother's path. What God does isn't necessarily a pattern for us; we are not, e.g., to use war or murder people in the way He has done at some times. Christ is the stumblingstone to all those who seek justification by works- their trust in works means that they don't perceive the need for Him, and so the whole idea of salvation by grace through being in Him becomes a stumblingstone for them. What this means for us is that we aren't to demand salvation by works from our brethren [e.g. from demanding dietary obedience from our brethren, which is the context of 14:13].

*And he that believes in him shall not be put to shame-* The emphasis is upon 'believing'. It is faith which makes us unashamed- in that the "faith" is faith that really, God does impute righteousness to us because we are "in Christ".

## ROMANS CHAPTER 10

10:1- see on Jude 20.

*Brothers, my heart's desire and my supplication to God is for Israel, that they may be saved-* "Desire" is a word used only elsewhere about the desire or will of God. Paul was therefore sharing God's desire or passion for Israel. He was praying with his will aligned with that of God, who passionately wishes Israel's salvation, and has millennia of track record in seeking it. As noted on 9:1-3, that desire of Paul's was to the point of being theoretically willing to sacrifice his own salvation for theirs. This will / desire of God and Paul will finally come to reality, in that all Israel shall indeed be saved (11:26); but through a redefinition of who is Israel. For "all Israel" being saved must be integrated into the idea that most of Israel shall not be saved, but "a remnant shall be saved" (9:27). That remnant become "all Israel" in God's eyes.

The language of Israel being saved is used in the Old Testament concerning their Red Sea deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 14:30; Dt. 33:29). Paul thereby again identifies himself with Moses. But their salvation from Egypt was not their personal salvation; and the term is used again of Judah's salvation from Babylon, which again they did not make full use of. This perhaps is why Is. 45:17 says that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an *everlasting* salvation". By being in the Lord Jesus by baptism, in the name of salvation, they could find a salvation which was eternal- a clear reference to eternal life. Only through the ministry of "the Lord our righteousness", whereby God's righteousness is imputed to us through His Son, can Israel finally be saved (Jer. 23:6). Again, this is all the outworking of the theology of Romans 1-8 in the case of Israel.

10:2 *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge-* Bearing witness is legal language, of which Paul has made frequent usage in Romans 1-8. In the court of Divine judgment, it could be said in mitigation, as it were, that Israel had a zeal for God. But it was not according to knowledge, and the only knowledge worth anything is in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. The idea of *kata* knowledge is to be found again in Col. 3:10, where we read that through the activity of the Spirit, we are renewed in knowledge *kata* the mental image of the Lord Jesus. The tension is therefore between attempted legal obedience, and permitting the work of the Spirit. This is the tension which has been explored in chapter 8; accepting imputed righteousness and our inability to be justified by works means accepting the work of the Spirit to transform us in reality to that which we are now by status in Christ. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, where he had repeatedly argued the same; the Judaist influence in Corinth was not producing spirituality, because they were not making use of the gift of the Spirit in their hearts to transform them (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

10:3 *For being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God-* Their ignorance was not in that they were unaware of the alternative. They were, to translate the Greek literally, 'agnostic' to it, not committed to it, ignorant in the sense that they ignored it. As noted on :2, there is a tension between accepting the work of the Spirit, and on the other hand seeking justification by acts of legal obedience. 'Seeking to establish' continues the courtroom language of :2. They tried to make a case before God in the basis of their own righteousness in terms of obedience to laws. But they failed to make a case; in the terms of Romans 1-8, they stood before God condemned by their sin, with their defence in ruins. The only alternative was to subject themselves beneath God's grace and accept imputed righteousness. The same word is used of

our submission to Christ, who is the righteousness of God (Eph. 5:24). He has been given the power to subdue all things unto Himself [s.w.], but we must ourselves choose to make that submission. It is pride in our own puny obedience to a few laws which stops that totality of submission to Him which is required for us to be counted fully righteous.

10:4 *For Christ is the end of the law regarding righteousness to everyone that believes-* This could be simply saying that for the believer in imputed righteousness, the law is finished as a source of righteousness. We have been given all righteousness in Him, and so the Law is over as a source of righteousness; and this is why Christ ended the Law in His death. But *telos*, "end", suggests that Christ was the end point of the Law, and the believer in imputed righteousness believes this. If the Law were perfectly obeyed, it would lead to a man who died on the cross with a perfect character- the Lord Jesus. In this sense the Law was not simply a series of types pointing forward to Him; if it were fully obeyed, it would lead to who Jesus was in character and action.

The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". He taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17).

10:5 *For Moses writes, that the man that does the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby-* The quotation from Lev. 18:5 could mean that actually perfect obedience would lead to life eternal; but more likely it is simply a statement that the man who obeys all the laws would live "in it" [NEV "thereby"], referring to the righteousness of the law. He would have blessing in this life, and live this life in the righteousness of the law- and that was it, without any hope of ultimate salvation.

10:6 *But the righteousness which is of faith says thus: Do not say in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down)-* The quotation from Dt. 30:11-14 is somewhat doctored by Paul. The words in their original context don't seem to be saying what Paul interprets them as meaning; as elsewhere, Old Testament words and phrases are picked up and read in a totally different, Christ-centred light in the New Testament. Paul appears to be teaching that the descent of Christ from Heaven is fundamentally in terms of the action of His Spirit in the heart, which is the sanctification which arises from believing in imputed righteousness [as outlined in chapter 8]

10:7 *Or, Who shall descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)-* The Lord's resurrection enabled the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of the believers, which according to Romans 8 is all part of the wonderful process which follows believing completely in imputed righteousness.

10:8 *But what did it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. That is, the word of faith, which we preach-* The word of the simple Gospel- that if you believe in Christ

you shall be saved- was enabled by the Lord's resurrection and shall come to full term in His descent from Heaven at the last day (:6,7).

"The word of faith" can simply mean that the basic content of God's word is an appeal for faith in His Son. But it is thereby also true that the word of the Gospel leads to faith. The Lord foresaw in Jn. 17:20 that there would be those who would believe on Him "through their word" (i.e. the word taught by the disciples). Our word of preaching can bring others to faith. Our preaching leads to faith being created in the hearers. "The word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:8) is the word (Gospel) that leads to faith; and a man cannot believe without hearing the Gospel, and he will not hear it unless it is preached by a preacher. Paul summarises by saying that faith comes by hearing [the Gospel] and hearing by [the preaching of] the word of God (Rom. 10:8,14,17). Paul's point is that whoever believes will be saved (Rom. 9:33)- and therefore, we must preach to all, so that they might take advantage of this blessed opportunity. In his repetitious manner, Paul builds up the argument in this letter:

- Even under the law, Israel could believe God's word as preached by Moses and have righteousness imputed to them (10:5-8)
- We preach, in essence, the very same word (10:9,10)
- Isaiah said the same: that belief of his preaching would result in justification (10:11)
- We preach the same. Whoever believes in the Lord's saving Name by baptism will be saved (10:12,13)
- Therefore preach the word, for without your doing this, people can never believe it and therefore be saved (10:14,15)
- Israel had heard the word of the cross preached in the past, so just hearing the preacher will not automatically result in faith (10:16-21). Both preacher and hearer must be aware of this. Therefore there was a need for the preachers to turn to another wider audience, i.e. the Gentiles.

Note that this passage in Romans 10 reasons that men will only hear the Gospel if there is a preacher, and yet it also states that all men have heard the Gospel, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Psalm 19 that the message would go into all the earth. But later in the same epistle, Paul says that he preached because he wanted to take the Gospel to those "who have not heard" (15:21). There must be a connection within his thought with what he wrote in chapter 10, about all men hearing the Gospel through preaching. Surely he understood that the fulfilment of the prophecy that all men will hear the Gospel is purely dependent upon our freewill effort to preach to all men. This understanding inspired Paul to press ahead with his plans to expand Gospel work into Spain; and it should motivate us likewise.

Paul comments that truly Israel have already heard the essence of the Gospel we preach, in that "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:8). He quotes here from Dt. 30:12: "For this command [to be obedient- or, as Paul interprets it, the word of the Gospel]... is it not far from thee [cp. how God is "not far" from anybody, Acts 17:27]. It is not in heaven above, that thou shouldest say, Who will ascend for us into heaven, and bring it to us, that we may *hear and do it*?" (Dt. 30:12 LXX). As Moses spoke these words on the last day of his life, he was at the foot of Nebo, which he ascended for his final meeting with God. He is surely alluding to the way in which he had 'ascended to heaven' before in ascending to God on Sinai, fulfilling Israel's wish that he should bring God's word to them rather than God Himself speak with them. He had returned bringing God's word to them, to which they had agreed they would "hear and do". Earlier, in Dt. 5:27, Moses had reminded the people how they had said: "Go thou near,

and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will *hear it, and do it*". Now he is telling them that actually the word he had brought to them needn't have been brought to them as in essence it was within their hearts. It is for exactly this reason that Paul could reason elsewhere in Romans that the Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the Law, although they don't know the letter of the Law. And the same principle is found in 1 Thess. 4:9: "As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves [i.e. from within yourselves?] are taught of God to love one another". This is rather like how the Gentiles were not 'written unto' and yet they knew from their conscience the essential spirit of the Mosaic Law.

10:9 *Because if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved-* Being saved is as simple as that. It is belief and not legal obedience which is required.

Confessing Christ before men applies to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10). Rom. 10:9,10 stresses that belief *and* confession are necessary for salvation. This may be one of the many links between Romans and John's gospel, in that Jn. 12:42 speaks of those who believed but wouldn't confess. Confession, a public showing forth of our belief, is vital if we are to be saved. It's perhaps worth noting that baptisms tend often to be attended largely by believers, and be performed indoors, e.g. in a bath at someone's home, or a church hall. It's quite possible to learn the Gospel, be baptized- and nobody out in this world ever know. It's down to us to ensure this isn't true in our case.

I have wondered, and it's no more than me wondering, whether it could be that Rom. 10:9,13; Acts 22:16 and the other references to calling on the name of the Lord at baptism imply that the candidate for baptism made the statement "Jesus is Lord!" after their confession of faith or just before their immersion, and then they shouted the word "Abba! Father!" as they came out of the water, indicating their adoption as a child of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

10:10 *For with the heart man believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation-* With the heart (mind / brain) man believes unto salvation and not by legal obedience. It is faith which leads to [imputed] righteousness; but if we really have believed this wondrous truth, then we will confess it with our mouths. We cannot be passive to it. It's not that witnessing to others is a work to be done for salvation; it is rather the inevitable outcome of having believed within the heart that really, I am counted right before God and in Christ I shall live for ever. The early believers clung to the Lord in whom they had believed "with purpose of *heart*" (Acts 11:23). They that had not heard of the cross of Christ were made to see, understand and therefore believe by Paul's preaching (Rom. 15:21). Our appeals likewise must be to the understanding. See on Acts 11:14; Heb. 11:19.

10:11 *For the scripture says: Whoever believes in him shall not be put to shame-* The "whoever" in Is. 28:16 is taken to mean that ethnicity is not important. It is faith and not obedience to any legal code which leads us to not be shamed at the last day, nor today. For Rom. 5:5 uses the same word to say that the sure hope we have of salvation, due to righteousness being imputed to us, means that we are not ashamed even now- "Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". Those seeking to be unashamed on the basis of their legal obedience have not therefore known the activity of the Spirit within their hearts.

10:12- see on Rom. 3:30.

*For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, for the same one who is Lord of all is rich to all that call upon him-* The "whoever" of Is. 28:16 means just that, no distinction is made between ethnic groups. The riches given by the Lord Jesus to those who believe are those of the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:5; 2 Cor. 9:11). The early preachers concluded that there was no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile exactly because they saw the gift of the same Spirit to both Jewish and Gentile believers, and the Spirit gift purified the hearts of them all (Acts 15:9). This was surely why the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit was given to the Gentiles whom Peter was to baptize with Cornelius- to make this same point.

10:13 *For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved-* Salvation was for "whoever", regardless of ethnicity. And salvation was by calling upon oneself the Lord's Name, having His Name / characteristics counted to them- and not by legalistic obedience. This is another way of saying that righteousness is imputed by faith in the Lord Jesus, and demonstrating this by baptism into His Name. The pouring out of the Spirit gifts described in Joel 2 was primarily fulfilled in Acts 2, whilst looking forward to "the great and the terrible day of the Lord". Thus Joel 2:32 "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" was fulfilled primarily in the first century too; it is quoted here in Rom. 10:13 in this connection.

10:14 *How then shall they call on him in whom they do not have belief? And how shall they believe in him about whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?-* Paul now demonstrates that believing these things demands in practice that we preach them. People cannot believe these things if they have not heard them. If we grasp the wonder of imputed righteousness in Christ, we should therefore take Him to people, and to Israel in particular. This is where true theology cannot but have a transforming influence in practice. For one cannot be passive to these great truths.

Here Paul clearly states that (as a general rule) it is impossible to believe in Christ without a preacher. The Ethiopian eunuch was the classic case of this. Bible in hand, his exasperation boiled over: "How can I (understand), *except* some man shall guide me?" (Acts 8:31). It is perfectly possible that Rom. 10:4 alludes to this, implying that this man's case was typical [and notice the connections between Acts 8:37 and Rom. 10:9]. Likewise the Lord Jesus spoke of "them also which shall believe on me through *their* (the preachers') word" (Jn. 17:20)- not through their unguided Bible reading. If all we had been given was a Bible, most of us would simply not be where we are today, spiritually. If I had started reading from Genesis, I don't think I'd have got much beyond Leviticus before giving up on the Bible. Yet there are some who have made it through, from Genesis to Revelation. And their testimony is even more emphatic: "Without doubt I needed someone to guide me, I was just crying out for all the pieces to be put into place", in the words of one such recent convert.

10:15 *And how shall they preach, unless they are sent? Even as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!-* An apostle is a sent one. But the implication is that we are all apostles- grasping the wonder of the salvation possible is of itself the call to preach it. And human need is of itself the call. The prophecy of the Lord Jesus preaching: "How beautiful are the feet of *him* that preaches the Gospel" (Nah. 1:15) is quoted here with a subtle change of pronoun: "How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach". We are the Lord Jesus to this world, because we are brethren in Him. Any who are

in Him, having His righteousness imputed to the, counted as Him, must act as Him- and He is the light of the world. So must we be. This alone is a powerful imperative as to who we are, how we speak, the men and women we show ourselves to be. Paul is quoting this Old Testament prophecy about Jesus to prove that we are all “sent” to preach the Gospel. The validity of our commission to preach is quite simply that Jesus Himself preached; in this way we are all personally “sent” to preach, simply because He was sent to preach. As the Father sent Him, so He sends us.

10:16 *But they did not all obey the glad tidings. For Isaiah said: Lord, who has believed our report?*- This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. What is true of the Lord Jesus must be true of us, if we are "in Him" and counted by God as Him. In Judaism, the prophets were seen as a saintly group to whom no ordinary person could pretend. But both the Messiah and Isaiah are here being cited as patterns for all who are "in Christ". The identity between Christian preachers and Isaiah also demonstrates that the essence of the Gospel ["glad tidings"] was preached in the Old Testament. Isaiah's lament here is of Judah refusing the good news of Messiah in his day, and that is just what happened in the first century. Isaiah's lament is that despite the amazing achievement of Messiah and God's offer of grace in Him, Jewry generally had not believed it.

The theme of Romans is the Gospel, and in this context Paul makes the point that because both Jew and Gentile are saved by the Gospel, *therefore* we should preach to both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 10:9-18). In this context, Paul quotes from Is. 52:7 and Nah. 1:15, both concerning preaching to Israel: "How shall they hear without a preacher? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of *them* (cp. 'he' in the originals- our preaching is a manifestation of the Lord) that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings". The Nahum passage is in the context of preaching to Israel the good news of their ultimate freedom from the Assyrian invasion which was then imminent. We are in a strikingly parallel situation in these last days. Rom. 10:16 then goes on to quote Is. 53:1, which again refers to the preaching of the Gospel to Israel, and applies it to our preaching.

10:17 *So belief comes of hearing, and hearing by the word of God*- "Hearing" is the same Greek word translated "report" in :16. It refers more to our preaching than to their hearing. We can play a part in the faith of others; our preaching is their hearing, and without it, they cannot believe. God has delegated His purpose and the progress of His work to us. The responsibility is huge. Faith comes by hearing God's word. But we can hear (or in our generation, read) God's word without faith (2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 4:2). Bible reading, like every other spiritual exercise, can become a mere formality. "The word of God" here as often in the New Testament refers to the message of God in Christ, the Gospel, rather than every verse in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, including the Chronicles genealogies. Our reporting / preaching [NEV "hearing"] is *dia* the word of God. This is not quite the same as saying that we preach the word of God; that would be phrased differently in Greek. Our preaching is on account of the word; it is motivated by the wonder of the word we have ourselves heard.

10:18 *But I say: Did they not hear? Yes, truly, their sound went out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world*- Paul is doubtless alluding to the great commission here. But he says that it is fulfilled by the preachers spoken of in Ps. 19:1-4, which he quotes. This



speaks of the "heavens" declaring God's gospel world-wide. In the same way as the sun 'goes forth' all over the world, so will the "heavens" go forth to declare the Gospel. The 'heavens' do not just refer to the twelve in the first century; the New Testament says that all in Christ are the "heavenlies"; we are all part of the "sun of righteousness". The arising of Christ as the sun at His second coming (Mal. 4:2) will be heralded by the church witnessing the Gospel of His coming beforehand. The enthusiast will note a number of other preaching allusions in Ps. 19: "The firmament *sheweth* his handiwork" (v.1) uses a word (in the Septuagint) which occurs in Lk. 9:60 concerning the publishing of the Gospel. "Their *line* is gone out through all the earth" (v.4) is picked up by Paul in describing his preaching (2 Cor. 10:13-16 AVmg.). The idea of 'going out' throughout the earth was clearly at the root of Christ's great commission (Mk. 16:15). Yet, as we have said, the "heavens" to which this refers in Ps. 19 are interpreted by the New Testament as referring to *all* believers in Christ. We have to ask whether David really had this interpretation in mind when he wrote Psalm 19. Probably not, but New Testament quotation of the Old is clearly at liberty in taking words out of context and applying them to Christian themes. We are not permitted to wrest Scripture from its context as we are not inspired; but the Spirit within both Paul and David was the same and can rework the words as needed. And yet on a human level, David was one of Paul's heroes; to the point that David's words are quoted by him with the preface: "I say...". But it was the same Spirit working through both men. See on :20.

Israel 'heard' the word, and yet they did not "hearken" to it (Rom. 10:16,18)- we can hear but not hear. Yet if we *really* believed that Scripture is inspired, we wouldn't be like this. It is awesome to reflect how those Hebrew letters, those Greek ciphers written on parchment 1950 years ago, were actually the very words of God Almighty. But this is the real import of our understanding of inspiration. Israel literally 'heard' the words of Ezekiel, knowing that a prophet had been among them- but they weren't obedient. We too can pay such lip service to the doctrine of inspiration- and yet not be truly obedient to the word we know to be inspired.

10:19- see on Dt. 7:4.

*But I say: Did Israel not know? First Moses said: I will provoke you to jealousy with those who are no nation, with a nation void of understanding will I anger you-* Paul sees the Jewish anger at Gentile conversion to Christ as a reflection of their jealousy. If Gentiles became followers of some idol cult, the Jews would have been indifferent. But their jealousy was provoked by Israel accepting Jesus of Nazareth as God's Son and Saviour. This jealousy was and is surely a reflection of a bad conscience, just as subconsciously Joseph's brothers knew that Joseph was not dead but alive, and standing before them. It was Israel's 'knowledge' of the Gospel they had heard which is related by Paul to their anger and jealousy. And we see the same today in many who exhibit anger and jealousy over the faith of others. This is a function of their 'knowledge' which they are in denial of.

10:20 *And Isaiah is very bold, and said: I was found by those that did not seek Me; I showed myself to those who were not asking for Me-* Paul, having the same Divine Spirit as Isaiah, sensed that Isaiah spoke those inspired words in a "very bold" manner, daring manner (s.w. 5:7). See on :18. The fact Gentiles found God in Christ when they were not seeking Him is an exemplification of the ideas of predestination and calling which have been introduced in chapter 8 as the supreme example of God's grace. The element of calling, of finding God when we were not looking for Him, is an example of that higher hand in our lives which is of grace alone. "Seek and you shall find" is here as it were subverted. It's not that God is hiding

behind a set of cards or has set up the Bible as a riddle between Him and men, which few figure out. He shows Himself to those who aren't even seeking. This is grace indeed.

10:21 *But to Israel He said: All the day long did I spread out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people-* The implication of "all the day long" is that Israel's day of opportunity was over. The spreading out of hands towards someone is a picture of a father teaching a child to walk, urging them to take their first faltering steps towards his opening arms. And this was just the figure used of God to Israel in Hos. 11:3.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *I say then, has God cast off His people? God forbid! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin-* As we will see on :2, God has cast off Israel but has not cast off His people in that a minority of them, like Paul, have accepted the Lord Jesus. Thereby His people, His Israel, have been redefined. The casting away of natural Israel led to the reconciling of the Gentile world (:15). So clearly they were cast away. "You are not My people" (Hos. 1:9,10) is clear enough; they can only again become God's people if they are reconciled in the last days (Hos. 1:10). God broke His covenant relationship with His former people just as a stick is broken in two (Zech. 11:10,11). God and Israel are, in another analogy, in a state of divorce, and He has remarried. Paul sees his own conversion as the evidence that God still has a people, and he urges other Jews to emulate his example (:14). The same word for 'cast off' is used of how Israel cast off Moses (Acts 7:27,39) just as they did Messiah; and Paul uses the word in saying how the Jews had 'cast off' God's word in Christ (Acts 13:46). So the situation arose because Israel themselves had cast off God.

It's possible to read this another way, whereby Israel are not 'cast off' because the faithfulness of a minority of them is counted to the rest. Therefore in some sense, God has cast off His people (2 Kings 21:14 RV; Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense, in that 'Israel' has been redefined; now Jews as well as Gentiles must be baptized into Christ if they wish to be the seed of Abraham. It was only because of this faithful remnant even in Old Testament times that Israel had not become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe. Perfectly in this context, Paul draws out the lesson from Elijah's mistake (Rom. 11:2); Elijah had thought that God had totally cast Israel off, but he didn't appreciate that there was a remnant of faithful within Israel. And the existence of that remnant may likewise have been concealed from the Christian church, Paul is perhaps implying. Only *part* of Israel are blind to Messiah; a majority, but not all of them (Rom. 11:5,7,25). I don't think that Paul is merely speaking of the situation in the first century, where clearly some Jews did believe. I say this because Jer. 31:37 states that Israel will never be "cast off"; yet, according to Romans 11, Israel are only not cast off because some of them do believe in Christ. The fact Israel are not now totally "cast off" therefore indicates that there always will be a remnant of faithful Jews- faithful to God's Son and trusting in grace rather than law (Rom. 11:6). Therefore we should be hopeful that at least a remnant will respond to our preaching to them. The Jews who do not believe were "cast off" at the very time the world was reconciled to God, i.e. when they crucified Jesus (Rom. 11:15 cp. 5:10,11). It was through their "trespass" in crucifying Him that salvation came (Rom. 11:11 RVmg.). And the resurrection and second coming which actualizes that salvation will only come once they repent (Rom. 11:15). So, Israel as a whole are not "cast off" because of the remnant of Jews who will always believe in the grace of Christ; but those individuals who crucified the Lord and uphold that position have cast themselves off from God. The practical upshot of all this is that we should preach to Israel, with faith that some will repent!

11:2- see on Num. 26:9.

*God did not cast off His people, whom He foreknew-* As noted on :1, God did cast off His people; the axe was laid at the root of the tree and it was cut down, or in another image, it was dried up from the roots even from the time of the Lord's ministry. But God's purpose with Israel continued in that Israel and 'God's people' were redefined. So I suggest we need to

read the statement here as meaning 'His people-whom-He-foreknew'. The foreknown ones were not cast off; the rest were. And earlier in Romans, Paul has laboured the point that it is the believers in Christ who are the foreknown (Rom. 8:29 s.w.). For the Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimately 'foreknown' One (1 Pet. 1:20 s.w.), and those in Him are likewise foreknown. Paul goes on to equate the foreknown ones with the remnant at Elijah's time. The "His people" doesn't therefore refer to Israel generically, but the faithful remnant. That remnant of course have not been cast off; but as demonstrated in chapters 9 and 10, mere physical descent from Abraham doesn't make anyone 'God's people'; for Ishmael and many others were descended from Abraham too.

*Or do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel-* "I, even I *only* am left" was Elijah's cry to God as he realized the depth of Israel's apostasy (1 Kings 19:10). But this was interpreted by God as a prayer for God to condemn Israel (Rom. 11:2,3). God read what was in Elijah's heart, and counted this as his prayer. Elijah prayed to God against Israel when he told Him that he alone was left faithful- i.e. he was asking God to destroy the nation now. Our essential feelings are read by the Father as prayers.

11:3 *Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have destroyed Your altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life-* There is such a thing as feeling lonely when we needn't. Elijah is an example of this; he felt that he was "left alone" faithful in Israel- even though there were another 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Rom. 11:3). The Hebrew in 1 Kings is hard to translate. It could mean that God reserved 7,000 of Elijah's brothers and sisters who potentially would not bow the knee to Baal. Yet Elijah didn't want to see the potential of his brethren. He set himself in a league above them, like the Psalmist, saying in his haste that all men are liars (Ps. 116:11).

11:4 *But what was the answer of God to him? I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed their knee to Baal-* "Left for myself" is the key phrase. These had been preserved by grace. God had worked in their lives to keep them faithful. And yet they were not openly associated with Elijah; their faith was weak, we can conclude; they included the likes of Obadiah who although counted faithful, still presumably went along with the appearance of Baal worship. These 7000 were therefore counted righteous, preserved by grace- and that is the exact context of Romans.

It may be that Paul's equation of the Jewish believers of the first century with the seven thousand who refused to worship Baal has a literal application (Rom. 11:4) in that there were about 7,000 Jewish believers. By the time of Acts 4:4 "the number of the men (that believed) had come to be (Greek- not as AV) about five thousand". The only verse that seems to contradict this impression is Acts 21:20: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe". However, the Greek word translated "many" is nowhere else translated like this. The sense really is 'You know what thousands believe'- i.e. 'you know the number of Jewish believers, it's in the thousands'. See on Acts 2:46.

Reflect on how God's mercy is far greater than the mercy of man- even if we are talking about very loving and spiritual people. Elijah told God that only he was faithful, and the rest of the ecclesia of Israel had turned away. God said that in *His* eyes, there were another 7,000 faithful. Paul uses this as an example of how all of us are like that 7,000- those saved by God's grace (Rom. 11:4,5). So Elijah was a spiritual man; but by His grace, God thought much higher of Elijah's brethren than Elijah did.

11:5- see on Rom. 11:1.

*Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant, according to the calling of grace-* As noted on :4, the remnant in Elijah's time were counted as righteous. But this was by grace. Chapter 8 has powerfully made the point that the whole concept of calling requires grace; the fact some are called and others aren't is one of the most obvious examples of grace. The "remnant" were now God's people.

11:6 – see on Jn. 4:36.

*But if it is by grace, it is no more of works. Otherwise grace is no more grace-* The concept of grace has no meaning if works are required. The AV and other MSS add to the effect that "work is no more work". We must add in an ellipsis: "[Justification by] work". We cannot be justified by work, the concept loses meaning, if calling is by grace.

11:7 *What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The chosen obtained it, but the rest were hardened-* 10:20 has said that the Gentiles were not seeking salvation but were given it; Israel was seeking but didn't obtain, because their searching was not in faith. The chosen / elected by grace obtained it when not looking for it; this is grace itself. "The rest", i.e. Israel, were hardened just as Pharaoh was hardened. They were treated as the Gentile world because that is where they were in their hearts. And yet even Pharaoh had a chance of salvation; and his hardening was a confirmation of his hardening of his own heart.

11:8 *According as it is written: God gave them a spirit of stupour, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day-* This explains in more detail what it means to have a hardened heart (:7). There is a psychological operation performed on the spirit or the mind- by the Spirit. This is in contrast to how God's Spirit works to call by grace; for *charis*, "grace", essentially means a gift, and often refers to the gift of God's Spirit. The faithful were 'left' by grace. This is why chapter 8 goes on from talking about election and grace to speak of the Spirit gift in the heart.

The repentance of Israel will be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day (of the Kingdom) shall the deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *unsealed* at "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). It will be in our last days that Israel's blindness starts to be cured, thanks to a Word-based revival, led by the Elijah ministry.

11:9- see on Acts 1:20.

*And David said: Let their table be made a snare and a trap and a stumblingblock and a recompense unto them-* Whilst "their table" can refer to a materialistic enjoyment of the things of this life, we will later suggest that the Jew in view who have stumbled are those who had initially accepted Christ in the first century, and were now stumbling from the way. This is the theme of Hebrews, the letters of Peter and other New Testament material. Their table therefore would more likely refer to their attitude to a closed table, at which they forbade Gentile believers or any others whom they feared would lead them to guilt by association. It

was [and is] this exclusive, superior attitude which causes legalists to stumble in a spiritual sense. it is their "recompense", their reward in this life only. But their exclusivity becomes a snare and trap to them spiritually. This is the concern of Paul so often; that refusing to accept other believers will cause spiritual stumbling to the supposedly elite.

11:10 *Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and bend their back forever-* This darkening of Jewish hearts / eyes has been spoken of in 1:21 (s.w.), and I have argued on chapter 1 that 'Jews' and 'Gentiles' refer specifically to the Jewish and Gentile Christian converts within the church at Rome- rather than to Jews and Gentiles in some generic, global sense. As noted on :10, what is in view here is the stumbling of Jewish Christian believers out of the way, leading to their being cut off from the Christ-olive tree. "Bend the back" uses the same word as just used in 11:4 for those who bowed the knee to Baal. They would be confirmed in their idolatry. And perhaps the reference is to how the Christian Jews who fell away from faith would eternally bow down at the last judgment (Rev. 3:9).

11:11- see on Rom. 11:1.

*I say then, did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid! But by their fall, salvation came to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy-* God did not just make them fall for the sake of it. Paul's vision was of the Jews being provoked by seeing the Gentiles rejoicing in the grace of Abrahamic salvation; and responding by also accepting it. Whether however this was God's intention or simply Paul's fantasy is not clear; he will write in :14 that he aims at provoking his Jewish brethren to emulate him in turning to salvation by grace in Christ. Whether he really achieved that aim is questionable; and in any case he was sent to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. I have noted throughout commentary on Acts that Paul became obsessed with preaching to the Jews and this at times led him to exaggerate positions in relation to his hopes for them. The language of stumbling and falling encourages us to assume that "the Jews" in view are not Israelites generally, but Jews who had initially accepted Christ but had now stumbled from Him and fallen; for stumbling is relevant to believers rather than those who have never professed a faith in Christ. The fall of Israel enabled the salvation of the Gentiles because there appear to be a specific number of saved persons; and if the Jews didn't want their places, then [as in the parable of the feast], the places had to be filled by others. This will now be stated explicitly in :12.

11:12 *Now if their fall is the riches of the world-* The whole failure of Israel became "riches for the world", the "riches" which by predestination are poured out upon the vessels of mercy (Rom. 9:23). Nothing is ultimately wasted or lost. Nothing can be done against the Truth (2 Cor. 13:8). Meditate on your own life and identify the countless failures through which, especially as you look back over time, the "invisible" hand of God is discernible. The 'enriching' was not just in that Gentiles could have hope of eternity in the future, at the Lord's return. The same word is used in Eph. 3:16 of the current enrichment of believers by "his Spirit in the inner man". This enrichment by the gift of the Spirit is so much a part of believing; indeed Israel refused so much spiritually.

*And their loss the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?-* "Loss" is literally 'their diminishing' (as AV); the idea is to their diminished numbers compared to the intention that the seed be as the sand of the seashore for multitude. But their resignation as it were opened up their places for the Gentiles, which is the idea of :25 speaking of how the full number of the Gentiles must come in. The places at the marriage supper must be filled up; the

diminished number of Jews taking the places meant that the Gentiles had to be compelled to come in, even though [according to the parable] such an invitation was not at all what they were seeking for (see on :7). If Jewish rejection of the Gospel was associated with such rich blessing being shared- how much more shall their final acceptance of the Gospel, thus making up the "fulness" or full number of redeemed, be associated with blessing to the world in the form of God's Kingdom on earth.

11:13 *But I speak to you who are Gentiles- inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry-* The believers in Rome were split between Jews and Gentiles. My reconstruction is that some of the Jewish Christians were returning to Judaism and the synagogue system, as indeed was happening throughout the empire and not least in the Jerusalem church. By speaking of the immense spiritual wealth coming to the Gentile believers, Paul says he was seeking to provoke the Jews to accepting grace. But Paul's letter to the Romans was not going to provoke the Jews generally; but it could provoke the Jewish Christians in Rome who would hear or read it. I will later suggest that it is these lapsed Jewish Christians who are the branches which had been broken off the olive tree. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, but I have suggested throughout commentary on Acts that Paul never completely accepted this as he might have done. He decided to interpret the ministry to the Gentiles as a way of provoking Jewish conversion. Acts records how consistently he arrived in a town and sought to provoke the Jews immediately- and suffered hugely because of it. For it was Jewish opposition which led to his various tribulations, which he could have been spared if he had been content to let Peter witness to the Jews.

11:14 *If by any means I may provoke to jealousy them that are my flesh, and may save some of them-* As noted above, Paul did indeed provoke the Jews to jealousy but there is no record of this policy actually being successful in eliciting Jewish conversion.

In Paul's case, being all things to all men meant that at times He sacrificed highest principle in order to get through to men; He didn't just baldly state doctrinal truth and leave his hearers with the problem of whether to accept it. He really sought to persuade men. He magnified his ministry of preaching to the Gentiles, he emphasized the possibility of Gentile salvation, "If by any means I may provoke to emulation ['incite to rivalry'] them which are my flesh [the Jews], and might save some of them" (Rom. 11:13,14). This hardly seems a very appropriate method, under the spotlight of highest principle. But it was a method Paul used. Likewise he badgers the Corinthians into giving money for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the basis that he has boasted to others of how much they would give (2 Cor. 9:2), and these boasts had provoked others to be generous; so now, they had better live up to their promise and give the cash. If somebody promised to give money to charity and then didn't do so, we wouldn't pressurize them to give. And we wouldn't really encourage one ecclesia to give money on the basis of telling them that another ecclesia had promised to be very generous, so they ought to be too. Yet these apparently human methods were used by Paul. He spoke "in human terms" to the Romans, "because of the infirmity of your flesh" (Rom. 6:19 NIV); he so wanted to make his point understood. And when he told husbands to love their wives, he uses another rather human reason: that because your wife is "one flesh" with you, by loving her you are loving yourself. 'And', he reasons, 'you wouldn't hate yourself, would you, so – love your wife!'. The cynic could reasonably say that this is pure selfishness (Eph. 5:29); and Paul seems to recognize that the higher level of understanding is that a husband should love his wife purely because he is manifesting the love of Christ to an often indifferent and unappreciative ecclesia (5:32,33). And yet Paul plainly uses the lower level argument too.

11:15- see on Rom. 11:1.

*For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*- Israel were indeed cast away- see on :1 and :2. The opportunity for the reconciling of the Gentile world arose, as Paul sees it, from Israel's rejection of the Gospel. But he foresaw that finally, they would accept the Gospel in the last days, and this would be associated with the resurrection of the dead. Paul as all true Christians acted as if the last day was imminent, and therefore sought earnestly for Israel's repentance- just as we should. He saw this as the great precursor to the resurrection of the last day. He argues the same in :26- the Messianic deliverer comes to Zion to bring Jacob back to God. The parable of fruit on the fig tree taught the same- that generation would see all thing fulfilled. We likewise ought to seek Jewish repentance in order to hasten the day of the Lord's return.

11:16 *And if the firstfruit is holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches-* The "firstfruit" is the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:20,23), and the lump always elsewhere refers to the mass of believers (Rom. 9:21; 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9). The holiness of the Lord Jesus is imputed to all in Him. This leads us to likewise connect "the root" with the Lord Jesus and the "branches" with all in Him. Rom. 15:12 (along with Rev. 5:5; 22:16) will define "the root" as the Lord Jesus. The parable of the vine in John 15 is so similar- the Lord Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and those who do not bear fruit are cut off from Him. The similarity with this allusion to the olive tree is exact. Perhaps the olive is chosen because Paul's theme is the ministry of the Spirit, and the oil of the olive tree is more appropriate for that symbolism. The branches are made holy by their association with the root- this connects with the entire theme of imputed righteousness which Romans has so far developed.

Paul makes an association between Job and Israel in Romans 11:16,17,30:

### *Romans 11*

:35 "Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?". This is countering the Jewish reasoning that they were self-righteous and were giving their righteousness as a gift to God, for which they were blessed.

:16,17 use the figure of roots and branches to describe the Broken branches refer to the apostate Jews.

### *Job*

Elihu similarly rebukes the self-righteous Job: "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth He of thine hand?" (35:7). Without this key from Job it would be hard to understand what 'gift' Rom. 11:35 was speaking about.

Bildad speaks of the wicked (i.e. Job- 18:4,7 cp.14:18 clearly Jews. refer to him) "his roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off" (18:16)



11:17 *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and did become partaker with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree-* The breaking off of the branches is because they bear no fruit, according to the parable of the vine in Jn. 15. The wild olive likewise is characterized by bearing no fruit. The Gentiles were therefore grafted in by grace- they had the same deficit of fruit as did the Jews. They were grafted in not because they were more fruitful. Fruit refers to the fruit of the Spirit; this is of the essence. The grafted branches must partake of the fatness, the oily-ness [Gk.], of the root. They must partake of the spirit of Christ and thereby bear fruit- otherwise they too would be cut off. The figure of the olive rather than the fig is perhaps used in order to highlight this aspect of the oil / Spirit. The same word for "partaker" is used of our partaking of grace [the "gift" of the Spirit of Christ] and the Lord Jesus (Phil. 1:7). The word *sug-koinos* suggests co-fellowship; and fellowship is with a person, the root, the Lord Jesus. The broken off branches had therefore once been in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus and partakers of His Spirit / fatness. The figure requires that the broken off branches were one time Jewish Christian believers, and not Israel in a generic sense. The vine parable of Jn. 15 likewise requires the branches to refer to those in Christ who were later broken off from the Christ-vine.

11:18 *Do not boast over the broken branches, for you are but branches too. For if you boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root supports you-* "Supports" is literally 'to carry' and is later used in Romans of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (Rom. 15:1,2). Awareness that He carries our sins will remove all boasting against those who have fallen away or respond less to Him.

11:19 *You will say then: Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in-* Often the Bible addresses the reader in the second person, as if he is actually present in the mind of the writer (e.g. Rom. 11:19; 14:15; 1 Cor. 7:16; 15:35). Such personalizing of Scripture is essentially how to study the Bible. Paul agrees that in a sense, yes, the Jewish branches were broken off so that the Gentiles could be grafted in. But :24 says that the ingrafted branches had been cut off from their own wild olive tree. They were therefore 'dead' branches. This is an apparent horticultural blunder. A dead, rejected branch can't get life by being tied on to a living tree. But in the miracle of redemption by the grace of the Spirit, this is how it will be. The oil / fatness / Spirit of the olive tree is such that even a dead branch can be revived by it. Verse 24 recognizes the intentional blunder by saying that Gentiles have been grafted "contrary to nature".

11:20 *Well. Because of their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Be not highminded, but fear-* The "unbelief" in view is not in that these Christian Jews had never believed. The "unbelief" appears to be that of Heb. 3:12, where the same word is used of how the Hebrew Christians were prone to a heart of unbelief by departing from their faith in Christ and returning to the Law.

11:21 *For if God spared not the natural branches, neither will He spare you-* The key issue is whether there was the bearing of fruit. The connection with earlier reasoning in Romans is perhaps in the same word being used of how God did not spare His own Son (8:32). This means that He will not spare in judgment those who refuse to accept Him. The language of 'not sparing' is that of judgment; Paul reasons as if judgment had already come, in essence, for those who rejected His Son.

11:22- see on Mt. 3:7.

*Behold then the goodness and severity of God: Towards those that fell, severity; but toward you, God's goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also shall be cut off-* "Goodness" is the word used in 2:4 for how the Jewish Christians had despised God's goodness and refused to repent. The severe language of judgment used in chapters 1 and 2 appears to refer specifically to judgment upon those Jews in the Roman church who had turned away from Christ. The letter has opened with the description of their judgment, the cutting off of the Jewish branches, and warns the Gentile converts that they must not behave likewise but rather continue in His goodness. The Greek for "severity" means literally sharpness or an abrupt cut. It connects with the idea of the branches being cut off. But it is "those that fell" who are cut off; and so the 'cutting off' is again only a confirmation of their own falling off from the tree.

11:23 *And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, shall be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again-* If they could be grafted in "again" then they had at one time enjoyed the status of the wild olive branches who were grafted in by baptism into Christ. It follows that the cut off branches had likewise at one stage been in Christ. Jew and Gentile are being used here as they are [for the most part] in the early chapters of Romans- referring not to Jew and Gentile as generic, global terms; but rather specifically to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. God's ability ["is able", *dunamos*, His power] to graft them in again reveals that nobody is forced to condemnation by God's will. Those who are called can always reconnect with the tree. We notice though that it is not simply a case of a cut off branch drifting back into the olive tree. That might be true on the level of social club interaction; but the re-joining of the olive tree is a specific operation by God, connecting a person back in to the flow of the spirit of Christ, the oil of the olive.

11:24- see on 2 Cor. 4:4.

*For if you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more appropriately shall these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?-* The "contrary to nature" is a reference to how dead branches are not grafted onto living trees and thereby somehow brought to life. The whole analogy here is to demonstrate the power of the spirit of Christ, the oil of the olive, and of God's grace, in bringing spiritual life to the dead. We note that the Gentiles were cut off from the wild olive and were warned that they could also be cut off from the good olive, if they followed Israel's example. This is true of so many- they cut off from the world, and then if they fall away from Christ, they are cut off from the community in Him. And they are of all men most miserable.

The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25.

The Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it. And the Gospel is essentially the promises to Abraham, about all nations being blessed. This promise is fulfilled in our preaching of it- which is why the Acts references to the disciples being "multiplied" consciously refers to the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham about the multiplication of the seed. "The fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:25) also refers to this idea of the final number of converted Gentiles being a fullness or fulfilment- of the promises to Abraham. But that fulfilment, as with that of many prophecies, is dependent upon and according to our preaching of the Gospel. See on Lk. 14:23.

11:25 *Brothers, I would not have you ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part has befallen Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles is made up-* The partial hardening doesn't mean that their hearts were a bit soft and partly hard; for :8-10 is clear that they were indeed hardened and blinded. The "in part" refers to Israel as a whole; part of God's "Israel", the full number of the saved, had been hardened. The numbers of ethnic Jews in the final number of "Israel" had been diminished (see on :12) and so the Gentiles were being brought in to make up the numbers. This was no reason for Gentile boasting; the repeated warnings against this could suggest that there was friction in the Roman church over this matter. The Gentiles were as the street people dragged in to make up the numbers at the wedding feast, being invited to something they had not been searching for.

Although Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, I understand Rom. 11:25,26 to mean that he preached to the Gentiles motivated by the knowledge that when the full number of the Gentiles had "come in", then "all Israel" would be saved by the Jews then turning to Christ. Paul understands "Israel" as the full number of those who shall be finally saved. Once the allotted number of Gentiles had come in, Paul seems to see the final number of "Israel" being made up by the latter day conversion of some ethnic Israelites. This alone indicates how we should preach to Israel in the last days. Paul thought he was in the last days and so he did so.

11:26 *And so all Israel shall be saved. Even as it is written: There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob-* "All Israel" refers to the full number of "Israel"; I suggested on :25 that Paul understands "Israel" as the specific number of the redeemed. This number, "Israel" in full number (:25), will be made up by the conversion of ethnic Israelites at the Lord's coming.

The Lord will come to those who have turned from ungodliness in Jacob, the latter day remnant who repent (Is. 59:20); although Paul's citation of this is deliberately altered to teach the truth that the *majority* of Israel will not turn before He comes. To them He will come and turn ungodliness away from them (Rom. 11:26).

In the final conflict between Israel and her enemies, God's confirmation of men will be clearly seen. The Gentile nations will be gathered to make the final invasion by the Lord's evil spirits confirming their evil spirit, whilst the repentant remnant of Israel will be confirmed in their regrets by having "the spirit of grace and supplications" poured on them (Zech. 12:10), i.e. a desire and ability to powerfully supplicate the Father for forgiveness. If men wish to turn from their sins, God will turn them. Thus "the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (Is. 59:20) is changed by the Spirit into: "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26). Those who turn from sin are turned from sin by the Lord. The blessing promised to Abraham was not only forgiveness of sins, but that the Lord Jesus would *turn away* Abraham's seed from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). Yet we only become Abraham's seed by repentance and baptism. Our repentance and desire not to sin is therefore confirmed after our baptism.

Be aware that many NT passages mix a number of OT passages in one 'quotation'; e.g. "The deliverer will come from Zion" (Rom. 11:26) is a conflated quotation of Ps. 14:7; 53:6 and Is. 59:20. See on Heb. 13:5.

11:27 *And this is My covenant to them, when I shall take away their sins-* Jer. 31 and Ezekiel 34-36 are clear that the covenant which the latter day Jews shall enter into is the new covenant, which Christians now are part of. That new covenant, according to Romans, was that contained in the promises to Abraham. Both ethnic Jews and Gentiles alike need to be baptized into Christ for that covenant to be made with them. The point of this statement seems to be that the sins of the ethnic Jews will be taken away by their baptism into Christ and acceptance of the new covenant in Him. And this will happen in the last days.

11:28 *As touching the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but as touching their calling, they are beloved for the fathers' sake-* The unbelieving Jews are alienated from God, and in God's master plan, their failure was made use of in that it enabled the empty places in "Israel", at the marriage supper, to be filled up by Gentiles. Their alienation from God was therefore positively seen as for the sake of Gentile salvation. Yet those of them who are called to the Gospel in the last days will be called specifically because of their ethnic identity- for their fathers' sake. That may appear to contradict the earlier statements that ethnicity and descent from Abraham are worthless; but Paul is building up to the climax of grace in the events of the last days, where grace will be seen to transcend every law and principle, no matter how noble of itself.

11:29 *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable-* The gifts [*charisma*- the many givings of grace] and calling are separate. As developed in chapter 8, the sovereign calling of God is a prime example of grace, and it is effected by the Spirit being given to influence men and women towards salvation. Such a gift was given to the Corinthians who had been baptized, although they made no use of it and were thus "not spiritual". It seems that Paul hoped and assumed he was living in the last days, and that therefore the Jewish Christians who had fallen away should reflect that their calling and Spirit gift received was not revocable. And it was God's earnest wish that they should re-join the olive tree.

11:30 *For as you in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience-* As noted on :28, their disobedience meant that Gentiles could be saved. Even human failure is used by God in His wider purpose. The Gentiles "have now obtained mercy (i.e. the merciful opportunity to hear the Gospel) through their (Israel's) unbelief. Even so have these (Israel) also now not believed, that through your mercy they may obtain mercy" (Rom. 11:30,31). "Mercy" here cannot be read on a surface level; it cannot be that by showing mercy, another race may obtain mercy. "Mercy" is surely being used as a figure for the preaching of the Gospel. Through our mercy to them in this way they can obtain mercy.

11:31 *Even so have these also now been disobedient, that by the mercy shown to you, they may also now obtain mercy-* The mercy shown to us by God in allowing the Gospel to come to us (:32), the mercy and grace of calling and predestination, is to be reflected by our taking of the Gospel to others, especially to Israel. This is the practical outcome of all talk about calling and grace. We are to be so humbled by our receipt of it that we go out and share the calling with others, especially Israel. Could this not mean that Israel's reconciliation to God is partly dependent on our "mercy" in preaching the Gospel to them? And now consider Peter's words to Israel: "Repent... and be converted, that (firstly) your sins may be blotted out... and (secondly) he shall send Jesus Christ" at the second coming (Acts 3:19,20). Does this not suggest that Christ's eager desire for the second coming is limited by our preaching to Israel?

11:32- see on Rom. 5:20.

*For God has shut up all to disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all-* The "all" appears to be that of :26 "All Israel" (see note there). All those within the number of the redeemed, known as "Israel", have at some point been disobedient; and that disobedience was within God's purpose, in the same way as God "concluded [s.w.] all under sin" (Gal. 3:22). Human sin and blindness is therefore used by God in the development of His final wonderful purpose of saving all His Israel.

Thus God works out His plan of salvation actually through man's disobedience rather than his obedience. As Paul puts it, we are concluded in unbelief, that God may have mercy (Rom. 11:32). It was and is the spirit of Joseph, when he comforted his brothers: "Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). And again, speaking about the sin of Israel in rejecting Christ: "Their trespass means riches for the [Gentile] world" (Rom. 11:12). Or yet again, think of how Abraham's lie about Sarah and unfaithfulness to his marriage covenant with her became a source of God's blessing and the curing of Abimelech's wife from infertility (Gen. 20:17- I read her infertility as a state that existed prior to the incident with Abraham). The righteousness of God becomes available to us exactly because we have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23,24). If we lie, then through our lie the truth and glory of God is revealed (Rom. 3:7). The light comes into the world- the light of hope of salvation, forgiveness, of God in Christ- but this light reveals to us our verdict of 'guilty' (Jn. 3:18,36).

The references to "all" being saved seem to be limited by the context- and "all" rarely means 'every single one', e.g. "all" Jerusalem went out to hear John the Baptist and were "all" baptized by him. I don't suppose the city was left deserted. The only passage which appears to have some bearing is Rom 11:32: "For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all". But the context speaks of how both Jews and Gentiles will be saved- not every Jew and Gentile that's lived, but those who accept the Gospel. And how does God have mercy? The preceding verse clarifies: "even so have these also now been disobedient, that by your mercy they also may now obtain mercy" (Rom 11:31). Surely the mercy we show to the Jews is preaching the Gospel of God's mercy to them. Their obtaining mercy depends upon our mercy. Because God chooses to work through us as His witnesses. The Jews must obtain salvation in the same pattern as the Gentiles do: "For as ye in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by their disobedience..." (Rom. 11:30). As Gentiles crossed over from disobedience to obedience to the Gospel, so must the Jews. And in the last days, this will happen: "...and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26). This turning away of ungodliness from Israel is required before "all"- i.e. the redeemed from both Jews and Gentiles- can be saved. But the turning away of ungodliness surely implies a repentance of some Jewish people; God won't just save them regardless, they must turn away from ungodliness.

11:33 *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past tracing out!-* This manner of working through human failure (see on :32) in order to save us is indeed beyond human commentary and definition. The knowledge of God here surely refers to His foreknowledge. His ways and judgments refer specifically here to His calling and the time and manner of that calling, by grace. Any attempt to analyse His paths will fail, so we can even less start judging their morality or correctness.

11:34- see on Job 21:22.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor?*- The parallel in :35 says that God is outgiving in His gifts / *charis* / grace, and not in any way returning to anyone what they gave Him. And this is true of His entire purpose; such pure grace originated within His mind and was not input there by anyone else in any form. The purity of His grace and salvation is pure and awesome. The allusions to Job noted on :16 all indicate that Job was brought to the same conclusion which Paul had come to- that we each lay our hand upon our mouth and recognize that it is not by works but grace alone.

11:35 *Or who has given a gift to Him, that he might be repaid?*- See on :16 and :34 for the significance of the quote from Job 41:3. The gift of grace is unprovoked; God gives it, without in any sense repaying or compensating for work done. For grace would then not be grace. The origination of all things in God is in fact yet another evidence for salvation by grace and not works. For no matter what works we do, the originator of all was God, by grace alone, before we had even existed or done any works. We are to reflect this by doing things for others which they too can never repay (Lk. 14:14 s.w.).

11:36 *For of Him and through Him and to Him, are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen*- As noted on :34 and :35, the way that all things originate in God and are of Him means that all is of grace; for there were no works done which God could have responded to. Of [*ek*], through [*dia*] and to [*eis*] all things [*pas*] is exactly the language used in 1 Cor. 8:6 about God's work in the Lord Jesus. God's whole plan centres in, through and to Him.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Therefore I urge you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your logical service-* See on 1 Thess. 5:3. As explained in the introduction, the practical section of Romans from 12:1 to the end is full of allusion to the earlier theological sections, demonstrating how true understanding is to be lived out in practice. The "mercies" in view are those just discussed in the context of God's grace in calling us, not according to our works. God will have compassion / mercy [s.w. "mercies"] on whom He will (Rom 9:15)- and He has chosen to have compassion upon us. Our response should be complete surrender to Him. The "mercies" could also be a technical term for the promises- "the sure mercies of David" of Is. 55:3.

The description of the believer as a "living sacrifice" alludes to the scapegoat, the only living sacrifice, which was a type of the risen Lord (Lev. 16:10 LXX = Acts 1:3). As the Lord ran free in His resurrection, bearing away the sins of men, so we who are in Him and preach that salvation can do the same. As Christ bore away our iniquities (Is. 53:11), so "we then that are strong ought to bear the iniquities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1).

Having spoken of the surpassing love of God in Christ, Paul urges that it is "your logical service" to totally dedicate ourselves to Him in response. Our reasoned response is to sacrifice all for His sake. It is not reason nor logic that we are any longer in this world to enjoy ourselves. We are here to give and not to receive.

Christ is the supreme priest; but because we are "in Him", we too have some part in the priesthood. Note how the priests are described in language relevant to the Lord: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity" (Mal. 2:6). Thus we must "present (our) bodies a living sacrifice" to God (Rom. 12:1); making the believer "the offering and the priest", as Christ was (and is). We are our own priests. This must have been a radical idea to those early Jewish Christians. Yet this is what Paul and Peter were driving at when they said things like: "You *also* are an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (Gk. *logikos*) service (*service* is priestly language)" (1 Pet. 2:5; Rom. 12:1). They were saying: '*You're your own priest now!*'. And the early believers found it hard to cope with. Have you considered that the most common form of apostasy (i.e. leaving the true Faith) in the early church was going back to the Jewish Law, with its system of priests? Natural Israel likewise totally failed to live up to God's desire that they should be a *Kingdom* of priests. They left it all to their priests. They *didn't* teach every man his neighbour and his brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11; even though when He re-accepts them, God will count them as if they did). Although it was God's original intention that each family leader sanctified themselves and slew the Passover lamb personally, they came to delegate this to their priests (so 2 Chron. 30:17 implies). See on Mt. 5:29.

We must be living sacrifices, devoted to the Lord (Rom. 12:1); but if we flunk out of this: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 5:22). We're a sacrifice either way, tied up without the freedom of movement as we would wish. There's therefore and thereby an element of sorrow, either way in life:

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of (i.e. that gift you will really, eternally enjoy): but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

12:2 *And do not conform to the mould of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may experience what is the good and acceptable and the perfect will of God-* "Be transformed" is asking us to allow the work of transformation and renewing which He wishes to perform within us. This is different to reading this as a command to somehow use brute psychological force to enforce a new psychology upon ourselves; we aren't strong enough to do so, neither is that a realistic possibility. The same word for "transformed" is used of how the Spirit transforms our minds into the mental image of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). This is an internal transformation and not a reference to any miraculous gifts. Likewise the only other time the Greek word translated "renewing" is used is in Tit. 3:5, speaking of the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Allowing the work of the Spirit will mean we experience the will of God; and this connects with the theology of chapter 8, where the will of God in choosing us and calling us is shown to outwork in practice through the function of the Holy Spirit in our lives and hearts. The perfecting of that will, its coming to full completion, will be in the salvation of the last day.

Psychotherapists have powerfully pointed out the difference between the real, essential person- and the personas, or personages, whom we live out in the eyes of others. We humans tend to pretend to be the person others expect of us, we act out the person we feel our society or upbringing demands of us, rather than 'being ourselves'; and so transformation of our real character is something which is left largely unaddressed in many lives. Truly did Shakespeare write [from a worldly perspective] that all the world's a stage, and we are merely the players / actors. And as Napoleon said, "One becomes the man of one's uniform"; the persona, the act we live, comes to influence the real self, the real person, like the clown who can't stop clowning around offstage. In Biblical terms, we allow the world to push us into its mould, psychologically and sociologically, rather than allowing ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds by the things of God's word and His Son (Rom. 12:2). We so easily allow the world to squeeze us into its mould, rather than being personally transformed by our relationship with the Lord (Rom. 12:2 J.B. Phillips).

12:3 *For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, accordingly as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith-* This continues the reference to God's will in :2. Faith is given, in the same way as we are called, predestined and moved towards salvation by the work and gift of the Spirit. This should humble us; in the same way as in the preceding chapter, Paul has urged Gentile believers to be humbled by the process of predestination, and not think highly of themselves because it is all of grace. And it was even of grace that Paul was reminding them of this. The awesome depth of this grace leads us to "think soberly", a word play in Greek: *phroneo sophroneo*. It elicits from us deep thinking- that God should give us faith, as Jacob was loved and Esau hated, quite apart from our works.

The next verses go on to speak of the manifestation of the gifts in a practical form, which in the first century included miraculous works. There was exhortation to "seek the best gifts"; and yet they were distributed "according as God hath dealt to every man [according to] the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3 and context). He gave to each of them in the early church gifts which reflected the measure of faith shown by the individual believer. How much they could achieve for their Lord was limited by their faith.



12:4 *For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same office-* Paul was writing this from Corinth, where he had had to make the same points (1 Cor. 12). It seems the Romans, just as the Corinthians and many today, had failed to distinguish between unity and uniformity. Each baptized member of Christ has some function- and this is important to remember especially when great emphasis is placed upon pastoral teams and the like. This doesn't mean that every member of Christ has no function; each must indeed be empowered to function. "Office" is *praxis*, and we shall be judged according to our *praxis* (Mt. 16:27), according to how we have used the Lord's potentials which we have been dealt. We need to seek and enquire what are His hopes for us, and to devote our lives to serving as intended.

12:5 *So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and although different, still members one of another-* We are to live according to our status; if we are baptized into the body of Christ and counted as Him, according to the theology of imputed righteousness explained earlier in Romans, then we are to act as part of the body. The Greek here could bear a retranslation, hinging around *kata heis*, AV "every one", to the effect that we are "one body in Christ, and on account of [*kata*] the one [Christ], members one of another". He is the unique bond between persons in Him. In another figure, He is the yoke who binds others together so that the burden is lighter. Human relationships are almost impossible to maintain on any intimate level- without the binding influence of the Lord Jesus. This is why He could reason in John 17 that Christian unity would be the supreme witness to Him.

12:6 *And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of our faith-* "Grace", *charis*, is so often associated with the gift of the Spirit. That gift is the Lord Jesus in our hearts transforming us into His image, and such a promise is for all time. But in the first century, this gift had miraculous manifestations which are not now available. The *charis*, "grace", was given then and still is now; but the *charisma*, the gifts according to that grace, vary in form over time just as they did in form between persons in the first century. Those given prophecy were to use that gift according as they had been given it. This may seem obvious, but clearly there was a tendency to want to serve the Lord in ways other than His ideal intention. Paul's obsession with ministry to the Jews, when this was Peter's intended work, is a case in point.

12:7 *Or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry. Or he that teaches, to his teaching-* See on Acts 20:24 *The ministry that I received*. The gifts Paul mentions in :6-8 are all gifts relevant to leaders rather than the mass of church membership. Perhaps Paul was writing with his eye on himself; or maybe he was particularly addressing the leadership of the church.

12:8- see on 2 Cor. 1:12.

*Or he that exhorts, to his exhorting; he that gives, let him do it with generosity. He that rules, with diligence. He that shows mercy, with cheerfulness-* The words used here are repeated in Paul's appeals for the Corinthians to give to the Jerusalem Poor Fund with cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7) and to support that ministry generously. Paul will mention this later in Romans. It was a major preoccupation with him and he may well be hinting here at Roman support of it.

12:9 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good-* The appeal here for unfeigned love (also in 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Pet. 2:22) highlights the fact that there can so easily be the appearance of love without true love. And this warning must be given its

true weight by us all as we seek to make true love the defining feature of our living and being. The Greek for "cling to" is used nine other times in the NT and always with the sense of clinging to persons. The Lord's teaching in Mt. 7:17-20 is that we can in fact quite easily tell the good from the evil persons by looking at their fruits. Perhaps Paul has that in view here. We are to cling or cleave to those in Christ who have good fruits and keep away from those with evil fruits. If we don't do this, then our love is going to become hypocritical and feigned.

*12:10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour to others-* "Love" is claimed by everyone; :9 has challenged us to love unfeigned, unpretended and genuine. That love or *agape* is the love of Christ, loving as He loved us- for in that is the 'newness' of the command to love one another "as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). That *agape* love will issue in a brotherly love for each other and respect / honour to others on account of their place in the body of Christ. If we seek to love our Christian brethren on the basis of their behaviour, we will find it impossible to love many or that deeply. We have to respect them for their status in Christ; and writing Romans from Corinth, Paul had gone very far in doing that. For he loved the Corinthians, so weak in understanding and behaviour, with the love of Christ- in that he respected their status as in Him. Paul uses the same Greek word for "honour" in reflecting that the Corinthians, and all believers, had been bought with a "price"- the blood of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 7:23). All who have been bought with that are to be honoured- for they are of great price.

*12:11 Be diligent, not lazy, fervent in spirit in your serving the Lord-* This is another of Paul's allusions to the Lord's parables, this time warning the Romans not to be like the lazy servant in the parable (Mt. 25:26 = Rom. 12:11). "Fervent in spirit" in the Lord's service is a phrase elsewhere used only about Apollos (Acts 18:25) who was also at Corinth (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 4:6) from where Paul was writing Romans. This kind of internal congruence deepens our faith in the veracity of the records; Paul was writing with the example of Apollos before him, and he urged the Romans to be like him. Paul is not simply appealing for zeal as opposed to laziness. He asks them to allow the Spirit to work in them, to be open to being used- and this would make them anything but lazy. There was a common association between slavery and laziness; for the slaves were often in such a dead end situation that there was no motivation for zeal and initiative. But slavery to the Lord Jesus, energized by His Spirit, was not at all like that, but the very opposite.

*12:12 Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing earnestly in prayer-* "Hope" in the New Testament refers to a confident expectation, not a vague hope-for-the-best. It is only by having such a certain expectation of a place in the Kingdom of God, an eternity assured at this moment, that a person can rejoice. One cannot have joy at a prospect which is vague or uncertain. And it is this sure hope, arising as it does from our status in Christ, which alone can make us endure tribulation and keep on in prayer, rather than praying on the cusp of emotion or desperate need. All this is the practical outworking of our status in Christ, and the guarantee of eternity by God's grace, giving us the hope which will make us endure all things (Rom. 5:2,3). "Tribulation" is literally *the* tribulation; Paul expected the Lord's return in his generation, and so envisaged that the tribulation of the Olivet prophecy would be experienced by his readers.

*12:13 Responding to the necessities of the saints by sharing, accustomed to showing hospitality-* The same word for "responding" [AV "distributing"] is to be used in 15:27 in the

context of donating towards the Jerusalem Poor Fund, and surely Paul had this in mind here. We note the repeated commandments to show hospitality, literally a love of foreigners (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). The mentality of the first century was very parochial; people loved their own, identifying themselves according to their ethnicity or birth place- and disliked others. The love of foreigners was achievable only by perceiving that we are all foreigners to God, who have been accepted by grace into a new identity.

The amount of travel by the early brethren was extraordinary, and could only have been impressive to the world around them. The same could be said of us today, regularly travelling for days across Russia and North America to attend gatherings, flying and hitch hiking around Africa to meet each other... driving hours to meeting. The NT letters feature passages which served as letters of recommendation (Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 16:10-12 cp. Phil. 2:25-30; Col. 4:7-9; Eph. 6:21; Philemon 22; Rom. 15:24). Thus hospitality became a required Christian virtue (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Even ordinary Christians could count on this hospitality. Yet "security and hospitality when travelling had traditionally been the privilege of the powerful, who had relied upon a network of patronage and friendship, created by wealth. The letters of recommendation disclose the fact that these domestic advantages were now extended to the whole household of faith, who are accepted on trust, though complete strangers". This was the practical outcome of the doctrines believed; a member of the *ekklesia* of God would be welcomed as a brother or sister in Laodicea, Ephesus, Corinth or Rome. And so it should be amongst us today.

12:14 *Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not-* We must bless / forgive those who persecute us (blessing and forgiveness are closely linked in Scripture). This is clearly to be done without waiting for the persecutor to stop or repent. Forgiveness without repentance has to be offered. Paul would have recalled how he had persecuted the Christians, and the likes of Stephen had blessed him rather than wished curses upon him; and those blessings had led to his forgiveness and redemption, to God's glory. The Roman church was perhaps under specific persecution of some kind, or Paul maybe foresaw the persecution which would come under Nero.

12:15 *Rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep-* Such a fellow feeling for others is only possible if we are connected to them within the same body; and so this ability to connect with the emotions of others is an outcome of our being united in the body of Christ. For 1 Cor. 12:26 clarifies that it is on account of our joint membership in His body that the members have such connection with each other.

12:16- see on Mt. 25:15.

*Be of the same mind one toward another-* This is not an appeal for uniformity of thinking or interpretation. The one mind which we should each have is that of the Lord Jesus, as stated explicitly in Phil. 2. Another way of expressing His mind would be His Spirit; we are to view each other with the eyes, spirit or mind of the Lord Jesus. And the earlier chapters in Romans have explained how He looks upon us as perfect, with righteousness imputed to us. Paul's attitude to the Corinthians, from where he was writing Romans, is surely the parade example of practicing this in church life.

*Do not be arrogant, but condescend to those who are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits-* We would rather expect: 'Do not be proud, but be lowly'. Instead we are asked to

condescend to, or accept, the humble. Our humility is shown in our attitude to the humble. Our attitudes to others is therefore read as a significant reflection of our pride or humility. Not being wise "in your own conceits" carries the idea as GNB of "Do not think of yourselves as wise". It is recognizing our unwisdom which helps our humility; and the idea that we are ourselves wise is arrogance. That is exactly the teaching of 1 Corinthians 1. The acceptance of God's wisdom, as extolled at the end of Romans 11, means recognizing that we of ourselves are not wise; and this is humbling.

*12:17 Render to no one evil for evil. Take thought to do things honourably in the sight of all men-* The spirit of grace received from God is that we received good for our evil; to render evil for evil, when we received good for evil, is therefore a denial of the grace we received. 1 Thess. 5:15 also teaches us not to render evil for evil, but on the basis that we should be consumed with always following after what is good. And it is with this thought that this section concludes in :21- we should overcome evil with good, and not with more evil. For this, in the bigger picture, is God's way of triumphing over evil through His grace in Christ. "Honourably" is literally 'good'; the idea is not that Paul inserts here a random injunction to give no bad appearances to people. Instead of rewarding evil with evil, we instead should plan to do *good* ['do things honourably', NEV] before men. For this is the summary conclusion of :21, that evil is to be overcome by good.

*12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all-* The "all" in view may refer to those within the church, and that may be the purview of :17 also. The majority of the pressures in Paul's life came from within the ecclesia. His life was based amongst the ecclesias; thus to him "all men" were the believers, not the world as a whole (Mk. 9:50 = Rom. 12:18).

Conflict in the ecclesia shouldn't actually surprise us. We should expect it. For it was the ecclesia of Christ's day who were the ones who rejected Him. "As far as it depends on you" surely suggests that Paul saw conflict with others as arising due to others' attitudes over which we have no control. Paul's inspired wording tacitly accepts that we often cannot live in peace with others because it's not possible given their failures; but we can change *our* attitudes, and that is the point. Paul's own example was of not being at peace with the majority of the brotherhood- all in Asia turned against him. Division and interpersonal tensions are inevitable- but we must ensure they are never our fault, for they betray a serious failure in the principles of living in the body of Christ, and living under grace.

*12:19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written: Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord-* The desire for vengeance may well refer to conflicts within the church. For "the wrath of God" would be the punishment of those who had done wrong, and this wrath will be poured out at the last day upon those who are responsible to the Lord. The comfort that the Lord's wrath would be upon those who have wronged us is therefore only appropriate to those who are responsible to judgment- largely those within the church.

We must remember that "Vengeance is *mine* [not ours, not the state's], and requital" (Dt. 32:35). That taking of vengeance, that requital, was worked out by God on the cross. There the Lord Jesus was clothed with the 'garments of vengeance' (Is. 59:17); the day of the crucifixion was "the day of vengeance" (Is. 63:4). This is one reason why God doesn't operate a tit-for-tat requital of our sins upon our heads- because He dealt with sin and His

vengeance for it in the cross, not by any other way. Hence David calls Yahweh the "God of revenge", the one *alone* to whom vengeance belongs (Ps. 94:1,3). Our response to all this is to believe that truly vengeance is God and therefore we will *not* avenge ourselves (Rom. 12:19). I take this to apply to all the micro-level 'takings of vengeance' which we so easily do in our words, body language, attitudes etc., in response to the hurt received from others. The cross alone enables us to break the cycle.

12:20 - see on Ps. 140:9,10.

*But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you shall heap coals of fire upon his head-* The fire of condemnation at the judgment has already been kindled by men's attitudes now (Lk. 12:49), and hence by doing good to such men when they abuse us we (now) "heap coals of fire upon his head". "Your enemy" here must therefore refer to someone who is responsible to the last judgment, i.e. in the ecclesia (cp. 2 Thess.3:15, which implies 'an enemy' was first century vocabulary for a shunned and rejected false teacher). See on Jude 23. By showing grace to your enemy within the church who refuses to repent, you are actually making his final punishment worse.

But I don't understand this as meaning that our motivation for such kindness should be the gleeful thought that we will thereby earn for them greater and more painful condemnation at the last day. Such motives would surely be foreign to all we have seen and known in the Father and Son. Rather am I attracted to the suggestion that there is a reference here to the practice, originating in Egypt, of putting a pan of hot coals over the head of a person who has openly repented. In which case, we would be being taught to show grace to our enemies, in order that we might bring them to repentance. This would chime in with the teaching elsewhere in Romans that God's goodness leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And this is how we should be, especially with our brethren. The idea of excluding our brethren seems to me the very opposite of the spirit of grace which we have received.

Paul quotes the words of Prov. 25:21,22 here. But he omits to apply the last part of Prov. 25:22 to us: "And the Lord shall reward you". Paul's point is that we should not resist evil, leave God to glorify His Name- and enable this to happen, without seeking for a personal reward for our righteousness. Thus Prov. 25:21,22: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat... for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee" is quoted here, but with the pointed omission of the last clause: "The Lord shall reward thee". It's as if Paul is saying: 'The condemnation of the wicked, when *God*, not you, pours out His vengeance, will glorify Him. So do your part to bring this about, don't worry about the reward you're promised so much as the bringing about of His glory'.

12:21 *Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good-* It will not do to glumly conclude that evil shall only be overcome at the Lord's return. We are to right now overcome evil, not by fighting it in the world nor by seeking to brutally repress it within our own minds; but to proactively focus on the good and thereby overcome it. God likewise overcomes evil through the overcoming of His Son on the cross (s.w. Rom. 3:4; Jn. 16:33). And that is to be our pattern too.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 13

13:1 The question has been asked as to how the words of Romans 13 can stand true, with their implication that Government ministers are God's representatives, punishing sinners and upholding righteousness, and therefore should be obeyed. Many believers are pressured by such ministers to join armies and in other ways too, to break the law of Christ. How, for example, could those words have been true in Hitler's Germany or Taliban-controlled Afghanistan?

First it must be remembered that there are other passages which do command our submission to human authorities: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Pet. 1:13-17). Whilst these words stand true, Peter himself also disobeyed human authority, with the comment that we must obey God rather than men. When there is a conflict in allegiance created, we must obey God and disobey anyone or any institution that commands us to disobey Him. And Paul likewise- the man who was jailed repeatedly for breaking the law: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men" (Tit. 3:1,2). But the Romans 13 passage goes much further, saying that these "ministers" are ordained by God on His behalf, and therefore must be obeyed. Logically, therefore, one would have to obey whatever they said. Otherwise we would always be having to decide whether or not a Government minister was really ordained in God's behalf, or not. And Romans 13 seems to imply that all ministers are "ministers of God". And so for this passage I wish to suggest that it specifically refers to submission to the elders and apostles of the first century ecclesia, empowered as they were with the miraculous Spirit gifts and direct revelations of wisdom and judgment.

There is great stress in Rom. 13 that these "powers" punish evil / sinfulness. This is just not true of human Governments. Yet it is appropriate if the "powers" spoken of here are within the ecclesia. So we will consider the passage phrase by phrase- and we find that almost every Greek noun or verb in it is used elsewhere in a specifically ecclesial context.

*"Let every one of you be in subjection to the governing authorities" (:1).*

The Greek for "Higher" means 'to excel, to be superior, better than, to surpass'. The same word occurs in Phil. 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other *better than themselves*". We may respect human ministers but we can scarcely esteem them better than ourselves in a spiritual sense. Yet authority held by ecclesial elders is earned and not demanded- based on our respect of them as brethren more mature in Christ than we are.

*"For there is no power but by God: the powers that be have been ordained..."*

"Powers" is s.w. [same word] 2 Cor. 10:8 "our [apostolic] *authority*"; "*the power* which the Lord hath given me" (Paul; 2 Cor. 13:10). "Not because we [the apostles] have not *power*" (2 Thess. 3:9). Those powers are "ordained"- s.w. Acts 15:2, where Paul and Barnabas were "determined", s.w. "ordained", to go to Jerusalem as representative elders; the family of Stephanas "addicted themselves", literally 'ordained themselves', to the work of ministry in the ecclesia. Note how here as in Rom. 13, the ideas of being *ordained* to be a *minister* also occur together.

*[Ordained] by God*

In the sense of 1 Cor. 12:28: “*And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues*”.

*“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists...” (:2)*

Alexander “hath greatly *withstood* [s.w. resisteth] our words” (2 Tim. 4:15)- the words of elders like Paul. This doesn’t mean that elders are beyond any criticism- for the same Greek word is used of how Paul “withstood” Peter when he gave in to legalism and rejected grace (Gal. 2:11).

*“What God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror...” (:2,3)*

“Terror” translates the Greek word used for how “fear” came upon the ecclesia when the elders exercised their powers of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:43; 5:5,11). Initially, Corinth showed such “fear” towards Paul (2 Cor. 7:11,15). Elders should rebuke publicly those who sin, that others in the ecclesia might “fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). The situation in the first century as far as the authorities of the world are concerned was actually the very opposite of what we read here in Romans. The same word occurs in 1 Pet. 3:14, telling the believers to endure persecution from the authorities, not to cave in to their demands, and “be not afraid of their *fear*”. Note that the Greek word for “afraid” occurs in Rom. 13:3- we should be “afraid” of the powers God has placed in the ecclesia. The fact the two words occur together in both Romans and Peter leads us to the conclusion: ‘Respect and “fear” those who are elders truly; but don’t fear / respect those who are elders in name only and are in reality far from grace’.

*“[not a terror] to good works, but to the evil. If you wish to live without fear of the authorities? (:3)*

The Greek word for “fear” is the same word in Gal. 2:12, which criticizes Peter for being “afraid” of the Jerusalem elders who were teaching legalism. Paul doesn’t mean we should fear an elder merely because they have the office of an elder; but we fear / respect those who are indeed spiritually “higher” than us.

*“Do that which is good! And you shall have praise from the same”*

This certainly isn’t true of worldly authorities and rulers. They don’t praise righteousness, and they certainly didn’t in the first century. Yet the same word is used in 2 Cor. 8:18 of how Timothy was “praised” in the ecclesias. Good elders and healthy ecclesias will give praise / encouragement to those who deserve it.

*“For he is a minister of God” (:4)*

Gk. *Diakonos*, sometimes translated “deacon”. The word is used 31 times in the N.T., nearly always about ecclesial elders / ministers / servants. Paul speaks of himself and Timothy with the very same words: a “minister of God” (2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thess. 3:2), who therefore ought to be listened to.

...to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain

This seems to be a reference to the ability which some elders had in the first century to execute physical affliction upon those who were disobedient. Peter smote Ananias and Sapphira dead. Paul seems to warn the Corinthians that he could “not spare” them if he convicted them of apostasy on his next visit. It even seems that the sicknesses spoken of in James 5 are a direct result of sinful behaviour, and the gift of healing could be exercised by the elders in the case of repentance. Jesus

Himself threatened immediate physical judgment, presumably through the hands of His representatives, upon some in the ecclesias of Rev. 2,3. Respect for elders is something taught throughout the N.T. letters- “remember them that have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:7). Here the writer clearly refers to elders in the ecclesia, for he bids his readers consider the end of those men’s faithful way of life and to follow their example. And yet they are described as ‘rulers’. It’s as if the point is that the real rulers of a first century believer were not the Roman administrators, but the ministers of God within their ecclesia. In illiterate ecclesias or those without access to the written scrolls containing God’s word, the elders would have played a more critical role in their relationship with God than in our age.

*“... For he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil- be afraid! For he carries not the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God, an avenger of God’s anger to him that does evil. Therefore you must be in subjection, not only because of God’s anger against sin, but also for the sake of your conscience. For this cause you pay tribute also” (:4-6)*

This could be referring to the Lord’s well known example of paying tribute, and simply saying that the principle of submission to authority should extend out of the ecclesia, to all those who have power over us- so long as this does not contradict our conscience toward Christ. But it could also be a reference to some form of tithing or regular support of elders. There is historical evidence that this went on early in the Christian church.

“Be subject” uses a Greek word elsewhere used about submission to elders (1 Cor. 16:16). Note how the word occurs in 1 Cor. 14:34- the sisters were commanded “to be under obedience” to their men [Gk.]. I take this to refer to the need for those sisters to be submissive to their appointed elder. When we meet the word again in the command “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22,24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1,5), I take this as meaning that they should treat him as they would an elder- in that Paul assumes he will teach and inspire her as the elders ought to have been doing.

*“For they are ministers of God’s service, attending continually upon this very thing” (:6)*  
The question arises, *what* thing? If the reference is to their reflecting of God’s judgment against those who sin, this is simply not true of human Governments. The first century authorities were persecuting the Christians, fabricating untruth against them, killing them, and insisting that those who refused to accept Caesar as Lord be punished. The words can only be true of the ministers of God of whom we read elsewhere in the N.T.- i.e., the ecclesial elders.

The Greek phrase for “attending continually” is a catchphrase usually employed to describe the zealous pastoral care of the early apostles: “These all *continued* with one accord in prayer...*continuing daily* with one accord...and breaking bread...we will *give ourselves continually* to prayer, and to the ministry [another Romans 13 idea!] of the word” (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 6:4). By using the phrase, Paul is undoubtedly pointing us back to the example of the early apostles / elders.

*“Render to all their dues” (:7)*

The Greek for “dues” is found in Rom. 15:27 about the due which the Gentile believers owe to materially support their Jewish brethren. We have no ‘due’ to this world (Rom. 13:8 Gk., s.w.), but our due is to love each other in the brotherhood. But admittedly Paul does seem in the next verses to extend the principle of submission further than just within the ecclesia. In the same way as elders should only be respected if they had earned that respect, and were leading brethren in the way of Christ, so too the authorities of the world should only be followed insofar as they did not lead believers into disobedience to Christ: “...tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (:8-10 AV).

We must remember that the Romans 13:1 passage about submission to human authority was written before Nero's persecution of Christians. It seems to be written on the assumption that



justice is being done by officialdom. Romans seems to have been written around AD60. The background situation in Rome, to which Paul was speaking, needs to be understood if we are to understand Paul in his context. In AD58 there were major revolts in Rome against the taxation system (as recorded in Tacitus, *Annals* 13.50,51). Jews were exempt from paying some taxes (they were allowed to pay them to the temple in Jerusalem); and Roman citizens also were exempt. There was therefore a huge amount of resentment from the Gentile, non-Roman citizen population who had to pay heavy taxes (1). It could well be that some of the Roman Christians were tempted to share in this unrest; and Paul is instead urging them to obey those who had the rule over them, in the sense of paying their taxes, rendering tribute to whom tribute was due. Ben Witherington, one of academic scholarship's most well-known and learned students of Paul, significantly doesn't see in the Romans 13 passage any suggestion that Christians should therefore bear arms, as this would contradict Paul's teaching about *non-violent* response to evil in the same section of Romans; rather does he understand the teaching about submission to authorities as being specifically in this taxation context (2).

(1) Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.5.1, Josephus, *Antiquities Of The Jews* 16.45,160-161; references in Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1998) p. 180.

(2) Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1998) pp. 178-184. He comments that "most ancient persons [took] it for granted that governing authorities have their authority from God" (p. 181). When Paul writes this to the Romans, he could well be quoting a well-known maxim- and thus using it in order to persuade the Roman Christians to pay their taxes.

13:1 *Let every one of you be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no power but by God, and the powers that be have been ordained by God-* I have suggested the possibility of this section referring to elders within the church. But it is also possible to understand the section as referring to civil powers, seeing that this was written before Nero's persecution of the Christians. We would then have a classic example of where Paul's letters address specific issues within a very specific time limited context. What he writes here about the nature of 'the powers that be' was true for the Rome ecclesia at that point in time; but it was not true for them some years later under Nero's persecution, nor was it true for believers under Hitler etc.

13:2 *Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment-* Judgment from the powers that be, rather than condemnation from God. The implication is that there were individuals within the church at Rome who were seriously misbehaving and would face criminal justice as a result. The letter of 1 Peter seems to address the same problem in the Jewish congregations of southern Turkey. Put this together with the shameful behaviour of the church at Corinth, and the similar very bad issues addressed in the other NT epistles. Titus is warned to strengthen the eldership, whilst there were many very bad behaviours amongst the congregation on Crete; and we find the same approach taken in advising Timothy about the mess at Ephesus. The overall picture is rather poor; the impression is of churches composed of many who seriously misbehaved, living alongside some wonderfully spiritual examples. The Lord's letters in Revelation give the same impression. Yet churches of our age face the problem of supposedly stronger members quitting because of the perceived unspirituality of the majority. And we see that there was no way that Paul was advising disfellowship of immoral members of the congregation apart from in nuanced and extreme situations such as 1 Corinthians 5.

13:3 *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. If you wish to live without fear of the authorities- then do that which is good! And you shall have praise from the same-* As noted on :2, this implies there was serious criminal misbehaviour amongst some in the church at Rome. And yet Paul writes in such warm terms about the church in chapter 1. This is the great challenge of Christianity; to accept the weakness of others, not turn away from it nor justify it, within the larger framework of knowing that they too are partakers of grace and salvation.

13:4 *For he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil- be afraid! For he carries not the sword in vain-* The mention of the sword implies the death penalty, which means that the church contained members guilty of serious criminal misbehaviour.

*For he is a minister of God, an avenger of God's anger to him that does evil-* The connection is with how the same word is used in 12:19: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written: Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord". It would be possible to conclude that some within the church were behaving in a criminal way towards others in the church, doing things to them which warranted the death penalty. And yet Paul has so much to say to them about grace and the certainty of salvation by faith. These considerations enable us to review chapters 1 and 2, which seem to speak as if murder and some of the worst forms of sexual perversion and abuse were being practiced within the church, just as they were by Israel in the desert.

13:5- see on 1 Jn. 3:18.

*Therefore you must be in subjection, not only because of God's anger against sin, but also for the sake of your conscience-* God's judgment would be manifest through the local authorities. But subjection to the authorities was not just in order to avoid judgment against sin, but because of a sense of conscience. Those authorities represented Him, and therefore quiet obedience to them was part of conscience towards God.

13:6 *For this cause you pay tribute also-* In the opening commentary on Romans 13:1 I gave evidence that in Rome there was widespread objection to paying taxes. Paul assumes their obedience- "you pay tribute". This is a great feature of Paul- he had such a positive spirit about brethren whom he knew to be far less than himself spiritually.

*For they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing-* This kind of religious language led me to suggest in the opening commentary that the authorities in view may in fact be within the church. But if not, then we can say that the language of the sanctuary is being consciously used about the ministers of the state. Just as believing slaves were to see their masters as representing Christ, so the Roman believers were to see tax collectors as requiring obedience *as if* they were part of the Divine system of things. And this is one of the arts of spiritual life- to see all our human interactions in this world as being performed as unto the Lord we have in Heaven and within the context of His system.

13:7 *Render to all their dues. Tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour-* This could mean 'to all magistrates', and surely Paul has his mind on the Lord's command to render unto Caesar what is his due (Mt. 22:21) rather than get involved in any form of anti-Caesar movement on the basis of refusing to pay taxes. The Christian movement indeed rejected Caesar as Lord, but there was no need to articulate this through not paying taxes to him. But the next verse shows that Paul develops a wider

context here. Not simply should taxes be paid, but a general spirit of respect towards others, including "honour".

13:8- see on Rom. 1:14.

*Owe no one anything, apart from to love one another-* The 'owing' would be in the context of accumulating tax debts in the hope they would never be demanded or enforced. Or perhaps Paul does literally feel that material debt to others is to be avoided at all costs. He has spoken of honouring and respecting persons in :6 and :7, and he sees keeping out of debt as a way of ensuring that we can respect persons for who they are and without the background factor of appearing to respect those to whom we are in debt. In low income situations, petty debt is a way of life; perhaps Paul is urging avoiding this. The debt we have is to love others, for we have been so loved by the Lord, and we are to realize that our need to pay that back must be articulated in terms of loving our neighbour- not that we can ever repay our debt to the Lord. Paul's conception of love to the world around him was clearly rooted in the need to preach to them, rather than provide material help. He felt he had a debt to love others (Rom. 13:8); yet also a debt to preach (Rom. 1:14). His debt was to love in the form of preaching.

*For he that loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law-* The law was fulfilled by the Lord's death on the cross. The death of the cross is the ultimate love of neighbour as self, the final honour, respect, submission etc. which forms the context here. The Lord's work and death can therefore really be participated in by us- in the small daily things of life such as kindness and respect to others.

13:9 *For this, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet- and if there be any other commandment-* Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. For example, in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

*It is summed up in this word, namely: You shall love your neighbour as yourself-* The intention of all the various laws was "love". Likewise the fruit of the Spirit is in the singular- "love". Love is the point of maturity to which we are all travelling (1 Cor. 13). The cross was the fulfilling of all law in that there love was articulated to its ultimate term.

13:10 *Love works no evil to his neighbour. Love therefore is the fulfilment of the law-* This looks at love from a negative aspect- love is the summation of all commandments, it is positively a loving of neighbour; but also working no evil is likewise another way of putting it. Yet the two sides are in parallel- positively, proactively doing good to neighbour is the same as working no evil to neighbour. This addresses the idea that 'I do no evil to others; I just keep myself to myself and have my own personal beliefs about Jesus, sit behind my screen and press the right buttons at times, no need for church, I just believe in my heart'. Such an attitude is increasingly popular in our disconnected and dysfunctional world, where people seem unable to cope with personal relationships. But to work no evil is part of doing proactive good. And remember that love is the fulfilment of the law, as epitomized in the

Lord's death upon the cross. One could go further, and argue that by not doing the proactive love to neighbour, we are actually working evil to neighbour- for sins of omission are every bit as real [before God] as sins of commission. Perhaps Paul has in mind the LXX of Prov. 3:27-29, where withholding good from our neighbour is paralleled with devising evil against him or her.

13:11 *And consider this too: Knowing the time, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep-* God actually saw us as saved right from the beginning of the world; He purposed, and effectively it was done. Perhaps this is the hardest thing our faith has to grapple with. "Knowing the time, that for us, the hour already is to be aroused out of sleep" and be resurrected (Rom. 13:11 YLT) may mean (contrary to the implication of the AV) that for us who are with God now, the time of resurrection and salvation is now with us, and therefore we should live lives which answer to this fact. The day of salvation is in that sense *today* (2 Cor. 6:2 Gk.). So sure is God's word that it is as if the concept of a delay between its utterance and the fulfilment is something not to be considered. Thus "the vision" is an ellipsis for 'the fulfilment of the vision' in Hab. 2:3. Although our day by day spirituality fluctuates, God is beyond time. He sees us either as an essentially good tree bringing forth good fruit, or as essentially bad (Mt. 7:23). And yet my sense is that here we have yet another example of where the early believers fully expected the Lord's return in their lifetimes. This was not simply because they were mistaken, or because the Lord's scheduled return in the first century was delayed because the church wasn't ready for it. This expectation of the Lord's soon return is, it could be argued, actually part of the Christian faith. We are to live in expectation of His imminent return, whether or not we consider current events to align with the relevant prophecies.

*For now is our salvation nearer to us than when we first believed-* The "salvation" is "the day" of the Lord's return (:12). We are chronologically nearer to that final salvation than when we first believed. This suggests a specific start point for 'first belief'; confirming that there is a specific point when a person becomes a believer, rather than belief being something drifted into as a result of upbringing or exposure to Christian preaching. And that specific point in time is surely baptism. "Nearer" uses the same word used by the Lord in saying that we know His coming is 'near' because of the fulfilment of the signs in the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32,33). Those signs were indeed fulfilled- His coming was indeed scheduled for the first century. But it was delayed, because the required preconditions of Israel's repentance, the spreading of the Gospel and the required spiritual fruit in the church were just not met. And so it has been delayed until our days. And we face the same urgent challenges in those same areas which the early church failed in.

13:12 *The night is far spent, and the day is at hand-* See on :11. Whilst Paul clearly expected the Lord's return in his time, the statement and spirit of it is not wrong. For we are to live *as if* the day of His coming is imminent. And of course we can die at any moment- and that for us will effectively be His return. The entire Gospel message begins with the usage of the same Greek word: The Kingdom *is at hand* (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7 etc.). We are therefore to live in expectation of the imminent breaking forth of God's Kingdom. And in a spiritual sense, the Kingdom has 'come near' [s.w. "is at hand"] in that our experience of life in Christ is our experience of the eternal life of God's Kingdom (Lk. 10:9 "The Kingdom of God is come near / is at hand to you"). And yet in the literal sense, we see the day approaching [s.w. "at hand", "near"]; and we are to draw near to God in response (Heb. 7:19; 10:25). James 4:8; 5:8

are very clear. We draw near to God and He draws near to us, in that the Lord's coming draws near.

*Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light-* It's been pointed out and exemplified beyond cavil that Paul uses much Essene terminology. I suggest he does this in order to deconstruct it. When he urges the Roman Jews to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light", calling his converts "the children of the light and children of the day" (1 Thess. 5:5), Paul is alluding to the Essene ideas. But he's saying that the children of light are to wage spiritual warfare against themselves, their own hearts, quit the things and habits of the flesh etc. – rather than charge off into literal battle with physical armour against the Romans. Likewise when Paul insists that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Rom. 9:14–18), he is not only repeating the Biblical record (Ex. 9:12,16; 33:19), but he is alluding to the way that the Jewish *Book of Jubilees* claimed that Mastema [the personal Satan] and not God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

13:13 *Let us behave decently-* Gk. 'honestly'. The context has spoken of paying taxes and not behaving as criminals.

*As in the day-* The "day" spoken of in the context is that of the Lord's coming and His Kingdom. We are to live the kind of life we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. In this sense we have the eternal life.

*Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy-* We will not spend eternity doing these things, so we should not be doing them now. Again we sense that all these things were going on in the church at Rome, and yet Paul still speaks so lovingly and positively of them all. The very same set of issues were clearly evident in the church at Corinth. Again [see on :2] the picture of the early converts is not very pleasant. All the more commendable therefore are those faithful ones who lived out their spiritual lives within such churches; and the Lord's letters in Revelation make just that point. But we note they were never exhorted to quit fellowship or association with the weak mass of Christian believers.

13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ-* We must even after baptism "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:14; Col. 3:12,14; 1 Thess. 5:8), even though *at baptism* we put on the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:10) and in prospect the flesh was co-crucified with Christ's flesh (Rom. 6:6,18). By putting off the things of the flesh and putting on the things of the Lord in our lives, we live out the baptism principle again; and thereby we are "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph. 4:22-24). See on Col. 2:6. Baptism in this sense is an ongoing experience of death and resurrection with the Lord.

*And make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires-* This is the simple key to overcoming temptation. "Provision" is related to the word for 'providence'. God's overall providence in calling, planning and predestinating us to salvation has been mentioned earlier by Paul in this letter. Our response is to likewise seek to structure our own lives so that we do not provide opportunities for the flesh, but rather for the Spirit.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 14

14:1 *As for the one who is weak in faith-* Remember that this practical section of Romans from chapters 12 to 16 is based upon the pure theology of Romans 1-8. Abraham, the spiritual father of us all, was *not* "weak in faith" (Rom. 4:19). The same words are used; and the point is that even those in the church who do not have the faith of Abraham should still be accepted. And the later context of Romans 14 explains more. The 'weak in faith' were those who tried to obey Jewish food laws (:2); and some had been made weak in faith by the insensitive attitudes of others in the church (:21). But for whatever reason, the weak were to be received- in contrast to the attitudes of those who assume that 'fellowship' must be based upon being able to jump certain doctrinal or practical bars. We note that again in 1 Cor. 8:11, the weak are those who are legalistic- and yet they are the very ones who consider themselves strong by their legalism.

*Welcome him-* The reason is because both God and the Lord Jesus have received or welcomed him (14:3; 15:7). The 'receiving' in view was presumably towards some who wanted to be in the church but who had been denied. The argument is similar to what had to be used with Peter- God had received the Gentiles, so Peter was to likewise. So perhaps it was the Jewish element who were unwilling to accept Gentiles in Rome. And this must be a principle for us too. We are not to be out of step with the Lord's acceptance of folks. It simply cannot be right to reason that 'They may well be good brethren in Christ, but we can't accept them because... '.

*But not so as to just quarrel with him over opinions-* Of course, the Jewish legalists would have argued back as many do today: 'These are not matters of opinion, they are fundamental issues, God is a holy God... etc.'. The church was not to be a place of quarrelling. People were to be accepted with the positions they held without seeking to endlessly argue with them- that is surely the idea.

14:2 *One man has faith to eat all things-* The faith was surely faith in Christ's cleansing work by which He had ended the Mosaic law and all conception of clean and unclean food.

*But he that is weak eats herbs-* Vegetarianism was associated with hyper legalistic Judaism, whereby every kind of meat was feared to be not completely bloodless or *kosher*. But those who had this position were "weak". Yet they were not to be argued with but accepted. This is not to say that Paul has no argument about this issue, for he clearly does elsewhere, as did the Lord Himself. But the point was that endless argument of a casuistic nature was not the way to resolve the issue. And again we have a valuable principle there. Presumably Paul does not engage with the Judaistic argument in the same way as he did in Galatians because he has already argued that justification is by grace and not the works of the law, and perhaps that point was accepted in general terms- whereas in Galatia it was not.

14:3 *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats; for God has accepted him-* Those with a more Biblically correct position are tempted to "despise" those who 'don't get it'. But all such spiritual elitism is wrong. Paul uses the same word used about how the Pharisee despised the publican (Lk. 18:9)- to demonstrate that such spiritual superiority was in fact a form of the very Pharisaism which they were despising. The legalists were likewise inclined to judge their brothers who ate anything- using the weight of the Mosaic law to condemn. Paul alludes to both groups in :10, where he uses the same Greek words in appealing for brethren not to "judge" and "set at

nothing" (s.w. "despise") their brethren- because they all stood before the Lord's judgment seat as sinners.

14:4 *Who are you to judge the servant of another?*- In :3, a distinction is made between the liberals who "despise" others, and the legalists who "judge" others. The reference here in :4 to not judging may therefore refer specifically to the legalists; or Paul's point may be that effectively, the liberals too were judging their brethren. The idea is that even if we consider the Biblical evidence judges another individual negatively, *we* are not to pass that judgment. That is not for us to do. This is a subtle but important difference. The Bible may indeed condemn a particular behaviour, but it is not for us to condemn the individual who does it.

*To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be made to stand up. For the Lord has power to make him stand*- We are all slaves; not the Master. Likewise we are all guests at the Lord's table who should by rights never be there; it is not for us to tell others to leave that table of grace. The 'falling' in view in Romans is stumbling over the rock of Christ and 'falling' into condemnation (Rom. 11:11,22). But Paul believes that God is able to make those who fall stand up, through imputing righteousness to them. For this has been his earlier argument in Romans. It is not for us, therefore, to judge those who fall. For God is seeking to make them stand up, and as the merciful Master, He may well count them as having stood up anyway, despite their fallen state. It is not therefore for us to judge those who fall. It may be that Paul's implication is that God is more likely to uphold His failing servant than we would be; therefore, let's not condemn our brother, because God is more generous-spirited than we are in His judgment.

The first century society was built around the concept of *oikonomia*, household fellowship. The head of the house was the leader, and all the extended family and slaves had to follow his religion and be obedient to him. For slaves, this was on pain of death. However, the call of Christ was to *individuals*; in conscious allusion to the *oikonomia* concept, Paul speaks of how we are the "household-servants" of Christ- not a human master (Rom. 14:4 RVmg.). Individual conversion to a religion was unheard of at the time. Indeed, religion was something for the wealthy to play with, as a hobby.

14:5 *One man esteems one day above another. Another esteems every day alike*- "Esteems" is the same word used in :1 about not having quarrels over opinions, or how one esteems / judges things. The matter was to be left within the mind of each person and not endlessly quarrelled over. Yet Paul is quite clear in Colossians 2 and elsewhere that the position that all days are the same is the right one. The Sabbath and all holy days have been ended by the Lord's work. But clearly he is willing for believers to remain of a different mind; the important thing being not to argue and have discord.

*Let each man be fully assured in his own mind*- Paul has argued using the same word that Abraham was "fully assured" of salvation by faith through grace, and not by works (Rom. 4:21). This is only one of several allusions to Abraham in this section. But even if a believer cannot get to Abraham's level and still seriously misunderstands- they are to be accepted. This has serious challenges for those who demand a certain level of faith, understanding and practice before extending Christian fellowship.

14:6- see on Acts 18:18.

*He that regards the day, regards it to the Lord-* "Regards" really means to regard highly. Paul didn't agree that some days were to be more highly regarded than others. But he advises that we respect those who have this wrong view, and consider that they are performing their mistaken service as "to the Lord". This is just how he has reasoned in chapter 13 about respecting local magistrates- service and obedience was to be performed to them 'as unto the Lord', just as slaves were to serve their earthly masters 'as unto the Lord'.

There is no lack of evidence in the NT that the Lord's sacrifice precluded the need to do these things. And yet Paul and the Council of Jerusalem made concessions to the Jewish brethren who couldn't bring themselves to accept the Truth in these areas, in the hope that continued practice of these things within the context of the Christian community would make them see for themselves that they were inappropriate. Paul says that Sabbath keeping is a matter of personal conscience (Rom. 14:1-10), even though elsewhere he argues so forcibly that to do this is to return to the weak and beggarly elements. Here, as with the demons issue, there was a clear concession to some degree of human non-acceptance of Divine truth and the implications arising from it. It seems that although the Law was done away by the cross, by the time of 2 Cor. 3:7,11 it could still be spoken of as "that which is being done away" (RVmg.). There was a changeover period allowed, rather than a bald insistence that acceptance of Christ and the meaning of His death must mean that the old Jewish ways were dropped instantly.

*And he that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks-* Paul assumes that believers of whatever persuasion will thank God before meals; and this should remain one of our good traditions.

14:7 *For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself-* Note that it is not living for others which is the immediate point; but living and dying to *Jesus* (:8). "None of us" is a very generous statement by Paul; he assumes that each of his readership are living and dying not to themselves but to Christ (:8). His positivity is expressed whilst at the very same time facing their immaturity and misunderstandings head on.

14:8 *For whether we live, we live to the Lord. Or whether we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's-* This is exactly the language of Romans 6 concerning baptism. The death of self and living now unto the Lord Jesus is the exact terminology used. Again Paul is positively assuming that the status taken on at baptism is being lived out in practice. He speaks of this level of total dedication to the Lord as a reason why we should not therefore be involved in judging our brethren, or getting involved in endless doctrinal disputes with them.

14:9- see on Acts 17:31.

*For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living-* There are some passages which appear to teach [misread] that we go on living after death. It has been observed that Rom. 14:8,9 implies that Jesus is our Lord after death as well as in life: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living". We are the Lord's after death, in the same way as Abraham lives unto Him (Lk. 20:38). We are still with Him. He doesn't forget us when we die, just as I will remember my mother till the day of my death,



regardless of when she dies. But if the Lord doesn't come, I will die, and my memory, my love, my fondness, will perish (for a small moment). But God doesn't die, His memory doesn't fade and distort as ours does; images of us don't come in and out of His mind with greater intensity and insistence at some times than at others; He remembers us constantly and will remember us after our death, right up until when the Lord comes. Because of this, He is the God of Abraham; Abraham is alive in the mind of God, He remembers his faith and his offering of Isaac, just as much as He was aware of it in Abraham's lifetime. The works of the dead follow them, in the sense that once they finish their labours their works are still in the memory of the Father (Rev. 14:13); for what father would not remember his dead child's ways and deeds? This is why Rom. 14:8,9 says that Jesus is our Lord after death just as much as He was and is during our lifetimes. Why? Because we are "the Lord's", because we were "added to the Lord" through baptism (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 11:24), because we are true brothers-in-Christ. From God's perspective, the dead believers are cheering us on as we run the race to the end; He remembers them as they were, and knows how they would behave if they were alive today, looking down upon us as we run the race (Heb. 12:1). Or in another figure, the blood of the dead believers cries out from under the altar, demanding vengeance on this world: on the Catholic, Protestant, Babylonian, Roman, Nazi, Soviet systems that slew them for their faith (Rev. 6:9). To God, their blood is a voice, just as real as the voice of Abel, which cried out (in a figure) for judgment against Cain (Gen. 4:10). After their death, those who had already died are spoken of as being given "white robes" and being told to rest a bit longer (Rev. 6:11).

The fact Jesus is Lord has vital practical import for us. In Rom. 14:7-9, Paul speaks of the need not to live unto ourselves, but to rather live in a way which is sensitive to the conscience and needs of others. Why? "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living". Because He is our Lord we therefore don't live for ourselves, but for Christ our Lord and all those in Him. When Paul in 1 Tim. 6 exalts that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, this isn't just some literary flourish. It is embedded within a context of telling the believers to quit materialism, indeed to flee from its snare.

14:10- see on 2 Cor. 11:2.

*But you, why do you judge your brother?*- The "you" refers to those legalists who judged the liberals. Those who despised or 'set at nothing' others are surely the liberals despising the conservatives. Hence "You again..." refers to a different group.

*Or you again, why do you set at nothing your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God*- We read in Jer. 42:2 of a supplication being "accepted", or 'to fall down before' (RVmg.). To fall down before the Lord Jesus is to be accepted of Him. Paul speaks of us all *standing* before the judgment seat of Christ after first of all casting ourselves down; and this in the context of saying that God is able to make the weak brother *stand* in His sight (Rom. 14:4 cp. 10,11). We will all be in the position of the weak brother. Don't "set at nought" your brother- because the judgment seat of Christ is coming for you too (Rom. 14:10). We will *all* be "set at nought" then; that's the implication. We will all have to be made stand by God's grace. We will *all* be made to stand, i.e. be accepted (Eph. 6:11-13; Col. 4:12)- or at least, Paul is saying, that's how you should look at your brethren, as if they too will be accepted. For if we have no right to condemn our brethren; we must surely assume

they will be accepted. In passing, note how Paul warns in this context that we can cause our brother to fall down or stumble (Rom. 14:13). Some at the last day will not be 'stood up', they will remain prostrate and then slink away. And why? Because they will have been made to fall by their brethren. Our faith and our community of believers is fragile, more fragile than we may think. In all the pressures of these last days it is so terribly easy to cause each other to stumble, to fall, with the ultimate consequence that they will not be stood up at the judgment. This is the evil of causing offence, stumbling, making another to fall down.

14:11 *As it is written*- Is. 45:23 "Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess" is quoted by Paul in Rom. 14:11,12 as being specifically concerning our position at the judgment seat. It is therefore fitting to read Is. 45:24,25 as being concerning our thoughts then: "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord (Jesus) have I righteousness and strength... and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed (cp. our earlier reconstruction of the rejected initially arguing with the Lord in anger, and then slinking away in shame). In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory". In God's presence (judgment language: Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10) no flesh will glory, but will glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:29). The RV makes all this even more personal: "Only in the Lord, shall one say unto me, have I righteousness and strength" (Is. 45:24 RV). The words of grateful realization will be directed specifically by us to the Lord Himself.

*As I live, says the Lord, to Me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess to God*- To God (in Christ). This is parallel to "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:11,12). "Account" is the Greek '*logos*'- we will '*logos*' ourselves in the sense that we will verbally confess ("every tongue") the innermost essence of our spiritual lives. "Confess", *exomo-logeo* is related to *logos*, "account". This will lead us to confess with our tongue that Christ is really our Lord (Phil. 2:11). Confessing our sinfulness will lead us to show our appreciation of His Lordship. That which has been spoken or thought in darkness will then be heard in the light- in that day "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed" (Lk. 12:2,3). He will confess our righteous acts, and we will confess our sins (Is. 45:23-25 cp. Phil. 2:10; Rom. 14:11). For the wicked, it will be the opposite. They confess their righteous acts, He tells them their sins. And in this way the good and bad deeds of all the responsible will come to the light.

14:12 *So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God*- The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 ["every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment"] suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life.

"Every knee shall bow to me... every tongue shall confess... so then every one *of us* shall give account" (Rom. 14:11,12) is an example of where 'all men', 'every man' means 'every one of us the responsible'. "The dead" will be judged (Rev. 11:18)- not everyone who ever died, but the dead who, God counts responsible. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" (Tit. 2:11)- certainly not to every human being that has ever lived; but

to the "all men" of the new creation. The Lord tasted death "for every man" (Heb. 2:9)- for every one who has a representative part in His sacrifice through baptism.

14:13- see on Mt. 13:22.

*Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide-* There is to be one thing we judge or decide- that we never cause another to stumble.

*Never to put a stumbling block-* The "stumblingblock" was used earlier in Romans with regard to the Lord Jesus and His grace being a stone of stumbling for the Jews (9:32,33; 1 Pet. 2:8). He could be made a stumblingblock by Gentile believers insisting that Jewish believers disobey the Mosaic law by eating things like pork; if the Jews did so with a bad conscience, they might end up turning away from Him completely. The word "stumblingblock" is used in exactly this context in :20,21 and 1 Cor. 8:9. So sensitivity is required in order to not make another stumble. It is not enough to insist that we are right from God's word, and therefore what we demand must be accepted by others. Their weakness of understanding and therefore of conscience must still be taken into account. Pure Biblicism has no place for this kind of thinking, and results in the utter belligerence and insensitivity which has led so many to stumble from the pathway to God's Kingdom.

*Or hindrance in the way of a brother-* "Hindrance" is *skandalon* and strictly refers to the twig on a trap, which once triggered opens up the trap into which the animal falls. The Lord is crystal clear in His teaching that those who create such triggers for others shall be cast out at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 18:7; Lk. 17:1). Hence Paul urges that we must soberly decide / judge *never* to do this to another believer. This needs to be taken far more seriously by those who insist on rejecting others from their communities because of positions on divorce or fellowship. Paul concludes by soberly warning avoidance of those who cause such *skandalon* (16:17). Walking in the light, loving our brother, means that we have no reason of causing *skandalon* (1 Jn. 2:10). Love is not causing another to stumble.

14:14 *I know, and I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus-* Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records.

*That nothing is unclean of itself-* This is another window onto the fact that essentially, sin is committed within the mind. It is the mental attitudes which go along with eating or not eating which are the key issues before God. Because there is nothing unclean of itself.

*Save that to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean-* Paul's approach could have been: 'The truth is that "nothing is unclean". So those who still think in terms of clean and unclean are wrong. It's their problem- they should accept the truth about this matter and get over it. By believing some things are still unclean they are denying the power of the Lord's sacrifice, how awful...'. But he doesn't. He asks us to accept that these believers really think some things are unclean and so for them, if they eat them, they would be sinning in their conscience. The bald black and white, truth / error scenario doesn't help here; the sensitive Christian must go beyond this in sensitivity to those who are still immature, rather

than hitting them with a choice as to whether to submit to Divine truth or not. We can be sure that the Father likewise practices this policy with us all over many areas where we also misunderstand and are genuinely miseducated. It is by our response to others like that as we encounter them in life that we work out our own final standing before Him.

14:15 *For if your brother is grieved by what you eat*- The grief or distress would be in their conscience, being encouraged to do something which they believe is sinful. Paul only uses the same word in Romans to describe his distress for Israel and those still under the Law (Rom. 9:2). This is the grief we should have. We the mature should therefore feel grief for the legalists; and not cause them grief in their conscience.

*You walk no longer in love*- Blind, bald insistence upon true principle in this case can lead others to stumble; and this nets our condemnation, not our commendation for understanding the theoretical truth about something. The way of love involves sensitivity to others. Recall that Paul has said that there should not be argument about these matters, not receiving these weaker ones to endless disputations (:1). Rather their weaker position must be accepted and lived with in sensitivity. This is a far ranging principle which so many Protestant groups obsessed with 'truth' have seriously failed to grasp.

*By what you eat, do not destroy*- The emphasis is upon "you". Our example is more powerful than we can imagine. The 'destruction' refers to condemnation at the last day; the Greek word is used in this way elsewhere (Mt. 5:29,30; 9:17 with reference to the new covenant destroying the old bottles of the legalists; 10:28,39; Rom. 2:12). So will God condemn a person for eating pork when they see you eat it, just because it is sinful in their conscience? Even when God sees that there is nothing unclean of itself? Maybe. Perhaps this is the degree to which God is sensitive to human conscience. But we must give due weight to the fact that whether our conscience commends or condemns us, it is not by our conscience that we shall be justified at the last day (1 Cor. 4:4). I would rather think that if a person e.g. eats pork when they feel it is a sin, they will thereby be emboldened to consciously sin in other areas too, and their spiritual lives will fast tumble downhill until they lose faith completely.

*The one for whom Christ died*- The tragedy of making another stumble is that Christ died for their salvation; you have made His death in vain for them. This is the message of the new wine, Christ's blood, being put into old wineskins; they are destroyed, and the new wine is poured out on the ground wasted. To make Christ's death to be in vain is serious, and can be the basis of our condemnation.

4:16 *So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil*- 'Spoken of as evil' is literally 'blasphemed'. The Greek word can be used of bad speaking against a person and not only against God. Paul uses the same word in this very context in 1 Cor. 10:30: "If I eat my food with thankfulness, why is evil spoken of me, for that for which I give thanks?". By allowing continual argument about the food issue, persons and things such as pork meat started to be spoken evil of. This is exactly why Paul wisely commands that those who have these 'weak' positions should be accepted but not argued with (:1).

14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not about what we eat and drink*- This verse doesn't speak only of the fact that in the future Kingdom of God on earth, we shall not be debating what we eat- and so we shouldn't be now. 15:13 uses the same Greek words to explain that God through the Holy Spirit fills us with "joy and peace". These are internal mental attributes; and

we are given them by God through the Spirit / mind which is given to us, as explained in chapter 8. Gal. 5:22 likewise says that the Spirit within us brings forth the fruit of joy and peace. "The Kingdom of God" was the core message of the Lord Jesus, and His teachings and parables about it refer mainly to life lived under the Kingship of God right now. Within that spirit of thinking and living, we do not argue about issues like food. There is a clear connection with the theological section of Romans- the life of the Spirit is all about righteousness (8:10)- the same terms used in this verse. The practical import of that is that we are not going to be mentally bogged down in endless disputes about legal issues. We are therefore not to keep arguing about them (:1), but just accept the weak and immature as they are, by grace.

*But about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit-* All the law, every possible type of legislation, is comprehended in the one simple law of loving our neighbour (Rom. 13:9). We aren't free to do, dress or speak just as we like; the law of love binds heavy upon us. The things of God's Kingdom don't revolve so much around laws (e.g. about what we should eat and drink) but around "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). It is attitudes which are important rather than specific acts of obedience.

In Ex. 33:8 Moses asks to see God's glory, and in reply he is told God will proclaim His Name before him, which is done in Ex. 34:5-7 by the declaration of God's righteous attributes. Solomon building a temple "For the name of the Lord, and an house for His Kingdom" (2 Chron. 2:1) suggests that God's Kingdom is another manifestation of His Name, because it will be filled with His attributes. This helps us understand Rom. 14:17: "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink... but righteousness... joy", i.e. the characteristics of God's Name.

14:18 *For he that herein serves Christ is wellpleasing to God-* The language is that of sacrifice, which is how God was 'served'; and "wellpleasing" is the word for 'acceptable', used about the acceptability of sacrifice. By patiently accepting the weakness and immaturity of others, and living the Spirit life of joy and peace which is not bogged down in endless arguments over interpretation, we are in fact serving the Lord Jesus; and that service is a sacrifice acceptable to God.

*And approved of by men-* Taking the higher path of not conflicting over these matters was in any case the way to acceptability with men. Not that this is of itself what we should be seeking; but Paul is addressing the unspoken issue of everyone wanting to be seen by men to be doing the right thing.

14:19 *So then let us follow after things which make for peace-* The endless disputations about law do not make for peace, neither with God [which is how Paul often uses the idea of peace] nor with men. Again we note that Paul came down on one side of the argument- for he writes that there is nothing unclean in itself. But this point was not to be pushed and made the source of endless argument. For peace between believers is the fruit and intention of the Spirit. And again there is a connection back to the more theoretical section of Romans, where Paul uses the same word in saying that Israel who 'followed after' legalistic righteousness did not attain it (9:30,31).

Lk. 14:32 records the parable of the man with a small army going to meet the General with a far larger army- and then wisely desiring "conditions (lit. 'things') of peace". The man is

clearly us, and the General coming with His hosts is evidently the Lord Jesus; we are to come to peace with Him before the final meeting of God and man in judgment. But this Greek phrase 'things of peace' recurs in Rom. 14:19, where Paul speaks of making every effort to live at peace *with our brethren*, e.g. being sensitive to their scruples about food. Paul clearly understood that our peace with God cannot be unrelated to our peace with our brethren. To make peace with God and His Son as required in Lk. 14:32 must have some practical issue- and practically, it means living at peace with the rest of God's children.

*And things whereby we may edify one another-* Paul repeats this in 15:2: "Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to encourage him". "Encourage" is s.w. "edify" or 'build up'. We take our place within the congregation thinking how we can build up the one next to us. And that requires wisdom; we have to choose our issues, losing a few battles to win a war. And arguing over the food issues was not going to build anyone up. Let that one go, just as the Lord let go the issue of folks believing in demons; focus instead on something positive which will really improve or build up our neighbour within the church. This approach of course is at variance with the mindset which insists that because truth has been perceived over one issue, we must keep on and on about that issue, until we either drive our brother out of the church or we split the community.

14:20 *Do not overthrow the work of God for the mere sake of food-* Paul has shown in 15:15 that we can destroy a brother by insisting on our particular point, no matter how correct we may be [see note there]. The "work of God" refers to His work to save that individual whom we can cause to stumble. Our own stubbornness and belligerence regarding our own correctness of understanding can actually be working against God's work. And because He allows us freewill, He permits us the power to both stumble and build up our brother. Much depends on us. "The work of God" is specifically faith in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:29). We can destroy another's faith in Jesus because of an argument about food. This is how fragile and delicate is the faith of others. And yet we can too easily ride roughshod over the faith of others by our insistence on our correct interpretations. Paul earlier in Romans has argued that God saves without works of men (4:2,6; 9:11). Salvation is His work... and yet we can disallow His work for others by making them stumble. We must take seriously our potential to do this. In no way can we therefore go along with any policy or position which leads to the stumbling of others. And this may have radical implications for us in our social life within the believing community, just as it did for the likes of Paul and Peter in the first century church. Our relationship with the Lord God is personal. Each of us is "the work of God", and we should therefore respect each other's spiritual individuality, even if it is based on misunderstandings such as misinterpretation of Old Testament passages about food.

*All things indeed are clean-* Again Paul clearly comes down on one side of the food argument- no food is unclean of itself. And yet his view is that the weak should be admitted to the church but there is to be no disputing about their wrong understandings (:1).

*However it is evil for that man who makes another stumble by what he eats-* Paul here redefines clean and unclean food in a new covenant context. Eating unclean food is made equal to doing something which makes your legalistic brother stumble. This is what defiles and places us outside God's realm of holiness.

14:21- see on Acts 18:18.

*It is good not to eat meat nor drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble-* The 'good' thing here is that spoken of in :16: "So do not let what you regard as good...". What is good or clean meat is to not do anything that causes your brother to stumble. "Or do anything..." takes this whole argument far beyond the immediate context of whether we can eat pork or only *kosher* chicken. The principles reach to our day. The legalists were convinced that the Bible taught a difference between clean and unclean food- for "the Bible tells me so". But the more mature could see that the Lord's words, and the implications of the Lord's sacrifice, meant that these laws should no longer be kept. Because 'the Bible told them so'. And they were in fact right, as Paul labours by twice stating that there is nothing unclean in itself. But they only won on points. The far wider issue was not causing another to stumble by keeping on about the fact, and accepting weaker brethren to only have "doubtful disputations" with them (:1). The principles are so clearly relevant to all the struggles over interpretation and practice which have riddled all the various denominations of Christendom.

14:22 *The faith which you have-* Eating previously unclean food was possible by faith in the Lord Jesus and His work. It would seem from how he writes that Paul is especially addressing the more mature element in the church; for in :1 he tells them to accept the weak into the church.

*Keep between yourself and God-* Our faith and understanding is in a sense very intimate, "before God" (Gk.), in His presence. By endlessly engaging others in the "doubtful disputations" of :1, that faith was no longer private, but was being forced upon others. The idea seems to be that one may eat privately what they wish, but should not eat or drink before a weaker believer in a way which makes him stumble (:21).

*Happy is he that has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves-* This is the blessedness of a good conscience.

14:23- see on Col. 2:18.

*But he that doubts-* Romans 14 and 15 have many allusions back to the earlier, 'doctrinal' part of Romans. Between them, those allusions teach that we *are* to be as Abraham; and yet we will be accepted if we can't rise up to his standard. Rom. 14:1 exhorts us to "receive the *weak in faith*"- when we have been told that Abraham was *not* weak in faith (Rom. 4:19) and we should seek to be like him. But we are to receive those who are in his seed by baptism, but don't make it to his level of personal faith. Rom. 14:5 bids us be *fully persuaded*- as Abraham was "fully persuaded" (Rom. 4:21). Yet, Rom. 14:23 he who *doubts* is damned- and Abraham didn't *stagger* [s.w. Rom. 4:20). Thus ultimately, he must be our example, even if some in the ecclesia will take time to rise up to his standard, and unlike him are "weak in faith".

*Is condemned if he eats, because he eats not from faith-* This is the opposite case of those who can happily eat whatever on the basis of their faith in the Lord's work; which is how "faith" is used in Romans.

*And whatever is not of faith is sin-* "Of faith" is a phrase used earlier by Paul in Romans; and I have argued that the practical section of the letter is full of reference to the theological foundations given in the opening section. "The just shall live by [s.w. "of"] faith" (1:17). If we are not living in justification in Christ, free from the Law, then we are in sin. This is the tough dualism Paul presents in the opening chapters of Romans. If they ate unclean food whilst still thinking they were thereby justified by the Law, then they were in sin- for Paul

has proved that legalistic obedience to Law leaves us in sin, and only faith in Christ can get us into a status outside of "sin". The Jews could only be justified by or 'of' faith (3:30; 4:16). Rightness before God is only "of faith" (5:1; 9:30,32). Any other way leaves us "in sin". And yet we are left with a significant logical problem: If indeed justification and salvation are *only* "of faith" in Christ and not by keeping Mosaic commandments, then why does Paul as it were allow this whole question of obeying Jewish laws to be as it were a matter of personal conscience? I can only conclude that he accepts that God's grace in Christ is such that even those who did not fully 'get it' would still be saved. And that is grace indeed. This also answers the question as to what was to become of the Jewish Christians amongst Paul's readership who didn't fully accept his arguments. Were they thereby condemned? If they sought justification by obedience to Law, then yes- "he that doubts is condemned". But if they still hankered after obedience to Law and couldn't emotionally accept the full implications of that status- well Paul seems content to allow them some concession to that weakness.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 15

15:1- see on Rom. 12:1.

*Now we that are strong-* As noted at the end of chapter 14, Paul is writing specifically to those who knew the Law to be ended and who rightly felt free to eat anything.

*Ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves-* In chapter 14, Paul has defined "the weak" as those who could not come to terms with grace and who persisted in misinterpreting Bible teaching about food laws. In effect, they were in denial of much of Paul's inspired reasoning earlier in Romans. But he has urged these "weak" be accepted in the church (14:1), but not endlessly argued with. The more mature had "to bear" their weakness of understanding and behaviour. This is at variance to the pure Biblicist, truth vs. error scenario, where those who are Biblically in the right keep on attacking the weak and will not fellowship them. The Greek for "infirmities" is the word used about how Abraham was *not* weak or infirm in faith (4:19); and how the Law was "weak through the flesh". Those still under the Law simply did not have the faith of Abraham. And others had been made weak or infirm by the intolerance of those who understood better than them (14:21 AV "is made weak"). But the strong were to accept them into the church (14:1) and carry / bear them. And this is indeed how life is in any church; there are some who will need to be carried to the Kingdom. That is how it is. And it is the serious sin of those supposedly 'strong' to refuse to carry them.

The Lord Jesus didn't sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a sinner, even though He wasn't. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended, we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). But in the context of that passage, Paul is quoting from Is. 53:11, about how the Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren. We should be able to say with Paul that we are indeed co-crucified with Him. For most of us, this co-crucifixion isn't in terms of literal pain or violent persecution for His sake. So in what terms, then, are His sufferings articulated in us? Surely, therefore, in our mental suffering with Him. Thus Paul can quote a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion and apply it to our sufferings as a result of bearing with our weak brethren (Rom. 15:1-3).

15:2 *Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to encourage him-* The ordinary people must take responsibility. Each of us should build up his neighbour- and 'neighbour' is usually to be understood in the NT as our neighbour within the ecclesia (Eph. 4:25; James 2:8; 4:12). In the context, encouraging or [Gk.] 'building up' is by bearing the weaknesses of the weak. According to 14:1 ff., those weaknesses involve their misunderstanding of the Lord's sacrifice and 15:3,4 suggest that these weak brethren insulted the 'stronger'. Building up others, loving our neighbour, was to be by accepting their weaknesses of understanding and conscience.

15:3 *For Christ also did not please himself, but as it is written: The reproaches of them that reproached You fell upon me-* We must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us

(Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to. The essence of living this kind of life is the cross of Christ. Paul brings this out in Rom. 14:21-15:3: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak... We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me". The quotation is from a Psalm which refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet Paul applies this to us, in our bearing with the weaknesses of our brethren and seeking not to offend them. For this is the living out of the crucifixion life in ours. This is putting meaning into words, reality into the regular action of taking bread and wine in identity with that sacrifice. Sensitively bearing with our brethren, not doing anything that weakens or offends them, but rather building them up by our patience and tolerance of their scruples and limited perceptions. This is the cross, for us. The more we realize the height of the calling, the more even like our Lord we balk at what we are really being asked to do. It is so hard not to offend others and to commit ourselves to only building them up. As hard, in barest essence, as the cross of Calvary, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, about 1970 years ago.

The love of Christ in the cross is to have a continual inspiration upon us- endless love, countless moments of re-inspiration, are to come to us daily *because of the cross*. This is how central it is to daily life. The crucifixion prophecy "The reproaches of them that reproached You fell upon me" is quoted in Rom. 15:3 about Christ's crucifixion; but on this basis Paul appeals to *us* to please not ourselves, but to edify our neighbour; and thus the prophecies about Christ's sufferings for us were written for *our* learning and encouragement (Rom. 15:2,4,5). This works out as being the case insofar as we are to see in His sufferings a direct, personal compulsion to *us* to respond in selfless service of others. The connection between Him there on that piece of wood and us today, struggling to live life in selfless service, is absolutely live, concrete and powerful.

15:4 *For whatever things were written previously were written for our education, that through patience and through the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope*- Paul has just quoted a prophecy of the Lord's sufferings; and he has drawn a bridge between Him there, and us today. His sufferings are ours. In the first century Roman context, our patience with legalists and their taunts is a form of sharing His experience on the cross. Those things were therefore written for us, as well as Him. And they are therefore for our "comfort". The *paraklesis*, "comfort", is literally a 'coming near'. He there in His time of dying comes near to us, in that all He suffered is in essence what we do in various ways.

15:5 *Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you*- Patience and comfort are internal attributes; and God is willing to give these things to us. They are if you like spiritual, relating to the spirit or mind; and God is eager to give us that spirit- His Spirit.

*To be of the same mind one with another, according to Christ Jesus*- What God gives is His Holy Spirit, or as it is termed elsewhere, the mind or spirit of Christ. We are counted as Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. But God seeks to make this how we actually are- by the transforming power of the Spirit within. Each believer is given the same mind of Christ- and so unity between believers is achieved on account of "Christ Jesus". And yet in chapter 14 we see Paul accepting that some of the believers were "weak" in their

understanding of some aspects of the Lord's sacrifice. But he focuses on the fact that despite that, they are of the same spirit of Christ as those who understand better. Unity is not the same as uniformity, neither is it achieved by identity of belief or understanding, let alone common ascent to a document such as a statement of faith. The verb translated "be of the same mind" is that used in 14:6 about those who regard or mind the Sabbath as holy and those who do not. They could legitimately have a different mind to each other over the interpretation of Scripture [for both sides considered they had God's word behind their positions]. But they were of the same mind with each other if they had the spirit of Christ- this was the essential unity, and not identity of Biblical interpretation. The same word is used in Phil. 2:2,5, where Paul appeals for believers to be of the same mind- and then defines that as being the mind of Christ. This is how we are of one mind- by having the same devotion to the mind or spirit of Christ and being open to receiving it. Paul has earlier used the word in describing how those who are justified by grace receive the gift of the Spirit which results in minding the things of the Spirit (8:5,27). Our efforts to consciously be of one mind toward each other (12:16 s.w.) are therefore an effort to allow the mind of Christ to be our rule and guide in all human relationships.

15:6 *That with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ-* "With one accord" is a phrase often used of the early church, who were clearly made that way by their common receipt of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, despite their major differences. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus is to glorify His Father- and all those who have received that spirit will do so.

15:7 *Therefore receive one another-* This forms an *inclusio*, a kind of bookmark, concluding the section which began in 14:1. They were to receive one another on the basis that they each had the spirit / mind of Christ. The basis for receiving another is because God has received them (:3). And clearly enough, Paul understood the Father and Son to have received these 'weak' ones who had not fully accepted everything revealed about the Lord's work and sacrifice.

*Even as Christ also received you each one, to the glory of God-* This may be a warning against blanket positions on fellowship, whereby people are not treated as individuals but as blocks of persons. Each one of us was received by the Lord and so each one we encounter is to be received.

15:8 *For I say that Christ has been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given to the fathers-* Paul seeks to bring together Jew and Gentile in the church at Rome by reasoning that the Lord's death as a Jew and for Israel was the basis for Gentile salvation. He died in the first place for Israel, those under the law, to redeem God's Israel (Gal. 4:4). When was Christ made a servant ["minister"]? According to Phil. 2, in His death on the cross. "The truth of God" is a phrase Paul elsewhere uses in Romans for the Gospel which is the universal truth for all men, Jew and Gentile. It was by the Lord's death that the promises to the Jewish fathers [which are the basis of the Gospel] were "confirmed". He was the sacrifice previsioned in Gen. 15 which was God's confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant. God's covenant commitment to us is amazing. In Genesis 15, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise'. Jer. 34:18 speaks of how Israelites must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. But in Gen. 15, it is none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself

for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals- but only Yahweh does. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant. See on Mt. 28:10.

15:9 *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy-* It was because of the Lord's death and resurrection that the promises to Abraham were confirmed. He became thereby in the fullest sense the seed of Abraham who would inherit the earth for ever. And all who identify with Him and become "in Him" by faith and baptism are thereby assured of the salvation promised to Him and Abraham. This was the thought of 4:16: "To the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed. Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all". The promise was made sure or confirmed (:8) in the Lord's death. And thus His death initially for Israel became the world's salvation.

*As it is written: Therefore will I give praise to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your Name-* The quotation from Ps. 18:49 is of David wanting to praise God among the Gentiles. Paul reads this as meaning that David looked forward to a day when the Gentiles would praise God, and he would be there amongst them doing the same.

15:10 *And again He says: Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people-* "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people" (Dt. 32:43) is quoted here in the NT concerning Gentile response to the Gospel. But they will rejoice and respond *because* of God's terrifying judgment of His enemies outlined in the context (Dt. 32:41-44). In some way, the harder side of God attracts, in that men see in truth that He is God and they but men. His rod and staff of correction are our comforts (Ps. 23:4). Israel will finally realize that God's judgments upon them have brought them to know Him: "They shall know that I am the Lord, in that I caused them to go into captivity" (Ez. 39:28 RV).

15:11 *And again: Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him-* This quotation from Ps. 117:1 is understood as putting "the peoples" in parallel with "all you Gentiles". The "peoples" were the tribes of Israel, and they along with "all the Gentiles" would praise Yahweh. The writer looked forward to a time when the Gentiles along with Israel would unite in praise of Israel's God. I suggest this because the other quotations here in Rom. 15 parallel the Gentiles with Israel. And this was Paul's context here- Jew and Gentile should praise the Lord together in the church at Rome. "All the Gentiles" is defined in Acts 15:17 as "all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called". The language of all the world or all the Gentiles refers not to every single person, but to all those who have believed in Christ.

15:12 *And again Isaiah said: There shall be the root of Jesse and he that arises to rule over the Gentiles-* The 'arising' of the One who was the offshoot of Jesse was a reference to the Lord's resurrection. It was that which enabled all people to identify with His death and

resurrection and thereby be saved. The "root of Jesse" rather than of David suggests that the Lord was prefigured by David himself.

*On him shall the Gentiles hope-* "In Him"; by becoming in Christ by faith and baptism, the dead and resurrected Lord becomes the One through whom salvation is possible for anyone. Jew or Gentile.

15:13 *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit-* The "hope" is the certainty of salvation made possible for all men by becoming "in Christ" (:12). The certain hope ahead comes from having sin dealt with, and the subsequent peace with God. And this brings joy. But the God who is the source of that Hope fills believing human minds with that joy and peace, "in the power of the Holy Spirit". The arena of the Spirit's operation is therefore in the human heart- for that is where joy and peace is experienced. This 'filling' by the Spirit is that found in Acts 13:52, where the believers "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit". We note from that reference that 'filling' is an ongoing process, and not something which only occurs at baptism. The believers in Rome had already been baptized, and Paul wishes them to experience another 'filling', as happened in Acts 13:52. Paul uses the same word in :14 concerning how he believed they had already been 'filled' with all knowledge and goodness; but he wished that filling to be ongoing.

*So that you may abound in hope-* They already had hope (:12), but the work of the Spirit in their hearts was to help them feel that, so that they might abound in that hope. Following through Paul's reasoning in Rom. 15:9-13, he seems to be saying that "hope" (RV) leads to joyful praising, which in turn leads to hope and trust. It's an upward spiral, a positive circle. And each of those fruits of the Spirit become more gripping upon us the more we develop them.

15:14- see on Mk. 4:8.

*And I myself also am persuaded about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness-* Paul has just said that he is "persuaded" that there is nothing unclean of itself (14:14); and he is equally persuaded that those who don't agree with his persuasion [the "weak" in the church] were just as much filled with the Spirit ["full of goodness"]. This is what we observed in chapter 14- Paul felt that they were all to be of the same mind, that of Christ, the Spirit, even if they had theological differences.

*Filled with all knowledge, able also to encourage one another-* The Holy Spirit filled the hearts of each of them, those with the old view of the food laws, and those who understood better in Christ. Paul believed that therefore they were able to 'admonish' (Gk.) each other, in the power and wisdom of the Spirit given to each of them. This was quite some unity- that the weak in understanding could still admonish the more mature or correct in understanding by the power of the Spirit within them. This is indeed "the unity of the Spirit", whereby those who have defective understandings of some things can still admonish those who have better understandings. All this is of course impossible of understanding by those who insist that 'truth' in terms of correct understanding is the final arbiter as to a believer's standing.

15:15 *But I write the more boldly to you in some way, as if putting you again in*

*remembrance, because of the grace that was given me by God-* Again, having explained the intended unity between the two groups, Paul weighs in on one side of the debate as he did previously, in stating that indeed there is no food which is unclean of itself. He insists that he has the gift / grace of God to teach, and it has clearly been revealed to him that the Gentiles are to be accepted by God on the altar of Christ (:16). And moreover, he has been chosen to play a part in the acceptance of the Gentiles, and so his views about the food issue were not just his opinions but actually inspired by God.

15:16 *That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable-* See on :15. Throughout my commentary on Acts, I noted that Paul got himself into so much avoidable trouble through insisting on ministering to the Jews. His ministry was for the Gentiles. But he seems to have envied Peter's ministry to the Jews; for Paul was so much better qualified for that. But the Lord chose him for a ministry which he naturally appeared less suited for; because the Lord loves to work through human inadequacy. The double emphasis upon 'ministering' or serving shows that all Gospel preaching is a slave like service. All pride is thereby removed from any preaching work. Paul had had it revealed to him that the Jewish food laws were not to be binding upon Gentiles- and yet his calling was to make them an acceptable sacrifice. Therefore the acceptability of that sacrifice meant that his position on the Law was not just his opinion. They would be acceptable even without keeping the food laws. He uses the same word to explain how he hoped that his work for the Gentiles would be "acceptable" with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (15:31); he wanted them to accept the Gentile converts just as God accepted them. And this has been his theme in this section- that we should receive those whom God and His Son have accepted. The Gentile believers were to be 'offered up'; they were to be a sacrifice. By using that figure, Paul shows his understanding that every believer is called to a life of sacrifice. He was simply enabling their acceptability.

Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar [note how Acts 11:7 uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching]. And this connects with how Paul had earlier spoken in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of.

When we read of 'ministering' in the NT, we are to generally perceive an allusion to the spirit of priesthood; for it was the OT priests who were understood as "ministers". Paul speaks of preaching God's word, both in the world and to brethren and sisters, as ministering (Col. 1:23,25; 1 Cor. 9:13). He saw himself as a minister of the Gospel "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable" (Rom. 15:16). This is priestly language. Paul saw his efforts for others as preparing a sacrifice. He says that we are *all* ministers (cp. priests) of God, stewards of the true Gospel, and should act appropriately (1 Cor. 4:1). Others gave money to poorer brethren, and again this is described as ministering, priest-ing (Rom. 15:27; Heb. 6:10). Reminding brethren of basic doctrines they already know is another kind of ministering (1 Tim. 4:16). Indeed, Peter says that we *each* have something to minister to each other, there is some way in which we can each serve each other (1 Pet. 4:10,11). We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood.

Paul speaks of his preaching as being like a priest bringing the offerings of the Gentile converts as an acceptable sacrifice to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:16). This is very much the language of the prophets concerning the Messianic Kingdom- as if to imply that the Kingdom is brought about by our successful preaching? Hence it is in keeping with this to think that there would be a burst of conversions to herald in the Kingdom.

Paul speaks of his preaching work as offering up the Gentiles, as if he is a priest (Rom. 15:16)- and in the same figure, Peter is encouraged to preach to Gentiles by killing and eating animals in a peace offering (Acts 11:7). The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num. 18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all* priests, we are all preachers.

*Being sanctified by the Holy Spirit*- The presence of the Spirit in their hearts made them acceptable, as he has argued since the start of chapter 14, and as he explained theologically in chapter 8. The presence of the Spirit is what makes a believer "one of His", i.e. Christ's. We are not to think that they are unacceptable because of a difference on theology or practice if they have the Spirit. This central role of the Spirit in Paul's theology and practice must be given far greater weight in our communities.

15:17 *I have therefore my boasting in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God*- Paul has just argued that the presence of the Spirit in the hearts of the Gentiles makes them acceptable to God, and the Jewish Christians must accept this (see on :16). Now Paul goes on to demonstrate how that same Spirit has been manifest in a very public, even miraculous way in his entire mission to convert Gentiles to Christ. The "things pertaining to God" alludes to the Jewish language of sacrifice. Those sacrifices were the Gentile converts, and they were acceptable despite Paul's position on the Law.

No flesh may glory before God (1 Cor. 1:29); but Paul, in his spiritual man, as counted righteous before God, could glory (Rom. 15:17).

15:18 *For I will not dare to speak of any things save those which Christ wrought through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed*- Paul saw himself as an agent of Christ. The Lord Jesus is not therefore passive. He is seeking to save others, He works through others to that end. He is trying to make Gentiles obedient. It is not enough to say that He has given them His word and it's just over to them now to obey or disobey. He works to persuade men towards obedience. And in the context here Paul is saying that this is done through the work of His Spirit.

Paul seems to have consciously modelled his life upon that of Moses; he evidently saw Moses as his hero. For example, he speaks of how he has been used to bring about God's glory through "signs and wonders" (Rom. 15:18,19), in the very language of Moses bringing "signs and wonders" upon Egypt (Ex. 7:3,9; 11:9,10; Dt. 4:34; 6:22). See on 1 Cor. 14:3.

15:19 *In the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit*- The same Spirit active in the sanctifying or making holy of the hearts of Gentile believers had been more visibly active through the miracles he had performed, which were part of the efforts of the

Lord Jesus to make the Gentiles obedient (:18). That the spirit does not just refer to the naked power of God is evident from Rom. 15:19: "the power of the spirit of God".

*So that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum*- His desire to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24 AV) indicates a commitment to taking the Gospel to the very ends of the world he then knew. He may well have been motivated in this by wishing to fulfil in spirit the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 66:18,19, which describes how Tarshish (which he would have understood as Spain) and other places which "have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory" will be witnessed to by those who *have* seen His glory and have "escaped" from God's just condemnation by grace. Paul sees this as referring to himself. For he speaks in Rom. 15:19 of his ambition to take the Gospel to Spain; and in that same context, of how he will bring the Gentile brethren's offering up to Jerusalem. This is precisely the context of Is. 66- the offerings of the Gentiles are to be brought up to Jerusalem, as a result of how the Lord's glory will be spoken of to all nations. So Paul read Isaiah 66 and did something about his Old Testament Bible study; he dedicated his life to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he encouraged them to send their offerings to Jerusalem. He was no mere theologian, no academic missiologist. His study and exposition of Old Testament Scripture led to a life lived out in practice, to hardship, risk of life, persecution, loneliness, even rejection by his brethren. It is also significant in passing to note that Is. 66:19 speaks of nations which occur in the list of nations we have in Genesis 10, in the context of the effect of Babel. It is as if Paul sees the spreading of the Gospel as an undoing of the curse of Babel and the establishment of the Kingdom conditions described in Is. 66. By his preaching of God's Kingdom and the reign of Christ, he brought about a foretaste of the future Kingdom in the lives of his converts. And we can do likewise. Note how once again, the preacher preaches from his personal experience; Paul takes the vision of glory which he has beheld to those who have not seen nor heard. Paul speaks of how he had preached the Gospel from Jerusalem "as far round as Illyricum" (Rom. 15:19). This was a Latin-speaking province. Was he not implying that he had preached throughout the Greek speaking world, and now wanted to take it into the Latin-speaking world? He wanted to preach to the regions beyond his previous limits (2 Cor. 10:15); his aim was to spend some time in Rome and then preach in Spain.

Preaching, on whatever scale, involves a certain spirit of spiritual ambition; for example, the hope and faith that a leaflet, a mere piece of paper, might be the means of directing someone on to the Kingdom road. That a scrappy piece of paper, a passing comment at a bus stop should really lead a small mortal towards the eternal glory of God's nature... without spiritual ambition the preacher just wouldn't bother to start. Paul was the supreme model of ambition in preaching: "I have *fully preached* the gospel of Christ. Yea, so have I *strived* (been ambitious, RV mg.) to preach the gospel" (Rom. 15:19,20). In his last days (or hours?) Paul's mind returned to these words. His swansong in 2 Tim. 4:17 is a direct allusion to Rom. 15:19: "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the *preaching* might be *fully known*, and that all the Gentiles might hear". Paul's reference here to 'completing the Gospel from Jerusalem and in a circle as far as Illyricum' is a window into his ambition in preaching. He speaks of his ambition to preach in Spain; and so we get the impression of him planning a circle starting in Jerusalem, curving north-west, then further west to Rome, and then south-west to Spain. To complete the circle to Jerusalem would have involved him preaching in North Africa- where there were major Jewish centres, e.g. Alexandria. Perhaps he implies that his ambition was to preach there too, in order to 'complete the circle of the gospel'.



*I have fully preached the gospel of Christ-* Paul speaks of having 'fulfilled' the Gospel by preaching it (Rom. 15:19 Gk.); the Gospel is in itself something which demands to be preached by those having it.

15:20 *Yes, making it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation-* Paul appears to have had a policy of breaking fresh ground for the Gospel and not getting involved where someone else had preached. It was his aim to spread the Gospel. He implies therefore that there were others preaching the Gospel apart from him. The metaphor of building is in context of Paul's teaching that they should be building one another up (a closely related word is used in 14:19; 15:2). Always Paul consciously sets himself up as their example. He has reasoned that just as the Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts of the Gentile converts in Rome to sanctify them, so the same Spirit has been at work with him in his missionary work. He sees a huge unity of the Spirit throughout. And likewise he speaks of how they in Rome can build each other up, including the Jewish brethren building up the Gentiles, just as he is at work empire-wide building up the Gentile converts. When a person is baptized, they call upon themselves the name of the Lord Jesus. "Where Christ was already named" may therefore refer to areas where there had already been converts made.

Paul read the OT prophecies of how "to whom he was not spoken of, they shall see"; and he didn't just see them as descriptions of what would ultimately happen. He realised that the fulfilment of this prophecy depended *to some extent* on our human freewill; and therefore he *strove* (against so many odds) to preach Christ where He had not yet been named (Rom. 15:19,20). And he asks the Romans to *strive together* with him in prayer (15:30)- i.e. to join him in the struggle to witness world-wide, in that they would pray for his success. It was God's prophesied will that the Gospel would go world-wide; but it required the freewill strivings of Paul to enable it, and the strivings with God in prayer by the brethren.

15:21- see on Acts 13:47.

*But, as it is written: They shall see, to whom no tidings of him came, and they who have not heard shall understand-* Paul's policy of preaching in fresh areas was guided by his understanding of this prophecy. We are to use our initiative in fulfilling Bible prophecies, rather than assuming the fulfilment shall come about anyway. Indeed it could be argued that God's purpose is so open ended that He as it were depends upon our initiative in fulfilling some of the prophecies. Here Paul appropriates a prophecy of how the news of the crucified Christ would spread to those who had never heard it. He didn't just read those verses as prophecy; he saw in them an imperative to fulfil them. In Rom 15:21, Paul justifies his preaching by quoting from part of the suffering servant prophecy in Is. 52 / 53. That whole passage is set in a context of explaining "how beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings... all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Is. 52:7,10). The preaching of good tidings and the declaration of God's salvation was through the crucifixion. Paul quotes Is. 52:15: "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand". This was Paul's justification for taking the Gospel to where Christ has not been named. Note in passing how the Lord Jesus sees us as "beautiful" in our witness to Him (as in Song 7:1). Yet further into Is. 53, so much else jumps out at us as appropriate to Paul's preaching: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high [cp. Paul knowing how to be exalted and abased, themes that occur in Is. 53 about Jesus' death]. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any

man [cp. Paul's thorn in the flesh?], and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for [that] which had not been told them shall they see; and [that] which they had not heard shall they consider". Paul appeared before Agrippa, Festus, and one or two Caesars, with a visage marred by his evangelistic sufferings.

15:22 *Therefore I was hindered these many times from coming to you-* Paul could now see why he had been hindered from visiting the church in Rome- for they were converts of others, not his. He saw that it had been the Lord's wish that he continued his policy of breaking fresh ground for the Lord. His final insistence on going to Rome was not blessed- it could be argued. The Lord kept trying to hinder him, the wind / spirit blew against him as he voyaged there... but the Lord allowed Paul his insistence.

15:23 *But now, there is no need for me in these regions, and having these many years a longing to come to you-* The regions are of :19. He seems to be saying that he has done his shot in preaching to the Gentiles by preaching in an arc that began at Jerusalem; and now he is free, so he thinks, to come to Rome. But I would suggest that he was obsessed with a trip to Rome, capital of the empire. He speaks of how he had tried so hard to come to them previously (:19, and in 1:9-11). The Lord had hindered him- because his work was to break fresh ground for Christ (:20). I suggest that he talked himself into thinking that he had done his work in breaking fresh ground for Christ. But surely that was wishful thinking. That work was not done fully, nor could one man ever surely come to a point where he could say that he has taken the Gospel to all the Gentiles. In commentary on Acts, I point out repeatedly that Paul's journey to Rome was not blessed, and he didn't find there what he had hoped for. The Lord of course worked with him in his desire, but I would take his argument here as an example of self-justification.

There can be no doubt that the emphasis in the life of Paul was upon the geographical spread of the Gospel as far as possible. In around ten years, he established ecclesias in the four provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. And then he speaks as if his work was done in that part of the world, he had spread the word from Jerusalem round to Illyricum [i.e. throughout the Eastern half of the Empire], and therefore "I have no more place in these parts" (Rom. 15:19,23). He speaks as if he has fulfilled the "line" or geographical apportion of areas to him, and now he was turning his attention to the Western side of the Roman empire, going to Rome, planning a visit to Spain. In some ways, this is surprising, for his letters indicate that the ecclesias he had already established were weak indeed. All in Asia turned away from him, and he warned the Ephesian elders of this. Ecclesias like Corinth were hopelessly weak in doctrine and practice, and many were turning away, either to the world, or back to Judaism as in the Galatian ecclesias. He could so easily have spent his life running around the Eastern half of the Roman empire, seeking to strengthen what remained. But he seems to have considered his work to have been done, and presses ahead with fresh witness in another part of the world. He wrote letters and made occasional visits to address the problems as they arose, but his stress was repeatedly on pushing forward with the work.

This comment that Paul no longer "had any room for work in these regions" may not necessarily mean that he had preached the Gospel to completion; rather could it be a sad admission from Paul that opposition from the Judaist wing within the church meant that he could no longer work for the Gospel sensibly without causing division, and so he proposed

opening a new front of work in Spain. And this wouldn't have been the first time when division between brethren has actually led to the Gospel spreading further, such is the way God works through the dysfunction of His children.

15:24 *I hope to see you during my journey, and to be helped on my way by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while-* His obsession was to "see Rome". I suggest that his appeal to Caesar was a desperate attempt to as it were force the Lord's hand and let him go there, when the Lord had hindered him several times from doing so (1:9-11). If he had not done so, he could have been set free and continued his work amongst the Gentiles. He makes out that he just wants to drop in and see them en route to Spain (:28). But Rome was not particularly en route to Spain. If Spain was his destination, there were more direct routes there, not least via Alexandria. But he clearly had an obsession with Rome, and broke away from his intended mission to only break fresh ground for the Lord. "To be helped on my way" is a phrase used to mean 'Fellowshipping me in my missionary journey' (3 Jn. 8; 1 Cor. 16:6,11; Acts 15:3; 17:14,15). He was trying to get them to participate in the work of preaching to the Gentiles- see on :20.

The AV mentions his ambition for Spain- his spiritual ambition at a time when most men scarcely travelled 100km. from their birthplace, is just superb (Rom. 15:24,28).

He says that if he is "satisfied" by the fruit of the converts in Rome, then he could move on to preach in Spain, if he could seal the spiritual fruit of unity between Jewish and Gentile converts in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:24 RV). This is the spirit of 2 Cor. 10:15, where Paul told the Corinthians that "when your faith is increased", then the measure or extent of his missionary work could be geographically expanded.

15:25 *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints-* The Jerusalem welfare project had been another project Paul tried in order to bring Jewish and Gentile believers together in the work of the Spirit. And he was hoping to get the Roman church to in essence get involved in something similar; see on :20 and :24.

15:26 *For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem-* This was a very positive take on the project. For it ran into big difficulties; the believers in Achaia didn't come up with their promised contributions, even though Paul had boasted that they were going to make those donations (2 Cor. 9:2). And there is no record of what was raised being received positively; all we read of in :31 is Paul's doubt as to whether it would be received. Rather it seems did the Jewish Christians betray Paul into the hands of the orthodox Jews and Romans. Again we sense an obsessive side to Paul, a desire to make things work out, to prove that Jew and Gentile were in fact harmoniously united in Christ.

God is believer-centric; to Him, His 'world' is the believers. He speaks of "Macedonia and Achaia" as meaning 'the believers in Macedonia and Achaia' (Rom. 15:26). "Samaria... received the word of God" (Acts 8:14)- not everyone in Samaria, but those who did are counted as "Samaria" to God. The field of the ecclesia is "the world" to God; and note how the Corinth ecclesia were "God's field" (1 Cor. 3:9 Gk.). Often Scripture speaks as if "all

men" will be raised. Rom. 2:6-9 speaks of "every man" being judged at the second coming. We know that literally "all men" will not be.

15:27- see on Rom. 15:16.

*They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them-* The believers in Achaia had to be cajoled by Paul to come up with what they had promised, according to 2 Cor. 9-11. And clearly there was much opposition from them towards Paul and his welfare project.

*For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to them also to minister to them in material things-* Again this is Paul rightly perceiving that Jew and Gentile both have the Spirit within them and working through and with them; and they ought therefore to work together. See on :20, :24 and :25. But he seems to wish to paint a picture of this actually happening on the ground, when in fact it was not at all like that. Human dysfunction was too strong.

All nations of the land were to be blessed because of Abraham and his seed, his one special seed [Jesus] and also his natural descendants. His children were intended to be a blessing to the other nations who lived around them, especially in that they were intended to bring them to Abraham's God and Abraham's faith. Now this is not to say that ultimately, Abraham and his seed will not bring blessing on literally the whole planet. Rom. 4:13 interprets the promise of the land of Canaan as meaning 'the whole world'. But this was by later development, and on account of the universal blessing achieved by the sacrifice of Abraham's greatest seed, the Lord Jesus. In the first instance, the blessing was to be upon all the families who lived on the 'earth' / land (12:3). There is a paradox here. For those already living in the land promised to Abraham, their land would be taken from them but they would be blessed. God was telling Abraham: 'You will possess the land and all nations of that land will be blessed'. They were to give up their physical inheritance to receive a spiritual one- this was the ideal. Paul applies this idea to us when he says that if Gentiles have received the spiritual blessings of Abraham's seed, ought they not to give their physical blessings to that same physical seed of Abraham? This is how and why he tells Gentile converts in Rome to send donations to the poor Jewish brethren in Jerusalem: "For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things... I shall come in the fullness of the *blessing* of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:27-29).

15:28 *When therefore I have accomplished this, and have given to them this fruit, I will leave for Spain by way of Rome-* We rather wish Paul would have added 'God willing'. For this was not how things worked out. He was arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem, nearly killed, spent at least 2 years in prison, and then forced his way to Rome by choosing to appeal to Caesar rather than being set free. And there is no Biblical evidence he ever made it to Spain. This situation also shows that having access to miraculous Spirit gifts didn't enable people to foretell their own futures. "Given to them this fruit" is not the best translation. The idea is that he wanted fruit sealed for them. The idea is as in Phil. 4:17 where he says he asked the Philippians for a gift not because he needed it, but because it would be a spiritual fruit for them with the Lord. For all his obsessive characteristics, this was a lovely move of Paul. He wanted the Spirit within the converts to bring forth fruit which would be to their credit before the Lord. We too need to consider how best we can encourage fruitfulness in others.

15:29 *And I know that, when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ-* The language is very similar to that of 1:11 "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to strengthen you". Paul seemed to think that his personal presence in Rome would result in their receiving some spiritual gift. Indeed he speaks of a fullness of blessing, as if he had something spectacular in mind. But there is no record of his doing anything of the sort when he finally arrived in Rome. So I am inclined to read this as I do his certain talk about going to Spain etc. He appears to have been "sure" (AV) of things which were not at all confirmed by the Lord- in his obsessive enthusiasm for 'Rome'.

15:30- see on Col. 2:1.

*Now I beseech you brothers-* Paul was so earnest for their prayers because he knew that prayer for others does really affect outcomes. Prayer for others either works or it doesn't, and each person must simply pray for their issues alone. But seeing that clearly prayer for others does 'work', Paul urges their prayers for his project. And we should have the same attitude.

*By our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit-* The idea of *dia* here is more 'for the sake of...'. He wanted their prayers for the Jew-Gentile fellowship project because he was doing it for the sake of the Lord Jesus. He knew it would please the Lord, such unity and expression of love was what He died in order to achieve and enable. And it was for the sake of the love inculcated by the Spirit working within their hearts. Elsewhere Paul defines the fruit of the Spirit in the singular- simply, "love" (Gal. 5:22). The love brought forth by the Spirit was what would motivate their prayers for the fellowship project. Paul's idea so far in this chapter has been that the Spirit is within both the weak and the stronger in Rome, it is operating in and through Paul too; and he asks that they channel the love brought forth by the Spirit into praying for his work with the Gentiles.

*That you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me-* The allusion may be to Jacob's wrestling with God in prayer. Paul had so many times been hindered in coming to the Romans (1:9-11; 15:22,23); and he thinks those hindrances were from God, who had wanted to keep him focused on breaking new ground for the Lord Jesus. A visit to the church in Rome would not achieve that. And it seems Paul was as it were praying, even struggling with God, to be released from his calling to preach to the Gentiles, for his existing work to be counted as if he had fulfilled the ministry completely- so that he could then visit the existing church in Rome with God's blessing. Their prayers were so that Paul could come to Rome "through the will of God" (:32), with God's will behind it. So he believed that prayer could alter or at least affect God's will.

Paul read the OT prophecies of how "to whom he was not spoken of, they shall see"; and he didn't just see them as descriptions of what would ultimately happen. He realised that the fulfilment of this prophecy depended *to some extent* on our human freewill; and therefore he *strove* (against so many odds) to preach Christ where He had not yet been named (Rom. 15:19,20). And he asks the Romans to *strive together* with him in prayer (15:30)- i.e. to join him in the struggle to witness world-wide, in that they would pray for his success. It was God's prophesied will that the Gospel would go world-wide; but it required the freewill strivings of Paul to enable it, and the strivings with God in prayer by the brethren.

15:31 *That I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe*- He is asking them to pray the Lord's prayer for him: "Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). Paul realized he faced a real threat from the Jews who did not believe in Jesus. If he had focused upon his ministry to the Gentiles, he need not have run the risk of engaging with them. It could be argued that these prayers were not answered; Paul was not delivered from this element, who got him imprisoned for at least 2 years, and his plans to jet off to Spain from Jerusalem via Rome... simply didn't happen. I have argued that his appeal to Caesar was a way of trying to force the Lord's hand in letting him achieve his obsession with visiting Rome.

*And that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints*- He has just used this word about the Gentile converts being an acceptable sacrifice on the Christ altar (15:16). He uses the same priestly language about his 'service' of bringing an offering to Jerusalem, which he hoped would be acceptable *to the believers there*. He seems to be confusing acceptability to God, and acceptability to men. The idea of his Gentile-Jewish welfare project was that the Jewish Christians would accept the Gentiles and be deeply grateful to Paul personally, and accept him. His exclusion by the Jerusalem Jews, including it seems the Jewish Christians there, was painful beyond words for Paul. And he was trying to by all means find a way to end it, whilst at the same time being genuinely committed to producing unity between Jew and Gentile in Christ. In the end, there is no evidence that what offerings he did cobble together were accepted by the Jerusalem Jewish Christians. Rather have I suggested in my commentary on Acts that they in fact played a large part in his arrest and imprisonment. So these prayers and desires were not in fact answered, or at least not as Paul hoped.

After all his spiritual diplomacy in raising the fund, he had to ask the Romans to pray with him that the Jerusalem ecclesia would accept it (Rom. 15:31). Presumably they didn't want to accept help from Gentile converts whom they despised. And if they didn't accept it, then Paul would look as if he had got them to raise the money just to give to him. There must have been times when he thought of quitting the Christian community because of slander in the church. Paul was not a larger than life figure in the eyes of the early church. They didn't see him as we do. The harder he worked, the more he was slandered, and the more painfully.

15:32 *That I may come to you in joy through the will of God*- See on :30 *Strive together*. Paul asked them to pray that he could come to Rome according to God's will; so he believed that the will of God was not the inflexible 'will' of a false god like Allah, but the willing of God- which is an emotion, a feeling, which is thereby open to change and influence.

*And together with you find rest*- The fact nobody from the Roman church stood with Paul at his trial, and he had to ask Timothy to bring him a warm jacket and writing equipment, all rather indicates that his hope and prayer for this was not finally realized. I suggest he had an obsession with the situation at Rome, albeit mixed with good motivations about the work of the Spirit and Jew-Gentile unity.

15:33 *Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen*- "Peace" in Roman means peace with God through the Lord's work, and it is a fruit of the work of the Spirit which is given to all believers. "With you *all*" refers to the divide between weak and strong, Jew and Gentile within the church. He wished them each, regardless of their misunderstandings or misplaced dogmatism, to experience the peace of sin forgiven and the knowledge that our salvation is assured.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 16

16:1- see on :23.

*I commend to you Phoebe*- Paul in 2 Corinthians seems to criticize the idea of letters of commendation and the practice of wanting to have some external commendation. He is not simply saying 'I converted you at Corinth, so you know me, and it is inappropriate for you to demand third party commendations of me'. He is saying that, but he says so because of his belief that it is only the Lord's commendation which means anything (2 Cor. 10:18). And yet he goes along with this idea in the case of Phoebe, because he goes along with their weakness and culture on this point. And we can take that wider principle.

*Our sister*- Paul argues to Philemon that if Philemon considers Paul a brother in fellowship, then he must also consider Onesimus such. Because Paul considers Onesimus a brother. And the same logic applies here; Phoebe was Paul's sister in Christ, and the Romans were to likewise accept her as a sister. It could be of course that she was his literal sister; for we know that his sister's son was supportive of Paul.

*Who is a servant of the church*- She was indeed a 'deacon' but the word simply means a servant and it is impossible to argue whether this referred to an official church position or not. Paul has just described himself in chapter 15 as a minister to the Gentiles, and it would seem he is extending that idea to Phoebe. So he is asking the 'weak' who were tacitly against the work with the Gentiles to accept another who was working likewise for the Gentiles- for the church at Cenchreae were likely Gentiles.

*That is at Cenchreae*- The port of Corinth, from where it seems Paul was writing.

16:2- see on Lk. 11:7.

*That you may welcome her in the Lord*- This is the same idea as the exhortation to 'receive' the 'weak' in fellowship (14:1; 15:7) exactly because they too were "in the Lord". We suspect there was some opposition to receiving her- hence Paul's raising of the matter. Perhaps because she was a woman, or perhaps because she too was engaged in the ministry to the Gentiles. For Paul has just written of both the Lord Jesus and himself as being ministers of the Gentiles; and now he states that Phoebe is also a minister. Active fellowship of the kind envisaged here is predicated upon being "in the Lord". It is therefore utterly wrong to accept on one hand that a person is "in the Lord", but to deny them fellowship for reasons of church politics.

*In a way worthy of the saints*- "The saints" is a term used about the final acceptability of the believers in God's future Kingdom. Being 'worthy' or 'not worthy' is likewise the language of the last judgment (Mt. 22:8; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:32 etc.). Accepting our fellow believers is the "way" to eternal life; this is a characteristic of those who will be 'worthy' or appropriate to be saints eternally. Likewise those who refuse to fellowship their brethren are behaving as the unworthy of being saints.

*And I ask that you assist her in whatever matter she may have need of you*- "Assist" is a legal term, used of presenting witnesses in a court (see Acts 24:13). Paul uses the word of how the Lord Jesus stood with him in his trial (2 Tim. 4:17).

*For she herself also has been a helper of many, and of my own self-* Or, "succourer". According to Barnes: "The word used here means properly "a patron, a help," and was applied by the Greeks to one who "presided" over an assembly; to one who became "a patron" of others; who aided or defended them in their cause; and especially to one who undertook to manage the cause of "strangers" and foreigners before the courts". The Cambridge commentary adds: "Lit. a champion; one who stands before another. The word conveys a graceful allusion to the request that they would "stand by" Phœbe: she had "stood before" many a needing and suffering Christian". The legal language used here leads me to think that she was in Rome on legal business on behalf of the Christian brotherhood. Perhaps she needed witnesses to testify, and Paul urges the Romans to participate. But we note from 2 Tim. 4 his lament that when he had to stand trial in Rome, none of them stood with him. Phoebe may simply have been noted as a patron or supporter of Paul and others; for clearly his work had to have been funded by someone. But it would seem there is more to it than that. A theme of chapter 16 is not only the mixture of Jewish and Gentile names, but also of slave and free, rich and poor. And further, the role of women is emphasized. It's as if Paul seeks to demonstrate that in the way the Spirit has worked with the Romans and those associated with his ministry, there was exhibited an amazing unity and breaking down of social barriers.

*16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus-* Priscilla is usually mentioned first in the records, perhaps because she played the leading role in the ministry. And as noted on :2, the collapse of barriers between male and female, as well as between Jew and Gentile, was a feature of the Spirit's movement in Paul's circle of ministry.

Acts 18:2 explains that Aquila was a Jew, born in Pontus, who had resided at Rome, and who had left Rome, and come to Corinth, when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome; so there is an internal consistency when we read that they have returned to Rome, as the decree was rescinded.

*16:4 Who for my life laid down their own necks. To whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles-* This suggests they at some point (perhaps in Ephesus) had been willing to take Paul's death sentence. According to Deissmann, this Greek term refers to the possibility of being murdered in the place of someone condemned to death. But 1 Clement 55 speaks of Christians serving prison terms for each other: "We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others". They did this, presumably, because they believed Paul's freedom would result in the Gospel spreading further than it would by their own continued freedom. Therefore Paul goes on to say that "the churches of the Gentiles" were grateful for this. The context in Romans 15 is of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, and his desire that the Romans participate fully in it. So it would be appropriate to mention the great example of Priscilla and Aquilla in this matter. We likewise may sacrifice money or even more to enable another to do work which we know we cannot do so well. If indeed they served a prison sentence on Paul's behalf, this might explain why they were back in Rome. Although :5 says that they had a house church.

*16:5 And greet the church that is in their house-* The first of several mentions in this chapter of house groups. There is no archaeological evidence of dedicated Christian meeting places in the first century; the believers met as house groups, occasionally coming together as larger groups. If all the Roman house groups are mentioned in this chapter, then the size of the church in Rome may not have been larger than 100 members at the most- probably far less.



*Greet Epaphroditus my beloved, who is the firstfruits of Asia to Christ-* It depends how we define "Asia", because 1 Cor. 6:15 says that "the household of Stephanas was the first-fruit of Achaia". Perhaps Epaphroditus was one of that extended family, perhaps a slave within it. The first convert in Asia, therefore, was an obscure slave. This is typical of how God works with the small things in human eyes.

*16:6 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on you-* Some manuscripts have the Hebrew form, Mariam; in any case, this is a Hebrew name. So she was a Jewish Christian in Rome who had done much for Paul personally, although Paul had never visited Rome. It seems all those in Rome whom he greets were in fact known to him personally, and had for various reasons ended up in Rome.

*16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias-* Junia could be Joanna.

*My kinsmen-* Their names are Greek and Latin (respectively) as was common for Jews living in the empire. But they were "kinsmen". Perhaps his relatives, maybe from the tribe of Benjamin, but the point was- they were Jews. And Paul has been writing earlier about how the Jewish element were "the weak", still tempted to rely on legal obedience for justification. And yet it now emerges that a number of the Jewish element were in fact well known to Paul and actually his friends. His position on them was therefore purely from principle, as his natural desire would have been to cut his friends some slack, understanding their culture and where they came from.

*And my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also have been in Christ before me-* Paul mentions elsewhere that he had "often" been imprisoned. The Acts record is very abbreviated, and most of them we are unaware of. It could be that even at Corinth, from where Paul wrote Romans, he was in prison- and these who were in prison in Rome were his fellow prisoners. Or perhaps at some previous point they had been imprisoned along with him.

*16:8 Greet Ampliatus my beloved in the Lord-* Tertius was a "scribe" (:22), which was a learned profession; Luke (:21) a doctor. Yet next to these brethren are listed the likes of Ampliatus, which was a common slave name. Romans 16 is an essay in the unity between rich and poor in the early ecclesia.

*16:9 Greet Urbanus our fellow-worker in Christ-* "A common Roman slave name found among members of the household" (Sanday and Headlam).

*And Stachys my beloved-* A rare Greek name, but recorded as being used among members of the imperial household. "My beloved" suggests that Paul knew this person from his previous missionary work- and now somehow this believer was in Rome and perhaps in Caesar's household. Paul's point is that the Gospel has united Jew and Gentile, and penetrated the most strongly Gentile places. And he asks the Roman church to participate in that mission which clearly was of the Lord through His Spirit.

*16:10 Greet Apelles the approved in Christ-* A name used among Jews and the name of a famous tragic actor. If this individual is referred to, then the point would be that his

approbation was from Christ, and not because of his secular fame. And he is listed alongside petty slaves, at the other end of the social spectrum, but all together in Christ.

*Greet them that are of the household of Aristobulus-* Paul writes to them as if there was one church in Rome, and yet he mentions the house groups of Aristobulus and Narcissus (Rom. 16:10,11). Indeed, in Rom. 16:14,15 we have lists of names of brethren, and then the comment “and all the saints which are with them”. It could be that the long list of greetings to named individuals was more like a list of greetings to the various house churches which comprised the larger ‘ecclesia’ in Rome. Robert Banks observes: “Justin in his *First Apology* refers to several distinct house-based meetings in Rome as much as a century after the New Testament”.

Lightfoot suggests that this Aristobulus may have been the grandson of Herod the Great. But the reference to his "household" may not require that he himself was converted. For Paul doesn't greet him, but rather those of his household. So here we have a Roman of considerable distinction who had Christians among his servants or his slaves. He may have been dead, and the slaves continued to be known by their association with his extended family. Again we have the picture of slaves being a significant part of the Rome ecclesia. The metaphors in Romans related to slavery, and the message of radical freedom in Christ, would have been the more meaningful to them.

16:11 *Greet Herodion my kinsman-* Probably one belonging to the Herod family, but a Jew like Paul. Again Paul is seeking to demonstrate the very wide range of the Spirit's work with Jew and Gentile alike.

*Greet them of the household of Narcissus, that are in the Lord-* Not all the extended family had been converted. Suetonius and Tacitus both mention a notorious Narcissus, a freedman of Claudius, who became one of Nero's bad favourites. But within the household slaves of that man, there were baptized Christians, who it seems had been known by Paul personally at some other place in the empire. Again, the scope, range and penetration of the Spirit's work amongst the Gentiles is being emphasized. For these Gentiles of the Gentiles are listed along with Paul's "kinsman" Herodion, a Jewish believer.

16:12 *Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who laboured much in the Lord-* The two sisters were labourers in the Lord, but sister Persis is commended for labouring much. The aorist may refer to some special occasion in the past, some particular great work she had done. Or maybe she had lost her labouring zeal and therefore laboured no more, or was too infirm to do the kind of labour she had once done.

16:13- see on Mt. 27:32; Rom. 16:23.

*Greet Rufus the chosen in the Lord ; and his mother, who also was as a mother to me-* A very common slave name, perhaps the Rufus of Mk. 15:21. Paul the Roman citizen considered a slave's mother to be his mother, who presumably was dead or had rejected him. Again we see the closeness of the new relationships in Christ.

16:14 *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the believers that are with them-* Asyncritus is a name on an inscription in Rome, referring to a freedman of Augustus. If it is the same person, then he is significantly listed next to Hermes, a very common slave name. Paul would be demonstrating the truth of Gal. 3:27-29- slave and freedman were all

together in Christ. Likewise there is an inscription in Rome mentioning Patrobas as a freedman of Nero. And this name is followed by Hermas, a common slave name. Slave and free are therefore being purposefully juxtaposed together. See on :23 *Quartus*. "The believers that are with them" would suggest that there was a small house church associated with each of them. The slaves could feasibly run a house church comprised perhaps of other slaves and household members, right within the premises they lived and worked in.

16:15 *Greet Philologus*- Another common slave name.

*And Julia*- The commonest name for female slaves in the imperial household because of Julius Caesar. Perhaps the wife of Philologus.

*Nereus and his sister and Olympe*- This name is found in inscriptions from the imperial household. Along with Julia, there is reason to think that there was a house group of Christians right in Caesar's household, comprised of believers whom Paul had personally known or maybe converted in other parts of the empire. Remember he had never yet visited Rome. We marvel how many slaves Paul knew personally. He, the Jewish rabbi, the intellectual, the educated and literate- had mixed with and converted those at the very lowest level of the social ladder. Many slaves could not easily get away from their masters, and so we imagine Paul entering the wealthy homes where they worked and lived.

*And all the saints that are with them*- As noted on :14, this would seem to refer to house churches connected with each name.

16:16- see on Acts 2:46.

*Greet one another with a holy kiss*- There is repetition of the command to *all* ecclesial members to greet *all* the other members with a "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14). It's hard to translate into our terms the huge meaning of this in the first century world. It would've been unthinkable for a slave to take such initiative to kiss their master, or indeed any free person. This practice of all kissing everyone else in the congregation would've been arresting and startling. Sociologically, it stood no chance of ever being done. And yet these social and inter-personal miracles were what made Christianity stand out so noticeably- and in essence, our overcoming of social and inter-personal barriers ought to do the same for our community in the present world. But does it? Are we *so* markedly different from others... ? Is our love and unity of such an evidently deep and different quality? The implication is that all these various slaves from different households did meet each other for fellowship. We can imagine the issues they faced with shifts, getting free time off, permission to leave the household etc. And the same effort is required by us to achieve face to face fellowship in Christ.

*All the churches of Christ greet you*- Just as Rome was comprised of house churches who met together occasionally, so it seems the church at Corinth [from where Paul was writing] was likewise composed of a similar network. And Paul would have made the effort to tell all in Corinth that he was writing to Rome, and solicited the greetings from the various house groups where he was.

16:17 *Now I urge you brothers, mark those that are causing divisions*- The article with each noun points to some well-known division; and the teaching in chapters 14 and 15 has made clear that the division related to issues between Jew and Gentile, and whether the Jewish food laws should still be kept by the Gentiles. It is not judgmental to note that certain individuals are divisive. Christianity is no call to naivety. We are not to judge in the sense of condemning, but we are indeed asked to be wise.

*And create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught*- Those who cause divisions cause “occasions of stumbling” (RV) and should therefore be avoided- because, the implication is, division causes stumbling. A *skandalon* referred to the twig on a trap which causes it to open. Divisions within the church may be over trivial matter, as trivial as a twig. But they cause people to stumble from the path to the Kingdom. It’s as simple as that. People stumble, in Paul’s experience, because of divisive people within the ecclesias. To be disunited was contrary to the doctrine taught; the specific teaching in view may simply be the commands relating to unity.

*Turn away from these*- And yet has not Paul been speaking about the all-important need for unity? There are different levels of being out of fellowship with other believers. Any analysis of the NT teaching about ecclesial discipline will make this clear. Some brethren should be simply *avoided*, kept away from, not *necessarily* because they themselves are teaching any false doctrine (Rom. 16:17 Gk.). More seriously, 2 Thess. 3:15 speaks of some cases where we should not count a brother as an “enemy”, ‘an opposing one’, but admonish him as a brother, while *separate* from him; whilst Mt. 18:17 describes other cases where the errant brother should be treated as we would a worldly Gentile (although note: “Let him be unto *thee*” singular; this is talking about personal decisions, not ecclesial withdrawal); and, going a stage further, 1 Cor. 5:11 suggests we should not even keep social company with a brother who is involved in sexual perversion. These different levels of being ‘out of fellowship’ can be applied to the different level of separation there may be in practice between us and a false teacher, and those who perhaps in a misguided view of ‘love’ still tolerate him in fellowship. Even if we insist that Mt. 18:7 should be applied to someone, it must be noted that the Lord’s attitude to tax collectors and Gentiles was to mix with them, even share table fellowship with them, with a burning desire to win them for His cause (Mt. 9:9; 10:3; 11:19; 28:19). It is no accident that all these passages in Matthew have some reference to Matthew the tax collector being called and saved by the Lord. Matthew is effectively saying under inspiration that we should treat the person we decide to relate to as a tax collector and Gentile just as he had been treated by the Lord’s saving, calling grace.

16:18 *For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ*- Those who make divisions don't serve “our Lord Christ” (Rom. 16:17,18 RV); if they saw Christ's Lordship, they wouldn't be divisive, but be humbled into loving co-operation with His brethren. And yet those who make divisions in churches nearly all claim to be reluctantly doing so as part of their devotion to the Lord Christ. It was the same in the first century, and Paul clearly states that this is just so much flannel and excuse.

*But their own belly*- It could be that there was some financial issue which further nuanced the question of obedience to the Law. Perhaps some were appealing to the Jewish law in order to demand tithes from other members.

*And by their smooth and fair speech they deceive the hearts of the innocent-* The language of the serpent in Eden. See on :20.

16:19 *For your obedience is known to all-* Obedience is a major theme in Romans; Paul liked to see the believers in Rome as a parade example of Gentile obedience to the Gospel (1:5; 6:16; 15:18; 16:26). He therefore feared that they would be led away by the Jewish false teachers, and this would negatively impact all those who had looked to them as an example of obedience. As noted in our study of Galatians, Titus and 1 Timothy, the legalism of Judaism was strangely attractive to the Gentile converts. To believe in salvation by pure grace is actually very demanding- for the wonder of it requires our all. The flesh finds it attractive to retain our acceptance that God and Jesus exist, but to slip back into a half-hearted attempt to keep a few laws in the hope that maybe we might be thereby accepted at the last day.

*But I would have you to be wise regarding that which is good and simple concerning evil-* A reference to the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the need to not listen to the voice of the serpent. The true wisdom was in Christ, not in the serpent. See on :20.

16:20 *And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you-* The ‘satan’ in view is I suggest the Jewish opposition, which was to be shortly destroyed in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem elite in AD70. The Jewish system ceased to be a serious adversary or Satan to the Christians in the aftermath of its destruction in A.D. 70, as Paul prophesied here. A closer study of the context reveals more precisely the mentality of the Judaizer Satan. Satan being bruised underfoot alludes back to the seed of the serpent being bruised in Genesis 3:15. The Jews are therefore likened to the Satan-serpent in Genesis (as they are in Jn. 8:44), in their causing “divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned” (Rom. 16:17). Other details in Romans 16 now fall into the Genesis 3:15 context: “they that are such serve... their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (:18). The fair speeches of the Judaizers were like those of the serpent. Instead of ‘Why not eat the fruit?’ it was ‘Why not keep the law?’. Is. 24:6 had earlier made the point that because of the sin of the priesthood “therefore hath the curse devoured the earth / land”; “their poison is like the poison of a serpent” (Ps. 59:4).

The tree of knowledge thus comes to represent the Law – because “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). The fig leaves which Adam and Eve covered themselves with also represented the Law, seeing they were replaced by the slain lamb. Their initially glossy appearance typifies well the apparent covering of sin by the Law, which faded in time. The fig tree is a symbol of Israel. It seems reasonable to speculate that having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they made their aprons out of its leaves, thus making the tree of knowledge a fig tree. Both the tree and the leaves thus represent the Law and Jewish system; it is therefore fitting if the leaves were from the same tree. It is also noteworthy that when Christ described the Pharisees as appearing “beautiful” outwardly, he used a word which in the Septuagint was used concerning the tree of knowledge, as if they were somehow connected with it (Mt. 23:27).

It was as if the Judaizers were saying: ‘Yea, hath God said you cannot keep the law? Why then has He put it there? It will do you good, it will give you greater spiritual knowledge’. Colossians 2:3–4 shows this kind of reasoning was going on: “In (Christ) are hid *all* the

treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words". Here is another allusion to the serpent. Because all spiritual knowledge is in Christ, Paul says, don't be beguiled by offers of deeper knowledge. Thus Adam and Eve's relationship with God in Eden which the serpent envied and broke is parallel to us being "in Christ" with all the spiritual knowledge that is there. Hence Paul warned Corinth: "I fear, lest... as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). The 'simplicity in Christ' was therefore the same as man's relationship with God in Eden. So again we see the Judaist false teachers equated with the Satan-serpent of Genesis. Titus 1:10 and 2 Peter 2:1 – 3 specifically define these men who used an abundance of words and sophistry as "they of the circumcision", i.e. Jewish false teachers. Those in 2 Peter 2 are described as speaking evil of Angels (:12 cp. Jude 8) – in the same way as the serpent spoke evil of the Angelic commands given in Eden. It's been pointed out that there's an Aramaic pun which connects the serpent [*hewya*] with the idea of instruction [*hawa*] and also Eve, the false teacher of Adam [*Hawah*].

Back in Romans 16, the Judaizer Satans/ adversaries are spoken of as serving "their own belly" (:18) like the serpent did. Maybe the serpent liked the look of the fruit and wanted to justify his own eating of it; to do this he persuaded Eve to eat it. Because he served his belly, he had to crawl on it. Similarly the Judaizers wanted to be justified in their own keeping of the Law, and therefore persuaded Eve, the Christian bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1–3), to do the same. "Yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple (AV mg. "harmless") concerning evil" (Rom. 16:19) – "be wise as serpents, (primarily referring to the Pharisees?) and harmless as doves", Jesus had said (Mt. 10:16).

16:21 *Timothy my fellow-worker greets you, as do Lucius*- Luke the writer of the Gospel, who was often together with Paul and Timothy.

*Jason*- The Jason of Acts 17:5,7.

*And Sosipater, my kinsmen*- Perhaps the Sopater of Acts 20:4, from where we learn he was Jewish. if these indications are correct, then Paul chosen to send greetings from Jewish brethren; having spoken of the Jewish element in Rome as "the weak". "Kinsmen" could mean they were Paul's relatives, or that they were also Jews, perhaps also from Tarsus.

16:22 *I Tertius, who write this epistle, greet you in the Lord*- See on :8.

"Note Paul's exquisite courtesy in leaving Tertius to salute in his own name. To dictate to him his own salutation would be to treat him as a machine".

16:23 - see on Lk. 8:3.

*Gaius my host (and of the whole church) greets you*- Gaius had a home big enough for the Corinth ecclesia to meet in (Rom. 16:23). The social mix amongst believers must have been startling. Excavations at Ostia near Rome have revealed how the spacious homes of the wealthy stood right next to the *insulae*, the blocks of squalid flats in which the poor lived. There was little differentiation of rich and poor according to which neighbourhoods they lived in. So when we read that the wealthy believer Gaius was 'host of the whole church' (Rom. 16:23), we are to imagine this wealthy man opening his spacious home to the urchins

who lived in the neighbouring blocks who had come to Christ. This must have been startling for the surrounding populace. Such was the witness of true Christian unity.

*Erastus the treasurer of the city greets you; and Quartus the brother-* The list of believers' names in Romans 16 is there for a purpose: to show how all types had come together in the Rome ecclesia. Women are named and greeted [uncommon in contemporary Jewish letters of the time]; some names are common slave names: Phlegon, Hermes, Philologus; whereas tradition has it that the Narcissus mentioned was a famous and wealthy member of the court of Claudius. Greetings are given from two members at Corinth: "Erastus the treasurer of the city [of Corinth] salutes you, and Quartus, a brother" (Rom. 16:23). There is an intended juxtaposition here: of the wealthy and powerful brother Erastus, and the unknown [slave?] Quartus, who all the same was "a brother", on the same spiritual standing. Phoebe is described as the *prostotes* of the Cenchreae ecclesia and Paul himself- a word translatable as "patroness" (Rom. 16:1,2). It could be that she funded Paul's activities at least in part. The same implication may be behind Paul's description of the mother of Rufus as being his "mother" (Rom. 16:13). This would have continued the example of wealthy women like Joanna supporting the ministry of Jesus (Lk. 8:2). If one goes through the Acts and the New Testament letters and makes a list of all the individuals who are named, we have a list of about 78 people. About 30 of these people have some indication in the narrative as to their social status; and the majority of these are from above average social stations. For example, the way Achaicus, Fortunatus, Tertius and Lucius in Corinth and Clement in Philippi all have Latin names in Roman colonies could well indicate that they were from the original stock of colonists, who tended to be well ahead of the local population.

16:24 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all-* The stress is upon "all". Both weak and strong, Jew and Gentile, those who correctly understood and those who didn't or wouldn't, are all covered in the Lord's grace. Yet *charis* is used also of the gift- of the Spirit. Paul has argued that the experience of the Spirit's work is what binds believers together, and he wishes this to be with them all.

16:25 *Now to him that is able to establish you-* Stability of faith involves the direct operation of God in the human mind; he writes in 1 Thess. 3:13 of how the Lord can establish hearts. And this is exactly the work of the Spirit about which this epistle has had so much to say. "Is able" uses the word Paul has earlier employed to explain how the unassisted sinner is *not* able to please God or obey his law (8:7,8). But God is able through the Spirit to transform us towards salvation- if we are willing and believing. The word "establish" is exactly how Paul began the letter, wanting to give them "Some gift of the Spirit, to the end you may be established" (1:11). He clearly did not have in view the word of the Gospel, for they already knew that. There was a Spirit gift which God was willing to give them which would stabilize them in faith so that they didn't believe the false teachers. But surely Paul had somewhat justified his trip to Roman by saying that he wanted to come to them in order to impart that gift to them. God was willing to give that gift in any case and by any means. And he wishes that in whatever way, they may receive it.

*According to the gospel I preach, which is the preaching of Jesus Christ-* As the Lord is the light of the world, so are we. We are Him to this world insofar as we preach Him. The message of salvation by faith alone and Holy Spirit strengthening was central to the good news Paul preached. But again the point is made to the Jews that Paul is not merely sharing his personal opinions about the law and salvation by faith- the Lord is preaching to them through his very words.

*According to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept in silence through times eternal-* The mystery was of salvation by faith alone and not obedience to law, and of internal strengthening by the Spirit. Paul felt these things were indeed found in "the scriptures of the prophets" (:26)- once you start searching for them, looking back from a Christian perspective. But until the time of Christ, this great mystery was as it were kept secret.

*16:26 But now is manifested, and in accordance with the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known to all the nations to obedience of faith-* This is surely an allusion to the great commission- a command to take the good news to all the nations, so that they might believe and be baptized. The act of baptism is therefore hinted at in the phrase "the obedience of faith". Paul has used the same word about how God has made known the riches of His grace to us (9:23); our response is to make it known to others. Preaching is therefore a response to His grace and initiative towards us.

*16:27 To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever-* That God alone is wise may be a final parry against the way the false teachers claimed to be offering new wisdom unknown to others. But clearly Paul also is simply commenting upon the wisdom of God in doing things the way He has.



## CHAPTER 1

### Paul and Corinth

In the letters to Corinth we really come to learn something of the mind of Paul; and he asked us to follow him, so that we might follow our Lord the more closely. So we want to analyse the relationship between Paul and Corinth in some detail; for we are all in desperate need of learning how to relate to each other better.

Firstly, let's firmly place in our minds the supreme spirituality of Paul. He saw visions which were unlawful to be uttered, he could look back on a string of ecclesias worldwide which were a result of his work, his writings show that he reached higher into the mysteries of God than most other man have ever gone. Naturally speaking, it must have been so difficult for him to relate to immature or unspiritual brethren and sisters! And yet his sense of identity with his spiritual children comes through all the time. Note how he purposefully mixes his pronouns: "*We* know in part... *I* know in part... *we* see in a mirror... *I* spoke as a child" (1 Cor. 13).

Now consider Corinth. Getting drunk at the breaking of bread, some members openly committing incest and other sexual perversions; and being justified by much of the ecclesia. Some had not the knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). The basic truth of Christ's resurrection and the second coming were denied, and Paul was slandered unbelievably. There is fair emphasis on Corinth's willing belief of the vicious denigration of Paul's character, made by some of their elders (1 Cor. 2:16; 3:10; 4:11-14; 9:20-27; 14:18). The depths to which that ecclesia sunk are hard to plumb. And yet Paul believed that they abounded in love for him; he asks them to abound in their generosity to others as they abounded in their love for him (2 Cor. 12:7). Truly Paul reflected his own experience of having righteousness imputed to him.

So the relationship between Paul and Corinth is fascinating, but above all it's instructive of not only how we should relate to each other, but how Christ relates to us. There is a strange paradox throughout the letters to Corinth. Paul uses the most exalted and positive language about them, enthusing about the certainty of their salvation, and yet he also accuses them of the most incredible spiritual weaknesses. There's a clear example in the chapter we've just read. In 1 Cor. 1:8,9, we read of Paul enthusiastically saying that God would "confirm *you* (note that) unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus". But then in v.12 he accuses every one of them of being guilty of factionism and division: "*Every one of you* (the same 'you' of v.8,9) says, I am of Paul...(etc.)". Paul really believed what he says in v.4: "I thank my God always on your behalf (implying: 'You ought to be thanking Him, but I'm doing it for you?'), for the grace of God which is given you...". This was the secret of how Paul managed to relate to them so positively; He deeply believed that they were in receipt of God's grace on account of their being in Christ.

## The Love Of Paul

So let's just review the positive way in which Paul felt towards his Corinthian brethren. His love for them was "in (his) heart, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). He boasted to others of their "zeal" to give money to the poor, even though it seems they had just made empty promises (2 Cor. 9:2). And in 2 Cor. 9:13 he goes even further; he speaks as if they had already distributed money to other churches. He saw them as righteous, even though they hadn't performed the acts they vaguely spoke of. Paul was surely reflecting the spirit of the Father and Son here. It may even be that Paul mentioned his devotion to Corinth in his 'front-line' presentation of the Gospel to others: "We preach... Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). His great wish was their "perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9). Paul's deep-seated love for Corinth was absolutely evident to all who knew them; it was not an act of the will, which occurred just within Paul's mind. So often our 'love' for difficult members of the ecclesia is no more than a grimly made act of the will. Even in the midst of rebuking them, Paul uses the language of real endearment: "Wherefore, *my dearly beloved*, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). The word "brethren" occurs as a refrain throughout the letters; it appears 19 times in the first letter alone, compared with 9 times in the letter to the Romans (a longer epistle). This is similar to the way in which Jeremiah repeatedly describes the Israel who rejected and betrayed him as "my people" (e.g. Jer. 8:11, 19, 21, 22). Despite all the cruel allegations made by them against Paul, he did not deal with them in the cagey, 'political' manner so common in our circles: "*O ye Corinthians*, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged" (2 Cor. 6:11). It is noteworthy that Paul is here alluding to Ps. 119:32, which speaks of God's word enlarging a man's heart. It was through his application to the word that Paul came to this large-hearted attitude. A smaller man than Paul would have trod mighty carefully with Corinth, making no more than succinct, measured statements. But his deep love for them led Paul to be as open-hearted as can be. Indeed, his pouring forth of his innermost soul to them in the autobiographical sections of 2 Cor. is evidence of how his heart and mouth were truly opened and enlarged unto them. There was no shrugging of the shoulders within Paul at the spiritual plight of Corinth: "Ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you" (2 Cor. 7:3). And it was this basic love which was in Paul's heart which led him to a wonderful spirit of hopefulness; so that even towards the end of his second letter he can speak of his "hope, that as your faith grows, we shall be magnified in you" (2 Cor. 10:15 RV).

## Corinth's Response

This love of Paul found at least some response from Corinth. Titus told Paul of their feelings for him: "He told us your earnest desire (for Paul), your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more" (2 Cor. 7:7). Here they were, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and Gentiles of the Gentiles; in a state of spiritual love with each other. The strange paradox of Paul's great love for them, yet also his repugnance at their evil ways, is perhaps explicable in terms of their spiritual 'in-loveness'. As a spiritual sister (cp. Abigail?) can marry an alcoholic (Nabal?) because she sees the good side in him, whilst not turning a blind eye to his drinking; as a father ever loves wayward children; so Paul felt towards his beloved sons, his attractive young bride (2 Cor. 11:2) of Corinth. That there was at least some love for Paul by Corinth is made tragically evident from 2 Cor. 12:15: "The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved". This is surely the language of falling out of love. And Paul was the aggrieved party. As with so many a father and young husband, Paul had to go through the pain of sensing that the object of his love was keeping him at arm's length, was being partial in their response to the great love he was showing: "You have acknowledged us (our love) *in part*, that we are your rejoicing" (2 Cor. 1:14). Yet Paul took great comfort from their albeit partial response: "Now I *praise you* brethren, that ye remember me in all things" (1 Cor. 11:2); whilst

struggling on to make them realize the intensity of his feelings towards them: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears (picture the old boy sobbing as he moved his quill)... *that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you*" (2 Cor. 2:4). Despite the spiteful way in which they demanded Paul bring letters of recommendation with him (2 Cor. 3:1), Paul jumped at their even partial spiritual response: "Great is my glorying of you! I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" because of their positive spiritual reaction to the visit of Titus (2 Cor. 7:4).

### Hard Discipline

It is often implied that Paul was perfectly happy to put up with the mess at Corinth, and that therefore we should not be unduly concerned at the state of our latter day ecclesias. This could just not be further from the truth. Perhaps the greatest indication of Paul's love for Corinth is seen in his apparent severity towards them, his desire that they really should abide in Christ. Thus in 1 Cor. 4:21 Paul parallels coming to them in love with coming "with a rod". The sarcasm of 1 Cor. 4:8-14 (and many other places), his hard words of 1 Cor. 3:1-3, all indicate that he saw Corinth for the apostates which they were; and responded to this. "If I come again, I will not spare... know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:2,5). This was more than the externally strict schoolteacher with a soft heart, more than dad just laying the law down one evening. What Paul was threatening was radical; it may be that he would have used the power of the Holy Spirit to smite them with literal death. 1 Cor. 11:30 would imply that either Paul or another apostle had done this to them on a previous visit. "I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy" (2 Cor. 11:2) is one of a series of allusions in that chapter to the events of Num.25, where Phinehas was moved with jealousy to slay those who were "unequally yoked" with the things of Belial (cp. 2 Cor. 6:14). Paul had accused his Corinthians of just that; and he was quite willing to play the role of Phinehas.

"I will bewail many that have sinned... if I come again, I will not spare" (2 Cor. 12:21; 13:2) is actually an allusion to Ez. 8:18: "Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here (in the natural and spiritual temple of Yahweh, cp. 2 Cor. 6:16)?... therefore will I also deal in fury: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them". God's anger with Israel as expressed at the Babylonian invasion was going to be reflected in Paul's 'coming' to spiritual Israel in Corinth. Yet for all his high powered allusions, Paul mixed them with the most incredible expressions of true love and sympathy for Corinth. In this we see the giant spiritual stature of that man Paul.

### No Blind Eye

Paul evidently did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's failures. He spoke of them in one breath as being spiritually complete, whilst in the next he showed that he was truly aware of their failures. There's a glaring example of this in 1 Cor. 5:6,7: "A little leaven (which they had in their bad attitude, and also in the presence of the incestuous brother) leavens the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, *as you are unleavened*". They had leaven; otherwise Paul would not have told them to purge it out. But then he tells them that they are "unleavened". In other words, he saw them *as if* they were unleavened, but he recognized that they had the bad leaven among and within them. There's another blatant example of this in 1 Cor. 8:1,4,7: "As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge... (v.4) we know that an idol is nothing in the world... (v.7) howbeit there is not in every man (in the ecclesia) that knowledge". So Paul starts off by saying that they all knew about the correct attitude to meat offered to idols. But then he recognizes that in reality, not all of them did know, or at best, they did not appreciate what

they knew. 1 Cor. 11:2 has more of the same: "I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you"; but then Paul goes on to show how they had blatantly disobeyed the ordinance he delivered them concerning the breaking of bread. Again, Paul sees the Corinthians *as if* they were perfect, but then goes on to point out their failures. This is surely a reflection of how the Lord Jesus sees each of us His people. 1 Cor. 3:1,18 shows how the Corinthians thought they were wise, when actually Paul could only address them as carnal babes in Christ; they were not "wise". Yet in 1 Cor. 10:15 Paul concludes a section with the words: "I speak *as* to wise men...". He treated them *as if* they were wise, when he knew that they weren't in reality. He begins by rejoicing that "in every thing you are enriched by him...in all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:5), even though this was only potentially true- they had been given the knowledge, but had failed to turn it into true wisdom. Likewise Paul spells it out to them that their behaviour was likely to exclude them from the Kingdom; but in the same context he speaks as if it is taken as read that they will be in the Kingdom: "*The saints shall judge the world. And if the world shall be judged by you... we shall judge Angels*" (1 Cor. 6:2,3,9).

It is so significant that Paul did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's faults. In seeking to be positive, we so often do this. But we are asked to relate to each other, as Christ does to us. And he certainly doesn't turn a blind eye to our failures. Yet our problem is that if we don't turn a blind eye, we find it so hard to relate to our brethren. So what is the secret of being able to look at both the good and bad sides of our brethren? I suggest the answer is something along these lines:

At baptism, a new man was born inside us, personified in the New Testament as "the man Christ Jesus", "the Spirit", etc. Yet there is still the devil within us, a personification of our sinfulness. We identify our *real* selves as our spiritual man (note how Paul refers to that side of him as "I myself" in Rom. 7:25). God looks upon us *as if* we are Christ Jesus, He sees us as justified in Him, He sees us as if we are as perfect as Christ; not that we are in ourselves, of course. This is how He wants us to view our brethren; if we see them as God sees us, we will see them as the spiritual man which they have within them. Yet like God, we will not turn a blind eye to their weaknesses. Paul looked ahead to the day when God would have confirmed Corinth "unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor.1:8). We too need to try to live the Kingdom life now; we must live *as if* we are in the day of Christ's Kingdom (Rom. 13:12,13). So in some ways we must see our brethren as they will be in the Kingdom. Thus in 2 Cor. 10:6,15 Paul speaks about the day when Corinth's "obedience is fulfilled... *when* your faith is increased... we shall be enlarged by you... abundantly". "We are your rejoicing, even as you also are ours, *in the day of the Lord Jesus*. And in *this confidence* I was minded to come unto you..." (2 Cor. 1:14). Paul's confidence in them was on account of the rejoicing he looked forward to having concerning them at the day of judgment. Some of his final words to them totally summarize his attitude: "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9). He looked earnestly towards the day when they would be spiritually matured. We too must recognize that we are all only children. We must look to what both we and our brethren *will be* one day, in spiritual terms. This certainly takes some spiritual vision. Yet Paul had just this: "...having hope, *when* [not 'if'] your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you" (2 Cor. 10:15). He here recognizes that their faith is now weak, and must increase; but he also had written that they were to remain standing in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13). They were weak in faith; this he recognized. But he recognized their *status* as being 'in the faith'. So concerned was he with them that he says

that if they were obedient to what he had asked them, then he would be ready to “revenge *all* disobedience” (2 Cor. 10:6). It’s as if he was taking them one step at a time in bringing them to realize their errors; like the Lord, he spoke the word to men as *they* were able to hear it, not as *he was able* to expound it or expose their failures. We are seeking the salvation and betterment of our brethren, not simply to air our perceptions of their inadequacies.

### **Corinth: Washed And Sanctified**

He saw Corinth as truly saved in prospect, by reason of their being in Christ. He quotes the words of Lev. 26:13 “I will dwell in them and walk in them... and they shall be my God” about Corinth (2 Cor. 6:16)- even though those words were said to be describing a status conditional upon Israel’s obedience. “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and *shall* present us (not ‘hopefully, if you get your act together!’) with you” (2 Cor. 4:14) sounds as if Paul fully expected the Corinthians to be there, and to be joined at the right hand side of the judgment seat by himself and Titus. 1 Cor. 15:51 has the same certainty of their acceptance: “*We shall be changed*”. “*We* (Paul and Corinth) know... we have a building of God... eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1), i.e. the spiritual man Christ Jesus within each man who is in Christ. Truly could Paul write: “Our *hope* of you is steadfast, knowing that, as you are partakers of the sufferings, so should you be also of the consolation” (2 Cor. 1:7). *They*, woolly Corinth, would judge the world in the Kingdom age (1 Cor. 6:2). “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, *be with you all* ” (2 Cor. 13:14) must have taken some writing, even under inspiration. “Be with *you all* ” would have included those Judaist-influenced brethren hell-bent on destroying Paul’s work and image, those who had sinned grievously, and those whose doctrinal appreciation was starting to slip. Yet this was how Paul saw them; as being in Christ, and abiding in the love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit; thanks to their baptism into Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and abiding (at least for that present time) in that blessed relationship. 2 Cor. 11:2 even shows Paul likening Corinth ecclesia to the guileless Eve in Eden, not yet having sinned, all innocence and uncorrupted beauty. And yet he saw himself as the Eve who had been deceived and punished by death (Rom. 7:11,13 = Gen. 2:17; 3:13); but he saw them as the Eve who had not yet sinned. This was no literary trick of the tail; he genuinely felt and saw them as better than himself to be- such was the depth of his appreciation of his own failures. Paul saw Corinth as abounding in knowledge and love (2 Cor. 8:7), even though they had some who lacked the basic knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34), and they needed exhortation to confirm their love to the disfellowshipped brother (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Likewise, unfaithful Israel is still addressed as “the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing” (Jer. 18:13); she was seen as a virgin right up until the Babylonian invasion, where she was as it were ‘raped’ (Jer. 14:17 Heb.). We reflect the same paradox in our efforts to see evidently weak brethren as still sanctified in Christ.

Having spoken of fornicators, idolaters, thieves etc., all of whom were found within the Corinth ecclesia, Paul says: “But such *were* some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). The reference to washing, and the Father, Son and Spirit all points back to baptism for the remission of sins (Mt. 28:19). The fact those people had been baptized meant so much to Paul. The significance of our brethren’s baptisms should also make a deep impact on ourselves. By this act they became “in Christ”. The Corinthians were committing idolatry, fornication etc. Paul was aware of that. But he was prepared to see them as being sanctified in Christ; he counted them as if this was not happening: *for the time being*. There was coming a time when he would no longer accept that they were in Christ, and when he would not spare



them in any way (2 Cor. 13:2). The repented failures of our brethren, however severe they may seem to us, must be overlooked if there is real evidence that they are making effort to abide in Christ. Unrepentant fornication or idolatry is hardly proof of this. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20) indicates that Paul did not see them as reconciled to God; yet he looked at the man Christ Jesus within them in order to be able to have all the positive feelings towards them which he did. So clear was Paul's vision of their spiritual man that he could actually boast about their 'good side' to other ecclesias (2 Cor. 7:4,14; 9:2). So enthusiastic was Paul about the great grace of God which Corinth basked in, that he actually made other ecclesias truly affectionate of Corinth: "which long after you for the exceeding grace (Paul knew just how exceeding it was to Corinth!) in you" (2 Cor. 9:14).

And Paul showed this same spirit in all his dealings with his brethren. He could say in all honesty that "I am convinced, my brothers, that you are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14 NIV)- even though there must have been major problems in Rome, not least the Jew: Gentile division. He was so positive about them that he could write that he was sure that Corinth's labour was "not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58)- and yet he knew that labour was in vain if converts fell away (1 Thess. 3:5). Yet he acted towards them, and genuinely felt as if, they would not and had not fallen away. This was quite some psychological and spiritual achievement, given the depths of their apostasy. Corinth hated Paul, slandered him, despised him. And yet he can write that their love for him "abounded" (2 Cor. 8:7). I take this not as sarcasm, but as a deep attempt by him to view them positively. We are challenged by Paul's example to look at our brethren the same way.

### **"As God... has forgiven"**

We are told to forgive one another, "*as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32). All our sins were forgiven, in prospect, at baptism. All our irritating habits and attitudes, our secret sins, all these were forgiven then. And we must respond to this by counting our brethren to have received the same grace. Seeing we have received this grace, why do we find it so hard to see our brethren like this? Surely the answer rests in the fact that we don't fully believe or appreciate the degree to which God really does see us personally as being perfect in Christ. Paul was so super-assured of his own salvation, of the fact that God really did see him as a man in Christ, and therefore he found it easier to see his brethren in such a positive way. He was so conscious of how his many sins were just not counted against him. He knew that he was "chief of sinners", he didn't turn a blind eye to himself; because he could realistically face up to his own position before God, he found it easier to do the same for his weak brethren.

The fact that Paul saw the spiritual man in all his brethren means that to some degree he saw them all as equal. He seems to bring this point out in 1 Cor. 4:14,17: "As my beloved sons I warn you (Corinth ecclesia)... for this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son...". Paul calls both Corinth and Timothy his beloved sons. The implication is that to some degree, he felt the same towards dodgy Corinth as he did towards the spiritually strong Timothy. Likewise Christ showed his love for the whole church when he died on the cross. This does not mean, of course, that Paul did not have deeper bonds with some than with others. But the fact is that in spiritual terms, he saw all his brethren as equal, in that they shared the same status of being justified in Christ. Whether one had 2% righteousness and

another 5% was irrelevant; they both needed the massive imputation of God's righteousness through Christ. As Paul could call both Timothy and Corinth his "beloved sons", so God calls both Christ and ourselves by the same title (Mt. 3:17 cp. Col. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). The reason? Because "he has made us accepted (by being) in the beloved (son)" (Eph. 1:6).

*1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints-* There is a play on words here. By baptism into Christ we are in Him, and are therefore made holy, sanctified; and therefore we are saints, holy or sanctified ones. Paul approaches the various behavioural issues in Corinth by encouraging them to live out in practice what they are by status in Christ, and to make use of the Spirit power potentially available to enable this transformation.

*With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place-* The Jerusalem pattern of gathering collectively in the temple and yet also having home groups was repeated in Corinth. 1 Corinthians is addressed to the singular church in Corinth, which he parallels with "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). Those 'places', I submit, referred to the various house churches in the city. He specifically mentions the house churches of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15). The exhortation that "you all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10) would then refer to the need for the various house churches to all "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment". As we know, there was an issue of fellowship in Corinth, concerning a deeply immoral brother. If he avoided church discipline by simply joining another house church, they were not going to be joined together in "the same judgment", and inevitably division would arise amongst those Corinthian house churches. There was to be peace rather than confusion "in all churches" (1 Cor. 14:33)- i.e. all the house churches in Corinth. Paul's complaint that "every one of you saith, I am of Paul... I of Apollos" (1 Cor. 1:12) surely makes more sense if read with reference to each of the house churches, rather than every individual member. Paul speaks there as if the believers 'came together' 'in ekklesia' (1 Cor. 5:4), i.e. the various home groups occasionally met together. Hence he speaks of when "the whole church be come together into one place" (1 Cor. 14:23), i.e. all the house churches gathered together for a special fellowship meeting. He says that when they 'came together', then they should make a collective decision about disfellowshipping the immoral brother. Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth, and he describes Gaius as the host of the whole church (Rom. 16:23)- implying that he had premises large enough for all the various house churches to gather together in. The abuses which occurred when the whole church 'came together' presumably therefore occurred on his premises.

*Their Lord and ours-* Paul could be saying that Jesus Christ is Lord both of 'us' and also of all the congregations of believers. But he could also mean (and the Greek rather suggests this) that the same Jesus *understood and interpreted somewhat differently amongst the various believers "in every place"* was in fact Lord of them all. For your interpretation of the Lord Jesus and mine will inevitably differ in some points. Now this must of course be balanced against John's clear teaching that those who deny Jesus came in the flesh are in fact antiChrist. However the idea is more likely that Paul is preparing the way for his repeated appeals for unity- Jesus is Lord of 'they' over there and also of 'us' here. "Theirs and ours" suggests Paul saw himself very much as standing with the Corinthians- which is significant, given his later criticisms and exposure of their behaviour.

1:3 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* This was no mere formality; the "grace", *charis*, the gift Paul wished them was that of the Spirit in their hearts, and he goes on to develop this idea of the *charis* in :4.

1:4 *I thank my God always concerning you-* The Corinthians slandered Paul, refused his teachings etc. But he can continually be grateful for them. We see here a lovely spirit. h thanks God because of what has been given them by status, and for how he believes God sees them, because of the righteousness imputed to them. Serious adoption of Paul's perspective would solve absolutely every church division and argument.

*For the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus-* There is a clear connection between baptism and the receipt of the gift of the Spirit. By baptism "in Christ", the converts were given a *charis*, a gift or grace, from God.

1:5 *That in everything you were enriched in him-* In detailing the work of the Spirit gift in the hearts of those who believe, Eph. 3:16-20 uses this same word for 'riches', and the same kind of ideas Paul uses in this section of 1 Corinthians 1: "He would grant you, according to the *riches* of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...". The complete spiritual enrichment of the Corinthians ["in everything"] is hard to square with their rather woeful spiritual state- getting drunk at the breaking of bread, denying the Lord's resurrection etc. But the point is that the gift of the Spirit had potentially enabled them not to be like this- and the appeal was for them to make use of the potential they had.

*In all utterance and all knowledge-* In all *logos* and *gnosis*. These were the very things the Corinthians were tempted to seek from secular sources, and to leave Christ for. But they were blessed with everything- every word of wisdom was in Him, provided by His Spirit. They need not look to other sources of these things because all had been made available to them potentially by the Spirit they had received.

1:6 *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you-* The preaching of Christ was confirmed *in* the believers by the gift of the Spirit within their hearts. And this was itself the testimony of Christ to the validity of their conversion to Him. The external miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given to confirm the preaching of the Gospel (s.w. Mk. 16:20), but their



withdrawal doesn't mean that the Lord Jesus doesn't still confirm the preaching of His word by the Spirit in an internal sense. This is the significance of the word *in* you. Paul says that this confirmation will work in them "until the end", i.e. the final glorification at the Lord's return (:8 s.w.). It was not temporary nor was it going to be withdrawn. A process is ongoing which is intended to bring us to final salvation at the Lord's return. This confirmation or 'establishment' is achieved by our being 'anointed'- a clear reference to the gift of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21 s.w.). The same word is used in Rom. 4:16, speaking of how the promise of salvation to Abraham is confirmed or [AV] "made sure to all the seed".

*1:7 So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ-* They had been enriched spiritually in every way (:5). But this was only true potentially. And this explains why a baptized believer may not sense the power of the Spirit in their hearts- because they are not allowing the potential to work. Paul is going to be appealing for radical changes in thinking and behaviour- but he begins by saying that all the power for that is already potentially with them. Paul later urges the Corinthians to covet the most useful Spiritual gifts (14:1). But he says here that they already have them all. So clearly enough he means that they must use their potential.

1:8- see on Gal. 6:4.

*Who shall also confirm you to the end, unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ-* The gift of the Spirit given as a confirmation at baptism (see on :6) would continue to work with them, if they allowed it, to present them acceptable at the day of final judgment. We can only be without accusation (Gk.) before the day of judgment by having righteousness imputed to us; this is the great theme of Romans. This is made possible by our part in the Lord's representative death for us (s.w. Col. 1:22). But as Romans 8 explains, this is made true for us in practice by the Spirit working within us to lead us to that end in practice, and seeking to make us in reality what we are counted as by status.

*1:9 God is faithful-* The claims made here for the work of the Spirit may seem incredible, given our weakness, and the evident weakness of the Corinthian believers. But God is faithful- He will really do what He has promised. The faithfulness of God is associated in the Old Testament with His faithfulness to the covenant; and the Abrahamic covenant included within it the implication of the Spirit's work; this is very much part of the "blessing" promised. And God will surely fulfill His part; it is for us to be open to this and believe it.

*Through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord-* We through the Spirit are in active fellowship with the Lord Jesus. It's not a case of mere theological agreement with a set of Biblical principles. Paul assumes that the Corinthians, with all their immorality and misunderstandings of basic doctrine, were in fellowship with Jesus; and he therefore treated them accordingly. This is a huge challenge to those who feel they can only accept in fellowship those who can jump certain bars of their own creation regarding doctrine and practice.

1:10- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*Now I urge you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment-* This appeal was made for the sake of the fact they

were all "in the name" of the Lord Jesus by baptism into that name. They had therefore been given "the spirit of Christ", the mind of Christ. The "one mind" or "same mind" which Paul appeals for us to have is the mind of Christ (see on Phil. 2:5). He's not confusing unity with uniformity, but rather reasoning that if we each allow the mind of Christ to be dominant within us, then we shall have the same mind / judgment because we will each have *His* mind. This is not therefore an appeal to each study the Bible in the same way and reach the same conclusions, or have the same level of discipline for those who fail in certain moral areas. Rather is it quite simply an appeal for us to have the mind of Christ. And thereby we shall be united, regardless of other issues over which we may differ.

"Be perfected together" (1 Cor. 1:10) uses the same Greek word as in Heb. 10:5, where we read of the Lord's one body "prepared", joined together.

1:11 *For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers-* Paul doesn't mean 'They dobbed you in to me, so I'm taking it with you'. That would be responding to gossip. The 'report' would appear to refer to a formal, written statement- that may well have been inspired by the Spirit. Otherwise Paul surely could not have written such confidence that the report was true.

*By those of the household of Chloe-* The 'church' at Corinth was comprised of various house groups; this one was apparently led by a woman, or at least were comprised of her household servants and family. Perhaps like Lydia she had converted her 'household' or extended family, including servants.

*That there are contentions among you-* If they each had the mind of Christ, then there would not be contentions amongst them. Therefore 'contentions' are a sign of not having the Spirit (3:3)- i.e. the spirit / mind of Christ.

The first problem in the Corinth ecclesia, Paul said, was that they were divided. He begins his letter by addressing this problem, not the incest, the drunkenness at the breaking of bread, the false doctrine... See on Gal. 2:2.

1:12- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*By this I mean, that each one of you is saying: I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I am of Christ-* 1 Cor. 3:22 speaks of three groups in the Corinth ecclesia, following Paul, Peter and Apollos. Yet in 1 Cor. 1:12 someone says "I am of Christ". This seems to be Paul himself- so Christ-centred was he, that he wanted no part in ecclesial politics nor in the possibility of leading a faction. His Christ-centredness was a phenomenal achievement.

A case can be made that the letters of Peter and Jude were also written to Corinth. Peter visited Corinth, presumably focusing his preaching on the Jewish community, and perhaps he was writing his letters specifically to the Jewish house churches there (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5). The same concerns are apparent as in Paul's letters to Corinth: The need to distinguish between spiritual and unspiritual persons who despised others (Jude 19 = 1 Cor. 2:6 - 3:4; 8:1-3); those who perverted liberty into licence (Jude 4 = 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), becoming slaves of sensuality (Jude 8,10,16,23 = 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 2 Cor. 12:21); some eating and

drinking abusively at the love feast (Jude 12 = 1 Cor. 11:17-33); refusing the authority of their elders (Jude 8,11 = 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 9:1-12); both Peter and Paul warn Corinth of the danger of worldly wisdom. Peter's reminder to them about the authority of Paul is very understandable in this case. However, the point of all this is to observe the tenderness of Peter and Jude in writing to the Corinthians ["my beloved..."], whilst at the same time warning them of the awesome judgment which their behaviour was preparing for them. It was the same passionate love for Christ's weak brethren which Paul showed them.

*1:13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?*- There are times when Paul uses the word "Christ" when we'd have expected him to use the word "church"- e.g. "Is Christ divided?... as the body is one... so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 1:13; 12:12). This synecdoche serves to demonstrate the intense unity between Christ and His people- we really are Him to this world. Think through the reasoning of 1 Cor. 1:13: "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?". The fact Jesus was crucified for us means that we should be baptized into that Name, and also be undivided.

Christ being undivided is placed parallel with the fact Paul was not crucified for us, but Christ was (1 Cor. 1:13). The implication is surely that because Christ was crucified for us, therefore those He died to redeem are undivided. We have one Saviour, through one salvation act, and therefore we must be one. The atonement and fellowship are so linked. Christ is not divided, and therefore, Paul reasons, divisions amongst brethren are a nonsense. *Christ is not divided, and therefore neither should we be* (1 Cor. 1:13; 3:3). Let's remember this powerful logic, in all our thinking about this issue. Paul even goes so far as to suggest that if we do not discern the body at the breaking of bread, if we wilfully exclude certain members of the body, then we eat and drink condemnation to ourselves. This is how serious division is. The devil's house is divided (Mt. 12:25,26); Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13 s.w.). We were called to the Gospel *so that* we might share in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ- i.e. fellowship with Him and His Father, and with all the others within His body (1 Cor. 1:9,10). If we accept that brethren and sisters are validly baptized into and remain within His body, then we simply *must* fellowship with them. Should we refuse to do this, we are working against the essential purpose of God- to build up the body of His Son now, so that we might exist in that state eternally.

*1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius*- Paul goes on to list others he had baptized, and admits the possibility he had baptized even more than he named. So we have an example here of a grammatical construction whereby 'None' or 'Not' is not global and absolute; and we need to bear this in mind in the interpretation of :17.

Gaius had a home big enough for the Corinth ecclesia to meet in (Rom. 16:23). Crispus was the leader of the Corinth synagogue and yet he and Gaius were the first people Paul converted there (1 Cor. 1:14). Thus in this case the initial response was from the socially well to do, although the later converts were generally poor. By all means compare with how wealthy Lydia was the first convert in Philippi. Anyone who was a household leader or with a home large enough to accommodate the ecclesia was clearly of a higher social level. Thus the Philippian jailer, Stephanas and Chloe had a "household" (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:15), as did Philemon; and even Aquilla and Priscilla although artisans were wealthy enough to have room to host an ecclesia (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5). Titus Justus [whose name implies he

was a Roman citizen] had a house adjacent to the synagogue in Corinth. Mark's mother had a home in Jerusalem that could accommodate a meeting (Acts 12:12); Baranbas owned a farm (Acts 4:36); Jason was wealthy enough to stand bail for Paul and entertain his visitors (Acts 17:5-9). An Areopagite was converted in Athens (Acts 17:34). Apollos and Phoebe were able to travel independently. Remember that most people at the time lived in cramped tiny rooms, so unbearable that most of their lives were lived outdoors as far as possible.

1:15 *Lest any of you should say you were baptized into my name*- Paul did baptize some in Corinth. But he means that he avoided baptizing people because of the way it would likely be used as the basis for factions in the future. He could have taken the position that 'I do not baptize into my name; and if at some later point some are to say I did, well, they are wrong, I did not'. But Paul is more sensitive to human weakness, just as we should be. He often sees ahead to the likely interpretations of his words and actions. Later he will parry possible misunderstandings of his words about resurrection by saying "But some man will say...". We too must move away from a bald truth- error scenario, leaving the misinterpretations of others upon their own heads, but rather anticipate their likely weaknesses; and by all means, seek to not make others stumble.

1:16 *And I baptized also the household of Stephanas. Besides these, I do not know whether I baptized any other*- He doesn't mean 'I don't remember whether I did'; for he would have used a different word. He means that he is not aware of it in that he kept no record of who he baptized, neither formally nor mentally. This is a far cry from those who insist on getting all the details of the candidates they baptize, filling out forms and so forth. Such behaviour is appropriate to admission to membership of a club; but baptism into Christ is into Christ and is not a sign of having joined any human club or institution.

1:17 - see on Mt. 3:8; Gal. 6:14.

*For Christ sent me not so much as to baptize, but to preach the gospel*- See on :14. The construction involving 'not' doesn't have to mean 'Not at all', but rather 'not' with conditions. Sometimes we need to read into the text the idea of "not so much *this*, as *that*". Thus "Christ sent me not [so much as] to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17 AV). Paul of course *did* baptize people, as he goes on to say in that very context (1 Cor. 1:14). Or take Jer. 7:22,23: "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them... concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God". God *did* command sacrifices; but He *not so much* commanded them *as* required Israel's spirit of obedience and acceptance of Him.

Paul's mission was to spread the word; human response to it was not something he unduly focused upon. Inappropriate focus on results in terms of baptisms can lead missionary endeavour into all manner of wrong paths. This is probably hyperbole (i.e. grossly exaggerated language to make a point). The command to preach and baptize as given in the great preaching commission was just one command; preaching-and-baptizing went together. It seems to me that Paul *did* baptize; but using the figure of hyperbole, he's saying: 'My emphasis is on getting on with the work of preaching the Gospel, the fact I've held the shoulders of many men and women as I pushed them under the water is irrelevant; Christ didn't send me to just do this, but more importantly to preach the Gospel'. And may this be our attitude too.

*Not in the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no power-* Paul did not seek to pressure people into baptism because he believed that the simple presentation of the cross of Christ would of itself elicit faith in people. This for all time demonstrates that apologetics and "the wisdom of words" will not persuade men to faith. That persuasion is in the message itself, which is of Christ crucified. No amount of smart arguments from science, archaeology, Bible prophecy being fulfilled etc. will of themselves persuade to faith. The bald presentation of the Gospel of the crucified Christ will of itself be 'powerful' to convert. And I speak from wide personal experience- as well as the clear implication of Paul's argument here. The paradox is that on the cross, the Lord 'made Himself of no power' (s.w. Phil. 2:7), and it was that moment of human powerlessness which is of power to convert. This is the mystery of faith. It is a paradox which is developed in the following verses; what appears foolishness in the eyes of men is in fact the deep wisdom and saving power of God.

Paul had been reconciled, as have all men, by the cross. But he still needed to be converted, and this depended upon the freewill obedience of the likes of Ananias. It really is so, for Paul warned that preaching the Gospel with wisdom of words would make "the cross of Christ... of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17). The effect of the cross, the power of it to save, is limited in its extent by our manner of preaching of it. And we can make "Christ", i.e. His cross, of "none effect" by trusting to our works rather than accepting the gracious salvation which He achieved (Gal. 5:4).

Paul declared unto Corinth "the testimony of God", i.e. "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). This message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", "the wisdom of God", "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:17,23,24; 2:4,5). Indeed, "the cross of Christ" is put for 'the preaching of His cross' (1:17). All these things are parallel. The cross is in itself the testimony and witness of God. This is why, Paul reasons, the power of the cross itself means that it doesn't matter how poorly that message is presented in human words; indeed, such is its excellence and power that we even *shouldn't seek* to present it with a layer of human 'culture' and verbiage shrouding it.

1:18- see on Rom. 1:18.

*For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness-* See on :17 *Not in the wisdom of words.* What seems foolish is the wisdom and saving power of God. There is a temptation to make our witness to the world in terms and colours which appear intellectually or even academically respectable. But we must ever remember the dichotomy here presented- that the wisdom of God will be seen as foolish to those who will not believe it. We can't have it both ways- an argument with secular respectability which is also the power and wisdom of God.

Because we are in Christ, therefore we witness Him; and we witness as He witnessed. *His* witness is in fact ours. But there is a sober theme in Scripture: that the essential witness of Christ was in His time of dying. "The preaching ['the word'] of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18) refers to the way in which the cross itself was and is a witness, rather than speaking of preaching *about* the cross.

Do we feel ashamed that we just don't witness as we ought to? There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. Knowing it, believing it, meant that it just had to be preached. The completeness and reality

of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought not to let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Paul spoke of "the preaching of the cross", the word / message which *is* the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. I submit that much of our preaching somehow fails in urgency and entreaty. We seem to be in places too expository, or too attractive with the peripherals, seeking to please men... or be offering good advice, very good advice indeed, background Bible knowledge, how to read the Bible effectively... all of which may be all well and good, but we should be preaching good news, not good advice. The message of the cross is of a grace and real salvation which is almost too good to believe. It isn't Bible background or archaeology or Russia invading Israel. It is the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world... and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. The Lord wasn't preaching good *ideas*; He was preaching good *news*. The cross means that we have a faith to live by all our days; not just a faith to die by, a comfort in our time of dying, as we face the endgame.

*But to us who are saved it is the power of God-* The cross is the power of salvation to us who are 'being saved', in the saving process. The cross is not only the means of our forgiveness, in a transactional sense, as if at that moment in time, God enabled our forgiveness and salvation. For He can and could have saved in any way He chose. The cross is the ongoing salvation of God in that the Lord there is our endless inspiration and His death released and releases the living waters of the Spirit into human hearts- if they continue to believe in Him there, in an ongoing sense.

1:19- see on Job 5:12,13.

*For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise-* The quotation from Is. 29:14 refers to the false 'wisdom' of the unfaithful Jews in Jerusalem at Hezekiah's time. It was perhaps the attraction of the Jewish false teachers which Paul is alluding to. Judaism had a strange attraction for even hedonistic Gentiles; as pointed out throughout our commentary on Titus. See on :20.

*And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nothing-* There is an allusion here to the Lord's words: "You did hide these things from the wise and prudent, and did reveal them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). Paul alludes to some parts of the Gospels more than to others. The record of John the Baptist, the sermon on the mount, the parables and the record of Christ in Gethsemane are all referred to far more than average. This surely would not be the case if the connections between Paul's writings and the Gospels were *only* the result of the Spirit irresistibly carrying Paul along. We have suggested that Paul's enthusiasm for the record of

John the Baptist was because he had probably first heard the Gospel from John; i.e. there was a reason personal to Paul as to why he alludes to much to that particular part of the Gospels. And so with his sustained allusions to Gethsemane, far more than we would expect statistically. Presumably the picture of the Lord Jesus struggling against His own nature, driven to the brink of eternal failure, was an image which echoed in Paul's mind. Likewise the parables were intended to be memorized and meditated upon; Paul did just this, and that's why he alludes to them more than average. This sort of pattern is just what we too experience; there are parts of Scripture which stick in our minds, often for personal reasons. And so it was with Paul. Mt. 11:25 was a verse which was perhaps very much in his mind as he wrote to Corinth; it is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:19; 2:8; 14:20- and nowhere else.

*1:20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*- As noted on :19, this quotation is from a passage talking about the vanity of Jewish wisdom (Is. 33:18). And it was Jewish false teaching which was the source of the problems at Corinth. Truly Paul despised all worldly advantage and insisted upon the radical principles of the Lord- that true greatness is in humility, wealth is in poverty, worldly learning is the very opposite of Divine wisdom, etc. He mocks, even, such things when he writes to the Corinthians: "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?" (1 Cor. 1:20). Every one of these terms would have been true of Saul the Pharisee, Paul the powerful user of rhetoric, Paul of the razor sharp mind. And he knew his worldly advantage, and despised it.

*1:21 For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God-* This is the paradox; that worldly wisdom does not lead to relationship with God. 'Knowing God' refers to relationship and salvation, not simply claiming some form of belief in the existence of a Divine being or force. Life eternal, living the Kingdom life we shall eternally live, is to 'know God' (Jn. 17:3). The Gospel message begins with the statement that to know God is a gift (Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10); for those to whom it is not given, everything about God remains in parables. And so faith is not reached by reading learned books about science, creationism, archaeology or the historical fulfilments of Bible prophecy. For that is the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God. If that indeed were the path to faith, then the illiterate and simple would be unable to come to faith. Yet the poor of this world are those "rich in faith". But the gift of faith is available for all- who will look to the cross of Christ as Israel looked to the lifted up serpent, and allow the power of it to transform them. Yet faith therefore is not arrived at by intellectual process; it is a gift. From God. And it is the cross of Christ (:18), the foolishness of the thing preached (:21), which leads to knowing God. There can be no real belief in God nor knowing of Him without Christ- for He is the only way to the Father. Any attempt to reach faith in God by intellectual process is therefore ultimately doomed; it can only be reached through encounter with Christ.

*It was God's good pleasure through the apparent foolishness of the message preached to save them that believe-* 1 Cor. 1:21,25 speak of the Gospel as "the foolishness of the thing preached" (RV) – not that it *is* foolish, but it is perceived that way. The thing preached is clearly the cross- "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (:18).

*1:22 Seeing that Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek after wisdom-* The Jews, like modern Pentecostals, demanded miraculous signs in order to believe; and the Gentiles thought that secular wisdom could be the only way to a respectable faith. But faith in the true God is

predicated upon encounter with the crucified Christ. Nothing visible nor intellectual will of itself bring a man to faith; both the Bible and observed experience support that. Whilst there is a tendency to chalk up conversions to various forms of outreach, and it is hard to define why belief is reached, Paul is here crystal clear that the ultimate force in conversion is encounter with Christ crucified.

1:23 *But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness-* The cross was foolishness to the Gentiles and an offence to the Jews. In Roman thought, the cross was something shocking; the very word 'cross' was repugnant to them. It was something only for slaves. Consider the following writings from the period.

- Cicero wrote: "The very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but... the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man... your honours [i.e. Roman citizenship] protect a man from... the *terror of the cross*".

- Seneca the Elder in the *Controversiae* records where a master's daughter marries a slave, and she is described as having become related to *cruciarum*, 'the crucified'. Thus 'the crucified' was used by metonymy for slaves. The father of the girl is taunted: "If you want to find your son-in-law's relatives, *go to the cross*". It is hard for us to appreciate how slaves were seen as less than human in that society. There was a stigma and revulsion attached to the cross. This was the offence of the cross.

- Juvenal in his *6th Satire* records how a wife ordered her husband: "Crucify this slave". "But what crime worthy of death has he committed?" asks the husband, "no delay can be too long when a man's life is at stake". She replies: "What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man?".

The sense of shame and offence attached to the cross was also there in Jewish perception of it. Whoever was hung on a tree was seen as having been cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, records Trypho (who was a Jew) objecting to Christianity: "We are aware that the Christ must suffer...but that he had to be *crucified*, that he had to die a death of such shame and dishonour- a death cursed by the Law- prove this to us, for we are totally unable to receive it". Justin Martyr in his *Apology* further records: "They say that our madness consists in the fact that we place a *crucified* man in second place after the eternal God". The Romans also mocked the idea of following a crucified man. There is a caricature which shows a crucified person with an ass's head. The ass was a symbol of servitude [note how the Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass]. The caption sarcastically says: "Alexamenos worships God". This was typical of the offence of the cross.

1:24 *But to them that are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God-* It has been pointed out that if some NT passages are translated into Aramaic, the common language of the day in first century Israel, there would have been ample encouragement for memorization. Thus: We preach Christ crucified (*mishkal*), unto the Jews a stumblingblock (*mikshol*), and unto the Greeks foolishness (*sekel*), but unto them that are called... the power (*hishkeel*) of God and the wisdom (*sekel*) of God" (1 Cor. 1:23,24). "To them that are called" raises concerns as to whether faith, therefore, is just a gift given to some. But the call is in the Gospel, and specifically in the outstretched arms of the crucified Christ. All who encounter it are called; but many refuse to respond. Likewise we noted on :21 that to know God is a gift; but it is available to all who encounter His Son.

1:25 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men-* That Almighty all-wise God could



inspire 1 Cor. 1:25 is another example of God's humility: "The foolishness of God... the weakness of God". In Jer. 14:21 we find something likewise wonderful: "Do not abhor *us*... do not disgrace the throne of thy glory". *We*, weak humans, are paralleled with the throne of God's glory.

*And the weakness of God is stronger than men-* The same word is used in :27 about the believers being "the weak things". Many times, this word is used about spiritual weakness, especially in 1 Corinthians (4:10; 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 12:22). The foolishness of God has been defined as the cross of Christ; but that is now made parallel to the way God calls spiritually weak persons to be His vehicle of operation. Such an observation was relevant to the Corinthian situation. Those weak believers were used by God on account of their association with the cross of Christ, "the foolishness of God".

*1:26 Consider your calling, brothers; not many of you had worldly wisdom, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth-* The references to 'wise' and 'powerful / mighty' men use the words just used about the Lord Jesus as the wisdom and power of God (:24). He can only be those things to those who are not wise or powerful- or, rather, who recognize that they are not those things. So the attraction of His wisdom and power is to those who recognize they lack those things- the unwise and the powerless. And that is why it is the chain smokers and the asylum seekers and the get rich quick scheme enthusiasts... who have what it takes to believe in Christ as the power and the wisdom of God.

The Lord Himself had implied that it was to the poor that the Gospel was more successfully preached. And Paul observed that in Corinth, not many mighty had been called, but most of them were poor (1 Cor. 1:26-28). "Christianity in its beginnings was without doubt a movement of impoverished classes... the Christian congregation originally embraced proletariat elements almost exclusively and was a proletarian organization". It has also been observed that the New Testament generally is written in very rough Greek, of a low cultural level when compared with other Greek literature of the period. The way he exhorts the Thessalonians to work with their own hands so that the world couldn't criticize them implies the readership of Thessalonians were mainly manual workers (1 Thess. 4:11). Likewise Eph. 4:28. Paul wrote as if the "abysmal poverty" of the Macedonian ecclesias was well known (2 Cor. 8:1,2); and yet he goes on to reason that they had "abundance" in comparison with the "lack" of the Jerusalem Christians (8:14). The Jewish Christians called themselves "Ebionites", based on the Hebrew word for 'the poor' - "it was probably a conscious reminiscence of a very early term which attested by Paul's letters as an almost technical name for the Christians in Jerusalem and Judaea". Even if not all these poor converts were slaves, they were all subservient to their employers / sources of income. Craftsmen would have had to belong to a pagan trade guild, normally involving idol worship which a Christian had to refuse, and slaves of course had no 'right' to their own religion if it differed from that of their household.

*1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world-* The word *moros* is predominantly used about the spiritually foolish. This was so relevant to the spiritually weak Corinthians. They had been chosen so that in God's strength they could come to glory. Maybe this is why the Lord forbids us to call each other *moros*, "fool" (Mt. 5:22). That is indeed how we are, spiritual blockheads. But we are not to see ourselves nor each other from that perspective- for we are called to be so much more, and it is through that weakness that God is to be glorified in His Son.

*That He might put to shame those that are wise-* The 'wise' here are those who appear to be wise. The fools confounding the wise is an inverse allusion to the Lord's parables, where the wise are saved and the foolish are condemned [e.g. in the parable of the two builders]. But here, the foolish shame the wise. "Shame" is the language of condemnation at the last day- this 'shaming' will happen only then, when those who appeared to be so 'wise', so sorted out, so spiritually and worldly wise, shall be condemned and shamed by the salvation of the transformed 'fools'. This whole approach was very necessary in approaching a church as weak as Corinth. And it has enormous implications for us today.

*And God chose the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong-* The word for "weak" is elsewhere used about the spiritually weak (Mt. 26:41; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14). The 'shame' is in the condemning of the apparently 'strong' at the last day by the apparently 'weak'. These terms effectively mean 'those who consider themselves weak / strong'. Rather like the Lord's statement that it is the sick and not the healthy who need a doctor- we must read in the ellipsis: 'those who consider themselves to be...'. All this is an outworking of the principle that "the weakness of God [in the crucified Christ] is stronger than men" (:25).

1:28 *God chose what is low and despised in the world-* "Low" is *agenes*, without descent. This may be a reference to the Gentiles, but "the world" of the first century despised people who could not prove where they came from. For people were identified by their ancestors and place of origin. Those who were on the very edge of society were those weak ones through whom His strength could work. Accepting this reasoning would make us conclude that the Christian church generally, and not just Corinth, should be comprised of the low, the stateless and those at the edges of society. For this is a general principle being explained here; it is not just relevant to Corinth. And yet in the West, the church is for the middle class. Historians claim that the early church was full of slaves, women and others on the edges. And this is what a mission church comprised of first generation converts will look like. The same Greek word for "despised" is used of the Pharisee despising the sinful publican in Lk. 18:9, and those who understood more of the Gospel despising those who were still stuck in their old ways (Rom. 14:3,10). We note with interest the usage of the same word in Paul's appeal to ask those despised *within the church* to judge matters (6:4). Perhaps that too has a spiritual reference? But it was of course the Lord Himself who on the cross was the despised one; the same word is used about Him there in Lk. 23:11 and Acts 4:11. He there was identified with the spiritually low and despised; for He died for sinners and not for the self-righteous.

*Even things that are not-* The language here recalls Rom. 4:17: "God, who gives life to the dead, and called things that are not, as though they were". The context there is of imputed righteousness. Those who had no righteousness are counted as if they do- by grace. This fits in with the context here in 1 Corinthians- the Corinthians were woefully immature but in God's strength would be justified by grace through faith- and bring to nothing those people / things which [appeared to] be spiritually strong.

*To bring to nothing things that are-* 'Bringing to nothing' is the language of condemnation at the last day (6:13; 2 Thess. 2:8 etc.). The apparently strong, the things that apparently 'were' spiritually, therefore refer to those who shall appear at the day of judgment and be rejected. The idea of some at the judgment condemning others is to be found in various places- e.g. the men of Nineveh shall condemn the Jews of the Lord's say. So perhaps the picture is of those who appear so sorted out, so spiritually stable, so acceptable in secular terms... being condemned at the last day because they didn't really believe in the good news of Christ

crucified, whereas those who were socially, spiritually and intellectually disadvantaged compared to them actually did believe in that saving good news. This is a powerful challenge to today's church.

1:29 *So that no flesh should boast before God-* In Gal. 6:14, Paul says that he will boast [s.w.] in nothing but the cross of Christ. We are not to boast of works, but only of what was achieved for us by grace through our faith in the Lord's cross (Eph. 2:9; Phil. 3:3). Any trust in human strength or wisdom is so abhorrent to God. He chooses the powerless and unwise, or at least those who recognize their lack of power and wisdom, to be the ones through whom He shall work. No wonder the Lord taught that the wealthy will scarcely be saved.

1:30 *But of Him are you in Christ Jesus-* We are "of God" in that we are born of Him by being in His Son by baptism into Him.

*Who was made to us by God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption-* It is those who lack these things, and recognize their lack of them, who are likely to earnestly believe in the Lord's offer of those things through the cross of Christ.

1:31 *That, according to what is written: He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord-* The whole purpose of calling the unwise, unrighteous and unholy is so that when they are saved at the last day, they will be glorying totally in the Lord's grace and in Him, in His characteristics which are counted to them. It is all a question of giving total glory to the crucified Christ and the plan of salvation by grace which is in Him. This is why self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, self congratulation, human wisdom and acceptance within human society... are all the very characteristics of the person who will not truly respond to the Gospel.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Jn. 1:14.

*I brothers, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God-* Paul has just argued in chapter 1 that the wisdom of God is in the crucified Christ, and those who are humanly wise will not respond to it. So Paul reasons that we should likewise present the Gospel with no attempt to make the cross of Christ somehow intellectually respectable, or acceptable in a secular sense. I have previously failed in this and so has so much Gospel outreach. Paul of course as a Rabbi and an intellectual could indeed have presented the Gospel with the trappings of secular wisdom. But he writes here as if he consciously stripped his message of anything like that. His message was after all, that of God in Christ- "the testimony of God". The Greek here seems to specifically mean 'evidence'. Faith is not built upon evidence that is visible (Heb. 11:1,2)- and that includes arguments from science, archaeology etc. The evidence / testimony of God is "the cross of Christ"; and the addition of human wisdom to it makes it of none effect (1:17). This is God's evidence which He provides to us in order for us to have a basis for faith. In encountering the Lord Jesus there, we are challenged to believe in God, as faith in God really is. All the energy expended upon apologetics to provide a supposed basis for faith is therefore in my view misguided. It is psychological encounter with the crucified Christ which elicits faith.

*2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified-* See on :1. The "determined" reflects Paul's struggle with the temptation to make the message of Christ crucified somewhat respectable in secular terms.

The letters to Corinth must have been very difficult to write. Paul was walking an absolute minefield. Therefore he says that his attitude to Corinth was that he wanted to know nothing among them, saving Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2); he wanted to keep his mind fixed upon the Lord Jesus and the intensity of His passion, rather than get sidetracked by personality issues and ecclesial politics. And his letters reveal this. They contain many unconscious allusions to the suffering and death of Christ. Paul refers to Christ as "Lord" throughout all his letters about once every 26 verses on average. And yet in Corinthians he does so once every 10 verses on average. The Lordship and suffering of Jesus were therefore very much in Paul's mind as he wrote. His Christ and cross-centred perspective is a real example to us, living as we do at a time when the body of Christ increasingly distracts us from the central object of our devotion: the Son of God who died for us, and was raised again for our justification.

When Paul faced Corinth, the ecclesia whom he had loved and brought into being with great labour pains, yet now riven with carnality, fabricating the most malicious rumours against him, bitter at his spirituality... he determined to know nothing among them, saving Christ, and Him crucified. The antidote to ecclesial problems and selfishness is reflection upon the cross. By insisting on our rights, Paul says, we will make the weak brother stumble, "for whom Christ died". 'Think of His cross and sacrifice', Paul is saying, 'and the sacrifice of self restraint *you* are asked to make is nothing at all'.

Despite “the offence of the cross”, Paul preached it. “I determined not to know [i.e. ‘teach the knowledge of’] any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. Paul didn’t accommodate his message to the ears of his hearers. There are times when God’s revelation is accommodated to us, but not when it comes to the basic message of Christ and the demands which His cross makes upon us.

2:3 - see on 1 Cor. 8:9; 2 Cor. 12:7.

*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling-* For Paul, his glory was not in heroic “deeds of the body” [see on Gal. 1:10] but rather in the fact that when he first preached to the Corinthians, he was suffering from “weakness... much fear and trembling”- a reference to anything from agitated nervous breakdown to malaria. We have Gal. 4:13 in the same vein: “You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at the first”. So it could be that this is a reference to his physical weakness at the time he preached to the Corinthians. But William Barclay understands the Greek words to more imply “the trembling anxiety to perform a duty”, and I tend to run with this. The words are a reflection of the heart that bled within Paul. The man who has no fear, no hesitancy, no nervousness, no tension in the task of preaching... may give an efficient and competent performance from a platform. But it is the man who has this trembling anxiety, that intensity which comes from a heart that bleeds for ones hearers, who will produce an effect which artistry alone can never achieve. He is the man who will convert another. It has truly been said that “the need is the call”. To perceive the needs of others is what calls us and compels us to witness, coupled with our own disappointment with ourselves, our race, our nature.

2:3-5- see on Jn. 15:26.

*2:4 And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power-* This is parallel in thought to Paul's idea that he would preach the cross of Christ without any words of human wisdom. The “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” is thus paralleled to the cross of Christ. Here was and is the demonstration of Spirit and power. And yet in what sense can the cross of Christ be so powerful? I would say that the Lord's death was designed and is empowered to produce faith in God within those who accept it. For the Spirit was released as rivers of waters from His slain body. And especially in the first century context of illiteracy, the cross of Christ had power in that it was the motivation for the living examples of Christian sacrifice which were Christianity's best advert.

The essence of all this is the same today as it was then- the revelation of the person of Jesus isn’t solely through Bible reading and getting the interpretation right; it’s through a living community, His body. It is there that we will see His Spirit / personality in action. I don’t refer to miraculous gifts- but to the spirit / mind / disposition / essence of the Lord, man and saviour Jesus.

*2:5 So that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God-* Paul has earlier defined “the power of God” as the crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1:18,24). Paul correctly perceived that a person's faith ‘stands in’ the message they first receive and believe. The teacher / preacher therefore has huge responsibility to teach the right thing. Real faith is not

in the wisdom of men, Paul has argued, nor is it predicated upon anything other than the cross of Christ. And so he preached likewise- simply of the cross. The Greek phrase translated "stand in" is the closest we get in the Bible to an explanation of the substance of faith; of what faith is based in. And it is *not* in "the wisdom of men", including apologetics. It is in the "power of God" which we have earlier defined as Christ crucified (1:18,24).

*2:6 We speak wisdom, however, among them that are mature-* Paul spoke only of Christ crucified (:2), and so the true wisdom was Him. The "mature" would perceive this. For we have just been told that God has made Christ to be "wisdom" for us (1 Cor. 1:30). The Corinthians needed exhortation to become "mature" (1 Cor. 14:20); maturity has been reached by some now (Phil. 3:15; Col. 4:12; Heb. 5:14; James 1:4) and yet in another sense it is yet future, when we attain the full measure of Christ's maturity (Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28). The same Greek word is used in all these passages. The idea that faith is predicated upon encounter with Christ crucified will be struggled against, shot down as philosophically lacking, intellectually weak and so forth. But the paradox is that the mature will perceive it. When you reach 'Christ', the maturity that is Him, then we will understand that *all* is of Him and His cross.

*Yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nothing-* The wisdom of this world and its "princes" (AV), its academics and philosophers and chat show hosts, is 'coming to nothing'. Paul has just used the same word in 1:28 of how the despised simple believers shall 'bring to nothing' what seems so smart and wise. The means by which the wise of this world shall be brought to nothing is through the simple believers. And the Greek tense used suggests that this is ongoing- the wise of this world are already "coming to nothing". The world rulers are defined in :8 as those who crucified the Lord; Paul envisaged the overthrow of the Jewish system as being at the hands of the humble Christian believers, including the worldly Gentiles of Corinth. Things didn't work out that way because the Lord's return was delayed until our last days, but the principle remains the same.

*2:7 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery-* Paul doesn't mean that he has shrouded the simple message of the cross in "a mystery". For he has spoken of how his preaching is of the cross of Christ, stripped of literally anything else (:2). He means that the message of God's wisdom, which is Christ crucified (1:24), is so simple that it is received as a mystery by the wise of this world and indeed by all those who do not believe it.

*Even that which was hidden, which God foreordained before the ages for our glory-* The appeal of the cross is "hidden" in that the 'wise' won't see it because they choose not to believe it. The allusion is surely to the usage of the same word in the Lord's teaching that the things of the Gospel had been 'hidden' from the wise, and revealed to babes (Mt. 11:25). 1 Cor. 2:6-9 stresses how the early believers possessed a truth which nobody else apart from them could know. Whilst this feature of true Christianity led into the arrogance and pride which eventually doomed the early church, when and whilst used properly, it bound them even closer together. Nikolaus Walter observes that the first century generally "did not experience religion as a binding force that was capable of determining everyday reality by offering support, setting norms, and forming community". And yet the Truth of Christ enabled just such things to occur. In this, as today, the example of the community is the ultimate proof that the doctrine of Christ which we teach is indeed the Truth and of itself demands conversion.

2:8- see on 1 Cor. 1:19.

*Which not one of the rulers of this world has known. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory-* The rulers or princes of the world therefore referred specifically to the Roman-Jewish leaders who crucified the Lord. As noted on :6, those rulers were already 'coming to nothing' and would be condemned by the simple faith of illiterate Christians. Such talk of the overthrow of empire and ruling systems was criminal within the first century Roman empire. But Paul writes as he does, so important is the message of how simple faith shall gloriously triumph over all secular splendour.

Paul saw the naked, forsaken, mocked, bleeding, spittle covered body of Jesus as glorious. This was another inversion of all human values. And His glory is ours- for :7 has just mentioned that this mystery was foreordained for "our glory". The Lord's glory is ours, and ours is His.

*2:9 But as it is written: Things which eye saw not and ear heard not and which did not enter into the heart of man, whatever things God prepared for them that love Him-* The context is speaking of man's rejection of the crucified Christ. Unbelievers did not perceive [see or hear] that message, neither therefore did it enter their heart. The "things God prepared" are therefore those of the crucified Christ, who died in order to achieve that great salvation "for them that love Him". The 'things prepared' are those of the Kingdom feast (Mt. 20:23; 22:4; 25:34); but the same word is also used of the 'preparation' of the Lord Jesus as our sacrifice (Lk. 2:31). The cross of Christ enabled all the wonderful things of the Kingdom and the salvation experience in Christ. And it is all those things which are not really believed by the eyes, ears and heart of secular man, because the wisdom of this world has blinded them to it.

So the things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

*2:10 God revealed them to us through the Spirit-* Again the allusion is to Mt. 11:25, where the Lord praises the Father for 'hiding' His identity from the wise and prudent, and revealing it [s.w.] to "babies". Those immature, largely illiterate disciples who 'got it' about Jesus are therefore us. Here Paul adds that the process through which that revelation happens is "through the Spirit". This is not to say that one person is zapped by the Spirit and forced to believe, but another is not. There is indeed an element whereby faith is not simply a result of human steel will, but involves the gracious work of the Spirit on human minds. Yet as explained so far in Corinthians, it is our freewill choice to encounter the crucified Christ and believe in God's salvation through Him.

*For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God-* The "things" in view are surely those concerning the Lord Jesus and His kingdom of :9. These are the deep things, and not any apparent profundity of human wisdom or debates. The 'Spirit' is personified as searching around all the depths of God's mysteries because we are going to now read that this Spirit has been given to us, so that *we* might know those deep things. This is all beautifully shown by a comparison of Is. 64:4 and 1 Cor. 2:9: "Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what He has prepared for him that waits for him". Paul quotes this in 1 Cor. 2:9,10: "It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto *us* by His Spirit". The passage in Is. 64 says that no one except God

can understand the things He has prepared for the believers. However 1 Cor. 2:10 says that those things have been revealed to *us*. Because His Spirit is given to us and becomes our spirit.

2:11 *For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the things of God nobody knows, save the Spirit of God-* The spirit of a person is intimately connected to themselves. Only the heart knows its own bitterness in this sense, and likewise an external person can never totally get involved with the heart's joy (Prov. 14:10). This is the wonder of the fact that God's Spirit is given to us; this is the intimacy possible between God and man in Christ.

2:12 *But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, so that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God-* The "we" refers to the same "we" who were speaking / teaching the Corinthians (:13) and refers I suggest specifically to Paul and his preaching team. The spirit of the world is the mindset of "the wisdom of this world". Although Paul had that in his rabbinic days, he disregarded it. The Spirit he had received was in response to his faith in the crucified Christ whom he had encountered. This was God's Spirit, and revealed the things of God; and it was those things which he taught to the Corinthians in his preaching of the Gospel. The "things" were "freely given" in that the Spirit of God as it were searches all of God's things. The connection between Christ crucified and the free gift of God's "things" is developed in Rom. 8:32, where the same words are used: "He that spared not His own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not also with him freely give us all things?". Once we accept the gift of God's Son, then all else, quite literally, is surely going to be given. And those things include faith and understanding. The Greek word for "freely given" is also that translated 'forgive'. Our experience of forgiveness on account of the cross opens the way to receive so much more too- all the things of God's free giving. For the cross not only is the basis for the 'free giving' of forgiveness, but of God's Spirit which knows all things.

2:13 *Which things also we speak about-* The "things" are those of the Gospel of Christ which Paul spoke or taught.

*But not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but in words that the Spirit teaches-* Paul has said that he preaches Christ crucified without any words of human wisdom. They are the "things" in view. The words taught by the Spirit were therefore the words of or concerning the cross. Paul's teaching of the Corinthians was only verbalizing what the Spirit taught which flowed from the crucified Lord. We can now better understand why "the Spirit" is a title of the Lord Jesus in material like Romans, 2 Corinthians and Revelation. He personally is to be identified with His Spirit which He freely gives to all who believe in Him.

*Combining spiritual things with spiritual-* The Spirit in Paul's message would connect with the Spirit within the believers at Corinth. The GNB seems to get the point of this rather difficult Greek: "As we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit". It was and is only to the spiritual that spiritual things make sense; to all others, who do not believe the simple message of the cross and all that is given to us through His work there, the spiritual things remain mysterious and unwise. And I have to add, that those believers who resist the current work of the Spirit will likewise find many things closed and hidden, because the Spirit of those teachings is not being allowed to combine with the Spirit within them.



*2:14 Now the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot know them-* Secular wisdom will not believe in a crucified Saviour. Instead of allowing the crucified Christ to convert them, they rush to Josephus and other early historians to enquire whether Jesus of Nazareth really died on a cross outside Jerusalem. But the point is that there is a power within Him there which of itself converts- if we let it, and humble ourselves to shed our human wisdom. Any references in Josephus etc. are at best confirmations of our faith, but play no part in essential faith in Christ. We must take seriously the repeated reports of the early missionaries, that they could not elicit belief in the message of Christianity or the Christian God amongst the illiterate folk they encountered in Africa or the Pacific islands- until they explained or drew pictures of the crucifixion. Then, all seemed to make sense- to those who felt their own sin and thirsted for forgiveness and connection with the one God. "The natural man" is the wise of this world who would consider the cross and all we have written about it to be foolish. Because human pride has stopped him believing. He will not "know" these things because he cannot- until he quits his human wisdom.

Paul saw the cross of Christ as parallel with "the things of the Spirit of God", the wisdom of God, what eye has not seen nor ear heard, but what is revealed unto the believer and not to the world (1 Cor. 1:18,23,24; 2:7-13). The cross of Christ was the supreme expression of the Spirit of God, and it's true meaning is incomprehensible to the world. In the cross, according to Paul's allusion back to Isaiah, God bowed the Heavens and came down. He did wonderful things which we looked not for. The thick darkness there is to be associated with a theophany presence of God Himself. See on Jn. 19:19.

*Because they are spiritually discerned-* Only the Spirit within a person who has believed in the crucified Christ will be able to 'combine with' or connect with Spiritual things (:13). The Greek word means literally to question; asking questions as we read God's word is therefore an appropriate thing for us to be doing. Paul is not advocating a simplistic approach, nor a shutting down of any critical, analytical approach.

2:15- see on 1 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 2:17.

*But he that is spiritual judges all things; and he is ultimately judged by no man-* Those who have believed in the crucified Lord will receive of His Spirit, and are thereby able to judge or discern the truth of the things Paul was preaching. Such persons will be mocked and despised by the wise of this world; but ultimately, they are not judged by those men. Indeed, they shall bring to nothing all such pretensions in the day of final judgment, as explained in 1:27,28 (see notes there).

In the final analysis, we will meet Jesus alone. There will by God's grace be a moment when we will even see the face of Almighty God- alone. This was the light at the end of Job's tunnel- he would see his redeemer for himself "and not another". Paul possibly expresses the same idea of an unenterable relationship in 1 Cor. 2:15: "He that is spiritual discerneth all things (about God), yet he himself is discerned of no man". Our real spiritual being is a "hidden man" (1 Pet. 3:4). The Spirit describes our final redemption as our "soul" and "spirit" being "saved" ; our innermost being, our essential spiritual personality, who we *really* are in spiritual terms, will as it were be immortalized (1 Pet. 1:9; 1 Cor. 5:5). Notice that Paul styles

the spiritual man "he himself" (1 Cor. 2:15 AV); as if the real, fundamental self of the true believer is the spiritual man, notwithstanding the existence of the man of the flesh within him. Likewise Paul calls his spiritual man "I myself" in Rom. 7:25. He now felt that when he sinned, it was no longer "I", his real, personal self, who was doing so (Rom. 7:17).

2:16 - see on Job 21:22.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ-* The person who knows the Lord's mind is the one who has His Spirit (:11). We have the mind of Christ, who had the mind of God. The spirit of Christ and that of God are the same thing. The idea that men should instruct God is unthinkable- but this is what effectively is the position of those who consider that their human wisdom is the true wisdom, and God's wisdom is foolishness. The quotation from Is. 40:13,14 is about God's people in Babylon being tempted to think that the wisdom of Babylon, perhaps the most advanced in the world at its time, was somehow superior to that of Israel's God. Paul uses the same idea in Rom. 11:34 concerning the false wisdom of Judaism claiming as it were to be superior to God's wisdom in Christ.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And I, brothers, can not speak to you as spiritual people, but as carnal people-* The "we" who have the Spirit in 2:13 refer to Paul and his preaching team and not all at Corinth. The Corinthians possessed the miraculous gifts, but were in a more fundamental sense Spirit-less. "John did no miracle", but was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Even the Comforter, which does refer to the miraculous gifts in its primary context, was, in perhaps another sense, to be unseen by the world, and to be *within* the believers (Jn. 14:17). It could well be that the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus concerning the need to be born both of water and Spirit must be read in the context of John's baptism; his was a birth of water, but Christian baptism is being described with an almost technical term: birth of the Spirit, in that baptism into the Spirit of Jesus brings the believer into the realm of the operation of God's Spirit. But as happened with the Corinthians, it is possible to deny the Spirit any space to operate within us; those who resist any idea of the Spirit working directly within the human mind are putting themselves in the same position. This is the answer to those who complain that they were baptized but 'feel' no Spirit operation; the potential was given, and is still there, as chapters 1 and 2 make so clear about the Corinthians; but they were not Spirit-filled because they didn't allow it.

*As infants in Christ-* But they were still "in Christ". And Paul respects them for that.

3:2 *I fed you with milk, not with solid food. For you were not yet able to bear it; no, not even now are you able-* Paul has defined what he initially taught them as being the crucified Christ. And he has proceeded to develop the idea that the presence of the Spirit within believers in Christ will enable them to 'combine with' further Spiritual teaching. But despite their initial belief, like so many today, they had not remained open to the Spirit, and so Paul was unable to share with them the deeper matters of the Spirit. Or if he did, they could not connect with those things because they were lacking the Spirit within them (see on 2:13). The language here and in Heb. 5:12-14 surely alludes to Jn. 16:12, although it doesn't verbally quote it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now". "Able" is *dunamis*, they were not of power to receive Spiritual things; and chapter 1 has laboured the point that *dunamis* comes from the Spirit of Christ received at baptism.

3:3 *For you are still carnal. For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are you not carnal and do you not walk after the manner of men?-* Paul can confidently conclude that they are not Spiritual, and therefore still carnal, because there is no evidence of the fruits of the Spirit. Jealousy, strife and division are the works of the flesh and advertise a lack of the Spirit within (Gal. 5:20). We are not to judge others in the sense of condemning them; but like Paul here, we can quite simply observe whether someone has the Spirit by whether they manifest the fruits of the Spirit. We may find that those who differ from us in some areas of Biblical interpretation clearly have the Spirit; and others who share our theology may be Spirit-less. Note that "strife" here translates *eris*, from whence 'heresy'. The real heresy is division between believers; and yet it is the fear of heresy which so often creates divisions. Paul could have chosen various indicators of the lack of the Spirit amongst the Corinthians; but he chooses the strife and division amongst them as the clearest example of it on a group level. For the joint possession of the Spirit creates unity- the unity of the Spirit. Where this is lacking on a collective level, it is clear that generally, as a community, the Spirit is lacking. This is not to say there were not individuals in Corinth who had the Spirit. But the reasoning here is forceful- any divided church, denomination or community is evidence that on a general, collective level, they are carnal and not Spirit filled.

3:4 *For when one says: I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos- are you not mere men?*- They were "men" rather than being 'spirit' on a collective level; see on :3. The division of the church into groups based around which teacher they preferred or who had baptized them was an evidence that the Spirit received at baptism had not been allowed to dwell within them.

3:5 *Who then is Apollos? And who is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed, and each as the Lord gave to him-* A Christ centred approach makes the person who preached to us a mere instrument, a servant / minister used by the Lord to bring about faith. "Each as the Lord gave to him" could refer to the way that Paul and Apollos were simply fulfilling the ministries given to them by the Lord; but the context is of faith and how one comes to belief. So the reference may rather be to the fact that each of them had believed as a result of the Lord's gift / grace. This was to be paramount in their thinking; the human instruments used in the process were of utterly no account.

3:6 *I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase-* The "increase" in the context is their faith; hence Paul later writes of "when your faith is increased" (2 Cor. 10:15). Faith is a gift from God. This metaphor would have stopped at the planting and watering if the Gospel alone was enough to provoke faith. Paul later explains how that in his preaching he laid the foundation of the Gospel of Christ, but other brethren were building on it, as here in this earlier parable he speaks of his planting the seed of the Gospel and Apollos watering it. He warned these 'builder' brethren to "take heed how he buildeth thereupon", because "every man's work (cp. "ye are my work in the Lord", 1 Cor. 9:1) shall be made manifest: for the day (of judgment) shall declare it... the fire [of judgment] shall try every man's work, of what sort it is... gold, silver... wood, hay, stubble... if any man's work abide which he hath built... he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:6-15). This clearly teaches that successful building up of brethren will have its specific reward at the judgment; and that to some degree their rejection will be a result of our lack of zeal, and we will thus lose the extra reward which we could have had for the work of upbuilding. No doubt if the brethren we have laboured hard with to help, are with us in the Kingdom, this will greatly increase our joy- as compared to the brother who has not had such intense fellowship with his brethren during this life, and whose close friends in the ecclesia have been rejected, he himself only barely passing through the fire of judgment himself ("Yet so as by fire").

3:7 *So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters, but God that gives the increase-* The channels by which God works are not themselves the source of faith. In chapter 1, Paul has tackled the fact that the Corinthians were divided into camps based around various teachers or baptizers. What's significant is that the individuals being so fiercely followed (Paul, Peter and Apollos) did not themselves want that following. And this kind of thing has repeated itself in church history. People want a human leader, a badge to wear, a human identity- and so they will chose persons and even systems which do not want to be treated in that way, but all the same, those people are made to fit the very human needs of the people.

3:8 *Now he that plants and he that waters are one, but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour-* Despite having said that in terms of giving faith and salvation, the channels are nothing- Paul is clear that those who do this work will be rewarded. The planter and waterer are "one" in that they are both being used by God, but they shall individually receive a reward for their work. Whilst salvation is by grace and not according to

works, it is also true that the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of our works in this life. And the judgment process will reflect that; one will reign over five cities, another over 10 cities; just as one star differs from another in glory.

3:9- see on Rom. 15:26.

*For we are God's fellow-workers-* We are co-workers with Him in the building up of His house (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). He could save men directly; but instead He has delegated that work to us, and thereby limited His power to save insofar as it depends upon our extension of it. Only through our preaching can the work of the cross be made complete- and that thought is frightening. God is building up His house, His ecclesia. But because we manifest God, we too are "labourers together with Him", not just puppets in His hand; we too are the builders of His house (1 Cor. 3:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:1). The contrast between "we" and "you" has been noted earlier- the "we" surely refers to Paul and Silas.

*You are God's husbandry, God's building-* "Husbandry" is literally 'farm'. The same word is used of how previously, Israel had been God's farm (Mt. 21:33-38); but now the likes of the Gentile Corinthians were that farm. But they appeared to be likewise yielding no spiritual fruit, despite all the work being done for them. We note that the Father is the husbandman (Jn. 15:1); and yet in another sense, we are the husbandmen. He is working with us through every effort made to promote spiritual fruit in His people. We are labourers together with none less than God Himself whenever we do anything to build up others.

3:10 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder-* The gift ["grace"] of God, the Spirit gift, was Paul's 'wisdom'. For he has explained in chapter 1 that spiritual wisdom is a Spirit gift from God.

*I laid a foundation, and another builds upon it-* The foundation was in converting unbelievers to the cross of Christ (:11). The rejected stone of Christ becomes the foundation stone ["corner stone"] for the faith of every individual and every true church. Paul saw himself as called to break new ground, to lay the foundation of Christian belief where it had not been laid before (Rom. 15:20); but he depended upon others to build upon it. This is in line with the terms of the great commission- to preach the simple news of the Lord's death and resurrection, to baptize people into it, and then afterwards to "teach them all things that I have commanded" (Mt. 28:20).

*But let each man take care how he builds upon it!-* The allusion is surely to the parable of the wise and foolish builders; for Paul has just claimed that he is a *wise* builder, laying a firm foundation. And the tension between wise and foolish is often played upon in these early chapters of 1 Corinthians. His take on the parable is interesting, in that he seems to be arguing that it refers to the work we do in building up others, rather than in laying a personal foundation and building as it were our own house.

Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 3:10-12 is that "every man" will make a convert, and he should ensure they are firm in the faith, lest he lose them at judgment day. These assumptions of Paul reflect his positive way of thought, in a brotherhood that abounded in weakness and failure to live up to its potential. Likewise he writes of marriage as if marriage within the faith was and is the only model of marriage which he knows, even though there must have been many failures to live up to this ideal, as there are today. Paul seems to have assumed

that all of us would preach and make converts (not leave it to just some of our community): he speaks of how "every man" in the ecclesia builds upon the foundation of Christ, but how he builds will be judged by fire. If what he has built is burnt up at the judgment, he himself will be saved, but not what he has built. I would suggest that the 'building' refers to our converts and work with other believers. If they fail of the Kingdom, we ourselves will be saved, but our work will have been in vain. This parable also suggests that the salvation of others, their passing through the fire at the judgment, is dependent upon how we build. This may be hyperbole to make a point, but it is a powerful encouragement that we are *all* elders and preachers, and we *all* have a deep effect on others' spirituality. We have responsibilities to those who respond to our preaching.

*3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ-* In chapters 1 and 2, Paul has explained that the foundation is Christ crucified; he determined to preach nothing other than that. The same word is used in Heb. 6:1 about the foundation of "faith toward God". Paul has explained that faith in God is predicated upon encounter with His crucified Son. And yet atheism was not popular in the first century Mediterranean world. The point is that in reality, we are not really believers in God unless we are believers in His Son; for the Son is the only way to the Father. Paul may be implying that some were seeking to claim to have laid some other foundation, disregarding the ground work Paul had done. The allusion to the parable of the wise and foolish builders suggests that the foundation is laid upon a rock- the Lord Jesus- rather than sand. This is the only valid building. And that rock is defined by the Lord Jesus as being Him and His words, believed and acted upon.

*3:12 But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble-* The builders upon the foundation of Paul's basic preaching work were those who then did the pastoral work of teaching all that the Lord has commanded (Mt. 28:20). The materials they build with refer to the quality of those they build up. Gold, silver and precious stones can pass through the fire (:13)- the final test of judgment day. And these three figures are used elsewhere about the believers. The other corresponding three figures will be burnt up by the fire. Here we see the principle that the final acceptance of individuals is partly related to the quality of the teaching and caring work done for them by third parties. God has built this factor into the algorithm of our salvation in order that we may each one devote ourselves to caring for others spiritually, and so that likewise we may realize our own need for others' help in our own path to salvation.

*3:13 Each man's work shall be revealed. For the day of judgment shall declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire itself shall test each man's work of what sort it is-* The 'revelation' and 'declaration' will be public because in some [unimaginable] form, the judgment experience will be public. We shall each perceive the various factors in the final salvation and condemnation of each person. The judgment process will reveal openly the efforts made by others towards the salvation of others; the fire shall "test" our work with each other. And Paul writes not merely of himself and his preaching team, but of 'every man'; for we are each called to work in building others up against that day. The same word for "test" is used of how we can examine ourselves now at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28); for that meeting is, or can be, a foretaste of judgment day. We can 'test our own selves' ahead of that day (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4 s.w.). Right now God is 'testing' our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4); the judgment process will be a declaration for *our* collective benefit of God's present judgments. Peter seems to allude to Paul's ideas here when he writes that the faithful are as gold who

pass through the fire right now, and are 'tested' with fire through present experience (1 Pet. 1:7 s.w.). Through our response to trial we therefore have a foretaste of judgment day.

At the point of conversion, the secrets of our hearts are in a sense made manifest (1 Cor. 14:25); but secrets are made manifest in the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18; 1 Cor. 3:13). The present judgments of God about us will be revealed at the judgment (Rom. 2:5). Our actions "treasure up" wrath or acceptance (Rom. 2:5). The materialistic believer heaps up treasure for judgment at the last day (James 5:3). See on Lk. 11:23.

1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation (Josh. 6:24). Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the faithful.

3:14 *If anyone's work shall endure which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward-* Our reward in the Kingdom will in some way be related to the work of upbuilding we have done with our brethren and sisters in this life. The "reward" which 1 Cor. 3:14 speaks of is the "work" we have built in God's ecclesia in this life. In agreement with this, Paul describes those he had laboured for as the reward he would receive in the Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). Paul has in mind that the Corinthians were his "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1). He encourages all the Corinthians to likewise abound in this "work of the Lord" (15:58)- i.e. of building up each other. Paul has said in :8 that he is liable for "reward"- depending on the growth of the Corinthians.

3:15 *If anyone's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as having passed through fire-* There is the implication in the New Testament that whoever lives the life of Christ will convert others to the Way. 1 Cor. 3 speaks of the converts a man builds on the foundation of Christ. They, like himself, must go through the fire of judgment, and if they are lost, then he himself will still be saved (if he has remained faithful). The implication is that all of us build up others, and our work is tried in the end.

The accepted will be saved "yet so as by fire" (AV). The fire of condemnation will as it were burn at them and remove all their surface spirituality. And as through death comes life, so through condemnation of the flesh comes salvation of the spirit.

If we invest our lives in seeking to save others and they are burnt up at the day of judgment, then we will indeed experience loss. "Suffer loss" is a term elsewhere used about being "cast away" in rejection at the day of judgment, or 'losing' one's own soul there (Mt. 16:26; Lk. 9:25). This is not teaching that the preacher / teacher will be rejected, for we go on to read that he shall not be- "he himself shall be saved". It's that if we really care for people, then the loss of any man is my loss; we identify with those we love and care for. Hence the faithful of the Old Testament felt that they had sinned along with Israel, and Ezra blushed to lift up his face to God because of the sins of the Israel with whom he was associated (Ezra 9:6). As we see those they laboured for condemned and burnt up, we will feel it as if it were us. This is

why Paul openly admits that he has a vested interest in the salvation of the Corinthians. We too cannot work with others in some dispassionate, at-a-distance manner, as if it were a mere 9-5 job we were doing. If those we served are indeed burnt up, it shall be as if we were, although we ourselves shall be saved. This I believe is the sense of the next sentence: "But he himself shall be saved, yet as having passed through fire".

*3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?*- Paul began the chapter by saying that they were not spiritual (:1); and yet the Spirit dwelt in them. As explained earlier in these notes, the Spirit is given but this doesn't make us spiritual unless we allow that Spirit to take over our lives and allow it free movement. And this was what the Corinthians weren't doing; for they instead gave freedom of movement to their flesh. The "you" here is in the plural; the Spirit was dwelling amongst them as a community.

*3:17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy; and such are you-* Judaism was very touchy about the destruction or damaging of the temple in any way. And Paul transfers that language to these Gentile Corinthians. He began in chapter 1 by appealing for holiness, or sanctification, on a personal level. He reminded them that they had been sanctified, in status before God in Christ and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. But they had to allow that to work out in practice instead of justifying the flesh. The damaging of the temple is being spoken of on a collective, plural level. The concern here is not so much with damaging ones own physical body, but with damaging the temple / church of God. The letter will continue to give examples of that- division, prostitution and immorality within the church, over eating and drinking at the breaking of bread, false teaching etc. Those who stop the community from being sanctified by advocating the flesh are therefore standing against the Holy Spirit, which is amongst the church and within the individual believers. This becomes a form of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

*3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks that he is wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise-* At this stage in the letter, there was in view a particular damaging of the church, God's temple. It was in the belief and teaching of human wisdom. For this stands opposed to the Spirit of God, as Paul has laboured from the start of the letter to this point. Paul is appealing here for a re-conversion- to 'foolishness', in the eyes of the world, by quitting human wisdom. The true wisdom was of the Spirit, which had already potentially been given to them. Chapter 1 has said that they are already enriched with all spiritual wisdom; they had to reject human wisdom, becoming 'foolish', in order to access it.

Job was the greatest of the men of the east (Job 1:3), people who were renowned in the ancient world for their wisdom (cp. Mt. 2:1; 1 Kings 4:30). Thus Job as the Jews would have been full of worldly wisdom, and this is maybe behind Paul's words of 1 Cor.3:18,19: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written (quoting Job 5:13, which is Eliphaz speaking about Job), He taketh the wise in their own craftiness". Job is equated with the false wisdom of the Judaizers, who were using "excellency of speech... wisdom... enticing words of man's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1,4), to corrupt the believers from the "simplicity that is in Christ", "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" (2 Cor. 11:3).

*3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God-* Chapters 1 and 2 have defined the wisdom of God as the power of the crucified Christ. All else is foolishness with God. The whole structure of the argument and language used allows for no incorporation of worldly



wisdom within Divine wisdom. Yet we in this age of all ages are so strongly tempted to proclaim a faith which appears intellectually and scientifically respectable.

*For it is written: He takes the wise in their craftiness-* The impossibility of combining secular and Divine wisdom is underscored by this. The worldly wisdom of the wise is actually what stops them from believing; which is why Paul insisted on preaching the bald message of the crucified Christ with no words of secular wisdom attached to it. For faith would not then be elicited. The quotation from Eliphaz in Job 5:13 raises interesting questions as to the nature of Divine inspiration. The words of the friends are at times wrong, and God later says they are wrong. But here some of their words are quoted as being correct. The view that every single word we read in our translations of the Bible is 'true' can lead us into the problems evident in many Bible fundamentalists. Take the words of Eliphaz against Job (Job 5:13). They were wrong words (Job 42:7). Yet they are quoted in 1 Cor. 3:19. Wrong statements can still be recorded under inspiration and even quoted. Take the mocking of Sennacherib. It's recorded under inspiration, blasphemous as it was.

*3:20 And again: The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are vain-* The vanity of secular reasoning is that it is vain in terms of bringing a person to faith. For true faith is predicated, as Paul has explained, upon encounter with Christ. The quotation from Ps. 94:11 is changed, under inspiration; "men" becomes "the wise" to fit the context of Paul's argument. But it could be argued that secular man is to be identified with secular wisdom. The obsession of our age with education and learning makes these issues poignant. The context of Psalm 94 is a pleading with the faithful in Israel not to adopt the philosophy and belief system of their oppressors. And this is pertinent to Christians- mixing the truth of Christ with secular wisdom is the same error. And the wisdom of the world is thus presented most negatively.

*3:21 Therefore, let no one boast in men. For all things are yours-* The boasting in men may refer to boasting in human teachers and their words of human wisdom. But these "men" are defined in :22 as Paul, Apollos and Peter. In chapter 1, Paul laments how the church has split into factions around these men. So he is here repeating the basic point made there- the cross of Christ is the fundamental basis of faith. Anything else added to it is mere human thinking. To start talking about perceived differences between those three Christian leaders was just the same as worldly wisdom. And surely none of those three men in themselves approved of the divisions being made around them. The "all things" in view are those of 1 Cor. 1:5; the gift of the Spirit had given them "all things" in the Spiritual sphere. Again the appeal is to realize what they have potentially been given by the gift of the Spirit. To start talking about the superiority of Paul's teaching over Peter's was a sign that they failed to be awed as they should by the "all things" given them in Christ. The spirit of Christ gave them the "all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Through the Spirit, God was working all things in all men in the church (1 Cor. 12:6) and will articulate this 'all things in all men' at the final change to immortality (1 Cor. 15:28).

*3:22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come- all are yours-* If literally all things have been made possible by the Spirit, then there is no need to argue about who baptized us, or the different nuances of teaching between church leaders. These things pale into utter insignificance compared to the all things made possible for us right now. "All are yours" suggests that there was the idea that by having a certain baptism or having some supposed superior teaching of secular wisdom, they possessed more than their fellows. This kind of petty arrogance can so often be seen. Yet

once the immensity of having "all things" is perceived, then such a mentality disappears.

3:23 *And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's*- Another nail in the coffin for Trinitarian views of Jesus being equal to God. If we feel we are Christ's, that we belong solely to Him, and through Him we are therefore also God's... then we shall not feel any allegiance to mere man. No human leader, even within the church, can have our allegiance, nor should we even seek to give allegiance if we are wholly Christ's. Yet there is a tendency in us all, as there was in the Corinthians, to be someone's; someone whom we know, who is visible on this earth. And that in the end is why there are so many denominations and followers of people. The extent of Christ's Lordship ought to drive this from us.

If we believe that all in Christ, all who are 'Christian', will be in the Kingdom... then, we will act joyfully and positively toward our community, abounding in hope. We have to assume that our brethren are likewise going to be there; for we cannot condemn them. Therefore we must assume they too will be saved along with us. Consider how Paul repeatedly has this attitude when dealing with his apostate Corinthians: "For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). See too 1 Cor. 6:3,11; 10:17; 13:12; 15:22,57; 2 Cor. 1:7; 3:18; 5:1.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Let a man regard us as servants of Christ*- Paul now begins to justify himself against criticism and gossip, and to lay the basis for his authority in appealing to the Corinthians regarding their serious misbehaviour and wrong teaching. Clearly some did not regard him and his team as "servants of Christ". The word for "servant" is that used by the Lord on the Damascus road in giving Paul authority to do the work he did: "I have appeared unto you... to make you a servant and witness of these things which you have seen" (Acts 26:16). The word *huperetes* is literally an 'under oarsman'. He was rowing, but the Lord Jesus was the captain directing the ship; and Paul was 'under' Him. He plays on this idea in 4:3 where he reasons that therefore it means nothing to him to be *hupo* man's judgment; for he is in fact *hupo* or 'under' the Lord's mastership. This is a liberating principle, and it flows directly from the apparently painless statement that Jesus is Lord and Master. If we are indeed 'under' Him, then we will not allow men to put us down, to make us 'under' their judgment. Their words and judgments will mean the less, indeed, nothing at all. For we are not 'under' them but the Lord.

*And stewards of the mysteries of God*- "Stewards" continues the idea of a 'servant' being 'under' a master. For a 'steward' was a slave within a household who managed day to day affairs. The goods in view were God's mysteries- and not Paul's own. I noted earlier that the Gospel of Christ was only a mystery to those who shut their eyes from understanding it.

4:2- see on Heb. 3:5.

*In this, moreover, it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful*- The same word is used in the parable of the unjust steward in Lk. 16:1-8. But the point was that the steward was found faithful or otherwise by his own master- and not by the gossip of other servants. And Paul goes on to develop this point.

4:3 *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or any man's judgment. I do not judge even myself*- Our being servants *under* the Lord Jesus, accountable to *Him*, means that we are not 'under' any human judgment; see on :1 *Servants of Christ*. This means that quite literally any human judgment of us, whether by our critics in the church or even by our own self in our personal self-assessment, is utterly irrelevant. And yet so many beat themselves up all their lives over the fact that he said that, she thinks that about me, they judged me like this or that. If we are solely and completely under the Lord's judgment, then their view [and our own view of ourselves, whether too harsh or too generous] is irrelevant.

For Paul, the fact that he had only *one* judge meant that he could genuinely feel that it mattered very little to him how others judged him. The idea of worrying only about God's judgment of us rather than man's lies behind Prov. 29:26: "Many seek the ruler's favourable judgment; but a man's judgment [i.e. the ultimate judgment, the only one worth having] comes from the Lord". But this takes quite some faith to believe- for in this age of constant communication between people about other people, we all tend to get worried by others' judgments and opinions of us. But ultimately there is only *one* judge- God, and not the guys at work, your kid sister, your older brother, the woman in apartment 35. The idea of the court of Heaven is a great comfort to us in the pain of being misjudged by men. It's a case of seeing what isn't visible to the human eye.

Paul's thought here is building on what he had earlier reasoned in 1 Cor. 2:15, that the spiritual man "himself is judged of no man". There was only One judge, and the believer is now not condemned if he is in Christ (Rom. 8:1). He that truly believes in Christ is not condemned, but has passed from death to life (Jn. 3:18; 5:24). So however men may claim to judge and condemn us, the ultimate truth is that no man *can* judge / condemn us, and we who are spiritual should live life like that, not fearing the pathetic judgments of men, knowing that effectively we are *not* being judged by them. How radically different is Paul's attitude to so many of us. The fear of criticism and human judgment leads us to respond as animals do to fear- the instinct of self-defence and self-preservation is aroused. We defend ourselves as we would against hunger or impending death. Yet here the radical implications of grace burst through. *We* are not our best defence. We have an advocate who is also the judge, the almighty Lord Jesus; we have a preserver and saviour, the same omnipotent Lord, so that we need not and must not trust in ourselves. By not trusting in this grace of salvation, we end up desperately trusting ourselves for justification and preservation and salvation, becoming ever more guilty at our abysmal and pathetic failures to save and defend ourselves.

The message of imputed righteousness was powerfully challenging. For the whole message of Romans is that our only acceptability is through *God* counting us righteous although we are not... and it is *His* judgment which matters, not that of the million watching eyes of society around us. 1 Cor. 4:3-5 teach that the judgment of others is a "very small thing", an irrelevancy, compared with Christ's judgment of us. The fact that we have only one judge means that whatever others think or judge of us is irrelevant. That may be easy enough to accept as a theory, but the reality for those living in collective societies was far-reaching. Appreciating the ultimate importance of our standing before *God* means that we have a conscience towards *Him*, and a rightful sense of shame before Him for our sins.

4:4- see on Gal. 6:4.

*For I know nothing against myself in my own conscience. Yet hereby I am not justified; but he that judges me is the Lord-* As explained in the previous verses, Paul was under the Lordship of Jesus as his master. Only His judgment therefore was of any meaning; even if his own conscience were clear, this would not justify him. He parallels his justification with his judgment; the Lord's present and final judgment will be our justification by His imputed righteousness. And so a comparison related to time is also introduced; whether we feel justified by our own self assessment now is nothing compared to His justification of us then. This idea is continued in the next verse- "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come".

Paul says that although he does not feel he has done anything wrong, this does not of itself mean that he is justified in God's sight. We cannot, therefore, place too much importance on living according to our natural sense of right and wrong. This is the very error which has led gay 'Christians' to interpret the Bible in the light of their own desires, rather than allowing themselves to be taught by God's word. "It's OK in my conscience" is their only justification. They and many others give more credibility to what they perceive to be guidance coming from within them, than to God's word of Truth. The words of the Lord Jesus in Lk. 11:35 seem especially relevant: "Take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. "It's OK in my conscience" is indeed dark light. Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will

judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience.

"He that judges me is the Lord" alludes to "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord" (Is. 49:4). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

1 Cor. 4:3-5 appeals to the reality of *God's* future judgment as a basis for not paying too much attention to how *man* judges us. If it is *God's* judgment that means everything to us, what men say or think about us, or what we perceive they do, will not weigh so heavily with us. The ultimate reality of our lives is the sense of God's future judgment, not the awareness of man's present judgment. If we really grasp the simple fact that God alone is judge, that there is only One who *can* judge us, that Christ will come, then we will say with Paul from our hearts: "He that is spiritual... himself is judged of no man" (1 Cor. 2:15). Of course, men *do* judge us; and it hurts. But we are to act and feel according to the fact that ultimately, they can *not* judge us. For there is only One judge, to whom we shall all soon give account.

Paul, misrepresented and slandered more than most brethren, came to conclude: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me [right now] is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The judge is the justifier, according to this argument. Paul is not justified by himself or by other men, because they are not his judge. The fact that God alone is judge through Christ [another first principle] means that nobody can ultimately justify us or condemn us. "Many seek the favour of the ruler ['judge']; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord" (Prov. 29:26). The false claims of others can do nothing to ultimately damage us, and our own efforts at self-justification are in effect a denial of the fact that the Lord is the judge, not us, and therefore He alone can and will justify.

4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come*- Any feeling OK in our own conscience *now* is irrelevant compared to the fact that the final judgment is not *now* but *then* when the Lord comes. The appeal to judge nothing before that time is directed very much at ourselves in our self judgment, rather than warning against judging others. We are not to judge, not simply because it is beyond our competence, but because *now* is not the time to judge.

*Who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts*- Judgment of others is impossible because we cannot see the hearts of others, nor can we see in darkness. There is an element to which judgment will be public; and hidden things will be made manifest not only to those being judged, but to all of us. The real intentions of others will then be known by us all. And this is necessary to prepare us to live eternally together. The judgment process in that sense is for our benefit and education, rather than because God needs it in order to gather information. The same word for "bring to light" is used of how we can now live 'in the light', with our whole body as it were full of light and having no dark parts (Lk. 11:36; Jn. 1:9). This is the whole sense of our having been 'enlightened' (Eph. 1:18; 3:9; Heb. 6:4; 10:32 s.w.).

We can live in the spirit of judgment day right now, if we allow the Lord's light to operate as intended. He will reveal the hidden things of darkness (the human heart), and will make

manifest the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5). Of course He knows these anyway; but He will make them manifest *to us*. The judgment seat is for our benefit, not God's- He knows our lives and spiritual position already. The day of judgment is to purify us (Mal. 3:2)- not ultimately, for that has been done by the Lord's blood and our lives of faithful acceptance of this. But the fire of judgment reveals the dross of our lives *to us* and in this sense purges us of those sins. Without the judgment, we would drift into the Kingdom with no real appreciation of our own sinfulness or the height of God's grace. The judgment will declare God's glory, His triumph over every secret sin of His people. The heathen will be judged "that the nations may know themselves to be but men" (Ps. 9:20)- self knowledge is the aim, not extraction of information so that God can make a decision. And it was the same with Israel: "Judge the bloody city... (i.e.) shew her all her abominations" (Ez. 22:2).

At judgment God "shall bring forth thy righteousness (good deeds) as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). The sins of the rejected and the good deeds of the righteous will be publicly declared at the judgment, even if they are concealed from men in this life (1 Tim. 5:24,25). This is how men will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 2:29). The wicked will see the generous deeds of the righteous rehearsed before them; and will gnash their teeth and melt away into condemnation (Ps. 112:9,10).

*And then shall each man have his praise from God-* The praise, in the context, would be for the counsels of their hearts. This is exactly the sense of Rom. 2:29, where the same word is used: "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God". This is how critically important it is to be spiritually minded; this is the essence which the Father looks at. And yet "praise of God" at the judgment recalls the Lord's parable of how we shall be praised in that day for having fed, clothed and visited the suffering Lord Jesus in the form of the least of His brethren. With such an awesome prospect ahead, we will not be interested in being judged positively by men; and neither will their negative judgment of us mean anything much.

Whilst we ourselves will feel the need to "confess to God" (Rom. 14:11,12) our failures and unworthiness, we have shown earlier how our Lord will not mention these to us, but instead joyfully catalogue to us those things which have so pleased him in our lives. This will be to our genuine amazement: "Lord, when..?". Keeping a subconscious inventory of our own good works now will surely prevent us from being in this category. 1 Cor. 4:5 speaks of us as receiving "praise of God" at the judgment, presumably in the form of praise for the good works which we are not aware of, as outlined in the parable (cp. Ps. 134:3). "Praise" suggests that our Lord will show quite some enthusiasm in this. Not he that commends himself will be approved [cp. The listing of good deeds by the rejected], "but whom the Lord commendeth" in as it were listing the good deeds of the accepted (2 Cor. 10:18).

There are some instructive parallels here:

"Bring to light"	"Make manifest"
"The hidden things of"	"The counsels of"
"Darkness"	"The hearts"

The hidden man is therefore "the counsels" of the heart. How we speak and reason to ourselves in our self-talk, this is the indicator of the hidden man. This will be 'made manifest' to the owners of those hearts, the Greek implies. "All things are naked and opened" unto God anyway; the second coming will reveal nothing to Him. The making manifest of our hidden man will be to ourselves and to others. The purpose of the judgment seat is therefore more for our benefit than God's; it will be the ultimate self-revelation of ourselves. Then we will know ourselves, just as God knows us (1 Cor. 13:12). Through a glass, darkly, we can now see the outline of our spiritual self (1 Cor. 13:11,12), although all too often we see this picture in the spiritual mirror of self-examination, and then promptly forget about it (James 1:23,24).

*4:6 Now these things, brothers, I have applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes-* The letter opened with a lament that the church had split into factions, after Paul and Apollos. Presumably the reference here is to the mention he has made of Apollos and himself a few verses earlier in 3:22: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours". He may mean that he has addressed the issue of following men by quoting Apollos and himself as examples of those who were being followed- even though they themselves did not want it. The implication might be that there were others whom he could name but didn't wish to, "for your sakes".

*That from us you might learn not to go beyond the things which are written-* The example of Paul and Apollos was of being leaders who did not want a personal cult following. The presence of the article ["the"] after "learn" requires us to read this as: "That you might learn the 'Not beyond the things which are written'". "Written" translates *grapho*, the writings, or, the Scriptures. 'Not beyond the writings' was a Rabbinic expression, and Paul is saying that the Corinthians would see it exemplified in the demeanour of Apollos and himself. The Corinthians were to learn from their example not to go beyond respect of leaders and fall into cult following. 'The things written' would in this context therefore refer to things written against following leaders into a cult situation; and that is what Paul has been writing about so far in the letter. The things written which must not be 'gone beyond', just as the Rabbis were not supposed to 'go beyond the [inspired] writings', would therefore refer to what Paul has just written under inspiration. So whilst turning down any personal cult following, he is also making clear that what he is writing is inspired and should be treated with as much respect as the OT Scriptures.

*So that none of you get puffed up, one against the other-* As noted earlier on this verse, the inspired message so far given was to stop such following of leaders in a divisive, cult-like sense. 1 Corinthians contains many warnings against being "puffed up" (1 Cor. 4:6,8,19; 5:2,6; 13:4). These warnings often come in the context of statements about the Lordship of Jesus, or about the sacrifice of Jesus, the Passover lamb. The fact He is our Lord and died as He did means that we must live Passover lives without the leaven of pride and being puffed up about leading brethren etc. Perceiving *His* greatness will mean that we will not seek to follow men.

*4:7 For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?-* Their differences were made by themselves; the differences were in their following of different leaders. What was 'received' by the Corinthians was the free gift of the Spirit (s.w. 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4). "Boast" translates a Greek word Paul has used in speaking of how we should glory in the Lord and

not glory or boast in human leaders (1 Cor. 1:29,31; 3:21). This boasting would only be made by those who did not have the Spirit; for such boasting is of the flesh and not the Spirit. We noted earlier that the Corinthians had been given the Spirit, and yet they acted as if they didn't have it. Their boasting was done as if they had not received the Spirit. Instead, their lives should have been wholly Spiritual, taken up with the things of the Spirit; so that it would be true that they had nothing in life apart from what they had been given by the Spirit and accepted from the Spirit. And this would utterly preclude boasting in mere men and their human words and examples. Yet the Corinthians had not made use of the Spirit gifts given them, as made clear in chapters 1 and 2; see on 3:1.

*4:8 Already are you filled, already you have become rich, you have come to reign without us-* The ideas of filling and being enriched were used in chapter 1 with reference to how the Corinthians had been filled with the Spirit, but had not made use of it. I suggested on :7 that what was 'received' was the Spirit. Here in :8 Paul is using sarcasm, which was more acceptable to use as a literary figure than it currently is in our times. They considered themselves wealthy, reigning and with no hunger or lack of anything. Paul is saying that they are indeed like this spiritually, if only they would know it; but their arrogant boasting was "without us", i.e. without the support of Paul and Apollos and Paul's team.

*Yes, and I hope that you will indeed reign, that we also might reign with you-* Paul's thought is of the 'reigning' in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:10 etc.). He sees his future reward as related to whether or not they his converts enter God's Kingdom. He has earlier developed this thought in 1 Cor. 3:8,15.

4:9- see on Ex. 7:4; Rom. 3:19; 1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 23:6.

*For I think God has sent us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death. For we are made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men-* The Roman spectacles included men doomed to death who were made to fight as gladiators to the death, either against each other or wild animals. The "last of all" compares with the idea of the Corinthians wanting to be 'first' (:8). Paul is saying that apostles like him were hardly worth following in a cultic sense; for they were indeed on the stage in front of all men, but were set to die a sad death, in shame and rejection. It would seem from 2 Tim. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:32 and 2 Cor. 1:10 that Paul was indeed thrown to the lions at Ephesus but was miraculously delivered. With typical spiritual culture, Paul only alludes to the incident indirectly, and in order to make points for the edification of others. Remember that Paul wrote this first letter from Ephesus. See on :11.

There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probations is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react. It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that offend (Mt. 13:41).



4:10 *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You have glory, but we have dishonour-* Wise, strong and honoured was how the Corinthians felt about themselves; although Paul observes that actually few of them were wealthy, wise and honourable (1 Cor. 1:26). But in their arrogance, they acted like this. Chapters 1 and 2 have explained that those who are fools, weak and not honoured are those through whom the Lord works. So Paul is not only criticizing them for their pretensions, but is pointing out that the way some of them despise him, consider him weak and foolish etc. is in fact placing him within the very categories which God accepts, and who are identified with the Lord Jesus. "We are despised" (1 Cor. 4:9,10; 2 Cor. 4:9,10) clearly alludes to "Him whom man despises" (Is. 49:7). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

4:11 *Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place-* Paul was writing from Ephesus, where he seems to have experienced some terrible trauma which he only indirectly alludes to. See on :9 *For I think...* . Hunger, thirst and lack of clothing are the very categories which the Lord says will typify the least of His brethren; and our attitudes to their needs and situations will be the basis for our final judgment. Paul was writing from "no certain dwelling place". He was no armchair theologian. His Divine inspiration notwithstanding, it is a reflection of his intense spiritual focus that he was able to compose such letters whilst confronted by such basic instability. Many would feel that they could only concentrate on spiritual matters once their basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter were met; but Paul's devotion and focus was far deeper than to require that. His mention of being "buffeted" uses the same word used of the Lord's sufferings in Mt. 26:67. "To this present hour" doesn't mean that all Paul's ministry was lived in this state; for there is evidence that at times he did have access to wealth, and he himself writes of how he had experienced both wealth and poverty throughout his ministry. Maintaining faith and focus despite these oscillations is a mark of how deep was his commitment to the Lord Jesus, and how little secular things mattered to him.

4:12 *We toil, working with our own hands-* To need to do manual work in order to survive was seen as the lowest level of existence in the ancient world. And Paul the one time wealthy intellectual was driven to this. The "we" referred to could possibly be Apollos and Paul. Paul was a tentmaker and lived with Aquilla and Priscilla because they too were tentmakers (Acts 18:3); and Apollos lived with Aquilla and Priscilla at one point, perhaps because he too was a tentmaker (Acts 18:24).

*Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure-* This is the language of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10,11); such things were and are necessary for every believer. The Lord too was "reviled" (Jn. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:23). The source of this opposition was likely also from within the church at Corinth as well as at the hands of the local opposition in Ephesus from where Paul was writing. For Paul goes on to ask the Corinthians not to fellowship with those of their number who were revilers (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10). The 'blessing' in view was perhaps that of forgiveness. Paul forgave these brethren but didn't want to associate with them. Forgiveness and trust / active association are different issues. It was the Lord who was "persecuted" (s.w. Jn. 5:16; 15:20). Paul saw his persecutions as a fellowshiping of the Lord's experience. But more pertinently, it was Paul who had persecuted the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:4) in that he had persecuted all those in Him (Acts 22:4; 26:11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13,23). He uses the same word in speaking of his persecution of the Lord Jesus in Phil. 3:6 and straight away uses the same word in writing of his 'following after' [s.w. 'persecuting'] the Lord Jesus in devotion to Him (Phil. 3:12,14). The energy and zeal of persecution was

redirected into devotion. And in this Paul sets secular man a huge challenge, with all our earlier passion and zeal for success and worldly advantage.

*4:13 Being defamed, we entreat-* The 'defamation' may well have included slander from the Corinthians; for the same word is used of how Paul was reviled or 'evil spoken of' by them (1 Cor. 10:30). The word is also frequently used of the Lord's sufferings, which Paul was fellowshipping both from the world and from his own brethren and converts.

*We are made as the garbage of the world-* The Greek *perikatharma* is a form of the Greek term *katharmata* which was used to describe how a victim was killed to expiate for the people. Paul felt that all his sufferings were for the sake of others' salvation. He was surely alluding to the Lord's sufferings for our salvation, and saw his own sufferings reflecting that. There's nothing worse than to suffer for no cause or end; and Christian suffering is the supreme form of achievement for others through personal suffering.

*The scum of the earth, even until now-* Paul described himself as the offscouring of all things- using the very language of condemned Israel (Lam. 3:45). He so wanted to see their salvation that he identified with them to this extent. By doing so he was reflecting in essence the way the Lord Jesus so identified Himself with us sinners, as our representative, "made sin" [whatever precisely this means] for the sake of saving us from that sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

*4:14 I do not write these things to shame you-* It is significant that when dealing with Corinth's belief of those who sought to totally black Paul's character, by accusing him of being weak, foolish and unworthy of honour (:10,11) he writes that he doesn't seek to shame them. Yet when dealing with their doctrinal apostacy, Paul does seek to shame them: "Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). Shaming people is not always effective for their growth; but in other issues, shame is a valid form of discipline.

*But to encourage you as my beloved children-* Paul writes of Timothy as his beloved child (:17). The Corinthians were so immature, and yet because they were in Christ, Paul felt he stood related to them as intimately as he did to faithful Timothy. Appreciating what it means to consider others as "in Christ" will transform our relationships and feelings toward each other within the church. "Encourage" is better translated 'to warn', as is the same word used of how Paul in Ephesus [from where he was writing to the Corinthians] had warned them night and day with tears for three years (Acts 20:31). Warning others was a large theme in Paul's ministry; he sensed the gravity of the issues to which we stand related, the extreme reality of the future we may miss. The figure of the Corinthians and Timothy being his 'children' connects with his claim in :15 to be their 'father'. Yet he had not baptized Timothy nor most of the Corinthians. But his pastoral efforts with them had been so colossal that he felt they were his spiritual children; and he had been the one who had first introduced the Gospel to Corinth. So those who may not have baptized anyone can still legitimately feel that they have spiritual children.

*4:15 For though you have ten thousand would be teachers in Christ-* Or "instructors". Paul began the letter by expressing concern that they were listening to human wisdom more than spiritual truth. These "instructors" refer to the teachers they had amassed to themselves. But

he doesn't use the expected word for 'teacher'. Instead he says they were no more than a *paidagogos*, a slave who had to take the little children to school, where they would be taught by the teacher (cp. Jesus). This was Paul's *hope* for the Corinthians; and his hope for Corinth is a powerful exhortation to us. But I mentioned earlier on 3:10 that Paul seems to have in mind Matthew's account of the great commission; the basic Gospel was to be taught, people baptized into it, and then the converts instructed in all that the Lord had commanded them. Perhaps Paul is drawing a similar contrast here between him as their "father", and the instructors who came after him.

*You have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus it was me who begat you through the gospel-* See on :14 *But to encourage you.* Paul is not lamenting that they have "not many fathers" as if he wished they had more fathers than teachers; his point is that he is their singular father. Although he had not baptized many of them, he considered them his spiritual children. This would humanly speaking explain his endless patience and passionate care for them.

4:16 *I therefore urge you to be imitators of me-* Literally, 'mimic me'. This continues the imagery of Paul being their father. He has earlier warned against the danger of following leaders, including himself. But he balances this with the observation that he is their spiritual father and they should mimic him. His answer to the problem of following human leaders appears to be: 'Follow me as I am your spiritual father; but not in any cult like sense, and following me means being spiritually minded'. Paul constantly sets himself up as an example to his converts; and whenever he bids them 'follow me', it is in the context of his example as a preacher (Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Cor. 4:16; 10:31-11:1; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). He was their spiritual father, and he wants the converts to have his spiritual characteristics, which included preaching to others. This perhaps accounts for the otherwise surprising lack of specific encouragement to his converts to preach which we observe in Paul's writings. He understood his role to be initiatory- he speaks of his preaching as planting (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 9:7,10,11), laying foundations (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10), giving birth (1 Cor. 4:15; Philemon 10) and betrothing (2 Cor. 11:2). His aim was for his converts to also preach and develop self-sustaining ecclesias. "Paul's method of shaping a community was to gather converts around himself and by his own behaviour to demonstrate what he taught", following a pattern practiced by the contemporary moral philosophers. Paul is set before us as "a Christ-appointed model" of the ideal believer. He himself seems to have sensed this happening when he so often invites us to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:10; 2 Thess. 3:7,9). He does this quite self-consciously, for example: "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved... let no man seek his own, but another's [profit]" (1 Cor. 10:33,24). He even says that he doesn't do things which he could legitimately allow himself, *because* he knew he was being framed as their example (2 Thess. 3:7,9).

4:17- see on Acts 2:46.

*For this cause have I sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord-* See on :14 *But to encourage you.*

*Who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church-* As noted on :16, Paul saw himself as their spiritual father and

asked them to mimic him. He draws a parallel between "my ways" and what "I teach"; he felt that his example was as it were the word becoming flesh. And yet Paul felt keenly his sinfulness. It was this which perhaps gives even more edge to his invitation to mimic him. He sensed that he was a pattern for others, but this didn't make him blind to his own failures.

4:18 *Now some are inflated with pride, as though I were not going to come to you-* 2 Cor. 1:17-19 suggests Paul was being slandered as an indecisive man whose word was not his bond. The implication of how Paul writes here is that his literal presence in Corinth would reveal the 'puffed up' ones as being indeed just inflated and having no substance. This situation would only be possible surely if Paul had some Spirit gift of discernment and even judgment or punishment which he was not afraid to use. James 5 seems to envisage a situation where the Spirit did smite some in the first century churches with disease, and the Lord's letters in Rev. 2 and 3 imply likewise. We recall the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira.

4:19 *But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power-* "Speech" is *logos* and "power" is *dunamis*. There were many words in Corinth, many claiming to be teachers, even thousands of them (:15). The Lord's preaching was with both *logos* and *dunamis* (Lk. 4:36). These teachers were spirit-less; they were all word but no spirit / power. Paul began by writing that the power of God is the *logos* of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). They were not teaching that, instead they were using the words of human wisdom; and so their message was without spirit / power. Paul's preaching was the *logos* with *dunamis* (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 1:5). The problem of words being preached without the spirit is not unknown to us today. Mere fact, mere words, will not of themselves save anyone without spirituality or an element of the Spirit. In :20 Paul will go on to argue that the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom are not [only] in *logos* but also in *dunamis*. There was a danger in the first century, as there is today, of a form of Godliness, a teaching of a correct form of words, which was lacking in "the power [*dunamis*] thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). We are kept by the *dunamis* of God unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). Simply imparting Biblical fact is not the same as spirituality. Theological truth can be held without the Spirit. Paul began in 1 Cor. 1 by pointing out this problem at Corinth; they had potentially been given the Spirit but they were Spirit-less (1 Cor. 3:1).

4:20 *For the kingdom of God is not in talk but in power-* See on :19. The Gospel of the Kingdom was in both *logos* ["talk"] and power; so we are to read this as 'not only in talk, but also in power'. The Gospel demands a response. The Greek word *euangelia* actually implies this, although the English translation 'good news' may mask it. There is an inscription from Priene in Asia Minor which reads: "The birthday of the god [=Augustus] was for the world the beginning of *good news* [*euangelia*] owing to him". The Gospel is not therefore just a proclamation of good news, e.g. an emperor's birthday. *Euangelia* meant the response to the good news; the good news and the response one must make to it are all bound up within the one word. "For the [Gospel of the] Kingdom of God is not [only] in *word*, but in *power*" - the Gospel isn't just so many words and ideas, as a life lived. For in the previous verse Paul has argued: "I will know, not the *word* of them which are puffed up, but the *power*", i.e. what their lives show of the things they profess (1 Cor. 4:19,20 RV). And we must ask ourselves whether our personal Christianity is mere words, or the power of a life living out those words.

4:21 *What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*- This I suggest is better placed with the material in chapter 5. Paul is going to

address the need to take concrete action regarding a major moral issue in the church. And he says he can take either a hard line with them, or appeal to them for love's sake in a gentle way. And he clearly takes the latter course, despite explaining in chapter 5 that he has received specific guidance and revelation from the Lord Jesus about how to judge this matter. But despite knowing he was in the right and they in the wrong, and in need of discipline, he doesn't let possession of truth or moral high ground lead him to take a dictatorial approach. He still appeals in love and gentleness- setting us a great example. The language of "rod" is that of a father disciplining his son (Prov. 13:24; 23:13,14). This is a metaphor pertinent to the context, for Paul has declared himself their spiritual father in :15. In this case, Paul is saying that he could legitimately take a hard line with them; but he chooses to take the path of love and gentleness.

## CHAPTER 5

5:1 Note how Paul deals with ecclesial problems in places like Corinth. He doesn't write to the elders and tell them to sort it out and clean up the ecclesia. He writes to every member of the ecclesia. He confronts the whole ecclesia with his concerns over pastoral issues- not just the pastors. He tells the whole ecclesia of his concern about how they have not dealt with flagrant sin amongst them (1 Cor. 5; 6:1-11). The Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:15-18 doesn't ask us to refer our concerns about others' behaviour in the ecclesia to the elders. He asks us to personally take the matter up with the individual. His church was to be built on individuals who followed Him personally and closely.

*It is actually reported-* The Greek implies it was widely being spread about. Some were boasting about their liberality, as some do today. They were "puffed up" about the matter (:2). It was not a case of quietly accommodating a non-standard moral situation, but of boasting in it and claiming it was quite acceptable and even commendable.

*That there is sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as is not even among the Gentiles-* This alludes to Old Testament condemnations of Israel for being actually worse than the surrounding Gentiles. And Paul is writing to Corinth, a city famed for its sexual immorality. Why is it that believers at times act far worse than unbelievers? The Corinthians were not living by the Spirit but rather by legalism; and obedience to a few laws leads people to fail spectacularly in other areas, because they feel justified. And as Paul explains in Romans 7, the knowledge of God's law provokes within human nature a desire to disobey it. The only way forward, then, is to recognize God's law but live in the Spirit. The legalistic spirit of the Corinthians is reflected in the way that they treated the man too harshly- for in 2 Cor. Paul has to urge them to receive him back lest he be psychologically and spiritually destroyed by their attitude. So, as legalists do, they went from one extreme to another rather than following the way of the Spirit.

*That one of you has taken to himself his father's wife-* The woman may not necessarily have been the mother of the offender. This case involved a man suffering wrong (2 Cor. 7:12), so we can assume that the woman was already married to the man's father, and he took her away from him. Hence "taken to himself...". The end of chapter 4 must be connected with chapter 5; Paul speaks of his choice of dealing with Corinth with a rod, or with the spirit of meekness, and he has in view the case he is now discussing.

5:2 *Instead of grieving, you have become arrogant-* The moral failures of others should cause our grief, as Lot grieved for Sodom. The Greek can mean mourning at a funeral; they were to mourn the spiritual death of the individual, and not boast about it nor be angry with him. His loss was their loss. But as noted on :1, the Corinthians were boasting about this case. Dealing with the offender was therefore a far more nuanced question than simply removing someone from a church because they are immoral. The Lord in writing to the churches in Rev. 1 and 2 doesn't take this approach; so here in 1 Cor. 5 the question is far wider than simply the private misbehaviour of an individual.

Any such separations are brought forth from much sorrow; Corinth ecclesia were told that they should have mourned as they withdrew from one who had left the faith (1 Cor. 5:2). "The whole house of Israel" were commanded to "mourn" the necessary destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:6). Samuel mourned and God repented when Saul was finally rejected (1 Sam. 15:35). Paul wept when he wrote about some in the ecclesia who had fallen away (Phil.

3:17-19). It must be said that 'block disfellowship'- the cutting off of hundreds of brethren and sisters because theoretically they fellowship a weak brother- hardly enables 'mourning' and pleading with each of those who are disfellowshipped.

*Remove the one who has done this deed from among you-* Paul explains his motivation for writing this in 2 Cor. 7:12: "So although I wrote to you, I wrote not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong; but that your earnest care for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God". Paul was surely aware of many such non-standard moral cases in the churches, but he was making a test case of this one. He was not commanding the removal of the person solely for the sake of the offender, but for wider reasons. So it would be unwise to assume from this case that every immoral person in a church must be removed. There was clearly a wider context here.

*5:3 For I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing-* There was a Spirit gift of knowledge which resulted in Paul being as it were virtually present; he was not therefore judging from a distance on the basis of gossip. Hence he can write in :4 that "when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do)". And he alludes to the same phenomenon in 2 Cor. 13:2 "I tell you as if I were present". This ability to be virtually present is used supremely by the Lord, whose presence is to be found in our lives and where two or three are gathered together. If Paul knew this case by the Spirit and was spiritually present in their gatherings to discuss the matter; how much more the Lord Himself.

5:4- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*I command you that in the name of our Lord Jesus-* This decision was confirmed by the Lord Jesus; for Paul commands it by the Spirit. But it's a dangerous path to assume that this is a pattern for all disfellowships, for we have not received an inspired word from the Lord to excommunicate specific named individuals.

*When you are gathered together-* The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul [writing on the specific command of the Lord Jesus, which we do not have in the cases we deal with] to dealing with the moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6). We are all priests, a community of them. This is why Paul writes to whole ecclesias rather than just the elders. 1 Cor. 5:4,5,11 make it clear that discipline was the responsibility of *all*, "the many" as Paul put it in 2 Cor., not just the elders. Even in Philipppians, where bishops and deacons are specifically mentioned, Paul writes to "all the saints".

*And my spirit is present with you when you do-* See on :3.

*With the power of our Lord Jesus-* Paul was commanding this course of action with the specific authority of the Lord. We do not have this available to us today when considering specific individuals. Perhaps this is why Paul labours the point- that he is speaking in this case according to a specific Spirit revelation received.

*5:5 Deliver such a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus-* Who the Lord Jesus was is who He will be in the future;

in the same way as who *we* are now, is who we will eternally be. For our spirit, our essential personality, will be *saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). “Flesh and blood” will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and yet the risen, glorified Lord Jesus was “flesh and bones” (Lk. 24:39). We will be who we essentially are today, but with Spirit instead of blood energizing us. It’s a challenging thought, as we consider the state of our “spirit”, the essential ‘me’ which will be preserved, having been stored in Heaven in the Father’s memory until the day when it is united with the new body which we will be given at resurrection. For in all things the Lord is our pattern; and we will in that day be given a body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21)- which is still describable as “flesh and bones” in appearance (Lk. 24:39).

The purpose of this delivering was in order “that the spirit may be saved”. If Satan is intent on making people sin and alienated from God, why should what he does to them result in them being saved? It is by the experiences of life that God controls, that we are spiritually developed (Heb. 12:5–11). How could the church at Corinth deliver the fallen brother to Satan if no one knows where to locate him? “Destruction” can also imply “punishment” (e.g. 2 Thess.1:9). Are we to think that God would work in cooperation with an angel who is rebelling against Him? Notice that Satan is not described as eagerly entering the man, as we would expect if Satan is constantly trying to influence all men to sin and to turn believers away from God. The church (v. 4) is told to deliver the man to Satan.

One of the big “Satans” – adversaries – to the early church was the Roman authority of the time, who, as the first century progressed, became increasingly opposed to Christianity. The Greek phrase “to deliver” is used elsewhere, very often in a legal sense, of delivering someone to a civil authority, e.g.:

- Someone can “deliver you to the judge” (Mt. 5:25).
- “They will deliver you up to the councils” (Mt. 10:17).
- The Jews “shall deliver (Jesus) to the Gentiles” (Mt. 20:19)
- “The Jews will... deliver (Paul) into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11).
- “Yet was I delivered prisoner” (Acts 28:17).

So is Paul advising them to hand over the sinful brother to the Roman authorities for punishment? The sin he had committed was incest, and this was punishable under the Roman law. Remember that “destruction” also implies “punishment”. Leander Keck demonstrates that the behaviour of the incestuous man was “contrary to both Jewish and Roman law”, rendering him liable to punishment by those authorities (Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) p. 106).

“Satan” here may also refer to the man’s evil desires. He had given way to them in committing the sin of incest, and Paul is perhaps suggesting that if the church separates from the man and leaves him to live a fleshly life for a time, maybe eventually he will come round to repentance so that ultimately his spirit would be saved at the judgment. This is exactly what happened to the prodigal son (Luke 15); living a life away from his spiritual family and totally following Satan – his evil desires – resulted in him eventually repenting. Jeremiah 2:19 sums this up: “Your own wickedness shall correct you and your backslidings shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter” (that they had done).



“The flesh” does not necessarily mean “the body”. It may also refer to a way of life controlled by our evil desires, i.e. Satan. Believers “are not in the flesh, but in the spirit” (Rom. 8:9). This does not mean that they are without physical bodies, but that they are not living a fleshly life. Before conversion “we were in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5). Galatians 5:19 mentions sexual perversion, which the offender at Corinth was guilty of, as a “work of the flesh”. 1 John 3:5 (cp. v. 8), defines sins as the “works of the Devil”, thus equating the flesh and the Devil. Thus 1 Corinthians 5:5 could be understood as ‘Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of Satan/the Devil’, so that we have Satan destroying Satan. It is impossible to understand this if we hold to the popular belief regarding Satan. But if the first Satan is understood as the Roman authority and the second one as the flesh, or sinful expressions of our evil desires, then there is no problem.

We have seen in our notes on Luke 10:18 that Satan is sometimes used in the context of reminding us that physical illness is ultimately a result of our sin. It may be that the spirit – gifted apostles in the first century had the power of afflicting sinful believers with physical illness or death – e.g. Peter could order Ananias and Sapphira’s death (Acts 5); some at Corinth were physically “weak and sickly” as a punishment for abusing the communion service (1 Cor. 11:30); Jesus could threaten the false teachers within the church at Thyatira with instant death unless they repented (Rev. 2:22–23) and James 5:14–16 implies that serious illness of some members of the church was due to their sins, and would be lifted if there was repentance. If the sickness mentioned here was an ordinary illness, it does not follow that if a Christian repents of sin he will automatically be healed, e.g. Job was afflicted with illness as a trial from God, not because he sinned. It was for the help and healing of repentant believers who had been smitten in this way, that “the gift of healing” was probably mainly used in the early church (1 Cor. 12:9). Thus Paul’s delivering the incestuous brother to Satan and also delivering “Hymenaeus and Alexander... unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20), may have involved him smiting them with physical sickness due to their following of Satan – their evil desires. Some time later Paul noted how Alexander still “greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14,15). The extent of his withstanding Paul’s preaching is made apparent if we understand that Alexander had been struck ill by Paul before he wrote the first letter to Timothy, but had still refused to learn his lesson by the time Paul wrote to Timothy again. Again, notice that Satan would try and teach Alexander “not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20). If Satan is an evil person who is a liar and blasphemer of God’s word, how can he teach a man not to blaspheme God?

The same verb for ‘delivering over’ occurs in the LXX of Job 2:6, where God ‘hands over’ Job to Satan, with the comment [in LXX]: “you are to protect his *psyche*, his spirit”. The connection between the passages would suggest to me that Job was in need of spiritual improvement, even though he was imputed as being righteous (Job 1:1). Whatever, the point surely is that God handed a person over to an adversary, for that person’s spiritual salvation. The orthodox idea of God and Satan being pitted in conflict just doesn’t cut it here. Biblically, God is portrayed as in charge of any ‘Satan’ / adversary, and using ‘satans’ at His will for the spiritual improvement of people, rather than their destruction. The story of Job is a classic example. Are we to really understand that there is a personal being called Satan who’s disobedient to God, out of His control, and bent on leading people to their spiritual destruction? No way, Jose. Not yet, Josette. 1 Cor. 5:5 and the record of Job teach the very dead opposite. And by all means bring on board here 2 Tim. 2:26, which speaks of people being caught in the Devil’s trap at God’s will / desire. This is the translation offered by H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 119.

*5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast raises the whole lump of dough?*- Paul is cleverly alluding to a common Jewish maxim that sinners must be removed from the community because just a little yeast affects the whole lump. But he is saying that the attitudes of those who were boasting about this matter were in fact the yeast. He has said that they were "puffed up" (:2 Gk. and AV). And here he continues the analogy. Their boasting had to be purged out- and so he urges them to purge out that yeast so that they might be "a new lump" (:7). Their boasting was the yeast. Whilst indeed the immoral person had to be removed, their attitudes were no better. This is a very telling play on the idea of yeast, and is so true of the wrong attitudes which have accompanied so much excommunication. Those attitudes were as bad and as damaging as the behaviour of the individual being disciplined. Paul makes his point specifically in :8, where he asks them to remove the yeast of "malice and wickedness" and instead be sincere and truthful. He uses the same word for "malice" in describing how things were amongst the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:6; 13:5; 15:33; 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:7). The Greek word for "wickedness" is that used of "that wicked person" (:13). Their wickedness, which they had to purge out, was no better than his wickedness. As noted earlier, the command to remove the individual was not simply for his sake (2 Cor. 7:12); there were far wider issues here. The essence of his sin was to be found in those who were boasting of him, and who would later over harshly condemn him.

*5:7 Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new lump*- See on :6. As a man or woman seriously contemplates the cross, they are inevitably led to a self-knowledge and self-examination which shakes them to the bone. We are to "purge out" the old leaven from us at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 5:7). But the same Greek word for "purge" is found in passages which speak of how the blood of Christ purges us: Jn. 15:2; Heb. 10:2. We purge ourselves because Christ has purged us. This is the connection between His death for us, and our self-examination.

*Even as you actually are*- They were full of yeast, and yet they were in another sense a new, unleavened loaf. The loaf represents the Lord Jesus. They were in Christ and by grace counted as in Him. But in reality they were leavened with malice, wickedness and boasting. This approach surely helped the spiritual Paul in coping with the unspiritual Corinthians. And it helps us in our struggles with all the moral weakness we see in our brethren. We are not to be naively blind to it, whilst on the other hand we are to perceive them as our brethren, justified in Christ.

*For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, even Christ*- They were to live in the intensity of Passover night, awaiting the call to leave Egypt at the Angel's coming, just as we await the Lord's coming. The lamb had been slain; now they were to keep the feast with unleavened bread. The plagues on Egypt are the basis for the various latter day judgments described in Revelation and the Olivet prophecy. Perhaps we too will be shielded from the final ones, as Israel were. The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread, and Paul urges them all to look to themselves in order to purge themselves within of yeast. He was concerned that the expulsion of a failed individual might lead them to not look within, when they were in essence as much at fault as him.

*5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the bread of sincerity and truth which has no yeast*- Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. This is echoing Moses' command to keep the Passover feast without leaven, putting Moses' words in his own mouth

(Ex. 12:15; Dt. 16:3). Paul saw himself as Moses in trying to save a generally unresponsive and ungrateful Israel.

In Dt. 16:3 the unleavened bread is called the "bread of affliction", whilst in 1 Cor. 5:8 it is called the "unleavened bread of sincerity and Truth", as if being sincere and true and not having malice and bitterness in our hearts is a result of much mental affliction and exercising of the mind. So to keep the feast we have to search our houses, our lives, for anything like leaven- anything that puffs us up, that distorts us from the true smallness and humility we should have, that corrupts our sincerity. By nature we have so much pride in us, so much that puffs us up. We should always find some leaven in us every time we examine ourselves. The Jews used to search their houses with candles, looking for any sign of leaven. So we too must look into every corner of our lives with the candle of the word. Similarly before the great Passovers of Hezekiah and Josiah there was a searching for idols which were then thrown down. Note how Paul calls on the Corinthians to keep the feast "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," which he contrasts with "malice and evil" (1 Cor. 5:8). Truth is set up against evil- not against wrong interpretations of Bible passages.

5:9 *I wrote to you in my letter to have no association with fornicators*- Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians previously which has not been preserved. *Pornos*, "fornicators", doesn't really refer to a young unmarried couple who 'go too far', although that is also not spiritual behaviour. The word refers to prostitutes or those willfully pushing immoral behaviour; we might translate 'pornographers'. The man who had taken his father's wife was therefore involved in a far wider scene of immorality. In 1 Cor. 5:9-13 Paul says that he doesn't intend the converts "to get out of the world" but rather to mix with the greedy, robbers and idolaters who are in the world. We know from later in this epistle that Christians in Corinth were free to use the pagan meat markets, and to accept invitations for meals in pagan homes. The Corinthians seemed to think that because they were self-consciously separate from the world, therefore it didn't matter how they lived within the community. It seems they had misunderstood Paul's previous letter about separation from sinful people as meaning they must be separate from the world. But Paul is saying that no, one must mix with the world, but separate from sin within our own lives. However, by the end of the 1st century, 'going out of the world' became the main preoccupation with some Christians, even though they themselves often developed low moral standards as a result of this. It was these ascetic groups who so over analysed some aspects of doctrine- for they had nothing better to do with their time- that they ended up with false doctrine. They converted only from within their groups, so the world was not witnessed to, the fire of love and compassion for humanity that was the hallmark of true Christianity was lost, and thus by the 2nd century the Truth both doctrinally and in practice had been lost.

5:10 *I did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters. For you must go out of the world to do this*- The Lord likewise mixed with sinful people and shared His table with them in order to bring them to Himself. He came *into* the world rather than going out of it to live on a mountain top. But this does not mean that within the community of Christ we can act just as the world does. It would seem that the Corinthians had misunderstood Paul's teaching; they were reasoning that they should not mix with unbelieving fornicators, but such fornication was therefore acceptable within the Christian community, and they were boasting about it. Nearly all misinterpretation is not simply a case of intellectual failure; there is a moral, psychological drive behind it, however subconscious. Later in this letter we will read of the Corinthians not believing in the

resurrection, getting drunk at the breaking of bread, even using prostitutes within their church services. This was hardly misinterpretation, but rather a desire to justify unspiritual behaviour. And I suggest that all of the classic 'false doctrines' likewise have a subconscious element driving them- the parade example would be the refusal to accept the Lord Jesus had human nature. For that demands so much practically from we who share that same nature.

*5:11 I wrote to you not to keep association, if anyone that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. With such a one have no association, not even to eat-* When Peter baptized thousands of people as recorded in Acts, there is no indication that he as it were screened them for morality. Likewise the 'baptismal interview' of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 focused upon his faith in Christ rather than his personal morality. The spirit of grace which there is in Jesus leads us towards a tolerance of others, in order to patiently lead them towards repentance. The Lord Himself broke His bread with serious sinners- and was criticized for eating with them, seeing that 'eating' with someone was freighted with huge spiritual significance in 1st Century society. The apparent command here not to eat with sinners would appear at variance with the Lord's teaching and example, almost purposefully so. Paul writes here in the context of the breaking of bread (5:8), and in chapter 11, he criticizes the Corinthians for being drunk at the breaking of bread. We know from Rev. 2:20 that there was a female false teacher in at least one ecclesia, who was teaching Christ's brothers to engage in fornication and idol worship. Bearing this in mind, let's observe that the format of the breaking of bread service was in outline terms similar to the 'symposia' of the trade guilds and religious club gatherings of Corinth; a group of likeminded people sat down to a meal, heard an address from a member of their guild or religion about what was of common interest to them all, and then drank wine to the relevant gods. These meetings, however, were characterized by the presence of male and female prostitutes, drunkenness was common, and the commonality provided by the trade guild or religion was really an excuse for an evening of debauchery and idol worship. It would appear that there was a tendency in Corinth for the breaking of bread meeting to be turned into just such an event, featuring drunkenness and idolatry. The word used here in 1 Cor. 5:11 for "fornicator" is  *pornos*, which specifically carries the meaning of a male prostitute- exactly the kind of person to be found at the 'symposia'. The Greek words translated "covetous", "railer" and "extortioner" all carry the idea of someone given over to utter debauchery. Such behaviour would be commonly associated with the drunken sexual debauchery which the symposia could turn into. It seems that the church at Corinth, and perhaps elsewhere, was slipping into this kind of behaviour at the breaking of bread. Paul condemns it in the strongest terms. He's saying that if any brother is acting as a ' pornos', a male prostitute, a facilitator and thereby teacher and encourager of this kind of behaviour, he is not to be eaten with. The Greek construction is rather strange: "Any man that is called a brother... with such an one, no not to eat". The grammar could suggest that one specific individual is being spoken about- 'That person who calls himself a brother, yes, that's right, with that one, don't even eat'. And the earlier context of chapter 5 makes it quite clear who that person was- the individual who had taken his father's wife, whom Paul had just commanded they separate from (:5) during those times when they were "gathered together" at the breaking of bread meeting (:4). This individual was involved in leading the breaking of bread meeting into gross sexual misbehaviour, alcohol abuse and debauchery. Such a person should not be eaten with, he shouldn't be allowed at that meeting as he clearly had an unspeakably awful agenda. Read this way, this verse doesn't mean we shouldn't break bread with someone who e.g. struggles with an alcohol problem or who is at times "covetous". The question of whether or not such a person has repented is very difficult to decide. But we don't need to struggle with those questions, because this verse doesn't demand that of us. It asks the

Corinthians to exclude an individual with the awful, publically advertised, wilfully perverted agenda described above, and we likewise of course should do the same. In our age any church comprised of new converts will have its share of immorally living folks; the question is whether this immorality is being paraded and gloried in, by them and others.

*5:12 For what have I to do with judging those that are without? Do you not judge those that are within?*- They were already judging those within by having adopted a position on the individual in question. They were being asked to reassess that judgment. But bear in mind that judging can mean either to condemn, or to have *an opinion*. By not judging in the sense of condemning, pre-judging the Lord's final judgment, this doesn't mean that we have no moral position on anything.

*5:13 But them that are without God judges. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves*- As noted on :6, their "wickedness" is described with the same word as used for the "wicked man". They were in essence no better, and the command to remove him was not so much for his sake as for other reasons (2 Cor. 7:12). It was not that wicked people must be removed from the church; for as noted on :6, they too were "wicked". There was a wider agenda here, as noted throughout this chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbour, go to law before the unrighteous and not rather take it before the saints?*- It is likely that this issue is related to that discussed in chapter 5 about the immoral man. That chapter concluded with an appeal to judge those within the church, and this theme continues here. I noted throughout chapter 5 that the case of the immoral man was not simply a case of removing a sinner from the church; 2 Cor. 7:12 is clear about that. The issue was wider and more nuanced than that. It could be that the immoral man had even taken his father to court in order to take his wife from him; for Paul later writes about an individual who "suffered wrong" in the matter, who would surely refer to the man who had had his wife taken from him.

6:2 *Or do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you-* They were therefore "the saints", for this is paralleled with them 'judging angels' in the future age (:3). Paul shows that in terms of salvation, he sees no difference between the Corinthians and himself, despite their deep moral failings and spiritual misunderstandings. Once someone was in Christ, Paul accepted them as redeemed and in prospect saved. He assumed their final salvation- and this is a huge challenge to us, with all our frustrations at the moral and doctrinal delinquency of others in the church. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world" is referring back to Mt. 19:28, which promises all those who have followed Christ that they will sit on thrones of judgment. That this promise was not just to the disciples is evident from Lk. 22:30; 1:33 cp. Rev. 3:21. It's as if Paul is saying: 'Now come on, you ought to know this, it's in the Gospels'. He expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ.

*Are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*- Paul often seems to quote snippets from the Corinthians' statements or even perhaps their correspondence. It seems they were arguing that they were not qualified to judge the moral behaviour of their brethren, and therefore they tolerated the situation which had developed, and even applauded it in the name of liberality.

6:3- see on Heb. 11:7.

*Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*- We have to assume our brethren will be in the Kingdom. Paul did this even with Corinth; he wrote of how "we shall judge angels" when we are all accepted in the Kingdom. And his way of writing to the Thessalonians about the resurrection and judgment assumes that all of his readers would be accepted ("so shall we ever be with the Lord... ye are *all* the children of light"). We too can do nothing else but see each other like that. The impact of this is colossal. We'd rather shy away from it. But meditate awhile upon it.

The Angels could refer to literal Angels who existed and sinned during some previous creation, but who will only be finally judged and destroyed when death itself is destroyed totally at the Lord's return. "The Angels which kept not their first estate... He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day" (Jude 6)- clearly the judgement at the second coming. See on Jude 6; Heb. 9:23; Lk. 11:32.

Or the 'Angels' in view may simply be messengers or local representatives of the nations, whom we shall 'judge' at the time of the Kingdom's establishment. Under the Law, there was a referral system up to Moses, smaller cases being dealt with by the 70 elders and family heads. These 'elohim' must surely point forward to us, the King-priests of the future age. "We shall judge angels" may refer to each believer being in the position to pass judgment on a messenger or representative of, e.g., a town or village. This mention of angel-messengers implies that we will be geographically located in one place in a region, to where cases must be brought by a messenger.

Judging Angels doesn't have to mean that we will condemn them. We are to "judge" our brethren, not in condemning them but in discerning between them, in the same way as we will "judge Angels" in the future. Then, we will not condemn them, but perceive / discern the differences between them.

*How much more, things that pertain to this life?*- The Greek word only occurs in Lk. 21:34 about how the rejected at the last day have been obsessed with "the cares of this life".

*6:4 If then you have to judge things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are of no account in the church*- Literally, seat them down in the judgment throne. The Greek for "no account" has been used in 1 Cor. 1:28 to describe how the Lord uses "things which are despised", in the total inversion of values which we see in the operation of the Spirit. Paul was thought by the Corinthians to be "of no account" (s.w. 2 Cor. 10:10). Here, Paul may therefore even have himself in view; he would be asking them to accept his judgment, which he offered to them concerning the immoral man in chapter 5.

It was usual for the head of the household to automatically be the leader of the religion which his household practised. But for the true Christians, this was not necessarily so to be; for the Lord had taught that it was the servant who was to lead, and here the least esteemed in the ecclesia were to judge matters. Elders of the household fellowships had to be chosen on the basis of their spiritual qualification, Paul taught. The radical nature of these teachings is so easily lost on us.

*6:5 I say this to move you to shame*- See on 4:14.

*What! Is there not among you even one wise man who shall be able to decide between his brothers?*- This is a reference back to 1 Cor. 1:19,20,25-27. The gift of wisdom was given to those "not esteemed" (1:28). Paul laments that despite having been given the Spirit, they were not spiritual (3:1) and therefore lacked wisdom. Paul had the Spirit, and he judged the situation about the immoral brother in chapter 5. But here he laments that there seems not one who has made use of the gift of spiritual wisdom. Christ had been made wisdom to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:30), but there was not a wise man amongst them. Just as they had been richly blessed with the Spirit, according to chapter 1, but were not spiritual (3:1). The Greek translated "decide" is used again in 1 Cor. 11:29 about not discerning the Lord's body, which is His church.

*6:6 But as it is with you at the moment, brother goes to law with brother- and that before unbelievers!*- In terms of 1 Cor. 1, they had turned to worldly wisdom and judgment rather than using the wisdom and judgment given by the Spirit. 'Going to law' translates *krino*; in :5 Paul lamented that they were not 'deciding' between their brothers, using *diakrino*. The same

distinction is found in 1 Cor. 11:31- if we would *diakrino* ["judge"] ourselves, we will not be judged [*krino*] in the sense of condemned. It is the Spirit which enables us to *diakrino* (s.w. 1 Cor. 14:29). But the Corinthians refused to make use of that gift.

6:7 *No, already there is totally a defect in you, that you have lawsuits with one another-* There was a 'lack', a deficit- of the Spirit. For despite having been given the Spirit, they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1).

*Why not rather take wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*- 2 Cor. 7:12 speaks of "he that suffered wrong", presumably the father of the immoral brother, whose wife had been taken from him. But it would appear that the father had launched legal action against his son for going off with his wife. "Defrauded" is used in a sexual sense (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thess. 4:6). The man is here being encouraged not to seek legal redress over the matter; and we note that Paul accuses them all of defrauding their brethren, as if they too were guilty of gross sexual misbehaviour. In the same way, he argued in chapter 5 that they had the same leaven within them which was as it were within the immoral brother.

Paul taught his hopeless Corinthians that they ought not to be taking each other to court in the world, but rather should get brethren to settle disputes between brethren. But then he offers the higher level: don't even do this, but "rather take wrong... rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded". This kind of concession to a lower level is something we will find throughout chapter 7.

6:8 *No, but you yourselves do wrong and defraud- and that your brothers-* As noted on :7, 'defraud' is used in a sexual context in 7:5 and 1 Thess. 4:6. The defrauded were defrauding- they had not allowed the Spirit of grace to break that endless cycle of bad behaviour in response to bad behaviour. The defrauding of brothers was in the form of taking brothers to law (:6).

6:9 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*- If they really believed that, they would not have searched for human justice and retribution. They 'knew' these things but not on the level of deep faith and relationship. Paul's reasoning about not going to law against those whom we consider to be in the wrong is based upon his reasoning that there will be a future judgment, and thieves, covetous persons, extortioners etc.- the very ones we might be tempted to take to law- will not inherit the Kingdom. If we take these types to law, Paul reasons, it's as if we don't know this basic first principle- that they will not be in the Kingdom. And this is surely judgment enough. They don't need our judgment now. Rather should we receive motivation to preach to others from the thought of judgment to come. He uses the "know ye not?" rubric several times in his writings (e.g. 6:19 in this context) to point the new converts back to the implications of the basic doctrines they had recently converted to. If we believe that there will be a righteous judgment, and those responsible who have sinned will suffer the awful experience of rejection... then why seek to judge them yourself, in this life? Why worry about the prosperity of the wicked within the ecclesia if you really believe that the wicked will not be in the Kingdom? That is such an awful thing that one need not worry about trying to judge them ourselves in this life. Take comfort in the fact that judgment is coming... that's Paul's message, built as it is on the implications of basic doctrines.



*Be not deceived-* Neither by their own internal reasoning, nor by false teachers who were claiming that sexual immorality was acceptable and even a condition for entering the Kingdom of God. Hence the emphasis may be that the unrighteous shall *not* inherit the Kingdom, as compared to the claim that they would certainly inherit the Kingdom.

*Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men-* Paul lists sins which will exclude from God's Kingdom; he focuses here on sexual sins, and some of the words he uses could imply prostitution. Clearly these were ongoing problems amongst the Corinthian Christians. They came from a background in which prostitution and sexual immorality were justified as part of religious services, and it is clear that they had imported such practices into the church. It is evident that he does not mean those who have committed one act of theft or adultery would be condemned at the last day (for this would, e.g., exclude David from God's Kingdom). He is evidently referring to those who continue in this way of life, justifying it as spiritually acceptable, and actually committing the prostitution rather than using it. And this was the problem at Corinth. The church is in embryo the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13), and therefore what will evidently be excluded from God's future political Kingdom must be excluded from the church now.

*6:10 Nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God-* Along with the likes of prostitutes, we find greedy and slanderers listed. This continues the approach taken to the immoral man of chapter 5; Paul there made the point that the leaven in that man was within them all. It's possible that the theft, greed, drunkenness, slander and extortion are all specifically relevant to the case of the immoral brother, who it seems was in court with his father. The whole question was it seems far more nuanced than a man simply and solely having an illicit relationship with a married woman. It could be that the reference to drunkenness refers to some particular abuse of alcohol within the church, just as the reference to prostitution apparently does in :9. Abuse of alcohol was common in religious ritual, and it seems it had been imported into the Christian church at Corinth- hence the rebuke regarding abuse of alcohol at the time of the breaking of bread meeting in chapter 11. However it is possible that Paul does have in view 'just' alcoholism. But does this mean that no alcoholic who can't quit will be there? No. On what basis, then, will they be there? Because they are repentant. They have a state of mind that turns back time and again from what they have done. It's easy to point the finger at alcoholics. Theirs is a sin that is open and goes before them to judgment. But we are all, sadly, habitual sinners. We sin, repent, and do the same again.

The language of not inheriting the Kingdom alludes to how Israel in the wilderness were unable to enter the promised land. Their behaviours in the wilderness matched those of the Corinthian Christians, and Paul will develop this point in chapter 10.

*6:11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God-* References to washing, the name, Jesus, the Spirit, God... all inevitably make this an allusion to our baptism into the Name, thus connecting us with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because they had been justified, counted as sinless due to their baptism into Christ, therefore they should:

- a) recognize their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit, and therefore to glorify God in spirit and body
- b) realize that they are not their own, to live their lives just as they wish

c) act as if they are indeed joined to Christ

d) let the power of Christ's resurrection and new life work in them

Clearly enough, the Corinthians were *still* fornicating and getting drunk. Yet, Paul says that this is how they used to be. Evidently he means that they have changed status- and they should live that out in practice. But Paul delves deeper into the psychology of sin's self-justification. They were saying that "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (:13). In other words, we have basic human desires and there are ways to satisfy them. Paul's response is basically that if we are in Christ, then we have vowed to put to death those desires, and to fulfil them is to act as if they are still alive and well. Further, in baptism we are counted to have died to them; and we seek to live the new life, empowered by the resurrection life which is now in the Lord, whose body we belong to. The comfort and challenge comes to Christian alcoholics today: You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified, counted as righteous. Think back to your baptism. That's what happened then. Now, try to live out that life. Act, or at least try to act, how God perceives you. The alcoholic needs to remember, as the Romans also needed to, the colossal significance of the fact they have been baptized. They have a responsibility and also tremendous, boundless possibility because of this. Remind them of it. Leave some photos or reminders of their early days in the Lord around the house. Talk about it...

Paul writes here about believers being sanctified and justified, in that order, and by so doing he reflects his absorption of how his Lord had referred to the Father as firstly sanctified and then justified in Jn. 17:11,25?

Isaiah 30:1 condemns the Jews for seeking forgiveness their own way rather than by the gift of God's Spirit: they "cover with a covering (atonement), but not of my Spirit, that they may add (rather than subtract) sin to sin". Is. 44:3 describes the latter day forgiveness of Israel in similar terms: "I will pour... floods upon the dry ground (spiritually barren- Is. 53:2): I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring". The blessing of Abraham's seed is in their forgiveness through Christ (Acts 3:25,26)- which is here paralleled with the pouring out of the Spirit upon the Jews. This is clearly the language of Joel 2 and Acts 2. Gal. 3:14 puts all this in so many words: "That the blessing of Abraham (forgiveness) might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit". Thus 1 Cor. 6:11 speaks of being washed from our sins "by the spirit of our God". There is a parallelism in Romans between us receiving "grace... the atonement... the Spirit" (Rom. 1:5; 5:11; 8:15), showing the connection between the gift ("grace") of the Spirit and the forgiveness which leads to the atonement. It is hard to overstate how much the New Testament builds on the language and concepts of the Old Testament, especially in view of the large primarily Jewish readership the epistles would have had. Time and again in the Pentateuch and Joshua God promises to give the land to His people- "the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it" is a common phrase. The counterpart of the land under the new covenant is salvation; that is therefore the gift of God now in prospect, with its associated forgiveness of sins.

6:12 *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient*- Perhaps Paul is quoting a phrase used by the Corinthians- "all things are lawful for me". He runs with the idea, but shows that this is not the complete picture. "Expedient" is a favourite word of Paul's in the Corinthian correspondence. The idea is always of what is best for others or in the context of salvation (1 Cor. 7:35; 10:23,33; 12:7; 2 Cor. 8:10; 12:1). Paul will use the same phrase in 1 Cor. 10:23, in the context of not eating food offered idols. It was lawful, but it didn't 'gather together for advantage' (Gk.). The Corinthians lacked the Spirit and were therefore selfish,

thinking of what felt good for them, rather than seeing their own actions and decisions within the wider context of what is good for others in the perspective of attaining the Kingdom, both for them and us as individuals. Again we have a principle which affects so many of the challenges we face today. Whether or not something is admissible within our own consciences is not the complete picture.

*All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any-* This is a valid observation in the context of addictions, or permitting oneself things which may later lead to enslavement. Paul would not be brought under the *exousia* of any policy, dogma, political requirement or agreement- exactly because he was under the sole *exousia* of the Lord Jesus. His Lordship becomes the practical answer to so many quandries regarding which course to follow. We are under His authority or power, the power of the Spirit which we received at baptism. This must be the deciding issue rather than the power of group think, acting as others do, even within a church. Being under the Lord's *exousia* is in fact a call to radical individuality and perception in practice of the true meaning and value of the human person.

6:13 *Food for the belly and the belly for food, but God shall bring to nothing both it and them-* Again this seems to be a quotation from the Corinthian philosophy: "Food for the belly and the belly for food". Human behaviour was seen as simply fulfilling the quite legitimate needs of the body; if the body demanded sex or over eating or drinking, then [so they reasoned] it was legitimate and natural to permit this. But the case of the sexually immoral man who took his father's wife surely demonstrates for all time where this approach leads, when taken to its ultimate term. Again, the Corinthians were going wrong [as many do today] because they left the Spirit out of account, and acted as if there was no 'spiritual' aspect to life. The chasmic difference and tension between flesh and spirit is a major theme with Paul. The flesh with its passions is doomed to destruction, being 'brought to nothing' in human death and at the last day.

*But the body is not for fornication-* If the Spirit of God has possessed us, then our whole being, our bodies included, are for Him. The Corinthians had been given this Spirit, as explained in chapter 1; but they denied its power, and were in practice not spiritual (3:1). Therefore it is not for us to justify the usage of even our bodies for ourselves. The idea of our bodies belonging not to us but to our Lord / Master is lifted directly from the language of slavery. A slave was bought, and therefore every part of him or her belonged to their master, including their very bodies. Given the prevalence of slaves amongst the early Christian population, this was both a liberating and challenging idea. And it is no less radical or those whose souls are effectively bought by employers, the minimum wage culture or oppressive social and family structures.

*But for the Lord-* The message and demand of Christ in moral terms would have stood out starkly and attractively, despite all the first century objections to Christianity; and so it should be with us, living in identical circumstances. In the Graeco-Roman world, sexual immorality was just the done thing. The feeling was that the body is essentially evil, therefore what was done with the body wasn't that great a deal. The call of the Gospel was that the body is for the Lord- something totally unheard of. And Paul places sexual sins at the beginning of his list of works of the flesh in Gal. 5, labouring the point to the Corinthians that sin involving the body was in fact especially bad. This was radical stuff in a culture where prostitution and

sexual immorality were seen as an almost necessary part of religion. Yet the Christian teaching of chastity was actually attractive to people precisely because of its radical difference. And yet we can be sure that this was also a barrier to the general mass of humanity at the time. This is just one of many examples where Christianity consciously broke through deeply held boundaries and worldviews. The self-consciousness of how the Gospel did this was bound to make it obnoxious to the majority.

*And the Lord for the body-* It makes an interesting study to analyze the areas of Paul's writing where he makes most intense use of the title "Lord" for Jesus. One such passage is in 1 Cor. 6:13- 7:40, where Paul addresses issues relating to sexual self-control. Here the density of usage of the title "Lord" is higher than anywhere else in his writings. And he wasn't merely playing with words- the idea clearly is that the Lordship of Jesus is to have a gripping practical effect upon our lives.

6:14 *And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up also through His power-* The Lord's resurrection is ours. The presence of His Spirit / power within us now is the guarantee that we shall be resurrected like Him. What happened to His body shall happen to ours. The resurrection of the body is thus clearly held to be the basis of the Christian hope (and not any idea of the redemption of an immortal soul). All this is the concept of baptism which has just been alluded to in :11. As in writing to the Romans, Paul seeks to remind them of the implications of their baptisms. To share a resurrection like His required them to have His Spirit actively within them. For the Lord's resurrection becomes ours, and His resurrection to eternal life was predicated on the fact He had the Spirit; he was "justified in the Spirit" (1 Tim. 3:16), raised according to His Spirit of holiness, His holy spirit (Rom. 1:4). Rom. 8:11 is explicit: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you".

6:15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?-* We noted on :11 and :14 that baptism is in view here; for we are baptized into the mystical body of Christ. Paul in Rom. 6:13,19 likewise warns against the misuse of our "members" in immorality; because we are baptized into Christ, our members are His and not our own. In chapter 12 Paul will explain that our membership of the Lord's body calls us to practical service within that body- rather than using our members for our own gratification.

Therefore, Paul says, smashing through all Corinth's rationalizations of their sin, "know you not" (isn't it obvious to you?) that we should not become one body with a prostitute. This isn't just because *we* belong to the body of Christ and manifest Him; it is also because we are representative of us all who are in that body, and we wouldn't wish to bring His body, i.e. all the other believers, into such an inappropriate position. What you do, we all do. And the Lord Jesus has delegated His reputation in the eyes of this world to us, who are His body to them. The wonder of being baptized into His Name, entering the body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:14 matches our resurrection with that of the Lord) means that like our early brethren, we will rejoice to suffer shame for the sake of carrying that Name (Mt. 10:24,25). It will be "enough" for us that we know something of our Lord's sufferings. The more we reflectively read the Gospels, the more we will know the nature and extent of His sufferings, and the more we will see in our own something of His.

Pause for a moment to reflect that the Lord's resurrection is a pattern for our own. This is the

whole meaning of baptism. “God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power” (1 Cor. 6:13,14). Yet there were evident continuities between the Jesus who lived mortal life, and the Jesus who rose again. His mannerisms, body language, turns of phrase, were so human- even after His resurrection. And so who we are now, as persons, is who we will eternally be. Because of the resurrection, our personalities in the sum of all their relationships and nuances, *have an eternal future*. But from whence do we acquire those nuances, body languages, etc? They arise partly from our parents, from our inter-relations with others etc; we are the sum of our relationships. And this is in fact a tremendous encouragement to us in our efforts for others; for the result of our parenting, our patient effort and grace towards others, will have an eternal effect upon others. Who we help them become is, in part, who they will eternally be. Job reflected that if a tree is cut down, it sprouts (Heb. *yaliph*) again as the same tree; and he believed that after his death he would likewise sprout again (*yaliph*) at the resurrection (Job 14:7-9,14,15). There will be a continuity between who we were in mortal life, and who we will eternally be- just as there is between the pruned tree and the new tree which grows again out of its stump.

Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't willfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). The Ethiopian eunuch read of his representative Saviour as also being childless, and being as he was, in the midst of a wilderness; and realizing this, he desired to be baptized into Him. Grasping the representational nature of the Lord's death inspires response in baptism, and yet the motivational power of this fact continues afterwards.

*Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid-* We need to read this carefully. Paul is not accusing them of simply using prostitutes. He is saying that they were the body members of Christ [by baptism], but they were acting as the body members of a prostitute. They are therefore accused not of *using* prostitutes, but *being* prostitutes. And this connects with our earlier thoughts in this chapter, that the cult of prostitution as practiced in the surrounding religions had been imported into the church at Corinth. They had 'taken' parts of Christ's body and used them in that way; the suggestion is surely that they had appointed some of their number to be ecclesial prostitutes. And this was likely what was going on at the breaking of bread. For this reason I have some sympathy with the reading of the sexual sins in :11 as specifically referring to prostitution of various kinds. Paul was not going to 'take' Christ's body parts, the believers, and use them as the body parts of a prostitute. Perhaps he had been invited to do so and was turning it down. It could be that Paul has in view a symbolic prostitute such as 'Babylon' but the context here is surely of literal sexual misbehaviour.

6:16 *Or do you not know that he that is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For the scripture says: The two shall become one flesh-* The implication of this reasoning is that the Genesis command that the two shall become one has a specific reference to the sexual act. And this was designed as part of the way God fuses man and woman together within the marriage context. By using the sexual act the Corinthians were declaring that they were married to the prostitute they were using. Seeing their bodies belonged to Christ and were indwelt by His Spirit, they were therefore joining Christ to that prostitute. But the Corinthians didn't sense this indwelling of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit, and so they were unaware of the enormity of the implications of how they were using what was effectively *His* body.

6:17- see on Acts 18:18.

*But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit-* The act of intercourse makes husband and wife "one flesh". In the same way as there is "one *body*... one *flesh*" at this point, so "he that is joined unto the Lord is one *spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:16,17). Highlight, or underline, those phrases "one body" and "one flesh" in v.16, and also "one spirit" in v.17. Don't miss the point. We must "stand fast in *one spirit*, with one mind striving together..." (Phil. 1:27). We are to be one spirit with the Lord, as a man is one body and spirit with his wife (1 Cor. 6:16,17). But that same intense union is to be seen within the ecclesia. We become one spirit with the Lord Jesus by baptism (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13); thus what we feel deep inside us in our spirit, in the spirit-man created within us, is automatically, instantly the feeling of the Lord Jesus. And because He is one with the Father in Spirit, He can therefore relay our spirit to Him. Rom. 8 is teaching that this is really what prayer is all about, and what we request verbally, not knowing what to pray for as we ought, is not really the essence of prayer. Yet the Corinthians were denying the operation of the Spirit, and therefore they failed to feel their personal relationship and connection with the Lord Jesus; and this led to them using their bodies in sinful connections with prostitutes. They failed to realize what Paul will now make explicit in this chapter- that possession of the Lord's spirit means we, our bodies, are His and not our own to use as we please. That principle goes far beyond sexual issues.

6:18 *Flee fornication-* Surely an allusion to Joseph literally fleeing from sexual temptation.

*Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he that commits fornication sins against his own body-* Whilst Paul does have in mind the use of the physical body, we must bear in mind that "the body" in Corinthians is usually used by Paul in the sense of the body of Christ. We also must answer the question as to how sexual sin is a sin against our own body. Sin is surely against God and against persons, rather than against the sack of water, calcium and complex chemicals which forms the human body. The Greek *eis* translated "against" is a very common word in the Greek New Testament, and usually carries the sense of "in" or "within". Within our bodies And the context of 1 Cor. 6 is about how our individual behaviour affects the body of Christ as a whole. Sin is sin not only because it is a technical infringement of Divine law, but because of what it does to others in practice. Sexual sin in particular rarely simply affects two persons. If a sister commits adultery in an ecclesia with a brother, there are many other parties affected, and ecclesias so often divide as the members take sides as to how to deal with the issue, and in their foolish human efforts to apportion blame- "She was more responsible... he was easily led... but her husband is abusive, you can understand how it happened... he has baptized kids and young grandchildren, you can't disfellowship him". The context of Corinthians is warning against turning the breaking of bread meeting into the kind

of *symposium* common in Corinthian society, whereby a group of equals met together to hear a speech of common interest to them, relating to their trade guild or religion, and it turned into a time of drunken revellry and use was made of prostitutes. The command therefore to "flee fornication (Gk. *porneia*) (:18) doesn't so much speak of going too far with your girlfriend (which is wrong but for other reasons), but is a warning against the systematic immorality (*porneia*) of using prostitutes. See on 5:11. Paul is arguing that what's wrong with this is that it's a sin against the body of Christ, against many others within the body, and thus against Christ personally, whose body we are part of and individually representative of. This would explain why he writes of "your ['you' plural] body" (:19).

6:19 *Or do you not know*- Paul says this several times. He is asking them to review their spiritual potential and use it. Chapter 1 opened with the encouragement that they had richly received the Spirit; but 3:1 then explains that they were not spiritual. Paul is asking them to live up to the huge spiritual potential and possibility which comes with being baptized into Christ.

*That your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you which you have from God*- They were unaware that the Spirit was within them- and their behaviour reflected that. 1 Cor. 1 tells them that through being baptized into Christ, they have been given the Spirit; but 3:1 is clear that they were spirit-less. Paul asks them to be aware that because they have been redeemed, bought as the property and slaves of the Lord Jesus, He has filled them with His Spirit so that they might be wholly His. But they had to allow that process and to as it were buy in to it. The Spirit dwelt amongst Old Testament Israel in the wilderness, but they grieved the Spirit of God and were unresponsive to it.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the community of believers as it earlier dwelt in the tabernacle and temple in the form of an Angel and the shekinah glory. The "price" paid for "you" [plural] refers to the redemption of the body of believers by the blood of Christ (:20). By baptism into the body of Christ (which Paul emphasizes in 12:13, where again he speaks of how in body and spirit we are made one with the Lord by baptism) we are His body, and to lock Him into intercourse with a temple prostitute is therefore a statement to the world about Him personally (:15). Note how in :13 "for the Lord... the Lord for the body" is a poor translation in that "for" has been provided by the translators in a failed attempt to make better sense of the blunt original- "the body... [is] the Lord [Jesus]- the Lord [is] the body". The implications of baptism into His body are major indeed. He is us and we are Him. Whilst the word 'baptism' isn't found here in chapter 6, the idea is clearly alluded to in 6:11. Therefore just as surely as He was raised up, so will we be (:14). Sin therefore has implications for Christ personally, and for the wider body of Christ. We sin in [*eis*] our own body, which is the body of Christ. Therefore even if something is considered "lawful" by us personally, this doesn't mean we can therefore do it- because it has effects upon others (:12). And this is exactly the reasoning Paul uses later in his reasoning about the question of meats offered to idols. Paul has said the same about himself earlier in 4:4, where he comments that he has a good conscience, he knows nothing against himself, but this doesn't make him thereby acceptable to God. To some extent, the conscience of others must be factored into our own personal conscience. We will only find the strength and motivation to do so by appreciating that we are together with them in the same one body.

*And you are not your own*- To willingly describe oneself as a slave of Christ was totally against the grain of first century social norms- for to be a slave in any form took away a person's credibility and value. And yet Paul especially in the context of describing his

witness, speaks of himself as a slave of Jesus. He urges the converts to see themselves as "not your own" because they have been bought as slaves by the blood of the cross (1 Cor. 6:19,20). People were trained to take their place amongst fixed categories within society- the whole idea of transformation, of taking ones' place amidst the ecclesia of Christ, of being a saint, a called-out one, of being made free from how others' see us... was all so radical that even those who converted to Christianity likely never grasped the full extent of the ideas.

Slaves in the first century were seen as mere bodies owned by their masters or mistresses. Hence Rev. 18:13 describes slaves as *somata*, bodies. They were seen as both the economic and sexual property of those who owned them. It seems Paul had this in mind when he spoke of how we have one master, Christ, and our bodies are indeed not our own- but they are His, to be used according to His wishes. For many slaves, this would've meant running the risk of death or flogging. And yet despite this radical demand, Christianity spread rapidly amongst the huge slave population of the first century world.

The importance (the *eternal* importance) which attaches to our attitude to materialism is certainly stressed. All that we have is not our own. It's not '*my* money', it's not '*your* car', it's not even '*my* toe' which *you* accidentally trod on. Yet we all cling on to what little we have; we get offended and upset if we 'lose' it, or if we feel it is demanded of us. But not only is our material possession not 'ours'; "*ye* are not *your* own. For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). This is said in the context of warning against abuse of our sexuality; it's not *our* body, so follow God's teaching concerning it. We ourselves, the very essential me, and you, have been bought with the blood of the Lord Jesus. If I don't own even myself, I certainly don't own anything material. *Now*, I am not my own. I am a slave, bought by the Lord Jesus. The fact He is Lord of *all* means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God? Will a man...?* We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'. See on Lk. 16:12.

6:20- see on Mt. 13:46.

*For you were bought with a price. Glorify God therefore in your body and spirit, for they are God's-* In the slave-master analogy, the Lord had bought them with His blood. They were therefore completely His, even their very bodies, and His Spirit was potentially within them. But they had to allow the action of the Spirit within their spirit; and use their bodies and minds appropriately.



## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote-* I have to say in preface to this section that what follows is how I understand this passage in all intellectual and expository honesty. I as a married man can make no pretension to being able to live up to the high standard which Paul seems to be suggesting. As with much in this commentary, I offer the following exposition more to stimulate Bible-minded and prayerful meditation, rather than as a prescriptive statement of how a believer must live.

Clearly the Corinthians had written to Paul; this explains why often in his reply he appears to quote terms and phrases from their correspondence. The Bible which we have bears the marks of the fact that it was written for a primary readership (as well as for us), and the language used is proof of that. Take a read through 1 Corinthians 7 to see what I mean. It is clear that Paul is answering some highly specific questions which the Corinthian believers had written to him. He begins his paragraphs: “*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me... now concerning virgins... now as touching things offered unto idols...*” (1 Cor. 7:1,25; 8:1). We can almost imagine him sitting there with their letter in front of him, answering the questions point by point. But we don’t know what their questions were, and this fact makes the interpretation of Paul’s words here difficult; although of course the study of them is beneficial to us. The fact is, some parts of the Bible which we have were written for its primary readership, and the language used reflects this (Dt. 3:9,11).

*It is good for a man not to touch a woman-* Paul's usage of the word "good" in this chapter must be understood as his clarification of what he means (:8,26). We marvel at how this group of believers on one hand were involved with serious sexual immorality, the use of prostitutes within the church (chapter 6) and boasting that one of them had taken his father's wife (chapter 5), and collectively they warranted the charge that they were lacking in the Spirit, unspiritual (3:1); and yet on the other hand, they were discussing issues such as remaining single for the sake of Christ, or married couples abstaining from sex in order to fast and pray. Perhaps there was a very wide range of spirituality within the church; and thereby we have a huge challenge to the exclusive mindset which many churches have operated, whereby the less spiritual or unspiritual or moral failures are excluded from the congregation. But it may equally be that we find here a reflection of the terrible duality which there is within religious people; extremes of spiritual devotion can beget extreme unspirituality and self-indulgence, justified by the idea that they have been so spiritual in other areas.

*7:2 But because there is so much immorality-* The Greek *porneia* refers to the use of prostitution, and in chapter 6 we saw that this sort of thing was going on within the Corinthian church. The context is not speaking about young couples 'going too far' and being advised to marry in order to avoid that temptation. Prostitution was common in religious practices in Corinth, and it seems likely there were some who wanted to justify practicing it in the church. An argument was being made that seeing human passions could be satisfied as much as physical desires for food (1 Cor. 6:13), the Christian should commit himself to the Lord's service as a single person, even breaking up marriage to do so, and use church prostitutes to satisfy sexual urges.

*Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband-* I suggest this not an appeal for single people to get married, but rather an encouragement to 'have' sexual relations with their *own* partners- rather than making use of the church prostitutes. This would be the force of the word "own". The next verses speak in this same context. I would doubt the reference is to getting married rather than being single because the majority of people in first century society were married. Singleness was not anywhere near as common as it is today, indeed New Testament Greek refers to either an underage girl, or a married woman. If my approach is correct, then we would need to note that women were also tempted to use male prostitutes in the church, and this would explain the usage of words relating to male prostitution in chapter 6.

*7:3 Let the husband render to the wife her due and likewise also the wife to the husband-* As explained on :2, the problem in view appears to be the usage of religious prostitutes within a religious, Christian context. Paul is saying that sex should be confined to marriage, and both partners should accept this. Sex is a "due", a debt which is intrinsic to the marital agreement; and it should not be avoided on the basis of using prostitutes in the name of religious devotion.

*7:4 The wife has no power over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise also the husband has no power over his own body, but the wife does-* The "power" is hard to interpret. The word really means 'authority' and is used rarely; but one of the other two usages is in 1 Cor. 6:12 where Paul says he will not be brought under the authority of any- perhaps, of anyone. It could be that some teachers in the church were claiming authority over others in these intimate matters. Or Paul may simply be pointing out that marriage is a surrendering of personal autonomy. It is a surrendering of the body to the partner. This kind of language is in fact appropriate to the sexual act itself, both physically and psychologically. Paul may therefore be saying that the sexual act is to be seen as a surrendering of autonomy to the authority of the partner- and that surrender is not to be made to a prostitute, nor to a religious leader, but solely to the marital partner.

7:5- see on Mt. 23:25; Rom. 5:12.

*Do not deprive one another, unless it is for an agreed time, so that you may give yourselves to prayer and then come together again-* "Deprive" is literally "defraud" and continues the metaphor of sex as debt which was introduced in :3. Paul says that sex might be foregone for an agreed period in order to enable total devotion to prayer and by implication, personal connection with the Lord Jesus. This is a very high standard to speak of. We must ask how long we spend each day in communion with the Lord Jesus, how many minutes we are in prayer for, and whether foregoing marital sex would enhance our prayer life. For many of us, the answer would have to be that such sexual 'fasting' would not enhance our contact with the Lord Jesus because we are just not on that spiritual level. But what is interesting is that Paul speaks of this high level of spiritual devotion in the same context as warning against the usage of prostitutes rather than marital partners, and has commented that the Corinthians were generally unspiritual (3:1) and lacking basic fruits of the Spirit. Perhaps Paul is here addressing a very spiritual minority within the church- in which case we are challenged by the way that they coexisted along with the less spiritual in the same church environment. Or it may be that there was a heady mix of the heights of spiritual devotion and the depths of moral failure which existed amongst the Corinthians. Such mixture would be typical of human nature and the kinds of juxtaposition and tension between flesh and spirit which we find

within ourselves and see constantly in others. The spiritually minded alcoholic, the sister with a heart of gold who has affairs... these are all so frequently encountered within church life.

There is an allusion to Mt. 17:21. Give yourselves to prayer and fasting with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle. Paul assumes that prayer will be such a major component in the lives of married believers that they may well choose to temporarily abstain from sexual relationships in order to find a greater intensity in prayer. This speaks of quite some emphasis on prayer; not just a few minutes at the end of each day saying often the same words.

*That Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control-* The temptation in view was that of desiring sexual expression, and that is a deeply internal process. The 'satan' or adversary would therefore refer to the lusts of the human mind. Paul speaks as if their lack of self-control is a given, it exists amongst them. He doesn't argue that they should have sexual marital relationships *in case* they might lack self-control and fall into sin. He states that they lack self-control- for they were lacking the Spirit (3:1). So we get the picture of believers who lacked self-control who were on the other hand very zealous to connect with the Lord Jesus in prayer and would even forego sex in order to focus upon their prayer life. This mixture of flesh and spirit is within each of us and within every church. But the lid is taken off here by Paul, we see the internal workings within the minds and church lives of the Corinthians- because in essence the same conflicts will be seen in all who have not totally surrendered to the ministry of the Spirit.

*7:6 But this I say by way of concession, not by commandment-* This must be linked with 1 Corinthians 7:12: "Now to the rest speak I, not the Lord (Jesus)". The implication is that verses 1-6 were not a repetition of Christ's direct teaching, neither were vv. 12 ff. But therefore we should read verses 7-11 as being 'the Lord Jesus speaking', i.e. Paul is repeating the spirit of Christ's teaching. The content of v. 7-11 concerns being single and not divorcing; it is significant that Paul says that what he said about marriage was him speaking "by permission" or concession, but what he says about singleness is from the Lord Jesus Himself. However, the translation "concession" is not helpful. The Greek word occurs only here, but it means literally 'common knowledge'; he may mean that he is sharing the implications of the Lord's direct teaching rather than His specific commandments- either in the Gospels, or as directly revealed by the Lord to Paul.

*7:7 Yet I would that all men were even as I myself-* The power of Paul's teaching about singleness is backed up by his personal situation. As a member of the Council who condemned Stephen, he would have had to be married. An unmarried Orthodox Jew would have been a contradiction in terms at that time. And yet he is evidently single in his Christian ministry. It seems fairly certain that his wife either died or left him at the time of his conversion, probably taking the children with her. If this is so, it gives extra poignancy to his comment that he had suffered the loss of all things for the sake of his conversion (Phil. 3:8). The chances are that he thought and wrote that with a difficult glance back to that Jerusalem girl, the toddlers he'd never seen again, the life and infinite possibilities of what might have been... And it gives another angle on his description of his converts as his children.

*However each man has his own gift from God, one after this manner and another after that-* Our life situation, married or unmarried, married to a reasonable or unreasonable person,

believer or unbeliever; or whether we are wired with stronger or weaker self-control... all these things are a gift from God, and should be seen in that way, rather than ever seeking to change our situation or wishing that somehow we were in another situation. The word "own" links back to the exhortation to have relationships with our "own" partner- and not prostitutes.

*7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows-* The "But I say" may mean that Paul is now sharing what has directly been revealed to him, whereas his other teaching is a reflection of the Lord's 'saying' or teaching as recorded in the Gospels. It would seem from the context of *porneia* and the problem of church usage of prostitutes that the sexual needs of the unmarried and widows were being met by prostitutes, and in this context Paul argues for marriage if they feel their sexual needs are beyond their self-control.

*It is good for them if they live as I do-* Adam alone was "not good". Adam and Eve together are described as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Paul seems to have this in mind when he says three times that "it is good" to be single (1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26). But what's the point of this paradox? Perhaps Paul's point is: 'In the old, natural creation, it wasn't good that a man should be alone. But now, in the new creation, it's good that a man does try to live a single life, because as Adam married Eve, so we are now married to Christ'. Or it may be that attention is being drawn to the fact that God's provision of Eve was the first of God's countless concessions to human need. It was God's intention, ideally, that Adam be single, therefore he was potentially "good" in his single state. But he couldn't handle it, therefore God made him a partner. And therefore Paul says that to live the single life is "good". But in the same way as God made a concession to Adam, so He does to believers now; "but if they cannot contain, let them marry". Whether we agree this makes marriage a concession to human need or not, the fact is that surely single believers should at least *consider* the single life. Likewise Paul's invitation to follow his example of being single in order to devote himself to his Lord must be taken as seriously as his other invitations to follow his example (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:33; 11:1). He knew that he was (in the words of Robert Roberts) "a Christ-appointed model"; the record of his life is framed to give the picture of the ideal believer.

According to :10, this verse 8 is part of Paul's repeating of the Lord's teaching about marriage. But where did He specifically speak about singleness? Surely it was when He spoke about men making themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom's sake (Mt. 19:12). The disciples' comment "It is not good to marry" is picked up by Paul when he says it is "good" to be single unto the Lord. The Lord's response to "It is not good to marry" was that "All men cannot receive this saying, saving they to whom it is given". The Lord Himself made concessions about marriage, and so Paul did the same.

The triple description of the single life as "good" (1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26) uses a Greek word which can mean 'beautiful'. Yet many a lonely, longing sister might not see anything 'beautiful' about her singleness; neither would she go along with 1 Corinthians 7:34, which says that the unmarried woman has the advantage that she can single-mindedly give herself to the things of the Lord Jesus. It may seem to her that she would serve the Lord much better if she were married. And probably so. This raises the possibility that by "the unmarried" Paul may not mean 'the single ones in the ecclesia'. He may be referring to those who had consciously decided to be single, but used the church prostitutes at times. Likewise "the widows" doesn't have to mean 'all those in the ecclesias who have lost partners'. It could mean those widows who had devoted themselves to the Lord Jesus rather than seeking

another partner, after the pattern of widows devoting themselves to the temple (cp. Lk. 2:37). The fact he recommends some younger widows to remarry (1 Tim. 5:14) is proof enough that "widows" doesn't mean 'all widows'. It may be that single and widowed brethren and sisters made open statements of their decision to devote themselves to the Lord Jesus, and so he would be using "unmarried and widows" as technical terms for those who were proclaiming celibacy to the Lord Jesus, and yet it seems were tempted to use the church prostitutes at times. 1 Tim. 5:9 suggests there was a specific "number" of widows in the Ephesus ecclesia who were financially supported by the ecclesia.

"Live as I do" translates a word which better means to remain or abide. This would connect with the teaching in :20 "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called".

*7:9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn-* There is a purposeful ambiguity in Paul's comment that it is better to marry than to burn due to unlawful passions (1 Cor. 7:9). Is he referring to the burning 'fire' of judgment (e.g. Mt. 13:40), or of burning in lust (cp. Rom. 1:27)? Surely he intends reference to both, in that burning in lust is effectively condemning yourself, kindling the fire of condemnation yourself. David burnt in lust, and was then smitten with a disease which he describes as his loins being filled with burning (Ps. 38:7 RV). Or consider the Jonah type. He was disobedient and left the presence of the Lord of his own volition, and was therefore cast forth from the ship to the dark waters- in this little type of judgment, he condemned himself. The rejected are told to depart, and yet in another sense they are cast away (Mt. 25:30,41). Sin is therefore its own judgment; in that sense, judgment is upon us right now, and "we make the answer now".

7:10- see on 1 Cor. 9:14; 15:10.

*But to the married I give this instruction; not I, but the Lord-* I take this to mean that Paul at this point is repeating the recorded teaching of the Lord Jesus, rather than sharing things separately revealed to him- he begins doing that at :12. We note his deep connection with the Lord Jesus and how saturated his thinking was by the Gospels; I have elsewhere listed all his allusions to the Gospel records, and in the whole Pauline corpus he is alluding to them at least once every three verses. But there is another option in interpretation here. Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 15:10 show Paul using the phrase "yet not I but..." to differentiate between his natural and spiritual self. Perhaps he does the same in the only other occurrence of the phrase here in 1 Cor. 7:10: "And unto the married I command, *yet not I* [the natural Paul], but the Lord [the man Christ Jesus in the spiritual Paul], Let not the wife depart from her husband". See on Acts 23:6.

*That the wife should not leave her husband-* The context so far has been of Paul warning the Corinthians against using church prostitutes and abandoning their marital partners under the guise of wanting to devote themselves completely to the Lord. We see here a window into how the flesh reasons- even marital breakup can be justified by the flesh as a path to greater spiritual service. "Leave" is the same word used by the Lord in teaching that man should not "put asunder" what God has joined together in marriage (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9). The context of those passages clearly places the 'putting asunder' in parallel with divorce.

*7:11 But should she depart-* This is a classic case of an ideal being stated, but a less than ideal situation being accepted. This theme is found throughout Corinthians, and it is hard for legalistic or literalistic minds to accept. Although God joins together man and wife, He allows His work to be undone in that He concedes to separation, even when there has been no

adultery (1 Cor. 7:11). Prov. 21:9; 25:24 almost seem to encourage it, by saying that it is better for a spiritual man to dwell in a corner of the housetop than to share a house in common (LKK *koinos*) with his contentious wife. The same word occurs in Mal. 2:14 LXX in describing a man's wife as his "companion" (*koinonos*). Throughout the Spirit's teaching concerning marriage in 1 Cor. 7, there is constantly this feature of setting an ideal standard, but accepting a lower one. This is demonstrated by the several occurrences of the word "But..." in the passage:

- It is better not to marry: "*But and if* thou marry, thou hast not sinned" (v.28).
- The same "but and if" occurs in vv. 10,11: "Let not the wife depart from her husband: *but and if* she depart...". Separation is, therefore, tolerated by God as a concession to human weakness, even though it is a way of life which inevitably involves an ongoing breach of commandments.
- It is better for widows not to remarry; but if they do, this is acceptable (1 Cor. 7:39,40; 1 Tim. 5:11)
- This same 'two standards' principle is seen elsewhere within 1 Cor. Meat offered to idols was just ordinary meat, but Paul, like God, makes concessions for those with a weak conscience concerning this (1 Cor. 8). See on 1 Cor. 9:12; 14:28; 12:31.

*Let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not leave his wife-* To be an unmarried woman was very difficult in first century society. Paul is asking a lot here. The command to be "reconciled" indicates that Paul saw right through the argument being presented- that due to a desire to serve the Lord on a higher level, believers were refusing to have sex with their partners or even leaving or divorcing them. And, as is clear from chapter 6 and the talk of *porneia* in this chapter 7, they were using church prostitutes to meet their sexual needs. But Paul perceived that the real problem was the usual raft of human issues which come between marital partners, and their lack of reconciliation was their real reason for ending the relationship. The word for 'reconcile' is used almost exclusively in Corinthians, and Paul will later write of how "the ministry of reconciliation" is fundamental to the Gospel. We are reconciled to God in Christ, we must seek to reconcile others, and the Corinthians needed to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We can assume that their lack of reconciliation with God was underlying their lack of reconciliation with each other, both within their marriages and within the church as a whole. It is simply so that division is a work of the flesh. Division and lack of reconciliation, both between believers and within marriages, can be so easily spiritually justified- apparently; but Paul is insisting that reconciliation with God will have its fruit in reconciliation with each other, and will come to full term in "the unity of the Spirit". But they refused to allow the Spirit to work (3:1) and so they lacked that unity of the Spirit.

7:12 *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord-* See on :10. There are several indications that Paul expected his readers to understand that the majority of what he was saying was basically a reflection of the words of the Lord Jesus. He hasn't earlier said: 'Now I'm going to remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus'. He takes it as understood that as usual, his reasoning has been a reflection of the words of Jesus (in the context, 1 Cor. 7:11 = Mt. 5:32; Mk. 10:9; "put asunder" is s.w. "depart"). But now he says that he is going to go beyond Christ's words (as in 1 Cor. 7:25). This doesn't mean he wasn't inspired; it means that he is drawing their attention to the fact that he is doing something unusual for him, i.e. to give teaching which is not an allusion or repetition of that of the Lord Jesus. My point is that the implication of this is that he expected his readers to take as read that he normally was only repeating the thinking of Christ. Likewise in 2 Cor. 11:17: "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord" (i.e. as I normally would). Every few verses, even according to our limited analysis, he was making a

noticeable allusion to the Gospels. When he says that he is speaking to the Thessalonians "by (in) the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15), this doesn't mean that what he was about to say was more inspired than anything else. What he meant was that he was specifically repeating the teaching of Christ (which he does through a series of extended allusions to Mt. 24 and 25). "To the rest" would be appropriate language to use if Paul were sitting down replying to a letter from Corinth which lists various categories and asks his opinion about them.

*If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her-* It is probably true that in every marriage, the thought arises as to what life would be like if it were to end. The problem was that believers in their low moments were justifying breaking up their relationships in the name of higher spiritual service. And Paul is most clearly arguing against all such reasoning. Most women in first century society automatically followed the religion of their husbands; but we see here an indication of the deeply personal nature of Christian commitment. It was far from automatic that marital partners would also accept the faith of their partners. "Leave her" translates a different Greek term to that used about the believing woman not 'leaving' her unbelieving partner in :13. Here in :12 we have a formal term for divorce. It would have been harder for a woman to divorce her husband, but she could leave or run away from him- and that is the term used in :13. Not being 'together', leaving each other, is therefore parallel to divorce. Documentary evidence for marital status is a concept only of recent times. And in any case, the essence of marriage is being together, not leaving each other but cleaving to each other.

*7:13 And the woman that has an unbelieving husband and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband-* As noted on :12, the stress of Christianity on *individual* conversion and responsibility meant that as Jesus had predicted, families were divided when one accepted Him. 1 Cor. 7 shows that there were times when a wife accepted Christianity but her husband didn't. Yet society expected her to treat him as her head in all religious matters. Plutarch taught that "it is becoming for a wife to worship and know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tightly upon all queer rituals and superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favour". These comments were very relevant to the many sisters who must have discreetly broken bread alone or in small groups. One can imagine all the social and domestic conflicts that Christianity created. This is why the movement was so slandered. And it explains the interpersonal conflicts and tensions caused by true Christian commitment today. See on :12 for the difference between 'leaving' and 'putting away'.

*7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother. Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy-* Those who come to the Faith already married have their marriage "sanctified" by God- if God did not do this, their children would be "unclean; but now are they holy". This connects back to Paul's opening statements in 1 Cor. 1 that all in Christ are "sanctified"; but he has argued that the Corinthians were not appreciating nor acting according to the status they had potentially been given. And here again, because they didn't really believe or feel their own sanctification, they failed to see that their marriages were also sanctified. Every part of their lives was sanctified- including in the case of marriage to unbelievers, and including their children. The implication is that God does not see marriage in the world in the same way as He sees marriage between His children. The implication of 1 Cor. 7:14 seems to be that if an unbeliever has a

relationship with an unbeliever, the resulting children are "unclean", not sanctified, because the parent was not sanctified by being in Christ. "Now *are* they holy" is another example of Paul recognizing that they were in status sanctified before God, even if they failed to appreciate that as they should. Just as the Corinthians were sanctified by status but this was no guarantee of their salvation ultimately, so it would be unwise to argue that the children of believers are sanctified in the sense of being saved eternally. And in any case, surely having a believing parent doesn't mean that their children shall be saved in any case regardless of their personal faith. If we insist on seeing a parallel between sanctification and final salvation, surely we must draw a line at when "their children" are no longer covered by the believing parent when they come to maturity. But this question is not addressed here because quite simply the issue of salvation is not in view at all.

*7:15 Yet if the unbelieving departs, let him depart. The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases-* The 'letting' presumably speaks of agreeing to the separation and not trying to stop it. The metaphor of "bondage" means just that- it is the language of slavery. It may not really refer to the 'marriage bond'; that is just a similarity in the English words for 'bond' and 'bondage'. The believing woman is not to accept effective religious and psychological slavery to an unbelieving husband.

*But God has called us to peace-* "Peace" is elsewhere translated 'to set at one again' (Acts 7:26) and connects with the call to 'be reconciled' in :11. We have been called to live at one with others around us, believers or unbelievers. The woman should not automatically agree with the departure of her unbelieving partner but should realize that God's calling or intention is for reconciliation. But if that is not possible, then He doesn't want us to live in slavery to a situation which is spiritually untenable. Again we see here the acceptance of a less than ideal situation. God has called the believing woman to peace with her unbelieving partner, but if due to the positions of another that is just not going to happen, then the Lord understands that. The only other reference to being called to peace is in Col. 3:15: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts- to this you were also called in one body; and be thankful". The idea may therefore be that throughout all the trauma of marital break up, the sister was to remember that the peace of Christ was to rule in her heart, for this is the psychological position she has been called to.

*7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you shall save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you shall save your wife?-* The thought seems to be that by hanging in there and seeking reconciliation (see on :15), the believing partner has the chance to save their partner. We note that salvation is partially predicated upon third parties. We can save others, we can cause their stumbling also. We also see here a balance regarding the interpretation of Eph. 5:23 where the husband is presented as the saviour of the wife. This is true, but it can also be that the wife saves the husband.

*7:17 Only as the Lord has distributed to each man, as God has called each, so let him walk-* Paul's argument is that it would be wrong to justify ending a marital relationship under the excuse that one is seeking a higher spiritual experience, and all the more wrong to then use church prostitutes. The immediate context here speaks of accepting our marital situation where possible and seeking to reconcile and live at peace with the partner, whether they are believers or unbelievers. The distribution or calling in view therefore refers both to marital status, and to the nature of our marriage. Those situations which the Corinthians were tempted to wriggle out of were in fact gifts from God- each therefore has "his own gift from



God" (:7). This is not the same as saying that our situation must be glumly accepted at all costs; rather is it an elevation of 'the ties that bind' and seeing them as gifts from God. Paul began in chapter 1 by saying that every believer has been given gifts at the point of baptism. Here he is saying that those gifts may not necessarily only refer to talents or characteristics, but also to life situations. He uses the same word to speak of the gift to him of a ministry to preach to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:13). He uses a related word in speaking of how each believer is a different part of the Lord's body (1 Cor. 12:27). We are to run with what we were given- to walk according to our calling, as he puts it here. The 'calling' again is that spoken of in chapter 1; it is not simply a calling to the Kingdom, but a calling to a unique path to that end, which includes marital situation and the nature of the marriages we have.

*And so ordain I in all the churches-* Understanding Corinth ecclesia as a series of house churches explains Paul's comment to the Corinthians that he ordained his guidelines to be practiced in all the ecclesias- i.e. the house churches that comprised the body of Christ in Corinth. He gives some guidelines for behaviour that appear to contradict each other until we perceive the difference between the commands to house groups, and commands about the 'gathering together' for special breaking of bread services. The role of women is a classic example. 1 Cor. 14:34 says that women should keep silent 'in ecclesia' [AV "churches" is a mistranslation]- i.e. a sister shouldn't teach at those special breaking of bread meetings when the house churches 'came together' (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20). And yet within the house groups, it's apparent from other New Testament accounts and from what Paul himself writes, that sisters did teach there (1 Cor. 11:5). Thus in the house church of Philip, there were four women who 'prophesied', i.e. spoke forth the word of God to others (Acts 21:8,9). This to me is the only way to make sense of Corinthians- otherwise Paul appears to be contradicting himself.

*7:18 Was anyone called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised-* It was not possible for the circumcised to become uncircumcised. But Paul uses this example in order to underline the extent to which he so strongly feels that we should retain the position we were in when baptized. He sees that position, whether it be our marital status or the nature of our marriage, or our social situation as slaves, as all part of the gift of the Spirit we received. Those things are gifts, intended for us to use in our path towards eternal life at the end of the process. "Every man hath his proper (Gk. *idios*, his very personal) gift of God...". The ideas are again linked in Rom. 11:29: "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance". This idea of us each being given a gift at the time of our conversion goes back to the parable of Lk. 19:13, where each of us, Christ's servants, are given a gift to work with. The goods of the Father are divided between the sons, for them to use as they think best (Lk. 15:12). "The Kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who *called* his own servants, and *delivered* unto them his goods" (Mt. 25:14). Note how the *calling* of the servants and the giving them the gifts / goods are connected. The idea of called servants is alluded to later, in 1 Corinthians 7:22. We have each been given "gifts" at our conversion. Our 'calling' is related to our situation at the time of our conversion. There is a parallel between God distributing gifts to each of us, and Him calling us (1 Corinthians 7:17). This is to be expected from the allusion back to the parables; the gifts are given to each of us at our conversion or 'calling'.

*7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing- but the keeping of the commandments of God is all important-* Paul is clearly attacking a Judaist influence at Corinth. As we noted in expounding Titus, Jewish legalism was actually attractive to immoral Gentile Christians- because they felt freed up to commit immorality because they were

legalistically obedient to some Jewish laws. The argument was that circumcision was a commandment of God and so it should be kept. Paul is drawing a sharp contrast between circumcision and keeping commandments. The real essence of keeping all Divine commandments was to believe in Jesus as Lord, and to live in love (1 Jn. 3:23). This would preclude breaking up marital relationships and the usage of prostitutes.

*7:20 Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called-* As noted on :18, our calling is personal and individually tailored to each of us. The position we were in baptism was God's purpose for us and part of the intended journey and spiritual process ahead for us.

So Paul wrote that slaves should abide in the callings they had when called, and not unduly seek freedom. This has huge implications when we consider the plight of female slaves, amongst whom the Gospel spread so significantly in the first century. They were the sexual property of their owners, who would personally use them and sub-let them as he wished. This was all part and parcel of being a female slave. For those women / sisters, the moral demands of the New Testament were even harder to follow than they are now. Yet nowhere do we read of Paul insisting that those women refuse their 'duties'; he teaches that they should abide in that position, and try as best they can to live by Christian principles. That appears to me to be a concession to weakness and to the huge difficulty those women faced. If God has so repeatedly made concessions to human weakness, allowing us to live below the Biblical ideal of marriage, then we must in some way respond to this in our dealings with our brethren. Somehow we must do this without infringing the need to uphold the Truth of God's commandments.

*7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry, but if you can become free, do so-* Gk. 'use it'. Our marital status at the time of conversion is being spoken of as our calling, as what we were given, one of the talents given to us, in the language of the parable. This thought alone should make whatever situation we are in seem less of a burden; it's part of the gifts, the talents, we were given at baptism. It's for us to work with it. And the same applies, Paul reasons, if you were called to the Truth as a slave. Don't fret about it, it's one of those precious talents of the parable; although naturally in that context, "if thou mayest be made free, *use it*" (7:21 AV)- note the allusion to *using* the talents in the parable. We are inevitably tied down with the things of this life; but if we can be made free, to serve God directly, as usefully as possible, then surely we should seek to do this. Take early retirement. You can choose to remain at work, and of course, you can glorify God. But you can devote your life and free time to the work of the Gospel, and bring dozens to the knowledge of Christ who wouldn't otherwise have had it. I'd say, and I interpret Paul to say likewise: "If you may be made free, then use it rather".

We can imagine a group of believing women eagerly listening to Paul's latest letter being read out in the house church. They heard of how they had been bought with the price of Christ's blood, that now they were slaves of the Father and Son, that their bodies were truly not their own but *His*. And they would've heard how Paul advised them not to be like other slaves, always dreaming of somehow getting free, but to be content with their situation in which they had been called, to live for the daily joy of being Christ's slave. They were no longer part of the 'household' of their master.

*7:22 For he that was called in the Lord being a slave, is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's slave-* This would have been so liberating for the slaves whose very bodies belonged to their masters. They had been set free. Such freedom or

manumission required a large price to be paid, or an extraordinary grace to be shown. And these are all appropriate to the grand metaphor of 'redemption' which is such a major Biblical theme. Many today feel in slavery to family situations, minimum wage employment, or employers who buy the souls of their employees- the school teacher who marks books up to midnight every evening. But we will only feel the freedom if we see life from a spiritual perspective, perceiving the exalted status we have in Christ. And this was what the Corinthians were failing to perceive, as Paul explains in his opening chapters to them.

Although the majority of Corinth ecclesia were poor, there were still some in good standing enough to be invited out to banquets in the course of their business obligations (1 Cor. 8:10; 10:27); and here in chapter 7 we see that some were wealthy enough to consider the economic luxury of divorce. The slave at conversion becomes "the Lord's freedman" and "the free person Christ's slave" (1 Cor. 7:22). Thus this extraordinary unity between social classes was made possible through being "in Christ".

It is unfortunate that most English (and other) translations mask the real force of the Greek words translated 'servant'; for they really mean 'bond-slave', a slave totally owned by his master, totally obedient, totally dedicated to his service. This is the logic brought out in Rom. 6: that before baptism, we were slaves of sin and self. After baptism, we changed masters. We didn't become free, but we became slaves of the Lord Jesus. "He that is called, being free, is the Lord's servant / bond slave" (1 Cor. 7:22). We cannot serve two masters; we are solely His. We are not only slaves, we are slaves whom the Master has come to know as His friends (Jn. 15:15,20). It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus.

*7:23 You were bought with a price. Become not slaves of men-* The price paid to buy us out of slavery was the blood of the Lord Jesus. To become slaves again afterwards is therefore an awful ingratitude to Him. We can become slaves by entering into relationships or employment situations which effectively rob us of our mental freedom to serve Him. The metaphor suggests we were bought out of one slavery in order to become freewill slaves of Him who bought us out of our hopeless situation. Paul surely had this metaphor in view earlier in the chapter when he speaks of a believer not being 'in bondage' (:15), not remaining with an unbelieving partner who wants to end the relationship just because they may provide financial security etc. The same argument was deployed in 6:20: "For you were bought with a price. Glorify God therefore in your body and spirit, for they are God's". Here in chapter 7 Paul is demonstrating some practical outworkings of this- in not becoming slaves of men, and managing our personal relationships in a way that enables us to remain God's slaves.

*7:24 Brothers, let each man, wherein he was called, therein stay with God-* This appears to be a repeat of the teaching in :20. But Paul here appears to specifically address males, whereas in this whole section he is careful to address the needs of both genders. Perhaps he is here alluding to one of the specific questions the Corinthians had written to him (:1).

*7:25 Now concerning virgins-* "Virgins" is clearly a technical term referring to some specific group in the church which we cannot conclusively define. But verses 26-28 appear to be directed specifically to the needs of male believers, as is the preceding :24 (see note there). Perhaps this advice is therefore being given to the fathers of the virgins they intended to marry; although this interpretation becomes problematic in :37 where a man is to not marry his virgin if he himself feels no "necessity". Likewise :28 speaks of a "virgin" woman having

the choice to marry or not. However I have argued throughout (especially on chapter 6) that the practices of the surrounding religions had entered the church, and the use of religious prostitutes had done likewise. The virgins in view may refer to the church prostitutes, called "virgins" in the religious cults. Paul encountered the same situation in the church at Ephesus- see my notes on 1 Timothy. He is seeking to reform the situation, and there he advised that those women marry; and he is saying here in Corinth that they should either be celibate, or marry. But he notes that if these virgins marry, the marriage will have "trouble in the flesh" (:28). A woman who had slept with many of the male members of the church was not going to have an easy marriage if she married one of them and remained in the church. This makes to me the best sense of saying that marrying a 'virgin' will bring "trouble in the flesh"; for marriage does not automatically bring trouble in the flesh but in fact very often it results in blessing in the flesh.

*I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give my judgment, as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy-* The Lord Jesus had not revealed anything specific to Paul in answer to the question, but He had delegated to Paul the freedom to use his own spiritual reasoning to come up with an answer, and to confirm that opinion as being His. The fact the answer is recorded here as inspired scripture is an indicator that the Lord accepted Paul's opinion as correct and therefore inspired by His Spirit.

*7:26 I think therefore that it is good by reason of the present distress that is upon us, that a man should remain as he is-* "It is good by reason of the present distress" uses the same word as in Lk. 21:23 concerning the distress of the last days. Some of us have no hesitation in proclaiming that the time of "distress" of Lk. 21 is upon us. But if it is, then we need to adjust our marriage attitudes accordingly. But the distress may not refer to Paul's sense that they were living in the last days and would soon face persecution. It could also refer to the distress of the particular situation in the Corinthian church, with brethren using some women in the church as prostitutes. The Greek for "distress" means necessity, and the same word is used in :37 about the man who feels no "necessity" to marry. The present necessity may therefore refer here as it does in :37 to the necessity felt for sexual relations and marriage. Paul would then be saying that despite the necessity that is felt by us all, it is better for a man to remain in the marital situation he is in. And it indeed could be that Paul has in view the expectation of persecution and the imminent return of the Lord.

*7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife-* The metaphor of binding connects back to how a woman is spoken of as being in bondage to her husband (:15). Paul is indeed emphasizing the existence of 'ties that bind', and is addressing the natural human desire to break free of them. That basic human tendency was being justified in Corinth on the basis of supposed spiritual devotion, with the use of church prostitutes if required- and Paul is arguing strongly against that. The reference to binding and loosing recalls the Lord's repeated teaching that what we bind or loose on earth is likewise bound or loosed in Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). It may be that the connection is to warn [and also encourage] that whatever decisions we take about relationships is as it were accepted by God- and we therefore have the greater responsibility. And we are to bear in mind Paul's observation that a woman is bound by law to her husband until death (Rom. 7:2); as well as the clear allusion to the idea of God joining or binding together two people in marriage. To loose that connection, that binding, is to go against God's intention and as it were undo His work.

*7:28 But should you marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marry, she has not sinned. Yet such shall have tribulation in the flesh, and I would spare you-* See the discussion of "virgins" on :25. The only one of the alternatives there suggested which consistently makes sense throughout this section on "virgins" is the idea that this is a technical term referring to cult prostitutes, in fact, church prostitutes. I noted on 1 Timothy 3-6 that such were known in the Ephesian church, and we must give full weight to the Lord's reference to a woman in the Thyatiran church teaching others to commit prostitution in that church (Rev. 2:20). As noted on :25, Paul is calling these sisters to repentance, and the brothers who were using them. He is suggesting they do not marry, but if they do then they can, but he suspects that a former prostitute marrying one of her clients is going to be a troublesome relationship in the flesh. Which seems a fair enough practical observation on a psychological and sociological level.

*7:29 But this I say brothers, because the time is shortened, that from this time forward both those that have wives may be as though they had none-* The reference to the shortness of the time suggests that Paul reasoned as if the Lord's coming was imminent. His teaching about singleness could therefore be understood as for one place and at one time; although we are to indeed live our whole lives as if the Lord's coming is imminent. I discussed on :26 the possibility that "the present distress" has a similar reference. Paul has just been arguing that the married state should be continued; but on the other hand, he is now going on to point out that what goes along with married life and domestic issues can easily become an obsession that blunts our awareness that we are to be living as if the Lord's coming is imminent. Our personal relationship with the Lord and eagerness for His coming is to take emotional and psychological precedence in our hearts above literally all else, including our marital status.

The Olivet prophecy spoke of the time being shortened for the elect's sake. And it seems this happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 says that "the time is shortened". Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was "shortened" by at least 3 years "for the elect's sake". And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times (Mt. 24:20). Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

"As though they had none" may be alluding to Abraham and Isaac in time of persecution.

*7:30 Those that weep, as though they wept not, those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not, and those that buy, as though they possessed not-* The weeping may refer in this marital context to those weeping during the process of bereavement, marital breakup or in desperation at their single state; the rejoicing may refer to those rejoicing in marriage, and the buying to paying a bride price. If indeed the talk about 'giving virgins' refers to fathers giving their daughters away in marriage, then 'buying' would be appropriate to men getting married. But buying, selling and giving in marriage is the Lord's language for the world of Noah's day who represented the world's state on the eve of the Lord's return (Mt. 24:38,39). There was nothing intrinsically immoral in anything they were doing; the issue was that they became obsessed with these matters of daily life and ignored their relationship with God.

In the context of writing about the approaching end of the age, Paul commented that because "the form of this world is passing away", therefore those who buy anything should "be as though they had no goods, and those who deal with this world as though they had no dealings with it". This was taught millennia ago by the Mosaic law of Jubilee- that whatever land you

bought wasn't really yours, because the land is God's. And again, we are not to be "anxious", because "the Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5). And there's nothing like managing our "wealth", however small it may be, to make us "anxious". Paul's not saying we shouldn't buy, sell or 'deal with this world'. He's saying we should do so *as if* we're not really doing so, as if this is all an act, a sleepwalk, something we do but our heart isn't in it. See on James 5:3. We should consider what we buy as not really being possessed by us. Paul practised what he preached: although he evidently had some financial resources (Acts 24:26), he acted and felt as if he possessed absolutely nothing (2 Cor. 6:10).

7:31- see on 1 Cor. 9:18.

*And those that use the world, as not using it to the full. For the fashion of this world passes away-* Marriage and all that goes with it is a using of the world. But we are not to be obsessed with these matters of human existence, learning the lesson from the world of Noah's day. We are not to use the Lord's concessions to our humanity "to the full" in becoming obsessed with them. "The fashion of this world", the external condition [Gk.], shall pass away. Whilst essential relationships between persons shall eternally remain, all else, including marriage, shall pass away. And we are to set our hearts on those things which are eternal. The present tense "is passing away" reflects Paul's sense of the closeness of the Lord's coming; and John uses the same words in saying that this world with all its desires, including for marital relationships, passes away (1 Jn. 2:17). The world and all in it has the semblance of permanence; but this too shall pass. Truly the things that are seen are temporal, and only the unseen things are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

7:32 *But I would have you to be free of worries-* Using the same word as in the parable of the sower, which warns that "cares of this world" choke spiritual growth (Mt. 13:22); and we note Paul has just spoken of marriage as being one of the things of "this world". The same word is used several times by the Lord in urging us to live a life free of care- and Paul saw the danger of domestic life becoming an obsession which led us to disobey that keynote teaching of Christianity.

*He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord-* This is not true for all unmarried people, indeed most young single people are 'careful' for the things related to finding a partner. So I suggest that as with "virgins", Paul is using a technical term, in this case for those who have vowed to remain single for the Lord's service and who therefore don't concern themselves with domestic and romantic matters. And this seems to be what Paul wishes for them. But they are not achieve it through using church prostitutes to relieve their human desires.

7:33 *But he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife-* Paul seems to be stating the exaggerated case to make a point; for not literally all married believers are divided between their partner and the Lord. This surely is the whole point of Christian marriage; to love and relate to our partners as service and love towards the Lord. So perhaps as in 14:1-4 and elsewhere, Paul is not making a global statement but is rather describing how things are in practice on the ground in the Corinthian church. The married were divided between care for their partners, and devotion to the Lord Jesus. But that was not how things should have been. Paul understood 'pleasing' in two senses. On one hand, he did not please men (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4); on another hand, he pleased all men in all things in

his efforts to bring them to Christ (1 Cor. 10:33). The same word is used. We can do what is spiritually nice / good / pleasurable for others- but without seeking to please them "in the flesh", as men pleasers. So here in 1 Cor. 7:33 he seems to mean that the married were pleasing their partners "in the flesh", rather than in the Spirit. And this was the whole problem at Corinth, as introduced in the very first chapter; they were of the flesh and not the spirit. I would therefore conclude that this verse 33 is a lament over how things were in their Corinthian marriages, rather than a global statement about the nature of marriage.

*7:34 And is divided-* As noted on :33, such division is not inevitable for the married believer, and I gave reasons to think that Paul is lamenting the situation in Corinth rather than making global statements about how all married believers are in their hearts.

*Also the woman that is unmarried or betrothed is anxious about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit-* The Greek translated "betrothed" is the word for "virgin" used earlier. Paul is saying that this is how a "virgin" should be if indeed she had undertaken not to marry; but instead, the "virgins" at Corinth as in Ephesus (see notes on 1 Tim. 3) had indeed promised to remain single, as did the cultic virgins of the shrines, but they were being used as church prostitutes. Genuine devotion to the Lord required a holiness of body and spirit which a prostitute could not have. It was in this very context of church prostitution that Paul had appealed for a glorifying of God in body and spirit, seeing they were the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:20). This is a strong connection, and it confirms us in understanding the unmarried and "virgin" as technical terms referring to those functioning as church prostitutes.

He encourages these particular unmarried women to stay single so that they can devote themselves to spiritual matters. In the surrounding Jewish culture, the unmarried woman was seen as a reproach. In the local Greco-Roman culture, the unmarried woman would have been perceived as an immoral woman, or one morally disgraced. Regardless of the surrounding perceptions, Paul spoke forth the Spirit's guidance.

*But she that is married is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband-* Again, this is far from a global description of every married woman. It is rather a description of how things were in Corinth. See on 'pleasing' on :33.

*7:35 And this I say for your own profit-* Gk. 'coming together'. The way to helpful unity within the church was to take Paul's advice. Using some sisters as church prostitutes, walking away from marital intimacy etc., was all sure to provoke a situation where the church was not functioning as intended.

*Not that I may cast a snare upon you, but so you may do what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction-* There is an allusion here to Mary and Martha. "Serve" literally means 'to sit beside'; it isn't the usual word for 'service'. The allusion would be to Mary sitting at the Lord's feet. And "distraction" translates the word which is only found elsewhere in the NT in Lk. 10:40, where Martha is cumbered or distracted with her domestic matters. Martha's distraction by domestic matters is being held up as a warning; there was nothing wrong in preparing food, it was the obsessive focus upon it which was wrong. We note in passing how saturated Paul was with the Gospel records. We who live in an age of such convenient access to them ought to be likewise if we are truly Christ-centred.

*7:36 But if anyone thinks that he behaves himself inappropriately toward his betrothed, if she be past the flower of her age, and if need so requires, let him do what he will. He sins not. Let them marry-* I have suggested earlier that the "virgin" (NEV "betrothed"- which is an interpretation rather than translation] refers to church prostitutes. But "his" virgin would suggest that the Corinthians were asking about male believers who regularly used the same woman, and she was now ageing. Paul considers that it would not be wrong for the brother to marry the woman in this case. The grammar here makes it very difficult to read the male in view as the father of the "virgin"; for he is to marry her.

*7:37 But he that stands steadfast in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desires under control, and has determined this in his heart, to remain betrothed; he shall do well-* "To remain betrothed" is literally as in AV "to keep his virgin". "Keep" can mean to financially keep. Perhaps the brother in view considered that despite having used the sister as a church prostitute repeatedly over a period of time, he would not marry her but would financially support her in her old age. The idea of remaining perpetually betrothed doesn't really make sense nor does it seem appropriate. And if we read this as referring to the father of an unmarried young virgin refusing to give her in marriage, then it would not be appropriate to write that his decision was because of his personal control of his sexual desires. The idea that the "virgin" refers to a believing woman who had formerly been used as a church prostitute seems to me the only approach which is workable in all the references to "virgin" here in this passage.

*7:38 So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better-* By speaking of marriage as 'doing well', Paul clearly is not against marriage. But he sees different levels of response to Divine principles- one choice may be "better" than another. And this is how things are with so many issues of spiritual life; and if we love the Lord we will seek to serve Him on the highest level we can. The choice of levels is surely to elicit in us the desire at least to serve on the highest level.

*7:39 A wife is bound for as long as her husband lives; but if the husband dies she is free to be married to whoever she chooses-* Paul in this chapter has spoken of marriage in the same language as slavery, because he sees both of those institutions as examples of the 'ties that bind' which a believer finds themselves in, or not in, at baptism. And the status is to be seen as a gift from God. This verse is it seems another answer to a specific question about widows. "Whoever she chooses" was a radical thing to say in first century society, where marriage was thought appropriate only between those of the same ethnic or social background. But the new community in Christ featured radical bonding between all groups. There was also doubtless the expectation that elderly widows should remain single in respect to their deceased husbands, and again Paul cuts right across such traditions.

Paul's teaching that remarriage could only take place after the death of the first partner (1 Cor.7:39; Rom.7:1-8) actually elevated the status of women compared to what it was in the local culture. He can hardly be accused of being a woman hater, in the light of this; nor is he giving commandments regarding the place of women which only fitted in with the local culture. Immorality, particularly in terms of temple prostitution, was so widespread that it is hard for us to appreciate the radicalness of Paul's insistence on absolute faithfulness to one's partner.

*But only in the Lord-* This is alluding back to the command to Zelophehad's daughters to marry "whom they think best", but only "in" their tribe, otherwise they would lose the



inheritance (Num. 36:6,7). The implication is that those who do not marry "in the Lord" will likewise lose their promised inheritance. And this rather strange allusion indicates one more thing: the extent of the seriousness of marriage out of the Faith is only evident to those who search Scripture deeply. As man and woman within Israel were joint heirs of the inheritance, so man and wife are joint heirs of the inheritance of the Kingdom (1 Pet. 3:7).

*7:40 But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I am certain that I also have the Spirit of God-* We noted earlier that Paul says that his judgment was confirmed by the Spirit. He was free to make his judgment on matters that were without direct guidance from the Lord's own recorded teaching; but his judgment was confirmed by the Lord.

That Paul should encourage single converts to remain single unto the Lord Jesus may seem a tall order, especially as he is making this challenge to a church who were so seriously immature. But consider the expectations on the early converts:

- Converts joyfully selling all their lands and property, pooling the money, and dividing it among the poorer members. Yet we can scarcely raise the money to pay for poorer brethren to attend a Bible School.
- Husbands and wives regularly abstaining from sex so they could the more intensely pray and fast for a period of several days. Surveys of Christian prayer habits reveal that on average we spend around 10 minutes / day praying. And scarcely any fast.
- Elders who spent so much time in prayer that they had to ask others to do some practical work for them so they could continue to give the same amount of time to prayer (Acts 6:2-4).
- Young brethren, "the messenger of the churches", who spent their lives full time running errands in dangerous situations throughout the known world.
- Over zealous brethren (in Thessalonica) who packed up their jobs because they were so sure the second coming was imminent.
- The expectation that the Gospel of Mark (at least) was to be memorized by all converts. Most Christians can scarcely quote more than 50 Bible verses- after generations of Bible study in our community.
- The assumption that all believers would make converts (1 Cor. 3:10-15).
- Believers were regularly persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and forced to migrate long distances unless they made what some today would consider only a tokenistic denial of their faith.

We have somehow hived off the first century church in our mind, as if to say to ourselves: 'Well, that was them, but we're in a totally different spiritual environment'. The same mind-set occurs when we consider the zeal of earlier believers. There is no doubt that the more we read the New Testament, the more we will see that the level of intended commitment required was high indeed. The fact many failed to rise up to it doesn't affect this. That single converts were expected to remain single would not therefore have appeared so strange, once the spiritual context of the New Testament church is perceived.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols. We know that we all have knowledge; yet knowledge puffs up, but love builds up-* Paul's whole position about meat offered to idols reflects the fact that he recognised that there would be some believers who still could not escape the sense that the idol is really something to be feared, that in some sense it is alive and accepting the sacrifice offered to it, even though the believer in the other half of his brain knew full well that idols are nothing and there is only one true God. We *all know this*, Paul reasons, and yet some still can't escape their sense that the idol is there, and that if they eat meat offered to it they are fellowshiping with it, even though it doesn't exist. Our tendency would be to be hard on such a person, insisting that they cannot worship the true God and yet also have this sense of the idol. And yet Paul knew that there is a dualism within each of us; we can still have a sense of the false even whilst we believe the true. And the Lord is more gracious than many of us seem to be to this feature of our nature.

It is hard to piece together what was really going on in the politics of the early church, because Paul seems to have submitted to their wishes apart from where essential principle was concerned. Luke in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 make the record sound so positive- as if the conference in Jerusalem solved all the problems, even though it is clear that it didn't, and the Gentile believers were still classed as second rate. It was after this that Paul wrote here: "As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth" (AV). This sounds like an allusion to the agreements hammered out at Jerusalem- 'we all know what was agreed', Paul seems to be saying. There was nothing wrong in itself with the compromises agreed. But it was love that edifies, not a legalistic use of those decrees as 'knowledge'. It all sounds as if there was joy at the conversion of the Gentiles, even though there was "much disputing" about it. And yet it is observable that the whole Acts record doesn't reflect the spirit of controversy and struggle against apostasy which the epistles so insistently reflect. Paul didn't protest being told not to teach Jews by his brethren- but he got on and did so. It was not knowledge of intellectual truth alone which justifies a person- for we know so pitifully little anyway (:2). It is doing what is best for the building up of others, in the spirit of love. Those who so love the idea of 'saving truth' need to remember this; for truth, no matter how pure, will not save of itself. As Fred Pearce remarked many years ago, "It is not an inspired Bible which will save you, but faith in the blood of Christ and God's grace".

8:2 *If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not know anything as he ought to know-* This sounds like another of the allusions to Job (here to 26:14) in the New Testament- particularly once it is realized that 1 Corinthians has several other Job allusions. "Thinks" is literally to show, to account, to have reputation. We *all* have knowledge (:1)- not just some would be leader who says he has it. And anyway, it's not about knowledge- it's about whether God knows *us* in that we are in relationship with Him because we love Him (:3). This is the *knowledge* required., and it was this knowledge which was lacking in those who thought that their academic knowledge was what ought to make them be held in high repute. This is the force of the person thinking / showing / reputing that he 'had knowledge'. "As he ought to know" is an aorist really meaning 'as he ought to come to know'. It is the knowing of relationship which is in view, the process of knowing- and this is developed in the next verse. Their knowledge was just facts; Is. 28:13 speaks exactly to this problem by rebuking Israel for having no relationship with God but rather just treating His word as "line upon line, here a little and there a little... precept [concept] upon concept". And this is how so much Bible

study has been for many. They have glorified it in itself, and have apparently not come to spiritual relationship with God.

8:3 *But if anyone loves God*- This alludes to the first commandment, to love God; and the Lord assures us that this still stands for His people today. The idea of loving God was used in a similar context earlier, in 1 Cor. 2:9, in arguing that human knowledge and learning will not lead us to real faith and relationship with God; but the spiritually minded "love God" and so have His Son revealed to them by the Spirit.

*The same is known by Him*- See on :2. Here we have the same tension between love and knowledge which was introduced in :1. But there is a nuance; for God to know *us* means that He is in relationship with us, and we on our part love Him. It is for us to love Him; it is for Him to know us. This stands as a caveat to our rightful emphasis upon the need to correctly know doctrine about God. Isaac Newton remarked that he was only gathering pebbles on the shore of the ocean of truth. Truly "How little a portion is heard of Him" (Job 26:14). In other words, we will never know God to perfection in this life; but what we can be sure of and rejoice in is that *He knows us*. Paul almost implies that we can easily forget this wondrous fact, because of our obsession with wanting to fully know about *Him*. It was this emphasis upon relationship with God which had been missed by the Corinthians, for they did not have the Spirit (3:1) and were therefore left with only technical knowledge of Him. And that can be so with those who pride themselves on being 'Bible students' and yet resist the entrance and leading of the Spirit, and despise the idea of 'relationship with God' as being nebulous and not really what they think their religion is all about.

Paul will later remark that the Corinthians are living in sin because they do not have the knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). "The knowledge of God" is an ambiguous genitive, meaning both 'our knowing about God' and 'God's knowing of us'. It is mutual relationship which is the intention of Christianity and the person of the Lord Jesus, through whom this "knowledge of God" is mediated.

8:4 *Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol has real existence and there is no God but one*- "We know" must be read in the context of what has been noted on 'knowledge' in :1-3. The technical knowledge was that there is one God and therefore idols have no real existence as gods. But Paul is going to go on to reason about how that knowledge should be used in love in practice. 'Idol' and 'God' are placed in antithesis because idols were seen as the representations of living gods behind them, somewhere out in the cosmos. The implications of there being one God is that such beings have no real existence. Note that Paul has just alluded to the commandment to love God (:3), and here he alludes to the commandment that "God is one". The Lord Jesus likewise quoted those two commandments as being effectively one commandment (Mk. 12:31). Paul had truly meditated upon the Lord's teaching and absorbed it to such an extent that it is everywhere part of his own reasoning and logical process. In this alone he sets us a great example. Eating was understood in first century religious terms as an act of fellowship with others. Hence the anger with the Lord for breaking His bread and sharing His table with anyone whom He could urge to sit down with Him. To eat food sacrificed to idols was felt to be a sign of fellowship with the god whom that idol represented. The food was freighted with such significance in the eyes of those who lived in that worldview. But belief in one God meant that this was not to be the mindset of Christians.

8:5 *For though there are those called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are gods many and lords many-* As noted on :4, the idols were "those called gods" in that they represented them. The location of the supposed gods represented varied- some were thought to be on earth, others "in heaven". Those entities supposed to be represented by the idols were 'gods' and 'lords'. These were two different categories; and the difference is reflected in the next verse, which states that we have only one God, the Father, and one Lord- Jesus.

8:6 *To us there is only one God-* See on :5. The denarius of Tiberius which Jesus used bore the words: *Tiberius CAESAR DIVI AUGusti Filius AUGUSTUS Pontifex Maximus*. Caesar was to be seen as the Son of God. The Lord Jesus was the *only, and begotten* Son of God. The implication is that no other 'son of God' was *begotten* as Jesus was- He was the *real* Son of God, the one and only (Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,18). Caesar was to be worshipped as God (see L.R. Taylor, *The Divinity Of The Roman Emperor*). Julius Caesar was known as Divus Julius after his death; indeed, many of the Caesars were held to have 'resurrected' to heaven and been granted Divine status. "To *us* [and this is the emphasis] there is only one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:4-6) takes on a vital radicality in the light of this. As does NT teaching about His resurrection and subsequent Divine glorification.

*The Father, of whom are all things and we are everything to Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, for the sake of whom are all things, and we exist for His sake-* "All things" have one source; whereas the pagans considered that the various gods were each responsible for different aspects of life. Earlier in this section, Paul has spoken of how we know God and He knows us. This idea of relationship is continued here; we are for His sake, and He is for our sake. All things are of Him, and we are all things ["everything"] to Him. His focus upon us His people is challenging indeed. All things are for our sakes (2 Cor. 4:15). We are all things to Him. This gives a window onto the question of other creations, both now and within infinite time and space. Even the Angels are for our sakes, and are in that sense inferior to us in ultimate terms, according to the reasoning of Hebrews 1 and 2. The focus of the Father is in His only begotten Son, and thereby upon all who are in Him.

8:7 *However there is not in all men that knowledge, but some being used until now to the idol, eat things sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled-* This is a description of how things were in reality within the "all men" of the Corinthian church. Not all had the knowledge; yet in :1 Paul says that they did all have knowledge. He is again playing on the difference between theoretical knowledge, and the spiritual knowing of relationship. Indeed he opened the letter in chapter 1 by doing the same; likewise, they all had the Spirit, and yet they were not spiritual (3:1). They knew God on one hand, but on another they had not the knowledge of God in real spiritual terms (15:34). It was because of this lack of knowledge as it was meant to be, that their conscience was defiled. They thought the gods really existed, because their 'knowledge' that God is one didn't translate into knowledge as knowledge is meant to be. When they ate the food offered to idols, they did so as a real act of fellowship with those supposed gods; the act of eating their food was understood by them in their conscience as meaning that those gods existed, and they were in fellowship with them. Despite this 'weakness', Paul speaks so often of the need to care for the "weak" (s.w.) and retain them within the Lord's body, and to become weak that we might save these weak ones (1 Cor. 9:22; 11:30; 12:22). Without doubt, Paul's approach was to preach the Gospel, get people baptized into Christ whether by his hands or others, and then tolerate their weakness of understanding and moral behaviour whilst making every effort to teach them further and correct them. This is in sharp contrast to the attitude of many today.

When dealing with the problem of fornication, Paul doesn't directly appeal to any legal code, not even the ten commandments, nor the agreement at the Council of Jerusalem, because he was appealing for life to be lived according to the spirit rather than any law. Likewise when writing about meat offered to idols in 1 Cor. 8, he could so easily have appealed to the agreements made at the Council as recorded in Acts 15. But he doesn't. For love's sake he appeals. He asks them "judge ye what I say", he seeks for them to live a way of life, rather than obey isolated commandments as a burden to be borne. It is simply so that brethren and sisters, men and women, prefer simple yes / no commandments rather than an appeal to a way of life. In those communities and fellowships where everything is reduced to a mere allowed / not allowed, there tends to be less internal division than if it is taught that life must be lived by principles. Paul was smart enough to know this, especially with his background in legalism. And yet he chose not to lay the law down with Corinth; instead he appealed to a spirit of life, even though he must have foreseen the strife that would come of it.

*8:8 But food will not commend us to God. Neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. Nor, if we eat, are we the better-* The earlier section in this chapter has spoken of how the critical issue is relationship with God and not technical knowledge. Attitudes to food likewise will not commend us to God. The issue is not about whether to eat idol food or not- Paul will go on to explain that the question is all about love. He introduced the whole section by contrasting knowledge which puffs up with the love which builds up (8:1); and that building up is of others through our sensitivities to them and their weaknesses. Note how Paul uses the same word for "commend" in saying that we shall be 'presented' without fault to God at the last day (2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22). That spotless presentation is by grace; it's nothing to do with whether we were ritually defiled or not by food. That itself is a mere technicality.

*8:9 But take heed, lest by any means this freedom of yours becomes a stumblingblock to the weak-* It wasn't a question of who was technically right or wrong on the issue of idol food. It was a question of having the love which builds up others, by not being a stumbling block to them; rather than who had the technical knowledge. This is one of several passages which warn us not to make the weak to stumble. But none of those passages actually says that we can know *who* is weak. What they are saying is that in God's eyes, there are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that *we* actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak. To understand 1 Cor. 8:9, we must understand what it means to be weak. The Greek word translated "weak" here usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the "sick" brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the "sick" brother in Mt. 25:36). Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same word), we visit *Him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother. Christ on the cross carried the sins of "the weak" (i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the "weak". In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each

other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are "weak" whilst the rest of us are "strong". Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

8:10- see on 1 Cor. 8:9; 11:3.

*For if a man sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be encouraged to eat things sacrificed to idols?*- Paul may mean this as a hypothetical case; the believer who knows for sure there is only one God could sit and eat at an idol sacrifice, seeing the food as just food and nothing else; and do nothing technically wrong. But by doing so, he would encourage the weaker brother to eat just the same food but as an act of fellowship with the false gods of paganism. But it might also be that the Corinthians were so weak that despite their knowledge of the one God and rejection of the existence of other gods, they still ate in the idol's temple. Interestingly, Paul doesn't criticize them for doing this itself; rather he reasons more subtly that by doing so, they were leading weaker Christians into sin. Later on he will argue that one cannot eat at the Lord's table and at the table of idols: "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). But at this point in 8:10, Paul is saying that one can literally eat food there, if this is not a participation, an active fellowshiping, with the idol. But externally, eating food at the idol's table looked as if they were partaking with the idol / demon. Paul recognized that two men can do the same thing externally and yet understand it quite differently in their hearts. But the problem is that the external behaviour can lead the weaker brother into sin in their heart, or as Paul has put it, "their conscience is defiled".

Our example- and let's not forget, we all set an example of one sort or another- will either edify others towards righteousness, or "encourage" [AV "embolden"] our weaker brother to sin (1 Cor. 8:1,10). We 'edify' others in only one of two directions; this is the point behind Paul using the same Greek word in both verses.

8:11 *For through your knowledge he that is weak perishes, the brother for whose sake Christ died*- This has been the whole theme of the section- knowledge as knowledge alone puffs up, but love builds up. Indeed, possession of knowledge, of 'truth' in this sense, can actually destroy others when that truth is used irresponsibly. And we likewise have all seen this kind of thing happen in conservative church life. We can build others up and we can also cause them to "perish", and thus the death of Christ is made in vain for that brother- thanks to our selfish attitude to the truths we possess by grace. Knowledge or truth of itself cannot just be insisted upon in a vacuum. We are not to shrug and say that "Well that's their fault, his problem, her lack of faith" because an individual weaker in faith and understanding is made to stumble by our indulgence in "truth". This is like the weak Corinthians who believed in

'gods out there' behind the idols being led to worship them- all by observing their 'stronger' brethren flaunting the truth / knowledge they held, in their freedom to eat idol food.

8:12- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*And thus, sinning against the believers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ-* Christ is His body; to persecute His brethren is to persecute Him, to sin against them is to sin against Him. Paul had learnt this principle through reflection on his own sins against Christ insofar as He sinned against His brethren by persecuting them. Even the very weakest, those who still felt the gods existed, are called "believers" and are seen as members of the body of Christ, and as members to whom the Lord Jesus is particularly sensitive. Clearly the scope of acceptance into the body of Christ [which is achieved by baptism] is far wider than many think. Likewise the tolerance is far broader; for our inclination would be to tell those who believe in pagan gods to get out of the church. But Paul doesn't take that approach, indeed in chapter 12 he will argue that the presence of these "weak" within the body is the more necessary for us who consider ourselves strong. The word for "wounding" is used about the servant "beating" the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49; Lk. 12:45). This 'beating' can be done through selfishly indulging in our own truth and knowledge in a way which spiritually damages others. This is the way God looks upon the commonly held idea that "It's OK in *my* conscience". That is not quite the point, as Paul will later develop in chapter 10. The parable of the fellow servant refers specifically to the situation at the Lord's coming. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble.

8:13 *Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh again, so that I do not cause my brother to stumble-* The eating of food referred to is specifically eating food offered to idols, perhaps even more specifically- eating it in the idol temple itself (:10). Paul is obviously aware here of the Lord's strict words for those who make their brother stumble. They shall be treated as Babylon, and cast into the depths of the sea. To not make others stumble must therefore be a paramount consideration. A closed table approach, ever censuring others for their failures and barring them from the Lord's table, seems to me a sure way to make others stumble- and it has done so in so many cases. We must give more weight to the Lord's words and to Paul's teaching here. It's not about me, my conscience, my knowledge, my truth. It's all about attitudes to the weak and not making them stumble.

The AV and some MSS add that Paul would not eat food "while the world standeth" - This could be hyperbole concerning how serious he was, or he could be saying he would not eat such food until the Jewish Law, which was intrinsically part of the Jewish world, was fully done away with in AD70. Col. 2:22 says that the using of the (Mosaic) laws "are to perish" - in the future, i.e. AD70.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my works in the Lord?*- The preceding chapter has spoken of how although we are 'free' to eat idol food, we should not do so for the sake of the weaker others. Now Paul starts to appropriate those principles to himself on a more personal level. Just as their liberty / freedom could cause others to stumble (8:9), so Paul too is "free" but he doesn't use that freedom, nor his authority, in a way which might make them stumble. He had authority / power over them- he had seen Jesus, been commissioned by Him as an apostle, and although he had not baptized many of them, they were his spiritual children and the result of his work for them. But he likewise would not use that power in a way which was harmful for them spiritually- as he has been expounding in chapter 8. This principle of not abusing power, knowledge and truth needs to be programmatic in our lives.

9:2 *If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*- Paul repeatedly speaks of his authority over the Corinthians because he has been the source of their conversion to Christ. He claims to be their spiritual father, and they were his "work" in the Lord (:1) and the proof in fact that he is an apostle to them. And yet he is clear in chapter 1 that he baptized very few of them. We could infer from this that he had preached to them and taught them, but had been careful to get others to perform the baptisms. We could also infer that since he had left Corinth, there had been relatively few baptisms by anyone else; unless we are to understand the entire correspondence as being addressed only to those within the church whom he counted as 'his work'. But that seems unlikely and there is no hint of that being the case. The "others" who didn't count Paul as an apostle would presumably be other purportedly Christian teachers who had visited Corinth and sought to poison them against Paul by claiming he was not in fact an apostle. This would presumably refer to the Jewish satan, an organized attempt to undo and discredit Paul's work in every church he founded. And this would explain the hints we have that Corinth had been troubled by Judaizers. Paul claims the very fact the Corinthians were his converts was evidence enough that he had been 'sent' to them and was indeed therefore their 'sent one' or apostle. Whilst we are not apostles in the sense that Paul specifically was, it remains true that those who bring others to Christ have some authority over them and should be afforded appropriate respect throughout their spiritual journey.

9:3 *My defence to them that examine me is this*- This is language from the courtroom. The Corinthians had written to Paul and he is replying; and they had included the criticisms which had been made of Paul. Yet Paul almost revels in such legal language elsewhere, especially in his letter to the Romans. His idea is that because we have appeared before God's throne and been justified, leaving no outstanding accusation against us, we are free from accusation altogether. And yet he here does make a response to the criticisms. Whether or not to respond to criticism is always a hard choice. Paul's major argument was quite simply that he had brought the Corinthians to Christ. To argue about whether he had been sent to them as an apostle was academic. We likewise should seek to answer criticism by appealing to mega principles, rather than arguing about details. The fruit of a person's life work in the Lord is what is important, and not carping criticisms rooted in personality issues.

It was the Jews and their "false brethren" who infiltrated the ecclesias (Gal. 2:4), and who were responsible for the deaths of many of the first century apostles and prophets. This suggests that the circumcision party within the ecclesias was linked with the Roman and Jewish authorities, and therefore 'satan' is a term used for them all. It got beyond dirty



politics in the church. This would explain why Paul uses legal language in describing his conflicts with the Judaizing element in Corinth: "My defence [*apologia*, a technical legal term] to those [in the ecclesia] who examine me [another legal term, *anakrinein*]..." (1 Cor. 9:3). The false teachers were taking the likes of Paul before the civil authorities- they were hand in glove. Rev. 17 and 18 describes 'Babylon' as the system which was responsible for these deaths. Whatever other interpretation we may give these chapters (and I would agree there is a strong similarity with the evils of the Roman Catholic church), it cannot be denied that they are full of reference to Old Testament passages concerning Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple, which became a spiritual Babylon. I suggest that it was from within the Jerusalem ecclesia, linked up as it was with the temple system and Roman authorities, that there came much of the persecution of the early church. And this is why 'Babylon' in its first century application refers to these things.

*9:4 Have we no right to eat and to drink?*- Paul had authority to ask the Corinthians to provide him with food and drink, basic sustenance. But "we did not use this right" (:12). He had the right- but didn't use it. It seems he was put in a position where he had to be wrong; if he didn't claim basic sustenance, then apparently he was not an apostle, because in first century terms, a teacher had authority to require his keep from his converts. And if he didn't ask for it- then he was not really a legitimate teacher. And yet if Paul had made use of this right, he would have been accused of profiteering. This idea of having the possibility of using concessions but choosing not to is of course exactly what he has just been talking about in the context of marriage and eating idol meat.

*9:5 Have we no right to lead a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*- Singleness was not respected in first century society. A religious leader ought to be married- As with the matter of asking for material support, whatever Paul did in the marital area was likewise going to be criticized. He has explained in chapter 7 that marriage is permissible, but he invites single converts to try following his own example of singleness in order to do the Lord's work. But religious leaders were expected to be married. We can quite imagine the likely gossip this created- that perhaps Paul was gay, or a womanizer with multiple casual relationships. If indeed as a Sanhedrin member, Paul had once been married, we can imagine how that fact would be distorted. He indeed had the "right" to be married to a believer, and to lead her with him around his missionary circuits. As, he says, Peter and the other apostles did. We note he mentions Peter separately, a reflection of the huge respect he had for him. Indeed in the commentary on Acts I have suggested Paul was almost obsessed with Peter and pretended to him. The respect of the intellectual Jerusalem rabbi for illiterate fisherman Peter is quite the lesson in respect within the body of Christ. We note too that the Lord's brothers, who were once so against Him, became leading missionaries in the early church. Paul had a "right" or "power" (*exousia*) to be married; but he did not use that power / right, just as he has been explaining in previous chapters that we are not to use power or knowledge just because we have it, but should seek above all the building up of others to God's glory. And that is the principle we are to take away from this.

"To lead a wife" is literally, to lead around. See on Acts 9:43. It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife, as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he

came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

9:6 *Or are Barnabas and I the only ones who have a right not to have to work for a living?*- Paul likewise did not *have* to work as a tentmaker. But he did; he chose a higher level for the sake of others. The point was that other apostles made use of such a concession; but the fact Paul didn't laid him open to criticism. But whichever way, he was going to be condemned by his critics.

9:7 *What soldier ever serves at his own expense?*- Paul used the metaphor of soldiery in explaining to Timothy the discipline required in missionary work. He saw his work for the converts as having fought for them, risking his life to liberate them in Christ. He could be implying that he in his case had done this work "t his own expense"; for clearly Paul at times did have access to funds. He lived in his own hired house in Rome, and was thought wealthy enough to possibly pay a bribe for his early release from prison in Jerusalem. And yet perhaps Paul is overstating his case here, as he does at times; for in 2 Cor. 11:8 he admits he took material help from other churches whilst ministering at Corinth, so as not to ask them for money.

*Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink the milk of the flock?*- Although he had not baptized many of them, Paul saw the Corinthian church as a vineyard he had planted. They were a flock he had fed; and so he could have legitimately asked for something material from them in return. The One who planted a vineyard and got no fruit alludes to the parable of the wicked husbandmen. God's hopefulness and fruitless care for Israel was reflected in Paul's for the Corinthians. The metaphor of drinking milk from a flock is slightly strange in that it suggests the Corinthians were a flock of cows or possibly goats- and not sheep. For a shepherd doesn't drink milk from his sheep.

9:8 *Do I speak these things after the manner of men? Or did not the law say the same?*  
- See on Dt. 25:4. At first blush it might seem strange to appeal to the immoral, Gentile Corinthians on the basis of an argument from the Jewish law. But I have mentioned elsewhere that there was a Judaistic element at work in Corinth; as noted on Titus, immoral Gentile Christians were attracted to the Judaistic arguments because they felt legalistic obedience to a few laws justified their immorality in other areas. To this day, this is the outcome of legalism in the churches.

9:9 *For it is written in the law of Moses: You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn. Is it for the oxen that God cares?*- In another figure, Paul likens himself to a lowly ox treading out corn, and being allowed to eat a bit of it. The argument seems to be that this commandment was not given because God cares for oxen, but for the sake of teaching us a principle. But often Paul uses a grammatical device whereby he argues 'Not [so much] A, but B'. Such a device is common in several other languages. God is clearly not insensitive to animals, as so many cases in the Old Testament demonstrate. So surely we are to read this as meaning that this command about not muzzling the ox was not primarily for the sake of the oxen, but even more importantly for the sake of teaching us a lesson. The treading out of corn connects with the metaphor of judgment day in Mt. 3:12, where we read that the "floor", literally 'the treading place' will be winnowed by the Lord Jesus in judgment. The fruit of Paul's labours for Corinth would be tested by the winnowing of what he had trodden out. He

saw his work as preparing them for judgment, making them true grain, separating them from the husks.

9:10 *Or did He say it entirely for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written. Because he that ploughs ought to plough in hope, and he that threshes, hopes to partake in the harvest-* The context of this argument, both in :11 and the preceding verses, is that Paul would be justified in receiving material compensation for his work. But he elevates that argument to a higher level here. He says that the benefit he ultimately hopes to get out of this is that if his treading out leads to their acceptance at the day of judgment, then he will share in the harvest. He too will as it were eat the trodden out corn. Elsewhere Paul says the same- that his reward in the Kingdom will be a function of whether his brethren are there too.

"He that ploughs" doesn't refer to a ploughman, as some paraphrase Bible versions wrongly claim. The allusion continues to the ox, who ploughs. "He that threshes" likewise refers to the ox, because the same word is used in :9 about the ox treading out the corn. Paul saw all his missionary activity with the Corinthians as the work of the humble ox, up and down the fields, back and forth threshing out the corn. The repetitious nature of teaching Biblical principles so familiar to us, patiently bearing with the same questions- all this humble work is what will lead folks to the life eternal. The parallel likes to imagine that the ox ploughs up the fields looking forward to the time when the crop sown will bear grain which he shall thresh, and get a few mouthfuls of that harvest by God's grace in allowing him an unmuzzled mouth. Breaking up the fields to receive the seed of God's word is indeed hard and thankless work. Paul was far from the modern 'evangelist' doing acrobatics from a stage to impress an audience. Such work is hard, and will only have any reward or true recognition when the harvest has been winnowed at the Lord's return.

9:11 *If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your material things?-* Paul slightly changes the metaphor here, likening himself to the sower. Clearly the sower parable was in his mind, with its purposeful ambiguity as to whether the sower is the Lord Jesus personally, or all those in Him who sow His word. According to Paul's principle of Gal. 6:8, sowing to the spirit will lead to a spiritual harvest; and a material or fleshly harvest from sowing to the flesh. But here he seems to be saying that he does indeed sow to the spirit and hopes for a spiritual harvest, but seeing the flesh / material is far less than the spiritual, he sees no reason why before that spiritual harvest comes, he shouldn't receive some material harvest from them too.

9:12 *If others have this rightful claim over you, do we not have more?-* Clearly the Corinthians were under the influence of other teachers, probably Judaists, who claimed the right to material support from the Corinthians. Or it could be that the "others" refer to the other apostles who had visited Corinth (:5) and who had asked for material support. But as the one who had led them to Christ, Paul felt he had more rightful claim than anyone else.

*Nevertheless we did not use this right, but we bear all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ-* Paul will soon use the very same phrase "bear all things" in saying that love bears all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Love is therefore no mere emotion or passing clutch at the heart. Love involved a carefully thought out policy, looking ahead to how asking for money would hinder the Gospel in this case. The idea of 'hindrance' is fairly common in the NT, and it is individuals who are hindered, or the spread of the Gospel. So we must interpret "the Gospel of Christ" here as referring to the spiritual progress of those who had accepted it; or to the spreading of that Gospel. For the Gospel is in itself an imperative to

spread it. And Paul saw here, in contrast to many evangelists today, that asking for money can in some ways and contexts actually hinder the Gospel's work. Clearly enough, the spread and progress of the Gospel, both to unbelievers and within those who have accepted it, depends upon us to some degree. We, or other people and attitudes, can hinder it. God will not just brush past our dysfunctions. So much has been delegated to us, and we are to act appropriately.

It seems that "the Gospel" is put by a figure for 'the spirituality which the doctrines of the Gospel brings forth, so close is the link between the Gospel and the inculcation of spirituality. We must walk worthy of that pure doctrine, in the abstract sense of doctrine, which we have received (Eph. 4:4-6). The purpose of keeping our understanding of the basic principles clear is that this will lead to true love and faith (1 Tim. 1:3-5).

Paul says he could have asked Corinth ecclesia to support him financially, but he chose not to. Thus he chose the higher of two options. See on 1 Cor. 7:11.

*9:13 Do you not know that they that labour in the temple get their food from the temple, and they that serve at the altar have their portion from that which is sacrificed on the altar?*- This argument from Jewish law might seem inappropriate for Gentile, immoral Christians in Corinth. But Paul's appeal to Jewish argument is likely because of the presence of Judaist influence, encouraging the Gentiles in their immorality by kidding them that obedience to some Jewish laws could of itself assure their salvation. The New Testament is very insistent that the true temple of God is the body of Christian believers (1 Cor. 9:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 3:12; 11:1,2; 1 Tim. 3:15). This string of passages is quite some emphasis. Yet the Lord Jesus was the temple; He spoke of the temple of His body (Jn. 2:19-21; Rev. 21:22). For this reason, the Gospels seem to stress the connection between Him and the temple (Mk. 11:11,15,16,27; 12:35; 13:1,3; 14:49; Lk. 2:46; 21:38). Christ's body was the temple of God. By being in Christ, we too are the temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:21), *our* body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul therefore saw his work for others in the church as being like a priest labouring in the temple. He saw himself as a temple servant, a Levite, able to take literally the food required to sustain life- a far cry from pastors demanding 10% of everyone's cash.

*9:14 Even so the Lord ordained that they that proclaim the gospel should live from the gospel*- Paul's almost rabbinic respect for every word of his Lord indicates how deeply he had them in his heart as the law of his life. He speaks of how "The Lord [Jesus] *commanded* that those who preach the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14 RSV). The Lord Jesus didn't command this in so many words- but it's the implication of His teaching in Lk. 9:1-5; 10:1-12, especially of Lk. 10:4 "The workman deserves his food / keep" (Gk.). But those words of the Lord to the disciples were understood by Paul as a *command*- so clearly did he appreciate that those men following Jesus around Galilee are really *us*, and every word of the Lord to them is in some form a command to us. Another example would be the way Paul states that the Lord 'commanded' that the wife is not to separate from her husband (1 Cor. 7:10). The Lord didn't actually state that in so many words- but He implied it quite clearly. And so that for Paul was a command. He didn't reduce the teachings of Jesus to a set of yes / no statements; rather he saw, as we should, even every *implication* of the words of Jesus as a command to us. You will notice that in both these examples from 1 Corinthians, Paul doesn't explicitly quote the Lord Jesus in the format in which we expect a citation- e.g. 'I'm saying this, because it is known and written that Jesus said, XYZ'. I submit that this wasn't simply because the Gospels weren't in wide circulation when Paul was writing. Rather I think that the indirectness of Paul's allusions and quotations

from the words of Jesus reflect how his mind was *so* full of the Lord's words that he doesn't quote from them in a formal sense, as one usually would quote from literature or the known words of a respected person. Rather did Jesus so *live* within Paul's consciousness, His words were so widely and deeply within the texture of his thinking, that the allusions and quotations are made less self-consciously. 9:16,17- see on Acts 18:4,5.

Yet despite this provision, Paul chose to disobey what he calls a 'command' from the Lord- because he figured that the purposes of the Gospel would be served better long term if he in his case didn't obey that command. Paul was no legalist- for legalism would reason that a command is there to be obeyed; but Paul perceived a higher principle than legalistic obedience. Not only does all this give an insight into the nature of a man's relationship with his Lord when he knows Christ well enough; but it indicates the huge priority placed by Paul upon the spreading of the Gospel. He would even relegate a 'command' from the Lord Jesus beneath the overall aim of spreading the Gospel. This is a line of reasoning which is of course dangerous for *us* to adopt; but it indicates the priority given to preaching. Actually one sees other examples of this in Paul- he observed Torah amongst the Jews, but broke it amongst the Gentiles; he thus relativized obedience to Divine law for the sake of the spreading of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:22). In fact all Paul's decisions in controversial matters seem to have been made based around the ultimate question: 'What would be best for spreading the Gospel?'. Perhaps the Lord was making the same point when He told His preachers to stay in their converts' homes and eat whatever was set before them (Lk. 10:8), i.e. without insisting on eating kosher food. For the Pharisees insisted that an observant Jew could *not* do what the Lord said- i.e. eat 'whatever' was set before them. But the Lord waived that commandment- for the sake of spreading the Gospel. And we do well to get into his spirit as we face the many calls we do in church life.

9:15 *But I have used none of these things, and I do not write these things that it may be so done in my case-* Paul is covering himself against the likely twist of this words, to the effect that he was hinting at wanting money from the Corinthians. We need to think ahead to the likely impact our words and positions are going to have, and the possibility of misinterpretation.

*For it is better for me to die, than that anyone should make my boasting void-* Paul goes on to say that he has nothing to glory / boast of regarding his Gospel work, for he is only doing his job (:16). So what glory of his does he fear might be made void? He has argued that his whole approach to these issues is because he wants to see them saved, and their salvation will be part of his salvation- for will partake in the same hope, the same acceptance of the Corinthians into immortality. If they were to be accepted into God's Kingdom, then they would be his glory. Thus he states in 2 Cor. 1:14 that the Corinthians accepted into God's Kingdom would be his glory [s.w.]. Likewise he would glory in the day of Christ if the Philippian converts were accepted (Phil. 2:16). Paul had constantly in mind this picture of his rejoicing / boast / glory on their behalf at judgment day; and therefore even in this life, he boasted / gloried about them (2 Cor. 7:14; 9:2), and the Thessalonians too (2 Thess. 1:4). The accepted Thessalonians at the last day would be Paul's glory and joy (1 Thess. 2:20). This future glorying which Paul ever had in mind would, however, be made void if the Corinthians turned away from the faith. And by asking them for money, Paul feared he might make them stumble out of the path to the Kingdom, and thus his future glorying in their salvation by grace would be voided. Throughout Corinthians, Paul speaks of his fear that his labour would be void, or "in vain", if they turned away from Christ (1 Cor. 15:14,58; 2 Cor. 6:1). Likewise

if the Philippians and Thessalonians turned away, then his labour also would be in vain / voided (Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 3:15). Paul felt that he would prefer to die rather than see their salvation lost and his glory in them voided. His whole life and reason for being was the salvation of others; and this must be our pattern. This explains his extreme concern for his brethren's path, rather than shrugging his shoulders. His desire to die if they were not saved is clearly alluding to Moses, who asked that his name be taken out of the book of the living so that Israel might be saved, and Paul in Romans 9 applies this spirit to himself. This desire to die if they were not going to be saved reflected how he felt he had nothing to live for apart from the salvation of others- a powerful challenge to our cluttered lives. It provides help in understanding his comment that he did have a desire to die, but to remain alive in the flesh was more necessary for his converts (Phil. 1:23).

9:16- see on Acts 20:26.

*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about. For necessity is laid upon me-* We may need to read in an ellipsis here: 'If I preach the Gospel [from a sense of necessity]. The necessity, in the context, would be the necessity of preaching because he was a paid preacher and needed an income in order to survive. But he goes on to explain that because he is not preaching from the necessity of getting an income, his necessity is of a more spiritual kind. Again we see the contrast between the way of the flesh and that of the Spirit. The necessity he had was one laid upon him by God and the Lord Jesus; and not because of his material needs. "Necessity" is the same word translated "compel" in Lk. 14:23- "compel them to come in" and sit in their places at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The compulsion is laid upon us by the tragedy of human rejection of the places Christ prepared for them, and the wonderful, so easy possibility to be there. Significantly, this same Greek word is used elsewhere about the 'necessities' which are part of our ministry of the Gospel (2 Cor. 6:4; 12:10). The urgency of our task will lead us into many an urgent situation, with all the compelling needs which accompany them. But that compulsion, in this context, was from spiritual reasons and not because we want financial gain in this life.

*For woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel-* The "woe" was because he would not be discharging his need before God to preach. It may be that in these words Paul is alluding to how the High Priest had to have bells so that "his sound may be heard... that he die not" (Ex. 28:35; this idea of the sound being heard is picked up in Ps. 19 concerning the spread of the Gospel). Whatever the predestined and foreknown purpose of God with Paul as a preacher may have been, the fact still stands that the record emphasizes the quite natural spirit of compulsion to preach which arose within him. Paul was under no financial necessity to preach- indeed he himself admits a tendency not to preach, to hold back from giving his all to fulfil that commission he had received to testify of the Gospel of God's grace (1 Cor. 9:16). He asks his brethren to pray that he would be able to "make it manifest" more than he did (Col. 4:4 cp. Eph. 6:20). He voluntarily, and not for financial motive, made himself a slave to all, selling himself as it were into slavery, in order to save them (:19).

9:17 *For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if against my own will, then I have clearly had a stewardship entrusted to me-* The "reward" referred to the financial motives which Paul has just denied having. The fact that true preaching is a carrying of the cross explains why Paul felt that the fact that to preach what he did went right against his natural grain, it was not at all what he wanted to do, and this was the proof that indeed a "dispensation of the Gospel" had been given to him. Likewise Jeremiah complained that the

visions which he had to preach, about violence and judgment, were quite against the grain of his sensitive soul (Jer. 46:5 RV; 47:6). There is therefore no such person as a natural preacher in the ultimate sense. This is a job one would not do for money, not any amount of it.

It seems strange to think that Paul had to *make* himself preach, that he did it against his natural will. But remember his poor eyesight, ugly physical appearance, his embarrassing early life spent persecuting and torturing Christians - no wonder public preaching of Christ was something he had to make himself do. It may be that the reason he went to the wilderness of Arabia after his conversion was that he was running away from the command to preach publicly (Gal. 1:17,18). Several times he speaks of how he fears he will lose his nerve to preach, and thereby lose his salvation; he even asks others to pray for him that he will preach more boldly. It also needs to be remembered that Paul was a passionate Jew; he loved his people. It seems that he "preached circumcision" (Gal. 5:11) in the sense of being involved in actively trying to proselytize Gentiles. But it was Paul the Hebrew of the Hebrews who was called to be the apostle *to the Gentiles*. It might have sounded more appropriate if preaching to the Jews was his specialism, and fisherman Peter from half-Gentile Galilee went to the Gentiles. But no. Each man was sent against his grain. And more than this. It seems that the Lord set up Peter, James and John as some kind of replacement to the Scribes and rabbis. And let's not forget Amos, too. He defended his prophetic ministry, as Paul defended his, by saying that it was something he had been called to quite against his nature. He was not a prophet nor a prophet's son, and yet he was taking from following his flock of sheep to be a prophet to Israel- quite against his will and inclination (Am. 7:14,15).

9:18 *What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel without charge-* This was the question the cynical Corinthians wanted answering. Why was Paul preaching, if indeed it was not for money or personal gain? Paul's decision not to take money from Corinth was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8 "freely you have received, freely give"; although there were other passages in the Gospels, even two verses later in Matthew 10, which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issue of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life.

*So as not to use to the full my right in the gospel-* Paul could have taken wages from the Corinthians for his service. But on that occasion he chose "not to use to the full my right in the gospel"; and he uses the same word in 1 Cor. 7:31, in teaching that although we have to 'use this world' we are to 'use it to the full' (RVmg.). As God operates with us on different levels, accepting non-ideal situations, so we are to deal with each other. Paul could have used his power in the Gospel more sharply than he actually did with the Corinthians (2 Cor. 13:10)- and note how he earlier uses those two words "power" and "use" in saying that he could have demanded financial support from them, but he chose not to use that power / authority which he had (1 Cor. 9:12).

9:19- see on Mt. 20:27 and 1 Cor. 9:16 *Woe to me.*

*For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more-* Far from seeking personal financial gain from preaching, Paul had as it were sold himself into slavery so that he might save others. But he "was free from all" in that he did not

take money for preaching. The idea of gaining or winning *people* rather than money [as he was falsely accused of] alludes to the Lord's words about winning men (Mt. 18:15). When Paul speaks of how he has "made myself a slave unto all" in his preaching (1 Cor. 9:19), there is an evident connection with his reasoning in Phil. 2:7 about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus likewise *made* Himself a servant to all. For Paul, preaching was and is to be a sharing in the cross of Christ. In his preaching of the Gospel, Paul could say that "I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19). Yet elsewhere, Paul uses the idea of the "servant unto all" as descriptive of Christ's attitude upon the cross (Phil. 2:7). The connection of thought reflects how Paul understood that in seeking to gain others for Christ, we make ourselves their servants, and in this sense our witness to them is a living out of the principles of the cross. Being such a "servant unto all" hardly squares well with the image of arrogant platform preachers dazzling their audiences. That isn't the preaching which truly 'gains' people for Christ.

If we can at least grasp the spirit of taking up Christ's cross, there will be a deep sense of fellowship with others who have reached the same realization; and a deep joy and calmness in confidence of sharing His resurrection. *The cross is attainable*. It's not just an awful thing that happened in a few hours of history so long ago, the details of which we flinch from, excusing ourselves that it's just too terrible. Look how Paul alludes to it, and arose to the point where he could truly claim to us that he was living the crucified life. The Lord predicted in Mk. 10:44,45: "and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be *slave of all*. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and *to give His life a ransom for many*". And Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor. 9:19: "I have made myself *a slave to all*..."; and later in 1 Cor. 10:33: "Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but *the profit of the many, that they may be saved*". Through his sharing in the cross of the Lord Jesus, he, the very human Paul, became an agent in the salvation of all men. He too became a 'slave of all' after the pattern of the Lord in His time of dying. We may make excuses about Jesus not being exactly in our position, because God was His Father etc. Valid or not, those excuses disappear when we are faced with Paul's challenge.

9:20- see on 2 Cor. 11:24.

*And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, I became as one under the law-* Acts is full of examples of this. Indeed, Paul's arrest in Jerusalem which led to his journey to imprisonment in Rome was all due to trying to be as a Jew to the Jews, entering the temple and paying for sacrifices. To become something else to others must be done for the sake of connection with them, with their salvation in view- there is a fine line at times between this and the natural desire we have to be as others would like us to be, apparently adopting their positions for the sake of peace and acceptance. The Lord Jesus was by nature one of us, but Phil. 2:5-9 speak as if He 'became' as us- in that He wilfully entered fully into our human situations. And this came to ultimate term in the death of the cross.

*Though I am not under the law-* One of the simplest and thereby most powerful statements that the Law of Moses is not now operative nor required for Christians.

*That I might gain those that are under the law-* Paul is writing this in answer to the aspersion that he was in the preaching business for personal or financial "gain". He is saying that the gain he sought was for the Lord and for his converts- that they should be gained for Christ



and the life eternal. Yet again, He is alluding to the Lord's teaching, which uses the same Greek word for "gain". The Lord taught against seeking personal gain, even gaining the whole world (Mt. 16:26)- instead we should seek to gain our brother (Mt. 18:15, cp. 1 Pet. 3:1). Paul could say that he had 'lost' all the secular things which he once counted "gain" (Phil. 3:7).

*9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law-* Whilst Paul was "not under the [Jewish] law" (:20), he clarifies that this does not mean that he is in total "without law to God". God's law is now not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. The law of Christ is to bear each others' burdens (Gal. 6:2). This was what Paul was doing by trying to relate to others in the burdens they carried, even if those burdens were a self-imposed attempt to keep the Jewish law. He has used the slavery metaphor in :19, saying that he was a slave to all men's salvation; but that is the same as being under the law of Christ, whose passion is the salvation of all men.

*9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some-* The "weak" in NT usage are the spiritually weak. He "became weak" without being spiritually "weak". The "weak" in the Corinthian context were those who still thought that the pagan gods behind the idols actually existed (1 Cor. 8:7,10), those who were smitten with weakness because of their gross sins (1 Cor. 11:30), the weak parts of the body of Christ that need extra care (1 Cor. 12:22). Perhaps Paul has in mind the 'weak' as being those who were taken in by Judaism, who were still "under the law"; for the same word is used about the weakness of the Law of Moses (Heb. 7:18). It is a tribute to the Lord Jesus that someone of His spirituality could be naturally attractive to sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes. Paul likewise sought to connect with the spiritually weak- the total opposite of his earlier Rabbinic mindset, which sought to distance oneself from the spiritually weak. He desired by all means to "save some"- but the Greek appears to mean "somebody". To save just one person was worth it all. As Paul reflected upon how many had turned away, this must have become an every stronger credo for him- to save at least one person is so wonderful that all the grief is worth it. I have had those thoughts at the funerals of those I feel I brought to Christ. By all means I saved somebody, in bringing them to Christ the Saviour. We note that Paul felt that he could play a role in another's salvation. The Lord's saving work has been delegated to us to the extent that we can save some, and also cause others to stumble from salvation.

Minucius records that opposition to the Christian faith was because the believers so closely identified themselves with the crucified Christ that His death and shame were seen as theirs: "They are said to be a man who was punished with death as a criminal and the fatal wood of his cross, thus providing suitable liturgy for the depraved friends". Thus we see how deep was their appreciation of the doctrine of representation: they saw the Lord in His time of dying as representative of themselves. Time and again the words and actions of Paul show that both consciously and unconsciously he was aware that he was experiencing in himself the experiences of his Lord. In his preaching he *made himself a slave of all, weak* that he might gain the weak (1 Cor. 9:19,22). This is language he elsewhere understands as appropriate to the Lord in His death (2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:7 cp. Mk. 9:35).

9:23 *And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker of it-* Here again we may need to read in an ellipsis with regard to "the Gospel's sake". As explained on :10, Paul's hope was that he would be a "partaker" in the final salvation of his converts, just like the ox who ploughs and threshes in the hope he will get a mouthful of the corn finally produced. As it stands here in :23, the "joint partaker" has no reference- joint with what or whom? The sake of the Gospel therefore refers, I suggest, to "the sake of your response to the Gospel". The "all things" which he "did" refer in the context to being all things to all men in order to save them. He did these things for the sake of their response to the Gospel, so that he might be a joint partaker with them of the hope of the Gospel.

9:24 *Do you not know that they that run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run like this, so that you may attain the prize-* There is only one who so ran that He received the prize thanks to His own efforts- and that was the Lord Jesus. But we are in Him, and should run like Him. But we must read this emphasis upon one receiving the prize as an intended contrast to what Paul has just written- that salvation was a matter of being "a *joint partaker*" of the hope contained in the Gospel. We are to run *as if* in a race where only one gets the prize- even though that prize is in another sense a matter of 'joint partaking', a prize received jointly. For Paul felt that the nature of his eternity was tied up in the salvation of his converts. He doesn't want them to think that this idea of joint partaking meant that they were not to run well themselves. They were to run, as he himself did (:26), as if it was a very personal race with an individual, unique prize at the end of the course. And yet in another sense, that prize is a collective matter, a 'joint partaking'.

9:25- see on Lk. 13:24.

*And every man that strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible-* Paul lifts the arguments about receiving material advantage from preaching to an altogether higher plane. We are aiming to receive an eternal, incorruptible victory wreath. Even the highest personal achievements and possessions in secular life are not worthy to be compared with that. The crown is both personal and collective; Paul speaks of the Philippians and Thessalonians as being his eternal crown- if they entered God's Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). Paul's striving [literally, 'agonizing'] was not just for his own crown, but for they to be accepted at the last day. The contrast between corruptible and incorruptible will be developed later in 1 Cor. 15:52; our corruptible body will be made incorruptible at the resurrection of the body at the Lord's return. The crown is therefore to be understood as the change of our bodies, both of Paul and the Corinthians, at the last day. The crown will therefore be very personal and intimate to ourselves- it is in the form of our eternal bodies. And those bodies, that being, shall reflect our efforts for others. If those we work with are saved as a function of our efforts for them, then they shall be part of our crown. Paul's self control was motivated by a desire for others' salvation as well as his own. And this surely is one of the factors explaining the Lord's amazing achievement of perfection within human nature; the motivation came from a desire to save us. For He died primarily "for us". If we are motivated solely by a desire to save ourselves, to get eternity for our personal body, then we will likely fail. We are too dysfunctional to be deeply motivated by that. But enduring for the sake of others' salvation is a more powerful motivator.

9:26 *I therefore run, but not with uncertainty. So fight I, but not as a shadow boxer*- Later we will find Paul answering the aspersions that he is indecisive and not serious (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:17). He was deadly serious, totally focused, because the issues before him affected not only his eternal destiny but that of many others. He uses the same word to urge that the trumpet not give an uncertain sound (1 Cor. 14:8). Various images are used in the Bible to bring home to us our sense of purpose. We are to see ourselves as soldiers disciplining ourselves for action, fighting in the only ultimately worthy cause with victory in sight; as slaves of a great Master; as athletes running a race. Paul saw himself as very much in reality, and not just shadowing boxing. Why does he bother saying this- that he boxes not as one who merely beats the air? Surely because he perceived that many people don't grasp the 'reality' of life, and he stood accused of being one of them. They think it's all some virtual game, online rather than real life. But Paul saw the real issues of eternal life and eternal death very clearly. Those who responded to his preaching and teaching really would live forever; those who rejected it or fell away from it would ultimately remain eternally dead. Paul perceived that we are dealing with the ultimate of all realities: the love of God, His feelings for us, His mission and purpose for us, how every moment the King of the Cosmos is yearning for us, the life eternal, the sense of the future men might miss. And so Paul fought for it all, not uncertainly, and not as one who feels only half in reality. It was his life.

9:27- see on 2 Cor. 12:10.

*But like an athlete I discipline my body and make it my slave; lest by any means, after I have preached to others*- The Greek for "body" is also translated "slave". Paul speaks here not only of the extent of his self-mastery; he is continuing the metaphor of enslavement with which he opened this section in :19. He made himself a slave to all men in order to save them, empathizing with their sensitivities and weaknesses in order to save them. And so continues the theme being developed here; that although he would be a joint partaker with his converts of the same hoped for salvation, yet he ran the race, as they should, as if only he personally was going to get the prize. His salvation, as ours, was personal; and yet on another hand, it was bound up in the salvation of the others in his life. He beat his body (NEV "discipline"), directing the boxing of :26 at himself, in order to enslave himself- but that enslavement was for the salvation of others (:19). If he did not do this, then having preached to others he would himself be rejected. So his argument is that he would be rejected from salvation if he did not enslave himself to the salvation of others. Serving them and their foibles and needs was a necessary part of his own path to salvation. This is a wide ranging principle. If we consider that we shall reach salvation by simply focusing upon our own faith, sitting behind a screen hitting the right buttons, but making no effort for the salvation of others- then we may well find that in the longer term, we shall ourselves miss salvation. This is the danger of the 'out of church Christian' movement.

*I myself should be disqualified*- A castaway, reprobate, rejected. The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in his mind (also in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words here in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (AV). Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

The real possibility of rejection at judgment day was evidently a motivator in Paul's life, and he used "the terror" of the coming day of judgment to persuade men in his teaching of the ecclesias (2 Cor. 5:11), and also in his preaching to the world (e.g. Acts 17:31). Paul's exposition of judgment to come caused Felix to tremble (Acts 24:25). I don't suppose Felix would if he walked into many churches today. The fact is, many will be rejected. The unforgiving believer will be delivered to the tormentors to pay what is due (Mt. 18:34); God is preparing torture instruments for the punishment of the rejected (Ps. 7:13). These are awesome descriptions of the self-inflicted mental agony in which the rejected will writhe. The matchless grace of God and His eagerness for our salvation should not be allowed to blunt the impact of these warnings- of what we can do to ourselves, more than God doing to us. Almost certainly, some of those you know today will go through the terrible rejection process which we are going to explore now. People from all over the world, the living responsible, will see the sign of the Son of man, will know His return is imminent, and wail with the knowledge that they have crucified Him afresh and must now meet Him (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). Our response to the certain knowledge that His return is imminent will in effect be our judgment.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Brothers, I would not have you ignorant*- Paul told the Corinthians that he didn't want them to be "ignorant" of the powerful implications of the fact that they had been baptized into the Son of God, and were on their way to His Kingdom, being in an exactly analogous situation to Israel as they walked through the wilderness. He uses a word which is the Greek word 'agnostic'. He didn't want them to be agnostic, to be indifferent, to shrug their shoulders, at the bitingly insistent relevance of the type to them. And that type of Israel in the wilderness is most applicable to us, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (:11) than to any other generation. Indifference seems to have been a problem in Corinth as it is for us. By contrast, God is provoked to jealousy by our indifference to Him (1 Cor. 10:22), seeing every self-reliant act as an implicit statement that we are "stronger than he". He would not have us "ignorant" or agnostic about the implications of the basic doctrines we believe (1 Thess. 4:13; Rom. 1:13; 2:4; 7:1; 11:25; 1 Cor. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13), nor 'agnostic' to the fact we have been baptized and risen with Christ (Rom. 6:3). These are all things that we are almost too familiar with; and yet he urges us, down through the centuries, to never be indifferent and agnostic to these things.

*That our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea*- Israel left Egypt, passed through the baptism of the Red Sea, and then walked through the wilderness- all in enacted parable of our spiritual experience. They then passed through the Jordan, and set foot in the land of promise (cp. our entry to the Kingdom at the judgment seat). But they had not been circumcised in the wilderness- possibly suggesting that the new Israel will not have cut off the flesh as they should have done in their wilderness walk. It is stressed at least five times in Joshua 5 that Joshua himself personally circumcised each of them, and then they kept the Passover. This would seem to tellingly point forward to our coming to the end of the wilderness walk of this life, and then entering into the Kingdom; to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus (cp. Joshua), who performs the intensely personal operation of rolling back and cutting off the flesh, and then we sit down together and keep the Passover, as the Lord clearly intimated we would (Mt. 26:29). This is how personal relationships in the Kingdom of God will be.

Israel crossing the Red Sea is one of the most well-known types of baptism / the new creation. They were being chased by the Egyptians, and were trapped against the sea. The only way of escape was for that water to open and allow them to go through it. If any Israelite had refused to go through, there would have been no salvation. Going further, it is evident that the people of Israel as a body were going through the death and resurrection experience of the Lord Jesus, through the process of the Passover and Exodus through the Red Sea:

Israel	Abib	Jesus
Ate Passover (Ex. 12:6)	14th	Died on the cross as Passover lambs slain
Left Egypt the next day (Num. 33:3)	15th	
Journeyed three days (Ex. 8:27)	15th-17th	Jesus three days in the tomb
Came through the Red Sea	17th	Resurrected

As we come out of the baptismal water, we really are united with the resurrected Lord- a new creation. His newness of life, His deliverance and successful exodus from the world- all this becomes ours. Israel were slaves in Egypt, and then after the Red Sea baptism became slaves of God. Ps. 68:18 pictures them as a train of captives being led out of Egypt, merging into the image of a train of a captivity led into a different captivity. Romans 6 powerfully brings home the point: we were slaves of sin, but now are become slaves of righteousness.

The cloud above them was water, and the water of the Red Sea on each side of them, giving them as it were a complete immersion without getting wet. But there's a sense in which baptism is ongoing, and it was for them. They are described as being "under the cloud" throughout the journey to the promised land (Ps. 105:39; Num. 14:14). We are to die for and in Christ and experience His resurrection life breaking through into our mortal lives as an ongoing process (2 Cor. 4:10,11).

Try to see the historical events which occurred to Israel as relevant to you personally. They were "types of us". Note how 1 Cor. 10:1 speaks of "*our fathers*"- even when Paul is writing to Gentiles. He intended them to see in the Jewish fathers a type of themselves. Israel's keeping of the Passover implied that each subsequent Israelite had personally been redeemed that night. All down the years, they were to treat the stranger fairly: "for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). The body of believers, the body of Christ, is not only world-wide geographically at this point in time; it stretches back over time as well as distance, to include all those who have truly believed. This is why David found such inspiration from the history of Israel in his own crises (e.g. Ps. 77).

10:2 *And were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*- In a sense, Israel's baptism was an ongoing experience, in that the cloud [of water?] continued over them throughout the wilderness wanderings. The ongoing nature of the act of baptism was outlined in baptism's greatest prototype: the passage of Israel through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). They were baptized into that pillar of cloud (cp. the water of baptism), but in fact the cloud and fire which overshadowed them at their Red Sea baptism continued throughout their wilderness journey to the Kingdom. They went "*through fire and through water*" (Ps. 66:12) throughout their wilderness years, until they entered the promised rest (cp. the Kingdom). Likewise, the great works of Yahweh which He showed at the time of their exodus from Egypt (cp. the world) and baptism at the Red Sea were in essence *repeated* throughout their wilderness journey (Dt. 7:19). Therefore whenever they faced discouragement and an apparent blockage to their way, they were to remember how God had redeemed them at their baptism, and to realize that in fact His work was still ongoing with them (Dt. 20:1). He told them in the desert that He was "Yahweh that *bringeth you up* out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 11:45). Therefore the overcoming of Edom, Moab and the Canaanite tribes is described in language lifted from the Red Sea record (e.g. Ex. 15:15-17). Throughout their history, Israel were reminded that what God had done for them in their Red Sea deliverance He was continuing to do, and therefore all their enemies would likewise perish if they remained God's people (e.g. Is. 43:16). See on Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:6.

Bullinger comments that "they were all baptized into Moses" can be literally rendered 'they

baptized themselves'. The same verb form occurs in Luke 2:5, where Joseph went "to be taxed", literally 'to enrol himself'. Self baptism is quite valid although not advisable in most cases. And yet the language of 'being baptized' suggests that it is God and the Lord, through the Spirit, who baptize us. And yet we take the step ourselves. Baptism is therefore a fusion of our freewill and God's action.

10:3 *They did all eat the same spiritual food*- This was the manna, which the Lord in John 6 interprets as Him and His word. Perhaps the emphasis is upon "the same"- for the Corinthians were under the influence of false teachers, and there was only one food which would get them through the wilderness journey. Unless we too feed on the Lord Jesus, we shall perish in the journey to the Kingdom. Daily reading of the word, especially of the Gospel records, seems to me to be critical in our age. The food was "spiritual" but the Corinthians were not "spiritual" (3:1), even though chapter 1 begins by saying they had been given the Spirit. Unless we feed the Spirit, we too shall not be spiritual.

10:4- see on Rom. 5:12.

*And did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock represented Christ*- "That rock was Christ". However, Dt. 32 seems to imply that the rock was an Angel. "I will publish the name of the Lord (a reference to the Angel declaring the name in Ex. 34)... He is the rock... He found (Israel) in a desert land... He led him" (vv. 3,4,10). This is all describing the activities of the Angel. Israel rebelled against the Angel (Is. 63:10), "lightly esteemed the rock... of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful" (Dt. 32:15,18). Another link between the rock and the Angel is in Gen. 49:24: "The mighty God of Jacob (an Angel)... the shepherd (the Angel, Is. 63:9-11)... the stone... of Israel". Note that Jesus is clearly the shepherd, the stone and the rock (of offence). The language of 1 Cor. 10 invites us not to interpret "the rock" just as the physical rock. It can be shown that the Comforter was an Angel representing Christ, in fact the same Angel as in Is. 63 which led Israel through the wilderness. It is therefore fitting that "the rock", the same Angel, should be chosen by Paul in 1 Cor. 10 as a type of Christ. What came from the rock was "spiritual drink"- showing that the Rock Angel spiritually as well as physically fed them. Christ's interpretation of the manna as representing the word in John 6 would support this idea of the Angels spiritually strengthening Israel on their journey. Ex. 29:42 implies this happened daily; the Angel stood at the door of the tabernacle each day to speak with them. Perhaps the same is true today for those who through Angelic help feed daily on the manna of the Word. It is possible that Israel tempting Christ in 1 Cor. 10:9 is meant to refer back to 1 Cor. 10:4 "They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ". Tempting Christ was therefore tempting the rock to produce water. The rock was a title of the Angel that was with them, and it was he, representing Christ, whom they tempted. See on Is. 51:9; Rev. 3:22.

Paul is alluding to a Jewish tradition that the rock followed Israel through the wilderness, always giving water. Some traditions suggest Miriam carried it; the supposed "Rock of Moses" is a piece of rock which could have been carried. Paul emphasizes that the point of his allusion is that the water which they drank of represented "Christ", the strength which comes from Him as the smitten rock; he alludes to the tradition just as he quotes pagan poets and makes a point out of their words (Acts 17:28). The Bible often features this kind of thing; and God isn't so paranoiac and apologetic that He as it were has to footnote such things with

a comment that "of course, this isn't true".

It should be evident enough that the rock which Moses smote in the desert was simply a rock; it wasn't Christ personally. The Jewish book of Wisdom claimed that "the rock was Wisdom" (Wisdom 11). Paul, as he so often does, is picking up this phrase and saying that more essentially, the rock represented Jesus personally, and not 'Wisdom' in the Jewish misunderstanding of this figure. It "was" Him in the sense that it represented Him. Likewise He said about the communion wine: "This is my blood". It wasn't literally His blood; it was and is His blood only in that it represents His blood. Paul is describing the experience of Israel in the wilderness because he saw in it some similarities with the walk of the Corinthian believers towards God's kingdom. The whole of 1 Cor. 10 is full of such reference. And this is why he should speak about the rock which Moses smote as a symbol of Christ. The Israelites had been baptized into Moses, just as Corinth had been baptized into Christ; and both Israel and Corinth ate "the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink". "Spiritual food... spiritual drink" shows that Paul saw the manna they ate and the water they drank as spiritually symbolic- just as He saw the rock as symbolic. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 10:16,17 to write of how Corinth also ate and drank of Christ in the breaking of bread, and in chapter 11 he brings home the point: like Israel, we can eat and drink those symbols, "the same spiritual meat... the same spiritual drink", having been baptized into Christ as they were into Moses, and think that thereby we are justified to do as we like in our private lives. This is the point and power of all this allusion. The picture of their carcasses rotting in the wilderness is exhortation enough. Baptism and observing the 'breaking of bread' weren't enough to save Israel.

The Lord Jesus Himself had explained in John 6 how the manna represented His words and His sacrifice. He spoke of how out of Him would come "living water", not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, "flowed abundantly".....as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface ("as out of the great depths", Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him.

The Law of Moses included several rituals which depended upon what is called "the running water"(Lev. 14:5,6,50-52; 15:18; Num. 19:17). "Running" translates a Hebrew word normally translated "living". This living water was what came out of the smitten rock. The Lord taught that the water that would come out of Him would only come after His glorification (Jn. 7:38)- an idea He seems to link with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19; Heb. 2:9). When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. The rock was "smitten", and the water then came out. The Hebrew word used here is usually translated to slay, slaughter, murder. It occurs in two clearly Messianic passages: "...they talk to the hurt of him [Christ] whom thou hast smitten"(Ps. 69:26); "we esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God"(Is. 53:4).

It was in a sense God who "clave the rock" so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). "Clave" implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadowing of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more



figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. Yahweh, presumably represented by an Angel, stood upon [or 'above'] the rock when Moses, on Yahweh's behalf, struck the rock. Here we see a glimpse into the nature of the Father's relationship with the Son on the cross. He was both with the Son, identified with Him just as the Angel stood on the rock or hovered above it as Moses struck it... and yet He also was the one who clave that rock, which was Christ. As Abraham with Isaac was a symbol of both the Father and also the slayer, so in our far smaller experience, the Father gives us the trials which He stands squarely with us through. And within the wonder of His self-revelation, Yahweh repeatedly reveals Himself as "the rock"- especially in Deuteronomy. And yet that smitten rock "was [a symbol of] Christ". On the cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". There He was the most intensely manifested in His beloved Son. There God was spat upon, His love rejected. There we see the utter humility and self-abnegation of the Father. And we His children must follow the same path, for the salvation of others.

The rock "followed [better, 'accompanied'] them" (1). We must understand this as a metonymy, whereby "the rock" is put for what came out of it, i.e. the fountain of living water. It seems that this stream went with them on their journey. The statement that "they drank" of the rock is in the imperfect tense, denoting continuous action- they *kept on* drinking of that water, it wasn't a one time event, it continued throughout the wilderness journey. A careful reading of Ex. 17:5,6 reveals that at Rephidim, Moses was told to "Go on before the people", to Horeb. There he struck the rock, and yet the people drank the water in Rephidim. The water flowed a long way that day, and there is no reason to think that it didn't flow with them all the time. The records make it clear enough that the miraculous provision of water was in the same context as God's constant provision of food and protection to the people (Dt. 8:15,16). The rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: "He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness (2). It was living, spring water- not lying around in puddles. The water that came from that one rock tasted as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time.

In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new. In our experience, it's as if He has died and risen for us every time we obtain forgiveness, or any other grace to help in our times of need. We live in newness of life. The cross is in that sense ongoing; He dies and lives again for every one who comes to Him. And yet at the end of their wilderness journey, Moses reflected that Israel had forgotten the rock that had given them birth. The water had become such a regular feature of their lives that they forgot the rock in Horeb that it flowed from. They forgot that 'Horeb' means 'a desolate place', and yet they had thankfully drunk of the water the first time in Rephidim, 'the place of comfort'.

We too have done the same, but the length of time we have done so can lead us to forget the smitten rock, back there in the loneliness and desolation of Calvary. Not only did his disciples forsake him and his mother finally go away home, but He even felt that the Father had forsaken Him. As Abraham left alone in the Messianic "horror of great darkness", as Isaac alone with only his Father, leaving the other men behind...so the Lord on the cross was as a single green root grown up out of a parched desert. Let us never forget that 'Horeb'; and let's not let the abundant new life and blessing which there is in Christ become something ordinary. God forbid that we like Corinth, like Israel, should drink of that sparkling water each week in our 'place of comfort' and go forth to do just as we please.

## Notes

(1) Marvin Vincent [*Vincent's Word Studies*] comments: "Paul appears to recall a rabbinic tradition that there was a well formed out of the spring in Horeb, which gathered itself up into a rock like a swarm of bees, and followed the people for forty years; sometimes rolling itself, sometimes carried by Miriam, and always addressed by the elders, when they encamped, with the words, "Spring up, O well!" (Num. 21:17)". Whether this is true or not, Paul is alluding to this idea- hence the rather awkward idiom to non-Jewish readers.

(2) There is repeated emphasis in the records that the water came from the [singular] rock. However Ps. 78:16 speaks of God cleaving the rocks. I suggest this is an intensive plural- the sense is 'the one great rock'. The next verses (17,20) go on to speak of how the water came from a singular rock.

10:5 *However with most of them God-* The majority of them (Gk.) were strewn down along the way (Gk.). Faced with the apostasy at Corinth, Paul was pointing out that as the majority of Israel failed to make it, so the new Israel should not be over confident that this feature of the type doesn't apply to them too.

*Was not well pleased-* Repeatedly this phrase is used in the Gospels to describe how God was "well pleased" in Christ (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). The implication may be that it is through being "in Christ" that God will count us acceptable, rather than by our keeping our nose clean of the more public sins of fornication and idolatry.

*For their dead bodies were scattered over the wilderness-* The Greek means to lay prostrate- the very language of idol worship. Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 20 are clear that Israel worshipped idols in the wilderness, having smuggled them with them through the Red Sea. And this was their death. Clearly idol worship was an issue at Corinth, with some of them still believing that idols represented pagan gods who had actual existence (8:7-12). The same image of the carcasses of Israel laying unburied in the wilderness is found in Heb. 3:17. Ps. 91:5-8 speaks as if the condemned generation were struck down one by one, by day and night, and the faithful Joshua was strengthened not to be fearful as he regularly experienced men falling dead literally at his side (Ps. 91:7) and saw carcasses, sometimes in the thousands, laying in the wilderness. The frightened people simply hurried on, with no time to bury the bodies. The journey must've been a fearful and depressing experience, with sudden death a daily reality. They were after all experiencing condemnation; it was a death march. Perhaps the destruction of the rejected will be the same at the last day. And yet that death march of the condemned generation is clearly used as a type of our journey from baptism to the Kingdom. In a sense we are living out our condemnation now, so that we will be ultimately saved (1 Cor. 11:29-31). It does us no harm to reflect upon the reality of condemnation, so that we

may sense more keenly the extent of God's grace in saving us from wrath through Christ. As soon as we start to think that surely all this can't mean that the majority of those baptized into Christ may also fail to make it, we must bear in mind the reasoning of Hebrews and Romans which warns us against feeling like that. On the other hand, God's grace is such that we can have every confidence that very many will reach the Kingdom, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. But the possibility of failure, the sense of the future we might miss, must be deeply felt by us. We *cannot* assume that as a community of believers we are any better than natural Israel. Reflecting for a moment on the possibility that the majority of those we know who are baptized will not make it, we are left with sober introspection- "Lord, is it I?". This thought alone inspires an intensity in seeking to abide in Christ.

10:6 *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they lusted-* Literally, they were 'types of us'. 8:7-12 shows that some in Corinth believed in idols and worshipped them, along with the true God. This was exactly analogous to Israel in the wilderness, and they were to take a warning from this. Hebrews however makes the point that Israel's rejection in the wilderness was solely because they did not have faith. The idol worship mitigated against total faith in the true God- and that was and is the essential problem with idol worship, in whatever form. Gal. 5:17 criticizes some believers for being in a position where the flesh lusted [s.w.] against the Spirit, and the nail biting conflict was too much for weak willed human nature, which fails to have within it the steel will required to resist the flesh. Paul argues there that the Galatians should give themselves over to the Spirit, so that such conflict is not experienced, knowing it will inevitably end in failure. This is a theme of Corinthians- they were not spiritual (3:1), they did not feed the Spirit (:3) they had been given at baptism (chapter 1). And so they lusted after the flesh, and easily gave in.

10:7 *Neither be you idolaters, as some of them were-* Some of them were idolaters as well as Christians (8:7-12). Paul accepted that was how it was, and urged those who were stronger not to make these weaker ones stumble. He never advocates solving the issue by casting them out of the church, and his repeated silence about this needs to be carefully weighed by those who believe in excommunicating weak members from the church.

*As it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play-* Sitting down to eat and drink is used in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 with reference to the breaking of bread service. Israel ate and drunk and then rose up to commit sexual sin in the name of idol worship and religious devotion to the golden calf. It seems from chapters 6 and 7 that the believers at Corinth were sing church prostitutes- and we can deduce from this allusion to the eating and drinking that this was being done at the memorial meeting. They were practicing the communion service just as the surrounding cults had special meals to worship their idols, at which they slept with prostitutes. The golden calf incident happened whilst Moses was absent, and he returned to them in judgment. Paul's threats to come to Corinth and judge their apostasy may suggest he saw himself as their Moses.

10:8 *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed-* The fornication in view here isn't going too far with one's unmarried partner, but the fornication associated with idol worship; indeed, this is the context of most of the NT warnings against "fornication", and the implication is that fornication was practiced at the breaking of bread, and taught by "Jezebel", because that service had been mixed with idol worship. Hence Paul has to make the point that

feasting and drunkenness shouldn't be practiced at the memorial meeting- clearly they had turned it into the kind of feast which accompanied idol worship.

The reference is apparently to the worship of Baal Peor and sleeping with the Moabite religious prostitutes (although see later on this verse). We note that Israel were led into that sin by their leaders (Num. 25:4), and perhaps that was the same in the Corinthian church.

*And so in one day twenty three thousand died-* Num. 25:9 gives a figure of 24,000. Perhaps the key to understanding the difference is the phrase "in one day". Num. 25:9 says that 24,000 died as a result of a plague sent to punish them- but it is not recorded how quickly they died from the plague. We can assume that a "plague" took some time period to kill them. But Num. 25:4,5 records that immediately, that day, the judges of Israel were commanded to kill by the sword those who had committed the fornication, and Phinehas arose in response. Those deaths by the sword were different to those from the plague- perhaps 23,000 died that day from these executions, and then 24,000 died from the plague subsequently. Another option is to note that there were 23,000 Levites (Num. 26:62). If each Levite killed a man (which Num. 25:5 "Let every one kill his man" might imply, cp. Ex. 32:27), this would mean 23,000 died in that one day, and if 1,000 died subsequently from the plague, we then have the 24,000 of Num. 25:9. Or it may be that 1 Cor. 10:8 is actually continuing to refer to the golden calf incident mentioned in :7; for Ex. 32:28 LXX says that 23,000 died at that time. The Masoretic text says 3,000. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Ex. 32:28 specifically states that this slaughter happened in one day.

10:9- see on 1 Cor. 10:4.

*Neither let us put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and perished by the serpents-* The usual assumption is that this refers to Israel's complaining about their "light bread" in Num. 21:5, as this is the only recorded incident where they were punished by serpents. But their complaint at that point hardly sounds like putting the Lord to the test. The more obvious reference is to the incident at the place subsequently named Massah, 'testing', when they put the Lord to the test by asking "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. 17:7). The Bible doesn't record that they were then punished by serpents, but this was so in Jewish tradition; and we saw on :4 that Paul is unafraid to allude to such traditions and take lessons from them. Suffering from "fiery serpents" was Israel's common experience in the wilderness (Dt. 8:15). This incident is more pertinent to the Corinthian situation. For in chapter 1, Paul has assured them that the Lord was indeed amongst them by His Spirit; but they were not spiritual (3:1), they refused to perceive His activity amongst them through the Spirit. The miraculous signs of the Spirit had been worked amongst them (2 Cor. 12:12). Christ crucified had been revealed amongst Paul's converts by the ministry of the Spirit (Gal. 3:1,5). And yet the Corinthians were effectively saying, along with the Galatians: 'Where is the promise of the Spirit amongst us which Paul keeps claiming?'.

10:10- see on Ex. 12:23; Ps. 78:49; Rom. 5:12.

*Neither let us grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the Destroyer angel-* The reference is to the murmuring of Korah's rebellion against Moses (Num. 16:41,49). Paul is positioning himself as their Moses; for he spends much of Corinthians answering their various murmurings against him. Likewise the grumbling about the manna (Ex. 16:8,10) was against Moses.

The number of firstborn males after Israel left Egypt was remarkably small (around 20,000, Num. 3:43). Women in most primitive societies have an average of 7 births. This would mean that given a total population of around 2,800,000 on leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:37), there should have been around 400,000 firstborn males. But instead, there is only a fraction of this number. Why? Did Israel eat the Passover? My suggestion- and this is well in the category of things you will never know for sure and can only ponder- is that many Hebrew firstborns died on Passover night. Israel were warned that if they did not properly keep the Passover, "the Destroyer" Angel would kill their firstborn (Ex. 12:23). "The Destroyer" is mentioned in 1 Cor. 10:10: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the Destroyer" (*olothreutes*; this is a proper noun in the Greek). Who was the Destroyer? If Scripture interprets Scripture, it was the 'Destroyer' Angel of Passover night. In similar vein Heb. 11:28 speaks of "He (the Angel) that destroyed (Gk. *olothreuo*) the firstborn".

Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 10:10 not to "murmur as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (i. e. the destroying Angel) implies that the unworthy among the "Israel of God" will also be destroyed by Angelic means if we make the same mistakes Israel of old made. The same Angel that destroyed the Egyptians would destroy God's Israel; they would be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The fact that the Angels will personally minister the condemnation of the unworthy (Mt. 13:49 "the Angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire") when in their lives those Angels gave their charges every chance to repent and to grow spiritually, preserving them from physical danger, is surely a heart rending thought; and a motivation to respond acceptably to the trials God brings into our lives through His Angels.

10:11- see on Gal. 1:4.

*Now these things happened to them as an example-* They were 'types of us'. Israel's sin was their fault, and the judgments for it were called forth by their behaviour. And yet as with all sin, God works through it. The whole process of their failures and judgments for that failure was for our sakes. We must sense the real possibility of spiritual failure, of the eternal future we may miss.

The ecclesia in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) were tempted to commit the same sins in principle as we are tempted to (1 Cor.10:1-10). Twice Paul hammers home the point: "These things were our examples... now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and are written (i.e. the process of inspiration became operative) for our admonition" (v.6,11). Paul seems to read the minds of many Gentile Christians as they quietly reason 'But that was Israel- we Gentiles have been called because we shall do better'; he warns that such an attitude places us in grave spiritual danger: "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (v.12,13). This could be paraphrased as follows: "The Jews ("man") had the same human nature as you; if you think that you can stand up to it better than they, then such spiritual arrogance will lead you to fall". Such reasoning goes against the grain of what we would naturally like to hear, which is that we will certainly reach salvation just as we are, with no conditions, and without having to have any conflict with our sinful nature. Paul therefore concludes by saying that only the spiritually wise will grasp his line of argument here: "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say" (v.14).

I have noted that "example" is the Gk. *tupos*, types. The New Testament writers present things like the crossing of the Red Sea and the events in the wilderness as real historical events which were types of the work of Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4; Hebrews 3 etc.). But by the second century, there was a shift away from reading these events as types, but rather they were seen as allegories- no longer were the events so importantly *real*, rather the characters and events were seen as allegorical. It was against this background of ever increasing abstraction that Christians likewise started to move away from the real Christ. Origen in the third century argued strongly that the historical sections of the Bible were to be taken as allegory and not as literally accurate history. He spoke of there being in the Bible "spiritual truth in historical falsehood", and went on to use this as an excuse to explain why the Lord Jesus is presented as human rather than Divine in the Gospels. And so, as so often, an incorrect base attitude to God's word led to seriously misunderstanding it.

*And they were written about for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come-* We are to imagine the inspired Moses [or whoever] writing these things down, with God having us in mind, hoping we would take instruction from them. As these things happened at the beginning of the Jewish age, they had particular relevance to those living at the end of that age. J. Milik argues that Paul's language here is alluding to Apocryphal Jewish writings, which speak of the "ages" as coming to an end in Satan's destruction at the last day. Paul's reasoning is that Christ's death has brought about the termination of the "ages" as the Jews understood them. Satan and his hordes – in the way the Jews understood them – are right *now* rendered powerless and non-existent. As ever, Paul's approach seems to be not to baldly state that a personal Satan doesn't exist, but rather to show that even if he once did, he is now powerless and dead. The way the Lord Jesus dealt with the demons issue is identical. Once we understand this background, we see Paul's writings are packed with allusions to the Jewish ideas about the "ages" ending in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan. Paul was correcting their interpretations – by saying that the "ages" had ended in Christ's death, and the things the Jewish writings claimed for the future Messianic Kingdom were in fact already possible for those in Christ. Thus when 1 Enoch 5:7,8 speaks of 'freedom from sin' coming then, Paul applies that phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* (Rom. 6:18–22; 8:2).

10:12 *Therefore let him that thinks he stands be careful lest he fall-* I have noted on the previous verses that Paul is at pains to point out that we are not to think that the record of Israel's failure is merely dry history. There is a very real possibility that the Christian community could be no better than Israel after the flesh; and only a minority of those who pass through the baptismal water will therefore be saved. Which should make us look closely at ourselves. Paul's only other usage of the standing / falling image is in Rom. 14:4: "To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be made to stand up. For the Lord has power to make him stand". Thinking we stand therefore refers to an assumption that we shall in our own strength stand acceptable before the judgment seat. We shall only be made to stand by the Lord's grace; for in the same passage Paul writes of how every knee shall bow.

10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man-* Paul so often sees to the reasoning we indulge deep within our hearts in the times of testing. 'This is unique, without precedent, so I am justified in responding in a sinful way; my unique temptation, which nobody else can understand, justifies my unusual, outside the book response'. But that is not the case. Every temptation has been shared by others, not least *the Man*, the Lord Jesus. "Overtaken" recalls a similar word used in Gal. 6:1 about being overtaken in sin; so perhaps

Paul is asking them to reconsider their previous falls into temptation and sin, and reflect that actually those situations were not without precedent; they were no more and no less than human, and therefore those tests were actually common to all men, and others had successfully resisted.

*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability-* What a comfort to know that God is aware of our spiritual limitations and point beyond which we would sin. I suppose that is why so few of us have been tortured for our faith. He allows us to be tested actually beyond that point- but provides a way of escape. In considering others, we need to be aware that what may be a bearable temptation for one is not so for another believer. Sensitivity is required rather than legalistic rules, especially about forbidding any remarriage after divorce to all and every believer.

*But with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it-* Truly "the sceptre of wickedness won't remain over the allotment of the righteous; so that the righteous won't put forth their hands to do evil" (Ps. 125:3). Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac leaves us all shaking our heads and feeling that we simply wouldn't have risen up to that level of sacrifice. For not only was Isaac the son Abraham had so longed for, but he was the longed for fulfilment of the promises which had been the very core of Abraham's life. Yet 1 Cor. 10:13 appears to allude to God's provision of another sacrifice and thereby a way out of Abraham's temptation / testing- and this passage implies that each one of us are in Abraham's shoes: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted / tested (=Gen. 22:1) beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also *provide* the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it". No longer can Abraham be seen as a Sunday School figure of faith to be merely admired. For we are in his shoes, and the same God will likewise work with us in *our* weaknesses, both testing and providing the ways of escape.

We tend to think that our temptations / tests are so unique that they are somehow unusual, when in fact all that we experience has been and is in essence experienced by other men. It is in fellowship with others, in real connection with them over coffee, as it were, that we come to realize that we are not alone. 2 Cor. 1 reasons that whatever we experience is so that we can strengthen others who are going through the same; but that only becomes real and functional if we have meaningful contact with others and share with them. Each test has *the* (Gk.) specific way of escape. Whether or not we take it or perceive it, God has designed so much potentially in the daily lives of each of us. We need to ask what the intended way of escape is in each case. But the "escape" doesn't necessarily mean the end of the temptation, it means rather a way to bear or endure it.

Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). This is alluded to in a telling way in 1 Cor. 10:13: for the righteous, they will never be tested more than they can bear, but a way of escape will always be made possible. But for the rejected, there will be no escape. It will be something too great to bear, and somehow they have to go on existing in that state. Thus the rejected will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), after the pattern of Judas bungling his own suicide after realizing his condemnation [thus his bowels gushed, although he was attempting to hang himself]; they will also seek the Lord, all too late, and not find Him either (Prov. 1:28; Jn. 7:34). Israel will seek their lovers / idols and not find them (Hos. 2:7), and then seek the Lord and not find Him either (Hos. 5:6). They will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), seek to their idols, see to the true God- and find none of them. They will exist in unbearable limbo. They will

wander seeking the word of the Lord, but not find it (Am. 8:12). Tragically, it was so freely available in their lifetimes (cp. the foolish virgins seeking oil, banging on the door trying to hear their Lord's words and speak with Him).

Put together two Bible passages: Cain felt that his condemnation was greater *than he could bear*, and so God put a mark upon him so he wouldn't be slain (Gen. 4:13,15). Now 1 Cor. 10:13: God will not allow us to be tested *more than we can bear*, but will make a way of escape so we can bear it. I take this as meaning that if God is even sensitive to the feelings of a condemned man like Cain, rather like putting an animal to sleep in a humane way... then we who are saved in Christ can take comfort that even in this life, we will not be asked to bear the unbearable, and yet we have the prospect of eternity in front of us when this life is through. And in a very quiet, sober way, we have to respond with gratitude: 'Wow'.

The idea of a way of escape being provided along with the temptation throws fresh light on Heb. 11:35. Some refuse the legitimate deliverances provided from temptation- and rightly shall receive a "better resurrection".

Yet a way of escape is not always provided from physical trials- especially in the case of those who were soon to be the Christian martyrs amongst Paul's readership. But when faced with situations which make us feel that we will be spiritually swamped by the power of our innate evil tendencies, then we can take courage that although the physical conditions causing the trial may not be taken away, there will certainly be an opportunity made for us to resist the spiritual temptation. Notice how a way of *escape* is provided- implying that initially the temptation is truly too heavy for us, and an escape is therefore made for us by God so that He is not in the position of forcing us to sin. Surely all readers of these words know this feeling only too well- sensing that we are in a position where our evil desires are growing stronger and stronger, not wanting to sin, but feeling that humanly, given a few more moments, and it will be inevitable. It is in these moments that we have to desperately cling to this promise- that God *will* make a way of escape, that he will keep us from falling (Jude 24) by His power of righteousness. Hence verse 14 continues "*wherefore... flee from idolatry*"- i.e. from the spiritual temptations.

10:14- see on :13.

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry*- Some were guilty of idolatry in the Corinthian church, actually believing that the idols represented real gods who actually existed (8:7-12). Paul calls for sensitivity to these weak ones, but urges they all flee from idolatry. The allusion is to Joseph fleeing from temptation with Potiphar's wife. Distancing ourselves from temptation is an important part of spiritual life in practice.

10:15 *I speak as to wise people. Think upon what I say*- The Corinthians were not wise; there was not apparently a wise man amongst them (1 Cor. 6:5). They had been given the Spirit gift of wisdom, according to chapter 1; but they were not wise because they were not spiritual (3:1). But Paul relates to the converts as if they were going to be saved, as if they were in fact spiritual. Seeing we cannot condemn our brethren, we are left with no option but to relate likewise to those whose weakness and immaturities are so evident to us. Paul never advocates disfellowshipping these individuals. Paul's patience with the Corinthians is amazing. He



clearly had no fear of guilt by association with them, and addresses them repeatedly as if they are by status “in Christ”- he spoke to them *as if* they were “wise men” (:15).

10:16 *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?*- Paul is going to build up to the argument that partaking in Christ is exclusive of any relationship with other gods, idols, religions etc. Bearing in mind the Judaist influences in Corinth, Paul uses the Passover terminology for the cup of wine which represents the Lord's blood: "The cup of blessing". The Passover was a prototype of the breaking of bread meeting. The cup is a symbol of God's blessing / forgiveness of us; and we bless it. There is thus a mutuality between us and the Lord as we bless that cup, and are reminded again of the blessing mediated to us through His death blood. "The cup of the blessing" (Gk.) may suggest that a blessing was pronounced over the cup by each believer as they took the cup- for "we bless" it. The reference to "a communion" could suggest that the breaking of bread is but one way of fellowshiping with His body and blood. Baptism, fellowship with the church which is His body, living aware of our connection with His blood- these are all other ways.

Paul expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ. An example is 1 Cor. 10:16 = Mt. 26:26; hence Paul reasons: "The cup of blessing... *is it not* the communion of the blood of Christ?" - i.e. 'Isn't it? I mean, this is familiar to us from the Gospels, isn't it'. It seems likely that the Gospels were memorized by the early converts.

Paul speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor. 10:16), probably using "blessing" in its Biblical sense of 'forgiveness' (e.g. Acts 3:25,26). Whilst there is, therefore, an awareness of our own sins and salvation from them at the memorial meeting, there is not any specific mediation of forgiveness to us through the bread and wine. In prospect, we were saved at baptism, through our Lord's work on the cross. In prospect, all our sins were forgiven then. We must be careful to avoid the Catholic notion that the bread and wine do themselves possess some power of atonement. They are the appointed aids to help us *remember* what has already been achieved. And this is why the early brethren could break bread with joy- not as part of a guilt trip prompted by the worrying remembrance of the standard set for us in Jesus (Acts 2:46).

The declaration that we are in the one body is shown in terms of breaking bread together. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (the sign of sharing in) the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:16-18). All who share in the saving work of the Lord Jesus by true baptism into Him ought to break bread together.

Paul sees the bread and wine as gifts from God to us. It's all about receiving the cup of the Lord, the cup which comes from Him. We should take it with both hands. It seems so inappropriate, given this emphasis, if our focus is rather on worrying about forbidding others in His body from reaching their hands out to partake that same cup and bread. Way back in Gen. 14:18, the gift of bread and wine [which foreshadowed our present memorial meetings] was a sign of God blessing us. Hence it was “the cup of blessing”, which Paul says we also

bless. There is a mutuality about it- we bless God, He blesses us. No part of this wonderful and comforting arrangement depends upon us not passing that cup to our brethren.

*The communion, the fellowship*, was brought about by the Saviour's body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16). Indeed, "*the fellowship*" is a common NT phrase (e.g. 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3). Because this has been created in prospect, from God's perspective we are all united in *the fellowship*, therefore we should seek to be of one mind (Phil. 2:1,2). It broke down, at least potentially, the walls which there naturally are between men, even the most opposed, i.e. Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death (Jn. 17).

10:17- see on 1 Cor. 11:29; 1 Cor. 12:15.

*Seeing that we, who are many, are one loaf, one body; for we are all partaking of the one loaf-* Just as Israel partook of "the same" food and water, "which is Christ", so the many within the body of Christ partake of Him. This verse is not saying that participation in the breaking of bread service somehow magically makes us 'one' and therefore it should only be done with those with whom we are in theological agreement. The unity in view here is between the believers and the Lord Jesus. We the many are one with Him, with His body. We are partakers in or of Christ (Heb. 3:14). Paul has argued in 1 Cor. 6 that because believers are one with the body of Christ, they should not be one with religious prostitutes, even Christian ones. And here he will go on to reason that we cannot be one with the Lord Jesus and also with the gods represented by the idols. If we are partakers in Christ, the one loaf, then we cannot partake with idols (:21). Heb. 2:14 uses the same word to explain that the Lord Jesus partook in our human nature; and in response, we partake in Him by acts of identity such as baptism and the breaking of bread, and in a life lived in Him. Here we see the practical power of understanding the representative nature of His sacrifice and His genuine human nature; it is an invitation to both ritual and psychological identity with Him.

The bread represents the body of Christ; at the communion service we express our unity with all who are in Christ as well as with Him. To refuse to break bread with those who are in Christ is therefore to effectively count ourselves out of His body. This doctrine of the one body is as fundamental as there being one God, one baptism and one hope (Eph. 4:4-6). But Paul's argument here is that we cannot therefore bind ourselves in communion with idols if we are truly in the body of Christ. The boundaries he draws are between the believer and the world, not between believer and believer. As the whole community of Israel were treated as one body of believers, even though there was unbelief, doctrinal and moral error amongst them, so is the body of Christ (:18). One implication of this doctrine of the one body is that we cannot be part of any other body. And this was exactly relevant to the Corinthians, who were turning the breaking of bread service into part of an idol service; see on :21. If we are truly "in Christ", our whole world will revolve around that; to be involved in any other system of thinking or worship is to provoke Him to jealousy.

To refuse to fellowship a brother is to effectively say that he is not within the Lord's body; for

when we break bread, we show that we are one bread and one body (1 Cor. 10:16,17). It is simply not true that refusal to break bread with another is not passing judgment upon them; it most clearly is. And as we condemn, so we will be (Mt. 7:1). The purpose of the cross was to gather together in one all God's children (Jn. 11:52), that the love of the Father and Son might be realized between us (Jn. 17:26). If we support division, we are denying the essential aim of the Lord's sacrifice.

Surrounding Roman culture forbade women to drink wine with men, and only permitted them to do so in special cases if they drank different wine from a different cup. But Paul in conscious reference to this emphasizes the one cup shared by all believers, male and female, in memory of the unity and tearing down of barriers between people achieved by the Lord's death.

The bread represents the body of Christ; but it is hammered home time and again in the New Testament that the *believers* are the body of Christ. By partaking of Christ's body, we are sharing with each other. Paul drives home this point with an Old Testament allusion: "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18). We are the living sacrifices, offered on the Christ altar (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:10). By being placed upon the altar, the sacrifice was counted as the altar. As Christ hung on the cross, all believers were counted as being in Him; Christ and the believers were, in this sense, indivisible on the cross. And they still are- hence the figure of us being the very *body*, the very *being*, of Christ. To personally share in fellowship with Him therefore *must* involve intense fellowship with other members of Christ's body. We must 'discern' the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29), and also judge (same word as 'discern') ourselves" at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 11:31). We discern the Lord's body, and thereby discern ourselves too- because we are part of His body. This further shows that our self-examination at the breaking of bread is both of Christ and also of ourselves (both individually *and* collectively, as the body of Christ?).

10:18 *Behold Israel after the flesh. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?*- "Participants" is the same word for "communion" in :16. Eating the sacrifice meant fellowshiping, having a common union, with the altar it was placed upon, and the god or religious entity the altar stood for. We recall that in chapter 8, Paul seems to say that a believer could eat food sacrificed to idols if he or she didn't believe there was a real god behind that idol; but to do so was wrong because it would encourage those Christians who still believed in the gods to do the same and in their case, actively participate in idol worship. The argument here seems to be that any eating idol food within the temple context meant that you were declaring common union with the idol. But Paul's argument in 8:10 was that a believer could eat food in the idol's temple but should not do so, lest it lead weaker believers into sin. He could have stated this higher and more obvious principle- that such action was effectively declaring common union with the idol. But instead he argues that an even higher principle is not to lead our brethren into sin. This too should be our primary concern- not, in the first place, whether this is right or wrong- but rather, what effect will this have on others? That is not to say that the right / wrong issue is irrelevant- as Paul makes clear here in chapter 10.

"Those who eat the sacrifices" within the Israelite system were the priests. They were allowed to take their daily food from the sacrifices offered to Yahweh. But Paul has earlier used this very argument in 1 Cor. 9:13 to prove that he would have been justified in taking material support from the Corinthians- because he was likewise involved in ministry work. He chose not to make use of that concession. But here he rather cleverly alludes to the same

reality and says that in fact, all the Corinthians were like the priests, eating of the sacrifice, that of the Lord Jesus. This is one of many examples where the NT teaches that we are all priests, the entire brotherhood of believers is "a royal priesthood", every one of us as dedicated to the Lord's service as the Levites were.

The only exclusivity of the Lord's table was that it was not to be turned into a place for worshipping pagan idols. Paul saw the sacrifices of Israel as having some relevance to the Christian communion meal. He comments: "Are those who eat the victims not in communion with the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18); and the altar is clearly the Lord Jesus (Heb. 13:10). Eating of the communion meal was and is, therefore, fundamentally a statement of our fellowship with the altar, the Lord Jesus, rather than with others who are eating of Him. The bread and wine which we consume thus become antitypical of the Old Testament sacrifices; and they were repeatedly described as "Yahweh's food", laid upon the altar as "the table of Yahweh" (Lev. 21:6,8; 22:25; Num. 28:2; Ez. 44:7,16; Mal. 1:7,12). And it has been commented: "Current translations are inaccurate; *lehem panim* is the 'personal bread' of Yahweh, just as *sulhan panim* (Num. 4:7) is the 'personal table' of Yahweh". This deeply personal relationship between Yahweh and the offerer is continued in the breaking of bread; and again, the focus is upon the worshipper's relationship with Yahweh rather than a warning against fellowshipping the errors of fellow worshippers through this action. What *is* criticized in later Israel is the tendency to worship Yahweh through these offerings at the same time as offering sacrifice to other gods. Is. 66:3 speaks of this dualism in worship:

#### **What was offered to Yahweh**

"An ox is sacrificed,  
a lamb is slain,  
an offering is brought,  
incense memorial is made,

#### **What was offered to other gods simultaneously**

a man is killed;  
a dog is struck down;  
swine-flesh is savoured;  
idols are kissed"

And the new Israel made just this same blasphemy in the way some in the Corinth ecclesia ate of the Lord's table and also at the table of idols ["demons"]. Paul wasn't slow to bring out the similarities when he wrote to the Corinthians. It is this kind of dualism which is so wrong; to be both Christian and non-Christian at the same time, to mix the two. But differences of interpretation between equally dedicated worshippers of Yahweh, or believers in Christ, were never made the basis of condemnation.

10:19 *What say I then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?* - In 8:4 Paul has clarified that "an idol is nothing". In chapter 8, he accepts that some of the Corinthian believers entered idol temples and ate their sacrifices without believing in the existence of the idols (8:10). This was not a case of eating meat sold in the market which had been offered to idols. Paul in chapter 8 accepts the situation but urges against it for the sake of not causing the weaker brethren to stumble. But now he seems to be saying that by forbidding eating in the idol temple, he is not presuming the real existence of the gods thought to be behind the idols. But all the same, despite that, he feels that to eat their food in the temples is to proclaim common union with the idols, and this is not possible if we also declare that common union with the Lord Jesus and eat as it were His food at the communion meal with Him. Note again that the even greater reason not to eat idol food in the

idol's temple was in order not to cause weak Christians to stumble. This is paramount, and must forge our positions and behaviour on absolutely everything.

10:20 *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I would not have you sharing communion with demons-* Demons refer to idols (Dt. 32:17; Is. 65:11 LXX calls Gad, the god of fortune, “the demon”). Paul now makes the act of eating idol sacrifices tantamount to having common union with the demons, the gods thought to be behind the idols and represented visually by them. In 8:10 Paul didn't make that direct attack when mentioning Corinthian Christians eating idol food in idol temples, whilst not believing in the demons. There, he argued this was wrong because it made other believers stumble. He could have attacked their behaviour with a direct broadside- but he didn't. This more subtle approach is often required in dealing with the error and immorality of others. Direct broadsides may feel good for *us*- but we must think of what *others* need and the way to achieve that, rather than salving our own consciences about wanting to speak out against wrong behaviour.

10:21- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons-* Paul is stating baldly that it is one or the other. If they ate idol food on the idol altar or table, then they were not really partaking of the Lord's table, in spiritual reality. Perhaps it is to this fact that he alludes when he states that "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (11:20). Their external celebration of the Lord's supper was not that at all, because they also partook of the table and cup of the gods.

Paul speaks of us each one partaking of “the table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21), a phrase used in the LXX for the altar (Ez. 44:16; Mal. 1:7,12)- the sacrifices whereof only the priests could eat. This would have been radical thinking to a community used to priests and men delegated to take charge of others’ religious affairs. Hebrew 3:13 gets at this idea when we read that *we* are to exhort one another not to turn away, situated as we are on the brink of the promised land, just as Moses exhorted Israel. As mentioned earlier, the Corinthians had turned the breaking of bread meeting into a religious gathering similar in style and format to the religious feasts of the surrounding cults. Vine comments that “The Greeks and Romans placed images of the gods reclining on couches, with tables and food beside them, as if really partakers of the things offered in sacrifice. In Mal. 1:7, the altar of burnt-offering is called “the table of the Lord”. The "altar" of :18 is the Lord's table. The idol altars were likewise their table.

The "table of the Lord" was Old Testament language for the altar (Ez. 41:22). By eating from it we are partaking of the altar, the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 9:13; 10:18; Heb. 13:10). If we don't partake of it, we declare ourselves to have no part in Him. Yet the very fact we partake of it, is a statement that we have pledged ourselves to separation from this present world; for it is not possible to eat at the Lord's table, and also that of this world (1 Cor. 10:21). The Passover, as the prototype breaking of bread, featured bitter herbs to remind Israel of their bitter experience in Egypt (Ex. 1:14). The breaking of bread should likewise focus our attention on the fact that return to the world is a return to bondage and bitterness, not freedom.

10:22 *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?*- The Corinthians were told that they would “provoke the Lord to jealousy” by breaking bread with the Lord Jesus and yet also with idols. This is surely an allusion to the “trial of jealousy” (Num. 5:24). A curse was recited and then the believer drank a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drank to their condemnation. Paul’s allusion suggests that each time we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives over the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup. It wasn't possible to eat the Lord's food and that of idols. This was actually counted as total idol worship in God's eyes; thus the prophets likewise consistently taught the need for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, and nothing else. In essence, we have the same temptation; to serve God and mammon, to have a little of both, to be passive Christians; to flunk the challenge of the logic of devotion. As the reality of Christ's crucifixion made Joseph and Nicodemus 'come out' in open, 100% commitment, come on them what may, so serious contemplation of the Saviour's devotion ought to have a like effect on us. It has been well observed: “that air of finality with which Jesus always spoke [meant that] everything he said and did constituted a challenge to men to reach a decisive conclusion”.

*Are we stronger than he?*- Chapter 1 of this letter opened by speaking about the weak and the strong, arguing that God's weakness is stronger than man's strength. What seems humanly smart and clever is actually a vain bid to be stronger than God. To consider that we can have a little of both, to serve two masters, is serious indeed.

10:23 *All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things edify*- I have repeatedly pointed out that Paul's condemnation of any eating of idol food in an idol temple is in apparent contrast to the way that in 8:10 he appears to accept that some did this whilst genuinely not believing in the idols. Paul there urged them not do so because it could lead others into sin. But here in chapter 10 he argues that by eating that idol food, one is declaring common union with them, and therefore any claim to also communion with the Lord Jesus is voided. Because He is rightfully jealous and demands out total devotion. And yet here again in 10:23 he nuances the argument by saying that all things are lawful- yes, they could eat in the idol's temple- but the essential problem with this was that it would not build others up ("edify") and was therefore "not expedient". It was therefore prohibited because of the colossal importance of the principle of edifying others and never making them stumble. The idea of 'expediency' is used by Paul with the idea of what is profitable for others; he will soon use the same word in :33 about his concern for their "profit". His concern was ever what was expedient or profitable for them (2 Cor. 8:10).

"Edify" is literally 'to build up'. This is a major concern with Paul, and it is a common NT theme. The parable of the wise man building *his* house upon the rock of Christ and His word may, at first blush, appear to mean that we build our personal faith on Him (Mt. 7:24). But the Greek word for 'build', which in 1 Cor. 10 is translated "edify", is usually used about building up others, and is never used about building up ourselves (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:17; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:11). And it is God and His Son who builds up the church (Mt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Pet. 2:5). He works through the efforts of the body of Christ to build itself up (Eph. 4:16); He operates through our building efforts, and the building up of others is done through the gift of the Spirit (Eph. 4:12)- which the Corinthians refused to use seeing they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). Indeed in 1 Cor. 14:3,4,12 Paul will criticize the Corinthians individually for building themselves up but not thinking about building up others. Edifying or building up others is therefore a strong theme; so major that it

dominates Paul's thinking about all the various questions he has to answer throughout the Corinthian correspondence. And it likewise should be our guiding principle. An addiction to having theoretical, propositional truth can lead us to ignore this; we may be right and others wrong, but the question is how can we build them up. And such building up of others is in fact building our own spiritual house. This again has been Paul's theme; that he wants the Corinthians in the Kingdom because they are part and parcel of his own eternal destiny.

10:24 *Let no one seek his own, but his neighbour's good*- In the context of what Paul has been saying (see notes above), the way to salvation involves far more than focusing upon our personal salvation. We get there, as the Lord did, through our focus upon saving others. What this means in practice is that we should be concerned, *truly* concerned, for the spiritual growth of our brethren. This isn't equivalent to a spirit of nosy observation of others' weaknesses. In spiritual terms, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Such a spirit is rare indeed ("all seek their own...", Phil. 2:21); and in 1 Cor. 13:5 Paul will say that not seeking our own (but by implication, that of others) is the essence of love. seeking first the Kingdom (Mt. 6:33) therefore involves seeking it for others as well as ourselves. A few verses later in 10:33, Paul clarifies that this is indeed his sense- he seeks not his own profit, but rather the salvation of others. Truly he could later write to the Corinthians: "I seek not yours (i.e. your money), but you (i.e. your salvation)" (2 Cor. 12:14).

10:25 *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience*- The left over meat from the idol sacrifices was sold in the meat market. Despite their deep immaturity, it would seem some in this very immature church had been caught up in the Jewish obsessions regarding whether the meat they were buying had been offered to idols. It has been commented that such meat was the cheapest meat, and the fact this issue is raised reflects the poverty of some in the church. Some of those very poor members were also those who had been taken in by the Judaist arguments. We have a window here onto the moral confusion there was at Corinth- some using church prostitutes, others not believing the Lord had risen from the dead; and others [and perhaps the categories overlapped in some cases] with an over finely tuned conscience regarding the previous history of the meat they ate. As noted elsewhere, such legalistic attempts at hyper obedience to irrelevant principles can be used to justify the conscience in performing serious acts of immorality in other areas.

10:26 *For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it*- Everything is God's. There is only one God, and so the fact the meat had been previously offered to an idol did not mean that it belonged to an idol, and that eating such meat with that history implied fellowshiping the idol. It was eating the meat in the idol's temple as a conscious act of fellowship with the idol which was wrong- hence the Lord Jesus Himself condemns eating meat offered to idols in his letters to the churches in Rev. 2:14,15,20-25. Note that in each of those cases, He links such eating with sexual immorality. Eating with the idol and then sleeping with the cult prostitutes was pure paganism, and typical of Corinthian religiosity. And it had entered the church at Corinth.

10:27 *If one of them that do not believe invites you to a feast and you are inclined to go*- "To a feast" is an insertion; the invitation could likely have been to a meal at home.

*Whatever is set before you eat-* This echoes the Lord's words: "Eat whatever is set before you" (Lk. 10:8 RSV). It could be that there is no semantic connection between the two passages; so perhaps this is purely an unconscious allusion to the Lord whose words were ever in Paul's mind. Or it could be that Paul saw accepting an invitation by an unbeliever as an opportunity to preach, to do missionary work just as valuable as that done by the apostles who were sent forth to preach. In this case, Paul's point was: 'You're all preachers, just like those seventy specially commissioned preachers, and in your everyday contact with the world, you too have a special commission to preach as they did'.

*Asking no question for conscience sake-* See on :25.

1 Cor. 10:25-27 and Rom. 14 give the impression that Paul either ignored or severely modified the prohibitions agreed upon in Acts 15, especially in relation to eating food offered to idols and blood (unless the Acts 15 decrees were only relevant to "Antioch, Syria and Cilicia"). Perhaps with later reflection he realized he had compromised too far; or, more likely, he re-interpreted the decrees and sought to keep the spirit of them, which was that there should be unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. We too may make an agreement and then realize we were mistaken, and it is humility rather than fickleness which should motivate us to act otherwise. Too many are trapped by pride in previously agreed to positions which they later realize were unwise or not Biblical.

10:28 *But if anyone says to you: This has been offered in sacrifice to idols! Do not eat it for the sake of he that tells you, and for conscience sake-* Paul has just explained that the history of the meat is irrelevant. But if someone else at the meal table feels differently, then do not insist on eating and having your conscience. The person who makes the objection is presumably a weaker fellow believer (see on :25). Although as noted on :32, it could also refer to an unbelieving Jew or Gentile whose potential path to the Kingdom would be blocked by a believer insisting that he is doing nothing wrong.

10:29 *Conscience, I say, not your own, but the other's. One may ask: Why is my liberty judged by another's conscience?-* "But it's OK in my conscience" is not therefore an appropriate argument for someone committed to building up their weaker brother. The freedom or liberty in view is that provided by the Spirit- "for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). The Corinthians lacked the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:1), hence they laboured under the bondage of legalism and guilt by association, worrying the prehistory of the meat they ate might make them unclean. It was the Judaists who specifically tried to take believers away from the liberty they had in Christ (Gal. 2:4). Gal. 5:13 contrasts our liberty with the need to "by love serve one another". And so Paul now goes on to argue that our freedom is overridden by the need to not make our weak, unspiritual brother to stumble.

10:30 *If I eat my food with thankfulness, why is evil spoken of me, for that for which I give thanks?-* This is not Paul stating his personal view or complaint, but a continuation of his answer to the objections he could guess would be raised against his teaching about respecting another's conscience more than our own in these matters. He imagined that it could be objected that if thanks were given to the one true God for the food (reflecting the practice of blessing food before eating it), then there ought to be no objection to eating any meat. That argument was true. But the utterly paramount issue is not to make our brother stumble.



10:31 *The principle is that whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do or do not- do all to the glory of God-* The glory of God is parallel with not making another to stumble from the path to the Kingdom of God (:32). For Paul, "the glory of God" was to be ultimately achieved in human salvation; he so often uses the term "glory" with reference to our final salvation at the last day. It can be that legalistic obedience and insistence upon our rightness of interpretation is not for God's glory, but our own. This is the tendency of legalistic Christianity and those who insist that finding Biblical truth about a matter is paramount *per se*. Greater than anything in these matters is love, the love that seeks not to cause a weaker person to stumble.

10:32 *Give no occasions of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Gentiles, or to the church of God-* see on :31. Making another stumble is not doing all to the glory of God, and as explained in these notes, is the paramount, deciding principle that must forge all our approaches. But even further, we can make unbelievers stumble; that is the context of :27 speaking of behaviour before an unbeliever. Perhaps the objector of :28 is also to be read as an unbelieving Jew or Gentile. We must consider the same principle of making another stumble- even with reference to the world. Unbelievers have the potential to come to faith and salvation in Christ, but we can place a barrier in that path by insisting on our own rightness. That is indeed true to observation; it is perceived hypocrisy which turns so many away from the Christ of the Christians.

10:33- see on 1 Cor. 4:16.

*Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but that of the many, that they may be saved-* The "profit" of another was their salvation; and therefore we have to consider all our actions and positions from the viewpoint of what would be best for their salvation. Several times Paul explains his positions as being because it was "expedient" or "profitable" [s.w.] for others, and always he has in view what will help them to salvation. His views on marriage and all these questions about how to act in various situations were resolved according to what would be "profitable" for their salvation (1 Cor. 6:12; 7:35; 10:23; 2 Cor. 8:10). And he will soon teach that the Spirit is given to each of us in order to "profit" both ourselves and others towards salvation (1 Cor. 12:7). The Corinthians denied the movement of the Spirit (3:1), and so they were left to struggle with all their questions on a case by case basis with no guiding principle to help them resolve them. That principle clearly enough is: What is helpful to their and thereby my salvation, to God's glory? The focus is not to be upon our personal profit or salvation, but upon that of others. And that was what motivated the Lord to the great achievement of the cross. In the same way as the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save, so Paul appropriates the same two Greek words regarding *his* seeking and saving of others (Lk. 19:10; 1 Cor. 10:33). Like Paul, the Lord Jesus didn't please Himself by being selfishly concerned with His own salvation, but pleased his neighbours for their good unto their eternal edification (Rom. 15:2,3). Here in 1 Cor. 10:33; 11:1 he bids us follow his example in that he lived a life dominated by seeking to save others- both in and out of the ecclesia [see context]. This may explain why there is little direct encouragement in Paul's letters to preach; not only was his pattern axiomatically an imperative to live a life devoted to witness, but the following of Christ as he did inevitably issued in a life of witness.



## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Be imitators of me, even as I am of Christ*- This verse is best linked to the preceding chapter 10, where Paul urges the Corinthians to put the spiritual profit of others before their own personal conscience on some issues. Paul's relationship with and perception of the Lord Jesus is held up by the Spirit as our example. He himself asks us to copy (Gk. *mimic*) the way in which he followed the Lord Jesus (this is what 1 Cor. 11:1 implies in the Greek). His mind was increasingly *saturated* with the Gospels, and with the surpassing excellency and supremacy of the *Lordship* of the risen Jesus.

The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking. Not only does he do it himself, but he encourages others to do it. He doesn't use the word 'modelling'; he uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul:

"Ye became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... ye know how ye ought to *follow* us...an ensample unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication is that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

"Be ye *followers* of me" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1)

"Whose faith *follow* (i.e. that of your ecclesial elders)" (Heb. 13:7)

Be "*followers* of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises", e.g. Abraham (Heb. 6:12)

"Ye, brethren, became *followers* of the churches... in Judea" (1 Thess. 2:14).

So Paul encourages them to mimic him, to mimic Abraham, to mimic the persecuted ecclesias in Judea, to mimic the faithful elders in the Jerusalem ecclesia (e.g. Peter), *so that* they would be better mimickers of the Father and Son. But the idea of mimicking involves a child-likeness, an intellectual humility, a truly open mind. Why Paul used that word rather than a word which simply meant 'to copy' or 'to follow' was perhaps because he wanted to stress that this kind of conscious modelling of your life on someone else involved a real need for openness of mind to the word, resulting in an unfeigned, uncontrived, child-like mimicking. Paul is really encouraging his readers to get involved in this 'mimicking' of faithful examples, of absorbing their spirit into our own by careful, sustained meditation. Will we rise up to it? Or are we still on the level of whizzing through our Bible reading in 10 minutes / day, giving little thought to what we've read throughout the next 24 hours?

11:2 *Now I praise you who remember me in all things*- This reflects the wide range in the church at Corinth. There were those who were obedient to the commands and teaching Paul gave, and at the other extreme, there were those who worked as and made use of church prostitutes. The way the more spiritual remained within such an apostate community is a challenge to us all, not least to those who insist on leaving any community which has the slightest apostasy.

*And hold fast the traditions, as I delivered them to you*- This suggests there was a specific body of practical teachings which Paul gave to his converts; and he frames his language in terms of Moses giving the law to Israel. It was expected that the disciples of rabbis memorized their teaching, and there's no reason to doubt that the Lord's disciples, both those who immediately heard Him and those who subsequently became disciples of their invisible Heavenly rabbi, would likewise have memorized the gospel records of His words. This would account for the way they are arranged [Mark especially] as series of 'pericopes', small bite-

sized sections which lend themselves to memorization. This would explain how Paul can use technical terms for handing on a tradition (*paradidomi*, 1 Cor. 11:2,23) and receiving it (*paralambano*, 1 Cor. 15:1,3; Gal. 1:19; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6); and of faithfully retaining the tradition (*katecho*, 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2; *krateo*, 2 Thess. 2:15); matched perhaps by John's insistence in his letters that the converts retain that teaching which they received "from the beginning".

11:3 *But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God*- The head of "every man is Christ" only in the sense that "every [believing] man" has this relationship with Him. "Every man" to God is therefore those in Christ. "All" shall be made alive at the Lord's return- i.e. all "that are Christ's" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). "All things" is a title of the church in Ephesians and Colossians, and "any man" evidently means 'any believer' in 1 Cor. 8:10. "All men... every man" means 'all that believed' in Acts 2:44,45. So what Paul now writes is specifically about relationships between believers, and specifically in response to the Corinthians' question which we do not have access to. "The head of Christ is God" is a fair nail in the coffin of trinitarianism.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head*- This may well be a criticism of the way that under the influence of Judaism [which we have noted earlier was a problem in Corinth], some of the brothers were covering their heads to pray. The head of the man was Christ (:3), and by acting as if He needed covering for sin and shame before God, they were dishonouring Him. Paul repeatedly uses the same word to argue that in Christ, we are not ashamed [s.w. 'dishonoured'] before God (Rom. 5:5; 9:33; 10:11 etc.). Those who had fallen under the influence of Judaism and its practices had failed to perceive this. And thus they were shaming their Lord, Jesus.

11:5- see on 1 Cor. 6:4.

*But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonours her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven*- I suggest there are a series of allusions to the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5; and the idea of uncovering a woman's head connects with how the woman suspected of infidelity had to have her head uncovered (Num. 5:18). A woman's hair was seen as her glory, and a covered head was associated with shame. It could be argued that the woman was being treated as innocent until proven guilty, and even invited to openly display her glory. The uncovering of the woman's head was a form of shaming (as in 1 Cor. 11:5,6). She had to be shamed whether or not she was guilty; and this led the man to a lose-lose scenario. If she was innocent, then he had needlessly shamed her, she would likely not love him in future, and he had to bear the sin of doing that (:31). If she were guilty, then he had to support a barren wife for the rest of her life, seeing the curses about killing or divorcing her were to be blotted out.

There are several such allusions to Numbers 5 in 1 Corinthians 11. The idea there of drinking unto condemnation or blessing / justification simply has to be understood in the Numbers 5 context. And it is no accident that the language of a woman having an uncovered head also occurs. What's the connection and the bigger picture? I suggest that what was happening in Corinth was that members who had sinned were being publically shamed before the congregation by e.g. the sinful sisters being made to sit in the meeting with uncovered heads. In Middle Eastern societies today, forcing a woman to uncover her head is a source of shame. Paul is saying that paradoxically, such misbehaviour in the Corinth ecclesia was actually

'shaming' those demanding it; "I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:22; 15:34). The allusions to Numbers 5 would therefore be saying: 'You are publicly shaming some sisters by making them remove their veils / head coverings in your meetings; and by the way in which you eat the Lord's supper, you are also purposefully shaming some (:22). Instead, *you* should be the ones in shame for your behaviour. By doing so, even if indeed those sisters have sinned, you are acting like the husband who uses the Numbers 5 legislation. Instead, whenever you drink the cup, examine *yourselves* and not others, and remember that you are the one who is being tested by the Lord's cup- either to your condemnation or justification'. Paul will soon go on to point out that the Corinthians were wrongfully shaming some within the church at the breaking of bread meetings (:22 "shame" is the same Greek word translated "dishonour" here in :4,5).

Shaved female heads were associated with prostitution in first century Corinth. To shame a woman by making her remove her head covering was effectively labelling her as a prostitute. Paul is against all such shaming behaviour; it is a tendency of religions to shame others, and Paul is deeply critical of it. The irony of course was that according to our notes on chapters 6 and 7, there were church prostitutes operating within the Corinthian church. And yet any sister who got on the wrong side of the leadership was shamed as being a common street whore by demanding she wear her hair uncovered. It ought to be clear enough that these verses speak to a very specific situation within Corinth according to the culture of that time and place; they can not legitimately be used to require women to wear head coverings at all Christian meetings in the world today.

11:6 *For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled-* See on :4. The male eldership were seeking to shame some women, just as they shamed others by not providing food for them at their memorial feasts (:22). Paul is saying that to make a woman take her veil off is the same as making her shave her head. Instead of shaming her, they should allow her to be veiled as she dearly wished to be in that society.

11:7 *For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man-* When we read that man is the "image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7), it seems to me that Paul is stating something which is only potentially true, rather than stating a global principle which is true for all males from birth until death- for he elsewhere says that we must be transformed *into* the image of God (2 Cor. 3:18), speaking of a progressive renewal in knowledge until we come to the image of our creator (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18). This kind of approach is common in Paul- he speaks of a state of being which we should rise up to, as if we already have it. He's surely inspiring us to rise up to our potential.

But another approach is suggested by observing that the whole arguments in 11:7-15 appear very contradictory. Woman was created out of the man, so she is to have her head covered (:8); but "in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (:11). Whether or not a woman should pray with uncovered head is considered to be something they should judge (:13). Long hair should be exposed and gloried in as a woman's covering (:14,15); whereas :10 says she should cover her hair to show she is under her husband's authority. And the more one re-reads this section, the more apparent contradictions appear. An answer could be to remember that there are no quotation marks in the original text; and that Paul is quoting or alluding to the questions and arguments of the Corinthians. I

suggest that he is quoting here from their arguments, which they had been using to justifying shaming some women by making them pray with uncovered heads. I suggest that :7-11 are all quotation from the arguments used by the Corinthians; and then :12 Paul answers all this by saying that "in the Lord" there is no such distinction. He then concludes by saying that contrary to what some wanted to imply, there was no universally agreed practice regarding head coverings in the churches (:16). Those who insist upon a head covering policy as a global truth are totally ignoring Paul's statement. The whole question depends upon local customs and attitudes to women, and whatever they are, in whatever time or place, the principle of :11,12 must be accepted: "In our life in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman was made from man, in the same way man is born of woman; and it is God who brings everything into existence". On this foundation, we are to "judge for ourselves" on these matters (:13), remembering that there is no universal principle to be enforced about them (:16).

11:8 *For the man is not of the woman, but woman of the man-* See on :7. I suggest this is part of the Corinthians' argument which Paul is quoting. It seems they as Gentiles had fallen under the influence of Judaist arguments.

11:9 *For neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man-* This was very much the language of Judaism- that women were created to serve men. It could be that Paul is here quoting it and then goes on to deconstruct it in the section beginning at :11.

11:10- see on Acts 18:18.

*For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels-* If this continues the quotation from the Corinthians' argument, then they would be arguing that because of how the Angels ordained things at the creation, the women should wear head coverings to show they were under their husband's authority. This was a distinctly Jewish attitude; and the reference to "Angels" is again Jewish, seeing Jewish thought was quite obsessed with Angels.

But it could be that at church meetings, indeed the Angel are literally present, and this command was to help those present be aware of this. Great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

11:11 *Nevertheless, in the Lord, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman-* This reference to how things should be in Christ, presumably in distinction and contrast to the ideas Paul has just quoted in :7-10. Paul is seeking to balance their Judaist-interpretation of the Genesis record by arguing that male and female are equal before God and interdependent.

11:12 *For as the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God-* Paul is here balancing their argument that because woman was made out of man, therefore she must be subservient and wear a head covering to symbolize it. He reminds them that in fact man is taken out of woman at birth. And it is not so that males are superior to

females simply because Eve was made out of Adam's bone. For it is God who is the creative source of all things, not man; and His creative power is responsible for not just humans but literally "everything".

11:13 *Judge for yourselves. Is it appropriate that a woman pray to God unveiled?*- The Corinthians had asked for Paul's judgment on this matter. Having explained some principles, Paul now throws the judgment back over to them. But he will argue in :14,15 that the whole issue of whether a woman should be covered or not is misplaced because God has given women a natural head-covering, in their hair. That covering should not be covered by human covering laws, so :15 implies. And this will lead up to the clear statement in :16 that this should not be the matter of contention which it was at Corinth, and there is no inspired standard for all the brotherhood to follow. As Paul puts it here in :13, we must "judge for yourselves" given the local culture and customs we find ourselves in.

11:14- see on Jn. 16:2.

*Does not nature itself teach you, that if a man has long hair it is a dishonour to him?*- This was true within the cultural context of Corinth. Nature does not teach that to all people in all cultures at all times. And "long hair" only applies to some people. Paul obviously isn't speaking about Africans whose hair cannot easily be described as "long". So he is obviously writing in a very limited context- to those at Corinth.

11:15 *But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her. For her hair is given her for a covering*- As noted on :14, this too is culturally limited to a specific time and place. Long hair is no longer seen as beautiful of itself, and again, "long hair" here surely doesn't refer to African Christians. The whole argument is limited to Corinth and the culture of that day. But Paul is making this observation in order to demonstrate that the whole argument about female head-coverings is misplaced. And that would be typical of both the Lord and Paul- to answer an argument or question by stating a mega principle which contextualizes the specific questions.

11:16 *But if anyone seems to be contentious, let them know we have no such custom, neither do the churches of God*- As noted on the previous verses, Paul is saying that contrary to what some contentious members wanted to imply, there was no universally agreed custom in the churches about head-coverings. It was a matter of each judging for themselves within their cultural contexts, but bearing in mind the principles of :11,12 (see on :13). It is typical of many contentious individuals to this day that they will argue and assume that their particular fetish of interpretation must be universally accepted in all Christian churches.

11:17- see on 1 Cor. 7:17

*But in giving you this instruction, I do not praise you- for you come together not for the better but for the worse*- The "instruction" here concerning how the breaking of bread meeting should be run was not an answer to questions- but an instruction. Their behaviour there was so bad that it would be better for them not to do it. For it was for their "worse" rather than their spiritual betterment.

11:18 *For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among*

*you-* Corinth ecclesia had cases of gross immorality, even incest; some got drunk at the memorial meeting, used church prostitutes and some even denied Christ's resurrection. There can be no question that such belief and practice was not ultimately tolerated either by Paul or God. Yet notice the first thing which the Spirit 'takes up' with Corinth. It wasn't any of these more obvious things. It was the fact there was a spirit of factionism within the ecclesia- "first of all" this was the issue Paul tackled. Just as he has in chapter 10 argued that the principle of building each other up is far more important than whether or not we personally consider idols and pagan gods to have real existence. This is also the way the epistles conclude (2 Cor. 13:11); Paul doesn't tell them 'Now don't forget what I said about adultery and having concord with Belial'. Instead: "Finally, brethren... be of one mind, live in peace".

*And I partly believe it-* This may not mean that Paul was undecided as to whether it is true or not. For in chapter 1 he has directly accused them of being a divided church. I suggest the sense is rather: 'I believe / know that this is partly true'. Some in the church were in line with the spirit of Paul's teaching (:2). But others weren't. It was this 'part' who were answerable for the divisions.

11:19 *For there must also be factions among you, that they that are approved may be revealed among you-* The allusion is to Mt. 18:7: "For it is necessary that the offences occur, but woe to that man through whom the offence comes!". Causing division within the body is therefore a sin which may exclude us from the Kingdom. It is so obviously true to observed experience that factionism within the church causes 'offences' or spiritual stumbling. It is also true that the "approved" are "revealed" by their correct response to the factionism. How we respond to church division is one of the litmus tests that reveal our spirituality. So many stumble... but it will be no excuse to tell the crucified Lord at the last day that His death and pain for us was rejected by us because of the cranky people in a church we attended. The cross is still there, and His outstretched arms towards us must not be spurned because of an argument here and hypocrisy there. Likewise those who see through those things and will not be swayed from their focus on the Lord who loved them, and who will not spurn His Spirit because others do, are thereby declared "approved" even now. For the essence of judgment day is worked out today. "Approved" translates a word meaning 'tried'; it is in James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is *tried* he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him". The experience of division in the church is the trial through which we demonstrate our acceptance before the Lord, and even have a foretaste of the Lord's acceptance at the last day.

Although sects and divisions should not be within the one body of Christ, in another sense there must be such sectarianism that they which are approved may be "made manifest" by their response to it- in anticipation of how we will all be "made manifest" (s.w.) at the judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). In this we see the Divine ecology; nothing is wasted. There must not be divisions; but even when they do occur, they are used by God in order to manifest the righteous and the principles of true spirituality. Thus trial can easily arise from within our ecclesial experience.

11:20 *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat-* Verse 21 goes on to reason that *the Lord's* supper has become *their own* supper. Our breaking of bread is *far far more* than *just* religious ritual, although on one level it is that. But we must rise well above this. Israel kept the Passover (cp. the breaking of bread), and yet to God they never *really*



kept it. The Corinthians took the cup of the Lord and that of the idols; they broke bread with both (1 Cor. 10:21). But they were told they *could not* do this. They took the cup of the Lord; but not in the Lord's eyes. They turned *His* supper into their *own* supper. They did it, but for themselves. And so in spiritual terms, they didn't do it (1 Cor. 11:20,21). Just as the "*Lord's* passover" became by the time of the NT "*the feast of the Jews*". They turned His Passover into their own. Likewise they turned the house *of God* into their *own* house (Mt. 23:38); and the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now "*their law*" (Jn. 15:25). And so we must just accept the real possibility that we can break bread on the surface, but not break bread. We've probably all done this. Don't let it become the norm. Likewise Israel had to be asked the rhetorical question: "*Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?*" (Am. 5:25). Because they *also* worshipped Molech, their keeping of the feasts wasn't accepted. So I can ask again: Do you *really* break bread? Israel kept their Passovers throughout the wilderness years, one would assume- but they never remembered the day that God brought them out of Egypt (Ps. 78:42)- although notice how although Israel didn't remember God, yet He remembered them in His grace (Ps. 106:7, 45).

11:21 *For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk-* "His own meal" meant it was no longer *the Lord's* meal- see on :20. The idea of a ritual meal, accompanied by abuse of alcohol and religious prostitutes, was typical of Corinthian religiosity. Clearly the Christian church there had turned the communion service into something similar. And worse still, the whole ceremony became a place to flaunt wealth. And yet the meal was supposed to represent the supreme unity enabled by the Lord's death, who on the cross became poor for our sakes.

11:22 *What, have you not houses to eat and to drink in?*- Paul has just been noting that some of them are drunk at the breaking of bread service because they turned the service into a feast similar to those of the idol cults. Paul is apparently telling them to go to their own homes and carry on like this. My response would have been to criticize them for getting drunk. But Paul's primary concern is for the church as a whole, and the damage done to other believers. And so he tells them to do this, if they must, in their own homes. Another possibility is that 'their houses' refer to the houses of the idols whose cults they were clearly still associated with. He would then be telling them to not serve two masters, and seeing they attempted to take the Lord's cup as well as that of idols (10:21) they were unable therefore to properly take the Lord's cup at all (11:20). He may therefore be telling them to go and carouse in the houses of their idols rather than in the Christian church.

Yet another possibility arises from the fact that the church was split into various house groups (listed in chapter 1); but they 'came together' at combined breaking of bread meetings. This wasn't the time to indulge in a huge party, with all the emphasis upon eating and drinking your own food and wine, rather than focusing upon that which God had provided in Jesus. Hence he comments: "*Have you not houses to eat and to drink in?*" (1 Cor. 11:22). Given almost every reference to 'house' in Corinthians is to a house church or to the spiritual house of God, it would seem Paul's idea is: 'It's OK to eat and drink and have a collective meal etc. in your house church meetings. But don't do that when you all meet together for the breaking of bread- it's getting divisive, because of the social differences between the house groups which are made apparent by the choice of food and drink'. They were to 'discern the body of the Lord Jesus' at those gatherings- i.e. recognize that all of them gathered there, the various house churches of Corinth, were in fact the collective body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29). If anyone was hungry and therefore in need of material support, the combined breaking of bread

meeting wasn't the place to raise the issue- he should "eat at home", i.e. take food and support from his local house church (1 Cor. 11:34). That's surely a more reasonable reading, for at face value it would seem the hungry brother lacking food is being heartlessly told 'Well go home and eat!'.

*Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who do not have? What shall I say to you?* - The reference to shaming connects to the allusions to the trial of jealousy commented on under :5. To not offend others, to seek to save them, means that we will not despise them. 1 Cor. 11:22 accuses some brethren of despising others [s.w. Mt. 18:10 about despising the little ones] in the ecclesia by "shaming" them. If we perceive the value of persons, the meaning of others personhood, we will not shame them in our words, gestures, body language or actions. No "shameful speaking" should proceed out of our mouths (Col. 3:8 RV). Of course, the true believer in Christ cannot be ashamed- for whilst some stumble on Christ, the rock of offence, the believer in Him will not be shamed (Rom. 9:33; 10:11- s.w. 1 Cor. 11:22). For his or her sure hope of the Kingdom "maketh not [to be] ashamed" (Rom. 5:5). Again, if our hope of the Kingdom is real to us, nobody will make us ashamed, will in reality make us feel despised, or make us stumble. The reality ahead will transfix us so that all human unkindness toward us gains no permanent lodgment in our hearts. We do well to review our way of talking and acting to ensure we do not shame others.

*Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise you!*- This connects to how he praised some of them in :2. But this group who behaved in this way were not being praised.

11:23- see on 1 Cor. 11:2.

*For I received of the Lord that which I in turn delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread*- The order of service which the Lord had given Paul required just a cup of wine and loaf of bread. Their style of feasting was not at all His intention. Note how Paul associates the themes of betrayal and the breaking of bread- and John quotes the prophecy that "He who feeds on bread with me has raised his heel against me" in the context of Judas breaking bread with Jesus. "Is it I?" must be a dominant part of the breaking of bread experience. The hint was clearly enough that there was one present at the original last supper who had betrayed the Lord; and Paul saw those who were also involved with the idol cults as being represented by Judas the betrayer.

11:24- see on Jn. 6:51.

*And when he had given thanks*- Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 after taking the bread and blessing it, and then distributing to the disciples and they to the crowds (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24). The connection surely show that the breaking of bread was not based upon any closed table ideology, but was radically open.

*He broke it, and said: This is my body, which is for you. This do in remembrance of me*- Some manuscripts add "which is broken for you". 'Broken' can imply divided and shared out. The gruesome record of the Levite cutting up his wife's body and sending parts of the body throughout all Israel has much to teach us of the power of the memorial service. It was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "take advice and speak [their] minds" (Jud. 19:30). It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to

provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings:

- The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (Jud. 19:1)
  - They were 'slain' by permission of a priest
  - They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob
  - They were "brought forth" to the people just as the Lord was to the crowd (Jud. 19:25)
  - "Do what seemeth good unto you" (Jud. 19:24) is very much Pilate language
  - A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate.
- There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord's 'broken body'- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

Considering how the bread represents the body of Christ leads us to a common query: 'Seeing that "a bone of Him shall not be (and was not) broken", how can we say that we remember the *broken* body of Jesus by *breaking* the bread?'. First of all, it must be understood that 'breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The breaking of a loaf of bread is not necessarily implicit in the phrase (although it can be). However, we must also be aware of a fundamental misconception which one feels is held by many; that the physical blood and body of Christ are *all* that we come to remember. This notion is related to that which feels that there is some mystical power in the physical bread and wine in themselves. Robert Roberts makes the point in *The Blood of Christ* that "it is not the blood as literal blood that is precious or efficacious". And the same might be said about the Lord's literal body. His body and blood were no different to those of any other man.

The fact that we are asked to symbolize His broken body, when it is stated that His literal body was *not* broken, is proof enough that Christ's body is to be understood as something more than His literal flesh and blood. Indeed, 1 Cor. 10:16,17 seems to suggest that the "body of Christ" in which we partake through the bread is a symbol of the whole body of believers, just as much as His actual body which enabled this salvation. Likewise the Passover was not intended to commemorate the red liquid which flowed from the first Passover lambs, but to remember the salvation which God had achieved for *all Israel* on account of that. Christ bore our sins "in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)- and it was more in His mind and mental awareness that this was true, rather than our sins being in (e.g.) His arms and legs. Other uses of "body" which require reference to our whole mind and being, rather than our literal body, include Mt. 5:29,30; 6:22-25; Jn. 2:21; Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; 9:23. Luke's record of the Last Supper shows how the Lord spoke of His body and blood as parallel with His whole sacrifice: "This is my body... this do in remembrance of *me* (His whole way of life- not just His physical body). This cup is the new testament in my blood, which *is* shed for you" (Lk. 22:19,20). Col. 1:20 likewise parallels "the blood of the cross" with "him" (the man Jesus). Rom. 7:4 puts "the body of Christ" for the death of that body; He was, in His very person, His death. The cross was a living out of a spirit of self-giving which *was* Him. The cup of wine represents the promises ("testament") of salvation which have been confirmed by Christ's blood. Note how Jesus quietly spoke of "my body which *is* (being) given for you... my blood which *is* shed for you". The pouring out of His life/blood was something ongoing, which was occurring even as He spoke those words. The cross was a summation of a lifetime of outpouring and breaking of His innermost being, or "body". It is this that we remember at the breaking of bread. The Passover was comprised of the lamb plus bread. The breaking of

bread, the Passover for Christians, is wine and bread. The lamb was thus replaced in the thought of Jesus by His blood / wine. He perceived that His blood was Him, in that sense.

It is also worth reflecting how the Hebrew writer saw the torn veil as a symbol of the Lord's flesh. It is just possible that the physical tearing of the Lord's flesh at His death through the nails represented the tearing of His flesh nature, symbolized in the physical tearing of the veil. But the tearing of the veil was something essential and far reaching- not a surface rip. The Lord's death is surely to be understood as a tearing apart of the flesh nature and tendencies which He bore; and it is this we remember in breaking the bread which represents His flesh. Note that to break the bread in a place was an idiom for breaking the life there (Ez. 4:16; 5:16; 14:13; Lev. 26:26). This was what the Lord asks us to remember- not the physical breaking of His body, but the breaking of His life for us and sharing it with us (Is. 58:7).

11:25 *In the same manner also the cup, after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood-* The breaking of bread brings us before the cross, which is in a sense our judgment seat. There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). The very structure of the Hebrew language reflects this. Thus the Hebrew *baruch* means both 'blessed' and 'cursed'; *kedoshim* means both 'Sodomites' and 'saints'. Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Indeed, the Lord's supper is a place to which the rejected are invited (Zeph. 1:7,8; Rev. 19:7), or the redeemed (Rev. 3:20). Like the cup of wine, being invited to the Lord's supper is a double symbol. And there is no escape by simply not breaking bread. The peace offering was one of the many antecedents of the memorial meeting. Once the offerer had dedicated himself to making it, he was condemned if he didn't then do it, and yet also condemned if he ate it unclean (Lev. 7:18,20). So a man *had* to either cleanse himself, or be condemned. There was no get out, no third road. The man who ate the holy things in a state of uncleanness had to die; his eating would load him with the condemnation of his sins (Lev. 22:3,16 AV mg.). This is surely the source for our possibility of "eating... condemnation" to ourselves by partaking of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner. And so it is with us as we face the emblems. We must do it, or we deny our covenant relationship. And yet if we do it in our uncleanness, we also deny that relationship.

*This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me-* This seems carefully worded so as to free us from any idea that we must break bread at a certain commanded frequency. Or perhaps the import was more practical- in that the cup was being used as means for getting drunk. The idea would be: 'Every time you lift that cup to your mouth and drink, it is to be in remembrance of the Lord- and not in the name of something else, and just as a path towards intoxication'.

11:26 *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death-* 1 Cor. 11:26 AVmg. makes the act of breaking bread a command, an imperative to action: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord's death, till he come". If we are going to eat the emblems, it is axiomatic that we will commit ourselves to shewing forth His death to the world, like Paul placarding forth Christ crucified in our lives (Gal. 3:1 Gk.). The Passover likewise had been a 'shewing' to one's family "that which the Lord did unto

me" (Ex. 13:8), the redemption we have experienced. The description of the memorial service as being a 'proclamation' of the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26 RV) is an allusion to the second of the four cups taken at the Jewish Passover: "the cup of proclamation". This was drunk after the reading of Psalms 113 and 114, which proclaimed Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Therefore our breaking bread is our proclamation that we really believe that we have been saved out of this world, and are on the wilderness path to the Kingdom. God forbid, really, that our breaking bread should come down to mere ritual and habit. It is a very personal proclamation of our own salvation- as well as that of the whole body of believers.

*Until he comes-* This is surely an allusion, but not a quotation, to the Lord's comment that He would not take the cup again *until* He returns (Mk. 14:25). The most evident link between the breaking of bread and the judgment / second coming is in the fact we are to do it "until he come". The Jews expected Messiah to come at Passover, and the Lord seems to have plugged into that fact. 'Until he come' was an allusion by Paul to the contemporary Passover prayer for the coming of Messiah at the Passover meal: "May the Lord come and this world pass away. Amen. Hosanna to the house of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Joachim Jeremias translates the phrase: "'Until (matters have developed to the point at which) he comes', 'until (the goal is reached, that) he comes'". He points out a similar construction in other passages relevant to the second coming (Lk. 21:24; 1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 11:25). Thus each memorial meeting brings us a step closer towards the final coming of Jesus. It would therefore be so appropriate if the Lord did return during a breaking of bread. One day, the foretaste of judgment which we experience then will be, in reality, our final judgment. As we break bread, each time we are 'reminding' the Father as well as ourselves of His Son's work and the need to climax it in sending Him back.

*11:27 Therefore whoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner-* The "unworthy manner" in the context clearly refers to things such as using church prostitutes at the breaking of bread, getting drunk on the wine there as if the whole service was an idol ritual, and in fact not really keeping the Lord's supper because they were also drinking the cup of idols (10:21) and had turned the Lord's supper into their own supper (:20). We come to the Lord's table as sinners; our pangs of conscience are in fact the sign we are there in the right and 'worthy' manner. The Greek for "unworthy" means 'irreverent'; and this is exactly the context. It is drunkenness with the wine, using it as part of an orgy, which is the irreverence in view.

*Shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord-* Noting the earlier allusion to Judas (see on :23), we can rightly assume that again it is Judas whom Paul has in mind. The unworthy are not weak sinners, which is us all, but those who wilfully are betraying the Lord.

*11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup-* We are to eat in a spirit of self examination ["so..."], not of light hearted partying as was happening at Corinth. See on :29 *discern*.

There seems an allusion in this section to Joseph's cup of divination. The Hebrew for "divines" means literally 'to make trial'; their taking of the cup was their trial / judgment. Thus we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves by taking the cup. The word used by the LXX for "divines" in Gen. 44:5 occurs in the NT account of the breaking of bread service: 'everyone should *examine* himself, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup' (1 Cor. 11:28). The Lord examines us, as we examine ourselves. There is a mutuality here- the spirit of man is truly the candle of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). He searches us through our own

self-examination. He knows all things, but there may still be methods that He uses to gather than information. Our hearts are revealed to God through our own self-examination. And is it mere co-incidence that the Hebrew words for "divination" and "snake" are virtually identical [*nahash*]? The snake lifted up on the pole [cp. the crucified Jesus] is the means of trial / divination. Through the cross, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (Lk. 2:35), just as they will be at the last day. Thus the breaking of bread ceremony is a means towards the sort of realistic self-examination which we find so hard to achieve in normal life.

The whole story of Joseph is one of the clearest types of Jesus in the Old Testament. The way His brethren come before His throne and are graciously accepted is one of the most gripping foretastes we have of the final judgment. The rather strange way Joseph behaves towards them was surely to elicit within them a true repentance. He sought to bring them to self-knowledge through His cup. Joseph stresses to the brethren that it is through his cup that he "divines" to find out their sin. He also emphasizes that by stealing the cup they had "done evil" (Gen. 44:4,5). And yet they didn't actually steal the cup. The "evil" which they had done was to sell him into Egypt (Gen. 50:20). They had "stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had "stolen" the cup. This is why he says that "ye" (you plural, not singular, as it would have been if he was referring merely to Benjamin's supposed theft) had stolen it (Gen. 44:15). And the brethren in their consciences understood what Joseph was getting at - for instead of insisting that they hadn't stolen the cup, they admit: "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen. 44:16). Clearly their minds were on their treatment of Joseph, the sin which they had thought would not be found out. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished. The cup was "found" and they realized that God had "found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their "iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph's garment: "This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32).

The cup made them realize their guilt and made them acceptive of the judgment they deserved. And it made them quit their attempts at parading their own righteousness, no matter how valid it was in the immediate context (Gen. 44:8). The cup made them realize their real status, and not just use empty words. Behold the contradiction in Gen. 44:9: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my Lord's bondmen / servants". The Hebrew words translated "servants" and "bondmen" are the same. Their mere formal recognition that they were Joseph's servants was to be translated into reality. Thus they say that Joseph had "found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we *are* my Lord's servants". Describing themselves as His servants had been a mere formalism; now they wanted it in a meaningful reality. And the Lord's cup can do the same to us. The way they were "searched" (Gen. 44:12) from the oldest to the youngest was surely the background for how the guilty men pined away in guilt from the Lord, from the eldest to the youngest. The whole experience would have elicited self-knowledge within them. The same word is found in Zech. 1:12, describing how God Himself would search out the sin of Jerusalem.

Joseph was trying to tell them: 'What you did to the cup, you did to me. That cup is a symbol of me'. And inevitably the mind flies to how the Lord solemnly took the cup and said that

this was Him. Our attitude to those emblems is our attitude to Him. We have perhaps over-reacted against the Roman Catholic view that the wine turns into the very blood of Jesus. It doesn't, of course, but all the same the Lord did say that the wine *is* His blood, the bread *is* His body. Those emblems are effectively Him to us. They are symbols, but not mere symbols. If we take them with indifference, with minds focused on externalities, then this is our essential attitude to Him personally. This is why the memorial meeting ought to have an appropriate intensity about it- for it is a personal meeting with Jesus. "Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face". If it is indeed this, then the cup will be the means of eliciting within us our own realization of sin and subsequently, of our salvation in Jesus.

Joseph's brothers' words are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

11:29 *For he that eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not discern the body of the Lord*- The invitation to *discern* the Lord's body at the memorial meeting uses the same word occurs in v.28: "let a man *examine* himself". It's too bad that the translations mask this connection. We are to examine / discern the Lord's body, and to do the same to ourselves. The two are inextricably related. Meditation upon and analysis of *His* body will lead to *self* examination and discernment. In this lies the answer to the frequent question: 'What should we examine at the breaking of bread? Our own sins, or the facts of the crucifixion / resurrection?'. If we think about the latter, we will inevitably be led to think of the former. In the Corinthian context, the body of Christ is to be understood as the ecclesia. 1 Cor. 12 is full of this figure. The need to discern the Lord's body at the breaking of bread means that we must go beyond reflection upon His physical body. We must recognise / discern His ecclesia too. The immediate context of 1 Cor. 11 is of unbrotherly behaviour at the memorial meeting. If we fail to recognise / appreciate / discern the Lord's physical body, we will fail to recognise His brethren. And if we do this, we have made ourselves guilty of His body and blood, we have crucified Him again. This is why I plead with those who use the breaking of bread as a weapon for division within the Lord's body to think again. The body which we must discern at the breaking of bread evidently has some reference to the ecclesia. We thereby place ourselves in a dangerous position by refusing to share the emblems with others in the body, and disfellowshipping those who do so.

Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 10-12 seems to be specifically in the context of the memorial meeting. The issue he addresses is that of disunity at the Lord's table- different groups were excluding others. It is in this context that he urges believers to "discern the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29)- and the Lord's body he has previously defined as referring to the believers

within that one body. For in 1 Cor. 10:17 he stresses that all who have been baptized into the body of God's people "being many are one loaf, and one body". There's only ultimately one loaf, as there's only one Christ. All within that one body are partaking of the same loaf whenever they "break bread", and therefore division between them is not possible in God's sight. "The bread which we break, is it not the *koinonia*, the sharing in fellowship, of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). By breaking bread we show our unity not only with Him personally, but with all others who are in His one body. To refuse to break bread with other believers- which is what was happening in Corinth- is therefore stating that effectively they are outside of the one body. And yet if in fact they *are* within the body of Christ, then it's actually those who are refusing them the emblems who are thereby declaring *themselves* not to be part of Christ.

Our attitude to the cross *and all that is meant by it* is the summation of our spirituality. I normally dislike using alternative textual readings to make a point, but there is an alternative reading of 1 Cor. 11:29 which makes this point so clearly: "He who eats and drinks [*'unworthily'* isn't in many manuscripts], eats and drinks discernment [judgment] to Himself. Not discerning the Lord's body is the reason many of you are weak and sickly". The Corinthians were not discerning the difference between the Lord's body and a piece of bread, for they were eating the bread as part of a self-indulgent social meal, rather than discerning Him.

The command to *examine* ourselves uses the same word as in 3:13 concerning the way our works will be *tried* with fire by the judgment process of the last day. If members of an ecclesia break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come together unto condemnation. Job knew this when he said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock... for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment.

Judging / examining ourselves is made parallel with discerning the Lord's body: as if discerning His body on the cross inevitably results in self-examination, and vice versa (1 Cor. 11:28,29). We must *discern* the Lord's body, and thereby *examine* ourselves (these are the same words in the Greek text). Yet the Lord's body in the Corinthian context is the ecclesia, the body of Jesus. To discern ourselves is to discern the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29,30 RV). By discerning our brethren for who they are, treating them as brethren, perceiving our own part



in the body of Jesus, our salvation is guaranteed. For this is love, in its most fundamental essence.

If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. This is why the Greek word translated "examine" (1 Cor. 11:29) is also that translated "approve" in 11:19 (and also 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15). By condemning ourselves we in a sense approve ourselves. Our self-examination should result in us realising our unworthiness, seeing ourselves from God's viewpoint. There is therefore a parallel made between our own judgment of ourselves at the memorial meeting, and the final judgment- where we will be condemned, yet saved by grace (James 2:12; 3:1). If we don't attain this level of self-knowledge now, we will be taught it by being condemned at the judgment. This makes the logic of serious, real self-examination so vital; either we do it in earnest, and realise our own condemnation, or if we *don't* do it, we'll be condemned at the judgment. Yet as with so much in our spiritual experience, what is so evidently logical is so hard to translate into reality. The process of judgment will essentially be for our benefit, not the Lord's. *Then* the foolish virgins realise that they didn't have enough oil / spirituality; whilst the wise already knew this (Mt. 25:13). As a foretaste of the day of judgment, we must "examine" ourselves, especially at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). The same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:13 concerning how the process of the judgment seat will be like a fire which *tries* us.

11:30 *For this cause many among you are weak and sickly and not a few sleep*- It was due to an incorrect attitude to the memorial meeting that many at Corinth were struck down "weak and sickly... and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30), presumably referring to the power the apostles had to smite apostate believers with physical discomfort and death. Such was the importance accorded to that meeting by them. This is not the only reference to physical sickness or death being used in the first century as a punishment for apostasy (Acts 5:5; James 5:15; Rev. 2:22,23).

11:31 *If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged*- If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned. This is written in the context of the breaking of bread. When we examine ourselves then, and at other times, do we get to the point where we truly *feel* through and through our condemnation? If this is how we perceive our natural selves, then surely we will be saved- if we *also* believe with joy that God's righteousness is counted to us. See on Lk. 17:10.

Our self-examination must be so intense that we appreciate that we ought to be condemned; if we achieve that level of self-knowledge now, we will not be condemned at the judgment. In the context of the self-examination command in 1 Cor. 11, Paul is speaking of the need to completely focus our attention on the sacrifice of Christ. Yet this command must have its basis in the directive for Israel to search their house for leaven before eating the Passover (Ex. 12:19). "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven... of malice and wickedness"

(1 Cor. 5:8). The disciples' question at the first breaking of bread, "Lord, is it I?" is another prototype of the command to examine ourselves at the feast (Mt. 26:22). Combining Paul's command to examine ourselves that we are really focusing upon our Lord's sacrifice, and the Exodus allusion which implies that we should examine our own lives for wickedness, we conclude that if we properly reflect upon Christ and His victory for us, then we will inevitably be aware of our own specific failures which Christ really has vanquished. But this will come as a by-product of truly grasping the fullness of the Lord's victory. The Passover was to be a public proclamation to the surrounding world of what God had done for Israel. Likewise our feast 'shows forth' (Greek: 'publicly declares') the Lord's death. Our memorial meeting should therefore include a degree of openly declaring to others what spiritual deliverances the Lord has wrought for us. This is surely the sort of talk that should fill up the half hour between ending the service and leaving the hall.

11:32- see on Lk. 13:28.

*But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world-* Apostate Israel are spoken of as the pagan world; and therefore at the day of judgment the rejected of the new Israel will be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32); assigned their portion "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46). If we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27); our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the sermon, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the Lord's judgment of us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord". We expect Paul to say: 'But when we judged ourselves, we are chastened...'. But he doesn't; our judgment is what reveals us to the Lord, and is therefore the basis of His judgment of us. Even if we flunk conscious self-examination from an underlying disbelief that we will attain the Kingdom, then this of itself reveals our hearts to Him.

Because of this connection between the breaking of bread and judgment, it would seem that the first century church experienced the physical chastising of the Lord in terms of being struck with sickness and even death *at the memorial meeting* (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Thus at ecclesial meetings- particularly the breaking of bread- the early church confessed their sins and prayed for healing from the afflictions some were smitten with as a result of their sins (James 5:14-16). It's easy to forget that the prophecy of the crucifixion in Is. 53 is in fact a confession of repentance by God's people- as His sufferings are spoken about, so they lead to

the confession that "He was bruised for *our* iniquities... with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:3,5). Reflection on the servant's sufferings elicited repentance. See on Lk. 2:35.

11:33 *Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat-* The eating and drinking at the memorial meeting is a judging of ourselves. It's a preview of the judgment. All of 1 Cor. 11 seems to be concerning behaviour at the memorial meeting. Time and again the brethren are described as "coming together" to that meeting (:17,18,20,33,34). Believers 'coming together' is the language of coming together to judgment. Where two or three are *gathered*, the Lord is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20) uses the same word as in Mt. 25:32 concerning our gathering together unto judgment. We should not forsake the "assembling of [ourselves] together" (Heb. 10:25)- the same word as in 2 Thess. 2:1 regarding our "gathering together unto Him". The church being assembled (Acts 11:26), two or three being gathered (Mt. 18:20)- this is all a foretaste of the final gathering to judgment (Mt. 25:32 s.w.).

*Wait for one another-* Again, despite all the serious abuses present at the Corinthian communion services, Paul's paramount concern is for love to be shown to each other. Waiting for each other may mean literally waiting for all to be present before beginning the service, rather than selfishly focusing upon themselves. But "wait for" can also mean to 'look out for', to wait for another's good- as in James 5:7; 1 Pet. 3:20.

11:34 *If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home-* See on :22. The assumption is that the person has food at home to eat; so I would doubt whether this is a reference to any attending the meetings just in order to be fed. In any case, the hungry remained hungry, because the more prosperous didn't share their food with them (:21). So I suggest Paul is targetting the Corinthian's justification of their feasting by saying that they were eating because they were hungry. His comment is that if you're hungry, then eat at home- not at church. Continually we find the interpretation of Corinthians to depend upon understanding or guessing the content of the questions which Paul was responding to.

*That your coming together be not to condemnation. About the other things I will give instruction when I come-* If we break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). If we feel we are worthy, then, we are unworthy. If we feel unworthy, then, we are worthy.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts-* Chapter 1 has explained that they had been given the Spirit, but they were not spiritual (3:1), and were refusing the leading of the Spirit. Paul wanted them to be aware of the working of the Spirit and how they were to walk in step with that Spirit. The Greek means literally 'spirituals'; it is the general working of the Spirit that is in view here, not specifically the miraculous gifts. By saying "I do not want you to be ignorant", the emphasis might be placed upon the word "not". Maybe they were justifying their lack of spirituality by claiming that Paul had kept them in the dark about the Spirit's working.

12:2 *You know that when you were Gentiles you were led away to those dumb idols, in whichever way you might have been led-* Paul places their idol worship in the past tense, but it is clear from several places that many of them were still involved in idol worship and even drunk the cups of the idols (10:21). This is another example of where Paul assumes his readership are saved and counts them as obedient when he knows that in practice they are not. Ellicott suggests the imperfect tense should be translated "As from time to time ye might be led". This would mean that they occasionally went off to the idol temples and then at times to the Christian church meetings. It is this kind of fickleness which is typical of so many converts to Christ. "When you were Gentiles" implies they were no longer Gentiles; they had a new identity as God's people, spiritual Israel. "Led away" is a strange term to use as it is often used with the sense of 'led away to death'. The idea would be that idol worship leads to death, and therefore there can be no compromise between idol worship and Christianity. They lead to death and life respectively, and nobody can be on both paths. The dumbness of the idols (alluding to Ps. 115:5,7 and Hab. 2:18,19- these were the types of idols which apostate Israel worshipped) is contrasted with the activity and sensitivity of the Lord the Spirit, who causes His people to speak forth the fact He is Lord (:3). The dumb idols claimed to speak through their priests and prostitute priestesses, who supposedly spoke forth the words of the gods at places like Delphi or other shrine. But by contrast, the Lord Jesus speaks in the hearts and minds of His people wherever they are (:3).

12:3 *Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says Jesus is accursed. And no one can say Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit-* The speaking of the Spirit is very different to the speaking of the gods represented by the idols- see on :2. It deeply costs us to accept Jesus as Lord. Yet for so many moments of each day, we deny Him His Lordship in practice. In the first century, accepting Jesus as Lord was a life and death issue. Pliny wrote to Trajan how accused Christians had to both say "The emperor is Lord" and also curse Christ. Polycarp was urged by a Roman official to submit: "What harm is there in saying "Caesar is Lord?"", and yet because he refused, Polycarp was killed (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 8.2). It would seem that there were some Christians who gave in- and even justified it. For 1 Cor. 12:3 warns that "no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is cursed!", and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit". My suggestion is that this is a reference to Mt. 10:17, which comforts believers that when we are delivered up, "what you are to say will be given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". It would appear that some of the Christians who gave in were claiming that in accordance with this verse, it was the Spirit of God which had made them say "Jesus is cursed!" and deny that "Jesus is Lord". Paul is pointing out that this simply doesn't happen. In our context, the point simply is that to constantly affirm "Jesus is Lord" demands an awful lot from us, and as in the first century, so in the twenty first... we will be sorely

tempted to think that just a few moments of denial when in a tough situation is quite OK. But in this there is the true test as to whether really we are under His Lordship or not. We have no court to face, no lions to fear. Instead, we have the court of human opinion, the lions of social mockery, financial loss, the human negatives that arise from the unselfish living which Christ's Lordship demands of us. Paul had forced Christians to blaspheme under torture- to say things like "Jesus is accursed". He knew from experience that those who truly had the Spirit somehow had the strength not to say those words. And through that same Spirit had had the power to answer Saul: "No, Jesus is Lord", as he tortured them to say "Jesus is anathema / accursed". It could also be that there were false teachers at Corinth claiming to be inspired by God, who were claiming that Jesus is accursed.

*12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit-* Verses 4-6 connect gifts with the Spirit; service with the Lord Jesus (:5); and activities with the God who empowers them (:6). This is an example of where Paul often brings together the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian doctrine in its standard form is wrong in the relationships it presupposes between these three entities. But as the baptismal formula of Matthew 28 makes clear, the believer is associated with Father, Son and Holy Spirit by baptism. Baptism is the point at which the Spirit gifts were given, and baptism associates with Father, Son and Spirit. This I suggest is the reason for the allusion to all three entities here in the context of the gifts of the Spirit.

There is major emphasis within this section upon there being only one and the same Spirit; all the blessing and gifts were all manifestations of the same one Spirit. We wonder why there is such repeated emphasis. I suggest the answer is in appreciating the degree to which the Corinthian church was operating its services in a way similar to the rituals of the idol temples, which had been their previous religious experience. And this is true to observation with modern converts to true Christianity- they will have a tendency to bring with them the practices of religion which they were previously exposed to, despite the apparent change in understanding concerning Jesus as Lord and focus. These cults, especially in Corinth, also featured the idea of spirit possession and speaking in tongues, in the sense of glossolalia / ecstatic utterance. The idea was that a worshipper of the idol slept with the cult prostitutes and in turn, were possessed by the spirit of the god who was represented by the idol. This possession was thought to be expressed in terms of ecstatic utterances and moaning / groaning, and could also produce supposed words of wisdom and knowledge. It was typical for people to have relationships with multiple gods and to claim possession by the spirits of the various gods. I suggest that this was what was going on amongst some in the Corinthian church. But they were claiming that all this was in fact part of their possession by the spirit of the Lord Jesus. To understand the Corinthian correspondence correctly, we need to appreciate this. Hence so much about speaking in tongues in chapter 14 (Corinth was near to the oracle at Delfi where this was common). And it's why there is so much emphasis upon the Spirit of God being one, and responsible for all things. It was not that He, or His Son, were one source of spirit amongst many others. The unity of God and the unity of the Spirit are therefore connected- "one God... one Spirit... one Jesus" (Eph. 4:4-6). If there was only one true God, then there could only be one Spirit. If there were many gods / idols, there would be many spirits, each responsible for a different aspect of spiritual life.

*12:5 And there are diversities of service, but the same Lord-* The gifts of the Spirit are given to enable us to serve the Lord. Never are they for our personal, secular benefit. They are for the service of others, through serving the Lord Jesus. The emphasis upon diversity would be appropriate to a community who favoured the more public, visible forms of service. See on :4.

12:6 *And there are diversities of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone-* "Everyone" means that it can never be the case that only the church leadership are empowered. All are empowered- if they are open to it. "Activities" and "empowers" translate the same Greek term; literally, 'energy'. There is a power of energy within- "*in everyone*"- from God through the Spirit. Such internal empowering is within the human mind. The reference is not simply to the more visible miraculous powers; for as later explained in this chapter, those were not possessed by "everyone". See on :4.

12:7- see on Mt. 25:15.

*But to each individual is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good-* Again the stress is upon the way in which "each individual" has been given the Spirit; see on "everyone" in :6. Paul's theme in this letter so far is that the welfare of others must be paramount in our thinking. The Spirit is given "for the common good". All spiritual gifts and empowerments are not for ourselves; even the energy given within us (see on :6) is ultimately to be used for the good of others.

Although NEV offers "each individual", the Greek literally means 'to each one', and it could refer to how each house church was given a specific gift; although note :11 "each man". I say that because there is New Testament evidence that suggests that not every single individual believer in the first century had miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. That is hard to square with 1 Cor. 12 teaching that 'each one' had such gifts. But remember the context. Paul has been arguing that there is one body of Christ in Corinth, and each house church contributes towards that. The house churches were divided against each other and some groups shunned others. Paul is saying that each of those house groups played a vital role. We can take a lesson from this. Each ecclesia even today has a somewhat different emphasis, and all too easily, ecclesias can divide from each other. And yet this would be a denial of the one body of Christ; we not only need each other individually, each ecclesia needs each other ecclesia in their area, if they are to fully function as the one body. The warning against "schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25) applied in the context to there being schism between local house churches, rather than between individuals.

12:8 *For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit-* Chapter 1 began by stating that the Corinthians as a church were enriched with all wisdom and knowledge. This was true insofar as these gifts had potentially been given to some within the community. But the church was divided, and the individuals it seems refused to recognize their gifts. And so the situation became analogous to that which we meet today- that many read the promises of Spirit empowerment and simply find them so untrue to observed experience. But that is our fault, both on an individual and collective level. See on :10.

12:9 *To another faith through the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings through the same one Spirit-* "Faith" may mean just that- the Spirit gives internal spiritual power to believe, once we have taken the step of faith and baptism. But *pistos* can also reasonably be translated 'conviction'; perhaps the reference is to the Spirit power to convict others of sin, as Peter displayed with Ananias and Sapphira, and which may have been used to smite some with illness as mentioned in James 5. Paul likewise appears to have used it in Acts 13:10. The plural "healings" suggests there were different gifts to heal different illnesses. See on :10.

12:10 *And to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy and to another discerning of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues-* The question that arises of course is whether the Corinthians, who were for the most part not spiritual (3:1) and deeply astray in understanding and practice, actually had these gifts. When we read "to one is given... and to another... to another...", is this Paul describing how things are at Corinth? Or is he saying that these were the potentials? They had been given the gifts of wisdom, according to chapter 1; and yet Paul laments there was not a wise man amongst them (1 Cor. 6:5). They were struck down with sicknesses because of their abuse of the memorial meetings (1 Cor. 11:30); so why were they not healed, if the gifts of miracles, healings etc. were present amongst them? If indeed they had the gifts of speaking in and interpreting foreign languages ["tongues"], then why in chapter 14 will we read that they were talking in unintelligible language without an interpreter? I am therefore driven to the conclusion that these gifts had been given in potential to the community, every single member had some gift ["everyone... to each", :6,7]. But they were not using them, they were focused upon themselves rather than realizing that these gifts were given "for the common good" (:7).

12:11 - see on Mt. 25:15.

*All these gifts are energized by one and the same Spirit, apportioned to each man according as he is willing to receive it-* I have commented earlier on the emphasis upon the "same Spirit" being at work (see on :4), and upon the way that "each man" had been given a gift (:10). So much spiritual energy and potential lay wasted and idle in Corinth. But the key was the fact that they were given to each man "as he is willing to receive it". They were unwilling; because they were self centered and did not perceive that the gifts were given for the good of others (:7). If they had had a true passion to serve others, then they would have been willing to receive the gifts. The situation recalls the parable where the poor man is brave enough to knock on the door of his rich neighbour at midnight because he needs bread to give to another- an unexpected visitor. And the rich man will give him whatever he needs- in order to give to others (Lk. 11:8).

12:12 *For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though being many, are one body; so also is Christ-* The term "Christ" is even used of the believers, such is His unity with us (1 Cor. 12:12). See on Jn. 3:11. The analogy to the human body means that every part is critical for the function of the whole. This is why despite the entire raft of problems at Corinth, Paul begins in chapter 1 by addressing their lack of unity. And he uses the same metaphor in Rom. 12:4,5, arguing that all members do not have the same function, but we are thereby "every one members one of another". This continual focus upon "every one" is in the context of the way that religion generally gives importance to the leadership, and the mass are expected to simply attend and empower the leadership. But in the body of Christ, each member is critical to the function of the whole. If any leave the body or malfunction, then all suffer. This is why Paul is so concerned that "members" of Christ's body should become one body with church prostitutes, because "your bodies are the members of Christ" (6:15). Yet within the same metaphor, we are "every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Undeniably, our membership within Christ is intimately connected to our membership of one another. This is why the practices of disfellowship and division, so common to many churches, are absolutely wrong. They deeply damage the entire community, including those who are responsible for them.

12:13- see on Gal. 3:27.

*For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free-* Christ "shall baptize you" plural (Mt. 3:11) was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized. The strong implication is that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions. For *by one Spirit* are we all baptized into one body" of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit seems to be the baptizer. But how? The Lord Jesus baptizes by the Spirit (Jn. 1:33), although He didn't personally hold the shoulders of those He baptized (Jn. 4:2- doubtless to show that who does this is irrelevant). We obeyed the Truth (through baptism) "by the Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:22). This doesn't necessarily mean that the Spirit made us obey the Truth. Rather is the idea that as *Christ* died and was raised by the Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4), so we go through the same process in baptism, being likewise resurrected (in a figure) by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18-21). It is therefore the Spirit which raises us up out of the water, as it raised Christ; the man holding our shoulders is irrelevant. It is therefore through / by the Spirit that we have our hope of salvation (Gal. 5:5). There is only one resurrection, ultimately: that of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 6:14,15). By baptism into Him, we have a part in that. God in this sense resurrected us with Christ (Eph. 2:5,6), we even ascended into heavenly places in Him, as He rose up into the literal Heavens. And this whole process was achieved by the Spirit. But what does the Spirit" mean in this context? The Lord Jesus Himself is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The Spirit is what quickens us; but consider Jn. 6:63: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth... the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are (what gives) life". The process of coming alive with Christ by baptism, the raising out of the grave which the water represents, is therefore due to the work of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit and His word. He is "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (Jn. 3:5; the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). We were washed by baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). "He that is joined to the Lord (Jesus) (by baptism) is one spirit (with Him)" (1 Cor. 6:17). We are saved "by the washing (baptism) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly by Jesus Christ" (Tit. 3:5,6). See on Jn. 3:5.

*And were all made to drink of one Spirit-* At baptism, we drink of the Spirit. The Corinthians had done so, but were unwilling generally to continue doing so. We were "made" to do this. It is not all a mere question of freewill response. 1 Cor. 10:4 has drawn the parallel with Israel all drinking the same spiritual drink, which was Christ. In Christ, we are "made" to drink of Christ's Spirit. But this is not an overpowering influence- for the Corinthians had drunk of it but had turned aside to idols, just as Israel had done.

12:14 *For the body is not one member but many-* Paul puts his finger on the psychological problem- that human beings tend to subconsciously assume that they are the only ones. That my immediate issues are paramount. But if indeed we are Christ's, there must be an acceptance that man is not alone. We do not live nor die to ourselves. Our baptism was not only a statement of our relationship with the Lord Jesus; it is also a sign of our entry into the body of the Lord Jesus, i.e. the community of believers, the one ecclesia (Col. 1:24). Members are added to the church through baptism (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 11:24); thus baptism enables entry into the one body of Christ. Whoever is properly baptized is a member of the one body, and is bound together with all other members of that body: "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body... for the body is not one



member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Paul, in his relentless manner, drives the point home time and again. He goes on to reason that just because the hand says it isn't of the body, and won't co-operate with the feet, this doesn't mean that it *therefore* isn't of the body.

12:15 *If the foot shall say: Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body- that would not make it not a part of the body-* When we are first baptized, we can tend to view those who leave our community as simply hard to understand, but we may easily shrug it off. Yet surely we need to do *more*; to *feel* more for them. And to realize that we all leave, in that we can be lost in sin for minutes or hours at a time, having numbed our responsibilities to the Father and Son. And yet, we are in covenant relationship with Him. This means that we do not slip in and out of fellowship with Him according to our concentration upon Him or our spirituality. We likewise shouldn't call those who leave us Mr or Mrs. They are always our brother or sister. We are in a family bond with them. Even if the hand says "I am not of the body, it is not therefore not of the body" (1 Cor. 12:15 RV). These words were written in the context of some of the Corinthian brethren effectively resigning from the ecclesia and joining the various temples of even synagogues in the town. But they couldn't really resign from a relationship with God; resign from the fact that their Lord bled to death for them.

Having reminded us that "by one Spirit are we all baptize into the one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), Paul makes the obvious point- that as members of that body we *cannot*, we dare not, say to other members of the body "I have no need [necessity] of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). To fellowship with the others in the body of Christ is our "necessity"; this is why an open table to all those who are in Christ isn't an option, but a necessity. Otherwise, we are declaring ourselves not to be in the body. Indeed "those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (1 Cor. 12:22). By rights, we ought to be condemned for such behaviour; for by refusing our brethren we are refusing membership in Christ. And yet I sense something of the grace of both God and Paul when he writes that if someone says "Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (1 Cor. 12:15). I take this to mean that even if a member of the body acts like they aren't in the body, this doesn't mean that ultimately they aren't counted as being in the body. But all the same, we shouldn't stare condemnation in the face by rejecting ourselves from the body of Christ by rejecting the members of His body at the Lord's table. That's the whole point of Paul's argument. Naturally this raises the question: "Well who is in the body?". Paul says that we are baptized into the body (1 Cor. 10:17); and this throws the question a stage further back: "So what, then, makes baptism valid?". Baptism is into the body of Christ, into His person, His death and His resurrection; and not into any human denomination or particular set of theology. If the illiterate can understand the Gospel, if thousands could hear the Gospel for a few hours and be baptized into Christ in response to it- it simply can't be that a detailed theology is necessary to make baptism valid. For the essence of Christ, His death and resurrection, is surely simple rather than complicated. Those who believe it and are baptized into it are in His body and are thus our brethren- whatever finer differences in understanding, inherited tradition and style we may have.

12:16 *And if the ear shall say: Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body- that would not make it not a part of the body-* Clearly there was jockeying for position within the Corinthian church, and some were professing that they had left the body. But declaration that we are not part of the body doesn't make us not part of the body. The principle we can take is that even if there are barriers between us and other believers, barriers which they have placed, distances

they have created- they are still part of the body and we still need them. Denominationalism and division over theology are perhaps the most common cause of these distances.

12:17 *If the whole body were an eye, where is the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where is the smelling?*- We cannot all have the same function. Corinth had "ten thousand teachers" (1 Cor. 4:15). There was clearly a desire for prominence, and this contributed to the overall dysfunction of the body. The Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1). They needed to accept the gifts they were given, and realizing them would mean that they would not seek for other positions. They would be more than content to use what they had been given.

12:18 *But now has God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased Him*- See on :17. If the Corinthians had accepted their given gifts and roles to play, they would not have been interested in usurping the place of others. God has gone to so much trouble to potentially enable the perfect functioning of the church; to the extent that according to John 17, the unity / perfect function of the body should be enough in itself to convert the world. But a self focused approach and refusal to accept the gifts of the Spirit meant that this wonderful potential didn't work out.

12:19 *And if they were all one member, where is the body?*- A chronic focus upon being the member we would like to be means that effectively we are destroying the body of Christ- crucifying Christ afresh. It would seem there were many aspiring to be leaders and teachers (4:15)- to be the head. But the head is the Lord Jesus. This aspiration was not only inappropriate but effectively leaves the head of the body without a body. Man is never better than when he has a specific calling, and the ability to achieve and practice that calling. And so it is in Christ. We have specific gifts, designed for usage for others "to the common good". Using them, being Spirit-filled in the ways intended for us, will mean that we have no aspiration to fulfil other roles for which in God's wisdom we were not intended.

12:20 *But now they are many members, but one body*- "But now" would imply that Paul saw them as right then at that moment a functional body. They were not "now" just a few members with effectively no body; they were many members in one body. This is one of many examples of where Paul counts the dysfunctional Corinthians as mature in Christ when in reality they were not.

12:21- see on 12:15.

*Therefore the eye cannot say to the hand: I have no need of you; nor the head to the feet: I have no need of you*- The same word is used in :24 about our more honourable parts thinking they have "no need". Perhaps we are therefore to read in an ellipsis there, to the effect they [think they have] no need; for here in :21 it is made clear that we all stand in need of each other. Again Paul is touching to the core of our subconscious sense that we are sufficient of ourselves.

This is something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done. He likens preaching to drag net fishing (Mt. 13:47), in which one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy.

God's fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the harvest was plentiful during the Lord's ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). So the idea is that if even the Lord Jesus needs us, how much more do we need each other.

As John realized the tendency of some to think they could love God without loving His sons, so Paul here tackled the same problem at Corinth. He knew that some would want to go off on their own, and he shows that such behaviour would suggest that they alone were the whole body. He knew that some would think that they had no need of other parts of the ecclesial body; he saw that some would feel that they were so inferior to others that they had no place in the body. All these are reasons why believers push off on their own. But notice that Paul doesn't actually say 'the eye *shouldn't* say to the hand, I have no need of you'; but rather "the eye *cannot* say to the hand...". Although some may say or feel this, ultimately, from God's perspective, it's simply not valid. Christian disillusion with Christianity mustn't lead us to quit the body. The same logic applies to those who think that the body of Christ is divided; ultimately, there is one body, and from God's perspective this is indivisible. The divisions only exist in the minds of men. Those who say that they don't need fellowship with their brethren "cannot say" this, according to Paul. If they continue on this road, ultimately they declare themselves not of the one body of Christ; although I trust there are many brethren who have done just this who may still receive God's gracious salvation.

12:22 *No, on the contrary, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary*- Many of those who ungraciously storm out of fellowship with the rest of the body, do so because they complain that other believers are weak, unloving, hypocrites, don't practice what they preach etc. And in many ways, their complaints are true (seeing that the Lord came to heal those who need a doctor rather than shake hands with the healthy). But those parts of our bodies "that seem to be weaker...that we think are less honourable... the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty... with special honour" (NIV). The private parts of our bodies are the parts we are most sensitive to, although on the outside they seem weak and hidden. And so Paul reasons that the weaker parts of the ecclesial body should be treated the same. The Greek for "feeble" (1 Cor. 12:21) is used (notably in Corinthians) to describe spiritual weakness: Mk. 14:38; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14. And in some ways, we are all "weak" (1 Cor. 1:27; 4:10). So those we perceive ("that seem to be... that we think") to be spiritually weak in their external appearance, we should be especially sensitive towards. Significantly, the "sick" (s.w. "feeble") in the parable of Mt. 25:44 are the "least" of Christ's brethren, the spiritually weakest; and at the day of judgment, the rejected are condemned because of their attitude towards these spiritually weakest of Christ's brethren.

Our attitude to the spiritually weak is a vital part of our salvation. Christian disillusion with Christianity ignores this at its peril. Thus "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are *indispensable*" (1 Cor. 12:22 NIV); indispensable for our spiritual development and salvation. So we shouldn't be surprised if we don't like our brethren, if there are things which unbearably bug us about the community. This irritation, this clear vision of the weakness of our fellow believers, is a God-designed feature of our spiritual experience. If the day of disillusion and disappointment with the brotherhood hasn't come for you, it surely will do. But remember how *indispensable* this all is. Consider all the miserable complaints believers make about us: they gossip about me, they actually fabricate things as well as exaggerate, she stole from me, he disregards me, her son *swore* at me, would you believe it (I would); they

don't ask me to speak, he's such a hypocrite, and do you know what she did... Let's say every word is true. These weak brethren and sisters who are doing all this are "indispensable" to the salvation of the one who suffers all this, *if* he responds properly. Just walking away from them is to effectively put ourselves outside the body. We *need* them, the Spirit says, we need all the mud, the comments and the undermining and the upstaging and the betrayal, all at the most sensitive and hurtful points.

12:23 *And those parts of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our unattractive parts have more abundant covering-* Paul, as always, is our hero. The one who gave his life, his health, his career, his marriage, his soul, for the salvation of others. Only to have confidences betrayed, to be cruelly slandered, to be threatened, to be so passionately hated by his converts that some even tried to kill him and betray him to the Romans and Jews. He talks of how we must honour those whom we think are "less honourable". He uses a word he earlier appropriates to himself in 1 Cor. 4:10 (AV "despised"). He's saying 'OK, if you think I'm so weak, so despised, let's say I am. But you should receive me, because I'm still in the body'. And to that there was no answer (and still isn't any) by those Christians disillusioned with Christianity.

12:24- see on Eph. 5:31.

*Whereas our more attractive parts have no need of this. But God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked it-* God has "tempered" the whole body together, mingling together the weak and strong. That is exactly why Paul didn't seek to resolve the problems at Corinth by disfellowshipping the weak majority. He is likely writing here with an eye to comforting and explaining things for the 'strong' minority who would have wondered how they could ever retain membership in this church. The allusion is to the way in which the unleavened cakes of flour were "mingled" or "tempered" with the oil (cp. the Spirit) in order to be an acceptable offering (Lev. 2:4,5; 7:10; 9:4 etc.). Paul has already likened his Corinthian ecclesia to a lump of unleavened flour (1 Cor. 5:7); he is now saying that they have been "tempered" together by the oil of God's Spirit. If we break apart from our brethren, we are breaking apart, or denying, that "tempering" of the body which God has made. It's like a husband and wife breaking apart their marriage, which God has joined together. It isn't only that we are missing out on the patience etc. which we could develop if we stayed in contact with our brethren. Our indifference and shunning of our brethren is actively doing despite to the Spirit of grace and unity which in prospect God has enabled His people to experience. The body "maketh increase of itself... unto the edifying of itself in love". By remaining in the body, we are built up from what every part of it contributes to the growth of the whole. To quit from our brethren is to quit from that source of nutrition and upbuilding. The earth in the sower parable represents various types of believers; and the Lord went on to say that the earth brings forth fruit "of itself". The community of itself brings forth spirituality in its members. Some of the most Spirit-filled brethren and sisters you can meet are those who have stuck at ecclesial life all their days, really struggled with personality clashes, with endless ecclesial storms and wrangles- but they've stuck it out. And thereby they have remained in touch with, and been moulded by, that Spirit of tempering together which is so fundamental to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"God has... *given* more abundant *honour* unto that part which *lacked*" (1 Cor. 12:24), as the husband should "(give) *honour* unto the wife, as unto the *weaker* vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7). God's dealings with the ecclesia are replicated both within marriage, and within the ecclesia- for we

too should give special respect and sensitivity to the weaker parts of the ecclesial body (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).

12:25- see on 1 Cor. 12:7.

*So that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another-* Paul begun his letter in chapter 1 by lamenting the schisms, and goes on to highlight their lack of care for each other in sexual matters and in the whole question of relationships with idol worship. But the composition of the community of believers had been precisely calculated by the Lord of the body for maximum spiritual functionality. The body was designed to have no schism within it, *so that* each member could care for others. This is why Paul sees schism as the first and foremost problem he must address. It is symptomatic of all the other problems, and it was this which was stopping the path of the Spirit in resolving all the other issues. The tempering of the body, the choice of composition, who was mingled with whom, was and is intended to produce an undivided community. But as we have noted so often, Corinth didn't live up to the potential made possible. And it is the same with us. It can seem that if only this or that person was not in the community of believers, then all would function so much better. But that is not in fact the case- the opposite is true. Who should be avoided are those who cause division, especially by the evil policy of cutting off members from the body.

12:26 *And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it-* In an undivided body, the situation of one member affects all. The idea of all suffering together is repeated by Paul in 2 Cor. 1:5,6: "For as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, even so our comfort is also in abundance through Christ. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which works in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer". The Lord Jesus is a member of the body, and His sufferings and exaltation are ours. But likewise our sufferings are not unique; they are so that we can find comfort from others who have suffered the same, and give comfort to them likewise. The joint rejoicing with the one member is surely alluding to the parables of the lost in Lk. 15:6,9, where the rejoicing over the finding of the lost member is a cause for inviting others to "rejoice with me".

12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ and each individually members of it-* This was perhaps aimed at the spiritually stronger who must have wondered whether Corinth was still part of the body of Christ. This brief statement stands as a huge challenge to all who would draw certain lines of theology or practice or morality in order to exclude others. Paul obviously drew the lines pretty low to say this about Corinth. Again, note the emphasis upon "each [one]" of them being a member of the body.

12:28 *And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then those who do miracles, then the gifts of healing, helping, administration and various kinds of languages-* God set the apostles *first* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 12:28)- but in another sense, God set the apostles *last* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9). It depends from which perspective we look at these things. Pentecostals need to note that healings and tongues are low down the list. "Administration" is likewise these days read as 'leadership'; but it is well down the list. Perhaps the idea also was that there was no use pretending to positions of apostles or prophets, because true apostles and prophets had been "set" by God in the church. Hence Paul

elsewhere speaks of how he had been set or appointed as an apostle (s.w. 1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11); any attempt by the agitators to talk that down was simply going against God's sovereign choice.

*12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*- Paul so often positions himself as Moses. The revolt against the authority of Moses was on the basis that "all the congregation are holy, every one of them" and therefore Moses did not really have the special authority he claimed (Num. 16:3). It seems the same was happening at Corinth.

*12:30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with languages? Do all interpret?*- The answer in reality was not 'No, only some do'. Because I have argued elsewhere that these gifts had only potentially been given. Those who had been struck with sickness had no healers in the church (11:30); and chapter 14 will rebuke the Corinthians for not using the gift of interpretation, and not speaking in foreign languages but rather in unintelligible gibberish after the pattern of the idol cults. Yet the Corinthians claimed to have these gifts. I have suggested earlier that they were imitating the claims made within the idol cults, but in their case, were claiming that these were Spirit gifts from God. In reality they were not. But Paul gently doesn't take direct issue with this. Instead he criticizes their desire to have the more public gifts, or at least, their desire to lay claim to them.

*12:31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts*- Although believers were "set" or appointed to have certain gifts and should not therefore aspire to others, there appears here to be the possibility of desiring even "higher" ones. It may be that this reflects the openness of God to serving Him and His people- that we can move above or beyond our calling. Or it could be that Paul is treating their wrongly motivated desires for Spirit gifts in the same way as he treated their wrongly motivated desires for singleness and freedom from the marital ties that bound them. He goes along with them, by saying that indeed singleness unto the Lord is commendable; but warns them against using the church prostitutes in their single state, and against breaking up existing marriages. And so here, having said that we should receive and use the gifts we were appointed to and not pretend to others which were not intended, he now seems to say that of course, God is open to dialogue with man, and may grant even greater gifts "for the common good" if our motivation is correct. But the highest way is a way far higher than miraculous gifts- it is the way of love without exercising those miraculous gifts.

*And I will show you a still more excellent way*- The "way" of love outlined in the next chapter. The "higher gifts" were those which would help others the most; but the way of love was higher. 1 Cor. 12:31-13:12 implies that Paul was faced with the higher choice of the ministry of love and the written word, compared to the lower choice of exercising the Spirit gifts. By all means compare this with the choice which he had in Phil. 1:21-26: to exit this life was made possible to him, but he chose the higher, more difficult and more spiritually risky option of living for a few more years, in order to strengthen his brethren. See on 1 Cor 7:11. The miraculous gifts were given "for the common good", and would have been given to those who truly sought the good of others. But the way of love was a better way. And that is the way open to us. We can achieve even more by that, than by possessing miraculous gifts. This is not only a stern counter to the obsession of Pentecostalism for the miraculous gifts. It means that we should never feel that we cannot serve others as we would wish because of lack of resources or gifts. The way of love, after the pattern of chapter 13, is even more effective.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *If I speak with all the languages of men and of angels, but do not have love-* The description of love in 1 Cor. 13, the outline of the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-26, these are all portraits of the man Christ Jesus. The clearest witness to Him “therefore consists in human life in which his image is reproduced”.

So far in Corinthians, Paul has been arguing that care for others is paramount. In issues like marriage and food offered to idols, the critical issue is what will edify / build up others. And the same principle is used regarding the Spirit gifts. The mere possession of material / physical ability to serve the Lord is not the same as love. At the end of chapter 12, Paul has argued that the ministry of love is more effective in helping others towards salvation than the exercise of the miraculous gifts. The Corinthian clamour for miraculous experience, especially speaking in exotic utterances, was akin to the pagan religious cults- upon which it seems they had based their church life. "If I speak..." could mean that Paul did indeed speak with all human languages- as a travelling missionary he was empowered to have the gift of languages. "Of angels" is likely hyperbole. The pagan cults experienced ecstatic utterances, and they (along with the apostate Judaists who were influencing Corinth) liked to justify their glossolalia by claiming it was in fact Angelic language. I would have been inclined to labour the point that the gift of 'tongues' was the gift of speaking and communicating in intelligible contemporary languages, in order to preach the Gospel. Their usage in Acts 2 is the parade example. But instead Paul takes a higher approach. He says that even if he speaks with every human language *and* Angelic language- it is of no use if he has no love. This is what he has argued in chapter 12- that if we are not achieving the building up of our brethren, then all we do is of no use.

*I have become like sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal-* These instruments soon give a headache if they just continue making the same sound for an extended period. This is another indication that Biblical tongue speaking is not making ecstatic sounds but rather is done to build up others in love. Vine writes of "the celebrated Corinthian bronze". There is a contrast between the unwrought brass or metal which was struck, and the more refined musical sound of the cymbal. Whether refined or totally unrefined, without love, the words spoken would be but noise. A clanging cymbal contributes nothing to music unless it is within a wider context of other contributions; and likewise speaking / teaching without love achieves nothing edifying. This is a much needed caveat to the emphasis placed upon platform speaking; of itself it will produce nothing.

13:2- see on Mt. 7:22.

*And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries, and all knowledge-* Prophecy, knowledge and understanding "all mysteries" are nothing unless we are going to use that knowledge to profit or assist others. In the knowledge oriented world of the information age, we need this reminder as no other generation. Intellectual knowledge alone cannot save; it is only if this is harnessed for others that we can become 'profitable' and as it were find ourselves; otherwise we shall simply "be nothing". The Corinthians were modelling their church upon the surrounding idol cults, with their claims to speak "mysteries" and have exclusive knowledge. They were clearly making these claims in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts. Although they were not spiritual (3:1), Paul doesn't directly attack their false claims. Rather he argues more subtly, that even if he has all such knowledge of mysteries, this of itself is nothing if it is not rooted in the love that seeks to upbuild others.

*If I have all faith so as to remove mountains-* Paul appears to speak of such faith as a gift of the Spirit. Perhaps the miracles of the Spirit were done through granting the believers the gift of faith so that they could achieve the miracles. Surely Paul has in mind the Lord's teaching that faith as a grain of mustard seed could remove a mountain (Mt. 17:20). But that alone would not save the individual doing the miracle. That mustard seed had to grow into a great plant which gave shelter to others (Lk. 13:19). Faith alone will not save; it must have works, and those works relate to the blessing of others. This is the whole theme here in Corinthians. We may have the faith which enables us to eat idol food; but that is not the point. Our impact upon others and care for them is the essential thing.

The fact we copy the language patterns of those we are with was true for Paul. The Gospels were so much in his heart that he can hardly speak or write without some reference, consciously or unconsciously, to the Lord Jesus. Thus in 1 Cor. 13:2 I sense that Paul as he is writing (on a human level) was looking round for a superlative to express just how useless we are without love. And the superlative expression he picks is unconsciously taken out of the Gospels (Mt. 17:20): "Though I have all faith *so that I could remove mountains* and have not charity, I am nothing".

Even if we have faith to move mountains- an allusion to the Lord's teaching in Mt. 21:21- we 'are nothing' without love (1 Cor. 13:2). God so respects faith that He may hear the prayer of a believer, even though He considers that person "nothing" because they lack love. Rather like Elijah bringing fire down from Heaven by his faith- and yet the Lord Jesus seems to imply that this wasn't the right thing to have done, because Elijah lacked love (Lk. 9:55). In our self-examination we may perceive how God answers our prayers, our faith is rewarded... and think we're doing OK. But it could be that we are still "nothing". It's a sobering thought. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 15:2,19 to say that faith can be "in vain", and hope can likewise be merely of benefit in this life. But 1 Cor. 13:3 hits even harder home: a believer can give their body to be burned, for nothing, if they lack love. Remember these words were written, albeit under inspiration, by a believer who did give his body to die a violent death, and who had seen with his own eyes the death of Christians. Surely Paul writes with a warning word to himself; that even that apparent pinnacle of devotion to the Lord can be in vain, if we lack love.

Note how he writes in the first person: "If *I* have all faith... but have not love, *I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:2). It's not only that Paul is warning himself personally; the only other time the Greek phrase "I am nothing" occurs is Paul speaking about himself, also to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:11). There's a kind of association of ideas between the "*I am [nothing]*" and "*Love is [everything]*". Unless we 'are' love, we 'are' nothing.

*But do not have love, I am nothing-* The same phrase is only used, also to the Corinthians, in 2 Cor. 12:11 "Though I am nothing". We are indeed "nothing" of ourselves; only if we have love for others do we become something. We are to connect "I am nothing" with the comment that "it profits me nothing" in :3. If we do not profit or benefit others, then we are ourselves nothing. This continues the theme so often touched upon in Corinthians- that our salvation is wrapped up in that of others. We cannot just focus upon our own salvation and relationship with the Lord. If we do not profit others, then we are nothing ourselves. This explains Paul's passion for the spiritual growth and salvation of the Corinthians and indeed all



his converts. The whole situation is reminiscent of how the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were not allowed to have their own inheritance on the East of Jordan until they had helped their brethren to secure their inheritances in the promised land to the West of Jordan.

13:3- see on Acts 7:59.

*And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing-* Even making sacrifice for others does not make us anything- if it is not done with love. Even dying for our faith doesn't make us any more than "nothing" if we do so without love. See on :2 *I am nothing*. Our "profit" is to that of others. Doing good deeds of charity alone would not save, according to the Lord's teaching in Mt. 6:1-4- if there was the wrong motive; some manuscripts add here "That I may glory". And this certainly makes sense here. The burning of Christians only began under Nero's persecution, so far as history records. But perhaps such punishment had already begun in some places and Paul therefore alludes to it.

Let's not equate true love with the mere act of giving aid to charities. We can give all our goods to feed the poor, but lack true love; the life of love, the love of Christ permeating all our being (1 Cor. 13:3 may well have been written by Paul with his mind on some in the early Jerusalem ecclesia, who *did* give all their goods to the ecclesial poor, but lacked a true love, and returned to Judaism).

There is another possibility regarding giving our body to be burned. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

13:4 *Love suffers long-* "Longsuffering" is used in the sense of patient waiting for response from others, or the patience required to forgive another who at this time has not made recompense (Mt. 18:26,29; James 5:7); and of God's longsuffering with us, as He awaits our spiritual maturity (Lk. 18:7; 2 Pet. 3:9). All the attributes of love in this poem have some reference to our attitudes towards others, and that is the key to understanding each term. Those who refuse to forgive until there is repentance, or who are impatient with the immaturity of others in spiritual terms, are lacking this longsuffering which is in view here. Paul's patience with the Corinthians is really a parade example of what he meant.

I find it deeply concerning that so many who have committed themselves to Christ are unable to confidently answer questions such as 'What is love?'. To expound the beasts of Daniel's visions is relatively easy- this equals that, that refers to this. But to get to grips with "love" appears to have been given all too little attention. Love is patient / long-suffering (1 Cor. 13:4). But let's not think that patience simply means how we react to forgetting our keys or spilling milk. To some extent, whether we take such events calmly or less calmly is a function of our personality, our nervous structure, the kind of cards we were dealt at birth. I

suggest that the long-suffering patience Paul refers to instead has reference to our forgiving attitude to others, rather than applying to whether or not we get frustrated with ourselves. The man hopelessly in debt to his Lord begged for Him to show "patience" (Mt. 18:26). Patience is about not forcing others to "pay me what you owe me". We all have many people in our lives who are in our debt- more such people than we may realize. We have all been hurt by more people, and hurt more deeply, than we realize. Patience is about bearing long with their immaturity, waiting for them, whilst the debts remain unpaid; rather than demanding that they resolve with us before we'll fellowship them.

*And is kind-* The context of this great love poem is the discussion of things like marital decisions, attitudes to idol meat etc. Paul has developed the theme that our salvation is wrapped up with that of others, and therefore love for others is vital within all spiritual endeavour. "Kind" translates a very practical word, meaning useful or quite simply, 'employed' (see the root word in 7:31 "they that *use* this world", "I have *used* none of these things", 9:12,15). 'Love is practical' would be a fair interpretation.

*Love envies not-* The Corinthians were full of envies because they lacked the Spirit (s.w. 1 Cor. 3:3), and Paul was fearful that they would continue to have "envies" (s.w. 2 Cor. 12:20). If we love others then we will not envy them. Envy arises from a sense of inferiority and regret that we are not as the envied. But if love and care for them, especially spiritually, is our passion- then whilst we are not 'above' them, for we too are human, we shall not envy them.

*It is not arrogant or rude-* If we see ourselves as the servants of others, in Christ's place, then we will never act as superior over them.

*Is not puffed up-* Earlier in Corinthians, Paul has warned that "knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor. 8:1). The Corinthians were "puffed up" in their supposed knowledge about sexual freedoms and the freedom to eat idol meat (1 Cor. 4:6,18,19; 5:2). But in those matters, Paul has argued that love thinks of others- and that is the important thing, far more significant than whatever we theoretically know. Let us never kid ourselves that because we "know" some things about God, even know them correctly, that we will thereby be justified. It's not a case of simply holding on to a set of doctrinal propositions which we received at the time of our baptism into Christ. For the day of judgment won't be an examination of our knowledge or intellectual purity. This is not to say that knowledge isn't important. Paul had been arguing that if we truly know that God is one, that idols therefore have no real existence, that we are free in Christ to eat any meat- then this knowledge should not lead us to be arrogantly insensitive to our brother or sister who has a less mature understanding or conscience. Love is... not like that. Love therefore restrains our own superior knowledge and bears with those who don't quite 'get it' as they should. Again, our pattern is God's attitude to us who know just a fraction of His ultimate Truth.

That the rugged and at times abrasive Paul could write a poem about love, albeit under inspiration, reflects the extent to which he had thought about the utter supremacy of love. The device of acrostic Psalms (9,10,25,34,37,119,145) and the use of acrostics in Lamentations and Esther would enable the reciting of them. The repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive sentences is yet another such feature (Dt. 28:3-6; 2 Sam. 23:5; Jer. 1:18; Hos. 3:4; 1Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:12). The same phrase is also sometimes repeated at the beginning and end of a sentence with the same effect (Ex. 32:16; 2 Kings 23:25; Ps. 122:7,8; Mk. 7:14-16; Lk. 12:5; Jn. 3:8 Rom. 14:8 Gk.).

*13:5 Does not behave itself inappropriately-* This poem about love is a summary of Paul's policies so far concerning various practical issues. He has urged that in marital and relationship decisions, we are to do that which is "appropriate"; appropriate to a life dominated by the love principle (1 Cor. 7:36 s.w.). The only other occurrence of the word is again in Corinthians, when Paul speaks of the weaker members of the Christian body with the same word (1 Cor. 12:23). Such members are weak because they do not have love; and yet Paul teaches that our response to them is "necessary" and that they must be retained within the community of the body of Christ. To love the unloving is indeed hard, but it is the essence of love.

*Is not self seeking-* This phrase again builds on Paul's earlier argument in Corinthians- that we should act sensitively to others weaker in the faith, not doing things which may make them stumble, according to the principle "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good" (1 Cor. 10:25). This is quite something. All the time, in every decision, action, position we adopt, we are to think of what would be best for *others* rather than what's cool for ourselves. At the very least, this means that we are to act in life *consciously*- not just go with the flow, reacting to things according to our gut feeling, choosing according to what seems right, comfortable and convenient to us at that moment; but rather thinking through what import our positions and actions will have upon others. It takes *time* to think out what will be beneficial for them. And "love is..." just this. This is a way of life and thinking which it's very rare to meet in people. Almost frustrated, Paul lamented: "For all men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). 1 Cor. 10:25 spoke of seeking not our own good, but the good of our brethren- i.e. "the things which are Jesus Christ's". But according to Phil. 2:20,21, Paul felt that only Timothy understood this spirit of not seeking our own good, but that of the things of Christ, i.e. our brethren. The life of love is therefore a lonely life. So few 'get it'.

*Is not easily provoked-* see on Acts 15:39. Faced by the heights of such challenges, we can easily despair. We are not like this, or not like it very often nor very deeply. But Paul felt the same, even though under inspiration he himself wrote the poem. Paul too realized his failure, the slowness of his progress. When he writes that love is not "easily provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5), he uses the same Greek word which we meet in Acts 15:39 describing the provocation / contention he had with Barnabas which led to their division. Surely he had that on his conscience when he wrote that love is *not* like that.

Here we have an allusion to how slow God was to anger with Israel. As their loving husband He stuck with them for centuries, enduring what would have emotionally shattered many husbands if they endured it just for a few months, and putting up with what most men couldn't handle even for a year. God was slow to anger for centuries, and even then in that wrath He remembered mercy, even in His judgments He desperately sought to find a way to go on with Israel in some form. And we are asked to show that same slowness to anger.

*Keeps no record of evil done-* The mind of love imputes no evil to others, as God doesn't to us (1 Cor. 13:5; AV "thinketh no evil", s.w. to count / impute in Romans). The Greek word can also mean that love keeps no records or count of wrong done. We must forgive our brethren as God forgives us (Eph. 4:32). God expunges the spiritual record of the sin, and will not feed it into some equation which determines whether we can be forgiven. Christ "frankly" forgave the debtors in the parable. The frankness of that forgiveness does not suggest a process of careful calculation before it could be granted. God's frank forgiveness is

seen too in Ps. 130:3: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?". God does not "mark" sin, as our love for our brethren should keep no record of their past sins (1 Cor. 13:5-7 N.I.V.). If we refuse fellowship people because of the *effect* of past sins for which they have repented, then we *are* 'marking' iniquity. God does not deal with us in a manner which is *proportional* to the type or amount of sin we commit (Ps. 103:7-12).

13:6 *Rejoices not in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth*- What Paul is advocating is a conscious outgiving of ourselves to love. Not just being a nice enough person, a reasonable neighbour, partner, parent, a "top bloke", real decent guy. But a love which is actually beyond even that. A love modelled on God's love, and the love of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us crucifixion. Paul's poem personifies love as a person- love, e.g., "rejoices with the truth", hopes and endures. We too are to 'be' love. Not just occasionally, not just in ways which we are accustomed to, which are convenient to us, or are part of our background culture such as occasional hospitality to strangers. "Love is...", and we are 'to be' love, as if our very name and soul and heart is '*agape*'. Love is not an option- it's to be the vital essence of 'us'.

Another possibility here is that "unrighteousness" is being put for 'punishment for unrighteousness'. We will not rejoice in the punishment of the wicked personally known to us, just as God likewise takes no pleasure in it (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). But we will rejoice with "the truth", the just judgment of God which glorifies His Name.

13:7 *Carries all things*- Gk. 'is a roof over'. The idea is of covering over. Atonement means 'covering'. Because God covers our sins, we ought to cover those of others. The simple statement "love covereth all sins" (Prov. 10:12) comes in the context of appealing for God's people not to gossip about each others' failures. And the passage is most definitely applied to us in the NT (1 Pet. 4:8; James 5:20; 1 Cor. 13:7RVmg. "love covereth all things"). "He that goeth about as a talebearer reveals secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter" (Prov. 11:13). Our natural delight in telling or brooding on the moral failures of others, as if life is one long soap opera, will be overcome if we have personally felt the atonement; the covering of our sins. "He that covers his [own] sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The opposition is between owning up to our sins, and trying to cover them for ourselves. If we believe in the covering work of God in Christ, then we will own up to our sins the more easily, confident in His atonement.

The idea of love bearing / covering / carrying all things is the language of the cross- the Lord Jesus bearing, carrying our sins, and covering them. If we really grasp this, it ought to make us take a deeper breath. We are being asked to personally enter into the cross of Christ. To not just benefit from it ourselves, admire it from afar, look at it as Catholics glance at a crucifix over the door, pause for a moment in unthinking respect of tradition, and then go headlong through the door. No. We are asked to get involved in the cross, to participate in it, to bear it ourselves. The mind that was in the Lord Jesus at that time is to be the mind which is in us (Phil. 2:5-7).

*Believes all things*- This is not a call to naivety. The Bible asks us not to believe all things but to believe what is true. Paul's approach to the Corinthians was hardly one of believing all things they said or claimed. The word *pisteuo* also carries the idea of crediting or entrusting. I have shown in the commentary on this chapter so far that the various aspects of love often

allude to God's love for us, shown by His imputation of righteousness to us in Christ. This we are indeed called to reflect; and Paul for sure had to do this in order to be able to write so positively about the weak Corinthians. But this is different to naive believing of whatever facts a human being proffers to us.

*Hopes all things-* The idea of *elpizo* is not 'to hope for the best', nor to just take a generally positive outlook on life. It refers to a solid expectation. Again, Paul's attitude to the Corinthians was a parade example. He wrote, felt and acted towards them as if he certainly expected them to be in the Kingdom. If we are unable and not permitted to condemn our brethren, then we have to act according to our assumption that all in Christ shall indeed be saved.

*Endures all things-* Paul again endured all manner of slander and abuse from the Corinthians, as will anyone who sets themselves to assist others towards salvation. But love endures- and endures all things, there is nothing, no incident, however cruel, that makes us give up. "He that endures to the end" (Mt. 10:22) in practice means he that endures all unkindness, brickbats and slapdowns from those he seeks to serve. Paul uses the same word again in the context of our attitude to others: "I endure all things for the elect's sake" (2 Tim. 2:10).

13:8 *Love never fails-* This continues the idea of love enduring all things (see on :7). Love is never 'blown off course'; the end in view is our salvation, intertwined as it is with that of those whom we serve in love. All forms of burnout- a common experience in the Christian life- result from not keeping that end in view.

*But whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away. Whether there be speaking in foreign languages, this shall cease. Whether there be the gift of knowledge, it shall be done away-* "But whether" suggests Paul recognizes there may be false claims to the prophetic gift. He is not going to go into this, but rather makes the larger case- that whether or not, they are going to pass away and are not the essential thing. The failing, ceasing, doing away of the miraculous gifts is contrasted to the love which does not fail- because [see comment on *Love never fails*] the end view of salvation at the last day is kept ever in view. Prophecy- both in the sense of prediction of the future and the speaking forth of God's word- shall not be needed in the Kingdom. Likewise the gift of knowledge will be obviated by being with the Lord; and there shall be no need to preach in foreign languages once the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord's glory as the waters cover the sea, as anticipated in the Old Testament prophecies of that age. This is not to say that this passage does not also anticipate the fading away of the miraculous gifts in the first century. That too is in view, especially in :11, but Paul is asking the Corinthians to adopt a Kingdom perspective, and not seek to display the miraculous gifts which would not play any role eternally. Love does and will play that role eternally. And this then is to be our focus. The focus on the three gifts of prophecy, foreign languages and knowledge is not incidental. These were the very things practiced and claimed in the religious cults of Corinth, and especially at the nearby shrine of Delfi. The Corinthians were basing their Christian life upon those cults, claiming to be able to do these things in the name of having the miraculous Spirit gifts. Paul could have directly confronted them over these issues- but instead he argues more subtly that the Christian life is supremely about love, about building others up so that they will enter God's Kingdom. At best, focus upon the miraculous gifts is therefore misplaced and immature- and that perhaps could be our starting point in dialogue with Pentecostals.

Paul didn't just start writing his poem about love in 1 Cor. 13. It's wedged firmly in a context, a clearly defined unit of material about the use of the Spirit gifts spanning 1 Cor. 12-14. Having clarified his own authority and personal experience of the miraculous gifts, he proceeds to shew the Corinthians "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). He uses a Greek word four times, although most English translations render it inconsistently. It's worth highlighting the words in your Bible, maybe with a note like "s.w." ['same word'] next to them:

- "Prophecies shall *fail*" (1 Cor. 13:8)
- The Spirit gift of "knowledge shall *vanish away*" (1 Cor. 13:8)
- "That which is partial shall be *done away*" (1 Cor. 13:10)
- "Now that I am become a man [mature], I have *put away* childish [immature] things" (1 Cor. 13:11).

I read this as Paul saying that he used the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in his spiritual immaturity; but in his maturity, he chose not to use them, he "put [them] away". Paul also writes of how the miraculous gifts will be "done away" when "that which is perfect [complete, mature] is come" (1 Cor. 13:10). He seems to be saying that his personal growth from childhood to manhood, from immaturity to maturity, is a reflection of how ultimately the gifts will be no more when the mature state has come; and he wishes to attain that state now in this life, and thus he ceased using the gifts. He asks us likewise in this context to follow his pattern, to be "mature" [AV "be men"] (1 Cor. 14:20). This connects with how he speaks in Col. 3:14 of "above all" having love, which is the seal, the proof, of the mature state [AV "the bond of perfectness"]. In his own way, John spoke of the same state when he wrote of "perfect / mature love", and how he who fears hasn't reached the 'perfected-in-love' stage (1 Jn. 4:18). Instead of flaunting the Spirit gifts, Paul sold his soul for love; he gave himself over to the life characterized by the kind of love about which he writes so powerfully in his poem. Paul laments that the Corinthians weren't mature nor Spirit filled (1 Cor. 3:1,2), and wishes to be able to speak to them as "mature" (1 Cor. 2:6). So often in the decisions we face in life, it doesn't come down to a right or wrong, a yes or no; rather it's a question of what is the mature Christian behaviour, and what isn't.

The same Greek word translated "fail... be done away.... vanish away" is used in many other places concerning the passing away of the Mosaic Law:

- "We are *delivered* from the law" (Rom. 7:6). We are like a woman *loosed* from her husband, i.e. the Law of Moses (Rom. 7:2).
- The glory of the Law was to be *done away* (2 Cor. 3:7)
- The Law *is being done away* at the time Paul was writing (2 Cor. 3:11 Gk.). It was *abolished, done away* in Christ (:13,14)
- Christ *abolished* the law of commandments (Eph. 2:15)

Likewise, the prophecy that "tongues shall *cease*" (1 Cor. 13:8) uses the same word as in Heb. 10:2, concerning how the sacrifices *cease* to be offered. The "perfect man" state of the church, at which the Spirit gifts were to be withdrawn (1 Cor. 13:10; Eph. 4:13) is to be connected with how the Lord Jesus is the "greater and more *perfect* tabernacle" compared to the Mosaic one (Heb. 9:11). The conclusion seems to be that the ending of the Spirit gifts was related to the ending of the Mosaic system in AD70.

Closer reflection upon 1 Cor. 13 suggests that the time of the withdrawal of the gifts was in fact at the time when the Mosaic sacrifices ceased to be offered. There was an interim period

between the death of the Lord Jesus and the destruction of the temple in AD70. During this time, various concessions were made to the Jewish believers; they were permitted to obey Mosaic regulations for the time being, even though the Spirit through Paul made it clear that they were unable to give salvation, and were in comparison to Christ “the weak and beggarly elements”. The early believers were guided through this period by the presence of the miraculous Holy Spirit gifts amongst them, pronouncing, prophesying, enabling preaching in new areas through the gift of languages, organizing the ecclesias etc. But once the ecclesia came to maturity, the written word replaced the gifts. Most if not all the New Testament was completed by AD70, and this was around the time the gifts were withdrawn. Paul uses the same Greek word several times in 1 Cor. 13, even though it is somewhat masked in the translations. The following words in italics all translate the same Greek word: “Prophecies...shall *fail*...[the gift of] knowledge shall *vanish away*...that which is in part shall *be done away*...when I became a man, I *put away* childish things” (:8,10,11).

Paul is predicting how the gifts of the Spirit would be withdrawn once the church reached the point of maturity; but he says that he himself has already matured, and he has “put away” the things of his immaturity- i.e. he no longer exercised the gifts for himself. He presents himself, as he often does, as the pattern for the church to follow. Thus the gifts “shall be done away” in the future for the church as a whole when they are perfect / mature, but for him, he has already ‘done them away’ as he has himself reached maturity. In the same language as Ephesians 4, he is no longer a child, tossed to and fro and needing the support of the Spirit gifts. He laments that the believers were still children (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:13)- yet, using the same Greek word, he says that he is no longer a child, but is mature. In Gal. 4:3, Paul speaks about how he had once been a child in the sense that he was under the Mosaic Law. But now, he has put that behind him. He is mature; and yet here in 1 Cor. 13:10 he associates being mature with putting away the gifts of the Spirit.

13:9 *For we know in part and we prophesy in part*- I have argued above that Paul is seeking to position the miraculous Spirit gifts within a Kingdom perspective. They will not then be necessary. It is the love we show to others now which shall eternally endure in that age. Any Spirit gift of knowledge or prophecy was only a small part of the final knowledge which shall be revealed in the Kingdom age. The idea of 'partial' knowledge may be understood in this sense. But it may also allude to the fact that only some parts of the body of Christ had the gifts of knowledge and prophecy (1 Cor. 12:27 s.w.). Each "part" of the body contributes a measure towards the whole (Eph. 4:16 s.w., also in the context of Spirit gifts). "The truth" refers to the Lord Jesus personally; the term is often used as if it refers to a saving body of doctrinal, theological knowledge upon which salvation is predicated. But we need to be aware that whatever truths we hold, this is just a part of the whole picture. And that whole picture, in the context of this chapter, the final maturity, is the life of love- rather than some even greater array of intellectual truths. The partial revelation of knowledge is only a part of the ultimate picture which is of the body of Christ in His maturity, "the perfect man". Eph. 4:11-13 make the same point. For He is love personified and embodied. But it is still so that only a small portion is heard of God (Job 26:14); to claim to 'have the truth' must be held always in the perspective of a rightful intellectual humility before the Almighty. The idea of knowledge being only partial connects with the figure of seeing only a hazy outline in the mirror of :12.

13:10 *But when that which is perfect comes, then that which is in part shall be done away*- The perfect / mature is the man Christ Jesus, who is the embodiment of love (Eph. 4:11-13). The coming of Christ will bring full knowledge, and all knowledge we have will then be

revealed as having been so very limited and partial. But the mature or perfect state can be aspired to now, in individual life. For love is the bond of maturity- see notes on 13:8-10. In the state of mature, Christ-centred love for others, the partial ministry of the miraculous gifts fades from significance.

13:11 *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I am a man, I have put away childish things-* See notes on 13:8-10. Speaking, feeling [Gk. 'understanding'] and thinking surely connect with the three gifts Paul is discussing- speaking in languages, knowledge and prophecy. He associates the use of those gifts with his spiritual immaturity. He is confessing that the public, dramatic work associated with possession of the miraculous Spirit gifts had taken him up; yet he likens that period to his spiritual childhood (note how he uses the same figure of childhood to describe the dispensation of miraculous gifts in Eph. 4:11-16). He seems to have chosen not to use the gifts so much, because he realized that the real maturity was faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these, Paul came to realize, was love. And a true love must be the end point of our lives, as it was for Moses, as it was for Jacob. If Peter's list of spiritual fruits in 2 Pet. 1:5-7 has any chronological reference, it is significant that the final, crowning virtue is love- a love that is somehow beyond even "brotherly kindness". Love is above all things the bond of spiritual perfection (Col. 3:14).

As noted earlier on this section, "put away" is the same word used three times for the ending or cessation of the miraculous Spirit gifts. Paul was seeking to live the Kingdom life right now. Those gifts would not figure in the future Kingdom experience; it is love, the love we show for others now, which shall be the dominant experience and reality of the Kingdom. And so he had moved on from public usage of the gifts to selling his soul for love.

13:12- see on Eph. 1:18; 4:15.

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know fully, even as also I have been fully known-* The reference is not strictly to a mirror but to a looking glass, polished to act as a mirror. Corinth was famous for such looking glasses. We see "dimly", literally, 'in an enigma'. Even now that the Mosaic law has ended, we see ultimate spiritual reality only through shadows and figures. This must always be the perspective in which we understand any idea of 'saving truth' if we understand that term as referring to intellectual purity of understanding. We are "fully known" to God, but we do not fully know Him. The joy of the Kingdom age will be a mutuality of understanding between us, surely comprehended in the idea of seeing God face to face.

1 Cor. 13 and Eph. 4 are difficult to interpret. A valid case can be made for them meaning that the dispensation of the Spirit gifts was partial, but the completed spiritual man was made possible once the New Testament was completed. I have outlined this in *Bible Basics* Ch.2. But Paul's description of the completed, "perfect" state is so exalted that it is hard to resist applying it ultimately to our position in the Kingdom. "*Then* face to face... then shall I know (fully, not from parts); but *now* (as opposed to then) abideth faith, hope and charity" (1 Cor. 13:12,13) sounds like the Kingdom. So I would suggest we interpret those passages along these lines: 'Now, in the first century period of Spirit gifts, knowledge is partial; a completer state will come when the written word is finished. But even this is relatively partial, only a necessary step, towards the ultimate spiritual reality and knowledge of the Kingdom'. The parable of the talents speaks eloquently of all this.



Moses is the one who saw God face to face (Num. 12:8). Surely Paul saw the depth of fellowship which Moses achieved in this life as indicative of the richness of felicity with the Father which we will all ultimately achieve. Remember that Paul so often presents himself as Moses; but at this point he says that he is like all Israel, seeing dimly through the veil, and still awaiting the status of seeing face to face.

To describe or 'know' the real self is ultimately impossible; we can't write down an inventory of who we really are. Paul perceived this when he wrote that now he only knows himself partially, and only in the Kingdom "shall I know, even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). The aorist here really means "was known"; we shall then see ourselves as God now sees us, marvelling at His patience with our immaturity. We know Him now only partially, *ginosko*; whereas He knows us thoroughly, *epiginosko*. He knows us all around [*epi*], understanding the total context of all our words and actions. This for me is one of the Kingdom's joys; to truly know myself, even as I am presently known by the Father. Until then, we remain mysteries even unto ourselves; and who amongst us has not quietly said that to themselves... The question 'Who am I?' and especially 'Who and how am I to God?' must ultimately remain to haunt each one of us until that blessed day. It would be too simplistic to argue that the new man, the real self of the believer, is simply "Jesus Christ". Our new man is formed in *His image*, but we are each a unique reflection of our Lord. He isn't seeking to create uniform replicas of Himself; His personality is so multi-faceted that it cannot be replicated in merely one form nor one person. This is why "the body of Christ" is comprised of so many individuals both over time and space; and it is my belief that when that large community has manifested every aspect of the wonderful person of Jesus Christ, then we will be ripe for His return. This is why the spiritual development of the last generation before the second coming will hasten His return; for once they / we have replicated Himself in ourselves in our various unique ways to a satisfactory extent, then He will return to take us unto Himself, that where He 'was' as He said those words, in terms of His character and person, there we will be (Jn. 14:3; note that read this way, this passage is clearly not talking about Him taking us off to Heaven). Ps. 69:32 RV says simply: "Let your heart live". In our terms, God is saying: 'Be yourself, let your inner man, the heart, come to the fore, and be lived out'. Even if we feel we haven't got there 100% in getting in touch with our real self, one of the joys of the Kingdom is that we shall know [i.e. ourselves] even as we are now known by God (1 Cor. 13:12). We never quite get there in our self understanding in this life- but then, we shall know, even as we are known.

Paul speaks as if he has in one sense matured into "love", no longer a child but a man; yet he writes as if he is still in the partial, immature phase, seeing in a mirror darkly, waiting for the day when he would see "face to face". Likewise "Now I know in part, but then shall I know..." (1 Cor. 13:12). It's the 'now but not yet' situation which we often encounter in Scripture. In a sense we have attained to the mature state of love; in reality, we are still far from it. Paul is alluding to Num. 12:8 LXX, where God says that He spoke with Moses face to face and not in dark similitudes. Paul felt that he wasn't yet as Moses, encountering God 'face to face' in the life of mature love. He was still seeing through a glass darkly. But some time later, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was now beholding the glory of the Lord's face [as it is in Christ] just as Moses did, "with unveiled face", and bit by bit, that glory was shining from him (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). And hopefully we feel the same- that bit by bit, we are getting there. So let's take Paul's urging seriously: to grasp the utter supremacy of the life of love, to "follow after love", to press relentlessly towards that state of final maturity which *is*

love (1 Cor. 14:1). Powerfully did Paul conclude his Corinthian correspondence: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

13:13 *But now abides faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love-* In the future Kingdom of God, there will be no need for the miraculous Spirit gifts as they were in the first century. Love is "the greatest" because faith and hope will then have been turned to sight and will be no more (1 Cor. 13:13). A theme of Corinthians is the ability of the believer to live on different levels- e.g. 1 Corinthians 7 advocates the single life of devotion to God as the highest level, but goes on to make a series of concessions to lower levels. It seems that in the matter of the use of the miraculous Spirit gifts, Paul is again presenting a higher level upon which the believer of his time could live- a "more excellent way". He wanted to live the Kingdom life now as far as possible. We "have eternal life" not in the sense that we shall not die, but in the way that we in Christ can live the kind of life we shall for ever live- right now.

## CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Pursue love, and in this pursuit therefore earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that of prophecy*- I have suggested throughout this commentary that the Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1); they had been given the Spirit but had not allowed it to work. They were basing their church services upon the religious cults around them, replete with use of church prostitutes [in the name of being single unto the Lord], eating the Lord's supper as if it were a form of fellowship with idols, and copying the claims of ecstatic utterances, gifts of knowledge and prophecy which were rampant in the idol cults [in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts]. Paul could have directly confronted them. But He copied the style of the Lord Jesus when tackling the language of belief in demons / idols. He argued on a higher plane, with all the power which is inherent in using a subtler argument. Just as Paul doesn't mock nor condemn their idea of singleness in order to serve the Lord [but decries their divorces and usage of church prostitutes which it seems to have involved], so he encourages their professed zeal for Spirit gifts such as prophecy. But he says, following on from the argument in chapter 13, that the motive for such gifts must be love, which as defined in chapter 13 means a desire for upbuilding others so that they might enter God's Kingdom. He has explained in 13:8-11 that the way of spiritual maturity will involve a focus upon love, and a de-emphasis upon the miraculous gifts. But Paul is aware that not all have reached that level, and so encourages them in going this lower road of wanting to use those miraculous gifts. But the comments he will make upon the usage of the gifts effectively condemn the Corinthians for using the ecstatic utterances of the idol rituals in the name of true speaking in foreign languages as a gift of the Spirit. They were doing what Pentecostals and the like do today- experiencing ecstatic utterances and claiming this is the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages. And Paul is explaining that they are deeply mistaken in doing so.

14:2 *For he that speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God. For no one understands, but in the Spirit he speaks mysteries*- I take this to be a description of how things were at Corinth, rather than a description of what true speaking in tongues was like. It is a criticism of the situation at Corinth rather than a general statement. *The Songs Of The Sabbath Sacrifice* was a document used in the Qumran community, claiming that the Angelic choirs of praise to God were reflected in the praises of the Qumran community. They saw themselves as praising God with the "tongues of Angels". A similar idea can be found in the *Testament Of Job*, which also uses the term "tongues of Angels" to describe how the praises of Job's daughters matched those of the Angels in Heaven. These two apocryphal writings include many phrases which are used by Paul in his argument against how the Corinthians were abusing the idea of 'speaking in tongues': "understand all mysteries (1 Cor. 13:2)... in a spirit speaks mysteries (1 Cor. 14:2)... speaking unto God (1 Cor. 14:2)... sing with the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15)... bless with the spirit (1 Cor. 14:16)... hath a psalm (1 Cor. 14:26)". It would seem therefore that the Gentile Corinthians were influenced by apostate Jewish false teachers, who were encouraging them to use ecstatic utterance with the claim that they were speaking with "tongues of Angels". And Paul's response is to guide them back to the purpose of the gift of tongues- which was to preach in foreign languages. My point in this context is that even in the Gentile church at Corinth, there was significant influence from Jewish false teachers. So it's no surprise to find that in the area of the nature and person of the Lord Jesus, which was the crucial issue in the new religion of Christianity, there would also be such influence by Jewish thinking. I have noted elsewhere, especially on the letter to Titus, that immoral Gentile Christians found Judaism and legalism attractive- keeping a few Jewish laws was felt to justify their living without any moral compass in other parts of their lives.

14:3 *But he that prophesies speaks to men, words of edification, exhortation and consolation-* Paul has previously laboured the point that building up others is love in action. Therefore the emphasis upon tongue speaking was not right. If they were keen on having the miraculous Spirit gifts, then the one they should be going for was prophecy, because through speaking God's word to illiterate people who had no Bible to read, they would be giving them the words of God which are able to build us up and give us an inheritance into the Kingdom (Acts 20:32). "Edification", or building up, was a major concern of Paul for the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:5,12,26). But is God who builds up the church (s.w. 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1). He works through human mechanisms- in all our efforts to build others up, we have God Almighty behind us. Likewise "exhortation and consolation" are the work of the Lord Jesus and His Spirit as stated repeatedly in Jn. 14-16, the comforter (also see Lk. 2:25, where the Lord is called "the comforter of Israel"). But if we are to probe further as to *how*, mechanically, if you like, He achieves this- it is through the loving labour of others within the church. In the first century context, the gift of prophecy was a clear channel for this. And this, therefore, was the kind of gift they should be seeking if they were motivated by love.

14:4 *He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he that prophesies edifies the church-* This has been the argument throughout Corinthians so far- that they were not focused upon building others up, but were spiritually selfish, because they were not possessed of the Spirit (3:1). I have suggested above that the tongues they were speaking in were the ecstatic utterances associated with idol worship. But it could also be so that although there not Spiritual (3:1), the Lord still worked through them via the miraculous gifts. For He has worked through men who were total unbelievers, empowering them according as His purpose requires; the king of Assyria in Isaiah 10 being a parade example. Again as in :2, Paul is describing the state of things at Corinth. The gift of languages was in order to help others by preaching and teaching for them in their native tongue. Paul could have laboured that point. Instead he cuts to the heart of the matter by saying that when they speak in their ecstatic languages, in imitation of the idol cults, they were [at best] only building up themselves. This is an example of assuming for sake of argument that a false position is true- and then pointing out how if it were true then it must be wrong. The Lord did the same with His assumption, for sake of argument, that Beelzebub existed and the Jews really did do exorcisms. And so here Paul is saying that if love and upbuilding are of the essence, then one would not focus upon just taking in an ecstatic utterance; but on instead prophesying / speaking forth God's word to build up the church.

14:5 *Now I would wish that you all speak with tongues, but especially I wish that you should prophesy; for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, unless he interpret, that the church may receive edification-* All the Corinthian Christians could have been prophets, all could have spoken with tongues (1 Cor. 14:1,5)- but the reality was that they didn't all rise up to this potential, and God worked through this, in the sense that He 'gave' some within the body to be prophets and tongue speakers (1 Cor. 12:28-30). He works in the body of His Son just the same way today, accommodating our weaknesses and lack of realization of our potentials, and yet still tempering the body together to be functional. The fact we fail to realize our potentials doesn't mean God quits working with us. We see in all this the openness of God; He is open to our desire for particular ministries / gifts, whilst on the other hand He sets us within the body with our particular, intended gift. There is an echo of Moses' desire that all Israel were prophets (Num. 11:29); so often Paul sets himself up as Moses. The context of Moses' comment was a challenge to his authority as if he were the

only one endowed with prophetic gifts; and Paul was facing similar criticism from his wayward congregation.

14:6 *But now, brothers, if I came to you speaking with tongues, without speaking to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching- what shall I profit you?*- Again and again, the question is not whether we can or cannot do something, it is whether we profit others. "If I came to you" may be referring to his earlier time in Corinth when he first taught them the things of the Gospel. If he had just spoken in ecstatic utterance, they would not have learned the Gospel. Clearly the gifts of teaching others were of paramount importance in edifying others. We can take the lesson in passing that building others up involves teaching them something- too easily, liberal minded Christian folk can assume that engaging in social activity together is all that is required to build others up. But ultimately, there has to be some teaching ministry.

14:7 *Even things without life which give a voice*- This is a rather laboured phrase if Paul means to simply refer to a musical instrument. Literally, 'Things without a soul which give a voice'. The idea was that the Corinthians lacked the Spirit (3:1); the ecstatic utterances were just noise. There was no Spirit animating them. Those utterances were no sign of spirituality.

*Whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*- Again the word for "distinction" is unusual and could appear out of place, as it essentially means a charge or commandment. The noises made were not saying anything, they were giving no message. In :6 Paul has established the point that the way of love will focus upon teaching others in order to profit them. Just making sounds with no message will not edify others. Making a noise of itself is not helpful- and this is Paul's comment on the ecstatic utterances going on at Corinth. He could have baldly stated that the true gift of tongues is the gift of speaking in foreign languages so that foreigners can understand the Gospel. And what the Corinthians were doing was nothing to do with that, and was merely mimicking the pagan religious practices around them. But Paul bases his argument on a higher level, and his subtly makes his point the more powerful and persuasive.

14:8 *For if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle, who shall prepare himself for war?*- Again, the purpose of speaking or making a noise was for the benefit of others and not for any selfish reasons. "The battle" could refer to the day of the Lord, or the daily spiritual strife. The Old Testament use of 'trumpet' language relates to the following ideas:

- To prepare for war
- To indicate the need to move on
- Convicting others of sin (Is. 58:1; Jer. 4:19)
- Warning of invaders (Ez. 33:3-6)
- A proclamation of the urgency to prepare for the day of the Lord (Joel 2:1)
- The certainty of salvation and God's response to prayer: "Ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God (Old Testament idiom for 'your prayers will be answered'), and ye shall be saved" (Num. 10:9).

*All of these elements ought to feature in the work of our twenty first century priests.*

14:9 *So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech easily understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air*- This verse is a clear enough condemnation of ecstatic utterances being claimed as Spirit gifts. The speech must be "easily understood". The principle of course goes wider- that if we have the love which upbuilds,

then we will consider the style of our presentation to others. For our aim will be their understanding and subsequent growth. "Understood" translates *semaino*, usually translated "signify". There must be significance to what is spoken. The "tongue" being spoken must be significant to the hearers. Ecstatic utterance simply lacks such significance. The hearer must be able to "know what is spoken". In no way is this true of ecstatic utterances which were and are passed off as 'speaking in tongues'.

14:10 *There are, surely, many languages in the world and none is without meaning-* This is quietly making the point that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak the "languages in the world", and every language has meaning to the native hearer. The words spoken must therefore have meaning; the hearers must "know what is spoken" (see on :9). But there is a word play going on here. "Languages" translates *phonos*, and "without meaning" translates *a-phonos*, literally 'non-language'. So Paul is saying that there are many world languages, and not one of them is a non-language. This seems a pointless tautology until we consider that in saying this, he was likely answering the false claim made by ancient Corinthians and modern Pentecostals alike- that actually, even if we can't understand the language spoken, it is actually a language of some other country unknown to us. But Paul is saying that a language is a language, not a non-language. Analysis of the ecstatic utterances of Pentecostalism show them to be the same as those of pagan religions. The syntax of the utterances, the repetition of the same sounds, is not that of language. it is mere sound. Hence Paul's apparently obvious point- that a tongue language is not a non-language.

14:11 *If then I do not know the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaks a barbarian and he that speaks will be a barbarian to me-* "The meaning" translates *dunamis*, which has the sense of 'power'. The suggestion surely is that their speaking in ecstatic utterances was not at all by the power of the Spirit; remember that the Corinthians were without the Spirit (3:1). If speaker and hearer do not understand each other, then they will be set apart from each other. For "barbarians" and those within the Roman empire were seen as deeply opposed to each other, if not in conflict. The practice of unintelligible speaking was in fact a re-creation of Babel, acting as if under Divine curse rather than His blessing, and would result in division rather than the unity which would upbuild. The Greek *barbaros* comes from the word *barbar*, which was a reference to the perceived harshness and coarseness of language amongst those outside the empire- they were said to speak *bar-bar*. This kind of tension would be introduced within the church by talking to each other in unintelligible sounds.

14:12 *So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to excel in edifying the church-* Paul seems to want to inculcate the spirit of ambition in preaching when he told Corinth that they should be ambitious to gain those Spirit gifts which would be most useful in public rather than private teaching of the word (1 Cor. 14:1,12). In similar vein Paul commends those who were ambitious (from the right motives) to be bishops (1 Tim. 3:1). Perhaps men like Jephthah (Jud. 11:9) and Samson (Jud. 14:4) were not wrong to *seek* to be the judges who delivered Israel from the Philistines. But we must note throughout this chapter that Paul has prefaced it all with 13:8-11, where he argues that the miraculous gifts are something to be discarded as immature. But he concedes to their weakness, and urges them to at least seek those gifts which can edify others. It was clear enough that their motive for desiring the gifts was probably in order to appear like the religious cults around them. But

Paul doesn't specifically accuse them of the obvious; rather he seeks to redirect their self-proclaimed zeal to the great goal of love, which is articulated in terms of building up others.

14:13 *Therefore let him that speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret*- Paul could have baldly stated that their ecstatic utterances were not at all the Spirit's gift of speaking in foreign languages, and they should just shut up. But he gently says that if this is indeed what they claim to be 'speaking in tongues', then they ought to pray for the gift of interpretation- so that they can communicate something to others with the aim of upbuilding them. "Interpret" can indeed mean to translate from one language to another; but the Greek word more commonly means to explain or expound. If indeed God was making them speak in ecstatic utterances, then they had better make a priority of asking Him to give them the ability to explain the utterances to others. For the preface to all this teaching is the poem about love in chapter 13. To love is to build up others. It is explanation and engagement with others which does this- and not making ecstatic sounds. The GNB has it right: "The person who speaks in strange tongues, then, must pray for the gift to explain what is said".

14:14 *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful*- This is not to say that tongues are to be used when praying. For the gift of foreign languages or tongues was clearly in order to preach the Gospel to those speaking foreign languages, as witnessed by the account in Acts 2. Paul is stating the hypothetical situation- if he, as the Corinthians were doing, were to pray as they prayed, in ecstatic utterances, then [at best] his spirit would be praying but he himself would not understand what he was saying. Again the GNB has the idea right: "For if I pray in this way, my spirit prays indeed, but my mind has no part in it". The connection between tongues and prayer was because this was what happened in the surrounding idol cults; prayer was supposedly made through the ecstatic utterances. Whereas Biblically, tongues / languages were in order to spread the Gospel in public preaching [as Paul will go on to point out]. Note that the term "unfruitful" is elsewhere used of those who fall away from faith and shall not be saved finally (Mt. 13:22; Eph. 5:11; Jude 12 etc.). Even if it were claimed that such utterances were 'the Spirit praying within me', Paul says that because there is no good done for others, such behaviour is unfruitful, it does not bear the fruit of the Spirit. So the Spirit can hardly be really within the behaviour if it doesn't bear the fruit of the Spirit.

14:15 *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also*- Prayer and praise must be with the understanding, or [Gk.] the mind. Any mindless, out of control behaviour is simply not of the Spirit. But this was exactly the kind of behaviour which was going on in Corinth and which is to be seen in Pentecostalism today.

14:16 *Else if you bless with the spirit, how shall he that is in the place of the unlearned say the Amen at your giving of thanks, seeing he does not understand what you say?*- We note the practice of saying "Amen" at the end of prayers. It could be that the "unlearned" sat separately from the baptized members. The Lord invited sinners and unbelievers to His table, and this separate seating arrangement reflects the pagan practice of making those not yet affiliated or initiated into the cult to sit separately in a specific "place of the unlearned". Paul's hope was that the visitor would say "Amen", in agreement to the blessings / prayers spoken. This of itself indicates Paul's hope that the unbelieving visitor would have some

participation in the worship. But if they were speaking in ecstatic utterances, it would not be possible nor legitimate for a visitor to express agreement, to utter the Amen, because the visitor would not have understood what was being said. However, the "unlearned" could refer to believers who didn't understand- they were "unlearned" in the sense that they were unlearned in the language being spoken. We note however that :23,24 speak of the "unlearned" as those entering the congregation, but they are differentiated from the "unbelievers". Perhaps they referred to those still undergoing teaching. The references there to 'coming in' certainly suggest a literal entrance to the church and having to literally sit in a particular "place".

14:17 *For you truly give thanks well, but the other is not edified-* Again, Paul is being generous. If they were uttering unintelligible sounds and calling that 'prayer', acting just as the surrounding religious cults did, then they were hardly to be commended for praying well. So I think Paul effectively means us to read in an ellipsis: 'You [may think that] you truly give thanks well, but [you would have to admit that] the other is not edified'. And the whole argument turns around whether our actions are building others up or not. Paul's whole approach here is masterful, and should be given due weight by those who believe that God's truth is best served by a belligerent, confrontational approach, ever seeking to set up a much headlined showdown between truth and error.

14:18 *I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all-* As a missionary, Paul would have used the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages far more than any of them.

14:19 *However in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue-* The contrast is between the tongue speaking of :18, and "in the church". Because the gift of tongues or speaking in foreign languages was not to be used within the church but in order to evangelize the unbelievers. Five intelligible words directed to building up the church, revealing an "understanding" or knowledge given from the Lord, were preferable to 10,000 words in a language which could not be understood. There may be some connection with Paul's comment that they had ten thousand would be teachers in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15); they all claimed to be teachers of each other, but there was no message.

14:20- see on Mt. 18:2; 1 Cor. 1:19.

*Brothers, be not children in your thinking. Yet in malice be babes; but in thinking be men-* This kind of malice has been mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:8; malice characterized their breaking of bread services. Paul sees this as immaturity; whereas we would rather consider "malice" to be something which would end our relationship with a person who is malicious. Paul here prefers to see this as immaturity, and urges their maturity. The way he has to repeatedly ask his converts to not be malicious shows this was a major problem amongst the immature churches of the first century (s.w. Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:1,16). The contrast between "babes" and "men" is misleading; *teleios*, translated "men", means mature, and this is the whole thrust of the argument- that the mature state mentioned in 13:10 and Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28 really could be attained by the Corinthians. And that maturity would have no particular use for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "Be babes" is the same word used by Paul in describing how when he was a "babe", in spiritual immaturity, he used the miraculous



Spirit gifts; but he had matured beyond them, to the maturity of love (13:11). The same figure of progressing from childhood to manhood is used of moving on from trusting in the Mosaic law for salvation (Gal. 4:3) It could be that these manifestations of immaturity were related- a legalistic trust in the Law for salvation inculcated a mindset that sought for evidence of salvation through the external and visible [possessing the miraculous gifts] rather than the internal- the things of the Spirit, culminating in the life of love as described in chapter 13.

*14:21 In the law it is written: By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak to this people, and not even thus will they hear Me, says the Lord-* The New Testament has examples of our being expected to deduce things which at first glance we might find somewhat demanding. 1 Cor. 14:21 rebukes the Corinthians for speaking to each other in languages which their brethren didn't understand. Paul considered that they were immature in their understanding because they hadn't perceived that Is. 28:11,12 states that it will be the Gentile non-believers who will speak to God's people in a language they don't understand. And this experience for Israel was part of their judgment for not having listened to God's prophetic words. So by talking to each other in language they did not understand, the Corinthians were living out their condemnation. Such an argument is subtle, but more powerful than a head on confrontation with them over the fact they were not really speaking in tongues as given by the Spirit, but were just copying the babbling of the mystery cults around them. The argument however presupposes a familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures, which would indicate that they were influenced by Judaizers.

*14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe but to the unbelieving; but prophesying is for a sign, not to the unbelieving but to those that believe-* Speaking in foreign languages was to be used for preaching to the unbelieving. The only time speaking in unintelligible language was envisaged, as explained in :21, it was a sign of condemnation to an unbelieving Israel. By doing this to each other, they were thereby proclaiming themselves to be unbelievers. But despite the logic of that position, Paul refuses to condemn the Corinthians and feels and writes towards them as if they are believers. We too may perceive that the logical position required by the behaviour of some 'believers' is that they in fact have lost faith. But all the same, it is not for us to condemn them. There is no example of Paul deciding to block disfellowship a whole group of baptized believers because of their moral or doctrinal errors.

14:23- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues-* The Greek suggests they assembled together "in one place" (AV). I suggested on chapter 1 that the church in Corinth was comprised of house churches, who at times gathered together in one place for the breaking of bread.

*And there come in-* The missionary drive of Paul was such that he saw in every outsider a potential insider, rather than merely a person to be separate from. Thus 1 Cor. 14:23 implies that the early ecclesial meetings were open for passers by to casually attend; indeed, the breaking of bread seems to have been used as a means of public witness "to shew [proclaim / preach] the Lord's death" and His coming again.

*Unlearned or unbelieving people, will they not say that you are mad?*- The "unlearned" may refer to those not fully instructed in the Lord's way; unbelievers would be those with no faith at all. If they saw a group of people babbling away, they would indeed think they were mad, and that comment is made upon Pentecostal meetings where just the same happens.

14:24- see on Heb. 11:7.

*But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned-* Paul will later command that the gift of prophecy should be used by only two or three at any one time (:29). But he has earlier said that he wishes they would all have the gift of prophecy: "I would wish that you all speak with tongues, but especially I wish that you should [all] prophesy" (:5). He is so eager to go along with them as far as he can. They sought the Spirit gifts for the wrong reasons, but he runs with that and suggests they seek especially to prophesy. But he envisages here, for the moment, all of them prophesying. And he imagines the great positive impact this would have upon an unbeliever. Again, he thinks in terms of the good which could be done for the edification of others- which is the essence of his poem about love with which he has introduced this section in chapter 13.

*He is reprov'd by all, he is judg'd by all-* The purpose of speaking forth God's word as intended was to lead unbelievers to repentance. "Reprove... judge" mean just that. The intention was to convict unbelievers of sin and lead them to repentance. Jabbering in unknown sounds would not do this. We are to note the intention of Gospel preaching- to bring others to repentance, to convict them of their moral need for the Lord Jesus. This is a far cry from the very tame profering of background Biblical information and other 'softer' approaches which characterize so much outreach work in our age.

Paul warned the Corinthians that only a church which was manifestly united, with each member using his or her gifts in an orderly, sensitive and respectful way... only such a church could convict the unbeliever of Truth. And this was all building on the Lord's clear statements in John 17- that the united church would lead to all men knowing of His grace and truth. This is why the Acts record describes the spectacular growth of the early church in the same breath as noting the intense unity and "all things common" between the believers. The mass conversions stopped after the politics of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and the division over welfare matters in Acts 6. While that incredible and genuine unity prevailed, converts were made by the thousand.

14:25- see on 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 9:11.

*The secrets of his heart are revealed-* This must be understood in the context of the person having been convicted of sin by the powerful preaching of God's word (:24). The secrets of the heart therefore refer to sins, and Paul uses the phrase in that way in Rom. 2:16 and earlier to the Corinthians he has said that the secrets of human hearts will be revealed and judged at the Lord's return (4:5). But for those who respond to God's word now, they can have that experience ahead of time. Whenever we come before the call of God in His word, whenever we hear the 'judgments' of God, we effectively come before His judgment. The Lord's preaching to the Samaritan woman had the same effect- she went and told others that He had revealed to her all the sins she had ever committed.

I've pointed out elsewhere how Paul so often alludes to and further interprets the words of the Lord Jesus. In Mk. 4:22 the Lord says: "For nothing is hidden, except to **be revealed**; nor has anything been **secret**, but that it should **come to light**". Paul's inspired allusions to this can be found as follows: 1 Cor 4.5: "who will bring to light the **secrets** of darkness and will **make public** the purposes of the heart"; Rom 2.16: "God judges the **secrets** of people, according to my gospel through Jesus Christ"; and, significantly for our context, 1 Cor 14.25: "The **secrets** of his heart are made **public / revealed**". The context of 1 Cor. 14 is of behaviour at the memorial meeting, following on from Paul's concerns about this in 1 Cor. 11 and 12. The point of the connections is this: As the secret / hidden matters of the heart will be judged at the last day, so they are revealed at the memorial meeting. For there, we stand before the cross, and the hidden thoughts of our hearts are revealed.

*And so he will fall down on his face and worship God-* The falling on the face in worship of God is because the man is having his experience of judgment day ahead of time. The same language is used in Rom. 14:11,12 of sinful man bowing before God in worship at judgment day.

*Declaring that God is among you indeed-* 1 Cor. 14:23-25 seem to imply that unbelievers came into house churches and ought to have been so deeply impressed that they declared that "God is in you of a truth". They were to be the living exemplification of how, as the Lord had prayed in John 17, the witness of Christian unity ought to be enough to convert the world. We need to give His words there their true weight. To see slaves and masters, men and women, Jew and Gentile, all sitting at the same table celebrating their salvation in the same Lord, with offices of leadership and responsibility distributed according to spiritual rather than social qualifications... this would've been astounding to the Mediterranean world of the first century. The way men mixed with women and the poor with the rich would've been especially startling.

14:26 *What is it then, brothers? As it is, when you come together, each one has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. But let all things be done to edify-* I have suggested that what in fact was happening was that the Corinthians were imitating the religious cults around them, falsely claiming to have Spirit gifts when in fact they were just copying the ecstatic utterances and irrelevant exclamations of supposed revelations which were common in those cults. But Paul doesn't specifically say that. He instead argues for the paramount importance of doing things in love, which means with the aim of edifying others. As it was in Corinth, all the babble of supposed claims, including perhaps Judaist influenced members reciting Psalms, was not going to edify anyone and would not convict any unbeliever of their sin and need for the Lord Jesus. I noted on :2 that their behaviour was partly influenced by Judaizers, and this would explain the significance of Psalms being thrown into the terrible confusion which was going on.

14:27 *If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three; and even then in turn, and let one interpret-* The proper gift of tongues was in order to communicate in foreign, intelligible language to those who were hearing the Gospel, as happened at Pentecost. It would be most unlikely that there would be more than two or three distinct language groups present at any one church service who needed this gift. Or perhaps the "two or... three" refers to speaking only two or three sentences at a time and then waiting for the interpretation to be given. There would be no point in talking over each other- otherwise the message would be drowned out in confusion, and no edification could occur. The insistence upon an interpreter could mean that the message given in one language must be translated

into the language of others present. But the Greek translated "interpret" more naturally means to expound or explain. The consistent theme is that God's word must be explained to people in order to build them up. The practice of all speaking in ecstatic, unintelligible utterances was clearly not going to achieve that. "In turn" is a fair translation; but *meros* has been used in the context of this passage for the "parts" of the body of Christ, to whom the gifts were distributed in order to build up the entire body. Possibly the idea was that only the legitimate members of the body of Christ should be displaying this gift.

14:28 *But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God-* The true gift of tongues was that of publicly speaking forth God's word in a foreign language, intelligible to the hearers. Anything else was just a pathetic attempt to mimic the ecstatic utterances of the idol cults- in the name of having a Spirit gift. But we have repeatedly noted Paul's gentleness and wisdom in not directly confronting the Corinthians over this abuse. He seems to be saying that if, as he has established in chapter 13, love of others and concern for their upbuilding is paramount- then there is no place for speaking in an unintelligible way. And if they felt that indeed they had such a gift- well OK, speak to yourself and to God, in silence, so you don't disturb the edification of others. His reasoning is exactly as one might use to children, who appear unable to hear their cherished belief shot down. If this is what you think you have or who you think you are- then do your thing quietly and don't disturb the church. So here again we have a case of Paul allowing something which seems to go against the tenor of his previous explanation of the *ideal* use of that gift. See on 1 Cor. 7:11.

14:29 *And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern them-* The limitation of the prophets to "two or three" is similar to that concerning the limitation of tongue speakers to "two or three". Perhaps the connection is in the fact that if only two or three were giving messages from God, speaking forth His word, then there would only be the need for two or three to speak in languages, assuming each prophet has his own dedicated inspired 'translator' into other languages.

How did it come about that the early church knew which books were inspired and which weren't? Paul and Peter were aware that there would be false prophets within the early church as well as true ones (2 Pet. 2:1). These false prophets wrote down their false teachings and claimed they were inspired. So there had to be a system of deciding whether a prophet was true, or false. There was a Holy Spirit gift which enabled the early church to 'discern the spirits'- to know for sure who was inspired and who wasn't (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Jn. 4:1). 1 Cor. 14:29 suggests that as soon as a person claimed to be 'prophesying' from God, then the person with the gift of discerning spirits was to be present with them and to confirm their words. And Paul goes on to say that anyone who doesn't submit to this, doesn't really have the Holy Spirit gifts. The scenario presented here is radically different to the idea of all present speaking in ecstatic utterances out of their control- which was the picture in the surrounding religious cults at Corinth, and is the Pentecostal scene to this day.

14:30 *But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence-* This may seem to contradict the idea that the spirits of the prophets were subject to them (:32). Prophecy was not a gift which could not be controlled and which led to interrupting another inspired speaker. And we have just read that the prophets were to speak by turn (:29). So why then does Paul appear to contradict the spirit of these principles by saying that if a prophet has a revelation, then the first speaker should fall silent? I would suggest that he is again

making concession to their weakness, despite having established the true principles; and is answering ahead of time their likely objections. In this case, the objection would be that as inspired speakers they could not help but speak forth. Paul is saying that OK, in that case, the other inspired speaker, who likewise 'can't help but speak', should fall silent! The contradiction and tension is purposeful. Because Paul has chosen to deal with their apostasy by indirect and subtle argument, pointing out the contradictory nature of their positions- rather than by direct confrontation.

14:31- see on Eph. 1:22.

*For you all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be exhorted-* The mention of "all" prophesying connects back to Paul's wish that they would all have the gift of true prophecy (:5). The prophetic message was to be given by one speaker at a time- otherwise, the confusion would be such that learning and exhortation would not happen. And the guiding principle in all these judgments is the upbuilding of the church. "Can" is *dunamis*- the power or ability is what is in view. Although they had each been given their potential gift and part to play in the church body, Paul is open to the idea that they could seek other, higher gifts. In his view, speaking forth God's word was the highest gift. And he was prepared to accept that potentially, each member of the church could get that gift. Another angle on "you call can..." is that Paul is arguing that the true Spirit gifts are under the control of the believer. It was not good enough to claim that they were all possessed by a spirit which made them prophesy and carried them beyond personal self control. You *can* prophesy one by one- *if* of course the gifts they had were the real thing and not just the imitation of the idol cult. And this is the theme of the next verse.

14:32 *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets-* See on :31 *For you all can...* . The Corinthian idol cults claimed that worshippers were possessed by the spirit of the demon / idol, to the extent that they were not in control of themselves. And this had been wrongly imported into the Christian church at Corinth. The gift of the Spirit from the Father and Son did not remove freewill or consciousness of behaviour from those who received it. It was not legitimate to claim that their trance like behaviour was because they were out of their minds under some overpowering supernatural influence. The prophet was in control of him or her self. It could be however that the reference is to the command to the prophets to "discern" each other in :29. Any prophetic word was subject to the discernment of other prophets.

14:33- see on 1 Cor. 1:2.

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints-* If the situation in the combined church meetings was from God, then it would not be characterized by confusion. Because, as repeatedly stated in this chapter, it is God's intention to build us up towards an inheritance in His Kingdom. The building up of believers will only be achieved within a background of "peace". We should therefore strive towards peace at the local church level because this is the environment which enables growth; and building up of others is the outworking of love. "As in all the churches" may be a counter to the claim that they at Corinth were a special case and special allowance should be made for them. Paul's comment is that these Divine principles are universal across all churches.

14:34- see on 1 Cor. 7:17.

*Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak-* The spirit of the prophets was subject to them (:32- see notes there). It was therefore quite possible for women to exercise silence; again the evidence would be that the genuine Spirit gifts were not the same as the 'possession' experience of the idol shrines. This controversial verse may mean no more than that the women were not to chatter during church services- as was the habit in many synagogues. Their excuse that they were just asking for more clarification about the message is then answered in :35.

We must give full weight to the intentional contrast with Paul's discussion of women prophesying and praying in chapter 11. He clearly accepted that women should prophecy in the church. And there are New Testament examples of this. But I have noted throughout this chapter that there was a huge difference between the actual possession of the real Holy Spirit gifts, such as prophecy; and the farce that was going on in the Corinthian church, whereby they acted like the surrounding idol cults, imitating their speaking in ecstatic utterances and claims to possessing the gift of supernatural prophecy or speaking forth a supernatural, divine word. These claims were false. They didn't really have the gifts of true Holy Spirit. But this was not to say that there were no sincere Christians in Corinth. Clearly there were some; and there were some women, according to chapter 11, who did have the gift of prophecy. So the key would seem to be in the command for "*Your* women" (Gk.) to be silent. Whose women? The "you" of the context (e.g. :36) are those who in the wrong on these matters, claiming to have the Holy Spirit gift of tongues when they were merely babbling. *Their* women / wives were false claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit gift of prophecy; for in the surrounding idol cults, female prophetesses were popular. The Christian church at Corinth was clearly imitating the cult at nearby Delphi, based around the temple of Apollo. This cult was characterized by women claiming to be prophetesses. And it would seem that the women of the church pretended to the same office. This is why Paul is uncharacteristically blunt and direct on this point- they were to shut up. They were not true prophetesses. I have noted several times that the Corinthians were also under the influence of Judaizers. And so Paul now plays their own logic against themselves- he quotes Jewish scripture and Jewish synagogue reasoning back to them, as if to say: 'If you are really as Jewish and Mosaic Law compliant as you claim- well then in any case, your women should be in subjection to their husbands; "the law" says so'. They could not on one hand claim to be compliant with Judaism and the Jewish law, whilst on the other hand allowing their women to act as the prophetesses of Delphi, but under a Christian guise. I noted on 1 Tim. 2 that a similar problem arose at Ephesus, with the women in the church acting as the priestesses of Diana, but under colour of Christianity.

There are of course other possibilities. Perhaps we are to read this command about women specifically in the context of the memorial meeting, which appears the context here in 1 Cor. 14. However, it is evident that women did possess the gift of teaching by 'prophecy' in other contexts:

- To teach other women after the pattern of Elizabeth teaching Mary, and Miriam the women of Israel- both by the gift of prophecy (cp. Tit.2:3,4). The reference in 1 Tim. 2:9 to how women should "also" pray publicly in an appropriate way suggests that there was an organised 'sisters class' movement in the early church. It has been observed: "Where women were kept secluded in Greek society, sisters would be the only ones who could teach them. Teaching by brethren would be difficult in such circumstances".
- To teach in 'Sunday Schools' (there is ample Old Testament precedent for women teaching children).
- To teach unbelievers. This clearly occurred in the early church. Euodia and Syntyche had

“laboured side by side” with Paul in the work of the Gospel (Phil. 4:2,3 NIV). Priscilla helped Aquila teach Apollos the Gospel (Acts 18:26). At least eight of the sisters mentioned in Romans 16 are described as workers / labourers. Philip’s seven daughters were prophetesses- presumably not speaking the word to baptized brethren, but either to the world or to other sisters.

There's even evidence that there was an organized women's missionary movement in the early church. Clement of Alexandria commented: "The Apostles, giving themselves without respite to the work of evangelism... took with them women, not as wives but as sisters, to share in their ministry to women living at home: by their agency the teaching of the Lord reached the women's quarters without raising suspicion".

All these references to women in the early church teaching would have been anathema to many of the surrounding cultures in which the Gospel spread in the first century: “Not only the arm, but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard...she should speak to or through her husband” (Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 31-32). Likewise the encouragement for a woman to “learn in silence” was a frontal attack on the position that a woman’s duty was to follow the religion of her husband and concern herself with domestic duties rather than religious learning. The way the Lord commended Mary rather than Martha for her choice to learn and her rejection of domesticity similarly challenged the prevailing gender perception. There is no doubt that a 1st century Christian woman was far more liberated than in any other contemporary religion. In our societies too, our sisters mustn’t concern themselves *only* with domestic duties.

*But let them be in subjection, as also said the law-* But the word translated "in subjection" has just been used in :32 for how the Spirit would be subject to the prophet. The question is therefore to what or whom should the woman be subject; and where does "the law" state that. The same word for "subjection" is used about a Christian married woman's subjection to her believing husband (Eph. 5:22; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). And within this same section, Paul has taught that the head of the [married] woman is the man [husband] (1 Cor. 11:3). In this case, the Old Testament reference to female subjection to the husband would be to Gen. 3:16. This seems the obvious reference; but see my comments on *Let the women keep silence*.

14:35 *And if they would learn anything, let them ask their men at home-* A woman was to keep silent and ask her husband [Gk. ‘man’] ‘at [a] home’ if she had any questions (1 Cor. 14:35 Gk.). Generations of mystified yet Godly women have read that verse and thought ‘But I don’t have a man at home to ask. I’m not even married’- or ‘But my hubby doesn’t know a thing about the Bible!’. Read in the context of a house church scenario, it makes perfect sense. The women weren’t to interrupt the combined gatherings with disruptively asked questions from the floor. They were to ask the elders back in their house churches. And that’s why the Greek in 1 Cor. 14:35 strictly makes a distinction, between the woman not speaking / publicly asking questions in the church, but asking the brethren in a house [church].

*For it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church-* As noted above, we must balance this against Paul's encouragement of women to use the gift of prophecy in the church in chapter 11. And chapter 11 would appear to be in the context of the breaking of bread service. So we simply cannot read this as a blanket forbidding of women "to speak in the church". I earlier

outlined the case for thinking that the Corinthians were not spiritual (3:1), and their claims to speak in tongues and prophecy were mere imitations of what was going on in the surrounding idol cults. Those cults in Corinth, especially at Delphi and the temple of Apollo, featured female prophets. Paul gently goes along with the immaturity of the Corinthians on many points, but as in his attitude in other places, he will not tolerate false teaching, people claiming to speak forth God's word when they are doing nothing of the sort. He clamped down on a similar situation in Ephesus in 1 Tim. 2 [see notes there]. And so here he continues the allusion to early Genesis [see on :34 *the law*] by saying that these women were no better than Eve in her shame in Eden. They were bringing shame on themselves and others by what they were doing; those women in Corinth, at that place and time and context, were bringing 'shame' by speaking in the church. Although of course if they had legitimate Holy Spirit gifts of prophecy then Paul was happy for them to use them, as he has made clear in chapter 11. Hence he encourages the Corinthians to prophesy (:39)- but he refers to the true gift of Holy Spirit prophecy and not some imitation of the ecstatic 'prophecies' of the surrounding religions.

14:36 *What? Was it from you that the word of God went out? Or came it to you alone?*- God's word "went out" from those inspired by His Spirit. They were not spiritual (3:1), and their female prophets were not really speaking God's word. God's true word had gone out to many apart from the Corinthians, and they should therefore speak in accordance with it; rather than pleading they were some special case. Paul's comment about "in all churches" (:33) likewise suggests that Corinth were claiming they were a special, unique case- and could therefore do as they wished. This kind of reasoning is often encountered, on an individual and church level. But Paul is saying that God's word is universal in reference and did not come to them "alone" as some unique revelation. He has structured his sentences to allude to how the word of God "went out" from Jerusalem- not Corinth. The word of God going out is used to refer to preaching in 1 Thess. 1:8.

14:37 *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandment of the Lord*- "Spiritually gifted" is literally "spiritual", and the same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:1 where Paul says that they are not spiritual. Again Paul takes the most non-confrontational approach he can. He writes that if anyone thinks himself to be a 'spiritual', then seeing that it would be the same Spirit inspiring that person as was inspiring Paul, then he would agree with what Paul is teaching here. This is a very gentle way of approaching the terrible problems which these false prophets were causing.

14:38 *But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant*- This recalls his comment in 1 Cor. 11:16 about head coverings: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God". Paul seems to allow for the possibility of some in the church remaining in disagreement with his inspired teaching. His desire, it seems, was to state Divine truth and not to cause division in the ecclesia by insisting that all he said about these procedural issues in church life should be enforced at all costs. Considering he was inspired, this is quite some concession. Paul opened this section in 12:1 by writing that he didn't want them to be "ignorant" about spiritual gifts. But now he says that if after all he has written they want to ignore it, well, ignore it. This is not coarseness nor sarcasm. It is grace really, to allow others to be ignorant of what Paul knew was inspired teaching from God. His lack of threat or consequence is noteworthy; and he certainly never threatens excommunication or a



break in relationship with them. After all, he has reasoned earlier that his salvation is bound up with theirs.

14:39 *Therefore my brothers, desire earnestly to prophesy and forbid not to speak with tongues-* "My brothers" reaffirms that he is not breaking off relationship with them. And he still urges them to continue desiring to prophesy, although he means with the legitimate gifts of the Spirit and not in mere imitation of the idol cults. He is at pains to say that despite his own view that the use of the miraculous gifts was immature (13:8-11), he was not forbidding them. This is quite some insight into his wonderful tolerance, arising from the love he felt towards them.

14:40 *But let all things be done decently and in order-* This reflects the multiple appeals in this chapter to do all things with the love which builds up, as defined in the love poem which is the basis for all this teaching about tongues. An orderly rather than a random approach to church life is required, in order to achieve the end of building up others.

## CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, wherein also you stand-* The classic chapter about the resurrection of body, 1 Cor. 15, is also about the resurrection of Jesus. And it is not just a doctrinal treatise which Paul throws in to his letter to the Corinthians. It must be viewed in the context of the entire letter. He has been talking about the correct use of the body- not abusing it, defiling it, in whatever way. And he has spoken specifically about sexual issues. And then in summary, at the end of his letter, he speaks at such length about the resurrection of the body. Seeing that God intends resurrecting our body, our body means so much to Him that Christ died and rose again to enable our bodily resurrection, therefore it matters a lot what we do with our body right now!

The material in chapter 15 stands alone in terms of style, and is clearly a discreet unit. It could be that it is a body of material which Paul had earlier preached to them, and is now as it were transcribing in written form, with a few extra comments thrown in.

"Which also you received" means that they received the same message which Paul had also received. He says this explicitly in :3. What he "received", he asked them to also "receive"; and he uses this same word and concept frequently (1 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 1:9,12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1). 2 Thess. 3:6 speaks specifically of the "tradition received from us". All this suggests a specifically defined body of knowledge given to Paul and then faithfully relayed. We therefore have here a unique transcript of the body of doctrine received and passed on by Paul as the basic Gospel. Yet that body of teaching may not be the entire chapter, but rather the simple fact that Christ had died for our sins and risen again (:3,4). For much that follows, such as the mention of unrecorded appearances of the Lord to James, Peter and 500 others, can hardly be described as core Gospel information.

15:2 - see on 1 Cor. 11:2.

*By which also you are saved-* We are saved *dia* the Gospel, and this presupposes knowing it. The knowledge required is hardly very detailed, but all the same there is a content to it; for faith is axiomatically faith *in* something. There has to be a content to faith.

*If you hold fast the word which I preached to you-* 'Holding fast the word' is a phrase used in the parable of the sower (Lk. 8:15). The word Paul preached was therefore the seed sown by the sower- the basic Gospel. The word preached and sown by the Lord Jesus was therefore that also preached by Paul. The preaching of Jesus was largely practical and had little what we might call theological content. The Greek for "Hold fast" is related to the Greek verb for catechize; and inevitably the illiterate would have been taught the Gospel records by catechism, committing them to memory by repetition. But Paul is saying that they must as it were continue repeating those things in their minds. The wonder and reality of the Lord's death and resurrection and their own salvation was to be continually repeated or catechized within their minds- and likewise with us.

*Unless you believed in vain-* "Belief" can mean just that; but the Greek can also carry the idea of being entrusted with something. The Gospel is entrusted to us- and if we forget it or are no longer transformed by it, then it is been entrusted to us in vain.

15:3-7- see on Lk. 23:55.

15:3 *For I delivered to you first of all that which also I received-* As noted on :1, Paul is ever seeking to build bridges of common experience between him and his readership. What they had received, he too at one point had also received and believed. And he asks them to follow his pattern of further response to it. "First of all" means 'most importantly'. The most important aspect of the Gospel is not the Kingdom of God on earth but the fact that Christ died for our sins.

*That Christ died for our sins-* This was the "first" or most important aspect of the Gospel. Those who are not deeply convicted by their moral guilt and desperate need for forgiveness will never really see any urgency in the Gospel, nor behold the utter wonder of Christ's death for those sins. The Lord died "for our sins" and also "for us", as so often testified in the NT. Our identity with "our sins" must not be forgotten. We are not to see our sin as some abstraction, somehow separate from us.

*According to the scriptures-* It is tempting to assume that this refers to the Old Testament. But the same term is going to be used in :4 regarding how His burial and resurrection on the third day were also "according to the Scriptures". There is little direct reference to these things in the Old Testament. So I suggest that the *graphe*, the written things, may refer to the early Gospel records which were already in circulation. If indeed Paul refers to the OT, then he would be expecting them to have figured things like Christ's burial and third day resurrection from the inferences of types and shadows- surely a big ask of illiterate, newly converted Gentiles with little access to the OT scriptures.

15:4 *That he was buried, that he rose on the third day in accordance with the scriptures-* See on :3 *According to the scriptures*, where I give reason for thinking that the "scriptures" in view are the early Gospel records. They all emphasize His burial, and the third day resurrection.

15:5 - see on Mt. 17:1; Mk. 16:9.

*That he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve-* The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. Mary was the first to see the risen Lord (Mt. 28:1; Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:1). But Paul speaks here in 1 Cor. 15:5 as if Peter was the first witness of the risen Jesus. From his other writings and practice, it's evident that Paul wasn't simply 'anti-women'. But here he's surely making another concession to weakness- for in the first century world, the witness of a woman wasn't acceptable. And so Paul speaks of the first man who saw the resurrected Lord, rather than mention Mary.

15:6 *Then he appeared to above five hundred believers at once-* This is not recorded in the Gospels. The inspired writers were careful to avoid any form of sensationalism, just as we should be. Were there 500 believers at the time of the Lord's death? Probably not; so perhaps these 500 became believers after His appearance to them, and remained so at the time Paul was writing. Or perhaps there were 500 who so believed His words about reappearing in Galilee that they went there, and were rewarded by an appearance. 500 people at one time is

quite something- and there was no major Jewish feast at any time between the Lord's death and ascension.

*Of whom the greater part remain until now (but some have fallen asleep)*- One of the features of newly baptized converts is that they are generally young- often under 25. There are many Biblical examples for young people. The very first converts of the early church were comprised largely of the same age group- and yes, it's possible to Biblically prove this. 1 Cor. 15:6 states that the majority of the 500 brethren who saw the risen Lord Jesus were still alive when Paul wrote to Corinth, about 25 -30 years later. Seeing that life expectancy in first century Palestine was around 50, it would follow that the vast majority of those first witnesses of the risen Lord were under 25.

“Fallen asleep” may not necessarily refer to death, although the NT does envisage the death of believers as a sleep. The Greek term is also used about the spiritual slumbering of those who fall away. The 'remaining' would then refer to abiding in the faith, and that Greek word is also used in that context.

15:7 *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*- Again this is unrecorded in the Gospels. James was at one stage seen as the leader of the early church; but the point is being made that he was not the first to whom the Lord appeared. The order of appearance seems significant to Paul, for he labours the fact that the very last appearance of the risen Lord was to himself, and he was the least of all. We may ask why Paul here lists specifically the appearances of the risen Lord which are not recorded in the Gospels (to Peter, James and 500 brethren at once). Maybe his point was that the risen Lord had appeared to more than they might have realized; and He through the Spirit can likewise appear [albeit in a different form] to His people today.

15:8 *And last of all*- Paul places the appearance to Peter as coming first, even though the Lord first appeared to Mary (:5). He is framing things in this way to place Peter first and himself last. He so often alludes to Peter's words and actions. Paul the intellectual rabbi shows a parade example for all time in his deep respect for Peter, the illiterate fisherman from Galilee.

*As to the abnormally born*- The Greek term means an abortion. Paul felt himself to have been an aborted child, who although aborted, somehow miraculously lived. The LXX uses the word for a stillborn child (Num. 12:12; Job 3:16; Ecc. 6:3 cp. Ps. 58:8). Paul's conscience had been struggling against the Lord Jesus for some time before he accepted Him in Damascus. He had surely heard the call of Christ a long time before he responded to it; the new man had been potentially formed but he had aborted it, and he saw huge grace in the fact he the self-aborted spiritual child should have come to live birth (:10). The LXX references tend to associate 'an abortion' with shame and revulsion. The term was used as an expletive to describe a despised person; it had surely been used about Paul, and he agrees with it.

The whole idea of conversion and changing, even transforming, one's basic personality was deeply unpopular in the culture against which the Gospel was first preached in the first century. Ben Witherington comments: "Ancients did not much believe in the idea of personality change or development. Or at least they did see such change- a conversion, for example- as a good thing; it was rather the mark of a deviant, unreliable person... Greco-Roman culture valued stability and constancy of character... the virtuous Stoic philosopher was one who 'surmises nothing, repents of nothing, is never wrong, and never changes his opinion'". Of course, this mindset was attractive because human beings never like changing-

we're incredibly conservative. And whilst we may live amidst an apparent mindset that 'change is cool', we all know how stubborn we are to changing our basic personality, or even seeing that we need to be transformed. And yet, despite the cultural background, the Gospel of conversion and radical personal change spread powerfully in the first century. The radical change in Saul / Paul's life was proclaimed by him as programmatic for all who truly are converted (1 Tim. 1:16)- and for him, this involved a radical re-socialization, seeing the world in a quite opposite manner, losing old friends and considering former enemies his beloved family. Quick, radical, 180 degree change was especially unpopular in the first century- proselytes, e.g., had to go through a lengthy process to become such. Yet Paul presents the change in him as being dramatic and instant on the Damascus road. Perhaps he alludes to how sceptically this was received by others when he answers the charge that he is an *ektroma*, a miscarriage, one born too quickly (1 Cor. 15:8,9). And he says that indeed, this had been the case with him.

*He appeared to me also-* Note that the same Jesus who appeared to the apostles appeared also to Paul, some time after His ascension to Heaven. He is not any fundamentally different to the literal, bodily Jesus who appeared to men after His resurrection. Paul saw that same Jesus. And truly He is the same yesterday, today and for ever. He is not now existing in some nebulous, non bodily form.

When Paul speaks of his sinfulness and weakness, it is nearly always in the context of writing about the privilege and wonder of our commission to preach Christ. He humbly wonders at the trust God places in him, to entrust him with the Gospel. He senses a privilege and responsibility in having been entrusted with the Gospel, to the extent that he can say that his preaching is done more by the grace of God he has received than by the natural Paul (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles-* "Least" could as well be translated "smallest" or "shortest". Hence when Paul embarked on his missionary work, he changed his name from Saul (the tall king of Israel who persecuted David-Jesus) to Paul, 'the little one'. Despite having withstood Peter to his face, according to Galatians, Paul still considered that he was less than them all.

Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners. He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: "As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has "all manner of concupiscence"). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end". Paul's progressive realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God's law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through

accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. Here in one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he now faced his death, he wrote to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:15 that he was "chief of sinners", the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful "to me *the* sinner" (Lk. 18:13 RVmg.). Note that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is rooted in the Lord's words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11).

*Who is unworthy to be called an apostle-* Inadequacy is the characteristic required for being used in the Lord's public service, and the Corinthians needed to learn from Paul's example.

*Because I persecuted the church of God-* The Lord had accused Paul of persecuting *Him*, and Paul would have perceived that all those in Christ were *Him*, and Paul's behaviour to them was his actions to the Lord Jesus personally. With his knowledge of the Gospels he would have reflected upon the Lord's teaching that whatever was done to "the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me" (Mt. 25:41,45). And it is therefore no accident that he uses this very word to describe himself now as "the least".

15:10 - see on Acts 23:6.

*But by the grace of God-* See on :8 *Abnormally born*. Paul saw himself as a stillborn, self-aborted child who somehow by God's grace had a live birth in his baptism by Ananias.

*I am what I am-* We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus. Paul was alluding to the Yahweh Name (as he often does) when he wrote: "... by the grace of God *I am what I am*" (1 Cor 15:10). Paul was especially chosen to bear the Name (Acts 9:15). 'Yahweh' means all of three things: I am who I am, I was who I was, and I will be who I will be. It doesn't *only* mean 'I will be manifested in the future' in a prophetic sense; that manifestation has been ongoing, and most importantly it *is* going on through us here and now. Paul felt Yahweh's insistent manifestation of the principles of His Name through and in himself and his life's work. We are right now, in who we *are*, Yahweh's witnesses to Himself unto this world, just as Israel were meant to have been. Thus he felt "jealous with the jealousy of God" over his converts (2 Cor. 11:2); jealousy is a characteristic of the Yahweh Name, and Paul felt it, in that the Name was being expressed through him and his feelings. His threat that "I will not spare" (2 Cor. 13:2) is full of allusion to Yahweh's similar final threats to an apostate Israel. "As *he is* [another reference to the Name] so *are we* in this world" (1 Jn. 4:17). Appreciating this means that our witness is to be more centred around who we essentially *are* than what we *do*. The fact God's Name is carried by us, the righteousness of it imputed to us, should lead us to a greater awareness of His grace. Paul alludes to how he carried the Yahweh Name when he says that "by the grace of God *I am what I am*" (1 Cor. 15:10). And his response was therefore to labour abundantly.

A theme of Malachi is that Israel failed to appreciate God's Name of Yahweh, and *therefore* they were half-hearted in their service. They gave the minimum to God, they were partial in their generosity, because they despised His Name. The fullness and richness of the Name, of who God is, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV), should lead us to a fullness of response. For the sake of the Name, believers labour (Rev. 2:13). To know the name of Yahweh is an imperative to serve Him (1 Chron. 28:9). The greatness of the Name should have led to full and costly sacrifices (Mal. 1:6-8,9-11,14; 2:2). Thinking upon the Name led the faithful to pay their tithes and fellowship with each other (Mal. 3:6,10). Giving unto Yahweh the glory due to His Name is articulated through giving sacrifice (Ps. 96:8).

There is an interplay between God's calling of men, and human participation in that outreach. The case of Paul exemplifies this. Without the vital work of Ananias, he wouldn't have been able- in one sense- to come to Christ. And yet it was God who called Paul. 'Ananias' means 'the grace of God'. And several times Paul alludes to this, saying that "By [Gk. 'on account of'] the grace of God [i.e. Ananias] I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:14). His conversion was by both God and Ananias. And thus we see the seamless connection in every conversion between God's role, and that of the preacher.

*And His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain-* "Bestowed upon" translates the simple word *eis*, "in". The gift of grace was internal; after baptism we receive the gift [s.w. "grace"] of the Spirit, which is essentially an internal influence. But we must let it operate. Paul is setting himself up as an example to the Corinthians, who had likewise received the same gift [see chapter 1], but who were not "spiritual" (3:1). Paul is ever concerned that the Corinthians had believed "in vain" (:2), and he holds himself up to them as an example of one who had *not* believed in vain.

*But I laboured more abundantly than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me-* As noted above, God's grace worked within Paul's mind. But it so dominated him that it can be put for he himself personally. *sun*, "with", can carry the idea of possession. God's grace possessed him, and brought forth the labour for others which was the outworking of the love poem of chapter 13. Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 15:10 show Paul using the phrase "yet not I but...." to differentiate between his natural and spiritual self. Perhaps he does the same in the only other occurrence of the phrase, in 1 Cor 7:10: "And unto the married I command, yet not I [the natural Paul], but the Lord [the man Christ Jesus in the spiritual Paul], Let not the wife depart from her husband".

He surely isn't boasting that he was worked and preached harder than others. Rather Paul sees a direct connection between the grace of forgiveness that so abounded to him to a greater level than to others, and his likewise abounding preaching work. He speaks as if a man called 'The grace of God' did the work, not him. So close was and is the connection between receipt of grace and labour in the Gospel (he makes the same connection in Eph. 3:8). Note that in the context of 1 Cor. 15, Paul is demonstrating the reality of the Lord's resurrection. Because of it, he received grace and therefore he preached it.

When Paul speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than all, he seems to be making one of many allusions back to incidents in the Gospels, this time to Lk. 7:47, where the Lord comments that Mary loved much, because she was forgiven much. It was as if the Lord didn't need to have knowledge of her sins beamed into Him by a bolt of Holy Spirit; He perceived from her great love how much she had sinned and been forgiven. Paul really felt that Mary

was his example, his pattern. And so should we feel. The much love which she had for her Lord was, in Paul's case, articulated through preaching Him.

15:11 *Whether I or they-* If it is God's grace which motivates all preaching work, then it matters not which channel was used- whether Paul or other apostles. This is what he has already laboured in chapter 1, explaining that it matters not who preached to a person or baptized them. All was a manifestation of the essential grace of God, and the channel used should not make any difference.

*So we preach and so you believed-* "Our preaching" and "your faith" are paralleled in 1 Cor. 15:14. We see here the degree to which individual initiative in preaching is related to the faith and salvation of others. This is the force of the word "so". Salvation is in some sense dependent upon third party efforts (Mk. 2:5). God has delegated His work to us, and to some degree, the extent of its progress depends upon us. Note that faith or belief is predicated upon hearing the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection. Not upon following the detailed scientific arguments made for creationism, nor by any other attempt to make science 'prove God'.

15:12 *Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?-* Some among them, perhaps just a minority of false teachers, were teaching that there was no resurrection at all. This sounds like a version of the beliefs of the Sadducees, the only group mentioned in the NT who denied any resurrection (Mt. 22:23); and it was a group of Sadducees who were bent on killing Paul and obsessed with destroying his work (Acts 23:7-10 and context). Perhaps their agents were influencing Corinth.

15:13 *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised-* If dead people don't resurrect, then Christ was not raised as claimed. We note here the implicit assumption that the Lord Jesus was a human being, and not some Divine 'special case', let alone God in a Trinitarian sense. And likewise if Paul had believed in an immortal soul or conscious survival of death, he would not have deployed this argument, nor insisted upon the critical importance of believing in a bodily resurrection both of Christ and those in Him.

15:14 *And if Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain-* He preached, and so the Corinthians believed (1 Cor. 15:11); his preaching and their faith are so closely related, because there is a degree to which the belief and salvation of others has been placed in our hands (cp. Mk. 2:5). Because Christ rose, we have not believed and preached "in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Because He rose, therefore "awake to righteousness and sin not" (15:34)- for He is our representative. We labour for Him because our faith in His resurrection is not "in vain". Our faith in His resurrection is not in vain (:2,14), and our labour is therefore not in vain (:58) because it is motivated by His rising again. The grace of being able to believe in the resurrection of Jesus meant that Paul "laboured abundantly" (:10). And he can therefore bid us follow his example- of labouring abundantly motivated by the same belief that the Lord rose (:58).

15:15 *Yes, we are found false witnesses of God-* Paul expresses this in terms of breaking the Decalogue ["you shall not bear false witness"] because of the evident Judaist influences at work. We too should try to be all things to all men, reasoning in their terms as far as we can.



If Paul had witnessed that God had raised Christ, but actually He had not raise Him, then Paul had witnessed falsely about God. Note that Paul doesn't say that he had taught a wrong message; his belief in the resurrection was a matter of personal witness. For he claimed to have met the risen Lord.

*Because we witnessed of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised-* The "we" refers to the apostles and all who had seen the risen Lord. Paul again sees their witness as united and not divided; and therefore no factions should develop following various apostles.

15:16 *For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised-* A repetition of the argument in :13, so powerful is it. See notes there.

15:17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain, you are still in your sins-* Paul had earlier written of his fear that they had believed in vain if they no longer held fast to their initial belief in the Lord's death and resurrection (:2). Their profession to believe, their semblance of religion, was vain if Christ was still dead. This was the whole problem at Corinth- they were basing their Christian services upon those in the surrounding idol cults, replete with church prostitutes, eating idol food and claims to ecstatic utterances and prophecies. But this 'faith' or religion was in vain- it was mere religion, if they didn't actually believe the core issue of Christianity, the bodily resurrection of Christ. Any who deny His bodily, literal resurrection are liable to the same rebuke from Paul- that whilst indeed they may be religious, their faith and religion is vain. The point of our faith is that we are no longer 'in our sins'. His resurrection [and not just His death] is what enabled forgiveness of sins. The implication is that the Christian faith is all about the message of forgiveness of sins made possible because of the Lord's death *and resurrection*. And any faith or religion which gives no such forgiveness of sins is vain. And the other way around, the attraction and power of true Christianity is the solid assurance of forgiven sin [and all the eternal consequences of sin] through the death and body resurrection of Christ. Such good news will not be attractive to those who are not convicted of their sins and are looking for mere religion (see on 14:24,25).

15:18 *And therefore also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished-* The reference may primarily be to those who had seen the risen Lord but had now "fallen asleep" in death (:6). Paul sees no other form of salvation apart from sharing in the bodily resurrection of Christ; for baptism into Him means that His resurrection shall ultimately be ours (Rom. 6:3-5). Paul simply would not have reasoned this way if he believed in an immortal soul going to eternity at death. Without the hope of bodily resurrection which is predicated upon the Lord's resurrection, then we have "perished". The Lord Himself had promised that those in Him would not "perish" [s.w.] but should be raised up again at the last day (Jn. 6:39). Indeed John's Gospel several times uses this word for "perish" in the context of the Lord promising eternal life instead of 'perishing'. The articulation of that eternal life will be through the resurrection of the body, Paul is arguing. And that in turn is predicated upon the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, to which we are connected by faith and baptism into it.

15:19 *If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all people the most pitiable-*

"Pitiable" translates 'mercy'- the ones to whom mercy should be shown. The hint could be that they needed the Gospel again preaching to them. They were as many religious people- their 'faith' was just for this life. There was no solid connection to a hope beyond the grave, in the resurrection of the body. They were indeed no better than the surrounding religious cults which they emulated.

15:20 *But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep-* "But now" implies 'right now'. The historical resurrection of Jesus can become new and fresh in our lives. Right now, the Lord has risen. His resurrection is the guarantee that those asleep in Him shall also be raised as He was. But we are not just waiting in hope for that great day of resurrection to dawn. "We have the firstfruits of the Spirit" and therefore eagerly await "the redemption of the body" in the resurrection of the last day (Rom. 8:23). The Corinthians refused to recognize the gift of the Spirit which they had been given (3:1). This in turn led to them not realizing that there was actual proof within them that the Lord's resurrection was for real, and guaranteed their own. The new man created within us by the Spirit, which came to us through the Gospel, "the word of truth", means that we have the firstfruits already within us; we are already the firstfruits of the creation we shall become (James 1:18). And we in turn are the firstfruits of a greater harvest yet to come (Rev. 14:4)- perhaps referring to those redeemed in some way around the time of the Lord's return, or those converted during some 'Millennial' reign. The Lord's resurrection to life eternal was the first-fruit or guarantee of our resurrection (as in Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). And our resurrection to life at the last day will likewise be first-fruit of some even greater redemption or harvest. In this we may have some hint at the resurrection of others to some opportunity of hearing the Gospel and becoming part of the harvest, if they so desire. For if we are the firstfruits (Rev. 14:4), then we must ask who constitutes the greater harvest after us. I have discussed in Revelation 20 the difficulties of the classical view of the Millennium- for that is the common answer given to this question.

Another perspective would be that because we are in Christ, and because God sees the gap between His exaltation and ours as irrelevant, we are called "the firstfruits" too. This is why Rom. 1:4 Gk. and 2 Cor. 5:14,15 RSV speaks as if ultimately there is only one resurrection: that of the Lord Jesus, in which we had a part as being in Him. The appearing of Christ is paralleled with our appearing with Him in glory (Col. 3:4)- because effectively, when He returns, we will appear with Him in the same moment.

15:21- see on Rev. 20:5.

*For since by a man came death, by a man came also the resurrection of the dead-* Paul now makes a series of extended allusions to the events of early Genesis. This, along with references to "first-fruits", suggest there were some in his audience who were aware of the Jewish scriptures. He has alluded to them throughout his arguments to the Corinthians. I have mentioned often how Gentile, illiterate, immoral Corinthians were attracted to Judaism because it offered an apparent way of justification by a few specific works, freeing them up to be immoral in other matters. This was why Judaism was attractive to such an immature Gentile Christian audience. We must emphasize how death and resurrection both came by "a man"- Adam and the Lord Jesus. Clearly enough, the Lord was a man; we see here clearly taught the necessity of the Lord's humanity and representative sacrifice. Trinitarianism makes a fair mess of this clear teaching.

15:22- see on Jn. 5:21.

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive-* "In" Christ speaks of baptism into Him and abiding in Him. All in Him shall be made alive; which makes being in Him by baptism a requirement for salvation. I noted on :20 that the language of resurrection used here is not only limited to the resurrection of the body at the last day. We are to be "made alive" right now by the Spirit; for the Lord Jesus is a life giving Spirit right now to those who will accept it (:45). The "spiritual" state spoken of in :46 is true in some sense for us now who have received the Spirit; hence Paul's lament that the Corinthians were not "spiritual" when they ought to have been (3:1). The Lord had taught that "it is the Spirit that makes alive" and thus guarantees our bodily resurrection (Jn. 5:21; 6:63 s.w. "be made alive"). It is the same Spirit of Christ which now dwells in us which shall also be the means whereby our bodies are made alive at the last day (Rom. 8:11 is explicit about this). The Lord Himself was made alive by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18). So we can see how it was in fact logical that people who refused to accept the work of the Spirit within them would come to reject the idea of bodily resurrection. In this sense, "the Spirit gives life", right now, once we have rejected the way of legalism which "kills" (2 Cor. 3:6). Our Spirit is to become the Lord's Spirit; our essential personality must therefore be immortalized, and this therefore requires the resurrection of the body. For we personally shall be saved.

15:23 *But each in his own order-* "Order" is the word used in the LXX for a troop of soldiers or people (Num. 10:14; 18:22,25). The parade starts with the Lord Jesus, then with us, and then (:24) another undefined cohort at "the end". Paul looks from the perspective of eternity upon these three cohorts. I have suggested on :20 who this last cohort might be, although it is intentionally left undefined.

*Christ the firstfruits, then they that are Christ's, at his coming-* "At his coming" is proof enough that the time of glorification is not at death, which is unconsciousness, but at His return. Preterism has a big problem with this- for if His "coming" was at AD70 then all who are Christ's should have had their resurrection then. We become Christ's by baptism into Him (Gal. 3:29). and so Paul assumes that all the Corinthians "are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3:23). Even if they did not properly understand or therefore believe in the correct nature of the Christian hope, he still assumes that as baptized into Him, they would receive the promised outcome of His resurrection. This has huge implications for how we treat others who clearly have left the faith or fail to understand it, despite having earlier been baptized into Christ. We cannot condemn them ahead of the judgment seat of Christ, so we can only assume their salvation and feel towards them accordingly.

15:24 *Then comes the end-* "Comes" is not in the original. Literally, "then- the end". On :23 I suggested that we are being presented with three orders or standard bearers / troops of people. Firstly Christ, then those who in this life are His "at His coming", and now we have in view a third group. I suggested on :20 whom they might be. If indeed "the end" refers to the end of a Millennial reign (although see on :20), when He will have put down "all rule and all authority and power", He will have reigned until "all enemies" are subdued. This would mean that there will still be enemies of Christ throughout the Millennium; and there will also be human rulers and powers opposed to Him, to some degree, until they are finally subdued at "the end" of the Millennium. As Solomon's reign featured local rulers still existing in surrounding lands, so Christ's Kingdom would still feature local human rulers of some kind, who may not be forced to be subject to Him. It takes time for the little stone to destroy the kingdoms of

men, and totally establish God's Kingdom. Zeph. 3:19 speaks of the Jews getting glory and praise in every nation which have persecuted them. The lands of their dispersion, Russia, Germany, the Arab world etc., will then recognize the spiritual status of God's people. This in itself implies that humanity will not be one homogeneous mass. The *nations* will decide to go up to worship God at Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16); hinting at some kind of high level national decision by their leaders, as well as the individual desire of ordinary people from all nations?

*When he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father-* There seems an emphasis here upon the Lord's inferiority to the Father. "Even the Father" seems to stress the point, having said that He shall give up the Kingdom to God. I suggested in *The Real Christ* that wrong thinking about the Lord Jesus was already developing in the churches at this time, wishing to present Jesus as another god; which is how the pagan cults around them would have perceived Him, for they considered every cult to worship a god. This error came to full term in the doctrine of the Trinity; but Paul here is arguing against it right at its incipient stage.

*When he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power-* Absolutely all kinds of authority apart from that of the Father and Son will be removed. "Abolish" translates a word elsewhere used about the abolition of the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:2,6; 2 Cor. 3:7,11,13,14; Eph. 2:15), as well as the rule of sin (Rom. 6:6; Heb. 2:14). Paul has used the word in his opening chapter to the Corinthians about how all worldly structures and systems shall be "abolished" (1 Cor. 1:28; 2:6). This was a radical thing to put in writing, in a society where the "rule... authority and power" of Caesar was what structured society. All such things were to pass away right now in the experience of the believer. The words are used about sin, about the power of the Mosaic regulations, and also about the authority of Rome. The Father and Son were to be all and in all for all believers; submission to their rule, power and authority [words often used by Paul about the authority of the Lord Jesus] is the way to ultimate freedom from all the secular ties that bind. Even the authority of the miraculous Spirit gifts was to be abolished (s.w. 1 Cor. 13:8,10), and the mature believer was to likewise abolish or put away such things (1 Cor. 13:11 s.w.). Clearly, in the life of the believer right now, the Kingship of Christ is to mean the abolition of all other authorities and principles, be they of sin or the Mosaic law. The reality of Christ as Lord is to be supreme. It is this process of getting people to be like this which shall progress onwards until "the end".

15:25 *For he must reign until He has put all his enemies under his feet-* Having things and persons 'under the feet' doesn't necessarily mean they were to be killed or destroyed. It can mean simply submission before the one enthroned. "All things", a phrase often used for all God's people, are to be placed under the feet of the Lord Jesus (Ps. 8:6- quoted here in :27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8, which teach that it is the church who shall be under the Lord's feet. Rev. 12:8 may teach the same). I noted on Mt. 22:44 and Acts 2:35 that the making of the Lord's enemies His footstool means that they shall repentantly accept Him, rather than being destroyed by Him. "We were enemies" of God, but are now reconciled in grateful, humble submission (Rom. 5:10). This is the whole message of the preceding :24- that all things shall progressively be subjected under Christ's authority and Kingship, thereby becoming part of His Kingdom. To achieve this on a universal level, He shall have to come to earth and destroy those who refuse to submit. But the end in view is that the earth and all upon it shall be His Kingdom, under the dominion of His Kingship. And that process is to begin in the hearts of believers right now.

15:26 *The last enemy that shall be abolished is death-* "Last" doesn't have to have a chronological reference, as if death is the enemy destroyed at the end of a period. It can simply mean the one great enemy. Just as all forms of power and authority shall be abolished (:24), so shall death. The same words are used in 2 Tim. 1:10 of how the Lord Jesus has right now "abolished death"; for through His death He has "destroyed [s.w. 'abolished'] the devil which has the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). This is not only a case of 'Now but not yet'. It is the case rather that for those in Christ, death has been abolished by the Lord's death and resurrection; for our hope of conquering death is certain. That hope is to be spread progressively to others, and by the elimination of all who refuse it, there will come "the end" when death shall have been abolished not just for us but for all on this planet.

As in our own day, literature and thought of Bible times tried to minimize death. Yet in both Old and New Testaments, death is faced for what it is. Job 18:14 calls it "the king of terrors"; Paul speaks of death as the last and greatest enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Humanity lives all their lives "in fear of death" (Heb. 2:17). Facing death for what it is imparts a seriousness and intensity to human life and endeavour, keeps our sense of responsibility to God paramount, and the correct functioning of conscience all important. We see this in people facing death; but those who've grasped Bible truth about death ought to live like this all the time, rejoicing too that we have been delivered from it.

15:27 *For He put all things in subjection under his feet-* In the end, all the enemies of Jesus will be placed "under His footstool" (Acts 2:35 etc.). Yet we were all His enemies, due to the alienation with Him caused by our sin (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). The Lord's footstool is the place where His people are figuratively located, praising Him there (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Lam. 2:1). Ultimately, all things will be subjected under Jesus, placed at the Lord's footstool, under His feet (1 Cor. 15:27). Submission to Him is therefore the ultimate end of both the righteous and the wicked; the difference being, that the righteous submit to Him now, rather than in the rejection and final exaltation of the Lord over them in the condemnation process.

*But when He said all things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is excepted who did subject all things to him-* We may well enquire why this point is being made and so laboured. I suggested on :24 that Paul is arguing against a wrong view of Jesus as being God Himself. But Paul is arguing also against the idea that Christianity is a religion just for this life. He therefore highlights the fact that the whole work of the Lord Jesus in this age is all towards a final glorious end, when He will be subject to the one true God, who shall then be thereby fully manifested ("all in all", :28). That point has not yet come- and this is a powerful argument against Preterism as well as any tendency we may have towards living as if our 'faith' is just to ease our passage through this life, with nothing at the end. Paul picks up from this apparent digression in :29, which is again about resurrection of the body. So the argument about the Son's final submission to the Father should also be read in the context of a series of reasons why the final resurrection of the body is a necessary Christian belief.

15:28 *And when all things have been subjected to him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things to him-* Being under the Lord's feet is therefore parallel with being subjected to Him. And we are to be subject to Him now (s.w. Rom. 10:3; Eph. 1:22; 5:24; Heb. 12:9; James 4:7). The same word is used in the context of the resurrection and glorification of the body in Phil. 3:21: "Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able

even *to subdue* all things to himself". Through the Spirit, He is now at work within us to subdue us unto Himself, and that same Spirit shall transform our bodies into immortality. This is exactly the context of 1 Corinthians 15; see on 15:20 and Rom. 8:23.

*That God may be all in all*- God will be "all in all" through the full expression of His Name. But Eph. 1:23 says that right now, *all* the fullness of God fills "all in all" in the church; in other words we should now be experiencing something of that total unity which will then be physically manifest throughout all creation. Eph. 4:8 states that Jesus ascended in order to give the Spirit gifts to men, as He stressed in His discourse in the Upper Room. Then Eph. 4:10 says that He ascended "that He might fill (s.w. Him that fills all in all with the fullness, Eph. 1:23) all things" (the saints). Note in passing how the phrase "all things" and "all in all" are used about the saints. "All in all" is used solely in this context of the saints (Col. 3:11 is a good example), and this is how we should read 1 Cor. 15:28 "God may be all in all"- i.e. that God may be manifested completely in all His *saints* (not just 'in all creation generally'), whenever they lived and died. So the Spirit was given in order for us to be filled, to come, to the "stature of the fullness of Christ"- which is God's fullness (Eph. 4:13).

15:29 *Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are people baptized for them?*- According to the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, baptism for the dead was practiced by the surrounding religious cults in Corinth to preserve the dead from a bad afterlife, especially at Eleusis. The practice is referenced in Homer's *Hymn to Demeter* 478-79. So again we see the Corinthian Christians emulating the surrounding religious cults (as with using church prostitutes, eating idol food at the breaking of bread meeting, making ecstatic utterances and prophecies in the name of having Holy Spirit gifts etc.). They had no personal belief in a future resurrection, yet they could not escape the nagging doubt about what fate awaits us beyond death. And this led them to baptizing themselves in the hope of giving their dead relatives a better afterlife, even a 'better resurrection'. This is a useful window into the contradictions evident within many religious people. They may personally deny any interest in a resurrection of the body, and yet they act as if they are actually concerned about these issues, especially when it comes to the loss of their loved ones.

15:30 *Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?*- This is an allusion to Lk. 8:23. Paul felt that if he gave up his faith, he'd be like those faithless disciples in the storm on Galilee. Paul found that every hour of his life, he was motivated to endure by Christ's resurrection; this was how deep was his practical awareness of the power of that most basic fact. It could be that Paul felt he was in peril ["jeopardy"] of missing out on salvation if Christ was not raised. But he uses the same word to describe his constant "perils" whilst serving the Lord (Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 11:26). He endured these things every hour, directly because of the Lord's resurrection and the hope of a resurrection like His. This motivated him every hour to endure what he had to. Every hour of his life was a "peril", and only faith in the Lord's resurrection empowered him to endure it.

15:31 *I protest by that boasting in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord: I die daily*- By this he perhaps means that because he was daily crucified with Christ and rose with Him, he was thereby able to rejoice in them; to overcome the pain and hurt which their treatment of him would naturally give rise to, because he could be another person. That new person could rejoice in the Corinthians and view them so positively, all because Christ had

risen and opened up the hope for the Corinthians to be saved, which was Paul's great hope and boast.

Baptism is in a sense ongoing; we live in newness of life, continually dying and resurrecting. Out of each death, there comes forth new life. For His resurrection life, the type of life that He lived and lives, becomes manifest in our mortal flesh right now (2 Cor. 4:11).

15:32- see on Is. 22:13; Rev. 19:10.

*If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die-* Paul's hometown of Tarsus had been founded by Sardanapalus, whose statue was in a nearby town with the inscription: "Eat, drink, enjoy thyself. The rest is nothing". This is incidental confirmation that the Biblical record was not made up. This kind of language usage, reciting a phrase encountered during youth, would be utterly realistic and appropriate for Paul as the author. However it seems that he is also quoting a form of Solomon's words in Ecc. 2:24 as the words of those who have no faith that there will be a resurrection. The rich fool likewise effectively disbelieved in the resurrection, and his words also allude to those of Solomon (Lk. 12:19 = Ecc. 2:24; 11:9).

It is in the context of talking about our hope of bodily resurrection at Christ's return, Paul says that this hope was what had given perspective to his wrestling with wild beasts at Ephesus. The context surely requires that we understand this as referring to how he had been in danger of losing his physical life because of this wrestling, but he endured it with a mindset which looked ahead to the resurrection of the body. The wrestling with wild beasts, therefore, appears to be a literal experience which he had, rather than using 'wrestling with wild beasts' in a figurative sense. There was at Ephesus an amphitheatre, and we also know that there were cases where convicted criminals were forced to fight wild animals; if they killed the animal, then they went free. It seems this is what happened to Paul. He speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of an acute crisis which he faced in Asia (and Ephesus was in Asia) which involved his having been given a death sentence, and yet being saved out of it by "the God who raises the dead". This emphasis on bodily resurrection is the same context we have in 1 Cor. 15:32. As he faced his death in 2 Tim. 4:17, Paul reminisced how the Lord had earlier saved him "out of the mouth of the lion"; and the context there is of literal language, and we are therefore inclined to consider that he was literally saved from a lion in the arena at Ephesus. This also helps us better understand his earlier reference in Corinthians to having been exhibited as a spectacle, as a gladiator at a show, "appointed unto death", in the presence of God and men (1 Cor. 4:9). Note that despite this traumatic experience, Paul chose to continue at Ephesus even after that, because he saw a door had been opened to him for the Gospel, despite "many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8,9). We who are so shy to put a word in for the Lord in our encounters with people ought to take strength from Paul's dogged example in Ephesus.

15:33 *Be not deceived-* This sounds like an appeal not to be deceived by false teachers.

*Evil companionships corrupt good moral habits-* This and :34 are in the midst of an argument about the importance of believing in the Lord's resurrection and focusing ourselves upon our own future resurrection at His coming. So we must understand these moral appeals in the resurrection context. "Evil companionships" is only one possibility in translation; AV "evil

communications" is not too far wrong. The Greek *homilia* means literally 'homily'. The communications or homilies in view would then be the false teaching against which Paul was warning them: "Be not deceived". It was this evil teaching being communicated to them which would corrupt morality. For if Christ is not raised and we shall not be, then there was no longer any binding moral compass upon Christians- for judgment day and the second coming would never happen, and there was no ultimate outcome of our moral behaviour in this life. The same word for "corrupt" will be used in 2 Cor. 11:3 of Paul's fear that false teaching would "corrupt" the Corinthians just as the serpent beguiled Eve.

15:34- see on 1 Cor. 4:14.

*Awake to soberness righteously, and do not sin. For some among you have no knowledge of God-* We died and rose with Christ, and if Christ really did rise again, and we have a part in that, we must therefore abstain from sin, quit bad company and labour with the risen, active Lord. As noted on :33, this teaching is about the result of listening to false teaching which denied the resurrection, both of the Lord and ourselves. The end result of it was sin, and not knowing God; although *agnosia* really means 'ignorance'. Belief in the Lord's awaking would result in their moral awakening. To not believe in the Lord's resurrection was to not know God. There is actually no valid belief in God, or theism, if it is not predicated upon belief in the Lord's resurrection. Nobody can come to the Father except through the Son. "Knowledge of God" may well refer to relationship with God, rather than simply a lament that they did not know the right theology.

One of the greatest false doctrines of all time is the trinity- which claims that there are three "persons" in a Godhead. Trinitarian theologians borrowed a word- *persona* in Latin, *porsonon* in Greek- which was used for the mask which actors wore on stage. But for us, God doesn't exist in personas. He exists, as God the Father. And we practice the presence of that God. The real, true God, who isn't acting, projecting Himself through a mask, playing a role to our eyes; the God who is so crucially real and *alive*, there at the other end of our prayers, pulling at the other end of the cord... What we know of Him in His word is what and who He really is. It may not be *all* He is, but it is all the same the truth of the real and living God. And this knowledge should be the most arresting thing in the whole of our existence. So often the prophets use the idea of "knowing God" as an idiom for living a life totally dominated by that knowledge. The new covenant which we have entered is all about 'knowing' Yahweh. And Jer. 31:34 comments: "They shall all know me... for I will forgive their iniquity". The knowledge of God elicits repentance, real repentance; and reveals an equally real forgiveness. It is possible for those in Christ to *in practice* not know God at all. Thus Paul exhorted the Corinthian ecclesia: "Awake to righteousness and sin not: for some have no knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34 RV). The knowledge and practice of the presence of God ought to keep us back from sin. Ez. 43:8 RV points out how Israel were so wrong to have brought idols into the temple: "in their setting of their threshold by my threshold, and their door post beside my door post, and there was but the wall between me and them". How close God was ought to have made them quit their idolatry. But their cognizance of the closeness of God was merely theoretical. They didn't feel nor respond to the wonder of it. And truly, He is not far from every one of us.

*I speak this to move you to shame-* As in 6:5; but on other matters, Paul did not seek to shame them (4:14). We note his sensitive approach to them, taking a different approach over different issues, just as we should. The "shame" was on "you"- that their collective attitudes



had led to some amongst them having "no knowledge of God". We are all in this together; it is not for us to shrug at the spiritual failure of some amongst us. Just as Ezra and others blushed at their collective shame for the behaviour of the community they were members of (Ezra 9:6).

15:35 *But someone will say: How are the dead resurrected? And with what type of body do they come forth?*- Where and when and how the salvation of the Father and Son will be finally manifested and outplayed isn't the most important thing. The *essence* of their salvation is what needs to concern us. Tragically Bible students have all too often been like the foolish questioner Paul envisages in 1 Cor. 15:35; he was preoccupied with *how* the body would come out of the grave, rather than on the essence of the fact that as we sow now, as we now allow God's word to take root in us, so we will receive in the nature of the eternal existence which we will be given at the judgment. I'm not saying that how we are raised etc. is unimportant; but its importance hinges around its practical import for us. All too easily we can bat these questions around with no attention to their practical relevance for us.

I mentioned earlier that the only group mentioned in the NT as denying the resurrection were the Sadducees; and these objections from "someone" were typically theirs. Clearly Corinth were under the influence of Judaism, and particularly from the Sadducees who hated Paul because he had been born a Pharisee. I have mentioned throughout commentary on Titus and also here on Corinthians that such Judaism was strangely attractive to immoral, immature Gentile Christians who likely had never read the Mosaic law. Because a few acts of ritual obedience apparently freed them up to continue an immoral life in other areas.

15:36 *You foolish one*- For all his gentleness and tolerance towards the Corinthians, Paul is quite sharp with the false teachers: "You fool" translates a fairly coarse term in Greek. This should be our pattern- patience and endless gentle reasoning with the weak, but standing up to false teachers. Hence the policy of an open table but a closed platform.

*What you sow does not come to life unless it dies*- Death is necessary in the wider plan of salvation; the coming to life must be at some point after death, for we are but a seed sown. Death is the gateway to a 'coming to life' at the last day [not immediately after death]. The necessity of resurrection is therefore Paul's answer to the detailed questions as to how mechanically the dead shall be raised. And it is important to grasp that logical and spiritual necessity of bodily resurrection- and the details and mechanisms then become irrelevant. The Greek for 'come to life' is used of our being spiritually quickened now after baptism (Jn. 5:21; 6:63), when we figuratively die and rise again. The Lord Jesus is now a life giving Spirit (:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). Hence Paul can write of how he dies daily (:31). Note that a seed does not die in the earth, but Paul is using this as a figure of death, a burial in the ground. The external body of the seed decays but the germ within lives. Paul is not teaching here the immortality of the soul, but rather than the very essence of a believer, which is the spirit, shall determine the nature of our resurrected existence. See on :22. It is the same Spirit of Christ which now dwells in us which shall also be the means whereby our bodies are made alive at the last day (Rom. 8:11 is explicit about this). It is of the Spirit that we reap eternal life at the last day (Gal. 6:8). The Lord had likened Himself to a seed falling into the ground and dying, and then bringing forth much fruit when it rises from the earth (Jn. 12:24). Paul is alluding to this because his whole argument is that baptism makes the Lord's death and resurrection a pattern for our own.

15:37 *And what you sow is not the plant body that shall later be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or some other grain-* The allusion is clearly to the Lord's parables of sowing; the requirement is that there shall come a harvest when the seed comes out of the ground. It is not the mature plant which is sown and then reappears. The seed sown is "bare", or "naked". Paul uses the same figure in 2 Cor. 5:3, where he likens the immortalizing of our bodies to our naked [s.w. "bare"] body being clothed upon with immortality. But there is something in common with our life now, just as there is a connection between the seed and the plant. And just as there are different types of crop, so there are different types of people who shall be immortalized- grain, wheat or some other crop which gives the bread of life to others. This may assist us in coping with the widely differing types we find within the church- one may be wheat, another grain.

15:38 *But God gives it a body just as it pleases Him; and to each seed a body of its own-* There is a connection between the seed we are in this life, and who we shall eternally be. In this lies the eternal consequence of the personality we develop now. And yet on the other hand, the body given us, the nature of our eternity, will be a gift from God according to His will or pleasure. Those two elements are brought together in this verse. We shall each be unique- each seed has a body of its own, just as each plant is unique. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our lives as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as "the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord.

15:39 *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes-* Paul labours this point over the next verses. He has introduced the idea of the unique, individual nature of our reward in writing of how each plant has a unique body (:38) and how there are different types of grain. The diversity of the natural creation will be reflected in the spiritual creation, and therefore there is going to be diversity amongst us within the church now- a point which needed making to a group as diverse as Corinth.

15:40 *There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly is one and the glory of the earthly is another-* Perhaps Paul is referring to Angels as the "heavenly bodies", and in so doing making another stab at the teaching of the Sadducees who denied both resurrection and Angels (see on :35; Acts 23:8). We shall become as Angels at the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36), and their varying glories shall be reflected in our own. The supreme heavenly body is that of the Lord Jesus, and we shall receive a body like His heavenly body (:48,49). An alternative is to understand the heavenly bodies as the planets which will now be listed in :41. Just as there are varying glories amongst the diversity of earthly bodies which comprise the natural creation (:39), so there are amongst the heavenly bodies (:41). This variation of glory will be reflected in the diversity seen amongst the glorified believers after their resurrection.

15:41 *There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another star in glory-* The different types of glory will be reflected in the diversity of believers both now and eternally. Clearly Paul envisaged a

gradation of glory amongst the believers. Some make more of God's truth than others. This would have been a most necessary point to labour in a church which was so diverse, with some strong and committed, and others extremely weak. The stronger ones could only relate to the weaker ones by understanding that they would be saved, although their glory might be less than that of others. The Lord likewise taught that some would have more cities to rule over than others; some will trade His talents better than others.

*15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption-* By "the dead" Paul understands "the dead in Christ", for he is predicating resurrection upon association with Christ's resurrected body. "Corruption" has moral undertones- see on :43 and :44. In this case, we have in view not an emergence in immortal form, but rather the idea would be that the corruptible the prone to sin, will be raised in a form which cannot sin, which is incorruptible.

15:43- see on 1 Cor. 8:9

*It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power-* "Dishonour" has moral connotations, the same word being translated "vile affections" (Rom. 1:26), and used of the "dishonour" of condemnation at the last day (Rom. 9:21; 2 Tim. 2:20). Paul has recently used the word about the weaker members of the church whom we might consider to be dishonourable (12:23). "Weakness" is likewise used of moral weakness (Mt. 8:17). These spiritually weak ones will be resurrected in power; yet the same words are used in Heb. 11:34 of how the [spiritually?] weak are "made strong", literally 'made of power', in this life. This theme of morally weak being raised spiritually strong is continued in :44, and in :42 the idea of 'corruptible' being raised incorruptible is introduced. Paul's reasoning here connects with one of the hardest issues posed by the Corinthian correspondence: Paul writes as if all the Corinthians shall be saved, for they are "in Christ". He feels warmly towards them and believes in their final salvation- for he will not ever state they are to be condemned at the last day. And yet he clearly reveals that their behaviour was in serious denial of basic Christianity, in doctrine and practice- and he urgently pleads with them to change lest they lose their salvation. Paul and those who were 'spiritual' in Corinth must have struggled hard over these issues. Paul is speaking in this section of the resurrection of the body at the last day, but he clearly does so in terms which refer to the moral weakness of the weaker ones at Corinth. He can only assume that if they are to be saved, then they shall die in moral weakness and dishonour but be resurrected in a spiritually stronger form. Even though those changes in a moral sense ought to be happening now. This speaks powerfully to us today. For we too wonder at the apparently non-Christian behaviour and beliefs of those who have been baptized into Christ and we therefore have to assume are "in" Him and in hope of salvation. For it is not for us to say they are non-Christian or have fallen from grace to the point they shall not be finally saved. For we are not to judge in that ultimate sense. We can only therefore assume their salvation. And that will mean they at their deaths are sown in moral corruption and dishonour but shall be saved at the resurrection, when they shall be changed. And this of course is a question we have likely asked ourselves too- is the resurrection just going to mean a change of physical nature for me, so that I shall be immortal? Or shall I be changed morally, spiritually, as well? Such change is sadly necessary for us all. But we wonder to what extent it shall be possible... will character and personality be totally transformed by the resurrection process? Or just as it were touched up? And if we hope for such a change in our own cases, to what extent can we deny such hope to weak believers who die in Christ whilst still so terribly immature in faith and behaviour? Paul's approach here is

indeed a comfort. The transformation from weakness to power, from corruption to not corruption, in moral terms, must of course be happening now. But we need the resurrection to make it complete. And like Paul with Corinth, we have to assume that resurrection shall mean moral as well as physical transformation for our brethren. And this frees us from the need to condemn and separate from our brethren in this life. We must assume that resurrection shall transform them to how they must be- as it will us. For none of us surely can claim that we are perfect now and just need immortality to get us to salvation.

15:44 *It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body-* See notes on :43 regarding the element of moral transformation which will be part of the resurrection process. Paul has drawn the tension between natural and spiritual in 2:14; the Corinthians were still natural when they ought to be spiritual, and Paul laments they are not spiritual (3:1). Jude 19 speaks likewise of weak believers as being "sensual [s.w. "natural"], having not the Spirit" as they ought to have. The transformation from natural to spiritual ought to be now; but the final transformation at the resurrection will also have to include this element for us all, and shall not solely be a changing of our nature from mortal to immortal. This is great comfort for those who feel their transformation is not complete and that they go to their grave not fully transformed in moral terms.

15:45 *So also it is written: The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit-* Be aware that the original writers didn't have quotation marks or brackets (consider where Paul might have used them here!). The quotation is from Gen. 2:7. But Paul goes on to say that the Lord Jesus as the last Adam is a life-giving spirit. He will be this in a literal sense at the resurrection of the last day. But His Spirit is about moral transformation; we should receive that Spirit now and be transformed. And the resurrection of the last day will also feature an element of moral transformation as well as physical- see on :43.

There was a first century Jewish speculation that Adam would be re-incarnated as Messiah. Paul's references to Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:45-47 are very careful to debunk that idea. Paul emphasized that no, Adam and Jesus are different, Jesus is superior to Adam, achieved what Adam didn't, whilst all the same being "son of man". And this emphasis was effectively a denial by Paul that Jesus pre-existed as Adam, or as anyone. For Paul counters these Jewish speculations by underlining that the Lord Jesus was *human*. The hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 is really a setting out of the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- and unlike Adam, Jesus did not even consider equality with God as something to be grasped for (Gen. 3:5). The record of the wilderness temptations also appears designed to highlight the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- both were tempted, Adam eats, Jesus refuses to eat; both are surrounded by the animals and Angels (Mk. 1:13).

15:46 *But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and only then the spiritual-* See on :44 for how the Corinthians were natural when they ought to have been spiritual. Again Paul is encouraging them to make the change now, but also comforting the 'spiritual' ones that the immaturity of the others had to be, because the natural comes first. The transformation of resurrection will not only be physical, but also moral. And that is what all of the body of Christ so desperately need.

15:47- see on Mt. 3:7.

*The first man is of the earth, earthy. The second man is heavenly-* I have noted elsewhere Paul's fondness for allusion to the words of John the Baptist, from whose lips he likely first heard the Gospel. Here Paul clearly has in view the words of Jn. 3:31: "He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaks. He that comes from heaven is above all". I have noted on previous verses in this section that Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the body at the last day, but he does so in language which is equally applicable to the moral 'resurrection' and transformation of the believer today. John's words reflect that the Heavenly man, the Lord Jesus, is speaking words of transformation right now. For Jn. 3:32-34 continues: "What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies... He that has received his witness has certified that God is true. For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give him the Spirit by measure". The transforming ministry of 'the Man from Heaven' operates through His Spirit and the words of His gospel. I have noted elsewhere that there was a problem with Judaist influence in Corinth. Heb. 12:25 contrasts Moses as the man who spoke on earth, and the Lord Jesus who speaks from Heaven. So loaded into this verse is a challenge to the exaltation of Moses above Jesus, as well as the teaching that we must be transformed now by the words of the Man from Heaven- and this transformation will seamlessly continue in the resurrection process at the last day.

The apocryphal Jewish *Book of Enoch* held that the "Son of man" figure personally pre-existed (1 Enoch 48:2-6; 62:6,7). The idea of personal pre-existence was held by the Samaritans, who believed that Moses personally pre-existed. Indeed the idea of a pre-existent man, called by German theologians the *ur-mensch*, was likely picked up by the Jews from the Persians during the captivity. Christians who believed that Jesus was the prophet greater than Moses, that He was the "Son of man", yet who were influenced by Jewish thinking, would therefore come to assume that Jesus also personally pre-existed. And yet they drew that conclusion in defiance of basic Biblical teaching to the opposite. Paul often appears to allude to these Jewish ideas, which he would've been familiar with, in order to refute and correct them. Thus when he compares Jesus and Adam by saying: "The first man is of the earth, the second man is from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-47), he is alluding to the idea of Philo that there was an earthly and heavenly man; and one of the Nag Hammadi documents *On The Origin Of The World* claims that "the first Adam of the light is spiritual... the second Adam is soul-endowed". Paul's point is that the "second Adam" is the now-exalted Lord Jesus in Heaven, and not some pre-existent being. Adam was "a type of him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14); the one who brought sin, whereas Christ brought salvation. Paul was alluding to and correcting the false ideas- hence he at times appears to use language which hints of pre-existence. But reading his writings in context shows that he held no such idea, and was certainly not advocating the truth of those myths and documents he alluded to.

15:48 *As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they that are heavenly-* The present tenses ["Such are they"] suggest that those who shall become as the Man from Heaven at the future resurrection shall be transformed right now into His image. Just as we should be spiritual and not natural right now (see on :44 and :46), so we should now be heavenly rather than earthly. We are to be focused upon heavenly things rather than earthly things (Col. 3:2).

15:49- see on :48 and Col. 1:15.

*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly-* Verse 48 has spoken of how we should now be "heavenly", so that we shall then at the

resurrection bear the image of the heavenly One, the Lord Jesus, in every way, physically and morally. We are now being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus through the transformation of the Spirit (Rom. 8:29); and this moral transformation shall continue through the resurrection process. That process will not solely change our physical nature. We are being progressively changed by the Spirit into His image (2 Cor. 3:18) and this shall continue through the resurrection. We are putting on the Lord's image through putting on "the new man" (Col. 3:10). Yet Paul says this shall happen supremely at the resurrection. The image of Jesus is not something physical, it refers primarily to things of the spirit and personality. Again (see on :43,44,45), the change at resurrection will be moral as well as physical.

When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be. See on Acts 9:3.

15:50- see on 1 Cor. 5:5.

*Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither does corruption inherit incorruption-* Flesh and corruption refer both to our physical constitution as well as our moral state. There has to be a change of both those aspects for us to inherit the Kingdom, and therefore resurrection has both a moral and physical aspect. Paul has warned the Corinthians earlier that their immoral behaviour is of a character that shall "not inherit the Kingdom" (6:9,10, as Gal. 5:21). But here he says that it is the resurrection process which shall transform those who cannot inherit the Kingdom into those who shall. See on :43,44 and :45 for discussion of this.

15:51 *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all remain asleep, but we shall all be changed-* What is so mysterious here, what new revelation is there in this teaching of the resurrection of the body? Paul is after all re-stating the basics of the Gospel, as he has stated at the beginning of the chapter. I suggest that the new mystery revealed is that resurrection is additionally going to be a moral transformation. He has rebuked them earlier for having members who were 'sleeping' spiritually (1 Cor. 11:30). Some of them even would be changed by resurrection. See on :43,44 and :45 for discussion of the implications of this. The "change" in view is more than physical immortality- for "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". The change is in addition to being made immortal. It is specifically associated with being made "incorruptible", unable to be morally corrupted, unable to sin.

15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-* See on 1 Thess. 4:17. "A moment" is literally 'in an atom'. The idea is of time that cannot be divided further, and may be a way of signalling that the meaning of time will be changed around the judgment and coming of the Lord. There are references to a trumpet sounding at the Lord's return (Mt.

24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16), but the *last* trumpet suggests a series. This is reason for thinking that the Apocalypse was given at an early stage and the vision of the trumpets (Rev. 10:7) was known to the initial readership.

*For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed-* For the difference between the "change" and being made "incorruptible", see on :51.

"In a moment... the dead shall be raised incorruptible (i.e.) we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). "The dead" here refers to the group of dead believers who will be found worthy. Their immortality will be granted to them together, as a group, "in a moment". Yet in a sense we will each receive our reward immediately after our interview with the Lord- another powerful indicator that the meaning of time must be collapsed at the day of judgment. The words of Mt. 25:34 are spoken collectively: "Come, ye (not 'thou', singular) blessed... ye gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". The corruption and incorruption may refer to the sense that we are now corruptible, we can sin and be corrupted. But the resurrected [i.e. glorified] believers who experience the "resurrection to life" will not be corruptible, they will be unable to sin. See on :42, :43 and :44.

However, this verse has been misread as meaning that all who are resurrected shall emerge from the grave immortal, meaning that the judgment is only for the dividing up of rewards rather than the granting of immortality to mortal bodies. There are a number of objections to this interpretation from other parts of Scripture:

- "We shall all be *changed*... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is *swallowed up* in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54). The rebuilding / raising up incorruptible is the "change", the mortal putting on immortality, death being swallowed up. All these phrases are rather uncomfortable within a scenario of immortal emergence from the grave. If the mortal bodies of saints are even further humbled before the piercing analysis of the judgment seat and *then* swallowed up in victory, clothed upon with immortality- these words find their natural fulfilment.

- Paul speaks of us being *clothed upon* with immortality at the judgment (2 Cor. 5:2,4,10 RV), as if we exist in a form which lacks the clothing of immortality, but is then 'clothed upon'.

- At the Lord's coming, our vile body will be changed to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:20,21).

- God will quicken our *mortal bodies* (Rom. 8:11). The mortal bodies of Paul and the Romans have yet to be quickened; therefore they must be resurrected mortal and then quickened. However, it could be that Rom. 8:11 is one of several expectations of the second coming within the lifetime of the first century believers.

- At the judgment seat, we will receive a recompense for the things we have done, in a bodily form (2 Cor. 5:10). Of the flesh we will reap corruption, of the spirit: life everlasting (Gal. 6:7,8).

- We *will be* justified and *be* condemned by our account at the day of judgment- not at resurrection (Mt. 12:36,37).

- The nobleman came, called his servants, reckoned with them, and only then was taken from the slothful servant even that which he seemed to have- at the judgment, not the resurrection (Lk. 19:12-26). The unprofitable are cast into outer darkness at the judgment, not the

resurrection.

- The sheep go away *into life eternal* and the goats *go away into death*- after the judgment process. It is hard to square this with immortal emergence before the judgment.

- "Come, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) is spoken at the end of the judgment process.

Only then will the faithful inherit the Kingdom and thereby receive immortality.

- The Lord will raise up the dead and quicken (i.e. immortalise) whom He will of those He has raised up (Jn. 5:21).

- 1 Thess. 4:17 teaches that the dead are raised and go with the living to the judgment, where sheep and goats are divided finally. It seems inappropriate for already immortalised believers to be judged and rewarded.

- When a man is tried (always elsewhere translated "approved") he will receive the crown on life- the crown which will be given at the last day (James 1:12 cp. 2 Tim. 4:8). The approval is surely not in the physical fact of resurrection- for the rejected will also experience this.

- If immortality is given at the resurrection rather than at the judgment, we would have to read 'resurrection' as a one off act; and yet it evidently refers to a process, something more than the act of coming out of the grave. The fact there will not be marriage "in the resurrection" is proof enough of this- it refers to more than the act of coming out of the grave. Also, if immortality is not given at the judgment, this creates a problem in respect of those who are alive at the Lord's return. Are we to believe that they will just be made immortal in a flash when the Lord comes, with no judgment?

- Immortal emergence inevitably means that men live with no fear of judgment to come. And yet the very fact of future judgment is an imperative to repentance (Acts 17:31; 2 Pet. 3:11). Admittedly, there is the danger that judgment can be over-emphasised to the point that God seems passive now, reserving all judgment until the last day. Both extremes must be avoided.

Taking the passage as it stands, it is quite possible to place it alongside several other Pauline passages which speak of the whole process of resurrection-judgment-immortalization as one act. This may be because he sometimes writes as if he assumes his readership will all be worthy of acceptance into the Kingdom, and will not be rejected. If we see our brethren as truly in Christ and therefore acceptable with Him, clothed in His righteousness, and seeing we cannot judge in the sense of condemning them, this ought to be a pattern for us. Judgment in the sense of condemnation will not pass upon those who will be in the Kingdom, although this doesn't mean that therefore they will not stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Gospels likewise speak of both the resurrection and the judgment process as occurring at "the last day" (Jn. 11:24; 12:48); as if the "resurrection" includes the judgment process. The way 'the resurrection' can be 'better' or 'worse' (Heb. 11:35) and of two kinds (Jn. 5:29) further indicates that the term cannot be limited to just the emergence from the ground.

However, there is another reason why Paul wrote as he did. I have shown elsewhere that the meaning of time will be collapsed at the period of the Lord's return and judgment. It is therefore quite possible that in terms of time as we know it, the resurrection-judgment-immortalization process will take place in a micro second. To an onlooker, there would appear to be immortal emergence (cp. how the record of creation is described as an onlooker would have seen it). But if we were to break the process down, there would be the resurrection, coming forth as a mortal body, gathering to judgment, discussion with the judge, giving of reward, immortalization. Paul saw the trumpet blast as the signal of both the call to judgment (1 Thess. 4:17) and also the moment of glorification (1 Cor. 15:52).



Against the proposition that "raised incorruptible" in 1 Cor. 15:52 means an immortal emergence in theological terms, the following points should be considered:

- Paul doesn't say 'the dead are *resurrected* incorruptible', but rather that they are *raised* (Gk. *egeiro*) incorruptible. If he referred to actual resurrection, he would surely have used the word *anastasis*. But he doesn't. *Egeiro* is used of rising up from sickness (Mk. 1:37), rising in judgment (Mt. 12:42), the raising up of men as prophets (Mt. 11:11), raising up a Saviour (Lk. 1:69), the raising up of Pharaoh to do God's will (Rom. 9:17), to rise up against, to raise up a building. These are all processes leading to a completed action, not a simple one time action. Therefore it is not unreasonable to interpret Paul's words as does John Thomas: 'the dead shall be rebuilt incorruptible', referring to the whole process rather than just the coming out of the ground.

- The seed is sown "a natural body" (1 Cor. 15:44)- a *psuchikon soma*, a living body. This raises a question as to whether Paul is really talking about a *dead* body going into the grave and then coming out immortal. 1 Cor. 15:36 speaks of the seed as being sown, being scattered, right now (*speiro* in the active voice). This is almost certainly one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- this time, to the parable of the sower. The seed is being sown now, and we respond to it. The seed is sown in the corruption, dishonour and weakness of this present nature (15:42,43). But that seed ("it") will be raised / rebuilt in an incorruptible, glorious body; this is the power of the seed of the Gospel.

All this reasoning is in the context of 1 Cor. 15:35,36: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool...". To max out on the exact form in which we emerge from the grave is *foolish*, Paul says. And yet some of us have done just that. Surely Paul is saying 'Don't get distracted by this issue as a physicality *in itself*'. The point is, as the seed of the Gospel is sown in you day by day, so in a corresponding way you will be rebuilt in the glory of the resurrection. So sow to the spirit, for as you sow you will reap (cp. Gal. 6:7,8).

15:53 *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*- When the Lord spoke of how the faithful will be clothed by Him in a robe (Mt. 22:11; Lk. 15:22), He is connecting with the usage of "clothing" as a symbol of the covering of righteousness which He gives, and which also represents the immortality of the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:2-5). The choice of clothing as a symbol is significant; the robe covered all the body, except the face. The individuality of the believer still remains, in the eyes of Christ. What we sow in this life, we will receive in the relationships we have in the Kingdom; there will be something totally individual about our spirituality then, and it will be a reflection of our present spiritual struggles. This is Paul's point in the parable of the seed going into the ground and rising again, with a new body, but still related to the original seed which was sown.

15:54- see on Rom. 1:3.

*But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality*- Note the difference between the mortal and the corruptible. I have argued above that the resurrection transformation will have both a physical and moral aspect; perhaps these two aspects are comprehended here.

*Then shall come to fulfilment the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory-* The same words for "put on", "mortal" and "swallowed up" are found later to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 5:4: "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life". "Swallowed up in victory" is matched by "swallowed up by [immortal] life". The eternal life is the victory- the thrill of victory shall be eternal, rather than a momentary buzz of kudos at the moment of resurrection. The quotation from Is. 25:8 is surrounded by a context which speaks of a very literal manifestation of God upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and the Messianic banquet being held there, which the breaking of bread meeting looks forward to: "In this mountain Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines. He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces. He will take the reproach of His people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it. It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation! For in this mountain the hand of Yahweh will rest". The victory upon Mount Zion had its first application to the salvation of Judah from the Assyrians at Hezekiah's time. This looked forward to the latter day salvation of all God's Israel from death itself.

15:55 *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*- We have noted from :43 onwards that resurrection is going to be both a physical and moral transformation, and that the spiritually incomplete shall be transformed to perfection by it. This quotation from Hos. 13:14 LXX is also in this context. For the book of Hosea is about Hosea's desperate hope for the redemption of his prostitute wife Gomer, in which we see God's loving hope for the salvation of His wayward people. The book contains paradoxical statements about how God on one hand notices and shall judge the unfaithfulness of His people; and yet mixed within those judgments is a tender desire to save them all the same. This was reflected in Hosea's love for his faithless wife. This is exactly what we see in Paul's feelings for the Corinthians.

15:56 *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law-* Again we see Paul addressing the problem of the Judaizers in Corinth. It was law which gave power and actuality to sin, as Paul noticed in his own experience throughout Romans 7, e.g. "I had not known sin, except through the law. For I had not known coveting, except the law had said: You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7). The "victory" given against sin was through the abrogation of law; for we are now "not under law" (Rom. 6:14). If there is a cosmic 'satan' responsible for sin and death, now would be the time, surely, for Paul to refer to it. But instead we see a reference only to sin and death. Death is personified, as a snake, which achieves its kill by the venom of sin.

15:57 *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ-* This is the language of Rom. 7:25, where Paul rejoices that despite our sin and its power, we are delivered through our Lord Jesus. We lost... but we are given victory, on account of being in the Lord Jesus. His victory is therefore legitimately counted as ours. Again we note the present tense: "Gives us the victory", not "Will give us the victory". The essence of resurrection is to be felt and known in our lives right now.

There were in the early church standard acclamations or doxologies which may reflect common phrases used in prayers throughout the early brotherhood- just as there are certain

phrases used in prayers throughout the world today. “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” is an acclamation that crops in up in some form or other in 1 Cor. 15:57; Rom. 6:17; 7:25; 2 Cor. 2:14; 8:16; 9:15. Likewise “God... to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 3:15; Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Eph. 3:21; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Tim. 1:17).

15:58- see on 2 Cor. 8:7.

*Therefore my beloved brothers, be steadfast, unmoveable-* "Beloved brothers" is the language of endearment, and given their known weaknesses, could only have been possible because Paul believed that they would ultimately be changed from their weaknesses. All the angst about separating from apostate brethren dissipates once we accept that since we cannot condemn baptized believers, we are to rejoice in the reality of resurrection meaning both moral and physical transformation. The sure hope ahead ought to inspire stability; nothing, no false teaching, no temptation, no depression at failure, should be able to move us away from that hope.

*Always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour in the Lord is not in vain-* We are to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” Jesus, knowing it is never in vain. And yet it is the work of preaching which has just been defined as not being in vain (:14); the more abounding labour is in the work of preaching (:10). Preaching is the work of the Lord Jesus in that He is working through us to do His saving work, and therefore we ought to be constantly active in His cause. Paul's preaching ministry was proportional to the grace he had received, and in this he saw himself as a pattern to us all (1 Tim. 1:12-16). He makes the connection even more explicit in his argument in 1 Cor. 15:10 and 58: “His grace which was bestowed upon me was *not in vain*; but I *laboured* more *abundantly* than they all” is then applied to each of us, in the final, gripping climax of his argument: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always *abounding* [as Paul did] in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your *labour is not in vain*”. Paul says that God's grace to him “was not in vain”, in that he *laboured* more abundantly than any in preaching. Yet within the same chapter, Paul urges us his readers that our faith and *labour* is also “not in vain”; the connection seems to be that he responded to grace by *labouring* in preaching, and he speaks as if each of the Corinthians likewise will not *labour* in vain in this way (1 Cor. 15:2,10,58). He clearly sees himself as a pattern of responding to grace by preaching to others.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *Now concerning the collection for the saints, do as I instructed the churches in Galatia-* "The collection" with the article refers to Paul's almost obsessive plan to raise money from his Gentile converts in order to support the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem in time of famine and persecution. Throughout my commentary on Acts I make the point that this plan was forced through by Paul at all stages, and never really came to fruition nor is there any record of the collection being accepted. Paul wanted those at Corinth to do as the churches in Galatia- because he wanted the collection to be a uniform gift from as many Gentile churches as possible. Whether Paul's 'instruction' about this matter was inspired or simply from himself... makes an interesting question to contemplate.

16:2- see on Acts 2:45.

*Upon the first day of the week let each one of you, as your income allows, put some money aside and store it up so that no collections are needed when I come-* Paul didn't want them to take up one big collection when he was personally present, because this might mean that their motivation was emotional. Giving should be from the heart but also not on the cusp of emotional or personal pressure. "Each one of you" may suggest that Paul was wanting each of them, even the very poor, to donate something- and not to leave the giving to a few. "As your income allows" suggests giving should not be irresponsible. And it is emotional, cusp-of-the-moment motivations which lead to irresponsible giving. "Lay by him in store" (AV) suggests they were not to put money into a church collection bag which was then held by a treasurer, but were to save the money themselves, and then donate it when Paul arrived in person. The giving envisaged was therefore all very personal. The two Greek words in this phrase "lay by him in store" are taken exactly from the Lord's teaching in Lk. 12:21 about the man who "lays up treasures for himself" but was not rich towards God. The same word for "put... aside [money]" is translated "lay up" in the Lord's appeal to lay up wealth in Heaven and not on earth (Mt. 6:19,20). Paul is clearly teaching that such 'saving up' of their pennies in order to give to the poor Jewish brethren was indeed building up wealth before God in Heaven.

16:3 *And when I arrive, whomsoever you shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your generosity to Jerusalem-* The approval was to be from them, and not of Paul's appointment. He was very wise in these things. They were to individually save their spare cash each week (see on :2) and then it would be gathered together when Paul arrived; and then it was to be transported by people other than Paul to Jerusalem, even if Paul accompanied them (:4). Paul was after all under false accusation of fraud, and he acted appropriately. "Generosity" is *charis*, "grace". God's gift or generosity to us elicits grace / generosity from us to others. Paul opened his letter by reminding them of the grace given them (1:4); their grace to others was therefore an appropriate response. And he will conclude with the desire that the Lord's grace will continue with them (16:23).

16:4 *And if it be fitting for me to go also, they shall go with me-* As noted on :3, Paul asked for the gathering together of everyone's individual donations to be made when he arrived, and for the church to appoint brethren to carry it to Jerusalem. Paul was carefully separating himself from handling the cash. He considered this entire project such a holy thing that he would only accompany the bearers of the funds if he were felt worthy [a better translation than "fitting"] to travel with them. He felt his worthiness to be part of the project [even though it was of his own devising] was in question; he felt he would accompany the gift if he were worthy of doing so.

16:5 *But I will come to you, when I shall have passed through Macedonia (for I plan to pass through Macedonia)*- Paul's travel plans were not dictated to him by the Lord or direct Spirit inspiration. He had to make his own plans in response to his perception of the Lord's calling and what he thought was best for the progress of the Lord's work. And sometimes his intentions didn't work out- for 2 Cor. 1:15-17 imply that this intended visit didn't happen, leading to the accusation that Paul was fickle and not serious in his promises. The reason he gives in 2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1 was that he wanted to spare them, as if he knew that if he came to them and they had adequately repented, then the Lord would use him through the Spirit to judge them severely in some way.

16:6 *And perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey*- He planned to "pass through" Macedonia (:5), but to for an extended period "stay with you" (as :7). Because of their evident weaknesses and the possibility they would miss the path to salvation, Paul wanted to make a special effort for them. 2 Cor. 1:16 says he intended to visit them twice, on the way to and from Macedonia; and that he wanted to go from Corinth directly to Judea. "Help me on my journey" refers to the practice of accompanying a departing visitor for the first part of their journey and wishing them God's blessing- as in :11.

*Wherever I go further*- This not to be read as a vague wish; rather is it clear from :3 and 2 Cor. 1:16 that he intended to go from them to Jerusalem with the brethren who were carrying the collection money. Perhaps one reason he changed his plans because he knew the collection money was not going to be ready, and he would feel the need to discipline them for this.

16:7 *But I do not wish to see you just in passing; I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permit*- See on :6. His special concern for Corinth is apparent, because he intended to "pass through" Macedonia (:5), but not just pass them by, but rather stay longer with them. He explained in 12:23 that the weaker parts of the body require the greatest attention; and he put this into practice in his own attitude to the very weak church in Corinth.

16:8 *But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost*- Paul was writing to them from Ephesus (which was in Asia, hence the greetings sent from the churches in Asia, :19).

16:9 *For a great door for effective work has opened to me, but there are many adversaries*- An insight into Paul's attitude is revealed in the way he speaks of how a door of preaching opportunity had been opened to him at Ephesus. Surely he is alluding to the Lord's words about knocking in prayer, and a door is opened. He had presumably prayed for the opportunity to spread the word in Ephesus, and he was given the positive answer. We likewise should be praying systematically for the people in our lives, for unreached nations and peoples. Yet the language of a door being opened sends us to Acts 14:27, where the response of the Gentiles to Paul's missionary work is likewise spoken of as a door being opened- presumably, meaning that here was an answer to prayer for response. A door was opened at Troas, we assume also because of sustained prayer beforehand (2 Cor. 2:12). We must ask whether we really desire the Gospel to spread; if we do, it will be reflected in our prayer life. Paul intended to stay longer in Ephesus rather than just passing through (see on

:6) because there were many adversaries. He didn't reason that because there was opposition, this was a 'sign' that he should move on.

16:10 *Now if Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear while he is with you. For he does the work of the Lord, as I do-* The "if" continues the theme of the plans of these early Christians not being at all set in stone or somehow set in stone by God's will. They used their initiative in planning as they thought best, and those plans were therefore at times open ended. The basis for acceptance of Timothy was that he did the work of the Lord Jesus- the Lord was working through him, and that was a good enough reason for believers to work with Timothy. This sets a powerful challenge to the parochialism of many in the Lord's body today. Paul writes to Timothy urging him not to fear, and yet he tries to pave the way so that Timothy would have no reason to fear. Paul's "work of the Lord" was the Corinthians (9:1 "Are you not my work in the Lord?"), and Timothy was sharing in this.

16:11 *Let no one despise him. But set him forward on his journey in peace, that he may come to me. For I expect him with the brothers-* Paul told Timothy to let no one despise him (see on 1 Tim. 4:12). But again Paul was at pains to remove the experience from Timothy; his sensitivity towards Timothy is truly brotherly. The practice of 'setting forward on a journey' implied spiritual blessing- see on :6. Paul expected Timothy to accompany "the brothers" whom Corinth would appoint to carry the collected money to Jerusalem (:3). I get the impression of Paul making elaborate plans, 'expecting' things to happen- when in fact the whole thing barely got off the ground. For he has to delicately write to them in 2 Corinthians about the fact they have not in fact raised any money to send. As explained in the commentary on Acts, I get the impression that time and again, Paul is trying to force through his pet project, and he became obsessive about it, when there was no real enthusiasm for it.

16:12 *But as touching Apollos the brother, I pleaded with him to come to you with the brothers; but he was unwilling to come right now, but he will come when he shall have the opportunity-* "The brothers" are surely those of :11- the brothers whom Corinth were to appoint to bring the collected funds to Jerusalem (:3). The translation "come to you" could as well be translated 'to accompany with', as if Apollos was intended to hover around them, *pros* them. Again we see Paul running ahead of himself. The funds had not been collected, and in fact would not be, so it seems from 2 Corinthians. But he asks the church to appoint brothers to carry the funds to Jerusalem, asks the church to send Timothy with those brothers, and now laments that he had asked Apollos to also accompany them, but he had declined. Not surprisingly- for it was evident that Corinth would unlikely raise the funds, and by the time of 2 Corinthians they had not done so, despite Paul's enthusiastic boasting to others about their willingness to do so. The whole impression is of a single individual obsessed with a pet project, and it doesn't quite work out. Apollos was unwilling to give in to Paul's pleading to join in this project. And yet Paul claims that "he will come when he shall have the opportunity". It is logical to assume that Apollos would have declined an invitation to go to Corinth and accompany brethren to Jerusalem with money which had not been collected, probably never would be, and without the blessing of the Corinthian church, who were surely known as being anti-Paul and a difficult group. But Paul likes to interpret this as 'He can't come at this moment, but he will come when he gets half the chance'. If Paul pleaded with Apollos to come but he declined, then Paul obviously considered that Apollos could make the journey, he could find the time if he wished. But Paul over generously concludes that Apollos does in fact want to come, 'it's just that he's busy right now'. This kind of obsessive even autistic focus can be detected in the sentence structure and path of logic Paul employs in

some of his writing. He was inspired and indeed a wonderful brother, but this didn't make him anything less than human.

16:13 *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong-* These are all military metaphors. Keeping awake, standing still as if on parade, fight as true men, be strengthened. But these metaphors are purposefully juxtaposed with doing all things in love (:14). The true manliness, the real bravery and strength- was to live in love. "Be strong" is literally 'be strengthened / empowered'. This has been the whole theme of the letter- they had been given the Spirit, but were refusing to let it work and empower them. The same word is used in Eph. 3:16: "*Be strengthened* with power through His Spirit in the inner man". This refers to the internal gift of the Spirit "in the inner man" which is available to this day.

16:14 *Let all you do be done in love-* See on :13 for the purposeful juxtaposition with the military metaphors just used. The real strength is in the life of love. Chapter 13 has underlined the utter supremacy of love and Paul repeats this in concluding the letter. Perhaps the immediate reference is to the collection for the poor Jewish brethren which Paul wished them to make; this whole project was to be done in love and from no other motive.

16:15 *You know the family of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia-* It depends how we define Achaia or "Asia", because Rom. 16:5 says that Epaenetus was the first-fruit of Achaia. Perhaps Epaenetus was one of the extended family of Stephanas, perhaps a slave within it. The first convert in Asia, therefore, was an obscure slave. This is typical of how God works with the small things in human eyes.

*And that they have devoted themselves to serving the saints; now I beseech you, brothers-* There is a word play here, masked in the translations: the household of Stephanas 'devoted' themselves to the Lord's service (Gk. *tasso*), and the ecclesia is bidden "submit" (Gk. *hupotasso*) to them (:16). Enthusiastic service by individuals truly influences the whole community. "Serving the saints" is literally "the ministry of the saints", and this term is used specifically about the Jerusalem poor fund project (Rom. 15:31; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1,12). Paul speaks highly of the family of Stephanas because they have devoted themselves to Paul's project; perhaps that is why he calls them "the firstfruits of Achaia" when in fact Epaenetus was (Rom. 16:5).

16:16 *You also be in subjection to such, and to everyone that helps in the work and labours-* See on :15. As noted on :10, all who help the Lord's work are to be respected. "The work" has been defined in :10 as the Lord's work. On one hand, 'God requires not help from man'. And yet He limits Himself, or allows Himself to be limited, in that He has genuinely delegated His work to men. In this sense the men of Meroz were cursed for not 'coming to the help of the Lord' (Jud. 5:23). Here too, those who help the Lord's work are to be respected and supported. But the specific work of the Lord was "the ministry" of the Jerusalem Poor Fund- see on :15. Paul asks the Corinthians to be obedient and submissive to Stephanus as the enthusiast and local coordinator. Anyone who assisted in that ministry, Paul considered worthy of respect and being obeyed.

16:17 *I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. For what was lacking on your part they supplied-* Paul says elsewhere that he did not take material assistance from Corinth. The Stephanas is surely the same of :15 who had devoted himself to Paul's pet

project of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. So perhaps Stephanas brought with him some donation for the fund- and thus caused Paul much joy. We could also assume that these three from Corinth came to visit Paul in order to carry the Corinthians' letter to Paul.

16:18 *They refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, acknowledge those that are such-* Paul sees his spirit as being that of the Corinthians'. He felt at least potentially a unity of the spirit between him and them. If the visitors had refreshed Paul's spirit, then they had refreshed the spirit of the Corinthians. Paul has earlier mentioned this in 5:3: "For I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing". There was a Spirit gift of knowledge which resulted in Paul being as it were virtually present; he was not therefore judging from a distance on the basis of gossip. Hence he can write in 5:4 that "when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do)". And he alludes to the same phenomenon in 2 Cor. 13:2 "I tell you as if I were present". This ability to be virtually present is used supremely by the Lord, whose presence is to be found in our lives and where two or three are gathered together. If Paul knew this case by the Spirit and was spiritually present in their gatherings to discuss the matter; how much more the Lord Himself. And as his spirit could be united with that of the Corinthians, how much more can the Lord's spirit intertwine with ours.

However one surely detects in the whole reasoning here a position whereby whoever was supportive of Paul's Jerusalem poor fund project was going to be commended. And it seems that on that basis, Paul asks the Corinthians to "acknowledge" or respect those three brothers. Paul assumes that his joy at their donation towards the project should be the joy of all the Corinthians. He is very imposing of his enthusiasm upon others.

16:19- see on Acts 20:20.

*The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house-* These churches in Asia were presumably where Paul was located when writing the letter. It would seem more logical to assume he was in Ephesus, where Aquila and Prisca were (cp Acts 16:6; 18:26). This means we should reject the note appended to the KJV to the effect the letter was written from Philippi.

16:20- see on Rom. 16:16.

*All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss-* Given the sexual immorality in the church (see on chapters 5 and 6), Paul had to emphasize a *holy* kiss. But greeting by kissing was only acceptable in the first century between those of the same social class. To suggest church members all kissed each other was radical- for a slave to kiss a master, a Jew to kiss a Gentile etc. Justin Martyr (Apology) claims that it was a well known and strange characteristic for the early Christians to kiss each other in their religious assemblies. We ask whether our love and unity leaves such a noticeable impression these days.

16:21 *The greeting of me Paul with my own hand-* Perhaps suggesting there had been false letters supposedly from Paul (2 Thess. 2:2).



16:22 *If anyone loves not the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha-* Those who departed from the faith didn't just drift away; they were formally pronounced *anathema* ("accursed"), delivered unto the satan of this world. Perhaps Paul had in view those in the church who claimed they had Spirit gift revelation to pronounce Jesus accursed (Gk. *anathema*, 1 Cor. 12:3). Those who said this of the Lord would themselves be accursed. The appeal for the Lord to come, "Maranatha", follows straight on. It is a willing of the Lord's judgment to come, just as David in the Psalms was eager for judgment day to come and resolve all issues of apostasy amongst God's people. "Anathema" was a synagogue term for total excommunication. Yet Paul was very open to fellowship with all at Corinth despite their apostasy. So I suggest he is saying that those who were in the church but didn't love the Lord would be anathema, "accursed", when the Lord returns; and the Corinthians were not to follow the synagogue pattern of labelling some as *anathema* according to their own judgment. "Maranatha" was likely a watch word used amongst the believers when parting with each other. They greeted with a "holy kiss", and parted with the term "Maranatha", a longing for the Lord's coming.

16:23 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you-* "Grace", *charis*, is used so often to refer to the gift of the Spirit. Paul wished that the Spirit's work of internal transformation would continue with them. For this really was his only answer to all their moral and doctrinal problems.

16:24 *My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen-* Given the major moral and doctrinal problems in Corinth, it is highly significant that Paul does not pronounce himself in fellowship with only some of them. He assures *all* of them of his love.

## The New European Bible Commentary: 2 Corinthians

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### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*And Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia-* The addition of "all the saints" in Achaia could be because the Gospel had spread there since the time of the first letter. But I suggest that 2 Corinthians is largely concerned with the issues surrounding the Jerusalem poor fund, and Paul wished that all the Gentiles in all Achaia would contribute to this fund.

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* Grace, *charis*, or gift, refers often to the gift of internal spiritual strengthening which the Father and Son wish to share with their people. And knowing the unspirituality of many at Corinth, Paul truly wishes the operation of the Spirit in their hearts.

1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort-* The reference to comfort being sent from the Father is surely a reference to the promise of the Comforter, a personification of the Holy Spirit given by the Lord Jesus, for the internal strengthening of believers. The comforter was to operate within the hearts of the Lord's people (Jn. 14:17). The theme of 'comfort' which Paul now develops may also be a reflection of his gratitude to gracious Barnabas for all he had done for Paul- he was "the son of comfort", a human form of God's comfort (Acts 4:36).

1:3-7 is in poetic form. It seems that hymns developed in the early church, fragments of which are found in the poems of 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Eph. 1:13,14; 5:14; Phil. 2:6-12; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:4 and elsewhere.

1:4 *Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those that are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God-* Our experiences elicit "comfort" spiritually from God, which we are then to mediate on to others who suffer our same afflictions. Paul could therefore speak of how "we were comforted in your comfort" (2 Cor. 7:13). But we must allow the intended flow of the Spirit to occur. Paul

concludes the Corinthian correspondence by appealing for them to "be comforted" (2 Cor. 13:11), to allow the operation of the process of comfort, the flow of the Spirit, the work of the Comforter through the members of Christ's body.

This principle is why experiences repeat between the lives of God's children. Our experiences connect with those of Biblical characters- and thus the Biblical records become alive and intensely personal for each of us. And we see similarities in patterns and experiences between our lives and those of others contemporary with us. This is surely to enable the principle of 2 Cor. 1:4- that if we suffer anything, it is so that we can mediate comfort to those who suffer as we do. To go into our shells and not do this not only makes our own sufferings harder, but frustrates the very purpose of them. This is the whole purpose of fellowship, of getting to know each other, of meeting together. The repeating similarities between our lives and those of others also reveal to us that God at times arranges for us to suffer from our *alter ego*- persons who behave similarly to us, and who through those similarities cause us suffering. In this way we are taught the error of our ways, both past and present. It seems that Jacob the deceiver suffered in this way from Laban the deceiver- in order to teach him and cause his spiritual growth. For example, as Jacob deceived his blind father relating to an important family matter, so Laban deceived Jacob in the darkness of the wedding night. Esau once begged food of Jacob, and he deceived him cruelly. As an old man, Jacob twice had to beg food from the estranged brother, his own son Joseph. No wonder he so tried not to have to send his sons to Egypt to beg for food. He was being taught- even after all those years- how Esau his brother had felt.

Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others. Consider too how the palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to teach others that Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:2-6).

So if we suffer anything, it is so that ultimately *others* may be comforted in our comfort. True Christianity, authentic relationship with God, simply can't be lived out in isolation, with us asking God for things and Him giving them to us just for us. We need to discern how *others* will be affected by our experience of answered prayer, and bear this in mind when formulating our prayers. And all this is surely the answer to the cynic's complaint that prayer is essentially selfish. It can be, it too often is; but Biblical prayer is not at all. In words which need reading twice, Elizabeth O'Connor drives the point home in *Journey Outward*: "If engagement with ourselves does not push back horizons so that we see neighbours we did not see before, then we need to examine the appointments kept with self. If prayer does not drive us into some concrete involvement at a point of the world's need, then we must question prayer... the inner life is not nurtured in order to hug to oneself some secret gain". The Psalms have all this as a major theme.

1:5- see on Acts 9:16.

*For as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, even so our comfort is also in abundance through Christ-* Our trials are specially designed so that we *may* give comfort to others who suffer in essence the same experiences- and this is how "our comfort aboundeth through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:4,5 RV). He is the comforter insofar as His brethren minister that comfort which He potentially enables them to minister. As we partake in the Lord's sufferings, so we partake of the comfort which is in Him- but which is ministered through the loving care of those in Him (2 Cor. 1:7). This is why any attitude of insularity is totally impossible for the true brother or sister in Christ. Behind every human face, there is a tragedy

behind the brave façade which is put up. Almost everybody has been bruised by life, and is feeling the pressure of temptation or defeat, depression, loneliness or despair. It's true that some need to be disturbed from their complacency, but the vast majority need above all else to be given by us *the comfort of God's love*. People, all people (not just our brethren) are desperate for real comfort and compassion. And it is up to us to mediate it to them.

*1:6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which works in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer-* It could be argued that *all* our experiences are in order that we might be able to give out to others from our own experience of God's grace (2 Cor. 1:4-6). Paul will use the same words to say that he "begs" [s.w. "comfort"] the Corinthians to "comfort" the disciplined brother by receiving him back (2 Cor. 2:7,8). Paul uses the same word to say that God was begging or comforting the Corinthians through him (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1). "The same sufferings" doesn't necessarily mean that we shall have identical sufferings to each other. The sufferings in view are those of the Lord Jesus mentioned in :5. Both Paul and the Corinthians were enduring the same sufferings- in that all their sufferings were those of the Lord Jesus. But the comfort, the power of the Spirit, is only mediated if there is some desire for it by those receiving it. The Spirit "comfort" is made effective (Gk.; NEV "which works") only if we patiently endure and participate in the Lord's sufferings. 1 Corinthians opened by stating that Corinth had received the Spirit; but 1 Cor. 3:1 and the rest of the letter is clear that they were "not spiritual". The Spirit is given- but it must be made effectual, the potential must be released, by our willing acceptance of it.

*1:7 And our hope for you is steadfast-* The Greek idea of *elpis*, "hope", is not a hope for the best, a kind of optimism that perhaps all might turn out all right. The idea is rather of a confident expectation; and considering the apostasy of the Corinthians, that is quite something. Paul refuses to condemn anyone who has been baptized into Christ and is therefore a partaker in His death and the Spirit-comfort which He makes available. And because Paul will not pre-judge the final judgement, his hope / expectation for them was "steadfast"

*Knowing that, as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also are you of the comfort-* The idea may be that *if or insofar* as they shared in the Lord's sufferings (:5), willingly understanding their experiences as part of His- then they would share in "the comfort", the Comforter, the gift of the Spirit, His life now mediated into the hearts and lives of those open it. If we share in His death, we share in His life. That is the basic significance of baptism, but the principle is ongoing throughout our lives. The association with His life is not simply in that we have hope of a future bodily resurrection, but in that His living, His life, becomes manifest in our mortal flesh right now (2 Cor. 4:11); we live in *newness* of life after baptism (Rom. 6:4).

*1:8 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant in regards to the hardships which we encountered in Asia-* Paul reminds them of his sufferings in the context of wanting to comfort them. For he has just outlined God's principle of how suffering is experienced in order that we might comfort others. His affliction is for their comfort (:6) and so he doesn't wish them to be ignorant of how much hardship he encountered in Asia.

*We were weighed down exceedingly-* This is the term used by the Lord in predicting what would happen to the believers immediately prior to His return (Mt. 24:9,21,29). Some of the preconditions for the Lord's return in AD70 were indeed fulfilled, and so Paul eagerly anticipated it. But there were other preconditions which were not fulfilled, and therefore His coming was delayed until our last days.

*Beyond our power-* The phrase is only used again in the NT in 2 Cor. 8:3. The Macedonians were generous to the Jerusalem Poor Fund beyond their natural power or ability. Paul is urging the Corinthians to learn from his example, and theirs too- that in the power of the Spirit we can do what would be beyond our own *dunamis*. In Paul's thought, what is beyond *human* power is the Holy Spirit, the power of God. The Holy Spirit and the power [*dunamis*] of God are paralleled in Lk. 1:35; 4:14. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the source of *dunamis*, power (Eph. 3:16; Rom. 15:13; 2 Tim. 1:7). In these passages the Spirit gives psychological, internal power.

*So much so that we feared even for our lives-* "Feared" is better "despaired", and the Greek word is only again used when Paul writes that through the power of the Spirit he does not despair despite all sufferings (2 Cor. 4:8). He is describing here in this opening chapter his natural powerless situation, but with the implication that the power of the Spirit changes all that. And although the Corinthians had received potentially the Spirit (1 Cor. 1), they were not making use of that potential. And Paul urges them to follow his example in doing so.

1:9 *Yes, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in the God who raises the dead-* The standard interpretation of this seems to be that when Paul asked himself as to whether he would die, he found the answer ["sentence"] that he would. But this is a very odd way of putting it; and why use the language of the courtroom, let alone a phrase taken from Jewish commentary and midrash on Genesis 3. This sentence of death can be read as an allusion to the sentence which passed upon all men as a result of Adam's sin. Paul is saying that all our sufferings are common in that we each have the same sentence of death. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves ["in our hearts we felt the sentence of death", NIV], *that* we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9 AV). The fact we are going to die, relatively soon, and lie unconscious... drives the man who seriously believes it to faith in the God of resurrection. It seems that at a time of great physical distress, Paul was made to realize that in fact he had "the sentence of death" within him, he was under the curse of mortality, and this led him to a hopeful faith that God would preserve him from the ultimate "so great a death" as well as from the immediate problems. Death being like a sleep, it follows that judgment day is our next conscious experience after death. Because death is an ever more likely possibility for us, our judgment is effectively *almost upon us*. And we must live with and in that knowledge. The tragic brevity of life means that "childhood and youth are vanity", we should quit the time wasting follies of youth or overgrown childhood (and the modern world is full of this), and therefore too "remove anger from thy heart and put away evil from thy flesh" (Ecc. 11:10 AVmg.). Ecclesiastes uses the mortality of man not only as an appeal to work for our creator, but to simply have faith in His existence.

1:10 *Who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver. On whom we have set our hope, that He will also still deliver us-* The "great death" from which Paul was delivered refers to the death sentence received in Asia, apparently to fight to the death with wild animals in the arena, which sentence Paul was miraculously delivered from (see on 1 Cor. 15:32). He uses the same Greek word for "deliver" in reminiscing how there "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17). "And will deliver" would then refer to Paul's hope of resurrection. For as noted on :9, he is reasoning that no matter how dramatic are our brushes with death in this life, we all have the sentence of death within us. Paul hopes that the Lord will continue to 'deliver him from evil' in this life (s.w. Mt. 6:13). But his greater hope is for the deliverance which will come at the resurrection, when we shall be delivered "from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24).

1:11 *You also helping together on our behalf by your prayers, so that it works out that for the*

*gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf-* Paul has in view an upcoming evil that he needed deliverance from. He asks them to pray for him, on the basis that the gift of salvation would then lead to all who had prayed for it then thanking God for it, and thus God would be glorified. But to describe his hoped for deliverance as a "gift" may seem strange- until we realize that Paul is framing all this in language he would later use of his pet project, the Jerusalem poor fund. His idea was that if there were many contributions towards that "gift", then there would be many praises given for it. And he paves the way for that by asking them to pray for his deliverance, that he may be given a gift of deliverance, and they would all praise God for it afterwards.

The idea of "helped... by prayer for us" (2 Cor. 1:11 AV) sounds as if Paul's unaided prayers had less power than when the Corinthians were praying for him too. Stephen believed this to the point that he could pray for the forgiveness of his murderers, fully believing God could hear and grant such forgiveness. Job believed this, in that he prayed God would forgive his children in case they sinned. The friends mocked this in Job 5:4; 8:4; 17:5 and 20:10, saying that the children of the foolish die for their *own* sins, whereas, by implication, Job had figured that *his* prayers and sacrifices could gain *them* forgiveness. Yet in the end, Yahweh stated that Job had understood Him and His principles right, whereas the friends hadn't.

1:12 *For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and Godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world- and more abundantly toward you-* "Holiness" is a poor translation; most manuscripts read "simplicity". And this is the word Paul will later use about the 'simplicity' required to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund. The word means both simple and generous. I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. The Greek word translated "simplicity" occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor. Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "*the simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated

‘simple’), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not ‘simple’ or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

Our fear of what others think of us, of their reactions and possible reactions to who we are, to our words and our actions; our faithless worry about where we will find our food and clothing, how we will be cared for when we are old, whether our health will fail... all these things detract us from a simple and direct faith in the basic tenets of the Gospel, which is what should lead us to humility. “The *simplicity* that is in Christ... in *simplicity* and godly sincerity... by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world... [doing our daily work] with *singleness* [s.w. ‘simplicity’] of heart, as unto Christ” (2 Cor. 1:12; 11:3; Eph. 6:5,6). Worries about the material things of life, or deep seated doubt developed during years of atheism or wrong belief... these all so easily distract us from the simplicity of a true and humbled faith.

1:13 *For we write no other things to you, than what you read or even acknowledge, and I hope you will acknowledge to the end-* This sounds like a reference to the letters being circulated in Paul's name which were not really from him. Hence he concludes some of his letters by signing "with my own hand". Any who feel they have suffered from slander and abuse within the church should take encouragement from what Paul suffered from the Corinthians. But still he loved them because they were in Christ. Just consider what he was suffering from Corinth alone at this time:

#### **Paul: Victim Of Slander In The Church**

- Too physically weak to do the job (2 Cor. 10:10)
- Underhanded, cunning (2 Cor. 4:2 RSV)
- Tampering with God's word (2 Cor. 4:2 RSV)
- Not preaching according to the sanction of the Lord Jesus, but inventing things for himself (in the context of Gentile liberty, Gal. 1:1).
- Preaching himself as the saviour, not Christ (2 Cor. 4:5)
- Commending himself, showing himself to be so spiritually strong (2 Cor. 3:1)
- Trying to build up his own self-image with his listeners as he preached the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:5)
- Trying to domineer over his brethren (2 Cor. 1:24; 8:8 Gk.)
- Mentally unstable (2 Cor. 5:13)
- Causing others to stumble (2 Cor. 6:3)
- An imposter (2 Cor. 6:8- in the context, Paul is saying that the fact he is so maligned is a kind of proof that he really is a genuine worker for the Lord!).
- Wronging, corrupting, financially defrauding brethren (2 Cor. 7:2)
- Demanding so much money from others that they would become impoverished themselves (2 Cor. 8:13,14 J.B. Phillips)
- But not a real apostle, seeing that if he was then he would do as the Lord had bidden and receive “hire” for being a “labourer”; if he was worthy, he would have accepted

it. The fact he didn't showed he wasn't a hard labourer. This was so untrue. It's a real cruel example of slander in the church.

- He only threatened ecclesial discipline but never did anything in practice- he was all talk and no do (2 Cor. 10:1-6)
- What he wrote was in his letters was a contradiction of the person he was in practice (2 Cor. 1:13)
- He kept changing his mind over important issues (2 Cor. 1:17-19)
- They were offended that Paul didn't take money from them (2 Cor. 11:7 RSV), and yet also grudging giving money for the Jerusalem Poor Fund because the Corinthian church slandered Paul that he claimed he was only trying to get the money for himself.
- Crafty and a liar, not opening his heart to his brethren (2 Cor. 12:16 cp. 6:11)
- Preaching that we can be immoral because God's grace will cover us (Rom. 3:8)
- Preached in order to get money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12)
- Still secretly preached that circumcision was vital for salvation (Gal. 5:11).

If you can imagine where Paul might have used quotation marks, this helps to reveal certain phrases which he was probably quoting from their claims. Most of the above slander in the church was from just one ecclesia (Corinth): one can be certain that there were many other such slanders.

1:14 *As also you did once partially acknowledge us, that we are your boasting, even as you are also ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus-* Paul saw his reward as proportionate to the quality of his brethren (2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 2:16; 4:1). The nature or quality of his eternal life was bound up with whether or not they would be accepted at the day of judgment- and that surely was why Paul kept on keeping on with the Corinthians, and why we endure the whole dysfunctional story which is 'church'. With what measure we give to others in spiritual terms, we will be measured to at the judgment (Mk. 4:24 and context). 1 Cor. 3:9-15 likewise teaches that the spiritual "work" of "any man" with his brethren will be proportionate to his reward at the judgment.

1:15 *And in this confidence I had decided to come first of all to you, that you might have a second benefit-* The neat maps in our Bibles notwithstanding, it is clear that Paul had no such clear plan of where to found ecclesias. He preached in Galatia because illness required that he spend some time there, against his original intention (Gal. 4:13). He was forbidden to preach in Bithynia as he had planned, he fled to Athens for safety and ended up preaching there, then he fled from there to Corinth (Acts 16:6,7). And it seems that he was only in transit through Ephesus, but found the people responsive and therefore continued working there (Acts 18:19). Indeed, his movements were so uncertain that he was open to the charge of vacillating about his plans (2 Cor. 1:15,18). And yet it has been shown that the places where Paul founded ecclesias were strategic points, in that they were centres where different nationalities mixed, where trade routes crossed, where social and religious conditions were better than elsewhere for the spread of the Gospel. Yet this was not due to any conscious desire of Paul for this; the Lord overruled this, so that, e.g., from Thessalonica the message sounded out throughout Asia, due to the many mobile people who heard the Gospel there.

The second benefit or grace / gift may suggest that on each visit, Paul would give them a spiritual gift, just as he promised to do with the Romans in Rom. 1:11. Perhaps his physical presence was necessary because the particular Spirit gift in view would be passed on by the



laying on of hands. The two gifts would have been a result of his intended two visits to Corinth- on the way both to and from Macedonia.

1:16 *And by you to pass into Macedonia and again from Macedonia to come to you, and from you proceed on my journey to Judea-* This plan was it seems changed because he decided to go Macedonia via Troas, because a great opportunity in the Gospel had opened there (2 Cor. 2:12). The journey planned to Judea was in order to take the collection money there. Hence Paul's urging of the Macedonians to contribute. "Proceed on my journey" is literally as AV "to be brought on my way [by you] toward Judea". This alludes to the practice of walking with a departing visitor for the first part of their journey as a sign of support for the journey undertaken. And Paul says that his intention is that Corinth would in this way bless his Jerusalem mission. This was an almost obsessive interest.

1:17 *When I planned this, did I show fickleness? Or the things that I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, so that in the same breath I say, Yes, yes and then No, no?-* The change in travel plans, going to Macedonia via Troas rather than Corinth, was because of an opening for the Gospel in Troas (2:12). Yet Paul's critics interpreted this as fickleness. Any commitment to the Lord's work immediately opens us up for criticism and wilful misinterpretation of our motives. "Yes, yes" is the language of :20 about the preaching of the Lord Jesus. Not only must we preach because our Lord preached. We must witness *as He witnessed*. Paul understood us to have been anointed in a similar way to who Christ was anointed; and thereby we become witnesses of Him. In this context, he explains that he wasn't vague and uncertain in the matter of preaching; he didn't keep vacillating between yes and no because this was not how Jesus preached- in Him was "yes!" (2 Cor. 1:20,17).

1:18 *But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yes and no-* Paul's preaching was an exact transmission of the person of Jesus; He was not indecisive, He was positive; and likewise Paul's preaching of Him had the same marks. He quotes this as a counter to the criticism that he was "yes and no", a man with no sense of truth or decision. 'If I am a man in Christ, then I will axiomatically act like Him, and therefore this criticism of me *cannot* be true'. The only other references to the faithfulness of God in the NT are also in Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13). Because "God is true", therefore it ought to be axiomatic that our words are true, as those bearing His Name (so Paul argues in 2 Cor. 1:18; 11:10). It could be that although baptized, the Corinthians were still as it were testing out God, and were tempted to feel that He was not consistently reliable or trustworthy. This mentality can be found amongst many new converts today.

1:19 *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yes and no; but in him is yes-* The preaching of Paul meant that the person of the Lord Jesus was preached amongst the Corinthians. The message was not only Christ-centred, but the preachers were themselves the manifestation of the Christ they preached. We are "in Christ" to the extent that we *are* Christ to this world. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us. "The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was preached among you through us, even through me and Silvanus" (2 Cor. 1:19 RVmg.). Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians (Gal. 3:1 Gk.); to the Corinthians he was "the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RSV). Just as the Lord Jesus is always "yes" with regard to the salvation of others, so was Paul because he was in Him; and so should we be.

1:20 *For no matter how many and whatever be the promises of God, in him is the ultimate Yes!-* We know that the promises to the Jewish fathers were confirmed by the death of the Lord; and yet "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). "In

him" is put for 'on account of His death which confirmed them'. 'He' was His death and His cross. In the preceding verse, Paul has spoken of "Christ crucified". He was brought to the cross a man who had already died unto sin; and the very quick time in which He died reflected how physically worn out His body was, in reflection of how sin had virtually already been put to death in Him.

*Therefore also through him is the Amen, to the glory of God through us-* The connection between the atonement and faith in prayer is brought out in 2 Cor. 1:20 RSV: "For all the promises of God in him are yea. That is, we utter the Amen through him". The promises of God were confirmed through the Lord's death, and the fact that He died as the seed of Abraham, having taken upon Him Abraham's plural seed in representation (Rom. 15:8,9). Because of this, "we utter the Amen through [on account of being in] Him". We can heartily say 'Amen', so be it, to our prayers on account of our faith and understanding of His confirmation of God's promises. But why this laboured aside about the utter certainty of God's promises, because they have been confirmed in Christ? It is in the context of Paul urging that *his* promises are to be taken seriously and that he is not unstable or fickle. If he- and we- have had such experiences of God's word of promise made even more sure, then one outflow of this will be in behaviour which is likewise solid and not fickle, changed at the last moment because of our own whims.

1:21 *Now he that establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God-* As noted on :20, the confirmation of God's promises through Christ's death are part of His stabilizing of us. Paul would not have lied to them about his travel plans because he has been established or confirmed, just as they had been ("with you"). This confirming or establishment is paralleled to having been anointed by the Spirit. The language of very special people in Jewish history- prophets and kings- is used of each believer. For no longer are just a few significant individuals anointed. Now, every believer is likewise significant and is similarly anointed; see on Acts 13:9. The Greek translated "establishes" has been used by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:6,8, where he reminds the Corinthians that they have been 'confirmed' by the gift of the Spirit after their initial believing into Christ. Yet they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1); they had not made use of that Spirit gift, just as many fail to today. The same word is used of the psychological confirmation of believers after their baptism and belief in Christ (Col. 2:7; Heb. 2:3). Heb. 13:9 is more specific, saying that the heart [or mind / psychology] is "established with grace", *charis*, the gift- of the Spirit. This is how I understand 2 Pet. 1:19- the word of prophecy, the word spoken forth by the early preachers, is confirmed / established [AV "made more sure"]. Now in 1 Cor. 1:22, Paul will go on to state specifically that the arena of the Spirit's establishing / confirming operation is within the hearts / minds of believers. The same word is found in Mk. 16:20, where the Lord promised to confirm or establish the believer in the Gospel by miracles. This function of the Spirit has passed away, but the essential confirmation of the Gospel by the Spirit gift in human hearts remains.

But the Greek for 'establish' can also mean to validate, and this was a relevant concern of Paul at this time. This same word keeps cropping up in Ignatius, who uses the Greek *bebaion* in the sense of 'valid'. Ignatius [and others] taught that for service of the Lord to be valid by a believer, it had to be validated through obedience to the church leadership. *They* gave his or her service its validity. "Whatsoever [the Bishop and presbytery] shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which ye do may be sure and valid [*bebaion*]" (*Smyrneans* 8.2). Significantly, Paul here addresses this very issue, using the very same Greek word, and in precisely this context- of justifying his service to God even though it was not approved / validated by others who thought they were elders: "He who validates us

[*bebaion*], along with you [the ordinary members of the flock]... is God, who also sealed us" (2 Cor. 1:21,22). God has validated and called each of us to His service. We don't need approval / validation / authorization from anybody on this earth. Of course we should seek to work co-operatively with our brethren, for such is obviously the spirit of Christ; neither Paul nor myself are inciting a spirit of maverick irresponsibility. But he *is* clearly saying that the idea of needing authorization / validation from any group of elders in order to minister, preach, break bread and baptize [which is a context of his writing to the Corinthians] is totally wrong.

1:22- see on 2 Cor. 3:3.

*Who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts-* "Also" doesn't have to mean that the statement following is an additional truth to preceding one. Literally "and...", this "and... and" structure can be used [as it is in several Eastern European languages] to express a series of parallel truths or descriptions of the same reality. As noted on :21, Paul has in view the gift of the Holy Spirit after baptism- a transforming power within the human heart. Any claim that the Spirit only worked through miraculous signs is made null and void by this specific statement that we have been given the Spirit in our hearts. After we believe, we are "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The promised Holy Spirit is surely a reference to the Comforter, a force which would be *within* the believer to make the Lord Jesus as real as if He were physically with us. The same gift of the Spirit is promised to all who would be baptized in Acts 2:39. The sealing is therefore "in our hearts". Perhaps this is why the 'sealing' of the faithful in Rev. 7:3 was "in their foreheads"- in their minds. This internal, psychological experience is the foretaste, the guarantee, of our future total transformation at the last day. 2 Cor. 5:4,5 present this "down payment" as the precursor to the literal transformation of the body at the Lord's return: "...that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing [the ending of our mortality by immortality] is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee". Eph. 1:13,14 speak of this same gift coming after belief: "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is a guarantee [s.w. "down payment"] of our inheritance, of the final redemption of God's own possession, for the praise of His glory".

1:23 *But I call God for a witness upon my soul-* David speaks of God enthroned in the court of Heaven judging him and yet also maintaining his right; and yet in the same context, David speaks of how God's throne is prepared for future judgment, He *will* minister judgment (Ps. 9:4 cp. 7,8,19). The court of Heaven that was now trying him would sit again in the last day. Paul shows the same understanding when, under 'judgment' by his brethren, he calls God as a witness right now (2 Cor. 1:23 RSV), several times saying that he spoke "before God", as if already at judgment day.

*That to spare you I came no more to Corinth-* In 2:12 Paul seems to excuse his change of travel plans by saying that a great door of opportunity for the Gospel had been opened at Troas. But it could be that this was an outcome of his knowledge that if he were to come to Corinth whilst they were still unrepentant of their gross immorality, the Spirit may have led Paul to severely judge them. Remember that in the first century, the Holy Spirit empowered the judgment of apostate believers with physical sickness or even death. Knowing this, Paul chose to give them more time to repent. We see here how the work of the Spirit through men was not [and is not] irresistible; Paul knew what the Spirit would urge or force him to do if he went there again and he chose not to allow that to happen. God is in dialogue with man, never forcing but always open to working with us.

1:24 *Not that we have lordship over your faith but are helpers of your joy. For in faith you must stand fast-* Nobody, not even faithful brethren, can have dominion over our faith; by our own faith we stand (2 Cor. 1:24, filling in the ellipsis). Solomon exhorts his son to get wisdom, for “if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it” (Prov. 9:12). The understanding of God we gain from His word, and the result of rejecting it, is so intensely personal. “Helpers” translates *sunergos*, a co-worker. As so often noted, the salvation of the Corinthians was related to Paul's own salvation. His joy at the last day would be their joy- if indeed they were accepted. And yet despite this close inter-relationship, it was by their own faith that they would stand acceptable before the Lord at the last day.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *But I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow-* As noted on 1:23, Paul changed his travel plans so as to avoid visiting Corinth until they were repentant. For he feared that if he did, the Spirit would compel him to bring judgment upon them for their gross immorality. Such judgment would however be a result of Paul's sorrow that they were as they were. Any form of church discipline must therefore be motivated and accompanied by genuine sorrow. In the whole saga with the immoral brother whom they had disfellowshipped, Paul had earlier written that his discipline should have been an outcome of their mourning for him (1 Cor. 5:2). Paul says he is determined that he will not come with sorrow- i.e. he is determined that they shall put things right. It was this willing of things through which perhaps explains the contradictory emotions he displays later in the letter- on one hand, rejoicing at the news of their apparent repentance, and yet threatening judgment for the major issues which were still unresolved. We cannot 'determine' others' changes, no matter how strongly we would wish for them.

2:2 *For if I make you sorry, who then is he that makes me glad, but he that is made sorry by me?*- "You made us sorry / upset us by your letter" is the typical stuff of church politics. And Paul tries to turn it round with a positive twist. But it seems no more than a playing with words: 'I made you sorry? Well if you are sorrowing *really*, unto repentance, then you will make me glad'. Paul writes later that they had sorrowed to repentance, and that his sorrow had been turned to joy by the news from Titus that they had changed (2 Cor. 7:9). But at this early stage of the letter, Paul writes as if they are still not made sorry to repentance. We can assume therefore that these early chapters were written before the news came of Corinth's repentance. My own take however is that Paul loved them with all the love of the lover who is over eager to interpret any news from the beloved in a positive way. For he has to conclude the letter with threats of major judgment upon them.

2:3 *And I wrote this very thing, lest when I came, I should receive sorrow from those in whom I ought to rejoice- having confidence in you all, that my joy is in you all-* What "thing" did he write that supposedly made them sorry? Presumably, from the later context, he refers to his command in 1 Cor. 5 for the immoral brother to be removed from their company. Corinth's response had been that they found Paul's demand most upsetting or 'sorrowful'. And he tries to make a play on the idea of 'sorrow' by saying that their sorrow could lead them to Godly repentance. In 2 Cor. 7 he rejoices at the news that their Godly sorrow had led to repentance; but I suggest this is an over eager desire to see the best in them, for he concludes 2 Corinthians lamenting their continued immorality and threatening major judgment to come. Yet he was 'confident' that his joy- the joy that would come from their repentance- is their joy. This all seems to reflect an over eagerness to see them as more than they really were. Perhaps that was the outcome of true love for them, imputing goodness to them; yet it was surely mixed with the same kind of over enthusiasm which Paul displays for the Jerusalem Poor Fund project.

2:4- see on Rom. 9:3.

*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears. Not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly for you-* As Paul expected them to remove the immoral person from a motive of sadness (1 Cor. 5:2), so he too had made the request for the excommunication from many tears. He suggests he wrote with tears dripping from his cheeks as he wrote. His motive was therefore one of abundant love, not to make trouble for the sake of it, nor to intentionally upset them.

"Anguish" suggests 'restraint' in the original Greek; perhaps Paul could have taken a harder line with them over the matter than he did, and his request for the offender to be removed was a restrained position, restrained by love. The "affliction" may refer to the great affliction he endured at the time of writing (s.w. 2 Cor. 1:8); as if whilst surrounded by great personal affliction, he still had emotional space to worry deeply about the situation in Corinth. It was at that very time of personal crisis that he had written to them about the matter, and that was a sign of his deep care for them.

*2:5 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not so much to me but in a sense (not to put it too severely) to you all-* Paul blames the sorrow on the behaviour of the immoral brother. The "any" is the "one" of :6. Paul is seeking to make their sorrow his sorrow, just as he envisages his joy as being their joy (2:3). This again seems a rather forced way of reasoning; for they were claiming that his letter had made them sorry and calling him to account over it.

*2:6 Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority-* There is no hint here that there was repentance by the immoral person. "Sufficient" can carry the sense of 'It has gone on for long enough now'. The disfellowship was intended to be temporary, Paul is saying. But that is not at all how he reasons in 1 Cor. 5 when commanding them to exclude the brother. It would seem that he is getting out of the situation by saying 'OK well he has been excluded long enough, have him back then'. He is so desperate to resolve the matter so that he and they are all at one on the matter.

*2:7 So that to the contrary you should rather forgive him and comfort him-* This command to "forgive him" suggests that he may not himself have been repentant. One would rather expect his penitence to be mentioned, both here and in 1 Cor. 5, if that were an issue. But there is no mention of it. Paul seems to want to move on, to put this issue behind them, so that they can focus on his pet project of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. "Forgive and comfort" are words full of association with the gift of the Spirit. *Charizomai* is not the usual word translated "forgive"; it means literally 'to gift', and *charis* is usually associated with the gift of the Spirit. Likewise "comfort" recalls the Spirit gift of the Comforter. Paul consistently appeals to the Corinthians to take the way of the Spirit in dealing with their issues. The receipt of the *charis* of the Spirit should lead us to likewise 'give'- both of our forgiveness, and also [as Paul will soon develop] in literal giving to the poor.

*Lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his excessive sorrow-* The psychological impact of disfellowship must be carefully considered. These words have been proven true time and again; those who are ejected from communion end up in spiritual shipwreck and with psychological issues as a result of being consumed, swallowed up, by the psychological trauma of rejection. And yet despite this, disfellowship of whole blocs of believers is practiced so freely by those who ought to know better. It is death and our mortality which is to be "swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 5:4). This 'swallowing up' in sorrow may be a reference therefore to the opposite outcome- condemnation at the last day. This is the end product of keeping a believer 'out of fellowship', no matter what they have done. And our history is littered with examples of shipwreck of faith brought about by disfellowship. The mention of "sorrow" uses the same word used throughout the chapter so far, in dealing with the Corinthian complaint that Paul had made them sorry by asking them to disfellowship this individual. He has responded that their sorrow should morph into a Godly sorrow that led them to repentance, and he likes to think that the immoral man has this same Godly sorrow of repentance.

2:8 *Therefore I beg you to confirm your love toward him-* This was far more than an on paper re-admittance of the brother to church fellowship. They were to assure him that they loved him, which would suggest that it is the sense of love withdrawn which leads the excommunicated into the mire of "excessive sorrow" which swallows up faith (:7). It could be that "love" here is a reference to the *agape*, the love feast; they were to re-admit him to fellowship at the breaking of bread.

2:9 *For to this end also did I write, that I might know, by putting you to the test, if you are obedient in all things-* Again I would say that Paul is trying to defuse the situation by saying that his commandment to withdraw from the immoral man was a test of their obedience, and since they had done it, they could now resume fellowship with the brother. That, however, hardly seems a good reason to disfellowship someone, given the psychological shattering which it would have upon the person concerned. So I would again conclude that Paul is seeking by all means to defuse the tension, taking as much guilt on himself as he can.

2:10 *But to whom you forgive anything, I also. When I also forgive- if I need to forgive- then I do it for your sakes-* Paul wants to move on from their complaint about his insistence that they separate from the immoral brother. With no mention of the man's repentance, he says that if they forgive him, then so does he. And his own forgiveness of the man was "for your sakes". Paul forgave the brother and moved on for the sake of peace with the Corinthians. This raises the interesting question of whether forgiveness can be granted or not granted for the sake of issues other than the actual behaviour or repentance of the offending individual.

*In the presence of Christ, so-* Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians (Gal. 3:1 Gk., see note there); and likewise here to the Corinthians he was "the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RSV).

2:11 *That no advantage may be gained over us by the Satan. For we are not ignorant of his devices-* As noted repeatedly above, Paul appears to be backtracking from his position concerning the immoral man, for he sees that he is at loggerheads with the Corinthian church over it. He had commanded them to withdraw from the man, they had done so, but were now complaining that he had manipulated them to do this and they were "sorry" or upset with him about it. Paul could see that a rift between him and his converts in Corinth would be used by critics in order to damage the overall work of the Gospel, and particular his project of raising funds for the Jerusalem poor. The 'satan' was some organized opposition to Paul's work which troubled Paul's converts and made capital over any tensions between him and his convert. I'd guess the reference is to 'the Jewish satan', the Judaists who dogged Paul's steps around the mission fields of the first century. I have given more detail about this theory in *The Real Devil*. "Devices" translates a Greek word used almost exclusively in 2 Corinthians, translated "mind" with the sense of 'perception'. Paul knew that the adversary would perceive the tension between Paul and the Corinthians, and use it. Most of the references are to the "minds" [s.w. "devices"] of the Corinthians being brainwashed by Judaist false teachers (2 Cor. 3:14; 4:4; 11:3). This would rather confirm a Judaist reference for "the Satan".

2:12- see on 1 Cor. 16:9.

*Now when I came to Troas for the sake of the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened to me in the Lord-* As noted on 1:23, Paul changed his intention to visit Corinth on his way to

Macedonia. He travelled via Troas- and that decision was blessed because a door was opened to him there in the Gospel's work. Frequently Paul uses the word "Gospel" as meaning 'the preaching of the Gospel'; the Gospel is in itself something which *must* be preached if we really have it (Rom. 1:1,9; 16:25; Phil. 1:5 (NIV),12; 2:22; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5; 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8). The fact we have been given the Gospel is in itself an imperative to preach it. "When I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:12 RV) has the ellipsis supplied in the AV: "to preach Christ's Gospel" [although there is no Greek word in the original matching 'preach'] .

*2:13 I had no relief for my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother, but taking my leave of them, I went into Macedonia-* Not only on a personal level, but also collectively, we can limit the amount and extent of witness. Thus Paul had a door opened to him to preach in Troas, but the ecclesial problems in Corinth that were so sapping his energy meant he had to leave those opportunities inadequately used (2 Cor. 2:12,13 RSV). He had been expecting Titus to meet him there with good news from Corinth, but Titus didn't come. So he left the Gospel opportunities there in order to hurry on to Macedonia and then get to Corinth as soon as he could because he was worried by the lack of news from them.

*2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ and makes manifest through us the savour of His knowledge in every place-* Despite all the setbacks with the Corinthians Paul felt that somehow we are "always", time and again, caused to triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14), participating day by day (and hour by hour at times) in His triumphant victory procession (so the allusion to the Roman 'triumph' implies). The spirit of ambition shouldn't just be an occasional flare in our lives; it should characterize our whole way of living and thinking. All things work together for good- and the changed plans necessitated by the weakness of the Corinthians led Paul to Troas and an opportunity for preaching there, and thus the knowledge of Christ was made manifest in another place, Troas. So despite all discouragement from the weakness of others and church politics, we are actually being led in triumphal procession behind Christ the victor. This passage invites us to see the Lord Jesus after His victory- which can only refer to His victorious death on the cross- leading a victory parade, in which we are the triumphant soldiers, carrying with us burning incense. This represents our preaching of the Gospel, as part of our participation in the joyful glory of the Lord's victory on the cross. And yet that incense is used as a double symbol- both of us the preachers, who hold the aroma, and yet we are also the aroma itself. We are the witness. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). But the motivation for it all is our part in the victory procession of the Lord, going on as it does down through the ages, as He as it were comes home from the cross.

*2:15 For we are a sweet savour of Christ to God in those that are saved and in those that perish-* The preacher is his message; if the doctrines of the Gospel are truly in us, then we ourselves will naturally be a witness to it in our lives. The Gospel is the savour of Christ; and yet we personally are the savour (2 Cor. 2:14,15); *we* are the epistle and Gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). The "saved" were the Corinthians, in the first context; the perishing were those new ears at Troas who had heard the message. They each had the choice as to how to perceive the savour coming to them.



2:14-17 2 Cor. 2:14-17 seems to have a series of allusions back to Mary's anointing of the Lord:

*2 Cor. 2*

*Mary's anointing*

Maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (:14)	The house filled with the smell of Mary's anointment
For we are the smell of Christ (:15) in our witness of Him to the world	Mary must have had the same smell of the same perfume on her, as was on Jesus whom she had anointed with it
Making merchandise of the word of God (:17 RVmg.)	As Judas coveting the anointing oil for mercenary gain

The simple point of the allusions is that we like Mary are spreading the smell of Christ to the world; she is our pattern for witness.

2:16- see on Mt. 3:11.

*To the one a savour from death to death; to the other a savour from life to life-* The smell of the incense, representing the truth of Christ manifested by Paul in his work with both the Corinthians and unbelievers, was variably received. For some it had the putrid smell of death; and those who received it that way would be led to eternal death. Perhaps the savour arose from the death of Christ, but led disbelievers to death. The savour arising from His resurrection would lead believers in it to eternal life. For them, the smell was pleasant and was perceived as the message of life, leading to eternal life. Paul is here alluding to Rabbinic views of the Law. *Debarim Rabba*, sec. 1, fol. 248: "As the bee brings home honey to the owner, but stings others, so it is with the words of the Law." "They (the words of the Law) are a savour of life to Israel, but a savour of death to the people of this world". Or in *Taarieth*, fol. 7, 1, "Whoever gives attention to the Law on account of the Law itself, to him it becomes an aromatic of life, but to him who does not attend to the Law on account of the Law itself, to him it becomes an aromatic of death". Paul is writing of the Gospel of Christ in the same terms as the Law of Moses. For these allusions to have been appreciated, we can only conclude that there was significant Judaist influence at Corinth, which was leading some to reject the "savour of Christ" in favour of the Law. Gentile, immoral and immature Christians were attracted to the Judaist argument because it freed them up to live immoral lives, with their conscience salved by tokenistic, legalistic obedience to a few laws.

*And who is sufficient for these things?-* As if to say, 'We simply don't appreciate the power and the implications of the logic we are putting before men'. There is no third way. Before all those who smell the savour of the Gospel is the choice of eternal death or life. And Paul, like any serious preacher of the Gospel, felt insufficient to be the one bringing this message of such ultimate importance. It is our sense of insufficiency which is our sufficiency as preachers; it is the most vital qualification.

2:17 *For we are not as most, corrupting the word of God; but as of sincerity and as of God-* "Corrupting" in Greek can mean 'pedalling'. The false teachers in Corinth demanded payment for their teaching- and received it. The message was a corruption of God's word, and not some totally pagan set of teaching. It was the word of God in a corrupted form. And that

would fit exactly with the Judaizers, who were corrupting God's word in the Law of Moses- and selling their teachings.

*In the sight of God we speak in Christ-* Or, "presence of God". Paul is using language which the Jews applied to the Angels. I take this to suggest that Paul felt himself to be so at one with his guardian Angel that he can appropriate such Angelic language to himself. Paul twice assures his readers that he speaks the truth because he is speaking in the sight / presence of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 12:19). The fact God is everywhere present through His Spirit, that He exists, should lead us at the very least to be truthful. In the day of judgment, a condemned Israel will know that God heard their every word; but if we accept that fact now then we will be influenced in our words now. And by our words we will be justified (Ez. 35:12). Reflection upon the omniscience of God leads us to marvel at His sensitivity to human behaviour. He noticed even the body language of the women in Is. 3:16- and condemned them for the way they walked. Paul says that he does not personally profit from his preaching, but in the sight of God does he preach (2 Cor. 2:17 RVmg.). Our motivation in preaching, whether it be to demonstrate intellectual prowess, or to sincerely save somebody, or merely to look good in the eyes of our brethren, is all weighed up; and so we must preach in the sight of God, knowing He watches.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?*- This is likely to be a quotation from the Corinthian criticism of Paul: 'Here he goes again, commending himself!'. The lack of quotation marks in ancient Greek makes interpretation difficult.

*Or need we, as do some, letters of commendation to you or from you?*- The subverters of Corinth ecclesia came with "letters of commendation" (2 Cor. 3:1 cp. 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12,18; 12:11), and one wonders whether these letters were not from Jerusalem; for in the synagogue system upon which the early ecclesia was based, the Jerusalem rabbis issued such letters. Recall how Saul had such letters to authorize him to persecute the Damascus Christians. Their tactics were political and aggressive- they made Peter so scared that he forgot all the lessons the Lord had taught him through the conversion of Cornelius, that from fear of them he refused to break bread with Gentiles when their representatives were present. It would seem that the Corinthians were demanding Paul have letters of commendation before they would listen to him; and they thought they had authority to issue a commendation of Paul, or not. And the lack of such documentation would affect Paul's credibility and authority. This is all the stuff of power brokering and politics. We note that in chapter 7, Paul will rejoice that the Corinthians are onside with him after the visit of Titus. But that outburst is at variance with the consistent impression that the Corinthians were against Paul and did not respect him. Perhaps it was Paul imputing righteousness to them; or maybe it was the overstatement which is typical of those in love, ever hoping for the best and extrapolating from everything into an unreal position.

3:2 *You are our letter of recommendation, written in our hearts, known and read by all*- The Corinthians themselves were hardly much commendation of Paul. It was not any letter written by them which would recommend Paul, but rather the fact that Paul so loved them in his heart was visible to all. His love and care for them was his recommendation to missionary service, rather than any letter from them. I suggest that this verse is that which Paul refers to in 2 Cor. 7:3: "For as I have said before [here in 3:2], you are in our hearts, to die together and live together".

Jesus 'came down' to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and 'all men' saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord. We too are to be a living epistle, words of the Gospel made flesh, "known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

3:3 *Being revealed before all that you are as it were a letter from Christ, delivered by us; written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God*- Just as Paul needed no recommendation letter from Corinth because they were written in his heart, so they needed no letter of commendation. Because the commendation was in the spirit and not in the letter; in their hearts and not on tables of stone. Their desire for letters of commendation betrayed a lack of the Spirit. If they really knew that the new covenant was engraved on their hearts by the Spirit, there would be no interest in any letter of human commendation. And this must be remembered by us too. The letter from Christ was "delivered by us" in that Paul had brought the Spirit to them through preaching the word to them which led to their conversion. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but were not possessed of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:1). They failed to feel and live according to the potential spiritual strength they had been given.

*Not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh*- The reference is to Jer. 31:33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be

their God, and they shall be My people". Yet the new covenant that was made with us by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Heb. 8 proves that we are under the new covenant by quoting from Jer. 31, which is a prophecy of how in the future, Israel will repent, and will enter into the new covenant. Twice the Spirit uses Jer. 31:31 to prove to us that we are under the new covenant now (see Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:16-19); yet Jer. 31 is a prophecy of how natural Israel in the future will enter into that covenant, after their humiliation at the hands of their future invaders. So we are being taught that our entering of the covenant now is similar to how natural Israel will enter that covenant in the future. The point is really clinched by the way the Spirit cites Jer. 31 as relevant to us today. The reasoning goes that because Jer. 31:34 speaks of sin forgiven for those who accept the new covenant, therefore we don't need sacrifices or human priesthood now, because Jer. 31:34 applies to us. So therefore God writing in our hearts is going on now, too. This is confirmed by Paul's allusion to Jer. 31 in 2 Cor. 3:3. God wrote with His Spirit on our hearts, He made a new covenant on the covenant-tables of our heart. Likewise 2 Cor. 1:22: "Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the spirit in our hearts". There are several prophecies which speak of Israel entering that new covenant, and what it will mean to them. All of them, in some sense, apply to us who are now in the new covenant. All of us should be earnestly seeking to appreciate the more finely exactly what our covenant with God means, exactly what covenant relationship with God really entails. 2 Cor. 3:16 reasons that when Israel's heart shall turn to the Lord Jesus, then the veil that is on their heart will be taken away. But now, through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, we each with unveiled face can behold the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). The clarity of vision concerning Christ which Israel will eventually come to should be ours now; our hearts should turn to Christ now, as theirs will do. For this reason, the Old Testament gives us much information as to how Israel's heart will turn to Christ.

3:4 *And such confidence have we toward God, through Christ-* "Confidence" means the certain expectation which comes from faith. Paul has used the word in 1:15 of how he was "confident" in the Corinthians; and he will use it again in this context in 2 Cor. 8:22. It is the confidence he himself expresses of how "in Christ", righteousness has been imputed, and he himself stands boldly before the judgment seat of Christ, both now and in the last day (Eph. 3:12). The ideas of being right *pros* God *dia* Christ are found in the classic explanation of imputed righteousness in Rom. 5:1: "Being justified [made righteous] by faith, we have peace with [*pros-* toward] God, through [*dia*] our Lord Jesus". This explains how on one hand he can be so critical of the Corinthians, fully aware of their gross immorality and lack of faith in the Gospel. Therefore his confidence was "toward God", in His presence both now and at judgment day; and *dia*, on account of, Christ- and not of themselves. And yet on the other hand he can speak and write so positively of them; as he cannot condemn them, he [like us] can only confidently assume that any baptized into Christ shall indeed be accepted at the last day. The idea of imputed righteousness continues in :5. This approach takes away all the angst associated with the perceived need to separate from any who depart from the one faith in doctrine or practice. The platform of course should not be open to such people, but in terms of continued association and fellowship- Paul's example with the Corinthians is crystal clear. He had "confidence" towards them whilst stating that some of them had no knowledge of [relationship with] God (1 Cor. 15:34).

However, as mentioned elsewhere in this commentary, Paul also seems prone to obsessive mindsets, he so wanted the Corinthians and his Jerusalem Poor Fund to work out successfully that he speaks and thinks of things and people in far more positive terms than is realistic.

3:5- see on Mt. 3:11.

*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God-* "Account" is the same word as "impute" [see on Rom. 2:26], and I explained on :4 that Paul believes that the Corinthians are counted righteous, they have righteousness imputed to them, and so he strives to see them likewise. The Greek for "sufficient" is also translated "worthy". Our worthiness is from God, for Paul has just said that none of us of ourselves are worthy or sufficient (2 Cor. 2:16). But he now clarifies that it is not that he is of himself counting them righteous; he does so because God has done so. He will proceed to explain that this is possible through the ministry of the Spirit; we are being made in reality what we are in status, which is "in Christ". Because *our* face / image is being changed into *His* image, "even as by the spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:3,5,18). We look in the mirror, and see Christ in us. This looking in the mirror is used by James as a figure for self-examination (James 1:18,22-25). By doing the word of truth, we find we will live lives of looking in the mirror, of self-perception. This is the essence of self-examination; to perceive the Christ-man within us, and that all other behaviour is our being unfaithful to our true self, living out a persona. We are to see ourselves as being Christ; we are to have a high view of ourselves in this sense, whilst despising and seeking to dismantle the personas we so often act out which are unfaithful to Him. See on 2 Cor. 11:5.

*3:6 Who also made us sufficient as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit-* The imputation of righteousness mentioned in :4 and :5 is a result of the new covenant. Under the new covenant, the Spirit is ministered. As explained in Romans 8, believers are transformed by the Spirit in practice into what they are by status. The idea of "servants [ministers] of a... covenant" makes us parallel with the Angels under the old covenant. The Law of Moses (and the whole Pentateuch? Consider Acts 7:38,53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2) was given by Angels. That the Angels ministered the Word in the past is picked up by Paul in 2 Cor. 3 when he says that because we have taken over the role of the Angels in this respect, we should teach the word boldly: "...Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech"(:12). The context refers to our preaching, that it should not be with the "enticing words of man's wisdom". See on Rev. 22:9. However, the reference to being ministers of the covenant may be an allusion to the Lord Jesus, in whom we are, and to Joshua / Jesus (Rom. 15:8; Heb. 8:2; based on Joshua / Jesus who was the minister of the Tabernacle, Ex. 24:13; Josh. 1:1). Our sufficiency, our sense of adequacy and competence, is of God (:5). Without this positive confidence we are unable to do any task well, and this is especially true of spiritually ministering to others. But that confidence is not of ourselves; it is a confidence in God's confidence in us.

*For the letter kills but the spirit gives life-* Faced with baldly stated commandments, we will fail. The letter thereby kills. It is the ministration of the Spirit which leads to eternal life. This highlights the importance of the Spirit in our lives. It is a matter of life or death. Paul writes from personal experience; for he had been 'killed' by the attempt to obey the law (Rom. 7:11 s.w.). "Gives life" is the language of future resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:22,36,45); but clearly in view is the new life given within the believing heart right now. It is the presence of the Spirit within our minds now which is the basis upon which our mortal bodies shall be made eternally alive (Rom. 8:11).

*3:7 But if that which ministered death, written, engraved on stones, came with glory (so that the children of Israel could not look continually upon the presence of Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this glory was)-* The allusion here and in :10 is to the LXX of Ex. 34:29,35: "Moses knew not that the appearance of the skin of his face was glorified... The children of Israel saw the face of Moses that it was glorified". The LXX in Exodus makes it clear that Moses veiled his face so that the Israelites would not perceive that the glory he received faded. This contrasts with the open, plain declaration of Christ's glory, which was

reflected in Paul's plain and open speaking (:12). The glory which came from the old covenant was blinding, whereas Paul will develop the contrast with the glory of the new covenant, which is transforming, not blinding.

*3:8 How shall the ministry of the spirit be without glory?*- The repeated use of the word 'ministry' is preparing for Paul's later appeal for the Corinthians to support the ministry to God's people in practical ways (3:9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1,12,13; 11:8). God's ministry to us, involving the glory of His grace in Christ articulated to us by the work of the Spirit, must become reflected in our ministry to our poorer brethren. Paul's idea was that the ministry of the Spirit would be exemplified by their participation in the Jerusalem Poor Fund project. Paul saw this as likewise bringing forth glory to God, as he states specifically in 2 Cor. 8:19: "in this act of grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord".

*3:9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness exceed in glory*- The contrast is not between condemnation and salvation, but between condemnation and righteousness. The context in :4 and :5 is of imputed righteousness being the basis of salvation. The blinding glory associated with the theophanies on Sinai and the tabernacle was nothing compared to the glory which was manifested in the Lord Jesus.

*3:10 For truly, that which has been made glorious*- Referring to the face of Moses, Ex. 34:29,35 LXX speak of how "the appearance of his face was glorified". God's glory is more permanently and supremely seen "in the face of Jesus", 4:6. We are to look at the invisible things of God's glory in Christ (4:18); all else is temporal compared with the moral glory, the characteristics of God, as they are perfectly revealed in the face of Jesus. The things of God's Name, His glory, His characteristics, are the only things which are truly eternal; all else will fade.

*Has not been made ultimately glorious in that the other glory is simply so surpassing*- There is no diminishing or deprecation of the Mosaic system in itself; it is rather that the glory in Christ "is simply so surpassing" that the Mosaic glory literally fades into insignificance.

*3:11 For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains permanently is yet more glorious*- Note that the Mosaic system is described as being then in the process of fading away. The Greek tense definitely demands such a translation. The reference is not only to the fact that the Mosaic glory began fading as soon as it was on Moses' face- it's just that the veil hid that fact from the Israelites. It's also a hint that the Mosaic system did not end at one moment, but there was a process of passing away. God and Paul could have taken a hard line: the Law is finished. This is why Jesus bled and lived as He did. But they are so sensitive to the difficulty of others in accepting what we know to be concrete truth. And we must take our lesson. In our witness to the world, we mustn't give up at the first sign of wrong doctrine or inability to accept our message. See what is positive and work on it.

The Greek translated "fades away" is used about the ending of the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:2,6), and also about the ending of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:8,10,11). It could be that the miraculous gifts and the Mosaic system all ended at the same time. In this we see God's patience and grace in not demanding that believers immediately accepted the end of that system at Christ's death; they were given a period in which to accept it, confirmed by the miraculous Spirit gifts, all presumably ending in the destruction of the temple in AD70. We

too must accept that other believers will not always immediately grasp the truths which are obvious to us- Christ's patience with ideas of 'demon possession' is a parade example. We should note too how the obvious command to take the Gospel to the Gentiles was only so slowly grasped by Peter and the early brethren; yet God patiently worked with them through their slowness to understand the obvious. He does the same with us, and we should be likewise tolerant to our brethren, rather than rigidly defining some finer points of Biblical interpretation and refusing to fellowship them until they reach that level of understanding.

3:12 *Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech-* See on :7. Paul exhorts us to speak 'freely' or boldly in our preaching just as he himself 'spoke freely' in his witness to Agrippa (Acts 26:26 s.w.). Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves. "Having, then, such hope, we use much freedom of speech" in preaching (2 Cor. 3:12 YLT). It is also exemplified by how Peter preached "freely" (Acts 2:29 s.w.). If we are certain of our hope, we should not only be bold in preaching it, but also plain and direct in our interactions with others, including our brethren. For Paul is writing with a view to the criticisms made of him that he was somehow unstable and deceitful in his words and actions. He is saying that the greatness of the hope, the wonder of the glory we behold with unveiled face, makes him not at all like that.

3:13 *And are not like Moses, who put a veil upon his face so the children of Israel could not gaze to see the outcome of that which was fading away-* The LXX in Ex. 34:30-35 clarifies that *when* Moses ceased speaking, he put a veil over his face. Israel therefore didn't perceive that his glory was fading. What was the "outcome" or the *telos*, the end, of the fading glory of the Mosaic law? Rom. 10:4 uses the same words: "Christ is the end of the law... to every one that believes". The Mosaic law lead those who have believed in Christ *to* Christ once they re-read it with Christ in view. But the law itself was given in order to stop Israel at the time from perceiving Him. The Law only made sense from the perspective of one who had believed in Christ. Rather as Bible prophecies, in the sense of predictions of future events, do not of themselves give rise to faith in God and the Bible. Once the step of faith is taken, then they (and many other things such as archaeology, types and shadows) all make perfect sense in confirming the faith that has been expressed. Romans and Gal. 3:19 likewise argue that the Law was given in order to enslave people under sin- rather than to be decoded as a hidden picture of a future redeemer figure.

3:14 *But their minds were hardened-* There is a strong Biblical theme that the judgments upon the Gentile world came upon an apostate Israel. The hardening of the hearts of the Egyptians was experienced by Israel. And the Mosaic law, "holy just and good" as it was, became the mechanism God used to effect this.

*For until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains, it not being revealed to them that it is made redundant through Christ-* The Mosaic law is not therefore an obvious path that leads to Christ. Those who trust in it and practice it actually find it veils their hearts to Christ. See on :13. "Made redundant" would be better translated "is fading away". The obvious connection is with the temple veil being torn down at the Lord's death. But it was re-erected. The Law itself, as it was read, veiled their hearts from seeing the glory of Christ. There was therefore something in it which was designed to hide Christ rather than reveal Him. God uses similar devices with humanity generally- the problem of suffering, the lack of scientific, Euclidean evidence for God's existence or the truth of the Bible. It is not until Christ's encounter is accepted, and the heart opens to the work of the Spirit, that all starts to make sense. As discussed on 1 Cor. 1, no amount of intellectual, logical, scientific, archaeological study will bring a heart to Christ. Neither will a similar analysis of the Mosaic

law. God is not as it were covering His face with hard cards which we have to guess or decipher before we get to see His face; the Bible is not a riddle which a few astute, lucky or fortunately positioned people happen to figure or crack, and then get rewarded with the vision of His glory. Indeed it is this rational, academic approach which according to 1 Cor. 1 *hides* Christ from men, and likewise with a similar approach to the Mosaic Law. The Jews searched these scriptures daily, but did not come to Christ that they might have life.

3:15 *But to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart*-The reading of Moses was designed to veil their hearts- see on :14. Throughout 2 Cor. 3:15-4:6, Paul comments on how Moses' face shone with God's glory, and yet he spoke to Israel through a veil, with the result that Israel did not appreciate God's glory. He speaks of him and all preachers of the true Christian Gospel as "able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6)- clear allusion to Moses as the minister of the old, inferior covenant. Paul uses this to explain why Israel did not respond to his preaching; "if *our* preaching be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul therefore saw himself and his fellow preachers as like Moses, radiating forth the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to an Israel which had the veil upon their heart. This allusion must have so angered the Jews- to suggest that Christian preachers were like Moses!

3:16 *But whenever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away*- When a [Jewish] man turns to the Lord Jesus, the veil of obedience to the Law is taken away (2 Cor. 3:16 RVmg.). Yet the Law also led men to Christ; and yet it also veils Him from them- depending whether they read it as God intended. But the "it" which turns to the Lord could refer to the hearts of Jewish people. The veil is the Law; the veil is not taken away by intellectual purity of understanding. It is taken away when the heart turns to the Lord Jesus, and this is the realm of the spirit or heart. *Epistrepho*, "turn to", is a form of *strepho* which is the usual word for conversion. But it is often used of what is done to a person by the Lord- we are converted by Him. 'To be converted' suggests the conversion is done to us. The Lord's wish is to heal and convert human hearts (Mt. 13:15); that they might be healed and converted. John the Baptist's mission was to convert hearts to Jesus as Christ, to turn or convert Israel to the Lord (Lk. 1:16,17). When a heart is turned to the Lord by the Lord, then the veil is taken away. But the person must allow the process to happen, and not harden their hearts against it. If they do, then they shall be confirmed in that by being hardened the more- as :14 has just stated. It is an openness to the leading of the Lord in the spirit which is so important. It is response to that leading which brings about conversion, rather than decades of poring over ancient Hebrew and Greek words. Verse 17 will go on to speak explicitly about the work of the Lord Jesus as the work of the Spirit.

Whenever the Jews read Moses, they have a veil over their minds, but when a Jew turns to the Lord, that veil is removed. Paul is perhaps alluding to the Jewish practice of covering their head and even face with a prayer shawl or *tallit* when reading or hearing God's word (Mk. 12:38). And this perhaps is behind his demand that brethren should not cover their heads in ecclesial meetings in 1 Cor. 11:4. They are like Moses, hiding his face behind a veil. But when the veil is removed by conversion, then the glory of Christ will shine forth from them. The implication surely is that a true Jewish convert to Christ will in turn radiate forth the Lord's glory to others. We *each*, with unveiled face, have like Moses seen the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). When Moses saw the glory, he was immediately given a ministry to preach to Israel, to share that glory with them (Ex. 34:34). And Paul drives home the similarity; we *each* have had the experience of Moses, and so "therefore seeing *we* (too, like Moses) have this ministry", "we each" are to exercise it to Israel.



3:17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*- Where, in the context, is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus? The preceding verses speak of the human heart. Hence F.F. Bruce offers the paraphrase: "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free". This freedom or liberty in the heart is what Paul so often exults in, comparing it to the bondage of legalism (Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 10:29; Gal. 2:4; 5:1,13).

The Jews believed that the *shekinah*, the physical light of glory associated with the tabernacle, was somehow a personal being associated with a Messiah figure. Paul deconstructs this idea in 2 Cor. 3:17,18, where he says that the *shekinah* seen on the face of Moses was a *fading* glory of the Old Covenant, having been made insignificant by the glory of Christ. Thus Paul is attacking the common Jewish idea by saying that the Lord Jesus was *not* the *shekinah* but is *superior* to it. Indeed, he so often makes the same point by stressing that the glorification of the Lord Jesus was at His resurrection and ascension. He *became* "the Lord of glory" by what He suffered, and received this glorification at the resurrection and ascension. If the Lord's glory was somehow pre-existent before that, the wonder and personal significance of the resurrection for Jesus is somehow lost sight of; the idea of suffering and *then* being glorified, as a pattern for us, is quite lost sight of. And yet this was the repeated theme of Paul's inspired writings. Note in passing how when describing the *shekinah* cloud in which the Angel dwelt, Paul comments that the cloud was mere water, for at the Red Sea it played a part in symbolizing Israel's baptism "into Moses in the cloud [water above them] and in the sea [water on both sides of them]" (1 Cor. 10:2). Moses and not the *shekinah* cloud was the type of Christ. Yet Justin Martyr and many other careless Bible readers, coming to Scripture in order to seek justification for their preconceived Trinitarian ideas, have interpreted the cloud as being the Angel which was supposedly Jesus. Hebrews 1 clarifies that God spoke in Old Testament times through Angels and prophets- but *not* through His Son. This He began to do in the ministry of the human Jesus. That path of thought alone should remove all possibility that any Old Testament Angel was in fact the Lord Jesus.

3:18- see on :5 *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves*; Jn. 11:40; Ex. 33:11.

*But we, with an unveiled face and reflecting the glory of the Lord*- "Beholding as in a mirror" (RV). In the same way as Moses spoke to the Angel without a veil on his face, and thereby came to reflect the glory which shone from the Angel's face (Ex. 34:33-35), so we are bidden look at the glory of God in the face of Jesus, to consider his character, and be changed into that same glory by reflecting his character in our lives. By simply beholding the glory of Christ's righteousness, truly appreciating it, we will be changed (2 Cor. 3:15-18 RV). Christ-centeredness, regularly thinking of Him, grabbing a few verses from the Gospel records in the course of the day- this is the essence of the Christian life, of beholding Him with unveiled face. Paul seems to be arguing that whenever a Jew turns to the Lord Jesus and fellowships with Him, then he is living out the pattern of Moses. And further, 2 Cor. 4:3 speaks of our Gospel being 'veiled' to those who are lost- as if *we* are as Moses, the Gospel we preach being as the glory of God which shone from Moses' face. Let's keep remembering how huge and radical was the challenge of this to a first century Jewish readership for whom Moses was an almost untouchable hero.

2 Cor. 3 speaks of our beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus in a mirror; and this process slowly transforms us into that same image of Him which we see. The "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the

very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness. I have given reason elsewhere for believing that the Gospel records are in fact transcripts of the Gospel message preached by the four evangelists. The 'Gospel according to Matthew' is therefore the Gospel message which he usually preached. And it's significant that at least three of them start and end where many of us would- starting with the promises to the Jewish fathers, and concluding with an appeal for baptism. Actually John's Gospel does this too, if you decode the language he uses. This is surely the explanation of the Lord's otherwise strange remark that wherever the Gospel is preached, the anointing of His feet by Mary would be part of that message. And this is one of the few incidents that all four Gospel writers each mention. What this shows is that the Gospel message is in its quintessence, the account of the man Christ Jesus- with all that involves. It has truly been commented that "the central message of the gospels is not the teaching of Jesus but Jesus himself". This is true insofar as Jesus is the word made flesh.

A mirror by its very nature, because of what it is, reflects the light which falls upon it to others. If we have *really* seen the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will *inevitably* reflect it to others. Jesus didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father. Paul puts the same principle another way when he says that we're all mirrors (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). We naturally reflect to others what has been reflected into us by the Lord Jesus. A mirror by its very nature, because of what it is, reflects the light which falls upon it to others. If we have *really* seen the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will *inevitably* reflect it to others. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

*Are all transformed into his likeness from glory to glory*- The "all" is in contrast with Moses, who alone saw the glory of the Lord God. But we are all in his position. No longer was Moses to be perceived as some unreachable hero of faith, as a saint in a stained glass window, to whom we poor sinners can never attain. We in Christ have attained *far beyond* him. This was a rebuke to the Judaizing element in Corinth, as well as a huge challenge for Jews of all ages. "From glory to glory" suggests an ongoing upward spiral. The glory is not fixed, as it was with the Angel whose face Moses beheld. It increases the more we behold. We are progressively changed into greater reflected glory; in contrast to the fading glory on the face of Moses.

The new man / person created in us at baptism by the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) is essentially a character; or at least, the potential for a character, after the pattern of the Lord Jesus. For Christ is said to be "formed in us". As we gaze into His glory, we are changed bit by bit into His image. His glorious character is a mirror, Paul says; as we look into it, our image comes to reflect His glory (2 Cor. 3:18). He doesn't subsume us beneath Himself. Self-expression, or even self-manifestation, is one of God's features, and so He intends it to be in us who are made after His image. God manifestation doesn't in that sense mean the destruction or ignoring of the individual human person; rather, the very opposite, in that the real character, the new life, will be eternally developed and preserved. This is where Hinduism is so wrong, as wrong as any monolithic, apostate Papal or Protestant Christianity- the person disappears into the great Whole. Joash understood where 'God manifestation' can be taken too far; he told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him

(Jud. 6:31). This needs thinking through. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to 'play God' for Baal; they had to mindlessly, unthinkingly manifest the god they thought existed. Joash says that if Baal really exists, he himself will act for himself, openly. And this of course is where the One True God excels; He does act for Himself, and doesn't rely *solely* upon manifesting Himself through men in order to achieve anything.

The fact that God is a person means that who *we* are as persons, our being as persons, is of the ultimate importance. It has been observed, in more sophisticated language: "To predicate personality to God is nothing else than to declare personality as the absolute essence". Thus who we are as persons, who we develop to become, is indeed the ultimate issue. And further. Having a personal relationship with a personal God means that we in that process develop as persons after His image; for there is something magnetically changing about being in relationship with Him. We are changed from glory to glory, by simply beholding His face and inevitably reflecting the glory there, which glory abides upon us in the same way as it stuck to the face of Moses even after his encounters with the Angel of Yahweh (2 Cor. 3:18-21). And yet we live in a world which increasingly denies us ultimate privacy or isolation; the loudness of the world is all permeating, all intrusive, to the point that Paul Tillich claims: "We cannot separate ourselves at any time from the world to which we belong". And at times, we would all tend to agree with him. We just can't seem to 'get away from it all' and be with God, no matter where we go on holiday, with whom we go, even if we slip off for an hour to be quite alone in the local park. But ultimately, I believe Tillich was wrong. We *can* separate from the world's endless call and insistent pull, even if we're stuck with an unbelieving or unhelpful partner, sniffy kids, long hours at work, the TV always on, the phone always ringing. Because we as unique and individual persons can *personally* relate to the *personal* God and His Son, thus finding the ultimate privacy and isolation which being human in this world appears to preclude. But further, it's actually in the very razzmatazz of our mundane, frustrated experience in this world that we can come to know God, and in which God reveals Himself to us.

*By the Lord the Spirit*- The Lord Jesus is "the Lord the spirit"; and "the Spirit" is one of Jesus' titles in Revelation, so closely is He identified with the work of the Spirit. It is He, through His Spirit, who effects this transformation of character, this progressive reflection of Him in human personality. Romans 8 has argued likewise; we who are counted as "in Christ" by status are transformed in practice into Him by the work of the Spirit. The Lord's activity is intense. The Lord calls men and women to Him, having first prepared their way to Him, guiding the preachers of His word. He brings people to baptism, enters into a husband-wife relationship with them (Eph. 5:24), has children by them (i.e. spirituality develops in our characters, Rom. 7:4), strengthens them afterwards, keeps them in Him, "in everything... co-operates for good with those that love God" (Rom. 8:28 NEB), saves them in an ongoing sense, develops them spiritually, and then finally presents them perfect at His return. He is actively subduing "all things", even in the natural creation, unto Himself (1 Cor. 15:27,28 Gk.). However, the NT focuses on His work amongst us, the ecclesia. Where two or three are gathered, He manifests Himself in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). He is like a priest constantly on duty, bringing His people to the Father (Mt. 26:29 cp. Lev. 11:9).

Jesus Himself is described here as "the Lord the Spirit". "The Spirit" is a title of Jesus (Rom. 8:16,26,27; Rev. 2:7,11 etc.). To walk each day in the Spirit is to live in Him, to act as He would act. It is this "Spirit" which will be the basis of our new life. Living life in that Spirit is living the life we will eternally lead. If we don't like the righteous, clean life in Christ, if we find it limiting and boring, then we are signing ourselves out of the eternal life. There will be no point in our receiving it. The eternal life is there to be lived. It's there for the taking in the

sense that it is there to be lived. If we live it, we have it. And our bodies will be changed at the Lord's coming so that we can eternally live it.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we do not give up-* The emphasis is on *this* [kind of] ministry. The not giving up is in proportion to the ministry of the Spirit [just spoken of] ever increasing in glory, whereas the Mosaic ministry fades away. What keeps any ministry going, what stops us all from giving up, is the Spirit- which is the dynamic of our service. All talk of burnout, lack of staying power or disillusion is an indicator that the Spirit was never really there in the ministry. The constant obtaining of mercy [in response to our ongoing sins] is what energizes us to not give up. Paul seems to ascribe his own unflagging zeal for preaching to his experience of God's gracious forgiveness of him. And further, he speaks in the third person, suggesting that his fellow preachers had a like motivation: "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry (of preaching), *as we have received mercy, we faint not*" (2 Cor. 4:1). The Greek suggests that as we have received mercy, so we have received the ministry- to share that mercy to others. Our witness to the Gospel and our ministry of caring for others are motivated by our own awareness of having received grace personally. Any other motivation simply isn't enough to inspire us to keep on keeping on. See on :14. "We do not give up" is repeated in :16, where it is cited as an outworking of living under grace and is part of our inward man being progressively renewed daily. Giving up, fading away, is a common experience of many religious people including Christians. The parable of the sower speaks of it. It is only the involvement with the Spirit which will stop this happening in real terms- for even if someone maintains their religious commitment to attending meetings, the question is whether we are spiritually alive within. And that is the realm of the Spirit.

4:2 *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully-* What had Paul personally renounced? Surely, the things of Judaism. He speaks about them with very hard language, leading up to his description of them as the great satan in :4. "The hidden things" connect with Moses' face being hidden behind a veil; and Paul now twists the idea of a covered face towards the concept of shame. He presents the revered Moses as it were covered in shame. He considered that the Jewish rabbis handled God's word deceitfully (an allusion to Jer. 8:8?). "Craftiness" is the same word used about the Jewish opposition to the Lord's ministry (Lk. 20:23); it was the characteristic of the Jewish false teachers in 2 Cor. 11:3.

*But by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God-* By showing that we are real men and women, who are desperate sinners thankful for the real and true grace we have so wonderfully come across, we will persuade men. The more real, the more credible. Paul described the genius of his preaching thus: "By the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience" (2 Cor. 4:2). It is our very transparency which strikes a chord in the heart of those who hear us. Paul didn't need letters to commend himself; he says that in their spirit, in the heart, they know that he is sincere. And he uses the same approach here. There is an intuitive sense that a person is manifesting God's truth. This again is the realm of the Spirit. "In the sight of God" or as the phrase is often translated "before God" is a common phrase of Paul's. He was ever aware that life is lived, even in our deepest hearts, in His eyes and presence.

4:3 *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those that perish-* The limitation of salvation to those who accept Christ couldn't be more clearly stated. Belief in *God* is not enough. The Jews strongly believed in "one God" but they would still perish without Christ. Liberal Christians seem to think that belief in God is somehow a saving grace; but salvation is in His Son. It was the face of Moses which was veiled, and Paul hereby identifies himself

and all Christian preachers with Moses. This was radical stuff for Judaists, who considered Moses the acme of spiritual attainment and effectively unreachable and devoid of equal amongst subsequent generations. The implication is also that "our Gospel" was the message of the glory of Christ, it was and is totally Christ centred. The veil was belief in the Law of Moses for salvation; this in fact led to their 'perishing' in that it prevented them seeing the glory of the Lord Jesus.

4:4- see on Eph. 1:20.

*In whom-* The problem was internal; the minds of the unbelieving were blinded. 3:14 has said that their minds were hardened or blinded because the veil of Judaism lay upon their minds. "The god of this world" is therefore sure to be related to Jewish, legal influences.

*The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving-* The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "To those in this world whose minds have been blinded by God, because they did not believe". It is darkness which blinds men's eyes (1 Jn. 2:11), i.e. not walking according to the light of God's word. There is only *one* God – not two. And it's also noteworthy that Is. 6:10 speaks of *God* as having the power to blind Israel. The New Testament repeats this. Rom. 11:8 says that *God* (and not Satan) blinded Israel to the Gospel; 2 Cor. 3:14 says that their minds were blinded or "hardened" (RV) as Pharaoh's was. Whoever "the god of this world" is or was, God worked through it and is therefore greater than it. Henry Kelly comments: "Given this track record, can we see the God of this Aeon as *our* God, as Yahweh? He is, after all, in charge of everything". It is God and not any independent Satan figure who sends people an *energeia* of error to believe falsehood (2 Thess. 2:12) – the ultimate 'energy' in the process is from God.

For something to be called "the god of this world" does not necessarily mean that it is in reality "the god of this world"; it could mean 'the thing or power that this world counts to be God'. Thus Acts 19:27 speaks of the goddess Diana, a lifeless idol, "whom all the world worships". This doesn't mean that the piece of wood or stone called Diana was in reality the goddess of this world. I mentioned in section 1-1-2 that Paul is quoting "the god of this world" from contemporary Jewish writings rather than actually believing such a 'god' existed. It's also possible that "the god of this world" who blinds people is an allusion to material in the documents comprising what are now known as the Gnostic Gospels. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* claims to record God's rebuke of Satan: "'You are mistaken, Samael", which means, "god of the blind"'. Paul in this case would be alluding to popular belief about Satan, and reapplying this language to the Jewish opposition to the Gospel, and to the human "blindness" which stops them accepting Christ. In Eph. 4:18 Paul specifically defined what he meant by "darkness": "Having the understanding darkened... through the ignorance that is *within* them... The blindness of their heart". That opposition, rather than any mythical 'Samael', was the real adversary / Satan.

Even if it is insisted that Satan exists as a personal being, the question has to be faced: Who created Satan? Is his power under God's control, or not? Time and again the 'Satan' and 'demon' passages of the Bible indicate that however we are to understand these terms, God is more powerful, God is in control. The book of Job shows how the Satan there had all power given to him *by God*. The power of the Lord Jesus over 'demons' makes the same point. And in that context, note how Ex. 4:11 assures us that God is the one who makes people deaf, but Lk. 11:14 speaks of how such muteness is apparently caused by demons. Clearly, God is in control. This world, with all the evil and negative experience in it, has not been left under the control of some out-of-control evil being. With this in mind, it should be apparent that the 'god of this world' can't mean that the world is under the *ultimate* control of Satan rather than

God. Rather, “the god of this world” [*aion*] “can also be read as merely a personification of all the forces of this *aion* that would thwart the success of the Christian message”.

The way that the idea of ‘Satan’ is used to describe both individual sin and societies governed by the principle of sin is very much in line with the way that first century society was very much a communalistic rather than an individualistic society. The society was the person. Further, social scientists and psychologists have time and again confirmed the Biblical teaching that the fundamental motivation of human beings is the ego, self-interest – what the Bible calls ‘Satan’. This is what drives people at the individual level, and thus drives societies. It’s appropriate, therefore, for ‘Satan’, the personification of human sin and self-interest, to also be a term applied to human governments and societies as a whole. Truly in this sense (the Biblical) Satan could be understood as “the god of this world”.

### **A Jewish Interpretation**

If Scripture interprets Scripture, “the god of this world (*aion*)” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 must be similar to “the prince of this world (*kosmos*)” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Both the Jewish age [*aion*] and *kosmos* ended in A.D. 70. In the context, Paul has been talking in 2 Cor. 3 about how the glory shining from Moses’ face blinded the Israelites so that they could not see the real spirit of the law which pointed forward to Christ. Similarly, he argues in chapter 4, the Jews in the first century could not see “the light of the glorious (cp. the glory on Moses’ face) gospel of Christ” because they were still blinded by “the god of this world” – the ruler of the Jewish age. The “prince” or “God” of the “world” (age) was the Jewish system, manifested this time in Moses and his law. Notice how the Jews are described as having made their boast of the law...made their boast of God (Rom. 2:17,23). To them, the Law of Moses had become the god of their world. Although the link is not made explicit, there seems no reason to doubt that “the prince of this world” and “Satan” are connected. It is evident from Acts (9:23–25,29–30; 13:50,51; 14:5,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 20:3) that the Jews were the major ‘Satan’ or adversary to the early Christians, especially to Paul. Of course it has to be remembered that there is a difference between Moses’ personal character and the Law he administered; this contrast is constantly made in Hebrews. Similarly, the Law was “Holy, just and good”, but resulted in sin due to man’s weakness – it was “weak through the flesh”, explaining why the idea of Satan/sin is connected with the Law. Because of this it was in practice a “ministry of condemnation”, and therefore a significant ‘adversary’ (Satan) to man; for in reality, “the motions of sins...were by the Law” (Rom. 7:5).

*That the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn-* "Dawn" is better "shine out". The glory of Christ and therefore of God cannot shine through the veil of legalism. That Christ "is the image of God" is mentioned to make the point that being blinded to Him means being blinded to God. It is not possible to have a relationship with the Father without the Son. The Gospel is the glory of Christ. The blessings now mediated by the exalted Lord mean that *whatever* the barriers, those who appreciate those blessings and the *height*, the pure, wondrous *height* of His exaltation and what this thereby enables for us, will *naturally* preach it. The Gospel is “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4 RSV). The glory of the “similitude of the Lord” that Moses saw and reflected (Num. 12:4) is likened to “the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Like Moses, Jewish people have the vision of that glory, but they have it veiled; they potentially have it, but it is hidden, because their minds are veiled. This could possibly suggest that Paul saw more potential in the Jewish mind for Christ than other races; thus he speaks in Rom. 11 of how the natural branch which has been cut off [Israel] will be more effectively grafted back into the olive tree than the wild Gentile branches. This of course has similarities with the Lord’s teaching about Himself as the vine, whose unfruitful branches had been cut off (Jn. 15:2). Israel “much more” than the Gentiles can be grafted back in, whereas Gentile converts

do this “against nature” (Rom. 11:24). In the context of Israel’s final repentance, God speaks of how every one of the Jewish people has been potentially created for His glory, because they carry His Name (Is. 43:7). Although Israel have been “quenched as a wick” for their sins (Is. 43:17 RVmg.), we are to realize that the wick is still smouldering, and are to follow the Lord’s example of never totally quenching it but instead seek to fan the wick of Israel back into life (Is. 42:3).

*4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake-* The Gospel preached was of the glory of the Lord Jesus. His Lordship is predicated upon His glory. If we grasp that this is to be the content of our message, then we shall be consumed with preaching Him and not in any form self-advertising, nor using God's truth as a channel towards self-glorification. Paul answers the accusation that he was 'lording it' over the Corinthians by saying that he preached Christ Jesus as Lord- and therefore he was a servant of Jesus, if Jesus really is Lord. But the service of Jesus was manifested through serving His people, the Corinthians.

4:6- see on Jn. 13:32.

*Seeing it is God that said-* It is emphasized that God created through His word of command; He said, and it was done (Ps. 33:6,9; 148:5; Is. 40:26; Jn. 1:3; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5). God is outside the constraints of time, and outside the possibility of His word not being fulfilled. Therefore if He says something, it is as it is done, even if in human time His command is not immediately fulfilled. Thus He calls things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17). It is in this sense that the Lord Jesus and those in Him are spoken of as if we existed at the beginning; although we didn't physically. And so God spoke the words He did on six literal, consecutive days, and the orders ('fiats' is the word Alan Hayward used) were therefore, in this sense as good as done. But the actual time taken to carry them out by the Angels may have been very long. The Genesis record can then be understood as stating these commands, and then recording their fulfilment- although the fulfilment wasn't necessarily on that same day. It would seem from later Scripture that the orders and intentions outlined by God on the six literal days are still being fulfilled. Take the command for there to be light (Gen. 1:3,4). This is interpreted in 2 Cor. 4:6 as meaning that God shines in men's hearts in order to give them the knowledge of the light of Christ. The command was initially fulfilled by the Angels enabling the sun to shine through the thick darkness that shrouded the earth; but the deeper intention was to shine the spiritual light into the heart of earth-dwellers. And this is still being fulfilled. Likewise the resting of God on the seventh day was in fact a prophecy concerning how He and all His people will enter into the "rest" of the Kingdom. The Lord realized this when He said that even on Sabbath, God was still working (Jn. 5:17). The creation work had not really been completed in practice, although in prospect it had been. In this very context the apostle comments that although we must still enter into that rest, "the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3). See on Col. 1:15.

*Light shall shine out of darkness-* The new creation is effected with the same power, Spirit and word as the natural creation.

*He shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge-* The initiative in granting this 'light of knowledge' is with the Lord. It is not that the Bible is a riddle to be solved, which some manage to crack, and thereby through the light of knowledge come to know the Father and Son. By contrast, we are being told here that the Lord took the initiative by direct action within human hearts. But as happened at Corinth, some choose to restrict God's intended pathway, they grieve the Holy Spirit, and "limit the Holy One of Israel" as did Israel of old.



Paul's description of how the light of the glory of God in Christ shines in the heart of the new convert was not without reference back to his own Damascus road conversion (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). Because the light was shone to us, we reflect it to others. "In the beginning", perhaps a huge period of time ago, God created the heavens and earth. But the present creation can be seen as being constituted some time later, after the previous creations. When during the six days of creation He said "Let there be light" this may not have necessitated the actual manufacture of the sun; this was presumably done "in the beginning". But the sun was commanded to shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:6), and therefore from the viewpoint of someone standing on the earth, it was as if the sun had been created.

*Of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ-* We read in Is. 52:14 that the Lord's face was more marred, more brutally transmogrified, than that of any man. And yet reflecting upon 2 Cor. 4:4,6, we find that His face was the face of God; His glory was and is the Father's glory: "The glory of Christ, who is the image of God... the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Who is the one who redeems His people? Isaiah calls him "the arm of the Lord": "To whom has *the arm of the Lord* been revealed?" (Is. 53:1; compare Is. 52:10). Then he continues: "*He* grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground" (v. 2). So, the *arm of the LORD* is a person- a divine person! He is God's "right arm," His "right-hand Man"! He is also human: He grows up out of the earth like a root out of dry ground.

*4:7 But we have this treasure in earthly vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves-* The reference is clearly to Gideon and his men breaking their earthly vessels, and God giving them a great victory (Jud. 7:19). Paul and Timothy were vessels used by God (Acts 9:15; 2 Tim. 2:21); but so are we all (2 Cor. 4:7). All true human achievement for God must be in allowing His Spirit to work, and not by human power "from ourselves". This is the spirit of Gideon (Jud. 7:2).

*4:8 We are afflicted in every way, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not in despair-* Another allusion to the situation at Gideon's time (see on :7). "Afflicted" is from a Greek word meaning to make narrow; "crushed" is from a different Greek word which has a similar meaning. We are made narrow, hemmed in- but in another sense we are not. We are gloriously free. Likewise in a sense Paul was in despair (s.w. 2 Cor. 1:8); but not in another. He uses the same word for "perplexed" in writing of his despair at the Galatians' loss of faith and moral declension (Gal. 4:20). We see here the two poles in his attitude to the Corinthians- despairing at them, and yet from a spiritual perspective, very positive about them.

*4:9 Pursued, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed-* As at the time of writing 1 Corinthians, Paul looked beyond his immediate traumas to the welfare of the weak Corinthians, and his concern for the impoverished Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The feature of all suffering is that we become self centred. Yet the Lord carrying His cross and looking outwards to the future suffering of the onlooking women is our great example. Paul was indeed forsaken by men (2 Tim. 4:10,16). But he was not forsaken by the Lord's presence through His Spirit. "Destroyed" translates the Greek term Paul repeatedly uses in Corinthians for the destruction of the condemned at the last day; he has just used it in this connection in :3 (1 Cor. 1:18,19; 8:11; 10:9,10; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3). It surely has to be that the 'destruction' in view is final condemnation. No matter how he was thrown or "struck" down by men, his comfort was that he was not and would not be condemned by the Lord. *His* acceptance means everything, and makes any human persecution or rejection of no account. And yet the rejection of men is a major issue with men; being 'cast down' from status or a position of acceptance becomes an unbearable experience for many. Paul went through all

this, but the fact he was in relationship with the Lord and would not be condemned *by Him* was the ultimate comfort. And it should be for us too. Paul states this clearly in 1 Cor. 4:4- that the Lord's judgment and not human judgment [including that of our brethren] is all important.

4:10 *Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body*- All Paul's sufferings listed in :8 and :9 he understood as a fellowshipping of the Lord's. Whilst we cannot attach meaning to event at the time, all our sufferings are part of His. This explains the breadth and depth of His sufferings; through them, He in essence can connect with all our sufferings. And those sufferings are given to us, as some form of manifestation of His sufferings. And just as surely, the resurrection life of Jesus will be manifested in our body, both in this life (:11) and in the resurrection body at the last day.

Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others: "So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:12). The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

Paul speaks here as if he full well understood the ongoing nature of the Lord's crucifixion, and saw it as the pattern of his daily living.

The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analysing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11
Always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross. See on Mt. 27:26.

4:11 *For we who live are always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh*- See on :10. If the life of Jesus is living in us ["we who live"], then we will constantly be experiencing both the crucifixion suffering and resurrection life of the Lord Jesus. The experience of new life within us now is the basis upon which our entire bodies will likewise be transformed (Rom. 8:11).

4:12 *So then death works in us*- The tragedy of death and suffering for the unbeliever is that it achieves nothing on a personal level, it is the end. Whereas for the believer, the Lord's sufferings and death are manifested in us, but they "work", they achieve or literally 'energize', life. Not only for us personally but for others. This is the ultimate death- a death which brings life for others as well as for ourselves. And only by connection with the Lord Jesus can such a meaning be attached to human death. This to my mind is one of the most powerful blessings

of Christianity, of connection to Christ in baptism and a life lived in the power and Spirit of His death and resurrection.

*But life in you-* We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7). Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others. The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

4:13 *But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe and on this basis we also speak-* The GNB gets the point: "The scripture says, "I spoke because I believed." In the same spirit of faith we also speak because we believe". Paul is saying that because he takes these things seriously, he really believes this is all gloriously true, he therefore speaks it out. "I believed, and therefore have I spoken" (Ps. 116:10) is quoted in 2 Cor. 4:13 concerning the attitude of the preacher; *because we have believed, therefore we preach*, after Paul's pattern. We carry in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, and live His resurrection life even now in our mortal flesh- and "We having the same spirit of faith [as He had], according to that which is written, I believed and therefore did I speak. We *also* believe, and therefore *also* we speak" (2 Cor. 4:11-13). Here Paul quotes the Messianic Ps. 116:10 about *our* witness, which is a living out of the spirit which Jesus had in His death and present life and being in Heaven. And we should adopt a similar positive approach.

We are all terminally ill, if only we would know it. Paul quotes from the experience of Hezekiah at this time and says that this should be the keynote of our witness (Ps. 116:10). He was "delivered from death" and therefore promised to walk before the Lord "in the lands of the living", believing in salvation and therefore speaking to those lands of it (RV). We all face the day when we shall be as water spilt on the ground, that cannot be gathered up; when the delicate, beautiful chandelier of human life will come crashing to the ground, when the rope holding the bucket snaps, and it falls into the well. In all these Biblical images of death, we face the tragic irreversibility of it all. Our bodies are already riddled with the cancer of inevitable decay. *Today*, while it is still today, we must focus ourselves upon the vital and essential realities of our faith, and away from all the peripheral issues upon which our flesh would far rather dwell.

4:14 *Knowing that He that raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you-* This is in the context of having observed that the process of sharing the Lord's death "works [energizes] life in you" (:12). Again Paul sees the final salvation of the Corinthians as partly related to his own continued connection with them. This is the exact opposite of those who cut themselves loose from any believers who fall beneath their own self-chosen standards of doctrine or practice. It was to be God, the One who raised Jesus, who would "present us with you". He will make us acceptable to Himself and His Son at the last day. Note how in 2 Cor. 11:2 Paul writes of how he himself was seeking to "present" (s.w.) the Corinthians "as a chaste virgin to Christ". But here he writes that this process of preparation and 'presenting' is God's. Clearly enough, he is teaching that God will work powerfully through our efforts to present others acceptable at the last day. If we set our hearts and lives upon such work, God shall work in and through us, somehow enabling our work.

4:15 *For all things are for your sakes, that the grace may be multiplied through many-* God's saving grace meant that "many" preachers like Paul were sharing this grace to others; and the result would be thanksgiving which glorified God. The terms used in this verse are going to be later used by Paul about the gift or grace of giving to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. He

believed that this giving would result in much thanks, to God's glory (2 Cor. 8:7; 9:8,12). The grace given each of us in salvation ought to be reflected in practical giving to the poor, so that our praise for God's giving to us translates into the praise of the recipients towards God. As Paul felt he could orchestrate even the salvation of the Corinthians (see on :12), so he felt he could arrange the glory of God through his elaborate Jerusalem Poor Fund project. But there is no evidence he gathered very much support for it, nor that it was accepted by the Jerusalem poor, nor that it ever elicited much thanks to God. Likewise it cannot be that Paul alone could be the saviour of those who "had not the knowledge of God" and who had turned away from God's glory in Christ.

*Causing thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God-* AV "to redound", Gk. 'to surge back'. God's grace shown to us surges back like the tide in good works to others; see on 4:1. The same word is used about the grace / giving to the Jerusalem poor abounding to God's glory through all the thanksgiving which Paul imagined the project would elicit (2 Cor. 9:12 s.w.).

4:16 *Therefore we do not give up-* As noted on :1 where the same word is used, the power to keep on keeping on comes from the Spirit, and from the firm knowledge that by His grace we shall surely live eternally. The presence of the Spirit in our hearts and lives now is the guarantee that we shall live eternally, and our mortal flesh shall in due course be transformed to Spirit nature. This is why we do not give up, it is why the true Christian faith is no mere passing religion, passion or enthusiasm which comes and goes as we go onwards in life.

*But though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day-* The same word for "inward man" is found in Eph. 3:16: "Be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man". Rom. 6:4 teaches that after baptism, we live in an ongoing "newness of life". This is because of the gift of the Spirit, which strengthens and renews the inner man constantly. Just as we are "always" experiencing the Lord's sufferings (:11), so "day by day" we are renewed. A related word is used when Paul teaches that the new creation which begins at baptism makes all things new (2 Cor. 5:17). There is a process on renewal and strengthening ongoing in the hearts or "inward man" of the believer- if we will believe it and permit it. Paul has spoken of this at the end of chapter 3; we are being progressively changed "from glory to glory", closer and ever more exactly into the mental image of the Lord Jesus. The ongoing nature of the transformation is important to Paul, because it contrasts with the fading glory of the Mosaic system.

4:17 *For our slight momentary affliction accomplishes for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison-* The traumas of :8 and :9 are "slight"; the word is only elsewhere used in Mt. 11:30 "My burden is light". The lightness is not in absolute terms, for we are asked to carry the cross of Christ; but in relative terms it is- compared to the eternal weight of glory ahead. The *weight* of that glory is contrasted with the *lightness* of the present affliction. However painful, it is for a 'moment' *relative to* the "eternal" glory. The context presents the eternal glory as that of the Lord Jesus. But we are being changed into His glory, from glory to glory, as the Spirit works within our minds now to effect that change. The RV reflects the Greek in offering: "More and more exceedingly an eternal weight". The ongoing nature is brought out well. The 'accomplishment' therefore refers not only to the change to glory at the resurrection of the body; but to a process of glorification now ongoing, and which will continue eternally. The transformation and renewal is something we shall eternally experience; eternity in that sense will never be boring. Our afflictions are right now accomplishing the eternal weight of glory. Paul will soon use the same word in writing of how God, through the guarantee of the Spirit's work in us, is 'accomplishing' our salvation in us (2 Cor. 5:5). Our current afflictions are nothing to be compared with the accomplishment of glory even now within us- let alone to the eternal glory of bodily immortality at the last day.

Every moment of our lives is being intensely used by God to prepare us for the eternity ahead. It is incredible that our probations here are so short- just forty years or so after our baptisms. It would seem more appropriate if we suffered for say one million years in order to prepare us for the infinite time we will one day enjoy, in which one million years will be as a moment. The point is, a tremendous amount of spiritual development and preparation is packed in to a very small space of time. And from this a crucial conclusion follows: we must allow God to use every moment of our present lives as intensively as possible, to the end we might be prepared for His eternal Kingdom.

4:18 *Whilst meantime we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal-* 'Things not seen' is a phrase elsewhere used for Jewish inability or blindness to the things of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:10; Jn. 9:39; Rom. 11:8,10). The idea of looking at things which are not visible is surely contradictory; until we read this in context of the preceding imagery of Israel not 'seeing' the glory of Christ because of the veil placed upon them. We look at those things, with unveiled face- things which are not seen *by many*, especially Jewish people.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens-* The context continues from the end of chapter 4, where we have been urged to focus on the things which are eternal rather than those which are immediately visible. Paul likens our body to a tent- and as a tentmaker it is understandable that he should use such a metaphor. If that tent or tabernacle is taken down, in death, we know that we have a solid, permanent building prepared for us by God, reserved in Heaven. It is this which we will be clothed with at the Lord's return. "Not made with hands" suggests that our future being has been prepared by God; "not made with hands" recalls the stone of Daniel 2 cut out without human hands, i.e. prepared by God. Verse 5 will explain that we have a future reward which is being worked out for us by the Spirit's action in our lives right now. Our focus should be upon who we will eternally be, not on who we are now. Who we shall eternally be is being prepared right now through the Spirit's action in our lives now.

*5:2 For indeed in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven-* The groaning is that of Rom. 8:23: "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as children and the redemption of our bodies". The groaning is therefore for "the redemption of our bodies" at the Lord's return; the building being prepared in Heaven (:1) refers to the same thing. It is shoddy Bible study to use this passage as proof that we shall receive our reward in Heaven at the point of death. The reference in Rom. 8:23 to "the firstfruits of the Spirit" is matched here in :5 where we are encouraged that we have received "the Spirit as a guarantee". The Roman 8 passage goes further in explaining that our groans for the final salvation merge with the groans of the Lord Jesus in His intercession for us right now. Being clothed with, or "upon" (AV), suggests that human personality will not be totally destroyed- but clothed upon with immortality. The Bible offers personal salvation- that you and I as persons shall be eternally saved, rather than fading into some nirvana of nothingness. And in this is the eternal significance of our character development now- for who we essentially are is who we shall eternally be.

*5:3 Inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked-* Nakedness is associated with rejection at the Lord's return (Rev. 16:15). Again the focus is upon His return as the time when this change shall be effected, and not at the point of our death.

*5:4 For indeed we that are in this tent do groan, being burdened. Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life-* "Burdened" is the same Greek word Paul has used in 1:8 to describe the burden / suffering he experienced for the sake of the Gospel. It made him "groan" the more for mortality to be swallowed by life- the resurrection and change of our mortal body to an immortal one at the second coming. The language is that which Paul has earlier used in 1 Cor. 15. "Not that we would be unclothed" connects with the reference to nakedness in :3. The sense is therefore 'Not that we want to be made naked before the judgment seat of Christ and left in that shameful state of condemnation, but to be made naked and then clothed upon with immortal bodies'. I don't think that being "unclothed" means that Paul didn't want to die- for in Phil. 1:23 Paul says he had a strong desire to die and only wanted to remain alive for the sake of what he could do in service to others. So his desire here in 2 Cor. 5:4 *not* to be "unclothed" I suggest refers to the nakedness of condemnation, the metaphor introduced in the preceding verse :3.

The struggle of prayer (see on Col. 2:1) is reflected in a word associated with it- 'groaning'. The Lord Himself prayed with strong groanings and tears, and He even now makes

intercession for our prayers with groanings which are inexpressible within the limitations of words. 2 Cor. 5:4 says that we groan, being burdened, for the day when “mortality might be swallowed up of life”. This is the language of a burdened Israel in Egypt, groaning for deliverance. Our ‘groaning’ in this mortal flesh (2 Cor. 5:2) is therefore not to be read as a justification for groaning and complaining about our humanity; but rather intense prayer for the second coming.

*5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee-* God is now preparing or 'working' out our future eternal nature of being, which we shall receive in the form of an immortalized existence when the Lord returns. But we have the Spirit now in our hearts as a guarantee and foretaste of that great salvation. Paul has just used the same word for 'prepared us' in 4:17- our light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory. But that 'working out' is God's working, by the Spirit. The only other usages of the word "guarantee" are also in the context of the Spirit being a guarantee *in our hearts* (1:22 "the guarantee of the Spirit in our hearts"), granted after we believe and are baptized (Eph. 1:13,14).

That God is working in our lives through His Spirit, and that He has granted us the gifts of forgiveness and prospective salvation by its working, should not engender any spirit of relaxation. If we truly believe this, it will motivate us to greater personal effort: "God... hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident... wherefore we labour that... we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat... knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:5-11 AV)- i.e. 'Despite having had God's gift of salvation in prospect, the utmost personal effort is still required in responding to it. Think of the day of judgment, the fear that you will have then because of God's holiness and your sinfulness. Although this is not our only motivation, indeed it is somewhat human ("we persuade men"), it is still powerfully true'.

But the 'preparation' or 'working' of God can also be understood in this context as the fact He has first made us mortal, and allowed us to groan for immortality. For we who understand not only Bible teaching about death, but also the insistent Biblical emphasis upon it, we don't live life in an eternal now. We live now for tomorrow, joyful in our awareness of the eternal consequence of our actions and personalities beyond the grave, knowing that all our beliefs, actions, faith, character developments- all come to their ultimate term before the judgment seat of Christ. In speaking of our mortality and our longing for immortality, Paul comments that "He that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. 5:5 AV). The reference to how God "wrought us" [NEV "prepared us"] would appear to comment upon the mortality of our bodies; human mortality [when correctly understood] makes us long for the coming of the Lord to clothe us with our new nature which is to be brought to us from Heaven (2 Cor. 5:2). God "wrought us" as He did in order to enable us to have this longing. According to the Bible, the spirit of man is God's. He gave us that life force (Is. 42:5), and at death "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). If we seriously believe this, then we will see death as an opportunity to give back to God what He gave us, namely our very life force. If in our lives we followed this principle, realizing nothing we 'have' is really ours but His, and therefore we were open handed with our possessions and knowledge of Him, freely giving it out as it were to Him, then giving back our life force to Him will be but a natural progression from this way of living. And thus we will see immortality not as something we personally crave for our own benefit, but rather a further opportunity to reflect back to Him, to His glory. Thus understanding Bible truth about death affects how we face death and eternity, and therefore radically influences our lives now.

*5:6 Being therefore always of good courage-* The "therefore" refers to the fact we have been given the Spirit in our hearts (1:22) as a guarantee that we shall indeed be finally saved.

Those like the Corinthians who deny the Spirit are left without this "good courage". It is that experience of the Spirit which convicts us that we are not "at home" in secular life, and long to be united with the Lord Jesus more fully (:8). The Greek word for "good courage" is used by Paul only here in 2 Corinthians (5:8; 7:16; 10:1,2). This personal confidence that we shall be saved inspires a generally hopeful and confident approach in dealing with others, not least politically fraught and tense situations as Paul faced with the Corinthians.

*And knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord-* "At home" translates the word which is found later in :8 and :9. The AV makes a mess here by not consistently translating the word. We are "at home in the body" but we would rather be "at home" with the Lord (:8). "At home" means just that- in your family. "Absent" carries the idea of having emigrated abroad, of having quit something. This definition is crucial to understand this passage from :7-9. I suggest that Paul is not merely describing the general situation of believers in mortality- as if to say that if we are still in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus is a major New Testament theme; we are not "absent" from Him. But we should not be in a position where we have emigrated from Him, gone out from Him, quit Him- and these are the ideas present in *ek-demeo*. Without question, the *ek* prefix means 'out of', and it carries that meaning around 900 times in the New Testament. I suggest rather that Paul is teaching that if we are at home in the body, if secular life is our natural and preferred habitat, where we feel most at home; then we have emigrated, gone away, from the Lord Jesus.

*5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight-* This connects back to 4:18: "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen". Our focus is not to be upon who we are now, what we see before our eyes; but upon who we shall eternally be, which we see by the eye of faith. In the language of :6 and :8, we are not to feel homely, "at home", in the present body nor the secular life with which it is associated. We are to have the Lord Jesus "at home" with us, and to be absent from the things of fleshly life.

5:8- see on Lk. 12:37.

*Yes, we are of good courage; and we would rather be absent from the body and at home with the Lord-* The reference of the "rather" is to being "at home in the body" (:6; verse 7 is an aside). Paul is confident of leaving the body and being at home with the Lord. As explained on :6, he has in view how we should right now in this life not feel at home in earthly life, and should not go away ["be absent"] from the Lord but rather be at home with Him in His family now. But this shall come to ultimate term when He returns, when like Lot we leave Sodom, we leave the things of this bodily life. He is confident, by grace, of that happening at the Lord's return. This interpretation is confirmed as we read on in :9,10 of our acceptance with Him then, and of the judgment seat of Christ at His return. This interpretation makes sense of the connection between confidence, and becoming fully "at home" with the Lord at His return and the judgment seat.

*5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to him-* Our aim or focus (see on :7) is to be pleasing to Him at the day of His coming- I prefer AV "we may be accepted of Him", because the next verse goes on to speak of the judgment seat of Christ. "Whether at home or absent" could mean 'Whether we are alive or dead at His return'. This would then connect with one possible view of :4 "Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed"- which could mean 'We don't want to die before His return, our preference is that this mortal body be swallowed up into immortality at His return during our lifetimes'. This would mean that here in :9, being "at home" refers to being at home with the Lord now, and "absent" refers to being absent from the Lord in death. But in my note on :4 I



have suggested an alternative interpretation. And we are never absent or away from the Lord, in death nor life, for all live unto Him. As explained on :6, we are now to be "at home" with the Lord and "absent" or to have quit the bodily, fleshly life. So Paul may well mean that he labours for the Corinthians, that whether they are currently at home in the bodily fleshly life or absent from it, spiritually weak or strong, they will still be accepted at the last day. And that fits to my mind more comfortably with Paul's whole attitude to the weak Corinthians and his labour for their final acceptance.

"In this (body) we *groan*... we that are in this tabernacle do *groan*, being burdened... we are always *confident*... we are *confident*, I say... Wherefore we *labour* (are ambitious), that... we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:1-10 AV). Notice the designed repetition of the words "groan" and "confident". The humdrum groaning of this life is related to our ambitious confidence that we really will be accepted at the day of judgment. The very thought of acceptance on that day requires real ambition, an ambition that will lift us right up out of the 'groaning' of this life.

5:10 *For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ*- We shall then be revealed as to whether we are "at home" with the bodily, fleshly life- or with the Lord and His family. We shall be revealed as to whether we are "absent" or have gone out from the Lord, or whether we have instead quit the bodily, worldly life. The revelation of each believer at the judgment seat will be public- the same word is used by the Lord in teaching that no secret thing shall not be revealed "abroad", before all (Mk. 4:22). Paul had earlier used this word in teaching the Corinthians that the secret intentions of the heart shall be "revealed" at the Lord's coming (1 Cor. 4:5); every man's work shall be revealed ["made manifest"] (1 Cor. 3:13). Here in 2 Cor. 5:10, he says that the deeds of the body shall be revealed- but in the Lord's book, the thought and the actions are the same. There will be a mutuality at the day of judgment- the Lord Jesus shall be revealed to us, and we to Him. His life shall then be manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:10,11). The essence of judgment day is ongoing now- for our deeds are manifest now before God, in the light of the cross (Jn. 3:21 and context; see notes there). And so Paul now goes straight on to say that "we are made manifest [s.w. "revealed"] unto God" right now (:11). This is why Paul claims utter transparency before the Corinthians; he has now hidden agendas, because he is completely "made manifest [s.w. "revealed"] among you in all things" (2 Cor. 11:6). We shall be revealed before the Lord and all our brethren in that day, so we may as well be in this life. "We must all *appear* before the judgment seat" (2 Cor. 5:10 AV) doesn't therefore just mean we'll put in an appearance. The Greek means to be exposed utterly. We shall have "our lives laid open" (NEB). Then, the unshareable self will be revealed; that essence of personality which is unknown even to us.

*That each one may receive the result of the things done in a bodily form, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad*- We note again the reference to the body. Paul has been urging us to not be "at home" in the body but to instead be "at home" with the Lord and His family (see on :6). The things done "in the body" (AV) will be judged with eternal consequence. All "the things done" will then be judged. Somehow, the judgment event will take account of every single action, every good or bad. This is what gives significance to human life, thought and action, every moment. All shall have eternal moment and consequence at the last day. We shall then "receive" for the good (Eph. 6:8) and bad which we have done (Col. 3:25).

5:11- see on 1 Jn. 3:19.

*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men-* "Persuade" is the same word used of how Paul had initially visited Corinth and "persuaded" the Corinthians of the Gospel (Acts 18:4). His preaching was now passive presentation of theological truths. Given the eternal moment of the issues arising from believing or rejecting the Gospel, he unashamedly, proactively sought to persuade men of the positive response they should make. And he did so knowing "the fear" or "terror"(AV) of the Lord's rejection at the day of judgment.

*But we are revealed to God, and I hope that we are revealed also in your consciences-* As noted on :10, we shall be revealed to God at the last day; and yet the essence of judgment is right now. Paul hopes that in their hearts, the Corinthians knew that the Paul they saw and heard was the real Paul; he was speaking and acting as if before the judgment throne of the Lord, right now. He did not in fact have any other persona or agendas, as they falsely accused him of. See on :10 and :12.

Fearing God's judgment and righteousness is not in itself a bad motivation. It may not be the highest motivation, but in practice, because we so often understand no other language, the real fear of God is a necessary motivation. Knowing the "terror of the Lord" (a phrase used in the OT with reference to coming judgment), Paul persuaded men to accept His grace (2 Cor. 5:11). Noah went into the ark (cp. baptism) from fear of the coming flood (Gen. 7:7), as Israel crossed the Red Sea (again, baptism) from fear of the approaching Egyptians, as men fled to the city of refuge (again, Christ, Heb. 6:18) from fear of the avenger of blood, and as circumcision (cp. baptism) was performed with the threat of exclusion from the community (possibly by death) hanging over the child. Biblically, *phobos* is the motivation for a pure life (1 Pet. 3:2; 2 Cor. 7:11), for humility in our dealings with each other (Eph. 5:21), for accepting the Gospel in the first place (2 Cor. 5:11). It must be remembered that the Gospel is not only good news, but also the warning of judgment to come on those who reject it (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38-40). The good news is *so* good that a man can't hear it and decide not to respond- without facing judgment for his rejection of God's love and Christ's death. There are many who know the Gospel (e.g. by being 'brought up in the Faith') but who calmly walk away from the call of the cross. I would suggest that they need more reminding than it seems they are given of the fear of God, the tragic inevitability of judgment to come, the sense of desperate self-hate and bitter regret that will engulf men then, the sense of no place to run... . Paul used "the terror of the Lord" , the concept of fearing God, to persuade men who had rejected his beseeching (2 Cor. 5:11).

The idea of conditional salvation, and that not for everybody but a tiny minority, I find both hard to accept and yet the very thing that clinches the actual reality of 'the truth' we hold. Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). And this book was in some way a joy and rejoicing to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). And when those that had already believed (Acts 19:18 Gk.) saw how the condemned sons of Sceva fled away from the spirit of Jesus naked and wounded, in anticipation of the final judgment, they ceased being secret believers and came out openly with their confessions of unworthiness and need for salvation. In the light of that foretaste of judgment to come, they realized that nothing else mattered. The image of them fleeing naked definitely alludes to Am. 2:16: "The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, Says the Lord" (NKJV).

5:12 *We are not commending ourselves to you again-* Perhaps Paul was quoting back to them what he knew some said about him: 'Here he goes again, commending himself'. The immediate reference would be to Paul's claim that he is transparent, because he stands now as before the judgment seat of Christ, revealed to them as he would be then (see previous

commentary on this chapter). He has just said that they know this to be true in their consciences (:11). And he has used the same argument in 3:1 and 4:2; his commendation is in fact within their consciences ("commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God", 4:2).

*But giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart-* Paul is setting the scene for his forthcoming self-commendation in human terms which he will make in chapter 6- "In all things approving [s.w. "commending"] ourselves as the ministers of God" in all his sufferings (2 Cor. 6:4). He is speaking in human terms- for he is clear that it is not he who commends himself who is approved, but whom the Lord commends (2 Cor. 10:18). This commendation of the Lord was in their consciences (:11)- by the work of the Spirit in their hearts, if they were indeed open to it. He notes that it is the false teachers, who humanly speaking were his competitors, who commended themselves (2 Cor. 10:12). But he will go on to make a self-commendation so that they can still engage with those false teachers ["who boast about outward appearance"] on their own terms. The boat should not be about outward things, but about "what is in the heart". And what was that? He has just said that they ought to have the Spirit in their hearts (:5), and it was that Spirit which ought to have worked within them so that the commendation of Paul was within their hearts, in their consciences (see on :11). Paul could of course have refused to engage with these people on their own terms. But he does, in the same way as some believers find it appropriate to engage with the arguments of scientific atheists in the terms of science. Even though the higher arguments for God's existence are beyond the scientific paradigm. "I speak in human terms" is a phrase Paul several times uses. He sought by all means to persuade men.

Like the Lord, Paul's transparency was what connected him with people. He says that he needs no letter of recommendation to them, because he is written on their hearts; "by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God... we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (2 Cor. 3:3; 4:2; 5:11 AV). There were those in Corinth who thought in terms of appearances rather than the heart; those who demanded letters of recommendation before accepting Paul (2 Cor. 5:12); but Paul's response is that because he is transparent to God, it is inevitable that he is transparent before them his brethren. They knew in their hearts / consciences, no matter how they sought to deny it, that he was sincere. And this was why Paul could be so open with the critical Corinthians about his personal life. "Be ye also enlarged" invites us to be like him in this. To be asked to have the openness of Paul is a challenge indeed. Even in our Christian experience, those brethren and sisters who have the most influence on others are those who artlessly radiate their own spirit, whose struggle with sin, devotion and example is unconcealable and uncontrived.

*5:13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you-* Paul is presumably quoting from accusations made about his mental stability. Festus made the same accusation (Acts 26:24). We note that Paul doesn't accuse the slanderers of slander; he reasons from the assumption, for a moment, that what they said was true. The Lord did likewise in His teaching. But the idea of appearing mad or in fact being 'right minded' are clearly in the spirit of Paul's opening position to the Corinthians which we find in 1 Cor. 1. It is the mind devoid of the Spirit which would consider a spiritual person to be "foolish". By considering Paul to be 'a fool', the Corinthians indicated how they were simply "not Spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) despite having been given the Spirit. "If we are out of our mind" would be more strictly translated "when we were out of our mind", with reference to a

specific past incident; compared to "we are in our right mind" which is a more continuous tense. The being 'out of our mind' and perceived as mad could refer to a single incident of ecstatic in-Spirit behaviour which the Corinthians had observed in Paul whilst he was amongst them. Plato (*Phaedrus* 244) describes the supposedly spirit-filled priestesses at Delphi [near to Corinth] as "mad" when they were [supposedly] filled by a spirit, and "in their right mind" [s.w. as here in 2 Cor. 5:13] when they were not possessed by a spirit. This apparent madness was 'to God'; but Paul related to the Corinthians in his right mind (Gk. 'soberly'). They had as it were eavesdropped on Paul's personal relationship with God in some Spirit ecstasy, and were mocking him for it. But his interactions with the Corinthians had, Paul says, been of an utterly sober nature.

5:14- see on 2 Cor. 8:9.

*For the love of Christ controls us*- The love of Christ (and this phrase is almost always used in the NT of the cross) must *constrain us* (2 Cor. 5:14); we must reflect upon it until with Paul we pray with bowed knees to know the length, and the breadth and the height, of that love of Christ (on Calvary) that passes our unaided human knowledge (Eph. 3:19). For this alone is what will drive our passivity from us; here at last is something to respond to with all our heart and soul. The image of soldiers in their time of dying has often been used afterwards as a motivation for a nation: "Earn this" is the message their faces give. And it is no more true than in the death of the Lord. "The love of Christ", an idea elsewhere used of His death (Jn. 13:1; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 8:32,34,35; Eph. 5:2,25; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5 cp. 1 Jn. 4:10), *constrains us*; it doesn't force us, but rather shuts us up unto one way, as in a narrow, walled path. We cannot sit passively before the cross of the Lord. That "love of Christ" there passes our human knowledge, and yet our hearts can be opened, as Paul prayed, that we might know the length, breadth and height of it. The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God.

The Lord died as He did so that the love of God, the real meaning of love, might be displayed in a cameo, in an intense, visual, physical form which could be remembered and meditated upon. Observing the memorial meeting is the very least we can do to this end; and this itself is only a beginning. "The love of Christ *constraineth us*" (AV) not to live for ourselves, but unto him that died for us, and to show this by our concern for our brethren, in the context. Marvin Vincent has a telling comment on the Greek word translated "controls": "The idea is not urging or driving, but *shutting up* to one line or purpose, as in a narrow, walled road" (*Word Studies Of The N.T.*). We shouldn't be driven men and women; we are not urged or driven by the cross, but shut up by it to one purpose. There are only two ways before us, to death or life; and we are shut up by the cross in that road to life. In this lies the sustaining and transforming power of the cross, if only we would meditate upon it. It is an epitome of every facet of the love of God and of Christ. There the Name of God was declared, that the love that was in the Father and Son may be in us (Jn. 17:26). The same word is used about the Lord in Lk. 22:63, where we read He was "bound", constrained, limited in movement- as He was constrained for us in His final sufferings, we should likewise be for Him.

*Because we have judged that in that one has died for all, therefore all have died*- If the classic idea of substitution were correct, then surely this should read "One has died for all, therefore all have *lived*". But the death of Christ *for* us rather shows us how to *die* in a death like His, that we through identity with His death might share in His life. If we really think of the Lord's passion seriously, our thoughts will be punctuated with the realization: "I would not have done that. I would simply not have held on". But in that He died for us all in Him, it is reckoned that we all died with Him the death of the cross. We are graciously counted as having died with Him in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), and now we try to live this out in practice.

And in appreciating this, inevitably our patience with our brethren will be the more thorough-going.

5:15 *And he died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and rose again-* The representative nature of the Lord's death means that we are pledged to live out His self-crucifixion as far as we can; to re-live the crucifixion process in our imagination, to come to that point where we *know* we wouldn't have gone through with it, and to grasp with real wonder and gratitude the salvation of the cross. Paul is surely alluding to the idea of baptism, whereby we identify with His death and resurrection; the language here is similar to that concerning baptism in Rom. 6:8. "As one has died for all, then all have died, and that He died for all in order to have the living live no longer for themselves but for Him who died and rose for them" (2 Cor. 5:14,15 Moffatt). It has been powerfully commented: "To know oneself to have been involved in the sacrificial death of Christ, on account of its representational character, is to see oneself committed to a sacrificial life, to a re-enactment in oneself of the cross" (W.F. Barling, *The Letters To Corinth*).

All that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes in some sense, at some time, true of each of us who are in Him. It's true that nowhere in the Bible is the Lord Jesus actually called our "representative", but the idea is clearly there. I suggest it's especially clear in all the Bible passages which speak of Him acting *huper* us- what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation". Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon define *huper* in the genitive as meaning "'for', 'in behalf of', 'for the sake of' someone. When used in the sense of representation, *huper* is associated with verbs like 'request, pray, care, work, feel, suffer, die, support'". So in the same way as the Lord representatively prays, died, cares, suffers, works "for" us, we are to do likewise, if He indeed is our representative and we His. Our prayers for another, our caring for them, is no longer a rushed salving of our conscience through some good deed. Instead 2 Cor. 5:15 becomes our motivation: "He died for (*huper*) all [of us], that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for (*huper*) them". We are, in our turn, to go forth and be "ambassadors for (*huper*) Christ... we pray you in Christ's stead (*huper* Christ), be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Grasping Him as our representative means that we will be His representatives in this world, and not leave that to others or think that our relationship in Him is so internal we needn't breathe nor show a word of it to others. As He suffered "the just for (*huper*) the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18), our living, caring, praying for others is no longer done "for" those whom we consider good enough, worthy enough, sharing our religious convictions and theology. For whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died *huper* us (Rom. 5:6). And this representative death is to find an issue in our praying *huper* others (Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11), just as He makes intercession *huper* us (Rom. 8:26,34). We are to spend and be spent *huper* others, after the pattern of the Lord in His final nakedness of death on the cross (2 Cor. 12:15). These must all be far more than fine ideas for us. These are the principles which we are to live by in hour by hour life. And they demand a huge amount, even the cross itself. For unto us is given "in the behalf of Christ [*huper* Christ], not only to [quietly, painlessly, theoretically] believe on Him, but also to suffer for (*huper*) his sake" (Phil. 1:29). In all this, then, we see that the Lord's being our representative was not only at the time of His death; the fact He continues to be our representative makes Him our ongoing challenge.

5:16 *Therefore we, from this time forward, know no one after the flesh. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more-* In the context, Paul has written of how baptism into Christ makes us totally identified with Him. His death and resurrection, and His ongoing life, are all to become ours. Paul is determined to perceive his

fellow believers as in Christ; which would explain why he can criticize and perceive so clearly their serious failures, and yet write and feel so positively about them. He would not know them after the flesh, but [by implication] after the Spirit. And although Paul had met Christ in the flesh, perhaps during the Lord's ministry [at which time Paul was living in Jerusalem] or certainly on the Damascus road- that literal meeting with the Lord was now irrelevant to Paul. For knowing the Lord Jesus after the Spirit was and is the true way to achieve and perceive His presence near and real. The promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was to make the presence of the Lord Jesus as real as when He was literally on earth- and in a more profound and personal sense. Paul had previously gloried in his having physically met the Lord Jesus- but he says that now he knows Him like that no more. All is of the Spirit, and having the Lord's presence in the heart through the Comforter.

5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*- The context is full of Paul's allusions to his Damascus road conversion, when he did indeed know Christ after the flesh (:16). Paul is surely saying that he was in a sense everyman there; what happened to him can happen to "any man". The emphasis is therefore to be placed on the word "any". Paul really is our pattern.

F.F. Bruce has observed: "Something of Paul's native impetuosity is apparent in his epistolary style... time and again Paul starts a sentence that never reaches a grammatical end, for before he is well launched on it a new thought strikes him and he turns aside to deal with that" (*Paul: Apostle Of The Free Spirit*, Exeter: 1980, p. 456). This style is exemplified here in 2 Cor. 5:17. The Greek text here is a sentence in which there are no verbs: "If anyone in Christ- new creation". It is as if the thrill of it leads him to just blurt it out. And observe that this was to be found in a man of extraordinary culture and intellectual ability. By perceiving this tension, the passion behind his style is thereby accentuated the more. Likewise consider how in Galatians Paul uses so many negatives, as if his passion and almost rage at the false teachers is coming out. See on Gal. 1:1.

The idea of a "new creation" is using a technical term known in Judaism for the conversion of a person from idolatry to Judaism and monotheism. Rabbi Eliezer apparently wrote that "He who converts a man to the true religion is the same as if he had created him". So seeing that Paul was the converter of the Corinthians, his description of them as a new creation may be a reminder of their debt to him.

God is seeking to work a new creation in the experience of men and women. He has done this for us in Christ, and yet the reality of it is still dependent upon whether we will allow ourselves to put on the new man after the image of God, whether we will become born again after His image and likeness (Eph. 4:23,24). "A new creation" is very much the language of Rev. 21:5 concerning the creation of new things on the ruins of the old, at Christ's return. Yet this dramatic change must occur within the believer as a result of being in Christ in this life, before he can share in the wonders of that future age.

The Greek of 2 Cor. 5:17 is tellingly ambiguous; the sense can be: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature", or, "If any man be in Christ, let him be a new creature". The fact of becoming in Christ through baptism means that we are new creations potentially, and therefore must work towards being new creations. We must go on further than just being baptized into Christ.

*The old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new*- As a new born baby sees a chair, a table, a brother or sister, for the very first time, so do we after baptism. It is so hard for us to appreciate the newness of everything to a baby or small child. "All things are become new" in our attitude of mind after baptism. Yet we live in newness of life (Rom. 6:4),

as if this process of birth is ongoing throughout our spiritual lives. After baptism, therefore, we set out on a life in which we should be gazing, in wide eyed wonder, at new spiritual concepts and realities. How patient we should be with others who are in this position. "Old things are passed away" at baptism, just as the old world order will "pass away" at the Lord's return (Rev. 21:5). The dramatic change that will come upon this planet in the Kingdom should therefore be paralleled in our new spiritual vistas after baptism, and throughout the process of being re-born and becoming a new creation. The contemporary Jewish writings and the Apocrypha use the term "new creation" to describe the situation which would be brought about at the last day (1 Enoch 72:1; 2 Apoc. Baruch 32:6). Further exemplification is presented in Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 297. Yet Paul applies what could be called 'future Kingdom language' to our status in Christ right now.

*5:18 But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation-* The Greek for "reconciled" implies to mutually change both sides. Both God and man were in some sense changed by the work of Christ. God reconciled us by the cross, and *therefore* to us was given the work of preaching the Gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18,20)- a sharing with others of our own experience. This was clearly what fired the first century ecclesia. On the basis of our experience of reconciliation with God, we have been given "the ministry of reconciliation", in that God "has put in us [Gk. settled deep within us] the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18,19). That which is deeply internal issues in an outward witness. For this reason all discussion of how that outward witness should be made is somewhat irrelevant- the witness naturally springs from deep within. If it doesn't, we have to ask whether we have anything much deep within.

"Ministry" is a word repeatedly used by Paul in 2 Corinthians for his ministry or service to the brotherhood (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1,12,13; 11:8). Because we have been reconciled to God by forgiveness, through the ministry of the suffering servant, we are to respond by ministering to others practically. Thus "the ministry of reconciliation" isn't simply 'preaching the Gospel' or reconciling others to God. It refers also to the practical ministry / service which is "of" or inspired by reconciliation. Classical Greek only uses the word translated "reconcile" regarding personal relationships of humans; and never about God or in a theological sense. The idea of having a personal reconciliation with God personally was a huge paradigm breaker in the first century world- and properly understood, it is today too. Thus "the ministry of reconciliation" is parallel with the ministry of the Spirit and of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6,8). The reconciliation achieved is by the Spirit, deep in the heart of the believer- for that is where personal relationships exist.

God reconciled the world; but the word of reconciliation is committed unto us. All men were reconciled to God on the cross, even while they were sinners (Rom. 5:10); but it depends upon us to take that Gospel of reconciliation to them. So far as we fail in this, so far we leave His death for them in vain, only a potential achievement. We were given reconciliation personally (Rom. 5:11 RV); and we are also given "the ministry of reconciliation", the command to preach that reconciliation and share it with others. To be reconciled to God is to be given a charge to reconcile others.

Our preaching should flow naturally out of our own personal experience of God's grace. The fact that we were reconciled is tied up with the fact that we have been given, as part of this "being reconciled", the ministry of preaching reconciliation. It is the greatness of God's grace which will form the content of our preaching, not our own practical experience of it. Our experience will only motivate us personally, not anyone else. We preach not ourselves, but

Christ as Lord and Saviour. Let's really get down to serious self examination, to more finely appreciating the holiness of God and the horror of sin. If we can do this- and only if- our preaching, our speaking, our reasoning, even our very body language, will be stamped with the vital hallmark: humility.

Note that the style of 5:18-21 suggests it may have been a hymn well known to Paul's early Christian readership, or even a baptismal confessional statement.

5:19- see on Ps. 32:2.

*That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses to them-* Christ "reconciled the world" in that He obtained forgiveness for *us* (2 Cor. 5:19)- we are "the world" which was reconciled, we are the "all things" purged by His blood (Heb. 9:22). God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" seems to be a comment on the death, rather than the nature, of the Lord Jesus. It is in the context of the statement that Christ died for all men (2 Cor. 5:14). In that death, God was especially in Christ. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

*And has committed to us the word of reconciliation-* We are the means by which God is appealing to mankind; and we must do this while there is the opportunity for salvation. As Moses delivered God's people "with the hand of the angel", we likewise are working in co-operation with huge Angelic forces (Acts 7:35 RV). In prospect, God reconciled the whole world to Himself on the cross, the devil was destroyed, *all* sin was overcome then, in prospect. In this sense Christ is the propitiation for our sins as much as He is for those of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). On the cross, He bore away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). So now we must spread this good news to the whole world, for *all* men's' sins were conquered on the cross.

5:20 *Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating the world by us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God-* We are the face of Christ to this world, and to our brethren; He has no arms or legs or face on this earth apart from us, His body. God "makes His appeal by us" (2 Cor. 5:20 RSV). Paul's logic here parallels the Corinthians with "the world". He begs them to be reconciled to God (knowing that some of them weren't in relationship with God and "had not the knowledge of God", 1 Cor. 15:34). And yet Paul elsewhere writes so positively about them. Their status in Christ meant that he on one hand felt towards them as to the Lord Jesus, confident of their salvation. But Paul is a realist, his love didn't make him blind. And sensing the real possibility of their condemnation, of the eternity they might miss, he *begs* them. The Lord's passion for the world's reconciliation led Him to the cross; and it is that same passion which He seeks to articulate through us. The other references to Paul's 'begging' or 'beseeching' the Corinthians relate to practical matters- the same word is used of begging them to accept back the disciplined brother (2 Cor. 2:8) and to contribute to the Jerusalem Poor Fund (2 Cor. 9:5). It was through these things that they were in practice reconciled with God. For our relationship with Him depends upon our relationship with our brethren. Paul will conclude 2 Corinthians by begging the Corinthians to "be comforted" (13:11), using the same word as here translated "beg". Paul knows that the Corinthians must make the choice to accept the appeal he was making, but he appeals to them by all means.

God desires to "reason together" with men (Is. 1:18). This is extraordinary indeed. God is



seeking to persuade men to accept the forgiveness available in the blood of His Son. And He asks us to do this work for Him, to reflect this aspect of His character to the world, with that same spirit of earnest humility: "As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God". No wonder in the context Paul says that we should *therefore* watch our behaviour and attitudes. The fact men turn away from God's *beseeching*, His *praying* that they will accept His grace, is surely the greatest tragedy in the whole cosmos, in the whole of existence.

*Because* of the cross, the atonement which God wrought in Christ's offering, we beseech men to be reconciled to God. Appreciating the cross and the nature of the atonement should be the basis of our appeal to men. And indeed, such an appeal is *God* appealing to men and women, in that there on the cross "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". The blood and spittle covered body of the Lord lifted up was and is the appeal, the *beseeching* of God Himself to men. And this is the message that we are honoured to preach on His behalf; we preach the appeal of God through the cross. See on Jn. 19:19. "All men" can have their part in a sacrifice which represented "all men". And this motivates us to preach to "all men".

5:21 *He who knew no sin, he became a sin offering on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him*- 2 Cor. 5:14-21 urges us to preach the salvation in Christ to all men, because He died for us, as our representative. He died *for* [the sake of] all (5:14,15), He was made sin *for* our sake (5:21); and therefore we are ambassadors *for* [s.w.] His sake (5:20). Because He was our representative, so we must be His representatives in witnessing Him to the world. This is why the preaching of Acts was consistently motivated by the Lord's death and resurrection for the preachers. See on Heb. 2:9.

There was a child-likeness about the Lord. Not in that He was naive- He was the least naive of all men. But rather did He have an innocence about sin, as if He were a sweet child caught up within the web of sinful men around Him. Indeed the point has been made that when Paul spoke of the Lord as being one "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), he was using the very phrase used in rabbinic and other contemporary writings to describe children, who were too young to 'know sin'. This child-likeness was beautifully related to His utter naturalness, which was so much a part of His moral perfection.

Paul's teaching here about imputed righteousness was fundamental to how he himself viewed the Corinthians. This was how God viewed them; and it was how Paul viewed them. This explains his positive language about them, despite being aware of their deep weaknesses of practice and understanding.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *And working together with him we entreat you not to receive the grace of God in vain-* God's desire for the salvation of the Corinthians involved Him working through Paul. And in that sense God and Paul became fellow workers (see on 1 Sam. 14:45). Paul seems to have the great commission in mind, when he wrote in 5:19-21 that to all of us has been committed the ministry of reconciliation, and in discharging it we are 'workers together' with God- the very same word used in Mk. 16:20 concerning how the Lord Jesus 'worked with' His men as they fulfilled the commission.

The "grace" in view is surely the *charis* of the Spirit. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit at baptism, but had not made use of it. They had received it in vain. The same word for "received" is used in 1 Cor. 2:14 to lament how the natural man does not receive the Spirit. And yet 1 Cor. 1 is clear that the Corinthians had received the Spirit. But they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Spirit had been received, but in vain. In contrast, Paul can say that he has not received God's grace in vain (1 Cor. 15:10); he is bidding them follow his example of transformation.

6:2- see on Ps. 69:13.

*For He said: In a time of acceptance I hearkened to you, and in a day of salvation did I succour you. Behold, now is the time of acceptance; behold, now is the day of salvation-* This quotation is in support of the statement that we have received God's grace, *charis*, gift of the Spirit; but we are not to receive it in vain, but rather make use of it. The 'succouring' in view refers to just that. The same word is used in Heb. 2:18 of how the Lord Jesus gives us such help in time of temptation. Seeing that temptation is internal to the human mind, this help is surely psychological, within the heart- which is exactly what the gift of the Spirit is all about. Forgiveness is indeed in view, but beyond that- strength against falling into sin.

There's an allusion here to Ps. 32:6. For every sinner, for whom David is our example, *now* is the time when God may be "found" in the sense of experiencing His forgiveness. God *is* love towards men, He *is* forgiveness. To experience this and respond back to it is therefore to find the knowledge of God. This "time when You (i.e. God's forgiveness, which *is* God) may be found" which David speaks of is that of 2 Cor. 6:2: "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation". Paul was speaking of how all sinners, baptized or not, need to realize this; we are all in David's position. Some complain that they did not experience a very great upsurge in finding and knowing God at the point of baptism. This may be due to an insufficient emphasis on the need for repentance and appreciating the seriousness of sin before baptism; and not being willing to make use of the Spirit gift which we are then given. We must not think that we know God because we believe a Statement of Faith and have been baptized. "Now is the accepted time", Paul wrote to the baptized Corinthians, to truly take on board the marvel of God's forgiveness, to know it and respond to it for ourselves, and thereby to come to a dynamic, two-way relationship with God.

But the allusion is also to Is. 49:8 "In an acceptable time have I heard you". This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. Is. 49:8,9: "In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you" is quoted about us in 2 Cor. 6:2 in the context of us being preachers, labouring with God. Isaiah continues: "And I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; saying to them that are bound, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves" (RV). This is the language of the Lord's preaching, which freed men from the prison house (Is. 61:1,2). Yet because we are in Him, we too have His ministry; our words too can *make men*

*inherit* the Kingdom, and free men from their bondage. "We are witnesses [through being] in him" (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). As the Lord in Isaiah's servant songs was the suffering, saving, atoning servant, lifted up to give salvation world-wide- so are we. This is why a Messianic passage like Is. 49:8 is quoted by Paul in 2 Cor. 6 about *us*. The next verse, Is. 49:9, must therefore also be about us: "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves... they shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water" (AV). In the same way as *we* have experienced the "acceptable time" in this life, so we will be able to encourage others to make use of the "accepted time" of God's grace.

6:3 *We aim to give no reason for stumbling in anything, that our ministry is not blamed-* The "ministry" received is to speak and act on God's behalf; for "our ministry" is *His* ministry of reconciliation which has been given to us (5:19). It is therefore critical that our service or ministry saves others, or works towards that; and therefore we will be careful not to cause any to stumble from the path towards that great salvation. As an "ambassador" (5:20), we must be careful not to discredit the Lord whom we represent and whose messengers and representatives we are.

6:4 *But in everything, commending ourselves as servants of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses-* An "ambassador" (5:20) was a servant. The authentication of him as an ambassador was in all the troubles he had experienced for the sake of that work, and his patient response to them. "Patience" or endurance was [and still is] the foremost qualification and characteristic. All the afflictions, necessities etc. were endured and did not stop Paul from continuing- for the idea of "patience", *hupomone*, is of "endurance". This is what authenticates a servant of God- keeping on keeping on, rather than a brief impressive mission trip or moment of sacrifice. We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25). It is primarily *people* who communicate, not words or ideas. Personal authenticity is undoubtedly the strongest credential in our work of communicating the message. Thus Paul could speak of his afflictions as being his credentials (2 Cor. 11:21-33; 1 Thess. 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:10-12). And God's true servant commends himself by the endurance of opposition (2 Cor. 6:4,5).

6:5 *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings-* These kinds of afflictions, especially the riots ["tumults"], had come upon Paul in Corinth and surrounding areas (Acts 18:13). His readership knew he was telling the truth. "Watchings" is literally 'sleepless nights' (NIV); the reference could be to how his hard labour as a tentmaker had to be done through the night at times, so that he could do ministry work during the day (1 Thess. 2:9 gives an example).

6:6 *In pureness, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness-* This group of sufferings refer to Paul's internal efforts and sacrifices in order for the ministry to go ahead. Paul's loving patience and care for the Corinthians exemplified all these characteristics.

*In the Holy Spirit-* The fruit of the gift of the Spirit included love and all that flows from it. Paul could sense that this fruit had been brought forth in him. Hence he goes on to list real love. This is why he so often links the Holy Spirit with love (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 2:1,2).

*In sincere love-* There is repeated N.T. warning against the ease of slipping into a mindset which thinks itself to be 'loving' when actually it isn't. "Let love be without dissimulation" (s.w. "unfeigned"; Rom. 12:9). The fact he knew himself to have "love unfeigned" (2 Cor. 6:6) was one of Paul's credentials as a genuine apostle. James 3:17 speaks of the true spirituality, including gentleness, patience, kindness etc., as being "without hypocrisy" (s.w. "unfeigned"). A true response to the doctrines of the basic Gospel will result in "love unfeigned" (1 Pet. 1:22). Israel of old failed in this: "With their mouth they shew much love; but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (Ez. 33:31). This is all some emphasis. It helps explain why both in ourselves and in others it is possible to behold a great emphasis on love whilst at the same time harbouring a very unloving attitude. I think all of us with any ecclesial experience will be able to recall conversations where 'love' has been advocated, or 'unloving behaviour' criticized, in language which simply *breathes* bitterness and contempt!

*6:7 In the word of truth, in the power of God-* The word of truth is the Gospel (Col. 1:5), and Paul's truthful preaching of it was confirmed by the power of God allowing miracles to be done to confirm his preaching.

*By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left-* The idea is of a warrior holding weapons in both hands, defensive in one, offensive weapons in the other.

*6:8 By glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report. As deceivers and yet true-* Paul lists these things as an evidence that he is well authenticated as a preacher or minister of the Gospel. But the personal integrity of every true preacher is always going to be questioned. Paul was not beyond criticism or false accusation. That can never be a required feature of those who minister the Gospel; for according to Paul here, the very fact the preacher becomes the object of slander and even exaggerated "good report" is all what confirms the credentials of a true minister of Christ. We could conclude that being unfairly gossiped about is a characteristic of the true servant of God. So here when Paul lists the things which confirm his apostleship, he not only lists his imprisonments and shipwrecks; he says that the fact he has been slandered is another proof that he is a servant of Christ. See on 1 Tim. 5:19.

*6:9 As unknown and yet well known-* The accusation was that Paul was a nobody, unknown. When as they knew, he was well known. This may explain the otherwise strange comment of the Jews in Rome that they had never heard of Paul. They surely had, but they treated him as "unknown".

*As dying and behold we live-* It is common for public figures to be gossiped about as having an illness, being terminally ill, and having only limited time left. It seems Paul had experienced that.

*As chastened and not killed-* Chastening may refer to public whipping, as it does in Lk. 23:16,22. Paul had five times been whipped or 'chastened' by the Jewish synagogue courts with 39 lashes (2 Cor. 11:24). Forty lashes were considered enough to kill- Paul was taken right up to the point of death. But he didn't die. Perhaps he has in mind the resurrection which occurred on one occasion after he was whipped to death in Acts 14:19,20.

6:10- see on Mt. 26:39.

*As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing-* In :9, Paul has cited the false accusations against him and answered them. Now he appears to comment upon some of his characteristics which his critics disliked, and justifies them, or at least presents them in another light. He so often writes of his tears and worry for his brethren; he was sorrowful, and yet it is part of the Christian life to also at the same time have joy. He has in view the Lord Jesus, who was the

man of sorrows on the cross, and yet could speak of "My joy" at the same time. But surely he also alludes to how he has used the same words in telling the Corinthians that he had sorrow from them when he ought to have rejoicing from them (2 Cor. 2:3). He sorrowed over them, and yet he also rejoiced over them for who they were by status in Christ (2 Cor. 7:7,9,13,16; 13:9).

*As poor, yet making many rich-* Critics leave the accused guilty whatever the truth is. Paul was accused of seeking wealth from his ministry, and yet apparently mocked for being poor-for wealth was seen, as today, as proof that a minister was of God. Paul clearly intends a linkage with his teaching in 8:9 that it was through the poverty of the Lord Jesus that we are made rich. And Paul saw that working out in his own life. He speaks of how we received the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:18; 2:7; 3:8,16); and yet in writing to the Corinthians he uses only to them a specific Greek word meaning 'to enrich'. He reminds them of how we are *enriched by Him* in the knowledge of forgiveness which we have (1 Cor. 1:5; 2 Cor. 9:11), and *therefore* we are to 'enrich' others in our preaching to them of the same grace (2 Cor. 6:10).

*As having nothing-* In our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. Paul could say that he was *as if* he possessed nothing, although he evidently had at least some money to his name (Acts 24:26), and could offer to re-imburse Philemon for any damages. There is a great freedom in this, if only we would know it.

*And yet possessing all things-* It is the Lord Jesus who possesses all things. The three characteristics mentioned in this verse each apply to the Lord Jesus in His time of dying. Clearly Paul felt identity with Him.

6:11- see on 2 Cor. 8:24.

*Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged-* The openness of Paul, his self-revelation of his innermost spirit, especially to his detractors at Corinth, is incredible. In such situations one tends to be cagey and reserved rather than open-hearted. But much of what we learn about Paul's innermost struggles comes from his letters to the Corinthians, who seemed ready to abuse his every word. And he asks them, as his very own children, to respond to his transparency by being open with him: "In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also" (2 Cor. 6:13). Many find that human leaders or elders come between them and a personal following of Jesus. Yet we need to remember that Jesus never delegated his personal authority over His people to anyone. This is where the Catholic idea of the Pope as the personal representative of Jesus is so wrong. Much as we should respect our elders, this respect shouldn't come between us and the Lord Jesus. Note how Paul never demanded power over his converts. He made himself vulnerable to them, in the hope that they would respond to him in an open relationship. Note the parallel between mouth and heart. This is very common in the Bible (at least 25 examples)- for our words issue from the heart.

6:12 *You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections-* The GNB seems to well summarize this awkward phrasing: "It is not we who have closed our hearts to you; it is you who have closed your hearts to us". This sounds as if one of the criticisms of Paul was that he had closed his heart to the Corinthians, he was all theory and no heart, a distant man hidden behind his own theology. And Paul's openhearted sharing of his life and feelings is therefore to be understood as a response to that slander.

Their sense of 'limitation' or being 'cramped' [Gk.] was not due to what he'd said, but more because of their own consciences as believers: "You are not cramped in us, but you are cramped by your own hearts... be you also enlarged! Be not unequally yoked together with

unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?" (2 Cor. 6:12-14). He's saying that the apparent 'cramping' or 'limitation' of being separate from the ways of the world is actually not a cramping at all- it's an enlargement of the heart's horizons. And this fits in admirably with the Hebrew idea of 'holiness'- a separation *from* sin /the world *unto* so much more.

6:13 *In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also-* The "return" was in that Paul wanted them to respond to his open hearted position before them. He wanted his attitude of transparency to elicit the same from them. Despite their revolt against him, he considers them his spiritual children (although he had baptized few of them); and so he wanted them to mimic his attitude in this.

6:14 *Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers-* Paul now attempts to put his finger on why they were not acting to him as towards a parent, mimicking his openness (:13). It is because of associations with others. Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. Thus Paul warns Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), or else he would come to them and not spare. He is quoting the LXX of Num. 25:3 concerning how Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, resulting in Moses commanding the murder of all those guilty- just as Paul later did to Corinth. Israel were not to sow "mingled seed" in their fields, or make clothes of "mingled" materials (s.w. LXX Lev. 19:19). The materials would, as the Lord Himself mentioned, tear apart. The garment wouldn't last. And sowing different seeds together likewise would bring no fruit to perfection. But the LXX in these passages is quoted in one place only in the NT: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). If we are, *the relationship can't work*. So don't think that if we yoke with unbelievers, as Corinth were with the Judaizers, or if we marry out of the Faith, it will all work out OK somehow. Unless there is serious repentance (and even then, not always), *it won't work*. It will be a garment patched up with two different materials.

*For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion has light with darkness?-* "Fellowship" and "communion", *koinonia*, here carries the sense of 'What do they have in common?'. The Corinthians thought that they could be Christians, yoked to the Lord, whilst involved in idol worship and Judaism. But if Christ is the light- then all else is darkness. Paul has earlier used the metaphor of how in the new creation, light shines forth out of the darkness. Although Paul was very tolerant of the Corinthians, he knew that ultimately there can be no compromise. It's not that they 'ought not to fellowship' with darkness; his point is that light and darkness are mutually exclusive categories, there is nothing in common between them. This is all being said in support of the appeal earlier in this verse not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Equal yoking is in order to get a job done- ploughing for the Lord, doing His work. And we shall not be able to participate in His work if we are unequally yoked. Not because we are not 'allowed' to, but because in practice we will be pulling different ways.

6:15 *And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what portion has a believer with an unbeliever?-* "Belial" was a specifically Jewish term for 'satan'. The fact Paul uses it here demonstrates the degree of Judaist influence upon the Corinthians. The Bible doesn't teach the existence of a cosmic Satan figure as believed in by first century Judaism; the word "Belial" never occurs again in the Bible. But (as he often does) Paul reasons with them from their perspective. It was unthinkable in Judaism to suggest that there was middle ground between Belial and God; but this in practice was how they were living. But when "Belial" occurs in the Old Testament, the Septuagint translates it as transgressor, impious, foolish or pest. It does not occur in the Septuagint as a proper name- i.e. 'Satan' as a personal cosmic being. *Belial* in Hebrew means 'worthless', and it seems that it became personified in Jewish

thought, eventually being twisted by them into a term for the cosmic 'Satan' figure which they came to wrongly believe in. So it could be that Paul is putting 'Belial' for what the Old Testament would call "sons of Belial", i.e. wicked men. They are then made parallel with "unbelievers", just as "Christ" is matched by "believers".

6:16 *And what agreement has a temple of God with idols?*- Paul here appeals to the Jewish obsession with the sanctity of the temple. To have idols within it was the greatest sacrilege. And yet the Corinthians were worshipping idols within the church, which is God's temple.

*For we are a temple of the living God, even as God said-* God 'lived' in the temple in that His glory and Spirit were present there; and He has placed His Spirit within each person who has believed and been baptized into His Son. But the Corinthians refused to be aware of this; hence in their personal and collective lives they were unaware of His presence and activity, and the need to keep themselves from defiling that holy space with idolatry. The quotation is not from any one place, but as was commonly done by Rabbis, is a mixture of language from Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:11,12; Ez. 37:26,27; 43:7 and Zech. 2:10,11.

*I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people-* God now dwells in His people through the Spirit ("In whom you also are being built up together for a dwelling place of God by the Spirit", Eph. 2:22). John's Gospel records the many times where the Lord Jesus speaks of abiding or dwelling within His people, especially through the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit. Paul has questioned whether the Corinthians appreciate that the Spirit is indeed within them, thereby making them the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16,17). The presence of the Spirit makes our hearts and lives exclusively God's. But because Corinth failed to permit the Spirit to function and were wilfully ignorant of it, they therefore failed to perceive the exclusivity of God's claim upon them, and were involved with idol worship. Paul is writing to a church which included Gentiles who had fallen under the influence of Judaism. He is saying that the Old Testament people of God are now the baptized Christian community, indwelt by the Spirit, for whom holy place and space is now the heart of the believer and the collective church of God. If God is walking amongst us and within us- then to be yoked together with an unbeliever is going to be impossible (:14).

The experience of God as "their God" was only if they came out from the world (:17). Paul has earlier stated that some of them have no relationship with God; "some have not the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34). God was not "their God"; for in practice, they refused to be indwelt by His Spirit, which was His stamp of exclusive ownership of them. Paul spoke of how those who join themselves with unbelievers (and marriage must surely have been in his mind) had to retract or repent of that relationship, and *then* God would receive them and *be their God* (2 Cor. 6:14-17). He was referring back to the Abrahamic promise of Gen. 17:7, that God would be the God of Abraham's seed. Although baptism makes us the seed of Abraham, we can step out of that covenant; and it seems this is what the Corinthians had done.

6:17 *Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will welcome you-* This is a quotation of Is. 52:11,12, initially concerning the need for the Jews to quit Babylon. Clearly Paul felt that the Corinthians were still within "Babylon" and needed to leave it, lest they be consumed in its judgments. This would be one of many examples of where Paul clearly saw the apostasy of the Corinthians; and yet he respects their status "in Christ" and assumes their final salvation, for he cannot personally consign them as individuals to condemnation at the last day. For we are not to judge in that sense.

God will confirm us in coming out from the world. He told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7).

Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

We are to "be separate" in this life, as an act of choice in the myriad of daily decisions we face (2 Cor. 6:17)- and yet at the judgment, the Lord will "sever" (s.w.) the wicked from the just (Mt. 13:49), or "separate" the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:32). But we are to live out the judgment now in our separation from wickedness. And if we do this, wicked men shall "separate" from us- the judgment is worked out ahead of time (Lk. 6:22).

6:18 *And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty-* Some in Corinth did not have "the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34), i.e. living relationship with Him. If they came out from the world, then God would accept them as His children. And yet Paul writes and feels towards Corinth as if they are indeed God's children; even though in another sense he appeals for them to enter exclusive covenant with Him and become His children. This is a powerful paradigm for us to follow, in our struggles as to how we should relate to children of God who by behaviour and beliefs are apparently not His children. We are to accept them *as* His children, ever honouring and respecting their commitment to Christ in baptism- but appeal for them to act appropriately and repent of their inappropriate positions.

Paul is alluding here to the LXX of 2 Sam. 7:14, where God promises David that He will be a father to David's Son, the Lord Jesus. As noted earlier, Paul applies language specifically relevant to the Lord Jesus to us; for this is what it means to be "in Christ".



## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 Therefore beloved, having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God-* The promises which concluded chapter 6 related to God's people being His temple, where He would live through the Spirit. Paul is arguing that they have already been fulfilled in the Spirit-filled believer, and he is urging the Corinthians to behave appropriately to that status. So we could understand "Having these promises" as meaning 'Having had such promises fulfilled in us'. Yet for many in Corinth, it seems that they were still promises which they had not yet attained to, because of their resistance of the Spirit and the spiritual life.

The call to leave Babylon in Is. 52:11 has been quoted about the Corinthians in chapter 6. They were to live appropriate to the calling received. The usage of Is. 52:11 suggests that the people referred to were actually *in* spiritual Babylon; they had unequally yoked themselves together with unbelievers; they needed to separate (s.w. to divide, sever) themselves, and come out from among them. The idea of unequal yoking could be a marriage allusion. We must wash ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit even after baptism (2 Cor. 7:1); by doing so, we as it were go through the death-and-resurrection process of baptism again; we live it all once again. See on Gal. 3:27.

2 Cor. 7:1 exhorts us to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh, not being like those sinners who "defile the flesh" (Jude 8). These passages would imply that the flesh is defiled not by who we are naturally, but by human behaviour and mindsets from which we can separate ourselves. Whilst we consider ourselves so awful that we consider our flesh to be defiled *naturally*, we will never value the human person, and will give way too easily to sin as if it's just our natural fate. See on Rom. 8:3. The cleansing had already been done to them at their baptisms, when they were given the cleansing or sanctifying of the Spirit, as noted in 1 Cor. 1 and 2 Cor. 1. God thereby purified or cleansed their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). But they had not made use of this, and needed to believe and experience it again. "Flesh and spirit" is a term Paul has used in appealing for sexual purity at Corinth (1 Cor. 7:34). This verse is really an appeal to quit the idol worshipping and sexual misbehaviour which characterized the church.

*7:2 Open your hearts to us-* The appeal to open their hearts (see on 6:11 and 6:13) was in order for them to get in touch with their own consciences, and realize that indeed, Paul had not wronged anyone. As noted on 5:11, Paul appealed for them to look at their consciences, to look within their hearts- for their, potentially, the Spirit of God was dwelling and active, if they would allow it to be. The allegations that Paul had wronged or abused others were untrue, and Paul baldly states as much.

*We wronged no one-* The same word used by the Lord of Himself in the parable of Mt. 20:13: "I did you no wrong". Consciously or unconsciously, Paul's thinking was saturated with the Gospels. Paul twice uses the term in Act 25:10,11 in insisting that he had done no wrong to the Jews; so again we sense that it was Judaists who were behind this false accusation.

*We corrupted no one-* The word Paul uses about the Jewish false teachers corrupting the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:3). Perhaps the emphasis is therefore upon the word "we". Paul had not corrupted them- others had.

*We took advantage of no one-* This sounds like the usual accusations against Christian leaders of seeking sexual or financial advantage. Paul uses it in a financial sense in 2 Cor. 12:17,18 and in a sexual sense in 1 Thess. 4:6. The 'Satan', the adversary, the Jewish opposition, did

indeed get an advantage over the Corinthians (s.w. 2 Cor. 2:11). Paul is stressing that *he* had not done this; but others had.

*7:3 I say it not to condemn you-* Paul can tell some at Corinth that they have no knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34), that they need to re-enter covenant with Him and come out from Babylon (as he has just said at the end of chapter 6). But he still refuses to condemn them- and therefore as he cannot pre-judge the outcome of the judgment seat of Christ, he accepts them as his brethren, uncondemned by him. Even if he begs them to act in a way which is appropriate for those who are the Lord's.

*For as I have said before, you are in our hearts, to die together and live together-* Dying and living together is the language of baptism. Just as we died and live together with Him and His body (Rom. 6:3-5), so we do with all the others who are in His body. Time and again, Paul feels that his salvation, his resurrection and glorification at the last day, is absolutely tied up with that of the Corinthians.

*7:4 Great is my confidence in you-* The following verses, climaxing at the end of the chapter with his claim to have "perfect confidence in you all", are all hard to square with what we know about the Paul-Corinth relationship. They were sceptical and critical of him, and throughout the Corinthian correspondence he is directly and indirectly answering their slander of him. But now he appears to launch into a section of ecstatic joy and praise of them, claiming things for them which clearly were not true. And he concludes the letter by threatening judgment upon them, deeply saddened by their rejection of him. The logic of his argument in this section appears faulty, as if they are words uttered on the cusp of emotional experience, not connected with reality, and as if he were just madly 'in love' with them, willing to see them as something which they simply were not in reality. And which reality he continually states and laments, both immediately before and after this section.

There are various possible explanations. The positive language about them may be pure sarcasm, of the kind he uses in 11:4; but it would be so extensive and never signalled as such to make this unlikely. He may have so counted them as "in Christ", imputing them as righteous when they were not, that he allows himself to express his emotions about them in writing in this way. Or he may have been 'buttering them up' because he moves straight on to ask them to come up with some money for the Jerusalem Poor Fund. Or perhaps he was so obsessed with his projects of saving them and of the Jerusalem Poor Fund, that the slightest positive news about them was amplified by him into ridiculously positive positions and claims on their behalf. Inspiration in this case would have allowed the letter to be written as is, full of Paul's irrational emotions at this point, just as the bitter rantings of David against his enemies are likewise recorded under inspiration in the Psalms.

It would be rather like the boy who madly loves a girl who isn't that interested in him. He invites her for countless dates, and she refuses. But then she calls him and asks if she can just drop by his place to pick up her favourite umbrella, which she left there a month ago. The boy of course agrees with glee, and as he waits for her to come, he gets onto social media and tells his friends that the girl has agreed to marry him and is on her initiative coming to visit him. And then afterwards she calls him and says her brother will just drop by and pick up the umbrella, as he is working in that area today, and she's too busy... This kind of irrational 'in love' behaviour can be seen in Hosea, where Hosea's wildly oscillating love and anger with Gomer reflect God's feelings for His faithless Israel.

*Great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort, in all our affliction I am overflowing with joy!*- This outbreak of basting, comfort and joy was because of some positive report from Titus, who had just come to Paul after a visit to Corinth. This letter is

therefore being written in real time; Titus as it were comes through the door with the news, whilst Paul is up to chapter 7:3 of his letter. And instead of going back and editing what he has written earlier in the light of the coming of Titus, he just leaves it as is and utters this burst of enthusiasm for the Corinthians- to return to reality in chapter 8.

It should be noted that an alternative is to view 7:4 as picking up from 2:14, with the intervening material as some huge digression. But 2:15 flows right on in context from 2:14. Such a break is unnatural; and all the same, the position Paul held about the Corinthians in chapter 2 remains contradictory with the outburst of confidence he has in them in chapter 7, and that outburst also contradicts the position and lack of confidence he has in them throughout the rest of the letter. So this ingenious idea doesn't really help things.

*7:5 For even when we went into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief, but we were afflicted on every side. Without were conflicts, within were fears-* "Our flesh" might mean that Paul's bodily health reflected his internal worries about the Corinthians and his ministry. "Even when..." would be a reference to the fact that the Lord had specifically called Paul to go and preach in Macedonia in a vision (Acts 16:9,10). And yet despite that specific invitation, the way was not easy and Paul was wracked with pressures and difficulties. Paul paints a hard picture of his time in Macedonia, as the backdrop against which the good news from Titus was received by him.

*7:6 Nevertheless God that comforts the lowly comforted us by the coming of Titus-* This is an allusion to the LXX of Is. 49:13. It would seem that Paul was so saturated with the Scriptures that he alludes to phrases at times without any significant relevance to his purpose or context; he is just using language and phrases which are in his mind at the time, just as we all do. God's comfort came to Paul through a human mechanism- Titus. It's as if Paul is seeking to provide an exemplification of the principles he stated at the beginning of this letter- that our experiences are in order to "comfort" others. Seeing that the Corinthians remained an awful concern for Paul, as witnessed by the rest of the letter, we can suspect that Paul is wilfully seeking to paint things in these terms.

*7:7 And not by his coming only, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you-* The Corinthians are commended for comforting Titus who in turn passed on that comfort to Paul. This again is an attempt to make the situation a fulfilment of the principles of 1:3-6, where Paul states that God's comfort to believers is mediated through the comfort of others. On :6 I noted that there seems an element of forcing the situation with Titus to fit those requirements, when in reality there was not so much comfort at all from the Corinthians. For Paul has to go on to badger them to come up with the cash they have promised for his Jerusalem Poor Fund. It seems from 12:16-18 that the Corinthians accused Paul of using Titus to 'craftily... take advantage' of them. Yet here Paul wishes to give the impression that the Corinthians comforted Titus, who relayed that comfort to Paul, and thus Paul was deeply grateful to the Corinthians for comforting him. It seems Paul here in chapter 7 is exaggerating things in his own mind; see on :4 for an explanation of why.

*While he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me. So that I rejoiced yet more-* Both before and after this section in chapter 7, Paul is dealing extensively with the cynicism and criticisms of the Corinthians against him. If indeed their love for Paul was so deep and credible, why does he have to state in 8:8: "I am probing the sincerity of your love"? If their love for him was so passionate, why in chapter 11 does he have to defend himself against their cynicism towards him, to the point that he even gets sarcastic with them: "For if he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept- it seems you think you do well to go along with him" (11:4). "Forgive me this wrong" (12:13)

is another example of a sarcasm which would be inappropriate in a mutually loving and respectful relationship. Clearly they were forsaking Paul in order to follow his enemies. This was hardly "your longing... your zeal for me". Zeal for him was what Paul subconsciously hoped for... and the news that they had been partially obedient to Paul on some point was perhaps wildly over-interpreted to mean they were zealous for him. The deep love for Paul which he likes to imagine as Titus gives him some news from Corinth is hardly for real, if he has to write to them: "I have become foolish. You compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you" (12:11). He desperately gave them reason to respect him- when such reasons ought to have been forthcoming from them. But they were not. 12:15 certainly sounds like they were falling out of love with Paul, rather than the more in love with him: "If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less by you?". They directly accused him of dishonesty: "You say I was crafty, and got the better of you by deceit" (12:16), and "you seek proof that Christ speaks in me" (13:3). Is this really reconcilable with Paul's claim to have heard of "your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me"? Especially powerful is 12:19: "You think all this time that we are excusing ourselves to you". "All this time" means that throughout their relationship over the course of the correspondence, the Corinthians didn't trust Paul and thought he was making excuses for having abused them through the visit of Titus and in other ways. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this exalting language of chapter 7 is either bitter sarcasm, or Paul being overly positive about them.

We hardly get the impression that they were longing for him, zealous for him and mourning their disobedience to him. If that were indeed the case, surely Paul would have put a red line through what he had previously written in 2 Corinthians, and then not written as he did in the rest of the letter. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Paul *interpreted* the report of Titus in terms of his deepest psychological hopes for the Corinthians. "Mourning" is an intense term, only used of the women weeping for their baby children who had been murdered (Mt. 2:18). Such deep lamentation is hard to square with the rest of the letter. "So that I rejoiced *yet more*" suggests Paul was already rejoicing over the Corinthians, and now he did so the more after the report from Titus. But he has earlier explained that he cancelled an intended visit to them because he knew they would give him sorrow rather than the rejoicing he hoped to have for them (2:3). He hoped to rejoice in them- and that psychological expectation was so deep in his subconscious that when Titus mentioned some potentially positive things about them, he found himself rejoicing, and imagining that even before that, he had been rejoicing. See my explanation and analogy offered on :4.

The words Paul uses for longing, mourning and zeal are found in essence in his description of their response to his command to separate from the immoral man (:11,12). Yet the terms can mean 'indignation' and can equally refer to their self-justification in explaining why they had not initially removed the immoral person. Paul likes to turn that around to mean they were zealous "for me". But the rest of the letter shows that to be wishful thinking. These terms are also used by Paul in describing his longing, mourning and zeal for his brethren. It's as if he is subconsciously hoping that his feelings towards the Corinthians are theirs for him. He has explicitly stated that he hopes that his attitude of mind toward them will be theirs toward him (see on 6:11,13).

The language here in 7:7-11 is allusive to David's penitence, because Paul wished to interpret the news from Titus as meaning that the Corinthians had repented of their deep immorality: "Ye were made sorry... ye sorrowed to repentance...ye were made sorry after a *Godly* manner (cp. "every one that is *Godly*...", Ps. 32:6)... for *Godly* sorrow worketh repentance to salvation... ye sorrowed after a *Godly* sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation (cp. David's in 2 Sam. 12:5)... what zeal... your

mourning, your fervent mind" (AV). Allusion after allusion to David is being piled up here. The eight references to their "sorrow" in four verses is surely a signpost back to David's intense sorrow for his sin with Bathsheba: "My sin is ever before me (Ps. 51:3)... my sorrow is continually before me... I will be sorry for my sin... many sorrows shall be to the wicked" who, unlike David, refused to repent (Ps. 38:17,18; 32:10). This association between sin and sorrow is a common one (Job 9:28; 1 Tim. 6:10; Ex. 4:31; Is. 35:10. The last two references show how Israel's sorrowing in Egypt was on account of their sinfulness). We must pause to ask whether our consciousness of sin leads us to a like sorrowing, whether our repentance features a similar depth of remorse. It would appear that Paul is likening Corinth to David. They too were guilty of sexual "uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness" (2 Cor. 12:21). As David's repentance was made in a "day of salvation", so in 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul told Corinth that they were in a similar position to him; they too had the chance of repentance. Those who had heeded this call earlier had experienced the zeal and clear conscience which David did on his repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-11). In this case, Paul would be likening himself to Nathan the prophet. This zeal which was seen in both David and Corinth is a sure sign of clear conscience and a joyful openness with God. Again, we ask how much of our zeal is motivated by this, or is it just a continuation of a level of service which we set ourselves in more spiritual days, which we now struggle to maintain for appearances sake?

*7:8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though only for a time-* We meet here the intriguing situation whereby Paul wrote an inspired letter with a command concerning the immoral man- and then regretted writing it. It seems that for a time Paul took false guilt over the matter. But he emerged from that, refusing to feel guilty for it. And there are other Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. Recall how the Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her for her rape (2 Sam. 13:20).

On a more human level, it seems that the Corinthians had replied that they were 'most upset' by Paul's letter commanding them to remove the immoral man, and criticizing them for not having done so. Yet Paul turns that pouting, self-justifying 'We are most upset by how you wrote to us, you know' into a claim that they had sorrowed unto repentance. He is making a word play with "sorrow". But the rest of 2 Corinthians shows that they still needed to experience Godly sorrow leading to real repentance (12:20,21).

7:9- see on Lk. 9:23-25.

*I now rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry to repentance. For you were made sorry in a Godly way-* Paul writes here as if they were made sorrowful unto repentance by his letter, asking them to remove the immoral man from amongst them. And he therefore rejoices at their heart felt obedience to him. We would therefore assume that he could now go to Corinth with joy- for I noted on chapter 2 that Paul had delayed going to Corinth because he didn't want to have sorrow from them on his coming, but rather joy. But even by the end of this letter, Paul states clearly and repeatedly his unallayed fear that if he does visit them, "I shall not find you such as I would" (2 Cor. 12:20,21). He urges them to repent in response to his letter, because otherwise if he visited them, the Lord might use him to seriously punish them (2 Cor. 13:10). So his claim to be totally confident of their

repentance and obedience seems somewhat hollow- for if they indeed had done all he had asked, then he could come to them with joy and not sorrow. But that clearly was not the case. If indeed the Corinthians had sorrowed to repentance, then why passages like: "See my suggestions for his exaggerated 'rejoicing' over them on :4.

*That you might suffer harm from us in nothing-* He appears to be quoting back to them their complaint that he had harmed them. He appears to be desperately trying to argue that all is good now, because their sorrow and hurt has led to their repentance and reconciliation with Paul. Although the rest of the letter shows this was not the case.

*7:10 For Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, it brings no regret; but the sorrow of the world works death-* Paul is trying to turn around their 'We were really upset you know by your letter, really sad you should write to us like that' as meaning they had sorrowed with Godly sorrow. But this was a desperate attempt to make things seem right.

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" by God (2 Cor. 7:10 AV) could mean that if we repent / change our minds, then God will not repent of His plan for saving us. But more likely is Paul's fear that they will regret their repentance, repenting of a repentance, as it were. And he says that this cannot be the case as Godly sorrow and repentance leads to salvation, and going back on it would mean death. Clearly Paul fears the Corinthians are unstable.

*7:11 For observe this very thing: you sorrowed in a Godly manner; and what diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be pure in the matter-* See on 7:7. This diligence and zeal after repentance must be squared with 12:20,21: "I fear, lest by any means, when I come, I should find you not as I would wish, and should myself be found by you such as you would not wish. Lest by any means there should be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality and sensuality that they have practiced". It could be argued that Paul is thrilled at their obedience over "the matter", some specific point of obedience. But the overall tenor of chapter 7 is that he is thrilled with them and has complete confidence in them "in everything" (:16). The comparison with 12:20,21 [and similar passages] leaves me concluding that Paul here is carried away with a loving positivity about the Corinthians. In 13:5 he seems to doubt whether they are really "in the faith"; yet here he speaks so positively of their Godly zeal. Their "indignation" and 'vehemence' may well have been indignation that Paul had asked them to separate from the immoral brother. But Paul now likes to interpret that as part of their Godly zeal. "You proved yourselves to be pure" sounds like they may have given some reason excusing them for not having previously separated from the immoral brother (1 Cor. 5); and Paul accepts that explanation as he understands it from Titus. Their 'clearing of themselves', *apologia*, self defence, sounds like self justification- doubtless giving excuses as to why they had not initially removed the immoral brother, and had now done so, in apparent obedience to Paul's demand they do so. Paul wishes to understand their indignant self-justification as Godly sorrow.

The Greek word *zelos* means both zeal in a good sense (2 Cor. 7:11,12; 9:2; 11:2)- and also it's translated jealousy, strife, envying (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20). Likewise, *thumos* is used both about righteous anger, and also fits of anger which are sinful. It's clear enough from these linguistic facts, quite apart from our practical experience, that zeal turns

into strife far too often and far too easily. The problem is, we so easily defend the strife, the jealousy, the anger... as righteous zeal, Godly anger. The line seems to us very fine, although it isn't in God's eyes. I observe too often brethren who appear so full of anger, but never reveal it openly... until it comes to some matter connected with their religious life. And then, wow, they let it all rip on some poor person, feeling they are justified.

*7:12 So although I wrote to you, I wrote not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong; but that your earnest care for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God-* This argument seems desperate. The reasons given for demanding the removal of the immoral man were given in 1 Cor. 5 as being because a little yeast affects the whole lump of dough. But now, Paul says that the whole thing was just a test to make them realize before God, in their consciences, how much they cared for / respected Paul. Paul has earlier appealed to their consciences as being proof of his sincerity, and now he says that the whole command to discipline the immoral brother was in order for them to have revealed to themselves how much they cared for Paul. If the whole request to remove the brother were really just an experiment to prove this, then it reveals a marked lack of care for the person involved; for Paul urges them to receive the brother back lest he be psychologically shattered by the exclusion experienced (2:7). All the contradictions within the argument can only really be explained by reading Paul here as utterly desperate to be reconciled with the Corinthians, taking blame on himself as much as he could, and trying to slip past the problem by saying it had all only been an experiment. Their "care" is the same word as in the preceding :11, translated "diligence" (AV "carefulness"). Paul is saying that the fact they did eventually remove the immoral man shows their diligence *towards him*. But that was just how he wished to see it. For the rest of the letter shows their deep disrespect of Paul.

*7:13 Therefore we have been comforted, and in our comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all-* Was this really what had happened, with Titus feeling joyful and refreshed by them? 8:23 and 12:18 imply that they accused Titus of being Paul's puppet and part of a crafty scheme to get money out of them. According to the [uninspired] footnote at the end of the letter, 2 Corinthians was written by Paul and Titus. The "us" references in the letter would therefore refer to Paul and Titus; and it is clear that Corinth were cynical and critical towards the "us", which would include Titus.

Yet all the same, Paul's joy for the joy of Titus is instructive. Paul sincerely felt the joy of others as being his personal joy (Rom. 12:15 cp. 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 2:3). Because we are in one body, we rejoice with those who rejoice. "We are partakers of *your* joy", Paul could write. The comfort which Titus felt was that which Paul felt (2 Cor. 7:6,7,13); Corinth's joy was Paul's (2 Cor. 7:13). This should ensure a true richness of experience for the believer in Christ, sharing in the joys and sorrows, the tragedies and triumphs, of the one body on the Lord. "He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire" (Prov. 18:1 RV). This says it all. Any separation from our brethren, whether it be from personal dislike of them or for fear of losing friends amongst others who order us to separate from them... is all ultimately selfish.

*7:14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true-* If Paul wrote so toughly to the Corinthians in both the recorded epistles, it is unlikely he kept Titus in the dark about their problems. So it seems Paul is surely putting the most positive possible interpretation on his guidance to Titus before Titus went to visit Corinth. Yet he insists that he 'boasted' to Titus of their obedience, and he feels he had been justified. We will go on to read that he had boasted of the Corinthians' intention to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund- even though it seems they never came through on their promises. So Paul boasted of them because

he so loved them that he dearly wished them to be spiritual and obedient. He counted them as far more than they really were.

*7:15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him-* Again, as noted on :13, we have to recall that 8:23 and 12:18 imply that they accused Titus of being Paul's puppet and part of a crafty scheme to get money out of them. If indeed they received Titus with "fear and trembling" then this was of little lasting consequence. And their "obedience" was hardly very significant, because in 10:6 Paul speaks of their "obedience" (s.w.) as not having been yet achieved. Again we are left with the impression that Paul is interpreting their behaviour in the most positive possible way, to the point of being unrealistic.

*7:16 I rejoice that in everything I can have perfect confidence in you-* Paul had every reason not to have confidence in them. The confidence he exudes here may be a radical example of imputing righteousness to those in Christ. Or it may also be an example of him being caught up on the cusp of obsessive-compulsive emotion, wildly over-positive about them. The word for "confidence" is used almost exclusively in 2 Corinthians (5:6,8; 10:1,2). Paul's confidence in the Lord spilled over into his confidence about his brethren. Whatever, we have here a great example of love and positive attitude toward those who are hopelessly weak.



## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Moreover brothers, we make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia-* Paul now turns his attention to his pet project- the Jerusalem Poor Fund. The Corinthians had agreed to contribute, but apart from a handful of pro-Paul loyalists listed in 1 Cor. 16, donations had not been forthcoming. Paul is now trying to persuade them to donate as they had promised. There seems no evidence that his project every really worked out- he has to ask for prayers that whatever he gathered would even be accepted by the Jerusalem elders (Rom. 15:31)- which makes us wonder how severe the plight really was in Jerusalem, for hungry people will accept food from whoever. When he finally arrived in Jerusalem, it appears [see my commentary on Acts] that he was arrested at the investigation of the Jerusalem Christians. The entourage which accompanied the cash and goods taken to Jerusalem doesn't include anyone from Corinth (Acts 20:4); and there is no record that the Corinthians ever heeded Paul's appeals here and actually donated. Further, there is no historical evidence for a long drawn out famine in Jerusalem lasting several years. Paul later in this chapter says that his Fund had begun over a year previously, and by the time the goods or cash were collected and taken to Jerusalem, we must allow at least another year. We wonder whether there was indeed the urgent need in Jerusalem which Paul imagines there was. He wished to assist "the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26)- not Palestine generally, nor all the believers at Jerusalem, but an impoverished group amongst the Jerusalem church. It would seem to me that Paul is fixated with Jerusalem (as I noted several times in commentary on Acts and Paul's determination to make a witness there), and wishes to force some fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which envisage Gentile wealth being brought up to the Jerusalem temple. It is noteworthy that Paul gives four reasons for the Jerusalem Poor Fund, and only one of them is the actual relief of poverty; the others are of a more abstract and spiritual nature (9:13).

Paul begins his delicate exercise by pointing out the generosity of the Macedonian churches, where he was located at the time of writing 2 Corinthians. Paul often uses *charis*, "gift" or "grace", with reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart which all believers receive at baptism. The Corinthians had been given the same gift, but hadn't actualized it, and were therefore still not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). By "the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia", Paul effectively means 'I want to tell you how much they have given'. But he speaks instead of the grace / gift given to them. The intentional confusion is to make the point that the gift / grace give to the Macedonians had elicited in them a grace / giving to the Lord's cause. Paul's repeated subtext throughout the Corinthian correspondence is that the key to their greater spiritual response is their awareness of the Spirit within them. The same words for 'grace given' are used of how the Spirit is given to all believers (Jn. 1:17; Eph. 4:7 "unto every one of us is given grace", and often); and specifically of how grace had likewise been given to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4).

8:2 *For in a severe test of affliction-* The severe famine in Palestine was matched by a severe test of some sort in Macedonia; perhaps there was a famine there too.

*Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part-* They were indeed cheerful givers, for their joy was the motivation for their giving. Their joy for what the Lord had done for them, for the "abundance" [s.w.] of His grace and giving to them (Rom. 5:17), led to their giving to the poor. The request for the Corinthians to be cheerful givers was therefore directly based on the Macedonian example (9:7). Likewise the "generosity" of the Macedonians was to be emulated by the Corinthians (9:11,13).

8:3 *For according to their power, I testify, yes and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord-* The idea of *kata* their *dunamis* occurs in the parable of the talents, which are given to believers on conversion (Mt. 25:11 AV "according to his several ability"). That this refers to the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of believers after baptism is confirmed by *kata dunamis* being used in exactly this context in Ephesians. The Spirit is given according to God's power (Eph. 1:17,19). We are strengthened according to God's power in the Spirit within the "inner man" (a point made three times, each time using *kata dunamis*- Eph. 3:7,16,20, repeated in Col. 1:11,29). The Macedonians had been given the *charis*, the gift of the Spirit; and according to that gift, they in turn were giving. The Spirit therefore influenced them and confirmed them in their generosity; it worked within the "inner man". For that is where decisions relating to generosity are taken. But *beyond* the psychological power inspired by the Spirit, the Macedonians donated even more. And that is quite something. This makes the best sense of what is otherwise an awkward verse: "For *kata* their power [*dunamis*], I bear record, and *hyper* their power [*dunamis*], they were willing of themselves" (AV). This last phrase [which is the literal translation of the Greek] finally makes sense- once we realize that they gave according to the power and will of the Spirit within them, but they of themselves, beyond the influence of the Spirit, donated even more. Paul's persistent concern is that the Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). He seems to blame their lack of donations as related to the same essential problem.

We can give on some kind of proportionate level to what we have. Or we can give *more than we can afford*; the kind of giving the Philippians are commended for (and no, Paul didn't scold them for being irresponsible): "In their deep poverty... to their power... yea, and *beyond their power*" (2 Cor. 8:2). The basic message of so many of the parables is that our generosity to the Lord's cause should be offered without a calculated weighing up process first of all, and with a recognition that such giving may be contrary to all human wisdom. Thus the rich man sells *all he has* and buys a pearl- he's left with nothing, just this useless ornament. He doesn't sell what he has spare, his over-and-above... *all he had* went on that pearl, for the sheer joy and surpassing, all-demanding excellence thereof. His wife, colleagues, employees- would have counted him crazy. He acted against all the conventions of human wisdom. Likewise the shepherd leaves 99% of his flock unguarded and goes chasing madly after the one weak, straying one. This was crazy, humanly; one per cent loss wasn't unreasonable. But he risked all, for love of the one. And in this He set us a pattern for forsaking all we have.

8:4 *Begging us earnestly to accept this grace as a token of their fellowship in this service to the saints-* The begging was perhaps necessary because Paul realized they had given more than they could sensibly afford to give. It was "a token of their fellowship in this service" in the sense that Paul understood donating to the Fund as an evidence that they fellowshiped their poorer brethren in Jerusalem. The language of "fellowship" is used (as in 9:13) because Paul's intention was to bind together in fellowship the Jerusalem Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in pagan Corinth. It was a grand idea and concept, but the Jerusalem Christians returned to the temple system of Judaism, not heeding the calls in Revelation to come out from that latter day Babylon [spiritually] lest they be consumed in her AD70 judgments.

8:5 *And their giving was beyond our hope; for through the will of God, first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us-* "First" can mean 'most importantly'. He saw their response to the Lord as their response to him- because he appreciated the degree to which he as their converter was a full manifestation of the Lord whom he preached. But all the same, on a human level, Paul's position on support for the Jerusalem Poor Fund seems far too personal. He sees support of it as support for him. He perceives it as a test of their personal loyalty to

him. And here he says so explicitly. Their generosity was beyond even what the Spirit had enabled them to give (see on :3). But to Paul, even more importantly, the Macedonians had given themselves "to the Lord and to us". Paul sees himself as manifesting the Lord Jesus to them; and thereby their attitude to him was their attitude to the Lord. We too can easily seek personal loyalty from others, rather than the overall service of the Lord Jesus by them.

Paul parallels *giving* to the poor believers with *giving* our own selves to the Lord. Every act of generosity to the Lord's people is a giving to Him personally. Paul had obviously grasped the huge implications of the Lord's teaching that whenever His people are cold, thirsty, in need... then He is in such need, and every ministration to them is a ministration to Him. 2 Cor. 8:9 teaches that our response to the Lord's sacrifice should be giving to others *until we are poor*, reflecting the Lord's making of Himself 'poor' to the extent of being left naked and dead, hanging upon a stake of wood. We must review all our generosity in this light. Is it a giving of our abundance, or is it a giving until we make ourselves poor...? The practical implications of this are *huge*.

8:6 *So much so that we urged Titus*- Paul asked Titus to visit the Corinthians. He himself "of his own accord" decided to visit them. But God put the idea in the heart of Titus (2 Cor. 8:6,16,17). The freewill desire of Titus was confirmed by the hand of God operating on the heart of Titus. It could be argued that it was God who put the idea there in the first place, foreknowing that of Titus's "own accord" he would wish to do this work.

*That as he had started, so he should complete among you also this act of grace*- "This act of grace" is literally as AV "the same grace". Paul wants the Corinthians to respond to the Spirit gift / grace given to them just as the Macedonians had. So the mission of Titus was to make the Corinthians respond to grace in the same way as the Macedonians had- by donating to his pet project, the Jerusalem Poor Fund. But response to God's grace is not uniform... Titus had "started" the work by arranging their contributions, and now he was asked to complete it by getting the promised cash and donations out of them. Again, "grace" is put for their response to God's grace- in giving / being gracious. And this is true for all time, not just in the particular situation here in view. God's grace cannot be passively received. We are to respond to it by likewise giving and being gracious.

8:7 *So as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge and in all earnestness and in your love to us, see that you excel in this grace also*- These are references to the Spirit gifts which the Corinthians had potentially received, and which they claimed to practice (1 Cor. 1:5; 12:8-10). Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 has revealed that in reality they were only pretending to have the Spirit gifts of speech and knowledge. They were acting as the pagans acted at the Delfi oracle, speaking in unintelligible utterances and calling this the Spirit gift of the Spirit. They didn't really practice the actual gifts of the Spirit, for they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). They *claimed to* "abound" in the Spirit gifts, but as noted throughout 1 Cor. 12, they did not in reality. Likewise their abounding "love to us" was imputed by Paul- for the rest of 2 Corinthians shows that they were far from being in love with him. But Paul takes a positive view of them, and reasons that if indeed they feel filled with the Spirit and with love, then they will also perform this *charis*, this grace or Spirit gift- by actually giving in material terms. Again, Paul is arguing that their actual giving will be a function of the gift or grace of the Spirit being allowed to operate within them.

We cannot know God's grace without likewise 'abounding' with it ourselves. This can be in acts of generosity; the early believers were to 'abound' in generosity to the needy (2 Cor. 8:7- the same word used about the abounding of God's grace). But the spirit of 'abounding' is far more than material generosity. We are to 'abound' in the work of edifying the church (1 Cor.

14:12; 15:58); abounding in prayer for each other (1 Thess. 3:10), rather than just praying once about someone else's problem as a conscience-salving formality. Ask yourself- whether your prayer for others is of the 'abounding' quality that the Lord's intercession was and is *for* you? We are to 'abound' in praise- for God's abounding grace abounds through us to His glory if we praise Him for that grace (2 Cor. 4:15). And so... how is your praise? A mouthing off of familiar words and lyrics, that you've hummed and hymned for years? Or the internal praise that has some real fire and flame to it? As God makes His grace *abound* to us, *we* are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to 'abound' in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God's abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

8:8 *I speak not as direct commandment*- The Jerusalem Poor Fund project was not a direct commandment from the Lord Jesus nor directly inspired by some Holy Spirit edict. It was Paul's own initiative. Yet more specifically, Paul is writing of his request that they actually give the promised contributions to Titus at this time.

*But rather through showing you the earnestness of others I am probing the sincerity of your love*- AV "But by occasion of the forwardness of others". Those "others" are the Macedonians. Paul excuses his urging of Corinth to come up with the cash because the speed [Gk.] or diligence of the Macedonians requires the Corinthians to now respond. The whole argument sounds somewhat contrived. The "probing" or testing is an image from metallurgy, and has been used about the final crucible of judgment day in 1 Cor. 3:13. Is it too much to think that Paul thought that their final judgment was related to whether they gave toward their poor brethren in this way? In which case he appears to be far too obsessive about garnering support for his project. If indeed Corinth had such passionate love and "fervent mind" toward Paul as he claims in 7:7, and if truly "I have perfect confidence in you all" (7:16), then why this need to probe the sincerity of that love? Clearly his argument is contradictory- because his outpouring of enthusiasm in chapter 7 was on the cusp of emotion, although the recording of it is Divinely inspired.

But whatever, love must of course be sincere. Unless our 'love' reflects a genuine care and respect for the other person, it isn't love. William Barclay suggests that the Greek word *porneia*, prostitution, is rooted in the verb *pernumi*- to sell. If our love is the love which is bought and sold, which goes to the highest bidder, which treats its object as a thing which can be discarded, or 'loved' without truly intimate union... then it's actually a form of prostitution. Each time we ditch a friend because the going got tough, withheld love because we weren't getting from it what we intended... we're essentially showing a spirit of prostitution rather than love. This is why love in the end must always find practical expression in a self-sacrificial way. The Corinthians were to show the sincerity of their love [implying there can be a fake 'love'] by their generosity to the poor believers in Judea (2 Cor. 8:7,8,24).

8:9- see on Mt. 13:46.

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor as a pauper; that you through his poverty might become rich*- I have argued throughout this section that Paul is going too far in trying to patch things up with the Corinthians and is urging them to donate to the Jerusalem Poor Fund using whatever

reasoning he can lay hold of. He now urges giving on the basis that the Lord Jesus was rich but became poor for us so that we who were poor might be made rich, and therefore they ought to give of their material wealth to the poorer brethren in Jerusalem. But 1 Corinthians 1 has stated that there were not many wealthy individuals in the Corinthian church. And thinking through the argument used here, the logic is far from tight. For the Lord Jesus was not materially rich. Our enrichment by Him is surely spiritually. But He did not lose his spiritual riches, becoming spiritually poor, in order that we who are spiritually poor should be enriched spiritually. Neither did He lose any material riches in order to spiritually enrich us. Not only is the logic of the argument not tight, but the meaning of riches and poverty is confused. The Lord's self giving on the cross should indeed motivate us to material generosity to the poor. But the metaphors used here are too mixed to make a very compelling argument once it is more closely analysed. He seems to make a similar mistake in :15 (see note there). This seems typical of the desperate tactics Paul is using to cajole the Corinthians into giving to the fund. There is no evidence they ever did, nor that what support was gathered from other churches was ever actually accepted when it arrived in Jerusalem.

We have each been touched by God's grace, and His influence upon us leads us to reach out to influence others by lives of grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus cannot be received passively. The Corinthians' response must be to make themselves poor, so that their poor Jewish brethren might be made richer. *Every* person who has been enriched in the Lord Jesus will in turn respond in a life and even a body language that somehow transforms others. Prov. 13:8 speaks of how our attitude to wealth is a crucial factor in our eternal destiny: "The ransom of a man's life are his riches". Just prior to that we read in Prov. 13:7: "There is that makes himself poor, yet has great riches". This verse is actually part quoted in 2 Cor. 8:9 and Phil. 2:7, about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus made himself poor, of no reputation, and now has been so highly exalted. Our living out of the Lord's cross is shown in our making of ourselves poor. That is surely the unmistakable teaching of this allusion.

Do we struggle to be truly generous to the Lord's cause, and to turn our words and vague feelings of commitment into action? Corinth too were talkers, boasting of their plans to give material support to the poor brethren in Jerusalem, but doing nothing concrete. Paul sought to shake them into action by reminding them of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). Corinth had few wealthy members, but Paul knew that the cross of Christ would inspire in them a generous spirit to those even poorer than they. The richer should be made poor by what the Lord did, Paul is saying- not harmlessly giving of their pocket money. For He gave in ways that hurt Him, ways that were real, meaningful and thereby effective and powerful.

To put it mildly, our experience of His death for us should lead us to be generous spirited in all ways. In appealing for financial generosity to poorer brethren, Paul sought to inspire the Corinthians with the picture of Christ crucified: "For ye know the grace [gift / giving] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor [Gk. a pauper], that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In the light of this, we should not just be generous from the abundance of what we have; we should become as paupers in our giving. The Lord's giving wasn't financial; it was emotional and spiritual. And so, Paul says, both materially and in these ways, we should likewise respond to our brethren, poorer materially or spiritually than we are. "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14 Philips; it "urges us on", NRSV).

Because in the Kingdom we will be given all the wealth that is Christ's, therefore we should sell what we now have and give to the poor (Lk. 12:33 cp. 44 NIV). But more than this, in a sense God *has now* given us the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32 NIV), and therefore we should in natural response to this give of our blessings (in whatever form) to make the poor rich, just as Christ did to us (2 Cor. 8:9 alludes here). Basically, according to this, generosity (both of spirit and material giving) is proportionate to our faith that we both have now and will receive the matchless riches of God's grace in Christ. "Grace" is used by Paul in 2 Cor. to refer to both the grace God has given us and the grace of giving which the Corinthians ought to respond to it with; as God had reached into their lives, so they should reach into the lives of their poverty stricken brethren.

In appealing for the Corinthians to be generous, Paul points out that the Lord Jesus became a pauper for our sakes, and therefore, because of the riches of salvation He has given to us, the *least* we can do is to reach out into the lives of others with what riches we may have (2 Cor. 8:9 Gk.). This is why in 2 Cor. 8:1,19; 9:14, Paul uses the word "grace" to mean both the grace of God and also our grace (gifts) in works of response. Thus he talks of bringing the "grace" of the money collected for the poor saints; he is talking about the gift they had made; but in the same context he speaks of God's grace in Christ. If we have received the grace of God's forgiveness and salvation (and so much more) in Christ, we must show that grace, that gift, by giving. Our heart tells us to give, our heart is in our giving, it's a natural outcome of a believing mind (2 Cor. 9:5-8, J.B. Phillips). Our giving is a quite natural outcome of our faith in and experience of the cross.

The suggestion has been made that because Jesus increased in favour with men, He may have gotten on quite well in His secular life. Paul speaks about how although Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor [a pauper, Gk.] that we through His poverty might be rich. Clearly the reference is to the 'poverty' of the cross, that we might be spiritually rich- for He doesn't enable us to get materially rich through following Him. And yet the context of Paul's words is about the need to give up our material riches for Christ's people, and he cites the example of Jesus to inspire us in this.

8:10 *And herein I give my judgment*- The idea is 'my advice'. Paul has stated that in these matters he is not speaking by direct Divine commandment (:8); this is all his personal initiative.

*For this is expedient for you*- There is no clear reason given for the expediency which would arise from their giving to the Fund. The word means 'profitable' and is used in 1 Cor. 12:7 of how the Corinthians had been given the Spirit for their 'profit'. Perhaps Paul means that if the Spirit is really within them, then they will make the donation and 'profit' thereby.

*Who were the first to make a beginning a year ago, not only to desire to give but to actually give*- The beginning was apparently in undertakings given to Titus that they would donate to the collection. Hence :6 speaks of Titus having begun this work in them, and now coming to them to finish it. This would place the previous visit of Titus about a year previously. Paul says that they had begun to do it a year ago- but then in :11 he asks them to "perform the doing of it" (AV). Again, Paul appears to be exaggerating. Had they actually begun 'doing', actually giving, i.e. putting money aside in collections, a year ago? Apparently not, for he asks them now to 'do' so (:11). But he likes to imagine that they began collecting a year previously as they had apparently undertaken to Titus.

8:11 *But now complete the doing also*- See on :10.

*That as there was the willingness to want to give, so there may be the completion of the desire also, according to your ability*- Again there seems a contradiction; Paul has said that they began actually giving a year ago (:10), but now a verse later he downgrades that to saying that they had only expressed a willingness to give, and he urges them to now complete or (AV) 'perform' what they had intimated. We get the consistent impression of weak argumentation, because Paul is seeking by any means possible to get them to actually donate. "according to your ability" is an attempt to render a difficult and ambiguous Greek phrase; the GNB may be better with "do it with what you now have", as if to say 'As you haven't been actually collecting funds, well OK, just give what you right now have in your pocket'. This would mean that his claim that they had begun 'actually giving' a year ago (:10) was at best exaggerated. The loose logic in argumentation arises it seems from a desire by all means to get something out of them, in order to make the grand concept come true- of Gentile Corinthian Christians giving funds towards the welfare of conservative orthodox Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul's focus upon the positive is really tremendous, especially coming from a man so far spiritually ahead of the weak Corinthians. He commends their "readiness" to donate, whilst pointing out they are more talk than action; and later speaks to others of "*our* readiness", identifying himself with the Corinthian brethren whose lack of actual action had got him into so many problems in fulfilling what he had confidently promised on their behalf (2 Cor. 8:11,12,19). He even gloried to others of their "readiness" (2 Cor. 9:2), whilst clearly not turning a blind eye to their failure to actually produce anything concrete.

The allusion here may be to Mk. 12:43. Paul saw those generous ecclesias as the widow with one mite, and also as rich Mary giving what she had (Mk. 14:8 = 2 Cor. 8:11). This reveals his sensitivity; he knew some of them were poor, some rich. Yet he saw they were all making a real effort. And he understood this in terms of characters in the Gospels.

8:12 *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has*- See on :11. The "readiness" would refer to their agreement a year ago to support the Fund. They are to give from what they have in hand right away, and not to worry if the actual sum was small. The language of 'acceptability' is appropriate to sacrifices on the altar being accepted by God (1 Pet. 2:5). Yet Rom. 15:31 uses the same word in casting doubt upon whether the collection would be 'accepted' by the Jerusalem Jews. Even if men don't accept our sacrifices, then God does.

*Not according to what he does not have*- He is saying that lack of great resources need not stop their actual giving, because the desire to give ("the readiness") is critical. And that principle is true for all time. A mean spirit is often excused by the knowledge that one doesn't have much to give. But the desire to be generous is critical, and means that the amount given is not of itself important. Paul had boasted for the past year that the Corinthians were "ready" (9:2); but that meant nothing if the cash had not been actually donated. The Greek of 8:19 could mean that if they actually gave, then they would glorify their own readiness of mind, which Paul sees as so critical in any giving.

The Lord taught men to give alms of such things as they had (Lk. 11:41); as we have opportunity / ability, we must be generous to all men (Gal. 6:10). These passages are teaching a *spirit* of generosity; and even a believer with literally *no* money can have a generous spirit. "If there be first (i.e. most importantly) a *willing mind*, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not". *Every man* was to contribute to the building of

the tabernacle (cp. the ecclesia) *with a willing heart* (Ex. 25:2- Paul surely alludes here). They weren't told: 'Whoever is willing and able to contribute, please do so'. And yet the majority of us have at least *something* materially; and as we have been blessed, so let us give. "*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart* (generosity is a mental attitude), so let him give; *not grudgingly*, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver". See on Acts 11:29.

Our intentions to do good can be counted as if they were performed. Thus if we have a generous spirit, and would love to be generous to the needy, but just can't do it – it's counted as if we've done it.

8:13 *For I do not say this so that others may be eased and you distressed-* Paul is not asking them to give to their serious detriment or "distress". He is looking for a symbolic donation- but there is no record that they made even that. "Distressed" is a term commonly used by Paul for the distress or affliction which almost inevitably accompanies the Christian life; but Paul doesn't wish to bring even that upon them.

8:14 *But that as a matter of fairness-* The idea is of equality, that the surplus of Corinth may meet the deficit in Jerusalem.

*Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be an equality-* Paul is asking them to give only of what they had in 'abundance', superfluous to basic needs. Considering that there were not many wealthy in Corinth (1 Cor. 1) and that most people lived a hand to mouth existence, we can conclude that by asking for this, Paul is seeking just a symbolic gift. The abundance of Jerusalem which supplied Gentile need is surely a reference to spiritual things. The language of 'supplying need' is used in a spiritual sense by Paul in Phil. 4:19. The idea of Jewish spiritual things being recompensed with Gentile material things is found in Rom. 15:26,27: "For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to them also to minister to them in material things". Achaia here refers to Corinth. All the efforts of Paul to make them actually pay up gives the lie to his claim that "they were pleased to do it". There would have been no need for the high pressure of 2 Cor. 8 if that were true. Again it seems Paul is obsessed with the idea of the Jerusalem Poor Fund, and loves to boast of the support he liked to imagine it had received. The Romans 15 passage goes on to speak of Paul's intended visit to Spain- and that too, so far as we know, never happened.

8:15 *As it is written: He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little had no lack-* The preceding verse has argued that Jewish Christian spiritual abundance should elicit material support from Gentile Christians. But that was not true to reality- for the Jerusalem Jewish Christians soon returned to Judaism, and were against Gentile Christians, being largely responsible for Paul's arrest when he arrived in Jerusalem with what had been collected, and probably behind much of the Judaist trouble making in the Christian churches he founded. And now he uses an argument which is not completely apposite to the case he is trying to make. In the wilderness, some families could collect more manna than others due to weak health or lack of opportunity. But they shared the manna collected in a collective way, according to Jewish tradition, so that nobody had too much or too less. Those who could collect more gave their abundance to those who could not gather enough. This posits a material giving of our superfluous material wealth to those in the community who have a deficit in material wealth, and in this way "an equality" is achieved. But :14 has argued differently- that Jerusalem's *spiritual* wealth should be matched by Gentile *material* giving. The argument from the Jewish manna tradition about the stronger sharing with the weaker



(which is not Biblically attested) is therefore not completely relevant. The Biblical account is that each family should gather their own manna for their family; so that Jewish tradition may not even have been correct or historically actual in any case. I noted on :9 that Paul makes a similar poor argument and confusion of category concerning the wealth of the Lord Jesus. He confuses material and spiritual, in a way out of character for Paul the intellectual rabbi, whose arguments are usually logically tight, compelling and watertight. All this arose, I suggest, from a desperate desire to make things work out regarding the Poor Fund and his vision of Jewish-Gentile unity within the wider church. Many well intentioned Christian leaders have made similar mistakes when seeking to enforce a unity in practice upon believers who are simply not mature enough nor ready for it.

Paul pleads with Corinth to see the similarities between them and the ecclesia in the wilderness; he wants them to personalize it all. He sees their gathering and redistribution of wealth as exactly analogous to Israel's gathering of manna (2 Cor. 8:15)- and he so wishes his Corinthians to think themselves into Israel's shoes. For then they would realize that as Israel had to have a willing heart to give back to God the wealth of Egypt which He had given them, so they were to have a willing heart in being generous to their poorer brethren (Ex. 35:5 = 2 Cor. 8:12). And they would have realized that as "last year" they had made this offer (2 Cor. 8:10 Gk.), so the year before, Israel had received Egypt's wealth with a similar undertaking to use it for the Lord's cause. As Moses had to remind them a second time of their obligations in Ex. 35, so Paul had to bring it again before Corinth. And if they had seen these similarities, they would have got the sense of Paul's lament that there was not one wise hearted man amongst them- for the "wise hearted" were to convert Israel's gold and silver into tools for Yahweh's service (Ex. 35:10 = 1 Cor. 6:5; 2 Cor. 10:12).

They were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20). There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

8:16 *But thanks be to God, who put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus-* We note that God can act directly upon the human heart. Although it may be that again Paul is exaggerating- for he had surely briefed Titus of his own expectations and intended outcomes, and I have argued on chapter 7 that Paul chose to over interpret the report of Titus when he returned to Paul from Corinth. "The same earnest care" refers to how the Macedonians had an "earnestness" (:8 s.w.) for the project. Titus and the Macedonians had the same urgency for

the project, and Paul wants Corinth to likewise respond "urgently" - for the Greek for "earnest care" carries the basic idea of haste. The urgency was because Corinth had not in fact been collecting for the Fund as they had intimated they were doing, and something at least had to be contributed from them for Paul's boasting about them to be validated, and for the project to work out.

There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others. When Paul thanks God that Titus has a heart of "earnest care" for the Corinthians, he uses a Greek word [*spoude*] which literally means "speed", and is elsewhere translated "haste" – as well as "haste" and "business" (2 Cor. 8:16). The heart that really cares will be characterized by a speedy and quick response, not a careful weighing up of a situation, nor a resignation of responsibilities to ponderous committees. See on Lk. 14:5.

8:17 *For he indeed accepted our appeal; but being very earnest, he went to you of his own accord-* As noted on :16, it was Paul who appealed to Titus to go to Corinth and get them to donate to the Fund. But he says that Titus also went of his own will, in response to God confirming his 'earnestness' with more 'earnest care' placed in his heart (:16). We see here a cameo of how Christian action works out in practice. There are various stimuli- a request from another brother, a passion placed in our heart, and our own freewill passion of our own accord. God will not force anyone to work for Him against their will; but He will place callings in their heart, and confirm their response to it.

8:18 *And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches-* The obvious questions are as to who this brother was, and why the anonymity? Another brother is apparently mentioned anonymously in :22- although that may be another description of the same brother. If the anonymity was to preserve from persecution, why would a specific brother be targeted for persecution for being involved in a welfare project? If persecution is indeed a reason, then one suspects it was Paul's Jewish enemies who were trying to stymie the project. Which is why when Paul arrives at Jerusalem with what had been collected, the Jews get him arrested. And with the Judaist influence at Corinth being such a problem for Paul, we can imagine it was that same Jewish influence which was seeking to hamper Paul's pet project. The brother with a good reputation amongst the churches was Timothy (Acts 16:2,3). 2 Cor. 1:1 states that this letter was written by Paul and Timothy; it could be that although the letter was written by both of them, Paul is writing here, and referring to his co-author in this indirect way because that was appropriate literary protocol at the time. Paul wants to remind the audience of Timothy's strong qualifications, but he is aware that this a letter ostensibly co-authored by himself and Timothy. So he has to refer to Timothy in this indirect manner.

8:19 *And not only this but he is the one who was appointed by the churches to travel with us in this act of grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord and to show our own willingness to help-* Paul carefully doesn't define which churches had appointed this brother [Timothy?] to carry the collection. We can assume they were churches founded by Paul and loyal to him. What would have added to the credibility and success of the project was if those "churches" included the Jerusalem church and other Jewish churches in Palestine. The group of brethren who took the gathering to Jerusalem in Acts 20:3 were certainly pro-Paul loyalists and include no "circumcision" Christians. So whilst Paul was right to seek to glorify the Lord and to administer the project with integrity, placing himself beyond reproach as to financial mismanagement, the whole approach was forcing something on to others which they were clearly not supportive or nor willing to support. This is the problem with obsessive enforcement of projects upon others. Paul was clearly the administrator of the project, as he says himself here. And he simply lacked credibility with the hard core circumcision party who dominated the Jerusalem church; this was not his fault, indeed there was likely nobody

who had the confidence of all the various factions to be able to pull off a project of this scope and scale. "To show our own willingness to help" is an attempt to translate two Greek words which literally mean "your ready mind" (as AV). The text could be stating that the "act of grace", the giving to the Fund in response to God's grace, would glorify both the Lord Jesus and also their willingness to assist in His work. But offering glorification of self as a reason to donate is really getting desperate.

8:20 *This was to avoid being blamed by anyone in this matter of charity which is ministered by us-* The "matter of charity", AV "this abundance", uses a term which concerns a large sum: "lavish gift" (NAB), "large sum" (NJB), "large fund" (JB). But the Corinthians hadn't yet donated anything, and as noted above, time was passing, Paul didn't want them to be burdened, and he was looking for just a symbolic donation from them. But he uses this term because of the huge significance which he saw in their donations. It really seems Paul was exaggerating things in his mind. Paul wisely got others involved in transporting the funds so that his integrity could not be questioned.

8:21 *For we take care to do things honourably, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men-* This is a quotation from Prov. 3:4 LXX. It is not enough to reason that we are correct before God; if we have a sense of His glory and our responsibility as His witnesses in this world, then we must be careful to appear correct before men too. Not because we wish their approbation, but because we seek to glorify God in the eyes of this world.

8:22 *And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have many times proved earnest in many things; but now, much more earnest, by reason of the great confidence which he has in you-* This could be a parallel description of the brother in :18. Or it could be another anonymous brother. The word "earnest" is used elsewhere only of Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:17), whose name means literally 'the bearer / carrier of profit', which would be relevant to bearing / carrying the Poor Fund to Jerusalem. I noted on 7:16 that Paul's "great confidence" in the Corinthians was because he wished to see them in a positive light, he over interpreted the report from Titus as meaning that they were indeed who he wished they were. And here too, this anonymous brother is described as having the same "great confidence" in the Corinthians. But as noted throughout chapter 7, I suggest that this is Paul projecting onto another brother his own [mistaken] feelings towards the Corinthians. He has decided that this anonymous brother will have the same view of them as he does. This is not to say that the record here is not inspired, nor that the Spirit was not with Paul. But as we read of David's bitter ranting against his enemies, his feelings on the cusp of emotion are recorded in God's words, so the record of Paul's feelings for the Corinthians are recorded- contradictory as they are, just as human emotion is often self-contradictory when love and personal investment are involved.

8:23 *Whether any inquire about Titus, he is my partner and my fellow-worker toward you; or our brothers, they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ-* The Corinthians knew Titus, for he had already visited them. So this 'enquiry' would not be in the sense that they didn't know who he was. It was Titus who had visited them and 'begun' the project with them, and he had just returned to Paul from a visit to Corinth (7:13). And Paul was now sending him to them again in the hope they would give him the promised donations. So the 'enquiry' was rather of another kind, reflecting a hostility towards Titus and the brothers with him. This reveals that Paul's claim about the mutual love between Titus and the Corinthians was again an emotional exaggeration, and he had to as it were come down to earth and in reality defend Titus against the scepticism the Corinthians had about him.

8:24 *Therefore show them in the presence of the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf*- Paul dealt with a very difficult situation in Corinth by being totally open hearted, when his natural sense must have been to be very cagey with them (2 Cor. 6:11). Indeed, some of his most revealing autobiographical passages are found in 2 Corinthians, as he opens his heart to them. And he encouraged them to likewise *openly show before the ecclesias* their love for others (2 Cor. 8:24 s.w.). He surely had in mind the Lord's teaching that our light should shine before others, because all things will ultimately be brought into the open (Lk. 8:16,17). This doesn't just refer to preaching; it refers to an open shining out of whatever spirituality we have, to everyone.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *For concerning the service to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you-* I have noted throughout commentary on chapters 7 and 8 that Paul's arguments are very emotional and desperate in many ways. He is seeking some actual real donation from the Corinthians as they had earlier promised. And he is using every possible argument, including some desperate ones, to get them to agree to give Titus and his team some cash or material donations when they come. So within the two chapters of high pressure reasoning which we have in chapters 8 and 9, it is hardly true that half way through he here says that it was really unnecessary for him to be writing to them about their donations, because he is so sure they are going to donate. He says he has "no need" (GNB) to be writing this because he knows their willing hearts (:2). So... why then write two chapters of desperate urging if it was unnecessary? Again (see on 8:9,15), Paul's logic and persuasion is uncharacteristically weak and unconvincing.

9:2- see on Jn. 19:39; Rom. 11:14; 2 Cor. 8:11.

*For I know your readiness, of which I boast on your behalf to those in Macedonia, that Achaia has been prepared for the past year-* Paul could have taken the view that they were all talk, as people often are when it comes to money matters. Instead he boasts of their talk about wanting to support his project. In all human relationships, we can take a cup half full or cup half empty approach. Paul was so 'in love' with the weak Corinthians that he acted as if he really believed them, when clearly all the evidence was that he should have been wary of their promises. After all, these are the same Corinthians to whom he wrote 1 Corinthians. It was surely an exaggeration to say that Achaia [Corinth and the churches around it] had been "prepared" for a year. Prepared to give? Or does he imply they had collected each week as he advised in 1 Corinthians 16, and were now ready for the donations to be picked up by Titus and his team, in order to be taken to Jerusalem? According to the usage of "prepared" in :3, that seems more the idea. As suggested on chapter 7, this is the boasting of a man deeply in love with a woman who just isn't going to come through on his expectations and hopes for her. Hope had morphed into reality in Paul's mind.

*And your zeal has stirred up very many of them-* Paul could bid men follow him, that they might follow Christ. And the inspired word does bid us go down the road of comparing our behaviour with that of others. Paul boasted of the Corinthians' enthusiasm in planning to make donations in order to provoke the ecclesias in Macedonia to a like generosity. Their zeal "provoked very many" (AV). We should provoke one another to love and good works, by example (Heb. 10:24). This is why Christian fellowship is built into our spiritual journey- for we take strength from others as well as from the Lord directly. He mediates His encouragement through others.

9:3 *But I have sent the brothers, that our boasting on your behalf may not be made void in this respect. That, even as I said: You may be prepared-* Paul had already sent Titus and the two anonymous brothers mentioned in chapter 8, and it would seem they were carrying 2 Corinthians in their hands to give to the Corinthians. He asks them now to "be prepared", i.e. to hand over some actual donations; whereas he had boasted to others that Corinth was already "prepared" (:2). He wants them to live up to his exaggerated hopes and expectations of them. And this is exactly what causes so much friction in human relationships, especially in the spiritual sphere.

9:4 *Lest by any means, if there come with me-* This sounds as if Paul was actually going to accompany Titus, but according to how he has earlier written of his travel plans, we can assume that Paul intended himself to come to Corinth after Titus had actually secured the donations from them. Hence in :5 he writes of Titus and his team going on ahead of him to

Corinth. But in 13:2 Paul speaks as if his coming to Corinth was under question, and if he did visit them again, it would be in serious judgment upon them. We can conclude that this letter is a 'flow of consciousness' letter, Paul is writing down his thoughts and feelings as they come to him, in line with his policy of being completely open hearted to the Corinthians (see on 6:11). He writes here as if all is going to work out, Titus will prepare them for the donations and they will make them, and then Paul and some Macedonians will come and be present when the donations are collected and taken on towards Jerusalem. But in 13:2 he concludes the letter by writing that his visit is in question and it will be for judgment of the Corinthians. This kind of flow of consciousness writing is to be found often in the Psalms, Lamentations and at times in prophets like Jeremiah. It is all inspired, but gives us an insight into the internal thought processes of believers, with all their anger and irrationality and the contradictions of thought which we all experience as we cope with situations.

*Some Macedonians and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you) would be embarrassed for my being so confident of your generosity-* These Macedonians were presumably Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus, mentioned in Acts 20:4 as those travelling to Jerusalem with the collection. Paul mentions his own embarrassment first, and theirs only secondarily, in passing. He had too much personally invested in the project. Loss of face was far more significant in the first century world than we can imagine. To reason 'You had better donate or else I shall be embarrassed' is not a particularly strong argument, and reflects the urgent desperation Paul felt to by all means make this project work. But don't be too hard on Paul- he was sincerely motivated, but like many believers of his personality type, his pet project in the Lord's service had become obsessive for him.

9:5- see on 2 Cor. 8:9.

*So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you-* The 'urging' suggests Titus and his team were not altogether confident of the whole plan, and Paul had to urge them. This gives the lie to Paul's rejoicing in chapter 7 that Titus had been welcomed by the Corinthians and was relieved and confident in their giving. That, I suggested, was written on the cusp of the joy which comes from the love which believes all things, on the slenderest and most unrealistic of evidence.

*And arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not, as it were, as an extortion-* Again there appears a tension within Paul's argument. He says that the gift must be "willing" and not extorted or pressured out of them. But he has just asked them to make the gift lest they be ashamed (:4). We are left with the impression of high pressure tactics being palmed off as 'things which don't really need to be said but I'll just mention them' (:1). "Extortion" is the word for coveting. We can give money generously, apparently, but do so from a motive of *covetousness*- the very opposite of true generosity and acceptable sacrifice. We can covet respect, admiration from our brethren... and not give as a pure and private reflection of the endless grace we have received.

9:6 *But this I say: He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully-* Paul now gives a more spiritual reason for their generosity. Our generosity to others now will lead to a reaping at the time of harvest, which is at the Lord's return. And yet from 1 Cor. 15 we know that some of the Corinthians didn't believe in the Lord's resurrection and were sceptical of a claim of future harvest at the resurrection. So the whole appeal was at a level inappropriate to the spiritual level of the Corinthians; and we can learn from that in our dealings with weaker believers. "Bountifully" is the same word used in :5 for "gift"; the AV in :5 brings out the connection by calling their "gift" a "bounty". They would receive again the "bounty" or gift they sowed- but at the

harvest, which 1 Cor. 15 has explained is at the Lord's return and will be in the form of the nature of our resurrection body. Our generosity now has eternal consequence. And as 1 Cor. 15 points out, there is an out of proportion increase between the seed sown and the body that later arises. We don't just get what we sow, but so much more. In the end, this is a question of levels. It's not that the "sparing" shall not be saved; but rather that they shall not eternally reap the blessings of their generosity in this brief mortal life.

*9:7 Let each man do according to what he intends in his heart-* The Greek suggests that they were to do this in the future (AV "so let him give"). Which rather gives the lie to Paul's over enthusiastic claim that they had already started donating in actuality (8:10). He is asking them to now give something, even on a symbolic level. But for all the desperation of his position and pressuring of the Corinthians to donate, Paul does to his credit recognize that all giving must be from the heart. It was there in the heart that the Holy Spirit resided, at least potentially; and Paul is again hinting that their giving would be actualized by allowing the path of the Spirit in their thinking and actions. Giving according to the heart is an allusion to Israel donating towards the work of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:2; 35:21). The new tabernacle is the poorest of the Christian believers.

*Not grudgingly, or of necessity-* Yet some of the reasons Paul urges for their giving were indeed from a motive "of necessity", e.g. to save face (:4). As discussed previously, this is another example of apparent contradiction within Paul's reasoning, so desperate is he to see this project work, at least on some level.

*For God loves a cheerful giver-* The quotation is from Prov. 22:8 LXX "God blesses a cheerful and giving man". The blessing may be alluded to in :8-10 where the idea is that God blesses the generous with even more to give. Paul has written of how the abounding joy of the poor brethren in Macedonia abounded unto a generosity which was actually beyond their means (2 Cor. 8:2). And here when he goes on to speak of how God loves a "*cheerful giver*" (2 Cor. 9:7), he uses a word which James Strong defines as meaning 'hilarious', from the Greek *hilaros*. And yet our giving tends to so often be a matter of phlegmatic planning, to salve an otherwise uneasy conscience. But the picture Paul paints is of a man or woman *hilarious* in their giving to the poor. This isn't the giving which watches for the response, and is offended if it isn't what we expect. This is a picture of giving from the joy of giving, reflecting the Father's generosity to us. And this, Paul says, *God loves*. Quite simply. We touch the heart of Almighty God by such giving. And yet this hilarious giving isn't merely the emotion of a moment, the sort of thing played upon in many a Pentecostal gathering. It is to be a giving as a person 'purposes in their heart' (2 Cor. 9:7); and again, Strong challenges us with his definition of the Greek word translated 'purposes': "to *choose* for oneself *before* another thing (*prefer*), that is, (by implication) to *propose* (*intend*)". But having made this conscious decision, to put, say, Sister Svetlana's need before your preference for a new piece of furniture, we are to perform the actual giving with the hilarity of the cheerful giver. And as we know, Paul makes the point that such acts of generosity are acts of sowing, bringing forth fruits of righteousness; and the Lord will grant us yet more seed to sow in the same way. Forsaking all we have may not mean we are left with nothing.

*9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that you, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound to every good work-* Paul often uses *charis*, "gift" or "grace", in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift, he feels, should elicit giving and grace within us, which is why in this section he puts "grace" for their giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. They had been asked to abound in this grace (see on 8:7), which in practice meant giving to the poor; and God was able in turn to make all grace abound to

them. In this sense we receive grace for grace (Jn. 1:16). The gift of grace is not just a one off gift at baptism; in response to how we use it, so it will be given yet more to us. The simple principle is that God will empower us to do good works; we cannot blame a lack of good works on God not having empowered us.

*9:9 As it is written: He has scattered abroad, He has given to the poor. His righteousness abides for ever-* The generosity of God is to be a direct pattern for our own. And His giving is liberal and abundant, and is part of a righteousness which is eternal. Giving now has eternal consequence.

*9:10 And He that supplies seed to the sower and bread for food shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing-* Seed is multiplied in order to be sowed, and not to be hoarded. Paul is not simply saying that if wealth comes our way, it is in order to give it away. For he was writing (according to 1 Cor. 1) to those who were not "mighty" in this world or secular reckoning. He is writing to low wage earners, and encouraging *them* to be generous with what they had, and to believe that they will be given "seed" in order to sow it by being generous to others. If we want to be sowers, which is part of our Christian calling, then God will give us the seed to sow. God will empower us to meet the needs and fulfil the callings received. 2 Thess. 1:11 is explicit about this too: "To which end we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling and fulfil every desire of goodness and work of faith, with power". The desire to do good shall be fulfilled by God's empowerment. This takes quite some faith to believe, and it seems the Corinthians also stumbled at it. But the principles here stand true as a challenge for all time.

Paul likens generosity to sowing seed. If we do this for our poor brethren, then God will multiply our seed for sowing (RV); He will give us yet more with which to be generous with. We are "enriched unto all liberality" (2 Cor. 9:11 RV)- this is *why* we receive anything, to be liberal with it. And thus he writes in conclusion of "the proving of you by this ministration" (2 Cor. 9:13 RV). This brief but vital teaching of Paul here is a proof of our spirituality. Our response to ministering to others is a proving of us. It's as simple and as clear as that. And remember that Paul was writing these words to a *poor* ecclesia, amongst whom there were not many wealthy folk (1 Cor. 1:26-28). Paul speaks of joy as a motive for generosity.

*And increase the fruits of your righteousness-* The Old Testament allusions are to the LXX of Is. 55:10 and Hos. 10:12. These passages imply an eternal quality to the righteousness, just as God's righteousness abides for ever (:9). The fruit of our generosity in this temporal life is eternal.

9:11- see on 2 Cor. 6:10.

*You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God-* "Enriched... for" could be translated as AV "enriched... to". Either way, the idea is in harmony with the teaching of the preceding verses, that we are enriched so that we may be generous- in whatever terms that enrichment comes. As stated earlier, we are given seed in order to sow it, rather than hoard it. Any enrichment for generosity is not as it were a reward for having been generous, but merely a provision to continue doing it. The fruit which sprung up from the seed sown, or the enrichment caused by generosity, is envisaged as being in spiritual terms. Thanksgiving to God would be produced as a result of their generosity. But again, the argument is true as it stands, but appears somewhat forced- please give your money as I direct you, so that I and my team can then give thanksgiving to God. I have noted through chapters 7-9 that Paul seems to use every argument possible to persuade the Corinthians to part with their cash, and at times his desperation is apparent. The



idea of enrichment however is how Paul opened the Corinthian correspondence, reminding them that they had been "enriched in every way (1 Cor. 1:5) in having been given the Spirit in so many different ways- even though they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) because they had not let the Spirit function. The similarity of wording is significant. The giving or grace of the Corinthians was to be enabled and rooted in the Spirit *charis* or gift / enrichment they had been given. It was in this sense that Paul could say he had "made many rich" by his preaching ministry (2 Cor. 6:10).

9:12 *For the administration of this charity not only provides for the wants of the saints, but abounds also through many thanksgivings to God-* Paul was clearly the administrator of the charity project, although he sees himself as a 'deacon' or servant of it (NEV "administration"). And yet it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the project and its success had become obsessive to him. He sees it is a way in which poverty could be relieved, but much praise and glory elicited for God and His grace, if orthodox Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could fall to their knees in praise and thanks for their Gentile brethren's generosity to them in Corinth. Visions of Christian unity are likewise not unknown today to become obsessive, and those involved in them become too personally caught up in their success or failure. I pointed out on chapters 7 and 8 that there is no evidence that the famine continued in Palestine as severely nor as long as Paul's passion for the Poor Fund required; to the point that he had to ask others to pray that when he finally arrived in Jerusalem with the food and cash, it would be accepted by the brethren (Rom. 15:31).

Thanksgiving to God and His glorification can be elicited in multiple ways, and even if the Poor Fund project failed, glory to God could surely be achieved another way. But it seems too much had been personally invested in it. The fascinating story is recorded for our learning, and the lessons are powerful. The truth is that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem with the Poor Fund, the Jerusalem Jewish Christians provoked a riot, were certainly not happy to see him, forced him to demonstrate loyalty to the Jewish law, and I have argued in commentary on Acts- got him arrested and imprisoned. It is fantasy to imagine Paul arriving with those carrying the money and goods, and the saints in Jerusalem falling to their knees in praise to God for Paul's initiative and administration of the Corinthian's generosity. That's just not what happened. Paul's project was intended indeed to elicit many thanksgivings to God, but that was not the outcome. He writes here of what he hoped and dearly wanted to happen as if it had happened. There is in Hebrew [and he clearly thought in Hebrew whilst writing in Greek] a prophetic perfect tense, whereby God often expresses His hopes for the future in the past tense, as if they have happened. And Paul does the same here, writing of how his project has resulted [i.e. surely *will* result] in thanksgiving as a result of Corinthian generosity. The idea that this refers to some previous support of the Poor Fund doesn't really fit with the flow of the argument in this chapter. Paul had been asked by the Jerusalem elders to "remember the [Jewish Christian, perhaps specifically Jerusalem] poor" in return for not demanding the circumcision of Gentile converts (Gal. 2:10). Paul dearly wished to be acceptable to the Jerusalem elders; for him culturally, Jerusalem was still the centre of the world. Perhaps his obsession with the Poor Fund arose partly from his desperation to be acceptable and pleasing to the Jerusalem elders. It would have been so very hard for Paul to experience a hostile reception by his Jerusalem brethren and perhaps a refusal of what support he had managed to gather for them. He was then forced by them to prove his orthodoxy, and it seems the Jerusalem Jewish Christians were the ones who orchestrated his arrest and imprisonment. The Lord surely worked to correct Paul's desire to please men.

9:13 *By their approval of this service-* "Their approval" is an attempt to grapple with what seems an awkward phrase, rendered correctly by AV "By the experiment of this" service. Paul rather likes the idea of things being an experiment; for he has written earlier using the same

word about his command for them to separate from the immoral brother (2:9). This was a test or experiment of their loyalty, rather than being necessary for the sake of that brother or those whom he had wronged (7:12). There must be divisions within the church so that the tested / experimented with / approved might be made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19). In these kinds of issues- division in the church, a case of an immoral brother or a project to support poor believers of a different ethnicity- the crucial issue is how we respond to the test or "experiment" which the situations provide. The apparently central issues (e.g. the poor at Jerusalem or the immoral brother) are in this sense the furniture of the scene. It is how we respond to the tests or experiments which is so critical.

*They glorify God for your loyalty which you confess to the gospel of Christ, and for the generosity of your contribution to them and to all-* As noted above, Paul is speaking of his hopes as if they had actually happened. The Jerusalem Christians were not glorifying God for Corinthian generosity at that time; and there is no evidence they ever did, or that Corinth gave anything. The use of the word "loyalty" is unfortunate because the careful reader is already suspicious that Paul is too concerned with Corinthian loyalty to him and his pet project. It is also simply not the case that by not supporting a particular welfare initiative, we are being disloyal to the Gospel. Again the argument is high pressure and not completely sound. Here at the very end of the section about the Poor Fund, Paul perhaps betrays the way that what he hopes for in the Corinthians is what he wishes to see and states as having happened. He says that the Jerusalem poor are praising God for the way the Corinthians are generous to them "and to all". But this was surely the fantasy of love. There was no evidence the Corinthians were donating "to all", and all the other evidence in the letters reveals their serious immorality and spiritual weakness.

Initially, the Corinthians agreed to take up a collection for their poor Jewish brethren. Paul later encouraged them in this when their will to carry it out flagged, but the initial inspiration was from "the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 9:13 NIV). That Gospel doesn't state that to obey it, one must give money to the poor believers in Jerusalem. But Paul perceived that *effectively* it did; this was, in their context, part and parcel of confessing the Gospel. We learn from this that the Gospel has abiding power to transform lives after conversion as well as before.

9:14 *While they also, with prayers on your behalf, long after you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you-* I noted earlier that Paul had exaggerated about the Corinthians supposedly longing for Titus and himself. And he makes a similar exaggeration here. The Jerusalem Christians likely had little knowledge of the Corinthians, and so the language of longing and praying is exaggeration. It was Paul who uses the word "long after you" several times about his longing after his brethren; and he imagines that the Corinthians have the same attitude to their brethren as he does. The grace (gift) "in you" is a reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the Corinthians, within them, which Paul has so often alluded to in his Corinthian correspondence. He urges the Corinthians to make use of that gift, to allow the path of the Spirit, which would elicit in them a giving of grace to others. But it is questionable whether in reality the Jerusalem Jewish Christians longed for the Corinthians upon that basis. But in theory, yes- the "fellowship of the Spirit" was and is a fellowship experienced on the basis of each believer having the Spirit at work in their hearts, and responding to it. This creates a fellowship with others who are allowing the same process.

9:15 *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift-* As noted on :14, the gift in view is that of the Spirit, within the hearts of the believers. Paul thanks God for it, with the implication that the Corinthians should be more appreciative of and responsive to it.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now I Paul*- The appeal to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund in chapters 7-9 is now finished, and Paul now returns to tackle the Corinthians over their serious spiritual inadequacies. For all the love, enthusiasm, imputation of righteousness, the loving them with a love which imagines good and exaggerated their spirituality- Paul was also realistically aware that they were heading the wrong way in their spiritual lives. "Now I..." suggests that the argument flows straight on from the preceding chapters. Chapters 7-9 appear to present the Corinthians in an unrealistically positive light, but now Paul turns to realities. The break in style is such that some have suggested that chapters 7-9 form a separate piece of correspondence. But "Now I..." indicates that Paul is fully aware of what he has just written, and is now returning to dealing with their suspicions of him and need for exhortation.

*I myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*- "I myself" emphasizes his personal approach to them. And he himself was acting as Christ to them, with His gentleness. His sarcasm and anger later in this letter must be read therefore either as a departure from his aim as here stated, or we are to read it as all the same expressing the Lord's meekness and gentleness. "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" is surely a reference to the Lord's description of Himself as being, there and then, "meek and lowly of heart" (Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Paul's point is that as the Lord was in His life, so He is now, in His heavenly glory.

*I who in your presence am lowly among you*- "Lowly" was likely a reference to how his critics described his literal presence, perhaps hinting at some physical deformity. But the ultimate "lowly" one was of course the Lord Jesus, and Paul has just stated that he seeks to relate to them as Him, with His meekness. For the same word is used by the Lord in saying that He was "lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29). And he has earlier stated that he feels "lowly" because of the bad state of affairs in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6 s.w.). The Lord's lowliness of mind (s.w.) was at its zenith during His time of dying (Phil. 2:3), and Paul sets that humbling of mind as the pattern for every Christian.

*But being absent am bold toward you*- The contrast is between being present and yet being now absent from them. He is keenly aware of his absence from them (10:11; 13:2,10). But he warns them that he will visit them and be in presence as he is when absent in his letters (:11). He earlier warned them that although he was absent yet through the Spirit he was present with them (1 Cor. 5:3; also Col. 2:5 "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit"). Therefore his presence or absence was not to be understood by them as significant. Any attempt to criticize the difference between his written style when absent and personal style when present was ill founded- because through the Spirit, he was present with them although absent. So they were not to think that what he was now going to write was just mere words, and his personal presence would be far less demanding.

10:2 *I beg you now, so that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh*- Paul has earlier expressed his fear that if he visits them, then he will boldly judge them. Indeed, he has given this as the reason why he delayed his planned visit to them. This attitude to his next visit stands in contrast to the claims in chapters 7-9 that they love him and he can't wait to see them and oversee the collection of their donations for the Jerusalem Poor Fund. He intended to boldly judge those who consider him as an unspiritual person, walking according to the flesh. The Spirit through Paul would judge them- and they would realize that he walked according to the Spirit and not the flesh. Paul was "confident" that he would judge

some of them severely, and yet in 8:22 he has written of the confidence he has that they will respond to his appeals, and his "confidence in you in all things" (7:16). These were statements written on the cusp of loving enthusiasm for them, thinking the best of them. But he is also confident that not all is well with them, and that he shall have to judge some of them severely.

10:3 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not fight in a fleshly way*- This is likely a quotation from the Corinthian detractors, who claimed that Paul conducted himself "in a fleshly way". Walking after the flesh rather than the Spirit is the way of condemnation (Rom. 8:1,4; Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 2:10). Paul is having to defend himself against those who consider that he is not at all Spiritual. Paul has used the same word for "fight" with reference to his ministry generally in 1 Cor. 9:7, and uses the same metaphor to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4). 2 Cor. 10:3,4 is perhaps an allusion to the way that Jericho was taken with such a humanly weak battle plan. The point of the allusion is for us to see ourselves as those nervous Israelites desperately clinging on to their faith in God's victory rather than human strength. And we each have our Jerichos- habits, life-dominating patterns of thinking, that seem so impossible to shift.

10:4 *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds*- The allusion is to the LXX of Prov. 21:22: "A wise man attacks fortified cities and demolishes the fortress in which the ungodly trusted". Note that in 9:6 Paul has quoted from Prov. 22:8, so this part of Proverbs was in his mind in formulating his argument in this part of the letter. We see here how the inspiration process worked- the ideas of the Spirit are reworked by the Spirit within the mind or spirit of the inspired writer. Paul sees himself really at war, using wisdom (according to the Proverbs allusion) to bring down all kinds of apparently solid and impregnable structures. His sense here is exactly that of 1 Cor. 1, where he says that the Spirit overthrows the unspiritual wisdom of men which seems so strong. He perceives those strongholds as being in the minds of the Corinthians and the false teaching received.

10:5 *Casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*- The "imaginations" are the "strongholds" of :4. The "high thing" continues the metaphor of bringing down fortifications, the reference being to high towers of defence. The picture is of the strongholds being stormed, and the captives taken into another citadel- where they are obedient to Christ. The whole metaphor is descriptive of internal thought processes and reflects how Paul realized that the state of mind is what Christianity is all about. It is thoughts and prideful attitudes which have to be overcome before obedience to Christ can be achieved in the mind. Paul has just written of being obedient to the Gospel in obeying its implications- in giving to the poor (2 Cor. 9:13). It is pride and the strongholds of human strength which hinder that obedience. Paul parallels "the knowledge of God" and having our thoughts in "captivity to the obedience of Christ". This is what it means to know God; the correct theological conclusions about God are not therefore in view when Paul writes of "the knowledge of God"; he uses 'knowledge' in the sense of relationship. He has earlier lamented that some in Corinth "have not the knowledge of God". To know God is to live in mental obedience to His Son. It is a matter of the Spirit in the mind, of having the spirit or mind of Christ within us.

Isaiah is full of references to the proud being 'made low' by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at

the day of judgment. We're calling people to humility. And we must ask whether the content and style of our preaching really does that.

Like John, Paul makes a seamless connection between defending true doctrine, and spiritually minded living in practice. Through destroying arguments and "every pretension that exalts itself against the knowledge of God", we can "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5 RV). This is because, as Neville Smart put it, "of the radical part played in the salvation of the individual by the ideas and beliefs he holds in his mind. They are in fact the roots from which his fixed attitudes and his daily actions spring, and from which they take their particular tone and colouring".

"Though we walk in the flesh (cp. Paul's recognition of his fleshly side in Rom. 7)... the weapons of our (mental) warfare are not carnal (of our fleshly man), but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds". These strong holds which are pulled down are defined in v.5 as "imagination... every thought" which have to be 'cast (cp. 'pulled') down'. Those strong holds exist in the recesses of our natural minds. Rom. 6:13 encourages us not to yield our minds as weapons of sin, but as weapons of God (Rom. 6:13 AVmg.). Our thinking is a weapon, which both sides in this conflict can use. The sinful man within us is "warring against the law of my (spiritual) mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23). Yet 2 Cor. 10:5 describes our spiritual man as overthrowing our carnal man, and bringing those thoughts into captivity to the Christ man. The impression is created of constant attrition, with victories for both sides. In Rom. 7 the impression is given that the carnal man is winning; whilst 2 Cor. 10:2-5 paints the picture of the Christ man triumphant. To get this picture over, perhaps the Spirit used a spiritually depressed Paul in Rom. 7, and a triumphant Paul at the time of writing 2 Cor. 10?

10:6 *And being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full-* This could mean that when they were fully obedient to Christ (:5), and had shown this in practice by obeying his command they donate to the Jerusalem Poor Fund, then he would punish the disobedience of others within the Corinthian church. On this basis we would have to assume that when Paul writes to 'you' here, he is writing to a subgroup within the church who will be obedient to him. But he seems to use "you" in a more general and natural sense throughout the letter. We get no impression elsewhere that he is writing to an obedient subgroup within the church. So we must consider other possibilities for interpretation. One possibility is that the more God's word abides in us, the more we will know our sinfulness (1 Jn. 1:10). Thus Paul would be speaking here as if when Corinth are more obedient, he will reveal further to them the extent of their weakness (2 Cor. 10:6).

Or it could be that the obedience of Corinth to Christ refers to their general spiritual maturity; once that was complete, then Paul could go further and move on to judge the disobedience of others apart from Corinth. This would connect with how Paul goes straight on to speak of how he had received, as it were, a measuring line which enabled him to preach in certain areas, including Corinth. When the spiritual growth of the Corinthian converts was complete, then his measuring line would be extended, and the Lord would allow him "to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" (this is how I would interpret 2 Cor. 10:6,13-16 RV). But a measuring line is Ezekiel's figure of Divine judgment; as if to say that once Corinth are obedient, then Paul can move on to other areas to revenge all disobedience / judge / measure them out.

10:7 *Look at the things that are before your face, staring at you. If anyone trusts in himself that he is Christ's-* Any serious study of a Bible passage requires us to look at it in different

translations and make some effort to understand the real meaning of the original- for sometimes the sense of a passage can completely change, depending on translation (especially in Job). Thus in the AV of 2 Cor. 10:7, Paul is made to ask a question: "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?". In the RV, this becomes an affirmation: "Ye look at the things that are before your face". But in other versions, it becomes a blunt demand from Paul that the Corinthians should open their eyes to the true facts: "Look at things which stare you in the face!" (J.B. Phillips).

On balance, on the strength of the context, I would go for a translation to the effect that Paul is rebuking them for looking at things from the outward appearance. For the same word translated "before your face" has been used by him in exactly this sense when he rebukes them for following those who look at life after the outward appearance (5:12). Paul's presence or face / outward appearance has just been described as unattractive and lowly (10:1). Paul is now rebuking them for looking at things externally, whereas he has just explained in :4,5 that the essence of the Gospel is about internal transformation and spiritual things. By judging according to external appearances, they were concluding that Paul was not even "Christ's".

*Let him remind himself that, even as he is Christ's, so also are we!*- There's definitely a tendency to think that we can have a relationship with the Father and Son, and this is all that matters. John countered this tendency, by arguing that "If a man say [and apparently this *was* being said by some brethren], "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20). Paul foresaw this same tendency here in 2 Cor. 10:7: "If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him *of himself* think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's". "Of himself" suggests that our internal thinking, our self-perception, of ourselves as "in Christ" cannot be valid unless we perceive "Christ" as having our brethren "in Him" also. And Paul's own example showed what he meant; for in all his hardships he was comforted not just by the Father and Son directly, but by the faith of his brethren- even if that faith was weak (e.g. 1 Thess. 3:7). If we are sure we are the Lord's, let's remember that we aren't the *only* person He died for. Therefore we *must* receive one another, as Christ received us, with all our inadequacies of understanding and behaviour (Rom. 15:7). We are thereby taught of God to love one another; we must forgive and forbear each other, as the Lord did and does with us (1 Thess. 4:9; Eph. 4:32).

10:8 *I could boast, unashamedly and somewhat abundantly, concerning our authority- authority which the Lord gave for building you up and not for casting you down*- This doesn't mean that the authority given could not be used for 'casting down'. For the same word is used about how Paul could do just that (:4; 13:10). The idea is that the power had been given Paul not so much for casting down, but for building up [edifying]. Paul had the power / authority to judge them, and he purposefully delayed visiting them lest the Spirit lead him to punish them, perhaps in a literal sense. His attitude reflects that of the Lord- who came more to save than to judge / condemn, although that doesn't mean that He will not judge / condemn some.

10:9 *But I will not, lest I appear to terrify you by my letters*- We see here how Corinthians is very much a flow of consciousness letter. He says he will not boast of his authority- but later he does, at great length (11:1,16). Likewise in chapter 7 he writes down his passionate feelings of love and confidence in the Corinthians- and then comes down to a more realistic view of them. And he begins this current section by saying he will have the meekness and gentleness of Christ (:1) when in fact chapters 10-13 are Paul at his most bitter, sarcastic and angry.

10:10 *For they say: His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account*- But was his physical presence indeed "of no account"? The Roman Governor Felix *trembled* at Paul's incisive logic- even in his prison uniform (Acts 24:25). Hardened Agrippa was almost persuaded by Paul, on his own public admission, to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). The Galatian converts would have pulled out their eyes from their sockets and given them to partially sighted Paul (Gal. 4:15). The aggressive crowd, baying for Paul's blood, were held in one of history's most uncanny silences by the sheer personality of that preacher. He beckoned with his hand, and "there was made a great silence...and when they heard how (Gk.) he spake... they kept the more silence" (Acts 21:39-22:2). Pagans at Lystra were so overcome by his oratory that they were convinced he was the god Mercury come down to earth; it took Paul quite some effort to persuade them that he was an ordinary man (Acts 14:12). This was the man Paul. He had undoubted ability as a preacher. Yet apparently the Corinthians mocked his weak physical presence; although Paul had undoubted charisma and power of personality, right up to the end. Was it not that he consciously suppressed the power of his personality when he visited Corinth? This was humility and self-knowledge indeed. Indeed, his reasoning in 2 Cor. 10,11 is that he could present himself to Corinth as quite a different brother Paul than what he did. Although Paul did have a significant physical presence, he doesn't dispute with the Corinthians about it. Instead he more humbly makes the point that presence or absence is insignificant in spiritual terms.

So I suggest that Paul made himself a weak person in his dealings with Corinth, just as the Lord also humbled himself, made Himself lowly as an act of the will. He could truly be all things to all people, he wasn't constrained by his natural personality type as so many of us allow ourselves to be. This is why Paul could go on in :11 to warn Corinth that the next time he visits them, he won't be weak. He will 'be' as he is in his letters. In all this we see the full import of the sacrifice and crucifixion of self of which the Lord repeatedly speaks. Putting meaning into words, this means that we will genuinely 'be' the person we need to be in order to help others.

"His letters, say they (Paul's detractors in the new Israel) are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible... though I be rude in speech... Christ sent me... to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words (mg. speech)" (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17). This is all the language of Moses, Paul's hero. Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words" (Acts 7:22), even though Moses felt "I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words)... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10). Maybe Paul likewise was mighty in words and wisdom, but felt like Moses that he wasn't. He allowed Moses' legendary humility to personally inspire him, rather than just admire it from afar, ticking the box, saying yes, Moses was humble...

It was believed that nature and destiny had decreed your place, and there was to be no questioning of it. Thus according to the first century principle of 'physiognomics', a slave was born with a muscular, servile body, an upper class female Roman was born beautiful, etc. The idea of education was to train them up to be as they were intended to be by nature. The ancient world believed that all that was decreed and predestined by nature would have some sort of physical reality in the appearance of a person. Hence the challenging nature of Paul's command not to judge by the outward appearance; and again, Divine providence overturned all this by choosing Paul as such a "chosen vessel", when his outward appearance and manner of speaking were so weak and unimpressive, literally 'lacking strength' (2 Cor. 10:10).

10:11 *Well, let such a person reckon this, that what we are in word by letters, when we are absent, such will we be also in deed, when we are present-* As noted on :1 *But being absent am bold toward you*, there is effectively no difference between Paul's presence and his absence, for in his physical absence he is still spiritually present with them, just as the Lord Jesus is. Paul is moving towards the position that when he does come and visit Corinth in the flesh, he is likely to be led by the Spirit to be seriously judgmental towards them. This is a far cry from his earlier positive comments in this letter that he is delaying coming to them so that when he does come, they will have fixed things up and made donation to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. These apparent contradictions within the letter have been explained by some on the basis that we have here various letters stitched together. But why do that? And the various proposed sections all join to each other seamlessly. I therefore have adopted the view that the letter was written under inspiration as a flow of consciousness, just as the inspired Psalmists both curse and bless their enemies within the same Psalm.

10:12 *For we are not bold enough to class or compare ourselves with those that commend themselves-* The sarcasm here seems at variance with Paul's opening statement in :1 that he is going to appeal to them with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Again, as noted on :11, this is a flow of consciousness letter, with Paul writing how he felt at the moment. The AV offers: "We dare not make ourselves of the number", and "the number" may be a technical term referring to a group of self-declared apostles who claimed that they were "the number", perhaps referring to how the initial apostles are described with the term "the number of the names" (Acts 1:15). Although Paul says he will not compare himself with those who commend themselves, he goes on at length to do just that in chapters 11 and 12. Rather like he begins this section by saying he will appeal by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (:1) and proceeds to write in anything but that tone. Once again- this is a flow of consciousness letter, with Paul expressing one feeling and then going on to write in a different way. The only other time the Greek word for "compare" occurs is again to the Corinthians, where Paul insists we must compare spiritual things with spiritual things and not confuse the categories by comparing fleshly things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13). But here Paul will go on to do just that, justifying himself in fleshly terms in order to confirm his spiritual authority. Paul has said that he needs no commendation of himself, because that commendation is known in their consciences, if they have the Spirit within and are in touch with it (2 Cor. 4:2). But then he says that in order for them to answer those who glory in outward appearance, he will give them some good ammunition to use by boasting of his qualifications (2 Cor. 5:12; 6:4). He will now go on again to commend himself, claiming that it is their fault, and their refusal to commend him according to their own consciences, the Spirit within them, has compelled him to boast (2 Cor. 12:11). In all this we see the rather jumbled logic which accompanies a desperate desire to persuade by all means, and even under Divine inspiration of the record, the jumbled logic reflects this desire of Paul to by all means get them onside.

*These are without understanding, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, which is unwise-* Paul points out the weakness of all peer-reviewed criticism. They measured themselves by their own standards and benchmarks which they themselves had chosen, rather than by God's standards. And Paul will now use the same word for 'measuring' to describe how he has been given a measure by God to teach and pastor them (:13).

10:13 *But we will not boast beyond our measure but rather according to the measure of the province which God apportioned to us- a measure to reach even to you-* The image of 'measuring' according to the measure God had given Paul connects with how the false teachers measured themselves according to measures and benchmarks of their own creation



(see on :12 *Measuring themselves*). Paul considered they were geographically and spiritually within a measure or allotted territory given to him and therefore they should respect him and not follow the false teachers. Whether he was specifically given such an allotment of authority is not recorded. We wonder whether Paul is now using every possible argument he can to get the Corinthians onside with him, rather as we saw him doing in appealing for them to donate to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. We recall from 1 Cor. 1 that Paul initially claimed to be approaching the Corinthians with only a Christ-centered attitude, stating he had baptized few of them, and all following of personal preachers was wrong. But his desperate appeal for authority at this final stage of the correspondence seems rather more human than that initial approach. Christ is not "divided", Paul had originally argued (1 Cor. 1:13), but now he uses the same word to say that God had apportioned (s.w. "divided") to him and his team the authority and responsibility for Corinth.

10:14 *For we are not overextending ourselves in our boasting, as though we did not reach unto you-* "Overextending" may be a quote from what the critics were saying about Paul. Perhaps the argument from the false teachers was that they were the local pastors, and for Paul to claim any authority in Corinth was an overextension of his authority.

*For we were the first to come as far as you in preaching the gospel of Christ-* As noted on :13, Paul's claim to have authority over the Corinthians because he first preached to them is at variance with his attitude in 1 Cor. 1, where he rightly claims that Christ is paramount, and who preached or baptized them is irrelevant. And he repeated that in 1 Cor. 15:11, where he argues that God's grace working through the preachers is all important, and who preached the Gospel to the Corinthians is irrelevant because whoever it was ("I or they"), they were just vehicles for God's saving grace.

10:15 *So we are not boasting beyond our measure in other men's labours; but rather we hope that as your faith grows, our influence among you may be greatly increased-* The critics may have claimed that it was their labours which were responsible for the church at Corinth. Paul is paving the way to boast of all his labours for the Corinthians which we will read in chapters 11 and 12. Paul's hope was that his influence amongst the Corinthians would increase as they matured spiritually. But this desire for personal influence and loyalty (a card he played in his appeal for their donations to his Poor Fund in chapters 7-9) is a far cry from his earlier claim to not want any personal influence but just to see the influence of the Lord Jesus growing in his converts. See on :14. But the AV is again more literally faithful to the difficult Greek here: "Having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly". This could mean that their spiritual maturity would enable his line or territory of work to be expanded. For Paul felt he would not be given new areas to preach in if the Corinthians had not matured in the faith. He in this case would be arguing that their immaturity and revolt against him was holding up his spreading of the Gospel further, as if God would "increase" his sphere of work if the Corinthians matured; and:16 seems to confirm this. Again, whether or not God had specifically stated that is unrecorded, and we could read this as another desperate argument to by all means keep the Corinthians loyal to him.

10:16 *So that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence-* See on :15. This can be read as a desperate appeal for Corinthian loyalty to him, lest other areas be as it were deprived of the Gospel. We are left to decide whether this was really the case or if it is just part of an increasingly desperate appeal for their personal loyalty. For Paul had earlier turned away from unresponsive Jewish audiences in order to go preach further to the Gentiles, rather than remaining with those Jews until they accepted his message. And in Romans 15 he openly

speaks of his ambition to preach in Rome and Spain, the "lands beyond" Corinth. He gives no condition to be fulfilled for that, but rather perceives it all as part of his calling.

Paul spoke of how both he and other brethren had their specific "line" or sphere in which they were intended to witness (2 Cor. 10:16 cp. Ps. 19:4 AVmg.; Am. 7:17). We each have ours, whether it be the people who live in our block of flats, an area of our own country or city; or another part of the world. Paul clearly had a purpose- to spread the Gospel in a semi-circle around the Roman empire (2 Cor. 10:15), beginning from Jerusalem, through Asia and Italy, then Spain (Rom. 15:19), North Africa and back to Jerusalem. Speaking of how he planned his journeys, he comments in 2 Cor. 1:17: "When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes yes, and no no?". Again we see a definite purpose, not the kind of human intention which vacillates between yes and no; for this is inimical to the person who has true purpose. The mission in our minds, the path ever before us, makes our decision making so much clearer than it is for those who dither over which flavour coffee to have tonight... Truly could Paul say at the end: "But you have followed my teaching, my conduct, and my purpose in life; you have observed my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, and my sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:10,11). And he is set up as a model for each of us (1 Tim. 1:16).

10:17 *But he that boasts, let him boast in the Lord*- This is the quotation from Jer. 9:24 with which Paul began his recorded letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:31). But I have shown in earlier commentary on this chapter that Paul's attitude is at variance with the non-partisan spirit which he had shown there. Despite knowing this principle, Paul is now as it were carried away to boast in the flesh. Again he states a principle and then appears to break it, as witnessed in his promise to entreat them by the gentleness of Christ (10:1) and going on to use bitter sarcasm and angry manipulation against them. This confirms my conclusion that this letter is an inspired 'flow of consciousness' recording of Paul's feelings. The context of Jer. 9:24 urges glorying in the Lord because judgment is coming- and that rather fits what Paul is going on to threaten.

10:18 *For it is not he that commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends*- For "commends", see on Lk. 12:8; 1 Cor. 4:5. And yet Paul goes on to commend himself in the next two chapters. Just as he says he will approach them in the gentle spirit of Christ (:1) and goes on to write to them otherwise. His immediate reference is to the false teachers who commended themselves (:12). Only the Lord's commendation is worth anything, and not the commendation of men. But in his desperate love for Corinth and desire to persuade them, he now embarks upon self-commendation, breaking his own principles and then blaming it on them for compelling him to do so (12:11).

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me-* Paul is asking them to bear with, or stick with, his reasoning as an unwise fool. He laments that they 'bear with' the false teachers, who demanded their loyalty and rejection of Paul; three times he uses the same word of how they 'bear with' these men who abuse them (:4,19,20). So the emphasis should be on the *me* in "[Please] bear with *me*", and not with these pretenders. This reading is confirmed by the way that :2 goes on to say that this is because Paul is as their father, who has betrothed them to Christ.

11:2- see on Mt. 3:7; Acts 13:9; 1 Cor. 15:10.

*For I am jealous over you with a Godly jealousy. For I betrothed you to one husband, that is, that I might present you a pure virgin to Christ-* The betrothal period lasted a year; the father of the bride was expected to keep her sexually pure. This period of a year may refer to the year he has already waited for them to produce the collection money (9:2). But during that betrothal period, he feared they had not been faithful to Christ because of their alliances with the false teachers. Paul considered himself their father and them to be his children (1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 6:13; 12:13-15). This analogy demonstrates that preaching is not all about getting a response which leads to conversion; the end point in view is not baptism, but a person remaining faithful for Christ until the end. The image of betrothal suggests that some guarantee had been given, and the guarantee in our relationship with the Lord Jesus is the Spirit given as the guarantee in our hearts; only here in 2 Corinthians is it spoken of in precisely that way (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 11:2 of 'presenting you' at the last day- he uses the same Greek work in a context of 'standing before' the judgment seat (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 4:14). Christ will present us to Himself at judgment day, as an unspotted bride / church (Eph. 5:27)- but Paul perceived that Christ will achieve this by working through people and pastors like himself. Paul aimed to "present" [s.w.] every man perfect in Christ by warning and exhorting them (Col. 1:28). We will present ourselves (2 Tim. 2:15 s.w.) to Him at the judgment; but He presents us, and others who have laboured for us will present us, because Christ will have worked through them to present us to Himself unspotted. The cross results in the suffering Lord being able to "*present* us holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" at the day of judgment (Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:27). Having said that, Paul goes right on to say that his goal is to "*present* every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:22,28; 2 Cor. 11:2). The sufferings of Jesus were not lost on Paul. He understood that he likewise must share in them, in order to "present" his brethren acceptable at the last day. For Paul, the events of Calvary were not far away in time and place, a necessary piece of theology... They compelled him to act, to stay up late at night preparing something, to pray, to live the life of true concern for others, to warn, encourage, write, endlessly review his draft letters to get them right, search through Scripture for relevant guidance for his friends... this was the life begotten in him by the cross. As the Lord died to present us "perfect", so Paul laboured to present us perfect. And neither the Lord Jesus nor Paul are mere history for us. This is all our pattern... In one sense, we present ourselves before the judgment seat (Rom. 14:10 s.w.; AV "stand before"). In other ways, we are presented there by our elders, e.g. Paul; and yet above all, we are presented there spotless by the Lord's matchless advocacy for us. And of course the essence of judgment is being worked out right now, as we daily present ourselves to the Lord, as the bodies of the animals were presented to the priest for inspection before being offered (Rom. 12:1). We are presenting ourselves to the judge right now.

11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve with his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ-* Note the focus upon their minds. Throughout Corinthians, Paul has taught that the role of the Spirit in the heart / mind is crucial to spirituality. The mind was and is the battleground for temptation, and the arena in which we develop spirituality. Paul did not want their minds to be led astray [NEV "corrupted"] from Christ. NEV "the simplicity that is in Christ" could as well be rendered as NIV "to Christ". The idea is that the Christian is mentally focused upon a man, the Lord Jesus. The problem with false theologies and other gospels is that they remove that focus, they are a corruption of the mind, and hence a different spirit (:4) from that which is to be Christ's. The corruption of the mind from this focus is described in :4 as receiving "a different spirit". The focus is intensely upon the human mind or heart, and whether or not the spirit of Jesus is there. This, in summary, is what Christianity is all about and how a Christian is defined- whether the spirit of Christ is in the heart or not. All the *angst* about doctrinal correctness and the struggle for correct interpretation must be seen in that light. If we have not the spirit of Christ, we are none of His; and if we do, then we are His.

Paul's imputation of righteousness to the Corinthians is reflected in the way he likens them here to the innocent Eve in Eden, when previous correspondence has revealed the depth of their moral (especially sexual) depravity. Clearly Paul read the Genesis account of the serpent as literal, seeing the literal serpent as now representative of the Judaizers who were preying upon the minds of the believers.

11:4 *For if he that comes-* "He that comes" could be a generic reference to the false teachers who came to them, presumably sent from Jerusalem to destabilize Paul's work; their 'coming' suggests they were not local Corinthians. There could however be a specific individual in view, whom Paul is careful not to name because he was well known and perhaps for fear of difficulties which would be created by specifically naming him. This may be the reference of 12:7, which speaks of a particular messenger or envoy of 'Satan', the Jewish opposition, sent to be a pain in the side for his ministry. The coming one, "he that comes", was understood in Judaism as the Messiah, "he that comes in the name of the Lord". The false teachers in view are therefore presented as anti-Christ, fake Messiahs, teaching and embodying "another Jesus".

*Preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept-* Receiving the spirit and accepting the Gospel of Jesus are paralleled. The situation in 1 Cor. 14 [see notes there] was that the Corinthians claimed to have Holy Spirit gifts, but actually the manifestations of ecstatic utterances they were claiming to experience were not at all Holy Spirit gifts, but rather an imitation of the idol cults. The aorists here would seem to imply that they accepted a gospel, another Jesus and another spirit at one specific moment. As if an individual had come and preached a fake imitation of Christianity- replete with a Jesus, a gospel and a spirit to be received. We note that the true Gospel features a receipt of the Spirit when the real Christ is accepted. This is not a reference to the miraculous gifts, but to the guarantee of salvation received in the heart, which must be responded to (1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). Perhaps the 'other Jesus' being taught was a Jesus who did not rise from the dead and was therefore currently inactive (recall the arguments of 1 Cor. 15) and who ministers no Spirit, therefore, to believers. This is worryingly similar, in practice, to the approach to Jesus taken by some conservative forms of Christianity today.

*It seems you think you do well to go along with him-* See on :3. They 'bore with' ["go along with"] these false teachers instead of bearing with Paul (:1).

11:5- see on 1 Tim. 1:16; Acts 23:6.

*But I reckon that I am not in the least inferior to these so called super apostles-* This group declared themselves to be "the number" (see on 10:12), the true apostles. But they had declared themselves as this, without any signs from the Lord affirming them as such. Paul "supposed", the same word translated "impute" as in 'imputed righteousness', that he was not inferior to these apostles, because he was a true apostle. He knew this was how his Lord counted him. But he felt himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8) and quite unworthy of the title apostle: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:9-10). He felt the status and acceptance imputed to him, as we should.

11:6 *Although rude in speech, I am not in knowledge. No, in every way have we made this manifest to you in all things-* Paul was falsely accused of being an *idiotes* ["rude"], an uneducated and simple person who pretended to the intelligentsia. This was patently untrue. But Paul doesn't attack the lies, he argues that even if that is true, and he doesn't bother justifying himself, then it could not be said that he was lacking in true knowledge. Again he is appealing to them to stop judging after the outward appearance (see on 10:7), but to look to the essence, the Spirit within. Paul can say that they surely know what "knowledge" he has, because he has been thoroughly manifested [Gk. *phaneroo*] to them in absolutely every way; there was nothing he knew which he hadn't shared with them. He is so open with them that he doesn't just write in a political, guarded way to them, watching every word.

11:7- see on Phil. 4:16; Lk. 3:5.

*Or did I commit a sin-* This kind of sarcasm is hardly in line with Paul's claim to now be appealing to them in the spirit of the Lord's gentleness and meekness (10:1). His bitterness reveals that his previous positivity about them in chapter 7 was uttered on the cusp of emotion, hoping against hope because of the love he had for them.

*In abasing myself so you might be exalted, because I preached to you the gospel of God for nothing?-* Paul told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted. This is one of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels; this time to Lk. 14:11; 18:14, which teach that he who abases himself will *himself* be exalted. But Paul was abasing himself so that Corinth could be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us. It was through refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians that he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted*- all language of the crucifixion (cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. We live in a world which has made the fulfilment of personal aims of paramount importance. It has affected the fabric of every society, and become embedded in every mind. To *live to serve*, to put oneself down that others may rise... this is strange indeed. John the Baptist had this spirit, for he rejoiced that he decreased whilst the Lord's cause increased. Paul likewise abased himself that others might be exalted, after

the pattern of the cross. God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *ourselves*.

11:8 *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you-* Accepting support from other churches was hardly robbing them, and the idea of robbing holy places / churches was particularly viewed as the language of sacrilege (Rom. 2:22). Paul uses this particularly arresting term to grab attention, but it is also true to say that he was exaggerating his case, as so often in his very emotionally charged relationship with the Corinthians. His refusal to take money from the Corinthians is presented as a self-abasement; but his decision must be tempered against the fact that he did in fact take support from others, just not Corinth.

*Took wages-* See on Acts 20:24 *The ministry that I received.*

2 Cor. 11:8-15, when properly translated, perhaps reflects Paul at his angriest and most abrasive: "I robbed other churches [an exaggeration!], getting money from them to be a minister to you!...as the truth of Christ is in me- I swear that this reason to be proud will not be stopped as long as I work in the area of Achaia! You ask me why do I do this? Do you think it's because I don't love you? God knows I do! It's because what I do- and I am going to go on doing it- shuts up some people who are trying to pretend they are as good as we are, those fakes! Such apostles are treacherous workmen. They deck themselves out as apostles of Christ and it's no wonder people are fooled... but they'll get what's coming to them!". Even through the barrier of words, time, culture and distance, the abrasion of Paul in full-flow comes down through the centuries. This was hardly the promised approach in the meekness and gentleness of Christ (10:1), which all goes to show that 2 Corinthians is written as a flow of consciousness letter- which explains many of the apparent contradictions and tensions within it.

11:9- see on 2 Cor. 13:4.

*And when I was present with you and was in want-* His time of "want" in Corinth was part of being "abased" whilst there amongst them (:7). The same word is translated "destitute" in Heb. 11:37. If he had asked for support or accepted it from the local Corinthians, the implication is that this abasement and want would have been avoided. Perhaps he was indeed destitute, until the Macedonians got assistance to him. "In want" is the Greek word translated "inferior" in :5. Paul was not at all lacking behind the so called "apostles"; but he had been lacking in material things. And that was his qualification as a true apostle. The fact Paul clearly at times had money, and came from a wealthy background, makes all the more impressive his being destitute and "abased" for the Gospel.

*I was not a burden on anyone. For the brothers, when they came from Macedonia, supplied all my needs; indeed in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will I remain-* Paul had the same policy in Thessalonica where he also resisted being burdensome (1 Thess. 2:6 s.w.). Acts 18:3 says that Paul worked in Corinth as a tentmaker when he first arrived there. The fact his needs had to be supplied by the Macedonians would indicate that he was unable to continue being self-supporting in this way, presumably because of an economic blockade against him organized by the Jews.

11:10 *As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me boasting about this throughout the regions of Achaia-* Paul's boasting about his independence from the Corinthians seems rather strange and somewhat human rather than spiritual. Seeing that he had been supported by wages paid by the Macedonians (:8,9), his financial independence from the Corinthians was not a great thing to boast about.

11:11 *And why? Because I do not love you? God knows, I do!-* "God knows", along with his appeal to the truth of Christ within him (:10), all suggests that Paul's claims here would be received cynically by the Corinthians, and so Paul feels the need to swear in some way to his truthfulness. But he might have perhaps taken more comfort from his own observation earlier, that his authenticity as an elder having authority over them was in fact known by them within their own consciences (see on 5:11). Yet in this section (chapters 10-13) Paul often seems to stray from his own principles as he is overly caught up with his personal investment in the situation at Corinth. He should have left it at that, but instead, he makes all kinds of oaths ["God knows!"] and human self-justification. We too can clearly understand and espouse a principle yet allow the humanity of a situation to allow us to indulge in personal self-justification when we have claimed to understand that this is not the way to go.

11:12 *But what I do, that I will continue to do, so I may not provide an opportunity to those that desire such an opportunity, and so that their boasting will be shown to be not the same as ours-* Clearly there were some at Corinth seeking opportunity to bring Paul down. He was up against consciously organized opposition, which he understandably sums up as "the satan" / adversary. Paul's boasting is made, he claims, so that he can as it were out boast the opposition. He has made up his mind to go down the path of human boasting, and says he will continue to do so, because he will deprive his critics of any opportunity to boast. But as observed many times in this letter, we are here reading flow of consciousness writing. Paul is writing down his thoughts as they come into his mind, and all emotions are at first blush contradictory. For it is obvious that by justifying himself, he will not by any amount of autobiographical truth somehow shut down his opponents by outboasting them. Nor will he rid them of opportunity to attack him. And such a path of action is in contradiction to his correct principle of not comparing ourselves amongst ourselves as men (10:12).

11:13 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ-* Paul claimed Divine qualification and authentication of his apostleship, whereas these men had merely declared themselves ["fashioning themselves"] apostles. They branded themselves as "super apostles" (:5); Paul calls them *false* apostles. The transformation of these men into something they were not is the basis for :14; as these men 'fashioned themselves' so "Satan fashions himself". But the connection is not historical, to some supposed even in Eden when Satan turned into an Angel. For Genesis and the Bible are silent about this; it is an import from paganism. The present tenses here must be given their due weight. As the false apostles were fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ, so 'Satan' was fashioning himself into an angel of light. I take this as meaning that these men were part of a much larger system of adversarial opposition to Paul's work, which he sums as 'Satan', the adversary. And the context here and elsewhere points unmistakably to a Jewish satan. I have written about this at length in *The Real Devil* 2-4.

There is indeed allusion to the deceit of the serpent in Eden, who was of course adversarial ['satan' = adversary], but this is not to say that Paul read the serpent as anything more than a literal "beast of the field" as indeed the serpent is presented in Genesis. As the serpent

deceived Eve by his subtility, so these false apostles worked deceitfully. These false apostles accused Paul of having the characteristics of the serpent- crafty and taking people in with guile (12:16). It is these very words and allusion to the serpent which Paul now uses about the false apostles here and in :3 and this explains the usage of serpent imagery. It all seems a rather tit for tat situation- he was trying to outboast them, and calls them the names they call him. This is all in contradiction of Paul's earlier arguments that he will not commend himself as others do nor compare himself with others. But he is carried away in a desire by all means and by every kind of argument to try to win the Corinthians to Christ and to himself.

11:14 *And no marvel. For even Satan fashions himself into an angel of light*- See on :13. For reasons why this is not supporting any idea of a cosmic satan, see my *The Real Devil* 5-21 . It needs to be recognized that Paul's writings very often allude to extant Jewish and Gentile literature, sometimes quoting verbatim from them, in order to correct popular ideas. Thus Paul quotes Aratus (Acts 17:28), Menander (1 Corinthians 15:33) and Epimenides (Titus 1:12) – he uses odd phrases out of these uninspired writings by way of illustration. I've shown in *The Real Devil* that much of the Biblical literature does this kind of thing, e.g. the entire Pentateuch is alluding to the various myths and legends of creation and origins, showing what the truth is. The fact Paul's 21st century readers are largely ignorant of that literature, coupled with Paul's rabbinic writing style not using specific quotation rubric or quotation marks, means that this point is often missed. It's rather like our reading of any historical literature – parts of it remain hard to understand because we simply don't appreciate the historical and immediate context in which it was written. When Paul speaks of Satan being transformed as a bright Angel, he's actually quoting from the first century AD *Life of Adam and Eve* (12–16) which speculated that 'Satan' refused to worship the image of God in Adam and therefore he came to earth as a bright Angel and deceived Eve: "Satan was wroth and transformed himself into the brightness of angels, and went away to the river" (For references, see Susan Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 45. *The Life of Adam and Eve* was apparently widely quoted and alluded to in the first century – see throughout M. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1992)). Paul's quoting from that document; although in a preceding verse (2 Cor. 11:3) he has stressed that "the *serpent* beguiled Eve by his subtility". He's reaffirming the Genesis account, which doesn't speak of a personal Satan, but rather simply of a serpent, created as one of the "beasts of the field". So we could paraphrase Paul here: 'I know that the Jewish writings say that the serpent wasn't really a serpent, it was 'Satan', and was actually in the form of a bright Angel. Now that's not the case – let's stick with Genesis, which speaks of a literal serpent. But OK, in the same way as in the Jewish myth Satan became a bright, persuasive Angel, well, these false teachers from the Jews appear as wonderful, spiritual people – but following them will lead you to the same catastrophe as fell upon Eve as a result of being deceived'.

The way Paul uses the word *metaschematizo* ["transform"] three times is interesting – "the stress is so heavy here because Paul is turning their own word against his opponents" (Neil Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 269). If this is the case, then we would yet another example [of which there are so many in Corinthians] of Paul using a term used by his enemies in order to answer them – which would mean that he is not necessarily agreeing with it. Indeed the apocryphal Jewish *Apocalypse of Moses* claims that because Satan appeared as such a dazzling, shining Angel, Eve was inevitably deceived by him. Paul here would thus be alluding to this idea – not that his allusion means that he supported the idea.



11:15 *It is no great thing therefore if his servants also fashion themselves as servants of righteousness-* Servants or ministers of righteousness is a Jewish term, allusive to the priests. The Jewish satan or opposition to Paul's work had servants / ministers who appeared to be righteous people. Judaism presented the faithful as "the righteous" and the servants of righteousness were those who ministered to Jewish congregations. But they were in fact servants of what Paul terms 'the satan', his term [as previously referenced] for the Jewish opposition. And his later self-justification in this chapter implies that they presented themselves as true Jews of the seed of Abraham.

*Whose end shall be according to their work-* The lazy servant was punished out of his own mouth (Lk. 19:22); and even in Job's time, this principle of Divine condemnation was known (Job 9:20; 15:6). The Judaizers too were to have an "end [that] will correspond to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:14,15 RSV). Jewish theories of the time accept that God punished the Satan figure, but the demons got around the punishment and tempt men to sin— as if God somehow was outwitted in the supposed struggle. But here Paul says that these men will indeed be punished and will not get out of it. The *Apocalypse of Adam* likewise minimizes human sin by claiming that 'Satan' in fact raped Eve, thus leading to the fall; the *Apocalypse of Moses* claims that because Satan appeared as such a dazzling, shining Angel, Eve was inevitably deceived by him. Paul here alludes to this idea— not that his allusion means that he supported the idea.

11:16 *I say again, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, accept me as a fool so that I may also boast a little-* The accusation was that Paul was "foolish", lacking the wisdom which the false teachers claimed to have. Paul is breaking his own principles now, acting as a fool, comparing himself with others, boasting in the flesh rather than the Spirit, and not as earlier leaving the Corinthians to realize his sincerity in their own spirit / conscience. He is driven by a desire as he puts it elsewhere to "speak in human terms" to by all means persuade them to remain with him and not go after the false teachers. Again we note that he (like the Lord Jesus) faces false statements and beliefs by going along with them and reasoning from their wrong perspective. If they thought him a fool, he will reason with them from the starting point that he is a fool- rather than protesting multiple times that he is being slandered and is no fool.

11:17- see on 1 Cor. 7:11.

*What I will now speak in this confidence of boasting, I speak not after the Lord but as in foolishness-* "After the Lord" is a reference to his opening statement in this section that he is now going to reason with them according to the gentle humility of Christ (10:1). He is not saying that this record of his words is not Divinely inspired. This is yet further evidence that 2 Corinthians is an inspired record of a flow of consciousness, whereby Paul wrote down what he thought and felt at the time. This explains the apparent tensions- in this case, between approaching them "after the Lord" Jesus, and yet now departing from His meekness and gentleness in order by all means to persuade them on the terms of comparison which they had set up.

11:18 *Seeing that many boast after the flesh, I will boast also-* He is seeking to outboast his boastful competitors, despite having earlier stated that he dare not ever compare himself with others, for that was "not wise" (10:12). As noted on :16 and :17, this was a departure from his own principles.

11:19 *For being wise, you bear with the foolish gladly*- This kind of sarcasm is not really much of an argument, and seems more reflective of Paul's anger, the anger of love unrequited, than any serious attempt to persuade the Corinthians. He is calling the competitors "foolish", and clearly thinks the Corinthians are not really "wise" because they are following such fools. But in terms of winning their hearts and minds for Christ and himself, such language and quips were surely hardly effective, indeed quite the opposite.

11:20 *For it seems you follow a man if he brings you into bondage, if he devours you, if he takes you captive, if he exalts himself, if he hits you on the face*- The "bondage" and "captivity" was to the Mosaic law, and Paul often uses this imagery in writing of the Law in Romans and Galatians. The 'devouring' probably referred to the financial demands made upon them by the false teachers. Why would immoral Gentile Christians be at all attracted by such Judaists? As noted on Titus, such false teachers were attractive to the weak Gentile Christians because their conscience about their misbehaviour was salved, on the basis of paying some money and doing a few symbolic acts of obedience. Many religions have swept to mass popularity on the same basis. These false teachers exalted themselves over their flock and were aggressive to them ("hits you on the face"). And still they returned for more. One wonders why aggressive priests in popular churches have any loyalty from their flocks when they behave likewise. But they do- because they are all about guilt tripping a spiritually weak flock and then demanding money and symbolic obedience. Smiting on the face was a punishment for heresy or blasphemy within the synagogue system (Mt. 5:39; Acts 23:2), although it was often administered gently and more as a symbolic gesture. They who were so immoral, replete with church prostitutes according to 1 Corinthians, were willing to be beaten for their supposed apostasy from Jewish ritual law. And doubtless after receiving it, they felt clean in their conscience and were willing to support and pay those who had punished them.

11:21 *To my shame, I can say, we were too weak to do that*- Such leadership as discussed on :20 was seen as "strong". Paul sarcastically says that he was too weak to have treated his flock like that.

*Yet wherein any is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am bold* also- What follows is some sort of encomium, a list of a person's biographical achievements. But it is presented as a sarcasm about Paul's encomium [see on Gal. 1:10]. Here in 2 Cor. 11:21-12:10, all the classic elements of the encomium are to be found- his origin and birth, training, accomplishments, comparison with others etc. But he has written that those who compare themselves with others (*synkrinontes*) are fools (2 Cor. 10:12), and that he himself has been speaking as a fool, a raving madman. That was what he thought of an encomium after the flesh. This is all a needful lesson for our generation, surrounded as we are by pressure to trust in education, achievements, being humanly cool and impressive. Paul goes on to say that actually, he prefers as a Christian to "boast of things that show my weakness" (2 Cor. 11:30). Instead of speaking of glorious "deeds of the body", he speaks of his labours, imprisonments, beatings etc. And thus he draws out the paradox, incredible for the first century mind- his real strength and power is in his weakness, for it was this that made him trust in God and in the grace of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 12:10). Instead of impressing those around him, Paul sought to impress the Father and Son above. His strength was not, as society then thought, in what he had inherited and developed from the communities into which he was born- it was rather in the grace of God transforming his character. His patron, his teacher and elder, was the Lord Jesus, and the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Gal. 1:1; Rom. 8:11), rather than any visible 'elder' of his natural communities.

11:22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I-* Clearly the false teachers were Jews, confirming that the 'Satan' referred to in :14 is some kind of personification of the entire Jewish resistance to Paul's work. Paul could have argued on a more spiritual level, as he does in Romans and Galatians, that ethnic descent is irrelevant. But here he takes a more human approach, arguing with them on the same terms of reference which they use.

11:23 *Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as like a madman) I more, with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death-* We note that only a fraction of Paul's sufferings are recorded in Acts, which is a reminder that Biblical history is highly condensed. We see a fraction of the biography of the people we encounter in the pages of the Bible. Many of the imprisonments and beatings would have been at the hand of the synagogue system, which had the authority to discipline their members with temporary arrests and beatings. As we will also note on :24, Paul could have avoided these by making a clean break with Judaism, leaving the ministry to the Jew to Peter as the Lord intended, and going solely to the Gentiles. But he chose not to follow completely the Lord's intention for his ministry- and suffered for it. I have given multiple examples in commentary on Acts. This doesn't mean the Lord didn't work with him; but as in our own lives, going His way is easier than insisting upon our own ways. Some of the beatings may have been from the Romans; but in this case, we wonder why they beat him, seeing that they did not beat Roman citizens like Paul (Acts 22:25,26; 23:27). Perhaps he had been unable to prove his citizenship in some cases; or perhaps he preferred to identify as a Jew and downplayed his Roman citizenship, suffering for it, because he so wished to identify with Israel in order to bring Israel to the Lord Jesus. In Philippi he seems to have kept quiet about his citizenship until after he had been scourged. But again, so much of this could have been avoided if Paul had followed the path of ministry envisaged by the Lord, to go to the Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter.

Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:23).

11:24 *Of the Jews five times I received thirty nines lashes-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). But such punishments from the synagogue system could have been avoided if Paul had not gone to the Jews and left them to Peter; see on :23. Forty lashes were thought enough to kill a man, and the thirty nine lash punishment was only to be given to a man once in his lifetime, according to synagogue law. The repeated experience of such major beating would have left Paul's back a real mess. In Acts 22:25 we get the impression Paul was willing to be scourged yet again, but at the last minute played the card of his Roman citizenship to avoid it. Perhaps this was because the previous lashings had left him so deformed and infected that he realized that if he were to be lashed again he would probably die.

The pattern of preaching which we see in the Father and in the Lord Jesus must be our model. He identified with us in order to 'get through' to us; the power of His personality and work rests in the fact that He was genuinely human. God Himself chose this method, of manifestation in a Son of our nature, in order to redeem us. We can do likewise, in identifying with our audience; living as they do when in a mission field; learning their language, both literally and metaphorically; patient bearing with those suffering from

depression, Aspergers, alcoholism, various neuroses... to win them. Thus to the Gentiles Paul became as a Gentile; and as a Jew in order that he might win them who were under the law (1 Cor. 9:20). This is exemplified by the fact that he underwent synagogue floggings (2 Cor. 11:24)- which were only administered to Jews who willingly submitted to the punishment because they were orthodox Jews. This was the extent to which Paul became as a Jew in the hope of winning the Jews. Fly by preachers, seeking to establish a colony of their home base, will never achieve much lasting success. Paul would pay any price in order to identify with his audience, in order to win them to Christ. He was living out the spirit of Jesus, who likewise identified Himself with us to the maximum extent in order to save us. "Forty lashes minus one" was a synagogue punishment, based on Dt. 25:2,3, which could only be administered to members of the synagogue community- and apparently, the members had the right under local Roman law to resign from the synagogue and escape the punishment. It would've been far easier for Paul to disown Judaism and insist he was not a member of any synagogue. But he didn't. Why? Surely because this was the extent to which he was willing to be all things to all men, to truly be a Jew in order to save the Jews. And we too can choose daily the extent to which we identify ourselves with those whom we seek to save. It's not simply the case of a Western missionary suffering privations along with the impoverished local population to whom he or she seeks to preach. It's about us each getting involved in the mess of others' lives, at great personal cost, in order to show true solidarity with them, on which basis we can more effectively witness to them. This is surely the way in which we are to 'love the world'; this inhuman world, this enormous collection of desperate, lonely people, into whose mundane experiences we can enter simply through genuine, caring, person-to-person encounter. And by doing this we will find ourselves. For it seems to me that the truly creative and original personalities, the Lord Jesus being the supremest, are those who give of themselves in order to enter into the lives and sufferings of others. And that, by the way, may explain why there are so few truly freethinking minds. Paul didn't just love the Jewish people in theory, he didn't draw a distinction between the Jews as persons, and their role or status before God. He loved them as persons, and so he suffered for them in order to save them.

11:25 *Three times I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been adrift at sea-* Only one beating with rods is recorded (Acts 16:22 s.w.), but Acts records only a fraction of Paul's sufferings. Beating with rods was forbidden to Roman citizens by the *Lex Porcia*, but Paul kept quiet about his Roman citizenship in order to receive it (Acts 16:37). He so wished to identify as a Jew in order to save the Jews; all he had to do was utter the words *Civis Romanus sum* and he could have avoided these beatings with rods, which often caused the death of the victim. We must ask to what extent we are willing to suffer in order to achieve identity with those we seek to save by our witness. The shipwrecks were prior to that on the journey to Rome; the Acts record of Paul's travels says nothing of them and we wonder how many other dramas were not recorded.

Paul endured one of the most traumatic lives ever lived- beaten with rods, shipwrecked, sleepless, cold, naked, betrayed, robbed, beaten, and so much of this isn't recorded (e.g. the three shipwrecks and two of the beatings with rods he speaks of in 2 Cor. 11 aren't mentioned in Acts). And yet he implies that even more than all that, he felt the pressure of care for his brethren in the churches. His heart so bled for them... Paul lived a traumatic life, lived with weakness, fear, trembling, tears, distress, dying daily, burdened beyond measure, despairing of life, having the sentence of death, sleeplessness... and all this would have had quite some effect upon him nervously. Almost certainly it would have lead him to be depressive, and this

may explain some of these flashes of anger. Yet these flecks of pride and anger reflect something of Paul's former self. He is described as fuming out hatred against the Christians like an animal; he was driven by hate and anger. Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt. Although Paul changed from an angry man to one dominated by love, to the extent that he could write hymns of love such as 1 Cor. 13, there were times when under provocation the old bitterness and anger flashed back. We too have these moments, and yet in the fact that Paul too experienced them even in spiritual maturity, we have some measure of comfort.

*11:26 On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, in danger from false brothers-* Travel in the first century was a risky business; flash floods ["rivers"] in Asia Minor claimed many lives. And Paul additionally had to cope with the opposition of both Jews and Gentiles. To obey the great commission to take the Gospel out into the world was therefore a call to face danger and hardship. In spiritual terms, that same calling has not been made any less radical for we who face so many distractions and issues which would likewise discourage us from obeying it.

The "false brothers" were surely those of Gal. 2:4, the Jews bent on derailing Paul's missionary work by entering the churches he founded under the guise of being converts. Paul is here hinting that he knows exactly who the false teachers of Corinth are; or as he puts it in 2:11, he was not ignorant of the devices of the [Jewish] satan. Paul mentions this problem last in this list because he wanted to highlight how aware he was of it.

*11:27 In toil and hardship-* Literally, weariness and pain. Perhaps Paul's traumatic life resulted in some form of M.E. or similar disease, causing pain and sucking his energy, resulting in insomnia.

*In many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, in frequent fastings, in cold and nakedness-* Paul loved Israel with the love of Christ: he describes his hunger, thirst, nakedness, insomnia and loss of all things in the very language used about Israel's condemnation (2 Cor. 11:27 alludes Dt. 28:48). In other words, he saw himself as somehow bearing their punishment for apostasy in his own life, as if he was some kind of suffering representative for them. His sufferings were the very opposite of what the Judaists believed should accompany an accredited spiritual teacher, for they practiced a form of the prosperity Gospel, having a proverb that "a goodly house, a fair wife, and a soft couch" were the prerogatives of the "disciples of the wise". Paul is in a way confirming their secular view that he was 'unwise'. But as he has stated in 1 Cor. 1, there is a total inversion of secular wisdom and blessing for those who are of the Spirit.

*11:28 Besides those things that are without, there is the daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches-* Paul identified his biggest pressure as "the care of all the churches" which he said 'came upon (Gk. to throng / mob / rush at) (him) daily' (2 Cor. 11:28)- as if he woke up each morning and had these anxieties thronging his mind.

11:29- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*Who is weak, without me being weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*- The word he uses for "weak" is one which features frequently in his writings, and it nearly always refers to the spiritually weak (Rom. 4:19; 14:1,2,21; 1 Cor. 8:9,11,12). He was so sensitive to his brethren that when he considered their spiritual weakness, he felt the same. He identified with them, he could put his arm around someone who was all slipping away and say "I'm with you" and so evidently mean it. He had a genuine and obvious sense of solidarity with them. He wasn't critical of them to the extent that he made a barrier between him and them. They knew his disapproval of their ways, but yet it was so evident that his heart bled for them. And when Paul saw a brother being offended, he burnt. His heart burnt and bled as he saw someone drifting away with a chip on their shoulder. He didn't just shrug and think 'Well that's up to them, their choice'. He cared for them. That brother, that sister, and their future meant so much to him. If Paul had lived in the 21st century, he would have telephoned them, written to them, visited them, met with them regularly. To be weak and to be offended are bracketed in Rom. 14:21: "Your brother is offended, or is made weak". And here in 2 Cor. 11:29 we have the same idea: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?". The parallels imply that if the weak brother was offended, Paul himself was as it were offended, even though he himself didn't stumble. He could identify with the spiritual weakness of others to the point of feeling that he himself had committed it or was in the shoes of the sinner- even though he himself was innocent. Paul could share with the Corinthians that he 'burnt' every time a brother stumbled from the way, feeling weak with the weak. The 'burning' could be a reference to the figurative usage of fire as the end destruction of the condemned at the last day. Paul felt their condemnation as if it were happening to him. He did not shrug and turn away but rather felt their spiritual situation as being his, such was his identity with them. He was no mere platform speaker, or a church member only theoretically connected with their brethren by common ascent to a statement of faith.

11:30 *If it is necessary for me to boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness*- The supreme qualification was in his weakness. We noted on :21 that Paul has been presenting a kind of inverted form of the biographical list of achievements which was commonly known as an 'encomium'. And now he sums up his humiliations with an incident which for him epitomized the humiliation which characterized his entire ministry. His glorying in his infirmities in 12:5 is similar.

11:31 *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed for always, knows that I do not lie to you*- The Corinthians considered Paul to be a liar, hence his frequent protestations that he is speaking the truth before God. Judaism spoke of God as the ever blessed One, but Paul here makes it clear that this title is true through His being the Father of the Lord Jesus, through whom His blessings are now articulated to men.

11:32 *In Damascus, the governor, under Aretas the king, guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to capture me*- Paul has his historical facts correct, for Aretas was an Arabian king from Petra who briefly ruled over Damascus. If the Bible is a forgery or uninspired, there would be major blunders in historical fact; but there are not. The Jews clearly had influence with him, far more than the Acts record indicates, and had his whole garrison (AV- an appropriate term, seeing Aretas of Petra had only recently taken control in Damascus) trying to catch Paul. There was therefore a mobilization of a large number of soldiers in order to stop Paul escaping Damascus. Hence the impression it left upon Paul.

11:33 *And only through a window I was let down in a basket by the wall and escaped his hands*- Paul sees this escape through a window in a basket as so humiliating because it associates him with David's escape from Saul's persecution. And Paul- the former Saul- saw himself as having persecuted David-Jesus and was ashamed of it. Paul seems to take a certain pleasure in this inversion of values. He boasts of how his greatest moment was when he was let *down* a wall in a basket, in fear for his life (2 Cor. 11:30-33). "In antiquity a Roman soldier who was first up a wall and into a conquered city would win a special award called a wall crown. Paul says he will boast of being first *down* the wall"- running from the enemy (Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* p. 124). He was the very reverse of the classical ancient warrior. This inversion of values is just as hard and counter-cultural to live by in our world. It's quite possible that garbage was lowered over the wall into a rubbish tip at the foot of the wall, which would have added to the humiliation. Outside the city, with wild dogs howling amongst the stinking garbage... this was the Biblical picture of condemnation. And Paul experienced it and through that humiliation was saved. In essence, we pass through the same experience.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *I must go on boasting (though there is nothing to be gained by it). I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord-* I have earlier explained the various tensions and apparent contradictions within 2 Corinthians by proposing that Paul is writing down his feelings and emotions as a flow of consciousness, albeit recorded under inspiration. This explains the volatile change of feelings and approach, one moment passionately 'in love' with them, the next bitterly angry and resentful against them. He has explained that indeed boasting or attempting to outboast his competitors is not the way to go. Here in 12:1 he again recognizes that, but feels compelled to go on boasting. In chapter 11, Paul has as it were concluded his list of sufferings by citing what to him was the supremest humiliation- being lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus into the rubbish tip beneath. But now he seems to revert to boasting about his qualifications in terms which might impress his competitors and their supporters. This reversion to a previous theme which he had supposedly concluded is evidence enough that indeed, we are dealing with a flow of consciousness record. "Visions and revelations" were the very things which the false teachers claimed to have.

12:2 *I knew a man in Christ, fourteen years ago-* Paul makes one of his most significant boasts mindful that he should not be boasting really. This may explain his reference to himself only in indirect terms, in an attempt not to boast overmuch about such a holy thing. He does this elsewhere (see on Gal. 1:6). "I knew a man" would be better "I know a man" (RV); the person in view was still alive. The vision which he received may well have included something about Jew and Gentile unity; for 14 years previously on some chronologies would take us to the time of the Jerusalem Council. Or the reference could be to the trance in the temple (Acts 22:17) in which he was told to go to the Gentiles.

*Whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows-* Paul stresses this twice. Perhaps his idea was that the mode of the vision was unimportant; it was the message which was all important. The mode of revelation was important to the Jewish mysticists; whilst Paul is indeed trying to outboast them ['foolishly'], he is also saying that the mode is insignificant. Whether a man went to Heaven in a bodily form to get a revelation is irrelevant compared to the message.

*Such a person was caught up to the third heaven-* The picture of being "caught up" is presented right after that of Paul being let down the wall of Damascus as refuse, into the rubbish tip at the foot of the walls; an incident he presents as his greatest humiliation. But it was that bringing down which was the basis for his being lifted up so high, following the pattern of the Lord Jesus.

The idea of seven heavens currently held in Judaism and Islam is not Biblical. There were at Paul's time only three understandings of heaven: the literal air, the sky, and Heaven itself where God dwells. Paul may simply mean 'Heaven' but he uses this Jewish terminology because his opponents in view were Judaists. Another popular suggestion is that the first heaven refers to the Mosaic law; the second heaven to the Christian dispensation, and the "third heaven" to the Kingdom age. But this is problematic because one would expect 'heavens and earth' to be the phrase used for a dispensation of things. And before the Mosaic law there was also some form of Divine dispensation upon earth, which this schema ignores. So I read Paul as simply referring to 'Heaven', which he parallels with "paradise" (:4). Paradise was understood in Jewish terms as Heaven; although one could argue that it refers to the Kingdom of God on earth when the paradise of Eden is restored. We would note in that case that Paul has recently presented the Corinthian church as Eve in paradise, now tempted by the serpent of the Judaizers (11:3). If paradise was where the Corinthians were now



situated, in prospect at least, perhaps Paul means that he saw a heavenly vision of how things really are for the church from the Heavenly viewpoint. It would be this vision which motivated Paul to keep on keeping on so tenaciously with the Corinthians, and would explain his obsessive insistence upon the success of the Jerusalem Poor Fund. This heavenly vision of how God saw the Gentile believers would have likewise inspired Paul to continually view them as being justified in Christ and acceptable to God. It would explain his extraordinary motivation for the Corinthians, and why he mentions this vision at this point. He doesn't utter in words what he saw- because his ministry for them was a public statement of his striving to achieve that ideal.

We are real life men and women, only too aware that although yes, we are in Christ, we are also all too human still. We still sin the sins and think the thoughts and feel the feelings of those around us. We are only who we are, born in such a town, living in such a city, doing a job, trying to provide for a family. In our minds eye we see the spotless lamb of God, moving around Galilee 2000 years ago, doing good, healing the sick. But He was there, and we are here now, today, in all our weakness and worldly distraction. He was as He was, but *we* are as we are. Reading through his letters, it is apparent that Paul saw himself as two people: a natural man, a Jew from Tarsus, a Roman citizen living in the Mediterranean world... and also, a man in Christ. This is why he here says of himself: "I knew a man in Christ", who had great visions 14 years previously (at the council of Jerusalem of Acts 15), and who was subsequently given a "thorn in the flesh". "Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory", he writes (2 Cor 12:5), as if separating himself from this more spiritually exalted man who saw these visions. Paul is surely telling us that he sees himself as two people. He makes the point clearly: "I will not be a fool... I am become a fool" (:6,11). He was the greatest apostle; although he was nothing (:11). This language comes to a crisis in 12:10: "When I [i.e. the natural Paul] am weak, then am I [the spiritual Paul] strong".

The Corinthians were mainly Gentiles, but Paul speaks of them as "When you were Gentiles..." (1 Cor. 12:2 RV). They had a new racial identity in Christ, and yet, he also reminded them at times that they were Gentiles. We too cannot obliterate who we are or where we came from. But superimposed upon this must be the realisation than now, we are in Christ.

Paul is in many ways a working model of how we should be aware of the two people within us. In writing to Corinth, he was highly sensitive to the danger of sinning by justifying himself as he needed to. To overcome this problem, he speaks (through the Spirit) as if he is two quite different people; the fleshly man, and the spiritual man. 2 Cor. 11 is full of statements concerning himself, which he makes "as a fool". His frequent usage of this word "fool" points us back to the Proverbs, where a "fool" is the man of the flesh. Ecc. 10:2 says that a fool has a 'left handed' mind, which in Jewish thinking was a reference to the "man of the flesh" of the N.T. There are a number of apparent contradictions between passages in 2 Cor. 11,12 which are explicable once it is appreciated that Paul is speaking firstly "in the flesh", and then concerning his spiritual man. Thus he insists that he is not a fool (11:16; 12:6), whilst saying that he is a fool (12:11). He says he will not boast about himself, but then he does just that. He claims to be among the greatest apostles, and in the same breath says he is nothing (12:11). His boasting was "not after the Lord", i.e. the man Christ Jesus within Him was not speaking, but the fool, the man of the flesh, was speaking (11:17). The supreme example of this separation of flesh and spirit in Paul's thinking is shown by 12:2: "I knew a

man in Christ (who heard great revelations)... of such an one will I glory, but of myself will I not glory". But 12:7 clearly defines this "man" as Paul: "lest I should be exalted... through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh". The "man in Christ" of whom Paul spoke was his own spiritual man, who was "in Christ". It is interesting that here Paul defines "myself" as his natural man, whereas in Rom. 7:25 he speaks of "myself" as his spiritual man. The point is made that at different times we identify ourselves either with the man of the flesh, or with the spiritual man within us. In 2 Cor. 11,12, Paul consciously chose to identify himself with the natural man, in order to boast to the Corinthians. It is worth noting that "fourteen years ago" takes us back to the Council at Jerusalem. The revelations given to Paul then were probably confirmation that the Gospel should indeed be preached to the Gentiles. This was the "third Heaven" dispensation. The wonder that Paul would be used to spread the Gospel world-wide so mentally exalted Paul that he needed a thorn in the flesh to bring Him down to earth. Yet, for the most part, we seem to shrug our shoulders at the wonder of our preaching commission.

12:3 *And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I do not know; God knows)-* See on :2 *Whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows.* The word for word repetition is the way Jews emphasized the totality of their truthfulness. Paul is emphasizing the wonder of the things heard; the form in which they were heard was utterly unimportant compared to the content of the message. And that principle remains true to this day.

12:4 *How he was caught up into Paradise-* See on :2 *Such a person was caught up to the third heaven.* Paul appears to equate paradise with "the third heaven", but it's also feasible that he is describing two stages of exaltation; one to the third heaven, i.e. Heaven, and then further into "paradise".

*And heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter-* Alluding to how Moses saw the greatest visions of God of any man in the Old Testament; visions which he could not repeat; he only repeated the words of command which he was given. He did not tell Israel what he saw in Ex. 34. It could be that Paul is saying that what is heard in Paradise cannot be spoken on earth; or at least, cannot be articulated 'lawfully', in the terms of the Mosaic law. In this case, such visions are not really any confirmation of having Divine authority in one's message. Therefore the claims of the Jewish false teachers, and those of Paul, were equal on one level- but were unimportant, because their message was not going to be comprised of what they may or may not have heard in Paradise. Because what is heard there is "unspeakable".

12:5- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

*On behalf of such a one will I boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, save in my weaknesses-* This is as stated in 11:30. Paul is inverting all human wisdom and worldviews here by saying that greatness and qualification is in weakness and not human strength. Earlier Paul has reminded them that he first preached the Gospel to them in "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3 s.w.). He seems to have in view physical frailty of health, which would encourage the view that the thorn in the flesh which we will now read of was some physical weakness.

12:6 *For if I wanted to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be speaking the truth. But I will not boast, lest anyone should account me above that which he saw me to be, or hears from me-* This awkward statement would appear to be Paul's way of explaining why he has just written about himself in the third person, and apparently distancing himself from the Paul who really did have things to truthfully boast about. Paul has now twice stated in two verses "I will not boast", whilst he is evidently doing just that. His argument that 'This isn't really

me...' has limited value. I would say that this letter is the record of a flow of consciousness, and Paul is baring his heart to them. The very genuine love he has for them and passion for their salvation and the unity of Christ's body has led him to get worked up into a frenzy of trying to persuade them by all means.

*12:7 That I should not be exalted overmuch-* The usage of words with the *huper* prefix is common in this section. The self proclaimed *huper* or super apostles could not be equalled by Paul because a true servant of Christ will be held back from being *huper* exalted. Paul repeats this phrase twice in this verse to emphasize the point.

*A thorn in the flesh-* An impediment of some sort. Whatever or whoever the opposition, there could be no thorn in the Spirit; any retardation of Paul's work was only on a human level. The thorn was Satan's "messenger", and I suggest below that this refers to an individual coordinating the Jewish campaign against Paul's missionary endeavours. But there are other quite feasible suggestions about the thorn in the flesh; and these are not to be excluded. It's quite possible that the repeated beatings Paul suffered from the Satan [the Jews] resulted in various health issues such as poor eyesight which meant that indeed, the human "thorn" resulted in 'thorns' in Paul's physical health.

Here, then, are some other alternatives concerning the thorn:

#### **Poor Eyesight**

Gal. 4:10-13 speaks of an 'infirmity in the flesh' which would have led many to despise Paul's preaching; and yet the Galatians overlooked this when they first heard Paul's preaching. Speaking of the same period of time, Paul reminisces how they would have been willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him (Gal. 4:15). This would seem to make a fairly firm connection between the "thorn in the flesh" of 2 Cor. 12:7 and the "infirmity in the flesh" of poor eyesight. Thus he concludes the Galatian letter with a reference to the large letter he had written with his own hand (Gal. 6:11); not "large" in the sense of long, but perhaps referring to his physically large and unimpressive handwriting. Paul "earnestly beholding the council" employs a Greek medical term for squinting as a result of poor eyesight (Acts 23:1).

#### **Malaria**

The description of Paul being with the Corinthians in "weakness and... trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3) uses a specific medical term describing the malaria shakes. "Weakness" is the same word as here in 2 Cor. 12:5, where the thorn in the flesh is a "weakness" given which actually qualifies Paul as an apostle. This would explain why he was "in peril of waters" (Gk. 'rivers'; 2 Cor. 11:26)- the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Poor eyesight could be associated with malaria; although it is difficult to understand the malaria just beginning in mid-life as suddenly as the 'thorn in the flesh' passage seems to suggest. Paul may well have had malaria, as any such traveller was likely to- quite in addition to any physical 'thorn in the flesh'.

#### **A Spiritual Struggle**

However, there are reasons to think that whilst Paul may have had a physical ailment, the "thorn in the flesh" may have referred to a spiritual affliction. One would expect to read about a thorn in the *body* if Paul was only speaking of a physical weakness. But in Paul's thinking, "the flesh" so evidently refers to the more abstract things of human nature. The context of the "thorn in the flesh" passage would suggest that it was a spiritual weakness. Paul says that he will not boast of himself, "except in my infirmities" (2 Cor. 12:5). One of his "infirmities" was therefore his "thorn in the flesh". He is saying that he will not boast of his physical

sufferings (which might include his weak eyesight) and achievements, rather he will exult in the fact that he, a man riddled with spiritual infirmity, especially one particular thorn in the flesh, had been used by God, and God's grace was sufficient to overcome all his spiritual weakness. Now this would fit in with the quintessence of Paul's belief: that by grace alone, not human achievement, God works through human weakness to bring about His purpose. Paul isn't adding to his list of physical glorying by saying 'And you know, on top of all this, I've had to struggle all my life with physical weakness'. This would only be continuing his boasting of 2 Cor. 11. But now he changes, and says that he wants to glory in his spiritual weakness, and how God has worked with him despite that.

Paul asked for the thorn to be taken away; but the answer was that God's *grace* was sufficient. Grace tends to be associated with forgiveness and justification, rather than with the ability to keep on living with a physical ailment. Likewise Moses, Paul's hero and prototype, asked a similar three times for entry to the land, and was basically given the same answer: that God's gracious forgiveness was sufficient for him.

### **Women?**

When Paul talks about being buffeted by a thorn in the flesh, he is in fact almost quoting passages from the LXX of Num. 33:55 and Josh. 23:13, where "thorns" which would buffet the *eyes* of Israel were the Canaanite tribes (cp. Ez. 28:24); and especially, in the context, their women. If they intermarried, those women and what they brought with them would be made by God as thorns in Israel's flesh. The implication could be that Paul had not driven out his Canaanites earlier, and therefore God gave them to Him as a thorn in the flesh, just as He had done to Israel earlier. There is fair reason to think that Paul had been married; he could not have been a member of the Sanhedrin and thus had the power to vote for the murder of the early martyrs unless he had been married and had children (Acts 26:10). His comment that he wished all men to be in his marital position (1 Cor. 7:8) has another slant in this case: he wished them to have had the marriage experience, but be in the single state. As a leading Pharisee, his wife would have been from an appropriate background. " ...for whom I have suffered the loss of all things" would then have been written with a sideways glance back at his wife, children he never saw... all that might have been. In gripping autobiography, Paul relates the innocent days when (as a child) he lived without the knowledge of law and therefore sin. But then, the concept of commandments registered with him; and this "wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. 7:8). "Concupiscence" is a conveniently archaic word for lust; and in the thinking and writing of Paul, the Greek *epithumia* is invariably used in a sexual context.

As an ardent Pharisee, with all the charisma of the unashamed extremist and evidently rising leader, it is almost certain that the inevitable interplay of sexuality and spirituality, of flesh and spirit, would have played itself out. And after conversion, the inevitable attraction of the committed missionary would have been evident; not least in the charismatic preaching of a new and ultimately true religion which was largely comprised of young / middle aged females (according to contemporary historians). No wonder Paul's slanderers made him out to be immoral; it was the easiest slur to cast. At Thessalonica he was even accused of preaching solely in order to get the praise and financial support of women (so 1 Thess. 2:3-12 implies). And as a man, with the commandments of God producing in him all manner of concupiscence, he would not have lightly shrugged off all these temptations. If this "thorn in the flesh" became particularly strong at a certain time, this could be seen as reference to the beginning of some illicit relationship.

And yet it cannot be overlooked that as outlined above, there does seem to be an evident link

between the thorn in the flesh and literal blindness (Gal. 4:10-13 = 2 Cor. 12:7). The explanation may be that because of Paul's wandering eyes and mind, his sight was severely impaired. He likens his ailment to a man plucking out his eyes with his own hands (Gal. 4:15), using language unmistakably recalling the Lord's command to pluck out, with ones' own hands, the eyes that offend, that we might enter the Kingdom. The command of Mt. 5:28,29 is in the very context of lustful thinking and looking. In His desire to save us, God has His way. Paul saw that his weakness for women would have cost him the Kingdom, and that therefore the Lord had plucked out his eyes. He had been given a thorn in his flesh spiritually; and so the Lord had given him a thorn in the flesh physically, that he might conquer that spiritual weakness. The other reference to plucking out the offending eye is in Mt. 18:9, in a context regarding the paramount need not to offend the little ones. Could it be that Paul's limitation was to protect some of his converts from stumbling? And so with us, the offending eye or limb must be plucked out or cut off; and if we will not do it, the Lord will: either now, by grace, or in the final destruction of condemnation. We either fall on the stone of the Lord and are broken now, or that stone will fall upon us, and grind us to powder. We either chose the baptism of fire now, or we will be consumed anyway by the fire of judgment. The logic of devotion, self-control and self-sacrifice is powerfully appealing.

God gave Paul his thorn in the flesh. Whilst God tempts no man- for temptation is a process internal to human nature- He may still have a hand in controlling the situations which lead to temptation. Hence the Lord bid us pray that the Father lead us not into temptation. Each of us has his own specific human weaknesses. When the apostle wrote of shedding *the* sin which doth so easily beset us (Heb. 12:1), he may have been suggesting that we each have our own specific weakness to overcome. This is certainly a comfort to us in our spiritual struggles. We aren't alone in them. They were given to us. We aren't alone with our nature. The purpose and plan of God for us is articulated even through the darkest nooks of our very essential being. Understanding this should make us the more patient with our brethren, whose evident areas of weakness are not ours.

*A messenger of Satan-* The Satan in view is the Jewish opposition to Paul's missionary work. An envoy / messenger / representative of that Satan had been allowed by God to operate in order to stop Paul being over exalted. And yet the work of this "thorn" was a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. It is quite possible that the Lord's work suffers because He has to work in such a way so as not to allow our pride to arise to such a point that we are turned out of the way to salvation. If we had developed to the point that we were not so prone to pride or other weaknesses, His work would prosper the more. There is the implication that one particular "messenger" of the Jewish Satan organized the persecution of Paul – Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14–15; 1 Tim. 1:20). The link between the messenger of Satan in 2 Corinthians 12:7 and those of 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 indicates that this person was a member of the ecclesia also. A primary application of the "man of sin" passage in 2 Thess. 2 may well be to this individual being in the temple (i.e. the church – 1 Tim. 3:15) of God, "whose coming is after the working of (the Jewish) Satan" (2 Thess. 2:9). This person could apparently do miracles – as could the Jewish Christians in the early church (Heb. 6:4–6). This man of sin is "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3), a phrase used to describe Judas (Jn. 17:12). This suggests an allusion back to Judas, and indicates that the man of sin might also be a Jew, who was within the ecclesia, as Judas was, but who betrayed Christ because he wanted the aims of Judaism to be fulfilled rather than those of Christ. The "day of Christ" referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3, before which time the man of sin must be developed, was primarily the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 – which again indicates a primary Jewish fulfilment of the "man of sin". Notice that organized Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching was very intense at Thessalonica

– Acts 17:5–13. The Lord Jesus could have returned in AD70 and therefore passages like 2 Thess. 2 had a possible fulfilment in the first century. His coming was delayed because the various preconditions were not met- so that such prophecies will be fulfilled in spirit but perhaps not to the letter in our last days.

The work of this messenger of Satan resulted in Paul developing the spiritual characteristic of humility. The Satan stopped Paul from being proud. Pride is produced by the Devil – 1 Timothy 3:6,7. So we have the situation where Satan stops the work of Satan. Again, this does not make sense under the traditional interpretation of Satan. Mark 7:20–23 says that pride is a result of our evil heart. Thus the trial brought on Paul by a person acting as a Satan to him stopped his evil desires – another use of the word “Satan” – from leading him into the sin of pride. “Satan” can be used to describe a man (e.g. Mt. 16:23) and the Greek word for messenger / angel can also apply to men (e.g. Mt. 11:10; Lk. 7:24; James 2:25). “Satan” may also refer to the adversarial Jewish system, and thus the messenger of Satan is most likely a man acting on behalf of the Jews.

Everywhere in Paul’s writings, as well as in Revelation, ‘Satan’ always has the definite article – apart from here. Likewise, this is the only time Paul uses the form *Satan* rather than his usual *satanas*. One reason for that could be that Paul is alluding to or quoting from known Jewish literature or ideas which mentioned a “messenger of Satan”. Another possibility is that he refers here to an Angel–Satan – for the Greek word translated “messenger” is also that for Angel. In this case, he saw himself as Job, suffering affliction from an Angel–adversary, in order to bring about his spiritual perfection. I have noted the similarities between Job and Paul elsewhere (See my *Bible Lives* Section 3-3-8).

*To harass me, that I should not be exalted too much-* Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor. 4:11 concerning how Paul right then was being harassed. The reference was to Jewish instigated opposition to his mission. “The messenger of Satan” is probably the same as the ministers of Satan referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, which we have interpreted as the Judaizers in the early church who were discrediting Paul and seeking to undermine Christianity. The buffeting done by this “messenger of Satan” is defined in v. 10: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions...” (i.e. in my thorn in the flesh which God will not take away). Note the parallel between the thorn and those things it caused. The reproaches refer to the Jewish ministers of Satan saying things like, “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10), as previously explained. The necessities and persecutions quite clearly refer to the constant waves of persecutions he received by the Jews which the book of Acts describe. This would fit the language of “buffeting” – implying physical discomfort that he experienced periodically. The infirmities would refer to the ill health which his persecutions by the Jews no doubt resulted in – being beaten until he appeared dead (Acts 14:19) must have done permanent damage, as would receiving “forty stripes save one” five times and thrice being “beaten with rods” because of the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24–25). Thus the passage probably refers to an organized program of persecution of Paul by the Jews which began after the vision of 2 Corinthians 12:1–4, from which time he dates his experience of the thorn in the flesh. It was from this time that Paul’s zealous preaching to the Gentiles no doubt stimulated the Jews to more violent opposition to him. Their complaint against him was often that he was adulterating the Jewish religion by allowing Gentiles the chance of salvation by what he preached.

12:8- see on Mt. 26:39.

*Concerning this thing-* The Greek could as well be translated 'this person', reinforcing the possibility that one particular envoy from the Jewish satan is in view. This singular "thing" is paralleled with the string of afflictions listed in :10 which were all brought upon Paul due to

the Jewish opposition to his ministry: "weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses...". They were all orchestrated not simply by the "satan", the Jewish system, but by a specific envoy of it. It would not be going too far to think that the man of sin envisaged in 2 Thess. 2 refers to this same individual. He was envisaged as taking power in the temple and being destroyed at the Lord's return. I would say that this was one of the possible scenarios which could have been fulfilled if there had been enough spiritual fruit to have enabled the Lord's return in AD70. There was not and therefore His return has been delayed until our last days, and the "man of sin" will have a slightly different fulfilment.

*I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me-* The Greek word for "thorn" can mean a "stake" – as was used for crucifying. This was to buffet Paul, as Christ was buffeted at the crucifixion (Mt. 26:67). Like Christ in His last hours, Paul prayed for the buffeting of Satan to be removed (2 Cor. 12:8 cp. Lk. 22:42). Paul "besought the Lord thrice" for this and so did Jesus in the Garden (Mt. 26:39, 42, 44). Also like Christ, Paul's prayer for release was not granted, ultimately for his spiritual good. Thus it is implied that because of Paul's sufferings at the hands of the Jewish Satan throughout his life, his whole life was "crucified with Christ" in that he experienced constantly the sufferings Christ had in His last few hours. This is exactly what we see in Acts 26:18.

12:9 *And he said to me-* We are left to speculate as to whether this was the answer Paul perceived in the lack of answer to his prayer, or whether the Lord actually spoke this to Paul in a vision. We can interpret God's silence as His word to us.

*My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness-* This is an allusion to the LXX of Gen. 33:11, where Jacob has been made weak with his thigh dislocated, in order to learn that God's grace is sufficient for him, and he needs literally nothing else. Paul would be saying that he has been taught (and learned) the same lesson as Jacob. Strength being perfected through human weakness is the whole lesson of the cross (13:4). It could be that the example of the Lord was the answer Paul received- perhaps there was no vision or statement from the Lord to Paul, but he deduced the Lord's word to him from the cross of his Lord. "My power" is interpreted in the next sentence as "the power of Christ". This would confirm such a line of interpretation. By sharing in the weakness of Christ, in His sufferings, then God's resurrection power shall be manifested in us. Paul has used the same word for "weakness" in saying earlier that human weakness shall finally be changed by experiencing a resurrection after the pattern of Christ's (1 Cor. 15:43).

*Therefore most gladly will I rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me-* As suggested above, connection with the weakness / suffering of Christ means that His power shall be manifest in us (13:4 "For he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in him; but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you").

Paul earnestly asked three times for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed (:9). The wonder is that he only asked three times. He knew it was for his spiritual good, and he believed this. Moses asked at least twice (maybe three times?) for him to be allowed to enter the land (Dt. 3:25; Ps. 90); but the answer was basically the same as to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee". The fact Moses had been forgiven and was at one with his God was so great that his physical entering the land was irrelevant. And for Paul likewise, temporal blessings in this life are nothing compared to the grace of forgiveness which we have received (Ex. 34:9).

12:10 *Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong-* It is in our very

weakness, the weakness of the man made to realize the weight of his own mediocrity and failure to achieve, that *the power of God breaks forth*. Reading through his letters, it is apparent that Paul saw himself as two people: a natural man, a Jew from Tarsus, a Roman citizen living in the Mediterranean world... and also, a man in Christ. He speaks of how “I bruise myself”, as if the one Paul was boxing against the other Paul (1 Cor. 9:27 RVmg.). This is why in this autobiographical passage in 2 Cor. 12, he says of himself: “I knew a man in Christ”, who had great visions 14 years previously (at the council of Jerusalem of Acts 15), and who was subsequently given a “thorn in the flesh”. “Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory”, he writes (2 Cor. 12:5), as if separating himself from this more spiritually exalted man who saw these visions. Paul is surely telling us that he sees himself as two people. He makes the point clearly: “I will not be a fool... I am become a fool” (:6,11). He was the greatest apostle; although he was nothing (:11). This language comes to a crisis in 12:10: “When I [i.e. the natural Paul] am weak, then am I [the spiritual Paul] strong”.

12:11- see on 2 Cor. 11:5.

*I have become foolish. You compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you. For in nothing was I behind the super apostles, though I am nothing-* Paul has written that it is inappropriate to commend ourselves or get involved in comparisons amongst ourselves. But carried away in a desperate desire to prove himself to them in their terms, which was surely rooted in love for them, he has done just that. But he now blames them for his lack of self control. And yet even in 1 Corinthians, Paul clearly had a tendency to boast: "For it is better for me to die, than that anyone should make my boasting void" (1 Cor. 9:15). Perhaps he would have been better to just admit his weakness here rather than blaming it on others. And we can take a lesson from that in many other aspects of life apart from a tendency to boast.

12:12 *Truly the signs of an apostle were done among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works-* Paul rightly considers his patience with the Corinthians as a sign even greater than all the miracles he had worked amongst them. We recall that the Acts record doesn't mention all these miracles performed by Paul in his 18 months in Corinth- reflective of the inspired record's lack of emphasis upon the miraculous element. The message was and is all important. All these miracles were done, but the Corinthians now doubted Paul's credentials as a Divinely approved apostle. Likewise Israel saw miracles daily in the wilderness through the provision of manna and water- but like the Corinthians, they did not believe. And so the role of miracles in eliciting real faith is demonstrated to be minimal. Not only does Pentecostalism need to consider this fact; but we too need not wish that God would miraculously intervene in human life in order to strengthen our faith. In the long run, even in the medium term, that is not what is achieved by the miraculous. The message, the Spirit within the heart, real relationship with the living, risen Lord Jesus- this is of the essence.

12:13 *For in what way were you made inferior to the other churches, except that I was not a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong-* Paul's sarcasm here will hardly win him the desired result- the return of the Corinthians both to him and to the truth of the Lord Jesus. We have here an example of his emotionally charged state shining through in the letter, especially when we recall how he began this section by writing that he would now appeal to them in the meek and gentle spirit of the Lord Jesus (10:1). The "burden" in view appears to be financial- he had not asked them for material support, although he had been in need of it, and this was now misinterpreted as meaning that he had treated them as inferior to the other churches, especially those in Macedonia, who had supported him whilst he had lived in Corinth. Whichever way Paul turned, no matter how he argued, the Corinthians were falling out of love with him. And his desperation shows. The whole record here is a worked example of



how relationships amongst baptized believers can go sour, and even if one party is innocent, the psychological processes will continue until there is a permanent rift.

12:14 *Behold, this is the third time I have been ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you-* The "burden" appears to be of asking for money, according to the second part of the verse. We could even read this statement as Paul saying 'Forget about all I wrote previously about your giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. I don't seek even that now'. This retreat from a previously held and strongly argued position is typical of the lover who is losing the beloved being willing to make any compromise. The "third time" doesn't have to mean that he was planning his third visit to them; rather does he mean that twice before he has planned a visit, but changed his plan because he realized that if he came, they would not be spiritually ready for him, and the Spirit would lead him to judge them. And now a third time he was contemplating making a visit to them, aware of the same possible negative outcome.

*For I do not seek your things, but you. For the children ought not to save up for the parents, but the parents for the children-* Paul was seeking 'them', their salvation, their relationship with him. He had earlier advised them to "save up" for his coming by putting aside something each week, so that they could present it to him as an offering for his Jerusalem Poor Fund (1 Cor. 16:2). But he appears to now be saying that they needn't do even that. They could forget all he had written about the Fund. He wanted by all means to preserve his relationship with them as his children. He even takes some false guilt over the matter by saying that it wasn't right of a father to ask his children to save up for him- it ought to be the other way around. Yet such passionate love comes just a verse after the bitter sarcasm of :13. Indeed this is a flow of consciousness being written and recorded under inspiration, giving us a unique insight into Paul's thought and feelings, and enabling us to thereby fully enter into the tragic falling out of love which happened between Paul and Corinth.

12:15- see on Lk. 15:24; Rom. 9:3.

*And I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less by you because of this?-* Paul's spending and being spent was for "you" (:14), "your souls", i.e. yourselves. He refers to their salvation; not because he believed in an immortal soul, but in the sense that he understood that salvation is personal. They themselves, as persons or selves / souls, could be saved and he was prepared to sacrifice all for this end. He did so inspired by the Lord, who for our sakes became a pauper in his death on the cross (8:9). Confronted with spiritual weakness we can so easily just turn away, considering it 'their problem'. But Paul physically and mentally expended himself for them, motivated by the Lord's love on the cross. He sets us a huge challenge. And the more abundantly he poured out his love, the less they loved him. This is really the classic, tragic final stage of the falling out of love process, all recorded in great detail for our learning. They were guilty, in the bigger picture; but the situation was made the more painful for everyone by Paul's way of seeing them as he wished them to be, rather than more realistically facing up to the fact that his hopes and expectations of them were not going to be realized.

Paul had enough self-knowledge to say that his love for Corinth was growing more and more (although this was expressed in an ever-increasing concern for their doctrinal soundness); he told the Thessalonians likewise that his love for them was increasing and abounding (2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 3:12). And Paul could therefore exhort the Philippians and Thessalonians to also increase and abound in their love for each other, after Paul's example (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:12). Paul's love for his brethren grew and grew, *even though they didn't notice this*. The 'you don't know just how much I love you' syndrome is surely one of the cruellest in human

experience. A growth in true love, true concern, isn't always apparent to our brethren. But if our growth is after Paul's pattern then this will be our experience too.

12:16 *But granting that I myself did not burden you, you say I was crafty, and got the better of you by deceit-* Throughout Corinthians Paul is quoting phrases from their allegations and questions, but it is not always exactly apparent. Perhaps using quotation marks we could translate: "Nevertheless, "being crafty", I "caught you with guile"". The New Testament so often seems to mix interpretation with Old Testament quotation; here especially we need to imagine the use of quotation marks. Given these feelings about Paul by "you", the church at Corinth (for there is no hint that only a small subgroup is being addressed), we conclude that his earlier joy at their love for him, and his confidence in them in all things (7:4) was written on the cusp of emotion, making them be in his own mind what he hoped they could be. The imagery of craft and deceit recall the serpent in Eden; this would explain why Paul has earlier claimed that it is the Jewish false teachers who were like this, and not him (11:3). Paul's lack of demand for material support from them was being read by them now as an example of craft- because he wanted to only get money out of them in the longer term. When relationships deteriorate to this extent, every act or word past or present, no matter how sincere and loving, is going to be misinterpreted. Perhaps this whole miserable account is recorded for us as comfort- that when these things happen to us in our relationships, it's not a sign of failure on our part. For Paul went through the same.

12:17 *But did I really take advantage of you by any one of them whom I have sent to you?-* The fact Paul had not asked them to materially support him was being twisted by some conspiracy theory to mean that when Titus was sent to them, he was really working for Paul in order to get cash out of them for Paul personally. Yet in chapter 7, Paul has claimed that Titus was much encouraged by their attitude, and he himself was 'over the moon' with confidence in them because of the good news brought by Titus. But the visit of Titus was clearly interpreted as Paul craftily taking advantage of them; and we conclude again that his statements about the Titus visit in chapter 7 were his own wild over interpretation of a few ambiguous words. If Paul was capable of that, even with Spirit guidance, we are too.

12:18 *I urged Titus to go and I sent the brother with him. Did Titus take any advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?-* The accusation was apparently that Titus was Paul's instrument and part of his crafty plan to extract money from them for his own benefit. Paul agrees that Titus had visited Corinth as a result of his 'urging', perhaps implying that Titus himself had doubted the wisdom of the visit. And Paul agrees that Titus shared Paul's spirit to the extent that effectively, his visit was Paul's visit. They 'took the same steps'. But he goes on to say that his spirit was solely to upbuild them (:19). Paul has elsewhere explained that he had changed his plans to personally visit them because he feared that the Spirit would lead him to severely judge the Corinthians if he visited them. But here he says that the visit of Titus was effectively Paul's visit, because they took "the same steps". Both Titus and Paul were motivated by the same Spirit and therefore their steps were identical. This same association of the Spirit with "steps" is found in Gal. 5:25: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in step with the Spirit". His refusal to personally visit Corinth was therefore surely playing some kind of game with God's Spirit, a form of brinkmanship. He and Titus were led by the same Spirit and therefore the visit of Titus was as it were the visit of Paul. They took the same steps as they were in step with the same Spirit- for "the same spirit... steps" refers to the Spirit and steps of the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21 "That you should follow His steps"). But Paul did not go personally because he feared the Spirit would lead him to judge and condemn the Corinthians for their unspirituality. Perhaps Paul would have done better to follow the Spirit's lead and recognize Corinth for who they were, and judge

them as the Spirit led him to- rather than wilfully misinterpret the reception of Titus by the Corinthians (see on 2 Cor. 7) and hold on to his own obsessively positive view of them against all evidence.

12:19 *You think all this time that we are excusing ourselves to you. But in the sight of God we speak in Christ-* "All this time" is a significant phrase, in that it means that Paul's exuberant rejoicing at the Corinthians' loyalty and warm reception of Titus (2 Cor. 7) was him believing these things in his own mind, having the love which turned hope and fantasy into reality in his own imaginations. As often demonstrated, this letter is a flow of consciousness piece of writing, recorded under inspiration, allowing us a unique insight into the feelings of Paul- a man who so loved the weakest of his converts and lived out in psychological reality the truths expressed in his great love poem of 1 Cor. 13. All along, "all this time", they had been sceptical, and Paul knew it; but he had the love that hoped and believed all things.

*All things, beloved, are for your upbuilding-* Paul had earlier written exactly this to the Corinthians, when urging that "all things be done unto upbuilding" (1 Cor. 14:26). The recurring theme of 1 Corinthians was that the upbuilding of others should be paramount in the Christian life; and it was "upbuilding" which the way of the Spirit was all about. And Paul can say that it was this Spirit which motivated both Titus and himself (:18). It was God who was upbuilding the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:9 s.w.), but He operates in this work through human agents- every willing member of the body of Christ. All and every effort to upbuild others will have His blessing and we will sense that we are His vehicle in the work. But as with the case at Corinth, this is not to say that those we work with will necessarily respond.

12:20 *For I fear, lest by any means, when I come, I should find you not as I would wish, and should myself be found by you such as you would not wish. Lest by any means there should be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder-* The issues Paul had raised in 1 Corinthians had not really been dealt with; the extreme sexual immorality and use of church prostitutes had not been addressed. And yet he still places issue like gossip, belligerent attitudes and division as of primary concern, even before the sexual issues he will raise in :21. We noted on 1 Corinthians that he had done the same there. The presence of these things would mean that he would act towards them in an unpleasant way- through the direct judgment of the Spirit. The sober warning to us all is that the wrong attitudes listed here, so commonly encountered in church life, warrant direct Divine judgment just as much as the sexual immorality of the next verse. The list of wrong behaviours listed here corresponds with the list of works of the flesh in Gal. 5:20. We noted on :18 that Paul feels that he and Titus are walking according to the Spirit, not the flesh, and there is a connection made with Gal. 5:25. Paul is therefore continuing his great theme to the Corinthians- that their problems with the flesh all arose from a refusal to allow the Spirit to operate.

12:21 *I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you-* Paul has in view that the Spirit may well lead him to severely judge them. But to be used in that way would be a very humbling experience for Paul. Any disciplining of others should likewise be a humbling for us, rather than any expression of pride or superiority (as in Gal. 6:1). The idea of being humbled is exactly that used by Paul regarding the Lord's death (Phil. 2:8 s.w.). Paul had earlier been humbled in Corinth, when he was left destitute and yet never asked the Corinthians for material help (2 Cor. 11:7). For Paul to meet the Corinthians and have to judge them as unspiritual would be humbling for Paul, as he had boasted about their strengths to others and inflated them in his own mind. To have to judge them for not being like that would be humbling for Paul.

*And I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality and sensuality that they have practiced-* Paul had earlier urged

them to mourn over those they had to discipline for sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:2). All such discipline should be done in genuine mourning. The sexual issues raised with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians are not raised by Paul in 2 Corinthians until this point. He has been giving them exaggerated praise for separating from the immoral man of 1 Cor. 5, and trying to get them to donate to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. And he has written in very inflated terms about their devotion to him and the Lord in chapters 7-9. Through all that, he has not raised with them the obvious issue as to why they had not dealt with their issues of sexual immorality. Now he has apparently given up any hope of getting any donations out of them (see on :14) and is realizing the reality of things with them, he returns to these more obvious concerns. Paul knew they were impenitent of these sexual issues- and yet speaks so glowingly of them in chapter 7 and elsewhere. Yet again I have to make the point that he was so in love with them that he wrote on the cusp of emotion, and the inspired record has preserved his feelings and flow of consciousness- for our learning.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *This is the third time I am coming to you*- Paul connects this "third time" with the need for two or three witnesses. Is he trying to argue that the three witnesses against Corinth equate with his three visits to them? For each time the Spirit would have witnessed against them. Here we have an example of the liberal interpretation of Old Testament passages; for the requirement of two or three witnesses obviously refers to two or three separate witnesses, and not one person witnessing the same behaviour two or three times. Such out of context allusion is common in the Bible and in rabbinic interpretations. This doesn't justify us in treating the text likewise (seeing we are not inspired), but it should also serve as a foil to the claim that context and logical corollary are all important in Biblical interpretation.

*At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*- The quotation from Dt. 19:15 suggests that the consequences of the trial would be serious, perhaps involving death or being cut off from the Lord's people. Such severe punishments could be executed by the apostles in the first century; we think of Ananias and Sapphira. The same words are used as in Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences; but they are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6).

13:2- see on 1 Cor. 15:10.

*I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them*- The enumeration of the visits is because Paul is viewing his two or three visits as the two or three witnesses against Corinth (see on :1). This threat of judgment for unrepented of moral sin had therefore hung over the Corinthians ever since the time of 1 Corinthians. This makes Paul's expression of confidence in them "in all things" in chapter 7 rather questionable. He appears to have written that on the cusp of emotion, obsessed with the possibility of their giving to the Jerusalem Poor Fund to the extent that he overlooked their unresolved gross moral failings. "I will not spare" calls for comparison with how Paul had earlier aborted a planned visit to Corinth in order to "spare" them judgment (2 Cor. 1:23). There is no record however that Paul ever made the threatened visit. The silence of the record is intentional, as we are left to struggle with the issues of whether patience with apostasy is to be limitless, or whether we are at times to act; and with the obvious question as to how far we can take precedent from an apostle who had the Spirit gifts of discernment and judgment.

13:3 *Seeing you seek proof that Christ speaks in me (who toward you is not weak but is powerful in you)*- Gk. "of the Christ that speaks in me". "Toward you" could as well be rendered 'among / within you'. His threatened judgment of them would be the final proof that indeed, he is of Christ. His words were those of Christ. And yet 2 Corinthians is a flow of consciousness letter, recording the emotions and gut reactions of Paul with all the contradictions and paradoxes which there are within human emotions. His final judgment of them, however, would be the word of Christ toward them. Again Paul returns to his favourite theme with the Corinthians- that Christ is indeed potentially within them through the gift of His Spirit / presence in their hearts (1:22; 5:5). They had not actualized it, they acted as if He was "weak" within them; but if only they would, they would perceive a perfect congruence between the Spirit in them and them and that within Paul. For Christ at least potentially is all and within all those baptized into Him.

13:4 *For he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in him; but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you*- Paul's much mocked "weakness" in the flesh was on account of his identification with the crucified

but glorified Christ. Because we are in Christ, His death was not an isolated historical event. We also are weak *with* Him, on account of having been baptized into Him (2 Cor. 13:4 RV), such is the identity between us and Him. When Paul reflected upon his own sickness [which the RVmg. calls his stake / cross in the flesh], he could say in all sober truth that he gloried in his weakness, because his identity with the weakness of Christ crucified also thereby identified him with the strength and power of the risen Lord (2 Cor. 11:9). The same spirit of Christ which is within us now is the basis upon which we shall be immortalized in a bodily form at the last day. Rom. 8:11 says this explicitly: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you [now], He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall [then, at the last day] give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you [now]". This is why if we do not have the Spirit of Christ transforming us now, we are none of His both now and eternally. That same "power of God" was as equally available to the Corinthians as it was to Paul; he would live eternally with Christ on account of God's power "toward [within] you". All accusation and answers to them would unnecessary if they would only perceive that the same Spirit worked within Paul as was within them. It was Judaism which did not know "the power of God" (Mt. 22:29) and their influence led the Corinthians to likewise not recognize that power which was potentially within them by the Spirit.

13:5- see on 2 Tim. 4:6.

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*- The Greek grammar suggests an emphasis upon "yourselves". They were to test themselves, rather than putting Christ and Paul to the test. As explained on :4, if they were in touch with the Spirit of Christ within them, then they would perceive that it was the same Spirit within Paul. All examination of his legitimacy as a brother and apostle would therefore be unnecessary, because the answer would be found within them, in their own hearts and consciences where the Spirit ought to have been active (see on 5:11). This is why Paul urges them to realize that Christ was within them. And if they did not know that, then they had failed the test.

If we cannot examine ourselves and know that Christ is really in us, then we are reprobate; we "have failed" (2 Cor. 13:5 G.N.B.). Self-examination is therefore one of those barriers across our path in life which makes us turn to the Kingdom or to the flesh. If we can't examine ourselves and see that Christ is in us and that we have therefore that great salvation in Him; we've failed. I wouldn't be so bold as to throw down this challenge to any of us in exhortation. But Paul does. It's a powerful, even terrible, logic.

The NT speaks of "the faith in Christ" or "the doctrine of Christ". "The faith", the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel, is all epitomized in a real person. To know we are "in the faith" is to know that Christ is in us (2 Cor. 13:5). "The faith", the set of doctrines we must continue believing, is paralleled with the man Christ Jesus. Jesus was "the word made flesh", and "the word" very often refers to the word of the Gospel rather than the whole Bible. The life which the corpus of doctrine brings forth is essentially the life and living of the man Christ Jesus. He was and is the supreme and living example of the living out of all the doctrines. It has been well said by Frank Birch that "Faith is not simply the intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrine. Faith is ultimately shown in a person, the man, Christ Jesus".

There is a question which cuts right to the bone of each of us; right through the debates and semantics which increasingly shroud our Christian lives. 'Can we be completely certain that should Christ return now, we will be in the Kingdom?'. Posing this question provokes widely different response- from 'Of course not! How presumptuous!', to that of the present writer: 'By God's grace- yes!'. We can't say ultimately because we may fall away in the future- but we should be able to assess the spiritual state we are in at this present point in time. If we cannot do this, then our salvation is very much at risk; as Paul bluntly told Corinth: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). They sought proof that Christ was in Paul (2 Cor. 13:3), yet he challenges them to know whether Christ is in them personally. The implication was that if they could not judge that, they were in no position to ask whether Christ was in Paul- or any other. This is vintage Paul; the logic is irresistible.

13:6- see on Mt. 3:11.

*But I hope you shall know that we have not failed the test-* Paul's hope as ever is for their repentance, through recognizing the Spirit of Christ within them and walking according to the Spirit. If they did that, as explained on :4 and :5, they would perceive that the same Spirit was within Paul, and he too had not failed the test but was legitimate.

13:7 *Now we pray to God that you do no evil. Not so we may appear to have met the test, but so you may do what is right-* This prayer raises the question as to whether our prayers can influence the moral behaviour of others. And surely we can have such influence, otherwise such prayer would be unnecessary and pointless. In the final unenterable algorithm of salvation, there is a role played by the prayers and faith of third parties. when the Lord saw the faith of the friends, he forgave the sins of the paralyzed man (Mk. 2:5). In His wisdom, God has set up the whole algorithm to include these factors. This is why we like Paul should continually be in prayer and concern for our erring brethren, and why we should invite their prayers for our salvation and forgiveness. This is one reason why we need fellowship with each other- real fellowship, sharing our real spiritual situations with each other, and not simply spending a few hours each week in the same hall going through well established rituals which salve our religious consciences.

David's requests in areas apart from forgiveness and salvation largely centred around his desire for God to grant spiritual help to others. There are many examples of praying for God to help others spiritually: 2 Kings 19:4; 2 Chron. 30:18; Job 42:10; Rom. 10:1; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 1:9,19; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Jn. 5:16. Surely this was also the spirit behind Abraham's intercession for Lot to be saved out of Sodom. Granted a certain modicum of spirituality in those being prayed for, Noah, Daniel and Job all delivered the souls of others by their prayerful righteousness (Ez. 14:14). When we pray for others, God sees it as them praying (if they have a modicum of spirituality), in the same way as when the Lord Jesus prays for us, He interprets what He knows to be our spirit to God, recognizing that we don't know how to pray in words as we should (Jer. 11:14). The Lord Jesus prayed for us concerning spiritual issues which at the time we did not understand (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 17:9,15,20), and Paul especially seems to have grasped this example.

*Though we may seem to have failed-* The idea may be as Vine suggests: "We pray God that you do no evil, not in order that your good conduct may attest the excellence of our teaching and example, so that we shall be approved; but in order that you may do what is good, thus rendering it impossible for us to prove our apostolic authority by administering discipline. In

that case we shall be as men unapproved". We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. And thus Paul can say that "we be *as* reprobates" (2 Cor. 13:7), using a Greek word elsewhere translated "castaway", "rejected", in the context of being rejected at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 9:27; Heb. 6:8). Yet he says in the preceding verse that he is most definitely *not* reprobate (2 Cor. 13:6). Here we have the paradox: knowing that we are not and by grace will not be rejected, and yet feeling and reasoning as if we are.

13:8 *For we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth*- If our motivation is for the salvation of others to God's glory, whatever choices we make in exercising that conscience cannot be ultimately against that final truth of eternal salvation. The Paul-Corinth had focused upon specifics- whether he was correct to ask them to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund, right or wrong in his attitude to taking material support from them, justified or not in considering himself their spiritual father etc. But these questions are merely cosmetic. The essence comes down to our motivation, and if that is pure, then we cannot be legitimately accused of doing anything "against the truth". The tension between *kata* ["against"] and *huper* ["for"] is to be found in Mk. 9:40, to which Paul surely alludes: "He that is not against us is for us". God likewise is "for" us and therefore nothing and nobody can be "against" us (Rom. 8:31); and that same positive spirit is found in His ultimate usage of all we seek to do towards the salvation of others to His glory.

13:9 *For we rejoice, when we are weak and you are strong*- The 'weakness' could mean that if they were truly strong in the Lord, then Paul would be 'weak' to administer discipline. *We* are weak and *you* are strong connects to the paradox established in 12:10, the only place where these words for "weak" and "strong" occur. Paul had learned that when *he* was weak, then *he* was strong. But now he speaks of how he wishes *his* weakness to be *their* strength. He wished the strength he experienced from his weakness to be shared with and experienced by them. The strength he gained through weakness was the strength of Christ; and he wished that same strength to be experienced by them. And he believed that his sufferings for them in his weakness could actually lead to their spiritual strengthening (see on :7). The same ideas are expressed in :4, where Paul says that the power of God which shall energize him is the same "power of God toward you".

*This we also pray for, even your perfecting*- Their perfecting was perhaps the outcome Paul wished to arise out of his visit to them; for he uses the same word in 1 Thess. 3:10 of how he longed to visit the Thessalonians and "perfect that which is lacking in your faith". He would far rather that be the outcome to his visit than judgment unto condemnation. Again we see that the efforts of a third party, in this case through visiting weaker believers, could result in their spiritual strengthening towards salvation (see on :7). God is able to "perfect" the faith and spirituality of His children (Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 5:10); and this surely is done by the work of the Spirit on the hearts of believers. This is why Paul concludes by wishing that this process of perfecting [s.w. "mending"] would be permitted by them in their hearts (:11); and connected with this wish is his final desire that the *koinonia*, the participation ["fellowship"] of the Holy Spirit would be experienced by them.

13:10 *For this cause I write these things while absent, that I may not when present with you deal sharply with you, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down*- "Deal sharply" may be a technical term for a rebuke from the Holy Spirit; it is only elsewhere used in Tit. 1:13 "rebuke them sharply". If they did not change, then Paul's Spirit power would have to be used to 'cast them down'. But the Spirit was given for their building up [more than] their casting down. We are surely correct to read in this ellipsis. 'Not A but B' doesn't have to mean 'not at all B'; but rather 'More for B than for



A'. Paul was desperately hoping that they would change so that his visit would not result in judgment for them.

13:11- see on 1 Cor. 11:18.

*Finally, brothers, farewell. Be perfected-* Being perfected by the Lord's ongoing work with us is in view in Lk. 6:40 and 1 Pet. 5:10. He is indeed active in human hearts by the Spirit. See on :9 *Your perfecting*. There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. "Be you therefore perfect" has always been hard to understand (Mt. 5:48). Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message.

*Be comforted. Be of the same mind. Live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you-* The *parakleo* or comfort in view was that of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. This is Paul's final appeal for them to allow the Spirit given in their hearts at baptism to work and transform them (1:22; 5:5). The "same mind" appealed for is not asking them to have identical positions on everything. Rather it is an appeal to accept the mind of Christ, the Spirit. As demonstrated in notes :4 and :9, this was the real basis for unity between the Corinthians and Paul; and between them and the Lord Jesus. Allowing the work of the Spirit in their hearts would empower them to live in peace with each other, as they were seeking to emulate the same one mind [that of the Spirit, of the Lord Jesus]. And through this they would experience the presence of the God of love and peace.

13:12- see on Rom. 16:16.

*Greet one another with a holy kiss-* According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the early church kissed each other at the breaking of bread meeting. This would have been the one time in the week that the church gathered together, as typically many would have been at work, as a fair proportion of the converts were apparently slaves. This was the time when the letters from Paul would be read.

13:13 *All the saints greet you-* Paul was writing from Macedonia, where he claimed the brethren would be disappointed if Corinth didn't come through on the promise to support the Jerusalem Poor Fund. All the same, they sent their greetings to these weaker brethren.

13:14 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all-* Paul's parting statement is an appeal for them to allow the gift of the Spirit to be with them. "Grace" is *charis*, 'gift'. The gift of the Lord Jesus is the Comforter, the Spirit given to every baptized believer in Him- including the Corinthians (1:22; 5:5). Despite having received it, they were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). There is a fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14) in the sense that all who live the same spiritually-centred life will thereby be bound together in a powerful and inevitable fellowship. When, for example, two Christian mothers strike up conversation about the difficulty of raising children in this present evil world, when two brethren talk about the difficulties of living as Christ would in today's business world... there is, right there, in those almost casual conversations, the fellowship of the spirit. It isn't just a social connection because we belong to the same denomination.

Paul's farewell is no standard wish for their general wellbeing; it is a desire that they allow this gift to be with them. This is the fellowship or participation of the Holy Spirit in their lives which was and is the key to all spiritual progress. The "all" in "be with you all" is the last word, but is significant- for there were some without the knowledge of God, deeply in sin and now ignorant of the basic Gospel they had once espoused. But still Paul wished the activity of the Spirit in their hearts; he was not writing to some subgroup of more committed believers at Corinth. It was and is the only hope for transformation towards salvation.

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)*- Consider how in Galatians Paul uses so many negatives, as if his passion and almost rage at the false teachers is coming out: “An apostle *not* from men... the gospel preached by me is *not* man’s gospel... *nor* was I taught it... I did *not* confer with flesh and blood, I did *not* go up to Jerusalem... I do *not* lie... Titus was *not* compelled... to *false* brethren we did *not* yield... those ‘of repute’ added *nothing*” (Gal. 1:1,11,12,16,20; 2:3,4,6). The way he says “Ye have known God, or rather, are known of God” (Gal. 4:9) seems to indicate [through the “or rather...”] a very human and passionate touch in his writing, as if he was thinking out loud as he wrote. Throughout 2 Corinthians particularly his writing in places can be described as an inspired flow of consciousness.

Authority in spiritual ministry doesn't depend upon any human authorisation. Paul's authority is linked specifically to the fact God raised Jesus from the dead. That resurrection led to the great commission and the Lord's empowerment of all witness to Him as risen and exalted. But this empowerment is given not only to Paul. All demands for authorization of ministry, e.g. to perform baptisms or decide who to fellowship in the church, is therefore utterly missing the point. We are authorized by the Lord, and the great commission applies to us all. In any case, once we start arguing that only some are authorized to perform ministry, the question is raised as to *how* they are authorized. And the Bible is silent about that. All manner of secular power brokering philosophy comes into play, but Paul and anyone led by the Spirit of the risen Lord will have nothing to do with that.

1:2 *And all the brothers that are with me, to the churches of Galatia*- Those *sun* Paul may refer to brothers who supported Paul's position on the Law, which was going to be the burden of this letter. It was Paul who was the inspired author but he is making the point that there were other brethren who agreed with his position. The churches of Galatia could have referred to quite a few of the congregations Paul is recorded as founding in Acts; because he sees his responsibilities as being to his own converts and his letters are generally addressed to those he has converted. These groups were largely Gentiles. I have noted elsewhere, especially on Titus, Corinthians and 1 Timothy, that Gentile converts often brought with them immoral practices. Yet they became attracted to Judaism because their religious conscience could be more easily salved by obedience to a set of ritual requirements, and their more fundamental moral habits would then be left unquestioned. Legalism to this day remains incredibly attractive to those who subconsciously seek to justify themselves in immoral practices. This is why the Galatian letter begins with strong theological arguments against returning to the Law, and then moves on to tackle practical issues of immorality.

1:3 *Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ*- Although Paul is going to upbraid them, he sincerely wishes them, as no mere formality, the peace with God which comes from His grace, rather than legalistic obedience to Jewish laws.

1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world,*

*according to the will of our God and Father-* The Lord's death is presented as the supreme sin offering, which had an outcome in practice- separation from this present evil world. Judaism tacitly allowed the Gentile converts to remain effectively in that world, but with a conscience cosmetically salved by a few acts of ritual obedience. The purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world. To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. See on Gal. 6:14. Paul had his inspired mind on the phrase in the Lord's prayer which requests deliverance from evil. Clearly enough, Paul didn't understand "the evil" to be a personal cosmic Satan, but rather the moral "evil" of this world and those who seek to persecute believers.

Much of Paul's writing is understandable on various levels. In some places he makes allusions to contemporary Jewish writings and ideas – with which he was obviously very familiar given his background – in order to correct or deconstruct them. This is especially true with reference to Jewish ideas about Satan and supposedly sinful Angels ruling over this present world. The idea of deliverance from this present evil world or age is an example. As more and more Jewish writings of the time become more widely available, it becomes increasingly apparent that this is a major feature of Paul's writing. The Jewish writings all held to the teaching of the two ages, whereby this current age was supposed to be under the control of Satan and his angels, who would be destroyed in the future age, when Messiah would reign and Paradise would be restored on earth (see 1 Enoch 16.1; 18.16; 21.6; Jubilees 1.29; T. Moses 1.18; 12.4). Paul frequently uses terms used in the Jewish writings concerning the Kingdom age, the eschatological age, and applies them to the experience of Christian believers *right now*. When Heb. 2:14 states that Christ killed the Devil in His death on the cross, this is effectively saying that the future age has come. For the Jews expected the Devil to be destroyed only at the changeover to the future Kingdom age. In 4 Ezra, "This age" (4.27; 6.9; 7.12), also known as the "corrupt age" (4.11) stands in contrast to the "future age" (6.9; 8.1), the "greater age", the "immortal time" (7.119), the future time (8.52). 4 Enoch even claims that the changeover from this age to the future age occurs at the time of the final judgment, following the death of the Messiah and seven days of silence (7.29–44, 113). So we can see why Paul would plug in to these ideas. He taught that Christ died "in order to rescue us from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4; Rom 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22). Therefore if the old age has finished, that means Satan is no longer controlling things as the Jews believed. For they believed that Satan's spirits "will corrupt until the day of the great conclusion, until the great age is consummated, until everything is concluded (upon) the Watchers and the wicked ones" (1 Enoch 16:1, cf. 72:1). And Paul was pronouncing that the great age had been consummated in Christ, that the first century believers were those upon whom the end of the *aion* had come (1 Cor. 10:11).

1:5 *To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen-* Christianity seeks to give eternal glory to the Lord Jesus; this is what we shall be doing eternally, and we must begin now. But Judaism devalued the role of Messiah. And we too can usefully assess teachings according to how far they give glory to the Lord Jesus.

1:6 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you to the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-* Paul describes himself as having been called by God, by grace; and in this context he comments how *he* called the Galatians to the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6 cp. 15). His response to his calling of grace was to go out and preach, thereby calling men to that same grace, replicating in his preaching what God had done for him. True

preaching reflects a certain artless selflessness. And so here Paul writes of his preaching to the Galatians in the third person: "him [Paul] that called you into the grace of Christ" (Gal. 1:6 AV). And likewise he talks about himself while at the Jerusalem conference, where he was given so clearly the ministry of converting the Gentiles, as if he hardly identifies himself with himself: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago... I knew such a man... of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I will not glory" (2 Cor. 12:1-4- the context makes it clear that Paul refers to himself, seeing that he was the one given the thorn in the flesh as a result of the revelations given to this "man"). In 1 Thess. 1:5 Paul could have written: 'We came with the Gospel', but instead he uses the more awkward construction: 'Our Gospel came...'. He, Paul, was subsumed beneath the essence of his life work- the preaching of the Gospel.

And yet we could also argue that Paul had a way of turning things rather too personally. They had deserted the grace of Christ, yet Paul expresses this in terms of them turning away from him personally. This tendency to over personalize things, it could be argued, was at the root of so much of his pain with the Corinthians as expressed in 2 Corinthians.

"Deserting" translates *metatithemi*, literally 'handed over', implying there was some other hand at work. As there is no cosmic satan doing this, I conclude that this higher hand was God's, confirming them in the way they wished to go. Romans 1:26,28 speaks of God doing likewise, giving people over to the mindset they themselves desired. He confirms us in the path we wish to go.

1:7 *Not that there is another one; but there are some who trouble you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ-* A distorted Gospel was no Gospel. The Judaizers were not calling for a wholesale abandonment of Christianity; rather they were preaching a Judaized version of the Gospel which was so distorted that it was not a Gospel. We note from this that a belief system which merely names the name of Christ is not therefore acceptable just because it claims to be an interpretation of Christianity. The 'troublers' are described with the same word in Acts 15:7 concerning the Jewish Christians who went out from the Jerusalem ecclesia to urge the Gentile converts to be circumcised; and of the Jews in Thessalonica who troubled the crowds to persecute Paul. It would seem that the same elements were involved- Jews driven by jealousy and anger at the perversion of the Jewish faith, as they saw it, by Paul's message of Christianity. It was part of a well organized system of derailing the churches Paul founded, referred to by him at times as the 'satan', the adversary. The same word is used in Gal. 5:10 about some single individual who was the troubler in Galatia; as if in that locality they were controlled by a particularly charismatic and influential individual whom Paul leaves nameless.

1:8 *But though we, or an angel from heaven-* God can deceive people to confirm them in the way of understanding they wish to go in (Ez. 14:9; 2 Thess. 2:11). But this could simply be hyperbole. But perhaps the individual troubler of Galatia in 5:10 (and see on :7 above) was being presented as an angel, a Divine messenger. This would then enable us to understand 2 Cor. 11:14 as referring to the same individual troubling Corinth which the same Judaistic message- the satan there was apparently revealed as an Angel of light, and he had his followers; just as there was one specific 'troubler' in Galatia (Gal. 5:10) who had fellow 'troublers' (Gal. 1:7).

*Should preach to you any gospel other than that which we preached to you, let him be accursed-* Again it could be argued that Paul was over personalizing the issue by writing of the Gospel "which we preached to you". The *anathema* ("accursed") was a Jewish synagogue term meaning excommunication. This may be the closest we get in Paul's writings to a request to actually excommunicate anybody in a religious sense; and it was clearly necessary. Seeing he is not afraid to ask for someone to be excommunicated, it is noteworthy that he doesn't recommend it for dealing with the huge raft of immoral individual behaviour and other moral and intellectual failure which filled the early churches.

1:9 *As we have said before, so I now say again: If anyone preaches to you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be accursed-* The *anathema* (see on :8) was for those who were teaching a false Gospel. Paul's approach to his churches, full as they were of moral and doctrinal failure, was to insist that the platform be secured; it was the false teachers who were to be removed. But he exemplifies endless patience with the flock who had been misled or were simply weak in the faith. Paul often refers to the 'receipt' of the Gospel; he saw "the Gospel" as definable and something which was received upon hearing the preaching of it. And yet clearly there was no lengthy package of theology in view.

1:10 *For am I now seeking the favour of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ-* Although Paul made himself all things to all men, he didn't just seek to please men (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4). He sought their salvation and approached them in appropriate terms, but he didn't just seek to please them from a human viewpoint. He didn't cheapen the Gospel. The argument here suggests that serving *Christ* is being placed in opposition to serving *men*. Thus he sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

1:10 *For am I now seeking the favour of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ-* Cultured, educated people in the first century presented themselves to others by means of an 'encomium'. This was a document or major speech which included five sections, clearly defined in the various manuals of rhetoric which survive, and which surely Paul would have been taught. The purpose of the encomium was to demonstrate how the person was an upright member of the community and worthy of honour within it. Students of the letter to the Galatians have detected these five sections of the encomium followed in an almost classic manner by Paul in Galatians 1:10-2:21:

1. Opening (*prooimion*) 1:10-12: Paul's Gospel
2. Lifestyle (*anastrophe*) 1:13-17: Paul as persecutor of the church and preacher of the Gospel. Gal. 1:13 uses the very word *anastrophe* ("way of life")
3. Achievements (*praxeis*) or "deeds of the body" 1:18-2:10- Paul's work in Jerusalem, Syria and again in Jerusalem
4. Comparison with others (*synkrisis*) 2:11-21- Paul and Peter; Paul and the Jews
5. Conclusion (*epilogos*)- 2:21 Paul and grace.

The encomium was essentially self-praise and self-justification within society. Paul almost mocks the encomium, by using its elements to show how radically different are the standards of thinking and behaviour for the Christian. In Gal. 1:15 Paul speaks of his birth (*genesis*), which in the usual encomiums would've been a reference to his family of origin, which as

we've shown was all important in a collectivist society. Paul never speaks of his parents, as would've been normal in an encomium- and seeing he was born as a free man, he could've made an impressive point at this stage had he wished. But the birth he speaks of is that which came from God, who gave Paul birth by grace. His place in God's invisible household was all important, rather than what family he belonged to naturally. An encomium would typically have a reference to a man's education- and Paul could've made an impressive case for himself here. But rather he speaks of how God Himself revealed Christ to him, and how his spiritual education was not through interaction with any other men of standing in the Christian community, but rather in his three years alone in Arabia (Gal. 1:18). It has been suggested that Paul actually coined a new Greek term in 1 Thess. 4:9, when he spoke of how he had been taught-by-God (*theodidaktos*). To claim an education 'not by flesh and blood' (Gal. 1:16) was foolishness to 1st century society. In the description of his "deeds", Paul could've made a fair case both as a Jew and as a Christian. But instead he spends Gal. 2:1-10 speaking of how he had laboured so hard to avoid division in the church of Christ, to teach grace, avoid legalistic obedience to the norms of Jewish society, and to help the poor. *These* were the works he counted as significant. It was usual in an encomium to speak of your courage (*andreia*) and fortitude. Paul uses the word *andreia*, again in conscious imitation of an encomium, but he relates it to how he courageously refused to "yield submission even for a moment" to the pressures to conform to Jewish societal expectations (Gal. 2:5). When it comes to the *synkrisis*, the comparison with others, he chooses to compare himself with Peter, who caved in to the pressures from the Jews, agreeing to act smart before men rather than God, whereas Paul says he withstood this and insisted upon a life of radical grace which paid no attention to what others thought of his appearances.

1:11 *For, brothers, I make known to you, as regards the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not from man-* The implication was that the Judaist opposition were claiming that Paul had just made up his interpretations and called it "the Gospel". Or perhaps there was some conspiracy theory that he was the agent of some other man. Whilst the Gospel was not "from man", *kata anthropos*, yet Paul uses that same term in saying that he can reason at times in that way, "after the manner of men", humanly speaking (3:15). But the core of the Gospel was from the Lord Jesus and not from men.

1:12 *For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through direct revelation from Jesus Christ-* See on :1. As a rabbi, it was important to justify teaching by explaining that he had been taught it by some greater rabbi. Paul cuts right across these expectations (see on :10), and says that his message had not been taught to him. He had received it directly from the Lord Jesus, who is the central part of the message he preached.

1:13 *For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and made havoc of it-* "Made havoc" is literally 'destroyed', and the same word is used in 1:23 of how he 'destroyed' "the faith". He draws a parallel between the church and the faith; for the true church is based upon the true faith. The same word is used of how he "destroyed" the Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 9:21). This clearly means he murdered Christians, including perhaps some of those who were converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. This sort of behaviour was a way of life elicited by Judaism; and Judaism is therefore to be judged by its fruits as seen in Paul. Whilst repeatedly taking full personal responsibility for his actions, Paul sees that they had been elicited by Judaism, "the Jews' religion". To return to that was therefore serious indeed.

1:14- see on Mt. 15:2.

*And I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of my own age among my fellow countrymen, being even more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers-* Paul could have been such a high flyer; he profited (materially, the Greek could imply) in the Jews' religion above any one else. But he resigned it all. He wrote some majestic words which ought to become the goal of every one of us: "But what things were gain to me [materially?], those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss *for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7,8). As noted on :13, whilst not at all dodging his personal responsibility for his actions, he sees the murder and hatred towards Christians as the fruit of zeal for Judaism. The traditions of Paul's fathers [cp. "our fathers" when referring to the patriarchs] refers surely to Paul's rabbinic forefathers. Casuistic following of the implications of previous expositions and judgments of those who have gone before resulted in murder. This was the fruit of Judaism, and all belief systems are to be judged by their fruits.

1:15- see on Acts 18:18.

*But when-* "But when" suggests there was a specific time when God decided to call Paul to manifest His Son. But we should not too quickly assume that this time was on the Damascus road, for the Lord there made the point that Paul had been pushing against the pricks of conscience for some time. Perhaps the calling was at the time of Paul's birth, when the umbilical cord was cut and he was separated from his mother's womb. The calling of grace is an idea Paul uses in Romans to exemplify God's grace, and he thereby makes himself the parade example of grace to all believers. In Gal. 1:15,16, Paul speaks as if his calling to preach the Gospel and his conversion co-incided. He clearly understood that he had been called so as to spread the word to others. Paul uses the word *kaleo* to describe both our call to the Gospel, and the call to preach that Gospel (Gal. 1:15 cp. Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; 7:15; Gal. 1:6; 5:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). He doesn't separate his call from that of ours; he speaks of how God called "us" (Rom. 9:24; 1 Thess. 4:7). We may not all be able to live the life of itinerant preaching and spreading the word geographically which Paul did. And yet clearly enough Paul sets himself up as our pattern in the context of his attitude to preaching. Our lamps were lit, in the Lord's figure, so as to give light to others. We are mirrors, reflecting to others the glory of God as far as we ourselves behold it in the face of Jesus Christ.

*It was the good pleasure of God-* Our salvation was "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by... renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). Thus in Paul's case "it pleased (lit. 'willed') God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace" (Gal.1:15) - not Paul's works. Thus our obedience to the truth was "through (on account of) the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:22). Against this must be balanced Rom. 10:17: "Faith cometh by hearing... the word of God". God's Spirit was involved in bringing about our calling, and is also present in the word by which we are called.

*Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace-* Paul seems to have admired the humility John the Baptist manifested in his preaching, for he often alludes to John- perhaps because he heard him live. For he was living in Jerusalem at the same time as John's ministry. He knew he had been chosen from the womb for his mission, as John had

been (Gal. 1:15 = Lk. 1:15). There is also allusion to Jeremiah being likewise known from the womb. Paul felt he had been “separated unto the [preaching of the] gospel of God”; and he uses a word which the LXX uses for the separation of part of a sacrifice to be consumed (Ex. 29:24,26). The Greek word for “witness” is *martus*, from whence ‘martyr’. To witness to Christ is to live the life of the martyr; to preach Him is to live out His cross in daily life. Yet the Lord’s servant being called from the womb (Is. 49:1) was applied by Paul to himself (Gal. 1:15)- see on Rom. 8:31. Choice from birth, calling, ministry to the Gentiles all recalls the servant known from birth (Is. 49:1,5). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. He saw himself as in Christ, and so the Lord’s mission became his as it becomes ours.

1:16- see on Acts 9:20.

*To reveal His Son in me-* Saul of Tarsus must’ve seemed the most unlikely of men to convert to Christ. But he later refers to how God chose “to *reveal* his son in me”. The Greek word *apokalupto* means literally ‘to take the cover off’. The implication is that Christ is passively within each person, but has to be revealed in them, through response to the Gospel. The cover can be taken off every single man or women with whom we come into contact! The Galatians passage could equally mean that Paul was called as an apostle to ‘take the cover off’ Christ to others; and yet Paul felt his calling was to all people on earth, to the ends of the world (Acts 13:47)- to every single person of all the Gentile nations (Rom. 15:11; 2 Tim. 4:17).

*That I might preach him among the Gentiles-* To preach Christ is to reveal Him to men through ourselves- this is the purpose for which we are called, that our lamp was lit, to reveal Christ to others through us. And thus Paul could conclude by saying that he bore in his body [perhaps an idiom for his life, cp. the ‘broken body’ of the Lord we remember] the stigmata of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17). The whole burden of his message was therefore the Lord Jesus, rather than theology or clever apologetic arguments.

*Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood-* Paul’s attitude to his brethren seems to have changed markedly over the years. He begins as being somewhat detached from them; perhaps as all new converts are initially. We see the Truth for what it is, we realize we had to make the commitment we did, and we are happy to do our own bit in preaching the Truth. But often a real concern and care for our brethren takes years to develop. Paul seems to tell the Galatians that the Gospel he preached had not been given to him by men, because in the early days after his conversion he was rather indifferent towards other Christian believers; “(Paul) conferred not with flesh and blood” after his conversion, neither did he go to see the apostles in Jerusalem to discuss how to preach to Israel; instead, Paul says, he pushed off to Arabia for three years in isolation. He was unknown by face to the Judean ecclesias, and even after his return from Arabia, he made no special effort to meet up with the Apostles (Gal. 1). The early Paul comes over as self-motivated, a maverick, all too ready to fall out with Barnabas, all too critical of Mark for failing to rise up to Paul’s level of fearless devotion (Acts 15:39).

1:17- see on Acts 26:16-19; 1 Cor. 9:17.

*Nor did I go to Jerusalem to those that were apostles ahead of me; but I went away into Arabia, and returned to Damascus-* As noted on :12, Paul resists the Rabbinic style of saying that his message is supported by the opinions of other learned men from the same religion



who had preceded him. This is the force of his statement that he did not go to see those who had been in Christ "ahead of me". Arabia could refer to various desert areas; we are left to imagine that this period in the wilderness formed his spiritual position by direct contact with the Lord Jesus. But it could also be read as a recognition of weakness- that instead of going to preach the Gospel he went instead into isolation. And thus he was glorying in his weakness as a qualification; see on :10. The return to Damascus, where he had almost been lynched and escaped it in a most humiliating way (2 Cor. 11:31-33), is really impressive; just as Paul returned to cities where he had been badly persecuted. Such was his care for his converts.

1:18 *Then after three years I went to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days-* The mention of three years may be another hint that he had not got on with witnessing to the Gentiles as he might have done; he is glorying in his weakness, as noted extensively on :10. "Visit" translates a term which can mean 'to learn from'; we see here Paul's humility. He as the literate, intellectual rabbi went to Jerusalem not to sit at the feet of some learned rabbi, but to be taught by an illiterate fisherman from Galilee. This again is a reversal of all the qualifications Judaism boasted in; see on :10.

1:19 *But none of the other apostles did I see, except James, the Lord's brother-* Judaism stressed which big names were supporting a position or individual, and Paul is consciously subverting this. See on :10. We likewise should be unashamed to subvert the peer review qualifications which are so popular these days. Observe how Paul counts James as an "apostle" although he was not one of the 12, perhaps anticipating the objection raised in Corinth that Paul was not really an apostle because he was not one of the 12.

1:20- see on Gal. 1:1.

*In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!-* Clearly Paul's version of events was questioned. All manner of conspiracy theories and slander had arisen, as they do in the life of anyone who devotes themselves to preaching Christ in truth. The origin of the 'troublers' of 1:7 was likely Jerusalem (see note there). Paul is answering the objection that 'Jerusalem' did not support him by strongly agreeing with it- and insisting that he had higher authority than Jerusalem, namely, his direct relationship with the Lord Jesus.

1:21 *Then I came to the regions of Syria and Cilicia-* Cilicia was Paul's home area. Again, he may be glorying in his spiritual weakness, saying that he had returned to his roots rather than going out into the world as he had been commissioned. For Barnabus had to come to Tarsus and as it were drag Paul with him on his first missionary journey. Such boasting in weakness is a subversion of any attempt to present a humanly strong case for authority; see on :10. "Regions" translates *klima*, which according to Vine referred "originally to an inclination or slope of ground: the supposed slope of the earth from the equator to the pole". Here we have an example of scientifically incorrect terms being used in the Bible without correction; and this helps explain the language of demons being used in the Gospels regarding mental illnesses.

1:22 *But I was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ-* Paul speaks warmly of these churches in 1 Thess. 2:14, showing his eagerness to believe the best about others, with the love that believes all things. The churches which were in Christ suggests there were some 'churches' not in Christ. The term *ekklesia* was used for any

gathering or assembly, and referred to the synagogues in small town and villages, some of whom had become Christian, and thus become assemblies which were in Christ. Christianity would have spread by the conversion of such synagogue assemblies here and there. The Lord did not ask His people to leave the synagogue system as part of their acceptance of Him; He just predicted that the time would come when His converts would be thrown out of that system (Jn. 16:2). This reflects how there was no concept of guilt by association, no demand of breaking association with an apostate system. If Jesus was accepted as Christ and preached as such, then the systems antithetical to that would themselves cast out the Lord's people. The *angst* about separation from error which has blighted the body of Christ was therefore unknown in the first century church.

1:23 *They only heard say: He that once persecuted us now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc!*- See on :13 "made havoc". Paul had arranged their persecution without seeing their faces (:22). But he was a household name amongst the Christian synagogues (see on :22).

1:24 *And they glorified God in me*- The house churches in the area around Jerusalem ["Judea"] were obvious targets for Paul, who sought to drag Christians Jews into Jerusalem for punishment. They glorified not Paul but God's grace which had worked within Paul to bring about his conversion.

### Chronology of Paul's Life

#### Standard Chronology Of Paul's Life

AD 35 Paul's conversion  
 36-38 In Arabia (1)  
 38-43 Preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem  
 44-46 Working in Antioch and Syria  
 46-48 First missionary journey  
 49-50 Jerusalem Conference  
 50-52 Second missionary journey  
 53-57 Third missionary journey  
 57-59 Arrest- Jerusalem-Caesarea  
 59-62 To Rome; first imprisonment  
 63-66 Release; travels in Asia, Greece, Spain  
 64-68 Nero's persecution of the Christians  
 67 Arrest, imprisoned in a dungeon in Rome  
 68 Final trial; executed.

#### John Robinson's Chronology Of Paul's Life (2)

AD33 Conversion  
 35 First visit to Jerusalem  
 46 Second [famine-relief] visit to Jerusalem  
 47-48 First missionary journey  
 48 Council of Jerusalem  
 49-51 Second missionary journey  
 52-57 Third missionary journey  
 57 Arrival in Jerusalem  
 57-59 Imprisonment in Caesarea  
 60-62 Imprisonment in Rome

### Notes

(1) "Arabia" is from the word 'Arabah', and occurs in the LXX in Dt. 2:8; 3:17; 4:49 to mean simply the wilderness. Since Paul went there from Damascus, it has been suggested that he mixed with the Damascene Essene group. There are extensive parallels between the Qumran texts and the letter to the Hebrews, which could lend support to this suggestion- as if Paul

wrote to an audience he knew.

(2) J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) pp. 52,53.

## CHAPTER 2

*2:1 Then after the space of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, also taking Titus with me-* See chronology of Paul's life on 1:24. The events and agreement mentioned in 2:1-10 need not be identical with the council of Acts 15. It could've occurred at the visit of Acts 11:30. Paul's various visits to Jerusalem recorded in Acts are hard to mesh into what he writes in Galatians. It seems that his visit to Jerusalem of Acts 9:26 is that referred to in Gal. 1:18-21; and the visit spoken of in Gal. 2:1-10 is that of Acts 11:1-18 rather than that of Acts 15. The fact Titus wasn't compelled to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3) matches the outcome of Acts 11:18; and Paul's description of the meeting as private (Gal. 2:2) sounds more like the visit of Acts 11 rather than the public council of Acts 15. In a long and fascinating study, Paul Achtemeier makes a good case that the decree of Acts 15 was not "the *result* of the conflict in Antioch reported in Gal. 2:11-14, but the *cause* of that conflict"- Paul J. Achtemeier, *Paul and the Jerusalem Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005) p. 58. This would mean that the advice Paul gave to the Corinthians about food which was contrary to the Acts 15 decree was actually given before that decree was given (1 Cor. 9:19-22; 10:32).

*2:2 And I went up there by revelation-* He means that he didn't go and attend a unity meeting from any political reasons, there was no human buying in or selling out. He was told by Spirit revelation to go there, and he did.

*And I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles-* Paul says something similar in 1 Cor. 15:1, where he again declares to the Corinthians the content of the Gospel message he had preached to them. The content he summarizes in 1 Cor. 15:1 ff. is quite basic. The message of the Gospel was simple, not complicated.

*But privately before them who were of repute-* This is a lovely example of considering others' positions and being sensitive and wise. Paul didn't want to engage the well known names in public debate. He knew that human pride being what it is, they might be unable to humble themselves before others and accept what he was saying as right. He knew he was in the right, but he engaged them privately so that there would be no public showdown. He knew that if there were to be that, then the Lord's work might well be damaged and his overall work would be in vain if converts turned away because of division. The problem with those who know they are in the right is that they often feel thereby empowered to get involved in public debate and demonstration of the error of others; my earlier years were characterized by such wrong attitudes. Possession of truth is like driving a very powerful car. You don't drive it as fast as you can just because you have that car and you can drive it fast. We must consider the slowness of others. The Lord knew the truth about demons, but He used that truth appropriately. And Paul did likewise in this matter of Gentile inclusion and the passing of the Mosaic law. He considered his audience and their weakness, realizing that it is so hard for public figures to backtrack and admit being in the wrong. He sought an appropriate forum in which to engage them- and that was a private meeting. There's so much we can learn from this. The same word translated "repute" is found in 2:6,9 and James, Peter and John who were 'reputed' pillars of the church are clearly in view. We note that even believers of their standing were liable to find it hard to backtrack on publicly advertised positions. And Paul showed the grace to appreciate that, rather than launching a head on public attack on their positions. By contrast, Paul records how later, after Peter had privately agreed with Paul's position in Jerusalem, Paul had to publicly confront him at Antioch when Peter backtracked

on the private agreement (:11). There's a place for public confrontation, but only after private entreaty. Indeed the whole account here sounds like a parade example of following the Lord's advice in Matthew 18, to approach a brother privately and only then publicly rebuke him before the church.

*Lest by any means I should be running, or had run, in vain-* Unity and avoiding division is vital. Paul even argues in Gal. 2:2 that all his colossal missionary effort would have been a 'running in vain' if the ecclesia divided into exclusive Jewish and Gentile sections. This may be hyperbole, but it is all the same a hyperbole which reflects the extent to which Paul felt that unity amongst believers was vital.

*2:3 But not even Titus who was with me, being a Gentile, was compelled to be circumcised-* See on Gal. 1:1. Paul's comment that Gentile Titus was not compelled to be circumcised would suggest that actually, James and the Jerusalem elders were now compelling Gentiles to be circumcised.

*2:4 In view of the false brothers unknowingly brought in, who came in secretly to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus-* Did Judaizers pose as Christians and get baptized even, in order to infiltrate and undermine the Christian church? But "unknowingly brought in" translates a Greek word used for smuggling in; as if there were Judaists already embedded within the church who smuggled in others who they knew would purposefully disrupt the church. "Spy out" suggests a conscious, cunning plan; to observe the "liberty" and then subvert it, in order to return the community to bondage to the Mosaic law. This "Jewish plot", as Harry Whittaker labelled it, was perhaps Paul's thorn in the flesh; a group of Judaists who intentionally sought to derail his ministry of grace. I have expanded upon this at great length in "The Jewish Satan" in The Real Devil. Peter was up against the same problem, when he writes of false teachers secretly entering in (2 Pet. 2:1). His usage of the same word as Paul here uses is a reflection of Peter's humility. For here, Paul is criticizing Peter for allowing this false teaching to enter unopposed. And Peter in his maturity realizes his error, and appeals to others not to repeat it. This is the humility of maturity in Christ.

*That they might bring us into bondage-* The term used in Acts 15:10 about the Judaizing element within the church, seeking to bring believers into the bondage of the Mosaic law. We naturally wonder why they went to such an extent in doing this. But this is all an essay in the power of legalism, and the way legalists consider that anything justifies the end of maintaining a traditional, legalistic system. Such defence of entrenched legalism is a psychological classic- it releases extraordinary energy and bitterness because of the belief that the end must justify any means. These same "false brothers" are referred to with the same word in 2 Cor. 11:26 as a group who literally endangered Paul's life. They were within the ecclesia. But legalists within ecclesias today show a similar hatred which the Lord judges as murder.

*2:5 We did not yield to them in submission-* Even though they "seemed to be somewhat" and were [in the eyes of some] "in repute" (Gal. 2:6 ASV). The same Greek word translated "subjection" is found in 1 Cor. 16:16; Tit. 3:1 and 1 Pet. 5:5 about submission to elders in the ecclesia. Paul's example shows that merely because an elder demands subjection, this doesn't mean we should automatically give it- even if others do. We should be "subject" to those who are in our judgment *qualified* to demand our subjection (1 Cor. 16:16); and "subjection" in

Paul's writings usually refers to our subjection to the Lordship of Jesus. Our subjection must be to Him first before any human elders.

*Even for a moment-* There would have been a temptation to just make a momentary acquiescence to the demands of the legalists. But such politics was not acceptable to Paul.

*So that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you-* If we give in to legalists, then others lose the truth of the Gospel. The salvation of others can be affected by third parties. We really can make others stumble, and legalism is one of the most common forms of this happening. We enter the one body of Christ by baptism into the one body of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13). We therefore have a duty to fellowship all who remain in the body (1 Cor. 10:16). Paul describes Peter as not walking according to the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:14) by effectively saying there were two bodies, of Jews and Gentiles, and only fellowshipping one of these groups rather than the entire one body. Paul says that this would mean that the truth of the Gospel would be lost. Paul put all the ecclesial politics behind him and withstood Peter "to his face". If we know "the truth" of Christ's Gospel, we will fellowship all those in Him and in that Truth. If we don't, Paul foresaw that ultimately "the truth of the Gospel" would be lost (Gal. 2:5). Tragically, in man-made attempts to preserve the Gospel's Truth the rest of the body has often been disfellowshipped. But by fellowshipping all the body, the "Truth" is kept!

*2:6 But from those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatever they were, it makes no matter to me, God does not accept man's person) they, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me-* The Greek is hard to translate. The idea, I suggest, is that when these brethren were "in conference" [AV] they had something added to them; but this meant totally nothing to Paul. This is indeed true to experience- when men, even brethren, come together, they can have an aura and power greater than the sum of their component parts. But this 'buzz' was seen through by Paul as he kept strictly to spiritual principle and would not be swayed by the power attached to men publicly together as it were on the platform.

*2:7 But on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Gospel to the circumcision-* "The gospel of the circumcision" being given to Peter and that of the Gentiles to Paul evidently means 'the duty of preaching the gospel'. The Gospel is in itself the duty of preaching it.

I have noted throughout the commentary on Acts that Paul in fact went to the Jews in practice, and suffered because of it. So what he is saying here may be theory rather than practice.

*2:8 For he that worked through Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, worked through me also to the Gentiles-* In Gal. 2:7,8, we read that Peter was given a ministry to preach to Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. But in Acts 15:7 Peter says that God used him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles- and the implication of 1 Peter is that he had made many converts in Gentile areas of Asia Minor. The reconciliation of these statements may be that God changed things around- Peter's ministry to the Gentiles was handed over to Paul, and Paul's initial work amongst the Jews was not for him to continue but for Peter. And so the Father may work with us, too. My simple point is that we are each given our group or area of potential

responsibility for preaching, and we should be workers together with the Father and Son to achieve what they have potentially made possible for us. And we each, in God's master plan, have an area of opportunity opened up to us for us to preach in, and this area may be changed, reduced, moved or expanded according to our freewill response to God's desire to use us.

*2:9 And when they perceived the grace that was given to me, then James, Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship-* Yet the Lord promises each believer that we can become "pillars" in His future temple (Rev. 3:12). We will all therefore in spirit take on the position of elders. In no way are we to see Christianity as a spectator religion, with a group of specialists acting effectively as priests. We are all to enter the spirit of responsibility which goes with eldership.

*That we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision-* James, the leader of the Jerusalem ecclesia, got Peter and John to join him in making Paul to agree to preach only to Gentiles, whilst they would teach the Jews (Gal. 2:9 NIV). This was contrary to what the Lord had told Paul in Acts 9:15- that he had been converted so as to preach to both Jews and Gentiles. And Paul took no notice of the 'agreement' they tried to force him into- he always made a priority of preaching first of all in the Jewish synagogues and to the Jews, and only secondarily to Gentiles. He did this right up to the end of the Acts record. Paul got drawn into politics in the church. Although he went along with the Acts 15 decree and even agreed to propagate it, he never mentions it in his writing or speaking, and later he writes about food regulations and the whole question of Gentiles and the Law as if he disagreed with it. Perhaps as he matured, he saw the need to speak out against legalism in the ecclesias rather than go along with it for the sake of peace.

We can ourselves so easily form into groups of brethren and ecclesias, papering over our differences as happened in Acts 15, adopting a hard line (as Jerusalem ecclesia did in Gal. 2:9 over Gentile believers), then a softer line in order to win political support (as in Acts 15), then back to a hard line (as in Acts 21). We ought to be men and women of principle. We look back at the senior brethren of those days arguing so strongly about whether or not it was right to break bread with Gentile believers, "much disputing" whether or not we should be circumcised... and it all seems to us such an elemental disregard of the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus and so many clear Old Testament implications. But there were background factors which clouded their perceptions, although they themselves didn't realise this at the time. And so it can be with us, if we were to see ourselves from outside our own historical time, place and culture, it would probably be obvious that we are disregarding some most basic teachings of the Word which we know so well. Like them, our blindness is because the environment we live in blinds us to simple Bible truth.

*2:10 Only they asked us to remember the poor, which very thing I was also zealous to do-* The Jewish poor at Jerusalem. Paul's attempts to do this via the Jerusalem poor fund weren't particularly successful; another indication that this compromise was not ultimately blessed by the Lord.

*2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned-* This is extreme language. Peter's name Cephas is used because he had reverted to his Jewish roots. Refusing to fellowship our brethren because of pressure from more conservative brethren can make us stand condemned. There is a *direct* relationship, in God's

judgment, between how we treat others and what will happen to us. This is to the extent that what we do to others, we do to ourselves. If we condemn others, we really and truly do condemn ourselves. Thus when Peter refused to fellowship Gentiles, Paul "opposed him to the face, because he stood condemned". Just as Peter had condemned himself by denying the Lord, so he had done again in refusing to fellowship the Lord's brethren. Realizing the seriousness of all this, Paul didn't just let it go, as many of us would have done in such an ecclesial situation. He realized a man was condemning himself; and so he risked causing a lot of upset in order to save him from this. Many of us could take a lesson from this.

The Peter who had come so far, from the headstrong days of Galilee to the shame of the denials, and then on to the wondrous new life of forgiveness and preaching that grace to others, leading the early community that developed upon that basis...that Peter almost went wrong later in life. Peter and the Judaizers makes a sad story. And as always, it was a most unlikely form of temptation that arose and almost blew him right off course. As often, the problem arose from his own brethren rather than from the hostile world outside. There was strong resistance in the Jewish mind to the idea that Gentiles could be saved without keeping the Mosaic law. And more than this, there was the feeling that any Jewish believer who advocated that they could was selling out and cheapening the message of God to men. Paul has to write about this whole shameful episode in Gal. 2. It becomes apparent that Peter very nearly denied the Lord that bought him once again, by placing on one side all the evidence of salvation by pure grace, for *all* men whether they be Jew or Gentile, which he had progressively built up over the past years. Paul, using Peter's old name, comments how Cephas seemed to be a pillar- but wasn't (Gal. 2:9). Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (2:11). Peter and some other Jewish believers "dissembled" and along with Barnabas "was carried away with their dissimulation", with the result that they "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (2:12-14). Paul's whole speech to Peter seems to be recorded in Gal. 2:15-21. He concludes by saying that if Peter's toleration of justification by works rather than by Christ was really so, then Christ was dead in vain. Paul spoke of how for him, he is crucified with Christ, and lives only for Him, "who loved me and gave himself for me". These were exactly the sentiments which Peter held so dear, and Paul knew they would touch a chord with him.

Yet Peter very nearly walked away from it all, because he was caught up in the legalism of his weaker brethren, and lacked the courage to stand up to the pressure of the Judaizers on him. Peter had earlier stayed with a tanner, a man involved in a ritually unclean trade (Acts 9:43). This would indicate that Peter was a liberal Jew, hardly a hard-liner. His caving in to the Judaist brethren was therefore all the more an act of weakness rather than something he personally believed in. For it was Peter, too, who had gone through the whole Cornelius experience too! And many a humble, sincere man in Christ since has lost his fine appreciation of the Lord's death *for him* and the whole message of grace, through similar sophistry and a desire to please 'the brethren'. In some of his very last words, facing certain death, Peter alludes to this great failure of his- his second denial of the Lord. He pleads with his sheep to hold on to the true grace of God, lest "ye *also*, being led away (s.w. Gal. 2:13 "carried away") with the error of the lawless, fall..." (2 Pet. 3:17). Ye *also* invites the connection with Peter himself, who was led away by the error of the lawyers, the legalists- whereas his sheep had the error of the lawless to contend with. The point surely is that to go the way of legalism, of denying the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, is every bit as bad as going to the lawless ways of the world. Peter was carried away with the "dissimulation" of the Judaizers (Gal. 2:13), and he uses the same word when he appeals to the brethren to lay aside "all hypocrisies" (1 Pet. 2:1); he was asking them to do what he himself had had to do. He had been a hypocrite, in



living the life of legalism within the ecclesia whilst having the knowledge of grace. We may so easily pass this off as a mere peccadillo compared to the hypocrisy of living the life of the world 6 days / week and coming to do one's religious devotions at a Christian church on a Sunday. But Peter draws a parallel between his own hypocrisy and that of such brethren; this is how serious it is to bow to the sophistry of legalism. It may be that an unjust disfellowship ought to be contended, and we say nothing. Or that a sincere, spiritual brother who places his honest doubts on the table is elbowed out of being able to make the contribution to the community he needs to. In our after the meeting conversations and in our Sunday afternoon chats we can go along with such things, depending on the company we are in. And it seems just part of Christian life. The important thing, it can seem, is to stay within the community and keep separate from the world. But not so, is Peter's message. His ecclesial hypocrisy was just as bad as that of the worldly believer whom Peter wrote to warn. Paul seems to go even further and consciously link Peter's behaviour with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

The sad thing about Peter's reversion to the Judaist perspective was that it was an almost studied undoing of all the Lord had taught him in the Cornelius incident. There he had learnt that the Lordship of Jesus, which had so deeply impressed him in his early preaching, was in fact universal- because "He is Lord *of all*", therefore men from *all* (s.w.) nations were to be accepted in Him (Acts 10:35,36). God shewed him that he was not to call any man common or unclean on account of his race (Acts 10:28). But now he was upholding the very opposite. And he wasn't just passively going along with it, although that's how it doubtless started, in the presence of brethren of greater bearing and education than himself. He "compelled" the Gentile believers to adopt the Jewish ways, as if Peter was a Judaizer; and every time that word is used in Galatians it is in the context of compelling believers to be circumcised (Gal. 2:14 cp. 2:3; 6:12). So it seems Peter actually compelled brethren to be circumcised. And the Galatian epistle gives the answer as to *why* this was done; brethren chose to be circumcised and to preach it lest they suffer persecution for the sake of the cross of Christ (Gal. 5:11; 6:12-14). Consistently this letter points an antithesis between the cross and circumcision. The body marks of Christ's cross are set off against the marks of circumcision (Gal. 6:17); and the essence of the Christian life is said to be crucifying the flesh nature, rather than just cutting off bits of skin (Gal. 5:24). Peter's capitulation to the Judaizers, Peter's reversion to circumcision, was effectively a denial of the cross, yet once again in his life. There was something he found almost offensive about the cross, an inability to sustainedly accept its message. And he turned back to circumcision as he had earlier turned to look at John's weaknesses when told he must carry the cross. And we turn to all manner of pseudo-spiritual things to excuse our similar inability to focus upon it too.

Eventually Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12). But he had learnt to eat with Gentile brethren in Acts 11:3; he had justified doing so to his brethren and persuaded them of its rightness, and had been taught and showed, so patiently, by his Lord that he should not make such distinctions. But now, all that teaching was undone. There's a lesson here for many a slow-to-speak brother or sister- what you start by passively going along with in ecclesial life, against your better judgment, you may well end up by actively advocating. It can be fairly conclusively proven that Mark's Gospel is in fact Peter's. Yet it is there in Mk. 7:19 that Mark / Peter makes the point that the Lord Jesus had declared all foods clean. He knew the incident, recalled the words, had perhaps preached and written them; and yet Peter acted and reasoned as if he was totally unaware of them.

Paul gently guided Peter back to the Cornelius incident, which he doubtless would have deeply meditated upon as the inspired record of it became available. Peter had been taught that God *accepted whoever* believed in Him, regardless of their race. But now Paul had to remind Peter that truly, God “*accepteth* no man’s person” (Gal. 2:6). The same Greek word was a feature of the Cornelius incident: whoever believes *receives*, accepts, remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and they *received*, accepted, the Holy Spirit as well as the Jewish brethren (Acts 10:47). With his matchless humility, Peter accepted Paul’s words. His perceptive mind picked up these references (and in so doing we have a working model of how to seek to correct our brethren, although the success of it will depend on their sensitivity to the word which we both quote and allude to). But so easily, a lifetime of spiritual learning could have been lost by the sophistry of legalistic brethren. It’s a sober lesson. And yet Peter in his pastoral letters (which were probably transcripts of his words / addresses) makes these references back to his own failure, and on the basis of having now even more powerfully learnt his lesson, he can appeal to his brethren. And so it should be in our endeavours for our brethren. Paul warned him that by adopting the Judaist stance, he was *building again* what had been destroyed (Gal. 2:18). And Peter with that in mind can urge the brethren to *build up* the things of Christ and His ecclesia (1 Pet. 2:5,7 s.w.), rather, by implication, that the things of the world and its philosophy.

2:12 *For before that certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision-* The whole nature of the agreement in Gal. 2:6-10 could be read as smacking of dirty politics- Paul could continue to convert Gentiles and not force them to be circumcised, but James and Peter would continue their ministry to the Jews, and Paul would get his Gentile converts to donate money to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. It all could be read as having the ring of a 'deal' rather than an agreement strictly guided by spiritual principles. James [not necessarily the same James who wrote the epistle] seems to have acted very ‘politically’. He sent his followers to pressurise Peter not to break bread with Gentiles in Antioch (Gal. 2:12). Then there was a conference called at Jerusalem to discuss the matter. There was “much disputing”, there wasn’t the clear cut acceptance of Gentiles which one would have expected if the words of Jesus had been taken at face value, and then James said ‘Nobody ever came from me telling any Gentile they must be circumcised and keep the Law. They are all welcome, just that they must respect some of the Mosaic laws about blood etc., and keep away from fornication’. This contradicts Paul’s inspired teaching that the Mosaic Law was totally finished. Gal. 2:12 records that James *had* sent brethren to Antioch trying to enforce the Law upon Gentiles! And then later, the Jerusalem ecclesia boasted of how many thousand members they had, “and they are all zealous of the law”. They then asked Paul to make it clear that he supported circumcision and keeping the Law (Acts 21:19-24). In passing, we note how hurtful this must have been, since Paul was bringing funds for their ecclesia which he had collected at the cost of damaging his relationship with the likes of Corinth. He meekly obeyed, perhaps it was playing a part in the politics in the church, although he had written to the Colossians and others that there was no need for any to be circumcised nor keep the Law, indeed these things were a denial of faith in Jesus.

2:13- see on Mt. 23:28.

*And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy-* Peter uses the same word in warning his flock against hypocrisy (1

Pet. 2:1); knowing full well that he had publicly rebuked for being a hypocrite. In this we see the humility which made him a true elder, appealing to others not to make the same mistakes he had made.

Paul withstood the pressures of the 'circumcision party' within the early church, and rebuked Peter for caving in to them (Gal. 2:12,13). But then he himself caved in under pressure from the same group, and obeyed their suggestion that he show himself to be not opposed to the keeping of the Mosaic Law by paying the expenses for the sacrifices of four brethren.

2:14 *But when I saw that they did not walk straightly according to the truth of the gospel-* Gk. 'with straight feet', like the cherubim. Correct walk / behaviour is therefore related to the fact we have believed the *true* Gospel, i.e. we hold the right Gospel rather than the wrong one. The true Gospel was simple- believe in the Lord's death and resurrection and the salvation in Him, identify with it in baptism, and indeed it shall be true for us. In this lies the importance of doctrine. This is why Is. 29:13,24 speaks of repentance as 'learning doctrine'; Israel went astray morally because they allowed themselves to be taught wrong doctrine.

*I said to Cephas before all: If you, being a Jew, live as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why do you compel the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*- Paul uses Peter's old name because he feels Peter has slipped back to his old positions and is at this time not living according to the Lord's hope and expectation of him, which was that he would be a rock, Peter, the rocky one.

2:15- see on Acts 23:6.

*We being Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles-* Paul is using here terms well known within Judaism, appealing to people, as we should, in their own terms and language. But Paul returns to allude to this term "sinners" in :17. There he reasons that if we seek to be justified by the Law whilst in Christ, then we shall be left unredeemed sinners. Thus, he reasons, you who are so defiantly Judaistic are declared sinners, and even worse than ignorant "sinners of the Gentiles".

2:16 *Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law-* Paul seems to be saying that their very reason for belief in Jesus for justification was because they knew there was no justification through keeping the Law. In our commentary on Acts 7, we sought to develop the idea that Paul was deeply touched by the inability of Law to save, and this led to the pricks in his conscience towards throwing himself upon faith in Jesus for justification. The motive for 'belief in Jesus' is therefore no mere agreement with an impressively interlinking set of theologies, but rather a desperate awareness that apart from Him, I cannot be saved from my sins. See on :19 *I through the law...*

*But through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law. Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified-* Like Abraham, we are justified by the faith in Christ; not faith in Christ, but more specifically the faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). The use of the definite article surely suggests that it is our possession of the same doctrinal truths (the Faith) which Abraham had, which is

what leads to faith in Christ and thereby our justification. The life Paul lived was by the Faith of Christ; not simply by faith, as a verb, which is how grammatically it should be expressed if this is what was meant; but by the Faith (Gal. 2:20). There is an intended ambiguity in the phrase "the faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4:16); this 'ambiguous genitive' can mean those who share "the (doctrinal) faith", which Abraham also believed; or those who have the kind of belief which Abraham had.

*2:17 But if, while we seek to be made righteous in Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners-* See on 2:15 *Sinners of the Gentiles.*

*Is Christ then a servant of sin? God forbid!*- Christ would be bringing people into sin if He on one hand offered justification by faith in Him, and yet on the other, demanded obedience to the Mosaic law. "Servant", *diakonos*, means that "sin" is a personification. If Paul had believed in a personal Satan, surely this would've been the place to use that word.

*2:18 For if I build up again those things which I destroyed, I prove myself a transgressor-* The "things" of justification by the Mosaic law. The same word is used by the Lord in saying that He had not come to "destroy" the Law but to fulfil it (Mt. 5:17). Paul surely alludes here, and understood the Lord to be saying that He had indeed come to destroy the Law, but through fulfilling it; and that although He had not at that early point in His ministry destroyed the Law, yet He would do so- in His death. Paul thus sees his own part in the things which the Lord Himself achieved, just as we too can play our part in things like reconciling the world to God, which were personally achieved by the Lord's sacrifice.

*2:19 For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God-* This is very much the language of baptism in Romans 6. Paul understood that at baptism, he had died, which meant that he was no longer bound to obey the law, but rather, more positively, he was obligated to "live to God". Peter makes the same point, probably also in a baptism context (1 Pet. 4:2,6). Paul says that "through the law" he had come to this position; and his autobiographical comments in Romans 7 suggest that it was through his experience of failure to obey the law that he was driven to throw himself upon Christ and death with Him. This was his point in 2:16- see notes there.

Galatians was one of Paul's earlier letters. In it, he speaks of his own baptism: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live" (Gal. 2:19-21). Years later he writes to the Romans about *their* baptisms, in exactly the same language: "All of us who have been baptized... our old self was crucified with him... the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:1-10). He clearly seeks to forge an identity between his readers and himself; their baptisms were [and are] as radical as his in their import. Note how in many of his letters, especially Galatians and Corinthians, he switches so easily between "you" and "we", as if to drive home the fact that there was to be no perception of distance between him the writer and us the readers.

2:20- see on Mt. 27:26; 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 2:16.

*I have been crucified with Christ-* Another reference to his baptism and the subsequent life spent living out those principles in practice (see on :19). Rom. 6:6 uses the same term for baptism- "crucified with Him". This is the idea of co-crucifixion, and the word is used about the thieves being crucified with Jesus (Lk. 23:42). The repentant thief is a type of us all. We

died with Christ there; everything within us cries out that 'I would not have done this'. But we did. We through baptism are counted as having died and risen with Him. To be crucified is not so much a command we are to obey but a fact about our status in Christ which is to be believed. We count ourselves as dead to sin with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:11).

*And it is no longer I that live but Christ living in me-* "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not *my* life, but the life which *Christ lives* in me; and my present bodily life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me". The spirit of the risen Christ lived out in our lives is the witness of His resurrection. We are Him to this world. His cross affects our whole life, our deepest thought and action, to the extent that we can say with Paul, in the silence of our own deepest and most personal reflection: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

*I live in faith-* The Gospel of the Lord Jesus isn't a collection of ideas and theologies bound together in a statement of faith. It is, rather, a proclamation of facts (and the Greek words used about the preaching of the Gospel support that view of it) concerning a flesh and blood historical person, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. The focus is all upon a concrete and actual person. Paul in Gal. 2:20 doesn't say: 'I live by faith in the idea that the Son of God loved me'. Rather: "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (RV). Faith is centred in a person- hence the utterly central importance of our correctly understanding the Lord Jesus. We are clearly bidden see the man Jesus as the focus of everything.

*And that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up-* A reference to the unique method of the Lord's death, consciously giving up His last breath in the words "Father into Your hands I commend my spirit", a life not taken from the Lord but consciously given up by Him. And that supreme act of self giving was "for me".

*For me-* There is the sustained implication that the personal relationship between Jesus and each of His followers is totally personal and unique. The Abrahamic covenant is made personally with every member of the seed "in their generations" (Gen. 17:7). The records of the renewing of the covenant to Isaac and Jacob are but indicators that this is the experience of each one of the seed. This means that the covenant love of God and the promise of personal inheritance of the land is made personally, and confirmed by the shedding of Christ's blood, to each of us. Paul appreciated this when he spoke of how the Son of God had loved him and died for him personally, even though that act of death was performed for many others (Gal. 2:20). This is one of the most essential mysteries of our redemption; that Christ gave Himself *for me*, so that He might make *me* His very own; and therefore I wish to respond in total devotion to Him and His cause, to make Him the Man I fain would follow to the end. And yet He did it for *you* and for *you*; for *all* of us His people. All the emphasis on fellowship and family life, good as it is, must never blind us to this ultimately *personal* relationship with the One who gave Himself for us. Each time a believer enters into covenant with Christ through baptism, blood is in a sense shed; the Lord dies again as the believer dies again in the waters of baptism. The Hebrew word translated 'to cut a covenant' is also translated 'cut off' in the sense of death (Gen. 9:11; Lev. 20:2,3; Is. 48:9; Prov. 2:21). Death and blood shedding are essential parts of covenant making. In Gal. 2:20, Paul wrote of "the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me"; and yet some years later he wrote in conscious allusion to this statement: "Christ loved *the church* and gave himself *for it*" (Eph.

5:25). He looked out from beyond his personal salvation to rejoice in the salvation of others. He learnt that it was God manifestation in a multitude, not individual human salvation, that was and is of the essence. And we follow a like path, from that day when we were asked 'why do you want to be baptized', and we replied something to the effect 'because I want to be in the Kingdom'.

2:21 *I do not make void the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!*- Strong language, but this is what all trust in legalistic obedience to law amounts to. We can frustrate the intention of God's grace, we can void or frustrate [s.w.] the will of God against ourselves by refusing baptism (Lk. 7:30). So much can be wasted, like the wine / blood of Christ pouring out on the earth unless we become new wineskins. "Make void" means literally to abrogate; perhaps the idea is that Paul had abrogated the Law, and not God's grace. And all this terrible waste of God's grace can come about, in the context of this chapter, by being pressured by legalistic brethren into rejecting salvation by grace alone.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1- see on Rom. 1:18; Gal. 4:16.

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*- Literally, 'cast the evil eye over you'. Paul didn't surely believe in such things, but like the Lord Jesus, he uses the language of the day without as it were footnoting the fact he doesn't literally believe in those things. Paul is writing to those who thought they were now going to be saved by obedience to the Jewish law. But Judaism taught that obedience to the Law shielded Judaists from the 'evil eye' and magic spells. Paul is saying that the opposite is, as it were, the case. They had been "bewitched" to return to the Law, and were thus under, as it were, the curse which comes to those who seek justification by it. He goes right on to talk about the "curse of the law" and how believers in Christ are saved from this (Gal. 3:10,13). His references to salvation from this "curse" must be read in the context of this opening play on the idea of being bewitched or under a curse.

*It was before your own eyes that Jesus Christ was openly displayed as crucified*- Gk. 'placarded'. When Paul preached to the Galatians, he placarded forth Jesus Christ crucified in front of them: his preaching of the Gospel involved a repeated and graphic portrayal of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as a historical event (Gal. 3:1). We are "in Christ" to the extent that we *are* Christ to this world. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us. Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians; to the Corinthians he was "the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RSV). It was this marred visage of Paul which had impressed the Galatians with how much Paul was Christ-manifest: "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, [even] as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4). He could truly say in Gal 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ", and that before their eyes "Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth ['placarded'], crucified among you... for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 3:1; 6:17). Thus to preach through cross carrying means sharing in the Lord's sufferings. It may mean being crucified by our brethren for it as He was, physical hardship and pain... but this is the ground of credibility for our witness.

It seems that Paul had gone through the process of crucifixion with them so realistically, that it was as if Christ had suffered before their eyes. If you have seen that, Paul says, and the vision remains with you, how can you turn away? And this is a powerful motivator for us too. The man who sees, really sees, something of the Lord's agony, simply won't turn away, doctrinally or practically. But if we turn away from the consideration, the motivation will not be there to keep on responding. In this sense the crucifixion record *almost* has a mystical power in it, if it is properly apprehended. Thus Paul could tell the Galatians that in him they had seen Jesus Christ placarded forth, crucified before their own eyes (3:1). Paul knew that when people looked at his life, they saw something of the crucifixion of the Lord. The Galatians therefore accepted him "even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14). He could describe his own preaching as "this Jesus, whom I preach unto you..." (Acts 17:3), as if Jesus was right there before their eyes, witnessed through Paul. As the Lord was Paul's representative, so Paul was Christ's. The idea of representation works both ways: we see in the Gospel records how the Lord experienced some things which only we have; and we show aspects of His character to the world which nobody else can manifest.

If we can rise up to all this, placarding forth the Lord's crucifixion sufferings in our lives, then there will be a power and credibility to our preaching which will be hard to resist. It was before the eyes of the Galatians that they saw in Paul, Jesus Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1). But the only other reference to the eyes of the Galatians is in Gal. 4:15- where we read that they had been so transfixed by Paul's preaching that they had been ready to pluck out their eyes. And where's the only other reference to plucking out eyes? It's in the Lord's teaching, where He says that if our eye offends us, we should pluck it out [Mt. 5:29- same Greek words used]. The connection is surely this: Paul's personal reflection of the crucified Jesus was so powerful, so compellingly real and credible, that it motivated his hearers to rise up to the spirit of the very hardest demands of the moral teaching of that same Jesus. Insofar as we genuinely live out the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, our preaching of His radical moral demands will likewise be heeded. The crucified Christ that Paul placarded before their eyes was "the truth" (Gal. 3:1; 4:14-16); and the integrity and reality of that truth was confirmed by the congruence between the example of Paul, and the reality of the crucified Jesus whom he manifested to them. In Paul's body language, in his character, in his response to problems and frustrations great and small, in the way he coped with physical weakness, his audience somehow saw the crucified Christ. In the same letter, Paul reminds the Galatians how they had initially seen him preaching to them in a weak bodily state, and had seen Christ in him then (Gal. 4:13,14). He says in Gal. 3:1 that they saw Christ crucified in him. Perhaps the way Paul handled a sickness or bodily weakness which he then had, somehow reflected to his audience the spirit of Christ crucified.

The effort we should consciously make to allow the life of Christ to be lived in us, is a natural outflow of the basic doctrine: that Christ was our representative. If we love Him and the record of His life, we will see in Him and His living the essence of our own: the same betrayal, barriers with His family and all close relationships, the pouring out of the love of God to a world and people who misunderstood, who thought they understood but didn't, who were blind, who thought they saw, who only broke from the petty materialism of their lives to listen to Him because they thought they might get some personal benefit...all the time, He poured out His grace and the Father's love. And He kept on to the final unspeakable, unwriteable, unenterable agony at the end. And even there, we sense He was not gritting His teeth trying to be patient, trying not to sin...He was pulsating with a love for men, a care for Pilate (comforting him that another had a greater sin); concern for the women who wept crocodile tears, that they might really repent; praying for forgiveness for those who knew not [i.e., fully] what they did; preaching to the thieves in whispers, each word taking an agony of pain, heaving Himself up on the nails to get the air to speak it... To love one's neighbour as oneself is to fulfil the law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:10); and yet the Lord's death was the supreme fulfilment of it (Mt. 5:18; Col. 2:14). Here was the definition of love for one's neighbour. Not a passing politeness and occasional seasonal gift, whilst secretly and essentially living the life of self-love and self-care; but the love and the death of the cross, for His neighbours as for Himself; laying down His life "for himself that it might be for us" in the words of Bro. Roberts. In Him, in His time of dying, we see the definition of love, the fulfilment of the justice and unassuming kindness and thought for others which was taught in the Mosaic Law. And we through bearing one another's burdens, through bearing with their moral and intellectual and spiritual failures, must likewise fulfil the law, in a voluntary laying down of our lives for each other (Gal. 6:2). And in this, as with the Lord, will be our personal salvation.



1 Cor. 11:26 AVmg. makes the act of breaking bread a command, an imperative to action: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord's death, till he come". If we are going to eat the emblems, it is axiomatic that we will commit ourselves to shewing forth His death to the world, like Paul placarding forth Christ crucified in our lives (Gal. 3:1 Gk.). The Passover likewise had been a 'shewing' to one's family "that which the Lord did unto me" (Ex. 13:8), the redemption we have experienced.

3:2 *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing works of the law, or by hearing with faith?*- This is not a reference to receipt of the miraculous Spirit gifts; for only some received these in the first century. 3:5 is clear about the difference: "He that supplies to you the Spirit and works miracles among you". Not all had the miraculous gifts, indeed Paul downplays their importance in 1 Corinthians. But all the Galatians are spoken of as having 'received the Spirit'. I suggest this refers to the gift of the Spirit which all believers in Christ receive at baptism (Acts 2:38)- the internal power towards holiness and spirituality, Christ in us, His mind / spirit within us. The same words are used in Jn. 7:39 of how the Spirit was to be received once Christ was glorified and had poured out this gift upon His people. This Spirit is received by the believers, not by the world, and is *within* us (Jn. 14:17). The receipt of this Spirit means that we in our hearts can cry "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Later in our chapter here, Paul speaks of receiving the Spirit as receiving the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14)- the blessing which in Acts 3:26 is defined as the power to turn us away from sin. Paul's immediate point here is that the Spirit was received by them not because they obeyed law, but because they had believed and been baptized into Christ. Gal. 4:6 is quite clear that the Spirit received by all the Galatian converts was a gift of Divine relationship within their hearts: "And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father".

3:3 *Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit*- The reference is to having begun spiritual life at their baptisms by receiving the Spirit (see on :2).

*Are you now perfected in the flesh?*- The function of the Holy Spirit is to guide our spiritual development unto maturity or 'perfection'. Obedience to Law will not achieve this. The same word is used in describing how the Lord has "begun a good work [with]in you" and will perform or 'perfect' it until the day we meet the Lord (Phil. 1:6). This work is essentially *within* us. We are in a program of development, and attempting to justify ourselves by work will interrupt that program.

3:4 *Did you suffer so many things in vain? If it be indeed in vain*- The connection is with Paul's thought in Gal. 2:21 a few verses earlier- that if we are justified by works, then Christ has suffered in vain. And our sufferings, which are a sharing in His sufferings, will likewise be in vain. Paul several times uses this powerful idea of life "in vain". If we do not enter the Kingdom, if we refuse to be new wineskins, then the blood of the new covenant flows out wasted on the ground. All is vain, compared to salvation. This general attitude to life under the sun and all human endeavour is indeed powerful.

3:5 *Does he that supplies to you the Spirit*- As noted on :2, this refers to the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of believers after baptism. The same word for "supplies" is used in Col. 2:19 of how the Lord Jesus as the head of the body supplies nourishment to every part. The Lord Jesus is indeed an active Lord. He ministers psychological, spiritual strengthening to all parts of His body, which is the church.

*And works miracles among you, do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*- See on :2 *Did you receive the Spirit*. Note the present tenses. Despite the apostasy in Galatia, the Lord Jesus still actively ministered His Spirit and enabled miracles to be done, just as God did to an apostate Israel in the wilderness. Even in the first century, the work of the Spirit was not just confined to the miraculous gifts; thus "He that supplies to you the Spirit *and* works miracles among you" suggests that there was a non-miraculous work of the Spirit then. It seems clear that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were not possessed by all first century believers; and yet the epistles often imply that all believers had received the Spirit (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:22). The resolution of this is in the fact that all believers then and now receive the non-miraculous effect of the Spirit. Indeed, Jude 19 suggests that 'having the spirit' could just refer to someone who is not "sensual", i.e. of the flesh. John was "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb... (going) in the Spirit and power of Elias... waxed strong in spirit" (Lk. 1:15,17,80); but "John did no miracle" (Jn. 10:41). David associated having God's holy Spirit with having free fellowship with Him due to sins being forgiven, paralleling the holy Spirit with "a right spirit within me... a clean heart" (Ps. 51:10,12); and Paul spoke of God's willingness to forgive us as "the spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29), i.e. His spiritual gift. Paul's reasoning in Gal. 3:5,6 is similar- the Spirit is ministered to us by faith, in the same way as Abraham's faith resulted in righteousness being imputed ('ministered') to him. Thus imputed righteousness is made parallel to the gift of the Spirit.

3:6- see on Phil. 3:6.

*Even as Abraham believed God, and that faith was imputed to him for righteousness*- His faith was weak, just as faith was weak in Galatia. See on Rom. 4:1-4,18,19. Paul's point in Rom. 4:3-5 is that Abraham was counted as righteous for his faith and not because of his works; the promises of the Kingdom salvation were made to him whilst he was uncircumcised.

3:7 *Know that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham*- 'Of' in the sense of being the descendant of. Faith is the defining family characteristic of the Abraham family- and not race or physical descent. "The real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith" (GNB).

3:8- see on Rom. 9:17.

*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would make the Gentiles righteous by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham*- Abraham was promised that "all the nations" [i.e. "the Gentiles"] would be blessed. Paul strains from this [so it could seem to those not used to rabbinic exegesis] that this blessing was not stated to be in response to any works- so it must therefore have been offered purely on the basis of faith. If they were to be given a blessing not on the basis of works, but on account of Abraham's singular seed, Jesus... then such

blessing would involve them being counted righteous, i.e. worthy of blessing, just because they believed this promise.

*When it says: In you shall all the nations be blessed-* This was 'preached to Abraham'; and he chose to believe it. It was spoken to him before he had done any works of obedience or before he had believed anything. He was told, effectively, that he would be blessed / saved. And he believed it. The Gospel likewise comes to us out of left field, as it were. We are promised that we shall be saved- and if we believe it, we shall be.

3:9 *So then, they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham-* "With" translates *sun*, the idea being that believers are blessed by association with Abraham. And :27-29 explain that this is through baptism into Christ, who is Abraham's specific seed.

Verses 10-13 are a parenthesis concerning the curse of the Law. If read without the parenthesis, the flow of thought goes straight on: "They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (v.9)... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles" (v.14).

3:10 *For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse-* See on 3:1 *Bewitched you.*

*For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do all things that are written in the book of the law-* The quotation is from the LXX of Dt. 27:26. The Masoretic text is different: "Cursed is he who doesn't confirm the words of this law to do them". This is an example of where so often the NT seems to prefer to quote the LXX over the MT. This has significant implications for any who insist upon the earth being 6000 years old as based upon the OT genealogies, for the figures are significantly different in the LXX.

3:11 *Now it is evident that no one is justified by the law before God! For, The righteous shall live by faith-* The thought is very similar to that in Romans. Rom. 2:13 uses the same phrase *para Theos* to reason that the *doers* of the law are justified before God; and nobody does the entire law. But here (as in Rom. 1:17) Paul uses a related but slightly different argument. He says that we are not justified by deeds "before God" because of the very existence of the concept of justification *by faith*; and he quotes Hab. 2:4 as an exemplification of this.

3:12 *And the law is not of faith-* Today likewise, legalism does not induce faith. It is our awareness of our disobedience and a deep sense of inability to be righteous which leads us to the faith which is a throwing of ourselves upon Divine grace and the Lord's cross.

*But: He that does the commandments shall live in them-* The 'living' in view, in the context, seems to be 'living eternally'; for Paul has just said that the righteous shall live [eternally] by faith (:11). He therefore understood Lev. 18:5 to mean that life eternal was possible through perfect obedience to the Mosaic law: "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My ordinances; which if a man does, he shall live in them". Notice that "in them" is added by the translators to make better sense of the simple statement that the obedient man "shall live". The truth of this interpretation is in the fact the Lord Jesus was indeed perfectly obedient to the Law and therefore lived for ever; He had to die for multiple reasons, but it was not possible that death should hold Him, seeing He had the right to eternal life through His perfect obedience; and therefore He was resurrected.

3:13- see on Acts 5:30.

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us- See on 3:1 Bewitched you.*

*For it is written: Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree-* The idea is not that for some reason, being hung on a tree made a person "cursed". Those who had sinned unto death, according to the law of Moses, were "cursed" by that law; and those dead, legally cursed people were then hung on a tree. The point is that we have each become cursed by the Law of Moses through failing to completely obey it. And the perfect Lord Jesus was our representative; He there on the cross was and is everyman. It flows naturally from this that we would wish to immerse ourselves into His body there on the cross, identifying with Him, so that His resurrection can become ours. That is of course the meaning of baptism, but the spirit of that identification is to carry on through daily life and thought afterwards.

Note that Paul likens the Lord on the cross to the body of the criminal lifted up *after* death, not in order to lead to death (Gal. 3:13; Dt. 21:23)- as if he understood the Lord to have been effectively dead unto sin at the time the body was lifted up on the cross. It was as if the idea of the cross had been lived out throughout the Lord's life; He was dead as He lived, and dead to sin at the point that His body was lifted up on the tree.

3:14 *This was so that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith-* Paul was so positive about his Galatians, many of whom he says seemed to be departing from the Christian faith. He feared he may have "laboured in vain" for some of them (Gal. 4:11), but he writes of his expectations in a totally positive way: "Christ hath redeemed us... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit [i.e. salvation]" (Gal. 3:13,14). "For ye are *all* the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27-29)- yet Paul could write this despite knowing his readers' lack of faith in Christ (Gal. 1:6; 3:1,3-5; 4:9,11,19,21; 5:4,7). "And because ye are sons... thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:6,7). "So then brethren we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free" (Gal. 4:31). If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others.

3:15- see on 1 Cor. 15:57.

*Brothers, I speak in human terms. Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it has been confirmed, no one makes it void, or adds thereto-* The confirmation of the covenant was 'previous' to the giving of the Law of Moses (:17). The confirmation was in the fact that God made an oath by Himself (Heb. 6:13-18); the promise itself, and then His word of oath, made two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie. The simple covenant of salvation was that anyone who believed the promises to Abraham and associated themselves with his seed will be eternally saved and blessed. Nothing has been added or subtracted from

that ever since it was given. The Lord's death was yet another act of confirming that covenant, and appealing to men and women to believe it and participate in it; but His life and death did not of themselves add anything to the salvation covenant promise given to Abraham, and which forms the basis of the Gospel. And likewise, the law of Moses did not void nor add to that covenant.

3:16 *Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He did not say: And to seeds, in the plural, but in the singular: And to your seed, who is Christ!*- A case can be made that the whole New Testament is a form of *Midrash* on the Old Testament, re-interpreting it in the light of Christ. Paul so often employs the same literary devices found in the rabbinic *Midrashim*, e.g. *al tiqra* [read not thus, but thus- Gal. 3:16 is a classic example].

The promises were made to Abraham's future seed, the Lord Jesus. He did not personally pre-existed.

3:17 *This is what I mean; the law which came years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise of no effect*- The confirmation of the covenant [s.w. :15 "confirmed"] was in that God swore it with an oath. The promise to save people who believed in His offer of blessing / salvation was absolutely certain. The logic of the argument here could suggest that actually, salvation was open to Gentiles in Old Testament times if they simply believed in the Abrahamic covenant. For it was not in any sense annulled; the Lord's death was simply an extra confirmation of it, and enabled believers to identify with the seed.

Gal. 3:15-20 stresses how the Law came after the promises to Abraham, and cannot disannul them. Reasoning back from Paul's writing, we can arrive at some understanding of what the Judaists were saying. Their position was that baptism of Gentiles into the Abrahamic covenant was fine, but they must keep the Law for salvation. Paul is pointing out that the promises to Abraham offer eternal inheritance in the Kingdom on the basis of faith and grace, and neither the Law of Moses nor any other form of legalism can change that fundamental basis. An appreciation of the promises will therefore root us in the wonder of salvation by grace, to the point that we will reject all forms of legalism whenever they are proposed in the ecclesia, and whenever our own flesh seeks to justify itself by works achieved rather than by humbly accepting forgiveness of sins. That the Lord's death took away the Law can be assented to us and passed by. But the RV of Romans draws a difference between "*the law*" and "*law*" without the article, i.e. legality. Because we are saved by grace, no legal code, of Moses or anyone else, can save us. Therefore we are free- but that freedom is so wonderful that we are under "the law of Christ", the rigid principle of always seeking to act as this Man would do, who freed us from law. Otherwise, we end up replacing one form of legalism [under Moses] with another, a set of laws given by Jesus. He *has* saved us in prospect, outside of any law. And we are to rejoice in this and yet respond to it. Dostoevsky's epic *The Brothers Karamazov* is really a parable of the terrible burden of this freedom and the forgiveness of sins. In it, Jesus returns to earth. He is arrested, and the Inquisitor visits Him in the middle of the night. He tries to explain to Jesus that people do not want freedom. They want security. He argues with Jesus, that if one really loves people, then you make them happy- but not free. Freedom is dangerous. People want law, not responsibility; they want the neurotic comfort of rules, not the danger of decision making and the burdens it brings. Christ, says the Inquisitor, must not start up this business about freedom and grace and the commitment and responsibility it demands. Let things be; let the church have its laws. And

will Jesus please go away. The life of grace to the extent that it must be lived is a radical confrontation- it creates the necessity of making pure freewill decisions to do and think acts of grace in response to God's grace. Grace has been presented as the easy way out. It isn't. It is far, far more demanding than legalism.

3:18 *For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise-* The inheritance of "the land of promise" was made possible *before* the Law of Moses was given. Israel were given Canaan on the basis of the promises to Abraham, and not the Law of Moses.

*But God has granted it to Abraham by promise-* Abraham was not given any set of laws he must obey. He was simply asked to believe, and go inherit the promised land. And the Gospel to us is really also that simple. Its very simplicity is why the demand for faith is so intense, and why people would prefer to slip back into some legal system, with a promised reward for obedience which can never be a certain hope because of our disobedience in some ways.

3:19 *For what, then, was the law? It was added because of transgressions-* The descendants of Jacob / Israel were not righteous, although they were God's people. The law of Moses was given to them "because of transgressions". And yet the very existence of the Mosaic Law generated sin, and thereby the experience of God's wrath upon His people (Rom. 4:15). So why were Israel given the Law? In some ways (and this isn't the only reason) to confirm them in their sinfulness. The original Mosaic Law was "holy, just and good" in itself (Rom. 7:12). But later, God gave Israel "laws that were not good" (referring to the Halachas of the Scribes?) so that they would go further away from Him (Ez. 20:25). He must have done this by inspiring men to say things which were genuinely communicated by God, but which were false.

*Until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. The law was given through angels by the hand of a mediator-* The promise was made to the Lord Jesus, therefore, when as yet He did not exist. In this sense the promises were spoken to Christ, the seed of Abraham (:16). God's word of promise likewise spoke to us right back then in Abraham's time- even though we had not then associated with his seed.

3:20 *Now an intermediary implies more than one party, but God is one-* The oath of God to Abraham was a unilateral undertaking. He alone passed through the burning pieces. Likewise the mediation of the Angels implied two parties in a contract- but actually the covenant was unilateral, only God bound Himself by terms and conditions. He simply wanted to pass on the blessing to us. All we have to do is believe it and accept the covenant.

Reflect a moment upon the sheer power and import of the fact that the Father *promised* things to us, who are Abraham's seed by faith and baptism. The Law of Moses was a conditional promise, because there were two parties; but the promises to us are in some sense unconditional, as God is the only "one" party (Gal. 3:19,20). And as if God's own unconditional promise isn't enough, He confirmed those promises to us with the blood of His very own son. Bearing this in mind, it's not surprising that Ps. 111:5 states that God "will *ever* be mindful of His covenant". This means that He's thinking about the covenant made with us *all* the time! And yet how often in daily life do we reflect upon the fact that we really are in covenant relationship with God... how often do we recollect the part we share in the promises to Abraham, how frequently do we feel that we really are in a personal covenant with God Almighty? In Genesis 15, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to

keep my promise'. Jer. 34:18 speaks of how Israelites must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. But in Gen. 15, it is none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals- but only Yahweh does. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

*3:21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid! For if there had been a law given which could give life, truly righteousness would have been of the law-* Under inspiration, Paul so often addresses the unspoken thoughts of his readers. If salvation was promised by faith alone under the Abrahamic covenant, then why ever introduce a law which was impossible to keep? This connects on the same large scale canvas with the question as to why God allowed sin, why there is even the concept of sin. And Paul speaks to these natural and obvious concerns. His answer is that we had to realize our desperation, our need, our hunger, our inability to achieve salvation by any other means- so that we would throw ourselves upon God's grace in Christ as it is presented in the Abrahamic covenant. Perhaps it was the lack of human interest in that wonderful covenant which led God to introduce the Mosaic Law- in order to thereby drive man to Christ. Likewise God uses human sin in order to bring us to Him. If there were no sin, no Law to place accent upon human desperation, then who would need Christ? How much less glory would be given to God and His grace if in fact there was no sin, if there had been no law... It was in this sense that the Law was a teacher / teaching slave to bring us to Christ. Not in that people understood the types and patterns as being Messianic; for here in Galatians 3, Paul says that mankind was "shut up" to all that; but rather in bringing us to know our desperation.

To be given life is paralleled with being given righteousness. Those without sin can live for ever; so the imputation of righteousness means eternal life.

*3:22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe-* See on :14. Sin occurs as a major theme in Paul's writings- not just in Romans, where he speaks so much about sin without hinting that a supernatural 'Satan' figure is involved with it. He sees sin as playing an almost positive, creative role in the formation of the true Christian, both individually and in terms of salvation history. He speaks of how the Mosaic law was given to as it were highlight the power of sin; but through this it lead us to Christ, through our desperation and failure to obey, "that (Gk. *hina*, a purpose clause) we might be righteousness by faith" (Gal. 3:24-26). The curses for disobedience were "in order that (Gk. *hina*) the blessing of Abraham would come upon the Gentiles" (Gal. 3:10-14); "the Scripture consigned all things to sin, in order that (Gk. *hina*)

what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who have faith” (Gal. 3:22). Note that it was the Law, “the Scripture”, which consigned things to sin— not a personal Satan. My point is that sin was used by God, *hina*, ‘in order that’, there would be an ultimately positive spiritual outcome. Indeed this appears to be the genius of God, to work through human failure to His glory. This view of sin, which any mature believer will surely concur with from his or her life experience, is impossible to square with the ideas of dualism, whereby God and ‘sin’ are radically opposed, fighting a pitched battle ranging between Heaven and earth, with no common ground. No – God is truly Almighty in every sense, and this includes His power over sin. The life, death and resurrection of His Son were His way of dealing with it – to His glory.

*3:23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law-* Paul sees the Law as a prison house, a law which held us captive in bonds. In the first century, a person was defined not so much by their unique personal character, credit was not given for who they had become or stopped being... but rather by the place in society into which they were born. And so these group-oriented people came to live out the expectations of society- and so the whole process rolled on through the generations. It was continuity rather than change, tradition rather than transformation, which was valued. Change was seen as some kind of deviancy- whereas the Christian gospel is all about change! The past was seen as more glorious than the present and the future, a pattern to be followed- whereas the Gospel of the future Kingdom of God on earth taught that the best time is *ahead*. And so often Paul compares the "past" of our lives with the much better "now" in Christ (Gal. 3:23-27; 4:8,9; Rom. 6:17-22; Eph. 2:11-22; 5:8).

*Imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed-* On one level, the Mosaic Law was a set of such intricate regulations that was almost impossible to keep. And yet it led men to Christ as a gentle slave leading the children to the teacher. I don’t think that the Law of Moses led people to Christ in the sense that they cracked the various types and worked it all out. There’s not one example that I can think of where an Old Testament character did this. Indeed it could appear from Gal. 3:23 and other New Testament passages that until Christ actually came, the Old Testament believers were “shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed”. Therefore the types etc. of the Law of Moses couldn’t have been perceived by them in the same way as we understand them. Hence the Lord’s comment that many righteous men had longed to understand the things of Jesus which the disciples saw and heard in reality. “In other ages” those things of Christ were not made known to men as they were revealed in the New Testament by the preaching of the apostles and New Testament prophets (Eph. 3:5). The Old Testament prophets even seemed to understand that the things they saw and wrote were not so much for themselves as for us (1 Pet. 1:12). Or as Paul says here in Gal. 3:23: “Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith [in Jesus] which should afterwards be revealed”. The Law was a shadow created as it were by the concrete reality of Christ. We can look back and see it all now, but I don’t think the types predicted anything to the people of the time. So how then did the Law lead people to Christ? Was it not that they were convicted of guilt, and cried out for a Saviour? “The law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that... grace might reign... unto eternal life by Jesus” (Rom. 5:20,21). This was the purpose of the Law. And thus Paul quotes David’s rejoicing in the righteousness imputed to him when he had sinned and had no works left to do- and changes the pronoun from “he” to “they” (Rom. 4:6-8). David’s personal experience became typical of that of each of us. It was *through* the experience of that wretched and hopeless position that David and all believers come to know



the true 'blessedness' of imputed righteousness and sin forgiven by grace. Perhaps Gal. 3:22 sums up what we have been saying: "The Scripture [in the context, this refers to the Mosaic Law] hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe". And Paul goes on to say in this very context that the law brings us unto Christ (Gal. 3:24). It brings us- not those who lived under the law. How does it do that? By convicting us of sin, 'concluding' us as being under the control of sin.

*3:24 So that the law became our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith* - The ultimate teacher must be the Lord Himself, not the pastor or speaking brother. The Law was a *paidagogos*, a slave who lead the children to the school teacher. And the teacher, Paul says, is Christ (Gal. 3:23-25). He uses the whole body to make increase of itself in love- not just the elders. As explained under 3:21, the law's bringing men to Christ was not in that people understood the types and patterns as being Messianic; for here in Galatians 3, Paul says that mankind was "shut up" to all that; but rather in bringing us to know our desperation, to highlight our sin, our chronic lack of steel within the soul to bring ourselves to obedience.

*3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*- The idea could be that the "tutor" was in fact a slave who lead the child to the teacher, and remained with them until the teacher came. The terms "Christ" and "faith" are thus put for the same thing- 'justification by faith in Christ'. "Faith" is put for the object of that faith, which is Christ.

*3:26 For you are all sons of God , through faith in Christ Jesus*- The "all" suggests that as Christ is the son of God, so are we. For by being baptized into Christ, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. Entering the body of Christ carries this implication. We must aspire to be united, with neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female etc., because "ye are all one man in Christ" (Gal. 3:28 RV). We "are all sons of God" (3:26 RV) because of our baptism into the Son of God. And so Paul goes on to reason that just as Christ was "the heir" (cp. "this is the heir..."), who is "lord of all", "even so we..." were kept under the law for a time (Gal. 4:1-3). The basis of our unity is that there is only one Jesus, and by being in Him we are living lives committed to the imitation of that same man. It's painless enough to read Gal. 3:27-29- that all those baptized "in Christ" therefore are in a status where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, no human barriers between us. But this is actually something we have to live out in life in order for it to become reality.

*3:27 For as many of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*- Elsewhere Paul urges already baptized believers to clothe themselves with Christ, to put on [s.w.] the new man etc. Baptism is a putting on of the Lord Jesus, a union with Him; but it is something essentially ongoing. The Lord Himself spoke of sharing His baptism as being the same as drinking His cup, sharing His cross (Mk. 10:39); which, again, is a process. Likewise Peter saw baptism as not only the one off act, but more importantly a pledge to live a life in good conscience with God (1 Pet. 3:21). 'Obeying the truth' is not only at baptism, but a lifelong pursuit (Gal. 5:7). The whole body of believers in Christ are being baptized into the body of the Lord Jesus in an ongoing sense (1 Cor. 12:13 Gk.), in that collectively and individually we are growing up into Him who is the Head (Eph. 4:15). See on Col. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:23.

3:28 *There can be neither Jew nor Gentile, there can be neither slave nor free, there can be no male and female- for you all are one in Christ Jesus-* For Paul to calmly teach that baptism into Christ meant that there was now no longer differentiation between male and female, slave and free, Jew, Greek or any other ethnic group- this called into total question all the first century understandings of society. Indeed, the idea that Gentiles could become spiritual "Jews", and that the Jews weren't the *real* children of Abraham, was an intentional reversal of the categories around which society had been built. Much of the early 'geography' of the first century involved stereotypical descriptions of ethnic and geographical groups, usually ending up with praising the Greco-Roman peoples as being superior in every way to all others. Yet this worldview, which was accepted even by the despised ethnic groups about themselves, had to be ended for those in Christ. Being in *Him* was to be their defining feature. This was equally radical for the Jews, who held themselves above these stereotypes about themselves. Contrary to what is often claimed, Paul went out of his way to show that contemporary views of women were unacceptable for those in the Lord. His teaching here is that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male or female, is surely conscious allusion to the Jewish traditional morning prayer for men: "My God, I thank thee that I was not born a Gentile but a Jew, not a slave but a free man, not a woman but a man". He is surely saying that for those in Christ, the Jewish male world-view is unacceptable.

It was hard psychologically for Jews to convert to Christianity. There were elements of Christian teaching which were a direct affront to Judaism. Part of being a Christian was to expect to be treated by the Jews in just the same way as they had treated Jesus. The Sabbath was replaced with keeping the first day of the week for worship; the food laws were reduced by Paul's inspired teaching to parts of "the weak and beggarly elements". The Jewish hatred of the Christians is revealed by the riots that ensued when the Gospel was preached in the synagogues, and in the persecution of the Christians at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem, Damascus and in the Asian cities (according to the letters in Rev. 2,3). The insistence that Jewish converts be baptized would have been hard of acceptance; for Gentiles took just such a ritual bath when they converted to Judaism. For orthodox Jews to submit to baptism demanded a lot- for it implied they were not by birth part of the true Israel as they had once proudly thought. The Jews thought of Israel in the very terms which Paul applies to Jesus: "We Thy people whom Thou hast honoured and hast called the Firstborn and Only-Begotten, Near and Beloved One". The New Testament uses these titles to describe the Lord Jesus Christ- and we must be baptized into Him in order to be in His Name and titles. The Lord Jesus was thus portrayed as Israel idealized and personified, all that Israel the suffering servant should have been; thus only by baptism into Christ of Jew and Gentile could they become part of the true seed of Abraham, the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The act of baptism into Christ is no less radical for us in our contexts today than it was for first century Jews. All we once mentally held dear, we have to give up.

Gal. 3:27-29 explains that through baptism into the Abrahamic covenant, there is a special unity between all in that covenant. Slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile are all thereby united, as they were in the early church. David Bosch comments: "The revolutionary nature of the early Christian mission manifested itself, *inter alia*, in the new relationships that came into being in the community. Jew and Roman, Greek and barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor, woman and man, accepted one another as brothers and sisters. It was a movement without analogy, indeed a sociological impossibility". Likewise ecclesial life today can seem "a sociological impossibility", but through the power of the most basic facts of the Gospel preached to Abraham, this incredible unity is possible. As a nexus "without analogy", the true Christian community of itself ought to attract the attention of earnest men and women- just as

the Lord predicted. Our unity should be the basis of our appeal to men. And yet our divided state is a tragic witness against us in this regard. Because there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ means that in practice, amongst those that "have put on the new man [a reference to baptism into Christ]... there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman [clear allusion to Gal. 3:27-29]. But Christ is all, and in all. Put on *therefore*... a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another" (Col. 3:10-13 RV). *These things* are what the promises to Abraham are all about in practice! Because we are all now united in Christ in our status as Abraham's seed, *therefore* we must see to it that through kindness, patience etc. there really *is not* Jew and Greek, or division of any kind, between us.

3:29- see on Mt. 25:34.

*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and the heirs according to the promise!*- The promise was made to two people- Abraham and his seed, the Lord Jesus. By being in Christ, all that is true of the seed is true of us. And so the paradox is fulfilled- the singular seed (:16) is also as many as the stars of the sky.

## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 But I mean so long as the heir is a child, he differs nothing from a slave, though he is lord of all-* The argument carries straight on from 3:29, where those baptized into Christ have been declared heirs along with Abraham. But Paul is saying that heirs don't receive anything "until the day appointed by the father" (:2). Inheritance in the first century wasn't necessarily received on the death of the parent. We think of the younger son in the parable demanding his inheritance whilst his father was still living. The father appointed a time or age at which the heir would receive the inheritance. Until that day, although the child was heir, even of absolutely everything ["though he is lord of all"], it was of no real meaning- the child had as much legal right to it as a slave. Children had no real value as persons- they were effectively treated as slaves. Many women were in the same position, which explains why the early critics of Christianity mocked it as a religion largely comprised of women and children. True Christianity is attractive today likewise to those who are seen by others as non persons.

The heir in view is the "seed" of chapter 3, the Lord Jesus, who is now "Lord of all". But Paul now argues as if the heir in view is everyone who was led by the law to become the seed of Abraham by faith. All that is true of the Lord is true of us personally.

*4:2 But the child is under guardians and stewards-* This continues the thought of 3:24; the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ.

*Until the day appointed by the father-* Paul argues that the day of inheritance has now come. We were proven to be the true adult sons of our Father, God, when He sent forth the Spirit of adoption into our hearts (:6). "The day appointed" sounds very much like that of the Lord's second coming; but the point is that for those who have received the Lord Jesus now, He has 'come' into their hearts, and our experience of Him now is a foretaste of what we shall eternally experience in the Kingdom age. The implication of the argument is that in some sense, we are "heirs", inheritors, in that we are those who have now received the inheritance. This does not preclude a future, literal receipt of the land inheritance; but we have received the spiritual blessings promised Abraham, which Acts 3:26 interprets as the turning away of our hearts from sin.

*4:3 So we also! When we were children, we were held in bondage under the elementary principles of the world-* Paul paints a rather onerous picture of childhood. It perhaps reflected his own experience, but all the same as noted on :1, children were seen as non-persons in first century Mediterranean society.

Paul says that the Galatians formerly lived as enslaved to the "elements of the cosmos" (Gal. 4:3), also a phrase used in the Jewish apostate writings; "what by nature are not gods" (*tois phusei mê ousin theois*; Gal. 4:8,9). They are "weak and powerless elements" (*ta asthenê kai ptocha stoicheia*; Gal. 4:9). The system of Satan, sinful Angels, demons etc. which the Jews believed in, Paul is showing to now be non-existent and at the best powerless. The real background problem, Paul is saying, is not a personal Satan and a network of demons; rather is it the influence of the Mosaic law and Judaism. See on Col. 2:17.

*4:4 But when the fullness of the time came-* As if God carefully set a time period for the operation of the Mosaic law, just as He brought it into operation at a specific point 430 years after the covenant with Abraham (3:17). This idea of a specific time period is in keeping with

the analogy regarding a child being set a period of time to live under governors, until he receives the inheritance as a young adult. I discussed under Galatians 3 the whole reason why the Law was given; its intention was to highlight sin and grace, and to make men throw themselves upon God's grace in Christ when this appeared in the person of the historical Jesus. The time period was optimal for that purpose to be achieved; yet many preferred the Law and effectively rejected Jesus, or like the Galatians, accepted Him but then went to the Law. That shows how God carefully set up a potential, but people preferred not to make use of it. He prepared and put them through a course of education, if you like; but they didn't engage with it, didn't get it, and went their own ways.

*God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law-* The purpose for this was "that we might receive the adoption of sons" (:5). Paul has just explained in chapter 3 that by baptism into Christ, we are counted as Him. All that is true of Him becomes true of us; He was Abraham's seed, so are we. Paul is explaining how the heirs came to receive the inheritance. We became the full sons of God because God's Son was born and was human. As our representative, we can identify with Him by baptism (3:27-29) and thus become Him, as it were. Again note that the implication of the argument is that in some sense, we are "heirs", inheritors, in that we are those who have now received the inheritance. This does not preclude a future, literal receipt of the land inheritance; but we have received the spiritual blessings promised Abraham, which Acts 3:26 interprets as the turning away of our hearts from sin.

*4:5 That He might redeem those that were under the law-* To return "under the law" therefore makes the Lord's work vain (2:21). The Lord's death was primarily to save Israel, those under the law. This was the focus of His work; it was their general rejection of it which made the more universal aspect of His death more public, as it were.

*That we might receive the adoption of sons-* See on :4. Because He was human, of our nature, our representative, we can thereby be adopted as the sons of God- if we identify with Him. The proof this wonderful plan has been achieved is by the Spirit of adoption being sent forth into our hearts, whereby we are enabled to cry to God as 'Abba', 'daddy', just as God's only begotten Son did. The role of the Spirit is therefore crucial and cannot just be ignored or downplayed or manhandled to refer only to miraculous gifts in the first century. That is clearly not the reference here at all, for the Spirit is sent into our *hearts*.

4:6- see on Mk. 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Jude 20.

*And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father-* Note this was said to the apostate Galatians. The work of God's Spirit was still active within them, and they were still to be treated as His beloved sons. Clearly at the point of commitment to Christ in baptism, the Spirit is sent into the heart of the believer; a psychological strengthening, enabling us to feel towards God as the Lord Jesus did, addressing Him as the Lord did: Abba, Father. This strange method of addressing God was characteristic of Jesus, and must've been very noticeable and provoked much wonder and comment. Thus we are being told that His characteristic personal style of relationship with the Father is now ours; and this is very much the idea of His discourse about the Comforter. See on 3:2.

4:7- see on Mt. 25:34.

*So you are no longer a slave but a son-* Paul is slightly stretching the bounds of the analogy here. He began by saying that we are heirs, but an heir who is a child is no better than a slave (:1). Now Paul is saying that under the Law of Moses, people were slaves. They had not received the inheritance promised by the Abrahamic covenant, even though it had been promised to them.

An advantage of reading versions that use “ye” and “thou” is that one can discern at a glance when ‘you’ plural and ‘you’ singular is being used. Gal. 3:26-29 speaks in the plural: “*Ye* are all the children of God by faith in Christ... and if *ye* be Christ’s [by baptism into Him], then are *ye* Abraham’s seed and heirs”. The very same ideas are then repeated a few verses later, but with the singular ‘you’: “And because *ye* are sons... wherefore *thou* art no more a servant but a son; and if a son [not ‘sons’], then an [singular] heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:6,7); and just to press the point home, he reverts to speaking of “you” [plural] in the subsequent verses. It’s as if Paul is talking generally, in the plural, of us all as a baptized community, heirs together of the promises, all in covenant relationship with God; but then he as it were swirls in upon us each individually; these promises really apply to us each one personally. And the outcome of this must be a deep seated joy and gratitude for God’s grace. The focus of Scripture and the Lord Jesus is upon individuals, not upon the building of a faceless and person-less social structure. Notice how often Paul talks of “you” or “ye”, and then focuses down to “thee” or “thou”- from the you plural to the you singular. Take Gal. 4:6,7: “Your [plural] hearts... thou [singular] art...”; or “Ye [plural] are all sons of God... thou art... a son” (Gal. 3:26; 4:7 RV). It all comes down to us personally...

*And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ-* We become legitimate heirs because the Lord Jesus was the “heir of all” (:1; Heb. 1:2), “heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). Rom. 4:13,14 use the same language; it was the promise to Abraham which promised an inheritance. The Law of Moses didn’t promise any inheritance. Another similarity with Romans is the idea of being an heir of God; He as our Father didn’t die and thus pass us the inheritance; rather God decided to give us the inheritance after a period of preparing us, as we entered adulthood: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs- heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. If so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him”. Here in Galatians, the same point is made- the receipt of the Spirit proves that we are God’s children. Because we are identified with Christ’s death, then we are joint-heirs with Him. Or as Galatians here puts it, we are heirs of God on account of Christ.

4:8 *However, at that time, not knowing God, you were in bondage to those that by nature are not gods-* This sounds as if Gentiles are being addressed. It’s hard to decide to whom Paul is writing Galatians- whether to Gentile or Jewish Christians. Acts portrays Paul as going to cities in Galatia and preaching to Jews within the synagogue system. On that basis, we would assume that he is writing to Jewish Christians who are returning to the Law. This is why he speaks of how they have “turn[ed] back *again* to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be *once more*” (:9). Likewise 5:1 “do not get entangled *again* in a yoke of bondage”. The pronouns in 2:15 seem to connect Paul the Jew with a Jewish readership in Galatia: “*We* being Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles... *we*...”. On the other hand, the language here sounds as if the audience were once Gentiles; and in 5:2 he speaks as if they were being circumcised in order to be acceptable with God (although the Greek could mean that they were thinking that their circumcision

made them acceptable). However 6:12,13 definitely speaks of false teachers encouraging the Galatians to be circumcised: "who would force you to be circumcised... they desire to have you circumcised". Perhaps some were Jews, some Gentiles. Yet the argument seems to be that those under the Law, without faith in Christ, were not actually "knowing God" and were in bondage to false gods. This is far from the only place where Paul develops the paradox that Judaism is in fact a form of pagan idolatry (see on 3:1 and 4:25). At very least, Paul would be saying that the Gentiles amongst them, who had previously worshipped idols, were in the same position as Jews under the Law without Christ. However the kind of complex argument in 4:21 ff., using Biblical history as "law" and arguing in a strictly rabbinic style, makes us wonder whether the Galatian audience were in fact Jewish; for surely the power and nuances of the argument would be lost on any not highly familiar with the Jewish scriptures and style of Rabbinic reasoning; the references to desiring their circumcision in chapter 5 would then refer to desiring them to be circumcised in order to be saved.

Paul challenges the Galatians: "You who were enslaved to those who were not really gods... How can you turn back again to those weak and beggarly spirits (*stoicheia*), whose slaves you want to be once more?" (Gal. 4:8,9). Here he parallels demonic spirits with 'gods who are not really gods'. But note how Paul argues [under Divine inspiration] – "*even if* there are" such demons / idols... *for us* there is to be only one God whom we fear and worship. This in fact is a continuation of the Psalmists' attitude. Time and again the gods / idols of the pagan nations are addressed *as if they exist*, but are ordered to bow down in shame before Yahweh of Israel (Ps. 29:1,2,10; 97:7). Whether they exist or not becomes irrelevant before the fact that they are powerless before the one true God – and therefore it is He whom we should fear, trusting that He alone engages with our lives for our eternal good in the end. "Yahweh is a great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3) shows the Divine style – rather than overly stressing that the gods / idols / demons don't exist, the one true God isn't so primitive. Neither were the authors and singers of Psalm 95. The greatness of His Kingship is what's focused upon – not the demerits and non-existence of other gods. To do so would be altogether too primitive for the one true God. And likewise with the Lord's miracles – God's gracious power to save was demonstrated, *this* was where the focus was; and its very magnitude shows the relative non-existence of 'demons'.

4:9- see on Gal. 1:1.

*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God-* This is not Paul as it were correcting himself. "Rather" would be better rendered 'moreso'. God's knowledge of us is what results in our responding by seeking to know Him. Likewise Paul writes in Phil. 3:12 of grabbing hold of the Lord who had grabbed hold of him. It's not that God plays hard to get, and whoever figures out His word correctly will find Him, hidden behind a mass of theology and interpretation which we must get right. God is in search of man. He knows / recognizes us, and we in turn know Him. Understanding this puts paid to all intellectual pride in having 'found' God by our own searching of the scriptures. The initiative was with Him. Paul considers that coming to believe in imputed righteousness, salvation by faith alone rather than by works of the Law, was and is "to know God". Justification by works and legalism is an attitude that does not know God. For God is His grace and salvation by that grace.

*How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless-* Literally, 'poverty stricken, poor'. Paul only elsewhere uses the word in Galatians for the Jewish poor (2:10).

*Elementary principles of the world-* The Greek for "elements" is always used concerning the elements of the Mosaic Law.

*Whose slaves you want to be-* There is a tendency in human nature to actually desire servitude. We see it most clearly in the tendency to addiction which there is in us all. But that is just a very public, open manifestation of what is latent within us each. The call to radical freedom in Christ is such that when people really see it, they shy away from it. The Galatians are a parade example for all time.

*Once more-* See on :8.

4:10 *You observe-* The Greek word used is not the most natural nor obvious one to use if Paul meant 'You are now keeping the Jewish feasts'. The word is elsewhere only translated 'watching' or 'looking towards', as if they were considering keeping the feasts. Paul himself kept some Jewish feasts, so we must read him as meaning that they were considering keeping them as a means to salvation.

*Days and months and seasons and years-* "Sabbatical years, occurring every seventh year. Not years of Jubilee, which had ceased to be celebrated after the time of Solomon".

4:11 *I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain-* The implication is that any labour is in vain if it does not result in a person entering God's Kingdom. And Paul knew that attempting to enter the Kingdom by obedience was doomed to failure. But see on 4:17 *They zealously seek you*. We too are surrounded by believers who are not completely certain of their salvation, because they have not fully accepted total salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Our labour too must be to persuade them of that simple, all demanding message of the true Gospel- and keep them believing it.

Paul feared he may have "laboured in vain" for some of them, but he writes of his expectations in a totally positive way: "Christ hath redeemed us... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit [i.e. salvation]" (Gal. 3:13,14). "I am afraid of you (i.e. what your position will result in for both you and me at the judgment?), lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:11).

4:12 *Brothers I urge you to become as I am, for I also have become as you-* "As I am" may mean 'One who once believed in the necessity to keep the Jewish laws, but who ditched it'; and "become as you" may mean 'Become effectively a Gentile, saved by faith in the Abrahamic covenant'. This assumes he is writing to a Gentile audience- see on :8. Paul aimed to become as his audience: "to those without law, I became as without law" (1 Cor. 9:21). God in Christ became as us, indeed even in OT times He limited Himself in some ways, to be as we are. And we reflect that spirit by seeking to become as others are, that we might win them to Christ. This means that preaching is infinitely more than holding out a set of doctrinal truths and waiting for some curious passer-by to grasp them from us.

The way Paul *begs* us to follow him (e.g. "become as I am") indicates the degree of confidence he had in acceptance by his Lord, his certainty that his way to the Kingdom was valid (Surely he had been told this by some Divine revelation?). See on Phil. 1:10 and Gal. 4:29 *Persecuted him that was born after the Spirit*.



Paul plays powerfully upon the idea of the two selves when he appeals to the Galatians "be as I am; for I am as you are" (Gal. 4:12). At first hearing, this seems nonsensical- how can Paul beseech the Galatians to be like him, if he was already like them? Fact is, their behaviour was unlike him; yet he saw their spiritual selves as being like him. And he asks them to be that spiritual self which he perceived them to have. We likewise need to perceive our difficult brethren as having a spiritual self, which they need to live up to.

*You did me no wrong-* The aorist means 'To date you did me no wrong- don't do so now [by returning to the Law]'.  
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4:13 *You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first-* William Barclay comments: “Paul never saw a boat riding at anchor or moored at a quay but he wanted to board her and to preach the gospel to the lands beyond. He never saw a range of hills in the distance but he wanted to cross them and to preach the gospel to the lands beyond”. When Paul was in Pamphylia, he decided to go on to Galatia, where on account of infirmity of the flesh he preached to the Galatians (Gal. 4:13). The suggestion has been made that the low-lying Pamphylia was a source of malaria, which may have been Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”, and he therefore sought the uplands of Galatia. And yet he could easily have returned to Antioch. But instead, he went on, up into the highlands, to spread the Gospel yet further. The way there led up precipitous roads to the plateau; the roads were cut by mountain streams, prone to flash floods which often carried travellers to their death. And these roads were the haunt of bandits, who would murder a man just for a copper coin. No wonder Mark went back. But as William Barclay observes, “the wonder is not so much that Mark went back as that Paul went on”. Although a sick man, he was driven by that desire to spread the Gospel further. Surely this is why his Lord was so pleased to open the hearts of the Galatians to the Gospel. The way the Holy Spirit controlled Paul’s missionary itineraries is an example of how mission work is almost purposefully made difficult at times. Thus Paul was forbidden to go north into Bithynia, and from going Southwest into coastal Asia Minor- and there were good roads leading to those places from where he was, and it would’ve seemed they were the logical places to go and expand the work of the Gospel. But instead Paul was told to go diagonally, cross country, through the rough roads and passes of central Asia Minor, to Troas- from where he was told to go to Macedonia. And on the way through that wild mountainous area, it seems Paul became sick. And we follow similar paths in our witness, if it is truly God directed.

4:14 *And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as a messenger of God, as Christ Jesus-* Perhaps it was a test in that like many today, people prefer their preacher to be dashing, handsome, healthy and successful. Not a sick man, through whom the very picture of the crucified Christ was placarded before their eyes (see on 3:1). It was by Paul's manifestation of the crucified Christ through his sickness that they were persuaded of Christ; and specifically, of salvation by faith rather than works. For Paul's sickness likely left him without the possibility of performing works for salvation.

4:15- see on 2 Cor. 12:7.

*Where then is that satisfaction you felt?*- Not a good translation. The word is translated "blessedness" elsewhere, and always in the context of the blessing promised to Abraham being that of imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:6,9). They no longer felt that blessedness

because they were seeking their justification by acts of obedience rather than faith alone. If we truly believe in the blessing promised to Abraham, and have received it, we too will speak of that blessedness as the Galatian converts did. Note that the blessings promised to Abraham had been received by them, the fulfilment of them is not solely and only in the future; see on 4:1.

*For I testify, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me-* It was before the eyes of the Galatians that they saw in Paul, Jesus Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1). But the only other reference to the eyes of the Galatians is in Gal. 4:15- where we read that they had been so transfixed by Paul's preaching that they had been ready to pluck out their eyes. And where's the only other reference to plucking out eyes? It's in the Lord's teaching, where He says that if our eye offends us, we should pluck it out [Mt. 5:29- same Greek words used]. The connection is surely this: Paul's personal reflection of the crucified Jesus was so powerful, so compellingly real and credible, that it motivated his hearers to rise up to the spirit of the very hardest demands of the moral teaching of that same Jesus. Insofar as we genuinely live out the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, our preaching of His radical moral demands will likewise be heeded. The crucified Christ that Paul placarded before their eyes was "the truth" (Gal. 3:1; 4:14-16); and the integrity and reality of that truth was confirmed by the congruence between the example of Paul, and the reality of the crucified Jesus whom he manifested to them. In Paul's body language, in his character, in his response to problems and frustrations great and small, in the way he coped with physical weakness, his audience somehow saw the crucified Christ. In the same letter, Paul reminds the Galatians how they had initially seen him preaching to them in a weak bodily state, and had seen Christ in him then (Gal. 4:13,14). He says in Gal. 3:1 that they saw Christ crucified in him. Perhaps the way Paul handled a sickness or bodily weakness which he then had, somehow reflected to his audience the spirit of Christ crucified.

4:16 *So then have I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?*- Society and human existence was all about what others thought of you; appearances were all important, loss of face before your community was a fate worse than death, and the honour of your family or community was crucial. You had to be polite, say what was right in the ears of your hearers rather than what was true, never shame those in your 'group' by telling inconvenient truths, say what the others want to hear. Against this background, and it's a background not so strange for any of us today in essence, the commands to be truthful, even if it meant becoming the enemy of some because you told the truth (Gal. 4:16), take on a new challenge.

Gal. 3:1 remonstrates with the Galatians as to how they could not obey the truth when the crucified Christ had been so clearly displayed to them; clearly Paul saw obedience to the truth as obedience to the implications of the cross. There is a powerful parallel in Gal. 4:16: I am your enemy because I tell you the truth... you are enemies of the cross of Christ. Thus the parallel is made between the cross and the truth. We are sanctified by the truth (Jn. 17:19); but our sanctification is through cleansing in the Lord's blood. The same word is used of our sanctification through that blood (Heb. 9:13; 10:29; 13:12). Perhaps this is why Dan. 8:11,12 seems to describe the altar as "the truth". The cross of Jesus is the ultimate truth. There we see humanity for what we really are; there we see the real effect of sin. Yet above all, there we see the glorious reality of the fact that a Man with our nature overcame sin, and through His sacrifice we really can be forgiven the untruth of all our sin; and thus have a real, concrete, definite hope of the life eternal.

4:17 *They zealously seek you for no good purpose. On the other hand, they desire to exclude you- so you might go running after them-* The GNB may have it about right in paraphrasing: "Those other people show a deep interest in you, but their intentions are not good. All they want is to separate you from me, so that you will have the same interest in them as they have in you". Thus zeal is no sign of acceptability with God. Paul talks of how he is 'zealous over' [s.w.] his converts (2 Cor. 11:2). But the Judaizers were likewise 'zealous over' the same converts. They were involved in a political tug of war, and the Judaizers won, despite all Paul's work for them. I have often been involved in this kind of thing, and seen others involved in it, and my conclusion is that we need to do our part and not get involved in feeling personally wronged or fought against. I wonder if Paul was not completely mature in his attitude to the conflict; he was so personally invested in it that he felt that his work had been "in vain" if his converts went to Judaism (see on :11). My impression however after these kinds of experiences is that finally, nothing is in vain, no service of the Lord can be looked back upon as purely wasted time. Yet Paul speaks like this because he was overly personally invested in the conflict.

4:18 *But it is good to be zealous in a good matter at all times, and not only when I am present with you-* Paul recognized that their enthusiasm was greater when he was with them. And he says this is no bad thing- but it must continue. Such inspiration by human personalities is therefore not to be totally despised; the problem is that such zeal tends not to continue once those personalities are off the scene. See on :20 *I so wish*.

4:19 *My little children, of whom I am again in the pains of childbirth-* See on :17. I do wonder whether this kind of figure suggests Paul was taking it all rather too personally; for the converts were not born out of him personally, but from the Lord. But then it is also true that the work of converting others is ultimately personal and involves intense personal engagement.

*Until Christ be formed in you-* The Galatians had not *per se* left Christianity; they had adopted a version of Christianity which trusted in works for salvation. Paul understands this as meaning that Christ is no longer within them. This is the scary thing, as we survey our surrounding Christian scene in which so few seem solidly persuaded that if the Lord returns today, they will surely be saved because of their faith in His grace. It is having "Christ in you" which is "the hope of glory", the guarantee that we shall eternally live with Him (Col. 1:27). Here in Galatians Paul has expressed that truth in terms of the Spirit of Christ being placed within the believer as a guarantee of salvation (4:6), what Eph. 1:13,14 calls sealing with the promised Holy Spirit as "a guarantee of our inheritance, of the final redemption". But the Galatians no longer had this, because they sought salvation not by the Spirit but by obedience to the letter.

4:20 *I so wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am in doubt about you-* The idea is that Paul felt that if he were present with them, then he would be able to change his upbraiding tone towards them because he would successfully persuade them to remain with grace rather than Judaism (see GNB). As noted on :18, Paul knew that his presence with them affected them positively. But if physical presence is required, then there is no depth of conviction. So many examples from church life flood to mind; of those who lived highly committed lives until influential figures passed off the scene, and then the commitment ended. It is only personal connection with the Lord Jesus which will provide lasting motivation right up until our last mortal breath.

4:21 *Tell me, you that want to be under the law, do you not hear the law?*- This kind of complex argument which follows, using Biblical history as "law", makes us wonder whether the Galatian audience were in fact Jewish, for surely the power and nuances of the argument would be lost on any not highly familiar with the Jewish scriptures; the references to desiring their circumcision in chapter 5 would then refer to desiring them to be circumcised in order to be saved.

4:22 *For it is written that Abraham had two sons. One by the handmaid, and one by the freewoman*- The allegory, like all such methods of presenting, is presenting history selectively; although it is axiomatic that history of itself is selective. Abraham had far more than two sons; he had others by Keturah and other handmaids, indeed it could be argued that he had them before the birth of Isaac and Ishmael. But the two sons are chosen here for the purposes of the allegory.

4:23 *However the son by the handmaid was born after the flesh, but the son by the freewoman was born through the promise*- The usual NT contrast is between flesh and spirit. Here it is between flesh and promise, because the promise in view is that of the Spirit.

4:24 *Such things contain an allegory. For these women are two covenants. One from mount Sinai, bearing children to bondage, which is Hagar*- The two sons are presented as being a slave and a freeborn son. This connects with the previous argument in 4:7; that we are no longer slaves under the Law, but sons. The tension between bond and free has been introduced in 3:28; in Christ there is no longer bond and free. And that is because we are "in Christ" and thus are all the free born children, the Son of God as He was. The argument in 3:27-29 is not so much that it simply doesn't matter of what gender, ethnicity or social status we are. Those things don't matter because we are Christ; all of us are Him. Who He was and is becomes who we are. He is the freeborn Son of God; and so we are too. Therefore there is no difference between bond and free because we are all free, the freeborn sons of God.

4:25 *Now this Hagar represents mount Sinai in Arabia, she corresponds to the Jerusalem that now is; for she is in bondage with her children*- It can be argued that Paul's extended allegory in Gal. 4:24-31 about "Jerusalem which now is" has some reference to the Jewish Christian elders in Jerusalem who had made the deal with him about making the Gentile converts keep at least some of the Jewish laws. The heavenly Jerusalem which is "free" would then be a reference to the freedom Paul felt for his Gentile converts; and the persecution of those born after the spirit would then be a sideways reference to the trouble he was experiencing from the Jewish-Christian attacks upon him. Paul observes earlier that "I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto" (Gal. 3:15). His speaking humanly was perhaps because he was tongue in cheek alluding to the human covenant of Acts 15, to which he believed the Jewish Christian elders in Jerusalem had "added" by still demanding that Christian converts lived in a Jewish manner.

Paul's argument is that Judaism was to be associated with Hagar and Ishmael; whereas every Jew was insistent that they were from the line of Isaac. Again, Paul is arguing that Judaism is in fact paganism (see on 3:1 and 4:8).

4:26 *But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother*- The Jews believed that "as the navel is found at the centre of a human being, so the land of Israel is found at the centre of

the world... Jerusalem is the centre of the land of Israel, the temple is at centre of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the centre of the temple, the ark is at the centre of the Holy of Holies... which spot is the foundation of the world... the holy city... is also the mother city". This was all consciously countermanded in Hebrews, where each of these features of the temple is shown to have been surpassed in Christ; and it is the *Heavenly* Jerusalem which is now "the mother of us all" (Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:26). And of course Gal. 4 drives home the point that it is the "Jerusalem which is above" which is the true Jerusalem, whereas the earthly Jerusalem and temple are in fact now to be associated with bondage and Abraham's illegitimate seed. This language of Hebrews and Galatians was just as tough on the Romans, who considered *Italia* as the "mother of all lands", and Rome to be the mother city. Paul's language was geared to provoke his readers to decide strongly one way or the other.

4:27 *For it is written: Rejoice, O barren one who did not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who were not in labour! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than those of the one who has a husband-* Abraham's relationship with Hagar doesn't really sound like marriage. And yet she is called "the one who has a husband", as if God recognized the relationship even though it was less than ideal.

4:28 *Brothers: We, as Isaac was, are children of promise-* Note the warmth of the language. These "brothers" had chosen Judaism, and Paul has just told them that Christ must be formed in them again seeing they are devoid of the Spirit, not experiencing the promised "blessedness", and had effectively precluded themselves from salvation by seeking to achieve it by works. He felt his work for them had been in vain. And yet Paul now speaks of them as if they are saved, and his full brothers. Likewise he says that the Lord still ministers the Spirit to them and ministers amongst them (3:5). It could be argued that Paul's protestations about the Galatians were exaggerated and reflective of how he had become far too personally invested in them. Or it could be that as with the Corinthians, he accepts them as his brethren in Christ by status, assuming their salvation because it was not for him to condemn them; whilst at the same time openly facing their failures and addressing them.

4:29 *But as then, he that was born after the flesh-* Identifying Ishmael with the Judaizers and those who sought to obey the Mosaic Law was highly provocative. Their attempts at super righteousness were in fact effectively paganistic. See on 3:1 and 4:8.

*Persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, so also it is now-* Birth after the Spirit would refer to the Lord Jesus and all in Him. The language of persecuting naturally suggests what Paul himself had done to Him and those born after the Spirit. Hence he wishes the Galatians to make the same huge change which he had made (:12). Birth after the Spirit may well allude to Jn. 3:3-5. It is the Spirit which is used in our figurative conception. This is the vehicle through which God shows His grace, in beginning spiritual life in one but not another.

4:30 *However, what does the scripture say-* Sarah's screaming indignation can be well imagined. Consider which words were probably stressed most by her: "Cast out *this* bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman *shall not be heir* (just hear her voice!) with *my* son, even with *Isaac*" (Gen. 21:10). This is in harmony with her previous bitterness and aggression to Hagar and Abraham. Her attitude in implying that Ishmael was *not* the seed is gently rebuked by God in his subsequent words to Abraham concerning Ishmael: "He *is* thy seed" (Gen. 21:13). And yet Sarah's words are quoted in Gal. 4:30 as

inspired Scripture! Here we see the wonder of the God with whom we deal, in the way in which He patiently bore with Sarah and Abraham. He saw through her anger, her jealousy, the pent up bitterness of a lifetime, and he saw her faith. And he worked through that screaming, angry woman to be His prophet. According to Gal. 4:30, God Himself spoke through her in those words, outlining a principle which has been true over the generations; that the son of the slave must be cast out, and that there must always be conflict between him and the true seed. Sarah in her time of child-birth is likened to us all as we enter the Kingdom, full of joy (Is. 54:1-4); and yet at that time she was eaten up with pride and joy that she could now triumph over her rival. And yet Sarah at that time is seen from a righteous perspective, in that she is a type of us as we enter the Kingdom. God's mercy to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily. See on Heb. 11:11.

*Cast out the handmaid and her son, for the son of the handmaid shall not inherit with the son of the freewoman-* Hinting at the need to eject the Judaist false teachers from within the church? Paul warns that the Galatian Jews had suffered so much but in vain, seeing they were returning to the Law (Gal. 3:4). It is no accident that Gal. 4:25 draws the contrast between the two Jerusalems- perhaps a reference to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who had returned to the bondage of the law, and the spiritual Jerusalem. And now Paul goes so far as to say that the Legalists must be cast out of the true ecclesia (Gal. 4:30). Circumcision shielded from persecution in Galatia (Gal. 6:12) in that it was the Jews and their "false brethren" who infiltrated the ecclesias (Gal. 2:4), and who were responsible for the deaths of many of the first century apostles and prophets. This suggests that the circumcision party within the ecclesias was linked with the Roman and Jewish authorities, and therefore 'satan' is a term used for them all. It got beyond dirty politics in the church.

Paul here quotes the bitchy, unspiritual words of Sarah in Gen. 21:10 with approval and as "scripture". God surely did not approve of her hot tempered nastiness; but He worked through that as we should see to work through others' sin and weakness, and try to incorporate it into a far greater narrative.

4:31 *Therefore brothers, we are not children of the handmaid but of the freewoman-* But Paul has been arguing that the Galatians were in fact "children of the handmaid". He is therefore asking them to be in practice what they were by status, having been baptized into Christ.

## CHAPTER 5

5:1- see on Gal. 5:11.

*For freedom did Christ set us free-* Romans 6 compares baptism to a change of masters. The point has been made that this is a reference to manumission, whereby a 'redeemer' gave a 'ransom' to a god, which meant that a slave was freed from his master and became a free man, although he was counted as a slave to the god to whom the redeemer had paid the ransom. Indeed, *lutron*, one of the words translated "ransom" with regard to the blood of Christ, has this specific meaning. Deissmann comments: "When anybody heard the Greek word *lutron*, "ransom", in the first century, it was natural for him to think of the purchase money for manumitting slaves". This means that when we come to understand the atonement, we understand that the price has been paid to free us from slavery into the service of God. We are in the position of a slave who suddenly discovers some gracious benefactor has made the longed for payment of ransom. And so he goes free, but is willingly and eagerly in slavery to the god to whom his redeemer had paid the price. In our case this is none other than the One, Almighty God of Israel. And the ransom is the precious blood of Christ, which thereby compels our willing slavery to the new Master. There are other references to manumission in Gal. 5:1,13 RV: "For freedom did Christ set us free... ye have been called unto freedom" and in the references to our being bought with a price, i.e. the blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). And this is the horror of 2 Pet. 2:1- "denying even the Master that bought them [out]". To turn against their gracious redeemer was the ultimate sick act for a slave freed through manumission. And this is the horror of turning away from the Lord. The death of Christ for us is thereby a warning to us of the end of sin and therefore the need to change.

The world, Paul told the Romans, seeks to push us into its mould (Rom. 12:2 J.B. Phillips). And this is increasingly true, as people crowded together catch the same bus each day to arrive at roughly the same time, reading the same newspapers, watching the same soap operas... automatic lives. Yet the real self created in the believer is ultimately *free*. For freedom did Christ set us free. The new person, the essential you and me, is characterized by sudden, creative welling up to the Father's glory. This doesn't mean that we have no habits-regular prayer, Bible study, meeting together etc. are all part of the new person. This is why the elderly, the infirm, the chronically shy, experience the flowering of the person, the sense of new life even in the face of the outward man perishing daily; because their inward man, their real self, is being so strongly infused with power (2 Cor. 4:16). This explains why the graph of spiritual growth in any person is not a smooth upward curve; it is a very jagged line. Our true person asserts itself in those moments of totally free choice to serve our Lord. But we so easily allow our lives to slip back into the automatisms which define our internet personas.

The spirit of life in Christ sets us free from sin (Rom. 8:2); but Gal. 5:1 simply says that "Christ" has set us free [the same Greek phrase] from sin. The Man Christ Jesus is His "spirit of life"; the man and His way of life were in perfect congruence. They always were; for in Him the word was made flesh. There was 'truth' in His very person, in that the principles of the God of Truth were perfectly and totally lived out in His person and being. Back in 1964, Emil Brunner wrote a book, whose title speaks for itself: *Truth As Encounter*. Truth is essentially a person- the Lord Jesus. Truth is an experience, a way of life, a total assurance of forgiveness and salvation, a validation of the new man created within us, in a way so deep, and so strongly felt, that all else appears as falsehood compared to that surpassing 'truth'.

*Therefore, stand fast, and do not get entangled again in a yoke of bondage-* "Again" would suggest to me that the audience was largely Jewish; but see the discussion at 4:8. The allusion is to the "yoke" of life in Christ; Paul seems to be saying that we cannot wear two yokes. We cannot be saved by faith alone, and also by legal obedience.

*5:2 Behold, I Paul say to you: If you receive circumcision-* There is strong reason to think that Paul was writing to a Jewish readership; see on 4:8. So we may need to read in an ellipsis here: 'If you receive the idea that circumcision is required for salvation'. He certainly was not saying that 'circumcision' were not profited by Christ; he means that some attitude to circumcision would lead to not being profited by Christ. But it is equally credible that even Gentile converts to the free salvation in Christ would be tempted to accept Judaism and a mass of regulations. Because this puts salvation under question, and means that the response required of us is so much less. Whereas if we are saved by grace through faith, regardless of our obedience or disobedience ratio, then this is so wonderful that it requires our total response. Every part of our thinking and living becomes subservient to this driving passion of gratitude and joy.

*Christ will profit you nothing-* The argument of Galatians is also found in Romans, here at Rom. 2:25: "For circumcision indeed profits, if you be a doer ['keeper'] of the [whole] law". Here in Gal. 5:3, Paul likewise goes on to reason that relying on circumcision [obedience to one Mosaic law] requires obedience to the entire law. This is the danger of focusing on obedience to just one law; if we think obedience on one point is so critical for salvation, then we require ourselves to in fact keep the entire legal package. And that is the case to this day; salvation is offered either to those who keep the entire law of Moses, or to those who fall in faith upon Christ, believing we are in Him and saved by identification with Him alone. And yet it is a common tendency amongst believers to focus upon one particular act of obedience to commandment and turn this into a shibboleth issue. Be it women wearing head coverings or divorce and remarriage, the same mentality can be evidenced as regarding circumcision in the first century.

*5:3 Yes, I testify again to every man that receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law-* God uses language differently to how we do because He can read motives. Paul and many other Jewish Christians were circumcised, but Paul is reasoning in the letter to the Galatians that the true Jewish believer was not under an obligation to keep the Law: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision" (Gal. 5:6). Therefore "every man that is circumcised" in Galatians 5:3 must mean 'every man who trusts in circumcision or wants to undergo it'. Some modern paraphrases support this, but the point is that what God actually said was that "every man that is circumcised... is a debtor to do the whole law" (see Greek text). Those words are just not true if taken out of context; we need to appreciate that God is speaking from the perspective of knowing men's motives. Paul doesn't mean that every circumcised man is a debtor to keep all the Law. He means that every man who is circumcised *in order to be saved* is a debtor to keep all the law.

5:4- see on Gal. 6:14.

*You are severed from Christ if you would be justified by the law! You are fallen away from grace-* Some texts read "Christ is become of no effect". Whichever reading is correct, the implications of attempting salvation by obedience are pretty severe. Christ's death was to no



purpose, He died in vain; or, in allusion to the Lord's parable of the vine in Jn. 15, we are severed from Christ because we have severed ourselves. This would come about by no longer believing that being "in Him" was important for salvation.

*5:5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness-* The contrast is between the way of the Spirit by faith, and keeping the law- in order to attain "the hope of righteousness", a term allusive to a term used in Rabbinic Judaism for the reward of the obedient. Paul has explained that the Spirit is sent forth into the hearts of those who simply and totally believe the promise to Abraham of blessing and salvation (3:2; 4:6); indeed, the gift of the Spirit is itself one aspect of the blessing promised, it is the foretaste and guarantee of the future inheritance of the earth which has been promised (Eph. 1:14). "We ourselves" may be a reference to Paul and those with him. For the Galatians had stopped trusting in that gift of the Spirit, they had left off faith in God's grace and replaced it with attempts to attain "the hope" by their own works. This is why the Galatians were now not behaving well; their attempt to achieve salvation by works actually made them sin more. Hence Paul now goes on to talk about practical issues and the need to overcome sin by life in the Spirit rather than steel willed obedience. This more practical section of the letter is not at all divorced from the earlier argument about the crucial need to trust in the word of promise and be transformed by the Spirit- rather than seeking justification by works of obedience.

*5:6 For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love-* Paul has argued in 3:27-29 that for those "in Christ" by baptism, gender, social status etc. mean nothing- because they have taken on His identity. The choice is between being completely obedient to the Mosaic Law- or faith in Christ. That faith operates through love. Love is the primary fruit of the Spirit (:22). If we go the path of faith in Christ alone [and there is no other option, because we have all failed to be totally obedient to the law]- then the Spirit operates in our hearts (3:2; 4:6). And the overall work of the Spirit is the fruit of love, in all its dimensions (:22). And so a path is set up: Faith- Receipt of the Spirit- Love. In this sense, faith operates through love.

Reading the Greek another way, "Faith is wrought by love" (Gal. 5:6 RVmg.) in that the fruits of the Spirit reinforce each other in an upward spiral. Faith leads to humility, and vice versa. Realizing we of ourselves are insufficient results in humility, which in turn develops faith. Hence Prov. 20:6 comments that a man of faith will not "proclaim his own goodness".

*5:7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?-* This suggests that obeying the Truth is not just in baptism; it is an ongoing motivation to keep running the race of practical life in Christ. See on 1 Pet. 1:22. "The truth" is used here for faith in the simplest, most fundamental truth- that the promised Kingdom of God really will be ours if we believe in Christ. All schemes of salvation by works are a form of not obeying the Truth.

*5:8 This persuasion came not from him that calls you-* The idea of having been called both by and to *grace* is quite a big theme with Paul (Gal. 1:6,15; 5:13). They had not been called to this legalism.

*5:9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump-* The problem in Galatia had been caused by a very small group ("the one who is troubling you", :10) or an apparently insignificant doctrine. But it was destroying the whole community; although this was because the idea of salvation by

works was so attractive. The Lord had spoken of the teaching of the Pharisees as "leaven" (Mk. 8:15). In the more immediate context, Paul may mean that once you demand legal obedience to one law, in this case circumcision, then this leads to a need for obedience to the entire Law. The idea being that small beginning has huge consequences.

*5:10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine-* Paul is both despairing and confident about them within a chapter or so. We get the impression that he had over invested in them personally and was taking it all too personally. Hence he speaks here of them taking "no other view than mine", which sounds rather as if he has personalized the whole thing in a wrong way.

We can however read Paul's confidence as an imputing of righteousness to the Galatians, and recognizing their status in Christ. Recognizing others as being "in Christ" imparts an altogether higher quality to our relationships. The cynicism and negativity which we naturally bring to many inter-personal encounters is taken away by a deep recognition that our brethren are indeed in the Lord. Having noted that the Galatians did not any longer "believe the truth", Paul can say that he has "confidence to you-ward in the Lord" (Gal. 5:10 RV). Because they were "in the Lord", he could hope against all human indications, that they would indeed rise up to an imitation of the Lord in whom Paul believed them to be. And so we have to ask ourselves, whether we indeed have that "confidence" about others, because we know them to be "in the Lord"? Or do we judge them after the flesh...?

*And the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is-* This would imply that the whole Judaistic campaign in Galatia was led by one person, the little / small leaven which was influencing the whole lump. "Whoever he is" connects with the spirit of 2:6: "But from those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatever they were, it makes no matter to me, God does not accept man's person) they, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me". We could assume that the individual was of some respect within the churches of Galatia.

5:11- see on 1 Cor. 1:23; 9:17.

*But I brothers, if I still preach circumcision-* The more you read between the lines of Paul's letters, the more evident it is that his very own brethren almost unbelievably slandered him. Thus the Galatians whispered that Paul still preached circumcision (Gal. 5:11), probably basing that nasty rumour on the fact he had circumcised Timothy. See on 1 Tim. 5:19.

*Why am I still persecuted?-* Paul's persecution of Christians was done to him. This was not just Divine poetic justice for the sake of it; it was practically to enable him to understand those brethren whom he had killed and tortured, in order to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in God's Kingdom.

*Then has the stumbling-block of the cross been done away-* The cross is described as a *skandalon*, an offence (Gal. 5:11). Either we stumble (are offended) on it, or we stumble and are offended in the sense of spiritually falling away. Either we share the Lord's cross, shedding our blood with His "outside the gate" of this world; or we will share the condemnation of those whose blood is to be shed in destruction outside the city (Rev. 14:20). It's Golgotha now, or later. The cross makes men stumble; either falling on that stone and being broken into humility, or the uncommitted stumbling at the huge demand which the cross implies. Paul had all this in mind when he wrote of the lust / affections of the flesh

(Gal. 5:24), using a word elsewhere translated "sufferings" in the context of Christ's cross. The sufferings, the lust, the cross of the flesh... or the cross of the Lord Jesus.

5:12 *I would that they that unsettle you-* A mild translation; the same word is used of how Paul had turned the Jewish world upside down by his preaching (Acts 17:6). We catch a sense here of how destabilizing all these arguments were; people had had their lives and world turned upside down by the Gospel, and were not having their new world turned upside down again by false teachers.

*Would even go beyond circumcision and emasculate themselves-* This contains a play on words which may seem quite inappropriate to us; so much so that many a Bible translator and expositor has had problems with it. The idea is that Paul wishes that the circumcision party would go further and fully emasculate themselves. This just isn't the way men would use language if they wrote the Bible uninspired by God. See on Lk. 17:37.

5:13- see on Jn. 8:32.

*For you, brothers, were called for freedom-* This goes back to the allegory of the two sons. We are children of the free woman. But whilst all men pay lip service to a love of freedom, very few really want it once presented with it. To believe we really are saved and shall be saved by grace when the Lord returns... and that great salvation is independent of our sins and obedience... this is the ultimate freedom, and we shall be granted that freedom in a more material sense when our natures are changed and we enter God's Kingdom at the Lord's return. The way the Galatians turned away from freedom is so instructive as to the real nature of human thought and essential preference.

*Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh-* No Greek word represents "use"; the idea is that the freedom to law which we are called to is not an opportunity for fleshly behaviour, but rather that freedom paradoxically ends up in service to others, because the work of the Spirit produces love as its summary fruit (5:22).

*But through love serve one another-* The Spirit produces love (:22), and that love is itself a motivating and activating power. Hence the GNB: "Let love make you serve one another".

5:14 *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself-* Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself, by dying on the cross. That was where and how the Law was fulfilled. Paul is arguing that if we are in Christ, then all that is true of Him is true of us. So there is no need to try to keep the Mosaic Law. The Lord Jesus Himself doesn't keep it- because He fulfilled it. Paul's argument has been that those who believe in salvation by grace are given the Spirit, which has the supreme fruit of love (:22), which in practice makes us serve one another (:13). And by doing so, we fulfil the essence of the Law.

To love one's neighbour as oneself is to fulfil the law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:10); and yet the Lord's death was the supreme fulfilment of it (Mt. 5:18; Col. 2:14). Here was the definition of love for one's neighbour. Not a passing politeness and occasional seasonal gift, whilst secretly and essentially living the life of self-love and self-care; but the love and the death of the cross, for His neighbours as for Himself. In Him, in His time of dying, we see the

definition of love, the fulfilment of the justice and unassuming kindness and thought for others which was taught in the Mosaic Law. And we through bearing one another's burdens, through bearing with their moral and intellectual and spiritual failures, must likewise fulfil the law, in a voluntary laying down of our lives for each other (Gal. 6:2). And in this, as with the Lord, will be our personal salvation.

The Old Covenant's command to love one's neighbour as oneself was in the context of life in Israel. One's "neighbour" referred to others belonging to the Covenant people; not to those in the 'world' of the surrounding nations. New Testament quotation of this command totally supports this view; under the New Covenant, we must love those *within the ecclesia* as we love ourselves (Gal. 5:14). 1 Cor. 6:1 (R.V.) speaks of brethren within the ecclesia as "neighbours". Again, this is not in itself proof that we should not give to (e.g.). famine relief. But it surely indicates that we are misguided in thinking that such action is fulfilling this command. However, there is copious evidence within the Law that Israel were to be considerate and concerned for the Gentile world around them. But there is no Biblical evidence that Israel preached a social Gospel to them.

*5:15 But if you bite and devour one another-* Since the Galatians left trusting in Christ for salvation and turned to their own works, they began biting and devouring each other. And so it is in legalistic, works based communities. Arguments arise about technicalities and the exact nature of obedience or disobedience; and because salvation is seen to depend upon these issues, the divisions are indeed bitter and passionate.

*Take care that you are not consumed by one another-* The unbelieving world will finally destroy themselves, brother against brother (Zech. 14:13). If we bite and devour each other, we may be consumed by each other (Gal. 5:15)- this is the same idea of brethren killing brethren, and the world killing itself. Israel were condemned to destruction by brother being dashed against brother (Jer. 13:14). Indeed, biting and devouring each other is a quotation from Is. 9:19,20 LXX (although not apparent in the AV), where Israel in their judgment for unfaithfulness would bite and devour each others' bodies in the siege. Paul is saying that if we bite and devour each other with our words (and we are all guilty of this at times), we are acting as the condemned. If we do this, we may well be consumed of each other- and this *may* have a terribly literal fulfilment, in that as the world destroys every man his neighbour in the confusion of the last day, so the rejected may do the same, living out the bigotry and passive anger they felt towards each other in their ecclesial life. This all needs some meditation. For there are very few of us not caught up in some division, personality clash, biting or devouring.

*5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh-* Having quit trusting in grace for salvation, the Galatians found that their flesh lusted against the spirit to the extent that they just couldn't do the things they knew they should and which obedience they now so desperately desired- because they were not led of the spirit, they were still under law (Gal. 5:18). They didn't have a spiritual way of life, instead they were just trying to keep certain specific commandments, and they found they just couldn't live a victorious spiritual life.

How to not sin is perhaps one of our most fundamental questions. The answer the legalists gave was: 'By obedience'. But that throws the question only a stage further back. How? Paul has said that if we really believe we will be saved, then we will be; and the promised

inheritance is by grace and not obedience to a set of laws. Those who believe this will give their whole lives in joy and response to that great salvation; they have no set of laws to follow, but the Spirit of Christ will be put into their hearts which leads them to "love", which outworks in lives of service to others. Thus they will lead lives 'walking by the Spirit', living life in that sphere of being and thinking; this is the way to not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Those who try to battle each temptation in their own strength will find themselves torn by the conflicting desires and passions which destroy so many religious people and make them nothing less than neurotic. Joy and peace as promised by the Lord will just not be realized by them. The Galatians are really a parade example; they switched over to trying to defeat each lust and passion as it arose, without the help of the Spirit and without the assurance of being secured in Christ by grace. And they started to fail, miserably. The misery of their position is well described in :17.

*5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary to each other. You may not do the things you would like to! - See on :16.* I read this not so much as a global truth, true of all men; but more as a description of the Galatians' miserable, neurotic position. Hence talks here about "you" rather than "we"; whereas elsewhere in this letter he at times uses "we" in associating himself with a situation. They were unable to overcome the flesh because they were doing so in their own strength and had neglected the operation of the Spirit, which was given commensurate to a person's total surrender to and identification with Christ. The leading of the Spirit means that we are not under law- it's not a question of struggling with white knuckles against temptation; but rather of following the Spirit's leading. See on :24 *With the passions and the lusts-*

*5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law-* If we are not justified by obedience but by faith, then we have no law. Sin *per se* is not now something to be avoided or dodged by a steel will. But this doesn't mean we are free to act as we wish; the whole wonder of being certain that we are going to be in the Kingdom, and are at this moment acceptable with the Father and Son... this demands our all. We cannot be passive to such faith and hope.

The Greek word behind "led" doesn't so much mean that the Spirit goes ahead and we follow. The word is usually translated 'to be brought'. The Spirit brings us through to salvation- if we allow it. The word is used so often in Acts of Paul being 'brought' to various places; his ministry was truly one led by the Spirit. There are many connections between Galatians and Romans. Paul uses the word of how the grace of God leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4), and of how those led by the Spirit are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14). This is the identical context to the argument here in Galatians. We who are God's sons in that we have identified with His begotten Son are given the Spirit in our hearts (Gal. 4:5). The gift of God's Spirit makes us part of the family, we think and act as do the Father and Son. The Lord Jesus was of our nature exactly so that He could bring / lead [s.w.] many sons unto glory (Heb. 2:10). The Lord's humanity was necessary so that we might be able to identify with Him. He as God's Son enables us to also be "sons".

The same contrast between the Spirit and the Law/flesh is seen in Rom. 8:2–3: “The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law (of Moses / sin) could not do...”. The Law indirectly encouraged the “works of the flesh” listed in Gal. 5:19–21, shown in practice by the Jews becoming more morally degenerate than even the Canaanite nations, and calling forth Paul’s expose of how renegade Israel were in Romans 1.

*5:19 Now the works of the flesh-* The Galatian fixation with works actually led them to do the works of the flesh. The greatest barrier against grace is our own psychology of works; our belief that even what is good about us, in our character and in our deeds, is a result of our own unaided effort. Not for nothing does Paul contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:19,23). As William Barclay noted: “A work is something which a man produces for himself; a fruit is something which is produced by a power which he does not possess. Man cannot make a fruit”. It’s because of this that works are so glorified in society; it’s why the elderly and weak are somehow despised because they’re not ‘productive’ of ‘works’. Grace therefore cuts right across the way our rationalistic society, whether Marxist or capitalist, worships productivity. Our tendency to value, indeed to worship, human works leads to great frustration with ourselves. Only by realizing the extent of grace can we become free from this. So many struggle with accepting unfulfilment- coping with loss, with the fact we didn’t make as good a job of something as we wanted, be it raising our kids or the website we work on or the book we write or the room we decorated... And as death approaches, this sense becomes stronger and more urgent. Young people tend to think that it’s only a matter of time before they sort it out and achieve. But that time never comes. It’s only by surrendering to grace, abandoning the trust in and glorying in our own works, that we can come to accept the uncompleted and unfulfilled in our lives, and to smile at those things and know that of course, I can never ‘do’ or achieve enough.

*Are manifest, which are these- fornication, uncleanness, sensuality-* The works of the flesh are already manifest- although they will be manifested again at the day of judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). The children of God and of the devil in the ecclesia are already manifest, in a sense (1 Jn. 3:10). See on Gal. 6:4. However it could be that Paul is saying that these works of the flesh were manifest, were now visible, amongst the Galatians since they had focused upon legal obedience rather than total faith in Christ's salvation. In chapter 3, he had argued that the Law entered in order to emphasize sin and drive sinners to a desire for participation in the promises to Abraham and the need for identification with the seed to whom those promises were made.

*5:20 Idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties-* Gal. 5:20,21 lists anger and divisiveness along with adultery and witchcraft- as all being sins which will exclude from the Kingdom. Indeed, the list in Gal. 5:19,20 seems to be in progressive order, as if one sin leads to another, and the final folly is division between brethren. See on 1 Cor. 11:18. The focus upon works raises issues of obedience, disobedience and thereby the need for exact definition of Divine requirements. This all results in division between believers, unlike a following of the way of the Spirit.

*5:21 Envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like. Of which I forewarn you now, even as I did previously forewarn you-* This would imply that Paul's earlier teaching of the Galatians included sober warnings about the list of moral issues contained here.

*That they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God-* The question was how to inherit the Kingdom, and Paul has been reasoning that the Law offered no inheritance; but the promises to Abraham did. And yet those who live in sin shall not inherit the Kingdom. The implication seemed to be that the Law and trusting in it actually leads to behaviour which will exclude from the Kingdom. And this fits with Paul's earlier argument in Galatians 3, that the Law was given in order to magnify sin and lead sincere people to abandon it for faith in Christ as the seed of Abraham.

*5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love-* It can be argued that the fruit of the Spirit is love, and the subsequent eight characteristics are the outworking of love. The Spirit is that given to believers upon acceptance of Christ (4:5). See the comments on 5:6 regarding how faith in Christ alone, rather than legal obedience, therefore works out through love. The role of the Spirit in Christian life is utterly fundamental, and it is a feature of legalistic groups that they place little emphasis on the gift of the Spirit. Typically the position amounts to: 'The miraculous gifts of the Spirit are not for today, therefore the Spirit plays no role, and we must get on and be obedient to law'. These positions go hand in hand- but according to Paul, they are close to a false Gospel; although it is true that the external miraculous manifestations of the Spirit are not seen in our age.

*Joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness-* The influence of continually hearing *God's* word should be that *our* words are likewise truthful and trustworthy. The fact that the Bible as *God's* word is true has implications for our own truthfulness. *Pistos* is listed as a fruit of the spirit in Gal. 5; but the idea it can carry is not so much of faith in the sense of belief, but of faithfulness, loyalty, reliability, utter dependability. If this is how *God's* words are to us, then this is how we and our words should be to others.

The description of love in 1 Cor. 13 are similar to the outline of the fruits of the Spirit here. These are all portraits of the man Christ Jesus. The clearest witness to Him "therefore consists in human life in which his image is reproduced". The connection with the total character of the Lord Jesus is because the Spirit we have been given is His Spirit (4:5), the power to become like Him.

*5:23 Meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law-* We are not under any law now (:18), telling us what to do; nor is there any law telling us what not to do. We are to wholeheartedly respond to the assurance of salvation. The way of living in and breathing in the Spirit is wholly positive. Such a life naturally takes up all our psychological energy so that there is no space left for temptation to have much power. This without doubt is how the Lord 'managed' to be sinless.

*5:24 And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh-* Who in their own strength could say they have done this? Only those who have identified with Christ in baptism, so that with Paul they can say "I have been crucified with Christ" (2:20). The same language is used about our identity with Christ in baptism in Romans 6. This is only true by status; and we are to really believe the status that we have "in Christ".

*With the passions and the lusts of it-* In the same way as Jesus crucified the Law (Col. 2:14) by His death on the cross, so the early church should crucify the Law and the passions it generated by its specific denial of so many fleshly desires: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections (AV mg. "passions") and lusts". This seems to connect with Rom. 7:5: "When we were in the flesh the motions (same Greek word, 'affections' as in Gal. 5:24) of sins, which were by the Law, did work in our members". "When we were in the flesh" seems to refer to 'While we were under the Law'. For Paul implies he is no longer 'in the flesh', which he was if 'the flesh' only refers to human nature. The end of the law means that passions and lusts are ended with it- if we have identified with Him who ended the law. This would be further encouragement to read the description of the passionate struggle

between fleshly lusts and righteousness in :17 as speaking of how things were with the Galatians, rather than how things have to be for all believers.

*5:25 If we live by the Spirit-* The gift of the Spirit is not an overpowering force which forces us to obedience. We must allow it to work; clearly the Galatians had turned away from it, towards justification by their own strength.

*Let us also walk in step with the Spirit-* An allusion to Ezekiel's vision of the wheels of the cherubim on earth being in step with the Angel-cherubim above them. Our spirit bears witness with God's Spirit- we know that our way of life is in harmony with Him, our spirit is His, and thereby we know that we are His children and united with the eternal life and now eternal spirit of His Son (Rom. 8:16). The way of life we live in Christ is an eternal life, an eternal spirit; in this sense we are living the eternal life, the life we will eternally live. This is how crucially important it is to be living the truth as a way of life. Go through your life and see how you can construct this ambience within it.

*5:26 Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another-* It would seem that since seeking to be obedient to the Law as a basis for salvation, the Galatians were experiencing much inter-personal conflict- of the type which is commonly seen in legalistic Christian communities. See on :19 *Manifest*. Legal obedience provokes all manner of questions of interpretation and comparison with others; and it also engenders pride and vainglory. The way of the Spirit, of salvation by faith in grace, produces humility; and the proof of which way is right is seen in the characters produced in those who believe the two schools of thought. Jealousy, irritation, provocation etc. are the ideas carried by the various Greek words used here- and such are the fruits of communal legalism.



## CHAPTER 6

*6:1 Brothers, even if a man is caught in any sin-* The Greek literally refers to a fall; and the fall in view is the falling from faith in grace of 5:4.

*You who are spiritual-* Paul has been lamenting how the Galatians generally have left the way of the Spirit, granted to believers who have fallen upon Christ as Abraham's seed in faith alone. Paul seems to be advising the minority who remained faithful to that calling as to how they should deal with the many who were "at fault" in having rejected grace for legalism.

*Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself-* "Restore" is elsewhere translated "perfect". God is at work to perfect or literally 'mend' His people (s.w. Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 5:10). But He does so through our efforts. Our attempts to restore others therefore have His full co-working behind us. Note that like the parable of the lost sheep, the assumption is made that we will be successful in the restoration. We are to approach all such attempts, difficult and awkward as they are, with the full hope that there will be a positive outcome.

*Lest you also be tempted-* Recognizing, in this context, that the temptation to legalism is every man's struggle. It's easy to forget this when dealing with legalistic brethren.

*6:2 Carry one another's burdens-* I have suggested on :1 that the particular fault or fall which is in view is the return to Jewish legalism. The demands of such legalism are called "burdens" in Mt. 23:4; Lk. 11:46 and particularly in this context Acts 15:28 "no greater burden". Those who were spiritual, led of the Spirit, were not themselves burdened; but they were to enter into the feelings of those who had burdened themselves with unnecessary burdens. This was the spirit of Paul when he wrote that to those under the law, he made himself as if under the law: "To them that are under the law, I became as one under the law (though I am not under the law), that I might gain those that are under the law" (1 Cor. 9:20). We wonder whether in fact Paul has in view Christians who had returned "under the law", for he has used that phrase about the Galatians in 5:18. It's too easy to shrug at the mental torments some get themselves into, thinking 'Well that's their problem'. It is, but we are to walk those burdened miles with them in order to restore them.

*And so fulfil the law of Christ-* If we understand 'the law of Christ' in the same sense as 'the law of Moses' then we have missed the crucial message that is in Christ; we have merely exchanged one legal code for another. His is a spirit of grace which specifically, legally demands nothing and yet by the same token demands our all. And so in all our living and thinking, we must constantly be asking 'What would Jesus do? Is this the way of God's Spirit? Is this how the law of love teaches me to act? '. To live the life of the Spirit, to construct in daily living an ambience of spiritual life, is therefore a binding law. Living according to the spirit / mind / example of Jesus will mean that we naturally find the answers to some of the practical dilemmas which may arise in our lives.

*6:3 For if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself-* Paul has just warned at the end of chapter 5 about the vainglory which comes from legalistic obedience. The basis of salvation is that we realize that we are "nothing", and on that basis come to the Lord for justification by grace through faith alone, knowing we have no obedience to show. Even if we have obeyed some points, such as circumcision, if we have not always obeyed the entire law, then we are nothing. Paul applied the term to himself when arguing that although he has "nothing" yet he "possesses all things" (2 Cor. 6:10) - a

reference to the promises to Abraham and his seed, and the language he uses in Gal. 4:1 about our inheritance- the heir who has nothing in hand shall possess all things if he associates with the one true Heir, the Lord Jesus.

*6:4 But let each man test his own work-* In the context of arguing about works, Paul is inviting those who trust in works to put those works through the tests he has just spoken out in his argument about works. Whilst it may be hard to believe, this says that we can prove / test / judge our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves. Although self-examination is fraught with problems, and even our conscience can be deceptive at times (1 Cor. 4:4), there is a sense in which we can judge / discern ourselves now. We can judge brethren and find them blameless (1 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 1:6,7)- all the language of the future judgment (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22). We cannot personally condemn them, but we can judge their behaviour against the judgments of God as revealed in the word. Some know the judgments of God against certain sins, and yet still do them, in the blindness of human nature (Rom. 1:32). Israel chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8; Jer. 5:4) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7). Judas knew in advance of judgment day that he was condemned (Mt. 27:3).

*And then shall he have his boasting in regard to himself alone, and not of his neighbour-* Perhaps this is sarcasm. Given his argument about the inadequacy of works, Paul may be saying that of course nobody can boast in their works. For at the end of chapter 5 he has criticized the vainglory of legalists in their few good works. The "boasting" later on in this chapter (6:13) was of the Judaist brethren. And Paul teaches against all such boasting: "But far be it for me to boast" (:14).

But the words are also capable of being read as a statement about how self-examination brings us face to face with our essential loneliness in a healthy way: "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" (Gal. 6:2-4). It is possible to have rejoicing in ourselves alone when we know we have a clear conscience before the Father. But this can only come through being genuinely in touch with oneself; the person who is subsumed within an organization, who is totally co-dependent rather than an individual freely standing before the Father... such a person can never reach this level of self-knowledge. The N.I.V. says: "Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else". We are treading a terrible tightrope here, between the deadly sin of pride on the one side, and the sin of devaluing our own God-formed personality on the other. Only a person in touch with him or herself can have the rejoicing or pride in one's clear conscience [cleansed, of course, by grace in Christ] of which Paul speaks here. Paul seems to have in mind the words of Job when he speaks of how he will in the very end behold God with his own eyes, "and not another" (Job 19:27).

Not only are we to perceive the value of others, but of ourselves too. Gal. 5:26; 6:4 RV make the point that we shouldn't be desirous of *vainglory*, but of "his glorying in regard of himself alone". Secured in Christ, justified in Him, we can even glory in who we are in His eyes. We can be so sure of His acceptance of us that there is such a thing as "the glorying of our hope" (Heb. 3:6)- all ours to explore and experience.

*6:5 For each man shall carry his own burden-* I have argued on :2 that the burdens in view are those of keeping the Jewish Law. Even if we try to walk with others on their burdened, legalistic road- we may not succeed. And finally they will have to carry their own burdens.

By our words we will be justified or condemned. The false prophets were judged according to their words: "Every man's word shall be his burden" at the day of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 23:36). Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden- i.e., that of his own words. And those words, in the context, would have been statements and demands concerning obedience to law. These positions will be cited back to me at the day of judgment.

*6:6 One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches-* It could be that Paul now addresses some practical issues in Galatia. However, he has urged them not to abandon him and to return to him personally, and to resist the influence of others who were trying to replace his influence. I have suggested throughout that perhaps he was taking it all rather too personally. It could be that this teaching is another example. He was the one who had taught them the word, as he had often reminded them throughout the letter. Perhaps he is hinting that they ought to be sending him material support, and indeed, they had a duty to do that. The "good things" would appear from :10 to be the 'good' of generosity to those in need, whether in the world or within the family of faith. By doing so, they would *de facto* be declaring their loyalty to him rather than some other unnamed individual who was seeking to have them as his disciples and to poison them against Paul (5:10).

If the "good things" refer to the things taught by the teacher, then we learn that even though some may be shepherds, they are still sheep; and they are leading others after the Lord Jesus, "the chief shepherd", not after themselves. And they should remember that Gal. 6:6 requires "him that is taught in the word" to share back his "good things", his knowledge in Christ, with his teacher. This is possibly the meaning behind the enigmatic Eph. 3:10- the converts of the church declare the wisdom of God to the 'principalities and powers in the heavenlies', phrases elsewhere used about the eldership of the church. The shepherd is to learn from his sheep- a concept totally out of step with the idea of leadership in 1st and 21st centuries alike.

*6:7 Be not deceived-* The natural connection is with the warning in :3 to the self-righteous, self-congratulatory Judaists not to deceive themselves- by thinking that a few acts of legal obedience such as circumcision were the way to salvation. Paul here uses the same word the Lord often uses in warning that in the last days, the believers must be careful not to be deceived; as if Paul saw the collapse in Christ-centered faith as a sign of His return. John uses the same word about the deceivers who were seducing his converts to return to Judaism (1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7). The "deceivers" are described as being "especially of the circumcision" (Tit. 1:10). This warning not to be deceived is similar to the message of :1- that those with the Spirit should seek to restore those who had turned to Judaism, but considering themselves lest they also be tempted (see notes there).

*God is not mocked-* To assume our obedience to commandment can save us is to mock God, connecting us with the Jews who mocked the Lord Jesus on the cross, at the very time He ended the Law and confirmed the new covenant of gracious salvation.

*For whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap-* Knowing the terror of the Lord at the judgment, knowing that Christ will come, Paul sought to use this to persuade men, such as

the believers at Corinth, to quit their sloppy attitude to God's Truth. Properly apprehending the reality of judgment to come makes us see the eye of the tiger, grasp the real issues of spiritual life, see the real essence of cross carrying Christianity. We will *believe* that whatever we sow, that we will reap; and we will therefore live accordingly. "*That*" shall he also reap is emphasized by the Greek. Those who trusted in works would reap what they had sowed- their few paltry works. Nothing more would be added; the Lord's all necessary righteousness would not be imputed to them, for they thought they didn't need it, like the man who entered the wedding without a provided garment.

*6:8 For he that sows to his own flesh-* We have noted throughout Galatians that Paul considers those now trusting in their own works to be effectively pagan, Ishmael's children rather than Isaac's; and children of the flesh (Gal. 4:29). Sowing to the flesh was by seeking justification through their own works. And they would reap the result of that at judgment day. 'Sowing to the flesh' is alluding to Eliphaz's description of Job in Job 4:8. Eliphaz interprets Job's downfall as an example of "they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). The conscious connection between these passages shows that Job was seen as a type of the Jewish, self-righteous, often Judaist-influenced, members of the ecclesia. However, the same passage also has connections with Job 13:9, where Job accuses the friends of mocking God- Paul has just spoken of how the Judaizers were mocking God (:7). Gal. 6 is saying that those who show themselves to be outwardly wise (:3), "making a fair show in the flesh (constraining) you to be circumcised" (:12), are mocking God. Thus the sweet-talking Judaizers infiltrating the believers in Galatia correspond to both Job and the friends. Job learnt the lesson which all Judaists have to learn.

*Shall of the flesh reap corruption-* At the day of judgment, the faithful shall have their corruption swallowed up into incorruption (1 Cor. 15:42,50). But the rejected will not be changed- they will remain in "corruption", because they reaped exactly what they sowed. Which was their own works and their own effort to attain salvation. Significantly, Col. 2:22 uses the same word about how the Jewish commandments are to corrupt [AV "perish"]. This is where legal obedience ends up.

*But he that sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap eternal life-* As noted on :1, those who trusted in grace by faith and not works were filled with the Spirit. Trusting in the operation of the Spirit and not our own works is therefore 'sowing to the Spirit'. But the majority of New Testament references to "he that sows" are to the Lord Jesus as He features in the sower parable- nearly 40 such references! And it is He who will 'reap' at judgment day (Mt. 25:24,26), sending forth His reapers who are the Angels. The idea of reaping of the Spirit is a continuation of the connection with 1 Cor. 15:42-44, which speaks of the resurrection as corruption receiving incorruption, and the flesh being turned into Spirit. So the reference is to the Lord's work at the resurrection and judgment. Paul is cleverly changing the focus of the well known saying that a man reaps what he sows. Indeed, if a man sows to the flesh by trusting in his own works, he will reap corruption. But the Lord Jesus sows to the Spirit, and those who respond to the Spirit He gives will be reaped by Him unto eternal life. Thus the true believer in Christ will not be doing works thinking that a reward will be received for them at judgment day. Rather are we to allow and follow the work of the Spirit, the sowing of the sower, the Lord Jesus; and He shall reap us into life eternal.

*6:9 And let us not be weary in doing well-* Paul is balancing his position by emphasizing that he is not at all teaching that we should not do works. Those works, however, are motivated by

a response to the great and saving grace we have been shown. The Galatians had grown weary of the great response to grace; and had preferred therefore to seek justification by works, for that actually demands less "doing well".

*For in due season-* At the day of judgment. We have noted the allusions to 1 Cor. 15, which presents that as the time of reaping and incorruption. See on :10 *As we have opportunity*.

*We shall reap, if we do not give up-* We as well as the Lord Jesus shall reap (see on :8 *But he that sows to the Spirit*). The problem was that the Galatians were indeed 'giving up'. They were giving up their understanding of salvation by faith without works, and instead going for salvation by works. But their well doing, their good works, were in fact decreasing! They were giving up sowing to the Spirit! This is such a powerful point. Those who are truly grateful for salvation by grace alone will respond far more enthusiastically than those who think their good deeds can secure their salvation. The same Greek word for "give up" is used in Heb. 12:3 about the Hebrew believers who were also returning to the Law likewise being tempted to 'give up' or "faint".

6:10 *So then, as we have opportunity-* This is the same word *kairos* that has just been used in :9 regarding the "due season" or time when we shall reap what we sowed. And that day is the future day of judgment. But each "opportunity" or "time" is in fact judgment day for us. For in essence, judgment is now.

*Let us work that which is good toward all men-* Paul is not saying 'Don't work! You don't need to, under grace!'. Rather he is urging belief in the wonder of salvation without works of obedience, knowing that belief in this will result in a life and heart being totally gripped for Christ. No way can we be passive to it. And we will indeed work what is good for all men. The "good" is to be connected with the "good things" of :6; see note there.

*And especially toward those that are in the family of the faith-* The believers generally belonged to house churches, which were part of the *patria* of God (Eph. 3:15). They belonged to another household, a household which they perceived by faith- the household of faith. No wonder Celsus complained that Christianity led its followers into rebellion against the heads of households. Doubtless he was exaggerating, but the idea of having another head of house, another *patria*, was indeed obnoxious to a slave owning society. This is why the language of slavery permeates so much of the New Testament letters; for according to Christianity's critics, it was largely a slave, female religion to start with. And of course, the unity between slave women and free women in the house churches was amazing; it cut across all accepted social boundaries of separation. The *Martyrdom Of Perpetua And Felicitas* tells the story of how a Christian mistress (Perpetua) and a slave girl (Felicitas) are thrown together into the nets to be devoured by wild animals, standing together as they faced death. This was the kind of unity which converted the world. There was to be now the "household of faith", with people from all the 'other' groups now to be accepted as 'brother' and 'sister', which meant denying the natural ties to your family in the way that surrounding society expected- for to them, loyalty had to be to family above all else. Denying this and putting our bonding with Christ and *His* family first was indeed equivalent to self-crucifixion (Mk. 8:34).

6:11- see on 2 Cor. 12:7.

*See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand-* Apparently a reference to Paul's poor eyesight, and the fact he had written the entire letter himself rather than through a scribe, as he wrote some other letters. He mentions this because he has reminded them of how they wanted to pluck out their eyes and given them to him (4:15). He has reminded them of that in the hope that such an appeal to personal history together might provoke their loyalty to him once again, and they would accept his rebuke and return to faith in Christ. I have noted several times in these notes that Paul's approach to the Galatians seems to me rather too high pressure, as if he had overly invested in them personally to such an extent that he was willing to apply all manner of pressure to bring them back to his fold of influence. Maybe I'm being too hard on Paul, but the obvious observation is surely that they ought to be following Jesus and the word of God rather than Paul personally. Yet he is certainly here making a personal tug at heartstrings over issues which concern life and death, and deeply personal decisions about what we shall base our faith upon- law or grace. And these issues can only finally be decided between a person and their God, rather than as a function of their human relationship to a preacher.

6:12- see on Gal. 4:30.

*It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised-* I suggested on 4:8 that this might mean 'To trust in circumcision'; for there are several references to the Galatians *returning* to Judaism, as if the audience was largely comprised of Jewish Christians. Paul began his letter by using this same Greek word translated "forced" in complaining that Peter had forced Gentile converts to live as the Jews; and noting that when Titus had visited the Jerusalem ecclesia, he had not been forced to be circumcised (2:3,14).

*And only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ-* This suggests that those applying the pressure were already within the Christian movement, who were feeling keenly the abhorrence of "the cross of Christ" which was felt by both Jews and Gentiles.

6:13 *For not even they who receive circumcision do themselves fully keep the law-* This recalls Paul's argument in chapter 5 that circumcision is only one of the whole package of Laws; without completely obeying the entire Law, those under the Law would be condemned.

*But they desire to have you circumcised so they can boast about you-* This suggests that the 'boasting' about works in :4 is being said sarcastically. Salvation by works of obedience breeds pride and boasting; and such mindsets and communities typically place much boasting on how many others they have converted to their position. That was the situation in the Galatian churches.

6:14 *But far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ-* Paul's encouragement of some to boast in their works in :4 is therefore surely sarcasm. The connection with :4 suggests that Paul felt he had no works to boast about; rather he would only boast in what Christ has done for Him. This is similar to the spirit of :8; where the man who sows his works and reaps them is contrasted not with the man who sows spiritual works and reaps them- but with the Jesus who sows and reaps. It's not about us- it's all about Him.

*Through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world-* Another reference to his co-crucifixion with Christ in baptism (2:20). We are therefore crucified to the world because that is what Christ was. "The world" in the context of :13 could refer to the need humans feel to be acting well in the eyes of the world; the pride of life which is part of "all that is in the world". Paul says he was not interested in how he looked to the world, and whether his belief in the cross of Christ made him look obnoxious and led to persecution (:12). Because he was hanging there with Christ, identified with Him, and crucified thereby in the eyes of the world as Christ had been. And thereby likewise the world, the desire to be seen as smart and acceptable by our world, had been crucified to Paul.

The Lord's death was *so that* He might deliver us from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4); because of the Lord's crucifixion, Paul saw himself as crucified unto the world, and the world unto him (Gal. 6:14). The Lord Jesus looked out across the no man's land between the stake and the crowd; He faced the world which crucified Him. We simply *cannot* side with them. To not separate from them is to make the cross in vain for us; for He died to deliver us out of this present world. The pull of the world is insidious; and only sober reflection upon the cross will finally deliver us from it. It's a terrifying thought, that we can make the power of the cross invalid. It really is so, for Paul warned that preaching the Gospel with wisdom of words would make "the cross of Christ... of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17). The effect of the cross, the power of it to save, is limited in its extent by our manner of preaching of it. And we can make "Christ", i.e. His cross, of "none effect" by trusting to our works rather than accepting the gracious salvation which He achieved (Gal. 5:4).

The life of self-crucifixion, daily carrying a stake of wood to the place where we will be nailed to it and left to die a tortuous death...day by day living in the intensity of a criminal's 'last walk' to his death; how radical and how demanding this really is can easily be lost upon us. And it can be overlooked how totally unacceptable was the idea of dying on a cross in the context of the first century. In Roman thought, the cross was something shocking; the very word 'cross' was repugnant to them. It was something only for slaves. Consider the following writings from the period.

- Cicero wrote: "The very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but... the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man... your honours [i.e. Roman citizenship] protect a man from... the *terror of the cross*".

- Seneca the Elder in the *Controversiae* records where a master's daughter marries a slave, and she is described as having become related to *cruciarum*, 'the crucified'. Thus 'the crucified' was used by metonymy for slaves. The father of the girl is taunted: "If you want to find your son-in-law's relatives, **go to the cross**". It is hard for us to appreciate how slaves were seen as less than human in that society. There was a stigma and revulsion attached to the cross.

- Juvenal in his *6th Satire* records how a wife ordered her husband: "Crucify this slave". "But what crime worthy of death has he committed?" asks the husband, "no delay can be too long when a man's life is at stake". She replies: "What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man?". The sense of shame attached to the cross was also there in Jewish perception of it. Whoever was hung on a tree was seen as having been cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, records Trypho (who was a Jew) objecting to Christianity: "We are aware that the Christ must suffer... but that he had to be *crucified*, that he had to die a death of such shame and dishonour- a death cursed by the Law- prove this to us, for we are totally unable to receive it". Justin Martyr in his *Apology* further records: "They say that our

madness consists in the fact that we place a *crucified* man in second place after the eternal God". The Romans also mocked the idea of following a crucified man. One caricature shows a crucified person with an ass's head. The ass was a symbol of servitude [note how the Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass]. The caption sarcastically says: "Alexamenos worships God".

Yet with this background, "the preaching of the cross" won many converts in the first century. "The Jews require a sign and the Greeks [Gentiles, e.g. Romans] seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:22,23). Paul exalts that Christ "became obedient to death- even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8 NIV). Those brethren and sisters must have endured countless taunts, and many times must have reflected about changing their message. But the historical reality of the crucifixion, the eternal and weighty importance of the doctrine of the atonement, as we might express it today... this was of itself an imperative to preach it. We cannot change our message because it is apparently unattractive. The NT suggests that the cross was not just something shocking and terrible, but a victory, a triumph over sin and death which should be gloried in and thereby preached to the world in joy and hope (Gal. 6:14). We may look at the world around us and decide that really, there is no way at all our message will convert anyone. We are preaching something so radically different from their world-view. But the preaching of a crucified King and Saviour in the first century was just as radical- and that world was turned upside down by that message! People *are* potentially willing to respond, even though in the stream of faces waiting for transport or passing along a busy street, we might not think so. It will be our simple and unashamed witness which will be used by the Father to convert them; we needn't worry about making our message acceptable to them. There was nothing acceptable in the message of the cross in the first century- it was bizarre, repulsive and obnoxious. But the fact men and women gave their lives to take it throughout the known world shows the power of conviction which it has. And that same power is in the Gospel which we possess. If we believe it rather than merely know it, we will do the same with it.

6:15 *For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. What counts is being a new creation-* This seems to parallel 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love". Paul's argument so far has been: Faith rather than works results in an identification with the Lord Jesus as the seed of Abraham; for to him were the promises of salvation made, and not through the Law. That faith and identification with Christ is confirmed by the Spirit being sent forth into our hearts (4:5), which results in love as the fruit of the Spirit (5:22). In that way, faith works through love. The parallel to that is that "what counts is being a new creation"; in other words, being created as Christ, being created as a Son of God as Jesus was, with His spirit whereby we also cry out "Abba, Father" just as He did. So the new creation in view is that we are created to be as Christ. Hence if any man is *in Christ* he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The language of "new creation" need not call up ideas of planets and a new cosmos. The new person created is Christ. Hence "the rule" of the new creation (:16) is another way of saying "the law of Christ". The Lord Jesus is "the image of every [new] creation" (Col. 1:15); we are made / created like Him, by the agency of the Spirit. He is thus "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). Hence the Gospel was preached to "every creation" (Col. 1:23), i.e. every convert. No "creation" is not open to the scrutiny of God's Word in Christ (Heb. 4:13). Clearly, "creation" was a title for believers in the early church, so common was this idea.

6:16 *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them-* See on :15. The fact we are new creations, that we are Christ, should be the *rule* by which we live. The reality



that we are new beings means that we have to learn how to live all over again. The same word is used in Phil. 3:16: "Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing"; and Paul's great theme in Philippians is that we should take on the mind of Christ. The "same thing" we should "mind" is the mind of Christ. The rule of Christian life therefore is to be Christ, to have His mind. Christ-mindedness is therefore the rule of life in Him. To have His Spirit, which is freely given to those who believe (4:5) is therefore utterly central and critical to the Christian life.

*And upon the Israel of God-* Paul clearly saw natural Israel as not "of God".

6:17 *From now on, let no one cause me further trouble-* The reason for this is that Paul is connected with the sufferings of Christ. Those who trouble him are doing so to the crucified Christ and will suffer accordingly.

*For I bear-* This connects with the theme developed earlier in the chapter; the same word is used about bearing the burdens of legalistic obedience (:2,5- see notes there). The same word is also significantly used in Acts 15:10 about being unable to bear the burdens of the Law. Paul's parting shot is therefore that he does not bear the burden of needing to be obedient to the Law, a heavy yoke which nobody was able to bear. Instead He bears the cross of Jesus and is co-crucified with Him. And this is the whole contrast; bearing the burdens of needing to perform and be obedient to laws- or bearing the cross of Jesus through identification with Him.

*Branded on my body the marks of Jesus-* All through his life and witness, Paul was aware of how he had rebelled against his Lord. He wrote that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He seems to be alluding to the practice of branding runaway slaves who had been caught with the letter F in their forehead, for *fugitivus*. His whole thinking was dominated by this awareness that like Jonah he had sought to run, and yet had by grace been received into his Master's service. Paul could conclude by saying that he bore in his body [perhaps an idiom for his life, cp. the 'broken body' of the Lord we remember] the *stigmata* of the Lord Jesus. He was so clearly a slave belonging to the Lord Jesus that it was as if one could see the marks of the nails in his body. Hence all the connections Paul makes in his letters between the suffering servant / slave prophecies, and his own experience. Paul has come over throughout his letter as self-assured, confident he is in the right and others are in the wrong, clearly and persuasively arguing for faith in Christ's cross as the only way to salvation. But he closes in a very appropriate way; by again asserting that indeed his life is totally tied up in the living and dying of his Lord, but within that same statement, admitting that he had and did in a way seek to avoid it.

6:18 *Brothers, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen-* Paul has argued throughout that those who throw themselves upon the Lord's grace will be given His spirit. His Spirit, His mind and thinking and feeling, thus becomes ours. And he concludes by wishing this to ever be, that we might have a spirit continually awed by our Lord's grace.

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God*- Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*To the saints that are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus*- "At Ephesus" is omitted by some manuscripts, supporting the idea that this is more of a circular letter. But we can also detect specific references to the situation at Ephesus. So it may be that the letter was indeed written specifically to Ephesus, but also used as a circular letter of a more general nature- hence the additional address to "the faithful in Christ Jesus". That term may however be some technical term which referred to the eldership; in which case we can note that the letter was firstly addressed to the whole church, and only secondarily to the leadership.

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*- How could Paul wish grace to them, seeing it is an abstract concept and not a feeling or experience like "peace"? So often *charis* refers to the gift of the Spirit, which is given at baptism and yet is poured out repeatedly throughout the life of a believer. The rest of the letter has so much to say about this that we could conclude that he is wishing them to be filled with the gift of the Spirit; for *charis* means both 'gift' and 'grace'.

1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*- He wishes us to be like Him, to have *His* Spirit. In this sense, through having the spirit of Jesus, He comes and lives in the hearts of those who accept Him (Rom. 8:1-26; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20). There is a resultant joy in the heart of the convert after baptism, as a result of the Lord's work (1 Thess. 1:6). To this end, He blesses us with all the varied blessings of His Spirit (Eph. 1:3 Gk.). Paul opens 1 Corinthians with similar statements, but goes on to say that the Corinthians were not "spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); the blessing of the Spirit must be made use of. We are by status in Heaven with the Lord Jesus, in the heavenlies- but we must live according to that status, thinking of Heavenly things and not earthly preoccupations.

1:4 *In that He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love*- "In that..." connects our having been chosen from the beginning with the blessing of the Spirit (:2). And in fact we were chosen not just from the beginning but from *before* that. At some point in infinity in the 'past', we were known and

chosen. This is even more awesome. Romans 8 makes the same connection; our being foreknown and called was by grace, the gift of the Spirit. The very idea of our calling, predestination and choosing is the parade example of grace; for no works could be done by us which affect those things. And yet Romans 8 goes on to reason that the Spirit has been given to transform us into what we are counted as by status in Christ; His righteousness has been imputed to us, but we are to be transformed by the Spirit into that righteousness in reality. "Without blemish" is of course the language of the unblemished Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus. We were chosen so that the work of the Spirit might transform us into His personality and character, which is counted to us by imputed righteousness.

Pre-eminently, our love of the brotherhood will be the basis upon which we find acceptance, and in this lies the reason why the life of love is a living out of an acceptance before the Lord now. If we live in love, we are right now holy and blameless before Him (Eph. 1:4). "Before Him" is the language of judgment day (Mt. 25:32; Lk. 21:36; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5); and being holy and blameless before Him is exactly how we will be at the judgment seat (Jude 24). Yet right now, he who lives in love, a love unpretended and unfeigned, lives in the blamelessness and holiness of his Lord, whose righteousness is imputed to him. Paul so loved his Thessalonian brethren that he joyed "for your sakes before our God" (1 Thess. 3:9). "Before our God" is very much the language of judgment day; and he had earlier reflected: "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye *are* [right now] our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19,20). They were in this life his joy, as he lived out his life "before our God" and they would be again in the day of judgment.

Not only are paragraph and chapter breaks sometimes misleading, verse breaks can be too. Inserting punctuation into translation of Hebrew and Greek texts is very difficult. Thus Eph. 1:4,5 in the AV reads: "...that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us". Shift the colon and another emphasis is apparent: "...that we should be holy and without blame before him: in love having predestinated us". When stuck with a 'difficult' verse (and they all are in some ways!), don't be afraid to try re-jigging the punctuation a bit. The love and grace of God is shown so clearly in the way we were "foreordained" or predestinated to be His children, when others were not. This was and is all of grace, for no works had been done by us to warrant this calling. The initiative was His.

1:5 *Having foreordained us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will*- The idea of adoption is also used in Romans 8, and is in the context of the gift of the Spirit. By being "in Christ", we have His righteousness imputed to us; but the Spirit works within us to make us in reality how and what we are counted as by status. Hence Rom. 8:15 speaks of the Spirit of Christ as "the spirit of adoption". Those who receive the adoption of sons therefore have the Spirit of God's Son sent forth into their hearts, by which they relate to God as Jesus did: "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:5,6). And here in Eph. 1 the context is the same; for 1:3 has spoken of the blessings of the Spirit received by believers, and the whole process of adoption results in the praise of His grace, His *charis* or "gift"- that of the Spirit (:6). All this was according to His "will", which might seem axiomatic until we allow Romans 8 to fill out the idea. Our choosing to be given the Spirit was His choice, His will- and not our own. This therefore is the parade example of His grace.

An understanding of predestination helps us towards true humility and appreciation of grace; see on :4. This is the very context in which Paul introduces the idea in Romans; he wished his readers to appreciate grace by reflecting upon how predestination involves something far over and above anything we could 'do' or 'be' in our own rights. Paul speaks here of predestination as a sign of God's grace- and thus we are "predestinated... to the praise of the glory of His grace". Predestination brings with it an appreciation of grace, and real praise for it. Predestination by grace doesn't motivate to lethargy and fatalism- if it's properly understood. When the Lord speaks of how we have been chosen, above and beyond any effort on our part, He goes on to teach that exactly because of this, we have a responsibility to produce fruit, to pray, to love one another (Jn. 15:16,17). Despite predestination, there are countless thousands of freewill decisions for us to make each day. Try to bear that in mind some mornings as you wake up. Whatever situation we're in, life takes on an excitement and meaning and challenge. The simple fact of predestination, of having been chosen by grace, should radically inspire us in every one of those freewill decisions. The true Biblical idea of predestination mustn't be confused with non-Biblical ones. The Romans, Greeks, Egyptians etc. all believed that they had been elected by the gods, predestined to be the special race that alone had true connection with the divine... but they assumed this predestination was because of their natural superiority. Biblical predestination is radically different- that the weak are chosen and the strong rejected, not because they are smart, beautiful, hard working, successful, lucky... but exactly because they are weak and just who they are. This is the grace of true predestination. And it's so wonderful that nobody can be passive to it. On this very basis, Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their differences because their names were written in the book of life (Phil. 4:2,3). That book was written from the foundation of the world, and the fact our names are written in it is a reference to the concept of predestination. This reality means that in practice we simply shouldn't be at loggerheads with others who share in that same grace of predestination!

1:6- see on Lk. 1:28.

*To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved-* As noted on :5, our calling was by God's will, not ours. The grace or gift of the Spirit is available to transform us into the image of the Christ in whom we are by faith and baptism. We are counted as Him, with His righteousness imputed to us. Our predestination to this state is again His grace. The issues of 'And what about all the others who weren't called?' remain with us, but we are invited to focus instead on praising Him for His grace toward us. We thankfully receive the lifebelt thrown to us, rather than wondering why others weren't thrown one. We are "made accepted", or literally, 'graced', by being in Christ [NEV "bestowed on us"]. All who wish to enter into Him are clothed with Him, and so the operation of grace through the Spirit is enabled.

1:7- see on Acts 20:28.

*In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace-* Salvation and all the wonderful processes which are a part of it are enabled by being "in Christ". This is a status we have to decide to enter, of our own freewill. Clearly baptism is "into Christ", and that surely is why the act of baptism by immersion of an adult is as it is- to provide an opportunity for us to wilfully demonstrate we of ourselves wish to consciously become in Him. We have "redemption" right now in that we

have forgiveness of sins (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30 say likewise); but "redemption" comes to its final term in "the redemption of the body" at the last day (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14), "the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). This means that our experience of forgiveness of sins today is the foretaste and guarantee of the final redemption to be given at the last day. If we wonder about our eternal salvation, we need to ask ourselves whether we have known forgiveness now. We should be able to taste that forgiveness; Peter did, and on that basis insisted that he was a personal witness that the Lord Jesus was really in Heaven mediating forgiveness to us. These wondrous things are indeed according to the riches of His grace. To hear all this but turn away from it is indeed to despise the riches of His grace (Rom. 2:4). Paul therefore will pray the Ephesians will perceive these riches of grace (Eph. 1:18). Those riches can be tasted right now; but at the last day, He will lavish the riches of grace upon us in the redemption of our bodies into eternal life (Eph. 2:7). The present experience of the riches of grace is in the receipt of the gift of the Spirit in our minds (Eph. 3:8). To deny these riches is really to despise those riches, no matter how politely worded is our theology in doing so. These riches are described in Col. 1:27; 2:2 as being of Christ in us, the trust we have of our future glorification; and the riches of the full assurance of understanding- that by grace, we really will live eternally in His Kingdom. The experience of the Spirit, of forgiveness, of Christ in us, is the earnest of the possession (:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), the full assurance of salvation (Col. 2:2).

*1:8 Which He lavished on us in all wisdom and prudence-* The Spirit gifts of wisdom and prudence are lavished upon us in that we have had the Gospel revealed to us (:9). There may be a reference to the miraculous gift of wisdom in the 1st century, but for us in our age we have wisdom lavished upon us in knowing the Christ who is the full wisdom of God.

God has been extravagant with His grace. And in dealing with those whom we consider to be hard, spiteful and unreasonable towards us in the brotherhood, we have the ideal opportunity to reflect such grace. It hurt God, to an extent we cannot fathom, to lavish that grace upon us in the death of the cross. And of course it must hurt us to show it to others. In the same way as we seem unable to focus our attention for very long on the ultimate issues of life, so we find it difficult to believe the extent of God's grace. He is extravagant with His grace- God "lavishes" grace upon us. The covenant God made with Abraham was similar in style to covenants made between men at that time; and yet there was a glaring difference. Abraham was not required to do anything or take upon himself any obligations. Circumcision [cp. baptism] was to remember that this covenant of grace had been made. It isn't part of the covenant [thus we are under this same new, Abrahamic covenant, but don't require circumcision]. Perhaps this was why Yahweh but not Abraham passed between the pieces, whereas usually both parties would do so. The promises to Abraham are pure, pure grace, a lavishing of grace.

*1:9 Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in him-* The Gospel is 'made known to us'; the emphasis is upon His action. It is not our Bible reading which revealed it to us, but rather His initiative in revealing it to us. This was part of His will; and we noted on :5 that the repeated references to God's will are another way of saying that we were called to the Gospel not by our works nor initiative, but by His will, His predestination. That revelation of the Gospel to us was planned "in Christ" in God's plan which was before time and continues to beyond time (:10). The moment or process through which we were called had therefore been waiting for infinite time to come about, and shall have eternal consequence, beyond time. Our preaching of the Gospel therefore has

eternal moment for each person who hears the call from us; words fail to express the significance of that work. The alleviation of human suffering is never to be ignored nor devalued, but the preaching of the Gospel is of far greater moment when viewed in this perspective.

1:10- see on Col. 1:20.

*In a plan which runs to the fullness of the times: To sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth-* God's purpose with each of us existed *before* [and not just *from*] the foundation of the world (:4), and His purpose with us runs to the fullness of the *kairos*, time itself. This is the impression of absolute infinity, within the limitation of words to describe it. Our eternity, to infinity and beyond, is "in Christ"; the AV adds at the end of this sentence "even in Him". We become "in Christ" by faith and baptism into Him now; and we shall eternally exist in Him. The whole atmosphere of our lives must therefore be of Him; for in this sense we can live now the life which shall be eternally. "All things", quite literally, both persons and spiritual ideas, all of God's spirituality, believers and Angels, shall all be summed up in that one unique man, Christ- and shall eternally be so.

1:11- see on Mt. 25:34.

*In whom also we were made His heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who does all things after the counsel of His will-* We are God's portion / inheritance (Dt. 4:20; 9:29; Eph. 1:18), and He is our inheritance (Ps. 16:5,6; 73:26; Lam. 3:22-24; Eph. 1:11 RV); we inherit each other. In infinite time and space, we are what He has as His very own, what He longs for and has planned for over infinite time. This helps us better understand the significance He places on our extension of His purpose to others by evangelism; and the deep anger He has at causing any to stumble out of that grand purpose He has for them. We are to constantly ask ourselves: 'Will this in any way cause anyone to stumble from this marvellous grace personally planned for them?'. This grand purpose is not simply according to God's will, which would be axiomatic, but "after *the counsel of His will*". That "counsel" is a reference to the Gospel and His word to man. Paul addressed the Ephesian elders with a reference to how he had entirely declared to them "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). This suggests that Ephesians may have been a follow up letter to those elders, and then it was adapted for more general usage to all the faithful (:1). This kind of thing would be typical of responsible missionary work; I have several times written letters to back up such face to face meetings in missionary contexts, and then reused the material in a more general form. Paul seems to have done the same, under Divine inspiration.

1:12 *So that we who had first hoped in Christ should be for the praise of His glory-* The next verse "In whom you also believed / hoped" could suggest that the "we" here refers to Paul and his missionary team. But "first hoped", *proelpizo*, carries the sense of "to hope in advance of other confirmation" (Strong). Having written and implied so much about God's predestination of us, and the outworking of His will in choosing us, Paul may be balancing that by saying that we have to also show initiative. Faith is in a sense a leap in the dark. No amount of clever apologetic arguments can ever take that away from what it means to believe / hope in Christ. Most of the apologetic arguments in any case refer to God, the Bible, the creation record etc.- and not to faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is spoken of here as hope, *elpizo*, a solid expectation and assurance- that He shall save us eternally. And no apologetic arguments can give you that. This is a leap which must be taken. But the idea of "to hope in

advance of other confirmation" begs the question: 'What confirmation, then, comes after we have taken this leap of faith and hoped in Christ?'. The next verse answers this- "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise". Human belief / hope in Christ is indeed confirmed from God's side. The promised Holy Spirit confirms and seals that faith.

Thus we "have obtained an inheritance" through being "in Christ". This is just another way of expressing the great truth of Gal. 3:27-29- that through baptism into Christ, we receive the promise of the inheritance promised to Abraham. But Paul continues in Eph. 1:12: "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in [Gk. 'into' - through baptism] Christ". The fact we are in Christ by baptism and thus have the Abrahamic promises leads to praise of God's grace. Yet we will only achieve this if we firmly grasp the real, pointed relevance of the promises to us; that we who are baptized are each one truly and absolutely in Christ, and the promises apply to *me* personally.

1:13 *In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise-* This sealing is the confirmation of our trust / solid hope that we really will be saved in Christ; see on :12. Our trust / belief / hope in "the word of the truth" doesn't refer to our having figured out a true set of theological propositions called "the truth". Our solid faith and hope in Christ is related to "the truth"- we consider the word of the Gospel as "the truth", we take it as truth. And the greatest personal truth for each believer is that we have heard "the gospel of salvation", we really shall be eternally saved. And we are "sealed", confirmed in our faith, by the gift of the Spirit (see on :12). The "promise" of the Spirit surely refers to the promise of the Comforter within us in Jn. 14-16, and this in turn is alluded to in Gal. 3:14, which speaks of our receipt of "the promise of the Spirit through faith". Thus the gift of the Spirit at baptism is a promise to all who shall believe at all times, and not just in the first century (Acts 2:39).

At our baptism we became "in Christ". Through that act we obeyed all the Lord's invitations to believe "in Him", or as the Greek means, to believe *into* Him. We believed *into* Him after we heard the Gospel, by baptism. We are now connected with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; we are treated by God as if we are His Son, and therefore the Spirit of His Son is given to us, to make us in reality as we are by status.

1:14 *Which is a guarantee of our inheritance, of the final redemption of God's own possession, for the praise of His glory-* This "guarantee" is the "earnest" spoken of in 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5- the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. As explained on :12, we take the step of faith in hoping in Christ, in believing that really this word of salvation is ultimate truth for us (:13; we "first hoped", *proelpizo*, "to hope in advance of other confirmation" (:12). And that confirmation that we shall really be saved, as we first believed we shall be, is in the gift of the Spirit. The New Testament promises "all joy and peace through believing" the good news of salvation in God's Kingdom; and this of itself implies that we have some confirmation of that future salvation. For otherwise we can hardly rejoice and feel peaceful in such a hope. And that confirmation is in the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the sign God owns us; He possesses us by and with the Spirit, and this thereby guarantees that we shall be finally redeemed by Him as His very own at the last day. But we must let that Spirit work and function; for the Corinthians were given the same Spirit, but were "not spiritual" and fell away (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:15 *For this cause, I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and the love which you show toward all the saints-* Paul felt warmly towards all others who

had really believed in Jesus as their Saviour and were rejoicing in sure hope of salvation because of the confirmation they had received from the Spirit (see on :12-14). This is indeed the 'basis of our fellowship' rather than some intellectual commonality on some theological issues. That faith and hope elicits love; hence faith, hope and love indeed go together in Paul's thinking. We take the step of faith in response to God's grace in calling us; we have a sure hope in salvation, confirmed by the gift of the Spirit; and the wonder and joy of it all has to be shown forth quite naturally in love. We are given fellow believers as a particular outlet for that love; hence the reference to "the love... toward all the saints".

Paul heard of the spiritual development of the Ephesians (1:15-19), therefore he prayed that God would grant them more knowledge and understanding (:16,17). The dynamic in this Divine confirmation of their freewill effort was God's Spirit power. Paul repeats the prayer in Eph. 3:14-21: "...be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that... (ye) may be able to comprehend... to know... to be filled with all the fullness of God". It is thus by God's Spirit acting on our "inner man" that this greater comprehension of our glorious calling is achieved. He tells them later to be "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph. 4:23), alluding to the Ezekiel passages which speak not only of Israel making themselves a new heart / spirit / mind, but of *God* giving this to them (Ez. 18:11; 36:26), in confirmation of their efforts. There are examples galore of God acting on the minds of men to give them a certain attitude which they would not otherwise have had (consider how He gave Saul another heart, or gave Israel favour in the eyes of the Egyptians so that they lent to them, Ex. 12:36).

1:16 *Do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers*- If all the wonderful things of :11-15 are true, then we can only constantly give thanks that those we have preached to shall really be eternally saved. Only if the wonder of that slips, will we find ourselves demotivated in our prayer life.

One practical caveat needs to be mentioned in the context of praying for others. It is all too easy to slip into the habit (and slipping into bad prayer habits surely dogs every prayerful man) of reeling off a list of names each night, something like "Dear Father, be with David, and please be with the children, and with Sister Smith, and with Karen, and with...". There's nothing in itself wrong with this. But over time, it can become a kind of incantation, with us fearful that this evening we let one of those names slip. Paul writes often that he "makes mention" or 'remembers' his brethren in regular prayer (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:2; Philemon 4). The Greek *mneia* is the word used in the LXX for the "memorial" of the incense or the meal offering (Lev. 2:2,16; 6:15; 24:7), or the constant fire on the altar (Lev. 6:12,13). That fire, that flour, that incense, had to be carefully and consciously prepared; it had to be the result of man's labour. And likewise, Paul seems to be saying, he first of all thought through the cases which he then presented to the Father. This is a high standard to keep up. It is through this constant prayer that we are in God's tabernacle presence and in sacrificial relationship with Him.

Compare the following passages:

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Is. 62:6,7)

with

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our



Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:15-17).

The ideas of praying without ceasing and making mention occur in both passages. Surely Paul had the Isaiah passage in mind. It seems that he saw the ecclesia as the spiritual Zion. In the same way as Zion’s watchmen were exhorted to pray for her without ceasing until the Kingdom is established there, so Paul prayed for the spiritual growth of his brethren. The implication is surely that once a certain level of spirituality had been achieved, then the Lord will return to establish His Kingdom. When the harvest is ripe, then the sickle is put in. Jn. 17:23 speaks of how the church will “be perfected into one” (RV), as if this process is ongoing and comes to a finality at the Lord’s return. This is an urgent imperative to unity amongst us- and yet as these [apparently] “last days” wear on, we become increasingly *disunited*. This ought to be a true worry to us.

1:17- see on Jn. 6:27.

*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; so that you may have-* Paul has explained in :12-15 that the believers are given the Spirit in confirmation of the hope they had in Christ for eternal salvation. But Paul wants them to perceive that Spirit, and to really feel and experience the guarantee of final salvation which it offers. The Corinthians likewise were given the gift of the Spirit on conversion, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). They failed to let the Spirit transform them. So Paul prays that his converts would be given an appreciation of the solid hope of salvation which they had. "The Father of glory" refers to how God's glory will be revealed at the final salvation of His people (Mt. 16:27); and Paul therefore asks the Father of glory to open the eyes of the believers to the glory which awaits them (:18). The giving of the Spirit is incremental; for they had been given the Spirit (:13), but Paul prays that the Spirit will be given them to open their eyes further to the wonder of their future salvation. The prayers of third parties, therefore, can potentially influence the spirituality of those they pray for. We are not left to just work out our own salvation; the prayers of others can play a part in it. And seeing that is the case, we are to constantly be in prayer for each other.

1:18 *The eyes of your mind enlightened, that you may appreciate what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints-* See on :17. The Ephesians already had the Spirit, the guarantee of their future salvation; but Paul wanted them to perceive the utter wonder of it all. The Spirit therefore works on the human mind, opening our perceptions and appreciation. To limit it to miraculous manifestations in the first century is to seriously miss out on a major Biblical theme. And again we note that our prayer for others can potentially influence their perceptions and mental attitudes. The enlightening is by the gift of the Spirit (:17); proof enough that the promised Spirit gift is essentially an internal, mental operation rather than external miraculous gifts. "Enlightenment" is associated with being partakers in the Holy Spirit and tasting the Heavenly gift [i.e. the Spirit] in Heb. 6:4. And Heb. 10:32 speaks as if this "enlightenment" was a standard part of the Christian path ("... after you were enlightened..."). The same word for "enlightened" is found in Jn. 1:9- the Lord Jesus is the light of our world and enlightens every man who comes into that world. Once we take the step in faith of entering His world, then the gift of the Spirit enlightens us. He is therefore not passively sitting in Heaven awaiting the time of His return; He is busy enlightening believers, and He does this through the operation of His Spirit.

Our eyes have been enlightened, now we see (Eph. 1:18; 5:8; Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9). And yet in other ways we are blind spiritually. We see through a glass "darkly" (Gk. 'enigmatically'; 1 Cor. 13:12). The things of the Spirit are largely enigmas to us. Therefore Paul prays that his Ephesians would have "the eyes of their understanding" progressively enlightened, even though they had already been turned from darkness to light (Eph. 1:17,18). The disciples had been turned from darkness to light, but the Lord rebuked them for their blindness in not expecting His resurrection.

1:19 *And what the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might-* The same Spirit power which resurrected the Lord Jesus (:20) is at work internally within us. Rom. 8:11 says the same about the Spirit gift that is now within us: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you". Paul knows that they have heard the theory of the Spirit gift and that they have received it, but he wants them to perceive how hugely powerful is this gift. I find myself praying this same prayer, both for myself and for my brethren.

"His power *toward* us" uses *eis*, which can as well be rendered "in" or "within". The huge power, *hyper* and *mega* [NEV "exceeding greatness"], is working within us, which is exactly where we need empowerment. It is the energy [*energeia*, "working"] of His mighty force [*ischus*, "might"]. These are all powerful words. The energy of this force within us is only limited by our acceptance of it and actual desire to change.

1:20- see on Eph. 3:9,10.

*Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead and had him sit at His right hand in heaven-* See on :19. The same force internally at work in transforming us was at work in the resurrection of the Lord (Rom. 8:11). The Lord's resurrection thus becomes a pattern for the breaking forth of new spiritual life within us. In spiritual terms, we too are raised from the dead and exalted to heavenly places in Christ. Verse 3 has used the same phrase, in stating that we are now in "heavenly places" through the work and blessing of the Spirit. And 2:6 will repeat this.

The Jews strongly believed that Satan had authority over the old / current age. Their writings speak of the rulers, powers, authorities, dominions etc. of this present age as all being within the supposed system of Satan and his various demons / Angels in Heaven. In Eph. 1:20–22 Paul says that Christ is now "above every ruler (*archê*), authority (*exousia*), power (*dunamis*) and dominion (*kuriotês*) and any name that can be named not only in this age but the age to come... All things have been put in subjection under his feet". Paul's teaching that no spiritual being can oppose the exalted Christ. He's using the very terms used in the Jewish writings for the rulers, powers etc. of Satan's supposed system. So when in 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul speaks of Satan as "the god of this age", he's not necessarily claiming that this is now the case – rather is he merely quoting from the well known Jewish belief about this.

1:21 *Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come-* Just as the Lord Jesus is far above all human governments and dominions, so the persecuted believers in Ephesus should remember that whilst not 'above the law', they were spiritually in a sphere far above all the

authorities who were persecuting them. "Far above" translates yet another superlative; *hyperano* is literally 'above the upper things'. And Ephesians 1 is full of such *hyper* and *mega* words, mixed with powerful adjectives; all seeking to demonstrate the huge force available to us and operative within us. The terms for rule, authority, power, dominion and names could allude to the Judaist tendency to elevate the worship of Angels, and to consider some "names to be named" as greater even than Messiah. Recall how the Lord had to demonstrate that David considered Messiah to be his "lord" (Lk. 20:44), because the Jews considered the "son of David" to be less than David, and certainly inferior to Moses. This would explain why the name of the risen Lord Jesus is to be understood as greater than any name in the world which is to come, i.e. the Kingdom age.

*1:22 And He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to us to be head over all things in the church-* The Lord's exaltation means that we are to be subject to Him. The Lord Jesus as the head of the body is going to as it were fill His body with His Spirit and direction. For the context here is of the transforming gift of the Spirit to those who are "in" the body of Christ.

The body of Christ, the ecclesia, is one form of the personal self-revelation of the person of the Lord Jesus. We don't only and solely receive His self-revelation through accepting dogma or doctrine. It comes to us also through the way He mediates His personality to us, His self-revelation, through His Spirit in His body. His fullness is to be found in the church, His body- He fills "all [believers / members of the church] in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). I take this to mean that the fullness of His personal character, person, spirit, truth... is to be found in His body on earth, i.e. the community of believers. Each of them manifest a different aspect of Him. This is the Biblical "unity of the spirit"- whereby the body of Jesus reveals Him consistently, as a unity, thus binding together all who share that same one spirit of Christ. This is the way to unity- not enforcing intellectual assent to dogmatic propositions.

All things were put under the Lord's feet because of His exaltation (Eph. 1:22); but now we see not yet all things put under Him (Heb. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:24-28). The "all things" matches with Col. 1:18 speaking of the Lord being placed over the church. We are the "all things". The great commission has the same thought sequence- because of the Lord's exaltation, therefore we must go and tell all men and bring them into subjection to the exalted Christ. In prospect His body is "all in all" (Eph. 1:23), but the "all in all" phase will only be realized in practice at the end of the Millennium (1 Cor. 15:28). It is for us to grasp the height of His exaltation and the fact that it means that potentially, all men, all of existence, is under Him. And then we respond to this by going out and seeking to bring all men under Him.

*1:23 Which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all-* See on :22. The 'filling' of the Lord's body is by His Spirit; the gift of His Spirit "in the inner man" is what enables Him to fill His body with all God's fullness (Eph. 3:16,19). We note the connection between the Spirit gift and being filled in Eph. 4:10; 5:18.

There is a clear connection between this idea of the fullness of God, and Ex. 34:6, where God proclaims His Name to be "Yahweh, a God *full* of compassion", grace and His other characteristics (see R.V.). So by bearing God's Name, we have His fullness counted to us; and the filling of the Spirit makes us in practice what we are by status. As Christ had the

fullness of God dwelling in Him in a bodily form (Col. 2:9), so the church, as the body of Christ, "is (Christ's) body, the fullness of him (God) that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). So you see the intensity of our unity; we *are* the very body of Christ, He exists in and through us (although of course He still has a separate personality). Likewise, the *fullness* of God is in Christ and thereby in us. We are not just one part of God's interest, our salvation is not just one of His many hobbies, as it were. He only has one beloved Son; He was human and born on this earth for *our* salvation. The fullness of God, even though we scarcely begin to comprehend it, dwelt fully in Christ, and is counted to us. We really should have a sense of wonder, real wonder, at the greatness of our calling. See on Eph. 3:19.

The church is "His body, the fullness of Him (God) that fills all in all". Thus we are "*the*" fullness of God and Christ. "We beheld His glory... full of grace and truth (alluding to Ex. 34)... and of His fullness have all we received" (Jn. 1:14,16). The word "fills" in Eph. 1:23 is the same as 'complete' in Col. 2:9,10: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are *complete* ["filled"] in Him". Christ is filled with God's fullness of the righteous attributes of glory, and in Christ we are also filled by the Spirit of Christ. Seeing that we are the body of Christ it follows that the ecclesia *in toto* manifests the fullness of Christ's and therefore God's glory, through each of us manifesting a slightly different aspect of God's glorious character to perfection. Thus Peter reasons that the quicker the ecclesia spiritually develops, manifesting those attributes, the earlier Christ can return (2 Pet. 3:11-15). See on Phil. 1:11.

The body of Christ is His "fullness" through which He fills us all. I take this to mean that each member of the body of Christ manifests something unique about Jesus, so that between us, we show all of Christ to the world- e.g. one may reveal His patience, another His zeal, etc. By limiting our definition of the body of Christ, we limit our perception and experience of Him; and thus we limit the extent we are filled with His fullness, if we refuse to accept that which every member of the body supplies to us, in order that we might grow up in Him (Eph. 4:16). God will be "all in all" through the full expression of His Name. But Eph. 1:23 says that right now, all the fullness of God fills "all in all" in the church; in other words we should now be experiencing something of that total unity which will then be physically manifest throughout all creation.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *You once were dead in the trespasses and sins*- We were spiritually dead and have now been resurrected, in spiritual terms, made alive in Christ (:5). This is indeed an allusion to baptism, but the connection is to the preceding argument in 1:19,20- that the same Spirit which raised the Lord Jesus is mightily at work within us, internally transforming us into His image (as taught in Rom. 8:11). There is an allusion here to the LXX of Is. 57:4, and we shall find allusions to that part of Isaiah throughout this section : :1= 57:4; :12 "no hope"= 56:10; :2 =57:5; :14=57:19; :5 =57:10 (RV) ;:19 = 56:1; :6 = 57:15; :21 = 56:7; :12 = 56:7; :19 =56:6 (RV) ;:22 = 57:15. The Isaiah references are to the possibility of revival at the time of the restoration from Babylon, and also at the time of Hezekiah. The returned exiles could have entered the new covenant and received the working of the Spirit to transform them into God's new people, according to Jer. 31 and Ezekiel 34-37. But they refused. And so the new covenant community, those baptized into Jesus and partaking in the new covenant, therefore have the same promises of Spirit-led restoration and transformation. Judah dead in sins without hope could indeed have been revived by the Spirit; but they preferred to remain in spiritually dead Babylon. And so the promises were fulfilled but with a somewhat altered focus- in that they were transferred to those who were baptized into the Lord Jesus in New Testament / covenant times.

2:2 *In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, according to the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience*- The transformation of the believer from dead in sins to alive in Christ is by his Spirit. But this Spirit is antithetical to the spirit of the world, whereby sin and selfishness are the spirit which shapes all thought and action.

“The prince of the power of the air” is one of the references in Ephesians which specifically refers to problems in Ephesus. This clearly alludes to the mythological concepts of Zoroaster – the kind of thing which Paul’s readers in Ephesus once believed. Paul says that they once lived under “the prince of the power of the air”. In the same verse, Paul defines this as “the spirit (attitude of mind) that... works” in the natural man. Previously they had believed in the pagan concept of a heavenly spirit–prince; now Paul makes the point that actually the power which they were formally subject to was that of their own evil mind. Thus the pagan idea is alluded to and spoken of, without specifically rebuking it, whilst showing the truth concerning sin.

But Paul re-casts the "prince of the air" as essentially referring to the life of the flesh, and thereby makes his specific allusion to a problem in Ephesus relevant to all believers (see on :1). “Walking” (i.e. living) according to the prince of the power of the air, is defined in :3 as living according to the lust of our fleshly mind. The “lusts of our flesh” come from within us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14) not from anything outside of us. “The prince” is “the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience”. The spirit frequently refers to an attitude of mind (e.g. Dt. 2:30; Prov. 25:28; Is. 54:6; 61:3; Ez. 18:31; Mk.14:38; Lk. 2:40; 2 Cor. 2:13; 12:18; Eph. 4:23). This is confirmed by :3 – such peoples’ lives are controlled by “fulfilling the lusts of our flesh (which come from our heart – James 1:14), fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”. Fleshly people do not allow their lives to be controlled by a physical “prince” outside of them, but by following their fleshly desires which are internal to their minds. A physical being cannot exist as a “spirit” in the sense of an intangible essence. A spirit does not have flesh and bones, i.e. a physical body (Lk. 24:39); therefore because “the prince” is a “spirit”, this must be a figurative expression, rather than referring to a physical being. The

“spirit” or attitude of mind is a figurative prince, as sin is a figurative paymaster (Rom. 6:23). This passage (and :11) speaks of their former Gentile lives. 1 Pet. 4:3 speaks of life before conversion as: “In the time past we wrought the will of the Gentiles... we walked in *lusts*”. Their own flesh was their “prince”. Thus walking according to the prince of the air is parallel with walking in the flesh (:11). The more common antithesis to walking in spirit is walking after the *flesh* – here termed “the course of this world”. George Lamsa, a native speaker of Aramaic, understands “the prince of the power of the air” to be the dynamic equivalent of the Arabic / Aramaic *resh shultana*, which he claims would’ve been understood as meaning simply ‘the head of the government’, with no intended reference to the literal air (George Lamsa, *New Testament Light* (San Francisco: Harper & Row) p. 24). So the allusion could be to how they had lived under Roman or Jewish spiritual domination, which they were now liberated from in Christ.

Athanasius argued that the death of Jesus cleansed the air where the demons / fallen angels now live, and therefore physically opened up a way for [supposed] immortal souls to find a way into Heaven (See Nathan K. Ng, *The Spirituality of Athanasius* (Bern: Lang, 2000)). Not only was all this unBiblical, it reflects a literalism which reduces God to a being hopelessly bound by physicality. In short, this kind of thinking arose from a basic lack of faith in God as the Almighty, who doesn’t need to build bridges over problems which men have created for Him in their own minds. It should be noted that the idea of saying “Bless you!” when someone sneezes derives from Athanasius’ idea that demons can become so small that they enter a person from the literal air. This is what happens if we insist that the Devil was thrown out of heaven and some of his angels are still in the literal air – it’s literalism gone wrong.

Verse 1 defines the “you” as the believers at Ephesus who had formerly been dead in sins. Verses 2 and 3 then express the reason for this in four parallel ways:

- (a) “...you walked according to the course of this world”
- (b) “...according to the prince of the power of the air”
- (c) “...the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience”
- (d) “...were by nature the children of wrath”.

The “whole world lays in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19). “The children of disobedience” show this by their lives “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (vv. 1,3). Thus “the prince of the power of the air” is re-cast as our evil, fleshly mind, i.e. the real Devil. There are many links between Ephesians and Colossians. One of the clearest is between these verses and Colossians 3:3–7. Colossians 3:3 speaks of us having died to sin as Ephesians 2:1 does. Verses 5–7 amplify what are “the lusts of the flesh” which “the children of disobedience” fulfil: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which you also walked some time, when you walked in them”. These things of v. 5 are “the works of the flesh” mentioned in Galatians 5:19. These things come from within us, not from anything outside (Mk. 7:21–23). Therefore the prince of the power of the air, which causes these things, is again redefined as our evil desires.

2:3 *Among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by our natural condition destined to be children of God’s wrath, even as the others-* See on :2. The contrast drawn in this section is between how believers were before baptism, and the status they are now in. The “we” here are different to “the others”, the world generally. Our status as being the children of wrath has now been changed,

as we no longer live in the lusts of our flesh. So it would be wrong to think that "children of wrath" refers to some natural condition we are born into by nature and can only get out of by ceasing to be human. "Children of..." is a Hebraism that doesn't refer to natural birth as children. The children of peace or of a town mean the people associated with that thing or place. So "children of wrath" doesn't mean we are born into a situation where God is as it were mad with us. The wrath of God is not upon every foetus conceived or baby born. His wrath refers to His condemnation of sin actually committed in thought or deed. But we are not now related to that, since we are now in Christ with His status and righteousness counted to us. We are not sinners by nature; for all we posit about human nature we state about the Lord Jesus, who was of our nature, and was all the same holy and undefiled before God in His life.

We don't sense enough, perhaps, that this world is not just passively disinterested in God. All outside of Christ are active enemies towards Him, subjects of God's wrath (Eph. 2:3,15). This isn't how we tend to see the world around us. But to the first century believer, it was clearly so. The greatness of the gulf that divides was clearly felt. Our world is (overall) more tolerant than it has ever been; but let's not forget that the ruling powers are 'satan', an embodiment of the flesh. All around is subtly articulated enmity against true spirituality and the cause of Christ. The more we see that, the more we will realise how close we are to each other who are the other side of the great divide, "in Christ" along with us. What differences of emphasis and personality there may be between us we will more naturally overlook. The world is therefore seen by God as actively sinful. For the man who does not accept salvation in Christ, "the wrath of God *abideth* on him" (Jn. 3:36)- it isn't lifted. We are therefore subject to the wrath of God until baptism (Eph. 2:3). It doesn't seem or feel like this. And yet God experiences this sense of anger with sin, albeit unexpressed to human eyes. But it need not "abide" on us, we need not remain by nature the children of wrath- for we can come into Christ.

*2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, for the sake of His great love with which He loved us-* God's great love is exhibited in the manner in which He intervened in our lives whilst we were still sinners (:5). He didn't notice our righteousness and respond accordingly. His love was and is the way He takes the initiative to intervene and call. And this is the love we are to emulate in all areas of life; from radical forgiveness of the impenitent to grace in family squabbles to taking the initiative to present the call of God's grace to those in the world who were not even looking for it. The same word for "riches" is used in Rom. 2:4 of how God's rich mercy is shown in Him leading us to repentance; taking the initiative to call the impenitent and unrighteous. But that wealth of mercy can be "despised" if we refuse to respond. Romans goes on to speak of the "riches" of grace manifest in God's sovereign calling of us, when not all have been called (Rom. 9:23; 11:12,33). God's intervention in our lives is His grace and the richness of His mercy; that He simply wants *me* to be saved. All the endless questions about "And what about all the others?" remain as they do, with various possible responses; but they are not to take us away from the riches of His mercy in calling us. In this sense, love is taking the initiative, intervention by grace and not in response to goodness. And we are to reflect it.

*2:5 Even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have you been saved!)-* See on :4. We were made alive when we were dead. A dead person can do nothing. In this God's grace is revealed in connection with our salvation. The reference is to baptism, but 'making alive' is also speaking of the way in which God's Spirit is

the vehicle for His grace in provoking new spiritual life and enlivening us spiritually. It is the Lord Jesus through His Spirit who makes us alive (Jn. 5:21; 6:63). It is the Spirit of Jesus in us right now which makes us alive and shall be the same principle by which are mortal bodies are changed to immortal at the last day (Rom. 8:11). The Lord Jesus is a Spirit which makes alive (1 Cor. 15:53), right now, and not only at the last day. It is the Spirit which 'makes us alive' (2 Cor. 3:6 s.w.). As made clear in Romans 8, so here- the enlivening work of the Spirit is what gives us life spiritually, and is the parade example of God's grace. But the Spirit doesn't just zap an unbeliever and make them believe regardless. We who were dead in sins were "quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5 AV). If we believe in Christ Jesus' resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation.

*2:6 And raised us up with him; and in Christ Jesus, has made us sit with him in the heavens-* The two stages of resurrection are laboured; we were made alive with Him (:5), and raised up with Him. And just as He is in Heaven as a result of the ascension, so are we, in spiritual terms. All that is true of Him becomes true of us if we are "in Christ Jesus". The term "Christ [Messiah] Jesus" may be a reminder that the Jewish Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth- another hint that as in every church founded by Paul, there was Jewish opposition to his work, and so he addresses Gentiles in terms appropriate to Judaism.

Our difficulty in believing 'we will be there' is perhaps related to our difficulty in believing that in prospect, we 'are there' right now, through being "in Christ". This most basic truth, that we are "in Christ" through baptism, carries with it very challenging implications. We are well familiar with Paul's reasoning in Romans 6, that through being immersed in water at baptism, we share in the Lord's death and resurrection. As He rose from the dead, so we rise from the waters of baptism. But what happened to Him next? He ascended to Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God in glory. And each of those stages is true of us right now. We are now in 'the heavenlies'; and not only so, but we *sit together* there with Christ. And He now sits upon His throne of glory. Even now we in a sense sit with Him in His Heavenly throne, even though in another sense this is a future thing we await (Lk. 22:30; Rev. 3:21). No wonder Paul goes on to make a profound comment: "That in the ages to come [the aions of future eternity], He might show [Gk.- to indicate by words or act] the exceeding riches of his grace [which was shown through] his kindness toward us through Christ". Throughout the ages of eternity, God will demonstrate how pure and wonderful His grace was to us in the few brief years of this life- in that, He will demonstrate, He counted us *right now in our mortality* as having resurrected, ascended to Heaven, and reigning / sitting with Christ in glory. The wonder of what we are experiencing now, the height of our present position, is something that will be marvelled at throughout eternity as an expression of God's grace and kindness. And we will be the eternally living witnesses to it. And we can start that witness right now.

So often does Paul speak of life "in Christ". We become "in Christ" by entering into the body of Christ by baptism; yet the "body of Christ" refers to the body of believers. A fair case can be made for interpreting Paul's phrase "in Christ" as very often having some reference to life in the community of believers. "In Christ" appears to be often a shorthand way of saying "in the body of Christ". It's because we are of "the same body" that we are sharers in all that is "in Christ" - whatever is true of Him becomes true of us. If He is the seed of Abraham, then so we are we, etc. (Eph. 3:6; Gal. 3:27-29). Salvation was "given *us* in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:9) as a community, just as Israel were saved as a body, "the body of Moses", when they



were baptized at the Red Sea. This is why we usually read about "you" plural as being "in Christ", rather than of an individual alone being "in Christ". *We* were created "in Christ" (Eph. 2:10); *all you* that are in Christ" (1 Pet. 5:14); *you* are now *all* made near "in Christ" (Eph. 2:13); *we* are in heavenly places *together...* in Christ" (Eph. 2:6); *all* God's children are gathered *together in one* "in Christ" (Eph. 1:10; Gal. 3:28). God's whole purpose is "in Christ" (Eph. 3:11); His plan to save us was through our joining a community, the body of Christ, headed up in the person of Jesus. It can't really be so, therefore, that a believer can live "in Christ" with no association with the rest of the body of Christ. This is how important fellowship is

*2:7 His intention was that throughout the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus-* We note "intention"; for God will never force. His passionate desire is to lavish His grace upon us eternally; but many ignore or resist His love. The "will" of God should be read more as His "intention", rather than a determinate force which shall make itself come true one way or another in the life of a person. That is the way of Islam, but it is not the God revealed in Christ.

Just as God must've 'thought out' His wonderful plan of lavishing grace upon us [for 'the word' existed first and then 'became flesh'], we too will need to take time to think out our plans for showing grace to others. Eph. 2:5-8 speaks of God working with us now, so that He can lavish His grace upon us for eternity. This is what He is all about. And it's what we should be all about; taking a Divine joy in forgiving, being generous, caring, showing grace. God simply loves lavishing grace; there is no response to human goodness as deserving it. And so our showing of grace should be likewise. Being kind and gracious for the sake of it, rather than as some calculated response to behaviour.

*2:8 For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that faith is not of yourselves, it is a gift from God-* This is grace indeed. In the same way as repentance is given as a gift of the Spirit (Acts 3:25,26), so is faith. As noted on :5, we were made alive whilst we were dead, when we could do nothing. Faith in this grace is also a gift. It was God's psychological intervention in our lives and thinking which gave it to us, a setting up of situation and circumstance which resulted in our believing.

But this is not to say that human response is totally not required. If we believe and grasp the wonder of it all, we cannot be passive. Time and again, faith and works are bracketed together. Abraham was justified by faith, Paul argues in Romans; and by works, says James. Even within Genesis, his faith was counted for righteousness in Gen. 15:6; but Gen. 22:15-18 stress that because he had "done this thing" and been obedient, thereby was he justified. The Centurion meekly said to the Lord: "I am not worthy... neither thought I myself worthy"; but his *faith*, not his humility [as *we* might have expected] was commended by the Lord. That faith brought forth humility; just as John's letters see faith and love as parallel. The woman who washed the Lord's feet was likewise commended for her 'faith', although her actions were surely acts of devotion. But the Lord's analysis cut through to the essence that lay behind them: faith. There is a beauty to all this, in that salvation is by faith that it might be by grace (Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:8). And therefore Hab. 2:4 says that living by faith is the antithesis of being proud. The life of faith, trusting thereby in grace, is a life of humility. All the fruits of the Spirit thereby come together. In this sense, salvation is not by works. But if we can comprehend something of the purity of that grace, of God's willingness to save us regardless of our works; then we will *believe* it. And if we believe it, we will live a life of active and

humble *working* for the Lord, not that we might be saved, but in thankful faith and gratitude for the magnitude of our experience of a grace, the height and depth of which, unfathomed, no man knows. We will "live", i.e. work through life, by faith (Hab. 2:4). If we truly accept God's ways, then we will walk in them; to not walk in them is to reject them (Ez. 5:6). This ultimately is the importance of doctrine.

2:9 *It is not of works, that no one should boast-* As noted on :8, faith cannot be passive; it will issue in works. But those works are not the basis of our salvation. And Paul emphasizes this. For both Judaism and paganism considered works as the basis for salvation. The good news of salvation without works is unique to true Christianity. The connections with Romans continue here, in that boasting was associated with Jewish boasting in legalistic obedience (Rom. 2:17,23). Our boasting instead is in our sure hope of salvation by grace through the cross of the Lord Jesus (s.w. Rom. 5:2,11; 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:14).

2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God beforehand prepared that we should walk in them-* Having said that salvation is not by works, we are told that the worker is God, the potter as it were working on us the clay. Baptism into Christ is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), which means that through the Spirit, He will be working on us with hopes and expectations of our response to His grace in specific ways. Man is never better than when working at what is clearly his calling and empowered by God in doing so. We need to pray that God will reveal to us what are those specific works which He has prepared for us to do- and make them the thrust of our lives. For it's unlikely that His intention and hope was that we should get qualified, climb the career ladder, improve our homes, go up the ladder of cars, holiday homes and expensive gadgets... and die in a comfortable nursing home leaving what was left over to our kids or someone else as a kind of short cut towards that same sad life we thought we did so well in. The only other time the Greek word for "workmanship" occurs is in the enigmatic Rom. 1:20- and I have noted so far many connections with the early chapters of Romans. There we learn that God's invisible principles are made known to the Gentile world by "the things that are made". Those "things" are "His workmanship"- us. Entry into Christ, therefore, is a beginning and not an end. Nor is it merely an assent to the correctness of a set of theological truths. Rather is it an opening of ourselves to His workmanship upon us, and working for Him.

2:11 *Wherefore remember, that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by those called Circumcision (which is in the flesh and made with hands)-* The reference to circumcision as being "made with hands" connects with the preceding statement that we are not saved by works [what is done with hands] but we are instead the work of God (:10). Instead of circumcision of the flesh, done with human hands, we have God working upon our most intimate and personal inner being by His transforming Spirit. The connection is again to Romans: "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God" (Rom. 2:29). In this sense "we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

2:12 *You were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and living without God in the world-* This is clear evidence that not all religious roads lead to the true God. Apart from Christ, we have no hope and are without [relationship with] God. Separation or [Gk.] distance

from Christ is parallel with alienation from the community of "Israel", the people of God. Paul will go on to demonstrate that therefore connection with Christ is connection with the community of believers. The covenants of promise are clearly understood by Paul as being the basis of the Christian Gospel. For the promises to Abraham are presented by him in Romans as being the foundation of the new covenant or testament. The "hope" in Christ is therefore the hope of Israel, salvation in the Messiah Jesus. How hard it would be for Roman citizens, or those who aspired to it, to realize that the highest honour was to be part of "the commonwealth of Israel", that poky, undeveloped, despised corner of the great Roman empire. And the call of Christ to middle class 1st century citizens is just as radical.

2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you that once were far off are made near by the blood of Christ-* The allusion is to Is. 57:19 LXX: "Peace upon peace [Biblical "peace" often refers to forgiveness and peace with God] to them that are far off, and to them that are nigh: and the Lord has said, I will heal them". Judaism spoke of Gentile converts as coming near when they became proselytes. The idea of being made near continues the thought of :12, that we were once separate, at a distance, from both the Lord Jesus and from the community of God's people. Being made near therefore speaks not only of connection with the Lord Jesus, but also with the community of "Israel", God's people, who are in Him.

2:14 *For he himself is our peace, who has made us one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility-* "Peace" continues the allusion to Is. 57:19 (see on :13). The Lord Jesus was our peace in the sense He is the source of our peace, our peace offering. The enmity ["hostility"] is the 'alienation' from the community of Israel spoken of in :12, physically manifest in the stone dividing wall between the court of the Gentiles and the temple proper. The first century unity between Jew and Gentile must have been especially impressive. Philo records of Jamnia: "There lived a mixed population, the majority of them Jews but the rest a number of foreigners who had nested there as vermin from neighbouring territories". And there are many other such references to the bitter hatred between them. This "enmity" (AV) between them was taken away for those who were in Christ (Eph. 2:14; Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28). It must have made a startling and arresting witness. And yet sadly, it didn't continue; the old tensions and feelings rent apart that unity. The issues facing the body of Christ today are not simply Jew : Gentile tensions; there are enmities and oppositions between groups and persons which are only resolvable by common membership in the body of Christ.

The offerer put his hand on the head of the animal, thereby associating himself with it. In a sense, the animal therefore represented the offerer. But it had to be "without blemish" (Lev. 3:1), and to produce a "sweet savour" when burnt (Lev. 3:16). But how are we to offer ourselves as an unblemished sacrifice? We are surely each aware of our desperate sinfulness. The answer is in the fact that the language of the peace offering sacrifice is applied to Jesus. "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14), our peace offering by metonymy (in the same way as Christ was made "sin" for us, i.e. a sin offering). He is the unblemished animal (1 Pet. 1:19), and if we are in Christ, we too will be counted as being without spot and blemish (Eph. 5:27). We ought to know whether we are in Christ. If we are, we will be seen by God as just as pure as He is. See on Eph. 5:2. We thereby become mediators of peace to all manner of divided groups and persons.

2:15- see on Lk. 11:22; Heb. 2:14.

*Having abolished in the flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself of the two one new man, making peace-* The source of alienation between Jew and Gentile was the Law, but the thought here goes far beyond that. It was human sin, transgression of God's commandments, which created alienation between God and man. This too has been removed, with the result that connection with the Father and Son is likewise connection between all others who are in Christ, i.e. the community of God's people, "Israel". But that unity has to be felt and expressed by us in practice. Hence Paul uses the fact that we are all "in Christ" as the basis of His appeal for true unity amongst the believers- with all the patience, forbearing etc. which this involves. By baptism into Christ, we are baptized into the same body of Christ as many others (Rom. 12:5). Therefore we "sit together... in Christ" (Eph. 2:6; 1:10). He has made in Himself one new man, so making peace between all those in Him (Eph. 2:15). This is why division between those in Christ is ultimately an impossibility. Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:10).

The body of Christ *is* Christ; the members of that body between them reflect every aspect of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 2:15,16). We may each be given a different aspect to reflect, and groups of believers in different historical periods may have been focused on different aspects, but the end result is that at the second coming, the body of believers will have reflected Christ fully. We were redeemed in one body by the cross; and *therefore*, Paul reasons, we are "fellowcitizens with [all] the saints, and of [all] the household of God... in whom *all* the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded *together* for an habitation of God" (Eph. 2:16-22). Christ died for all of us in the one body, and therefore we who benefit from this are built up *together* into a temple in which God will eternally dwell. To refuse fellowship to other stones of the temple is surely a denial that they are part of that one body which was redeemed by the cross. He died to make us all one, to abolish all that humanly might keep us apart, "for to make in himself one new man, so making peace" (Eph. 2:13-15). To uphold division and disharmony within the "one new man" is well nigh a blasphemy against the body and blood of the Lord. From the Lord's pierced side came His bride, after the pattern of Eve from Adam, through the blood (memorial meeting?) and water (baptism?). The creation of the one body was a direct result of His death. The Greek word for "fellowship", *koinonia*, is used outside the New Testament to refer to peoples' joint sharing of a common property. We are "in fellowship" with each other by reason of our relation to a greater whole in which we have a part. And that 'property', the greater whole, is the person and work of the Lord Jesus- for our fellowship is "in Him". This background of the word shows that it's inappropriate to claim to have 'withdrawn fellowship' from anyone who is in Christ. They are joint sharers in Christ just as much as we are- so we cannot tell them that they don't share *koinonia* with us. To say that is to judge either them or ourselves to be not sharing in Christ- and according to the Lord's plain teaching, any such judgment will lead to our condemnation. It is the Lord's body, His work, and He invites who He wishes to have *koinonia* in Him. It's not for us to claim that *we* have withdrawn fellowship from anyone who has *koinonia* in Him.

2:16 *And might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, thereby having slain the enmity-* The enmity between God and man has been dealt with in Christ, and this means that likewise the natural enmity between persons has likewise been ended for all those in Christ. Reconciliation with our separated brethren therefore can be achieved; because potentially the enmity is slain, we are already reconciled in one body by the cross. It's for us to live this out in practice. We can move away from the tribal, jungle mentality that 'my

enemy's friend is my enemy' - if we see and believe how God loves them too as His dear children. The Lord Jesus reconciled all true believers unto God "in one body by the cross". All who are reconciled by the Lord's sacrifice are therefore in the one body, and therefore we have a duty to fellowship with others in the one body. If we refuse to do this, we in some way attempt to nullify the aim of the cross. He died in the way that He did in order that the love which He had showed might be manifested between us (Jn. 17:26). To break apart the body is to undo the work of the cross.

2:17 *And he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were near-* He could remind the Ephesians that Christ personally "came and preached peace to you" after His resurrection, when it was in fact Paul who did this, motivated as he was by the resurrection of Christ. Paul, like us, was therefore the manifestation of the Lord Jesus when he preached Him. As the Lord is the light of the world, so we are the light of the world. All that is true of Him becomes true of those "in Christ" and we are to act accordingly. Those considered by Judaism 'far' [Gentiles] and 'near' [Jews] all needed the good news of peace preached to them. The idea of the Lord Jesus coming and preaching to people is found also in 1 Pet. 3:19 (see note there). The language of going, coming or moving is often used in relation to the preaching of a person – e.g. Mt. 9:13: "*but go* and learn what that means". The Lord didn't intend that they literally went away somewhere. Likewise Dan. 12:4 and Hab. 2:2 bid those who understand God's word to "run" – not literally, but in response to the word preached. God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He 'preaches' to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to "go, tell Ebed-melech..." a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn't have literally left prison to do so – but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord's word has as it were experienced the Lord 'going' to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could 'go' to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time.

2:18 *For through him we have our joint access in one Spirit to the Father-* The extent of our peace with God is that we have access to the Father in the Spirit. There is only one Spirit- not one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. 1 Pet. 3:18 has a connected idea; and we noted on :17 that 1 Pet. 3:19 is connected also to this passage: "Christ once suffered for sins... that He might bring us [s.w. "have access"] to God [on account of having been] put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit". We too have been made alive with Him by the Spirit (see on :5). "To the Father" , *pros* the Father, is a phrase used about the status and place of the ascended Lord Jesus now (Jn. 13:1,3; 14:12,28; 16:10,16,28; 17:11; 20:17; 1 Jn. 2:1). Those references in John are largely in the context of the Comforter, the gift of the Spirit, enabling us to be *pros* the Father as the Lord Jesus now is. Or as Ephesians 2 has put it, we died, rose and ascended to Heaven with the Lord Jesus if we are in Him. This access to God is for both Jew and Gentile. We are both brought to the same place, in the Father's presence in Heaven, by the work of the Spirit which we received because we are in Christ. This of itself should unite us in our earthly relationships. Paul goes on to say that he prays *pros* the Father (Eph. 3:14).

2:19 *So then you are no longer strangers and pilgrims, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God-* We who were "strangers" have been accepted; and this in practice should motivate us to accept "strangers" (Mt. 25:35,38 s.w.). The Lord's crucifixion led to "strangers" being able to be buried within Jerusalem (Mt. 27:7 s.w.). In a sense we are "strangers and pilgrims" to the surrounding world (Heb. 11:13). But not to God. In first

century society, there was a strong sense of identity based upon geographical origin. To sacrifice this for the sake of an abstract association with the citizenship of God's people, "Israel" (:12), was no small thing. And it is no less radical for us- to exchange our sense of identity and social security for association with the still immature community of "Israel". Paul again urges them to see their connection with God as a connection also with His family.

The Romans allowed the existence of the autonomous *politeia*, the city-state, so long as within its religion it featured the worship of the Emperor. And yet the NT writers speak of the ecclesia as a city which is independent, defiantly devoted to the worship of the one and only true God (Eph. 2:19; 3:20; Heb. 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 21). The writers must have nervously penned those inspired words, knowing the problems it would create. The Spirit of God could have chosen not to so directly challenge this world; and yet there is a chasmic difference between the community of God and the surrounding world, which the New Testament unashamedly triumphs in. The whole basis of this radical separation is the fact that Christ died for us. He died to unite us who believe in what the NT terms "*the unity*", without seeking to further define it (Jn. 11:52; 17:23; Eph. 1:10; 2:14; 4:3). We were reconciled to each other as well as to God "in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2:16). His death unites us in that standing before His cross, all our pettiness disappears, and we are impressed again with the reality that if He so laid down His life for us, so we must lay down our lives for the brethren (1 Jn. 3:16). It really and truly is a case of one for all, and all for one.

*2:20 Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone-* The reference is surely to the New Testament prophets whose inspired utterances formed the New Testament documents, which were the foundation of the new temple of God's people. The Heavenly Jerusalem of the closing visions of Revelation likewise features the apostles as the foundation stones. What was then all so abstract will be turned to visual reality when the Lord returns, and reveals how things really are from God's viewpoint. We are "being built", rather like we are the workmanship of God (:10). The metaphor requires us to allow ourselves to be shaped and put into place within God's wider plan for saving a community. His building is done through other builders (1 Cor. 3:10,12) and through our response to the word of grace which builds us up (Acts 20:32 s.w.). In that sense we build ourselves up (Jude 20) through allowing His building of us.

*2:21 In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord-* The equivalent in Colossians is the statement that we are "grounded and built up in Him" (Col. 2:7). The whole process of preparation, which is what building is largely about, involves being used in cooperation with the other materials in the building. So much of His work with us therefore involves our association and dovetailing with others; and this is exactly the aspect of His work which leads so many to give up. This is exactly why the frictions which are part of church life are all so necessary. To opt out by pushing off into splendid isolation, whilst professing to maintain our faith in Christ, is to miss the purpose of His work with us; and risks us being left out of the final total building. This is not to say we should not quit abusive churches and church situations, but the essence of "being fitted together" must not be ignored. This same word is only used again in 4:16, where in a different metaphor, we are the body parts which cannot exist separately to each other, but are all fitted together by God's operation in order to function. Solomon built the temple of stone already prepared (1 Kings 6:7); Christ is the builder of the spiritual temple, in which the stones should fit together without strife (Eph. 2:21 alludes to 1 Kings 6:7).

2:22 *In whom you also are being built up together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit-*

The repeated "in whom" (:21) again suggests that "in Christ" is a terms which often has reference to our collective experience with others who are in His body. As noted on :21, the metaphor emphasizes how we are built "together". The Spirit of God dwells in the assembled temple, and not just in isolated individuals who want nothing to do with the building as a whole. The churches to whom Paul was writing were extremely immature; yet he never once advocates separating from them. Nor does the Lord in His letters to the churches. And it is the perceived immaturity of others in the church which is the main reason why believers push off into isolation. Such impatience and quitting of the building site, as it were, should not be glorified as 'standing up for the Truth'. It is nothing of the sort- just being cranky and selfish, and failing to perceive God's work through the Spirit. God is now dwelling within us, individually and collectively, by the Spirit; but this is in anticipation of how He shall do so eternally. To be without the Spirit now means we shall not be eternally inhabited by it.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-* The "cause" is that in the preceding verse, 2:22. There, Paul has taught that God is working through His Spirit so that He may indwell His people through the Spirit. When he finishes his parenthesis, he continues praying "For this cause..." that the Spirit will dwell in them richly (:14-19).

Understanding the way Paul breaks off into another theme and then resumes is the key to understanding some of the more difficult passages in his writings. Here we have a huge bracketed section, as it were: "For this cause I, Paul [*the prisoner of Jesus Christ...* ]"; and then there is a parenthesis of 13 verses, until then he resumes: *For this cause* I bow my knees" (Eph. 3:1,14). There are other examples in his letters: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare [*his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say*] at this time his righteousness" (Rom. 3:25,26). "But if I live in the flesh [*this is the fruit of my labour... nevertheless to abide in the flesh*] (this) is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:22-24).

"The prisoner" suggests Paul wrote to them from prison in Rome. He feels that his imprisonment was for the sake of the Gentiles receiving the Gospel. And so it was; for it was Jewish fury and jealousy over this issue which led them to get him imprisoned. But we recall that he was sent to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. So much could

3:2- See on Eph. 4:7.

*If indeed you have heard-* This doesn't mean that they had not heard of the fact that Paul by God's grace was sharing with the Gentiles the news of salvation. He means rather 'If you have really appreciated', and he will go on in :16-19 to pray that they will be helped by the Spirit towards such an appreciation. 1 Pet. 2:3 has a similar idea: "If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious". There was no doubt that they had heard that the Lord was gracious. It was a question of appreciation.

*Of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you-* Paul surely alludes to how he was the especially commissioned apostle to the Gentiles, with the role of taking God's grace to them.

3:3 *As I wrote before in few words: How by revelation was the mystery made known to me-* Perhaps Paul had written a brief, unpreserved letter to the Ephesians before. Or maybe the reference is to Galatians, where he explains that he received the ideas concerning grace to the Gentiles by revelation from the Lord Jesus Himself, and not from men.

God's ways are described as a secret, a mystery; the Hebrew word used in this connection means 'A confidential plan revealed to intimate friends'; and yet they are revealed to the true believers (Am. 3:7-8; Jer. 23: 18,22 AV mg.; Ps. 25:14; Eph. 3:3-6). Therefore the congregation of true believers is called "the secret assembly of the saints"(Ps. 89:7 Heb.).

3:4 *Whereby, as you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ-* This is not boasting as to how much Paul understands; rather he wants them to perceive his understanding and share it as their own. He will go on to pray, as he has done earlier, that their eyes will be opened by the Spirit to perceive the mystery of Christ (1:18; 3:18). His



prayers for their enlightenment would therefore mesh with their own reading or hearing of his words to them. The gift of the Spirit to perceive therefore opened their eyes to the real import of the written words; just as the Ethiopian commented that he could not understand the word he was reading without extra help.

*3:5 This in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit-* The "other generations" could equally be rendered "other ages", as if Paul recognized the Jewish division of human history into ages. The inclusion of the Gentiles is stated in the Old Testament, both directly and obliquely. But the obvious truth had not been "made known" or "revealed". Just as we noted on :4 that the Spirit would give the Ephesians understanding of the written word so that they 'got it', likewise Paul is saying that all those Old Testament references (which he himself brings to our attention in his letters) needed "the Spirit" to reveal their (now) obvious meaning. And the Lord worked through the apostles and New Testament prophets to make that revelation- through His Spirit. This is yet more evidence that man does not face off against God over an open Bible alone; the Spirit reveals the meaning at the right time.

*3:6 That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel-* This is "the mystery of Christ" of :4. "The Gospel" had already been revealed to Abraham, in the form of the promises which clearly implied the acceptance of the Gentiles into His seed (Gal. 3:8). But as noted on :5, this (now) obvious truth had to be revealed by the Spirit. The words on paper required an interpretation which was given by the Spirit at the right time. The delay in revealing this truth was surely because the body of Christ was not then in existence, and His work and sacrifice had not then been completed. And seeing He had genuine freewill, there was the possibility He could have failed. In this we see the thrill of victory when he finally dies perfect and morally triumphant, and the endless wonder and significance of His resurrection.

*3:7 Of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of His power-* All preaching work is to be done as a servant, after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, the servant of all. Being *made* a servant recalls Paul's language about how the Lord Jesus throughout His life and supremely in his death was "made a servant" (Phil. 2:7). Paul made himself a servant of all (1 Cor. 9:19), and yet here he says he was "made a servant" according to God's powerful working. God's game plan with us is to humble us, make us slaves- and insofar as we willingly seek to go along with that plan, He will work with us as we with Him. "His power" in that sense is perfected in human weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). "The working of His power" is a phrase Paul uses about God's work in each and every believer through the Spirit given to us (Eph. 1:19; 4:16), a "working" or [Gk.] 'energy' released within each of us through our baptismal association with the Lord's resurrection (Col. 2:12). Paul was not therefore a special case; we each have the same power working in us to achieve and enable the Lord's intended mission for each of us. It is only our dysfunction which doesn't allow it to operate fully.

*3:8 To me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ-* Twice (also in :7) Paul marvels at the grace we have received in order to share the Gospel with others. Preaching is not therefore a mere duty, to be performed in the spirit of glum witness to a disinterested world. It is a wonderful grace given that we should have the honour of inviting others to eternity. Whenever Paul talks about preaching, he talks of humility. In one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9).

However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he later faced his death, he wrote to Timothy here that he was "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. Paul coins a word here to emphasise his humble status in contrast to the honour of being a preacher: "less than the least" (*elachistotero*). He was a preacher despite the fact he was chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15); only through mercy / forgiveness had he received the commission he had (2 Cor. 4:1).

Paul felt he was "less than the least" of all saints, that he would be the least in the Kingdom (Eph. 3:8). He uses a closely related word to that used by John when he spoke of how he must "decrease" (Jn. 3:30). It was as if he felt like John at his most 'decreased', in prison fearing death; and remember that Paul wrote Ephesians from prison too. But John was weak in prison; he doubted (momentarily) whether Jesus was the Messiah, "him that should come" (Lk. 7:19). Yet Paul seems to allude to this when he says that "he that shall come will come" (Heb. 10:37)- as if to say 'John, my hero, you had your weak moments too, but I've tried to learn the lesson from them'.

3:9 *And to make all men see what is the intention of this mystery which for ages has been hid in God who created all things*- To 'make see' is the same word used in 1:18, where Paul prays for the eyes of the believers to be "enlightened". The "all men" therefore particularly has in view those who have already believed (see on Mt. 20:27); he wishes both Jew and Gentile believers to perceive the wonder of the unity which God's program has in mind for us. He will go on in 3:18,19 to pray that the believers will be empowered by the Spirit to comprehend and know the wonder of the Gospel and its implications in personal relationships. All this prayer and concern about realizing the implications of the Gospel is proof enough that the Christian life is not simply knowing or preserving a set of doctrines. That alone will not save. We need the Spirit to open our eyes to the implications of these things. The comment that "God created all things" may be a reference to the new creation of believers (2 Cor. 5:17; AV adds "by Jesus Christ"); but it may be simply making the point that all things literally were created in order to merely provide a backdrop for God's essential intention- the "fellowship" (AV, NEV "intention") between persons in Christ. The fact the church is riven with so many inter-personal tensions is sadly a reflection of the way that we have missed the point of the Gospel, and remained on the level of technical knowledge of propositions rather than allowing the Spirit to enlighten us as to the implications in practice. These things were "hid in God" in the sense that they could only be actualized by the Lord Jesus, His work and sacrifice. But in Him and through the members of His faithful body, they are now revealed.

3:10- see on Gal. 6:6.

*The intention was that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*- We note the idea of "intention" (as in :9). God will not force His way upon those who refuse Him, and even with those of us who accept His way, He bears with our dysfunctions- which mean that His ideal intentions remain not fully achieved in this life. We waste so much potential by our slowness and obtuse

dysfunction in spiritual matters. The wisdom of God was seen by Paul as being His plan to save and unite all men, Jew and Gentile, within His Son (Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2:7). That wisdom is given to us by the Spirit (1:17); it is ours for the asking (James 1:5). The unity of Jew and Gentile in the church is the context here, and that was to be the public exhibition of God's manifold wisdom. We can read "the rulers and authorities" as referring simply to the rulers of this world; for 'the heavens' can Biblically refer to those in authority over the masses on 'earth'. The church at Ephesus had been born within a background of conflict with the rulers of this world; and the unity between Jew and Gentile in the church was intended to witness to them of God's manifold wisdom. The church is the body of Christ; He is manifest only through us. We are Him, in that sense. Our bodies are members of His body (1 Cor. 6:15). All that we do, in word and deed, is in the Name of the Lord Jesus- i.e. as representing Him whose Name we called upon ourselves in baptism (Col. 3:17). We are the words of His epistle to both the world and the brotherhood; He has no other face or legs or arms than us (2 Cor. 3:3). We can thereby limit Him if our disunity fails to manifest His wisdom as intended.

But Paul was a Jew writing to those influenced by Judaism. It could be that "principalities and powers" (AV) could refer to Angels, which were a major aspect of Jewish thought in the first century. In this case it would appear that the Angels learn and increase their knowledge from watching our response to the Gospel. "Principalities and powers" is a phrase apposite to the Angels and it is clearly used regarding the Angels who gave the Law in Col 2:15. In this case Eph. 3:9,10 could be read like this: "To make all (both Angels and Christians- AV "men" is not in the original) see what is the fellowship of the mystery (that both Jews and Gentiles can be saved), which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God (and therefore from the Angels too)... to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the ecclesia the manifold wisdom of God". We share the heavenlies with the Angels- and in any case, why cannot 'the heavenlies' refer to literal Heaven also in a sense? As Christ was resurrected and ascended to literal Heaven, the Heavenlies of Eph. 1:20, so we are baptized and spiritually ascend to Heaven straight afterwards (Eph. 1:20). An Angelic interpretation would avoid the difficult that the human principalities and powers to whom the mystery was made known would not accept that mystery, according to 1 Cor. 2:7,8,14: "We speak the wisdom of God (cp. Eph. 1 "the manifold wisdom of God") in a mystery (cp. "the mystery... which hath been hid" in Eph. 1)... which none of the princes of this world knew (principalities and powers!)... the natural man (i. e. the princes of this world) receives not the things of the Spirit of God (the "mystery" of :7), for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned". Because Angels control world rulers, "principalities and powers" could perhaps refer both to them and the Angels behind them.

3:11 *According to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord-* I noted earlier that God's purpose with us in Christ was not simply hatched from the beginning of this present world; but from eternity, from before time- and it shall continue beyond time, for eternity. The unity in Christ, this fellowship between the redeemed which the cross enabled, had been God's original intention; how tragic, therefore, is our disunity within the church. The mystery of His will, His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself from not merely 'the beginning' but from eternity, was that "in the dispensation of the fullness of time he might gather together all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Thus the unity of the redeemed is not just an incidental product of our redemption and unity in Christ; it was the essential intention and goal of God from before the beginning of the world, and was only revealed through the unity achieved by the cross (Eph. 3:9,10). This was His "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). These

passages in Ephesians need meditation; for it is easy to underestimate the tremendous emphasis given to how the mysterious unity of the body of believers, *together* glorifying His Name, was so *fundamentally* and *eternally* God's main purpose. And so Paul marvelled that *he* had been chosen to plainly reveal this, God's finest and most essential mystery, to all men; for it was not revealed at all in the OT, nor even (at least, not directly) by the Lord Jesus. And we may likewise marvel that we have a living part in it. That I, the little boy with glasses from the council estate behind Grove Park railway station in an anonymous South London suburb... was known from eternity by God, to live for eternity in unity with the rest of His people... And you too. What a tragedy it is when a person steps out of that purpose, opts out because of some petty argument with others, or is thrust out of it because they didn't get this or that right or messed up or fellowshipped this one or that one, or got maxed out on earning more money to buy that dream house or car ... and what a glory, an honour, to be able to extend a place in that eternal purpose to those around us.

3:12 *In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him*- The "boldness" with which we come before the "throne of grace" right now, is the "boldness" with which we will come before that same throne at the final day of judgment (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12 cp. 1 Jn. 4:17). Faith in the Lord Jesus therefore produces this boldness and confidence; faith in Him therefore means believing, trusting in Him, that He has saved us and shall do so at the last day. Faith in Him doesn't simply mean believing He once existed, for about everyone from atheist Communist to Judaist to Muslim believes that much. Nor does it refer to a mere knowledge of some propositions about Him. It is trust that really, He has and will save us eternally, and on account of Him we have a place in God's eternal purpose which was always in Him (:11). Prayer therefore will be with such confidence- not confidence that we shall absolutely receive the requests made in the terms in which we asked for them, but a confidence in God's presence as we speak with Him.

3:13 *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory*- Our confidence in the Heavenly throne room explained in :12 should mean that nothing on earth makes us waver. They had heard and perhaps witnessed Paul's tribulations at Ephesus for them, and were aware he was in prison in Rome. He was a living exhibition of the sufferings which come from being "in Christ". And it naturally made the converts worry at what might be coming their way. Instead of fearing as a result of Paul's sufferings, they were to instead glory in them.

"Lose heart" is a phrase elsewhere translated "faint not" and it occurs in Lk. 18:1: "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint". There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable. This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: "Brethren, be not weary (s.w. "not to faint") in well doing" . What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: "Brethren, pray for us". And he concludes it with the same rubric: "Brethren, be not weary" (faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind here when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): "In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence

(to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)... *wherefore* I desire that ye faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations"; is he not implying 'You know how powerful prayer is, so don't faint in it, you know what struggles I'm having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent widow in the parable'. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

3:14- see on Eph. 1:15.

*For this cause I bow my knees to the Father*- This resumes the train of thought from "this cause" in :1. The intervening verses, as noted there, are a parenthesis. What we now read until the "Amen" in :21 is a unique transcript of Paul's prayer for them, said on his knees, and also mixing praise with worship; for to bow the knee is an idiom for praise as well as the prayer of request. Paul uses the same words in writing of how every knee shall bow to God at the day of judgment (Rom. 14:11); but he lived in prayer now as he would before the day of judgment. That was exactly the sense of his idea of being "confident" both in prayer now and the day of judgment in the future- see on :12. Our attitude in prayer to God now will be our attitude at the day of judgment.

3:15 *From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named*- "Every family" may be a reference to every church, especially appropriate given that most of the early churches were house churches, meeting as family. The phrase can equally be rendered "the whole family". Paul chooses to use the word *patria* to describe this new "family in heaven and earth" to which we belong in Christ. The word *patria* is defined by Strong as meaning "a group of families" that comprise a nation [s.w. Acts 3:25 "all kindreds of the earth"]. The various family units / house churches comprised the overall body of Christ, the nation of the new Israel. Eph. 3:15 takes on a new meaning in the light of the house-church nature of early Christianity. God is the *pater* [father- the head of the house] from whom every home [*patria*] in heaven and on earth is named". We're invited to see God as a family God, with us as "the household of God" (Eph. 2:19; 3:15). See on Acts 8:3; Col. 1:20. By baptism into the Name, we have His family Name named upon us. To be aware of who Yahweh is, of the characteristics outlined in Ex. 34:5-7 that comprise His Name... this must surely affect *our* behaviour, seeing we bear that Name. It is an understanding of the Name that inspires our faith in forgiveness. "Though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many" (Jer. 14:7,9,21). The Name is called upon us in baptism (Jer. 14:9 = Eph. 3:15), and this is why we urge men to be baptized into the Name to wash away their sins. See on Heb. 13:15.

3:16 *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man*- This is evidence enough that the function of the Holy Spirit is within the inner man, and the gift of Spirit strengthening doesn't refer solely to the temporary miraculous gifts. And this verse is likewise evidence enough that the Spirit doesn't simply enter us through Bible reading. For Paul prays that God would give them this gift. There is a strong element of external agency here, the prayer of a third party for this working in the inner man to happen. There are many examples even in the Old Testament of God working directly upon human hearts / spirits. There is a huge wealth of spiritual strength with God- "the riches of His glory". Although we are given the Spirit at baptism, we continue to receive it, and it appears from this prayer that it can be also given in response to the prayers of third parties. John the Baptist was "strengthened in the Spirit" (Lk.

1:80), and yet "John did no miracle" (Jn. 10:41). The reference is to internal strengthening; to palm off all references to the Holy Spirit as referring to the temporary miraculous gifts is just not the correct interpretation. We are to humble ourselves under the strengthening hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6 s.w.); His activity seeks to humble us that we might be exalted in due time. The Spirit is given at baptism, and Paul prays that that indwelling gift might give them strength. The Corinthians had received the gift, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). We too have the same gift but need to realize the potential. These promises of internal spiritual strengthening don't mean that we shall not sin; the only other reference to "the inner man" is when Paul laments that he delights in God's law "in the inner man" (Rom. 7:22), but still sins because he is in the flesh. We should not therefore ignore the promises of the Spirit's work because we know we are sinners and shall continue sinning throughout our mortal lives.

3:17- see on Lk. 6:48.

*That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love-* It is the "spirit of Christ" which dwells in us (Rom. 8:9,11). This is the promised Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, which would dwell within us to the extent that the Lord's physical absence would be compensated for by His Spirit making His presence real to us. And the simple end result of that is, in a word, "love". Such love, both the love of Christ for us and our response in lives of love, will become our root and foundation. And if we are "rooted and grounded in love", then :18 promises that we will come to appreciate yet more "the love of Christ". There is an upward spiral of spirituality. It is the love principle which alone can give stability to our otherwise unstable existence. People do not know really how to live, how to think, how or what to be. It is having a foundation in the love principle which constantly and consistently provides the answers to our endless questions as to how to respond to all the mental and secular issues which we meet hour by hour.

*3:18 That you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-* As noted on :17, the gift of the Spirit enables us to perceive the love of the Father and Son. Rom. 5:5 says the same- "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us". Again we have in view a gift of the Spirit within our spirit, or as Ephesians terms it, "the inner man". The gift of understanding something of the dimensions of the Lord's love is not received by us in isolation; the heightened comprehension is "with all the saints".

"The love of Christ" often refers to the Lord's sacrifice. We cannot sit passively before the cross of the Lord. That "love of Christ" there passes our human knowledge, and yet our hearts can be opened, as Paul prayed, that we might know the length, breadth and height of it. The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God. The love of Christ was shown in His cross; and through the Spirit's enlightenment we can *know* the height, length, breadth of that love (Eph. 3:18,19). But this passage in Ephesians is building on Job 11:7-9: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea". The purpose of the connection is to show that through appreciating the love of Christ, unknowable to the unenlightened mind, we see the Almighty unto perfection, in a way which the Old Testament believers were unable to do. It was as high as Heaven, and what could they do? And yet it must be confessed that we do not in practice attain to such fullness of knowledge and vision. We look to the Kingdom, one of the excellencies of which will be the full grasp of the Almighty unto perfection, as manifest

in the death of His Son. All we *now* know is that that cross was the fullness of God, it was "the Almighty unto perfection". But then, we shall know, we shall find it out. And yet, paradoxically, in some sense even now we can *know* "the love of Christ" [a phrase often used about the cross] that *passes* human knowledge. Speaking of His upcoming death, the Lord warned that where he was going, the disciples could not then follow; but they would, afterwards. This doesn't necessarily mean they too were to die the death of the cross. Rather could it mean that they later would enter into what His death really meant; then they would see with some understanding, rather than run away from the vision of the cross. And for us, one of the Kingdom's riches will likewise be that we shall then understand that final climactic act the more fully. Yet we begin that discovery now.

God has more spiritual culture, for want of a better way of putting it, than to describe the love of Christ just with a string of superlative adjectives. Paul prayed that his Ephesians would be strengthened by the Spirit's working in the inner man, so that they would "be strong to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18,19 RV). There is a paradox here; to know something that can't be known, that passes knowledge. We can only know that love by God working on our inner man, so that we realize the experience we have of the love of Christ, and by seeing it manifested in others.

*3:19 And to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God-* "To truly know" doesn't mean that we know to perfection every aspect of the Lord's love. It rather means that we know His love for us as the ultimate truth. "The truth" is not so much a set of doctrinal propositions as the simple fact that the Lord loved us to the end, and we shall live eternally with Him through that love.

It is surely apparent that it would be pointless to pray for our brethren if in fact those prayers have no power at all, and if ultimately we are all responsible for our own spiritual path. There is in all this an incredible and most urgent imperative. This is why Paul bowed his knees in prayer for the Ephesians, knowing that his words could really increase and enrich the quality of their relationship with God, if not their very salvation (Eph. 3:14-19). If my prayers can influence your eternal destiny, if they can lead you from condemnation to the eternity of God's Kingdom: then I must, if I have any gram of love and care within me, dedicate myself to prayer for you. And you, likewise, for me. Prayer for others' spiritual well-being becomes no longer something which is 'tacked on' to our tired, repetitious evening prayers.

*All* the fullness of God dwelt in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9); "and of his fullness have *all* we received" (Jn. 1:16). God's fullness, the full extent of His character, dwelt in Christ, and through His Name which speaks fully of that character, that fullness of Christ is reckoned to us. And so, in line with all this, Eph. 3:19 makes the amazing statement. And it is amazing. We can *now* "be filled with *all* the fullness of God". Let's underline that, really underline it, in our hearts. We can be *filled* with *all* the fullness of God. Filled with all the fullness of God's character. See on Eph. 1:23. We are counted righteous, counted as if we have the Lord's moral perfection; but as Romans 8 explains, the Spirit is given in order to help us become in reality what we are counted as being by status. The language of 'filling' is used about being filled with the Spirit in our inner person (Acts 13:52; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 4:10; 5:18). It is the filling by the Spirit which reveals to us the fullness of God.

3:20 *Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us-* This is one of several allusions to Paul's final address to the Ephesian elders; I suggested on 1:1 that Ephesians was initially a follow up letter to that meeting:

Acts 20:19 = Eph. 4:2 "lowliness of mind"

Acts 20:27 = Eph. 1:11 "counsel", God's plan.

Acts 20:32 = Eph. 3:20 God's "ability".

Acts 20:32 = Eph. 2:20. Building upon the foundation.

Acts 20:32 = Eph. 1:14,18 "The inheritance of the saints."

Answers to prayer are described as "great and mighty things, which you know not" (Jer. 33:3)- i.e. the very nature of answered prayer is that it is above all we ask or think. It leads to a sense of wonderment with this God with whom we are in relationship. And answered prayer is indeed part and parcel of a living relationship with the Father and Son. But Paul may simply mean that the spiritual help he has just prayed for is far beyond anything the Ephesians could "ask or think" of requesting. He urges them to believe that God is indeed "able" to work the spiritual transformation he has just prayed for. And that ability is potentially within each of us; for each baptized believer has received "the power that works in us", it is a question of allowing it to operate. Again we note that the Spirit works *within* us; there is no reference to the miraculous gifts, they were an incidental, temporal external witness to the profound fact that God's Spirit power has been given into the hearts of believers and is at work there. God is at work in our hearts, in our psychology- but we must be open to this.

3:21 *To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen-* The allusion seems to be to the concluding doxology of the model prayer: "For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen". "The power" has been defined in :20 as the Spirit power which works within us. Our glorification of God is therefore due to our thankfulness for His power working within us to transform us into persons who shall live for ever and ever to His glory.



## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called-* Paul repeatedly expresses his resentment and frustration with his "bonds"; but he saw those limitations as "in the Lord". We are all frustrated by limitation of situation or health; but they are to be experienced as "unto the Lord". Living "worthily" or appropriately to our calling, of the Lord, of God, of our status as believers, is a major theme with Paul (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). Our lives are to be full of fruits worthy or appropriate to repentance (Mt. 3:8; and Paul repeats this teaching of John in Acts 26:20). The tendency then as now is to accept the Gospel but not to live and feel in response to that calling. Yet the way of the Spirit is to make us in practice what we are in status. Our calling was by grace- the fact we were called and others were not is a parade example of grace toward us, according to Romans 8 and 2 Tim. 1:9 (Who has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace"). Paul has already prayed that the Spirit would open their eyes to the huge implications of being a called person (1:18). We have heard the Gospel- we are called. Of that there is no question, for the call is in the Gospel of the Kingdom. This should have a huge effect upon us; we are to walk appropriate to such a calling, making our calling sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

*4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with patience making allowance for each other in love-* The experience of having been called from eternity, part of God's "eternal purpose", not just 'from the beginning' but from infinite past eternity, should elicit in us appropriate humility and patience. For God waited patiently for infinite time until He called us, and is so patient with us now in our brief moment of opportunity as we live out this life. Exactly because we are the elect / chosen ones, we should put on lowliness (Col. 3:12 s.w.). This is the outworking in practice of appreciating our calling and predestined place in God's purpose- humility and patient love of others. The equivalent of this verse in Colossians is the command to make allowance for each other and therefore forgive them (Col. 3:13). Forgiveness is assisted by making allowance, by considering why a person is acting as they are, rather than taking their words or actions as they stand and judging them for them, which is how natural human justice behaves.

*4:3- see on Jn. 17:23.*

*Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace-* The patient forgiveness and making allowance for others just spoken of (:2) will in practice mean that the unity the Spirit has potentially created will be realized in practice. We have here another encouragement to live in practice what we are by status- a united community. The implication is that by dividing, by intolerance, both of practical and intellectual matters, we are going against the unity which the Spirit has potentially created; and we are thereby out of step with the Spirit. It is "peace" which is to be the bond or uniting principle; and "peace" is often a reference to peace with God through the forgiveness achieved in the Lord Jesus. An awareness of our own experience of forgiveness is what will connect us with others who have experienced the same in Christ; mere adherence to the same set of theology will not, and evidently does not, create true spiritual unity between believers.

*4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in the one hope of your calling-* Seeing there is only one Spirit and we have each received the same calling to the same hope, we are only one body. There are not different callings and different hopes. The order of things in the list of essential doctrines in Eph. 4:4-6 is marvellous: "One body" (us)

comes first, and "One God" comes last. Behold here the humility of God in inspiring this teaching in this way, and the paramount importance placed on unity between believers.

4:5 *One Lord, one faith, one baptism*- It is possible to discern within the NT letters the beginnings of a body of teaching about moral behaviour. The same outline themes are discernible in Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter and James;; I suggested on 1:1 that Ephesians was indeed written to the Ephesians, but it became the basis for a more general set of teachings which was employed in the early church and was repeated, verbatim at times, to the believers in Colosse:

Theme	Colossians	Ephesians	James	1 Peter
The new birth [baptism]	2:12	4:4-6	1:18	1:23
The things of the old life that must be left behind	3:9	4:22	1:21	2:1
The image of God and Jesus; the new life that must be put on	1:19	4:24	1:18	2:21
The theme of submission to Jesus as Lord of our lives	3:18	5:22	4:7	2:13; 5:19
Exhortation to stand strong against temptation / the 'devil'	4:12	6:11	4:7	5:8,9
Watch and pray, endure to the end	4:2	6:18	5:16	4:7

4:6 *One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*- The theme here is of unity amongst the believers, and so the "all" here I would take as referring to all believers. For through the Spirit, God works through and in [within] all believers. That is a major theme of Ephesians. The "all" is surely the "each one of us" of :7, and the "men" of :8. The emphasis that "all" believers, "each one of us", have God urgently active in our hearts and lives through the Spirit was and is necessary because there will always be those in any believing community who feel they are just amongst the crowd, and God's activity is through the leadership and they are mere spectators at a show.

4:7 *But to each one of us was the grace given, according to the measure of the gift of Christ*- As noted on :6, "each one of us" has been given the gift of the Spirit by the Lord Jesus, and not just the leadership or those who appear to have more spectacular usage by Him. We have all sinned, so we have all received grace, and that grace is manifest in the gift of the Spirit within each forgiven believer. This emphasis is necessary because Paul will now further speak of how the miraculous public gifts were given to some in the first century; but each of us has been given a measure or portion of the Spirit gift of Christ.

When Paul speaks of the stewardship of God's grace given to him (Eph. 3:2 RVmg.), he is alluding to the parable of the talents (see on Mt. 25:15). He saw the talents as the amount of grace shown, and for him, he knew this to amount to many talents; and he invested them, in response, through the preaching of the Gospel. And he carries on the allusion in Eph. 4:7, speaking of how unto every one of us Christ has given a gift, namely, grace. Whilst grace will

produce unique response in each of us, we are bound together by the same basic experience of having been saved by grace.

4:8- see on 1 Cor. 15:28.

*Wherefore He says: When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men-* Ascension refers to the Lord's literal ascent to Heaven, but it is also used as a metaphor of His 'ascent' in victory over sin. What held us captive was sin, and when this was made captive by the Lord's victory on the cross, we were given gifts. The "men" are the "all men" of :6, the "each one of us" of :7. The context of Ps. 68:18 is the victory song at the Red Sea deliverance. The gifts were those taken from Egypt / sin / the world. Such gifts were not available before the victory. They therefore refer primarily to the various victories over sin which are now possible. The miraculous manifestations of the Spirit were seen in Old Testament times too, so they are not the primary reference. Although the internal gifts to the "inner man" were testified to in the first century by miraculous endowments, to make the point- that God's Spirit is now indeed given to men. Acts 2:33 speaks of how the Lord received the Spirit and gave it to men, and the Comforter passages in Jn. 14-16 speak likewise. Ps. 68:18 continues: "Yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them". The purpose of the gifts was that even the backsliding might be transformed to have God dwelling within them. And Ps. 68:19,20 define the gifts as the benefits which the Lord daily loads us with- salvation. The daily blessings are not miraculous gifts but forgiveness, and guidance towards salvation. It is these blessings with which He internally fills all in Christ (:10).

*4:9 Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?-* The ascent to receive these gifts for us required the Lord's death and burial. The victory song of Psalm 68 could only be ultimately sung because of the Lord's death "first". We find here yet another connection with the thought of Romans, this time to Rom. 10:7, where 'descending [s.w.] into the deep' is connected with the resurrection of the Lord from the dead. His three days in "the lower parts of the earth" was therefore whilst He was dead; and death, Biblically, is unconsciousness. This puts paid to all speculations about the Lord doing conscious battle in some underworld with the powers of evil. "The lower parts of the earth" is a phrase used in Ps. 63:9 and Ps. 139:15 LXX for the grave.

But many times the same Greek word for "descended" is used for the Lord's 'descent' from Heaven; He 'came down' from Heaven in the same way as the manna 'descended' from Heaven- it was sent from God, but created here on earth. In this case, we would read the height of His ascent, in spiritual terms, as a reflection of His total connection with the lowest things of earthly life. "The lower parts of the earth" would be a quotation from Is. 44:23 LXX, which uses the term to describe the lower ranks of people upon earth. This would then explain the possible connection with Jn. 3:13, "no man has ascended up to heaven, but He that descended from Heaven".

It could be that both interpretations have validity; the Lord's descent from Heaven, His sending from God, involved His descending into the grave itself. His sinless association with humanity and finally His dying the death of all men was what qualified Him to be so highly exalted.

4:10 *He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things*- It was "the same" essential Jesus who died as who ascended; in terms of personality, He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8), just as who we essentially are is who we shall eternally be. The Jesus who loved little children and was pitiful to the weak is the same Jesus with whom we have to do now, and whom we shall meet at judgment day. Likewise "that same Jesus" who was crucified is the one who is now exalted Lord in Heaven (Acts 2:36).

Paul's description of Christ 'ascending up far above all heavens' seems to be rooted in his vivid re-living and imagining of the scene in Lk. 24:51, where the record says that Christ was "parted from them, and carried up".

The risen Lord has filled "all things" with His spirituality, "the whole universe", i.e. the believers (Eph. 3:19; 4:10 NIV). This is based on God's attitude in the OT; that Israel were His people, His 'world', and the other nations were "not a people"; effectively, they weren't people, in God's eyes (Dt. 32:21). Is this Biblical evidence for a social Gospel? These words are true of all those who are out of covenant relationship with Him, including those who have fallen away. Thus Elisha told the apostate king of Israel: "Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, *I would not look toward thee, nor see thee*" (2 Kings 3:14). The 'filling' surely refers to the filling of believers with the Holy Spirit in their hearts, leading to the fruits of the Spirit such as joy, peace etc. (Rom. 15:13; Eph. 3:19; 5:18).

4:11- see on Lk. 11:22.

*And he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*- The miraculous manifestations of the Spirit were given in the first century in order to visibly reflect the huge power of new spiritual life now given into the hearts of believers by the Lord's ascension. The fact that the miraculous manifestations of those gifts are not now possessed doesn't mean that the essential gift of the Spirit is not now received by us. And yet it is true that each member of the Lord's body not only has its unique function, but the Spirit enabling in order to fulfil those functions.

4:12 *For the perfecting of the saints, to the work of holy service, to the building up of the body of Christ*- The allusions to priestly service and building all recall the gifts of the Spirit given to enable the building of the tabernacle / sanctuary, which was representative of the people of God, the body of Christ. Therefore the more visible gifts of leadership in :11 were only given in order to prepare the congregation for acts of service themselves ("the work of holy service"). "Christianity was no slick imitation of existing ecclesiastical organisations. It made no attempt to set up a hierarchy modelled on previously existing institutions. It preferred *diakonia*, lowly service, to the grandiose ideas of the Gentiles". The "building up" of believers in the first century was partly through the Spirit gift of prophecy, whereby inspired New Testament prophets spoke relevant words from God to the newly converted illiterate believers (1 Cor. 14:3,5,12). And yet the building up of the body today is by the contribution of *every* part (Eph. 4:16,29). In the special case scenario of the first century, the miraculous Spirit gifts were given; their withdrawal doesn't mean that God's work of "building up" His people through the Spirit is over. It's just that the mode of operation has changed.

4:13- see on Heb. 2:10.

*Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ-* "The unity" and "the faith" each have the article and grammatically do not together mean 'the one faith'. They refer to the unity created by the one faith. And that is Paul's theme here- of unity between Jew and Gentile created by having the same one faith, which is the knowledge of the Son of God. And 'knowledge' refers to the knowing which refers to relationship, rather than knowing an identical set of theological propositions about the Son of Go. It is common relationship with Him which creates unity between groups and individuals as diverse and separated as Jew and Gentile were in first century towns like Ephesus. It is that unity between persons within the church which is the sign of maturity, of having grown up into stature of the Lord Jesus, and in which His fullness will dwell. His fullness refers to the full total sum of His personality, His 'Name', in Old testament terms. Each individual believer has various parts of His total personality, and between us, the united, mature church is completely His body to the world, they are Him in total. But division amongst us precludes us on a collective level from being Him in totality.

The body of believers is progressively educated, matured, built up, until finally at the Lord's return we are all brought to be like Christ, to know Him fully, and to "the unity of the faith". The implication would therefore be that there will never be total understanding of "the faith" in its fullness, nor will there be "unanimity" amongst us on every point as a body, until the Lord is back.

Eph. 4:13 parallels the knowledge of the Son of God with "the unity of the faith". To know the one faith is to know Christ as a person. He *is* the essence of the one faith. Academic knowledge of a series of theological propositions in a 'statement of faith', no matter how accurate their formulation may be, is still not the same as 'knowing Christ'. To perceive those doctrines as they really are, to know the unity, the sum of the one faith, is to know Christ as a person and come to "the fullness of Christ". The *unity* of the faith thus parallels the *fullness* of Christ. Those doctrines as propositions are a means to an end; and unless that is perceived they are little worth. So very often men have argued over those propositions, and in their argument have revealed that they really 'don't get it'- they simply don't know Christ as a person. They got caught up on the means rather than perceiving the end- which is to know the Son of God.

4:14 *That we may no longer be like children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine devised by the trickery, craftiness and deceitful scheming of men-* The intended unity of the body around the one faith spoken of in :13 requires of course that we have the one faith, and are not therefore swayed by the false teachings of men. The crafty, deceitful schemes of men referred to suggests far more than a genuine intellectual misunderstanding of some Bible verses. The reference is surely to the campaign of the Judaizers, who schemed to destabilize the churches Paul founded. The language recalls the serpent in Eden, whom Paul in Romans and 2 Cor. 11:3 (s.w. "craftiness") has used as symbolizing the Judaizers, the great satan or adversary to his work. The teachings were "devised" as part of a "scheming of men"- clearly the reference is to a purposeful program of leading others astray, rather than an innocent misreading of Bible verses by sincere if misguided believers. Heb. 13:9 uses the same word about not being "carried about" with

doctrines which take us away from the heart being stabilized by grace. It was legalism and Judaism which was the antithesis of grace.

Judah was condemned to being tossed to and fro (2 Chron. 29:8 RV; Is. 54:11); and yet the spiritually unstable also allow themselves to be tossed to and fro (Eph. 4:14; James 1:6), and thereby they effectively live out their condemnation now, ahead of the gnashing of teeth which awaits them. The type of natural Israel being rejected in the wilderness must be instructive as to the position of those who are the "goats" of spiritual Israel.

In Eph. 4:14,15, the point is made that because we are not blown around with every wind of doctrine, therefore we deal truly in love (RVmg.). Truthfulness with each other within the one body of Christ is related to our having known and deeply believed the truth of God. The implication is also that by speaking and preaching truth, we "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ", who is "the Truth" in every way. Notice how Eph. 4 stresses the need for true doctrine because this is related to truthfulness with each other; if we are not tossed to and fro by false doctrines, then we will speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:14,15); "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus... wherefore [because of this] put away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour" in the one body of Christ (Eph. 4:21,25).

*4:15 But speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head-Christ!*- As noted on :14, having true doctrine is related to "speaking the truth", "dealing truly" (Eph. 4:13-15 RVmg.) with each other- as if the sensitive, heartfelt preaching of truth should result in our own truthfulness. English does not have a verb "to truth," but Paul uses such a verb when he urges the Ephesians that "'truthing' in love" they should grow in Christ in all things. We might understand this as "speaking the truth in love," but more probably we should see truth as a quality of action as well as of speech. Paul wants his converts to live the truth as well as to speak it. Real spiritual growth is only possible by a way of life that 'truths it'.

The state of perfection which we shall finally reach, hopefully in church life now but supremely in the Kingdom, is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). We are now 'growing up into Him', we are on a journey, and the end point of it is to be fully as the Lord Jesus. This is the end point- where we spend eternity is one issue, but the essence is that we shall be like Him. We are indeed the body of Christ, but we are counted as that, the status is imputed to us; and the Spirit is at work to develop us to actually become as Him.

When Christ comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has (Mt. 24:47), we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.). See on Lk. 19:13.

*4:16 By him all the parts of the body fit and are knit together, with every joint supplying something according to its unique purpose, thus making the body grow as it builds up itself in*

*love*- Each member of the body contributes to the overall strength and health of the body. As noted on :6 and :7, there is great emphasis on the fact that each and every believer is unique and has a role to play in the overall strengthening of others- and not just those with more visible gifts or higher profile roles. No member can say they do not need the others; the problem with 'out of church Christians' is that they are tempted to forget that they too have something to contribute. The body "makes increase of itself" and builds itself up in love, strengthened by the nourishment mediated by the other members (Eph. 4:16). There *is* therefore strength and power from outside of ourselves within the body of Christ. Tragically, the body of believers is perceived by many sinners to be judgmental, shaming, not understanding etc., when the idea of association with the Lord's body is that we are built up and also contribute towards the building up of others. We enter the body in order that we may contribute, and not simply to take, or because we see baptism as the seal of our doctrinal assent to a set of propositions.

The builder of God's house is ultimately God, the builder of all (Heb. 11:10). We are God's building (1 Cor. 2:9). But we are also Christ's building, in that God has delegated this work to Him. And yet we build each other up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2), Paul was a master-builder (1 Cor. 3:10), and the body builds itself up (Eph. 4:16). As God has delegated the building to Christ, so He has delegated it to us. The Ephesians were built up on the foundations of the apostles' work- not that they are the foundation, for no other foundation can there be except Christ (Eph. 2:20 cp. 1 Cor. 3:11). The building up of those early brethren was on account of the work of the apostles. They were the foundation, they were 'Christ' to those brethren and converts. Hence they are called the foundation, whereas Christ is the only foundation. This is how far His work has been delegated to us. Without the work of the apostles, if they had been lazy or spiritually selfish, there would have been no Ephesus ecclesia, nor spirituality within it. Quite simply, we *are* a function of the efforts our brethren and sisters make to build us up. See on Col. 2:19.

The various parts of the one body *supply* strength to the rest of us. But the very same Greek word rendered "supply" occurs in the Phil. 1:19, about the *supply* of the spirit of Jesus Christ. How does He *supply* our need and strengthen us? Through the very human members of the one body. Which is why we so desperately need them, and to walk away from them, reasoning that they 'give nothing', is in a sense to turn away from the supply of the spirit of Jesus.

Cyprian taught that "Whatever and whatsoever kind of man he is, he is not a Christian who is not in Christ's church... he cannot have God for his Father who has not the church for his mother". And Church membership depended upon "submission to the bishop... rebellion against him is rebellion against God... the schismatic, however correct his doctrine or virtuous his life, renounces Christ and bears arms against the church". Individual spirituality and correctness of faith meant nothing; obedience to the leaders was paramount. Cyprian even went so far as to say that "the church is founded on the bishops... held together by the glue of the mutual cohesion of the bishops". This is a glaring contradiction with the Biblical emphasis upon Christ as the only foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), and the body being held together on account of being "in Him", compacted and built up by what "every joint supplies" (Eph. 4:16). This shift from the internal, the spiritual, to the external and visible, the perception of Christianity as a human organization we belong to, has been seen in the lives of many individual Christians, churches, denominations, groups etc. over time. The warning is for us

to remain disciples of the Lord Jesus, following Him as it were around Galilee, focused upon Him alone, and finding the unity with others doing the same which will naturally follow.

“The whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16 NIV). In the context, Paul is demonstrating the necessity of Jew and Gentile to work together in the ecclesia; they couldn't just run parallel ecclesial lives, even though there seems to have been temporary concessions to their humanity at the beginning. The newly baptized, Old Testament-ignorant Gentiles had something to contribute to the Bible-saturated Jewish believers; and, of course, vice versa.

*4:17 Therefore, this I say and testify in the Lord: You are to no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind-* Paul reminds them that his teaching here is a direct testimony from the Lord Jesus. A new section of practical advice now follows. The way of the flesh, be it wanton immorality or simply living in the vanity of the mind, is not as the Ephesians had been taught the Gospel of Christ before their baptisms. That basic Gospel had very practical implications (Eph. 4:17-27). And more than this. The new wine of the Gospel will destroy a man who holds it unless he changes his life (cp. the wine skin), so that it too is new. The new cloth of the Gospel will rip a man apart who doesn't change from his old clothing. Leaven is an apt symbol of the Gospel, in that it corrupts terribly *if it is left idle*. If the principles of the Truth lie dormant in our lives, they can only destroy us. The idea of 'walking' connects with the opening charge of :1, that we are to walk in a way appropriate to our calling. "The mind" is Biblically called "the spirit". Unbelievers think in vanity, and we catch ourselves spending large amounts of mental time imagining or chattering within ourselves about vain things. How we think in the mind is how we walk in practice. The receipt of God's Spirit into our spirit will therefore issue in a quite different walk. Vain thinking is a particular malaise of our online world. The inane and meaningless have been glorified.

*4:18 Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart-* The language of darkening and hardening could suggest that "the Gentiles" in :17 refer to those who have left the Lord's way. Perhaps those who left were labelled "the Gentiles" as a kind of technical term in the early church. Their "ignorance" was not natural ignorance, but the ignorance that comes from a darkening and hardening of the heart, which resulted in an alienated position. These people had stopped "feeling" and had given themselves over to immorality (:19). This is all the language of those who leave one way of life for another, rather than those who had never known the way of righteousness. Paul has prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians will be enlightened- and yet the work of the Holy Spirit in achieving this is matched by "an evil spirit from the Lord" of the type which pushed king Saul into a downward spiral, and which hardened Pharaoh's heart because he himself hardened his heart. "The life of God" would then refer to the gift of the Spirit which these people had been given at baptism, but they were now alienated from it. The life given by God is the concept used by John to describe what Paul would term the gift of the Holy Spirit; for John's writings speak of the eternal life given by God into the heart of the believers, the power to live now as we shall eternally live. The Corinthians were given the Spirit but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1), and the burden of Paul's writings is that we are to make use of the potential of the Spirit which we have within us. Those who leave the faith are alienated from that potential life or spirit within them.



*4:19 Who being past feeling gave themselves up to sensuality, to work all uncleanness with greediness-* As noted on :18, this language refers to those who leave one way of life for another, rather than those who had never known the way of righteousness. The Lord gave Himself over for us on the cross (s.w. 5:2,25), but in response, these people had given themselves over to pleasing the flesh. The sensuality in view was provoked by the false teachings of :14. These teachings turned God's grace into sensuality (Jude 4); the words of these false teachers allured believers into sensuality (2 Pet. 2:18). So it was not simply a case of believers falling for the temptation to live the life of the world; the false teachers were encouraging the converts to engage in the sensual practices of idol worship in the name of serving the Lord Jesus. This was the problem at Corinth and was widespread; the false teachings were attractive because they enabled believers to live the life of unbelievers whilst still thinking they were within the body of Christ.

*4:20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!-* When the Ephesians learnt their first principles from the mouth of Paul and other preachers, they "heard Him (Christ), and (were) taught by Him" (Eph. 4:20,21); the preacher of Christ closely manifests his Lord. And part of the basic Gospel was a call to deny immorality and sensuality. The Gospel of the Kingdom as taught by the Lord Himself was essentially an appeal for a way of life in practice.

*4:21 Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus-* Paul wonders whether they had really been taught about the moral dimensions of the Gospel when they first heard it (see on :20). The "you" refers to those whom Paul earlier calls "Gentiles" in :17; he has in view those who had left the faith (see on :17,18). But they were apparently still within the community at Ephesus to whom Paul was writing. "The truth in Jesus" referred to a way of life rather than theological truths of themselves; and Paul may mean that he wonders whether they were any longer aware of that early teaching of the Gospel which they had received. In illiterate societies there would have been a need to keep teaching the message initially preached, and perhaps that had not been done. The Lord's letter to the Ephesians in Rev. 2:1-6 commends them for having rejected false teaching; so it would seem that Paul's appeal here was heeded, but the Lord lamented their lack of love, which was going to lead to their rejection.

*4:22 Those things belonged to your former manner of life, which was corrupt through deceitful desires-* We must "put off the old man" (Eph. 4:22 AV); and yet "you have (already) put off the old man" (Col. 3:9), it was crucified with Christ at baptism (Rom. 6:6). Have we, or haven't we? In God's eyes we have, in that the new man has been created, and the old man died in the waters of baptism. But of course we are still in the flesh; and the old man must yet be put off. What happened at our baptism must be an ongoing process; of laying the old man to rest in death, and rising again in the newness of life. The Gospel 'instructs us to the intent that, having once and for all put away ungodliness (i.e. in baptism) and worldly lusts, we should live in a holy manner' (Tit. 2:12 Gk.). Having put these things off in baptism, we must live a life of putting them off. We are to live in practice what we are counted to be by status in Christ.

Our lusts are deceitful (Eph. 4:22), and so the Devil or 'deceiver' is an appropriate way of describing them. They are personified, and as such they can be spoken of as 'the Devil' – our enemy, a slanderer of the truth. This is what our natural 'man' is like – the 'very Devil'.

4:23- see on Eph. 1:15.

*But you, being renewed in the spirit of your mind-* The sensuality of :19 is listed as a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19). The key to growth was to allow the Spirit they had received to renew them. They were to "be renewed" (AV), they were to allow the process of renovation to operate. And the locality and method of that renewal was by the Spirit within their minds. Again and again it is clear that the arena of the Spirit's operation is within the mind, "the inner man" of chapter 3, and the reference is not to the external manifestations of the Spirit in miraculous gifts. It was this re-newing which could create the new man of :24. The Spirit had been given to them, as to all believers, at their baptism. But some of them were alienated from that life / Spirit of God within them. They were to allow that Spirit free course to make them new again, to form again the new man within them.

*4:24 Put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness-* The creator of the new man is God through His Spirit- see on :23. The likeness of God is the Lord Jesus, who in His perfect character was the image of God (Col. 1:15). We put on "Christ", "the new man", at baptism (Gal. 3:27), but we are to put Him on throughout our lives (Rom. 13:14). The sense of the Greek is 'be clothed with'. Again there is the impression not of steel willed obedience but of allowing ourselves to be clothed, permitting the creative process of the Spirit to operate. "True righteousness and holiness" may be a reference to the righteousness and holiness offered by an apostate Judaism.

*4:25 Therefore, putting away falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour. For we are members one of another-* As noted on :15, the truth of Christ leads to our being truthful. Dishonesty, lying and gross exaggeration were very much part of Middle Eastern culture, and Paul is urging the converts to change in this. Because the intended unity earlier spoken about in this chapter can never happen when lying is part of our culture. In some cultures and situations to this day, this exhortation and implication of the truth of Christ needs particular emphasis. "Putting away" is the word that has just been used in :22 for putting off the old man; and it would seem that Paul saw telling lies as symptomatic of the old man. "Members one of another" is a reference to us as different limbs in the one body of the Lord Jesus. But Paul accepted there would be members of that body who had not put off the old man, who had not stopped lying nor stealing (:28). He urges them to act appropriately to their status as the Lord's body. Membership of the Lord's body is here spoken of as being members of one another. Our connection with Him is inextricably linked with our connection with each other. Evil practices such as disfellowship, mud campaigns etc. are a denial of this connection; our attitude to each other, immature as we may find each other to be, is our attitude to the Lord Jesus. We cannot therefore push off out of the body into splendid isolation.

We are the body of Christ. We are counted righteous because we are baptized into Him. We are counted as Him; and we are parts of His body, hands, feet, eyes, internal organs. As such, we are inextricably linked in with the other members of the body. We cannot operate in isolation from them. "We are members one of another... we are members of his body" (Eph. 4:25; 5:30). Only insofar as we belong to each other do we belong to Him. We must perceive ourselves not so much as individual believers but as members of one body, both over space and over time. Eph. 4:25 draws a practical conclusion from the one body of Christ: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: *for* we are members one of another". If we are one body, there should *therefore* be truthfulness between us. No white lying, no gross exaggeration, no gossiping, no presentation of facts in a distorted way. Why? Because "we are members one of another". If we *do* behave like this, we are

really saying that we are not members of the one body. The one body is Jesus; and all that is true of Him must be true of us. He is not divided, and neither should we be, either within our own beings, or as a community.

*4:26 In your anger, do not sin! Do not let the sun set while you remain angry-* This is in the context of appealing for unity between the members of the Lord's body (:25). Unresolved anger with other limbs of the body is a sure way to stop that body functioning. Anger in itself is a purely natural reaction, and is seen in both God and His Son. The issue is, how to "be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26)? God "made a path for His anger" with Egypt, by bringing plagues upon them and slaying their firstborn (Ps. 78:50 RV). Anger has to go somewhere, for otherwise it burns within us and rises up ultimately into extremely damaging and inappropriate forms of behaviour. I say 'inappropriate' because pent up anger has a way of bursting forth upon anyone in its way, who may likely be nothing to do with the cause or object of the initial anger. Anger is a form of energy, and as such it must be harnessed. Throughout the Old Testament, we often read of God being "provoked to wrath" by human sin, and His anger burning. There's very little said about this in the New Testament; and I wonder if this is because the ultimate path which God made for His anger was in giving His Son to die for human sin, rather than endlessly seeking to punish human sin and be hurt by it. Immediately let's take an obvious lesson: don't waste your anger energy on endlessly fighting those who provoke you, but use it positively. Throw it in to some project or other for the Lord. For anger is to some extent reflective; whilst we remain horns locked with a situation, both our opponent and ourselves are feeding off each others' anger. Hence the wise advice of Prov. 22:24,25: "with a wrathful man you shall not go: lest you learn his ways". Disengage from anger situations.

In any case, we are to seek to not end any day angry. The only way to end the day without anger is to forgive- for if we make our anger dependent upon the repentance or improved behaviour of another party, then we will not be able to stop our anger. The teaching here is clearly that we have power over our own anger, and can cease it if we wish- regardless of the situation or individuals provoking the anger. The quotation "Be angry and sin not" is from Ps. 4:4 LXX- David had anger with Saul and yet rose above it, perhaps by not allowing it to cripple him because David forgave Saul. Psalm 4 continues: "commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still". It seems Paul is interpreting that as meaning that we should within ourselves decide to forgive and not be angry, and fall asleep "still" and in peace.

*4:27 Give no opportunity to the Devil!*- The devil here may refer to the great enemy, sin and sinful desires within; for it is through anger and deceit of each other that sin is provoked. But so often, "the devil" or "satan" refer to a human organization or group. The Judaist 'satan' was clearly in view in :14 [see notes there]. Interpersonal frictions within the church were going to be capitalized upon by this group.

*4:28 Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, so he may have something to give to him that has need-* As noted on :25, there were members within the body of Christ who were lying and stealing. This was going to stop the development of the unity within the body which was so essential to jointly coming to the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Lord Jesus. Paul's ambition for the converts is amazing. Those who stole so much that they didn't do a normal job were permitted in the church; but his belief was that they could be so transformed that they would stop doing this,

get a job, and be generous to those who were in need; and grow up into the full stature of the Lord Jesus.

4:29- see on Mt. 12:33.

*Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but as the need arises, speak that which is good for encouragement, that it expresses grace to those that hear you-* As observed on :28, Paul's converts included some rough types- liars, those who stole so much they didn't have a day job, and those who used "corrupt speech". Paul's hope for their transformation was realistic because he believed in the huge available power of the internal gift of the Spirit. He hoped that those who once stole would work and *give* to the needy; and here he sees the possibility for those with foul mouths to instead come to use language that was expressing grace, reflecting the *charis* or gift of the Spirit within them, in a way which would transfer that grace to them too. Such corrupt fruit of the lips cannot grow on a good tree (Lk. 6:43 s.w.). There would either be transformation, or the corrupt tree would be cut down. But that was for the Lord to do; Paul's view of the body of Christ was that it would include such immature people. "Encouragement" is the same word used in :16 for 'building up'. Coarse language and terminology is not going to build up the rest of the body; our words and conversation should be a reflection of our sense that we have a role to play in building up our hearers. The hearers in view are therefore other members of the Lord's body.

4:30 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which you were sealed until the day of redemption-* All the bad behaviour of :19-29 is at variance with the Spirit which has been given to each believer, and which seeks to bring forth in us spiritual behaviour. But we are grieving or effectively frustrating this process if we refuse to be transformed. The gift of the Holy Spirit is in our hearts- God has "sealed us and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22). This gift of the Spirit is the foretaste of our final redemption (2 Cor. 5:5). After we believed, we were given this promised gift of the Spirit (1:13). Those who lied, stole and swore were given it. But by remaining in the old life and ways, they were not allowing it to function. The allusion is to how Israel in the wilderness had been baptized in the Red Sea and yet they grieved God's Spirit (Is. 63:10) in the form of the Angel who wished to lead them to the Kingdom of God.

The "Holy Spirit" may allude to a specific Angel set apart for this purpose of strengthening us so that we might reach the Kingdom, like the wilderness Angel provided Israel with the manna (= the word of God, so the Lord Jesus reasons in Jn. 6) and every type of sustenance in order that they should get through the wilderness to the promised land. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is associated with our calling and choosing. The Angel was associated with the sealing of the believers (Rev. 7:2,3). We must not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God (cp. how Israel vexed the Holy Spirit Angel- Is. 63:10) whereby ye are sealed". Eph. 4:30 also links this grieving the Holy Spirit (referring to the Holy Spirit Angel of Is. 63:10) and abusing God's sealing of us, as if by the unspiritual behaviour Paul is speaking of in Eph. 4 we will truly grieve or sadden the Angel who has sealed us.

4:31 *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and railing be put away from you, along with all malice-* Again we note that all these things were going on amongst those who were members of the Lord's body, and who had received the Holy Spirit gift in their hearts. The intended growth of the body in unity unto the image of the Lord Jesus could not happen on a communal level if these attitudes remained in the hearts of the individual members. We

note that they are all internal issues- which could be overcome by the Spirit of God within the human mind. It is spiritual mindedness which is the essence of Christianity.

4:32 *And be kind to each other, sensitive, forgiving each other, even as God in Christ also forgave you-* The problem was that the Ephesians were not allowing the Spirit to work in their hearts. Therefore the internal attitudes of :31 remained; Paul urges that these should be replaced by the sensitivity to others which leads to kindness and forgiveness. And we recall that those who had left the faith were "past feeling" (see on :19). It is a lack of basic empathy or sensitivity which is the root of so much bad thinking and action. Captain Gustav Gilbert was the army psychologist who worked with the Nuremberg trial defendants; he concluded: "In my work with the defendants I was searching for the nature of evil and I now think I have come close to defining it. A lack of empathy. It's the one characteristic that connects all the defendants, a genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow men. Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy". The gift of the Spirit creates sensitivity; because that same Spirit is operative in the hearts of others, and is the heart of God- who is the ultimately sensitive, seeing and knowing all things. The kindness which leads to forgiveness is the antidote to all the anger and associated issues spoken of in :31. As noted on :26, it is for us to overcome our anger by forgiving, regardless of whether there has been repentance. We are forgiven by God "in Christ"; we were granted imputed righteousness, by reason of our status in Him, rather than on the basis of our specific repentance over the millions of sins we have between God and us, whether or commission or omission.

Mt. 6:14 is surely alluded to here. The Lord Jesus said: "If you forgive, you'll be forgiven". Paul subtly changes the tenses: "You've been forgiven already, so forgive". It's as if Paul is saying: "Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very close analysis of those simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had.

Paul does not say we should forgive as Christ *is forgiving* us. Our forgiveness was granted at baptism; the power of sin in our lives was overcome by baptism into Christ's death, which destroyed the devil. Therefore anyone baptized into Christ is not a servant of sin, unless they leave Christ. Of course, we know that in practice we all keep on sinning. But our spiritual man is in Christ, God looks upon *that* side of us, not upon the devil within us. We cannot destroy the devil within us- his destruction is in death (Rom. 6:23). That natural man cannot be made subject to God's word (Rom. 8:7; Gal. 5:17,18; James 3:8). What God requires is a growth in the spiritual man, living in a way of life which on balance shows that the new man is more fundamentally 'us' than the old man, and a 'putting off' or disassociation from the old man, of the type we see made by Paul in Rom. 7:15-25. As God eagerly looks upon that new man within us, so we too should perceive the new man in our brethren. Too often extreme brethren look upon how bad the old man is in a brother, and how publicly he is manifested (e.g. in marital problems)- rather than assessing the new man, "the hidden man" which is surely to be found deep within all believers.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 Therefore, as beloved children, be imitators of God-* The understanding seems to be that a child will imitate the one who shows love. And experiments on babies raised in orphanages in Communist regimes observed the same- the carer perceived as showing love was imitated by the baby. The love we have been shown is in the gift of God's Son; it is the cross, therefore, which elicits imitation or (Greek) 'mimicking' of God.

*5:2 And walk in love- just as Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us-* As noted on :1, our exposure to His love is the basis for imitating it, in the form of a life lived or walked in love. In His love is the ultimate motivation to love. Do we struggle to live the life of true love, to endure people, even our brethren; are we simply tired of people, and living the life of love towards them? Does the past exist within us as a constant fountain of bitterness and regret? "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake [the sake of His cross] hath forgiven you... walk in love, *as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us*" (Eph. 4:31-5:2).

*A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God-* The peace offering was to make a sweet savour. Through His death on the cross, the Lord was this: "Christ... hath given himself for us an offering (a peace offering?) and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). If we are in Christ, then God will see us too as a sweet savour. And this is exactly what 2 Cor. 2:15 says: "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ". Yet we must fellowship His sufferings if we are in Him, really fellowship them. The peace offering was to have the fat and rump "taken off hard by the backbone" (Lev. 3:9). The ruthless division of flesh and spirit within Christ (shown superbly in the way His wilderness temptations are recorded) must be seen in us too. We must ask if we are really taking off the fat hard by the backbone. Are we even prepared for the pain, the pain of self- knowledge and self denial which this will necessitate? For His love, His sacrifice, is not only counted to us but is to be ours.

5:3- see on Josh. 23:7.

*But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you- as is appropriate among saints-* These terms are all elsewhere used about sexual immorality, particularly in the context of cult prostitution. There was a tendency to mix Christian worship with the prostitution of the surrounding cults, just as there is for any Christian convert to mix their new faith with previous concepts of religion. This was particularly a problem in Corinth but clearly it was also elsewhere in the first century.

We need to let passages like Eph. 5:3–5 have their full weight with us. Fornication, covetousness, all uncleanness should not be "named amongst us", in the same way Israel were not to take even the names of the Gentile idols onto their lips (Ex. 23:13) – "but rather giving of thanks", knowing that those who do such things will not be in the Kingdom of God. The Exodus allusion suggests that idol worship with its associated sexual vices is what is in view in this passage, rather than young couples in love 'going too far'. A thankful attitude, thinking and speaking of those things with which we will eternally have to do, is to replace thinking and talking about all the things which shall not be our eternal sphere of thought in the Kingdom age. And yet our generation faces the temptation like none before it – to privately watch and read of those things, vicariously involved in them, whilst being under the

illusion that we're not actually doing them ourselves. For this is what the entertainment industry is based around.

*5:4 Nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor crude joking, which are not befitting saints; but rather the giving of thanks-* Paul always gives an antidote, a new channel into which to channel the energy which would otherwise be expended on the forbidden action. Paul's vision for personal transformation is remarkable; he envisages those accustomed to coarse language instead using words of praise.

According to the New Testament, having a spirit of true thankfulness to God *in all things* should help swamp our tendency to sinfulness; the concept of praising God in gratitude should get such a grip on our way of thinking that the thinking of the flesh is thereby suppressed. Eph. 5:3,4 states this in so many words. It reels off a list of forbidden sexual thoughts and actions; and then the antidote is stated: "Let (them) not once be named among you... *but rather* giving of thanks". A few verses later the same medicine is prescribed; this time as the antidote to an unsaintly abuse of alcohol: "Be not drunk with wine... *but* be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms... singing and making melody in your heart... giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:18-20). This is a laboured, triple emphasis on praise as being the antidote to drunkenness.

*5:5 For this you know for sure, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God-* Eph. 5:3-5 has some surprises for the attentive reader; the black words on white paper have an uncanny power: "This ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, *nor covetous man*, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ". It's easy to assume that the coveting is of a sexual nature. But frequently Paul reels off a list of spectacular sins and inserts in the list one or two issues we would consider rather common to all men and of a different order of failure. He does this to highlight the seriousness of those apparently lesser sins. The list of sexual perversions here are the sort of words we whisk past, in the relieved confidence that *they* don't apply to us. But covetousness is there listed as a carnal sin, along with sexual perversions. That's how bad it is. No one who is covetous will be in the Kingdom. And therefore it's hard for a rich man to be in the Kingdom. In fact, the Lord says, it's humanly impossible for a rich man to get there; it's only through God's gracious working to make it possible that it can happen, that a rich man will scrape into the Kingdom (Mt. 19:23-26). *Every one of us has the elements of covetousness very close to the surface.* Materialism is perhaps the direct equivalent of idol worship under the old covenant. They were to not even desire "the silver and gold that is on them... for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God... thou shalt utterly detest it; and *thou* [like God] shalt utterly abhor it" (Dt. 7:25,26). God despises idolatry; and we also must go a step beyond merely avoiding materialism; we must despise it.

"This you know for sure" suggests that this hard line against covetousness and idolatry was known by all Christian converts as part of their instruction in the Gospel. "The Kingdom of Christ and God" is an unusual phrase, as usually "the Kingdom of God" is spoken about. Perhaps the idea is that God's Kingdom is also going to be that of Christ, and He should therefore reign as King over His people, who should be devoted to being Christ-like.

5:6- see on Mt. 24:4.

*Let no one deceive you with empty words-* This would be appropriate to a warning to better control the platform and not allow false teachers to deceive the congregation with vain words, words lacking in or empty of the Spirit.

*For because of these things comes the anger of God upon the sons of disobedience-* Those characterized by disobedience would surely refer to those who had heard the call to disobedience and refused it. The wrath of God is coming upon them in particular at judgment day. Paul may well have in view "the wrath to come" upon Israel in AD70 (Lk. 3:7; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16). In this case, "the sons of disobedience" would be the Jews, and those claiming they would not be so judged would be Judaist false teachers, who clearly were the big problem for Paul's churches.

*5:7 Therefore do not associate with them!*- Being "parkers" (AV) with those who are not Kingdom people is the opposite of being partakers in Christ (Heb. 3:14) and of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4); we are partakers in the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:6). If we partake in Christ, then we partake in His Spirit. To partake in the spirit of the world is therefore impossible if we are partaking in His spirit. This contrast with the way of the Spirit would explain why in the AV, :9 starts talking about the Spirit as if this is in view in the context: "For the fruit of the Spirit..." (AV).

*5:8 For you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord. Walk as children of light-* This is another example of appealing for us to live in practice who we are by status. This is why Romans progresses from talking about imputed righteousness and our status in Christ, to the language of the Spirit actually transforming us in practice into who we are by status. Although the readership were not walking as children of light, yet Paul says that there were "now light in the Lord", and no longer in darkness. He surely refers to their status rather than actuality, and appeals for them to live according to the status they have been granted by grace. Likewise he says that every believer at Thessalonica was one of "the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) when clearly there would have been some finally who were not. But they were counted that way by status.

At times it seems Paul 'unconsciously' uses a phrase from the parables, out of context, but as an indication that they were running through his mind (e.g. "children of light" in Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5 is quarried from Lk. 16:8).

*5:9 For the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth-* Some manuscripts, followed by AV, read "the fruit of the Spirit". This may seem out of context, but I have argued on :7 that the entire argument here is an appeal for the Spirit rather than the flesh to be the dominant principle in Christian thought and behaviour. All kinds of goodness and truth are the fruit of the Spirit. A way of life is elicited by the Spirit / light. Light is not therefore merely correct understanding of some doctrinal points. Our participation in the Lord Jesus (:7) will elicit a life and thought pattern like His.

*5:10 Proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord-* "Proving" can mean 'experiencing'. I have argued on :7 and :9 that the context here is of the movement of the Spirit. The same Greek words for "proving" and "well-pleasing" / 'acceptable' are to be found in Rom. 12:2: "Do not conform to the mould of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may experience [s.w. "proving", Eph. 5:10] what is the good and acceptable [s.w. "well-pleasing", Eph. 5:10] and the perfect will of God". The renewing and transformation of the mind / spirit is the work of the Spirit gift which we accept at baptism into the Lord Jesus.



Here in Ephesians Paul is asking us to allow the Spirit free course, to experience- for this is the way to transformation in practice, rather than by trying to force our flesh to change by steel willed self control.

5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them-* "But rather reprove them" continues the theme so often seen in this section- of redirecting mental and spiritual energy from sin towards positive spirituality. Not sharing in the works of darkness is one thing; but enforcing our separation from wrong doing is of itself negative. The positive thing is to redirect that mere avoidance of sin into actually trying to save the sinners. Having written here of light and darkness (:8), perhaps Paul's mind is in Jn. 3:20, which says that the light is what reprove. If we are of the light we will naturally reprove the darkness; so this is an appeal in another form to live as light. Verse 13 will make this point explicitly- it is the light which reprove. I have argued throughout this section that Paul is urging us to live the life of the Spirit rather than the flesh; and it is by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit within us, that we reprove the world of sin (Jn. 16:8; 1 Cor. 14:24).

5:12 *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret-* The sin of Ham in relation to Noah's drunkenness included the fact that he told his brothers about Noah's shame (Gen. 9:22). This incident seems to be alluded to by Paul when he says that it is a shame to speak of what sinners do in secret. A large amount of the communication which would be called 'gossip' includes the communication of sinful things which would be better not entering the minds of saints in any case- one tends to gossip about a neighbour's adultery rather than his lost cat. So the appeal here is to rebuke such wrong behaviour- but directly to the person responsible, and not by way of gossip. Nothing of course is ultimately done "in secret", so [as so often in the Bible], this is recorded from the mistaken perspective of the persons involved, without specific correction. The language of demons is another example.

5:13 *But all things when they are reprov'd are revealed by the light. For everything that is revealed then becomes light-* The day of judgment will be the ultimate bringing to light and manifesting of all supposedly hidden things (Mk. 4:22; 1 Cor. 4:5 s.w.). But we ahead of that time are used to reveal the hidden things; because light reveals, and we are the light of the world. But this is no call to become the Lord's forensic policemen, ever intent on uncovering the failings of others and constantly investigating vague hunches or conspiracy theories. Light reveals hidden things quite naturally; we as the light of the world by our nature and example will reveal and thereby reprove that which is in darkness. Likewise the revelation of human sin at the last day will largely be through the fact of sinners being in the personal presence of the Lord Jesus, just as happened during His ministry. His presence and personality of itself convicted people of their sins. The revelation of the hidden things in this life is so that those things revealed "then become light", i.e. that there is real change and transformation. The revelation of hidden things at the last day will be too late. And we have noted throughout this section that Paul envisages a radical transformation now of darkness to light; he who steals now gives to the needy, the curser instead utters words of grace etc.

5:14 *Therefore it is said: Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead and Christ shall shine upon you-* At baptism, we were "quickened together with Christ" (Col. 2:13). But Paul wrote this to the baptized saints at Ephesus. As in Romans 6, he is asking them to live out in practice what they are by status. It is thought that Paul is quoting here from a first century baptism hymn; he is encouraging them to be as it were baptized again, spiritually, in coming to life in Christ. Note that the Ephesians were active in the outward work of the Truth (Rev.

2:2,3); but their real spiritual man was asleep. The resurrection from the dead with Christ at baptism was by the work of the Spirit; the same Spirit that resurrected Him likewise gives us internal new life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:11). That life will therefore have the Lord Jesus as the light, ever searching out our hidden things. After 'arising from the dead', the light of "Christ shall shine upon you". Paul has already prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians will be enlightened (1:18); he sees them as needing to arise with Christ and have His searching light shine upon them.

*5:15 Therefore, look carefully how you walk, not as the unwise but as the wise-* "Carefully" is better "diligently", and is the same word used about Apollos who was "diligent" or 'careful' in his faith at Ephesus, and would have been known to the initial readership (Acts 18:25). Our way of life is not to simply left at a default position, as it is with most people. Life in Christ is to be consciously lived, examined and adjusted consciously. This is the true wisdom; the wise of this world are spiritually unwise, which thought provides yet another connection with the early chapters of Romans (Rom. 1:14,22). James 3:13 likewise defines "the wise" as those who live in practice a spiritual life.

*5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil-* They should hurry up and make the changes Paul and their status in Christ require of them. In contexts regarding the evil of our surrounding world, Paul teaches us to 'redeem the time' (also Col. 4:5). This is a word classically used of the market place, in the sense of 'buying up' while the opportunity is there. But it is used of how the Lord has redeemed us (Gal. 3:13; 4:5). His redemption of us elicits a conscious redemption by us of our time, in His service. Yet the context demands that this pressing need to buy up time be understood in the light of the evil world around us. Is it not that Paul is saying 'Buy up all the opportunities to gain back time from this world', in the same spirit as he told slaves "If thou mayest be made free, use it rather" (1 Cor. 7:21)? This means we shouldn't glorify the use of time for the necessary things of the world. If we *must* spend our time in the things of the world, as the NT slaves simply had to, then God will accept this as done in His service. But we shouldn't use this gracious concession to do all we can in the life of the world, justifying it by saying it is done 'unto the Lord'. This concession, in its context, only applies to those who by force of circumstances really must spend their time in the things of the world (Eph. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 10:31). We must "break up our fallow ground" (Heb. 'plough the unploughed'), analyse ourselves from outside ourselves, and use our time and our "all things" to the utmost of their potential (Jer. 4:3; Hos. 10:12). We were created "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10); we were redeemed that we might be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14)- not that we might drift through life playing with our hobbies and with the fascinations of our careers.

"Because the days are evil" may be a reference to the day of evil coming upon the world in AD70, which Paul expected to be the second coming of the Lord Jesus. His idea would then be that because the Lord's coming draws near, we should therefore use our time the more wisely. Col. 4:5 parallels this passage by asking us to redeem our time in the context of walking wisely towards outsiders, and perhaps the idea is that we should use our time in witnessing to them the more intensely as we see time running out for this world.

*5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is-* Paul is asking baptized believers not to be foolish, but to be wise by understanding the Lord's will. The reference seems to be to the Lord's urging of those who know their Lord's will to prepare themselves for His return (Lk. 12:47). The foolish servant was getting drunk rather than

serving the Lord's extended family (Lk. 12:43-45); and Paul goes on to speak of precisely those kinds of weaknesses (:18). We see here a call to seek understanding of what the Lord's will is for each of us personally, what specific service He hopes for in us and has potentially enabled; which good works He has "before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

5:18 *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit-* Paul always offers an alternative to sinful behaviour, reflecting the Hebrew idea of 'holiness', which means both separation *from* [sin] and separation *unto* spiritual behaviour. Instead of alcoholism, being filled with hard spirits, we are to be filled with the Spirit. Remember he was writing to those already baptized, who had been given the Spirit at baptism. But we can be further filled with the Spirit, if we allow that to happen. The Greek *asotia* ["debauchery"] is literally 'not-saving'. Alcoholics can be saved; but the behaviours associated with alcoholism, as with any sin, are not the way to salvation. Filling with the Spirit is the answer to the alcoholic life, and has been witnessed many times in the transformation of alcoholics. Earlier in Ephesians we have read of being filled with God's fullness through the gift of the Spirit (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:10). This filling will as it were displace the alcoholic life- for a whole new vista of existence is opened up. Clearly there were alcoholics in the Ephesian church, and Paul doesn't advise their excommunication, but rather urges transformation by the Spirit. Paul was keen for others to copy John the Baptist, to find in him the inspiration which he too had found. So he encourages his Ephesians not to drink wine but instead be filled with the Spirit- the very language of John (Lk. 1:15). In other words, 'Be like that Spirit-filled zealot John rather than enjoying the sloppy pleasures of this life!'

There are clear parallels between Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:18,19: "Let the **word of Christ** dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord... but be **filled with the Spirit**; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". Clearly the *Word of Christ* is equated with being "*filled with the Spirit*". This is not to create a primitive, direct connection between 'word' and 'Spirit'. The word of Christ refers to the simple message that if we believe in Him, we shall be saved. And as a result, the Spirit of Christ fills our hearts (Gal. 4:5,8).

5:19 *Speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart-* On :17 we detected reference to the parable of the servant who was to focus upon caring for others in the household rather than getting drunk. The opposite to the selfishness of alcohol abuse is to care for others; to be filled instead with the Spirit in order to speak to one another in spiritual terms. We noted on 4:29 and 5:4 that the antidote to swearing and blasphemy was to speak to the grace of others; it is our commitment to others which will motivate the changes required. This is exactly why we need the church, interaction with others and taking responsibility for assisting their spiritual path. And that should be precisely why we attend church or are involved with other believers- in order to contribute to them.

The Greek translated "to make melody" means 'to twitch or twang, i.e. to play on a stringed instrument' (Strong)- evidently it's a musical term. The implication is that we should so know our own heart and spend time in communion with our own mind that we know how to rouse our own feelings in praise. Such self-knowledge is a sure antidote to fleshly thinking. So by all means get into Christian music; "speaking to yourselves (a reference to self-talk?)

Although it likely means 'speaking to each other') in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19 AV).

*5:20 Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-* Gratitude is again cited as an antidote to the selfishness of alcoholism and other unspirituality. That gratitude is not to be occasional but "always and for everything", a worldview that is grateful for all things, praising in the heart (see on :19).

*5:21 Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ-* Another help against alcoholism and the life of the flesh is to see the Christ in others. We will submit to others in that they too are representatives of the Lord Jesus. The carnal mind, from which arises alcoholism and all unspirituality, is not subject to the spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:7); submission to Him means having His spirit within us, and so we will not be submissive to the mind of the flesh. 1 Cor. 15:28 suggests that all things are undergoing a progressive process of submission to the Lord Jesus, and when this is achieved, then the Lord Jesus will be enthroned fully in glory. This could mean that when the body of Christ is sufficiently submissive to Him, when spiritual fruit is ready for harvest, then He will come. And whilst the number of true believers appears to be in decline in the world, it would seem that true spirituality amongst them is on the increase. "All things" have been submitted under the Lord Jesus (1:22 s.w.), but we are to live this out in practice by submission to Him in our minds and living. Heb. 2:8 uses the same word in explaining that God has indeed "put all things in subjection under His feet... but now we see not yet all things subjected under Him".

*5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord-* This is a specific example of the principle of :21; we should submit to all in the Lord's body "out of reverence for Christ", because each member represents Him. Women were to see in their husbands the representation of the Lord Jesus, just as all members of the church were to see it in each other. Perhaps Paul particularly mentions the case of women because there may have been a tendency in Ephesus for women not to respect their believing husbands.

*5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the head of the church- himself being the saviour of the body-* The general principle of submission to each other in Christ, which includes men to women in Christ, doesn't mean that the woman is not to regard the believing husband as not being "the head". But Paul carefully balances against abuse of this by emphasizing that it is Christ who is Himself the saviour of all his body. The husband is not the saviour, but is of course to manifest that passion for salvation to his wife.

*5:24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so the wives should also be to their husbands in everything-* The AV adds, following other manuscripts, "to their own husbands", as if there was a tendency for women to be subject to other men or teachers, instead of their husbands. This subjection to the husband is in response to his attempt to love the wife with the self-sacrificial love of the Lord Jesus for us all (:25). Perceiving any realistic attempt at emulating that should elicit respect and submission in that the woman perceives that the husband's game plan and intention is her salvation. These principles therefore apply only to man and woman in Christ; there is no suggestion here that males *per se* are to be submitted to by females simply by reason of their gender.

5:25- see on Gal. 2:20.

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for it-* The Greek for "gave himself" is mainly used of the Lord Jesus giving up the spirit to the Father. We have shown elsewhere that His death was as an act of the will, He gave up His life rather than it being taken away from Him. This matchless peak of self-control and self-giving for us must somehow be replicated in the humdrum of daily domestic relationships. No wonder therefore that Paul urges the wife to respond to the husband's attempt to reach this level with respect and submission.

The Lord carried our sins "*that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes (Gk. wheals- Peter saw them) you were healed*" (1 Pet. 2:24). The husband should love his wife, "*even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body*" (Eph. 5:30 RV). Jesus loved us as much as He loves Himself; He "cannot be separated from the work which He came to do" (R.R.). He saved Himself so as to save us. And this isn't just atonement theology- this is to be lived out in married life. As Christ died for us and gave up His last breath for us, so as a supreme act of the will, the husband must give up his life for his woman. And she can only but respond to this. These are high ideals. But the very height of them can transform human life in practice.

*5:26 That he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word-* The allusion is to the laver, the large bath in which the priests washed in order to be sanctified and able to serve in the tabernacle. The Lord's death was to purify us so that we might serve; and the thoughtful love of the husband for the wife is likewise aimed at providing her opportunities to serve. There is clearly an allusion to baptism; the Lord died so that we might be washed in baptism, so that we might be sanctified and thereby ready for His usage, prepared unto all good works (2 Tim. 2:21). This guiding of the wife into the Lord's service is part of a husband's love for his believing wife.

*5:27 That he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and blameless-* "To Himself" suggests that indeed beauty is in the eye of the beholder; the Lord Jesus aims through His love, death and work with us to present the church without spot in His eyes. The final salvation of the wife is likewise to be the husband's aim. And in that process, despite the wrinkles of passing years, he will come to see his wife increasingly as "without spot". This is the very opposite direction to the thrust and direction of secular relationships, in which men tend to hanker after the young and physically unwrinkled. In Christ, there comes an increasing respect and positive view of our partners, matched by increasing respect on the part of the wife. This dynamism and growth in perception and respect ought to be the hallmark of true Christian marriage.

*5:28 Thus husbands ought also to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his own wife loves himself-* This and :29 are not an appeal to selfishness, as if men ought to love their wives because actually they are loving themselves by so doing. The Lord Jesus joins together husband and wife as one flesh (:21). The husband who is willingly part of this process will therefore not separate his own agendas and aims from those of his wife. Love of the partner becomes love of self in that the two are joined as one by the Lord's process of binding the two parties together.

5:29- see on Rom. 6:19.

*For no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church-* See on :28. There is of course self harm and self hatred especially in our mixed up world. But the idea that nobody hates themselves was common in the classical writers. Curtius, “*Corporibus nostris quoe utique non odimus*” - “We do not hate those things that pertain to our own bodies”; Seneca “*Fateor insitam nobis esse corporis nostri charitatem*” - “I confess that there is implanted in us the love of our own body”. It could be that Paul is alluding to these ideas, not completely correct as they are, and building an argument upon them. The Bible is unafraid to do this, without footnoting, as it were, that there is an error in the original idea. The usage of the language of demons is typical. But another option in interpretation arises from considering that “hated” can mean ‘to love less’, as in Lk. 14:26. The Lord Jesus did not love us less than himself, and neither should the husband love his wife less than himself. The Lord's personal salvation was tied up in ours; as Robert Roberts put it, His death was “for Himself that it might be for us”. And the husband's salvation likewise. The unity between man and woman is such that he will not separate his salvation from that of his wife. They are on the journey together. Hence “flesh” is used instead of “body” because of the allusion to God's joining of man and woman as one flesh (Gen. 2:23). Nourishing and cherishing refer to nurturing with a view to growth (Eph. 6:4; 1 Thess. 2:7). This nourishing is provided by the Lord to the body in the form of the Spirit, which is administered through the various members of the body (Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19). And so likewise the husband should be the spiritual nourishment for his wife; but each member of the body should be likewise for the others, including the wife for the husband.

*5:30 Because we are members of his body-* The man represents Christ, and the woman the ecclesia. But the ecclesia, all of it, *is* the body of Christ; so in this sense husbands should love their wives “as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh” (5:28,29). The more we appreciate the strength and power of typology, the more we will realize the spiritual unity which there should be between brethren and sisters. The physical body of Christ is not divided- there is only one Jesus in Heaven. If brethren represent Christ and sisters typify His body, then there should be no division- either between husbands and wives, or amongst brethren and sisters within Christ's body. Thus marriage breakdowns and internal ecclesial strife are equally wrong- they both spoil the typology presented in Eph. 5. They effectively tear Christ's body apart, as men tried to do on the cross. We say “tried to” because ultimately Christ's body is indivisible- in the same way as in a sense His body was “broken” (as it is by division in the body), whilst in another sense it remained unbroken, in God's sight. Likewise, the ecclesial body in God's sight is even now not divided- we are one in Christ.

The figure of *being* somebody's body could not be more intense and personal, indeed it almost alludes to the sex act itself. You touch your own body, feel your bones beneath your flesh- that's fundamentally *you*. Whilst of course Christ does have a separate bodily existence, we are fundamentally Christ. Without us and our sin, Christ would not have come into existence, nor would He now exist. Joseph's brothers said: “He is our brother and our flesh” (Gen. 37:27). And some manuscripts here add: “We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones” (Eph. 5:30 AV).

*5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh-* “For this cause” is hard to interpret. Because of what? Does Paul mean that the whole marriage and bonding process is to teach us of our personally becoming one with the Lord Jesus? The special psychological bonding which is given by God

whereby two persons become one, over time, therefore points to the work of the Spirit in the life of the individual who is attached to Christ. And as there must be a leaving of the family of origin, so there is to be a leaving of previous spiritual associations. That point had to be emphasized to the new converts to whom Paul wrote, be they from paganism or Judaism.

The radical value attached to every individual in Christ is brought out especially by the New Testament teaching about family life. There were many pagan 'household codes', which basically exhorted the slaves, children and women to be subordinate to the male leaders of the family. Paul frames his family teaching in exactly the terms of these 'household codes' in order to bring out the significant differences between God's way and the way of society in this vital area. The fact Paul and Peter in their 'household codes' speak of the head of the house being submissive and having responsibilities to love, as an act of the will, was quite radical. But those male leaders had to learn that in Christ, everyone matters, and people can't be treated by their brethren as they are by society generally, as nothing and nobody, mere cogs in a machine. The *familia*, or extended family in contemporary thought, was of itself devaluing to persons. A woman married into her husband's extended family, and effectively lost so much of her uniqueness as an individual- indeed women were so often treated as faceless. But Paul teaches, on the sure foundation of Genesis, that a man should *leave* his parents and *cleave* to his wife (Eph. 5:31). This was far more radical than may now appear. The man was being taught that merely perpetuating the extended family, using the woman you received in your arranged marriage in order to continue and expand the family, was not in fact God's way. He was to *leave* that extended family mindset and personally *cleave* to his wife in love- love which was an act of the will. He was to start a new family unity; to love his *wife* rather than his extended family "as himself". Likewise fathers are told to bring their children up in the instruction of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:4)- when the task of training up children was left to the women, older children and slaves (especially the *paidagogos*) in the extended family. The value of persons implicit here was thus a call to be essentially creative, independent, perceiving the personal [rather collectively-imposed] value in both oneself and others in ones' family.

"God hath *tempered* the (ecclesial) body together... that there should be no schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:24,25 AV) uses a related word as in Eph. 5:31 concerning how a man "shall be *joined* unto his wife... I speak concerning Christ and the church". Because both man and woman ultimately represent Christ, there should be no schism between either believers, nor husbands and wives. Husbands and wives become "one flesh". But "flesh" is almost equivalent to "body" (see Eph. 2:15,16; Col. 1:22)- their union of "one flesh" is parallel to the union of the "one body" within the ecclesia. We should all be "perfectly *joined* together (marriage language) in the same mind" (1 Cor. 1:10). Recall how "Israel *joined* himself unto Baalpeor" (Num. 25:3) in a sexual context. Hos. 9:10 comments on this as meaning that Israel "Separated themselves unto" Baalpeor. We cannot be 'joined to' something unless we are 'separated from' something else. If we are truly joined to Christ and each other, we *must* be separated from idolatry. It is impossible to experience this 'joining' with believers who are not 'separated'- one cannot be 'joined' in intercourse to more than one person. We *cannot* serve two masters without *hating* God.

5:32 *This mystery is great, but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church-* The idea of "mystery" has been used earlier in Ephesians concerning the strange and profound unity possible between Jew and Gentile in Christ. The idea of two becoming one has been used earlier about the unity of Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ, the church. The bond

between persons enabled by the Spirit is indeed a mystery which has now been exhibited in practice. This is why the Lord in Jn. 17 spoke of the unity which His sacrifice would enable as something new, unique and powerfully persuasive as a witness in this world. The connection with the language of Jew-Gentile unity is to make the point as noted on :31- that unity within the church is to be reflected between believing partners.

*5:33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband-* The simple practical point is that the love of the husband for the wife, after the pattern of the Lord's love for the church on the cross, is to elicit respect from the wife to the husband. This addresses the female need for love and the male need for respect- and it all reflects the far higher level of the Lord's love for us and our submission towards Him.



## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord. For this is right-* Given the predominance of slaves, children and women in the early churches, we are to imagine the house church meetings with plenty of women, nursing mothers, kids running everywhere. Eph. 6:1 and Col. 3:20 seem to suppose that children would be present at the church gatherings and would listen attentively to what was said. But "in the Lord" may mean that this obedience is not simply because parents are parents. It could be a continuation of the theme of respect for the sake of being "in Christ" which was developed at the end of chapter 5. Believing children should obey their parents "in the Lord"; or perhaps, for the sake of the fact that they are "in the Lord", seeing them as the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. The whole passage in 6:1-3 is a strange allusion to Jacob; "Jacob obeyed his father and his mother" (Gen. 28:7) by going to Padan Aram (actually he fled there, but the record frames it as if he did so purely out of obedience to his parents and from a desire to find a wife in the Faith). Because Jacob did this, God promised him at Bethel that it would *be well* with him (Gen. 32:9 = "that it may be well with you", Eph. 6:3), and he too was given the Abrahamic promises of living long on the earth / land (= "the... commandment with promise", Eph. 6:2). Thus Jacob's fleeing to Padan Aram is seen by the Spirit in Paul as a righteous act of obedience to faithful parents, which resulted in him receiving the promises. And yet his flight was rooted in fear, and at the time he did not accept the promises as relevant to him, neither did he believe Yahweh was his God (Gen. 28:20). And yet the positive side of Jacob (i.e. his obedience to his parents) is seized on and held up as our example.

6:2 *Honour your father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise)-* See on :1. Paul clearly saw "the promise" of the old covenant as being the hope of the new covenant; the hope of the promises made to the Jewish fathers was the Christian hope, as Paul so clearly stated at his trials. This involves eternal possession of a glorified earth- and not going to Heaven on death as an immortal soul.

6:3 *That it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth-* The promise of 'long life' now means eternal life in God's Kingdom on earth. "Well" is the equivalent of the promise that "it may go well with you" (Dt. 5:16). The same Hebrew word is used of the blessing of Abraham to be received in the land of promise (Gen. 32:9,12). Again, the promises to Abraham are seen as the basis of the Christian hope (Gal. 3:8).

6:4- see on Eph. 5:31.

*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but nurture them in the training and instruction of the Lord-* This confirms that the parents and children in view are "in the Lord". The balance within the verse suggests that the opposite of nurturing in the Lord is to provoke them to anger, perhaps referring to anger at a later stage in the child's life. "Nurture", *paideia*, is literally 'education' or 'training'. The idea is that the Lord Jesus should educate our children; in the sense that we are to allow Him to operate through us in training them. We are to be the Lord Jesus in training our children; if we do not show them Him then we are not Him to them. We are to provide this nurture; Sunday School or church programs for kids are all very well, but the essential responsibility is with the parent. And any "admonition" is to be from the Lord, and not therefore motivated by a flash of anger or frustration.

*6:5 Servants, be obedient to those that according to the flesh are your masters, with respect and fear, in singleness of your heart, as if to Christ-* As with the commands about parents, children and marital partners, this would seem to apply to servants and masters within the church. As we each manifest the Lord Jesus because we are in Him, so servants should perceive the Christ in their believing masters. Seeing the Christ in others is what can so elevate and transform human relationships, including the difficult ones, such as between believing master and believing slave. The believing slave would have been sorely tempted to despise their believing masters, considering that really they should release them from slavery and shouldn't even be involved in slavery in the first place. To respect those who are not living as they might in Christ is hard indeed, but again, it is because they are "in Christ" that we can find the sort of respect for them which Paul found even for the Corinthians.

*6:6 Not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart-* Whether or not the master was in Christ, the slave was allowed to serve them as if serving Christ. All the wonderful ideals of serving the Lord Jesus in works, such as evangelism and caring for others, would have seemed unrealistic for those who were slaves. They had no freedom nor ownership even of their bodies. With what relief they would have read that their secular service could be accepted as service to the Lord. This is a comfort likewise today to those who are effectively in slavery, working on minimum wage and paying high rent and taxes. It can all be accepted as done unto the Lord, and therefore is not to be done as work done just when the master is watching ["eyeservice"], but knowing that the Heavenly Master is watching at all times, and we are pleasing Him and not men. Slaves could also reflect that their position and labour was "the will of God". By obeying the will of their masters, they were obeying the will of God. But we need to be aware that many masters asked their slaves to perform immoral deeds, especially sexually. Paul does not call for rebellion against such masters, which would likely have resulted in mutilation or death. And yet the Bible is clear that we should be obedient to men only insofar as we are not thereby disobedient to our Master in Heaven, Peter's example with regard to preaching being perhaps the clearest. The fact the question is not directly addressed is surely because we are to this day left with many such nuanced situations, where principles appear to be in conflict, and it is not the case that not following the highest path shall lead to the Lord's rejection.

*6:7 Giving service with a good will, as if to the Lord and not to man-* "Giving service" is literally 'being in bondage'. We are His slaves, and the force of that metaphor should not be lost upon us. The depth of that servitude should mean that our 'slavery' in secular things is not significant, compared to our deep sense of bondage to the Lord. He is our exclusive Lord, and so any human servitude is to be performed as unto Him.

*6:8 Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, the same shall he receive in return from the Lord, whether he be slave or free-* The 'receiving in return' is at judgment day; the same word is used of our 'receiving' a reward in response to life lived today. Not in this life, when the righteous often suffer for their goodness. *Every* good deed will then have its recognition. "Each one" again encourages us that we are taken notice of as individuals; the slaves, who probably rarely attended church meetings, may have felt that they were somehow insignificant to the Lord. Paul is encouraging them that every act of service performed in their secular lives- yes, every errand run and meal prepared- could be accepted as service to

the Lord and would be rewarded at judgment day. Our status as slave or free will not be significant.

6:9 *And you, masters, do the same things to them, and stop your threatening; knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him-* "The same things" refers to the good things of :8. For masters to do good to slaves was a paradigm breaking idea in the first century world, where a slave was not considered a person but a machine. Clearly it is believing masters who are being addressed here, and some of them practiced "threatening"; quite against the spirit of their Lord who when He suffered, "threatened not" (1 Pet. 2:23 s.w.). Masters were to realize that they too are in slavery- to the Lord Jesus. He will not take account of someone's social status in His judgments of people- "there is no partiality with Him" matches the comment in :8, "whether he be slave or free". Surely nobody actually said in so many words that the Lord took account of their higher social status; but in their hearts they assumed this, and so Paul directly tackles that attitude. I noted on 5:32 that Paul uses the same principles about the unity of Jew and Gentile to reason that husband and wife are to be united in Christ. Here too, "there is no partiality with [the Lord]" is used both about the unity between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 2:11) and now here about the essential unity between master and slave in Christ. Paul is teaching far more than that masters and slaves should be civil, reasonable and tolerant towards each other; but beyond that, they were in fact united together as one in Christ. This is the result of baptism into the same Lord (Gal. 3:27-29).

6:10 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might-* Here we have the two aspects brought together: human endeavour meshed with the Lord's activity. We are to be strong, but in His strength. The strength of the Lord's might clearly refers to His Spirit. We are strengthened with His might (1:19; Col. 1:11), and that strengthening is by the might of His Spirit in the inner man (3:16,20 s.w.). The strengthening envisaged is therefore internal, psychological strengthening. But we must wish for it- this will not happen against our will. We must seek to be strong in the Lord, putting on the armour (:11), and will be strengthened by this internal Spirit strengthening.

6:11 *Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil-* Having spoken of the strengthening of the Spirit in :10, we are reminded that we must seek that strengthening; we must put on the armour. Our battle is essentially spiritual (:12), and so we need the armour of the Spirit. It is the Spirit which will empower us against temptation, but we must seek to put it on. See on :12.

6:12 *For we do not wrestle only against flesh and blood, but also against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies-* At least three possible interpretations present themselves. The language is partly relevant to Angels; yet also to the Judaizers and also to the Roman authorities. Those three possibilities can mesh with each other. Paul is writing in Jewish terms to a group under the influence of Judaizers and Jewish thinking. The Old Testament presents the world as under the control of Angels, with each power group having Angelic representatives in the court of Heaven. For "spirits" see on Dan. 10:20,21. Paul sees the Christian conflict as not only against their own flesh and blood, or even against individual humans; but against systems of wickedness, both Judaist and Roman. Both groups were

involved because the Jews were seeking to use Roman power and litigation to destroy the Christians, just as they had in the crucifixion of the Lord. And yet Paul frames the conflict in terms of Angels because he sees great comfort in the fact that all situations on earth are allowed by Angelic control, and God is not unaware of the earthly situation. We find this kind of approach commonly used in Revelation. Here, the "principalities and powers" can refer therefore both to literal Angels and to those they represent in the Roman system; the wicked spirits in heavenlies can refer to Judaizers within the church as well as to their representatives in the throne room of Heaven.

As regards common misunderstanding of this passages, note that the world is under God's control, not that of evil beings in heaven (Dan. 4:32). "All power" in heaven and in earth has been given to Jesus (Mt. 28:18) by God (Rev. 3:21; Lk. 22:29), so it cannot also be possessed by wicked beings in heaven. There can be no sinful being in Heaven itself (Ps. 5:4,5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10). There is much figurative language in vv. 11–17 – the armour of the Christian is figurative, as is the wrestling, seeing that "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24); v. 12 should be similarly interpreted. If the "Devil" was cast out of heaven in Eden, how could he and his followers still have been in the literal heavens in Paul's time?

The same phrase "Principalities and powers" is used in Col. 2:15 concerning the Angels who gave the Law. The phrase "wiles" (:11) is only used again in 4:14 ("Lie in wait") regarding the Judaizer-devil circulating false doctrine. The rulers of the Jewish heavenlies were both literal Angels and the Judaizers whom they represented in the court of Heaven. Eph. 6:13 warns of a forthcoming battle: "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day" - the spiritual battle between the Law of Moses and that of Christ which is detailed in Rev. 12. Paul could see that in the final conflict against the Judaizers, he would need courage to speak out as he should: "Pray... for me... that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel" (v. 19)- a phrase often used in connection with Gentiles and Jews having equal standing with God through Christ.

The Greek for "wrestle" in Eph. 6:12 is the same word as "cast out" in Rev. 12. The battle of the Christians then was not to cast out men- "we wrestle not against flesh and blood". This is a real difficulty for any 'explanation of difficult passages' that tries to make this refer to human rulers alone. It was the Jewish devil that needed casting out, and the Angel principalities and powers which co-ordinated it. There is no doubt that "principalities and powers" does also refer to Jewish and Roman authorities (Lk. 12:11; 20:20; Mt. 7:29 etc). This is to be expected once we understand that the devil and satan of the New Testament often refers to both Jewish and Roman systems and the Angels behind them. Remember that the Angels rule the world. God's system of manifestation remains constant. In the same way as the "pattern of things in the Heavens" in the Angelic organization there was repeated on earth through the organization of the tabernacle and the *elohim* of Israel's judges and priests, so that Heavenly system is maybe also reflected through the judges and leaders of the world, every one of whom is controlled by an Angel. Hence the identical language used for both Angels and worldly rulers- in the same way as Angel-Cherubim language is used concerning both Angels and earthly armies, e.g. of Babylonians, who fulfilled their will.

This passage seems a footnote to the epistle: "Finally, my brethren..." (v. 10). This is similar to the footnotes begun in Phil. 3:1; Gal. 6:12 and 1 Tim. 6:20, all of which warn against the Judaizers - indicating the immense importance Paul attached to the coming struggle with the "Principalities and powers".

The context is set in v. 13. The preparation was to be because the church was facing “the evil day”. This refers to a period of especial persecution of the church, which was to come at the hands of the Romans, seeing they were the only people with enough power to create an “evil day” for the Christian church at the time Paul was writing. (1 Pet. 4:12; 5:8–9). The wrestling was against “the rulers of this dark world”, who at the time were the Romans. Note that the wrestling is spiritual wrestling to keep the faith (2 Cor. 10:3–5). This time of evil had already begun as Paul was writing (Eph. 5:16) – “the days are evil”. “Principalities” is translated “magistrate” in Luke 12:11; human “rule”, in the sense of human government, in 1 Corinthians 15:24, and the “power” of the Roman governor in Luke 20:20. So it does not necessarily have reference to any power or prince in heaven. “Powers” is translated as the “authority” of the Roman governor in Luke 20:20, and regarding one having “authority” in Matthew 7:29. We must “be subject to principalities and powers” (Titus 3:1) in the sense of earthly governments, insofar as they do not ask us to do things which are contrary to the law of God (Acts 5:29; 4:19; Mt. 19:17). If “principalities and powers” are evil beings in heaven whom we must resist, why are we told to be subject to them? If we accept that they refer to human governors and authorities, then this is easily understandable. “Heavenly places” may also refer to positions of authority in the secular world. Thus the king of Babylon was a figurative “star” in heaven (Is. 14:12), i.e. a great ruler. Jesus is the “sun” (Mal. 4:2), the saints are the “stars” (Dan. 12:3) of the future order. The present “heavens” of man will be replaced by the new Heavens when the Kingdom is established on the earth (2 Pet. 3:13), i.e. the positions of power and rulership, now in the hands of sinful men, will be handed over to the true Christians. The saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdoms of men (Dan. 7:27). Thus wicked spirits in the “heavens” could refer to men of wicked minds in places of power in the world who were persecuting the Christians.

“Wicked spirituals in high (heavenly) places” does not refer to wicked beings in heaven itself. The exalted position of the true believers in Christ is described as being “in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 2:6). “Spirituals” can be used to describe those in the church who had the gift of the spirit; having given a list of commands as to how the gifts of the spirit should be used, Paul concludes: “If any man (in the church) think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual (i.e. spiritually gifted, see N.I.V.), let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). 1 Corinthians 14 shows there was a big problem in the church of believers misusing the spirit gifts. Hebrews 6:4–6 describes some Jewish Christians in the first century who had the gift of the spirit, but who were leading the church away from true Christianity by their attitude. These would be a prime example of wicked spirituals in the heavenlies (i.e. in the church). The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25, cp. 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple. In the same way as wicked people could be in the temple, so, too, they could be in the heavenlies of the church. Possession of the Spirit did not mean that someone was necessarily acceptable in God’s sight, e.g. Saul possessed it for a time (1 Sam. 10:10) as did the judges of Israel (Num. 11:17) although they were not righteous; they did not believe the report of Joshua and Caleb and therefore were condemned to die like the other Israelites, despite their having the Spirit – Psalm 82:1–7 says as much. For a period the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 possessed the gifts despite their errors, until eventually their candlestick was removed (cp. Acts 20:28–29; Eph. 4:11; Rev. 2:5). Thus the wicked spirits in the heavenlies were apostate Christians within the church, in league with the Judaists, leading the church into an “evil day” of temptation.

Thus the threat to the church was twofold: from the Roman/Jewish persecution and from the (often Judaist) “false apostles” (2 Cor. 11:13) within. Remember Ephesians 6:11–13 was

written to the church at Ephesus. Paul had previously warned them about this threat from within: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30). Rotherham’s translation brings this out well: “Our struggle is against the principalities against the authorities against the world – rulers of this darkness, AND against spiritual wickedness in heavenlies”.

It is possible to still interpret “the Devil” in v. 11, as having a certain degree of reference to the “Jewish Satan”. The “Heavenly places” of v. 12 may refer to the Jewish heavenlies; 2 Peter 3 and Deuteronomy 32:1 speak of the Jewish heavens. This is strengthened by the fact that the “sun, moon and stars” are sometimes figurative of the Jews (e.g. Genesis 22:17; 37:9; Dan. 8:9,10,24). We have shown that the wicked spirituals may have reference to the Jewish Christians who were spirit-gifted, but turned to apostasy. They would thus be in both the Christian and Jewish “heavenlies”. The threat from within the church posed by the Judaizers infiltrating the church, who were Jews. Thus “the Devil” was manifested in the Roman authorities *and* the Jews within the Christian church. The two entities were connected insofar as the Jewish synagogue powers often informed the Roman authorities against the Christians.

The “wiles of the Devil” offers support to the Jewish context in that the Greek word for “wiles” is elsewhere translated “to lie in wait to deceive”, in a verse which talks about the Judaizers subtly trying to introduce false doctrine into the church: the church was being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). If the “heavenly places” also represent the Jewish system, further meaning is given to Ephesians 3:3–10: “The mystery... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs (with the Jews), and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel... To make all men (both Jews and Gentiles) see what is the fellowship of the mystery... To the intent now that unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”, i.e. that by the church showing the unity that existed between Jew and Gentile within it, the Jewish leaders (“principalities and powers in heavenlies”) might come to appreciate “the manifold wisdom of God”. This, in turn, opens up John 17:21: “That they all (Jews and Gentiles) may be one... that the world (this phrase almost always means the Jewish world in John’s Gospel) may believe that You have sent me”. The “evil day” of v. 13 would be a result of the Judaizers, who were “evil men and seducers” (2 Tim. 3:13).

Another approach is to be found by considering the view that many of the later New Testament documents are full commentary upon and critical allusion to popular ideas of false religion which were circulating at the time. The commentary of David Pitt-Francis on Ephesians 6 bears quoting at more length:

“The object of the Christian message was to shake such imagined deities out of their places, so that men would give real glory to Christ, and to the God of Heaven alone. Paul describes the conflict of Christian witness as a struggle, not against flesh and blood but... “against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness; against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”. To many unacquainted with the real impact of the gospel, both sun and moon seemed to have personalities which they did not possess, as did the stars of heaven, heaven itself, and those exalted parts of nature such as mountains and islands. Thus Isaiah 2, which contains primarily a prophecy against idolatry in Israel and describes idol-worship in the context of ‘high mountains’ and ‘lofty hills’ contains a description of the flight of men into caves and holes of the rocks from the terror of God, and

this description is borrowed in Revelation. The end of the worship of sun, moon and stars is also foretold by Isaiah in a later passage, where the imagined gods of heaven are described as being punished: "On that day, the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven – and the kings of the earth, on earth – they will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit... then the moon will be ashamed, and the sun confounded for the Lord of hosts will reign" (David Pitt-Francis, *The Most Amazing Message Ever Written* (Irchester: Mark Saunders Books, 1984) chapter 4).

6:13 *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to withstand it; and after you have done everything, to stand firm-* See on :12. Protection against spiritual destruction was not therefore simply in their own strength; they were to put on God's defences. Once they had done all they humanly could, the Divine defence would operate. The same idea is found in :17. It is this huge spiritual power which enables us, as David against Goliath, to successfully "withstand" evil. The same word is used in teaching that we are not to resist evil in physical, secular terms (Mt. 5:39). We are to resist evil- but in spiritual terms. I explained on :12 that the evil in view was the power of Judaism seeking to destroy Christianity in league with the Roman authorities. The same word for "withstand", often translated "resist", is used of how the Gospel of grace was resisted by Judaists and Romans (Acts 13:8; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:15), but the power of the Christian defence / resistance could not be 'withstood' (Lk. 21:15; Acts 6:10; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:9). We in our last days face a final time of evil which shall swamp the believers unless they are armed with God's defences, which basically refer in various forms to "the Spirit". The armour described is all defensive; the peace of God (surely a reference to the Spirit) keeps hearts and minds in Christ (Phil. 4:7).

6:14 *Stand therefore, having girded yourself with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness-* "The breastplate of righteousness" was understood by Jewish ears as referring to the High Priestly breastplate. No ordinary Israelite would ever have had the ambition to dream of wearing it. But as often, Paul calls the believers to the heights of spiritual ambition. They were not mere spectators at a show, but participants, the priestly tribe, called to do even the work of the High Priest on earth. The girdle or belt of truth enabled the Christian to flee swiftly; being girded on Passover night spoke of being able to flee quickly. And it is "truth", our covenant relationship with the Lord, which psychologically keeps us mobile from temptation, binding our minds together rather than us having the disordered and loose mind of the unbeliever.

6:15 *And having shod your feet with the readiness to announce the gospel of peace-* This is in the context of defensive measures against temptation and tribulation. Being prepared to witness to the Gospel is of itself a means of defence against temptation; for the work of witness means we will not be in league with the world but separate from it in a spiritual sense. "Peace" has been earlier used in the letter regarding peace in relationship between Jew and Gentile because of the peace with God which is in Christ (2:14,15,17; 4:3). The good news is not simply of a future eternity upon planet earth *redevivus*. It is far more than that. It includes the genuinely good and attractive news of reconciliation between persons who would otherwise have remained intractably separated.

Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example; and it was John who was described as 'preparing' the Lord's way, using the same word as here translated "readiness".

The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'. See on Mt. 10:32.

6:16 *Meanwhile taking up the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil-* "Taking up" here as in :17 carries the idea of receiving, accepting, as David received Saul's armour. The idea is not simply that our own faith will be our shield. That would be somewhat axiomatic, and the power of resistance and defence would rest with us alone. I suggest the idea is that we are to accept the shield of Spirit defence against temptation, which shield we receive if we believe we shall be given it. We are to believe that truly the Lord is able to keep us from spiritually falling (Jude 24). The fact He is able to do this shows of itself that we can be fortified over and above our own efforts. Otherwise He would have no role to play in keeping us from falling.

6:17 *And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God-* "Take" as in :16 really means to receive or "accept" (GNB); see note on :16. We are to take the defensive armour of the Spirit. It is the Spirit which will keep us from falling; the helmet guards the head, the mind, the thinking, which Paul presents as the essence of Christianity. The Spirit is the guarantee that we will be finally saved, it is the earnest of the possession yet to be received in final salvation (1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). Believing this will keep our minds in peace; if really we are persuaded that we shall eternally live the spiritual life, we shall not give in to petty temptation now. But we must clothe ourselves with that as a helmet, just as we must of our own volition clothe ourselves with Christ in baptism. We receive not 'the sword-of-the-Spirit', but the sword which is the Spirit or given by the Spirit. "The word [*rhema*] of God" is not necessarily the Bible from Genesis to Revelation; for not all the Bible had then been written. Paul in Rom. 10:8,17 understands this term to mean the Gospel. And the Spirit is available from believing the Gospel. And the *rhema* of God is likewise understood as the Gospel message in Acts 10:22 and often. The *rhema* of the Lord is specifically stated to be the promised gift of the Spirit in Acts 11:16. Experiencing the *rhema* of God was to experience the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:5). The grammar requires that the sword and not the Spirit is the word of God. The Spirit therefore gives us God's word; it is incorrect here to draw a direct equivalence between the Spirit and the word. The Spirit can give help through God's word- Bible verses can be brought to our mind in the battle against temptation. But the "word" in view is, as suggested above, specifically the word of the Gospel, the good news of the Spirit's help to us in times of need. This is the nourishment and strength ministered to us by the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 4:4), in our times of spiritual crisis (Heb. 4:15,16).

6:18- see on Lk. 12:37.

*With all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit; and with this in view, be alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints-* "At all times" is really 'on every occasion'. Every occasion of temptation or testing is to be met by prayer; and we are not to simply pray for ourselves, but for others as we observe them in times of crisis. This suggests that spiritual strengthening is partly dependent upon the prayers of third parties for us. This is the reason for fellowship with other believers, opening up to others our spiritual needs. And it is why we should be continually in prayer for others- for we can play a role in their eternal salvation, just as they can in ours. Paul has listed six items in the defensive armour of the spiritual warrior; prayer is the seventh. This is the ultimate and completing weapon we are to



use in withstanding temptation and the day of trial. "Prayer and petition" are hard to define separately; the sense may be that "prayer" is more general, and "petition" refers to specific supplication in time of specific need. Prayer "in the Spirit" surely connects with how the same phrase has been used earlier, of how "in Christ" we are the temple of God and are indwelt by His Spirit. If the promised Spirit of God dwells in us, then we are "in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9). So the idea would be that those who are aware of the indwelling of the Spirit and live "in the Spirit" will pray "in the Spirit", in that same atmosphere, for the Spirit to provide the spiritual defence against temptation which the previous verses have offered. We are to pray whilst being alert / awake, in the spirit of the disciples in Gethsemane, indeed, in the spirit of the Lord Jesus praying there; see on Mt. 26:41. For He there was surely praying for us; and we with His Spirit are to pray for the spiritual perseverance of others in time of trial. This was exactly what the Lord was praying for in Gethsemane, whilst the disciples slept.

*6:19 And on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel-* Paul saw the Lord's "boldness" as an imperative to him to likewise be "bold" in preaching (Eph. 6:19). We all find it hard to be bold in witness, and yet in this as in all spiritual endeavour, 'thy fellowship shall make me strong'. A deeper sense of the presence of Jesus, a feeling for who He was and is, a being with Him, will make us bold too. Even Paul found it hard; he asked others to pray for him, that he would preach "boldly" [s.w.] 'as he ought to' (Eph. 6:20 AV); and their prayers were heard, for in his imprisonment during which he wrote Ephesians, he preached boldly (Acts 28:31 s.w.); indeed, boldness characterised his whole life (Phil. 1:20 s.w.). In passing, we note how Paul felt spiritually weaker than he was; he felt not bold, when he was bold; and we see how the admission of weakness to others and their prayers for it can grant us the victory we seek. The point is, who the Lord is, we are. Or, we must be. If He was bold, if He was apt to teach and patient, so must we be; indeed, so are we, if we are truly in Him. Likewise, all the Father is, we are to manifest if we bear His Name. We should daily pray for opportunities to witness ("utterance").

6:20- see on Mt. 26:35.

*For which I am an ambassador in chains-* Again we sense Paul's resentment of his chains, his limitations; but he doesn't become demotivated, he seeks for ways to serve and witness all the same, and asks others to pray for him that he might be able to still be the Lord's ambassador despite them. This should be our example, as we all feel limited in some ways. There is an intended juxtaposition in ideas between being an ambassador, and yet being "in chains". The Lord's Kingdom has ambassadors / diplomats who are "in chains", who are not qualified at all in secular terms, indeed, who might appear to be precluded from such a role by the limitations of their position in life. But that is precisely the Lord's style and way of operation with us.

*That in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak-* After his conversion, we sense from the record of the preaching that Paul was in his element. The record of his early preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem is recorded with the same rubric: he preached "boldly", and on each occasion it seems he would have gone on, utterly oblivious of the fact he was heading for certain death, had not the other brethren "taken" him and quietly slipped him out of those cities (Acts 9:27). The same word translated "boldly" occurs later, years later, when Paul asks his converts to pray for him, that he would speak "boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:20). He has already asked them this in v.19; he asks for the same thing twice. And he confessed

his same problem to the Colossians (Col. 4:4). As he got older, he found it harder to be bold. First of all, in those heady days in Jerusalem and Damascus, it was the most natural thing in the world for him. But as time went by, it became harder for him to do this.

6:21 *But so you may also know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, shall make known to you all things-* Tychicus is mentioned as running errands and messages (Tit. 3:12; Col. 4:7), and from his prison cell Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12). This is another indication that Ephesians was written initially specifically to Ephesus, regardless of what later usage the letter had. Such "messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23) were vitally important in a period of very limited communications. In essence we can take the lesson that we should likewise sacrifice time and effort in order to keep the body of Christ informed of each other.

6:22 *Whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our state and that he may comfort your hearts-* Tychicus was sent from Paul's prison cell right at the end of his life, it would seem (2 Tim. 4:12). Yet Paul looked out from his own immediate needs and sacrificed one of his few stable friends and encouragers, in order to comfort *them* and to tell them about his "state", so that they might pray for him. This was how much he valued prayer for him.

6:23 *Peace be to the believers and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* These wishes of peace, love and faith have real power. Paul clearly believed that his prayerful desire for their spiritual growth would result in them actually increasing in peace, love and faith. These are all fruits of the Spirit, or aspects of love, the one fruit; and he believed that his desire for them to be spiritually minded in these ways would produce actual fruit. It is an awesome concept- that we can actually positively influence the spirituality of others.

6:24 *Grace be with all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit, the power of new life within the heart of the believer. Paul has just wished them peace, love and faith- all results or fruits of the Spirit. Paul wishes them this gift and the spiritual growth which will come from it. "Undying love" is a fair effort to translate a difficult phrase, but the same word is elsewhere translated "immortality" and "incorruption". The love we now have for the Lord Jesus is an eternal love- in that, as John's Gospel expresses it, we can live the life we shall eternally live right now. The love we have for the Lord now is the love we shall eternally have. This highlights the profound and eternal importance of who we are now; our love for Him now is an attribute we shall eternally display, indeed we could say that the type of love we now have for Him, the relationship we have with Him now, is what we shall eternally enjoy. And that is going to be unique, slightly different, for each of us.

## CHAPTER 1

*1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus-* Paul was writing from prison in Rome; Timothy was with him. Yet 2 Tim. 4:9 records Paul's request for Timothy to come and be with him there as he was about to die. Perhaps this letter was written after Timothy arrived; or perhaps Timothy was with Paul there at some earlier stage in Paul's time at Rome. This seems most likely, because Paul says he is going to send Timothy to them (2:19) and hopes to come to them himself (1:26). If this was after Timothy had come to Paul on his deathbed as it were, we see here how Paul valued their encouragement more than his own. The emphasis upon "joy" in Philippians is notable, and is all the more significant when we consider that Paul was writing from prison, and perhaps at the end of his life. And we would then read Paul's words in 2 Tim. 4 as written in depression, whereas here he is confident of release and visiting Philippi again (:26); unless we are to read this as the unrealistic hopes of a dying man. Throughout this exposition I have noted hints which would support the idea that Philippians was written at the end of Paul's life, facing death, at around the time he wrote 2 Timothy (see notes on 2:12,16, 17,23; 3:13,20; 4:1,13; Col. 4:14).

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi-* The general congregation are addressed first, and then the overseers, as if to emphasize that Paul is writing to all. There would have been a tendency for the illiterate mass of the congregations to feel they were mere spectators at a show, just as there is in large churches today. "Saints" is the term used for all Israel being a "holy people" in that they were all intended to be priests (Ex. 19:6; Dt. 7:6; 14:2). The point was that although they had spiritual leaders, they were all to take priestly responsibility in the new Israel.

*With the bishops and deacons-* We must respect elders (and indeed all people) for who they are as persons, and not for any 'office' they may appear to hold. Notice how in Phil. 1:1 Paul omits the definite article ("the") in addressing bishops and deacons. Those words indicate what they do for people, rather than any position in a hierarchy. Jesus seems to have outlawed the use of any official titles for His ecclesia (Mt. 23:8-12). Paul never speaks of an ecclesial 'elder' but of *elders* in the plural. The same can be said of "bishops (overseers), see Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28. Our groups may have secretaries or teachers, but this individual must never be seen as *the* elder. There is only one author [Gk. 'pioneer'] of our faith: the Lord Himself, who worked in our lives to bring us to Himself. This is stressed in Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 2:10; 12:2.

*Bishops-* Vine notes that "The word was originally a secular title, designating commissioners appointed to regulate a newly-acquired territory or a colony". Paul may be using it in this sense, for he sought to leave behind in each new church someone who could teach the new converts, whom he saw as colonies on earth of the Heavenly Kingdom. It would therefore be possible to argue that "bishops" were a temporary office designed for a missionary context. "Deacons" are the servants of the church, those serving by practical arrangement of things.

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* "Grace", *charis*, often refers to the gift of the Spirit which is received in the heart of every baptized believer. Paul wishes them the peace which comes as a direct gift from God and the Lord Jesus. This then is no mere formal greeting, but a real desire that they experience in their hearts what was potentially available to them.

1:3 *I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you-* This could mean 'every time I remember / think of you'. But 'remembering' someone is a Hebraism for prayer. It would then parallel "every prayer of mine for you" in :4. He would then mean 'Every time I remember you before God in prayer, I thank God for you'.

1:4 *Always in every prayer of mine with joy making requests for you all-* As noted on :3, Paul likely means that every time he prays for them, he does so with joy, as he makes "requests" for them. What started out as requesting things for them merged into a sense of joy and thanksgiving for them. There's nothing wrong with a Christian experiencing both joy and sorrow at the same time. The Lord's description of His 'joy' at the time of His being the ultimate 'man of sorrows' is an obvious example. But consider too Paul's language to the Philippians. On one hand he speaks insistently of his joy: "I pray always with joy... Christ is being preached, and I am glad... I will also continue to be happy... I am glad, and I share my joy... it made me very happy (Phil. 1:4,18; 2:17; 4:10). And yet on the other hand, he speaks of his sorrows at that very same time: "...that I may receive news about you that will cheer me up... keep me from having one sorrow after another" (Phil. 2:19,27).

1:5 *Giving thanks for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now-* "Your participation in the [preaching of the] gospel" is paralleled with "your faith" (Phil. 1:5). If we really believe, we will be involved in the preaching of what we believe.

Paul felt the Philippians were still assisting him in the furthering of the Gospel even whilst he was in prison, and he was likewise assisting them. They were hugely separated by distance and situation. Yet they still fellowshipped with each other in the Gospel's work through the connection in the Spirit which is actualized by prayer for each other. And similar bonds can easily be created today too thanks to the communication revolution.

"The first day" presumably refers to when Paul first preached in Philippi, and Lydia and her household responded. He was imprisoned and beaten at Philippi, but Paul remembers the positive, the glass half full rather than half empty; when many others would have been so traumatized by the experience that the post traumatic stress displaced any memory of the good. This is a great example to us all.

1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ-* "Confident" is a Greek word much beloved of Paul in Philippians (1:6,14,25; 2:25; 3:3,4). The word really means 'persuaded'. Writing from prison towards the end of his ministry, Paul could see how he had been persuaded of his positions throughout his walk with the Lord. He was persuaded that the good work begun within them would come to its intended term at the Lord's return. The work begun within believers refers to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the gift given to every believer, but which only becomes actualized in those who allow it to. Many like the Corinthians received that gift but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). The gift of the Spirit in our

hearts is the earnest or guarantee / down payment on the salvation we shall finally receive at the Lord's return (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The good work begun and now ongoing will come to its intended end at the Lord's return. It is God who works His works in us (Heb. 13:21), completing the work of faith in the power of the Spirit within us (2 Thess. 1:11). His dynamic power works within us to this end (Eph. 1:19; 3:7). Phil. 3:21 clearly refers to this idea: "Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself". The power of transformation at the last day is that same power which is now at work within us. And that is the explicit teaching of Rom. 8:11: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you". Gal. 3:3 echoes the ideas here in Phil. 1:6 by speaking of how the Spirit has begun a work in us, which shall be also completed (s.w. "perfecting" Phil. 1:6) at the Lord's return. This is why in :7 Paul says he feels like this about the Philippians because they have all received the grace, the gift, of the Spirit as Paul has.

*1:7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel-* The "defence and confirmation of the gospel" uses legal terms- the Greek word translated "defence" means a plea entered in a court of law; and "confirmation" refers to supporting evidence offered to a judge. Paul's idea is that in our preaching, our audiences are the judge; and we are entering a plea for the case of none other than God Himself, and His Son. We have to ask whether our witness to the world is indeed a *plea*- or whether it's a case of merely getting people in our own social group to just drop by at *our* church rather than their usual one. The fact we are speaking on God's behalf, pleading for His case to be accepted in the hard hearts of men, should impart an urgency, a desire to penetrate minds, and persistence in our witness.

*You all are partakers with me of grace-* As noted on :6, the grace which they had partaken of was the gift of the Spirit in their hearts, which was constantly at work preparing them for the final salvation of the last day. It is this common experience of spiritual transformation which is the basis of Christian fellowship in practice, rather than solely a common theological understanding. Paul had "fellowship in the Gospel" with the Philippians, "because... ye all are partakers with me of grace" (Phil. 1:5-7 RV). All those in the Lord Jesus by valid baptism, and who remain in Him by faithful continuance in His way, are partakers of His gracious pardon, salvation, and patient fellowship; and they will, naturally and inevitably, reflect this to their brethren as part of their gratitude to Him.

*1:8 For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus-* The legal term "witness" connects with the legal metaphors noted on :7. God was a witness to how Paul had preached and defended the Gospel and how he truly sought the salvation of his converts. "Tender mercies" translates the Greek word for spleen; the inward heart, the "inner man" where the Spirit works (Eph. 3:16). If we have the spirit of Christ Jesus, then our spirit is His; even His innermost thoughts and feelings are ours, once our spirit becomes His. And the Lord's longing after the Philippians was therefore Paul's. The "fellowship of the spirit" is achieved by having the same spleen, the same innermost values, ambitions and feelings (2:1 s.w.). Just as the Lord's innermost feelings can be ours, so those who have the Spirit of Christ are likewise connected with us. Onesimus is therefore described as Paul's "spleen" (Philemon 12). This is a great example of how the Spirit connects in fellowship; Paul the intellectual rabbi was connected with Onesimus the runaway slave who landed in jail in Rome, because

they had the same Spirit within them. This same connection was between Paul and the Philippians, and was the basis of his longing after them from such a great distance. Those who deny the working of the Spirit are left with only cold intellectual positions, and the pride of common tradition, to hold them together. But that is not the fellowship of the Spirit, and it becomes very fragile and so easily broken.

1:9- see on 2 Cor. 12:15.

*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment-* As noted on :8, the connection or love between Paul and the Philippians was a result of the indwelling of the Spirit; yet we have to "put on" the spleen or inner feelings ("tender mercies") of the Spirit (Col. 3:12) and our love likewise grows in that the work of the Spirit is ongoing and must be allowed by us. For God will not force us against our will. Our love abounds more and more through "discernment, so that ye may prove the things that differ" (RVmg.). We grow by being given different situations to respond to, in order to develop our judgment- what Eph. 5:10 calls "proving what is acceptable unto the Lord". By reason of use our spiritual senses are exercised to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:14). This is why, be it in church or family or deeply personal life, our consciences are constantly being probed and exercised by the situations which Providence leads us into. And thus we grow in sensing more keenly right and wrong, more victoriously overcoming all the temptations whose strength lies in the fact that in the heat of the moment we waver as to what is right and wrong... and the end result of this increased and heightened discernment, Paul says, is a love which abounds "yet more and more" (Phil. 1:9).

1:10 *So that you may approve the things that are excellent, so that you may be sincere and void of offence until the day of Christ-* The pinnacle of love is to be a person who gives no cause of stumbling to others (s.w. Acts 24:16; 1 Cor. 10:32). This suggests that naturally we all cause others to stumble, as stated in James 3:2. We need to be aware of this; the maturity of the love which is ever growing (:9) is to come to a point where we are hyper sensitive to the possible effects of our thinking and being upon others. This sensitivity is the ability to judge / approve the things which differ (Gk.), i.e. having wisdom to know what will upbuild and what will make to stumble. The same phrase is used in Rom. 2:18 of how the Jews thought they could judge the things which differ on the basis of the Law. In Philippi as in all Paul's churches, there was the constant pressure from Judaizers. Paul is saying that it is the spirit of Christ within us, and not casuistic study of the Law, which will lead to this position of maturity. We *know* right now the principles on which God will judge us; we can prove [s.w. "approve"] what is acceptable to God (Rom. 12:2), just as He will "approve" or test every man's work in the fire of judgment day (1 Cor. 3:13 s.w.). We can judge what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10- judgment day language). We can judge / discern those things which are excellent in His eyes (Phil. 1:10).

1:11 *Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God-* The preceding verses have alluded to the activity of the Spirit within us. The fruit of the Spirit is what we are filled with, as a gift, rather than what we bring forth in our own unaided strength. Such fruits of righteousness are not of ourselves, but on account of the Lord Jesus; which results in praise to God rather than glory to our own psychological strength. The idea of fullness of spiritual attributes is an allusion to the righteous characteristics of God of Ex. 34- which likewise were unto the *glory* of God. The R.V. of Ex.

34:5-7 says that God is *full* of these attributes- hence Phil. 1:11 talks of us being filled with these things too if we bear the Name, even in this life. The idea of fullness and being filled often occurs in the New Testament in the context of the glory. Eph. 1:23 describes the church as "His body, the fullness of Him (God?) that fills all in all". Thus we are "*the*" fullness of God and Christ. "We beheld His glory... full of grace and truth (alluding to Ex. 34)... and of His fullness have all we received" (Jn. 1:14,16). See on Eph. 1:23.

1:12 *Now I would have you know, brothers, that the things which happened to me have turned out for the progress of the gospel-* If we are truly focused on God's agenda, knowing we have His backing, then all setbacks, even our death itself, will be understood by us as all for the ultimate advancement of the aims we are working towards. It's a battle, a war, a campaign, a race, which we can't ultimately lose. With God on our side, we have to win. And we shall. "Progress" is the same word as used in :25 about the progress in their faith. Paul's focus was upon the progress and development of others, and this enabled him to bear with his own apparently dead end situation in a Roman prison.

1:13 *So that my bonds made Christ manifest throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest-* It has been suggested that if Paul were constantly chained to a succession of Roman soldiers, he would have preached to them all; and thus the Gospel was spread throughout the guard. And from 4:22 we know that there were believers amongst "Caesar's household", and the list of names in Romans 16 include some which can be traced there too (see notes there). Paul's apparently dead end situation therefore led to the Gospel penetrating the very highest of places within the Roman empire, in a manner which would have been impossible had he not been imprisoned in Rome. The Greek *praetorium* is mainly used of how the Lord Jesus was held in the Praetorium, in chains as Paul was (Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:28,33; 19:9). Paul quickly perceived that in essence he was continuing the Lord's witness by fellowshipping His sufferings, and we can make the same connections between our chains in life and the Lord's sufferings.

1:14- see on Acts 2:46.

*And further, most of the believers in the Lord, being made confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear-* Paul's amazing witness noted in :13, penetrating deep into Caesar's inner circles, was and is an encouragement for other believers to likewise preach. We too can be inspired by the witness of others. "More abundantly" is a common term with Paul, reflecting his sense that the progressive work of the Spirit in our lives makes us ever growing in love and zeal to preach.

1:15 *Some indeed preach Christ out of envy and strife, and some of good will-* Paul's ability to judge motives here may have come from direct Spirit insight. For it is not really for us to judge the motives of some preachers as being of envy. And yet it was quite clear that this category had an agenda- to make trouble for Paul and have his prison sentence extended or turned into a harder prison regime for him (:16). The believers in view were presumably those in the church at Rome. His enthusiasm to see them and be with them, as witnessed in the letter to Rome, may well have guided him in appealing to Caesar. And yet at his trial, none of them stood with him; and we get no impression that they ministered to his needs in prison. It was faithful friends from elsewhere in the empire who had to be asked to bring him a warm coat and writing materials. They may well have advertised Christianity in terms

which were provocative to the Roman leadership, in order to make Paul as the high profile Christian prisoner suffer more. And this was rooted in envy or jealousy of him. Paul could have given in to bitter disappointment with the Roman church, but we never get a hint of it in his letters. He was very positive about the whole experience.

*1:16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains-* As noted on :15, these believers were jealous of Paul and were presenting Christianity in a provocative way in order to add to Paul's chains- seeking to get him a longer and harder sentence. And yet in faith he believes he will be released and even visit Philippi again (:26). He could so easily have succumbed to the 'glass half empty' syndrome and wallowed in depression.

*1:17 But the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel-* All preaching of the Gospel is to be motivated by love. But the contrast is with how some preached motivated by a desire to make problems for Paul, whereas others preached from love- and we could assume that the love is therefore love of Paul. And the context of this verse has been talking about Paul's love for the Philippians. Preaching from love for Paul would therefore have referred to witnessing publicly in his support, which meant witnessing for Christ; knowing that Paul had been appointed by the Lord to openly defend the Gospel before the Gentiles.

*1:18 What then? In every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and therein I rejoice, yes and will rejoice-* This is a powerful principle; regardless of the motives others have in their work, we should rejoice Christ is preached. And yet so many believers have so little joy at the witness of others to Christ because of their hangups about those who are doing the preaching work. The 'believers' out to make trouble for Paul were only 'pretending' which suggests they were false brethren, those who faked conversion in order to enter the early Christian communities and derail them (Gal. 2:4). But despite that, Paul still rejoices that the Lord Jesus was getting at least some publicity; he clearly believed that no publicity is bad publicity, and my own ministry led me to the same conclusion. These false brethren were Judaists, and the same word translated "pretence" is used of orthodox Jews in Lk. 20:47 and Jn. 15:22.

*1:19 For I know that this shall result in my salvation, through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ-* The machinations of Paul's enemies, seeking to lengthen or harshen his prison term, would, he believed, turn out in his salvation from prison in Rome- if the Philippians prayed about it. "Salvation" is rendered better by Moffatt: "The outcome of all this, I know, will be my release". The Greek here is almost identical to Job 13:16 LXX: "Though he slay me... even that is to me an omen of salvation". The context is of Job speaking of the good conscience he had maintained with God; similarly, Paul's good conscience made him fearless of approaching death, as he also made clear when on trial for his life (Acts 23:1; 24:16).

I have noted above that Paul felt the fellowship of the Spirit with them because the same Spirit in him was in them- that of the Lord. The operation of the Spirit would result in his salvation from prison. But whether Paul was released at this point (see on :1) is unclear. "I know that..." was written by Paul in faith, although he did not know how exactly the Spirit was going to work in this case. "Supply" is only elsewhere used in Eph. 4:16, concerning how the body functions through each member supplying something towards its total function.



But what they supplied was what the Lord supplied; a related word is used of the Lord's supply of the Spirit to the church (Gal. 3:5). The Spirit is supplied through the functioning of the Lord Jesus through the ligaments of His body. See on Zech. 4:14.

There seems reason to believe that the gift of the Spirit is a way of describing answered prayer. The giving of "good things to them that ask" in prayer is the same as the giving (gift) of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). Phil. 1:19 parallels "Your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". Similarly, 1 Jn. 3:24 says that we are given the Spirit as a result of our obedience to the commands; verse 22 says that obedience to those commands leads to our prayers being answered. Thus our confidence is due to having our prayers heard (1 Jn. 5:14) and also due to having the Spirit act in our lives (1 Jn. 3:21,24; 4:13), seeing that prayer is answered by the Spirit's work.

1:20- see on Eph. 6:19.

*According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame; but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death-* This seems to echo Job 13:13-15 (especially in RVmg.), where Job says he is willing to face every trial, but knows that death will be his lot; yet he is certain that God will still be glorified through this. All of this is very apposite to Paul's situation. Paul has just expressed confidence that he will be released from prison (:19), but his hope for 'salvation' from prison merges into his confident hope in salvation at the last day, when he [unlike the rejected] would not be put to shame but would glorify the Lord Jesus. Whether he was released from prison or died the death of a martyr, he believed he would glorify his Lord. In this sense the natural panic when faced with death was not with Paul; for his aim was the Lord's glorification, and he could see that whether he lived or died he would achieve that, seeing he intended to use the life he might be given in the Lord's continued service. When faced with death or the cutting short of life or physical opportunity, this is the choice before the believer- and if we are focused upon the Lord's glorification, it is a win-win situation.

"Magnified" means just that. Paul magnified the name of the Lord Jesus through his preaching work amongst men (Acts 19:17 s.w.). And he would achieve the same through dying for Him as a martyr. In this sense we can make the Lord greater by our witness and living. He has partially delegated His own glorification to us, as He has given us His wealth and the run of His house; and shall return to see how we have got on with running His business.

1:21 *For to me to live, is Christ, and to die- is gain-* As noted on :20, Paul faced the possibility of death as a win-win situation. If he lived, he would glorify the Lord through his work with the Philippians and others. If he died, he would likewise glorify the Lord. If he lived further, then Christ would continue living in him. His life would be that of Christ. To live, therefore, would be "Christ". And yet if he died- that would be gain or profit for him. He uses the same word in explaining how he counted all that was once "gain" to him as loss for the sake of Christ (3:7). His real gain was, in a word, "Christ". His life was so absorbed with that of the Lord Jesus, the Lord's Spirit was his spirit, that death itself was no great issue for him. If he lived, he lived "Christ", the Christ who was in him. If he died, whilst he would be unconscious until the Lord's coming, he would eternally have that same connection with his Lord after the resurrection and immortalization which he so eagerly anticipated.

When Paul speaks of "...that I may win Christ....to live is Christ", his idea seems to be of attaining a spirituality even in this life where the life we live is Christ living in us, totally reflected in our actions and spirit. "To die is gain" was effectively Job's attitude too, particularly in Job 10:20-22, where whilst recognizing the unpleasantness of death, he speaks as if he were willing to suffer it to maintain his integrity with God. Paul is reasoning along similar lines.

The picture of Paul in prison, having reached this spiritual pinnacle, fired the minds and living of "many of the brethren in the Lord" (:14). And for me too, the old and brave Paul in that cell is the man I fain would be. And yet as his perception of Christ and his surpassing excellency increased, so did his warnings against apostasy, and the need to hold on to true doctrine. In other words, his absorption and appreciation of the Spirit of Christ was what fired his zeal for purity of doctrine and practice. It was this which gave him the spiritual energy and power to live the life that he did, to the point that he could truly say that for him, to live was Christ; that the life he lived in the flesh, the things he did, the thoughts he thought, was all the result of Christ living in him and through him. He brought *every thought* (and this isn't figurative language) into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). My sense is that as he was lead out to face his death, this phrase he'd coined to the Philippians was in his mind: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain".

1:22 *But if by living in the flesh, this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I do not know*- "I do not know" can carry the sense of 'It is all the same'; which was his whole point (see on :20,21). The idea of Paul having a choice to live or die doesn't necessarily mean that he had control over his destiny at that point. He is saying that if he had a choice, it would be all the same what he chose, because his existence was a glorification of the Lord, both now and eternally. Yet if he had to choose, he reasons that he would come down on the idea of living a bit longer, because he saw that was more needful for the new converts (Phil. 1:21-23). This accounts for his emphasis in Philippians on how much he desired their growth; because he had chosen to stay alive in this mortal flesh *solely because* he wanted to achieve this. The tragedy was that all in Asia turned away- when he had 'risked' remaining alive, with the full knowledge he could himself fall away, having been offered certain salvation- all for their sakes.

Understanding the way Paul breaks off into another theme and then resumes is the key to understanding some of the more difficult passages in his writings (examples in Rom. 3:25,26; Eph. 3:1,14). And we have another case here: "But if I live in the flesh [*this is the fruit of my labour... nevertheless to abide in the flesh*] (this) is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:22-24).

1:23- see on 1 Cor. 12:31; 2 Tim. 4:6; 4:6-8.

*I am torn between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*- I suggested on :22 that Paul had no real choice in the matter of living or dying; he is expressing his internal debate over the hypothetical question of whether it would be better to die as a martyr or be released from prison and bring forth fruit amongst Gentiles like the Philippians. He came down on the side of living longer in the flesh for their sakes. He clearly felt that he had an irreplaceable role to play for them, as their spiritual father. This description of the internal debate is by way of explanation as to why he so firmly believed he would be released from prison (:19) in order to visit them again (:26).

Paul clearly understood that the interval between death and resurrection at the Lord's coming plays no significant role in anything when it comes to our personal salvation. To depart this life in death was effectively to be with Christ- for the second coming would be the next conscious experience after death. That "with Christ" refers to being with Him at His return is made clear in Col. 3:3,4, a passage which has many points of contact with Phil. 1: "For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then with him you shall also be manifested in glory".

Another way of reading this language of internal debate about death is to consider that Paul may have written the letter when he was so ill that he had a choice of being able to "depart, and to be with Christ" or remain. Paul may have been so ill that he could give up his will to live if he chose, but struggled for their sake to keep alive. No wonder his mind went to the afflicted Job, to whom he alludes several times.

1:24 *Yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake-* Paul had the choice, at least hypothetically, as to whether he wanted to die and finish his probation; but he chose to stay alive, with all the temptations and spiritual pitfalls of human existence, for the sake of the first century believers. This was love indeed.

1:25 *And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and stay with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith-* Paul was confident that he had reasoned his way to the right decision in this hypothetical case regarding dying as a martyr or being released, and so he is confident that despite the machinations of some towards his death, he would be released. Hence the confident expectation of release in :19 and :20, and his certainty he would again visit the Philippians (:26). Indeed "stay with you all" could suggest Paul even envisaged retiring to Philippi as this was the church which seemed to be the most loyal to him. But it is in all an open question as to whether this is what happened; as discussed on :1, it is possible that this letter was written at the very end of Paul's life, and that he was executed soon afterwards. And if he was released, there is no evidence that he did revisit Philippi and significantly progress their faith. So we do feel that Paul is rather forcing and willing through his argument here, in a way we noted he tended to in his reasoning of 2 Corinthians.

1:26 *That your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again-* I suggested on :17 that some were preaching Christ out of love for Paul, as if they were pressuring for his release and by so doing were witnessing to the Lord Jesus. Perhaps this is the boasting he refers to. For his reasoning seems to be that their boasting of Paul will result in his presence with them; we noted on :19 that he believed their witness for him and the Lord Jesus would lead to his release.

1:27 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That, whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state- you standing fast in one spirit, with one mind together striving for the faith of the gospel-* Whether or not their efforts for his release from prison worked out or not, and whether he did in fact use his freedom to visit them, the most important thing was their spirituality. The good news of salvation in Christ was to elicit a manner of life in them. His great wish was that they should remain in the Spirit. The parallel between mind and spirit indicates that the gift of the one Spirit was essentially a state of mind. Because there is only one Spirit- that of the Lord Jesus- they therefore would have one mind. But whose mind? That of Jesus. This is not a call for uniformity of position on all

issues, but rather to be united by having the same one mind and spirit- that of Jesus. This theme will be developed at length in chapter 2.

Whoever really believes the doctrines of the One Faith and lives the life which they naturally bring forth, really will be saved. Therefore we will have a sense of true unity with our brethren who believe as we do, whatever human barriers there may be between us. Therefore "the Faith" is linked with unity between believers (Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27). We will live eternally together, and this must begin in life together now. It is inevitable that a certain amount of 'politics' intrude upon our ecclesial experience; one group wants this, another wants that; one sees things one way, another perceives things from a different viewpoint. But here again, the principles of the most basic Gospel must govern us. The Greek word for 'politics' does in fact occur in the New Testament.- when Paul says that our *politeuesthe* must be "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). The principles of the loving, saving, reconciling, patient Christ must work their way through even the politics that are inevitably part of life together.

The early church are held up as our example here: "Stand fast in *one spirit, with one mind* striving together for the faith of the Gospel". Doesn't that sound just like an allusion to the early ecclesia? The theme continues in 2:2: "Be likeminded, having the same love, being of *one accord*, of one mind". There's that phrase "one accord" again. It's hardly used outside the Acts, so we should read that like a signpost, saying 'Go back to the Acts!'. So Paul is saying: 'You believers must always remember the great spirit of "one accord" in the early ecclesia in Jerusalem. Let the early church be your example!'. There are a number of other allusions back to the early chapters of Acts. For example, 2:4: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others". Twice we read there in Acts of disregarding our own "things". Paul definitely has his eye on Acts 4:32: "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul (just as Paul spoke about in Phil. 2:2): neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own (cp. "his own things" in Phil. 2:4); but they had all things common". And then in 2:3 Paul warns against doing things "through vainglory". Doesn't that sound like an allusion to Ananias and Sapphira? Then he warns them in 2:14 "Do all things without murmurings and disputings". It can't be coincidental that in Acts 6:1,9 we read twice about there being murmurings and disputings in the early ecclesia. Phil. 2 describes the exaltation of Christ on his resurrection. It seems no accident that this is then described in the very words which the apostles so often used in their preaching in the early chapters of Acts. Thus in 2:9, "God has highly exalted him" is a reference to Peter's words: "Being by the right hand of God exalted... him has God exalted" (Acts 2:33; 5:33). The whole theme in Phil. 2 is of Christ suffering on the cross and then being exalted by the Father, and given the mighty Name. The very same language is used so often in Acts (2:9-11=Acts 2:36; 2:10= Acts 4:10; 3:6,16). When Paul exhorts us to hold forth "the word of life" (Phil. 2:16), he surely has his mind on the way the early preachers held forth "the words of this life" in Acts 5:20. We are to follow their spirit.

The unity of the Philippians is connected with their preaching of the Gospel. It was their unity which would be the greatest witness to the world. The way Simon the Zealot and Matthew the pro-Roman tax collector were all welded together within the 12 would have been an arresting display of unity in the Gospel, which cannot fail to have impressed first century Palestine. And it would have been so in the Antioch ecclesia too- the elders included Paul, the fiery ex-Orthodox rabbi; Manaen, one of the intimates of the Herod family; Barnabus, a Cypriot Levite who had owned land there to get around the Law's demands; Simeon the black man; Lucius from Cyrene, also in Africa. No wonder it was from this

ecclesia that the Gospel really spread outwards. When the early church showed that uncanny unity between Jew and Gentile, slave and master, they converted the world. And so would and could and do we. And yet when and where we are divided, the power of conversion is lost. This is why the Philippians were told to live lives appropriate to the Gospel they preached, and to 'contend as one man' for the Gospel (Phil. 1:27,30). Their united witness, according to John 17, would convert the world. But if they were disunited, that great salvation would not be shared as it could potentially be.

1:28 *And not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, and of your salvation- and that from God-* The "clear sign" is understood by Vine as a legal term, an indictment; as if our lives and situations are played out before the throne of Heaven and judged right now. Lightfoot connects it with the language of striving for the Gospel in :27, claiming that it refers to the sign given by a striving gladiator when he had vanquished his opponent. But all the same, the question arises as to what was the clear sign? Was it persecution, which was the basis of condemnation for their opponents but a proof of their salvation? It could be, but we can look deeper than that. The context of :27 is of having the spirit / mind of the Lord Jesus and remaining firm in faith. This was the victory of the spiritual gladiator. The clear sign of future salvation would then refer to the one mind / spirit; which connects with how the gift of the Spirit in our hearts is seen as the earnest or guarantee of our future salvation in 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5. Response to the Gospel is a condemnation of others whilst being the portent of our final salvation (2 Cor. 2:16- a savour of death to some, and life to others).

1:29 *Because to you it has been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer in his behalf-* They were not to be frightened / surprised [Gk. 'startled'] at persecution (:28). It goes with territory of being in Christ. If we are Him to this world, then we shall be treated as He was by this world. Difficulties are going to come. The parable of the sower sought to explain this; that some accept Christ but fall away once the inevitable persecution starts. Here too Paul has to warn against an attitude that we are required to simply "believe in Christ". If we are in Him, then we have been given, as a gift, to suffer with him. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. Baptism into His death and resurrection proclaims we are prepared for the process of dying with Him, so that we might live with Him.

By God's grace, the Lord tasted death *for* (Gk. *huper*) *every man*, as our representative: "in tasting death he should stand for all" (Heb. 2:9 NEB). In His death He experienced the essence of the life-struggle and death of every man. The fact the Lord did this *for us* means that we respond *for Him*. "To you it is given *in the behalf of* (Gk. *huper*) Christ, not only to believe on Him [in theory], but to suffer *for his sake* (Gk. *huper*)". He suffered *for us* as our representative, and we suffer *for Him* in response. This was and is the two-way imperative of the fact the Lord was our representative. He died *for all* that we should die to self and live *for Him* (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "His own self bare our sins [as our representative] in his own body [note the link " *our* sins" and "his *own* body"] that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24,25). We died with Him, there on His cross; and so His resurrection life is now ours. He is totally active for us now; His life now is *for us*, and as we live His life, we should be 100% *for Him* in our living. He gave His life *for us*, and we must lay down our lives *for Him* (1 Jn. 3:16). See on 2 Cor. 5:15.

1:30 *Having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me-* The conflict may refer to how the Philippians had been witnesses of Paul's beating and imprisonment in

Philippi for their sakes, and now they were hearing that again Paul was undergoing imprisonment for the Gospel, this time in Rome. But in essence, because of their connection in the Spirit, they were fellowshipping Paul's sufferings. Their experience of persecution was shared by him; it was in essence "the same conflict". He uses the same word *agon*, "conflict", in recalling the great conflict / agony he suffered in Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2). He is experiencing this in a different form in Rome, as they were in Philippi. In each case, they now in Philippi, Paul earlier in Philippi, Paul now in Rome... it was "the same conflict". The unity of the Spirit is thus brought about by experience in practice; and it is experience which unites. Mere intellectual theology tends to divide.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions-* The preceding chapter has spoken of the one mind and spirit which they had, and the unity of suffering experienced by them in Philippi and Paul in Rome. But the receipt of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit of Christ in the heart of every baptized believer, needs to be realized in practice. That one mind must be put on, and the fellowship of it experienced. "If there is any..." suggests Paul is quoting the great claims made about the Christian faith; and indeed they are true. But he is saying that the Spirit is not going to just zap people with spirituality; there must be moves from our side too. If there is any consolation of love- then we are to have the same love as the Lord has (:2). If there is fellowship from sharing the same one Spirit of Christ- then we are to be of one accord and mind with each other (:2). "Encouragement" and "consolation" translate words from the *parakleo* family, the very term used for the Comforter which is the Holy Spirit which shall be within us who believe. But we can receive that Spirit at conversion and yet not be spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Philippians are therefore being urged to live in practice as they were potentially enabled to by the Spirit. We noted on 1:8 that the very inward 'spleen' of Paul was filled with the Spirit of Christ, and he believed that was how it was with the Philippians; and therefore they had such close fellowship. But now he is arguing that if this is true, then they must act accordingly; for the same word is here translated "tender mercies".

2:2- see on 1:27.

*Make my joy full by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind-* As noted on :1, they were to think and be in practice how they potentially were. The one mind he goes on to define as the mind of Christ. This is the one mind, the point at which we are "like-minded". Paul exhorts preachers to be "with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel", and then goes on to define that "one mind" as the mind that was in Christ Jesus in His time of dying. Having outlined the mind of Christ at this time, Paul then returns to his theme of preaching, by saying that the Lord's death was so that each of us should be inspired to humbly confess him as Lord to the world (Phil. 1:27; 2:2,5,11).

2:3 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself-* In chapter 1, Paul notes that some preach Christ from the wrong motives. Although he rejoiced Christ was preached, he urges the Corinthians to not be wrongly motivated. "Conceit" translates *keno-doxia*, literally 'empty glorying'. The argument goes on to play with this idea by saying that the mind of the Lord Jesus on the cross emptied itself (:7 *kenoo*) of all human glory and thereby He received the highest glory. Seeking our own glory is not therefore having the mind of the crucified Christ. And "lowliness of mind" is the basic word used of how the Lord there "humiliated Himself" (:8), allowed Himself to be brought down, that He might be exalted in due time and not right away. For the believer, that means so realizing our own sins that we *hegeomai*, place others in a hegemony, higher than ourselves. The idea is not that we think others are better than us, for that would mean doing ourselves down in an unrealistic and psychologically unhealthy way. Rather is the nuance of meaning that in any hierarchy or hegemony, we consider ourselves on the lowest level. Paul was secure in himself, confident of his salvation, satisfied with the fight he had fought and the race he had run; but he also considered himself the least of the believers (Eph. 3:8) and the worst of sinners. We are all as the beggars in the parable, who quite undeservedly are invited to the banquet, and so should take the lowest seat- that they might be invited up to a higher seat in the hegemony or ranking when the Lord comes, and not now.

2:4 *Each of you not looking to his own things, but each of you to the things of others*- If we are to consider ourselves as appropriate only to the lowest station in God's household, we will be as a servant of all, the lowest of the slaves, just as the Lord was on the cross. We will as the lowest slave be looking to serve the "others" of :3 within the household. Perhaps Paul is thinking of the Lord's comment about how a slave will not think of his own things, preparing his own supper, but of preparing the supper for others (Lk. 17:7-9).

We should be ever "looking to" the best interests of others- the Greek word *skopos* is the one used in "telescope" or "microscope". Our focus must be upon what is their best interest spiritually. Not upon anything else. Condemning, belittling, comparing, labelling, insulting, condescending, being sarcastic... have absolutely no place in a life driven by this purpose. For we are to have the mind of the Lord as He died, which was so focused upon us and our needs. When we were so immature and only rarely ever seem to 'get it'.

If we are to live lives devoted to the rest of the brotherhood, we need a motivation more powerful than just steel will-power. The constant out-giving of the cross, in the face of the most studied rejection and lack of appreciation, can be the only motivation that time and again, without fail, will revive our flagging will. Paul paints a powerful picture of the Lord's progressive self-humbling in service to others, culminating in "the death of the cross"; and with this in mind, he asks us: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ...". The Mosaic command to give, every man according to the blessing with which God had blessed him (Dt. 16:17), is purposely similar in phrasing to the command to eat of the Passover lamb, every man according to his need; and to partake of the manna (cp. the Lord Jesus), every man according to his need (Ex. 12:4; 16:6,16). According to the desperation of our need, so we partake of Christ; and in response, according to our blessing, we give, in response to the grace of His giving.

2:5 *Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*- This is the "one mind" and 'like mind' which Paul has earlier asked us to have. The mind is the spirit; the gift of the Spirit of Christ enables us to have His mind or Spirit. And Paul now argues that the quintessence of the Lord's mind was seen in Him as He died. This is an extremely high calling- to have the mind which the Lord had as He died. The context of this passage must be carefully considered. Paul does not just start talking about Jesus 'out of the blue'. He refers to the mind of Jesus in Phil. 2:5. Back in Phil. 1:27 Paul starts to speak of the importance of our state of mind. This is developed in the early verses of chapter 2: "Being of one accord, of one mind... in lowliness of mind... look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2:2-5). Paul is therefore speaking of the importance of having a mind like that of Jesus, which is devoted to the humble service of others. The verses which follow are therefore commenting upon the humility of mind which Jesus demonstrated, rather than speaking of any change of nature. Just as Jesus was a servant, so earlier Paul had introduced himself with the same word (Phil. 1:1 cp. 2:7). The attitude of Jesus is set up as our example, and we are urged to join Paul in sharing it. We're not asked to change natures; we're asked to have the mind of Jesus- so that we may know the "fellowship of sharing in his [Christ's] sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10,11).

Trinitarian theology sees God's salvation of humanity as being on account of His supposed 'incarnation' in Christ, and His sending of the [supposedly] pre-existent Christ into the world. But the New Testament emphasis is upon the *death* of Christ, His victory within Himself and



subsequent resurrection, as the crucial means by which our redemption was enabled. And further, how He saved us through the cross and through His own self-debasement is held up as our very real example in passages like Phil. 2 and 2 Cor. 8:8-10. We are not pre-existent gods in Heaven awaiting an incarnation on earth. We are very real, human guys and gals. His pattern can mean nothing for us if it was all about saving others through submitting to some kind of 'incarnation'. But the Biblical emphasis makes His sufferings, death and victory in resurrection our very real pattern, so real that we are to be baptized into it (Rom. 6:3-5) and live according to this as a pattern for human life every moment.

2:6- see on 1 Cor. 15:45.

*Who, though being-* The Greek word translated "being" here does not mean 'being originally, from eternity'. Acts 7:55 speaks of Stephen "being full of the Holy Spirit". He was full of the Holy Spirit then and had been for some time before; but he had not always been full of it. Other examples will be found in Lk. 16:23; Acts 2:30; Gal. 2:14. Christ "being in the form of God" therefore just means that he was in God's form (mentally); it does not imply that he was in that form from the beginning of time.

*In the mental image of God-* Jesus was "in the form of God". That "form" (Greek *morphe*) cannot refer to essential nature is proved by Phil. 2:7 speaking of Christ taking on "the form of a servant". He had the form of God, but he took on the form of a servant. The essential nature of a servant is no different to that of any other man. In harmony with the context, we can safely interpret this as meaning that although Jesus was perfect, He had a totally God-like mind, yet He was willing to take on the demeanour of a servant. Some verses later Paul encourages us to become "conformable unto (Christ's) death" (Phil. 3:10). We are to share the *morphe*, the form of Christ which he showed in his death. This cannot mean that we are to share the nature which He had then, because we have human nature already. We do not have to change ourselves to have human nature, but we need to change our way of thinking, so that we can have the *morphe* or mental image which the Lord had in His death. The Greek word *morphe* means an image, impress or resemblance. Human beings can have a *morphe*. Gal. 4:19 speaks of "Christ (being) formed in" believers. Because He had a perfect character, a perfectly God-like way of thinking, the Lord Jesus was "in the form of God". Because of this, He did not consider equality with God "something to be grasped at". This totally disproves the theory that Jesus was God. Even according to the N.I.V. translation, the Lord did not for a moment entertain the idea of being equal with God; He knew that He was subject to God, and not co-equal with Him. There are many examples in the Greek Old Testament of the Greek word *morphe* being used to mean 'outward form' rather than 'essential nature'- e.g. Jud. 8:18 [men had the *morphe*, the outward appearance, of a king's sons]; Job 4:16; Is. 44:13 [a carpenter makes an idol in the *morphe* or outward appearance of a human being- but not in the very nature of a human being!]; Dan 3:19 [the king's *morphe* or appearance changed because he got angry; his essential nature remained the same]. And likewise in the Apocrypha: Tobit 1:13; Wis. 18:1; 4 Macc. 15:4. If Paul meant nature or essence he would have used the word *ousia* or *physis*- as he does in Gal. 2:16 where he speaks of "We who are Jews by nature [*physis*]...".

We should remember that Philippi was in Macedonia, it was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Alexander was some sort of hero there. He was held to be successful in his exploits because after conquering a people, he did not have a policy of ruling by suppression but instead made all attempts to befriend them by making himself a servant to the people. Alexander was perceived to have an *hypostasis* (the substantial quality) of both

master and servant. It seems that Paul may be making a conscious connection between the Lord Jesus, and Alexander the Great. But the Lord Jesus went so much further. He emptied Himself of all pride and became a servant to all. In our context, the point I take from this is that Alexander didn't change natures when he, the master, became a servant to his people; and the same is true of the Lord Jesus. His humiliation and self-deprecation was specifically upon the cross; and as such He is our example. We too are to have His spirit. We are unable to change natures; the challenge rather is to change our minds. Peter says the same, perhaps alluding to Paul's words here: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time".

*Did not consider grasping at being equal with God-* The essence of the temptation in Eden was to think that the tree of knowledge could bring salvation; it was an attempt to grasp at equality with God, according to Phil. 2, it was a vain belief that possession of knowledge / truth enables us to play God. And we, with our emphasis on the need for truth, for correct understanding, are especially prone to this major temptation. He did not conceive the equality with God with which He would be rewarded as "booty" (Gk.), something to be grasped for: instead, He concentrated on being a humble servant, working to bring about the salvation of others (Phil. 2). This sense of working for *God's* glory must really permeate our thinking. Vincent Taylor analyses Paul's hymn of praise to the Lord Jesus in Phil. 2:6-11 and concludes that it is an adaptation of a Jewish hymn which spoke of "the appearance of the Heavenly Man on earth". Paul was writing under inspiration, but it seems he purposefully adapted a Jewish hymn and applied it to Jesus- to indicate the status which should truly be ascribed to the Lord Jesus. See on Col. 1:15. The lowest of the 30 aeons, Sophia, "yielded to an ungovernable desire to apprehend [God's] nature". And Paul alludes to this in Phil. 2:6 by saying that Jesus by contrast didn't even consider apprehending God's nature, but instead made Himself a servant of all. As more and more is known of the literature and ideas which were extant in the first century, it becomes the more evident that Paul's writings are full of allusions to it- allusions which seek to deconstruct these ideas, replacing them with the true; and by doing so, presenting the Truth of the Gospel in the terms and language of the day, just as we seek to. See on Col. 2:9.

It has been shown that the hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 is alluding to various Gnostic myths about a redeemer, the son and image of the "highest God", who comes down to earth, hides himself as a man so as not to be recognized by demons, shares human sufferings, and then disappears to Heaven having redeemed them (Documented in Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology Of The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1955) p. 166. Bultmann showed that many of the 'difficult passages' in John have similar connections (*ibid* p. 175). I would argue that John likewise was alluding to these Gnostic [and other] redeemer myths in order to deconstruct them.). I suggest that these allusions are in order to deconstruct those myths. Paul's point is that the redemption of humanity was achieved by the human Jesus, through His death on the cross, and not through some nebulous mythical figure supposedly taking a trip to earth for a few years. The hymn also alludes to the many wrong ideas floating around Judaism at the time concerning Adam. Messiah was *not* Adam; Adam is compared and contrasted with Jesus in Phil. 2:6-11- he like Jesus was made in the image of God, yet he grasped at equality with God ("you will be like God", Gen. 3:5), which Jesus didn't do. The description of Jesus "being in the form of God" was therefore to highlight the similarities between Him and Adam, who was also made in the form of God. The choice Jesus faced was to die on the cross or not, and it is this choice which Phil. 2:6-11 glorifies. The context of Phil. 2 shows that it was in this that He was and is our abiding example in the daily choices we face. If His choice was merely to come to earth

or stay in Heaven, then there is nothing much to praise Him for and He is not our example in this at all.

2:7 *But poured himself out*- Christ “made himself of no reputation”, or “emptied himself” (R.V.), alluding to the prophecy of his crucifixion in Is. 53:12: “He poured out his soul unto death”. He “took upon himself the form (demeanour) of a servant” by his servant-like attitude to his followers (Jn. 13:14), demonstrated supremely by his death on the cross (Mt. 20:28). Is. 52:14 prophesied concerning Christ’s sufferings that on the cross “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”. This progressive humbling of himself “unto death, even the death of the cross” was something which occurred during his life and death, not at his birth. We have shown the context of this passage to relate to the mind of Jesus, the humility of which is being held up to us as an example to copy. These verses must therefore speak of Jesus’ life on earth, in our human nature, and how he humbled himself, despite having a mind totally in tune with God, to consider our needs.

*Taking the mental attitude of a servant, and was the made just the same as all ordinary men*-Trinitarians please note that Phil. 2 was written by Paul with his mind on the *death* not *birth* of Christ, as their false theology requires (Phil. 2:7 = Mt. 10:28; and note the connections with Is. 53). The mixture of the Divine and human in the Lord Jesus is what makes Him so compelling and motivational. He was like us in that He had our nature and temptations; and yet despite that, He was different from us in that He didn't sin. Phil. 2 explains how on the cross, the Lord Jesus was so supremely "in the likeness of men"; and yet the same 'suffering servant' prophecy which Phil. 2 alludes to also makes the point that on the cross, "his appearance was so unlike the sons of Adam" (Is. 52:14). There was something both human and non-human in His manifestation of the Father upon the cross. Never before nor since has such supreme God-likeness, 'Divinity' , if you like, been displayed in such an extremely human form- a naked, weak, mortal man in His final death throes.

The Lord *taking upon himself* the form of a servant is to be connected with how at the Last Supper, He *took* (s.w.) a towel and girded Himself for service (Jn. 13:4). The connection between the Last Supper and Phil. 2, which describes the Lord's death on the cross, would suggest that the Lord's washing the disciples' feet was an epitome of His whole sacrifice on the cross. The passage describing the Last Supper begins with the statement that the Lord "loved us unto the end" (Jn. 13:1). This is an evident description of the cross itself; and yet His service of His followers at the Last Supper was therefore an epitome of the cross. As that Supper was "prepared" (Mt. 26:17,19), so the Lord on the cross "prepared" a place for us in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1 s.w.). As the observing disciples didn't understand what the Lord was doing by washing their feet, so they didn't understand the way to the cross (Jn. 13:7 cp. 36). There is thus a parallel between the feet washing and His death. But in both cases, the Lord Jesus promised them that there was coming a time when they would understand His washing of their feet; and then they would know the way to the cross, and follow Him. John describes the Lord *laying aside* His clothes in order to wash the feet of His followers with the same word he frequently employs to describe how Christ of His own volition *laid down* His life on the cross, as an act of the will (Jn. 10:11,15,17,18); and how later His sacrificed body was *laid aside* (19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). As the Lord laid Himself down for us, epitomized by that deft laying aside of His clothes, so, John reasons, we must likewise purposefully lay down our lives for our brethren (1 Jn. 3:16). As He did at the last supper, so He bids us do for each other. John uses the same word for Christ's "garments" in his records of both the last supper and the crucifixion (13:4,12 cp. 19:23). It could be noted that the man at the supper without garments was seen by the Lord as a symbol of the unworthy (Mt. 22:11 cp. Lk. 14:16,17). He

humbled Himself to the level of a sinner; He created the story of the sinful man who could not lift up His eyes to Heaven to illustrate what He meant by a man humbling himself so that he might be exalted (Lk. 18:14). And He humbled Himself (Phil. 2:9), He took upon Himself the form of a servant and of a sinner, both in the last supper and the final crucifixion which it epitomized. As the Lord Jesus laid aside His garments and then washed the disciples' feet with only a towel around His waist, so at the crucifixion He laid aside His clothes and perhaps with a like nakedness, served us unto the end: the betrayers and the indifferent and the cautiously believing alike. Throughout the record of the Last Supper, there is ample evidence on the Lord's awareness of Judas' betrayal (Jn. 13:10,11,18,21,25). The account in 1 Cor. 11:23 likewise stresses how the Supper was performed with the Lord's full awareness of Judas' betrayal. It is perhaps therefore inevitable that we in some ways struggle with the problems of rejection, of betrayal, of being misunderstood and not appreciated by our brethren. For these were all essential parts of the Lord's passion, which He asks us to share with Him.

The Lord in His time of dying was and is the definition of self-humbling: "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Mt 23:11-12). Being a servant to others is the 'abasing' or [s.w.] humbling that will lead to exaltation. The Lord became a servant of all in His death (Mk. 10: 44,45). These things are brought together in Phil. 2:5-11, where we are invited to have nothing less than the mind of Christ in the self-humbling of the cross: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who...thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name...". The seven stages of the Lord's self-humiliation are matched by seven stages of the Father's exaltation of Him (read on in Phil. 2 and note them!). And this pattern is to be ours. This mind is to be in us. Because of this, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other... look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil 2:3-4). Every time we look on the things of others rather than just our own, not seeking our own glory but esteeming others enough to see them as worth suffering for...we have achieved the spirit of the cross, we have reached self-humbling. As the Lord died for Himself and others, so we are to look on the things of our salvation *as well as* those of others. This must be the foundation principle of all aspirations to preach or strengthen our brethren: esteeming others, thinking they are worth the effort, seeking their salvation.

"In the likeness of man... in human form" doesn't mean that the Lord Jesus only appeared as a man, when He was in fact something else. Rather the emphasis is upon the fact that He truly was like us. Going deeper, F.F. Bruce has suggested that these terms "represent alternative Greek renderings of the Aramaic phrase *kebar-'enash* ("like a son of man") in Daniel 7:13" (F.F. Bruce, *Paul And Jesus* (London: S.P.C.K., 1977) p. 77).

2:8- see on Heb. 2:3.

*And being perceived as a normal man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death-* "Became obedient" suggests that in His mind the Lord worked down and down, until He came to the final humility of the cross. Likewise Heb. 2:9 describes how Christ was "made lower" than Angels- the same Greek word is translated "decrease". He was decreased lower

than the Angels "by the suffering of death"; perhaps because previously the Angels had been subject to Him, but in His time of dying he was 'decreased' to a lower position?

He wasn't a God who came down to us and became human; rather is He the ordinary, very human guy who rose up to become the Man with the face of God, ascended the huge distance to Heaven, and received the very nature of God. It's actually the very opposite to what human theology has supposed, fearful as they were of what the pattern of this Man meant for them. The pre-existent view of Jesus makes Him some kind of Divine comet which came to earth, very briefly, and then sped off again, to return at the second coming. Instead we see a man from amongst men, arising to Divine status, and opening a way for us His brethren to share His victory; and coming back to establish His eternal Kingdom with us on this earth, His earth, where He came from and had His human roots. Take a passage much beloved of Trinitarians, Phil. 2. We read that Jesus was found (*heuretheis*) in fashion (*schemati*) as a man, and He humiliated Himself (*tapeinoseos*), and thereby was exalted. But in the next chapter, Paul speaks of *himself* in that very language. He speaks of how he, too, would be "found" (*heuretho*) con-formed to the example of Jesus in His death, and would have his body of humiliation (*tapeinoseos*) changed into one like that of Jesus, "the body of his glory". We aren't asked to follow the pattern or *schema* of a supposed incarnation of a God as man. We're asked to follow in the path of the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, in His path to glory. Repeatedly, we are promised that *His* glory is what we will ultimately share, at the end of our path of humiliation and sharing in His cross (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; Jn. 17:22,24). The more we think about it, the idea of Jesus as a Divine comet sent to earth chimes in with some of the most popular movies. Think of *Superman* and *Star Trek*- the hero descends to earth in order to save us. Or take the "Lone Ranger" type Westerns, set in some wicked, sinful, hopeless town in the [mythical] American West... and in rides the outsider, the heroic cowboy, and redeems the situation. The huge success of these kinds of story lines suggests that we like to think we are powerless to change, that our situation is hopeless and beyond human salvation... an outsider is needed to save us, as we look on as spectators, feeling mere pawns in a cosmic drama. And this may explain the attraction of trinitarianism and a Divine comet-like Christ who hit earth for 33 years. It breeds painless spectator religion... go to church, hear the Preacher, watch the show, come home and spend another rainy Sunday afternoon wondering quite what to do with your life. Yet the idea of a *human* Saviour, one of us rising up above our own humanity to save us... this demands so much more of us, for it implies that we're not mere spectators at the show, but rather can really get involved ourselves.

*Even the death of the cross*- Our Lord Jesus seems to have gone through seven stages of progressive humbling of himself, rungs up (down) the ladder, before He was *made* perfect (complete) by His sufferings (Heb. 2:10); which equate with the seven aspects of His glorification which this hymn goes on to list. The climax of His humiliation was being obedient not only to death, but even to the death of the cross. In our Lord's progression towards that ultimate height, of laying down his life for others, we see our ultimate prototype. He stepped progressively downwards in the flesh, that He might climb upwards in the Spirit. So Philippians 2:6-9 describes the progressive humiliation of the Lord Jesus on the cross (not in His birth, as Trinitarian theology has mistakenly supposed. Note the allusions back to Isaiah 53). *There* He was supremely "in the form of God", but notwithstanding this He took even further the form of a servant. In that blood and spittle covered humility and service, we see the very form and essence of God. My understanding of Phil. 2:8 is that being in the form of God, being the Son of God and having equality with God are parallel statements. The Lord understood being 'equal with God' as some kind of idiom for His Divine Sonship (Jn. 5:18; 10:33; 19:7). He was in God's form, as His Son, and He therefore didn't consider equality

with God something to be snatched; He had it already, in that He was the Son of God. In other words, "He considered it not robbery to be equal with God" is to be read as a description of the exaltedness of His position as Son of God; not as meaning that it never even occurred to Him to try to be equal with God. He was equal with God in the sense that He and the Father were one, spiritually, and on account of the fact that Jesus was the begotten Son of the Father. This interpretation depends upon understanding 'being equal with God' as an idiom for being the Son of God; it doesn't, of course, mean that 'Jesus is God' in the Trinitarian sense. There, on the cross, the Lord Jesus was the form of God, equal with God in that sense, the only begotten Son. And yet on the cross His form was marred more than that of any man, He finally had no form that could be desired (Is. 52:14; 53:2). And yet this was the form of God. *He* was contorted and marred more than ever, there was no beauty in *Him* that men should desire Him, in those hours in which His Son suffered there. The Lord Jesus then had the form of God, although in His mind He had taken the form of a servant. The Lord made Himself a servant in His mind; He looked not on His own things, but on those of others (Phil. 2:4,7). This is the context of Philippians 2; that we should have the *mind* of Christ, who disregarded His own status as Son of God and humbled Himself, even to death on the cross, so that we might share His status. His example really is ours, Paul is saying (which precludes this passage describing any 'incarnation' at the birth of Christ). The Lord had spoken about the crucial need for a man to humble himself if he is to be exalted (Lk. 14:11); and this is evidently in Paul's mind when he writes of Christ humbling Himself and then being exalted. He saw that the Lord lived out on the cross what He had asked of us all. If that example must be ours, we can't quit just because we feel rejected and misunderstood and not appreciated by our brethren. *For this is the very essence of the cross we are asked to share.* See on Jn. 19:19.

Trinitarian theology uses Phil. 2 to justify their 'V-pattern' view of Christ- that He was high in glory in Heaven, then descended briefly to earth, and then returned to high glory in Heaven. All such talk of a V-pattern, albeit on the lips of eloquent churchmen and theologians, is frankly a serious missing of the point. Phil. 2- and the whole teaching of Jesus- is that the true greatness is in humility, the servant of all becomes Lord of all. The pinnacle, the zenith, the acme- was in the humility of the cross. The New Testament presents the death of Christ as His final victory, the springboard to a J-curve growth, involving even literal ascent into Heaven. What seemed to be defeat turned out to be the ultimate victory.

2:9 *Wherefore God highly exalted him*- The Lord Jesus "humbled himself", and was later "highly exalted" (Phil. 2:9), practising His earlier teaching that he who would humble himself and take the lowest seat at the meal would be exalted higher (Mt. 23:11,12; Lk. 14:10,11). The Lord Jesus at the Last Supper humbled Himself from the seat of honour which He had and took not only the lowest seat, but even lower than that: He washed their feet as the servant who didn't even have a place at the meal. And both James and Peter saw the Lord's humbling Himself at that supper and His subsequent exaltation as a direct pattern for us to copy (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). Paul takes things one stage even further. He speaks of how he humbled himself, so that *his hopelessly weak and ungrateful brethren* might be exalted (2 Cor. 11:7). He is evidently alluding to the Gospel passages which speak of how we must humble ourselves so that *we* may be exalted (Mt. 23:11,12; Lk. 14:10,11). But Paul sees *his* exaltation, which his humbling would enable, as being identical to *theirs*. He doesn't say: 'I humbled myself so that I may be exalted'. He speaks of how he humbled himself so that *they* might be exalted.

We can understand 2 Cor. 8:9 in this same context- the choice of Jesus to 'become poor' for our sakes is held up as an example to the Corinthians, to inspire their financial giving. The

choice is whether or not to live out the cross in our lives- rather than deciding whether or not to come down from Heaven to earth. Jesus gave up the 'riches' of His relationship with God, calling Him "abba", to the 'poverty' of the cross, in saying "My God, Why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). Poverty was associated with crucifixion, rather than with a God coming from Heaven to earth: "Riches buy off judgment, and the poor are condemned to the cross" (Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p. 60 note 15. ). It is Christ's cross and resurrection, and not this supposed 'incarnation', which is repeatedly emphasized as being the source of our salvation (Rom. 5:15,21; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; Eph. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). This is a far cry from the teaching of Irenaeus, one of the so-called 'church fathers', that Christ "attached man to God by his own incarnation" (*Against Heresies* 5.1.1). The New Testament emphasis is that we were reconciled to God by the *death* of His Son. The whole of Phil. 2 is about the Lord's attitude in His *death* and not at His *birth*. It was *after* His birth but *before* His death that the Lord could talk of his freedom of decision as to whether or not to lay down His life (Jn. 10:18)- and it is this decision which Phil. 2:9-11 is glorifying.

*And gave to him the name which is above every name*- These verses are taken to mean that Jesus was God, but at his birth he became a man. It is significant that this is almost the only passage which can be brought forward to explain away the 'missing link' in Trinitarian reasoning - how Jesus transferred himself from being God in Heaven to being a baby in Mary's womb. Yet "God also has highly exalted" Jesus "and given him a name" (:9) shows that Jesus did not exalt himself - God did it. It follows that he was not in a state of being exalted before God did this to him, at his resurrection.

Jesus carried the name of Yahweh when on earth- He came in the Father's Name (Jn. 5:43) and did and said many things which previously had been specific to Yahweh. Thus He walked on the water and stilled the waves as Yahweh was said to do (Ps. 107:29); yet Phil. 2:9 implies He was given the Name at His ascension: "God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him the Name which is above every name". Does this suggest there are degrees of God manifestation and degrees of bearing His Name?

Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this.

Phil. 2:9 in the AV says that the Lord Jesus has a name "above" every name. Yet His Name surely cannot be "above" that of Yahweh. The Greek for "above" is usually translated "for [the sake of]", and I would suggest we read Phil. 2:9 as saying that the name of Jesus is for [the sake of] every name, in that every man and woman was potentially comprehended in His all-representative sacrifice. By baptism into the name of Jesus, they confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There was and is no other name given under Heaven by which men can be saved; "every name" under the whole Heaven must take on the name of Jesus in baptism. This is why Acts associates His exaltation (Acts 2:33; 5:31) and His new name (Acts 2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,18,30; 5:40) with an appeal for men and women to be baptized into that Name. Realizing the meaning of the Name of Jesus and the height of His exaltation meant that they realized how "all men" could have their part in a sacrifice which represented "all men". And thus they were motivated to preach to "all men". And thus Paul's

whole preaching ministry was a bearing of the Name of Jesus before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Christ as our representative means that He is the representative of the church as a whole, the entire body of persons who are “in Christ”, we each have some unique contribution to His body upon earth. This is why He suffered *so* much- so that He found a fellow feeling true with every tempted mind which is in Him. In society and the workplace, nobody is irreplaceable, no cog can somehow not be replicated albeit in a slightly different form. But the part we have to play in Him is unique and in one sense irreplaceable by anyone else. He has been highly exalted and given a name *huper* every name, that each of us should bow our knees before Him (Phil. 2:9). *Huper* here is usually translated “above”, but perhaps the idea is rather that through His representative sufferings, the Lord has now a Name *for* every one of our names / personalities / histories / characters. He tasted death *for* every man (Heb. 2:9), and we are therefore to be *for* Him and all that are in Him. His whole suffering *for* us was to leave us an example, that we should follow in His steps to the cross (1 Pet. 2:21). Forasmuch as He suffered *for* us, we are to arm ourselves likewise with that same mind (1 Pet. 4:1- this is repeating the teaching and reasoning of Phil. 2, that we should have the same mind in us which was in Jesus at the time of His death). As He laid down His life *for* us, so we should lay down our lives *for* our brethren (1 Jn. 3:16)- in all the myriad of large and small sacrifices this requires, from phone calls through thoughtful comments and cash generosity to literal death *huper* others if that’s what’s required. His whole priestly, reconciliatory work is to be ours. Not that *we* are Saviours of the world in ourselves, but we are to do this work *huper* Him and *huper* this world.

2:10 *That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth-* These words are alluding to Is. 45:23,24: “...unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength”. We all find humility difficult. But before the height of His exaltation, a height which came as a result of the depth of the degradation of the cross, we should bow our knees in an unfeigned humility and realization of our sinfulness, and thankful recognition of the fact that through Him we are counted righteous. The reference in Phil. 2:10,11 to every knee bowing and every tongue confessing the Lordship of Jesus is perhaps a reference back to the great commission to take Him to all peoples. That day when every knee would bow to the Lord Jesus will be the result of the outcome of His exaltation. A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

In Phil. 2:10, the Lord Jesus is said to have been given power over all beings in heaven, earth and the nether-world. The Romans understood the world to be divided into these three spheres of the cosmos. But this passage is based upon Is. 45:23, which says that God has total supremacy – and this has been granted to His Son. As I understand it, Paul is reasoning that if God is all powerful, and if that power has been given to the Lord Jesus, then whatever cosmology there is around, e.g. belief in a nether-world, well, in that case, Jesus has all power over that as well. The same argument applies to demons. If they exist, well the essence is that they are well and truly under the Lord’s control and aren’t essentially powerful. Paul doesn’t so much ridicule the idea of a nether-world, rather he takes the view, as Jesus did in His dealings with the demon issue, that God’s power is so great that their existence is effectively not an issue.

2:11 *And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father-* The whole process of Christ’s humbling of himself and subsequent exaltation by God was to be “to the glory of God the Father”. God the Father is not, therefore, co-equal with the



Son. Is. 45:20-24 speaks of how “all the ends of the earth” will look unto “a just God and a Saviour [Jesus]” and be saved- evident reference back to the brazen serpent lifted up for salvation. The result of this is that to Him “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess” his moral failures, rejoicing that “in the Lord have I righteousness and strength...in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”. These words are quoted in Phil. 2:11 in description of the believer’s response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before the Lord at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord’s cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must simply allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

<b>Is. 45:23-25 cp. Rom. 14:11,12, about our reaction at the judgment seat</b>	<b>Phil. 2, about our reaction to the cross of Christ today</b>
:23 every knee shall bow	:10 every knee shall bow
:23 every tongue shall swear	:11 every tongue shall confess
:24 in the Lord	:11 Jesus Christ is Lord
:25 shall glory	:11 to the glory of God

Clearly our response to the cross is a foretaste of our response to the judgment experience.

2:12 *So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence-* The fact they needed exhortation to be obedient when Paul was not present with them is another hint that Paul's warm commendations of them in chapter 1 were how he wished to see things, or because he as it were shared the Lord's approach of imputing righteousness. We noted the same about his "confidence" in the Corinthians, when he goes on to be far less than confident in them (see on 2 Cor. 7:16).

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling-* This exhortation is in the light of his preceding poem about the Lord's total focus upon us on the cross. This should motivate us to respond; His efforts for our salvation should elicit similar from us. The "fear and trembling" would more speak of our deep respect for what He has done for us, rather than any idea of our being petrified as to the outcome of judgment day. The parable of the unjust steward makes the point that in the Kingdom, the faithful will be given by Christ "the true riches... that which is your (very) own" (Lk. 16:12). The reward given will to some degree be totally personal. Each works out his *own* salvation, such as it will be (Phil. 2:12)- not in the sense of achieving it by works, but rather that the sort of spirituality we develop now will be the essential person we are in the eternity of God's Kingdom.

Moses' last speeches are often referred to by Paul here (e.g. Phil. 2:15 = Dt. 32:5; Phil. 2:28 = Dt. 31:16; Phil. 2:12 = Dt. 31:8,27,29). This could be a hint that the suggestion on 1:1 was correct- that Paul wrote to the Philippians at the very end of his life, facing death in prison.

2:13 *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work, for His good pleasure-* Christianity is meant to be lived in a community. Indeed, God has created salvation in a community, in the body of Christ. “Work out your [plural] salvation... for it is God who is working in your midst [as a body]” (Phil. 2:12,13). But our working out (:12) is in response

to God's working within us, in our hearts. The initiative is His. He works in us to work [s.w.] His will- this is fair emphasis on the fact that God is really at work within us, in our hearts. And the will of God is that none of His should perish, but we should all be saved. Eph. 1:11 likewise connects God's will with His working in us. Clearly enough, this working is by the Spirit, which works [s.w.] in each believer (1 Cor. 12:6,11; Gal. 3:5). Eph. 3:18-20 states that this working [s.w.] is through the gift of the Spirit "in the inner man". But we are to respond to that working of God- just as Paul laboured according to God's working which worked mightily within him (Col. 1:29).

2:14 *Do all things without complaining and questionings*- In the preceding light of the Lord's death for us with a mind totally focused upon our redemption, reflecting the will of God for our salvation, and His continued working within us to that end... we should be focused on far higher things than complaining and academic questions and the striving which accompanies them. Our way of life will make an inevitable witness to the world. Simply not moaning and groaning in the daily round will be a holding out of the word of life to those with whom we trudge through this life (Phil. 2:14 cp. 16). The allusion is to how Israel were saved with such great salvation- but murmured and questioned instead of rejoicing in it (1 Cor. 10:10).

2:15- see on Mt. 3:11; Jn. 3:18.

*That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; among whom you shine as lights in the world-* "Blameless and harmless" alludes to Lk. 1:6 (as does 1 Thess. 3:13). We are to have the serene spirituality, all down the years, of Zacharias and Elizabeth. "Become..." continues the idea that the Philippians had been given the Spirit, but had much growth left. Lights shining is alluding to the Septuagint of Dan. 12:3, concerning the saints in the Kingdom shining as the stars. Once it is appreciated that we are now in the spiritual heavenlies (Eph. 2:6) then this makes sense. And Paul was using language which Moses had earlier used of how apostate Israel were the "crooked and perverse generation" (Dt. 32:5). The point of his allusion may have been that despite the darkness and apostasy of the surrounding brotherhood, we must all the same shine with the constancy of the stars. Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Thus Moses prophesied of an apostate Israel: "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV). These very words are used by Paul here regarding the Gentile world. Apostate Israel are the pagan world; and therefore the rejected at the day of judgment will be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). Likewise Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Israel were to be made like "the tope of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

2:16 *Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not*

*run in vain or laboured in vain*- The context of shining as lights in the world encourages me to translate "holding fast" as in AV, "holding forth". The Lord Jesus was the light of the world; and by doing "all things without murmuring and disputing... blameless and harmless [as the Lamb]... *you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*" [i.e. the Lord Jesus; Phil. 2:14-16]. Paul felt he would have "run in vain" if his converts didn't in their turn preach. The quality of our converts affects the nature of our final reward- for Paul elsewhere uses the image of a race as a symbol for the Christian life which ends in the victory of the Kingdom. But whether he won or lost, he felt that the whole thing would be meaningless if they did not spiritually develop. If as suggested on 1:1 and 2:12,17,23; 3:13,20; 4:1,13 Paul was writing this at around the time he wrote 2 Tim. 4, his comment there that he had run a good race in 2 Tim. 4:7 therefore meant that he was satisfied with the fruit of his labours amongst his converts; for here in 2:16 he says that his race would have been run in vain if they were not spiritually fruitful. And yet all in Asia left him, and so many of his converts clearly fell away, according to how he writes to the Galatians and Corinthians. But some did not, especially some at Philippi, and so he considered his race to have been successful. We too can follow his example and see the glass half full rather than half empty. Paul's joy at the last day was to be a function of the efforts he made in this very brief life for others. And this is the thought which gives eternal significance to our patient teaching and involvement with others who are on the path to the Kingdom. Even a career helping unbelievers will not have the same eternal result; for those folks shall be eternally dead. But life lived for others in Christ shall have this eternal joy of fulfilment. Paul, like us, therefore had a personal investment in the spiritual success of those in his life.

2:17- see on 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

*Yes, and if I am poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all*- As noted on :16, the nature of our eternal experience will be a reflection of what we have sacrificed for others in this life. Paul saw his life as the drink offering which gave acceptability and completeness to the sacrifice of those for whom he laboured. The believer's death is a pouring out of blood on the altar (Phil. 2:17 Gk; Rev. 6:9), which is language highly appropriate to the Lord's death. It follows from this that the death of one in Christ is the pinnacle of their spiritual maturity, as the Lord's death was the pinnacle of His. It is a spiritual victory, more than the temporal victory of the flesh which it can appear. The only other time we encounter the Greek word for 'poured out as a drink offering' is in 2 Tim. 4:6, where Paul felt he was ready to be poured out. This is another reason for thinking that Philippians was written at the very end of Paul's life; see on 1:1; 2:12,16,23.

Paul says that he saw his brethren as an altar, upon which he was being offered up as a sacrifice. He saw his brethren as the means by which he could serve God. And for us too, the community of believers, the ecclesia, be they strong or weak, a pain in the neck or wonderful encouragement, are simply the method God has chosen for us to offer ourselves to Him. Running around for others, caring of others, patient sensitivity with our brethren... these are but the altar provided by God, upon which we can serve Him and give ourselves to Him.

"I am glad and rejoice" is in the present tense; Paul has said that their final acceptance will be his eternal joy at the last day (:16). But we are to live the Kingdom life now, for in this sense we "have eternal life" in that we are living the kind of life which we shall eternally live. Paul felt the Philippians were on track to the Kingdom; if the Lord came at that moment, they would be accepted. And so he rejoiced for them right now.

2:18 *And in the same manner you also should be glad and rejoice with me-* As explained on :16 and :17, Paul would rejoice eternally at the last day because of their salvation; but they were on track for salvation, and so Paul rejoiced even now. And he asks them to share that joy, as if they were in some unnecessary doubt about their salvation. There will be both now and eternally a mutuality in our joy. Joy in its true sense is not selfish; to rejoice regarding issues only pertinent to ourselves would surely be selfish.

2:19 *But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may also be cheered by news of you-* Paul's joy in their salvation was because he believed they would be saved, just as we ought to believe that others far away from us shall be saved. But he intended to send Timothy to them to actually know the real state of their faith, so that his joy could be based on reality rather than blind faith that they were strong in the Lord and on track for salvation. Paul's "hope in the Lord Jesus" indicates that he saw the Lord Jesus as the One who would decide whether or not Timothy's visit would happen. The Lord is indeed so very active, permitting or blocking various things in our lives, and certainly not sitting idle in Heaven leaving us to our own devices. As noted on 1:1, if this sending of Timothy to Philippi was at the time of 2 Timothy 4, this was indeed a sacrifice. For Paul felt abandoned and forgotten by all, and had begged Timothy to come to him in prison; and this letter to the Philippians was written by Paul and Timothy together whilst Paul was imprisoned (1:1).

2:20 *For I have no one likeminded, who will truly care for your welfare-* Timothy's visit was so as to return to Paul with good news about their spiritual state (:19), but this would perhaps be a result of Timothy's true care for their spiritual welfare. The "care" of all the churches daily pressed upon Paul, and had nobody else who had this same mind as he did apart from Timothy.

2:21- see on 1 Cor. 13:5.

*For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ-* Paul realized more clearly the apostasy of the brotherhood; "all men seek their own" he commented, in conscious allusion to his earlier words that such self-seeking should not be the case amongst the ecclesia (1 Cor. 10:24). Paul was clearly disappointed in how little care there was for the spiritual welfare of others; he felt Timothy was the only one who 'got it'. And yet he is so positive about his brethren, whilst seeing their deep weaknesses. His 'cup half full' approach was therefore not the result of some naive, Alice in wonderland optimism. It was the more notable because he was not blind to the weaknesses of his brethren. He really believed what he wrote about the imputation of righteousness.

2:22 *But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served as an apprentice with me in declaring the gospel-* Paul has been explaining that he feels Timothy is the only one who really 'got it' about caring for the spiritual welfare of others (:20,21). But he partly attributes this to how Paul had spiritually nurtured him, to the point that although Paul had not baptized Timothy, he considered him his spiritual son.

2:23 *Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me-* This would suggest that Paul was at a critical point in his imprisonment, as noted on chapter 1. He wanted Timothy with him if it came to having to die. Paul is here apparently more realistic about his situation; in 1:19 he had written of being confident of his release from prison and

his continued living in order to strengthen the Philippians. But now he is more realistic, recognizing that he doesn't actually know how things will turn out. There is no record of Paul revisiting Philippi, and so we can assume that perhaps things did not turn out as Paul confidently hoped, and he was executed. In this case this letter to the Philippians was written at the end of Paul's life. His great theme of joy was because he indeed was finishing his race with joy (Acts 20:24).

*2:24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall come shortly-* In 1:19-23 Paul speaks as if his desire to not die but continue living had been accepted by the Lord, and so that was how it would be. But it was a matter of trust / faith, although Paul speaks of what he prayed for as if he had actually received it. As soon as his case was decided positively, Paul would send Timothy to them, and then himself follow shortly afterwards. These were his plans, but there is no record of them coming true.

2:25- see on 1 Thess. 3:1.

*But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need-* The "But..." suggests that Paul knew there would still be some time before his case was decided, and so he had sent Epaphroditus to them, even though this brother was the one who was arranging for Paul's care whilst incarcerated. It was largely over to relatives and friends to provide for the imprisoned, and so this was a huge sacrifice. Especially as Paul writes in 2 Tim. 4 as if he lacked even a cloak and writing equipment. We observe that the church in Rome, who he had felt so warmly towards in his letter to them, were not providing for him. This was indeed a sad way for such a great missionary to meet his end- ignored or avoided by his local brethren. We may consider Paul as the leading light of the early church, but that is not how he was perceived at the time. All Asia turned away from him. He describes Epaphroditus as the one "that ministered to my need". The Greek for "ministered" is used in the LXX concerning the priests (and Joshua) ministering to Moses in practical things; one of several examples of where Paul saw himself as Moses.

2:26- see on Mk. 14:36.

*Since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick-* His longing for them was the longing Paul had for them (1:8 s.w.). Like Timothy, he shared Paul's care for them. This longing for other believers is described with this same word in Rom. 1:11; 2 Cor. 9:14; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4. It was a feature of the believers, and we must ask whether we have that today. For we live in an age of isolationism as never before. And in this connection we note how news of a brother's sickness in Rome travelled as far as Philippi, and they were so concerned about the brother that on his recovery, he wished to go visit them- in an age when international travel was generally unheard of. This was the kind of unity the Lord's death enabled, and which he foresaw in Jn. 17 as alone having the power to convert the world. We live in the time of communication revolution, whereby we can have unparalleled contact with each other. This ought to be powerfully harnessed in the interests of the kind of unity which we have a taste of here.

*2:27 For indeed he was sick and near to death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow-* Again we see the connection

between brethren. The loss of Epaphroditus would have been a loss to Paul too. Losing him would have been a sorrow and loss- and yet Paul was prepared to lose him by sending him to visit the Philippians. His recovery from the face of death was being used for the Philippians, and in 1:19-23 Paul has said that this is how he wishes to use his salvation from the death penalty and the limitations of imprisonment. In this too we see the connection of spirit between these two believers. And the same connections in the Spirit are forged continually in the Lord's body today, if we are open to them. Losing Epaphroditus in death would have been another "sorrow" for Paul; and yet when he recovered, Paul wilfully lost him again by sending him to the Philippians. And this resulted in sorrow for Paul (:28), which would be compensated for if Epaphroditus were to find the Philippians as strong in faith in reality as Paul imputed to them by faith in their status before the Lord.

*2:28 Therefore I have sent him more diligently, so that when you see him again, you may rejoice and that I may be less sorrowful-* Their joy would reduce Paul's sorrow, because their joy was his joy; see on :27. 2 Cor. 2:3 speaks in similar terms of the joy of the Corinthians being Paul's joy. This is the ideal of fellowship in the Spirit- our spirits are connected if we both have the Spirit of Christ. If we are focused only upon our own feelings then we will never achieve the joy which comes from caring for others' spiritual progress.

*2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy and hold such in honour-* That Paul had to ask them to "receive him in the Lord" could be another hint that the spirituality of the Philippians was not as great as he had praised them for in chapter 1. We receive each other on the basis that we are "in the Lord"; to refuse to accept those who are "in the Lord" but who fail to meet some document based fellowship requirement is wrong indeed. Epaphroditus was to be honoured by them because of his labour in the Lord (:30). This respect of others for their labours is all part of the general picture the New Testament gives, of the true church being a place of respect and praise of its members.

*2:30 Because for the work of Christ he came near to death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me-* We have just read that Epaphroditus was near to death due to sickness. It could be that this sickness referred to some physical result of persecution he had endured in an incident in which he risked his life to supply Paul's needs. Perhaps his identification with the imprisoned Paul and attempts to provide for him had led to him being so physically beaten up that he was sick and nearly died. Their ministry to Paul was "lacking"; and yet Paul speaks so positively of their great love for him in chapter 1. He later praises them for sending him material help when he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16), and they had also sent gifts for Paul with Epaphroditus when he had previously visited them (Phil. 4:18). In Phil. 4:10 he writes of how their care for him had "revived", and excuses their lack of service to him as not having had the opportunity to do so: "But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your thought for me. I know you did indeed take thought for me, but you lacked opportunity". The rebuke here in 2:30 stands as it does; but Paul positively seeks to excuse them, whilst not turning a blind eye. Seeing the cup half full is no call to naivety or pretending not to notice things; for that is no basis for legitimate, authentic relationship. Just as Paul praises the Corinthians for their love of him and then reveals their lack of love and respect for him, so with the Philippians Paul is so positive about their care and love for him, and yet is not blind to the fact that their lack of service led to Epaphroditus nearly losing his life. This is not merely seeing the cup half full rather than half

empty; this is the rightful praise of others for what devotion they do show, even if it is lacking, insufficient (Gk.), more than half empty. Paul's attitude was surely a reflection of how the Father sees us His wayward children, focusing with joy upon what little obedience and devotion we do show rather than overly lamenting 'that which is lacking in [our] service toward Him'.

"The work of Christ" was done by caring for Paul in prison, and like Paul, Epaphroditus did not consider his life worth holding on to if it meant not doing "the work of Christ". He like Paul considered that "to live is Christ"; and like Paul he did not count his life dear to himself for the sake of the ministry (Acts 20:24). "The work of Christ" may not mean simply 'work done for Christ', for in :12,13 we have read of how God works through our works. So "the work of Christ" would then refer to the work done by Christ through us. And we like Paul and Epaphroditus should be so absorbed in being Him and letting Him work through us, that the continuation of our lives is not significant; for after resurrection we shall eternally continue this way of being.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. For me to repeat the same things to you as I did before is not tedious, indeed it only confirms their certainty-* "Finally" sounds as if the letter is being concluded, but Paul is only half way through the letter as we now have it. He seems to get carried away now [in the Spirit] in warning against false teachers and Judaism. Paul says he is repeating what he has said before, and the fact he is doing so prompted by the Spirit inspiring him "only confirms" the reality of the problem. He may have written these things before in an unrecorded letter, or perhaps he is reminding them of the warnings he gave them whilst present with them. He feels he has to make these warnings against legalism because he wants them to "rejoice in the Lord", and legalism takes away the joy of salvation by grace on account of the Lord's work.

3:2 *As so I say again: Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers-* "Dogs" were unclean animals; to call religious Jewish people workers of evil, when they considered themselves full of good works, and unclean body cutters [an allusion to pagan idolatry] was extreme language. Indeed "dogs" could refer to the male prostitutes of the idol temples. This was how Paul saw the Judaists- their legalism was a form of the crudest idolatry.

*Beware of the mutilators!-* "Look out for those dogs... who do evil... who cut the body" (NET). If this is merely a reference to circumcision only, it would contradict Paul's tolerant attitude towards those who in their immaturity still practiced the rite. He wasn't so passionately against circumcision as such; his reference is to those who divide the body of Christ through insisting upon such things. This cutting of the body is so easily done, whenever discord is sown. The language used by the Spirit here is some of the strongest anywhere in the New Testament. Sowing division is *so* seriously wrong.

3:3 *For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh-* Circumcision was understood by Paul to refer to what is done to the heart of a person after they have been baptized: "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29). The inward man is where the Spirit operates (Eph. 3:16), strengthening us with God's psychological power. And here in Phil. 3:3, Paul again associates spiritual circumcision with the work of the Spirit; for it is the Spirit which empowers us to cut off the flesh. It is this work of the Spirit which is the seal or token of the fact we are in covenant with God and are His true Israel. Human willpower cannot cut off the flesh; those who seek justification by steel willed obedience are placing "confidence in the flesh" rather than in God's operation through the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we glory or (as AV) rejoice in Christ. This connects with the opening thought in 3:1, that we are to rejoice in the Lord Jesus rather than go the way of Judaism. There can be no joy for those who try to cut off the flesh by the flesh. And they have no sense of rejoicing or glorying in the Messiah Jesus if they effectively do not need Him to cut off their flesh. Circumcision is something done to another person when that person is immature and powerless. This is exactly what God does to the new born convert to Christ, through sending forth the Spirit of His Son into their heart to cut off the flesh (Gal. 4:6).

3:4 *Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If any other man thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more-* Paul is not boasting here, but rather saying that even the best qualifications of Judaism were irrelevant to salvation. Phil. 3:4-11 reads rather like an encomium [see on Gal. 1:10], with Paul writing of how he was "circumcised on the eighth



day... of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). But then he as it were alters course half way through, as if to say 'Nah, just kiddin'. He speaks of his "confidence in the flesh", his former "gains", as being now "loss for Christ"; he's almost sarcastic about his humanly impressive encomium. For he says all this in the context of the preceding chapter, Phil. 2, where he has shown that the only true path of glory lays after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, who had to die the death of the cross in order to be highly exalted. A similar sarcasm about his humanly impressive encomium is to be found at more length in 2 Cor. 11:21-12:10.

*3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of Israelite stock, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As touching the law, a Pharisee-* Benjamin was in the middle of Israel, the tribe of their first king, and the only son of Jacob born in the promised land, indeed he was Jacob's favourite son; and the only tribe faithful to Judah. The battle cry of Israel was "After thee, O Benjamin". Paul was a pure blooded Jew with no question of intermarriage in his recent ancestors, a Hebrew of Hebrews in that his Hebrew parents had not become Hellenised; and belonging to the strictest school of interpretation of the Law (Acts 26:5).

3:6- see on Phil. 1:10; 1 Tim. 1:16.

*As touching zeal, persecuting the church. As touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless-* Judaism at the time apparently considered persecuting Christians as a sign of high qualification as a Jew. In saying that he persecuted the Christian church "zealously" he was alluding to the way that Phinehas is described as 'zealous' for the way in which he murdered an apostate Jew together with a Gentile who was leading him to sin (Num. 25). Note that the Jews in Palestine had no power to give anyone the death sentence, as witnessed not only by the record of the trial of Jesus but Josephus too (*Antiquities* 20.202; *BJ* 2.117; 6.302). Paul was a criminal murderer; and he had justified it by saying that he was the 1st Century Phinehas. Ps. 106:30 had commented upon the murder performed by Phinehas, that his zeal "was accounted to him for righteousness". This sets the background for the converted Paul's huge emphasis upon the fact that *faith* in Jesus is what is "reckoned for righteousness", and it is in *this* way that God "justifies the unGodly" (Rom. 4:3-5; 5:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul is inviting us to see ourselves as him- passionately obsessed with going about our justification the *wrong* way, and having to come to the *huge* realization that righteousness is *imputed* to us by our faith in the work of Jesus. Paul saw himself as learning the lesson of Job. Phil. 3 has several allusions back to him- like Job, Paul suffered "the loss of all things" (:8), although he considered himself previously "blameless" (:6). He threw away his own righteousness, that he might be justified by grace and know thereby the essence of Christ (:9), just as Job did.

Paul's technical obedience to the Law was "found blameless"; but it was only "found" that way by men, externally; for in Rom. 7:15-25 he admits to gross and continued disobedience to the Law in his spirit. If we seek justification before God by legal obedience to the Law, we shall be "found sinners" (Gal. 2:17). We can only be found truly blameless before God if He imputes righteousness to us through our being in Christ, and we are "found in Him" (:9).

*3:7 However, what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ-* Paul saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. "Gain" could imply financial gain; but Paul has recently used the word in saying that "to die is gain" (1:21). This is the radical

inversion of values which there is in Christ; secular gain becomes spiritual loss, and secular loss becomes spiritual gain. Paul alludes to this idea when he says that the shipwreck on the way to Italy was gaining from a loss (Acts 27:21 uses the same words). It could well be that he had reflected on that incident, the casting overboard of secular wealth with his own hands, and it now influenced his later thought now imprisoned in Rome.

3:8- see on Lk. 9:23-25.

*Yes indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ-* Paul truly believed, "doubtless" (AV), without even temporal doubt, that the loss of secular things was gain. We tend to doubt that sometimes; waves of worry about our financial future and longer term security swamp us at times. But Paul was without doubt about his position. The "all things" which Paul lost were largely psychological values and standing amongst men; although the words for gain and loss can have a distinct financial sense too. And he likely lost much of his family, seeing he was from a line of proud Pharisees. The power of Paul's teaching about singleness is backed up by his personal situation. As a member of the Council who condemned Stephen, he would have had to be married. An unmarried Orthodox Jew would have been a contradiction in terms at that time. And yet he is evidently single in his Christian ministry. It seems fairly certain that his wife either died or left him at the time of his conversion, probably taking the children with her. If this is so, it gives extra poignancy to his comment that he had suffered the loss of all things for the sake of his conversion. The chances are that he thought and wrote that with a difficult glance back to that Jerusalem girl, the toddlers he'd never seen again, the life and infinite possibilities of what might have been... And it gives another angle on his description of his converts as his children.

Paul "counted" the things of this life as loss "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ" and His sufferings, so that he would gain the resurrection. Moses likewise rejected the world for the same two reasons: the excellency of sharing the reproach of Christ, and secondly from respect unto the recompense of the reward, at the resurrection. He uses the same word translated "esteemed" when we read of how Moses "esteemed" the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Heb. 11:26). The "reproach" of Christ is the same word used concerning Christ being "reviled" on the cross. Paul felt that the intellectual heights of knowing the mind of our crucified Lord, of being able to enter into the riches that are even now in the mind of Christ (Col. 2:3) more than compensated for his sacrifice of all material things in this life. And Moses was the same; he esteemed the "reproach of Christ", the knowledge that he was sharing the sufferings of his future saviour and would thereby enter the Kingdom which he would make possible, as far greater than the possibility of being King of Egypt. He knew that he was sharing the sufferings of Christ, and that therefore he would be rewarded. It was this knowledge which motivated him in rejecting the riches of Egypt.

Paul could have been such a high flyer; he profited (materially, the Greek could imply) in the Jews' religion above any one else (Gal. 1:14). But he resigned it all. He wrote some majestic words which ought to become the goal of every one of us: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss *for the*

*excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7,8). Why did he do it? Not just because he wanted to get salvation. "For the *excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*". For the *excellency* of who Christ is, as *my Lord*, he did it. Grasping the wonder of our salvation in the Lord Jesus should do even more than motivate us to write out a cheque; Paul not only gave, but he counted the things of this life as *dung* (and that's just what it means); he *despised* material advantage. This is a stage beyond just being generous.

3:9 *And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own which is of the law, but which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness which is from God by faith-* As noted on :6, it matters not if we are "found" blameless before men; it is our standing in Christ which matters. Righteousness "of the law" is not God's righteousness, but 'our own'. A feeling good about ourselves because we were technically obedient to some laws. Righteousness which comes from God has to be imputed, or given- on account of our faith in Christ. This is absolutely what Paul taught the Romans and he is repeating it here.

3:10- see on Acts 9:16.

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death-* The full knowledge of the Lord Jesus will be when we know materially the "power of His resurrection". Eternity will be about relationship with Him, and that is why eternity begins now insofar as we have relationship with Him. Knowing Him, therefore, refers to relationship rather than technical knowledge of theological propositions concerning Him.

The centrality of the cross is reflected in the way in which to live a life crucified with Jesus is set up as the ultimate aim of the Christian life. We are "becoming conformed [coming towards His *morphe*, His form and appearance] unto his death" (Phil. 3:10 RV). Slowly, our lives are working out towards that end; this is intended by God to be the final position we all reach by the time of our death or the Lord's return; that we will in some vague, feint way, have become conformed to the mind of Jesus as He was at *His* death. For as chapter 2 has explained, His *morphe* there is to be our pattern. His Spirit is to be ours. And through His resurrection, we are given that Spirit to displace our natural spirit (Jn. 7:39). The process of transformation by the gift of the new spirit, of "becoming conformed", is ongoing now and continues until our last breath. Old age is thereby given meaning once we grasp this. And then finally at the Lord's return, our body will be "conformed" (same Greek word) to His in a physical sense (Phil. 3:21). And this is why we should count all things loss in order to come to know Christ (Phil. 3:8)- which the context suggests we are to read as knowing the spirit of His death. This is why His cross, the mind He had at His death, is so vital and central to our lives.

3:11 *If by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead-* As noted on :10, the idea is that it is through this ongoing conforming to His *morphe* our mind / spirit, we shall become fully like Him at the resurrection from the dead. This is the "means" by which we shall share His resurrection in literal terms. Paul clearly speaks of "the resurrection" as meaning 'the resurrection to eternal life'. Some will indeed be raised, condemned, and shall die "the second death". But Paul is focused on our resurrection being that of the Lord, and so he speaks of "the resurrection" as meaning 'the resurrection to life'. Paul uses the same word for "attain" in writing that through the work of the Spirit we shall come to 'attain' the full knowledge of the Lord Jesus and become like Him, a "perfect man", fully sharing His spiritual stature (Eph.

4:13). This shall finally happen at the transformation of resurrection; for "we shall be changed", not just physically, but into Him in the fullness of all that means. Note that Paul here uses the same ideas of attaining to a 'perfect' state (:12) and knowing the Lord Jesus (:10).

3:12- see on Acts 18:18; 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me-* As explained on :11, the final attainment of perfection will be at the resurrection. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect", alluding to the Lord's bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. Yet we must compare this with "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect..." (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is 'perfect', and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not "already perfect", he admitted. We are counted as if we are in Christ, as if we are Him; but we are to live like that in practice. In a marvellous statement of our mutuality with the Lord, we are to lay hold on what we have been laid hold of for; and what is in view is the final perfection of body and spirit which shall be achieved at the resurrection to life. We have been seized (Gk.), laid hold of, for salvation. The grip is tight, and only by our wilfully wriggling out of it will the Lord not achieve His intention with us.

3:13 *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own yet. But one thing I do, forgetting the past and looking forward to those things which are ahead-* Paul twice stresses that he does not consider himself to have arrived at the "perfected" state (:12). Perhaps this was in response to slander that he considered himself perfect. "Forgetting the past" doesn't mean to delete past events from our memory banks- because that is not within our power to do. And Paul talks freely about his awful past, he had not obliterated memories. So Paul presumably means that we are not to wallow in past failure. The certainty of what is ahead means we will focus on that; the glass is not only half full rather than half empty, but more than half full. We admit we have not yet attained perfection, but this doesn't mean we are to allow the past to exist as a fountain of constant regret. We are to look forward in sure hope to the things ahead- which is to know Christ, to be perfectly and fully like Him through the resurrection to life (:10,11,14). Paul sees this hope as being "ahead". He looks forward to it without any doubt as to whether it shall be true for him; because 'hope' means a confident assurance that what we hope for we shall certainly receive. It is not a mere 'hoping for the best'. But "looking forward" is literally 'reaching forth', and connects with the image of the runner which will be used in :14. The idea is of the athlete stretching forth head and body towards the finishing line. Paul felt that the end of his race was very near- another indication that he wrote this at the very end of his life, when he felt he had all but finished his race (2 Tim. 4:7). See on 2:16. Here he speaks as if he is but centimetres away from the tape and is reaching forward to touch it.

3:14- see on 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

*I press on toward the goal, to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus-* The Greek for "goal" is literally 'the line'; Adam Clarke's commentary gives examples of its usage like this in contemporary literature. As noted on :13, Paul is reaching forth towards the finishing

line, just centimetres away. The "prize" is to be as the Lord Jesus (:10,11,14). This is the essence of our future salvation and eternity; the Abrahamic land promises are incidental to this. Eternity will be about knowing Him, and the location of that relationship is not much emphasized in the New Testament. It is a high or heavenly calling in that to be called to be like Him is the highest calling, the greatest end point of the journey, which could be imagined.

3:15 *Let us therefore, as many as are mature, be thus decided; and if in anything you are otherwise decided, this also shall God reveal to you-* "Mature" or "perfect" (s.w.) is the state which Paul says we have not yet attained (:12). But we are counted as perfect by being in Christ. "Decided" is literally "minded" (AV). Paul repeatedly brings everything back to the state of our hearts, how we think, and whether we are letting the Spirit operate within us or not. Those who have received the Spirit will be thinking of the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5 s.w.). The "mind" we should have is that of the Lord Jesus, and that is a gift, of His Spirit (Rom. 15:5). The same word has been used in 2:2,5 of how we should have the mind or spirit of Christ in His time of dying on the cross. In the immediate context, the "mind" we should have is one of pressing toward the goal or finishing line of final and total identity with the Lord Jesus. But a mindset is an outlook which incorporates many aspects of thinking, attitude and behaviour. In some things we will be out of step with the total mind of Christ; the work of the Spirit is to transform us towards His image in every way. And so in those things or aspects wherein we are 'otherwise minded', the Spirit will reveal these areas to us. We think of how the Lord used the same word in commenting that the Father, rather than the unaided mental strength of the flesh, had "revealed" the Lord to Peter (Mt. 16:17). The Father both hides and reveals things to people (Lk. 10:21); and He does all things by the Spirit. The arm of the Lord has to be revealed to men (Jn. 12:38). 1 Cor. 2:10 is clear as to the connection between the Spirit and God's 'revealing' things to believers: "God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit" (also Eph. 3:5). God revealed His Son *within* Paul (Gal. 1:16). Stage by stage, aspect by aspect, those areas of our thinking and being which are not of the spirit of Christ will be revealed to us, so that we might move towards that total transformation into Christ which shall be at the last day.

3:16 *For now, according to that understanding unto which we have attained, by that same rule let us walk-* As noted on :15, we are on a journey towards the full mind of Christ within us. But we are not yet perfect (:12), aspects of the Lord's mind are still being revealed to us (:15); but we are to live according to what we do currently understand. This conception of each believer being on a journey is important in enabling us to live together in the church, being at different stages on the journey. We cannot expect another to have grasped what has been revealed to us; we have to be patient, recognizing that full completeness of understanding and Christ-mindedness will only come at His return. It has been observed of Paul here: "In Phil. 3 he concludes a fundamental statement of his own Christian conviction by commending his opinion: 'So let those of us who are mature think in this way. And if in any way you think differently, this too will God reveal to you. Only we must stand by that conclusion which we have already reached' (3:15,16). That is: I am sure that mine is a correct, mature, Christian view, and I believe that in God's time, you will in the end share it. But what matters is that you honestly maintain and live by the position you have at present reached". "Rule" translates *kanon*, a line or boundary. And yet we will each have different lines or boundaries. It is this question of drawing lines and establishing boundaries which tends to divide believers, especially once they are written down as 'canon', as documents such as statements of faith and definitions of behaviour. All this is an attempt to impose the

understanding or maturity of one upon another. We are to each individually walk according to the *kanon* which we have come to understand, realizing that we will likely have other aspects revealed to us as the Spirit transforms us towards full understanding or knowing of the Lord Jesus (:15). We simply cannot impose our *kanon* upon another. The fact the wider church has spoken of 'canon law' is the tragic opposite of what Paul is teaching here.

3:17 *Brothers, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern-* The example in view may specifically refer to the attitude expressed in the notes on :16. They were to be 'co-followers', bound together by a common attempt to walk as Paul did. The 'walking' in view is surely that just spoken of in :16, of walking according to our present state of understanding of the Lord Jesus. Paul's tolerance of others, of meeting them where they stand and going further with them, is to be our pattern. And yet it is also clear from 1 Tim. 1:16 that Paul saw himself as "a Christ appointed model" (Robert Roberts).

3:18 *For many walk, of whom I told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ-* The 'walking' is that of :16, walking according to our current understanding of the mind of Christ, and open to being taught further of Him (see on :15). Those who did not walk like that, in the context of this chapter, were the legalistic Judaizers. Legalism requires that all jump the same bar; the idea of each individual being on a personalized journey, being progressively led by the Spirit ever closer towards the full mind of Christ, is all anathema to legalism. Such Judaizing requires that each have an identical understanding and position at the same moment. Growth is thereby disallowed. And Paul wept tears on the parchment, as it were, because he saw that such attitudes were robbing the cross of Christ of its power in men.

The cross of Christ is personified here as if to show that the Lord's whole being and life was crystallized in His cross. He could take the bread and wine with the comment that *right then* His body was being broken and His blood shed (note the present tenses).

We can be active *enemies* of the Lord's cross unless we carry it, no matter how soporific and unaggressive our lifestyles may be.

3:19 *Whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things-* The Judaizers in view (see on :18) were not actually bringing people closer to God by their insistence upon a common obedience to the same set of legislation. They were glorying in shameful things, and worshipped their own sensual desires as a god. Again, Paul brings it all down to the state of mind, whether we have the Lord's Spirit or not. And they were minding or thinking of *earthly* things; for the *heavenly* calling is to think with the mind / Spirit of the Lord who is now in Heaven (see on :14). We noted on :2 what extreme language Paul uses of the Judaizers. By teaching obedience to a few rules, they were allowing shameful behaviour to be glorified, and sensual desires in other areas to become a god to people. This is why we have noted time and again in expounding Paul's letters that Judaism was so attractive to newly converted Gentile Christians, who didn't want to leave behind the sensuality and shameful behaviour they had once enjoyed. Their "end", *telos*, is in contrast to the end or perfection / maturity (*teleios*) of the Spirit filled believer, which is to be immortalized with the mind of Christ at His return. But the end of legalism and these Judaizers at the Lord's return would be destruction; the same word is used of how Jews justified in their own minds by the Law are destined to "destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The 'enemies' of the Philippians of 1:28 had advance notice of their "destruction" (s.w.); and these opponents were therefore the Judaizers who are here referred to. The Jewish Christians who

were drawing back from Christ, rather than reaching forward unto Him (3:13,14), were drawing back unto destruction (Heb. 10:39 s.w.). Peter uses the same word about the end of the Judaizers in 2 Pet. 2:1,2,3.

3:20- see on Mt. 6:10.

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ-* When Paul speaks of redemption, he alludes to the practice of manumission, whereby a slave could be redeemed by his master and given the breathtaking gift of the much coveted Roman citizenship. Thus there were slaves who actually became Roman citizens. Hence here he invites all of us to see ourselves as a citizen of a Heavenly state (Phil. 3:20). We learn from Acts 22:26 that Paul was a Roman citizen from birth. The question therefore arises as to how they obtained citizenship. It would not have been through army service, because they were observant Jews (Phil. 3:5) and Jews didn't serve in the army. "The most common origin of this status for Jews outside Palestine was the manumission of Jewish slaves by masters who were themselves Roman citizens. In this case the citizenship was acquired... after one or two generations" [Simon Legasse, 'Paul's pre-Christian career' in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Book Of Acts* Vol. 4 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995) p. 372.]. So it seems Paul's father may have been 'redeemed' by manumission. And yet he uses the very language of manumission about all who are redeemed and freed in Christ. Roman citizenship was the most coveted thing in the Roman empire. Phil. 3:20 claims that we *all* have the coveted citizenship of the Kingdom / empire of Heaven. The Judaizers were minding earthly things (:19); but our minds should be full of Heavenly things. We are pressing towards the goal of being made fully like the Lord Jesus (:10,14), and this pressing towards that is spoken of here as eagerly awaiting the second coming. Rom. 8:23 uses the same word for "eagerly wait" in describing how we who have the spirit / mind of Christ therefore and thereby eagerly await the redemption / manumission of our bodies. And Paul is to speak of this in :21. It is by or on account of the Spirit that we "eagerly await" the Lord's coming (Gal. 5:5). The Spirit is progressively at work in us, transforming us into His mind- and so due to that work, the work of our lives and hearts, we eagerly await the moment when we shall be fully changed into His image. This is why all who eagerly look for His coming on this spiritual basis shall be saved (Heb. 9:28; 2 Tim. 4:8). We note the connection of thought with 2 Tim. 4:8, written by Paul apparently at the end of his life in Rome: "From this time forward there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me alone, but also to all those that have loved his appearing". This would be further reason for thinking that Philippians and 2 Timothy were written at around the same time, at the end of Paul's life and imprisonment in Rome. See on 2:16.

3:21 *Who will transform our lowly body-* The link between our mortality and humility is brought out in Paul's description of our present state as being "the body of our humiliation" (Phil. 3:21 RV). Believing we are mortal ought to be a humbling thing. The fact we lose faculties and memory, needing to be cared for by others, is humbling. But it is built into our human experience purposefully, because God's whole game plan with us is to progressively humble us, to bring us down, so that He might exalt us in due time (2:2,5). We must go with the program and not resist it, humbling ourselves under His humbling hand that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6).

*That it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself-* There is a clear parallel in Rom. 8:11: "But if the Spirit

of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies- through His Spirit that dwells in you". The gift of the Spirit given at baptism is the means whereby God is "working" within us. That gift is the guarantee of our eternal salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The transforming work of the Spirit is leading us through processes which will come to their final term in our body being transformed into the form of His glorified body, at His return. Bit by bit, every part of our lives is being subdued to Him through the internal work of the Spirit. This is the huge significance of our death; that is the point at which we will have been humiliated and subdued unto Him. As noted on 2:2-5, we are called to have the *morphe* of the mind of the Lord Jesus, especially His *morphe* in His time of dying. This will be revealed in more physical terms at the second coming by our bodies being "conformed" to His body. This is the end intention of the entire working of the Spirit in transforming our minds now.



## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, my beloved, stand firm in the Lord-* This longing for each other in Christ was how Paul opened the letter (1:8); and see on 2:26. The joy of the Kingdom will therefore be far greater for those who longed for their brethren, than for they who went off into spiritual isolation from others, seeing only the issues that made them differ rather than what they had in common. There will be differences between us, but we are united by what we have in common in Christ. This again is a case of Paul seeing the cup half full rather than half empty. Paul assumed that at this moment in time, his brethren were in Christ and would be accepted in God's eternal Kingdom at the Lord's return. For to think any other way is to judge / condemn in a way we are unqualified to do. But his earnest desire was that they should "stand firm in the Lord", just as the Lord in John's Gospel speaks of "abiding" in Him. Their abiding in the Lord would mean that Paul's joy and crown in the Kingdom was them. The nature of his eternity was therefore bound up in their endurance in the faith. Our attitude to the endurance or stumbling of others simply cannot be to shrug the shoulders. In 2 Tim. 4:8 Paul at the end of his life wrote from prison that he looked forward to receiving "the crown" (2 Tim. 4:8). This would be another indication that Philippians was written around the time of 2 Timothy, at the end of Paul's life. See on 2:16. But that "crown" was the immortality of his brethren for whom he had laboured (1 Thess. 2:19). This may be why Peter uses the same image in saying that faithful pastors will receive a crown at the last day (1 Pet. 5:4).

4:2- see on 1 Cor. 14:34.

*I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord-* This repeats the earlier appeals to have the same mind, that of the Lord Jesus (2:2,5). The appeal is not simply that they should have the same mind about the issues dividing them, but to have the same mind which is "in the Lord" Jesus. Whatever the differences between these two sisters (:3 "these women"), the fundamental issue was that they were not of the mind of the Lord Jesus. We will never have the same mind over many issues; but we can each be devoted to the replication of the mind of Jesus within us, and this of itself will bring about the unity of the Spirit.

4:3- see on Mt. 11:29; Eph. 1:5.

*Yes, I urge you also, true companion, help these women, for they laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also-* The women are Euodia and Syntyche (:2); although as noted on :2 they were not fully of the mind of Christ, yet they laboured with Paul in the work of the Gospel. As explained on 3:15 and :16, we do not fully have the mind of Christ and it is progressively revealed to us where we fail to have it. But this doesn't mean that we cannot work for the Lord or be accepted by Him as we are. We note that again "the gospel" is put for "the work of the Gospel", because the Gospel of itself elicits labour for it. The "help" required from the undefined "true companion" was presumably to help these women to have the mind of Christ, so that they would be united. The anonymity may have been to avoid naming someone in a document for reasons of avoiding persecution; or it could be that *synzugos* should be read as proper noun, the name of a person, and it should just be transliterated as that. Or it could refer to Epaphroditus. Paul clearly saw those women as just as much his fellow workers as men like Clement; we see here an example of how Paul was so far ahead of his time in considering man and woman equal in Christ, and the work of the Gospel equally open to women as well as men.

*And the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life-* Perhaps the idea is that these other fellow workers were already dead, asleep in Christ, and assured of salvation. Heb. 12:23 speak of those who had died faithful as "written in heaven". Our names are written already in that book, but can be blotted out from it (Rev. 3:5; Ex. 32:32). Salvation is assured for each baptized believer, but we can lose it if we do not stand fast (:1). All Paul's fellow workers were written in the book of life. And so the feuding sisters of :2 were also written in the book of life, for they were also fellow workers. Despite their division between each other and lack of the complete mind of Christ (see on :2). This is a comfort when we consider the immaturity of our brethren.

*4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say: Rejoice!*- Such joy is only possible if we are confident of our future salvation; that our names are written in the book of life (:3). If the Gospel is perceived not so much as good news as a list of theological tenets we must believe, then there will be little joy. Faith is not the same as understanding theology; it is faith in the good news that truly I shall be saved because I am in Christ and counted as Him. This is why the call to rejoice is predicated upon being "in the Lord". That status is constant, and so our rejoicing likewise is to be "always", at all times. If indeed Paul is writing this facing death (see on 1:1; 2:16), his repeated focus upon joy is wonderful (3:1). He was indeed achieving his aim of finishing his race with joy (Acts 20:24).

*4:5 Let your gentle attitude be known to all men. The Lord is at hand-* The appeal to be gentle is perhaps in the context of the fierce dispute between the two sisters of :2. There was a particular need for this to change because they were involved in the work of Gospel proclamation (:3), and disunity between believers is the biggest disadvantage for the Gospel. The 'making known to all men' is because "the Lord is at hand". We should preach especially in the last days, knowing that a witness must be made to all nations before the Lord comes; and Phil. 4:5 seems to imply that just because "the Lord is at hand" we should let our "moderation" [RVmg. "gentleness"] be known unto all men" in the hard world of the last days. "The Lord is at hand" is also how Paul signs off his letter in 1 Cor. 16:22, although he uses the Aramaic equivalent of this term: "Maranatha".

However, it is possible to understand "at hand" as meaning near in space rather than near in time. The appeal for gentleness would then be based around the fact that the Lord is present with us, and in His close presence we should be always gentle. In support of this we note that the same Greek phrase is used in the LXX of Ps. 119:151 "You are near, O Lord".

Forbearance and tolerance are to be characteristic of our attitude to others (Eph. 4:2; Phil. 4:5). Paul was aware that on some matters, brethren can quite honestly hold different points of view (Rom. 14:5,6). But there is a difference between tolerance and indifference. The tolerance which is the fruit of the spirit is something hard to cultivate, and it can only spring from love. It's not that we think something doesn't matter... but rather that in sympathy with the other person, we seek to understand why the other person is thinking and behaving as they do. There is some truth in the saying that to know all is to forgive all. And when false doctrine does have to be challenged, the truth must be spoken *in love* (Eph. 4:15). Opponents are to be corrected "with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:23-25; 1 Pet. 3:15). It is all too easy, knowing the truth as we do, to win the argument but lose the person. And so often I have been guilty of this.

*4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God-* This surely alludes to the six occurrences of the same

word in Mt. 6:25-34. But here Paul explains how concretely we can "take no thought" for our lives. It is by praying consciously for every little thing that you need in secular life, e.g. daily bread. It can be that we take the exhortation to "be careful for nothing" as meaning that we are intended to live a care-free life. But the sentence goes on: "but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God", and a few verses later we read of how the Philippians were "careful" to support Paul's ministry in practice (Phil. 4:6,10). The idea is surely that we should have no anxiety or care about the things of this life- and the world in which we live is increasingly preoccupied with the daily issues of existence. The same Greek word for "careful" or "anxious" (RV) is repeatedly used by the Lord in the context of saying we should *not* be anxious (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34)- but rather, we should be anxious to serve and hear the Lord in practice. We must "be careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:8), "care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:25), "care" for the state of others (Phil. 2:20). So the NT teaching is that we should not have the anxious care about our daily existence which characterizes the world, but rather, should translate that into a life of anxiety for *others*. See on Lk. 10:42.

Prayer should be "with thanksgiving". Any request we make known to God should be framed within deep gratitude for what He has already done for us. Paul perhaps realized the tendency to make prayer just a list of requests when he commanded his Philippians: "In every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God". This is what prayer is all about; an opening up of life before God, not specific requests; a conscious casting of our care upon Him (1 Pet. 5 :7). The believers of the parable told their Lord of the ungrateful behaviour of their brother (Mt. 18:31)- they brought the situation before Him, without asking specifically for something to be done.

*4:7 And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus-* The peace of God fills the mind simply as a result of making our requests known. Praying alone in the room, kneeling, maybe at the bedside, pressing your little nose into that mattress as you concentrate your thoughts and requests; the very experience of this close communion will *of itself* enable you to unbend your legs and rise up a new man. But "peace" Biblically refers to peace with God on the basis of having been forgiven. This is the wonderful atmosphere in which we are to live daily life, and which guards our thinking. That peace passes all definition or "understanding" expressed in words. This guarding or keeping of our minds is due to God's action, through the Spirit. We are "kept [s.w. "guard"] by the power of God" (1 Pet. 1:5).

*4:8 Finally brothers-* This is the second "Finally..." (3:1). We get the feeling that Paul is writing in a flow of consciousness, albeit under Divine inspiration. I have commented much more about this in discussing the apparent contradictions within Paul's arguments in 2 Corinthians 7-9.

*Whatever things are true, whatever things are honourable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things-* Again Paul is focusing upon where our thoughts are. We are to have the mind or spirit of Christ, and in practice this means making a conscious effort to think on spiritual things. If we are to achieve spiritual mindedness, we need to surround ourselves with positive influences- Bible verses on the walls, regular Bible reading, not filling our minds with the trash which passes for entertainment; and cultivate a culture of gratitude and appreciation for all in our lives. Too

much of our lives can so easily be spent going over the past, reliving old hurts- when our mental space should be taken up with positive spiritual things.

*4:9 The things which you both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do-* Ours isn't just a religion like anyone else's; it is *real*, creative life. There is congruence between belief and action, an honest admission of our humanity, just as there was then, and this yet further compels a response in those who see it. Paul could tell the Philippians to think on whatever *things* were true, honest, just, pure etc.; and then boldly say that "Those things [which he has just listed] which ye hath both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, these things do" (Phil. 4:8,9 RV). What they had learnt and heard from Paul, they had seen in him. He was the word which he preached made flesh, after the pattern of his Lord. Paul could speak of "my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17). His ways, his life, his person, was what he taught- there was congruence between his teaching and himself. And this congruence was consistent- in every place and in every ecclesia, be it in Corinth, Jerusalem or Rome, Paul the person was reflected in the teaching of Paul. The lack of congruence between the message and the life is what is turning people away from the true church in these last days; and yet the opposite is true now as never before. Congruence between life and teaching, to the point that they are one and the same, is powerfully attractive, especially in these days of shallowness of personality, playing out of roles and other forms of hypocrisy. This was why people believed in Jesus.

*And the God of peace shall be with you-* The God of peace can mean the God who gives peace. In response to their conscious effort to copy Paul in thinking about spiritual things, God would give peace in their hearts.

*4:10 But I rejoice in the Lord greatly-* Paul's joy, as explained on :1, was in the spiritual progress of others. His joy in this context was that they were showing spiritual fruit by caring for him.

*That now at length you have revived your thought for me-* In the form of the gift he has just received from them (:18).

*I know you did indeed take thought for me, but you lacked opportunity-* Paul has rebuked them for not caring for him to the extent that Epaphroditus nearly lost his life (see on 2:30). But as in writing to the Corinthians, Paul puts the best possible slant on their behaviour, saying that they had not had the chance to help as they must have wished to. This is a worked example of the mind which thinks on positive spiritual things (:8) having the love which covers weakness; not in a naive, cup half full way, not papering over disappointment and failure, but genuinely wanting to move on from that which is past and press forward positively, as noted on 3:13.

*4:11 Not that I speak regarding want-* If Paul didn't really need material help whilst imprisoned, why does he make such an issue about it in 2:30 (see notes there)? It could be that his reasoning is similar to that we find in 2 Corinthians, where he says that the project of donating for the Jerusalem poor, and also temporarily excommunicating the immoral member, was not for the sake of the poor or for the sake of that individual (see on 2 Cor. 7:12). Rather it was all an opportunity to bring forth fruit for the Lord. He states that specifically in :17: "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that accrues to your account".

*For I have learned to be content whatever my situation-* This is the same word used in :9, where he asks the Philippians to "learn" from him. But he the teacher has also had to learn. He does not place himself above them, but rather as an example of how to learn. "Content" is similar to the word found in 2 Cor. 12:9, where Paul was taught that the Lord's grace was "sufficient" or content enough for him. If Paul had nothing materially but had the Lord's grace- that was enough. "Whatever my situation" is an attempt to render a strange phrase- literally 'with what I am'. This is a concept far wider than simply his material state. To be content with ourselves, recognizing that we are not perfect nor as mature in the mind of Christ as we should be (see on 3:13,15,16)- but content with how "I am", knowing that we are in the true Name of "I am", Yahweh of Israel.

4:12 - see on Lk. 3:5.

*I know how to be abased and I know also how to abound. In everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to have plenty and to be in want-* Life is littered with examples of people who do not know how to be. They may abound or be abased, but they do not know how 'to be' in that situation. We noted on :11 that Paul was content with 'how I am'. From how he reasons here, we can assume that Paul had experienced wealth. He had "profited" in Judaism, and the word has a distinct financial meaning (Gal. 1:15). At the start of his imprisonment he had funds to rent a house large enough to entertain a large crowd of visitors in; he was considered wealthy enough to pay a significant bribe (Acts 24:26), and his family were wealthy enough to send him to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel. And yet he had to work with his own hands at other times, and needed material assistance ("to be in want" is used of his situation whilst living at Corinth, 2 Cor. 11:9). He says here that he has experienced actual hunger; and yet he doesn't mean that he has simply experienced those things. He had learned the secret how to be both hungry and filled. This is different from simply experiencing things, for there is no secret to be learned by experience alone. People experience things and yet never learn 'how to be'. He had been "instructed" (AV) by those things, he had learnt from experience rather than simply passed through experience. "To be in want" is a phrase quarried directly from the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:14), as if Paul felt he had squandered so much opportunity, and had come back to the Lord only "in want". But he had learnt from it all- and therefore didn't need their material assistance for the sake of the assistance in itself.

4:13 *I can do all things in him that strengthens me-* The "all things" refer to the attitudes to plenty and want he has just spoken of in :12. The strengthening of Paul was therefore psychological, and that ability to learn and cope with varying life situations is granted by the work of the Spirit in our minds. The same word for 'strengthen' is to be found in Col. 1:11; Eph. 3:16,20 about the strengthening "by his spirit in the inner man". The Lord Jesus strengthening him is exactly how he concludes 2 Timothy (2 Tim. 4:17 s.w.), again encouraging us to see Philippians as written about the same time and in the same broad circumstances. See on 2:16.

4:14 *However you did well in that you had fellowship with my affliction-* Fellowship is not simply an on paper agreement about theological propositions, sharing membership in the same church or fellowship. It means feeling in common with an afflicted brother and therefore doing something in response; or as :15 puts it, a fellowship in giving and receiving. "My affliction" may have specific reference to the "affliction" which had been brought upon the imprisoned Paul by false brethren seeking to create "affliction" for him in prison (1:16

s.w.). The Philippians would have been amongst those who sought to help him out of that situation (see on 1:17). They suffered his afflictions with him, just as he and we all share in the afflictions of the crucified Lord Jesus. If we ask how exactly we do that in concrete terms, the answer is that we fellowship with the afflictions of His body, which is the members of His church.

4:15 *And you yourselves also know, you Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel's work, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, but you only-* As noted on :14, "fellowship" is no theoretical matter, but concerns not just giving to those we have commonality with, but the art of receiving from others too. Paul was not perceived in his lifetime as the charismatic Christian leader whom all tried to support. In his time of need after leaving Macedonia, not one church apart from the Philippians sent him material support. He would have been perceived as a difficult maverick, a pariah figure rejected by conservatives and liberals alike in the church. We note that although the Antioch church sent him forth on the Gospel's work (Acts 13:1-3), they did not support him in his time of material need; when they as his sponsoring church would surely have been the ones who ought to have done so. We can assume there was some falling out between them and Paul. And yet he speaks of their fellowshiping him in "giving *and receiving*". It is too simplistic to read this as meaning that they fellowshiped him by giving to his material needs; for they fellowshiped in giving "and receiving". This consideration makes attractive the GNB rendition: "You were the only ones who shared my profits and losses". The trading metaphors continue in :17,18: "I want to see profit added to your account. Here, then, is my receipt for everything you have given me..." (GNB).

4:16 *For even in Thessalonica you sent often to my need-* How are we to square this with Paul's claims elsewhere that he did not receive personal support but was self supporting financially? Maybe the answer is in the way that Paul saw his brethren's need as his personal need. We see this by studying the apparent contradiction between Paul's comment that the Philippians sent support to him repeatedly for *his* necessities (Phil. 4:16), and the way he boasts to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:7) and Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9) that he did not receive personal financial support from others, but worked with his own hands so as to be self-supporting (see too Acts 20:33-35). Yet he wrote those things at roughly the same time as the Philippians were sending him help towards 'my necessities'. The conclusion seems to be that Paul viewed the necessities of his converts as *his* personal necessities- hence he can say that the Philippians sent money and support for *his* necessities, whilst at the same time truly stating that he took no *personal* support from his converts. Perhaps he is arguing that he took donations to support others, but not for himself.

4:17- see on 1 Thess. 3:12.

*Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that accrues to your account-* Paul prayed that others would bring forth fruit (Col. 1:9,10), and he here tells the Philippians how he is willing to accept donations from them, because he wanted them to bear fruit. We can help others please God- by our prayers for them, and by giving them the opportunities to bear fruit. Their 'minus' by giving to Paul's work was a 'plus' in God's accountancy. The cattle on a thousand hills are His, and in that sense nothing can be given to Him (Ps. 50:8-14). And yet, for our benefit, He asks for sacrifice to be given to Him. And Paul realized that it is similar with their giving for him. "Fruit that accrues" is read by some as referring to interest on a deposit paid

by a bank. The actual money was given to God, but the interest upon the gift was spiritual fruit, which arises from the process of giving.

4:18- see on Jn. 12:3.

*But I have all things and abound. I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, they were as the odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, pleasing to God-* "I have all things" is quoting from Jacob in Gen. 33:11. Having earlier deceived Esau of the blessing, he asks Esau to now "take away my blessing, for God has dealt with my in grace, and I have all things". Jacob eagerly resigned all the material blessings he once held dear, because God's grace was "all things" to him. The same argument is used to Paul in 2 Cor. 11, where he is told that having God's grace is sufficient; we need nothing more, because with that we have all things. Paul is reasoning here that he is "filled", his cup is not half full but full; not because of what they have sent in itself, but because that gift was spiritual fruit for them, and a very acceptable sacrifice to God. Paul has earlier written that the sacrifice of his life to God was made upon their sacrifice to Him; he wrote in 2:17 in the conditional tense: "If I be offered upon [your] sacrifice... I joy and rejoice with you all". Now he had seen their sacrifice, he was the more ready to be offered himself. And this is why he could speak of his joy at their offering (:10). Again we see how the nature of his eternal salvation was bound up with their salvation; his offering of his life and theirs went together. Truly no man is an island in Christ; we are inextricably linked, both now and eternally, with our brethren.

4:19 *And my God shall supply every need of yours according to His riches, in glory in Christ Jesus-* This is a tacit recognition that Paul did have material needs, although he discounts them. He understands "riches" to refer to spiritual blessings given through the gift of the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 1:7; 3:16). The "riches in glory" is the term used in Rom. 9:23 and Eph. 1:18 for our final salvation. The response to such generosity was going to be eternal. This is not to say that we can buy our salvation, but all the same, there will be an eternal outcome of generosity. And in this life too, the gift of the Spirit is given as a foretaste and guarantee of that great salvation in the future. Paul has used the idea of "supply" earlier, writing of "the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ" (1:19). That supply of the Spirit, that great spiritual richness, would be granted in response to their giving; for grace, giving, *charis*, the gift of the Spirit, would be God's response to their giving. "Supply" is the same word just used in :18 for "full". As Paul had been filled with their gift, so God would fill them with the Spirit and all its rich blessings. For the same word is in Eph. 5:18: "Be filled with the Spirit" (as Rom. 15:13 "the God of hope *fill* you... through the power of the Holy Spirit).

4:20 *Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen-* The whole wonderful way of God's working, filling us with grace and His Spirit that we might be saved, our response to that in giving... all this leads to glory to Him, and not to ourselves. And we shall glorify Him eternally for the wonder of it all, perhaps recalling incidents from this life where His giving and our giving meshed together, to the glory of His grace and gift in His Son.

4:21 *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers that are with me greet you-* "Every saint" is a reminder again that Paul is not writing just to the eldership. Every believer, including the illiterate and the slaves who could rarely attend meetings, were saints in Christ. Likewise in :22, "All the saints...". Paul saw himself as facilitating person to person communication, real

fellowship between ordinary people, and not just high level communication between elders. The brothers with Paul could refer to his fellow prisoners whom he had converted, or the few faithful friends who had come to Rome to minister to him. We note he does not extend greetings from the Roman church, with whom he seems to have parted company; for nobody stood with him at his final trial (2 Tim. 4:16). To die in such isolation from local brethren was a hard thing, but he clearly felt the Lord's personal presence with him compensating for it (2 Tim. 4:17).

4:22 *All the saints greet you, especially they that are of Caesar's household*- "All the saints" again emphasizes the value of the rank and file believers; see on :21. As noted on 1:13, Paul's witness (presumably via the soldiers he was chained to) had led to conversions within the extended family and slaves of Caesar's palace; although according to Romans 16 there were already some believers there. Through all the hard things that happened to Paul, the Gospel had entered the very elitest centre of the Roman empire. Josephus even suggests that the Empress Poppaea may have been favourably inclined to Christianity. This is an encouragement for all time that even the worst experiences and situations have a role to play in the extension of the Lord's saving way amongst men. And Paul realized that, hence "especially they...".

4:23 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit*- The gift or *charis* of the Lord Jesus often refers to His gift of the Spirit to every baptized believer. And that is surely in view here, having alluded to the work of the Spirit so much in this letter. His gift, of His Spirit, was to be with *your* spirit. Paul's greatest wish was that the Lord's spirit would displace our carnal thinking or spirit.



## CHAPTER 1

*1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*And Timothy our brother-* The "our" connects Paul with the Colossians. The rather unusual grammar suggests Paul is identifying himself with his audience. This identity is a vital part of all preaching and pastoral work.

*1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ that are at Colosse-* This doesn't refer to two tiers of believers in Colosse but rather reminds them that every believer is a saint. In both Judaism and paganism there was a tendency to consider some believers to be in a 'super' category. Paul carefully debunks that concept.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* This is no mere standard literary introduction. God's grace and subsequent peace was willed and prayed for by Paul to come upon his audience, and prayer for third parties indeed makes a difference.

*1:3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you-* Paul tells so many that he is "always" praying for them. His life was a life of prayer for others.

*1:4 Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus-* Perhaps Paul had never visited them nor knew them personally. 2:1 suggests they had never seen his face. But his warmth towards them is remarkable. We must ask what emotions and feelings are called forth in us by news of believers we have never met. The same connection between faith in Christ and love for the others in Christ is made in 1 Jn. 3:23. We cannot therefore profess faith in Christ personally and remain in splendid isolation from others in Him. For we are baptized into the body of Christ, which is the church. There are many parallels between the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, and the parallel here is in Eph. 1:15, where Paul says again that he has heard of both their faith in Christ and their love to the other believers.

*And of the love which you have toward all the saints-* Loving other believers is part and parcel of accepting the faith in Christ; this love is the intended outcome of it, the fruit of the Gospel (:6), which can be powerful enough to convert the world by its display.

*1:5 We thank God because of the hope-* Paul has spoken of faith and love in :4. The Greek suggests that the love of :4 was elicited by their hope. Faith, hope and love are so often spoken of by Paul together. If we really believe in the Gospel of salvation then we have a sure hope, and the certainty of that hope results in love for others.

*Which is laid up for you in the heavens-* A specific reward is prepared for each of us, s.w. 2 Tim. 4:8 a crown of righteousness is laid up for Paul. The nature of each of our battles is unique, and therefore our crowns or rewards / signs of victory are going to differ. In the parable, we will each have different towns we rule over. It's an upward spiral. We have "love toward all the saints, because of the hope which *is* laid up for you" (Col. 1:5 RV). If we doubt the hope, thinking we don't know if we will be accepted or not... there isn't much inspiration to love our brethren with the similar senseless grace which *we* have experienced. Note that the hope was 'laid up' in Heaven in the sense of being stored safely there- rather than the hope consisting of being one day in Heaven. For the Kingdom of God shall come on earth. Although Paul had never met these brethren, he strongly assumed they would be saved; this is an assumption which we must make about all believers in Christ. For it is not for us to condemn.

*Of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel-* The parallel Eph. 1:13 says that the word of truth is the good news of salvation. The ultimate truth is that we shall be saved. This is the good news of the Gospel- no reference is in view to some set of theological propositions which are logically true. The truth is that we shall be saved, not that we have figured out a true set of interconnecting theological explanations which ring 'true' to our own minds- at this point in our lives. We should be able to positively answer the question 'Will I at this point in my life be saved if I die?'. This is the final, ultimate and only truth. We may at some future point change our interpretations of some Bible passages and themes, but the ultimate truth is that we shall be saved. And if we lose that confidence, and only then, we will have 'left the truth'. Departure from some particular interpretation is not necessarily the same as 'leaving the truth', neither should 'the truth' be used as a kind of code word summarizing our association with a particular church or denomination.

*1:6 That Gospel is come to you, even as it has also come to all the world-* This is not to be read as a statement that the Gospel had been spread into all the world let alone the entire *kosmos*- for it had not been. The idea may be that there is something universal about the Gospel, in contrast with the various false religions and gospels of paganism, which tended to have mere local appeal. They offered good news for the local people of a certain city or area, whereas the true Gospel of Christ has universal appeal and relevance and is addressed to all people equally. Colossians appears directed against a particular false 'gospel' which was circulating in Colosse and surrounds.

*Bearing fruit and increasing, as it does in you also, since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth-* Paul enthuses that the Colossians were in the good ground category of the sower parable: the Gospel "*bringeth forth fruit... in you, since the day ye heard*" (AV). The important doctrines of the basic Gospel bring forth the fruit of spirituality in the converts (Col. 1:6). The *euangelion* is pictured in Colossians 1 as a mighty, personal force working

powerfully in the lives of men and women. It produced fruit, i.e. concrete actions (Philemon 11). The Gospel gives "understanding *that* ye might walk worthy" (Col. 1:9,10). We bear fruit and increase in this "by the [increasing] knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10 RVmg.). Thus we are to be renewed in knowledge, finding full assurance of our salvation in *understanding* (Col. 2:2; 3:10). The Hebrew word for "understanding" is also that for "certainty"- e.g. Josh. 23:13 "Know for a *certainty*..." [s.w. "understanding"]. To understand is to be sure, in God's language. Understanding, "being filled with the knowledge of his will", *does* have a place in determining our daily walk in Christ. What and how we understand, and thereby what we believe, *does* therefore matter.

1:7 *Even as you learned it of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf-* The same as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25; 4:18; Philemon 23, which mentions he was a prisoner in Rome at some stage). He was a local Colossian, "one of you" (Col. 4:12).

1:8 *Who also declared to us your love in the Spirit-* Perhaps the Spirit inspired Epaphras to give Paul an inspired account of how they were doing. Or maybe the idea is that their love had been brought forth as a result of the function of the Spirit in their hearts; for love is a fruit brought forth by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). This would be the "love of the Spirit", the love brought forth as a fruit of the Spirit, which Rom. 15:30 refers to. God's love is poured out in our hearts through the function of the Spirit within us (Rom. 5:5).

1:9 *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make requests for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding-* Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will", just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that thou shouldest know his will" (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction... See on Acts 13:11. He clearly believed, as we should, that our prayers can affect the internal spiritual condition of others; and that the Lord is willing to fill believing minds. The parallel in Eph. 1:22,23 is that the church, the individuals within the body of Christ, is filled with the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This filling can be complete- insofar as we allow it and are open to it. There's nothing more wonderful to behold than the life and heartbeat of a secular man or woman being taken over by the things of the Spirit.

1:10- see on Col. 2:1.

*To walk worthily in the Lord fully pleasing him, bearing fruit in every good work; increasing in the knowledge of God-* This is wonderful encouragement when we as sinners wonder how we could ever please the Lord Jesus. We can, according to these words, *fully* please Him. This doubtless is a function of His way of imputing righteousness to us, and the way love has of being thrilled at the slightest move of the beloved towards the lover. This is why Paul goes on to say that we are "suitable" for immortality (:12), and are spotless before Him (see on :22). We are "filled" (:9) so that we might "fully" please Him. The fruit which pleases Him is empowered by the Spirit He grants which brings forth that fruit if we allow it. In this sense we are "strengthened" by Him (:11). "Fully" translates *pas*, "all", and we find the word again in :11 speaking of the "all" power which strengthens us to be fruitful. We too easily assume that it is circumstance or environment which enables our pleasing of Him; and too many have

sold their souls to create wealth, believing that this will enable them to somehow purchase a situation in which they can more fully please their Lord. But here we are told that it is His will that we please Him, and He gives us "all" that is necessary in terms of internal strengthening and attitude. If we are honest, we all know that it is those internal attitudes which are most important, and they are a gift which cannot be bought with wealth or situation.

1:11 *Strengthened with all power*- See on :10 *Fully pleasing him*. A play on words, 'made able with all ability'. It's the same word as found in Mt. 25:15, where we read that talents are given to each one "according to his personal *ability*"; but *kata* ("according to") needn't be translated like this at all, and could mean that the talents given *are* [what results in] the personal abilities. This connects with a major theme of Paul's- that we are *made* able, rather than having existing abilities which God asks us to use. The parallel Eph. 3:16-20 speaks of "the power that works in us" as being far above all we ask or think; and it is exercised within our minds ("strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man", Eph. 3:16). We are given psychological power, strength within, to do what would have been impossible otherwise. Constantly we're faced with mental situations we feel we can't endure- the need for continued patience with a difficult person, to keep on keeping on forgiving and showing grace... The strengthening which Paul has in mind is exactly what we need. It is internal, "in the inner man". And this is the same context in which Paul speaks here in Col. 1; for the mighty strengthening we receive enables the mental, internal attributes of patience and joyful endurance (:11). We who were once alienated "in your mind" (:21) are now changed; the Christ formed "in you", the mind of Christ within, is the basis for our "hope of glory" (:27). 2:2 continues this theme when Paul speaks of his urgent concern for the state of the believers' *hearts*. Indeed the whole hymn of praise to Christ in :15-18 is in this context; Paul is emphasizing the utter supremacy of Christ because this should lead to Him dominating our thinking. Appreciating the height of His exaltation will lead to Christ mindedness. "He is the head of the body" in the sense that He is the mind of it, the thinking of it. Members of Christ's body are shown to be in the same body by the fact that they are Christ-minded, they have Him as their "head". Christ-mindedness is therefore the basis upon which we feel that someone is also in the body of Christ rather than membership of the same denomination, fellowship, church etc. But note that the idea of the Greek word translated "strengthened" is essentially ability, and therefore potential. Nobody is forced against their will. We are given the potential ability, and must use it.

*According to the might of his glory, to all patience and endurance, with joy*- This appears to be a reference to the immense and total power which the Lord Jesus now enjoys, as King of the cosmos and prince of the kings of the earth. The idea is that the internal strengthening of the believer is performed by He whose power is unbounded throughout the cosmos. This is encouragement indeed, when we wonder how ever we might be able to change, or rather, be changed.

1:12 *Giving thanks to the Father*- This is a function of the work of the Spirit in us, which Paul has introduced in :9.

*Who made us suitable-* See on :22. The Greek is clear that the idea is not that we are in process of being made qualified, as if 'making us suitable'. We have been made suitable, in that we attained this new status at baptism into Christ. This is indeed the breathtaking good news of the Gospel.

*To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light-* Paul may well have Angels in mind- we shall become like the Angels (Lk. 20:35,36), who are "Angel[s] of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). But he has defined the "saints" in :2 as the believers. We walk now "in light"; insofar as we do, we are experiencing the essence of the future inheritance. The parallel idea in Ephesians is that "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). Our future and present hope is expressed in terms of partaking in something collective, the inheritance of all the saints; no man can therefore be an island in this life.

1:13 *Who delivered us out of the power of darkness-* "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness (cp. Egypt, 1 Pet. 2:9,10), and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear son; in whom we have (now) redemption through His blood... for by Him were all things created (the new, spiritual creation of believers is finished in prospect) ... you... now hath he reconciled... if ye continue in the faith... whereunto I also labour, striving..." (Col. 1:13,14,16,21,23,29). This shows how our comprising the Kingdom in prospect is dependent upon our continued personal effort. The contention is sometimes made in discussion with those who wrongly believe that the Kingdom in its full sense is the church of today that "into" in Col.1:13 can mean 'for'. However, the Greek preposition *eis* means 'in the interior, into, indicating the point reached or entered' (Strong). Thus Phillip and the Eunuch "went down both into (Gk: *eis*) the water" (Acts 8:38)- from which we correctly argue that baptism is by full immersion into water. However, it is true that at times 'eis' is translated with the idea of 'towards', although this is not its primary meaning. The rest of the quotation from Col. 1 made above would suggest that we should understand 'eis' here in its normal meaning.

*And translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love-* Used of the removing of people from one nation to another, as in the exile of the Jews to Babylon and thence back to Judah. The language of Judah's restoration is so often applied to what has happened to the believers. But the idea presented in :12 is of us receiving the lot or inheritance of the saints- suggesting the allusion is at least equally to the bringing of Israel out of Egypt through baptism, to receive an inheritance in Canaan.

1:14 *In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins-* The Greek for "redemption" definitely refers to a ransom payment. In Christ- through baptism into that "in Christ" status- we were bought out of slavery. This metaphor [with all the limitations of any metaphor] was used of Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt, and on :13 *Translated us* I have noted that this image is in view in this chapter. The ransom payment is in that we have been forgiven our sins- which continues the slavery metaphor with the suggestion that we were in slavery because we were hopeless debtors. The Lord Himself used that idea in framing the parable of the unmerciful debtor. It's highly likely that the language and metaphors chosen by Paul here were aimed at deconstructing the heresies about 'redemption' and ransom which were common amongst the incipient Gnosticism of that time and area. But that notwithstanding, the truths he elicits are for all time.

1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation-* This interprets the creation of a man in God's image as a reference to the resurrection and glorification of the

Lord Jesus. *This* was what the Angels had worked for millennia for, in order to fulfil the original fiat concerning the creation of man in God's image. Even now, we see not yet all things subdued under Him (Heb. 2:8); the intention that the man should have dominion over all creation as uttered *and apparently fulfilled* on the sixth day has yet to materially come to pass. The Angels are still working- with us. For 1 Cor. 15:49 teaches that *we* do not now fully have God's image, but we will receive it at the resurrection. Therefore we are driven to the conclusion that the outworking of the creation directives regarding man in God's image was not only in the 24 hours after it was given, but is still working itself out now. The new creation is therefore a continuation of and an essential part of the natural creation; not just a mirror of the natural in spiritual terms. See on 2 Cor. 4:6.

The idea of a new creation is well explained in Gal. 6:15: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. What counts is being a new creation". This seems to parallel Gal. 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love". Paul's argument so far has been: Faith rather than works results in an identification with the Lord Jesus as the seed of Abraham; for to him were the promises of salvation made, and not through the Law. That faith and identification with Christ is confirmed by the Spirit being sent forth into our hearts (Gal. 4:5), which results in love as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). In that way, faith works through love. The parallel to that is that "what counts is being a new creation"; in other words, being created as Christ, being created as a Son of God as Jesus was, with His spirit whereby we also cry out "Abba, Father" just as He did. So the new creation in view is that we are created to be as Christ. Hence if any man is *in Christ* he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The language of "new creation" need not call up ideas of planets and a new cosmos. The new person created is Christ. Hence "the rule" of the new creation (Gal. 6:16) is another way of saying "the law of Christ". The Lord Jesus is "the image of every [new] creation" (Col. 1:15); we are made / created like Him, by the agency of the Spirit. He is thus "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). Hence the Gospel was preached to "every creation" (Col. 1:23), i.e. every convert. No "creation" is not open to the scrutiny of God's Word in Christ (Heb. 4:13). Clearly, "creation" was a title for believers in the early church, so common was this idea.

The creation record in Genesis 2 is not about a different creation from that in Genesis 1; it is a more detailed account of how the Angels went about fulfilling the command they were given on the sixth day. The process of bringing all the animals to Adam, him naming them, becoming disappointed with them, wishing for a true partner need not therefore be compressed into 24 hours. It could have taken a period of time. Yet the command to make man, male and female, was given on the sixth day. However, this may have taken far longer than 24 hours to complete. Indeed, the real intention of God to create man in His image was not finished even then; for as Paul shows here, the creation of man in God's image ultimately was fulfilled in the resurrection of God's Son.

Col. 1:15-20 is another poetic fragment which is misunderstood by those seeking to justify the false idea of a personal pre-existence of the Lord; it has been identified as a Jewish hymn which Paul modified (see on Phil. 2:6). We must remember that Paul was inspired by God to answer the claims of false teachers; and he was doing so by using and re-interpreting the terms which they used. This is typical of those passages which can give the impression that Jesus actually created the earth.

If this were true, then so many other passages are contradicted which teach that Jesus did not exist before his birth. The record in Genesis clearly teaches that God was the creator. Either

Jesus or God were the creator; if we say that Jesus was the creator while Genesis says that God was, we are saying that Jesus was directly equal to God. In this case it is impossible to explain the many verses which show the differences between God and Jesus (see *Bible Basics* Study 8.2 for examples of these).

The Lord Jesus was the “firstborn”, which implies a beginning. There is no proof that Jesus was God’s “firstborn” before the creation of the literal earth. Passages like 2 Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 89:27 predicted that a literal descendant of David would become God’s firstborn. He was clearly not in existence at the time those passages were written, and therefore not at the time of the Genesis creation either. Jesus became “the Son of God with power” by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). God “has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son, this day have I begotten you” (Acts 13:32,33). Thus Jesus became God’s firstborn by his resurrection. Note too that a son standing at his father’s right hand is associated with being the firstborn (Gen. 48:13-16), and Christ was exalted to God’s right hand after his resurrection (Acts 2:32 R.V.mg.; Heb. 1:3).

It is in this sense that the Lord Jesus is described as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), a phrase which is parallel to “the firstborn of every creature” or creation (Col. 1:15 R.V.). He therefore speaks of himself as “the first begotten of the dead... the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor. 5:17). “In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality, he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.

The creation spoken about in Col. 1 therefore refers to the new creation, rather than that of Genesis. Through the work of Jesus “were all things created...thrones...dominions” etc. Paul does not say that Jesus created all things and then give examples of rivers, mountains, birds etc. The elements of this new creation refer to those rewards which we will have in God’s Kingdom. “Thrones... dominions” etc. refer to how the raised believers will be “kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). These things were made possible by the work of Jesus. “In him were all things created in the heavens” (Col. 1:16 R.V.). In Eph. 2:6 we read of the believers who are in Christ as sitting in “heavenly places”. If any man is in Christ by baptism, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By being in Christ we are saved by His death (Col. 1:22). The literal planet could not be created by being in Christ. Thus these verses are teaching that the exalted spiritual position which we can now have, as well as that which we will experience in the future, has all been made possible by Christ. The “heavens and earth” contain “all things that needed reconciliation by the blood of (Christ’s) cross” (Col. 1:16,20), showing that the “all things...in heaven” refer to the believers who now sit in “heavenly places...in Christ Jesus”, rather than to all physical things around us.

If Jesus were the creator of the universe, it is strange how He should say: “...from the beginning of the creation God made them...” (Mk. 10:6). This surely sounds as if He understood God to be the creator, not He Himself. And if He literally created everything in Heaven, this would include God.

That "by him" is a poor translation is readily testified by reliable scholars. Take J.H.

Moulton: "for *because of him* [Jesus]..." (1); or the *Expositor's Greek Commentary*: "*en auto*: This does not mean "by Him"" (2).

Many of Paul's more difficult passages are understandable once it is appreciated that he is alluding to existing Jewish and Gentile literature which was familiar to his readers. He does this in order to deconstruct it and give the Lord Jesus His rightful place of exaltation. There are a number of connections between Col. 1:15-20 and Jewish Wisdom theology concerning Adam and the mystical "heavenly man". The terms "image of God" and "firstborn" refer to Adam; it's as if Paul is showing that Jesus should be afforded the place of all exaltation, and not the mystical "Adam" or "Heavenly Adam" which Judaism then believed in (3). Another possibility, not necessarily mutually exclusive, is that Paul is alluding to and even quoting a "pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer hymn" (4)- and seeking to demonstrate that Jesus is the true redeemer. We may apply the words of a well known song or character to someone we know, in order to show the similarities and bring out the contrasts; but the correspondence isn't 100%. And so with the manner in which Paul quotes Gentile or Jewish literature and terminology about Jesus- not every word must be literalistically pressed into relevance to Him. It's like the idea of types- Joseph was a type of Christ, but not *everything* about Joseph was true of Christ. We need to be aware that Paul didn't sit down to right theology sitting in an ivory tower university, or because he just felt like delving into these matters for the pure intellectual buzz of it. His letters are all missionary documents, born out of real life situations in his work of preaching and then pastorally caring for his immature converts. He was dealing with attacks upon his tender babes in Christ by Jewish and Gentile false teachers; there was no written New Testament, and the Christian message was in competition with the 'scriptures' of the surrounding religions. So it's hardly surprising that Paul so often alludes to their terminology and literature in order to deconstruct it.

It should be noted, as a general point, that God the Father *alone, exclusively*, is described as the creator in many passages (e.g. Is. 44:24; Is. 45:12; Is. 48:13; Is. 66:2). These passages simply leave no room for the Son to have also created the literal planet.

It could also be argued that the hymn to Jesus here in Colossians 1 is speaking of how God views Jesus. "He is "firstborn of all creation"- not in time, but in the Father's mind" (5). To God, Jesus was the beginning, in everything He was *en pasin autos proteuon*- in all things He held first place (Col. 1:18). But where and how? In the Father's mind. It was God who created the world. But for God, in the context of creation, Jesus His Son was pre-eminent. James Dunn comments on Col. 1:20: "Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God... There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth" (6).

## Notes

(1) J.H. Moulton, *Grammar Of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) Vol. 3 p. 253.

(2) W.R. Nicoll, ed., *Expositor's Greek Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) p. 504.

(3) This case is made at length in H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 78-86.

(4) See E. Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" *in Essays On New Testament Themes* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964) pp. 149-168.

(5) Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 138.

(6) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 254.



1:16 *For in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible-* See on :15. The theme of the believers being "in Christ" is so major in Colossians and Paul generally that we should have no problem in seeing here a reference to the new creation. But all this has meaning in practice- we who are in Christ are to have Him [and not mere abstract ideas] as the whole basis of our existence.

*Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created on account of him and for him-* "Thrones... powers" is a Jewish rabbinic term which expressed their idea of "the various gradations of angelic spirits". But it's doubtful he believed in this himself. Paul at times quotes from or alludes to popular Jewish ideas with which he may not have necessarily agreed. The lack of quotation marks in New Testament Greek means that it's hard for us at this distance to discern when he does this – but it seems to me that it's going on a lot in his writings. Thus he uses the phrase "your whole spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), a popular Jewish expression for 'the whole person' – but it's clear from the rest of Paul's writings that he didn't see the body and soul as so separate.

1:17 *And he is superior to all things, and in him all things consist-* See on :15. The "all things" are those reconciled to God in Christ (:20), and therefore refer to persons rather than the physical creation, which is not morally alienated nor in need of reconciliation with God.

1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead-* See on :11,15. A phrase which is parallel to "the firstborn of every creature" or creation (Col. 1:15 R.V.). He therefore speaks of himself as "the first begotten of the dead... the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor. 5:17). "In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality, he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.

*So that in all things he might have the pre-eminence-* The concept of being "in" Christ is so frequent here in Colossians 1 that we must surely interpret the "all things" as a reference to the believers; because of His work, we are to give Him the pre-eminence in our thinking and hearts. And a real person, the Lord Jesus, can more meaningfully have such pre-eminence far more than abstract ideas or even theology as theology.

1:19 *For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell-* All the fullness of God dwelt in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9); "and of his fullness have *all* we received" (Jn. 1:16). God's fullness, the full extent of His character, dwelt in Christ, and through His Name which speaks fully of that character, that fullness of Christ is reckoned to us. And so, in line with all this, Eph. 3:19 makes the amazing statement. And it is amazing. We can *now* "be filled with *all* the fullness of God". Let's underline that, really underline it, in our hearts. We can be *filled* with *all* the fullness of God. Filled with all the fullness of God's character. See on Eph. 1:23. We are counted righteous, counted as if we have the Lord's moral

perfection; but as Romans 8 explains, the Spirit is given in order to help us become in reality what we are counted as being by status. The language of 'filling' is used about being filled with the Spirit in our inner person (Acts 13:52; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 4:10; 5:18). It is the filling by the Spirit which reveals to us the fullness of God.

1:20 *And through him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross- yes, to reconcile all things through him, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens-* God has reconciled all of us into Himself through the work of Jesus; reconciliation with God is therefore related, inextricably, to reconciliation with each other. The fact that believers in Christ remain so bitterly unreconciled is a sober, sober issue. For it would appear that without reconciliation to each other, we are not reconciled to God. All we can do is to ensure that any unreconciled issues between us and our brethren are not ultimately our fault.

1:21 *And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works-* Note how the “works” were done “in your mind”; a similar parallel is in Tit. 1:15,16. Paul had fully absorbed the Lord’s teaching that the thought is the action. We live in a virtual world, lived looking at screens. At no other time in history has this perspective been more vital; that sin is in the mind, the thoughts are the works. The parallel Eph. 4:18 speaks of being alienated “from the life of God”. His Spirit, His living, His life and personality, can be given into our minds through the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Refusing that is to be alienated from God. The work of reconciling us with God is therefore fundamentally performed in the mind; for that is where the essential alienation is located. Our thought processes and worldviews are alien from Him; and the work of reconciling that alienation in our minds, in our evil spirit, is performed by the *holy* spirit of God.

1:22 *Yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish-* Yet by our preaching we “may present every man perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:22,28). The connection is clear: because we are being presented perfect in Christ through belief and baptism, we preach the opportunity of this experience to others. Likewise the Law often stressed that on account of Israel’s experience of being redeemed from Egypt, they were to witness a similar grace to their neighbours and to their brethren. See on Jude 24.

*And unproveable before Him-* AV “in His sight”. In His view, the way He looks upon us, we will be without sin, faultless before the presence of His glory at the last day (Jude 24); we will be “made meet” or appropriate to receive the inheritance of the saints (:12). We will be “made” like this. It will be the result of imputed righteousness. Thus the Lord will praise the faithful for all the good deeds they did, which they will be ignorant of (Mt. 25:37). But there is also a mechanism through which the Lord works to achieve this; for we will be “*made*” like this (:12). Thus :28 speaks in very similar terms of how at that last day, Paul hoped to “present every man perfect in Christ”. How Christ counts us in status- as complete because we are “in Him”- He also tries to work out in reality by actually changing our minds and hearts through His work. And one of the ways he chooses to do that is through people like Paul. Our efforts for others’ spiritual development will have His every blessing and enablement. Hence Paul moves forward to describe in :24,25 how he suffers with Christ in order to build up the body of believers into the body and person of Christ in actuality.

1:23- see on Lk. 6:48; Acts 2:9.

*If indeed you continue in the faith-* We are to continue in the doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), continue in grace (Acts 13:43), rather than continuing in sin (Rom. 6:1). The idea is not simply that we shall doggedly hold to a set of theology we accepted at baptism; but more essentially, that we shall continue in faith in the wonderful grace those teachings reflect, that little me, I myself... shall really and truly live for ever in God's Kingdom. For the immediate context here is about being presented faultless in His eyes at the last day (:22); and we are to continue believing that wonderful truth.

*Grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to all creation under heaven. Of which I Paul was made a servant-* Paul says that the certain hope of salvation is what must ground us in life. "Hope" means a certain assurance. The fact it had been preached to all creation doesn't mean that it is no more to be preached. And "all creation" in the context of this chapter refers to every member of the new creation; for not all of the natural creation had heard the Gospel. And "all creation" is a strange way to refer to "all people". The idea is that all the current believers at the time of writing, those in whom the work of the new creation had happened, were in that status because of having heard the very same gospel which Paul was preaching. The Colossians had also heard it- they too needed to allow the work of the new creation through that gospel to work in them.

*1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh-* It has been perceptively commented: "The work of Christ in one sense is complete, but in another sense it is not complete until all men have known it and been reconciled to God by it. He is dependent on men and women to take it out and to make it known. He who accepts this task of bringing the message of the work of Christ to men may well be said to complete the sufferings of Christ". Every leaflet we distribute, every conversation we start, every banknote we put to the Lord's work... through all this we are extending the victory of the Lord in ways which would otherwise never occur. Thus Paul can say that in his work of preaching and upbuilding, he was filling up the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24). By the cross, all things were reconciled, but this is only made operative in practice *if* men "continue in the faith", which Paul suffered in order to enable (Col. 1:20-23). This is the context in which Paul speaks of fulfilling the cross. Thus Paul speaks of filling up "the afflictions of Christ" in his life (Col. 1:24), but uses the very same word to describe the "afflictions" [s.w.] which he suffered for his brethren (Eph. 3:13). The sufferings of the Lord become powerful and continue to bring forth fruit in human lives- through our response to them.

We too are asked to fill up the Lord's sufferings in our lives. The idea is that by the end of our lives, we have fellowshiped His sufferings, and finally our death becomes His death, so that His resurrection shall become ours. This perhaps is why old age for believers often entails particular physical or mental affliction which enables us to fellowship aspects of His sufferings which previously we had not fellowshiped. This imparts meaning to the final part of our lives, whereas in secular terms we would be viewed as having daily experiences which have little significance attached to them.

*For His body's sake, which is the church-* The way in practice we fellowship the Lord's personal sufferings is through our engagement with the sufferings of others in the church. Paul saw himself as filling up what was lacking in his share in the sufferings of Christ's body. He uses the idea of Christ's body in a double sense- the sufferings of Christ's body on the cross are being replicated in him in the course of his ministry to the body of Christ in the

sense of the church. It could also be that Paul has the idea that Christ is suffering now, the cross is in a sense ongoing, and he is suffering with Christ right now for our redemption. All we suffer for the sake of the believers and the preaching of the Gospel in order to develop the body of Christ is in fact a sharing in the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus. The “afflictions” of Christ are inevitable. We were “appointed” to such afflictions (1 Thess. 3:3). The parable of the sower suggests that tribulation [s.w. “afflictions”] come inevitably to the believer in Christ (Mt. 13:21). We *must* pass through much affliction or tribulation [s.w.] to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We can therefore glory in such tribulation (Rom. 5:3). We experience “affliction” as Paul did in concern for our brethren (2 Cor. 2:4), in ostracism (Heb. 10:33) as well as physical deprivation in the generosity of spirit required in the preaching of the Gospel and care for the body of Christ, in which context Paul uses the word many times. There’s a logic to all this, as the same word is used about the “afflictions” to be suffered by the rejected at the judgment seat (Rom. 2:9; Rev. 2:22). 2 Thess. 1:4,6 speaks of *our* afflictions now and then uses the same word to describe the afflictions of the rejected in that day. We must suffer one way or another. Paul consciously sought to experience what Christ did on the cross. He was warned by the Holy Spirit that “afflictions” awaited him if he went up to Jerusalem (Acts 20:23), but he chose to go up there, he made a determined decision within his own spirit to do so (Acts 19). High challenge as this is, we too should seek to consciously experience the sufferings of Jesus.

*1:25 Of which I was made a servant, according to the plan of God which was given me concerning you, to fulfil the word of God-* Knowing the Gospel somehow compels us to testify of it. “The word (*logos*) of God”, a phrase which the NT mainly uses with reference to the Gospel rather than the whole Bible, is sometimes used as parallel to the idea of preaching the Gospel (Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 20:4 and especially here in Col. 1:25).

*1:26 The mystery of which has been hid for ages and generations; but now has it been manifested to His saints-* Paul is answering the incipient Gnostic claims to hold ‘mysteries’. The idea that ‘I know something you don’t’ is very attractive, and is surely one of the reasons why the likes of JWs and other small time Protestant sects with unusual interpretations are at least initially attractive to many simple folks. They claim, as did the Gnostics, that the true mysteries are only to be found within their private meetings. Paul is saying that the mystery is now openly revealed and being shouted from the housetops- quite simply, any who believe in Christ shall be saved.

*1:27 To whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles- which is Christ in you, the hope of glory-* At baptism, the “new man” was created within us; the man Christ Jesus was formed in us, a new birth occurred, the real, essential Duncan or Dave or Deirdre or Danuta became [potentially at least] ‘Jesus Christ’, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This is how important this matter is. Perceiving the Christ-man within yourself is related to your “hope of glory”; this is the assurance of our future salvation, through which we can have all joy and peace through believing.

*1:28 We proclaim him, encouraging every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ-* As Christ will “present (us) holy and unblameable” (Col. 1:22), as a spotless bride (Eph. 5:27). The relationship between Christ and the ecclesia is to be mirrored within the ecclesia. See on Eph. 5:31.

1:29- see on Lk. 13:24.

*For this purpose I labour, striving according to his power, which works in me mightily-* As explained on :11, this power is boundless. And it works through us if we seek to save others and bring them within God's saving purpose. Never therefore need we fear lack of power, resources etc. in performing His mission. Paul can say that he has not yet become complete (Phil. 3:10-14) and yet he seeks to present each of his converts “complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). He recognized that he too hadn’t got to where he was seeking to take his converts.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Rom. 9:3.

*For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh-* This striving for others is in the power of the Lord's spirit, as explained in the preceding verse (1:29). His mental effort for those he had never met was and is inspirational. Paul's conflict or struggle was in prayer; for true prayer is a struggle, not a mental muttering of a few thoughts as we drift off to sleep at night, just as Jacob's struggle with the Angel is interpreted as a wrestling with God in prayer (Hos. 12:4). Paul's attitude in prayer spread to Epaphras, who did the same (Col. 4:12)- attitudes to prayer are catching, just as the disciples asked to be taught to pray after observing the Lord Jesus in prayer. But the idea of striving in prayer is continuing the figure of Col. 1:29, where Paul says he strives "according to His working which works in me mightily". This explains why at times we feel moved to pray for situations; we can of course refuse to allow God's work to work in us, but if we are in touch with Him, walking in step with the Spirit, then we will be open to His promptings to pray for situations.

Appreciating that prayer is so much "in the spirit", we can better grasp why prayer is portrayed as a struggle. Moab would pray in the time of his judgment; "but he shall not prevail" (Is. 16:12), as if the prayer process was a struggle. Jacob, by contrast, struggled with the Angel in prayer and prevailed (Hos. 12:2-4). The Romans were to strive together with Paul in prayer (Rom. 15:30); the Lord's prayers in Gethsemane were a resisting / struggling unto the point of sweating blood (Heb. 12:2). "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have [RV 'how greatly I strive / struggle'] for you... that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" is parallel to "We do not cease to pray for you... that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 2:1 cp. 1:9,10). Paul's conflict / struggle for them was his prayer for them. Epaphras likewise was "always striving for you in his prayers" (Col. 4:12 RV).

*2:2 That their hearts may be comforted-* The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, can operate in human hearts- but we must allow this to happen. Hence throughout Ephesians and Colossians, Paul prays that the potential activity of the Spirit will be realized in his readership.

*They being knit together in love-* He who fears the Lord, "him shall he teach in the way that he [God] shall choose" (Ps. 25:12). The Father opens up new ways of understanding for us each, of His choosing and according to our individual needs, in response to our living a God-fearing life. If our hearts are knit together in brotherly love, the more we will understand- for true understanding is, in the end, to fathom the depths of God's love (Col. 2:2).

*And to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God as it is in Christ-* It is true that the deeper we understand, the easier some things are to cope with. But the understanding in view here is of the "mystery", which we saw in chapter 1 refers to the simple fact that those who truly believe in Christ's death and resurrection shall indeed be saved. This is what gives assurance; whereas correct theology of itself gives no assurance when faced with the inevitable demise and death which all men face.

2:3- see on Mt. 13:46.

*In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge-* "The wisdom of God was in the midst of him" (1 Kings 3:28 AVmg.) is alluded to here in Col. 2:3- clearly seeing Solomon as a type of Christ.

The idea of being hidden is an allusion to the Colossian heresy of incipient Gnosticism, the idea that truth is hidden in secret writings, known only to the chosen few. The true wisdom is indeed hidden, but hidden in Christ.

2:4 *This I say, so that no one deludes you with persuasive speech-* AV "beguile", s.w. LXX Josh. 9:22 of the Gibeonites deceiving Joshua with their words. The implication may be that even false teachers and infiltrators of the flock still have the possibility of salvation, for by all accounts the Gibeonites appear to have repented and to have become fully assimilated into God's people, serving Him with distinction above many Israelites. Clearly the community Paul wrote to were threatened by false teachers whose ideas were attractive- it was "enticing" (AV).

2:5 *For though I am absent in the flesh, I am still with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ-* Perhaps Paul had some Spirit gift of knowledge which enabled him to know their spiritual position. A similar passage in 1 Cor. 5:4,5 seems to also imply a supernatural ability to be present with an ecclesia: "I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing, I command you that in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do), with the power of our Lord Jesus...". But the ideas of flesh as opposed to spirit would more suggest that he was mentally, spiritually 'with' them.

2:6 *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord- walk in him-* Gk. *The Christ... the Lord-* all the emphasis upon Christ's greatness is in the context of warning us to let nothing whatsoever distract us from our focus upon Him as a person. In our generation those distractions may not be arguments of Gnostics and Judaizers- although there are those who fall to such- but rather the host of selfish, laziness-enabling, egocentric distractions of modern culture.

As we received Christ Jesus as Lord at baptism, so we *live* daily in Him; our baptism experience is lived out throughout daily life (Col. 2:6). Thus Paul spoke of how he died daily so that he might share in the Lord's resurrection life (1 Cor. 15:31). We always bear about in our body the spirit of the Lord Jesus in His time of dying, so that His life might be made manifest in our mortal flesh even now (the use of "mortal flesh" indicates that this is not a reference to the future resurrection). In this way the process of dying to the flesh works life in us (2 Cor. 4:10-12). See on Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 1:23.

2:7- see on Lk. 6:48.

*Rooted and up built in him and established in your faith, even as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving-* Rooting, as of a tree, and being built up, as a building, are two metaphors

which occur together in Eph. 3:17, where we are taught that we are to be rooted and grounded "in love", whereas here we are to be rooted and grounded in Christ personally. A Christ-focused life leads to love. The source of a loving life isn't therefore to be found in psychological gymnastics within our minds, but rather by a focus upon Him personally. And we all, surely, want the answer to the question: 'How can I be more loving?'.

2:8 - see on Mt. 24:4.

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit-* The Greek for "spoil" means literally to lead away as booty. There were clearly false teachers eager to lead off the Christian converts through deceitful philosophy; and their origin was clearly Jewish.

*After the tradition of men, after the elements of the world, and not after Christ-* "The tradition" is perhaps a reference to the Jewish Kabbala, 'the received tradition'; "the world" is the Jewish world.

2:9 *For in him, in a bodily form, dwells all the fullness of all that God stands for-* Colossians and Ephesians emphasize the reconciling of both Christians and Angels through the death of Christ, perhaps due to the cross taking away the Angel-coordinated Mosaic system which separated man from God and the Angels. "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things (a phrase which elsewhere includes Angels- e. g. Heb. 2:8) unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in Heaven" (Col. 1:20). What are the things in earth and Heaven if they are not Christians and Angels? In Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9)- the fulness of Gentiles, Jews and Angels. "And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power (i.e. Angels- Col. 2:15)"- 2:10. As Christ is the head of the Angels, so if we are in the body of Christ, He is our head too, and we are therefore with the Angels in the same body. There is thus no need to worship them, nor the Mosaic ordinances they instituted. This seems to be a major theme in Col. 2 "Let no man beguile you of your reward in... worshipping of Angels... and not holding the Head (Christ), from which all the body (both Christians and Angels, whose head is Christ, v. 10,15) by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together (Angels and Christians!) increaseth (both of us growing in knowledge of God) with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the elements of the (Mosaic/ Angelic) world, are ye subject to (Mosaic/ Angelic) ordinances... ?" (v. 18-20). The evident similarities between Colossians and Ephesians invite us to interpret Ephesians 1 in the same way: "In the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Angels and Christians, Jews and Gentiles)... in whom we also (as well as Angels- it is hard to understand why Paul, being a Jew, should speak like this about Gentiles also, as well as Jews, obtaining an inheritance) have obtained an inheritance... (God) raised (Christ) from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the Heavenly places, far above all principality and power (i.e. Angels- Col. 2:15), and might, and dominion (Angels- Jude 8,9), and every name that is named (Christ "hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name" than Angels- Heb. 1:4), not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things (literally all things- including Angels) under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:10,11,20-23). The reference in Eph. 3:15 to "the whole family in Heaven and earth" probably refers to the Angelic and human parts of the family of God in Heaven and earth respectively being united



by the sacrifice of Christ. Christ's parables of the lost coin and lost sheep lend support to this. The woman and the shepherd on one level represent Jesus searching for the lost saint, calling together the friends to rejoice on finding him (Lk. 15:9,29). These friends represent Angels, we are told (v. 10). However, those in the ecclesia are also members of God's household; Christ laid down His life for us His friends; "Ye are My friends... I have called you friends" (Jn. 15:13-15). The parables of Luke 15 were initially directed at the Pharisees, implying that they as the shepherds of the ecclesia should be mixing with the weak of the flock to win them back (Lk. 15:2-4; n. b. "which man of you..."). Thus Jesus also expected the woman, shepherd and friends to refer to members of the ecclesia on earth. Yet He also specifically says that they have reference to the Angelic household in Heaven. Thus both Angels and earthly believers are part of the same "family in Heaven and earth" of Eph. 3:15. See on Jude 6; Heb. 9:23.

Col. 2:8,9 reasons that because in Christ dwells all the fullness of God, so far is He exalted, that we therefore should not follow *men*. A man or woman who is truly awed by the height of the Lord's exaltation simply will not allow themselves to get caught up in personality cults based around individuals, even if they are within the brotherhood.

Many of the 'difficult passages' in the New Testament are only difficult because they are alluding to, and even quoting phrases from, popular contemporary ideas and writings and seeking to deconstruct them. This technique is found throughout the Bible, especially with respect to false yet popular ideas about evil. To take an example: Valentinus taught in the second century that there was a *pleroma*, a "fullness of the Godhead", comprised of 30 aeons of time. Like most thinkers, he was drawing on ideas that had circulated a century before him, and so it's reasonable to think that the philosophical idea of a "fullness of the Godhead" was around in the first century. And Paul uses just this phrase when explaining how the entire fullness of the Godhead was to be found in the person of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). No need for philosophy and wild guesses at the structure of God. The fullness of the Godhead was and is in the personality of Jesus. However, this isn't Paul's only allusion to this idea. The lowest of the 30 aeons, Sophia, "yielded to an ungovernable desire to apprehend [God's] nature". And Paul alludes to this in Phil. 2:6,7, saying that Jesus by contrast didn't even consider apprehending God's nature, but instead made Himself a servant of all. As more and more is known of the literature and ideas which were extant in the first century, it becomes the more evident that Paul's writings are full of allusions to it- allusions which seek to deconstruct these ideas, replacing them with the true; and by doing so, presenting the Truth of the Gospel in the terms and language of the day, just as we seek to.

The fullness of God dwells in the body of Christ- and Paul often uses this idea with reference to the body of baptized believers. Within us and amongst us, over time and space, there will have dwelt (by the time of Christ's return) all the fullness of God's moral perfection and characteristics; one may have His love and grace, another His judgment, etc. This is confirmed by 2:10.

2:10 *And in him you are made complete. He is the head of all principality and power-* "Complete" is Gk. 'made full'. As God dwelt fully in Christ, so He fully dwells in us, the entire body of Christ. However the principalities and powers were perceived, be their hierarchies of Angels or not, the Lord Jesus was the head.

2:11 *In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ-* Through baptism, we enter

the "in Christ" status, and our flesh is as it were cut off, by status we are in Him and not in the flesh. This is repeated in Paul's argument in Romans 1-8, although there he stresses that our flesh still remains; but from God's perspective, it is cut off. It takes faith to believe this- faith in God's operation, that the circumcision operation was really performed by Him (2:12). Baptism is the means by which we become "in Christ" and in spiritual terms cease to be uncircumcised (2:13).

*2:12 Having been buried with him in baptism, by which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead-* AV "the operation of God". See on 2:11. Baptism is effective because we are to believe that God will now work in us to allow the life of the risen Lord to break forth in our mortal flesh. The faith required before baptism is therefore not merely an understanding of past events, but more importantly a belief that God's *energeia*, His energy, will operate in the transforming of our hearts and lives. The act of baptism alone doesn't save; it saves through our faith in God's operation to save us. Tit. 3:5 speaks of baptism as "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"; but we have to believe in that "working of God" as Paul here puts it in Colossians. Baptism is paralleled with circumcision, which was a cutting off of the flesh. Our flesh, the mind of the flesh, will be cut off by God, as an ongoing process, once we make the connection with Christ in baptism. The parallel in Ephesians is Eph. 1:19,20, which speak of how the same unbounded power which raised the dead body of Jesus from the dead will likewise work in the hearts of us who believe.

*2:13 And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses-* This change from the second to the first person, or, *vice versa*, is common in Paul's writings. He like a truly good teacher admits his own need for forgiveness, and wishes to share his personal experience with us his readers.

Baptism is to be associated with the ancient rite of circumcision. The Lord Jesus Himself as it were circumcises men at their baptism, cutting off the flesh of their past lives, and thereby inviting them to live in a manner appropriate to what He has done for them (Col. 2:11-13).

*2:14* In the context of baptism and warning believers not to return to the Law, Paul argues "If ye be dead with Christ (in baptism) from the rudiments of the (Jewish) world, why, as though living in the (Jewish) world, (i.e. under the Law) are ye subject to (Mosaic) ordinances...?" (:20). The Law was "against us... contrary to us" (Col. 2:14) – hence it being called an adversary/Satan. The natural Jews under the Mosaic Law, as opposed to the Abrahamic covenant regarding Christ, are called "the children of the flesh" (Rom. 9:8). Similarly those under the Law are paralleled with the son of the bondwoman "born after the flesh" (Gal. 4:23). Paul reasons: "Are you now made perfect by the flesh?... received you the Spirit by the works of the Law?" (Gal. 3:2,3) – as if "by the flesh" is equivalent to "by the law". Now we can understand why Heb. 7:16–18 speaks of "The Law of a carnal commandment... The weakness and unprofitableness thereof". Not only is the word "carnal" used with distinctly fleshly overtones elsewhere, but the law being described as "weak" invites connection with phrases like "the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41). Rom. 8:3 therefore describes the Law as "weak through the flesh". See on Rom. 8:3.

*Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances-* Gk. 'to wash out', an allusion to baptism. The same word is used about the blotting out of our sins (Acts 3:19), of our tears (our lament for our sins, Rev. 7:17; 21:4). Our sins are blotted out in that the law itself has been blotted

out. We are saved through being "in Christ", counted as Him- and not on the basis of any legal obedience to any law. This is Paul's argument in Romans; not simply the Law of Moses, but any legal code which is against us has now been taken away. 'Law' in the sense of 'legality', and not only the law of Moses, has been replaced by salvation by faith in grace. But the reality of salvation by such pure grace is not lawlessness and indulgence in sin, but rather being utterly bound by the principle or law of being "in Christ". Our response to such grace will make us in fact more self controlled and consciously obedient to Divine principles than any system of binding laws, resulting in our being judged according to our obedience or disobedience.

*That was against us, which was contrary to us, Christ did away with it by nailing it to the cross-* Legal terms, reminiscent of the argument in Romans, that the Law stands in court accusing and condemning us by our failure to obey it; but in Christ we are declared in the right. Paul says here that this Law has been taken away, or as he says in Romans, where is now our accuser? He has fled the court room, there is none to accuse us if we are in Christ. Hence "took it out of the way" means literally in Greek to take away from the midst, away from the foreground- from the middle of the courtroom.

2:15- see on Lk. 11:22.

*Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it-* S.w. Heb. 6:6 about the "open shame" of the crucified Christ. One reason for the cross was to publicly declare that all the laws which we break, our sins, are once and for all publicly declared in all their shame- and rendered powerless, lead away in Christ's triumph (2 Cor. 2:14). Disarmed [NIV]- an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:51.

The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

2:16 *Let no one therefore judge you in food, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day-* But people do judge us. We can only not allow them to judge us by not letting their judgments affect us. This is a valuable principle; for the judgment of others seriously impacts upon our emotional and spiritual state. We are not to allow the judgments of others to do this, because we believe that there is only one final judge. Believing that God and His Son are our only judges is therefore of immense practical import. A similar situation is to be found in 1 Tim. 4:12 (cp. 1 Cor. 16:11), where Timothy is told to let nobody despise him. People did despise him- but he is told to disallow them from doing so by not taking it to heart, holding on to his value before God. And Paul tells Titus the same (Tit. 2:15). Likewise in 1 Jn. 3:7 we are told to let no man deceive us- although they will try, for as John notes, there are many deceivers in the world. Here in Col. 2:18, the same is taught- the Colossians were not to let anyone deceive them.

2:17 *They were a shadow of the things to come, but the real object is Christ-* Bible students have long recognized a 'prophetic perfect' tense in Hebrew, whereby the future is spoken of as having already happened. This not only reflects the utter certainty of God's words coming true, it also reflects God's way of looking at issues without time, in the sense that God is beyond time. Thus when He told Abraham that He *had made him* (not 'will make you') a great nation, this reflected the way that God already saw Abraham as a father of many.

Things which don't yet exist for us do *actually* exist for God (Rom. 4:17). The Law was a *shadow* of Christ (Col. 2:17) even when Christ didn't physically exist. Yet a shadow implies the real existence of the object. The Law reflected God's knowledge of the Lord Jesus; to Him, the Lord did in that sense pre-exist, although we know that literally He didn't. Likewise Levi was seen by God as paying tithes whilst he was still as it were within Abraham's body (Heb. 7:9,10), and the dead believers are likened to spectators in a stadium, cheering us on as we race the race of this life (Heb. 12:1).

Paul's statement that God has made public display for ridicule (*edeigmatisen en parrêsia*) of the "rulers and authorities" is alluding to a phrase which occurs in the Jewish writings about the supposed Satanic rulers of this present world. But Paul says that God displays them for what they are and thereby holds them up to ridicule (Col. 2:17), rather like Elijah mocking the non-existence of Baal. In Col 2:8,20 and Gal 4:3, 8–10, Paul says that believers are no longer subject to the "elements of the cosmos" (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) – again, a term the Jews used to describe supposed sinful Angels ruling the cosmos. He's deconstructing these ideas rather than supporting them.

2:18 *Let no one rob you of your prize by a false humility and worshiping of the angels, keeping on about all the things which he has supposedly seen in visions, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind-* If we let ourselves act against our conscience, we are *now* condemned (Rom. 14:23). If we judge another, "thou condemnest [present tense] thyself" (Rom. 2:1). We must not let false teachers "judge against you" (Col. 2:18 AVmg.) in the sense that by following them we can let them as it were pass the verdict of condemnation upon us, here and now.

Seeking to cut off the flesh by steel willed obedience to laws is in fact fleshly. Likewise in 2:23 Paul argues that obedience to laws isn't any benefit in cutting off the flesh; this is done by God in Christ through our baptism into Him and being counted as Him.

2:19 *And not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God-* The Lord Jesus, as the Head, *ministers* nourishment to the body (Col. 2:19). But how? The same word is used in the parallel Eph. 4:16: every joint of the body *supplies* (s.w.) the rest of the body with nourishment. The Lord's work of ministering to us is articulated through us His servants. This is why faith can die in individuals and ecclesias, simply because brethren and sisters are not ministering strength to others. We should seriously consider our words, spoken and written, our motivation, whether or not we challenge a brother or sister over something, the direction of our conversations... for we can obstruct the grace and nourishment of Christ by our raising of that which pulls down rather than builds up. Likewise Col. 2:19 says that God gives increase to the body; but Eph. 4:16 uses the same Greek in saying how the body makes increase of itself in love. It occurs again in Eph. 2:21: "all the building fitly framed together *groweth* unto an holy temple". This is all so weighty in its implication. Our duty is not merely to retain a correct understanding of certain propositional truths, and ourselves live a reasonable life. The welfare of all others in the body has been delegated to us. Their salvation and perhaps their eternal rejection lays in our hands, to some extent. See on Eph. 4:16.

2:20 *If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the*

*world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances?*- The aorist tense of “you died” refers to a one time event, surely our baptisms into Christ's death. Likewise 3:1 refers to our one time rising with Christ in baptism. They were ‘subjecting themselves’ to the Jewish ordinances, the legalities of Judaism, “as though” they were living in the [Jewish] world. Submission to Judaism was inappropriate for those who had died with Christ in baptism. The salvation by faith through grace experienced in Him meant that they had died not only to sin, but to the law which brought about sin.

*2:21 Handle not, nor taste, nor touch-* These legal concerns were about external contamination. But the focus of Colossians has been that the gift of the Spirit affects the human spirit, the mind, the heart. This is the focus of true Christianity. Contamination of the heart cannot occur through eating or touching ritually unclean things. “Touch” in Greek can mean simply ‘association’, having ‘to do with’ someone. In this case, Paul is categorically condemning the whole concept of ‘guilt by association’ which has been the root cause of so much division between believers. Not handling [touching] nor tasting is alluding to Eve’s perception that she was not to touch nor taste the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:3). Eve had put a fence around the command not to eat of the fruit; she had added ‘neither shall you touch it’. And it had not saved her from sin; indeed, her primitive legalism was not mixed with faith in God’s grace, and it led her to spiritual catastrophe. The Judaist legalism and fences around the law were leading them in just the same way.

*2:22 (All things that perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?*- The idea may simply be that all external things perish, food is touched, eaten and then perishes; whereas the work of the Spirit is in the heart and is permanent. The food laws concerned things which perished permanently; avoiding them was just a temporary way of avoiding legal infringements, whereas the work of the Spirit had permanent effect upon the heart. And it is the Spirit which will be experienced eternally in God’s Kingdom. And in any case, the ordinances of Judaism in view here were “of men”, and not therefore the law of God. This is a pointed attack on the Jewish idea that the teachings of the Rabbis effectively became Divine law.

*2:23 Which things have indeed a false appearance of wisdom in worship and humility and severity to the body, but are not of any real value against stopping the indulgence of the flesh-* Paul sees the “real value” of any teaching in spiritual terms. The legalism associated with worrying about food legislation was of no value against stopping us indulge the flesh. What is required is the Spirit, working internally; rather than regulations about external defilement. The “worship” in view is that of Angels (:18). Fasting was not demanded by the Mosaic law, apart from at the day of atonement; but fasting was a major part of Judaism. But all this would not stop the flesh but rather encourage it; what was required was the ministry of God’s spirit within the human spirit.

## CHAPTER 3

*3:1 If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above-* Chapter 2 has spoken of baptism as death and resurrection with Christ. If this has happened, then we follow where He went after resurrection, which was to Heaven. Not literally, for heaven going after death is not taught in the Bible; but in our thoughts being with Him there in the Heavens. The structure of Paul's letters shows very clearly the link between doctrine and practice.

Colossians 1 and 2 are pure theology, the precise, analytical Paul at his most flowing, intellectually devastating and persuasive; but "then..." (3:1) we are lead on to another two chapters of the practical implications of this. This theology / doctrinal treatise and the pivotal, crucial then... therefore... is likewise the turning point of Romans (12:1), Galatians (6:1-10), Ephesians (4:1) and Philippians (4:1). His theology, his doctrine, always ends in an ethical demand (see too 1 Thess. 5 and 2 Thess. 3). To use pompous words, our orthodoxy (right doctrine) must lead to orthopraxy (right behaviour).

*Where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God-* Hence the significance of Stephen seeing the Lord *standing* at the right hand of God in urgent mediation and emotion for him in his sufferings.

*3:2 Set your mind on the things that are above-* The same word is used in bidding us to "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ" (Phil. 2:5); indeed, Paul uses the word seven times in Philippians. It is Christ who is "above" in that He has ascended to Heaven (:1); so the "things" in view are those of Christ, rather than spiritual, heavenly things generally.

*Not on the things that are upon the earth-* Paul is repeating the great theme of Philippians, to set our mind on Christ rather than be of those who "mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). The appeals in Philippians to be of "one mind" refer to the need to all be focused upon the same mind- Christ. That is the basis of unity, rather than being uniform in all matters of doctrinal interpretation or living.

*3:3 For you died-* Continuing the baptism allusions. When we were baptized, we died to the natural life, and therefore the only life we have is the life which we are given by reason of our association with the resurrected Lord Jesus. And therefore our spiritual life must be the central thing in our existence- not a hobby. As I dried myself off after my baptism, I opened my Bible at 'random', and came with marvellous appropriacy to Prov. 23:26: "My son, give me thine heart". And Paul taught the same: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). "The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that (Christ) has died for all (believers); therefore all have died. And He died for all (of us), that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised... therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old (life) has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:14-17 RSV). "I was co-crucified with Christ (Gk.): nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me" (Gal. 2:20). And "The love of Christ constrains us", it shuts us up with no other real way to move, as the Greek implies.

*And your life is hid with Christ-* The idea is of treasure in a totally secure place; for Christ is

in "the bosom of the Father" (Jn. 1:18). Our most valuable treasure is our life, who we are, our personality, which is what shall eternally endure. The "life" in view is surely our eternal life. In this we see the supreme, eternal importance of the development of spiritual personality; for it is that which shall last eternally.

3:4- see on 1 Cor. 15:20.

*When Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then with him you shall also be manifested in glory-* 1 Jn. 3:2 uses the same word in saying that "what we shall be" has not yet been "manifested". The manifesting of the Lord Jesus at the second coming is therefore our manifestation, because Christ is our life. But we are also individuals; *our* life and eternal being is involved. So our unique eternal personality is in fact an aspect of Him. The fullness of His personality has been shared out amongst all those in Him; one wired more towards His grace, another more towards His justice, e.g. In another figure, we are each unique parts of the body which is Christ.

If we believe we really will be there, then we will look more earnestly for the day to come. We can never be truly enthusiastic about the Lord's return if we are unsure about our ultimate acceptance at His hand. Because we are sure that "When Christ... shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication..." etc. (Col. 3:4,5). We don't control ourselves because we think this will make us good enough to be accepted, but rather because we believe that we have already been accepted. By grace alone.

*3:5 Therefore, put to death what is earthly in you: Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness-* Gk. 'make a corpse of'. We are alive and yet we are dead, as walking corpses. Putting to death is paralleled with "also put away..." in :8; the idea there is of undressing, of casting away clothes. We are naked corpses, that is the picture being developed. Our real life and being is centered around Heavenly things. The same word is only used elsewhere of Abraham whose body was dead, i.e. sexually impotent (Rom. 4:19; Heb. 11:12). The examples now given in the rest of this verse are all sexual. We are invited to see ourselves as Abraham, whose focus was upon the stars above, the promises of Heavenly things. Paul clearly saw that there was a real temptation for his readers to fall into sexual lust; and at the end of chapter 2 he has warned that claiming to abide by Jewish legal regulations was actually a temptation towards lust. The reasoning seems to be that legal obedience tempts a person to think that other areas of sin are therefore quite acceptable. And this would explain the link between Christian legalism and sexual immorality which has so often become apparent.

Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28. The Colossians still had to "put to death" things like fornication, even though they had put them to death in baptism (Col. 3:5 = Rom. 6:6). Yet they are described as having formerly lived in those things, as if now, they don't do them (Col. 3:7). Yet clearly they did still do those things. Again, Paul is saying that they don't do those things by status, in God's eyes, therefore they shouldn't do them in practice.

*Which is idolatry-* Paul is writing to those attracted by Judaism, for whom avoiding idolatry was an obsession. But he is warning that the real idolatry is not falling down before statues, but the life of the flesh and the hidden lust of the mind.

*3:6 For which things' sake comes the anger of God upon the children of disobedience-* The idea of disobedience suggests that the class in view are those who know God's requirements, those responsible to judgment. The similar language of Rom. 1:18 refers to this category of persons. And we can assume there were some in Colosse, as in other New Testament churches, who were justifying serious sexual immorality as perfectly allowable for believers in Christ.

*3:7 Things in which you also once walked, when you lived in these things-* The parallel Eph. 2:2 says that "in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, according to the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience". That 'spirit' is here defined as that of sexual abandon and lack of internal mental control. This arises from within the flesh; and not as a result of some cosmic being controlling us.

*3:8 But now you are to also put away-* See on 3:5 *Put to death*. The commandment to "put away" these behaviours suggests that they were all ongoing amongst the Colossian converts. The same word is used of how Christian converts elsewhere needed to "put off" such carnal behaviour and immorality (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 2:1). Clearly the early churches were full of quite serious immorality, bad language, blasphemy and even violence. The historical accounts of how some very self-sacrificial behaviour attracted the positive notice of outsiders doesn't take away from this; and this sad scenario is all witnessed by the New Testament itself. We need to give this internal evidence its due weight. It's clear that Paul preached and then baptized whoever said 'yes' without unduly analysing their motives or morality. Inevitably with so many quick baptisms, the communities which developed would have been characterized by the same spiritual immaturities which were in their native societies.

The "also" connects with the list of five forms of sexual sins in :5. Paul now gives another list of five sins which are more internal than external. He may be continuing the theme developed at the end of chapter 2, of needing to focus on the internal and spiritual more than the external.

*Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth-* The idea is that the five gross sexual sins of :5 are no worse than the five more common failures now listed.

*3:9 Lie not one to another-* The parallel Eph. 4:24,25 explains the significance of "to each other": "Put on the new man... Therefore, putting away falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour. For we are members one of another". The function of the one body will be hindered by lying to each other within it.

*Seeing you have put off the old man with his doings-* This is the language of Rom. 6:6 about baptism. It could fairly be said that Colossians is explaining to baptized believers the



implications of their baptisms.

*3:10 And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator-* Because in status we have 'put on the new man', "put on, therefore... mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind", i.e. bring forth in yourself the characteristics of Jesus, seeing you have 'put Him on' in baptism (Col. 3:10,12). Clothe your personality with Him, submerge yourself within Him, seeing you 'put on' Christ in baptism. We are to live out in practice how the Lord sees us by status.

The Lord Jesus is set up in so many ways as the example for us to follow- in a way that some cosmic being descending from outer space never could have been. In the same way as Jesus was the image of the invisible God in His character (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), so we are bidden put on the image of God (Col. 3:10), being transformed into His image progressively over time (2 Cor. 3:18), through "the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2), being conformed to the image of Jesus our Saviour (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). Thus the process of our redemption, through the perfect character of Jesus, becomes in turn a personal pattern for each of us who have been saved by that process. And it was only through the successful completion of that work of redemption that Jesus was "made" Lord of all (Rom. 1:4; Acts 2:36). This is a different picture to the Gnostic-Trinitarian idea of a pre-existent Lord of all descending to earth which was apparently troubling the Colossians. Further, their theory gets somewhat confused when they claim that the Angelic appearances on earth in Old Testament times [e.g. the Angel with Israel in the wilderness] were actually appearances of Jesus on earth. If this is so, then when did Jesus come to earth to save men? Did He make several visits...? Why couldn't each of these visits have been enough for human salvation? The idea that the Lord Jesus was an Old Testament Angel is simply unsustainable in Scripture and needs to be rejected, along with all Gnostic-influenced views of Him. We know from Acts 14:11 that there was a strong tendency in the first century to believe that the gods could come to earth in the likeness of men; and Trinitarianism simply reflects the fact that weak Christians in the early centuries sought to accommodate Christianity to their existing beliefs.

*3:11 Where there cannot be Gentile and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman- but Christ is all and in all-* In the "new man" whom we have "put on", i.e. Christ, "there cannot be Greek and Jew" etc (Col. 3:11 RV). But we have to do something in order to bring this about- mere baptism isn't enough. Paul continues: "Put on therefore... a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience" (Col. 3:12). If we are "in Christ", there "cannot be" division in that body- if there is, from our perspective, then surely we are proclaiming ourselves to be not of that body. But in order to actualize being "in Christ", we have to therefore show kindness, humility, patience etc. in order that there will not be division. We have to live out in practice the status which we have been given at baptism, of being "in" the undivided, indivisible Christ. "Christ is [created in] all [who believe] and in all [places of the world]" (Col. 3:11 Bullinger). It is the common experience of this new creation which binds us together as one body and spiritual nation world-wide.

*3:12 Therefore, as God's elect-* The language of Old Testament Israel, and also of the Messiah. The new Israel are characterized and identified by their spiritual attributes, as the children of Abraham by the spirit, rather than fleshly identity. We again note that the false

teaching plaguing Colosse and its surrounds was connected with a return to Judaism. But the main reference is I believe to us being as Christ, the elect.

*And beloved-* A title of Christ, whose titles and personality is now counted to all of us in Him (Mt. 12:18; and the clear parallel in Eph. 1:6 is that He "has made us accepted [by being] in the beloved").

*Put on-* We cannot just sit down and acquire the listed characteristics. But insofar as we are in Christ, we have clothed ourselves with Him, and these characteristics of His personality are counted to us by grace. We have "put on [s.w.] the new man", Christ (:10), who according to Isaiah's servant songs was "the elect". The faith that that is indeed so leads us to naturally be the persons we are counted to be by status.

*Sensitivity, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering-* These five characteristics are the antidote for the lists of five sins in :5 and :8.

*3:13 Forbearing one another and forgiving each other, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as the Lord forgave you, so also forgive-* He forgives us on account of our status in Christ, forgiving therefore without demanding specific repentance for every sin. And we are to operate a similar policy with others in Christ. This is the force of the little word "As...". Forgiveness without requiring repentance frees us from so much legalism and bearing of records of wrongs against others. Every "complaint" needs to be gone into, and a judgment reached as to whether the event really happened, or happened as the aggrieved party says it did; and whether there has been real repentance. And there is no ultimate ombudsman or judge on earth who can reach the ultimate truth of the situations. Every judge and jury, within or outside the church, formal or informal, will decide differently. In many cases, mitigating or unconsidered factors will keep on coming out of the woodwork. All this is a recipe for interpersonal strife and division. To forgive without demanding repentance, including forgiving perceived issues, is the way to peace and harmony, both within ourselves and within the believing community.

3:14- see on 1 Cor. 13:11.

*And above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection-* Moses' spiritual pinnacle was characterized by arriving at a profound depth of love. Love is likewise seen by Paul as "the bond of perfection" (Col. 3:14), the sign of ultimate maturity. He has already begun in Colossians 1 by saying that true faith and hope for eternity will bring forth love. The Greek for "bond" is a medical term, referring to the ligaments of the human body. Paul has just used it concerning the anatomy of the body of Christ, the church, in 2:19. The completeness of the body is brought about by love, and the context of that "love" is in the command in the preceding verse :13 to forgive as we have been forgiven, i.e. without demanding repentance. But this is the state of "perfection" or spiritual maturity. Those who insist upon repentance before forgiveness are not therefore mature, and the body of Christ will only be completely functional if this policy of forgiveness without repentance is universally accepted and applied.

*3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts- to this you were also called in one body;*

*and be thankful-* We are called to the hope of the Kingdom "in one body" (Col. 3:15); all who receive the call of the true Gospel are in the same one body. There is one body, based around sharing the one faith, one hope, understanding of the one Father and Son, having participated in the one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). So whoever believes the doctrines of the basic Gospel and has been baptized and walks in Christ, we have a duty (and should have a desire) to fellowship. The need for unity amongst us is so very often stressed (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 15:5,6; Phil. 2:2; Eph. 4:31,32; Col. 3:12-15).

3:16- see on 1 Pet. 2:5.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. In all wisdom teach and encourage one another-* This may well be an allusion to the tradition of learning the Gospel of Mark. How can it richly dwell in us if we do not daily meditate upon those inspired records?

*With Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs- singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord-* There are connections between praise and forgiveness of sin. Col. 3:16 speaks of communal hymn singing as a means of "admonishing" each other- and the Greek translated "admonish" here means just that (cp. Tit. 3:10). The connection between praise and confession / forgiveness makes this appropriate. It may be that Paul is writing with his eye on Dt. 32; the Song of Moses spoke of Israel's weakness and proneness to apostasy. Yet they were bidden sing this to each other, in order to inculcate the culture of forgiveness without repentance- see on :13 and :14. Would anything like that get into a Christian hymn book today?

3:17 *And whatever you do, in word or in action, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him-* The doing and acting in view is in the policy of forgiving without repentance, on account of a believer's status in Christ; see on :13 and :14. We do this because we are in Christ, we are acting in His Name, and do so giving thanks to God for our blanket forgiveness which we experience in Him, whereby all our sins are blotted out because of our status in Christ (2:13).

3:18 *Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord-* As all in Christ are to be subject to each other (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5). These commands about family life are added in the context of the preceding argument about love and unconditional forgiveness. The Christian family and home is to be the living and supreme example and microcosm of the principles governing church life. This is why church leaders are to be judged more than anything else by the state and function of their own families.

3:19 *Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them-* I have argued that these commands about family life are exemplifications of the preceding comments about unconditional forgiveness and treating each other as Christ has treated us. The parallel in Eph. 4:31,32 supports that: "Let all bitterness and wrath... be put away from you... be kind to each other, sensitive, forgiving each other, even as God in Christ also forgave you". Bitterness arises from unforgiveness. Likewise the command in :21 about not provoking others to wrath (AV) must be read in this same context; wrath, according to Eph. 4:31,32, arises from unforgiveness.

3:20 *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is pleasing to the Lord*- Implying there were baptized young people in the ecclesias. The early critics of Christianity mocked it as a religion of children and women. Those not counted as persons in ancient society found their meaning and acceptance in Christ.

3:21 *Fathers, do not provoke your children, in order that they are not discouraged*- See on :19 *Be not bitter*. These commandments are regarding believing families. The discouragement in view was presumably in the context of the children growing up encouraged by their fathers to believe and be baptized. But endless provocation of children in domestic life will only discourage them from that path.

3:22 *Servants, obey in all things those that are your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord*- The Greek *kurios* is used here for “masters” rather than the more natural *despotes* because the idea is being developed that service to human masters can be accepted as service towards the Master- the Lord Jesus.

3:23 *Whatever you do, work heartily, as if to the Lord and not to men*- This is in the context of commands to slaves (:22). It would have been so liberating for those in dead end daily situations, similar to those trapped in minimum wage employment today, to realize that their service can be done "to the Lord". He realizes the limitations of human situations in employment, and is willing to accept the toil of the daily grind as done to Him- if we are willing to give it to Him.

3:24 *Knowing that from the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ*- The comfort is to first century slaves, and those in the slavery of minimum wage dead end employment in our age, to not look so much to the pittance of salary or reward at the end of each day or month- but to realize that the reward of working as unto the Lord is in fact the inheritance of the Kingdom.

3:25 *But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality*- The context is about slaves and masters, and the reference may well be to believing masters who abused their slaves.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Masters, give to your servants what is just and equal. Knowing you also have a master in heaven-* Our relationships with others should be governed by our sense of relationship with the Lord Jesus. If we are but His slaves, then we will deport ourselves appropriately in any secular position of authority which may be our lot. The even handed attitude of the Lord Jesus to us, without favouritism, was to be reflected by masters not having favourites amongst their slave; and certainly not giving them unjust compensation for their services. For the Lord's attitude to us is ultimately "just and equal". Indeed, Paul's thought is repeatedly that we are the unjust, but are justified by faith in His grace. Our Master died for us, "the just for unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18). And even if we have to deal with unjust servants, we are to remember that God sends His rain on both the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45). This command follows on from the comment in the previous verse that there is "no respect of persons" with the Lord Jesus, and that believing masters who abused their slaves would be judged for this (3:25).

4:2 *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving-* This is the very language of the earliest church, who are repeatedly set up as our example (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46). The difficulty of prayer is to persevere in it, not making requests as a passing shot, but continuing in prayer. And any requests are to be framed within constant thanksgiving for what the Lord has given us already, not least in His Son. The same word is used about continuing in prayer in Acts 6:4 and Rom. 12:12. "Vigilant" means 'keeping awake', and is used of the disciples in Gethsemane failing to do this as asked (Mt. 26:38,40,41). We can read it quite literally- do not drift asleep whilst praying. For who of us is not concerned about our tendency to do that. The appeal is for mental focus, not allowing prayer to slip into mere ritual, a repetition of the same themes and phrases. And "thanksgiving", deep gratitude for what we have been given already, which will help us in this alertness.

4:3 *Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for preaching the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for the sake of which I am also in chains-* This prayer was indeed answered, because Phil. 1:13; 4:22 [see notes there] report that Paul's witness in chains led to the conversion of people right within Caesar's household. Opening doors is the language of release from prison (Acts 5:23; 16:26). So although in prison, Paul felt that his chains would as it were be loosed, he would no longer feel so limited, if he could spread the Gospel. I pray each day to meet the right people, or as Paul put it, for a door to be opened for preaching. Paul had earlier written of how a great door had been opened to him to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9). He may well have prayed for this, for the allusion is to how prayer is a knocking which opens doors (Mt. 7:7). If we want such open doors, they will be given to us. For to pray for that is surely to pray according to God's will. But all the same, Paul asks others to pray for him in this matter; and his success in prison is a parade example of how this prayer will be answered.

4:4- see on Mt. 26:35.

*Pray that I may speak boldly, as I should-* As noted on Eph. 6:20, Paul himself admits a tendency not to preach, to hold back from giving his all to fulfil that commission he had received to testify of the Gospel of God's grace (1 Cor. 9:16). He asks his brethren to pray that he would be able to "make it manifest" more than he did (Col. 4:4 cp. Eph. 6:20). As

noted on :3, this prayer was powerfully answered in the conversion of slaves and others within Caesar's household. "Speak boldly" is literally 'to manifest'. Paul earlier told the Romans that the Gospel is now made manifest [s.w.] to all nations (Rom. 16:26, also 2 Cor. 2:14; Tit. 1:3). But this is dependent upon our efforts to make it manifest, and even Paul felt that he was failing in this and needed prayer to achieve what was potentially possible. The Gospel has been made manifest to us (Col. 1:26 s.w.) and we therefore are to manifest it to others.

*4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those that are without, redeeming the time-* In a preaching context, Paul tells us to "redeem the time", or "be buying up the opportunity" (Col. 4:5 RVmg.); we are to urgently snap up every opportunity to preach. And walking wisely towards those "without" is a way of witnessing to them. Closer analysis of "redeeming the time" reveals that this is in fact a quotation from the LXX of Dan. 2:8, where Nebuchadnezzar tells the wise men that they want to 'redeem the time, because you know that [the decree for their execution] is gone from me'. There are other allusions in Col. 4 to Daniel: captivity, earnest prayer, thanksgiving, making manifest wisdom to the world as we ought to, walking in wisdom in the eyes of the world. Daniel and his friends urgently devoted every moment of their lives to prayer in order to redeem time, so that they would be delivered; and Paul took as it were a snapshot of their frantic urgency, and applies it to each of us, also living in Babylon. "The days are evil", the world around us is insidious- and therefore we must redeem the time from it (Eph. 5:16). Or it could be that 'the evil days' refers to the great and special day of evil, at the second coming (Eph. 6:13, in context; Ps. 37:29). In view of the coming of that day and the judgment it will bring, we ought to have a deep sense of the future we might miss, and the urgency of our present position; and devote ourselves therefore to redeeming the time. The sure coming of that day is an exhortation to the believer, "that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles... [for we] shall give account to him that is ready to judge" (1 Pet. 4:2-5). Peter's message is that there's no need to spend time living as the world does, tickling the desires of our nature- for we already spent enough of our time doing that. We are men and women living under judgment, and therefore should devote our lives to the service of God's will.

*4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one-* "Always" demands consistency; it is easy to talk nicely at times, but to live and speak like this as the atmosphere of our language demands much more. Our experience of grace should empower this consistency, our word choice and intonation will reflect the grace we have received. Living in this atmosphere or spirit of thinking will mean that we somehow naturally find the right words to speak, rather than struggling to respond rightly every time we encounter a provocative conversation. "Each one" presumably refers to "those without" of :5. But it equally applies to our words to our brethren. The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6). Salt was a symbol of covenant relationship with God (Lev. 2:13); yet in the NT this salt stands for love, peace and kind speaking the one to the other (Mk. 9:50; Col. 4:6). This is the result of true membership in covenant relationship; a true and abiding love for all others in covenant.

4:7 *All my affairs shall Tychicus make known to you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord-* In an age where communication was very limited, "the messengers of the churches" travelled around the known world taking messages and news (2 Cor. 8:23). We should be making the same effort to be bound together with others within the Lord's body, and surely the age of easy communication has arisen in order to allow us to do just that. Let us not abuse it but use it for the purpose the Lord intended.

4:8 *Whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our state and that he may comfort your hearts-* The sole reason Tychicus was sent all the way from Rome to Colosse was to carry news of how Paul was faring in prison; see on :7. Paul assumed that the Colossians were desperately worried about his state in prison, and "for this very purpose" sent Tychicus to comfort them.

4:9 *Together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you, they shall make known to you all things that are done here-* As the Lord sent out the disciples in pairs, so it would seem that Tychicus and Onesimus were sent together. Onesimus was "one of you", originally from Colosse and known to them. "All things that are done here" presumably refers to the kind of regime Paul was experiencing in prison, as well as the real state of things under Nero's terror against the Christians. Paul has to emphasize that Onesimus is faithful, because he would have been known only as the runaway slave. He is again called "the beloved brother" in Philemon 16. Paul would therefore have been writing the letter to Philemon at the same time as he was writing to the Colossians. As noted on Phil. 1:1, a fair case can be made that the prison epistles were all written quite close to each other, when Paul was no longer dwelling in his own hired house in Rome but was suffering the results of Nero's persecution of the Christians. In this case we note all the more his focus upon the spiritual wellbeing of others, when he was himself in such a time of crisis.

4:10 *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)-* Aristarchus is called Paul's fellow worker when he writes about this time in Philemon 24. The prisoners saw themselves as actively working for the Lord despite their apparently reduced freedoms. It's all a great encouragement to us, that no matter that the ties that bind, we can actively labour for the Lord. "Mark" is likely the "Marcus" of Philemon 24; another hint that the letters of Philemon and Colossians were written about the same time and may well have been carried together to Colosse by Onesimus. If Mark was the relative of Barnabas, we can better understand why Barnabas found a patience with him which Paul apparently didn't. Paul was aware that he had fallen out with Barnabas over Mark, who had 'departed from' Paul and returned to the Jerusalem church- all language which suggests a spiritual division between them, perhaps because Mark couldn't cope with the mass appeal to the Gentiles which Paul was making. But now towards the end of his life, Paul urges them to forget all that and accept him amongst them. For Mark now is with Paul, apparently also his fellow prisoner. All tensions between brethren over interpretation and acceptance of third parties are all somewhat irrelevant once both of them are sitting together in prison for Christ. We too need to focus as far as possible on what we have in common, which is so much, indeed, "all things".

4:11 *And Jesus who is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-*

*workers to the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort to me-* Paul graciously speaks of some brethren "who are of the circumcision [party]" as his "fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God", noting that they are "men that have been a comfort unto me" (Col. 4:11 RV). The circumcision party understood things very differently to Paul- he is ever arguing against their position, showing that circumcision profits nothing. And yet these brethren whom he here refers to were still acceptable to him as fellow workers, and he even took "comfort" from their fellowship. I find that a beautiful example of how tolerance can be practiced; despite the fact Paul was right and they were wrong, the simply reality that they were mistaken on this point, he could still work with them and be encouraged by them. He didn't reason: 'If you don't agree with me on this point, well, we're not working together, that's it, goodbye, I can take nothing positive from you by way of fellowship or encouragement'. In fact we could read the AV translation as implying that although Paul had many fellow workers, out of them all, the ones who were a personal comfort to him were these brethren who were of the circumcision party: "Aristarchus... Justus, who are of the circumcision, these only are my fellow workers... which have been a comfort unto me". Justus was in common use among Jews and proselytes, as "denoting obedience to the law". Yet Paul the apostle of grace and the end of the Law found great comfort in him, and worked together with him "to the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is not now literally established upon earth, but we as believers are under God's kingship. We are therefore His Kingdom. Paul and his brethren in prison were workers within and towards the Kingdom. There is nothing better than when man has an end in view for his labour; and that end for us is glorious, nothing less than men and women entering God's Kingdom at the last day.

4:12- see on Col. 2:1.

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always striving for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God-* Perhaps Paul had watched Epaphras on his knees in the same prison cell, 'wrestling' as Jacob did in prayer, for the perfecting and assurance of his home church back in Colosse; for he too "is one of you". Prayer is no bedtime lullaby; it is a real wrestling, not just on occasion, but "always". Faith is a certain hope that really, we shall be saved and live eternally in God's Kingdom. He prayed that they would 'get it', and be fully assured that this was indeed God's will for them. For our salvation is so often linked with the will of God. Epaphras was following Paul's example, who constantly prayed that they would be filled [s.w. "fully assured"] with the knowledge of God's will (1:9). If these brethren were sharing the same prison accommodation, we can understand how attitudes to prayer would be so contagious. Knowing God's will doesn't have to mean that we know the will of God for us in every situation. It is part of the journey of faith and trust that we do not. But His will is for our salvation in His Son; this we can know and experience.

4:13 *For I bear witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis-* On :11 we noted that Paul considered these brethren, along with himself, to be 'working' for the Kingdom's cause whilst incarcerated. In :12 he observes how Epaphras was always striving in prayer "for you". I suggest therefore that the hard work [AV "great zeal"] in view refers to the work of prayer. And he also prayed not only for Colosse but for those he knew in Laodicea and Hierapolis.



4:14 *Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you-* Luke's loyalty to Paul had led him to accompany Paul on the journey to Rome, including the shipwreck; and perhaps he remained in Rome as Paul's personal physician. Luke was with Paul at the very end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). We could therefore conclude that Colossians was written at around that same time. I have argued the same for Philippians (see on Phil. 1:1). In this case, Paul ended his days with desperate appealing to others to see the reality of the great hope he had; his focus was outward, not upon himself, but upon the spiritual welfare of others. However, 2 Tim. 4:10 contrasts the faithful Luke with the less faithful Demas, who left Paul, "having loved this present world". Colossians would therefore have been written slightly earlier than 2 Timothy. But the fact both Luke and Demas are mentioned together suggests the time gap was not that great.

4:15 *Greet the brothers that are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church that is in their house-* This could mean that the church in Laodicea met in the home of Nymphas. For Laodicea is the context both before and after this mention of Nymphas [some manuscripts offer Nympha, a female name, and read "her house"]. We tend to assume that the size of 'churches' today was the same in the first century; but there is no archaeological evidence for dedicated Christian meeting places in the first century, although there is ample for the existence of house churches. The perversions which the Lord later criticizes in the church at Laodicea would likely have all occurred in the lounge or side rooms of a large house. Nymphas may well have been "the angel of the church" to whom the Lord's letter to Laodicea was addressed (Rev. 3:14).

4:16 *And when this letter has been read among you, take steps to have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and you also read the letter from Laodicea-* The letter *from* rather than *to* Laodicea may refer to a circular letter which was being passed around the churches, and was to come from Laodicea to Colosse. The letter in view may well be Ephesians (see on Eph. 1:1). The wish for letters to one church to be read to another indicates that we are wrong to think these letters are merely Paul writing to one specific church, and that the principles have no relevance to us. They clearly do, for even originally the letters were to be read to other churches for their instruction.

4:17- see on Acts 12:25.

*And say to Archippus: Take heed to the service which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it-* Archippus was part of the house church of Philemon (Philemon 2; possibly the son or relative of Philemon). His ministry ["service"] was perhaps to minister there whilst Epaphras and others from there were away in Rome. This would suggest that the Colossian church met in the home of Philemon. if we are "in Christ", then we receive a ministry; receiving the ministry is predicated upon being in Christ, and therefore every baptized believe into Christ has a ministry, something to do; but we must "take heed" that we "fulfil it". To "receive" Christ (s.w. 2:6) is to also receive a unique role in His body, a ministry, a path of service.

4:18 *I Paul write this salutation with my own hand. Remember my bonds-* As he signed the letter, Paul would have been aware of this chain. There is here the stamp of circumstantial evidence that what we read in the Bible is authentic; for signing a letter would lead to reflection on the chain.

*Grace be with you-* The *charis* or gift of the Spirit was what Paul so wished to be experienced by all believers. And he often prays for this. We cannot therefore read this as a standard ending to a letter, which in any case would more likely have read "I wish you peace". Paul really felt that his prayerful wishes for them would have effect in practice.

The New European Bible Commentary: 1 Thessalonians

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## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace-* Paul and Silas were only "three Sabbath days" in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2). As many would have been working during the week, and Paul would not have been the only teacher in the synagogue, those baptized there would have had only a few hours instruction in the Gospel. It's not surprising that Paul had to now write to them about apparently basic things such as the Lord's coming and the resurrection. They were really "in God" and in Christ- Paul didn't want them to think that they had merely shown passing interest in some itinerant preacher. It was all for real.

1:2 *We give thanks to God always for you all-* The Old Testament as well as New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables, and we have an example here: *Pantote Peri Panton* (1 Thess. 1:2); *Polymeros kai polytropos* (Heb. 1:1); *hautee protee entolee* (Mk. 12:30); *aphtharton amianton amaranton* (1 Pet. 1:3,4).

*Making mention of you in our prayers-* This means more than just 'mentioning'. To mention before God is a Hebraism referring to actually having real effect upon God's view of the person or situation, just as might make positive mention of someone to a superior. Whilst the Lord Jesus is our only mediator, it is also that because we in Him, we can have influence upon God in regard to others; He is so open to our prayers.

1:3 *Remembering without ceasing before our God and Father your work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ-* "Remembering" is a similar word to "making mention" in :2 (see note there). Paul brought to God's attention, as it were, their faith, hope and love. And we must ask ourselves, as to how much of our prayer time is taken up with telling God the good things about others? Paul says he did this "without ceasing". Quite a challenge to our prayer life, which so easily tends towards selfishness. "Labour of love" is literally 'toil', and is elsewhere translated "trouble" or "weariness". Loving others results in just this- weariness and trouble. But that is what love is about in practice. "Hope" refers not to a hoping for the best, but a solid expectation- in this case, of salvation, because we are in Christ. That hope was 'patient' or enduring; our tendency is to be persuaded of our salvation for a moment and then drift into the mire of mediocrity in that we lose that intensity of vision and expectation. But patient or enduring hope means life lived in the constant belief that we shall be saved. Paul commends them for this- and yet has to explain to them later that

those of them who had recently died were not lost, but would be resurrected at the Lord's return. The Thessalonians therefore had a basic faith, that there was hope in Christ, and they endured in that faith; but their understanding of what that hope was remained clearly very hazy. But all the same, Paul commended them in his prayers before God for believing and having the sure hope. So whilst faith must have content, we believe in something, it is also true that basic faith in Jesus is acceptable even if we have details wrong as regards how it shall all work out in practice.

Note how many times Paul gives thanks for the spiritual progress he sees in others, even though we can be sure he saw clearly enough the spiritual immaturity which there still must have been in his converts. So many times he thanks God in his prayers for what he has seen in others (Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 9:12-15; Eph. 1:3-23; Phil. 1:3-6; Col. 1:3-14; 1 Thess. 1:2,3; 2:13-16; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3-10; 2 Tim. 1:3-7; Philemon 4-7). Now it follows that if we are to *pray* like Paul, we must have the heart of love for people that was in him. So often we dwell upon the negative, the scandals, the failures of others. And we can't thank God for those things. Paul's pattern of prayer was of positive praise. And we can only share that if we have a mind that is positively perceptive of signs of response to grace in others.

Their "work of faith" recalls how James argues that there is no essential difference between faith and works. 'Faith' is not just credulity or a vague feeling of hope, but an active, driving force. There is "the work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11); faith is something which ought to be 'done', the Lord taught (Mt. 23:23). Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (43:10); and the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding (Mt. 16:7,8). *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*.

We note that their "hope" is praised here, but they were seriously deficient in understanding what that hope was in detail, apparently not understanding much about the resurrection. Yet Paul perceived their faith in Christ and firm expectation ["hope"] of salvation in Him, and praises them for it- even if they were astray or ignorant in their understanding of how it would work out in practice. See on 4:13. We can only conclude that not understanding the details of our future hope does not mean we do not have a valid faith in Christ, nor does it hinder the validity of a baptism. But like Paul, we are to seek to fill in the gaps which believers have in their knowledge of these things.

1:4 *Knowing, brothers beloved of God, your first calling-* Paul was sure they had been called because he had preached the Gospel to them (:5). The call is therefore in the Gospel. Those who hear the Gospel are called; those who have been invited to Christ cannot ever claim they were not invited or not called. Paul doesn't want them to be in any doubt about their calling- he wanted them to 'know' it. And yet Paul is so positive about these rather weak Thessalonians when talking to God about them; see on :3. The Lord's mediation for us is similar.

1:5- see on Gal. 1:6.

*How that our preaching of the gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit-* As noted on :4, this preaching of the Gospel was the proof that they had indeed been called to the Kingdom; and they should not stop 'knowing' that they were called. The word they had heard had been backed up by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no record of any miracles being performed to back up Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10). The confirmation of belief was in the gift of the power of the Spirit in the hearts of all believers after baptism. It was and is not simply accepting a word preached; that word is confirmed by the action of the Spirit. The "power" given can refer to miracles, but there is no record of them in Acts 17; I suggest the reference is therefore to the power of the Spirit within us; the parable of the talents uses the same word, translated "ability", regarding the gifts given to each believer (Mt. 25:15). It is the gift of the power of the Spirit which enables us to abound in joy, hope and peace- all internal attributes (Rom. 15:13). This is the "power" (s.w.) with which we are strengthened by the gift of "the Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). This is why Paul assures them that he can thank God for their faith, love and patience (:3); because they were given these things by the work of the Spirit.

*And in much assurance-* See on Jn. 15:26. As noted above, this could also refer to the gift of the Spirit in their hearts which was an assurance of their future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The riches of full assurance (Col. 2:2) are the same riches given by the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (Eph. 3:16-18). But we can be given the Spirit gift, and yet not be spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). We must allow the work of the Spirit within us, and believe it.

There was a confidence exuding from the early preachers that they had arrived at Truth. They 'had the Truth' in that what they knew and had experienced was enough for salvation. Unlike the surrounding philosophies and religions, they knew whom they had believed; they weren't going somewhere in vague hope, they had arrived. They had something concrete to offer others. They preached from a basis of personal hope and conviction and experience, quite unlike the more 'political' methods other religions used to recruit members. The philosophers and teachers of the 1st century had little conviction about the value or truth of their position. But the Truth came "not only in word but also in power... and with full conviction (Gk. *plerophoria*)" (1 Thess. 1:5). This conviction was not mere dogmatism and self-belief; and likewise our witness must carry with it a "full conviction" that contrasts with the uncertainty about faith, hope etc. which many professing 'believers' of other faiths reveal when they are probed in any depth about their positions. Paul preached the seriousness of the issues which there are in the Gospel; and yet people flocked back to hear more (Acts 13:41). The preaching of truth involves the message of something being exclusive, and compellingly so. In the first century, "no pagan cult was exclusive of any other and the only restriction on initiation into many cults was the expense".

*Even as you know what manner of men we have shown ourselves toward you, for your sake-* Paul realized he was "a Christ appointed model" (RR); see on 1 Tim. 1:15. And so he framed his life in such a way as it could be usefully imitated, showing himself a pattern "for your sake". There is a fine line between this and posturing / hypocrisy. Paul was only with them for "three Sabbath days" (Acts 17:2), he had only a few contact hours with many of them. The greatest Christian instruction he could give them was himself. And they imitated him (:6). As many would have been illiterate, the word of the Gospel and of Jesus had to be made flesh, modelled, so that they could follow the pattern. This is not the same as the endless 'Let

me tell you about myself' sermons which clutter Christianity today. To be a Christian is to be Christ centered, and Paul realized this; for he goes on to say that their imitation of him was therefore also of the Lord Jesus (:6). He wrote the same to the Corinthians: "Be followers of me even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He was to imitated only insofar as he was an image of the Lord.

1:6 *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord-* See on :5. The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking. Not only does he do it himself, but he encourages others to do it. He doesn't use the word 'modelling'; he uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul. "You became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... you know how you ought to *follow* us... an ensample unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication is that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

We all have more influence on each other than we may think. Quite naturally, the Thessalonians imitated the ecclesias of Judaea and also Paul personally (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14). And in turn, they became models to all the believers in Macedonia (1 Thess. 1:7). Leadership is essentially a process of influence, rather than a brother standing up and lecturing others. But the Lord used images such as salt, yeast and light to describe *all* who are in Him. They speak of indirect, constant, transforming influence rather than a frontal assault on the unspirituality of others.

Paul explains to the Thessalonians that he has consciously lived life before them in order to provide them with a template to copy; and their copying of that template in turn became a pattern to those within their circle of contact to emulate. In this we see the power of example, especially in the preaching of the Gospel: "You know what kind of men we were among you *for your sake* (i.e. Paul consciously lived as an example to them). And you became followers of us... so that *you* became examples to all in Macedonia... so that *we* do not need to say anything [because those who had copied Paul's example were effectively his voice to others]... for *they* [the converts of the Thessalonians, not Paul] themselves declare concerning *us* what manner of entry we had to *you* [i.e. the converts of the Thessalonians were a reflection of Paul's conversion of the Thessalonians]... you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea" (1 Thess. 1:6-9; 2:14). This last comment suggests that in imitating Paul, the Thessalonians were imitating the ecclesias in Judaea- perhaps indicating that it was those ecclesias who had initially influenced Paul and been his pattern, and now he was a pattern to the Thessalonians, and they in turn were a pattern to their converts in Macedonia.

*Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit-* At the point of conversion and baptism, they received joy on account of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Rom. 5:5 speaks of love too being shed forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. The outpouring of the Spirit is not only at baptism; we continue to be given it if we are open to it. Hence at Acts 13:52 "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit", and Paul prays that the Roman believers would be "filled with joy... through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). Life in Christ now is about "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). One of the fruits brought forth by the Spirit in us is joy (Gal. 5:22).

1:7 *In this way you became an example to all in Macedonia and in Achaia that believe-* See on :6. The example of the early Christians, especially their deportment under persecution and even death, was what converted others. The Thessalonians were convinced that what Paul taught them was not the word of men but the word of God, because of who Paul was: his life, his self-sacrifice, his caring, convinced them (1 Thess. 2:1-14). Paul speaks of how they had become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia; and yet he also notes in the same context how the Gospel has been spread throughout those very same regions, Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7,8). Their example was associated with the acceptance of the message. Their faith had “gone forth” and so thereby had the word of the Lord “sounded forth” (:8 RV).

1:8- see on Acts 2:46.

*For from you has sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place your faith toward God has gone forth; so that we do not need to say anything about you-* See on :7. Their following of Paul (:5,6) appears to specifically be a reference to their obedience to the great preaching commission: as if Paul is saying: 'Well done for realizing that the great commission which some of us received specifically, does in fact apply to you too!': "You became imitators of us... *for* not only has the word of the Lord *sounded forth* from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has *gone forth everywhere*". We see from this verse the network of communication which there was amongst the early churches. We read in Col. 4:8 of Tychicus being sent specifically from Rome to Colosse 'just' to share news of how Paul was faring in prison; and there were a whole group of "messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23). Communication was so important within a community which knew itself to be the body of Christ on earth, existent in order to build one another up. And yet with all our ease of communication, so little real communication goes on within the body of Christ relative to the ease of it. Communication then was a real sacrifice, and yet messengers scurried around the Mediterranean basin, in an age when most people never travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace. And so the faith of those in Thessalonica, who had heard Paul preaching Christ for only three Sabbath days, spread far and wide.

1:9 *For others report about what kind of reception you gave us and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God-* See on :8. The record in Acts 17 says that Paul preached for three Sabbath days in the synagogue; and yet this verse envisages the Thessalonians as having been previously idol worshippers, and 2:14 states that the readership were Gentiles. Perhaps Paul preached to Gentiles too, although Acts 17 doesn't record it states that in addition to some Jews, a large group of "religious Gentiles" also responded. We would assume from Acts 17:4 that these were proselytes, or at best the religiously curious who also attended synagogue services. In this case we find great encouragement in our witness; for it can be discouraging to keep meeting people who are religious on a hobbyist level, but who seem unable to come to firm faith in the one true God. These were, it seems, the types Paul converted at Thessalonica, attending the synagogue as well as worshipping idols. Confronted with the truth of the Lord Jesus, they realized that the days of having religion as a hobby were over; this was the truth, and they believed it. They perceived that they were called to actually serve this living God; that He was not just an idea, a theology which they could approve, but a real, live Being who called them not only to intellectually assent to Him, but to actually serve Him. The Lord's parable spoke of all believers being given unique talents, and leaving, as it were, the baptismal waters to go out and use them for Him. This call to service, rather than mere academic assent, is lacking in much of our witness.

1:10- see on Mt. 3:7.

*And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come-* On one hand we are serving God in practice (:9), on the other, we are waiting for the Lord's return. The usage of "Jesus" without any title, such as "Lord" or "Christ", is unusual. "Jesus" was a very common Jewish name at the time. Yet Paul baldly uses it, in purposeful juxtaposition with the fact He is God's Son, raised from the dead, who shall return. Yet Paul along with that emphasizes His utter humanity, having a name as common as Dave or Steve in the Anglo Saxon world. "The wrath to come" may refer to the time of trouble of the last days which Paul clearly expected to come upon that generation; they should not fear it, because it was to be the sign the Lord's return was imminent. He may well be alluding to the prediction that God's true Israel would be delivered by "Michael" from the time of trouble of the last days (Dan. 12:1). Paul considered both Jewish and Gentile Christians to be part of that new people of God.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Brothers, you know our visit with you, that it has not been found vain-* "Our visit" is literally as AV "our entering in", and is the same word used by Paul for the 'entering in' by the Lord Jesus when He began His ministry (Acts 13:24). Paul clearly saw his ministry as a manifestation and replica of the Lord's. His audiences met Christ insofar as they met him. Therefore Paul's personal example could hardly be distinguished from the gospel he taught (1 Thess. 2:1-12)- he was his message, just as the Lord was His word made flesh. This is why 'authority' and respect are things which are earned naturally in a community by those who have converted the community. It is hard to impose these things from outside the conversion experience.

2:2 *As you know-* Paul was only with them for three Sabbath days, and yet in his teaching of them he told them what had happened to him in Philippi just days before. The marks of the beatings and the imprint of the chains would still have been on his body. He would have been a living, visible example of what it meant to suffer with Christ, and of the kind of commitment which following Him required. And Acts 17:4 says that a large number of people responded to his preaching.

*Previously in Philippi we suffered and were spitefully treated-* These are the very words used about the sufferings of the Lord (Mt. 16:21; 17:12 etc.); and of His shameful or spiteful treatment on the cross (Lk. 18:32). Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ's sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ's Gospel (Col. 1:24). Paul was explaining and exhibiting what death and suffering with Him really meant; and people lined up to be baptized in response. They became followers of Paul and of the Lord (1:6). I suggested on 1:9 that the converts in Thessalonica were religiously curious Gentiles who attended the synagogue. But it was seeing the radical height of the call in Christ which made them snap out of the religiously curious mindset and be willing to sacrifice themselves for the Lord. The height of a demand motivates us to snap out of the mediocre secular mindset and give all for Him. Terrorist groups often find recruits among the uncommitted, religiously curious, secular types- who see in the rhetoric of total commitment something appealing. That rhetoric of total devotion unto death is found in the Lord Jesus, and Paul was a parade example of human response to it. The same word for "suffered" will be used in :14 and 2 Thess. 1:5 of how in turn, the Thessalonians "suffered"- with Christ, with Paul, and as an invitation to others to likewise sign up to the life of suffering and death with Him, that we might live with Him.

*But even amid much opposition we were bold in our God to tell you about the gospel of God-* Thessalonians tends to speak more about God rather than about the Lord Jesus. This was because they had been persuaded to quit their many gods and accept the one true God (1:9).

2:3- see on 2 Cor. 12:7.

*For our appeal is not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in deceit-* Paul didn't state bald facts and leave it to his audience to make their minds up, which seems to be the tendency of preaching in our age. He *appealed* for their response. He has to remind the Thessalonians that he isn't preaching because he wants to take money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12). There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica who accepted the Gospel (Acts 17:4 Western Text), and no doubt gossip spread from this. See on 1 Tim. 5:19. It goes with the territory that any preacher of the Gospel is going to suffer gossip and slander, no matter how wisely they deport themselves.



*2:4 But even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak-* We were "put in trust with the Gospel", literally 'en-faithed' with it, God gave it to us in faith that we would preach it (1 Thess. 2:4). The parable of the talents has an element of unreality to it, in that the rich owner gives all his wealth to his slaves and then goes away, leaving them to trade with it and increase his overall wealth. The storyline demands that we see him as having taken a big leap of faith in men and women who were not at all used to operating on their own initiative.

*Not as pleasing men but God, who tests our hearts-* If we know God's judgments- and this is an ongoing process- then our self-examination will become closer and closer to the real picture of us which God has. It is apparent that God *now* tries our hearts (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23), e.g. weighing up our motives in preaching (1 Thess. 2:4).

*2:5 For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness-* Usually, itinerant preacher rocked up in a town, taught their ideas, and demanded payment or donation, using flattering words of gratitude. Paul was only two or three weeks in Thessalonica, but he was teaching what he knew to be desperately and urgently and ultimately true. His teaching was no cloak or covering over a covetous desire for money or adulation (:6). It is this desire for money and glory from men which has wrecked Christian leadership and the wider church.

*2:6 Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have claimed authority as apostles of Christ-* Paul turned up in Thessalonica and preached. But he didn't claim any authority to do so, listing his qualifications, explaining that he was an apostle of Christ etc. He simply preached the message. It's rather like the teenage Mormon 'elder' who comes to your door telling you all his qualifications. All that stands for nothing. The message is all important. Paul knew his motives well enough to be able to say that he did not seek glory neither from his converts nor from his audiences generally.

*2:7 But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherishes her own children-* Paul taught from the podium of the synagogue for three Sabbath days in Thessalonica. But he was somehow "in the midst of you", treating them as his babies. This is a challenge for all platform speakers. He was amongst them as a nurse with her *own* children. This is a touching figure- a wet nurse giving that extra special attention to her *own* child (as 2:11 RV a father with his *own* children); and like children, they mimicked him (1 Thess. 1:6 Gk.). This was quite different to Paul's background culture, where "boldness and abusive scolding were considered essential by many of the wandering philosophers if their teaching was to have any impact". Many a Pentecostal pastor likewise scolds his flock for their lack of faith; but the leaders of our groups shouldn't be like this. There should be gentleness, an appeal for love's sake, rather than shouting and criticism. Paul dealt with his converts "as a father with his own children", encouraging, comforting, 'dealing with each one [individually]' and urging them to live a life worthy of God's grace (1 Thess. 2:11,12 RV). Note in this context how Paul says that he cares for them as for his own babies, as both the father and mother, and yet reminds them that "We were babes among you" (1 Thess. 2:7 RVmg.). His appeal to them was on the basis of the fact that although their parent, he was also essentially like them. Only as their spiritual father could he ask the Corinthians whether they wanted him to come to them with a whip or with a loving appeal. He *could* exercise the discipline of a father, out of his affectionate concern for them; but he chose, wherever possible, a better way. He normally

uses the father: child image to show his closeness to them, rather than to impose his authority upon them. And so it should be with the true spiritual father or mother in our groups today. He asks them to copy him; his method of shaping the community was to present himself as the pattern. This was especially necessary amongst largely illiterate converts- one could not direct them merely to independent study of the text of Scripture. Paul even likens himself to a woman breast feeding a child (1 Cor. 3:1-3; 1 Thess. 2:7). And yet such wet nursing was considered to be an occupation for the very lowest of women in the Roman world; it was common for even a respectable slave woman to pass her baby over to such a woman to breast feed. But no, Paul himself, as their leader and converter, as it were breast fed them himself. This very nicely shows the link between unashamed, self-abasing humility and true leadership. And again, the Spirit chose 'shepherd' as an image of ecclesial leadership, when the surrounding Rabbis despised shepherds as dishonest. It's just the same as the Lord Jesus describing Himself as the humble King- a very contradiction in the terms of the contemporary culture. There is an intended juxtaposition in Zech. 9:9: "thy King cometh... lowly, and riding upon an ass".

2:8 *So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us-* As explained on :7, this affection or 'yearning' (Gk.) was because he really considered them to be his own children, for whom he would die. It is one thing to impart the Gospel to someone. It is another to give your soul to them, because you truly love them. I suspect we have all been guilty of merely imparting the gospel, without the heart that bled within Paul. They are two quite different things. Imparting knowledge, inviting to meetings, distributing books... is not the same as giving your soul. The AV of this passage says that Paul was "*willing to have imparted unto you... our own souls*". There may be a connection back to Rom. 9:3 (see note there), where in the spirit of Moses, Paul says that he is theoretically willing to give his eternal place in the Kingdom for the sake of his hearers' conversion- even though he had learnt from Moses' example that God will not accept such a substitutionary offer. To give your life, to impart a Gospel... is one thing. But to so feel for others that you would let them go to the Kingdom rather than you... this is love. No wonder Paul was so compelling a converter. There was such an upwelling of thankful love and reflected grace behind his words of preaching. The Thessalonians became so "dear to us" over just two or three weeks, and we wonder exactly how many contact hours they had with Paul during that period, given the demands of family and secular life, and Paul's need to work night and day to support himself (:9). But he fell in love with them, and treats them as his beloved babies; despite their weaknesses of understanding and behaviour. For he had to warn them: "Abstain from fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3), and he had to teach them that when a believer dies, that is not the end, he will be resurrected at the last day (1 Thess. 4:13). 1 Thess. 5:14 clearly states that there were amongst them the "disorderly... fainthearted... the weak". But moral and doctrinal weakness need not get in the way of a yearning love for our brethren because they all the same are committed to the Lord Jesus. Paul's example with the Thessalonians is a great example of this.

2:9- see on Phil. 4:16.

*For, brothers, you remember our labour and distress, working night and day, so that we would not burden any of you while we preached the gospel of God to you-* Paul was only there with them for three Sabbath days. But he didn't have the cash in hand to support himself and his team for that time; he had to somehow work, presumably doing manual work on a

casual basis. He would have had no time to set up a tentmaking business in three weeks; at best he could have only worked for a tentmaker on a casual basis. So he worked nights too, so desperate was he for cash. This makes his love for the Thessalonians the more remarkable, for he twice mentions that there were lazy people amongst them who didn't work (5:14; 2 Thess. 3:11). And he had only recently been thrown into prison and badly beaten in Philippi, so his health and ability to do manual work was limited. His example is even the more commendable because he knew that he would have been quite justified in asking for basic support. He reminds them again of this in 2 Thess. 3:8,9: "Neither did we eat bread for nothing at anyone's hand; but we ate our bread as the result of our own labour and toil, working night and day, that we might not financially burden any of you. Not because we do not have the right to do so, but to make ourselves an example to you- that you should imitate us". All this also suggests that the number of contact hours he had with the Thessalonians was limited. He worked by night perhaps so he could teach folks by day; but they too had to work, and so they learned the Gospel in a very short time. The power of the most basic ideas of the Gospel, even if one has only a few hours to explain them, is enough to radically turn around the religiously curious into those on fire for Christ, willing to sacrifice all. And it was during the course of his daily work that he won many converts: "You remember, brothers, our work and toil. *It was while* we were labouring night and day... that we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:9 Gk.). People would have been stunned and deeply impressed by this man, as with lash marks on his back he carried water or shifted fruit or building material around the town to support himself... and it was whilst doing this that he preached and people believed. Celsus claimed that Christianity was attractive "only to the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children... [the Christian evangelists] were wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels [who enticed] ... children and stupid women [to come along to] ... the wooldresser's shop, or to the cobbler's or the washerwoman's shop, that they may learn perfection". This could almost be a quotation from 1 Cor. 1, where Paul describes the converts as just such people. And yet from out of their ordinary life situations, the witness went forth. Not from specially built halls, but from the workplace. And so it has ever been. This is why Pliny could observe that Christianity "penetrated not only the cities but even the villages and farms". It was individuals converting individuals.

2:10- see on Phil. 1:10.

*You are witnesses and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe-* "Toward [AV "among"] you that believe" carries the sense that they now believed, because of Paul's example. It was Paul's behaviour during the two weeks he was with them which left such an impression. All itinerant preachers demanded money; but Paul was to be seen doing manual casual work around the town in order just to get food and lodging (:9), bearing in his body the signs of a recent traumatic lashing and beating. No wonder his own example led people to Jesus. Ideas alone are only meaningful and compelling, especially to the illiterate, when they are made flesh in practice. And this was just what Paul did. See on :9.

2:11- see on 1 Thess. 2:7.

*As you know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, encouraging you and testifying-* Paul did not just preach to a group, baptize them as a group, and relate to them as a teacher to a class of pupils. He dealt with each of them

individually. The language here is appropriate to practical exhortation and encouragement in a way of life, rather than theological instruction. Despite his few contact hours with each of them, he stressed the way of life more than theology (hence the need to teach them in chapter 4 that the dead in Christ are not lost but shall be resurrected at the last day). The Gospel of the Kingdom as taught by the Lord was likewise largely focused upon the way of life in Him rather than theological truths.

*2:12 To the end you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory-* See on 2:2 for the emphasis on God rather than the Lord Jesus. Note the present tense of "calls you"; God is constantly calling us to the Kingdom through the word of the Gospel, and therefore that word dynamically works in us who believe. The basic Gospel of the Kingdom works in us throughout our lives, calling us daily, beckoning us onwards to the Kingdom. Walking / living appropriately given our calling to eternity, appropriate to the fact the Lord died for us, is a major theme with Paul (s.w. Rom. 16:2; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10). This explains Paul's huge teaching emphasis upon practical issues in his short time amongst them (see on :11).

*2:13 And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that when you received from us the word of the message of God, you accepted it not as the word of men but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works powerfully in you that believe-* It is the Spirit which works powerfully within believers (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:16-20 s.w.). But it would be a mistaken equation to therefore state that the word of God as in the Bible equals the work of the Spirit, as if we can squeeze the Spirit out of the pages of the Bible by extensive study of it. Such study has been impossible for the majority of believers over time, seeing they were illiterate and didn't have Bibles. And the Spirit of God is repeatedly described as a gift, given into our hearts by grace. The "word of God" rarely refers to the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation; and here we are reading of the *logos* of God rather than the *rhema*. It is the Lord Jesus who is "received" and "accepted", as the essential *logos* of God. The Lord Jesus is He who "works powerfully" in human hearts through His Spirit. But this working is not independent of the word of the Gospel; if we neglect that word, He will never force us. His work in us is related to our willingness for Him to work in us, and such willingness will be reflected in our continued memory and [in our generation] reading of His word. That basic Gospel message continued to work powerfully within them. Spiritual growth is not so much from discovering new things about the Bible (which can become a mere form of intellectual titillation), but from being persuaded over and over of the wonder and practical implication of the basic Gospel truths.

2:14- see on 1 Thess. 1:6-9.

*For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea. For you also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews-* This is a fairly clear statement that most of the Thessalonians were Gentiles, although they had been converted whilst involved with synagogue attendance (see on 1:9). What did Gentiles in Thessalonica know about the Jewish churches in Judea? Only what Paul had taught them. And it was he who had persecuted those very churches (Acts 9:31). Yet Paul was only three weeks at most with the Thessalonians. His teaching of them had involved personal testimony of his own shameful past, and how brave and committed those Judean Christians had been under his own persecution and torture of them. Paul would have been

radically different from any other itinerant preacher; this man who worked day and night to support himself and his team (see on :9), with wheal marks on his back from a recent flogging and imprisonment in Philippi... who admitted to torturing and murdering Jewish Christians, but had changed because he had met the Lord Jesus, and was now urging Gentiles to convert to the Hope of Israel. His stories of those churches he had persecuted gripped the minds of his hearers, and they vowed to follow those brave believers. And somehow there was a credibility in Paul's accounts, a sense that really he was not making this up. They "suffered", using the same word as used for Paul's sufferings and those of the Lord (see on :2). Paul and the invisible Lord he imitated became their template.

*2:15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and do not please God, and oppose all mankind-* Considering Paul had met the Thessalonian converts in the synagogue, his strong anti-Jewish rhetoric was purposeful. He saw the threat of Judaism and the Judaist campaign against his work as the biggest single problem facing the church. "The prophets" refers to the New Testament prophets, and therefore to martyrdoms which aren't recorded in Acts, which mainly focuses upon the work of Paul and Peter alone. As noted on :2, Paul continually draws a parallel between the Lord's sufferings and his own, and theirs. This principle is true for us; all our sufferings are a sharing in His final suffering, so that His life might be ours too, both now and at the last day (2 Cor. 4:11). They "drove us out" refers to how the Jews in Thessalonica had driven Paul out of town and persuaded the town authorities to ban Paul from ever returning (see :18). And contrary to the Judaist claim to be 'God pleasers', they were the very opposite. Judaism would have objected to the claim that they "oppose all mankind", but they did so in that they sought to stop Paul preaching to the Gentiles (:16). This is an example of how the implications of human behaviour are perceived and judged by God.

2:16- see on Mt. 19:14.

*Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved-* Paul had preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, and from this he had met Gentiles who attended the synagogue who were impressed with his message. But the Jews had forbidden him to preach; and like Peter, he had refused to be obedient. We also see here the huge and eternal significance of preaching; by speaking to men we can lead them to salvation.

*By doing so they fill up the full measure of their sins. But God's wrath comes upon them at last-* The Jews forbade or hindered the apostles from preaching to the Gentiles "to fill up their sins... for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16). This is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 15:16 about the Amorites. See on Jn. 12:31. The religious Jews are being painted as nothing less than the worst of the Gentiles in God's eyes. This was an argument Stephen had used multiple times in his speech of Acts 7 which Paul would have heard and been convicted by. And he now repeats that same basic argument.

Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,6,19; 17:5-9,13,14; 18:6,12-17; 21:27-36; 23:12-25). Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having "killed both the Lord Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins" (1 Thess. 2:13-16).

These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great 'Satan' to the cause of Christ in the first century. And Paul refers to them like this in :18.

2:17 *But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence but not in heart, endeavoured more eagerly to see your face with great desire-* Often he speaks of his urgent desire to see the face of his brethren (Rom. 1:11; 15:24; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:6,10; Heb. 13:23). It has been pointed out by F.F. Bruce that Paul's later letters reveal a marked *and progressive* fondness for Greek words compounded from *syn-*, i.e. together / with (e.g. *synergos*, co-worker; *synaichmalatos*, co-prisoner). Priscilla, Aquilla, Timothy, Titus, Marcus, Archippus, Luke, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Epaphras, Demas, Epaphroditus, Clement, Philemon, Euodias, Syntyche (the last two being weak in terms of spiritual behaviour) ...all of these are described by Paul with a *syn-* compound word. It seems that as he matured, Paul *needed his brethren*, he realized he wasn't so alone and strong-willed as he had once been, he saw the Christ in his brethren. Perhaps Paul's endeavours to see them again refer to how he sought to have his ban from entering Thessalonica reversed; see on :15 and :18.

2:18 *Because we wanted to come to you, I Paul time and again; but Satan hindered us-* As noted on :16, it was the Jewish satan / adversary / opposition which stopped Paul returning to Thessalonica. According to Acts 17, it was the Jews who got Paul driven out of town, which may mean they persuaded the local Roman administration to issue a ban forbidding Paul to ever return there (:15). All efforts to appeal against it had been rejected by Jewish pressure upon the Roman administration there.

2:19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even you, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?* - Nearly all references to Paul's "joy" are in the context of his joy at the prospect of others' spiritual development and salvation (Acts 13:52; Rom. 5:11; 15:32; 2 Cor. 2:3; 7:4,6,13; Phil. 1:14,18; 2:2,17; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philemon 7,20). See on Eph. 1:4. Paul could say that his great joy at the judgment would be to see his dear brethren enter the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 4:1; 2 Cor. 1:14); not just joy for his own personal acceptance. In this moment, "he that soweth and he that reapeth [will] rejoice together" (Jn. 4:36)- the letter writers, speakers, writers, travellers... Hence Paul "held forth the word of life" to his converts at Philippi, "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ (through their acceptance) that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain". This explains the intensity of his efforts to strengthen his brethren: "As though God did beseech you by us: we *pray* you... be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And later he could write from prison "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus even in this life John could write: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth... I wish *above all things* that thou mayest (spiritually) prosper" (3 Jn. 2-4).

Paul's "crown", the nature of his eternal reward, was tied up in whether or not his converts made it there. He appeals to the Philippians to "stand fast" exactly because they were his "crown" (Phil. 4:1). His certainty at the end that he would receive the crown (2 Tim. 4:8) is perhaps a statement that he rejoiced that at least some of his converts would indeed be saved. Our focus likewise must be upon the moment when we shall stand before our Lord Jesus. The joy and crown will be tied up in the acceptance there of others for whom we have laboured. This is not to teach salvation by works; but the quality and nature of our eternity is clearly predicated upon what we do for others. Sitting in splendid isolation, insisting upon our

understanding of some curious theological point as an excuse for non engagement with the rest of the Lord's body... is not going to enable us to share too much joy for others in that day.

2:20 *For you are our glory and our joy*- Paul has stated that their acceptance in the last day before the Lord Jesus will be his glory and joy (:19). We noted on 1:3 how in prayer before the Lord, he recounted the good things about his Thessalonian brethren; he gloried in them right now in this life, before the throne of grace in prayer. And our attitude in prayer now before the Lord will be our attitude at the last day. In that day too, Paul will be glorying in his brethren, and eternally (:19). All this is a powerful template for us to live by.

## CHAPTER 3

*3:1 Wherefore when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone-* The "wherefore" references Paul's explanation at the end of chapter 2 as to how his salvation is tied up in theirs; they would be part of his eternal crown. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it seems Epaphroditus was a great comfort to him; he didn't want to send him to Philippi, but he "supposed it necessary" (Phil. 2:25). Likewise, it was only when he "could no longer forbear" (1 Thess. 3:1,5) that he sent Timothy away from him when he was living at Athens, to strengthen the Thessalonians. Paul came to really need his brethren. We recall how Paul almost pathetically begs Timothy to come to him in Rom (2 Tim. 4); he so valued the company of others. So the sending of Timothy was a huge sacrifice for Paul, but he did so because he so loved the Philippian and was concerned at the state of their faith; for the nature of his eternity was tied up with their salvation.

Loneliness isn't at all a bad thing. Paul tells the Thessalonians how desperately he wanted to physically be with them, but God stopped him "time and again"; and so he concluded in the end that it was better for him to be left at Athens alone and send his close companion to them (1 Thess. 2:17-3:1). But looking back, we realize that that aloneness in Athens had actually been for his spiritual good, even though he so longed to be with his brethren. And here those who so bemoan [understandably] their spiritual isolation as they live out their Christian lives in ones or twos can take comfort. It was whilst left alone in Athens that Paul's conscience was stirred within him and he began an incredibly successful preaching campaign (Acts 17:16-22). The image of that wonderful man standing alone on Mars Hill taking Christ to the masses there for the very first time is inspirational; but he only stood up there and did it because he had been left in Athens alone by a loving Father. His loneliness led to his spirit / conscience being stirred within him by the need of the humanity around him. His loneliness made him see how unique was his relationship with God Almighty and His Son.

*3:2 And sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith-* See on :1. Paul was ever concerned with 'establishing' converts in their faith (s.w. Rom. 1:1; 16:25). he was far from just notching up baptisms. This was a particular concern at Thessalonica, for they had only had Paul with them two or three weeks to teach them the Gospel. Paul uses this same word for "establish" another three times, but always about the Father and Son establishing the Thessalonians (3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3). Our efforts to establish others will have God working with them; we are Him to others. Especially in a situation like this, when it was impossible for Paul to personally visit and establish them (see on 2:15,18). God is the One who builds up even when we personally cannot. "Comfort" is the word used about what Paul did to them whilst with them (2:11), what he seeks to do through his letter (4:1,10; 5:14); and especially significant is the way that Paul uses the word in teaching them to comfort one another (4:18; 5:11). This is the sign of maturity of converts; when instead of relying upon visits and letters for upbuilding, they build themselves up.

*3:3 That no one be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that for this we are appointed-* "No one" reflects Paul's concern for every single member of the flock; see on 2:11 "each one of you". "Afflictions" is the same word used in the parable of the sower for the "tribulation" which inevitably comes to every believer, but which causes some to fall away (Mt. 13:21). It is however the same word used about the tribulations of the last days (Mt. 24:9,21) which Paul believed were coming upon them in the first century.



3:4 *For truly, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction. Even as it came to pass and you know-* Paul made a point of telling his converts that tribulation / affliction was bound to come (s.w. Acts 14:22 "We must through much tribulation [s.w.] enter into the Kingdom"). I noted on 2:11 that Paul spent his few contact hours which he had teaching the Thessalonians in focusing more upon practical issues than theological ones- hence the apparent serious gap in their knowledge about the resurrection in chapter 4. The persecution of Paul and driving him out of Thessalonica didn't calm down after he left- his converts were clearly targeted.

3:5 *For this cause I also, when I could no longer endure it, sent Timothy-* "No longer endure it" is a repetition of :1. Paul was so anxious about their faith because the nature of his eternity was tied up with whether they would endure in faith (see on 2:19,20). To send Timothy was a major sacrifice- see on :1,2. Notice how there was no distinction between Paul's will (*"When I could endure it no longer, I also sent..."* 1 Thess. 3:5), and that of his fellow workers (*"When we could endure it no longer... we sent..."* 1 Thess. 3:1,2). He assigned to his brethren his own feelings and decisions.

*That I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you and our labour should be in vain-* Despite having had these questions about the state of their faith, he had always been positive about their faith and endurance, even telling God about it (1:2,3). This means that despite his doubts about them and valid concerns, he believed in their status in Christ and felt towards them accordingly. This is no simplistic positivism, but a studied outworking of faith in what it means for a person to be in Christ. The source of the opposition at Thessalonica was the Jews, as 2:14-16 and Acts 17 makes clear. They were the tempters, the satan of 2:18. He personifies the entire Judaist opposition and Jewish plot against his work as a singular adversary. We note he likens the Judaizers tempting the Corinthians to the tempting serpent in Eden (2 Cor. 11:3). To go off to Judaism would cost them their salvation; and Paul's labour would have been in vain. But he has stated in 2:1 that his work with them so far had not been in vain.

3:6- see on 1 Thess. 2:17.

*But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us the good news of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also you-* Paul seems to equate their good attitude towards him with having kept the faith. He was indeed so tied up personally with his own message that this was understandable. But he writes this in the context of concern about the Judaizers (:5). Their approach was clearly to defame Paul and shake faith in him personally. Paul must have endured defamation and slander more than most, and yet his positive, proactive approach continued. He didn't let it bring him down, as lesser men have often done.

3:7 *For this cause, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we were comforted through hearing of your faith-* Paul wrote to the Thessalonians how their faith was a comfort to him in his "distress". And yet he goes straight on to say that he plans to visit them in order to "perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (:10). I find this so wonderful. Their faith was imperfect- and yet Paul all the same rejoices in what faith they do have, and can speak of "all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God" (1 Thess. 3:9). Yet we are all too easily discouraged by the immaturities we notice in others' faith; instead, in a world where the majority don't truly believe, we need to focus on the positive in our brethren and rejoice in it, rather than holding them to some ideal standard which we claim to have in our own mind or

understanding or perception. For when compared against the spirituality of our Lord, we are ourselves so miserably imperfect.

3:8 *For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord*- Paul could say that he lived, if his brethren held fast; his life was bound up with theirs (1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Cor. 7:3), just as his eternity was (see on 2:19,20). He was willing to be offered as a drink offering upon the sacrifice of the Philippians (Phil. 2:17). Time and again he rejoices in the joy and hope of others (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:13; Col. 1:4); they were his joy and hope and future crown of reward in the Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19,20). For them to be accepted at the day of judgment would be his crown, i.e. his reward and expectation which he looked forward to. It was for their salvation, not his own, that he would rejoice at the Lord's return (2 Cor. 1:14). His spiritual life was bound up in that of others; others who were many times his spiritual inferior. See on 2 Tim. 2:10.

3:9- see on Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 2:19,20.

*For what thanksgiving can we render again to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sakes before our God*- We noted on 2:19,20 that their acceptance in the Kingdom would be his eternal joy as they stood "before God" at the last day. But in prayer likewise "before God" he rejoiced in their faith (1:2,3). We are to live now the kind of life we shall eternally live; in this sense we "have eternal life". And so Paul rejoiced that if the Lord were to return, or they were to die, at that moment... they would be saved. He didn't allow the understandable worry about the possibility of living longer and falling away to cloud his present joy. He lived not as a naive short termist thinker, but as rejoicing in what Peter terms "the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12), the reality which is gloriously true at this moment.

3:10- see on 2 Cor. 8:7; 1 Thess. 2:17.

*Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and may perfect whatever is lacking in your faith?*- We note the need Paul felt to be personally present with them in order to give them spiritual strengthening; he writes likewise to the Romans (Rom. 1:11). The need of his physical presence may have been because the laying on of hands transmitted some spiritual gift. But I prefer to think that this was not really what he had in view; rather, as noted on 2:9,10 and elsewhere, Paul presented himself to illiterate people as the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, and asked them to follow him insofar as he followed the Lord. This is why in his brief contact with the Thessalonians, he had explained to them his own past and shown them by example what a life in Christ looks like. And this meant that his personal presence with them was significant, and would assist in maturing, developing and completing their faith. As noted on :6, Paul rejoiced in their faith, even though there were things lacking in it.

Paul's description of praying "night and day" (1 Thess. 3:9,10) alludes to the sacrifices, prepared and offered "night and day" (Ex. 30:7,8; Ps. 55:16,17). There was clearly an element of preparation before offering the prayer, as there was before offering a sacrifice. Note how Prov. 15:8 likewise parallels sacrifice with prayer. Prayer ought to be a humbling experience, perhaps alluded to by the incense, representing prayer, needing to be "beaten small". Preparation of prayer involves humility. David takes words of supplication to himself, which as King he must often have heard from desperate citizens, and uses it in his own prayers to God: "Save, Lord: let the king hear us when we call... A Psalm of David" (Ps. 20:9). In this one sees a conscious humility in how David formulated his prayers.

3:11 *Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you-* "God Himself" is involved in our lives, and can confirm us in our deepest desires. The same word is in 2 Thess. 3:5: "The Lord direct your hearts...". Clearly Paul believed that God can work on the human heart, directing hearts and in this case directing our path in life. There is no evidence, however, that Paul did re-visit Corinth.

3:12- see on 2 Cor. 12:15.

*And the Lord make you increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men-* As noted on :11, Paul recognized that the Father and Son can work directly on the human heart. Increasing and abounding in love is an attitude of the heart or spirit, and here Paul prays that they will be "made" to have this; the work of the Father and Son on human spirits is surely by their Spirit working directly in the hearts of believers. Paul talks of an "account" of good works that is 'increased' by each good work- an account not kept by us, but by the Father (Phil. 4:17). And if we 'increase' in such acts of love, we increasingly have a heart unshaken by the prospect of judgment to come (1 Thess. 3:13).

*Even as we also toward you-* Paul envisaged the love between the Thessalonians and himself as being a love which was ever increasing, thanks to God making it like that. All human relationships seem to begin with an in-loveness which fades and even ends. The unique spiritual gift of ever abounding love is that the recipients of that gift go on increasing in love. And this will be our experience eternally; an ever increasing love between each other. This is why it is so serious if believers in this life will not love one another, placing barriers and stone walls between each other so that love has no chance to grow.

3:13- see on Mt. 24:28.

*So that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints-* It is the experience of the gift of the Spirit making us ever growing in love (:12) which will mean we can appear before God, the Lord Jesus and the Angels, or before our own brethren, with hearts which have been 'established' or set fast. This is the same word used of the work of establishing we do to others (:2). There is thereby a wonderful connection established between how the Thessalonians will be at the day of judgment, and the efforts made for them now by Timothy. And this is true of our work for others. No longer, then, is church attendance and interaction with other believers to be treated as mere attendance at the same social club. We are working for the establishment of others now, in a way which will help them become now who they shall be before God at the last day.

The context has been of love toward others, and so I suggest the "saints" before whom we shall have an established heart at the day of judgment refer to our brethren. "Saints" usually refer to human believers rather than Angels. If we have not dealt in love toward them now, how can we have an established, stable heart before God as we appear before them in the day of judgment? There is ample reason to think that the "saints" in this context of judgment day refer to the believers. The Lord Jesus comes to judgment with His saints with Him (1 Thess. 3:13; Zech. 14:5; Jude 14). It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. The cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. Such a picture

is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; the Lord Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Mt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to *come down*" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. The bride as it were *comes down* out of Heaven as a prepared bride. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obad. 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The apparent confusion between our gathering to judgment in Jerusalem and the judgment of the nations there at the same time is explicable if we accept that the meaning of time will be collapsed around the second coming.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Finally, brothers, we urge and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God-* “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another... to the end He may establish your hearts” (1 Thess. 3:12,13) gives an insight into the upward spiral of development which the Lord wishes us to partake in. The theme continues here in chapter 4: “abound more and more... increase more and more” (4:1,10). “As you received from us” lends further weight to the argument that Paul's limited contact hours with them were spent teaching them practical things about how they “ought to walk”, rather than theological issues- hence the gap in their knowledge about the resurrection which Paul addresses later in this chapter.

4:2 *For you know what instruction we gave you through the Lord Jesus-* The abounding love which is the context here (3:12,13), leading to an established heart before both the Lord and our brethren at judgment day, means that we will not commit fornication (:3). Paul's brief time with the Corinthians had been an instruction of them as it were by the Lord Jesus, whom Paul manifested. “Instruction” translates a specific term generally used in the contemporary literature for military orders. Paul set them up as soldiers in spiritual warfare, and gave them specific commands about moral issues. All this was part of the teaching of the basic Gospel.

4:3 *For this is the will of God, that you live sanctified lives. Therefore abstain from fornication-* The Greek for “sanctification” here was a term used for consecration unto an idol. But that consecration often involved the use of the cult prostitutes as a sign of consecration to the cult. Consecration to the one true God and His Son was through living a moral life, and specifically denied such fornication / *porneia* / use of prostitutes. It was a radically new approach to religion. Despite Paul's praise of their faith and spirituality, the Thessalonians like the Corinthians appear to have been tempted to still visit the idol shrines and use the prostitutes there. Remember that most of the Thessalonian converts had been religiously curious Gentiles who attended the synagogue, which is where they encountered Paul (see on 1:9). It could well be that they continued this syncretism, by not abstaining from the *porneia* of the idol cults. Paul has praised them for turning away from the idols (1:9); but he is not unaware that some of them had not done so completely. Again we see his positivism regarding his converts, and his great valuing of their status in Christ.

The will of God is not always done on earth automatically; it's not determining of human behaviour in absolute terms; otherwise the will of God would exclude human freewill. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3 AV); but the Thessalonians still had the freedom to commit fornication. The will of God here refers to the wish / desire of God. But the fulfilment of God's will is of course up to the freewill of the individual. Which is why we pray for God's will to be done in our lives; not in the sense of ‘OK well get on and do what You are going to do anyway’, but rather of seeking for strength to personally do God's wish in our lives. And as we mature, our will and the Father's become closer. We ask what *we* will and it is done; and therefore and thereby we ask for the Father's will to be done.

There was evidently a problem with immorality in the Thessalonica ecclesia (1 Thess. 4:3-6). And yet the ecclesia was so eager for the second coming that some were throwing in their jobs, so certain were they that it was imminent. Clearly the moral implications of the soon coming of the Lord had not been felt. And this is why in every chapter of those epistles, Paul pounds away about the Lord's return- a fact which they knew and enthused about, just as we

can, and yet would not face up to its real implications. If Christ is coming soon, we must quit the things which plagued Thessalonica- immorality, laziness, irresponsibility etc.

*4:4 Let each one of you take a wife for himself in sanctification and honour-* This command suggests that some of them, perhaps the younger ones, were using the temple prostitutes (see on :3). A wife / woman "for himself" suggests they needed to stop having relations with multiple women and have just one woman, their wife. And yet we recall the warm praise which Paul has heaped upon the Thessalonians, for their faith and spirituality, even saying this before God (1:2,3). Yet he did this being fully aware of their weakness. In 2 Thess. 1:3 he states that the love of each and every one of them was growing and he rejoiced in this; and yet in 2 Thess. 3 he clearly is aware that all was far from well with the spiritual state of some of them. The AV gives "possess his vessel" for "take a wife", and the reference in that case would be to knowing how to use our bodies. This would then make better sense of :5.

*4:5 Not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who do not know God-* As noted on :4, Paul was aware that the church as a whole, and not just some of them, needed warning about not living "in the passion of list". We would probably have praised the faithful amongst them, and then singled out the weaker members and made it clear that we are addressing them, and not the faithful. But we see no such division in Paul's writing here. The Gentile Thessalonians had turned from idols to the one true God (1:9); but by 'knowing God' Paul refers to relationship with Him. If we "know God" we will not live "in the passion of lust". To know God is not therefore a question of academic knowledge of theology alone.

We noted on :4 that the context here could be regarding how a man takes a wife, or how he possesses his body. If the reference is to taking a wife, then marriage is not to be entered on the sole basis of wanting to legitimize sex, for that would be taking a wife "in the passion of lust". If the context is as AV of 'possessing his vessel' or body, then the idea would be that our body should be possessed by the outcome of knowing God, i.e. His Spirit, and not in the spirit of the passion of carnal lusts. It is walking by the Spirit which empowers us to not obey the lusts [s.w.] of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). The same word translated "lust" is used in Rom. 6:12: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the *lusts* thereof".

Col. 3:5 uses the same Greek word for "passion" and adds: "Which is idolatry". I suggested on :3 that the specific *porneia* in view was the usage of idol prostitutes.

*4:6 Let no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter. Because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified-* This appears to be a direct and sober warning against using another brother's wife. The context before and after is clearly in this context. I noted on :3 that the immediate reference may be to cult prostitution, and perhaps the particular scenario in view was in that context. Again we note that Paul is backing up what he has verbally taught them during his brief presence with them- he had warned them and testified about these things. And yet later in this chapter we find a gap in their knowledge about the death state and resurrection. Clearly his focus when with them had been on teaching the life in Christ rather than theology.

*4:7 For God called us not to uncleanness but to sanctification-* Perhaps the argument was that the usage of prostitutes was part of God's call; and Paul is saying that His call is to a holy life, quite the opposite. Religion and sex have always got mixed up, unashamedly so in pagan religions. This was the problem at Corinth and there probably was a tendency in all the

Gentile churches to import into Christianity the religious practices to which they had been accustomed. This call to holiness and not to uncleanness is described in :8 as a "teaching" Paul had given them during his brief time with the Thessalonians.

Paul had the same calling as we do (Rom. 9:24; 1 Thess. 4:7); in him above all there is set a pattern for all those who would hereafter believe. This may not entail itinerant missionary work as it did for Paul, but all the same, the same essential commitment to Gospel preaching must be at the core of the life of every convert.

*4:8 Therefore he that rejects this teaching rejects not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you-* The "therefore" implies that to reject God's calling is to reject God. This is why most hard core atheists whom I know were actually exposed to God's calling and refused it. The Holy Spirit is given at baptism, the internal potential power to overcome the flesh and be transformed "in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16-20), but the Spirit is progressively poured out into the hearts of those open to it. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5), and Paul several times prays that converts will receive the Spirit in this ongoing sense (Eph. 3 in particular). The result is that we are filled with the Spirit in order to sanctify us; to live in uncleanness rather than sanctification is therefore to grieve the Spirit, to go against God's sanctifying intention for us.

*4:9 But concerning love of the brothers, you have no need that anyone write to you. For you yourselves are taught of God to love one another-* "But concerning" suggests Paul is going through a list of issues, perhaps brought to his attention as a result of Timothy's visit to them and his report back to Paul. Perhaps the Thessalonians had asked Paul to write to them about brotherly love; his response is that no letter from anyone can teach that better than the teaching they have from God to love one another. God's ongoing involvement in our lives is therefore to be seen as His constant teaching of us "to love". Peter uses similar ideas as found in this section when he comments that we have been sanctified [:7] through the Spirit [:8] unto "love of the brothers" (1 Pet. 1:22 s.w.).

*4:10 For indeed you do it toward all the brothers that are in all Macedonia. But, brothers, we encourage you to abound more and more-* Paul's desire for their love to increase came true, for he says in 2 Thess. 1:3 that their love for each other is abounding. This is a feature of the love which is formed by the Spirit- it abounds, it increases, it is not stable nor does it decline or fragment into familiarity and mere sentimental fondness for a person or persons whom we have known a long time. True love keeps on growing, and we shall eternally experience this. Love is something 'done'; they 'did' love to the Macedonian brothers, perhaps in reaching out to their "great trial of affliction and deep poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2).

4:11- see on 1 Cor. 1:26-28.

*May you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you-* "That ye *study* (be ambitious) to be *quiet*" (AV) presents a powerful opposition of ideas; to have heroic ambition to be quiet; to be self-controlled, living a blameless spiritual life in everyday things (:12; this is what the idiom of "walk" refers to). In 2 Thess. 3:12,13, Paul returns to this idea: He tells them once again to live a *quiet* life, and says in that context: "Be not weary in (such) well doing". Yet he asks them in 1 Thess. 4:11 to be ambitious to be quiet. By encouraging them to keep on being "quiet" he is encouraging them not to be weary in living a life of such ambition. And this is not the only

reference to ambition in Thessalonians. Paul praises them for the brotherly love which they undoubtedly had. But he doesn't just say 'Keep it up!'. He exhorts them to increase in it, more and more (1 Thess. 4:10).

Paul's "command" to "work with your own hands" was backed up by his own example in the three weeks he was amongst them (see on 1:9). There was a congruence between his teaching and example; a word made flesh. "Mind your own business" may seem superfluous, but in illiterate urban society, with people living and working on top of each other, gossip and over involvement in the lives of others was a problem major enough to split a church. They were to aspire, or be ambitious, not to be like that. And we can take the exhortation too. For the world of social media today is little different in essence.

*4:12 That you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing-* Paul perceived very clear boundaries between those in Christ, and all others "who are outside". The commands of :11 were in order to make a witness to those "outside", just as Paul had lived amongst them as he did so conscious that he was setting an example: ""You know what kind of men we were among you *for your sake*". "Properly" can also mean "honestly" (AV), and this would connect with them 'having lack of nothing'. The temptation in that kind of society would be to do what everyone else did, and practice petty dishonesty so that they could make ends meet. But by being honest, they would under God's providence "lack nothing". But the Greek can equally mean "that you may need no man". In :11 he has urged them to work with their own hands, and in this case, his argument would be that they then would have no need of asking support from others. Paul returns to this issue in 2 Thess. 3, where he openly states that some of them were asking for help but refused to work. Paul's great love for this group is the more notable, seeing that he speaks so highly of them all as a group, and having worked night and day, despite having been beaten in Philippi just beforehand, in order to get enough to eat during the three weeks he was with them.

*4:13 Brothers, we would not have you ignorant concerning those that fall asleep, lest you grieve like those who have no hope-* The following section addresses the question of what happens to believers who die, and it concludes by urging them therefore to be of good comfort (:18). Several times in these letters, Paul reminds them of practical issues about the life in Christ which he says he had already taught them whilst with them (2:11,12; 3:4; 4:1,2,8,11; 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:10). If he had taught them about these issues concerning resurrection, we would rather expect him to point that out to them, and perhaps rebuke them for having forgotten. But he doesn't, which implies his brief contact time with them during his three week stay with them had been taken up with teaching them practical things rather than theology about death and resurrection. Yet he praises them before God for their hope in Christ (1:3). But they were seriously deficient in understanding what that hope was in detail, apparently not understanding much about the resurrection. Yet Paul perceived their faith in Christ and firm expectation ["hope"] of salvation in Him, and praises them for it- even if they were astray or ignorant in their understanding of how it would work out in practice. We can only conclude that not understanding the details of our future hope does not mean we do not have a valid faith in Christ, nor does it hinder the validity of a baptism. But like Paul, we are to seek to fill in the gaps which believers have in their knowledge of these things.

*4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again-* As noted on :13 and elsewhere, Paul had only taught the Thessalonians very basic theology; most of his teaching during his three weeks with them had been about practical issues of the Christian life. He is now drawing out



an implication of the basic belief that "Jesus died and rose again". 1 Cor. 15:1-4 likewise defines the Gospel Paul preached as being this thing- the death and resurrection of the Lord.

*Just as surely those that have fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring up with him-* We can read this as meaning that those baptized into the Lord will share a resurrection like His. "Bring up with him" would therefore refer to the resurrection. The Lord's resurrection is the basis for ours. Despite the emotion and hardness of death itself, our belief in resurrection is rooted in our faith that our Lord died and rose. When comforting those who had lost loved ones in the Lord, Paul doesn't simply remind them of the doctrine of the resurrection at the Lord's coming. His focus instead is on the fact that "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14). The reality of the resurrection must mean something to us in the times of death which we face in life. Jesus and the New Testament writers seem to me to have a startling disregard of death.

But "bring up with him" can also mean just as well "bring with him". It could be that the idea is that the Lord Jesus will "bring with Him" from Heaven "them also which sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14) when the Heavenly Jerusalem (the believers) comes down from Heaven at Christ's return (Rev. 21:1). However, we know that the Lord Jesus will bring the Angels with Him. Being the guardians of those who have died, in this sense those people come with Christ from Heaven, although of course literally and personally they cannot seeing they "sleep in Jesus" in the dust of the earth. See on Dan. 5:23. Or perhaps there is in view the Lord's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem to save Israel with the resurrected believers with Him. 4:15- see on 1 Cor. 7:11.

*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are still living at the coming of the Lord, shall in no way precede those that have fallen asleep-* By or in the word of the Lord Jesus may mean that here Paul is repeating the teaching of the Lord in the Gospels. 1 Thess. 4 and 5 are shot through with allusions to the Olivet prophecy. A few of the more obvious are listed:

<b>1 Thess.</b>	<b>Olivet Prophecy</b>
4:15 "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" Jesus	Jesus on Olivet
4:16	Mt. 24:30,31
5:1	Lk. 21:24
5:2	Mt. 24:43
5:3	Mt. 24:43,48,51
5:5 "Children of light"	Wise virgins with lamps (Mt. 25)
5:6	Mt. 24:13,25,42,49
5:9	Mt. 24:51

1 Thess. 4:15-18 begins with "For..." . This is explaining 1 Thess. 4:14, which states that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (up) with him". This will thus be true both spiritually, in that they will share His victory over death, and, literally, in that they will come with their judge to judgment. John 14:3 may also become easier to handle with this understanding: "I will come again, and take you to be with me" (N.I.V.). Initially, this may

mean a literal ascent into the sky, followed by a return to earth to be with Christ eternally in the Kingdom. "That where I am, there ye may be also" may be the Spirit's basis for 1 Thess. 4:17, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord". The idea of literally travelling through the sky to the judgment seat was plainly taught by our Lord in His explanation of how "one shall be taken (literally disappear) and the other left" at His coming; "Whosoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Lk. 17:36,37). The point of this allusion is to show that as the eagle travels through the air with a natural homing instinct, without fear or worry as to correct direction, so there should be no apprehension in the mind of the believer concerning the mechanics of how he will be taken away to meet his Lord.

*4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first-* The Greek for "shout" really means a shout of command. The command in view is for the dead in Christ to rise; we recall the Lord's loud shout to bring forth Lazarus from the dead. "The archangel" is defined in Jude 9 as Michael. The connection is clearly to the prophecy of Dan. 12:1-3, which speaks of the revelation of "Michael" as being at the time the dead are resurrected. "The trumpet of God" is also associated with the Angels at the Lord's return in Mt. 24:31: "He shall send his Angels with a great sound of a trumpet"; see on :14. 1 Cor. 15:52 likewise: "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised". Perhaps there shall be a literal trumpet sound as the first concrete sign of the Lord's return; but the allusion is to the trumpet blasts which called the camp of God to move onwards in the wilderness, and which brought down the walls of Jericho so that God's people could possess the promised land.

*4:17 Then we that are alive-* Paul is speaking of the faithful believers in 1 Thess. 4 and 5 rather than all the responsible. He comforts them that the dead believers really will be rewarded with immortality, and that they can take comfort from the fact that they would live for ever (1 Thess. 4:13,14,18). Paul is therefore assuming their acceptability at judgment. "You are all the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) as opposed to the unworthy within the ecclesia, who were in darkness. This suggests that Paul wrote as though his readership were all faithful and assured of eternal life.

If we believe that we are counted righteous, we must likewise assume that all those properly baptized are equally righteous, and will be saved along with us. We cannot condemn each other; therefore we must assume each other will be saved. If we have a positive attitude to our own salvation, we will likewise perceive our whole community. And the reverse is true; if we cannot believe that God sees *us* positively, we will tend towards a negative outlook upon ourselves. My sense is that many of us fail in this area. Paul had many reasons to think negatively of his converts; and yet he writes to the Thessalonians as if 'we all', all his readership, would be saved (1 Thess. 4:17). And likewise to dodgy Corinth, he writes as if they would all be accepted at the Lord's return (1 Cor. 15:52); he saw them *all* as innocent Eve in danger of being beguiled (2 Cor. 11:3).

*That are left, shall together with them be snatched away in the clouds in the air-* Jesus will return to earth for judgement with His Angels, as we are told in His parables concerning the judgement. In the parable of the wheat and tares the point is made that the Angels do not just come to gather the harvest, but also to separate the wheat from the tares. Thus it would seem that the actual process of judgement will be largely associated with the Angels. We are told in 1 Thess. 4:17 that "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". The clouds must be the clouds of Angels with which Jesus returns, and may

even represent the figurative "air" in which we meet Him first of all, as if He is manifested through the Angels which He sends to gather us to judgement (although it is quite possible to take the 'air' literally too).

*To meet the Lord, and so shall we ever be with the Lord-* The connections between the parable of the virgins and 1 Thess. 4 are strengthened by the same Greek word being translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ and also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming. Further, the 1 Thess. 4:16-18 passage is described by Paul as him speaking "by the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15). If 1 Cor. 7 is any guide to how Paul uses this phrase, he would appear to be saying that in this passage he is merely repeating what the Lord Himself said during His ministry. This deals a death blow to some Pentecostal fantasies about the passage.

Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. " caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. " caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us. This cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will then go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. Such a picture is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Mt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obad. v 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The sequence of events here suggested chimes in with the thought so often expressed by generations of believers - that our initial reaction to the knowledge that our Lord is back will effectively be our judgment, although this will be formally confirmed at the judgment seat before which all the responsible must appear (2 Cor. 5:10).

The chronology we have suggested can now be summarized:-

- Persecution of believers.
- The Lord is revealed; the resurrection.
- An Angel invites each of the responsible to go and meet Christ.

- The unworthy delay, whilst the worthy go immediately.
- The worthy are snatched away into the air, forming a cloud of glory which is visible to all. They are physically with Jesus.
- Along with Him they come to Jerusalem.
- The unworthy are then gathered there.
- There is a tribunal-style judgment. The sheep and goats are together before the judgment seat. They are then finally separated by Christ's judgment, and receive their rewards.
- The wicked are destroyed along with the nations then surrounding Jerusalem.

The time scale for all this is unimportant- it could well be just a few seconds, if the meaning of time is to be collapsed, although there presumably must be a period of time for the cloud of witnesses to be beheld, and for the unworthy to desperately try to slap themselves into spiritual shape. The tremendous encouragement offered by the scenario here presented should not be missed: we will come with our judge, possibly already reflecting His glory, to the judgment. This in itself should give us a sense of humble certainty as we come before His tribunal. So much will depend on our reaction to the Angel's coming- our faith in acceptance, our degree of concern for the things of this life - all will be revealed in that instant.

4:18 *Therefore, comfort one another with these words-* The implication could be that they were indeed grieving as others who had no hope; see on :13 for the implications of this. The same word for "comfort" is used of how Paul comforted the Thessalonians whilst with them (2:11), how Timothy comforted them on his follow up visit (3:2), and how Paul comforted them in his letter (4:1,10). But the sign of true maturity amongst converts is when they can comfort each other (as also in 5:11), without needing letters and personal visits. This kind of spiritual autonomy amongst converts should be the aim of all missionary endeavour.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need that something be written to you-* It would seem that after the mention of the return of Timothy from his follow up visit to Thessalonica in 3:6, Paul spends the rest of the letter answering various questions they had given to Timothy, or issues which he had brought to Paul's attention. The question 'When will Christ return?' is absolutely typical of the questions asked by new converts, and adds some verisimilitude to the inspired record. They had asked Paul to write to them about this, and Paul says there is no need for him to write anything, because the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night, unexpectedly (:2), and whether we die before His coming or not is immaterial because the Lord died and rose again for us, that we might be resurrected like Him (:10); and our focus should be on building each other up rather than trying to guess the date of the Lord's return (:11). These perspectives need attention in our days, with so much interest in "the times and the seasons".

*5:2 For yourselves know perfectly well-* See on :1. This assumption of prior knowledge suggests that this too was one of the things Paul had taught them whilst with them, lending weight to the impression that he focused upon the practical issues of the basic Gospel rather than any deeper theology such as the issues about resurrection discussed in the previous section; see on 4:13.

*That the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night-* The Lord comes as a thief to the unready (:4; Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39; Rev. 3:3). The argument is: You don't need to know the day nor the hour; just watch, be aware of the Lord and eager for His return at all times. This would explain why Paul writes as if the Lord's return was imminent when it wasn't in reality. We are to live, as part of the Christian faith, in expectation of His coming at any moment, regardless of any other indicators in prophetic fulfilment which might encourage us that His coming is near. We are to be watchful exactly because we do not and cannot know the exact date of the Lord's return: "Watch therefore; for you know not what hour your Lord does come" (Mt. 24:42).

The context is shot through with allusions to the parable of the virgins. The sleeping virgins represent the unworthy amongst the believers who will live just prior to the second coming. Paul's allusion to this fills out the details: the coming of Christ to this category of 'believers' will be like a thief in the sense that their privacy and spiritual house will be invaded by the reality of the second coming. This will be due to their attitude of 'peace and safety', which they will actively promulgate - 'Everything's great within the household, we're going from strength to strength spiritually, there's no need to fear failure in any form!'. That "they shall say, Peace and safety" (:3) suggests that this is an attitude which they publicly disseminate amongst the brotherhood. Bearing in mind the many prophecies and indications that there will be a massive spiritual collapse within the latter-day ecclesia, it is reasonable to assume that the faithful minority will speak out against this - to be met by a barrage of 'peace and safety' reasoning. Those who will stand ready for their Lord will be in the light, in the day, self-aware, spiritually sensitive and realistic, and therefore *not* saying "Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3-8). Christ's coming as a thief to the unworthy is therefore in the sense of His coming being unexpected by them, rather than being as a thief to the world.

*5:3 When people are saying: Peace and safety, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no way escape-* See on :2, where I suggest that the cry of 'peace and safety' is amongst the unprepared within the brotherhood. It

could also refer to a brief respite in the troubles of the last days, perhaps offering a possible explanation of how the final invader comes down upon Israel that is living without bars and gates and at peace, "dwelling safely" (Ez. 38:11). Prophecy after prophecy describes a time of global cataclysm around the time of the second coming, even though this may be mixed with a fair degree of material prosperity. In no way will it be a time of "peace and safety" for the world; and their ever-increasing escapism shows that they don't exactly see it like that either. Biblically speaking, their hearts are failing them for fear, apprehensive concerning whatever is going to happen to their planet earth (Lk. 21:26, see modern versions). So I am inclined to see this as referring to a situation amongst the brotherhood.

Paul begins chapter 5 by saying that we do not need to know exact times and seasons (i.e. dates) of the second coming, because the most obvious sign is that it would come when some in the ecclesia were unaware- it would come upon them as a thief. Likewise Jesus said that a sign more important than famines etc. was the tribulation of the household. The unworthy saints of the last days who are not watching will find the second coming take them like a thief (Mt. 24:43). 1 Thess.5:3 says that those who think there is "peace and safety" within the ecclesia will also find the second coming to be thief-like. Thus a lack of spiritual watching is the equivalent of the "peace and safety" cry. The attitude that all within the house (the ecclesia) is well and there is no real danger of tribulation will result in a lack of watching. What sense can we make of Lk. 21:36 if we deny the possibility of a persecution period: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass" ...? "Pray *always* that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that *shall* come to pass...". Whilst it is possible that we will be *saved out of* the tribulation, to dogmatically say that we will not experience it, coupled with an attitude which refuses to admit the doctrinal and behavioural problems within the ecclesia, will result in us being lulled into a sense of peace and safety. This "peace and safety" atmosphere within the ecclesia matches that in Israel just prior to the Babylonian invasion: "Them that are at ease (A.V.mg. "secure" ) in Zion" (Am.6:1, cp. Lk.6:24) trusted in their riches and regular observance of a few religious rituals. But surely we "are all the children of light", and therefore "are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (:5,4). "By peace (prosperity) he shall destroy many" (Dan. 8:25) is the language of 1 Thess.5:1-3 regarding peace, safety and materialism destroying the saints of the last days. If this connection is valid, it shows that the little horn of Daniel will exert its influence within the ecclesia.

Ezekiel (8:8-15; 9:8; 11:3), Jeremiah, Micah and perhaps even the Lord Jesus (Is. 59:16; Lk. 13:8) over-estimated the spirituality of God's people in the run up to the 'day' of Divine judgment in their time. The "peace and safety" cry within the latter day ecclesia is part of an extended set of allusions back to the parables of Mt. 24 and 25, concerning the apostate, drunken servant who thinks everything is fine being suddenly destroyed by his Lord's coming. This kind of believer had been foreseen by Moses in Dt. 29:19; the type who hears the curses for disobedience, but blesses (forgives) himself in his heart, "saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst". As natural Israel will be awoken from their drunkenness by the final Arab invasion (Joel 1:1,2), so spiritual Israel will be awakened by the holocaust to come. The false prophets who lived on the eve of the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions told Israel that everything was "peace and safety" within the ecclesia of their time (Jer. 5:12; 6:14; 14:13; Ez. 13:10; Mic. 3:5). It seems that the latter day ecclesia will likewise have a faithful remnant who clearly perceive the apostasy, although they are surprised at it, seeing in it the clearest sign of their Lord's return; and an apostate majority, backed up by the elders of the ecclesia, who will claim with

some aggression that this is all utter nonsense, and there is peace and spiritual safety within the ecclesia.

The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travails" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

*5:4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you as a thief-* it is therefore 'walking in the light' which means that we are not in darkness; we will not be caught off guard by the Lord's coming, as by a thief in the night, if our general walk is "in the light" (Eph. 5:8; 1 Jn. 1:7). If we live as if in the light of His presence, His actual presence will not surprise us as a thief.

*5:5 For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night, nor of darkness-* "Sons of light" was the language of Judaism for the hyper righteous within Israel. Remember that the Gentile Thessalonians had been synagogue attendees whom Paul had persuaded. He was saying that they, in Christ, were the true "sons of light". "The day" surely refers to the Kingdom; we recall Rom. 13:12,13 (see note there): "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the day". We are to live the Kingdom life now; in this sense, we "have eternal life", and that we are to live now as we shall eternally live. We are "the sons of the day" in that we are "the children of the Kingdom", another phrase understood by Judaism to refer to the righteous Jews- whom the Lord said would be cast out into the darkness of condemnation (Mt. 8:12). "Darkness" is so often associated with the condemnation of the last day; we are not to live the life of the condemned, but of those who shall eternally live the Kingdom life.

*5:6 So then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober-* The allusion would be to the foolish girls who slept (Mt. 25:5 s.w.). This would explain the otherwise strange phrase "as do the rest / the others". Those "others" would be the foolish girls, and Paul is writing as to the wise girls. The allusion is also to the Lord's command to the weak believers in Gethsemane to not sleep, but watch- which they failed to do (see on Mt. 26:41). This conforms that "the rest" refers not to the world generally but to the failed believers.

*5:7-* see on Mt. 3:7.

*For they that sleep, sleep in the night-* There are many links between 1 Thess. 4,5 and Mat. 24,25; see on 4:14. The wise virgins slumbered and were sleeping at the time of the Lord's return. Paul matches this by saying that the *unworthy* will be slumbering and we ought to be awake and watching at the time of the Lord's return. And yet, the parable teaches that those slumbering wise girls will be accepted. This is a glaring paradox within the Lord's own teaching- for had He not taught that the faithful servants will be awake and watching when their Lord returns? Yet the paradox is there to flag a major message- that even though the last generation of believers may well not be ready and watching as they should be, their humble

recognition of the very likelihood of their oil running out would be their saving grace. And within 1 Thess. 5:6-10 this same paradox is brought out: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us *watch* and be sober. For they that *sleep sleep* in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we *wake* [s.w. *watch*] or *sleep*, we should live together with him". The same Greek words are italicized. The contrast is between those who watch and those who sleep. And yet Christ died to save both those who watch / are awake, and those who sleep, as the 'wise' virgins slept when they ought not to have done. Both those who watch and those who sleep [after the humble pattern of the wise virgins] will be saved due to the fact that Christ died to save sinners, to save the sleepy as well as the more lively- if they are truly and humbly in Him. Likewise the Lord's parables generally include two types- the self-righteous rejected, and the accepted, who have something spiritually the matter with them. They either enter the Kingdom with splinters in their spiritual vision / perception, or are totally blinded by planks in their vision and will be rejected.

*And they that are drunk, are drunk in the night*- The allusion is to the parable of the believer who thinks the Lord delays His coming and starts drinking (Mt. 24:49; Lk. 12:45) rather than caring for his brethren. Lk. 21:34 uses the same word to say that believers must beware lest the Lord's coming is a shock for them (cp. "a thief in the night") due to their being drunk. This scenario could well arise if there is a brief respite in the traumas of the last days, all seems to be resolved politically, and there is an upsurge of global wealth.

5:8 *But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation*- "We are of the day" means that we are living the Kingdom life now- see on :5. This means that we shall be "sober", aware, perceptive and watching for the things of the Lord. Peter three times uses the word in appealing for us to be "sober" in the light of the Lord's imminent return (1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). The armour listed here is defensive- against the temptation to be unready for the Lord's return. The Thessalonian converts had once been synagogue attendees, and would have appreciated that it was only the High Priest who put on the breastplate. No ordinary Israelite would ever have had the ambition to dream of wearing it. But as often, Paul calls the believers to the heights of spiritual ambition. They were not mere spectators at a show, but participants, the priestly tribe, called to do even the work of the High Priest on earth. The helmet guards the head, the mind, the thinking, which Paul presents as the essence of Christianity. If really we are persuaded that we shall eternally live the spiritual life, we shall not give in to petty temptation now. But we must clothe ourselves with that as a helmet, just as we must of our own volition clothe ourselves with Christ in baptism. "Hope", *elpis*, doesn't mean 'hoping for the best', but rather a solid confidence that we shall be saved. This shall guard our thinking, and keep us ready and eager for the Lord's return.

5:9 *For God has not destined us to suffer His wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*- As noted on :8, the certain hope of salvation will keep us eagerly watching for His return, far more so than any understanding of prophetic interpretation. Paul therefore underlines this point here in :9; we were in fact predestined to salvation, and not to condemnation. He wants us to be saved; hence we have the sure Hope, and believing that if the Lord were to return now, we shall surely be saved... will make us ever eagerly watchful for His coming.



5:10 *Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him-* As explained on :8 and :9, we will be eagerly watching for the Lord's return if we surely believe that it means salvation for us; and Paul yet further underlines this by saying that the Lord died so that we should be saved. As explained on :7, the "sleep" here can be interpreted in line with the rest of the chapter, where it refers to spiritual sleep rather than the sleep of death. The paradox of those who should not be asleep being saved is an allusion to the fact that even the wise girls of the parable also fell asleep, but were saved by grace. And yet the passage could just as well be saying that whether we are dead or alive at the Lord's return is no big issues; because we shall be resurrected and live with the Lord, and this was the whole purpose of His death for us. See on :1. In 4:14,17 the same language has been used for those who fall asleep in death before the Lord comes, and the issue of what shall happen to those who are alive at His coming is discussed there.

5:11- see on :1.

*Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, even as you already do-* As explained on :8 and :9, we should encourage each other with the fact that if the Lord returns right now, we really shall be saved. And we must ask how often we specifically state this to each other. As noted on 4:18, this ability to build each other up was a sign of maturity, rather than relying upon visits and letters to encourage them. The words for 'encourage' and 'build up' are also found in the record of how these things are done to believers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). But that Spirit power is partly mediated to the members of the body of Christ through the other members (Eph. 4:16); our efforts to build each other up are a channel for the Spirit, and will be blessed.

5:12 *But brothers, we urge you to recognize those that labour among you, who are over you in the Lord and who encourage you-* Although the work of encouragement was to be done by each member (:11), there were spiritual leaders in the group, who should be recognized and respected on the basis that they were labouring for the upbuilding of the community. This is the basis of respect and recognition; not the mere possession of office. It would seem from "But brothers..." that there was a tendency for them not to respect their elders.

5:13 *Esteem these exceedingly high in love, for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves-* As noted on :12, they should be respected for the sake of their work of upbuilding others, and not just because they demand respect or hold an office. "Be at peace among yourselves" suggests (as on :12) that the tendency not to respect elders leads to frictions amongst the group. And that is why those communities who do not have an eldership system are noted for the endless arguments amongst themselves.

5:14 *And we exhort you, brothers, warn the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all-* Despite knowing there were such within the church, Paul wrote so highly of them and spoke so positively of them before God (1:2,3). He saw them as "in Christ" and shared the Lord's view of imputed righteousness towards them. They were all exhorted to do the work of warning, encouraging and supporting; unless "brothers" refers specifically to the eldership. But the context is of Paul addressing the entire church membership, and he uses "brothers" specifically about them rather than about the eldership (:12,13). Being a member of the body of Christ means we are to take responsibility for others, and not resign it all to the eldership. The 'warning' of the disorderly was presumably with the consequence of temporary exclusion from the local congregation; for that is the consequence advised by Paul for "the disorderly" in 2 Thess. 3. The fainthearted were presumably those

who struggled to believe the great truths explained in :8 and :9, that we really can be sure that we shall be saved if the Lord returns right now. See on :11. The allusion is to Is. 35:3,4, where in the context of a vision of the Kingdom, the weak minded are urged to believe it as wonderfully true for them. Being "longsuffering" may allude to the parable of Mt. 18:26,29, where those indebted to us beg for "longsuffering", and we are to frankly forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. This idea is continued in :15.

*5:15 See that no one repays anyone evil with evil, but always follow after that which is good one toward another and toward all-* This follows on from the appeal at the end of :14 to be forgiving toward all. Forgiveness is "that which is good", and again they are told to practice this "toward all". To not forgive is therefore to repay evil with evil. The response to evil done is therefore to forgive, and there is no assumption here that we are to forgive only if repentance is shown. Paul uses the same words when commenting that Alexander had done him much evil, but the Lord would repay that evil (2 Tim. 4:14). The commands not to repay evil for evil are therefore because it is not for *us* to do this, but for the Lord (Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 3:9). Instead of repaying evil for evil, we are to bless or forgive (1 Pet. 3:9). But that is not to say that the person shall not have the evil repayed at the last day. But for us to do so in this life would be a form of playing God.

*5:16 Rejoice always-* A life of joy cannot be experienced if we are unforgiving and bent on repaying evil (:15). The insistent stress by Paul on the need to live lives worthy of our beliefs is really powerful. He knew that this was the main drawing power for the community. It has often been pointed out that sections of his letters seem to have strong links between them. Consider:

1 Thess. 5	Rom. 12
:12,13a	Respect elders
:3-8	Don't think too highly of yourselves
:13b	Peace among yourselves
:18	Peace with all men
:14	Care for weak and unruly (14:1); Receive the weak
:15	Not evil for evil, but good to all men
:17	Not evil for evil, but good to all men
:16	Rejoice always
:12	Rejoice in hope
:17	Pray unceasingly
:17	Continue in prayer
:19	Don't quench the Spirit
:11	Fervent in spirit
:20	Don't despise prophecy
:6	Prophecy

:21	Test all things, hold fast to good
:9	Cleave to good
:22	Avoid evil
:9	Hate evil

The conclusion from this could be that there was in fact a common document to which Paul is referring- a kind of practical guide to true Christian living that was expected of converts. If this is the case, then the early community would have been committed to being joyful, prayerful, tolerant, peaceful, loving, humble, Bible based, as a fundamental principle. These were what accepting Christ in baptism would have required.

5:17- see on Jude 20.

*Pray without ceasing-* The allusion is to the unceasing sacrifices of the tabernacle, which could be understood as speaking of our prayers. When Paul wrote of praying "night and day", it could be that he refers to his twice daily prayer times. For he was hardly praying 24/7. The idea is that we should live in an atmosphere of prayer, and not give up on an issue after a short time.

5:18 *In everything give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you-* God specifically wants us to be thankful, just as any parent seeks the virtue of gratitude in their children. Paul was again a word made flesh, for he has written earlier of his own constant thankfulness (1:2; 3:9,10). The Thessalonians were "appointed" to tribulation (3:3), but the will of God was just as much for their final salvation and for their gratitude, therefore, for all things in life; knowing that they are all somehow working towards that great salvation which is God's ultimate will.

5:19 *Do not quench the Spirit-* Verses 19-24 seem to mostly speak of the activity of the Spirit which was and is so central to the life of all believers and churches. All are given the gift of the Spirit on baptism, but this will not help us unless we allow it. Hence the Corinthians were given the gift but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). We can in this sense "quench the Spirit". I noted earlier that chapters 4 and 5 are full of connections back to Matthew 24 and 25, especially the parable of the foolish virgins. We may have another link here, in that "quench" is the same word used in "our lamps are gone out", 'quenched' (Mt. 25:8). They had no oil- the Spirit. They were "not spiritual". Eph. 4:30 [see note there] puts it another way in appealing for us not to grieve the Spirit, not to frustrate God's intention to transform us mentally now and physically at the Lord's return.

5:20 *Do not despise prophecies-* The gift of the Spirit is as real today as it was then, but in the first century there was the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit which was required for those times. The gift of prophecy was required in order to communicate God's word to the new community; for the New Testament was not then written or at least not in circulation in its current form. The Thessalonians had warmly accepted Paul's preaching, impressed by his personal example and the congruence of his life with his message; but when their elders gave them prophetic words from the Spirit, there was a tendency to despise them. We noted on :12

and :13 that they were not as respectful to their elders as they might have been, and this was particularly serious when those elders were speaking to them by direct Spirit inspiration.

5:21- see on Job 34:4,5.

*Test all things. Hold fast to what is good-* As noted on :20, there were gifts of prophecy available in order to teach the new, illiterate communities what was the Lord's word for them. But there were false prophets around, and so the various prophetic words had to be tested. There was apparently a Spirit gift specifically for this (1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Cor. 14:29 and see on Rom. 9:1). When a prophetic word was authenticated as legitimate, they were to "hold fast" to it and to generally "what is good". And by doing so, they would "abstain from evil" (:22).

5:22 *Abstain from evil wherever it appears-* See on :21. This abstaining from evil may specifically refer to rejecting false prophecies. But we can also read this on a more general level; we should abstain from every appearing of sin; wherever it comes up, we should abstain (this verse *doesn't* mean 'don't do things which look as if they're sinful'). Whenever we hear of sin we should seek to cover it, not to show it forth more widely, and especially seek for it to be forgiven. By doing so we will reflect our own experience of how God has dealt with His knowledge of our sins. "A talebearer reveals secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals (Heb. 'covers') the matter" (Prov. 11:13). And it is the Spirit which is the context here in :19-24.

5:23- see on Phil. 1:10.

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ-* The context in :19-24 is of the work of the Spirit; and it is the Spirit which sanctifies or makes us holy (1 Cor. 6:11). The Holy Spirit is literally 'the spirit of holiness / sanctification'; "sanctify" here is a form of the word for "holy". It is by the Spirit that we are made holy or sanctified. That work of sanctification affects every part of our lives and being- it operates upon us "completely". However the Greek translated "completely" is a unique word in the New Testament, and literally means 'complete to the end'. The Spirit works in our minds now to progressively transform us, and it is that same Spirit which shall transform our bodies physically at the last day into immortality (Rom. 8:11). Paul has spoken earlier of the possibility of being alive at the Lord's return, and this was his great wish as it is ours. And it seems he has that in view here, in wishing that their whole spirit, person ["soul"] and even their body would be "preserved blameless" at the Lord's coming. We are or course sinful, but we are counted as "blameless"; as explained in Romans 8, the work of the Spirit is to make us in reality how we are counted by the grace of imputed righteousness. That grace has its outflow in the grace or gift of the Spirit in transforming us into that which we are counted as by status.

Paul at times quotes from or alludes to popular Jewish ideas with which he may not have necessarily agreed. The lack of quotation marks in New Testament Greek means that it's hard for us at this distance to discern when he does this – but it seems to me that it's going on a lot in his writings. Thus he uses the phrase “your whole spirit, soul and body”, a popular Jewish expression for ‘the whole person’ – but it's clear from the rest of Paul's writings that he didn't see the body and soul as so separate.

5:24 *Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do it*- We are called to salvation. To get us there, as it were, the Spirit is being used to transform us and then to finally change us at the Lord's return from mortal to immortal; see on :23. Paul here simply states that we have been called to this, and He really will do it. This repeats the argument in Romans 8- that we were called to be saved, and so the Spirit will work to transform the called into a position whereby they will actually be saved.

5:25 *Brothers, pray for us*- Paul's authority was strengthened by his openness and exposure of his vulnerability. He needed their prayers.

5:26 *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss*- "A holy kiss" seems to have been the way of concluding a first century Christian meeting, in the same way as Paul ends some of his letters with this (1 Thess. 5:26; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14). It's hard to translate into our terms the huge meaning of this in the first century world. It would've been unthinkable for a slave to take such initiative to kiss their master, or indeed any free person. This practice of all kissing everyone else in the congregation would've been arresting and startling. Sociologically, it stood no chance of ever being done. And yet these social and inter-personal miracles were what made Christianity stand out so noticeably- and in essence, our overcoming of social and inter-personal barriers ought to do the same for our community in the present world. But does it? Are we *so* markedly different from others... ? Is our love and unity of such an evidently deep and different quality? The implication is that all these various slaves from different households did meet each other for fellowship. We can imagine the issues they faced with shifts, getting free time off, permission to leave the household etc. And the same effort is required by us to achieve face to face fellowship in Christ.

5:27 *I solemnly implore you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the brothers*- Revelation, Thessalonians and Colossians contain specific statements that the material was to be read out loud to the [illiterate] church members (Rev. 1:3; 1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16); but the contents of those books require quite detailed analysis, which we tend to wrongly assume can only be given by reading the text. The processes of occasional listening to a text [employed by most first century believers] and reading a text [employed by many twenty first century believers] are quite different. We can go back to a text, re-read it, re-access it at will. Someone who occasionally hears a passage read, and who maybe only heard parts of the New and Old Testaments read once or twice in their lives, simply relates to the text differently. Further, the nature of the reading of the text, the delivery of the speaker, would've played an important part in the interpretation of it by the illiterate hearer- hence the greater responsibility of teachers in the first century than today. For the illiterate audience, the message was tied up with the messenger to a huge degree. Hence Timothy is told to pay attention to his [public?] reading, preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 4:13).

5:28 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*- "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit, the power of new life within the heart of the believer which is given by the Lord Jesus. "Be with you" can as well be translated "be within you", for this is where the Spirit most essentially operates. And such spiritual mindedness was Paul's greatest wish for all believers.

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## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* As the three of them were still together, we can assume that the second letter was written soon after the first. The emphasis upon "God" rather than the Lord Jesus continues, appropriate to the way they had converted to the one true God after being pagans (1 Thess. 1:9).

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* There was real meaning and intention behind these greetings and farewells. Grace, *charis*, often refers to the gift of the Spirit, and peace, Biblically, refers to peace with God through forgiveness. And Paul believed that by his prayers and wish, these things could be true for the readership.

1:3 *Brothers, we are obligated to thank God always for you, as is appropriate, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other-* As in 1 Thess. 1:2,3, Paul talked to God about the Thessalonians, thanking God for their spirituality. We need to have this feature in our prayer life too. And yet in chapter 3 it is clear that all was not well with the community; those sponging off others were hardly abounding in their love toward the others. But Paul's positivism, and faith in their status in Christ and His grace, was such that he genuinely held this view of them. See on 1 Thess. 4:4.

1:4 *So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure-* We recall Paul's boasting of the Corinthians' promised generosity to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. Despite all the betrayals and disappointments of his life, Paul's positivism about his converts- to God, to them and to others- is a real inspiration. The opposition to Paul during his brief visit had obviously continued, but those converts- who had had only three weeks of Paul's time and probably only a few real contact hours with him- were still enduring. This is the abiding power of true ideas, of the Gospel, and of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who believe it.

1:5 *These are proof that God's judgment is righteous, and you are enduring them to the end you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer-* That "we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom" was Paul's standard teaching (Acts 14:22). We are only accounted worthy of the Kingdom by the grace of God's plan of imputing righteousness to us. And yet because He counts us worthy, He works in our lives to make us in reality what we are by the status He has granted us. Romans 8 caps the previous teaching about imputed righteousness by teaching about the work of the Spirit in our hearts and the purpose of suffering- because these are the means by which we are brought in practice to that status of rightness with God which has been counted to us. And in 1:11 Paul uses the same word in praying that God would count them worthy of the calling he has given them; and this again is the language of Romans 8, where the predestined calling of God is cited as the great example of salvation by grace. This prayer for them to be 'counted worthy' as therefore uttered in full awareness that the process would require suffering on their part, which they had to endure. When we pray for another to be saved, to be in God's Kingdom, we are in fact

praying that they shall pass through and endure "much tribulation". This is why our response to suffering now is a foretaste of judgment. See on 1 Pet. 3:16.

1:6 *It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who afflict you-* The emphasis is that God and not us will repay evil with evil. Paul had had to teach them that before; see on 1 Thess. 5:15. God's repayment of evil is just / righteous; whereas any human attempt to do so is unjust, because we fail to understand the complete picture which we are attempting to judge; and we too are sinners, in essence having committed whatever we would seek to condemn others for having done. "Afflict" is literally 'to narrow', and the same word is used of how only the narrow way shall lead to eternal life (Mt. 7:14). The persecution they endured was a narrowing of their way- that they might enter the Kingdom.

1:7- see on Mt. 24:28.

*And to give relief to those who are afflicted (and to us too), when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire-* Paul saw the day of judgment as an "assurance", a comfort, a relief longed for, rather than an inevitable and dreaded event on the horizon of our existence (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Acts 17:31). Job and David speak of it likewise. Paul envisaged the persecution of the Thessalonians as continuing right up until the moment the Lord Jesus returned from Heaven. He believed that the latter day tribulation had begun, at the hands of the Jews and Romans who were doing the persecuting; although he believed that the antichrist had still to be revealed (chapter 2) and so the time of tribulation would continue for some time yet. And so often, Paul argues as if he and his readership were living in the last generation before the Lord would return; see on 2 Cor. 5:4. This is not to say he got it all wrong. The Lord's coming was indeed scheduled for some time in the first century, as the Olivet prophecy makes clear. But Bible prophecy is mostly conditional; preconditions must be met. And they weren't; there was not the repentance of enough Jews as required, the Gospel was not taken to the Gentiles as it should have been, the church was not spiritually fruitful enough to be harvested, and there was a falling away from the Faith. And so the Lord's return was delayed.

Note that the Lord Jesus will return to earth with His Angels, and this means that throughout eternity there will be Angels with us on the earth. This is something to take into account in our visions of the Kingdom age. It appears that they are more prominent in the setting up of the Kingdom, and that we will take over their role later on. They are the "reapers" sent forth to gather the saints, and that they will be responsible for punishing the nations (2 Thess. 1:7,8). Initially, the Angels and the Lord Jesus will be physically together in the judgement of the world- the unrepentant worshippers of the beast "shall be tormented... in the presence of the holy Angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10). Presumably the individual beast worshippers will be brought together to one locality for this judgement- the literal location of Gehenna, where the unworthy saints will be punished? This gathering process will be by the Angels, as was that of the saints and of the nations to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16).

1:8 *Rendering vengeance to them that do not acknowledge God and to them that do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus-* Those persecuting the Thessalonians were the Jews who had persuaded the Roman authorities to persecute the Christians (Acts 17). These Jews are described as not acknowledging God- whereas their much vaunted belief in God would make that seem a strange thing to say. But claiming belief in God is not very significant; He must be acknowledged, and that acknowledgment is through obeying the Gospel of His Son, who is the only way to the Father. To refuse to obey Jesus as Lord is effectively atheism; for such

a person has not come to the Father. It is the Lord Jesus, and not apologetics, which leads to faith in God. We come to God through faith in Jesus, rather than coming to Jesus through faith in God. Some may disagree, but this is the Biblical position; and they would need to ask whether such 'faith in God' is legitimate and actual, rather than a mere intellectual statement. Acknowledging God and obeying the Gospel is language which tends to suggest that those in view were responsible to judgment- they had heard the Gospel but refused to obey it. The reference would then be to the synagogue Jews in Thessalonica who had heard Paul preaching for three Sabbath days, and rejected the message. The same Greek phrase is used about the Jews not obeying the Gospel (Rom. 10:16). Those Jews who happened to be at synagogue service those three weeks had heard the Gospel- and were therefore responsible to judgment. That might seem rather tough, seeing that in later life they may well have forgotten all about that unusual itinerant preacher who passed through and grabbed a bit of a following from amongst the Gentiles. But out of the billions who have lived on this planet never having heard the Gospel, those men were chosen to hear- and they rejected it. And so they are responsible to judgment. For them to receive the promised judgment of this passage, they will have to be resurrected and face the Lord whom they rejected.

2 Thess. 1:7-9 speaks as if the judgment of the wicked and the coming of Christ from Heaven are simultaneous. If we could break this split second into real time, there would be the process of mortal emergence from the grave, judgment involving a period of time, then the righteous being grouped at Christ's right hand side, and then they would all be immortalised together. "Come... inherit the Kingdom" is spoken to the whole group of sheep; we will be immortalised together, at the same time. If we are all judged individually in real time, this is impossible. Some would be immortalised months or years after others. This collapsing of time at the Lord's return would explain why "the resurrection" is sometimes used as a description of the whole process of resurrection, judgment and immortality (even in the OT- Ps. 1:5 LXX; 24:3).

1:9- see on Rev. 14:10.

*They shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might-* See on :8. The punishment is destruction; it is eternal in that it has eternal consequence. No second chance, no way to have another crack at the eternal future which they have missed. "From the presence of the Lord" envisages them appearing before His judgment seat and then going out from His presence- "these shall go away into..." destruction (Mt. 25:46). Why the reference to them having to go away from "the glory of his might"? The "might" refers to His might which is given to us by the Spirit to transform us and lead us on the journey to transformation now and final salvation at the last day. The same word is used of this might in Eph. 1:19; 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:11. Those who are rejected will have hidden their talent / gift, quenched the Spirit, grieved the Holy Spirit... and now they walk away from it all to eternal non-existence. We really must use it or lose it.

1:10 *When he shall come to be glorified in his saints-* We can live the Kingdom life now, in that this word is only used again in :12, where Paul wishes them to glorify the Lord now.

*And to be marvelled at in all them that have believed in that day (because our testimony to you was believed)-* Our amazement and incomprehension at the judgment is brought out here,



using a Greek word meaning 'to marvel at in incomprehension'. This praise will also be on account of our being "presented faultless" before the judgment (Jude 24). We will feel the wonder of it all. The Gospels often record the 'marvelling' of people at the Lord Jesus. We are to do that in this life, so that we shall do so at the day of His coming too; see on :12. And all this is because Paul's preaching to them was believed; and as explained on 1 Thess. 1:1, this testimony to them likely lasted only a few hours. This is the power of ideas, of the Gospel- that what can be explained and believed in a few hours now can lead to life eternal at the last day.

1:11- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

*To which end we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling-* See on :5. Paul had the end in view for them, which was acceptance by the Lord at the last day; so that their calling to the Kingdom would come true in practice.

*And fulfil every desire of goodness and work of faith, with power-* Paul assumed they had such spiritual ambition, desiring good news, and wanted to see it realized. Spiritual ambition means that we will desire to do some things which we can't physically fulfil- and yet they will be counted to us and we will be empowered to do them. Abraham is spoken of as having offered up Isaac- his intention was counted as the act. And Prov. 19:22 RV appropriately comments: "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness". It is all accepted according to what a man has, not what he has not. And yet the filling ["fulfil"] with "power" speaks of the power of the Spirit to empower us to actually do the goodness which we in faith would like to achieve. It is God's "desire" that we should be saved (Eph. 1:5,9 s.w.). If this is also our desire, then we will be empowered towards it. We are strengthened with "power" (s.w.) "by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16), "the power (s.w.) that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). If we desire goodness and believe God will empower us, then He will, through the gift of the Spirit. And that is in view too in the next verse (see note there). We know that it is God's will for us to be spiritual and to be saved; and so in praying for things relating to that, we are praying according to His will and will be thus empowered.

1:12 *To the end that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ-* The grace of God often refers to His *charis* or gift of the Spirit. The same Spirit is at work now transforming our hearts as will transform our bodies at the last day (Rom. 8:11). This is why we right now are to glorify the Lord Jesus, just as we will at His return (see on :10).

## CHAPTER 2

*2:1 Now brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we urge you-* The false teaching that the Lord had already come (:2) obviated the need to be gathered together to Him, a phrase clearly taken from the Lord's teaching about our gathering to judgment. This is the problem with preterism and with any idea that the Lord has already come. We would then be effectively living with no accountability to a future judgment. And that false teaching would then tend to be reflected in lifestyle.

*2:2 Not to be quickly shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter appearing to be from us, as though the day of Christ had come-* The largely illiterate community converted by Paul after only a matter of hours of contact time (see on 1 Thess. 1:1) was going to be vulnerable to the attacks of the Jewish satan / adversary to Paul's churches; there was an organized opposition to his work. In Thessalonica, the Gentile converts had originally been synagogue attendees, and they mobilized the local Roman authorities against the fledgling church. There were false prophets who claimed to be speaking by the Spirit, and false letters claiming to be from Paul. This all indicates Judaist activity; they had elsewhere used the tactic of forging letters in Paul's name (Gal. 6:11; Heb. 13:22; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 3:1). Thus Paul concludes this second letter to the Thessalonians with "the salutation of me Paul with mine own hand which is the token in every epistle, so I write" (2 Thess. 3:17). Their reasoning was that the day of Christ, i.e. the Kingdom, was already present. This was a basically Jewish argument – hence the Judaist cancer at Ephesus had led to Hymenaeus and Philetus "saying that the resurrection (and therefore the Lord's return) is passed already; and overthrown the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18). We see similarities with modern day preterism, which likewise posits that the Kingdom and return of Christ has already come.

*2:3 Let no one beguile you in any way-* Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The Olivet prophecy had incipient, possible fulfilment in the first century; and a major fulfilment is ahead in our last days. Paul's allusion to it suggests the "man of sin" prophecy is to be read likewise.

There are some connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 which show that the "man of sin" has specific reference to the last days, as Mt. 24 does:

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>2 Thessalonians 2</b>
Lawlessness will abound (v.12)	The man of lawlessness
Men saying "Lo, here is Christ" (v.23)	"Be not soon shaken... by word... that the day of Christ is here" (v.2 R.V.)
"Believe it not" (v.23)	"Let no man (of sin) deceive you" (v.3).
"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders" (v.24).	"With all power and signs and lying wonders" (v.9)

<p>“Insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (v.24); implying the non-elect <i>will</i> be deceived.</p> <p>“Behold, I have told you before” (v.25), as Christ prophesied His sufferings.</p> <p>“As the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (v.27)</p> <p>“The Son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven (Angels) with power and great glory” (v.30)</p> <p>“Shall gather together his elect” (v.31)</p> <p>“I am Christ... shall deceive many” (v.5)</p> <p>“Iniquity shall abound” (Greek: ‘multiply’, i.e. convert more people to it)</p> <p>“The love of many shall wax cold” (v.12)</p>	<p>“All deceivableness... they (shall) believe a lie... but you, brethren beloved of the Lord, have from the beginning (been) chosen to salvation” (v.10,13) – i.e. it was impossible for <i>them</i> to be deceived.</p> <p>“When I was yet with you, I told you these things” (v.5)</p> <p>“The brightness of his coming” (v.8)</p> <p>“With his mighty Angels... The glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8,9 cp. 2:8)</p> <p>“Our gathering together unto him” (v.1)</p> <p>“Strong delusion, that they should believe a lie... all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish” (v.11,10).</p> <p>“The mystery of iniquity does... work” (v.7)</p> <p>“They received not the love of the truth” (v.9)</p>
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*For first of all must come the falling away and the man of sin shall be revealed, the son of destruction-* The falling away, or apostasy, speaks of a loss of faith and collapse within the church. Paul had warned them before that there would come this great collapse (:5). But it was not inevitable for any of them on a personal level. The word in common Greek referred to a revolt or defection; and is used in the LXX of a falling away from God (Jer. 29:32 e.g.); and in Heb. 3:12 of how the Jewish believers were tempted to fall away. Paul envisaged a collapse in faith amongst the believers in the last days, followed by the revelation of a particular individual who would be supported by and in league with the Jewish 'satan' (:9). This combination of Jewish and Roman power was exactly the problem which the Thessalonians were up against, according to Acts 17 and the various hints at it throughout the Thessalonian letters. This is why Paul chose to explain to them of all the churches what was going to happen. But what he envisaged didn't happen, even though Revelation likewise predicts the uniting of the Roman and Jewish forces of evil to persecute the fledgling church, to be destroyed by the Lord's return. I have elsewhere discussed and demonstrated at length the principle of conditional prophecy. Nineveh was to be destroyed in 40 days, with no mention of any conditions. But it was not, one possible path of fulfilment was replaced with another. Likewise with the prophecy of a grand temple to be built at the time of the restoration, with Messiah within it, in Ez. 40-48. This could have happened- but it didn't. This

is not to say that these prophecies shall never come true- their fulfilment was rescheduled. The essence will be fulfilled later, in the last days. And so it is with the scenario envisaged here and in Revelation. The Lord could have come in AD70, and many of the signs such as famines, wars etc. began to come true; but the other human preconditions, such as the repentance of Israel and the taking of the Gospel to all the world, were not. And so His coming has been rescheduled, until our last days. The "man of sin" prophecy can therefore be seen to have the beginnings of a possible fulfilment in the first century; but we are to look for a final fulfilment in our last days. The 'destruction' [AV "perdition"] of the man of sin would be the destruction of the apostate within the church and of those who had refused the Gospel; a related word is used for the perishing or destruction of this category in :10.

We can be sure that the Jewish opposition which attended Paul's first visit to Thessalonica would have continued well after he left. They were under pressure from "them that trouble you" (2 Thess. 1:6), who are defined in Gal. 5:11-13 as the Judaizers ("they... which trouble you"). The Thessalonians are comforted that these troublemakers would be destroyed by the Lord's second coming in fire, "taking vengeance on them... that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (preferring that of Moses): who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (cp. Gehenna) from the presence of the Lord" (1:9). This sounds very much like the punishment of the responsible at judgment day (Jude 24) – and the Judaizers fit that category. Significantly, the only occurrences of the Greek idea of a "man of sin" in the LXX describe Jewish apostates (Prov. 24:22; Is. 57:4).

This prophecy speaks of a specific "man of sin" who would arise within the people of God [be they Israel or the ecclesia]. It seems that there may have been such an individual in the first century:

- "You have heard that antichrist shall come" (1 Jn. 2:18)
- "Who [singular] did hinder you... a little leaven [that] leaveneth the whole lump... he that troubles you..." (Gal. 5:8-10)
- "He that is of the contrary part" (Tit. 2:8)
- "Who (which individual) hindered you?... (Paul's) letters, saith he, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:7,10 A.V. mg.).
- The world – the first century Jewish world, in John's usage of the term – was under the power of a 'Satan', a Prince or leader (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 1 Jn. 5:19) – perhaps the High Priest?
- A "stranger" to the flock and a "thief" would come to harm the flock of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 10:5,10).
- The existence of such an individual would make special sense of the Lord's request for the Father to keep the disciples safe from "the evil one" (Jn. 17:15). 1 Jn. 2:13,14 alludes to this prayer and shows it to have been fulfilled in the first century – the true believers had been kept safe from "the evil one". And there appears some connection with the promise of Rev. 3:10, given just prior to the cataclysm of AD70, to keep the brethren safe from "the hour of trial".
- John seems to speak, at least in the Greek text, of one specific individual – e.g. "The one [singular] saying he is in the light" (1 Jn. 1:9). "Who, then, is *the* liar?" (1 Jn. 2:22) has evident connection with the lying antichrist figure of 2 Thess. 2:8,9; and "the deceiver" (2 Jn. 7) connects with that same figure who will follow "deceit" (2 Thess. 2:11). John saw the singular antichrist as being heralded by many antichrists who had, he felt, already arisen in the first century. They belonged to the [Jewish] world (1 Jn. 4:5) – an indication that the antichrist is somehow Semitic, at least in its first century application. John's reference to "many false prophets" (1 Jn. 4:1) connects with Mt. 24:11, which in an AD70 context

predicts that “many false prophets shall arise”. This indicates to me that the singular antichrist had some fulfilment in the first century. And the same will be [is?] true in our last days. The likes of Saddam Hussein and Hitler are perhaps such antichrists who presage the coming of the specific person who will be the latter day antichrist. They had some similarities to him, but were not the actual person. Significantly, John seems to have understood this person as someone who would nominally accept Jesus, but deny that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah (1 Jn. 2:22). This would fit a Muslim position far better than it would a Catholic – for Catholics believe that Jesus is the Christ. Likewise in the first century, the Jewish antichrists believed Jesus had existed, but denied He was the Christ.

It is noteworthy that this individual is not named. Martin Hengel comments, correctly: “One of the riddles of Jewish and early Christian polemic is that it hardly ever really names its opponents, but tends to use derogatory paraphrases. This is [also] true of Essene polemic, which conceals its opponents in ciphers” (Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: S.C.M., 1996 ed.), p. 41). In this context we recall the references to Babylon and Egypt in the Old Testament as, e.g., “Rahab”. Paul likewise doesn’t seem to refer to his enemies by their names but rather hides behind almost taunt phrases (2 Cor. 11:5,13; 12:11; Gal. 5:12; Phil. 3:2; and see too Gal. 1:7; 3:1,10; 4:17; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Rom. 3:8; 15:31). The references to the prophetess “Jezebel” in Rev. 2:20 and “the teaching of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14) don’t actually name the individuals concerned, but rather give them a kind of code name. I would suggest however that the individual is not named because the prophecy did not come to full term in the first century, because of the delay of the Lord's return until our last days.

The Jewish nature of the man of sin which Paul warns the Thessalonians of is also suggested by a careful reflection upon 1 Jn. 2:11,19: “He that hateth his brother... walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth... they went out from us, but they were not of us”. This is all alluding back to the example of Cain going out from God’s presence and wandering in the land of Nod with no direction to his life. Cain is a type of the Judaizers and the Jewish system (Jn. 8:44); the primary reference of John’s letters was probably to the Judaizers. I note on 2 Thess. 3:14 that the Judaizers within the Thessalonian church were to be ‘marked’ just as Cain was. These people are described in 1 Jn. 2:18 as “antichrists” whose presence heralded the full manifestation of “*the* antichrist”. This is why the New Testament repeatedly stresses that the appearance of false teachers and fake Christs will be a sign of the end. If these antichrists of the first century were Jewish, then “the antichrist” probably also was. There is ample evidence that John’s letters were primarily intended for ecclesias facing this Judaizer problem. The copious links with his Jewish-based Gospel should make this evident. Note too that the Qumran Essenes described the apostate High Priest as “the man of lies”. Tertullian’s interpretations of John’s letters clearly understood the “antichrists” to be referring to contemporary false teachers.

Paul warns that the Lord’s coming will not be until there has come a marked further apostasy, and the full public revelation of the man of sin, whose “mystery of iniquity” was already quietly at work. It would be fully revealed once God’s withholding patience had ended. At this stage the man of sin would show “lying wonders” which would deceive many; but he would soon be destroyed by “the brightness of (the Lord’s) coming”. This “mystery of iniquity” was the Judaist false doctrine undermining the ecclesia, resulting in many believers being influenced by them, until in the immediate prelude to Christ’s ‘coming’ in AD70 the Jewish system seemed to have the upper hand over the true believers. We know from Heb. 6 and elsewhere that the Judaist elders were able to do miracles. Such a bout of impressive

miracles to be done by false teachers in the last days is predicted in the Olivet prophecy and parts of Revelation. The events of AD70 then totally destroyed the Jewish system.

Our commentary seeks to interpret 2 Thess. 2 from these two perspectives – the possibility in the first century, and the major fulfilment in the last days.

## Who Will He Be?

We have seen that the latter day man of sin will have some association with the people of God, after the pattern of Judas. He may be partly Jewish. He may even have Christian connections. Or it may be that he is an Arab, a half Jew, who will enthrone himself as the head of the Islamic beast and make his capital and temple in Jerusalem. Nah. 1:15 RV describes the leader of the Assyrian invasion as “the wicked one”, the “wicked counsellor” (1:11), “*he* that dashes [Israel] in pieces” (Nah. 2:1). Further evidence for a charismatic Islamic antichrist is provided in my study of the revival of latter day Babylon in *The Last Days*. Of particular significance is the way that the man of sin exalts himself “against all that is called God or that is an object of worship” (2 Thess. 2:4 RV mg.). This is exactly relevant to Islam, whose insistent belief in one God leads them to be aggressively against any icon, idol or object of worship. This is the very opposite to the Catholic way of venerating objects of worship.

The following table shows the evident links between the personal “man of sin” spoken of in 2 Thess. 2, and the beast systems of Revelation:

<b>2 Thessalonians 1&amp; 2</b>	<b>Revelation</b>
2:3 – son of perdition (see also Jn. 17:12)	17:8 – Beast goes into perdition
2:7 – mystery of iniquity (Gk. <i>anomia</i> ) ( <i>a reference to the son of perdition</i> )	17:7 – Babylon associated with mystery
2:8 – wicked (lit. ‘lawless’ – Gk. <i>anomos</i> ) one revealed (see also v. 7 where “iniquity” = Gk. <i>anomia</i> )	1:1 – The revelation of Jesus Christ
2:8 – Lord consumes him [the wicked one] with the spirit of his mouth (cp. Is. 11:4)	19:11, 15 – Christ destroys the beast ( <i>ref. To Isaiah 11:4</i> )
1:8 – Lord Jesus in flaming fire	19:12 – Christ’s eyes “as a flame of fire”
2:11 – those who perish believe a lie (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	19:20 – “false (or lying) prophet”
2:11 – strong delusion (or working of deceit) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	13:14 – deceive
	19:20 – deceive
	( <i>references to the second beast and the false prophet</i> )
2:9 – signs (Gk. <i>semeion</i> ) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	13:13 – wonders (Gk. <i>semeion</i> )
	19:20 miracles
	(Gk. <i>semeion</i> ) ( <i>references to the second beast and the false prophet</i> )
2:4 – temple	11:2 – temple

It seems reasonable to equate this “man” with the specific “antiChrist” of 1 Jn. 2:18. The beast / horn system is also an imitation of Christ. It breaks in pieces the whole earth (Dan. 7:23) – the same word used in Dan. 2:40,44 to describe Christ’s breaking in pieces of the nations at his return. The little horn will “think to change times and laws”. This is clearly alluding to Dan. 2:21, where God alone is described as changing the times and seasons. The little horn thus makes himself as God – the man of sin “as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). This man of sin will be destroyed by the brightness of the Lord’s second coming (2 Thess. 2:8). He will therefore be actively in existence in the last days. This man of sin will be revealed during a falling away from the Truth just prior to the return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:2,3). Thus whatever fulfilments of this power there may have been over history, it has to be accepted that it will have a particular manifestation in the last days.

The man of sin is “the son of perdition”, clearly alluding to Judas (Jn. 17:12). This associates this power with the apostate element within the ecclesia, who in the first century were Jewish. Through infiltrating the ecclesia, he will sit “in the temple of God” (2 Thess. 2:4), i.e. the ecclesia. Judas was a betrayer; we have seen from the Olivet prophecy that there will be betrayers within the ecclesia in the tribulation period. The link with Judas surely teaches that there will be a ‘Fifth column’ within the latter day church, who are connected with the latter day Babylon / beast / man of sin.

However, it is possible that these prophecies refer to a specific individual who claims that he is Christ – a real ‘antiChrist’, possibly associated with a renegade Christian (after the pattern of Judas being one of the twelve). It may even be that he builds a literal temple, which would then be the abomination which makes desolate standing in the holy place. Remember that the horn / beast blasphemes the temple (Rev. 13:6), and in their manifestation as the King of the North, “he shall plant the tabernacle of his palace... In the glorious holy mountain” of Zion (Dan. 11:45). 2 Thess. 2:8,9 point the contrast between the Lord’s coming and that of the man of sin – as if the latter is a replica of the former. This new power will break in pieces opposing nations just like Christ will (Dan. 7:23 cp. 2:44); he will institute a new set of laws world-wide as if he has God’s authority (Dan. 7:25 cp. 2:21).

Some may be duped into thinking that Christ has come back, when actually it is the ‘antiChrist’ of the beast. The beast may have its adherents within the ecclesia who will promulgate this view. The beast has a mouthpiece in another beast that speaks like a dragon – i.e. like the beast – but has horns like a lamb, i.e. a fake Christ. This beast “does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men (i.e. this is conscious exhibitionism), and deceives... by the means of these miracles which he had power to do” (Rev. 13:11–14). Bringing fire from Heaven means that this is a conscious imitation of Elijah, implying that the Elijah ministry is active during the tribulation. It will be opposed by the publicity stunts of the beast system.

The idea of an anti-Christ as a replica of the real Christ also occurs in Proverbs, where there is a designed contrast between the woman of wisdom (representing Christ, the seed of the woman, 1 Cor. 1:24), and the “foolish woman” who does the same external things as “wisdom” (e.g. Prov. 9:1–5 cp. 9:14–17). This prototype antiChrist is a whore, which is a symbol associated with the dragon / Babylon / beast of Revelation. Thus the antiChrist and

the beast are closely linked. Because of the false miracles, the weak believer will worship the image of the beast and join the 666 system (Rev. 13:14–18). This is based on the image in the plain of Dura, which many of God’s people were duped into worshipping. Only the three friends seem to have refused to do so. Perhaps the furnaces which were the means of punishment for those who refused to worship the image are related to the furnaces of the concentration camps, which we may well see repeated in the future.

### “A time of trouble”

We have suggested that the blasphemous power building his palace on the temple mount in Dan. 11:45 is the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2, and thus also the little horn power. This is immediately before the second coming of Christ and resurrection described in Dan. 12:2. It is during this period that “there shall be a time of trouble such as never was” for God’s people, natural and spiritual – the time of Jacob’s trouble that occurs after Israel’s present regathering to the land. “That day is great, so that none is like it” (Jer. 30:7). Those who are written in the book experience it, but are saved from it. This group must surely be true believers. Seeing that this will be a time of trouble for God’s people such as never was, the previous sufferings of the Jews and the tribulation of the second world war will be nothing compared to this. It will be so bad that it will seem that every one of us will perish – “there should no flesh be saved” (Mt. 24:22). But for those who doggedly hold on to the patience and faith of the saints, the glorious, miraculous deliverance will come. Even an Angel was so amazed by the extraordinary nature of this time of trouble that he asked: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?”. The answer was “For a time, time and an half (i.e. three and a half years); and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7,8). The Hebrew for “the holy people” is literally ‘the people of the holy ones’ – i.e. all those among natural and spiritual Israel who belong to their holy guardian Angels. “All things” being fulfilled in Dan. 12:8 is probably alluded to in the fig tree parable – the generation that see the revival of Israel (fruit instead of leaves on the tree, as a result of Christian preaching) during that three and a half year tribulation will live to see the end of all things. The holy people are to be scattered (Dan. 12:7). The Hebrew means ‘to break in pieces’, and is also used regarding the beast / horn breaking in pieces the whole earth / land (Dan. 7:23). As it treats God’s people, so it will be judged, seeing that the little stone breaks in pieces the beast / image.

The horn who scatters God’s people in the last days, the “he” of Dan. 12:7 is the “King of the North” of Dan. 11:45 – suggesting that the beast / horn has something to do with latter day Assyria and Babylon, the historical / Biblical “King of the North”. The faithful will be “tried” (Dan. 12:10) by this invader, as Israel were by the Babylonian invasion of the past (Jer. 9:7). The same word is used in Zech. 13:9 and Mal. 3:2 concerning the faithful remnant in Jerusalem enduring their future sufferings.

There are a number of similarities between Daniel 11 and the prophecies concerning the persecution of the saints by the horn / beast / man of sin:

<b>Daniel 11</b>	<b>The Latter Day Tribulation</b>
v.31 “Shall pollute the sanctuary”	The beast’s blasphemy against the temple



v.32 “Such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries”	Some of those in the covenant will be deceived by the flatteries of the beast (cp. Dan. 8:25)
“Such as do wickedly”	“The wicked shall do wickedly” (Dan. 12:10)
v.32,33 “The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many”	Zealous preaching by the faithful during persecution.
v.33 “They shall fall by the sword”	The beast kills the saints with the sword and leads them into captivity in the tribulation (Rev.13:10). “They shall fall by the sword” is quoted in Lk. 21:24 concerning the tribulation.
“Many days”	1260 days

v.35 “Some of them of understanding shall fall” (in death)	“Some of you shall they cause to be put to death” (Lk. 21:16) – the faithful remnant are characterized by their “understanding” – of the prophecies?
“To try them, and to purge, and to make them white”	“ Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried” (Dan. 12:10)
“Even to the time of the end; because it is yet for a time appointed”	The tribulation continues right up to the end – the Lord’s coming. The time appointed – 3.5 years of Dan. 12:7?
v.36 “The King...shall exalt himself”	As the horn did over the other horns. If this verse is a continuing description of Antiochus Epiphanes, then it just isn’t all true. Rather it seems do we have another gap / jump in chronological fulfilment, as happens elsewhere in Daniel, until the latter day antichrist.
“And magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods”	The man of sin exalts himself above all that is called God (2 Thess. 2:4); the horn speaks blasphemy against God.
v.38 “He shall sit in the seat of the Almighty God” (A.V. mg.)	Sitting as God in God’s temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

There are too many similarities here for this to all be coincidental. The primary fulfilment of Dan. 11 appears to be in the persecution of the Maccabees. The effective tribulation which they went through then, preparing as it did a faithful remnant who accepted Jesus as Messiah at His first coming, must be a dim shadow of what the church and natural Israel are to undergo in the last days. Note that Dan. 11:33 and 12:10 emphasize that only those who understand will spiritually survive the persecution. This should serve as the ultimate inspiration to zealously apply ourselves to the study of prophecy, rather than give up because it seems too difficult. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

### **The Old Testament Basis**

In searching for an Old Testament basis for “that wicked one”, we find that very phrase used in the Septuagint of Esther 7:4 to describe Haman. He too was ‘revealed’ for who he was – the Persian leader plotting the total destruction of Jewry, from which they were saved by grace. The entire story of Esther can be read as a detailed type of Israel’s latter day weakness, persecution and deliverance by grace. The idea of a “man of sin” within the temple of God surely has its source in the Ezekiel passages (e.g. Ez. 8:8–16) which describe the idolatry (“abomination”) which occurred within the temple in the days just prior to the invasion of Israel by the Babylonians. These passages lead up to the vision of the purged, perfected temple of the Messianic Kingdom in Ez. 40 – 48. The ‘men of sin’ which Ezekiel saw within the temple were the “elders of the house of Israel”, the corrupted priesthood. The connection with 2 Thess. 2 suggests that in the last days, before the final neo-Babylonian holocaust, the elders of both natural and spiritual Israel will practice corruption in the temple / ecclesia of God.

There is an incident in the experience of Nehemiah, Governor of Jerusalem (a type of Christ, Mt. 2:6) which points forward to all this. Nehemiah (cp. Jesus) returned to the Emperor to have his authority over Jerusalem confirmed (cp. Christ to God, Mt. 25:19; Lk. 19:12,13). He then returned to the holy land, to find Israel indifferent to the state of God’s house, taken up with the petty materialism of daily life, with the result that the Arab Tobiah had been permitted by the elders of Israel to live in the chambers of the house of God (Neh. 13:6–9). Nehemiah in fury expels him and “cleansed the chambers”, throwing out all his things, after the pattern of Christ cleansing the temple (Mt. 21:12). Along with the type of Moses returning from the mount to a corrupted Israel, this points forward to the state of affairs at Christ’s return. Is. 8:5 speaks of an “image of jealousy” being placed in the temple by the Jews just prior to the Babylonian invasion. This was the original image behind the Lord’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation being placed in the temple by the Romans. And yet His prophecy has a distinct latter day reference. All this points to a similar literal fulfilment in some way, in a literal latter day temple.

“The son of perdition” was Judas (Jn. 17:12), the epitome of sin and the Jewish Devil (Jn. 6:70,71 cp. 8:44). We will see that throughout 2 Thess. 2 there is frequent reference to the events surrounding our Lord’s suffering and death; as we also note in the Revelation passages concerning the saints’ final sufferings. Judas was concealed among the disciples until he finally flew his true colours at his betrayal of Christ, which marked the beginning of His passion. The Judaizers were only revealed for what they really were in the traumas of AD69/70. And if the man of sin has a latter day equivalent, this group of false teachers will only show their hand immediately prior to the second coming, at the beginning of the

tribulation, which matches the beginning of Christ's final sufferings which began after Judas' betrayal. This indicates that any witch hunt for this group is doomed to failure. The disciples tried to expose Judas, "the man of sin", before his proper time to be manifested; and ended up accusing each other of fitting the role. Such is the inability of human nature to make accurate judgment in this respect. There were three and a half days from the time of Judas being openly revealed for what he was to the end of Christ's sufferings, marked by the resurrection. It may be that there will be a three and a half year tribulation period for the latter day believers, beginning with the open revealing of the "man of sin".

The N.I.V. (correctly) translated "man of sin" as "man of lawlessness", highlighting the contradiction in the fact that the law-crazy Judaists were actually *lawless*. Because lawlessness abounds in the last days, the majority of the ecclesia will lose their love (Mt. 24:12). The beast is epitomized by a man – "the number of the beast... is the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18), in the same way as the system described in 2 Thess. 2 is personified as a man of sin. The figure of Rev. 13:5,6 is clearly based around an Old Testament 'man of sin', Goliath – a real, historical person. Rev. 11:4,13 draw a contrast between a god of the earth / land of Israel, and the true God of Heaven. The "god of the earth" has two olive trees and two candlesticks standing before him, with evident allusion back to Zech. 4:14; 6:5, where the Lord / King of the earth / land appears to refer to the King of Babylon.

These passages all imply that there may well be one specific "man of sin" in the last days. Judas, the prototype "son of perdition", influenced the other disciples, as shown by the complaint concerning Mary's 'waste' of ointment being described as made by Judas in Jn. 12:4, but by the whole group in Mt. 26:8. Jude's letter is a warning against the Jewish-influenced apostasy of the first century. He cites "the gainsaying of Korah" as typical of the false teaching that was infiltrating the ecclesias. He could have spoken of "Korah, Dathan and Abiram", but instead he focuses on Korah, as if he was the outstanding influence. By doing so, was Jude suggesting that there was one specific individual in the "last days" who was to be resisted?

The connection with Judas would suggest that the man of sin being in the temple may refer to the presence of this individual or system within the ecclesia. But there is a clear link with Mt. 24:15, concerning the abomination of desolation standing in the temple as a clear sign that Christ's return is imminent, just as Paul says the man of sin in the temple is the clear sign of the second coming (2 Thess. 2:3). The Lord's words are looking back to Daniel's prophecy that a desolator (RV) is to appear in the temple, and also to Jeremiah's description of Nebuchadnezzar as a 'desolator' of God's people and His cities, who achieves his 'desolation' by a fake theophany, coming with clouds and chariots just as the Lord Jesus will (Jer. 4:7,13). The language used by Jeremiah in that section is very similar to that used in Ezekiel 38 about the individual named as 'Gog'. The abomination that desolates is at the hands of an individual desolator – the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2. The likely application to an abomination within the ecclesia notwithstanding, one is tempted to look for a physical temple to be built in Jerusalem in order to ease the fulfilment of this prophecy. It cannot be insignificant that the right wing Rabbis are enthusiastic for this, *and have already drawn up the plans for one!* It could be that Rev. 13:14,15 predict that the man of sin will set up a literal image of himself there in the temple. And as has been pointed out, Caligula had ordered a statue of himself to be erected in the temple, and although this never actually happened, this would've been an enduring memory amongst the New Testament readership. This background again points to the personality cult of a specific individual being developed in the temple.

Paul was an enthusiast for living as if we know the Lord's return is imminent; but he told the Thessalonians that that blessed day wouldn't come immediately, because some prophecy still had to be fulfilled (2 Thess. 2:3). This, I suspect, is the situation we are in now: living *as if* we expect the Lord imminently, but recognizing that we don't *know* whether his return is imminent, and still looking for some prophecy to be fulfilled.

2 Thess. 2:3 RV speaks of "*the* falling away" which must come as the final, crystal clear sign that the Lord's return is imminent. It sounds as if Paul treated this as an obvious, well known thing amongst the believers. In the context, he's saying: 'How ever can you believe this idea that the day of Christ is here now (RV)? As you know thoroughly well, the great apostasy from the truth in the ecclesia must come, and only *then* will the Lord come, to save the elect within his corrupted ecclesia'. The idea of latter day weakness in the ecclesia is taught explicitly and implicitly throughout the Scriptures. Both natural and spiritual Israel have to be almost pleaded with to come out from among the beast system of the last days (Rev. 18:4), implying that somehow they become part of it- although ideally they should never have become involved with it. Israel being tempted by Balaam and the Moabite women at the very end of the wilderness journey looks forward to the tendency of latter day spiritual Israel to mess up on the eve of the Kingdom. A fair case can be made for thinking that Adam sinned at the end of the sixth day, on the eve of the Sabbath of rest (cp. the Millennium). See on 1 Tim. 4:1.

The accounts of the latter day invasion of Israel all feature a single charismatic individual, who will be destroyed personally by the Lord Jesus at His coming. This is Paul's "man of sin", Daniel's aggressive king of fierce countenance, Ezekiel's Gog, the chief prince. It is also the person referred to by Micah: "And this man [Messiah] shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land" (Mic. 5:1,2). The Lord Jesus will save His people in the latter days from an "Assyrian". It has been shown that Assyria and Babylon are used almost interchangeably in Scripture. Gog was a Jew who apostatized and went to live in Assyria / Babylonia, according to 1 Chron. 5. This is why he has the appearance of spirituality; and he may even be a middle Eastern Christian. I say this because 2 Thess. 2 describes him as "the son of perdition", exactly the phrase used about Judas, the false disciple of Jesus.

2 Thess. 2:3 is clear enough that the "man of sin" will arise in the last days immediately before the Lord's return. We need not think that Christ is about to return until we see this person gloriously enthroned "as God". This is what Paul seems to be saying. And when the Lord was asked for the signs of His coming, he started off by warning that false Christs would come (Mt. 24:4,5). 1 Jn. 2:18 says just the same: "It is the last time [RV "hour"]": and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time". This was true in the run up to AD70, and it will be true in the ultimate last hour too. Ezekiel 38 likewise speaks of a man called 'Gog', a "chief prince", who would come against God's people at the time of the end. This is the man of whom Dan. 8:25 speaks- "he will destroy many and will stand up against the Prince of princes", the Lord Jesus.

2:4 *He that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself up as God-* I suggested on :3 that the situation envisaged was of a joining together of the Jewish and Roman opposition to Christianity. This would result in a specific individual enthroned in the Jerusalem temple, and also in the temple in the sense of the church of God. The language used here is very similar to

the cult of Caesar worship; Nero especially set himself up as God. As explained on :3, this scenario did not come about in the first century although an incipient fulfilment was seen in the events of AD70. We look to a future fulfilment in our days.

"He that opposes" was clearly the Jewish satan, to which Paul alludes in most of his letters; an organized network of opposition to his missionary work. The word and idea is used in concerning the Judaizers and Jews in Lk. 13:17; 21:15; 1 Cor. 16:9; Phil. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:25 and 1 Tim. 5:14. This opposition to the Gospel in the Thessalonian context has already been established as coalition of Jewish and Roman forces of evil (see on 1 Thess. 2:18). Their arrogance is well described as exalting themselves above anything that is 'worshipped', whether Christian or otherwise. This is the same word as "devotions" in Acts 17:23 concerning pagan idols. The forces of Jewish and Roman evil were to unite to set up an entity which would be above any idol. They made themselves "as God", perhaps by imitating Moses, the god of this (Jewish) world" (2 Cor. 4:4 and context); James 4:11,12 is just one example of the Judaist-influenced eldership making themselves equal to Moses. There are two Greek words translated "temple", one referring more to the physical building and the other to the spiritual dwelling place of God, i.e. the ecclesia (1 Tim. 3:15). It is this latter one which is used here – the man of sin sits down (Gk. 'takes his place') in the ecclesia, showing himself (Greek 'demonstrating') that he is God. This word is translated "approved" in Acts 2:22 concerning Christ's approval as God's representative by His miracles. This indicates that the man of sin is an imitation of Christ – a true antiChrist. The showing that he is God would be through the pseudo miracles of v.9 – in the same way as Moses was made as God to Pharaoh through the miracles he did (Ex. 7:1). The Judaist-influenced elders of the Jewish ecclesias seem to have retained the power of the miraculous gifts for a short time after their apostasy (Heb. 6:4–6); the Jews also had their false miracle workers (Acts 13:6; 19:14). The beast of Revelation also works impressive miracles. Thus as the man of sin did false miracles in the first century through the Jewish miracle workers and their Judaist friends within the ecclesia, so both in the beast system of the last days as well as in the ecclesia, the latter day "man of sin" will work false miracles.

In the last days context, the ecclesia will be infiltrated by a "man of sin" who appears to be an apostle, and who in league with the beast, the power dominating the world, corrupts the ecclesia. He is an anti-Christ, a false God. His sitting in the temple of the ecclesia is matched by Tobiah the Arab having rooms in the temple- rooms which should have been symbolic of the dwelling place of God's people with Him (Neh. 7:13 cp. Jn. 14:1-3). He will get this place, as Tobiah got his place, because the ecclesia has failed to grasp the rigid line of demarcation between the things of God's Kingdom and those of Satan's. They will have been deceived by the apparent similarity between the two Kingdoms. The presence of antiChrist within the ecclesia will be the sign "whereby ye know that it is the last time" (1 Jn. 2:18); and 2 Thess. 2:3 and Mk. 13:5,14 say the same thing. The recognition of the presence of such false teaching within the ecclesia will be what tells the faithful remnant that the Lord's return really is imminent. If the "man of sin" is to be connected somehow with the Muslim beast as we have suggested elsewhere, it may be that the vague, outline similarities between Islam and the One Faith are what are capitalized upon in order to make the differences seem minimal. Thus Muslims tenaciously believe in one God and a restored paradise on earth, and Shi'ite Muslims (comprising 99% Iranians and 60% Iraqis) look for the return of the 12th Imam (who they believe has ascended to Heaven) to rule the world. Muslim mosques are fake temples of God, designed as they are around an outer court and two sanctuaries. As Adam desired equality with God (see the allusions to his fall in Phil. 2) and was punished with an inability to hide, shame and nakedness as a result, so Edom will be punished in precisely the

same way (Jer. 49:10)- because they too desire equality with God, as Babylon did in Is. 14:13, and as the man of sin will attempt (2 Thess. 2: 4). The connection between Babylon, Edom and the man of sin's blasphemy suggests that he is connected with radical Islamic religious blasphemy.

The antichrist is a mimic of the true Christ; his kingdom is a parody of God's Kingdom. And the King of Babylon claiming "I am and none else beside me" are the very words of Yahweh- the King of Babylon is clearly to be identified with the man of sin, who sits as God in God's temple (2 Thess. 2). The "man of sin" will sit in the temple of God and proclaim that he is God. This is surely the "abomination that maketh desolate" that the Lord Jesus predicted would sit in the temple just prior to His return. The abomination makes "desolate", clearly referring to *Jerusalem* being made desolate by Babylonian / Iraqi invaders (Dan. 9:2,17). Luke 21:20 parallels "the abomination that maketh desolate" in Mt. 24 and Mk. 13 with "the desolation of Jerusalem". The abomination / abominator will stand "where *he* ought not" (Mk. 13:14 RV). He is the "one that maketh desolate" (Dan. 9:27 RV). A specific individual is clearly implied. Dan. 8:13 RV describes this person as "the transgression that maketh desolate"- yet it is the abominator that makes Jerusalem desolate. Therefore "the transgression" is surely being put by metonymy for a man, who will sit in the Most Holy place and make Jerusalem desolate. And 2 Thess. 2 says just the same- "the man of sin / transgression". The whole tenor of the Daniel prophesies is that they refer to an individual who will arise in the last days- not someone like a Pope sitting in St. Peter's for centuries. The vision of the 2300 days of abomination- the days during which the abominator will make Jerusalem desolate- "belongs to the latter days" (Dan. 8:26). These are the days during which the sanctuary and the host of God's people will be "trodden under foot"; interpreted by the Lord as Jerusalem being trodden down of the Gentiles until "the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled".

It is quite clear that the leadership of Israel's fiercest enemies would dearly love to sit and stand in the Sanctuary if they could get their hands on Jerusalem [as they vow they will]. He will sit there "as God". Another place where we read of a man sitting in the temple proclaiming that he is God is in Ez. 28:2, where the King of Tyre proudly says that he sits as God ruling the seas of the people. The King of Tyre was a prototype for the latter day man of sin. The King of Tyre was "in Eden the garden of God" where he was "anointed" and beautifully adorned (Ez. 28:12,14). These descriptions may be further information about the serpent in Eden, although omitted from the Genesis account; and of the idol cult of Tyre being established in the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel's time. In this case, the fake-Christ [anointed one] is "the old serpent", just as the latter day beast leader will be (Rev. 12). The beast is so often paralleled with its leader, just as the little horn seems to refer to both a leader and a nation / political system. The sudden destruction that comes upon Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2 is the same kind of thing spoken of in 1 Thess. 5:3- "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh". The saying of peace and safety is exactly the language of Daniel regarding the false peace produced in the very last days by Antichrist. It could well be that under Babylon's domination there is a brief boom period for the entire world. This ensures his political survival, and explains why all the world's merchants will weep at his fall. This sorrow by the traders hardly seems likely to happen if the Vatican was destroyed. This person will accuse the brethren of Christ before the throne of God (Rev. 12:10), but will be thrown down by the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. This is exactly the language of 2 Thess. 2 about the antichrist who is to be destroyed by the

Lord's coming. Yet the idea of a false accuser of the brethren before the throne of God takes us back to Job's satan- who seems to have been a pseudo-disciple, bringing down the outpouring of vial-like judgments upon God's people (cp. the scene in Revelation). Antichrist, the man of sin, sitting in the temple of God, is surely the abomination that Jesus said is to be in the temple in the last days, leading to the final desolation. Is. 14 describes the rise and fall of the King of Babylon; he too desired to set himself as God in the temple of God, having first terrorized the nations that dwell on the 'earth', those situated in the land promised to Abraham between the Nile and Euphrates. This seems so on the cards for latter day Babylon- to terrorize the Middle Eastern world into accepting her leadership, and then to seek to set up the King of latter day Babylon on "the mount of God", Zion. Finally, Nahum speaks of how there was one specific Assyrian leader who was to be destroyed by the coming of Messiah. The phrasing is so similar to that found about the "man of sin": "There is one gone forth out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor... behold upon the mountains the feet of him [Messiah] that bringeth good tidings... the wicked one shall no more pass through... he is utterly cut off. He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face" (Nah. 1:11,15; 2:1 RV).

2:5 *Have you forgotten that when I was still with you I told you these things?*- Paul was only with them for three Sabbath days. He had little contact time with them, and yet he warned them of future tribulation at the hand of Jewish and Gentile forces of evil, to result in a "man of sin" being enthroned in the Jerusalem temple. And yet from 1 Thess. 4 it is clear that they were still ignorant of basic theology about the resurrection. Clearly Paul considered practical warnings as to the difficulty of the path ahead as being more important than theology.

In 1 Thess. 5:3-5 they had been told that the pre-eminent sign of the Lord's coming is the "peace and safety" cry within the ecclesia. Now in 2 Thess. 2 Paul puts it another way: "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away *first*", or most importantly, as the most obvious sign.

2:6 *And now you know what is restraining him now, that he may be revealed in his own time*- This restraining influence was known by the Thessalonians; it lay within the range of their experience. That is significant in our attempt to interpret this difficult question as to who or what the restraining influence refers to.

"Restraining" is also translated as "stand fast" and also "keep hold", often in the context of resisting Judaist infiltration by retaining true doctrine. This would imply that the spiritually strong within the ecclesias were withholding the revealing of the man of sin and the Lord's return ("that he might be revealed in his time" can neatly refer to either, cp. 1 Tim. 6:15). However, it was only a matter of time before the falling away was so widespread that they would be "taken out of the way"; "for the mystery of iniquity (literally 'law-breaking', another pun on the Judaizers' position) doth already work" (v.7). This is the opposite to "the mystery of Godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16), and refers to the Judaizers claiming to be so spiritually deep that the Truth was a "mystery" known only to them (cp. Jude 19; Rev. 2:24). That which hindered the revealing or coming (cp. 1:7; a false second coming) of the man of sin would be taken out of the way. "Out of the way" here is normally translated "from among them" - the spiritually minded members of the ecclesia were to be taken away, so that God's punishments could come upon the rest of them. In the first century this was shown in the command for the faithful to flee the Jerusalem ecclesia (Lk. 21:21), to come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4), which is a common symbol of Israel and apostate Jewry in the prophets. The word for "mystery" is

also used in a negative sense in Rev. 17:5,7 concerning the woman of sin riding the beast – hinting at a specific individual who will be the figurehead of the beast?

I suggested on :3 that what is in view, initially, in the first century context, was a coalition between Jewish and Roman forces of evil, culminating in the enthronement of a Nero like figure in the Jerusalem temple, proclaimed as the only object of worship, and thus closing down all the various idol cults. This coalition of Jews and Gentiles against the church would be a repetition of what happened to bring about the Lord's death, and the church would therefore fellowship His sufferings in this way. But that was restrained by the strong paganism of the population. Perhaps it was this which was initially in view; as well as political opposition to such an extent of Caesar worship and deification within the Roman leadership. There was indeed a movement against this development. But this was to be taken out of the way. The restraining nature of Roman civil law as it was then practiced was well known to the Thessalonians, for it was this which had saved Paul from being lynched at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6,9).

We can only speculate what the restraining influence may be in the last days. It could simply be God's desire to delay the Lord's coming so that more may get a chance to repent. Even in the first century, there was this element of Divine delay (2 Pet. 3:9).

*2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so, until he is out of the way-* The "mystery" could refer to the false teaching of the Judaizers, or to the development of the imperial Caesar cult. See on :6 and :7. "The mystery" in the New Testament refers to the mystery of the Kingdom, of the Gospel; and the Gospel likewise was "at work" through the Spirit in believers. But the man of sin is a fake Christ, and is associated with a false Gospel and another spirit and mystery. The 'working' is defined as "the working of satan" (:9), and I have noted that the great satan or adversary to the Lord was the Judaist movement. This is termed lawlessness because as Paul often shows, Judaism was effectively anti God's true Law. By not obeying the Gospel they were effectively not knowing God (see on 1:8).

*2:8 And then shall be revealed the lawless one-* The revealing of this individual would be at the time of the revealing of the Lord Jesus (1:7). The revealing of this individual is therefore a mimicry of the Lord's revealing from Heaven. And the true Christ shall clearly be shown. Just as Judas was revealed for who he was ("the son of perdition", :3, = Jn. 17:12), so this latter day individual would be revealed.

"The lawless one" of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to "the wicked one" of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is "the Assyrian". So it would appear very likely that the latter day antichrist figure comes from 'Assyria'. And what's going on in the territory of 'Assyria' right now is gripping the whole world's attention. See on Rev. 19:20.

*Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of his coming-* The Spirit and brightness of the Lord's coming parallels the description of judgment on the Judaizers in 1:6–9: "...mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance... punished... from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power". This judgment is against "them that trouble you" (1:6), i.e. the false Judaist 'brethren' who were leading the early church astray (Gal. 1:7). The link with 2:8 shows that it is such false brethren *within the ecclesia* (temple) who are "the wicked one" which will be destroyed by the second coming; along with the "man of sin" system of the world. On :3 I suggested there



is a religious and secular element to the system in view. 2 Thess. 1:6–9 also recalls the description of coming judgment on the apostate Jews in Rom. 1:18: The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all unGodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness”. Paul’s words in Thessalonians can also be traced back to Is. 11:4: “He (Christ) shall smite the earth (Heb. *‘eretz’* – land, of Israel) with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” in Israel, primarily. The Greek for “wicked” is translated “without law” in Romans, again making a play on the Judaizers who were claiming to keep the Law. There is a parallel between “the mystery of iniquity” in v.7 and the “wicked one” of v.8 – the revealing of “that wicked” is therefore the revealing of a mystery, which mimics the ‘revealed mystery’ of the true Gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3; 6:19; Col. 1:26). The wicked one was to be “destroyed”, the Greek for which is also translated “abolish”, “do away”, “make of no effect”, “vanish away”, “make void” etc., all in the context of the doing away of the Jewish Law and the system which supported it. This was only fully done with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70.

“The spirit of his mouth” looks forward to Rev. 19:15,21 concerning Christ’s destruction of the beast at the last day, which has close links with the man of sin. The emphasis on the destruction of the man of sin by Angels and fire recalls Dan. 7:10,11 concerning the beast’s destruction by the Lord’s return. Perhaps the man of sin will appear associated with the latter day ecclesia, the temple of God, but he will be linked with the political ‘beast’ which will then be in control of the world.

2:9 *But the coming of the lawless one will be according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders-* However we understand the “working of Satan” (*energeian tou Satana*) in 2 Thess. 2:9, it was under the control of God – for it was part of the “strong delusion” (*energeian planes*) which God sent (2 Thess. 2:11). The repetition of the word *energeian* is missed through the mask of translation through which most read this passage, but in the original Greek it stands out clearly. The ‘Satan’ isn’t working *against* God but is being used by God in *His* working in the lives of others. It is “evil” and “the work of Satan” which deceives the wicked (2 Thess. 2:9,10); but God works through this, it is *He* who sends the delusion... an indication that ‘Satan’ here is not radical evil, i.e. evil that is free and independent from God, lurking free in the cosmos as it were, but is sent by God, under His control. But of course, we want to know more about this ‘Satan’; and clearly the Jewish opposition to the Christian Gospel was a significant adversary or ‘Satan’ in the first century.

‘Satan’ in the New Testament frequently refers to the Jewish system. We noted on :3 the idea of a coalition between Jewish and Gentile forces of evil. The envisaged new religious order would be supported by the Jewish satan, who would perform false miracles to give it credibility. “Coming” can be translated ‘coming in’, referring to the subtle entry of Judaist agents and ideas into the ecclesia (Gal. 2:4 etc.). The coming of Christ was associated with miracles, and this would be matched by ‘Satan’s’ miracles at *his* ‘coming’. The Greek for “working” is often used concerning the working of the Holy Spirit. “Power, signs and wonders” is a phrase always used concerning the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 2:22,43; 4:30; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:4); and in 2 Cor. 12:12 concerning the qualifications of an apostle. This would portray the man of sin as a false apostle (cp. 2 Cor. 11:13–15) doing false miracles to accompany a false Gospel; he is “the son of perdition” after the pattern of Judas. The Greek for “lying” is used about the apostate Jews in Jn. 8:44; Rom. 1:25; 1 Jn. 2:21.

Jannes and Jambres were another prototype of these Judaizers (2 Tim.3:8). Perhaps these magicians who replicated Moses' miracles were apostate Jews. Israel's experience in Egypt points forward to ours at the time of the second coming. Perhaps the beast, symbolic 'Egypt' of the last days, will also have a group of renegade Jews in tow, who match the miracles performed by the latter day Moses. Showing "signs and lying wonders" is an evident allusion back to Mt. 24:24, concerning this happening in the last days of AD70 and our own times. If the miraculous gifts are possessed by some of the faithful in the last days, e.g. In connection with the Elijah ministry, the ability of the apostate believers to do miracles will seem the more credible. There are many links between 2 Thess. 2 and the Olivet prophecy, as noted on :3.

The description of those deceived in 2 Thess. 2 is amplifying that of the judgment seat in 1:6–9, which is concerning those responsible to judgment, i.e. those who know Christ. We therefore conclude that the many who are deceived by false claims of miracles are actually within the ecclesia. Only the elect will not be deceived. This was what happened in the run up to AD70, and must presumably be seen in our last days too. The establishment of the beast's power in Jerusalem, accompanied by powerful miracles and the support of some Judas-like brethren within the ecclesia for it, will persuade some in the church to think that Christ is back. The connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 indicate that many (Gk. the majority, Mt. 24:12) within the ecclesia will be deceived, egged on by a subtle group of false Christians who will be the counterpart of the first century Judaizers.

2:10 *And with all unrighteous deceit of them that perish. Because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved-* The deceit refers in the first century context to the work of the Judaizers (s.w. 2 Pet. 2:13); "unrighteous" is used about the Jews in Rom. 1:18,29; 2:8; Heb. 8:12; 2 Pet. 2:13). Paul insists that his preaching at Thessalonica was not of deceit (1 Thess. 2:3)- unlike, by implication, that of the Judaizers who stirred up persecution for him there. There will be a conscious program of deceit orchestrated in the last days too, and according to the Olivet Prophecy and the implications here in 2 Thess. 2, many shall be taken in by it. Loving the truth doesn't simply mean that they have a love of truth in the sense of wanting to find the right interpretation of the Bible. "Truth" here is being placed in opposition to the deceit and lies coming from the coalition between the "man of sin" and the Jewish satan. It is not academic truth which shall save, but "truth" in the sense of living relationship with the Lord Jesus. This is why :12 speaks of loving unrighteousness instead of loving the truth; there is clearly a moral dimension to "truth" in how Paul uses the term here. The same ideas are found in :13; we are the 'loved' of the Lord if we believe the 'truth' which is the Lord Jesus. The truth in this sense elicits love (1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1). This love which comes from truth is to be 'received' rather than cultivated by steel will. This is the word used frequently for 'receiving' the Gospel; the Jews in Thessalonica did not "receive" the word of the Gospel (Acts 17:11 s.w.), and the Thessalonians to whom Paul is writing are commended for having 'received' (s.w.) the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13). The group in view here are therefore those who had heard the Gospel but refused to receive it, meaning that they did not live in love and truth but rather in deceit and hatred towards the Lord's people. All this was within the direct experience of the Thessalonian readership.

2:11- see on 2 Thess. 2:7.

*For this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie-* "Strong delusion" is literally the energy of delusion; just as God can work within the minds of

believers according to His *energeia* by His Spirit (Eph. 1:19; 3:16-20), so those who refuse to believe have another spirit sent to work within them, deluding them into believing the lie. "The lie" refers to the "delusion"; and in the first century context, that delusion was the words of the Judaizers, framed as they are as the serpent in Eden and Cain who told the first lies (the same Greek word for "delusion" is used about the Judaizers who sought to delude the believers in Eph. 4:14; 2 Pet. 3:17; Jude 11 cp. Jn. 8:44). John contrasts a love of the truth (cp. :10) with "the spirit of error [s.w. "delusion"]", which operated through the false Judaist prophets / teachers infiltrating the churches (1 Jn. 4:1,6). Psychological confirmation of disbelievers is a feature of God's working with men (Is. 6:9,10; Rom. 1:24-28), and God even sends false prophets or teachers as part of this process (1 Kings 22:22,23; Ez. 14:9; Job 12:16). This is what will particularly happen in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1), just as it did in the collapse of Christian faith which was seen in the run up to the events of AD70.

This passage explains clearly why the Bible is so confusing. God plagued the first century ecclesia with false brethren who could work impressive miracles; because "they received not the love of the truth (they treated it as a hobby)... God shall send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie". God deceived brethren in the run up to AD70- it's that plain. And the events of AD70 are typical of our last days. 2 Thess. 2 has many connections with the Olivet Prophecy, as noted on :3. The idea of brethren being deceived at the time of Christ's "coming" connects with Mt. 24:5,11,24 describing 'the majority' (Gk.) of the latter day ecclesia being "deceived". 2 Thess. 2:11 says that this deception is sent by God because they refuse to love the Truth. The conclusion is hard to avoid: in our last days, the majority of us will be deceived because we don't "love the truth" - it's no more than a hobby. Whether we have yet reached that situation must remain an open question. God worked false miracles at the time of AD70, according to 2 Thess. 2:9-11. This means that the 'miracles' claimed by some false religions may be actual miracles; God allows them to be done because He wishes to deceive such people.

This same word for "lie" is used in :9 about "lying wonders". This implies that the beast / false prophet / man of sin is somehow allowed by God to do the lying wonders; they will be sent by God to test the faithful. God deluded the unfaithful within the first century ecclesia into false doctrine and alienation from Him; and it seems, if we are interpreting correctly, that He will do the same in these last days.

2:12 *That they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*- See on :10. "Truth" clearly has a moral aspect here. To not love or believe the truth means that one has pleasure in unrighteousness rather than pleasure in or love of the truth (:10). Truth, even on an academic, intellectual level, is often rejected because of a subconscious desire to walk in unrighteousness and to dodge the moral demands of God's truth. This is why every false doctrine has a moral basis to it, a widening of the narrow way in practice, or some implied excuse for not living in the Spirit as we should.

2:13 *But, brothers, we are obligated to give thanks to God always for you, beloved of the Lord, for God chose you from the beginning to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*- This final section down to :17 emphasizes the work of the Spirit in confirming the believers, because we have been reading that those who refuse to believe are confirmed in their unbelief by another spirit sent from God to psychologically confirm them in their path; see on :11. As also explained in Romans 8, God's election of us is part of His grace, and if we believe the truth of Christ, He will sanctify us by the gift of His Spirit in our hearts. We can resist that process, quench or grieve the Spirit, limit the Holy One of Israel.

The Judaizers taught that Israel were the chosen people; the same word for "chose you" is used in the LXX of Israel (Dt. 7:7; 10:15). But the new Israel in Christ are the chosen ones, "the beloved of the Lord". The Jews had chosen not to "believe the truth" of Christ (:12); those who do believe the truth are the chosen. It is by such belief that we make our "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). Those who do not believe nullify their calling; they become those whose names were not written in the book from the beginning (Rev. 13:8) and are therefore destroyed because of it. Our having been chosen from the beginning was so that we might be holy or sanctified (Eph. 1:4); if we refuse to be holy then we are annulling our calling. But if we wish to be holy, then the gift of the Spirit will work in our hearts to sanctify or make us holy in practice.

*2:14 Unto which He called you through our preaching of the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ-* Paul was only with the Thessalonians three weeks at most, during which time he worked day and night to support himself, dodged and endured persecution, and they also had to work. So the number of contact hours was very small (see on 1 Thess. 1:1,9). And yet through that brief witness, they heard their calling, which had been prepared for them from before the beginning (:13) and which if followed, would lead them to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus. The glory of the Lord Jesus is His moral perfection; and the gift of the Spirit to those who believe the truth and accept the calling was intended to make them holy in their hearts and practice (:13), so that at the last day they would be made fully like the glory of the Lord Jesus.

*2:15 So then, brothers, stand fast, and hold to the teachings which you were taught, whether by word, or by our epistle-* Seeing the great process which was going on with them, begun by their responding to the brief message preached to them (see on :14), they were to hold on to the teaching received, remain within the process of being sanctified by the Spirit (see on :13).

*2:16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit (see on :13). The love of the Lord Jesus was in dying for us (Rom. 8:37; Gal. 2:20), and His death was likewise the Father's love for us (Jn. 3:16). It was through that death that the Comforter, the Spirit which would abide eternally, was given (Jn. 14-16). The ideas here are all connected together in Rom. 5:5: "Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". The gift of the Spirit in our hearts, the Comforter, sanctifies us and propels us on the journey towards salvation (:13)

*Everlasting consolation-* This comfort has been given us, and yet Paul prays they might have this comfort (:17). Clearly enough he realized that so much potential spiritual help is available, but it doesn't come automatically into our lives in practice; it must be perceived, desired and prayed for. Thus Paul prays that the Lord Jesus would "establish" them in their works (cp. Ps. 90:17) and then confidently proclaims in 3:3 that He will indeed do this for them- so confident was he that his prayer for their innermost strengthening would be heard. The eternal nature of the Holy Spirit comforter is in that we are now being sanctified, made holy (:13), transformed into the kind of characters we shall eternally be. In this sense the Comforter would abide with us for ever (Jn. 14:16).

2:17- see on 2:7.

*Comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word-* This is another call for direct action upon the hearts of believers by the Father and Son; and they have promised to do this through the work of the Comforter, the power of the Spirit within our hearts. We will be established in whatever good work or word we speak or teach; whatever we put our hands too in His service will be blessed and established. The establishing is at the last day (1 Thess. 3:13 s.w.); the good works and words of this life all form part of a spiritual character which shall be set in stone eternally, as it were, at the last day.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1- see on Lk. 18:1.

*Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, even as also it is with you-* Paul's frequent requests for prayer show his need, vulnerability and equality with his converts. We ought to unashamedly ask others for their prayers if we too believe that the prayers of third parties really can influence our path and the success of our preaching work. The word of the Lord was glorified when people believed it (Acts 13:48), but Paul believed that the prayers of others could somehow influence whether individuals believed it or not.

There is an idiom in Scripture which concerns running. To 'run' is sometimes used to describe a man's response to God's word (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.)- it must be a running, active, speedy response. Dan. 12:4 seems to imply that in the last days, God's word will be clearly understood by the brotherhood and therefore many will "run to and fro" in response. The more clearly we understand and perceive God's word, the faster we will 'run' in response. We cannot separate our Bible study from our actions. This is why we should not only do our Bible readings daily, but study and pray and strive to understand... so that we will be the more motivated in practice. It is all too easy to be apparently zealous for good causes, as are many unbelievers, because of the needs of the moment, because we are in a situation where we would feel awkward not to enthusiastically respond... but the only true and lasting motivation for good works is an understanding, a purely personal understanding, of God's will for us. When the shepherds were told that Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, they "quickly" went there- for they believed what they had understood (Lk. 2:16). Paul "immediately" went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the vision suggesting he do this (Acts 16:10), just as he "immediately" began his initial preaching commission after receiving it (Gal. 1:16).

The word of the Lord was glorified in the Thessalonians- so Paul sincerely felt. But he goes on to speak of weakness amongst them. But he sees the cup half full rather than half empty, and never seeks to give the impression that he is addressing only some within the community he is enthusing about.

3:2 *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men. For all do not have faith-* These surely refer to the Judaists, whose schemes to stop the spread of the Gospel were Paul's constant headache. "All do not have faith" may be a way of saying that this group of people appeared to have faith but did not; they were the false brethren who posed as converts of Gal. 2:4.

3:3 *But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and guard you from the evil-* Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw the Lord's power as greater than the schemes of the Judaizers to upset their faith (see on :2).

"Establish you" translates Greek meaning 'to turn in a direction, to confirm'. The Lord confirms us in the path we wish to go; He has the ability to turn human hearts by His direct operation upon us (:5; Prov. 21:1). The theme continues in :5, where we read that the Lord

directs our hearts; and see on 2:17. But this turning or establishing of the human heart is often done by the Lord through a human mechanism; the same word for “establish” is found in Lk. 22:32, where Peter is told to “strengthen” his brethren, in Rom. 1:11 where Paul speaks of his strengthening of the Roman believers through his personal presence with them and teaching the Gospel to them (Rom. 16:25), and in 1 Thess. 3:2 where Timothy’s visiting of brethren would strengthen them (Paul goes on to say that *the Lord* would strengthen them, 1 Thess. 3:13- working through Timothy to do so, we can conclude). Likewise in :5 when we read that the Lord will “direct” their hearts, the only other time Paul uses this word is in 1 Thess. 3:11 where he speaks of how God will direct his journey so that he visits the Thessalonians. God’s confirming of His children in their way to Him can operate through the agency of our pastoral efforts for others, our physical presence with them through visiting them, our sharing of the Gospel with them.

They could be 'guarded' or 'kept' from the forces of evil, the Judaizers associated with "the man of sin" in chapter 2. This implies direct psychological action upon them by the Lord Jesus; and clearly He uses His Spirit to achieve this. Thus the same word is used of "the Holy Spirit which dwells within us" empowering Timothy to keep or guard what had been entrusted him (2 Tim. 1:14).

3:4 *And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you both do, and will do, the things which we command-* Why "confidence in the Lord", rather than 'confidence in you'? The Greek strictly means 'to be persuaded'. Paul was persuaded of their current and future obedience because they were "in Christ". Time and again, this was the basis for his positivism about others. They were in Christ and counted as Him. And so he assumes their current and future compliance with His will, knowing that the Spirit would be working to make them in reality what they were counted as by status.

3:5- see on Jn. 5:42.

*And so may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God-* Paul was confident God would act directly upon their hearts due to his prayer for them of 2:16,17. Here we have a clear statement to the effect that God is able to work directly upon the human heart, guiding it to a position or understanding. If we are simply intended to read the Bible and figure out things for ourselves, then Paul not only would state this explicitly, but there would be no point in him praying and wishing for such 'direction' of their hearts, if the direction of the human heart is purely down to our unaided efforts, and by our own intellectual processing we are intended to as it were squeeze the Spirit out of the pages of the book called the Bible.

*Into the patient waiting for Christ-* Gk. ‘the patience of Christ’. His characteristics should be our aim, and Paul knew that God can work directly on the human heart to make us more like His Son. Note that He is even now patient; John spoke of how he was sharing in the patience / endurance of Christ (Rev. 1:9). This is the same idea as in Colossians 1 and Rom. 8 [see notes there]- we are counted righteous by reason of our status in Christ, but God’s grace doesn’t simply count us that way, but works through the Spirit within our hearts to actually change us into the “Christ” which we are counted as being. That work of the Spirit is through mechanisms, such as God’s word which is Spirit and life (Jn. 6:63), and through the ministering of men like Paul who aim to present us “perfect” or completely in Christ, in the last day (Col. 1:28). But God is also sovereign and can clearly work directly on human hearts; for historically, not all believers have had access to Bibles and the majority have been illiterate.

3:6 *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly-* "Disorderly" is the same word translated "unruly" concerning those who ought to be "warned" at the time the first letter was written (1 Thess. 5:14). If the warning hadn't worked, then the Thessalonians were to withdraw themselves from these individuals who were demanding financial support from the church whilst refusing to work (:11). The "tradition" received from Paul may have been a verbal or written statement directly from the Lord, to the effect that there were not to be handouts for those who refused to work and who saw church membership just as a means of income, confirming them in their laziness. In every age and society, there are those who wish to join the church in the hope of material benefit. Paul here does not advocate a totally non-judgmental approach; he is quite insistent that this should not be allowed. And his motive was clearly because he wanted to see human salvation in Christ; and going through the motions of joining Christ simply in order to attain some secular advantage was not going to help the people concerned. 'Withdrawing' means more to keep away from, rather than religious excommunication; in this context it could simply mean that the church was not to give them financial support. But "withdraw yourselves" is also translated "avoid", literally meaning 'to arrange around' (as in 2 Cor. 8:20). The idea may not be formal excommunication, but some other form of church discipline- or simply, an exclusion from the list or "number" of those who received support as in 1 Tim. 5:9. Verse 10 is translated in some Bibles as "don't give them food", supporting this idea; but the force of "withdraw yourselves" seems to suggest that Paul wasn't merely warning the ecclesia not to give food as welfare support to these people, but to not associate with them, and therefore, not to eat with them in a religious sense.

The whole passage in 2 Thess. 3:6-12 seems to criticize sloth and sponging off others in remarkably strong language, insisting that those who are think they can get an easy ticket through life at others' expense must be separated from. But the language is *so* strong, that we wonder whether this really is all that in view. We recall that the feeding miracles of Jesus and His general attitude to assisting the sick and needy never incorporated any kind of "means test", a checking out of whether actually every single person in the crowd of 5000 males was in fact genuinely in need of food. Rather does He give, so superabundant in His grace that there were large carrier baskets full of the crumbs afterwards. When we encounter human need, it could probably often be argued that the need could have been avoided by harder work by someone somewhere; but surely the need is the call, to action on their behalf. For any hard hearted "God helps those who help themselves" attitude seems to me at variance with the gracious giving of the Lord to us. We from our distance are unaware of exactly what was going on in the ecclesia to which Paul wrote, and we don't fully know the false teaching and exact forms of misbehaviour which he was up against. But the evidence above is surely enough to conclude that whatever the details, Paul wasn't arguing so strongly for the utter exclusion of lazy spongers. There seems to have been far more to this group of people than simply that. I suggest on :10,11 and :14 that these who refused to work and demanded support were in fact Judaizers, who in line with Paul's dire warning against them in chapter 2, needed to be excluded from the church.

*And not after the tradition which they received from us-* It seems from 2:14,15 that Paul taught them the Gospel, and then gave them "traditions", 'that which is passed on', i.e. from Christ, concerning practical Christian living; exactly in accord with how the great commission requires us to preach the basic good news of a risen Christ, baptize people, and then teach them further all things He commanded and passed on to us (Mt. 28:19,20). But the context goes on to say that they were to follow Paul's example; as if his personal example



was the tradition he had set for them to follow. He repeatedly states that he had consciously lived as he had in order to set them an example, and he is now declaring this as the "tradition" they are bound to follow.

*3:7 For yourselves know how you ought to imitate us. For we ourselves did not behave disorderly among you-* As suggested on :6, the "tradition" received may have simply been in Paul's example, which the Lord intended his converts to imitate. The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking; and it would have been especially appropriate to an illiterate church who didn't have access to the completed New Testament and had been likely cast out of the synagogue where the Old Testament scrolls were located. This is why Paul realized that he was to be their example of Christian walk, and encourages them to follow his example. He several times uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul. "You became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... you know how ye ought to *follow* us... an example unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication could be that that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

*3:8 Neither did we eat bread for nothing at anyone's hand; but we ate our bread as the result of our own labour and toil, working night and day, that we might not financially burden any of you-* Paul paid Jason for the meals provided; as he was only three weeks in town, and would not have had time to set up his own tentmaking business. He would therefore have had to do odd jobs for low pay, working at night as well. And he did so having recently been severely beaten in Philippi, with the marks of the wounds clearly all over him and likely with broken or fractured bones. "Labour and toil" are words which mean pain, weakness, weariness. He performed his work, perhaps carrying water or shifting building materials or merchandise in the market, with difficulty because of his physical state. See on 1 Thess. 2:9.

3:9- see on Acts 19:31.

*Not because we do not have the right to do so, but to make ourselves an example to you- that you should imitate us-* Here we have an example of choosing to live on a higher level than the minimum; Paul could have asked for material support from the Thessalonians, but he chose not to in order to set them an example and to avoid establishing a wrong precedent. He was deeply aware that he was the living example of Christianity to them, the only template they had to copy in practice; see on :7. Many of our choices come down to a decision between living on a higher or lower level; and the pattern of the Lord Jesus inspires us to live as high as we can, whilst showing understanding to those who like us all, in many areas of life, live on lower levels.

*3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you: If any will not work, neither let him eat of your food-* Paul's example, as noted on :8 and 1 Thess. 2:9, was absolutely congruent with his commandment to them. He was the word made flesh in this sense. It is clear from 1 Thess. 4 that there were gaping holes in their theological knowledge, given the brief time Paul was with them; but his focus was more on the practical issues which are very much the Gospel as preached by the Lord Jesus in the gospel records.

But what may lie behind Paul's tough line against those who refuse to accept that "if any will not work, neither shall he eat" (3:10)? "If any will not work, neither shall he eat" is a

quotation from a Jewish Targum [paraphrase] on the curse upon Adam in Eden; especially the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 3:19. The language of Gen. 3:17-19 about working and eating bread is alluded to several times in 2 Thess. 3:6-12. When Paul speaks of how he "worked in toil and hardship" because he couldn't eat others' bread for nothing (3:8), he clearly has in mind the curse upon Adam. Paul's comment that such persons shouldn't be 'given anything to eat' in 3:10 would then be an allusion to how the serpent gave food to Eve, and she then gave the food to Adam. And the serpent is set up as typical of the Judaizing element that sought to destroy the church (2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 16:20). Genesis 3 is arguably the most used and yet most misunderstood chapter in the Bible, and thus it has ever been. So many of the false teachings circulating in first century Judaism involved misinterpretations of this chapter.

My suggestion would therefore be that there was a teaching going around that actually we are no longer under the effects of the curse in Eden. We don't need to work, we bear no responsibility for our sins nor do we suffer from the effects of Adam's sin. And they believed this to the point that they expected more wealthy Christians to as it were fund their belief by providing for them materially. Now this all involves something far more than the laziness and occasional irresponsibility which at times we all struggle with. They were "disorderly", *ataktos*, not in "order". The word is used in a military context for soldiers falling out of line in marching. By claiming to be more than human, these people were unacceptable of their humanity, their place in the ranks of the rest of humanity. Interestingly, *ataktos* is derived from the Greek verb *tassein*, "to order", and this verb is several times used by the Septuagint in the context of the "order" decreed by God at the beginning (Lev. 18:4; Dt. 27:1; Job 38:12); it's also used in Jewish writings about the "order" established by God at the time of Adam's sin (M.J.J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 131 provides examples). Sirach 7:15 speaks of how Adam's sin led to "toilsome labour and agriculture, *ordered* by the Most High". The *disorderly* walk of some in Thessalonica was therefore in refusing to accept their own humanity and the consequences of being human; in this sense they were *disorderly* in that they refused to accept that we must work if we are to eat, and sought to get around it, with the implication being that they had not sinned and didn't deserve to suffer under such a curse. And hence they walked around as walkers around up to no good ["which walk... as busybodies" disguises a play on words in the Greek original]. This walking around up to no good sounds very much like the serpent in Eden; and Paul elsewhere fears lest the churches, whom he likens to innocent Eve in Eden, should be misled by such serpents (2 Cor. 11:3). And other New Testament letters suggest that misinterpretations of Eden were being used in the early churches to justify various moral, especially sexual, misbehaviours. All this leads to the same conclusion as noted on :14; that these who would not work were in fact Judaizing false teachers.

3:11 *For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that do not work at all but are busybodies-* "Busybodies" is literally 'working around'; we have here a word play, literally 'not busy, but busy'. Human beings have to do something with themselves all day. One blessing which came out of the Edenic curse of working in order to procreate and survive is that most people are thereby kept 'busy' and don't fall into major sin. With the unequal distribution of wealth which there is in many societies and the attempts of social welfare systems to redistribute it, there has arisen a subclass of the very rich and of the very poor who don't have to work; and the amount of work others are required to do has in some ways been lessened by technological advances and the concept of retirement. The result of this is that people become "busybodies"- their busy-ness becomes focused on destructive meddling in others' lives, often through the internet under the guise of social networking. I suggested on 1

Tim. 5:13 that the busybodies of Ephesus were in fact false teachers; it was these women who were forbidden from going around teaching their Judaist ideas in the house churches (1 Tim. 2:12, see note there).

3:12 *Now those that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread-* He has already warned them about such behaviour (1 Thess. 5:14), and now makes yet another appeal to them before having to advocate the discipline of :14. We should live “quietly”, and we are exhorted to do this “by our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 3:12). Our imagination of who He was and how He would have lived must be our pattern. We are in this sense in the grip of a personality cult based upon Him. Thus His patience is to be ours (see on :5). “Quietness” literally means “silence”; a strange thing to say if the only problem was laziness. I have suggested throughout this section that there is more to these lazy folk than may meet the eye, and that in fact the reference is to Judaizing false teachers who refused to work but demanded payment for their false teaching. Here then we would have a command that they should be silenced, they should not teach and not demand payment for it, but should instead work for their own bread. See on :10.

3:13 *But you, brothers, be not weary in doing good-* Not referring so much to outstanding ‘good deeds’, but to the workaday life of :12. It is this patient continuance in the workaday life, lived in the Spirit of Christ, which is so hard to maintain, and so easy to weary from. The Greek for not being weary is found in Lk. 18:1 about not being weary in the life of intense prayer (see note there). 2 Cor. 4:16 teaches that this not being weary is inspired by the gift of the Spirit, which is constantly renewing our inner man. Likewise in Gal. 6:8,9, it is “of the Spirit” that we shall not weary in well doing. This inner power to keep on keeping on cannot come merely from the flesh, for we shall simply lack the endurance. It is of the gift of the Spirit which we must be open to.

3:14 *And if anyone does not obey our word by this letter, note that man, that you have no association with him-* “Note” or marking the person is literally ‘to set a mark upon’, with clear allusion to Cain; Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:12 and Jude 11 present Cain as a prototype of the Judaizers. These people refusing to work but demanding material support would then refer to the Judaizers, who demanded payment for their false teaching. This feature of them is noted many times in Paul’s letters, and cements their association with those seeking dishonest gain from religion. This would better explain Paul’s apparently very strict attitude to those who were refusing to work. If they were simply lazy, we wonder why he would make such a major issue about them. If in fact they were Judaist false teachers, we can better understand his approach, especially in light of the prediction in chapter 2 that the ‘satan’ of the Jewish plot against Paul was to join hands with Roman civil power in order to seek to destroy the Christian community; see on :10. The call to “have no association” is strong, and I suggested above is not simply a reaction against laziness of itself, but is rooted in the fact that these busybodies were in fact Judaist false teachers. The term is only elsewhere used about not associating with brethren who were idolaters, sexually perverted and so forth (1 Cor. 5:9,11). Laziness seems of a different order, until we join the dots and see the picture, that the group referred to were in fact Judaist false teachers.

*So that he may be ashamed-* Even the lazy, or as I suggest, the Judaist false teachers, could repent; and it was Paul’s hope they would. Shame is the outcome of condemnation at the last day, and Paul wanted them and us all to go through that process now rather than then. Paul

had warned these people in 1 Thess. 5:14, and now was asking for them to be shamed. We recall how he tells the Corinthians that he is warning and not shaming them (1 Cor. 4:14), as if these were two distinct parts of a church discipline procedure. Many churches have no sense of church discipline; somebody is tolerated unchallenged, and the only discipline known is excommunication. But there were a range of disciplinary actions reflected in the New Testament. Even this 'being ashamed' may not be the final step, because :15 encourages the person to continue to be warned as a brother. So the avoidance / shaming did not include a total breakoff of relationship with him.

3:15 *But do not count him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother-* See on :14. Paul did count some as enemies, using the same word about some false brethren in Acts 13:10 and Phil. 3:18. The Jews who rejected the Gospel were 'enemies' (s.w. Rom. 11:28). Chapter 2 has warned of how the Judaizers were going to collude with the Romans to bring about a time of terrible persecution of the Christians. Paul sees these busybodies as under Judaist influence, but he doesn't feel they have gone so far as being all out enemies of the Gospel. Likewise he states clearly in 2:3-7 that the final apostasy has not yet come. We must ever remember that we were enemies of the Lord, but were reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21 s.w.). Our attitude to the unreconciled must be the same as His has been to us; and His patience and seeking to work with us by all means has to be our pattern.

3:16 *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all-* The Lord Jesus is presented as the source of peace. This means that peace is not brought about merely by our own submission of our mind to God's ways and living according to our own conscience. Such peace would therefore be as it were self-created. But the peace here comes from the Lord Jesus, a gift from Him. The allusion is surely to the gift of the Spirit given by Him, and the Lord's being 'with' us through His Spirit. This is the specific teaching of Jn. 14:27; 16:33 about the Lord's gift of the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, who would be so within our hearts that truly the Lord Jesus is 'with' us and gives us peace. See on :18.

3:17 *The salutation of me Paul with my own hand, which is the token in every epistle. So I write-* This was particularly significant in the light of the falsified letters being sent in Paul's name; see on 2:2.

3:18 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit, the power of new life within the heart of the believer which is given by the Lord Jesus. "Be with you" can as well be translated "be within you", for this is where the Spirit most essentially operates. And such spiritual mindedness was Paul's greatest wish for all believers. He wished it for "all" of them, including those who wouldn't work or were lazy, despite his example of working night and day when weak to support himself; and including those influenced by anti-Paul doctrine. He truly wished the Lord's grace and Spirit to be with them all. For he wished the Lord's glory.

## The New European Bible Commentary: 1 Timothy

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### CHAPTER 1

**1:1 *Paul, an apostle***- Paul begins by saying he has been called to be a sent out one, and then a few verses later backs it up by repeating that he was appointed to be an apostle (2:7). The same pattern is to be seen in 2 Timothy; the opening verse speaks likewise of how he is an apostle (2 Tim. 1:1), and then 2 Tim. 1:11 says he was indeed appointed as an apostle. Perhaps Timothy was beginning to doubt Paul's credentials, and this was a factor in Timothy's lack of full devotion to his ministry? Or perhaps Paul is urging Timothy to follow his own example of commitment to the calling he had received. For the letters to Timothy suggest that Timothy needed to be stirred up to continue responding to the calling received.

*Of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Saviour, and Christ Jesus our hope*- The most essential error, practically or doctrinally, is to "lose connection to the head [Jesus], from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together... grows" (Col. 2:19). The Lord Himself taught what Paul called 'growing up into Him who is the head'; He commented that the end goal for His disciples was that "every one [i.e. disciple, in the context] when he is perfected shall be as his master", i.e. Himself (Lk. 6:40). This was why Paul can speak of "Jesus who is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), all we hope to ever become. The hope of glory is to have Christ in us fully (Col. 1:27), which explains why the presence of the spirit of Christ in us now is a foretaste and guarantee of our eternal salvation.

**1:2 *To Timothy, my true child in faith***- Timothy had not been converted to Christ by Paul's preaching directly. But his spiritual formation was largely thanks to Paul's influence. We can have children in the faith as a result of pastoral work with them, even if we ourselves were not responsible for their conversion or baptism. "*True child*" might suggest that our real children are our spiritual children. For our efforts with them will last eternally. We might even infer from this that Paul had other, unbelieving children of his own.

*Grace, mercy and peace to you*- They are nearly always mentioned in this order. God's grace is the basis for His mercy and this leads to peace with God. The standard wishing of peace to a person [*Shalom / salaam*] was thereby invested with so much more meaning when used between Christian believers. It was a real wish that 'May the things we believe really be true for you'.

*From God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*- The clear separation between Father and Son here and in :1 [and so often in Paul's letters] ought to be proof enough that Trinitarian understandings are wrong.

**1:3 *Stay at Ephesus***- From what we figure of Timothy later in the correspondence, the implication would be that Timothy wanted to give up in his work with the believers there because he was tired of the inter-personal tensions involved in confronting people and leading people to a better way.

*Just as I urged you to do-* The Greek can stand the translation 'begged'. Timothy clearly needed to be persuaded and was weak from the start.

*When I was going into Macedonia-* It seems this refers to the time of Acts 20:1: "Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them he said farewell [to Ephesus] and departed for Macedonia". But soon afterwards we read that Timothy rejoined Paul (Acts 20:4); we could conclude that Timothy couldn't stick it for long. And now Paul is urging him again.

*So that you might instruct certain men not to teach a different doctrine-* "Instruct" is to charge. This word is repeated three more times to Timothy; he was to charge others as to how to behave (1 Tim. 4:11; 5:7; 6:17). For a young, insecure man to charge others regarding their behaviour was of course very difficult. All teaching is difficult because the message we have is not acceptable to our audience, for the most part. This is why true teaching of God's word is not an easy work- if we do it properly. It is not entertainment; reasoning with folks about how to use their money (1 Tim. 6:17) is bound to be difficult and not something we naturally would prefer to do. The difficulty was worse because the Ephesian church had originally been formed out of the synagogue, and the false teaching in view in this verse was probably by Jews. And Timothy was born uncircumcised and probably not fluent in Hebrew. Yet he was to charge the Judaists with authority that they must not teach their false teaching further.

*1:4 Nor give heed-* The same word used about not giving heed to the teaching of the Pharisees (Mt. 16:6,12) and the scribes (Lk. 20:34). The specific nature of the false teaching was Jewish, because the Ephesus ecclesia had begun in the synagogue. And further, the Judaizers had a conscious program of seeking to infiltrate Christian groups with their teachings. The same words are found in Tit. 1:14, warning Titus not to give heed to *Jewish* fables. Later in 1 Timothy the word is used about not giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (4:1). These terms might appear to be more relevant to pagan ideas; but a great theme of Paul is that Judaism was in fact another form of paganism. This needs to be given its full weight by those Christians who seem attracted to Jewish legalism to this day.

*To fables-* The Jewish myths which were considered by them to be inspired on an equal level to the Old Testament scriptures.

*And endless genealogies-* Literally, unfinished genealogies. The idea may be that the only genealogies worth studying are those which finished in Christ, as recorded in Matthew and Luke. The temple records were destroyed by the Babylonians, and so Judaism was in crisis- as the priests could not conclusively prove their descent from Levi and Aaron. All they had was incomplete genealogies which they used to justify their positions.

*Which cause disputes-* The problem with much academic Bible study is that it can only minister questions and not building up. This is not helpful in any pastoral context. By saying this, I am not appealing for a simplistic approach. But rather a way of interpreting the Bible which builds up, using building blocks of interpretation and connection which are not speculative and are therefore not open to any question.

*Rather than Godly edification which is in faith-* The Hebrew and Greek idea is of trust. Edifying, building up, involves trust. And nothing more can be said. We do not arrive at such trust / faith by considering endless questions which have no definitive answer. So much that passes for apologetics is in my view misplaced. It is childlike trust which enables God's word to build us up, not endless debate or "disputes". They do not forge a path towards upbuilding.

*1:5 The intended result of this instruction is love out of a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith-* The purpose of keeping our understanding of the basic principles clear is that this will lead to true love and faith (1 Tim. 1:3-5). Timothy was to "charge" some that they didn't teach false doctrine, and the "end" of this charge [s.w. :5] was "charity out of a pure heart... a good conscience... love unfeigned". This is what the true Gospel enables, and *this* is why it should be defended. This is where it all leads. All commandments are "briefly comprehended" in that of love (Rom. 13:9). This is the end result of everything, it is the singular fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), the bond of maturity (Col. 3:14).

*1:6 From which things some having strayed have turned aside to idle talking-* If the development of love and faith is not the end point in our motivation, all discussion of Biblical interpretation ends up straying and going wrong, degenerating into academic difference of opinion for its own sake. All the profound disputes end up therefore as "idle talking", literally, 'babble'. For all their apparent erudition, they are just that- babble. Our motivation is so very important before getting involved in any doctrinal teaching or dispute.

*1:7 Desiring to be teachers of the law-* Clearly the nature of the problem in Ephesus was rooted in Jewish thinking. These people aspired to be small time rabbis. And Paul the rabbi had quit all that; he was in the best position of all to warn against this tendency. The term 'teacher of the law' was applied to Gamaliel, Paul's tutor (Acts 5:34). These men pretended to Gamaliel; and Paul had once done the same.

*Though they neither understand what they say, nor what they confidently affirm-* The word is only used again in urging Titus to confidently affirm the need for true spirituality in the face of Judaist false teaching (Tit. 3:8). Spare a thought for timid Timothy, up against men with every air of self-assurance, who confidently affirmed the teachings which he was asked to stand up against. We wonder why someone of Timothy's nature and timidity would be used by the Lord for such a ministry. Our callings in ministry are very often right against the grain of what we would consider ourselves naturally suited to. This is the nature of carrying the Lord's cross. Thus Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when naturally they were both best suited for the opposite role.

*1:8 But we know that the law is good-* Paul is always at pains to point out that the Law is holy, just and good. The problem was with how it was used (Rom. 7:14).

*If a man use it lawfully-* Galatians 3 explains that the law was given in order to convict sinners of the hopelessness before God, and to prepare sincere sinners to throw themselves upon salvation by grace in Christ. The intended usage of the Law was therefore for sinners; but the Jews considered it was intended for the righteous.

*1:9 Since we know that the law is not made for a righteous man-* See on 1:8 *If a man use it lawfully*. This was the very opposite of the Jewish understanding of the Law as intended for the righteous.

*But for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers-* Why this particular list of crimes in :9 and :10? The first four commandments of the ten commandments are all broken by the "Lawless and unruly... ungodly and sinners... unholy and profane". Murderers of parents break the fifth commandment; manslayers break the sixth commandment.

1:10 *For fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers-* As noted on :9, the list of sins chosen here is not random, but each of them refer to various commandments within the Decalogue [the ten commandments]. Significantly, Paul doesn't allude to the command about Sabbath keeping; that is the one command in the Decalogue he considers as not morally binding.

*And if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine-* Whilst Paul is arguing against legalistic obedience to the Law, he is not saying that the Law is somehow 'not good' (:8). Indeed, he sees sound Christian teaching ["doctrine"] as being in line with the spirit of the ten commandments, excluding the Sabbath law. Hence 1:11 continues: "In accordance with the Gospel...". Breaking the spirit of the Decalogue was breaking the spirit of the Christian Gospel.

1:11 *In accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God-* The language recalls in Jewish terms the glory of God revealed at the giving of the ten commandments. The previous three verses have laboured the point that the Gospel precludes the same things as were forbidden by the ten commandments. The giving of the Gospel is as glorious, in fact far more so, than the giving of the Law. The would-be Rabbis whom Timothy had to struggle against (:7) were claiming that God's revelation had come to them, and therefore they had authority. Paul's point is that the Gospel in all its glory has been revealed to each one who has faith in it ["committed to my trust" is literally 'en-faithed'], making each believer no less authoritative than the Rabbis.

*Which was committed to my trust-* Paul uses a strong and emphatic Greek construction here. The Greek means 'to me, myself, I, personally'. Those raised 'knowing the truth' should pause and reflect whether the wonder of the fact they have been given the Gospel is registering with them as it might. God believes in us; this is why He has graciously called us to know His Truth. Thus when Paul writes in :14 about his own conversion: "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus", he perhaps means that it was the love and faith of Christ in him, Paul, that was the basis of his being converted by the Lord Jesus.

Every time Paul speaks of having been entrusted with the Gospel, he uses the common Greek word for 'to have faith in'; and within the next verses, we find him using the same Greek word again, in the context of our belief in Christ (1 Tim. 1:11,12,16; Gal. 2:7,16). We had faith in the Lord, and He had faith in us, He en-faithed us, with the preaching of the Gospel we have believed in. Here we see the awesome mutuality between a man and his Lord. We have been entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel; the Lord believes in us to do His work.

1:12 *I thank him that enabled me, Christ Jesus our Lord-* Literally, en-strengthened me, put His *dunamis* in me. I take this as a reference to the internal strengthening within a believer made possible by the gift of the Lord's Spirit. Such a gift is received after baptism. And Paul is the parade example; after his baptism, he "increased the more in strength" and preached boldly (Acts 9:22 s.w. "enabled"). He refers to this strengthening later: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Those "all things" in that context refer to the internal, mental, psychological ability to cope with various life circumstances. He wishes Timothy to make use of the same strengthening: "Be strong in the grace [Gk. 'the gift'] that is in [that comes from being in] Christ" (2 Tim. 2:1). And at the end of his days, Paul could reflect that the Lord Jesus stood with him at his final trial and strengthened him (2 Tim. 4:17). The same word is used of how weak believers like us were strengthened out of their



weakness to be strong in faith- again a reference to psychological strengthening (Heb. 11:34), just as Abraham's weak faith was strengthened (Rom. 4:20 s.w.). The same power strengthens believers [s.w.] unto internal characteristics such as endurance, patience and joy (Col. 1:11), the "power" in view being the spirit of Christ. This same power / *dunamis* is referred to in Rom. 15:13 as the source of these same internal, mental attributes: God fills us with "all joy and peace... that you may abound in hope, through the power / *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit". To deny the operation of this power is not simply a matter of missing out on so much; it is a denial of the essence of the transforming Gospel. A related word is found in Eph. 3:16- we are "strengthened with might [*dunamis*] by His spirit in the inner man". This is where the gift of the Spirit operates; the reference is to "the inner man" and not the public display of the Spirit in special miracles etc. Paul's whole ministry, like ours, is a result of "the operation of His power / *dunamis*" (Eph. 1:19,21; 3:7). On this basis, Paul urges timid Timothy to allow the spirit / *dunamis* of love and a sound mind to work in him [again, internal attributes, not referring to any ability to perform miracles]; and this would drive out his "spirit of fear" (2 Tim. 1:7). It was this *dunamis* which would enable Timothy to endure "the afflictions of the Gospel" which were clearly making Timothy balk (2 Tim. 1:8). Paul notes that the opposition to Timothy within the church had a "form of Godliness [possibly referring to their upholding some kind of statement of faith] but [were] denying the power [*dunamis*]" of that form of Godliness, i.e. the doctrines of the Gospel (2 Tim. 3:5). Paul has spoken of the "form of sound words" as referring to some kind of corpus of Gospel teaching in 2 Tim. 1:13. This has unpleasant similarities with those of our day who loudly profess their Biblicism, their holding of some "form of Godliness" in the Gospel; but who deny the operation of the power / *dunamis* which is associated with it, in that those who accept the Gospel shall be given the Spirit. And this element within the church of today deny this, insisting that the Spirit is not given in response to belief of the Gospel, and that the days of Spirit operation ceased in the first century. It is this *dunamis*, this power from the Lord, which provides us with all things required for spiritual life and Godliness, and keeps us unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5; 2 Pet. 1:3). See on :14 *And the grace...*

*For that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service-* Very much the language of Romans, about how we who are sinners are judged and yet found innocent because of our status in Christ. We are counted as faithful; it would be rather arrogant surely to assume we are given a ministry because of our righteousness. But that is surely not what Paul intends to say, especially as he now goes right on to speak of his terrible past. He who was such a sinner, was judged / counted faithful. That is Paul's point. The ministries we are given are therefore given as an outworking of God's undeserved, unmerited grace to us; and not as a function of any human adequacy for the tasks.

1:13 *Though I was before a blasphemer, a persecutor and abusive-* Orthodox Judaism was and is highly sensitive to the possibility of blasphemy. Paul so often casts Judaism in the language of paganism; and he saw himself as such. He had compelled others to blaspheme (see on Acts 26:11); and he sees himself as the blasphemer. He took responsibility for what he had forced others to do.

Paul saw himself, his own life and experiences, in the light of the words of the Gospels. He saw himself as having been like those Roman soldiers who nailed Christ to the tree trunk (Lk. 23:34 = 1 Tim. 1:13). He saw himself as "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), and therefore one of those referred to by Christ in Mt. 9:13.

*However, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief-* Ignorance is not an excuse for crime. The Lord had prayed on the cross for forgiveness of those who persecuted and crucified Him, because of their "ignorance" (Lk. 23:34). The Jews however were not totally ignorant, just relatively so. And Paul likewise was not totally ignorant; he had been pushing against the goads of conscience. And as one brought up in Jerusalem, he presumably would have heard the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. Paul knew full well from Mosaic precedent that ignorance did not remove guilt; for there were guilt offerings prescribed for sins of ignorance. Remember that Paul is about to hold himself up as an example and pattern of ultimate grace. He is saying that he "obtained mercy" on the basis of the Lord's prayer of Lk. 23:34 as it were covering him too; his torture and murder of those in Christ had been done to Christ personally, for they were His body. And He Himself had pointed this out to Paul in saying that "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5). Paul knew that ignorance was no basis for innocence before God; and he is not to be read here as preaching that. He is saying that *even though* ignorance is not an excuse, yet the utter, extreme grace of Jesus in His prayer for His personal tormentors was applied by Jesus to those who likewise tormented those in His body. And so the same extreme grace was shown by Him to Paul. And he urges us to realize that this happened in order to set him up as a pattern for everyman who should afterward believe. Nobody should ever therefore feel that they are somehow beyond the scope of God's grace- because of the parade example shown to us all in Paul.

1:14 *And the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus-* See on :13 *I obtained mercy*. God's grace to him was indeed outstanding. But the sense seems to be as in the GNB: "Our Lord poured out his abundant grace on me and gave me the faith and love which are ours in union with Christ Jesus". "Grace", *charis*, carries the idea of 'gift', and there is here a reference to the Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit to Paul after his baptism, the point of our "union with Christ"; see on :12 *Him that enabled me*. The gift of the Holy Spirit was fundamentally a gift of a new spirit, a mind / psychology. And it included such internal spiritual, mental attributes as faith and love. That a sinner like Paul should be given such a transforming gift was grace / gift indeed. And in this, he is the pattern to all who subsequently believe- we too receive that same gift. See on :16 *Believe in Him*.

1:15 *Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptance-* This could refer to inspired prophetic sayings being judged by other inspired prophets to be "worthy of acceptance", and coming to form a corpus of Holy Spirit inspired material which was accepted as authoritative in the early church. Perhaps this corpus of material is referred to as the "form of sound words" or "form of Godliness" (2 Tim. 1:13; 3:5). The idea that Paul was the parade example of the Lord's operations and grace to all believers was therefore accepted and distributed in the early community.

*That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief-* Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners. He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: "As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has "all manner of concupiscence"). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end". Paul's progressive

realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God's law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. In one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to "the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he now faced his death, he wrote to Timothy here that he was "chief of sinners", the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful "to me *the* sinner" (Lk. 18:13 RVmg.). Note that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is rooted in the Lord's words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11).

*1:16 However, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as the chief sinner might Jesus Christ-* Peter uses the same term in saying that all God's people have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:10). He took his friend Paul at his word, seeing in Paul a pattern of everyman's conversion.

*Show all his patience-* The Lord had spoken of how Paul had kicked against the goads. His patience with Paul was amazing, even allowing him, as it were, to torture and murder Christians until Paul finally surrendered to conversion. This is a template for His patience with us all.

*As a pattern-* He saw in his conversion a pattern or template for all those who would afterwards believe (see on :15 *Faithful is the saying*). Having said that he was "chief" of the tribe of sinners, Paul goes straight on to say that this "was so that in me *as chief* might Jesus Christ shew forth *all* his longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should later believe on him" (1 Tim. 1:15,16 RV). This sounds as if Paul realized that he was being set up as the chief, supreme example to us; a template for each of us, of forgiveness and zealous response to that forgiveness. His conversion and subsequent spiritual growth are recorded as they are because they are a pattern for every subsequent believer- not just for those involved in preaching and pastoral work. It's because of this, it seems to me, that we have *so much* information about the man Paul; we really are enabled to enter into his spirit and personality. His physical appearance is stressed (Gal. 4:13,14; 1 Cor. 2:3,4; 2 Cor. 10:10; 12:5,7,9; Phil. 3:21; and especially his hands: Acts 21:11; 27:19; 1 Cor. 4:12). We imagine him as having a dark complexion, seeing he was confused with an Egyptian (Acts 21:38).

*To those that would later believe in him to gain eternal life-* According to John's Gospel, the eternal life begins now, in that through the work of the Spirit we begin to live the kind of life which we shall eternally live. The Greek literally reads "Believe on Him in[to] eternal life". Faith in Christ, demonstrated by baptism into Him, results in the Spirit empowering us to live the life eternal, the kind of life we shall eternally live. Paul has touched on this idea in :14.

1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen-* The whole style of this suggests that :15-17 are all part of the "Faithful saying" which Paul is quoting. Note especially the "Amen" at the end, followed by a resumption of the argument in the next verse and continuing on with the rest of the letter. It could be that the "Saying" about Paul being our pattern of grace was part of a liturgy, said or sung in prayer or hymn. Yet the first person pronoun, "I", might suggest that it was said or sung about each believer and not just about Paul; everyman should see in himself a pattern of amazing grace for others. This would explain why such a "Saying" was used in hymn or prayer- as a witness to the unbelievers listening.

1:18 *This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy-* The charge of remaining in Ephesus and resisting the false teachers (:3); a charge which had been supported by inspired prophecy.

*In accordance with the prophecies which were made about you, that by them-* There were prophecies about Timothy which had gone before, or "led the way to thee" (1 Tim. 1:18 RVmg.). But Paul had to encourage Timothy to fulfil them, to make them come real and true for him. Likewise the fearful and timid Jeremiah was told "I have made thee this day a defenced city... be not dismayed" (Jer. 1:17,18). He had to live out the potential personality which God had enabled him to have.

*You may war-* But Paul had to warn Timothy that whoever goes to war cannot entangle himself in the things of this world (s.w. 2 Tim. 2:4). It seems that Timothy had the potential to pull down great strongholds in his warfare; but he was distracted by the things of the world. Not living up to potential is a tragic feature of so much spiritual life.

*The good warfare-* The word is only used elsewhere in 2 Cor. 10:4: "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds". The warfare was too much for timid Timothy; but he had access to great spiritual strength to cast down the strongholds of false teaching.

1:19 *Holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some having thrust from them, made shipwreck of their faith-* The lead examples were Hymenaeus and Alexander (:20). 2 Tim. 2:17 informs us that these two men had lost their faith in the resurrection, and taught this, resulting in the faith of others being overthrown. Those who lose their own faith so often seek to overthrow ["shipwreck"] the faith of others. Their teaching that the resurrection was past already was therefore rooted in their lack of faith. False teaching so often has a root in a lack of faith or other moral deficiency. Human nature seeks to bring others down to our own level; whereas the call of the Gospel is to seek to raise our own aspirations and to encourage others to aim higher and be elevated to Heavenly things.

1:20 *Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan, that they might be taught not to blaspheme-* The fact they were still causing trouble in 2 Tim. 2:17 means this intention didn't work out; they continued their blasphemy. The mention of blasphemy is in the context of :13, where Paul has admitted to being a blasphemer, who had been converted by the long patience of the Lord Jesus as an example to others (:16). And now Paul seeks to reflect to others the patient, seeking, saving grace which he has experienced. And this was his motive in whatever courses of action were involved in his 'delivering [these men] to satan'.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on 1 Pet. 3:7.

*I urge therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made-* In view of the way believers fall away and also because of our great duty to witness to the world, *first of all* (i.e. most importantly), *prayer* must be made (1 Tim. 2:1 and context). Indeed, it is an actual sin- albeit a sin of omission- to cease to pray for our brethren (1 Sam. 12:23).

We naturally ask why these four forms of prayer are spoken of here: "supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings". One possible explanation is that these terms are all elsewhere used about the prayer work of the Lord Jesus; indeed, "intercessions" are spoken of as being specifically *His* work and not within our capability to make (Rom. 8:26,27,34; for the other words, see Heb. 5:7; Lk. 22:19,45). And directly in this context, Paul emphasizes that there is only one mediator, one who can make intercession- and that is not us, but the Lord Jesus (:5). This leads us to reconsider the opening words of this verse: "I urge...". This translates *parakleo*, to call near. It could be that Paul is calling out to the Lord Jesus to pray / draw near to God for the things he now mentions.

*For all men-* If as suggested above Paul is calling the Lord Jesus to pray / intercede "for all men", this enables us to understand the same phrase being used in :4 concerning God's willingness to save "all men". The Judaists would have felt that prayer was only appropriate for Jews and not for Gentiles.

*2:2 For kings, and all that are in high place, that we may live a calm and quiet life in all Godliness and dignity-* This implies that environment does indeed affect our spirituality, and we should pray for that environment to be such that it allows us to live in "proper conduct". And perhaps it follows that we ought to consciously seek environments which enable us to lead Godly lives. Yet on the other hand, according to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, God seeks our spiritual fruitfulness and gives us ultimately the optimal environment for that. Also remember that Paul is writing to Timothy about the situation in Ephesus, where the believers were very much at the mercy of the mood of the governing bodies towards them.

The Greek for "dignity" conveys the idea of soberness, gravity, seriousness. This is indeed appropriate for those who are face moment by moment with the very real issues of eternity, eternal life or death... both for themselves and others. Perhaps this was a reference to Timothy's need to "flee youthful passions" (2 Tim. 2:22 ESV). He needed to act with a gravity beyond his years.

God's own Son made the point that He did not pray for the world, but for His own people (Jn. 17:9). The way He tells the Father this in prayer would seem to emphasize how strongly He felt about this. The commands to pray for the world are in the context of requesting that human Governments might permit God's people to live spiritual lives among them (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:2); not for the Governments etc. in themselves.

*2:3 This is good and acceptable-* A reference to the incense and sacrifices being acceptable before God. For prayer really is our equivalent of incense and sacrifice under the new

covenant. Again, remember that Paul is writing to Timothy in the context of the problems faced from Judaizers.

*In the sight of God our saviour-* With the Governments so against them, it would've been tempting for Christians to think that they should publicize their prayers for their rulers in order to show that they were not against the Governing bodies. But Paul, as so often, foresees that likely tendency and urges them to pray because it is acceptable *before God*. Prayer should never be used for image or to impress men.

2:4 *Who would wish all men to be saved-* See on 2:1 *For all men*. I have suggested that Paul bids the Lord Jesus pray for all men, especially those in the Governments; and he here gives the reason. The Lord's will that all be saved requires the taking of the Gospel to all men, and their acceptance of the message. And so Paul bids the Lord Jesus to pray for those in authority, because it was and is typically them who hinder the spreading of the Gospel and who create environments which penalize accepting the Gospel.

Paul tells Timothy [or calls the Lord Jesus- see on :1] to pray for the Government to allow him to continue preaching, because God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4). There is here the suggestion that Timothy's prayers would enable more men to come to the knowledge of the Truth, and thereby fulfil God's intention. But that intention and will of God had been made dependent on the prayers and preaching of the likes of Timothy. God's “will” is that all will be saved; yet not all will be. His will is that not one of the little ones perish (Mt. 18:14); but we can offend the little ones, so that they do perish. His *intention* is that the church reveals His wisdom to this world (Eph. 3:10); but it doesn't always do so. None can resist His will; and yet His will is not necessarily what He does, in that His will does not force men and women into obedience or compliance. God is not a manipulator nor a bully, i.e. He does not enforce His will over others. Only in the future Kingdom of God will His will be done on earth as it is now done in Heaven. His will to save all has been frustrated by the church. The Gospel was to be taken to every person under heaven, from the first century onwards. So why, then, did billions live and die in ignorance? I have no final answer, but I would suggest that this was not His will; just as our behaviour so often is not His will. The church was potentially empowered to take the Gospel to the planet, right from the start. And yes, I include to the remotest islands of the Pacific, the jungles of South America etc. The technology would have been raised up- the logistical side of it would've been nothing for God to fix if believers had wished to do it with all their hearts. Instead they argued over theology and got lost in legalism and divisions between themselves, and allowed the world and all its limitations to influence their thinking. Here, Paul is appealing for prayers for Governments so that “all men” can be saved. He realized that state opposition hinders the salvation of all men, because people

It could also be observed that “all men” need not mean ‘every human being’, but ‘all types of men’. In our age we see this happening. The Gospel *is* going to all the world. Not only to every nation, but to every type of person. Even in the West, men from prisoners to the highest business executives are now being baptized; and women from prostitutes to politicians. There is repeated Biblical emphasis that “all men” will hear and respond to the Gospel (Jn. 1:7; 5:23; 12:32; Acts 17:30,31; 1 Tim. 2:4). It can't mean ‘every man, woman and child who ever live’; for many have lived and died knowing nothing of Christ. It must surely mean that a few of ‘all [types of] people’, ethnically, linguistically, socially, in terms of personality

types... will be saved; just as there were representatives of all types of animal gathered into the ark [a type of baptism into Christ, as Peter informs us]. If the rain is a type of the second coming, it follows that before that time, all types of animal, clean and unclean [which Acts 10 interprets as Jews and Gentiles] must be gathered into the ark of Christ. And now in this century, as we come to the end of human history, all types of people are realising deep within them that something is up with this world. They are starting to feel their desperation, for all their show of hedonism. There are far more believers in God today than there were 50 years ago. That's a fact. Never say or think that people 'just aren't interested'. Some of them are, indeed more and more of them are, and they are desperately interested. Men and women are somehow turning to Him, but lack the knowledge. And if we go on with this work, the end will shortly come.

*And come to the knowledge of the truth*- Paul sometimes writes of *the* truth, with the article; but this is one of the 14 times in the pastoral letters where he doesn't use the article. So I don't think his sense is that God wishes all men to pass through a process of knowledge / study until they come to a defined set of theological understandings which he calls "the truth". The very same phrase is used in 2 Tim. 3:7: "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth". So learning, 'Bible study' of itself will not necessarily lead to "the knowledge of the truth". And that is true to observed experience; for all manner of folks study the Bible but come through all their learning to a different set of truths at the end of it. I suggest that as so often, there are two halves to this verse, which state the same thing but in different terms. "To be saved" is parallel with 'coming to the knowledge of the truth'. Jn. 17:3 speaks of life eternal as knowing the one true God; the great salvation which we shall experience in terms of knowing Him and His Son, the relationship with them then which begins now- that is the knowledge of truth. This is the one and ultimate truth. And that is not the same as sitting for eternity reciting the terms of a statement of faith, the various correct Biblical interpretations we have come across. Knowing God and His Son is all about relationship with them, as is made clear so often and especially in John's Gospel. Phil. 3:8 speaks of "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" and parallels it with 'winning Christ' at the last day; the 'knowledge' which is in view here in 1 Tim. 1 is also, I suggest, speaking of our relationship with Christ in the Kingdom. This is the 'knowledge' of 1 Cor. 13:12: "Then shall I know, even as also I am known". For now we "see through a glass darkly", our 'knowledge' is blurred and incomplete; and only then shall we see / know Him "face to face".

Unfortunately, an over hasty and slipshod reading of this verse has led to the phrase 'saving truth', by which the impression is given that the possession of true Biblical interpretation will somehow save the possessor thereof. And thus the attitude develops that if we 'know the truth', in the sense of understanding a particular set of teachings, we shall thereby be saved; and maintaining those same understandings up to our grave planks is seen as the most essential part of Christian endeavour. But we cannot be saved by intellectual knowledge; but rather by faith in the simple truth of Christ and God's saving grace. This is what can lead us to the faith that is certain that if the Lord returns at this moment, by grace I shall indeed be saved. Focusing upon 'saving truth' gives high priority to the issue of whether we have our interpretations all completely right; and it creates inevitable tension over words and meanings, with the need to disfellowship others who differ however slightly from the supposed 'saving truth' of our interpretations.

2:5- see on Heb. 4:14.

*For there is one God and one mediator-* The "for" here suggests that we are being given another reason for Paul's statement that the Lord wishes the salvation of "all men". The fact the Lord Jesus was human, a man, shows God's desire to save all men. A representative man was required to save men. God is not passive to human salvation or the extent of it; having given His only beloved Son to save men, He wants all men to be saved. He wants us saved! He therefore has no pleasure in the death or condemnation of the wicked; exactly because He gave His only Son to *save* men. He wants to see the purpose of the sacrifice achieved. The logic of encouragement here is powerful indeed. The reminder that there is only one God and one mediator may suggest that their total and unique focus is combined upon "men". There are no other creations God is saving through His Son, because His Son was *human* and therefore is a saviour of humans.

*Between God and men, the man Christ Jesus-* Against the Judaist background of this letter, it would seem that Paul is emphasizing that God is seeking connection with "men", indeed "all men"- and not just the Jews. Moses was a mediator between God and Israel, but the Lord Jesus between God and "all men". The word for "mediator" is mainly used about the Lord Jesus being the mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). The "men" in view would then be all those who are in the new covenant; and these, therefore, would be the "all men" whose salvation God wishes, the "all men" for whom the ransom was given, i.e. those redeemed / ransomed (:6). However, the problem is that the "all men" is surely that of :1 for whom prayer is to be made, and includes governors. However it could be argued that "for all men; for kings, and all that are in high place" (2:1,2) could refer to leaders within the ecclesia; although *basileus*, "kings", is hard to apply to church elders.

The extent of Christ's humanity is brought out by the RV translation of 1 Tim. 2:5. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus". Paul is writing this after the Lord's ascension and glorification. A mediator might be thought of as being somehow separate from both parties; but our mediator is actually "himself man", so on our side, as it were. Having received Divine nature doesn't take anything away from the Lord's appreciation of our humanity, to the extent that Paul here [for all the other exalted terms he uses elsewhere about Jesus] can call Him even now "himself man".

He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality. On this account we will be able to relate to the mortals in the Millennium.

Throughout this exposition I take the position that the Ephesian church was under strong influence from the Diana cult. This cult taught that there were many gods; whilst Paul's statement stands true in a global sense, it is clear that as so often in these letters, he is alluding to the specific errors of the Diana cult.

The Jewish obsession with Angels influenced the early Christians in the area of Christology [i.e. theories about Christ], just as it did on the topic of the Devil. Chapters like Hebrews 1 and Colossians 2 deal with this in detail, stressing that Jesus was *not* an Angel [something which the Watchtower movement of today needs to consider more fully]. The Jewish



*Testament Of Daniel* 6.1 exhorts Israel to "draw near unto God and unto the angel that intercedes for you, for he is a mediator between God and man". This is alluded to by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:5, when he underlines that to us there is "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus". Clearly Paul is alluding to the apostate Jewish angelology and correcting it- as in Hebrews 2, the point is laboured that Jesus was a man and not an Angel, and He is the only mediator.

Much has been made of the similarities between Jn. 1:1-3 and the 'Wisdom' literature of the Jews. Judaism believed in a number of intermediaries who interceded between God and Israel- Wisdom, the *Shekinah* [glory], the *Logos* / word. The *Torah* [law] had become so elevated and personified that it was spoken of almost as a separate 'God'. John and Paul are picking up these terms and explaining their true meaning- Jesus is the glory [*shekinah*] of God, He alone is the one and only true mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). By stressing that the mediator was "the man Christ Jesus", Paul is also taking a swipe at the Greek idea of a superhuman mediator between the world and the world's creator, sometimes called a "second God". And when it comes to the Logos, John is explaining in his prologue that the theme of all God's word in the Old Testament was ultimately about Jesus, and that 'word' became flesh in a person, i.e. Jesus, in His life and death. Understanding this background helps us understand why John appears to use very 'Divine' language about the logos. He's doing so because he's alluding to the mistaken beliefs of Judaism and showing where the truth really lies in Jesus.

2:6 *Who gave himself as a ransom*- see on Rom. 3:19; Gal. 5:1. We were bought out of slavery by His death- and should not remain under bondage to any legal code nor to anything.

*For all*- Christ died a ransom "for all", and yet more specifically "a ransom for many", i.e. not all (1 Tim. 2:6 cp. Mk. 10:45). See on 1 Cor. 11:3. The Lord was "a ransom for all", although it was only us, the redeemed, who were ransomed by Him out of sin's slavery (Lk. 1:68; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 8:13; Rev. 5:9; 14:3,4). The "all men" of our 'world' could therefore be limited to those who constitute God's world, as here defined. The real solution to being 'too inward looking' is to go out into the highways and byways, and compel men to come in to the covenants of promise.

Do we admit that we just don't preach as we should, failing to engage people with the Gospel because we assume 'nobody's interested'? 1 Tim. 2:1-6 has something for us. The Lord's death on the cross was a ransom payment "for all men"; and in this context, Paul urges that because God therefore wishes "all men to be saved" we should therefore pray "for all men, [even] for kings and those in authority". If the Lord's death truly was for all, in that He was representative there of all men, He there "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9)... then we should pray for "all men" quite literally to be saved, knowing that God is willing that "all men be saved". And Paul makes this point in the context of appealing for us to pray for all men, even Kings. This means that we should pray for even those we consider most unlikely- that they might be saved. For the cross of Christ has potentially saved them- if they will accept it. Thus Paul comments in 1 Tim. 2:6 that the cross was "a ransom for all, to be testified". The testifying or witnessing to it is to be done by our preaching. Notice how Paul draws a dynamic parallel between praying for all men and witnessing to all men (1 Tim. 2:1 cp. 6). Preaching- when it is truly inspired by the cross- can never be a prayer-less exercise, a mere

presentation of information. It will be done prayerfully, thoughtfully targeted at specific individuals whom we're praying will accept the message.

Paul exhorts that prayers be made "for all men", just because "Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all", and He thereby is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:1-6). Because of what He enabled for all, we should pray for all, that somehow circumstances might be allowed which enable all men's salvation in Jesus to indeed spread to all men.

*The testimony made at the due time-* The idea is overall as in GNB: "That was the proof at the right time that God wants everyone to be saved". The cross of Christ is the assurance that God wants human salvation. He is not passively waiting for us to clear some bar, but rather urges us on through demonstrating in the cross His passion for our salvation.

*2:7 To this [end] I was appointed a preacher and an apostle-* This continues to be in the context of the Lord's desire to save all men. Any effort we make to preach and save men has His full passion, will and enabling behind it.

*I speak the truth, I do not lie-* As noted on 1:1, it would seem that Timothy was perhaps doubting Paul's authority over him; or at least, those Timothy was caring for had such doubts. I sense that Paul is really speaking to Timothy's doubts; for throughout the correspondence we have the impression of Timothy having doubts and fears about everything. And yet in Rev. 2:2 the Lord later commends the church at Ephesus for having tested and rejected false apostles in their church. So we can work out that Paul's apostleship was under challenge from false apostles, and Timothy was prone to be taken in by them. The fact that finally he rejected those false apostles shows how a man was made strong out of psychological weakness.

*A teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth-* Preacher, apostle, teacher is allusive to the titles of Jewish rabbis and teachers. Paul is saying that he has indeed been appointed rabbi with responsibility for teaching Gentiles, just as there was such a position within Judaism. However, in practice Paul didn't focus on his commission to the Gentiles, but rather was obsessed with preaching to Gentiles- which was Peter's commission.

*2:8 I therefore desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands-* I suggested on 2:1 that Paul has called upon the Lord Jesus to pray for all men, to enable the Father's will to save all men to be progressed and achieved. Now he asks the "men" who were part of the "all men" to be saved- to themselves pray. The subject of the prayer is clearly the progression of the plan to save "all men".

Having reminded us that there is "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all", Paul drives home the practical result of understanding Christ's work: "*Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere... without wrath and doubting*" (1 Tim. 2:5-8). "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:15,16 NIV). Really appreciating that Christ is our personal High Priest to offer our prayers powerfully to God, should inspire us to regularly pray in faith.

*Without anger-* Perhaps the warning is to not pray like Jonah did, angry that Gentiles and "all men" could be saved. In this case the words of prayer would have been said with an agenda, not to God but designed more for the hearing of men or as a duty which the heart was not in. This is an easy pitfall in prayer- to pray to oneself as did the Pharisee (Lk. 18:11), or to pray with attention to how our human hearers will receive the words. To begin prayer with "Our Father" and a few thoughts on the God to whom our words are being directed is surely wise advice from the Lord. We can pray with an impure heart; and yet the very practice of prayer can make us think we are somehow spiritually acceptable before God. Thus Paul had to warn that prayer should be made "without wrath and doubting". He knew that a man can pray to God with an angry heart, thinking the act of prayer cancels out his anger.

*And dispute-* Or, "argument". This connects back to Paul's warning to Timothy not to allow himself or others to get obsessed with endless questions and disputes about interpretation, "which only produce arguments" (1:4). One problem with all that argument and interpersonal tension arising therefrom is that prayer is hindered, especially intense prayer for the salvation of "all men".

2:9- see on 1 Cor. 14:34.

*In like manner, I urge that women adorn themselves-* "I also" (AV), or "In like manner" means the women are being addressed in the context of :8. And that is of prayer. I suggest that the warning is not to pray as the pagans and some Jews did- whereby women thought that by dressing up nicely they would somehow impress God and give power to their prayers. It is in this context that Paul is criticizing dressing up. The whole figure of a bride adorning herself is used positively in the Bible; it's not that God is against cosmetic adornment *per se*. But it adds nothing to the acceptability of prayer- that's the point in the context. The 'speaking' of women which is in view later in this chapter is probably likewise in this context, alluding to some local custom of women in the church at Ephesus.

*In modest apparel-* As noted above, I suggest the reference is to prayer not being made acceptable by some gaudily dressed priestess. Remember Paul is writing to Timothy in the context of his work in Ephesus- which was a city devoted to the worship of Diana, descriptions of whom fit exactly with the language Paul uses here about the kind of dress which is not appropriate to associate with the acceptability of female prayer. Now we can understand why Paul was just emphasized that there is only *one* mediator between God and man (:5); the Diana cult featured a mass of female priestesses, the Melissai, who were claimed to be mediators. Paul is teaching that men should pray to God through the one mediator- and not think that gaudily dressed women in the church were adding something to the prayers of males. For more reason to think that the Diana cult was the problem in the Ephesian church, see on 3:15 *The house of God*. The priestesses of Diana, like many such cult priestesses, had sex with male worshippers in return for money under the excuse that they were enabling the worshippers to have intercourse with the god or goddess. The sex act, ejaculation within a woman, was understood as intercourse / fellowship / worship / prayer to the idol, through the idol's representative. This is why this challenge to these young women was so serious. Here, Paul says that these young women must not do this, because Christ is the only mediator, and must save themselves from their path to condemnation by having children. Later in 1 Timothy he addresses the same group of young women, saying that they must stop defrauding the widow's welfare fund, and instead have children (5:14). The funds

given to them from that fund were nothing less than payment for sexual services rendered; but it was all dressed up under a Christian guise. If the young widows of 1 Timothy are the same women here addressed, they may not have been that many- for there were not that many young widows in the congregation, surely, who were engaging in this activity. It may have been as few as four or five, but surely not more than 20. But all the same- it was a huge problem, as it involved a considerable number of male Christians in the church.

*With bashfulness and sobriety; not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing-* 'Goddess Diana' earrings feature pearls in gold; all this is the language of Diana, goddess of the Ephesians, with whom Paul was dealing.

*2:10 But apparel which becomes women professing reverence towards God through good works-* Rev. 19:8 likewise speaks of the apparel of the saints as good works. But their apparel is granted to them by Christ; it is His good works which are counted to them. "Good works" is a term used several times by Paul to Timothy. It is used twice about women in the church (1 Tim. 5:10). Perhaps the sisters felt they were not a fundamental part of the church or had no meaningful part to play. Here again in 2:10 Paul is urging the women towards being proactive, to get involved with "good works" which backed up their prayers for the spread of the Gospel to "all men"; rather than dressing themselves up in the belief that thereby they would somehow make the prayers of the men more acceptable with God. Some conservative Protestant churches of our age have come not too far away from this very kind of position, and need the same call to action. Significantly, the Lord's letter to the Ephesian church in Rev. 2 commends them for their good works, and for how they have resisted false teachers. So it would seem that Timothy's ministry was successful; all Paul's challenging, rebuking and encouraging of him actually paid off. We can easily get the impression that such appeals for change and improvement never really achieved anything, but the Lord's letter to the Ephesians seems to indicate that in Timothy's case, the letters we are reading did indeed bear fruit in his response.

*2:11 Let a woman learn-* Judaism discouraged women from learning or studying the Scriptures. Perhaps Timothy was caught up with that pressure; and Paul urges him to let the women learn. As noted on :10, it would seem that the sisters were not being encouraged to see themselves as in personal relationship with the Lord or to be proactive in their faith and works.

*In quietness with all subjection-* I read this in the context of Paul's concern that all the argument about abstract interpretation in the Ephesian church had led to a lack of "quietness". See on 2:8 *Or argument*. The men couldn't pray properly without bringing in the various arguments which were ongoing in the church (:8); and the women likewise couldn't learn without being tempted to be distracted by the background noise. The teacher from whom the women were to learn was Timothy. That is the context of 1 Timothy. He was to teach, and Paul wished him to include the women as his students; and they were to be allowed a learning environment free from background noise distraction. That is a perfectly valid meaning for the word translated "silence" or "quietness".

2:12- see on 1 Cor. 14:34.

*I do not permit-* The Greek suggests 'I have not given over / transferred'. Paul could here be answering a claim made about him, as he often does in his letters.

*A woman to teach nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in submission-* It is clear that in some contexts, women did publicly teach in the early church. We think of Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9) and the command that female teachers should do so with covered heads in the Corinth ecclesia (1 Cor. 11:4-6). It could be that they were not to teach at some meetings, perhaps the breaking of bread meeting, but they could at others. Or it could be that the commands we are reading in 1 Cor. 14 about female silence were specific to Corinth, these in 1 Tim. 2 were specific and context limited to Ephesus; whereas in other areas, such as Philip's church, it was allowed. But I suggest that here in 1 Tim. 2 we are reading Paul's commands to Timothy in Ephesus where there was a specific threat to the church from Judaist infiltrators and false teachers. Timothy was being told by Paul to pull himself together, take responsibility, and secure the platform in the church, not allowing the Judaists to teach. I have sought to demonstrate that in commentary on chapter 1 and elsewhere. Perhaps it was that some very pushy Jewish women were insisting on teaching their Judaistic teachings in the church, claiming that Paul had allowed them to do so when he was in Ephesus. Paul is saying that he has *not* permitted them to do that; and he is telling Timothy to ensure they do not teach because as Judaist influenced believers, they were like Eve in Eden, deceived by the serpent. And Paul has used that very figure elsewhere in describing how the early converts likewise were as Eve in Eden but prone to be deceived by the serpent of Judaism (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:3). Paul wants Timothy to do the teaching- not any Judaists, including women. This interpretation would fit the context seamlessly. Otherwise, why would Paul suddenly start talking about the place of women, when his letter to this point has been concerned with Judaist false teaching? He is urging that these female false teachers should not be given the platform. They should be in submission to the teaching of the true teachers.

2:13 *For Adam was first formed, then Eve-* See comment on 2:12. Paul wants Timothy to do the teaching, perhaps setting him up as Adam; the group of Judaist women wanting to teach were as Eve. The emphasis upon Adam being formed *first* and Eve being the one deceived may be in order to challenge a particular wrong emphasis or teaching within the church at Ephesus. The commentary on chapter 1 has surely established that the church was under threat from Judaists. But we also know from Acts that many former worshippers of Diana were in the church. The pull of paganism would always be significant. We have deduced from :9 that some women within the church believed that their part in prayer was in dressing up with the same opulence as Diana. It could be that wrong Jewish speculations about Eve were mixed with pagan ideas about Diana. This kind of Jewish-pagan synthesis was what led to the doctrine of the trinity. Perhaps this is why Paul here draws their attention to Eve's weakness, and Adam's primacy in creation. Reading this teaching about women in its context, it would seem to me that Paul is tackling some specific group of women in the church who were advocating a quite wrong attitude to prayer, and who were glorifying unspirituality.

2:14- see on Rom. 5:12.

*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression-* These female false teachers were misinterpreting the story of Eve, and adding to it various Jewish myths. And so Paul alludes to it and shows them what it really means, and how by associating themselves with Eve, they are condemning themselves. As Eve was deceived by the serpent, so believers were being deceived by false teaching (s.w. Eph. 5:6 "let no man deceive you with vain words"). Eve, then, contrary to Jewish ideas and myths (1:4), was not to be glorified and pretended to. Nor was she to be crossed with Diana. She was deceived, just as they had been by false teachers. And Timothy was to challenge and correct this. Note

that the same word for "deceived" is used about the deceit of Jewish false teachers in Col. 2:8 and 2 Pet. 2:13. Note that Paul is not saying that Eve 'transgressed' and Adam did not. He uses the very same word about Adam's transgression in Rom. 5:14. He is saying that Eve fell into the transgression through having been deceived; whereas Adam, it would therefore seem, entered into the transgression clearly understanding what he was doing.

2:15 *But she shall be saved through the child-bearing-* Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, there is no article here. No reference is being made to "the child bearing", as if the birth of Messiah is in view. The sentence continues "If they continue in faith..."- so the reference is to plural women and not to the singular woman, Mary, who bore the Lord Jesus. And the salvation of Mary or women generally is surely not just because Mary was the channel for the Lord's birth. Likewise, general child-bearing is not the salvation of women.

We must look for the answer to this apparently strange statement in the context. And a glance at standard reference works (such as the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* edited by James Orr) reveals that the priestesses of Diana / Artemis in Ephesus "were all virgins". They did not have children because they were devoted to Diana; even although some of them slept with the worshippers, they aborted their children conceived as a result of this. Such abortion was common amongst temple prostitutes of many cults, but was apparently particularly enforced in the worship of Diana at Ephesus. Paul is saying that the group of sisters in the Ephesian church who were acting like these priestesses, claiming to make the prayers of males acceptable (:9), acting like mediators rather than accepting the one mediator (:5), dressing up in luxurious clothing in imitation of the Jewish Eve cult and the pagan Diana cult... these women were not to teach. Their influence was to be cut off by Timothy. They were to have children, and not abort them, and not to denigrate child-bearing. And they were to realize that Eve was not a heroine to be pretended to in that she sinned, was deceived by false teaching- as they had been. Instead they were to copy her in moving on after she realized her sin- by doing what first century women generally did, child-bearing. But with the difference that they were to raise a Godly seed, doing this work in faith and Godliness. Paul is advising this group of Ephesian women to get on and have children rather than imitate the Diana cult priestesses by not having children. The only other time the Greek word for "child-bearing" occurs is in 1 Tim. 5:14, where a group of young widows in the Ephesian church are advised to "bear children" and focus on leading their families- rather than giving the enemy an opportunity. Perhaps this same group are being referenced here. A group of young widows were becoming attracted to the cults of both Eve and Diana. Paul didn't want Timothy allowing them to teach, and he advises them to settle down and have children rather than playing at being priestesses.

So it would seem to me that Paul is addressing a particular group of women in Ephesus, and is advising Timothy how to deal with them. Those women are probably those referenced in 2 Tim. 3:6, influenced by false teachers "that creep into houses [house churches] and take captive weak minded women laden with sins, led away by various lusts". Timothy had been charged to stop and root out this false teaching, as it was particularly influencing the sisters. But Paul is not making global statements about women and their place. For as pointed out, there is New Testament evidence of other [more Godly] women speaking and teaching in the churches.

*If they continue in faith, love and sanctification with sobriety-* These terms are used elsewhere about men as well. So there is no intention of telling all women globally how they as women must behave. Instead of their involvement in the behaviour discussed above, these

women in Ephesus were to focus upon the positive spiritual attributes required of all believers, male or female. Paul uses the same words translated here "continue in faith" in saying that God continues faithful (2 Tim. 2:13); His abiding faithfulness to us is to result in our abiding faithfulness to Him. This same idea of mutuality between God and man, whereby we both trust in each other, has just been used by Paul in 1:12 [see note there].

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 The picture we get of Timothy is of a young man with frequent health issues, timid, with a spirit of fear rather than of power and a stable mind, easily tempted by "youthful lusts", easily awed by older, loud mouthed false teachers ["let no man despise your youth"], apt to forget what he had learned from his mother and grandmother; and yet with a desire to minister. And Paul gave him the ministry of being the bishop at Ephesus (1:4), with the brief to charge false teachers not to further teach. I speculated in discussing chapter 2 that he faced a powerful group of women in the church who were influenced by the cults of Eve and Diana, who had to be conclusively dealt with. And he was to model good works and encourage the church to likewise do them. The list of qualifications of a bishop are Paul telling Timothy how he should be; and how he should appoint brethren to leadership who met these criteria. We wonder how ever he coped. But we know- because soon afterwards, the Lord wrote to the church in Ephesus, telling them that they had done well in doing good works and in limiting the false teachers. His words were addressed to "the angel of the church"; either Timothy or those whom Timothy had appointed in leadership. So Timothy for all his weakness of character, which we can probably identify with, did indeed rise above all his limitations and achieve the spirit of what Paul is asking here.

*Faithful is the saying-* As noted on 1:15, there appear to have been inspired 'sayings' which were accepted as genuine by those with the Spirit gift of discernment. These short sayings were doubtless remembered and were valuable in a largely illiterate community.

*If a man seeks the office of a bishop-* I assume from :14,15 that Paul is writing with Timothy in view as the bishop of the church at Ephesus: "These things I write to you, hoping to come to you shortly. But if I am delayed, I write so you may know how you ought to behave in the house of God". A bishop or overseer was exactly the role Paul gave Timothy- for Timothy was to be in a position where he could charge church members not to teach (1:3). Perhaps timid Timothy in naive youthful zeal desired to be a bishop- and Paul having made him one, is now telling him what it involves in practice. To 'seek' means literally 'to stretch oneself unto'. So it could be that Timothy actually didn't have the ambition to be the bishop in that difficult situation. Rather, Paul thrust it upon him and he stretched himself out to it, he accepted it, although it clearly was a major stretch for Timothy, well outside his comfort zone.

*He desires a good work-* There is nothing wrong with spiritual ambition. The Greek *epithumeo* literally means 'to lust'. The noun is used by Paul when later warning Timothy to "flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). We could translate the phrase before us as meaning that if a man seeks / stretches out to the office of bishop, then he must lust after good work. The passions which are part of our nature must be directed into good work rather than for our own sensual pleasure. This redirection of sexual or passionate energy is likewise found in Eph. 5:3,4, where we are told that "fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness" is inappropriate, "but rather giving of thanks". It seems that Timothy failed to make that complete redirection of passion, because he had to be reminded in 2 Tim. 2:22 about fleeing his lusts. In another figure, we are to draw near to God; fleeing lusts means running towards God. And He will draw near to us.

3:2- see on Rom. 12:13.



*The bishop therefore must be without reproach-* Paul's advice to Timothy in 1 Tim. 3 as to what constituted good eldership was shot through with reference to his address to the Ephesian elders [remember Timothy was in Ephesus], where he outlined what manner of man he had been: Blameless = "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26); Husband of one wife = Paul? Sober = "serving the Lord with all humility of mind" (:19); Given to hospitality = his example was in that he was "ready to support the weak...it is more blessed to give than to receive" (:35) and his whole attitude to care for the Jerusalem poor was evidence enough. Apt to teach = "I have taught you publicly, and from house to house...I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (:20.27). Not covetous = "I have coveted no man's silver" (:33). One that ruleth his own house well = Paul as the father of so many. Not a novice = Paul. A good report of them without = "These things cannot be spoke against" (19:36), and witness his appeals to a good conscience before both God *and men* when on trial.

*The husband of one wife-* This could refer to not being polygamous; or it could equally mean 'a man of one woman'. These qualifications suggest Timothy was married.

*Temperate, sober, orderly, given to hospitality-* The Greek *philoxenos* could be read as being the opposite of xenophobic. A love of strangers / foreigners would not have come easily to any first century Jew; indeed, society was very parochial, with anyone from outside the local area being seen as suspicious. Love was to be shown to one's own rather than to strangers; and the characteristic of being *philoxenos* would have been distinctly a Christian virtue. As some bishops may not have had homes large enough to entertain visitors, we can be sure that this word doesn't refer to 'hospitality', but rather as suggested.

*Able to teach-* This could imply that some were being chosen as bishops because of their secular status rather than their familiarity with scripture or ability to teach.

3:3 *Not given to wine-* As noted on :1, Timothy took Paul's words to him very seriously. He had to be later advised to at least take a little wine for his stomach problems; he had totally quit alcohol on the basis of Paul's words here and drunk only water (5:23).

*Not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not argumentative, not covetous-* The implication would be that within the church, as potential for being chosen as bishop, there were Christians of whom these things were true. We see here the tolerance in the early church when it came to baptism and acceptance of sinners; and yet the way that the leadership positions, the platform, was not at all open.

3:4 *One who rules his own family well, having his children in submission with all reverence-* See on :15. As explained on :1, Paul is writing specifically with Timothy in view, at least in the first instance. Perhaps Timothy's weak character meant he had a tendency to allow anarchy in his home. And if he indeed was married, then Paul's warning to flee youthful [sexual] lusts and to be a man of one woman (:2) suggest that Timothy was tempted not to be a solid husband.

1 Tim. 3:4,5 lays down that an elder in the house [church] of God must be one who rules his own household well. The implication perhaps is that the ecclesias of which Paul wrote were household churches. The 1st century household was governed by the *paterfamilias*, the head of the house. In terms of the household ecclesias, this person was the 'elder'; but to govern a

household church required that such a person governed their own domestic household well. My point is that there is an implied equation between the 'church of God' and the domestic household; understandable, if the early churches were in fact household groups. Where things would've got awkward was if the 'elder' or leader of the household church was not in fact the *paterfamilias* of that house where the church gathered. We are left to imagine wealthy brother A opening up his home to the house church, in which poorer brother B was the leader of the spiritual house. This is the radical import of Paul's teaching that eldership in the ecclesia was to be based upon spiritual criteria and not human wealth or social position. No wonder the extraordinary unity and social bonding of the early churches proved so attractive and startling to the world. And we in our day are invited to practice similar sociological impossibilities in our ecclesias.

The commands relating to bishops (overseers) stress that he should only be treated as such if his own family is in order (1 Tim. 3:4,5,12). This could suggest that he was the one who had converted others; for the image of our converts being our spiritual children is a frequent one (1 Cor. 4:14,17; 2 Cor. 6:13; Gal. 4:19; Tit. 1:4; Philemon 10; 1 Pet. 5:13). In the same way as a father ought to be respected by his children, so converts ought to respect those who converted them. The fact Paul had made converts and founded ecclesias was used by him as a proof that he deserved at least some respect- they were his 'seal', the hallmark that showed him genuine (1 Cor. 9:2). My sense is that the first century Gentile ecclesias were very similar to many Christian groups throughout Africa, Europe and Asia today; somebody was converted by a visiting preacher, and they in turn converted a group of their associates. Such groups need leadership, and the logical leader is the one who converted. This is why elders are defined in Heb. 13:7 as those who preached the Gospel to those they lead. Yet there can be a tendency for groups of converts to forget the eternal debt they owe to those who brought them to new life in Christ, just as there can be a forgetting of responsibility to our natural parents. The respect afforded to such leaders should, however, be qualified by their meeting of the standards Paul lays down: e.g. their own natural children should be well led by them. The integrity and manner of life of those who converted us is what inspires us to carry on

*3:5 For if a man does not know how to rule his own family, how shall he take care of the church of God?*- Maybe the stress is on 'know *how*'. Timothy as a young parent and husband needed to realize that family life doesn't just happen; there must be a conscious learning *how* to conduct family life and operationalizing it, rather than just allowing life to take its natural course; which is a frequent reason for the failure of spiritual development in family life.

Perhaps it should be noted that the bishop's qualification is that he *knows* how to rule his own house (1 Tim. 3:5). It may be that as with Samuel and other elders, their children or converts do not 'turn out' well. If this is because there was a lack of spiritual leadership, this disqualifies a brother. But if he *knew* how to rule, but they rebelled, then he is not thereby disqualified. Fathers cannot be held responsible for the spiritual failure of their children in all cases (Jer. 31:29,30; Ez. 18- and the example of Yahweh with Israel). Likewise, Paul was clearly a bishop and yet was single. "A bishop *must be* the husband of one wife" therefore requires us to again read in an ellipsis: '[If he is married he must be...] the husband of one wife'.

3:6- see on Lk. 12:49.

*Not a new convert, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil-* There is a word play here, because "new convert" translates a Greek word literally meaning one newly sprouted or puffed up. Seeing Paul is in the first instance writing to Timothy, perhaps he is warning him that as a new convert, he must be aware that he will be prone to pride in his new conversion.

A new convert should not be made an elder because he may fall into "the condemnation of the devil". This may refer to the Jewish 'devil' eagerly waiting to accuse the leadership of the Christian ecclesia in Ephesus. But *diabolos* is often used in the pastorals in relation to gossipers (1 Tim. 3:6,7,11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3). Gossip is the clearest manifestation of the 'devil' within our natures, and we should be aware of this. "The condemnation of the devil" may therefore mean that the gossipers, whether within or outside the ecclesia, will more easily condemn a novice. If a brother has behind him all the qualifications listed in 1 Tim. 3, of faithful children, a reputation as stable, patient etc., then such gossips will have less power to condemn him in the eyes of others. Paul indicates that he understands the power of gossip in the church- he knew that a spiritually young elder was going to face slander, as sure as day follows night. And therefore, young elders aren't a good idea, he concludes. We too need to face up to the reality of gossip, that it will happen, and we need to seek to protect those vulnerable to it before it starts.

3:7- see on 1 Tim. 6:9.

*Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace or into a snare of the devil-* "The devil" or false accuser is paralleled with "outsiders" who were waiting to catch Christian leaders in a trap. The church at Ephesus was surrounded by Jews who were bent on destroying Christian congregations and were happy to work with the pagan Government to effect this. Timothy is being warned against being naive, which was perhaps another of his characteristics. There were people out there, perhaps members of the 'Jewish satan' which dogged early Christianity, eager to set snares for people in Timothy's position and indeed any church leader. Not falling into snares himself would enable Timothy to persuasively exhort others not to fall into the snare of seeking wealth (6:9). We are enabled now to better understand Paul's later warning to Timothy to help some escape from the "snare of the devil" which they were caught up in (2 Tim. 2:26). This snare could have involved some Jewish plot aimed at entrapping Christians, perhaps by an offer of wealth or some get rich quick scheme. Hence those chosen for leadership were not to be "greedy for money" (:8). The fact Timothy had become aware of the snares and avoided them empowered him to help others out of them. And that principle is true for us all.

3:8 *Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine-* For this to be said we can infer that there were such within the church whom Timothy would consider for the office of deacon. The early church was open to all sinners and some clearly didn't change very quickly if ever; but the leadership structure was to be held to standards of behaviour and doctrinal position. Note too that it was Timothy who would appoint the deacons. Democracy was never used in order to choose leadership.

*Not greedy for money-* This was important because of how the Jewish satan outside the church was using offers of money in order to ensnare people. See on :7 *A snare*.

3:9 *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience-* In discussing chapter 2 I suggested

that the believers in Ephesus were under pressure from their pagan background in the Diana cult and also the myths pedalled by Jewish false teachers such as the Eve cult. These cults and indeed all paganism loved the idea of "mystery". Paul is saying that deacons must wholeheartedly be committed to the mystery of the Christian faith. They were to hold it in a good conscience, i.e. not also holding to other mysteries as were the women forbidden from teaching in chapter 2.

3:10- see on Gal. 6:4.

*And let them first be tested-* This idea of a probation period is found also in the command to Timothy to "Lay hands hastily on no one" (5:17), i.e. do not hastily appoint anyone to office, but require a probation period first. Perhaps here we see a hint that Timothy had a tendency both to naivety and to impetuous, quick action. He was perhaps not naturally a wise man; the way he succeeded at his difficult calling (see on :1) shows the real power of personal change which is possible to those led by God's word.

*If they are found blameless, then let them serve as deacons-* Gk. 'unaccused'. Perhaps a reference to the way that the church in Ephesus was surrounded by critics eager to falsely accuse ["the devil"] and thereby entrap the unwary in snares. Truly Timothy's position is one not to be envied.

3:11 *Likewise, their wives must be reverent-* This could mean that their wives served as part of their office as deacon; for Phoebe was a female deaconess. Deacons in this case would refer to husband and wife teams. Or it could be that the sign of a suitable deacon was that he had influenced his wife for spiritual good. Because otherwise, the objection could be raised that a man is not surely to be judged by the behaviour of his wife.

*Not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things-* "Slanderers" is from the same word as "devil". In the immediate context, the snare of the devil has referred to the schemings of the Jewish and pagan opposition to bring down the church at Ephesus (:6,7). The requirement may be that a deacon's wife was to have no part in those systems. "Temperate" and the other characteristics of a deacon's wife are the same requirements for the bishop himself (:2; Tit. 2:2). The implication could be that ideally a deacon and his wife should work as a husband and wife team, each with the same spiritual qualifications.

3:12 *Let deacons be men of one woman-* Not polygamous, or at least, not womanizers, focused upon their wife as their one woman.

*Ruling their children and their own families well-* As noted on :5, family life was not to be allowed to just follow a natural course. There was to be conscious leadership.

3:13 *For they that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus-* The "for" connects with the previous verse, talking about ruling in one's own family. The idea may be that if they have served as deacons in their own family first, then they will be qualified to do so in the church. In the process of being a deacon, faith is developed. The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice in the upward spiral of spirituality. The "good standing" is surely before God and not men.

3:14 See on Acts 20:25 *I know*.

*These things I write to you, hoping to come to you shortly*- Paul had appointed Timothy the bishop of the church at Ephesus (1:4), and so we are to read these principles about eldership as Paul reminding Timothy of how he should be living. This is not to say that the principles do not have wider, general application; but the first context reference was to Timothy. These principles were to explain to Timothy how he personally should behave in the church (:15).

3:15 *But if I am delayed*- Paul had no miraculously provided itinerary. He realized the many variable factors in the life of a believer.

*I write so you may know how you ought to behave in the house of God*- The existence of house churches within the Ephesus ecclesia would explain the slightly unusual Greek construction here which in the Greek speaks of behaviour “in a house of God”. Maybe Paul refers to the same distinction between house churches and larger gatherings in Ephesus when he advises that a bishop should rule well his own house [church] and have his children in subjection (:4,5). There is a common New Testament understanding of ‘children’ as referring to converts; and the Greek word translated “rule” is only used elsewhere, both in 1 Timothy and in the rest of the New Testament, about ‘ruling’ or ‘providing for’ the church in a pastoral sense (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 3:14). This interpretation would solve a commonly observed difficulty- that the children of many fine elders aren’t not always believers, they’re not always “in subjection”, and neither were those of many Biblical heroes. And further, seeing even the children of believers ultimately have freewill choice, how can it be that church leaders are held as it were responsible for their children’s choices? If we understand the ‘ruling’ here to mean spiritual provision for those in one’s own house church, as a qualification for appointment to being a minister of the larger, joint congregational gatherings- then this difficulty disappears. And this idea- of being faithful over a household and then being promoted to greater responsibility- would then be an obvious allusion to the Lord’s parable about the faithful house-manager [AV “steward”] who is then promoted to greater responsibility in the Master’s own household (Lk. 12:42 compared with Mt. 24:45).

*Which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*- I have pointed out that most of the Ephesian church were Gentiles- hence the letter to the Ephesians several times refers to “you Gentiles”. Most of them would have been converts from the temple of Diana, which was put out of business by the Christian preaching. And yet as noted on chapter 2, various rituals and ideas associated with temple worship had not been fully jettisoned by all the converts. Paul here uses language associated with a temple- and applies it to the ecclesia or church of God, making the point that the true temple is the Christian community and not an edifice with literal pillars and foundations. The *oikos* of God uses a word elsewhere translated “temple” (Lk. 11:51). The final phrase “of the truth” may simply mean that the *true* edifice, the *real* pillar and foundation of the temple, was the ecclesia- the group of individual Christian believers, and not any literal physical edifice. Excavations of the temple of Diana / Artemis at Ephesus have found that its pillars were an unusual feature of it- there were 127 pillars, 60 feet high, supporting a striking roof. It would’ve been easily identified by the large number of pillars all around it. All that now remains standing of the temple is in fact one pillar. So without doubt it is the temple of Diana, from whence many of the converts had come, which was the point of the allusion; the true pillars and supports [NEV “ground”] of God’s temple were the converts. Contrary to what was being taught, no physical building had any significance in God’s saving plan. And this confirms our

suggestions on chapter 2, that the converts had brought with them the baggage from Diana worship.

3:16 *And without controversy, great is the mystery of reverence towards God: He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory-* See on :9 *The mystery.*

1 Tim. 3:16 speaks of how Christ was:

1. God manifest in the flesh [on the cross]
2. justified in the Spirit [in the resurrection- Rom. 1:4]
3. seen of angels [at the resurrection]
4. preached unto the Gentiles
5. believed on in the world
6. received up into glory [the ascension].

It must have occurred to many expositors that this would be nicely chronological- were it not for stages 4 and 5. "Preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world" seems a clear reference to the great commission- to preach the Gospel of the resurrection to all the world, and whoever believes it will be saved. But the tenses are definitely past tense, not future. Indeed, the whole passage seems to have Mark's record of the resurrection, preaching commission and ascension specifically in mind [not surprising if tradition is right in saying that this Gospel was learnt by heart by candidates for baptism in the early church]. I would suggest that Paul is using a Hebraism although writing in Greek (and E.W. Bullinger provides scores of other examples of where Paul does this, in *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible*). Paul is thinking in the Hebrew 'prophetic perfect' tense, to describe something yet future as already past, so sure is it of fulfilment. He *is* referring to the great commission when he speaks of Christ as "preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world"; and he *is* giving a chronological account of the Lord's resurrection, with reference to Mark's Gospel record. But he sees the command to go and preach to the Gentiles, to make them believe, as so sure of being obeyed that he speaks of it in the past tense. The fact the Lord asked us to do this, for all the many reasons outlined in this study...this of itself is such a strong imperative to do it that Paul sees it as *already done*. And so the Lord's bidding should weigh as heavily with us. In fact, He had just the same idea when in Luke's record of the commission He says: "Beginning at Jerusalem you *are* witnesses" (Lk. 24:48 RVmg., cp. Acts 1:8). What He meant, according to Mark's version, is that 'You are to go world-wide and be witnesses'. But He speaks as if they have already done this, as if He were saying: 'Go and be world-wide witnesses, you are witnesses, it's axiomatic to your experience of my resurrection that you will witness, so I see it as if its already being done, even as you stand here before me'. L.G. Sargent, quoting C. Spicq, tabulates the following parallels in *The Gospel Of The Son Of God* p. 210 (Birmingham: CMPA):

#### 1 Tim. 3:16

##### Mark 16:9-19

:12 appeared (i.e. was manifested)      manifest in flesh  
in another form

:15 preach the gospel      preached unto the Gentiles

:15 into all the world...:16 he that believed on in the world  
believeth

:19 was received up into heaven received up, into glory

1 Tim. 3:16 seems to have been a well-known confessional formula in the first century church; perhaps it was recited by the candidate in the water before being baptized. It can be read as a chronological description of the Lord's death and resurrection:

1. "God was manifested in the flesh" in the Lord's *crucifixion*, not just His *life*. The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (s.w. 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26).
2. "Justified in the Spirit" - the resurrection (Rom. 1:4)
3. "Seen of Angels" - at the tomb (Mt. 28:2)
4. "Preached unto the Gentiles for belief in the world" (Gk.)- cp. Mk. 16:15,16
5. "Received up into glory" - what happened straight after the commission to preach the Gospel world-wide.

This chronological approach suggests that "God was manifest in the flesh" refers to the Father's especial manifestation in His Son's crucified human nature during those hours of final suffering- rather than just to His birth. There on Calvary, Almighty God Himself was supremely revealed. He, *God Himself*, was despised and rejected by men; *His* love and self-sacrifice were so cruelly spurned; *He* was spat upon and made the song of the drunkards (Ps. 69:12). The same word for "manifest" occurs in other passages which relate it to the crucifixion:

- Heb. 9:26: "For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he *appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself".
- 1 Pet. 1:19-20: "...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world [as the sacrificial lamb slain from the foundation of the world, Rev. 13:8], but was *manifest* in these last times for you".
- 1 Jn. 3:5-8: "And ye know that he was *manifested* to take away our sins [on the cross]; and in him is no sin... For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil", which He did through His death (Heb. 2:14-18).

It may be added in passing that the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in judgment. And this explains why the breaking of bread, with its focus upon the cross, is a foretaste of our appearing before Him then. See on Jn. 1:14; 19:19.

## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 But the Spirit says expressly-* The reference may be to the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit, stating clearly that there must be false teachers and a falling away amongst the believers before He returned (Mt. 24:10,11,24). Interestingly, Paul has commissioned Timothy to try to *stop* that happening (1:4). This is an interesting example of how human freewill effort dovetails with God's foreknowledge and developing purpose.

*That in the last times some shall fall away from the faith-* We either depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12), or we depart from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19, 22; 1 Tim. 6:5). We're always moving in one direction or the other.

*Giving heed to seducing spirits-* Yet Timothy's job was to ensure that the church did *not* "give heed" to false teachers (1:4)- who are the "seducing spirits" spoken of here. Like Moses reasoning with God about Israel's fate, it could be that Paul is encouraging Timothy to reason with God, to do what he can so that the Lord's express prediction will not come true. Just as the Ninevites did, and succeeded. As noted on 3:1, Timothy's ministry was successful, according to the Lord's letter to the Ephesians in Rev. 2. He did shut down false teaching and inspire the doing of good works.

*And teachings of the idol worshippers-* So far in this exposition I have suggested that the Ephesian church was prone to influence by the Diana cult, from which many of the converts had come; and also from Jewish false teachers from the synagogue where Christian preaching had first begun in Ephesus. And that picture is confirmed by these warnings here in chapter 4. Paul will go on to warn also against those who taught that only some foods could be eaten (:3); this clearly was the Judaist false teaching. Paul saw in these attacks, and the fact some believers fell for them, a fulfilment of the Lord's Olivet prophecy where He had warned that these were signs of the last days. The Lord could have come in the first century- all was in place. But the church didn't take the Gospel to the world nor bring forth spiritual fruit which enabled that potential to happen, and so it has been deferred until our last days. The body of Christ is likewise suffering from legalism on one hand [cp. Judaism] and worldly idolatry on the other.

4:2- see on Mt. 23:28; Rev. 13:15.

*Through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies-* Hypocrisy suggests the Lord's warnings against the Pharisees, i.e. Jewish false teachers.

*Branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron-* Paul felt that Christian co-crucifixion with Jesus meant that we too are branded with His marks. He uses the same figure in Gal. 6:17. So he feels that we bear the marks of ownership, either of Jesus or of some other system. This is exactly the picture we have in Revelation- believers in the last days marked either for the beast or for the Lord Jesus.

*4:3 Forbidding to marry-* This fits with our comments upon Paul's encouragement of female child-bearing in chapter 2. The Diana cult forbade their female followers to marry and have children. Paul is not making a global command to women to marry and have children, rather is he countering the false teaching of the Diana cult which had affected some sisters in the Ephesian church.



*And to abstain from food- which God created to be received with thanksgiving-* Jewish false teaching which was also a pressure upon those in Ephesus.

*By them that believe and know the truth-* Not 'know and believe'. 'Knowing the truth' is used by Paul to refer to an ongoing relationship with the Lord; he doesn't mean 'those who correctly understand a set of theologies'. We ought to be deeply, deeply moved by the fact that we have been called into God's world, into His sphere of vision. He even created the different types of meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth"; they were made for us, not the world, and therefore *we* ought to give thanks for our food with this realization.

*4:4 For every creature of God is good and nothing is to be rejected-* Paul often alludes to Peter, and this clearly references Peter's experience on the housetop. I have argued elsewhere that Paul pretended to Peter, wishing dearly that he was the apostle to the Jews as Peter was. But it can also be so that Paul genuinely respected Peter- which is an essay in humility, that a leading rabbi would so respect an illiterate fisherman.

*If it be received with thanksgiving-* Here and in :5 Paul assumes that believers will pray before food, and this ought to be our pattern too in these days. Perhaps he has in view the standard Christian prayer "Give us this day our daily bread", which he understands as a thankful admission that our food is indeed a gift from God. And if a Divine gift, then surely it is sanctified by Him.

*4:5 For it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer-* Peter had been taught that it was the Lord's sacrifice which sanctified unclean food. So "the word of God" may refer, as it often does, to the Lord Jesus rather than the Bible. For the Bible in that sense doesn't cleanse unclean food. It could also refer to 'the Gospel'. Or it could be that Paul had in mind the simple statements of Genesis, that we have been given all food by God (Gen. 1:29; 9:3). This would be typical of Paul- as he does so powerfully in Galatians, he bids us return to God's original intentions in Genesis and consider the Mosaic Law as a temporary addition which has now ended. Food is not of itself sanctified or not sanctified (Rom. 14:14), so I doubt that Paul meant that the chips on your table are made somehow holy because you prayed over them. It is human life which can be sanctified to God, as Paul so often says in his letters. Thanksgiving for food is therefore a recognition that we have been given food in order to live life which must be sanctified to Him.

*4:6 If you put the believers in mind of these things-* Gk. 'put them under'. Clearly Paul had set up timid Timothy in a position of authority which was quite foreign to his natural disposition, especially as the believers included many forceful, dogmatic individuals. Our ministries too are often not naturally compatible with who we are.

*You shall be a good minister of Christ Jesus-* A good deacon. Timothy was to be act as both a bishop and deacon. This is in contrast to later abuses of the position of "bishop" in orthodox Christian churches. Timothy has been advised how to choose deacons in chapter 3, and he is being asked to model to them how they ought to be. Such servanthood is ultimately service to Jesus- "a good minister of Jesus Christ". Our service to others in Christ, including the dogmatic, the difficult and the woefully misinformed, is all service to Him. He would be a "good minister" insofar as he was nourished in the "good doctrine".

*Nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed-* By teaching these words to others, Timothy would himself be nourished by them. By feeding others, he would himself be fed; see on :16 *By so doing*. and 5:18 *The ox when he treads out the corn*. This is one reason why the Lord has chosen to work through the process of evangelism. The very process of teaching something makes us come to that material ourselves in a more intimate way than we would if we didn't teach it but simply mentally assented to it within ourselves. "The words of the faith" may refer to the 'faithful sayings' which Paul several times alludes to in his letters- brief inspired sentences which were distributed amongst the new converts. "Followed" is a word used again by Paul in 2 Tim. 3:10 where he says that Timothy has fully followed his own teaching and example. This is quite some commendation. As noted on 3:1, Timothy was very obedient to Paul, and thus his ministry was successful, in that the Lord's judgment of the Ephesian church in Rev. 2 reveals that the very things Timothy was asked to do- he achieved. Despite not at all being cut out for that task. Timothy was to be "nourished up in the words of the faith [a reference to 'words' of basic doctrine which comprised a first century Statement of Faith?], and of the good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6 RV). True doctrine has the power of growth; it is the seed which is sown, leading to the fruit of good works. The basic Gospel ("doctrine", AVmg.) of the cross is the active, outstretched arm of Yahweh the Almighty (Is. 53:1). We must let that power work. "Let your conversation (way of life) be as it becomes the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). By nourishing others with good teaching, he would himself be "nourished up in the words of faith". Caring for others on whatever level is what stimulates an upward spiral in our personal spiritual growth. In doing so, we will ourselves find spiritual growth. Practically, this is evident- in that the brother who looks through the Bible readings before doing them with his family, or reads a chapter with his five year old daughter and then the same chapter again with his wife, who makes an effort to prepare a different sermon each time he speaks rather than re-hash an old one... the one who benefits is ultimately himself.

*4:7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself with reverence towards God-* This rejection meant 'Do not let these things be taught in the church', because that was his brief in 1:3, to not allow false teaching. There was clearly a problem with some women in the Ephesian church. We saw in chapter 2 how Timothy was to stop some women teaching who were advocating a version of the pagan Diana cult mixed with the Jewish cult of Eve. And there were older women who likewise were teaching "fables"; and Timothy has been told in 1:4 not to allow Jewish fables to be taught in the church. Here and in chapter 2 it could be argued that we have evidence that women were indeed allowed to teach in the Ephesian church; but Paul's concern was with *the content* of what some of them were teaching. This was why these women should not be allowed to teach; not because they were women, but because of the content of their teaching. This also explains why Paul advises Timothy as to how old and young women should be living; this was not just general pastoral advice, but was given in the specific Ephesian context of women who were teaching false doctrine, who needed to be redirected to more positive spiritual pursuits. The double reference to "profane and old wife's' fables" may refer to the dual pressure there was in Ephesus- from paganism and the Diana cult ["profane"], and from Jewish women teaching Jewish fables such as the Eve cult. We have noted this double problem several times in this exposition. It's noteworthy that public recitations were something that women were allowed to participate in. Slave women especially were known to make such recitations to the women of a large household, including the female freewomen. This doubtless laid the basis for the phenomenon [portrayed on some frescoes] of female house churches, with slave women leading the gatherings even when their mistress was present.

*4:8 For bodily exercise is profitable for a little time-* This is in contrast to the need to exercise spiritually (:7). This may well have been one of the profane [pagan] or old wives' fables of :7. Otherwise it is hard to see why Paul would suddenly start speaking about it. Mt. 6:2,3 = 1 Tim. 4:8. The implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

*But reverence towards God is profitable for all things-* "Profitable" is only used elsewhere in 2 Tim. 3:16 [the Scriptures are profitable] and in Tit. 3:8, where "good works" are "profitable". The disciplines of the spiritual life, of daily Bible reading and good works, carry their blessings in this life too- "having the promise of the life which now is"; and those present blessings are far more than those achieved by physical exercise.

*Having the promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come-* There is a link between the spiritual life lived now, and that which shall eternally be lived. The life which now is, is connected with the life which is to come. Our experience now is the promise of life tomorrow. John's Gospel expresses the same truth in saying that we now have the eternal life- we are living now the kind of life which we shall eternally live. Godliness having the promise of life both now and in the future is a reflection of Christ's teaching that the life of self-denial would have its present as well as future rewards (1 Tim. 4:8; Mk. 10:29).

*4:9 Faithful is this saying and worthy of all acceptance-* Another example of where brief inspired messages from the New Testament prophets were "accepted" as indeed inspired and distributed; see on :6 *The words of the faith*.

*4:10 For to this end we labour and strive-* In contrast to striving in physical exercise to preserve our own lives a bit longer (:8) we instead strive so that "all men" may experience the eternal life now possible. These words are used about Paul's labours in preaching and pastoral work (1 Cor. 15:10; 16:6; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29). Paul uses the same word to encourage Timothy to likewise labour in the Ephesian church (1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:6). And again, Paul's exhortation was taken to heart; for some time later, the Lord commended the eldership ["the Angel of the church"] at Ephesus for labouring so hard (Rev. 2:3 s.w.).

*Because we have our hope set on the living God-* The Greek *elpis*, "hope", means certainty, trust. We are certain that God wishes to save all men, as explained under 2:1-6; and so we labour and strive so that this great salvation is shared with all men.

*Who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe-* If we understand this literally, then God is the Saviour of "all men" including Hitler. But the Bible doesn't teach universal salvation. There's a difference between being a Saviour- and saving. God gave Israel a "saviour" in the form of Jesus (Acts 5:31; 13:23). But this doesn't mean that "Israel" were all saved, because many of them have rejected their Saviour. This is the tragedy- that God is a "Saviour" for all men through His Son, but not all men wish to accept that salvation. This verse does not touch on the problem of those who have not heard the Gospel (for whatever reason). Frequently, the New Testament speaks of "God our Saviour" (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3 etc.). Perhaps the emphasis needs to be put on the word "our". He is *our* Saviour because we have accepted His plan of salvation- but others have not. There is a salvation potentially possible for all- but it is a salvation unaccepted. Rom. 5:18 speaks of how by Christ's righteousness "the free gift came upon all men unto justification". But not literally all men will be justified. The "all men" is limited and not universal, because salvation is not universal. Jn. 1:5-11

speaks of Jesus as the light which came into the world, but the darkness preferred to remain in the darkness: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... John... came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, [so] that all might believe through him... He was in the world... yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him". God's intention was that "all men" in the "world" of Israel might believe. John preached "so that all might believe". But "all" did not believe. They "might" believe- they had the possibility of doing so, but did not. Note that "the world" here is "His own"- the Jewish world. Clearly "all men" is not to be understood literally. It's obvious from how "all men" is referred to in the New Testament that the term doesn't mean literally every single person:

- 'All men' thought John was a prophet (Mt. 21:26). But not all in Israel did (Lk. 21:6), and the whole planet definitely didn't know anything about John
- 'All the Gentiles' are defined as those who "seek after the Lord" (Acts 15:17)
- Paul was to be a witness to "all men" of his vision of Jesus (Acts 22:15)- clearly not every person on the planet; and he speaks of how he had taught 'all men' (Col. 1:28 Gk.- the same words as in 1 Tim. 4:10 "all men")
- We are to live at peace "with all men" (Rom. 12:18)- all people in our lives, not every human being on the planet
- "All Judaea... Jerusalem" were baptized by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:5).

4:11 *These things command and teach*- The commanding *and* teaching may refer to teaching both formally, from the platform, and informally. A church leader like Timothy was not to simply teach from the podium and assume the job was done. The "things" to be thus taught were that we ought to "labour" for the Lord (:10) and do the good works associated with reverence to God (:8). And Timothy was obedient- for some time later, the Lord commended the eldership ["the Angel of the church"] at Ephesus for labouring so hard (Rev. 2:3 s.w. :10 "we labour").

4:12 *Let no one despise your youth*- They surely did despise his youth, but people can only do such things to us if we let them. And Timothy was not to allow them to do this, in that he was not to feel despised, but rather to be strong in the sense of his own mission and significance in the Lord's larger plan. Paul has just called Timothy to do battle with the older sisters who were teaching Jewish fables in the church (:7). For a young man to shut them up was going to be difficult, especially for someone of Timothy's sensitive or weak character. The fact he succeeded shows the power of God's word through Paul and the real possibility of personal transformation and achievement in the Lord's service.

*Be an example to those that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity*- Any teaching ministry is only effective insofar as the word is made flesh; and this was and is the ultimate power in the Lord's ministry to us. "Purity" carries the specific idea of sexual purity. Paul has commanded Timothy to be a man of one woman in chapter 3, he will go to warn him to deal with the younger sisters "with all purity" (5:2) and will later tell him to flee youthful [i.e. sexual] lusts (2 Tim. 2:22). Putting all this together, it would be fair to assume that Paul perceived a weakness in Timothy in this area. And yet all the same, Paul put him in to the position of eldership, with all the inter-personal contact with females which this required. But he warned him to beware of his weakness.

4:13- see on 1 Thess. 5:27.

*Until I come-* The implication of how the argument develops could be that Paul intended to give Timothy some Spirit gift which would further empower his ministry, presumably by the personal laying on of hands [as in :14; see note there]. He wrote similarly to the Romans (Rom. 1:11). Until then, Timothy was to focus on his own study and teaching.

*Give attention to reading, to preaching, to teaching-* The "reading" could refer to Timothy's own Bible study being the basis for his preaching [to the unbelievers] and teaching [of the converts]. But it could equally refer to the public reading of the Scriptures- which was especially necessary in largely illiterate congregations. The same word for "give attention" is used about not giving attention to Jewish fables (1:4) nor false teachers (4:1); but these negative commands must be replaced by a positive giving of attention to God's word and to sharing that word with others. Positive preaching and teaching of God's word, if focused upon, will mean we will not have mental space to give attention to false teaching. And maybe we are to read this appeal for focus, mental 'giving attention', as the antidote to Timothy's proneness to sexual weakness touched on in :12.

4:14 *Do not neglect the gift you have-* Paul may be intending to give him another gift [see on :13 *Until I come*], but he asks Timothy not to neglect the one he already has. Timothy had desired the office of a bishop (3:1) and had been given the potential power to achieve it. But he wasn't, it seems, using his potential because of his natural weaknesses and the difficulty of dealing with the opposition. Neglecting, not taking seriously, our potential... is one of our most common failings. We have all been dealt talents by the Lord and are to use them, and not neglect them in the ground.

*Given to you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you-* There presumably had been an inspired, prophetic word from one of the New Testament prophets to the effect that Timothy could achieve his mission in Ephesus. Paul had appointed him as a bishop on the basis of that prophetic word (1:18). The elders had laid their hands on him to empower him. That council of elders may refer to those in Jerusalem [s.w. Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4]; or it could have been some group of elders who were present at the time that Paul first told him to remain in Ephesus. If the reference is to the elders in Ephesus who were appointed soon after their conversion and before Timothy was appointed over them (1:3), then again we find Timothy in an awkward, embarrassing position. He would have been given power by the elders, who were older than him, and then he was appointed over them. He is told not to rebuke elders but to appeal to them, to carefully consider allegations against them and to honour the elders who deserved it (5:1,17,19). So there were "elders" in Ephesus, and the same word is used in this phrase "council of elders". So he was in a position where he had to rebuke the elders who had given him the power to rebuke them. And the Lord chose a young, shy man, struggling with many weaknesses, for this apparently impossible mission given his personality. And yet he succeeded, as noted earlier several times [e.g. on 3:1].

4:15 *Be diligent in these things-* Gk. 'keep practicing', a present active imperative, alluding to the command to exercise spiritually (:8).

*Give yourself wholly to them-* Gk. 'be in these things'. His whole being was to be in the things of serving the Lord. Such total dedication is often smiled off as fanaticism, obsession and imbalance. But if indeed we shall live eternally and can help others to, and if the Lord's glory is truly achieved by our efforts- then it follows that we will be "be" them now, for we shall eternally be continually and totally "in" them.

*That your progress may be manifest to all-* The obvious personal progress of a teacher is the greatest inspiration to those being taught. Otherwise, he or she becomes merely a purveyor of facts and truths which may as well be read in a book. But if the teacher models growth, then the word really becomes flesh and powerful to transform. Such progress also reveals a humility, in that the teacher themselves is a pupil and also on a learning curve. This was quite contrary to the popular conception that a teacher was some static figure passing on truths which had long been held as a kind of conduit.

4:16- see on Dt. 4:1,9; Acts 20:28.

*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching-* To see ourselves from outside of ourselves is difficult, but the Bible often asks us to do it. This kind of self knowledge is a large part of our growth in Christ.

*Persist in this-* The sense of keeping on keeping on, of abiding and enduring, are common in Paul's words to Timothy [see on :15 *Be diligent*]. It would appear that Timothy easily gave up and was too quickly swamped by the immediate, just like ourselves.

*For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers-* This continues the theme discussed in :6 *Nourished*. Efforts to save others result in our salvation. It could be argued that the Lord's perfection and His own salvation out of death was a function of His devotion to our salvation. We see here the huge importance attached to teaching; it is connected with the salvation of the hearers. The salvation of some is dependent to some degree upon third parties. Illiterate people will simply not hear God's word unless it is read to them; and many who are literate come to that word so burdened with limitations and issues that unless somebody explains it to them, they like the Ethiopian eunuch will simply never understand.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 Do not rebuke an elder but exhort him-* See on 4:14. Timothy would have had to discipline some of the church elders, and these were the very ones who perhaps had laid their hands on him to grant him the Spirit gift required to be their bishop. We wince as we think of a man so lacking in self-assurance and maturity as Timothy... having to do this. Truly his ministry, like every ministry, was not easy; and he was empowered hugely in order to achieve something which was so against his grain of nature. It could be argued from the list of different groups now mentioned (old men, young men, old women, young women) that in all cases, Timothy was not to rebuke but to exhort. The natural way that a group leader operates is to rebuke when necessary; but in Timothy's case, given his weak personality and persona, this would just not have worked. And so he was advised to not rebuke but to appeal / exhort / come near to folk who needed to change and be changed. Just in fact as the Father and Son have done with us.

*As a father-* This again was difficult; the young Timothy, who was despised for his youth, had to act as a father to men older than him. Only the psychological strengthening of the Holy Spirit enabled him to achieve this- the gift bestowed by these elders in :14. We too find ourselves in psychologically and emotionally impossible situations as we do the Lord's work, and require the same mental strengthening. Paul uses the same words to describe how he too charged those under his care, as a father does his children (1 Thess. 2:11). The same words are used of the Father exhorting or entreating the hypocritical *older* son (Lk. 15:28). Perhaps Paul is consciously alluding to this in advising Timothy how to deal with the *older* ones. The older son clearly speaks the language of the Judaists; perhaps in order to discharge his responsibility to stop false teaching by the Judaists (1:3), Timothy had to deal with older men and older women who were distributing the Jewish "fables". Perhaps these were amongst the earliest converts in Ephesus, who had come to Christ as a result of Paul's initial preaching in the synagogue. Therefore their 'age' may be a reference to how long they had been in Christ relative to others.

*The younger men as brothers-* Timothy was of their age, and yet he was their spiritual elder. He was to emphasize what he naturally had in common with them, to exhort them as their leader but not as their superior, ever remembering that he was an equal brother in Christ as they were. Here again we see a great psychological and inter-personal challenge; which in the internal strengthening and wisdom of the Lord's Spirit, it seems Timothy achieved.

*5:2 The elder women as mothers-* I suggested on 4:7 that there were a group of older women teaching Jewish fables in the church, who had to be stopped. And Paul advises him to go about this by exhorting / appealing rather than direct rebuke. How could Timothy, young and despised for his youth, remove older women from their teaching ministry, and keep them within the church? Only by the wisdom of the Spirit.

*The younger women as sisters-* The younger women who needed rebuking may refer to the former followers of the Diana cult who had to be removed from their positions of influence in chapter 2. How could Timothy, who seems to have had a particular temptation from women, successfully engage with the younger women and get them to accept his position, and remove them from their teaching positions? For the positive outcome to be achieved which the Lord's later letter to Ephesus suggests, Timothy must have been powerfully blessed to achieve what would have appeared to be psychologically, sociologically and spiritually impossible. And that same strengthening of the Spirit is available to us in similar missions apparently impossible.

*In all purity-* See on 4:12 *Purity* regarding Timothy's tendency to sexual weakness.

*5:3 Honour widows that are indeed widows-* This section reveals that there was clearly a problem with a group of widows in the Ephesian church. They were living off the church, and yet instead of praying (:5) were giving themselves to sensual pleasure to the point they were spiritually dead (:6). Some of the widows were young and would be best to remarry and have children (:14), other widows were elderly with adult children and grandchildren (:4). These are the same two groups who were giving false teaching. Chapter 2 speaks of the younger women who were acting still like the prostitute priestesses of the Diana cult, claiming that their sexual services empowered the prayers of the men who used them (see commentary there). It was these women whom Paul urged to get on and have children (2:17); and he gives the same advice here (:14). They were remaining single in order to act as the priestesses of Diana but in a Christian garb. And Paul condemns this and encourages them not to see marriage and bearing children as so dishonourable. The older women represented the Judaist problem in the church; they were teaching Jewish fables (4:7). The simple problem was that these widows were financially supported by the church and had time on their hands. Indeed we could go so far as to say that if indeed [as suggested on chapter 2] they were acting like the Diana cult priestesses, they would have been paid money for their sexual services by the men of the congregation. Effectively they were prostitutes, even if the whole system was justified by having drawn up a register of widows and the claim that they were being supported by charity. This level of immorality in the early church ought not to surprise us when we recall that the Corinthians were getting drunk at the breaking of bread service, and there is the implication in Corinthians that there was sexual misbehaviour going on there too. Jezebel is rebuked for teaching the Lord's people to commit fornication. The letter of James suggests grave abuse and even murder going on in the church. I have seen all this kind of thing happening in churches in the developing world today. So the picture I am painting of Ephesus is not beyond imagination. The fact the Lord doesn't mention this kind of thing in His letter to Ephesus some time later is highly significant; for He does mention such things to other churches. It shows that Timothy's difficult mission did in fact succeed. To reform such an awful situation would seem not at all the mission for a young, insecure, timid man like Timothy. But his success and empowering just shows what can be achieved by the work of the Spirit. Timothy was being asked to differentiate between the genuine widows who really did need support; and these other widows, both young and old, who frankly needed to focus on good works and serving the Lord in family life, rather than the roles they had been adopting. Again we note that it was the content of their teaching, rather than their gender, which was what Paul took issue with.

*5:4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show devotion towards their own family-* The presence of the elderly in our lives is in order to teach us something. It is a form of "devotion", the Greek meaning 'worship' (only s.w. Acts 17:23). Again there may be a hint at the idol worship / devotion to Diana- for the word is only elsewhere used about idol worship (Acts 17:23). The Christian equivalent of 'devotion' to idols / Diana was to look after your mum and dad or your granny... and not the grandiose external rituals which passed as 'devotion'. Another track is suggested by the way in which a related word is used about *Jewish* devotion to Judaism (Acts 10:2,7; 22:12). And again... *Christian* devotion was not so external and public, it was all about the daily nitty gritty of caring for your elderly relatives. Perhaps Paul chose this word in order to address the two elements of the Ephesian problem- devotion to Diana on one hand, and to Judaism on the other.



*And to repay their parents-* The Greek seems to suggest an equal, measure for measure repayment. I have been raised by parents and cared for those parents in their old age. And I have raised my own children. I can therefore comment that in no way is the care for aged parents an adequate or equal repayment for the care they gave you. But Paul says that by attempting to do this, we learn. We learn grace, that were it not for parental grace, we would not have survived babyhood and would not be here today. And we seek to reflect that grace in caring for the elderly within our families. And this learning and response to that learning- is pleasing to God.

*For this is acceptable in the sight of God-* The language of the acceptability of sacrifice before God. Sacrifice was a part of both paganism and Judaism; Paul is saying that the acceptable sacrifice to Him under Christianity is to care for your relatives.

*5:5 Now she that is indeed a widow and alone has her hope set on God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day-* The allusion is to Anna in the temple. The elderly are limited in what they can physically do, but Paul seems to envisage here a very serious and organized prayer ministry, made possible by the widow being materially cared for. That care should come from her family, and if not, then the church. And in response, she should use her time and freedom from secular cares to seriously pray "night and day". This is a wonderful idea for all of us whenever or however we find ourselves indisposed. But it obviously has particular relevance to elderly believers. Regarding widows and prayer, see on :3.

*5:6 But she that gives herself to pleasure is dead while she lives-* See on :3. I have suggested that the younger widows were acting similarly to the priestess 'mediators' of the Diana cult from which they had come out. They were in serious sin, and although they had the name of the living Jesus, they were spiritually dead, in anticipation of the condemnation to death they would receive unless they repented. Eph. 4:17,18 was written to the same Ephesians, and urges them to "No longer walk as the Gentiles walk... alienated from the life of God", that is, dead. Eph. 5:14 makes the same appeal to these Ephesians- to awake spiritually out of the sleep of death.

*5:7 These things also command, so that they may be without reproach-* The concern seems to be that the surrounding opposition to Christianity in Ephesus, both Jewish and pagan, could so easily use the situation with the widows in order to bring reproach upon the name of Christ and to finally stamp out Christianity in Ephesus. The "things" may be the practical commands regarding how to reform the system of widow support in Ephesus which follow in :8-16. The Greek for "reproach" means literally 'not arrested'. Paul could imagine how the Christians could easily be arrested for things related to what they were doing; they were laying themselves wide open to all manner of accusations and legal problems.

*5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own family and specially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever-* This seems rather an extreme thing to say about someone who doesn't care for their elderly relatives as they might do. And it can hardly be true as it stands, because not everyone is able to provide for their elderly relatives, due to economic, health or geographic reasons. But the statement here makes perfect sense if we accept the reconstruction of the scene as suggested in these notes. Instead of looking after parents, money was being paid to a class of 'widows' in the church who were effectively prostitutes, who claimed they could empower the prayers of the men to be better heard by God (see on chapter 2). This indeed merits the kind of condemnation Paul hands out here.

But then the deep error of ignoring care for parents must still be faced. If we selfishly build up our own possessions through ignoring the needs of others, we have denied the Faith- even if we hold on to a clear understanding of the doctrines. Loving money is erring from the Faith- again, even though we may keep our theoretical understanding (1 Tim. 6:10). It is perhaps intentional that three times in the same section in 1 Tim., Paul speaks of those who leave the Faith; once he speaks of this in the context of doctrinal error (1 Tim. 6:21); the other two references (5:8; 6:10) concern leaving the Faith through being materialistic, whilst holding on to true doctrines. The point is, the one is as bad as the other. The fact the Kingdom will be on *earth* not in Heaven is not just incidental. It means that we *now*, as we live on this planet which will be our eternal possession, will not strive for present possession of it, neither will be swayed by the pressure groups and political groups who only look at the state of the world as it *now* is. "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again [because he dies before he can repay his mortgage?]; but the righteous dealeth graciously, and giveth. *For* such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:21,22 RV). Exactly because we will inherit this planet gives us strength against materialism; it means that we will be generous; we will not focus our lives upon temporarily buying a spot of land which in any case we will eternally inherit.

*5:9 Let no one be registered as a widow who is under sixty years old-* This is proof enough that the commands being given here were relevant to sorting out the situation in Ephesus and not global commands. We must read the commands about a certain group of women being silenced in chapter 2 in the same way. The fact he recommends some younger widows to remarry (:14) is also proof enough that "widows" doesn't mean 'all widows'. It may be that single and widowed brethren and sisters made open statements of their decision to devote themselves to the Lord Jesus. 1 Tim. 5:9 suggests there was a specific "number" of widows in the Ephesus ecclesia who were financially supported by the ecclesia. But as noted above, this was being abused and turned into what was effectively prostitution.

*Only register those who have been the woman of one man and-* This confirms our earlier suggestion that the group supported as 'widows' included some who were sexually immoral, acting [as suggested in chapter 2] effectively as church prostitutes, taking money for acting as the Christian equivalent to the priestesses of the Diana cult, in order to supposedly enhance the prayers of the men they slept with. Note that Timothy and other elders in this church are warned to be the man of one woman (3:2,12)- modelling to these church members the kind of life required of a believer. Thinking it through, "the woman of one man" surely cannot mean that over the course of their lives, they must not have been promiscuous. For surely such sins are washed away at baptism and should not be a reason for not supporting such a woman after she has been baptized and is widowed, being over 60 years old. Rather the logic surely requires that she should not *now* be promiscuous, a woman of many men. This again supports the idea that there was a problem in Ephesus of some female members, even those over 60, being promiscuous. And this is explained by our suggestion on chapter 2 that some of the sisters were offering sexual services supposedly to improve the power of the men's prayers. No wonder Paul tells Timothy to end this system and haul them off the platform.

*5:10 Well reported of for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has used hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has helped the afflicted-* This is not just a random list of good works for a believing woman. I suggest that each of these works are in conscious contradistinction from the behaviour of the priestess prostitutes of the Diana cult. They did not believe in having or therefore raising children; hence Paul tells the

younger widows to have children (:14) and in chapter 2 suggests those particular women save themselves from their immorality by childbearing. The Diana cult was fiercely xenophobic- we recall how the appeal was made to the citizens of Ephesus to destroy Paul and his missionary work on the basis that he was bringing their beloved Ephesus into dishonour. The problematic sisters were clearly influenced by these wrong attitudes although they had left the Diana cult. Hence the requirement for them to show hospitality to strangers; and they were to wash the feet of their brethren rather than take money for having sex with them on the excuse they were assisting in the power of their prayers [according to our reconstruction offered in chapter 2]. "Helped the afflicted" may well refer to how Paul went through awful problems with the mob there (Acts 19); the Greek for "afflicted" means literally 'the thronged', which is how it is translated in Mk. 3:9. 1 Cor. 15:32 suggests he may even have been thrown to the wild beasts in the arena there. Those who had ministered to Paul and other persecuted preachers then were thus qualified to be supported. The hint might be that these Christians who were still so influenced by the Diana cult may not have been so forward in coming to his assistance. It is Onesiphorus and not the local believers who is mentioned as ministering to Paul in his great afflictions in Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:18). Paul mentions this in writing to Timothy there at Ephesus.

*If she has diligently followed every good work-* Notice the double emphasis in this verse alone on good works; and so often in the letters to Timothy. The fact the Lord later commended Ephesus for their good works in Rev. 2 shows that Timothy's ministry was in that sense successful. He, the weak and unlikely one, took Paul's inspired words at their full weight and implemented them. The same relatively rare Greek word translated "followed [after]" is found soon after, where in :24,25 Paul says that the good works of the faithful follow them to judgment. Whilst salvation is by grace and not works, works will be taken into account in our final judgment and will play a part in forming the nature of the person whom we shall eternally be.

*5:11 But refuse to register younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry-* There is nothing wrong with marrying. Indeed Paul commands it for these women in :14. It would appear that they had entered a voluntary vow to Christ not to remarry- hence the sin. As suggested on chapter 2, actually these young sisters were acting like the prostitute priestesses of the Diana cult, vowing virginity to their god whilst sleeping with the male worshippers and aborting any pregnancies. They had of course left the Diana cult, but were acting in a similar way, instead taking a vow of virginity to Christ- will apparently sleeping with brethren on the pretext of strengthening the acceptability of their prayers, and then receiving money for this from the widows' support fund. This would be a classic example of pagan mentality mixing in with Christianity, and apparent devotion to Christ being mixed with immorality. This kind of thing is far from unknown in the church of today.

*5:12 Having condemnation, because they have rejected their first pledge-* As there were consequences for breaking the Nazirite vow and other vows under the Mosaic law, so it was and is wrong to vow things to the Lord and then break them. But all the same, the language of condemnation seems rather strong- see on :8. And yet it is understandable if my reconstruction of the situation is correct. To use such a pledge to Christ as an opportunity for immorality, and earning money by effective prostitution in the name of worshipping God and mediating Christian prayers- this is indeed behaviour that has to call for condemnation. If we don't read it this way, we are left with the apparent severity of judging those who pledge

singleness to Christ and then feel they want to get married. In 1 Cor. 7, Paul speaks exactly to this situation. He seems to refer to this pledge of singleness when he writes of those who promise to keep their virginity; but Paul says that if even after that, they cannot "contain", then they should marry. Yet here he is saying that such breaking of the pledge warrants condemnation. I therefore feel justified in resolving that contradiction by seeing in the pledge breaking far more than meets the eye if we just read these words without their context.

5:13- see on Lk. 9:4; Acts 20:20.

*Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not-* The Greek for "idlers" means literally 'not workers'; the compound includes the same word for "works" used in 2:10 about the need for the young sisters to do good "works" rather than dress up as the equivalent of the priestesses of the Diana cult. The antidote to their bad behaviour and immorality was to do works; not that works would save them, but passionate involvement in the Lord's service in practice would preserve them from involvement in immorality. This is actually, reading between the lines, Paul's advice to Timothy regarding his wayward sexual urges. And it is true for all time that the [Biblical] devil finds work for idle hands. One reason why God's purpose operates through human works is that the works are a necessary part of our own spiritual path and development; although the works in themselves are not needed by God nor are they the basis of our salvation *per se*. "They learn to be idlers" can bear the translation "they give to understand / teach"- as they went from "house to house". This is the very phrase used in Acts 2 about the early brethren going from house to house, i.e. from one home group to another, breaking bread and doing Bible study. We can assume that these women were going around the house groups which comprised the Ephesus church, teaching idleness, teaching against good works. The fact Ephesus are commended for their good works in Rev. 2 shows that all this advice really did work for the church and Timothy managed to obey it all successfully. "Saying what they should not" uses *laleo*, a word elsewhere translated 'preach' and 'teach'. And they were repeating gossip and busybody material in the name of teaching. No wonder in chapter 2 that Paul says they should no longer be teachers. But we notice that it is the content of their teaching, rather than their being teachers, which is the burden of his difficulty with them.

By publicly getting a bad name for "wandering about from house to house", these women were giving opportunity to the Jewish adversaries to "rail against" (A.V. margin) the Christians. Jude 9,10 implies that the Judaizers brought "railing accusation" against the Christians. "Speaking things which they ought not", recalls Jude 10 about the Judaizers: "these speak evil of those things which they know not". "Wandering" connects with Jude's description of "wandering stars" (Jude 13). Diotrephes, one of the Judaizers who was trying to discredit the apostle John and the other apostles, (as the Judaizers did to Paul) is described as "prating against us with malicious words" (3 Jn. 10). "Prating" is from the same word translated "tattlers" in 1 Timothy 5:13 concerning these women. The women going from house to house may imply from church to church, as that is how the word "house" is often used in the New Testament (due to the many house churches then in existence). This is what the Jewish false teachers did; 2 John 7 talks about deceivers or seducers that had entered into the Christian world, i.e. the false brethren "unawares brought in" to the church of Galatia. There are many references to these "seducing spirits" (1 Tim. 4:1) – i.e. false teachers (1 Jn. 4:1) – within the church, to which the church was not to give "heed" (1 Tim. 4:1). That these

were Jewish false teachers is suggested by other references to “giving heed” in the context of being watchful against Jewish infiltration of Christianity:

- “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” (Mk. 8:15);
- “Not giving heed to Jewish fables” (Titus 1:14);
- “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4) – the source of which genealogies was probably the Old Testament, over which the Judaizers were encouraging the Christians to argue to no profit.

5:14 *I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children*- I have repeatedly connected this with the comment that the young women of 2:15 should quit their effective prostitution and teaching within the church, renounce their vow of virginity which they had copied from the Diana cult priestesses, and have children. And by submitting to the spiritual disciplines which come with Christian family life, they would save themselves from a path which was otherwise leading to their condemnation (5:12).

*Rule the household, give no occasion to the adversary for slander*- These women, as teachers, were clearly capable. Paul encourages these particular women to exercise their abilities in spiritually leading their households. But it could be that Paul is also encouraging them to start their own house groups of believers which they would “rule”, instead of going around teaching idleness to the other house groups (see on :13).

The New Testament speaks of households run by women: Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:14,40); Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11). These women were presumably wealthy widows or divorcees who hadn’t remarried. We are left to speculate whether they were in some way the ‘leaders’ of the house churches which met in their homes. Women are described as ruling households in 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5. The woman of Prov. 31 clearly had autonomy within the private sphere of the household, even though the husband was the public leader. Seeing Christianity was initially a house-church, household religion, we are left to wonder how much women actually led house churches, especially seeing that the majority of early Christian members appear to have been women. The wall paintings [frescoes] found in the Christian catacombs around Rome are highly significant for our present study. The significant ones for our purposes are the catacombs of Priscilla on the Salaria Nuova, Callixtus on the via Appia Antica, and that of Domitilla on the via Ardeatine. They feature in places scenes of female Christians raising cups, with the inscription *agape* over them. Some show a woman occupying the central place in the meal, with a large cup in her hand, with the other women looking at it intently. Some of the frescoes [there are many of them] show women dressed as slaves doing this in what appears to be a wealthy home. These frescoes seem to me indicative of how groups of slave women formed house churches, and faithfully kept the breaking of bread. Some frescoes show the women sharing the bread and wine with children around the table; one shows a woman holding a scroll, as if she is reading Scripture to the others. One fresco features a woman holding a cup of wine inscribed ‘*nobis*’- ‘for us’. Some frescoes show men in the group, but the woman in the centre, as if she is leading the meeting, or as the host of the household.

Paul encourages younger mothers to “rule their households”, using a word [*oikodespoteo*] which would usually be used about the man ruling the house. His implication is surely that in

Christ, husband and wife together rule the household, notwithstanding the wife being in submission to her husband.

“The adversary” is not the same word as “Satan”, although it may still refer to the Jews seeking opportunity to criticize the. It can mean “an adversary at law” in a legal sense, implying that the Jews could get them in trouble at a Roman court. There’s plenty of historical evidence of this.

5:15 *For already some are turned aside after satan*- The Greek for "turned aside" is used four times in the letters to Timothy. Paul knew that some would be turned aside by false teaching (1:6; 2 Tim. 4:4), and he didn't want Timothy to be turned aside by it either (6:20). We see here the importance of Timothy's commission to stamp out false teaching- because this is what it leads to. People listen, and they are led aside from the Kingdom path.

Note that the widows turn themselves aside after Satan – Satan is not necessarily seeking the women. Verses 12 and 13 explain that the widows “cast off their first faith” – something they did themselves. “They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house”. It was by their doing this that they “turned aside after Satan” – their evil desires, and the Jewish temple cult. Using the tongue in the wrong way is a result of an evil state of the heart – “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt. 12:34). Their turning aside after Satan involved being “tattlers... and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not” (v. 13). Thus “Satan” refers to their evil heart. Through profitless talking and not keeping hold of the true spirit of the Word of God, some had “turned aside unto vain jangling” (1 Tim. 1:6). Paul is now pointing out that some of the young widows in that ecclesia had also turned aside for the same reason “unto Satan”, or their evil desires, expressed in their idle talking.

The “seducing spirits” of :1 had seared consciences (:2), implying that they were apostate believers. They forbade to marry, “commanding to abstain from meats” (:3), which especially the latter, was the big contention of the Jewish element in the church in the first century. Notice that what is said here about the Judaizers is also true of the Catholics – supporting the idea that 2 Thessalonians 2 is about both Jews and Catholics.

Thus the “seducing spirits” of 1 Timothy 4:1 were the Jewish infiltrators of the church, which were doubtless amongst the “deceivers” of 2 John 7, which 2 John 10 implies were going from house to house (church to church) spreading their doctrine of belittling the person of Christ. These Judaizers “subvert whole houses” (Titus 1:11). Back in 1 Timothy 5:13, the fact that the women also went from house to house is another indication that what they were doing was also what the Judaizers were doing. Thus it is an interesting possibility that when their husbands died, these women lacked spiritual leadership, and therefore turned aside after the Jewish Satan, being influenced by the Jews to undermine the church. Using such apparently innocent members of the church would have been a very effective way of infiltrating. Perhaps there is a reference to this in 2 Timothy 3. This speaks of men within the ecclesia, “having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof” (v. 5), unsound judgment in church decisions (v. 8 A.V. margin). “Their folly shall be manifest unto all men” (v. 9) – at the Judgment, where the responsible appear. They are likened to Jannes and Jambres, who, according to Jewish tradition, were apostate Jews. These false teachers (probably Judaizers), “creep into (i.e. subtly infiltrate) houses (churches), and lead captive silly women” (v. 6). Note how the Judaizers are described as capturing Christians to become

infiltrators in 2 Timothy 2:26 and in 1 Timothy 3:7. This view of the women is confirmed by the following two points:

i) Acts 13:50 describes the Jews stirring up “the devout and honourable women and (thereby)... raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas”.

ii) There is evidence in profane history that many Gentile women were influenced by the Jews. Thus Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 20.2) claims that when the Jews of Damascus were persecuted, the proselyte wives of the Gentiles living there were also attacked. Josephus describes the Gentile wives of the men of Damascus as “almost all of them addicted to the Jewish religion”. William Barclay says that during the first century “the Jewish religion had a special attraction for a woman... round the synagogues were gathered many women, often women of high social position, who found in this (Jewish) teaching just what they so much longed for. Many of these women became proselytes” (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 2003) p. 114). That the women Paul refers to were also wealthy is shown by them having time to go around from house to house, instead of having to work.

*5:16 If any woman that believes has widows in her family, let her help them and let not the church be burdened, so that it may help those that are indeed widows-* This appears to be a summary of the commands in this section about widows. But in some MSS, such as those followed here by the NEV, it seems specifically addressed to women. In this case, given our previous reconstructions, it would seem these young women were justifying the payment for their sexual services by saying they were being paid not only for their own widowhood but for their widowed mothers too.

5:17- see on Mt. 7:24.

*Let the elders that rule well-* There were some Ephesian elders that did "rule well", despite all the problems in the church which we have pointed out. And "the angel of the church at Ephesus" was commended by the Lord for stamping out false teaching and excelling in works. Although it was the loss of *agape* love which was their downfall in the end. We recall Paul's last meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, where he glumly warned them that of their own selves, men would arise destroying the flock at Ephesus; and urged attention to God's word in view of this. I see that warning in the same way as I see God's inspired message that in 40 day, Nineveh would be destroyed. But these expressions of future doom of themselves invite repentance and spiritual effort, which God rewards and takes deep notice of, to the extent that the threatened catastrophes either don't happen or are delayed. And the existence of an acceptable church in Ephesus by the time of Rev. 2 is a proof case of this. The command to appoint faithful elders and pass on the baton to them (2 Tim. 2:2) was therefore fulfilled well by Timothy.

*Be counted worthy of double honour-* If this has some financial reference (:18 "wages", and see the parallel in 1 Cor. 9:8-10 which is in a financial context), then we should connect it with the preceding comment that the money spent on the fraudulent widows' welfare fund was a 'burden' on the church (:16). Paul states plainly enough that he is not against a paid ministry although he didn't use it himself. But this verse would appear to be saying that Timothy decided what was paid to whom, and there seems the surprising idea of payment

according to spiritual integrity. We would rather have expected payment to be simply according to basic living needs, but he does appear here to go beyond that. Presumably his idea was not to offer a financial carrot towards spirituality, but to demonstrate that good service to the Lord was to be recognized and rewarded by the congregation. I am uncomfortable with that conclusion but I find it hard to see any other consistent interpretation. The only alternative I can think of is that the "double honour" may be referent to the money paid to widows- those elders who ruled well were to get double what they were being given. But still the problem remains that it was because of the 'wellness' of their work that they were to be rewarded; and "honour" is not completely relevant to the widows. And see on :18 *The labourer is worthy of his wages*.

*Epecially those who labour in the word and in teaching-* A reference to Bible study and then teaching the results of that study. Teaching is therefore not entertainment, re-casting secular stories or wisdom in spiritual terms accessible to the congregation; it is to be preceded by study of the word itself. The idea may be that the labour of the elders was not in secular life, but their work in study and teaching was equal to that of secular employment. The Lord commends the "Angel" at Ephesus, presumably referring to the eldership, for "labouring" (Rev. 2:3 s.w.).

5:18 *For the Scripture says-* We find a very significant feature in both the New Testament itself, and in the historical, uninspired writings of the early Christians: *they speak about the New Testament writings as being inspired Scripture just as they speak of the inspired Old Testament writings*. So Peter, writing in A.D. 68, speaks of Paul's letters as being amongst "the other Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16), i.e. on the same level of acceptance as the Old Testament Scriptures. Here in 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul combines two quotations, one from the Old Testament and another from the Gospel of Luke, and calls them both "Scripture": "For the Scripture saith 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn' [Dt. 25:4]; and, 'The labourer is worthy of his hire'" (Lk. 10:7). Polycarp, writing in about AD115, combines the Old Testament Psalms and Paul's letter to the Ephesians in a similar manner: "In the sacred books... as it is said in these Scriptures, 'Be ye angry and sin not,' and 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath'." Some years later, the [uninspired] second letter of Clement (2:4) quotes Isaiah and then adds: "And another Scripture, however, says, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners'" -quoting from Matthew. The first epistle of Clement, dating at the latest to AD95, quotes from many of Paul's letters and from the Gospels; but very significantly, it doesn't quote from any of the books which later were rejected at the Councils. So, the 'new' writings of the New Testament were accepted on an equal footing as the Old Testament Scriptures, from soon after they were first circulated. Notice that this was all *before* the Councils met to assemble the canon. The books were widely accepted as inspired *before* them! They didn't give those books an inspired status. It's also apparent that the 'new' books didn't go through much of a process of being recognized as inspired. They were accepted as inspired immediately. See on 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Jn. 4:1.

*You shall not muzzle-* The word means literally to render speechless. The idea may be that if an elder was not paid, then they would not have time to prepare their talks for the congregation. The Old Testament contains examples of where the Levites failed to teach the people because the tithes for supporting them were not paid.

*The ox when he treads out the corn-* The stress may be on the word "when"; the elder must do this if he is to be fed. The treading out of the corn represents the labour in the word which is



required before teaching it to the church congregation (see on :17). The corn represents God's word and the treading out the processing of it. And yet in this figure, the ox [cp. the elder] eats some of the corn he processes. This has been a theme of Paul in advising Timothy- that the very process of spiritually feeding others leads to the spiritual benefit of the feeder (see on 4:6 *Nourished up*).

*And, The labourer is worthy of his wages-* The wages are to be *axios* the worker, appropriate to the quality and amount of work. Hence those who worked "well" were to receive "double" (:17).

*5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except at the mouth of two or three witnesses-* The way Paul commanded Timothy not to even *consider* a complaint against an elder unless another two or three had been eye-witnesses is proof enough that he expected elders to be slandered from within the ecclesia. The more you read between the lines of Paul's letters, the more evident it is that his very own brethren almost unbelievably slandered him. See on Gal. 5:11; 1 Thess. 2:3. The context is the problematic group of sisters spreading gossip and being busybodies (:13). This kind of thing happens today, with the internet facilitating it. Paul seems to be saying that such gossips should not be 'taken up' or responded to unless there are two or three eye-witnesses.

*5:20 Those elders that sin, reprove in the sight of all-* The "all" may refer to all the elders; the "rest" who are to take warning from the reproof. I say this because there appears to be a parallel in the next verse, where Timothy is charged before or "in the sight of" "the elect angels", who I suggest refer to the eldership. For the Lord addresses them as the Angel of the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2.

*So that the rest may also be in fear-* Reproof in the sight of others is shame based, which we may be somewhat uncomfortable with. But shame was a hugely powerful component in first century Mediterranean psychology and sociology. And perhaps the "sin" in view was connected to this whole issue of good appearance in the sight of others- which pride to this day is the root of so many sins.

*5:21 I charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus-* If the elders were to be reproved in the sight of each other (:20), then who was Timothy as the 'boss' to be reproved in the sight of? The answer to that was 'In God's sight and that of Jesus- as well as of the Angels'.

*And the elect Angels-* The context in 1 Timothy warns against the Jewish obsession with effectively worshipping Angels. Paul wishes to refocus their attention on Angels in the correct sense. I suggested on :20 that this refers to the elders of the church. But they in turn were represented by literal Angels in Heaven. Hence the Angel of the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2 was [in the context] both a literal Angel and the human elder or group of elders in Ephesus which were represented by an Angel in Heaven. Scripture abounds with reference to this 'court of Heaven', in which individuals and situations on earth are reflected in Heaven, and Heaven's structure is reflected on earth. Angels represent the face and presence of God; the fact they are physically present in our lives means that we should live in a sense of awe and humility at the nearness of God to us. Often this presence of the Angel is used as a means of motivating us to higher endeavour for the Lord. Jacob conceived of his guardian Angel as "the fear of my father Isaac". This then is one of the ways we should fear God- to live in

constant respect and awareness of the Angel in our lives. Paul uses the idea of charging brethren "before the elect Angels that thou do these things without preferring one before another" (1 Tim. 5:21), as if to say that the physical presence of the ecclesia's representative Angels should inspire humility and obedience in the running of ecclesial affairs. In a judgment context, Paul charges Timothy before the angels of the elect, i.e. our guardian Angels- as if to say 'They are watching over you now, they will be there again at judgment and look back to your present life; so behave as you should as a man under God's judgment'.

The present nature of the judgment ought to powerfully motivate us. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things..." (1 Tim. 5:21 AV) is full of judgment language: before God, Christ and the Angels of the elect (i.e. our 'guardian Angels'). 'Before God' is the language of the judgment in Mt. 25:32; Lk. 21:36; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5. It's as if Paul was reminding Timothy that he was present before the judgment already, and should therefore be obedient. 2 Tim. 4:1 makes the link even more apparent: he charged Timothy to preach as being before (Gk.) both the Father and Son, who *will judge* the living and dead at His appearing. Because we effectively stand before the judgment seat now, therefore preach now, because preaching is one of those things that will be taken into account at the final judgment day (Lk. 12:8). As men being before the Lord's throne, who will be finally judged just as we are now being judged, therefore act according to the principles which we know will lead to acceptance then.

*That you observe these things*- The same word is used to Timothy in 2 Tim. 1:14, where he is again told to 'keep / observe these things' "by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us". The Holy Spirit or mind is an internal power, working "within", in order to empower obedience. But like Timothy, we must be exhorted to make full use of it rather than attempting to be obedient in our own strength.

*Without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality*- This was so hard for Timothy without the spiritual strengthening just alluded to. There were many different interest groups within the church, Jewish and pagan. Timothy the timid and young had to deal with older people who were teaching wrong things and shut them up. Timothy the afflicted with sexual lusts had to tell attractive young women to get married and have children. It would've been so very easy to act with partiality. He needed the psychological Holy Spirit strengthening mentioned under *Observe these things* in order to achieve this.

5:22 *Lay hands hastily on no one*- This is in the context of elders, who like Timothy were appointed by laying on of hands. He is being told not to appoint anyone hastily, in chapter 3 he has been warned to give deacons a probationary period before appointing them. We can infer that Timothy was liable to over hasty and naive decision making. Again, the fact his mission succeeded was and is a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit working within such a weak young man; see on :21 *Observe these things*.

*And do not participate in other's sins. Keep yourself pure*- It would be fair to say that the church at Ephesus, including its leadership, was in a very bad moral state. It would've been a big temptation for someone as weak minded as Timothy to justify bad behaviour because the other elders were doing it. Paul has just spoken of the "sin" of elders (:20), and the "others" of :20 would seem to be the other elders. So Timothy, the newly appointed elder, is being told not to participate in the sins of the other elders, but rather reprove them (:20). *Koinoneo*,

"participate", is from the common word family for 'fellowship'. We are not to fellowship the sins of others in the sense of not participating in them by doing them- Timothy was to "Keep yourself pure", with the emphasis on "yourself". Not fellowshipping other's sins clearly here doesn't mean 'cast them out of the church as individuals'. The fact the Lord positively addresses the eldership at Ephesus in Rev. 2 is a testament to the power of Timothy's example; he turned around that church by obedience to Paul's inspired advice and commands, rather than by throwing the offenders out of the church. Significantly, Paul doesn't tell Timothy to do that- despite the errors being serious indeed. As has been witnessed so many times, the problems aren't ultimately resolved by throwing people out and 'breaking fellowship' with them.

*5:23 No longer drink only water; instead use a little wine for your stomach's sake-* A theme of the Timothy correspondence is that Timothy is indeed obedient to Paul's inspired commands- and therefore ultimately his ministry succeeds. He was clearly aware that Paul was concerned that he might abuse alcohol; for Paul commands Timothy not to be given to much wine (3:3). It seems Timothy took this to the extreme and would not touch any alcohol. Such total abstinence was rare in first century society, so we can assume Timothy adopted this position from purely spiritual reasoning. Seeing alcohol was one of the most commonly available medicines for stomach and other ailments, this meant enduring much suffering. And Paul doesn't believe that stoic suffering for the sake of it is required; rather he wants Timothy to be active and useful in the church. And to that end he had been given the gift of the Spirit within him, i.e. in his mind, within his psychology (2 Tim. 1:14). But he had to allow himself to "be strengthened in the grace [gift- of the Spirit] that is in Christ" (2 Tim. 2:1), to "stir up the gift that is [with]in you" (2 Tim. 1:6). It was only due to doing this that [according to the Lord's later letter to the Ephesians] his ministry succeeded in the areas he was charged with [inspiring good works and shutting down false teachers].

*And your frequent infirmities-* We continue to get the picture of Timothy as weak both physically and in personality. To be given such a demanding, stressful commission, when stomach problems are often connected to nervous strain, means that his obedience and success is the more noteworthy. And it is a testimony to the internal, psychological power of the Holy Spirit within Timothy which empowered him mentally to pull through it.

Consider Timothy's weaknesses, both directly stated and implied:

- He first of all flunked the calling to remain in Ephesus (see on 1 Tim. 1:3)
- The commands concerning bishops were firstly Paul's commands to Timothy (see on 1 Tim. 3:14,15). The suggestion would be that Timothy needed to pay attention to things like not womanizing and being a solid family man
- Liable to be taken in by the Jewish myths pedalled by the old Jewish sisters (1 Tim. 4:7; 6:20)
- Easily discouraged by older people despising his youth, needing encouragement to set a good example (1 Tim. 4:12)
- Liable to neglect his gifts, not using his full spiritual potential (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6,14; 4:5 "make *full* proof of your ministry")

- Needing to take heed to himself (1 Tim. 4:16)
- Tempted to show partiality (1 Tim. 5:21) and to do the sins he saw other elders doing, being easily led (see on 1 Tim. 5:22)
- Frequently ill with stomach upsets (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul says that he himself had to work as a tentmaker in order to meet the needs of Timothy whilst Timothy was with him; he had to work because of Timothy's weakness, mentally or physically, because he was unable to work to make himself a living (see on Acts 20:34).
- Often in tears (2 Tim. 1:4)
- Being a fearful person rather than a positive one (2 Tim. 1:7)
- Fearful of suffering and having to identify with Paul from fear of persecution, easily embarrassed by association with Christ (2 Tim. 1:8), needing encouragement to "endure hardness" and have a disciplined mind and life (2 Tim. 2:3)
- Weak and needing to be stronger (2 Tim. 2:1)
- Easily caught up in secular things (2 Tim. 2:4) and to try to take spiritual shortcuts around the difficult inevitabilities of the true Christian life (2 Tim. 2:5)
- Needing to flee sexual lusts (2 Tim. 2:22), even though he was a married man with children, according to 1 Tim. 3. He had to be exhorted to "purity" (1 Tim. 4:12), the word carrying the specific idea of sexual purity. Paul commanded Timothy to be a man of one woman in chapter 3, and warns him to deal with the younger sisters "with all purity" (1 Tim. 5:2). Putting all this together, it would be fair to assume that Paul perceived a weakness in Timothy in this area. And yet all the same, Paul put him in to the position of eldership, with all the inter-personal contact with females which this required. But he warned him to beware of his weakness.
- Needing to be constantly reminded to "continue" and not give up, as he was near to doing (e.g. 2 Tim. 3:14).

All these issues could have been the result of being a 'rich kid'. 2 Tim. 3:16 says he was taught to read from the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). He was very blessed to have both a mother and grandmother to raise him; for female mortality was very high in the first century world. And the vast majority of the Roman empire was illiterate. So Timothy had advantages from birth which put him in a favoured minority. But this is no reason to despise him; he was made strong out of the weaknesses associated with his background.

Yet out of all this weakness, Timothy was made strong and according to the Lord's letter to the Ephesian church, he achieved his calling to stamp out false teaching, purify the eldership, and encourage the doing of "good works". Perhaps he did it so zealously that the church ended up lacking the *agape* love for which finally it was condemned. But so far as his obedience to his particular ministry goes- he succeeded. Out of such weakness.

5:24- see on 1 Cor. 4:5.

*Some men's sins are evident, preceding them to judgment-* The sins in view are surely those of the elders just mentioned (see on :20 and :22). Paul is saying that although some sins are open and need to be rebuked openly, Timothy should be aware that there are many other secret sinners around whose sins he may never know about in this life. He was not to judge the evident sinners on a basis which assumed everyone else was innocent and had no secret sins. And that is important to be aware of in church life today too. Any church discipline is only dealing with the evident sins. And those evident sins will in any case be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; any rebuke we may give is not therefore to be seen as equivalent to His judgment.

*But those of others follow them there later-* The Greek could equally mean 'Those of others accompany them there'. The idea being that some have sins which they quit, which go before them to judgment; other men are accompanied by their sins to judgment. The idea would be, in the context of open rebuke in :20, that the motive for bringing out another's sins to the light is so that those sins do not follow him to judgment later, but are openly made evident now.

*5:25 Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden-* The idea may be that in seeking to inculcate a culture of good works, Timothy should be aware that some good works are not "evident" not, but will not be hidden at the day of judgment. For then, according to the Lord's parable, He will openly go through the good deeds of the accepted; their feeding of the hungry, clothing the naked etc. Nothing then will be hidden. Timothy's mission of encouraging good works was recognized as successful by the Lord's letter to the Ephesian church in Rev. 2. But Paul is encouraging Timothy that it would be hard for him to judge his own success, because good works are not always evident.

However, the "otherwise" could mean '*bad* works'; the comfort being that secretly committed bad works will all the same be judged, and Timothy should not worry unduly about the bad works which he could not detect or find enough evidence to openly rebuke. Again, in this case, we see Timothy's tendency to overly worry.

For the righteous, our acceptability before God now is related to our acceptability with Him at judgment day. Our good works are manifest before we reach the judgment, which will manifest them again (1 Tim. 5:25). Thus David reflected on the experiences of his life: "Thou hast made my judgment; thou satest in the throne judging right... and he shall judge the world (at the second coming, through Christ, Acts 17:11) in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness" (Ps. 9:4,8 A.V.mg.). This shows the continuity between God's attitude to him in his mortal life, and God's attitude at the coming judgment. If Christ is glorified by us now, we will glorify Him in that day (2 Thess. 1:10,12).

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Let all that are under a yoke as slaves*- This reads rather strangely, because a slave was axiomatically under a [AV "the"] yoke. It appears to be saying the same thing twice. And there is no evidence that 'under the yoke' was a common term for slaves in New Testament times. Perhaps the idea is to remind slaves that actually they were under the yoke of Christ, which is "light" (Mt. 12:29,30). Whatever slavery we may feel under, perhaps in our working or domestic lives, we can remind ourselves that ultimately we are under slavery to the Lord Jesus, and His yoke is light. But Acts 15:10 and Gal. 5:1 speak of those under the yoke as being those in bondage to the Mosaic law. Perhaps Paul is addressing the delicate question of how a slave was to behave if he came to Christ but was under the yoke of Jewish law because his master was Jewish. This was likely a live issue in Ephesus because the church there began with Paul making converts from within the synagogue. He does not urge rebellion against those masters or sticking on points of principle; but rather to treat these masters as Christ and thus get higher than them (see next comment).

*Regard their own masters as worthy of all honour*- This is a clever word play. The Greek translated "regard" is elsewhere translated as the noun "Governor" (Mt. 2:6; Acts 7:10), "he that is chief" (Lk. 22:26), "chief speaker" (Acts 14:12), "chief men" (Acts 15:22). By regarding their masters as "worthy of honour" because they were to serve them as they served Christ- who alone is the One "worthy of all honour"- they were effectively masters of their masters. It recalls the spirit of the Lord's command to offer to take a Roman soldier's bags another mile when asked. Those treated as low become the high by their Christian attitude. Let's remember that many slaves were abused by their masters; not even their bodies belonged to themselves. Sexual abuse was common. Yet never does Paul tell slaves to refuse the sexual demands of their masters. And slaves, according to contemporary references to Christianity, formed a large percentage of Christian congregations. This is not to say that the moral teaching of Christianity in this regard was not to be taken seriously- to refuse such demands and face the consequences was clearly the highest level to be taken by a Christian slave. But Paul in this matter surely makes a concession to human weakness and the nature of human situations, which the letter of the law could never accommodate. The way of Christ however elevates the drudgery of slavery and dead end situations, of the type faced today by many in effective slavery to minimum wage employment, abusive employers or very claustrophobic, limited domestic situations.

*So that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled*- "Reviled" or "blasphemed" is exactly what the pagans in Ephesus had accused Paul of doing to Diana (Acts 19:37 s.w.). Clearly the pagan opposition were looking for every opportunity and reason to do the same back to the God of the Christians, whose name they carried by baptism. Paul makes an assumption here, in warning believing slaves to act faithfully before their unbelieving masters, lest the doctrines of God be blasphemed by them. Paul takes it as read that the slave would have taught the doctrines of the faith to his master, and therefore any misbehaviour by him would cause those teachings to be mocked. He assumed that radical preaching would be going on. And again in Tit. 2:5, he writes that wives should behave orderly so that "the word of God be not blasphemed". He assumes that all believing men and women would be preachers of the word, yet if the wives were disorderly in their behaviour they would bring mockery upon the message preached. Paul so often in writing to Timothy expresses concern about the disrepute possible in the eyes of outsiders. Clearly there was a conscious effort to destroy the church in Ephesus through legal procedures, and so care had to be taken not to give genuine reasons for this to happen. Further, Paul had entrusted Timothy with a teaching

ministry, and bad behaviour amongst the converts would mean that his teaching would be "reviled". The message preached was therefore backed up by the behaviour of those who believed it. Conversions are not often won by the simple attraction of the message of itself; that word is made flesh in the eyes of the world by those who believe it. "The teaching" would be reviled if those hearing it behaved in a way which invited mockery. So the teaching and the example of the believers of that teaching are parallel.

*6:2 And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brothers-* Why should a Christian slave despise his believing master? Perhaps because slavery was so obviously wrong; a Christian master should not participate in the style of slavery then practiced. The master should release his slave- because that is just the language used of what Jesus did to all in Him. He released us from slavery, redeeming us from it, paying the price of manumission whereby a person could be bought out of slavery. But for whatever reason, these believing masters hadn't responded as they might. The Lord had warned His followers to "despise not" the 'little ones' (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase here in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as 'little ones', with all the patience this would require. The command is not to despise them; but we might think that the dominant emotion in this case would be anger. Yet Paul focuses on not despising because his point is that we must respect others because of their status in Christ; every believer in Him should be respected by us. We must ask whether our churches are places of respect, or whether various strata of respect and acceptance have robbed them of the spirit of mutual respect which ought to characterize the communal life of God's people.

*But rather serve them because those whom they are serving are believers and beloved-* The reference to "beloved" invites connection to Christ who is "the beloved"; just as unbelieving masters were to be given "all honour", i.e. served as Christ, to whom alone "all honour" is due. In any difficult relationship with a believer, however abusive to us we consider them to have been, no matter how much better we feel they ought to be able to do in their relationship with us, let us remember that 'God loves this person'. They are beloved. So much so that He gave His only begotten Son for them. Some MSS, followed by the AV, add here: "Partakers of the benefit", literally, 'partakers in the good deed', referring surely to the cross. The Lord died not only for me. But for those who name His Name whom I consider to have abused me. We cannot condemn another believer, so we are to presume their acceptance by the Lord. This will mean that they have partaken in the benefits of His death, just as we have. This is so easy to write, but it was equally difficult for first century Christian slaves being abused by their Christian masters.

*Teach and exhort these things-* The idea is of comfort, and the message to abused slaves was indeed a comfort.

*6:3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine-* Paul's opening charge to Timothy at Ephesus was to stop false teaching (1:3). From those who taught different teaching, Paul says that Timothy is to "withdraw thyself" (:5 AV- although omitted in some MSS and NEV). Timothy was to distance himself from such teachers, which is equivalent in 1:3 to not allowing them the platform. This little phrase "withdraw thyself" has been much abused in closed table communities to mean that we are to withdraw ourselves from anyone who differs from us on some matter of understanding or practice. But the context here, and the parallel with 1:3, is that the persons in view should not be allowed to teach. Who takes bread and wine is one

issue, and does not ultimately affect anyone much. But who is allowed to teach is another issue altogether. The "different doctrine" or teaching references the teaching about the possibilities for slaves in :1 and :2. We can imagine that the teachers were also materially wealthy and may have been those referred to as the "believing masters". We can assume that they would have been tempted to not agree with the teaching of :1 and :2, and not to teach it- despite the simple command at the end of :2 to teach these things.

*And consents not to sound words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ-* The teaching in view is that about slaves and masters in :1 and :2. To disagree with what Paul has said would be to disagree with the words of the Lord Jesus. This could be because Paul's inspired words were effectively the words of the Lord Jesus, although in that case we wonder why the reference is to the words of Jesus rather than of God. Or Paul may mean that the teaching he had just given was a repetition of the essence of the *logos*, the essential idea, of the Lord Jesus. He may not have been quoting recorded words of the Lord Jesus (although maybe he is alluding to words of Jesus which were then well known but were unrecorded in the Gospels)- but in any case, Paul was repeating the *logos*, the word or essential ideas, of the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

*And to the doctrine which shows reverence towards God-* The teaching or doctrine in view is that of :1 and :2 which have spoken of the need not to bring God's Name to disrepute; and to reverence / respect people because God is working through them and they in a sense represent Him. But "reverence towards God" is the word for "Godliness" which often occurs in 1 Timothy; and it occurs in this context in :5, where these alternative teachers are portrayed as men teaching "that reverence towards God ["Godliness"] is a way of gain". They didn't want to teach things like those in :1 and :2 because they used their teaching as a way of gain. So far in this exposition I have suggested that there were female teachers in the church who were acting like the female mediators of the Diana cult, and taking money for their sexual services to brothers in Christ by getting money from the church for their services under the front of the widows' support fund. And here we find Timothy again being told to remove some from teaching- and again money is involved. These people were using 'Godliness' to get gain for themselves and were abusing their teaching ministry to that end. It sounds like the same group. It was doubtless with this money that the women could dress themselves up with such expensive and provocative clothing in 2:9,10.

*6:4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words-* This is the warning of chapter 1 repeated now at the end of this first letter. Those who 'know nothing' are those of 1:7: "They neither understand what they say, nor what they confidently affirm". They did of course know something theoretically, for they were teachers. But in real spiritual essence, they knew nothing. They were "bereft of the truth" (:5), which is Jesus and the great, real salvation in Him. All else is insignificant. The obsession with disputing and arguing about words frankly sounds like elements of many small time Protestant groups in their neo-Judaism. And the fruit of that attitude is the same- envy, strife and division. "Obsessed" translates a word meaning 'to be sick', in the sense of vomiting. That is what all the disputes and arguments amount to- vomit. The only time Paul uses the term 'arguments over words' again is in 2 Tim. 2:14, where Timothy is told that he must still stamp out this attitude. I have mentioned several times that the Lord's assessment of the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2 is such that we can conclude Timothy's charge was carried out successfully by him; for they are then commended for not having false teaching. But the way Paul has to repeat these charges about not allowing false teachers suggests that this was not so easily achieved;



in the gap between the two letters, Timothy had not made total progress. His final success is therefore the more noteworthy and commendable.

*From which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions-* We see here the importance of having a good teaching ministry. The congregation become this way according to the kind of teaching they are receiving.

*6:5 Wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth-* The word can mean 'meddlings' and is used about being a busybody. Although a different word is used, this is the very accusation made about the female false teachers of 5:13. Again we get the impression that the same group of teachers are in view; the women and their male supporters, teaching a heady mixture of Jewish and pagan [Diana cult] heresy.

*Who suppose that reverence towards God is a way of gain-* See on :3 *To the doctrine.*

Some MSS and AV add "From such withdraw thyself". See on :3.

*6:6 But reverence towards God with contentment is great gain-* In chapter 2 and elsewhere, Paul urges the false teachers to settle down into Christian family life and where appropriate, have children. We note that he doesn't tell Timothy to cast these people out of the church. He wants their salvation. And from personal experience I would tend to think that the "Godliness with contentment" which is "great gain" is a reference to a Christ-centered family life which is not focused upon getting personal wealth and success nor leadership in the church.

*6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out-* This is a quote from Seneca, contemporary with Paul. The Bible is full of allusions to contemporary literature and wisdom, approving some of the ideas and deconstructing others. Some of the Bible's most difficult passages are likely difficult to our eyes because they are alluding to material we are unaware of. For the Bible is written *for* us but not directly *to* us in our generation. The fact we cannot take anything material with us is proof enough that any amassing of personal wealth is for this life only. The deception of wealth is the idea of permanent ownership of property, in various forms. But the permanence is only until death. The opening "for" connects with the idea of 'gain'. Overall in life, we gain nothing. We start and finish with nothing, so why stress about 'gaining' as we pass through the life process. Ps. 49:17 may be in view: "For when he (the rich man) dieth, he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him". In saying this, Paul is alluding to how Job faced up to the reality of our condition by saying that we entered this world naked and return naked (Job 1:21). Paul is saying that we are all in Job's position, facing up to the loss of all things, and should count it a blessing to have even clothing. We need not pass through Job's experience if we learn the theory. Solomon says the same in Ecc. 5:15, but only after passing through the wealth experience. It is our wisdom to absorb this principle without having to be dragged through a hedge backwards to make us realize its truth.

*6:8 But having food and covering we shall be content-* The reference may be to God's provision of these two things, food and clothing, to Israel in the wilderness. Their journey towards the promised land is a common prototype of our path towards the Kingdom. Note that there is no promise of a stable place to live; Paul himself had "no certain dwelling place" and neither did Israel in the wilderness. So much angst goes with the question of property

ownership. But the promise we can take comfort from is that we ourselves shall always be provided with food and clothing.

6:9- see on Lk. 5:7.

*But they that are intent on being rich-* Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

*Fall into a temptation and a snare-* Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). He mentions the snare of the devil again in 2 Tim. 2:26. In the immediate application, the 'devil' referred to the enemy of the church which surrounded them in Ephesus- a combination of Jewish and pagan powers who were eager to trap the Christians by accusations regarding financial and moral matters in order to close down the church. The clear influence of the Jewish Eve cult and the pagan Diana cult indicates that this snare was very real. Yet the Ephesian church survived, for the Lord wrote a letter to them in Rev. 2. Again we sense that Timothy's difficult ministry was successful, for despite all this surrounding desire to snare and strangle the church to death, it survived.

The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome of the devil, our inherent sin which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The unexpectedness of the destruction should set us thinking: surely the implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with copious OT references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire of wealth is the equivalent of OT idolatry. But there is another, even more telling Biblical usage of the "snare". The day of the Lord will be a snare to the unsuspecting worldling, who will suddenly find that the Lord has come and destroyed him (Is. 8:14; 24:17,18; Jer. 50:24; Lk. 21:35). Yet the materialistic believer falls into the snare of riches here and now. Surely the point is that our attitude to riches is a preview of the judgment; the materialistic believer has condemned himself, right now. Not only does such a man fall into the devil's snare, but he pierces himself through with sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10), which is the language of crucifixion. This connection suggests a powerful logic. We face a cross either way; either the cross of the Lord Jesus, with the matchless eternity it heralds; or the cross, the twisting, unsatisfied pain of a life devoted to material advancement, which finally results in the darkness of rejection.

*And many foolish and hurtful lusts-* The lust for wealth spawns many other lusts, for the things which can be done with wealth or for things which are thought to lead to wealth. Hence :10 says that the desire to be wealthy is the root of all evil.

*Which drown men-* The word is only elsewhere used about the disciples almost drowning because they overloaded their boats with fish (Lk. 5:7); which Paul saw, through this allusion, as rooted in a desire to be wealthy. The fish were given by the Lord, all the same; He could give or not give them, but by giving them, the disciples almost drowned.

*In destruction and condemnation-* Quite simply, men will be condemned at the last day because they wanted to be rich in this life. This is a sober warning.

6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil-* We could read the "all" literally, as if all evil can be traced back to a love of wealth. Or we can read these "kinds of evil" as referring to the "many foolish and hurtful lusts" of :9 which arise directly or indirectly from a desire for wealth. In the context of Ephesus, Paul's reference to love of wealth would apply to the women / sisters receiving money for sexual services to brothers, taken under cover of spirituality from the widows' relief fund. "Love of money" is literally 'love of silver'. Again in the context of Ephesus, we recall that the images of Diana were made of silver; and it was the guild of silversmiths who raised the persecution against the early church in Ephesus and sought to have Christianity banned. Their literal love of silver led them to "all kinds of evil". But those materialistic ones *within* the church were in essence no better than those in the world outside who were persecuting them.

*Which some, by seeking for, have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows-* The Greek translated "pierced themselves through" is related to the verb 'to crucify'. We are asked to crucify ourselves, to give up the brief materialism of this life. Yet if we refuse to do this, we still pierce ourselves through, we crucify ourselves, with the pain which comes from a mind dedicated to materialism and self-fulfilment, a life devoted to reaching the end of a rainbow. So what is the logical thing to do? It's crucifixion either way. The idea of piercing self through with sorrow is actually a direct quote from the LXX of 1 Kings 21:27, where Ahab was pierced with sorrow as a result of his coveting of Naboth's vineyard. And yet when Naboth was dead, Ahab tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, in sorrow for what he had done (1 Kings 21:16 LXX- omitted in the AV); but these very words are used in describing how when Ahab heard the words of his condemnation, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth (21:27). His sin brought him to tear his clothes, just as he did when his condemnation was pronounced. In his seeking for happiness he pierced himself through with the sorrow of condemnation. Quite simply, people who are bent on getting wealthy are not happy. Wealth

6:11 *But you, o man of God, flee these material things-* The call to flee suggests weak minded Timothy was tempted by material things.

*And instead pursue after righteousness-* There must always be something positive in place if we decide to flee sin. The fleeing from must become a pursuing after. Paul repeats this idea in 2 Tim. 2:22- flee youthful [sexual] lusts and [instead] follow after the same positive attributes.

*Reverence towards God, faith, love, patience, meekness-* To aspire to meekness is the acme of spiritual endeavour.

6:12- see on 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Lk. 13:24.

*Fight the good fight of the faith-* In 2 Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to accept the disciplined life of a soldier, as if Timothy was naturally weak minded and not well disciplined; we recall the command to him to have his children more firmly in order in chapter 3. Paul uses the same words in saying that he has "fought a good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7), unashamedly and consciously setting himself up to Timothy as an example. This is possible to do, without pride and any self affection, if truly we live in integrity before God and man.

*Lay hold on the everlasting life-* We can experience eternal life by starting to live now how we shall eternally live. Hence the Lord in John's Gospel speaks of having eternal life now. Paul goes on to write of how the wealthy can lay hold on everlasting life (:19 s.w.) by giving away their wealth in the Lord's service. But Timothy was to be their example of laying hold on the Kingdom life right now. We are frequently spoken of as having been 'laid hold of' by the Lord; and we are to respond by laying hold of the things of the Kingdom as firmly as He has taken a grip upon our lives.

*Whereunto you were called and did confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses-* The confession was perhaps related to confessing that we have been called to eternal life, and have taken hold of that offer and will try to live that eternal life now. This was such a fundamental idea that it was part of some unrecorded "good confession" which was presumably declared by baptismal candidates (s.w. Rom. 10:9,10 "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus... confession is made unto salvation"; "the obedience of your confession" of the Faith, 2 Cor. 9:13). We note that such materials have not been preserved for us- so that we would not slavishly hold to any form of words. For a confession of faith by its nature is personal and unique. Yet the confession before witnesses may not necessarily refer to Timothy's baptism, but rather to the time when the elders, the "many witnesses", laid hands on him to grant him the Holy Spirit for his ministry (4:14). The Greek for 'confess' means essentially 'to agree'; the agreement was therefore regarding the reality of the hope of eternal life, and Timothy's promise to live that eternal life now and fight for the faith. The "good fight" he was to fight connects with the *good* confession he had made.

6:13 *I urge you in the sight of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate made the good confession-* Timothy's confession was one of faith and commitment to the life and work appropriate to the belief that God really will give life to all in His Son. And the essence of that confession of devotion and faith in the life to come was seen in the Lord's confession before Pilate. In Mt. 27:11 we read that Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "Thou sayest". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control and intense focus of meaning upon that word- that Pilate had said truly in saying that Jesus was a King who would reign in God's Kingdom. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession". You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose and faith towards the coming Kingdom and eternal life... was just so great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. And as He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

6:14 *Keep the commandment without stain*- Which charge or commandment? Presumably here at the end of the letter, Paul is summarizing and referring back to his opening charge to Timothy to remove false teachers and inculcate good works, with love as the intended end result (1:3-5). Yet in the immediate context, the charge / commandment might be that to which Timothy had given a good confession (:12); which would suggest his 'good confession' was not at his baptism but rather in agreement to the commission given him to care for Ephesus. The sentence as it stands can be read two ways- either the commandment itself was to unstained; or Timothy was to keep the commandment without stain. The question is whether "without stain" refers to the subject or object of the sentence, and in my judgment of the Greek it refers to keeping the commandment itself unstained- until the Lord's return. This could only be achieved by handing on the commandment / charge to maintain pure doctrine to faithful men of the next generation (2 Timothy 2:2). If Paul meant that Timothy was to keep the commandment until the Lord returned, then it would mean that Paul expected the Lord's coming to be within Timothy's lifetime. And indeed Paul does write like that and in other places he does appear to make that assumption- as we all should live in the hopeful expectation of the Lord's imminent return.

*Without reproach*- Timothy as the bishop at Ephesus was to be without reproach (3:2). This strengthens the impression that "the commandment" was the command to Timothy to take care of Ephesus.

*Until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*- See on :14 *Keep the commandment*.

6:15 *In due time He shall reveal him, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*- Caesar was seen as king of many subject kings, Lord of many conquered and inferior lords. In this we see the radical challenge of 1 Tim. 6:15,16: that Jesus Christ is the *only* potentate, the Lord of Lords, the King of all Kings. The RV margin brings out the Greek even more radically: "them that rule as lords"- those who think they are lords when compared to the Lord Jesus they are nothing. Many of the terms used in relation to Caesar worship are deliberately used in the New Testament and redefined in an exclusive Christian context, setting the Christian view of them up against any other use of them, and insisting upon it as the only valid meaning of the term. Thus '*evangelion*' was a well-known concept. It meant the good news of victory, and the corresponding duty to make thank and praise offerings for it. The Imperial Cult used the word for announcing Caesar's victories, his birthdays, his accession to power, his granting of *salvation* to his people... Mark's Gospel especially uses the word *evangelion* in a way which sets it up in contrast to the way it was used in the Imperial Cult. It is the good news of the birth, victory, resurrection and Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, and the *evangelion* calls men and women to make self-sacrifice in response to it. It has been noted that "King of kings and Lord of lords", along with the surrounding couplets, are rhythmical. They are likely a quotation from some early Christian liturgy- a hymn or prayer. This means that such radical challenge of the Caesar cult and the Roman empire would have been a regular part of church life; just as we should be constantly aware of our radical collision course with the spirit of this world.

When Paul exalts that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, this isn't just some literary flourish. It is embedded within a context of telling the believers to quit materialism, indeed to flee from its snare. 1 Tim. 6:6-14 concern this; and then there is the passage about Christ's exaltation (:15,16), and then a continued plea to share riches rather than build them up (:17-19). Because He is Lord of all, we should quit our materialism and sense of self-ownership. For we are His, and all we have

is for His service too. And the principle of His being Lord affects every aspect of our spirituality. Dennis Gillet truly observed [in *The Genius Of Discipleship*]: "Mastery is gained by crowning the Master as Lord and King".

6:16 See on Ex. 32:30-32.

*Who only has immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable-* This may be a final swipe at the Diana cult, which taught there were thousands of immortal gods; and of course they lived in the Artemisian temple at Ephesus, rather than "dwelling in light unapproachable". And it is also for sure a swipe at the imperial cult, which claimed that many of the dead emperors of Rome had been deified and were now immortal.

*Whom no one has seen, nor can see. To whom be honour and power eternal. Amen-* This likewise is a contrast between the one true God, and the pathetic idea of a god who is a visible idol like the Diana statue or the silver images made of her.

6:17 *Instruct those that are rich in this present world-* The connection between wealth and world continues the theme of :7. We come into this world naked and exit naked. Any wealth is only for this present world- and we who have the sure hope of eternity are looking for the world to come.

*That they are not proud, nor have their hope set on the uncertain riches; but instead on God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy-* The same Greek phrase for "not proud", "be not high minded", is used in Rom. 11:20 about those who think they are spiritually superior to others. And so perhaps the idea was that the wealthy liked to think their wealth was a result of their spirituality, and therefore they despised the poorer brethren. And Paul directly warns against any such thinking, the like of which is seen so much in Pentecostal circles. The rich fool was not read by Paul as referring to some Hollywood millionaire; he saw that character as being in the ecclesia (Mt. 19:21 = 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

6:18 *Let the rich do good, that they be rich in good works-* The true wealth is in giving away rather than accumulating.

*Ready to distribute-* "Ready" suggests Paul is not envisaging selling all and giving away. The rich should be "ready" to share, rather than looking for reasons not to.

*Willing to communicate-* Literally, 'to fellowship'. Fellowship is not an on paper agreement based on dry theology. Fellowship in practice means sharing wealth with others.

6:19 *Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation-* The Spirit describes our final redemption as our "soul" and "spirit" being "saved"; our innermost being, our essential spiritual personality, who we *really* are in spiritual terms, will as it were be immortalized (1 Pet. 1:9; 1 Cor. 5:5). This means that our spiritual development in this life is directly proportional to the type of person we will be *for evermore*. If, for example, we develop a generous spirit now, this is "a good foundation" for our future spiritual experience (1 Tim. 6:19). This is a stupendous conception, and the ultimate fillip to getting serious about our very personal spiritual development. Our mortal bodies will be changed to immortal, Spirit nature bodies according to the Spirit which *now* dwells in us (Rom. 8:11 Gk.). The attitude

which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46). So the wealthy who give their wealth away are not buying a place in the Kingdom for themselves, but who they eternally will be shall eternally reflect the generous character they developed in this life. In this sense they have 'laid hold' on the eternal life; they have begun to live the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

*Against the time to come*- They have 'laid up in store for themselves' spiritually, in that the future day ["time to come"] which in is subconsciously in the mind of all savers, hoarders and folk rich and poor... is going to be revealed as the day of judgment. Those who have given away wealth [so that they are left at a real minus, and not simply being generous in ways they wouldn't notice]... have laid up a store of wealth for *that* day.

*That they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed*- God richly gives things to *all of us*, Paul says; and by our being "liberal and generous [we] thus lay up for [ourselves] a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of the life which is life indeed". "The life which is life indeed" is not the lower middle class striving-for-security life of slowly saving and occasionally splashing out on something, building, building up, watching the interest slowly grow, worrying about inflation and the possible need for a new boiler or roof... Much as those things are all part of our human experience in this age, they're not "the life which is life indeed". That life begins now, in a counter-instinctive going against the grain of being generous.

6:20 *O Timothy, guard*- We sense from Paul's emotional appeal that Paul really feared Timothy was not going to hold on, and would allow his weaknesses of character to dominate, with the result that the truth of Christ would be lost in Ephesus. The Lord's letter to the Ephesians some time later shows that Timothy did hold on and discharged his commission. The only problem was that all the emphasis on good works and maintaining purity of teaching was achieved without *agape* love- and this was why the Ephesian church was finally reprimanded. But from the point of view of Timothy's calling and mission- he fulfilled it, and out of weakness was made strong.

*That which was committed to you*- Paul urges Timothy a while later to guard or keep what was committed to him, i.e. the charge of 1:3,4 of maintaining true teaching and good works in Ephesus, "by the power of the Holy Spirit which dwells within us" (2 Tim. 1:14). Given Timothy's weaknesses of personality, the only way he could have achieved his calling was by internal psychological strengthening. And that is exactly what the Holy Spirit / mind "which dwells *within* us" is all about. It works within the human mind. The ability to do miracles etc. was not in view. And Paul uses the same idea about keeping what the Lord committed to us in saying that the Lord is able to guard / keep what *we* have committed *to Him* (2 Tim. 1:12). He has committed His work to us to do, and we have committed our lives to Him. We have undertaken to be totally taken up with His work, and thus we have staked our entire lives and future on His existence and real working with us. There is thus an indescribable mutuality between God and man if we are committed to what He has committed to us.

*Turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of false knowledge*- Again we see a connection with the opening of the letter, where Paul has noted that some have 'turned away' unto vain ideas; and Paul urges Timothy to likewise 'turn away' these ideas, perhaps in practice by not granting a platform to those teaching them. The idea is not just that Timothy personally should turn away from such babblings, but should himself turn those babblings away- by stopping them being taught, according to his charge in 1:3,4. Again we note that

Timothy was being asked to stem a tide which the prophetic word had said would not be turned away- for in the last days, men would depart from the faith (4:1), and be turned away unto fables (2 Tim. 4:4). But Timothy was asked to bravely still battle that tide of apparent inevitability. Just as Moses prayed for the destruction of Israel not to happen. And it succeeded; for the Lord's summary of the Ephesian church in Rev. 2 stated that they were doctrinally intact. "False knowledge" is *gnosis*, possibly a reference to incipient Gnosticism, but more likely a criticism of the mentality which is alive and well to this day in the internet generation: 'I know something you don't, I've got access to sources you don't have access to... so do what I say'. The immediate reference would have been to the Jewish fables taught by the old Jewish women, and the nonsense connected with the cults of Eve and Diana which Timothy had to engage in chapter 2.

6:21 *Which some professing*- The female false teachers of 2:10 had 'professed Godliness' at their baptismal confession; and yet it seems they had also made some profession / confession to the Diana cult, and had seriously erred from the Christian faith as a result.

*Have erred concerning the faith*- Another connection with the opening section of the letter, where Paul notes that some have 'swerved' (1:6). "The faith" is a path, a road with an end point- spiritual mindedness, the imitation of Christ, resulting in eternity in God's Kingdom united with Christ. Smart ideas, philosophies, Jewish fables etc. all cause people to swerve from that path. 2 Tim. 2:18 uses the same word in giving concrete examples of those who have 'erred' by saying that the resurrection has already come- first century form of the Preterist heresy which is rife today. Those who hold false doctrines have "missed the mark concerning the faith" (1 Tim. 6:21 RVmg.). The true faith has an aim, a mark to which it aims. A false 'faith' misses that aim. "Profane and vain babblings... increase unto more ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:16)- they precipitate a downward spiral of practical behaviour.

*Grace be with you*- The word *charis* means literally 'the gift', and refers surely to the internal gift of Holy Spirit strengthening commented on under :20 *Guard that...*



## CHAPTER 1

*1:1 Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus-* Paul begins by saying he has been called to be a sent out one, and then a few verses later backs it up by repeating that he was appointed to be an apostle (1:11). The same pattern is to be seen in 1 Timothy; the opening verse speaks likewise of how he is an apostle (1 Tim. 1:1), and then 1 Tim. 2:7 says he was indeed appointed as an apostle. Perhaps Timothy was beginning to doubt Paul's credentials, and this was a factor in Timothy's lack of full devotion to his ministry? Or perhaps Paul is urging Timothy to follow his own example of commitment to the calling he had received. For the letters to Timothy suggest that Timothy needed to be stirred up to continue responding to the calling received.

*Through the will of God-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*According to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus-* The promise of life is referred to in 1 Tim. 4:8 as concerning both life in Christ now, and the eternal form of that same life which is yet to come. Likewise in John's writings, eternal life is the promise we have (1 Jn. 2:25), and also our present experience. We have the eternal life in that we through the spirit of Christ can live now the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

*1:2 To Timothy, my beloved child. Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord-* Although Paul had not converted nor baptized Timothy, he had played a huge formative part in his spiritual life, to the extent he could address him as his child in the faith. This is the significance of the relationships we can build up now through our spiritual interaction with and efforts for each other. Paul's increasing perception of sinfulness is shown by the way in which in his earlier letters he uses the greeting "Grace and peace"; but in Timothy and Titus, his last letters: "Grace, mercy, and peace...". He saw the overriding, crucial importance of God's grace and mercy, and he wished this on all his brethren.

1:3- see on Rom. 8:16; 1 Jn. 3:18.

*I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience, how unceasing is my remembrance of you in my prayers, night and day-* How could Paul "thank God" that he

remembered Timothy in prayer? "Thank" here translates *charis*, the usual word for gift or grace. Paul expresses his thanks in this way because he wishes to acknowledge that his feelings for Timothy are maintained by God's grace, the gift of the Spirit within. Perhaps Paul is here alluding to Anna as his model for continual thanksgiving (Lk. 2:37 = 1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3). The language of constant prayer cannot mean that we are literally on our knees 24/7. It refers rather to how our spirit and His are united. It speaks of an incredible personal bonding in prayer between the Creator and each, specific one of His creatures. Only through our will, our essential person and spirit, becoming united with God's can it be possible to live a life of prayer, whereby we are praying without ceasing, constantly, every moment (Rom. 1:9; 12:12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 5:17; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2:13; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3). Our life, our person, our spirit, our being, is read as a prayer to God.

Paul claims that the Jewish forefathers served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3 NIV). Yet the Jewish fathers, dear Jacob particularly, must have had plenty of twinges of guilt over their years. Indeed, all the Jewish fathers had a bad 'conscience' because of their sins (Heb. 9:9; 10:2). Surely Paul must mean that they had such a firm faith in forgiveness that *in God's eyes* they had a pure conscience.

*1:4 Longing to see you, remembering your tears, wanting to be filled with joy for you-* The tear stained cheeks of Timothy were such a haunting memory for Paul because he perceived Timothy's weakness and his heart bled for his protégé. Timothy had not attained the Christian joy which Paul knew was potentially possible for him; and he so wished the spiritual growth of Timothy in this respect. We too should long for the spiritual maturity of others; to not feel that way is to be spiritually selfish. Being "filled with joy" is an expression used specifically about the filling of a believer with joy as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit (Jn. 15:11; 16:24; Acts 13:52; Rom. 15:13). Paul wished for Timothy to open himself up more to the work of the Spirit, and this would lead to Paul feeling that fullness of joy in Timothy within himself. As explained more fully on 1 Cor. 5:4, the Spirit in Paul found connection with the Spirit in other believers, thereby creating "the fellowship of the Spirit". In this way, the joy of Timothy would be Paul's joy, just as the joy of Titus was his joy (see on 2 Cor. 7:13).

*1:5 I am often reminded of the sincere faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice; and I am persuaded dwells in you also-* Faith can become just vague hope for something better, rather than a "confident assurance", a seeing of the unseen. Paul's reference to "unfeigned faith" (1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5 AV) as the goal of personal and ecclesial life would suggest that he realized the temptation to have a fake, feigned faith. See on Jn. 8:30. The faith "in [within] you" connects with the gift "in you" (:6).

*1:6 Because of this I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands-* Because Paul knew that Timothy had faith (:5), he encouraged him to use the gift of the Spirit within him to greater potential. That same gift had been given to the Corinthians, as they are often reminded, but they were still "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). Likewise Timothy is being urged to use to the full the potential created by the Spirit gift within him. That gift or *charisma* was "in you", within Timothy, and refers to the same Spirit gift in the heart which is given to all believers. Yet that gift could be given multiple times; not just at baptism, but also through the laying on of hands of believers like Paul.

*1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and a disciplined mind-* The "us" suggests this is a general reference to the gift of the Spirit to all believers, and

doesn't reference any specific gift given only to Timothy. Likewise :14 speaks of the gift of the Spirit "which dwells in *us*". The reference is to an internal gift, within us, and not to miraculous gifts. See notes to this effect on :4,5 and 6. The same words for 'giving' and 'Spirit' are found in describing the gift of the Spirit given at baptism (Acts 5:32; 8:18). They are likewise found in Rom. 5:5, which speaks of God's love being "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us". The domain of operation of this Spirit gift is clearly within the human heart or mind. Likewise the same words for gift and Spirit are found in 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5: "Who has sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit *in our hearts*". This gift can be given at points after baptism- hence Paul prayed for the baptized Ephesians that God would "Give you... to be strengthened with might by His Spirit *in the inner man*" (Eph. 3:16). The gift of the Spirit (1 Thess. 4:8) results in our internal awareness, *within us*, that the Father and Son are abiding with us and we in them (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13).

"Because you are sons (already born again through response to the Gospel), God has *sent forth* the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). We become sons of God by birth of the Spirit as promised in the word of the Gospel (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18), and therefore God sends this Spirit of Sonship into our hearts. Notice that the prerogative in this is with God, not us. Likewise Paul prayed that God "may *give* unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:17,18). The gift of the Spirit didn't mean that Timothy would not be fearful, or be loving and disciplined. But he, as all of us, had been given that Spirit. It is for us to allow the path of the Spirit in transforming our spirit; and Timothy's fearfulness and lack of mental power meant that he had not let the Spirit act as he could have done. Likewise the Corinthians were given these Spirit gifts but remained "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); they failed to allow the Spirit gift to work within them.

1:8- see on Rom. 1:16.

*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but suffer hardship for the gospel according to the power of God-* The possession of the Spirit within us is an earnest or guarantee of the Lord's abiding with us and of our future salvation. Therefore Timothy was to be unashamed of testifying for the Lord Jesus and suffering because of it. According to the power / spirit of God, the gift within, Timothy was to not be ashamed but "suffer hardship". His weak nature seems to have found "hardship" hard to endure, for the word is used repeatedly (2:3,9; 4:5). Clearly the Lord chooses those who are least humanly qualified for the job required; but the example of Timothy is that he was strengthened through the Spirit to achieve what was so hard for him. His sense of 'shame' was surely before the church- for he was called to take in hand a belligerent and forceful opposition in the Ephesian church. So being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

Paul was clearly frustrated by imprisonment, and laments his bonds and limitations. But he saw himself as the Lord's prisoner; even the most oppressive of circumstances are under His control and can be endured 'as unto Him'.

1:9- see on Eph. 2:6.

*Who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal-* The allusion is to the salvation of Israel out of Egypt- although they were still able to fall from that 'saved' position. Natural Israel was called out of Egypt by their Red Sea baptism to be "a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). After our baptism, the members of spiritual Israel likewise receive "a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9). After baptism we "become slaves of... holiness" (Rom. 6:19,22 and context). Our calling is according to God's purpose- the same words and argument as used in Rom. 8:28; 9:11. Paul there cites the whole concept of calling as the great example of grace. The fact God's "purpose" means some are called and some aren't is a parade of grace (Rom. 9:11). Instead of getting caught up on the imponderables about those who are not called, the fact we have been called and are in God's purpose should be read as His grace being poured out upon us. We know we are called because without doubt we have heard the call to the Kingdom. But this calling was in fact given to us in Christ from infinity- "before times eternal". This is mind-blowing- that God's plan to save us was given for us not just at the creation of the world, but from some infinite point before time existed. To say 'from the beginning' would be to miss the wonder of it.

*1:10 But has now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel-* The plan to save us which was made from infinity 'back' (see on :9) was actualized by the death of the Lord Jesus. What had been for so long in God's mind for us has now been revealed to us. It would be tragic indeed to shrug it all off as unimportant or exaggerated in wonder. There is no immortality for any of us apart from "through the Gospel"; it was the Lord Jesus who brought our immortality to the light of real possibility. This not only means that there is no immortal soul; our immortality, on a personal level, is the context of :9. And this plan from infinite time (:9) had as it were been in the dark, but in Christ, it was brought out into the light of day. The "appearing of our Saviour" refers both to His appearing to abolish death on the cross, and also to His appearance in glory at the last day, when in reality death shall be abolished. This is the "that day" referenced in :12.

Paul says that Jesus has "abolished death" in that death as the world has to face it, final and total death, does not happen to us in Christ. This is why those who truly follow the Lord will never taste of death (Jn. 8:51,52); everyone who lives and believes in Him shall never die (Jn. 11:26). It really is but a sleep. I know the hard reality of the loss still hurts, still registers. But in the end, because He abolished death in Himself, so has He done already for all those in Him.

*1:11 Of which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher-* The wonder of extending the grace of God's calling to others is compelling. All who hear are surely called, and despite the masses of those not called [and all our curious questions about them], the wonder is that all those called had a wonderful eternity planned for them from before infinity (see on :9). These reflections are a great motivation to preach and teach these things to others.

*1:12 For which cause I suffer also these things. Yet I am not ashamed-* Paul is asking Timothy to copy his example of suffering hardship and not being ashamed. The wonder of being saved, and knowing that all our witness work is extending the calling to others and bringing them to the real possibility of eternal life and glory to God... all this empowers us to suffer and not be ashamed for the sake of the Gospel.

*For I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard what I have committed to him against that day-* As we along with Paul have committed our "all things" to Him, so He commits the "all things" of the Gospel to us (2 Tim. 1:12 cp. 14; 1 Tim. 6:20). There is a mutuality here between us. But some manuscripts offer an alternative, to the effect that He is able to guard what *He* has committed unto *me*. The gift of the Spirit, through which God's power / ability ["is able"] operates, will enable us to hold on to the ministry we have received from Him. And Timothy is then urged in :14 to use the power of the Spirit to maintain the ministry which *he* had received.

"I know Him" clearly speaks of relationship, rather than mere theological awareness, no matter how pure. It is the knowledge of Jesus, the mutual relationship with Him, knowing His presence in the Spirit, which makes us not ashamed. "That day" is the appearing of the Lord Jesus at His return, when death shall be abolished (see on :10). Paul's persuasion that he would be 'guarded' until that last day is another way of saying that he knew that he really now had the Spirit as an earnest / guarantee of future salvation. For His 'ability', *dunatos* ("able"), is through the *dunamis* of the Spirit which we have been given.

1:13 *Hold the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus-* The "pattern of sound words" could refer to some defined body of teaching which Paul had passed on to Timothy. The problem with any such 'statement of teaching / faith' is that it tends to be held in anything other than love or faith. As soon as definitions and boundaries are potentially established, there arise disputes, lack of love and an associated loss of faith. Hence the urge to hold this form of sound teaching in faith and love.

1:14 *That good thing which was committed to you guard through the Holy Spirit which dwells in us-* See on :7. The "good thing" may refer to the prophecies committed upon Timothy to "war a *good* warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). The reference may be simply to his calling to the ministry at Ephesus. Just as Paul had been given a ministry which the Spirit empowered him to fulfil (see on :12). The only other time we read of the Spirit dwelling in us with tis Greek phrase is in Rom. 8:11 "His Spirit that dwells in you". As here, the Spirit is operative *within* the human mind and person. No reference to the miraculous gifts, but to the internal gift of the Spirit which is promised to all believers for all time. The Spirit likewise distributes to each believer a ministry, a role or part within the body of Christ; and the same Spirit empowers us to maintain it.

1:15 *This you know, that all that are in Asia turned away from me. Of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes-* Paul lamented on his deathbed that all the believers in Asia had turned away (2 Tim. 1:15; Gk. *apostropho*, to apostasize). But at roughly the same time, the Lord Jesus wrote to seven ecclesias in Asia, commending some of their members for holding on to the Truth. Paul was a man of great love, who really tried to see the best in his brethren, having been touched by the grace of God. He even would have given up his eternal life, so that the Jews would be saved (Rom. 9:3 cp. Ex. 32:32). But even Paul, in the time of his greatest spiritual maturity, thought that all the Asian Christians were apostate; when in the Lord's eyes, this wasn't the case. As noted on Galatians 1, it would seem that Paul over personalized issues; their turning away from him he took as a turning away from the Lord, when the letters of Rev. 2 and 3 show this was not the case. We too can take the lesson, that personal fall out with ourselves doesn't mean that a believer is no longer with the Lord. The names Phygelus ["fugitive"] and Hermogenes ["born of Hermes"] may be code words, nick names created so as not to allow the naming of specific individuals for reasons of security.

Perhaps Phygelus was seen as a fugitive slave on the run from the Lord Jesus; and Hermogenes had returned to the worship of Hermes.

1:16- see on Mt. 5:7.

*The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain-* The family [or house church?] of one faithful individual were blessed for his singular kindness and grace shown to Paul. Blessing [and the reverse] often comes upon third parties as a result of the spiritual position of another. Thus the paralyzed man was forgiven his sins for the sake of the faith of his friends (Mk. 2:5). Association with prisoners has never been an easy thing to do, and Onesiphorus was unashamed of association with Paul. The implication could be that the Rome ecclesia generally were ashamed of such association. This brother's example was cited as an encouragement to Timothy whose sensitive, timid spirit was concerned at being ashamed for the Gospel and of Paul personally (:8).

2 Tim. 1:16 records Paul praying that the Lord would *give mercy* to the house of Onesiphorus; yet the same phrase is used in :18 about receiving mercy at judgment day. Here it seems that the whole household of Onesiphorus is to be granted mercy, at that day, because of his faithfulness. Does this imply that some will be in the Kingdom only due to the efforts of a third party?

1:17 *But, when he was in Rome, he diligently searched for me and found me-* This diligent searching and finding surely takes us to the Lord as the good shepherd doing just the same for the lost sheep. Perhaps Paul means to imply that he was spiritually weak and needed the refreshment and 'finding' due to the efforts of this brother.

1:18 *(The Lord grant to him that he find the mercy of the Lord in that day); and in how many things he gave service to me at Ephesus, you know very well-* Paul obviously thought that his prayers and wishes for Onesiphorus could affect the outcome of the judgment seat "in that day" for him. If we really can affect the eternal destiny of each other, and Paul's letters, prayers and example show that we surely can- then we should like Paul be constantly in prayer and concern for each others' path towards the Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus-* Having exhorted Timothy to be strengthened in the Lord, Paul speaks of how the Lord has strengthened *him* in his last court appearance (2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17). "Grace", *charis*, often refers in the New Testament to the internal gift of the Spirit which is given to all believers. It was given to the Corinthians, but they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). We must allow that gift to work. Paul has urged Timothy about this elsewhere- see on 1:14. And here Paul is stating it explicitly; Timothy [as all of us] is to allow the strengthening process. We lack the iron in our soul to force change to any significant extent; but the way to progress is an opening to the superhuman strengthening of the Spirit which is already potentially at work in us. It's tragic that so many are so nearly there- but will not allow the Spirit to work. This can be due to pride in their own strength, and because of theological denial of the work of the Spirit.

2:2 *And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, you are to commit the same to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also-* Paul wanted Timothy to fulfil his ministry, and that required more than Timothy personally remaining strong to the end. If we take seriously our calling, we realize we have goals to achieve which are beyond us personally. We need to think ahead to a future generation, to rope in others to help achieve the goals. The Lord's later letter to Ephesus, where Timothy had his ministry, would indicate that for all his timidity and weakness, Timothy did actually achieve his goals. For in a later generation, there were still "faithful men" in that church.

2:3 *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus-* Paul tells Timothy to "endure hardness" and "endure afflictions" in the Gospel's work, and then goes on to use the same Greek word to describe how he himself 'suffered trouble' in the same work (2 Tim. 2:3,9; 4:5). He sets himself up as a role model for Timothy, his child in the faith (:1). He seeks to draw a parallel between himself in a Roman prison, and Timothy doing his ministry in Ephesus.

2:4 *No soldier in service entangles himself in the affairs of this life, so that he may please whoever enrolled him as a soldier-* There is nothing morally wrong with the pragmatic things of this life; but they can so easily entangle us and take us away from our focus on the Lord Jesus and His service. This is to be paramount. Problems with a leaking roof can take us far away from the Lord's service... The one who enrolled Timothy as a soldier could refer to God who called him to the service of His Son. But we suspect Paul has himself in view, as the one who introduced Timothy to ministry. And again we see Paul's tendency to over personalize things, as noted on 1:15. Personal loyalty to Paul meant, it seems, far too much for him. Much of his *angst* in dealing with the Corinthians, especially in 2 Corinthians, hinged around this issue of expecting personal loyalty.

2:5 *And if also a man competes in the games, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules-* We can have an appearance of spiritual progress towards the crown, as did the man who quickly built his house on the sand. But it was the man who perhaps didn't finish his house (we are left to imagine) but who had hacked away at the rock of his own heart, striving to seriously obey the *essence* of his Lord's words, who was accepted in the end. We can deduce that Timothy was tempted to take short cuts in his ministry; and Paul urges him to see his ministry at Ephesus as a work which had to be done according to principles, rather than meeting each issue *ad hoc*. "According to the rules" is literally

'according to the law', and Paul consistently argues against keeping any legal code as the basis for salvation. I suggest that he is putting a simple riddle to Timothy, and he gives another in :6, concluding in :7 that Timothy should "consider" these things and the Lord will give him understanding as to Paul's sense. He may be saying that although we are no longer under law, this doesn't mean that we are without principle in any sense; and likewise in :6, Paul wishes Timothy to understand that "labour" is still required- but as a response to grace and faith in the fact we shall be saved by grace. So he is inviting him to not go too far in thinking that freedom from the Mosaic law means no guiding principles or labour at all. Hence he urges Timothy to the disciplined life of a soldier (:3,4). Maybe Timothy had gone too far in not having any principles at all guiding him.

*2:6 The husbandman that labours must be the first to partake of the fruits-* I suggested on :5 that this and :5 are riddles Paul is putting to Timothy, with the invitation in :7 to consider them and let the Lord guide him to understanding. The ending of the Mosaic law didn't mean that labour is not required- although in response to grace. If Timothy laboured in trying to help spiritual fruit to develop in Ephesus, he would partake in the fruits of it. We too receive blessing from trying to help others towards spiritual fruitfulness. But the riddle includes the obvious connection with the fact that according to 1 Cor. 15, the Lord Jesus partakes of the firstfruits first. And Mt. 21 is clear that the Jewish leadership were the husbandmen who had been fired and replaced with new husbandmen; timid Timothy was therefore invited to see himself as directly replacing the Jewish rabbis and synagogue leadership, who were behind the effort to undermine the Christian mission in Ephesus. Yet "My father is the husbandman" (Jn. 15:1). God works through our efforts in bringing forth spiritual fruit in others. And the Lord Jesus clearly identified Himself with the husbandman in His parable of Lk. 13:8. His labour involved spreading manure around the tree of Israel. This humbling work was required of Timothy, and he would be manifesting the Lord Jesus in such work.

*2:7 Consider what I say. And may the Lord give you understanding in all things-* As noted on :5 and :6, this applies to the two riddles Paul has given Timothy to think about in the preceding two verses. Our obedience leads to greater obedience, in an upward spiral. The dynamic in this spiral is God's spirit. It is through the Spirit that God draws near to us if we draw near to Him (James 4:7,8). This is neatly summarized in 2 Tim.2:7: "Consider what I say: and the Lord give thee understanding in all things". Thus our freewill 'considering' will result in the Lord adding to our understanding even more that we could ever achieve unaided. 'Considering', literally 'exercising the mind', is one thing; but the Lord will act directly on the human heart to bring about greater "understanding". And that is taught in Col. 1:9; 2:2, where the ministry of the Spirit leads to a filling of believers with "understanding". Clearly the Lord is prepared and eager to act directly upon the mind of believers. Yet too many in conservative circles have left things at just 'considering' Scripture, resistant to the extra element of the Lord adding understanding to their mental gymnastics with Scripture.

*2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to the gospel I preached-* Paul appeals for Timothy to take a Christ-centered approach. Knowing that he is under attack as a charlatan, he emphasizes that his Gospel was what as it were resurrected Christ from the dead. In our hearts, the Lord remains dead until the Gospel reveals His resurrection to us. "Remember" is a similar idea in Greek to the word used for "Consider" in :7; it implies the exercise of the mind. The most basic truths of the Gospel and their implications can easily be forgotten or become swamped in significance by all the *angst* which goes with grappling with church politics.



2:9- see on 2 Tim. 2:3.

*Because of this I suffer hardship, even to bonds, as a criminal; but the word of God is not bound-* "Suffer hardship" is the same word as used in encouraging Timothy to do the same in :3. Paul is encouraging Timothy to take himself as a pattern to himself. "A criminal" is the word only elsewhere used about the criminals crucified with the Lord, and "bonds" is used of the binding of the Lord at that time, both immediately before and after His crucifixion (Mt. 27:2; Jn. 19:40); Paul sees in all his sufferings a fellowship with the Lord in His time of dying. He deeply resented his "bonds" and, by implication, the limitations of freedom they imposed upon him. He realized however that he was "bound in the Spirit"; his bonds were of the Spirit rather than simply of men (Acts 20:22). And yet through his prison experience, he came to write the letters which have had such major significance. Our limitations likewise can be used by God for far wider things than we can ever realize at the time. Paul never once hints that he perceived that his letters were going to have significance for millennia to come; and that is the wonder of the lesson to us. What we experience as a limitation of freedom, as intense frustration, can be used by the Lord for eternal significance in ways we can never understand at the time. The word of God, the basic Gospel of :8, is unbound- perhaps Paul perceived that his bonds, his limitations, were playing a part in a wider unbound experience. In Col. 4:3, Paul had asked for prayers that he could be given an opportunity to spread the Gospel despite being in bonds. Perhaps he is saying here at the end of his life that in fact this had worked out; for in chapter 4 he writes of how the Gospel had spread and become "fully known" through is bonds (4:17). If we pray for opportunities to preach we will be granted them. Let's pray daily for meetings with people whom we can witness to successfully.

*2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, so that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory-* Their salvation was dependent upon his enduring. And therefore he endured for their sakes. Paul as noted above has been seeing his sufferings as part of the Lord's sufferings; and His suffering led to our salvation, just as our sufferings likewise play a part in the salvation of others, if we are suffering in and with Him. Salvation is "in Christ"; not in any particular ecclesia or fellowship, but through being an active part of His body in the Biblical sense. See on Eph. 2:6. Paul "endured", he held on himself, for the sake of the elect. And likewise the Lord Himself died above all *for us*, His desire for *our* salvation lead Him to endure for Himself. And on a mundane level; the husband who does his Bible readings a second time for the sake of his wife or children or because a brother has paid an unexpected visit... this kind of spiritual effort for others keeps us going ourselves. See on 1 Thess. 3:8. All this opens up a fuller understanding of 2 Cor. 4:17- our sufferings lead to an eternal weight of glory "for us", in the plural.

*2:11 Faithful is the saying: For if we died with him, we shall also live with him-* "The saying" would refer to one of the pithy "faithful sayings" which the New Testament church committed to memory. These would have been especially valuable for the illiterate. Paul has explained that our sufferings for others can play a part in their salvation, if our sufferings are part of the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. So he is giving another dimension to the well known truth that we are to die with Him; our death is not isolated from His death, and our sufferings are not isolated from His- if we are baptized believers "in Him". And so it shall come to pass that because He lives, we in Him shall live also; His life becomes ours, both now and eternally. The tense of "we died with Him" surely alludes to baptism, the one-time moment when we died with Him.

2:12- see on Mt. 26:70.

*If we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we shall deny him, he also will deny us-* The allusion to death with the Lord in baptism in :11 must be tempered by the fact that we must also "endure". Paul has just written of enduring all things for the sake of the chosen (:10), so that they may be saved. By writing here that thereby *we* shall also reign with Him, Paul has his mind on the fact that our endurance in Him can lead to "we", others, not just himself, reigning with the Lord in glory. On the other hand, our denial of Him can lead to Him denying us- not just us personally, but our failure can lead to others likewise being denied at the last day, for we all have more influence upon others than we realize. Paul was clearly alluding to Peter's denials- and the grace shown by the Lord. For He will not automatically deny those who deny Him, but works instead for their restoration.

2:13 *If we are faithless, he abides faithful. For he cannot deny himself-* "Faithless" in Greek more suggests a loss of faith. This was and is at the root of denying Him; for losing faith is here paralleled with denial. The faithfulness of God is hard to understand unless we understand it as faithfulness towards us. Unlike the tendency in human relationships, God will not break His hope, faith and love toward us in response to our withdrawal of them toward Him. He does not mirror our behaviour towards Him; and we should seek to be like Him when we encounter withdrawal of relationship towards us from others. 'He', "Himself", stands for total commitment to His people throughout their lives, and He will not deny His fundamental self.

2:14 *Of these things put them in remembrance, instructing them in the sight of the Lord, that they do not fight about words, to no profit, to the catastrophic destruction of those that hear them-* The "them" in view appear to be the teachers at Ephesus. The fact the Lord later commends this church in his letter to them indicates that Timothy successfully obeyed Paul's command here. The teachers were to be redirected towards the basic issues of the Gospel and the implications which arise from it, rather than using their teaching ministry to provoke profitless arguments about words and meanings. Such teachers would lead to the eternal destruction of those who heard them. And this is a profound warning to those right wing groups whose teachers have filled them with third hand garbled stories about "the original Hebrew actually means..." whatever, and demanding everyone accepts their particular peculiar take on a matter of semantics. This warning was especially required in Ephesus, which was under attack from Judaizers who would have insisted that they had superior knowledge of the Hebrew language, and would easily have dominated the Gentile audience with various arguments about Hebrew words. The wicked will be "overthrown" in the final condemnation (2 Pet. 2:6)- but this is the very same word used for 'apostasy' or 'subversion' (AV) or "catastrophic destruction". If we apostatize, we are overthrowing or condemning ourselves and others ahead of time. Israel in the wilderness "rejected" the land- and so they didn't enter it (Num. 14:31 RV).

2:15- see on Mt. 7:24.

*Exert yourself, to prove you are pleasing to God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, handling correctly the word of truth-* The AV "Study to show thyself..." has been tragically misunderstood as meaning that Bible study makes us pleasing to God. But that is a result of

misreading "study" - in the days of King James it means 'to try', and that is the idea of the Greek. For not all are Bible students nor have the apparatus to be that. The context of :14 is specific commandment to the teachers within the church. They were workmen, working on the church of God, and their work with others would be examined at the last day. And they would be ashamed if those under their teaching are given the shame of condemnation. Effort must consciously be made to build up others. We must 'rightly divide', or cut straight, the word of truth in our preaching of it. The LXX uses the same word in Prov. 3:6: "He will make straight your paths". We are to offer people a clear, straight way to the Kingdom; to span that gulf between the word of God and the mind of man. "The word of truth" refers to the basic Gospel, according to the context, which Paul has redirected their attention to. By involving their audience in strife about semantics and words, they were not using the word of truth correctly. The whole of Paul's exhortation to zealous service in the ecclesia in 2 Tim. 2:15-20 is based on the returned exiles, confirming that they are indeed 'types of us'; and the teachers are the manual workers, slaving away to build up Zion:

## 2 Tim. 2

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use" (:21)

"A workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (:15)

"The foundation of God standeth sure" (:19)

"The Lord knoweth them that are his" (:19)

"A great house" (:20)

"Vessels of gold and of silver" (:20)

## Nehemiah

"I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates... thus cleansed I them from all strangers" (Neh. 13:22,30). Also a reference to the cleansing of the Jews from mixed marriages.

The workmen rebuilding Zion

The laying of the foundation stone

The spirit of Is. 44:5- that although at the time of the restoration not all knew their genealogy, they were accepted in any case, being surnamed with the Name of Jehovah and that of Jacob

The temple (1 Chron. 22:5)

"Vessels of gold and silver" (Ezra 5:14)

2:16- see on 1 Tim. 6:21.

*But shun profane babblings of false teachers; for they will result in progressive ungodliness-* The preceding verses have taught Timothy how to teach the teachers; so the shunning would mean not allowing the false teachers to teach. Their "babblings" referred to the endless striving about the meaning of original Hebrew words, profitless arguments about semantics, words and meanings (:14). It's simply not true that just teaching something about the Bible or Biblical words will lead to spiritual growth; these teachers with their emphasis upon semantic games actually elicited increasing ungodliness in the behaviour of the flock. This is because the need to act and think in a Christ-like way, denying the flesh, is excused by instead focusing upon semantics and hyper interpretation of original words and phrases. And this has

been witnessed in so many groups, who have focused upon 'doctrine' and supposed intellectual purity of interpretation- whilst in private life being so far from the spirit of Christ in daily thought and living.

2:17 *And their word will eat away like a cancer. An example would be Hymenaeus and Philetus-* The "progressive" nature of ungodliness (:16) elicited by their wrong usage of "the word of truth" is likened to the spreading of cancer. Teaching has a real effect upon listeners; we may assume that everyone dozes through Bible studies and teaching, but in fact something- a lot- goes in. Especially in illiterate societies, the word preached by the teacher is their only access to God's word. The Greek *gangraina* refers to gangrene, leading to the loss of limbs, and spreading from one infected limb to damage the whole body. Paul surely had in mind the overall damage to the body of Christ by losing some who had been taken away from the body by the gangrene of false teaching. Hymenaeus had been "delivered to satan" for blasphemy in 1 Tim. 1:20- but had not been corrected, apparently. The orthodox view of Satan as a cosmic being falls right down in the light of this. The Lord's commendation of Ephesus in His later letter indicates that Timothy did indeed save the body of the church by cutting out this gangrene. But we note that what is being taught here is not guilt by association, nor a call to excommunicate individuals who believe the wrong things. The context is instruction to Timothy regarding who he allowed onto the platform to teach.

Hymenaeus had destroyed his own faith, and as such often do, wanted to destroy that of others (see on 1 Tim. 1:20). Despite having been "delivered unto satan" he was now back in the teaching ministry. Perhaps Timothy had not fully supported Paul's discipline of Hymenaeus, and this was the fruit of that.

2:18 *Men who concerning the truth have erred, in saying that the resurrection is past already; and they ruin the faith of some-* "The truth" may refer specifically to the Lord Jesus. These men may have been influenced by the kind of incipient Gnosticism which was pushed by the Judaizers, coming to term in the teachings of the kabbala which deny the significance of the body and of bodily resurrection. The denial of bodily resurrection was associated with "unGodliness" in practice (:16). If we are living only for today, and bodily resurrection [both of the Lord and ourselves] is minimalized to the point of denial, then there will be "ungodliness" in practice. And this is the danger of preterism. Faith is 'ruined' if the bodily aspect of resurrection is minimized or removed. "Ruin the faith" is a Greek word only elsewhere used in Tit. 1:11, where the motive for such false teaching was money. If we do not need to face a future judgment for the things "done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10), then the flesh can be pleased just as we wish. And this was so attractive that some were even prepared to pay money for that to be true. We see here how the root of much doctrinal, theological heresy is psychologically based; a desire to justify the flesh.

2:19- see on Mt. 7:23.

*However the firm foundation of God stands sure, having this seal: The Lord knows those that are his. And: Let every one that names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness-* The implication is that despite false teachers, those known by the Lord [Jesus?] are on God's firm foundation and will not be shifted from it. But that firm foundation, as Paul uses the metaphor in Corinthians, is a living relationship with the Lord Jesus. Those who know Him, and are known by Him, are thereby in relationship with Him. And having named His Name, calling it upon themselves in baptism, they will "depart from unrighteousness". Any teaching

which leads them to unrighteous behaviour will be intuitively rejected by them. In expounding 1 Timothy 2, I noted there were many allusions there to the idol temples of Ephesus, especially the temple of Artemis. The reference to firm foundations likewise refers to that same temple. The two "seals" quoted are likely "faithful sayings" popular amongst the illiterate of the first century Christian community. The seal of God is in the mind, "in the forehead" (Rev. 9:4), likely a reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart / mind of every believer. This is what knowing the Lord and being known by Him is all about- living relationship with the Lord Jesus through the gift of His Spirit. And the function of that Spirit in practice will be a departure from unrighteousness. The term "depart from" usually refers to departing from persons; and this is the context of this verse- an appeal to depart from false teachers and their teachings. The same word has been used in 1 Tim. 6:5 about withdrawing from those who taught like this.

*2:20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour-* As noted on :19 and earlier, the context here is of separation from false teachers and their teachings; not allowing them to teach, and not giving heed to their teachings. Those who teach rightly from God's word will not be ashamed (:15); whereas those who do not shall be ashamed. The honourable vessels here refer to the true teachers, and the dishonourable vessels to the false teachers. This is why :21 will go on to speak of separation from the dishonourable. Gold, silver and wood are listed in 1 Cor. 3:12 as the kinds of building which a teacher makes in his or her pastoral work. We note that the existence of dishonourable vessels within the "great house" of the church is taken as something inevitable; there is significantly no call for them to be excommunicated, but rather they should not be given a platform nor their ideas given credence.

*2:21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, fulfilling the use intended by the master, prepared to do every good work-* As noted on :20, the context is about separation from false teaching and not allowing false teachers the platform. The purging from the dishonourable vessels [= false teachers, see on :20] therefore doesn't speak of excommunication but of not allowing God's house to have such people teaching within it. The Master of the great house (:20) is surely the Lord Jesus; and He has a use intended for all the apparatus ["vessels"] within the large household. There were good works intended for us from the foundation of the world (Eph. 2:10). We need to pray to God to reveal to us what those works are, and which uses He has in mind for us. The language in :20 and :21 is alluding to Is. 22:20-24 about the temple. "Prepared to do every good work" must link with 2 Tim. 3:16,17, which says that the word of God enables the man of God to be "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works". Thus the sanctifying and purging power is the word (as Jn. 17:17; Eph. 5:26).

*2:22 Enthuse about righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart-* Some manuscripts, followed by the AV, add: "Flee youthful lusts". It is possible that Timothy went through a mid-life crisis, as Hezekiah did. Paul's warning to middle aged Timothy to "flee youthful lusts" was a sure reference back to Joseph fleeing from the advances of Potiphar's wife. If indeed Timothy was now middle aged, Paul would be reasoning that his sexual crushes were the immaturity of youth which by this stage he ought to have left behind. I noted on 1 Tim. 3 that Timothy was the bishop at Ephesus, and the commands concerning bishops and their relationships with their wives were therefore being spoken directly to Timothy. We can assume he was therefore married. And yet Paul sensed

Timothy needed exhortation about "youthful lusts". The antidote to these lusts was positive- the energy should instead go into enthusing about spiritual things, not consorting with women in questionable relationships, but taking strength instead from others who "call on the Lord out of a pure [sexually pure?] heart". This rechannelling of energy from sin to righteousness is a common Biblical theme (e.g. "Not coarse joking but rather giving of thanks", Eph. 5:4); and Paul's redirection from persecutor of Christ to ambassador for Him would be the parade example. And so here, *pheugo* ["flee"] lusts, and instead *dioko* ["enthuse about"] righteousness. *Dioko* is the standard term for persecution, used about Paul's persecution of the Christians. His energy for persecution was redirected into a chasing after of righteousness.

Those with a pure or purified heart / mind are those who have allowed the sanctifying / purifying of the Spirit to cleanse their minds, conscience and thinking (1 Pet. 1:22; Heb. 10:22). We must be *made* clean by the Lord Jesus, it is not of ourselves (Jn. 15:3; 13:10,11). Paul recognizes that not all in the church will have allowed this purifying work of the Spirit, even though all believers have potentially been given the Spirit gift at baptism. But he urges Timothy to associate with those who have.

2:23 *But foolish and ignorant questions refuse, knowing that they only cause strife-* The command to Timothy to "refuse" surely means in line with :14 and :16 not allowing the platform to teachers who "babble" with issues of semantics, words and meanings. These issues cause strife- the same word used in Tit. 3:9 of how the Judaist false teachers caused "strivings about the law". Teaching with a view to helping others towards spiritual fruitfulness does not leave the hearers with a mass of questions with no answers. This is destabilizing, and such teachers aren't aiming to help anyone towards God's Kingdom; all they will do is cause tension between persons, because different answers will be presented to the questions raised. The style of teaching which throws out a mass of questions was clearly the style of the Judaizers, in their program of destabilizing the Pauline churches. This is not an appeal for simplistic attitudes; rather for direct guidance of the flock, especially the illiterate, towards true spirituality. And this may involve ignoring certain questions, just as the Lord often avoided giving direct answers to leading questions and replied in terms of mega principles.

2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel but be gentle towards all, eager to teach, patient of ills and wrongs-* As noted on :23, a minister / teacher will be eager to teach, and not simply present a mass of questions to an illiterate, newly baptized audience which will only destabilize. This was the style of the Judaizers. Such presentation of questions was not teaching, being didactic, as the term means. The new converts needed a didactic approach, instructing them, rather than destabilizing them with endless questions and provoking quarrels. The Judaist false teachers were apparently not gentle, nor patient with disagreement. This dogmatism is somehow attractive to some audiences; Catholic and Orthodox priests were [at least in the past] renowned for their aggressive attitude to their flock. And many like it that way- to be made to feel unworthy and weak, because that is how they feel themselves, and to trust that a firm leadership might somehow lead them to salvation at the end of the day; although they have no firm hope in salvation for that would demand too much of them in mental and secular life. This attitude was prevalent in Judaism and amongst the false teachers. 2 Cor. 11:20 suggests the false teachers beloved of the Corinthians demanded money from them and even hit them on the face.

All teaching must be after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, who taught "as His manner was", i.e. He was "eager to teach". When Paul wrote that "the servant of the Lord must not strive" in

his preaching ministry (2 Tim. 2:24 AV), he was alluding back to how the servant song described the Lord Jesus in His preaching as not striving or lifting up His voice in proud argument (Is. 42:2 cp. Mt. 12:19). And Paul goes on: "...but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing...". This is all a pen picture of the Lord's witness to men in Galilee. And yet it is applied to *us*. "Apt to teach" is surely an allusion to the way in which the Lord taught the people "as he was wont" (Mk. 10:1). So it's not just that we should witness because the Lord, in whom we are, was the "faithful and true witness" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14); because we are in Him, we must witness *as He did*, with something of that same ineffable mixture of candour, meekness and Divine earnestness for man's salvation

Paul makes a series of allusions to Moses, which climax in an invitation to pray like Moses for the salvation of others:

## 2 Tim. 2:24,25

## Moses

"the servant of the Lord	A very common title of Moses
must not strive	As Israel did with him (Num. 26:9)
but be gentle unto all	The spirit of Moses
apt to teach	As was Moses (Ex. 18:20; 24:12; Dt. 4:1,5,14; 6:1; 31:22)
patient	As was Moses
in meekness	Moses was the meekest man (Num. 12:3)
instructing those that oppose themselves	at the time of Aaron and Miriam's self-opposing rebellion
if God <i>peradventure</i> will give them repentance [i.e. forgiveness]"	" <i>Peradventure</i> I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30)- and he prayed 40 days and nights for it.

And note too: 2:19 = Num. 16:5,26; 2:20 = Num. 12:7; 2:21 = Num. 16:37; 2:22 = Num. 12:2; 16:3; 2:26 = Num. 16:33. This is quite something. The height of Moses' devotion for His people, the passion of his praying, shadowing as it did the matchless intercession and self-giving of the Lord, really is our example. It isn't just a height to be admired. It means that we will not half-heartedly ask our God to 'be with' brother x and sister y and the brethren in country z, as we lie half asleep in bed. This is a call to sustained, on our knees prayer and devotion to the salvation of others. For the Judaists, an appeal to be like Moses, to emulate him in teaching, was blasphemous; for they considered Moses at such a level that he could never be imitated. Yet Paul urges timid Timothy and all teachers to realistically be Moses to our audience.

2:25- see on Acts 18:6; 2 Tim. 3:7; Tit. 1:1.

*In meekness correcting those that contradict themselves, so that God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth-* Arrogance is so easily companion of holding a superior understanding about something. To realize we have the correct position and to

correct with humility- is really the supreme qualification of a teacher. And the context here is about teachers. If the contradictions can be corrected in humility, *then* God may give them repentance. He is prepared to confirm the efforts of a sincere teacher, by acting on the mind of the person being corrected. Repentance is a gift, as stated clearly in Acts 5:31. This is more than forgiveness. Repentance itself is a psychological gift, a direct operation upon the human heart. And the text here says that God will grant this when a teacher has humbly corrected a person; so He works with our teaching of others. Repentance is an outcome of having corrected someone who is contradicting themselves; the contradiction is therefore a moral issue, a way of life being lived in contradiction to principles espoused. There is no reference here to simply correcting someone whose theology or intellectual process is self contradictory or logically twisted. That has for too long passed as 'evangelism' or 'preaching'. The issue here is essentially *moral*, because the resolved contradictions are confirmed by the Lord granting repentance. And a fair case can be made for "contradict themselves" really meaning 'contradict' in the sense of those who contradict the teachers; the same group are mentioned with a similar word in 1 Tim. 6:20 and Tit. 1:9. "Correcting" is a word used about training of children; it is to the spiritual elders / fathers / teachers that these words are addressed.

"The acknowledging of the truth" doesn't mean 'I accept you are right and I am wrong'. This is the stuff of Socratean debate which has been so attractive to conservative Protestants, whereby "Bible truth" becomes a battleground upon which one side strives to win the victory of 'truth' in intellectual, expositional terms; as if Bible study is a concourse with only one glorious winner and many eternal losers. I have demonstrated above that "repentance" means that moral issues are in view. The repentance granted by the Lord leads to "the knowledge of the truth"; "acknowledging" is an unfortunate translation, because it suggests that the contradicting side acknowledges logical defeat. But it is the same word used as in Eph. 1:17 and 4:13, speaking of the effect of having the gift of the Spirit, leading to "the knowledge of Him". Repentance leads to relationship, a knowledge of the Lord Jesus who is "the truth". The very phrase "the knowledge of the truth" is used in 1 Tim. 2:4 [see note there] as meaning 'being saved'. Repentance results finally in salvation, when we shall know the final truth- which is of God's grace in Christ for eternity. Indeed 2 Tim. 3:7 contrasts "ever learning" with "coming to the knowledge of the truth". It is all a moral dimension, rather than an intellectual one of learned intellectual knowledge.

2:26 *And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will-* As noted throughout this chapter, the problem Timothy faced was from Judaizing false teachers, whom Paul was urging him to ban from the platform at Ephesus. Already the "Devil", the Jewish opposition to the Pauline Christian churches, had gained some converts and taken captive some of the converts. But good teaching, with the Lord's additional help, could lead to some of these lost ones being recovered. The parallel is with how the false teachers "overthrow the faith of some" (:18). "Overthrow" is the same word translated "subvert". Nearly every other time it occurs it is in the context of the Judaizers subverting the Christians - Titus 1:11; 3:9-11 (an equivalent word); Acts 15:24 (the Judaizers "subvert your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law"). The Jewish satan, the great adversary to true Christian mission in the first century, was seeking to make converts. The only other usage of the word for "taken captive" is in Lk. 5:10 about 'catching men' i.e. making converts.

For a critique of the standard view of the Devil in this verse, see <http://www.realdevil.info/5-26.htm> .



The RV reflects an alternative manuscript reading: "Having been taken captive by the Lord's servant unto the will of God". It seems to me that whilst on one hand preaching can be likened to a warfare, a tearing down of the bastion of unbelief, the Lord's servant taking people captive unto the will of God, this is only one facet of the picture. Taken too far, we can become motivated perhaps by a fear of failure, we try harder and only get into a verbal battle, a jousting match, or worse. We will often 'lose' these exchanges, because we were unable to convince our 'adversary'. Thus such exchanges become like a court battle of who's right and who's wrong, one-upmanship and point scoring. We will then end up feeling that the person has rejected the calling of the Father simply because my argument wasn't good enough. This need to win, this fear of failure, is the way of the world not the way of God, it is not "reasoning together". There is too much ego involved. Preaching, though it might seem otherwise at times, is not a competitive sport. If we failed it's not because we did not try hard enough, nor is it because we did not know enough, perhaps it's because we tried too hard driven by a fear of failure, or perhaps we have thought too highly of ourselves, thinking we speak for our God?

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come*- As noted on 1 Tim. 4:1, Timothy was called to stem what seemed an inevitable tide. Men were going to fall away from the faith, but his ministry was to stop this happening. And according to the Lord's view of the Ephesian church in Rev. 2, he succeeded against all odds, despite his own weaknesses.

3:2 *For men shall be lovers of self*- These "men" were within the church, for :5 speaks of them having the form of Godliness. The list of sins here recalls that in Rom. 1:29, which appears to be about the spirit of the unbelieving world. The point being that the spirit of the age shall affect the church. We note that these bad characteristics all arose from the false teachings which Timothy had been called upon to stamp out in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3,4). False teaching without doubt brings forth bad fruit, and thus a teacher or teaching is to be known by its fruit. Perhaps Paul is telling Timothy that such things will be found within the church because Timothy was somehow shocked and disappointed that they were present. We note that he was not called to isolate the guilty individuals and cast them out by some formal process of disfellowship; but rather to always seek to turn things around.

*Lovers of money, boastful, proud, argumentative, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy*- "Argumentative" is really "blasphemers". Paul himself had been one of them (see on 1 Tim. 1:13) but had turned around; likewise the predictions here are not to be read as an inevitable tide. Timothy was called to fight against them; just as Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days, and yet that prophetic word was annulled by their repentance.

It's possible to understand 3:1-3 as specifically talking about our last days: "In the last days, fierce (Gk.) times shall come. For men (in an ecclesial context) shall be lovers of their own selves... proud... without natural affection... despisers of those that are good, traitors (cp. Mt. 24:10)... highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God (implying they *do* love God); having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof". The spirit of fierce aggressiveness which is increasingly seen in the world will enter the ecclesias; brethren will become proud, argumentative, materialistic, despising the truly righteous, disregarding the needs of the household. And there are other NT passages which suggest that this was indeed the ecclesial situation in the prelude to AD70. The increasing bitterness and subdivision amongst us indicates this will all be seen in the latter day body. Ultimately, human relationships within the ecclesia will go crazy; brethren will hate and betray each other. There will be little real spiritual mindedness; the power of Godliness, the spirit / mind of Christ, will be denied, and only the outward form of Godliness remain (cp. Eph. 3:20; 6:10; Col. 1:11). The abounding wickedness of the world will so permeate the ecclesia that true agape-love will grow cold amongst us (Mt. 24:12). The antidote to this is offered in 2 Tim. 3:14 - 4:3: Love the word, hold on to the doctrine you were taught by faithful brethren, study the word, make it your life, challenge the apostate majority of the ecclesia with no fear of the result, preach to the world, look to the blessed day of Christ's coming.

The Old Testament as well as New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. In 2 Tim. 3:2,3 nearly all words end in (-oi), the masculine plural case termination- when it would surely have been possible to construct the sentence in another way.

3:3 *Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers* - There were such within the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:11 s.w.)

*Without self-control, fierce, not lovers of good*- AV "despisers of those that are good". Timothy had been despised by some within the church (1 Tim. 4:12); these people were within the church (see on :2).

3:4 *Traitors, headstrong*- Both words used about Judas, a member of the ecclesia (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:18 "falling headlong"), who typified these Christians in the church at Ephesus.

*Puffed up*- The word is only elsewhere used in 1 Tim. 3:6; 6:4 about the proud within the church at Ephesus.

*Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*- "Rather than" is better "more than" (AV). These people had a love of God, but their love of pleasure was greater. They were within the ecclesia, having the form of Godliness (:5).

3:5 *Holding a form of reverence towards God, but having denied the power of it*- Paul notes that the opposition to Timothy within the church had a "form of Godliness [possibly referring to their upholding some kind of statement of faith] but [were] denying the power [*dunamis*]" of that form of Godliness, i.e. the doctrines of the Gospel (2 Tim. 3:5). Paul has spoken of the "form of sound words" as referring to some kind of corpus of Gospel teaching in 2 Tim. 1:13. This has unpleasant similarities with those of our day who loudly profess their Biblicism, their holding of some "form of Godliness" in the Gospel; but who deny the operation of the power / *dunamis* which is associated with it, in that those who accept the Gospel shall be given the Spirit. And this element within the church of today deny this, insisting that the Spirit is not given in response to belief of the Gospel, and that the days of Spirit operation ceased in the first century. It is this *dunamis*, this power from the Lord, which provides us with all things required for spiritual life and Godliness, and keeps us unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5; 2 Pet. 1:3). See on 1 Tim. 1:14 *And the grace...* Paul has spoken much to Timothy about the "power" / *dunamis* which can strengthen him as it did Paul. He wishes Timothy to make use of the same strengthening: "Be strong in the grace [Gk. 'the gift'] that is in [that comes from being in] Christ" (2 Tim. 2:1). And at the end of his days, Paul could reflect that the Lord Jesus stood with him at his final trial and strengthened him (2 Tim. 4:17). The same word is used of how weak believers like us were strengthened out of their weakness to be strong in faith- again a reference to psychological strengthening (Heb. 11:34), just as Abraham's weak faith was strengthened (Rom. 4:20 s.w.). The same power strengthens believers [s.w.] unto internal characteristics such as endurance, patience and joy (Col. 1:11), the "power" in view being the spirit of Christ. This same power / *dunamis* is referred to in Rom. 15:13 as the source of these same internal, mental attributes: God fills us with "all joy and peace... that you may abound in hope, through the power / *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit". To deny the operation of power is not simply a matter of missing out on so much; it is a denial of the essence of the transforming Gospel. A related word is found in Eph. 3:16- we are "strengthened with might [*dunamis*] by His spirit in the inner man". This is where the gift of the Spirit operates; the reference is to "the inner man" and not the public display of the Spirit in special miracles etc. Paul's whole ministry, like ours, is a result of "the operation of His power / *dunamis*" (Eph. 1:19,21; 3:7). On this basis, Paul urges timid Timothy to allow the spirit / *dunamis* of love and a sound mind to work in him [again, internal attributes, not referring to any ability to perform miracles]; and this would drive out his "spirit of fear" (2

Tim. 1:7). It was this *dunamis* which would enable Timothy to endure "the afflictions of the Gospel" which were clearly making Timothy balk (2 Tim. 1:8).

It may be that those who have "a [the] form of Godliness" but deny its power are those who merely accept the propositions as outlined, e.g., in a statement of faith, but deny their living power in practice. And let us note that Paul lists this as an especial temptation of the last days. 2 Tim. 3:5-8 has some telling parallels:

Having a form of Godliness	denying [Gk. 'contradicting', 'going against', the power thereof
Ever learning [Gk. Studying]	but never acknowledging the truth [the 'form of Godliness']
Resisting the truth	

All this implies that there is a power in the "form of Godliness", perhaps the basic "form" of doctrinal teaching delivered to baptism candidates. This power can be resisted in that lives remain unchanged; yet acknowledging the true implications of the Gospel will radically transform life. One can 'hold the truth' and study it academically, yet not acknowledge its power. Thus one can hold to a statement of faith and regularly study Scripture, and yet live the life outlined in 2 Tim. 3:1-3, of lying, deceit, boasting, dividing etc.- all because we do not acknowledge the power of the demands of the doctrines which we study. Hence, there is an urgent need to discern and accept the practical, lifestyle demands of each of the doctrines which are fundamental to the Gospel. If we do not see the connection between doctrine and practice, if we don't perceive how doctrine and practice are linked, then the life of thought without action reduces our faith to mere intellectualism and endless theological debate, with all the resultant division this creates.

In 1 Tim. 4:1, Paul warns of a coming apostasy in the last days. 2 Tim. 3 repeats this theme by saying that in the last days, men will be "lovers of their own selves, covetous" etc.; these men / brethren will be "holding a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (3:5 RV). Their keeping the faith was meaningless. This "form" of teaching which they held is that of Rom. 6:17- the form of doctrine which they accepted at baptism. They will 'hold the truth' but deny its real power. "From such turn away" (3:5) is the equivalent of the command in 2:21 to separate from those vessels unto dishonour which exist in the house of God, the ecclesia. So the problem of 'holding the faith' but denying its practical meaning is going to be *the* major apostasy of the last days, Paul reasons. Continuing in and keeping the Faith is parallel with running the gruelling marathon of struggle against ourselves, wrestling not with flesh and blood in the fight for real spirituality (2 Tim. 4:7). There have been theologians at times who have argued that 'God did not command certain things because they are right, but certain things are right because God commanded them'. I sense this attitude at times amongst us too. But the Father doesn't seek obedience just for the sake of it. There is reason and purpose to His commands- hence David so praises them for this in Ps. 119. And so it is with all 'doctrine'.

*From such people- turn away-* Timothy as the bishop of the church could not just personally ignore some church members. His commission at Ephesus had been to stamp out false teaching and inculcate a culture of good works (1 Tim. 1:3,4). So I would read this as meaning that he was to turn away such people- from the platform. The next verse goes on to speak about the same group of [largely female] false teachers in the church who were the burden of 1 Timothy.

*3:6 For of these are they that creep into houses and take captive weak minded women laden with sins-* This entering the house churches which comprised the larger Ephesian church and creating havoc is exactly the scene we found in 1 Tim. 5:13. There, according to the reconstruction offered in our notes there, we encountered a group of young widows, the same group of gaudily dressed prostitutes within the church who were slammed in 1 Tim. 2, "going about from house to house". These women were getting more adherents in the house groups which comprised the church at Ephesus. Note how Tit. 1:13 speaks of a similar scenario, whereby the church at Crete suffered whole 'houses' being subverted; i.e. house groups were taken over by the false teachers. The G.N.B. does well in translating "weak women who are burdened by the guilt of their sins". Most of the Gentile converts had come from the Diana cult, and perhaps these women had been part of the thousands of Ephesian women involved in the cult prostitution of the Diana cult. The false teaching women kidded these other women that actually they need not feel bad about it, and could join them in essentially the same behaviour under a Christian guise. The 'creeping in' to the house churches is very much the language of Jewish false teachers in Gal. 2:4; Jude 4 and 2 Pet. 2:1. Yet in our reconstruction, these female false teachers were Gentiles who had once been involved in the Diana cult. But we have noted repeatedly that there was a heady mix of Jewish myth and Gentile paganism at Ephesus. The constant fear that 'Satan', the adversary, would use the situation refers to the organized Jewish campaign to undermine Christianity. And they would be eager to use the women who were involved in this false teaching.

*Led away by various lusts-* This along with the "sins" earlier in the verse are fairly obviously sexual in character. The false teaching sisters of 1 Tim. 5, who feature here too, were therefore offering some kind of justification for sexual misbehaviour. We note that by the time the Lord wrote His letter to Ephesus in Rev. 2, the problem had been resolved. But it was not resolved immediately, for between the first and second letters to Timothy, the problem was still present.

*3:7 Ever learning-* I have shown in commentary so far in this chapter that the persons referred to were within the church. They continued learning, attending teaching sessions; but could never acknowledge "the truth". The reference is not to people who hear the Gospel but fail to come to "the truth" by some intellectual refusal to accept it. Rather the "learning" must refer to Timothy's teaching of the church, and the fact that some 'learned' but never came to the repentance which is signified by "the knowledge of the truth". This would have been comfort to Timothy lest he get discouraged by the apparent failure of his teaching ministry with these individuals.

*And never able to come to the knowledge of the truth-* Jer. 5:1 says that "if ye can find a man... that seeketh the truth... I will pardon it". To seek truth is therefore to repent. Those moments of realization of our sinfulness, of accurately perceiving the gap between the personas we act out and the real, Christ-self within us- in those moments, we have come to truth. And this is the repentance that leads to true, authentic pardon. There is a moral link

between any falsehood and an unspiritual life. And so repentance is an acknowledgment of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25). A person can learn the theory of God's truth but never come to acknowledge it- i.e. to repent and live the life of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7), never being transparent before God and brutally honest with oneself. However, as noted on 1 Tim. 2:4, "the knowledge of the truth" is a phrase also used there, but referring to final salvation. God wills "all men" to come to this "knowledge of the truth". Their inability to "learn" is therefore a wilful rejection of God's attempts to bring them to His great salvation. Their inability to convert 'learning' to "the knowledge of the truth" is therefore due to their own moral failure, and not simply some intellectual barrier, an honest failure to connect ideas together as they should be.

The parallel is with those having the form of Godliness [cp. "ever learning"] but denying the power thereof [cp. "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"] (3:5). I explained that "the power thereof" referred to internal strengthening by the Holy Spirit. It could be argued that the 'true knowledge' here also refers to the knowing of God, in terms of relationship, which is made possible by correct response to the gift of the Spirit in human hearts. For this is how "knowledge" is used in Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9,10; 2:2; 3:10).

*3:8 Just as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses-* Some Jewish fables claimed that these two magicians of Pharaoh were converted to support Moses. But Paul makes it clear that they "withstood Moses". Jewish fables were a major problem at Ephesus, according to several passages in 1 Timothy. Paul is often weaving into his argument inspired corrections of the Jewish myths.

*So do these also withstand the truth-* The same word is used in 4:15 about the false teacher who "withstood our words". Resisting Moses, "the truth" and "our words" are thus all paralleled. It was an incredible calling for weak minded, self doubting, half Jewish Timothy to realize that he was being put on the level of the revered Moses. But speaking forth God's word does that.

*Men corrupted in mind-* Used in 1 Tim. 6:5 about believers in the Ephesus church.

*Reprobate concerning the faith-* GNB "failures in the faith". The idea is that these are not random people from the world but those who had been "in the faith".

3:9- see on Rev. 16:15.

*But they shall proceed no further-* Does Paul refer to his certainty that the Lord's coming will be experienced by that generation, and declare their folly at the day of judgment? Or is he certain in faith that the Lord through Timothy is going to turn around the Ephesian church and expose these people? Or is he hopeful that they will in fact repent, realizing their folly and confessing it to others? He may have in view the idea that the false teaching is not going to proceed- Timothy is going to put it down, which according to Rev. 2 he succeeded in doing. Paul notes that evil men in the world will proceed in their evil- for :13 uses the same word: "[they] shall grow worse and worse [s.w. "proceed"]".

*For their folly shall be made evident to all men, as theirs also came to be-* Not least, their folly will be made evident to themselves at the very end. Parables like that of the rich fool, the foolish virgins... they will all be crystal clear to them. *Then* the Kingdom of Heaven will

be likened to wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1), after the judgment experience. The materialist "at his end [rejection at the judgment] shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). The utter *folly* of the rejected is a major theme (Prov. 14:8,18; Ps. 5:5; 49:13; Mt. 7:26; 25:8). Rejected Israel were made to drink the wine of astonishment (Ps. 60:3), and the rejected in like manner will gape: "When saw we thee...?". They will be turned back from the Kingdom "in dismay... clothed with shame and confusion" (Ps. 35:5,26). Confusion will then give way to panic and then to a level of agitated dementia well beyond the paradigms of present psychiatry. Often the Spirit points out that the sinner is only harming himself by his actions- and yet he earnestly pursues his course, in the name of self-interest and self-benefit (Num. 16:38; Prov. 19:8; 20:2; Hab. 2:20; Lk. 7:30). Sin is therefore associated by God with utter and derisive foolishness (e.g. Num. 12:11; 2 Tim. 3:9); but this isn't how man in his unwisdom perceives it at all. Indeed, to him self-denial is inexplicable folly and blindness to the essentials of human existence. "This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah (pause to meditate)" (Ps. 49:13). The *folly* of sin is only *fully* evident to God.

3:10 As he prepared to die for his Lord, Paul's openness increased yet more. He tried to motivate Timothy to resist apostasy in the ecclesia by reminding Timothy of how well he knew Paul's example: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, patience" (2 Tim. 3:10). The sense of *purpose* and *determination* in Paul comes over so often (e.g. Acts 19:21). The constant energy of his mind comes over in the record (e.g. Acts 28:23), and also in his letters (note the urgency of "today" in Heb. 3:7,13,15; 4:7; 2 Cor. 6:2). It makes a good exercise to read through the record of Paul in Acts and highlight words like "reasoned", "persuaded", "convinced", "purposed", "disputing" (e.g. 18:4,5,11,19; 19:8,9,21). And he really is our example, not just a historical figure to be admired.

3:10 *But you, follow my teaching-* Paul could only write such things without pride because of his deep sense of what he wrote at the beginning of 1 Timothy; because of his serious sins and the depth of grace shown to him, he had been set up as a parade example to other Christians. The idea could equally be [as in AV] that Timothy had "fully known" Paul's teaching etc.- by reason of having travelled so much with him.

*Conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience-* Paul could say that Timothy had fully known his "purpose" (2 Tim. 3:10). The Greek *prothesis* is the same used in the New Testament about the shewbread- the bread openly on display before God. Paul is saying that his essential and real self was transparent, openly shown to both God and man. To say 'You've fully known how open and transparent I am' is really quite something. Who Paul showed himself to be was who he really was.

3:11 *Persecutions, sufferings-* I suggest the "sufferings" refer to the mental and spiritual temptations which arise from the literal, physical persecutions. The same word is translated "sinful passions" (Rom. 7:5; Gal. 5:24). The rest of the verse goes on to talk about the Lord's spiritual deliverance of Paul from these spiritual temptations (see commentary).

*Think of what things befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-* Timothy had been with Paul and was being asked to model himself on Paul.

*What persecutions I endured-* Paul uses the same word for "endured" in explaining that we can only bear or endure our trials because a way of escape is made for us out of them (1 Cor. 10:13). And so the Lord's deliverance of Paul was through making ways of escape every time. The comment that the Lord had 'delivered' Paul from those persecutions therefore refers

to not suffering him to spiritually collapse as a result of them. Paul seems to constantly feel that Timothy is on the verge of spiritual collapse; the fact he fulfilled his ministry at Ephesus, according to the Lord's judgment of the church in Rev. 2, shows that despite so much teetering on the edge, the Spirit finally made Timothy strong out of weakness. Timothy was being encouraged that despite all the trauma that Paul had endured, the Lord had delivered him from spiritually stumbling as a result of them; and Paul is consciously setting himself as Timothy's example.

*And out of them all, the Lord delivered me-* I noted above that this deliverance was more in spiritual terms than deliverance from literal hardship. The bad experiences were not allowed to make Paul stumble. We find the same word in the Lord's prayer, regarding deliverance from temptation (Mt. 6:13); and of our deliverance from spiritual temptation (2 Pet. 2:9). Paul's confidence that he would always be "delivered" (4:18) surely refers to his confidence that he would be delivered from spiritually falling; for in the same breath he recognizes that the time of his death is near, and he did not expect any last minute reprieve from it. This is huge encouragement for us all; we shall be delivered from spiritual temptation if this is our true desire. Truly "The sceptre of wickedness won't remain over the allotment of the righteous; so that the righteous won't put forth their hands to do evil" (Ps. 125:3).

3:12 *Yes, and all who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution-* Paul sees himself as being set up as a model for all believers, not just for Timothy (1 Tim. 1:13). And we will likewise be delivered from the spiritual temptations which go along with those persecutions- if that is our dominant desire.

3:13 *But evil men and impostors shall grow worse and worse-* As noted on 1 Tim. 4:1, Timothy was called to fight what seemed an inevitable tide of declension from the faith. As were the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20. And just as Moses succeeded in changing Israel's destiny, it seems they succeeded. For the Lord's letter to Ephesus commends the church for keeping out false teaching and excelling in good works. The problem was that they lacked *agape* love.

*Deceiving and being deceived-* This is surely a pointer to Jacob. Allusions to Jacob in later Scripture often comment on his negative side.

3:14 *But you, grow in the things which you have learned-* The downward spiral of :13 is matched by this upward spiral language. We can never stand still in spiritual life; there are forces propelling us either downwards or upwards. The command is not simply to retain what we learned before baptism; but to grow in those things, ever seeing new and wondrous implications in those basic truths.

*Knowing from whom you have learned them-* The integrity and manner of life of those who converted us is what inspires us to carry on. Thus Paul urges Timothy to "continue" because he knew "of what persons" he had been taught them (2 Tim. 3:14 RVmg.). The reference would be not only to Paul, but to his mother and grandmother who first taught him the Gospel. Paul is writing from the psychological viewpoint of Timothy; the integrity of the teacher was and is associated with the truth of the message taught. This is basic human psychology. And it explains why there is so much emphasis in Timothy's ministry upon not allowing immoral people to teach. Because especially with illiterate audiences, the power of the message will be compromised by the integrity of the messenger. It is too easy to take the



high ground that people should believe the message despite the messenger, because it is ultimately from God. That may be true on a theoretical level, but reality is that people do associate the message with the messenger. Hence Paul's request that Timothy reflect on the integrity of those who brought him the message, so that he might continue believing the message.

3:15 *And that from a child*- This continues the argument of the preceding phrase in :14; because Timothy had been taught the scriptures from childhood by his mother and grandmother who were of integrity (2 Tim. 1:5)- therefore he should continue to reverence the scriptures. See on :14 *Knowing from whom*.

*You have known the sacred writings*- Literally, 'the holy letters' (s.w. 2 Cor. 3:7; Gal. 6:11), as if referring to how his mother and grandmother taught him to read letter by letter from the Scriptures. Considering the low literacy rate in the Roman empire of the first century, we can assume that Timothy's background was of reasonable wealth. This would explain much of his weakness of character and personality which we have noted elsewhere; the weaknesses are typical of a 'rich kid'.

*Which are able to make you wise to salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus*- Paul is not saying that Bible reading will save us. It is faith in Christ which saves us, and we are made wise to that fact by the content of the entire Scriptures. The Old Testament scriptures were opened up by faith in Christ; that is what provided the key to interpretation which made them useful.

3:16- see on 2 Tim. 4:2,3.

*Every scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*- The Hebrew Bible was split up into small sections, such as "The Bush", referring to Moses and the burning bush. Each section was Divinely inspired.

A comparison of 2 Tim. 3:16 with 4:2,3 makes it clear that because the inspired word is profitable:

for doctrine *therefore*

preach the word; be instant in season, out of season (i.e. whether you naturally feel in the preaching mood or not)

for reproof *therefore*

reprove

for correction *therefore*

rebuke

for instruction in righteousness *therefore*

exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.

3:17 *So that the man of God may be complete*- Note how Peter says that the prophet was a 'man of God' who was moved by God's Spirit to write Scripture; whereas Paul says that the Spirit-inspired Scriptures are what makes a 'man of God'- us- who he is (2 Tim. 3:17 cp. 2 Pet. 1:21). There is a mutuality here, in which even we in this age can have a part.

*Completely empowered to every good work*- Yet we so often blame our lack of good works on a lack of resources or abilities. But the Scriptures speak to us, if we let them and read them

in faith, and thus inspire us to good works. The Lord later commended the Ephesus ecclesia on their "good works", so it would seem that Timothy really obeyed the spirit of all this. He pursued the teaching ministry he had been given, even if it was initially against the grain of his character. And it did indeed empower others to good works. Sadly, this was all done without *agape*, and this was the Lord's serious criticism of the later Ephesian church.

## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 I charge you in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus-* Paul several times writes this to Timothy. Paul always seemed so worried as to whether Timothy was going to hold on, and we could dynamically translate him as meaning 'Get a grip!'. But it may be that Paul had been given charges by the Lord which he was duty bound to soberly pass on to Timothy- hence the reference here to the charge being given in the presence of the Father and Son.

*Who shall judge the living and the dead-* The charge to preach to others is made in the light of judgment to come. We shall be judged according to whether we have shared the light with others or not. This is not to say that our acceptance is determined by our works; but the final judgment shall in some form take into account the life we lived now.

*And by his appearing and his kingdom-* Because there really will be a Kingdom of God on earth and people really can eternally live there because of their response to the Gospel- therefore we should preach.

*4:2 To preach the word. Preach it urgently, whether the occasion seems appropriate or not-* Our task of witness may seem hopeless. But we are to be prepared to preach “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2 AV). Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, and his language in 2 Timothy has many allusions to his own behaviour whilst at Ephesus. He spoke at Ephesus of how he had preached the word “at all seasons” (Acts 20:18)- and he tells Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim. 4:2 AV); Paul had taught what was profitable to others (Acts 20:20); and this was to be Timothy's pattern (2 Tim. 3:16 RV). “Out of season” translates a Greek word only elsewhere rendered ‘lacking opportunity’ (Phil. 4:10). Whether there is apparent opportunity or not, we must still witness- not just wait until someone asks us if we are religious. This is a common fallacy we all fall into at times. By contrast, there is to be a sense of urgency to our witness. Several times the Lord invites us to “go” and preach- we are all to feel a spirit of outgoing witness, rather than the defensive, tell-them-if-they-ask attitude which has dominated so many of us for so long. We need the same spirit of heroism in our witness which Jeremiah and Ezekiel had, as they reflected the indomitable Spirit of God in this matter of human salvation. Our unbelieving families, our workmates, our neighbours, seem to be stony ground to the point that it just isn't worth bothering. But we need a positive spirit.

*Reprove, rebuke, exhort, as you patiently teach-* The patience or *makrothumia* which God has is intended to be had by us too (2 Pet. 3:9,15; Rom. 2:4; Eph. 4:2). And especially is the preacher encouraged to have this *makrothumia* (2 Tim. 4:2; 3:10). God waits / is patient for repentance, amazingly so (we recall His waiting 120 years before the flood came)... and we are to have it in this same way too.

*4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching-* See on :4 *Will turn away*.

*But having itching ears, will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own lusts-* "Lusts" in Timothy refer to lusts for illicit wealth and sex (1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:6), of the type justified and indulged in by the group of female false teachers whom Timothy had struggled with in Ephesus. We have noted that there were sinful Christian women of 3:6 who were led astray by female false teachers seeking to justify their lusts. But those women were

led astray because they subconsciously wanted to have such teaching. The whole theme of the Timothy letters is that Timothy has been given a charge to teach true doctrine and stop false teaching in Ephesus. Paul is warning him about these particular false teachers, and helping Timothy understand that false teaching is actually a psychological function of the desires of the audience, ever seeking self-justification. Paul may be saying that even although Timothy has sorted out the immediate problem in Ephesus, it will recur- because that is the way of human nature.

*4:4 And will turn away their ears from the truth-* Paul had told the Ephesian elders the same (Acts 20:29,32). It is the more impressive, therefore, to read the Lord's judgment that the church at Ephesus had maintained the faith and driven out false teaching. Timothy had fulfilled his ministry against incredible odds, and had changed, at least for a generation, the direction which the Spirit had foretold.

The phrase "the truth" is used in Scripture as a summary of the Godly life, rather than a set of particular theologies; for truth telling, and being truthful with oneself and God, is the epitome of the life which God intends. All too often it has been assumed that because we know and believe true propositions about the Gospel, therefore we are somehow automatically 'of the truth'. The following passages make clear enough that "the truth" refers not so much to intellectual purity of understanding as to a righteous way of life. If someone understands a matter of Biblical interpretation differently to how we do, e.g. over matters of prophecy, this doesn't mean they have 'left the truth'. Yet if we [e.g.] lie, then we have 'left the truth' despite holding a correct understanding of the doctrines of the Gospel. Sinners turn away from truth (2 Tim. 4:4; Tit. 1:14). They are bereft of the truth (1 Tim. 6:5). God has revealed the truth, indeed has sent his Son to live it and to proclaim it, but sinful people have refused to listen.

*And turn aside to fables-* Gk. 'be turned aside'. As men turn away their ears (of their own volition) from the truth, so God will turn their ears to fables. If you turn away your ears from truth, Paul says that you are turned unto what is untrue. He doesn't say that a person turns their ears away from truth and then turns their ears to untruth. By turning away from truth, God confirms the person in that- and He turns them towards untruth. He sends strong delusion upon those who love and want to believe in lies (2 Thess. 2:11). The fables in view are those which Timothy had been asked to stamp out in 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7. According to the Lord's estimation in Rev. 2, he succeeded in stamping them out. But Paul is saying that there will always be a desire for people to believe in them, and God will even turn people towards them if they do not want to hear truth.

4:5- see on 2 Tim. 2:3.

*But you, be sober in all things-* The word means literally to be sober as in not being drunk. Every time it is used, it is in the context of being prepared for the Lord's second coming and not being caught off guard (1 Thess. 5:6,8; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). The reference is surely to the Lord's parable about the household servants who are to remain sober and care for the others in the household (Mt. 24:45-50). Timothy had been set over the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) and thus that parable spoke to him directly as one "whom his lord has set over his household". The soberness or awareness was therefore in relation to looking out for the needs of the household.

*Suffer hardship-* The same words used about Paul himself, and his earlier encouragement to Timothy to endure hardship (2:3,9). Paul so consciously sets himself up as Timothy's pattern (1 Tim. 1:13-16).

*Do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry-* Paul encouraged Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" *despite* all the doctrinal and pastoral problems and needs at Ephesus. These are never to be an excuse for not evangelizing. This was in addition to "fulfil your ministry"- which according to 1 Tim. 1:3,4 was to stamp out false teaching and encourage good works. In other words, his pastoral calling should not mean that he overlooked evangelizing fresh blood for the church. So often evangelism has been overlooked because of pastoral concerns, and yet it is fresh blood which is so helpful in moving beyond the pastoral problems.

*4:6 For I am already being offered-* Paul has in view his imminent death, but he sees it as an ongoing death. Alternatively we can read this as GNB "the hour has come for me to be sacrificed". But there is the idea as reflected in the AV that "I am now *ready* to be offered". It seems that Paul wrote 2 Tim. 4 when news of his imminent death had just been broken to him. As Paul faced his death, there was a deep self-knowledge within him that he was ready, that he was "there". As we face the imminent return of the Lord, it should be possible for us to have a similar sense: "I am now ready...". If we don't know that we are "in the faith" and that "Christ is in you", then we are "reprobates" (2 Cor. 13:5). All those who will be accepted *must*, therefore, *will*, therefore, have a measure of self-knowledge and appreciation of how far they've grown in Christ. Growth is a natural process, it's impossible to feel it happening. But by looking back on our lives and attitudes and comparing them with the experience of successful believers, it *is* possible to get some idea of our readiness for the judgment.

*And the time of my departure comes-* Paul had earlier spoken of his "departure" (Phil. 1:23), he had told Timothy and the Ephesian elders that he must finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24); and he knew his time had come; he could speak of having reached "the time of my departure" (2 Tim. 4:6). The level of self-knowledge he had as he faced the end is remarkable. Yet it really is possible for each of us; for his glorious race to the finish is our pattern. Despite his surface sadness and depression, Paul was finishing his course *with joy*.

As Paul's sense of his own sinfulness grew, so did his confidence of salvation. These two elements, meshed together within the very texture of human personality, are what surely give credibility and power to our witness to others. On one hand, a genuine humility, that we are sinners, that we are the last people who should be saved; and yet on the other, a definite confidence in God's saving grace and the achievement of Jesus to save sinners. Paul at the very end had a wonderful confidence in the outcome of the day of judgment. He had spoken earlier of running the race (1 Cor. 9:24-26; 1 Tim. 6:12). Now he says that he has finished it, in victory. His final words consciously allude back to what he wrote to the Philippians a few years earlier:

Philippians	2 Timothy 4
What I should like is to depart (1:23)	The hour for my departure [s.w.] is come (4:6)
If my life-blood is to crown the sacrifice (2:17)	Already my life blood is being poured out on the altar of sacrifice [s.w.] (4:6)
I have not yet reached perfection [finishing] but I press on (3:12)	I have run the great race, I have finished [s.w. perfected] the course (4:7)

I press toward the goal to win the prize  
(3:14)

Now the prize awaits me (4:8)

Paul felt that he had attained the maturity which he had earlier aimed for. To have the self-knowledge to say that is of itself quite something. May it be our ultimate end too. These parallels and Paul's commentary becomes all the more poignant if we accept the view that actually, Paul did not die soon after 2 Tim. 4 was written- rather was he released, did much work for the Lord, and died under Nero at a later date. In this case his commentary in 2 Tim. 4 is a reflection not so much of a dying man's last words and hopes, but of a mature, reasoned conviction that in fact he had arrived at a point of believing in salvation.

4:7- see on Lk. 13:24.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course-* Paul has used the metaphors of a soldier and athlete in challenging Timothy to a disciplined life. And now he says that he has himself fulfilled those images, yet again setting himself up as Timothy's pattern. In nearly all his letters, Paul asks his readers to pray for him. But not in these final letters to Timothy. "I am now ready to be offered". He knew he had finished the fight (2 Tim. 4:7). The Greek for "fight" occurs in Phil. 1:29,30 concerning the struggle we have to truly take up the cross of Christ, and also in 1 Cor. 9:25 regarding the battle we have for total self-control. Paul knew these were the aims his Lord had hoped to achieve in him. And Paul knew that he was through, he'd finished and achieved them. He had achieved self-control. He knew his Lord, he had been made conformable to the dying Lord Jesus on the cross, he *knew* the fellowship of his sufferings. He had filled up the whole measure of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

Paul felt very clearly his sense of mission. He speaks in Troas of how "none of these things move [deflect] me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy" (Acts 20:24). Some years later at the end of his life he could write that "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7). He didn't let anything distract him- and our age perhaps more than any other is so full of distractions. In his time of dying (at which he wrote 2 Tim.), John his hero was still in Paul's mind. Paul speaks of finishing his course (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), using a word only used elsewhere concerning John finishing *his* course (Acts 13:25). On a series of long Russian train journeys, I read through the Gospels and epistles, noting down all the times Paul makes a direct or indirect allusion to the Gospels. I then worked out how many times in each epistle he alludes, on average, to the Gospels. I found that on average, he did it once every six verses. But when you list his epistles chronologically, the general trend suggests that in his writing, Paul *increasingly* alluded to the Gospels. And in his time of dying (in which he wrote 2 Timothy), the intensity of his allusions to the Gospels reaches an all time high. In 2 Timothy he is referring to the Gospels at least once every 3.9 verses- and almost certainly more than that, seeing that my analysis is incomplete. As he faced death in 2 Tim. 4, he more intensely modelled his words (probably unconsciously) upon those of Christ. Thus when he speaks of how he is about to *finish* his course (2 Tim. 4:7), he is combining allusions to Mt. 26:58; Lk. 12:50; 18:31; 22:37 and Jn. 13:1. He speaks of how he wished that "all the gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17) in the language of his Lord, also facing death, in Jn. 17- where He spoke of His desire that all "the world might know".

*I have kept the faith-* Paul breathes a sigh of relief at the end of his life when he says that he has "fought a good fight... finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). To keep

believing true doctrine ("the faith") is likened to a lifelong struggle, a gruelling race. It hardly appears like this when we first learn the basic doctrines and are baptized. That it will be a struggle to continue believing them properly hardly seems possible in those innocent days. But living out true doctrine is a pre-requisite for acceptance into the Kingdom: "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truths (AV mg.) may enter in" (Is. 26:2).

Paul at his bitter end could say that he had kept the Faith; but he brackets this together with finishing the race and fighting a good fight (2 Tim. 4:7; Eph. 6:12). These ideas of running the marathon and wrestling through the fight he uses elsewhere; but in the sense of striving for spiritual mastery over ourselves. It is *this* which is keeping the Faith. The need to remain in the Faith, to hold onto it, is one of the classic themes of the NT (Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 4:7). Jude begins by appealing for his readers to be keeping the faith, to contend for the faith; and concludes by asking them to build up each other in that faith. To preserve it is in order to build up; for our growth is on the basis of the pure Gospel which we believe. It is this which leads us on "from faith to faith" in an upward spiral of growth (Rom. 1:17). These passages do not mean that we must religiously hold on to our understanding of the doctrines of a 'Statement of Faith', *and nothing more*. It is true that the need to maintain doctrinal purity *is* taught in these passages; but those doctrines are not just things which have been delivered to us to 'keep' in the sense of maintaining a correct understanding of them. If this were the case, God would be rather like the Roman slave owner who endlessly dropped a spoon and asked his slave to pick it up, then he dropped it again, asked him to pick it up... There was no *purpose* in the exercise itself, it was simply a test of the slave's obedience. But God is not like this. He has commanded us to keep the faith, to preserve the doctrines of the Faith, but there is a reason for this. Those doctrines are not just arbitrary statements which God invented as part of the boundless theological fantasy of an omnipotent being. They are intended to produce *behaviour*, and *this* is why they must be defended; because without the understanding of true doctrine, true spiritual behaviour is impossible. To simply hold on to the same doctrines we learnt before baptism, e.g. that God is one not three, is not holding the Faith in the sense the NT requires. This is simply clinging on to what we have always believed, just as most human beings cling on to their belief systems, especially as they grow older.

4:8 *From this time forward*- Was Paul given some special assurance that he would be saved at the last day? Otherwise it is hard to understand the force of him saying that he is sure of his salvation "from this time forward".

*There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*- It could be that the reward is to be made righteous. Or that the reward / crown is the reward for righteousness. Yet Paul elsewhere is very aware of "our unrighteousness" (Rom. 3:5), and how righteousness is imputed to us, final salvation not being any function of "works of righteousness which we have done" (Tit. 3:5). Perhaps he means that he now finally believed in practice what he had so eloquently explained to the Romans in theory- that he was righteous by faith. And he saw that there was indeed a crown for that faith.

*Which the Lord, the righteous judge*- This title is to be connected with the way that He will give us "the crown of righteousness". The 'justness' or 'rightness' of His judgment is not to be measured in human terms; for it shall involve counting us righteous who are not- if we have believed it. But this is *His* rightness / justice.

*Shall give to me at that day; and not to me alone, but also to all those that have loved his appearing-* The Lord said that all those whom he finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast (Lk. 12:37). And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord? The faithful are described as "those that *seek* (God)... such as *love* thy salvation" (Ps. 40:16). None truly seek God (Rom. 3:11- the context concerns all of us, believers and unbelievers); and yet we are those who seek Him. We must be ambitious to do the impossible. Those who truly *love* righteousness and the Kingdom will be rewarded with it. Likewise Paul in 1 Cor. 8:2,3 describes the faithful man as one who accepts he knows nothing as he ought to know, but truly loves God. Heb. 9:28 is clear: "Unto them that look for (Christ) shall he appear the second time... unto salvation". Those who truly look for Christ will be given salvation. People from all over the world, the living responsible, will see the sign of the son of man, will know His return is imminent, and wail with the knowledge that they have crucified Him afresh and must now meet Him (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). Their response to the certain knowledge that His return is imminent will in that moment effectively be their judgment. See on Lk. 12:37. The idea that whoever truly loves the Lord's coming will therefore be accepted by Him can easily be abused by those who reason that anyone who has the emotion of love towards Christ will be rewarded by him. We know that true love involves both having and keeping his commands. But for those of us in Christ, these verses are still a major challenge. If we truly "look for" Christ's second coming, if we "love his appearing", this will lead us to acceptance with him. So the point is surely clinched: our attitude towards the second coming is an indicator of whether we will be saved. Time and again in the Psalms, David expresses his good conscience in terms of asking God to come and judge him (e.g. Ps. 35:24). Was this not some reference to the future theophany which David knew some day would come?

As Job's emphasis on the coming of Christ and judgment increased, so his concentration on his present sufferings decreased. His heart was consumed within him with desire for that day (Job 19:27 AVmg.). 2 Tim. 4 can be regarded as Paul's most mature spiritual statement, written as it was just prior to his death. In 2 Tim. 4:1,8, Paul's mind was clearly on the second coming and the certainty of judgment. He realized, in that time of undoubted maturity, that the common characteristic of all the faithful would be that they all *loved* the appearing of Christ. This isn't, of course, to say that anyone who loves the idea of Christ's coming will thereby be saved. A true love of His appearing is only possible with a correct doctrinal understanding, and also a certain level of moral readiness for His appearing. But do we *love* the appearing of Christ as Job did? Is it *really* all we have in life? Is our conscience, our faith in the grace of God, our real belief in the blood of the cross, so deep that we *love* the idea of the coming of judgment, that we would fain *hasten* the day of His coming? The graph constructed above shows how Job's *love* of the Lord's coming grew very rapidly. Before, he was too caught up with bitterness about his unspiritual fellow 'believers', effectively justifying himself in the eyes of his ecclesia and his world, full of passive complaints about his own sufferings... and so he didn't *love* that day as he later came to.

4:9 *Make an effort to come to me soon-* "Make an effort" again seems to reflect Paul's knowledge of Timothy's tendency to inaction and laziness, and the need to 'stir himself up'. By inviting him to Rome, Paul clearly believed that Timothy did not have to be permanently



in Ephesus, but must have been confident that Timothy could pass over his duties to faithful brethren there for a time.

4:10- see on Mt. 13:22; Lk. 13:27.

*For Demas-* In Col. 4:14, Demas is a fellow prisoner with Paul, or at least with Paul in Rome. Either he fell away, or the difference is evidence of a second imprisonment. Demas was certainly within Paul's inner circle to have been with him in Rome, and a great loss.

*Forsook me-* Paul does take things rather personally, although that is just a function of being human. We would rather expect him to speak of forsaking the Lord. There are so many references to "I" and "me" in these final words that we can assume that Paul was in deep depression as he faced death alone and deserted. "Only Luke is *with me*... profitable *unto me* (:11)... did *me* much evil (:14)... no man stood with me, but all forsook me (:16)... that *through me* the message might be fully proclaimed" (:17).

*Having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia-* Translated to Hebrew, the *olahm hazzeh* ["present world"] is the term used by Judaism for the Jewish system. So it seems that Demas went off to Judaism, another casualty of the Jewish plot and machinations against Paul and his work.

4:11 *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with you-* As Paul in his time of dying remembered his fallout with Mark, so awareness of sinfulness is a sign of spiritual maturity in us all. Paul must surely have had twinges of guilt over his behaviour at times (not least over the bust up with Barnabas and Mark, Acts 15:39); and yet he insists that he always had a good conscience; so convinced was he of forgiveness. It seems Paul was aware of his error of years before in pushing Mark away. We have seen that he alluded to it in his letters. And now, right at the very end, the memory of his earlier pride and brashness to his brethren stayed with him. Every, every one of us has done the same thing to our brethren, countless times. Will we remember them on our deathbeds? Will our sensitivity to sin be that great? Paul in his time of dying was a man who had reached a spiritual peak, the love which was the bond of spiritual completion and maturity. Yet this didn't stop him being depressed, or from so desperately wanting his brethren, or from meditating upon past mistakes.

*For his service is profitable to me-* AV "Profitable to me for the ministry". Paul at his last gasp was still thinking about fulfilling his ministry / service of the Lord. And he saw that the fulfilment of his ministry required others, including those whom previously he had considered unhelpful. We all go through this path, coming to realize that we ourselves desperately need our weak brethren, that no man is an island, not even me. The term has just been used by Paul in saying that if a man separate himself from the vessels which are to dishonour, then he can be "profitable" in ministry (2 Tim. 2:21). It could be that Paul considered the vessels unto dishonour to be the Judaists, for he uses similar language about those under the Mosaic law in Romans. Perhaps he was satisfied that Mark had now separated himself from those Judaistic influences which had limited his service previously. Or perhaps Paul in his desperation to fulfil his ministry, simply lowered the bar and accepted the likes of Mark, even though he disagreed with those with whom Mark fellowshipped. Again, this path has been trodden by so many of the Lord's servants as they come towards the end of their service.

4:12 *But Tychicus I sent to Ephesus*- Timothy was the bishop at Ephesus, and Paul has charged him about how to lead the church there. But really wanting Timothy to personally come to him, he had arranged for Tychicus to go to Ephesus to temporarily relieve Timothy. We see here how intensely valuable and encouraging Paul found Timothy's presence. And yet there is probably no other single individual over whom Paul worried so much, and feared his weakness and possible spiritual collapse. Such fears are evident throughout the letters to Timothy. But it is a mark of Paul's final maturity that he took such encouragement from a brother whose weaknesses he so clearly perceived.

4:13 *When you come, bring the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus*- Paul's situation is very different from that presented at the end of Acts, where he lives in a large rented home capable of accommodating many visitors. He is presumably cold and needed the cloak. There are many links between Paul's time of dying (as recorded in 2 Tim. 4) and the death of the Lord Jesus. Paul felt that he had at last approximated to the fellowship of his Lord's sufferings, and therefore he looked ahead with confidence to the day of resurrection. His awareness of his cloak, as his one treasured worldly possession, was maybe fuelled by a realization that this too was the only significant worldly possession of his Lord, at the end (2 Tim. 4:13).

*And the books, especially the parchments*- He wanted to have his own copies of the Scriptures, which implies his relationship with the Jews in Rome had soured to the point where nobody would provide copies of the Scriptures to him. His desire for parchment reflects how he had no local source of them, even though Luke was with him, they perhaps had no money to buy parchment. Whereas previously Paul had the funds to rent his own accommodation in the prison. His desire for parchment suggests he wanted to write more letters; and yet 2 Timothy appear to be his final letter preserved. Perhaps his intention never came to anything; but he surely desired to serve his Lord until his last breath, and he realized that letter writing was a significant ministry.

4:14 *Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; may the Lord render to him according to his works*- The individual was clearly known to both Paul and Timothy, and it seems he was present with Timothy in Ephesus. He is the Alexander who had left the faith in 1 Tim. 1:20. It cannot surely be coincidence that Acts 19:33 records that there was a friend of Paul's called Alexander in Ephesus who attempted to defend him when the crowd of silversmiths called for Paul's destruction, angry that the collapse of the Diana cult had put them out of business. We can reconstruct that Alexander as a metalworker likewise depended upon the Diana cult for his livelihood. He initially converted and stood with Paul- but the pull of the Diana cult and the love of wealth and his former status had meant that he had turned against Paul. To regain his credibility in Ephesus, he had started a campaign against the Christians in Ephesus which affected Timothy and also led to Paul's suffering from him even in prison in Rome. This is fairly commonly seen amongst once zealous converts who fall away, and contributes towards the picture of Paul feeling so forsaken at the end.

4:15 *You also need to be on guard about him, for he greatly withstood our words*- The same word in 3:8 about the men of corrupt minds within the Ephesian church who resisted the Truth. There the parallel is drawn between them and Jannes and Jambres, the magicians who did false miracles to withstand the teaching of Moses. Perhaps Alexander repeated the false miracles claimed by the Diana cult; and the parallel would put Paul and timid Timothy in the place of Moses, who was seen as someone way above all other human spiritual endeavour. Paul often alludes to Moses as an example who is to be realistically followed, rather than admired as an icon from a distance.

*4:16 At my first defence no man stood with me, but all forsook me-* Paul was obviously deeply hurt by this. His call for Timothy to join him in Rome was therefore an invitation to persecution; for people didn't stand with Paul for fear of guilt by association and persecution. "All forsook me" obviously recalls the Lord in Gethsemane and Paul continues this allusion further. This is how 'Jesus is with us', in that life situations are clearly designed to be repetitions of what He experienced.

*May it not be held against them-* Paul saw that his own tribunal appearance was nothing compared to the appearance we shall all make before the judgment seat of Christ. Things like not standing up for a brother in court will perhaps be raised. But Paul understood that his forgiveness and prayer in this life, regardless of their repentance, could influence the nature of their judgment experience. His forgiveness of them could mean that the issue would not be raised with them then (AV "laid to their charge"). Whilst Paul doesn't speak with absolute certainty ["May it not..."], this possibility opens up huge issues for us. It gives eternal weight to our decisions regarding forgiveness, and our need to implore others to forgive us when we have sinned against them.

4:17- see on 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:7; 4:13.

*But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me-* There in the empty witness box, Paul sensed the Lord Jesus standing. The 'strengthening' is that spoken of in the notes on 3:5. It was psychological strengthening, against the pain of being left alone there, against bitterness, against unforgiveness. The Lord had such a wide experience of human life and suffering so that not one of us could ever complain that He does not know in essence what we are going through. This is my simple answer to the question of why, exactly why, did Jesus have to suffer so much and in the ways that He did. Take one example of how His earthly experiences were the basis of how He later administered "grace to help in time of need" for a believer. The Lord's one time close friend Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn. 18:5. Paul says that none of the brethren 'stood with' him when he was on trial, but "the Lord [Jesus] stood with me". It seems to me that the Lord knew exactly what it felt like to be left alone by your brethren, as happened to Him in Gethsemane and at His trials; and so at Paul's trial He could 'stand with' him, based on His earthly experience of being left to stand alone. In our lives likewise, the Lord acts to help us based on His earthly experiences; He knows how we feel, because He in essence went through it all. John maybe has the image of Judas and Peter standing with the Lord's enemies in mind when he writes that the redeemed shall stand with Jesus on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1), facing the hostile world.

*That through me the message might be fully proclaimed-* Paul's intention of going to Rome in order to make a public witness for the Gospel was therefore fulfilled. His trial was presumably high profile, so that many Gentiles heard the Gospel.

*And so all the Gentiles might hear-* As he faced death, Paul more intensely modelled his words upon those of Christ (see on :7). And yet despite this, perhaps because of his increasing identification with Christ and sense of Christ's supremacy, Paul's concern was constantly for doctrine; he pounded away, time and again, at the danger of apostasy. As he got older, this was a bigger and bigger theme with him. His last words just before his death are full of this theme, more than any other of his writings. And yet that same letter has more reference (relatively) to the Gospels and to the Lordship of Christ than anything else he

wrote. On average, Paul refers to Christ as "the Lord" once every 26 verses in his letters. But in 2 Timothy, he calls Christ "Lord" once every six verses; and in his very last words in 2 Tim. 4, once every 3 verses, nine times more than average! His appreciation of the *excellency* and the supremacy of Christ, of the height of His Lordship, grew and grew. Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last days as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). The Gospel is to be preached; Paul realized this in these his very last words, as even then, he makes one of his last plays on words: "... that through me the proclamation might be fully proclaimed" (2 Tim. 4:17 RVmg.). The Gospel, the proclamation of the Kingdom, is to be proclaimed. We cannot possess a proclamation, designed to be proclaimed, without proclaiming it.

*And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion-* As a Roman citizen, Paul's death would have been by execution. So he may be expressing gratitude that the form of his death was not going to be so awful as death in the arena. But he may also mean that he was spared the death penalty. But in this case, why does he write with urgency to Timothy as if he is about to die shortly? Perhaps he realized he had a terminal illness? Surely such language would be inappropriate if he had just been acquitted from a death penalty. This is why I take him here to be simply grateful for the form of death which had been decreed for him. We must also factor in the historical records of Paul's execution at the time of Nero's persecution. The reference to salvation from the lion was alluding to the Lord's experience on the cross, as described in Ps. 22:13,21. He felt forsaken by his disciples, just as Christ had been at His arrest and judgment (2 Tim. 4:16). The Lord's deliverance from the lion was through resurrection- and not through temporary release from its power. And it seems Paul understood that. But maybe he was also alluding to Daniel, who was literally saved from the mouth of the lion.

Whatever, Paul's mind was full of allusions to John the Baptist, Daniel, Moses and above all his Lord. All his years, his hours and minutes, of sustained meditation, of bringing the mind back from its natural wandering, were now paying their glorious reward. The picture of Paul in prison, having reached this spiritual pinnacle, fired the minds and living of "many of the brethren in the Lord" (Phil. 1:21). And for me too, the old and brave Paul in that cell is the man I fain would be. Nero is reported as having said that the time would come, when men would call their sons Nero and their dogs Paul, as veiled with all the pomp and the power and the pride of this life, he watched Paul led out to his death. And yet that Paul is the man we fain must be; and doubtless he had in his mind words he had penned years before: "... those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things... and be found in him... being made conformable unto *his* death; if by any means I might attain the resurrection of the dead... forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth... I press toward the mark for the prize" (Phil. 3). This is a far cry from the Paul who just a few years earlier had 'refused to die', who wanted to fight for his life (Acts 25:11). Now he felt ready to be offered, to be poured out as a drink offering upon the lives of his brethren (Phil. 2:17 Gk.); he held nothing back, but *gave* his life rather than have it forced from him by the inevitable death that must come to all men. What he had once counted gain- and the Greek suggests material, financial gain- he now counted loss. He came to despise the materialism of the world, as did Jacob in his maturity. The power of all this is not just in its relevance to the elderly or terminally ill. We are all old men now, we are all on borrowed time. We believe the Lord's return, the end, *the ultimate end*, is imminent. If we are living expecting the imminent second coming; *are we* ready? Have we reached the completeness?

4:18 *The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me to his heavenly kingdom; to him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*- Paul writes to Timothy as if he is shortly to die. So I don't take this as meaning that he was confident of deliverance from death at the hands of the Romans. Rather is this confidence that despite the "evil work" of his execution, he would be delivered from that through resurrection of the body at the Lord's return. He was using the very words of the Lord's payer, "Deliver us from evil, for Yours is the Kingdom..." (Mt. 6:13). He understood this as ultimately a prayer for deliverance from death into the Kingdom of God on earth at the Lord's return. Admittedly he has spoken of past deliverance from his persecutions (3:11), but here he speaks of deliverance as a 'saving me to His heavenly Kingdom', the Kingdom of Heaven to come on earth at the Lord's return. The Greek term for "evil work" however may well not refer to the 'evil work' of his execution. The plural "every evil work" suggests many evil works. And the phrase is consistently used in the NT of sins (Col. 1:21; 1 Jn. 3:12; 2 Jn. 11; 3 Jn. 10), specifically those committed by Judaism against Jesus (Jn. 3:19; 7:7). At the end of his life, faced with death, Paul's mind was inevitably on the serious sins he had committed against Jesus under the influence of Judaism. And as he surveys his future, he is confident that he will be delivered from them, and accepted into God's Kingdom. And that is enough for him to face death calmly. And it is with this issue of forgiveness and subsequent salvation in view that he can comment: "to him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen". This language is more appropriate to the triumph of Divine forgiveness and salvation than it is to Paul's being delivered from Roman punishment and released from prison.

4:19 *Greet Prisca and Aquila and the house of Onesiphorus*- His old friends Priscilla and Aquila were now at Ephesus.

4:20- see on Acts 20:25 *I know*.

*Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left at Miletus sick*- Perhaps this is a lament of loneliness. Instead of coming to Paul, Erastus had remained at Corinth. Hence Paul's urging of *Timothy* to not be like the rest and find excuses not to come to him.

4:21 *Try by all means*- At the bitter end, the way Paul begs nervous, spiritually and physically weak Timothy to try to get to him before he dies has something pathetic about it: "Do thy diligence to come... do thy diligence to come", he repeats twice over (2 Tim. 4:9,21 AV). The spiritual weakness of Timothy and his need for Paul's encouragement is quite a theme (1 Cor. 16:10; 1 Tim. 4:12,14; 2 Tim. 1:6-8; 4:2).

*To come before winter*- The urgency may be because without the cloak he would have frozen in his cell (:13). But he knows that the time of his departure is near. He knows that travelling to Rome by sea in Winter is dangerous- as he had experienced. So he wished Timothy to come immediately and not miss the shipping season.

*Eubulus greets you, and Pudens and Linus and Claudia, and all the brothers*- We note his grace in passing on these greetings; because these would have been amongst those who sadly did not stand with Paul in support at his trial (:16).

4:22 *The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you*- As noted on 1:14 and elsewhere, Paul was very conscious of the work of the Spirit as an internal strengthening within Timothy's spirit. "Grace" or 'gift', *charis*, refers to the gift of the Spirit; so we see here the way Lord's

Spirit intertwines with the human spirit. This is Paul's closing wish to Timothy, because he realized the supreme importance of having the mind or spirit of Christ. We should give it a like importance.

## CHAPTER 1

*1:1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ-* Paul several times calls himself "a servant of God". In the light of all his other allusions to Moses, Paul is surely alluding to the frequent descriptions of Moses as God's servant.

*For the sake of the faith of God's elect-* Paul in Romans understands election as evidence of grace; some are called to 'know the truth', to have faith, and others are not. This immediately removes any pride from any spiritual achievement, be it of faith or understanding.

*And their knowledge of the truth-* Or 'acknowledging'. There is a tremendous power in the basic doctrines of the One Faith. We come, over time in our spiritual growth, to acknowledge "the Truth" (2 Tim. 2:25), to be led to a Godly way of life by not only *knowing* the Truth but *acknowledging* its power (Tit. 1:1).

*The truth which is ultimately all about reverence towards God-* The NIV in Tit. 1:1 speaks of "the truth which leads to Godliness". Truth doesn't save of itself. Thus true understanding *is* related to true Godly living- *if* we translate the doctrines into practice. The Passover would only be properly kept, Moses explained, if the meaning of it was understood (Dt. 6:20-25). Again we note that 'the truth' is not a phrase which refers to set of theologies correctly understood. Perhaps this was a misconception even in those days which Paul is correcting, by saying that this phrase is instead ultimately practical and not theoretical.

*1:2 In hope of eternal life-* This is to be connected with the fact that God promised this "before times eternal". The mind boggles at the huge significance which our eternity has to God. He had the idea of it before eternity and He intends to give us eternity.

*Which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal-* This is an intentional tautology. There can be no point before infinity. But the contradiction achieves its end- we are blown away by the thought that somehow, in a beginning before eternity, the most precious thing in our hearts was promised. And that is, our eternity, our deepest and most passionate hope, that which we fear losing above everything else... was in fact secured and promised. How was it promised at that 'point'? The Greek can mean 'to assert to oneself', and this is I think the idea. God asserted within Himself that we would come to eternity. And God cannot lie, not to us nor to Himself. And He has spent infinity preparing this for us, through developing this earth with its unique possibilities for our existence, our personal gene pool, our calling etc. What a wonderful day it will be when finally all this work of infinity comes to term in our immortalization at the Lord's return to earth! This is all a rather deep and intellectual way of saying that God passionately wishes to give us that which is our master passion too- acceptance in His Kingdom. Another take on this phrase would be to go with the AV "Before the world began" and to understand the promise of eternal life made in the promises to Abraham as being before the Jewish world began at the Sinai covenant.

*1:3 But in his own time manifested His word in the message-* The message / word is simply that God wishes to give us eternal life. We are playing a part in God's eternal purpose; the idea of giving us eternal life began 'before infinity', God asserted this plan within Himself; and He waited all this time to use us to go take that message to people who could accept it and thus come to eternity. This is why any genuine attempt to spread that message has His eternal power and strengthening and enablement behind it. It could also be said that the manifestation of that word of eternal life / salvation was in the person of the Lord Jesus.

*The message with which I was entrusted-* In a sense God requires not help from man; and yet in another sense He has delegated His work to us, and limits His achievements according to what we are willing to do. C.S. Lewis in *The World's Last Night* observes: "He seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye. Creation seems to be delegation through and through. I suppose this is because He is a giver". As any employer soon learns, delegation is a risk. We have been "entrusted with the Gospel" (Tit. 1:3 RV); and therefore the world God so wants to love, the world God is appealing to, may never see Him; for He makes His appeal through us, as Paul told the Corinthians. The same word is found in 1 Tim. 1:11 (see notes there). The Gospel has been entrusted to us; in a sense, the progress of God's work depends upon us. He could save who He wishes as He wishes, but it seems He prefers to work through the mechanism of preachers sharing His word with others. See on 2:11.

*According to the commandment of God our Saviour-* A reference to the great commission? Or to the specific calling given to Paul at this conversion? Recall how Paul does at times begin his letters with an appeal to the fact he has been specifically commissioned as a preacher (Gal. 1:1-12; 1 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:11). He has just written that the message was entrusted to him personally. But this is not to say that we have not also been commissioned to share the same message.

*1:4 To Titus, my true child-* There is no evidence that Paul had converted or baptized Titus. But clearly Paul had much influence in his life. Timothy was likewise Paul's son in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2) although it was due to Eunice and Lois that Timothy had come to faith. This shows that our pastoral efforts for others can make them just as much our children in the faith; and these are the family ties which shall last eternally. "My *own* child" (AV) would suggest that there was some unique influence of Paul upon Titus, just as in natural families.

*After a common faith-* Whoever is baptized after believing the doctrines of the true Gospel is our brother or sister- regardless of who baptized them, or what name they go under. Titus was Paul's son "after the common (Gk. *koinos*) faith" (Tit. 1:4 AV). The faith, the doctrines which he had been taught by Paul and been baptized upon believing, were what had made him Paul's son; and therefore that faith was what bound them together in fellowship. The Faith in Jesus, as in the basic doctrines which make baptism valid, are the basis of our commonality, our fellowship, with each other. Perhaps Paul is saying that Titus had become his son due to the Gospel, i.e. he had converted him. But see above.

*Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour-* AV "Grace, mercy and peace". Peace with God comes from knowing His mercy in forgiving us, and that is because of His grace. Paul wished that Titus would feel this; there was real meaning in this otherwise standard greeting.



1:5 *The reason I left you in Crete was so you would-* The letters to Timothy begin with Paul saying he has left Timothy in Ephesus for the same reasons. The letter to Titus can be seen as a kind of template upon which those to Timothy are written; for there are many similarities of wording. The fact Paul speaks with such authority regarding matters in Crete suggests he had been instrumental in starting the work there. For he is careful not to get involved in any pastoral work which was the responsibility of others, and he did not build upon others' foundations (2 Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:20). His mission and vision was to begin the Lord's work afresh in each place- no bad policy for any true missionary. But when was Paul in Crete? The only time mentioned is during his journey to Rome, when they stayed for a short time near Lasea (Acts 27:7-9), but because it was such a small place and not much fun to spend the Winter in, the sailors wished to sail further along Crete towards the larger port of Phenice (Acts 27:12). It was whilst trying to sail there that they got blown right off course and ended up on Malta. It would seem that during the stay near Lasea at the inlet known as Fair Havens, Paul preached in Crete. It would have been no more than a village. And from that work there arose churches throughout Crete, for Titus was to "appoint elders in every city". They were pushing towards Rome, and so they surely would not have spent long at Fair Havens. And yet there is a strange turn of phrase about their stay there in Acts 27:9: "Now when much time was spent...". The modern versions seek to avoid the difficulty by suggesting that much time had been spent on the journey overall; but the Greek really suggests that they had spent "much time" at Fair Havens. They hadn't, really. But it was a significant amount of time from God's viewpoint, because as a result of this witness, several churches developed. And the witness began in a remote village, a mere anchorage rather than a harbour, near Cape Leonda, from where they had to walk five miles to the nearest shops in Lasea, itself little more than a village by modern standards. And from that remote spot the Gospel spread throughout the island. This to me has the hallmark of the divine.

*Set in order-* Used by medical writers of setting broken limbs or straightening crooked ones. The reference is to the body of Christ.

*The things that were lacking-* Literally, the things lacking in time to fix up. This was just the right word to use considering how brief was Paul's time in Crete. No wonder he wanted Titus to remain there and establish the new churches. Although we note that Paul wrote the letter from Macedonia, according to the endnote attached to the letter. This would be reason to think that Paul was released from the house confinement with which the Acts record ends, and from Rome went to Macedonia; and then returned to prison in Rome by the time of 2 Tim. 4, when he is clearly awaiting his death in Rome.

*And appoint elders in every city-* "Every city" suggests the Gospel had spread throughout the island; although the 'cities' were no more than villages or towns by modern European standards. Paul's approach to pastoral work was that it needed elders; the congregations were not left to just take it in turns to teach and run their meetings. This was not because they had the miraculous gifts of the Spirit and we in this age do not. It was simply that a system of eldership has always been God's way of structuring the life of His people, and there is no reason to think it is not to this day.

*As I instructed you-* The implication could be, as with Timothy in Ephesus, that Titus had not initially done what Paul had asked him.

1:6- see on Gal. 6:4.

*If anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife*- This could mean 'not polygamous', or could refer to not being a womanizer. He was to be a man of one woman.

*Having children that believe*- The converts on Crete had not long been baptized. The idea may be that it was quite acceptable for "children" to also convert; the elders should be heads of households who had accepted the faith. This was the more necessary because there is no archaeological evidence for dedicated Christian meeting places in the first century; the churches met in homes. The reference to "whole houses" (:11) would be to house churches.

*Who are not accused of riot or unruly*- But a related word is used about the behaviour of God's son, the prodigal (Lk. 15:13). The implication would therefore be that these brethren had done all they reasonably could so that the child wouldn't turn out like this.

*1:7 For the bishop, as God's steward*- Literally, a household manager. This is saying that the elder must have demonstrated ability to manage his own family well; family life is the training ground for work in God's family. The same is true today; an elder cannot really be a person who has clearly failed in family life because of their own faults.

*Must be blameless*- This is the language of priesthood. There are many allusions to the language of priesthood in the New Testament, both as major statements and also in passing, as here.

*Not arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain*- Clearly there were such people within the church membership, who formed the potential group from which Titus was to choose elders. He is told not to choose these types. We get the impression of a church completely open to all manner of sinners, including violent alcoholics; but the leadership was not open. A church open to sinners- all sinners- but led by Godly leadership is the ideal we should be working towards in our times. For we can hardly say that some sinners but not others are allowed.

1:8- see on Rom. 12:13.

*But given to hospitality, a lover of good, self controlled, just, holy, disciplined*- Literally, a lover of *xenos*, the very opposite to a xenophobe. This was a significant characteristic for a Christian to have, when most people were extremely insular and parochial, feeling negatively towards all from outside their immediate experience or geography. The same basic mentality is in us all, but in Christ we are not to be like that but the opposite, as recipients of the Lord's outgoing love toward us.

*1:9 Holding to the faithful word which is according to the doctrine*- "Holding" is elsewhere used about holding on to the Lord Jesus (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13), so the *logos* of faith could refer to the Lord Jesus, who is the substance of "the teaching / doctrine". The use of *didache* prompts the thought that there was perhaps a body of teaching which was used in missionary work, and the appointed elders would be teachers who were faithful to that. The early Christian document known as the *Didache* may possibly be in view, but probably the body of teaching has intentionally not been preserved for us.

Mt. 6:24 = Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word. Paul spoke of *holding fast* the faithful word (Tit. 1:9) with allusion to *holding to* our Master (Mt. 6:24). But- and this is an important caveat- don't deceive yourself that time spent in expounding Scripture is *necessarily* Bible study as *God* wants it- although it may make an impressive impact on a group of assembled Christians. True Bible study and understanding was what lead the Lord to the death of the cross. To *truly* love God with all our heart and understanding, not just for the intellectual fascination of it, is more than a burnt sacrifice.

*That he may be able to minister comfort using the sound doctrine-* Sound or faithful teaching is to be used as a "comfort" and not as an end in itself. The Bible is not a puzzle to be solved, with those who successfully make their way through some intellectual jungle of interpretation being rewarded at the end of it, for their mental tenacity and good fortune in meeting up with good teachers. God is not passive, He more actively seeks human salvation and the useful triumph of His Son's work in human lives.

*And also refute those who oppose it-* "Refute" means to convict, and the word is often used with the hope of eliciting repentance and reformation. We have the picture of the new churches under pressure from those teaching non-Christian ideas; but Paul doesn't say they should be driven out of the congregation. Rather his concern is with not allowing them to teach their ideas, and to convict them in the hope of their repentance. If individuals holding false ideas are to be excluded from the church, then we surely would expect to read about it here in the pastoral letters. But we never do. The concern always is with maintaining true teaching from the podium, as it were. Defenders of a closed table may respond that this is an argument from silence; but the silence is repeated, noticeable and deafening.

1:10 *For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers-* The idea is of men who were not subordinate to anything or anyone. Paul seeks to inculcate a structure in these new churches, of subordination to authorized elders, and to the *didache* or body of teaching which had been the foundation of the churches.

*Epecially they of the circumcision-* Titus himself was a Gentile (Gal. 2:3) and the early converts in Crete were likely Gentiles. But there was a conscious campaign of destabilization of the early churches by the Jews. The same pattern is seen throughout Paul's arguments to Timothy about the situation in Ephesus. Gentile converts were being destabilized by Jewish teachers who were getting access to the platform; just as happened in the Galatian churches. The burden of the pastoral letters is to eliminate false teaching and replace it with sound teaching. Exclusion from the breaking of bread is never once mentioned as a tool to be used to this end.

1:11 *Whose mouths must be stopped-* They must be excluded from the teaching structure; there is no mention of driving them out of the church or limiting their access to the Lord's table.

*Men who overthrow whole houses-* The churches of Crete as elsewhere in the first century were comprised of house groups, which were vulnerable to subversion by individual teachers.

*Teaching things which they should not, all for money's sake-* What exactly was the connection between their teaching and money? Were they demanding payment for their

teaching services? That sounds unlikely to have been successful. Perhaps they were pedalling a version of the prosperity gospel. Or perhaps they were playing on the fact that Judaism was a registered religion within the Roman empire, and religious Jews were free from army service and paying some taxes. To affiliate with the synagogue was attractive; and we note that the false teachers were Jewish (:10,14). See on :15 *To the pure*.

The early corruption of Christianity was due to false teachers who like Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15); they taught false doctrine for the sake of money (Tit. 1:11). Time and again the NT warns against elders who would be motivated by the love of money rather than the Lord Jesus and His people (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2). The Greek translated "filthy lucre" in the AV is hard to understand; it doesn't just mean 'money'. It suggests profit that is somehow filthy, morally disgusting. This is what money turns into, in God's eyes, when men so love it.

1:12- see on Jn. 1:46.

*One of their prophets said-* It is often claimed that what follows is a quotation from the Cretan teacher Epimenides. He is not called a false prophet, although he was. God is not so keen to as it were cover His own back, footnoting all the time to the effect that 'this is not true'. Hence the usage of the language of demons in the Gospels when such things do not exist. But Epimenides was born around BC 660- many centuries before. The "their" in view clearly connects with the preceding context, which is about *Jewish* false teachers, who may well have repeated what Epimenides was supposed to have said many centuries ago.

*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons-* To lie like a Cretan was a well-known saying in the first century. The laid back island lifestyle would have made Crete an unlikely area for the Gospel. But as noted on :5, the Gospel spread there like wildfire. So we have a picture similar to what we find today- secular people were eager to respond to the Gospel, tired of the empty life of flesh pleasing, but on conversion still carried with them the baggage of that previous culture.

The Cretans were typical port dwellers, making a living from entertaining passing sailors and their passengers, disposed to laziness from the good life, easy money and pleasant climate. Their idleness had led them to obsession with vanity in listening to vain arguments about words and turning to Judaism (:10). We see in parts of the church today an obsessive over-interpretation of Scripture, sectarianism, neo Judaism- and partly this is likewise a result of not harnessing the good life as it should be, to the Lord's service. See on 2 Thess. 3:11. It's noteworthy that division over 'doctrine' and demands to exclude others who fail to agree on some complex matter of theology nearly always come from the prosperous churches of the West, and not from the poor unto whom the Gospel is preached and willingly accepted.

1:13 *This testimony is true-* But not every Cretan was like that. Yet Paul doesn't worry to cover his back, he accepts that this is the general spirit on the island, and it had affected the believers- and they needed to be rebuked for it. We can deduce from this that many of the converts were local Cretan Gentiles. At first blush it may seem strange that such people, still very secular and worldly in their outlook, could be attracted to Judaism and Jewish fables (:14). But this is the huge attraction of legalism; it enables a fleshly mind and lifestyle to be respectably maintained under the guise of deep religiosity.

*For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith-* Soundness in the faith doesn't refer to purity of correct doctrinal understanding. Rather does it refer to the practical issues of not lying, not indulging the flesh in gluttony etc.

1:14 *Not giving heed to Jewish fables-* To the false doctrines of Judaism which were being pedalled *within the ecclesia*. Yet the spirit of our day generally is to be more and more tolerant of doctrinal deviants, rather than 'giving heed', 'watching' against them. There is a telling play on words here. The Greek for "giving heed" is normally used concerned taking heed, being ware, of false teachers (Mt. 7:15; 16:6; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:4; Tit. 1:14). Paul's implication is: 'Instead of giving heed to the *danger* of these people within the ecclesia, you gave heed to them in the sense of listening to them'.

*And the commandments of mere men who aim to turn away others from the truth-* This is further evidence that there was a consciously organized Jewish plot to infiltrate the early ecclesias and break down the faith of the Gentile Christians. Despite this, never once does Paul advocate dealing with the problem by closing the doors of the church or fencing off the Lord's table. Instead his method is repeatedly to ensure that the teaching ministry is sound. If access to the Lord's table is indeed based on qualification, we would for sure have expected Paul to talk about this in these pastoral letters, and in addressing the problem of known infiltration of the church. Note that it was Jewish fables which were being used to turn believers away from the truth- which is in Jesus. Not everything Jewish must be automatically accepted and glorified by Christians- there is a tendency that way in some quarters. It was Jewish fables and ideas which actually led to Gentile Christians in Crete losing their faith.

1:15- see on Lk. 11:41.

*To the pure, all things are pure-* The reference is surely to the Jewish food laws. The parallel in Timothy would be the comment that all food is to be accepted now (1 Tim. 4:4,5), which in turn alludes to the statement to Peter that all foods are to be seen as pure (Acts 10:15). All foods have been declared clean in Christ (Mk. 7:19). Indeed, food is not of itself morally pure or impure (Rom. 14:20). Paul's argument is that things are not of themselves impure- in contrast to the Judaizing arguments referenced in the preceding verse. What makes the usage of those things pure or impure is the attitude of heart which we bring to them. The legalists had tried to bring every issue of human life to the point of being pure or impure. It was a matter of atoning for one's endless impurities by ritual- rather than a heart matter. Seeing Crete was an island, this was only possible by paying for sacrifices to be made at the Jerusalem temple. This may explain the strong financial element to the false teaching noted on :11.

*But to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; both their minds and their consciences are defiled-* This element were within the church, but effectively unbelieving in Christ. Everything was potentially impure- because the Judaists thought that their laws covered every possibly part of human experience. It may seem strange, at first blush, that the easy going, morally lax islanders of Crete would be attracted by this kind of thinking. But actually, this kind of purchased legalism is very attractive to worldly Christians with a niggling conscience.

They can buy in to the whole idea of a superior spirituality and understanding, and as it were purchase legal righteousness which makes no demand upon their heart or private behaviour. And the niggling conscience is apparently appeased, to the point that it is actually "defiled" and ceases therefore to function.

1:16 *They profess that they know God*- There are so many parallels with the letters to Timothy. The equivalent of this is the reference to those who have "a form of Godliness" but deny its power (see on 2 Tim. 3:5). The 'profession' of knowing God may refer to some confession of faith, perhaps of a standard "form of Godliness", made at baptism.

Tit. 1:16 AVmg. speaks of those who "profess that they know God" but are "void of judgment". The same word is used in Rom. 1:32 about those who know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind "void of [an awareness of] judgment" (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts. There is a theoretical knowledge of God, and the knowing of God in ongoing fruitful relationship. Thus those who do not understand will ultimately be condemned by God (Rev. 1:16-18 cp. 14:10).

*But by their works they deny him*- The same word is used in 2 Tim. 3:5; some had "a form of Godliness" *denied* the power thereof. The power of that form of Godliness issued in good works. But the legalism of these Gentile law-keepers was such that they disallowed themselves from doing good works, and their legalistic obedience actually made them "disobedient".

*They are detestable, disobedient*- See above. Paul the carefully obedient Pharisee, spotless as to legal righteousness, described himself at that time as being amongst the disobedient (3:3). The essential law is not about acts of commission; it is a heart issue, obedience to the spirit of Christ.

*Unfit for any good work*- Just as everything was impure to them (:15), so their mentality resulted in an inability to do anything good. Because the good works the Lord seeks are those which are done from a motive of gratitude for His total grace. "Unfit" translates a Greek word commonly used for 'rejection'. It's as if the Lord seeks people to do His good works in this world; but he rejects these types. Their apparent emphasis on works rather than faith left them unable to perform good works. For the heart motive is all important, and legalistic obedience stops this.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *But you-* Despite the presence of other, false, teachers, Titus was to focus on teaching which promoted spiritual health or 'soundness'.

*Must teach what accords with sound doctrine-* His teaching was to accord with sound teaching; presumably referring to the basic teachings which comprised the Gospel message. The argument suggests that "sound doctrine" is a body of material against which subsequent teaching can be compared. Being unsound in the Faith is another way of saying that in works a man is denying Christ; to be "sound in the faith" is to tell the truth and not be lazy nor gluttonous (Tit. 1:13,16). Good behaviour "adorns the doctrine of God", i.e. the basic doctrines of the Gospel (Tit. 2:10); the practical commandments of Tit. 2:2-10 are "the things which befit the sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1 RV) which Titus was to teach. It's almost as if Paul is telling Titus to bring out the practical implications of the doctrines which he was teaching. "Doctrine" refers to a code of behaviour, not just a set of correct propositions concerning God and His plan with men. Thus we don't read about "*pure doctrine*" anywhere in the AV; but rather "*sound doctrine*": living, active doctrine. The things which become sound doctrine are soberness, etc. (Tit. 2:1-4).

2:2 *That older men-* This may refer to old in age, or to elders. The way the commands proceed to younger men (:6) may suggest it is older people who are in view.

*Be sober-minded, dignified-* This and other characteristics which Paul is appealing for were not inculcated by obedience to Jewish food laws and rituals which form the context of these exhortations (1:15). A number of these characteristics are mentioned in :12 as being inculcated instead by living under grace. Realizing that we are saved in spite of ourselves actually provokes in us a desire to be spiritual in response to that grace. For we cannot be passive to knowing that by grace, I shall indeed live eternally.

*Self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in patience-* This appeal is made to old men [elders?], old women and young men (:5,6). It was obviously a very needed exhortation in the context. And yet the ecclesias in Crete were prone to be attracted by hard core Judaism, according to our notes on chapter 1. This is proof for all time that legalistic obedience and keeping Jewish food laws (see on 1:15) is not the same as self-control. Indeed it would seem that by attempting legalistic obedience, these Gentile converts were justifying a lack of self-control in their lives in other areas. Col. 2:23 makes precisely the same point- that obedience to Jewish rituals is of "no value" in the battle against self-gratification. By contrast, living under grace is what teaches us to overcome the flesh (:12).

2:3 *That older women likewise be reverent in demeanour-* Vincent: 'as those who are engaged in sacred service'- an allusion to priestly service. The idea is that the rank and file also live out the spirit of priesthood. The Greek means 'on sacred duties'. This could mean that these older women were elders in some kind of spiritual office in the church. But the allusion may be to priesthood, which was the domain of males under the old covenant. But now the entire church were to see themselves as a "holy priesthood", including older women, who were otherwise excluded from religious duties in most religions including Judaism. True Christianity opens up opportunities for service to those whom society would generally consider as unqualified to serve or be useful. Elderly women were particularly in that category in the first century, and there are many such groups within societies today. But the

Lord has use for everyone because He has given each convert unique talents and callings to service- and not just to the visible leadership of a church.

*Not slanderers-* The same word usually translated "devil". This is proof enough that the word *diabolos* simply means a slanderer and does not necessarily refer to any cosmic being. But the 'devil' is often used as a personification for the Jewish opposition to the Christian movement in the first century. These women had perhaps been influenced by Jewish thinking, just as in 1 Tim. 4:7 we noted that the older sisters in Ephesus were teaching Jewish fables.

*Nor enslaved to much wine-* The incidence of alcoholism amongst elderly females is not something which receives much attention today, and we can be sure that this was a radical area to address in first century Crete. The older women were liable to just be overlooked in society and in any pastoral program. But Paul sets a great example in showing that each and every believer, in whatever situation they are in, must be valued and cared for. And he puts the finger on a weakness which many would've just shrugged off as irrelevant to the main thrust of church life and just a personal matter. But if they were teachers, it was not right that they were also alcoholics.

*Teachers of that which is good-* These women had a teaching ministry- something unheard of in most contemporary religions. This is one reason for thinking that the 'older women' and 'older men' here could refer to elders rather than necessarily those older in age. We see here the immense value of the human person. In an age when old women were considered irrelevant to the functioning of any religious group, Christianity had a unique place for them. They are not criticized for teaching; as we saw in commenting upon 1 Timothy, the female teachers are rebuked for the content of their teaching rather than the fact they were teaching at all. The pastoral letters repeatedly focus upon the need for correct teaching, rather than suggesting that troublesome individuals be excluded from the church or the breaking of bread. The lack of such commands is significant. It is a silence that is deafening. These churches were threatened by serious false teaching and immorality; but Paul's inspired answer is to control the platform, the teaching ministry, rather than throwing people right out of the church or the symbols of the Lord's patient, saving love.

2:4 *So that they may train the young women-* This could suggest that there was a specific women's ministry intended, after the pattern of Miriam teaching the women of Israel.

*To love their husbands, to love their children-* In an age of arranged marriage rather than love marriage, this was a required exhortation. And it shows that 'love' as God intends is an act of the will. It is not something which comes and then can leave. It can be practiced in response to a command like this. The 'love' they were to show them was not, therefore, the natural love of a woman towards her children; but the conscious act of Christian love. They were living in an age, as we are, where people were "without natural affection" (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3). There was to be a resurrection of love, and a break with the spirit of the age in regard to feelings and family commitment. It could be that there was a specific reference here to not practicing abortion or infanticide, which were common.

2:5 *To be self-controlled, pure, working at home-* The Greek in all these verbs suggests a moral, sexual tendency towards immorality which was to be guarded against. Again we note that the attraction of legalistic Judaism had not influenced them for good. Rather were they



perhaps feeling justified in immorality because of a few acts of legal obedience.

*Kind and submissive to their own husbands-* This is written in the context of church life where both husband and wife were believers. For wives in Eph. 5:22 and Col. 3:18 were to submit themselves to their own husbands as unto the Lord Jesus. The context of Titus is that there were many false teachers around, demanding submission to them. But the women were to not submit themselves to them, but to their husbands who were hopefully leading the family in sound teaching. Likewise believing slaves were to be submissive to their believing masters, who also were intended to be teaching them rightly (:9). The force of "their own" suggests to me that there were competing claims for submission; and the context is of false teachers seeking submission to themselves. This I suggest is the first context for the 'submission' which is in view here and in :9.

*That the preaching of the word of God may not be mocked-* The pastoral letters continually reflect a concern that there was a watching world outside the churches, eager to slander and mock the Christian movement. And no reason must be given for this to be legitimate. He assumes that all believing men and women would be preachers of the word, yet if the wives were disorderly in their behaviour they would bring mockery upon the message preached. See on 1 Tim. 6:1.

*2:6 The younger men likewise exhort to be self-controlled-* See on 2:2 *self-controlled*. But the Greek is literally 'sober minded', and the "likewise..." suggests this may be a continuation of the criticism of the older women for being alcoholics (:3). The soberness in any case is a required characteristic of all believers because of the immense gravity of the issues with which we constantly deal with- eternal life and eternal death, living in the shadow of the Lord's crucifixion death for us. These things can only issue in a sober, serious mindset.

*2:7 In all things show yourself as an example of good works-* This suggests a conscious self exhibition, of the kind Paul makes in 1 Tim. 1:13-15. This is not posing or posturing; it is a realistic acceptance of the fact that actions speak louder than words. In a largely illiterate congregation, the real teaching of the Christian life was by example, and not by appeal to words on scrolls or ancient manuscripts which were inaccessible to the majority.

*In your teaching show integrity-* Lack of integrity in teaching is found in telling people what we perceive they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear from God.

*Dignity-* The spirit of first century Crete was what we have today- a love of entertainment, light hearted joking and enjoyment. This is not to feature in teaching. We are dealing with ultimately serious issues, of eternity. And if we have grasped them, our teaching will likewise be with an appropriate dignity and soberness. The continual appeals for soberness [NEV "self-control"] were obviously needed in Crete and they are in our age no less.

*2:8 Sound speech that cannot be condemned; so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us-* Again we have the impression of the Christian churches being surrounded by critics, who had infiltrated them, and who were ever seeking to slander the Christian movement. The context requires that there were within the churches such 'opponents', eagerly grabbing hold of the words and behaviour of Christian leaders in order to speak evil of the Way of God in Christ. We recall how the Jewish opposition "spoke evil of the Way" in Acts 19:9. The opposition were going to do this no matter how careful Titus was. Therefore the "put to shame" may refer to how they would ultimately be silenced at the day

of judgment, where it will supremely be manifest that the true Christian "cannot be condemned". Speaking of the sudden destruction of the wicked at the future judgment, David reflected: "So they shall make their own tongues to fall upon themselves" (Ps. 64:8). Unsound speech will be condemned, or perhaps [will lead to our] condemnation.

*2:9 Encourage servants to be submissive to their masters-* See on :5 *submissive*. The implication would be that their masters were also believers; see on :9.

*And to be pleasing to them in all things-* The other 8 occurrences of the Greek word are all about being well pleasing to the Lord. This confirms my suggestion that the masters were believers "in Christ", and they were to view their masters as the Lord; all service done to them was done to Christ. This was an incredibly liberating concept for those locked into slavery, just as it is to those locked in to the slavery of working on minimum wage or other forms of modern slavery.

*Not argumentative-* The slave owned nothing, not even his or her own body. There was a chronic search for meaning and self value, a desire to preserve identity, define boundaries and keep self-respect, and secret ownership over at least some things, however small. These needs reflected themselves in arguing back with masters over requests made, and in petty theft of objects (:10). All these psychological needs were met in Christ, and according to contemporary references to Christianity, it was very popular amongst the slave population for precisely these reasons. The Lord likewise knows exactly our needs, emotionally and psychologically. And if we will accept it, there is the ultimate answer in Christ.

*2:10 Not petty thieves-* See on :9 *Not argumentative*. The believers who were in slavery were told no to 'purloin', not to steal little bits of property and money in the hope that one day they would save enough to buy their freedom. And yet we in our century with our mortgages and pension schemes are in just the same desperate, petty, small minded position!

*But showing integrity in everything; that they in all things may make attractive the doctrine of God our Saviour-* The psychological breakout from the awful mental trap of slavery... this was a huge advertisement for the teaching of the Gospel, and of the practical success of God's plan of salvation in Christ.

*2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men-* "The grace of God... bringing salvation to all men..." is an allusion to the great commission to *preach* salvation to all men. But here, grace is said to do this. The conclusion seems unavoidable: grace and the preacher are inextricably linked. The experience of grace is the essential motive behind all witness, and the witness itself is about God's saving grace. That salvation is by grace enables us to look forward with eagerness rather than uncertainty to the second coming, and our lives are thereby changed. "The grace of God... teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts... looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:11-13). The word 'appearing' refers both to the appearing of grace now, and the appearing of the Lord at the second coming (:13). The ultimate outworking of grace will be at the Lord's return, when we shall be raised from the dead and this mortal shall put on immortality.

The Greek for “all men” suggests that God’s grace that brings salvation to all has appeared; but we have to take that salvation to others and they must respond to it. We therefore can conclude that potentially all men could be saved, but they will not be because the preachers haven’t taken the message of God’s grace to them and they haven’t all responded to it. See on 1:3. In the context, Paul has just addressed various categories- old men, old women, elderly female alcoholic Christians, young men and slaves. God's grace has appeared to "all men" in the sense of all kinds of people; and His desire to save teaches all people, of whatever type and station, the transformation of their lives which is appropriate in their situation.

2:12 *It trains us*- "Teaching us". Just as God’s grace is likened to a king in Romans, reigning over us, here it is likened to a teacher. From the time of our spiritual birth at baptism, we are trained up by grace. The contrast is with how Paul was trained up from a child in the things of the Law (Acts 22:3); Titus was up against converts who were prone to influence by legalistic Judaism, as noted on chapter 1. If we grasp the wonder of salvation by grace, that we are saved by status, counted as righteous right now, we can’t be passive to it; we have to respond by living a spiritual life. Knowing we are saved by grace can alone enable us to look forward eagerly to Christ’s return (:13). The initial aim of the letter is to guide Titus as to how to teach and who to appoint as teachers. But he is reminded that the most powerful teacher is the experience of grace. The Gentile converts on Crete were tempted by Judaistic legal obedience; but as noted on chapter 1, this wasn't achieving spiritual characteristics in them. It is grace which teaches them.

*To renounce ungodliness and worldly passions*- "Worldly" is only used elsewhere about the Jewish world (Heb. 9:1). The lusts or passions of the Jewish world were those provoked by living under law, believing that obedience to commandment and avoidance of sin is the way to salvation. Paul's autobiographical section in Romans 7 describes this in his own experience; obsession with law bred lust and sinful desire. Living under grace is the way to 'deny' those lusts; believing that we are saved by grace, already in the status of 'saved', totally independent of our obedience or disobedience. Our response to that will be so powerful that we reject or overcome the passions of the flesh.

*And to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in this present age*- These are all internal, mental characteristics brought forth by God’s “grace”, or gift. That gift is the work of the Holy Spirit within our spirit.

2:13 *As we look for the blessed hope*- Grace and faith in the forgiveness of sins teaches us to look for the blessed hope and the appearing of Jesus. The Greek *elpis* doesn’t mean a 'hope for the best' kind of hope but rather refers to a solid certainty. If we aren't sure of salvation at His return, we can hardly look forward to it. A firm grasp of salvation- definite salvation- by a real grace alone means we can look to that day with confidence and expectation. See on Col. 1:5. The 'blessed' hope is literally 'the happy hope'; and we "look for" this, or as the Greek suggests, we admit it, we accept it. God's grace therefore gives us the joy of certain salvation and joyful anticipation of the return of the Lord Jesus. The good news of the Gospel really is of joy and peace and security. But too often the only real message seems to be 'Learn to read the Bible effectively, understood a package of true doctrines, then you will be responsible to judgment, and hopefully, you may be accepted for eternity'. This is a non-Gospel. It is hardly good news, which brings joy and peace along with it.

*The manifesting of the glory of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ-* The same Greek word used in :11 for 'the appearing' of God's grace. The point is that when grace appeared in our lives, we were assured of salvation at the Lord's return- in the sense that we should be able to say that if the Lord comes now, or we die now, then we shall surely be saved. If God's glory is to be eternally revealed, we are to live that same glory within our own minds now; in this sense we "have eternal life", the kind of life we shall eternally live begins now.

*2:14 Who gave himself for us-* The phrase 'to give self for' is used several times in the NT; it doesn't necessarily have to refer to the crucifixion, although that is surely largely in view.

*That he might redeem us from all iniquity-* "Redeem" or 'ransom' suggests that we are bought out of slavery to our master- "iniquity". As Romans 6 puts it, we are no longer slaves of sin once we accept the Lord's death in baptism. We are totally forgiven of all sin once "in Christ"; by grace and not by our works.

*And purify to himself a people for his own possession-* There is another aspect attaching to the fact that the Lord obtained our freedom from our sins. Because we are forgiven, not because of our works of repentance but simply by grace are placed in a status of 'saved', we cannot be passive. We respond to this by allowing ourselves to be 'purified' by His Spirit, and zealously responding in good works. This purification, whereby He possesses / dwells within us, is by the Spirit. The argument is so similar to that in Romans. "Purify" translates a Greek word often used about ritual, legal purification. The reference is to the fact that Jewish false teachers had been pressurizing these Gentile converts with their various theories of purification (1:15). The Lord is now at work to purify *us*, rather than us having to perform rituals to purify ourselves. We are to respond to His actions by purifying ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). But the Biblical emphasis is upon *His* cleansing / purifying action, which we respond to. The gift of the Spirit is described as God purifying our hearts in response to our having believed the Gospel (Acts 15:9). The Holy Spirit is a holy mind / disposition, a working within us, rather than any external ability to perform miracles. The sacrifice of Christ means that our conscience, our mind, is "purged from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). Believing we are totally redeemed from sin means that we wish to respond in good works of service. And we are empowered to do so by the conscience being purified. The language of Heb. 9:14 is very similar to what we have here in Titus. There are many parallels between Titus and the letters to Timothy; in them we read of the pure / purified heart and conscience of the believer (1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; 2:22). This purifying of the heart is a reference to the Lord's work through His spirit, in the hearts of all those who have accepted His redemption of them by grace. All this is in pointed contrast to the way the Jewish false teachers in Crete were offering sinful Gentiles a conscience about sin which was defiled rather than purified (1:15,16).

*Zealous of good works-* As noted above, these good works arise from believing that we have been redeemed from sin by grace and not works. The wonder of that is so great that we can no way be passive to it.

*2:15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority-* The authority was the Spirit-guided word of Paul in the letter to Titus. The "things" refer to the wonderful message of salvation by grace, and transformation in response to it. These things were what should be

taught from the platform, and not Judaistic legalism. And they were to be a comfort to the hearers [the idea of 'exhort'].

*Let no one despise your teaching-* See on 1 Tim. 4:12 *Let no man despise your youth.* People did despise the teaching; but we allow others to despise us. It is our choice whether we allow them to despise us. The Judaists would have mocked the message of salvation from sin by grace; they were arguing for purification by ritualistic obedience rather than by the Lord's work in our hearts by the Spirit. But Titus was to be unashamed of the message.

## CHAPTER 3

*3:1 Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities- to be obedient, to be eagerly ready to do every good work-* These terms could refer to authority figures within the church i.e. elders. But they more naturally refer to local magistrates etc. The picture presented of the Cretan congregations is very negative. There were problems with alcoholism, slander, aggression, laziness, in trouble with the law and not obeying court judgments. They were keen to obey Mosaic Law, but not the civil law around them. They needed to be exhorted not to be "disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (:3). And yet never is there any talk about restricting the breaking of bread to these folks or casting them out of the church. Rather the focus is on having the right teaching mechanisms to try to improve these folks.

*3:2 To speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, but to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men-* One theme of Titus is that God's amazing grace and the certainty of salvation should be perceived so strongly by us that we will not argue about words and have strife with others (:9,10; 2:12). Those who trigger divisions amongst brethren over strife about words and meanings are reflecting their own insecurity concerning their personal salvation by grace alone. The Greek is literally 'not quarrelling', using the same word as we will meet in 3:9 for "quarrels about the law". As observed on chapter 1, the Cretan converts were generally worldly and still very influenced by alcohol and the laid back, lazy life. But they were tempted to get involved with endless strivings about Jewish legal interpretation... And that makes psychological sense. They thought their uncommitted Christian life could be made right by a few acts of legalistic obedience, and getting involved in argument about abstract matters of interpretation. And the same has been seen so often in conservative Protestant circles.

Titus was to teach the Cretan brethren that because they had been washed and regenerated in baptism, therefore they were not to speak evil of others, because it was *in the past* that they used to be like that (Tit. 3:2-6). But they still *were* acting like that, even after baptism! They are called upon to remember the implications of their baptism, and live out the status they thus attained before God.

*3:3 For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another-* Paul says that this catena of poor behaviour was *him* before his conversion. Yet he was legally obedient to the Law. But it didn't elicit a spiritual person within him. So he holds up his own conversion as an example to those on Crete who were tempted to turn to the Law as a means of spirituality. Legalistic obedience just would not elicit spirituality, and Paul was the parade example of that. He wished them all to follow his pattern (:4), just as he wrote to Timothy of his being a Christ-appointed model of conversion (1 Tim. 1:13-15).

*3:4 But when there appeared the kindness of God our Saviour and His love toward man-* See on :3 *For we also...* . Paul refers to the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road, and sees this as programmatic for each believer.

*3:5 Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us-* This is a warning against the tendency towards Judaism in the Cretan

congregations which we noted in chapter 1. The idea was that by doing works, there was a chance of future salvation. Paul's point is that we have been saved, we are in the 'saved' status, in that every believer should be able to say that if the Lord returns now, or we die now, then by grace we shall surely be saved. Hence the significance of the past tense: "He saved us". God forgives men on the basis of their *faith* in the blood of Christ, and association with it by baptism; "*not* by works of righteousness, which we have done" (Tit. 3:4-8). God's basis of salvation is *not* works. We must be careful not to insist on 'forsaking' sins in physical terms to the extent that we too preach justification by works. Just one sin deserves death. No amount of forsaking that sin can change that sentence. God's way of escape is for us to be in Christ, so that He looks upon us *as if* we are Christ, imputing Christ's perfect character to us. Therefore forsaking sin is not in itself the basis of salvation; rather is it faith in Christ. Of course, true faith shows itself in works. But none of us has the degree of faith which we ought to have, and therefore none of us does the amount or type of works which we should. To insist that someone shows their faith by specific works, e.g. certain changes in their marital status, is to insist that there is a direct, definable relationship between faith and the precise type of works which that faith leads to. Yet we are not so strict with ourselves. The faith and works of each of us are far from complete. Exactly because we are not saved by works but by God's mercy, *therefore* Paul wished to "affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:5,8). In this sense, as Paul says in Romans, grace reigns as a King. It has power over every department of human life and thinking.

The grace of God guarantees our salvation. Yet we find it so hard to believe- that I, with all my doubts and fears, will really be there. Israel were warned that they were being given the land (cp. salvation) "not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thy heart... for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Dt. 9:5,6). These words are picked up in Tit. 3:5 and applied to the new Israel: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing (baptism) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit"- by His grace alone.

The spiritual life renews (Tit. 3:5), giving us that *newness* of life, that ongoing baptism and resurrection experience, which Rom. 6:4 promises. This way of life, as it develops, creates its own momentum for further change.

*Through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit-* "Washing" is literally 'the laver', suggesting that through baptism we come closer into the sanctuary to offer sacrifice. It is a clear reference to how baptism saves us; not, as Peter says, by the simple ritual in itself, but because it unleashes within us the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. When Paul says that after baptism, we walk in "newness of life", he has the same thought in view (Rom. 6:4). But here Paul explains the mechanism of how that works. The making new, the regeneration, is through the Holy Spirit. The only other usage of "renewing" is in Rom. 12:2, where we read of our being "transformed by the renewing of your mind". The idea is that this renewing is being done to us; it is not an appeal to renew our own minds by our own steel willed efforts, but rather to allow the renewing process to operate. Our own steel will isn't enough to renew our minds; we are to allow the process enabled at baptism, the laver of regeneration, to have its work in us. This renewing is an ongoing, daily process (2 Cor. 4:16); the renewing is unto the knowledge of the image of Christ (Col. 3:10 Gk.). The purpose is to actually create the mind of Christ in us, to make us after His image; for this is what we are counted as being, and Christ through the work of the Spirit within our spirit / mind is seeking to make us like Him in reality. Romans 8 expounds this in more detail. The "regeneration", or re-birthing, spoken of here has obvious connection with Jn. 3:3-5, which speaks of water

baptism giving rise to a spiritual rebirth; and here Paul is filling out the details. This renewing by the Spirit comes about “through Jesus Christ” (:6), perhaps meaning ‘on account of our baptism into Jesus Christ’.

Baptism is a washing away of sins (cf. Acts 22:16). The descriptions of the believers as being washed from their sins in the blood of Christ therefore refers to their doing this by means of baptism (Rev. 1:5; 7:14; Tit. 3:5 [NIV] speak of this as “the washing of rebirth”, referring to our being “born of water” at baptism [Jn. 3:5]). "According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5) connects with Christ washing the church with the water of the word (Eph. 5:26). Baptism is therefore done by Him, in a sense; His washing of us then speaks of His ongoing psychological renewal of us afterwards.

*3:6 Which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour-* This term is used for the shedding of the Lord's blood (Mt. 26:28 etc.) as well as for the outpouring of the Spirit. The Spirit was given as a result of the Lord's death (Jn. 7:39; symbolized by the Lord's breathing His last breath in the direction of His people, and water gushing from His smitten side). It's not only that His sacrifice enabled our salvation, and that salvation in practical terms involves our transformation by the Spirit in this life. He there on the cross is to be the inspiration for a truly spiritual, Spirit filled life. The Spirit was poured out on Pentecost (Acts 2:17,18,33); but that gift was the purifying of our hearts (Acts 15:9; see on 2:14). The Holy Spirit gift results in the love of God being shed into our hearts / minds (Rom. 5:5). We must pause to consider how the converts on Crete were a rough lot, and apparently were still the same. Paul is saying that the Spirit has been poured out richly into their minds. Why then were they not transformed? Because the Spirit does not force spirituality; we are enabled to be spiritual, we have now this huge potential for transformation. And here we are all being urged to make far fuller use of it.

*3:7 This was so that being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life-* The gift of the transforming Spirit was so that we might receive eternal life. Our salvation involves change now; that is why when the Lord's death enabled our salvation, the Spirit was given and made available for all who would believe. So being *made* heirs speaks of the Spirit *making* us appropriate to be heirs- by grace, for of our own strength we shall never conform our minds and lives as is appropriate. We are "made heirs" by baptism into the Lord Jesus, the seed of Abraham who is the singular "heir"; but the whole process doesn't end there. We are "made heirs", made in practice who we are by status, by the ongoing operation of the Spirit after our baptisms. Hence the NT emphasis that it is baptism which results in the gift of the Spirit.

*3:8 This teaching is trustworthy-* AV “A faithful saying”, one of the collection of "faithful sayings" Paul often refers to, which perhaps formed a corpus of pastoral material for the illiterate church to commit to memory, and meditate upon.

*And I want you to insist on these things-* The teaching about the Spirit in the preceding verses is not just a nice theological extra. This is utterly fundamental to Christian life in practice; the 'insistence' was because of the desire to justify themselves by legalistic obedience to Jewish laws. We too must insist on the ministry of the Spirit and acceptance thereof. This is not just a nice idea, to be casually meddled with on the level of exposition or interpretation. This is the essence of Spiritual life and is the path towards our salvation. No wonder it was part of a



"faithful saying" to be firmly committed to memory and meditated upon.

*So that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works-* The whole message of salvation by grace and not works is what actually provokes good works in practice; in thankful response to the salvation *without* works which we have received. The wonder of it is such that none who believe it can be passive to it. Paul told Titus to affirm the faithful sayings "confidently, *to the end* that they which have believed... may maintain good works" (Tit. 3:8 RV). The congregations' spirituality was related to the confidence of their pastor's presentation. Those "good works", as ours, have been "afore prepared" in the Father's plan for us to perform (Eph. 2:10); but we have to be inspired to live up to the potential which He has prepared for us. Num. 14:20 records how the Father forgave Israel according to Moses' word. And in just as real a sense, He has placed the reconciliation of this world in the hands of our ministry. The belief that we will be saved is the only real anchor in life's uncertain storm. "When the kindness of God our saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us... that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life... and concerning these things I will that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they which have believed God may be careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:4-8). The confident, regular reassurance of other believers was to be part of the ecclesial diet with which the Cretan brethren and sisters were constantly fed. And this assurance was to be the foundation of ecclesial growth as members individually developed the mind of Christ.

*These things are excellent and profitable for people-* The key issue in teaching is being helpful to others; and not simply talking about what we want to talk about.

*3:9 But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law-* The controversies and genealogies were therefore related to Jewish arguments. Compared to the wonder of transformation by the Spirit spoken of in the preceding verses, arguments about interpretation are to be seen as distractions which are to be avoided. The 'avoiding' in practice meant not allowing this kind of thing to be taught in the early churches.

*For they are unprofitable and worthless-* Compared to the teaching about the Spirit, leading to good works; which are "profitable" and "excellent" (:8).

*3:10 A divisive person, after a first and second warning, reject-* The context is of divisions caused by teaching about the Jewish law, and any provocation of argument about interpretation which distracted from the path of Spirituality outlined in :5-7. The rejection was not from the church but from the pool of teachers. A teacher was not to provoke endless questions, doubts and arguments about interpretation; but to positively inculcate spirituality and following of the Spirit.

*3:11 Knowing that such a one is perverted and sins-* "Perverted" is better "subverted"; taken over and used as an agent of the Jewish program of infiltrating and subverting the early churches, by distracting them from the essence of Christianity by arguments about interpretations of Jewish law.

*Being self-condemned-* If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our

own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. See on 1 Cor. 11:29.

3:12 *When I shall send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, give diligence to come to me at Nicopolis, for there I have decided to winter-* Paul wanted the personal presence of Titus, but he was sending others to replace him in Crete during his absence. And when the replacements arrived, then Titus was to leave. We recall Paul's later begging for Timothy to personally come to him. Paul needed his brethren, very deeply. He was no self-motivated maverick.

3:13 *Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing-* A Jewish lawyer who had converted to Christ? Perhaps such a person was needed to address the Judaistic influence on Crete. But maybe he was indeed a secular lawyer who had been converted.

3:14 *Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, to help those in urgent need, and not to be unfruitful-* The call for good works is frequent here and in the letters to Timothy; but the works, as explained, were to flow from the experience of grace, and not as acts of isolated obedience which it was hoped might give a better chance of salvation.

3:15 *All that are with me greet you. Greet those that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all-* There was a difference between those who loved Paul, and the "all". Yet for all of them, including those who didn't accept Paul's authority, he wished the experience of God's gift / grace of the Spirit. If some do not accept us personally, we are still to follow Paul's example and treat them as brethren and wish them God's grace.

## The New European Bible Commentary: Philemon

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:1 *Paul, a prisoner of Christ*- Paul clearly resented his imprisonment, but he sees his captors as representing Christ; just as he asks slaves to consider their masters as Christ and live 'as unto Him' through secular experience. And Paul was no hypocrite; he saw his imprisonment as being served as unto Christ.

*And Timothy our brother*- So Timothy was with Paul in Rome, possibly in prison with him. At the end of 2 Timothy, Paul begs Timothy to come to him, apparently before he dies. It could be argued that Paul was in fact released; for perhaps Timothy came to him, and now he writes to Philemon as if he expects to shortly be released and would come and visit him and settle any financial loss incurred by Onesimus (:19,22). Yet Paul does write in 2 Tim. 4 as if is at the end of his life, and the situation in prison has radically changed from the period at the end of Acts when he lived in his own rented accommodation within the prison. So perhaps during that period, Timothy came to him; and then on the second imprisonment, he asked for Timothy to come again to Rome and be with him. Seeing Paul had left Timothy with the difficult charge of running the rather wild church at Ephesus, this is itself a picture of how Paul took much encouragement from Timothy, a brother far weaker than himself. And this sets us an important principle.

*To Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker* - Paul shows an increasing fondness for the *syn* prefix in his letters, if we arrange them chronologically. He came to perceive, in his spiritual maturity, the need for our brethren, even if we disagree with them and have to rebuke their weaknesses.

:2 *And to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house*- Why mention these two? Probably Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus his son. Or maybe they were elders in the house church which Philemon ran. "Fellow soldier" might reflect how Paul, writing surrounded by soldiers guarding him, considered *himself* to be the soldier of Jesus.

:3 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*- This was no mere formal greeting. Onesimus had run away from Philemon for a reason; and Onesimus feared that Philemon would show him no grace on his return. These greetings and conclusions of Paul in his letters were a real prayerful wish for grace and peace to be theirs. He wanted Philemon to know God's grace, and to have the peace which came from it. Fretting about the evil of his runaway slave and the financial loss caused (:18,19) was not the way of peace.

:4 *I thank my God always, making mention of you always in my prayers*- This is clearly alluding to the Is. 62:6,7 passage, about always making mention of Jerusalem in prayer. But for Paul, the true city of God was now the scattered group of Christian believers around the Roman empire of the first century. Jewish minds would've picked up Paul's purposeful allusion to the 'always' prayers for Jerusalem; and would've marvelled that he saw the great holy city as now the bunch of guys whom he'd baptized around the place, and that instead of a city, it was those very real men and women who filled his thoughts, prayers and yearnings.

Paul saw himself indeed as the watchman upon Zion's walls- but watching over the people of God, not a physical city.

*:5 Hearing of the love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints-* Because Philemon believes the Lord Jesus, he must believe what His brethren say. And so it is with us. In some parts of our community there is constant doubt of our brethren and suspicions as to their motives and words; and yet this, as with *all* attitudes we adopt to our brethren, is the mind we are showing toward the Lord Jesus Himself. See on Jn. 8:42. Paul would have heard about all this faith and love towards all believers from Onesimus. But Onesimus feared that in his case, Philemon would not show him much love. And presumably there was a reason why Onesimus ran away from Philemon- probably connected with abuse of him. This is a lovely picture, of a man recognizing that another brother who treats him badly does in fact have many good points, and treats others differently to how the brother treats him. And Paul thanked God for the good points in Philemon, even though he considered him deficient in grace (see on :3). Dealing with believers who lack grace is a real challenge; and Paul's positive approach to Philemon, thanking God for his good points, is a great example to us.

*:6 I pray that our fellowshiping of your faith may result in our coming to acknowledge every good thing which is in you in Christ-* The crucial importance of personal, Christ-like example empowering our witness is brought out here in the AV: "The communication [sharing] of thy faith may become effectual [Gk. 'energized'] by the acknowledgment [i.e. recognition, by others] of every good thing which is in you in Christ". There's a lot compacted into these words, strung together as they are in a rather awkward sentence. Our sharing of the faith is energized, it takes on power and compulsion as a witness, when others can acknowledge that we are "in Christ" because they see His characteristics reflected in us. This is why effective witness can only be made by those "in Christ", those who show His personality written in theirs. This will 'energize' their sharing of the facts of the Gospel with others. As I have pointed out at such length in *The Power Of Basics*, each doctrine of the Gospel is designed to elicit practical changes in human life. Where those changes are apparent, the preaching of a doctrinal Gospel becomes empowered and energized. Proffering mere doctrinal propositions to this world and nothing else, will never be successful. It will lack power, energy and the compulsion required for conversion.

What was good in Philemon was counted to him because he was "in Christ". We must perceive that others too are counted as righteous because they are in Christ, and we will likewise seek to count them as having imputed righteousness even as we feel and know God has so counted us. For frankly, Philemon was lacking in grace, and the good things about him are being almost exaggerated- because he is being seen as "in Christ". The power to share our faith ["fellowshipping of your faith"] is rooted in realizing that we have been counted righteous through our being in Christ. As God reckons us righteous, so we must reckon each other (Rom. 3:28; 4:3,5,24 RV). This is an immense challenge, but it comes directly from the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Our being justified / counted righteous by God's grace is the very basis and essence of our salvation. And yet, as ever, we can't be passive to this wonder. We too are to seek to count others as righteous, seeing them for who they are as 'in Christ'. Every time we are sinned against, or perceive the weakness and spiritual incompleteness in our brother or sister who is in Christ... we have a wonderful opportunity to count them as righteous, in the same way as we are counted righteous through being in

Christ. The Hebrew word *tsadaq*, to count righteous, to justify, is used about our justification of others in Dan. 12:3- those who count many as righteous will shine as the stars for ever [AV "turn many to righteousness" rather misleadingly gives the idea of converting others by preaching, but that's not the idea of the Hebrew].

*:7 Already I had much joy and comfort in your love-* Paul gives an excellent pattern to us in how he dealt with Philemon, whom, it would appear, had not treated neither Paul nor Onesimus in a Christ-like way. Paul genuinely rejoices in the good deeds of Philemon in other contexts: "We have great joy... in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother". But he goes on to ask Philemon to do this to him: "Brother, let me have joy of you... refresh my heart" (Philemon 7,20). The two verses are clearly linked to each other- the words "joy", "brother", "refresh", "bowels" etc. recur. Paul appears to be saying: 'I fully recognize, brother, that you've done many good things, given other brethren joy, refreshed their hearts. But, you've not done that to your slave, brother Onesimus, neither to me. But I acknowledge the good, Christ-like things in you that I see, in other contexts (:6). But please, expand that love to include me; please, treat me in the same good way you've treated other brethren; treat me too as a brother in Christ'. Now this sets a wonderful example to us. To acknowledge some good things even in our bitterest enemy in the ecclesia. Because they are in Christ. To realize that how they are treating us is not actually how they treat all brethren. And to plead with them as does Paul, "for love's sake", to treat us in the graceful way they treat their other brethren.

*Because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you-* See on :20 *Refresh my heart.*

*:8 Thus although I have all boldness in Christ to command you to do what is required-* Because Philemon was "in Christ" he had to act as Christ; he actually *had to* receive his slave back as a brother and not punish him as many slave owners would. This was a command, an imperative arising from being "in Christ". Paul could be bold about this- without doubt, Philemon should accept Onesimus back. Paul likewise opens his heart to the Corinthians, when he asks them if they want him to come to them with a rod, or with the spirit of meekness (1 Cor. 4:21). Paul is remarkably open hearted in his letters. He shares openly his internal questioning- whether to take a tough line, or to beg and implore in gentleness. Both would have been legitimate. And the "rod" or 'I command you, Philemon' would have been the approach he as a former legalist would have been more comfortable with. But he had now learned of Christ... to be different, and to take the gentler and more sensitive path.

*:9 Yet I prefer to appeal to you for love's sake- I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus-* It could be argued that this is a human way of appeal, and Paul would have been better sticking to spiritual principle rather than emotional appeal. But he says that he does at times put things "in human terms" (Rom. 6:19; Gal. 3:15); he shows a remarkable humanity and sensitivity to the human situations of the folks and situations he addresses.

*:10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus-* The fact that the Lord intercedes for us means that we should be open to others interceding with *us* on behalf of another. Paul explains what I mean. In one of his countless allusions to the Gospels, he speaks of how he 'beseeches' or 'appeals' Philemon to be generous and gracious to his runaway slave Onesimus. Paul uses the word *parakleo*- well known for its repeated use in the Gospels to describe how the Lord Jesus is our *parakletos*, our comforter, interceder, beseecher of the Father for us. Surely he means us to get the connection. As the Lord Jesus beseeches / intercedes the Father for us, Philemon

included, so we, and Philemon, should be open to others beseeching *us*- and respond with a like grace and lavish response. And there's another allusion to the Gospels in the very next verse of the letter to Philemon.

*Whose father I became in my imprisonment*- Paul had presumably converted or baptized Onesimus in prison. And yet he uses the same language of 'my child' regarding Timothy, whom he did not baptize, but spiritually influenced to a formative extent. Perhaps Onesimus had been baptized and was a brother in Philemon's house church. But he had run away and ended up either in Rome, or in prison there. And Paul's outreach even in chains had reached this runaway slave, just as it reached the Praetorian guard (Phil. 1:13). Those who feel shut in and unable to do much preaching can take great encouragement from how Paul managed to witness.

:11- see on Col. 1:6.

*He was once unprofitable to you*- The unprofitable servant of Mt. 25:30 is all of us, the Lord taught. And so when Paul appeals to Philemon to be gracious to his unprofitable servant Onesimus (Philemon 11), he's alluding back to that parable. And making the point that Philemon is himself an unprofitable servant, graciously received by his Lord; and so he should be likewise gracious to *his* unprofitable servant.

*But now is profitable to you and to me*- By receiving Onesimus with grace, there would be "benefit" and "profit" for Philemon (Philemon 11,14 Gk.). Humanly speaking, there was only loss. For Onesimus had defrauded Philemon (Philemon 18 Gk.), and Paul was implying that Onesimus send him back to Rome to help him, with Philemon's 'agreement' [AV "mind"] (Philemon 13,14 GK.). Losing a slave was a material, financial loss. But by showing grace in this case, the material loss would become a spiritual profit for Philemon in the last day.

:12 *He is as my very heart*- Paul's spirit or heart was in Onesimus; they thought the same way. In this sense the spirit of Christ was in Noah and as it were preached to people in 1 Pet. 3:18, although Christ Himself was not there in Noah's time; the spirit of Christ was in the prophets although He didn't exist then (1 Pet. 1:11); Paul's spirit was present at the church gatherings in Corinth even though he was absent (1 Cor. 5:4). So in Onesimus, insofar as he had the spirit of Christ and Paul did too, Paul's spirit / mind / presence was standing before Philemon. This is "the unity of the Spirit".

*And it is he whom I have sent back to you*- That might seem obvious, but the idea is 'My very heart is in his very own person'.

:13 *I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel*- If Onesimus returned to Rome and served Paul there, he would be ministering to Paul as if Philemon was doing this- "on your behalf". So as Paul was represented by Onesimus (:12,17), so likewise Onesimus would represent Philemon. This is the John 17-style unity which there is in Christ. It would seem that if Onesimus could be so useful to Paul in Rome, he was not therefore in prison; therefore Paul's outreach from within prison had reached to a runaway slave outside prison. And of course Onesimus was free to travel back from Rome to Philemon. Maybe Paul's teaching about grace in the letter to the church at Rome had been heard by Onesimus, and so he had come to ask Paul about working it all out in practice.

:14 *But I preferred to do nothing without your consent, so that your goodness-* Gk. 'your profit'. See on :12 *But now is profitable*. The picture we get of Philemon is that he was an active and good brother in many ways. He had an ecclesia that met in his house, probably, by implication, comprised of his own family / "house" whom he had converted. The "beloved Aphia" refers to a female [*agapete*]- probably his wife. He was well known for a truly generous spirit to the brethren, and for a deep faith (:5-7). And yet his whole standing with the Lord, Paul implies, was going to be revealed, and stood now under question, over the issue of his attitude to his runaway slave who had now accepted Christ. If he wouldn't accept him, then all this good upright living was in vain. Paul was giving him a test. He could've just kept Onesimus with him in Rome. But he sent him all the way back home to Philemon, to get his 'agreement' (Philemon 14, AV "mind") that Philemon accepts Onesimus as a brother, and sends him back to Rome to serve Paul. He could've "retained" Onesimus; but instead, he seeks a "benefit" [spiritually] for Philemon by bringing the issue to a pointed head (:13,14). And so it can be with us, that providence brings one specific case or person into our lives to test whether or not we have really accepted grace in the very core of our hearts. And on this, all else ultimately depends. And these things 'God works oftentimes with man'. We find ourselves living out the situations of both Onesimus and Philemon. The crucial challenge of grace comes to us time and again in ecclesial life, and we too present it to others. Upon our response to it, our salvation-by-grace depends.

*Might not be by compulsion but of your own free will-* Paul thought of ways to make Philemon bear spiritual fruit; so he leaves the choice over to his free will. Likewise he says that he had asked for and taken support from the believers in Philippi "Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account" (Phil. 4:17). We likewise should sensitively consider our brethren and try to set up situations whereby they will produce spiritual fruit which will be credited to them. This is the way of spiritual maturity. We must not just do what *we* wish in the Lord's service, but think of what others need to do, for their own fruitfulness. For we seek the Lord's glory and for Him to be pleased by them as well as by ourselves. Too often we can embark on a project for the Lord because it is what *we* want to do. But the bigger picture of the Lord's glorification must be ever in view.

:15 *For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever-* The "forever" sounds like a reference to the life eternal together in the Kingdom. The whole situation, of Onesimus apparently committing fraud, running away, probably from abuse by Philemon; his meeting with Paul in Rome and conversion, or at least, deeper conversion; Paul's desire to send him back to Philemon... all this was so that they might live eternally together forever. *Aionos*, "forever", is usually used of the life eternal and not for the remainder of this life. Perhaps Philemon's eternity depended upon his forgiveness of and reconciliation with Onesimus. Paul speaks of how Philemon would "receive" Onesimus "for ever"- and yet he is implying Onesimus should be sent back to minister to him in Rome. Surely what Paul has in mind is that if someone is truly our brother, then we will eternally "receive" them as such in the Kingdom ages- and therefore we ought to be doing that right now. The baptism of Onesimus was a hard call for Philemon. He had to believe that that difficult man who had defrauded him was now his brother, even though he hadn't baptized him. Many an ecclesial upset has been caused by this kind of thing.

:16 *No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-* This is just the term Paul has used about both Philemon and Archippa, presumably his wife. Paul's patient love for Philemon was to be reflected in Philemon's love for Onesimus.

*Epecially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord-* "In the flesh" perhaps refers to how after reconciliation, the parties are closer to each other than before.

*:17 So if you consider me your partner-* Paul asks Philemon to prepare a room in his home because he was planning on visiting after his release from prison (:22). Paul is really saying that Philemon is to accept Onesimus as much as he would accept him; and if he didn't, then he was effectively separating himself from partnership with Paul.

*Take him into your home-* 'Receive him'. The point is made twice (Philemon 12,17). Paul had written to the Romans years before that they should receive one another, as God for Christ's sake has received us (Rom. 15:7 s.w.). It seems that the case of Onesimus gave Paul an opportunity to practically exemplify what he had meant- now that he was in Rome. Time and again, the theory of the Romans letter has to be lived out by Paul once in Rome himself. Paul says that if Philemon received Onesimus, then he received Paul. Paul was one with his new brother Onesimus (:12).

*As you would [receive] me-* Paul parallels loving the Lord Jesus with loving "all saints" (Philemon 5). To receive Onesimus was to receive Paul (Philemon 12); and "if thou count me therefore a partner [Gk. *Koinonos*- 'one in fellowship'], receive him as myself" (Philemon 17 AV). Paul's mind or spirit was in Onesimus (:12). Paul is saying that if we receive any brother, then, we receive him. He clearly has in mind the Lord's teaching, that if we receive Him, then we are to receive His brethren. So if we receive any brother, we not only receive the Lord Jesus, but we receive all other brethren in Christ; for each brother represents the entire body of Christ. This shows the utter fallacy of division within the one body. It is an utter nonsense to accept one brother, but not the other brethren, e.g., of his ecclesia. According to the logic of Philemon 17, if we don't accept a true brother, then we are not treating our other brethren as being in fellowship. For Paul says that if Philemon considered *him* to be in fellowship, then Philemon ought to accept Onesimus. Likewise, he reasons that he saw in Onesimus the face of Philemon; for Onesimus ministered unto Paul "in thy [Philemon's] stead" (Philemon 13). The implications of this are far reaching. For by refusing fellowship with our brethren, we are effectively declaring ourselves outside of the body of Christ. And hence Paul's sober warnings in 1 Cor. 11, to discern / recognize the Lord's body; for if we refuse to break bread with our brethren, then, he says, we are eating and drinking damnation to ourselves, because we refuse to accept our part in the Lord's body.

*:18 But if he has wronged you at all or owes you something-* Philemon clearly thought that Onesimus had wronged him or stolen something from him. Or since he had bought Onesimus, he maybe meanly considered that all the time Onesimus was away in Rome, he was losing money because he had to take on another slave to replace him.

*Put that on my bill-* Literally, 'on me'. Again Paul is directly identifying himself with Onesimus. Attitudes to a brother in Christ are effectively our attitudes to others in Christ. This is why there can be no respect of persons at all in Christ.

*:19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay any debt-* Paul was writing from his hired house within the Roman prison, in the period at the end of Acts 28. He seems to have access to money. But by 2 Tim. 4 he is in prison [again] and can't afford even a cloak, and needs writing equipment. He knew how to abound and be abased when it came to money and wealth.



*Even though you owe me your own self-* Continuing the theme of 'profit', Paul says that Onesimus 'owed' him his very self because Paul had converted him; therefore any material debt that Onesimus 'owed' Philemon should be forgiven with pleasure (Philemon 18,19). The unpayable debt that we have should lead us to be forgiving of whatever others owe us. Note in passing how Philemon 'owed' his very [eternal] life to Paul. This is the power and responsibility of witnessing to others. The saviour is the Lord, and yet the preacher manifests that salvation to others to such an extent that effectively we owe our salvation additionally to the person who converted us. See on :22. Philemon owed his salvation to Paul's preaching, and was therefore eternally obligated to him. We too can be a tree of life to those with whom we live; we can win their souls for the Kingdom (Prov. 11:30). The Thessalonians would be accepted in the final glory of judgment day simply "because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). Eve, taken out of the wounded side of the first man, was a type of the ecclesia; and her name means 'source of life', in anticipation of how the church would bring life to the world.

The idea of two men in debt, one [Onesimus] more than the other [Philemon] recalls the Lord's parable of Mt. 18 about two men like this; and also to another parable of two indebted men who were both frankly forgiven, and the one forgiven most loved his master the most (Lk. 7:42,43). There are several allusions to the parables in the letter to Philemon. The man with the bigger debt was being unreasonable to the other servant who was indeed in his debt, but not so seriously as he was. The debt of Philemon was partly to Paul for saving him, but it could be argued that Onesimus had a similar debt. The rest of his huge accrual of debt was therefore from something else which Onesimus had not done. So it would seem that Philemon, pastor of his own house church, renowned for good deeds... had some pretty dark secrets, and perhaps it was the practice of them which had led Onesimus to steal money for a journey and then run away from him. The "frank forgiveness" of the Lord to the bigger debtor is picked up in :22 *I shall be restored to you.*

:20 *Yes, brother, let me profit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ-* Paul recognized that Philemon "refreshed the hearts of the saints", and he rejoiced that this was the case. Yet there was one saint whose bowels Philemon had not yet refreshed- and that was Paul himself. For Paul uses this very phrase in asking Philemon to rejoice *his* bowels by receiving Onesimus (:7,20). Here we see grace to the extreme. Paul could rejoice that a brother was genuinely loving and encouraging to other brethren, even though that brother had not been so to him personally. It's so easy in personal disputes to write a brother off as totally no good because he was unkind or inappropriate or downright wrong in his treatment of us personally; we so easily forget that in many *other* walks of his life, he is a wonderful servant of the Lord. Yet Paul modelled the very grace which he asked Philemon to show to Onesimus.

:21 *I write to you having confidence in your obedience-* Paul believed his prayers would be answered and wrote, felt and acted accordingly. He goes straight on to ask for a room to be prepared for him on his release from prison (:22), so confident was he that the prayers for his release would be answered.

*Knowing you will do what I ask-* Gk. '*more than I ask*'. In the same way as God had done for us exceeding abundantly *above* all we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20), so Philemon was to do *more* [s.w.] than the grace that Paul was suggesting (Philemon 21, 16 s.w.). It's not just a case of forgiving each other because we were forgiven; it's a question of lavishing the grace

upon each other which the Lord has upon us. And notice the context of all this. Paul says that as Philemon's elder, he could just "enjoin" him to do that which was required of those in Christ. But he prefers not to work through a command from an elder, demanding obedience. Instead, he appeals to Philemon's own experience of personal grace, and sees in *that* an imperative, a command to be 'obeyed' (Philemon 8,21). God's generosity to us in answering us "above all we ask of think" should be reflected in our doing things for others over and above what they have requested.

:22 See on Acts 20:25 *I know*.

*But meanwhile also prepare for me a lodging-* This sounds as if Paul was hoping to come to Philemon along with Onesimus- hence the word "Also", with the emphasis on "for me" [also]. This plan highlighted Paul's argument- that if Philemon would fellowship Onesimus, then he was fellowshipping Paul. And if he wanted to only fellowship Paul and not Onesimus, then this was effectively not fellowshipping Paul.

*For I hope that through your prayers-* On :19 *Even though* we saw that a third party can be responsible for the fortunes of another brother. Here too, Paul trusted that through the prayers of Philemon he would be released; and he was so confident in the answer to that prayer that he asked him even to prepare a room for him ahead of time!

*I shall be restored to you-* Or AV "given unto you". This rather awkward phrase is another allusion to the parable of the two debtors. It is translated "forgiven" in Lk. 7:42,43. Perhaps Paul's point is that he too is a big sinner, and through their prayers he would be released from the debts arising. He doesn't want Philemon to feel that Paul is as it were getting at him unkindly by suggesting he is like the bigger debtor; he is now saying that he himself is also in debt to the Lord and even more so.

:23 *Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you-* Paul has twice referred to himself as a prisoner in Christ. He is practicing what he has preached elsewhere- that e.g. slaves should consider their service to their masters as done unto Christ. He saw himself not as a prisoner of Caesar but of Christ. This is likely the same as the Epaphroditus of Phil. 2:25; 4:18. It could be argued that Paul may be using "prisoner in Christ" in a spiritual sense (Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 10:5), which would not require Epaphras to actually be in prison with him. Rather, his sense of being a prisoner of Christ in a spiritual sense was so great that he felt one with Paul who was literally in prison, and Paul is noting that.

:24 *As do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow-workers-* From within prison, Paul had been able to 'convert' Onesimus and also some in the Praetorian guard. But this would have required the assistance of others, and it seems Paul had a faithful group of helpers who came to live in Rome and assist him in his witness. He calls them here his co-workers. He in prison, apparently stranded, was still able to "work". We wonder what role the church at Rome played in all this; for none of them stood with him at his final trial (2 Tim. 4:16). Paul had been so eager to get to Rome to witness, and had written to the church there ahead of his coming there; and it seems when he got there, they didn't really support him much.

:25 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit-* See on :3. Philemon needed to have the grace of Jesus in his spirit / mind in order to make the right decisions about Onesimus, and Paul wishes this for him. The *charis* or gift of our Lord Jesus is *His* spirit or mind / disposition. And Paul wished that the Lord's Spirit would be with and in the spirit of

Philemon; for this is the essence of Christianity, that Christ should dwell in our hearts / minds.

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 I have suggested on [Heb. 13:22](#) that Hebrews was originally a transcript of a sermon at the breaking of bread meeting at the Jerusalem church, turned into written form, with a few practical comments appended to it at the very end. This accounts for various stylistic features in the book which would otherwise appear rather odd. The style and use of language is very clearly Pauline; that is beyond serious denial. Paul's major concern was that there was going to be a great falling away from the faith, and the initial cause of this was the Judaizing campaign against him and his converts. The large Christian church at Jerusalem, along with the other Palestinian congregations, were under particular pressure to return to Judaism. And it was against this background that Hebrews was written.

I noted throughout [commentary on Acts 7](#) that there are so many connections between Stephen's speech and Hebrews. The Jerusalem church, to whom Hebrews was primarily addressed, would have known Stephen well. Hebrews is full of allusions to Stephen's speech, and my suggestion is that it was not Stephen writing to his own church before his death, but rather Paul expanding upon Stephen's speech. As the bitterly angry Saul, keenly listening to Stephen and grasping his every allusion, he would have felt the goads of Scripture sticking into his conscience. He remembered every word, and after his conversion, he took Stephen's thoughts further. Hebrews, I suggest, is his development of Stephen's words and ideas. The historical characters mentioned by Stephen are also mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11. Paul draws his sermon in Hebrews towards a conclusion by speaking of how we as Christians have come into association with "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22,23). It seems to me certain that Paul had Stephen in mind at this point, a clearly 'just man', who had asked the Lord Jesus in Heaven to receive his spirit, as one of "the spirits of just men made perfect", and whose name as a martyr was for sure "enrolled in Heaven". The anonymity of the letter would be appropriate, as Paul was seen as a heretic and *persona non grata* among many of the Jewish Christians who were turning back to Judaism.

1:1 *God, who at various times and in various ways- Polymeros... polytropos* is framed in such a way as to aid memorization, and would be typical of a spoken address; see on 13:22 and 1 Thess. 2:1.

*Spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets-* The Lord was "the word made flesh"; having spoken to us through the words of the prophets, God now speaks to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2 RV). His revelation in that sense hasn't finished; it is ongoing. Right now, the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like many waters and a sword of flame- according to John's vision of the Lord's post-resurrection glory.

In the first century, you usually began a letter with a preface, saying who you were and to whom you were writing. The letter to the Hebrews has a preface which speaks simply of the greatness of Christ (Heb. 1:1-3), tackling the devaluing of the Lord Jesus and the role of Messiah generally which was being done by the Judaizers. The higher critics speak of how the preface has been lost or got detached. But no, the form of Heb. 1:1-3 is indeed that of a

preface. The point is that the greatness of Christ, of which the letter speaks, is so great as to push both the author and audience into irrelevancy and obscurity. It's significant that the New Testament writers speak so frequently of Jesus as simply "the Lord". This would've been strange to first century ears. Kings and pagan gods always had their personal name added to the title 'the Lord'- e.g. 'the Lord Sarapis'. To just speak of "the Lord" was unheard of. The way the New Testament speaks like this indicates the utter primacy of the Lord Jesus in the minds of believers, and the familiarity they had with speaking about Him in such exalted terms.

1:2 *Has in these last times spoken to us in the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, on account of whom also He structured the ages-* The immediate purpose of the exalted language applied to Jesus in Hebrews was to tackle the devaluing of Him by the Judaist element within the church. Judaism understood the likes of David and Moses to be far higher than Messiah, whoever He was (hence the Lord's argument that David called Messiah his Lord, Lk. 20:44). This has of course led to passages like Heb. 1:2 being misunderstood to believe that Jesus created the earth. It could be argued that the prologue to Hebrews is based upon the prologue to John's Gospel. The same ideas recur- the Word of God from the beginning come to expression in Christ, "all things", glory, etc. Note the similarity between "apart from him not one thing came into being" (Jn. 1:3) and Heb. 2:8, "not one thing is not left put under him". Jn. 1:3 stated that "all things" were created by the Word, i.e. the logos / intention which God had of the Messiah. Heb. 1:2 clarifies this (because of misunderstandings in the early church?) to define the "all things" as all the ages of human history. These were framed by God with the Christ in mind. Later in Hebrews we meet the same idea- Heb. 11:3 speaks of how the ages were framed and then goes on to give examples of Old Testament characters who displayed their faith and understanding of the future Messiah.

It should be noted that the 'ages' which Christ was to be involved in creating refer to "the world to come"- for Heb. 2:5 says that this passage is speaking about "the world to come". Heb. 9:26 adds indirect support by commenting that Christ died at the end of "the (singular) age"; the ages [plural] to come are the eternity of God's Kingdom which is made possible through His work. Thus the idea is not that He created the world, but rather that through His work, the ages /to come/ were made possible through Him. And therefore those ages before Him find their meaning in the context of He who was to come and open the way to eternal ages.

We read of "the Son... by whom [Gk. *dia*] He [God] also made the worlds [Gk. *aion*]"'. '*Dia*' can mean 'for whom / for the sake of / on account of'. It doesn't *always* mean that, as it's a word of wide usage- but it very often does mean 'on account of' and actually frequently it *cannot* mean 'by'. There are stacks of examples listed in [Appendix 11 of \*The Real Christ\*](#). Thus in a creation context, we read that all things were created *dia*, for the sake of, God's pleasure (Rev. 4:11). Significantly, when 2 Pet. 3:5 speaks of how the world was created "*by*" the word of God, the word *dia* isn't used- instead *hoti*, signifying 'causation through'. This isn't the word used in Heb. 1:2 about the creation of the *aion* on account of, *dia*, the Son. Eve was created *dia* Adam- she wasn't created *by* Adam, but *for the sake of* Adam (1 Cor. 11:9). 1 Cor. 8:6 draws a helpful distinction between *ek* [out of whom] and *dia*- all things are *ek* God, but *dia*, on account of, Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). The context of Heb. 1:2

features many examples of where *dia* clearly means ‘for the sake of’ rather than ‘by’. Just a little later we read in Heb. 1:14 of how the Angels are “ministering spirits” who minister *dia*, for the sake of, the believers. Because of [*dia*] Christ’s righteousness, God exalted Him (Heb. 1:9). The Mosaic law was “disannulled” *dia* “the weakness and unprofitableness thereof” (Heb. 7:18). The weakness of the law didn’t disannul the law; the law was disannulled by God *for the sake of* the fact it was so weak. Levi paid tithes *dia* Abraham (Heb. 7:9), not *by* Abraham, but *for the sake of* the fact he was a descendant of Abraham. Jesus was not an Angel *dia* the suffering of death (Heb. 2:9). Clearly here the word means ‘for the sake of’ rather than ‘by’. Jesus was born a man *for the reason that* He could die. He was not an Angel who was then made ‘not an Angel’ *by* the fact of death. That makes no sense.

Note that *aion* [AV “worlds”] is a plural- if this verse means ‘Jesus created the earth’, then, did He create multiple, plural ‘earths’? That the word means ‘the ages’ or ‘an age’ is again clear from seeing how else ‘*aion*’ is used. In almost every case where the word *aion* occurs in the New Testament, it doesn’t mean ‘the physical planet earth’, but rather an age or situation on the earth, rather than the physical planet. In Eph. 2:7 we read of “the ages to come”- and it is the word *aion* again. The church will glorify Jesus “throughout all generations”, and this is paralleled with the phrase ‘the *aion* of the *aions*’ [Eph. 3:21- AV “world without end”]; the same parallel occurs in Col. 1:26, “hid from *aions* and from generations”]. Clearly *aion* refers to periods of time rather than a physical planet. Just a few verses after Heb. 1:2, we read that the son will reign ‘for the *aions* and the *aions*’, or in English “for ever and ever” (Heb. 1:8). Surely the combined message is that the previous ages / *aions* existed only for the sake of Christ, and He will rule over all future *aions*. There is the *aion* to come [AV “the world to come”, Heb. 6:5], and Christ will be a priest “for ever” [Gk. ‘for the *aion*’, Heb. 5:6]. The *aion* to come is the eternity of God’s Kingdom. It will be, in somewhat hyperbolic language, an eternity of eternities. Later in Hebrews we read that Jesus made His sacrifice for sin “in the end of the world / *aion*” (Heb. 9:26). If an *aion* ended at the death of Jesus, then clearly the word doesn’t refer to the physical planet- but rather to the age which then ended. The Hebrew writer clinches this view of *aion* in Heb. 11:3, where he prefaces his outline of Bible history from Abel to the restoration from Babylon by saying that the ages / *aion* are framed by the word of God. Response by faith to God’s word, seeing the invisible with the eye of faith, occurred amongst the faithful in every *aion*. The *aion* [AV “worlds”] were framed by the word of God. Consider other uses of the word *aion* where clearly it refers to the ages and not to a literal planet (Mk. 4:19; Lk. 1:70; 16:8; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6,8; 3:19; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:10).

The whole of history, with all its ages, and all that is to come, exists solely for the sake of Christ. He is the One who gives meaning to history. Further, if this verse means ‘Jesus created the earth’, then OK, question: Genesis and many other passages say *God* created. If this says Jesus was the actual creator, then is Jesus directly equal to God? Also, if Heb 1:2 is saying that *Jesus* is the creator of earth, the One through whom God did the job, then, *why* do we have to wait until Hebrews to know that? There’s no indication in Genesis or even in the whole Old Testament nor in the teaching of Jesus that Jesus was the creator of earth on God’s behalf. That’s my problem with the pre-existence idea- it’s nowhere in the Old Testament. So would believers have been held in ignorance of this fact for 4000 years? If so, then, is it so important to covenant relationship with God? I am sure David, Abraham etc. believed that *God* and *not* Messiah created the earth. If they’d have been asked: ‘Did *Messiah* create the earth, or God? Does Messiah now exist?’, they’d have answered ‘No’ both times. Surely?

It is argued by trinitarians that *dia* + the genitive, as we have in Heb. 1:2, means that the ages were made by the instrumentality of Christ. But *dia* + genitive doesn't only mean 'by whose instrumentality'. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, p. 90 explains the uses of *dia* with genitive:

"1. With a genitive, through

a. Used of place or medium through

b. Used of time, during in the course of; through

c. Used of immediate agency, causation, instrumentality, by means of, by; of means or manner, through, by, with

d. Used of state or condition, in a state of".

Meaning (b) appears relevant to Heb. 1:2 because it is *dia* Christ that the *aions* (a time reference) were created. This would require us to read in an ellipsis: "Through the (period of the ministry of) the Son, God framed the ages". Or, "Through(out) the Son, God framed the ages", i.e. all God's purpose throughout the ages was framed with Christ in mind. Acts 3:18 uses *dia* + genitive to explain how God had spoken of Christ "by" or throughout the period of all His "holy prophets".

1:3 *Who being the brightness of His glory and the exact image of His person, upholds all things by the word of his power*- Nearly all the titles of Christ used in the letter to the Hebrews are taken from Philo or the Jewish book of Wisdom. The writer to the Hebrews is seeking to apply them in their correct and true sense to the Lord Jesus. This explains why some titles are used which can easily be misunderstood by those not appreciating this background. For example, Philo speaks of "the impress of God's seal", and Hebrews applies this to the Lord Jesus. The phrase has been misinterpreted by Trinitarians as meaning that Jesus is therefore God; but this wasn't at all the idea behind the title in Philo's writings, and neither was it when the letter to the Hebrews took up the phrase and applied it to Jesus. This sort of thing goes on far more often than we might think in the Bible- existing theological ideas are re-cast and re-presented in their correct light, especially with reference to the Lord Jesus. Arthur Gibson notes that "there is an important second level within religious language: it is a reflection upon, a criticism of, a correction of, or a more general formulation of, expressions which previously occur".

3 Enoch [also known as *The Hebrew Book Of Enoch*] spoke much of an Angel called Metatron, "the prince of the presence", "the lesser Yahweh", who appeared as Yahweh to Moses in Ex. 23:21, sat on "the throne of glory" etc (3 Enoch 10-14). Early Jewish Christianity appears to have mistakenly reapplied these ideas to Jesus, resulting in the idea the first of all Jesus was an Angel, and then coming to full term in the doctrine of the Trinity. J. Danielou devotes the whole fourth chapter of his survey of the development of Christian doctrine to the study of how Jewish views of Angels actually led on to the Trinity. Paul's style was not to baldly state that everything believed in by the Jews was wrong; he recognized that the very nature of apostasy is in the mixing of the true and the false. He speaks of how Jesus truly has been exalted and sits at God's right hand (Rom. 8:34) and has been given God's Name, as the Angel was in Exodus (Phil. 2:9-11); but his whole point is that whilst that may indeed be common ground with the Jewish ideas, the truth is that Jesus is *not* an Angel. He came into physical existence through Mary ("made / born of a woman", Gal. 4:4), and as the begotten Son of God has been exalted above than any Angel. The language of Heb. 1:3-6 clearly alludes to the Metatron myth and deconstructs it in very clear terms. For Jesus is described as "being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image /

pattern of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son? And when he again bringeth in the firstborn into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him".

*When he had accomplished the purification of sins-* In a sense, all sins were purged by the Lord's death. Sin, the 'devil' of Heb. 2:14, was destroyed; He "made an end of sins" (Dan. 9:24). We can easily forget the wonder of this; Peter uses the same word about those who had forgotten their purging [s.w.] from their old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). They lacked the spiritual vision to look back to the cross and perceive that now, human sin is no longer a barrier between God and ourselves. The Lord's blood is therefore of such power as to purify even our conscience from the guilt of past sins (Heb. 9:14; Tit. 2:14). But this was all achieved at a specific historical point- when the Lord died on the cross.

*He then sat down on the right hand-* In his time of dying, Stephen saw the Lord Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). But about 13 times in the New Testament, the point is made that the Lord *sits* there, unlike the Mosaic priests who stood (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus was passionately feeling for Stephen; and He just as emotionally and passionately feels for us in our struggles. This alone should lift us out of the mire of mediocrity. Prayer will have meaning and power. It won't just be the repetitious conscience-salver it can descend into. Many of those 13 NT references to the Lord being seated at the right hand of God are in Hebrews; and this again encourages us to see Hebrews as Paul's deeper reflections upon Stephen's speech. This would especially be the case if the Jews in the council actually saw something of what Stephen saw.

*Of the Majesty in Heaven-* It is a majestic, glorious theme of the Bible that God is revealed as a real being. It is also a fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is not a real being, then it is impossible for Him to have a Son who was the "image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). The Greek word actually means His "substance" (RV). Further, it becomes difficult to develop a personal, living relationship with 'God', if 'God' is just a concept in our mind. It is tragic that the majority of religions have this unreal, intangible conception of God.

*1:4 He thus became so much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they-* Judaism was obsessed with Angels, reflecting the pagan notion that there were various 'spirits' controlling various aspects of life. This idea likewise entered the Catholic and Orthodox churches. But the point is laboured here that the Lord Jesus as begotten Son of God is far better than Angels. The more excellent Name would appear from :5 to be connected to His Sonship. Angels are also "sons of God" but not in the ultimate sense in which the Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son. Angels too can bear and manifest the Yahweh Name just as we can, but the Lord inherited that Name in a "more excellent" sense than them; for He had achieved the characteristics of that Name within His own personality. This all adds even more wonder to the fact that by being "in Christ", all that is true of Him becomes true of us; and we are co-heirs with Him, inheriting as He did (Rom. 8:17), fully sharing in all His glorification.

*1:5 For to which of the angels said He at any time: You are my Son, this day have I begotten*



*you? And again: I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son?*- Ps. 2:7 is applied to the Lord's resurrection in Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4. But the rest of Psalm 2 is quoted about various points of the Lord's work; at His birth, death, resurrection, return and at the time of the final rebellion against Him. And the original application appears to be to David and then to Hezekiah. Clearly it is not always so that if a verse is quoted in one context in the New Testament, then the surrounding context of the original quotation must refer to the same time. And it is likewise clear that the same scripture can have multiple fulfilments; Psalm 2 is a classic cse of that. The insistence upon context as the guiding light of interpretation is often misplaced; because the mind behind the word of God does not work according to the Greek influenced linear thinking of the European mind, with its emphasis upon logical corrolary and linear progression and development of thought and context.

James Dunn quotes Tertullian, Justin, Epiphanius and Clement as all believing that the Lord Jesus was an Angel: "So too Jewish Christians of the second and third centuries specifically affirmed that Christ was an angel or archangel... Justin's identification of the angel of Yahweh with the [supposedly] pre-existent Christ". It was this Jewish obsession with Angels, and the desire to make Jesus understandable as an Angel, which led to the idea that He personally pre-existed and was not quite human. And hence the specific and repeated emphasis of the New Testament that the Lord was *not* an Angel but *because* He was a man and *not* an Angel He has been exalted far *above* Angels (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:16; 2:8-10; Heb. 1; 1 Pet. 1:12; 3:22; Rev. 5:11-14). It's the same with the idea of Melchizedek, whom the Qumran community and writings understood as an Archangel. The commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews stresses that he was a *man* ("consider how great this *man* was...", Heb. 7:4)- therefore *not* an Angel. He was a *foreshadowing* of Christ, and not Christ Himself. It would appear that the commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews is actually full of indirect references to the Qumran claims about Melchizedek being an Angel and somehow being the Messiah. Sadly, too many trinitarians today have made the same mistake as the Jews- arguing that Melchizedek was somehow Jesus personally. The Jews of Qumran were quite obsessed with Angels- they also suggested that Gabriel was somehow the pre-existent Messiah. Bearing that in mind, it would appear that the descriptions of the Angel Gabriel announcing the conception and birth of Jesus are almost purposefully designed to show that Gabriel and Jesus are *not* the same but are two quite different persons (Mt. 1:20,24; 2:13,19; Lk. 1:11,19,26-38; 2:9).

Hebrews 1 can be a passage which appears to provide perhaps the strongest support for both the 'Jesus is God' and 'Jesus is not God' schools. Meditating upon this one morning, I suddenly grasped what was going on. The writer is in fact purposefully juxtaposing the language of Christ's humanity and subjection to the Father, with statements and quotations which apply the language of God to Jesus. But the emphasis is so repeatedly upon the fact that God did this to Jesus. God gave Jesus all this glory. Consider the evidence: It is God who begat Jesus (Heb. 1:5), God who told the Angels to worship Jesus (Heb. 1:6), it was "God, even your God" who anointed Jesus, i.e. made Him Christ, the anointed one (Heb. 1:9); it was God who made Jesus sit at His right hand, and makes the enemies of His Son come into subjection (Heb. 1:13); it was God who made / created Jesus, God who crowned Jesus, God who set Jesus over creation (Heb. 2:7), God who put all in subjection under Jesus (Heb. 2:8). And yet interspersed between all this emphasis- for that's what it is- upon the superiority of the Father over the Son... we find Jesus addressed as "God" (Heb. 1:8), and having Old Testament passages about God applied to Him (Heb. 1:5,6). The juxtaposition is purposeful. It is to bring out how the highly exalted position of Jesus was in fact granted to Him by 'his

God', the Father, who remains the single source and giver of all exaltation, and who, to use the Lord's very own words, "is greater than [Christ]" (Jn. 14:28).

1:6 *And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world He says: And let all the angels of God worship him-* "Brings" is strictly 'brings again' and refers to the resurrection, as noted on :5. The quotation is not from the Masoretic Text but from the Septuagint of Dt. 32:43 and perhaps Ps. 97:7. This indicates that the inspired writer considered that material in the LXX which is not in the Hebrew text is inspired by God and worthy of quotation as such. The context of both those passages is hardly that of the Lord's resurrection; but as noted on :5, the New Testament writers tend to quote without attention to context. Dt. 32:43 LXX is also quoted by Paul in Rom. 15:10. Another example of this kind of thing would be how in Romans 3 there is a quotation from Ps. 14:1-7 LXX; but six of the quoted verses are not in the Hebrew text.

We might well wonder why Paul is quoting verses only found in the LXX in order to prove that the Lord Jesus is greater than Angels; and why he insists on quoting only from the LXX. It's as if he is making some kind of point about the Septuagint. I suggested on 1:1 that Paul was appealing to the Jerusalem Christians, in terms which recalled the witness of their famous martyr Stephen. What brought about Stephen's demise was his apparent backing of the Greek speaking Jews in the Jerusalem church. This might explain why Paul is appealing specifically to them by quoting so insistently from the Septuagint and even from passages which are only to be found there and not in the Hebrew text.

1:7 *And of the angels He says: Who makes His angels winds, and His servants a flame a fire-* The quotation from Ps. 103:4 LXX only demonstrates the Lord's supremacy over Angels by stating that God makes the Angels into winds / spirits and flames- we recall the Angel seen by Samson's parents ascending in a flame of fire- whereas He has made His Son to be a king with a sceptre. The Lord Jesus is able to rule and decide issues on His own volition and agenda, rather than simply be sent as Angels are sent to obey the Father's agenda.

1:8 *But of the Son He said: Your throne, O Mighty One, is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness-* See on :7. The Angels are sent out with temporary power to perform specific tasks they are given to perform; whereas the Lord Jesus is an eternal Kingdom, with a sceptre, i.e. ruling and issuing orders Himself rather than taking them. Ps. 45:6,7 quoted here is clearly about Solomon in its initial application, so it is fruitless to argue that "Mighty One" refers only to God Himself. For it can be applied to human kings.

1:9 *You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows-* We should not see sin as something to be regretfully avoided and denied; the Lord's example was of hating sin. And that hatred of sin arose out of the depth of His love for righteousness. Being loved and exalted above his brethren is a Joseph allusion. The idea of "your God" anointing Messiah with joy above His "fellows" is all impossible to make sense of within the standard Trinitarian paradigm. The connection between anointing and joy is that there were traditionally expressions of joy and praise when a man was anointed or chosen for some special task such as rulership. David in writing this surely had his heart on the way that he had been anointed above his brethren. And yet "fellows" is being interpreted as referring to the Angels; the Lord Jesus was anointed above them.

1:10 *And: You, Lord, in the beginning did lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands-* Heb. 1:10 appears to quote words about God (from Ps. 102:25) and apply them to Jesus. To take a Psalm or Bible passage and apply it to someone on earth, even a normal human, was quite common in first century literature (Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 234). It's rather like we may quote a well known phrase from Shakespeare or a currently popular movie, and apply it to someone. It doesn't mean that that person is to be equated with Romeo, Juliet, Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth etc. By quoting the words about them, we're saying there are similarities between the two people or situations; we're not claiming they're identical. And seeing that the Son of God was functioning for His Father, it's not surprising that words about God will be quoted about the Lord Jesus.

In the same way as the Angels are so closely associated with their charges that they are identified with them, so the Angels are described as the things in the natural world which they have created. The quotation of Ps. 102:26 in Heb. 1:10 can appear to pose major problems for belief in the humanity of Christ and that the world will never be destroyed. The context in Hebrews is again Christ's superiority over the Angels; however, the context in Ps. 102 is of Christ on the cross thinking of the eternity of God, how that "of old", "in the beginning" (clearly alluding back to the beginning of the natural creation in Gen. 1), God created the Heavens and earth by His Angel-hands. But "they shall perish... wax old like a garment... as a vesture shalt thou change them" (Ps. 102:26). This language is similar to that used elsewhere about the ending of the Angel-oriented Mosaic Law (e. g. Heb. 8:13). Thus the literal Heavens and earth will not perish, but the Angelic system that created them will do. Thus both the natural creation and the Mosaic system are identified exactly with the Angels that created them.

1:11 *They shall perish, but You continue; and they all shall wear out as does a garment-* As noted on :10, the purpose of the quotation is to demonstrate the Lord's superiority over Angels. One approach is to understand the Hebraic way of stating that 'even X shall happen to prove the greatness of Y'; e.g. heaven could pass away [X] but the Lord's words would not [Y] (Mt. 24:35). This is not to say that X shall literally happen; it is stated as a hyperbole, to demonstrate the greatness of Y. And that may be the case here too. God's eternity is contrasted with the [relative] passing of the Heavens, which were made by Angels. "They shall perish" may not therefore mean they shall literally perish.

The context of Ps. 102 is however pertinent. The "set time [had] come" suggests that the Psalmist is writing maybe in captivity in Babylon as the predicted 70 years of Judah's captivity there came to a close, and he looks forward to the promised restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem. He enthuses in :16 that "Yahweh has built up Zion"- although He had not then done so (:13). The earlier part of the Psalm laments this. But the Psalmist believed in God's prophecies of doing so, and considered them as good as already fulfilled. Faith is all about adopting God's perspective, seeing future promises as if they have already been fulfilled, thereby enabling us to live the Kingdom life now in its essence. Then in Ps. 102:25 we read of how "Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth, the heavens are the work of Your hands". The language of laying foundations is nearly always used about the laying of the foundations of the new, rebuilt temple at the time of return from exile (Ezra 3:10-12; 5:16; Is. 44:28; Hag. 2:18; Zech. 4:9; 8:9); and this is the context of this Psalm (see on :13 and :16). The 'heavens and earth' refer to Israel (Is. 1:2) and the temple. Although they had 'perished' in the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the first temple, God

remained and would, the Psalmist believed, install a new temple system (as outlined in Ez. 40-48). However, this never quite happened as God intended due to Judah's weakness, and so these prophecies were reapplied to how the entire Jewish system based around the temple and Law of Moses would 'perish' and God's new temple system based around the exalted Lord Jesus would come into existence (Heb. 1:10 and context).

1:12 *And like a cloak You shall roll them up as a garment, and they shall be changed; but You are the same and Your years are without end-* See on :10 and :11. The Jewish system would be rolled up (see on :11), as a scroll that is not going to be read any more; the Law would end. But Messiah would remain eternally. It was the Lord Jesus by His sacrifice which changed the Jewish system. The same word is used of the Lord's 'changing' the customs delivered by Moses (Acts 6:14).

1:13 *But of which of the angels has He said at any time: Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?*- Again the contrast is between the Lord being given a throne to sit on, from whence He can direct and control; and the Angels who are servants, sent forth to fulfil the will of Him that sits upon the throne (:14). See on :3 *He then sat down on the right hand*. The footstool refers to that which the King reigns over; we the enemies who were reconciled become the Lord's footstool, and we are 'made' like this by the Father's will and desire to glorify His Son in this unique way.

1:14 *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of those that shall inherit salvation?*- "All" Angels are obedient servants; this of itself rules out any argument for some Angels being sinful. Their 'sending forth' from the Heavenly throne room has a literal aspect to it- see on Is. 37:36; Ex. 7:4. But in this context the argument is that the Lord Jesus is the enthroned King, whereas Angels are servants sent forth to serve us; and thus the Lord's supremacy over Angels is established. Indeed it could be argued that the position presented is that the Lord Jesus has been enthroned by the Father, and He sends forth the Angels to do His service for the sake of our salvation. The Lord Jesus is therefore the Lord of Angels.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest attention to the things that we heard, lest we drift away from them-* The *more* earnest attention continues the theme of chapter 1, that the things of the Lord Jesus are of greater moment than those spoken by Moses and declared by Angels (:2). "That we heard" suggests they would have heard rather than read the Gospel message. All they had was their memories of the word spoken; we therefore can the more understand the significance of the New Testament being written down. Hence the appeal to give attention to those things. Those things were about their personal salvation (:3). The more we believe that we really have been redeemed, the more evident it becomes that these things demand our whole and total devotion. If we "neglect so great salvation", we will have 'drifted away' (RV) from the solid assurances which are in the Gospel we first heard. Clearly, it is a temptation to drift away from those assurances, even if we 'hold' to the doctrinal propositions of the Gospel in theory. The wonderful reality of it all for us can so easily drift away. But; we will be there!

2:2 *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution-* "Transgression" is more 'inattention'. Although the judgments of the Mosaic law were not put into effect by the priesthood, the intention was that every act of violation, conscious or otherwise, had retribution. And God to this day is a sensitive responder to the works and thoughts of His people (s.w. 11:6). We should realize that under the new covenant, behaviour is even the more significant, and every act of life and thought is therefore the more culpable in light of the fact that God's Son shed His blood for our salvation.

2:3- see on Acts 1:1.

*How shall we escape-* The rejected will have a desire to escape but having no place to run (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). Rev. 20:11 likewise speaks of the rejected 'heavens and earth' fleeing from the Lamb's throne and finding no place to go. Before the whirlwind of God's judgment, the false shepherds of Israel "shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape" (Jer. 25:35). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31). They will be like the Egyptians suffering God's judgments in the Red Sea, wanting to flee but having no realistic place to run to. Uzziah hasting to go out from the presence of the Lord after he was judged for his sin was a foretaste of this (2 Chron. 26:20). But the "escape" in view may specifically refer to escape from the tribulation to come upon Jerusalem in the last days (Lk. 21:36 s.w.), and this had special relevance if indeed as suggested on 1:1 Hebrews is addressed primarily to the Jerusalem church.

*If we neglect so great a salvation?-* "So great a salvation" is the LXX for "A great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7), brought about by the suffering of Joseph-Jesus at the hands of his brethren. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her

reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even to the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden. "If *it* be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mt. 26:39) may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross.

*Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those that heard-* This is the standard proof for a non-Pauline authorship of Hebrews. But see on 1:1. The "us" and "we" in Hebrews refers to the wider readership and don't have to demand that the author includes himself in the reference. There are other examples of this e.g. "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). "We" should no longer be tossed around by false teachings (Eph. 4:14) surely precludes Paul personally. In Hebrews, the "we" who need to take more earnest heed to the Gospel is surely the readership rather than the author (Heb. 2:1). The personal notes at the end of chapter 13 are hard to interpret as written by anyone other than Paul. Even if the "we" must include Paul, "Those that heard" would refer to the disciples, whom Paul was not among. They "confirmed" the Lord's own message. It could be argued that Paul is saying that he had heard the message directly from the Lord on the Damascus road, as he emphasizes in Galatians; and what he heard was corroborated by the witness of the disciples. Read this way, the argument would be that the "us" referred to someone who had heard the message spoken through the Lord Jesus directly, and had the content of it confirmed to him by the disciples. And that "us" could only be Paul personally. In this case, this verse confirms rather than questions Paul's authorship.

*2:4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various powers and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will-* The purpose of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit was to confirm the spoken word of the disciples, the eye witnesses and first hearers of the Lord Jesus (2:3). This clear purpose of these gifts is proof of itself that they were not for all time; once the Lord's message and the inspired interpretation of it had been codified in the New Testament, there was no need for these miraculous gifts to confirm the authority and veracity of the preachers.

*2:5 For not to angels did He subject the world to come, of which we speak-* Paul now returns to his theme of the Lord's superiority over Angels. The great salvation made possible by the Lord's death means a place in God's Kingdom, when the world shall be subject unto us- and not to Angels. Whatever their future role, Paul implies that our status in the future Kingdom will be far greater than that of the Angels currently. "Did He" rather than "will He" reflects suggests that the whole plan of our salvation has already been effected in God's purpose and will. The subjection of the world to us was what Paul spoke about- in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God coming on earth.

2:6 *But one has somewhere testified-* As noted on 13:22, this is the kind of language appropriate to a transcript of a talk or lecture.

*What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the Son of Man, that You visit him?*- The parallel between mankind generally and "the Son of Man", Messiah, clearly places this "Son of man" as one of mankind, and not God. But it is this total humanity of the Lord Jesus which is the basis of His exaltation above Angels, as the argument goes on to demonstrate. This is also answering the tendency within parts of Judaism to think that the Messiah would be some kind of Angel or pre-existent spirit which visited earth. Note that God is mindful of man because He visits him- which He does through His Angels (visiting is Angelic language). Thus God is mindful (literally mind-full!) of us because of the Angels "visiting" us with trials and observation "every moment" (Job 7:18). His mind was full of us in that He 'visited' humanity in His Son. Note that the Son did not visit earth; God visited not the earth but mankind, in that He manifested Himself in His Son who was born of our human nature. And who were we, a tiny planet in an infinitely expanding cosmos, and just a few of us two legged beings on its surface, that God Almighty should plan our salvation and high exaltation through the nature and sacrifice of His only begotten Son...

Heb. 2:6-9 is an example of the inspired writer using expected reader response and expectations in order to make a point. Having spoken of how the world to come will be given to redeemed human beings and not to Angels, the writer goes on to quote from the Psalms to prove that point. We begin reading the quotation assuming it's talking about humanity generally; but as it goes on, we realize it's talking about the pre-eminent Son of Man, i.e. the Lord Jesus. Notice how in :9 He is called "Jesus", with no 'Lord' or 'Christ' added on. The point of it all is to make us perceive how totally identified is Jesus with humanity as a whole; a passage which speaks in its context of humanity generally is allowed to quite naturally flow on in meaning to apply to the Lord Jesus personally. It's a majestic, powerful way of making the point- that the Lord Jesus was truly one of us.

2:7 *You made him a little lower than the angels, You crowned him with glory and honour and did set him over the works of Your hands-* The context of Ps. 8:5 is of David's exaltation after killing Goliath. David sees in his victory the possibility for the exaltation generally not only of Israel but of all humanity. The individual in view is interpreted specifically as Jesus (:9). And it is likewise true that His exaltation is the possibility for the exaltation of all Israel and all humanity, insofar as we are "in Him" and identified with Him in baptism. The making of man or the Lord Jesus for a short time lower than the Angels is no evidence of His pre-existence or Divine incarnation in Him; for the words in their original context apply to the man David and to "man" generally. The idea is that man, and the Lord Jesus, is made for a little while / period lower than the Angels, and Paul takes this as implying that both the Lord Jesus and ourselves shall be exalted higher than the Angels, seeing we are only for a short period made lower than them.

2:8 *You did put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He subjected all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not see all things subjected to him-* The "him" is mankind generally and also specifically the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22;5:24 use the same language to describe our subjection under the Lord's feet, becoming thereby His footstool. But the Gospel must yet advance, and those obedient to it must yet subject more parts of their lives to His kingship. Through His Spirit, we are

progressively subjected to Him (Phil. 3:21). And finally, all things on earth shall literally be subject unto the Lord Jesus; and that includes Angels. For His superiority over Angels is the context of this passage. The same word is used of how Angels have been made subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22).

2:9- see on Rom. 3:19; Phil. 2:8.

*But we behold him who has been made a little lower than the angels- Jesus- crowned with glory and honour because of his suffering of death, whereby, by the grace of God, he tasted death for every person-* The focus is now moved from mankind generally to the Lord Jesus, the pre-eminent "son of man". He has been exalted to glory and honour, perhaps by implication a glory greater than of the Angels because of His suffering of death. The implication might be that Angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) but the Lord did, and was thereby exalted above them. The Lord's exaltation is ours, and repeatedly we read in Hebrew 2 of the Lord's total connection with humanity in order to save and exalt us. That connection was not with Angels but with humans; for the Lord was not an Angel, seeing His mission was identification with men and thereby to achieve their salvation. His death was supremely a tasting of death for every man. Seeing Angels cannot die, the Lord's death was a clear enough statement He was no Angel but human, dying for His people. Death is the ultimate human fear and problem; and the Lord tasted every man's death, every man's ultimate fear and struggle. This was by God's grace because what is man, that He should be so mindful of us as to give His only begotten Son to identify with us and save a few of us.

By God's grace, the Lord tasted death *for* (Gk. *huper*) *every man*, as our representative: "in tasting death he should stand for all" (Heb. 2:9 NEB). In His death He experienced the essence of the life-struggle and death of every man. The fact the Lord did this *for us* means that we respond *for Him*. "To you it is given *in the behalf of* (Gk. *huper*) Christ, not only to believe on Him [in theory], but to suffer *for his sake* (Gk. *huper*)" (Phil. 1:29). He suffered *for us* as our representative, and we suffer *for Him* in response. This was and is the two-way imperative of the fact the Lord was our representative. He died *for all* that we should die to self and live *for Him* (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "His own self bare our sins [as our representative] in his own body [note the link "*our sins*" and "*his own body*"] that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24,25). We died with Him, there on His cross; and so His resurrection life is now ours. He is totally active for us now; His life now is *for us*, and as we live His life, we should be 100% *for Him* in our living. He gave His life *for us*, and we must lay down our lives *for Him* (1 Jn. 3:16).

Heb. 2:9 seems to describe the Lord *in His time of dying*, in the suffering [not just the experience of, but the suffering associated with] death, as "crowned with glory and honour". There He was crowned not with thorns but glory and honour, from God's perspective. The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative



reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us". This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

2:10 *For it became Him for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation-* The God for whom are all things wishes to bring many sons to glory- not just one, the Lord Jesus. He who could do all things, whose are all things, worked out His purpose of having many glorious sons through giving them an author of salvation who was perfected through sufferings. That salvation has to be authored for each son makes it personal, and the relationship between the author and the authored the more intimate. The false idea of each person having an inherent "immortal soul" totally destroys the wonder of eternal salvation being personally authored for each of us. The same word for "author" is used in this sense in 12:2, where Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. By His grace He began faith in people, and the grace / gift of His Spirit finishes our faith in salvation. Through that path the Lord Jesus is the author of our salvation.

*Perfect through sufferings-* The Lord Jesus alone could say, with full meaning, "I am". Who He appeared to be, was who He essentially was. He alone achieved a completely integrated, real self. He was what Paul called the "perfect man", the completed, integrated person (Eph. 4:13). But He had to work on this. Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks like wise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. His final point of perfection was reached at the moment of His death; the sufferings of death elicited within Him that final point of completion / perfection. Which was why He died at just that point. And this adds infinite meaning to the sufferings of death which are our common experience.

2:11- see on Heb. 11:26.

*For both he that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of the same nature-* This is yet more evidence that the Lord was not an Angel. He had the nature of those whom He sanctified in order to achieve that sanctification. This inspired principle is profound and underpins the representative nature of the Lord's work and sacrifice. The sanctifier must be of the same nature as the sanctified. This raises a serious question about the validity of the Mosaic sacrifices; they were only acceptable by reason of the truly representative Messianic sacrifice to which they pointed forward. And as Paul will later point out, it was therefore not possible for the blood of animals to take away human sin; the sanctification had to be achieved by a sanctifier of the same nature. But "of the same nature" is literally "out of one". The argument could equally be that they were of the same Father, which is why He is not ashamed to call us brothers, for we are of the same one Father. In this case, Paul read the virgin birth as no fundamental barrier to the Lord's identification with us, for we and Jesus are all "of the same one", i.e. God.

*For this cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers-* The very fact Christ calls us His brothers (as in Mt. 12:50) is seen as proof of Christ's humanity, that it was men and not Angels who were His brothers. The Lord shall be ashamed of His association with some at the last day, and of us He will not be ashamed in that day (s.w. Mk. 8:38). But His

unashamed association with us begins now in this life. Because God's Son is unashamed now of having us as His brothers, therefore the Father is not ashamed to be known as our God (11:16 s.w.).

2:12- see on Mt. 28:10.

*Saying: I will declare Your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation will I sing Your praise-* The Psalm quoted predicts the Lord's crucifixion. His prayer thoughts to the Father then included His awareness that the *ekklesia*, the church or "congregation", were His brothers. For He realized that it was through His sacrifice that a new family was being created. The declaration or preaching of the Father's Name to us was supremely through the Lord's death on the cross. The cross was the supreme declaration of the Name (Jn. 17:26); the first letters of the Hebrew title over the cross spelt 'YHWH'. And that declaration of the Name in the naked, bleeding, betrayed and crucified Christ was to us. And the Lord looked forward, perhaps in literal terms, to singing praise to the Father in the midst of His brothers. This all hardly sounds as if the Lord Jesus was "God the Son". He positioned Himself in the midst of His brethren, singing God's praise- even after His exaltation.

2:13 *And again: I will put my trust in Him-* The fact the Lord Jesus needed to trust the Father is cited as an example of His humanity, and therefore proof of His not being an Angel- for Angels do not need to exhibit trust or faith in God. The quotation from Is. 8:17 goes on to state that God is hidden from the majority of Israel- relevant to the Hebrew Christians who were wondering how so many in Israel could be wrong, and who were returning to the majority, the broad way of Judaism. The original context speaks of the isolation of Isaiah and his family within Israel; "I", even if Israel *en masse* do not, "will put my trust in Him"; the majority in Israel had stumbled (Is. 8:15), a figure Paul elsewhere uses about Israel's stumbling on the rock of Jesus as Messiah. And it was all because they had not truly understood God's law (Is. 8:20) which spoke so fully of Jesus as Christ.

*And again: Behold, I and the children whom God has given me-* Isaiah is a confirmed type of Christ, and his school of prophets typical of the saints. "I (Isaiah) and the children (prophets - Is. 8:16) whom the Lord hath given me" (Is. 8:18) is quoted here as referring to Christ and His brethren. Other instances of Isaiah being a type of Christ can be found by comparing Is. 6:10 with John 12:39-41 and by appreciating that "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me... to preach good tidings... to comfort all that mourn" (e.g. Hezekiah) is primarily concerning Isaiah's message of hope to Israel during the Assyrian invasions, although it is quoted concerning Jesus (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Luke 4:18). Is. 8:16-18 could be taken as Isaiah saying that he had decided not to teach his school of prophets any longer, but rather to just personally focus upon his own relationship with God: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him". The next verse is however quoted in Heb. 2:13 about the Lord Jesus and His brethren being of the same nature: "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts". The Hebrew writer therefore understood this statement to reflect an intense unity between Isaiah and his "children", be they his literal children [Immanuel and Mahershalalhashbaz] or his spiritual children. It seems to me that Immanuel could've been some kind of Messiah figure- but for whatever reason, he didn't live up to it and the prophecy was therefore given a greater

application to the Lord Jesus. Likewise, the "children" Isaiah refers to in Is. 8:18 became the faithful children in Christ under the new covenant, according to how Heb. 2:13 quotes it.

2:14- see on Gal. 1:4; Rev. 20:5.

*Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same nature; so that through his death he might bring to nothing him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil-* The language of sharing and partaking does not mean that the Lord only shared part of our nature; for we the children are sharers or partakers in flesh and blood, and we are fully human. He likewise participated or shared fully in our condition. Not an actor, playing out a theological necessity that was scripted in the heavenly text, but in full total reality.

“Him that had the power of death, that is the Devil” (Heb. 2:14) may refer to the fact that “the sting (power) of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the (Jewish) Law” (1 Cor. 15:56; see also Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 7:8, where ‘the Law’ that gives power to sin is clearly the Jewish law). Bearing in mind that the ‘Devil’ often refers to sin and the flesh, it seems significant that ‘the flesh’ and ‘sin’ are often associated with the Mosaic Law. The whole passage in Heb. 2:14 can be read with reference to the Jewish Law being ‘taken out of the way’ by the death of Jesus [A.V. “destroy him that hath the power of death”]. The Devil kept men in bondage, just as the Law did (Gal. 4:9; 5:1; Acts 15:10; Rom. 7:6–11). The Law was an ‘accuser’ (Rom. 2:19,20; 7:7) just as the Devil is. Hebrews 2:14 states that the Devil was destroyed by Christ’s death. The Greek for ‘destroy’ is translated ‘abolish’ in Ephesians 2:15: “Having abolished [Darby: ‘annulled’] in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”. This would equate the Devil with the enmity, or fleshly mind (Rom. 8:7) generated by the Mosaic Law; remember that Hebrews was written mainly to Jewish believers. The Law itself was perfect, in itself it was not the minister of sin, but the effect it had on man was to stimulate the ‘Devil’ within man because of our disobedience. “The strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor. 15:56). “Sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me (Rom. 7:8,11). Hence “the wages of sin (stimulated by the Law) is death” (Rom. 6:23). It is quite possible that the “sin” in Romans 6, which we should not keep serving, may have some reference to the Mosaic Law. It is probable that the Judaizers were by far the biggest source of false teaching in the early church. The assumption that Paul is battling Gnosticism is an anachronism, because the Gnostic heresies developed some time later. It would be true to say that incipient Gnostic ideas were presented by the Judaizers in the form of saying that sin was not to be taken too seriously because the Law provided set formulae for getting round it. The Law produced an outward showing in the “flesh”, not least in the sign of circumcision (Rom. 2:28).

This passage places extraordinary emphasis upon the fact that the Lord Jesus had human nature: “He *also himself likewise*” partook of it (Heb. 2:14). This phrase uses three words all with the same meaning, just to drive the point home. He partook “of the *same*” nature; the record could have said ‘he partook of *it* too’, but it stresses, “he partook of the *same*”. The passages hammers home the same truth multiple times: “Himself... likewise... in like manner... partook... the same”. The Lord’s humanity was of huge moment to Paul. It is the basis for our salvation. The Lord partook in our nature, and we are made partakers in Him unto salvation (Heb. 2:14 cp. 3:14; 12:10; 2 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:13). As He partook in our nature, so we partake in Him and symbolize it by partaking at His table (s.w. 1 Cor.

10:17,21,30). His humanity, when preached and understood, is a powerful invitation to partake in Him by baptism and a life lived in Him. A Divine "God the Son" has no such appeal.

2:15- see on Heb. 5:7.

*And might deliver all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage-* The reference is to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The "devil" who was slain in :14 could then allude to Pharaoh. But Israel were delivered from a greater bondage- to the law and the inevitable fear of death which it inculcated in sinful man (see on :14). It is the fear of death, the subconscious awareness in every human being that they have sinned and must die, which is here defined as the psychological bind which keeps people in bondage. The message of freedom from sin and death which is in Christ is only attractive to those who are honest enough to get in touch with themselves and realize that this is indeed the psychological tie that binds them. We can only experience the joy of release from bondage if we perceive we were in bondage; and such joy can only come from a firm persuasion that if the Lord were to return right now, we really will be saved. For anything less than that is not good news, just a fearful sense of responsibility to judgment to come, against which we vainly hope our knowledge of some true theology will somehow triumph.

The fear of death grips our society more than we like to admit. The Swiss psychologist Paul Tournier observed the huge "number of people who dream that they are locked in, that everywhere they come up against iron-bound and padlocked doors, that they absolutely must escape, and yet there is no way out". This is the state of the nation, this is how we naturally are, this is the audience to which we preach. And we preach a freedom from that fear. Because the Lord Jesus was of our human nature- and here perhaps more than anywhere else we see the crucial practical importance of doctrine- we are freed from the ranks of all those who through fear of death live their lives in bondage. For He died for us, as our representative. How true are those inspired words. "To release them who through fear / *phobos* of death were all their living-time subject to slavery" (Gk.). Nearly all the great psychologists concluded that the mystery of death obsesses humanity; and in the last analysis, all anxiety is reduced to anxiety about death. You can see it for yourself, in how death, or real, deep discussion of it, is a taboo subject; how people will make jokes about it in reflection of their fear of seriously discussing it. People, even doctors, don't quite know what to say to the dying. There can be floods of stories and chit-chat... all carefully avoiding any possible allusion to death. This fear of death, in which the unredeemed billions of humanity have been in bondage, explains the fear of old age, the unwillingness to accept our age for what it is, our bodies for how and what they are, or are becoming. I'm not saying of course that the emotion of fear or anxiety is totally removed from our lives by faith. The Lord Jesus in Gethsemane is proof enough that these emotions are an integral part of being human, and it's no sin to have them. I'm talking of fear in it's destructive sense, the fear of death which is rooted in a lack of hope. There's a passage in *Hamlet* which speaks of not so much fearing death as "the dread of something after death" (some of the sentiments in Job 18 are similar). And modern psychoanalytical studies have confirmed this. A large part of the fear of death is the fear of what follows. For those in Christ, whilst like their Lord they may naturally fear the process of death, their future is secured; they know that death is unconsciousness and will end ultimately in a bodily resurrection at the Lord's return, after which they will share in His eternal life. For them, "the fear of death" in its ultimate form has been removed (Heb. 2:14-18).

This passage in Hebrews 2 says that the Lord can deliver us from such bondage because he is our representative, our brother, of our nature, not ashamed of His connection with us (2:11). Reasoning back from this, we can see that Moses' ability to redeem Israel from Egypt, his appropriacy for the task, was because he had openly declared that he was one of them. Yet the wonder of that was lost on them. And if we are not careful, the wonder of the fact that the Lord had our nature, that He was our representative and is *therefore* mighty to save, can be lost on us too. The thrill of these first principles should ever remain with us.

All the Judges in some way prefigured the Lord; for they were "saviours" raised up to deliver God's weak and failing people in pure grace, when according to God's own word, they should have received the due punishment of rejection (Neh. 9:27,28). He who delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15) was typified by all those earlier deliverers of God's people from bondage (cp. Mt. 1:21). The "great salvation" of Heb. 2:3 which the Lord achieved was foreshadowed by the great deliverance wrought by Samson (Jud. 15:18).

2:16 *For truly not to angels does he take hold in association; but he took hold of the seed of Abraham-* The tense of "take hold" suggests the Lord is doing this now. He does not take hold of Angels to associated with them, but of humans; because He had been intended through His nature to take hold of the seed of Abraham. The Lord Jesus is therefore an active Lord, calling men and women, taking hold of them by His calling. But the word translated "take hold" is used in the Gospels of the Lord taking hold of men literally (Peter on the water in his loss of faith, Mt. 14:31; the blind man of Mk. 8:23; the little child of Lk. 9:47 with his immature faith and understanding; the paralyzed man of Lk. 14:4). In all these incidents we see acted parables of how the Lord takes hold of people in all manner of situations; and He does so on account of having fully shared our nature. The seed of Abraham referred to a singular seed, not a plural (Gal. 3:16)- the Lord Jesus personally. But He takes hold of men and women and His humanity is a beckoning to them to become 'in Him' by baptism, so that they too are part of the seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

Angels cannot die: "Death... does not lay hold of angels" (Heb. 2:16 Diaglott margin). If Angels could sin, then those who are found worthy of reward at Christ's return will also still be able to sin. And seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), they will therefore not have eternal life; if we have a possibility of sinning, we have the capability of dying. Thus to say Angels can sin makes God's promise of eternal life meaningless, seeing that our reward is to share the nature of the Angels. Heb. 2:16-18 repays closer reflection in this context of Angels and possibility to sin. It speaks of the reasons why the Lord Jesus had to be of human nature: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the [nature of the] seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted". Exactly because the Lord Jesus had to be tempted to sin, He did not have Angelic nature but human nature. His mission was to save humanity from human sin and death, not the Angels who cannot die. So, He had to have human nature so that He could be tempted to sin; and so this section so labours the point that therefore He did not have Angels' nature. Which, by inference, is *not* able to be tempted to sin. Note how the Bible speaks of "Angels" as if there is only one category of Angel-obedient Heavenly beings.

2:17- see on Lk. 24:6; Jn. 19:13.

*Therefore in all things he had to be made like his brothers-* The same Greek word is used in 1 Jn. 3:2 of how finally, we shall be "made like" Him. His experiences of life, of our humanity, brought Him into identity with us- so that we might reach final identity with Him. The language of 2:14-18 may well be intended to be talking specifically about the Lord's death. This ongoing process of being 'made like' us came to particular intensity at that time. The hymn of Phil. 2 makes the same point- that the Lord was made like us mentally particularly through His experience of crucifixion and death. His death became ours, so that His resurrection and life shall likewise become ours. But "made like" implies a process, as if through His life experience He progressively came to identify with all men, and this process of identification and total understanding of all men came to a peak culmination in His time of dying. "Made like" means fundamentally 'to assimilate'. He assimilated all that there is in man, so that nobody can ever now complain that there is nobody who understands them. On earth there indeed is not, but there is the Heavenly man who does.

Moses' persecution by Pharaoh enabled him to enter into the feelings of Israel in the slave camps; and as they fled from Pharaoh towards the Red Sea, Moses would have recalled his own flight from Pharaoh to Midian. The whole epistle to the Hebrews is shot through with allusions to Moses. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17) is alluding to Dt. 18:18: "I will raise them up a Prophet *from among their brethren* like unto *thee* (Moses)". The brethren of Christ are here paralleled with Moses; as if Moses really is representative of not only natural Israel, but spiritual too- as well as Moses being a type of Christ. For this reason he is such a clear pattern for us, and we are invited so often to identify ourselves with him by copying his example. Moses was *made like* his brethren through his similar experiences, as Christ was progressively *made like* us by his life of temptation.

*So that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people-* The Jewish High Priest was doing a job, and had no personal dispensation which allowed him to be merciful / compassionate (Gk.) to the offerers who came to him or to the people for whom he interceded. The Lord Jesus is a High Priest who has the capacity to show compassion, who is faithful or trustworthy to do the required work of obtaining our forgiveness. "Things pertaining to God" is an attempt to translate *pros theos*, the very phrase used in Jn. 1:1, "with God" and Jn. 13:3 "to God" (also Jn. 20:17 "I ascend... *pros* my Father"). The Lord is not simply "with God" in a literal sense but He is before God and with Him in the sense that He and the Father are 'together'; and the Lord Jesus is very much with us, on our side. He therefore is able uniquely to get our forgiveness. For He wants to save us... quite simply so. He is God "with us", Emmanuel, bringing God to be on our side in the crucial area of dealing with our sins. When we read of prayer being made by believers *pros theos*, with or before God (e.g. Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 4:6), this is possible on account of the Lord's mediation for us there. It also explains how Paul could have a clean conscience *pros theos* (Acts 24:16), when there had been a time when he had walked against the goads of conscience. But his heavenly mediator *pros theos* brought him too *pros theos*, because he was "in Christ". There in heaven itself, before God, we have peace and every confidence *pros theos* on account of our Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 3:4; 1 Jn. 3:21). For we are "in Christ", and are therefore and thereby acceptably *pros theos* in Heaven itself (1 Thess. 1:8,9).

2:18 *For because he himself suffered when tempted, he is able to succour those who are being tempted-* This succouring of tempted persons is surely psychological, seeing that temptation is internal to the human heart (James 1:13-15; Mk. 7:15-23). The succouring is therefore through the gift of the Spirit in the hearts / psychology of the believer. The Lord

was tempted because He was human; God Himself cannot be tempted (James 1:13). And because He overcame, therefore He is now able to give His Spirit, the mindset He had, to those who are "in Him" and desire to truly be as Him. This verse suggests that in the heat of temptation, at the very moment of it, He is able to provide psychological strength to overcome it. And this is the path to salvation, it is how He saves us in practice. Now is the day of salvation, and so now is the time when He will provide us this "succour" or aid (see on 2 Cor. 6:2). We can boldly say that the Lord Jesus is my helper / succourer [s.w.], so we need never fear a situation that could spiritually swamp us (Heb. 13:6). "Suffered when tempted" doesn't mean that He simply suffered in the sense of experienced temptation. The word is used many times of the Lord's suffering on the cross, and later in Hebrews it is used in this way (5:8; 9:26; 13:12). His identity with our temptations came to a climax of total identity on account of His final sufferings, when He was the most sorely tempted.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Therefore holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus-* Chapter 2 has emphasized that we are the "brothers" of the Lord Jesus. And yet the focus now moves on to the greatness of that supreme "brother". The argument is to counter the relatively low status assigned to the Messiah figure within the Judaism which was beckoning the Christians. Even if they accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, the view of Messiah was far too low, and was not giving due respect to the high status and work of the Lord Jesus. Judaism was at best an earthly calling; we are "partakers" in Christ (3:1; 2:14-18), and thereby of a calling from Heaven, i.e. of God. They were to "consider" / 'observe or perceive fully' (Gk.) the real nature and wonder of the exalted Lord Jesus. He was a 'sent one', an Apostle, just as He sent us into the world. As the Father sent Him, so He sends us to the world in the great commission (Jn. 20:21). "Confession" means literally that, and implies that faith involves a literal confession or profession of faith to others. Paul uses it three times in Hebrews (also 4:14; 10:23).

Concentration on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is something which the Hebrew writer so often encourages, in his efforts to encourage the Hebrew believers. After perhaps 25 years of believing (they were probably converted at Pentecost), they were starting to get bored with God's Truth; the will to keep on keeping on was no longer what it was. But because of the cross, because *He paid dearly for you*, because He is now thereby our matchless mediator: hold on, hold fast, *therefore* (a watchword of Hebrews) endure to the end (Heb. 3:1,6; 4:14; 10:21,23). For that great salvation will surely be realized one day. So, concentrate *personally* on the fact that He hung there for you, honour your solemn duty to at least try to reconstruct the agony of His body and soul.

3:2 *Who was faithful to Him that appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house-* "Appointed" is literally 'made'. The Lord was 'made' High Priest for us at His resurrection (5:5; Acts 2:36). The tense of "was faithful" implies that He was and still is. This High Priest can be trusted; the Mosaic High Priests simply did a job and it was over to God to grant forgiveness and acceptance. But our High priest has a role to play in the granting of forgiveness and mediation of blessing. The reference may be to how God 'made' or appointed Moses and Aaron (1 Sam. 12:6). Although Moses was not the High Priest, he effectively acted as such due to Aaron's inadequacy; hence the Lord's High Priestly role is contrasted to that of Moses, with the hint that the Aaronic High Priest was never fully adequate. One like Moses, but greater than Moses, was required; and that is how Messiah is defined in Dt. 18:15. The language of Moses being faithful in God's house is quoted from Num. 12:7, where "My servant Moses is not so. He is so faithful in all My house" is stated in the context of Moses' superiority over Aaron the High Priest. The house or family / people of Moses was Israel, but Messiah's house is universal in scope.

3:3 *For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, in that he that built the house has more honour than the house-* Judaism considered Moses worthy of higher glory than any Messiah figure. Again Paul is attacking their concept of Messiah as inadequate. The "house" of Messiah is different to that of Moses; Messiah built "his own house" (:6) and was and is faithful over it. Moses did not build the house of Israel; God did. Moses was placed over it. Messiah built His own house and was faithful over it. "He that built the house" doesn't mean that Christ built the house of Moses. It has a general reference to the fact that Messiah built and rules over *His* house, whereas Moses built no house but was simply placed over the house of Israel at the time. To build a house / family means to have children and raise them.



This is what the Lord Jesus has done by having spiritual children of His own nature, as taught previously in 2:13, where the Lord is likened to Isaiah building up his faithful family, and we are as Isaiah's children of prophetic witness. Judaism had so glorified Israel as a people that they were effectively saying that they had as much glory as God who built them. They were confusing the creator and the created, as Paul points out in Romans 1. Effectively, Judaism was making Moses equal to God. The Rabbis argued that by gematria the numerical value of "Moses our Rabbi" was 613, which is also the value of the letters of "Lord God of Israel". Paul is seeking to refocus them upon the basics- that God is greater than Moses, and Messiah likewise is, for He has built a greater house which He is Lord over.

*3:4 Every house is built by someone; but He that built all things is God-* The Lord Jesus, Messiah, is the builder of the spiritual temple, the house of God (Zech. 6:12). But it was God working through Him to build it, in ultimate terms. Moses was not the builder of any house, and so God was not in that sense manifested through Him in such work as He was through Messiah.

*3:5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken-* Moses was a servant over his house, whereas Messiah had God manifested through Him in building *His* house over which He therefore was and is a true Master *over* His house (:6), and not simply a servant within the house. Moses is frequently called the "servant" (Josh. 1:1,2; 9:24 etc.). But the builder of a house is more than a servant; as the Son of the Divine Builder of all things, He is "over" His own house in a far superior way to that in which Moses served as a servant within his house. The faithfulness of Moses was a testimony towards someone far greater, Messiah Jesus.

If Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45).

*3:6 But Christ, as a Son over his own house-* As explained above, the Messiah was to "over" His own house / family because He, on God's behalf, was the maker of it. Moses was a servant set over a household, but the Lord's household was made by Himself with God's manifestation through Him. We are that household.

*Whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, remaining firm to the end-* Clearly enough, we must endure to the end to be saved (Mt. 10:22). We can, by implication, leave the household of Christ. We need to assess any exit from a church community in that light; for so often, disaffected individuals leave a local community and go nowhere, to then fade away in their faith. "Hold fast" is the same word used for the "good ground" 'keeping the word' in their hearts (Lk. 8:15). Without a written New Testament, they would have needed to quite literally remember and mentally keep hold of the word preached. They were to hold fast [s.w.] the confidence they had at the beginning (:14), in those heady days when thousands of Hebrews were baptized in Jerusalem. They were confident of salvation; but with the passing of the years, that joy which came from being confident of the outcome of the judgment seat had subsided. Whether we are still joyfully confident of "the hope", the *elpis*, the firm assurance, is what is finally the litmus test for our faith. We will be confirmed as the Lord's "house" at "the end"; He shall eternally be the master over the family which we have now joined, but which shall be eternally solidified, as it were, at the last day.

*3:7 Therefore, even as the Holy Spirit said-* The understanding is that the words of the Old Testament are God's Spirit speaking; for this is the meaning of the Scriptures being Divinely inspired or in-spirited. The argument begun by "therefore" is picked up again in :12-  
therefore, "take heed".

*Today, if you shall hear his voice-* The Hebrew is an appeal: "Oh that today you would hear His voice". The emphasis upon "today" is in the context of appealing for confidence in the certain hope of salvation (:6). We should be able to say with confidence that "today" if the Lord comes or if we die, we shall be saved. This is the meaning of the emphasis upon "today"; Peter has the same idea when writing of our rejoicing in "the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12), the ultimate truth that today at this moment we shall be saved if the Lord returns or we die. In this sense "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). At this moment we can seek and find the Lord, "while He may be found" (Is. 55:6). The Lord repeats the same argument by saying that "If any man hear My voice... I will come in to him" (Rev. 3:20). Hebrews opened with the statement that the God who spoke by the prophets has spoken to us in His Son; and it is directly from Him that we are appealed to. Hearing the Lord's voice may well allude to the Lord's statement that His sheep hear His voice; and the context of the Psalm 95 quotation is that "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps. 95:7 ASV). The voice of God is therefore mediated to us through the shepherd voice of the Lord Jesus.

*3:8 Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, like the time of testing in the wilderness-* We note that it was the Jews who hardened their hearts when Paul preached to them (Acts 19:9). The entire period of wilderness wanderings was characterized by Israel putting God to the test; they were not confident of their final salvation, and were ever looking for evidence from Him. He had brought them out of Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb; and there were daily miracles of provision in the bread and water which pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. This desire for yet further proof is seen in various guises today; from the phlegmatic, wavering believer who wants more 'scientific proof' of God to those in the Pentecostal movement ever seeking visible evidence that the Lord is amongst them. The word of promise regarding salvation is to be believed and that faith and joy held on to (:6).

*3:9 Where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years-* See on :8. They continually tested God even though they saw His works daily; the manna, water from the rock, shekinah glory over the tabernacle, the cloud by day and the fire by night. But still they tested Him. As noted on :8, this is our warning against ever seeking 'hard proof'. Even if we were to be daily given it, this would not take away the desire to test God. It is total faith in the word of promise which is required (:6), and the confirmation is not in petty experimentation day by day which 'prooves' God, but rather has it already been provided in the Lord's death and resurrection.

*3:10 Therefore I was displeased with this generation, and said: They do always err in their heart. They did not know My ways-* This 'displeasure' or 'grief' lasted 40 years (:17 s.w.); it was a daily grief that they did not trust Him. To believe in God is to trust Him. In Hebrew, belief is trust. And no amount of petty testing of God will give us that trust. Psalm 95 gives us a unique insight into God's internal thought processes. He "said" within Himself that their problem was in Israel's hearts. They had seen "His way in the [Red] Sea" (Ps. 77:19), He had "made known His ways to Israel" (Ps. 103:17), but their heart was far from Him. But "My ways" refers so often to God's commandments; Israel were repeatedly asked to "walk in His

ways" as they walked through the wilderness (Dt. 10:12; 11:22; 26:17 etc.). He sought not so much total legalistic obedience to His ways / commandments as to "know" them, to appreciate them, to perceive them in their hearts. The Hebrew word translated "err" is that used for Israel's "wandering" in the wilderness for 40 years (Ps. 107:4). They wandered in their minds, just as humanity does today- from this passing passion to that, toying with that principle or fantasy and then with this... and that mental lack of stability was reflected in how they literally wandered. This aimless wandering through life is the parade characteristic of the unbelieving world. Only a firm hope in Christ and our future salvation can give us this mental and emotional stability which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

3:11 *As I swore in My anger: They shall not enter into My rest-* God has emotion. The generation that were promised the rest, permanence and stability of the promised land were not given it, because in their hearts they wandered. And this, as noted on :10, was reflected in their wandering in the wilderness. This implies that God changed His mind about letting Israel enter the land; for He had promised that generation "rest" in that He promised them the land (Josh. 1:15). Or as Num. 14:34 (A. V. mg. ) says: "Ye shall bear your iniquity, even forty years, and ye shall know the altering of My purpose". These were the words of the Angel to Moses. The apparent change of plans could be seen as more appropriate if it concerned the Angel which led them; and yet the Angel all the same was manifesting God. This oath they would not "enter into My rest" was solely because they did not believe (:18). The immorality, idolatry etc. were relatively incidental to the essential issue- that they did not believe He would give them rest in the promised land. And therefore He did not give it to them. The context of all this is Paul's appeal for confident hope in our future salvation (:6). It is unbelief and a constant demand for 'proof' which was their problem which cost them salvation.

3:12 *Brothers, take care, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, causing you to depart from the living God-* The problem was in their hearts (:10), their unbelief (:18). The appeal to "take care" was not just to the Hebrew believers as individuals, but to them as "brothers" to ensure that not only in themselves personally but amongst none of them there should be this heart of unbelief. The immediate issue was of not believing in the Lord Jesus. This was the reason why they were no longer confident of salvation; because Judaism had eroded their faith in the saviour, their real confidence in salvation was waning, and likewise their joy (:6). It was this heart of unbelief in Messiah as Saviour which would cause them to depart from God, the God who is alive in His risen Son. This was the great tragedy- that Judaism which so prided itself in theism was actually turning people away from real faith in God. Because faith in Him is predicated upon faith in His Son.

3:13- see on 1 Cor. 10:21.

*But encourage one another day by day, so long as it is called today, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin-* See on :7 for the significance of "today". As noted on :12, the Hebrews were to not only worry about their own salvation but that of others. They were to encourage one another daily, which suggests the audience were daily with each other. This would fit the situation in the Jerusalem church, where it seems they daily encountered each other (Acts 2:46). It was the deceitful nature of sin which could harden their heart; but the 'heart' problem was a disbelief in the sure salvation available in Jesus. But ultimately it was sin which was deceiving them, albeit under the guise of claiming to be more rigorously legally obedient to Judaism. The final issue is between sin and righteousness; the kingdom of this world or the eternal Kingdom of God and His Son; the life of the flesh or the Spirit. It

was sin which was attractive to them, and we can infer that this was the fundamental reason they were shying away from confident faith in their salvation. For if we are sure we are to live eternally in God's Kingdom in the spiritual life, we can hardly be enthusiastic for the way of the flesh in this life. So it is the desire to sin which militates against total confidence in salvation.

*3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to our original confidence, remaining firm to the end-* The word for "partakers" is used of how we are His "fellows" or co-partakers (1:9); we partake in the heavenly calling (:1) and in the Holy Spirit (6:4). We are saved, and yet not finally; we are partakers, but only completely so at the last day, after we have held firm unto the end. The "original confidence" implies they were totally confident of their salvation when they were first baptized; "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16) rang so simply true to them. Salvation is on account of being "in Christ", but we must abide in Him to the end of our lives. It is then that we are "partakers of Christ". Paul envisaged the Lord's return in the lifetime of believers, and so uses "the end" as a reference to both the end of a believer's life and also to the Lord's coming. The Lord Himself several times defined "the end" as the day of His return (Mt. 24:6,13,14). Paul asks us to hold our faith unto "the end" (6:11), which seeing death is unconsciousness means that he intended us to hold the faith until "the end" of our lives. And yet in effect, our death is His return, for the next conscious moment for us will be His return.

*3:15 It is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion-* The idea of "today" as expounded on :7 is that if we right now hear the Lord's voice, we can rejoice that if today is our "end", then we shall be saved. We have heard in essence the same voice as Israel heard in that the Gospel was preached to them as well as to us (4:2). "The rebellion" is a phrase used only elsewhere in :8, where it refers to the whole period of Israel's testing of God in the desert, rather than some particular moment of rebellion. But the quotation from Ps. 95:8 specifically uses the Hebrew word *meribah* for "the rebellion" or "provocation". Their provocation at Meribah was that they had specifically challenged God to prove He was amongst them, despite having been given so many signs that He was; and they did this at a place called Meribah twice, at the beginning (Ex. 17:7) and at the end of the forty year wanderings (Num. 20:2-13). The observation is made in Ps. 78:18,41 that this latter testing of God was done "in their heart", and it is the heart which is Paul's concern in this section. The hardening of hearts was therefore in refusing to perceive all the evidence which God had already given in Christ and indeed in the miraculous signs which had been witnessed by the Hebrew Christians. Perhaps Paul felt that the 40 year period from the Lord's death was coming to a close, and the Hebrew Christians likewise at the end of a similar period were testing God and desiring to return to Egypt, which is what happened at Meribah (Num. 20:2-13). But the element of 'return' was in that they were returning to Judaism, which Paul sees as 'Egypt'. Stephen made the same connection in his speech (see on 1:1).

*3:16 For who, having heard, still rebelled? Was it not all those who followed Moses out of Egypt?-* The implication could be that having heard the message of salvation, they should not have rebelled. The argument and rhetoric is typical of one which would be used in a verbal address (see on 13:22); as if to say 'And let's remind ourselves, folks, who are we talking about? Who are these rebels who heard the good news but still rebelled? Was it not all those who followed Moses out of Egypt?'. The implication was that it was Christians who had followed Christ out of the world and through the waters of baptism towards salvation (1 Cor. 10:1,2)- who were now turning back to where they had come from. The total failure of that generation is cited as a sober example of a mass collapse of faith; "your whole number" were

to perish as described in :17 (Num. 14:29 "Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number"). Paul in 2 Thess. 2 envisaged a great collapse of faith just before the Lord returned. And here he seems to hint at the same thing by suggesting that the Hebrews were at the point Israel were at in Meribah, at the end of their journey / 40 years, where they turned away and wished to return to Egypt.

*3:17 And with whom was He displeased for forty years? Was it not with those that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*- The sustained series of rhetorical questions is appropriate to a verbal address- see on 13:22. The displeasure for forty years could suggest that the incident of Meribah, "rebellion" / "provocation", was the one at the start of the forty years; see on :15. Heb. 3:17 RVmg speaks of their "limbs [which] fell in the wilderness"- the picture is of condemned men staggering on through the desert, discarded limbs wasted by some terrible and progressive disease. This is the picture of the condemned. Israel wandering in the wilderness until their carcasses lay strewn over the scrubland of Sinai connects with Cain also being a wanderer after his rejection. He was made a "fugitive", from a Hebrew root meaning to shake, to totter, to reel. He was to wander, shaking with fear, reeling. The word is also rendered 'to bemoan'. It's an awful scene: bemoaning his lot, shaking, wandering, reeling, nowhere. The same image is found in Prov. 14:32: "The wicked is driven away [Heb. to totter, be chased] in his wickedness".

God grieved over the carcasses of those wretched men whom He slew in the wilderness for their thankless rebellions against Him their saviour. The apostle makes the point: "With *whom* was He grieved?". Answer: with the wicked whom He slew! A human God or a proud God would never grieve over His victory over His enemies. Even in the fickleness of Israel's repentance, knowing their future, knowing what they would subject His Son to, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Jud. 10:16). He delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace.

*3:18 And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to those that were disobedient?*- Disobedience is paralleled here with "unbelief" (:19) in that faith and works are related. Faith without works is dead. If we really believe that we shall be saved, and can say at this moment of time that in this "today" I shall be saved... then we will naturally seek to be obedient. But what was Israel's particular act of disobedience in the wilderness which led to their being excluded from entering the land? I suggest the reference is to Dt. 1:26: "Yet you wouldn't go up [AV "refused to go up"], but rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh your God". They were told to enter the land but refused. Refusal to accept the Kingdom of God is tantamount to disbelief we shall enter it (:19). This is where it is critical to understand "faith" as not simply belief in the rightness and logical correctness of a set of theological propositions. Faith is trust / confidence that we shall be saved. It is to say "Yes!" to the command to enter the Kingdom. If we cease believing this, then we are in that sense disobedient to the command to enter the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. We thereby judge ourselves as those who shall be rejected from the Kingdom, in that we did not wish to be there ourselves.

3:19- see on Jn. 3:3.

*So we see that they were not able to enter in because of their unbelief*- See on :18. The essential problem with Israel was not their moral failure but their disbelief that really they

would be saved. They did not enter in because they chose themselves not to. But once rejected, they then did attempt to enter the land, not by faith but in their own strength; and they were not able to enter (Num. 14:40-45). This again was a pertinent challenge to the Hebrew Christians returning to Judaism. Entry to the Kingdom of God can only be by faith that we shall do so; any attempt to enter in our own strength will leave us realizing all too late that we "were not able to enter in" because we lacked faith, even if we had belated desire and human effort. The *dunamis* ('ability') to enter the Kingdom is the *dunamis* of the Spirit gift, which is predicated upon faith alone (Eph. 3:16-20); the idea is parallel with not being able to see the Kingdom [cp. Moses seeing the promised land] unless we receive the birth of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3,5). "Cannot enter into" in Jn. 3:5 translates the very Greek phrase found here ["not able to enter in"].

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Therefore, while the promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any one of you should seem to have failed to attain it-* As explained on 3:6, we should be able to say that "today" we shall be saved, and be confident in it, if the Lord returns today or we die. The promise of entering salvation in this sense remains to us; all we have to do is believe. But as in Rom. 11, there is the command to fear because of the real possibility of our being like natural Israel. There is a very powerful parable in the account of the wilderness journey through life, whereby the Red Sea represents baptism, eating the manna daily corresponds to daily feeding on the word etc. This parable is alluded to in so many parts of Scripture. However, only a minority of those baptized in the Red Sea actually reached the promised land. Can we expect the parallel with the new Israel to break down at this point? Just look back at your own Christian experience if you can't believe it. Add to this the number of those who spiritually fall asleep, and the frightening similarity between natural and spiritual Israel comes abruptly into focus.

An element of fear is not wrong in itself. Israel in the wilderness had the pillar of fire to remind them of God's close presence, and to thereby motivate them not to sin: "His fear (will) be before your faces, that you sin not" (Ex. 20:20). Notice how Isaac's guardian angel is described as "the fear" in Gen. 31:42,53 cp. 48:15,16.

4:2- see on Jn. 15:27.

*For indeed we have had good tidings preached to us, even as also they did; but the word they heard did not benefit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard it-* The Gospel was preached to Abraham as it is to us (Gal. 3:8). That good news in its simplest form is not a set of theological propositions but the simple promise that by grace we shall receive an eternal Kingdom. The promise of inheriting the land is therefore a key part of the Gospel preached to us. They like the Hebrew believers in Jerusalem had "heard" rather than read this good news. But the message preached must be "united... with" us. This act of unity with the promise of the Kingdom is baptism and abiding in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). The breaking of bread service is another opportunity to demonstrate our unity with the Kingdom promise in Christ, but unity with it is primarily in living the Kingdom life now. The ultimate "benefit" is that we enter the Kingdom of God (s.w. Mt. 16:26). The word of the Spirit is what profits or benefits us (Jn. 6:63 s.w.). By turning away from the word of promise, the Hebrew Christians were not going to be benefitted or [s.w.] 'profited'. The Jewish rituals upon which they were now relying would "profit nothing" (Gal. 5:2; Heb. 13:9 s.w.).

4:3- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

*For we who have believed do enter into that rest, even as He has said: As I swore in my anger: They shall not enter into My rest-* The emphasis is upon the word "They". Because some would not enter the rest, the implication is that some would. This is a parade example of a cup half full rather than half empty attitude. It is typical of Paul's positivism, which should be seen in our thinking too. We "do enter" in the sense that we shall enter if we believe; a futuristic present middle indicative.

*Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world-* The Kingdom has been prepared for us "from the foundation of the world" and we are to "enter" it as they were to enter the "rest" of Canaan (Mt. 25:34). So the tragedy was and is that those who have heard

the word of promise of the Kingdom and who do not believe it... are missing out on a possible future that was carefully prepared for them from the beginning. It was not a question of doing enough works- all the necessary works had been done, the Kingdom prepared. They 'just' didn't believe it, didn't want it. To disbelieve in salvation is to spurn what was finished and totally prepared for us from the beginning.

*4:4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: And God rested on the seventh day from all His works-* "A certain place" is again language appropriate to a verbal address, where the reference would not be turned up in the synagogue scrolls (see on 13:22). Again we see the doctrine of inspiration- for the author's comment that "God rested..." is quoted as God speaking. God's "rest" was not from exhaustion; He ceased working then. The works of creation were finished; and the finished works of :3 are our salvation. All the work of the physical creation was done with our eternal salvation in view. To spurn it is to spurn creation and all its intentions, to turn away from all things into the darkness of nothingness. This theme of works being finished and ceasing is picked up in 4:10; if we have believed, and "today" have effectively entered the Kingdom rest by faith, then we too have ceased or 'rested' (s.w.) from reliance upon our works. And this was just the message needed by the Hebrews who were falling away from faith and turning to works for justification.

*4:5 And in this place again: They shall not enter into My rest-* The point is being made that the "rest" of Gen. 2:2 is the same "rest" which God intended His people to share in Psalm 95. The sabbath rest therefore speaks of the Kingdom. It is as if God invites us to identify with Himself as having laboured, but now ceasing from that labour in 'rest'. The idea has been put forward that the seventh day of creation represents the 1000 years of the Millennium, and therefore this should begin at the end of the 6th day, i.e. 6 days or 6000 years after creation, if one day is as a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). The view is therefore pushed that the Lord must return around the year 2000 AD, taking Biblical history as spanning 4000 years from creation to the Lord Jesus; and seeing His appearance as that of the sun on the fourth day. But this view whilst ingenious is problematic. Hebrews quotes almost exclusively from the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, and so do many of the inspired New Testament writers. But the chronology presented in the Septuagint is very different from that in the Masoretic text; and the history from creation to the Lord Jesus is significantly shorter as the ages and order of the genealogies are different from the MT. And the idea of a literal millennium is also open to serious question, as noted on Revelation 20. The "rest" in view is a cessation from work and enjoyment of God's grace.

*4:6 Seeing therefore it remains that some should enter therein, and they to whom the good tidings were earlier preached failed to enter in because of disobedience-* God's plan will not totally fail. Some will enter the Kingdom rest. The good news of inheriting the Kingdom was preached to the Hebrews in Egypt and afterwards, but they disbelieved. But the rest of the Kingdom is still planned, prepared from the foundation of the world. Here in :6 "disobedience" is cited as the reason for their failure to enter; but the obedience in view was obedience to the challenge to simply believe that they would enter the Kingdom. See on 3:18,19.

*4:7 He again defines a certain day, a today, saying through David a long time afterwards (in the words already quoted): Today, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts-* As explained on 3:6, that "today" is our today; in that right now at this moment, if we hear and believe His voice that promises us eternal inheritance in the Kingdom, we can be saved. We



can be assured that if we die today or the Lord returns today, we shall be saved. By grace. This is the crucial importance of life and living today. And again we see the point made about Divine inspiration- God spoke through David in his Psalms. This emphasis upon inspiration was necessary because there were sectors within Judaism which denied the Divine inspiration of anything apart from the Pentateuch. The appeal to not harden hearts is of course alluding to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who hardened their hearts and were confirmed in it by being hardened by God. The point is that the Israelites who left Egypt repeated the same attitude- they too hardened their hearts, they thought like Egyptians. Despite, like the Egyptians, having seen evidence of God's hand through the signs and wonders done. The Hebrew Christians were in the same position.

4:8 -see on Josh. 22:4.

*For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken afterward of another day-* The argument of Judaism was that Joshua-Jesus had given Israel rest. But of course Paul is arguing that a greater Jesus-Joshua offered the rest still to come. The "another day" is the "today" of :7. The today of entering the rest can be our today if we believe we are saved and shall enter into the rest. It's a case of 'now but not yet'; in a sense we are saved and have entered the rest, having ceased from justification by works; but in another sense we still await literal entry into the Kingdom of God.

4:9 *There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God-* God's people are not therefore the same as Israel after the flesh. Israel were not given "rest", their temporary possession of parts of the territory promised to Abraham was hardly entering the Sabbath rest. For they were removed from that land and did not permanently possess it, neither did they inherit the entire territory promised from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt.

4:10 *For he that is entered into His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His-* The sense may be that we are no longer justified by works insofar as in prospect we have entered the rest, as explained on :8. The "he" in view is the believer who is also doing part of God's creative work; as God ceased from works, so does the believer. But we are not yet entered into that rest, and must "give diligence to enter into that rest" (:11). In that sense we are continuing to work as God did during the six work day of creation. The works were finished from the foundation of the world (:3; see note there), but in another sense the Father and Son are working continually because their Sabbath rest has not yet come (Jn. 5:17 and context). Our work is therefore part of God's creative work, leading towards the re-creation of Eden on earth, the Kingdom of God in its full literal establishment when the Lord Jesus returns.

4:11 *Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no one fall by the same kind of disobedience-* As noted on :10, we are in a sense in the rest in that our salvation at this "today" is assured, but in another sense, we have not yet entered and are to labour as God did during the six days. Our labour and diligence is not just for ourselves personally, but to the end that nobody falls as the bodies and limbs of disobedient Israel fell in the wilderness. Those who no longer relied on the works of the Law but on faith were living in the spirit of the Sabbath- they had in some sense entered the rest. But despite their reliance on faith, works were still necessary: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God... let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall." (4:9,11). This is a perfect cameo of

the whole situation; in prospect we are in the Kingdom, but have a very real possibility of falling from grace, and still need to labour for the final entry into that Kingdom. And that labour is especially in ensuring that others do not fall after the pattern of the Hebrews' fall.

4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart-* The motivation for the receding appeals is that the word of God, as a title for the Lord Jesus, is right now "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of [our hearts]" in mediating for us. Such language is appropriate to a person, Jesus as the word of God, rather than to the book called the Bible. And Hebrews began by saying that as God had spoken through the words of the prophets, so He now speaks to us in His Son. But this is how He was in His mortal life here- for then He was "of quick understanding" too (Is. 11:3). He would have had a way of seeing through to the essence of a person or situation with awesome speed- and this must have made human life very irritating for Him at times. But who He was then is who He is now. It's the same Jesus who intercedes for us in sensitivity and compassion. See on Heb. 4:15. The reference to the sharp knife dividing up the inner parts of the body is an allusion to the priest preparing the sacrifices, and :14-16 develops this theme in relation to the Lord Jesus as our priest. Our innermost parts are laid bare and placed on the altar before God. And it is the state of the heart which is, for this priest, the most significant part of the offering. Hence the earlier appeals not to harden our hearts but to be completely confident in our hearts that in this "today", at this moment, we shall be saved.

4:13 *And there is no creature that is not revealed to his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to give account-* We must see the urgency of our position as sinners; we are condemned now and yet we can repent; but not then. Heb. 4:13 makes the point that we right now are "naked" before the eyes of Him to whom we right now give account [*logos*]. We will give that *logos* in the last day (Rom. 14:11,12); yet before the Word of God, as it is in both Scripture and in the person of the Lord Jesus, we face our judgment today, in essence. And we are pronounced "naked" before Him. Yet therefore, in this day of opportunity, we can come boldly before the throne because we have "such an High Priest", as Heb. 4:16 continues. We must realize that we are right now revealed and laid open to the Lord Jesus; just as much as we shall be at the last day. We are to live now as if we are in His judgment presence.

4:14 *Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession-* He endured our nature and temptations *so that* He might be an empathetic High Priest (consider the implications of Heb. 2:10,17; 4:14,15; 5:1,2); the Lord was fully consecrated as High Priest after His death, and it was then that He began to be the sympathetic, understanding High Priest which the Hebrew letter speaks of. The fact that He knows so thoroughly our feelings here and now, especially our struggles for personal righteousness, should *of itself* encourage our awareness of and relationship with Him.

The continuity between the mortal, human Jesus and the exalted Lord of all which He became on His ascension is brought out quite artlessly in Heb. 4:14: "Our great high priest, who has passed through the heavens". The picture is of "this same Jesus", the man on earth, passing through all heavens to 'arrive' at the throne of God Himself to mediate for us there. His

ascension to Heaven was viewed physically like this by the disciples, and is expressed here in that kind of language of physical ascent, to bring home to us the continuity between the man Jesus on earth, and the exalted Lord now in Heaven itself. The allusion is also to the Jewish idea of there being many 'heavens'; whether there were or not, Paul's idea is that the Lord has passed through them all. The same Jesus who was once here is now there; He who once experienced temptation can thereby strengthen us in our temptations. We need to realize that nobody can be tempted by that which holds no appeal; the Lord Jesus must have seen and reflected upon sin as a possible course of action, even though He never took it. And for the same reason, several New Testament passages (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:5) call the exalted Lord Jesus a "man"- even now. Let's not see these passages merely as theological problems for Trinitarians. The wonder of it all is that Jesus after His glorification is still in some sense human. He as "the pioneer of our faith" shows us the path to glory, a glory that doesn't involve us becoming somehow superhuman and unreal.

4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things, yet did not sin-* See on :14. Note carefully the tense used: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities". It doesn't say 'which could not have been touched...', but rather "which cannot [present tense] be touched". It's as if He is *now* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Which opens a fascinating window into what having God's nature is all about. When we by grace come to share it, it's not just that we will dimly remember what it was like to be human. We will somehow still be able to be touched by those feelings, in sympathy with those who still have that nature during the Millennial reign. The only other time the Spirit uses the Greek word translated "touched with the feeling..." is in Heb. 10:34, where we read of how the Hebrew Christians "had compassion of me", the writer of the letter. The link, within the same letter, is surely to reflect how they had been so compelled by their Lord's fellow feelings toward them, His fellow feeling for them right now, that they in turn came to feel like this for their suffering brother. A related word is found in 1 Pet. 3:8: "Having *compassion one of another*, love as brethren". The wonder of the fact that Jesus feels for us, that He can enter into our feelings, should result in our seeing to get inside the feelings of others, empathizing with them, feeling for them and with them. It's this feature of the Lord Jesus which enables Him to be such a matchless mediator. Stephen saw Him *standing* at the right hand of the throne in Heaven, when usually, Hebrews stresses, He *sits*. The Lord was and is so passionately, compassionately, caught up in the needs of His brethren that this is how He mediates for us. And it's the same Jesus, who walked round Galilee with a heart of compassion for kids, for the mentally sick, for oppressed and abused women... even for the hard hearted Pharisees whom He would fain have gathered under His loving wings, such was His desire for others' salvation. Jesus, despite the moral splendour of Divine nature, is still able to be *touched* with the feeling of our infirmities as He intercedes for the forgiveness of our sins.

4:16 - see on 2 Sam. 7:27.

*Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace-* Coming boldly before the throne of grace in prayer is again judgment seat language (see on :13). Our attitude to God in prayer now will be our attitude to Him at the judgment; we are 'bold / confident' before Him now, and we can be 'bold' then (1 Jn. 2:28). Before the throne of grace we find grace to help; whereas we will "find" [s.w.] mercy in the day of judgment (2 Tim.1:18). Each time we receive grace to help before the throne, we are anticipating the judgment day scenario. The

throne *of grace* suggests that it is prayers of confession and seeking of forgiveness and salvation which are in view. Hebrews so often uses the word "therefore"; *because of* the facts of the atonement, we can *therefore* come boldly before God's throne in prayer, with a true heart and clear conscience. This "boldness" which the atonement has enabled will be reflected in our being 'bold' in our witness (2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4); our experience of imputed righteousness will lead us to have a confidence exuding through our whole being. This is surely why 'boldness' was such a characteristic and watchword of the early church (Acts 4:13,29,31; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Heb. 10:19; 1 Jn. 4:17).

*That we may receive mercy and may find grace to help us in our time of need-* The throne of grace means the throne from whence grace is given. And if indeed it is prayers for forgiveness and strength against temptation which are in view, then the grace given is in forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit to withstand temptation; this is the 'succouring' spoken of in 2:18 (see note there). The allusion is to Lk. 1:30. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah.

The Lord Jesus is prophetically described as He "that hath boldness to approach unto me" (Jer. 30:21 RV). This is applied to us, who boldly approach the Father in prayer likewise. We are bidden to draw near to the Father in prayer just as the Son drew near (Heb. 4:15,16). He wishes us to share in the loving relationship which there was between Him and His Father, and prayer is crucial to this. Really appreciating that Christ is our personal High Priest to offer our prayers powerfully to God, should inspire us to regularly pray in faith. "Time of need" is literally 'at the right time'; hence GNB "just when we need it". And it is in the moments of temptation and realization of failure that we need grace; and we are given it precisely then. Bear in mind that Paul often uses *charis*, "grace", to refer to the gift of internal strengthening by the Spirit.

## CHAPTER 5

*5:1 For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin-* "Taken from among men" continues the emphasis upon the Lord's humanity; the language recalls the Passover lamb being taken out from among the flock. The connection of thought is that the high priest was appointed "for men" because he was "from among men"; this is a repetition of the argument in 2:11 that the sanctifier and the sanctified are "all of one". The Lord's high priestly work is not simply to get forgiveness for our sins; but to enable us to offer our "gifts", the sacrifices of our lives, our thank offerings, in a way acceptable to God.

*5:2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray-* The same idea of "going astray" is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance. It is the same word used of the lost sheep which had "gone astray" and left the flock of God's people (Mt. 18:12,13). But the word is used of how the Judaists had gone astray (Mt. 22:29; M. 12:24), of how the Hebrews ancient and modern had gone astray (Heb. 3:10) and of how Judaism would make many 'go astray' in the last days before His coming (Mt. 24:4,5; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7). Even though the Hebrews had been made to go astray, Paul assures them of the Lord's continued compassion, just as much as for them who did not know the true way and were "ignorant". The Lord Jesus has compassion upon those who are ignorant of His Gospel, just as He does upon those who fall out of the way to life (Heb. 5:2, alluding to Christ as the good Samaritan who comes to stricken men). His current activity and range of feeling is amazing. It is He who brings men to faith in God (1 Pet. 1:21; 3:18), revealing the Father to men (Lk. 10:22; Jn. 14:21), calling and inviting them to the Kingdom (1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 22:17), going out into the market place and calling labourers (Mt. 20:3-7), almost *compelling* men to come in to the ecclesia (Mt. 22:8-10), receiving them when they are baptized (Rom. 15:7). He is the sower who sows the word in men's hearts, working night and day in the tending of the seed after it has taken root (Mk. 4:27); the one who lights the candle in men's spirituality so that it might give light to others (Mk. 4:21). He permits and sometimes blocks preaching (1 Cor. 16:7,4,19; 2 Cor. 2:12; Phil. 2:24; 1 Thess. 3:11).

*Since he himself is also subject to weakness-* This speaks of the Mosaic high priests; the Lord likewise was "subject to weakness" and thereby qualified and motivated to be sensitive to the weak. "Subject to" in Greek really means 'impeded by', and is used of being bound with a chain (Acts 28:20) or having a weight tied around the neck (Lk. 17:2). The limitations, impediments and frustrations of human weakness were experienced by the Lord and motivate His sensitivity to us. And yet we notice the present tenses. He is not subject to weakness now, but in a sense the Lord "is" because of His total identification with us. In the same sense, He is described as being right now "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). This is so on account of His intense identification with us now, in all our aspects of weakness.

*5:3 And because of it, he is required to offer sacrifices both for his sins and also for the sins of the people-* The "weakness" of the high priest included moral weakness, which required him to offer also for his own sins. The references to the High Priest are to present the Lord Jesus by way of both similarity and contrast. Thus the way the high priest served standing is contrasted with the way the Lord serves sitting (10:11); and the contrast here at this point is that the Lord had no sins to offer for. The Lord indeed was subject to weakness (:2), but without the need to offer sin offerings for his own sins.

5:4 *And no one takes this honour to himself, but only when he is called by God, even as was Aaron-* The Lord was likewise "called" and was not self-appointed; but the similarity then turns to contrast when we realize that He was not of the tribe of Levi, and was appointed not by birth from the tribe of Levi but through having been begotten at resurrection from the dead (:5). He was 'called' by reason of being the son of God, not the son of Levi through Aaron.

5:5- see on Rom. 8:26.

*So Christ also did not glorify himself to become a high priest, but He that spoke to him: You are my Son. This day have I begotten you-* The calling to be high priest was through His resurrection, which was when He was declared God's Son in power (Rom. 1:4). There is no record of the Father ever speaking these words to the Son; perhaps they were spoken in some intimate ceremony at or after the resurrection or ascension. The new kind of high priesthood in view is predicated upon sonship- but not of Aaron, but of God. God's Son was therefore high priest, on account of His begetting from the dead in resurrection. It was this which qualified Him to be High Priest, having been subject to human weakness (:2) and also to glory and power over that weakness.

5:6 *As also He said elsewhere: You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek-* This spoken word of inauguration and appointment was likewise uttered in the "day" when the Lord was "begotten" in resurrection (:5). There is no evidence here for any personally pre-existent Christ. The Hebrew writer alludes to and subverts the defiant language of the Maccabees in repeatedly describing Christ as "priest for ever" (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:3,17,21)- when this was the term applied to Simon Maccabaeus in 1 Macc 14:41. See on Lk. 20:25. The nature of the priesthood was to be eternal; so although there were similarities with the Aaronic priests, the priesthood of Messiah was not identical with it. It was after the order of Melchizedek.

5:7 *Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his Godly fear-* Verses 7-9 lead up to the climactic statement that therefore, the Lord was ordained as high priest at His resurrection and glorification. It could be argued that the prayers offered up refer to the prayers of believers which the Lord offered to the Father even in the days of His flesh. The plural "days" would encourage us to read this offering up of prayers as something which happened during His lifetime; for He did indeed pray the Father for His followers (Jn. 16:26). This was as it were training and preparation for His inauguration as High Priest over God's house which occurred at His resurrection. His behaviour and experience during His mortal life was what qualifies Him for the work He now does. And yet the prayers to be saved from death, offered with crying and tears, surely also reference the Lord's praying for personal salvation in Gethsemane. He "was heard"; not in the form He wished, i.e. immediate deliverance from the crucifixion process, but in that the essence of His prayer was heard, and "for his Godly fear" He was resurrected. The Lord's humanity is so stressed here that Trinitarians really need to recalculate their positions based on these words. The Lord's prayers for others and His prayers for His own salvation from death are really part of the same nexus. This is why it's not so much a question of two possible interpretations [the prayers offered being of others, or, His own prayers for salvation]; but rather these two options are really part of the same picture, and this is why they artlessly merge into each

other. For as Robert Roberts put it, "He died for Himself that it might be for us"; His salvation was so tied up with ours.

"With strong crying and tears" is certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of the Lord making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". One might think from Heb. 5:7 that the Lord Jesus made quite a noise whilst hanging on the cross or in Gethsemane. But Rom. 8:26 says that His groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. No doubt the Lord Jesus was praying silently, or at best quietly, as He hung there. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved on the cross for us is what He now goes through as He intercedes for us with the Father.

Heb. 5:7 can be understood as describing the Lord on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation. See on Lk. 23:34.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" which enables Him now to save us from the bondage of fearing death (2:15). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity.

*5:8 Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered-* A difficult verse for Trinitarians. This learning of obedience doesn't suggest there was ever any disobedience, but rather that the Lord progressed spiritually to the point when He was made fully mature, or "perfect" (:9). That point of final completeness was the same point at which He authored eternal salvation, and that point was at His death. The Lord's Divine Sonship cannot be used as any reason to think that the Lord somehow had spirituality easy; He still had to learn obedience in a progressive manner. And "*a Son*" rather than *the Son* suggests that for the purposes of spiritual growth, His Sonship functioned in a similar way that our sonship to the Father does.

But the learning of obedience through suffering may not necessarily refer to a progressive lifetime of obedience. Rom. 5:19 uses the word in speaking of how through the Lord's one act of obedience, in contrast to Adam's one act of disobedience, many are made righteous. That specific moment of obedience was in the death of the cross; Phil. 2:8 makes this explicit, in calling for us to have the mind of the crucified Christ and to follow Him in His obedience to death, even the death of the cross. This all leads on to the same word being used in :9 in calling for our obedience to Him- to He who was in turn obedient, asking us to follow His pattern. The things which He suffered would then refer to His final crucifixion sufferings rather than to the sufferings of His life. And Hebrews uses the word for "suffering" specifically in the context of the Lord's suffering at the time of His death (Heb. 9:26; 13:12).

*5:9 And having been made perfect, he became to all those that obey him the author of eternal salvation-* The authoring of salvation was on account of the Lord's death; as noted on :8, the final suffering of the cross brought the Lord to the point of total obedience and completion / perfection. The obedience in view in :8 was to the call to be obedient to the death of the cross, as in Phil. 2:8. There in the naked body of the Lord on a stake of wood outside Jerusalem, covered in blood and spittle and apparently defeated and forsaken by all... was the mind which was finally and totally obedient and perfected in every way. This was the moment the Lord had in mind when speaking of all how He aimed to finish or perfect God's work (Jn. 4:34; 5:36). It explains why the same word is used of how the Lord finished or perfected all at the moment of His death (Jn. 19:28), leading to the cry "It is finished". His moment of total moral perfection and completion was as it were eternally set in stone; for the same word is used of how the Son is perfected [AV "consecrated"] for evermore (7:28). And for those in Him, He shares that acme of spiritual triumph and achievement; for we in Him are "perfected for ever" (10:14). We too are on a path towards our spiritual perfection or maturing (12:23 "the spirits of just men made perfect"). In this lies the huge significance of old age and the time of dying; whereas in secular terms, life is seen as closing down once old age is reached, and significance of existence decreases rather than increases, as it does for those who are being led towards a point of completion or 'perfection'.

*5:10 Pronounced by God a high priest-* The Levitical priests became such by reason of age and birth; whereas the Lord's high priesthood was as it were created, He was pronounced a high priest rather than becoming one by default.

*After the order of Melchizedek-* A non-Levitical priest, greater than Abraham, whose office did not depend upon genealogy, who was both a King and a priest.



In the commentary on Melchizedek in Hebrews Paul admitted he was going deep, speaking of things which could only be grasped by very mature believers (Heb. 5:10,11,14). It is therefore not wise to base fundamental doctrine on the teaching of such verses; nor should the Melchizedek passages loom large in the minds of those who are still coming to learn the basic doctrines of Scripture. "This Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem), priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him" is spoken of as being "without father, without mother, without descent (genealogy), having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:1,3). From this it is argued by some that Jesus literally existed before his birth, and therefore had no human parents. Jesus has a Father (God) and a mother (Mary) and a genealogy (see Mt. 1, Lk. 3 and cp. Jn. 7:27). 'Melchizedek' therefore cannot refer to Him personally. Besides, Melchizedek was "made *like* unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3); he was not Jesus himself, but had certain similarities with Him which are being used by the writer for teaching purposes. "After the similitude of Melchizedek there arises another priest", Jesus (Heb. 7:15), who was ordained a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6). The language of Hebrews about Melchizedek just cannot be taken literally. If Melchizedek literally had no father or mother, then the only person he could have been was God Himself; He is the only person with no beginning (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 90:2). But this is vetoed by Heb. 7:4: "Consider how great *this man* was", and also by the fact that he was seen by men (which God cannot be) and offered sacrifices to God. If he is called a man, then he must have had literal parents. His being "without father, without mother, without descent" must therefore refer to the fact that his pedigree and parents are not recorded. Queen Esther's parents are not recorded, and so her background is described in a similar way. Mordecai "brought up... Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother... whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7). The author of Hebrews was clearly writing as a Jew to Jews, and as such he uses the Rabbinic way of reasoning and writing at times. There was a Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not" (See James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 276 note 59)- and it seems that this is the principle of exposition being used to arrive at the statement that Melchizedek was "without father". Seeing no father is mentioned in the Genesis text, therefore he was "without father"- but this doesn't mean he actually didn't have a father. It's not recorded, and therefore, according to that Rabbinic principle, he effectively didn't have one.

The book of Genesis usually goes to great lengths to introduce the family backgrounds of all the characters which it presents to us. But Melchizedek appears on the scene unannounced, with no record of his parents, and vanishes from the account with equal abruptness. Yet there can be no doubt that he was worthy of very great respect; even great Abraham paid tithes to him, and was blessed by him, clearly showing Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham (Heb. 7:2,7). The writer is not just doing mental gymnastics with Scripture. There was a very real problem in the first century which the Melchizedek argument could solve. The Jews were reasoning: 'You Christians tell us that this Jesus can now be our high priest, offering our prayers and works to God. But a priest has to have a known genealogy, proving he is from the tribe of Levi. And anyway, you yourselves admit Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Sorry, to us Abraham is our supreme leader and example (Jn. 8:33,39), and we won't respect this Jesus'. To which the reply is: 'But remember Melchizedek. The Genesis record is framed to show that such a great priest did not have any genealogy; and Messiah is to be both a king and a priest, whose priesthood is after the pattern of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6 cp. Ps. 110:4). Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, so you should switch your emphasis from Abraham to Jesus, and stop trying to make the question of genealogies so important (see 1

Tim. 1:4). If you meditate on how much Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (i.e. the details of his life pointed forward to him), then you would have a greater understanding of the work of Christ'.

5:11 *Of him we have much to say and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing-* "Much to say and hard to explain" is language appropriate to the transcript of a verbal speech; see on 13:22. As the Hebrew writer spoke and wrote to brethren who were not as spiritually mature as they ought to be for their time in Christ, he saw the similarity between himself and the Lord Jesus talking to the crowds, those crowds of very human people who at that time comprised God's ecclesia (Mt. 13:15 = Heb. 5:11). The Hebrews failed to break into this upward spiral because they were "dull of hearing" the word (Heb. 5:11). The Greek word for "dull" implies 'lazy', and yet comes from the same root as the Greek for 'bastard' ('*nothros*' cp. '*nothos*'). Thus because they were not being properly born again by the word of the Gospel they were unable, in subsequent spiritual life, to receive the real power of the word. The fact they had "become" dull of hearing suggests a spiritual collapse amongst them. Their return to Judaism would have meant plenty of attention to the letter of God's word; but this made them dull of hearing to the things of the Lord Jesus. The word for "dull" is only used again in 6:12 where they are exhorted not to be lazy or slow to follow the examples of the faithful. It is a mental, spiritual laziness which seems in view; the idea was that they had not been quick to respond to the things of the Spirit, and their return to legalism was actually lazy man's spirituality rather than a zeal for God. The spiritual life moves at such a pace that it is not for the lazy.

5:12 *For when by reason of the time, you ought to be teachers-* Paul assumes that every believer over time moves towards a position of being a teacher. Teaching is therefore not just for some; we should be holding forth the knowledge we have for others.

*You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God; and have become as those in need of milk and not solid food-* The basic principles were those about Jesus, the word and oracles of God made flesh. For it was this which they had turned away from by returning to Judaism. The things of the Lord Jesus, therefore, are the elementary principles of the Gospel; the focus is upon Him rather than upon teachings about the Kingdom of God on earth, which both Christianity and Judaism at the time were broadly agreed upon.

The phrase "elemntary principles of the oracles of God" is better rendered in the RVmg. "the beginning of the oracles...". The truth we learn and teach before baptism is but a springboard so much further. The writer seems to perceive the tendency to forever be digging up the foundations to make sure they are still there; for he says: "Wherefore let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on..." (Heb. 6:1 RV). Sadly, as he goes on to say, he does have to speak to those particular readers of those basics again, but in a healthy spiritual life this shouldn't be the case. They should have used those basic doctrines to lead them further in following the example of He who was also "made perfect", who reached 'perfection'. As He was "made perfect" (5:9), so we should strive to go on unto a like 'perfection' (5:14; 6:1). Paul doesn't balk at the height of this calling, unattained as it has been by us all. But it is the lofty height towards which the power of the Gospel can propel us. See on Heb. 6:1.

Paul likewise lamented the immaturity of the Corinthians in similar terms: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food" (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14) surely alludes to Jn. 16:12, although it doesn't verbally quote it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now".

*5:13 For everyone that partakes of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness, for he is a babe-* It's evident to me, from the very way the Bible is written, that an understanding of the deeper parts depends upon a correct understanding of the basic doctrines. The milk of the word leads on to the meat; Heb. 5:13,14 implies you can only understand the meat if for some time you have been properly feeding on the milk. This means that those who don't understand the basic doctrines of the true Gospel can't really understand the meat of the word. But "the word of righteousness" speaks specifically of the Gospel of imputed righteousness through faith in Christ, by grace and not legal obedience. The Hebrews had not personally experienced that, they had perhaps never fully believed it, and so they needed to be fed with that "milk" of the basic Gospel until they accepted it.

*5:14 But solid food is for the mature, those who by experience of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil-* The "solid food" in view initially is an exposition of Melchizedek. And yet Paul does give this, in chapter 7. But he is prefacing that here by saying that he knew it was beyond most of them. The "experience of use" doesn't mean they were experienced Bible students; for Bible study alone will not lead to maturity. The experience is as explained on :13; that of feeling and knowing imputed righteousness without legal obedience.

If we stay as babes, taking only milk, we will be unable to discern good and evil. The idea is that as a baby will put anything in its mouth, so does the immature convert. Those who don't mature on from the milk of the word run the risk of poisoning their spirituality. In the Hebrew context, it meant accepting Judaist false teaching. The drive to maturity isn't optional; if we lack it, our spiritual health will suffer. And by contrast, the more we grow, the more we will be able to discern what is harmful and what is nutritious. As noted on :13, it is the experience of imputed righteousness by grace which actually increases, rather than decreases, our sensitivity to good and evil. The allusion is to Adam in Eden attracted by the knowledge of good and evil offered through taking the forbidden fruit; and Paul is presenting that fruit as Judaism, which through endless legal codes still didn't give the sense of good and evil as God intended.

## CHAPTER 6

*6:1 Therefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on to completion-* The "us" would refer to Paul and his team. He wants to press on beyond teaching or re-teaching ["doctrine" = teaching] of the "first lessons" of Christ (GNB). They had heard those "first lessons" from Peter and the apostles when the Gospel was first preached to the Hebrews in Jerusalem. Paul felt that "completion" or "perfection" was to be pushed on towards after the first teachings had been believed. 1 Cor. 13 and Eph. 4 likewise envisage a point of "perfection" or completion. It seems Paul expected the Lord's return in the first century, and saw it as coming when the fruit was ripe to harvest, i.e. when the believers had spiritually matured into the image of Christ.

We must not see the learning of the basic doctrines and baptism as an end rather than a beginning. It is a tragedy if a man dies knowing and appreciating little more than he did at his baptism. Sunday School Christianity isn't the stuff of the Kingdom of God. We must go on unto perfection. "Let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on unto full growth" (Heb. 6:1 RV). It almost implies that the Hebrews were so busy *talking* about the first principles that they had omitted to use them as the springboard to *growth*. See on Heb. 5:12.

*Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith toward God-* "Dead works" could refer to the idea that works of legalistic obedience could bring salvation, without the life of the Spirit. Their "repentance" would have been a re-thinking about such justification by works. Likewise "faith toward God" does not imply that previously the Hebrews were atheists, but rather that the first principle of Christ was of faith in God's justification through His Son, rather than by works.

*6:2 The teaching of baptisms and of laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment-* These "first lessons of Christ" which they had forgotten were perhaps taught to the Hebrew Christians during Peter's sermon, the account of which in Acts 2 is certainly abbreviated (it can be spoken out loud in just a few minutes). Or it could be that the regular gatherings of the newly baptized believers in the temple afterwards included this kind of instruction. That judgment will be "eternal", that there is an eternity we may miss, was a first lesson in the faith in Christ. The serious consequence of faith and unbelief were to be accepted and seen clearly.

*6:3 And if God permits, this will we do-* Not in the rest of the letter, but through a visit to Jerusalem to teach them these things again. Paul's last recorded visit to Jerusalem led to his rejection by the Hebrew Christians, betrayal by those he came to give aid to, and his imprisonment and subsequent exile in Rome. So God's will or permission for this was apparently not granted.

*6:4 For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit-* Enlightenment is something done to another; we do not make ourselves see, for we are helpless as spiritually blind persons. The light comes through grace, through having our mental eyes opened by God's initiative upon our hearts. We likewise are "made" to partake in the Spirit, the gift from God to us, the power of change and transformation unto salvation which is placed in the heart of each believer. They were all "partakers" of the heavenly calling (3:1), "the heavenly gift", but would only be "partakers in

Christ" if they remained firm in their faith in salvation (3:14). The Corinthians likewise received the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

6:5 *Who tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*- The tasting of the Spirit (:4) is related to but not totally identical with tasting the goodness of God's word. These were the things promised in the word of God's goodness, and they had tasted them as real; and thus had had a foretaste of the Kingdom age. For the current experience of the Spirit is an earnest, a foretaste given "in our hearts", of our future salvation in the Kingdom (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). It is by the Spirit now in us that we shall be immortalized in the age to come (Rom. 8:11).

6:6- see on Mk. 15:15; 1 Jn. 2:28.

*But then fell away- it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*- It is not impossible for anyone to repent. But a person cannot be spiritually renewed to repentance whilst they are crucifying the Lord afresh. Paul is addressing the Hebrews who have fallen away and is urging their repentance. So he clearly means that they cannot be renewed again whilst they are re-crucifying the Lord. He uses a related word in saying that how the Hebrews 'fell' in the wilderness is a warning to the Hebrews of his day (3:17; 4:11). It could be that by "then fell away" Paul is speaking from the perspective of judgment day; those who fall condemned in that day cannot be renewed again to repentance. We noted on Acts 3:26 that the gift of the Spirit involved not only forgiveness but repentance itself; they were led to repentance, renewed to it. But whilst the giving of the Spirit is not just at baptism and can continue throughout mortal life, it cannot operate on those who were once enlightened but refuse to stop crucifying the Son of God and shaming Him. They had been once renewed- the new life of the Spirit had been given them, they had become a new creation, the gift of the Spirit after baptism had been for them "the washing of regeneration" by the Spirit; but that regeneration / renewing could not again happen whilst they were shaming the crucified Christ.

In the Lord's death we see the heart that bleeds, bared before our eyes in the cross. It is written of Him in His time of dying that He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew translated "poured out" means to make naked- it is rendered as "make thyself naked" in Lam. 4:21 (see too Lev. 20:18,19; Is. 3:17). The Lord's sensitivity was what led Him to His death- He made His soul naked, bare and sensitive, until the stress almost killed Him quite apart from the physical torture. To be sensitive to others makes us open and at risk ourselves. A heart that bleeds really bleeds and hurts within itself. And this was the essence of the cross. It seems to me that the Lord was crucified naked- hence those who turn away put Him to "an open [Gk. 'naked'] shame". In being sensitive to others, we make ourselves naked. The heart that bleeds is itself in great risk of hurt and pain. The Lord Jesus is not passive in Heaven; He has sensitivity and pain, He can be shamed and crucified afresh by those who turn away to legalism and Judaism. This of itself opens a window onto what it may mean to have Divine nature.

It was this same category who in 10:29 trod underfoot the Lord's blood and treated it as unholy. These one time Christians had become so influenced by Judaism that they considered Him unholy and despised His sacrifice, supporting the same Jewish authorities and mentalities which had crucified Him. They re-crucified Him by coming to agree that what the

Sanhedrin had done was correct. It was as if by such an attitude, they too were guilty of His crucifixion. This falling away was all a matter of the heart; for no man or human organization can pluck us from the Lord's hand; we shall "never perish" because of that, but only from our own internal lack of faith (Jn. 10:28)

*6:7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God-* The land which has drunk in the rain gives forth "herbs meet for them by whom it is tended" (Heb. 6:7 RV). The parallel is intended with "those who have tasted the good word of God" (Heb. 6:5). If the land represents those who respond to the Gospel, as in the sower parable, who are those who tend it? Surely the preachers and pastoral carers. They benefit, they are encouraged, by those whom they have cared for and converted. I've seen this so very often- one goes to exhort, and comes back home exhorted. But this is all part of the intended upward spiral in functional ecclesial life. But the cultivation still depends upon the rain of blessing from God, which has been defined in 6:4,5 as the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. The Spirit is given not just once at baptism, but "often". For our fruitfulness is God's intention; He gives us the Spirit in order to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. The husbandman produces fruit which is appropriate to his labours, and so our eternal future and being will be a reflection of our labours now (Heb. 6:7). Not that salvation depends upon our works: it is the free, gracious gift of God. But the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of our present efforts and the efforts of others for us. The ground brings forth fruit appropriate to those who have worked on it. Does this not suggest that we each bring forth a unique and personally appropriate form of spiritual fruit?

*6:8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected and in danger of being cursed, whose end is to be burned-* The parable of the wheat and weeds teaches that at the time of Christ's coming, there will be weeds actively growing in the ecclesia. Those are the "thorns and briers" of Heb. 6:8, the 'thorns' who crucify Christ again (2 Sam. 23:6,7; Heb. 6:6-8). Yet we will, in some sense, rub shoulders with this category if we are in the latter day ecclesia (Mt. 13:27-30). In the last days, the true Christian community simply won't be (isn't?) the spiritually safe place, where error is impossible, which we may have felt it to be in the past. The man of sin, the wicked one, will sit in the very *temple of God*, the ecclesia. The "end" of the rejected is to be later "burnt", as if rejection occurs in the mind of God now, but will articulate the punishment later, at the judgment. There is a play on ideas here, in that "thorns and thistles" were part of the curse; but if we bear them instead of spiritual fruit, then we shall be cursed. If we act as sinners, as the cursed, rather than seeing our potential to rise above- then we shall remain cursed.

*6:9 But beloved, though we speak in this manner, we are confident of better things for you; things that accompany salvation-* This is the kind of positivism Paul employs to the Corinthians. He convicts them of serious failure and tendencies towards condemnation, and then states that he has every confidence in them and rejoices over them (2 Cor. 2:3; 7:16). "Better" is a common word in Hebrews, used of how the new covenant in the Lord Jesus is "better" than the Mosaic system (1:4; 7:7,19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 12:24). Paul wishes to be persuaded that they are going to be saved; he uses the same term "better things" of our final salvation in 11:40. We too cannot condemn our brethren, so we are to assume that all baptized believers shall be eternally saved.

*6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work-* They were tempted to think that God

did not notice the great love which the Hebrew Christians had shown to their fellow believers in selling their possessions and giving to the poor. Perhaps now in later life they were regretting their past generosity. But Paul encourages them that God would not forget what they did; to think that would be to suggest He is unrighteous.

*And the love which you have shown toward His Name, in that you serve the saints and still do-* Serving other believers is love toward the Lord's name in that these who needed help were baptized into His Name. Our attitude towards those in Christ is our attitude to Him. "Serve the saints" is a Greek phrase used only elsewhere in Rom. 15:25, again specifically concerning serving the poor believers in Jerusalem. The generosity of the Hebrew Christians towards their poor had been significant and perhaps the greatest ever display of Christian financial generosity.

*6:11 And we desire that each one of you may show the same zeal to have the full assurance of hope until the end-* The great devotion and generosity of the Hebrew believers (see on :10) was zeal indeed; but it was not works of generosity to the poor which would save. They needed to show the same zeal as they had in giving their wealth to the poor in maintaining their assurance of salvation, their "hope" in the sense of utter assurance. The joy they had once had in that assurance was waning, because their faith in Jesus as their saviour was fading and being replaced by dependence upon their own works. Their great works of generosity had earlier been motivated by faith and joy in an assured salvation, but now their works were motivated by a fear they were not saved and thinking that works could bring them salvation.

*6:12 Do not be lazy, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises-* The laziness in view is not regarding works, for they are commended for continuing to care practically for "the saints" (:10). See on 5:11. Paul's concern was that they would continue to totally believe that the promise of eternity in the Kingdom would be fulfilled to them. To maintain a real faith and confident assurance in future salvation, that if the Lord returns now or I die now, I shall be saved... this requires huge mental effort. For it requires our all. If I am sure of my salvation, this takes all my passion, thinking and living. It would be fair to say that this is demanding, so much so that the human tendency to laziness kicks in; we want a quieter, less mentally and practically demanding life, and so laziness can lead to a lack of faith in our future salvation. We must take for live templates those others who believed the promises of salvation and patiently endured in that faith.

*6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself-* We are to be followers of Abraham's example (:12) because in essence, the very same promises have been made to us. The good news of eternal salvation in the Kingdom was preached to Abraham as much as to us (Gal. 3:8). We ought to believe that we will be saved because God made the promise of salvation "by Himself". the whole of God is as it were staked on our being saved. To doubt it is to doubt God and all God stands for.

*6:14 Saying: Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you-* The emphasis is upon "Surely". The blessing is that of eternal salvation, and that a multitude of men and women would become in Christ and be saved in Him, thus bringing about the multiplication of Abraham's seed. The program, the plan and purpose, was "surely" going to work out; and we should be "sure" of this great salvation for ourselves.

6:15 *And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise-* See on :12. This patient endurance was not just a waiting, a sitting it out. Abraham's life was active, and motivated by his belief that the promises of future salvation and inheritance really would come true for him. Abraham received the promise in a limited sense in this life, just as the Holy Spirit is our foretaste of the future inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). Abraham is our example in that he received in his lifetime the promise, to an extent. We have been saved, we should be able to rejoice at this "today" that we will eternally live if the Lord comes for us today. In this sense Abraham is our example of obtaining the promise in this life. Indeed all the faithful "obtained promises" (11:33 s.w.). Abraham's patient endurance is that of :12, he kept on and on believing that the salvation promises would come true; and they did.

6:16 *For men swear by something greater, and in every dispute of theirs, the oath is final for confirmation-* The fact God has promised our salvation on oath should end any dispute within our own minds, or theologically with others such as Judaists, that we really can be saved by faith through grace. The greatest possible assurance has been given; oaths have to be made upon some higher source entity, and that entity is God. The confirmation should therefore be seen as "final", all our wonderings and hopping between certainty and uncertainty should be no more; the assurance is total and final. This oath is "an end of all strife" (AV), what cannot be contradicted (s.w. 7:7 "without contradiction"). There can be no argument against the proposition that we are saved in Christ right now. The confirmation is in the Lord's death (Rom. 15:8) and the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21,22; Heb. 13:9 s.w.). But His word of promise is itself confirmed. The arguments every way are for our total assurance that His promise of salvation shall come true for me, today.

6:17 *Therefore God, determined to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutability of His purpose, confirmed with an oath-* The word of promise was enough, seeing it came from God; but God confirmed it with an oath, because He was "determined" to show us the certainty of the promise. Despite having promised us eternal inheritance, as promised to Abraham, God is eager for us to accept it. He has not just made promises and left us to do our part by believing them. He comes to meet us, using every logical, intellectual and spiritual instrument to do so, and crowning them all with the death of His Son to confirm the word of promise to Abraham which comprised the new covenant. God discerned that we fear His promise might change; the oath showed it was immutable. Perhaps our wide experience of failed promises and agreements is the psychological root of our difficulty in accepting the most simple truth- that we really shall be saved if we have said 'Yes' to God's purpose of salvation for us. The Galatians like the Hebrews had been "removed" from the Christian Gospel to another (Gal. 1:6); and "immutable" here translates the negative of this word, the 'not-removable' nature of God's promise. The priesthood was "changed" (7:12), but the new covenant promises of God to Abraham of our salvation will not be "changed" as they are not-changeable, "immutable".

6:18 *So that by two immutable things-* The promise of God and the oath confirming it.

*In which it is impossible for God to lie-* To doubt our salvation is to effectively accuse God of being a liar. But that is impossible.



*We may have a strong encouragement-* God not only promised our salvation but confirmed the promise with an oath. Paul says the same in different terms in Rom. 5:8: "God commends His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly".

*Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us-* The allusion is to how the person who found they had committed a sin worthy of death, yet without as it were wishing to have done so, could flee to a city of refuge and be saved there by the death of the high priest. The curse upon Levi was that the members of this tribe were to be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7). However, this resulted in the cities of the Levites being scattered throughout the land, thus providing accessible cities of refuge to all who wished to escape the consequences of sin. Those cities were evidently symbolic of the refuge we have in Christ (Heb. 6:18). Again and again, the curses and consequences of human sin are used by the Father to mediate blessing. It is the sure hope before us which is our refuge. "Hope", *elpis*, is a confident knowledge of a future reality, rather than a hoping for the best. We should be confident in our salvation.

*6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and passing into the presence beyond the veil-* The certainty that we shall be saved is what give us spiritual and personal stability, as an anchor. But the "anchor" in view is not simply that of a moored boat. This anchor enables us to pass beyond the veil into the most holy place, the very presence of God. The allusion is to how the high priest entered the most holy each year to make atonement for Israel with a rope attached to him in case he were to die there and need to be pulled back out of the most holy, so that no man needed to enter the most holy to retrieve the body. The height of the challenge for first century Hebrews is hard to appreciate; we are called not simply to salvation but to the very status of the high priest on the day of atonement. For we are in Christ. We are to go into God's very presence, in Christ, to do the work of atonement for others. This is the spirit in which we should pray for others. And we need no human anchor- for our sure knowledge of future salvation is our anchor.

*6:20 Into which as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek-* As noted on :19, it is us who are called to enter the holiest place and God's presence. The Lord Jesus has entered there, but He has done so as a forerunner, whose steps we are to follow. Priestly work is therefore to be our eternal occupation- seeking salvation and blessing for others. He is like the boy who brings the ship's line to shore ("forerunner"), and then guides the ship to dock. But that dock for us is the most holy place, the presence of God personally, when God Himself shall dwell amongst us in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Here in Hebrews alone in the New Testament is the Lord's simple, human name "Jesus" used so baldly- not 'Jesus Christ', 'the Lord Jesus', just plain 'Jesus' (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2,24; 13:12). And yet it's Hebrews that emphasizes how He can be called 'God', and is the full and express image of God Himself. I observe that in each of the ten places where Hebrews uses the name 'Jesus', it is as it were used as a climax of adoration and respect. For example: "... whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). "But you are come unto... unto... to... to... to... to... and to Jesus the mediator" (Heb. 12:22-24). The bald title 'Jesus', one of the most common male names in first century Palestine, as common as Dave or Steve or John in the UK today, speaking as it did of the Lord's utter humanity, is therefore used as a climax of honour for Him. The honour due to Him is exactly due to the fact of His humanity. The juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and

His exaltation is what is so unique about Him. And it's what is so hard for people to accept, because it demands so much faith in a man, that He could be really so God-like. The juxtaposition of ideas is seen in Hebrews so powerfully.

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him-* As noted on 5:14, Paul doesn't consider the Hebrews mature enough for this exposition. But he still gives it. The material in chapter 6 is therefore almost in parenthesis, which is very typical of Paul. There is no hint that Abraham and Melchizedek were personally acquainted before this meeting, although they both were servants of the true God. We might wonder why God didn't connect them earlier. In His wisdom He doesn't always force believers to regularly fellowship with each other, indeed He made Abraham travel all around Canaan rather than telling him to settle near Melchizedek and form some kind of ecclesia or community of believers. And clearly the implication is that Abraham maintained a legitimate relationship with God without needing to use a human priest, even one as good and exalted as Melchizedek. For more on Melchizedek, see on 5:10.

*7:2 To whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all. He was first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also, King of Jerusalem, which is, King of peace-* "King of righteousness" connects with Paul's appeal for the Hebrews to accept the word or Gospel of imputed righteousness in Christ; see on 5:13, remembering that here in chapter 7 Paul is picking up from 5:13 after the parenthesis of chapter 6. The connection between righteousness and peace is a feature of Messiah- in Him, they kiss each other (Ps. 85:10), and are the mainstay of the Messianic Kingdom on earth (Ps. 72:3; Is. 32:17; Rom. 14:17). Righteousness is emphasized before peace- "then also... king of peace". "The work of righteousness shall be peace" (Is. 32:17). But in Paul's theology, it is the righteousness of King Jesus which is imputed to us and thereby creates peace with God. This is the much laboured message of Romans 1-8. So we can understand his enthusiastic perception that Melchizedek, a type of Messiah, was king of righteousness "and then also... king of peace".

*7:3 He was without recorded father or mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life but presented as being like the Son of God, abiding a priest continually-* Without doubt God frames the Biblical record in order to highlight certain facts. Thus there is a marked lack of information concerning the father and mother of Melchizedek in Genesis. God is providing us with an interpretation of how He worded the account in Genesis, making the point that Melchizedek typified Christ. But although we are not to read Hebrews 7:3 at face value, there is no explicit indication to this effect. The objection that the New Testament does not warn us against reading the 'casting out of demons' language literally is therefore not valid. Hebrews 7:3 is one of many examples of where it is imperative to understand the way in which God is using language if we are to correctly understand His word, but there is no explicit warning about this in Hebrews 7:3!

Jesus has a Father (God) and a mother (Mary) and a genealogy (see Mt. 1, Lk. 3 and cp. Jn. 7:27). 'Melchizedek' therefore cannot refer to Him personally. Besides, Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3); he was not Jesus himself, but had certain similarities with Him which are being used by the writer for teaching purposes. "After the similitude of Melchizedek there arises another priest", Jesus (Heb. 7:15), who was ordained a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6). The language of Hebrews about Melchizedek just cannot be taken literally. If Melchizedek literally had no father or mother, then the only person he could have been was God Himself; He is the only person with no

beginning (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 90:2). But this is vetoed by Heb. 7:4: “Consider how great *this man* was”, and also by the fact that he was seen by men (which God cannot be) and offered sacrifices to God. If he is called a man, then he must have had literal parents. His being “without father, without mother, without descent” must therefore refer to the fact that his pedigree and parents are not recorded. Queen Esther’s parents are not recorded, and so her background is described in a similar way. Mordecai “brought up... Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother... whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter” (Esther 2:7). The author of Hebrews was clearly writing as a Jew to Jews, and as such he uses the Rabbinic way of reasoning and writing at times. There was a Rabbinic principle that “what is not in the text, is not” (See James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 276 note 59)- and it seems that this is the principle of exposition being used to arrive at the statement that Melchizedek was “without father”. Seeing no father is mentioned in the Genesis text, therefore he was “without father”- but this doesn’t mean he actually didn’t have a father. It’s not recorded, and therefore, according to that Rabbinic principle, he effectively didn’t have one.

The book of Genesis usually goes to great lengths to introduce the family backgrounds of all the characters which it presents to us. But Melchizedek appears on the scene unannounced, with no record of his parents, and vanishes from the account with equal abruptness. Yet there can be no doubt that he was worthy of very great respect; even great Abraham paid tithes to him, and was blessed by him, clearly showing Melchizedek’s superiority over Abraham (Heb. 7:2,7). The writer is not just doing mental gymnastics with Scripture. There was a very real problem in the first century which the Melchizedek argument could solve. The Jews were reasoning: ‘You Christians tell us that this Jesus can now be our high priest, offering our prayers and works to God. But a priest has to have a known genealogy, proving he is from the tribe of Levi. And anyway, you yourselves admit Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Sorry, to us Abraham is our supreme leader and example (Jn. 8:33,39), and we won’t respect this Jesus’. To which the reply is: ‘But remember Melchizedek. The Genesis record is framed to show that such a great priest did not have any genealogy; and Messiah is to be both a king and a priest, whose priesthood is after the pattern of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6 cp. Ps. 110:4). Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, so you should switch your emphasis from Abraham to Jesus, and stop trying to make the question of genealogies so important (see 1 Tim. 1:4). If you meditate on how much Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (i.e. the details of his life pointed forward to him), then you would have a greater understanding of the work of Christ’.

7:4- see on Heb. 1:5.

*Now consider how great this man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the spoils-* Melchizedek was a man, not a pre-existent God. The argument is that tithes are given to someone greater. Hence Jacob offers to give tithes to his father's God if He will preserve him (Gen. 28:22).

*7:5 And they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priest's office-* Paul doesn't call them Aaronites because he wants to make the point that the tribal head, Levi, was not the ancestor

of Melchizedek; and as one of the patriarchs, he as it were paid tithes in Abraham to Melchizedek.

*Have the commandment according to the law to take tithes from the people, that is, of their brothers; even though they are also descendants of Abraham-* Levi's sons could take tithes of their brothers, but this did not make them 'greater' than their brothers. They were 'brothers' on the same level as those who tithed to them. But payment of tithes to an unrelated person was a more impressive evidence of the greatness of that person over the tithe payers.

*7:6 Melchizedek was not descended from Levi by genealogy-* There is no evidence that he was even from within the Abraham family; he was effectively a Gentile, the king-priest of Jerusalem. But the fact he was not a Levite is emphasized because this was a reason some were giving for not accepting the priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

*But he took tithes of Abraham and blessed him that had received the promises-* The blessing was given from Melchizedek to Abraham in response to tithes. Yet Abraham is the one who was to be a blessing in the land, according to "the promises" received. But actually, the blesser had himself first to be blessed. This definitely places Melchizedek on the level of manifesting God to Abraham.

*7:7 But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better-* To suggest anyone was "better" than Abraham was radical for Hebrews, who considered Abraham the father of their race. And to rub the point in by saying that he was "less" was to suggest that the entire metanarrative of descent from Abraham being so important was being overwritten- and had in fact been overwritten by any sensitive to the brief details given about Melchizedek. That the ministry of the Lord Jesus was "better" than that of the Mosaic law is stressed in Hebrews (1:4; 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 12:24).

*7:8 And here mortal men receive tithes; but there one received them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives-* The argument here might appear somewhat forced, but it was all legitimate within the style of Rabbinic midrash. Melchizedek "lives" in that there is no record of his death; we noted on :3 the Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not". And Paul goes on to reason that the priesthood of Melchizedek continues still, in that Messiah was to have this priesthood eternally. "That he lives" can also be understood as meaning that Melchizedek had a lifelong priesthood, that was not replaced by others because he had reached a certain age. McKnight observes that the Greek verb *zē* here is not in the present, but the imperfect of the indicative, and he translates "that he lives" as "lived, a priest all his life, in contradistinction from those who ceased to be priests at a certain age".

*7:9 And, so to say-* Another usage of language which suggests we are reading a transcript of a spoken address; see on 13:22.

*When Abraham paid the tithe, Levi, whose descendants receive the tithe, also paid a tithe-* Abraham is seen as representing his descendant Levi. The Levitical priests did indeed pay a tithe of their tithes- to God. But Paul argues here that Levi, in Abraham, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, thus making him a manifestation of God.

*7:10 For Levi was yet in the loins of his ancestor Abraham when Melchizedek met Abraham-* This kind of argument may appear forced, but it was quite legitimate within the milieu of Jewish midrash.

7:11 *Now if there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be reckoned after the order of Aaron?*- The argument is that the whole mention of Messiah having a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek would have been unnecessary if the Levitical priesthood and legal system could bring "perfection". Paul forces through the logic of his position by reasoning that the "need" for the Melchizedek priesthood meant that this new priest must actually not be "after the order of Aaron" and therefore must not be a descendant of Aaron. I have previously noted that this kind of apparently forced argumentation would have been acceptable to those used to this kind of reasoning in the rabbinical interpretations of the Old Testament. But it is all the same logically forced, although from our Christian perspective it all makes good sense. I suggested on expounding Paul's obsession with the Jerusalem Poor Fund in 2 Corinthians that he had an obsessive streak within him, whereby he marshalled all possible evidence to support his positions and at points his logic and reasoning bears the hallmark of the obsessive. It could well be that we have a case of that here.

7:12 *For the priesthood being changed requires also a change of the law*- This verse is a stubborn problem for those who consider that the Mosaic law has not been changed nor abrogated. The reasoning here is logically sound, but it depends upon the assumption that the Melchizedek priest has in fact come; and only in that case could it be reasoned that the priesthood had been changed from the Aaronic to that of Melchizedek, this requiring a change of the law. The argument only had [and has] force for those who accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. It is therefore highly relevant to the Hebrew Christian audience but would lack logical power with Hebrew non-Christians.

The whole Law of Moses is described as an everlasting covenant (Is. 24:5; Dt. 29:29), but it has now been done away (Heb. 8:13). The feasts of Passover and Atonement were to be "an everlasting statute unto you" (Lev. 16:34; Ex. 12:14); but now the Mosaic feasts have been done away in Christ (Col. 2:14-17; 1 Cor. 5:7). The Levitical priesthood was "the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (Ex. 40:15; Num. 25:13), but "the priesthood being changed (by Christ's work), there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). There was an "everlasting covenant" between God and Israel to display the shewbread in the Holy Place (Lev. 24:8). This "everlasting covenant" evidently ended when the Mosaic Law was dismantled. But the same phrase "everlasting covenant" is used in 2 Samuel 23:5 concerning how Christ will reign on David's throne for literal eternity in the Kingdom. In what sense, then, is God using the word *olahm*, which is translated "eternal", "perpetual", "everlasting" in the Old Testament? James Strong defines *olahm* as literally meaning "the finishing point, time out of mind, i.e. practically eternity". It was God's purpose that the Law of Moses and the associated Sabbath law were to continue for many centuries. To the early Israelite, this meant a finishing point so far ahead that he couldn't grapple with it; therefore he was told that the Law would last for ever in the sense of "practically eternity". For all of us, the spectre of ultimate infinity is impossible to intellectually grapple with. We may glibly talk about God's eternity and timelessness, about the wonder of eternal life. But when we pause to really come to terms with these things, we lack the intellectual tools and linguistic paradigms to cope with it. Therefore there is no Hebrew or Greek word used in the Bible text to speak of absolute infinity. We know that death has been conquered for those in Christ, therefore we have the hope of immortal life in his Kingdom. But God speaks about eternity very much from a human viewpoint.

*7:13 For he of whom these things are said belongs to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar-* The "He" refers to the Melchizedek priest who was to be Messiah. "Has ever" makes the point that a new priesthood is now in view. The Lord Jesus serves at *the* altar; this is the altar at which the Levitical priests have no right to eat / fellowship, but we Christians do (13:10), suggesting that we in Christ are likewise there, serving at and eating at the heavenly altar which features so strongly in Revelation, as part of the Heavenly sanctuary which the tabernacle was a dim reflection of. The Lord Jesus is actively 'serving' there; He is not passive in Heaven, just waiting to return to earth.

*7:14 For it is evident that our Lord originated from the tribe of Judah. Regarding this tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood-* The Lord being descended from Judah was "evident" or obvious- presumably from the genealogies which connected Mary to the tribe of Judah. But again as noted on :11, Paul's enthusiasm seems to be carrying him away, for it was far from obvious that Jesus of Nazareth was from Judah. However he may have meant instead that Messiah had to come from Judah; this much was indeed "evident" from the Old Testament and undisputed.

*7:15 And what we say is even more abundantly evident, if after the likeness of Melchizedek there arises another priest-* The abundantly obvious argument was that the Melchizedek priest had to be eternal (see :16,17); and the only candidate was Jesus, whom Christians believed had been resurrected and given eternal life. He was the only person who had then been immortalized. But this argument again was logically powerful only to a Hebrew Christian, and not to a Hebrew non-Christian. The 'arising' of this 'other priest' may be a hint at His resurrection to immortality.

*7:16 Who has been appointed, not on the basis of a law about physical descent, but according to the power of an endless life-* The Levitical priests became priests by reason of their age and descent, whereas the Melchizedek Messiah priest had to be "appointed". The basis of the Lord's appointment was His immortality- because the priest had to have an eternal ministry, so it was necessary that he was immortal. And the only immortalized human was Jesus of Nazareth.

*7:17 For it is witnessed: You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek-* "For ever" is being interpreted as meaning that the priest would be immortal, making the resurrected, immortalized Jesus the only possible candidate. The 'witnessing' by God in Ps. 110:4 is understood as the priest being "appointed" (:16).

*7:18 On the other hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness-* This new priesthood required a new law; a changed priesthood meant a changed law (:12). And this required an "annulling" of that law, and that was because it was weak and unprofitable. Such language appears to deprecate the law, although Paul elsewhere says that the law was "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12); it was weak and not profitable because it was unable to bring salvation or perfection to those under it. The strong language used here about the law of Moses must be given its full weight by those who argue that it should still be kept today.

*7:19 (For the law made nothing perfect)-* Likewise :11 has argued that the Levitical priesthood had to be changed because it could not bring "perfection". The law convicted men of sin and offered some mechanism of patching up the broken relationship caused by it. But it did not enable moral perfection. By being in Christ, we can be counted as Him, the only

perfect human. Faith in Christ could therefore make perfect in that the Lord Jesus was 'made perfect' by His sufferings, particularly on the cross (5:7-9).

*And a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw near to God-* By being counted as in Christ, having His perfection as ours due to our status in Him, we have the sure hope of future salvation. The *elpis* or hope in view is a solid expectation regarding the future, not a mere hoping for the best. And it is by having this hope that we find strength against materialism and "draw near to God". The Hebrew readership would have understood this as meaning 'drawing near in priestly service' (cp. Ex. 19:22). The Hope we have compels us to God's service.

*7:20 And the Melchizedek priesthood was not without the taking of an oath-* The oath taken was by God (Ps. 110:4), vowing by Himself to honour the eternally powerful priesthood of Messiah. Such Divine underwriting was not given to the Levitical priesthood.

*7:21 The Levitical priests were made priests without an oath, but he with an oath: The Lord swore and will not change His mind; you are a priest for ever-* The eternal nature of the Lord's Melchizedek priesthood is at the basis of the certainty of our hope for future salvation (:19). God Almighty guarantees that the Lord Jesus will be our eternal priest. Our standing before Him is therefore eternal; we have such a priest who is not simply a mediator between God and men, a conduit allowing us to offer to Him and approach Him, but a priest who on His own agenda eternally secures our salvation.

*7:22 By this also has Jesus become the surety of a better covenant-* The sure hope of :19 is underpinned by the way the Lord is the surety or guarantor of the better covenant. The Greek for "surety" occurs only here in the NT and LXX. The idea is of a guarantor who promises his self sacrifice in the case that the party to the covenant is unfaithful. It literally means 'the pledge of a limb'. The "surety" could offer his own limbs, or himself into bondage as a slave, if the person being guaranteed somehow failed. The Lord's death confirmed God's promises as being for real. But did God's side of the covenant need such a surety? Perhaps we are better to think of the Lord's being a surety as being a guarantee for our faithfulness to the covenant. But we have not been faithful to it; and so He died, gave His all, His limbs, and became the preeminent servant of Yahweh on the cross. This was to the end that the new covenant between God and us might still stand, despite our infraction of it.

*7:23 And they indeed have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing-* The eternal priesthood required for the Messianic Melchizedek priest could not be attained by mortal priests.

*7:24 But he, because he abides for ever, has his priesthood unchangeable-* The eternal priesthood of the Melchizedek priest meant that His priesthood can never be changed. He has obtained eternal redemption for us, and that can never be liable to any renegotiation. Our hope for eternity is therefore sure (:19) because the One who obtained it is immortal, and His work for us is in this sense eternal.

*7:25-* see on Heb. 2:3.

*Therefore he is able to save for ever those that draw near to God through him, seeing he lives forever to make intercession for them-* The Lord's intercession for us is eternal. We are in Him, and His drawing near to God in priestly service is therefore ours (see on :19 for



'drawing near' as priestly language). It is our desire to serve others and thereby serve God which is what propels us to draw near to God; and in this desire we shall be eternally empowered.

The Lord Jesus eternally intercedes for us, even after our death. The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us now just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us (Is. 53:11,12); but now He ever liveth to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6,11). The fact that the Lord "ever lives to make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25) is an allusion back to Is. 53:12, which prophesies that on the cross, Christ would make intercession for the transgressors. His prayer for us then, that we would all be forgiven (and see the prophecies of this in Psalms 22,69 etc.) was therefore His intercession for our salvation. His whole death was His prayer / intercession for us. But it was of His own freewill; He was not relaying our words then. And His intercession for us on the cross is the pattern of His intercession for us now. This ought to be a humbling thought.

He made one mediatory offering for all time (Heb. 5:7; 7:27); therefore He has nothing to offer now. The High Priest going into the Holiest is also a type of Christ entering Heaven. He is in a sense permanently in the Holiest, He bears our names *always* before Yahweh; He ever lives, all the time, to make intercession for us, always. This of course opens up the interesting question as to in what sense the Lord will eternally intercede for us, once we are immortalized. Perhaps the 'eternal' nature of His intercession is relative to the temporary work of the Levitical priests who died, and refers to eternity only in a relative sense; see on :12. But the Greek for "intercession" does not of itself require the idea of reconcillation or mediation. Through the ministry of the Comforter, we do not need that even now (Jn. 14:16; 16:26,27). The idea can simply be that He will confer with the Father about us eternally; and that is how the word is used in Acts 25:24 and Rom. 11:2. This is a wonderful thought; that the Lord Jesus shall be talking eternally to the Father about you and me.

*7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us- holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners-* He was and is "harmless" in His priestly mediation; the same word is translated "simple" in Rom. 16:8. He was an intellectual beyond compare, morally and dialectically He defeated the most cunning cross-questioning of His day; and yet He was a working man surrounded by masses of daily problems. But He was and is "simple" in the sense of single-mindedly committed to His priestly work. We are on earth and God is in Heaven, and therefore our words should be few (Ecc. 5:2). Not few in the sense that we don't pray for very long, but few in terms of their simplicity and directness. The Lord warned us against the complicated prayer forms of the Pharisees; and asked us to *mean* our words of 'yes' and 'no' rather than use more sophisticated assurances. The heart is deceitful and so wicked we cannot plumb its depths (Jer. 17:9); and yet the pure in heart are blessed. This must surely mean that the "pure" in heart are those who despite the intrinsic self-deception of the human heart, are nonetheless "pure" or single hearted in their prayer and motives and desire to serve God.

The Lord Jesus was in His life "separate from sinners". The Greek word very definitely means 'to actively depart from'- it's used about a partner walking out of a marriage. Yet the Lord is always pictured as mixing with sinners, to the extent that they felt they could come to Him easily, and actually liked to do this. So how was He "separate" from them in the way the Hebrew writer understood? Here again we see one of the profoundest paradoxes in this supremest of personalities. He was with sinners, then and now; His solidarity with us, the

roughest and the most obvious and the subtlest of us, is what attracts us to Him. And yet He is somehow totally separate from us; and it is this in itself which brings us to Him.

It needs to be noted that the Lord Jesus had human nature, and yet was holy, harmless and separate from sinners, and attained 'perfection'. Human nature is not, therefore, an inevitable source of sin and separation from God. The Father is not made at us for being human; it's no sin to be alive.

*And has been exalted higher than the heavens-* The allusion is to the common Jewish idea of there being various "heavens". Paul doesn't specifically criticize the idea, but just states that whatever we understand about this, the Lord Jesus has been exalted higher. The Gospels take a similar approach to the wrong ideas about demon possession; the power of the Father and Son is infinitely greater than that of 'demons', however we wish to understand the term.

*7:27 Who needs not to offer up sacrifices daily, like those high priests, first for his own sins and then for those of the people. For this he did once for all, when he offered up himself-* "This he did once" is a contrast with how the old High Priest offered ["this"] daily [Jesus did it only "once"]. The reference to "first for his own sins, then for the people's" is as it were in parenthesis, a throw away comment, to indicate again the inferiority of the old High Priests who themselves were sinners and therefore needed to offer for their own sins as well as those of God's people. My own suspicion that Paul was the author of Hebrews is based upon the style of writing we have there which we see in Paul elsewhere- so often, a comment is made in passing like this example of commenting that the old Priests had to offer for their own sins too. This kind of style is typical of Paul, Ephesians and Colossians are full of this kind of thing- making an argument, but throwing in a comment in the midst of it, a kind of aside, which often phases the reader.

It is not the day of atonement which is in view here, because the contrast is with the "daily" offerings of the priests. A sincere priest would have offered daily sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. The Lord Jesus didn't need to do this; the parallels with the Levitical priesthood are by way of both contrast and similarity. They stood; He sits. They offered animals, He offered "Himself". But as He offered for "the people" so too did the mortal priests; but He did so once, whereas they did so daily. They offered for their own sins too; He did not. If the Lord in any sense had needed to offer for His own "sins", He would have had to do so daily. But He offered only one offering, for us. That Christ died for *our* sins according to the scriptures is the clear emphasis of the entire Biblical revelation. "*This* He did" refers to His offering for the people, for us; and not for His own 'sins'. This point is underlined in the next verse, which notes that the priests were morally weak, whereas the Son of God is perfect and shall be forever, unable to sin.

*7:28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever-* See on :27. Sin brings death, so the eternal priest appointed by the word of God's oath in Ps. 110:4 had to be not only eternal but also sinless. There could therefore be no other candidate for this priest than the Lord Jesus. The contrast between the moral weakness of the priests and the perfection of God's Son is further reason to understand "*this* He did" in :27 as referring solely to His sacrifice for "the people". The Lord's 'perfecting' was in the supreme moral perfection He achieved on the cross (see on 5:8,9). That acme of utter perfection, attained within a body covered in blood and spittle, dying in agony on a tree trunk, tormented by flies and barking

dogs on a hill outside Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, 2000 or so years ago... has as it were been set in stone eternally. The perfection attained is "forever". Our far weaker spiritual growth will likewise be eternally set in stone.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Now in the things of which we are talking, the chief point is this-* This is language appropriate to a transcript of a talk or sermon; see on 13:22.

*We have such a high priest who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens-* The way the Lord *sits* rather than *stands* is emphasized, and is another connection with Stephen who saw the Lord standing, passionate in His defence (see on 1:1). The personal existence of God is taught here clearly enough; Jesus is at His right hand, and He has location, rather than being an abstraction or puff of 'spirit'.

8:2 *A servant of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man-* The Lord Jesus is actively working in Heaven for us. The allusion is to priestly 'service', which was always focused upon bringing others to God and enabling their service. The "true" tabernacle doesn't suggest the Mosaic tabernacle was untrue; but it was but a figure of the ultimate, 'true' Heavenly reality.

There is great emphasis in Ex. 26 that the tabernacle was "one", joined together in such a way that taught the lesson of unity. The spiritual tabernacle, the believers, was "pitched" by the Lord God- translating a Greek word which suggests 'crucifixion' (Heb. 8:2). Through the cross, the one, united tabernacle was pitched. To tear down that structure by disuniting the body is to undo the work of the cross.

8:3 *For every high priest being appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, it is therefore necessary that this high priest also have these to offer-* The train of thought about offering gifts and sacrifices is somewhat interrupted until 9:9, creating a parenthesis which is typical of Paul's style. The argument is that He did offer, but one offering- of Himself, and not of endless gifts and animals (9:27,28; 10:12). He was not so much offering the gifts of others, but offering Himself.

8:4 *Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer the gifts according to the law-* Clearly this was written whilst the Jerusalem temple was still functioning, before AD70. Because His mediation was a one-off act, the Lord would not be a priest if He were now on earth. He is given the *title* of priest, as He is given the title "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), even though He is not now a man. And the Lord was from Judah, not Levi. Paul is stressing the two different kinds of priesthood, and by noting that there were still Aaronic priests operating, he is implying that their service is worthless compared to that of the Messianic Melchizedek priest.

8:5 *Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is warned when he is about to make the tabernacle. For He said: See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain-* The "pattern" is therefore taken by Paul to imply that the tabernacle system was a copy or reflection of the heavenly tabernacle (9:23,24), with the priests reflecting the work of the Angels; hence *elohim* is used of both priests and Angels. Judaism even called the tabernacle 'the heavenlies', but Paul's point is that it was only a "copy and shadow" of them, and the Lord Jesus is dealing with the ultimate realities which were only dimly reflected in the tabernacle system. The priests 'served' the copy of these things; but the Lord serves us.

8:6 *But now has he obtained a more excellent service, as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted upon better promises-* The old covenant was mediated by Moses (Gal. 3:19); the Lord Jesus mediates the new covenant to us. That covenant was based upon the promises made to Abraham, but they were only mediated to us in Christ. Those promises envisaged eternal inheritance of the earth for Abraham and his singular seed, Jesus (Gal. 3:16). By baptism into Him we become part of the seed, and heirs according to those promises (Gal. 3:27-29). The new covenant is therefore based upon the promises to Abraham. Those better promises already existed, before the time of the law; but they were only mediated to us when we could become in Christ, part of the seed. And that required the Lord's death as a representative for all men. Now that He has mediated that covenant to us, He continues to serve those within that covenant.

8:7 *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second-* "Faultless" doesn't mean it was faulty of itself; the failure was that it could not bring perfection / salvation to men. Who was seeking a place for a second covenant? The reference may be to God, seeking salvation for us (see on :8); or to believers under the first covenant, who sought salvation and moral perfection but not finding it under the first covenant, searched for another. God didn't seek for a second covenant but for a place for it, a way in which it could operate for all men. And that place was in the work of His Son, the seed of Abraham who was the perfect Messianic priest, in whom all men could find a place and have the promises to Abraham's seed, the new covenant, mediated to them. It was God who sought for a man to empower this, and found Him only in Christ (Jer. 5:1 etc.).

8:8 *For finding fault with them, He said-* The ensuing quotation is from God's words in Jeremiah 31. So it would be God who was the one seeking a place for the second covenant, and who found fault with the old covenant- in that it could not bring about the human salvation He sought. But it could equally be that the "them" with whom God "found fault" were the Judah of Jeremiah's day, which would better account for the plural "them". The answer to the "fault" of the law being unable to bring salvation for sinful man was in the new covenant.

*Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-* The mention of both the houses of Israel and Judah would imply that unity between God's people is achieved on the basis of them all being within the new covenant. The cup of the new covenant / testament is therefore the symbol of unity between the redeemed; to refuse it to those who are within the house of God's people is serious indeed, an undoing of God's intention of unity upon the basis of the covenant. The new covenant system of salvation was designed for sinners; those with whom God had "found fault".

8:9 *Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in My covenant, so I paid no attention to them-* The old covenant between God and Israel was a two way agreement. God took the initiative in it, He took Israel by the hand. But they refused to remain within the covenant, so it was unable to save them. In order to save God's people, there therefore needed to be another covenant which could save them by grace. The promises to Abraham were just such a one-sided agreement, where God swore to Abraham, passing between the cut pieces of the covenant victim; whilst Abraham was not required to make any

response. He just had to believe in God's love. Once the old covenant was broken by Israel refusing to remain within it, it was broken; and God therefore could not look toward them, seeing they had broken the connection between God and themselves. The idea of not continuing in the covenant uses the same word as in Gal. 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does *not continue* to do all things that are written in the book of the law". Israel did not continue in obedience, so they did not continue in the covenant.

8:10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their mind and in their heart also will I write them, and I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people-* A new covenant was needed because Israel had not kept the old covenant, they had broken their covenant relationship (see on :9); God had "found fault" with them (:8). The covenant proposed here was to be written by God in human hearts rather than on tables of stone, to which obedience was demanded. God would "be to them a God" in that this was part of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:7,8) which are the "better promises" forming the new covenant (see on :6). This new covenant which was to be made with Israel has now been made with us in this life (cp. :13). The promises which comprised the new covenant were those made to Abraham; but they referred only to Abraham and his one singular seed (Gal. 3:16). Once the seed had come, we are able to be baptized into Christ so that all that is true for Him becomes true for us (Gal. 3:27-29). As the full and totally inclusive representative of all humans, the Lord Jesus thereby opened the way for the promises to Abraham to actually become the new covenant in practice for all who become in Him. The promise to Abraham and his Messianic seed [just two people] that "I will be their God" thereby becomes true for an entire people; "they [who are in Christ] shall be to Me a people". Entry into the new covenant therefore involves God writing upon our hearts, which is done through the work of His Spirit operating directly upon the hearts of all those baptized into the seed (2 Cor. 3:3).

8:11 *None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying: Know the Lord. For all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them-* Under the new covenant, we are in Christ. We relate to the Father as He does, being in Him. 'Knowledge' in Hebrew thought often effectively means 'relationship'. The relationship possible under the new covenant is not therefore dependent upon the teaching of men, but is a direct relationship with the Father. This kind of knowledge / relationship with God is on the basis that sin has really been dealt with and forgiven (:12).

If we know God in an experiential sense (and not just knowing theological theory about Him), we know that our sins are forgiven. We preach to others "Know the Lord!", exactly because "I will be merciful to their iniquities" (Heb. 8:11,12). It is our knowledge of God's mercy to us which empowers us to confidently seek to share with others our knowledge, our relationship, our experience with God. Forgiveness inspires the preacher; and yet the offer of forgiveness is what inspires the listener to respond.

8:12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will not remember against them-* As noted on :11, this forgiveness is the basis upon which those under the new covenant know / have relationship with the Lord. The sins of men will not be remembered under the new covenant; whereas there was a remembrance of sins made each year by the old covenant (10:3). So God's way of dealing with His sinful people with

whom He "found fault" (:8) was to instill obedience to His principles into their hearts, and to not remember their sins. This is all the work of the Spirit. The "blessing" promised to Abraham, in the "better promises" which comprise the new covenant (:6), was of not only forgiveness but also in turning away human hearts from sin (Acts 3:25,26). This work of the Spirit is the only way to bring about human salvation, seeing that giving them laws and demanding obedience thereto just didn't work out in practice.

8:13- see on Ps. 102:26.

*In that He said: A new covenant, He has made the first redundant. Now what is becoming redundant and growing old is ready to vanish away-* The very concept of a new covenant means that an old covenant has been "made redundant". There is now no purpose in attempting to keep the Mosaic law, because it achieves nothing. The old covenant was "ready to vanish away" in that the temple was soon to be destroyed; but there is also perhaps a reference here to how by grace, God allowed there to be a changeover period. He recognized the deep conservatism within human nature, and allowed this changeover period during which the old covenant 'became redundant'; even though it was replaced by the new covenant when the Lord's blood was shed to confirm that new covenant and bring it into operation. As soon as the new covenant was in operation, the previous covenant became 'old'. That happened in a moment, and yet Paul generously says that it is becoming or growing old, as if a process is in view. Likewise in 1:11, the same word used here for "becoming redundant" is applied to how the 'heavens' of the Jewish system were 'becoming old'. And yet the Lord had clearly warned of how the old and new wine cannot be mixed or confused and they are mutually exclusive. The allowance of a changeover period was by grace alone, and it could be argued that the Hebrew had abused it and were turning back to the "old" rather than progressively forsaking it as intended.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *Now even the first covenant had regulations for Divine service and an earthly sanctuary-* The implication is that the second or new covenant also has a sanctuary and a structure for service. But that is all ongoing in Heaven, thus declaring the attempt at "Divine service" through the temple system to be redundant. The same word is used of how each believer is to do "service" to God in the new order, by presenting their own bodies as sacrifices, acting as both priest and offering (Rom. 12:1). The priests did God's "service" in the first tabernacle, i.e. the holy place (:6); we in Christ do His service in the most holy place, associated with heaven itself.

9:2 *For there was a tabernacle prepared, the first section, wherein was the candlestick, the table and the bread of the Presence, which is called the Holy Place-* The presentation of the Most Holy as being sectioned off by the Holy place is to emphasize how the tabernacle system did not give entrance into God's presence, but rather created barriers. It was the priests who served in the Holy Place who effectively stood between God and man, rather than enabling ordinary worshippers to come into the Most Holy place. However, it could be argued that the candlestick speaks of the church (as in Revelation), and the table and bread refer to the breaking of bread; as if after the laver [cp. baptism and the regeneration of the Spirit], we must pass through the experience of church life before we enter the direct fellowship with God in the Most Holy. This raises serious questions over the attitude that we can be 'out of church Christians', walking with the Lord in splendid isolation because of various crotchets of interpretation or past hurts. Perhaps the term "bread of the presence" is used to suggest a connection between the holy place (church life now) and the presence of God in the Most Holy place.

9:3 *And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies-* The Holy and Most Holy places are presented as two distinct tabernacles or tents. The old and new covenants are presented in :1 as the first and second covenants [although the promises to Abraham forming the new covenant were in fact given before the Mosaic legislation, although that new covenant was only ratified and brought into operation for men through the Lord's death]. The flow of thought is presumably that the new or second covenant is to be associated with the second tabernacle, the Most Holy place, in which believers in Christ are now located. We are therefore described often in Paul's thought as "the heavenlies", sitting in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2:6). The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death made the same point- the way into the Holiest was now opened.

9:4 *This had the golden altar of incense-* This could be translated "censer" [as AV]. The censer was only in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12), so perhaps that is the situation Paul is presenting here (see on :5). The incense altar was in the holy place, not the holy of holies (Ex. 31); and so "censer" is likely the correct translation option, although that was only in the most holy on the Day of Atonement. The argument will develop that we are now with the Lord Jesus in the Most Holy, for we are "in Christ"; and so Paul takes a picture, as it were, of the situation as it was on the Day of Atonement, the only time when the high priest entered the Most Holy.

*And the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant-* It has been



complained that the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod were not within the ark, but "before the testimony" (Ex. 16:34; Num. 17:10). I suggest that "the testimony" referred to the tables of the covenant, which were within the ark (Ex. 25:16). However, Israel were not obedient to this, for in Solomon's temple "there was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone" (1 Kings 8:9). The actual temple system never matched up to what it was supposed to be anyway, and Paul appears to be making this point. That manna symbolized the Lord Jesus, as did the budding rod, with its message of resurrection of the Messianic "rod". But Judaism was without the awareness of these things.

*9:5 And above it were cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat-* The reference may be to the shining forth of the *shekinah* glory from between those cherubim on the Day of Atonement, which is the situation being described here; see on :4.

*Of which things we cannot now speak in detail-* This sounds similar to the comment on 5:11 that Paul could not speak as he could have done about some things because of the immaturity of the audience. But the Greek could also imply that he was running out of time and so had to skip talking about the cherubim- which would be appropriate to a spoken address (see on 13:22).

*9:6 Now these things having been thus prepared, the priests went in continually into the first tabernacle, performing the services-* The 'continual' entry is in contrast with the way the Lord Jesus entered once- and not into the Holy but the Most Holy place, and remains there. The Holy Place is called the "first" tabernacle, associating it with the first or old covenant (:1; see on :3).

9:7- see on Jn. 12:24.

*But into the second only the high priest went, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people-* As noted on :6 and so often in Hebrews, Paul is comparing and also contrasting the Lord's priesthood with that of the Levitical priests. Indeed, most of the points of contact are in terms of dissimilarity rather than identity. And the difference here is that the High Priests were sinners and needed to atone for their own sins as well as the peoples; whereas the clear emphasis of Scripture is that "Christ died for *our* sins", and His work was and continues to be for our forgiveness and salvation rather than His own. Likewise the Lord did not enter once / year, but once for all- and remained there. So the points of contact with the Levitical High Priests are in the dissimilarity rather than similarities. See on 7:27,28.

*9:8 The Holy Spirit indicating that the way into the Holy Place was not yet made manifest whilst the first tabernacle remained-* As noted on :3, the Holy place is associated with the "first" covenant and the Most Holy with the new or second covenant (:1). The Holy Place is therefore presented here as a barrier to entry into the Most Holy; and the priesthood are therefore framed as standing between God and man rather than as a conduit whereby men could come to God's presence. That first tabernacle no longer "remained", according to Paul's logic; the Mosaic system was over. The tearing of the veil at the Lord's death showed in visual terms what is being explained here- the way into the Holiest was made open to all.

9:9 (*Which is symbolic for the present age*)- The idea may be that the present age, that of the Christian dispensation, was symbolized or pointed forward to by the arrangements of the tabernacle. It was all a *parabole* ("symbolic"), a parable to be interpreted. But now that age had come, they are of no practical value apart from as symbols of the reality we are now in.

*According to this system, both gifts and sacrifices were offered which could not make the worshiper perfect as relates to the conscience*- This is parallel with the thought of :8, that the tabernacle system was actually a barrier between God and man, stopping men coming into the Most Holy, the presence of God. No worshiper could come into the Most Holy, the presence of God, because all within him would cry out that he was imperfect; his conscience wouldn't allow him to seek to enter, even if it were legally possible. The "system" in Christ enables our complete forgiveness and cleansing; we are counted as "in Christ", as righteous as He, thereby cleansing the conscience and allowing our entry into the very presence of God. The Lord's teaching about the Comforter speaks of similar things; through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our hearts, we can come directly to God without mediation (Jn. 14:16; 16:26), to the extent that the Lord's physical absence is not felt and we live as in His very personal presence.

9:10 *Being merely foods, drinks and various washings, earthly ordinances imposed until a time of reformation*- The inadequacy of the rituals in allowing man to come into the Most Holy place of itself implies that there had to be a "time of reformation". The word for "reformation" is found again in 12:13: "Make straight ['reformed'] paths for your feet", lest any stumble. The idea is of making a path straight and direct (LXX Jer. 7:3,5). The way of Judaism caused men to stumble; there was no direct path into the Most Holy. No amount of ritual could cleanse the conscience; a radical reformation was required, a straightening out of the path between God and man.

9:11 *But Christ having become a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation*- The "good things to come" may be from the perspective of the old covenant; the tabernacle system was parabolic of the good things to come (:9). And they had now come, Paul is saying; the Greek can be rendered "the good things realized", or "come to pass". It was as if the good news was too good to believe; the Hebrews preferred to shrink back from the good things because the goodness of them was too demanding. And that is the attraction of legalism; it allows us to feel still connected to God, but the reality of the good news, of salvation by pure grace, has passed us by. As the High Priest passed into the Most Holy, the Lord Jesus has passed into Heaven itself (4:14). This greater tabernacle was pitched by God and not man (8:2), not of "this creation", made with the material things of this world.

9:12 *Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption*- The Lord not only entered once and then left, as the priests did; He entered and remained, "once for all". And the Most Holy is Heaven itself. As noted earlier, the scene here is the Day of Atonement, when goats were offered for the sins of the people and a bull calf for the sins of the High Priest (Lev. 16:6,15). The plural is because these animals were offered each year. The redemption achieved by the Lord was "eternal", not temporary. Paul appears to be quoting here from the midrash of Jonathan ben Uzziel on Gen. 49:18; ben Uzziel would have been contemporary with Paul: "Jacob said, when he saw Gideon the son of Joash, and Samson the son of Manoah, who should be redeemers; not for the redemption of Gideon am I waiting, nor for the redemption of Samson am I looking, for their redemption is a temporal redemption;

but for thy redemption am I waiting and looking, O Lord, because thy redemption is "an everlasting redemption"". The redemption in view is clearly of others rather than of Himself; for the Lord was the redeemer of God's Israel (Lk. 1:68; 2:38). He gave His life as a redemption for many (Mt. 20:28); He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from our sins (Tit. 2:14). That redemption worked out in redeeming us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). The AV defines the eternal redemption as "for us"; and the Cambridge Bible comments: "The "for us" is rightly supplied; but the middle voice of the verb shews that Christ in His love to us also regarded the redemption as dear to Himself". So the inference that the Lord 'obtained for Himself' our eternal redemption doesn't mean that He obtained redemption for Himself plus for us; rather does the Greek mean that He obtained our redemption for Himself, He wanted it to be His. The allusion may be to the language of a man 'redeeming' a wife for himself, just as God redeemed His people for Himself. But this does not mean that He redeemed Himself.

9:13 *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, could sanctify to the cleansing of the flesh-* The ashes of the heifer were sprinkled in the water of the laver to create water used for cleansing (Num. 19:1-10). The laver speaks of the baptism into Christ which leads to the regeneration of the Spirit (Tit. 3:5). The Lord's blood makes our baptism into Him have meaning far beyond the cleansing rituals of the tabernacle system. Our very conscience can be cleansed (:14). "The cleansing of the flesh" refers to some surface level 'cleansing' which did not touch the conscience; the contrast is between the flesh and the heart or conscience. They experienced forgiveness on a technical level, but remained with a bad conscience, knowing they were likely to sin again, and with no means of feeling that sin had not only been removed but that they would surely be saved and washed in their inward parts. The individuals such as David who came to such a realization in Old Testament times did so through their faith in God's grace rather than through the legal processes of the law of Moses. The sanctification was not a sham, however ("how much more...", :14). But there was internal cleansing of the spirit, even though forgiveness was granted on one level. The defilement that was cleansed or sanctified was ritual defilement; but the defilement of the spirit and conscience was not addressed by the sacrificial system. But the Lord's priesthood enables that too to be addressed, through the ministry of the Spirit in human hearts. Those who deny the work of the Spirit are in effect in the position of those who were technically forgiven and cleansed from legalistic defilements by the Mosaic sacrifices.

9:14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God-* As noted on :13, ritual defilement and legalistic infringements could be cleansed by the Mosaic sacrifices, but the sacrificial system did not address the spirit or conscience. The work of the Lord is on the conscience, on the spirit through His Spirit. His sacrifice is therefore described here as having been one of the Spirit; His Spirit or mind was and is eternal, in that the mind He achieved by the end of His mortal life has been eternally preserved (see on 5:7-9), and is given to His people eternally. The Mosaic sacrifices had to be repeated, and related to the flesh ("the cleansing of the flesh", :13). The Lord's sacrifice pertained to the Spirit, and was eternal rather than of only temporary consequence. He did not offer an animal, but Himself; as the animal was to be "without blemish" in the flesh (Lev. 1:10), the Lord was "without blemish" morally, in His Spirit. The animal had no choice in being offered; the Lord "offered Himself" as an act of conscious volition. He was *spiritually* without blemish whereas the animal sacrifices were only unblemished in the *flesh*. His cleansing of our spirit / conscience was *dia* or on account of His spirit. And His spirit is eternal; for He is now immortalized, His personality, mind, spirit, character lives on eternally,

both in Himself and ultimately in us to whom He gives His Spirit. He is a priest who operates now according to the power / spirit of an endless life (7:16).

The Lord offered Himself on the cross "through the eternal spirit" in that it was the Spirit of God, understanding from His word what God really wanted, what He is really like and thereby demands of us, which led the Lord Jesus to the cross. And why the odd phrase "the eternal spirit"? Surely to show that this same Spirit operates today, and if we follow it, will lead us likewise to the same death of the cross. These things are challenging to the very core of our being, the very fabric of our self-understanding. We who cower in the dentist's chair, who fear and avoid pain, who would sooner die than have a surgery without anesthetic... are called to die with Jesus, the death of the cross. God was manifested in the flesh of Christ, but now Christ is living "in the Spirit", thus justifying God's righteousness (1 Tim. 3:16). He was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by (on account of) the Spirit", the Spirit-man within Him (1 Pet. 3:18). Thus Christ's sacrifice was acceptable by reason of his "eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14); his perfect spiritual character was what enabled his physical blood and death to win our salvation. His resurrection was due to his "spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4). We can only relate to Him now as a spiritual being. We can not now know Him after the flesh. Now his mortal flesh has been destroyed, He is "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 R.V.); He is called "the Spirit" in Revelation because the spiritual character He developed in his mortal life is now what He is.

*Cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*- The "dead works" are those which can be turned away from by baptism into Christ and forgiven (6:1). The contrast is with how the sprinkling of blood and water cleansed the flesh, getting technical forgiveness for legal infringements, but could not cleanse the conscience or spirit of the offerer. 1 Pet. 1:2 states that the sprinkling of the blood of Christ is to be associated with our sanctification by the Spirit, referring to the internal cleansing of the heart by the gift and operation of the Spirit there. As explained in Romans 1-8, we are "in Christ", counted as Him, with His righteousness imputed to us; and therefore we can be confident that if He returns today or we die, we shall surely be saved. The bad conscience regarding our previous "dead works" is totally removed; and on this basis we can do priestly service in the Most Holy place. We are not to simply rejoice in our own redemption, but to realize that our cleansing is so that we may serve. The mention of "the living God" would suggest again the function of the Spirit; He is alive and interactive with us, and we are to therefore serve the God who is Spirit in spirit (Jn. 4:24).

The Greek word translated "conscience", *sun-eidesis*, means literally a co-perception. It implies that there are two types of perception within the believer- human perception, and spiritual self perception. The conscience that is cleansed in Christ, that is at peace, will be a conscience that keeps those two perceptions, of the real self and of the persona, in harmony. What we know and perceive humanly, is in harmony with we spiritually perceive. Our conscience, our co-perception, our real self, makes sense of the human perceptions and interprets them in a spiritual way. So, a young man sees an attractive girl. His human perception signals certain things to his brain- to lust, covet, etc. But his co-perception, his conscience, his real self, handles all that, and sees the girl's beauty for just simply what it is- beauty. Job before his 'conversion' paralleled his eye and his ear: "My eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it" (Job 13:1). He was so sure that what he heard was what he saw; he was sure that his perceptions were operating correctly. But later, he comes to see a difference between his eye and his ear. He says that he had only heard of God by the ear; but only now, he says, "my eye sees You" (Job 42:5). He had heard words, but, he realized, he'd

not properly 'seen' or perceived. Finally, he had a properly functioning 'conscience', a co-perception. What he saw, was what he really heard.

Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. It's therefore unreliable (1 Cor. 4:4). And yet there is Bible teaching concerning the need to live in accordance with our 'conscience', and the joy which is possible for the believer who has a clear conscience (e.g. Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:18-22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:21). This must mean, in the context, the conscience which God's word has developed in us- it cannot refer to 'conscience' in the sense of our natural, inbuilt sense of right and wrong; because according to the Bible, this is hopelessly flawed. The fact the "conscience" is "cleansed" by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) proves that the Biblical 'conscience' is not the natural sense of right and wrong within our nature; for our nature can never be 'purged' or 'cleansed', the believer will always have those promptings within him to do wrong. The cleansed, purged conscience refers to the new man that is created within the believer at baptism. This new 'conscience' is not just a sense of guilt which is invoked on account of not living an obedient life; it is also a conscience which positively compels us *to do* something, not just threatens us with a pang of guilt if we commit a sin.

We have a conscience which in God's eyes is cleansed of sin, knowing that our sin has been overcome once and for all, and that we have access to this through baptism. Our hearts were purified by that faith (Acts 15:9); we were cleansed from the conscience of sins (Heb. 9:14); all things became pure to us (Tit. 1:15; Rom. 14:20). This is a good conscience, Biblically defined. When Paul said he had a pure conscience before God, they smote him for blasphemy (Acts 23:1,2); there is an association between a clear conscience and perfection (Heb. 9:9; 10:14). A clear conscience therefore means an awareness that in God's eyes, we have no sin. Thus Paul's conscience could tell him that he was living a life which was a response to his experience of God's grace / forgiveness (2 Cor. 1:12). The conscience works not only negatively; it insists that we *do* certain things. It may even be that the goads against which Paul was kicking before his conversion were not the pricks of bad conscience, but rather the *positive* directions from God that he *ought* to be giving his life to the service of His Son. Whilst we may still have twinges of guilt, and sins to confess, from God's viewpoint the slate is clean, and has been since our baptism. It is impossible to believe this without some kind of response. We are purged in our conscience so that we might serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

*9:15 And because of this, he is the mediator of a new covenant; that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance-* The Lord's ability to cleanse even the conscience of believers through His total eradication of sin is what makes Him the mediator of the new covenant, even though that new covenant was comprised of the promises made to Abraham and his seed [the Lord Jesus] of eternal inheritance of the earth. By association with the representative sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we can become "in Him", we become the seed, and thereby the promises to Abraham and Jesus are made to us. His sacrifice thereby enabled us to receive the promise of eternal inheritance- the promise made to Abraham. His death was also the basis for the salvation of those who sought forgiveness under the old covenant; for the blood of animals of itself could not take away sin. It was only effective insofar as it pointed forward to the Lord's future sacrifice.

It must be remembered that the High Priest of the Old Covenant did not offer up the prayers of the people. Yahweh's ears were ever open to the cry of the individual Israelite, without an

intercessor. Moses mediated the Old Covenant in the sense that he obtained it and relayed it to Israel; his mediation was a one-off act. This is the basis of the NT passages concerning the mediation of the New Covenant through Christ; He did this through His death and resurrection (Gal. 3:19,20; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Christ was the mediator of the new covenant so that the sins committed under the old covenant could be forgiven; thus His mediation is not in the relaying of our words to God, but in the sealing of the new covenant through His own blood. The mediation between God and man by the Lord is paralleled with His giving Himself as a ransom on the cross (1 Tim. 2:5,6). This is the sense in which He is the mediator of the new covenant; He mediated it *once*, not in an ongoing sense.

*9:16 For where a will is of power, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it-* Paul is playing on the meaning of the word translated "testament" or "covenant"; it also means a will, a set of promises which become actual after the death of the one who made the promises. I have commented elsewhere that whilst Paul's reasoning is true enough as it stands for us as Christians, viewing it retrospectively from our position, there are times when it would appear that he is rather forcing a point. For the obvious objection would be that it was God who made the new covenant, not Jesus; His death is not to be seen as the death of God, leaving us without Him to receive what He has left behind for us. But this kind of apparently forced logic would have been acceptable within the paradigm of Rabbinic midrash. The point becomes more logical however when we consider the argument that the old covenant or "will" was ordained with the shedding of blood, as if it would only come into true effect when someone died. And as explained in :15, the forgiveness offered under the old covenant was only finally effective when the Lord died. For the blood of animals of itself could not take away sin.

The death of the covenant victim was to act as a warning for what would happen to those who broke the covenant. Thus "The men who transgressed my covenant... I will make like the calf which they cut in two" (Jer. 34:18 RSV). In the account of a Babylonian covenant it was written: "This head is not just the head of the goat... it is the head of Mati'ilu... If Mati'ilu breaks the oath, then as the head of this goat is cut off... so shall the head of Mati'ilu be cut off". Thus the dead animal was seen as a representative of the person who entered the covenant. The death of our Lord, therefore, serves as a reminder to us of the end for sin. We either put sin to death, or we must be put to death for it. Gal. 3:15; Heb. 9:16 and other passages liken the blood of Christ to a covenant; and yet the Greek word used means definitely the last will and testament of a dead man. His blood is therefore an imperative to us to do something; it is His will to us, which we must execute. Thus His death, His blood, which is also a symbol of His life, becomes the imperative to us for our lives and living in this world. Note how blood is a symbol of both life and also death (Gen. 37:26; Num. 35:19,33; Lev. 20:9). Both His death and His life form a covenant / testament / will for us to obey- in both baptism and then in living out the death and life in our daily experience. We cannot be passive to it.

*9:17 For a will is of force where there has been death; it does not have power while he that made it lives-* The new covenant as given in Genesis 15 also required the shedding of animal blood to ratify it; but it only came into force in the death of the Lord Jesus, thereby enabling all men to become part of Abraham's seed and share in the promise of eternal inheritance made to him (:15). Now the Lord has died, the promises to Abraham of eternal inheritance, the new covenant, is "of force". Paul uses the same word about the solidity of this hope in Rom. 4:16: "It is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure [s.w. "of force"] to all the seed". If it were not of grace through faith, it would have to be on the

basis of works. And our human weakness would leave us with no sure hope, knowing we would never be perfectly obedient or do enough in order to make the promise of salvation "of force" or "sure". The same idea is carried in the word *elpis*, "hope"; not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid, certain knowledge of the future. Paul connects the ideas in 3:6 and 6:19, saying that we are to hold fast the confidence of the hope "firm", "of force" (s.w.), unto the end. This solidity of hope, this confident sense that our salvation is sure, "of force", is lacking in many who name the name of Christ today. They still sense that they must attain the new covenant by some form of works. But if we are focused upon the meaning of the Lord's death, then we can feel the "force", the sureness, of the promise of future salvation and inheritance of the earth. The prophetic word which has been made "more sure" (s.w. "of force") is surely a reference to this same wonderful truth- that the prophetic word to Abraham of salvation for his seed has been made "more sure", "of force", by the Lord's death (2 Pet. 1:19). The idea is not that predictions of future events were proven true; but rather that the word of salvation has been made sure, and we ought to thereby make our calling and election "sure" (s.w.; 2 Pet. 1:10).

9:18 *Therefore even the first covenant has not been dedicated without blood-* Salvation and forgiveness was possible for those who lived under the old covenant on the basis that the covenant was of power in these ways on account of the Lord's blood, to which the blood of animals pointed forward.

9:19 *For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people-* This brings out the link between blood and law-giving; the people were sprinkled with blood as they heard the Law read to them. The new covenant in Christ's blood results in the laws of God being written on our hearts, in our consciences (Heb. 8:10). Then Heb. 10:14-16 goes on to say the placing of the laws on our hearts in this way is in fact a "witness" to how His blood sanctifies us. We can't be passive to His sacrifice; the conscience elicited by it, the writing on our hearts, is what propels us forward to live a sanctified life. The language of blood, water, scarlet and hyssop is full of reference to the circumstances surrounding the Lord's death on the cross. It was to this that the Mosaic dedication and cleansing rituals pointed forward, and it only had power on that basis.

9:20 *Saying: This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded for you-* At the breaking of bread, it's as if Christ is sprinkling us with His blood, it's as if we are Israel assembled together, re-entering the covenant each time we break bread. No wonder we are asked to assemble ourselves together (as far as possible) to remember Christ (Mt. 26:28 = Heb. 9:20). We have elsewhere made the point that Hebrews is full of appropriate material for a breaking of bread exhortation (see on 13:22), which we believe it to have originally been.

Far back in Mosaic ritual, the voice of command was associated with the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat; the blood of the lamb was a command to respond (Ex. 25:22), and God's presence and voice came from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat. Hence instead of reading of the *laws* which were commanded, we read of "the blood of the covenant which God commanded"; the book of the law was sprinkled with that blood to show the connection between the blood and the book. To eat His flesh and blood (in evident anticipation of His coming sacrifice and the memorial meeting) was to eat *Him* and His words (Jn. 6:53,54,63).

His words were all epitomized in His offered flesh and blood. In His death and sacrifice (which "the blood of Jesus" represent), we see His very essence: He Himself. On the stake He poured out His soul unto death (Is. 53:12), and yet in His life He poured out His soul too (Ps. 42:4). The cross was an epitome of who He really had been for those 33 years. To know Christ is to know His cross (Is. 53:11). See on Heb. 12:25.

9:21 *Moreover the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry he sprinkled in like manner with the blood-* The vessels of the ministry which were used to achieve some level of sanctification were only of power by reason of the blood sprinkled upon them; and that blood of itself was just red liquid. It was only meaningful in that it pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice. The point was that even if the Hebrews wished to continue participating in the temple rituals, they were to realize that they had only ever had any meaning on account of the blood of Christ.

9:22 *And according to the law, I may almost say-* This is again language appropriate to a verbal exhortation rather than a letter; see on 13:22. The "almost" is because there were allowances for the very poor to not offer blood sacrifices.

*All things are cleansed with blood; and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission of sin-* The cleansing and remission was not therefore through ritual of itself, but on the basis that the rituals were as it were smothered in the blood which pointed forward to that of the Lord Jesus. This may seem a fine difference, but it is significant. People with all their dysfunctions and conscious and unconscious sense of sin come to perform various rituals, and then emerge from the rituals feeling better and somehow cleansed. But this is mere religion, the psychology of religious ritual. The cleansing and remission offered under the old covenant was for real, but it was only for real in that the blood looked forward to the future sacrifice of the Messiah.

9:23 *It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these things-* Because ritual of itself could not sanctify sin, the whole ritualistic framework had to be doused, as it were, in the blood which pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice.

*But the heavenly things themselves had better sacrifices than these-* "Sacrifices" may be an example of Paul thinking in Hebrew whilst writing in Greek. We may have here an intensive plural, whereby the plural is used to refer to one great singular item- in this case, the one great sacrifice, that of the Lord on the cross. The tabernacle was a copy, a shadow, of something greater. It was a shadow of us. God dwells in the tabernacle of human hearts, rather than in any physical structure. That point was made within the Old Testament, and in the New Testament we are repeatedly portrayed as the tabernacle / temple / dwelling place of God. The better sacrifice which cleansed us, even our conscience, was the Lord's. Thus there is a parallelism between verses 23 and 24:

v. 23

The patterns of things in  
the Heavens

The Heavenly things themselves

v. 24

The holy places made with hands  
the tabernacle

Heaven itself... us



*9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are only copies of the true ones; but into Heaven itself-* See on :23; the things in Heaven are us who are cleansed in Christ. It is stressed in Heb. 9:24; 8:2 that this Heavenly temple was made by God not by human hands. The Kingdom of Christ [which is essentially His people, those over whom He has Kingly dominion] is symbolized as a stone cut without hands (Dan. 2:44). We are the ones in heavenly places now (Eph. 1:3) who are cleansed by the Lord's sacrifice. Likewise Abraham looked forward to the Kingdom in terms of a city "whose builder and maker is God"; and God, we are told, has prepared that city for Abraham and his seed (Heb. 11:10,16). The coming down of that city/temple from Heaven in Rev. 21:3 is the fulfilment of Abraham's hope. The city/temple from Heaven has foundations (Rev. 21:14), just as Abraham expected (Heb. 11:10). The Lord has entered into God's actual presence, Heaven; and we are with Him there, cleansed, confident and unashamed before the presence of His glory. And this shall come to a literal fulfilment when at the last day we are presented "faultless before the presence of His glory" (Jude 24).

*Now to appear in the actual presence of God for us-* The language of Romans 8 about His intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered is to be connected with Hebrews 5 speaking of the Lord groaning with strong crying and tears on the cross. The point being that the intensity of His prayer there, struggling for every breath, is the same essential intensity with which He mediates for us now. He died "*for us*", and yet right now He appears "*before the face of God for us*" (Heb. 9:24 RV). Thus there is a connection between His death and His ongoing mediation "*for us*". We must struggle with Him, framing and offering our words in the full realization of the agonizing effort He is willing to make to intercede. The Greek translated "appear" meaning to exhibit openly. We are openly exhibited to God by the Lord Jesus, he reveals our inner spirit, our essential desires, to the Father; for we are "*in Him*". His appearance in God's actual presence is our appearance there.

Romans is full of legal language, of interceding, pleading, finding a favourable verdict etc., and refers this to the judgment and also to the cross. But Romans 8 uses these very ideas in relation to prayer, for in coming before the throne of grace now on account of the Lord's sacrifice, we come in essence before judgment. Coming before the throne of God in prayer (Heb. 9:24; Ps. 17:1,2) is the language of the judgment seat. If we become before His throne and are accepted, it follows that this is a foretaste of the outcome of the judgment for us, were we to be judged at that time. Our boldness before the Father in prayer will be the same attitude we have to Him at the judgment throne (1 Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14 all use the same Greek word).

*9:25 Nor must he offer himself often, as the high priest enters into the Holy Place year by year with blood not his own-* The Lord entered once, into Heaven itself, with His own blood; and remained there, rather than nervously slipping in and out once / year as the High Priest did.

*9:26 Or else he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once at the end of the ages has he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself-* "The foundation of the world" surely refers to the beginning of the Mosaic system; the "end" of that world is the end of the Mosaic system at the Lord's death. He sacrificed not animals, but "Himself".

On the cross, the Lord Jesus was 'manifested', shown as He really and essentially is (Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:19,20; 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 1 Tim. 3:16). But the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in judgment. There He endured the spitting and hatred of men in order to save them. And the same gracious spirit will be extended to all His true people, whatever their inadequacies.

The Lord's sacrifice "put away sin"; the same word has been used in 7:18 about the "disannulling" of the law. The whole concept of sin has been disannulled in that the law has been disannulled. In this sense His death "made an end of sins" (Dan. 9:24- perhaps Paul has this passage in mind here). For those in Him, sin is no longer a barrier between God and man; we stand "in Him" before God's very face / presence, counted as the sinless Lord Jesus.

*9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed to men once to die and after this comes judgment-* The contrast and parallel to this statement is in :28, speaking of the Lord Jesus appearing at His second coming to reveal salvation rather than judgment. Throughout this section, Paul has in view the Day of Atonement (see on :4). Judaism spoke of the annual entry of the High Priest into the Holiest as his 'death', and his return to the people as his resurrection and judgment. Verse 28 will explain that the Lord Jesus actually died, to bear our sins Himself rather than them being figuratively placed upon a scapegoat to bear them, and the equivalent to His emergence from the Most Holy is His return from Heaven to earth with the good news of our salvation. The allusion to the High Priest would account for the otherwise odd usage of the word "appointed", which is appropriate for the High Priest and also for the Lord Jesus (s.w. 1:2; 3:2).

*9:28 So Christ also, having once been offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him-* As explained on :27, this is an allusion to the second coming of Christ with the good news of our salvation, which paralleled the emergence of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement from the Holiest, with the news of God's pardon. The High Priest emerged to a humbled, repentant Israel on the Day of Atonement, having confessed their sins and afflicted their souls through fasting, waiting for their High Priest to appear and pronounce upon them the blessing of forgiveness. The Spirit is using this as a type of us expecting the second coming of our Lord; the motivation for our enthusiasm should be our earnest need of ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation with God. David likewise speaks of waiting and watching for the Lord in the context of asking for forgiveness (Ps. 130:5,6). And we could possibly infer that the Lord's second coming is dependent upon Israel's humbling and repentance.

The focus of the Lord at His return will not be to "deal with sin". He did this in His death. Any necessary judgments upon a sinful world will not be His prime interest; rather does He return in order to give us salvation. This was and is His focus, like His Father, taking no pleasure in punishing sin. But the AV is literally correct here: "Without sin unto salvation". The phrase "without sin" is exactly that used in 4:15 of how the Lord had all our temptations but was morally "without sin". The High Priest emerged from the Holiest on the Day of Atonement and pronounced the forgiveness. The Lord Jesus will emerge from Heaven and as it were just stand there, "without sin". His moral perfection achieved in mortal flesh is of itself the guarantee and statement of our own forgiveness and salvation.

If we understand something of the ‘mechanics’ of the atonement, and grasp something of the fact that they were outworked in a real, historical man, we will see that the final realization of the redemption achieved at the cross will be when Christ comes back. If we understand something of the atonement, we will earnestly look for the second coming, when the redemption achieved on the cross will be brought unto us (cp. 1 Pet. 1:13). An enthusiasm for the second coming, spurred by a realization that the bringing of salvation then is an outworking of the cross, will lead to a loose hold on the things of this life.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *For the law having only a shadow of the good things to come, not the reality of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those that draw near-* The law was treated by Judaism as the reality; they couldn't get beyond the ritual, and see that it was something temporal, pointing forward to a greater and more personal spiritual reality. The Hebrews were attracted by the religion of it all, just as many Christians can apparently not see beyond the "mere religion" of their supposed spirituality. There was no perfection offered; there was only a temporary covering over of legal infringements which had to be renewed each Day of Atonement. The Lord's sacrifice can perfect believers in that by identity with Him, we are counted as perfect and without sin; perfect righteousness is imputed to us. 'Drawing near' uses the same word elsewhere used about coming near to God, drawing near right before His throne (4:16; 7:25; 10:22). To draw near to God's presence in the Holiest was declared intrinsically impossible by the Mosaic tabernacle.

10:2 *Else would they not have ceased to be offered?-* The recurrent nature of the sacrifices of itself indicated that they did not take away sin permanently, and therefore the worshippers were left with an abiding awareness or consciousness of their sins.

*Because the worshipers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins-* Heb. 10:18,26 states that Christ only made one sacrifice for sin, implying that the sins of those in Christ were atoned for at one moment in time. He will not make another sin offering each time we sin, and therefore we should not sin wilfully, because that assumes that he will once again sacrifice for sin. Thus we will be crucifying Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6). The sacrifice of Christ can make us perfect in God's sight, so that "once purged" we should have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:1,2). This does not refer to "conscience" as the guilty streak within us. Our spiritual man ought to have no more guilt for our sins, which are now forgiven. But if we allow sin to be the governing principle in our lives, we can no longer be reckoned as sinless (Rom. 6:12; 1 Jn. 3:8).

10:3 *But in that sacrificial system there is a remembrance made of sins year by year-* All the sacrifices offered to obtain forgiveness were somehow deficient if once every year there needed to be the ritual of atonement performed on Yom Kippur. So it worked out that instead of the awareness (:2 "consciousness") of sin being removed, in fact it was heightened by bringing sin to remembrance.

10:4 *For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins-* Sin brings death for the sinner; the blood had to represent the death of the sinner. So it needed to be human blood, representative of human sinners; and not that of animals who are not under the law of God. God is not a pagan deity who is apparently placated by animal blood.

10:5 *Therefore when he came into the world, he said-* The quotation from Psalm 40 is of words first thought and spoken by David in reflecting that there was no sacrifice which could be offered to deal with his sin in effectively murdering Uriah and committing adultery. All he could offer God was a broken heart, and a desire to humbly serve Him in whatever days he might be given by grace. The Bathsheba Psalms all have further reference to the attitude of the Lord Jesus on the cross; the brokenness of David at that time, physically and psychologically, pointed forward to that of the Lord in His time of dying. The purpose of this is to teach us to what extent the Lord Jesus identified with hopelessly fallen man especially at

the time of His dying; whilst Himself never having sinned. The reference to David is evidence enough that the words of this passage do not demand an incarnation of some Divine Spirit into a body waiting on earth to receive it, as Trinitarians claim. The language of Psalm 40 originally applied to David's feelings after his sin with Bathsheba. It is interpreted as being appropriate to the Lord's feelings when He "came into the world".

"Came into" is the very word which has been used in this section about the Lord's coming into the Most Holy, representing Heaven itself (6:20; 9:12,24,25). The reference could be to the Lord's beginning of His priesthood in Heaven, rather than having any reference to His birth or death on earth. But "into the world" is the phrase so often used in John's Gospel for the Father sending His Son into the world at the start of His ministry at age 30 [not necessarily at His birth]. And the same phrase "came into the world" is used of how "I am come a light into the world" (Jn. 12:46) and how the Lord "came into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth" (Jn. 18:37). That witness began to be given at age 30, which was when the Lord "came into the [Jewish] world". "The world" in John's Gospel nearly always refers to the Jewish world, as it does in this context in 9:26; and the Lord came into that world when His ministry to them began at age 30. We would therefore interpret this as meaning that the Lord began His ministry with the understanding that God had never wanted the animal sacrifices of themselves, but rather required a representative human being to perfectly do God's will. And this He dedicated Himself to doing in the ministry which culminated in the final doing of God's will by dying on the cross. The death of the cross is so often spoken of as the Father's "will".

*Sacrifice and offering You did not want, but a body did You prepare for me-* God did want sacrifices, but not for the sins David had committed concerning Uriah and Bathsheba. The Greek word "body" is also translated "slave" (Rev. 18:13). The idea cannot be that a body was prepared on earth, and some Divine Spirit incarnated it and the body became known as 'Jesus of Nazareth'. As noted above, the primary reference of the Psalm 40 quotation is to David after his sin with Bathsheba reflecting that sacrifices were not appropriate, and all he could do was to offer himself as the humble servant of Yahweh for the rest of his days. In any case, reading this as meaning that the 'Spirit Jesus' came down from Heaven and lived inside a specially prepared body is reading too much in to the words. Jesus began as an egg within Mary, which divided and re-divided until it became a foetus, then a child and thence "the man Christ Jesus". Jesus 'was' the body; He didn't somehow enter into a body which was prepared somewhere on earth. I therefore suggest that we read "body" as "slave" or "servant". And this is in fact what the Hebrew text implies in Psalm 40; Paul is quoting here from the Septuagint, but the Hebrew reads: "My ears You have digged / bored" (Ps. 40:6). The allusion is to how a servant could choose to remain within his master's house as a permanent slave because he so loved his wife and family and his master; and in this case his ear was bored through and nailed to an upright piece of wood (Ex. 21:6). This clearly hinted at the crucifixion. The Lord Jesus was the slave who willingly decided to devote Himself permanently to the service of the Master's household, demonstrating it by His crucifixion; His ministry for us is therefore eternal, unlike that of the Levitical priests. Paul nearly always quotes the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, but the sense here is essentially the same, although the readings differ. The idea is that God didn't want dead animals, but a totally dedicated servant / slave who would perfectly do His will and devote himself to the permanent service of His household. And that person was the Lord Jesus, typified by the repentant David. Phil. 2:7,8

along with the prophecies of the suffering servant makes it clear that the Lord was supremely a slave / servant in His death on the cross.

10:6 *In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure-* God did require them and was pleased they were given, but He had no desire for them in response to David's sin. David is everyman, worthy of death because of our wretched failure, with no animal sacrifice or ritual to save us. See on :5.

10:7 *Then said I: Behold, I come (in the roll of the book it is written about me) to do Your will, O God-* The will of God is specifically associated with the Lord's death on the cross (e.g. Mt. 26:39). The entire scroll of the Pentateuch [the "roll of the book" known to David at the time of Psalm 40] implied the death of a perfect human sacrifice who would complete God's will for human salvation in totality. And Paul is applying these thoughts of David to the Lord Jesus as He began His ministry [or perhaps specifically when He died, or when He began His priestly service on entering Heaven; see on :5].

10:8 *First he said: Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor did You have pleasure in them (all of which are offered according to the law)-* Paul perceives that firstly, there was the statement that God did not desire animal sacrifices of themselves in order to remove sin; and secondly, the Lord Jesus came to do God's will, in a way which animals simply could not do. This division into first and second is pressed into a similarity with the first and second covenants, as noted on 9:1. God's desire was that sacrifice should be offered under the Old Covenant, but this could not take away sin of itself. What He desired far more ['not A but B' can mean 'not *so much* A as B'] was the sacrifice of the One who did His will perfectly.

10:9 *Then he said: Behold, I come to do Your will. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second-* As noted on :8, the "first" statement is associated with the first covenant, the law of Moses. The doing of God's will by the perfect sacrifice establishes "the second", i.e. the new covenant; and by doing so, the first covenant is made old (8:13), or as stated here, 'taken away', or literally 'slain / killed'. This is how totally the old covenant had been taken away. The second or new covenant was "established" in that as explained above, it was based upon the promises to Abraham which already existed, but which were mediated or brought into operation by the Lord's sacrifice. Thereby, men and women could become "in" the seed of Abraham, and the promises which were originally to only Abraham and his singular seed thereby were made to all within the One Messianic seed. These promises, this second or new covenant, was 'established' by the Lord's death; and thereby the "first", Mosaic covenant was done away. To return to that was therefore to reject the Lord's work and to shy away from the wonder of salvation now made so sure and established.

"Establish" is literally 'to make to stand up'; the same Greek word is used in :11 about the standing up of the priests. It is used nowhere else in Hebrews. There is no semantic connection, just a usage of the same word a sentence later, although in different contexts. I would suggest this is the kind of thing which happens in verbal language usage, when we speak out loud. And it is more evidence that Hebrews is the transcript of an address (see on 13:22).

10:10 *By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all-* The "will" of God refers to God's will that none should perish but all should be

saved (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 3:16; 6:40). That will lead to the giving of His Son; and yet the Son had to freely fulfill that will of His own volition. The incredible will of God for human salvation was demonstrated publically by the offering of the Lord's body. This "once and for all" declared the will of God to save us, ending for all time any doubt or nagging suspicion that He is somehow indifferent to human salvation and is simply leaving us to make our own decisions without any passion or will from His side. The Lord's death was therefore His "will" (Mt. 26:42). The doing of God's will by His Son is parallel with the finishing of His work (Jn. 4:34), coming to a climax in His last words from the cross: "It is finished". Yet we too are to play our part in the doing of that will- in reaching out to save others by the grace of the Lord Jesus (10:36; 13:21). "The offering of the body of Jesus" alludes to how the offering of animal bodies could not save of itself; but again it was the life and person of the Lord Jesus which saves, rather than simply His body, which was like any other human body.

10:11 *And every priest indeed stands day by day serving, and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins-* This contrast between the priests *standing* in service and the Lord *sitting* at God's right hand is emphasized. I suggested on 1:1 that Paul is writing to the Hebrews with constant allusion to the martyrdom of Stephen. He saw the Lord standing at God's right hand- when usually, the Lord sits. But He was [and can still be] caught up in the passion and urgency of our human situations. The way the sacrifices were repeated ["the same sacrifices"] demonstrates how they were not ultimately effective. I have noted throughout chapter 9 that Paul has the rituals of the Day of Atonement in view. The allusion here would be to how the scapegoat apparently 'took away sins'; but the sacrifices had to continue to be offered. So there was something wrong with the scapegoat ritual; it was only effective insofar as it pointed forward to the ultimate bearer of sins, which Isaiah 53 presents as being the suffering servant on the cross, the "body" or "servant / slave" prepared instead of the ritual sacrifices (:5).

10:12 *But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God-* See on :12 for the significance of the Lord sitting. The one sacrifice for sins for ever means that there is now no more consciousness of sin as a barrier between God and us (:2). This is a far more wonderful truth than simply meaning that the Lord offered one sacrifice for sins and therefore no more animals need to be killed. Note that it was when the sacrifice was offered that the Lord sat at the right hand of God. His sacrifice therefore included both His death and resurrection. See on :14.

10:13 *From that time forward expectantly waiting until his enemies be made the footstool for his feet-* In Acts 2:35 there is an appeal for the Hebrews who crucified the Lord to repent. They were His "enemies"; but once they became a footstool for His feet, then He would return. Therefore Peter appealed for their repentance, apparently understanding being 'a footstool for His feet' as meaning they would put themselves at His feet in obeisance. The Lord's footstool is the place where His worshippers come (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Is. 66:1-3). The Father was willing to "make" His Son's enemies, those responsible for His death, into His worshippers. But they had to do their part, in repentance and acceptance of the activity of His Holy Spirit. Heb. 10:13 adds the detail that the Lord Jesus is eagerly looking for [AV "expecting"] His former enemies to become His footstool- and then He will return. This is why witness to Jewish people is so deeply significant in God's program. The Lord's victory over sin means that sinners, His "enemies", would be made the seat and basis of His praise.

10:14 *For by one offering he has perfected for ever those that are sanctified-* As noted on :12,

the Lord's "one offering" included both His death and resurrection. He saw His resurrection as His being "perfected" (Lk. 13:32 s.w.). By becoming "in Christ", all that is true of Him becomes true of us. We are sanctified by being in Him, counted as having His sanctity / righteousness / holiness. And thereby we are perfected as He was when He cried "It is finished" or perfected (Jn. 4:34). We are "perfected" only in prospect; just as the Lord achieved God's will on the cross but we must also do that will (see on :10). The Lord prayed that because He had perfected God's work, so we should be "made perfect in one" (the same words are used- Jn. 17:4,23). His death enabled those who become "in Him" to be counted as perfect as Him; but His death also empowered the gift of the Spirit to transform / mature / 'perfect' us in practice into who we are by status. This is the thought developed in the following verses, just as it is in Romans 8, which goes on from speaking about our sanctification by the cross to explaining the work of the Spirit in our hearts. And here too in Hebrews 10, those who are sanctified are also perfected. A process is in view, of maturing and developing us through the Spirit; parallel to the process of *making* us His former enemies to be the footstool of His feet (:13).

10:15 *And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us. For after saying-* The inspiration of this message by the Spirit is mentioned because the teaching is going to be about the operation of the Spirit in our hearts; see on :14. The covenant promised to Israel in Jeremiah is testified "to us".

10:16 *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and on their minds I will write them-* As noted on :14, the Lord's sacrifice enables us to not only be forgiven, but to be perfected / matured, and to be "made" His footstool. This process of sanctification and maturing is achieved by the work of the Spirit in our hearts. The context of the Jeremiah quotation is God's acceptance of Israel's continued disobedience and plan to insert His laws into their hearts; to not only forgive them (:17), but to change them. It is the Spirit which sanctifies in the heart; the sanctification of the Spirit is something we must allow to be done to us rather than seeking to make ourselves clean by rituals (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). By resisting this sanctifying power, we are despising the gift or grace of the Spirit (10:29). No amount of ritual obedience can change our hearts; we must allow the Lord's Spirit to do this. "Sanctify" in Greek is a form of the word "Holy"; the Holy Spirit is in essence the Spirit or power which makes our spirit holy / sanctified. To understand this is fundamental to understanding the function of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

10:17 *Then is added: And their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more-* The forgiveness of sins is in addition to the work of the Spirit in human hearts, changing us to be like the Lord whose righteousness is counted to us. Hence Paul notes that this "is added", forgiveness is a separate promise to the sanctifying or transformation of human hearts. And this speaks exactly to our need as sinners; we need not only forgiveness but also the power to change so that we are not endlessly knocking on Heaven's door for the forgiveness of the same sins. Sins are "remembered no more" not in the sense that God 'forgets' them, for the Bible is full of historical accounts of human sin which has been forgiven. The sense is rather that He will not remember sin against us. Here is the final answer to all fears about ghosts from our past. Those sins will not be remembered against us.

Sin was completely overcome by the Lord's victory; "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever (in their conscience) them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14 cp. 9:9). "Their sins and



iniquities [there seems no hint that this only refers to pre-baptismal sins] will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). If we sin wilfully after knowing this, there is no more sacrifice for sins- because that sacrifice was only ever made once (Heb. 10:26). At our baptism, our conscience was cleansed of all sin. We need to meditate upon that lifeless body of the Lord and what it meant. "A covenant is of force over dead [victims or sacrifices]... it is never held to be of force while he who is the appointed [sacrifice] is alive" (Heb. 9:17 Bullinger). Over that body the personal covenant to each of us (Gen. 17:7) came into real, living operation.

The Lord Jesus made *one* sacrifice for all sins for all time, and therefore we don't need to offer any more sacrifices or use a human priesthood; we are already totally forgiven of all our sins. There is further evidence, apart from the reasoning of Hebrews, that all our sins, past and future, were forgiven at Calvary:

- On the cross, sin was ended, iniquity reconciled, everlasting righteousness brought in (Dan. 9:24). One sin offering was made for all time.

- We must forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake *has* forgiven us (Eph. 4:32); not waiting for our brother to repent before we forgive him, but forgiving in advance, in prospect, even as we were forgiven. This takes this issue out of the realms of theology into the painfully practical.

- Our sins were / are forgiven by the blood of Christ- not by our repentance or words of prayer. "God's forgiveness is not just a wiping clean of the slate [from hour to hour]... if it were, prayer would be immoral- a mere incantation to bring about a magical result: and we need to be continually wary of the pagan conception which would reduce it to such a level". These words are so true. Whenever a twinge of guilt arises, we rush off a quick prayer for forgiveness- and then, at the end of the day or the week, we are left with a doubt as to whether our spirituality is valid or not. If this is our experience, we are all too similar to Israel of old; offering the sin offering (cp. praying for forgiveness), feeling guilty, coming to the day of Atonement (cp. the breaking of bread), still feeling guilty, realizing that as the sin offering couldn't cleanse sin, neither could the sacrifice at that feast, offering more sin offerings... It can become the ritual of a bad conscience, stumbling on because there seems no other way to go. But our sins (yes, yours, that snap at your wife, that curse as you spilt your coffee) really were forgiven through the Lord's work on the cross; we really do have access to this through *really believing it*- and therefore expressing our faith in baptism. Our prayerful response to failure should be to confess it (1 Jn. 1:9), and also profess our faith in the redemption already achieved for us.

*All* our sins were forgiven when the Lord died for us; both past and future. By baptism we identify ourselves with this work, and we are thereby in a position where we have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:2,22), knowing that all is forgiven, and only if we fall from grace will this become untrue. Thus YLT speaks of "*the* conscience" in the NT, as if it is something specific which we have, rather than an occasional twinge of guilt. We have this Biblical conscience "toward God"; this is how He sees us (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:21). Thus we may have a guilty feeling about something, we may doubt our salvation, but our conscience in God's eyes is pure; we are still cleansed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have a clear conscience, God will punish those who persecute us (1 Pet. 3:16 RSV). 1 Pet. 3:21 teaches that baptism saves us not because in itself it means that we are free from the deeds of the flesh ("putting away the filth of the flesh" uses words which elsewhere carry this connotation), but because it gives us a good conscience in God's eyes- according to the Biblical definition of conscience.

10:18 *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin required-* As noted on :17, forgiveness of all sin was achieved in one offering. No further sin offerings are required. The logic of this not only meant that the Hebrews should not be offering sin offerings in the temple any more; but interpretations of Ezekiel's temple prophecies which require future sin offerings in the Kingdom age must be suspect in the light of the reasoning here. We note however that whilst in Jerusalem with the Hebrew Christians, Paul did apparently offer animal sacrifices (Acts 21:24); and he suffered hugely for doing so. We could read this as Paul seeking to be all things to all men; or perhaps in his zeal to by all means be reconciled with the Hebrew Christians, he departed from his own principles when he ought not to have done so.

10:19 *Therefore brothers, having boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus-* The High Priest nervously entered the Holiest for a few moments on the Day of Atonement; but we can enter "boldly", a term often used to characterize the early Christians. The only way any man can be so "bold" is through believing in the Lord's total forgiveness and further, that we are counted righteous by status. It was the High Priest alone who entered the Holiest, representing the Lord Jesus. And we are in Him. All that is true of Him becomes true for us.

In the light of ten chapters of detailed exposition of the meaning of the blood of Christ, *therefore let us...*, Paul triumphantly drives home (Heb. 10:19-25). And he speaks of how we must transform our lives:

- Let us enter boldly "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus". This is only possible through a deep knowledge of sin forgiven. Our prayer life should be a positive and upbuilding experience: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience". Reflection on the atonement, believing it all, will result in a positive and unashamed faith.
- "Let us hold fast... without wavering". If the belief of the cross is imprinted upon our minds, reflected upon not for a few fleeting minutes on Sundays but often throughout each day, we won't waver. The natural tendency to blow hot and cold in our spiritual endeavours will be vanquished beneath an unceasing wonder at what was achieved. It is only sustained reflection upon the cross which can, in an almost mystical way, impart an unceasing verve of inspiration.
- "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". Again the doctrine of the atonement and that of the second coming are linked. As we realize more and more clearly that very soon the final outworking of the cross will be achieved in the actual physical granting of redemption to us, so we will be inspired to more and more earnestly seek the welfare of our brethren. If we believe in the atonement, we will naturally seek to break bread. Whether it means summoning the courage to meet with those we naturally would rather not meet with, bringing the wine to the meeting, we will be motivated to rise up and serve in these ways by the eternal and personal truth of the cross.

The smell of the incense passed through the veil, and into the Most Holy Place, where the presence of God Himself was symbolized as being over the blood-stained cover of the ark. The simple wonder of it all is that the words of our prayers really can penetrate to Heaven itself; and even further, we are as it were "there" in the Holiest, in Christ. In Christ, the veil itself has been done away, and we can with boldness enter into that Most Holy Place and personally have direct fellowship with God (Heb. 9:7-13; 10:19). Our heart can touch the heart of God. It's a priceless wonder to know and experience this.

Under the Law, the provision for Nazariteship encouraged the average Israelite to enter into the spirit of the High Priest by imposing some of the regulations governing his behaviour upon them. *All* Israel were bidden make fringes of blue, in conscious imitation of the High Priest to whose spirit they all were intended to attain (Num. 15:38). But we are bidden now to "come boldly unto the throne of grace (cp. the mercy seat in the Most Holy)... boldness to enter into the holiest" (Heb. 4:16; 10:19): to do what only the High Priest could do under the Old Covenant. This must have been a huge challenge for the Jewish believers to rise up to. The context of Heb. 10 encourages us to enter the Holiest and "consider one another". The High Priest entered the Holiest in order to make atonement for Israel, not just to bask in the fact he was allowed in there. And so with us. The marvellous fellowship with the Father which we are permitted in Christ, the entry into the Holiest, is not just for the sake of it; it is so we can do something for others. I am not suggesting, of course, that in any way we replace the one and only High Priest, the Lord Jesus. But because we are *in Him* we therefore in some ways share His honours and His work. The idea of eating the bread of the sacrifices would likewise have appeared strange in a first century context: it was as if the whole brotherhood (and sisterhood) were being invited to see themselves as priests. But in His last message, the Lord went further: He promised that those who overcome will eat of the hidden manna, concealed in the Most Holy: as if to say that we will ultimately rise up to and exceed the glory of the High Priests who saw that bread once a year. See on Jn. 10:9.

10:20 *By the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh-* The Lord Jesus inaugurated the "new and living way" for us *dia*, on account of, "his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). It was exactly because of "the flesh" of the Lord's humanity that He opened up a new way of life for us. Because He was so credibly and genuinely human, and yet perfect, the way of His life becomes compellingly the way we are to take, and enables every man to become "in Him". Once we grasp this, we can better understand the anathema which John calls down upon those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" (2 Jn. 7-9). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.). The cross is ongoing; the Lord's blood is "new", fresh, not coagulated, unlike the blood sprinkled each Yom Kippur which was dead and dried.

On one level, the atonement can be logically explained. On another, it cannot be. The veil, an eloquent symbol of the flesh of Jesus, was made of mixed fibres, something which was otherwise forbidden under the Law. This perhaps reflected how the Lord's nature and the atonement God wrought through Him was and is in some ways contradictory, to human eyes.

Through His death, the veil was torn open, so that we might enter into the Holiest "by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us... through the veil, that is to say [the sacrificing of] his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-22 Gk.). This assumes that the followers of Jesus are already in the position of the High Priest standing in the Holy Place, but through what He opened through the cross, each of us must now go through into the Most Holy. And what was the purpose of the High Priest's entry? To obtain forgiveness *for others*, to *mediate for them*, just as the Lord Jesus did on the cross and continues to do for us. His cross compels us to not merely passively contemplate our own salvation, but to go deeper into the very presence of God in our ministry *for others*. Yet the High Priest had to cleanse himself meticulously; access had been limited to the Most Holy as a result of inadequate preparation by some in the past (Lev. 16:1,2). The Lord's death opened up the veil, for us to pass through with the

utmost effort made by us in personal sanctification, in order to further God's glory in the salvation of others. We cannot simply refuse to enter, turn away from the torn veil. To do so is to turn away from what the cross has achieved, and to place ourselves outside its scope. We must go forward, go onwards into the presence of God to replicate in essence the Saviour's work, with the awed and humble spirit of the High Priest entering the Holiest on the day of atonement. He would surely have carefully analysed his motives, as to *why* he was passing through that veil, and whether he was sufficiently personally sanctified for the work he was doing. He would have been comforted by knowing that his motives were solely for the glorification of his God in the redemption for his people which he was seeking to obtain.

10:21 *And having a great priest over the house of God*- This is an allusion to priesthood as it was at the time of Melchizedek and not of Moses, where a family ["house"] had a priest-head. Although as explained above, we are "in Him" and stand with Him as High Priest in the Holiest, in Heaven itself, in another sense we are His family members and He is our great priest over us.

10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water*-

There is a clear NT theme: that the believer always has a good conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5,19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16); this clear conscience is a gift from the time of baptism (Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 9:14 cp. 6:1; Rom. 6:17), when "our bodies [were] washed with pure water". It was not external things which are sprinkled, as they were under the law, but the innermost recesses of the human heart. Our bad conscience about sin is totally removed; because of our fullness of faith in the Lord's work for us. If a believer loses that good conscience, he has fallen from grace. The Hebrews were losing that good conscience and beginning to worry about their sins to the point of wanting to return to ritual and sacrifices as a way to deal with their bad conscience. Those who leave the faith have a conscience which is wounded (1 Cor. 8:12), defiled (1 Cor. 8:7; Tit. 1:15), seared (1 Tim. 4:2). It's hard to find a consistent Biblical definition of conscience. "Conscience" in the Biblical sense often refers to how God sees our conscience, rather than how we feel it. Therefore only rarely does the Spirit speak as if "conscience" is something which is good one moment, and bad the next; it is something which we have on a permanent basis. Thus to say "I watched TV last night with a good conscience, but I had a bad conscience that I didn't give out any tracts today" isn't really using "conscience" in its Biblical sense. Paul repeatedly emphasizes that he has *always* had a good conscience (presumably, from the time of his baptism, when he stopped kicking against the goads, Acts 9:5).

The good conscience is Biblically defined in Hebrews 9, 10. Here the writer is basing his argument on how those under the Old Covenant still had a guilty conscience after their sacrifices, because the blood of animals could not take away sin; the yearly Day of Atonement required them to confess their sins once again. Their conscience was not made perfect (Heb. 9:9). In his overpowering way, the writer drives his logic home: not only is our conscience cleansed by the one sacrifice of Christ, but we are in a more exalted position than the OT worshippers; we are in the very position of the High Priest who on that Day of Atonement entered the Most Holy; *we* can enter the Holiest with *boldness* (cp. the nervousness of the Priest) because our consciences are cleansed with Christ's blood. And because of this, "let us draw near" (Heb. 10:22), the language the LXX uses about the priestly

serving of God; now *we* can do the priestly work, because our consciences are cleansed. We are not like the OT believers, who had a bad conscience because of their sins and needed to offer an annual sacrifice for them, as a result of their conscience. We, by contrast, have no more conscience of sins. According to this Biblical definition of conscience, the conscience is cleansed, and we partake of that cleansing by baptism. At and in that sacrament, we make a pledge to keep that good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21 NIV); perhaps we need to point this out more to baptism candidates. We are once and for all forgiven. Our emphasis must be on confession of failure, not feeling guilty and rushing off a quick prayer, as if this will get us forgiveness. We have been cleansed and covered, we are in the new covenant of grace. Only by breaking out of this can we lose the gracious position in which we stand: we have a conscience which is free of guilt, if we truly believe in the power of the cross and our relationship to it through baptism.

10:23 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope so that it does not waver. For He who promised is faithful-* Given the allusion to water baptism in :22, the confession of hope may refer to some statement made then- to the effect that 'I really believe all my sins have been dealt with and that I shall definitely be saved if the Lord returns today or I die; I believe God is faithful to His promises of forgiving and saving me'. This was the Christian "hope" or *elpis*; not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid confident expectation of future salvation. And that public confession was to be continued, at a time when in Jerusalem the Hebrew Christians were being mocked and persecuted by the Judaists. We continue professing / confessing our hope "that it waver not" (Heb. 10:23 RV). It doesn't waver for us, exactly because we preach it. There is a great personal benefit in publicly stating our faith to others.

10:24- see on Acts 15:39.

*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works-* We are with the Lord Jesus, ministering in the Most Holy. And that work was essentially about the welfare of others. Our work with others therefore isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24). But let me ask: do you *consider* how you might encourage your brethren, or those in the world around you; what words to say, what to do or not to do...?

In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted. In practice this means guiding our words and example so that others are exalted, not speaking of our own achievements, *considering each other* as to how we may provoke them to righteousness (Heb. 10:24; earlier in 3:1 Paul speaks of *considering* the Lord Jesus, and this leads on to considering each other). As the Lord considers us and our unique situations and how to lead us to the best service, so we should consider each other.

10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the habit of some is; but rather encouraging one another, and so much the more, as you see the day drawing near-* The Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem initially 'assembled together' in the temple courts, but with growing opposition from the temple system it seems they stopped doing this and instead returned to the temple system. This explains the need to assemble because the day is drawing near, and in the AD70 context this referred to the destruction of the entire temple system. The

individual believers were the new temple, and they should therefore assemble themselves, rather than within the physical temple.

The connection between the last day, both of AD70 and the second coming, and assembling together is brought out by the allusion to the Passover. Gathered around the slain lamb, the memorial of their salvation, in their various homes, the command was clear: "None of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Ex. 12:22). This is surely an eloquent picture of the ecclesia of the last days, highlighting the urgent need to remain within the ecclesia, and to centre our fellowship around our Passover Lamb.

Not assembling ourselves together is of course not a good thing. If we love our brethren, we will seek to be physically with them. There can be no doubt that we must struggle with our natural selfishness, our desire to go it alone. But is this actually what Heb. 10:25 is talking about? A glance at the context shows that forsaking the assembly is paralleled with the wilful sin which shall exclude us from God's salvation, a treading under foot the Son of God and reviling the blood of the covenant- what had to be done by Christians who 'repented' of their conversion and returned to the synagogue, the sort of blasphemy that Saul was making Christian converts commit.

This is not really appropriate to someone who fervently believes in the Lord Jesus, but for whatever reason, doesn't 'make it out to meeting' on Sundays? The context seems to speak about a wilful rejection of the Lord Jesus. And this of course is the very background against which Hebrews was written. It was a letter to Hebrew Christians who were beginning to bow to Jewish pressure and renounce their faith in Christ, and return to Judaism. "The assembling of ourselves together" can actually be read as a noun- not a verb. Those who 'forsook' 'the assembly together of us' would then refer to those who totally rejected Christianity. The same word "forsaking" occurs in 2 Pet. 2:15, also in a Jewish context, about those who "forsake the right way". So I suggest that forsaking the assembly refers more to turning away from Christ and returning to apostasy, than to simply not turning up at church as often as we might. The writer laments that "some" were indeed forsaking the assembly (Heb. 10:25). But that Greek word translated "some" recurs in Hebrews to describe those "some" who had forsaken the ecclesia and turned back to Judaism: "Take heed... lest there be in *some* [AV "any"] of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (and returning to Judaism- Heb. 3:12)... lest *some* [AV "any"] of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13)... for *some*, when they had heard, did provoke [referring to the earlier Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the hope of the Kingdom- Heb. 3:16]... *some* of you should seem to fail [like the condemned Hebrews in the wilderness- Heb. 4:1]... lest *some* fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). In fact, right after the reference to the "some" who forsake the assembly, Heb. 10:28 speaks of "*some* [AV "he"- but the same Greek word in all these places for "some"] that despised Moses' law". Clearly, those Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the spirit of Christ in Moses and the hope of the Kingdom, are being held up as warnings to that same "some" in the first century Hebrew ecclesia who were turning back from the Hope of the Kingdom. I'm not in any way saying that we needn't bother about our ecclesial attendance. Far from it! But I also feel it's not right to insist that if someone doesn't attend an ecclesia, for whatever reason, they are therefore guilty of the wilful sin and certain fiery condemnation of which Hebrews 10 speaks for those who forsake the assembly. In fact, the passage has almost been abused like that- as if to say: 'If you don't turn up on Sunday, if you quit meeting with us, then, you've quit on God and His Son'. This simply isn't the case.

10:26 *For if we sin wilfully after what we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins-* The wilful sin in view is that of :25, forsaking the Christian assembly for that of the temple, seeking justification by sacrificial rituals and the Jewish, anti-Christian priesthood rather than by faith in the amazing priesthood of the Lord Jesus which has been explained in such compelling terms so far in Hebrews. "The knowledge of the truth" here refers in the context to the knowledge of forgiveness and salvation; it's parallel to the "knowledge of salvation" (Lk. 1:77). The "truth" is the ultimate, surpassing reality- that we are saved, by grace, and can look forward to that great salvation being revealed at the last day. There was only one effective sacrifice for sins made- by the Lord Jesus. As explained earlier in this section, that sacrifice does not need to be repeated, and the killing of animals for forgiveness was effectively trying to crucify or sacrifice the Lord Jesus again. The idea is not that there is no opportunity for repentance; that is always possible. Rather, the idea is that those who forsook the sacrifice of Jesus for the ritual sacrifices of Judaism were mistaken in thinking that those sacrifices could gain forgiveness. If they trusted in them, then they would not receive forgiveness.

10:27 *But a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries-* For those trusting in Christ, there was no longer a conscience of sins. They had all been dealt with in the Lord's sacrifice, and they could be bold in their approach to God. Those who now trusted in animals sacrifices could never have their conscience of sin cleansed, as the sacrifices had to be continually offered; and so they could only look ahead to future judgment with fear rather than boldness. And they could only expect the condemnation of fiery destruction for their sins; they would be counted amongst the Lord's enemies or adversaries because they had refused His program of making His enemies / adversaries His worshippers (see on :13). The temple system was the adversary or satan of the Lord Jesus, and would meet its appropriate end.

10:28 *A man that set at nothing Moses' law died without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses-* By turning away from the Lord's sacrifice, they were despising God's ultimate "law", which is in His Son. There could be no compassion for those who stated they didn't want it because their ritual obedience was enough. The return to the temple system by the Hebrew Christians was public, and not on the word of two or three who had observed secret sins.

10:29- see on Mk. 15:15; Heb. 12:17.

*Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, shall be considered those who have trodden underfoot the Son of God and have counted the blood of the covenant (with which they were sanctified) an unholy thing, and have insulted the Spirit of grace?- Treading underfoot God's son and blaspheming His blood was the kind of thing Paul had tried to make the Hebrew Christians do under pain of torture. These blasphemous statements were required of those who had left Judaism for Christianity and now sought to return to the temple system and the legal protection of Judaism within the Roman empire. To turn away from such great salvation and blaspheme it could not be treated with neutrality by God. There was going to be a terrible consequence for it. The Lord's work had not only attained forgiveness, but had shed forth the gift ("grace") of the Spirit to transform human hearts so that they did not continue in sin. To turn away from the Lord Jesus was to insult and obstruct that Spirit.*

As "the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise "the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in

the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's transforming gift or grace, which aims to change us into how the Lord Jesus actually is. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

10:30 *For we know Him that said: Vengeance belongs to Me, I will reward. And again: The Lord shall judge His people-* Judgment and punishment for sin have been dealt with for all those who are in Christ, as Paul has argued in this section and also in Romans 1-8. Those who now turned away from all this would therefore have to face judgment.

David asks God to judge him *now* (Ps. 26:1; 35:24; 43:1; 54:1). He wasn't *so* afraid of the future judgment; He knew that it will only be the pronouncement of how we have now lived. He had a good conscience, and so He asked God to show how He felt about him right now. "The Lord shall judge the people [at the last day; this is quoted in this connection in Heb. 10:30]: judge me [i.e. now], O Lord, according to my righteousness" (Ps. 7:8).

10:31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God-* This may well refer to Angelic punishment at the last day, as the hands of God is Angelic language, and "the living God" may well carry the idea in Hebrew of 'God of the living ones', i.e. the Angel-cherubim. But God is a living God in that He is alive in our lives through His risen Son.

What is written about the toughness of God's condemnation may seem awful. But actually, the condemnation and judgment of God is far softer than that of man. It was men who created the concept of eternal torment, not God. It was men who created Auschwitz and similar perversions of 'judgment'. It is truly written in the context of God's final condemnation that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But David said that he would prefer to fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of man (2 Sam. 24:14). To fall into the hands of God is thus a figure for judgment / condemnation by Him. Fearful as it is, it is actually far milder than the judgment of men. This is how cruel our judgment of others can be; this is how awful is human condemnation of each other. It is worse that God's. No wonder that the Lord established "Judge not..." as a foundation principle for His true people.

10:32 *But call to remembrance the former days, when you were first enlightened. You endured a hard struggle, with sufferings-* The earliest Hebrew Christians, baptized in their thousands by Peter, were persecuted. But that was all in vain if they now returned to the temple system. The "sufferings" were a sharing in the crucifixion sufferings of Christ (s.w. 2:9,10). And His resurrection life by the Spirit had lived in the Hebrews who had participated in the sufferings. The awful persecutions they endured were orchestrated by Paul himself. He wrote of what he personally was aware of. Their return to Judaism was effectively a statement that Paul had been correct in persecuting them; and so Paul is personally involved in the argument in this sense.

10:33 *Partly in that you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly in that you became companions of those who were so treated-* Suffering is therefore



not only in what we personally experience, but in our fellowshiping with the sufferings of others within the Lord's body. For in Him, if one member suffers, all the others do (1 Cor. 12:26). The early Christian converts were made a theatre, a "spectacle", openly revealed for their Christian faith; and what Paul did to them in this way he himself experienced (s.w. 1 Cor. 4:9). To come out in open solidarity for someone publicly mocked for their faith was in effect to suffer what they did. But to avoid that, the Hebrew Christians had become secret believers, hiding their light under a bucket; and now they had taken the logical next step, which was to return to the darkness of Judaism.

10:34- see on Mt. 5:7; Heb. 4:15.

*For you had both compassion on them that were in bonds, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your own property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an enduring one-* It is tragic that believers who suffered so much could then revert to the very temple system which had so persecuted them. But this is a feature of our natures. We become like that which we hate the most and have suffered from the most, like Israel worshipping the idols of the nations whom they believed had defeated them. The giving of property to the poorer believers may therefore have partly been because property was being confiscated from Christians anyway. These verses in Hebrews 10 give us vital information about the persecution of the Hebrew Christians which the Acts record doesn't mention, just like the Acts record doesn't mention Paul's final privations in prison, of which we learn in 2 Tim. 4.

The manuscripts followed by the AV add: "Knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven...". They had once understood what Paul has earlier explained in this chapter; that believers "in Christ" are "in heaven", in the Holiest, their spiritual man ["in yourselves"] was in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). But they were turning away from that faith and understanding.

The early Christians "joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property" by the state. There was a *joy* felt amongst them because of their loss. This is a totally counter-instinctive feeling- to be *joyful* because you lost or gave away 'possessions'. The Philippians likewise gave out of a deep *joy* at giving away; the abundance of their joy resulted in their liberality (2 Cor. 8:2). And let's not think that the early church were necessarily all dirt poor. The Christians of Heb. 10:34 had property which was plundered- and still they gave support to the poor saints in Palestine (Heb. 6:20).

The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there in God's future Kingdom, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34). The RV of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Who we ourselves will be turned into is our better possession, "a better possession and an abiding one" (RV). And this compensates for the loss of material *possessions* in this life. Therefore the writer urges them to not cast away their confidence in the receipt of this reward at the Lord's return (:35). The more humbly confident we are in receiving the Kingdom, the less the loss of possessions now will mean to us. Hebrews also associates the hope of the Kingdom with the characteristic of patience in the

small things of this life. Hence Job, when he lost his hope, could exclaim: "What is mine end, that I should be patient?" (Job 6:11 RV).

Who we ourselves will be turned into is our better possession, "a better possession and an abiding one" (RV). And this compensates for the loss of material *possessions* in this life. Therefore the writer urges them to not cast away their confidence in the receipt of this reward at the Lord's return (:35). The more humbly confident we are in receiving the Kingdom, the less the loss of possessions now will mean to us.

10:35 *Therefore do not throw away your boldness, which has great reward-* This is the "boldness" which can only come from believing that our sin is totally dealt with in Christ, and that we can boldly enter beyond the veil right now, into the Holiest of fellowship with God Himself (:22). This was being thrown away by those who returned to the temple system of sacrifices for sins. Later Paul uses these words about Moses, bidding us follow his example of bold faith in the future reward (11:26).

10:36 *For you have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise-* They were lacking the vital characteristic of patient endurance in faith that the great salvation would really be true for them. They had done the will of God, which was to believe in His Son and commit to Him in baptism (Jn. 7:17). 'Receiving the promise' is the language of Abraham receiving the promise of eternal inheritance at the Lord's return, which Paul has said is the promise of the new covenant (see on 9:15). But that will only come true for those who have patiently endured in faith as Abraham did.

10:37- see on Eph. 3:8.

*For yet a very little while, and he that comes shall come and shall not delay further-* This reflects Paul's belief that we should live as if the Lord's return is imminent. He also sensed that the fact the Lord had not yet come is because of a "delay". 2 Peter 3 speaks of this delay, mentioning that Paul had also written of it- presumably referring to this passage, thereby adding another argument for believing Paul was the author of Hebrews. The delay, according to Peter, was so that more could be saved, and also because of the lack of spiritual maturity amongst those who had believed. For when the spiritual harvest is ripe, then the sickle will be put to it in the Lord's return.

This verse is generally a quotation from Hab. 2:3 about the fulfilment of the prophecy about Babylon's destruction. Paul saw this as having the same fulfilment as the return of Christ to earth. The Lord's return would be the destruction of Babylon; so by "Babylon" Paul understood the Jewish system which was about to be destroyed. And Revelation speaks of it likewise. The Lord did not return in the first century, because various preconditions were not met. But His coming will also be the destruction of the latter day Babylon, to which believers of our age will be tempted to associate themselves in order to avoid persecution.

The "little while" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 26:20, which suggests that there will be a "little while" of final tribulation for the believers from which they may be preserved, just prior to the Lord's coming. Potentially, that was how close the second coming could have been in the first century.

10:38 *But My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul will have no pleasure in him-* This is a quotation from a prophecy about the Lord Jesus personally, "My righteous one", who would overcome the wicked Babylonians, whom Paul in :37 has associated with the temple system. But as explained throughout chapter 10, all that is true of Him is true of us. We are in Him, in the Holiest. But as the Lord had the possibility of failure in His mortal life, so do we. The Father's soul had pleasure in Him because of His faithfulness unto death (Is. 53:10). But there was the possibility He could "shrink back", just as there is for all those in Him. All the assurances of salvation mentioned in the argument so far are true of believers at the current moment in time; but it's not a case of once saved, always saved. We have to abide in Christ, patiently endure in faith.

The 'shrinking back' was in recoiling from the wonder of salvation by grace through faith, and returning to trust in the temple system for salvation. The same word is used of Peter shrinking back from these wonders because of Judaist pressure (Gal. 2:12).

10:39- see on Mt. 27:5.

*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls-* The shrinking back at the day of judgment is spoken of in 1 Jn. 2:28- the rejected will be ashamed from before Him at His coming, they will literally slink and shrink away in shame. But "we make the answer now", living out the essence of judgment day now. The Hebrews who were shrinking away from the wonder of real salvation in Christ would shrink away from Him in condemnation at the last day. It is faith in Christ and in God's saving grace which saves us, which 'preserves' us in the sense of preserving our present state of being saved in Christ. And Paul now goes on in chapter 11 to speak of how this kind of faith was held by the Old Testament heroes.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction about invisible things*- The context of this discourse about faith is to be found in chapter 10. The Hebrew Christians were abandoning faith in Jesus as Christ and returning to the visible, concrete things of the temple system for their salvation and justification before God. All the examples of faith now given are to be understood in that context. As noted on 1:1, this discourse is based upon Stephen's in Acts 7, which would have been a mainstay of Hebrew Christian faith.

Yet the definition of faith here is deeply relevant to our materialistic age which seeks for science to prop up faith, and demands that spiritual understanding be inline with observable phenomena as defined and understood by contemporary science. The definitions of faith given here preclude any appeal to science as 'proving' God's existence or the truth of His word. Science cannot prove faith nor underpin it, for faith is assurance in "invisible things". The "things hoped for" are those of chapter 10- the "hope" of the Christian is not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid conviction that our sin has been dealt with and we can confidently anticipate the promise of eternal inheritance at the last day. The complaint that science conflicts with faith is misplaced; for faith is not about observable things. The whole thrust of 'apologetics' is therefore seriously misplaced. No amount of archaeological evidence or historical support or the intricacies observed in the natural creation can provide faith. A generation of Christians raised on this kind of thing is now wilting in faith, confronted by scientific evidence which brings these things into question. Perhaps they never had the faith spoken of here in Heb. 11:1.

Faith is the assurance that the hope of salvation shall come true for us. Issues such as how God created the world are not in view here. "Assurance" is the word used of our "confidence" in salvation in 3:14. The argument may appear logically faulty, at first blush- faith itself is the confidence, whereas we would expect faith to have some kind of basis. Faith comes by hearing the Gospel; when confronted with the message of salvation, there is a power within the message itself which compels faith. This is all the stuff of the Spirit, and the secular mind recoils at such statements. But the few thousand former atheists I baptized in the former USSR all came to faith not through scientific 'evidence' nor the argumentation of apologetics; but from being confronted with the Gospel of itself. Thus indeed, the basis for faith is faith- which appears a circular argument to the literalist and the materialist, but millions of transformed lives are a far greater witness. And the man who structures his life and thinking on the sole basis of rationalism, empiricism and literalism is not a happy chappy. Indeed, there is no such person. Faith is the "conviction" or "evidence". The evidence for faith is faith. Yes, it is therefore a leap in the dark. But so in fact is every position held, for nobody is a pure rationalist or literalist, believing only what is before their two eyes. The ultimate thing "not seen" is our salvation, which we hope for patiently (Rom. 8:24,25; Mt. 13:17; 2 Cor. 4:18). Noah saw by faith what could not be seen- his salvation from the flood (:7). Elsewhere in the New Testament, faith is predicated upon connection with the Lord Jesus; the Son is the only way to the Father, and it is through or on account of the Son that we believe on the Father (1 Pet. 1:21). Any claim to 'believe in God' which is not predicated upon faith in Jesus is therefore not real faith in God as Biblically defined. To believe is to trust; not simply to intellectually accept that there is likely to be some higher power. The 'belief' in God of non-Christian religions and philosophies is not therefore Biblical faith in God. Faith in Him comes from hearing His word, which is about Jesus.

11:2 *For on account of their faith, the elders had witness borne to them-* These "elders" may not refer to those of whom we shall go on to read. I suggested on 1:1 that the Jerusalem church is being addressed here, and that the Hebrew letter is shot through with allusions to Stephen, their martyr. And nowhere is that clearer than in Hebrews 11, which is based upon Stephen's witness in Acts 7. The same word for "had witness borne" is translated "of good report", concerning the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:3). "Elders" is the word repeatedly used about the "elders" of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4). The founding elders of the Hebrew congregation in Jerusalem were therefore publically commended for their open faith in the Lord Jesus and resistance of the temple system; and the Hebrew audience were to follow their example rather than quitting Christianity and returning to Judaism.

11:3 *By faith we understand that the ages have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which appear-* This is no reference to the world being created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. The *ages (aion)* were prepared according to God's word, the Gospel; but we only perceive history from that perspective "by faith". Revelation puts this truth in a different way by saying that the Lamb opened the seals of future history through His sacrifice. The structure of all history revolves around His work as explained in the Gospel, "the word of God". The things which are now seen are not the things of faith, which cannot be seen (:1). In the context of this chapter and its position within the letter, the things which are seen referred to the temple system (see on :1). Those things were not created out of the reality of Christ which had now appeared. Understood properly, this is actually a strong case against the personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. They were not made out of Him, He who appeared or was manifest in His life and death, but pointed forward to Him, as a shadow, rather than being the very reality from which He came and would have therefore been subservient to.

11:4 *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect to his gifts; and through it he, though being dead, still speaks-* As noted on :1, the examples of faith in this chapter relate to faith in the invisible rather than the visible, concrete things of tabernacle ritual; and to faith in the Lord's sacrifice. It was by faith in that future sacrifice that Abel offered a blood offering, because he believed the principle of 9:22, that without shedding of the Lord's blood there could be no remission of sins. God bore witness to this faith by sending fire from Heaven to consume his sacrifice, rather than the vegetable sacrifice of Cain. That witness was not a recognition of his *obedience* but of his righteousness. Given the strong message of imputed righteousness in chapter 10, we are left to assume that through faith in the Lord's future sacrifice to cover him, Abel was counted righteous just as Abraham was, and just as we are. In that sense he "still speaks" to us by way of example.

Heb. 11:4 speaks of God bearing witness, giving a verbal testimony, to Abel's sacrifice, and that through that witness Abel is as it were still speaking to us, in that to this day God is still speaking / testifying to that acceptable act of service performed by Abel. Abel, through the account of him in Scripture, "is yet spoken of" (Heb. 11:4 AVmg.) in the Biblical record. Isaiah was prophesying directly to the hypocrites of the first century, according to the Lord in Mk. 7:6 RV. God says that He 'watches over My word to perform it' (Jer. 1:12 RV). Thus God didn't just write the Bible as we write words, and forget it. He remains actively aware of all His words and consciously fulfils them. This is another window into the way in which the word of God can be described as a living word. There is an active quality to the words we read in our Bibles.

Who we are is in reality our judgment. After death, our works "follow us" to judgment (Rev. 14:13). According to Jewish thought, men's actions followed them as witnesses before the court of God, and this is the idea being picked up here. There is a great emphasis in Hebrews 11 on the way that each man has a "witness", "testimony" or "report" as a result of his life (Heb. 11:4,5,14,39). Because of this the dead are still spoken for, in that God keeps and knows that testimony, and it speaks for them (Heb. 11:4 AV mg.). They are 'alive', not personally in conscious form, but in the memory and testimony of God.

11:5 *By faith Enoch was snatched away so that he should not be killed; and he was not found, because God had taken him away. He had witness borne to him, that before his being snatched away he had been well pleasing to God-* Paul wrote this to Hebrew Christians under persecution, believing that the second coming was at the doors, and soon they too would be snatched away to safety from persecution (1 Thess. 4:17). Paul was urging them to believe as Enoch did, and to be confident of final salvation as well as preservation in this life. He was "well pleasing" in that he believed (:6). Perhaps the example of Enoch is chosen because his ancestor was Cain, who did *not* please God, in contrast to Abel who has just been mentioned (:4). The point would be that we can break out from our surrounding environment, we are not inevitably, genetically tied in to any spiritual situation, but there is available to us the radical power of new creation in the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). There is no reason here to believe that Enoch was snatched away to Heaven or immortality, for the wages of sin is death; and Enoch was not perfect. The Lord Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and receive immortality (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The "witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God" is courtroom language. Could it not be that his representative / guardian Angel in the court of Heaven had made this testimony to God Almighty?

11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him. For he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those that seek after Him-* Our faith in God is a seeking after Him. To believe / trust in Him is to seek Him. Whilst this may be a Hebraism for worship, it is all the same true that faith is not a finding of God, an arrival at a point where we have all our questions answered and all intellectual struggles resolved. That position, which is only theoretical, would not be one of faith but of simplistic dogmatism and literalism. Our faith is not simply in Him, but in the fact that we really shall receive the promised salvation or "reward".

There are a few NT references to the Yahweh Name. One of them is in Heb. 11:6: he who comes to God must first [most importantly] believe that *He is* [a reference to He who is who He is, and will be who He will be], and that therefore, as an intrinsic part of who He is, *He will be* a rewarder of His people. Surely the point is that it's not just knowing the Name theoretically, it is to believe it- that He who is, really *is* in our lives. Who God *is*, i.e. His Name, is an imperative to believe Him and be like Him. If we are His sons and daughters, who He is becomes quite naturally the law of our being. Thus we should love our enemies, because God makes *His* sun [cp. 'our' goodness] to rise on both His friends and enemies. As we reflect on the massive power that every moment works to move the sun and earth around each other, so every moment we have an imperative to love.

This is why belief in God cannot be merely an intellectual act occurring within certain brain cells. Belief means action in some way. Belief *and* the act of baptism are necessary for

salvation; but some NT passages speak as if faith alone saves. This is reconciled by understanding that faith, true faith, includes works. James reasons that there is no distinction between true faith and works. They are part of the same nexus. Thus when we read in the NT of belief in Christ, the normal construction with a dative case was dropped and instead a preposition is used with the verb- belief *into* Christ is the idea, with implied reference to baptism *into* Him and an active life *in Him* as a result of our belief. To be brethren in Christ is not to just believe Christ or God, but to believe *into* them in practice. R.T. Lovelock comments: "The NT writers felt the importance of this utter trust in God so strongly, that they originated a new construction in their language to emphasise the concept and force it upon the attention of their readers".

11:7 *By faith Noah, being warned concerning things not seen as yet-* The unseen things were of judgment to come for sin, and of salvation through the ark into a new world, typical of God's future Kingdom on earth. The same word for "warned" is used of how we are not to refuse the Lord's warning voice today (12:25).

*Moved with Godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith-* Noah's fear of judgment to come was because he too was a sinner, and he feared judgment. He was in the position of those Hebrews who had a fearful looking forward to judgment because they had refused the sanctifying, saving work of the Lord Jesus (10:27). But he did something about it- he built the ark and entered it, understanding something of how Peter understood it- that it represented the Lord Jesus.

Noah is one of several examples in Hebrews 11 of where the faith of a third party can save others; it was by his faith that he saved his family. And as with Abel, we see that the idea of imputed righteousness was around far before Abraham. Righteousness was imputed to him because he feared condemnation for his sins. He believed that the salvation system offered him would work, and did what was required to enter it and remain within it. And thus he was counted righteous. This was done for him without the offering of sacrifice or participation in any ritual; he accepted salvation in the ark and did what he could to build it. This was of course highly relevant to the Hebrew Christians seeking to return to sacrifices and ritual.

Noah's response was not to smugly reflect how that soon he would be vindicated for his separation from the world, i.e. for his own personal righteousness. Instead he took seriously God's warning that sinners were to soon be destroyed. Noah was, of course, a sinner as we all are. He therefore must have cried out to God in faith, asking for God to count him as if he were righteous, so that he would be saved from the coming judgments against sin. This is how he had righteousness imputed to him. He showed his faith that God really had justified him by doing something physical- his faith led to the 'works' of building the ark; as our faith likewise leads us to baptism into Christ.

Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world; the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27). This is

why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

11:8- see on Gen. 12:4.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed-* This statement itself is an example of imputed righteousness. The Greek implies that *as soon as* God called Abram, he got up and left Ur. But a closer examination of the record indicates that this wasn't absolutely the case. It is stressed that both Abram and Sarai left Ur because "Terah *took* Abram his son... and Sarai his daughter in law" (Gen. 11:31). Abram had been called to leave Ur, separate from his family and go into Canaan. But instead he followed his father to Haran, and lived there (for some years, it seems) until his father died, and then he responded to his earlier call to journey towards Canaan. The Genesis record certainly reads as if Abram was dominated by his father and family, and this militated against an immediate response to the call he received to leave Ur and journey to Canaan. At best his father's decision enabled him to obey the command to leave Ur without having to break with his family. And yet, according to Heb. 11:8, Abram immediately responded, as an act of faith. But it was a moment of faith.

For some unrevealed reason, perhaps the invasion of the area by hostile tribes, the workings of providence made Terah take the decision to leave Ur. Because 'Canaan' would have been relatively unheard of (Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went", Heb. 11:8 AV) and uncivilized compared to Ur, it is possible to speculate that Abram had told Terah about the promise he had received. Terah then may have decided that such a promise ought to involve *him* as Abram's father, and decided to go with Abram. Terah must have had a very high level of motivation to leave cosmopolitan Ur for uncivilized Canaan. "Terah *took* Abram" certainly implies that some unrecorded circumstances took the decision out of Abram's hands; he had to leave his own country, because his father had ordered a mass emigration of the family. How hard it must have been for Abram to make sense of all this! He had been told to leave his family and country, and travel to a land God would show him. At that point in time, he was unaware that that country would be Canaan. How God would lead him was unexplained. But he believed God, and "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). Therefore when his father announced that they were emigrating to Canaan, Abram would have realized that this was a Divine prod to obey the call from God to get up and leave. Unlike the rest of Terah's unrecorded family, who would have mocked such a crazy plan, Abram willingly submitted. But how was he to leave his kindred and father's house? For they were coming with him! Indeed, Terah "took Abram". Thus Abram had faith in God's promise, yet may have balked at the command to leave his country and family. Providentially arranged circumstances then resulted in his aging father taking him, implying some degree of compulsion, and leading him out of his native country. Whilst not fully understanding how he could leave his father's household whilst they looked set to be accompanying him on this journey to a strange land, he went ahead in faith. It is emphasized that *God* "brought out" (s.w. to lead, pluck or pull out) Abram from Ur (Neh. 9:7; Gen. 15:6,7). The calling came through Abram's hearing of



the word of promise, and providentially arranged circumstances encouraging his faithful response to it.

*And left for a place which he was to receive for an inheritance afterwards. And he left not knowing where he was going to-* The promise of inheritance was of "eternal inheritance" (9:15), the same promise made in the new covenant to us. Detailed information or knowledge about the future Kingdom was not required; he didn't know where he was going to. And contrary to the apparently solid, permanent location of Judah in Palestine at the time, this was not the receipt of the promised inheritance. Abraham's faith or trust was in that he did not understand the details; he just said yes to God as far as he understood God.

*11:9 By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as yet not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise-* Abraham had been an urban dweller, both in Ur and Haran; not a bedouin. He became a wandering herdsman and tent dweller by faith in the promises to him. The chronology provided in Genesis actually allows for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to have all lived together at some point in the same encampment. "A sojourner" refers to the way Abraham recognized he was "a stranger and a sojourner" in the land (Gen. 22:4) and therefore needed to buy a burial plot there for his wife.

*11:10 For he looked for the city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God-* The urban dweller who by faith lived as a nomad always hankered after a solid city- but not Ur. He overcame the desire to return to the city of his roots by focusing instead upon the future Kingdom of God, called her "the city". This was relevant for the Jerusalem Church who are being addressed here, tempted as they were to return to the stability of the temple city. The "architect" (Gk.) of the future city was God; recalling how the ages of human history were "framed" by God (:3). The foundation of God's work is the doctrine of the Christ (6:1); He is also portrayed as the "foundation" in 1 Cor. 3:11 and Eph. 2:20. Abraham perceived that his future seed would be the foundation of his own eternal city. Again we see that it is faith in Christ which was the basis of the "faith" of Abraham and others mentioned here.

*11:11 By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had made the promise-* The seed of Abraham was only realized by faith, despite so many reasons to disbelieve. If faith were based upon rational evidence then she could never have come to such faith.

This personal nature of the promises resulted in a mutuality between God and the patriarchs, as it can between Him and all Abraham's seed. God's present judgment of us is actually related to how we 'judge' God to be. There's a mutuality between God and man in this business of present judgment. This theme is played on throughout Hebrews 11. Sarah "judged" God as faithful, and He 'judged' her as faithful (Heb. 11:11); she counted Him as trustworthy and He counted righteousness to her. As Abraham "was offering up Isaac" (RV), with the knife raised, he was "accounting" God to be capable of performing a resurrection, just as Moses quit the riches of Egypt, "accounting the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:17,19,26 RV). And yet God 'accounts' us to be faithful, imputing righteousness to us. Through these acts and attitudes of faith, "these... had witness borne to them through their faith" (Heb. 11:39 RV). It was as if their lives were lived in the

courtroom, with their actions a constant presentation of evidence to the judge of all the earth. Our judgment of God to be faithful thus becomes His judgment of us to be faithful.

"Even Sarah herself" is clearly making a point, holding up a flashing light over this particular example. There is every reason to think, from the Genesis record, that Sarah not only lacked faith in the promises, but also had a bitter, unspiritual mind. The account alludes back to Eve's beguiling of Adam when it records how "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16:2) in acquiescing to her plan to give her a seed through Abram marrying his slave girl. The whole thing between Sarah and Abraham seems wrong on at least two counts: firstly it reflects a lack of faith in the promise; and secondly it flouts God's ideal standards of marriage. Sarai seems to have recognized the error when she bitterly comments to Abram: "My wrong be upon thee" (16:5). Her comment that "the Lord hath restrained me from bearing" (16:2) would suggest that she thought she hadn't been chosen to bear the promised seed. Yet because of her faith, says Heb. 11:11, she received strength to bear that seed. Hagar was so persecuted by Sarah that she "fled from her face" (16:6). God's attitude to Hagar seems to reflect a certain amount of sympathy for the harsh way in which Sarah had dealt with her. These years of bitterness and lack of faith came to the surface when Sarah overheard the Angel assuring Abraham that Sarah really would have a son. She mockingly laughed at the promise, deep within herself (18:15). Yet according to Heb. 11:11, she rallied her faith and believed. But as soon as Isaac was born, her bitterness flew to the surface again when she was Ishmael mocking. In what can only be described as unrestrained anger, she ordered Hagar and Ishmael out into the scorching desert, to a certain death (humanly speaking). Again, one can sense the sympathy of God for Hagar at this time. And so wedged in between incidents which belied a deep bitterness, lack of faith and pride (after Isaac was born), the Spirit in Heb. 11:11 discerns her faith; on account of which, Heb. 11:12 implies ("therefore"), the whole purpose of God in Christ could go forward. See on Gal. 4:30.

Because of Sarah's faith, "therefore sprang there...so many as the stars of the sky in multitude" (:11,12). Those promises to Abraham had their fulfilment, but conditional on Abraham and Sarah's faith. Gen. 18:18-20 says that the fulfilment of the promises was conditional on Abraham teaching his children / seed the ways of God. Those promises / prophecies were "sure" in the sense that God's side of it was. Rom. 4:18 likewise comments that Abraham became "the father of many nations" precisely because he *believed* in this hope. Yet the promise / prophecy that he would be a father of many nations could sound as if it would have happened anyway, whatever. But it was actually conditional upon Abraham's faith. And he is our great example exactly because he had the possibility and option of *not* believing in the hope he had been offered. The promises to Abraham form the new covenant, of which Paul has had so much to say in Hebrews. And yet the realization of it depends upon faith, just as it had earlier depended upon the faith of Abraham and Sarah, no matter how fragile that faith was.

"Faith" in Hebrews 11 often refers to faith in Christ, the seed of Abraham. Perhaps we are to understand Sarah's faith that conception would occur as motivated by her faith that the promises of the great seed would have to come true through her as the legitimate wife of Abraham. So it was by her shadowy faith in Christ as the future seed that she sound the faith to believe that her old body could bear a child.

*11:12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of*

*the sky in multitude- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore-* According to Heb. 11:12, God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled on account of his faith; God in some way allowed Himself to be potentially limited by Abraham's faith. Indeed, the promised world-wide blessing of all nations was promised only "because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:16,18). In this sense the covenants of salvation were partly due to another man [Abraham] being faithful [although above all our salvation was due to the Lord Jesus]. In this sense he is the "father" of the faithful.

Abraham was impotent, "as good as dead". The argument here is so similar to that in Rom. 4:19. Abraham believed his body could be empowered to do it, "without being weakened in faith", the same word translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:7. Abraham was physically impotent, perhaps even seriously ill and weak at the time the promise was given- but not impotent or weak in faith. The idea of the Greek is that Abraham didn't weaken in faith as he observed / considered his body. "Considered" in Rom. 4:19 means that he didn't fix his mind upon the fact his body was dead (i.e. impotent) and unable to produce seed. He wasn't obsessed with his state, yet he lived a life of faith that ultimately God's Kingdom would come, he rejoiced at the contemplation of Christ his Lord; and he filled his life with practical service. He wasn't obsessed with the fact that in his marital position he personally couldn't have children when it seemed this was what God wanted him to do; and this was very pleasing to God. Nor did he consider the "deadness of Sarah's womb". So often we allow the apparent weakness of others to become a barrier to our faith. 'She'll never change... she just isn't capable of that'. But Abraham not only believed that *he* could do it, but that the apparent obstacle of another's weakness was also surmountable by the word of promise.

11:13 *These all died in faith-* The point is that they continued believing until the end of their lives; they did not give up. And that was a necessary exhortation for the Hebrew Christians who were giving up their faith in Abraham's seed.

*Not having received the promises, but having seen them, and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth-* All the faithful went through the same process: persuaded - embraced - confessed to the world around them. Confessing was part of the natural response to belief of the promises. Hearing God's word in faith is associated with declaring it (Jer. 9:12). The confession of being a stranger was surely that made by Abraham publicly to the local inhabitants of Canaan that he was a stranger and sojourner amongst them (Gen. 22:4).

When we read that the faithful 'saw' the promises although they didn't receive them, we are surely meant to understand that they 'saw' the *fulfilment* of the promises. This is the faith which sees that which cannot be seen in natural visible terms (:1). 'The promises' are so sure of fulfilment that the phrase is put by metonymy for 'the fulfilment of the promises'. And because of their utter certainty, we are to be strangers and pilgrims, and unworldly (Heb. 11:13,14). There is therefore an obvious link between doctrine and practice. A doctrine believed leads to us coming out of this tangled world and unashamedly speaking of our secular lives as not being what we really identify with. Believing the promises to Abraham involves open confession to the world around us.

11:14 *For they that say such things make it obvious that they are seeking after a country of their own-* Abraham made the statement that he was a stranger and sojourner in Canaan whilst he was actually there in the land (Gen. 22:4). Contrary to how Judaism reasoned, the

literal presence of the Jews in Palestine was not the fulfilment of the promises, which spoke of "eternal inheritance". They were seeking a far greater fulfilment of the promises (:16).

*11:15 And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return-* Abraham was called to leave Ur and travel to Canaan, the land promised to him. If his heart had remained in his native land, as the heart of most immigrants and exiles does, God would have worked in his life to make it possible for him to return to it, and thereby reject God's covenant with him. The fact Abraham wasn't given this opportunity indicates his faith. It also shows that God gives us the opportunity to renounce our faith if that is what we want in our hearts (cp. Balaam).

*11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one-* As noted on :14, the physical presence of the patriarchs in Canaan was not seen by them as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. They looked for an "eternal inheritance" (see on 9:15). Their desire was for "a heavenly [country]", not in the sense that they desired to go to Heaven- for they were never promised that. They looked for the Kingdom of Heaven to come on earth, symbolized in Revelation by the city of heavenly Jerusalem coming to earth at the Lord's return. The "better" nature of what they sought connects with how Hebrews uses this word of the "better" things of the new covenant in contrast to the inferior things of the old covenant. The old covenant offered Israel a national homeland, but no "eternal inheritance" (9:15). It was life eternal, eternal inheritance of the promised land, which was promised in the new covenant; it was that which was so far "better" than the promise of the old covenant. "But now they..." raises the question as to who is in view. The "they" of :15 were the patriarchs; but they were long dead and unconscious. The "they" merges with us the Christian believers, identified with Abraham's seed by baptism into that seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

*Therefore God is not ashamed of them- to be called their God-* Right now, God is ashamed or not ashamed of us, according to our separation from the spirit of this world; and yet His not being ashamed of us will also be apparent at the final judgment. We have our judgment now, from His point of view. "To be called" is literally 'to be surnamed'. His Name becomes part of ours, in spiritual terms; the things of His Name and purpose become inextricably bound up with us, just as 'Abram' was changed to 'Abraham' by inserting the middle letters of the Yahweh name into Abram's name- see on Is. 44:5.

*For He has prepared for them a city-* This is the Kingdom on earth prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). It is called a city because Paul wants the Jerusalem Hebrew Christians to whom he is speaking to realize that the "Jerusalem that now is" was not the true city of hope; and neither was Rome. Heb. 11:13-16 contains some radical demands in a first century context- to see the *true* city, when Rome was *the* city to be identified with; to be a non-citizen of any earthly state... how hard would that have been for Roman citizens to read, hear, and say 'Amen' to! This was particularly an issue for the Hebrew Christians, who were attracted to return to Judaism because the Roman legislation permitted it to exist as a recognized religion.

*11:17 By faith Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac. Yes, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son-* The tenses here are important. Abraham was counted as having offered up Isaac; hence he figuratively received him back from the dead (:19). The language of effective resurrection in :19 leads me away from thinking that the

mere act of placing Isaac on the altar was spoken of as Abraham having "offered up Isaac". Abraham had done it in his mind. God counts our intentions as if we have done them; hence in the matter of generous giving, the desire to give is all important and counted all the same as "giving" (2 Cor. 8:12). We too are asked to give up our children; not to Molech, but to God. For our children are God's children whom we raise for Him and trust Him to use them as part of a wider purpose which we have to trust Him for.

"Was offering up" invites us to play Bible television with this verse. We are taken back to Abraham there on Moriah. He who was remembering how he had laughed with joy at the promise of the seed, rejoicing to see Christ's day (Jn. 8:56), and naming the little boy "Isaac", 'laughter', to reflect his joy... was now fighting back those memories as he was offering up Isaac his son in sacrifice. "His only begotten son" emphasizes how this was all pointing forward to God offering His only begotten. Seeing Abraham had many other children, Paul may be rather forcing a similarity here, perhaps reasoning that Isaac was Abraham's only son by his legitimate wife Sarah.

11:18 *Even he to whom it was said: In Isaac shall your seed be called-* As noted on :17, we are asked to imagine Abraham's thoughts as he was offering up Isaac. He would have struggled to understand how this son of promise could be the path to the promised seed, if he had to now offer him. The faith displayed was therefore trust, trust that although we do not rationally understand, we believe that God's purpose will somehow work out. Again, faith is portrayed as not at all based on rational evidence or reasoning (see on :1).

11:19 *Abraham accounted that God is able to raise up, even from the dead. From where he did, figuratively, receive him back-* Abraham was driven to the conclusion that God would resurrect Isaac, so that the promises would be fulfilled. Faith in the Abrahamic promises likewise requires faith in the resurrection of his Messianic seed; a faith which the Hebrews were finding hard to maintain. Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was counted as if he had done it; hence the arising of Isaac from the altar was effectively his resurrection. See on :17.

Abraham 'accounted' that God was able to raise Isaac; his faith involved an intellectual process. Israel were to hear / understand "the statutes and judgments... that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them" (Dt. 5:1). Understanding is related to obedience. See on Rom. 10:10.

11:20 *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come-* Yet the record of this in Gen. 27 doesn't paint Isaac in a very positive light. "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). The AVmg. seems to bring out Isaac's superficiality: "Isaac loved Esau, because venison was in his mouth". This seems to connect with the way Esau threw away his birthright for the sake of food in his mouth. Esau was evidently of the flesh, whilst Jacob had at least some potential spirituality. Yet Isaac preferred Esau. He chose to live in Gerar (Gen. 26:6), right on the border of Egypt- as close as he could get to the world, without crossing the line. And he thought nothing of denying his marriage to Rebekah, just to save his own skin (Gen. 26:7). So it seems Isaac had some marriage problems; the record speaks of "Esau his son" and "Jacob (Rebekah's) son" (Gen. 27:5,6). The way Jacob gave Isaac wine "and he drank" just before giving the blessings is another hint at some unspirituality (Gen. 27:25). Isaac seems not to have accepted the Divine prophecy concerning his sons: "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), seeing that it was his intention to give Esau the blessings of the firstborn, and thinking that he was

speaking to Esau, he gave him the blessing of his younger brothers (i.e. Jacob) serving him (Gen. 27:29 cp. 15). Isaac didn't accept the sale of the birthright, and yet God did (Heb. 12:16,17). *And yet*, and this is my point, Isaac's blessing of the two boys is described as an act of faith; even though it was done with an element of disbelief in God's word of prophecy concerning the elder serving the younger, and perhaps under the influence of alcohol, and even though at the time Isaac thought he was blessing Esau when in fact it was Jacob. Yet according to Heb. 11:20, this blessing of Esau *and* Jacob (therefore Hebrews doesn't refer to the later blessing) was done with faith; *at that very point in time*, Isaac had faith. So God's piercing eye saw through Isaac's liking for the good life, through Isaac's unspiritual liking for Esau, through his marriage problem, through his lack of faith that the elder must serve the younger, and discerned that there was some faith in that man Isaac; and then holds this up as a stimulant for our faith, centuries later! Not only should we be exhorted to see the good side in our present brethren; but we can take comfort that this God is our God, and views our Christian hypocrisy in the same way as He viewed theirs.

11:21 *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff-* The Hebrew for "bed" has the same consonants as "staff", and is translated "staff" in the Septuagint, which Paul generally follows over the Masoretic text. It may be that Jacob considered Joseph to be the special Messianic seed (which he was, in type), and this would explain why Heb. 11:21 adds the detail that at the end of his life, as he was dying on his bed, Jacob showed his faith (i.e. his faith in Christ, which is the theme of Heb. 11) by worshipping Joseph, propping himself up on the bed head with his last energy to do it (Gk.). He clearly saw in him a type of his future redeemer. He finally accepted the truth of Joseph's dream: that Jacob must bow down to his greater son- although he reached this humility, this bowing before the spirit of Christ, in his very last breath. It seems probable that meditation on Joseph's experience was what brought Jacob to Christ; he had managed to scheme and plot his way out of every other crisis, but the loss of Joseph brought him to his knees helpless.

11:22 *By faith Joseph, when his end was near, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel and gave commandment concerning his bones-* Joseph's faith was specifically in the promises to Abraham concerning the eternal inheritance of Canaan. By faith he looked to the day when Abraham's people would no longer be in Egypt but in Canaan, and he wanted his bones buried in the promised land to show his identity with that future Kingdom rather than all the wealth of secular life in Egypt. And our lives too should be full of countless such acts of identity with the things implied in the promises to Abraham.

11:23 *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a goodly child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment-* "Faith" in Hebrews 11 generally refers to faith in the Abrahamic promises which comprise the new covenant, and in the promised, saviour seed of Abraham. It was this faith, rather than simply faith that God would save their darling baby boy, which led to Moses' parents hiding him. They perceived from babyhood that he was a child "fair to God" (Heb.); maybe they thought he would be the promised seed, or would at least typify that promised seed. So again it was their faith in the Abraham promises which motivated them. Again we note the salvation of a person as a result of the faith of third parties, just as the Lord forgave the sins of a man because of the faith of his friends (Mk. 2:5). Their faith in the promises meant that they did not fear the commandment to kill Moses; and their faith was passed on to Moses, who in maturity likewise did not fear the wrath of Pharaoh.

11:24- see on Acts 7:35.

*By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter-* "When Moses *was grown*, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens... when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren... by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. We too have points of maturity we must reach before the Lord gives us our next task.

So at age 40, Moses came to a crisis. He had a choice between the riches of Egypt, the pleasures of sin for a season, and choosing rather to suffer affliction with God's people and thereby fellowship the reproach of Christ. He probably had the chance to become the next Pharaoh, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but he consciously refused this, as a pure act of the will, as an expression of faith in the future recompense of the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which invite us to follow Moses' example in this. Paul was motivated in his rejection of worldly advantage by Moses' inspiration. And as in all things, he is our example, that we might follow Christ, who also turned down the very real possibility of temporal rulership of the world- for the sake of living the life of the cross, and thereby securing our redemption.

11:25 *Choosing instead to share ill treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time-* "(Moses) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *having chosen rather* (Gk.) to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Heb. 11:24,25) suggests that there was a struggle within the mind of Moses, between the reproach of Christ and the approbation of this world, and he then decisively came down on the right side. If we are truly saints, called out ones after the pattern of Moses, this struggle between present worldly advantage and the hope of the Kingdom must surely be seen in our minds. For this reason Moses is held up so highly as our example and pattern.

Moses could have been the next Pharaoh; according to Josephus, he was the commander of the Egyptian army. But he walked away from the possibility of being the richest man on earth, he "refused" it, because he valued "the reproach of Christ" and the recompense of the Kingdom to be *greater* riches. Yet what did he know about the sufferings of Christ? Presumably he had worked out from the promises of the seed in Eden and to the fathers that the future Saviour must be reproached and rejected; and he saw that his own life experience could have a close association with that of this unknown future Saviour who would surely come. And therefore, it seems, Moses counted the honour and wonder of this greater than the riches of Egypt. Both Paul and Moses rejected mammon for things which are abstract and intellectual (in the strict sense): the *excellency* of the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, and the Kingdom this would enable. Living when we do, with perhaps a greater knowledge of the Lord's victory and excellency, our motivation ought to be even stronger.

11:26- see on 10:35; Phil. 3:8.

*Considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. For he looked to the greater reward-* Even within Hebrews, the description of Moses' rejection of Egypt for

the sake of Christ is shown to be our example: "Esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures (i.e. Pharaoh's treasures, which he could have had if he succeeded as Pharaoh) in Egypt... let us go forth therefore unto (Jesus) without the camp, *bearing his reproach*" (Heb. 11:26; 13:13). We should be even eager to bear 'reproach for the name of Christ' as Moses did (1 Pet. 4:14), knowing it is a surety of our sharing his resurrection. For Moses, "the reproach of Christ" was his having "respect unto the recompense of the reward". He therefore must have understood in some detail that there would be a future Saviour, who would enable the eternal Kingdom promised to Abraham through his bearing the reproach of this world. Such was Moses' appreciation of this that it motivated him to reject Egypt. His motivation, therefore, was based upon a fine reflection upon the promises to Abraham and other oblique prophecies of the suffering Messiah contained in the book of Genesis. Moses knew he could have a share in the sufferings of the future saviour and thereby share his reward, because he saw the implication that Messiah would be our representative. Yet those promises are the very things which Christians now say they are bored of hearing every few weeks on a Sunday evening. No wonder we lack Moses' desire to share Christ's reproach, and thereby reject the attractions of this world. The way Moses had "respect unto the recompense of the reward" is our example; for again, even within Hebrews, we are exhorted: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great *recompense of reward*" (Heb. 11:26; 10:35). The Greek for "respect" means to look away from all else; indicating how single-mindedly and intensely did Moses look ahead to the Kingdom; the knowledge of which was, in terms of number of words, scant indeed. All he had was the covenants of promise.

Moses fought with the temptation to just observe from a distance, but then he came out into the open, declaring that he was a Hebrew, rejecting his kind Egyptian foster mother, openly declaring that he was not really her son, as both she and he had claimed for 40 years. He would have borne the shame of all this, "the reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:26). But he was not ashamed to call Israel his brethren, as Christ is not ashamed of us (Heb. 2:11- one of many allusions to Moses in Hebrews). All this suggests that like Moses, our Lord came to a point where he "came down" from obscurity to begin his work of deliverance. The references to 'coming down' in John's Gospel allude to this.

It is possible that Moses appreciated that he was a type of Christ the future Messiah; he considered "the reproach of Christ" enough to motivate him to reject the attractions of Egypt (Heb. 11:26); he knew he was sharing the sufferings of the future, ultimate saviour, and the wonder of that alone was enough to motivate him to leave the attractions of this world- even the possibility of being the next Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth. The similarities between Jesus and Moses are too many to sensibly tabulate. There is ample opportunity to enter deeply into the attitude of Moses towards Israel, and it is this which perhaps most valuably deepens our appreciation of the love of Christ for us, and of our own liability to failure after the pattern of Israel.

Moses was willing to give both his physical and *eternal* life for the salvation of Israel (Ex. 32:29-32), that God's Name might be upheld. He so loved and respected God's character, His personality (all bound up in His Name) that he was willing to forego all personal blessings, even life itself, just because of the wonder of God. A less spiritually mature Moses had been motivated 40 years earlier by his respect of the recompense of the reward (Heb. 11:26). But now his motive is the glory of God's Name. Personal possession of the Kingdom *is* held up as



a motivator in our lives; but surely, like Moses, we ought to progress towards a desire to see the achievement of God's glory, rather than being obsessed with personally finding our place in the political Kingdom.

11:27 *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king-* But Moses *did* flee Egypt, because he feared the wrath of the King (Ex. 2:14,15). It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. This is a theme here in Hebrews 11; weak faith is counted as faith all the same. In similar vein, at the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, and it seems he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14). And yet at this very time, the New Testament says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God (Lk. 20:37). But it was a momentary faith, valid all the same. Moses fled from Egypt, not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh; he went in faith (Heb. 11:27). But the Exodus record explains that actually he couldn't keep this level of faith, and fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15).

*For he endured, because he saw Him who is invisible-* *Hupomone* is generally translated "patience" or "endurance"; the idea is of the staying power that keeps a man going to the end. The meaning of *hupomone* grows as we experience more trials (Rom. 5:3; James 1:3). We find that the longer we endure in the Truth, the more we can echo the words of Peter, when the Lord asked him (surely with a lump in His throat) if he was going to turn back: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (Jn. 6:68). There is no third road in the daily decisions we face. Over the months and years, *hupomone* becomes part of our essential character; keeping on keeping on is what life comes to be all about, no matter what short term blows and long term frustrations we face. The longer we endure, the stronger that force is, although we may not feel it. Moses is described as having it at the time he fled from Egypt, even though in the short term his faith failed him at the time and he fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Yet God counted him as having that basic ability to endure, even to endure through his own failure and weakness. *This* is what God looks at, rather than our day-to-day acts of sin and righteousness. See on Heb. 12:28.

Moses forsook the possibilities of Egypt not just for the reproach of Christ"; he was also motivated by the fact that "he endured (Gk. was vigorous), as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). It was *as if* he had seen the invisible God, as he later asked to. He had the faith that sees what the rational eye cannot see (:1). When the disciples asked to see God, the Lord said that the manifestation of His character which they had seen in him was the same thing (Jn. 14:8). Our experience of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, with unveiled face like Moses, ought to be a *wondrous* experience. When Moses asked to physically see God, the Angel proclaimed the characteristics of God before him. So when we read of Moses *as it were* seeing God at the time he decided to forsake Egypt, this must mean that he so appreciated God's Name and character, he so had faith in the future Kingdom which this great Name and character promise, that he left Egypt. The Lord Jesus fed for strength on the *majesty* of the Name of Yahweh (Mic. 5:4). Therefore an appreciation of the Name of Yahweh is what will motivate us to forsake the attractions of this temporal world. This does not mean, of course, that simply pronouncing that Name in our prayers and readings is enough. We must develop an appreciation of God's righteousness, so that we read of His demonstration of grace, of mercy, of truth, of judgement for sin, and love it, revel in it,

respect it. As Paul says, if we behold the glory of the Lord as Moses did, we will by that very fact be changed into the same image of that glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Yet such an appreciation needs constant feeding and development. It is tragic, absolutely tragic, that over the next 40 years Moses lost this height of appreciation, until at the burning bush he seems to have almost completely lost his appreciation of the Name. Whatever spiritual heights we may reach is no guarantee that we must inevitably stay there.

Several Old Testament anticipations of the crucifixion involve a time of great darkness when God Himself 'came down', in a way reminiscent of the theophany on Sinai. There God Himself in person in some form 'came down' to earth. Moses saw His back parts, but not His face; for no man can see the face of God and live. He saw the face of the Angel and spoke to him as a man speaks with his friend. Moses seeing the back parts of God could even mean that God Himself came down to earth. If He did this at the institution of the Old Covenant: how much more at the death of His very own Son? The reference in Heb. 11:27 to Moses as having endured seeing the invisible may lend support to this idea that Moses did in fact see the back parts of the God whose *face* cannot be seen by men. I submit that likewise He was there, almost physically, at the cross. The blood of the covenant was shed before Him, in His presence, just as countless sacrifices in the tabernacle had foreshadowed for centuries beforehand. See on Jn. 19:19.

11:28- see on 1 Cor. 10:10.

*By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborns should not touch them-* This is another example of how the faith of one party can save others. It would not be surprising if Israel were not all obedient to the command to daub their doorposts with blood; but they were saved by Moses' faith rather than their obedience.

Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea seems to be attributed to Moses' faith (Heb. 11:28,29; Acts 7:36,38). Yet in the actual record, Moses seems to have shared Israel's cry of fear, and was rebuked for this by God (Ex. 14:15,13,10). Yet in the midst of that rebuke, we learn from the New Testament, God perceived the faith latent within Moses, beneath that human fear and panic. we can as it were do the work of the Saviour Himself, if we truly live as in Him. In this spirit, *Moses'* faith in keeping the Passover led to *Israel's* salvation, they left Egypt *by* him (Heb. 3:16; 11:28); and when Aaron deserved death, he was redeemed by Moses' prayer on his behalf (Dt. 9:20). Israel were intensely disobedient to God from the time of their exodus from Egypt, even before their deliverance from the Red Sea (Dt. 9:24 = Ex. 20:5,6). Only because of Moses' faithful keeping of the Passover did the Angel which destroyed the firstborn (both Egyptian and Hebrew- see on 1 Cor. 10:10) not destroy the whole of Israel as God had initially planned. Moses faith was not simply that God would save His people in the moment of crisis; the faith spoken of in Hebrews 11 is faith in the promises to Abraham and in his promised seed. We can conclude that these things were what motivated Moses' faith.

11:29 *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as if on dry land, which the Egyptians in trying to do were swallowed up-* "By faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them (Israel). By faith *they* (Israel) passed through the Red Sea". Yet at this time Israel were weak in faith, they passed through the Red Sea cuddling the idols of Egypt, from the day God knew them they were rebellious against

Him; so runs the refrain of the prophets. It seems that due to Moses' faith in the promises about the salvation of Abraham's seed that Israel were saved by the Passover lamb, through his faith in these promises they passed through the Red Sea; his faith was so great, his desire for their salvation so strong, that God counted it to the rest of Israel. Thus "he (Moses, in the context) brought them (Israel) out" of Egypt (Acts 7:36,38). This points forward to Christ's redemption of us, and also indicates how quickly Moses' faith rallied. And yet just prior to crossing the Sea, God rebuked Moses: "Why do you cry unto me?" - even though Moses calmly exhorted the people to have faith (Ex. 14:15 cp. 13). Yet by faith he brought them through the Red Sea. Therefore as with his first exit from Egypt (he feared the wrath of the King, and then he didn't), his faith wavered, but came down on the right side. Again we see how the examples of faith quoted in Hebrews 11 are often of faith displayed in weakness.

*11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days-* Whose faith? What faith? Was Joshua-Jesus' faith counted to the people? Or was their very weak, hope-for-the-best faith all the same accepted as faith by God's grace? The faith of Joshua was in the Abrahamic promises that the seed would inherit the land- and therefore he believed that seemingly insurmountable obstacles such as Jericho's walls would fall.

*11:31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace-* Her faith was in the promises to Abraham and their implications; things she may have heard in garbled form from her clients. She welcomed the spies ["with peace"] because she wished to identify with the people of the promised seed, and she later married into them and became an ancestor of the promised seed Himself. She believed not simply that Yahweh was more powerful than the local gods; she believed that Canaan would be given to Abraham's seed, and she wished to identify with that seed.

Rahab's faith was faith in God's grace. For Rahab was an Amorite and according to the law of Moses there was to be no pity or covenant with them- only death (cp. Dt. 7:2). Rahab had the spiritual ambition to ask that they make a covenant with her- she requests *hesed*, the common term for covenant relationship ("deal kindly with me", Josh. 2:12 cp. 1 Sam. 20:8). And the spies made a covenant with her. Grace, like love, finds a way. Remember that she was also aware of what Israel had done to their enemies on their way to Jericho- and she appears to allude to Moses' commands to destroy utterly and *not* make covenant with the peoples of the land (Dt. 2:32-37; 7:1-5; 20:16-18).

There are times when circumstances do change the appropriacy of behaviour which in more normal life we should practice. Take lying as an example. To lie is wrong. We should be truthful. Of course. But think of Rahab. She lied- and her lie and acts of deception are quoted in the New Testament as acts of faith! Further, Rahab implied that the Israelite spies were her clients- "there came men unto me" (Josh. 2:4) appears to be a euphemism- and she gave the impression that of course, as they were merely passing clients, how did she know nor care who they were nor where they went? Her male interrogators would've found it hard to press her further for information after she said that. So she not only lied but she gave the impression that the messengers of the Kingdom of God were immoral- in order to protect both them and her. Of course the way she left a red cord hanging from her window, as if almost inviting people to imagine the spies had been let down over the wall from her home on the wall, was a tremendous act of faith and witness by her, but she presumably kept to her story that they were her anonymous clients. For she was still living in her home when the city was taken. Her witness was thus an indirect one to those who wished to perceive it, but it was

made within the context of a major series of untruths. The Hebrew midwives lied to the Egyptians- and were blessed for it. And we could give other examples. If we probe further, and ask why such lies were acceptable and even required, we find that often those lies were connected with saving life. To do anything that would cause the loss of human life when it is in our power to save it is dangerously close to murder.

11:32 *And what more shall I say? For time will run out if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-* "Time will run out" is another example of language appropriate to a sermon being given live; see on 13:22.

The Lord's idea of binding the strong man must surely look back to Samson. The language can't just be accidentally similar (cp. Jud. 16:21). This means that the Lord saw Samson as the very epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous. The mention of all the names given here makes us reflect that all of them had weakness, quite significantly so; but their faith, weak as it was at times, was deeply impressive to God. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was graciously counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). The exploits later mentioned have relevance to Samson in particular, who killed a lion, escaped fire and killed many Philistines by his faith- so the Spirit tells us. Yet these things were all done by him at times when he had at best a partial faith, or was living out moments of faith. He had a worldly Philistine girlfriend, a sure grief of mind to his Godly parents, and on his way to the wedding he met and killed a lion- through faith, Heb. 11 tells us (Jud. 14:1-7). The Philistines threatened to burn him with fire, unless his capricious paramour of a wife extracted from him the meaning of his riddle. He told her, due, it seems, to his human weakness and hopeless sexual weakness. He then killed 30 Philistines to provide the clothes he owed the Philistines on account of them answering the riddle (Jud. 14:15-19). It is evident that Samson was weak in many ways at this time; the Proverbs make many allusions to him, the strong man ruined by the evil Gentile woman, the one who could take a city but not rule his spirit etc. And yet underneath all these weaknesses, serious as they were, there was a deep faith within Samson which Heb. 11 highlights.

11:33 *Those who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions-* This states that the likes of Abraham obtained promises by their faith. Yet the Old Testament record clearly enough states that the promises were just given to them by God, the calling of grace; they weren't requested by the patriarchs. Indeed, David was surprised at the promises God chose to make to him. Conclusion? God read their unspoken, unprayed for desires for Messiah and His Kingdom as requests for the promises- and responded. Their weak or hazy, vague faith was counted as faith. This was the case with the faith of Sarah and Abraham as noted earlier. See on :32.

11:34 *Quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens-* All these things have strange reference to Samson; see on :32. Perhaps he is the particular epitome of Old Testament faith which is chosen, because his faith was so weak. Paul is not appealing for perfection; he is teaching that God is eager to accept any faith in His promises as faith, and the Hebrews should not be influenced by the perfectionism of Judaism to think that weak faith was not acceptable. That encouragement is needed today by those who have been spiritually abused

by the high bars and standards demanded of them by legalistic religion. Samson is listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong. A character study of Samson must remember this about him. This could suggest that he was even weaker than a normal man; or it could be a reference to the way in which out of his final spiritual weakness and degradation he was so wonderfully strengthened (Jud. 16:28).

11:35 *Women received their dead by a resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection-* The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22); and thus Heb. 11:35 alludes to this incident by saying that through faith- in this case, the faith of Elijah, a third party- women received their dead raised to life. The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Heb. 11 cites women receiving their dead back to life as an example of faith. Because of the faith and prayers of the women, a third party, their dead loved ones were at times resurrected. Lazarus being raised because of his faithful sisters Martha and Mary is the obvious example we know about, but the Hebrew writer may well have had his mind on unrecorded Old Testament examples too. Our faith in prayer in some sense limits God's ability. But "faith" in Hebrews 11 is specifically faith in the promises to Abraham which form the basis of the new covenant. The women mentioned therefore believed that the promises implied future resurrection; and yet they believed that those promises could have some present realization too.

Some were tortured "not accepting redemption" because their eyes of faith were upon the future resurrection implied in the promises to Abraham. By implication they accepted the true redemption of the blood of Christ rather than the pseudo-redemption offered by this world and the claims of Judaism and the temple cult. Again, the redeeming work of Christ is what fortifies men against the fake Kingdom and redemption of the anti-Christ anti-Kingdom of this world. There will be degrees of reward in God's Kingdom- a "better resurrection" for those who endured torture. The comfort is that those who did not endure- and there would have been many- may also be saved. But those who did will have a "better resurrection". This gradation of service and reward, some trading their talents better than others, is impossible for the legalistic mindset to cope with. But ranges of possible response to God's love, and appropriate eternal consequence for the choices made, is all the stuff of living personal relationship with God.

11:36 *And others were tested by mockings and whippings, yes, also by bonds and imprisonment-* These words are all used about the sufferings of Paul and his team, many of them witnessed personally by the Hebrew Christians. And of course Paul had himself done these things to the Hebrew Christians. So these anonymous "others" would bring the cloud of witnesses painfully up to date; for there is a chronological progression throughout Hebrews 11 to this point.

11:37 *They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tested, they were killed with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated-* The reference may be to various Jewish traditions about the fate of the prophets and some Jews during the time of the Maccabees. But the point of Hebrews 11 is that the faithful endured for the sake of their faith in the promises to Abraham, the same new covenant which was operative for the Hebrew Christians. So I personally doubt that the heroics of the Maccabees is paramount in reference here. I have noted throughout that it was often flecks of faith in moments of weakness which are being picked up here in the record. It was Jacob who wore

animal skins- in deceit and weakness, but out of an enthusiasm for the promises to Abraham to be made to him. And thus he became destitute, afflicted and ill-treated by Laban. Perhaps John the Baptist is also in view; he is presented as a cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

11:38 (*Of whom the world was not worthy*), *wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes of the earth*- The "world" in John's Gospel and at times in Hebrews often refers to the Jewish world. The Jewish world had turned away from God and His Son, and the fact the faithful listed so far were largely Jews meant that the Jewish world was not worthy of them. This was another warning to the Hebrews not to return to Judaism and the Jewish world. It was faithless Israel who wandered in deserts; but for some, they did so in faith in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, that at the end of their desert wandering there would be a promised land. David's wandering in deserts and mountains under persecution was motivated by faith in the promise that somehow, God's Kingdom would be established in Israel and the ancient promises come true, as well as those given to him personally. The possibility of a reference to David is strengthened by the next phrase about living in caves and holes. For identical language is found in 1 Sam. 13:6 concerning Israel's pining away when under attack by the Philistines. Yet some did so in faith that the Abrahamic promises would be fulfilled, even though it seemed at the time that Philistine domination was never going to permit that. Likewise "The children of Israel made them the dens ('dry river channels') which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds" (Jud. 6:2). Some of the Israelites who fled to the dens and caves in Jud. 6:2 are described as heroes of faith because of their faith that somehow, enemy domination would and must end because of the implications of the promises to Abraham. And yet their domination by the Philistines was a result of their idolatry. They were idolatrous, and yet some had faith; and it was this faith which was perceived by God.

11:39 *And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, did not receive the fulfilment of the promise*- That witness, as noted on :11, was before God in the court room of Heaven. Judaism posited that the promises to Abraham and the new covenant had already been fulfilled because Israel were in their land and had the temple system. Paul is arguing that Christians are identified with the Old Testament faithful who did not consider that those things meant that the promises had been fulfilled. Seeing God keeps His promises, there had to come a far fuller fulfilment, of "eternal inheritance", implying eternal life.

11:40 *God having provided some better thing involving us, that without us they should not be made perfect*- All the believers are rewarded *together*, at the same time; the Greek for "without us" means 'at a space from'. Therefore there was no way that Judaism's claim that the promises had been fulfilled could be true. This verse may also teach that the number of 'the believers' is completed only by our development of faith- implying that the sooner this happens, the sooner the united perfection of the faithful can occur. God "provided" or planned this in advance; because the eye of faith can perceive how the ages of human history were structured by Him (:3). He is the "architect" of the city of God's Kingdom to come (:10). Being "made perfect" is therefore presented as the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham; and it is this moral "perfection" by imputed righteousness which the new covenant offered, according to how Paul has reasoned so far in Hebrews. Yet the literal realization of that in physical terms shall come only when the Lord returns. Then we shall be "made perfect", and

not by offering animals now. It is the Lord Jesus, the seed of Abraham, who was "made perfect" by His sufferings (2:10; 5:9; 7:28). By being in Him, we too shall share that perfection; whereas obedience to the law made nobody perfect (7:19; 9:9). By status and in prospect, we have already been "made perfect" (10:14), the spirits or characters of dead believers have already been "made perfect" in God's record book (12:23), but the physical outworking of that shall be when all believers in imputed righteousness are "made perfect" by nature at the second coming.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1- see on Rom. 14:8,9.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us-* We are to run the race encouraged by all those who have held on to their faith previously- for that is what encouraged them in their day. The Hebrews were returning to legalism, offering sacrifices for sin rather than trusting in the Lord's work. And by so doing they were actually cumbering themselves with sin, and with 'weights' which hindered their running the race.

The race could imply that before each of us an individualized racetrack is set, and we are to run that race having laid aside every distraction. Ask God to reveal to you His intentions and specific plans for you. Likewise when Paul wrote of shedding *the* sin which doth so easily beset us, he may have been suggesting that we each have our own specific weakness to overcome. This is certainly a comfort to us in our spiritual struggles. We aren't alone in them. They were given to us. We aren't alone with our nature. The purpose and plan of God for us is articulated even through the darkest nooks of our very essential being. Understanding this should make us the more patient with our brethren, whose evident areas of weakness are not ours. The race is "set before us", and the same word is used of how the Lord Jesus ran His race looking at the joy "set before" Him (:2). The connection is in that the race and the joy are the same, they merge into one, the road becomes the destination, for those who have the solid hope of salvation ahead of them.

12:2 *Looking to Jesus the author and completer of faith, who for the joy that was set before him-* The race is to be run (:1) with our eye on "Jesus" as the finish point. Our ultimate aim is to become like Him; "we shall be like Him". The joy set before the Lord was to sit at the right hand of God, where He mediates for us. In chapters 8-10 the argument has been that as the Lord entered the Holiest and there does service for us, so we have also entered. Our joy ahead is to be His joy, to be as Him, in working for others to the Father's glory. Our efforts to do so in this life are designed to help us acquire a taste for that eternal way of being.

"Author" could be translated "prince / leader", but the translation "author" is valid; and it connects with Him being also the completer of our faith. Grace means that God and not ourselves takes the initiative. As noted on 11:1, true faith in God is predicated upon the Lord Jesus; it is encounter with Him which authors faith in us. And He develops, matures and completes it, if we let Him. All appeals to scientific 'evidence' [falsely so called] for God and the Bible are pointless and misdirecting us; for it is the Lord Jesus who authors and develops faith in our hearts, through the work of the Spirit which matures our faith. "Completer" is the same word just used in 11:40 of how we shall be "made perfect" at His return; but that point of faith reached at our death or His coming will have been developed by His direct action in our lives. Hebrews 11 speaks of how so many died in faith, the process of faith development continued unto the end of their days. In this we see the significance of old age; we may cease to have much significance in secular life, but the Lord's process of developing our faith continues unto the end. We must remember that the Lord's efforts to mature faith continue in the lives of all His people, including those whom we may consider too far gone in their falling away. Any efforts we make for them will have His blessing, and will be channels of His activity for them.



"Set before" can imply a vision, as if Christ saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes Christ looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore". Christ is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

"For the joy set before Him He endured the cross" may seem on first reading to mean that He did serve for a reward. Until we understand that the Greek word *anti* translated "for" really means 'in place of'. With evident reference to the wilderness temptation to take the Kingdom joys without the cross, the writer is making the point that instead of the joy that the tempter of His own flesh set before Him, He endured the cross.

*Endured the cross, despising the shame, and has been sat down at the right hand of the throne of God-* The shame of the cross is a theme of the records. The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself". These mockings were therefore part of "the cross". The "cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life of cross carrying*. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles.

There's significant Old Testament emphasis upon the fact that those who are truly on the Lord's side shall not be put to shame. It was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that He set His face like a flint, "that I shall not be ashamed" (Is. 50:7). Perhaps His lack of destructive anger was because He didn't let Himself be shamed by men, instead taking His self-worth and values from God's acceptance of Him. To avoid "anger" in the wrong sense, we need to avoid being wrongly shamed. And we can do this by ensuring we ourselves aren't led into shame, due to placing too great a value upon the opinions of men. Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed. Thus Joel begins his prophecy with a call to "be ashamed" before God for sin, and concludes with the comfort that in this case, "my people shall never [again] be ashamed" (Joel 1:1; 2:27). In this sense we can understand the comment that the Lord Jesus 'despised the shame' of the cross (Heb. 12:2). He 'thought against' it [Gk.], he refused to be shamed before men, even though naked and bedraggled and humanly defeated; for He believed that He was being 'lifted up' in glory from God's viewpoint. Paul could say that it mattered very little to him how men thought of him, for the Lord's judgment was all that mattered (1 Cor. 4:4); and the Lord Jesus gave somewhat the same impression, for He evidently "regarded not the person of men" (Mt. 22:16). If our value, validation, self-worth

etc. are dependent upon men's opinions of us, then we're likely to be easily shamed; and this sets us up for all manner of anger feelings, and makes us the more easily woundable by those whose acceptance we crave. Quite simply- if God has accepted us, then don't let ourselves be shamed by men.

12:3 *Think on him that endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart-* "Think on Him" is the essence of true spirituality and Christianity; it is who we are when nobody is watching which is the litmus test of our faith. We need to repeatedly challenge ourselves with the question as to how much we are thinking on Him; whether we are truly Christ-centred or not. Thinking about issues vaguely connected to our religion is not always the same as this mental focus upon Him which is so utterly critical. The apostasy of the Hebrews was most essentially a mental issue; they were growing weary and fainting in their minds (AV) in that they were losing their personal focus upon the Lord Jesus.

12:4- see on Col. 2:1.

*In your striving against sin you have yet to resist to the point of shedding your blood-* Sin is personified here, as it often is. Once that basic truth is accepted, it should not be difficult to appreciate that sometimes that personification is called satan or the devil, the great enemy.

We must balance ourselves against Him who endured such contradiction, and the more freely confess that we "have not yet resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". Only by a personal reconstruction and reliving of the cross, and a serious, sustained attempt to live out something of its spirit in our lives, will we come to a recognition of the depth of our own failure, our need for His grace, and an appreciation of what really was done for us. And if we realize all this, we will respond- mightily. As the forgiveness suggested by the sin offering led on to the burnt offering (with its message of dedication), so our desperation leads to our dedication (Lev. 5:7).

The struggle against sin in the Lord which led to blood alludes to His sweat as blood drops. It is a call for us to recognize this, and to have the picture of our Lord in Gethsemane as a motivation "lest we be wearied, and faint in (our) minds". Paul is saying: 'You've never got anywhere near that intensity. So don't get tired of the unending mental battle against your natural mind. Consider Him there' (Lk. 22:44). But, the implication is, we ultimately should. We bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body (2 Cor. 6:10)- not just at resurrection, but now. And it is through this that we bear witness to the resurrected Jesus. He can be seen as alive because He lives in us. The disciples in Gethsemane slumbered and slept when the Lord had specifically asked them to struggle on in prayer. A stone's throw from them, the Son of God was involved in a height of spiritual struggle utterly unequalled. And they dozed off in the midst of their half-serious prayers. This incident is alluded to here in a powerful appeal to us: "Consider him that endured [as the kneeling disciples should have watched the distant Lord Jesus as an inspiration to themselves]... lest *you* be wearied, and faint in *your* minds [as they did]. *Ye* have not yet resisted unto blood [cp. the Lord's sweat as drops of blood], [in *your*] striving against sin". Time and again Paul alludes, sometimes perhaps even subconsciously, to the record of Gethsemane. He evidently saw in those garden prayers and the disciples' sleepiness a powerful cameo of our every battle and failure; and a strong, urgent plea for us to rise up and catch the fire of real spiritual struggle.

*12:5 You have forgotten the word of encouragement which reasons with you as with sons: My son, do not regard lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor become faint when you are reproved by Him-* This alludes to the idea of a living word by speaking of an Old Testament passage as 'reasoning' with us. We are a separate people. We have been redeemed from them by the precious blood of Christ. We are spiritual Jews. What God spoke to men like Jacob, He therefore spoke to us (Hos. 12:5; Gen. 28:15 cp. Heb. 12:5,6). All Scripture is recorded for *our* learning and comfort (Rom. 15:4). The exhortation of Prov. 3:11 "speaketh unto *you* as unto children...". Hebrews 3 quotes Psalm 95 as relevant to all readers. The warnings there for its "today" were also be a warning for the first century "today", and yet likewise we can still take hold of the past word of God and relate it to the needs of our "today". We can fail to personalize God's word, in the sense of realizing that it speaks to us personally. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar what would happen to him unless he repented; and he wouldn't listen. When his judgment came, God told him: "O King Nebuchadnezzar, *to thee it is spoken*: The kingdom is departed from thee" (Dan. 4:31). We have a way of reading and hearing, and yet not making the crucial connection with ourselves.

The quotation from Proverbs 3 is about how "my son" should accept discipline. But the "my son" passages in Proverbs were particularly relevant to the Lord Jesus. Prov. 3:4 speaks of the son growing in favour with God and man, and that is quoted about the Lord in Lk. 2:52. Here, a few verses later in Prov. 3:12, the "my son" is defined as "the son in whom [the heavenly Father] delights". That Son in whom God's soul delighted was the Lord Jesus. And so a passage specifically about the Lord is quoted here about us, implying we are in Him. And that is exactly the context here in Hebrews 12. The Lord's sufferings are to be seen as ours, and all are specific hard experiences are to be understood as in some way a fellowshipping of His sufferings.

*12:6 For the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives-* The persecution of the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem is portrayed by Paul as the Lord's discipline. Their error was presumably in turning away from His Son and back to Judaism; and in resisting the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. But discipline should never be perceived as a withdrawal of love, and Paul emphasizes that point here. Despite their apostasy, the Father was in process of receiving [Gk. admitting, accepting] them as His adopted sons, and He was chastising them so that they would adopt the family likeness. This of course was quite against the spirit of Judaism, which assumed that Jewish birth was all that was needed to be in the Divine family. The emphasis may be upon *every* son receiving discipline and chastisement; for the Greek words are used about the Lord's chastening and suffering in His time of dying (Lk. 23:22; Mt. 20:19; Jn. 19:1). His sufferings then are ours today; and they are intended as part of our spiritual path to glory.

*12:7 Endure your sufferings as a father's chastening; it shows how God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom his father does not chastise?-* As noted on :6, the Lord's sufferings are to be ours. The Father's chastening of Him was not in the sense of correcting error, but in order to stimulate His spiritual growth. And so it is with our sufferings; they can of course be for correction, but there is no direct link between sin and suffering in the immediate term. The fact we experience sufferings which can be related to those of God's Son shows that we are indeed His children. And we can thereby take comfort that we are God's children.

12:8 *But if you are without chastening, of which all have been made partakers, then aren't you illegitimate children and not real sons?*- This is the error of the prosperity Gospel, the idea that God is the source of only positive experience. The idea is that if we don't experience God's chastening, we are not therefore His true children. We may appear His children, but we are illegitimate. The Hebrew Christians were being wooed by the temple system; their persecution from them and difficulties with the Roman authorities would apparently cease if they reunited with Judaism, which was a recognized religion under Caesar. But then they would be God's children only in appearance; in real spiritual terms, they would be illegitimate. Paul uses the same argument in the allegory of Galatians 4; the Jerusalem that now is were to be associated with Ishmael, the illegitimate son of Abraham, and not with Isaac, in whom the seed was called. "Partakers" is a major theme in Hebrews; we are made partakers in Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the calling from Heaven (1:9; 3:1,14; 6:4). But these wonderful things involve likewise a partaking in the Lord's sufferings under God's good hand; and "all" the true children must partake of them.

12:9 *Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them respect; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*- The chastening of our natural fathers was to set us in the path of being normal responsible human beings after the flesh. But all the same, a life no matter how well lived ends in death. God's chastening is so that we might develop spiritually, and live eternally. To submit ourselves to God means more specifically submitting ourselves to the gift of His righteousness and not seeking to 'get' righteousness by our own works; Judaism had failed to submit to God in this way (Rom. 10:3). We have been made subject to the Lord Jesus (Eph. 1:22; 5:24), made the footstool of His feet in status (10:13), but we must live this out in practice. Thus all things have been put in subjection under Him in prospect and in status, but now we see not yet all things subjected unto Him in practice (2:8). In :23 we will read of the spirits of just men perfected; their spirits, who they were in essence, had been perfected by the Father's work with them through the processes of chastisement throughout their lives.

12:10 *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, so that we may be partakers of His holiness*- This was an appeal to the Hebrew culture of respect to fathers. The problem was that many of the Hebrew Christians had fathers who were or had been in their lives staunch Judaists. The call of the Gospel was to be in subjection to our heavenly Father more than to the fathers of our flesh. The discipline of human fathers is often *ad hoc* and at times inappropriate; here too severe, there too lax. But the hand of the heavenly Father is not like that; we can be guaranteed that every touch of His hand is for our eternal "profit". That word is associated with the work of the Spirit in human lives (Jn. 16:7; 1 Cor. 12:7), which is how in practice God chastises / operates in our lives.

Our chastening by God is so "that we might be partakers of His holiness". The ideas of sanctification and holiness are parallel (e.g. "sanctify yourselves... for I am holy", Lev. 11:44). It is the word of the Gospel that sanctifies (Jn.17:17), thus enabling us to be partakers of God's holiness. The message of the Gospel word is that event now has ultimate meaning, for it is the good news that God's chastening is preparing us to be sanctified / made holy so that we may do His work. Paul has previously argued that the goal of our spiritual journey is that we in Christ might enter the holiest to do God's service, for others to His glory. As noted on :8, we are partakers in the Lord and His sufferings, but our identity with Him means that we are both now and eternally partakers in His holiness, His righteousness imputed to us.

12:11 *All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit to those that have been exercised thereby- the fruit of righteousness-* There is a parallel between the action of the Gospel word upon a man and the effect of trials: "Chastening... yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11 AV). Yet "the word of righteousness... strong meat" leads to those who respond to the word of God "by reason of use (having) their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (5:13,14); and the word abiding in us also yields the fruits of righteousness (Jn. 15:4,7). The word of the Gospel enables us to make sense of "all chastening", and there is a synthesis between our life experience and that word, whereby we can be assured that there is no such thing as random event in our lives, but all chastening has a potential role to play in exercising us unto the fruit of righteousness. The "fruit of righteousness" is a term elsewhere used about the fruits of the Spirit filling our lives insofar as the gift of the Spirit works within believing hearts (Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11). Paul speaks of the work of the Spirit here in terms of the Lord's chastening, designed to bring forth spirituality in our spirit or character. To receive the Spirit, therefore, is no joyful thing in practice in that it will be associated with Divinely directed chastening.

12:12 *Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees-* The Hebrews were fainting in the Gospel race. Now if Scripture interprets Scripture at all, this just has to be an allusion back to feeble-kneed Moses, with his hanging-down hands being held up. And the apostle says: 'You are the one with feeble knees and hands, represented by Moses in Ex. 17!'. This allusion also critiques the Judaist view of Moses as the supreme icon of spirituality. But the quotation in full is from Is. 35:3, which urges the spiritually weak to be strengthened because the day of the Messianic Kingdom is very near. And this was so relevant to the Hebrew Christians. Paul again reasons as if the second coming was just around the corner; and it could've been in the first century. But God's people refused to heed the exhortations, and so that day was delayed until our last days.

12:13 *And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be disabled further, but rather be healed-* The unbelieving world is repeatedly characterized as walking in a crooked path (Lk. 3:5; Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15 and often in Proverbs). Quietly starting every day right is part of our walking in a *straight* path, following the way of the cherubim, walking in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25); and by walking in that straight daily path we will not have opportunity to stumble. But the message here is not just personal; we are to make straight paths for our collective feet as a community, so that the lame may not be further stumbled but rather be healed. Church life in community so often ends up placing a cloud of legislation and legalistic conformities in the way of the stumbling, so that they are not healed but made to stumble further. The church should be a straight path between God's Kingdom and stumbling man; that is to be the repeated and simple focus of all collective activity. And by not doing so, we are going to be guilty of causing others to stumble, which nets condemnation.

12:14 *Follow after peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one shall see the Lord-* The idea of "peace" is of peace with God and each other on the basis of sin forgiven. This is the way to make straight collective paths for our communal feet (see on :13). If we are to partake in the Lord's holiness (see on :10), we are to seek it proactively. The idea of following after connects with the picture of following a straight path in :13. It is a lack of peace within the community which causes the lame to stumble further; and a focus upon holiness and holding in view the final end of 'seeing the Lord' will lead us to avoid making

others stumble. Seeing the Lord is understood in Revelation in fairly literal terms; God Himself shall dwell upon earth, we will see His face, as Job and others hoped for. This is further evidence that we are to understand God as a personal being rather than as an abstraction.

12:15- see on 1 Jn. 2:28.

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many are defiled-* The bitter root refers to a poisonous plant growing up in the path to the Kingdom spoken of in :13 and :14. It is the responsibility of each of us, and not just the elders, to ensure that none fail of God's grace; and the Judaist menace was taking people away from that grace. The bitter rooted plant could lead to many being defiled, a term with cultic overtones. Defilement meant that the defiled could no longer serve in the temple cult, and the holiness / imputed righteousness which was to be followed after and attained by grace would then be made null and void. The quotation is from Dt. 29:18 LXX which speaks of a false teacher arising and inviting God's people to serve the idols of the world around them. This is how Paul presented the Judaizers with their appeal to the Jerusalem Christians to return to the apparent monotheism of the temple cult. It was no more than idolatry; and we noted on 1:1 that Paul was deeply touched by Stephen's address in Acts 7 and reflects it in his reasoning to the Hebrew Christians. Stephen too had by inference made this same point. And this is how Judaism should be seen by Christians today.

12:16 *Ensure that no one is an immoral or Godless person like Esau, who for one meal sold his own birthright-* The false teachers of :15 are associated with immorality; and this connection is seen throughout the New Testament warnings against false teachers. They were not simply intellectually mistaken. There was a moral issue too; Judaism was attractive even to Gentile converts in places like Corinth and Ephesus because the idea of justification through a few rituals opened up the way to behave immorally in other areas of life which were outside the circumference of the rituals. The Hebrew Christians had identified with Isaac, the true seed; and thereby with Jacob too. It was Judaism which was the illegitimate seed of Abraham, associated with Hagar (Gal. 4), the illegitimate children of :8. By returning to Judaism they were selling their birthright for temporal benefit of the moment- the apparent safety from Roman and Jewish persecution. Judaism is here called "Godless", just like Esau, despite his public attempts to be pleasing to his father Isaac by choosing wives he thought might please them. Esau was the firstborn, but he threw this away. The Lord Jesus is the "firstborn" of all creation, a form of the same Greek word used for "birthright". The believers are counted as the firstborn who were saved by the Passover lamb (11:28), and thus are "the church of the firstborn" (:23). But they were giving away that birthright for temporal benefit, just as many do today in different contexts.

12:17 *For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no conditions for a change of mind, though he sought it diligently with tears-* Esau before Isaac, pleading with him to change his irrevocable rejection, is picked up here as a type of the rejected at the day of judgment. The implication is that Jacob at this time symbolized the saints; yet he was no saint at that time. If Esau's rejection by Isaac is indeed a picture of the rejection of the goats at the final judgment, Isaac there becomes a hazy prefigurement of our future judge. And yet the record presents a scene of both father and rejected son as shaken and helpless together, both dearly wishing it could be different (Gen.

27:33). The sadness of Isaac becomes a figure of the pathos and sadness of God in rejecting the wicked. Note how the LXX of Gen. 27:38 adds the detail: "And Isaac said nothing; and Esau wept". We are left to imagine the thoughts of Isaac's silence. Truly our God takes no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked (Ez. 33:11).

Esau's great and bitter cry for blessing is quoted here as typical of the attitude of all the rejected. He had earlier shrugged at the implications of selling his birthright, but now his self-rejection was being worked out in practice. The rejected argue back "When did we see you...?". Surely they wouldn't have bothered doing so, unless they were upset at their rejection, and desiring to see the verdict altered. Israel's passing through the Red Sea is a definite type of baptism, and their largely unsuccessful wilderness journey therefore becomes a pattern of failed Christian lives. Yet when they were told that they were unworthy to enter the land, obvious as it must have been to them, they repented and were willing to make any sacrifice to enter it (Num. 14:40-48). When they disobeyed God's word and fled to Egypt from the Babylonians, they then so wanted to return to their land [cp. the Kingdom]- but it was all too late (Jer. 44:14). Cain is another type of the rejected- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16). The Hebrews were warned not to follow Esau's sinful example (Gen. 27:34), otherwise at the judgment they would experience what he did. In view of this, the weeping of the rejected at judgment may be as a result of desperate pleading with the Lord to change his mind. Earlier in Hebrews the point is made that "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy". The phrase "without mercy" is surely included to point out that the condemned would have earnestly pleaded for mercy, after the pattern of Cain, the foolish virgins pleading for entry... The next verse continues: "Of how much sorer punishment... shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God?" (Heb. 10:28,29), indicating that the sad picture of those condemned under the old Covenant, pleading for mercy, will be repeated at the judgment of those under the new Covenant.

And yet the impossibility of retracting the decision may not only refer to the finality of judgment day. The passage reads more comfortably as if Paul means that if they returned to the temple cult, there would be no way of coming back to Christ. And yet surely any sinner can always repent? Perhaps Paul is reasoning as in :12 (see note there) as if the Lord's return is around the corner. The temple cult was about to be destroyed as the Lord had predicted in the Olivet prophecy, and if now at the last moment the Hebrew Christians returned to it, then they were going to be destroyed in its destruction.

12:18 *For you have not come to a mountain that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest-* The new covenant means that we are not under the old covenant. We are not as Israel standing nervously before the mount Sinai as the covenant was given. The language of darkness, blackness and fire is all used elsewhere of condemnation at the last day. This was what the old covenant would lead to for sinful man. But the awesomeness of the scene there, however, looked forward to the even greater awesomeness of the things to which we stand related. The blood of Christ is as palpable as fire, and as real and actually demanding as words booming from Sinai. The mount "might be touched"- but on pain of death (Ex. 19:12), and :20 implies that some did touch it and die.

12:19 *And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words which they that heard them begged that no more words should be spoken to them-* The trumpet sound will be associated with the Lord's return and the summons to meet Him in judgment. But we can come boldly, knowing we are covered in His righteousness, not fearing our own sins and disobedience, knowing all sin has been dealt with. Israel there sensed their weakness and tendency to disobedience; they begged that the words of command would no longer be spoken to them, for they feared their own tendency to disobedience. This fear of sin and disobedience is not to be felt under the new covenant; instead we eagerly seek for progressive relationship with God through the revelation of His word to us, without fear of our spiritual inadequacy.

12:20 *For they could not endure that which was commanded- If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned-* Israel were disobedient even to the peripheral command not to touch the mountain; let alone to the actual content of the covenant. The old covenant therefore propelled men away from God rather than towards Him.

12:21 *And so fearful was the appearance that Moses said: I am exceedingly afraid and trembling-* Again there is the implication that Moses was not to be read as the acme of spirituality which Judaism presented him as. He himself sensed his own moral weakness as he climbed the mountain which would lead to death for any other being, human or animal, who touched it. There is no direct record of Moses saying what he here says; Paul may have been inspired to share this with us for the first time. But he reasons as if Moses' words were already recorded and known. We read in Ex. 19:16 that the people trembled; perhaps we are to understand that Moses as one of them, the sinful mass, trembled likewise, and said so before God. He as a sinner received the old covenant, trembling at his sense of moral failure. The contrast is thereby heightened with how the Lord Jesus, without sin, although also one of us, mediated the new covenant.

12:22- see on Jud. 5:19,20; Gal. 4:26; Eph. 2:19.

*But you have come to association with mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels-* Paul was writing to the Jerusalem Christians who were tempted to return to the temple cult on mount Zion. He is seeking to persuade them that the true Zion and Jerusalem is "heavenly", the community of true believers in the new covenant is a city waiting to come down from Heaven to earth as it were [as spoken of in Revelation]. But "the Jerusalem that now is" remained in bondage (Gal. 4). The new covenant is associated with hosts of Angels, just as the old covenant was, but as explained in Heb. 1, they are under the control of the Lord Jesus and work for the guidance of those in the new covenant and not in the old.

12:23 *To the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect-* Just as :1 says we are surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses of former believers who died in faith, so we are associated with the heavenly church. There is no conscious survival of death, no immortal soul that goes to heaven after death. But through the Spirit, God is at work maturing or perfecting the spirits, the personalities, of His people; and on death, they continue to live on in His memory, as it were. Their names are in the book of life, "enrolled in heaven", and they have already been judged by God "the judge of all" His people, as being acceptable. If we



abide in Christ, we can be confident of salvation should the Lord return now or we die. We are therefore associated with the community of God's true Israel, those who shall live eternally. We are all saved because of being effectively "in Christ", the firstborn (see on :16 concerning the birthright or right of being the firstborn). Only the firstborn was saved at the Passover. We are the church of firstborns, a paradox as it stands written. For there can be only one firstborn. A whole community can't be "firstborns". But we are, through being in Christ. We are the new priesthood; and the priests gave their lives to God in recognition of the fact that He had saved the lives of the firstborn at the Passover and Red Sea deliverance (Num. 3:12). Our deliverance from the world at baptism was our Red Sea. We have been saved. Those firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). We are now being led towards that glorious Kingdom, when by rights we ought to be lying dead in that dark Egyptian night. The wonder of it all demands that like the Levites, we give our lives *back* to God, in service towards His children.

We are come *now* "to God the judge of all" (Heb. 12:23); God is *now* enthroned as judge (Ps. 93:2; Mt. 5:34 "the heaven *is* God's throne"). We are now inescapably in God's presence (Ps. 139:2); and 'God's presence' is a phrase used about the final judgment in 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10. Hence "God is [now] the judge: he putteth down one and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:7) – all of which He will also do at the last day (Lk. 14:10). So "The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now" (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). God isn't passive to human behaviour- right now "To every matter there is a time and a judgment (LXX *krisis*)" (Ecc. 8:6 RVmg.). He perceives our actions right now as critically important. And this should highlight to us the crucial importance of life and right living today.

Israel's exodus from Egypt on Passover night was a type of our exodus from the world at the second coming (Lk. 12:35,36 = Ex. 12:11). The firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). Perhaps 90% of the firstborns failed to be delivered because they murmured (see on 1 Cor. 10:10), they allowed themselves to be distracted from the fundamental basis of their redemption: the blood of the lamb. What percentage will it be for the new Israel?

It's also possible that the "spirits" are the guardian Angels of the righteous (see on Dan. 5:23). We are associated with the hosts of Angels (:22). These Angels enrolled the names of the responsible at the beginning of the world, but they are capable of removal from the book. It is as if God informed the Angels of all those they would be dealing with during human history, and they subsequently have kept a record of the works of each of them as they guide them through life.

12:24 *And to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel-* Moses mediated the old covenant, shaking with fear because of his moral weakness; whereas the Lord Jesus mediates the new covenant in an ongoing sense to all who believe, confident in His moral perfection. The blood of Abel spoke, crying out for vengeance from the ground (Gen. 4:10); but the Lord's blood is not so much a cry for vengeance as of victory and vengeance achieved. It is "the blood of sprinkling" in that blood sprinkling was used to sanctify priests and equipment for service in the tabernacle. It has been a repeated theme of Paul that the whole wonderful path of salvation is so that we might serve with the Lord Jesus in the Holiest, working for others to the Father's glory. And yet the blood of sprinkling recalls that sprinkled on the day of atonement upon the mercy seat.

The blood of Christ speaks a message, better than that of Abel. As we examine ourselves before His cross, reconstructing in our own minds the physicalities of His time of dying, we hear a voice from Him. It is a voice that shakes heaven and earth (Heb. 12:24,26). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). It shows forth, as a voice, God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25,26 RV). The ark was made of shittim wood- from a root meaning 'to flog, scourge or pierce', all replete with reference to the cross. And it was there on that wooden box that Yahweh was declared in the blood sprinkled upon it. Note how there is an association between the blood of atonement and the throne of judgment in 2 Sam. 6:2 and Is. 37:16, as if we see a foretaste of our judgment in the way we respond to the Lord's outpoured blood for us. The Lord Jesus in His time of death is the "propitiation", or rather 'the place of propitiation' for our sins, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). The blood of Christ is therefore to be associated with the commanding voice of God, such is the imperative within it. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross. Ps. 40:9 describes how the Lord Jesus accomplished God's will as the ultimate sacrifice, through the death of the cross. That death is foretold by the Lord, in the prophetic perfect, as 'preaching righteousness to the great congregation' [LXX *ekklesia*]. In living out the dying of the man Christ Jesus in our daily lives, we are making the witness of Christ.

12:25 *See you do not reject him that speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected Him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that warns from heaven-* The One who speaks ["warned" is not a good translation; the Greek means literally to preach or speak] is the Lord Jesus, personified as His blood in :24. The same word translated "reject" is that used in :19 of Israel rejecting the word of the old covenant. They rejected God's word because they feared the massing up of commandments to obey. They totally missed the point of relationship with God on the basis of His word. And the same fear of God's demands was to be seen in the Hebrews of the first century turning away from the voice of the cross of Christ. He there is indeed a voice speaking to us, demanding much of us- not in terms of obedience to legislation and commandments, but in asking us to believe that because of His work there, we shall surely be saved, our sins are no longer a barrier between God and us; and the joy and confidence arising from this should lead us to a life of total response and commitment. To turn away from the voice of the cross, as the Hebrews were doing, means there can be no escape, no place to run, at judgment day. The Lord had used the same word in saying that the Jews would have no way to "escape" condemnation (Mt. 23:33). The same word is also used in each of the accounts of the Olivet prophecy of how the Christians would "escape" from Jerusalem; it was those who remained dedicated to the temple who did not escape and were destroyed in AD70.

The events of the crucifixion are an epitome of who the Lord most essentially was and is. His soul was made 'sin' in that He "poured out His soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew for "poured out" also means to make naked, to stretch out. The Lord bared His soul, who He essentially was, was displayed there for all to see; the wine was His blood which was Him, in the sense that the cross is who the son of God essentially was and is and shall ever be. "This is Jesus" was and is the title over the cross. There, for our redemption, He died (Heb. 9:15), He gave us *Himself* (1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14), His life (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45), His blood (1 Pet. 1:18,19; Eph. 1:7). His death, His life, His blood, these are all essentially *Himself*. The blood

of Jesus speaks to us as if *He personally* speaks to us; He is personified as His blood (Heb. 12:24,25). This is the preaching (Gk. the word) of the cross. Paul makes the connection between the voice of Christ's blood and the earthquake that shook all things at the time of the Old Covenant's inauguration. The voice of that blood can shake *all things* with the exception of the Kingdom, which cannot be shaken. This is the power of the cross. Human words, platform speaking, magazine articles- all these are so limited, although our communal life is inevitably built around them. See on Jn. 6:51; Heb. 9:20.

*12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth, but now He has promised, saying: Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also heaven-* The voice of the cross is far stronger than the voice associated with the old covenant, which was so powerful it caused an earthquake which shook Sinai (Ex. 19:18). The voice of the cross made and makes all of heaven and earth to shake. The quotation from Hag. 2:6 speaks of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and its rebuilding in the Messianic Kingdom. But the restoration did not work out as it potentially could have done. The temple was not rebuilt according to the specifications of Ez. 40-48, and most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon. But the essence of the restoration prophecies comes true in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus and His work. The implication is that the past destruction of the Jerusalem temple was the first shaking of the earth; but a shaking of the whole planet was coming, and the only thing left would be the Kingdom of God, that which cannot be shaken and destroyed, in the language of the image prophecy of Dan. 2:44. The language of 'shaking' connects with the Lord's prediction of the shaking of the heavens as a prelude to the destruction of the temple and His return in glory (Lk. 21:26 s.w.).

*12:27 And further: Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain-* The things made and visible were those of the Jerusalem temple cult. These too were to be shaken and destroyed; the only unshakeable things which remain are those of the Kingdom of God. As noted on 11:1, the things that are made, that are visible, referred to the immediately visible things of the temple cult; the eye of faith saw beyond them to the city which has foundations, the Kingdom of God to come on earth. "Yet once more" was being understood by Paul to mean that as the first temple was destroyed, so the temple which stood in the first century would also be destroyed as Haggai's prophecy had its fulfilment. But in the final fulfilment of these things, absolutely all things shall be shaken and fall, just as Sinai shook and the temple was brought to nothing. The only permanent thing which shall remain will be the solid mountain of God's Kingdom on earth. But this shaking of all things is on account of the voice of the blood of Christ; it is His victory on the cross which would remove the temple cult, and on account of His life [represented by His blood] all things on earth would be shaken to nothing so that His eternal Kingdom can be established, the fulfilment of the new covenant promises to Abraham.

*12:28 Therefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe-* The receipt of the Kingdom is ongoing in this life. But the language of receiving a kingdom is appropriate to the king of the kingdom, rather than the subjects. The same words are used in the Lord's parable about Himself going to the "far country" of Heaven "to receive for himself a kingdom and to return" (Lk. 19:12). Yet again, language personally relevant to the Lord Jesus alone is used about all who are in Him. We recall how in chapters 8-10 Paul has argued that because we are "in Christ", we are also with Him in the Holiest, in Heaven itself, doing the work of the

High Priest. The rest of this verse goes on to use language appropriate to the priesthood; doing pleasing service to God with reverence. This priestly service is essentially service of others, for the glory of God. And we do this 'having grace', the idea being that we do so motivated by gratitude (see GNB "let us be grateful"). Our eternity is not in question; as explained earlier, we should be humbly but totally confident that if the Lord comes or we die, we shall surely be saved by grace. We are "in Christ", and so we are in that sense in process of receiving the Kingdom. Whilst works shall not save us, it is also true that if we believe this great salvation, we cannot be passive. We shall in reverence do priestly service in deep gratitude, but with the "awe" or fear that comes from realizing the eternal future which we may miss. There is a comment in the next verse :29 about the reality of condemnation for some; and this leads me to understand the fear / awe spoken of in :28 in that context.

12:29 *For our God is a consuming fire*- The allusion may still be to how the old covenant was associated not only with Sinai shaking but a consuming fire coming down upon it (Ex. 19:18). Those who remained within the old covenant system were associated with this condemnation, because they simply could not be perfectly obedient to that covenant. By identifying with the temple cult, they would find in a literal sense that God consumed them in fire, for this was how many Jews perished within the temple in AD70. The same word is used of how the Lord at His return would "consume" the system which sat in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:4). The Hebrew Christians were being warned ahead of time that if they returned to the temple cult, they would meet their end in the fire which would consume that temple, just as the first temple had been burnt with fire.

The quotation is from Dt. 4:24 "For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire"; this was spoken in the context of 'forgetting the covenant of Yahweh' (Dt. 4:23). This was in fact what the Hebrew Christians were doing; forsaking the new covenant for the old.

Is. 33:14 is being alluded to, which speaks of the sinners within the surrounded city of Jerusalem at Hezekiah's time: "The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless ones. Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting burning?". Note the reference to "trembling" too, which has also figured in this context in Hebrews 12. Zion, the temple mount and cult, was sinful and would suffer the condemnation of fire. Those who wanted to return to it were not being more righteous or obedient; they were sinning. Legalism, not trusting in the Lord's blood but in our own few works, is just that- sin.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1- see on Lk. 12:42.

*Let love of the believers continue-* The shift towards legalism and Judaism was associated with a decline in love. For as with legalistic churches today, belief in justification by works and ritual breeds a distrust and dislike of anyone who doesn't think the rituals are important for salvation and even actively discourages them. And it was of course hard to show love to uncircumcised Gentile believers if one believed that circumcision was essential to have covenant with God.

13:2- see on Rom. 12:13.

*Do not forget to show love to strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares-* As noted on :1, the Hebrew Christians were prone to consider uncircumcised Gentile Christians as outside covenant relationship with God. The reference could also be to the itinerant spirit gifted prophets, cp. 2 Jn. 10). Paul is appealing to the Hebrew understanding that all people had representative Angels. By refusing Gentile brethren, they were turning away Angels. The only Gentiles in Jerusalem would have been associated with the Romans or Arabs. If there were believers amongst them, it is understandable that orthodox Jewish Christians were tempted to refuse them hospitality (Gk.). But by doing so they were leaving Angels out on the street. For each believer had a representative Angel.

The allusion is clearly to Abraham entertaining the Angels unawares. If they were the true seed of Abraham, then they would be eager to have Gentiles, strangers, under their rooves and provide them with hospitality. As Peter reminds us, it was considered illegal for a Jew to come under the roof of a Gentile. So the Hebrew Christians needed encouragement to allow Gentiles into their homes, and to realize that by not doing so, they would be going against the spirit of Abraham. Perhaps he was motivated to receive strangers by reflecting on the promises to him, that all Gentiles would be blessed through his seed.

But there is also an allusion to Lot unknowingly entertaining Angels, on the eve of Sodom's destruction; and Isaiah had portrayed Jerusalem as Sodom, as does Rev. 11:8. The hint was that they were living in the very last days or even moments before Jerusalem was to be destroyed; and they should be as Lot rather than the men of Sodom - Jerusalem.

13:3 *Remember those that are in bonds, as if you were bound with them; those that are ill treated, as being yourselves also in the body-* The Hebrews were tempted to return to Judaism because it saved them from persecution by the Roman and Jewish authorities. Judaism was a recognized religion within the empire, and adherents were free from army service. The Hebrew Christians were attracted by this, and were tempted to not identify with those who were imprisoned or persecuted.

If we are truly members of the one body, we will be affected by the sufferings of others in that body. The fact we are members of the one body of Jesus should exclude all self-centred feelings, in the sense that if one other part of the body suffers or rejoices, then we are to be affected by this. Heb. 13:3 tells us to "*remember* them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (AV). We are to feel as if we are inside the body of our brethren. This is quite something. There is a purposeful ambiguity here. Whose body? The body of Jesus, or that of the suffering brother? Effectively, the one is the other. We can truly place ourselves in the place of others. The only other time

the Greek word translated "remember" occurs in Heb. 2:3: "What is man that thou art *mindful* of him". Because of the almost senseless mindfulness of God for us down here on this speck of a planet, dust and water as we are... we must be inspired to likewise be mindful of our suffering brethren. "Those that are ill treated" is a Greek term found elsewhere only in 11:37; the suffering Christians in Jerusalem were in direct connection with the faithful of old who had likewise suffered for their faith.

13:4 *Let marriage be held in respect among all, and let the marital bed be undefiled. For fornicators and adulterers God will judge-* I noted on 12:16 that sexual immorality was an issue amongst those wishing to return to Judaism; they felt liberated to misbehave in other areas of moral life if they were technically obedient to ritual. The allusion to Jerusalem as Sodom in :2 (see note there) is continued here; Judaism and the temple cult was actually sexually immoral and would face God's judgment for this. We have here a classic case of where legalism doesn't curb sinful behaviour but actually encourages us. The grip of grace will teach us to deny such lusts, whereas legalism encourages those lusts. There may also be a swipe at the tendency for some Jewish false teachers to deprecate marriage (1 Tim. 4:3); and we noted on Ephesians and 1 Cor. 7 that the Judaists had encouraged the denial of marriage in order to indulge in sexual licence outside of it.

The adulterers who would be judged were those within the ecclesia and responsible. This is matched by 1 Pet.3:1-5 warning that the sisters were increasingly rebelling against their great prototypes of Eve and Sarah, unwittingly egged on by their unspiritual husbands. So many other New Testament passages imply a surge of marriage and sex related problems in the run up to AD70. The ecclesia of Israel was an adulterous generation; this was their main characteristic (Mt. 16:4). Looking around our sisterhood and brotherhood today there can be no doubt about the reference of all this to our last days. Add to this the parallels with Sodom and the times of Noah in this respect too.

13:5- see on Dt. 31:3; Josh. 1:5.

*Be free from the love of money, content with such things as you have. For God Himself has said: I will in no way fail you, neither will I in any way forsake you-* This again must be understood in the context of the Hebrew Christians wanting to return to Judaism. The economic discrimination against Christians in Jerusalem would have been significant, and surely contributed to the dire poverty of the Jerusalem church which Paul had sought to address through the Jerusalem poor fund. The Pharisees were covetous and materialistic (Lk. 16:14), and the Sadducees were famed for their love of money. The economic attractions of Judaism were to be resisted by faith that God would not fail to provide for His people. Paul demonstrates this by quoting the Father's words to Joshua-Jesus. So again we have a case of words specifically appropriate to the Lord Jesus being applied to all those who are in Him, just as the Lord's passage into the Holiest as supreme High Priest is applied to all in Him.

Heb. 13:5 combines quotes from Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:5 and Dt. 31:16. Heb. 13:5 doesn't quote any of them exactly, but mixes them together. See on Rom. 11:26.

Those Old Testament promises are surely relevant to us: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said (to you, as well as Joshua), I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5 AV). Notice once again that the Old Testament scriptures are seen as alive and speaking directly to each of us in whatever

generation. The message was that it isn't the actual possession of wealth that is condemned, but the way of life that seeks more than what we have been given. This is the real danger of materialism.

13:6 *So that with good courage we can say*- This is the word for "boldness" which is so characteristic of Hebrews; if as reasoned earlier we are bold before the very presence of God in the Holiest, we can be bold against all fears of human persecution.

*The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What shall man do to me?*- The quotation is from Ps. 118:6 "Yahweh is on my side, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?". Just as Scripture speaks personally to us (see on :5), so we can put the words of scripture in our own mouths. The context is relevant to those who wanted to trust in the apparent strength of the temple cult to save them from persecution: "It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to put confidence in man" (Ps. 118:8). The Psalm is clearly Messianic, stating that "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Ps. 118:22). So again, words directly personally relevant to the Lord Jesus regarding His enemies in Jerusalem become just as directly relevant to all those "in Him" in Jerusalem.

13:7 *Remember those that had the rule over you, those who spoke to you the word of God*- The past tense "had" invites them to recall the earliest leaders in Jerusalem such as Peter and Stephen. If as noted in 1:1 Paul is speaking or writing Hebrews with his eye on Stephen, this takes on powerful relevance. The outcome of his life and faith was death at Paul's hands, but with the sure assurance of salvation. The basis of authority within the pastoral structure is that those who 'have the rule' are those who taught the Gospel to those over whom they have authority. Paul elsewhere uses family language to express the same truth; elders / fathers in the church family are those who brought us to spiritual life by teaching us the Gospel. This is the basis for eldership in the local church; such positions of authority cannot be attained by a vote or simply by default or age itself.

*Consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith*- Elders are especially responsible. They can shut up, or open, the Kingdom to men. They watch "in behalf of" the souls of the ecclesia (Heb. 13:17 RV). Their very examples can influence the flock positively or negatively- for "like priest like people" is a Biblical idea. When the leaders "offered themselves willingly", so did the people (Jud. 5:2,9).

Respect must be earned by elders, never demanded. Their way of life is the basis of their authority; in this sense, we have the choice whom to consider as our elders, whom we will respect and follow. Jesus taught as one who had authority, unlike the scribes (Mk. 1:22). Yet the Scribes had authority in terms of their position, and yet they were not respected; and hence they couldn't teach with authority as Jesus could.

In illiterate societies, or those with limited access to the Old Testament scrolls and the Gospel records, the direction in spiritual life was given by elders, by living examples. That is true today, but more so in their early situation.

Amongst those tending towards returning to the temple cult, there was a tendency to despise those who had first taught them the Gospel and suffered at the hands of Judaism for doing so. This is also mentioned as a last days problem in 1 Pet. 5:5; 2 Pet. 2:10 etc. See on 1 Tim. 3:4.

13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever*- "For ever" is literally 'for all ages'. There will be many "ages" to come, as there have doubtless been many "ages" of previous creations already (Rom. 1:25; 9:5); but for our "age" alone was the only begotten Son of God given as a representative of *us*, the humans who live in this brief "age". God thus describes Himself as a first timer falling in love with His people; as a young man marries a virgin, so God marries us (Is. 62:5); Israel were as the lines graven on a man's palm, with which he was born (Is. 49:16). Thus from absolute eternity, we were the great "all things" to Almighty God, the God of all, all past and future creations.

Past, present and future as stated here suggests Paul saw the three elements of the Yahweh Name supremely manifest in the Lord Jesus. Which is surely why 'Jesus' in the NT becomes the Name above every Name (Phil. 2:9,10; Eph. 1:21); for only 'Yahweh' was exalted above every other name (Neh. 9:5; Ps. 148:13).

The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. The *same* Jesus who went into Heaven will *so* come again *in like manner* (Acts 1:11). The record three times says the same thing. The "like manner" in which the Lord will return doesn't necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the "like manner" to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord's people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will 'see' Him at His return "in like manner" as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day. Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brethren" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of 1st century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him. When the Lord awoke, He would have immediately been aware of the carefully wrapped graveclothes and the anointing oil. He would have then realized the care shown to Him by His sisters. Some of the very first thoughts of the risen Lord were of His brethren. There was no gap between His mortal awareness of His brethren, and His feelings for them after resurrection.



The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory. It just isn't true that He came as a meek, gentle person, but will roar back as an angry lion. At His second coming, He will reveal "the wrath of the lamb". Can you imagine an angry lamb? Yes, lambs can get angry. But it's a lamb-like anger. He came as the lamb for sinners slain, and yet He will still essentially be a lamb at His return. The Jesus who loved little children, sensitive to others weaknesses, desperate for their salvation, is the same one who will return to judge us. Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, He thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21:9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. After His resurrection He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

"The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the mortal and the immortal Jesus. Pause for a moment to reflect that the Lord's resurrection is a pattern for our own. This is the whole meaning of baptism. "God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power" (1 Cor. 6:13,14). Yet there were evident continuities between the Jesus who lived mortal life, and the Jesus who rose again. His mannerisms, body language, turns of phrase, were so human- even after His resurrection. And so who we are now, as persons, is who we will eternally be. Because of the resurrection, our personalities in the sum of all their relationships and nuances, *have an eternal future*. But from whence do we acquire those nuances, body languages, etc? They arise partly from our parents, from our inter-relations with others etc; we are the sum of our relationships. And this is in fact a tremendous encouragement to us in our efforts for others; for the result of our parenting, our patient effort and grace towards others, will have an eternal effect upon others. Who we help them become is, in part, who they will eternally be. Job reflected that if a tree is cut down, it sprouts (Heb. *yaliph*) again as the same tree; and he believed that after his death he would likewise sprout again (*yaliph*) at the resurrection (Job 14:7-9,14,15). There will be a continuity between who we were in mortal life, and who we will eternally be- just as there is between the pruned tree and the new tree which grows again out of its stump. All our obedience and response to God's word in this life is likened to building a foundation which will endure beyond the storm, representative as that is of judgment day at Christ's return (Lk. 6:48). There is therefore a link between who we are now and who we will eternally be; we are building now the foundation for our eternity.

Who the Lord Jesus was is who He will be in the future; in the same way as who *we* are now, is who we will eternally be. For our spirit, our essential personality, will be *saved* in the day

of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). "Flesh and blood" will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and yet the risen, glorified Lord Jesus was "flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39). We will be who we essentially are today, but with Spirit instead of blood energizing us. It's a challenging thought, as we consider the state of our "spirit", the essential 'me' which will be preserved, having been stored in Heaven in the Father's memory until the day when it is united with the new body which we will be given at resurrection. For in all things the Lord is our pattern; and we will in that day be given a body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21)- which is still describable as "flesh and bones" in appearance (Lk. 24:39).

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones* (Lk. 24:39). In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is *we* who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The continuity between the mortal, human Jesus and the exalted Lord of all which He became on His ascension is brought out quite artlessly in Heb. 4:14: "Our great high priest, who has

passed through the heavens". The picture is of "this same Jesus", the man on earth, passing through all heavens to 'arrive' at the throne of God Himself to mediate for us there. His ascension to Heaven was viewed physically like this by the disciples, and is expressed here in that kind of language of physical ascent, to bring home to us the continuity between the man Jesus on earth, and the exalted Lord now in Heaven itself. The same Jesus who once experienced temptation can thereby strengthen us in our temptations. We need to realize that nobody can be tempted by that which holds no appeal; the Lord Jesus must have seen and reflected upon sin as a possible course of action, even though He never took it. And for the same reason, several New Testament passages (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:5) call the exalted Lord Jesus a "man"- even now. Let's not see these passages merely as theological problems for Trinitarians. The wonder of it all is that Jesus after His glorification is still in some sense human. He as "the pioneer of our faith" shows us the path to glory, a glory that doesn't involve us becoming somehow superhuman and unreal.

And so the Man who walked dusty Galilee streets is the very same one, in essence, whom we will meet in judgment day. The ultimate question for each of us, is whether we will be accepted by Him. In the Gospels, we see the Son of man, Son of God, so acceptant of others, so patient with their weaknesses, passionately dying for our salvation. Will He turn as it were another face on us at the day of judgment, showing Himself suddenly and unpredictably to be someone else? Like people we know, who suddenly surprised us one day by showing a completely different aspect to their character? I believe He won't. Because integrity and consistency of character, sharing His Father's characteristic of not changing, is what He is essentially about. He won't show another face then, that we've not seen now. The same basic Jesus, who so wished and wishes to eternally save us, will be the One whom we meet in the final day.

If we truly love the Lord, we will fantasize about our moment of meeting with Him. I suspect that His very appearance of ordinariness and evident human aspect will impress me in that first moment of meeting. Perhaps it will be that He appears to me in the midst of everyday life, when I'm desperately consumed with doing something, and interrupts me. And He'll seem like an ordinary local person, speaking with the same accent, wearing normal clothes, just as He did after His resurrection. And then He'll say with a very slight, cultured kind of smile: "Duncan, I'm Jesus...". Who knows how it will be. But if you love Him, you'll fantasize of that moment, as you love His appearing.

13:9 *Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings. For it is good that the heart be established by grace- not with food laws, which have not profited those who have been so occupied with them-* The Hebrews were indeed being carried away and back to Judaism. But if we have known grace, the certainty of salvation in Christ, looking forward 'boldly' to future eternity with Him, then our heart will be stable; the hope we have will be as an anchor of the soul. Our heart will be stable.

It's easy to assume that the arguments about "regulations about food" in the first century hinged about what *types* of food should be eaten, i.e. whether the Mosaic dietary laws should be observed or not. But the angst about "food" was more passionately about *with whom* you ate. Peter explains in Acts 11:3 how utterly radical it was for a Jew to eat with a Gentile. Bearing this in mind, the way Jew and Gentile Christians ate together at the Lord's supper would've been a breathtaking witness of unity to the watching world. And yet ultimately, Jew and Gentile parted company and the church divided, laying itself wide open to imbalance and every manner of practical and doctrinal corruption as a result. The problem was that the Jews

understood 'eating together' as a sign of agreement, and a sign that you accepted those at your table as morally pure. The Lord's 'table manners' were of course purposefully the opposite of this approach. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho* 47.2-3) mentions how the Jewish Christians would only eat with Gentile Christians on the basis that the Gentiles firstly adopted a Jewish way of life. And this is the nub of the problem- demanding that those at your table are like you, seeing eating together as a sign that the other has accepted your positions about everything. The similarities with parts of the 21st century church are uncanny.

13:10 *We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat-* As noted on :9, the arguments about "food" were more about with whom one ate. In the same way as the Jews were connected with the altar by reason of eating what was upon it, so all who are connected with the Christ-altar (Heb. 13:10) show this by eating of the memorial table. If we deny the breaking of bread to brethren, we are stating that they are outside covenant relationship with God, that they have no part in Israel. The argument here is not that the priests or Judaists were forbidden from breaking bread with Christians. Rather was it that they considered that they partook with the literal altar and thereby as it were fellowshiped the tabernacle system as a whole; they themselves denied themselves the right or [Gk.] authority to eat at any other altar. For Judaism was exclusive; if you were partakers of the Jerusalem temple altar, you were not allowed to partake of any other altar. And so they themselves declared that they had no authority to eat of the Christ altar. Return to the temple system was therefore a radical separation of themselves from fellowship with Christ, for Judaism had become so exclusive. Initially, Christianity could exist as a sect within Judaism, but Judaism soon began to exclude Christians, and the time came as the Lord predicted when Christians would be cast out of the synagogue system.

However as explained on :11, it is the day of atonement ritual which is in view; and those who kept the Mosaic laws had no right to eat of the sin offering whose blood brought atonement. But Christian worshippers do.

13:11 *For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the Holy Place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp-* The sin offering at the day of atonement, which is the situation in view throughout Hebrews, could not be eaten of by the priest nor worshippers. Its blood was important, but the body was burnt and not eaten. Yet Christians by going outside of the camp of Israel and the tabernacle system could eat of that ultimate sacrifice.

13:12 *Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate-* The reference is to the day of atonement ritual. "The people" are no longer natural Israel but those who believe in His blood and are sanctified even in their consciences, cleansed from all sin. But "sanctify" is the word used by the LXX to describe the consecration of the priests to service of the body of Israel (Ex. 28:41). If we reject the call to priesthood today, we reject the point of the Lord's saving suffering for us. The Lord's death was not within the temple system; it was outside the city gate.

13:13 *Let us therefore go to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach-* We recall Simon carrying the Lord's cross in the sad procession which went outside the camp of Jerusalem to Golgotha; and he becomes a type of us. See on Mt. 27:32; Jn. 8:56.

When Heb. 13:13 speaks of *us* going forth outside the camp, perhaps there is a reference to Joshua who dwelt with Moses outside the camp- thus making Joshua symbolic of us all. We are to go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, his 'having it cast in the teeth' (Gk.; Heb. 13:13). *We* may boldly say that we will *not* be fearful, as Joshua was, because God has addressed to *us* the very words which He did to Joshua: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5,6). In this especially, Joshua is our example.

The call to even now go to Him outside the camp speaks as if He is still there, outside the city gates, and we shoulder our crosses and His reproach as He walked the Via Dolorosa, and go out to be crucified next to Him, as we endure being fools for Christ's sake in our worldly decisions. It's a rather strange idea, at first consideration. But His sufferings are ongoing. The cross is still there- wherever we go, and however far we fall away from Him. And the implication appears to be that the Hebrews had already returned within the camp of the temple system, and were being asked to come out from it, to Golgotha.

"Without the camp" is full of Old Testament allusion. The cross convicts of sin, for we are impelled by it to follow Christ in going forth "without the camp", following the path of the leper who had to go forth without the camp (Lev. 13:46).

We'd sooner skip over the words of Deuteronomy 23:12-13 than analyze them closely: "Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith". Yet there can be no doubt that this is one of the source passages for the words of Hebrews 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto him (Jesus) without the camp, bearing his reproach". When the Israelite soldier had a call of nature, he went forth "without the camp", doubtless with a sense of sheepishness as he carried his spear-cum-spade with him. Everyone knew what he was doing. This commonplace incident is picked up by the Spirit and made relevant to the Jewish Christians going forth from the camp of Israel, carrying with them the obvious reproach of the cross of Christ.

13:14- see on Eph. 2:19.

*For we do not have here a permanent city, but we seek after one which is yet to come-* The exodus of people from Jerusalem to Golgotha was seen as symptomatic of how we as God's people, as Abraham, are ever on the move, looking for a permanence and stability that is yet ahead for us in literal terms (11:10). Jerusalem with its apparent solidity was not a permanent city, it was about to be destroyed. The Jerusalem yet to come is the community of believers whose memories / spirits are in God's memory, who shall in symbolic terms come from heaven to earth at the Lord's return. And the apparent solidity of secular life is likewise far from permanent.

13:15- see on 1 Pet. 2:5.

*Through him, therefore, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His Name-* Mosaic sacrifice could never be continual; the whole nature of the rituals precluded that. But with such a priest as the Lord Jesus, we can continually offer the sacrifice of praise, rather than animals. The praise is for the certainty of

our salvation and for the certainty of our forgiveness; for "confession" can mean just that, confession of sin. Our praise is for the forgiveness of sin confessed, celebrated in the peace offering.

The peace offering was offered with unleavened cakes as was the Passover. The bitterness of sin was to be ever remembered, amidst the joy of peace with God. The description of the peace offering as "the sacrifice of thanksgiving" is alluded to in Heb. 13:15: "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God"- praise and thanks for our spiritual peace with God, our forgiveness through His grace.

True sacrifice is praise of God; thus Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was "praise" (Gen. 22:5). Israel in their repentance "will account our lips as calves" (Hos. 14:3 LXX, RVmg.), i.e. as sacrifices. The "fruit of the lips" there was repentance. Which is why Paul says that we "make confession to his name" with the fruit of our lips (13:15 RV). Continually we should offer this sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15), the thankfulness that wells up from knowing we are forgiven, the joy born of regular, meaningful repentance. And we do this "by" or 'on account of' the sacrifice of Jesus for us, which enables this forgiveness and thereby repentance (Heb. 13:12,15). "Continually" in itself suggests that "praise" does not mean singing or musical expression. This "sacrifice of praise" is a quotation from Jer. 33:11, which describes our offering "the sacrifice of praise... for his mercy" at the beginning of the Kingdom. Praise will [and does] bring forth sacrifice / action. Yet "praise" here is the same Hebrew word translated "thanksgiving"; and the sacrifice of thanksgiving was the peace offering, a commemoration of our free conscience and the peace of sin forgiven (Lev. 7:12-15). If we seriously confess our sins and believe in forgiveness, we should be experiencing a foretaste of the praise we will be offering at the start of the Kingdom, as we embark upon eternity. Our offering of this sacrifice of praise will be "continual" if we continually maintain a good conscience through the confession of our sins. This is surely a high standard to have placed before us: to *continually* confess our sins, to *continually* receive God's mercy, and therefore to live *continually* in a spirit of grateful praise. The way David praises God so ecstatically for immutable things and principles (e.g. His character) is a great example in this (e.g. Ps. 33:3-5); our tendency is to only seriously praise God when He resolves the unexpected crises of life.

The Name of God of itself elicits repentance. Faced with the wonder of who He is, we can't be passive to it. We realize and are convicted of our sin by the very reality of who He is, was and shall be. Heb. 13:15 speaks of the fruit of our lips, giving confession to His Name. The "fruit of lips" in Hos. 14:2 RVmg. to which the writer alludes is clearly enough, in the context, the confession of sin. And the context in Heb. 13:12 is that Christ's blood was shed to sanctify us. That declaration of the Name elicits a confession of sin, albeit in words of praise, to His Name. Mic. 6:9 has the same theme. When the Lord's voice calls to the city demanding repentance, "the man of wisdom shall see [perceive] thy name"- i.e. repent. We come to know God's Name in practice through the cycles of sin-repentance-forgiveness by God which we all pass through. It is through this process that we come to know the very essence of God's Name. Thus Is. 43:25 LXX: "I am "I AM", who erases your iniquities". We come to know His Name, that it really *is* ("I am") all about forgiveness and salvation of sinners. See on Eph. 3:15.

13:16 *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased-* This was a prompt to remember the early days of the Jerusalem church, when the members

shared their possessions. In the immediate context here we have been reminded of the Lord's sacrifice and our partaking in it. But there is to be a practical response to that, in sharing what we have rather than solely partaking in the sharing of the Lord Jesus.

The letter to the Hebrew Christians describes salvation and the Kingdom with the idea of inheritance. The believers had possessions (Heb. 10:34), had been generous to others (Heb. 6:10), and yet needed the exhortation to "not live for money; be content with what you have" (Heb. 13:5) and to "share what you have with others" (Heb. 13:16). We could surmise that this audience weren't unlike many of us today- not overly wealthy, but sorely tempted to be obsessed by possessions and material advantage. And to them, as to us, the writer emphasizes that salvation in Christ is the ultimate inheritance or possession (Heb. 1:2,4,14, 6:12,17; 9:15; 11:7; 12:17); this is the ultimate "profit" (Heb. 13:17). Hence Esau was quoted as an example- he gave up his inheritance for the sake of a material meal (Heb. 12:15-17). The *eternal* inheritance which is promised to us in the Gospel, rooted as it is in the promises to the Jewish fathers, should make us not seek for great material inheritance in this present world.

*13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive; for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you-* Given the apostasy of the Jerusalem church and their lack of support for Paul and his positions, this was surely an attempt by Paul even from prison in Rome to yet ingratiate himself to the Jerusalem leadership.

Elders must give an account for their flock as a shepherd must for his sheep- implying that there will be a 'going through' with them of all in their care. The drunken steward was condemned because he failed to feed the rest of the household and beat them. If the capricious behaviour of the flock makes the shepherd watch out for them "with grief", with groaning and heaviness, then this is not profitable for us the sheep. For they will not shepherd us well if all the time they are grieved by our wayward behaviour and need to restrain all the time rather than lead forward.

*13:18 Pray for us. For we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring to live honourably in all things-* The prayer was for Paul's from prison (:19). Paul's sense of injustice at his incarceration comes through so often, and again here. His conscience had been cleansed in Christ, as he had previously taught in this letter; he felt no guilt over his sins as they had truly been dealt with. A lesser faith in the Lord's sacrifice would have surely led him to consider his imprisonment as a just reward for the bad life he had previously lived, involving as it did torture and murder of civilians.

The argument seems to imply that the more they prayed, the sooner he would be released from prison. Thus prayer can hasten things, given certain preconditions are fulfilled. So it is in our experiences, and so it may be with the Lord's return.

It was accepted in Judaism, as well as in many other contemporary religions, that faithful saints [e.g. the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets etc, in Judaism's case] could intercede for the people. Yet in the New Testament, *all* believers are urged to intercede for each other, even to the point of seeking to gain forgiveness for others' sins (1 Thess. 5:25; Heb. 13:18; James 5:15). They were *all* to do this vital work. The radical nature of this can easily be overlooked by us, reading from this distance.

13:19 *And I exhort you the more exceedingly to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner-* As noted on :18, Paul felt that the answer to his prayers depended upon how many others were praying for him. Revelation uses a similar idea in visualizing a situation where there is enough incense arising to trigger a response from Heaven. This in God's wisdom is how prayer operates, so that we share our situations with others and urge their prayers for us, and we too pray for others. This explains why we cannot be Christians in splendid isolation from others, but rather active communion and prayer for each other are a vital part of our collective lives.

I suggested in commentary on Acts that Paul was not warmly received by the Jerusalem church on his last visit there, and it would appear that his arrest and imprisonment there was partly due to Jewish Christian elements collaborating with the temple system. Yet Paul wishes to be restored to them; he intended after release from prison to return to see them in Jerusalem again. His fervour for their spiritual strength and holding on in faith is remarkable after such betrayals.

13:20 *Now the God of peace, who brought from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, through the blood of an eternal covenant-* The idea of "peace" speaks of peace between believers as well as with God; and this would be the context provided by :19, where as noted there, Paul has in view the restoration of his relationship with the Jerusalem church. God is the author of peace both with Him and within His people on account of the blood, resurrection and covenant relationship of the Lord Jesus. "*Our* Lord Jesus" is another attempt to demonstrate that they had in common a joint acceptance of Jesus as "Lord"; even though it would seem many amongst the Hebrew Christians were losing that sense of His exaltation. The references to the Lord's resurrection, His blood and the eternal new covenant pave the way for the desire in :21 that God would continue working within them. For it was the Lord's death and resurrection which brought into effect the new covenant for those in Him, with its promise of the blessing of being spiritually transformed within.

"In the blood of an eternal covenant" (Gk., through the power of the blood) is a hard phrase to understand if we isolate it from the rest of the verse. The GNB gives the best general sense: "God has raised from death our Lord Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd of the sheep as the result of his blood, by which the eternal covenant is sealed". The Lord's qualification as the supreme elder was on account of His death. The Abrahamic covenant is the new covenant of eternal inheritance (see on 9:15), but this was sealed, brought into operation for us and guaranteed, by the Lord's death. The connection between the covenant and God's people as sheep, shepherded by God through Messiah, is made clearly throughout Ezekiel 34. The sheep of Israel shall be led by the shepherd into an eternal covenant. This is true of all the Lord's sheep today as it will be for natural Israel in the last days.

13:21 *Perfect you in every good thing to do His will; working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen-* We work God's will, and He works in us (Gk.). There is a mutuality between God and man. The new covenant involves the blessing of the Spirit, preparing us, perfecting and maturing us, so that we might do God's will in practice. But all this is predicated upon the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus within us. It is the internal gift of the Spirit through which God works within us (Eph. 3:20), and this is an outflow of the new covenant (:20). The "Amen" brings to a close



the sermon we have transcribed here (see on :22); and the final appeal to glorify the Lord Jesus would be an appropriate end to breaking of bread sermon.

13:22 *But I urge you, brothers, bear with this word of encouragement; for I have written to you in few words-* I suggest that the letter to the Hebrews is actually a breaking of bread sermon first given by Paul to the Jerusalem ecclesia, against a background of Judaist pressure to return to the Law, and also bearing in mind some specific moral and doctrinal problems which were in the ecclesia; see on 1:1. If you read it through out loud, the "letter" takes about 45 minutes. The last few verses seem to be 'tacked on' to turn it into a letter. Paul asks them to "suffer the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22 AV), although, he says, it was a brief one. This would imply that usually "the word of exhortation" was a lot longer. Remember how Paul exhorted all night at Troas at the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7-9).

There is evidence that the early breaking of bread service was based upon the Synagogue Sabbath service. Heb. 13:17,24 speak of "them that have the rule over you" , the language of the 'ruler of the synagogue' (cp. Lk. 8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8). There were weekly portions of readings which were read, similar to our *Bible Companion* (1) and then expounded by the Rabbi and any others who would like to offer a "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15). Acts 13:15 is the only other place apart from Heb. 13:22 that "the word of exhortation" occurs. It is clearly a synagogue phrase. It is possible that "suffer the word of exhortation" was also a Synagogue phrase, said at the end of the 'exhortation' on the Sabbath. This suggests that the whole of Hebrews was a "word of exhortation" at a Sabbath breaking of bread (probably this was the day the Jewish ecclesias met in Jerusalem), being a commentary on the readings for that week (perhaps the Melchizedek passages and parts of the Law), constantly bringing the point around to the death of the Lord Jesus. In this, Hebrews is an ideal sermon: it continually comes around to the work of Christ.

Hebrews is also a series of quotations and allusions (over half the sermon is comprised of these), interspersed with commentary and brief practical exhortation (e.g. to disfellowship false teachers, 12:15,16), all tied together around the theme of Christ's sacrifice and our response to it. Our sermons should be Bible based, after this same pattern. This is surely the way to construct sermons: re-reading verses from the chapters in the readings, commenting on them, bringing it all round to the work of Christ. A recurring theme of the Hebrews sermon is a reminding of the hearers of the reality of their future reward, made sure by Christ's work (4:9; 5:9; 6:10,19; 9:28; 10:34; 11:40; 12:10). This should surely be a theme embedded in our sermons: the personal Hope of the Kingdom, made sure for us by the work of Christ.

So much in Hebrews is obviously relevant to the memorial meeting. The wine represents the blood of the new covenant. That new covenant is repeated in 8:10,11; and the word "covenant" occurs 14 times, and the parallel "testament" 7 times. The blood of the covenant is explicitly referred to in 7:22; 8:6; 9:1 and 13:20. 12:24-26 personifies that blood as a mighty voice speaking to us, manifesting the voice of God, capable of shaking Heaven and earth. This is truly the power of appeal behind a consideration of Christ's blood, as symbolised in the wine. There are 22 references to "blood", 4 to "body", 8 to "sacrifice" i.e. the body of the animal, and 9 to "offering", also a reference to the body of the animal. The breaking of bread is designed to remember the body and blood of our Lord's sacrifice. And this is exactly the theme of Hebrews. Yet at the same time as doing this, Paul was getting over his specific point to the Jerusalem ecclesia: the utter supremacy of Christ's sacrifice ought to obviate the need

for any other theory of reconciliation to God. If only we could exhort like this: make the specific points we need to make under the umbrella of a *sustained* emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ.

1 Cor. 10:17,21 (probably an epistle known to the Jerusalem ecclesia) speaks of us being *partakers* of the one bread at the breaking of bread, *partaking* of the Lord's table there. The same word is used in Heb. 3:14 concerning being *partakers* of Christ, again suggesting that Hebrews was first spoken in a breaking of bread context. The same word occurs in Heb. 12:8: we are *partakers* of Christ's sufferings. We are Christ's *partakers* (AV "fellows"; 1:9); Christ *partakes* of our nature (2:14). Yet we are only ultimately *partakers* of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence (3:14). All these ideas are brought together in our *partaking* of the emblems of Christ at the memorial meeting. In them, Paul is reasoning, we should see our partaking of Christ's sufferings as a response to His partaking of our nature, and thereby our partaking of the promised reward, the "heavenly calling" (3:1).

### Oral Style

The references to "let us" do this or that are all so appropriate to a verbal sermon, encouraging the listeners to respond to the work of Christ. "We see Jesus" (2:9), "Consider... Jesus" (3:1; 7:4; 12:3) would fit in well to the context of a sermon given with the emblems before the audience. "Concerning whom in our discourse..." (Heb. 5:11 Diaglott) would certainly fit in to an oral discourse. "And, so to say..." (Heb. 7:9 RV) is another example. Saying above, Sacrifice and offering..." (Heb. 10:8 RV) sounds as if a scroll is being read and quotation made from passages "above" in the scroll. "Of the things which we have *spoken* (RV we are saying) this is the sum" (8:1) is language more appropriate to a transcript of an address than to a written composition. "As I may so say" (7:9) is another such example. "One in a certain place..." (2:6) is an odd way to write in a formal letter. Yet it fits in if this is a transcript of a sermon; it's the sort of thing you would say verbally when you know your audience can't turn up the passage. The word of exhortation contained in Hebrews was in "few words" (13:22); but this is a bad translation. Strong defines it as meaning "a short time, for a little while" (2)- i.e. Paul is saying 'It won't take long in terms of time to hear this, but consider the points carefully'. Note that the RV speaks of "suffer the exhortation", unlike AV "the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). One almost gets the impression that Paul is speaking with great constraints on his time: "the cherubim... of which we cannot now speak particularly... what shall I more say? for the time is failing me, running out" (Heb. 9:5; 11:32 Gk.). These sort of comments would surely be irrelevant in a written letter. But as a transcript of a live sermon, they make perfect sense. M. R. Vincent in his *Word Studies Of The NT* observed in Hebrews "a rhythmical structure of sentences (with) sonorous compounds", as if what is written had first been spoken.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God" (13:15) would be appropriate to communal praise at a memorial meeting. Likewise "Let us draw near... we draw nigh... let us come boldly before the throne of grace" (4:16; 7:19) is appropriate to the congregation coming before God in collective and private prayer, culminating in the 'drawing nigh' of taking the emblems (cp. the idea of 'coming to God' in 11:6). The emphasis on the power of Christ as a mediator (7:25; 9:24) would be appropriate in this context of rallying the congregation's faith in their prayers and confessions of sin. The encouragement to "exhort one another *daily*" (3:13; 10:25) takes on a special relevance if said at the breaking of bread; Paul would have been implying: 'Don't just listen to me exhorting you today, or a brother doing it once a week; you must *all* exhort each other, every day, not just on Shabbat!'.

## Self Examination

There is another sustained theme in this sermon, in addition to all the stress on our Lord's sacrifice. It is the repeated warning as to the likelihood of apostasy (2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:4-8; 10:26-30,38; 12:15-17,25,27) and the possibility of abusing the blood of Christ (10:26-30)- exactly after the pattern of 1 Cor. 11:26-30, which explicitly makes this warning in the context of the breaking of bread. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye [again, oral style], shall he be thought worthy, who hath...counted the blood of the covenant... as unholy thing?" (Heb. 11:29) is almost allusive to 1 Cor. 11:29, warning of drinking damnation to oneself through an incorrect attitude to the memorial cup. This kind of emphasis in a 45 minute sermon wouldn't go down well in a Western church. Yet the more we consider the wonder of the work of Christ, the more we will be driven to consider our own weakness, and the need to "hold fast" our connection with it. This is why we should examine ourselves at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). "Hold on" is another related theme (3:6,14; 4:14; 10:23). And here and there we find brief, specific practical warnings which were doubtless especially relevant to the initial audience. It's amazing that Paul got so much in 45 minutes. Yet this is what is possible. Note that all the exhortations in Hebrews, the comfort, the warnings, are all an outcome of a consideration of first principles, especially relating to the atonement. Thus Paul turns the fact that Christ is our *representative* round to teach the need for unity amongst us whom He represents (2:11).

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief" (3:12) is very relevant to a call for self-examination in the presence of the emblems. "Let us" boldly ask for forgiveness (4:16) could be read in this context too. The reminder that Christ examines us, that we are naked and opened in His sight, would have encouraged them to be open with him in their self-examination (4:12). Paul reminds them of their initial conversion (3:6,14; 6:11; 10:22,32), in the same way as the Passover was intended to provoke national and personal self-examination, looking back to their spiritual beginnings at the Red Sea (cp. baptism). He encourages them with a reminder that Christ is such a powerful priest that He can really cleanse our conscience (9:14; 10:2,22); the blood of the *new* covenant can destroy an evil conscience (10:22 cp. 9:20). Therefore, Paul reasons, with this clear conscience, "let us draw near"- to the emblems, to the reality of our relationship with God. Again we see a marked emphasis on the need for self-examination at the breaking of bread.

Having created this background of self-examination, Paul is able to more easily hand out explicit rebuke; e.g. "You are dull of hearing" (5:11-14; 12:5). Yet at the same time Paul expressed a very confident view of his audience; e.g. "We are persuaded better things of you" (6:9; 10:38,39). This is an important aspect of exhortation; to convey to the brethren and sisters the fact that we genuinely respect them as brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus, with the sure Hope and possibility of salvation.

There is an emphasis on the good works which a true understanding of the first principles should bring (4:11; 9:14; 10:24; 12:28). This is exactly in harmony with the idea presented above: that exposition of first principle doctrine is the basis for practical exposition. This emphasis on the need for works in response to the doctrines of the atonement could suggest that Paul expected the congregation to make resolves at the breaking of bread concerning their future behaviour. Maybe this is behind his appeal for them to appreciate that Christ offers our works to God as the priests did the sacrifices in the past (5:1; 8:3,4; 9:9).

## Personal Relevance

The Hebrews sermon is shot through with internal connections; just as our preaching sessions should constantly refer back to each other. Paul is trying to get the brethren and sisters to see

that if they respond to his exhortations as they should, they will be connected in spirit with the faithful heroes of the Old Testament; they will become connected with "the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:23). Thus Noah was moved with fear, Paul says (11:7), just as we should be (4:1); Sarah "judged him faithful who had promised" (11:11), just as we should (10:23); as Moses bore the reproach of Christ (11:26), so should we (13:13). The breaking of bread is the equivalent of the Passover under the Old Covenant; therefore 11:28 highlights how Moses kept the Passover in faith as to the power of the sprinkled blood of the lamb. The implication is that if we take the wine with a similar faith in Christ's blood, we will come become united with the spirit of Moses.

There are many of these inter-connections within Hebrews. Our "afflictions" (10:32) uses the same word translated "suffering" in the context of Christ's sufferings (2:9,10); we are to "endure" (10:32) as Christ "endured" the shame of the cross (12:2,3 same word). Through these inter-connections, Paul is trying to make the sufferings of Christ relevant to them. We may never hope to achieve as much as Paul did in those 45 minutes. But the principles remain for us to try to copy. Therefore we should try not to offer unconnected comments on the readings, we should seek to tie them together under the umbrella of the work of the Lord Jesus, we should relate His sufferings to those of our brethren and sisters, we should seek to inspire them with the fact that they are fellowshiping the hope of the faithful recorded in the Bible records.

### **A Pattern For Us**

The sermon to the Hebrews becomes more significant for us as we consider its likely background. In his book *The Jewish War*, Josephus explains in detail how the Jews in Palestine revolted against the Romans in AD66-70. Initially, everything went well for them. The Romans were defeated at the foot of the temple mount, the legions of Cestius Gallus were defeated, and the Jewish zealots attributed these successes to God's rewarding of their loyalty to the Law. They purified and rededicated the temple, and appointed a High Priest who was not a collaborator with Rome. The zealots spoke of the liberation of Israel in strong religious terms; there was a great wave of enthusiasm for the Law. It seems that Hebrew Christians were caught up in this revival, and of course all Jews were expected to take up arms and fight. The exhortation to the Hebrews therefore stressed the passing of the Mosaic Law, the need to rally around Christ as the true altar and the only true, pure High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 10:19-25; 13:10). There was the command to move outside the camp of Israel, i.e. Jerusalem (Heb. 13:13). And the institutions of the temple, which the Jewish nationalists were so glorifying, are shown to be of no value compared to the blood of Christ. The references to the temptations of Jesus (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:15) may be references back to the wilderness temptations, where He faced the same choice that the Jewish Christians had- to opt for a Kingdom here and now, throwing off the Roman yoke; or to hold fast our faith in the Kingdom which is surely to come. The speaker / writer to the Hebrew Christians doesn't specifically tackle the issues affecting them in bald terms. He instead sets a masterful example of how we should approach issues and weaknesses which need our comment. He adopts a Christ-centred and Biblical approach, demonstrating that he is exactly aware of the issues which face them, and reasoning from unshakeable principles towards specific applications of them.

### **The Final Appeal**

All good sermons have a strong final appeal and focus on the sacrifice of Christ. Heb. 12:23 appears grammatically and structurally to be a climax: "Ye are come unto... the general assembly and church of the firstborn". It is possible to understand this 'general assembly' as a

reference to the combined ecclesia present at the breaking of bread. Indeed the Orthodox churches use this verse in this sense in their eucharist liturgy, rendering it "the festival of the firstborn" (3). Chapter 13 contains a series of brief practical exhortations just before the final appeal to home in on the body and blood of our Lord. 13:10 then goes on to compare us to the priests eating the sacrifice on the altar; a picture so appropriate to partaking the emblems at the memorial meeting. 13:11-15 is surely a fitting climax to the sermon, as the audience prepared to take the emblems: "The *bodies* of those beasts...Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with his own *blood*, *suffered*...let us go forth therefore unto Him, bearing his reproach... by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually* (not just at this meeting)". Notice the emphasis on the *body* and *blood* of Christ, and an appeal for our response in praise rather than further self-examination. The whole sermon started with God (the very first word in 1:1), and ends with God; reflecting the fact that Christ's work is a manifestation of God, and is intended to bring us to the Father, and eternally reconcile us with Him.

Indeed, a fair case can be made that most of the NT epistles are in fact based upon sermons read out at the breaking of bread service. Given that most Christians would have been illiterate, the memorial meeting would have been the logical time and place to read out the latest letter from Paul or Peter, in any case (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Consider how Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 5:3-5 as if he is present with them at their memorial meeting ["ye being gathered together..."]. Many of the endings and greetings of the letters have some reference to the memorial meeting. The commands to pray and kiss each other which conclude some of the letters must be compared to the information we find in Justin Martyr's description of the early communion meetings: "When we have ceased from prayer, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president bread and a cup of wine" (*Apology* I, 65). The strange ending of 1 Corinthians 16:20-24 is an obvious allusion to the passage in the *Didache*, describing the words spoken at the breaking of bread meetings in the first century: "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha...Amen". According to the *Didache*, the president at the memorial meeting said: "If any man is holy, let him come; if any be not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Indeed, it is possible that the book of Revelation is a series of prophecies initially given at ecclesial gatherings. The whole book is punctuated by passages of liturgy and worship (4).

The evidence provided here that 'Hebrews' was a sermon at the breaking of bread is to me quite strong. As we've said, in an oral culture of illiterate converts, it is to be expected that the majority of Paul or Peter's letters would've been read aloud to the assembled congregations when they gathered for worship. There is reference to a "holy kiss" at the end of some of the letters (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). This was understood by Justin, Tertullian and Hippolytus to be a signal to the hearers that now the sermon had ended, and they were to kiss each other and begin partaking of the Lord's supper (5). Whether that's the case or not, there's some major homework here for the enthusiast- to study each of the New Testament letters as a sermon appropriate to the breaking of bread service.

## Notes

- (1) See Joe Hill, 'An Ancient Bible Companion', *Tidings*, series 1994/5.
- (2) The only other times this construction occurs is in Heb. 2:7,9, where we read that Christ was for "a little while" (RV mg.) lower than Angels.
- (3) Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom Of Morality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996) p. 107.
- (4) This idea is developed further in Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London:

SCM, 1953).

(5) References provided in Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 176.

13:23- see on 1 Thess. 2:17.

*Be informed that our brother Timothy has been set at liberty; along with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you-* This is a strong indication that Paul was the author, writing from Italy (:24), where it seems Timothy was also imprisoned. Paul expressed his concern for the situation in Jerusalem by sending Timothy to them. His begging of Timothy to come to him in 2 Tim. 4 was therefore asking a fair favour of Timothy, seeing timid Timothy had apparently been imprisoned with Paul at some stage. Although it has to be said that there is no specific implication that the place of Timothy's imprisonment was Rome.

13:24 *Greet all those that have the rule over you, and all the saints-* Paul recognizes their elders (see on :17), but parallels the elders with the church membership.

*They of Italy greet you-* This is significant in that we get the impression from 2 Tim. 4 that the Rome ecclesia had come to ignore Paul, so that he effectively stood alone.

13:25 *Grace be with you all. Amen-* There is significance in the "all", because it's clear from the letter that some of the Hebrew Christians had returned to the temple cult. And I noted in commentary on Acts that there were apparently elements within the Jerusalem church who collaborated with the Jewish 'satan' to get Paul arrested and imprisoned. But we should likewise wish grace, the experience of God's gift working within to transform us, to all who have named the name of Christ; no matter how far they have apparently strayed from Him or personally turned against us.

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion, greeting-* A good case can be made that James was written as a follow up to the Council of Jerusalem. It's interesting to observe all the connections between the letter of James and the Acts 15 council. Note some of the more obvious: The salutation (James 1:1 = Acts 15:34); "Listen, my brothers" (James 2:5 = Acts 15:13); "The name which was called upon you" (James 2:7 = Acts 15:17); "Keep unspotted from the world" (James 1:27 = Acts 15:29); and there are at least three Greek words which occur only in James and Acts 15 (James 1:27 = Acts 15:14; James 5:19 = Acts 15:19; James 1:16,19,25 = Acts 15:25). Perhaps the letter of James is in some way his retraction of his wrong attitude, an example of where a man comes to understand what works are really important... or perhaps it was to dissociate himself from those who are called "certain persons who came from James" (Gal. 2:12), as if he was not actually behind them. Perhaps, however, it was that James saw through church politics for what they were, and focused upon the need for real, practical spirituality, the works of faith and spirit rather than mere legalism.

The reasons for believing James to be the Lord's brother are well summarized elsewhere; his introduction is therefore an essay in humility and not playing on human relationships as a means to assert authority, seeing he does not mention this fleshly relationship: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". James the Lord's brother being the clear leader of the early church, it would be fitting that at least one of his letters (and Hebrews too?) be preserved. His high position of respect is indicated by Mk.15:40 describing a "James the less" - i.e. than the great James the Lord's brother. It was not until after James' death that the Gospel mushroomed among the Gentiles, which again points to a basically Jewish readership being catered for. The Lord's brothers having been sceptical of him during his ministry (Jn.7:3-5), James' depth of appreciation must have developed at lightning speed for him to write this epistle at a relatively early date. Two outstanding characteristics of James are the constant allusions to previous Scripture, especially the Gospels and Proverbs, and the intensely practical understanding of the moment by moment spiritual battle which we all face. It is worth noting that the most senior brother of the early church scored highly on these points. His humility in calling himself a servant of the Lord Jesus is remarkable- Paul could legitimately lay weight to his reasoning by saying he had seen Christ in the flesh (1 Cor.9:1; 2 Cor.5:16); how much more so could James have gently pointed out his "(knowing) Christ after the flesh"?

"Greeting" means literally 'I wish you joy'. James then goes on to define what that joy is: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations". And so we are introduced to the basic theme of James- the machinery of human nature and our evil desires, and how to overcome them. Contrary to how it is often read, the temptations here are spiritual temptations- so the context of the chapter and letter require. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust (NIV "evil desire"), and enticed" (1:14). The real temptations in life are to give way to our evil desires; the trials of life like illness or disaster may not necessarily tempt us

so strongly in this way. It is easy to think that 'temptation' refers to these 'physical' trials, and to see those problems as things in themselves to be bravely endured. But whether we lose a leg or miss a bus, the same spiritual temptation of frustration- or whatever- may be presented to each sufferer. The flesh tends to make a big difference between physical and spiritual temptations; but to God- and James- the spiritual temptations are of paramount importance; whatever physical temptations we have are not for their own sake but to create the situation which our evil desires will use to tempt us spiritually.

*1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations-* We must pray not to be led into temptation (Mt. 6:13); but when we fall into such temptation (s.w.), count it all joy, James says (1:2). The exercise of praying not to experience those temptations was for our spiritual benefit, and God is willing that it should be so. James exhorts us to count falling into spiritual temptation as a joy; instead of the 'here we go again...', 'sin after sin' kind of attitude descending on us as we sense such temptations approaching. We must instead rejoice that here is another opportunity to please God on the highest level possible; to have an evil desire in your heart and to overcome it. The idea of falling ("When you fall...") may create the idea of giving way to the temptations. But there may be some degree to which we fall a little way before we are tempted: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away (from his normal safe spiritual self, abiding in Christ) of his own lust" (1:14). There is surely no real temptation if the evil desire appears so unattractive as to not even lead us part way towards realizing it. Thus the devil in the sense of the Lord's natural desires (Heb. 4:15 cp. James 1:14,15) led Jesus away from His own supreme spirituality to tempt him.

*1:3 Knowing that the proving of your faith works patience-* Our joy at the onset of temptation should be because we know that we have an opportunity to develop permanent spiritual fruit, if only we can respond correctly in those split seconds when the process of being drawn away and enticed is going on. The trying of our faith due to spiritual temptation is in the sense of our faith that God "is able to keep (us) from falling" (Jude 24). In the moment of temptation, whether it be from an unkind word from someone or irritation at someone's natural characteristics, our joy will be helped by our faith that God will keep us from falling, and will not lead us any further into temptation unless we go on ourselves. However, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

It is worth drawing attention to the remarkable parallels between James 1 and 1 Peter 1. The infallible principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture will therefore allow more light to be shed on much of James 1. Peter's parallel to "the trying of your faith worketh patience" is "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith... tried with fire" (1 Pet. 1:6,7). A heavy spirit is more likely the result of prolonged spiritual temptation than physical trials, although these were no doubt the cause of the spiritual tests. The fire therefore represents the fire of the flesh, a figure which James also uses regarding the tongue as the epitome of our evil desires (3:5,6). Thus Prov. 16:27: "An unGodly man digs up evil (out of the evil treasure of his heart- or is this the basis of the wasted talent parable?): and (therefore) in his lips there is as a burning fire"; cp. too 1 Cor. 7:9. It is the constant reaction to spiritual trial that forges an acceptable character, not just the receipt of physical trial, as would be the case if the fire only represented persecution in itself. This trial of faith "works patience"- which must therefore be defined in this context as the ability to grit one's teeth in the moment of temptation, and cling on to one's faith in God's spiritual protection in the power of the word.



The interpretation of "faith" as faith in the Spirit keeping us from falling (Jude 24) is confirmed by a closer look at Rom. 5; "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations *also*"- as if he is saying that the "tribulations" had the same effect as "being justified by faith (in forgiveness), we have peace (through forgiveness) with God...we have access by faith (in forgiveness) into this grace..." (Rom. 5:1,2). So we see the equation: "Tribulations" (Rom. 5:3)= same effect as having total faith in forgiveness (Rom. 5:1,2)= "the trial of your faith" that God will help you overcome your sin (James 1:3), i.e. keep you from spiritually falling (Jude 24). In the language of Rom.5, the "experience" of patiently resisting sin gives birth to hope- confidence and a positive approach, hoping for grace in the last day. The more we overcome the hour by hour niggles of the flesh, the more humbly confident we will be of our eternal future.

*1:4 And let patience have its perfect work, so that you may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing-* Such patience results in a "perfect work... perfect and entire, lacking in nothing" (1:4; note the triple emphasis of the same idea) in terms of spiritual development. The word of God has the power to make perfect (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 13:10), and we have seen its place in developing the faith and patience which James says lead us to perfection. The trial of faith leads to the development of these fruits of the Spirit; yet the word also leads to the same fruits (Jn. 15:7 cp. v.4,5). The goals of spiritual development James sets are high- contrast Paul, who frequently laments the realities of the flesh (why the different approach?). Maybe James was alluding to Christ's ultimatum "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect", Mt. 5:48. The idea of perfection occurs again in 3:2, where it applies to the man who does not offend in word, and therefore has his whole life in tight control- again, the result of a mind fully controlled by the word. In the context of sin and forgiveness, Paul's words in Rom.5 take on new meaning: "We glory in (spiritual) tribulations (cp. "Count it all joy...") also: knowing that (spiritual) tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed" (Rom. 5:3-5). "Tribulation" is therefore to be equated with "the (spiritual) trial of your faith" in James 1.

"That you may be perfect" may seem an unreasonably high target. In Eph. 4:13 Paul says that through the ministry of the Spirit (now in the word) we are on the way to the "perfect man" state; he implies that he too is on that journey ("till we all come"). Yet in Phil. 3:12-17 Paul speaks as if whilst he has not yet reached that state, striving for literal perfection is the same thing as being perfect. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after... reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize... let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded... be followers together of me" in this example of all out striving for a perfect character. Does this indicate that a state of perfection is theoretically possible for us in this life, through developing a full faith in God's total justification of us on account of our being in Christ? Thus both the word and the blood of Christ sanctify us, seeing that the word reveals and develops faith in Christ's sacrifice (Jn. 17:17; Heb.10:10-14). Both blood and water (the word- Eph.5:26) came from Christ's side on the cross.

*1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all liberally and without reproaching, and it shall be given him-* "Wisdom" is associated with the faith and perfection which James well anticipates his readers would complain they lacked. We have seen that the word is the source of such faith, perfection and endurance; it seems fair to equate wisdom

with the word. We will see by and by that James makes frequent reference to Proverbs- and in that book wisdom is almost a synonym for the word, in the local instance the Law of Moses, upon which Proverbs is often a commentary. Again, James anticipates the natural human fear that a totally spiritual God will upbraid us for our lack of spiritual strength; but God's giving of such strength is "liberal", to whoever asks. James evidently interpreted "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Mt. 7:7) as primarily referring to asking for spiritual strength and knowledge. Similarly "...how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things ("the Holy Spirit", Lk. 11:13) to them that ask Him?" (Mt. 7:11). These passages appear to be alluded to by James here- thus wisdom, the word, the Holy Spirit, good things, "every good gift and perfect gift" (1:17), God's spiritual help to overcome sin, are all equated. These things are further defined in 3:17 as resulting in peace and harmony. "Reproaching" can imply to taunt, to cast in the teeth. James says that *God* doesn't do that, implying some others did. No doubt he was referring to the spiritually elitist Judaizers, who would have rejoiced to mock the spiritually immature who humbly sought for spiritual strength to overcome their temptations. God expects us to crawl to Him seeking for such strength to do better. But half the time our love of true spirituality just isn't strong enough to motivate us, and we let our fear of God's holiness and righteousness make us fear His 'upbraiding'.

*1:6 But let him ask in faith, never doubting. For he that doubts is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed-* A half hearted 'Dear God please keep me from this sin I think I may well commit soon' is no good. It is easy to conceive of faith as a sense of hope and trust in God in time of physical trial. But far more is it a totality of belief that God will hold us back from sinning as the temptation starts to develop- surely the supreme way of showing faith.

There must be a connection with the later description of a controlled tongue being the force that overcomes fierce winds (3:2-4). Words being a reflection of the mind (Mt. 12:34), controlled words show a controlled mind, which is through the influence of the word. Such a man is a "perfect man" (3:2)- i.e. matured by the word (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 1 Cor. 13:10). Thus the only way to ask for spiritual strength is if the mind is firmly controlled by the word, which thus generates an upwards spiritual spiral- "unto every one that hath (of spiritual strength) shall (more) be given... but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Mt. 25:29). This parable of the talents must refer to spiritual knowledge and strength, and the need we have to develop (trade) the spiritual gifts we have been given. Notice how we are given the talents/ gifts of spirituality, totally at the discretion of the Master. In a similar way, the gift of wisdom in James 1:5 equates with the "good and perfect gift... from the Father... the word of truth" of 1:17,18 and the wisdom that descends from above that is pureness, peace, gentleness, mercy etc. in 3:17.

"Doubts" comes from a root meaning 'division', giving the idea of inner debate. We will see that time and again James is warning us against having a semi-spirituality, whereby only part of our mind is totally influenced by the word, whilst other parts still retain the thinking of the flesh. James being so shot through with allusions to the Gospels, it is tempting to think that James is as it were taking a snapshot of Peter, wavering both in his physical movement and in faith as he stood on the water. Jesus did not upbraid Peter (cp. 1:5) for his request for strength and support, but was eager to satisfy it. There is also a possible connection with Eph. 4:13,14, which says that the miraculous Spirit gifts were to be possessed *until* the church reached the "perfect man" state, i.e. when the canon was completed (1 Cor. 13:8-10 cp. 2 Tim. 3:16,17), and that through being in that state they would "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and

fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine... and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive". The primary reference is doubtless to the doctrine of the Judaizers. This would liken the brother in James 1 whose faith in the Lord's protection from temptation is weak, to the brother in Ephesians 4 who will not make full use of the word to remain in the "perfect man" state, and is therefore liable to be influenced by false teaching. Both brethren are weak for the same reason- not making full use of the Spirit's gift in the word. Eph. 4:13,14 implies that firmly grasping the basic doctrines of the one faith results in us not being blown about by winds. This connection with James teaches that true doctrine will have a very practical effect upon our lives; in this case, by developing a firm faith.

It's significant and instructive that the other leaders of the early church not only accept Peter's authority, but do so exactly because of how he had dealt with his weaknesses and failures. It's as if they see in his humanity a reason to elevate him in their own estimations. Thus Peter's wavering when walking on the water is picked up by James, in one of the earliest of the New Testament letters [note the allusions to Stephen, John the Baptist, the references to Christians as still meeting in the synagogue, etc.- it has been argued by John Robinson that James was in fact the first of the epistles. It seems that the "scattered abroad" audience of James 1:1 refers to the scattering abroad of the Jewish believers in Acts 8:1]. James warns that we shouldn't waver in faith, like a wave on the water, blown and tossed around by the wind (James 1:6). James of course had seen Peter wavering on the water; and he holds up Peter, who at that time was the senior elder of the very early church, as an example of how *not* to be. My point is that the greatness of Peter was in his example of failure and how he overcame it.

1:7 *Do not let that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord*- James constantly sets before us the need to strive for a "perfect" (complete, mature) man state, through having a mind wholly committed to the word. His black and white, "hot or cold" approach is now powerfully shown: "Let not that man (the waverer) think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (1:7). This squashes the natural human reasoning that a bit of faith in prayer will lead to a bit of response from God. Faith is an absolute state. We either pray in faith- or with what are effectively empty words. But of course by contrast, if we do not waver, we certainly shall receive of the Lord. Again, there is another warning against semi-spirituality: having faith within certain limits, being content with expecting a small answer to our requests in accordance with our shaky faith. The way James understands human nature shines through, and it is fitting that someone of his experience and insight into the moment by moment ways of the flesh should have been the great leader of the early church. He too must have analysed his sins and temptations like we also can do. The correlation between his being such a senior brother and his evident appreciation of the wiles of the flesh must be significant; something to think about at the next ecclesial election?

1:8- see on Mt. 14:31.

*He is a doubleminded man, unstable in all his ways*- The theme of semi-spirituality continues: "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways"- i.e. all his spiritual ways. "Ways" is often used in a spiritual context in Proverbs, to which James alludes so much. The more evident allusion here is to Mt. 6:24: "No man can serve two masters: for he will hate the one, and love the other. You cannot serve God and mammon". James inspired interpretation of Matthew would make this apply to our minds. One can quite easily serve two masters

physically, externally; as every self-examining Christian should be all too aware. It is only in our heart that we can only serve one master. "Mammon" in the James context is thus not just material goods, but more importantly the lack of a totally spiritual mind which is behind these things. Note again the 'all or nothing' approach. While surely every reader of these words finds this somewhat worrying, tempting to conclude that this exposition is so idealistic as to be out of touch with reality, it does us no harm to reflect that ultimately in God's sight things are in black and white. As we read these words we are either in black or white with God. The ideal standard is set by Christ speaking of taking up the cross daily and following him. "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" Paul could say. If our conscience is tuned according to the word, we should be able to sense whether we are "double minded... wavering" or with that totality of commitment to the word in our heart, even if sometimes we falter. Considering these things should make us all recognize that spiritually we are but candles in the wind, desperately needing to make every effort to resist the winds of the flesh, and seek the shelter of Christ and His word of grace which keeps us from falling. "Double minded" means literally 'two souled', showing that the soul can refer also to the spiritual side of man, as well as the carnal. Notice how in the context James is talking about the mind being split into carnal and semi-spiritual divisions. The 'souls' referred to in the phrase 'double minded' would therefore be referring to attitudes of mind.

1:9 *Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation*- The riches which exalt the poor brother are the spiritual riches contained in the word (Ps. 119:14; Prov. 3:16 etc.). A poor brother being exalted recalls the parable about taking the lowest seat in the ecclesia so we may rise up higher at the judgement. Yet James uses the present tense- "he *is* exalted". This is one of many examples of believers being spoken of as if in prospect they are already in the Kingdom, in the same way as Israel were constituted the Kingdom of God at Sinai after their Red Sea baptism, but were not fully manifested as such politically until their entry into Canaan. Thus "The rich... *is* (present tense) made low (i.e. told to take the lower seat, as he will at judgement)... he *shall* (future) pass away" (v.10). However, this may have had a primary reference to the rich Jews of the first century being stripped of their wealth in some parts of the empire. Note that Heb.10:34 was also written to the scattered, persecuted Christian Jews whom James was addressing: "Ye... took joyfully the spoiling of your goods". If James is alluding to the parable of the wedding feast, then the reference to the poor brethren being given an honoured seating place in God's sight in this life, would have telling reference to the practice of the rich Christian Jews having their own honoured seats in the ecclesias to whom James was writing (2:3). This command to "rejoice" is in the context of v.2 speaking about rejoicing in spiritual trial. For the low brother who was to be exalted, the very thought of such greatness in the Kingdom could be a temptation to pride- and he should rejoice in the chance to fight this. '*Let him rejoice*' shows that the kind of joy James is thinking of would not come naturally, as it would if the brother was just thinking of his exaltation in this life.

1:10 *But the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away*- 1 Pet. 1:24,25 has a similar passage: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: But the word of the Lord endures for ever". The fading grass is contrasted by Peter to the enduring Word of God, and this is repeated by James. The humble brother taking the lowest seat in the ecclesia (cp. the more spiritual members being told in 2:3 "sit here under my footstool... you stand there" because all the chairs were taken by the rich) is connected with the one who asks the wisdom from God (v.5), who is not wavering or double minded, and who through the word is attaining to

the perfect man state (v.4). Thus the poor in this world are rich in the faith that comes by hearing the word of God.

The figure of fading grass suggests reference back to Is. 40:5-8: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together... The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withers, the flower fades... surely the people is grass... but the word of our God shall stand for ever". The "glory of the Lord" being revealed primarily refers to Christ's manifestation to Israel at his first coming. The preceding verses 3 and 4 describe John's preparatory work: "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness...". "All flesh" were to see the revelation of God's glory in Christ. This "all flesh" can refer to the Jews, "all" of whom went out into the wilderness to hear John's testimony regarding the coming Christ. This is confirmed by v.7 "The (Jewish) people is grass". The "goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field" would then be a reference to the Jewish law, which was "holy, just and good" but offered a fading glory, which Paul in 2 Cor. 3:7-18 said epitomized the Law. The word of the Lord (v.5) and "the spirit of the Lord" (v.7) were to make the grass wither and pass away, although the word would remain. This pointed forward to the ending of the Jewish system and Law through the work of Christ, "the word made flesh", "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 R.V.), and the ministry of the word remaining. James seems to have this background in mind when he makes the allusion in 1:9-11 to Is.40. The rich Christian Jews of the first century who were not that humble to the power of the word may well also have been swayed by Judaist arguments. They are being likened to the "grass" of Is. 40, which represented the Jewish system which was to be replaced by a permanent, unfading system based on the word. The Messianic Ps. 102:4,11 describes our Lord as being "withered like grass", showing how in his life and death on the cross he took upon himself the punishment of apostate Israel. James is neatly exhorting them to commit themselves wholly to the word, lest the demise of the Jewish system should result in their fading away too. Yet there is also the very primary application to the materialism of this group, being obsessed by their earthly riches.

*1:11 For the sun rises with the scorching wind and withers the grass, and the flower of it falls and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So also shall the rich man fade away in his business-* This is an obvious allusion to the person who received the word and quickly "sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth", referring to the person who falls away due to temptation (Mt. 13:5,20,21). The rich members of the ecclesia had therefore only let the word enter them skin-deep; it had not penetrated far through the "earth" of the flesh. The rising of the sun can refer both to Christ's coming (Mal. 4:2) and also to trials. In a sense both these meanings were fulfilled in AD70, when the rich Jews converted just prior to AD70 fell away, having endured only "for a while". The call to let God's word fully penetrate our flesh goes out to us with great urgency, living as we do on the brink of the final period of trial, and the full coming of Christ.

"So also shall the rich man fade away in his business". "Business" is elsewhere translated "journeyings", and would connect with the reference to the itinerant Jewish traders in 4:13: "You (amongst the believers) that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain".

*1:12 Blessed is the man that endures temptation. For when he has been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him -* Now James is

giving us supreme encouragement in those moments when the decision between flesh and spirit looms large. When we endure spiritual temptation, hanging on to the spiritual side of our minds, we will at that moment receive a crown for overcoming in Heaven. Because of this, we will be given the crown of victory at the judgement (2 Tim. 4:8), which has been developed as a result of our moment by moment spiritual victories in this life. Therefore each temptation we face is like a mini-judgment seat. This idea of there being some recognition in heaven the moment we achieve a spiritual victory is perhaps based on Mt. 5:11,12. So much of James is rooted especially in the Sermon on the mount. "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you...rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* (present tense) your reward in Heaven". Our eternal life "is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3,4) Similarly Rev. 3:11 implies we do now have the crown in a sense: "Hold fast that thou hast (your reward you have in prospect?) that no man take thy crown". Through our trials, God "scourges every son whom he receives", and therefore we can be spoken of in the continuous tense as "receiving a Kingdom" through our continued correct response to trials (Heb.12:6,28).

1:13 *Let no one say when he is tempted: I am tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and He tempts no one-* In those moments of spiritual temptation it is easy to recognize that the situation creating the temptation has clearly been arranged by God, and therefore to get bitter against Him. Now the earlier definition of 'temptation' as the spiritual temptation to sin which arises within us becomes vital. God may put the physical temptation in our way- e.g. the serpent in Eden, God tempting Abraham in Gen. 22:1- but our evil desires or "lusts" in our minds (v.14) are alone responsible for our sinning, due to wrongly responding to these physical temptations. Thus God could therefore examine the inner thought process of David's mind to reveal whether he was giving way to the spiritual temptations that would be developed by the physical trials: "Examine me, O Lord, and prove (same word as "tempt" in Gen. 22:1) me; try my reins and my heart" (Ps. 26:2). Thus "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away" (v.14).

1:14 *But each man is tempted, when he is dragged away by his own lust and enticed-* See on :13. It could be that James is arguing against the popular view that temptation is due to the overpowering swamping of a person by a cosmic satan. Instead, we are to understand temptation as coming from our "own lust", internally. We can take ownership and control over the source of temptation, which is within us. We are not merely puppets of some external cosmic forces. Those internal lusts are personified here as a women enticing and then dragging away her male victim. Proverbs uses similar metaphor, appealing for the "young man" to be wise and to resist her. The Judaist false teachers are described with the same word for "enticed" (2 Pet. 2:14,18). The essence of the enticement was an appeal to the flesh, to the internal mechanism of temptation within each person.

1:15 *Then the lust, when it has conceived, carries sin; and the sin, when it is fully grown, brings death-* The lusts inside our mind are being likened to an attractive woman enticing us. Thus the instinct to illicit sexual attraction within us is seen as a type of all wrong attraction to sins of any kind. It is a repeated New Testament theme that the punishment for sin is some kind of burning by fire. To the Old Testament mind, this image of being burnt at judgment day would have connected with the command to burn a whore (Lev. 21:9); thus all types of sin are to be seen as prostitution against God. The same process in sexual attraction of a wrong thought taking root, constantly preying on the spiritual mind, resulting in our allowing

it to grow under the excuse that we are still in control, eventually bringing forth gross sin, is repeated time and again as we are faced with the spiritual temptations of life every hour. The same figure occurs in Num. 15:39 speaking of 'going a whoring' "after your own heart and your own eyes", as if our natural mind is a whore.

Our carnal mind being likened to a whore or glamorous woman is a strong theme of Proverbs. The important thing to note is that Proverbs emphasizes that it is obedience to the word which will keep us from the lusts which the woman represents. "The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil... hear me now therefore (says the wisdom / word), O you children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her" (by listening to wisdom's words); Prov. 5:3,7,8. "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light... to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman" (Prov. 6:23,24). Prov. 7:1-5 is an even stronger emphasis: "Keep my words, and lay up my commandments... keep my commandments... My Law... that they may keep you from the strange woman, from the stranger which flatters with her words". The woman was "subtle of heart" (v.10), recalling the serpent, and had a guise of spirituality: "I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows" (v.14). She reasons that "the goodman is not at home, he is gone on a long journey: he has taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed" (v.19,20). This is almost certainly the basis of the Lord's parable of the talents, revealing that the reasoning of the one talent man was that since the Lord was not physically around, he need not develop. Thus that man does not represent just the lethargic Christian; but the man who consciously indulges in sin because he cannot feel the Lord's presence. "The goodman" is further equated with the Lord in Mt. 20:11. Notice the emphasis in the three Proverbs passages mentioned on the words of the woman being her means of attraction. Prov. 7:21 is explicit: "With her much fair speech (cp. the serpent again, and 2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 16:18, which connect the fair speaking, the whore, the serpent and the Judaizers) she caused him to yield". Words are a reflection of the mind (Mt. 12:34), again indicating that the woman represented an epitome of fleshly thinking. The parable of the prodigal son is clearly meant to show the path which we all take whenever we sin. The women upon whom he wasted his (spiritual) substance represent our giving way to sin in its various forms (Lk. 15:13).

1:16 *Be not deceived, my beloved brothers-* See on :15. This suggests there was some kind of 'deception' circling around which the readership needed to be aware of. And surely it refers to the Judaist false teaching and the "evil woman" of the temple cult plaguing the Jewish converts to whom James is writing. The same word is used of "them that seduce you", again in a Judaist context (see on 1 Jn. 2:26). So often there is the appeal by Paul and Peter to not be deceived, to resist the seduction of the Judaists. This was a major problem in the early Jewish churches. And James gives an interesting window onto that seduction, by portraying it was actually appealing to the flesh. The idea of ritualistic obedience, thereby freeing us up to act how we like in other areas, is terribly appealing. It explains why religion *per se* is so popular. But true Jesus-based spirituality is not like that.

1:17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation nor shifting shadow-* Again, James warns us not to err in thinking that God is leading us into sin by stressing that "every good gift and every perfect gift (gift of perfection) is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (v.17). The gift that leads to perfection is that of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to bring us towards the maturity of Christ. This coming down of the "good gift" (cp. "the good word of God", Heb. 6:5) is parallel with the gift of wisdom in v.5, which gift is further expanded in 3:15-17:

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure (cp. "the words of the Lord are pure"; "Your word is very pure", Ps. 12:6; 119:140), then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits". Thus the effect of asking for wisdom (1:5) is to be liberally given the gift of responding to the word so that it cultivates a fullness of spiritual fruit in us (1:17; 3:17). The gift of wisdom produces a fullness ("full of...") of characteristics which recall the moral characteristics of God's Name as declared to Moses: "Merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant (cp. "full of good fruits") in goodness and truth, keeping mercy..." (Ex. 34:6,7). The R.V. describes Yahweh as a God "full of" these things. Thus the Spirit through developing those characteristics in us leads to God's Name being upon us and God being manifested to us.

The gift of the Spirit "comes down from the Father". 'Coming down' is the language of God manifestation- e.g. God "came down" upon Mount Sinai in a mighty theophany; Jesus "came down from Heaven"; God "came down" to destroy Sodom and Babel. It is through the word 'coming down' into our hearts that we are able to manifest God. Thus Jn. 3:5 speaks of being born again (lit. 'from above') by the Spirit.

"The Father of lights" means that the light within us is from God, by His direct gift. Another connection in this context starts in 1 Jn.1:5: "This then is the message (word) which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all". The prologue of John's Gospel is closely linked to that of his epistles. The parallel to 1 Jn. 1:5 is Jn. 1:4 "In him (the word) was life, and the life was the light of men". Thus the Father of lights is the source of the logos-word, which is the gift that can be given to us in our hearts.

James again puts his finger on the feelings we have in those moments of weakness- there is "no variableness, nor shifting shadow" in the amount of spiritual strength He gives. It is tempting to think that the power of the Spirit does vary, and therefore God's involvement somehow waxes and wanes in our lives, and this affects the likelihood of us overcoming sin. But this is not the case. There is no variableness from His side; any such sensation is solely our fault. There is a subconscious element of doubt within us as to the stability of God; and we need to recognize that and realize that we are wrong and it is we who move from Him and not He from us:

- In Num. 23:19 Balaam assures Balak that God will not suddenly give him a different prophetic word after the one he had just given, and that the prophecy he had just given would be surely fulfilled: "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the Son of man, that He should repent: has He said, and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?".

- Later Saul thought that the word of God was variable, in that he doubted whether the command to totally destroy the Amalekites still stood. Samuel rebuked him for not "obeying the voice of the Lord... the Strength of Israel will *not* lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent" (1 Sam.15:22,29).

- Mal. 3:6 "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed"- because of the eternal covenant of grace which God made with Israel.

- Titus 1:2,3: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised... in... His word through preaching".

1:18 will- see on Job 22:27,28.



*Of His own will He gave us birth by the word of truth-* According to John 17, our unity will convert the world. The Gospel is a message of reconciliation with God which overflows into reconciliation between each other, according to Ephesians. The church is a foretaste, an advertisement, of what the future Kingdom will be like (James 1:18).

In contrast to the process of conceiving sin explained in v.14,15, "Of His own will He gave us birth by the word of Truth" (v.18). The child of God is born "Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:13)- i.e. of the will of God. The act of intercourse which leads to human conception is the ultimate and strongest expression of the fleshly will of man. The same immense drive and will is possessed by God, who channels it through His word and Spirit to result in the conception of spiritual people. What *tremendous* power there is therefore in that word! Note the comparison: "Of his own lust... of His own will... the word" (v.14,18).

"Being born again, not of corruptible (human) seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). Jn. 3:3 says that the new birth comes from above- James 1:17 describes the good and perfect gift of the word as being "from above". Notice that the word of God is connected with the will of God. Perhaps our faith in our prayers is militated against by our resigned 'If it be Your will' being so liberally sprinkled in them. Generally the Biblical examples of prayer- which presumably guide our approach- are conspicuous by their omitting of 'If it be Your will...'. They seem to request things in total faith- and normally receive them. Even Paul in recounting his experience of having three prayers go unanswered (2 Cor. 12:8) does not make any specific comment about the will of God. If we have the word of God in our minds and guiding our prayers, then we will be praying according to the will of God, "in the Holy Spirit". John 15:7 is explicit: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what *you* will, and it shall be done unto you". Jesus doesn't say that our prayers will be answered according to *God's* will, but according to our own will. This is because the word guiding our thoughts results in our will becoming identical with that of God, in so far as it is guided by the word. Again, an ideal is being suggested to us- a wholly spiritual mind filled with the word will result in a far more powerful prayer life. It is by birth of the word, therefore, that we become a son of God, part of the Divine family; and Jesus said "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt.12:50)- thus equating the will of God and the word. Similarly Jn.7:17 "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (in the word). Even more fundamentally, the covenant name of God is 'I will be who I will be' (Ex. 3:14 R.V.mg)- and God executes the will that is intrinsic in His very Name through His word.

*That we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creations-* We are living the eternal life, the Kingdom life, right now- if we have the Spirit living within us. We are already part of a new creation by the Spirit, which is a foretaste of the new order / creation which is to come. We can have the firstfruits of that state now in our minds, which if they are spiritual are the only part of our bodies which are experiencing the Kingdom life now, albeit in a limited form. An alternative approach to this verse is to view the "creatures" as the whole multitude of the redeemed, of which the present believers are only "the firstfruits". In this case, all the faithful who have been influenced acceptably by "the word of truth" are only a small foretaste of the many who will be so converted at the Lord's coming.

1:19 *You know this, my beloved brothers! But let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*- If we are truly born by the word then we will swift to hear it, as Jesus was of quick understanding in the word (Is. 11:3). We will share His aptitude for it, and we will be slow to speak anything else. The great danger is to be hearers and not doers of the word (James 1:22), but James implies that the antidote to this is to reflect upon the very nature of the word which gave us spiritual birth.

Because of the glorious power of the word of the Gospel as outlined in the previous verses, we should be quick to hear that powerful word. The idea of running swiftly in eager response to the word is quite a common Biblical idiom (2 Thess. 3:1; Ps. 119:32,60; Hab. 2:2; Amos 8:11,12; Dan. 12:4). Inevitably some practical examination of our eagerness of response to the word has to be made. How frequently do we rise up from our readings with an eager resolve to do something practical, to make some subtle change in our character? How often do our minds burn and race within us as we chase connections and themes through Scripture (cp. Lk. 24:32) and God's word falls open to us? Or are we content to dash through our Bible readings on the way to work, or leave them to the dog end of the day? God and the Angels no doubt look eagerly to those parts of the day when we read the word as their opportunity to guide and teach us, to strengthen us against the flesh. What a despoil to them if our minds are somewhere else as we read- if we bother doing any Bible readings at all that day. The practical effects of swiftly hearing this powerful word are to make us "slow to speak, slow to wrath". Along with many other examples in James, this definitely alludes to the Proverbs- in this case 10:19 and 17:27 for "slow to speak", and 14:29 for "slow to wrath". The context in these passages is that "instruction... reproof (10:17)... knowledge... understanding (17:27) ...understanding" (14:29) lead to the control of speech and wrath. All these things are true concerning the word- the ultimate source of reproof (2 Tim. 3:16,17) and understanding. This is exactly the context of James 1- by being "swift to hear" the spiritual strength which is in the word, we find the strength in practical terms to be "slow to speak, slow to wrath". It may be that James is alluding to Moses being "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue"- i.e. rather quiet, unsure of his words. Hence God reassured him: "I will teach thee what thou shalt say" (Ex.4:10-12). This would be specially relevant to James' persecuted Jewish readership; telling them to 'be like Moses' in his quiet speaking. And remember that James is writing to Jews, for whom Moses was an unattainable saint. But they are asked here to actually be like him.

1:20 *For the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God*- The implication is that the word making us "slow to anger" *does* work the righteousness of God- i.e. the word works or develops the righteous attributes of God within us, e.g. being "slow to anger". This is a specific characteristic of God's Name (Ps. 103:8; 145:8); thus the word gives us God's Name. In a similar way, the spiritual trial of our faith "*worketh* patience" (1:3)- another aspect of "the righteousness of God". In this case, we see that the word has the same effect upon us as trials. Our present tribulation "*works* for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). 1 Jn. 2:29 is also relevant- "every one that does righteousness is born of God", which James and John say is by the Spirit. Thus the word and Spirit of God acting on a man "*works... the righteousness of God*". There are so many allusions in James to the Sermon on the mount that the mention of the righteousness of God probably links with the only time Jesus mentioned this, in Mt. 6:31-33: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat... but seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness". Thus seeking God's righteousness is contrasted with over-concern about food. In the wilderness Jesus made the contrast between not living by bread alone, but by every word of God. Thus living by the word of God is associated with seeking the righteousness of God. It is also stressed that we only receive

('work') the righteousness of God by faith (Rom. 3:22; 10:3-6; Phil. 3:9)- which comes from the word (Rom. 10:17- which is in the context of a whole chapter showing that righteousness comes by faith).

1:21- see on Lk. 8:11.

*Wherefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls-* The word of the gospel is "implanted". It's not that we come to it by a process of correct intellectual study. As Paul points out in Romans, our calling is a matter of grace and even predestination. The call operates through the word, but that word is implanted in human hearts. God operates directly on human hearts. But it all depends how we "receive" that implanted word. Receiving the word so that it makes us "slow to speak, slow to wrath" is helped by laying apart "filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness". The Greek phrase translated "lay apart" is elsewhere used always concerning forsaking the practical, specific characteristics of the flesh (Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1; Eph. 4:25; Rom. 13:12). We have seen so far that James is emphasizing that it is through the new birth from the word that this can be achieved. 1 Pet. 2:1 also tells us to lay aside fleshly characteristics by being "newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word" (v.2). Similarly Eph. 4:23-25: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind... put on the new man (created by the word)... putting away lying" (etc). Rom. 13:12,13 gives us the greatest motivation to make this effort to so apply the word: "The night is far spent, the day (of the Kingdom) is at hand; let us therefore cast off (same word "lay apart") the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as (if we are) in the day" of the Kingdom. Thus we can therefore live now to some degree as we will in the Kingdom- by using the word to cast off the flesh and put on spiritual attributes, resulting in us walking (living in our day to day lives) as if we are in "the day" of the Kingdom.

The word acting on our minds should help us lay apart all "superfluity of naughtiness". "Superfluity" is from the same word translated "abundance" in Mt. 12:34 "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". It must have occurred to us all at some time that the command to bring "into captivity *every* thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) seems impossible to achieve. There are so many thoughts which are necessary in our secular lives, they cannot all be brought around to Christ. However, the word "abundance" means 'that which is over and above the necessary'. The point of bringing our thoughts to Christ is so that our words will be Christ-like, and as our thoughts lead to our words, we must control them. The context of 2 Cor. 10:5 is Paul justifying the apparently hard words he was having to use to the Corinthians- he assured them that in practice he was bringing all his thoughts captive to Christ, therefore his words were not the outpouring of unspiritual bitterness. Thus only those thoughts which are "of the *abundance*" of the heart (the mind) control our words; those thoughts which are over and above our necessary ones. James is saying that this "abundance" or "superfluity" of wrong thinking ("naughtiness") can be displaced by the word.

The Greek for 'implanted' means more literally 'something placed inside you which springs up'. This must have some reference to the sower parable- "The seed is the word", and if we are to receive the word meekly, James must be likening us to the ground of the parable- in this case, 'meek' ground. Are we meek to the word- 'quiet, mild', as 'meek' implies? It is so true that a settled, quiet mind is vital if we are to let the word really act on us. There may also

be a reference back to Romans 11, where Paul reasons that the Gentiles had been grafted into the Israelitish olive tree. Having a Jewish readership, James is maybe gently hinting that *all* men, including Jews, need the word grafted into them.

We have spoken in general terms about "the word" being the power of righteousness, which comes down from above and germinates spiritual life within us. This verse 21 gives us some hints as to a more precise definition. We have noted the clear allusion to the parable of the sower- the "engrafted"/ implanted word-seed. "The word of truth" of v.18 "begat" us, which the almost parallel passage in 1 Pet. 1:23 says is the seed-word of God. The word in the parable of the sower is defined as "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt.13:19)- i.e. the Gospel of the Kingdom. The sower parable shows the response of various people to the Gospel which they *initially hear*. James 1:21 continues by saying that this word is "able to save your souls". This recalls a number of passages which say that it is the message of the basic Gospel which saves our souls:

"To you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts 13:26).

"The Gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom.1:16)

"I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received (cp. "receive with meekness the engrafted word")... by which also ye are saved; if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you" (1 Cor.15:1,2); this Gospel which would save them was centred around the basic truths of the resurrection and second coming of Christ which Paul goes on to reiterate in 1 Cor.15. There really *is* power in them, to save our souls.

1:22 *But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding your selves*- This plainly states how easy it is to hear the word, and *deceive* ourselves into thinking that this very process justifies us. But if we are not doers of the word, we only "seem to be religious... (*deceiving* our) own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). We are invited to see a parallel between the process of hearing God's word, and seeming to be religious.

The subsequent warning "Be doers of the word" in the sense of bridling the tongue and visiting the sick (v.22,26,27) implies that "the word" of the Gospel included practical matters- something hinted at in many other passages. The believers to whom James was writing had already received the implanted word-seed of the Gospel at their conversion- but James implies that they needed to keep on receiving it. 1 Pet.1:22,23 connects loving "one another with a pure heart fervently" with "being born again... by the word of God". Thus again the new birth is not just a question of accepting doctrine in the sense of 'first principles', but also the doctrine of practical Christian living. Thus it needs continued intercourse with the word to create a stream of new life. On a practical note, let us remember that we should get this power of new life entering us from re-hearing the basic Gospel as much as from the deeper parts of our Bible study. Notice that the word can "save your souls", showing that the soul does not always just refer to the life or body/creature, but can also refer to our spiritual selves, which the word is able to save or preserve.

One of the easiest forms of self deceit is to hear the correct exposition of the word and feel that therefore we are on the right track towards the Kingdom. Yet a comparison with v.27 indicates that it is quite possible to be "spotted by the world" as well as being a hearer of the word. This must be something we are especially liable to, hearing as many of us do up to three times a week the correct exposition of the word at church meetings. There must be a reference back to Rom.2:13: "for not the hearers of the Law are justified before God, but the

doers of the Law shall be justified". Thus again James is thinking of the Jewish nature of his readership, and leading them to redirect their zeal for keeping the Law to zeal for receiving and doing "the engrafted word" of Christ's Gospel. "Deceiving" implies 'reasoning'- and again, James has his finger on the pulse of human nature. If we ask ourselves, 'Do I reason with myself that I am doing the word when actually I'm only hearing it' the instinctive answer is, 'No, I'm not aware I do anyway'. The reasoning or "deceiving" goes on in our deep subconscious. "Doer" is also translated "poet", in the sense of a performer of a written script. Thus Paul speaks of "how to perform that which is good (i.e. the law/word of God, v.16) I find not" (Rom. 7:18). This theme of self-deception is continued in v.26- if a man "seem to be religious, and bridles not his tongue (he) deceives his own heart". Words are a product of the mind (Lk. 6:45), and thus to bridle the tongue is to bridle the mind, which can only be done through the application of the word. If this is not done, then we deceive ourselves- which v.21 says we do by hearing and not doing the word. Thus to be a doer of the word in this case is to apply the word to our minds, to consciously make the mental effort to let the word control our thinking and words when in a provocative situation. Therefore being a doer of the word does not necessarily involve any physical work. There are other examples of 'works' not being physical actions but mental effort to apply the word to our minds, allowing the operation of the Spirit:

- "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent" (Jn. 6:29- cp. Rom. 10:17 "Faith comes by hearing... the word of God"). Prov. 12:22 (Septuagint) speaks of the man that "works faith".
- "The work of the Law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15)
- Sin "did work in our members" (Rom. 7:5)
- God "has begun a good work in you" (Phil.1:6)- i.e. in your spiritual development
- "Fruitful in every good work... patience... longsuffering... joyfulness" (Col. 1:10,11)
- A man carefully examining himself by the word, "the perfect law of liberty", is "a doer of the work" (James 1:25).
- We will be judged according to our works (Rev. 22:12)- and our spiritual development rather than physical achievements will be of paramount interest to our Judge.
- Those who believe false doctrine about Christ's nature should be shunned because "He that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds", i.e. his beliefs (2 Jn. 11,7). A like example is in Rev. 2:6,15: "The *deeds* of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate... the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate".
- Similarly the Lord worked "the works of Him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4; 17:4) not just in miracles and good deeds, but in developing that perfect character until He "finished the work (of saving man) which you gave me to do".
- "The works of Abraham" (Jn. 8:39) in the context were to believe in Christ.

All this is part of the great Bible theme that our thoughts really are reckoned as works by God. In the light of this housebound housewives and hard working bread winners can take courage that their lack of 'works' physically achieved is totally appreciated by the Father. With this definition of works it is no longer necessary to feel we can only work for God at weekends or in the evenings- or after the children are asleep. Our whole life can be one of active, working service. But to inspire those works, constant contact with the word must be made. The odd glances at the pocket Bible during the day, or the Commandments of Christ on the wall, will be worth their weight in golden faith in the great day.

1:23 *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like to a man seeing his natural face in a mirror-* Hearing the word but not doing it is a sermon on the mount allusion- those who *heard* those sayings but did not *do* them were likened to the man building his

house on the sand (Mt. 7:26). In the same way as he *thought* that he was building and was doubtless quite pleased at his progress, so the man who glanced in the mirror thought all was well with his spiritual development. The acquiring of knowledge ('hearing') can give the impression that we are progressing; but practice ('doing') is the real foundation. It is sad that the ever deepening level of the church's Bible scholarship is not always matched by such 'doing'. Hearing the word is likened to glancing in a mirror and then going on with life, immediately forgetting that vision. Like the quick glance at the mirror, straighten the tie, brush the hair, off to the office. Maybe this equates with the sleepy, half awake doing of the readings in the morning and then off into the day with not a further thought about our real spiritual figure.

"Beholding" means 'observing fully'- the man's mistake was in his immediate forgetting of the image he saw. Thus he was a very careful hearer- because it is not always that we apply ourselves so much to the word that it is as if we are staring into our own face, observing fully our real spiritual self. In the previous analogy, here is someone who got up, washed, dressed and did his readings at the table with a concordance, and was really helped in those minutes to examine himself. But Bible study was only part of his life- he "immediately forgot". Surely none of us can feel complacent at this challenge of James?

Notice how the word is likened to a mirror- our study of it should always lead to some form of self-examination and assessment as we compare ourselves against the deep things of the Spirit. Thus our studies should revolve around the application of the word to our moment by moment spiritual lives, rather than the mental gymnastics with Scripture at one extreme and empty platitudes at the other, which seem to characterize so much of our communal Bible study. The idea of the word being represented by a mirror occurs again in 1 Cor. 13:8-12. Verse 8 describes the withdrawal of the miraculous spirit gifts, and their replacement by the completed word- "that which is perfect", v.10 (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16,17). Paul then contrasts the dispensation of the Spirit gifts and the word: "Now we see through (look into) a glass, darkly; but then face to face". Thus the dispensation of the word would enable him to see a clear reflection of himself- "Then shall I know (myself) even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). The implication of these few words are tremendous- through using the completed word to examine ourselves, it is possible for us to see ourselves as God sees us- to know ourselves even as God knows us. Paul expresses his lack of full knowledge in 1 Cor. 4:4: "I know nothing by myself (therefore) am I not hereby justified". The context is Paul's countering of the Corinthians who claimed to have examined and judged him. Paul is saying that he is not qualified to fully examine and judge himself, so therefore cannot comment. But now, with the completed revelation compared with the partial understanding of only some facets of God's revelation to man given by the ministry of the miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 13:9), we are able to achieve a fuller self-examination. James' description of the word as the "perfect law" (1:25) strengthens the impression that he is consciously alluding to 1 Cor. 13 (cp. "that which is perfect" concerning the completed word); as if he is preparing his readers for how they should use the completed word which he, like Paul, knew in advance would soon be available.

The word enables us to 'behold' ('Observe fully') our "natural face". "Natural" is from the Greek *gennas*- to regenerate, conceive, gender, beget. This must connect with the concept of v.17,18 and the parallel 1 Peter 1:23- we are conceived by the word entering us, through

God's initiative through the Spirit. The man James is speaking of looked at his "natural face". This could imply at least two things- he examines the state of spiritual regeneration he has reached from the word; or he looks back to his initial spiritual birth, how he was at his first 'genesis' by the word of the Kingdom when it developed within him for the first time. The same idea is picked up in 3:6; the tongue "defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell". Our thoughts lead to the words of the tongue. Thus ultimately an undisciplined mind "sets on fire the course of nature"- unless our thoughts are restrained by the word, our 'genesis' ("nature") so far developed by the word, and our initial spiritual strength developed by the word of the Gospel, will be destroyed, "set on fire". Strong interprets "course" as meaning 'A circuit of effects'- the circuit of effects due to our 'genesis' ("nature") will be destroyed or broken unless we make a conscious effort to control the mind. We have seen that the 'genesis' is a result of the action of the word on a man's heart. This creates a 'circuit of effects'- hence 3:6 AVmg. speaks of the "wheel of nature" (the 'genesis') in the sense of something continuous. Surely the implication is that once the word starts to take effect, it initiates a circular, upwards spiral of spirituality- spiritual strength leading to spiritual strength, a certain level of appreciation of the word steadily leading to a higher level. However, this "course of nature" can be broken by not making a conscious effort to control the mind and the words which follow from it (in the context of James 3:6), and of not making the effort to *continue* beholding our "natural face" in the mirror of the word, and letting the word act on the results of our self-examination.

That the word should lead to an ever-increasing level of self-examination and recognition of the urgency of our need to spiritually improve is also hinted at in 1 Jn.1:10: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"- implying that the more the word is in us, the more we recognize the degree to which we have sinned. But notice it is not just a reading of the word that results in this- seeing that the Jews to whom Paul partly wrote Romans, for all their Bible knowledge and ability to assimilate the detailed Old Testament allusions Paul makes in Romans, were of the opinion they could "continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1)- i.e. they reasoned that whatever they did was automatically blotted out by reason of being in Christ (and Jewish?). "We make Him (God) a liar" must refer back to the serpent in Eden, who also lacked the word of God in him, thus effectively leading him to the conclusion that Adam and Eve could not sin, even if they consciously disobeyed the commandments. Saying we have not sinned is equivalent to saying that we do not need Christ- both statements make God a liar (1 Jn. 1:10 cp. 5:10); which again was the implication of the serpent reasoning. Paul picks this point up in 2 Cor. 11:3, where he connects the reasoning of the serpent with that of the Judaizers, who also argued that Christ was not vital for salvation. Eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge made Adam and Eve aware of their sin- as does eating of the word of knowledge in our day. Jn. 15:22; Lk. 12:47,48 and many other passages clearly teach that the more knowledge of the word a man has, the more aware he is of his sins, and therefore the more answerable to judgement.

1:24 *For he sees himself and goes away and immediately forgets what manner of man he was-* James 1:24,25 parallel looking at ourselves, and looking into the perfect law of liberty. To read Scripture as God really intended, not as mere words on paper, is to find ourselves engaged in an inevitable self-examination. Reflect a while on two consecutive verses in Ez. 8:18; 9:1: "Though they [Israel] *cry in my ears with a loud voice* [when they are under judgment for their actions, which I now ask them to repent of], yet will I not hear them. He [God] *cried also in my [Ezekiel's] ears with a loud voice*, saying...". Do you see the connection? As we read and hear God's word today, He is passionately crying in our ears

with a loud voice. Just imagine someone literally doing this to you! If we refuse to hear it, then we will cry in *His* ears with a loud voice in the last and final day of condemnation. The intensity of *His* appeal to us now will be the intensity with which the rejected plead for Him to change His verdict upon them; and God, like them in this life, will refuse to hear. What arises from this is a simple fact: as we read and hear the pages of Scripture, as we turn the leaves in our Bibles, God is crying in our ears with a loud voice. Our response to Him is a foretaste of our acceptance or rejection at the day of judgment.

*1:25 But he that looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues, being not a hearer that forgets, but a doer that works, this man shall be blessed in what he does-* The very nature of life in this present world appears to make it impossible to permanently "continue therein" ("continue"= 'to stand beside'). Thus looking at the word and hearing the word are paralleled. The only access to the word by the average believers was probably by hearing it read publicly. The ability to read would not have been widespread, and copies of the scrolls not widely available (hence the ministry of the miraculous spirit gifts to provide the word of prophecy and its interpretation). Other passages refer to this hearing of the word through public reading of it in the ecclesia: Acts 13:27; 15:21 (cp. James 2:2 AVmg.); 2 Cor. 3:15; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; Rev. 1:3; 2:7,11. The believers should hear the word spoken or read and look into it continually- i.e. keep it in mind, meditate upon it. Thus 1:19 encourages them to be "swift to hear" the word of God- not to mentally doze through those all-important meetings of the ecclesia when the word was read. Thus James never intended these words to be read as meaning 'You must walk around with your head in a Bible all day'- he was too practical to advocate that. But he was offering an even greater challenge- to live each day continually looking into the things of the word in one's mind, with "the eyes of your understanding being (open)", Eph. 1:18. We who can read and have convenient access to the written word have so much more opportunity- but we seem to lack the degree of mental spiritual alertness to the word that James is speaking of. Surely every Christian who can afford one should have a pocket Bible close at hand during the day and frequently refer to it- even for a few brief seconds in the hour. But above all, we must strive to achieve that continual mental looking into the things of the word. But he who continues looking into "the perfect law", "this man shall be blessed in his deed"- and that in itself means that James is not setting an impossible standard. It is realistic for a man to achieve it. Note how the continual looking into and application of the word is "his deed". We have earlier commented how 'deeds' and 'works' can refer to the mental effort made in daily life, rather than specific physical actions.

Notice the reference to "the law of liberty"- another gentle dig at his Jewish readers, reminding them of "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...be not entangled again with the yoke of (Mosaic) bondage" (Gal. 5:1). Other references to "liberty" are clearly in the context of liberty from the Mosaic Law, and they also have indirect hints at our liberty being because of a word ("law") of liberty:

- "We are not children of the bondwoman (the Law) but of the free" (Gal. 4:31). We are children by being born of the word of God (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). Thus "the free" is the free word of the liberty of the Spirit.
- "You have been called unto liberty... (to) walk in the spirit" (Gal. 5:13,16)- i.e. in a way of life guided by the Spirit (Jn. 6:63 etc.)
- "As free... (doing) the will of God" (1 Pet. 2:16,15)- which is in the word (James 1:18; Jn. 1:13)



- "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17)- the Lord's Spirit is in the hearts of His people who are influenced by the word of the gospel.
- "The truth (the word- Jn.17:17) shall make you free... the servant abides not in the house for ever (alluding to Hagar being cast out, representing the casting out of the law, Gal. 4:30). If the Son therefore (i.e. because the law was being cast out) shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (Jn.8:32,35,36). That freedom comes from the Truth (Jn.8:32), which is the Spirit.

Now it may be argued that if "the law of liberty" is the words of Jesus and the New Testament, then that part of Scripture is far more spiritually powerful than the Old Testament, particularly the Law. Why not just concentrate our Bible reading on the New Testament? Two comments present themselves:

- "The spirit of Christ was in (the prophets)" (1 Pet. 1:11). The Spirit of Christ was in them, but it was only there for our benefit who came after Christ (1 Pet. 1:12). Thus the prophets "searched diligently" for the meaning of their prophecies (1 Pet. 1:10)- the implication being that they were unsuccessful because the purpose of the prophecies was for our benefit not for theirs- "not unto themselves... they did minister the things, which are *now* reported (explained) unto *you*" (1 Pet. 1:12). We have shown that the Spirit-word is the law of liberty, which is contrasted to the Mosaic law or word of bondage. The contrast is not specifically made between the word and the Mosaic law, but between the Spirit word and the Mosaic Law. Thus it may be that the Spirit in the sense of a power of righteousness that can change a man's mind was only released fully from the Old Testament word when it was read by believers after Christ. Notice how the parallel with us looking into the law of liberty in 1 Peter is in 1:12 concerning the Angels desiring to look into the word. This is a parallel with 1:10, describing how the prophets desired to look into the word. Thus seeing that prophets and Angels have unsuccessfully tried to look into the word, we should grasp the opportunity we have. This parallel show that the "law of liberty" was also the prophetic word of the Old Testament which the prophets tried to "look into".

- There is considerable evidence that the power of the Old Testament word was opened by the death and resurrection of Christ, when He became "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17,18 RV), thus enabling us to be changed from the Mosaic glory to the Christian glory- "From glory to glory... by the Spirit of the (risen) Lord" (cp. Jn. 1:16,17). In passing, it is worth considering whether Paul's other reference to contrasting types of glory also has reference to the Mosaic/Christian system comparison- "the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another... so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:40,42). Thus Paul would be likening the present mortal state of our bodies to the earthy (terrestrial) Jewish system, compared to the glory of the spiritual heavenlies in Christ.

The man who keeps mental hold of the Spirit of the word in his daily life "Shall be blessed in his deed". This must be alluding to Lk. 11:28 "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it". Again, the hearing of the word was a literal hearing, as Jesus had been speaking orally to the people. Thus James' interpretation of keeping the word was to continually look into it in one's mind and let it have the effect of self-examination upon us. The preceding verse records the comment "Blessed is the womb that bare you, and the breasts which you sucked" (Lk. 11:27). Jesus is saying that the more important spiritual equivalent of this is to "hear the word of God". Thus being breast fed is likened by Jesus to hearing and keeping the

word. In Peter's language: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word" (1 Pet. 2:2). It is only the spiritually young who should feed on the milk of the word (1 Cor.3:2; Heb. 5:12,13). Those to whom Jesus spoke about the sucking of breasts being like hearing and keeping the word were also spiritually young, having only just heard the word. James 1:24,25 is saying that the man who continually looks at his natural face in the mirror of hearing and keeping the word will be blessed for his effort. Lk. 11:27,28 is saying that the spiritually young who as newborn babes keep hearing and keeping the word will be blessed. Remember that it was suggested that the "natural" (Genesis-ed) face of the man could refer to his recently spiritually born self. This would fit the connections with Lk. 11:27 nicely. Thus James implies that there is an especial temptation for those newly converted or spiritually conceived by the word to soon give up their zeal for the word and to stop carefully examining their own position in the light of the word. The parable of the sower puts this in black and white.

"If (we) know these things, happy (blessed) are (we) if (we) do them" (Jn. 13:17). Also worth mentioning is Lk. 8:21: "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it". By being born again of the Spirit by hearing, doing, keeping and continually looking at the word, we take on the family likeness- Jesus can feel to us as to a mother or brother. These things help us appreciate the real spirit of the frequent commands to "Keep my commandments, and do them" (Lev. 22:31). This implies that keeping and doing the word are different. God is not so much looking for individual cases of us 'doing' the word in the sense of occasionally obeying a highly specific command- but for us to "keep" the word in the sense of continually keeping it in mind in our lives, so that as a consequence we 'do' the specific commands when necessary. The copious parallels between James 1 and 1 Peter 1 further illuminate the looking into the word of this v.25; the parallel is Peter's description of the Cherubim Angels earnestly looking down into the mercy seat in 1 Pet. 1:12, as if paralleling that supreme place of God manifestation with the Word.

1:26- see on 1 Pet. 1:18.

*If anyone thinks himself to be religious while he does not hold his tongue but rather just deceives his own heart, this man's religion is vain-* The Greek word translated "religious" is elsewhere always used in the context of the Mosaic law; James is implying that they were not properly keeping the spirit of the Mosaic law if they "bridled not (their) tongue". This idea of bridling the tongue is picked up again in 3:2-4, where James says that we put bits in the horses' mouths to control them, "but the tongue can no man tame", i.e. bridle (3:8). "No man" here must mean 'no ordinary man of the flesh', since James 1:26 says that the believer must bridle his tongue. In the preceding verses in James 1, James has been talking about 'doing' the word in practice rather than just theoretically receiving it. The prime example of this, he continues, is whether you can bridle your tongue. This is because our thoughts lead to our words, and therefore to bridle the tongue is to control the mind- and this can only be done through the conscious application of the word. This is the main 'doing' of the word. Again there is the warning against semi-spirituality; seeming to be religious.

Ps. 32:8,9 provides the basis for James 1:26: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go: I will guide (mg. 'Counsel') you... be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you". Thus having the instruction, teaching and understanding of God should

replace having a bridle or bit. God does not want to force our tongues and bodies to obey Him- but for us to effect this by our application of His word to our minds. Thus the word is the means of bridling our tongues and therefore our minds- our whole lives. Note too that a bridle is a two-way thing. It stops the horse approaching the rider in an ungainly and painful way. The action of the word on our minds should lead to us similarly being helped in our approach to God. The man who thinks he has his mind bridled but whose words belie this "Deceives his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (v.26- cp. Jer. 17:9). To be "Double minded" (1:8; 4:8) is thus to have what we think is our 'spiritual' heart or mind deceiving our real heart- that of the flesh, "his own heart".

1:27- see on Acts 6:3.

*Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: To visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unstained by the world-* Visiting (in the Hebrew sense of coming near to) the fatherless and widow in the ecclesia is associated with being unspotted from the world; our closeness to the world of the ecclesia in itself will keep us separate from the pull of the kingdoms of this world (James 1:27). Visiting the fatherless and widows will result in the believer keeping himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27 Gk.).

"Pure ('clean') religion" may refer to the system of religion that comes as a result of "the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26). This religion is also "undefiled"- possibly implying that to not let the word totally affect our lives is to allow ourselves to be defiled by our fleshly mind and desires. The sexual connotations of the word for "Undefiled" would suggest that passive laziness to apply the word is equivalent to active unfaithfulness against Christ. This pure and undefiled religion "Before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (v.27). The reference to God as the Father is in the context of v.17- "the Father of (the) light" of the word which came down to us. We may well ask 'Why is God so especially concerned for "the fatherless and widows"'? Maybe because He had witnessed the emotional agony of His humanly fatherless Son, Jesus, and the broken heart of Mary on the Lord's death? There is a possible connection between this verse and John 14:18 where Jesus promises that he "Will not leave you orphans (fatherless- A.V. 'comfortless'): I will come to you" through the Holy Spirit Comforter.

The ideas of God 'coming down' and 'visiting' people are common Old Testament idioms for God manifestation. Thus it may be that James is implying that in the same way as Jesus has visited us through the Spirit-word, so we should share the spiritual Comfort of the word with the fatherless and widows. We have noted the association between 'coming down' and the gift of the Spirit-word already in v.17, which provides the background for this v.27. This pure religion is also to keep ourselves "Unspotted from the world". The words "pure", "undefiled... unspotted" are all the language of marriage. Because the notion of us being the bride of Christ, engaged to Him, seems so far above our feeble spirituality, it is tempting to think that the relationship between a man and his bride is just being used as a vague likeness of our relationship with Christ. But the glorious fact is that we are in absolute reality the typical bride of Christ! Intercourse with the world and fleshly mind is as bad as being unfaithful to our bridegroom- and almost on the night of our marriage, too. The comment is sometimes made that Christians are too dreary and weighed down by our sins. But bearing in mind the nature of our relationship to Jesus and His faithfulness unto death for us, it is not surprising that we are seriously worried about the continual failures which we have to admit to; these

are equivalent to being unfaithful to Him. To balance this, there is the joy of receiving "every good and perfect gift" from our loving, truly merciful Father, the knowledge that He is delighted by our strivings to truly develop spiritually; and the happiness ("blessedness") of the man who does try to keep the word in his heart. Whilst we need to be careful that we are not giving way to spiritual pride, there can be a sense of deep joy and peace at the little victories we slowly win against the flesh.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *My brothers, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality-* This gives the Lord Jesus the title of "the glory" (Gk., as also in Lk. 2:32; Eph. 1:17). And James makes the point that we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus as the Lord of glory and have respect of persons. This may seem a strange connection at first sight. But perhaps the sense is that if we see the *height* and surpassing extent of *His* glory, all others will pale into insignificance, and therefore we will be biased for or against nobody and nothing because of the way they are all as nothing before the brightness of the glory of the Lord we follow. "The Lord" is not in the original- "Our Lord Jesus Christ of glory". This idea of Jesus being the glory is picked up in 1 Peter 4:14: "If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the spirit of glory (parallel with "the name of Christ") and of God rests upon you"- as the cloud of glory did over the tabernacle. Also on the same track is 2 Cor. 3:8,9: "How shall not the ministration of the Spirit (in Christ) be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation (the Mosaic law) be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory". Thus James describing Jesus as the Lord of glory may be yet another hint against keeping to the Mosaic glory. Notice the gentle yet firm way in which James makes the point- appealing to his Jewish readers through Biblical allusions which he knew they would appreciate.

"With respect of persons" is another link back to the Proverbs- here to 24:23: "These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgement". Thus through having wisdom- which is from the word- respect of persons is avoided. This is the point made in 2:8,9: "If ye fulfil... the Scripture... you do well: but if you have respect of persons, you commit sin"- through fulfilling the Scriptures, we avoid respecting persons. There is also a link with the fact that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34) in a Jew/ Gentile context. It seems from this allusion that the Jewish brethren were prejudiced against poor Gentile believers.

2:2 *For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing-* Gk. 'Gold fingered'- not just one ring!. The use of the word 'synagogue' here shows that some of the early Jewish ecclesias were the result of whole synagogues being converted to Christ. The ecclesias are also called synagogues in Acts 6:9; thus Heb.10:25 reads literally "Not forsaking the synagoguing of yourselves together". The fact James uses the word 'synagogue' rather than 'ecclesia' indicates the degree to which early Jewish Christians still kept a fair amount of the Jewish approach to religion. The Lord said that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues; He made no demand that they leave the system at that stage, for He had no concept of guilt by association. Thus the letter of Acts 15 concerning this implies that it was felt quite in order for Jewish believers to continue being circumcised, whilst the Gentile believers still had to abstain from blood (Acts 15:29). Elsewhere Paul vigorously argues that obedience to both these Mosaic commands was quite irrelevant to salvation or spiritual growth. Similarly Paul seems to have placed great importance on keeping a Jewish feast (Acts 18:21), whilst telling the Colossians (2:14-17) that this was not necessary due to Christ's death. The rich stranger who unexpectedly turned up at their ecclesia perhaps refers to the same class of Jewish itinerant preachers as are mentioned in 2 Jn.7-11. James is writing to Jewish believers. The "poor man" walking into the ecclesia was a brother- "the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom" (v.5). If this poor brother was also a Jew, why does James talk about "Your

assembly... you have respect to (the rich)... and say to the poor....""? We have two possibilities at least:

- 1) The letter was written just to a group of rich Jews; or
- 2) The letter was written generally to all Jewish believer and the "poor man" represented the poor Gentile brethren whom the Jewish believers despised.

There is fair support for both:

1) Poor believers are equally in need of exhortation as are the rich. They are even more prone to the temptations of materialism; but there is nothing aimed at this group in James. Chapter 2 rebukes rich brethren for belittling these poor brethren. Chapter 3 is about brethren seeking to be "many masters" (3:1) and proudly talking to that end. These are the temptations especially faced by rich, capable brethren. Chapter 4 describes the itinerant Jewish traders always hungry to make more money (4:13). Chapter 5 is specifically about "you rich men... your riches are corrupted" (5:1,2).

2) "The poor of this world" could be Gentiles- "He has dispersed abroad; he has given to the poor" (2 Cor. 8:9) is quoted by Paul to show that the poor Gentiles had received spiritual riches, and should therefore contribute their earthly riches to the poor Jewish believers at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26). "Rich in faith" would then refer to the Gentiles being given the spiritual riches of Christ (2 Cor. 9:9). "Heirs of the kingdom" recalls Eph.3:6 "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs" through also having the promises of inheriting the Kingdom made to them (Gal. 3:27-29).

There are no doubt elements of truth in both views. Thus the letter does seem to be aimed at the rich Jewish Christians who had fled Israel from the persecution of Saul; but there may also be a secondary implication that the poor brethren they were despising were Gentiles. This would be in keeping with the fact that every reference in James to the Jew/Gentile, Moses/ Christ question within the ecclesia is indirect and subtle.

One of the reasons for James writing was to encourage the Jews to spiritually improve so that the second coming would be hastened and the Kingdom established for real, rather than the 'coming' being just a 'coming down' manifestation of the Lord, as it actually was. It was the affluent sector of Jewry who had a partial faith in Christ whom James singles out as being the important ones whose repentance would hasten the second coming. Applying these things to the last days, it cannot be without significance that the 'Jews for Jesus' movement is gaining phenomenal ground- amongst whom? The affluent, loud mouthed (cp. James 3), money-loving, trade-crazy Jews of North America (cp. James 4:13; 5:2). Bearing in mind the orthodox false doctrines these people are full of, they fit well their prototypes in James- Jews who were not truly humble to the power of the word, committed to a 'hail fellow well met' Christianity (cp. 2:2,3). Notice that generally it has not been the poor Jews of London's East End or downtown Tel Aviv who are professing Christ. We know that the Jews are still to face their greatest holocaust. How relevant then is James 5:1-3: "You rich men, weep and howl for

your miseries that shall come upon you... you have heaped treasures together for the last days". Every persecution of the Jews has been partly inspired by Gentile jealousy at their wealth- not least in these last days. Turning the spotlight to spiritual Israel- maybe the implication of James is that if only we can summon the courage to repent of our gross materialism into which the ecclesia of the last days has slumped, then there will be a hastening of the second coming. It is Biblically argued elsewhere that a specific rejection of materialism by the ecclesia of the last days may save us from part of the tribulation to come, and thus hasten the coming of Christ for us. If we do not curb it, we may need to go through the tribulation to achieve the same spiritual effect upon us as would a specific repentance from it here and now.

"A gold ring, in goodly apparel" probably connects with 1 Peter 3:1,3: "you wives... whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of... wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel". The links between James and Peter are so numerous that it seems fair to assume that there is a conscious connection here. In this case it is worth noting that the passage in 1 Peter 3:3 about adorning has subtle reference to Judaism- e.g. "adorning" is the Greek 'kosmos'-ing, often used about the Jewish age. 'Cosmetic' is derived from this word too.

"A poor man in vile raiment" may also be talking about spiritual pride and partiality. For the word "vile" carries the idea of morally filthy- it is translated "filthiness" a few verses earlier in 1:21 in a moral sense; and "the filthiness of the flesh" in 1 Peter 3:21 (note Rev.22:11 too). The idea of raiment or clothing representing a spiritual state is common in the New Testament. Thus James may be warning them against judging a brother who, due to his poverty, appears outwardly to have an appearance of evil when this is not the case.

2:3 *And you have regard to him that wears the fine clothing, and say: Sit here in a good place; and you say to the poor man: Stand there, or, Sit under my footstool-* The Greek for "fine" implies dazzling bright- it is used of the "white (same word) linen" in which the saints will be clothed (Rev. 15:6; 19:8), the "bright clothing" of the Angel in Acts 10:30 and "the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16). This further supports the suggestion that James 2 is referring to spiritual pride- apart from wearing gaudy clothes, these brethren were imagining themselves to be supremely righteous, and therefore lording it over those they considered to be spiritually poor. This is almost confirmed beyond question by the rest of the verse being an allusion to the parable of the guests at the marriage supper- some come into the ecclesia wanting to immediately have the places of honour, whilst others -the truly spiritual- gratefully accept whatever place they are given. There is also possible reference to Mt. 23:5,6 which also speaks of outward dressing by the Jews to give a spiritual impression, and a loving of chief seats in the synagogue: "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at (Jewish) feasts (cp. the communion service), and the chief seats in the synagogues". The fact that within the Jewish ecclesias there were seating arrangements in order of seniority further shows how they were based around the Jewish synagogue system, even suggesting that the ecclesia had the actual building as their ecclesial hall. Similarly there is ample evidence that the communion service was originally run on the lines of the Jewish Passover, with the eating of a meal in fellowship as a vital part of the 'love-feast'. Notice that James does not criticize the existence of such seating arrangements in themselves, but the wrong brethren being put in the wrong place. "A good place" does not just imply a nice seat- "good" is normally used in the sense of being morally good, and is also translated "honest"; it comes from a root meaning 'virtuous, morally worthy'. "Sit here under my footstool" also has a mainly spiritual implication- unless some

brethren were so pompous that they had virtual thrones to sit on in the ecclesia. Jesus being seated at God's footstool shows his subjection to Him spiritually, and does not necessarily refer to the physical place where Jesus sits. Marshall's Interlinear renders "sit here" as "sit here well", implying that James' readers were thinking well of brethren in spiritual terms due to their outwardly impressive appearance.

*2:4 Do you not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?*- Being partial within their minds, resulting in them respecting ('judging') the thoughts generated by their evil minds continues the theme of being only semi-spiritual due to being "double minded", a result of not letting the word totally dominate the mind. Verses 8 and 9 also go on to show that only through lack of application to the word was this partial thinking coming about. In similar vein Jeremiah accused the Jews of 'dissembling in their hearts' (42:20), using a Hebrew word which can mean both 'to go astray' and also 'to vacillate'; as if partiality and spiritual vacillation between good and evil are the same as rank disobedience.

It makes an interesting exercise to read through the letter of James and note how frequently we are warned about our internal thought processes; to control them and have them influenced by the Lord is the essence of following Him. James 2:4 would be an obvious example – when we see a well dressed believer, we are not to judge him “within yourself” as a judge who has evil thoughts, an unjust judge (see R.V.). We shouldn't deceive ourselves within ourselves (James 1:22), our mind is not to immediately forget the truths we encounter in God's word (James 1:25).

*2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers. Did not God choose those that are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those that love him?*- James really pleads with us to see the importance of all this, as if he is physically with them and known to them. This would again imply that the initial readership which James was focussing on was quite a small group of brethren. This should not be read merely as meaning 'God has called the poor people to the Gospel'- seeing that the rich to whom James was writing had also been called (cp. Is. 66:2). Rather the emphasis is on "*God* (has) chosen the *poor* of this world" for positions of authority within the ecclesia- implying, in the context of v.3, that *they* had made a wrong choice, saying to the man in gay clothing "sit here in a good place" in the ecclesia. Thus James implies that God's choice should be our choice. The fact has to be faced that looking around the ecclesias of today, it is not "the poor of this world" who are in places of authority. Yet James here implies that they should be- as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:4). Now it can reasonably be argued that this category of brethren do not want such positions, and are happy to see those humanly more competent doing the job. Because of this, it is not the done thing to even nominate such brethren for office. Perhaps the fault lies with both sections of our community- surely those brethren should both be nominated and be prepared to accept responsibility, in the light of what James and Paul are saying? Remember that Peter, James and John were simple working men- but through the power of the Spirit James could talk to his brethren as "my beloved brethren" and rebuke them. That same Spirit can be in us through the word. 1 Cor. 6:4 shows beyond cavil that in a case of disagreement or difficulty in judgement- and such cases are now increasingly common- the opinion of the most humble and least esteemed brother should be sought and accepted. Such a brother will, by his very qualification for the task, naturally demur- as doubtless the brother chosen in the Corinth



ecclesia did initially (if they obeyed Paul's advice). But surely this is what is required by these passages?

"Heirs of the Kingdom which he has promised to them that love Him" (v.5) mirrors 1:12 "Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which he has promised to them that love Him". The implication is that it is "the poor of this world" who successfully endured spiritual temptation by the power of the word, and who therefore will have the reward "which the Lord has promised to them that love Him". The repetition of this phrase in 1:12 and 2:5 encourages us to make this interpretation. Yet in the first century, "the poor of this world" would have been those with the least free time, probably unable to read and anyway unlikely to be able to afford their own Scriptures, and probably more heavily burdened with domestic cares than the "rich men" of the ecclesia. Thus the point is again made that our spirituality is not related to the amount of spare time which we have free to devote to Bible reading. It is from the constant daily meditation on whatever spiritual food we have had time to feed on that we can overcome temptation and thus have the heart-warming knowledge of being thought of by God as "them that love Him". "If you love me, keep (in memory) my commandments" Jesus had also said. Note that "the Kingdom" and "the crown of life" are equated by comparing 1:12 and 2:5; as in 2 Tim.4:1,8. Thus "the Kingdom" does not only refer to the 'political' situation on the earth when Christ's rule has been established, but is also a synonym for eternal life, "the crown of life". Thus at the judgement seat the sheep are told "Inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34)- when the Kingdom in the sense of Christ's political rulership of the earth has not yet been established. Similarly, Christ's preaching "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God" to Israel (Mt. 4:23) was not just composed of details about the state of the world after His second coming- but also about the opportunity of receiving "the crown of life" at His return. A study of the Greek word 'basileia' translated 'Kingdom' indicates that it can refer to all aspects of the King's rulership, not just the political Kingdom.

*2:6 But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the courts?*- "The poor" here are brethren- and therefore the poor labourers who were oppressed by the "rich men" of the ecclesia in 5:4 must also refer to brethren in the ecclesia. "Dishonour" here in 2:6 in the Greek can also carry the idea of active abuse- it is also translated "dishonour" in Jn. 8:49, "suffer shame" in Acts 5:41 and "entreated shamefully" in Lk. 20:11. These are all concerning the Jews persecuting Christ and the early church. The only other occurrence of the word (Rom. 1:24) is also concerning the apostate Jews. Thus it may be that James is implying that this despising of the poor Jewish believers and Gentiles in the ecclesia was the same as the Judaizers and Jewish authorities behind them were doing. It would be surprising if the letter of James, being addressed to Jewish Christians, did not make some reference to the Judaist infiltration of the ecclesias, which Paul's letters show was a major threat to the early church (e.g. Gal. 2:4). The use of this word "despise" may thus imply that this group of rich Jews had been infiltrated by the Judaizers. Their lack of total commitment to the word would mean that their resistance to the Judaist infiltration was low indeed. It is therefore to be expected that they succumbed.

This recalls the descriptions of Jewish persecution of the saints:

"Saul... entering into every house (church?), and haling ("Dragging"- same word in Jn.21:8) men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3); "they drew Jason and certain brethren

unto the rulers of the city" (Acts 17:6). The believers to whom James was writing had therefore suffered violent physical persecution, and yet still they lacked any deep spirituality. The rebuke later in this chapter of their attitude that works alone could substitute for their weak faith may well have reference to this (cp. 1 Cor. 13:3; Rev. 2:13,14). No doubt it is extremely tempting when being physically persecuted to feel that this excuses us from making the effort to control our minds by the application of the word. In the holocaust to come which we may well have to endure we will do well to remember this. The implication behind James' use of these words is that as the Jews were doing to them, so they were doing to their brethren, thus equating them with the Jews- maybe implying that the Judaist infiltration was so subtle that they were being influenced doctrinally by these people, and yet also submitting to persecution from their 'provisional' wing. Israel's relationship with Egypt, Assyria and Babylon had been similar.

*2:7 Do not they blaspheme the honourable Name by which you are called?*- Or 'that is called upon you'- in baptism. 1 Tim. 6:1,2 associates the blaspheming of God's Name with servants despising their masters who were believers. The context in James is of believers despising their poor brethren (v.6), perhaps through despising the brethren who were in their employ (5:4). Thus the suggestion is that the same spiritual blasphemy which occurred when believers were persecuted was repeated when a rich brother abused or despised a fellow brother. Notice that it is the name of God which is blasphemed in 1 Tim. 6:1, whilst at baptism the believers called upon themselves the name of Christ- they were baptized into Christ and thus became Christ's. This interchangeability of the name of Christ and God occurs frequently in the New Testament- because God's Name was given to Christ on his ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12). The reason for the rich brethren despising the poor was through not appreciating that God's Name was called upon those brethren- in the same way as the Jews' blasphemy of the Name was through their lack of appreciation that the believers carried the Name. Thus the key to successfully, humbly relating to our brethren is to remind ourselves of the mighty Name which they bear, and that to despise them is to despise God.

*2:8 However, if you fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture: You shall love your neighbour as yourself, you do well!*- "Royal" means the Kingly law- James' comment on the emphasis which Jesus gave to the command to "love your neighbour" in Mt. 22:39, and especially to the giving of the "new commandment... that you love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Mt. 22:37,38 clearly states that the command to "love your neighbour" was secondary to that to love God. Yet the "new commandment" of Jn. 13:34 to love your neighbour ("one another"), and James' calling of this "the royal law" implies that now the law had been ended on the cross, including the ten commandments written in stone (Col. 2:14-17), these two commands were one- because to love God is equivalent to loving your spiritual neighbour, because by calling on the name of Christ the neighbour therefore carried the Name of God, and thus to love the neighbour is the same as loving God. This is the teaching of the preceding v.7, as we have seen. Alternatively, "the royal law" may refer to the entire Mosaic law- seeing that the law was fulfilled in the keeping of that one commandment, to "love your neighbour as thyself" (Rom. 13:9). Gal. 5:14 says the same, and as in James 2 the context is of not biting and devouring one another within the ecclesia, as a result of Judaist infiltration to stir up strife (Gal. 5:11,12,15). If the command to "love your neighbour" was fulfilled with no subsequent despising of poor brethren, "you do well". The Greek for "well" is the same word translated "good" in v.3- the rich were invited to sit in a "good place" in the ecclesia, i.e. in a place of spiritual honour and respect. Thus James is

saying that the ultimate qualification for sitting in the "good place" in the ecclesia was to love the members of the ecclesia as oneself, especially those whom it was tempting to despise. If the "royal law" refers to the whole law of Moses, it should be noted that *we* must fulfil it in spirit. It is easy to think that the Law was fulfilled solely by Christ's death on the cross.

*2:9 But if you show favouritism, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors-* This conviction by the Law may refer to the command to Israel's judges: "You shall not respect persons in judgment; but you shall hear the small (poor) as well as the great" (Dt. 1:17). These judges were therefore matched by Spirit-gifted ecclesial elders in the New Israel. These judges were 'given' as heads over Israel (Dt. 1:15 A.V.mg), as the ecclesia were 'given' Spirit-gifted elders (Eph. 4:11). Because of their power, "all the people shall hear and fear" (Dt. 17:13), exactly as they did after Peter's Spirit-guided judgment of Ananias (Acts 5:11). The judges were "wise men" (Dt. 1:13)- hence James' rebuke of the elders because they were *unwise*: "Who *is* a wise man... among you?" (3:13 cp. 1 Cor. 6:5). The book of Malachi is a rebuke of Israel's priests and judges- James' many allusions to it tabulated in our comments on 4:8 are understandable once the connection between Israel's judges and ecclesial elders is appreciated. Psalm 82 condemns the judges for doing many things which James accuses the elders of doing: possessing the Spirit, but respecting persons, overlooking the poor, fatherless and needy; neglecting the true knowledge of God, although they had been called to be God's children. Col. 2:14-17 clearly shows that the law in the form of the ten commandments, including that to "love thy neighbour", had been replaced by Christ. Yet James reasons with his readers as if they still respected the old law of commandments- again indicating the slow transition to an acceptance that the Law had been ended in Christ. The command to love one's neighbour as oneself is an absolute statement; it cannot be fulfilled if one neighbour is loved more than another. The love a man has for himself is complete- in fundamental terms the degree of this love does not change with time or with the characteristics he exhibits. This nature of love should be shown to the brethren. To respect persons was to break this ideal. Thus Jesus could ask us to love each other "As I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). He loved us as the church as a whole ("you" is plural), and therefore each of us receives the same all consuming love of Christ, shown in summation by his death on the cross. Our love to each other should be equally constant and without the favouritism which seems almost inevitable with our natural mind.

*2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of breaking all of it-* As with so much in James, this seems almost too idealistic. But James drives the importance of it home: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (v.10). This is identical reasoning to Gal. 3:10-13, where Paul is arguing that the Galatians should resist the inroads of the Judaizers and not return to the Law- therefore suggesting that there was an identical situation amongst James' readers, as there probably was in nearly every first century ecclesia, especially the Jewish-dominated ones.

*2:11 For He that said: Do not commit adultery, also said: Do not kill. So if you do not commit adultery but if you kill, you have become a transgressor of the law-* "For that law which said (AVmg.), Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the Law" (v.11). The statement that "that law" included two separate commandments (concerning murder and adultery) shows that "the royal law" of v.8 may well refer to the whole law of Moses, which was fulfilled by

loving the neighbour (Rom.13:9). These two commands concerning adultery and murder occur together elsewhere; it may be that James chose them because in spirit they are easily broken due to an uncontrolled mind; and the control of the mind is the great theme of James. Spiritual adultery is further defined in 4:4: "You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?", thus interpreting adultery as having worldly friends. Those to whom James was writing were aware, so v.11 implies, that literal and spiritual adultery were wrong, but were not so conscious of the command not to kill each other by hating them in their heart (Mt. 5:21,22). The fighting and killing which James describes as happening amongst his readers (4:1,2) must refer also to this spiritual murder due to lack of love (to what else can it apply?). It is noteworthy that James is one of the few New Testament letters that does not contain explicit warning against sexual misbehaviour. We can thus start to build up a fuller picture of James' audience- keeping dutifully away from worldly friendships, holding themselves back from sexual sin, yet trading zealously with the world to make much profit (4:13), and unaware of the supreme importance of the command to love each other, resulting in them transgressing the law in spirit. Perhaps they are not without their counterparts today.

2:12 *So speak and act as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty*- The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection. We must so speak as those who will be judged, knowing that he who shewed no mercy in his words will receive none (James 2:12,13); our words of mercy or condemnation, and perhaps *the way we say them*, will be the basis upon which we will be accepted or rejected. This lack of love was especially shown in their words: "So speak and act...". Notice the equation of words and actions ("speak... do"), continuing the theme of thoughts and words being the same as physical actions. "The law of liberty" is normally used elsewhere in contrast to the Law of Moses- another subtle swipe at the Judaist tendencies in the early Jewish ecclesias. We must speak our words in accordance with the fact that we will be judged by the word; if we have the word/law of liberty (cp. 1:25) in our hearts and therefore influencing our words, we need not fear our judgement by that word. Thus we judge ourselves now by our response to the word in practice, by how far we let it influence our words and doings, especially in the area of showing love to our brother.

2:13 *For judgment is without mercy to whomsoever has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment*- This appears to be alluding to Job 22:6-11, where Eliphaz says just the same about Job, saying that the harsh judgements coming upon Job were a result of him being harsh in his dealings with his fellow men previously- e.g. "Thou hast sent widows away empty...therefore snares are round about thee" (AV), as they were around a widow. Several of the things Eliphaz mentions in his accusations of Job are also themes in James:

Job 22:6-11	James
"Thou hast...stripped the naked of their clothing	"If a brother or sister be naked" (and you don't clothe them), (2:15)
Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry...	"Destitute of daily food"

But as for the mighty man, he had the earth (i.e. you gave much to <i>him</i> )	"You have respect to him that wears the gay clothing" and neglect the poor (2:3)
...thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken". (1:27)	"Visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction"

If these connections are valid- and there are several other places where James is writing with Job in mind- then it appears that James did not see Job as beyond reproof; but that like those to whom James wrote he was a rich businessman, trusting in his own strength. This fits in to the many other indications that Job represented those Jews who trusted in the Law. If the allegations of Eliphaz in Job 22 are therefore partly true, Job's clearing of himself from these things in Job 31 is to be read as sophistry- and therefore this clearing of himself is vigorously rebuked by Elihu, speaking on God's behalf, in Job 32. It is not unreasonable to think that it is not just the recording of the friends' words that was inspired but that to some degree their rebuke of Job was also directly inspired by God, although not all they said can be treated like this. We are quick enough to accept their reasoning regarding the mortality of man as inspired statements of Divine truth- why not some of their other statements about Job?

"*He* shall have judgment without mercy" suggests the picture of two people at the judgment seat being judged for the same sin; one is forgiven because he had showed mercy, while the other is rejected for not doing so. The rejoicing of the merciful brother is then set against the misery of the unmerciful brother. Mercy will then rejoice *against* judgment in the same way as the men of Nineveh will rise up *against* the unworthy at judgment day.

Note the implication that the believer should *shew* mercy. The Greek word translated "shewed" in v.13 is not the normal word translated thus. The word used here means literally 'to do a work', again continuing James' theme that spiritual actions are still 'works'. This lack of love and harsh judgement amongst James' audience was also connected with an academic emphasis on faith to the neglect of works- seeing that v.14 continues "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?". It seems true in practice that those who are busy actively expressing their faith in works tend to have less time for unnecessarily harsh judgement of others in the ecclesia. It did not "profit"- literally 'heap up'. Those to whom James wrote were hard working traders (4:13); thus such language was especially relevant to them. Again, James is working out a very telling play on words: 'Your heaping up of material profit while being academically familiar with your faith is not heaping up spiritual profit'. These brethren *said* they had faith. Later in chapter 3 James points out that because the word was not really controlling their thoughts, their words were uncontrolled. An example of this would be this public talking about their faith, heaping up a reward in the eyes of men.

2:14 *My brothers, what good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no works? Can that faith save him?*- James speaks of the man who says to his poor brother 'Be ye warmed and filled' but does nothing about it practically. This, James says, is dead faith; faith without works is not faith. But the man said those words, so James' logic goes, *in faith* that somehow

the poor man would be helped. Yet he did nothing, and therefore his faith wasn't really faith; "can *that* faith save him?" (James 2:14 RV). There is true faith, and 'that' kind of faith which only appears to be faith in the eyes of the person holding it.

A notable example of faith without works is then given in v.15,16. It ends with the challenge "What does it profit"- cp. v.14 "What does it profit...though a man say he has faith, and have not works?".

2:15 *If a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food*- It is probable that this was not a hypothetical situation; 5:4,5 describe some rich brethren as oppressing their brethren who were their agricultural employees. "Lack" means literally 'coming short', perhaps connecting with the fact that the employers kept back these brethren's wages (5:4).

2:16 *And one of you says to them: Go in peace, be warmed and filled! And yet you do not give them the things needful to the body- what does it profit?*- 1 Cor.13:2 makes the point that it is quite possible to have great faith without having any true love for one's brother. Similarly, these people were saying in absolute faith, really believing it would be done by God, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled". "Go" or "Depart" either implies they were told this by their employers to whom they came with their request, or perhaps that they were told to depart from the ecclesial meeting where such requests were considered. It would seem that their rich employers were these brethren who refused their requests. The mention of lack of food and clothing ("naked") recalls Mt. 6:25, where the Lord assures His people that these needs will always be provided for. Yet the believers James writes of had to be concerned about these things. It may be that God provides for our needs by giving the means to the rich in the Ecclesia, but it still depends on their freewill decision to share what they have.

2:17 *Even so, faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself*- This is in the context of the previous eight verses which have been reprimanding the readers for the lack of a loving mind. These are the "works" which were lacking, as well as the physical "works" of giving material support. There must be a connection here with Christ's words: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). If this connection is valid, then James is equating faith with the seed of wheat. The seed represents the word (Lk. 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23), supremely manifested in the Lord Jesus. The equation is because "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". Thus James is saying that the word seed in us should bring forth fruit in our caring for others, in the same way as Jesus died in order to bring forth much spiritual fruit in us. The rich brethren needed to make the same kind of short term sacrifice due to the effect of the word in their lives, in order to care for their brethren's welfare, as Jesus did for them. It is significant that in v.26 faith is likened to a dead body, which is the same figure being used here in v.17.

2:18 *Yes, a man will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works and I, by my works, will show you my faith*- The man is implying that if James has faith and he has works, then between them they should be accepted. Thus the man was effectively advocating salvation by works, whilst agreeing that faith was also important- although not essential for him personally to develop. This sounds like the reasoning of the wavering Jewish believers. James replies that faith and works are indivisible, that true spiritual works cannot exist without faith. Thus it is irrelevant for a believer to think that he

must concentrate on developing 'faith' or 'works' as independent things- what God looks for is 'faith-works', i.e. a faith whose very nature leads to works; a faith that *works* by love (Gal. 5:6). Thus the works follow as an inevitable corollary from the faith, and therefore are not consciously performed. Therefore James reasons that a wise man will "shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (3:13). "You believe that there is one God"- the fundamental truth of Judaism which the Christian Jews prided themselves on- "the devils (demoniacs) also believe, and tremble" (v.19), alluding to the sick often trembling before their cure. This may refer to the many incidents of curing of demoniacs in the Gospels, all of whom were parabolic of the hopeless state of the Jewish system. More significantly, James is referring to the fact that many people during Christ's ministry had had the faith to be cured, but only a handful had responded with the works which a word based faith should have produced- as opposed to the intense hope and belief in personal betterment which the people had. The other person in the conversation is described as a "vain man" (v.20); "vain" meaning empty headed or minded, referring to the demoniac state of v.19. We saw in 1:26 how the man who did not have the word in his heart to control his tongue was also "vain". The man referred to here in 2:20 was without faith, and thus without the word, seeing this is the basis of faith. Faith without works is barren (v.20, Gk.). This is in the context of v.21 speaking of once barren Abraham (Rom. 4:19 implies he was impotent when Isaac was conceived) being "*our* father", as well as that of Isaac. Faith *with* works is therefore spiritually fruitful. Faith *without* works being barren or dead may hint at the deadness of Abraham's body and Sarah's womb (Rom. 4:19). Despite having produced Isaac, their faith and works were only completed by the offering up of Isaac. Until that point, they were still effectively 'dead' in God's sight, not being totally proven.

2:19 *You believe that God is one! You do well. The demons also believe and shudder*- James 2:14-18 speaks of the connection between *faith* (believing) and *works* (doing). It is no coincidence that 2:19 then says in this context: "*You believe that God is one... you do well*". To have *faith* in the unity of God will lead to *works*, 'doing well'.

"Demons" is put here by metonymy for the [supposedly] demon possessed people, and their observed 'trembling' at the time of their cure. But I don't think that this verse is James as it were telling us doctrinal truth about demons. The context of James 2 shows it to be part of an imagined dialogue between the "works man" [who thinks works can save], and a "faith man" [who thinks merely saying we believe is enough and our lives are irrelevant]. Both these imaginary men come out with 'wrong' statements, so it's not surprising that the 'works man' disparages 'faith' by saying that even demon possessed people can believe and be cured. Of itself, this passage can hardly be taken as proof that demons really do believe – the usual position taken is that demons are fallen angels who cannot believe and cannot repent nor be healed. This passage even taken on face value would contradict that system of belief.

2:20 *But, O vain man, do you need evidence that faith without works is useless?*- Faith without works is "barren" (James 2:20 RV)- the implication being that if we do the works which our beliefs elicit from us, yet more creative fruit is brought forth. And James goes straight on to speak of Abraham offering Isaac (James 2:21)- as if to say that Abraham and Sarah's 'barrenness' was overcome by their faith, and this led them to the 'opportunity' to show yet more faith in being prepared to offer Isaac.

2:21 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?*- James goes on to show how Abraham's faith brought works as a natural by-

product. The phrase "Abraham our father" looks back to Mt. 3:8,9 and Jn. 8:33,39, where the Jews who said this were told to "bring forth fruits (works) meet for repentance" and to "do the works of Abraham" respectively. Thus James was telling his readers to do the works of Abraham. The fact they were doing works already shows that the real 'work' of Abraham they needed to develop was his faith. "This is the work of God, that ye believe" (Jn. 6:29), Jesus had said. The Biblically minded would have spotted the apparently flat contradiction between "Abraham our father (was) justified by works" and Rom. 4:2, which stresses that Abraham was not justified by his works but by his faith. Thus again the "works" which James says Abraham was justified by were his faith *and* the practical outworking of it in being prepared to offer Isaac. Abraham's "works" were that "he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar" (v.21). Notice the past tense of "he had offered" and that it does not say 'he bound Isaac...'. Because of Abraham's faith that God would resurrect Isaac on behalf of the perfect lamb sacrifice that he believed was to come (Gen. 22:5,8,14), it was reckoned to Abraham as if he had performed the 'work' of offering Isaac even though he had not physically performed it. Thus the Biblically minded would be able to see from these allusions to other Scriptures that the spiritual attribute of faith and the concept of works are almost indivisible. This is confirmed by noting that the one act of offering up Isaac is described as "works" in the plural- because it involved many separate decisions of faith. And in our lives too, God may count something to us as a completed work when we have only summoned enough true faith to do it, and have not actually performed it in reality.

*2:22 You saw that faith worked together with his works, and so by works was faith perfected-* Faith is perfected / matured by the process of works (James 2:22,23). The works, the upward spiral of a life lived on the basis of faith, develop the initial belief in practice. Thus Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but the works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". It is that faith, therefore, which does the works. Verse 22 puts this in so many words: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?". Note too the upward spiral initiated by having a basic faith- faith led to works, and those works perfected the faith. The Greek word for "wrought" is the same translated 'worker together' in 2 Cor. 6:1: "We then, as workers together with (God)". Faith 'works' alongside the physical works. The preceding verse (2 Cor. 5:21) speaks of how God is working through His gift of Christ for our salvation through our not relying on our own works. Paul says he is working together with God to get the believers not to "receive the grace of God in vain" by relying on their physical works for salvation. By having this attitude to works and faith, Abraham's faith was "made perfect" or finished, implying that it is possible for a man to develop a fullness of faith in something, a totality of belief which needs no further improvement. If Abraham could reach this dizzy height, it must certainly be within reach of all his seed.

*2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which said: And Abraham believed God and it was accredited to him as righteousness; and he was called the friend of God-* James 2:23 speaks as if the comment "Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" was a one-off statement made at that time when Abraham believed; and it was subsequently justified when Abraham demonstrated his faith by offering Isaac. So the comment that "Abraham believed" surely must refer to Abraham's response as he stood there looking up at the stars.

This is quoting Gen. 15:5,6, where in the moment that Abraham looked up at the stars and



believed (so Rom. 4:23 implies) "So shall your seed be", God "counted it to him for righteousness". God knew that Abraham's faith in those words would really be shown when he was asked to offer Isaac, the only human means of their fulfilment. Thus the Scripture recorded that Abraham was righteous when this was as yet unproved by his works. However, that Scripture was fulfilled when Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac. The point is being made that just that kind of intense faith is as if the works have already been done- which is exactly in line with James' preceding reasoning. The use of the phrase "The Scripture" implies that either there was a literal written account made of the words of Gen. 15:6 which was then validated by Abraham's offering of Isaac (note "*was* fulfilled", past tense), or "The Scripture" refers to some kind of (Angelic?) record in Heaven of events in our probations, similar to the concept of the deeds of believers being written in a book of life. The evidence for either seems about equal, and there is no reason why both cannot be correct. "The scripture of truth" in Dan. 10:21 appears to have been some written record available to the Angels which they revealed to man. "The Scripture" elsewhere in James seems to refer to the general spirit of God's principles in dealing with man: "The Scripture saith...The spirit that dwelleth in us..." (4:5) does not seem to refer to any specific written scripture, and "the royal law" (i.e. what was specifically placed on record) seems to be separate from "the scripture" in 2:8. Similarly "the scripture" foresaw that God would justify the heathen (Gal.3:8), and "concluded all under sin" (Gal. 3:22), hinting that "the scripture" is more than just the written words. Writing was certainly developed by Abraham's time, and a literal written statement of Abraham's acceptance with God being verified by his offering of Isaac is an attractive idea. That "the scripture" which was fulfilled at the time of the offering of Isaac (James 2:20) was something written is suggested in Rom. 4:22,23, where the fact "it was imputed to him" in Gen. 15:6 "was not written for his sake alone". The fact Abraham was justified for his faith was written for Abraham to see at some time in his life. The point has been made that the descriptions of Sodom in Gen. 10:19 (cp. Gen. 14:3) imply that Genesis 10 was written before Sodom's destruction as recorded in Gen.19. Thus it is reasonable to suggest that Gen.15 may also have been in written existence.

2:24 *You see that by works a man is justified and not only by faith*- Romans 4 stresses that works do *not* justify a man, but rather a true faith that is expressed in actions. "Faith only" must therefore refer to a holding of true doctrine and a hope that God provides physical help, as characterized by the healed demoniacs (2:19) and exemplified by those who asked in prayer for things to "consume upon your lusts" (4:2,3). There is a definite connection between "faith" as a spiritual quality and "the faith" as the set of doctrines which the believer accepts. It is these which produce the attribute of faith. The "works" James is referring to are 'faith works'- i.e. works that come as a natural corollary to faith and which include spiritual attributes like belief in God's word.

2:25 *And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*- The use of the word "messengers" instead of "spies" implies that the spies came with a message which Rahab believed. The Joshua record stresses how she knew the covenant Name, knew and quoted the words of Moses (Josh. 2:9), and had her roof covered with flax- i.e. linen, perhaps hinting at the righteousness already imputed to her for her faith. The message which the spies brought was probably a call to repentance, or perhaps a statement of the coming destruction of Jericho. Rahab's acceptance of this message based on her knowledge of God's basic principles corresponds to the holding of 'the faith' by the Jewish Christians. Her sending out of the spies another way was the

'works' that came as a natural response to her true faith. Her hiding of the spies, courageous lying to the Jericho Gestapo or putting the cord out of the window as a public testimony to her separation were her physical 'works'- but these are not chosen as an example of her 'faith-works'. Her scheming to enable the spies to safely return to Joshua by them going out "another way" and thereby enabling the campaign against Jericho to begin, showed her real "works". She believed their message about the destruction of Jericho, therefore in faith she enabled the spies to return to bring this about. Rahab was "justified... *when...*", again showing that justification or faith being made perfect (v.22) is something that can occur at a specific moment after reaching a certain degree of faith which has been expressed in actions (cp. Abraham looking up at the stars and believing). The implication here in v.25 is that the moment the spies were sneaking through the outskirts of Jericho following her directions, Rahab was justified.

2:26 *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead-* 'Faith' is being likened to a person, i.e. the believer in the conversation of v.18-20 who thinks that his own faith alone will save him. "The Spirit" is often a reference to a spiritual mind, notably in Romans. Thus the body is equated with faith as the Spirit or spiritual attributes are with "works".

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Be not many teachers. My brothers, realize that we teachers shall receive heavier judgment-* We will be condemned by the very presence of the excellence of the Lord's glory; but we will have judgment / condemnation with mercy (James 2:13); we will receive damnation, and yet be saved (James 3:1).

James continues to be increasingly specific as to how the word should act upon us to produce a spiritual character. The whole of Chapter 3 is devoted to showing how *our* words are the clearest indicator of how *the* word is affecting our heart, and the emphasis we should therefore give to the control of the tongue and the thoughts behind it. This being addressed to those leading the ecclesia further suggests that this letter was written primarily to the rich Jewish believers who were the Spirit gifted eldership in the mainly Jewish ecclesias of the first century. These two verses must have Mt. 23:8 in mind: "Be not you called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all you are brethren". Hence James addresses them as "my brethren", gently reminding them that they were not masters but brethren. The context of Mt. 23 is denouncing the Pharisees for loving the prominent seats in synagogues and to be publicly recognized for their righteousness, which again indicates that these brethren were influenced by Judaistic attitudes. We have seen how in 2:2,3 they were placing great importance on having good seats in the synagogue/ecclesia. "Masters" means 'teachers'; and maybe this is echoing Paul's condemnation of the Jews in Rom. 2:17-24: "You are called a Jew... and makes your boast (cp. James 4:16) of God... and are confident that you yourself are... an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes". There are several other links:

Rom. 2:17-24	James
"Makest thy boast of God"	The tongue of the teachers in the ecclesia boasted (3:5; 4:16)
"Knowest His will"- so they thought.	They should have said "If the Lord will" (4:15)- implying they thought they already knew God's will.
"An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes"	"Many masters" (teachers); 3:1
"Dost thou commit adultery?"	"Ye adulterers" (4:4; 2:11)
"Through breaking the Law"	"Ye commit sin, and are convinced of the Law as transgressors" (2:9)
"The name of God is blasphemed among the which ye Gentiles because of you (Jews).	"Rich men... the judgement seats(Gentiles) ...blaspheme that worthy name by (Jewish believers) are called" (2:6,7)

3:2 *For in many things we all make others stumble. If any does not cause stumbling by his words, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also-* We all offend others

(James 3:2), and he who offends his brother will be condemned. Those who are sleeping at the Lord's coming will be found unworthy, so says the spirit in Thessalonians. But in the Lord's parable, *all* the virgins are sleeping at His coming, wise and foolish alike. They were all living on far too low a level, and yet the Lord will save them [us] by grace alone. God accepts we aren't going to make it as we should. There ought to be no schism in the body (1 Cor. 12:25), but He realizes that inevitably there will be (1 Cor. 11:19).

Their desire to be teachers therefore indicated that they were bringing the attitude of their former religion and the surrounding world into the ecclesia. The rest of Chapter 3 is about the tongue; James' argument therefore seems to run 'As a teacher you will have to speak many words, and the chances are (v.2) your words will offend someone in the ecclesia. Remember that as a teacher of the ecclesia you are responsible for the flock, and therefore "we shall receive the greater condemnation"(v.1). Only a "perfect man" who has his words totally in control will not offend anyone, and only he is "able also to bridle the whole body" (v.2)- the ecclesia, the body of Christ'. It is worth noting that our judgement in the last day will take into account the quality of our converts and the effort we have made to build up others. Our receiving condemnation as a result of being masters may be alluding to Mt. 12:37: "By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned". In this case, the words Christ is speaking about are specifically our words to our brethren and sisters. The context in v.34 is Christ telling the teachers of the law that it was impossible for them to "speak (i.e. teach) good things" because their heart was evil. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things" (v.35), which connects with the description of the Scribes (teacher of the Law) instructed in the Truth bringing forth "out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt.13:52). The ideal ecclesial 'master' will not offend any in the ecclesia because his words are controlled on account of his being a "perfect man". 2 Tim. 3:16,17 says that the word of God through the spirit has the power to create a perfect man (cp. 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:8-13). James 1:4,5 has shown that by the wisdom of the word, a man can be made "perfect and entire". Only such a brother will be able to "bridle the whole body" (ecclesia). Earlier, in 1:26, the bridling of the tongue is spoken of as a result of the word acting on the heart. Thus only someone able to bridle his own tongue can bridle the ecclesia. That this interpretation is on the right lines is also suggested by v.6 talking about the "members... the whole body" being influenced by the tongue. This is the language of 1 Cor. 12 concerning the ecclesial body.

3:3 *Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also-* This can probably be read on two levels- the need to control our lives by concentrating on the control of the mouths (the tongue), and also the implication that the whole body of the ecclesia can be turned about by their leader controlling the ecclesial tongue- i.e. encouraging the members to control their thoughts and words. And this is exactly what James, the real leader of the Jerusalem ecclesia and the Jewish believers of the Diaspora (1:1), was trying to do. The way he asserts his own leadership like this is so subtle that only the thoughtful and spiritually aware would appreciate it. The Greek *pletho* translated 'obey' carries the idea of yielding and friendly confidence- as one would deal with a horse; and this is precisely how James was trying to influence this ecclesial "body". This was to the end that the body would be turned about, a phrase implying a total about turn, thus showing the degree to which the ecclesia needed to change. The reference to bits in the horses' mouths is an allusion to Ps. 32:8,9. This teaches that the understanding of God, having experienced His mercy, should lead us to control our tongues, rather than our having to be forced to do so by a bridle. This fits in with the teaching of v.8, that the tongue cannot be tamed by man's human

efforts (cp. bit and bridle), seeing that the natural mind which produces our words is 'beyond cure' (Jer. 17:9 Heb.).

*3:4 Behold the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, they are all the same turned about by a very small rudder, wherever the impulse of the steersman wills-* The figure of the ecclesia's leaders as the rider and the church as the horse is now transferred to that of a captain steering the ship. Again, emphasis is given to how relatively easy it is to control the direction of our spiritual lives and the whole ecclesia- by a dedicated concentration on the control of the tongue and the thinking behind it. The ships seem "so great" (translated "mighty" in Rev. 16:18); the flesh seems so vast and strong, the task of turning round a wayward ecclesia appears so impossible. They "are driven of fierce winds" representing the winds of false Judaist doctrine (Eph. 4:14), and the winds of the flesh and trials of life which beat upon the spiritual house of our lives and the ecclesia, as described in the parable of the house on the rock (Mt. 7:25-27). Note how the immature ecclesia is being likened to a ship blown about by the wind, and yet this was a foretaste of judgment day. Our experiences now are training for that day. The winds of the parable of Mt. 7 were overcome by hacking away at the rock of our hard human heart in order to hear the sayings of Christ and put them into practice. It is significant that the winds of James 1:6 could be overcome by faith, which comes from the word. The wavering believer is likened there to a ship in trouble on a windy sea. The ship can be turned about "Wherever the impulse of the steersman wills". The hint may be that there is a greater steersman in our lives than our own steel will, and He works by the impulse of the Spirit. The word for "wills" means 'intense desire or will', showing the great concentration of mental effort required by the captain of the spiritual ship. Again, the way to have a powerful will is to have our own personal will merged with that of God. The will of God is in the word (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18 cp. John 1:13), and a saturation of the mind with the word will result in our mind becoming like that of God. Thus John 15:7 states the tremendous encouragement: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done". Jesus does not say we must ask according to God's will- but according to our *own* will, because if the word abides in us then our will becomes that of God- and any prayer according to His will is heard (1 Jn. 5:14).

*3:5 So the tongue also is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire!-* The believer is identified with his tongue. "A little (Greek: micro) member" stresses the small physical size of the tongue in proportion to the vast spiritual effect it has. If the body and its members also have reference to the ecclesia as a whole, it may be that James is implying that one very subtle member- i.e. an individual in the ecclesia- was using his words to mislead the ecclesia. The ship can be easily influenced- by either a good or bad governor. The individual referred to was probably an agent of the Judaizers, whom the New Testament often describes as doing their evil work through "Great swelling words of vanity" (Jude 16; see too 3 Jn. 10; 2 Pet. 2:3; 2 Tim. 2:14; 1 Tim. 6:4; Col. 2:4; Eph. 5:6; 1 Cor. 1:17; Rom. 16:18). The tongue boasting "great things" is looking back to Ps. 12:2,3: "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a *double heart* do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh great things" (AVmg.) The context of bad words coming as a result of a double mind is exactly the same as in James (1:8; 4:8). the vain man of Ps. 12:2 is mentioned again in James 2:20. Ps. 12:4,5 also have connections with James. Psalm 12 concludes with praise of God's words: "The words of the Lord are pure words" (v.6), as if to suggest that the word of God is the antidote to proud speaking. This all fits the context of James nicely. Thus "the

tongue" here in James 3:5 is being used to represent a group of proud, vain talkers within the ecclesial body, who were probably all influenced by the Judaizers, possibly with one specific ringleader. Being "a little member" of the ecclesia, this group may not have been numerically large. "Behold, how great a matter ('wood') a little fire kindles!" (v.5). The Greek word for "little" here is different from that in the phrase "a little member". This implies rather a short period of time- i.e. 'consider what havoc can be caused by fire so quickly'. The implication is that James' readers needed to act quickly both to bring their own tongue under control and also to restrain "the tongue" element that were leading the ecclesia astray, and soon would burn down the ecclesia- represented by the 'wood', composed of "the planting of the Lord". The New Testament epistles often give reason to think that the ecclesia will be in a state of great spiritual weakness just prior to the second coming. Those who find this hard to believe should bear in mind how *quickly* a small group of brethren can influence the ecclesia for bad.

3:6- see on James 1:23.

*And the tongue is a fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna-* Our words are as fire, and are to be connected with the fire of condemnation (James 3:5,6), which our words have already kindled (Lk. 12:49). Speaking of the last day Isaiah 33:11 had foretold: "your breath [i.e. words], as fire, shall devour you". See on James 5:3.

If we may speak in human terms, the speed and power of God's intellect is such that He does not need words as we do in order to reason and reach conclusions. This begins to be reflected by the way in which the Bible is full (fuller than many realize) of the device of metonymy, whereby the cause is put for the effect. The piercing analysis of God is reflected by the way in which He uses this linguistic device so frequently. Much misunderstanding of the atonement has arisen through failing to appreciate God's use of metonymy. Other examples include James 3:6, where "the tongue" means the words the tongue speaks; and 1 John 5:15, where God hearing our prayers means (see context) that He answers them. Unless we appreciate metonymy, we will come to the conclusion that God's word is making incorrect statements; for example, that mere possession of a tongue means that our whole body is defiled (James 3:6).

The root of all sin is in our hearts (Jer.17:9), and as the tongue so accurately reflects the heart, it is "a world of iniquity". God "has set the world in (man's) heart" (Ecc. 3:11), which means that "there is no good in" man (Ecc. 3:12), i.e. in man's heart. The tongue will defile the whole body- the ecclesia, and also our individual lives. Remember how in 2:26 a man's spiritual life is also likened to a body. The tongue defiles the body. This is alluding to the Lord's words in Mt. 15:11,18 that "those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man". Jesus says our evil desires defile us; James describes our tongue as doing the same, again showing the effective identification of our thoughts and words. We have suggested that "the body" refers to both the ecclesia and the spiritual life of the believers. There are many references to "the body" which cannot be applied to our physical body; most obviously James 3:2 speaks of the body being bridled by control of the tongue. Similarly, every part of the body we have in the Kingdom will be spiritually aware and significant. It is for this reason that abuse of the body we now have is such a serious offence. The word for 'defile' is the same translated 'spot' regarding the need for a believer to keep himself and his spiritual garments unspotted by the world (1:27)- thus equating "the

body" and the garments, and "the world" with our evil thinking which leads to our bad works. Remember that God has set the world in our heart, so that there is no good in man (Ecc. 3:11,12). The tongue and the evil heart behind it "sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (v.6). We have commented earlier on this. The tongue will be set on fire of Gehenna- i.e. the destruction of the physical body of the rejected at the judgement will be the destruction of his "tongue", seeing that there is a certain association between our spiritual character and our physical body. The language here implies physical fire may be used to destroy the unworthy saints- an idea supported elsewhere.

*3:7 For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind-* "Mankind" in Greek is from two words- 'Man' and 'kind'. The latter is the same as occurs earlier in the verse, and as well as meaning a genus it fundamentally means 'nature' (see A.V.mg). In the same way as a horse and ship can be "tamed" because we can relatively easily analyse their nature and make them respond in an expected way to a certain stimulus, it seems that some in the ecclesia were thinking that the use of human wisdom could tame our animal human nature. Marshall's Interlinear offers the rendering "every nature of beasts... has been tamed by human nature". The fact animals have increasingly been tamed by man ("is tamed and hath been tamed") perhaps encouraged these believers to think that there could be a gradual progression in the taming of human nature also by human strength. The connection between the animals and our bestial sinful instincts would have been appreciated by these brethren; "every kind" of animals had been increasingly tamed, and thus they thought human strength could also tame human nature.

*3:8 But the tongue no one can tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison-* our pets are more obedient to us than our tongues. The Greek for "mankind" well describes the reasoning ability of our human nature that can apparently tame animal instincts. "Man" alone can imply human, semi-spiritual reasoning- e.g. "I speak (reason) after the manner of men", or "I am speaking in human terms" (N.I.V.) in Rom. 6:19. "Kind" carries the idea of growth by germination.

But rather than being progressively tamed, human nature is in a progressive downward spiral to death if it goes unchecked (1:14,15). The deception of our natural thinking is that to a limited extent it can be spiritually sound: "The Gentiles... do by nature the things contained in the law" (Rom. 2:14), "nature itself" teaches the spiritual principles governing hair length (1 Cor. 11:14). Like James' ecclesia, it is possible to live in the Truth adhering to correct doctrine- "the faith"- and make a half-hearted attempt to develop a spiritual mind to control our actions in our own strength. James argues for a totality of success in our spiritual lives; he is saying that any striving for spiritual development based on our natural reasoning will fail, ultimately, to develop the high standard of being totally spiritual that James is setting. He holds up Abraham and Rahab as examples of those who did reach a certain point of fullness of faith and subsequent justification with God, showing that such a state is not impossible for us. Jude 10,12 describes the Judaizers speaking "great swelling words...which they know naturally" at the communion service ("feast of charity"). This again suggests that James' warning about using natural wisdom- i.e. from within our own nature- to control the ecclesial body and our own lives is aimed at a group of false teachers within the ecclesia who were controlling the ecclesia and encouraging its members to control themselves by relying on the mental abilities of human nature, rather than on the wisdom from the word filling the mind. "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (v.8).

The likening of "the tongue" to a deadly snake invites comparison with the serpent in Eden, and therefore with the Judaizers, who "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" were enticing Christians away "from the simplicity which is in Christ" by preaching "another Gospel" based on "another Spirit"- i.e. of the human spirit or mind, as opposed to the Holy Spirit which was in the word of the true Gospel (2 Cor. 11:3,4). The serpent in Eden is elsewhere a symbol of the Jewish system. The serpent was to be *destroyed*, not just tamed, by the seed of the woman. The serpent/ devil being in our natural mind, our tongue must be regarded by us as a rampant snake, seeing that it reflects our thoughts. The following verse 9 contains another allusion to early Genesis. By the tongue, the man made in God's similitude is cursed, due to the serpent's tongue. Through the unbridled tongue and also the influence of the Judaist serpent, the new creation of believers could be cursed, as they can be today too. The tongue cannot be tamed by man; the emphasis being on the word "man". Yet in 1:26 we saw that the mark of a true believer influenced by the word is that he *can* bridle his tongue. Thus here James is saying that "no man" in the sense of the natural man, a reliance on human strength, can control the tongue. There must be a connection with the demoniac Legion whom no man could tame (Mk. 5:4)- perhaps in that he also represented the Jewish system. There is also an echo here of Paul's description of how human nature is so impossible for the natural man to control: "The carnal mind... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be... in my flesh dwelleth no good thing... how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 8:7; 7:18). Thus it is not a question of changing the carnal mind by the strength of the carnal mind; Paul says that is impossible; but of creating a "new man" by a spirit or power of reasoning outside the natural man. If the spirit of man is no use, the only other source of power is God's Holy Spirit. The parallels between the untamable nature of the tongue and that of our evil thinking as described in Romans shows how exactly our words are to be equated with the thinking of our heart. The tongue is "an unruly evil"; Strong defines "unruly" as 'unrestrainable', which fits in with the exposition offered above.

*3:9 With this we bless the Lord and the Father, and with this we curse men, even though they are made after the likeness of God-* James warns his converts of the need to restrain our tongue; and yet he admits that "we", himself included, use the tongue to bless God and curse men; whereas in other parts of his letter he addresses his readers as "you" when he criticizes their behaviour. But in this matter of the tongue, he holds himself, their teacher, to be afflicted with the same failures as them (James 3:9 cp. 4:15,16).

James himself appeals in his letter for us to bridle the tongue. But here he seems to say that the tongue is uncontrollable, and "we"- he includes himself- use it to both bless God and curse men. And he goes on to say that this shouldn't be so, because a good tree brings forth good fruit, i.e. words. Inappropriate words from our mouths indicate that there is something fundamentally wrong with our spirituality. What is the reconciliation of this? I suggest that James, despite being a leading brother, is showing a chink in his own armour, and thereby empowering his message all the more. He is saying that he himself has to admit that "we", including himself, do sometimes say inappropriate things. The tongue can be bridled, it can be as Peter puts it 'refrained'. But in practice, no man seems able to totally tame the tongue. And this is why James also says in this very context that we shouldn't be eager to be teachers, because it is almost inevitable that we will use words wrongly and thereby offend our brother, with all the Biblical implications this carries: "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (3:2). James, a teacher in the ecclesia, a



Master in Israel, says that “we”, himself included, at times offend others; because “the tongue can no man tame”. And yet it *can* be bridled, refrained, tamed, just as a horse can be tamed by use of a bridle. Surely what James is saying is this: ‘This matter of the tongue worries me no end. I know I, and all of us, could tame our tongues. It’s vital we do. But inappropriate words do still come out of me, and you. And it worries me, because a good tree doesn’t bear such bad fruit. It seems no man among us can tame his tongue as he ought. Oh wretched men that we are. Me especially, because I’m your teacher, James the brother of Jesus Himself. Yes, let us strive the more earnestly in this matter of bridling the tongue. But who in the end shall deliver us from this bondage of corruption, this seeming inability to live and speak and do and be as we ought to? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord and His saving grace’.

God as creator created man in His own image; and therefore we shouldn't curse men (James 3:9). By reason of the image they bear, we are to act to all men as we would to God Himself; we are not to treat some men as we would animals, who are not in the image of God. Because we are made in God's image, we should therefore not kill other humans (Gen. 9:6). James says the same, in essence, in teaching that because we are in God's image, we shouldn't curse others. To curse a man is to kill him. That's the point of James' allusion to Genesis and to God as creator. Quite simply, respect for the person of others is inculcated by sustained reflection on the way that they too are created in God's image.

The fact that they did use their tongues to praise God tempted James' readers to think that this meant that they had their tongues and therefore their thinking too in control. Again, the warning against semi-spirituality and a 'feel good religion' comes over. We have seen that the rich, proud speaking members of the ecclesia are the target of much of what James is saying. Our previous notes on 2:6,16 have shown that this group were quite aggressive to the lower ranks of believers. The men "made after the similitude of God" may well refer to the creative power of the word making them in God's image. As with Daniel, Nehemiah and other faithful spiritual leaders of the Jews, James totally associates himself with his brethren- *we* curse men, he says. It is noteworthy that as a faithful shepherd James does not disassociate himself from this wayward flock. However, elsewhere in the letter he repeatedly addresses them as "ye"- e.g. v.14 is in the same passage concerning control of the tongue: "*Ye* have bitter envying and strife in your hearts". The only other places where James associates himself with the readers are in 3:1,2 and 6, again in this same passage about the tongue- it is "*among our members*". There seem two possibilities to explain this. It may be that James personally felt guilty of misusing his tongue- "If any man offend not in word the same is a perfect man" (3:2). No doubt James had spoken wrongly at some time and was conscious of this, and therefore felt he could not phrase this criticism of them as he does all the others- he could not write 'You both bless God and curse men with your tongue' when he too was guilty. However, James' 'cursing' and thereby offending ("we offend all", 3:2), was no doubt a temporary slip-up, compared to his readers whose generally unbridled tongue was because "*You* (not James) have bitter envying and strife in your hearts" (v.14). This envying and strife within the ecclesia caused the "fightings among you" (4:1), and this again suggests that the cursing of men which they were guilty of related to their words to their brethren. The other possible explanation of why James personally associates himself with the 'cursing' done by the tongue is that "the tongue" may indirectly refer to a certain group within the ecclesial body. They were part of the body of Christ, as was James, therefore the tongue was "*among our members*" (3:6), and its cursing of men therefore implicated the rest of the ecclesia.

We have seen that James often bases his reasoning on the sermon on the mount. The ideas of blessing, cursing and men in God's similitude are found in Mt. 5:44-48: "Bless them that curse you... that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven (i.e. showing His spiritual characteristics)... be you therefore perfect" (cp. James 3:2 "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man"). This again suggests that the men in the similitude of God who were being cursed were those of the ecclesia who blessed these rich brethren who cursed them, and thus became the children of God due to their being born of the word, which makes a man "perfect". "Similitude" is from a word meaning 'to assimilate', implying a likeness that has been taken on. The "men" like this are those who have developed the likeness of God, "men having become according to likeness of God" (Marshall's Interlinear). The frequent references to Peter's letters also makes an interesting point. The parallel there is in 1 Pet. 3:8-11: "Be ye all of one mind... not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing... refrain (your) tongue from evil... the Lord is against them that do evil". The "evil" spoken of here is therefore that of bitter speaking within the ecclesia which must not be responded to. This type of evil is far harder to resist than being taken to law unfairly, which is how we tend to read this passage. However, the context in Peter is also of physical persecution by the Romans, influenced by Jewish criticism of the Christians. There seems a hint that this group of evil speakers within the ecclesia were associated with the Roman and Jewish authorities.

*3:10 Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so-* There is possibly a passing allusion here to Moses, the only other person in Scripture to be recorded as having blessing and cursing coming from him. He could justifiably do so, because he had the word of God in him. But these who did not have the word in them were not justified in doing so- i.e. the association of themselves with Moses which was being made by these Judaist-influenced brethren was not valid. For another example of this, see notes on v.15 and also 4:12. Verse 11 implies that this sending out of blessing and cursing was simultaneous- the figure is of a spring gushing out both salt and fresh water from the same place (Greek 'hole'- cp. the mouth) at the same time. If the cursing of the other brethren was being done in the name of God, then this figure is apt- i.e. along with praise of God there was apparently righteous condemnation of these other brethren, in the same way as Moses simultaneously blessed and cursed the people on God's behalf.

No doubt the withholding of wages from these brethren (5:4) and refusing to materially alleviate their poverty (2:16) was justified by accusing the poor brethren of spiritual weakness that warranted this cursing by God. The close association of material wealth and spiritual pride throughout Israel's history and also here in James must be taken to heart by us in these last days. Just before the Lord returns there will be some who "eat and drink with the drunken" due to their wealth, and this leads them to beat their fellowservants (Mt. 24:45-50). This group will be those who are called to be the rulers of the ecclesia ("his Lord has made ruler over his household, to give them their- spiritual- meat in due season"). Those James speaks of were the "masters", "governors" and horse-riders in the ecclesia (3:1-5). The fact that some of our ecclesial leaders are in a position to be rich in this world must mean that all this is a serious warning to them- some will, according to the parable, allow the authority and power they have in their secular life to corrupt them, so that they act like that in the ecclesia. Let us all humbly resolve that our Lord's parable will not be fulfilled in us. Note how that parable formed a footnote to the Olivet prophecy- as if to say that this temptation to have a

lack of true love for one's brethren in these last days will really be something to be reckoned with. The blessing and cursing "proceeds" from the mouth. This is the same word used in Mt. 15:18,19: "Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart...out of the heart proceed evil thoughts". Again, the mouth is effectively identical with the heart, showing the great emphasis by James on a man's words as being the main form of manifestation of his evil heart, and the need to control them if all other sin is to be avoided. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be". The Greek for "ought" occurs nowhere else and is extremely strong (cp. "my brethren" with the gentle opening gambit of the Lord in His letters to the ecclesias). It is worth noting at this point how well and personally James seems to have known his readership, although they were all "scattered abroad" (1:1) throughout the Roman world. Surely he would not have been so dogmatic in his denunciation of the type of words they spoke unless he knew exactly their situation. The nature of inspiration is such that James could have just sat and wrote as a result of a specific revelation to him of the weaknesses of these people, seeing in vision how they selected comfortable chairs in the meeting room for the rich (2:3), refused welfare to the poor, and spoke such wrong words as described in chapter 3. However, it seems more likely that inspiration worked through a band of dedicated (young?) servants of the ecclesias moving around the scattered pockets of Jewish Christians as they went from city to city (4:13) and reporting back to James. Or maybe James himself moved around visiting them, as a good shepherd; or perhaps he knew them all personally due to them all being in the Jerusalem ecclesia together in happier days.

3:11 *Does the fountain send forth from the same spout both fresh and bitter water?*- We have already made some comment on this in our notes on v.10. The spring gushing out (the idea of "spout") sweet and bitter water corresponds to the mouth having blessing and cursing proceeding from it. The idea of their words gushing from them corresponds to the rebuke that their tongue was unbridled in v.3. Note that both blessing of God and cursing of brethren gushed from them. For our words in regard to God to be unbridled is a sin, as much as to curse a brother without restraint. It is so tempting to feel that our relationship with God is fine, and therefore to assume that our attitude to our brethren is therefore beyond rebuke. These who blessed God and cursed their brethren fell into this trap. Our praise of God needs to be bridled or restrained by the word. Any ecstatic release of praise to God can therefore only be acceptable if it is within the bridle, or control, of the word- i.e. if its root motivation is in the word rather than human emotion. The word for "bitter" is from a root meaning 'to pierce'; the words of this group in the ecclesia who are being reprimanded must have really pierced the heart of the poor, humble brethren. A spring can either emit sweet or bitter water, depending on the surrounding soil type- cp. the parable of the sower/types of ground. So our words really are an indication of our spiritual status; they will not really alternate between sweet and bitter, although they may appear to in our human self examination. In God's eyes they are either sweet or bitter. There is a significant link with Jer.6:6-8: "Cast a mount against Jerusalem (ecclesia?): this is the city to be visited (AD70 language); she is wholly oppression in the midst of her (cp. James 2:6;5:4 concerning the Jewish believers oppressing their brethren). As a fountain casts out her waters, so she casts out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her (i.e. the waters cast out are paralleled with her words of violence- that is how violence is *heard*)... be instructed (the same idea as "endued with knowledge" in the Greek of James 3:13), O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited"- as happened after AD70. The Jewish believers are thus being likened to apostate Jerusalem-fitting, seeing they were all once members of the Jerusalem ecclesia that had since been "scattered abroad" (James 1:1 cp. Acts 8:1,4; 11:19).

The sending out of sweet and bitter waters must also look back to Marah, where the bitter waters were changed to sweet by the tree cast into the waters (Ex. 15:25), pointing forward to the cross. James' way of changing the bitter water of human nature into sweet waters was by true obedience to the word in our heart. Ex. 15 suggests that this change is due to the cross being applied to the waters. By doing so, "there He proved them" (Ex. 15:25) whether they would believe in the efficacy of the tree or not. Therefore our belief in the cross of Christ and the power he has subsequently made available for the development of 'sweet water' is only shown by our zeal to obey the word. The need to obey the word in order to drink the sweet waters is also stressed in Ex. 15. The people feared they would catch disease from drinking the bitter water, and so immediately after the tree had been thrown into the waters "there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them, and said, If you will hearken to the voice of the Lord... I will put none of these diseases upon you...and they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of (sweet) water, and seventy palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters" (v.25-27). Obedience to the word would lead to the bitter waters being changed to wells of good water, of the spirit, as witnessed by their coming to the prosperous oasis of Elim. Compare the wells of Elim with James' fountain (spring) of sweet waters.

3:12 *My brothers, can a fig tree yield olives or a vine figs? Neither can salt water yield fresh-* We have seen that the fountain yielding water represents our heart or tongue yielding our words. The trees bearing fruit therefore must be interpreted as being our hearts bearing the spiritual fruit of our words. Both fig and olive trees are well hacked Old Testament symbols of Israel- as if to imply to these Jews that only by having the real spirit of Israel in their hearts rather than just in their flesh could they bear spiritual fruit. The bearing of fruit by the fig tree is a consistent symbol of the repentance of Israel in the "last days" of AD70 and (hopefully and prayerfully) in the twentieth century. In his usual neat style James is implying that the national repentance of Israel would be imputed to them if the "remnant" of Jewish Christians bore fruit; but with their present attitude of mind this was impossible. This is the same idea as in 5:7: "The husbandman (God? Christ?) waits for the precious fruit of the earth (the land- of Israel? i.e. from the Jewish believers especially?), and has long patience for it"- a connection with 2 Pet. 3:15, where Peter says that the delay in the second coming to await the development of "all holy conversation and Godliness" (v.11) among Peter's Jewish readers shows "the longsuffering of our Lord" (Christ). It is possible to argue that the exact timing of the second coming is related to the repentance of Israel, and was deferred from AD70 due to lack of Jewish repentance. Thus we can appreciate why James, knowing this as he wrote before AD70, so earnestly begs the Jewish believers to develop true spiritual fruit that would result in the second coming, as opposed to petty bickering and infighting. Peter's plea is just as intense. The same plea, with even greater urgency, has to be made to natural and spiritual Israel in these days. In practice, let us again notice how all spiritual fruit is epitomized by the type of words we speak; the fruit of the olive is parallel with the water from the fountain.

There is a clear link with Mt. 7:15-20: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing (looking like a lamb, appearing to have the gentle, spiritual characteristics of Christ)...you shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns? or figs of thistles?... a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit (cp. "so can no fountain... yield")... every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire (cp. James 3:6- the tongue will be destroyed in Gehenna fire). Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them". This almost conclusively shows that this group of Jewish

believers within the ecclesia whom James is writing about were the Jewish "false prophets"- or those influenced by them- whom the Lord had warned would try to infiltrate the ecclesia. For those who were attune to these connections with other Scripture, it would have been obvious that these brethren were false prophets because their words so clearly gave them away. Note how James has slightly changed Christ's analogy-from grapes and figs growing on thorns and thistles to grapes growing on figs, and figs growing on olives.

Thorns and thistles is used to describe the fruit of the (same?) Jewish false prophets in the ecclesia in Heb. 6:5-8, and they would also recall the curse in Eden to any Jewish mind. This would associate these Jewish false teachers with the serpent who brought thorns and thistles into Eden- a simile repeated in 2 Cor. 11:3 and elsewhere. James is saying that the thorns and thistles had become figs and olives, i.e. they appeared far more acceptable than the false prophets of Christ's parable, but the fact their fruit was not consistent with what they appeared to be was still the litmus test which proved they were false. Again, there is a warning against thinking that semi-spirituality means acceptability with God. As the ecclesia seemed duped into thinking that because they used their tongue to bless God, all their words must be acceptable, so they thought that because these men didn't appear to be thorns and thistles but rather figs and olives, they must be acceptable even if there was some mismatch between the tree and the fruit.

There is a slight change of figure also with v.11: sweet and bitter water becomes "salt water and fresh". The many links with the sermon on the mount suggest a connection with the group of passages that show that the salt in a believer (Mt. 5:13) represents his gracious, "seasoned with salt" way of speaking (Col. 4:6) which leads to peace within the ecclesia (Mk. 9:50). Both salt water and fresh represent positive spiritual ways of speaking; as their parallel figs and olive berries both equally represent spiritual fruit. The point is thus being made that a spring or tree cannot yield two types of products, and therefore encourages the connection with Mt. 7:15-20. Figs, olives and bitter water recalls Jer. 8:13,14: "There shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree...for the Lord our God has...given us water of gall ('poison'- Dt. 29:18) to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord". The lack of spiritual fruit on Israel is here associated with bitter or poisonous water. If James is referring to this passage, the tongue "full of deadly poison" (3:8) and the corrupt mind it reflected was the cause of the Jews' lack of fruit, and there is even the implication that God had given them the 'bitter water' of their tongues as a curse, as He did to Israel at Marah, in the sense that God confirms the spiritual or unspiritual attributes of a man- e.g. He hardened Pharaoh's already hard heart.

3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works in his good life, in meekness of wisdom-* A "wise man" is a synonym for a prophet: "I send unto you prophets, and wise men" (Mt. 23:34), the implication being that these brethren thought that they were prophets (i.e. having the Spirit gift of prophecy) and endued with Heavenly knowledge. This follows on nicely from the albeit indirect accusation in the previous verse (through the Mt. 7 allusion) that they were false prophets. Verse 14 lends support to this: "If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth". "Thy word is Truth" (Jn. 17:17), and therefore if they had bitterness in their hearts they were blaspheming against the word which they were inspired to speak. The elders of the early ecclesias (the "presbytery" of 1 Tim. 4:14) probably had the Spirit gifts, especially that of prophecy- i.e. 'forth-telling' inspired words of God to the ecclesia. Our Lord said that many who had the

gifts of the Spirit would be condemned at judgment day (Mt. 7:22)- a prophecy hard to apply to anyone other than the Jewish believers and elders of the first century.

Thus it is possible that James is telling these brethren to validate their spiritual position by humbly showing the word at work in their hearts by their way of life ("a good conversation"), rather than thinking that just because they had the gifts this was proof that they were righteous before God. In this case the "blessing" of God (v.9) which they thought justified all their other words would have been blessing or praying to God using the spirit gifts as described in 1 Cor. 14:16 and Jude 20. The fact their mouths uttered the "sweet" water of the inspired word along with their own brash speaking was therefore especially serious. Because they possessed the gift of prophecy they thought it unnecessary to make the personal effort of applying the word in their hearts to control their thoughts and subsequent words. Examples abound in Hebrews, Corinthians and the Lord's letters in Revelation of those possessing the gifts being unacceptable to God, hence His withdrawal of them. There are similarities between this and our possession of the word of Truth. A true response to the word must always produce humility- any Bible study that does not result in this in some way is pointless. A comparison of verses 13 and 14 shows that "a good conversation" is the same as not having "bitter envying and strife in your hearts". "Conversation" therefore does not simply mean 'way of life' but rather the thinking that is behind that life. "The former conversation" is "the old man...the deceitful lusts" and is replaced by being "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph. 4:22,23), showing that "conversation" applies to the state of mind. It is because of this that Timothy's "Conversation" was to be comprised of mental attributes like "charity... faith... purity" (of mind), 1 Tim. 4:12.

As was argued in Chapter 2, "works" are 'shown out' of the state of the mind, and cannot be separated from it. The context being of the tongue, the "works" referred to are probably words, which epitomize all a man's spiritual "works". Words should therefore be humble ("with meekness of wisdom"), and based on a heart saturated by the word, and this will indicate whether a man is a true prophet. By contrast, proudly speaking inspired words to publicly show off the gift of prophecy, and also gushing out the words of an unregenerated heart, were equally unacceptable. Such a person was not a true prophet in God's sight.

The idea of "showing out" goes back to 2:18, where James asks this class of believers to show him how it was possible to have faith without works. There he is arguing that they are indivisible, and here in 3:13 he is effectively saying the same- that the works or words are an inevitable reflection of the heart, "the faith", or "conversation".

3:14 *But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your heart, do not boast about it and deny the truth-* The bitter envying in the heart connects with the bitter water of v.11, representing the bitter words of the brethren- again showing that words and heart are effectively identical. "Envy" is the Greek *zelos* and is the word used to describe zeal for God; it is not the normal word translated "envy". This envying, as we can imagine from what we know already of these brethren, was justified by them with spiritual reasons; similarly Acts 13:45; 17:5 and 1 Cor. 3:3 describe Jews and believers envying each other for supposedly spiritual reasons. Envy and strife within the ecclesia were a (conscious?) product of the work of the Judaizers and other false teachers amongst the brethren. It may well be that they were envious of others in the ecclesia spiritually, being jealous of the true spirituality possessed by the poorer brethren. However, the "wars and fightings" of James 4 seem to be associated with

desiring material possessions (4:2), resulting in evil speaking between brethren (4:11). In this case the envying of chapter 3 could just be envying the possessions of other brethren. Yet the spiritual associations of "envying" ('zealousing') suggest that either this envying of possessions was couched in spiritual terms- e.g. 'You shouldn't have that car (which I envy) because you should show more generosity to the Truth'- or that the envying was of the more spiritual members. The envying and strife was clearly within the ecclesia, from what chapter 4 and other mentions of envying and strife imply (1 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 1:15 etc.). But the root cause of this was because this bitterness and envying was "in your hearts". Amazingly, these brethren were glorying (boasting, rejoicing) in this: "glory not". Similarly they rejoiced in their boastings about how they made plans to make business trips without taking account of the working of God's will (4:13-16)- presumably because they thought that as prophets they knew God's will. They were clearly rejoicing in what was wrong and evil, doubtless as a result of taking on board the Judaist-pedalled philosophy that "let us continue in sin, that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1). Romans was written largely to Jews- the first two chapters especially describe how the Jewish ecclesia of the first century were repeating the same errors as that in the wilderness. The Jewish believers were reasoning that because they were Jews they were justified, and Christ being a Jew confirmed the impossibility of sin being held against them. Thus they smugly rejoiced in being able to commit sin and, as they thought, remain justified, thereby spurring their spiritual condemnation of their poorer Gentile brethren.

The basic message of the Gospel was "in the beginning", in John's language, right from Eden and Abraham, and was made flesh in the person of Jesus. God could have left it at just "the word", but to make it powerful and compelling of acceptance it had to be made flesh in a person. That word must become flesh in us too. This is why James 3:17 speaks of "wisdom" as if it has been made flesh in the believer: "The wisdom that is from above is pure peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy" . Abstract wisdom can't be spoken of in those terms; but wisdom made flesh in a person can be. The "wisdom" of which James speaks is "the truth" (3:14). The true Gospel, the doctrine of Christ, must be lived out in flesh; this is the whole intention. It isn't merely an intellectual test to see who can figure it out, and on that basis a relationship with God is given as a reward. One of the Hebrew words for "wisdom" also means "practical working" - and as so often in the Hebrew language, the Divine perspective is reflected in the language. Wisdom is "manifold in effectual working" (Job 6:11 RV); and compare the AV and RV of Job 12:16: "With him is... wisdom [AV] / effectual working [RV]". The man Christ Jesus was made unto us "wisdom"; in Him wisdom was made flesh.

3:15 *This wisdom is not a wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual and devilish*- This is reminding them that such philosophy was not by God's inspiration- that because one is a vehicle for God's inspired word, it does not follow that all ones' thoughts and reasoning are correct. "Sensual" means 'natural', and looks back to v.7 implying that human nature cannot be tamed by the 'natural' reasoning of human nature, or the human mind- it is "devilish", or 'demoniacal'. James 2:19 has associated these Jewish believers and their semi-faith with the healed demoniacs; James is saying that such semi-faith which has enough hope to be healed but does not respond with works subsequently, is not a positive spiritual attribute at all- it is rooted in the natural, earthly mind.

James is pointing a contrast between wisdom- or the word (cp. notes on 1:5)- which comes from above, and that which is of the earth. There is a link here with Heb. 2:2,3, a letter which we have suggested was sent to the same readership as James and may have been known by them already. "If the word spoken by Angels (the Law) was steadfast... how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation... spoken by the Lord". "If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth (Moses? The Angel who spake the Law?), much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven" (Heb. 12:25). The wisdom that came from the earth is therefore associated with the Jewish system, and it is this which was resulting in all the human reasoning of these brethren; not the Law itself, but the influence of the Judaizers who advocated it. The wisdom from above mentioned in v.17 is therefore that which comes from the new covenant in Christ as opposed to that of the Law. "Comes down" carries the idea of literal downwards movement, perhaps referring to the Angel physically descending in the cloud to give Moses the words of God by which he was constituted a prophet. If this is the reference, then as we saw in the notes on v.10, this is another rebuke of these brethren who were seeking to parallel themselves with Moses.

*3:16 For where jealousy and division are, there is confusion and every vile deed-* If there is envying and strife in the heart, "there is confusion and every evil work" in the same place. Yet again, the works are said to take place in the heart. The Corinthians are twice rebuked by Paul for having confusion in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 12:20 translated 'tumults'), due to their misuse of the Spirit gifts. This would seem to be relevant to the situation in James' ecclesia; but again, the confusion began in the heart due to the lack of impact the word had made upon it. Another repeated theme is that "every evil work" is paralleled with the uncontrolled tongue, showing that the tongue is the summation of every potential sin that lies within our heart. The Greek for "evil work" only occurs four times; one of them is in Titus 2:8, which speaks of the Jewish and Roman adversaries of the ecclesia seeking to speak evil of the believers. Whilst on its own this would not be significant, in view of the constant parallels between the Jewish system and his readers which James is making, it appears that he is linking the evil thoughts in their hearts concerning their poor brethren, with the evil speaking about the ecclesia being done by the Jewish 'satan' outside the ecclesia.

*3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is most importantly pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy-* The wisdom coming from above is the gift of the word coming down from God, making us "firstfruits of His (spiritual) creatures" (1:17,18). We have suggested that the wisdom from above is the word of Christ as opposed to that of Moses; in Jesus the word became flesh (Jn. 1:14), the whole of God's revelation became associated with the person of Christ, not just the words of the New Testament inspired after His time. Thus this verse describes both the work of the word, and also the character of Christ, the wisdom/word of God from above.

If the word was truly in them, they would have the characteristics of purity as opposed to their double mindedness; they did not have peace in their hearts (cp. v.16), their rejecting of their poor brethren's welfare requests (2:16) and harsh treatment of them (2:6; 5:4) contrasted with the gentleness and ease with which brethren should feel they can entreat us with. The word with it's associated spirit of Christ will develop these attributes within us. Purity of mind (cp. Phil. 4:8) is of "first" importance; if this is achieved, "then" the characteristics which the ecclesia were so sadly lacking in would then naturally follow. The Greek 'proton' occurs again in Mt. 6:33: "Seek *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness". This is



achieved, according to James, by striving to let the word develop now those righteous attributes which will be revealed so fully and widely in the Kingdom (cp. Rom. 14:17).

"The wisdom that is from above" must also refer to Jn. 3:3-5, which speaks of being born from above, i.e. from Heaven by the Spirit. Nicodemus thought that he had already been born from above, seeing that he had a knowledge of the Law. But Christ told him "heavenly things" (Jn. 3:12), which Nicodemus found hard to accept. The word which makes us born again (Jn. 3:5 cp. 1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18) does so because it reveals Heavenly principles to us. This wisdom/word in James was "full of mercy and good fruits". The word develops these fruits (Jn. 15:5-8), as does Christ (Phil. 1:11)- again showing His equation with the word. The language of fruiting goes back to v.12, where the tree that bears fruit is the heart of the believer. Now what bears fruit is the word- because that must be equated with the heart if good fruit is to be produced. Thus we can make the equation: Christ= Spirit= Word= In heart= fruit. These factors may be arranged in any order, showing how Christ dwells in our heart by faith (Eph. 3:17 cp. Col. 3:16; Rom. 10:17). The fullness of spiritual attributes mentioned here may refer back to Ex. 34:5-7 (R.V.), which describes the name of God as being *full* of His attributes of mercy, patience, justice etc. The word of true wisdom produces these characteristics in us, thereby giving us the Name of God. Again, James is setting an ultimate standard- aiming for the fullness of God to be developed in us through the almighty power of the word. It must be theoretically possible for a man to be perfect in God's sight; even though in the past he has failed and thus come short of Christ's standard, he can still be justified by the faith which is developed by the word acting upon him. Our Lord was of our nature, and yet still attained perfection. We are invited to follow him to perfection, being perfect even as God is. The means by which we achieve this may be slightly different to how he did; yet through the word "now are we the sons of God" (1 Jn. 3:1,2; Jn. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:23), Spirit-begotten as He was.

This degree of commitment to the word leads to a brother being "without partiality"; something which the ecclesia were guilty of due to their lack of having the word in their hearts (see notes on 2:4). Having their own minds full of strife, division and confusion (v.14-16) would inevitably lead them to be partial or divided in their dealings with other brethren. The word 'affectionately believed' will lead us to be "without hypocrisy"- again inviting a comparison between these brethren without the word truly in them and the Pharisees, who are those invariably described as "hypocrites" in the New Testament. However, the phrase also occurs in the sermon on the mount, and the many allusions to this discourse in James suggest that he may have had Mt. 7:5 in mind: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye". We have seen that the context of James 3 is of a group of brethren criticizing another group, with the inference that their criticism was masked with pseudo-spiritual reasoning. This is exactly the theme of Mt. 7:5. To avoid being a hypocrite, James implies, we need to let the word sink into ourselves- which has the same effect as casting the plank out of our own eye. It is the word which has the power of self-examination; 1 Jn. 1:10 implies that if the word is in us, then we appreciate what sinners we have been. The telling thing about the description of the Spirit gifted eldership as "hypocrites" ('play-actors') is that their make-up and costume was the Truth itself. The fact we are wearing this can lead us to think that we really are the part we are playing- but putting on the clothes and changing our heart to truly identify with what we profess are two different things.

3:18 *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those that make peace-* There are a number of connections here with the Septuagint of Is. 32:16-20: "Righteousness remain in the fruitful field... the work of righteousness shall be peace... quietness and assurance... blessed are you that sow". This is clearly a Kingdom passage, yet it is quoted about our present ecclesial experience. This is one of many examples of where spirituality in this life can give us a foretaste of the Kingdom. The wisdom coming from above in v.17 we have shown to have reference to our birth by the word, to become new creatures. Verse 18 has links with two passages which also contain this theme of spiritual re-birth by the word.

The mention of being "full of good fruits" in v.17 may be looking back to the list of spiritual fruits in the beatitudes in Mt.5- the poor in spirit, the weeping, the meek, the pure in heart, those hungering after righteousness, the peacemakers etc. comprise all the main spiritual fruits; and are also a fair description of the oppressed, spiritually minded underclass in the ecclesias to whom James is writing. Now v.18 makes a definite connection with Mt. 5:9; "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God".

This would indicate that James read the people mentioned in the beatitudes as being within the ecclesia, and "the peacemakers" being the quiet brother who humbly tries to calm the bitter vying for power between the rich, self opinionated leaders. In this case, James is reminding these leaders of the virtues of those they despised; they sowed the fruit of righteousness because the word developed those fruits in them. By doing so, Mt. 5:9 says, they became the children of God. Thus the word led them to develop the spiritual fruits which made them peacemakers, which made them the children of God. Thus possession of the word does not automatically make us sons of God, but the effect it achieves upon us in giving us the family characteristics of our Father. The other clear connection of v.18 is with Heb.

12:11. Having spoken of the persecution of the Jewish believers being a proof of their sonship to God, "the Father of spirits", Paul encourages them that this chastening "yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". The poor believers in James' ecclesias had also become the spiritual children of God by the word acting on them, making them react to the chastening they were receiving at the hands of the rich brethren by developing peace. Their peaceful sowing of the word, which was the seed sown (Lk. 8:11), was going to lead them to "raise a harvest of righteousness" (N.I.V.) in their own characters. If this line of interpretation is correct, it would appear that the poor, mistreated brethren were humbly responding to the criticisms of them (the cursing of v.9) by quietly quoting the word, in order to try and make peace both between them and the rich brethren, and between the rival factions in the eldership. See notes on 5:7 for more on this. This problem of there being "wars and fightings" amongst this group is continued in 4:1, thus making the chapter division unfortunate.

## CHAPTER 4

*4:1 What causes the wars and fights among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasures that war within you?*- The way this is phrased implies that the unspiritual brethren were blaming the evident infighting within the ecclesia on others- perhaps the group of poor brethren who they spiritually cursed in 3:9,10. Note how the fightings came out of their lusts- warring in the members suggests an allusion to Rom. 7:23 "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members". The allusions to Romans may be because this letter too was in circulation amongst the dispersed Jewish believers. The "members" of James 4:1 are therefore the parts of the evil human heart. The double mindedness in the hearts of the individual brethren was inevitably reflected in the members of the ecclesial body (cp. 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:25). Another link with 1 Peter clarifies that the warfare within the body was also within their own minds: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). The Greek for "lusts" here in James 4 is not the normal word so translated. The only other times it occurs are in 2 Pet. 2:13 translated "pleasure", where it is associated with the Judaist false teachers; Tit. 3:3, where Paul says these lusts were part of his former Judaist life; and in Lk. 8:14 regarding that which chokes the growth of the word.

Their lusts or pleasures may have warred against each other in the sense that they desired different things which conflicted within their heart, but the idea of war and fighting seems more usually used with reference to the spiritual warfare within the human heart (cp. 1 Pet. 2:11), whereby the spiritual reservoir is under violent attack from the united desires for the various pleasures to be possessed. The Greek for "fightings" occurs in Titus 3:9 and 2 Tim. 2:23,24 concerning arguments within the ecclesia over the interpretation of the Law. It would therefore seem that the justification for gratifying their materialistic desires was based on misapplication of the word. Again we are seeing the classic characteristic of apostasy- a mixture of truth with error until a position of self-justification has been reached. These reasonings over certain passages began as a debate within their own heart ("members"), and then spread to the whole ecclesia. We have pointed out that the break between chapters 3 and 4 is unfortunate. The mention of "wars" in 4:1 and "confusion" in 3:16 only 3 verses earlier suggests a connection with the "wars and commotions" heralding the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:9), seeing that "confusion" and "commotions" are the same Greek word. Is James implying that the crazy political situation in the world that heralded Jerusalem's downfall was going to be reflected in ecclesial life in the last days, resulting in a similar downfall of the scattered Jerusalem ecclesia? The situation within the body in these last days may provide an unfortunate parallel.

*4:2 You want what you don't have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask*- The Greek for "lust" here is the normal word, and a powerful parallel is made between this and asking (praying) in the wrong way. Such prayer is an expression of lust; the very same word is used concerning lusting after a woman in Mt.5:28. Prayer to God for personal pleasures that gushes out without the restraint of the word is truly a serious offence. The idea of killing in 2:11 was interpreted as meaning showing lack of love to your brother, after the pattern of Mt. 5:21,22. The word for "kill" here in James is not the usual Greek word. This one is normally translated "kill" in the phrase "Thou shalt not kill" when quoting the ten commandments. Thus James is making an especial appeal to their Jewish minds by implying that their lack of love really is effective manslaughter. Thus in order to satisfy their carnal desires they were killing or hating their brethren. An obvious fulfilment of this would have been in their withholding of the meagre

wages of the poor brethren- effectively killing them by their lack of love- in order to indulge their latest pleasures. What parallels with saving for the holiday home at the expense of struggling ecclesias in the third world? "Desire to have" is a very emotion-loaded word in Greek, implying to be moved to jealousy by something or someone. Such a motivation for prayer is unacceptable. The parallel is with "and cannot obtain", which means literally 'to chance upon'. Their semi-spiritual attitude to life is epitomized by their psychology of prayer- thinking they might chance to get the answer to a prayer, they expressed their emotional, natural desires for the pleasures of this life in prayer, justifying this by misapplying Scripture. They never realized that the love of these pleasures was actually swamping the growth of the real word seed, which was occasionally planted in them by the poor brethren reminding them of the word; so the two references to the sower parable in 3:18 and 4:1 would imply.

*4:3 You ask and do not receive because you ask with the wrong motivation, you want only what will give you pleasure-* Some ask and receive not, because in reality, they don't ask at all. They are playing around with the possible power of prayer for their own benefit. And Old Testament Israel fasted, but only to themselves, not to God (Zech. 7:5,6).

Despite all the commotion within their hearts and the ecclesia, and perhaps also in their strivings in their misdirected prayers, although they asked in prayer, in God's sight such words are not prayer: "You ask not... you ask", because desiring is not praying. Alternatively, this may be looking back to 1:4,5 about asking for wisdom, as if to say 'You don't receive answers to your prayers for material things because you don't pray firstly for the wisdom from the word to be in your heart, which would have made your subsequent prayers powerful'. There is a link here with Mt. 7:7,8: "Ask, and it shall be given you... for every one that asks receives". But "You ask and receive *not*". The reason for such powerful prayer is given in the surrounding context in Mt. 7- if they were not hypocrites in criticizing their brethren, which 3:17 implies they were guilty of, and if they did to men as they would like God to do to them (Mt. 7:2,12). Not surprisingly therefore, the prayers of these brethren were not answered as Mt. 7 promised. There is probably also a reference to Jn. 15:7: "If...my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you". "Done unto you" possibly implies physical blessing. Because the word was not in them, which is the whole theme of James, this promise was not fulfilled in them.

"With the wrong motivation" is better "Amiss", and is from a word meaning to be sick or diseased, or generally 'evil'. Although it is not the same word translated "sick" in 5:14-16, there may be a connection with the idea there of them being struck with physical sickness because of their sin and being advised to pray for forgiveness and therefore a cure. Here in 4:3 James is saying that their prayers were for human things and therefore they and their prayers were sick. This would explain their 'killing' of their brethren by holding back wages from them (5:4), because they specifically wanted the cash in hand; see notes on 5:3 too.

*4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God-* As the reference to killing in v.2 looks back to 2:11 in the sense of killing your brother by not loving him, so the command in the Old Covenant not to commit adultery mentioned in 2:11 is here interpreted as meaning not having friendship with the world. James' reasoning seems to be based (yet again) in the sermon on the mount- this time in the passage about not being able to

serve two masters, which results in loving the one and hating the other (Mt. 6:24). James is putting things in black and white terms again. By their prayers being based on the human desires of their heart they were loving the world and thereby hating God. "The world" is therefore primarily our evil desires- the world is in our heart (Ecc. 3:11,12), and "The lust of the eyes" etc. is "All that is in the world". The language of adultery invites us to interpret being a "friend" of the world in a sexual context, or to see that mere friendship with the world is of the same intensity as intercourse with it, in God's sight. Serving mammon (the world) in the two masters parable is due to taking thought for human possessions (Mt. 6:25)- i.e. the service of mammon is a mental condition in the heart rather than just physically spending time pursuing these things. This is exactly the context here in James.

"Friendship" (Greek *philia*) is a gentle word, even implying 'fondness'. Being a friend of the world means that, in the light of the two masters parable, they were not being a friend of God. This maybe connects with 2:23, which calls Abraham a friend of God because of his faith and works based on the word of promise taking hold of his heart. Their friendship or sympathy to the world and its desires which were in their heart meant that they had no real faith because the word was not truly influencing their thinking. This friendship with the world is "enmity with God". This takes us immediately to Rom. 8:7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God", thus again connecting the love of the world with the unregenerated mind. James is pounding away about the importance of the mind, and therefore of our attitude to the word which influences it. This enmity is further defined in Eph. 2:15,16: "Having abolished in His (Christ's) flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make in himself one new man... that He might reconcile both unto God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". The phrase "*the* enmity" implies that this is the same enmity as referred to elsewhere, namely in Rom. 8:7. The carnal mind allowed itself to be stimulated by the Law- not that the Law encouraged sin, but man's response to it encouraged carnal thinking, e.g. in the form of self righteousness. This again hints that their "friendship of the world" was justified by their misquoting of the Law. "The world" which they were so sympathetic towards (so "friendship" implies) may even refer to the Jewish world, both in its doctrine and its materialistic, pleasure-seeking attitude to life.

4:5 *Or do you think that the scripture says in vain: The Spirit that dwells in us yearns jealously-* This does not appear to be a verbatim quote from any manuscript- for a comment on the word "scripture" see notes on 2:23. James is effectively rebuking them for their lack of sensitivity to the word- by not recognizing the fundamentally lustful nature of our natural mind, they were effectively saying that the Scriptures' warnings about our evil human nature were "vain". They thought that by reason of possessing the Spirit gifts the evils of the human heart were by-passed an error also made by evangelical theology today. There appears to be a reference back to the descriptions of man at Noah's time in Gen. 6:5 and 8:21 as having a fundamentally wicked heart. 2 Pet. 3, Jude and the Lord in His Olivet prophecy all interpret Noah's world as being a type of the Jewish system heading towards destruction in AD70. So again James is saying that the lustful attitude of mind within these Jewish believers equated them with the rest of the Jewish world, which was about to be destroyed as Noah's world was. The Greek for "vain" is often used about vain Jewish philosophy that affected the ecclesias (Eph.5:6; Col.2:8; 1 Tim.6:20; 2 Tim.2:16; and Acts 4:25); it also looks back to the description of the brethren James is writing to as "vain" in 2:20. This would imply that because of the influence of vain Jewish (Judaist?) reasoning, they had become vain in their minds, and therefore Scripture had also become vain to them. The Greek for "dwelleth" means 'to dwell as an integral part'; the same Greek word for 'dwell' occurs in Rom.

7:17,18,20, describing "sin that dwelleth" within our members; we have seen 4:1 is alluding to this same passage in Rom. 7 concerning the spiritual conflict in our members. The same word is also used in 1 Cor. 3:16 about the Holy Spirit dwelling in the early believers - maybe suggesting that James is reminding the Jewish ecclesial elders that the Spirit gifts dwelling in them did not mean that the evil human spirit of our own nature did not dwell in them.

The very word "spirit" can refer both to this human spirit and also to the spirit of Christ in our minds. Thus they had to have the Spirit truly in their heart by their response to the word as well as tabernacling in them by reason of their possession of the gifts. The effort to apply the word to the human heart is therefore not just something which began after the miraculous gifts were withdrawn, but which also had to be practiced by their early possessors. If even those with the gift of prophecy (i.e. chosen by God to speak forth His word under direct inspiration) had to make this effort; how much more must we? God *yearns* that we might have a spirit like His, that we might be spiritually minded: "He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us" (James 4:5). He so wants us to accept His Spirit. And be sure that He will be ever working in our lives to try to get us to have this focus. The particular aspect of our inherent natural spirit that James draws attention to is its capacity to envy. We have suggested previously that their desire for wealth led these brethren to show a lack of love to the others in the ecclesia, although they justified this by misinterpreting parts of the Law. James is saying that they should not justify these envious feelings so quickly, but remember that Scripture generally warns that these feelings are part of our fallen nature, and they should not misapply odd passages to justify them as acceptable. The Greek for "envy" here is always used elsewhere concerning either the envying of the Jews against the believers, or about the envying generated within the ecclesia by Judaist-stimulated controversies.

4:6- see on Mt. 25:35.

*But He gives more grace. Wherefore the scripture said: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble-* This apparent personality of "the Scripture" was commented on under 2:23. Having quoted Scripture which states the pathetic spiritual condition of man, James quickly reminds us of another Scripture that gives more hope. The context of v.6 is in the earlier verses of the chapter concerning why their prayers were unanswered. "Grace" means 'gift', and can refer to the answer of prayer by God's Spirit. Thus James is saying 'God does actually answer prayer- Prov. 3:34 says he gives grace to the humble, i.e. He answers their prayers, although He resists the requests of the proud'. Note that James is quoting the Septuagint version of Prov. 3:34 here rather than the Hebrew Old Testament. Giving grace in the sense of a gift also recalls 1:17,18 and 3:17 concerning the gift of the word- as if to show that God would hear prayers for the wisdom of the word to be revealed to them (cp.1:5), but not answer a 'wants list' of worldly pleasures. The context of the quote from Proverbs is that the humble man is the one who has wisdom- i.e. who has taken note of the word in his heart. Being humble is paralleled with being submissive to God and resisting our evil nature (v.7) and drawing nigh to God acceptably (v.8); thus humility born of the word is revealed by both our attitude to God's holiness and to our own innate sinfulness. The brash prayers and self justification of these brethren was in sharp contrast to all this. The same verse from Proverbs is also quoted in 1 Pet. 5:5 in the context of the elders showing loving care to the flock, because God "giveth grace to the humble". This context of commands to elders is the same as in James, whose intended readership appears to have been the same group of elders in the Jewish ecclesias. Peter's argument, if it follows that of James, would therefore be that their prayers would be hindered, i.e. grace would not be shown- if the elders proudly oppressed the flock. Note that these same elders are warned not to exact money from the flock as a reward for their shepherding in 1 Pet. 5:2, which we have seen was a problem mentioned by James in

the form of them holding back wages from their brethren-employees. This would mean that this was being done under the spiritual pretext of keeping the money back as the wages of the elders, no doubt backed up with some misinterpretations from the Mosaic Law.

The giving of grace is of course not just in material giving; speaking of how this world has an envious, materialistic spirit, James comments that by contrast, God “gives more grace” (James 4:6), i.e. His grace is more than the material ‘giving’. Especially is grace given through forgiveness, especially forgiveness without demanding repentance, being inclusive rather than exclusive, patience, especially patience with others’ immaturities, forbearing one another, basic kindness and thoughtfulness, imagining how others feel or may feel. God *delights* in showing forgiveness and mercy; He loves doing it (Mic. 7:18). It's "*son métier*" - 'what He's good at, His speciality’.

*4:7 Therefore, be subject to God and resist the Devil, and the Devil will flee from you-* "Submit" means literally to put oneself under- i.e. to keep under these evil human desires, which is the same as resisting the Biblical devil. Bearing in mind the Jewish background of this letter and the other connections with Romans, this idea of submission to God may be referring back to Rom. 10:3: "They (the Jews) being ignorant of *God's* righteousness, (through a lack of open-hearted Bible study), and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God". Thus one of the root causes of their pride and lack of recognition of their own sinfulness was that they were influenced by the Jewish concept of self-righteousness. Note the importance of doctrine in having very practical effects on a man's way of thinking and thereby his standing with God. There is a clear parallel between these verses in James 4 and 1 Pet. 5:2-9. After making the quotation from Prov. 3:34, Peter warns them to "be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour". This primarily refers to the Jewish and Roman authorities seeking occasion to criticize and therefore persecute the Christians. However, the parallel in James 4:7 is "resist the devil", which corresponds with 1 Peter 5:9 "Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world". The devil of Peter refers to the Jewish/Roman systems as well as to the flesh. The Greek *pathema* translated "afflictions" means both physical persecution and 'an emotion or influence' (Strong), thus showing that both types of 'devil' are referred to here, although the emphasis in Peter's case is on the devil as a civil power. *Pathema* is used concerning physical persecution by the civil 'devil' in 2 Tim. 3:11; Heb. 10:32; 2 Cor. 1:6; 1 Pet. 5:1; and concerning our evil desires in Rom. 7:5 (the "motions" of sin within us), and the "affections" of the flesh in Col. 3:5; Rom. 1:26; Gal. 5:24. Thus the parallel passage in James 4:7 concerning resisting the devil is about both the Roman/ Jewish system and the evil desires of the flesh, although the latter is the context in James, whilst the former provides the backdrop to Peter's use of the word. Again, we see that the Jewish thinking influencing the ecclesia was encouraging the 'devil' of their evil hearts, whilst a conscious resisting of the Judaizers' inroads and of the fleshly heart would lead to those things fleeing.

*4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you doubleminded sinners, and purify your hearts-* The Greek phrase for "draw near" is used in the Septuagint to describe the priests drawing near to God in the offering of sacrifices and prayers. The elders were being reminded that they were equivalent of priests in the new Israel and therefore had a

responsibility to acceptably and reverently draw near to God on behalf of the congregation, as well as to accurately expound the word publicly (Mal. 2:7; Hos. 4:6; see too comments on 2:9). This drawing near to God in prayer was only possible through a pure heart and therefore pure hands or actions. God would only hear their prayers if these things were in order; which is why the feeling we should have that our prayers are heard should give us confidence that spiritually we are going the right way (1 Jn. 5:14). "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you" (Zech.1:3) and "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (Mal. 3:7) must be the basis for these words of James. Both these passages are in the context of Israel's restoration at the time of the second temple; there are a number of other connections between James and the restoration prophets:

<i>James</i>	<i>Restoration prophets</i>
1:13	Mal.3:15
1:17	Mal.3:6
1:27	Mal.3:5; Zech.7:10
2:1	Mal.1:9
2:4	Mal.2:9
4:3	Mal.2:13
4:4	Mal.2:11
5:3	Mal.4:1
5:4	Mal.3:5
5:17	Hag.1:10,11
5:20	Mal.2:6

As it was the duty of the priests to convert the people of Israel by the word (Mal. 2:6), so it was too for the ecclesial elders of the New Israel (James 5:20). But as the temple was neglected due to bickering, materialism and fleshly living among the priests, so was the ecclesia of the first century. The problems of Malachi's time and also those of James were solved by a coming of the Lord (Mal. 3:1,2). Living on the brink of Christ's return, there must be similarities with the present ecclesial position. All these types highlight the key position of elders in influencing the ecclesia, and therefore the standards required of them. A fair degree of our current ecclesial problems may be traceable in some measure to our inattention to the importance of elders' qualifications.

The idea of drawing near may have faint connections with the day of the Lord in AD70 drawing near; the same Greek phrase is used in Mt. 24:32; Lk. 21:20,28; and see notes on 5:8. The Greek root is 'to squeeze close', which we can do to God by prayer, and which He will therefore do to us. The parallel in 1 Pet. 5:6 says that in response to humbly drawing near to God, He will "exalt you in due time"- i.e. answer your prayers eventually, and especially with a place in the Kingdom (cp. "friend come up higher" at the judgment seat). God's immediate drawing near to us as a result of our drawing near to Him is therefore not necessarily in the immediate answering of prayer, but in the sense of peace with God which we have after acceptably placing our requests before Him- "by prayer and supplication with



thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds" (Phil. 4:6,7), even before we receive the answers.

The language of physical movement in verses 7 and 8 paints a fascinating picture of a man walking towards God ("drawing near" is often used in the sense of literal walking), thereby resisting the devil, and therefore the devil turning tail and fleeing in the opposite direction. As we walk towards God, he walks towards us- perhaps alluding to the parable of the prodigal son, where the man's walking towards the Father is matched by His running towards him (Lk. 15:20), so eager is our God to respond to any real spiritual effort on our part. The context here in James 4 is of prayer- the drawing near to God is in prayer.

The idea of cleansing the hands suggests a link with Is.1, which has other connections with James: "When you spread forth your hands (in prayer), I will hide My eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear (as was happening to these brethren): your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean (cp. "cleanse your hands"); put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes... seek judgment, relieve the oppressed (what the brethren had not done- James 2:14-16; 5:4), judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (cp. James 1:27- what they didn't do)... if you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land (i.e. inherit the Kingdom): but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword" (AD70; Is. 1:15-20). These scattered members of the Jerusalem ecclesia were therefore being equated with the "sinners in Zion" at the time of Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion; it was in their capacity to enable the Kingdom to be established in AD70, but if they continued in sin both they and Jerusalem along with natural Israel would be destroyed. Sadly they chose the latter, and their counterparts in Hezekiah's time made such a shallow reformation that they only succeeded in deferring judgment.

The Greek word is often used for the 'cleansing' of leprosy; the Lord likened the Pharisees to cups that needed cleansing, i.e. the cups were defiled by leprosy and needed purification; His description of Jerusalem's destruction stone by stone recalled the method of destroying a leprous house. The Jewish system was leprous because *inwardly* it was defiled; externally it looked fine (Mt. 23:26). It was their fleshly way of thinking that was the real leprosy, and this is also the context here in James 4:6; the cleansing of actions is parallel to purifying a double-minded heart, because in James the thoughts of the heart and actions, especially words, are treated as identical. Cleansing or purifying ('washing') the heart suggests Jer. 4:14, which is also in the context of the impending destruction of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem (ecclesia!), wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain (cp. 2:20 "vain man") thoughts lodge within you?". The parallels between these believers and apostate Israel are unmistakable. "Purify" is often used about Mosaic purification (Jn. 11:55; Acts 21:24 etc.)- cp. the idea of cleansing being associated with the Law's commandments about leprosy. This purification by washing comes from "the wisdom that is from above (that) is... pure" (3:17)- i.e. the word, "the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26), which is the new covenant's equivalent to the purification process performed in the laver. For this reason John Thomas translates Titus 3:5 as "the laver of regeneration", cp. "the washing of regeneration...of the Holy Spirit". "Purify your hearts, you double minded" implies that having a mind which was only semi-spiritual was as bad as being totally defiled and needing cleansing. It looks back to the description of those who had only semi-faith in prayer as "double-minded" in 1:8. Here in chapter 4 the context is the same (see notes on 4:1-3). Thus

James is saying in 1:6-8 'Ask for wisdom, the spiritual strength from the Spirit, in full faith, not the double-minded prayers you have been making for your pleasures ("lusts", 4:3)'. See notes on 1:8 for more on "double minded".

*4:9 Lament and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom-* This exhortation to weeping and the general theme of making a repentance from the heart recalls Jesus' desperate, 11th hour call to repentance to avoid judgment on Jerusalem. "Turn ye even to me (cp. "draw near to God") with all your heart (cp. "you double minded"), and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments (cp. their hypocrisy- James 3:17)... who knows if He will turn and repent (of the planned judgments on Israel, natural and spiritual)?...let the priests (cp. the ecclesial elders of James)... weep" (Joel 2:12-17). Joel 2 goes on to describe the judgments of AD70 in verses 30-32- according to Peter's quotation of them in Acts 2.

The double emphasis on mourning in this verse suggests reference to Mt. 5:4 "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted". This would mean that James interpreted this group of people as those mourning in repentance for their sins, receiving the comfort (Greek *parakleo*- drawing near) of closeness to God. The idea of God drawing near has been seen in the preceding verse- "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you". Again, the encouragement James' readers got from his words was proportionate to their ability to pick up these definite connections with other passages. To him that has spiritual talents of understanding the word, more will be given. James could have said 'Jesus basically said, "mourn and I will draw near to you", so mourn in repentance and this is how God through Christ will draw near to you, as I have just spoken about in v.8'. But instead we have to be sensitive to the two mentions of mourning here in v.9, recognize this is one of the many references back to the sermon on the mount, and appreciate the similarity of meaning between 'comforted' in Mt. 5:4 and "draw nigh" in v.8. That the connection with Mt. 5:4 is valid is confirmed by the Greek word for "joy" in James 4:9 only occurring elsewhere in Lk. 6:25, which is effectively repeating Mt. 5:4: "Woe unto you that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep". "Mourn and weep" is repeated in James 4:9.

There seems fair reason to believe that the riotous merry making mentioned here occurred at the Breaking of Bread. 1 Cor.11 rebukes some at the Corinth ecclesia (which included Jews, and was probably in receipt of James' letter, therefore) for getting drunk at the communion service. Similarly Peter and Jude warn of those brethren who 'feasted' at the love feast (Breaking of Bread). The Greek in Jude 12 means to revel or be sumptuous, and describes those guilty as "feeding themselves without fear". This word for "feeding" specifically means to shepherd- as if it were the ecclesial elders or shepherds who were particularly guilty of these abuses. Thus James is saying that they ought to be mourning and weeping in repentance at the Breaking of Bread rather than revelling. If this is what James is meaning, some important practical issues emerge. Firstly, sorrow and an apparently long face are to be expected from many of us who inevitably feel the need for repentance burning keenly as we face the supreme dedication and holiness of Christ on the cross. There seems far too much criticism of those who do "weep and mourn" in their souls with a spirit of heaviness (cp. Is. 61:3; James 4:9) at the memorial service. How can any of us tell another to be more happy or look more cheerful without knowing the nature of their relationship with God in the past few days? For such an intensity of self-knowledge and repentance to occur, there must be a fair period of time for reflection and self-examination- not just the odd minute as we wait for the

emblems to reach us. The "feast of charity" referred to in Jude 12 would have been a replica of the last supper- a whole meal of fellowship followed by the specific taking of the bread and wine.

"Afflicted" means 'to realize ones own misery' (Strong) and only occurs elsewhere in Rom. 7:24 and Rev. 3:17. Romans 7 and 8 have been alluded to previously in the letter, and Rom. 7:24 is describing the wretchedness Paul felt due to appreciating how sinful his innate evil desires really were. This marvellously fits the context of James 4, where he is advising them to analyse their own evil hearts more and appreciate their inherent sinfulness. By doing so they would feel "wretched" or "afflicted". The Laodiceans were perhaps another ecclesia with a Jewish element to whom James was also writing; they certainly had the same problems of materialism and a lukewarm, semi-spirituality. The Lord criticized them for not knowing that they were wretched, i.e. not examining the wretchedness of their own evil desires enough. The idea of wretchedness is similar, although not linguistically connected, to the descriptions of the rejected at the day of judgment, writhing in the pain of self-hate, realizing for the first time the degree of their inherent sinfulness. If we judge ourselves now, i.e. examine ourselves and realize we are worthy of condemnation (judgment- Mt.7:1), then we will not be judged (1 Cor.11:31). They were to "turn" their revelling into sorrow; a word which means basically 'to pervert'- e.g. the Judaizers perverted (same word) the Gospel of Christ (Gal.1:7). This would imply that as they had perverted the Gospel, they were to 'pervert' it back again; they had spiritually justified their laughter and revelling by this perversion.

4:10 *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall exalt you*- The parallel in 1 Pet. 5:6 indicates that this lifting up is at the judgment seat: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you (same Greek as "lift you up" in James) in due time", i.e. in the future, at the judgment (cp. "come up higher" in the wedding feast parable). Thus if we examine ourselves to the degree of wretchedly feeling that we in our own strength will be only worthy of condemnation, then as we will be lifted up from our grovelling before Christ at the judgment, so He will lift us up now. Luke 21:36 seems to refer to this lifting up at the judgment: "Pray always... to be stood before the Son of man"- by the Angel gently lifting us up from the ground at Christ's feet, as He did to Daniel in his acting out of our experience at the judgment (Dan. 10:8-19). The humbling of self spoken of in verses 6 and 7 was in the context of being humble in prayer. The lifting up which comes as a result of this we have shown to be our exaltation in the Kingdom. Thus by reason of having our prayers heard, especially those for the gift of the understanding of the word (4:6 cp. 1:17,18; 3:17), it is as if we are exalted in prospect into places in the Kingdom. Thus 1 Jn. 5:14 says that the confidence we have of acceptance at the judgment is based on our prayers being answered now. James 1:9 spoke of the humble brother rejoicing in that he is exalted ("lifted up" in 4:10). The context there was of having prayers for wisdom heard (1:5,6). The rich man's wavering prayers (1:6 cp. 4:14) were unheeded compared to those of the poor.

Thus the poor brother being "lifted up" was through his prayers being answered. Now in 4:10 James is again telling the rich elders to humble themselves like the poor brethren so that they too could be lifted up. The emphasis in 1:9 and 4:10 is on God lifting us up (same word as "exalting"). This must look back to the repeated warnings in the Gospels about exalting oneself (Lk. 14:11; 18:14; Mt. 23:12), often referring to the Jews who did this. The man of sin, which must have reference to both Jewish and Roman systems of apostasy, also "exalteth himself" (2 Thess. 2:4). The Jewish characteristic of spiritual self-exaltation was therefore seen in these Jewish brethren. There is a parallel between verses 6 and 10; God "giveth grace

unto the humble" (v.6) and lifts them up (v.10). The giving of grace we have interpreted as giving the answer to prayer, and especially in the gift of wisdom from the word; this equates with being lifted up with a place in the Kingdom. Thus to an extent we are in the Kingdom now in prospect through experiencing the gifts of the word and answered prayer.

*4:11 Brothers, do not speak evil against each other. He that speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge-* James now speaks specifically of one particular manifestation of their evil desires and the things which militated against their prayers being answered, namely evil speaking and condemning the poor brethren. This is the same thing as noted in 3:9,10, where we saw that they cursed these brethren with the excuse that they were doing it under the inspiration of God. Their evil speaking was due to not letting the word curb their evil desires; they were thus effectively judging the word, saying that their own natural spirit was superior to that holy Spirit provided by a humble response to the word. Similarly they effectively thought that the Scriptures' warning against the natural lust of our heart was "vain" (4:5). Note that speaking evil of the brother and speaking evil of the law are equated, implying that the brethren they were slandering had the word in them.

The parallel passage in 1 Pet.2:1,2 says that the antidote to "evil speakings" was to "desire the sincere milk of the word" as newborn spiritual babes- strong medicine for ecclesial 'elders', who probably had the gift of prophecy. Possession of the miraculous gifts did not force them to desire the true spirit of the word. Speaking evil is equivalent to condemning or spiritually killing a brother, according to James- no doubt basing his reasoning on that of the Lord, that to hate your brother was to kill him (Mt. 5:21,22).

James saw the Mosaic command not to kill your brother as meaning 'do not condemn' under the New Covenant. Therefore to do so was to speak evil of "the law" both of Moses and Christ. The Lord also said that to call your brother a "Fool" was as bad as condemning or killing him. The Greek for "fool" implies someone who has been shut out of a certain knowledge; the word is invariably used in the New Testament regarding someone lacking in the true knowledge of God. There does seem to be a definite reference to Mt. 5:21,22, and therefore James would be implying that the Jewish elders were accusing the others of not having their true knowledge of God (due to their gift of prophecy, they may have argued?) and therefore being condemned by God. By doing so they were speaking evil of the word which the other brethren had received, which was enough to make them spiritually wise ("the wisdom that is from above", 1:17,18 cp. 3:17) and not fools, as the elders accused them of being. The elders were not denying that the others had received part of the word, but were saying that without having the knowledge which they claimed to have, these brethren were fools, i.e. 'judged' or condemned. This spiritual superiority due to supposed additional revelation is a common characteristic of the descriptions of the Judaizers and their followers: Rev. 2:24, "the (pseudo) depths of (the Jewish) satan"; Jude 10; 1 Cor. 1:17-21; 2:1-7; 3:18,19; 2 Cor. 11:19; Rom. 1:22; 12:16. Jude 19 describes these brethren as separating themselves, falsely claiming to have the Spirit, although they still attended the communion service to spread their false ideas (v.12); thus their separating of themselves was not in a physical sense, but an elitism due to their claim to have superior Spirit-given knowledge. Even today it is possible for there to be spiritual elitism from thinking that we have a deep understanding of the Spirit word which others are not yet able to appreciate.

This verse 11 seems to consciously refer back to 2:5-16. Speaking evil of "the law" by evil speaking about the brethren is probably based on 2:8,9: "Respect to persons (breaks)... *the* royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbour as yourself". The chapter 2 passage mentions the oppression of the poor brethren before the "judgment seats" of the eldership (2:6), and the subsequent turning down of their welfare requests (2:16), as examples of breaking the royal law. That same law was being broken by the elders falsely accusing and condemning their brother, according to 4:11. Thus these elders were trying to act like Christ in His role as judge, and were bringing false accusation against the brethren and subsequently condemning them, as an excuse not to provide them with their basic needs, and to withhold their legitimate wages (5:4). The judges of Israel under the Mosaic Law were those "to whom the word of God came", and yet they were condemned for judging unjustly, accepting the persons of the wicked (cp. saying to the well dressed man 'sit here', 2:3), not defending the poor and fatherless (the Jewish ecclesial elders also neglected these; 1:27) and not delivering the poor and needy (cp. 2:15,16; 4:5). Despite being inspired with the word of God "they know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness" (Jn. 10:34-36; Ps.82:1-5). James is making a very apt comparison between these judges and the Jewish eldership, who had become so obsessed with being the equivalent of these judges in the new Israel that they had come to think that their personal doing of the law was not important. Similarly those today who publicly expound the word can become 'judges' rather than doers. That they judged the law may even imply that they set up their personal ideas as being greater and more inspired than the word of God itself, and maybe even 'judged' or condemned part of the word which conflicted with their personal 'wisdom'. Being a doer of the law must be another allusion to Romans: "not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13). This is again in the context of Paul's rebuke of the Jewish thinking that by being Jews and having heard the Law they were justified; and this also connects with the argument in James 2:20 that holding "the faith" must be accompanied by works, and being "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (1:22,23).

James could tell others not to speak against their brother (James 4:11 RV) knowing full well he had done the same to Jesus, his brother. Preaching and pastoral work is so often powerfully achieved on the basis of having personally experienced grace.

4:12 *One only is the lawgiver and judge. He who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge your neighbour?*- The stress on *one* lawgiver suggests, in harmony with our previous comments, that the elders were making new laws under the claim of inspiration, and were using these to condemn their brethren. Note how the evil speaking which began as a result of the word not controlling their thoughts led them to condemn others, contrary to the clear law of Christ (Mt. 7:1), and having effectively disregarded the word their next step was to literally add to it. They had already done this in effect by trying to Biblically justify their wrong actions. The phrase "there is one lawgiver" would have rung bells in every Jewish mind concerning Moses the lawgiver. Again their likening of themselves to Moses is being condemned (see notes on 3:10). However, the ultimate lawgiver is God, who is "able to...destroy" soul and body (alluding to Mt. 10:28). The fact that God's ability to save and destroy in Gehenna at the judgment (note the Mt. 10:28 allusion) is chosen out of all His powers, shows that the elders were specifically claiming that they had the power to make the decision of salvation or destruction, and that the judgment panel which they formed to judge the poor brethren was rated by them as an exact equivalent to Christ's judgment seat at the second coming.

The extent of their blasphemy of the word of God which they claimed justified them in all this is hard to comprehend.

This verse has clear reference to Rom. 14:4: "Who art you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand". We have seen in 4:10 the idea of being lifted up at the day of judgment. Thus Paul in Romans is also using 'judging' in the sense of spiritually condemning, and is saying that the brethren doing such judgment were usurping Christ's position as the judge, saying *they* were the master of the servants. Therefore Paul says that such condemned brethren will be justified by being lifted up to acceptance at the true judgment seat. The similarity of the situation suggests strongly that Romans and James were written to the same readership, and that their writers expected the readers to make connections between the letters- due to the same spirit inspiring both writers. The context in Rom. 14:3 is judging (i.e. condemning) your brother due to his attitude to the Mosaic food laws and the Sabbath. Those who were doing the judging were "him that eats not"- i.e. the Judaizers who wanted a move back to the Jewish laws. The connections between Romans and James are such that we can safely say that the group who were doing the judging in James are identical to the group of Judaizers in Romans.

Thus the group of Jewish elders James writes to were almost definitely either Judaizers or Judaist influenced. The connections with James would explain why Rom. 14:10-13 stresses so much that the judge at the judgment seat is God through Christ, rather than men. The importance of this can be appreciated far more once it is recognized that the Jewish eldership were claiming to have an inspired command from God to set up judgment seats and judge to condemnation on Christ's behalf. The situation is made the more fascinating when we appreciate that the power of the Spirit was available to the apostles and possibly some elders to inflict physical sickness as a punishment- e.g. Peter could strike Ananias and Sapphira dead, Christ would threaten to strike down false teachers (Rev. 2:23; 22:18); Peter could threaten many (unrecorded) physical curses that he could bring upon Simon for his blasphemy (Acts 8:24); Paul could make Elymas blind (Acts 13:9-11). It is probable that the gift of healing was largely used to cure such people after their repentance, and this is the basis of James 5:15 (see note there). It would appear that the Jewish elders were claiming some kind of similar authority.

The omnipotence of God not only inspires faith; it demands even more than that. Because God alone has the power to save and destroy, He alone can ultimately judge; the fact there is only one law giver means there is only one judge (James 4:12 RV). To judge, therefore, is to 'play God' in a blasphemous way, arrogating to ourselves the role of lawgiver and judge. Yet apart from God we are powerless, totally and utterly. Our powerlessness needs to be reflected upon more deeply. We simply cannot judge. The omnipotence of God alone precludes it.

4:13 *Come now, you that say that today or the next day we will go into this city and spend a year there and trade and make a profit-* The two references to "Come now" or "Go to" in James (here and 5:1) suggest immediately the one other place where this idiom is used- it occurs three times in five verses in Gen. 11:3-7 concerning the building of Babel. There is good reason to believe that Babel represented the apostate Jewish system of worship. "A city and a tower" of Gen. 11:4 points forward to Jerusalem and the Jewish system having a tower in the midst of its vineyard (Is. 5:2; Mt. 21:33). All Jewish temples were built with the help of Gentile labour, as Babel was built by all nations collected together in one purpose. Babel and Shinar are the basis of Babylon in Scripture, and the descriptions of Babylon in Revelation have many echoes of the Jewish system. The scattering abroad of Babel all over the earth

corresponds to God's Angelic 'coming down' on Jerusalem in AD70 and the subsequent scattering of the Jews world-wide. We have seen previously that James very much has the events of AD70 in mind, and the use of the phrase "go to" would be another reminder that unless the Jewish believers repented of their materialism and other unspirituality, then both natural and spiritual Jerusalem would be severely punished- as indeed happened to both of them. We have shown earlier that this verse primarily refers to the itinerant Jewish traders within the ecclesia.

2 John 7-11 (also written to a Jewish audience?) also speaks of itinerant preachers who were likely to have serious doctrinal errors. The Jews with whom they mixed in such travelling would not have been wholesome spiritual company. Indeed, it was "Vagabond" (Greek 'strolling') Jews who stirred up trouble for the believers (Acts 19:13). These brethren blatantly, proudly talked of their business plans, glorying in not saying 'God willing' (so v.15,16 implies). This was probably because they believed that they no longer personally had to keep the law (v.11), and that they were justified by reason of knowing the truth and being Jews by birth (2:20 and cp. Romans 6:1).

The sudden switch of subject away from judging brethren to that of crazy materialism calls for an explanation. It seems that the letter of James criticizes the believers for increasingly serious things, with a corresponding increase in punishment from God. The sections can be categorized as follows:

1:1-12 Semi-faith in prayer from lack of attention to the word due to materialism

1:13-27 Falsely blaming God for temptation, hard speaking to brethren, and neglect of the fatherless and widows in the ecclesia due to brief, meaningless self-examination and not being sensitive to the word.

2:1-13 Preference to the rich in the ecclesia, condemning the poor brethren, saying some parts of the word were unimportant.

2:14-26 Saying external works and technical holding of the Truth justified a man, and that lack of real spiritual effort can be Biblically justified.

3:1-4:12 Total unrestraint of the evil heart and its words, saying this was unnecessary for them. Claiming to be inspired with new revelation from God which replaced parts of the Bible and justified them totally.

4:13-5:6 Sinking into total materialism, throwing off all sense of subjection to God, effectively crucifying Christ afresh (5:6).

5:7-20 Subsequently being struck with physical sickness to try to lead them to repentance; final destruction at the Lord's 'coming' in AD70 and the holocaust for natural and spiritual Israel which followed.

If this analysis is correct, then these separate parts of the letter would have been sent at different times- hence 4:13 "Go to *now*". How many of us are in the first category discussed in 1:1-12? If our attention to the word continues to slip, it is only a matter of time before the ecclesia of the last days drops into the categories lower down the list. It has been suggested that the letter of James is a series of exhortations given to or at the Jerusalem ecclesia and then circulated. This would fit in with the pattern deduced here.

4:14 *Whereas you do not know what shall be the next day. What is your life? For you are as a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away-* In view of the Jewish and Christian persecution which the parallel letter of Peter speaks of, they especially could not plan on predicting the future without God's help. Their travelling from city to city trading was probably enforced by the persecution. The Greek for "buy and sell" in v.13 means specifically to trade whilst travelling around, as a pedlar. Thus in their spiritual arrogance

they were saying that their travelling around was done by their own spiritually correct decision, which obviated the need to say 'God willing'. They probably showed off their plans to the poor labouring brethren, as if they knew by direct inspiration what would be on the morrow. There must also be reference back to Christ's commands about not worrying about tomorrow because God would provide- "take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow" (Mt. 6:34). If James had this in mind, then he was saying that he knew that in their evil heart they were worrying in a God-forsaking way about tomorrow, which they justified by saying that they had inspired knowledge of the future and the profit they would make, and therefore showed this off with a false air of confidence to the poorer brethren.

Again, these brethren are reminded of the need to remember their true nature: "For what is your life?" (cp. 4:14). The description of life as a vapour appears to be an allusion to Job 7:7: "O remember that my life is wind". Thus James is asking them to learn the lesson of Job, as he does in 5:11; to come to a true understanding of the weakness of human nature through responding in humility to the trials of life, and to the knowledge of God directly provided by Him. Again, as in 2:3 (see notes there) these brethren are being compared to Job, as they are again in chapter 5; as with him, physical trial was brought upon them in order for them to learn humility and the lessons concerning human nature and its relation to a holy God, which previously they had been unwilling to learn.

4:15 *For you ought to say: If the Lord wills it, we shall both live and do this or that-* "To say" implies that there should have been a verbal statement, publicly heard, of their recognition of the Lord's will in their lives. Their need to say that they would live if it was the Lord's will shows the extremely temporary nature of their lives at that time of persecution. Despite such tribulation, their hearts were so hardened against the true influence of the word that they were not made more sensitive to God's hand in their lives, but rather were hardened into thinking that in their own strength and wisdom, which they imagined was God-given, they would weather the present crisis. The Lord's "will" here is the Lord's desires and wishes, not necessarily the pre-determinate "will" of God. The parallel letter of Peter emphasizes that the will of God was what controlled their present persecution (1 Pet. 2:15; 3:17; 4:19), and that they should seek to do God's will by overcoming the natural will of the flesh (1 Pet. 4:2,3) by the word of God, which contains the will of God (1 Pet. 1:23; 2 Pet. 1:21 cp. Jn. 1:13). Putting together these ideas, the message seems to be that it was the same will of God that they needed to get inside their hearts, to overcome the will of the flesh, which was also bringing their tribulations, implying that God was developing their response to the word through their persecutions.

James is therefore saying that they should recognize the will, the desires, the purpose of God behind their persecution from city to city, which was to develop in them a more truly spiritual mind. But by effectively saying that God's will or desires were irrelevant to them, they were denying themselves the opportunity to be spiritually developed by their sufferings. Lack of attention to what God is willing or desiring in our own trials can similarly lead to them being in vain for us too. That they should say "we shall live" if the Lord will suggests that they thought that their lives were protected from harm, or that they had some inherently indestructible element to them; hence the reminder in the previous verse that their life was only a brief vapour, as opposed to the more permanent 'immortal soul' they perhaps almost believed in as a result of the Roman/ Judaist philosophical influence upon them. The amazing thing is that despite these brethren's progressively worse problems in their doctrine and way



of life, James continues to patiently reason with them, leading on towards his final appeal for repentance in Chapter 5.

4:16 *But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil-* We have previously commented on how their blatant rejoicing in their sin was due to their reasoning that it was impossible that they could sin- hence "all such... *is evil*". Similarly the Judaist element at Corinth rejoiced in the fact that there was a division in the ecclesia between the Paul and Apollos factions (1 Cor. 4:6,7), and that they retained in fellowship a brother who had brazenly committed incest for all to see (1 Cor. 5:6); this all shows the same mentality, of openly rejoicing in the freedom that they believed they had from all moral and spiritual constraints. "Rejoice" really means to glory or boast, which means that it had to be done to someone else. To boast that they did not need to say "If the Lord will" about their plans would not have made many eyes turn in the world generally; therefore it is more likely that they were boasting to the poor brethren whom they had spiritually condemned, saying that the superior revelation which they had received enabled them to have freedom from that kind of spiritual requirement which the poor brethren needed to obey.

"Boastings" occurs only three times elsewhere, and each time it is in the context of false Judaist reasoning. Rom. 1:30 describes how Israel in the wilderness, and also the last day Jewish ecclesias, were "boasters". If this means spiritually boastful, then it implies that the rejected generation in the wilderness thought up ways to spiritually justify themselves; hence Rom. 1:30 goes on to describe "inventors of evil things", i.e. the alternative tabernacle system of worship that they created and carried with them, based around their idols (Acts 7:43,44). 2 Tim. 3:2 describes the boastful infiltrators of the ecclesias in the last days (2 Tim.3:6), who had once known the Truth (2 Tim. 3:5 cp. Rom. 2:20; 2 Tim. 1:13) but through their claims to superior knowledge and revelation ( 2 Tim. 3:7) and giving way to their corrupted natural mind (2 Tim. 3:8) were "reprobate concerning the faith". This very well describes the Judaist brethren to whom James was writing.

"Boasting" also occurs in 1 Jn. 2:16 translated "pride": "All that is in the world (the Jewish world- so the phrase normally means in John's writings), the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride (boasting) of life, is not of the Father (as the Judaists were claiming?), but is of the world. And the world passes away" (in AD70). We have suggested that this boasting of life was a spiritual boasting by the Jews that they were blessed with superior wisdom and justification with God. 1 Jn. 2:16 is looking back to Eve's sin in Eden (Gen. 3:6)- she saw that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was good for food (the lust of the flesh), pleasant to the eyes (lust of the eyes) and to be desired to make one wise (pride of life). The Jews' desire for worldly wisdom was like Eve in Eden. Her motivation for taking the fruit would therefore have been that of spiritual pride, the desire to boast to her husband that she was now under no restrictions at all and had a wisdom equal to that of God. Exactly the same was true of the first century Judaizers.

4:17 *Therefore, to him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin-* This indicates that these elders knew what they should be doing but consciously chose not to. In the light of their false claims to inspiration and the despicable doctrine and practice which they followed, it seems incredible that they could still have a knowledge of the real truth within them; and yet such is the deceit of the human heart that such doublemindedness can easily occur. There

may be a reference here back to Lk. 12:47: he that "knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes". James 4:15 has spoken about their conscious disregard of their Lord's will. Thus v.17 is saying 'You know God's will and you know that you should show your recognition of it publicly- but you don't'. Lk. 12:48 goes on to say that knowing the Lord's will is the same as being given much- which the Jewish elders had been by having the miraculous Spirit gifts. The phrasing of "to him that knows... to him it is sin" implies that not all James' readership did have that knowledge- because they had become so hardened in their belief that their attitudes were correct, that they no longer had the knowledge of the truth? "To him it is sin" implies that there were some without knowledge to whom their lack of doing good would not be reckoned as sin- i.e. although all unrighteousness is sin, no matter who commits it, "sin" is reckoned to the person who has the knowledge of what he ought to be doing. This is another of the many indications that an ongoing record is kept of our actions or lack of them, so that our failure to do an action that we know we should is counted as sin to us at a certain moment in time.

## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you-* The reference to rich men weeping again suggests a link with the beatitudes: "Woe unto you that are rich... that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep... when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Lk. 6:24-26). The mourning and weeping was what they were advised to do as a mark of their repentance in 4:9- perhaps this was therefore to be as a result of their no longer being rich, i.e. sharing their wealth with their desperately poor brethren. The beatitudes were saying that the rich would mourn and weep at the judgment; James is advising them to do so now, i.e. to judge or condemn themselves by their self-examination in this life, so that they would not experience the weeping and gnashing of teeth then (cp. 1 Cor. 11:31). The weeping and howling were to be when "your miseries...shall come upon you"- i.e. in AD70.

Thus the 'coming' of Christ then was also like the judgment seat at the second coming; the misery of the AD70 judgments and subsequent Jewish persecution was similar to that to be seen at the second coming. There should also be a parallel with the true contrition which we ought to have after repentant self-examination.

There is an allusion here to Zeph. 1:11,12: "Howl, you inhabitants of Maktesh (i.e. the market area near the temple- see N.I.V.)... I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil. Therefore your goods shall become a booty". The Jews Zephaniah addressed were facing the coming day of the Lord at the hand of Babylon; the materialism and subsequent money-making from the temple worshippers that they were guilty of, was being repeated in a more subtle form by their counterparts in the Jewish ecclesia in the days before AD70. Zephaniah warned "The great day of the Lord is near, and hastes greatly" (Zeph. 1:14), hoping to motivate them to repent. Similarly James: "The coming of the Lord draws near" (5:8). Ripping off the temple worshippers was paralleled by the financial abuses of the flock by the elders, to be mentioned in v.4. The idea of howling in Israel as a result of the impending day of the Lord due to their sins is common in the Old Testament prophets: Is. 13:6; Jer. 25:34; 47:2; Ez. 21:12; Joel 1:5,8,11,13; Mic. 1:8; Zech. 11:3. Many of these refer to the priests or the prophet howling. Thus James is saying that as well as howling in repentance, these ecclesial elders as counterparts of the priests and prophets under the Mosaic system should be howling out warning to the flock concerning the coming day of judgment.

"Miserias" can also imply spiritual lowness; the rareness of the Greek word and the other allusions to Rom. 7 in James suggest that we are intended to see a connection with Rom. 7:24: "O wretched (same word as "miserias") man that I am!"- an exclamation concerning the intense evil of his natural mind that was called forth by Paul's self examination, maybe implying that if they judged (condemned) themselves now in their self examination, they would avoid the misery and self-realization they were to have in the coming holocaust.

5:2 *Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten-* The similarities between them and the priests is continued by their garments being described as moth eaten; which exactly fits the context of Heb. 8:13, which describes the old covenant as a decaying garment about to vanish away in AD70. Thus the Jewish ecclesial elders were so closely associated

with the Law due to their desire to justify their materialism (which the riches and garments must also refer to) that they were to be destroyed along with it. That these rich men were in the ecclesia is confirmed by the reference back to the rich brother in goodly apparel being given a prominent place in the ecclesial meeting place (2:2).

Note the present tenses: "are corrupted... are moth eaten". The unlikelihood that they walked around in literally moth eaten clothes or that their gold was literally corrupted indicates that James meant that they were like this in the sight of God. This provides an interesting key to Mt. 6:19-21, to which there is a clear allusion: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt... but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven... for their will your heart be also". Thus James read the moth and rust corrupting as being in God's sight- if a man's heart is set on earthly things, God looks ahead to the distant day when those possessions have decayed, perhaps after the person's death, and as they are then, so God considers them to be in this present life. The emphasis in Mt.6 is on where the heart is- which precisely agrees with the context of James. Our mind *is* able to see our material possessions in a similar light to how God does.

5:3 *Your gold and your silver are rusted, and their rust shall be a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days-* Their riches were specifically "gold and silver"- which we have identified as the main thing which these brethren were desiring (see notes on 4:3). The idea of corruption of financial wealth is repeated in 2 Cor. 8:15, where Paul likens the Corinthians' giving of their financial blessings in order to make an equality among the brotherhood, to the manna not being left to corrupt by the morning, but instead being gathered and shared out (Ex. 16:18,19). Those who refused to obey this command found their manna was corrupted by morning- teaching that unless we share our manna or money (as 2 Cor. 8:15 interprets it) before the morning of the Lord's coming, we will incur His wrath. This fits beautifully with the situation in James; in our notes on v.1 we saw that there was probably the suggestion that they share their riches with the poorer brethren, so that the curses on the rich and happy in the beatitudes did not come upon them.

The eating of the flesh with fire connects the literal and symbolic use of fire to destroy the Jewish heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:7). Note the equation of the believers with their riches- as rust ate gold and silver, so fire would eat their flesh. Their life ("flesh") *did* consist in the abundance of the things which they possessed (Lk. 12:15). The fire also represents the Gehenna fire of the rejected at judgment; its connection with the rust of their riches perhaps indicates that the punishment of the rejected at judgment is at the hands of those things which caused their rejection. Alternatively, this language may be similar in idea to "delivering to satan for the destruction of the flesh" in 1 Cor. 5:5; the satan, or evil desires, in this case being their love of riches.

The Greek for "rust" occurs also in 3:8 translated "poison", concerning the nature of the tongue and the evil heart it is associated with. Thus they are being reminded that their gross materialism was rooted in their evil desires, and it is this fact that "shall be a witness (judicially) against you". Again this is the language of judgment, as if they were to be soon at the Lord's judgment seat. The idea of eating flesh at judgment occurs again in Rev. 17:16 and 19:18- prophecies which must have an initial application to the AD70 destruction of Israel. They describe the military forces responsible for the AD70 punishments and subsequent

persecutions as eating the flesh; here in James the evil desires behind their riches do the eating, implying that it was because of these that the judgment came, again stressing the ultimate importance of the heart's spiritual condition. Remember that the judgments on Jerusalem in AD70 had repercussions for natural and spiritual Israel throughout the Roman world.

The heaping of treasure together is another allusion to the early chapters of Romans: "Do you despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance (cp. 2 Pet. 3:15 concerning the delay in judgment upon Jerusalem in order to allow natural and spiritual Israel time to repent), but after your hardness and impenitent heart (notice the emphasis on this) you treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath" in AD70 (Rom. 2:4,5). The treasures they had heaped up were therefore directly proportionate to the amount of wrath they would receive- perhaps because their wealth was proportionate to the amount of defrauding and subsequent lack of love shown to their brethren (5:4). The Heavens and earth (natural and spiritual Israel?) were "kept in store" (2 Pet. 3:7)- the same Greek phrase for "treasuring up" and heaping treasure together- for judgment by fire in AD70. The fact this fire was to come on individuals (2 Thess. 1:8) invites us to interpret the heavens and earth as referring to the individual people that comprised the Jewish system; and we can conclude that this included both apostate, largely Judaist-influenced Christians, as well as the natural Jews.

This Greek phrase for laying up treasure also occurs in Lk. 12:21 concerning the 'greater barns' man laying up treasure for himself. Note that Lk. 12:15, also in this context, has already been alluded to in James 5:3 (see above). The rich man was a farmer- as were some of the rich brethren amongst James' readership (5:4); he thought he knew the future, as the same class in James' letter thought they did (4:13), and the suddenness of his destruction corresponds with the rich in the ecclesia thinking that spiritually they were in peace and safety, and then the sudden destruction of AD70 coming (1 Thess. 5:2,3) at "the day of the Lord"- note the many links between 1 Thess. 4:15 - 5:9 and the Olivet prophecy concerning the same destruction. Again, James opens up a parable with an interpretation many of us otherwise would not have reached. The emphasis on their time being "the last days" is doubtless because they thought they knew the future- as indicated in 4:13-15 by their lack of saying 'If the Lord will', presumably because they thought the Lord's coming was far distant. Therefore along with their prototype in the rich farmer parable, they thought that they could go on building up their own Kingdom on earth.

Especially in our generation, we hold wealth- any wealth- in the full knowledge that our Lord could return at any moment. James 5:3 brings out the paradox- of hoarding up wealth for the last days! The Greek for 'hoarding up' means 'to reserve'. And this is just what our flesh tells us to do- reserve 'our' wealth for a rainy day, for long term security. It's as if James foresaw that in our last days, this would be a particular temptation. See on 1 Cor. 7:29.

Our words are as fire, and are to be connected with the fire of condemnation (James 3:5,6), which our words have already kindled (Lk. 12:49). Speaking of the last day Isaiah 33:11 had foretold: "your breath [i.e. words], as fire, shall devour you". Likewise wrongly gained wealth is the fire that will burn those who have it at the last day (James 5:3). James is picking up a figure from Is. 33:11, again concerning the final judgment: "Your breath, as fire, shall devour you". Their breath, their words, were as fire which would in the end be the basis of

their condemnation. Nadab and Abihu kindled strange fire, and it was with that fire that God burnt them up, in symbol of His destruction of all the wicked at judgment day (Lev. 10:2). "He that believes not is condemned already" (Jn. 3:18). A heretic is already condemned of himself (Tit. 3:11); our heart can condemn us now (1 Jn. 3:20).

There is an amazing ability in human nature to believe that wealth lasts for ever. That's why we recoil in horror at the idea of forsaking all we have. James 5:3 says well that gold rusts. Yet we know it doesn't rust. But in the very end, it does in the sense that it doesn't last in our hands for ever. Especially in the perspective of the soon return of Jesus, materialism is totally inappropriate for the believer awaiting Him. James 5:3 RV says it so clearly: "Ye have laid up your treasures in the last days". It's as if it's self-evidently inappropriate to build up wealth in the last days. Period. The men of Beth-Shemesh were smitten because they looked into the ark (1 Sam. 6:19). I suspect this was because they wanted to find any more jewels which the Philistines might have placed there. In the face and presence of the things of the supreme glory of Jehovah of Israel, they scavenged around in a spirit of petty materialism- just as men gambled for the clothes of Jesus at the foot of His cross.

*5:4 Indeed, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth-* We have frequently made reference to this verse previously, showing how this was being done by the rich farm owners in the ecclesia, under the pretext that the poor brethren who were their employees were spiritually unworthy; and it is to this that 2:6 concerning despising the poor refers. This situation could well have occurred within a small household ecclesia, thus putting much more pressure on the labourer brethren.

There is a reference here to Mal.3:5, which is in the context of describing the day of the Lord's sudden coming to the temple in fire in AD70 (v.1-3), and primarily refers to the judgements on the corrupt priesthood: "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against... false swearers, and against those that oppress (mg. 'defraud', cp. James 5:4) the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless (James 1:27), and that turn aside the stranger from his right (James 2:2 cp. 2:6 implies unexpected visiting brethren were refused material help), and fear not Me... return unto Me.. But you said, Wherein shall we return?... It is vain to serve God... we call the proud happy (cp. glorying in their proud boastings)"- Mal. 3:5,7,14,15. Again, the eldership of the Jewish ecclesias is being likened to the priesthood under the Old Covenant (see notes on 4:8), and the priests' stealing of the offerings matched the elders financially abusing the poor of the flock within the ecclesias. The materialism and subsequent laxness of Israel's shepherds has uncanny similarities with criticisms which could be levelled at their latter day equivalent.

We have seen in our notes on "consume" in 4:3 and 5:3 that the weakness of these brethren was for hard cash- hence it was "the hire" that was kept back. Passages warning about the dangers of loving money (e.g. 1 Tim. 6:10) can now be interpreted with reference to this class of believers. The cry of these brethren coming up to God connects with Elihu's inspired accusation of Job causing the cry of the poor to rise to God (Job 34:28), thus making Job a type of the rich Jews of the first century ecclesia who had to learn the true ways of God through their sufferings.

A cry entering God's ears recalls the effect of the slaughter of Abel by Cain (Gen.4:10), who as the first human liar and murderer was a prototype of the Jewish devil (Jn. 8:44). His persecution and slaughter of Abel represented the oppression of the poor Christians by these Judaist-influenced brethren. Cain's killing of Abel pointed forward to that of Christ by the Jews, and thus James is saying that by enduring the abuses of these so-called elders in the ecclesia, the poor brethren were fellowshiping the sufferings of Christ on the cross at the hands of the Jewish elders of His 'ecclesia'. Each of our sufferings too can be examined to show echoes of the cross. It appears that Cain's hate of Abel was based on spiritual pride- Gen.4:3 speaks of their review by God "at the end of the day" (AVmg.), and Gen. 4:7 suggests that then a choice was made between them by God as to who should be priest: "If you do well, shall you not have the excellency?... and unto you shall be his desire" AVmg.). This type of hurt pride is easily discernible in the actions of the Jewish elders towards the more spiritual believers, and in the persecution of Jesus by the Jews. Thus the description of the brethren as condemning and killing the just in v.6 applies both to Christ on the cross and to the spiritual condemnation and lack of love ("killing", in terms of the sermon on the mount) which was being shown towards the poor brethren by their reprobate elders. Note how Rom. 12:14 speaks of brethren persecuting each other within the ecclesia.

God's hearing of a sincere cry of affliction also looks back to Israel in bondage to Egypt, whose cry was then answered by Angelic intervention. Similarly the use of the title "Lord of Sabaoth" is the equivalent of the "Lord of hosts" with all its Angelic implications. This emphasis is doubtless due to the fact that Angels brought the punishment of natural and spiritual Israel in the AD70 period (Mt.22:7 cp. Rev. 19:14; Dan. 4:35). The echo of Israel's experience in Egypt is surely intended: "The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage" (Ex. 2:23). This would associate the rich Jewish believers with the Egyptians in their persecution of God's people. And as natural Israel were delivered at Passover, so these suffering poor believers would be at the second coming, which the Passover deliverance typified. "Reaped down" is a totally different Greek word to that used in "them which have reaped". The latter means to harvest in the agricultural sense, whilst the former means more 'to gather together', thus linking with the idea of heaping treasure together in the previous verse.

The hard work of the labouring brethren had brought riches to the rich elders, yet still they defrauded them of their wages, showing the degree of their wide-eyed lust for money. The complaint of the believer-labourers cheated by their masters is paralleled with the cry of the wages which they were owed. This cry entered into the ears of the Lord of judgment (James 5:4). The situation was counted as the prayer of those brethren against the brethren employing and deceiving them.

*5:5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts only for a day of slaughter-* Note the certainty of James' accusations- "You have" occurs four times in as many verses. This shows the certainty of inspiration, either through James having seen how they had lived in Israel before their scattering, the inspired reports of the 'messengers of the churches', or a direct satellite-vision of their present situation given to James. Their living in pleasure on the earth may refer back to the affluent man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, who represented the Jewish priesthood (Lk. 16:19). Compare this with the same class being represented by the rich farmer in the greater barns parable. The

mocking of the requests of poor Lazarus would refer to the rich Jewish eldership despising the welfare requests of the poor believers.

The use of the phrase "on the earth" may be reminding them that they were amassing pleasure on earth as opposed to Heaven, as v.3 had also made clear. Alternatively, the past tenses here may refer to James' knowledge of how they had lived "on the earth" or land of Israel. The words for "pleasure" and "wanton" imply glorious feasting; "ye have nourished your hearts" therefore equates their minds with their bodies. This is a theme of James- that our way of thinking and our physical actions and sensations are indivisible. Their glorious feasting was really feeding the evil desires of their hearts which had led them to hold the feasts. Yet in practice they were fattening themselves in readiness for the slaughter to provide meat for another feast- that of God's wrath (cp. the description of the day of the Lord's judgment as a feast with slaughtered beasts in Is. 34:6). The Greek for "nourished" can also mean 'to stiffen', digging at their refusal to let their hearts be changed by the word. "A day of slaughter" suggests reference to Ez. 34:2-4, which condemns the pastors of Israel for killing the spiritually fat of the flock but not spiritually feeding the others; and also to the "day of slaughter" of those in Jer. 12:1-3 whose hearts were far from God because of their prosperity, although they had a show of Godliness. There is probably another link to Jer. 25:34, where the shepherds of the flock were to be killed in the AD70 slaughter (Jer. 25:38=AD70; 25:32=Mt. 24=AD70).

It is the Lord's will that we His people should be ready for Him; the harvest is reaped when it is ripe; His apparent delay in returning is in order to give us time for spiritual development. It seems not coincidental that in these last days there is now unparalleled opportunity for giving up what material wealth we have for the Lord's cause. To heap up possessions (in whatever way) in the last days is absurd; it's like a cow eating just before he's slaughtered (James 5:5), or in Jeremiah's terms, like a bird building up its nest just before it flies off in migration. There are concrete opportunities galore to give to the Lord's work, whether it be a postage stamp per week in one context, or trying to pay one's fares to a Bible School rather than presume on the generosity of others, to a large regular donation of cash in another believer's context. Who we leave 'our' property to (if we have any) is something else we can ponder. We have been given all that we have from the Lord, it is not our own, and He watches our attitude to it carefully. What we have is not ours because we worked for it- although that, I know, is how it feels. It is ours on loan. Surely this of itself ought to mean that each of us leaves our property, if we own any, to the work of the Truth, or to a brother or sister who we know will use the resulting funds in the Lord's work (after the pattern of how David left all his personal wealth to the work of the temple, rather than to Solomon personally- 1 Chron. 29:3 NIV).

5:6 *You have condemned, you have killed the righteous, even though he does not oppose you-* We have shown in our comments on v.4 that "the just" can refer to both Christ and the oppressed underclass of believers. Their sumptuous feasts of v.5 were at the expense of killing fatted animals- who represented the spiritually fat, ideal sacrifices of Christ and the poor brethren. The idea of killing being equated with lack of love is popular in James- e.g. 4:2; 2:11, based on Mt. 5:22. There seems to be a contrast here with 4:6, where God is said to resist (same word) the prayer of the brethren. Maybe the maximum show of God's displeasure with them was only in not answering their prayers for material things and money. Thus an



apparent lack of major signs of displeasure from God should not lull any of us into thinking that this means we are totally acceptable in God's sight.

"The just one" is a title of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14) whom they crucified afresh, and "He doth not resist you" indicates that one particular "just one" is being referred to. However, "the just" can also refer to those justified by their faith, which is how it is used in early Romans (1:17; 2:13), a part of Scripture which James' readers seem to have been familiar with in view of the number of references made to it. By being justified by their faith these believers were not relying on the Mosaic law- for which they seem to have been condemned by their elders. Yet they did not resist the abuses made of them, but followed Christ's example on the cross. Thus we have the impression of this group of brethren being condemned by pompous, materialistic elders claiming to have some new revelation from God, who used this as an excuse to withhold their wages and publicly humiliate them at the communion service (2:2); and in the face of all this, they did not actively resist but took the sad state of the ecclesia to God in prayer- cp. the faithful servants sorrowfully telling their Lord about the abuses of one of their number by the much-forgiven ecclesial elder (Mt. 18:31). The cry of those servants and their fellow brethren whom James is referring to "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth"- and He heard.

*5:7 Therefore brothers, be patient until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain-* This final section of the letter appears to be addressed to the whole ecclesia, with a bias towards those who were being persecuted by the rich brethren. Its theme is an appeal for positive co-operation in order to help each other repent and thus be ready for the imminent coming of the Lord. It is therefore intensely relevant to the Lord's people of today. Note that James appears to have expected the second coming in his time: "Unto the coming of the Lord". "Patient" means literally to be 'long-spirited', again showing the fundamental importance of the control of the mind. It can also imply to suffer patiently, as if encouraging the abused brethren to continue to use their spiritual minds to spiritually endure the trials the others were giving them. Their patience is equated with that of God, as a husbandman waiting for spiritual fruit to develop. This shows James' urging of them to continue their non-resistance to these brethren so that they would bear spiritual fruit, and maybe also the suggestion that they were to be patient with the misguided elders until they too bore spiritual fruit. James 5 goes on to speak of the patience of the prophets in continuing to speak the word- as if to encourage these brethren to keep using the word to help the others to bear spiritual fruit- cp. notes on 3:18.

"The coming of the Lord" is paralleled with receiving the early and latter rain, which must be referring back to Joel 2:23 and Dt. 11:13,14 concerning the blessings of the Kingdom which would be experienced once Israel repented. Note that there is a dearth of direct Biblical evidence to support the idea that the early and latter rains refer to the outpourings of the Spirit in the first century and the Kingdom- although humanly speaking the idea fits nicely. Biblically they seem to refer to the physical blessings of the land as a result of Israel's obedience. Thus again there is the inference that James looked for the literal second coming and establishment of the Kingdom being in AD70, conditional on Israel's repentance.

The precious spiritual fruit of the ecclesia would only be fully harvested by the Lord then- maybe indicating that the attitude of mind we develop now will be fully manifested in terms of spiritual fruit by our reaction to that great moment of absolute truth at the judgment. "Precious fruit" carries the specific idea of great financial value in Greek- as if to encourage them that the spiritual fruit being developed by their poverty was the true riches, thus again connecting with the allusion in v.3 to the Lord's words about treasure in Heaven rather than on earth.

The long patience of God for spiritual development until the coming of the Lord is clearly parallel with 2 Pet. 3:7-15, which says that the apparent delay in the Lord's coming was in order to give them the opportunity of developing spiritual fruit. "As workers together with God" for their spiritual growth and subsequent acceptance at judgement, they were to be patient under the trials God was bringing- as God too was patient in watching their gradual development of fruit. The husbandman receiving the rains connects with Dt. 11:13,14 describing a repentant, obedient to the word Israel being given the rains- again showing the Jewish audience of the letter, and stressing the need for the whole ecclesia to repent.

*5:8 Be you also patient. Establish your hearts. For the coming of the Lord is at hand!*- Again, James throws down an ultimate challenge- to show the same supreme patience to our stumbling spiritual development and blatant faults which God shows to us, to both the trials which help us develop and also to our weak brethren.

"Establish" means both to set fast/ confirm, and also to turn resolutely- which neatly makes it relevant to both groups in the readership, the one who needed to continue to develop their already spiritual mind, and the other who needed to resolutely turn their hearts around in repentance. The word occurs relatively frequently in Thessalonians, also in the context of preparing for the Lord's coming- showing that the main way of preparing for the second coming is by a conscious development of our way of thinking, which can only be achieved through true commitment to the word. Very often the Greek word for "stablish" is used about God stablishing our heart- showing that God will work on our hearts in accord with our personal effort. 1 Thess. 3:12,13 even suggests that this stablishing or confirming of the mind which we have personally developed will be done for us at the judgment seat, where self-doubt as to whether we have had a truly spiritual mind will loom large: "Abound in love one toward another... to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". Notice this stablishing is dependent on loving each other now- very relevant in the James context.

The coming of the Lord was drawing nearer on behalf of their patience. The exhortation to patience was not just because they needed to patiently endure in their spirituality, but also because James was probably aware that the second coming of the Lord which he expected in the first century was quite likely to be delayed, due to the lack of Israel's repentance. Both James and the parallel Peter (2 Pet. 3:11,15) are saying: 'Be patient for the second coming and continue your spiritual patience so that it will come quicker and you won't have to be patient for so long'. Thus Peter's parallel to this v.8 is "The end of all things is at hands: be therefore sober (self-controlled- by having a stablished mind), and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent love among yourselves" (1 Pet. 4:7,8). They were to continue their effective love to those brethren who so abused them, praying earnestly for the second

coming. This would only be achieved by their continued attention to establishing their thinking, so that it was consistently controlled by the word rather than just being partially controlled- which was the root cause of the semi-faith and lukewarm commitment to true spirituality that had been the downfall of the other brethren.

"Draws near" literally means 'is made near'- the more spiritually aware, especially those who had heard of Peter's reasoning in 2 Pet.3, would have seen in this the implication that a establishing of the mind would draw near the Lord's coming. The same Greek phrase occurs in 4:8 "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you"- and we have seen that this refers to praying to God acceptably from a heart influenced by the word. Such prayer would hasten the second coming- a basic principle taught in the Lord's prayer, seeing there is no point in praying "Thy Kingdom come" unless we believe those prayers will result in the days being shortened to that day.

James 5:8 cp. v.11 seems to connect "the coming of the Lord" and "the end of the Lord" with Job in Job 42. The fact that the Lord was "very pitiful, and of tender mercy" with Job thus reminds us of how He will be in our day of judgement.

5:9- see on Lk. 12:2.

*Brothers, do not complain about each other, so that you are not judged. Behold! The judge stands at the door!*- In view of the gross abuses going on, it must have been a sore temptation for the poor brethren to grudge against their elders- not least when they turned them away empty handed at pay day (v.4). James is pleading with them to keep up their excellent attitude of not resisting (v.6)- because at any moment the true judge would come. And note too that if they did resist by grudging, they also would be condemned at the Lord's coming- for taking the judgment of these renegade servants of the Lord into their own hands. How much less have we any right to judge our fellow servants of today! James' reasoning implied that the verdict of condemnation pronounced on them by the other brethren (v.6) was not valid- but they would only be condemned if they grudged against such treatment.

The Greek for "grudge" is normally used concerning the groaning of sincere prayer, often in silence, brought about by suffering- e.g. Mk. 7:34; Acts 7:34; Rom. 8:23,26; 2 Cor. 5:2,4- although it also carries the idea of complaining. Thus instead of making their complaints to each other, they were to quietly make them to God- and the Lord Jesus, with "groanings (same word as "grudge") which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26) would make powerful intercession for them. Peter's equivalent for them being condemned is in his warning that Sodom and Gomorrha were "condemned with an overthrow", making them an ensample unto those that after should live unGodly" (2 Pet. 2:6). If this is a valid connection, James is saying that vicious bitterness against brethren who are wrongly abusing you, leading you to condemn them, is the same magnitude of sin as living the reprobate life of the Sodomites. Similarly "the judge stands before the door" is clearly matched by 1 Pet. 4:4,5, which says that some - the same group of Judaizers within the ecclesia?- "think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (this is the sort of accusation often made by the Judaist infiltrators- cp. their smear campaign on Paul): who shall give account to him that is ready (cp. "before the door") to judge the quick and the dead".

Thus a life of "excess of riot" is the same as giving way to bitterness in the heart that leads to condemnation of the brethren. This connection between 5:9 and 1 Pet. 4:5 parallels the coming of the Lord in judgment with the resurrection- the judging of living and dead. Thus James and Peter did not think of the Lord's coming in any sense other than how we think of the second coming- to raise and judge the dead, and establish the Kingdom on earth (see notes on 5:7). Thus Paul, probably writing to the same group of Jewish believers: "Wherefore we receiving (i.e. being so near to receiving it we are practically receiving it now) a Kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear" (Heb. 12:28)- i.e. in the development of truly spiritual characteristics in our heart. Such acute awareness of the imminence of the Lord's coming should surely be matched by us, as we live on the very edge of time and human experience as we know it, when "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7).

This likening of the second coming to Christ standing at the door must surely connect with Rev. 3:20: "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him". Having a formal meal ("sup") with the believer must connect with the Lord's parable of the marriage supper representing the Kingdom. These letters having been written before AD70, Christ is maybe saying that if only there was a true response to His word on an individual basis ("If any man..."), then he would fully come in the glory of His Kingdom in AD70. The principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture- in this case Rev. 3:20 by James 5:9- surely has violence done to it if the Lord's standing, knocking at the door is not understood with some reference to the second coming. James 5:9 *pleads* with believers not to grudge / groan / sigh (Gk.) against each other *on the very eve of the Lord's coming*.

5:10 *Brothers, take for an example the suffering and patience of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord*- We have suggested in our notes on v.7 that the example of the prophets patiently speaking forth the word of God amidst opposition from others in their ecclesia, was an example of the patience the wrongly denigrated brethren needed in continuing to gently rebuke the erring brethren with the word; and to continue patiently letting the word dwell in their minds so that they did not let bitterness develop. This appears to be another allusion to the beatitudes- this time to Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are you, when men (even in the ecclesia, in their case) shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely... rejoice, and be exceeding glad (cp. James 1:2)... for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". This enduring physical suffering not only associated them with Christ, but also with a whole band of men who had faithfully spoken forth the word in the past. The fact the prophets had suffered for speaking forth the word to an apostate Israel indicates that the persecution of the brethren was due to their Biblically hitting the rest of the ecclesia below the belt.

The Greek for "suffering [affliction]" really means 'hardship', referring to the obvious domestic hardship brought about by the holding back of the wages by the criticized brethren. We have suggested that the eldership in the Jewish ecclesias probably had the gift of prophecy, and even if they did not, these to whom James was writing certainly thought they did. Thus James is pointing out from much Biblical precedent that being a prophet was associated with experiencing hardship as a result of persecution and unfair treatment by those who claimed to be brethren (so the Mt. 5:12 allusion intimates); and also with being patient with many opposers. Such reasoning would have been very telling on these elders. It is hard to see why the reminder should be given that the prophets spoke in the name of the Lord.

Maybe it was because the poor brethren's Scriptural protests were being ridiculed as not being spoken in the name of the Lord. In this case James would be encouraging them that by reason of their being persecuted for their message, they were proving their association with those who were truly inspired to speak in the Lord's name. Speaking forth the word is often associated with carrying the name of God; not only in the sense that prophets spoke God's word in the Lord's name, but that the word develops the attributes of the Name (Ex. 34:4-7) in a man's character, thus leading him to carry God's Name if he shows forth the truth, mercy and patience of the Lord. By their correct response to the word these believers were similar to the prophets in that they spoke in the name of the Lord.

The whole of James 5:10-16 appears to be based on the example of Job: v.12= Job 3:1; v.13,14 cp. Job's afflictions; v.11= Job 42:10; God's mercy to Job is used by James as an encouragement to the sinners in the ecclesia to repent; v.16= Job 42:8. Job is held up in v.11-13 as an example of a prophet being afflicted, but then James goes on to speak of praying for the sick who had sinned- i.e. those who had been struck with physical illness as a result of their wickedness. The sick were to "pray for one another, that you may be healed", knowing that "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much". This may be alluding to Job's prayer for the friends in 42:8 while still sick himself. The word for "fervent" is the same translated "earnest" in the record of Christ's fervent prayer in the garden in Lk. 22:44-46. Job's prayer for the spiritual welfare of the friends points forward to Christ's prayer in the garden. His prayer was for his salvation from death- which was tantamount to praying for our salvation, and that was certainly the motive behind it rather than of selfish self-preservation. Only through His resurrection could we be saved. Thus the motivation for Christ's earnest prayers for salvation was His desire to gain us salvation.

*5:11 Behold, we call them blessed that endured. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the result that the Lord intended, how the Lord is full of pity and is merciful-* The concluding theme of this letter is that despite their faults, all the ecclesia should pray for God's forgiveness for the others, especially bearing in mind the physical affliction that had been brought on some of them because of the grossness of their sins (see notes on 4:12). Job was a prophet (Job 29:4), one of those referred to in the preceding verse, and his example seems to be behind much of what James says in this chapter. "Happy" being the same word translated "Blessed" in the beatitudes encourages us to see an allusion here back to Mt. 5:10-12, which v.10 has already referred to: blessed are those who endure tribulation for speaking the word. The Jews ("we") counted the prophets as blessed people because of their sufferings (Mt. 23:29; Acts 13:15,27). Indeed, the Greek for "count" means 'to beautify', and is from the word for "happy/ blessed". The suffering which Job endured was not just physical but more especially from the mental trauma created in him by the criticisms of him by his friends with their (false?) claims to be inspired prophets, saying that his sufferings were due to gross spiritual weakness. This was probably the elders' reason for not supporting the poor brethren- they would have reasoned that their hardships were a sign of God's displeasure because of their lack of spirituality. We have discussed the problem of Job being credited with "patience" despite his mistakes elsewhere; his patience seem to have been in continuing to speak forth the true word of God, and in having the humility at the end to accept his failures. That Job did have failures is indicated by James saying that in "the end of the Lord" He showed great mercy and pity, which would imply forgiveness. The same word is used in Heb. 10:28 concerning the man dying without mercy, i.e. forgiveness, under the Law as a punishment for sin.

"Full of pity" is very intense in Greek- elsewhere it is translated "bowels", "inward affection". Thus the position of Job touched the Lord's heart in a way few other human experiences are said to in the word. We have elsewhere shown Job to have been a man who allowed himself to be too far influenced by the Judaist-type philosophy of the friends, the 'elders' of his ecclesia, and yet to have kept doggedly reflecting on and believing God's basic principles so that he eventually came to an appreciation of human nature and God's greatness which few others have done. The poor brethren in the Jewish ecclesias were in a similar position- being worn down by the spiritually cocksure reasoning of their elders, feeling increasingly spiritually desperate because of their words, as Job did, and therefore needing every encouragement to patiently continue rather than give way in bitterness, so that they might come to the same end as Job. The tremendous pity which God showed for Job would also be shown to them if they fully fellowshipped his example by their patient endurance.

It is not only so that we can limit God by our prayers. It is also true that prayer and spirituality can to some degree change the stated intentions of God, such is His openness to it. That God has intentions proves of itself that there can be a degree to which what He intends to do is governed by human response. James reasons that because we have seen "the end intended by the Lord" (James 5:11 NKJ) we ought therefore to do the maximum of *our* ability. Thus Amos pronounced what the Lord had shown him: that the land would be destroyed by grasshoppers, and then by fire. But each time he begged Yahweh to relent. And "the Lord repented for this: It shall not be, says the Lord" (Am. 7:1-7).

That God has intentions proves of itself that there can be a degree to which what He intends to do is governed by human response. James reasons that because we have seen "the end intended by the Lord" (James 5:11 NKJ) we ought therefore to do the maximum of *our* ability.

5:12- see on Mt. 23:28.

*But above all things, my brothers, do not make oaths. Neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath; but let your yes, mean yes, and your no, mean no, so that you will not fall under judgment-* This may well be referring to Job again, in his over-dogmatism brought about by the intensity of his sufferings; e.g. his cursing of the day he was born, and his swearing that he will never confess to being a sinner or admit that his sufferings were justified because of his sinfulness (see Job 27:5 and context). This was the type of statement which he repented of at the end. Similarly, James wants the brethren not to let the emotionally charged nature of their situation lead them to make any other response apart from a humble response governed by the word. Hence v.13 and 14 go on to say that the response to affliction, sickness or falling away should always be expressed in the form of prayer, rather than in self-generated oaths. The stress of "above all things" is hard to understand until the passage in the sermon on the mount which this verse is based on is properly appreciated.

Mt. 5:33 quotes Lev. 19:12 concerning swearing, which warns that oaths by the Lord's name should not be made lightly but had to be fulfilled, otherwise the name of the Lord would be blasphemed. Therefore the Lord quotes this as saying "You shall not forswear thyself (i.e. swear falsely), but shall perform (His emphasis being on that word) unto the Lord your oaths"

(i.e. oaths made in His name). But because Christ so appreciated the extreme proneness to failure which we have by nature, He correctly declared that whatever men claimed they would do 'by the Lord's name' was likely to be "of the evil one", i.e. the devil of their own heart (Mt. 5:37), and therefore plans to do the Lord's work should be expressed in straightforward, unassuming language. Even with the best intention in the world, the Lord knew that oaths could so easily go unperformed. Christ concluded His advice with His reason for it: "For whatsoever is more than these cometh of the evil one" (AVmg.). The phrasing of James 5:12 is similar, and matches this with "Lest you fall into condemnation"- which connects with the theme of the whole letter, that "above all things" the believer must not give way to his innate evil desires because doing so will lead to rejection at the judgment. And again, he singles out the expression of those desires through the tongue ("swear not") as being the most likely form of failure.

The Greek word used for 'falling' here does not carry the idea of falling headlong, as in "Fall from your own steadfastness" in 2 Pet. 3:17, but rather of a more gradual stepping down from their high spiritual position- as if to say that whether they dramatically fell by renouncing their faith or apparently just stepped down a little by responding to the trials given by these false brethren, the result was the same- condemnation at the judgment which James believed was so imminent. "Condemnation" is also translated "hypocrisy"- i.e. they could step down into a semi-spirituality, which was tantamount to being condemned.

Those who speak strong words with Divine oaths will 'fall under judgment' for those words (James 5:12 RV); if they don't use them, they won't have to have them considered at the judgment. And thus "He that keeps his mouth keepeth his life; but he that opens wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The children of Edom will have their words against Zion remembered against them at judgment: "Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom The day of Jerusalem; Who said, Rase it, rase it" (Ps. 137:7 RV). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear.

*5:13 Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise-* The previous verse has been emphasizing the importance of not letting our words run away with us- and therefore James now tells us to channel all our words through prayer, rather than indulge in the circular talking of Job and the friends which was the exact opposite of "Yes, yes... no, no". "Afflicted" is the same word translated "affliction" in v.10 concerning Job's hardships.

"Cheerful" really means 'To be cheered up' after hardship, and is only used elsewhere in the record of Paul's shipwreck concerning the company being of "good cheer" after Paul's stirring exhortation on the deck- surely one of the most dynamic and powerful appeals for faith ever heard (Acts 27:22,36). It may be that some of them had found legitimate release from their sufferings, perhaps by contributions from other ecclesias. Alternatively, James may be talking hypothetically: 'Even if any of you find relief, then express your joy in the words of the psalms rather than giving reign to your own natural inclinations to make a rash oath to God in gratitude'. Those who had been 'cheered up' may refer to the rich brethren- instead of expressing their joy in rowdy parties dressed up with spiritual excuses (Jude 12; 1 Cor. 11:21; James 2:2), they should express it in the words of psalms.

"Sing" here is also translated "making melody" in Eph. 5:19, where Paul speaks of doing so in the heart by singing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs". It is perhaps significant that Paul advises them to do this as an antidote to being drunk (Eph. 5:18)- and if James is speaking about the need to sing psalms instead of indulging in drunken revelry at the communion service, then he would be saying the same thing as Paul. Drunkenness at the breaking of bread must have been a regular occurrence at Corinth at least, from how Paul writes (e.g. "Another is drunken... when(ever) you come together... this is not to eat the Lord's supper", 1 Cor. 11:20,21). Singing psalms would have been done at the breaking of bread service to imitate the singing of the Hallel Psalms (113-118) at the last supper (Mt. 26:30); and the reference to Psalm singing in 1 Cor. 14:26 also seems to be in the communion service context. Thus it may be that v.13-16 are describing what should have been happening at the memorial feast- there should have been prayer rather than complaining by the suffering, psalm singing rather than drunkenness by the joyful, the time given over to conversation- which would have been considerable, if the service was based on that of the Jewish Sabbath or Passover- should have been spent confessing faults rather than bragging, condemning and spreading false doctrine (Jude 10-12 cp. 2 Pet. 2:18,19), and this should have given way to loving prayer for those who had been struck sick because of committing such sins.

*5:14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord-* There are two different words translated "sick" in :14 and :15 The first implies more 'weariness of mind', as if spiritual weakness is being referred to. The references to "save a soul from death and... hide a multitude of sins" in v.20 is in the same context of spiritual sickness. In any case, it is unlikely that James would be saying that any physical sickness could be cured, bearing in mind Paul's thorn in the flesh.

"The elders of the church" may be those of the Jerusalem ecclesia, as that is whom "the elders" often refers to in the New Testament. However, it is just as likely that they refer to the Spirit-gifted eldership of the individual ecclesias to whom this letter was sent- their anointing with oil shows their control of the use of the Spirit. This pouring out of oil not only recalls the use of the Spirit to heal the physically sick by the disciples (Mk. 6:13), but also the outpouring of the Spirit in the gift of forgiveness in Acts 2:37,38. In this case James would be emphasizing the need to respect the eldership because of their possession of the Spirit, which made them God's representatives regardless of their personal spirituality. Compare this with David's respect for apostate, Spirit-gifted Saul, and the respect Israel had to give their reprobate judges (Ps. 82:1-5). Notice that it was possible for "the prayer of faith" by these elders to "save the sick" despite their unspirituality. Similarly Paul warned an identical group at Corinth that although they had faith to move mountains through the Spirit- e.g. curing the sick- their lack of love would deprive them of salvation personally (1 Cor. 13:2). Spiritual success in any form- be it in preaching or the triumph of faith in a particular problem- can so easily tempt us to feel that therefore in all other areas our life must be acceptable with God. But not necessarily so.

*5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he has committed sins, it shall be forgiven him-* "The sick" in v.15 does refer to physical sickness, although "raise him up" is also used concerning a spiritual revival (Rom. 13:11 cp. Eph. 5:14). This confusion between physical and spiritual sickness is understandable once it is appreciated that physical sickness was brought upon weak members of the first century ecclesia in order to lead them to repentance (see notes on 4:12). Therefore v.16 tells them to



confess their faults to each other so that they could pray for forgiveness and subsequent healing for their brethren.

5:16 *Therefore, confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man avails much in its working-* Note the parallel effect of the prayer of a friendly brother and that of the eldership in v.14,15- again indicating that in ultimate terms an elder had no spiritual power that was not possessed by any brother who had a humble faith. The Job allusions continue, this time to his prayer for the forgiveness of his friends (Job 42:8). Job himself was ill at the time he prayed for the friends- his "captivity" was ended "when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10). That James too was counselling the sick to pray for the sick is implied by "pray one for another, that you may be healed". The sickness being brought on as a result of their sins in holding false, Judaist doctrine confirms that James read Job, under inspiration, as a type of those influenced by Judaist thinking. Based on Job's example, James is probably advising them to concentrate on forgiving and loving one another, as this would lead to their personal repentance and thus their cure too. This would imply that the fundamental sin that was causing their sickness was their gross lack of love and spiritual concern for each other.

As these sick brethren were to call for the elders of the ecclesia to pray for them, it may be that the rich, spiritually proud brethren whom James has been reprimanding in his letter may not have been the true eldership, although they fancied themselves as such. However, it appears that the problem of spiritual and subsequent physical sickness was widespread in all groups of the ecclesia, including the eldership. There seems, at first glance, two types of prayer spoken of in v.15 and 16; a calling of the elders to pray for the sick person, and the afflicted ones confessing their sins to each other in order to effect a cure. Yet in view of what we know of the corruption of the eldership, it would seem better to treat these two descriptions as parallel- the elder who had been struck seriously sick was to call the others to him, and at the pathetic bedside of the once arrogant rich farmer they, too, were to confess their sins, so that not only would he be cured, but their less serious sicknesses would also be lifted. To be successful this kind of prayer had to be "effectual". The Greek *energeo* gives the idea of dynamic expenditure of energy. Such effort in prayer for the spiritual welfare of others can only come from a truly selfless spirit. The prayer of our Lord for us and the disciples in Gethsemane springs to mind. The connection is strengthened by "fervent" being the same word translated "earnestly" in Lk. 22:44 concerning the Lord's praying more earnestly with huge tears. This would suggest that James understood Christ's prayer in Gethsemane not just to have been for personal strength but also for our forgiveness and salvation. Thus in Lk. 22:46 He could encourage the sleepy disciples to rise and pray *also*- i.e. as well as him praying for them- that they did not fall into temptation. Note how "watch" in Mt. 26:38 is elsewhere used about spiritual watching rather than being on the look out for people approaching. Heb. 5:6,7 lends support by saying that Christ's agonizing prayer in the garden that God would save Him from death was fulfilling the type of Melchizedek, who prayed to God for other people, not just himself. The only way of reconciling all this is to see Christ's prayer for salvation from death as being motivated by His desire for our salvation from death. No wonder James refers to this as the supreme example of showing spiritual love for our brethren in our prayer life.

"Avails" means literally to 'in-work'- as if prayer for others will help us personally by our offering it. This idea seems to be picked up in the next verse.

James 5:16 speaks of the need to pray for one another, that we may be healed. This is an undoubted allusion back to mighty Moses praying for smitten Miriam, and to Aaron staying the plague by his offering of incense / prayer (Num. 16:47). Surely James is saying that every one of us can rise up to the level of High Priest in this sense.

Elijah could be so sure his prayer would be heard because he knew that he was genuinely motivated. His reason for withholding the rain and dew was so that Israel would come to repentance (James 5:16-18)- perhaps through them perceiving that lack of rain was a sign that they had broken the covenant. In this case, Elijah was somewhat harsher than God Himself, who had not yet withdrawn rain from His people. Elijah “shut the heavens, even though Israel rejected him at that time (Lk. 4:25,26). Their rejection of him is unrecorded in the Kings record, but we are left to reflect upon the wonder of the fact that Elijah’s response to rejection was not to merely hurt back, but to earnestly seek their restoration to God. He “prayed in his prayer” (James 5:17 Gk.)- there was a deep prayer going on within his prayer, words and feelings within words- the prayer of the very inner soul. This was how much he sought their repentance. The James passage sets Elijah up as a pattern for our prayer for our wayward brethren. He really is our pattern here. He clearly saw prayer as requiring much effort; and the way he prays at the time of the evening sacrifice on Horeb suggests that he saw prayer as a sacrifice (1 Kings 18:36).

*5:17 Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months-* Elijah's prayer exemplifies how intensely we should pray for the spiritual benefit of others, and how that in itself helped him spiritually. In view of the exalted status of Elijah in Jewish theology, James stresses how he was of "like passions" to us (cp. Acts 14:15)- i.e. he too, because of his inherent human nature, did not find intense prayer easy. Elijah's fervent prayer was that it might not rain, and in the context of James his prayer was for the spiritual good of Ahab and apostate Israel. In the same way as apostles like Paul and Peter could pray for physical sickness to come upon men to lead them to repentance, so Elijah prayed for the famine to come upon Israel to make them realize their sin. James is saying that if the sick brethren and indeed the whole ecclesia prayed for forgiveness with the same intensity that the apostles and Elijah had prayed for such physical problems to come upon the spiritually weak, then those problems could be lifted. But it was only those who were sensitive to the true spirit of the word, in this case in the Elijah record, who would have grasped this. The intensity of Elijah's prayer needs some thought to appreciate, as superficially it appears that it is hardly recorded that he prayed for the drought. However, it must have been as a result of his prayer that he could say "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word". This is because of a principle outlined by Eliphaz in Job 22:27,28; he said that one of the blessings of living in good conscience with God was that one's prayers were powerful, and therefore "You shall make your prayer unto (God), and He shall hear you... you shall also decree a thing (i.e. in prayer), and it shall be established unto you". Thus the power of prayer is such that effectively requests became decrees, so sure can we be of their being answered. So many of the great prayers of Scripture are not littered with "If it be your will"- instead, because those who prayed were saturated with knowledge of God's will through their familiarity with the word which contains God's will (Jn. 1:13 cp. 1 Pet. 1:23), they could pray whatever *they* willed, and could be confident of being heard because the word was in them. And our Lord had said that nothing less was possible for His people now- Jn. 15:7. Therefore if a man of

our passions like Elijah could pray so powerfully for the weak in his ecclesia, the same was possible for that of the first century.

One way of realising the seriousness of our sin is to recognise that each sin we commit, we could have avoided. We must hang our heads, time and again. In the very end, we can blame neither our circumstances nor our natures, even though these are factors in the committal of each sin. We must each bear total personal responsibility for every sin, both of commission and omission. We must hang our heads. James, as he often does, foresees how in practice we may reason that fervent prayer isn't possible, because...we are angry, low, tired, don't feel like it. So we tell ourselves. But James cuts across all this: "Elijah was a man subject to like passions [RVmg "nature"] as we"- and yet *he* prayed earnestly (James 5:17). We can't excuse our lack of prayer by blaming it on the "passions" of our natures. Men like Elijah had the same nature as we do, prone to the same depression and mediocrity, and yet they prayed fervently.

We are intended to connect Elijah's 3.5 year ministry (James 5:17) with the 1260 days/42 months (i.e. 3.5 years) of the tribulation of God's people spoken of in Daniel and Revelation. The description of the whore of Babylon in Revelation is based upon Jezebel as a prototype. As she ruled over Israel through her puppet Ahab during Elijah's ministry, so latter day Babylon (through a puppet Israeli leader?) will dominate Israel during Elijah's future ministry. Whilst it is quite possible that Israel's holocaust will last for a literal 3.5 years, during which time 'Elijah' will be among them, it may be that the similarity of the time periods is just to indicate that the work of the latter-day Elijah will coincide with the holocaust period.

Prayer is perhaps the area where it is easiest to have only a surface level of spirituality, without getting down to real faith, real perseverance in prayer, real wrestling with God. Elijah "prayed in his prayer" (James 5:17 AVmg.) reflects the Spirit's recognition that there is prayer, and real prayer. "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer" (Ps. 64:1) seems to say the same: there is our true, pleading voice: and the outward form of prayer. The form of words we use, the outward form, conceals the *real* thing; the real groaning of spirit which is counted by God as the real prayer.

5:18 *And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit-* Again we are left to imagine when, where and how Elijah made this prayer, seeing that it is unrecorded. After his glorious triumph of faith on Carmel in the sight of all Israel, there appeared at last to be a significant repentance: "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Yahweh, He is the God", and promptly proceeded to massacre the priests of Baal. No doubt finding the four barrels of water to put on the sacrifice as the ritual required had involved considerable effort- making them reflect on the God whom they knew in their hearts provided rain. Elijah then went up to the solitude of the crags of Carmel, "cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees (in fervent prayer), and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea" for rain. This command was repeated seven times. Being a man of like passions as us, it took seven repeated prayers, a widow continually coming and not taking no for an answer, for there to be even an indication of a response. Thus Elijah's 'praying again' was for a lifting of the physical curse on the land because of

their repentance. Note his running before Ahab's chariot as the rain started to come down, symbolic of his belief that by his repentance Ahab was the righteous king that he had come to herald (1 Kings 18:39,33,42-46). This same calibre of head-between-the-knees, up-in-the-mountain prayer, consistently repeated, would lead to the lifting of the sickness placed on the first century ecclesia.

The heaven giving rain is associated with the earth bringing forth her fruit- miraculously, seeing that it is unlikely that anything had been planted in the previous three and a half years of total drought. Similarly God would act over and above their personal ability to develop spiritual fruit in them, given this basic prerequisite of total faith in prayer, based on the word truly dwelling in them as it did in Elijah. Similar victories of faith and repentance are just as possible for us, especially during the three and a half year period of tribulation which may well come upon us in the last days. James' specific, inspired mention of the three and a half year period of drought must be significant, as the duration of the drought is not mentioned in the Old Testament record. It is possible to historically demonstrate that there was a three and a half year period of especial difficulty in the land and among the Jews empire-wide before the final cataclysm of AD70; during this period the Jewish ecclesias would have had special opportunity to repent. The situation of AD70 is more than likely to be replicated in our last days. The way to ensure that we will stand up to that test is by each showing unlimited love and concern for the true spiritual welfare of our brother. The final two verses sum this up, and thereby the whole theme of the epistle.

*5:19 My brothers. If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back-* Erring from the truth in the terms of James' letter is not only limited to doctrinal deviance in the sense of 'first principles', but in showing a lack of love of each other and of the word, having a selfish materialism rather than a truly spiritual mind, and having a heart uninfluenced by the word, resulting in uncontrolled words and a lack of true compassion towards the Lord's brethren. In the context of the previous verses, James is giving extra incentive to pray for each other's repentance and forgiveness- such prayer as well as personal discussion and example really can "convert him". This shows that to some degree our prayers can influence the spiritual state of another brother over and above his personal level of spirituality- given certain prerequisites. If this is not so, and we each totally determine our own spiritual destiny regardless of the effort of others, then these closing exhortations of James 5 are without purpose.

*5:20 Let him know, that he who turns back a sinner from the error of his way, he shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins-* "Convert" here means literally 'to revert'. It is used in the New Testament particularly of the conversion of the Jews- i.e. a reverting of their hearts to the true spirit of their father Abraham (cp. Lk.1:17). Interestingly, Is.6:10 and Acts 28:27 talk of the Jews refusing to be sensitive to the word preached in the first century, and therefore not being healed- both physically and spiritually. This background of the word 'convert' nicely fits the context of James in its associating the ecclesia with the apostate Jewish world by which they were influenced, and warning that unless they were more sensitive to the word they would not be healed. By the same token those who did speak forth the word to try to convert their brethren were being classified along with Christ and the apostles, who also spoke the word to try to convert the Jews.

"If... one convert him, let him know..." sounds as if the brethren were not consciously trying to win converts- yet James encourages them that their conscious 'preaching' of the word to

their wayward brethren and praying for them were all to the same effect as preaching, seeing that these brethren were spiritually dead anyway. By re-awakening them to a truly spiritual life they were saving their soul from death. The 'soul' here may mean the body or life, in the sense that ultimately acceptance at the judgment seat would mean that their "soul" or life would not die; however, it is more likely that the soul here refers to the spiritual record of the believer. The language of preaching- i.e. conversion and saving souls- is being used here about the upbuilding of brethren. The same style is found in Dan. 12:3: "They that be wise (Heb. 'teachers', i.e. prudent guides) shall shine as the (stars)... and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars". 1 Thess. 1:8 similarly speaks of the word of the Lord sounding out from the Thessalonian ecclesia- in the sense that all the ecclesias near and far were inspired by their evident faith. Thus it was their spiritual example to others that was their sounding out of the word. Another example is Phil. 2:15 speaking of the ecclesia witnessing as lights in the world to "a crooked and perverse nation". A closer examination of this passage shows that this was through their holding forth the true word of life to the Judaizers amongst them. The specific nation referred to cannot be the Roman world in general, but rather the Jews. This suggestion is clinched by the fact that Paul is here quoting Dt. 32:5, which is describing the apostate among the ecclesia in the wilderness as "a perverse and crooked generation".

Thus Paul like James is using the language of preaching, to describe how they should work through the word and prayer to build up the apostate amongst the new Israel during their wilderness walk to the Kingdom. Likewise Acts 20:7 speaks of Paul "preaching unto" the Troas ecclesia in his breaking of bread exhortation. The language of preaching being used in upbuilding existing believers may help explain why Paul sometimes speaks to believers as if he is imparting basic doctrine to them; thus "Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep" (1 Cor. 15:51) was written to believers. Writing to the same ecclesia a while later there is more of the same: "As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

The exact parallel of these verses in James is found in 1Pet. 4:7,8: "The end of all things is at hand: be therefore sober, and watch unto prayer (for each other, we may imply from the James parallel). And above all things have fervent love (cp. fervent prayer, James 5:16- through which true love can be expressed) among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins". This parallel shows that fervent prayer for each other spiritually is the way fervent love is shown. Converting the erring brother will "hide a multitude of sins", alluding to Prov. 10:12: "Love covers all sins". True love is therefore shown by loving rebuke, rather than turning a blind eye. Truly "the end of all things is at hand" for us, as never before. There is a special need in our last days to show these qualities of true love to each other. We have to seriously ask ourselves personally whether we have that degree of selfless concern for the spiritual welfare of each other that we would climb mountains to find the solace conducive to prayer; to have our face between our knees in the intensity of our pleading with God, for the sake of our brother's spiritual growth.

Elijah and the brethren of the first century did this for men who were far gone in their declension; how much more motivated should we be for our far less errant brethren? Many of us do not have the fear of sin, both in ourselves and in our brethren, which leads us to such intensity of effort either for others or for ourselves in our own weaknesses. Surely each of us needs to assimilate more the idea of striving for God's glory in the conquest of the flesh. But this is the high challenge of the letter of James- to drive ourselves onwards to an altogether

higher and fuller spirituality, which by its very nature concerns itself with the triumph of others in the day of judgment to the same extent as we care for our own.

Our 'conversion' of people doesn't just mean that we teach them true doctrine and see them baptized; the priests were to 'turn' [s.w. 'convert'] believers away from the life of sin and behind the way of God (Mal. 2:6 LXX, applied to all of us in James 5:19).

The book of Malachi stresses what the priesthood *should* have been like, compared to what it actually was. Indeed, many of the Old Testament prophecies against Israel are specifically aimed at the priests. The priests should have followed the example of the early descendants of Levi: "The law of truth (God's word- Jn. 17:17) was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity" (Mal. 2:5,6). These words are alluded to in James 5:20 concerning how we, as the new "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9) should turn our brethren from the error of their ways. This covenant was given on account of Eleazar's going in among the people to slay them, and thereby turning many others away from iniquity. He was not just showing an iron fist to those who were being disobedient; his real role was to turn men away from sin. As the future priests, our role will also be to execute the judgments written; but it will be to the end of bringing men to appreciate the seriousness of sin, and to turn them away from it. To this end, "the priests lips should *keep* knowledge (i.e. they shouldn't apostatize from it), and they should seek the (meaning of the) law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 2:7) by reason of accurately speaking forth His word. The priests were to use their knowledge of God's word to turn the people away from sin. If we have a real hate of sin and a true love of God's righteousness, we ought to have a burning wish to take the Gospel to the kids in the tower blocks, to the call girls and drug addicts. Yet we are frustrated by the knowledge that somehow they are deaf to God's word. The joy of the Kingdom is that we will be able to speak forth the word with convicting power within the community we rule over, and to see its very real effect.

The Lord spared Aaron because of Moses' intercession for him (Dt. 9:20); and this is perhaps the basis for James' appeal to pray for one another, that we may be healed, knowing that through our prayer and pastoral work for others, we can save a man from his multitude of sins and his soul from death (James 5:20). The very ability we have to do this for each other should register deeply with us. And in response, we should live lives dedicated to the spiritual welfare and salvation of our brethren.

## The New European Bible Commentary: 1 Peter

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### CHAPTER 1

James	1 Peter
1:3	1:7
1:1	1:1
1:10	1:24
1:12	1:7;3:14
1:25	1:12
1:18	1:23,3
1:17	1:3
1:2	1:8
1:12	1:9
1:17	1:12
1:21	2:1
Whole of James	1:13
1:14	1:14
1:17	1:23,25

Like James, Peter in both his letters is emphasizing the need to develop spiritual attributes in the light of the imminence of the Lord's coming; and he warns that false teachers would sidetrack them from the pursuit of real spirituality, which is a major theme of James.

*1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ-* As Peter matured by the time of 2 Pet. 1:1, he adds "a servant and an apostle". Progressive humility, an ever deeper sense of servanthood, is part of our spiritual growth. Phil. 2:5-8 speaks of the Lord's progressive humility as being our pattern.

*To the chosen ones who are temporary dwellers of the dispersion-* The reference to the dispersion suggests Peter was writing to Jews; the similarities noted above with the letter of James confirm that the same Jewish audience is in view. James too was addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion (James 1:1). Perhaps these were those whom Peter had baptized on the day of Pentecost, who had scattered when the Jerusalem church was persecuted, and were now in the provinces of what is now Turkey. All the NT letters are written to those whom the writer has converted, as further pastoral support. It was on this basis that they had authority to tell their converts how they ought to be behaving and believing. But "temporary dwellers" is the word for a pilgrim or foreigner, and is used in a spiritual sense in 2:11 and Heb. 11:13. By status they were to always be 'passers through' and were to remember that. Any refugee yearns for stability, to settle down again permanently. But they were being reminded that they were always on the move. In their cases, they had come from their birthplaces to live at Jerusalem, had accepted Christ, and were now refugees

in Turkey. This would make many of those whom Peter was addressing somewhat advanced in years. But even in middle and old age they were to remember that in the spiritual life, we are always moving on. We too may long for stability, and bend all our efforts to try to achieve it; the solid relationship, home, career, family life etc., but we are on a journey and that present instability is for our eternal good. For thereby we are taught that this world is not now the Kingdom of God. Jews within the land of Israel used these terms to denote Gentiles visiting Palestine; and now in Christ, these once orthodox Jews were realizing how those Gentiles felt.

*In Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia-* The order of the provinces listed is the route a messenger would take, going around the provinces en route further West, perhaps to Rome.

*1:2 Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father-* Paul speaks of these ideas in Romans [where perhaps Peter had been if Babylon in 5:13 refers to Rome]. He cites them as an example of how the work of the Spirit is by grace- and therefore not by works of the law. And Peter repeats this reasoning, going on now to speak of the Spirit's work.

*In sanctification of the Spirit-* GNB "made a holy people by his Spirit". Just as we could not call ourselves nor place ourselves in God's foreknowledge, so we cannot make ourselves holy. This is all the work of the Spirit.

*To be obedient and sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ-* Although so much has been done for us, we must still respond. The reference to obedience to Jesus and being sprinkled / purified by His blood may well refer to baptism. It is by that act that we respond to what has been potentially planned for us.

*Grace to you and peace be multiplied-* Grace means 'gift'. He wished that the gift of the Spirit be multiplied to them each one.

1:3- see on 1 Thess. 1:2.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead-* We are born again by the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). This would then be another reference to baptism (see on :2 *To obey...*). Peter had baptized his audience quite some time ago, and he wanted to remind them of the significance of their baptisms. Because of Christ's resurrection, we too have a living hope, a hope of living [again]. And the connection between His resurrection and ours is made by baptism. We are born again and become living because the Lord rose from the dead, and thereby shed forth the power of His living, His spirit, in our lives.

There are a series of allusions to Daniel which show him to be representative of all those in Christ:

## **Daniel**

### **1 Peter 1 (re. the saints)**



"An inheritance... reserved... for you" (v.4)	"Thou shalt... stand in thy lot (inheritance) at the end of the days" (12:13)
In heaviness of spirit (v.6)	Daniel's heaviness of spirit
"The proof of your faith... is proved by fire... unto praise and honour and glory" (v.7 RV)	The experience of Daniel's friends Daniel praised, honoured and glorified (2:6 cp. 4:37)
"Whom having not seen ye love... now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice" (v.8)	The spirit of Daniel?
"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (v.9)	Cp. Daniel's assurance of salvation (12:13)
"The prophets have enquired and searched diligently... searching what manner of time the spirit... did signify" (v.10,11)	Peter was certainly writing here with his eye on Daniel's enquiring and diligent searching "what manner of time" his prophecies referred to (8:15,27; 9:2; 12:8)
"Unto whom it was revealed (in response to their enquiries) that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister... ... which things the Angels desire to look into" (v.12)	This is definitely alluding to Dan. 12:4, where Daniel is told that he cannot understand his own prophecies, but they will be understood by latter day believers to whom they will be relevant. Angelic interest in prophecy is mainly demonstrated in Daniel.

1:4 *To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away*- The same word is used in the parallel James 1:11 about the wealthy shall "fade away". The sustained references to the unfading, eternal inheritance are therefore in contrast with the fading things of material inheritance now. This was particularly relevant to the refugees; whatever they managed to accumulate for themselves would fade away. It probably deeply grieved these older folks (see on 1:1 *Temporary dwellers*) that as refugees they had lost all and had nothing to leave as an inheritance. But they were to focus upon the eternal inheritance.

*Reserved in heaven for you*- The "inheritance" is therefore not simply the land inheritance to Abraham to which we become heirs by identity with Christ, the seed of Abraham. It is already prepared for us, and is safely kept in Heaven. Our reward, the nature of our eternal being, is prepared uniquely and individually for us. It is prepared and present now in Heaven, and only our own wilful fighting against God's will can stop us being given it at the Lord's return.

1:5 *You who by the power of God are guarded*- The power / Spirit of God guards, preserves us, unto salvation at the last day. This continues the theme of :2. But some who start the race shall not finish it. They will therefore have resisted the Holy Spirit, consciously tried not to

be saved, wilfully going against His will. There is a power in our lives preserving us unto salvation. Strength is given us even in our weakness; temptations removed or overcome... But God will not force us into His Kingdom. This power operates through faith in it. If on a theological level we deny this power, then we cannot have faith in it- and are left trusting solely on our own strength.

*Through faith-* The fact that God so loves us is itself a limitation to Him. Because in any relationship, one person usually loves more than the other. And the one who loves the most- which is unquestionably God- has the least power. This is why He, the more powerful in physical terms, changes His mind to accommodate us. But the Almighty also allows His infinite power to become limited by our degrees of spirituality. We are kept "by the power of God through faith..." (1 Pet. 1:5); His power in practice is in some sense paralleled with and in that sense controlled by our faith.

Whatever else it referred to in its local context, the gift of the Spirit promised after baptism in Acts 2 was related to forgiveness and the subsequent hope of salvation. At baptism we rise in prospect as Christ rose, to total victory over sin. In prospect, all our sins were forgiven. As forgiveness is a spiritual gift, or gift of the Spirit, it follows that in some way we receive this at baptism. The continuation of this gift is conditional upon our using faith to keep it active on our behalf. We are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (alluding to our baptism), to an inheritance (a place in the future Kingdom)... reserved in Heaven for you, who are kept by the power (spirit) of God *through faith* unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

*To a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time-* This is the reserved inheritance (see on :4). It is "a salvation" because salvation will be unique to each of us; whilst we shall all be immortalized, the nature of our eternity will be tailored to each of us individually.

1:6 *Wherein you greatly rejoice-* As in :8. Knowing we shall be saved if the Lord returns now is the basis for great joy. If we are not certain of this... then Christianity is hardly the source of all joy and peace, but rather a fearful looking ahead to judgment day.

*Though now, for a little while, if need be, you have suffered many trials-* The idea is as in GNB "even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer". Rejoicing and sadness therefore go together in the Christian life. The joy experienced is something far deeper than surface level emotion; for on that level we may well be sad. This is how the Lord before His death could talk of sharing His joy with His followers; even though He Himself was sorrowful unto death.

1:7- see on 1 Pet. 3:15.

*So that the proof of your faith-* To whom is our faith proven through trials? God knows the end from the beginning. Recall how He commented that He knew that Abraham would be faithful: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19). The proof is surely to ourselves. The purpose of testing is that we may know ourselves. The initial application of Peter's words here are surely to the "fiery trial" of Nero's persecution, from which he hoped the believers would emerge spiritually intact and then be immediately glorified by the Lord's return; see on 4:12 *The fiery trial*.

*(More precious than gold that perishes though it is proved by fire)*- Another parallel with James, who writes of gold that rusts. The idea is that gold doesn't rust and doesn't perish; but it does at infinity. And we are to live as if we are there, at infinity. The Jewish refugees in Turkey needed that assurance, with money a daily worry, especially since they had no land, no property, and no assurance they could work towards getting it. The supreme value of their faith is therefore emphasized.

*May be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ*- But in this life, choosing the life of faith as opposed to the legalism of neo-Judaism will also result in "the praise of God" (Jn. 12:43). Likewise Rom. 2:29 speaks of receiving praise of God for choosing to circumcise our heart rather than resting content with being a Jew outwardly. Being praised at the last day recalls the parable about the faithful being praised for using their talents, or for feeding the hungry, clothing the naked etc. Such praise is because of the righteousness imputed to us. But it is also because our faith in this life is so deeply significant to Him; it is indeed more precious than gold.

1:8 *Whom you love though you have not seen him*- Peter almost implies that His very invisibility is what makes us love Him, through His revelation to us in Scripture, in the way He seeks us to. We believe in Him because He is presently invisible to us; for faith is belief in what cannot be seen (Heb. 11:1-3). Yet Peter surely had his mind on the Lord's words of Jn. 20:29: "Blessed are they that have not seen yet have believed". Here Peter parallels believing in Jesus with loving Him. Belief in Him therefore involves far more than accepting His historical existence. It involves emotion and relationship which arise from that.

*On whom you believe, though now you do not see him*- The language of first faith and conversion, alluding to the Lord's promise of blessing for those who had not seen but had believed. Remember that Peter had baptized his audience at Pentecost. But believing on or into Jesus is an ongoing process.

*And rejoice greatly with joy inexpressible and full of glory*- This joy was far deeper than emotion; see on :6. They were saddened and distressed as refugees; but they were inexpressibly happy. But inexpressible joy *and fullness of glory* suggests the joy of final acceptance at the last day. The awesome message is that we can experience that right now.

1:9 *Receiving the result of your faith, the salvation of your souls*- The joy of :8 and present fullness of glory can only be because of the fact that we are right now in process of receiving eternity; as John's Gospel puts it, we have eternal life, in that we are living now the kind of life we shall eternally live. We have the hope of life now (:3); and *elpis* doesn't mean a mere possibility, but a stable, certain future event. See on 1 Pet. 3:15.

1:10 *Concerning this salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you*- AV "Of which salvation...". They searched for information about this kind of salvation, the salvation that can now be experienced... and perceived that it was for us who believe in Christ. They didn't fully experience it themselves because Christ had not then died and resurrected. They prophesied about the grace that should come to *us* and was not then revealed in reality.

1:11- see on Mk. 14:35.

*Searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point to-* The Spirit of God is that of His Son, for they are of the same mind / Spirit. There is ultimately only one Spirit, God's, which is in His Son and in us. The Spirit which was about Christ was in them, so that they prophesied about Him. But they wanted of course to know *when* this time would be. And it's now, Peter is saying.

*When it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow them-* We now are "full of glory" (:8). The glories enabled by His sufferings refer to the spiritual blessings we now have, the outpouring of the Spirit as a result of His glorification, which Peter has recounted; the possibility of being certain of future salvation, the transforming Spirit of God sanctifying us and preserving our path to eternity, and living the eternal life right now.

1:12 *It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven-* The things which were not then possible; the Holy Spirit had not been given into the hearts of believers as Christ had not then been glorified; the "things" are the "glories" of :11 [see note there].

*Which things the Angels desire to look into-* A clear equation of prophets and Angels is found by comparing 1 Pet. 1:10 and 12: "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently. . . which things the Angels (also) desire to look into", referring to the Cherubim Angels peering down intently into the blood on the mercy seat, the "salvation" which the prophets searched after. In the parable of redemption contained in getting a wife for Isaac, the servant went to seek out Rebecca, representing the prophets going to take us out of the world to begin a wilderness journey to our new husband. He must surely represent the word taking us out of the world; yet he was led by an Angel (Gen. 24:7), suggesting the Angels work through the word they inspire to bring us out of the world. Other passages relevant to this theme of Angels giving the Word of God are Ex. 23:22; Num. 22:35; 23:17; 24:1,2; Heb. 2:2. See on 2 Sam. 23:1-3.

1:13 *Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope completely on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ-* Peter's letters are full of reference to the cross and various physical aspects of the trial and mocking of the Lord which he witnessed first-hand (5:1). "Girding ourselves" with humility is a reference to what the Lord did at the last supper (s.w. Jn. 13:5), although then, Peter had so misunderstood what He had done. Other examples in 1:19; 2:20; 2:22; 2:23; 2:24; 3:18; 4:1; 5:3. Well does the NCV translate Prov. 4:23: "Be careful what you think because your thoughts run your life". We are to gather together "the loins of your mind" (1 Pet. 1:13), make a conscious effort to analyse our thinking, get a grip on it and gather it together into Christ.

The eating of the meal with girded loins (Ex. 12:11,13) is seen by Peter as meaning we should have our *minds* girded, gathered up, in place and order (1 Pet. 1:13). Note how 1 Peter is replete with Passover allusions (1:17 cp. sojourning with fear in Egypt; 1:18 silver and gold taken from Egypt; 1:19 the Passover lamb; 1:23 corruptible seed= leaven; 2:9,10 cp. leaving Egypt at night, led from darkness to the glory of Sinai, where they became a nation. The

Passover night is alluded to in the New Testament as being typical of the spirit which we ought to have in daily life as we await the Lord's return. They were to eat it with their clothes girded together ready to up and go, huddled together in their family / ecclesial units, focused upon the slain Passover lamb in their midst which was to be their salvation. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind... and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ... forasmuch as ye know that ye were [redeemed] with... the precious blood of Christ, as of a [Passover] lamb without blemish" (1 Pet. 1:13,18,21). "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return... that they may open unto him immediately" (Lk. 12:35,36). In order to be ready to quit this life at any moment, with no looking back after the pattern of Lot's wife, we need to live in a daily spirit of urgent awareness of our position, living as we do in Egyptian darkness. 1 Peter 1 is packed with Passover and exodus allusions; v. 13 interprets the girding of loins: "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you". The sober minds of those families on that night, their thoughts like their garments pulled together and tightly bound, should resemble the type of mind control which we exercise in the face of our Lord's return.

Those refugees, so concerned at their lack of future security, worried about mid to long term financial issues (just like so many today) were to set their *elpis*, their confident expectation, on the fact they would be saved by grace at the last day. The operation of the grace / Spirit mentioned earlier was the guarantee that the final grace of personal salvation would be brought to them at the last day. "Brought to you" is a mild translation of a term used for rushing, a ship being driven by the wind; salvation is rushing to meet us.

1:14 *As children of obedience, do not be conformed to the lusts-* AV "conforming yourselves". The contrast is between children who are raised with principles which they are obedient to; and children who raise themselves, conforming themselves to whatever takes their fancy. This is how we shall 'turn out' unless we accept God's word as the final authority.

*You had in your former ignorance-* If my reconstruction is correct, Peter is writing to once very committed Orthodox Jews whom he had baptized in Jerusalem. But the life of legalism is in fact of living in lusts; Paul says this about his own life in Romans 7, and specifically states that he at that stage lived in lust (Tit. 3:3). Only grace can lead us out of that.

1:15 *But like He who called you is holy, be you yourselves holy in all manner of living-* This connects back to :2, which says that they had been called by God's gracious plan from the beginning, and His Spirit was at work to sanctify or make them holy. He is Holy, and His plan is to raise "children of obedience" (:14) like Him. Orthodox Jews such as they once were would have been obsessed with holiness in the sense of ritual separation. But this was to be extended to "all manner of living". By being holy / separate over a few things, they were tempted to think that vast areas of life in other areas could be lived as they wished. This was and is the problem with legalistic obedience. Hence the focus on *all* manner of living.

1:16 *Because it is written: You shall be holy, for I am holy-* This is quoting from the Levitical code of conduct for priests (Lev. 11:44,45). But those same words were spoke to all the congregation (Lev. 19:2)- for it was God's intention that all Israel should develop into a nation of priests. And this very idea is applied by Peter to the entire church (2:5,9). We likewise cannot assume that others shall take care of our spirituality; we are in fact called to be Levites for others. All of us have this calling.

1:17 *And if you call on Him as Father*- Perhaps a reference to the way early Christians used the Lord's prayer, beginning "Our Father...". If God was their Father, the first word of the prayer ["our"] demands that we accept we are not His only children. And He will judge all His children the same, and that included the Gentile converts with whom perhaps these Jewish converts were finding it hard to get along.

*Who without partiality judges*- The trial of our faith is going on now; the judgment will simply formally reveal the verdict which is now being arrived at. The Father judges now "according to every man's work" (1 Pet. 1:17), as He did in OT times: "Thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps. 62:12). Yet when His Son returns, He will give every man "according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). It couldn't be clearer: the judgment is going on now, and the Lord Jesus returns to give us the reward which has been 'judged' appropriate for us. With this background, Peter drives home the almost inevitable practical lesson: "... [therefore] pass the time of your sojourning here in fear". *Now* Yahweh's eyes judge and examine the righteous, as He sits enthroned; and He *will*, at the future day of judgment, rain sulphur upon the head of the wicked and chase them away with His brining wind (Ps. 11:4-6 RV- reference to the Angel of the Lord chasing the rejected away?).

God will judge every man's work "forasmuch as ye know that ye were... redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb slain..." (1 Pet. 1:17-19). The link between our judgment and Christ's death needs to be reflected upon here. Our appreciation ("forasmuch...") of the cross is related to how we will be judged. The Lord's death should influence our works and therefore it is intimately related to our final judgment. We will be judged in accordance with how far we have let the cross influence our daily works. Baptism can never be undone; as a result of that covenant statement before God, we for evermore live our lives with a sense of responsibility to Him. "If ye call [upon yourselves] on the [name of] the Father [an allusion to baptism into the Father's Name]... pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: *forasmuch* as ye know [i.e. the more you realize this, the more you will live in fear / reverence] that ye... were redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ".

*According to each man's work*- Peter had found it hard to accept that truly "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:37). And, as was well known, there had come a time when he had slipped back into the old mindset, and had once again respected persons by refusing to break bread with Gentiles. And yet he reminds his Jewish readers that their prayers ascend to a Father "who without respect of persons judgeth according to *every* man's work" (i.e. Jew or Gentile). He was asking them to learn what he had so slowly and falteringly come to accept as the articulation of the very same grace to the Gentiles which had been his salvation too.

*Pass the time of your sojourning in fear*- Or, "exile". The Jewish Christians had been driven out of Jerusalem by the Orthodox Jews, thus making a parallel between the Orthodox and Babylon, who had likewise driven Judah into exile. And "Babylon" may be a title for Jerusalem in 5:13 and in Revelation. It has been demonstrated that the record of the exile from the land is framed in terms of the exile from Eden; the offer of return to the land is therefore an offer of paradise restored, fellowship with God renewed- for those who wanted it. Let's remember that the exiles were symbols of us. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV).

1:18- see on Lk. 24:21.

*Knowing you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold-* Gold only corrupts at infinity, and that is where we are. The connection is with the reference in :4 to the transitory nature of wealth (see notes there); and how our relation to the Lord's blood, which has *eternal* effects, ought to make us not materialistic. All wealth can buy is temporary; but we stand related to the eternal wealth.

*From your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers-* The Orthodox Jewish life of legal obedience was in fact "vain". And they were redeemed from it. And the Lord's death redeems us likewise from whatever was our spiritual and psychological inheritance. Do we feel that life is just pointless, an endless round of childcare, working all day doing in essence the same job for 30 years, a trudging through an endless tunnel until our mortality catches up on us? We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ from the "vain way of life handed down from the fathers" (1 Pet. 1:18), from the frustration of this present life. The word used for "vain" is that used by the LXX for the 'vanity' of life as described in Ecclesiastes, and for idol worship in Lev. 17:7 and Jer. 8:19. We have been redeemed from it all! Not for us the life of endlessly chasing the rainbow's end, slavishly worshipping the idols of ever bigger homes, smarter technology... we were redeemed from the vanity of life "under the sun" by the precious blood of Christ. We were bought out of this slavery, even if in the flesh we go through its motions. Knowing this, we the redeemed, the bought out from vanity, shouldn't spend our hours in front of the television or doing endless crosswords, or frittering away the time of life as the world does. James foresaw that a man could appear to be religious, and yet have a religion that was "vain" (James 1:26)- because he didn't appreciate that the cross has bought him out of vanity.

New life is always needed. This is why in our daily reading and fellowship with our Lord, as we enter ever more deeply into His character, we are challenged afresh daily. We aren't professionals, committee members, in this drive for spirituality. We are amateurs at heart, children, wide eyed with wonder at what we are being shown, ever moving on to some fresh endeavour. Our spiritual new life need never become a mere routine, a burden, a duty to be performed, a habit. For "[in the heart] where the spirit of the Lord [Jesus] is, there the heart is free" (2 Cor. 3:17); we were brought out from the pointless, repetitive bondage of Egypt by the blood of Christ. What this means is not that red liquid somehow did something for us; His example of death, how He was there, inspires us to break out from the vain way of life we received by tradition from our fathers. We alone, as true believers in the representative nature of His sacrifice, are thereby empowered to break out of the routine of our lives.

1:19 *But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot-* 1 Pet. 1:18,19 sets the blood of Christ in utter opposition to materialism; the very historical fact of His cross of itself means a rejection of material things. The financially strapped refugees needed to be reminded of this. We are familiar enough with the way in which Israel's crossing of the Red Sea represents our redemption in Christ. Their response when they got the other side was to willingly sacrifice the riches of Egypt which they had brought with them; they gave them to the Lord's work, so that the tabernacle could be built up. Israel's exodus and establishment as God's Kingdom at Sinai was the prototype of the early church's experience. They too, for the sheer joy of the Truth, resigned their material possessions. The merchant man for the sheer

joy of finding the beautiful pearl sells *all* he has, for the pure excellency of possessing just that one pearl (Mt. 13:44-46).

"Precious" is the same word just used about how precious is faith (:7). The blood of Christ is only precious to those who believe that by His work we shall eternally live. To damage the faith of another is to damage something so very precious, and if they stumble, then the blood of Christ is no longer for them precious.

1:20 *He was foreknown before the foundation of the world*- The same word has been used in the opening argument in :2. We were foreknown in God's plan; but this is because we are "in Christ", and all that is true of Him is true of us. By baptism into Him, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. This solves the problem of how some were foreknown from the beginning, and others apparently were not. The truth is that all those who choose to become "in Christ" share all that is true of Him. If He was foreknown, so then are we. It is our choice as to whether we wish to be in Him. And note that as He was foreknown, so were we. That does not require His literal, personal pre-existence, just as it doesn't demand ours.

*But was manifested at the end of times for your sake*- The "foundation of the world" could refer to the Jewish or Mosaic age. For Judaism, in which the readers had grown up, referred to the Sinai covenant as "the foundation of the world". So "the end of times" would then refer to the end of Jewish times, the time of the Mosaic Law, which was ended by the Lord's death. His manifestation would then refer particularly to His death rather than His birth. His death was the supreme manifestation of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb without spot (:19).

1:21 *Who through him are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory*- Nearly everyone in the first century believed in the God-idea. There were very few atheists. Hence the radical nature of statements like 1 Pet. 1:21: we "through him [Jesus] are believers in God", because God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of the Lord inspires faith in the Father to such an extent that anyone whose faith in 'God' is not based on the risen Jesus does not actually count as a believer in God.

*So that your faith and hope might be in God*- The hope / certain expectation which is in view is not simply the existence of God, but of final salvation. That is guaranteed by the Lord's death and resurrection.

1:22- see on 2 Cor. 6:6.

*Seeing you have purified your souls*- This returns to the theme of :2, that the Spirit has sanctified us, purified us. But we must respond by living in practice according to what we are in status; we must allow the operation of God's desire to purify / sanctify us, and the working of His Spirit to that end. Hence they had "purified your souls... through the Spirit".

*In your obedience to the truth*- Peter writes in the RV of "your obedience of the truth unto [issuing in] unfeigned love of the brethren... having been begotten again... of incorruptible seed, through the word of God" (1 Pet. 1:21,22 RV). The purity and truth of the "word of God" - and by this he surely refers to the Gospel message- is what issues in a true love for others, in comparison to the pseudo-love that fills our human experience in this world. Truth leads to true love- that's the message. This is the importance of correct teaching of the word of the Gospel. And yet how often have we used the concept of 'truth' to hate and divide our



brethren...? John's writings reflect many struggles. But in the end they all forge into one ultimate struggle- between light and darkness, love and hatred, truth and error, life and death. Hence the struggle for purity of doctrine becomes parallel with the struggle between love and hatred. Love is therefore and thereby connected with purity of doctrine.

*To sincere love of the brothers-* We obeyed the truth "unto unfeigned love of the brethren... [therefore] see that ye love one another" (1 Pet. 1:22 AV). Our obedience to the truth of Christ placed us in the status of those who unfeignedly love their brethren; but this means, Peter is saying, that we'd better get on and love them in practice.

Jonah 2:9 contains the enigmatic statement that those who "hold to empty faiths" (Heb.) "forsake their own *hesed*". *Hesed* basically refers to the capacity a superior has to show mercy, grace and love to someone in an inferior position. For over 20 years I wondered what Jonah was really getting at. I think I then grasped it- those who hold to empty faiths forego the capacity to show *hesed*, favour to others- the implication being that the result of the one true faith is that we are empowered to show *hesed*, love, favour, grace, mercy, to others. And this ties in perfectly with 1 Pet. 1:22- we obey the truth *unto*, with the result that, we show "unfeigned love of the brethren". This is how and where true doctrine comes to its ultimate term- love of others. Karl Barth put it powerfully: "The best theology would need no advocates: it would prove itself". If each doctrine of the Gospel had its intended outworking in our lives, there would be no need for the explanation of Gospel doctrine; the doctrines would be lived out in our personalities. Perhaps this was why there was so little 'theology', propositional truths or academic doctrine, on the lips of the Lord Jesus. For He was the word of the Gospel made flesh. To quote Barth again: "Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is Himself the way".

*Fervently love one another from the heart-* The experience of the grace which brought about the forgiveness of our sins will make us gentle people, kind hearted, generous, not hard-minded in our judgment of situations; it will make us dedicate ourselves to the work of sharing this superb grace with others through preaching, and will inspire us to work unceasingly to reclaim those who have wandered away from the grace of God, and to build up those who hesitate to fully accept it. As God has reached out into our little world, so we will try to do in the lives of those around us. The end result of obeying the truth is "unfeigned love of the brethren... love (of) one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). "Ye were running well; who did hinder you, that ye should not [keep on] obey the truth?" (Gal. 5:7) suggests that obeying the Truth is not just in baptism; it is an ongoing motivation to keep running the race of practical life in Christ.

1:23- see on Job 22:27,28; Lk. 8:11.

*Having been begotten again-* AV "Being born again". This second begetting was by the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). God has taken the initiative. But we must respond, allowing His movement, and living the life of conscious love, which is the singular fruit of the Spirit. We "love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again...". Love of the brotherhood is in the end the result and guarantee of the new birth. We are asked not to receive God's grace in vain, nor do despite unto the spirit [power] of grace. These phrases surely suggest that the experience of grace is a compulsion to action, which we can resist but ought rather to allow to work in us to bring forth fruit. The [Gospel of the] Kingdom of God and our relation to it now ought to bring forth fruit in us (Mt. 21:43). It isn't just a set of true propositions.

The Greek tense of "begotten again" could imply an ongoing process; thus Peter in :3 speaks of how we have already been born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Christ (a clear reference to baptism), and yet here goes on to say that having obeyed the truth, we must go on in being (continuous tense) born again by the work of God's word (1 Pet. 1:3,23). See on Col. 2:6; Gal. 3:27.

*Not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and endures-* See on :25 *The word of the Lord*. I suggest the "word" here refers to the Lord Jesus. It is He who now "lives and abides for ever".

1:24 *For, All flesh is as grass and all the glory of it as the flower of grass-* We shouldn't see the mortality of man and the true meaning of the Hebrew word *nephesh* as a negative thing that we unfortunately have to tell people who believe their loved ones are alive in Heaven. "The voice" tells Isaiah to cry. "And I said, What shall I cry?" (Is. 40:6 LXX; RVmg.). What was to be the message of Isaiah's Gospel? The voice addresses Isaiah as "O thou that tellest good tidings", and tells him the good news he is to preach. It is that "All flesh is grass... the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever". The reality of man's mortality is the backdrop against which we can see the eternity of God and the offer made to us through His abiding word that we really can escape from our condition. Christian preaching about "man is mortal" need not be bad news. The message can be turned into good news! For it was this message of mortality which prepared the way for men to accept Christ (Is. 40:3-5); the mountains of human pride are made low by this message so that we can accept salvation in Christ. 1 Pet. 1:24 RVmg. quotes these verses and concludes that we are being offered salvation through "the word of the God who liveth for ever" - the Gospel that is prefaced by the message of human mortality. God's eternity and man's mortality are placed side by side- and thus the way is prepared for the wonder of the fact that through "the word" of Jesus, of the Gospel, we the mortal are invited to share in that immortality.

*The grass withers and the flower falls-* The seed of all things produces fruit which cannot abide, no matter how beautiful and pleasing it may appear for a moment. The contrast is with the seed of the Gospel of Jesus, which produces permanent results. The great salvation in Christ is an inheritance which will not fade away, like the flowers (see on :4) and which produces eternal glory (:7), unlike the glory of the flower which fades. The things of the Kingdom and the great, eternal, glorious salvation in Christ are being contrasted with material things- because it was materialism which was the problem faced by the exiled Jewish believers in Turkey to whom Peter was writing.

1:25 *But the word of the Lord endures for ever-* The word of the Lord Jesus is put for the fruit brought forth by it. See on 1:24 *The grass withers*.

*And this is the word of good news which was preached to you-* "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth (accepting the basic doctrine of the Gospel)... see that ye (continue) being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet.1:22-25 AV). Note the continuous tense of "*is*", according to the AV; remembering that Peter is writing to those already converted. The once off act of intercourse and begettal, whereby the seed or sperm initiates new life, is here spoken of in the continuous sense. Similarly, a sower sowing seed is a once-off act, yet the parable has an ongoing application. Human "seed" and begettal is "corruptible" (1 Pet.1:23)- i.e. the offspring does not have the exact character of the person

from whom the seed originated. Yet God's seed is "incorruptible" in that it will eventually result in our being brought forth in the exact image of God after the judgment, when we are fully born of Spirit nature. This is because "the word (seed) of God... liveth and abideth for ever", i.e. God's word can have constant intercourse with us, constantly creating us after the image of our spiritual Father.

The word is to be made flesh in us as it was in the Lord. "The word" in the New Testament often refers to the basic Gospel rather than every inspired word which there is in the whole Bible. But here it specifically refers to the word which is Jesus. "The word of God (a title of Jesus)... the word of the Lord... is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25 RV). It is this word of the basic Gospel which is the "milk of the word" which enables us to "put away therefore all malice... guile... hypocrisies" (1 Pet. 2:1,2). And having spoken of tasting / drinking the word of God (the same figure is in Heb. 6:5), Peter then speaks of tasting the grace of the Lord Jesus (2:3). He is the word of the Gospel made flesh- to taste His Gospel, the word, is to taste of Him.

## CHAPTER 2

*2:1 Therefore, put away all wickedness, deceit, hypocrisies, envies and all evil speaking-* The behaviour of the exiled Jews whom Peter had once baptized in Jerusalem wasn't good. They had allowed the stress of the refugee life to lead them into unspirituality; they had now allowed free operation to the gift of Holy Spirit made available to them at baptism.

“Hypocrisies” recalls how Peter was carried away with the “dissimulation” of the Judaizers (Gal. 2:13), and he uses the same word when he appeals to the brethren to lay aside “all hypocrisies” (1 Pet. 2:1); he was asking them to do what he himself had had to do. He had been a hypocrite, in living the life of legalism within the ecclesia whilst having the knowledge of grace.

In Jeremiah's time, gossiping was associated with 'proceeding from evil to evil' (Jer. 9:3); it is part of a downward spiral of spirituality. Once gossip starts a quarrel, it's like water bursting out of a dam; soon the whole land of Israel will be flooded (Prov. 17:14 NIV). So it's best not to start it, not only for our own sakes, but because of the effect it will have on the rest of the body. Peter likewise points an antithesis between gossiping and receiving "the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:1,2). Real spiritual growth is impossible if we are taken up with gossiping; and this is true on the communal as well as individual level.

*2:2 Be as newborn babes, longing for the spiritual milk which is without deceit-* Peter was writing to those he had baptized many years ago, who had become hardened by this world. He urges them to look back to their conversion, and start again. Hebrews criticizes Jewish converts for needing milk rather than meat, so Peter's exhortation here is not without an element of criticism and regret that they had not matured more. The euphoria of those thousands of baptisms at Pentecost must be considered against how Peter now writes to them, years later.

‘Be babes’ he exhorts, ‘and grow as they do’ (1 Pet. 2:2). The same word occurs in Lk. 18:15 in description of the “infants” whom Peter rebuked. The Lord’s response had been to tell Peter to be like them (Lk. 18:17). And, having been humbled into learning something of a child’s teachableness, a babe’s desire for the sincere milk, Peter now asks others to learn the lesson.

*So that you may grow thereby to salvation-* “Salvation” is being like the Lord, the saved one; we grow into it, as well as being granted it finally. James 1:18 speaks of "the word of truth", the inspired word of the basic Gospel message. But he goes on to appeal for us to be "doers of the word" (James 1:22,23). "The word" must be that of v. 18- the word of the Gospel. He sensed the tendency to accept the word of God as true, to show this by baptism: and yet not to be "doers" of that word. It is in this sense that the word of the Gospel is what we grow by (1 Pet. 2:2 cp. 1:23,25; 2:8; 3:1); by our daily response to the most basic things which we have understood and claim to believe, we will grow spiritually. When we were baptized, we read the simple Biblical statements about baptism and obeyed them. That translation from Bible reading into practice is something which we thenceforward struggle to maintain for the rest of our lives. There is a power in the inspired word, whereby one mind- God's- can penetrate another with no intermediary but a piece of flattened wood pulp, black print on white paper. It's an amazing phenomenon to be part of. Lev Tolstoy in his spiritual autobiography A

*Confession* tells in gripping manner how he read the words of Jesus "Sell everything you have and give to the poor" and then finally overcame all the restraints of his nature to do just that. He freed his serfs, gave away the copyrights to his writings and began to dispose of his huge estate. Words on paper must likewise lead to action in us. The more familiar we become with the text of Scripture by daily reading, the stronger is the temptation to become blasé, and not read the word expecting to be taught something new, expecting to be challenged to change.

2:3- see on Rom. 2:4.

*If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious-* 1 Pet.2:2,3 describes desiring "the sincere milk of the word" as *tasting* the grace of the Lord, through knowing "the word of his grace" (Acts 20:32). Peter may well be alluding to Heb.6:4,5 concerning *tasting* "the Heavenly gift", *tasting* "the good word of God", which parallels being "made partakers of the Holy Spirit". Thus the word of Jesus is connected to the gift of the Spirit, a connection made all the stronger once we realize that the Greek word for "grace" sometimes refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter is quoting here from the LXX of Ps. 34:8, so we can agree with the GNB: "As the scripture says, "You have found out for yourselves how kind the Lord is"". In this case, we have the sense that in our receipt of salvation at the last day, we will have a totally unique and personal experience. We will have found out His grace for ourselves.

2:4 *Come to him as to a living stone-* The contrast is with the dead stones of the temple, which had played such a crucial role in the culture and faith of Peter's Jewish readership. Peter goes on to say that we too are "living stones" (:5); the titles of the Lord Jesus are applied to all of us in Christ.

*Indeed rejected by men but chosen by God and precious-* The Jewish believers had been rejected by the same group in Jerusalem who had rejected the Lord Jesus. And so Peter uses titles of the Lord Jesus [taken from Is. 28:16 LXX] which he has just used about the believers. They too were "chosen by God" (1:2) and were "precious" (1:7). All that is true of Him becomes true of us.

2:5 *You as living stones are being built up-* Even though the Jewish believers being addressed were at a low point in their spiritual growth, the Spirit was seeking to build them up. The wise man builds his house upon the rock of Christ (Mt. 7:26), and yet the Lord Jesus builds His church on the rock of our faith in His resurrection (Mt. 16:18). Our efforts are confirmed by the Lord; this is His way of working by the Spirit. The implication is that the Lord is the builder; in contrast to the builders of the Jewish leadership, who rejected the Lord as the chief corner stone (:7). It may have been a frightening, scary and lonely prospect to be rejected by the 'builders' of Judaism and driven into exile, without any structure of spiritual support and leadership. For the early Christians continued to attend the temple and remained in the synagogues until they were cast out. Peter is urging them to realize that the Lord Himself is their builder, their good shepherd.

*Into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood-* Exile from the temple system would have been a frightening experience for these orthodox Jewish converts. But they were being reminded that *they* are the temple, they are the priesthood. So often, structures we depend upon are removed and we are made to realize that it is for us to do and be what those

structures were for us. Every Israelite was intended to be a priest; they were to be "a Kingdom of priests". The "covenant of my peace" was with both Israel (Is. 54:10) and the priesthood (Mal. 2:5). The same is true of spiritual Israel; "a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). The process of baptism recalls the way in which the priests washed and then embarked on service to the rest of Israel. Christ is the supreme priest; but because we are "in Him", we too have some part in the priesthood. See on Rom. 12:1.

As it was God's intention that Israel were to be a nation of priests to the rest of the world, so the new Israel likewise are to *all* discharge the priestly functions of teaching their brethren (Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:9,10). Under the new covenant, we should *all* teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16). Indeed, God told Israel [unrecorded in the historical records]: "Ye are gods [*elohim*] and all of you are sons of the Most High" (Ps. 82:6 RV). Further, Ps. 96:9 makes the paradigm breaking statement that even the Gentiles could come before Yahweh of Israel in holy, priestly array- they too could aspire to the spirit of priesthood (Ps. 96:9 RVmg.). Moses spoke of how all Israel should pray that God would establish the work of their hands (Ps. 90:17)- but this was in fact his special request for the blessing of Levi, the priestly tribe (Dt. 33:11). Ps. 135:19,20 parallels all Israel with the priestly family: "Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: bless the Lord, O house of Aaron: bless the Lord, O house of Levi: ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord... praise *ye* the Lord". All Israel were to aspire to the spirit of priesthood. Indeed, the Psalms often parallel the house of Aaron (i.e. the priesthood) with the whole nation (Ps. 115:9,10,12; 118:2,3).

*To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ-* Our offerings are acceptable to God by (Gk. *dia*, "in", on account of) Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5); by / by being in Christ we offer to God the sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15). The fact we come unto God directly *dia*, "by", through, on account of the Lord Jesus does not mean that therefore Christ must interpret our every word to God; it cannot mean that in prayer we cannot come directly to the Father. If this were so, the Lord's model prayer would be seriously lacking in its omission of any such clause which reminds us that we are praying to God through the mediation / interpretation of Christ. If English and Greek mean anything, the Lord categorically stated that He does *not* transfer our prayers to God; through Him, as a result of His work, we have a direct approach to God: "Ye shall ask *me* nothing... Ye shall ask [the Father] *in* my name (i.e. because you are located there, in that position / relation): and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:23,26,27). Christ does not pray for us in the sense of offering up our words of request to the Father; He prays for us, according to Rom. 8, of His own freewill, with His own agenda, not ours. The aim of His suffering and Heavenly mediation today, is that He might "bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). This refers to His reconciliation of us to the Father, rather than His offering of our prayers. Because we are in His Name, on account of ("by") Him and His work, we can pray directly to the Father. He does not pray the Father for us.

We are all parts of the same body, branches on the same vine, bricks in the same building; we are all strangers and pilgrims, lacking any rights of a citizen. We are all members of the same priesthood, with equal responsibility to offer up acceptable sacrifice. Don't miss the power of this to New Testament Jewish ears: the special responsibilities of the priests were now applied to *every* believer.

*2:6 Because it is contained in scripture: Look, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, chosen, precious-* The Jewish converts who were now in exile from Jerusalem, excommunicated from the temple, were in fact still in Zion- spiritually. Peter is clearly aware of the sense of

spiritual loneliness which they felt after being cut off from the temple system. They had left their homes to come and live, or retire to, Jerusalem- because the temple was there. Peter had baptized them, and they had been cast out of the temple system and were now refugees in Turkey. But they were the temple and the priesthood- that is the force of his argument.

*And he that believes in him shall not stumble-* The Jewish refugees, cast out of the temple system, perhaps felt they would stumble as a result of being outside the temple structure; and perhaps Peter sensed they were close to doing so. But he urges them to retain their faith in Christ as the true corner stone, who like them had been rejected by Jerusalem Judaism.

2:7- see on Jn. 12:3.

*Therefore, for you that believe he is precious-* The repeated emphasis upon the Lord Jesus being "precious" connects with the preciousness of their faith (1:7). Their faith was precious to the Lord, and He was precious to them. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord.

*But to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone-* The Lord is a stone- either of stumbling, or the chief cornerstone of our faith. Yet the Lord presents a different two options with regard to Him as the stone. We either fall on the stone and are broken; or it falls upon us and grinds us to powder, with full allusion to the stone of Dan. 2:44 which will grind the condemned to powder by the Lord's return (Mt. 21:44). But stumbling over the stone means it is a stone of offence to us. We either stumble upon the Lord, we sin and are broken by it but repent; or else He will condemn us at the last day. It's rather like the parable of the two sons; we are either the prodigal and end up saved, or the self-righteous older brother who ends up outside the Lord's fellowship.

2:8- see on 1 Pet. 5:2.

*A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence-* Looking back, it must have been shameful for Peter to recollect how he had sought to dissuade the Lord from going up to Jerusalem to die there for the world's redemption. At that time the Lord had called him a rock, upon whose declaration of faith he would build his church, and then soon afterwards a stumbling-stone, an offence. Peter combines these two descriptions in styling the Lord "the head(stone) of the corner (upon which the ecclesia would be built), and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" (1 Pet. 2:7,8). There is undoubted allusion to the very titles which the Lord had given Peter. And yet here Peter applies them both to the Lord Jesus, even the "rock of offence". His point perhaps was to show that he saw Christ as manifest in him, and he being "in Christ", *even in his weakness*. Nothing could separate Peter from the love of Christ; and therefore he merges the titles of Christ with those of himself, even when they describe his weakness. This was the unity that was possible between a man and his Lord, and Peter holds it up in inspiration to his readers.

*For being disobedient, they stumble at the word-* But the Lord Jesus is the rock or stone over which they stumble. So "the word" refers to Him, in that attitudes to His word are attitudes to Him. He is the word, made flesh. We cannot claim to love Him if we disregard His word. The "disobedient" here refer to the Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Christ; for the Greek really means to disbelieve. So when Peter later uses the same word in warning his readership about those who are disobedient to the Gospel, or husbands who do not initially obey the word, he has specifically in view Jews who do not believe in Jesus as Christ (3:1; 4:17).

*To which they also were appointed-* This does not just say that the wicked are disobedient; they are *appointed* to this. God therefore had a hand in their disobedience- through confirming them in their conscious rejection of Him. On the other hand, "Whom (God) did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). The predestination was not just to know the Gospel, but to be righteous- to be able to conform our characters to the perfect example of Jesus. Thus "I have chosen you... to bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:16), i.e. spiritual attributes.

2:9 *But you are an elect race-* They who believed in Christ were the true Israel of God, and not those back in Palestine who had rejected and persecuted them.

*A royal priesthood, a holy nation-* God intended Israel to be "a Kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). "All the people of Israel" were the builders of the spiritual house of God, i.e. His people (Acts 4:10,11). All Israel were to lay their hands on the Levites to show that they were truly Israel's representatives (Num. 8:10). When Israel were rejected, they were told that they as a nation could no longer be God's priest (Hos. 4:6). By baptism, we become spiritual Israel; and this idea is relevant to us too. Peter picks up these words in Exodus and applies them to every one of us: "Ye *also* are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5,9). The Lord Jesus is a King-priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:13-18; Ps. 110:4); and through being in Him, we share this position. Through what He achieved for us on the cross, we have been made *now* king-priests, with the future hope of reigning on earth (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Israel were constituted a Kingdom of priests; a whole nation who would preach forth God's ways to those about them. And this designation and commission is applied now to the new Israel (1 Pet. 2:5,9 cp. Ex. 20:5). Males who could not procreate were barred from the congregation (Dt. 23:1), possibly in prototype of how spiritual procreation was to be a vital characteristic of the future Israel.

Israel were called out of Egypt in order to declare among the surrounding nations the character and greatness of Israel's God. In this calling to be a missionary nation they failed miserably (what similarities with the new Israel?). The very reason why we are a "chosen race, a royal priesthood (is) *that* we should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness (cp. Egypt)". Our separation from this world is therefore related to our praise of God. We don't shew forth the knowledge and praise of God to this world by singing to them; but rather by showing in our lives and preaching that we have been separated unto a glorious Kingdom of light. This is the true shewing forth of praise.

*A people for God's own possession, that you may show forth the excellence of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light-* Judaism was therefore "darkness".

2:10 *Who in times past were no people-* The true Israel of God are those who are the baptized seed of Abraham. The very negative language and imagery used here about Judaism and natural Israel was designed to comfort the Jewish refugees who had been rejected by Orthodox Judaism and the "Jerusalem that now is". Paul in Galatians 4 likewise speaks most negatively of the then current Jerusalem.

*But now are the people of God-* After their baptism at the Red Sea, Israel were declared the Kingdom of God by reason of God being their King through their promised obedience to His word (Ex. 19:5,6). They were "saved" (Jude 5) from the power of Egypt (cp.sin). Yet they



had to walk through the wilderness (cp. our probations), behaving according to the responsibilities of being God's Kingdom, and yet still capable of backsliding before they became established as the physical Kingdom in the land. Those very same Abrahamic promises of inheriting the land of Canaan as the centre of the coming Kingdom are made to us through our Red Sea baptism. Abraham lived in the land of promise in his mortal life, but did not of course experience what it would be like in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:9). That he had to look forward to in faith, as do we, his seed. Peter leaves us with no doubt as to the validity of this parallel: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (cp. "a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation", Ex. 19:6), an holy nation, a peculiar (i.e. purchased) people; that you should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness (Egypt) into His marvellous light (cp. the glory at Sinai?). Which in time past were not a people (Kingdom), but are now the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:9,10). Alluding to this same idea, our guardian Angels, speaking on our behalf, welcomed the risen Lord into Heaven with the song "You... have made us unto our God (now) a Kingdom of priests; and we shall (in the full manifestation of that Kingdom) reign on earth" (Rev. 5:10). Hebrews 12 describes our being in Christ in language referring back to God's declaration of Israel as His Kingdom at Sinai (Heb. 12:18,29= Ex. 24:17). See on Acts 7:36.

*Who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy-* Hos. 2:23 is being alluded to. The son of the whore Gomer was adopted by grace by the faithful Israelite Hosea, into his prophetic family. Clearly that child represented the Gentiles. But it also represented Israel. In this beautiful way, Jew and Gentile are united by grace within God's family.

*2:11 Beloved, I urge you as temporary residents and pilgrims-* Language directly relevant to their position as refugees in exile from Jerusalem, but also reminding them that thereby they were in fellowship with Abraham, father of the faithful, and were thus his true seed.

*To abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul-* It could seem that the exiled Jewish Christians were slipping away into fleshly lusts. Such lusts war against the soul in that the Christ-man within us is our real being, our true self. But this comes under attack if we give in to fleshly lusts. Such internal warfare is not therefore how things should be. Gal. 5:17,18 likewise speaks as if this kind of internal lusting is not how things should be in those led of the Spirit: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary to each other, so that you cannot do the things you should. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law". Their soul, their real person, was the spirit, the spirit person formed in them, potentially, by the work of the spirit. I take this to be a criticism of how things were with the Galatian believers, rather than a general statement of how things are for all those possessing human nature.

*2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable-* It would seem that the cash strapped exiles were not behaving as honestly as they might as they lived amongst the Gentiles of Turkey.

*So that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God-* Peter, like Paul, seems to have expected the Lord's coming very soon. He reasons that the Gentiles observing them may be persuaded by their good deeds, so that when Christ comes, they would glorify God and accept the Lord then. This principle is valuable for us in this age.

*On the day of visitation-* The “day of visitation” is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through.

*2:13 Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake-* They were to consider the Gentile rulers as the Lord; just as the obedience of slaves to their masters was reckoned as serving the Lord, so submitting to rulers would likewise be reckoned as submission to the Lord.

*Whether to the king, as supreme leader-* Maybe an allusion to Caesar, but he is called “the king” rather than the emperor because Peter wants us to figure that the real king is the Lord Jesus. Peter asks his sheep: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man... unto governors... as free... honour all men” (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn’t need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for baptism. Peter’s readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn.

*2:14 Or to governors as those sent by him to punish evil-doers and for the praise of those that do well-* This is hard to understand when not all civil leaders in history have done this; and it was soon not true at all in the Roman empire. But “the king” could refer to the Lord Jesus, and the governors could refer to church elders. But the more comfortable reading is that at that time and place Peter is writing about, the governors were as stated, and should be obeyed. This would then go to show that the NT letters are not always to be read as global statements for all time, but are specific to a time and place in the commands they give.

*2:15 For so is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-* As in Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus (e.g. Tit. 2:8), there is great concern that the Lord's Name should not be brought into dishonour in a situation where the believers were surrounded by critics eager to slander them.

*2:16 As free and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God-* Here again we see Peter influenced by the letter to the Romans, which is understandable if he had been in Rome when the letter arrived (5:13). We are free and yet slaves of God. That freedom from law was it seems leading them into sin; hence the need for the appeal not to continue in sin because grace abounds. The Gentile Galatians, who were in the same geographical area as these Jewish exiles, had to be warned likewise not to use their freedom in Christ as an excuse for sin (Gal. 5:13). So this was clearly a problem in the churches of that area.

*2:17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king-* “The King” could refer to the Lord Jesus. See on :13. But it may be an allusion to the Lord's comment that His people were to render to Caesar what was Caesar's. For he was “the king” of the Roman empire. The Jews strongly disliked this and had a tendency not to honour him, and Peter is

asking them to act outside of their cultural inclination- again a principle which is valid for all time. These calls to respect others are psychologically understandable- for exiled refugees would have a tendency to bitterness and therefore disrespect of others.

2:18 *Servants, be in subjection to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the harsh-* I have argued that Peter is writing to those he had baptized on Pentecost, who had now been scattered from Jerusalem by Jewish persecution of the church. Perhaps some of them were wealthy and had slaves; and some of those masters were "harsh". Or perhaps some of the exiles were so poor that they had ended up selling themselves into slavery, and detested them. Yet they are exhorted to live in a spirit of respect to all people, as stated in :17. Human beings should be respected, whoever they are and whoever you are in relation to them, even if they are bad- because they too are made in the image of God.

2:19 *For it is commendable if because of conscience toward God one endures grief - suffering unjustly-* For the sake of our conscience, we should endure persecution *after the pattern of Christ on the cross* (1 Pet. 2:19-22). He did not hang there fearing a bad conscience; it was his clear, sinless conscience before God which motivated him to endure. See on 1 Jn. 3:18. "Commendable" is *charis*, "grace" or "gift". In this case, we could look upon unjust suffering as a gift. In the context of :18, the reference would be to slaves who refused to be obedient to their masters for the sake of their conscience toward God. Masters owned their slaves and used their bodies just as they wished; it would be understandable if Christian slaves refused to be obedient, and refused to accept that their minds and bodies belonged to an earthly master. For they knew they were God's slaves (:16).

2:20 *For what glory is it, if, when you sin and are beaten, you shall take it patiently?*- The reference is to Christian slaves being beaten by their masters (:18). "Beaten" is the s.w. in Mt. 26:67 about Christ being struck with a fist- something Peter would have probably watched out of the corner of his eye from where he was.

*But if when you do well, and suffer, you shall take it patiently-* By a slave refusing to obey the master's commands to do sinful things. See on :19.

*This is acceptable with God-* The parallel is with the reference to "glory" in the first half of the verse. Those who refused to be obedient to their master's sinful demands will be praised for this in glory when they are accepted at the last day with God. Those slaves would be glorified for their quiet words of refusal in a villa in southern Turkey, and their endurance of a beating for it in the garden shed...

2:21- see on Jn. 21:19.

*For this were you called-* The letter begins with a reference to our calling, and the way the Spirit strengthens us to follow that calling to its final end in salvation at the last day. It is interesting to note the changes of pronouns in 1 Pet. 2:20 ff: "Hereunto were *ye* called: because Christ also suffered for *you*, leaving *you* an example, that *ye* should follow his steps... who his own self bare *our* sins... that *we* having died to sin, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes *ye* were healed". In the context, Peter is speaking about the need for slaves to live out the death and life of Christ; but when he comes to speak of the Lord's death for sin, he cannot but include himself as a sinner and a beneficiary in the cross.

In Peter's final maturity, his mind was full of the cross. His letters and preaching were full of allusion to Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering servant (especially Acts 3:13,26; 4:25-30; 1 Pet. 2:21 ff.); he and Philip are the only preachers to explicitly make this connection. It could be that Peter was so impressed by the way the Lord washed his feet that his mind was evermore transfixed with this image and the Biblical allusions behind it. And note that initially, Peter had totally failed to grasp that Jesus was indeed "the servant". Every allusion he makes to Jesus as the servant was a reflection of his recognition of his earlier failure to perceive it.

*Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example-* The brutal beating of the Christian slave woman in the garden shed of a villa in southern Turkey connected her directly with the Lord's sufferings. And she would share in His resurrection. His cross and experience was such that we can find direct connection with Him there, through our experiences of aspects of His sufferings in our own. Truly He was our representative.

*That you should follow His steps-* The beating of the Christian slaves was to be connected with the Lord's beating; and after that, He walked to Golgotha. And the slaves were to follow even further- in His steps there.

*2:22 He did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth-* Through being justified, any repentant sinner will then have the characteristics of Christ, in God's sight. In Christ there was no guile, as there was not in David (or any other believer) after the justification of forgiveness (Ps. 32:2). The Lord's trial attempted to find evidence that He had spoken bad words during His ministry, but no evidence was found. "Found" translates a legal word, s.w. Mt. 26:60; Jn. 18:38; 19:4,6 concerning Christ's trial, parts of which Peter would have seen or heard first hand. And yet it was ultimately God's judgment which found no deceit in the Lord's mouth- note how never deceiving, being totally honest, is paralleled with not sinning. Sin is a lie, the devil [sin] is a false accuser. All sin is a form of dishonesty.

*2:23 Who, when he was insulted, did not retaliate with insults, when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to Him that judges righteously-* a reference to the Lord's final words on the cross: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit"? We likewise should follow that example in our dying with Him, in that we too "commit the keeping of [our] souls to him in well doing" (4:19). See on Mt. 27:26. At the Lord's death, the Father judged both His Son's righteousness and the world's rejection of it at that time. See on Jn. 12:42; 19:13,37. It's as if the Father judged the world as unworthy and His Son as worthy in the time of the Lord's death.

2:24- see on Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 5:1.

*Whom himself bore our sins-* "Who his own self bare our sins in his body up on to the tree" (2:24 RVmg.) suggests the watching Peter reflecting, as the Lord's body was lifted up vertical, that his sins of denial and pride were somehow with his Lord, being lifted up by Him.

*In his body upon the tree-* An unusual term for the cross (he also uses it in Acts 5:30; 10:39).

Perhaps because he saw the crucifixion (5:1) and was struck by the way the Lord carried a piece of a tree and was impaled upon it. He carried our sins in His own self (AV), in His body. I take this to mean that He was totally identified with us in our sinfulness; not that our sins were part of His body in some metaphysical sense. His physical body was like ours; there was nothing unique in that body of itself which carried our sins. The language speaks of identity rather than anything else.

*That we, having died to sin, might live to righteousness-* A reference to baptism, our identity with Him in response to His identification with us. The Lord died as He did so that we might live righteously (1 Pet. 2:24); the account of the crucifixion is written as it is so that we might be inspired to a true faith (Jn. 19:35). He "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that *we might die to sin* [Gk.] and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). He died for our sins, there all our weakness met their death in His death- so close was the association between Him and our sins. Our response to that is to put those sins to death in *our* bodies, as He put them to death in His on the tree. He carried our sins "*that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes* (Gk. weals- Peter saw them) *ye were healed*" (1 Pet. 2:24). Because of the suffering entailed in the putting to death of our sins by the Lord's cross, we should respond in likewise mortifying them. Because He died, so should we. We recognize that principle in baptism and are to continue living it out.

*By whose stripes you were healed-* Gk. 'weals', the swollen up bruises, which Peter would have seen when Christ turned and looked at him through blackened eyes (after the beating of Mt. 26:67). See on Mk. 15:15.

2:25 - see on Lk. 15:4-6; Acts 2:39; 3:19.

*For you were going astray like sheep-* Peter is clearly concerned that they were going astray, but he now writes as if they had stabilized and returned. He spoke of his hopes for them as if they had happened. Or perhaps the reference is to how their lives in Judaism had in fact been no better than sheep going astray.

*But are now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls-* The same word for "converted". Peter reminds his sheep of how they are now "returned" (s.w. 'converted') to the Lord Jesus, just as he had been. His experience of the Lord's gracious spirit inspired him. Time and again in his letters he alludes to his own weaknesses in order to inspire his flock.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *In like manner*- Just as the Jewish Christian slaves were to be subject even to bad masters, so that principle continues in family life.

*You wives be in subjection to your husbands*- As slaves were to be subject even to bad masters, likewise wives to, presumably, bad husbands, on the principle of "as unto the Lord". This is how slaves have just been asked to be in subjection to bad masters. The women were converts from Jewish orthodoxy; perhaps their husbands had now left the faith due to the persecution or being caught up with the worldly stress of being refugees in Turkey. But :7 speaks of "husbands" as if believing husbands are in view; Peter is therefore addressing the situation of sisters whose believing husbands are not believing and behaving as they ought to.

The church is *subject* to Christ, as wives are to their husbands (1 Pet. 3:1). Yet because the wife too represents the body of Christ, all of us are to be subject to each other (1 Pet. 5:5). See on Eph. 5:31.

*That, even if any do not obey the word*- Peter has used this word for 'disobedience' in reference to Jews who refuse to obey the Gospel of Jesus- see on 2:7,8. So their husbands were Jews who now didn't believe in Jesus as Messiah. Or perhaps they never had done, and had had to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution of their Christian wives.

*They may without the word be gained by the behaviour of their wives*- But is not the word of the Gospel what ultimately wins converts to Christ? It is, but that word must be made flesh in persons, and it is therefore their witness to that word in life lived which is equally the preaching of the word to a person. This statement is disproof of extreme Biblicism, whereby it is held that the word alone is all sufficient to save someone.

3:2 *Seeing your chaste behaviour coupled with fear*- This continues the connection between wives and slaves in difficult domestic situations; for the slaves were to likewise be subject to their masters with "fear" or respect (2:18). The respect for persons, mixed with a good way of life, was intended to be a powerful witness to the unbeliever.

3:3 *Whose adorning, let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel*- 'Not A but B' doesn't necessarily have to mean 'Not A at all'. Such a grammatical construction is common in several languages. The idea is that they were to focus upon internal beauty far more than upon external beauty. The idea of adorning for a husband is used approvingly elsewhere in the Bible.

3:4- see on Lk. 24:39; Rom. 7:22; 1 Cor. 2:15.

*But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit*- This is not corruptible, surely alluding to the description of our spiritual treasures as eternally lasting in Heaven, where there is no corruption (Mt. 6:19,20). Our future inheritance is described by Peter as "incorruptible" (1 Pet. 1:4), yet he also speaks of God's word which creates the new man, as also being "incorruptible" (1 Pet. 1:23), as is the hidden man which it develops (1 Pet. 3:4). This teaches us that the new man created within us here and now by the action of the word, is in fact strongly related to the future "incorruptible" inheritance we will receive at the second coming. And yet our spirit is incorruptible- although we die, our spirit

will continue eternally, in the sense that who we are now in spirit, by personality, is who we shall eternally be. This demonstrates the importance of character and spiritual mindedness.

*Which is in the sight of God of great value-* Just as our faith is so precious to Him (1:7). Those exiled from the temple needed to remember that their personal spirituality was so intensely noticed by the God of Heaven.

*3:5 For after this manner, in the past, the holy women who trusted in God also made themselves beautiful by submitting to their husbands-* Submission is a real theme with Peter (2:13; 3:1,22; 5:5). Perhaps he had struggled with this idea himself. The Jewish exiles would have struggled to submit themselves to the situations they found themselves in.

*3:6 As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord-* The way in which God chooses the good side of Sarah and recognizes it for what it is can be seen even more finely in 1 Pet. 3:4-6. Here sisters are bidden follow Sarah's example of

1. Having a meek and quiet spirit
2. Not outwardly adorning herself
3. Obeying Abraham
4. And calling him her "Lord".

It can be shown that the Spirit in Peter is adopting an extremely positive reading of Sarah.

1. She isn't revealed as having a meek and quiet spirit at all; but presumably, God saw that underneath her anger and bitterness there was a meekness and quietness, perhaps especially seen as she grew older.

2,3. Concerning not outwardly "adorning", the Greek text is alluding to the Septuagint of Gen. 20:16, which says that Abimelech told Sarah that he had given Abraham many silver pieces "that these may therefore be for thee to adorn thy countenance". Abimelech is speaking sarcastically (note how he calls Abraham "thy brother", referring to Sarah and Abraham's family relationship). It was a custom for married women to wear their silver pieces on their face (cp. Lk. 15:8). Presumably she had taken these off, in order to appear single and sexually available. Abimelech is saying: "I've given your so-called 'brother' Abraham 1000 silver pieces, so just make sure you wear them in future and don't lead any more men into sin". And what does the Spirit comment? "Thus she was reproved" (Gen. 20:16). Her willingness to pretend she was single and not refusing the sexual advances of Abimelech can only be seen in a negative light from the Genesis record. She lacked continued faith in the promises of a seed, and she disregarded God's marriage principles for the sake of an all too convenient 'obedience' to her husband. It may have been that she regarded her inability to have children as partly his fault (cp. the deadness of Abraham's body, Rom. 4:19). The thing is, she had already shown enough faith to conceive (Heb. 11:11), and presumably the effect of this was seen in the physical rejuvenation of her body, which made her so attractive to men, although she was 90 years old. Both Sarah and Abraham had shown faith, she was living with her own body as the constant reminder of God's faithfulness, and yet in the incident with Abimelech she wavered and had to be reproved. Yet she is seen in a positive light by the Spirit; her lack of wearing ornaments, even though it was to show she was single, is commended; as is her obedience to her husband, even though she was reproved for this. The point is, like all of us, her motives were probably

mixed. She did want to be truly obedient to Abraham, she did want to have a meek spirit rather than outward adorning. Her wrong motives surfaced, and were rebuked. But God saw deep inside her heart, and saw the good motives, and drags them out and holds them up as an example.

4. Sarah is commended for calling Abraham her "Lord" (1 Pet. 3:6). She is recorded as doing this in one place only: "Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12). She doubted God's promise; she is rebuked for this by the Angel. Yet in doing so, when she came to think of Abraham, in her heart she called him "my lord". So in the midst of her lack of faith in one respect, she also had a commendable attitude to Abraham. All this, don't forget, was going on "within herself". God searched her thoughts, He saw her wrong attitudes there deep in her heart, and He saw what was commendable there too; and through Peter He drags this out and reveals it to us all as an inspiration. See on Gal. 4:30; Heb. 11:11.

*Whose children you now are, if you do well-* Peter was writing to Jewish believers. But his point is that they were only the true descendants of Abraham and Sarah if they acted and believed as they had. Whilst this was quite confronting for Jewish believers to be reminded of this, in this context it was comforting; for those back in Jerusalem who had driven them into exile were not in fact the children of Abraham and Sarah. Paul makes the same point in writing to the Galatians, the same area where Peter's audience were located. He says that orthodox Judaism is the offspring of Hagar and not Sarah.

*And are not put in fear by any terror-* Perhaps an allusion to how Abram and Sarai lied about their marital status.

*3:7 You husbands, in like manner-* The "manner" refers to submitting to the other just spoken about. For Peter will go on to appeal to all to be subject to each other (5:5).

*Live with your wife with understanding-* This refers to having the wisdom to submit and be sensitive to each other.

*Giving honour to the woman as to the weaker vessel-* To honour women for the sake of the fact they were weaker than men was unheard of in the ancient world. Women were dishonoured exactly because they were physically weaker. This was radical, counter cultural stuff- just as radical as the call of the Gospel in our age.

*As being also joint-heirs of the grace of life-* Peter describes sisters as 'joint-heirs' with their husbands, implying "full religious equality with man- a thought impossible for Judaism". But the grammar really suggests that they were both joint-heirs. They were "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). But they were both joint-heirs. Because they were both connected to Christ, they ought to therefore be with each other. Husbands and wives are "*heirs together*" just as the whole church are "heirs together" through being one in Christ (Gal. 3:29; Eph. 3:6). See on 1 Pet. 3:1. "The grace of life" may refer to the gift of life in the Spirit which is received now, and comes to full term in the eternal life of the Kingdom age.

*That your prayers are not impeded-* 1 Pet. 3:7 gives an unexpected reason for appealing for husbands and wives to get along with each other: that your prayers be not hindered. So important was prayer in the thinking of Peter. Comparing ourselves with the first century



community, it seems to me that we simply don't give prayer the place of importance which they did. 1 Tim 2:1 reflects *their* balance: "I exhort therefore, that, *first of all* [the Greek implies 'most importantly' rather than just being first in a list], supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men". Marital strife results in prayers being "impeded", the same word translated 'hewn down' (Mt. 7:19) in a judgment day context. The evidence that the experience of answered prayer is an indicator of God's pleasure with us is quite compelling.

The way Paul talks of how in 'marriage', the man represents Christ and the woman the church, helping each other towards salvation, would indicate that he presumed marriage was only relevant to believers; Christian marriage seems to be the only model of marriage he assumes. Here Peter speaks of husband and wife praying together (1 Pet. 3:7); he too assumed marriage in the Faith as the only model of marriage.

3:8 *Finally, all of you, be likeminded, compassionate, loving as brothers-* Unity is not uniformity. This is not a call to have identical positions on everything. Rather is it similar to Phil. 2:5, where we are asked to have the mind of Christ. The one mind we should have is the mind of Christ. This is what binds believers together in spiritual experience, rather than an on paper agreement about theology.

*Sensitive, humble-* Husbands were to likewise live sensitively with their wives (:7). The principles regarding marital relationships are to be practiced within the wider community of believers.

3:9 *Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but instead give blessing-* To give blessing to those who sin against us is exactly what God did to us; for the Gospel is all about blessing, just as was first preached to Abraham.

*For this were you called, that you should inherit a blessing-* Peter opened the letter by saying that believers have been called from the beginning, and God's Spirit has been tirelessly at work down the ages preparing *us* for the moment when we respond to the call and we are given the blessings of the Gospel, which shall finally be revealed at the last day. We should respond to this by blessing those who sin against us.

3:10 *For he that would love life and see good days-* The "good days" are those of the Kingdom to come; if we love the idea of the life eternal, then we must live now as we shall eternally live. For the Gospel gives us eternal life now in that we can live now as we shall eternally live, as John's Gospel points out. Matthew tends to put it another way; the parables of the Kingdom refer to life lived now, which is the Kingdom life. The quotation here in 3:10-12 is from Ps. 34:12-16 LXX, but with variations- an example of how inspired writers quote the Old Testament but change various details to be relevant to their theme or audience.

*Let him restrain his tongue from evil and restrain his lips so they speak no lies-* But how in practice to "restrain" the tongue? We lack the iron will to do so, in many cases. Iron will, steel in the soul, is surely not the way to spirituality. The same word is used in 4:1: "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind. For he that has suffered in the flesh has *ceased* from sin". The Lord Jesus suffered and died. If we identify with His death, in baptism and an ongoing commitment to let His death be our pattern, then we will be counted as in Him, and will naturally seek to live according to that status. And His Spirit will help our efforts. This is the way to cease or restrain from sin, such

as speaking lies. Note the parallel between "evil" and "lies". Lying is evil. Dishonesty is at the heart of all sin.

3:11 *And let him turn away from evil and do good-* To turn away or "eschew" (AV) evil recalls Job (Job 1:1). It seems that the Jewish brethren had fallen quite seriously; and yet in 2:25 Peter says that they had been going astray, but had now returned. But here in chapter 3 it seems clear that they were still far from having turned back. We conclude therefore that 2:25 is Peter's positive desire that they should turn away from evil and turn back to the Lord Jesus. But he thinks of them as already having done so.

*Let him seek peace and pursue it-* Doing good is for Peter epitomized in seeking peace, both with God and with others. He surely has in mind the Lord's special blessing for "the peacemakers".

3:12 *For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil-* The eyes and ears of the Lord are contrasted to His *face* which is "against them that do evil". Eyes and ears are part of a face. The point may be that the Lord is highly sensitive to the prayers of the righteous; but that deep sensitivity is not for the wicked, but His general 'face' is against them. We cannot always pray, and some cannot verbalize things well. This doesn't mean that their prayers are not heard. The Lord's eyes and ears are paralleled here. He sees their situations as prayers which He hears. Just as He 'heard' the cry of Abel's blood, or the cries of workers who weren't paid for their work in James 5.

3:13 *And who is he that will harm you, if you be zealous for what is good?-* There are many examples of where zeal for good results in being harmed. So Peter is writing here [as in many of the NT epistles] about a particular set of circumstances at a specific time. It would seem that the Jewish Christians were getting in trouble with the law for doing "evil", perhaps because of their desire for money. At that time and place, they need not have feared trouble with the authorities- unless they were doing wrong, which it seems they were.

3:14 *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled-* As with the slaves of chapter 2, we get the impression some were suffering for their sins, and others for their righteousness. The connection with the slave passage in 2:18-20 is significant in that Peter is demonstrating that the same principles apply to all in the church; just as submission of wife to husband in 3:1 is actually to be practiced by all members of the church to one another in 5:5. The practical application of common spiritual principles is what brings unity in practice within the church, whether we are slave or master, male or female, or Jew or Gentile. Note that the same categories are in view when Paul teaches that baptism into Christ eclipses all these category distinctions (Gal. 3:27-29).

3:15 *But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord-* Knowing and having Christ as Lord of our hearts will practically enable us to overcome tribulation, and will lead to a suitably humble witness in response. Peter began in 1:2 by speaking of how the Spirit sanctifies us; but in our hearts or spirit we must consciously act to have Christ as Lord.

From where do we get the motivation from for loyalty to Christ? I'd suggest that it comes from first of all realizing, on a theological level, the greatness of Christ. He is now Lord of

Heaven and earth, all power has been given unto him, He is the "Prince of the Kings of the earth". Those early brethren who had seen the Lord in His humanity really appreciated this. Thus "Yahweh of hosts, him shall you sanctify" (Is. 8:13 LXX) is applied by Peter to the Lord Jesus, whom we should sanctify (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul speaks about "the Lord" as if we all know who he refers to; *the* Lord, the one and only Lord, the exalted Lord Jesus. This especially comes out in his breaking of bread passage in 1 Cor. 11:23-29. Such is the supremacy of Christ that "We cannot lift Christ too high" as Robert Roberts expressed it. If we appreciate the extent and height of His Lordship and exaltation, we will see the extent to which our minds should be dominated by Him. Our very consciousness should beat with His spirit, His mind. We are told that He should *live in our hearts*; for us, He should be the alpha and omega (Rev. 1:11). The confession of faith before baptism is summarized, in its quintessence, as confessing with the mouth Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9 RV). All the doctrines a candidate must know beforehand are summarized in this.

Because Christ is Lord of all, we must preach Him to all, even if like Peter we would rather not preach to them. This was the motivational power and reality of Christ's universal Lordship for Peter (Acts 10:36). The same link between Christ's Lordship and witness is found in Phil. 2:10 and 1 Pet. 3:15 (which alludes Is. 8:13- Yahweh of Hosts, of many ones, becomes manifest now in the Lord Jesus). The ascended Christ was highly exalted and given the Name above every Name, so that for those who believed this, they would bow in service at the Name of Jesus. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3).

*Always ready to give answer to every man that asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear-* They were to be ready always to give an answer to those who ask, albeit with fear; exactly what Peter failed to do on the night of the denials. He continually alludes to his own weakness. The hope within is "Christ as Lord" who is sanctified within our hearts. He is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). Christ within us is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Our hope is therefore primarily about eternal relationship with Him; the environment where we shall enjoy that Hope is the Kingdom of God on earth, but the essence is the eternal relationship with Him.

In our suffering for righteousness' sake at the hands of the world, we must "give an answer (s.w. 'a defence, clearing of oneself)... a reason (*logos* , cp. Mt. 12:36)... with meekness and fear... having a good conscience... let him not be *ashamed* " (1 Pet. 3:15,16; 4:16). This is all judgment seat language. And yet we must go through this now in our confrontations with the world. The trials of our faith are like fire which purifies us (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). And yet this is the language of the last judgment (Mal. 3:1,2). In our response to trials, we have the outcome of our judgment. We must rejoice *now* in our tribulations with the same joy which we will

have when we are accepted by the Lord at the last day (1 Pet. 4:13). Job felt that his calamities were God entering into judgment with him (Job 14:3). If we react properly to trials, we thereby receive now "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). Thus the question of the degree to which we now are 'saved' is connected with the fact that to some degree, the judgment process is also going on now.

Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet.

3:16- see on 1 Jn. 3:18.

*Having a good conscience, that, when you are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ-* Are slanderers really put to shame now by our good living? The putting to shame of the wicked is at the final judgment. The Greek phrase translated "When" might better be rendered 'In which...' or 'In that which'. At the day of judgment, it will be demonstrated that actually it was the slanderers who were guilty of the things they were accusing the believers of. And they will be put to shame at the last day for that. It is psychologically true and observable that slanderers will often accuse others of doing exactly that which they are doing. That is the principle of transference; they realize their sins, subconsciously, and know they should be punished for them. So they transfer those sins onto others, e.g. by slander, and seek to get them punished for those sins.

3:17 *For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that you suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing-* see on :14. Suffering according to the will of God is an idea picked up again in 4:19. We can take comfort that any suffering is not outside the will of God. There is no satan out there causing it.

3:18- see on 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 5:1.

*Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit-* This could well have been written by Peter with a glance back at the way that after his denials, he the unjust went to the crucifixion scene and reflected just this. When in 5:1 he comments that he witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he could be saying that therefore these thoughts were his thoughts as he witnessed it: the just suffering for him the unjust, to bring him back to God.

Do we seek strength to endure unjust treatment and the grace to submit cheerfully to the loss of what we feel is rightfully ours? Be it discrimination in the workplace, persecution from the Government, perceived abuse or degradation by our partner or family...? Let the cross be our endless inspiration: "For it is better, if the will of God be so [a reference to the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane being our struggle], that ye suffer for well doing... *for* Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:17,18). Remember how under persecution, the faithful love not their lives unto death because of their experience of the blood of the lamb shed for them (Rev. 12:11).

Eph. 2:18 speaks of how "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father". This access is not only in the moments of time we designate for prayer. Christ suffered for us and obtained our forgiveness, "that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18), and we are in that position now, all the time, not just when we pray. Being in this position means that our Spirit, the essence of our spirituality, our deepest spiritual desires, are transferred to the Father by the Son.

3:19- see on Acts 3:26; Acts 3:34.

*In which also-* We seek to understand how Christ could preach in his spirit. He was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in [Gk. 'through, on account of'] the spirit". The Lord was raised "according to the spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4). Why was Christ resurrected? Because of His sinless life and character, i.e. His "spirit" of a holy life. In this lies the connection between the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus. He was raised by the Father because of His spirit of holiness, his holy spirit of life. We too will be raised to eternal life on account of our spirit of life which we are now developing: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). This passage shows that the spirit of Christ is the same spirit that is to dwell in us. This doesn't mean we are disembodied spirits, but rather that our way / spirit of life must be that of Jesus. 1 Pet. 4:1 makes the same point – we are to arm ourselves with the same mind / spirit that was in Christ as He suffered on the cross. If our Spirit and that of Christ coincide and are one, then we have the witness that we are truly God's children (Rom. 8:16). It was through *this* same spirit that Christ witnessed to imprisoned humanity, especially at the time of Noah, as Peter shows. The spirit of Christ was in all the prophets, and this was the essence of their witness. "The testimony [preaching] of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" in the sense that the preaching of the prophets was in essence the preaching of Jesus insofar as they had His Spirit in their message.

There is an undoubted theme throughout 1 Peter 3 and 4 of the opposition between the "flesh" (that which is external, the appearance of things) and the "spirit", that which is internal, which is of God.

Being dead to sins	Should live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24)
Not the outward adorning	But the hidden man...a quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:3,4)
Put to death in the flesh	But quickened by the spirit (1 Pet. 3:18)
Baptism is not a washing of the flesh	But the answer of a good conscience / spirit (1 Pet. 3:21)
Don't live in the flesh	But to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2)
Judged by men in the flesh [outwardly]	Live to God in the spirit (1 Pet. 4:6)

The spirit by which Jesus was quickened is thus paralleled with our spirit of living to God, a quiet spirit, a life of righteousness, of good conscience etc. His Spirit is to be our spirit – we are to be of the "same mind / spirit" with Him, sharing the mind which He had especially

during His time of dying (1 Pet. 4:1). And this is exactly the point of Phil. 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” at the time of His death. Notice that the Spirit of Jesus is epitomized by the mindset which He displayed during His death. It is this very mind / spirit which is to be in us. It is therefore in this sense that *through His death* the Lord Jesus preached ‘in spirit’ to those whom He had never met.

In this sense, it was the spiritually minded lifestyle of Noah which was his witness to the world of his day. Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:19 that Christ through His Spirit preached to the people of Noah’s day. In 2 Pet. 2:5 he says that Noah was a preacher of, or [Gk.] ‘by’ righteousness to the people around him. Yet in 1 Pet. 3:19 Peter says that Christ preached to those same people through His Spirit. The resolution surely is that although Noah had never met the Lord Jesus, he lived according to the same Godly spirit as did Jesus; and this was his witness to his world. There is ultimately only one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). The same spirit of holiness which was in Jesus was likewise thus in Noah. “The Spirit”, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are all equated in Rom. 8:9.

*He went-* Firstly, we need to remove any misunderstanding which arises from the phrase “he went”. Contemporary Greek literature often used such expressions in a redundant sense. Eph. 2:17 speaks of the Lord Jesus ‘coming’ and preaching peace to us. But this doesn’t mean that He Himself in person came up to us and preached. Indeed, the language of going, coming or moving is often used in relation to the preaching of a person – e.g. Mt. 9:13: “*but go and learn what that meaneth*”. The Lord didn’t intend that they literally went away somewhere. Likewise Dan. 12:4 and Hab. 2:2 bid those who understand God’s word to “run” – not literally, but in response to the word preached. God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He ‘preaches’ to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to “go, tell Ebed-melech...” a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn’t have literally left prison to do so – but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord’s word has as it were experienced the Lord ‘going’ to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could ‘go’ to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time.

*And preached to the spirits in prison-* The Lord Himself quoted Is. 61:1 about Himself: He proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. But this passage is evidently behind Peter’s assertion that after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus preached to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:18,19). His resurrection was the basis of His command to go into all the world and preach the word; and thereby His preachers went out to do and continue the work which He personally had done.

Biblically, a man or woman is identified with their spirit in the sense of their mind or way of life. Heb. 12:23 speaks of the spirits of just men, with whom the believer ought to associate. This means that we ought to identify ourselves with the way of life, the spirit of life, of “just men” of the past. God is “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22; 27:16) in the sense that He is the God of all humanity. So “spirits in prison” can refer to people who, in their spiritual lives, are imprisoned. Immediately the mind goes to Is. 42:2,7, which in speaking of the preaching of Jesus, prophecies that He would release the spiritually imprisoned – not so much by direct didactic teaching, but by the spirit of His personality and example. So the “prison” is simply the prison of the human mind, which the mental example of Jesus can open up.

We obviously ask *why* ordinary people should be described in this passage as “spirits”. The context is speaking of the witness of Jesus to people through His Spirit or way of life as manifested in His people. The *spirit* within His people appeals to the imprisoned *spirit* or heart / mind of their audience. We appeal to the *heart*, the spirit, by our witness – not merely to the intellect. The spirit of Christ within us appeals to the imprisoned spirit within others.

The “spirits in prison” were once [“aforetime”] disobedient (1 Pet. 3:20). The same two Greek words translated “aforetime” and “disobedient” occur in Rom. 11:30 about all of us, who “in times past [s.w. “aforetime”] have not believed [s.w. “disobedient”]. This is surely one of the many times when Peter’s phrasing is so similar to Paul’s that he is surely alluding to him; and thus Peter is making the point that although the witness of the spirit of Christ was, in his context, specifically to Noah’s generation, it is also the witness which we all receive from those with the spirit of Christ at any time. Peter has just spoken of how disobedient [s.w.] people are converted by the witness of a spiritual, Christ-centred way of life (1 Pet. 3:1). Peter is writing against a background of “the last days”, of which Noah’s generation is a clear type. Just as they were witnessed to by the spirit of Christ in Noah, so will the generation of the last days have a like witness. God’s patience “waited” in Noah’s time; the Greek implies to wait *for* something. It is also translated “expect”. God was waiting for and expecting a response from Noah’s witness; and in this we see the essential hopefulness of God. He hoped against hope for response; and none came. The Spirit of Christ and of God has always been His witness to all generations. The question arises as to why Peter chose to especially focus upon the example of Noah out of all the generations. Perhaps this was because Noah’s generation is a type of the last days, in which Peter believed he was living. And therefore this entire study has a great relevance to our day; for the crucial witness of the last days is through the spirit of Christ in us witnessing to an increasingly self-imprisoned world.

3:20- see on Mt. 24:48.

*That previously were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was prepared. Wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water-* Peter likens the ark in the time of Noah to Christ, showing that as the ark saved Noah and his family from the judgment that came upon sinners, so baptism into Christ will save believers from eternal death (1 Pet. 3:20,21). Noah entering into the ark is likened to our entering into Christ through baptism. All those outside the ark were destroyed by the flood; standing near the ark or being a friend of Noah was quite irrelevant. The only way of salvation is, and was, to be inside the Christ/ark. It is evident that the second coming, which the flood typified (Lk. 17:26,27), is nearly upon us. Entry into the Christ/ark by baptism is therefore of the utmost urgency. Human words really do fail to convey this sense of urgency; the Biblical type of entry into the ark in Noah’s time is more powerful. Noah’s ark was an appropriate symbol for salvation through baptism in that the Hebrew word *teba* (“ark”) only occurs elsewhere in reference to the “ark” or “chest” in which the baby Moses, condemned to death, came through water to a saved life. And “a similar root in Egyptian means chest or coffin”- connecting with the idea that baptism is a burial with Christ in water, as it were entering a coffin with Him, to emerge into new life. Indeed the dimensions of Noah’s ark are in proportion similar to those of a coffin.

Peter reasons in 1 Pet. 3 that the ark represents two things- being in Christ by baptism, and being saved from the tribulations to come on the world of the last days. These are typified respectively by the first and second entries of Noah into the ark. If our baptism is like that first entering in, then Noah's tense, earnest waiting for the rain in the next 7 days should typify our feelings towards the second coming (cp. the rain). We should live our whole lives after baptism as if we know for certain that the second coming is but a week away.

Knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would be saved.

The flood was brought about by God's wisdom, not because a deity lost his patience and temper with mankind. God destroyed mankind because of His *grief* (Gen. 6:6)- and He did so because He planned on saving the world through water. Noah and the faithful were saved from corruption and the faith being lost by the world that threatened to destroy them (spiritually) being itself destroyed.

3:21- see on Gal. 3:27; Heb. 10:17,22.

*Which is also a true likeness of how baptism does now save you: not the washing away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God-* Can we know that we have the spirit of Jesus, and that we are living the eternal life, to the point we are confident that "we will be there"? John addresses this question head on. "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him... if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 Jn. 3:19-22). The answer of our conscience is therefore highly significant. Now living in societies as we do, based around shame and guilt, we can condemn ourselves more harshly than God does. Baptism is "the answer (RVmg. 'appeal') of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Note how the phrase "toward God" occurs in both passages. We need to reflect more deeply upon what baptism really meant. Just as Romans 6, the classic baptism chapter, is asking the Romans to think back and remember what their baptisms really did for them before God. There we were counted as being 'in Christ'. God now looks upon us as if we are in Christ, covered with His righteousness. In the court of Divine justice, the fact we have been baptized and had our conscience cleansed is our appeal for justification. And it will be heard. We condemn ourselves for our failures, yes. But on the other hand, do we believe that we really are baptized into Christ, with all that means in terms of how God now sees us? Do we believe rather than merely know... the most basic elements and realities of our Christian faith? I believe we do underneath, but we need to think deeply about all this.

*Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ-* The resurrection of Christ thus "interrogates our conscience" in all areas of life (1 Pet. 3:21 RVmg.). We can't be passive to it; it's not painless to believe.

3:22 *Who is the one at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, Angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him-* There are repeated hints in this chapter that the believers were getting in trouble with the local authorities. They are urged to submit to those authorities, as unto Christ. And here we are reminded how that is possible- those authorities are subject to Him. Perhaps each of those powers had a representative Angel in the



court of Heaven; and they too were subject to Christ. There may also be a swipe at the Jewish theories about Angels and the wrong idea that there are sinful Angels; the Christian should focus instead upon Christ, for in any case, all Angels are subject to Him.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1- see on Phil. 2:9.

*Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh-* That He suffered “in the flesh” could be seen as stating the obvious until it is realized that Peter is referring to the way in which he actually saw the flesh of Christ really suffering.

*Arm yourselves also with the same mind-* The height of this calling is colossal. To think and feel as He did as He hung upon the cross. The very extremity of the calling is what binds us together; we who at least attempt to rise up to it. The appeal is just as in Phil. 2:5- to take on the mind of Christ which He had in His time of dying. The principle of being 'of the same mind' should beg the question 'Of whose mind?'. The answer of course is the Lord. The real basis for unity in practice is not an on paper agreement about theological points, but a sober dedication by each person in Christ to take on the mind of the Master. And moreso, His mind whilst impaled on the stake. The mind that propelled Him, braver and more determined than any man has been, to death itself and beyond.

*For he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin-* A dead person doesn't sin. And we are in the dead Christ. See on 3:10 *Let him restrain.*

4:2 *You should no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh-* The idea is "So that you...". Reflection upon the cross must have a distinct mental impact upon us, if we reflect upon it in sincerity and truth. There is what I would call a crucifixion compulsion; a transforming power in the cross. His sacrifice *must* have an effect upon those who believe it: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves *with the same mind*... that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:1,2). So often the will of God is associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). As the Lord's life and death was devoted to the fulfilment of God's will and not His own, so we too will have that stamp upon us "forasmuch..." as our Lord did and died as He did.

*To the lusts of men, but to the will of God-* Lusts and will are effectively parallel in :3 and also in Eph. 2:3 and 1 Jn. 2:17. If we don't do the will of God, we are doing the will of men. And we all like to think that we are somehow different from "men" generally. But we are actually controlled by their will and lusts, unless we do God's will. There is no other choice; we are slaves either to God or men. Paul plays on this logic strongly in Romans 6, presenting baptism as a change of master, just as Israel's Red Sea baptism was a change of master from men to God.

4:3 *For we have spent enough of our past lifetime doing the will of the Gentiles-* Peter, himself a Jew, was writing to believers who had once been very religious Jews, whom he had baptized at Pentecost. He says that their life before conversion to Christ was living as Gentiles do. Indeed, the life of legalism was associated with serious immorality and moral failure. The connection between serious moral failure and legalistic obedience is true to life; we can probably think of many such examples in our own experience. Paul likewise admits to a life of lust before conversion to Christ. See on Tit. 3:3.

*When we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties and abominable idolatries-* It's possible that sometimes "fornication" refers to a way of life and thinking rather than just the specific physical actions. Thus 1 Pet. 4:3 speaks of how before conversion "we walked (lived day by day) in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine...". It doesn't mean that all day every day Peter and those brethren had committed fornication; but it was a way of life that got a grip on their personality. And so it is today, although made much worse by the ingenuity of man. That sexual impurity is a state of mind was of course taught by the Lord Himself (Mt. 5:28). Here Peter, in a rare autobiographical comment on his life before conversion, admits that he "walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine... running with them (the Gentiles) to the same excess of riot" (1 Peter 4:3,4). He uses the same Greek word as in Lk. 15:13 regarding the riotous behaviour of the prodigal. He saw himself in that younger son, rejected by the Judaistic elder brother, who would not sit at meat in table fellowship with him. According to other NT allusion, we are to see the prodigal as a symbol of all of us who will ultimately sit at meat with the Father in His house. And yet Peter makes the link plain for all to see.

*4:4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, and so speak evil of you-* The slanderers accused the Christians of doing exactly what they were doing. A Christian didn't join in some perversion- and those who did then falsely claimed that the Christian had done it. This is psychologically understandable. They wanted others to commit their sins so that they would feel better about them. And when the Christians refused, they still tried to bring them down to their level by falsely stating that in fact, they had done them. And from elsewhere in the letter we know that they were seeking to then get the Christians legally punished for doing the things which they themselves did. This is a psychological classic- transference of guilt from a guilty person to another through slander, realizing that the sin deserves punishment, and therefore demanding that the slandered person be heavily punished.

4:5- see on Lk. 20:25.

*Who shall give account-* The same term is used of our giving a *logos*, an expression of our innermost intentions, at judgment day (Mt. 12:36; Lk. 16:2; Heb. 13:17). This is enough emphasis for us to conclude that we will indeed say something at judgment. The purpose of judgment is not for the Lord's benefit, but for the sake of our own self knowledge. And our memories will surely be empowered to be able to remember...

*To him that is ready to judge the living and the dead-* Again Peter implies he expects the Lord's imminent return. The living would be those who are alive at His coming; and the dead would be those responsible to judgment who shall be raised to give an account. Those who urge us to sin are unaware, or forget, that we are not judged by them, but by God at the last day.

*4:6 For to this end was the gospel preached to those now dead-* The dead are those in :5; those who died and will be resurrected to judgment. Several times Peter appeals to the example of those who had gone before and were now dead; Noah, Lot, Abraham, Sarah, the prophets. They were all judged by men as foolish because they refused to act as they did, or slandered them.

*That they might be judged according to men in the flesh-* The context is of the men of :3 judging the believers who refused to sin along with them. They judged them by slandering

them and trying to get them in trouble with the law- for doing the very things they themselves were doing. This happened to the believers of old time.

*But live according to God in the spirit-* They were judged as good as dead by their contemporaries, who were angry that they refused to sin along with them. But they were spiritually alive to God. And Peter wishes his slandered brethren to realize they were simply going through the experience of so many.

*4:7 But the end of all things is at hand-* Again we see Peter's expectation of the Lord's coming in his generation. The fact this expectation has been preserved by the inspiration process is perhaps to teach us to likewise live in the expectation of the Lord's imminent return; this is indeed part of the Christian faith, to continually live in expectation of His soon coming.

*Therefore, be of sound mind and sober in prayer-* Literally, 'watching in prayer'. Passover night was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), strongly suggesting "watching in prayer" (Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:27?). Similarly those who are found "watching" at the Lord's midnight coming (cp. that of the Passover angel) will be found acceptable (Lk. 12:37).

*4:8 Above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves-* Love within the Christian community is what is most urgently called for by an awareness that the Lord could come at any time. Why love? Surely because this will be the prime issue which will factor in the outcome of our judgment.

*For love covers a multitude of sins-* It cannot really be just that by loving, we get covering for our sins. The letters of James and Peter are clearly connected, and the parallel in James is in James 5:20 [see note there]: "He who turns back a sinner from the error of his way, he shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins". Our love for others can lead to *their* sins being covered. This has huge implications; our efforts for others in this regard should consume our lives if indeed we can play a role, account for a certain percentage, in the final equation of human salvation. The Lord is of course the Saviour and not us, but in His wisdom, He has delegated some elements of His scheme to us and our freewill. Thus the faith of a man's friends led to his forgiveness in Mk. 2:5.

*4:9 Be hospitable to each other without complaining-* Peter speaks of the need to use hospitality *without grudging* (1 Pet. 4:9); he foresaw how brotherly love could be shown physically, but with an underlying grudge that in fact we somehow *must* show such love. This is not the "love unfeigned" of which the Scriptures speak. But the context is of :9, about our efforts for others leading to their forgiveness. The hospitality in view may therefore be more than simply giving folk a bed for the night. And :10 goes on to say that such hospitality is part of using the gifts of God's grace for others.

*4:10 According as each has received a gift-* The parable of the talents is clear that each believer is given a gift or talent to use in the Lord's service. This is part of the gift of the Spirit received at baptism. Church structure often leaves individuals with the impression that they are intended to do no more than attend meetings. But we each called to some form of ministry- ministry is not just for those believers who 'choose to go into ministry'. That phrase and concept is very damaging and unhelpful to the mass of believers.

*Minister it-* We have all been given some gift, and that is to be used in the servanthood / slavery of our Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 4:10). We can mindlessly say that yes, Jesus is Lord, quite forgetting that it implies we are His serving slaves. The magnitude of the 'slave' concept in the ecclesia of Christ is easily overlooked, and it was this which made it so different from others.

*Among yourselves-* The gifts given are specifically intended for usage within the body of Christ. This is why separation from the body is not at all what God intends- for then how can we minister what God has given us "among yourselves". We cannot be true Christians in isolation from others, just internally assenting to the truths of the Gospel.

*As good stewards of the manifold grace of God-* The grace of God is "manifold", using a Greek word which means multi-faceted, many coloured, light split into its various components through a prism (1 Pet. 4:10).

4:11- see on Rom. 9:17.

*If anyone speaks-* We have just been told that each man / person has been given a gift and is to minister it. Now we read "If anyone speaks... if anyone ministers". But we are all called to minister. For we have all been given gifts to minister to others. So I do not read this as meaning that one may be called to speak, and another to minister. We are all called to minister, so we are all called to "speak". But *laleo* means just 'to speak' and is at times used about preaching; it doesn't refer to platform speaking specifically.

*Let him speak as if it were oracles of God-* This is the language of the Old Testament prophets. Those men were not to be looked at as icons from afar, on some level of spirituality far above our own. In all our speaking, which is an integral part of ministering to others with the gifts we have been given (:10), we are to do so as if we are each none less than about prophetic work. This doesn't mean that all that comes from our mouths will be Divinely inspired [hence "*as if it were* oracles of God"], but we are to speak and serve / minister with the same gravity and seriousness the prophets had.

*If anyone ministers-* Verse 10 is clear that we have each been given gifts which we are to minister.

*Let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ-* The supply of the Spirit is to be used; we are not to seek to serve / minister to others in our own strength. This is so that *God* and not us will be glorified- as this verse continues to say explicitly.

*To whom belongs the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen-* A clear allusion to the closing phrases of the Lord's prayer. Those words however are about God, but Peter here applies them to the Lord Jesus; because as he has just written, God is glorified through Christ.

4:12 *Beloved, do not think it strange-* Perhaps some thought that Peter's warning of a coming holocaust, based as it was on Old Testament precedent, was "strange" [Greek: 'foreign, an intrusion']. And how many will react to similar warnings made in our last days in just the same way? The Greek word translated "strange" here often refers to the Gentiles- as if Peter is correcting any feeling they may have had that the tribulation predicted would only affect the Gentiles. 'Think it not *strange*, a Gentile thing only- it will affect both you believers and

the Gentile world at large'. This is a highly relevant warning to those today who state with such dogmatism that believers will not experience any of the tribulations which are to come upon the surrounding world. A suggestion worth testing is that the sufferings of natural Israel have always been matched simultaneously by difficulties for Israel after the spirit.

*Concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened to you-* Peter initially had in mind the coming persecution under Nero. It seems the Spirit of prophecy informed him about this. He seems to reason in :13 that if the believers would endure that fiery trial, then they would be glorified at the Lord's coming, as if he imagined the second coming as coming immediately once the tribulation had been endured. The Olivet Prophecy speaks similarly. But there was a deferment until our last days. The trial by fire, or literally, by smelting / melting, is referenced in Peter's earlier mention of how faith is like gold tested in fire (1:7). Although the immediate context of Nero's persecution is not ours, we can still take the general principles. Not just in that we too are set to pass through a tribulation of fiery proportions; but in that all our sufferings connect us with the Lord's sufferings, and thereby relate us to His resurrection glory.

4:13 *But inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice!*- The purpose of the tribulations of the last days, as well as all our sufferings in whatever generation, will be to make us truly fellowship our Lord's agonizing, to make us know for ourselves that "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him". It is fair to assume that those who really try to shoulder their Lord's cross now will not need to go through such an experience in the tribulation of the last days. There are many connections between the experiences of the latter day saints, and the sufferings of Christ. Peter's letters were written to strengthen the faithful in the problems of the AD70 'last days', as well as our own. They are full of reference to Christ's sufferings (e.g. 1 Pet.1:11,19,21-24; 3:18; 4:1). "The fiery trial which is to try you (is cause for rejoicing because it makes you) partakers of Christ's sufferings" (4:13). See on Mk. 13:13 for more evidence that the last generation of believers will particularly fellowship the Lord's sufferings through their experiences in the final tribulation.

*That at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy-* We have shown that our sufferings in the tribulation will associate us with Christ's sufferings- so that the joy on his return will be "exceeding" ! "The time [AD70] is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" [4:17]. Going through the tribulation will effectively be our judgment seat. "The righteous [will] scarcely be saved" [4:18]- spiritual survival during this time will be by the skin of our teeth; as was our Lord's spiritual survival on the cross which we will then fellowship.

4:14 *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed-* "Reproach" is the word used for how the Lord on the cross was reproached. He there is us today in our sufferings. He had such a wide range of sufferings so that none of us need ever feel alone, without anyone who understands or has trodden the path before.

This uses 'the name of Christ' as meaning 'living in or preaching the name of Christ'. The two ideas are so closely related. In the course of this witness, men will 'speak evil' of us, and yet in doing so they are speaking evil of the Christ we are so identified with (:4,14). "For his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the preaching commission (3 Jn. 7). Because we bear the Lord's Name by baptism into it, we *are* Christ to this world. Likewise, those in

covenant relationship in the Old Testament bore Yahweh's Name, and were therefore in all ways to act appropriately lest their behaviour "profane My holy name" (Lev. 22:32).

The allusion is to the beatitude that we should rejoice and be blessed / happy if we are reproached [s.w.] for Christ's sake (Mt. 5:11). The Lord said that this identified us with the prophets (Mt. 5:12). And Peter has just made the point that we are as those prophets (see on :11 *As oracles of God*).

*Because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you-* We have just read that we shall share the Lord's glory if we suffer with Him (:13). There is only one Spirit; the Spirit of Christ and that of God are all the same Spirit. The present tense suggests that just as the Spirit of glory shall rest upon us at the last day, when the Lord's glorious resurrection becomes ours, so even now it rests upon us. The activity of the Spirit in our lives now is a foretaste of the future glorification by the Spirit at the last day. In this sense Paul argues that the possession of the Spirit is an earnest, a guarantee, of future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The 'resting upon us' recalls the cloud of glory resting upon the Israelites after their Red Sea baptism and as they travelled through the wilderness. Its presence was the guarantee that they were being led on a journey which would climax in entry to the promised land. The allusion to the resting of that cloud is appropriate; because Peter's point is that the Spirit which shall glorify us at the last day is active in our lives right now. They were now the true tabernacle; the temple cult was already obsolete.

4:15 *For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer-* That this needed to be said is an indicator of how seriously low they had fallen- these one time 'righteous' Orthodox Jews, now Christian converts. But as in all the pastoral letters, it is noteworthy that Peter doesn't demand the disfellowship of such persons. Rather he seeks their reformation, and urges the eldership to teach soundly and truly care for the flock.

*Or as a meddler in other men's matters-* We shouldn't suffer as murderers or thieves... nor as meddlers in others' matters. Meddling in others' matters is put on the same level as murder and theft! Time and again, we expect there to be a dichotomy made by the Lord between the sinners and the righteous, the good guys and the bad guys. But before Him, we are all sinners. Thus to the prostitute kneeling before Him, He assures her that her sins are forgiven; but He turns to the 'righteous' Simon and severely rebukes him for a lack of love and for being too judgmental (Lk. 7:36-50).

4:16 *But if anyone suffers as a Christian-* Peter has just spoken of how our sufferings are those of the Lord (:13). The idea is that we suffer as Christ suffered, as one of the Christ people, the people who are focused upon Him, whose lives are bound up in His life.

*Let him not be ashamed-* This is rather like Timothy being told to not let anyone despise his youth. It is we ourselves who control whether or not we are 'successfully' despised or ashamed.

*But let him glorify God in this name-* "This name" is a rather odd construction, until we recall that Peter was told not to "preach in this name" (Acts 4:17; 5:28). Constantly, Peter is making his pastoral appeals based on his own experience of the Lord, both in His life, and also in the way He had worked with Peter after His ascension. We should do likewise, with words and actions shot through with reference to our own personal experience of the Lord Jesus.

4:17 *For the time of judgment begins at the house of God*- Another reference to Peter's persuasion that the Lord's return in judgment was imminent, and was even beginning in the form of the Neronian persecution. See on :12. Peter has earlier laboured the point that the believers are the house / temple of God. He is saying that the AD70 judgments upon the temple are about to come- but the "first" or most important thing to God is *our* judgment, since we are His people and Orthodox Judaism were not.

*And if we are judged first*- The Greek *proton* doesn't have to mean 'first' in a chronological sense. And "first begin" in the AV is wrong; for there is no Greek word here corresponding to "begin". I have just suggested that the emphasis is on the fact that judgment is beginning; not that it begins first with the believers and then with the world. Indeed the Biblical pictures of the time around the Lord's coming would suggest that the world is judged first, and then the believers; with the unworthy being sent back into a world which is then already experiencing judgment. Most importantly, from God's point of view, *proton*, is the judgment of His people; the punishment of the unbelievers is not something He takes pleasure in nor is unduly eager about.

*What shall be the outcome of those that do not obey the gospel of God?*- The word for "obey not" is used nearly all 16 times it occurs of those *Jews* who refused to accept the Gospel. And Peter has used it in this way in 2:7,8. The Jewish temple and the Judaist system associated with it was to be judged, but more important than that, "first", would be God's judgment of His people- the true house of God.

4:18- see on Mt. 14:30; 2 Pet. 3:15.

*And if the righteous are scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?*

- The judgment of their persecutors was not to make these Jewish converts feel that they were justified just because their persecutors were evil. Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. Indeed, they shouldn't be. For Christian believers aren't good people. We are saved by grace alone. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that He hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay".

Peter is here quoting, liberally and mixing quotation with interpretation, from the LXX of Prov. 11:31. Peter never introduces his quotations as Paul does, with an "It is written...". And he always quotes from the LXX, and often in a rather loose way. Peter was illiterate, and would know the LXX quotations by memory, recollecting how they had been read to him, rather than having read them with his own eyes and memorized them. And this shows in the way he quotes the OT- although the whole process and final product was Divinely inspired.

4:19 *Therefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God*- Peter writes so often of suffering, because he had personally seen the Lord's final sufferings (5:1), and was for ever



under the indelible impression of His death. Those who suffer according to God's will are those who suffer with Christ there (:13). No suffering is outside the will of God; there is no cosmic satan who has some 'will' in our suffering. And this is a great comfort.

*Commit their souls in doing well-* Throughout this letter, Peter alludes to various details of the physical crucifixion. He has alluded to the wheals / "stripes", the lifting up on the tree stake, and other details. Here the allusion is to the Lord's outbreathing His Spirit, His last breath, to the Father; commending His spirit into the Father's hands. And Peter is saying we should do even that, in lives of "doing well".

*To a faithful creator-* Because Yahweh God was Israel's creator, therefore He ought to have been their King (Is. 43:15). If we really believe His creative authority over us, then He will rule in every aspect of our lives. Realizing that God is a "faithful creator" should inspire us to commit the keeping of our lives to Him in time of suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).

## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *The elders among you I urge (I who am a fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ-* Peter was present at the cross. After the denials, knowing his condemnation, where did Peter go after his denials? Probably he could quite easily have also gone and hung himself- for he was of that personality type. But instead he went to the cross- for he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 5:1), and his words and writing consistently reflect the language of Golgotha's awful scene. There, in that personal, hidden observation of the cross, probably disguised in the crowd, not daring to stand with John and the women, his conversion began. Then his love for his Lord became the more focused. Now he could *do* nothing- and his thinking had been so full of *doing* until that point. All he could do was to watch that death and know his own desperation, and somehow believe in grace. "Who his own self bare our sins in his body up on to the tree" (2:24 RVmg.) suggests the watching Peter reflecting, as the Lord's body was lifted up vertical, that his sins of denial and pride were somehow with his Lord, being lifted up by Him. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18) could well have been written by Peter with a glance back at the way that after his denials, he the unjust went to the crucifixion scene and reflected just this. When in 5:1 he comments that he witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he could be saying that therefore these thoughts were his thoughts as he witnessed it: the just suffering for him the unjust, to bring him back to God.

Peter was a "witness" of the sufferings of Christ. The same word is used to characterize his witness of preaching in Acts 1:8; 5:32; 10:39. The Greek word doesn't convey that he simply saw the Lord's sufferings, but that he saw-and-therefore-spoke it. There is something in the cross that cannot be held passively once it has been seen / understood. It *must* be spoken out. Having described the physicalities of the cross, Is. 52:15; 53:1 continue: "*So shall he sprinkle many nations... for that which had not been [i.e. the like of which had never been] told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard [ever before the like of] shall they consider. Who hath believed our preaching (Heb.)? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*" by our preaching? There is an undeniable link between the Lord's sufferings and the preaching of them. They are in themselves an imperative to preach them. *So shall He sprinkle many nations with His blood of atonement and new covenant*, in that His sufferings would provoke a world-wide ("to all nations" cp. "many nations") witness to them by those who knew them. Paul sums it up when he speaks of "the preaching of (Gk. 'which is') the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18). This is how essential the link between preaching and the cross. Peter's witness to men is a living exemplification of this.

*Who is also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed)-* Our eternal future will be about God's glory being revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). And yet we are even now partakers in that glory which shall be revealed through us in the future. In this we see the connection between our present spirit of witness, and the eternal life. We 'have' eternal life in the sense that we live out now the essence of the life we will eternally live. Our eternal future will be all about revealing Christ, who is the glory of God; and this therefore is to be the essence of our lives today. Which is all why 'preaching' isn't an optional extra to the Christian life, something some are into but not others; the essence of revealing / manifesting Christ is to be the essence of our whole existence. And further, the fact we will do this to perfection in God's future Kingdom is seen by Paul as the ultimate encouragement for us, on account of which we can count all the sufferings of this life as nothing (Rom. 8:18).

We have been called to "glory" in possessing Divine nature in the Kingdom (2 Pet.1:3,4). Obviously we do not fully have that now. Yet we are firmly connected with that hope; Peter earlier described himself as "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" in us. Likewise we have been credited with righteousness now through Christ (Rom. 9:30), yet our reward in the Kingdom will be a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8).

*5:2 Tend the flock of God-* The Lord's commission to Peter to "Feed my sheep" is now passed on by Peter to all pastors, whom he pointedly describes as "fellow elders", as if to safeguard against any possible misunderstanding to the effect that he was the senior, special elder. They were *all* to follow his path and thereby achieve the same for others. It is only the typical perversity of the Catholic church which makes them read Peter as the very opposite: as a father figure unapproachable in achievement by any other. The way Peter calls Christ the *petra* of the ecclesia (1 Pet. 2:8) is surely to warn against any view of himself as exclusively the rock.

*Which is among you-* The reminder is that the pastors themselves were amongst the flock, also sheep of the good shepherd. They were among the flock (:1), and the flock among them (:2).

*Not reservedly but willingly, according to the will of God; not for dishonest gain, but eagerly-* God's will for the salvation of all the sheep was and is to be the "will" ["willingly"] of the pastors. We will not therefore care for others only in return for material payment or some other benefit; His constant will for the salvation of His people is to be ours.

*5:3 Neither lord it over those entrusted to you-* This phrase 'Lord it' is surely chosen to remind them that the flock had Jesus as their only Lord. Pastors were to set an example which encouraged them to accept His Lordship- not theirs.

*But make yourselves examples to the flock-* Making ourselves examples doesn't mean posing nor hypocrisy, but rather acting in such a way that consciously sets ourselves up as examples. This was particularly necessary in illiterate communities, where the only real access to the word was to see it made flesh in other Christians. The same word is used in Jn. 20:25 about the "print" of the nails- another perhaps unconscious allusion to Peter's experience of the Lord's sufferings. Elders are not to be domineering but to be examples, *typoi* (1 Pet. 5:3); but we are all *typoi* to each other (1 Thess. 1:7).

*5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested-* A reminder that they themselves were but sheep having a shepherd.

*You shall receive the crown of glory that does not fade away-* The glory of human leadership fades away. They were to serve others with no expectation of reward now, neither materially nor in terms of glory in the eyes of others.

5:5- see on 1 Pet. 3:1.

*Likewise, you younger ones, be subject to the elder men. Yes, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another. For God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble-* James and John had desired the senior places in the Lord's Kingdom. "And when the ten

heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren”, and we can imagine Peter to have been the most indignant. For he had thought then that he loved the Lord more than any of the others (cp. Mt. 26:33; Jn. 21:15). “But (in admonition) Jesus called them unto him” and taught that only in the world did men worry about who was greatest and mind that others were over them, and went on to teach that the true greatness was in humility: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life...” (Mt. 20:25-28). These words were lived out in epitome at the last supper- and again, Peter had objected to it. He had failed to grasp the Lord’s teaching here. And having learnt the lesson finally, he can teach others that they like their Lord should not ‘lord it’ over their brethren, but rather be clothed with humility after the pattern of the kneeling Lord in the upper room (1 Pet. 5:3,5). “Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another” is a clear reference to the Lord’s humility at the last supper. But it had been Peter who didn’t perceive it. Now, it is as if he pleads with his readers not to be as slow as he had been to perceive the supremacy of humility.

A relationship with a God like ours really ought to humble *us*. He, the Almighty, has asked us to humble ourselves so that we might walk with Him, as if He is so far beneath the petty pride of man (Mic. 6:8 mg.). This really ought to humble us. The whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring down the mountains of human pride and lift up the valleys of those who lack any self-respect (Is. 40:4), thereby making an equality of attitude amongst God’s people. The vision of the Kingdom in Is. 2:2-4 was used as an appeal for *humility* amongst Israel (2:10-12). We have been clothed with God’s righteousness (Is. 61:10; Rev. 3:18), and therefore we should be clothed with humility too, as our response to this (1 Pet. 5:5).

5:6- see on Mk. 9:35.

*Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time-* God wants to exalt us at the last day, and so His hand, His Spirit or action in our lives, will be humbling us now. And we are to willingly merge with that process, realizing that this life is all about being brought down, so that we might be lifted up to His glory at the last day. The ideas are very similar to what we have in Phil. 2, where we are asked to have the same mind which was in Jesus on the cross, who humbled Himself [s.w. Phil. 2:8] so that He might be exalted. So whilst self humbling is a conscious act, we are confirmed in it by God’s hand. The same Greek words are used in the parallel James 4:10, also written to Jewish believers: “Humble yourselves *in the sight of the Lord* and He shall lift you up” (s.w. “exalt you”). The parallel is between God’s hand, and “the sight of the Lord”. We are assisted in the self humiliation process by recalling that we live life in His sight; the Lord is watching us closely, and a sense of His presence should inspire our self humbling.

5:7- see on Phil. 4:6.

*Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you-* The “anxiety” was related to being refugees in Turkey, worried about money and an uncertain future. Peter is roughly quoting from Ps. 55:22 LXX. Simple faith that “He cares for you” ought to remove anxiety; Peter is clearly alluding to the sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25). Just as the illiterate Peter appears to summarize Old Testament quotations as an illiterate person would, so we could take this as his summary of Mt. 6:25. The Greek text makes a seamless connection between

humbling ourselves, and casting anxiety upon God. Much worry about material survival is a result of pride...

*5:8 Be sober, be watchful-* They were to “be watchful” (1 Peter 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (4:7), as Peter had not been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord’s rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn’t do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest’s house.

*Your adversary the Devil, like a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour-* This fits with Peter's concern that the Jewish Christian exiles are living within a very critical society eager to find fault with them; and the 'devouring' in view would be the fiery trial of the upcoming persecution of Christians by Nero (4:12). Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution, he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

It’s maybe significant that the Septuagint translates “going to and fro” in Job 1:7 with the word *peripatei* – and we find the same word in 1 Pet. 5:8 about the adversary of the early Christians ‘going about’ seeking them – a reference to the agents of the Roman and Jewish systems.

*5:9 Stand firm in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brothers-* Strength to endure is given by the encouragement of the example of others. This is exactly why we have the concept of church, of life together- because especially in illiterate society, teaching and encouragement would largely be by direct observation of the example of other believers. See on :3. "Stand firm" is "resist" in James 4:7: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". The idea is that if the Christians resisted the persecution, then it would be removed from them- presumably by the Lord's return. The fact He didn't return in the first century would suggest that the early Christian community did not resist as expected. But we can take the principle- that our sufferings are not as unique as we may feel. The "same sufferings" will be experienced by others; indeed 2 Cor. 1:4-8 seems to argue that suffering does repeat in form amongst believers, exactly so that the believers may minister encouragement to each other.

*Who are in the world-* Throughout the rest of the Roman empire. These Jewish converts were to take encouragement and inspiration from their Gentile brethren, whom they might have been tempted to despise.

*5:10 And the God of all grace-* "Grace" means 'gift, and it is to the gift of the Spirit which Peter now refers.

*Who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while-* Peter opened the letter with a reference to how the calling of God is worked out in our lives through the operation of His Spirit.

*Shall Himself perfect, establish, strengthen you-* These are all internal issues, relating to internal psychological, spiritual strengthening. The words are elsewhere used about the internal strengthening of the Spirit.

*5:11 To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen-* An allusion to the concluding phrase of the Lord's prayer. The point was that they were to allow the Lord to have dominion in their hearts now, because that is effectively living the Kingdom life- for He shall eternally have dominion over us and all things. In this sense we "have eternal life" as John's Gospel expresses it.

*5:12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him-* The sheer complexity of human persons means that we cannot ultimately judge them. We see our brother's various personas, sometimes his true, reborn self coming out; and our images of others derive as much from ourselves as from them. It amazes me that we humans succeed in accurately communicating with each other as much as we do. The more one perceives the complexity of the person and the personas whom we meet, the more apparent it is that we cannot claim to be their judge. And the more evident it is that the judgments which human beings constantly make about each other are so superficial and often inevitably false. Further, if we truly believe that we ourselves are in Christ and "impute" His person as being the essence of our real self, then we must likewise impute His righteousness to our brethren. Thus Peter could say that he 'imputed' Silvanus to be a "faithful brother" (1 Pet. 5:12). If only we could consistently live out this truth, then all friction between brethren would be a thing of the past.

*I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it!-* The whole letter has spoken of God's grace / spiritual gift at work in us, seeking to move us onwards towards final salvation. And we are to realize that this is indeed the ultimate truth of life.

*5:13 She that is in Babylon-* If a code name for Rome, then this would indicate Peter was present in Rome at some stage, and this would nicely explain his allusions to Paul's letter to the Romans. But "Babylon" is also a title for Jerusalem in the prophets and later in Revelation. He may be reminding these Jewish Christians, exiled from Jerusalem, that there were still faithful believers in Jerusalem.

*Elect together with you, greets you, and so does Marcus my son-* The letter opens with the point that our election or calling operates through the Spirit, and Peter has urged his readers amongst the Jewish Christian exiles to perceive how the Spirit has continued the salvation process with them through their experiences. But it operates according to how it operated from the beginning, when we were first elected or chosen. But we are not the only ones chosen- Gentile believers in Rome, or perhaps other Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem from where they had fled, were also just as much part of the Spirit's ongoing plan and process of operation. This is the unity of the Spirit- the same Spirit operating in our lives is also operating in those of our brethren from whom we may be somewhat distanced, and whom we may be tempted to despise.

We note that Peter had a believing wife, and here we read that he had a believing son. He was therefore well qualified as an elder.

5:14 *Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all that are in Christ-* Peace was a highly relevant wish for these refugee brethren. But that peace was from the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation with God through Christ.

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those that have obtained the same precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God, and the Saviour Jesus Christ-* Peter progresses in his humility from calling himself "an apostle of Jesus" (1 Pet. 1:1) to adding "a servant and an apostle". Growing humility should characterize all spiritual growth. He saw faith as what was "obtained"; even faith is the gift of God in that some are called and others are not (Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 3:2). The Greek for "obtained" is the same word used for receiving a lot cast, when many other words could have been used. We sense in Peter at the end of his life a deep awareness that all is of grace, and we respond to that grace in faith, but thereby even faith is a gift, *charis*, grace of God. That faith is in the reality of righteousness imputed to us in Christ, on which basis we can be humbly confident of future salvation. If we do really believe it, we cannot be idle in this knowledge of Christ; it will elicit in us a response (:8 RV).

1:2 *Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord-* This was no mere standard greeting; Peter believed that his prayerful wish for his readership would be fulfilled in them appreciating the grace hinted at in :1, and having an ever multiplying peace with God. This assurance of grace and peace is from knowing the Father and Son in the Hebrew sense of 'knowing' a person, i.e. having a relationship with them, rather than growing in incremental knowledge of theology.

1:3 *Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the precise and correct knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue-* The grace explained on :1 is God's power to us; the Spirit is both the power of God and also His work within us, empowering us to have "all things" required for the spiritual life. The precise knowledge of Him doesn't mean that the more theory we acquire, the more power we have. For Peter's audience would have included many illiterate folk, whose access to the Old Testament scrolls was limited, and who only heard the earliest New Testament documents read to them. The knowledge in view is therefore that of relationship, as noted on :2. Indeed the Greek is better rendered "acknowledgment"; it is the recognition of God's power at work in us, and an openness to receive all the empowerment He gives, which is so critical. God's Spirit power works through His calling us; as noted on :1, we "obtained... faith" because we were called to it. And the end result of God's system of calling some by grace is to His glory by us in marvel and thankfulness.

1:4 *Whereby He has granted to us His precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in that world by lust-* Just as "faith" is "obtained" or granted (:1), so too the promises which form the basis of the new covenant are likewise "granted" by the power of the Spirit (:3). The preciousness of the faith we have been given (:1; 1 Pet. 1:7) connects with the preciousness of the promises in which we have faith. The precious "faith" given is therefore specifically faith / belief in the precious promises. Whilst on one hand God will not force



people to believe, on the other hand, our faith is so weak that without God's involvement in it we shall never believe enough.

The very fact we have received the promises should mean that therefore we separate ourselves "from the corruption that is in the world". We will be happy to have a light hold on possession of property, knowing that this earth is ours, it's just that for now, we are just passing through it, surveying it, after the pattern of Abraham. Yet the corruption of lust has overtones of immorality, which we noted on 1 Peter were a problem for the Jewish converts.

The past tense "having escaped" suggests that partaking in the Divine nature is something we now experience. Peter will soon use the same word, again in the past tense, to speak of how we "have escaped" from the world (2:18,20). Those who have escaped are "partakers". The same word is used by Peter in describing himself as a "partaker of the glory" (1 Pet. 5:1). Insofar as we escape the corrupting lusts of the world, we partake right now in the "Divine nature". This is hard to define if we isolate the phrase, but it could be summarized as the essence of God, what by nature He stands for, His Name. And :5-7 go on to define what the characteristics of God's essential nature really are- the various aspects of the Spirit which we can now have in our own spirit. And we partake in those things as we disassociate or end our partaking / fellowshiping with the world of lust and corruption; we partake in His Spirit as we stop our partaking in the flesh. "The Divine nature" is put as the opposite of "the corruption... through lust". The idea is as in Heb. 12:10, of being right now "partakers in His holiness". The phrase broadly parallels Paul's idea of receiving God's holy Spirit into our hearts.

Partaking of Divine nature is therefore ongoing now. It is not correct to think that we live now as any other secular person does, but with our baptism guaranteeing some huge change to Divine nature for us at the Lord's return. We are on a process and path of partaking of that nature now, although it will be physically and materially expressed in the change of nature required for us to become immortal.

1:5 *Yes and for this very cause you on your part should show all diligence*- We are now partaking in Divine "nature" (:4). The essential idea of the Greek word for "nature" is that of growth; for God is His Spirit, He is dynamic. We are therefore, "for this very cause", to experience ongoing growth, with the various aspects of spirituality reinforcing each other as we grow. The spiritual characteristics now listed are the things of the "Divine nature" (:4) which we now partake in. "Diligence" in Greek carries the idea of speed, haste and urgency. This would fit with the reasoning we will encounter in chapter 3- that the sooner we develop spiritually, the sooner the Lord will come.

*To your faith add virtue, and to virtue, knowledge*- This cannot mean that we consciously plan our own growth by adding characteristics to those developed earlier. Life doesn't work like that, nor does development of character and personality. If the idea was that we progressively add things to our own personality then a different Greek word would surely have been used; the word is usually translated 'to minister to'. The idea is that someone ministers or adds to another. Peter uses a form of the word in 1 Pet. 4:11 to describe how God "gives" or "adds" in order for us to have the ability to serve Him. Vine comments: "The verb originally means to bear the expense of a chorus, which was done by a person selected by the state, who was obliged to defray all the expenses of training and maintenance. In the New Testament the word has lost this technical sense, and is used in the general sense of supplying or providing". It is used nearly always about the ministering or supply of the Spirit to us (2

Cor. 9:10; Gal. 3:5; Col. 2:19). Our partaking in these things of the Divine nature is of course our choice, and yet the Spirit is operative in leading us on this path of development. The Spirit of God is His mind, His way of thinking, what He is by nature; so partaking in His nature will be through the gift and operation of His Spirit. And a synthesis develops whereby one spiritual characteristic leads to another.

The "virtue" we are to have is a reflection of God's "virtue" in calling us (:3); and that calling was by grace, energy expended in order to intervene in our lives by grace and seek to lead us to salvation. It is that "virtue" we are asked to have.

There is a great emphasis by Peter on the need for "knowledge" to overcome the coming tribulation: 1 Pet.3:7; 2 Pet.1:2-6,8,16; 2:20; 3:18; an impressive list. By all means compare this with Dan. 12:10, which prophecies a sudden jump forward in understanding God's word by the faithful of the last days. But 'knowledge' in its Hebraic sense refers to relationship; and it would have been difficult for an illiterate readership to amass technical knowledge. Peter himself was likely illiterate; Peter's confidence in preaching to the wise of this world in his *a-grammatos* way (see on Acts 4:13) is continued in the way his letters stress that the only true knowledge is that of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5,6; 3:18). He was writing in response to the Gnostic heresy that *gnosis*, knowledge, enlivens the eternal spark within man until a man's knowledge becomes his 'immortal soul'. Peter didn't leave this for the more erudite to combat. Like an illiterate peasant farmer unashamedly challenging atheistic evolution, Peter powerfully made his point.

1:6 *And to your knowledge self-control, and to your self-control patience, and to your patience, reverence toward God-* As noted on :5, this process is not consciously controlled by the believer, but is the path of operation taken by God's Spirit for those who are open to it. There is no chronological sense here- otherwise it would be a case of having self-control and patience before having any reverence toward God. The sense rather is of a symbiotic growth towards spiritual maturity.

1:7 *And to your reverence toward God, brotherly kindness, and to your brotherly kindness, love-* Relationship with God is reflected in relationship with others, especially our brethren, as John's writings often make clear. We are not able to claim a relationship with God whilst ignoring our brethren. The fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love, love manifested in all the various ways we have listed in the descriptions of the "fruit of the Spirit". And here likewise, we are not reading of sequential, chronological development, in which "love" is not supplied into the mix until the end of the process; rather, the entire symbiotic relationship which comprises our spirituality is summarized in love.

Our experience of tribulation leads to the development of patience, then real hope of salvation, and above all, as the final stage of maturity, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). It is the work of the Spirit within us which matures us towards the final maturity of love. Here, 2 Pet. 1:5-7 describes a similar upward spiral of chronological development, again culminating in brotherly kindness and then, love. And again it is the work of the Spirit which effects this work.

1:8- see on 3 Jn. 11.

*For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be neither idle nor unfruitful in the precise and correct knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ-* "In the... knowledge" is better

"unto the... knowledge". By living in the Spirit, and developing every aspect of the characteristics which comprise "the Divine nature", we come to 'know Christ' in the sense of relationship with Him. And that point of mature relationship is "love"; and it is not a relationship for the sake of it, but like any good relationship, ours with Jesus has fruit, it motivates and inspires to action and activity, rather than being idle in our knowledge / relationship with the Lord Jesus. And there is an upward spiral in it all; if the fruits of the Spirit abound in us, then they in turn make us fruitful in our knowledge / relationship with our Lord Jesus. This is the secret to spiritual growth; and this is a window onto quite how the human Lord Jesus could be as morally perfect as God.

1:9- see on Lk. 17:12.

*For he that lacks these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins-* If we lack spiritual fruit, we have forgotten our cleansing from sin. The implication is that an awareness of our cleansing urges us in gratitude toward spiritual growth. To not 'see' the forgiveness of past sins is to be short sighted, to live seeing only what is immediately before our vision. And that is the sad state of the majority of people. The Jewish converts to whom Peter was writing had forgotten that they were serious sinners, forgiven by grace, and could not 'see' the significance of their baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Peter in preaching to them in Acts 2 had laboured the need for forgiveness; and now he is writing to those same converts many years later, sad that they had lost sight of that urgency for cleansing which they had initially had. The moment of cleansing from sin was on the cross (Heb. 1:3 s.w.). The Lord's cross failed to speak to them as it once had.

1:10 *Wherefore brothers, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure-* We were called and chosen from the beginning, by pure grace. But this is not to say that one man is zapped for salvation whilst another is not, and there is no further say in the matter. We must "make sure" that calling by living appropriately to the fact we have been saved by grace. The way to do that was to focus on the development of spirituality as just mentioned in :5-7.

*For if you do these things, you shall never stumble-* The "things" in view are the "things" of :8, the spiritual attributed of :5-7. If we live in the spirit of those things, in the upward spiral of spirituality which we discussed on :5, then we will not have the opportunity to stumble in our walk. This again is a window onto how the Lord did not stumble in His path. He gave Himself over fully to the path of spirituality, whereby one aspect reinforces and elicits others; and so the opportunity to stumble arose with far less force than it does in the life of the immature person who tries to fight each temptation with steel will and knuckles white with the tension of attempting self-control in our own strength.

1:11 *For thus shall be richly supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ-* Entering the Kingdom is a phrase commonly on the Lord's lips in the Gospels. Jn. 3:5 teaches that we can only enter the Kingdom if we are born of the Spirit, and it is that work of the spirit which has been in view throughout 2 Peter 1 so far. But we must play our part, doing the things (:10) which the Spirit leads us to.

Perhaps the richness or abundance of entry implies that there will be different degrees of reward in the Kingdom. Are these not a reflection of the different levels which men have

served God on in this life? One star will shine brighter than another; one will rule over five cities, another over two. There is entry into the Kingdom, and an 'abundant' entry (AV). Or the idea may simply be that the final moment of entry into the Kingdom will be the highest exemplification of the Lord's abundant or rich grace toward us.

1:12 *Wherefore I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth which is with you-* One of the themes in Peter's second letter, written as it was at the very end of his life (2 Pet. 1:14), was that of the need to "remember" the words of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 1:12,13,15; 2:3; 3:1). This was with evident allusion (the same word is used) to the way that on his shameful night, Peter had remembered the word of Christ, and wept those bitter tears of ineffable regret (Lk. 22:61). Peter knew some of his sheep were weary with the way, and needed a like repentance and subsequent energizing which he had known. He was wishing all his readers (and that includes us) a path of growth that followed his. He had always *known* the words of Christ; indeed, he had loved them. He shows himself an enthusiast for Bible study and reflection on the Lord's words. But he didn't remember them in that they weren't living as a compelling force within his conscience. After his first denial and the cock crowing, surely he 'remembered' the Lord's words: that before the cock crowed twice, he would deny Him thrice. He must have shrugged off that first cock crowing as coincidence, sure he wouldn't deny again. And then the second denial- well, there was no cock crow, so, don't worry... But he wasn't aware enough of his own liability to failure to have the Lord's warning words in the forefront of his mind. He didn't pause to reflect that the cock would soon crow again, and therefore he would be sorely tempted to make the third denial. He knew the word of the Lord, but failed to remember it. And this he now realized. And he urges his readers to learn more quickly and less painfully what he had to be forced to learn.

Now Peter was converted, he was strengthening his brethren (Lk. 22:32). This theme of strengthening was evident in Peter's letters (s.w. 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12; 3:17). Some of his last written words were that "You... are *established* in the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12 AV); he uses the same Greek word which the Lord used when He asked Peter so *strengthen* his brethren (Lk. 22:32). Peter at the very end knew that he had made it. His awareness of his own failures was at the root of his appreciation of his Lord's grace, and this was the motive power behind all his pastoral work. But "truth" often refers to the sure reality that we shall be saved; the hope, the confidence, that if we die now or the Lord returns, we shall definitely be in the Kingdom. This is as the AV puts it "the present truth". This doesn't mean that truth varies and is true only at any given moment for that time. The idea is not of 'truth' as in intellectual purity, but "truth" as in assurance of the highest and most ultimate truth- that at this present moment, I shall be saved. That is the basis for a sure hope, and of all joy and peace through believing. We may fall away tomorrow; but we can rejoice in the "present truth", what is true at this present moment.

1:13 *And I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance-* Peter saw his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:4). Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, either for his Lord or for himself. But now he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down, the vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom,

these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5).

Yet Peter goes on to talk about the transfiguration in :17,18. He had that in mind, and so perhaps unconsciously uses the same word for "tent" or "tabernacle" as was used for the tent he had wanted to build then. There may be no direct semantic connection with the later reference to the transfiguration, but we have here a wonderful evidence that this letter really came from Peter, albeit under Divine inspiration; for the process of thought and use of language is just as we would expect from a man who really was at the transfiguration and is now writing a letter some years later. For "remembrance", see on :12.

1:14 *Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle comes swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ indicated to me-* For "tabernacle", see on :13. Peter sensed that the end of his mortality was soon. It could be that like Paul, he reasoned and felt as if the second coming was imminent. Or perhaps he knew within himself due to illness or being imprisoned under a death sentence that his end was near. And he of course recalled the Lord's words to him in Jn. 21:18, that he was to die in a way that glorified Him, perhaps also by crucifixion, in the manner that the Lord Jesus "hath shewed me" (AV) by His own example. This connection with the Lord's words suggests to me that Peter, unlike Paul, expected to die before the second coming. The way he now writes of them remembering his message after his death (:15) is clear enough in this regard. This difference in perspective shows how two sincere believers can have different understandings whilst believing the same Gospel.

1:15 *Yes, I will give diligence that at every time you may be able after my death to call these things to remembrance-* "My death" is Gk. *eksodos*. As he faced up to his own imminent time of dying, he saw that his death would be a death with the Lord (Paul also spoke of his death in this way). He spoke of his death as "my *eksodos*" (2 Pet. 1:15), using the very same and specific word which he had heard at the transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah comforted the Lord regarding His *eksodos* (Lk. 9:31). The Lord's death was his death; he would die as the Lord Jesus had shown him by example (see on :14). The Lord's death is our death; the symbolism of baptism is to be remembered by us particularly at our death, and in our understanding of the death of our brethren. His death was a crescendo, the end point of a process, very intense at the end. This adds huge meaning and significance to old age and terminal illness; we are not to be seen as no longer significant, a burden merely to be carried by others, by medical staff and our families. We are being led to final identity with His death, that we might live eternally with Him in the power of His resurrection.

How could Peter try his best to ensure that after his death, they would remember his message? Perhaps he means that he would try to ensure that his message was written down and preserved; and that "diligence" was achieved, for we to this day hold his inspired letters in our hands. "That you may be able" is literally 'that you may have it'; which makes sense if Peter had in view a written record of his words.

The emphasis on remembering the words is to be understood in the light of the transfiguration experience. His brethren were to take heed to the word, just as he had to be almost rebuked: "This is My beloved Son: *hear him*". Peter loved the word, but so often

didn't hear it, and at the crucial moment didn't remember his Lord's word. He had said "at thy word" I will let down the net; but when he saw the huge catch, he was amazed; he realized that he hadn't really believed his Lord's word. And he knew he was simply "a sinful man", worthy of condemnation for his lack of faith ("depart from me"). He had to be taught that his own natural abilities were nothing at all. He was taught this in relation to fishing, to his faithfulness, commitment to laying down his life for Christ. He was made to learn that he knew nothing as he ought to know. And he implicitly admits this to his readers, when he asks us to take heed of the word which we may think we well know, just as he had to. Peter learnt the lesson of the transfiguration when he told the Jewish authorities that he had to hear God's word rather than theirs (Acts 4:19).

1:16 *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty-* As witnessed elsewhere in the New Testament, the brotherhood [especially the Jews amongst them] were under the influence of the various Jewish fables (Tit. 1:14), the *midrash* of the rabbis which twisted the sense of God's actual word. The transfiguration was understood by Peter to be a foretaste of the Lord's power and second coming. What he witnessed on the mount was evidence that this same Jesus should likewise come in power to mount Zion at the last day. And he was not repeating Jewish fables; he was an eyewitness of that majesty. And he had "made known" to his readership this fact; the gospel records are transcripts of the preaching of men like Peter who were eyewitnesses. The Gospel is therefore to be found in the gospel records; and elsewhere I have suggested the gospel of Mark is Peter's gospel record. Peter would have been one of the eyewitnesses who gave material to Luke for the compilation of his gospel (Lk. 1:2).

1:17- see on Jn. 13:32.

*For he received from God the Father honour and glory, delivered to him by such a voice from the Majestic Glory: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased-* Perhaps Peter means to say that when this voice of Divine approbation came, there was a visible manifestation of glory around the person of the human Lord Jesus on the mountain top. But "This is My beloved Son" is a quotation from the voice heard at the Lord's baptism. All the Synoptics record it there. Peter says that the voice came "from the Majestic glory", using the same word as he has just used in :16 when he says that he was an eyewitness of the Lord's "majesty". This eyewitness experience was at the Lord's baptism. But he says that he heard the same voice again on the mount of transfiguration (:18). He could well be saying that the voice at baptism sounded the same as the voice at the transfiguration- it was God's voice. Here we have a profound evidence of the personality of God- He has a voice, and that voice sounded the same on the two occasions Peter heard it.

1:18 *And this voice we heard, delivered out of heaven, when we were with him on the holy mount-* Peter is struggling in words to explain how the voice heard was from Heaven, not from earth, and was the actual voice of God, written down by him in words. That same sense of wonder is to be found in fact in every word of the Bible- it is all in some sense God's word. Hence the Greek suggests "There came *such* a voice to (Christ) from the excellent glory... and this voice which came from heaven *we* heard... we have also a *more sure word* of prophecy, whereunto *ye* do well that *ye* take heed" (2 Pet. 1:18,19). Notice the progression in his reasoning here. Peter considered it such an honour that he could hear the words which God primarily intended for Christ. And even more wondrous, the word of prophecy which we

have all heard is an even *more* wondrous revelation of God's glory than the word of God which came at the transfiguration. Yet do we even begin to reach that sense of wonder which Peter had on the mount? That sense of rapture, of real spiritual transport, of reaching out of earthly things into Heavenly, that desire for the experience never to end, even though we realize that we only understand a fraction of the infinity which is revealed by God's word?

1:19 *And we have the word of prophecy made yet more sure-* The Greek is awkward here. I think the sense is that Peter is sparing a thought for those of us who did not hear the Divine voice at the Lord's baptism and transfiguration. He is saying that in any case for "we" who heard the voice in reality, the prophetic word is even more "sure" as a witness. Because events can be forgotten, no matter how momentous at the time; memory fades and also distorts. But the fulfilment of the prophetic word of God is more sure for Peter than even his personal experience of hearing God's actual voice. And it is to *that* recorded voice which his readers needed to pay attention to.

"Prophecy" in Hebrew refers to speaking forth God's word, more than prediction of future events. There were New Testament prophets, speaking forth God's word under inspiration. Peter has earlier appealed for his readers to give due attention to his own inspired words. He is reasoning that although they did not hear the Divine voice as he had done, the letter he was writing, along with that of the other prophets, was even more sure than his account to them of having heard God's actual voice. The written inspired word is no less the actual voice of God to men.

*To which you do well that you take heed, as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the day-star arises in your hearts-* The command "hear Him!" was given to Peter and those who heard it; but the witness of God's prophetic word is even "more sure", and all of us must likewise "take heed" to that; and Peter's readership were to take heed to Peter's own inspired words just as much. This even more sure word of prophecy is shining as a light (candle) in the dark ("squalid", R.V.mg.) place of our mortal mind, or of the dingy apartments the Jewish refugee converts in Asia were living in, "*until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*". When the day of Christ's coming arrives, we will then have the fullness of the light of God's revelation. The present word of prophecy is but a lamp struggling against the darkness of our natural mind, in this life. But at the Lord's return, our very innermost beings will be filled with the light of God's revelation in Christ. Somehow our knowledge of God will be of such a different magnitude, that we will no longer relate to the word of prophecy in the same way as we do now. We must take heed to the word *in our hearts*- this is the idea, rather than any suggestion of a mystical coming of Christ in our hearts.

1:20 *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation-* To appreciate the force of Peter's argument in the previous verses, it must be understood most importantly ("first") that prophetic Divinely inspired scripture is just that- it is not the personal interpretation of men, unlike the Jewish fables referenced in :16. "Private interpretation" is parallel with a word coming "by the will of man" (:21). We would better read the phrase as meaning that no prophetic, inspired word "is private interpretation", the kind of personal interpretation or take on things which the Jewish fables were.

1:21 *For no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit-* According to our understanding of the inspiration process, so we will respect

God's prophetic word. Men did not think up what they were going to say, or will themselves to prophecy. They were moved, carried or driven along, by the Spirit, so that the words they spoke were of God, of His will rather than theirs. This explains why so many of the inspired writers in the Old Testament were of themselves unwilling; they spoke according to God's will and not their own.

But we need to clear up the misconception that the prophets were merely fax machines, dispassionately forwarding God's message to men. Their words were indeed the words of God, they were inspired, but they also had emotional involvement. All Scripture is indeed God-breathed, but this involved the prophets in breathing in of that Spirit and exhaling it, as it were (2 Tim. 3:16). The passage in 2 Pet. 1:19-21 has been somewhat misunderstood. Holy men of God indeed spoke as they were "moved" by the Holy Spirit; but, contrary to what is repeated parrot fashion by so many, the Greek for "moved" doesn't necessarily mean 'irresistibly carried along', as if the prophets had no personal input into what they said and were just treated as machines. The Greek word *phero* appears several times in 2 Peter:

- "The grace that is to be *brought* unto you" (2 Pet. 1:13)
  - "There *came* such a voice to [Christ] from the excellent glory" (2 Pet. 1:17)
  - "This voice which *came* from heaven" (2 Pet. 1:18)
  - "The prophecy *came* not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *phero* ['as they were...' is not in the original- it's in italics in the AV] the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21)
- Clearly enough, *phero* in 2 Pet. 1 doesn't mean 'irresistibly carried along by'. The context of 2 Pet. 1:21 is a warning that as there were false prophets in Old Testament times amongst the people of God, so there will be in the new Israel (2:1). Peter's stress is that the Old Testament prophets were *holy*, they spoke according to the will of *God* and not the will of *man*; their words came from the Holy Spirit, and not the spirit of the flesh- in distinction to the false prophets who spoke of the flesh.



## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Gal. 5:1.

*But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall secretly bring in destructive heresies-* The failures of natural Israel are traceable to false teaching from the priesthood / leadership, rather than purely personal apostasy. All the examples of rejected false teachers mentioned in 2 Pet. 2 were responsible, and in the ecclesia of their times. These false teachers had once known the Truth [:12] and would therefore be reserved to judgment [:9]; they attended the memorial meeting [:13], they had or claimed to have the gift of prophecy as Balaam did [:15 cp. Heb.6:4-6], and had once left the world, although now they were returning to it [:20-22]. In other words, they had all the external trappings of good Christians. We must expect something similar in the latter day ecclesia.

The appropriacy of the allusion to Israel's history was in the fact that Peter is writing his letters to his own converts, who were largely comprised of the Jews he had baptized in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

*Denying even the master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction-* He warns that they even deny the Lord who bought them (AV). They *even* do this- as if denying the Lord was the worst possible, imaginable sin. And it was the very thing which he had so publicly done, three times, and had effectively done again when bowing to Judaist false teaching. They deny "the Lord"- and that had been Peter's favourite title for Jesus during the ministry. As he warned of the evil of the apostate brethren, his own sense of personal failure and frailty was so evidently shown. And yet it was no reason for him to simply say 'So, I can't judge, I can't criticize another after what I did'. What he had learnt from the whole experience of forgiveness and grace was that the wondrous grace and atonement of Christ *must at all costs be preached and preserved*.

The tragedy is that Israel's rejection of Moses is typical of the rejection of Christ by those in the new Israel who turn away. The same word used about Israel *refusing* Moses as their deliverer (Acts 7:35) is used about those who *deny* (same word) the Lord (Jesus) that bought them. This is prefaced by the information that as there were those who lost their faith in the ecclesia in the wilderness, so there will be among the new Israel. Therefore "the Lord that bought them" is an allusion back to Moses as a type of Christ. The illogicality of Israel's rejection of Moses when he first appeared to them is so apparent. They were slaves in Egypt, and then one of the most senior of Pharaoh's officials reveals that he is their brother, and has been sent by God to deliver them. Yet they preferred the life of slavery in Egypt. This same illogicality is seen in us if we refuse baptism, preferring to stay in the world of slavery, or later when we chose the world as opposed to Christ. We deny, we refuse, we reject, the Lord who bought us by going back to the world from which he redeemed us. The illogicality of going back to the world is brought out by the illogicality of Israel's rejection of Moses. Israel rejected Moses because it was easier to stay where they were. Such is the strength of conservatism in human nature; such is our innate weakness of will and resolve. They rejected the idea of leaving Egypt because they thought it was better than it was, they failed to face up to how much they were suffering (Num. 11:5). And our apathy in responding to Christ's redemptive plan for us is rooted in the same problem; we fail to appreciate the seriousness of sin, the extent to which we are in slavery to sin- even though the evidence for this is all around us.

*2:2 And many shall follow their destructive ways, by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be blasphemed-* This has to be connected with the Lord's teaching that "many" (Gk. the majority) would fall away just before His coming (Mt. 24:12); Peter is perhaps picking this up, and shewing that this will be due to following false teachers. "Destructive ways" is literally 'the ways of condemnation'. The heresies they taught were likewise those of condemnation (:1); and their condemnation was therefore near (:3 s.w.). There is a great power in ideas; believing the wrong ones leads to destruction / condemnation.

False prophets bring forth bad fruit; the nature of the teaching therefore affects the nature of the fruit (Mt. 7:16). False teaching [which isn't the same as genuine intellectual failure] therefore elicits a bad way of life ("their destructive ways"); and the false prophets of the latter days will result in iniquity abounding (Mt. 24:11). This is why teaching does matter. Without faith- which comes from holding *the* Faith- it is impossible to please God. True righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit; the result of the word of the Gospel working within us, the result of the Spirit of Christ which God has sent forth into the hearts of His people. Many outside of the Faith appear to in fact be far more righteous than most of us, in terms of 'good works'. But these good works are an outcome of their natural personality type; this is how they *are*. But God has sent His Son to the sick who need a doctor, to those imprisoned by their own thinking, to the tragically blind. Through the power of the basic Gospel, we have the power to change.

Any student of the New Testament epistles cannot fail to notice these repeated warnings against false teachers. Peter reminded his readers of "the words... spoken by the holy prophets [New Testament ones?] and the apostles... knowing this first [i.e. most importantly], that there shall come [false teachers and mass apostasy] in the last days" [2 Pet.2:3]. Unless we say that "the last days" is a phrase which has no reference to our own times, we have to accept that there will be major false teaching and apostasy within the brotherhood just before Christ's return.

*2:3 And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you-* So often, financial advantage figures in the motivation of the false teachers. They not only taught falsely, but demanded payment for it. They made their message as attractive as possible in order to be paid for saying it. Their "feigned words" suggests they were falsely claiming Divine inspiration for their message; this problem has been addressed in the immediate context in 1:16-21. They justified immoral behaviour by assuring believers that a special message from God had permitted it; and people paid for this to be true, as it were.

*Their sentence now from of old does not linger, and their destruction does not slumber-* The essence of the judgment seat is now. Their sentence and destruction / condemnation had already been issued and would not delay in fulfilment. This idea of the last day being somehow 'delayed' is returned to in chapter 3. God is not tuned out towards human behaviour now, only opening the books and reviewing it at the last day. He now is sensitive to our actions, and His judgment toward it is ongoing.

*2:4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved until judgment-*

It was presumably in one of the previous creations that the Angels were developed. They have knowledge of good and evil, just as fallen man has (Gen. 3:22). This could suggest that

they too had the experience of temptation and choice between sin and obedience. Job speaks of the angels who were charged with folly as if this fact was well known (Job 4:18). John Thomas suggested that the "angels that sinned" in 2 Pet. 2:4 lived at this time. There is no doubt that this passage in Peter, and the parallel in Jude, has some reference to Korah's rebellion. However, there are many such warnings to God's people which combine reference to more than one historical event, and it could be the same here: as if to say, 'History repeats itself. The angels that sinned so long ago went through in principle the same process of apostasy as Korah's company, and you too are capable of falling from grace in the same basic way'. Apostasy has a long continuity; all who fall follow a similar pattern, ultimately sharing the same apotheosis. It could even be that the fall of the Kings of Tyre and Babylon (Is. 14; Ez. 28) are recorded in the language of an angel / "anointed cherub" who wanted superiority over the others, and who then fell from Heaven (Ez. 28:14; Is. 14:13,14 cp. Eph. 4:10). There are strong similarities between these passages and the Jewish understanding of Angels that sinned before creation. These similarities would be in order to show the same kind of historical continuity: between the Angels who once sinned, and spiritually blessed men who turned away from what they could have had. The fact that *all* the Angels *now* are righteous and incapable of sinning (cp. Lk. 20:35,36) doesn't mean that Angels never sinned in a previous creation. But the point to note is that they are now in the grave, chained in darkness-not running around as evil spirits causing mischief. They are "reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4), when "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3).

But this passage is of course seriously misunderstood by those who believe there are currently sinful Angels in existence. But if literal angels are referred to here, then they are not going around making people sin, seeing that they are kept safely chained up. They are "under darkness", i.e. not openly on the earth nor in heaven. The parallel passage in Jude 5,6 implies that this is a reference to a well-known fact: "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this". There is no record in any other part of the Bible about angels sinning in Eden; how then could these Christians be reminded of these things? All the other examples which Peter and Jude mention are taken from Old Testament examples which were well known, and this is no exception.

There is no indication that these things happened in Eden. There is no mention of the angels starting to cause trouble after they sinned – the implication in Jude 6 is that they were immediately chained up under darkness. At the creation "all the sons of God (the angels) shouted for joy" (Job 38:7) and they saw "everything... was very good" (Gen. 1:31); there was no evil whatever.

The Hebrew and Greek words translated "Angels" can refer to men. These "angels" are to be judged at "the great day" of the second coming. The punishment of the unworthy at that day will be total destruction (Mt. 25:41); yet we know that angels cannot die or be destroyed (Lk. 20:35,36)- an angel walked with Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:27,28). We read of the angel that appeared to Manoah, "when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar" (Jud. 13:20). God "makes his angels spirits: his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). Therefore these "angels" who are to be condemned must be human ones, because fire cannot destroy Angels.

Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah also ("even as") "are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (i.e. total destruction after judgment – Mt. 25:41). This implies that the angels that sinned were made a public example (as was Sodom) of what would happen to those who disobey God. However, there is no Biblical record of angels

sinning in Eden – so how are these “angels” “set forth for an example” (Jude 6)? There is no indication that even Adam and Eve saw the punishment of anyone apart from the serpent. Remember that sin entered the world “by one man” – Adam (Rom. 5:12) – not by an angel sinning.

Notice that the words “Devil” and “Satan” do not occur in these passages. 2 Peter 2:9–11 interprets the reserving of the angels unto judgment as “The Lord knows how... To reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished... them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government... speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels... bring not railing accusations”. This is saying that the counterparts of the sinful angels are the unjust men who follow their human lusts. That these men are not Angels is shown by the fact that they speak evil of people, whereas Angels do not. Peter doesn’t imply there are different categories of angels, sinful and good. He does not say ‘the good angels do not...’, but rather he refers simply to “angels”, all of whom are good beings.

“Chains of darkness” represent death in Proverbs 5:22–23 (“cords” in v. 22 is rendered “chains” in the Septuagint). Thus the ‘angels’ are now dead. They are “reserved” unto the day of judgment. “Reserved” does not mean (in the Greek) ‘kept prisoner’, it implies rather that God has made a note of these people, and will give them their judgment accordingly, at the second coming of Christ. 2 Peter 2:1 sets the context for :4: “But there were false prophets also among the people (of Israel, in the wilderness, cp. Jude 5), even as there shall be false teachers among you”. Thus the angels that sinned appear to refer to false teachers amongst Israel in the wilderness. That God “spared not” the sinful ‘angels’ connects with how God “spared not” the sinful Israelites in the wilderness (Ps. 78:50). Indeed, the idea of God not sparing is often associated with His attitude to apostate Israel: Dt. 29:20; Jer. 13:14; 21:7; Ez. 7:4,9; 8:18; 9:10. The angels “reserved unto judgment” matches how the Jewish world was “reserved unto judgment” in AD70 (2 Pet. 3:7).

The immediate context is in 2 Peter 2:3 – the Judaizers were about to be suddenly punished (in the holocaust of A.D. 70) – “whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”. Peter then reasons that as God immediately punished the ‘angels’ that sinned, so the judgment and damnation of the Judaizers would not be long delayed. If the angels were super-human beings who still have the liberty to go about tempting us to sin, and have had such liberty since the garden of Eden, then their day of judgment *has* lingered, it *has* been a long time coming, and therefore Peter’s use of the angels that sinned as an example of God quickly punishing sin in v. 4 does not apply. Jude was writing against a background of belief that sinful Angels were roaming the world and inciting people to sin. He surely is attempting to debunk this idea by stressing that “the Angels who kept not their first estate” – whoever we understand them to be – are safely locked up in chains, unable to influence anyone on earth today.

We have noted that this incident is probably concerning human “angels” at some point in the history of Israel, probably on the wilderness journey, and that it would be well known and documented in Jewish history (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures). It also involved a great public punishment of the wrongdoers which set them “forth as an example”. The rebellion of the 250 princes of Israel in the wilderness led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, as recorded in Numbers 16, seems to fit quite well.

“Angel” can mean “minister”, “messenger” (as John’s disciples were messengers or ministers to him, Lk. 7:24). Numbers 16:9 describes the rebels as “ministers” of the

congregation. The Septuagint uses the word *aggelos* for “ministers”, which is the same Greek word translated “Angel” in 2 Peter 2:4. They left their first, or original, “principality” (Jude 6, A.V. margin); the rebels were princes, but wanted to be priests as well (Num. 16:2,10). Because of this, the ground opened and swallowed them (Num. 16:31–33), as a dramatic example to everyone of the fate of those who rebel against the Word of God. It was especially dramatic in that it is emphasized that this was the first time that such a thing had happened (Num. 16:30). Thus they are now dead, “in everlasting chains under darkness”, in the heart of the earth, to be resurrected and judged at “the judgment of the great day”. Jude 8 implies that “likewise”, i.e. like the angels that sinned, the Judaizers “speak evil of dignities”, e.g. Jesus and Paul. The rebels spoke evil of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:11–14). “Cast them down to hell” (2 Pet. 2:4). “Hell” in this verse is *tartaroo* in the Greek and is used only once in the New Testament. It was used in pagan Greek mythology to describe a subterranean place of darkness for the dead. “Chains of darkness” is rendered “pits of darkness” in the R.V. The Greek word *serius* (pits) indicates an underground granary or prison, which corresponds with Korah, Dathan and Abiram’s destruction when they “went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished” (Num. 16:33).

That they were destroyed and were not left alive is shown by a comment on this incident in Psalm 73. Here Asaph describes how “my steps had well nigh slipped” (v. 2) because the wicked seemed to be prospering so much. Then, “I went into the sanctuary (tabernacle) of God; then understood I their end” (v. 17). This was because the brass censers of the 250 rebels were melted down after their death and beaten into plates with which the altar was covered – another example of the angels that sinned being publicly “set forth as an example” (Jude 7). Asaph would have seen these and reflected on the fate of the wicked men. Thus he reflects upon the rebels, the angels that sinned, “surely thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down (by the earth swallowing them) into destruction” (v. 18) – therefore they are not alive, but in the same way as Sodom was destroyed with eternal fire, i.e. totally, so, too, were these “angels” (Jude 6,7).

The language of being cast down to the underworld and the darkness of the grave all features in the record of Egypt’s judgment in Ez. 31:16–18. Yet Egypt was not literally cast down from Heaven. The allusion to Egypt is to show how the apostate Jews in the wilderness were treated as if they were actually Egyptians – because in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.

We must understand the immediate context in which Peter uses the idea of God having judged ‘angels’ [whoever they refer to]. He reasons that *if* God didn’t spare ‘angels’ who sinned in the past but judged them; and *if* God punished sinners by a flood but saved Noah; and *if* God overthrew the wicked in Sodom but saved Lot... *then* we can be assured that God knows how to rescue the Godly and to judge the wicked in a future day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:4–9). The example of angels being judged must be seen as a warning and a comfort to us in our day. The implication would surely be that just as the flood and the destruction of Sodom were well known Biblical examples of Divine judgment, so must the judgment of the ‘angels’ be. And therefore the interpretation which associates them with Korah and his rebellion in the wilderness would seem to be most appropriate. And note that there is *no* Biblical record of rebellious Heavenly angels being judged and thrown down to earth.

2:5 *And did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly-* Given this apostasy of the sons of God and the unwillingness of the world to listen to Noah's preaching (2 Pet. 2:5) the size of the ecclesia must have declined, until it was only 9 strong. H.P. Mansfield

claims that 'Methuselah' means 'When he dies, it shall come'- suggesting that he died a few days or weeks before the flood came. We can imagine the ecclesia falling away one by one until it was just that old brother Noah, his wife and his three faithful sons (no doubt he had other grandchildren and children whom he failed to influence). The small, declining size of the faithful in our last days and the total apathy to our preaching should not discourage us- as with all negative things, a positive message can be read into them in the light of Scripture. And the message here is that such things clearly indicate that we are in the last days. The only people to survive the temptations of these 'last days' before the flood were one family unit. As these events are so pregnant with latter day relevance, it may be that we are to perceive here a faint hint that strongly led family units are the way to survive the last days. Noah is described as "the eighth" (AV), perhaps alluding to the fact that of the eight people saved in the ark, he was "the eighth"; he put the others first.

Peter here mentions Noah and Lot together (:6). There are many connections between Peter's letters and the Gospels. I calculate that once every three verses, Peter is alluding to the Lord's words. And the figure is probably higher, seeing that we don't know all the words and actions of the Lord Jesus, and probably Peter is alluding to incidents and words which aren't recorded. Like Paul, Peter's mind was saturated with the Lord Jesus. This was the secret of his spirituality, this was why he could cope with the ministry to the Gentiles which he had so boldly started being taken away from him and given to Paul, this was why he didn't slump into a life of melancholy bitterness. Some of his allusions are conscious allusions (e.g. those to the transfiguration). Others seem almost unconscious- e.g. the way he cites both Noah and Lot (2 Pet. 2:5-8) as warnings for the last generation, when the Lord had likewise used both of them together (Lk. 17:26-32).

2:6- see on 2 Tim. 2:14.

*And turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemning them to destruction, having made them an example to those that should live ungodly lives-* According to Gen. 18:17-19, the reason God told Abraham what He would do with Sodom was because Abraham would teach others, and his descendants would teach others. This implies that Sodom's destruction was to be a special lesson for all generations. And 2 Pet. 2:6 says the same- Sodom was to be a perpetual "example unto those that after should live ungodly"; in this sense Sodom was "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). The fire was "eternal" in the sense that the example of destruction was to be to all generations. This paves the way for Sodom's destruction to be understood as a particularly significant type of the last days.

This warning is in the context of the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. Peter saw Jerusalem, the "holy city" of Judaism, as spiritually Sodom- just as Isaiah did (also Rev. 11:8). Yet Judaism prided itself on separation from Gentiles and obedience to Divine law. All this was covering up an utterly "filthy" and "unGodly" interior.

2:7 *And delivered righteous Lot, distressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked-* "Distressed" carries the sense of being oppressed; it is only elsewhere used in Acts 7:24 of the oppression of Israel in Egypt. The idea may not be that he was upset and worn down by the immorality all around him; it could be that he was actively persecuted by the wicked living people around him. This was why he needed to be "delivered", not just from the judgment to come upon Sodom, but from his persecutors. This was highly relevant to the Hebrew Christians

being persecuted by and within Jerusalem, and it was they to whom Peter was writing. The same word for "delivered" is used of how God knows how to deliver the Godly from temptation / testing (:9). So Lot's deliverance was not simply from sharing in Sodom's destruction, but from the temptations and testing from living amongst such wicked people.

*2:8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, tormented his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds)-* Lot's righteousness was not so great of itself. Perhaps he too had righteousness counted to him, as his uncle Abraham did. "Seeing and hearing" suggests a bombardment of his senses with the lawless deeds of Sodom- which are being used by Peter as parallel with the lawless deeds of Jerusalem and the temple cult. Their much vaunted keeping of law was in fact lawlessness, in God's eyes.

The calling of Lot out of Sodom is a type, on the Lord's authority, of our calling away to judgment. His position immediately prior to the Angels' coming must therefore connect with our situation now. Lot was in no way as spiritually strong as he ought to have been, nor as enthusiastic for the Lord's coming as his complaining about the evils of the city recorded in 2 Pet. 2:7,8 might lead us to think. The very fact that he chose to live in the area whilst Abraham steered well clear of it is testimony enough to his worldliness (Gen. 13:10,11). The offering of his two daughters to the Sodomites also betrays a certain unspirituality (Gen. 19:8). The fact that Sodom's fate was revealed to Abraham rather than Lot may also be significant.

2 Pet. 2:8 reveals how Lot "tormented his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds" (AV). Seeing that he failed to influence his family to properly appreciate the sins of that city, and that he was so attached to it that he was unwilling to leave, this must be interpreted as little more than the sort of middle class, respectable 'tut-tutting' that present day Christianity abounds with. After all, he had chosen to live there, he did not have to stay, and the record of his choice of Sodom in Gen.13 spotlights his unspiritual, worldly thinking in this regard when compared to Abraham, the stranger and sojourner. Whether this assessment of Lot's character is felt to be correct or not, it must surely be accepted that there was a serious dualism in his position which has strong similarities with ours today- vexing his soul about the sins of the surrounding world, and yet increasingly involved in it and greatly benefiting from it materially, at spiritual cost to himself and his family. Lot was effectively willing to betray his daughters to the men of Sodom, pointing forward to the Lord's prophecy of how in the holocaust to come, many will betray each other (Mt. 10:36), family life within the ecclesia will break up; a spirit of dissension will fall upon natural and spiritual families.

*2:9 Therefore the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation-* 'The Lord' to Peter meant 'the Lord Jesus'. He comforts them that the Lord Jesus knows how to deliver the Godly out of temptation. Surely he was referring back to how the Lord Jesus had prayed for him, knowing the temptation that was to come upon him in the High Priest's house, knowing Satan's desire to have him. And although it might have seemed that in the short term Peter's weakness rendered that prayer powerless, in fact in the end, his faith didn't fail, just as the Lord had prayed. And so from his own example he could comfort his readers that surely their Lord knew how to deliver from temptation, even if like Lot and like Peter those he delivers may deserve to be left to the outcome of their own words and actions.

To keep Lot from the great spiritual temptation provoked within him by that city, God destroyed it. Similarly God's abhorrence of this present world which Sodom typifies is largely due to the spiritual temptation it so evidently brings upon His people. And remember that it was thanks to Abraham's prayers that Lot was saved out of Sodom. Perhaps his prayers had been especially for Lot's spiritual deliverance from the situation he was in; and the destruction of Sodom perhaps happened exactly for that reason.

*And to keep the unrighteous under punishment to the day of judgment-* There is no conscious survival of death. The sentence for sin is passed now (:3), but they only receive it at the day of judgment. They are therefore kept "under" that judgment, although dead, until they are resurrected to face judgment. The idea of keeping or reserving the wicked unto judgment at the last day is quite common with Peter (2:4,9,17; 3:7 all use the same word). Likewise our eternal inheritance and crown is "kept ['reserved'] in heaven" for us (1 Pet. 1:4). The judgment has already been made; but the result of the verdict is reserved or kept until the last day. As the Psalms make clear, we can know right now the Lord's judgments; they are revealed to us in His word, which is His judgments.

2:10- see on Jude 14.

*Chief among these are those that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement and despise dominion. Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries-* Amongst those to be condemned, there are "chief" and also lesser ones, just as there will be grades of reward amongst the righteous. These gradations reflect the Father's huge sensitivity towards human behaviour.

In a sense, the Angels deal with men according to men's own perceptions of themselves, and with what can only be described as a certain spiritual culture. They do not "speak evil of dignities", as exemplified in the way the Angelic voice from Heaven addressed the wicked Nebuchadnezzar whom they were about to depose as "O king Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan. 4:31). This isn't only an example to us of not being abrasive to people even if we know them to be seriously in the wrong. It's an example of how we should seek to deal with people within the terms of their own perceptions. It makes one wonder whether at the judgment, the Lord will address those who were known in their lives as 'Doctors' or 'Reverends'... obviously making the point, as the Angel was to Nebuchadnezzar, that human advantage means so absolutely nothing before the ultimate analysis and set of values of His judgment.

The "them" of :11 refer to the same "dignitaries"; Angels do not rail at them but instead say "The Lord rebuke you" (in the parallel Jude 9). The example of this cited in Jude 9 is a quotation from how in Zechariah, the Angels rebuke the human adversaries / local government authorities who were opposing the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The "dignitaries" [*doxa*] are not Angels themselves, because :11 goes on to say that Angels do not talk about "dignitaries" in this way but rather call down the Lord's rebuke upon them (Jude 9). Seeing there are no sinful Angels, it cannot be that the "dignitaries" are Angels. Note that *doxa* is used of sinful humans and not Angels by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:24.

I noted on 1 Peter that some of Peter's Jewish refugee converts in Asia were getting in trouble with the local authorities and considered themselves above the local laws. They slandered "dignitaries" and also despised "dominion" or "government"; the word is used about human



civil government in Eph. 1:21. These people are here called "self willed". They considered themselves above the law and had created themselves as the final arbiter of right and wrong; they were as James says, judging the law and speaking evil of it by considering themselves as the ultimate law (James 4:11).

*2:11 Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not dare bring before the Lord an injurious accusation against them-* As explained on :10, the "them" refers to local government authorities whom the Jewish false teachers were slandering and setting themselves over. The parallel in Jude 9 exemplifies this by a quotation from how in Zechariah, the Angels rebuke the human adversaries / local government authorities who were opposing the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The Angels are "before the Lord" in the court of Heaven; and so are all of us, effectively. Yet even they talk about sinful people on earth with appropriate respect and restraint, not condemning them of themselves. This is a window into the awareness of God and the Angels concerning situations on earth, and how they discuss those situations with respect toward men. Their greater "might and power" do not make them disrespect those who are weaker. And that is truly a pattern for us, who each have some greater power than others in some way.

*2:12 But these, as creatures without reason-* "Without reason" is *a-logos*, without the *logos* of God's word. The parallel in Jude 10 says that they relied upon their natural knowledge and perception, rather than God's word.

*Born mere animals to be taken and destroyed-* The idea is that they were predestined to this destruction; and yet it was because they acted in the way they did of their own choice. There is a word play on the word "destroyed", which carries the idea of 'corruption'. Their final corruption in condemnation is because of their own corruption. Hence "in their destroying ['corruption'] they shall be destroyed / corrupted".

*Speak reproachfully in matters of which they are ignorant; they shall in their destroying surely be destroyed-* They were living out their own condemnation; human behaviour is of itself our judgment. Truly "we make the answer now" to the issues of the future day of judgment.

*2:13 Suffering wrong as the wages of wrong-doing-* This implies that the false teachers were even in this life suffering a punishment appropriate to the kind of sin they were committing. The phrase "the wages of wrong-doing" is repeated in :15 regarding how Balaam loved such wages. The only other usage of the phrase is in Acts 1:18 about how Judas bought a field with his "wages of wrong-doing". These false teachers were after money, but that love of money lead them to even now 'suffer wrong', just as happened to Judas. It would seem from some hints in 1 Peter that the 'wrong' they suffered was at the hands of the local civil authorities.

The allusion to Judas makes Judas out to be the arch apostate and betrayer of the Lord Jesus, whose example was followed by these false teachers. And yet Judas and Peter had committed in essence the same sin of denying their Lord, and at the very same time. Peter would have intensely been aware of this. And yet he holds up Judas as a prototype of all who fall, as if to say: 'And there, but for the Lord's grace, nearly went I. See the terror of it, and turn away from that road. I of all men can tell you that'.

*They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime-* One wonders about the way that Peter describes the apostate believer as drunk in the day time, when earlier he had dismissed with a confident logic the claim that he was drunk at Pentecost by saying that it couldn't possibly be so, because it was early in the day and people can only get drunk at night (Acts 2:15). Could it be that his perception of sinfulness and the grossness of this present evil world had increased by the end of his life?

*Spots and blemishes, revelling in their deceivings while they feast with you-* These people were apparently confidently participating in the breaking of bread meetings. As happened at Corinth, these meetings were being turned into drunken feasts. They were unashamedly out to deceive the Lord's people through participating at these feasts. These were the types who needed to be excluded from the Lord's supper- not sincere folks who may have failed in some ways or who honestly misunderstand some of His teachings. They were spots and blemishes upon the bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus is working to present us to Himself *without* blemish (Jude 24 s.w.). These false teachers were therefore working directly against the Lord's work and intention.

2:14- see on 2 Pet. 3:16.

*Having eyes full of adultery, they cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls-* The false teachers, both here and elsewhere in the New Testament, were sexual predators. The breaking of bread at Corinth was turned into a drunken feast where the equivalent of temple prostitutes were used. The Christian church was being operated just how most other religious cults of the time were- with sexual abandon and alcohol abuse used as part of their rituals. As suggested on 1 Peter, it seems that the converts Peter is writing to are those he made in the thousands in his early preaching to the orthodox Jews at Jerusalem. They had fallen a long way; from strict orthodox Jews full of faith in and love for Jesus, who had shared their goods amongst each other and then been persecuted, and for the sake of their faith had gone into exile in what is now Turkey... and there, the pressures of the refugee life had taken over. Bit by bit they had slipped into this state of immorality. We marvel at how a man can at one point in his life be so committed and spiritual; and only a few years later, end in the spiritual gutter. But we are surrounded by examples of it, and therefore the situation we are reading of here is not impossible to imagine. It is a sober warning that faith must be maintained. No apparent height of spiritual strength will be retained unless we in an ongoing sense exercise our hearts in the ways of the Spirit.

*Having a heart exercised in covetousness, children of cursing-* Their tragic decline was because of the bad exercise of their hearts. They were covetous, just as the orthodox Jews of Lk. 16:14 were. They came to Christ with great zeal, but that basic problem with coveting remained. It became the regular mental experience of their minds, and it eventually led them to this tragic collapse of faith, similar to what Paul laments in Hebrews concerning the Jerusalem Hebrew Christians who instead of going into exile, had reverted to Judaism. They were sons of cursing / condemnation; at that moment, they would be condemned if the Lord returned or they died. And they could change that.

2:15 *Forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of wrongdoing-* These false teachers were home grown within the church, rather than having entered in from outside it; they had gone astray, they were once in the right way, having been baptized. The stress is that they had a financial motive in their

misbehaviour. The same term "wages of wrongdoing" is used about Judas in Acts 1:18. We marvel that love of money could lead to such awful behaviour, wrong beyond words, of betraying God's Son and destroying His people. But people commit all manner of murder for relatively small sums. This is the power of the love of money. No wonder Scripture warns against it so strongly.

*2:16 But he was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spoke with a man's voice and hindered the madness of the prophet-* Peter was unafraid to rebuke the high flying intellectuals who were wrecking the first century ecclesia. He likens his rebuke of them to the "dumb ass speaking with man's voice" which rebuked Balaam. This was what he chose to identify himself with; that inspired donkey. There was no great trained intellect in Peter; yet his zeal for God's word puts us to shame. As the time of the end progresses, it seems that more and more of Christ's church (in the Western world) are educated people. In this I see a tremendous danger. A man who could probably not read, who probably wrote his inspired letters by dictation because he couldn't write himself, had a zeal for understanding which puts us to shame. Paul correctly made the point (and who more aware that his intellectuality could run away with him than Paul) that God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty; He has chosen the simple of this world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1 and 2). I get some kind of intuitive feeling that Paul had Peter at the back of his mind as he wrote this letter to working class Corinth (1 Cor. 1:26). The deep mutual respect between theologian Paul and fisherman Peter is a real working model for our ecclesias.

Yet "rebuked" can also be a legal term, meaning 'to convict'. So often in this passage we encounter this idea that the essence of judgment day is today. The convictions for sin are going on right now- and should be responded to. It's as if the guilty verdict and eternal condemnation is passed down to the guilty right now- but they can change the verdict by repentance. What urgency should there be therefore, when we are convicted of sin.

The dumb ass was speaking God's word. But that word was spoken in order to save Balaam from destruction at the hand of the Angel who stood in front of him. We see here God's justice and grace working together. God made the Angel go out to kill Balaam; and made the ass speak to Balaam and collapse beneath him so that this didn't happen. It's rather like the Angel of death going out to destroy all the firstborn on Passover night, including that of the Israelites; but turning away from the houses over which the Passover Angel hovered. Thus one Angel delivered people from another Angel. There is no contradiction here; rather an insight into the careful balance within all God's operations with men. He doesn't simply operate on auto-pilot.

*2:17 These are springs without water-* They appeared to be fountains but had no substance as such. This would allude to how they were teachers, fountains, sources of water in the desert; but without water.

*And mists driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved-* These types "are carried with a tempest [in] the mist of darkness". The Greek for "carried with a tempest" only occurs elsewhere in Mk. 4:37 and Lk. 8:23 in description of how Peter and the disciples, proud of their sailing ability, were driven by the storm / whirlwind in the darkness. The Greek for "tempest" is highly specific- it refers only and specifically to the whirlwind storms which can arise on Galilee. Peter clearly intends the allusion back to the night when

he too was driven in a Galilee whirlwind, and had been rebuked for his lack of faith. He is really saying that he too has been a condemned man and can relate to how they feel; yet he was converted out of it, and came to gracious forgiveness. And so, he implicitly appeals, can each of you my readers be.

They will be sent to a mist of darkness, as Paul walked about in a mist and darkness, not knowing where he was going (Acts 13:11). Thick darkness is associated with God's judgment (Is. 8:22; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)- and recall how the judgment of darkness upon Egypt was so severe that human movement required 'groping' (Ex. 10:21). Perhaps there will be a literal element to this in the experience of the rejected. Be that as it may, the utter *pointlessness* of life without God will be so bitterly apparent. And yet they would not face up to it in their day of opportunity. This likening of the rejected to scavenging dogs in the rubbish tips outside Jerusalem lends further support to the suggestion that the punishment of the wicked will be associated with literal Gehenna, outside Jerusalem. 2 Sam. 23:6 speaks of how the rejected will be "thrust away" by the Lord. The Hebrew means to wander, to be chased [and is translated this way elsewhere in the AV]. Significantly in this connection, 2 Sam. 23:7 speaks of how the rejected will be consumed in "the same place" where the seed of David was to overcome wickedness. Literal Gehenna was in the same vicinity as Golgotha; and this in this sense His death was a foretaste of the future judgment, as we observe elsewhere.

2:18 *For when they speak-* They were teachers within the church.

*Great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error-* The lewdness and lusts of the flesh all have sexual hints. As noted on :14 and :19, they were justifying sexual immorality within the church and actually at the breaking of bread meeting. We recall how there was a false teacher code named "Jezebel" who taught fornication within the church, claiming that she was speaking inspired words of prophecy which permitted and commanded fornication (Rev. 2:20). Their words were "swelling", just as false teaching is likened to yeast which swells up.

2:19 *Promising them liberty, while they are in fact slaves to corruption. For of whom a person is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage-* As noted on :18, the "liberty" was the libertine sexual freedom to use prostitutes at church meetings. This was their interpretation of Christian freedom. It may be that they misquoted Paul's writings to this effect. He states in Rom. 3:8 that his message of grace and freedom from law was indeed wilfully misquoted in this way. The tension between freedom and slavery is at the heart of Paul's teaching about baptism in Romans 6. We are made ultimately free through slavery to the Lord Jesus. These false teachers were offering apparent moral freedom only because they had been overcome by sin, personified here as "a person". The same word is used in :20 for how they had previously been "overcome" by the immorality of the world. It is this which had overcome the false teachers, and they were trying to bring others into the same bondage which they were in. This is the same mentality behind why addicts may seek to get others hooked; there is a downward tendency in human nature, we wish to bring others down to our level. The path of the Spirit is what reverses all this.

2:20 *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning-* See on :19. The having "escaped" suggests a one

off point when they escaped; see on 1:4. That point was surely baptism. It is through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus that we "escaped" the world; but theoretical knowledge of doctrine is surely not in view, for one can be aware of all that but still be entangled in the things of the world. Indeed, Peter in his letters doesn't appear to need to tackle any major theological errors (unlike Paul to the Corinthians). "Knowledge" is being used in the Hebraic sense of 'having a relationship with'. It is living, two-way relationship with the Lord Jesus which means we find the attractions of the world and flesh far less attractive. "Entangled" is a word only elsewhere used in 2 Tim. 2:4 about the spiritual soldier not entangling himself with the affairs of this life. The obsessive, entangling nature of the things of secular life are just as much a source of entangling as the defilements of the world in its worst sense. For those who have once escaped these things and return to them, their latter end is worse than at their beginning, when they were ignorant of the Gospel. For such people are not responsible to judgment. But having known the Gospel and then returning to the world, the fate will be resurrection to judgment, seeing the future that has been missed, and then having to die eternally, "the second death".

2:21 *For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them-* The Jewish converts whom Peter is addressing, those baptized by him at Pentecost, would have heard John the Baptist's message. And that message of preparation for the new covenant is the only teaching described with this same phrase, "the way of righteousness" (Mt. 21:32). "The holy commandment" is a phrase used only elsewhere about the old covenant (Rom. 7:12). To turn away from the covenant was the ultimate sin for Jewish people. Peter is using this language of the old covenant about the new covenant. To have turned from the old covenant to the new, and now to turn away from it... meant that "it were better" not to have been born. The allusion is to Judas (Mt. 26:24), whom Peter sees as the epitome of all that fall; but see on :13.

2:22 *It has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to his own vomit and a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire-* The word for 'washed' means a complete bathing, and would be appropriate to baptism. These orthodox Jewish converts who had come from hard line Judaism to being washed in Christ by Peter baptizing them... were returning to the wallowing in the mud which had been their former way of life. And that was how Peter therefore esteemed the hard line legalism of Judaism- a wallowing in mud, as pigs, the classic unclean animal. In another analogy, their conversion away from Judaism had been a vomiting up of rotting unclean food; and they were now returning to what they had once vomited up. Judaism is not at all spirituality, according to how Peter, Paul, Stephen and others allude to it. The washing of baptism is likened to a vomiting up of rotten food. Again the implication is that the vomiting of the old life was a one off act which occurred at a specific time- their baptism. Baptism is therefore a specific action of the Spirit upon us in moral terms.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write to you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance-* 2 Peter 3 concerns the coming of the 'day of the Lord' both in AD70 and more importantly in our last days. The allusions to the Olivet prophecy, which is similar in this respect, and the use of the word *parousia* to describe this 'coming' of the Lord confirm this approach. This chapter contains warnings of a major apostasy that would arise within the latter day ecclesia, and urgent exhortations as to how we should live in the last days. It is not an exaggeration to say, in the light of this, that these words were fundamentally written for our generation, living just prior to the second coming, notwithstanding any other application to earlier generations. The purpose of this chapter, in common with the whole second epistle, was to "stir up (the Greek implies suddenly, with force) your pure minds... that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy (Christian?) prophets (e.g. Paul, v.15), and of the commandment of us the apostles" (v.1,2).

"Sincere minds" could be an example of Peter imputing righteousness to his readership, assuming their sincerity and standing "in Christ" despite being aware of serious failures amongst them. Or it could be that Peter is now focusing upon the faithful remnant amongst his readership.

3:2 *That you should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles-* AV: "Of us the apostles". The things written in Peter's letters were therefore a reminder of what had been spoken by the New Testament prophets, and what Peter and the apostles had taught all the thousands of converts who were baptized at Pentecost. There was clearly follow up teaching in addition to the address recorded in Acts 2. The "prophets" would refer to the group of Christians who spoke on that day as inspired prophets, fulfilling Joel's prophecy of prophets being raised up.

The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before". Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

3:3 *Knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts-* The "first" or most important (Greek) thing they were to understand when it came to Bible teaching about the last days was "that there shall come in the last days mockers". The presence of false teachers within the ecclesia would be one of the clearest signs of the second coming. The Lord "began" His Olivet prophecy with a warning about false teachers, as if this would be the first main sign (Mk. 13:5). Likewise Paul says that it was needless for him to write to the Thessalonians about the "times and seasons" of Christ's return. "For yourselves know perfectly (clearly) that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief

in the night" (1 Thess.5:1,2); i.e. it would be when there were unready elements within the ecclesia, to whom Christ's return would be thief-like. In similar vein, John taught that the believers could be certain they were in the 'last days' of AD70 because of the presence of false teaching (1 Jn. 2:18).

Connecting this with our comment on 1 Thess. 5:1,2, it may well be that the 'false teaching' is not so much in terms of basic abstract doctrine, but in the encouragement of a way of life that is not alert for the second coming. As we progress through 2 Peter 3, and indeed the entire New Testament, it becomes painfully obvious that this class of people were to arise *within* the ecclesia. As there were false teachers among natural Israel, so there must be within the New Israel (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter implies that this fact is a major theme in the teaching of all the apostles and Spirit-guided brethren. There are a number of connections between the descriptions of these people in 2 Pet. 2, and the language of 2 Pet. 3.

Such false teaching was something which Peter was prophesying: "There *shall* come... scoffers... saying...". But now the tenses change to the present: "For (because) this they willingly *are* ignorant of...". Even then these brethren had shut their mind to Bible based reasoning, refusing to consider the power of God's word as exhibited in the Old Testament. It was therefore only a matter of time before they started speaking forth false ideas. And Jude's allusions to 2 Peter 2 are because the situation predicted had by his time already started to come about, in the AD70 context.

The "mockery" was in order to justify the indulgence of "their own lusts". I have noted several times in chapter 2 that the false teaching was rooted in a justification of lust, especially sexual lust. The reality of the second coming ought to be a guard against sexual misbehaviour. The subconscious desire for most false teaching is in order to make the way easier and justify human lust.

This links up with the false teachers of 2 Pet. 2 being styled "them that walk after the flesh in... lust" (2:10). Thus, as always, the motivation for the questioning of true doctrine, in this case that of the second coming, was in order to justify a fleshly way of life. There seems a connection of thought here with the Lord's reflection that the servant who felt the Lord's coming was extensively delayed would start to "eat and drink with the drunken" and beat the fellow-servants. Peter's later reference to the Lord's thief-like coming for such brethren (:10) indicates that there is a connection here. This would show that Peter is interpreting the Lord's description of the man who thought that the Master was delaying His coming, as meaning that in reality he was questioning whether his Master would ever come. This must surely be where a disinterest in prophecy ultimately leads- in a man's heart, anyway.

*3:4 And saying: Where is the promise of his coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation-* Note how the false teaching was expressed in the form of a question. This common characteristic of false teachers dates right back to the serpent in Eden, showing that they have the family likeness of the beast. But then came the thrust of their argument: "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (AV). If "the fathers" here refers to the ecclesial elders who had known Christ in the flesh (as the phrase is used in 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Jn. 2:13,14), it would appear that these dishonest doubters of the first century were middle aged believers who had themselves been waiting some time for the Lord's

return, having been baptized by Peter at Pentecost. Christ's parable of the wicked servant getting tired of waiting would indicate the same. In any case, a group of arrogant youngsters would be unlikely to have the impact on the ecclesia which 2 Pet. 2 and 3:17 indicate that these false teachers would have.

This idea that Christ would not literally return was doubtless wrapped up in very respectable terms. We cannot overemphasize that the motivation for this false doctrine was in order to justify a fleshly lifestyle. Apostasy from the truth always has this motive. Conversely, true enthusiasm for the Lord's return is invariably associated with a spiritual way of life (cp. Rom. 13:12). 2 Thess. 2:2 says that the deceiving brethren taught that the day of Christ is here" (R.V.)- presumably through the idea that the believers now are fully the Kingdom of God, that the Lord's mystical presence amongst us is in fact His real and only form of existence and 'coming' to be with us, and that therefore there was no need for a doctrine of a second coming. In such an hour as the unworthy "think not", the Lord will return (Mt. 24:44). The Greek translated "think not" implies a very strong level of conviction that he will not return; it doesn't just imply that they will be expecting him but not very eagerly.

It may be in this way that there is a claim of "peace and safety" within the latter day ecclesia, seeing that "peace and safety" is very much the Old Testament language of the Kingdom (1 Chron. 22:10; Ez. 28:26; 34:25,28; 39:26; Zech. 14:11). It is very difficult to achieve a balance between appreciating our high spiritual status now, and realizing that we are not yet the fullness of God's Kingdom. A true appreciation of our position should lead us to value the second coming more, to personally yearn for it, and see its vital necessity. Never will that be a dry doctrine which we just assent to.

But the question "Where is the promise of his coming?" has an extraordinary number of allusions to other Scriptures, which all confirm a uniform interpretation.

In Ezekiel 12, the desolation of Israel by the Assyrian invasion was foretold. The message was continually mocked by the false prophets, who claimed inspiration from God to claim that the day of judgment had been endlessly delayed. They also belittled the predictions made by the true prophets, spreading their ideas until it became a common joke that Yahweh's prophets kept speaking of a coming day of the Lord that never came. But God's reply was clear: "What is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?... I will make this proverb to cease... say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect (fulfilment) of every vision... I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall no more be prolonged" (Ez. 12:22-25). The similarities with the last days leading up to AD70 are clear. The true word of God regarding the coming day of the Lord was mocked; a belief that "the days are prolonged" led to the conclusion that "every vision faileth", as the thought that "my Lord delayeth his coming" resulted in a lack of faith in the word of promise. Our Lord's statement that "all shall be fulfilled" at His coming (Lk. 21:32) matches the assurance given here that "every vision" *would* be fulfilled when the day came. Those within the ecclesia of Israel at Ezekiel's time who were expressing such doubt, were matched by those within the ecclesia of spiritual Israel (perhaps also Jews?) in the first century. Clearly they must have their latter day counterparts.

Set against the background of the imminent Assyrian invasion, the denunciation of Israel in Isaiah 5 also has marked similarities with the words of 2 Pet. 3. "My people... have no knowledge... that say, Let Him make speed, and hasten His work, that we may see it...



therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the stubble... (so) is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people" (Is. 5:13,19,24,25). Peter implies that the false teachers he is referring to should have "grown in knowledge" (3:18), and that because of their mocking request for God to speed up His purpose they also would have a fiery destruction. The irony was, of course, that the apparent delay was due to God's mercy in providing them time to repent (:9-12).

There are several allusions in 2 Peter 3 to the Olivet prophecy. The attitude Peter is speaking of here in :4 is related to that of the elder servant who decides that his Lord is delaying His return, and therefore he can act in a fleshly way as if the Lord will never come (Mt. 24:48). The person Jesus describes did not throw off the external trappings of his faith. "*My Lord delays his coming*" indicates that he still spoke of Jesus as his lord, and we are therefore left to conclude that he did not say these things in a spirit of public, gross abandon to the ways of the flesh, but rather deep in his heart, or perhaps as a new form of doctrine. Our Lord spoke of the man thinking this "in his heart"; but because our thoughts always find reflection in our words (Mt. 12:34), it is inevitable that Peter should speak of these people now actually saying those words. Thus the words of these false teachers had long been gestating.

The following verses in 2 Peter 3 speak of how God's word was present in the initial creation and His subsequent re-ordering of it. In just the same way, the word of God would have a part to play in the judgment of these false teachers. This would suggest that their claim that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" refers back to that of Gen.1. However, we can expect to see in the reasoning of these men a fair degree of complexity. It is just possible that the concept of a new creation in Christ was so common in the thinking of the early believers (Rev. 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:15,16; 3:10; Rom. 8; Eph. 2:10; 3:9; 4:24 etc.), that they were saying 'Since the apostles ("fathers" ) died, everything is going on fine since the new creation began on the cross. The spiritual graces we experience now as part of the new creation are such that there doesn't seem any need for this second coming doctrine'. The error was in focusing upon only one side of a bigger picture of Bible teaching, and then using that distorted picture to justify the way of the flesh. And yet the bottom line is that the latter day brotherhood will shy away from the second coming *in their hearts*, and doubtless each will articulate this in different ways: doctrinally, practically or simply in the attitude of their hearts.

*3:5 For this they wilfully forget, that there were heavens from of old and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God-* They had willingly forgotten that it was through God's word of command that the earth arose out of the water at the creation, and by this same word of God the water was commanded to overflow the earth again at Noah's time, taking the world (or that part of it) back to how it was before creation- a sphere covered in water. One message of creation is simply that God's word is powerful; for creation is presented as creation through a spoken word of God. That same word is powerful and effective for both creation and destruction in judgment. The false teachers were exalting their word over that of God's.

*3:6 By which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished-* The "means" is that of God's word, "by which" the present world was created, by commanding the waters to recede to let the dry land appear (Gen. 1:9). Peter had previously made the point that the promised judgment of God in Noah's time was delayed in order to allow the maximum scope for repentance by that wicked world (1 Pet. 3:20). The false teachers were

ignorant of this fact through having forgotten what they once knew- i.e. that a similar delay was being experienced by their generation in the coming of the Lord's day. Because of this, they were now squarely matching those who mocked Noah. The times of Noah are a definite type of the 'last days' of the Jewish system leading up to AD70. "The *world* that then was... perished... the *Heaven and the earth* which are now, by the same word (of God) are... reserved unto fire" (cp. water; :6,7). Thus Peter equates the "world" with the present "Heavens and earth", implying that a "Heavens and earth" were destroyed in Noah's time. It was "all flesh" that perished (Gen. 6:11-13). This indicates a clearly figurative interpretation of "Heavens and earth" as meaning an order of things. This line of argument has yet to be answered by Pentecostals, Catholics and others, over-enthusiastic to see in these verses a destruction of God's own perfect dwelling place as well as this beautiful planet. The quotation of Is. 65:17 in :13 should also be appreciated- the new "heavens and earth" is a new system of things to come upon this (already) beautiful earth. The literal heavens and earth were hardly destroyed in Noah's time.

Elements of this prophecy refer to the ending of the Jewish system in AD70; the world of Noah "perished" (:6) as the Jewish world would. The same Greek word occurs in Heb. 1:11 concerning the 'perishing' of the Jewish heavens and earth due to the unchanging ministry of the Lord. This would indicate that the Law itself was in some way ended in AD70, although of course it was 'taken out of the way' on the cross (Col. 2:14-17). The same word for "perish" occurs in 2 Pet. 3:9 in the context of God's punishment of the wicked within the ecclesia- He is unwilling that "any (of them) should perish". Jude 11 matches this by warning the same class of how their prototypes "perished in the gainsaying of Core". It appears that the judgments which were to bring the Jewish system to a close would therefore be the same as those which would punish the false teachers. We can conclude from this that many of the first century false teachers were Jews or Judaist-influenced.

We are told by the Lord Jesus and Peter that the second coming is typified by the flood. There is therefore a similarity between the world of Noah's time, and our last days. It is easy for us to fail to appreciate the carnage of the flood; the Sunday School image of happy giraffes with extra long necks poking out of the ark really isn't correct. The destruction wrought by the flood was absolute and devastating. This gives us a clue to the huge amount of change which the Lord's coming will suddenly bring on the earth. 2 Peter 3 draws a parallel between Noah's world being destroyed by water, and ours being ended by fire. The flood water changed the climate, and totally remoulded the topography. We can safely assume that even *greater* physical changes will be brought about by the Lord's return. Is. 54:9 speaks of the latter day judgments upon Israel being "as the waters of Noah unto me: for the *mountains shall depart*, and the *hills be removed*; but my *kindness shall not depart* from thee, neither shall the *covenant... be removed*" . Thus in the future, the mountains and hills *will* depart as they did at Noah's time; but God's kindness and covenant will not.

3:7 *But the heavens that now are and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men-* The flood was the result of God's commands to the Angels. "By the same word" could suggest that when God spoke to the Angels about the flood, His commandments then also included details of the judgements at the second coming.

"By the same word" of God that had caused the earth to rise from the waters and later called the waters over the earth, "the heavens and the earth which are now... are reserved unto fire

against the day of judgment" (AV). The allusion to Mt. 5:18 confirms that there must be some reference here to the passing away of the Law and the Jewish system associated with it: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled". Our Lord's fulfilment of the Law was primarily on the cross, but the fact that 2 Pet. 3 speaks of the Jewish heavens and earth passing away in AD70 indicates that the finishing of the Law did not come into full effect until the destruction of the temple. This explains the many hints throughout the New Testament that the believers kept some parts of the Law prior to AD70.

2 Thess. 1:8 speaks of the Lord Jesus coming "from Heaven with his mighty Angels, *in flaming fire* taking vengeance" on those who had rejected the knowledge of God, and had consciously disobeyed the Gospel of Christ. This connection not only underlines the fact that both AD70 and our last days are spoken of in 2 Pet. 3, but also proves that the "heavens and earth" which suffer fire are representative of individuals. Hence Peter's description of the day of "fire" as being "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men".

2 Pet. 3:7 speaks of the heavens and earth being reserved unto "*the day* of judgment and perdition of ungodly men", and then goes straight on to point out that "one *day* is with the Lord as a thousand years". Whilst the judgment seat itself may last a very short time, does this read as if *the day* or era of judgment will in some way be the 1,000 years of the Millennium, even though the wicked individuals themselves will probably die fairly quickly? The Millennium will be the period in which the earth will gradually be cleansed of the results of the sins of "ungodly men". See on Rev. 14:11.

2 Pet. 3:7 uses the same Greek word for "ungodly" as in 2 Thess. 1:8 to describe the false teachers; and it occurs an impressive six times in Jude's letter concerning the same people. The warning that judgment would no longer be delayed shows that "the day of judgment" which came on the Judaizers must refer to AD70. But there can be no doubt that "The day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" must refer ultimately to the second coming. The idea of punishment being "reserved" is continuing a theme of the preceding chapter. "The angels that sinned" were "*reserved*" unto judgment" (2:4), the responsible people to whom Lot preached are "*reserved... unto the day of judgment*" (3:7), and thus for the false teachers of the first century too, "the mist of darkness is *reserved* for ever" (2:17). As the first two examples received judgment in this life and also a 'reservation' of future punishment, so the sinners within the first century ecclesias would receive a punishment at the manifestation of the Lord in AD70, and also at his second coming. This explains the dual reference of 2 Pet. 3 to both these periods. The theme of judgment being "reserved" adds weight to Peter's plea for his readers to realize that God was not suspending judgment indefinitely, but that despite an apparent delay in meting it out, judgment was without doubt reserved for revelation at a future date. The continued emphasis on God using the agent of His word to do this must be connected with Peter's request for us to give more careful attention to that word as spoken by the true prophets / teachers (3:12,15,16). It will be by the Word and our attitude to it that we will be judged at the last day. As the word of God would be the agent of destruction for the unworthy, so it could bring salvation to the righteous.

I have earlier suggested that the language of creation used here may echo the idea of the new creation in Christ. "By the word of God the heavens were of old" suggests the account of the

new creation in Col. 1:17- and "the word of God" is a title of the Lord. Thus as He had brought about the new creation, so He was capable of punishing (in AD 70) and destroying (at the second coming) those parts of it which failed to reflect His glory.

3:8 *But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day-* The attitude of willing ignorance by the unworthy can quite easily be adopted by us. "Beloved, be *not* ignorant (as those of :5 were) of this one (Greek 'other') thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (AV). Peter bids us be aware of one other thing- that God can collapse and expand periods of time as He wishes. Not only can one of God's "days" be a vast expanse of time to us in human terms, but also one of our brief days can be turned into a thousand years by God if He wishes. This principle is illuminated by appreciating that Peter is here quoting Ps. 90:4. This prayer of Moses was bringing before God the miseries of the condemned generation in the wilderness, and pleading that God would repent of [i.e. change] His decision to bar them from entering the land (Ps. 90:12-17). After all, Moses had previously changed God's declared purpose of destroying Israel and making of him a nation; and had not God declared to him that He was willing to show Moses the fact that His purpose could be changed in accordance with human behaviour (Num. 14:34 A.V.mg.)? Thus Moses had every reason to try to change God's plan again through prayer. Against this background Peter is reasoning that if Moses could try to pray for the days of punishment for Israel to be shortened and for their sin to be overlooked, then we too can find reason to pray for the shortening of the days until the Kingdom, and for God's mercy upon the sinners of His people. There are a number of significant parallels between Peter's argument and Psalm 90:

<b>Psalm 90</b>	<b>2 Peter 3</b>
:2	:5
:5	:8
:6	The language of 1 Pet. 1:24; Is. 40:6-8 re. the first century Jews
:7	:7,10,12
:12	:2,15,18
:13,14	:12

And for the enthusiast: Ps. 90:16,17= Hab. 3:2 (re. the second coming) = 2 Pet. 3:12,13.

It is quite possible to translate 2 Pet. 3:8 as "One day with the Lord is as a thousand", which would suggest another Psalm allusion- this time to Ps. 84:18: "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand". In this case Peter would be saying 'By all means be aware that a day of judgment and condemnation will surely come, as outlined in :5-7; but beloved, do be mindful too of the wonderful reward. Just 24 (12?) hours of perfect fellowship with the Lord, unmarred by our sin, is worth a thousand years of this life!'. Truly an inspiring thought, and a motivation to come to appreciate the righteousness of God.

3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance-* "The Lord... is longsuffering to us-ward" (AV) of the last days. This longsuffering of Jesus suggests the parable of the persistent widow, whose continued requests

should match our prayers for the second coming (the vengeance of our adversaries which she requested will only come then). "Though he bear long" (s.w. 'longsuffering') with us, "God shall avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him" (Lk. 18:7). The "us" whom Peter refers to as experiencing the Lord's longsuffering ('bearing long') are therefore to be equated with "the elect" in their fervent prayers for the second coming. The days being shortened for the elect's sake therefore refers to the hastening of the second coming on account of the elect's prayers (Mt. 24:22). In view of the later references to Mt. 24, it is not unreasonable to think that Peter is consciously alluding to Mt. 24:22 concerning the shortening of the days for the sake of the elect's prayers, through his allusion to the parable of the persistent widow of Lk. 18:7.

Peter presses home the point: "The Lord (Jesus- :15,18) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn. 14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason.

This kind of postponement, misinterpreted as "delay", was a major feature of God's dealings with natural Israel previously. So it is not surprising that there are a number of instructive Old Testament allusions here. Is. 30:17-19 records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem. "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer thee". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

Peter's stress on how the word of God would bring about the day of the Lord shows his realization of how the false teachers were really trying to say that the word of God was untrue, and that *it* was delaying. Perhaps he had Hab. 2:3 in mind: "The vision (of the word) is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry". The context is a prophecy concerning the coming Babylonian desolation of Jerusalem. Evidently there were some in Israel who felt that the fulfilment of these words of God was 'tarrying' so long that it would never come. The next verse continues "But the just shall live by his faith", i.e. in the eventual fulfilment of the word of God. This is twice quoted in the New Testament concerning the first century believers (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38). It is therefore in order that verse 3 concerning the coming 'day of the Lord' in the Babylonian invasion should have relevance to the same period. If 2 Peter 3 refers here, then this is indeed the case. It is noteworthy that prophecies like Jer. 17:27 speak of this Babylonian invasion as a "fire" in both literal and spiritual terms- as 2 Peter 3 also

employs "fire". Reading between the lines of the New Testament epistles, it is evident that Paul often phrased things in such a way as to warn against what was presumably a common temptation- in this case, to think that the day of the Lord had been delayed so long that effectively the brethren felt that it would never come. Thus Heb. 10:37 quotes Hab. 2:3 which we have been considering with reference to the second coming: "He that shall come *will* come (cp. 'I am that I am'), and will *not* tarry".

The key to overcoming this temptation was to remember that the delay in the Lord's coming was a sign of God's mercy in granting sinners time to repent. Rather than leading to slackness of service, the delay should lead to greater diligence.

This "longsuffering" is because God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (AV). The "any" and "all" here evidently refer to those whom God has called- the responsible. The fact that millions of people throughout history have lived and died with no chance of repenting or avoiding 'perishing' through response to the Gospel, is proof enough that God is perfectly willing that many should perish and not come to repentance, as far as the world in general is concerned. But such is His desire for the *responsible* to live up to their spiritual potential, that He has delayed the coming of the Lord. Doubtless Israel deserved immediate punishment for their crucifixion of Christ- a human 'God' would certainly have reacted straight away- but judgment was deferred until AD70 in order to give them every opportunity to repent. God's judgments in the OT were often deferred because people repented (e.g. Is. 48:9; Nineveh); yet such is His supreme grace to Israel that when they unrepentantly crucified His Son, He *still* deferred judgment. The same is true in our days. What pain it must give our Father to see this time which has been allowed as extra opportunity being used irresponsibly! The bridegroom of the parable "tarried", the same Greek word translated "delay" in "my Lord *delayeth* his coming". Tragically, this resulted in the spiritual slumbering of all of the virgins rather than their greater eagerness and expectancy.

That this passage is indeed concerning the responsible is confirmed by the allusion it makes to Ez. 18:23: "Have I any pleasure (Heb. "will") at all that the wicked should die... and not that He should return from His ways, and live?". The context is concerning a Jew (i.e. responsible) who had been wicked but now had repented. The 'perishing' of 2 Peter 3:9 must refer to destruction at the judgment, God is not willing that any of us ("longsuffering to *usward*") should be condemned then, therefore that day is delayed. Perhaps we can infer that it is because of God's particular love for our very last generation of believers that the day is delayed- perhaps by 40 years, as in the case of Israel in AD70? It is possible that there may be a "generation" of 40 years after the blossoming of the fig tree- i.e. the first signs of Jewish repentance (cp. the Jews for Jesus movement?).

The way this worked out in the first century is demonstrated by the judgment of the false teachers in the Thyatira ecclesia. "I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold... I will cast her into great tribulation... I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Rev. 2:21-23). This latter phrase clearly refers to the second coming (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 20:12; 22:12); but in addition to their judgment then, they were also punished in the "great tribulation" of AD70 referred to in Mt. 24:21,29. As explained in 2 Pet.

3, these people were 'given space to repent', but did not. Therefore judgment came. Sadly, there must be similarities with the last days. But it must ever be appreciated that God is doing all things possible to bring about that repentance; and we should likewise help these people to repent, so that the Lord's coming will be hastened. The idea of God being unwilling that any should perish but that all should repent must have some connection with the parable of the lost sheep. The efforts of the good shepherd should be replicated, so the context of the parable indicates, by the believers. Thus the parable is summarized: "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Mt. 18:17 cp. 2 Pet. 3:9). The fact that there is / will be a delay in the second coming indicates that there will be a distinct stubbornness by some to repent in the last days- perhaps the last Christian generation is the lost sheep generation, whose repentance will bring the Lord's return? "*When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come*" (Mk. 4:29).

But what exactly does 'coming to repentance' imply? "Longsuffering" on the Lord's part takes us back to 1 Pet. 3:20, where we learn that God's longsuffering resulted in a delay in the flood coming, so that people had the maximum opportunity to repent and enter the ark, representing entry into Christ by baptism. The Greek for "come to" repentance has the idea of a one off act. A glance down a concordance under "repentance" shows that this word is associated with only two things- baptism, or a major repentance by a completely apostate believer. The delay in the second coming is for these two reasons- so that a seriously apostate group within the ecclesia can repent, and so that there can be the maximum possible allowance of time for the encouragement of people to be baptized. In addition to our prayers being able to speed the Lord's return, these two reasons for the delay involve our own effort speeding it. By repentance and encouragement of our weak brethren to repent, this really will happen; and the quicker we spread the Gospel world-wide, "baptizing all nations", the quicker the delay will end and the Lord will come (Mt. 24:14). The latter day Elijah ministry will presumably be after the pattern of John the Baptist- with an emphasis, therefore, on the baptism of Jesus as a means of preparing them for Christ's coming.

3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief*- This is an evident reference to another part of the Olivet prophecy, which has reference to both AD70 and the second coming. The Jewish "house" was "broken up" by the thief-like coming of the Lord. 1 Thess. 5 refers to this same passage, interpreting it as a description of how the Lord will come unexpectedly to the spiritually weak within the ecclesia. It will be a time when they think they are in "peace and safety" spiritually, and will publicly teach this ("When they shall *say* peace and safety"). This is exactly the theme of 2 Peter 3- the false teachers within the ecclesia of the last days will preach that the second coming is far off; that in fact all is in peace and spiritual safety within the household. But as the thief would break the house up, so 2 Peter 3 graphically describes the total dissolution of the Jewish system ("heavens and earth"). Mt. 24:43 indicates that the Lord comes as a thief to those who would be watching over the house- i.e. to the leaders of the ecclesia. The false teachers will therefore be in the leadership of the body- otherwise it would be hard for their ideas to gain the following which these prophecies indicate they did and will.

*Then the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up*- "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise" may therefore refer to the destruction of this class of leaders, the 'heavens' of the ecclesia. "A great noise" in Greek implies a whirring- perhaps

referring to there being a manifestation of the cherubim at the second coming ("the sign of the son of man in Heaven"?). Jer. 30:23,24, in a decidedly latter day context, speaks of God's judgments coming as a mighty whirlwind, associated as it is with the cherubim (Ez. 1:4). "The elements shall melt with fervent heat" provides impressive evidence for the AD70 application of this chapter when it is realized that most of the occurrences of the Greek word for "elements" are concerning the Mosaic ordinances (Gal. 4:3; 5:21; Col. 2:8,20). "Melt" can mean 'to unloose', conjuring up the idea of the law as a burden which was now being unstrapped.

"The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (AV) may refer specifically to the judgments coming on the land ("earth") of Israel, and the ending of the works of the Law through the destruction of the temple in AD70. As Noah's world was destroyed with literal water, so it is not unreasonable to expect a literal aspect to the "fire" here mentioned, although this is not to question the symbolic reference of fire to the anger of God. The temple was destroyed with fire, although interestingly Dan. 9:26 speaks of its end coming with a flood; fitting in perfectly with Peter's connection of the AD70 judgments on Israel with the flood.

The passing away of heaven and earth suggests another link with the Olivet prophecy: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt. 24:34). The physical heavens and earth being permanent (Ecc. 1:4; Is. 45:18; Ps. 78:69), our Lord must have been referring to the order of things which would end in both AD70 and the last days. The faithful who came through the figurative 'fire' of those times would do so through their clinging to the Lord's words. We have earlier commented that this is a theme in 2 Peter 3- by God's word the natural and spiritual creation came about, and by it too sinners can be destroyed if they fail to let it act upon them.

The detailed description of all the elements of heaven and earth being destroyed is embedded, as we have seen, in allusions to the Olivet prophecy. It is therefore to be expected that our Lord's talking there about the sun and moon being darkened, the stars falling etc. (Mt. 24:29) should also have some connection with 2 Pet. 3. The Olivet prophecy speaks of these things being obscured and affected- but 2 Peter 3 describes their complete and fundamental destruction. Sun, moon and stars have several associations with Israel (e.g. in Joseph's dream), and 'Heavens and earth' have also been symbolic of the Jews (e.g. Dt. 32:1). Mt. 24:29,30 describe how there will be signs in these things, and then the Lord would come with the clouds of heaven. 2 Peter 3 shows how this refers to the lead up to AD70, and that then the Jewish system was totally destroyed. This means that the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven to replace the previous sun, moon etc. would have a limited reference to the system of things based around Christ and his word (Mt. 24:34) which was firmly established in AD70. But most importantly, the dissolution of these 'heavens' refers to the second coming, with the destruction it will bring upon both the Jewish and Gentile worlds, and also upon the unworthy in the ecclesia. This shows that the signs in the heavens which warn of the second coming are not just in the Jewish and Gentile world- but (even clearer) in the state of the wicked within the "heavens" of the ecclesia, who will meet their judgment in this horrendous destruction of all that is evil.

A number of images found in 2 Pet. 3 also occur together in Nahum 1:4-8: "He (God) rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry (cp. the earth standing out of the water in 2 Pet. 3)... the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence ("the elements shall melt... the earth shall be



burned up", 2 Pet. 3:10), yea, the world, and all that dwell therein ("the earth and the works that are therein")... His fury is poured out like fire... with an overrunning flood (cp. 2 Pet. 3:6) He will make an utter end". But all this is prefaced by Nah. 1:3: "The Lord is slow to anger". As God always gave ample time for repentance in His dealings with both Israel and the nations in the Old Testament, so He would with spiritual Israel (and even more so?). All God's past dealings with men, as at the flood, with Israel at the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions, in His judgments of the nations, all these will find their summation in how God will deal with us in the last days. In this fact lies the value of following up the Old Testament allusions which Peter makes. That an appreciation of all this must have a fundamentally practical effect upon our lives is something which cannot be over-emphasized.

*3:11 Seeing that these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be- in all holy living and reverence toward God-* The logic is irresistible; all things of the world as we know it are to be dissolved; only our Godly character will survive the fire; the word which develops this will also last beyond the destruction of the heavens and earth, seeing that it is through the word that they will be destroyed (cp. Mt. 24:34). By developing such a Spirit-formed character, we are "looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God" (:12)- a fair summary of what we have read between the lines of this chapter.

*3:12 Looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat-* The earth being dissolved connects with Is. 24:19: "The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved". The earth may specifically refer to the land- that promised to Abraham, which is the centre of Bible prophecy. The previous verse alludes to the flood, as 2 Pet. 3 does: "The windows from on high are open (cp. Gen. 7:11) and the foundations of the earth do shake" (Is. 24:18). Is. 24, especially in the Septuagint, appears to have been very much in our Lord's mind during His Olivet prophecy. 2 Pet. 3 being based on the Olivet prophecy, it is to be expected that it will have connections with the same source passages. "The earth" in Is. 24 meaning 'the land' (of Israel) indicates that 2 Pet. 3 is also primarily concerning the troubles that came upon the land in AD70 and which shall come there in the last days.

Frequently the Greek word translated "look for" here is used in the context of the second coming, often translated "waiting" (Jude 21; 1 Cor. 1:7; Rom. 8:19; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28; Tit. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:10). Our 'waiting' for the Lord is not therefore a passive thing- it is shown by our "holy way of life", something which needs our constant active attention. All too often the impression is given that our 'waiting' is a grim, passive clinging on to a set of doctrines received at baptism. This is certainly part of it- but the quicker we take a dynamic approach to considering "what manner of persons" we ought to be, the sooner the Lord's coming will be hastened. That our spiritual effort, especially in prayer, preaching and pastoral work mentioned earlier, should hasten the coming of that great day should never cease to be a source of wonder and inspiration to us. But do we really want to see the day of Christ? Distractions of family life, the challenge of careers, personal ambition, a desire for a few more years to work on our character- these and many other factors lead us away from an all consuming desire to see the day of the Lord. And if we lack that, then there will be little true motivation for developing a spiritual character and doing the preaching and pastoral work, which we know between them will hasten the day. As if to provide motivation in all this, verse 12 repeats verbatim the language of :10 and 11 concerning the totality of destruction

which awaits the present world order: "The day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved (= :11)... and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (= :10)". This repetition underlines the fact that every element of the present system will be destroyed- the only common link between this life and the future world order is the spirituality which we now develop. We came into this world with nothing, a naked baby; and all we can leave it with is God's record of our spiritual character. Thus it will be by our real spiritual character that we recognize and relate to each other in the Kingdom, rather than by our present physical characteristics. For this reason even the rejected will be able to recognize (in this sense) giants of faith such as Abraham entering into the Kingdom.

The coming of the Lord is spoken of as being delayed (Mt. 25:5); and yet it is our spirituality which hastens the day of Christ's coming (2 Pet. 3:12). Putting these facts together shows that the day of Christ will not come when planned because the ecclesia are not as spiritual as they were 'expected' to be- or at least, that's how God wants us to see it.

3:13 *But, according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness-* As opposed to the present earth, where "the works that are *therein* shall be burnt up" (:10). For Peter, therefore, the vision of the Kingdom was centred around the fact that goodness and righteous principles would so evidently abound, being almost physically manifested in this planet; it will be a "new earth *wherein* dwelleth righteousness". Psalm 72 stresses the abundance of righteousness in that time, showing that David's picture of that time was similar. Likewise if we truly *love* righteousness, this is how we will perceive the Kingdom- rather than as a glorified tropical holiday.

"According to His promise" shows that Peter is referring to a specific Scripture- surely Is. 65:17, where a picture of the Kingdom is titled "the new heavens and earth". "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens..." contrasts with the words of the mockers: "Where is the promise of his coming?" (:4). This indicates that "the promise of his coming" was not just the simple statement of Jesus that He would return (Jn. 14:3), but it included the details of the Kingdom which He would establish, as outlined in the promise of Is. 65:17-25. Thus the doctrines of the literal second coming and the future Kingdom on earth are inseparable. Thus the slippery slope ran: The Lord is delaying longer than I thought; maybe it isn't important that he comes: therefore the Kingdom on earth is a pipe dream. So "the faith" was lost. There is also a connection with Is. 66:22-24: "The new heavens and the new earth which I will make... it shall come to pass that... they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched". These last phrases are quoted in Mk. 9:44 concerning the punishment of the wicked at the judgment seat. The reference to fire fits the 2 Pet. 3 context, again showing that the 'heavens and earth' which are to be destroyed with fire include the wicked believers who will be punished in Gehenna. Note that the idea of the ecclesia being ultimately purged of false teachers is presented by Peter as a *comfort* to the faithful remnant.

3:14 *Wherefore, beloved, seeing you look for these things, give diligence that you may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight-* With sins covered through the blood of Christ. Such a condition, even for these "pure minds" (:1), can only be achieved and maintained through much diligence. If it is our desire to be found acceptable by our

bridegroom, our awareness of how near we are to meeting him will motivate us to constant self-examination so that we can be presented to him spotless.

Knowledge of the coming of judgment leads to self-examination: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come... But who may abide the day of his coming?" (Mal. 3:2 cp. Rev. 6:17). Belief in the second coming must provoke the question: "What manner of persons ought (we) to be...", as we hasten towards the day of judgment? "Wherefore, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him... without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:11,14). When Israel knew Yahweh was going to appear, they were to prepare themselves against that day by sacrifice and atonement (Lev. 9:4). Jonah simply proclaimed that judgment would come upon Nineveh; as far as we know, he didn't appeal for repentance. But the very knowledge of judgment to come was in itself an imperative, a command, to the Ninevites to repent (Jonah 3:4,5). "Let the bed be undefiled: *for* fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4 RV). Sexual immorality is impossible if we truly believe rather than merely know... that judgment day is coming.

3:15 *And consider, that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you-* 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18).

It sounds as if Peter had in mind a particular passage of Paul, the tenor of which is repeated in all his letters. It may well be that he is referring to the idea of there being a delay in the second coming to allow repentance; however, if "these things" is the repeated warning against the false teachers of the last days, and advice on how to live in those times, then this is quite easily discernible. Moreover, there is a connection back to :2,3 where Peter reminds us how warnings against false teachers were a major theme of all the inspired writings of the New Testament. However, Peter writes as if he is referring to a particular passage in Paul's writings. A likely candidate is Rom. 2:3-5, which addresses the weak (Jewish) members of the Rome ecclesia, warning them that there will be a day of judgment, and that they should not despise God's love in delaying that day so that they could repent. "Thinkest thou... that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering (cp. 2 Pet. 3:15): not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9)? But after thy... impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself (cp. "kept in store", 2 Pet. 3:7) wrath against the day of wrath (cp. fire) and... righteous judgment of God" (cp. 2 Pet. 3:7).

Another possibility is Eph. 5:15,16: "Walk circumspectly... redeeming the time, because the days are evil". By 'buying up' the opportunities for spiritual development in the daily round of life, we are effectively "redeeming the time" in the sense of hastening the Lord's return. Paul pleads with us to see the urgency of this principle: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (:17). *Seeing that* they could redeem the time to the second coming in this way, the exhortation is driven home: "Awake! Thou that sleepest!... and Christ shall give thee light" by His early return.

3:16 *As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things. In his letters there are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the other scriptures-* An underlying theme of Peter's argument is the supremacy of the word of God, and how through understanding of and obedience to it, a character can be developed which will pass through the judgments which that word will bring upon the world. Those who are to be destroyed at that time, such as the false teachers, will have failed to understand these things of which Peter and Paul spoke- they were 'ignorant'. But they were not unaware of Paul's epistles- they 'wrested' them through their wilful misunderstanding of them (:5). The beginnings of this sad situation are found in Heb. 5:11, where the Jewish believers are called "dull of hearing" God's word, and therefore found the exposition of Melchizedek "hard" to understand. It is to these same Jewish believers that Peter's letters are addressed. Thus a lack of sensitivity in Bible study and to the movement of the Spirit, resulted eventually in a wilful misunderstanding of basic teaching concerning fundamental doctrine, e.g. the second coming. It takes real faith in the teaching of God's word here to accept that this really can happen, and has done so. The example of the first century is there for our learning. Such wresting of the Scripture was done "unto their own destruction" (:16), using the same word translated as "perdition" in :7, as if their judgment was already working itself out in this life. That verse speaks of how the "ungodly" would meet their perdition in the day when the heavens and earth were destroyed by fire. Thus those within the ecclesia who were so wresting the Scriptures are the same group as those of :3-7 who would be destroyed at "the day of judgment and perdition (s.w. "destruction") of ungodly men".

Jude likewise talks of "ungodly men" who had crept into the ecclesia (:4). The evident similarities between 2 Pet. 2 and Jude are for a reason. 2 Pet. 2 and 3 are a prophecy of what *would* happen in the ecclesia, whilst Jude is the record of their fulfilment; hence his use of the present tense "there *are* crept in... ungodly men". The corrective is hinted at throughout all these prophecies: "Remember... be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (:1,2), meditating on the power of God's word in the past, in creation and at the flood, correctly understanding the teachings of Paul and Peter about the last days (:15,16), bringing our way of life into conformity with our great hope of the second coming (:11,12), and so by all this growing "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (:18).

Ex. 16:20 says that the manna, symbolic of God's word, "bred worms and stank" if it was not used properly. The Scriptures, we are told, can be "wrested" by those who claim to believe them, until the "unstable" 'believer' is destroyed morally (2 Pet. 3:16). The only other occurrence of the Greek for "unstable" is a few verses earlier (2 Pet. 2:14), where it is used in a sexual context. The implication is that those 'believers' who want to justify a deviant sexual lifestyle will find that they can "wrest" the Scriptures to suite them, but in so doing they will be working out their own destruction. This is the category who turn God's grace into license for sexual sin (Jude 4).

3:17- see on 2 Pet. 1:12.

*Therefore beloved, you, knowing these things beforehand, beware; lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, you lose your own stability-* In some of his very last words, facing certain death, Peter alludes to this great failure of his- his second denial of the Lord. He pleads with his sheep to hold on to the true grace of God, lest "you *also*, being led away

(s.w. Gal. 2:13 “carried away”) with the error of the lawless, fall...” (2 Pet. 3:17). You *also* invites the connection with Peter himself, who was led away by the error of the lawyers, the legalists- whereas his sheep had the error of the lawless to contend with. The point surely is that to go the way of legalism, of denying the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, is every bit as bad as going to the lawless ways of the world.

"Stability" or 'strengthening' is the essential outworking of the Spirit abiding in our hearts (Rom. 1:11 s.w.; Eph. 3:16). If we are certain of salvation by grace, this is what Hebrews calls an anchor of our soul. The Lord used the same word in telling Peter to strengthen or stabilize his brethren (Lk. 22:32). It was therefore Peter's deep concern that his brethren might lose their stability. His worry about the false teachers was that they would destabilize his brethren and that therefore he would not be fulfilling the commission which the Lord had potentially empowered. But looking at this another way, we could conclude that the Lord may give us commissions to achieve and the power to do so- but that is only in potential, because all the same human freewill is respected by the Lord, and those who wish to call away or listen to false teachers shall do so. And the failure is theirs rather than ours, if like Peter we have done all we humanly can.

The "things" of :14 which the beloved look for are those spoken of in :17: "Beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness". "These things" are therefore not just concerning the coming Kingdom, but also the warnings of the uprise of false teaching, the prophecies of their success, and the fact that the apparent delay of the Lord's return was to give the opportunity for repentance. Peter's double warning is because he knew how prone we are to forget such warnings, and to lose the reality of our love for the Lord's coming. It is as if Peter is speaking to us personally, as the last (?) generation before the full "day of the Lord". "Seeing ye know these things *before*" (:17) is yet another Olivet allusion- "False prophets shall rise... take ye heed: behold, I have *foretold* you all things" (Mk. 13:22,23) about this apostasy. "Take ye heed" is matched by "beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Pet. 3:17). "The wicked" are the false teachers within the ecclesia, referred to in 2:14,18 as "beguiling unstable souls" (= 3:16) and 'alluring'. It follows therefore that the false Christs and prophets which our Lord warned of, would come, in whatever form, from within the ecclesia. The bizarre claims of the few bogus Messiahs that have appeared are hardly much temptation to us- but how different if they are to come from within the ecclesia?

3:18- see on 2 Pet. 1:5,6.

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen-* It would be hard to grow in grace if we consider grace as just a static theological concept. The *charis*, gift / grace in view is the gift of the Spirit, connected with the knowledge or relationship with the Lord Jesus. Peter frequently uses 'knowing' in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship with.

Peter's last words in 2 Peter are full of the theme of knowing Christ (1:2,3,5,8; 2:20). Finally, Peter came to really know the man whom he thought he once knew. His very last recorded words urge us all to follow his pattern: to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (3:18). He wrote this with awareness that he had denied the knowledge of the Lord; his very

last words reflected his sense of inadequacy and shame at his failures, and yet the sure and certain knowledge that he knew the grace of the Saviour whom he believed.

At the end of Peter's recorded words in Acts, he comes to a climax of understanding in coining the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ". In 2 Pet. 2:1 he describes Christ as "Lord" using a word which is usually used in the Gospels for God. He saw the extent of Christ's perfection, the height of His exact manifestation of the Father. He was the "Lord" who bought us through His blood, and therefore and thereby He has an almost God-like authority over us. Appreciating the true implications of the cross leads to a true sense of His Lordship. At the end of 2 Peter, Peter reaches an even greater height in the title: "Our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ" (3:18). He brings together in one title all the different aspects of his Lord he had learnt and come to appreciate in the course of his life. And this should surely be the climax of every life of discipleship.

New European Commentary

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[1 John](#)

[1 John 1](#)

1:1 *That which existed from the beginning, which we have heard-* The Gospels are transcripts of the version of the Gospel taught by e.g. John. The converts learnt or probably memorized the Gospels, and then after their baptisms, the preacher followed up with them by visits and letters. This is what John is doing in his letters, written to the 'Johannine community', the house churches converted as a result of hearing or reading his version of the Gospel which we have in the gospel according to John. It's therefore to be expected that the letters of John are going to build on his Gospel, and allude back to it constantly.

The prologue of 1 Jn. is an example of this; it is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

**In the beginning was the word**

The word was with God

In [the word] was life

The life was the light of men

The light shines in darkness

The word became flesh

And dwelt amongst us

and was manifested to us

We beheld his glory

Of his fullness we have all received

Through Jesus Christ

The only Son of God

**What was from the beginning**

The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God

The word of life

God is light

In Him there is no darkness at all

Seen, touched, handled by the apostles

This life was manifested

What we looked at

The fellowship which we have is with the Father and with his son

Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven, and the life which was manifested in resurrection that it might be further manifested by the preaching of the disciples. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are

because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal, resurrected body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

John begins his first letter with an elaborate prologue. Raymond Brown comments: "Many commentators observe that a Prologue is an extraordinary beginning for an epistle since it violates all the standards of letter format". This 'violation' appears typical of how Scripture so often appears to 'violate' contemporary usages of language. [Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 176].

The perfect unity within the Lord Jesus, between the person He portrayed and who He really was, is reflected in much New Testament language concerning Him. Thus "life" in 1 Jn. 1:1,2 is personified as Jesus; He was the life (Jn. 11:25; 14:6; 1 Jn. 5:20). The person whom people knew, saw and touched in first century Palestine was the essence of the eternal life, the life God lives, and the life we by grace will eternally live. He wasn't acting human; He was human, genuinely human, and yet that human life which He lived was the ultimate and inner life of the Spirit.

"The beginning" is a term used in John's letters with reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry, or to the beginning of a believer's conversion. See on Jn. 1:1 *In the beginning*. Seeing His ministry and life is to be ours, there's an appropriacy in this double usage; His beginning becomes the beginning for each believer when they begin believing in Him. He is "the beginning [s.w.] of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). John writes of the commandment and message which his converts had "in the beginning"- clearly referring to the beginning of their conversion, when they first began to hear the message of the Lord Jesus (1 Jn. 2:7,24; 3:11; 2 Jn. 5,6). John mentions that the "fathers", the older converts, knew Him from the beginning (1 Jn. 2:13,14); this may simply mean that they had known Jesus as a person, from the beginning of His ministry.

"Which we have heard" is an idea often used in John's Gospel about those who heard the historical Jesus, perhaps with special application to how they first heard Jesus in the incidents recorded at the "beginning" of His ministry in Jn. 1.

*Which we have seen with our eyes*- A reference to the transfiguration? Their eyes were there "opened" to see Jesus in glory (Mt. 9:30). It is John's Gospel more than the others which records believers 'seeing' the historical Jesus, both literally and in the figurative sense of 'understanding'.

*Which we saw and our hands handled*- The two Greek words for 'seeing' are different; they had literally seen and also perceived. The Lord had promised that the Comforter would enable them to have His presence ever in their hearts, as really as if He were physically present. John is saying that he not only had literally seen the resurrected Lord, referring to the 'seeing' of the risen Lord and the way they responded to His invitation to handle Him (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:39); but had also experienced the "I will see you again" promised in the gift of the Comforter. Note the chronological progression- from first 'hearing' Him at the 'beginning' of His ministry and the 'beginning' of their path with Him; to seeing with their eyes at the



transfiguration and throughout His ministry; to seeing and handling Him after His resurrection.

*Concerning the word of life-* The apostles had seen and known the physical, historical Jesus. They had known Him 'from the beginning'. But 'Jesus' was one of the most common male names in first century Palestine. What was unique about Jesus of Nazareth was the word about Him, the *logos*, the essence, the inner ideas of that Jesus; and His life, lived out in the manifestation of a sinless character. This was the essence of that man, and it was this which the apostles were preaching and fellowshiping in with their converts.

1:2 *The life was manifested-* This is not talking about the Lord Jesus personally, but about His life. His life, sinless and totally Godly as it was, was the life of God. That life, those principles, existed with God and in God; but that life, spirit, essence, *logos* of God was manifested in the person of the historical Jesus who came into existence as a foetus in Mary's womb. It was this life which the apostles were 'declaring'. Therefore verse 5 says that it was "the message" which the apostles were declaring. The message was the life- the life lived by Jesus of Nazareth, seeing it was the life of God. For although human by nature, the Lord Jesus was of perfectly God-like character and personality. "The life was manifested" in the sense that the Lord Jesus "manifested [s.w.] Your Name unto the" apostles (Jn. 17:6). God's Name was declared to Moses in terms of His characteristics and personality; this was the life of Jesus, and it is "the eternal life", the kind of life we shall live for ever, and which we can begin to live now. For in this sense, in John's terms, we 'have eternal life'. Not that we shall never die, but in that we can now live His life, the kind of life we will live in His Kingdom, the essence of the kind of life He lived and lives.

*And we have seen and testify and declare to you the life-* I suggest there is a chronological progression here. The apostles had 'seen' the life lived by the Lord Jesus, a perfect life, the essence of the life which is with God; they had preached / testified it to the people who had been baptized and were now in the group to whom John was writing; and now he was 'declaring it' to them, *apaggello* meaning 'to show again'. The basis for his pastoral work with this group was to declare again to them the way of life which was in Jesus Christ. The essence of John's preaching and pastoral teaching was the life of the Lord Jesus. This is why such a large proportion of the New Testament is taken up with the Gospel records.

*The eternal life, which existed with the Father-* John's Gospel is full of reference to the gift of eternal life being available now; not that the recipients shall never die, but in that by living His life, we are living the life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom, and shall resume living that life at resurrection. "Which existed with the Father" is an unhelpful rendering. The life was *pros* the Father, and the idea is of being with or towards the Father. Thus the prodigal son decided to come 'to [*pros*] his father' (Lk. 15:18,20). The life lived by the Lord Jesus was inclined towards the Father, it was a life lived with God. Notice it was not the literal person of Jesus which is in view here. Rather is John talking about the life, the essence of God which was lived out in perfection in the sinless character of Jesus. There is no hint here at the personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. It was the life, not Jesus personally, which was *pros* the Father. We now can come *pros* the Father (Jn. 14:6, AV "cometh unto the Father"); so being *pros* the Father doesn't require that we are personally located in Heaven, nor is it language which can only be used about the Lord Jesus. Paul likewise speaks of himself as being *pros* the Father in prayer- whilst here on earth (Eph. 3:18).

*And was manifested to us-* It was the life of God which was manifested to the disciples through Jesus; they had received the gift of eternal life as promised by the Lord. They had received it by seeing it manifested in the Lord personally, and accepting the gift of His spirit, whereby His life / spirit would live within them. It was not any pre-existent Jesus who was manifested to them, but an actual life lived in a person. What was manifested was what they in turn declared to others (:3); and they declared the life and message and personality of Jesus, rather than His literal body.

It was so hard for the Jewish mind to conceive that a man walking down a dusty Galilee street was the awesome God of Sinai manifested in flesh. And it's hard for us too. This is why the whole struggle over the trinity has come about; people just can't find the faith to believe that a real man could have been the just as real perfect Son of God. It's our same struggle when we come to consider the cross; that a body hanging there, covered with blood, spittle, dirt and flies, an image as palatable as a hunk of meat hanging in a butcher's shop... was and is the salvation of the world, the real and ultimate way of escape for us from the guilt of our iniquity. The life the Lord Jesus lived was 'the sort of life that was in the Father's presence' (1 Jn. 1:2 Gk.). The sort of life God Almighty lives, the feelings and thoughts He has, were the life and feelings and thoughts and words and deeds of the man Jesus. This has to be reflected upon deeply before we grasp the huge import which this has. That a Man who walked home each day along the same dusty streets of Nazareth was in fact living the sort of life that was and is the life of God in Heaven.

John calls Jesus "the eternal life" (1 Jn. 1:2). The life that He lived was the quality of life which we will eternally live in the Kingdom. The personality of Jesus was the living quintessence of all that He preached- as it should be with the living witness which our lives make. To preach "Christ" was and is therefore to preach "the things concerning the Kingdom of God", because that Kingdom will be all about the manifestation of the man Christ Jesus (Acts 8:5 cp. 12). So, Jesus was "the word" in the sense that He epitomised the Gospel. This is why James 1:18 says that we are born again by the word of the Gospel, and 1 Pet. 1:23 says that the word who begets is the Lord Jesus.

1:3- see on Mt. 28:10; Jn. 3:32; Jn. 20:18; Acts 4:20.

*What we have seen and heard, we declare to you also, so that you may also have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ-* The Lord Jesus is called "the life, the eternal life, which existed with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (:3). In this lies the importance of a Christ-centred life and mind; *He is the definition of eternal life*. This is what eternity will be like, John is saying: life lived as the Lord lived and lives, the eternal life is a knowing of the Father and Son, a relationship with them (Jn. 17:3). Eternal life isn't defined in terms of sitting under a fig tree in a perfect climate watching the animals living happily together (although we are invited to believe that by God's grace this *will* be a part of our Kingdom experience). It is the life of Christ our Lord; and that's why one of His titles is "the life, the eternal life". He shewed us what eternal life will be about, and invites us to begin that experience, however imperfectly, even now (cp. Hos. 6:3 RV). And it is in this sense alone that "we may know that we have (now) eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:13).

John exalts in the fact they touched and saw "the word of life"; the Lord Jesus personally was and is the voice of God's word. When John writes that "that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you", he doesn't mean to say that he is simply giving a transcript of the

Lord's spoken words. He is telling men about the person of Jesus, the man he personally knew, and in doing this he was declaring God's essential *logos* / word to them. If the very being of the Lord Jesus was the expression of God's word, it is little to be marvelled at that the cross, being as it is the crystallisation of all He was and is, should be in an even more intense sense the voice of God to us. And the same process of the word becoming flesh must be seen in us too.

There are different levels of fellowship; as we actually know from our own observed experience. There are some we are 'in fellowship' with whom we don't feel so close to as others. John says that he wanted to declare to them the depths of the understanding of Christ, "that you may also have fellowship with us" (1 Jn. 1:3), even though they were already technically 'in fellowship'. And so it is with our communal life. A close binding together in the depths and heights of the Lord Jesus leads to ever higher experiences of fellowship. It may be that there are even different levels of fellowship between men and God. Thus God's original intention was that His presence in the Angel should go up to Canaan in the midst of Israel; but because of their weakness, He went in front of them, somewhat separate from them (Ex. 33:2,3). Likewise the glory of God progressively distanced itself from the temple and people of God in Ezekiel's time. The basis of our fellowship, both with the Father and His people, is the life and living of the Lord Jesus. It is not a set of theological tenets *per se*. It is common experience of living His life, sharing His spirit. We sense this fellowship intuitively with others who live and have it, and if we later discover that we have points of difference over some matters of interpretation, this cannot take away from our connection together in the spirit of Christ. And conversely, sharing simply the same theological tenets is no guarantee of itself that fellowship shall be experienced.

Fellowship with each other is predicated upon fellowship with the Father. To deny fellowship to another is therefore to say something about their fellowship with the Father and Son. To break fellowship with His children is likewise to break fellowship with Him, as developed in chapter 4. It is therefore utterly fundamental to our fellowship with the Father to be open in fellowship to all His children, all who are in His Son. If we have His spirit within us, this will happen naturally; we just have to ensure that denominational laws and the fear of what others think of us doesn't lead us to go against the Spirit and deny the experience of unity in the Spirit which is naturally created.

There appears a contrast between 'us' and 'you'. What 'we' see, 'we' declare to 'you'. The 'we' may refer to John and some elders, or even the original disciples, wishing to share their experience of life and fellowship with the Lord with John's converts.

1:4 *And these things we write, that your joy may be made full*- John saw himself as manifesting to his brethren what the Lord Jesus had manifested to him. John records how the Lord had said: "I have said this to you... that your joy may be fulfilled" (Jn. 15:11), but he then says of himself that "We are writing these things so that your joy may be fulfilled" (1 Jn. 1:4 RV). He saw himself as the face and mouth of Jesus to his brethren; and so are all of us who are in Christ. He wanted them to receive the spirit of Christ, the Comforter, so that their joy might be filled up by having His spirit of joy. Perhaps John felt that his converts were lacking in the spirit, and wanted them to be filled with it as he was.

Note how John repeats his Lord's use of various terms, e.g. "little children"; and how here he appropriates the Lord's phrase "that your joy may be complete" (Jn. 16:24; 17:13) to the way

*he* spoke (1 Jn. 1:4). These are just a tiny fraction of the examples possible. We are to speak, think and feel as He did; to *be* as He was and is; to be brethren in Him.

1:5 *And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you: That God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all-* There is a negative attached to all truths; if something is true, then therefore other things or ways of life are not true. There are several Bible passages which bring out this dualism.

"God is light	and in Him there is no darkness" (1 Jn. 1:5)
"God is faithful	and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Dt. 32:4)
"God is righteous	and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps. 92:16)

It is therefore quite valid to understand that a set of true teachings by their very nature give rise to a set of untrue ones, to be rejected. But more personally relevant for each one of us, each truth we perceive leads to not only things we should do, but things we should not.

The references to light and darkness further allude to the prologue of John's Gospel. The word "was God", and was the light which shone in the darkness of the Jewish world, to which the Jewish world would not come because they preferred the darkness. John's converts were Jews, and the temptation to return to Judaism, or compromise with it, was strong. He therefore presents the light of Christ as being effectively the light of God, and compromise with the darkness was by nature impossible.

1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie and not do the truth-* As noted on :5, the allusion to the light and darkness of the prologue in John 1 suggests John is warning against fellowship with the darkness of Judaism, which had rejected the light of Christ. The darkness will later be defined as walking in hatred of our brother (2:11). Jewish attitudes to the Lord Jesus and His Jewish followers were indeed a hatred of their brethren. To walk in the darkness of Judaism was therefore to walk in the darkness of hatred of our brethren. There could be no association with any such darkness, if they had the spirit of Christ.

John writes of *doing* the Truth (Jn. 3:20,21; 1 Jn. 1:6)- the truth is a title used for the Lord in John's Gospel, but the knowledge of Him must be 'done'. He and His *logos* cannot be known purely in the abstract, but must be lived. For He is "the life". The Lord Jesus was "the Truth" in His life example as well as in His teaching. This tendency to apparently 'know' the Lord Jesus on a purely abstract level is a serious temptation in this internet age.

1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin-* To walk "in the light" means to be open and up front about our walk with Him, in His Son, whom He has appointed the light of our lives. The tendency for these Jewish Christians was to maintain synagogue attendance, with

all its social benefits, whilst being secret Christians. John's Gospel has demonstrated how there were many like this during the Lord's ministry, who either returned to the Jewish world or 'came out' for the Lord, as Joseph and Nicodemus did. Walking in the light is not the same as living without sin; for it is those who walk in the light who are in an ongoing sense cleansed from all sin by the Lord's blood. Rather does it refer to a life lived and oriented around the person of the Lord Jesus, the light which the prologue of John 1 says came into the darkness, and was Him, His *logos*, the essence of Him as He was amongst men. If we live in this orientation, a life lived *pros* the Father (see on :2), then "all sin" that we commit is dealt with on account of our association with the Lord and His blood. This is not to say that sin is of no moment, but that our focus is to be upon living His life, walking in the light of Him, rather than seeking to avoid sin or endlessly badger Him to forgive it.

The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). The cross is ongoing. It is on this basis that we experience fellowship with each other, that fellowship naturally arises between those who are walking in the light of His life and experiencing their sin dealt with in this way. Fellowship is an experience which arises from these things; it is not created by an agreement to a common set of theological propositions. Even when such propositions are agreed between individuals, severe tensions still occur between them and many do not walk together who are basically theologically agreed. But fellowship as presented here is something which arises naturally and involuntarily. To consciously refuse a brother fellowship is to imply that he is in the darkness, and that the blood of Jesus Christ is not cleansing him from sin. Like it or not, to do so is a serious judgment of him, even if that is denied in words.

1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*- This attitude of "we have no sin" could have arisen from incipient Gnosticism, but it more likely refers [at least initially] to the attitude of Judaism, to legalistic self-righteousness in the Jewish world which was ever tempting the converts to whom John was writing. To do the truth is to walk in the light (:6), but walking in the light doesn't mean being without sin; rather it refers to a life focused upon the light of the Lord's life, in which our "all sin" is dealt with by the Lord (:7). To have "the truth" in us may well refer to the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus, "the truth", through the "Spirit of truth", the Comforter. The Comforter convicts the world of sin, and surely convicts us too. The presence of the Spirit within a believing heart doesn't mean that the person doesn't sin, but rather that they become conscious of sin, and the cleansing process can therefore begin.

1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*- Repentance needs to be verbalized- it must be "confessed", which implies a verbal or written statement of the issues. It's like praying or Bible reading out loud; it makes our minds think not quite so fast. We need to get to grips with all the aspects of our sin. We must face it, in all the ugliness of what we have done. The idea of cleansing from sin differs slightly from forgiveness; we need to be not only forgiven but cleansed so that we do not repeat them. This is the work of the Spirit, which is what sanctifies or cleanses us; there is a major connection between sanctification [cleansing] and the work of the Holy Spirit given to each believer (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). And yet we are cleansed by the Lord's blood (:7), and by His *logos* or word (Jn. 15:3). Our sanctification is by both "the blood of the covenant" and "the spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). These are all terms referring to the same thing. The Lord Jesus, as the sum of His personality,

was His word made flesh; His blood, His Spirit, the light of His life, personality, spoken words and actions, His biography... all these things are summarized in His Spirit, which is given to us. As noted on :8, it is the Spirit of truth which abides in us and convicts of sin, and yet also sanctifies.

1:10 *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us*- It is the indwelling of "the truth" which convicts and then sanctifies / cleanses from the sin which it convicts (see on :8,9). I suggest it is not 'the Bible' which is in view here; it is not every word of that inspired book, including the Chronicles genealogies, which will convict of sin. If 'the Bible' were referred to then surely we would read 'the Scriptures', or at least, some other word apart from *logos* would be used. The *logos* of God is clearly defined in John's Gospel as His Son, and likewise here in :1. It is the indwelling of the Lord Jesus, by His Spirit (see on :9), which both convicts of sin and cleanses from that sin. Those who claimed to be without sin had not received the Lord's spirit, and were "none of His" therefore, as Paul puts it in Rom. 8:9- even if they claimed membership in some form of the Christian community.

Our experience of life, the way God works through our failures, almost overruling even (it seems to me) the *kinds* of sins we commit and their outcome, is all intended to bring us to an increasing realization of our own sinfulness. The more God's *logos* abides in us, the more we will know our sinfulness. Thus Paul speaks as if when Corinth are more obedient, he will reveal further to them the extent of their weakness (2 Cor. 10:6). On a racial level, it could be argued that over history, God has progressively revealed the sinfulness of man to him. Thus the early records of Israel's history in Egypt and in the wilderness contain very little direct criticism of them. But the prophets reveal that they were corrupt even then, taking the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20). But then in the New Testament, Stephen brings together several such prophetic mentions, combining them to produce a stunning description of Israel's ecclesial apostasy, which culminated in their rejection of the Son of God.

To just have an attitude that we haven't sinned, is read by God as stating that He is a liar- even though we would never dream of saying this. If we don't believe Him, we likewise "make him a liar", we slander or falsely accuse Him, because we call His witness to us in the Spirit / Comforter a lie (1 Jn. 5:10). We may recoil at this language. But it is so- to deny our sinfulness, to disbelieve what God says about it, is to slander God and resist the conviction of His Spirit.

## 1 John 2

2:1 *My little children, these things write I to you, so you may not sin. And if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous-* As explained on 1:8-10, John was teaching that if we are focused on the light of the Lord Jesus and have the Comforter abiding within us, then "all [our] sin" is dealt with in the Lord Jesus. But this is not to say that we will not sin; indeed, it is the presence of the "truth", the "spirit of truth", the Comforter within us which convicts us of sin. And now he alludes to the same thing, saying that we have a *parakletos* with the Father, the Lord Jesus, "the righteous", and we are counted as in Him, His righteousness imputed to us. The Comforter refers to the Spirit of Christ within us which means that we have the Lord's presence with us to more than compensate for His physical absence. The same Lord who is within us convicting us of sin is the same Lord who is now in Heaven to obtain our total forgiveness. This way of thinking and being means that we will find the power not to sin. "These things" John has just written at the end of chapter 1 are the way not to sin; to not as it were worry about avoiding sin, but rather to positively focus upon the presence of the Lord within us, allowing Him to convict us of our sin and deal with it in His own way.

The Comforter passages assure us that we need no mediator because the Father Himself loves us, and the spirit of His Son is within us so that we can directly relate to Him as the Son did and does with the Father. The later NT passages concerning prayer and mediation therefore speak largely in the context of prayer for forgiveness and salvation (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1). This is what the Lord's mediation / advocacy for us achieves, rather than acting as a constant go-between for us with the Father in the context of our regular prayers for other things.

2:2- see on 2 Cor. 5:19.

*And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world-* As noted on :1, the passages concerning the Lord as our mediator are all in the context of Him asking for our forgiveness, as the High Priest sought Israel's forgiveness on the day of Atonement. On the cross He was there the propitiation for our sins, and yet He is that now, each time we sin (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:10). The cross is ongoing, in essence. The simple fact is that the Lord Jesus died as the antitype of the guilt offering. He died to take away guilt... and he or she who truly believes that has no need to transfer or discharge their guilt in these ways. The guilt of our iniquity was laid upon the Lord Jesus upon the cross, He there was the expiation of our sins (1 Jn. 2:2)... we don't have to vainly try to transfer it onto anyone else, or use any other way of dealing with that guilt, e.g. through repressing it deep within ourselves.

The sins of the whole [Jewish] world are potentially dealt with in the Lord. If only individuals would accept Him, then their problem with sin is resolved. In this lies the imperative to take this amazing message to the whole world.

2:3 *And hereby we truly know that we truly know him: If we keep his commandments-* The idea is not that we are faced with scores of commandments from the Lord, and if we manage to keep them, then we are in a state of knowing or having relationship with the Father and Son. For that was exactly where the Mosaic system failed to be of use to men. Paul is at pains in Romans 1-8 to point out that law, as in *any* legal code, cannot lead to justification. We note that keeping commandments [plural] is paralleled in John with keeping His singular *logos* or commandment [singular]. "His commandments" and "the [singular] commandment" are paralleled in 2 Jn. 6. The plural commandments may be the Hebrew plural of majesty,

referring to one specific commandment. And the commandment in view is to love each other, as He loved us, and as His entire *logos* of being is our example: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on [Gk 'into'] the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 Jn. 3:23). We believe into the Name of Jesus when we are baptized into His Name. We "love one another" perhaps specifically by keeping the *agape*, the love feast, the breaking of bread, with one another. If we refuse to break bread with any of our brethren, then we cannot have a good conscience. I am not saying that simply being baptized and breaking bread can save anyone. For the commandment is to love as the Lord loved us unto death, rather than merely pass bread and wine.

Understanding "the commandments" and the singular commandment / word as loving one another would explain why in the context of the appeals to 'keep' them, we read of receiving the love of the Father and Son. For we love our brother in receipt of His love. His love and our love are connected in that if we do not love our brother, we do not know His love. To know /be in relationship with Him requires us to keep the great commandment of loving our brother as the Lord loved us, unto death. If our self-examination reveals that we do love, then we can have a good conscience, knowing we have kept His commandment[s], and are thus assured of 'being there'.

The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (Jn. 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by Jn. 15:17: "These things [plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5).

*2:4 He that says: I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him-* As noted on :3 and :5, the "commandments" is a plural of majesty referring to the one great commandment, to love our brother as the Lord loved us. If we do not, then any profession to "know Him" / have a relationship with Him is hollow. Indeed, we are 'liars', "the truth" of the light of the Lord Jesus, "the spirit of truth", is not in our hearts. I suggested on Jn. 8:44 that the "liar" who committed the first murder was Cain, and not any personal Satan figure. Cain is set up as representative of all who hate their brother (3:12). To lie, in this context, is to claim to know God and hold "His truth", but to not love our brother. Sadly these terms, truth, lies, keeping commandments etc., have been applied to knowing theoretical, propositional truth regarding theology- and the entire point has [conveniently] been missed. And it is a misplaced focus on those very things which has led to hatred of brethren.

*2:5 But who keeps his word, in him truly has the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him-* As noted on :3, the singular "word" is parallel with plural "commandments", which I suggest is the plural of majesty referring to the great commandment, to love one another as the Lord loved us. If we keep the 'word' of loving our brother, then God's love has been perfected in us, it has achieved its end result- that we



should love as He loved us. And this is our confidence that we are in Him. If self-examination reveals that we do harbour hatred in our heart for our brethren- we really need to urgently do something about it.

2:6- see on Mt. 14:29.

*He that says he abides in him, ought also to walk even as he walked-* The reference is to loving as He loved us, which is the "new commandment" of the next verses. We abide in Him insofar as He abides in us, through the gift of the Spirit permitted by us to operate in our hearts. We cannot claim to experience this if we do not love as He loved us. For the love principle will affect our entire "walk" in daily living and thinking.

John speaks of Jesus as "that one" in the Greek text of 1 Jn. 2:6; 3:5,7,16; 4:17. I.H. Marshall comments: "Christians were so used to talking about Jesus that 'that One' was a self-evident term". Too often I hear fellow believers talking about their faith in terms of "I believe that... I do not believe that...". Maybe I'm being hypercritical, but surely it ought to be a case of believing *in* the things of the personal Jesus, rather than 'believing *that*...'. For example. I believe *in* Jesus returning to the earth, rather than 'I believe that Jesus will return'. It's so absolutely vital to see and believe in the Lord Jesus as a person, rather than merely a set of doctrine / teaching *about* Him.

*2:7 Beloved, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard-* The singular "commandment" is the "commandments" referred to earlier in this section; the plural of majesty being used to refer to the one great commandment, to love as the Lord loved us. This was "new" in that it could only have been true after the advent of the Lord. And it is that commandment which in another sense is "old" or 'original' in that this was the imperative from "the beginning" of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1 for the reference of "the beginning"). The "commandment" was imperative in the whole encounter with the Lord. He was love made flesh, and His whole being demanded and still demands that from all who encounter Him. Love, in this "new" sense, is thereby predicated upon knowing Him; Christian love is therefore of an altogether different order from any secular version of 'love'. The idea of an old commandment being new may be another way of expressing the idea of how we can attain a second naivety, a meeting of Jesus 'again for the first time'. For John now repeats that "new" commandment (:8).

2:8- see on 1 Jn. 3:18.

*But now, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in him and in you. Because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shines-* John is repeating the "new commandment", which was "new" in that it was to love *as the Lord loved us unto death*. I suggested on :7 that the idea of an old commandment becoming new suggested that there was a "newness" to this commandment; it keeps coming new. And so John can write of giving the new commandment which had in fact already been given in that it was imperative in the example of the Lord Jesus. Living by that new commandment was "the truth" which was in the Lord and comes to be "the truth" in us; it is the final "truth" by which a believer lives. All attempts to read "the truth" here as referring to some set of doctrinal, intellectually-apprehended truths has totally missed the point, putting head over heart to a point where the

approach is not at all 'true'. It is true "in" us in that the spirit of truth, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, dwells within us.

The allusion to the prologue of John 1 invites us to interpret "the darkness" as that of the Jewish world. And that was "passing away" as AD70 approached. The true light was that of the personality and personal spirit of the Lord Jesus. That was shining, and the darkness had not overcome it, and was in fact now passing away. :17 has the same reference when we read of "the world" passing away; the Jewish world is in view, as often in John's Gospel and letters.

*2:9 He that says he is in the light and hates his brother, he remains in the darkness-* The darkness, as explained on :8 refers in the first context to the darkness of the Jewish world. Nobody who claimed to have left Judaism and entered Christ was legitimate if they hated their brother, whilst claiming to be in the light of the Lord Jesus. For walking in His light axiomatically means that we walk in love, and hatred of our brother is not possible in the light of Him properly perceived. The hatred of brothers refers to the Jewish hatred of their brother the Lord Jesus, and of all that were in Him. The initial reference of this hatred of brethren refers to Jewish Christians who were collaborating with the synagogue persecution of Christians. And clearly there were plenty of such agents within the early Jewish Christian communities, false Jewish brethren who crept in to the early churches. Paul's letters contain many allusions to this major problem (Gal. 2:4 etc.).

There is fair emphasis that the rejected saints will be cast into darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13). Yet darkness is a common symbol of the world (Eph. 5:11; 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9). And those amongst us who won't love their brother are already in darkness, self-condemned even before the day arrives (1 Jn. 2:9,11).

*2:10 He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him-* Abiding in the light of the Lord Jesus means we will not hate our brother. The Greek here means that before us, there will be no stumblingblock. It is interpersonal conflict within the church, and indeed with those outside of it, which is the most common cause of spiritual stumbling. But if we have sold our souls for love, living in the light of the Lord Jesus, then we will not stumble. The allusion is to how the Lord had spoken of how walking in the daytime means we will not trip over as we are illuminated by "the light of this world" (Jn. 11:9). This refers to the Lord Jesus, the light of the world. Walking in the light of His presence through the Comforter means that we will have no chance to stumble, because love for others is the dominant spirit of our lives.

*2:11 But he that hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes-* This is true in general terms, but the initial context refers to those who were ostensibly within the Christian community, but who were walking in the darkness of Judaism, with its agenda of hatred toward the Lord Jesus and all His brethren. The great commandment is to love as the Lord loved us; if we do not live according to this then we are not in the light of the Lord Jesus. We will have no certain sense that we are indeed on a journey toward the Kingdom, we will not know where we go, and shall wander lost in life. A healed blind man who wilfully returns to his blindness is a tragic picture indeed.

2:12 *I write to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you, for his name's sake-*

The references here and in :13 to children, young men and fathers must be understood in the light of the triple commission to Peter, recorded by John as ultimately applying to us all, to care for the lambs and sheep (Jn. 21:15-17). The little ones would refer to recent converts, who were rejoicing in the implication of baptism into the Lord's Name, by which their sins were forgiven. For there is a clear link between baptism and forgiveness. John is writing to these three groups because he sees the triple commission to Peter about caring for the lambs and sheep as applying to him too. He felt he too had betrayed the Lord, and that His commission here was relevant to him and all in Him. This of course is very far from the Catholic interpretation of Peter's unique role.

2:13 *I write to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you little children, because you know the Father-* See on :12. The "fathers", the older ones, were those who were the "sheep" and not "lambs", those who had had longer experience in Christ, and who had known Him "from the beginning", a term often used in John for the beginning of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1). The younger ones are commended for overcoming "the evil one", initially a reference to the 'satan' of Jewish opposition to the Lord. They therefore loved their brethren and were not guilty of hating them by being part of the Jewish world's persecution program of the Christians. Knowing the Son, whose manifestation had been "from the beginning" of His ministry, is parallel with knowing the Father. To see / know / have relationship with the Son is to know / see the Father, as often declared in John's Gospel and letters.

2:14 *I have written to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning-* This repeats what is said in :13, perhaps to emphasize that spiritual maturity is in having known the Lord Jesus many years and continuing in that relationship with Him

*I have written to you young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one-* These new converts had overcome the Jewish Satan or "wicked one" trying to especially subvert young converts, both in years and spiritual maturity, just as it had tried to subvert the disciples during the Lord's ministry (Mt. 13:19 the wicked one catches away the word sown in the hearts of new converts). The Lord clearly described the Jewish world as the evil one in Jn. 3:19; 7:7; 17:15. Their strength was because the *logos* of God, the Lord Jesus, abode in them. Whilst we should love and meditate upon the Scriptures, this is not the reference of God's *logos* in John. The prologues to both the Gospel and the letters make it clear that the reference is to the Lord Jesus. It was the Lord personally who overcame the Jewish world (Jn. 16:33). His victory is counted to all believers in Him; the parallel is between "the evil one" and "the world", rather than to any superhuman personal being called 'satan'. The allusion in this verse is also to the prologue to the Gospel, where we read that the darkness of the Jewish world had not overcome the light (Jn. 1:5). Those in the light, in whom the *logos*, the spirit of the Lord Jesus, abides, had overcome the darkness of their world. The parallel with :13 is perhaps to show that they had not overcome the world in their own strength, but through the Lord's indwelling.

2:15 *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him-* "In the world" is the very phrase used of how the Lord was in the Jewish world, but rejected by it (Jn. 1:10; 9:5; 13:1; 16:33; 17:11-13). There could be no compromise between the Jewish world and the Christian; for the Jews hated the

Christians, and to be part with them was to be involved in hating ones' Christian brother. And in this case, the love of the Father would not be in them.

*2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world-* The initial reference was to how the Jewish world was full of these things. The Pharisees were covetous (Lk. 16:14), and the Jewish religion was big business; the religious leaders were the wealthiest people in Palestine. The Sadducees had no belief in an afterlife, and were totally hedonistic. This is why later in Revelation, John will later describe the Jewish system as "Babylon", obsessed with wealth and pride, drunk with the blood of the Christian prophets and martyrs. In Jn. 8:44 the Lord had characterized the Jewish world as doing the lusts of their father; these various lusts are summarized as the lust of the [Jewish] world which was in process of passing away as AD70 approached (:17).

John speaks of how we are tempted by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life", alluding to the very things which were Adam and Eve's temptation in Eden. Adam is set up in Scripture as 'everyman'; on almost every page of the Bible there are allusions back to him. Thus Jezebel's provocation of Ahab to sin is presented in the same terms as that of Adam and Eve; Israel "like Adam have transgressed the covenant" (Hos. 6:7). Paul sensed that as the serpent deceived Eve by his subtilty, so the minds of the Corinthian Christians were being deceived by false reasoning (2 Cor. 11:3 = Gen. 3:13). The sinner chooses or accepts the words of the "tongue of the subtle" (Job 15:5 – the same word is used about the serpent in Gen. 3:1). The frequent command: "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). In all these allusions [and they exist in almost every chapter of the Bible] we are being shown how human sin is a repetition in essence of that of our first parents. The insistent emphasis is that we should rise above and *not* be like them.

*2:17 And the world passes away and the lust of it, but he that does the will of God abides for ever-* The Jewish world was fast passing away as AD70 approached. The various lusts of :16 refer to those of the Jewish world; its lust for pride and wealth would all come to an end in the destruction to come. Jn. 9:31 has used the same words in describing the Lord Jesus personally as the one who "does the will of God". But all who are in Him are likewise born of God's will (Jn. 1:13). The Lord is presented in opposition to the Jewish world; just as He is in the prologue of John 1. If ever a man stood with His back to the world, it was the Lord and the Jewish world. But He is the one who "abides for ever", whereas the Jewish world passed away. He "abides for ever" in the sense that the gift of His Spirit, the Comforter, would "abide for ever" with His followers (Jn. 14:16). The Jewish idea that God would "abide for ever" in the Jerusalem temple came to an end when that world passed away (1 Kings 8:13); the eternal abiding was by the spirit of the Lord Jesus in a spiritual temple of believing persons.

*2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you heard that antichrist comes, even now have there arisen many antichrists. Whereby we know that it is the last hour-* These antichrists are those of :19, the "they" who entered the Christian community but were never really "of" it. This surely refers to the Judaist infiltrators of the early church (Gal. 2:4). In John's immediate context, these people were "anti" Christ both in the sense of being against Him, and of false appearing like Him. They were part of the singular "antichrist" system which John felt was to arise in "the last hour". We wonder if he has in view the uprising of a system of evil just

before the Lord's coming, of the kind he prophesied about in Revelation. It could even be that John's epistles were written after Revelation, and it is to that document he refers in writing that they have "heard" about the coming of antichrist. The beasts, whore, false prophet etc. are all capable of application to the Jewish system destroyed in AD70, and this was the "synagogue of satan" which the opening letters of Revelation begin by talking about. This is not to say that Revelation does not have other and specifically 'last days' fulfilments.

John may have in mind 2 Thess. 2, as the source from which they had heard about the coming of antichrist. This envisages a specific individual, similar to Judas, arising from within the community of believers and being enthroned in "the temple". I have noted on that chapter the possible fulfilments of this "man of sin" in a Jewish context. The 'revealing' of the "man of sin" would then connect with the 'revealing' of the specific antichrists (:19).

2:19- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:31; Jude 19.

*They went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be revealed, that all these are not of us-* This is the language of Judas going out into the night to betray the Lord. As noted on :18, the antichrists have some similarities with "the man of sin", who as "the son of perdition" is also based upon Judas. There was a conscious campaign of infiltration of the church by Judaist false brethren (Gal. 2:4). According to many of Paul's letters, they enjoyed fair success in destabilizing the churches Paul founded. But in the community John had founded and is writing to, they "went out from us". Their exit revealed them for who they were. The implication is that those who wilfully leave the community of the body of Christ are effectively leaving Him. It is likewise no less a sin to exclude members of that body from association with it. 3:9,10 use the same word in saying that the revealing of the sons of God and those of "the devil" [the Jewish system] is in whether they love or hate. Going out from the community of believers is not abiding in love. Their exit revealed them; and the revelation is in whether we love or hate (3:9,10).

"All these are not of us" can be rendered "they were not all of us" (AV), and this makes the reference to the Lord's words about Judas even clearer. He said that "not all" of them were cleansed because of Judas being the one amongst the "all" who would betray Him (Jn. 13:10,18).

2:20 *And you have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all these things-* The grammar here means that the "anointing" is the thing anointed with, as it were the oil used in the anointing. But literally, it means 'a Christ-ing', for "Christ" means 'anointed'. The reference is to the Spirit. John in his gospel has recorded how the Lord promised the gift of the Comforter, to the point that the disciples would feel His personal presence as if He were physically present as He had been in the brief years of His ministry. Note that John applies this allusion to the Comforter to "you", his converts, who had not met the Lord. The promise of the Comforter was therefore not just to the original disciples but "for ever", to all subsequent believers. This presence of the Spirit was effectively the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ personally in their hearts. And by this "you know all these things", referring to their knowledge of the Judas-like individuals who had entered their community and then gone out from them- presumably, because they "knew" them. Perhaps the allusion is to how the Lord through His spirit "knew from the beginning" those such as Judas who didn't sincerely believe and should betray Him (Jn. 6:64). His spirit had been given to the believers; the "anointing" was the means by which He abode within them and taught them "all things"

(:27), and He abides in His people by His Spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). The "things" immediately in view here are about the Judaist plot to infiltrate the fledgling churches. Paul had the same revealed knowledge, but seems to have been less successful in stamping it out than John was in his community.

We read in :20,27 that we have each been anointed. The idea of anointing was to signal the initiation of someone. I'd therefore be inclined to see this as alluding to baptism; when we become in Christ, in the anointed, then as 2 Cor. 1:21 says, we too are anointed in a sense by the gift of the Spirit. We're given a specific mission and purpose. "The anointing that you received" would therefore refer to our commissioning at baptism and the empowerment of the Spirit to achieve it. The Comforter passages are in the specific context of promising empowerment in obeying the great commission of preaching the Lord to all nations. And it is that same commission which is in view here. It seems to imply a one time act of being anointed / commissioned / inaugurated for service. Baptism isn't therefore merely an initiation into a community; it's a specific commissioning for active service, in ways which are unique to us. We do well to bring this point out to those we prepare for baptism. The words for 'anointing' are unique to 1 John but they occur in the LXX to describe the anointing / initiation of the priests, and of the tabernacle / dwelling place of God (e.g. Ex. 29:7; 35:14,28). John sees us as the dwelling place / tabernacle of the Father. There is some historical evidence that candidates for baptism in the early church were anointed with oil. References- uninspired of course, just for historical interest- are Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7.1,2; and various references in the 'Didascalia', the Acts of Judas Thomas, and the Pseudo-Clementine epistles. It could be that in the house ecclesias to whom John was writing, there was already this practice in place, and the initial readers would've understood this clearly. Paul, writing to a different audience, uses a different figure when he speaks of being "sealed with that holy spirit of promise". We are after all baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So the anointing which we've received would in my view refer back to our baptism. It was the initiation of us into service, just as the priests and tabernacle parts were anointed. The question we must each sort out is, what are our specific talents, our gifts, the potential uses for which the Father and Son intend us, the paths of service they potentially mapped out for us and initiated us for at our immersions?

*2:21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it! And because no lie is of the truth-* I have suggested that "truth" in John's Gospel refers not simply to abstract "truth" in a general sense, or in terms of correct interpretation; but specifically to the Lord Jesus as "the truth". This statement that they know the Lord Jesus ["the truth"] then leads in naturally to the warning in :22 that there are those who deny the Lord Jesus. Such a "lie" cannot be part of those who are "of the truth", of the Lord Jesus. Those who were stating untruths about the Lord were therefore not to be considered Christian. They knew the truth in that they knew the Lord Jesus, and could therefore discern that the false teachers were not teaching correctly about Him. This is the context both before and after this verse.

*2:22 Who is the liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist: he that denies the Father and the Son-* The antichrist has been defined in our notes on :18 as Judaist infiltrators to the fledgling church. They were denying that the Lord was the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one. But the faithful had received the anointing (:1), the presence of the Christ within, as real as He was once amongst His people "in the flesh". By denying Him as the anointed one, they were declaring themselves not to be of Him, to not have received His

Spirit, and those who had received it could see clearly that they were not His. They were denying the Son, as Peter had, but without repentance. And for all Judaism's much vaunted focus upon God, they were denying the Father by denying His Son.

We deny Jesus is the Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). As explained on :20, the context here is of having been anointed with the commission to preach Christ to the world. It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11).

2:23- see on Mt. 10:32.

*Whoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father. He that confesses the Son has the Father also-* The Judaists were arguing that they were loyal to the Father, but His Son was not the Christ / Messiah. And yet they thereby were denying the Father, and did not 'have' the Father. "The Son" had to be 'confessed'. This is a theme of John's Gospel; that some claimed to believe in the Son, but would not "confess" Him for fear of the Jewish world around them (Jn. 12:42), seeing that any who "confessed" Jesus as Christ were excluded from the synagogue system (Jn. 9:22 s.w.). John the Baptist is held up as an example to be followed of confessing and not denying the Lord (Jn. 1:20); and Joseph and Nicodemus are presented as parade examples of Jews who progressed from secret faith to open confession. Confession of the Lord is essential for final salvation; denial of Him before men results in His denial of us (Mt. 10:32,33). The infiltrators would not openly confess the Son, and therefore remained in the synagogue system; but they were thereby effectively denying the Son, and yet they claimed some association with the church, appearing to be "of us" (:19).

2:24 *As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also shall abide in the Son and in the Father-* John strongly links belief in Christ as the Son of God with a life of true love. They had heard from "the beginning" of their contact with the Gospel that Christ was the Son of God; and yet also the need to love one another. The "message" which they had heard from the beginning was that Christ was the Son of God (1 Jn. 2:24); and yet it was also that we should love one another (1 Jn. 3:11). Encounter with Him, living in the light of His personal example and the receipt of His spirit / mind, results in love. This is why in the context of teaching the need for love, John warns against false teaching regarding the nature of the Lord as Son of God (1 Jn. 2:22,23; 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 7-11). "The word... from the beginning" was the *logos* of Christ, the essence of Him and His spirit, which was love unto death (Jn. 1:1-3); and yet in John's letters, the word from the beginning was that we should love each other (1 Jn. 2:7; 3:11). This is the essence of belief in the Lord: love for each other. "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (3:23). "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him" [i.e. your brother]. "If we love one another, God dwells in us... whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him" (4:12,15). But why is there this link between love, and belief in Jesus of Nazareth being the begotten Son of God? Theologically, it could be said that if we accept Him as God's Son, then we must likewise accept all God's other sons, begotten as they are by His Spirit. But practically, are we not being taught to see the *pure wonder* of the way in which *Almighty God had a Son* and gave that Son, so freely and so painfully, for us...? The *pure wonder* of God having a Son of

our nature, a child and then a man who showed us the essence of God displayed in human flesh and temptation; and then giving Him to us... If we see this, we will naturally show love to our brethren. So it isn't just a case of thinking yes, we believe the Lord was Son of God, not God the Son- and period. No. There's infinitely more to it than this. This faith and understanding can tear down every barrier between men, and provide the inspiration for a life of true, self-sacrificial love. The true *wonder* of it all simply must be meditated upon. That God's very own son should begin so small, as an ovum, "a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a foetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager".

The Lord speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). That *logos* is not the whole Bible, but the *logos* of Him, the essence of His personality, recorded words, character and, in a word, His spirit. That word abiding in us may indeed refer in the first instance to the illiterate new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His word abiding in us; but not just His recorded words. The very essence of Him should be the spirit which takes over our entire life and thinking. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words and person of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious... for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words and being are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. And perhaps too 1 Jn. 3:9 has similar reference- the seed of God [the Gospel- of John- which the converts had first heard] must abide in the convert, so that he or she doesn't [continue in] sin. The continual meditation upon the Lord's words and person as we have them in the Gospels will have the same effect upon us. *This* is the real way to overcome sin and to achieve genuine spiritual mindedness, to know the mind of Christ; in this way the Lord Jesus abides in us by His Spirit (1 Jn. 3:24). Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son, the Spirit and anointing abiding in us (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas.

But we are to "let" or allow His *logos* / Spirit abide in us. It is not just a matter of psychological steel will to recite His words to ourselves. We are to allow Him to fill us with His Spirit, to make His abode or dwelling with us.

2:25 *And this is the promise which he promised us- everlasting life-* The promise of eternal life in John's gospel refers to the present give of the eternal life right now; it is a reference to the spirit of the life of Jesus which is given into us now. It is "eternal" in that this is the kind of life and spirit which we shall eternally live, resuming living it seamlessly at the resurrection of the body.

2:26 *These things have I written to you concerning those that would lead you astray-* The reference has been to the Jewish infiltrators of the churches (Gal. 2:4), teaching that the Lord was not in fact "Christ". "Lead you astray" is the term used in the Olivet prophecy of how false Christs [cp. "antichrist"] would lead many astray, and this would be a sign of the last day approaching (Mt. 24:24). AD70 was clearly approaching as John wrote this; and we wonder whether there will be a similar collapse of faith due to infiltrators in the last days



before His return. Mt. 24:24 predicted the success of these people; they would "lead many astray", and John is clearly up against this problem.

2:27 *And as for you, the anointing which you received of him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you all things and is true and is no lie and even as it taught you, so you are to abide in him-* As noted on :1, the anointing refers to the gift of the Spirit, of the Christ in them and with them. The Comforter passages had explained that one role of the Comforter would be to replace the personal presence of the Lord on earth as their teaching Rabbi (see on Jn. 14:18). In this sense they needed no human teacher. And all those who have received the Comforter will likewise not be at the mercy of teachers within the church system they are involved with. The abiding of the Lord in us is through His spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). The function of this is to actively teach us. This is the way to avoid being led astray by false teaching. What is taught, that which we hear and read, must be compared against the spirit of Christ within us. And we will soon sense what is right and wrong; not of our own natural intuition, but in comparison with His spirit within us. This is the sense behind Jn. 7:17: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself". The will of God is to believe on who He sent; and this belief will result in the gift of the Lord's Spirit. This is why the most simple, illiterate folk who are filled with the Spirit can so easily detect false teaching about their Lord.

2:28- see on Lk. 6:46.

*And now, little children, abide in him-* The appeal was to abide in Him by letting Him abide in them by the Spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). There is an element of our permitting Him to dwell in us; being possessed by the Spirit does not remove our freewill in allowing Him to be a guest within us.

*That, when he shall be manifested, we may have boldness and not be ashamed before him at his coming-* The "boldness" at the day of judgment is only possible if we have the "eternal life" within us now, having received and having lived the spirit of the life of Jesus in our mortal life. To forsake that Spirit would leave them naked and thereby ashamed before Him.

"Before him" is literally 'from before Him'. After the rejected start to perceive the reality of rejection, there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment. It would appear that the wicked will argue back in protest against their rejection at the judgment ("When saw we thee?... Thou art an hard man"), and will desperately try to find acceptance. All this has to be reconciled with the silent dejection and grim acceptance of the 'goats'. 1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of them as being "ashamed from before him at his coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame, after the pattern of Israel being *carried away* into captivity (2 Kings 17:6,11,23,33- Heb. 'to denude, make naked'). Another foretaste of this was in the way the condemned world of Noah's time [the flood was a clear type of the final judgment] were to 'pine away / languish' (Gen. 6:17; 7:21- AV "die"). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falleth back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace back to Judaism will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. Note that Jesus Himself will be likewise ashamed of His unworthy followers (Lk. 9:26); there will be a

mutuality in the natural distancing between the two parties. This is the scene of Rev. 16:15- the rejected being made naked in shame. This slinking back in shame will fulfil the prophecies of Is. 1:24,29 and Jer. 2:35,36, which speak of the rejected being made ashamed, becoming ashamed, of their idols; which is all that legalistic obedience amounts to. They will be made ashamed by the judgment process. Thus we have the picture of them initially arguing with Jesus, growing less and less forcible, giving way to a pleading with tears for a change of mind, finally followed by a silent slinking away in shame. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6). Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away) to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:3-5). See on Mt. 27:5. Speechlessness is a characteristic of the rejected (Mt. 22:12); the brothers slunk away from Joseph's physical presence (Gen. 45:4), as the rejected will.

1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of our being able to have "boldness" at the day of judgment; but the Greek *parresia* means literally 'a saying of all'. This free telling of all will be when we list our sins to the Lord; and yet, in the greatest paradox, this will be our confidence before Him. That 'freedom of speech' in His presence will be the sign that we are accepted; and yet the freedom of speech begins with our free confession to Him of our unworthiness.

The 'manifestation' of the Lord is paralleled here with His *parousia* or second coming. But John has used this word of how the life and person of the Lord is manifested to believers in Him through the Spirit (1:2; 3:8) as He was manifested in His life (Jn. 1:31; 2:11 etc.), just as His physical life and presence was manifested at His literal resurrection (Jn. 21:1,14). The Comforter enables us to experience the Lord's presence just as real as He was physically present with men during His ministry. This is not at all to devalue His second, literal coming; but the essence of His manifestation is already experienced by those who have His Spirit.

2:29 *If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone also that does righteousness is begotten of him-* This is in the context of discerning false teachers. The New Testament always associates false teaching with false behaviour; for by fruits a tree is known. Hardly ever is abstract false teaching mentioned, genuine misunderstanding of Bible verses and so forth. Always the false teachers are known by their immoral fruits. The litmus test as to whether a person is "of Him" is whether they do righteousness, as He is righteous. "You know..." is the way to discern. The spirit of Christ within us will feel an intuitive disjunction with those who lack that same Spirit. We are begotten of Him through receipt of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The key issue in false teachers is that they are not born again by the Spirit, and their lack of personal righteousness reflects that. The parallel in 1 Jn. 4:7 says that loving our brother is proof we are born of God. The lack of righteousness in view here is therefore in practice, a lack of brotherly love. Likewise 3:10 parallels not loving our brother with not doing righteousness.

## 1 John 3

3:1 *Look what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. And we are! For this cause the world does not know us, because it did not know Him-* This continues the theme of 2:29, that we have become God's children by being born again through receipt of the Spirit at water baptism (Jn. 3:3-5). This is all of His grace, His love. And our response is to be in love. The idea of the Jewish world not knowing us because they do not know God [for all their talk about monotheism] alludes to the prologue to the gospel of John. The world did not know the Lord Jesus in the sense that they did not accept the message that was in Him (Jn. 1:10); but those who did receive Him were given power by the Spirit to become God's children (Jn. 1:12,13). Those in Christ would be persecuted by the Jewish world as He was, because they did not know the Father (Jn. 16:3). The Jewish world did not know or recognize / have relationship with God's children, because they did not know God. But rejection by those around us, even in the name of God and their religion, should never take away from the wonder that we really are His children, begotten by the Spirit.

3:2 *Beloved, now are we children of God; and it is not yet revealed what we shall be. We know that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him-* The same Greek word is used in Heb. 2:17 of how the Lord in His life and death was "made like His brothers". Here we read that finally, we shall be "made like" Him. His experiences of life, of our humanity, brought Him into identity with us- so that we might reach final identity with Him. Our identity with the Lord is not complete and total, despite all the very exalted language John uses for our current status in Christ. The promise that we shall be made like Him at His return is a great comfort when we ponder the question of how far we shall be changed. For if our nature alone shall be changed, and spiritually we shall be left as we are, then we feel the burden of knowing that our characters are not as transformed as they ought to be. Yet if character is going to be changed overmuch, we personally shall not be saved, but turned into someone whom we are not. Yet in the end, we do need to be changed to be "like Him". More thoughts about this on 1 Cor. 15:51,52.

*For we shall see Him even as He is-* This 'seeing' of God in His Son was and is possible in this life; for whoever has 'seen' the Son has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9). Especially was the essence of the Father and Son upon the cross, and 'seeing' / perceiving Him there leads to a transformed life. And yet He will be manifested / appear [AV] at the Lord's return; and through seeing Him as He truly is, we will be transformed into an existence like Him. Yes, our natures will be changed in a twinkling of an eye. But have you ever asked *how* this will happen, putting meaning into words? John says that it will be through our 'seeing' of Jesus in that actual and new way which we will then. Seeing Him fully as He is will mean that our very natures are changed; and this is exactly what is going on now in a moral sense as we see the essence of Him manifested in His life, in the cross and in the manifestation of His life now through His resurrection. As noted on 2 Cor 3:18, even now we are changed from glory to glory, the more we perceive Him. Our change will not therefore simply be at the flick of a switch, as it were, in some mechanical way. The change will indeed be instantaneous, but will be predicated upon our mental perception of Him as He is in the fullness of His moral and personal glory.

The idea of being able to "see" God must be understood in the context of how John uses the word "see". It carries not only the idea of physical vision, but also of believing and understanding. If we can't love our brother, another human being who on some level we *can* comprehend; how then can we love God, who in this life we cannot comprehend (1 Jn.

4:12,20)? Yet John says that ultimately, we will see God (1 Jn. 3:2). Perhaps the implication is that seeing God in our brother and loving him, having a relationship with him, is the prelude to seeing God Himself and relating with Him eternally.

*3:3 And everyone that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure-* The purification or cleansing is by the Spirit; 'purify' and 'pure' are from the same word translated "Holy" as in "Holy Spirit". The function of the Holy Spirit is to purify / cleanse us. Our purifying of ourselves according to His purity is impossible in our own strength; it can only be achieved by allowing His spirit to purify us towards His own purity. As noted on Jn. 15:2, the Father cleanses or purifies us through the work of the Spirit. This process comes to its final term when we are made completely "pure" in the change of nature and total personality envisaged in :1,2.

*3:4 Everyone that keeps on committing sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness-* The Judaist false teachers were characterized by personal sinfulness, living in sin (see on 2:29). In fact, for all their much vaunted attention to the Jewish law, they were lawless. The "keeps on committing..." is in contrast to the ongoing process of purification by the work of the Spirit we have just read of in :3.

3:5- see on Mk. 15:20.

*And you know that he was manifested to take away sins; because in him is no sin-* Or as stated in :3, "He is pure", and we are being purified toward the complete reflection of His sinlessness. His work of taking away sins therefore is ongoing. It was achieved in one sense by His death, but that death released the Spirit (Jn. 7:39) which is as water of purification, washing and transforming us from sin. The language here could suggest that in His atoning death, 'He' was manifested. There God set forth Jesus in His blood, for all to see and respond to (Rom. 3:25 Gk.). There the real essence of Jesus was publicly shown forth. And there we come to know what love is (1 Jn. 3:16).

*3:6 Whoever abides in him does not keep on in sin. Whoever keeps on in sin has not seen him, nor truly knows him-* The true knowledge / seeing / relationship with Him has to have an impact upon us. If we abide in Him, if the whole sphere of our living and thinking is Him, then His Spirit abides in us (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). And this will indeed transform us. Intellectual knowledge of itself does not cleanse from sin; the knowledge in view is clearly the Hebraic idea of relationship with. John stresses how he had 'seen' the Lord's crucifixion (Jn. 19:35), and he later says that anyone who has truly 'seen' Jesus will not commit sin (1 Jn. 3:6). Holding the vision of Him there as He was, really 'seeing' and perceiving Him and continuing in relationship with that crucified Lord, will hold us back from sinning. This is the power of the cross.

*3:7 My little children, let no one lead you astray. He that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous-* John repeats the warning noted on 2:29, that the false teachers who were leading them astray could be told by their fruit and lack of righteousness. And the teachers criticized by the Judaist infiltrators could be told as true because they were righteous as the Lord is righteous. Those who have His Spirit will be able to intuitively tell who is righteous, because they have the same spirit.

3:8 *He that keeps on in sin is of the Devil. For the Devil sins from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil-* The Biblical 'devil', the false accuser, is indeed a parable for 'sin'. But it also often refers to sin manifested in an individual or system. The system immediately in view here is the Jewish world. The false teachers, the Judaist infiltrators, were sinful people in their personal lives, without the fruits of righteousness, and without love for their Christian brethren. They wilfully continued in that life, and were untransformed by the Spirit, which they resisted being filled with. I suggest that here and even in Revelation, John portrays the whole Jewish world as the false accuser, the devil; the great adversary or satan to the cause of Christ, as we see historically exemplified in the book of Acts. The Lord clearly called the Jewish opposition to Him the children "of the devil" (Jn. 8:44), in contrast to those born again in Him, who are here called the sons of God (3:1). These Judaist infiltrators (Gal. 2:4 etc.) were "of the devil" in that they were part of the larger Judaist system.

The purpose of the Lord's work and death was to unloose [NEV "destroy"] the works which "the devil" trusted in; the works of legal obedience which were characteristic of Judaism. Eph. 2:14 uses the same word for how the Lord unloosed the wall of partition enforced by the Jewish law. And the word is used about unloosing the law of Moses (Jn. 5:18; 7:23; see on Jn. 10:35). The need not to break or unloose the Law was a common Rabbinical saying found often in the Talmud. It was through the Lord's removal of this works-based legal system that He removed our sins (:5).

3:9- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

*Whoever is begotten of God does not keep on in sin, because his seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on in sin, because he is begotten of God-* The seed of God is His Son, the Lord Jesus, born by the Spirit. This is a huge Bible theme. The seed of God also begets us as God's children (Jn. 3:3-5). The begetting of God's only begotten Son refers also to us in outline principle. So long as we remain God's begotten children, the Spirit will work within us to purify us against sin (see on :3). We will not continue in sin as the Judaists did; we will be transformed; see on 2:1. But as is made clear in 1:10, the work of the Spirit is to reveal sin to us, to convict us, and also to cleanse us from it. That is a process; so this teaching does not mean that at any point in time, we are without sin. We are a work in progress, and even then, we shall have to be "made like Him" (see on :2).

3:10 *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he that does not love his brother-* The allusion is to the Lord's words in Jn. 8:44, where the children of the devil clearly refer to the Jewish leadership. The doing of righteousness is epitomized in loving our brother, which is presented as the one great commandment which is imperative in the very person of the Lord. To walk in His light is to become like Him, bit by bit. The Judaist infiltrators were controlled by the "devil" of the Jewish system. They did not love their Christian brethren but worked against them; and they did not love God's only begotten Son.

3:11 *For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another-* The message pronounced from the beginning of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1 for this definition of "the beginning" in John) was, in a word, love. From the beginning of His

ministry, the Lord's very being pronounced His love for the world, and supremely for the Father. This is the essence of the Lord Jesus; the imperative is ever in any encounter with Him to love as He loved, to the death of the cross for others.

3:12 *Not as Cain, who was of the evil one, who killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous-* The allusion to Jn. 8:44 continues (see on :10). The hatred of Cain for Abel is used in Jn. 8:44 as typical of the Jewish hatred for the Lord Jesus. As Abel's sacrificial obedience provoked an awareness in Cain of his own evil works, so with the Jewish darkness around the Lord. Cain's evil works do not refer to his vegetable sacrifice, but to the fact that his conscience of his unrecorded "evil works" was prodded by the observation of Abel's righteousness. The Lord in John's gospel explained that the darkness hates the light (the Lord Himself and those in Him, who are "the light of the world" as He is); and this is because their works are exposed as evil by the light. This is another way of saying that their consciences are prodded by the very existence of the light. And therefore they hate the light and want to destroy, obscure or extinguish it. The world hates all those who testify of its evil (Jn. 7:7). It is too simplistic to say that Cain killed Abel, as the Lord was killed by the Jews, just because of jealousy. Rather is the reason because the goodness of the righteous exposed the evil deeds of the wicked, simply by reason of their being righteous.

3:13- see on Jn. 5:28.

*Marvel not brothers if the world hates you-* As explained on :12, it is the unconscious exposure of others' sin by our example which will lead to hatred. The Jewish converts were apparently surprised that the Jewish religious world would hate them. John is explaining that such hatred is completely to be expected. But in this very context, John warns about *some brethren* who hate their brethren, and who thereby abide in darkness (1 Jn. 3:15; 4:20). John's simple logic is evident: if you hate your brother, you're in the world, you've put yourself into darkness, you've condemned yourself. The place of the rejected believers is in the ranks of the world- nowhere else.

3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He that does not love abides in death-* Again, the litmus test of the Lord's indwelling through the Spirit is if we love our brethren in Christ. If we have received the promised gift of eternal life, which is the life and spirit of the Lord Jesus, then we shall not hate our brethren. For He loves them. If we have His spirit, His mind, His love- then so shall we. John implies that we should be able to enquire of ourselves as to whether we love our brothers, and to find a clear answer. Harry Whittaker was fond of seeing the *agape*, the love feast, the breaking of bread, as implied in references to showing *agape* to our brethren. That is indeed one implication, and those who refuse to break bread with their brethren can hardly claim to have *agape* for them. But much more is implied- for the *agape* of the new commandment is to love unto death as the Lord did, passionately wishing salvation for all our brethren.

Having eternal life and passing out of death is spoken of in Jn. 5:24, where it is predicated upon hearing the Lord's word: "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life". To hear the word of Christ and believe the Gospel of God *must* issue, if it is valid and credible,

in something practical- loving our brethren. It is only John who records the Lord speaking of "my word" [*logos*]. To hear Christ's word or *logos* is not merely to believe that the Bible was written by Divine inspiration, or to intellectually assent to doctrinal truth; it is to discern *Him*, to know Him as a person in truth. And this simply has to lead to loving the brethren. This is the real result of knowing / being in relationship with the Lord.

3:15- see on Mt. 5:22.

*Whoever hates his brothers is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him-* The allusion to Cain and Jn. 8:44 is continued; he was "the murderer from the beginning", the archetypal murderer. The Lord of course taught that hate is tantamount to murder. But the great murder in view was the Jewish murder of the Lord (Mt. 22:7; Acts 7:52). "Eternal life" in John's Gospel is a present gift, received now and abiding in our hearts, "in him"; the life of the Lord Jesus, His spirit, the ability to live now as we shall eternally. This cannot abide in us if we hate our brother. For murder is related to death; and we have life abiding in us. The Greek for "hate" carries the idea of 'to detest'; we must ask ourselves if we detest any of our brethren. It seems apparent that many cannot answer that question very well.

"Eternal life" should be read as referring more to the *quality* of that life, rather than its eternal duration being the fundamental construct behind our conception of the Kingdom. This is how the phrase "eternal life" seems to be used in John's letters (1 Jn. 1:1-3; 2:24,25; 3:15; 5:11,13). We must not be like the rich young man who desperately asked: "What must *I do* that *I* may have *eternal life*?", as if he saw having eternal life as the ultimate possession to get under his own belt. Notice how our Lord's reply described 'having eternal life' as 'entering into life', 'having treasure in heaven', 'entering the Kingdom of God', rather than personally possessing eternal life (Mt. 19:16-23).

3:16 *Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers-* The message from the beginning of the Lord's ministry was of love, in that the light of His person was an imperative to love unto death. But the supreme definition of love was given in His life; that enables the new commandment to be real, to love as He loved us, unto death.

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). We must carry the cross if we are to know His salvation. Yet we can be caught up in the spirit of a world which seeks obsessively to save its life rather than give up life. Through popping pills, exercise, healthy living... we can seek to extend our days. We use insurance to seek to cushion us against the harder knocks of life. We seek our lives to be as free as possible from hard work. And none of these things is wrong in themselves. It is quite right that we should make use of these things in the Lord's service. But we can be caught up in the spirit of life and thinking of which they are part, and *this* is the danger. For the spirit and desire that gave rise to them is that which is exactly the opposite of the sense of *must* which the Lord possessed. He knew that He *must* suffer, He *must* crucify His flesh. And so *must* we. This is a

solemn and eternal compulsion. Yet we live in a world which believes that we *must not* suffer anything negative, and we *must* seek to save our lives rather than give them out for others. If we are to show the love of God to the world, this will primarily (but not exclusively) be in terms of our spiritual help towards them, rather than a social gospel. Our response to God's love in Christ will also be expressed by laying down our lives "for the *brethren*". The next verse helps define this as material, practical help (1 Jn. 3:16,17).

*3:17 But whosoever has the world's goods and sees his brothers in need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*- The Lord Jesus personally, His word, His *logos*, the love of God, the Spirit... are all referring to the same thing. The indwelling of the Spirit of Christ means that we shall love as He loved. If we do not show love in practice, then quite clearly His Spirit, which has love as its essence, is not within us. We cannot claim to have His Spirit in a purely intellectual sense; and our lives not show love. I have argued throughout John's Gospel and epistles that "the world" usually refers to the Jewish world; and on 2:16 that the Judaist movement was wealthy. The false teachers of Rev. 3:17 were increased with goods and had need of nothing. They had the goods of the [Jewish] world; but refused to help needy Christians. For they were after all just infiltrators into the Christian churches (Gal. 2:4) and wouldn't want to 'waste' any money helping their poor.

The principles arising from the first century context which John wrote in do of course apply to us in any age. The early church was the parade example of giving to brothers in need (Acts 2:45; 4:35; 6:3 s.w.). The psychology of being mean is well expressed here; we see / notice the need, but close up our hearts lest we make an emotional response from the "bowels" [Gk.]. Emotion and pity are therefore quite normal motivations for generosity, and we should not close them down lest we be left out of pocket.

*3:18 Little children, let us not love in word, nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth*- Every religion and indeed every person on earth talks of "love". But John has radically redefined love as being what is done motivated by the "new commandment", to love as the Lord loved us unto death. This is the love which is not in theory or spoken about in pious language, but the love which is reality and which is "truth" in the sense that the Lord Jesus was "the truth". The word [*logos*] is to be made flesh (Jn. 1:14); that seems the idea here. The word of love, the love as the Lord loved, is not to remain as mere language, but to become deed and reality.

The commandment to love, as Christ loved us, is made new "as it is made true" (1 Jn. 2:8 Gk.) both in the person of Jesus, and in all who are truly in Him. This means that the principles we receive in theory are to become 'truth' in us as they were in the Lord; they are to become applied in the very person and fabric of our beings, and not remain merely part of our shadow selves. It is truth that makes us pure (1 Pet. 1:22,23), good deeds are produced by truth (1 Jn. 3:18). No amount of correct theory can make us pure; surely the reference is to the life of transparency to God, of 'truth' in the sense that there is no divide between our inner convictions and our actual lives. Then will come true in us the connection which John perceives between truth and love (1 Jn. 3:19).

*3:19 Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him*- "The truth" as often in John refers to the Lord, who is "the truth". The "Him" before whom we assure our hearts at the last day is the Lord; "the truth". The extent to which we are intended to be Christ-centred is reflected in how John speaks of Him as "the truth". Indeed,



He appears to refer to the Name of Jesus with the same sensitivity with which a Jew would refer to the Name of God, and uses a similarly wide range of titles for Him. John seems to use *aletheia*, 'the truth', as a kind of periphrasis for "Jesus"; *en aletheia*, in the truth, appears to match Paul's *en kyrio* ['in the Lord'] or *en christo* ['in Christ']. John refers to missionaries being sent out "for the sake of the name", when the other records say that they were sent out in the name of Jesus. The exalted Name of Jesus was therefore, to John, 'the truth'; the person of Jesus, which the Name encapsulates, is to be the deciding, central truth in the life of the believer.

We can know whether we are living in love; and if we are, then we come to judgment day with stable hearts. All those who uphold exclusive policies against fellowshiping their brethren need to ponder long and hard what they are doing, and whether they can face the Lord in that day with an assured heart... as they see brethren they have excluded entering His Kingdom. If we have a good conscience that we have lived in love, then we shall assure, or calm down, our fluttering hearts before Him at the last day. To live in love, with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, is to live the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live. If we know we are living in love, we shall be assured when we meet Him that we shall seamlessly continue that life.

3:20 *Because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things-* The preceding verse has spoken of being able to assure our hearts before the Lord at judgment day, if we have lived in love. The context here in :20 therefore specifically refers to the question of whether or not we can say we live in love. If it does, then God is greater than our various feelings of bad conscience concerning those we do not love. He knows all things- if we know we have not lived in love, then this will be symptomatic of yet more sins, which He knows all about. The same Greek words for "knows all things" are used about the Lord Jesus knowing all things that are in men (Jn. 2:24).

3:21- see on Lk. 6:46.

*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have boldness toward God-* As noted on :19,20, the context here is specific to the question of whether we know that we live in love toward the Lord's brethren or not. John assumes that we can in fact know the answer to this question, and that our heart reliably reveals whether or not we are living in love. The "boldness" is the 'assurance of heart' at the last day which we shall have if we know we have lived in love (:19). But we can have that boldness right now; we can come in prayer boldly before the throne of grace, and boldly enter the holiest (Heb. 4:16; 10:19). This is why John's thought goes on from the day of judgment to our standing in prayer now before the Father and Son (:22). Because our attitude toward them now in prayer shall be our attitude at the last day. Through the ministry of the Comforter, we are now in the Lord's presence, we have His presence just as really as when He lived amongst men in Palestine.

3:22 *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight-* As shown on :21, the thought has developed from having love for each giving us boldness before the Father and Son in the day of judgment, to now being bold and confident in prayer before them now. Because our attitude toward them now in prayer shall be our attitude at the last day. The theme of being confident because we live in love is also continued. The "commandments" in view are I suggest a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment- to love as He loved us. Indeed the next verse (:23) rather makes this clear. See on 2:3. And this is 'to do the things pleasing to God', a phrase

lifted directly from Jn. 8:29 "I do always those things that please Him". So effectively, we shall have our prayers answered, we can have boldness in prayer, if we obey the commandment to love ["because we keep his commandments"], which is to live as He lived, loving as He loved ["and do the things that are pleasing in His sight"]. And this fits perfectly with the context of the preceding verses- that we can have boldness before the same Father and Son, if we live in love.

3:23- see on Jn. 17:11.

*And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment-* The plural "commandments" of :22 are the singular commandment, to love as He loved because we have believed into His Name. See on :22 and 2:3. If we "believe in the name of... Jesus Christ", then we will love one another. To believe the name and to love each other are "his commandment" - singular. They are one and the same thing. This is how direct is the link between truly believing in the name of Jesus, and loving each other. One cannot truly believe in Him, in all that He was, all that He stood and died for, and all that He is... and not articulate this in some form of love for the brotherhood. Belief in Him can never therefore be a purely intellectual matter of mastering certain doctrines. Belief in Him is to love one another; one cannot believe in Him, truly encounter Him and accept Him, and not live in love.

3:24- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

*And he that keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us-* As noted on :23 and 2:3, the "commandments" here refer effectively to the one great commandment, to love as He loved us. To have His Spirit abiding in us is parallel in effect to living in the spirit of love as He loved us. The indwelling of the Spirit is therefore connected to our living in love. The Lord's spirit could be summarized in that word, "love". Into our hard hearts there comes His heart, His spirit into our spirit, His word / *logos* / essence of being into ours. And the most essential spirit of Jesus was love for the Lord's people, unto death for our salvation. Here then is real help and hope for those who have been so bruised by life that they feel they can never love. And indeed, who can seriously think that in their own strength, they could love as Christ loved us, unto the death of the cross? The fact is, we have been given His spirit, and this is how He abides in us; and He abides in us if we keep His commandment to love. It's not that we get the Spirit as a reward, as it were, for being loving. We are given the Spirit when we are baptized, when we first believe. It is the empowerment to keep the great commandment of love. For His spirit in the end is the spirit of His love, in a word. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). Hence we read of "the love of the Spirit" (Rom. 15:30); and love is *the* singular fruit of, or brought forth by, the Spirit.

## 1 John 4

*4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God. Because many false prophets have gone out into the world-* In John's Gospel and letters, the defining feature of true believers and teachers is that they have received the spirit of the Lord Jesus, the Comforter. The authenticity of teachers / "prophets" was to be demonstrated according to whether they had the fruits of the Spirit, which are summarized in love for our brethren as the Lord loved us unto death. This is the test of the spirits.

There were other tests of these prophets- if they didn't accept that Jesus was Lord, they didn't have the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). If they held false teaching about whether Jesus came in the flesh, and walked in hatred of the other Christians, they also were to be rejected (1 Jn. 4:1-10). When Paul says that God and the Holy Spirit witness to the truth of what he is writing, he is presumably referring to how those with the gift of discerning spirits had tested and approved what he was saying (Rom. 1:9; 9:1 cp. 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). What all this means is that as soon as a genuine New Testament prophet gave a prophecy, it was *immediately* recognized as such, because all these methods of 'testing the spirit' had been followed. This, by the way, explains the very 'dogmatic' and self-assured tone of some of the writers. They insist that their commands have God's authority (1 Thess. 4:2; 2 Thess. 2:15), and therefore must be obeyed (2 Thess. 3:14). They can insist that what they are saying is actually the will and command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37); and their inspired preaching was "of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). These claims would have come over as arrogant and baseless- unless there had indeed been the process of confirmation of their words explained above. The writers can ask for their letters to be read at the gatherings of the early church- which initially would have been based around the synagogue practice of reading from the Old Testament Scriptures. Their writings were clearly accepted on a par with those writings- as soon as they were issued (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3). The testings of the various claims to Holy Spirit inspiration are to be found in Gal. 1, 1 Cor. 14 etc. But the letters of John, written at the end of the New Testament period, have the most warnings about the need to test the various claims of Holy Spirit inspiration- understandably, as John was writing towards the end of the period when inspired writings were being given (1 Jn. 4:2,3; 5:6; 2 Jn. 7). See on 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Tim. 5:18.

*4:2 Hereby do you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is of God-* The Judaist infiltrators claimed to have the Spirit, as the true Christians did. For being without the spirit of Christ makes a man "none of His". So exactly what "spirit" they claimed to have needed to be tested. People here are called 'spirits' because of the close identification between a person and their 'spirit'. True Christians would have the spirit of Christ at their core and would thereby be personally, openly identified with Him. John's Gospel has spoken of the difference between claiming faith in Christ, and confessing or professing Him before men. The cross elicited open and total confession of Him before men. John the Baptist is presented as an example of a man who confessed and did not deny the Lord (Jn. 1:20), and Joseph and Nicodemus are presented as examples of men who went from secret faith to the open confession required of a true Christian. Many Jewish 'believers' refused to confess Jesus as Christ because the penalty for such confession was exclusion from the synagogue system and the Jewish world (Jn. 9:22; 12:42); see on 2:23.

So firstly, a person filled with the spirit of Christ, the Messiah, would actually confess Jesus as Christ, as Messiah. The Judaist infiltrators would not openly confess Him in this way. But they must confess that He "came in the flesh". They had to openly accept that Jesus was a real person; for already incipient ideas of Docetism ['seeming'] and Gnosticism were being

advocated by the Jews as a way of clouding the whole issue- that a man born of Mary was Son of God and Messiah, having a perfect character, and now risen, was able to share His spirit with believers in Him. I demonstrated in [\*The Real Christ\*](#) that much false teaching about the nature of the Lord began with Jewish attempts to cloud the true Christian teaching about the Lord; and these attempts later morphed by further extension into the absurdities of Trinitarian doctrine.

The idea of "Christ comes..." cannot be pressed to support any idea of pre-existence. It was a standard Jewish phrase to refer to the arrival of the Messiah (so used in Mt. 24:5; Jn. 4:25; 7:27,31,41,42; 11:27). So the idea would be that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah who should "come"; and He came as an actual human being, "in the flesh". He was the manifestation of God "in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Already Judaism was beginning to suggest that Messiah was just some abstract, idealistic personification rather than a literal person. That idea is popular in reform Judaism to this day.

There is another possibility. The Lord had promised that despite His physical departure, He would "come" to the disciples, in that the gift of His Spirit in their hearts would make His presence as real [and moreso] as when He was literally with them (Jn. 14:18). His 'coming' to His people was therefore through His Spirit indwelling their flesh. The very same Greek words are used when Paul explains that the life of the risen Jesus, His Spirit, is made manifest "in our mortal flesh" right now (see on 2 Cor. 4:11). The Spirit gift would be given to "all flesh" (Acts 2:17 s.w.). Hence Paul could say that "Christ lives in me... in the flesh" (Gal. 2:20). In this case, the "spirit", the person claiming to have the Spirit, would confess that the spirit of the Lord Jesus had entered them, their "flesh".

4:3- see on Jn. 12:42.

*And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus came in the flesh is not of God, and they are proved to be of the antichrist; of whom you have heard that it comes, and now is already in the world-* "Of God" suggests 'born of God'. The believer is born "of the Spirit", not of the will of man but "of God" (Jn. 1:13; 3:5). There were false claims of Spirit possession in the first century; as I have noted on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy [regarding the claims made in Ephesus]. The Judaist infiltrators claimed to have the spirit of Christ, and even did false miracles to support their claims, in Corinth they were talking in glossolalia, "mumbo jumbo", and falsely claiming this was the gift of tongues / languages. Those who had been truly born again, of the Spirit, would openly confess the Lord Jesus as Messiah, as a real person "in the flesh". By refusing to do so, they demonstrated that they were "antichrist", the fake, imitation Christ. "You have heard that it comes" must refer to the Lord's predictions that there would be false Christs. These false versions of Messiah refer to the ideas being pushed in the Jewish world and spread into the churches by the Judaist infiltrators. They were specifically entering the [Jewish] world.

4:4 *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them. Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world-* By being born of God by the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5), what was in them (the Spirit) was greater than the supposed 'spirit' in the Jewish world. The believers were "little children" of God, having been born of Him by the Spirit. The Spirit is personified ["he"] not because the Holy Spirit is a personal being, but because the presence of the Spirit would be as real for the believers as if the Lord were physically present with them as a person.

John makes such a fuss about believing that the Lord Jesus came in the flesh because he wants his brethren to have the same Spirit that was in Jesus dwelling in *their* flesh (1 Jn. 4:2,4). He wants them to see that being human, being in the flesh, is no barrier for God to dwell in. As He was in the world, so are we to be in the world (1 Jn. 4:17 Gk.). *This* is why it's so important to understand that the Lord Jesus was genuinely human.

4:5 *They are of the world. Therefore speak they of the world and the world hears them-* The world of the first century didn't generally hear the Jewish false teachers; but the Jewish world did. This confirms that we are correct in viewing "the world" here as the Jewish world. The message of these people, their teaching / 'speaking', was of the Jewish world, and therefore attractive to the Jewish world.

4:6 *We are of God. He that knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error-* Being "of God", born of Him by the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5), is presented as being in opposition to being "of the [Jewish] world". John himself was a Jew and was not at all personally anti-Jewish; but he clearly presents the world of Judaism, with their conscious denial of Jesus as Messiah, as being absolutely opposed to the things of God. Those who were not born of God by the Spirit would not "hear" the teaching of John and his team. Yet they surely had the Spirit; to refuse their teaching, which they had been taught by the Comforter, was another proof that these hearers were not "of God". There is an intuitive bonding between all who have the Lord's spirit. Those who were out of step with the teaching of spirit-filled teachers like John were thereby discernible as of "the spirit of error". "Error" is more 'deceit' in the Greek, the same word used of the spirit of deceit which the Lord would send upon the Jewish world (2 Thess. 2:11; see note there).

4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God, and everyone that loves is begotten of God and knows God-* Another proof of having been born of God through the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5) is whether we love one another. The love in view is not of a secular nature; but the love of the new commandment, to love as the Lord loved us, unto death on a cross. To be born "of God" is to have the love which is "of God", the love which came to its ultimate term in the gift of His Son for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16). Although John's audience were all born of God, they still had to be exhorted to "love one another". The love between us is not as it were imposed by the Spirit against our will; the work of the Spirit requires our willing partnership. Knowing God means living in the sacrificial love of the Father and Son. Clearly we do not 'know' God simply by perceiving the correct theologies about Him and placing a mental tick of agreement against them.

4:8- see on Jn. 3:3.

*He that does not love, does not know God. For God is love-* As noted on :8, to know God in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship with Him will issue in love- His unique, self-sacrificial love which led to the events of the cross as their acme. To 'see' or 'know' both the Father and Son is to become like them; beholding their glory results in the glory of their person and Name shining off from our faces (see on 2 Cor. 3:18). So a litmus test of false brethren is whether or not they have love. And so often those who appear the most conservative in their teaching totally fail the *agape* test.

To experience God is to know Him. So often the Hebrew prophets speak of 'knowing God' as meaning 'to experience God'. Because God is love, to love is to know God. Quite simply, how deeply we have loved [and I am speaking of 'love' in its Biblical sense] is how deeply we have known God- and vice versa. And that love is worked out in the very earthliness and worldliness of human life in practice.

*4:9 Herein was the love of God manifested to us, in that God has sent His only Son into the world that we might live through him-* The supreme manifestation of God's love was in the cross. We live through Him in that He gives to us the gift of His life, His spirit, the kind of thinking He thinks and life He lives, breathing it into every open heart through the gift of the Comforter. As the Father sent the Son into the world, so we are sent into the world in obedience to the great commission (Jn. 17:18). Our mission likewise is to manifest His love and to give others the gift of His life, acting as a channel for the movement and gift of His life / Spirit.

*4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins-* The love of the Father and Son is not "love" as the world understands it; but the love of the cross, that men might be eternally forgiven and saved. One dimension of that love is that it totally takes the initiative; it is not a kind, positive response to those perceived to have loved us. It is the initiative of dying for ones' enemies, in the hope they shall come over to your side- as Romans 5 expresses it. The Judaism which John was up against had much to say of their boasts to "love God"; but it is not our love of Him which is to be the focus, but His love of us whilst we were sinners, and His supreme gift of His Son for our sins and weaknesses, rather than to complement our supposed righteousness.

John seems to purposefully make the point that the Lord *was sent* [as a one time act in the past] "to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). In His blood covered body, He was the place of propitiation, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat (s.w. "mercy seat" Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5). And yet: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: for He *is* [right now, each time we sin] the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:1,2 s.w.). In obtaining forgiveness for us He in some way goes through again the essence of His sacrifice. It is too simplistic to say that we repent, and God forgives. He does, but only on the basis of Christ's atoning act that must come ever before Him in the granting of forgiveness. The Mosaic offerings of blood "before Yahweh" all pointed forward to this fact. Awful as His actual physical sufferings were 2000 years ago, we should not separate them from the work He came to do- of obtaining our redemption. He worked this work in His life, on the cross, and continues it until this day. The daily morning and evening sacrifice had to be of a first year lamb without blemish- the identical specification for the Passover lamb. His death on the cross at Passover was the same as His daily life of sacrifice.

*4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another-* This sets the standard so high. For the love of God toward us is not "love" as the world understands it, but the love of utter, total self-sacrifice expressed on the cross (:10). It is with that love that we "ought to love one another". Anything which may damage the path to salvation of the other must not be done; and every effort and sacrifice is to be made to help others on the path toward salvation.

*4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us-* The allusion is to the prologue of John's Gospel; we have not seen God, but

the Son has revealed Him in who He was (Jn. 1:18). And thereby we who have seen the Son have seen / understood / believe in the Father for all the Father is.

The abiding of the Father within believers is through the indwelling of the Spirit in our hearts (3:24). The litmus proof of that is that we will love one another within the believing community; for we are to love as the Lord loved us and died for us to save us.

The idea of "perfected" is of an ongoing process. John writes often in absolute terms, according to our status "in Christ"; as if it is simply so that those who know the Father therefore automatically live in and with the kind of love exhibited by Him in Christ. But we know from observed experience that this is a process and doesn't happen instantaneously; even Paul felt he had not yet been "perfected" (Phil. 3:12 s.w.). Love, the love unto the death of a cross, is developed and "perfected" in us; this results in the Christian community being "perfected" into a profound unity, unseen in any other human social relationship (Jn. 17:23 s.w.). Our life paths are therefore directed towards the development of that love; and when our lives are over and the next we know we stand before the Lord at the judgment, our love should have been perfected, matured and developed to such a point that we assure our fluttering hearts before Him and find boldness there. We shall then have reached the point the Lord did, who was "perfected" until the very point when He died- for that was the ultimate term and maturity of the process of love being "perfected" in a person (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28). We note from His example and path that whilst the process of 'perfecting' is still in operation, we may be not fully mature, but lack of full maturity is not sinful. For the Lord never sinned. It is the Spirit which 'perfects' us, until on death we can be spoken of as being amongst the spirits of just men who were perfected (Heb. 12:23). It is by keeping the word of the Lord Jesus ever before us that this love is perfected in us (2:5).

*4:13 Hereby we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of his Spirit-* This complements the statement in :12 that we know He abides in us if we live in love. The presence of the Spirit will produce love, the love of Christ, which is the cardinal feature of His entire Spirit. The Spirit is a gift, given- and not cultivated by our own steel willed effort or felicity in Biblical exposition. The Spirit was given when the Lord was glorified (Jn. 7:39); there is a specific gift given to each believer at the time of water baptism.

*4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world-* This continues to comment on the result of the gift of the Spirit (:13). For it was the Comforter who would "testify" of the Lord, "and you also shall testify" (Jn. 15:26,27; 1 Jn. 5:6). The power to witness is given in the strength of the Spirit we are given; otherwise shy individuals somehow find the power to bear major witness, circumstances are arranged whereby the most reserved of us have meetings with others who are searching for the truth of Christ we have encountered and can share with them. John and his fellow apostles had testified of what they had seen, in the preaching which the Gospel of John is a transcript of (s.w. Jn. 3:11; 19:25; 21:24; Rev. 1:2). John sees himself as following the example of the Gentile Samaritan woman, who 'testified' that the Lord was the saviour of the world (Jn. 4:39,42 s.w.).

*4:15 Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God-* As noted on :2 and :3, confession was required, not just secret 'belief'; and such confession meant being put out of the synagogues and thereby out of the Jewish world / society.

Therefore many 'believed' but would not "confess" (Jn. 9:22; 12:42); see on 2:23. God's abiding in a person is through the Spirit (:13). And yet the Comforter passages promise that the indwelling spirit will empower our witness or confession. This therefore is another evidence of having received the Spirit; that we shall testify, in the power of the Spirit. The false teachers and infiltrators didn't do so; and were not therefore "of God" and their claims to Spirit possession were false.

There is a repeated Biblical theme that the believer's relationship with the Father is essentially *mutual*. For example, we dwell in God (Ps. 90:1), and He dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16). And here too: "God abides in him and he in God". We work out our salvation, and God in response works in us both to will and to work (Phil. 2:12,13 RV). This is the mutuality which arises from the Spirit.

4:16- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

*And we know and have believed the love which God has toward us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him-* The love God has toward us is supremely in the gift of His Son to die for us (Jn. 3:16). This love is an essential part of God, and for Him to abide in us and we in Him means living in the sphere of self-sacrificial love, with that love touching every part of our thinking and doing. And this is empowered by the action of the Spirit within us, which is the means through which He abides in us and we in Him (:13). This speaks of nothing less than a complete psychological takeover of the natural spirit and personality. If we are open to it, we shall be filled with "the fruit of the Spirit", which is finally just one thing- love, in its various manifestations.

The fact the Lord Jesus didn't pre-exist as a person needs some meditation. The kind of thoughts that come to us as we stand alone at night, gazing into the sky. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e.g. for the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the spectre of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5). Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. The Jesus who didn't pre-exist but was like me, died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost. His pure *love* for us, His condescension, should mean that we also ought to reach out into the lives of all men, never thinking they are beneath us or too insignificant or distant from us. No wonder 1 Jn. 4:15,16 describes believing that Jesus is the Son of God as believing the love that God has to us.

4:17 - see on 1 Cor. 15:10; 1 Jn. 4:4.

*In this way is love made perfect with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Because as he is, even so are we in this world-* The connection is with how Jn. 14:2,3 taught that through the gift of the Comforter, we can be with the Lord "where I am", or "as he is", where He was and is in His relationship with the Father. He prayed for this in John 17; that



His relationship with the Father might be ours. And this is effected by the gift of the Comforter, as often noted on John 14-16.

As explained on :12, the work of the Spirit is to perfect or develop our characters towards an ever deeper love, approximating progressively closer to the love of the Lord for us on the cross. By the end of our lives we will have reached the maturity of love intended for us, and thereby we shall be confident in the day of judgment. We shall know that we have the spirit of Christ, which in simplest essence is love like His love; and in this sense, we will have received the eternal life, the spirit of living as He lived, and we can confidently expect to resume living that eternal life through the process of resurrection and glorification.

There is a major theme in the NT: that we are living the life of Christ, and thereby His life becomes ours. In this sense we have and live the eternal life. "As he is, so are we in this world"; we will be persecuted as He was persecuted (Jn. 15:20); we fellowship His sufferings, being made conformable to the image of His death, and thereby will fellowship His glory (1 Pet. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 1:7). Paul had this idea ever before him: "It is now my joy to suffer for you; for the sake of Christ's body, the church, I am completing what still remains for Christ to suffer in my own person" (Col. 1:24 REB).

In the grace of Christ, we can have a certain "boldness" in prayer (Heb. 4:16); but we will have "boldness in the day of judgment" (1 Jn. 4:17) in the sense that the attitude we have in prayer now and the experience of the Lord we know now will be that we have in the day of judgment. If He is no more than a black box in our brain we call 'God' or 'Jesus', if for all our Christianity we haven't known Him, so it will be then as we face Him.

4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; because fear has punishment, and he that fears is not made perfect in love-* If we reach the level of love intended for us, then we will have no fear at the day of judgment, but rather "boldness" (:17) and assured hearts (see on 3:19).

Murderers often reveal that their psychological motivation was not merely hatred, but often fear- fear of what that person might do, or who they might show them up to be. Fear, therefore, is at the root of all lack of love and respect for our brethren. We fear the poor image of ourselves which they reveal by their actions or examples; and so slander and hatred of them in the heart [Biblical murder] develops. If only we can cast away this kind of fear, then love will take its place; for perfect love comes when fear has been cast out (1 Jn. 4:18). The Greek for 'drive out' is that used in Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 to describe how the wicked are driven out into darkness at the last day. If we now in this life can cast out or condemn our own fear of rejection, then we will not live in fear... because fear has, or is, its own condemnation (1 Jn. 4:18 Gk.). If we are still consumed by fear, in whatever way, in this life- then this, according to John's logic, appears to be a sign that we will not be accepted in the last day. Fear as a purely nervous reaction is not what he is speaking of. Rather is it the crippling moral fear of which we have spoken.

We are saved by grace, already, we are elevated to the heights of heavenly places on account of being in Christ. A perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn. 4:16,18), fear is associated with bondage rather than the freedom of sonship which we enjoy (Rom. 8:15). Yet all this can in no way erase the very clear teaching of many other passages: that we ought to fear God, really fear Him. What's the resolution of all this? It may be that *ideally*, we are called to live a

life without any fear in the sense of *phobos*- in the same way as we are asked to be perfect, even as God is (Mt. 5:48). Yet the reality is that we are not perfect. And perhaps in a similar way, we are invited to live a life without *phobos*, but in reality, it is necessary to have it if we truly realize our weak position. We ought to be able to say with confidence that should Christ come now, we will by grace continue to be in His Kingdom. Yet in the same way as we always assume a future, so we inevitably look ahead to the possibility of our *future* apostasy; as we grow spiritually, there is an altogether finer appreciation of the purity of God's righteousness. The risk of rejection, the sense of the future we may miss, and the faint grasp of the gap between God's righteousness and our present moral achievement, will *inevitably* provoke a sense of fear in every serious believer. And yet fearing God, unlike fear on a human level, is a motivating and creative fear. Our fear of and yet confidence with God is a strange synthesis.

Psychologists suggest that there is something within the human psyche that needs to fear, that wants to fear. Just look at the huge success of terror stories, movies, images, Stephen King novels; and the way that the media realizes that their global audience laps up fear and sensationalism about terror. One common thread throughout all the pagan forerunners of the 'personal Satan' idea is that the pagan concepts all involved the generation of fear and terror. True Christianity aims to "cast out" such fear through its revelation of the ultimate love of God (1 Jn. 4:18). So many control systems have played upon fear of the Devil – to bring children into subdued obedience, flocks into submission to pastors, etc. It's now high time to realize that this is not how the true God works. "For fear has torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), and this is exactly what true understanding of the cross of Christ saves us from. God isn't a psychological manipulator, and He doesn't coax us into submission through fear. And yet it could be said that humanity is increasingly addicted to fear. People may mock fearing a Loch Ness monster, werewolves, funny sounds at night... but they still buy in big time to fearing a personal Devil. There's something in us that wants to fear something; that just loves the popular idea of a personal Satan. This is why it's hard to budge this mentality.

4:19 *We love, because He first loved us*- The love in view is the love unto death of the cross, the "new commandment". The 'first love' He showed us was in the death of the cross; and it was this death which enabled Him to give His life spirit to us in the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 7:39) which provokes love within us (Rom. 5:5) because love to the end was the dominant aspect of His Spirit. Again we are reminded that this "love" is the love that takes the initiative, in dying for others whilst they are yet alienated from us- rather than being kind and generous to those we perceive as having first been that to us.

4:20 *If a man says, I love God, and hates his fellow believers, he is a liar*- Again the allusion is to Jn 8:44, where the Jewish opposition is likened to Cain, the first liar and murderer. His first lie was in relation to his covering his hatred for his brother. This exactly fits the Judaist infiltrators; their religion had slain their brother, the Lord Jesus, and they were out to slay His brethren. Yet they were trying to hide that fact by slipping into the churches as false brethren (Gal. 2:4). The "liar" is the antichrist, which in John's first context was the Jewish system (see on 2:22).

*For he that does not love his fellow believers whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen-* These Judaists, for all their talk about 'loving God' [a very Jewish monotheistic term], in fact did not love Him because they did not love His children. We cannot literally see God, but we can 'see' Him insofar as we 'see' His Son. For the Son alone has fully 'seen' the Father (Jn. 6:46). To love the Father is to have His Spirit abiding in us, which elicits sacrificial love for His children, our fellow believers. Any hatred of those begotten by His Spirit therefore reveals that we lack His Spirit, and do not love Him.

Our attitude to others is simply so eternally important. John's writings are characterized by seeing everything in terms of dualism, black and white, good and evil. He describes those who do not love their brethren as having not seen God, as not being a child of God. Martin Hengel has observed: "How one behaves towards a Christian brother at one's own front door is the deciding factor over faith and unbelief, life or death, light and darkness". John demonstrates with piercing logic that hating our brother means that we hate our God. But it is so easy to adopt the position of the man whom John sets up. We can even think that our love of God is articulated in a hating of our brother, for the sake of God's Truth. It is relatively easy to love God, apparently, anyway. But it's hard to love all our brethren. And yet this means that a *true* unfeigned love of God is not quite so natural and easy as we think. 1 Jn. 5:1-3 make it clear that it is axiomatic within loving God that we love all His children. If we don't love them, we don't love Him. So if we think that loving God is easy, think again. Think who He really *is*, of the inclusive and saving and seeking grace which is so central to His character, and the imperative which there is within it to be like Him.

Biblically, it's impossible to have a relationship with God without relating with His children. This point is hammered home by John, writing as he was to ecclesias riven with factionism and accusation. The result of believing that Christ laid down His life for us, is that we lay down our lives for our brethren (3:16). All believers are the children of God. If we love God, we will love His children (5:1,2). God and His children, the believers, are inseparable. And yet within our human nature is the tendency to try to make a distinction between them. John was fully aware of this: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (4:20,21). Loving our brother is therefore the litmus test as to whether we are "of God", whether we have "passed from death unto life" (3:10,14). It is simply impossible to claim to love God but politely disregard His children. It's not that we must love God *and also* our brother. If we love God we will love our brother, by loving our brother we love God. These things are axiomatic. The intimacy this implies between the Father and His sons is so deep. As those "in Christ", all that is true of the Son of God, Jesus our Lord, becomes true of us. We share His relationship with the Father.

4:21- see on Lk. 10:28.

*And this commandment have we from him, that he who loves God, loves his fellow believers also-* The "commandment" is to love our brethren as He has loved us on the cross (Jn. 13:34). Here the implications of that are unpacked further. That love of our fellow believers is part and parcel of our love of God, as noted extensively on :20. John keeps on repeating the same things from different angles and slightly playing with the words- in a desperate attempt to get us all to perceive the utterly fundamental importance of love for all our fellow believers.

## 1 John 5

5:1 - see on Jn. 3:3; 8:42.

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God; and whoever loves Him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of Him-* The language of "begotten of" implies the initiative was with the begetter. The begetting is through the Spirit, which becomes effective by water baptism and acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah / Son of God (Jn. 3:3-5). So I would read this as meaning that belief in Jesus as the Christ precedes the begetting of the Spirit. And yet admittedly the grammar he can be read as meaning that the begetting of God (by the Spirit) results in our belief in Jesus as Christ. Whatever, He is the prime mover in our spiritual begetting; and we are the objects of the begetting, rather than the prime movers in it. Being God's begotten children makes us brethren of His only begotten Son. We have a natural love for the Father who begot us; and yet we cannot love God, vertically, as it were, without horizontally loving those others begotten by Him. For His Spirit has worked in many other lives apart from our own, bringing even the most difficult and awkward of our brethren to be likewise God's begotten children. And as explained throughout chapter 4, we cannot claim to have love for God if we don't love His children.

Chapter 4 began this whole section with guidance as to how to spot false teachers. The appeal is not made to compare their teaching against Scripture; perhaps because the converts were largely illiterate and without access to the scrolls of the Old Testament, and the New Testament was hardly in circulation. The questions to be asked were, and still are: Does this person have the spirit of Christ? Have they clearly been born again? Do they love all God's children? Do they confess openly their faith in Jesus as Christ? Do they hate their brother? For false teaching is far more than genuinely misunderstanding some Bible verses. It is more essentially a way of life.

*5:2 Hereby we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and do His commandments-* As noted on :3 and elsewhere, I suggest that "His commandments" refer to the one great commandment, to love God's children as the Lord loved them, unto death on a cross. This is why 'doing' or 'keeping' the commandments is always associated in John with love, often love of God. For as he has been at pains to extensively point out in chapter 4, love of God and of His children are interrelated. "This is how we know..." (GNB) and similar language elsewhere suggests that although John so often speaks in absolute terms of our living in love and in the "eternal life", he recognizes that there are going to be major doubts within us as to whether we really have reached that level of love. John by all means seeks to comfort and encourage. He looks at the equation of loving God and loving His children from the perspective of asking us to enquire whether we love God.

Or the Greek could simply mean that loving God and do His commandment[s] to love as the Lord loved is the same as loving God's children.

*5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous-* The plural "commandments" is a reference to the one great commandment- to love our fellow believers as the Lord loved us in dying for us (Jn. 13:34). I have elsewhere suggested that the plural "commandments" is a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment: to love our brethren as the Lord loved us. And that fits the context here; for

keeping that commandment "is the love of God". God's love and our love for our brethren are mutual and reciprocal experiences.

The Lord's commandments are "not grievous"; it is not that we have been given a whole set of detailed regulations similar to the 613 given by Moses. It is not hard to be obedient to His commandments, 1 Jn. 5:3 implies. The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (Jn. 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by Jn. 15:17: "These things[plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5). This alone is what makes self-sacrificial love "not grievous", not "heavy" and burdensome as the commandments of Judaism were (Mt. 23:4,23 s.w.). The apparent ease of achievement is because we have been "begotten of God" (:4), which is by acceptance of the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

*5:4 For whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith-* As noted on :1, the language implies that the begetting of God is something done to us, something received rather than of our own volition. It is the birth of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The language of 'overcoming' is used elsewhere in John about the overcoming of the Judaist false teachers and infiltrators (see on 2:13,14; 4:4), just as the Lord overcame the Jewish world (Jn. 16:33). The overcoming of that world was on account of faith in the Father and Son. Again we see pointed up a colossal conflict between the Jewish and world and those in the Lord Jesus.

"Whatever" uses the neuter rather than the male gender to describe all believers. Most contemporary writers would likely have used the male gender here. The New Testament is in fact sensitive to the gender issue.

*5:5 And who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God-* The "faith" spoken of in :4 is now defined as faith that Jesus is the Son of God; the confession of which led to being cast out of the synagogue and active persecution from the Jewish world (Jn. 9:22). This faith was both what provoked the opposition of the world, and what overcame that opposition. The Lord Jesus was the one who had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33); perhaps the implication is that whoever believes that He is God's Son, and thereby identifies with Him, will have His overcoming of the world counted to them. His spirit becomes theirs, so that His overcoming is also theirs in practice and not simply counted to them by grace.

*5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood-* The Lord Jesus "came" that the in water and blood flowing from His side represented the gift of Spirit; for by this He 'comes' to us (Jn. 14:18). He still testifies by three things- His Spirit [making alive the believer], the water [baptism cleansing us] and the blood [atoning for our sins]. The choice of 'three' things doesn't refer to a trinity- rather is it the principle of Dt. 19:15, requiring two or three witnesses. The water and blood

are mentioned together, and then the Spirit is added; as if "two or three". And note how inanimate things are spoken of as giving witness (Gen. 31:45-48; Dt. 31:28)- the three that bear witness don't refer necessarily to three persons, as the trinity wrongly states. Those things which the Lord enabled, witnessed through us today, provide the witness to the fact that He 'came' in the past and 'comes' to us today, in the sense that He 'comes' to us through the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 14:18). "Not with the water only" may be a reminder that water baptism alone will not save; we must be born of water and spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

The witness of the Lord and of His disciple were one and the same. The witness on earth was a reflection of that in Heaven (1 Jn. 5:6,7).

*5:7 And it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth-* This is included in :6 in some manuscripts. The water and blood are joined by the Spirit as a witness. John began in 4:1 writing of how to tell whether a teacher was a genuine Christian, but he moves on to discuss how we personally can be assured that we are of God. The Comforter was given to empower individual Christian witness (Jn. 15:26,27). If we perceive that our witness to the Lord is empowered and backed up the action of the Spirit, we know that we are of God and have truly received the Spirit by which He abides in us. The outflow of water and blood from the Lord's pierced side spoke of the gift of the Spirit towards His followers; for the Spirit was given because He was glorified (Jn. 7:39). John himself was an example of this; for having made his testimony about the outflow of water and blood, he adds: "And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe" (Jn. 19:35). This testimony was by the Spirit gift, for the Comforter testified and the disciples also testified; their testimony / witness was the witness of the Spirit (Jn. 15:26,27). Thus John there linked together the water, blood and the testimony of the Spirit. "The Spirit is truth" is a clear reference to the Comforter gift as "the spirit of truth" (Jn. 16:13). In 4:6 John has spoken of discerning "the spirit of truth" and "the spirit of error"; all true Christians had "the spirit of truth", and the Judaist infiltrators with their false claims of Spirit gifts had "the spirit of error".

*5:8 For there are three who testify, the spirit and the water and the blood; and the three agree in one-* As noted on :7, this alludes to how John personally had recorded the testimony of spirit, water and blood in his account of the crucifixion and the outflow of water and blood from the Lord (Jn. 19:34,35).

Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented here that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness. John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And in Rev. 1:2 (see note there) he is saying that as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse.

*5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For the witness of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son-* "The witness of men" refers in the context (see on :7 and :8) to the account of John and others about the outflow of water and blood from the

Lord, an account or witness that was testified by the Spirit, which backed up the testimony of the disciples (Jn. 15:26,27). And although those who had believed John's gospel record had received that witness, the greater witness was that of God, the witness of the Spirit within the believers (:10). God's testimony concerning His Son was not just in the words of those who had visibly, personally witnessed the Lord's death and the outflow of water and blood which symbolized the gift of the Spirit. The greater witness was in the fact that that gift of the Spirit within the believer also testified within them (:10). This was the more essential witness which God had testified of His Son. For it was the Comforter who would make that witness, confirming the faith initially exhibited in the crucifixion record (Jn. 15:26,27).

This experience of an acceptive mutuality between God and man is surely at the very core of our spirituality; it should be part of an inner spiritual shell that nothing, *nothing* can shake: aggression from our brethren, disillusion with other Christians, persecution from the world, painful personal relationships... Israel were to give their hand to God, and His hand in turn would give them a heart to follow Him further (2 Chron. 30:8 cp. 12 A.V.mg.). "This is the witness of God... He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness *in himself*... the (i.e. this) witness of God is greater" than that of men (1 Jn. 5:9,10). The ultimate proof that the Truth is the Truth is not in the witness of men- be they archaeologists, scientists, good friends or who. The real witness of God is deep in yourself. "Taste and see, that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8) is the most powerful appeal. John is using a legal word for "witness". There is, of course, something intentionally contradictory here. For a witness must be independent of yourself. You can't really be a valid witness to yourself. But the Lord said that He was a witness of Himself, and this witness was valid (Jn. 8:14-18). We, too, John is saying, can be a valid witness to ourselves that our faith is genuine. Our personal experience of the Lord Jesus *is* valid. Paul proves the resurrection of Jesus by saying that "he has risen indeed" exactly because he (Paul) has seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15). This is the kind of 'evidence' we tend to fight shy of. But our personal experience of the Lord Jesus *is* a valid prop to our faith, according to the passages considered.

5:10- see on 1 Jn. 1:10.

*He that believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. He that does not believe God has made Him a liar; because he has not believed in the witness that God has given concerning His Son-* As noted on :9, the witness in ourselves is that of the Spirit, confirming our faith in the word about the cross which we initially heard. The 'liars' are associated with the Judaists (see on 2:22). They refused to believe the witness which God gave of His Son during His ministry through the miracles; and the witness they now refused to believe was the witness of the Comforter, witnessing through the lives of those transformed by the Spirit (Jn. 15:26,27). The internal witness within every believer creates a witness to the world that the Lord is indeed alive, and is the Son of God. To disbelieve that witness is culpable; for every one who comes to faith because of the witness of the spirit of Christ in a believer, there are many who see the same witness and refuse to believe. This is making God a liar; He has made a witness / legal testimony that His Son is alive and living through those in Him; and those who disbelieve it have placed themselves in the role of judges, and chosen to dismiss His testimony as fraudulent.

We have the witness within ourselves; for the witness is the word and life of Christ, His eternal life, which lives in us (5:10,11). The Lord Jesus didn't witness to His word by giving out bits of paper or teaching a catechism; He was, in person, the constant exhibition of the

word He witnessed to. And with us too. I'm not saying don't write books, give out literature, speak words from platforms... but the more essential witness to men is that of our lives, that witness which wells up from the word and life of Christ within us. The way God's word is made flesh can be seen in Hosea. His going and marrying a worthless woman is prefaced with the statement that this was the beginning of the word of the Lord (Hos. 1:2). The command to go and marry her was not so much "the word of the Lord" to Israel as his marriage and example of true love to his wife. Hosea's example in his marriage was the word of the Lord to Israel. He made the word flesh. The Lord did this to perfection, and yet like Hosea we in principle must do the same.

We each have the witness of the Lord's resurrection in ourselves; we are witnesses, both to ourselves and to others, in that the life we live is a witness that He is within us; the testimony of the Spirit is our testimony to the world (Jn. 15:26,27). But a witness in a courtroom isn't expected to argue the case, prove the truth or press for a verdict; but rather to simply report what actually happened in their experience. This is where I personally see little point in 'apologetics'- trying to prove there is a God or that the Bible is true. These are matters of faith in the end. We are called not to apologize for God but rather to be witnesses from ourselves of the work of the Father and Son.

If we are real witnesses, testifiers to the reality of the Lord's death and resurrection, we *must* therefore, by the very nature of our experience, be witnesses of these things to the world. The resurrection is the witness that God has given of His Son. Whoever believes that witness, will have within themselves the witness- they will be witnesses to God's witness. The witness of the Gospel is within ourselves in the sense that it is our Christ-like life which is the essential witness to Him. Hence Peter says that a woman can win her husband to Christ "without the word", i.e. without formal, conscious preaching. Paul parallels his preaching with God 'revealing' Jesus through him (Gal. 1:9).

The souls under the altar cry out (Rev. 6:10). But those men and women of Heb. 11 are then described in Heb. 12:1 as themselves "witnesses". Who they were is their witness, the testimony which is given of them in the court of Heaven and upon which God's judgment is decided. We have the witness in ourselves, and yet it is a witness which is in fact God's witness / record to us (this is the context of 1 Jn. 5:6-11). The Spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit, that we really are the Sons of God (Rom. 8:16); the Holy Spirit testifies, and we also testify (Jn. 15:26,27). In this sense Paul's conscience bore him witness in the Holy Spirit, i.e. his testimony was that of the Spirit (Rom. 9:1). The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31).

We labour and strive in the preaching of the Gospel "because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men" (1 Tim. 4:10 RV). The certainty of our hope is the basis of our witness. "The witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life... he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 Jn. 5:10,11 RV). We will witness from a sense welling up within us, that we have in prospect been given eternal life. If we have ourselves believed that the good news of the Gospel really is good news, we will inevitably share that message. Good news can't be kept to oneself. News of engagement, marriage, child birth... is spread somehow and yet urgently by those affected by the events. Even the most retiring of people can find a way to communicate the good news of their first child or grandchild. Sometimes I find my e-mail clogged up with big attachments of baby photos- from people I scarcely know! But their sense of good news compelled them to make contact



with me. And so it will be with us in the round of encounters and conversations which make up our daily lives. We will get the word out, somehow. We will break barriers and boundaries in order to engage people in conversation about the one thing that really and essentially matters to us. And, believe me, passively, beneath the show of casual indifference, people *are* interested. And Bill Hybels claims from surveys that “about 25% of the adults in the US would go to church if a friend would just invite them”.

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word “is” God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4).

*5:11 And the witness is this: that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son-* Our witness is a life lived, the kind of life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom. That life given to us is the life of the Lord Jesus, His Spirit. That life is the life now lived in His Son, within the mind of the exalted Jesus now. The Gospel of the future Kingdom was therefore explained in terms of parables about how life should be lived now; the “eternal life”, as John puts it, the Kingdom life, lived in us now. But this life is a gift, the gift of the Lord's spirit, living and thinking as He does; the life which is “in His Son”. This is so true to observed experience; that it is not the exposition of doctrinal truths which in itself makes a powerful witness, but rather of the Kingdom life, the eternal life, the life which was and is in Christ, being lived in human life before the eyes of our fellows.

*5:12 He that has the Son has life. He that does not have the Son of God does not have life-* John is at pains to stress that the gift of life (see on :11) is the life of God's Son. Hence the Greek reads literally “*the life*”- the life of Jesus. There can be no legitimate spiritual life or spirituality outside of Him. And he writes this against the background of the Judaist infiltrators arguing that there was spiritual life to be had from legalistic obedience, even if the Lord's Divine Sonship was denied. The Lord Jesus and His life are intimately connected; “the Son has life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26). To have Him is to have His life. And to ‘have’ the Son is to ‘have’ the Father (2 Jn. 9).

5:13- see on Mt. 16:16; Jn. 20:31; 1 Jn. 1:3.

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life-* Clearly there were some who had believed into the Name of Jesus, demonstrating it through baptism into that Name, who doubted their salvation, and whether they had in fact received the promise of “eternal life” as a present experience. In this we find John addressing so many of us. John has flanged out from discussing how to recognize a true Christian and thereby reject false Christians into the more personal application to ourselves. We who have believed in the Lord have received the gift of His Spirit, His life, which is an eternal life.

5:14- see on Mt. 18:19; Jn. 15:27.

*And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us-* If His Spirit and life abides within us (see on :13), then His will is within us, and the Spirit teaches us directly, revealing “all truth” to us (Jn. 16:13). This “truth” is

here spoken of as knowing His will. As noted on Jn. 15:7, if His Spirit, His *logos* abides in us, then we shall ask what *we* will and receive it. Our spirit is His Spirit; and so we shall perceive better over time what is His will, and our prayers will be for those things. And they shall be answered. This increasingly positive experience of answered prayer, which comes about from progressively knowing His will, is another evidence that we are indeed indwelt by the Lord and can be confident that we have "eternal life", His Spirit; for the context of :13 is encouragement to those who have believed and received the Spirit and yet still have their doubts. The Lord's Comforter discourse said as much- He there taught that answered prayer means that our joy will be full (Jn. 16:24).

Eph. 3:12 uses the same word about our "boldness" in access to God in prayer on account of Christ. The same Greek word is used about our "boldness" in the day of judgment (2:28; 4:17). Our attitude to God in prayer now reflects our general attitude toward Him (3:21; Heb. 10:35). We cannot clothe ourselves in some special spirituality when we come before Him in prayer nor at the day of judgment; who we are in our hearts with Him now is who we are in prayer and who we will be at the last day. We come "boldly [s.w.] before the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16)- both before God now, and before Him at the last day. Each time we pray to Him, we have a foretaste of the judgment experience- if only we will take prayer seriously enough to perceive it. The word is used about the generally "bold" attitude we can have in witnessing before men in this life; for if we can be bold before the holiest of all, the very judgment presence of God, we can be bold before men right now in our preaching (Phil. 1:20; 2 Cor. 3:12; Acts 2:29; 4:13,31; 28:31), just as the word is used about the "boldness" of the Lord's own preaching which is the pattern for ours (Jn. 7:26; 11:14; 16:29; 18:20). For as He is and was, so are we to be in this world (4:17). But these are ideals; even Paul had to ask others to pray that he might preach as "boldly" as he ought to (Eph. 6:19). The reality of the judgment seat will likely be somewhat different, with many staggered in unbelief by the Lord's positive recital of all our good deeds.

But we must add a caveat. God indeed answers prayer as a result of the fact that we believe and as a token that we are acceptable before Him. But there are examples of where God answers the prayers of those who don't believe with a full faith, and even of those who later will be condemned (Zacharias; the believers praying for Peter's release; Mt. 7:21-23). The relationship between faith and answered prayer is not so simple as it appears in some passages. God is working with us at a higher level than simply responding to our words as a token of His acceptance of our faith.

*5:15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we obtain the requests we have asked of him-* John has just cited answered prayer as a proof that the Spirit dwells within us, progressively revealing His will so that our prayers are not so much hit and miss but coincide with His will. But there can still be a residual doubt as to whether prayer is being answered as we envisaged and requested. John therefore parallels "He hears us" with 'obtaining the requests we asked'. It is through possessing the Spirit, the Comforter, that we have the Lord 'doing' things in response to what we ask (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23-26- all a major emphasis). But the Lord's 'doing' in response may not be articulated in the terms we expected. The request [literally, 'the ask'] asked will be 'done'; but not always as we expect.

*5:16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life for them that sin not to death-* The 'asking' here must be understood in the context of teaching about 'asking' and definitely receiving in :15; it is through possessing the Spirit, the Comforter, that we have the Lord 'doing' things in response to what we ask (Jn. 14:13,14;

15:7,16; 16:23-26- all a major emphasis). For those who sin not unto death, it seems that our prayers definitely can 'work' in recovering them; for this is the Lord's will, and all we ask according to that will shall be granted. This is a phenomenal challenge to our prayerfulness, rather than observing others slipping away and shrugging our shoulders, or politely lamenting it to others. In response to such prayers, God will "give life" to the person prayed for; the life in view is the life lived by and in the Lord Jesus, His life, His Spirit. It is of course true that in some ways, we are ultimately responsible for our own salvation; our brethren can't really help us, if we wilfully chose to rebel against our calling. And yet there is reason to think that up to a certain point, our prayers and pastoral concern for our brethren can save them, whereas without our effort they would not be saved. James 5:15,20 say the same: "...the prayer of faith (uttered by faithful friends) shall save the sick (struck down with sickness as a result of his sin, which seems to have happened in the first century, cp. 1 Cor. 11:30; Acts 5:5) ... and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed... he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins". Behold the power of freewill effort for others: For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

*There is a sin unto death. Not concerning this do I say that he should make requests-* The allusion is to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29). In the context, John is up against the problem of Judaist infiltrators who falsely claimed to have the Holy Spirit, but who did not openly confess the Lord as Messiah and Son of God, and who were consciously trying to destroy the Christian movement (cp. Gal. 2:4). Paul was up against these same blasphemers of the Spirit in Corinth and Ephesus (as per 1 Timothy). These men were not to be prayed for in the same sense as weak but genuine believers were to be prayed for.

5:17 *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death-* John urges them to accept that although sin is sin, not all sins lead to death; and the reason they don't is because other believers can pray for the sinners, and they shall receive the gift of life, the Spirit, the life of Jesus, to strengthen them (see on :16). The onus upon us to pray for others is huge.

5:18 *We know that whoever is begotten of God does not keep on in sin; but he that was begotten of God keeps himself, and the evil one touches him not-* The One begotten of God was the Lord Jesus; the "evil one", the devil / satan, both of the flesh and of the systemic Jewish opposition to Him, did not touch Him. The prince of this world had nothing in the Lord (Jn. 14:30), and He was untouched by the temptations of 'the devil' in the wilderness. But all believers have been begotten of God through allowing the Spirit to birth them (Jn. 3:3-5). This active process of the Spirit means that whilst they are still committing sins (1:10 etc.), they do not continue in the life given over to sin, for the Spirit changes and cleanses them. We are kept from falling, but we must also 'keep ourselves'; there must be some willing

response from our side. The Spirit does not zap a man and force him to transformation and salvation against that man's will and volition.

*5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one-* We know that we are born of God because that begetting was of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The Spirit abiding within us is the proof that we are His. The whole Jewish world [not just the more visible or aggressive parts of it] were in the power of "the evil one", a phrase earlier used about the 'satan' / adversary of the Judaist system of opposition to Christianity (see on 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18). In the wider application of these words after the first century, we take from this the impression that there are two 'spirits' operating; that of God, the Holy Spirit / spirit of Christ, and that of the world. There is a 'spirit' in and of the age / world where we live, a ghost in the machine, a principle of thought and being which can be summarized as "the flesh", or the Biblical 'devil'.

*5:20 And we know that the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ-* The coming of the Son of God is through the gift of the Spirit, the Comforter, whereby we feel His presence even more really than when He visibly lived amongst men (Jn. 14:18). John is saying that we can be confident that we have received of His Spirit. We have been given "an understanding", or literally, 'a mind'. The same word is used elsewhere of how the Lord through His Spirit enlightens our mind (Eph. 1:18); the gift of the Spirit envisioned in the new covenant is of God's way being put into and written in our mind (Heb. 8:10; 10:16), and of "the mind" purified by the Spirit (2 Pet. 3:1). A mindset is given us; we do not develop it solely by our own mental effort. And that mind / disposition is given *so that* we might know / have a relationship with Him that is true. For "the spirit of truth" would "teach you all things" (Jn. 14:26 and see note on 1 Jn 2:27).

*This is the true God and eternal life-* This whole verse is allusive to Jn. 17:3, which defines the eternal life which we are now given as knowing / being in living relationship with "the true God". John is not saying that the Lord Jesus is "the true God". The allusion to Jn. 17:3 cannot be doubted, and there we have "eternal life" defined as 'knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent'.

William Barclay (*New Testament Words*) has a very interesting section on the word *aionios*. He cites examples in contemporary literature where it is used not of indefinite continuance, but simply of that which is beyond time. "To attach eternity to the created was impossible. So He (God) made time as a moving image of eternity... the essence of the word *aionios* is that it is the word of the eternal order as contrasted with the order of this world... the word can be properly applied to no one other than God... the life of God". This helps us understand how 'eternal punishment' is not in fact punishment of unending continuance. And yet eternal punishment is set as the antithesis to eternal life (Mt. 25:46); this itself shows that "eternal" is not to be understood as unending continuance. For the wicked will not be punished for ever- they will die and cease existing. The Lord Jesus *is* eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20); this alone points us to see "eternal life" as more a description, a quality of life, rather than indefinite continuance. Those who "seek for glory, and honour, and immortality" are granted eternal life, as though "eternal life" comprehends all these things for which they seek (Rom. 2:7).

*5:21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols-* Idols were anathema to Judaism. But the temptations to return to Judaism were no more than idols. The statement at first blush is

unusual. John's letter uses a very limited vocabulary, and recycles the same word families and ideas. But now, as the last statement of the letter, we have a new word and concept introduced: "idols". We expect the thought to be developed further, but it is not. It seems a new idea is introduced right at the very end, and left hanging. And there is no sign off to the letter. We are left with "idols" as the last word. But this is all intentional. The truth that we now have the eternal life, the spirit and presence of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, the life we shall eternally live, and are thereby assured of salvation... all this is such a wonderful truth that John has kept repeating it from different angles. But with such an ultimate truth in view, he pleads with us not to be distracted from it by anything. Absolutely anything else, be it the Judaism of the first century Jewish world or the materialism of our age, is nothing but a false god, idols, a distraction from the ultimate truth of the cosmos.

New European Commentary

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## 2 John

*:1 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth-* John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that "You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community "who have come to know the truth", i.e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. For "the truth" is a common Johannine title for the Lord Jesus. "In truth" is equivalent to how Paul might write "in the Spirit" or "in Christ". For it is John who has told us of the gift of the Spirit to every believer, calling it "the spirit of truth", or as Paul would say, "the spirit of Christ". "Know" likewise is understood in John not as theoretical, doctrinal knowledge, but as perception and relationship of and with a person, the Lord Jesus, and not a set of theologies.

"Lady" is *kyria* and I suggest this refers to an actual sister, Kyria. It is not the usual word for "lady". Her "children" referred to her converts. John was her "elder" in that he had converted her; and she now had developed her own house church. Her "house" (:10) refers to her house church; the "your" in :10 is grammatically female. John passes on greetings from another chosen sister, left anonymous, and *her* converts (:13). So John's preaching of the Gospel had led to the development of house churches, those who had read or heard his preaching of the Gospel which we have transcribed in the Gospel of John. And two of them were run by women; 3 John is addressed to another house church, led by Gaius. These women may have been like Lydia, women of wealth who were converted and their household members followed suit. There are various frescoes and other archaeological evidences of female house churches, with wall paintings of women distributing the bread and wine at communion services etc. Such things were radical in first century society, and led to Christianity being characterized by its critics as a woman's religion. The Gospel today likewise appeals to the marginalized and those deprived of meaning and significance by society.

*:2 For the truth's sake which abides in us, and shall be with us for ever-* In John's thought, "the truth" is the Lord Jesus in the form of His Spirit, "the spirit of truth", and he uses the term in the same sense as Paul often uses the term "in Christ" or "in the Spirit". "The truth" is what "abides in us", but it is the spirit ["of truth"] which abides in us (1 Jn. 3:24). It will be with us "for ever" in that the gift of the Spirit "abides with you for ever" (Jn. 14:16). That promise had been made when the Lord was about to physically leave the believers, yet He promised that the gift of the Spirit in their hearts would mean that in fact they had His presence, through the Spirit, ever with them. The allusion to the Comforter promise yet again indicates that the Comforter, the gift of the Spirit, was promised not just to the first disciples but to all who should afterward believe, even though the Comforter had special relevance and manifestation in a unique way to the eleven disciples who first received the promise.

:3 *Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love-* "Grace" is a term often associated in the New Testament with the gift of the Spirit, and peace is peace with God through His mercy upon our sins. But this was no standard greeting; it comes not in the first verse as we might expect if that is all it is. It follows on from the reminder that they had received the Spirit, through which all these things are mediated. And John includes himself in the blessing alluded to- "with us", not "with you" as we would expect were this just a standard greeting.

:4 *I rejoice greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father-* This is a case of seeing the glass half full rather than half empty; he rejoices that "some" of her converts were walking "in truth", or as Paul puts it, "in Christ". Some had fallen away; but some had remained, and that for him was wonderful.

John's greatest joy was that his converts, and his convert's converts, 'walked in truth', they 'walked after [the Father's] commandments' (2 Jn. 4,6). Paul likewise speaks of how his converts are his "joy and crown". They walked in life honest to themselves and to the Father, and walked "in truth" in that they walked in "the spirit of truth", in step with the leadership of the Spirit, walking in the Spirit as Paul would put it (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:16,25). Walking or living 'in truth' is thus put for living a life pleasing to God as guided by the Spirit within us. It surely doesn't mean that we simply live our lives holding on to the same intellectual understanding of doctrines which we had at our baptism. We 'keep' the commandments by 'doing' them (1 Jn. 2:3 cp. 5:2), not by merely holding to a true theoretical definition of them. There is so much more to walking in truth than this. We rightly emphasize the need for true doctrine; but the issue of this in practice is that true doctrine leads to a true life, a life true to God, to our brethren, to ourselves, in the power of the Spirit of truth. John parallels walking in the light with walking in the truth (1 Jn. 1:7; 2 Jn. 4); and yet Jn. 3 defines the true light as ultimately the light of the crucified Christ and the Spirit given as a result of that death (Jn. 7:39). To live life self-analytically in the shadow of the cross, of Him as He was there, is the only way to walk in the spirit of truth. This is the true life; to merely hold certain interpretations of Scripture in intellectual purity is not all there is to 'walking in truth' or 'in the light'. This kind of truth sets us free (Jn. 8:31,32); for where the spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free (2 Cor. 3:17). Discerning the correctness of sound exposition will not of itself bring any freedom. But living a life that we know broadly corresponds to the image of the crucified Jesus and under the influence of His Spirit will give a freedom unknown in any other sphere of human experience.

:5 *And now lady, I urge you not as though I write a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another-* The newness of the commandment was to love one another as the Lord has loved us (Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 3:23). We wonder why she needed 'urging'; the need to love each other as the Lord loved us is so huge, that it is unsurprising that exhortation was required to remember how fundamentally important it was. This was what had been heard "from the beginning", a phrase used in John's Gospel for the beginning of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1). Or perhaps John refers to the beginning of his encounter with Kyria; the commandment to love as the Lord loved was characteristic of the message he first preached, and which had first been preached right at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. The loss of such *agape* love was a problem in Ephesus, where the first *agape* had been lost (Rev. 2:4). Life hardens people, and we constantly need that call back to the spirit of the Lord's love, rather than allowing familiarity with the body of Christ to lead us to disrespect them.

:6 *And this is love, that we should walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, even as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it-* This speaks of the commandment which we readers received "from the beginning". But "the beginning" in John frequently if not always refers to the 'beginning' or [Gk.] 'first association' which the twelve disciples had with the Lord Jesus. Again, we are spoken of as if we are them, and their experiences were ours. Those twelve men who walked around Palestine with their Lord are symbols of us all. There is a continuity in Luke-Acts between "the disciples" who followed the Lord, and "the disciples" as a title for all the Christian believers. We are their continuation. Or John could also have in view his first preaching of the Gospel to Kyria; whereby we can understand that the up front bottom line of John's first preaching of the Gospel was a call to self-sacrificial love. Not theology but the call to love as the Lord loved His people in the death of the cross.

The "commandments" plural are comprehended in a singular commandment; and as noted elsewhere (see on Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 2:3), the reference is to the singular, fundamental commandment to love as the Lord loved us. This was what the Lord had preached from "the beginning" of His ministry (see on Jn. 1:1), and what John had likewise preached up front at the "beginning" of his preaching to Kyria. It is this principle of loving as the Lord loved us, to death on the cross, which is the light in which we should walk, deciding all issues in the light of His example and its imperative to us.

:7 *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, especially those that do not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist-* The "for" connects the warning against false teaching with the call back to *agape* love in :5,6. The end result of understanding that the Lord was of our nature is love, love as He loved. I suggested on 1 Jn. 4 and 5 that John's communities were up against the problem of Judaist infiltrators (also in Gal. 2:4 and in the churches Paul founded). They did not "confess" Jesus as Christ, lest they be put out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22). Yet they had entered into the Christian churches, with an agenda of bringing them to Judaism and destroying their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They had come up with the idea that the Lord was not really fully human, or that the Jewish Messiah was not to be a person "in the flesh". The ideas of deceit and "antichrist" are elsewhere associated by John with the Judaist system. These people were not therefore sincere Christians who genuinely misunderstand some Bible verses. These deceivers were out to deceive, and had gone out into the [Jewish] world as part of a conscious program of deception of Christians. Heb. 10:5 uses the same phrase for how the Lord 'went out into the world'. They were false, imitation Christs, which is the idea of 'anti' Christ.

That we can't be secret believers is brought out here. Anyone who does not confess publicly that Jesus came in the flesh is described by John as a deceiver and even anti-Christ. The French [Segond version] is clearest: "ne declarent pas publiquement". Whilst the passage is open to a number of interpretations, in our context the point perhaps is that to secretly believe in Christ isn't possible- it must in some way be declared publicly or else we are "deceivers". The Judaist infiltrators did not confess Jesus as Christ publicly lest they be cast out of Jewish society (Jn. 9:22); and this was the evidence, John says, that they were not of the Spirit of Jesus and were frauds, false Christians.

We may wonder why John is at such pains to point out that Christ "came in the flesh", and why he pronounced anathema upon those who denied that (2 Jn. 7-9). It seems to me that his converts had come up against Jewish attempts to re-interpret Jesus in terms of apostate



Jewish thinking about Angels and the whole nature of existence, the kind of heresy battled against in Hebrews and Colossians. Take Jewish views of the Angels who appeared to Abraham. Josephus says they "gave him to believe that they did eat" (*Antiquities* 1.197); Philo claimed that "though they neither ate nor drank, they gave the appearance of both eating and drinking" (*Abraham* 118). The Bible states simply that they ate. And that Jesus likewise ate after His resurrection. John emphasizes that the Lord Jesus had been fully tangible, the disciples touched and felt Him (1 Jn. 1:1-4); and that His death was equally real (1 Jn. 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; 5:6-9). And he presses the point that this is what had been believed "from the beginning", indicating that already new ideas were coming into the Christian communities about the nature of Jesus. This of itself shows that the whole issue of who Jesus is *does* matter; that the Christ was and is the *real* Christ was for John crucially important, as it is for me. Hence this book. The inspired apostle didn't simply shrug off these new ideas as well meaning misunderstandings. He speaks against them in the toughest possible terms.

:8 *Look to yourselves, that we do not lose the things which we have done but that we receive a full reward-* The letter is addressed to Kyria personally, the hostess of the house church; and she is asked to look to her converts, that they do not lose the spiritual position to which they had attained. We see here how a woman has pastoral responsibility, especially over her "children", her converts. The "yourselves" and "we" are different. The things "done" by John and his preaching team were the spiritual creation, under the Lord's influence, of Kyria and her house church of converts. This is our work for the Lord, what a man should 'do' in his life, the only labour that abides beyond our graves, the only career worth anything eternally.

But 'the things done' could also refer to their faith in the Lord Jesus. To believe in Him is described by John as a 'work' that has to be laboured at- with even more effort than that expended by the crowds who walked around the lake to get to Jesus and the free bread He appeared to be offering (Jn. 6:27; 2 Jn. 8). It is this 'labour', this hard mental effort to know Him and believe in Him, which will have a 'full reward' (2 Jn. 8). John here is alluding to the LXX of Ruth 2:12, where a 'full reward' is given to Ruth for working hard all day gleaning in the fields. It may be that this allusion was because "the elect lady" addressed by John was in fact a proselyte widow, like Ruth. But the point is, we have to *labour*, as much as one might work hard walking around a lake or gleaning in the field, in order to know the Lord Jesus Christ and bring others to that knowledge. The "full reward" may be reference to the fact that if we ourselves are saved but our converts or spiritual children fall away, then we have as it were lost the fullness of reward which there could have been for us. The fullness of reward is that not only we are saved, but our spiritual children too.

:9 *Whoever goes ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. He that continues in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son-* "Goes ahead" is a challenging term to translate. The idea is to step *pros*, beyond or around. The idea could be that the Judaist false teachers were suggesting that they had a new, more advanced teaching about the Lord; what is called the supposed 'depths' of the Jewish satan (Rev. 2:24). But I prefer the sense of stepping around, in that they were ignoring, sidestepping, the fundamental teaching of Christ that He would be their teacher through the Spirit; in this sense they were not left orphaned, without a teaching Rabbi after His departure. He was just as really with them, actively teaching them and guiding them into all truth through the Spirit (see on Jn. 14:18). This would read "the teaching of Christ" as a verb rather than a noun; they sidestepped the whole idea of Christ as our teacher, teaching us. Grammatically, the reference is to the teaching which He taught (as in Jn. 18:19; Rev. 2:14,15), rather than the doctrine which teaches about Him. John is writing to Jews as a Jew, and he is using a popular Jewish

phrase, "the doctrine of the King Messiah", or the Messiah's Talmud (*Bereshit Rabba*, sect. 98. fol. 85. 3), the teaching by Messiah.

Those who abide in Him are those in whom His Spirit abides, as John has emphasized throughout all his letters. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth which teaches us in the place of His personal presence as Rabbi of the early disciples during His ministry. Those who abide in Him have Him, and thereby His Father. So the idea is not so much that we receive a body of theology, of doctrine, at baptism- are to hold on to it until our deathbeds. Instead we are to abide in Him, whereby His Spirit shall be our teacher, ever opening new truths to us as we are guided by this "spirit of truth" into "all truth". This is a subtle but fundamental difference, and the usage of the word "doctrine" in the AV has confused it.

And yet the more traditional reading of the passage still has some merit. John writes that to confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh, to acknowledge His true humanity, is related to walking after His commandments (2 Jn. 6,7). And this perhaps is why John can say that it is a 'going ahead', a sin, a "transgression" according to some translations, to not abide in the doctrine of a human Jesus (2 Jn. 9). Why should it be 'sinful' to hold a theological misunderstanding? Surely God cannot hold people morally culpable for genuine misinterpretation? Perhaps the answer lies in looking at it from a different angle. The purpose of doctrine is to elicit a Godly way of life. To refuse to believe in the real, human Jesus is actually a way of justifying our wrong behaviour, of hiding away from the challenge that *His* humanity is to *us* as His fellow human beings- to transform our personalities after the pattern of His. To believe the doctrine of a human Jesus who was nonetheless God manifest in human flesh empowers us not to sin; through this real and human Christ we have forgiveness and inspiration in the life that is in Him. This is why doctrine about Him matters- because if believed properly, it empowers a Christ-like life. This perspective helps us likewise understand what is fundamental doctrine, and what isn't. Any idea or theory or interpretation that doesn't have the potential to change our lives in practice just... isn't worth arguing about. See on 1 Jn. 5:5.

:10 *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not welcome him into your house and give him no greeting-* The Judaist infiltrators were itinerant preachers, turning up at Christian house churches and wanting to teach. The whole of 1 Jn. 4 has warned about these people, with their false claims to Holy Spirit possession, who did not openly confess the Lord as Messiah and God's Son; see notes there. Kyria was to not let these people influence her house church.

:11 *For he that gives him greeting partakes in his evil works-* As explained on :7, the people in view are not sincere Christians who misunderstood things here and there in their theology. For that is true of us all. Instead, the reference is to the Judaist infiltrators who had a specific mission to destabilize and destroy the Christian churches. These are the "evil works" in view; and not genuine misinterpretation. That sort of thing is not appropriately described by the term "evil works". The implication is that *good* works are inspired by a true understanding of the Lord's humanity, and evil works by a refusal to accept this teaching. The tests of genuineness which John commanded centred around two simple things: Do those who come to you hold true understanding of the nature of Jesus; and do they love as He loved us to death on a cross. The two things go together. And they are a fair test even today. For where there is no love, the true doctrine of Jesus is not truly believed, no matter how nicely it is expressed in words and writing.

:12 *Having many things to write to you, I would not write them with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and to speak face to face, that your joy may be made full-* Paul's use of letter writing was perhaps analogous to our use of the internet. He says time and again that he's writing a letter, but he sees it as a poor substitute for the face to face contact he would prefer (Rom. 15:14-33; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Gal. 4:12-20; 1 Thess. 2:17-3:13). John here says the same (2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 14). The fullness of joy envisioned upon their meeting is clearly a reference to the fullness of joy which was to result from possessing the Comforter (Jn. 15:11; 16:24). Perhaps John had the power to give the Spirit, to fill up other believers with it, maybe by the laying on of hands.

:13 *The children of your elect sister salute you-* John passes on greetings from another chosen sister, left anonymous, and *her* converts, who would have felt close to the church of Kyria, who were also converts of a woman. See on :1.

New European Commentary

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### 3 John

:1 *The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth*- The "beloved" may refer to how Gaius was beloved by the Father and Son, just as John has referred to himself in his Gospel as the disciple whom the Lord loved. John says that God's love for Gaius is his love for him; John loves Gaius "in truth", "in Christ" or "in the spirit" [of truth], as Paul would put it, as a reflection of the love which God had for Gaius. So John was practicing the theory he had taught in 1 Jn. 4; that we are to love our brethren with the love of the Father and Son for them. Gaius was John's convert, for he says he is the "elder" of Gaius.

:2 *Beloved, I pray that in all things you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers*- Gaius was John's convert (see on :1), and John believed that by praying for him he could influence his spiritual progress; see on 1 Jn. 5:16. John's prayer for the physical health of Gaius could imply he was sick- and at the very time he needed brotherly support, he had been excluded from his local church (see on :9,10).

:3 *For I rejoiced greatly, when brothers came and testified to the truth which is in you, even as you walk in truth*- The brothers appear to be a group of itinerant mission workers who went forth from John's home church, and visited converts like Gaius, bringing back reports to John as to how his converts were progressing. We see the huge importance attached to the spiritual growth of converts, rather than simply baptizing people and bragging about numbers. What was "within" believers and what they walked in was "the spirit", here called "the truth". The reference is to the Lord Jesus, "the truth", and more exactly to "the spirit of truth", the spirit of Christ, His living, thinking and breathing, which is given to all believers. The 'holding firm in the truth' which was in view is therefore not a retaining of some set of theologies; but rather continuing to allow "the spirit of truth", of the Lord, to abide within them, and having this as the guide of daily 'walking' and thinking.

Daniel speaks of repentance and obeying God's voice as being a result of 'having discernment in thy truth' (Dan. 9:13,14 RV). To grasp the endless depth and height of the fact we are in touch with ultimate truth inevitably affects our lives. 3 Jn. 3 in the AV speaks of "the truth that is in thee"; but the Greek can also mean, as in the RV, "thy truth". There is to be a close personal identification between us and the "spirit of truth", of the Lord Jesus personally. His spirit becomes our spirit, His truth is our truth. The outcome elicited by this is repentance, and our being truthful at the very least. Our contact with God's truth results in our being truthful not only to others but to ourselves, and this, as Daniel observed, gives rise to true repentance.

Paul can speak of "the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5) and again of "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5). He refers to "the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation" (Eph. 1:13). It's quite Biblical that we refer to our faith as "the truth". But truth is clearly a way of describing or summing up the leading of the indwelling Spirit in a way of life which the doctrines of the truth should elicit in us. Thus "the new man... is created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4:24). We obey the truth in unfeigned love of our brethren (1 Pet.

1:22), not just by intellectual assent at a baptismal interview; we 'do the truth' in loving our brother (1 Jn. 1:6); if the spirit of truth is in us then we walk in it (3 Jn. 3).

*:4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth-* John's greatest joy was that his converts, and his convert's converts, 'walked in truth', they 'walked after [the Father's] commandments' (2 Jn. 4,6). Paul likewise speaks of how his converts are his "joy and crown". Joy in the Kingdom will not be a selfish thing; our joy will be in seeing the results of our labours for others in this brief life. We therefore need to give our all to such labour, for it has eternal consequence like nothing else we may put our hands to.

*:5 Beloved, you do a faithful work in whatever you do toward those that are brothers and especially to strangers-* As noted on :3, "the brothers" refer to the messengers of John's church who went around visiting his converts and spreading his gospel record, now found in the Gospel of John. Gaius had materially supported them; and Diotrephes disfellowshipped those who did this (:10). So, Gaius was excommunicated for showing support to missionary workers from an individual [John] with whom Diotrephes had an issue. Such absurd behaviour is not unknown today. It is the power of the deadly evil of 'guilt by association'. "Especially to strangers" could mean 'bearing in mind that these brethren are strangers to you'; or it could refer to the fact that Gaius was generous and hospitable to strangers generally, including 'strangers' in the sense of Gentiles. Showing hospitality to Gentiles was not much done in Judaism, and it may have been another reason why Diotrephes so hated Gaius. No good work goes unpunished, that is the lesson; and when we experience it, we are not alone. There is likely an allusion to Mt. 25:35, where the Lord taught that He was manifest in the "stranger" (s.w.) and to assist them was to assist Him. The Lord was manifest in these brethren; and likewise the way Diotrephes refused to assist them and excommunicated those who did was to be the ground of his condemnation at the last day. For he had not 'known' the Lord, and the Lord would tell him this at the last day. Our attitude to our brethren is our attitude to Him; and that truth must radically affect our positions, even if it involves being sanctioned because of them.

*:6 Who testify of your love before the church. You will do well to set them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God-* "The brothers", the mission workers sent forth by John to see his converts such as Gaius, had returned and testified to John and his home church of the love which Gaius had shown them, materially supporting them when Diotrephes and the former home church of Gaius had refused to do so, and had not fellowshipped them (:10). Setting someone forward on their journey suggests provision of material help towards them, which resulted in Diotrephes disfellowshipping those who did (:10). But Gaius is encouraged that he 'does well' in so doing, regardless of the position of Diotrephes. "A manner worthy of God" supports the suggestion on :5 that attitudes to these brethren was attitude to the Father and Son.

*:7- see on 1 Pet. 4:14.*

*Because for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing from the Gentiles-* The brothers sent forth by John in pastoral and missionary work were obeying the great commission, to which this language clearly alludes; for that commission was a being sent forth to preach in the Lord's Name (Lk. 24:47). This is yet further evidence that the great commission applied not only to the eleven disciples. For the excellence of knowing His

Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help from unbelievers to enable this. The itinerant Judaist false teachers did take such support. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3).

:8 *We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth-* 'Welcoming' implies material support, in the context here. I have suggested that "the truth" in John is a reference to the Lord Jesus and His "spirit of truth". The gift of the Comforter / Holy Spirit was particularly to empower the spreading of the Gospel. And yet the Spirit does not as it were zap people against their will. There needs to be an exercise of the human volition; we work together with the Spirit, and with the Lord Jesus who gives it. We are labourers together with Him (1 Cor. 3:9).

:9 *I wrote somewhat to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not welcome us-* The picture is of Gaius being a member of a church which had shunned Gaius because of the evil influence of Diotrephes. Gaius welcomed "the brothers" from John (:5,8), and so therefore would have been excommunicated for doing so (:10). It is the Lord who is presented in the New Testament as having "the pre-eminence". It is a lack of focus upon Him and His greatness which leads to the human tendency toward *personal* pre-eminence. "Welcome us" is parallel with welcoming the brethren sent from John (:10). Attitudes to brethren in Christ are our attitudes not only to Him but to all other brethren. Hence in writing to Philemon, Paul argues that to receive Onesimus was to receive him personally (Philemon 12).

:10 *Therefore, if I come-* A visit to Gaius would mean John could also visit Diotrephes; they lived nearby to each other, which makes sense when we realize that Diotrephes had disfellowshipped Gaius from his local church.

*I will bring to remembrance his works which he does, prating against us with wicked words, and not content therewith, neither does he welcome the brothers; and those that would, he forbids and throws them out of the church-* Bringing to remembrance could imply some exercise of Spirit judgment against Diotrephes which required John's personal presence. Or it could just imply that he would confront Diotrephes over his behaviour.

John has just commended Gaius for receiving "the brothers", the mission workers from John's home church (:3). But the local church which had expelled Gaius would not receive those same "brothers", and in turn excommunicated any who would fellowship and support them. Neither would that church "welcome" John himself (:9). It was all the picture of daisy chain fellowship; if Diotrephes was against John, he was against the "brothers" from his church, so he was against Gaius who supported them, cast him out of the church, and then drove out any others who supported their missionary work. It was guilt by association; and it is all called "evil" in :11.

His "malicious words" were *poneros*, evil, the same term used in speaking of the Judaist system of opposition to Christianity as "the evil one" (see on 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18). Diotrephes was therefore likewise also a Judaist. "Forbidding" is likewise a word associated with how the Judaists sought to "forbid" preaching to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16), and the legalistic forbidding of little ones to come to the Lord (Mt. 19:14; Lk. 11:52; Acts 8:36; 10:47; 11:17). To 'cast out' of the church was to reflect in Christian terms how the Jews cast

out from the synagogue those who accepted the Lord as Messiah (Jn. 9:22,34,35), just as they "cast out" the Lord Jesus from the vineyard of Israel (Mt. 21:39 s.w.). Diotrephes had the mentality of Judaism and was seeking to turn the Lord's church into a Judaist dominated synagogue. Casting the Lord's brother out of the church is to cast Him out; this should act as a sober warning to those well-respected church leaders who act in this way to this day. The same word is used about the 'casting out' to condemnation in the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). No matter how much nice speak is used, to cast a brother out of the church is to condemn him. It is God's intention that "there should be no schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25). If we refuse to break bread with validly baptized, good living brethren- then we are working against God. And if we then go on to disfellowship anyone who will not agree with our opinion on a brother, we are doing just what Diotrephes is condemned for doing.

It could be that there is a chronological progression here. Prating against John personally, i.e. gossiping about and slandering him, left Diotrephes not content until he had done something worse; and so he refused to welcome or materially support "the brothers" who were mission workers for and with John (:3,5,7); and then he forbade [Gk. 'hindered'] others in his church from supporting them; and finally he threw out of the church those like Gaius for doing the good work of giving support to missionary workers. This is where the mania about disfellowship leads. And it happens so often to this day. It should not be presented in respectable spiritual terms as merely a case of being overzealous for God's truth. John calls such behaviour "evil", and it is. And the final absurdities, of disfellowshipping sincere believers for materially supporting the sincere missionary workers of a sincere apostle, all come about from a psychological and spiritual slide downhill. Hatred is as a darkness which blinds the eyes of such men, so that they cannot see where they are going (1 Jn. 2:11).

A fair case can be made that he received the Apocalypse *early*, well before AD70, and wrote his gospel and letters *afterwards*. In this case, the similarity of wording would partly be explained by the fact that the language of his Lord rubbed off almost unconsciously [as well as consciously] upon John's style of thinking, speaking and writing. Thus "If I come, I will bring up the things he is doing" (3 Jn. 10) reflects the Lord's style: "If you do not repent, I will come to you" (Rev. 2:5). There are many other examples- finding them is good homework for the enthusiast. Now the practical point is surely that we are living the essence of the Kingdom life now; we 'have eternal life' in the sense that we are experiencing the nature and quality of the spiritual life which by grace we will eternally live. And that life is the life of the Lord Jesus; in His life on earth we see a picture of the nature of the eternal life which we hope to live for evermore. Therefore understanding Him personally is to understand the good news of the future Kingdom of God.

:11 *Beloved, do not imitate such evil, but imitate that which is good. He that does good is of God. He that does evil has not seen God-* The "evil" in view was the guilt by association disfellowshipping of brethren and sincere missionary workers noted on :10. We may well ask why Gaius would need to be warned not to "imitate such evil", when he had himself suffered from it. It is simply so, that the abused tend to abuse. This is a fact of observed human experience; and John urges Gaius not to practice the evil excommunication policy that he had suffered from. It is so easy to treat others as we have been. Instead of copying Diotrephes, who had "not seen God", Gaius was to imitate the "good", the One who "does good", who is '[born] of God', and who has "seen God". For we are to imitate or mimic [s.w.] the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). That One to be followed / imitated is primarily the Lord Jesus. Instead of psychologically being dominated by our abusers, we are to look not to them as role models, but to the Lord Jesus. Many of us were taught implicitly and explicitly that the harder line

taken on matters of disfellowship, the more likely we were to be close to God. But here such behaviour is called "evil". And it is. Those who do these things have not seen God, Paul says.

If we see / know God in the experiential sense, we will do no evil (3 Jn. 11). To have the true knowledge of Jesus Christ means we will not be barren [Gk. 'idle'] nor unfruitful (2 Pet. 1:8). When Zacharias wanted to have grounds for faith, he was simply told: "I am Gabriel...", the man like God (Lk. 1:19). The declaration of God's Name in Ex. 34:6,7 doesn't include statements like "Trust in God! He'll help you!". Instead we read of the grace, mercy, justice and inevitable judgment of God. Knowing and experiencing these more abstract things will lead us to a practical faith in God. Because David remembered God's Name, *therefore* He kept His law (Ps. 119:55 RSV). This is why the Bible uses the idea of 'knowing' God in the sense of knowing Him by experience, not just 'knowing' the right theory. Likewise John uses 'the truth' in the sense of not just correct knowledge but the way of life it brings forth.

:12 *Demetrius has the witness of all and of the truth itself. Yes, we also testify, and you know that our witness is true-* This language of testimony being confirmed recalls how John has spoken and written at Jn. 19:35-37 and elsewhere. "The truth" refers to the spirit of truth, the Lord Jesus who is "the truth". "All" the Spirit filled brethren with John, and he himself, could testify that Demetrius was indeed genuine. This may have been thanks to a specific statement from the Spirit; but it likely refers to the way that there is an intuitive sense of another's sincerity when the spirit of Christ is in that person and also in those whom he or she meets. Presumably Gaius was unsure about Demetrius, and he is being assured that he does indeed have the spirit of Christ.

:13 *I had many things to write to you, but I am unwilling to write them to you with ink and pen-* The context of :12 speaks of the fellowship between persons created by them each having the same spirit of truth, that of the Lord Jesus. Written communication was one thing, but the synergy and nexus achieved by the meeting of spirit-filled persons was far superior to that. And that after all is why we still have the concept of church meetings and personal fellowship in our age, despite all the electronic possibilities of 'virtual' communication we now have. See on 2 Jn. 12.

:14 *But I hope shortly to see you, and we shall speak face to face-* John planned to visit Gaius, at which time he intended to confront Diotrephes (:10). See on :13 for the power of face to face meeting. John's desire for this rather than simply written communication is a powerful challenge and is strangely relevant in our age of digital communication.

:15 *Peace be to you. The friends salute you. Salute the friends by name-* The wish of "peace" is a desire for the peace enabled by the Comforter, the gift of the Spirit possessed in the hearts of both John and Gaius (Jn. 14:27; 16:33; 20:19-22). John records how the Lord called those who would receive His spirit His friends (Jn. 15:5), and it is John who uses this title in addressing his brethren (3 Jn. 14). He reflected how the Lord saw him as his *friend*. And John realised that this was how he should see his brethren; and so must we.



:1 *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those that are called; beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ*- "Called" is better "sanctified" (AV). This sanctification is by the work of the Holy Spirit gift in human hearts (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11). That sanctification is by association with "the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Here as there, we have Father, Son and Spirit associated. These three entities often occur together, and baptism associates us with each of them (Mt. 28:19). The error and blasphemy of the doctrine of the Trinity is in the relationship it claims between the three, and in claiming the Holy Spirit to be a personal God. The doctrine as it stands is seriously wrong, as I have argued throughout *The Real Christ*. But clearly there is a 'trinity' with a small 't', as God, the Lord Jesus and the Spirit are mentioned together many times in the New Testament, both directly together and also the three ideas occur together. Jude 1 is an example. "God the Father" and the Lord Jesus are mentioned along with the sanctifying and 'keeping' work of the Spirit. We are to 'keep' the Lord's ways and commandments, and yet He keeps us by the Spirit. "They have kept Your word... keep [s.w.] [them] by Your own Name... I kept them in Your Name... keep them from the evil" (Jn. 17). Jude will conclude by glorying in the fact that the Lord is able to keep us from falling in spiritual terms (:24). 2 Peter 2 had predicted that there was going to be an arising of false teachers amongst the Jewish believers whom he had baptized. Jude is full of allusion to 2 Peter, and speaks as if that falling away and arising of mass false teaching had arisen by his time. And yet Jude still writes to the very weak believers as if the Spirit is still active within them and seeking to preserve them unto salvation. We too can only assume the salvation of others and their status "in Christ"; for we cannot condemn them.

### **Jude, Peter And Corinth**

A case can be made that the letters of Peter and Jude were also written to Corinth. Peter visited Corinth, presumably focusing his preaching on the Jewish community, and perhaps he was writing his letters specifically to the Jewish house churches there (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5). The same concerns are apparent as in Paul's letters to Corinth: The need to distinguish between spiritual and unspiritual persons who despised others (Jude 19 = 1 Cor. 2:6 - 3:4; 8:1-3); those who perverted liberty into licence (Jude 4 = 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), becoming slaves of sensuality (Jude 8,10,16,23 = 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 2 Cor. 12:21); some eating and drinking abusively at the love feast (Jude 12 = 1 Cor. 11:17-33); refusing the authority of their elders (Jude 8,11 = 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 9:1-12); and both Peter and Paul warn Corinth of the danger of worldly wisdom. Peter's reminder to them about the authority of Paul is very understandable in this case. However, the point of all this is to observe the tenderness of Peter and Jude in writing to the Corinthians ["my beloved..."], whilst at the same time warning them of the awesome judgment which their behaviour was preparing for them. It was the same passionate love for Christ's weak brethren which Paul showed them.

:2 *Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied*- Jude like Paul and Peter really believed that this wish that others would experience the fruit of the Spirit in their lives would come about.

*:3 Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you, urging you to contend earnestly for the faith which was delivered once and for all to his saints-* Jude gives the impression that he sat down to write a positive missive of encouragement concerning the great salvation he and his readers had in common, but changed course to warn them to defend the faith. We see here a window onto the meaning of Divine inspiration; the will of the writer is not completely obliterated, but rather was worked with by the Spirit.

The Bible speaks of “the faith”, “the Gospel”, as a set of doctrines, a deposit of truth which has been delivered to the believer (Eph. 4:4–6) – “the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3 ASV). That truth cannot be added to nor subtracted from, as the Bible itself makes clear – especially in the appeals of Paul and Peter to maintain the purity of the one faith. This means that a vitally true doctrine cannot become ‘added’ to that body of truth. Jaroslav Pelikan correctly reflected: “What can it mean for a doctrine to ‘become’ part of the Catholic faith, which is, by definition, universal both in space and in time?”.

We note that the "saints" are the 'sanctified ones' of :1; the same word is used.

*:4 For there are certain people who have crept in secretly, who long ago were designated for condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into a license for immorality, and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ-* This parallels rejecting Jesus as Master and Lord with rejecting His moral demands. If He truly is Lord and Master, we simply won’t live the immoral life which Jude criticizes. The warnings of 2 Peter 2 about these men had now come true. The language of creeping in secretly suggests a conscious program of infiltration; the same group are spoken of in Gal. 2:4 as being Judaist false teachers. 2 Peter 2 was addressed to Jewish converts, perhaps those Peter had baptized at Pentecost who were now refugees in Asia; so we can assume that it was to this same group that Jude was writing, seeing he uses 2 Peter 2 so consciously. These Judaists were actually appealing to the lusts of the flesh by allowing gross immorality, justified by a tokenistic obedience to some Jewish traditions. This is why in several of the New Testament epistles addressed to Gentiles, there is warning against the Judaizers. The opportunity to continue in sexual immorality whilst ostensibly having justification by works was very attractive to them. This explains why in Corinth, Ephesus, Thyatira and elsewhere there is evidence that the church meetings were a time of sexual immorality, using prostitutes as part of the worship in the same way as they were used in the surrounding religious cults.

*:5 Now I desire to have you remember (as you know all things already) that the Lord having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that did not believe-* Israel were therefore “saved” from Egypt, as all those who are baptised are “saved” from sin. If one of those Israelites had been asked, “Are you saved?” their response could have been, “Yes”, but this would not mean that they would *ultimately* be saved. Salvation was a status, but the believers had to abide in it. Baptism, passing through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2), was no guarantee of ultimate salvation. It seems that the false teachers were justifying sexual immorality (:4) on the basis of some 'once saved always saved' teaching.

:6- see on 2 Pet. 2:4.

*And the angels which did not keep to their own domain, who left their proper abode, He has kept in everlasting bonds, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day-* The simple point was that although judgment had been passed upon these individuals, it had not yet been executed in practice. But this was no reason to think that it would not be. The false teachers seemed to be arguing that future judgment for sin was not going to happen; see on :5.

There seems to be the implication in Heb. 9:23 that the Lord's sacrifice somehow cleansed the Angels. We have to emphasize that there were no sinful Angels in Haven at the time of Christ's sacrifice, and probably never have been. However, we have to bear in mind that "His Angels He charged with folly" (Job 4:18); "The Heavens are not clean in His sight" (Job 15:15), and also the possibility that the "Angels that sinned" (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4) were actual Angels before the present creation. This was a view supported by John Thomas; the fact that there are such strong connections between these Angels and the princes associated with Korah's rebellion does not mean that his view is necessarily wrong.

Jude's other historical examples are capable of being interpreted with reference to more than one past incident, not all of which are recorded in Scripture. Thus the dispute about the body of Moses (Jude 9) could refer to the Samaritans disputing about the people of Israel or Joshua the High Priest (see Zech. 3), or it could refer equally to Michael the Archangel, the Angel of Israel, who buried Moses' body, disputing with a group of Israelites who wanted to have Moses' body travelling with them, as those of Joseph and the patriarchs did (Acts 7:15,16 RV). Similarly Jude 14 talks of an incident concerning Enoch which is not detailed in the Bible (cp. Jannes and Jambres in 2 Tim. 3:8 too).

Thus there is no reason why "the Angels which kept not their first estate" of Jude and 2 Peter should not refer to "Angels that sinned" before creation as well as to Korah's company of Num. 16. Psalm 103 is praise for God's forgiveness and mercy to sin. David concludes it by asking the Angels especially to praise God for this (Ps. 103:19-21)- which would be fitting if they too had benefited in the past from God's mercy towards sin. The fact that the Angels had crowns when they are symbolized by the elders in Rev. 4:10 suggests that they had won them through overcoming some kind of tribulation. See on 1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 9:23.

*:7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, these gave themselves over to fornication and went after strange flesh. Such are given as an example. All of them suffered the punishment of eternal fire-* Jude warns the believers that Sodom's punishment was what awaited those of the new Israel who threw off their responsibilities. In passing, it should be noted that all Jude's examples of Divine punishment involve people who were responsible to God, by reason of knowing His ways. Is Sodom an exception? Perhaps Lot's witness to them made them responsible? The argument of the false teachers appears to have been that future judgment would not come for sin, and having been baptized, they were permanently saved (see on :5 and :6). The "fornication" being practiced amongst the Christian converts was on the basis of religious, spiritual arguments; see on :4. But judgment comes, and Sodom is cited as an example.

"Eternal fire" is symbolic for complete destruction, as in Jer. 7:27. There is no fire burning in Sodom now; but the consequence of the condemnation they received was eternal.

:8- see on Zech. 3:1,2.

*Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries-* The authority rejected by the false prophets was that of the true prophets, who were speaking God's word in truth. They were "dreamers" in that they claimed to have had Divine revelation in dreams. But their message was awful- the paradox of 'defiling the flesh' is used, a kind of tautology to express how bad they were. The parallel in 2 Pet. 2:10 [see note there] suggests that the "dignitaries" they slandered were local civil authorities, and the example quoted in :9 concerns these too. It would seem that the immorality these false teachers were advocating was so gross that it was even against the local laws. This is how far we can go if we accept the false idea that we are saved whatever our future behaviour; and that God is not a God of judgment. This is the power of ideas; we cannot assume these issues are merely academic. What happened to the 'Christians' to whom Jude wrote is a prime example of where the power of wrong ideas can lead.

:9 *But Michael the archangel, when contending with the Devil in dispute about the body of Moses, does not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said: The Lord rebuke you-* As noted on 2 Pet. 2:10, the slander of human "dignitaries" was wrong even in its style, because the archangel Michael was at best 'polite' in rebuking the representatives of the local authorities who were resisting the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The implication is that the Angels speak in a soft, gentle way- they do not dare bring a "railing accusation" against the men they operate upon. Similarly the wilderness Angel that gave the Law and pronounced the blessings and curses upon Israel did not do so in a matter of fact 'obey or perish' tone of voice; He "pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt", as He will plead with them to repent in the last days too (Ez. 20:36). The Angel spoke to Moses "as a man speaketh to his friend" (Ex. 33:11)- i.e. in a relaxed, friendly way. It should be remembered that it was in this tone of voice that the "fiery Law" of Moses was given, rather than in a harsh, judgmental way as is often thought. Similarly Eliphaz had a vision in which he "heard a still voice" (Job 4:16, AV mg.); most visions being associated with Angels, it seems fair to assume this was an Angel's voice- as was the "still small voice" Elijah heard? (1 Kings 19:12).

Jude 9 gives guidance about how to deal with slander and attacks from false brethren. Jude alludes to the well known Jewish legend, *The Testament Of Moses*. In it, the 'devil' slanders Moses, accusing him of having murdered the Egyptian and therefore being worthy of condemnation, and tries to drag Moses' body down to punishment. Jude points out that in the story, the Angel Michael doesn't indulge in justification but rather says that "the *Lord* rebuke thee". And may this be our pattern.

Michael the Archangel's disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses could refer to the Angel that led Israel through the wilderness contending with a group of disaffected Jews. There is no implication that "the Devil" here is an angel; rather does it refer to a group of human opponents whom Angels were against. Seeing that it is stressed that all the Angels are united in doing God's will and are all obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21; 148:2; Heb. 1:14), it is not possible for there to be an argument in heaven between angels. Remember that the phrases "Devil" and "Satan" can be used about ordinary men. This Devil is concerned with the body of Moses not the so-called "immortal soul" of men (which is not Biblical teaching anyway). There are many similarities between Jude and 2 Peter 2. Jude 9 has a parallel in 2

Peter 2:11: “Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord”. Peter’s equivalent of “the Devil” is “them” – implying that the Devil in Jude 9 is not an individual, personal being, but a group of people. 2 Peter 2:10–12 clearly indicates that the “them” was a group of men. As with Jude 6, this verse is in the context of Jude 5 – “I will therefore put you in remembrance”. Jude is therefore reminding them of incidents in Israel’s history from which they should learn lessons. Thus Jude 9 must be a reference to an historical incident recorded in Scripture. There is no such incident concerning an angel called the Devil arguing with another angel. Michael the Archangel asked God to rebuke, or “forbid”, the Devil. If there is a super-human person, power or agency, called the Devil causing men to sin and creating trouble, then there is no evidence that he was ever effectively forbidden, seeing that sin and disaster are progressively increasing.

The reference to the Devil here is incidental. The purpose of the passage is to show that angels speak in a gentle, humble way, even about people they know are in the wrong. They do not show personal vindictiveness, but say “The *Lord* rebuke you”. The Judaizers “speak evil of dignities; yet Michael... durst not bring against him (the Devil) a railing accusation”, i.e. he did not resort to bitter speaking as they did. Similarly Ex. 33:9–11 says that the angel spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend”, i.e. In a relaxed, friendly way. It should be remembered that it was with this voice that the “fiery law” of Moses was given by the angel, not in a harsh manner, as can be wrongly inferred from some parts of the narrative. Similarly the “still, small voice” that Elijah heard was probably the quiet, unassuming voice of an angel (1 Kings 19:12 cp. Job 4:16).

There are so many points of contact between this verse and Zechariah 3:1,2 that that chapter must surely provide an historical background to the verse, which would be appreciated by Jude’s readers: “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”.

The most evident similarities are:

<b><i>Zechariah 3</i></b>	<b><i>Jude</i></b>
The angel of the Lord	Michael the archangel
Satan	The Devil
The Lord rebuke thee	The Lord rebuke thee
A brand plucked out of the fire (vv. 1,2).	Pulling them out of the fire (vv. 9,23).

The context in Zechariah 3 was that of the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. They were trying to rebuild the temple and re-establish a system of worship there. However, “the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building” (Ezra 4:4), i.e. they acted as Satan / adversaries to the Jews. They are actually called “the adversaries of Judah” in Ezra 4:1. They wrote “an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The Hebrew word for “accusation” is related to that translated “Satan”. Zechariah 3:8

clearly tells us that the characters of verses 1 and 2 are “men of sign” (A.V. margin), i.e. we have to interpret them. So the satans – the adversaries – stood before the angel along with Joshua the High Priest, who “was clothed with filthy garments” (:3) – without a mitre on his head (:5 implies).

The implication is that the inhabitants of the land, the Satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel tells Satan, “The Lord rebuke thee”, and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (:4,5), thus showing God’s acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind them. But the angel says that “the Lord...hath chosen Jerusalem”, in the same way as He had chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem. “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” the angel asks Satan concerning Jerusalem. This is quoted in Jude 23 concerning saving repentant sinners. Thus the angel is in effect saying, “Jerusalem has repented, therefore I have plucked them out of the fire of judgment and destruction; you should not therefore be implying that Jerusalem and the Jews are so sinful that they cannot be restored to their land with Me behind them”.

Jude says that the dispute between the angel and the Devil – those opposed to the rebuilding of the temple – was “about the body of Moses”. This phrase can therefore either refer to the Jewish people generally, in the same way as the Christian church is “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27) because we look to him for guidance, rather than being in the “body of sin” (Rom. 6:6) because we follow sin, or to Joshua the high priest. Joshua was the “body of Moses” in the sense that “body” can be a figure of speech for a “slave”, e.g. Revelation 18:13; Hebrews 10:5; Psalm 40:6; and Exodus 21:2–6, and Romans 6:6 where having a “body of sin” probably means being a “slave of sin”. The High Priest was thus the slave of Moses.

Another suggestion is that the “body of Moses” was Moses’ literal Body; Michael the archangel was the angel of Israel (Dan. 12:1) who led them through the wilderness in the cloud and fire (Ex. 23:20–21). The dispute may have been between the angel and a group of Jews – “the Devil” – who wanted to take the body of Moses with them. But the angel had buried Moses’ body and would not tell anyone where it was (Dt. 34:6). Remember that the body of Joseph was carried up into Canaan by the Jews (Josh. 24:32) as were the bodies of Jacob and the twelve patriarchs from Egypt (Acts 7:15–16 R.V.); and we know that the bodies of the kings of Israel were used in wrong worship rituals (Ez. 43:7); it is to be expected, therefore, that some of the Jews would also want to take the body of Moses, their great leader, with them. The Jews laid great store by having the remains of their leaders physically with them – they are condemned for keeping the corpses of their kings in the temple (Ez. 43:7–9).

*:10 But these revile whatever things they do not see with their eyes or cannot examine naturally. They are like the beasts without reason. In these things are they destroyed-* The path of Cain involved reviling what he did not understand (Jude 10,11). He didn’t understand, or didn’t let himself understand, the principles of sacrifice, and so he reviled his brother and God’s commands, he became a true child of the Biblical Devil – because he refused to spiritually ‘see’ / understand. Their destruction [the same word is used about condemnation at the last day] was ongoing; they were destroying / condemning themselves by their behaviour.

They were completely closed to any higher, spiritual reasoning- like animals. "See" is the word for 'understanding'. They used abusive language and had a belligerent attitude because they chose to be without understanding. They reviled "dignitaries" and "authority"; they were so drunk on their own power that they considered themselves above all civil and ecclesial authority. They were so sensual that they were blind to anything beyond that which they could "examine naturally", what was visibly in front of them. And the essence of this error is to be seen in those who reject God and His moral teaching because they say that the evidence for Him cannot be examined naturally, by direct impact upon their own eyes and ears.

:11 *Woe to them! For they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah-* Cain, Balaam and Korah represent a heady mix of lust for money, power and sex. I mention "sex" because this was the method used by Balaam to entice Israel to sin so that they would fall, and thereby he could receive the promised "hire" from Balak. Those men were all within the community of God's people in Old Testament times. The past tense "perished" implies they had already been condemned; but that condemnation was still going to be ministered to them at the last day. They were the living dead, already "perished". Balaam "ran" for reward, so wanting to do Balak's will in order to receive the promised "hire"; and the Angel and donkey tried to arrest him in his headlong rush. He paid no attention, just as the efforts of Jude and Peter to arrest the madness of these men were not being heeded.

The condemned amongst the first century ecclesias "cast themselves away through the error of Balaam" (Jude 11 RVmg.)- and yet it is the Lord who will "cast away" the bad fish in the last day. Yet those He casts away have in fact cast themselves away. Those who lay in wait for others to kill them "lay wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives" (Prov. 1:11,18). There is a *direct* relationship, in God's judgment, between how we treat others and what will happen to us.

:12 *These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts when they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves-* These people were present at the breaking of bread meetings, and were in fact the shepherds of the flock. They were leaders of the church. They had no fear of future judgment, and they were solely after their own gratification; in this context the parallel 2 Pet. 2:14 says that their eyes were full of adultery. They clearly had a sexual agenda, and that agenda was realized at the "love-feasts", which in Corinth and Ephesus had been turned into orgies after the pattern of the surrounding religious cults. "Hidden rocks" can also be translated "spots" and this is alluded to in the final encouragement that the Lord through His Spirit is able to preserve His true bride "spotless". This is quite something, given the context. Sincere individuals living under such abusive and insincere shepherds could still be preserved by the Lord, such is the power of the Spirit. Bad environment, even spiritually, doesn't preclude the Lord acting to preserve His own. And clearly enough, if members of these churches were preserved "spotless", without spot, then there is no such thing as guilt by association, somehow acquired by belonging to an apostate church.

*Clouds without water, carried along by winds-* They appeared to be full of rain / water, a symbol of teaching. But they never dispensed any, and were as if carried along on an endless path to nowhere.

*Autumn leaves without fruit*- Harvest time had come, but there was just an appearance of leaves, but no fruit. The Lord had cursed the Jewish fig tree exactly because of this. This is another indication that the false teachers in view were Jewish.

*Twice dead, plucked up by the roots*- 2 Peter 2 and Jude have so often stressed that these men had already been given their condemnation, although the execution of it was yet to come. They would experience "the second death"; we all die once, but those who know God's truth and refuse it shall be resurrected, condemned and thus will die a "second death". But by status, this is how these men already were. They had already been plucked up by the roots- a metaphor used in Mk. 11:20 for the judgment of apostate Israel, but a quotation from Dan. 7:8 about the plucking up by the roots of Gentile powers. These Judaists were effectively Gentiles and would be judged as them.

:13 *Wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame*- "Shame" is the language of the condemned at the last day. They were proudly displaying their condemnation. They were as the wicked of Is. 57:20, a restless sea. Stability and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit and arise from the firm anchor of having the Kingdom hope, were far from them. The indulgence of lust doesn't lead to a happy life, but to this endless restlessness, a sense of movement but going nowhere.

*Wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever*- As noted above, they are "wandering" because of the way the flesh ever seeks new fulfilment. The stability of knowing the eternal love of the Lord Jesus and the certainty of future salvation are unknown to such people. "Blackness of darkness" seems a tautology, as was 'even defiling the flesh' in :8; language struggles to adequately deliver the sense of utter tragedy arising from the depth of such utter depravity. Eternal death is blackness, night, utter nothingness with no order. Compared to the infinite activity of the Spirit, eternally.

:14 *And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying: Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His holy ones*- Jude speaks about the false teachers of the first century. He recalls how Enoch had spoken of how the wicked of his day were destroyed in the flood: "Behold the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment" (Jude 14,15 RV). I suggested on Gen. 8:1 that these "holy ones" were Angels who actually brought about the flood. The Lord's coming with the Angels at the last day will be an even greater fulfilment of this. And yet Jude says that "To these also [i.e. the first century false teachers] Enoch... prophesied" (Jude 14 RV). Enoch's words were primarily addressed to his own generation, but his words ought to be taken as speaking directly to the first century apostates. In similar vein, the Lord said that Isaiah's words to his generation were prophecy "of you" in the first century. The idea seems to be that Jude's prophecy of their condemnation was to be seen as the equivalent of Enoch's condemnation of the immoral false believers of his age in the lead up to the flood.

But there may be a double meaning here. For there was a popular first century BC 'Book of Enoch'.

A rather detailed argument – and yet a very powerful one – that Angels don't sin is actually provided by considering the passages in 2 Peter 2 and Jude which are used by some to prove that Angels sin. We have here what we meet many times in Holy Scripture – a series of allusions to a contemporary, uninspired, popular piece of literature in order to show that it is



in fact wrong. This point may easily be lost on us, reading as we do from our distance from the original context. It's been observed that there are many allusions to the popular first century BC 'Book of Enoch' in 2 Peter and Jude. This book claimed that 200 Angels were expelled from Heaven and then married beautiful women on earth. Peter and Jude allude to it in order to show how wrong it is. In the Book of Enoch, it is claimed that the righteous Angel Michael brings accusation against the 200 supposedly rebellious Angels. But this is specifically alluded to and corrected by Peter and Jude. In the table below are some of the allusions:

<b>Jude</b>	<b>Book of Enoch</b>
"Enoch the Seventh from Adam prophesied" Jude 14	Enoch 60:8
"dry springs" Jude 12	Enoch 48:1,96:6 dried up fountains
"waterless clouds" Jude 12	Enoch 18:5,41:4–5,100:11–12
"reserved for blackest darkness" Jude 13	Enoch 21:3 "darkness shall be their dwelling" Enoch 46:6
"trees without fruit" Jude 12	Enoch 80:3
"plucked up" Jude 13	Enoch 83:4
"raging waves" Jude 12	Enoch 101:3–5
'See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done'." (Jude 14–15)	"See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done" (Enoch 1:9)
"reserved unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6)	Reserved unto the day of sorrow Enoch 45:2

Peter consciously contradicts this by stressing that "angels do *not* bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord" (2 Pet. 2:11), and Jude is even more specific by saying that this is true of Michael the Archangel (Jude 9). According to the Book of Enoch, the man Enoch judges the sinful Angels, but 2 Peter 3 warns that actually Angels will come with Lord Jesus in order to judge *men*. We can now understand why Peter claims that "bold and arrogant these men (the false teachers) are not afraid to slander celestial beings" (2 Pet. 2:10) – i.e. the Angels. The Book of Enoch slandered Angels by claiming 200 of them sinned. As Jude 8 puts it, the false teachers "reject authority and slander celestial beings". The idea that the 200 Angels had sexual encounters with enticing women was therefore a slander. We need to reflect on the implications of all this – for claiming that Angels sin is actually spoken of by Peter and Jude as if it is serious blasphemy. Those early Christians were returning to their earlier Jewish and Pagan beliefs, which according to 2 Pet. 2:22 is to be seen as a dog returning to its vomit. This is how serious the issue is.

It should be noted that the Book of Enoch and other such writings are frequently alluded to in the Apocalypse – again, to deconstruct them and show a first century readership the *real* meaning of the terms used in the popular uninspired literature of the time. Thus the descriptions of the Heavenly "Son of man" in Enoch 47:3–7 are alluded to in the description of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 1:15–17 (This and many other such allusions are to be found tabulated in Hugh Schonfield, *The Original New Testament: Revelation* (London: Firethorn Press, 1985)).

:15 *To execute judgment upon all and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him-* The judgment of the Lord's second coming will not be a simple destruction of the wicked. Through the condemnation / judgment process, they will be convicted of all their sins, including all their hard words they spoke against the Lord. Such is the Lord's knowledge that words spoken by men in this life will be quoted back to them at judgment. By their words will men be justified and condemned (Mt. 12:37); see on Mt. 12:36; Lk. 13:28.

Num. 32:23 prophesied of Israel in their time of condemnation: "You will be sensible of your sin when evil overtakes you" (LXX). Truly has Ez. 6:9 prophesied of the rejected: "They shall loathe themselves for their evils which they have committed in all their abominations". Jude 15 would even suggest that the purpose of judgment being executed is to convict the rejected of *all* their ungodly deeds and hard words. Through realising their condemnation they will realize in awful detail exactly *why* this had to be. Our own self-examination now will be stimulated by realising the depth to which we *deserve* condemnation, even though by grace we are saved rather than condemned.

:16 *These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts-* "Murmuring" is the word used of how the Jews murmured against the Lord Jesus (Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41,43; 1 Cor. 10:10). The murmuring and complaining by the false teachers was presumably in slander of the faithful teachers. And the terms of course recall Israel in the wilderness, ever murmuring and complaining against Moses and God. They should have been walking after the Spirit, but instead the lusts of the flesh controlled them.

*(And their mouth speaks great swelling words), showing respect of persons for the sake of personal advantage-* This alludes to how they were false teachers, speaking words which like leaven swelled up into great things. We recall how leaven was used as symbolic of the teaching of the Pharisees. The Greek could be translated the other way around, as if they got people to respect their persons for the sake of personal advantage. They had seized the podium for the indulgence of their own lusts- see on :12. Their teachings were ultimately in order to empower their own self indulgence regarding wealth, power and sex. As noted on :15, these people would be judged at the last day for their words; and those words included the words they were teaching. Hence James warns us to not rush to be teachers, for those who speak the most words [especially publicly] risk the greater condemnation (James 3:1).

:17 *But you, beloved, remember the words which have been spoken previously by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ-* The faithful minority in these churches were not to listen to the swelling words of the false teachers (:16) but rather to remember the words of the true prophets, the Lord's apostles. "Remember" is appropriate to illiterate folk who would only have had the memory of the inspired, spoken words to go on. Maybe the implication is that Jude's readership were initially those of 2 Peter 2, who were the Jews whom Peter had baptized after their hearing the words of the Lord's apostles at Pentecost.

:18 *How they said to you: In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts-* Warning of the great falling away had been a major part of the initial teaching which these converts had received. The records of these warnings appear to have been greatly abbreviated in the Acts transcripts of the apostolic addresses. Clearly there was follow up

instruction given after baptism. The mockers were credible enough to become the apparent shepherds and teachers in the congregations to whom Jude was writing. The mocking may have therefore been quite subtle; but the Spirit through Jude exposed it for what it was. The same Greek words for "ungodly lusts" are found in Tit. 2:11,12- it was a denial of God's grace which led to living in such lusts. And the Judaizers had rejected that grace for a form of legalism which allowed them to indulge their own lusts.

:19 *These are they who make divisions, sensual, having not the Spirit-* Being divisive is the supreme testament to the lack of the Spirit; for the Spirit unites. Each heart that has received the gift of the Spirit and allowed it free reign will naturally unite with others who are led by the same Spirit. This is what "the unity of the Spirit" is all about (Eph. 4:3). Division is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20); unity is a fruit of the Spirit. It's as simple as that. Those who are divisive lack the Spirit. We need to each enshrine the principle that we will never, ever divide from those for whom Christ died, His body. If we do, we have not the Spirit and are mere religionists. These people are "sensual", seeing things in natural terms, of the flesh, and without the Spirit. This same kind of language is found in :10 [see notes there]. To divide from others is the natural, animal like way. To unite is counter-instinctive, if we live in the flesh. Unity is of the Spirit. And the natural man cannot receive spiritual things which are spiritually discerned- unless he has the Spirit and is no longer seeking to view life in material, visible, concrete, rational terms (1 Cor. 2:14). The Greek for "make divisions" here means literally to draw a boundary. The Lord Jesus was fundamentally open; He drew no boundaries of exclusion from His table and fellowship. It was men who themselves decided whether to come near to Him or not. All the *angst* about where to draw fellowship boundaries is really arguing about where to draw lines in the sand. The Lord was fundamentally open rather than closed. And as clearly stated here, such drawing of boundaries is not the way of His Spirit.

:20 *But you, beloved, build up yourselves in your most holy faith-* The antidote to all the awful behaviour listed so far is to be built up in the Spirit. The Lord builds us up, edifying us by His Spirit; but we need to respond by doing our part in being open to His work within us. The ideas of holiness and "the faith" recall the opening of the letter; the believers were being made holy by the Spirit, and were to defend the faith. Spiritual growth was on the basis of the basic Gospel they believed, "the faith".

*Praying in the Holy Spirit-* We receive the gift of the Spirit in our hearts at baptism, but we are to allow this Spirit to teach us and take over our thinking and action. The Spirit in view is the Spirit or mind of the Lord Jesus; it is His psychological entrance into us. This explains the encouragement to pray in or by the Spirit (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 6:18). The contrast is with those who did not have the Spirit (:19).

Who we are as persons is effectively our prayer and plea to God. This conception of prayer explains why often weeping, crying, waiting, meditating etc. are spoken of as "prayer", although there was no specific verbalizing of requests (Ps. 5:1,2; 6:8; 18:1,2,3,6; 40:1; 42:8; 64:1 Heb.; 65:1,2; 66:17-20; Zech. 8:22). The association between prayer and weeping is especially common: 1 Sam. 1:10; Ps. 39:12; 55:1,2; Jn. 11:41,42; Heb. 5:7, especially in the Lord's life and the Messianic Psalms. "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer" (Ps. 6:8,9) crystallizes the point. *Desire* is also seen as effectively praying for something (Rom. 10:1; Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 9:14). Weeping, desiring, waiting, meditating etc. are all acts of the mind, or 'spirit' in

Biblical terminology. There is therefore a big association between our spirit or state of mind, and prayer. The spirit (disposition) of Christ which we have received leads us to *pray* "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). "Praying in the holy spirit" (Jude 20) is to be seen in this context. Prayer is part of the *atmosphere* of spiritual life, not something hived off and separate- it is an expression of our spirit. Thus there are verses which speak of many daily prayers as being just one prayer (Ps. 86:3,6; 88:1,2); prayer is a way / spirit of life, not something specific which occurs for a matter of minutes each day. The commands to "pray without ceasing" simply can't be literally obeyed (1 Thess. 5:17). "Watch and pray *always*" in the last days likewise connects prayer with *watchfulness*, which is an attitude of mind rather than something done on specific occasions. This is not to say that prayer *in no sense* refers to formal, specific prayer. Evidently it does, but it is only a verbal crystallization of our general spirit of life.

:21 *Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life*- The work of the Spirit in keeping us in Christ must be responded to by our freewill efforts to likewise keep or remain in Him. We are to 'keep' the Lord's ways and commandments, and yet He keeps us by the Spirit. "They have kept Your word... keep [s.w.] [them] by Your own Name... I kept them in Your Name... keep them from the evil" (Jn. 17). Jude will conclude by glorying in the fact that the Lord is able to keep us from falling in spiritual terms (:24). We are "looking", in utter confidence, to receive mercy and eternal life at the Lord's return. The parallel in 2 Peter is "looking for... the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12). This again suggests that we should be able to be certain that if we die now or the Lord returns now, we will certainly be saved. But we must "keep" or abide in that status.

Jude 20,21 exhorts us: "building up yourselves... keep yourselves in the love of God". The use of the plural 'yourselves' rather than a singular 'thysself' suggests that we are to understand this as meaning that we should build up our community, keep each other in the love of God. Jude had begun by exalting that we are "sanctified by God the Father, and preserved [s.w. "keep yourselves"] [by God] in Jesus Christ". His conclusion is that we are kept / preserved by God in Christ *insofar as* we, the ministers of Christ, keep / preserve each other. The Greek for 'building up' occurs in Eph. 4:16: "From [Christ] the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, *maketh increase* [builds up] of the body unto the edifying of itself in love". The body builds itself up, *if* each part contributes. If they don't, then there is no building up. Using the same figure, 1 Cor. 3:10-14 speak of us building up God's house, the believers, on the foundation of Christ. And we will be judged for the quality of what is built- our final judgment will be a reflection of the quality of our brethren, in that their spirituality is partly determined by our efforts for them. But Col. 2:4 uses the same word to say that we are built up "in [Christ]... as [according as] ye have been taught... beware lest any man spoil you [through false teaching]. The life of fellowship with our brethren in Christ is what builds us up, if we teach each other the right things. But false teaching means that the house of believers will not be built up. This would have been especially so in ecclesias of largely illiterate members. The point is, we are all builders, each part has something to contribute, and the doing of every ecclesial service must be consciously to the end of building up one another.

:22 *On those who are in doubt have mercy*- As noted on :21, these commands are collective, and they were the more necessary because the shepherds of the congregation were self-

seeking and apostate. All the faithful members had to therefore take responsibility for the flock. It is seen as trendy to admit "doubt" about spiritual things; but "doubt" here requires "mercy". It should not be the case. The work of the Spirit convicts and convinces so that doubt regarding the basic existence and saving power of God in Christ is not in doubt. We can hardly have the sure Hope which the Gospel speaks of if we have such doubts. The AV adds: "Making a difference". The context has spoken of those without any conscience who were abusing the flock and bent on indulging their own lusts through the abuse of others. The "difference" was presumably between these types and those who were weak and needed compassion shown to their moral weaknesses.

*:23 And others save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some, have mercy with fear, hating even the underclothing stained by the flesh-* This continues the allusion to Zechariah 3 noted on :9. The Angel just about decided in favour of saving Jerusalem out of the 'fire' of eternal punishment (cp. Jer. 17:27) for her sins- He had "compassion, making a difference" (Jude 22). The "garment spotted by the flesh" must connect with the "filthy garments" worn by Joshua as he came into the Angel's presence.

Likewise an Angel had pulled Lot from the fire (Jude 7)- in this sense, Jude seems to suggest, we can do God's work for him. Likewise we must "make a difference" concerning some, just as the Angels "contended" [s.w.] for men (Jude 9 cp. 22). The fire of condemnation at the judgment is in a sense already kindled, as the Lord Himself had taught (Lk. 12:49). The weak brother condemns himself by his way of life, and falls into condemnation even now, before the judgment (James 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:6; Tit. 3:11). We see this, and have the power in some cases to save the brother by pulling him out of that fire of condemnation. Surely the point is that we can save our brother from condemnation at judgment day by what we do for him now. See on Rom. 12:20.

The "fear" we are to show is perhaps in realizing that the process of saving these people from out of the fire risks our falling into it; to save someone you have to get close to them. And these people were already condemned, in the fire of Gehenna, as it were. Their clothing was blemished, in contrast to how we are to appear "without blemish" at judgment day (:24). The Lord will keep us from stumbling, however (:24). Jude has several times expressed the idea that the false teachers were so bad that they were condemned already, as it were already in the Gehenna fire. But the faithful remnant could even save some of them, at least potentially. To pull someone out of eternal condemnation is one of the most significant things we can do with our lives. But this can only be achieved by coming close to them in association.

:24- see on Eph. 1:4.

*Now to him that is able to guard you from stumbling-* God can withhold men from sinning (Gen. 20:6), and His Son can keep us from falling (Jude 24), keeping [s.w.] us from evil (2 Thess. 3:3). This preservation unto salvation is the work of His Spirit in our hearts. It is for this that we pray when we ask in the Lord's prayer to be 'delivered from evil'. We of course must play our part in 'keeping' the faith. But we are empowered to do so by the Spirit- hence Timothy is challenged to "keep [s.w.] that which was given to you, by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us" (2 Tim. 1:14). The strong similarities between Jude and 2 Peter 2 continue on this point too; for the same word is used of how God saved or kept / guarded Noah (2 Pet. 2:5), whilst condemning the world around him for their sin. This 'keeping' refers therefore to

God's keeping of Noah spiritually, from falling into the sins of those around him. If his literal salvation from death by drowning was in view, a different verb would have been used.

*And to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy-* It is only the Lord Jesus who is "without blemish", the perfect Paschal lamb (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19). There are repeated encouragements that we shall be likewise "without blemish" before Him at the last day (Rev. 14:5), as we are now (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Col. 1:22). But this is only true because of His righteousness being imputed to us, by grace through faith. This status should bring "exceeding joy" both now (1 Pet. 1:8) and in the last day (1 Pet. 4:13). We shall enter into the joy of our Lord (Mt. 25:21). His joy is above that of all His brethren (Heb. 1:9 s.w.), and yet all that is true of Him shall be true of us.

The idea of "blemish" has been common in 2 Pet. 2 and Jude. The false teachers and wicked shepherds were blemishes upon the church (:12; 2 Pet. 2:13); some were already under condemnation, with their clothes "spotted by the flesh" (:23). Yet the faithful remnant would be preserved without blemish in that they were clothed in the Lord's righteousness.

When all this is finally realized, we shall be awed at the Lord's grace, feeling with those of the parable that we have not done all the wonderful things counted to us. Our amazement and incomprehension at the judgment is brought out in 2 Thess. 1:10, which speaks of the saints 'admiring' Christ in that day, using a Greek word meaning 'to marvel at in incomprehension'. This praise will be on account of our being "presented faultless" before the judgment (Jude 24). The Greek for "presented" is the same word translated "stood" in Lk. 21:36, showing that our angel is able to stand us up in the august presence of the Lord, only by reason of our faults having been totally covered by Christ's imputed righteousness. Col. 1:22 has a similar message: "...to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable (Gk. 'free from accusation') in his sight". This freedom from accusation explains why none of our bad deeds will be mentioned to us then. One wonders if Paul's appearance before the judgment seat in Acts 25 is described as it is in order to help us imagine this; he has no accusers, and therefore can be acquitted. The idea of being presented faultless before the glorious presence of a monarch was well known in the ancient world. Esther and Daniel's friends had a person assigned to present them faultless before the monarch; and it is the Lord Jesus through the work of His Spirit who can present us faultless before Himself. Our beauty is truly in the eyes of our beholder. He is both the ultimate monarch, and also the one who prepared us for the presentation before Him.

*:25 To the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now and for always in the future. Amen-* The Roman proconsuls were to be called "Saviour". But for Christians, there was only *one* Saviour, the Lord Jesus. The Caesars were frequently called "Saviour"- Josephus thus addressed Vespasian. Hence the radical import of the way that Jude 25 calls the Lord Jesus our *only* Saviour. 'Caesar is Lord' was the cry of the Roman empire. Pliny wrote that he considered refusal to make the customary gesture to the emperor's statue to be a criminal act punishable by death. But "To us there is but one Lord, Jesus" the Christ, i.e. Jesus the Messiah of the despised, weird Jewish race.

Note that God's purpose with us began "before all time"; not just from "the beginning". We were part of His "eternal purpose" in Christ (Eph. 3:11). Our calling and foreknowledge was not just from some 'beginning', but 'before' that; we were always in God's mind, and He existed with that mind from eternity.

New European Commentary

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## REVELATION

### CHAPTER 1

#### **The Nature of Revelation**

Revelation is full of visual images, borrowed from the Old Testament. But it presents them as a kaleidoscope of images, overlaying each other, relying upon other images for the final picture presented. As such, it simply cannot be read as a chronological prediction of historical events. The images presented of the new Jerusalem and God's ways are intended to deconstruct the images of Babylon and her ways. In earlier application, Christians living within the 'Babylon' of the Roman empire were subject to her images, worldviews etc., and Revelation enabled them to re-imagine life from God's perspective, thinking according to His images of the world, seeing Babylon and the beast for who they are, and seeing ourselves and God's people for who they are. This is of supreme practical value today, as it has been in every age. But it will be of ultimate value for those living under the domination of the beast entity in the land / earth under the beast's domination in the brief period of tribulation before Christ's return. A major theme of Revelation is of martyrdom and witness. It is not God's pleasure to destroy the beast, and He expects His people to make His final appeal and witness to the beast, even at the cost of their lives, physically, economically and socially. The radical nature of that call comes to each of His people over history, but it will be at its most intense and acute in the last days. Another theme of Revelation is the Lordship of Jesus; exalted titles are given to Him, and things stated about God are stated about Him. This is not to say that He is God; rather the intention and necessity of this message is that as strongly as the beast insists that *he* is Lord, so we are to insist and proclaim that *Jesus* is our Lord. The image of the slain lamb, the crucified Jesus, hangs as a watermark image over the book of Revelation; and again, that makes sense. For the community of the last days, under intense physical and / or psychological oppression from the beast, will have the image ever before them of Him in His time of suffering and dying.

#### **A Futurist Approach**

I submit that in the last days, all God's prophetic word will come true. All previous historical fulfilments of it were true and valid, but they will be seen as but incipient fulfilments of the final and ultimate fulfilling of God's word in the events of the last hour, and the final triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ in His return to earth to judge the enemies of His people. Rev. 1:1 opens Revelation by saying that the things revealed or apocalypsed are to "shortly" come to pass, and the book ends with the same statement (Rev. 22:6). The Greek can just as well mean that these things will happen quickly, suddenly- rather than requiring that the entire book had a fulfilment shortly after the time it was first given. For clearly the events described in the book did not all happen 'shortly' after John's time in the first century. That is a fact, and I would argue that it leaves us little leeway in interpreting *tachos* as therefore meaning that they will happen quickly, suddenly. The ultimate thrust of their fulfilment, therefore, is not over an extended period of time from John's time over the two millennia to the time of Christ's coming. The same phrase is used by the Lord to the believers in Rev. 2:5,16 where He warns them that He will come unto them "quickly"- the idea is that His coming in



judgment will be sudden *unless* they repent. The quickness or suddenness of His coming is related to His wrath in judgment; if they repent, then the coming will not be 'sudden' or 'short'. He surely doesn't mean 'If you don't repent, then I will come back soon. If you do repent, then I won't come back soon'. He uses the same concept of suddenness and unexpectedness, although without using *tachos*, in Rev. 3:3: "If you shall not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall not know what time I will come upon you". Attention must be paid to Revelation especially in the last days because "the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3); but *eggos* means literally 'squeezed' or 'throttled'- creating the idea that things are going to happen very quickly at the end. The fulfilment of God's word in this sense will be 'hastened' (Is. 60:22; Jer. 1:12). And the world situation we are in enables this to be the case as no other generation. The student of Revelation, therefore, will not be caught by surprise by the speed of events in the last days- that seems to be the idea.

This is not to say that the prophecies did not have relevance to the historical experience of God's people. The continual theme of persecution and comfort of ultimate victory against the world was, of course, a powerful and relevant message to God's persecuted people throughout history. But those fulfilments were but shadow fulfilments of the final triumph and events which the book describes. These are to happen quickly, suddenly, in a short time space. This explains why each of the various visions, of seals, trumpets, bowls etc. all end with the final victory of Christ's coming and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. They can all be read as having specific reference to the last days- whatever historical fulfilment they may have had. To argue otherwise requires that these events had their main fulfilment at some time in the last 2000 years, and then there is a gap until their fulfilment in the coming of Christ. But the nature of the language and arguments used hardly allows for that. At best it could be that after each of those historical incidents there was the possibility of Christ's return, but that didn't happen because other preconditions weren't met. Therefore the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied for their main fulfilment in the events of the last days. This would explain why some of the historical fulfilments suggested by expositors of the continuous historical school appear to 'fit' better than others. But at best, these were only incipient fulfilments- the final reality for each of God's prophetic words must come in the last days, just as the image of Daniel 2 had some continuous historical application, but the image must stand erect and complete in the last days- and that is the main fulfilment of the prophecy, whatever application it may have had in history.

1:1- see on Dan. 10:21.

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*- The Lord's second coming is called His "revelation" (s.w. 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13 etc.), and so there is a play on ideas here. The things revealed by the Lord in this book ultimately concern His second coming, whatever other relevance they have had throughout history.

*Which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must shortly come to pass*- A great theme of Revelation is that "the time is near"- these things were about to happen. This is a major theme (1:1,3; 2:16; 3:10,11; 22:6,7,10,12,20). The relationship between the letters to the churches and the rest of Revelation cannot be overlooked; what was to happen to them in judgment was bound up with what was to come upon the land of Palestine in AD70. Mt. 21:40 parallels the coming of the Lord with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. This is exactly the sequence of events we expect in the last days, according to Zech. 14. There are

many links between the trumpets, seals and the Olivet prophecy; and also many links with Josephus' descriptions of what came upon Palestine in AD66-70- e.g. 9:5 "inwardly tormented" Gk. *ebasanizonto* is used in Josephus (Wars 5.1.5).

Revelation	The Olivet Prophecy
6:1,2	Mt. 24:14
6:14	Mt. 24:35
6:3,4	Mt. 24:6,7
6:16	Lk. 23:30
6:5,6	Mt. 24:7
6:17	Lk. 21:36
6:7,8	Mt. 24:7
7:1	Mt. 24:31
6:9	Mt. 24:12
7:3	Lk. 21:18,28
6:11	Mt. 24:14
7:14	Mt. 24:19,21
6:12	Mt. 24:7
8:3	Lk. 21:36
6:13	Mt. 24:32
8:5	Mt. 24:27

It is clear enough that the Olivet Prophecy has application both to the "last days" of AD70 and also to our last days. Revelation is the Lord's expansion upon His words on Olivet- and therefore we should use this as a framework for interpreting the book. It applies to both AD70 and also our last days. The following notes trace some leading features of the AD70 interpretation. The most powerful proof is in private reading of Josephus' *Wars of The Jews*- it reads like a running commentary on the seal and trumpet judgments upon Israel.

*Which he sent and put into sign by his Angel to his servant John*- This message was passed from the Father to the Son to the Son's "angel" or messenger and thence to His servant John. The "angel" may be a human messenger, but the Divine "Angel" with whom John interrelates throughout the book is surely the "Angel" referenced here. In this case, the Lord has a personal Angel who represents Him, perhaps Gabriel.

1:2 *Who testified of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw*- The aorist suggests the testimony was made once in the past; and John uses this idea of his testimony about the Lord in explaining that his Gospel record is his testimony about Him. In addition to that, he is testifying of the Lord's testimony, which consists in all things he saw in the visions he is now going to describe. This is in line with how the testimony of the Comforter, the spirit of Christ, was the testimony of the believers who had received that Spirit (Jn. 15:26,27). Here as a parade example of that, John testifies of the Lord's testimony.

The apostles bore witness to the Lord Jesus (e.g. Acts 26:22; 1 Cor. 15:15 s.w.), and He in turn bore witness to the [preaching of] the word of his grace (Acts 15:8). In their witness lay His witness. Revelation begins with John witnessing / testifying to the Word [made flesh, i.e. Jesus], and concludes with Jesus testifying (1:2 cp. 22:20 s.w.).

Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness (1 Jn. 5:8). John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse. Because he had beheld the Lord's witness on the cross, he witnessed. For he was in Christ, part of Him, of His life and death. And so are each of us. Paul puts our thesis in so many words, by saying that his preaching to the Galatians had been a placarding forth of Christ crucified before their eyes (Gal. 3:1 Gk.). His witness to them had been a living out of the Lord in His time of dying.

1:3- see on Lk. 11:28.

*Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein*- This has been misread as meaning that blessing is related to 'correctly understanding' the Revelation. The Greek word translated "reads" doesn't have to mean 'correctly understands'. The obvious sense is to link it with those who *hear* the words... the message is being sent by a messenger, who was to read it out loud- as we know Paul's letters were thus read to a largely illiterate brotherhood- and it was then *heard* by the ecclesias. Both reader and hearer were blessed if they kept what the prophecy implied- which was and is an awareness of God's claims upon His people, their separation from this world, and an earnest readiness for Christ's return. The 'blessing' is elsewhere applied not to those who intellectually understand something but to those who are doing and living and saying the right things at the return of Jesus. The same Greek word for 'Blessed' is used of those who are ready at the Lord's return and doing the right things (Mt. 24:46; Lk. 12:37,38,43). Rev. 22:7 links back to 1:3, the epilogue interpreting the prologue: "Blessed is he who keeps the *logos* of the prophecy of this book" - the essence / *logos* / underlying idea of it all, which is that God's persecuted people will remain faithful to His word in Christ, will testify it to an unbelieving world, and will live lives always prepared for their Lord's return. The blessing is in the preparedness, not in the detailed understanding. If blessing depends upon holding the continuous historic view of Revelation, then the majority of God's servants aren't blessed- seeing that it couldn't possibly have been understood throughout most of the time from the first century until now.

*For the time is near*- The disciples expected the second coming within a generation of the Lord's death (Mt. 26:18; Lk. 21:32; Phil. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 1:3); and note the use of words indicating imminence: 'shortly', 'immediately', 'a little while'. Could it not be that if Israel had accepted Jesus as Son of God, the Kingdom could have come then? Even after His death, had they believed the witness of the apostles and repented for what they had done, the Kingdom could have come then. Of course God foreknew this would not happen; but the disciples looked forward to it as a distinct reality and possibility. Revelation itself seems to read as if when "Babylon" was judged and destroyed by the day of the Lord, then

the Kingdom would be established on earth. It seems that it was possible that the Roman empire be destroyed by the Lord's return; but instead the prophecy was delayed, and now "Babylon" must apply to some latter day system, which had an earlier incarnation in the Roman empire which *could* have been its final fulfilment but wasn't. In any case, we are to live *as if* the second coming is imminent.

1:4 *John to the seven churches that are in Asia. Grace to you and peace, from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne-* There were more than seven churches in Asia, so this number is chosen to represent the complete churches. Their experiences were to echo down the centuries in the various churches and groups who experienced persecution. The sources and forms may have changed, but the spiritual essence remained the same as they experienced.

Is, was and is to come recalls the essence of the Yahweh Name. The God who had ultimately preserved His Son and His disciples from their persecutions ["was"] would preserve the seven Asian churches in their current traumas ["is"]; and would ultimately preserve believers of all ages "to come". The essential characteristics of the Yahweh Name would be manifested consistently in whatever time and context. And in this consistency is the power of history, as Biblically recorded. For as He acted in history, so He shall act today and for all ages to come.

The essential will of the Father and Son is grace and peace toward the believers, despite all the twists and turns of history and current experience. That will was operationalized through the seven spirits before the throne in the court of Heaven. The seven spirits match the seven churches; the entire Spirit of God ["seven"] will work in the lives of all those in His community, represented by the seven churches.

1:5- see on Jn. 7:38.

*And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him that loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood-* The Lord's faithful witness unto death is to be the pattern for all the Lord's people. Although the kings of the earth persecute the Lord's people, He is their ruler. Events have not got radically out of control; all is under His rulership.

It will be observed that Revelation frequently hints that it is a message specifically addressed to those under persecution. Phrases like "Jesus Christ the faithful witness" (:5) should be read in the context of encouraging the readers to continue *their* witness, even on pain of death, just as Jesus did (see too 13:8). For this reason, an understanding of the book of Revelation is vital for those who will experience the latter day tribulation, in whatever form we feel it will take.

"The kings of the earth" is a phrase and idea which we will encounter later. If we enquire what they refer to, it depends upon what scale we wish to investigate at. The "earth" often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and the futurist interpretation of the later chapters in Revelation must bear that in view.

The love of the Lord Jesus is again interpreted as specifically His death on the cross, as often in the New Testament. His command to love as He loved us means that we too are to love unto the death of a cross (Jn. 13:32). That death means we are freed from our sins- despite

being ruled over by the kings of the earth / land. It is freedom from sin which is the ultimate freedom rather than political freedom, which was always attractive to the Jewish readership of the first century.

1:6 *And who made us kings and priests to his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen-* Having spoken of the kings of the earth, who will be portrayed later as dominating God's people temporarily, we learn that in fact it is we who are freed from any domination by sin who are the king-priests. Immediately we are introduced to what shall be a major theme in the visions- that there are two spheres of things. On the earthly level, the kings of the earth dominate us. But on the spiritual, heavenly level, we are the kings, and are radically free from all domination because of the freedom won for us on the cross. This earthly-heavenly distinction is to be found throughout John's Gospel. Things as they are in secular life only appear like that. For things are radically different from God's perspective.

The Lord "has *made* us kings and priests" in prospect, although we will only exercise this power in the Kingdom. Frequently we read of the saints being 'made' things which we must still strive to attain (Rom. 5:19; 6:18,22; 8:2; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:6; 2:13). God *made* the Lord a sin offering, that we might be *made* the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21), although our Lord still had to exercise freewill effort to be that offering, as we must too. "God... saved us (in prospect)... that... we should be *made* heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit.3:5-7).

Note too that the idea may well be of king-priests, after the order of Melchizedek, seeing we are "in Christ" and all that is true of Him comes true for us. So the idea is not that some will be kings and others priests.

1:7- see on Jn. 1:14; 19:37.

*Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. So shall it be! Amen-* This passage from Zechariah appears to be a prophecy of how Israel shall see the Lord at His second coming, and that is the interpretation given here. Those who crucified the Lord had this prophecy come true as they looked upon and gloated over the pierced Lord Jesus on the cross (see on Jn. 19:37). But it shall come true again, when they are resurrected to judgment at the last day, see His enthronement in glory ["he comes with the clouds" is the language of Dan. 7 about this], realize from marks in His body that this is the one whom they crucified, exclaim "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mt. 23:39), but find they are not able to be in His Kingdom. That bitter disappointment at the future they have missed, that they now so want, with all the resulting self-anger, is described as weeping and gnashing of teeth. That will be psychological punishment enough for the rejected. "The tribes of the earth", every eye of them, shall see the Lord in that moment. "The earth" refers to the land, of Israel; all those who looked upon Him upon the cross, "every eye", shall then be resurrected to see Him and mourn bitterly over what they did. The "every eye" is I suggest unpacked and defined by "they that pierced him" and "all the tribes of the land". The "and..." does not have to mean 'in addition to'; it can be a device for defining the term which has gone before it. As if to say 'Yes, even...!'

1:8 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty-* The way God is outside of time as we know it, existing in past, present and future simultaneously, is mentioned in connection with the judgment upon those who pierced the Lord and who at the resurrection to condemnation will remember what they did. They will then realize that for God, what they did is actual and real as if they were doing it right then. The passage of time does not blunt His awareness of sin nor the implication of past actions. It does to us, with our fading memories and ability to re-imagine and re-create the past according to our own warped perceptions. This is why repentance at the time of sin is so important; otherwise the passing of time results in our memories often reshaping and rewriting the sin, writing down its significance.

1:9 *I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and the kingdom and patience of Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus-* This language speaks of another King and another Kingdom existing right then. This language and implications of this sort had been enough to provide the technical reason why the Lord was crucified; for Caesar and his kingdom were the only king and kingdoms which could be spoken of within the Roman empire. John was commanded to "write" these things, which as noted on :19 was going to be a criminal act. John seems aware of this because he goes right on to mention that he was, or had been, in exile on Patmos because of his testimony about the Lord and "the word of God". This may be a reference to his being arrested and punished for writing and distributing what we know as the Gospel of John. See on :2.

John saw himself as their partner rather than the one above them, partaking with them of the same sufferings; repeatedly he describes himself and all believers as fellow-slaves (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 7:4; 19:2,5; 22:3,6- quite some emphasis). See on 3 Jn. 14,15.

1:10 *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying-* The radical, heretical nature of the book of Revelation needs to be appreciated against this background; it's almost a polemic against the Caesars, and to speak in this way against them was punishable by death. And Revelation speaks of the capital of the beast system (Rome) as being in the wilderness, rather than as the (perceived) centre of a cosmopolitan metropolis. And of course, Rome is spoken of as a whore... the most abusive image possible! The whole vision was given "on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10)- and this appears to be an allusion to the way that there was "a day in the Roman calendar when all the Roman citizens had to go to the local temple and declare 'Caesar is Lord'". On that very day, when John was supposed to be worshipping Caesar as Lord, he was given a vision outlining how Caesar was not in fact 'Lord' at all. And yet the Lord's day is so often a reference to the second coming. All in Revelation is to be understood in that context, which creates a solid case for treating a futuristic interpretation as not only possible but required. Although most parts of the book have discernible application to the first century or other points in history, the essence of it all will come true fully only in the last days.

Yet the great voice he hears behind him is as of a trumpet; what he heard he was to write (:11) and distribute. It was not a quiet, personal voice; but a trumpet. His message was to be preached, and it was a radical polemic against the Roman empire, the Jewish system in Jerusalem; just as in its later applications, it was a radical polemic against every society in which the Lord's people have lived. And that message is to be preached, for the voice comes

as a trumpet. The principles revealed in this book are not to be quietly kept in our hearts; by their nature, they cannot be.

1:11- see on Acts 2:46.

*What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches. To Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea-* For the significance of placing all this in writing, see on :9 and :19. The churches chosen are surely representative of all congregations over time. Hence the number seven, suggesting completion. For there were other churches in that area. The order of the churches is perhaps simply because that is the order in which a messenger would have travelled in delivering the letters, in a kind of circuit.

1:12 *And I turned to see the voice that spoke to me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks-* "To see the voice" rather than "to see the person that spoke" suggests that this personage is a word made flesh, a person totally identified with their voice. And that is of course how John has portrayed the Lord in Jn. 1:14.

Our covenant relationship with God isn't just between Him and us. It demands that we are in covenant with His people; we can't love Him that begat without loving those others begotten by Him, as John puts it (1 Jn. 4:9). When John later heard the voice of Jesus and turned to see Him, instead of seeing Jesus in person as he expected, he saw instead the seven candlesticks, symbolic of the ecclesias / body of Christ (Rev. 1:12). Perhaps this was the idea behind the way that "Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people: between the king also and the people" (2 Kings 11:17).

1:13 *And in the midst of the candlesticks- one like a Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest-* The Lord being in midst of His churches [referring of course to the people within them] is a continuation of a major Johannine theme: that the Lord Jesus abides in the hearts of His people through the Spirit. The long robe and sash could possibly frame Him as a priest, working for us all in an ongoing sense, and identified with the churches. And we note that even with Divine nature, the Lord's humanity is stressed. He is as a "son of man". John's resurrection narratives stress the continued human aspect of the exalted Lord Jesus; and He is called still "the man Christ Jesus" even in His Heavenly glory (1 Tim. 2:5).

The vision of Rev. 1 has close links with that of Dan. 10. If the Rev. 1 vision is concerning the Angel, then so is that of Dan. 10. The context of the Daniel vision is that he had been praying for the opposition to the restoration to be overcome. He was therefore given this vision of the mighty Angel who was going to answer his prayers; Daniel describes the vision as being "of a certain man" (Dan. 10:5); when the Angel comes to him to tell him that despite the opposition He was going to answer his prayers, Daniel describes him as "one like the appearance of a man" (Dan. 10:18), or as is said here, "like a son of man". So the association with Daniel 10 was a message that ultimately, the opposition would be overcome on account of the glorious "son of man" who abides amongst the believers.

1:14 *And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire-* The similarities with the visions of Daniel signpost the basic message that

opposition to God's people will be finally overcome, even though they are currently in exile and under Gentile power.

To a certain degree, the acceptance or rejection which will be shown to us in the day of judgment can be visited on us in this life, in accordance with our actions. Thus the Lord Jesus appears here as the judge of the churches, in that the description of him there being very similar to that in Dan. 7 and 10, where he is portrayed as the judge at the second coming. Asaph knew that God *now* judges, and therefore asks God to arise and judge openly in the earth according to those judgments (Ps. 82:1,8). His eyes are as fire right now- He sees every aspect of our tribulations.

1:15- see on Jude 14.

*And his feet were like bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the voice of many waters-* This voice of judgment is going forth now. The essence of judgment day is now; see on :14. The connection is also with the vision of cherubim given to Ezekiel; again, like Daniel, to encourage God's people who were temporarily under Gentile power.

Ezekiel's cherubim refer to God's people, as well as the Angelic hosts and the hosts of Babylon; perhaps the message was simply that God was awesomely involved- as awesome as the cherubim vision- with His people on earth. The same Angelic system that brought the hosts of Babylon upon Judah also went with Judah into captivity, and would return from there with them- if they still wished to be part of that Angelic system. And yet most of Judah opted out of it, and remained in Babylon, just as we can opt out and remain in Babylon today. In this context it's interesting that the vision of Jesus as the Son of Man in Rev. 1 has similarities with the cherubim vision of Ez. 1 (feet like brass, Ez. 1:7 = Rev. 1:15; shining face, Ez. 1:13 = Rev. 1:16; voice like many waters, Ez. 1:24 = Rev. 1:15). Perhaps this suggests that Israel's failure to identify with the cherubim led to a refulfilment of the prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus, who was in person all that God intended Israel to have been. Thus the prophecies of Israel as "the servant of Yahweh", given in the context of the restoration, could have been fulfilled in the people of Israel, but were reapplied and fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus.

The opening vision of Rev. 1 presents the Lord in His post-resurrection glory; but elements of that description occur throughout Revelation in portraying the beasts. The point is, they are all false-Christ's. The Lord has a voice as the sound of many waters (Rev. 1:15), but the serpent, on the surface, speaks with just the same voice (Rev. 12:15). The four empire-beasts of Dan. 7, the kingdoms of this world, are a parody of the four living creatures of the cherubim (Rev. 4:6). See on Acts 12:20.

1:16- see on Lk. 12:49.

*And he had in his right hand seven stars-* Referring to the Angels of the seven churches, held protectively in the Lord's hand, whatever persecution may come upon them. See on :20.

*And out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shines in its strength-* That same right hand was what touched John; see on :17. The idea of the sun shining in its full strength is the picture of Divine judgment being openly manifested (Jud. 5:31). The sharp two-edged sword has similar associations (Ps. 149:6). But



the Lord is presented as having those judgment characteristics right now. This is typical of what we find in Revelation; a kaleidoscope of images often paying no attention to time as we know it. The encouragement is that even under the heat of Gentile persecution, the Lord sees with eyes as of a flame of fire, and is giving judgment right now. It's not that He is as it were looking the other way, and shall open the books and review things at judgment day. See on 2:12.

1:17 *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead*- As noted on :16, the Lord appears in the form of His latter day judgments, although that day is not yet in our kind of time. And so John goes through a symbolic death and resurrection, as Daniel did when beholding a similar vision in Daniel 10.

*And he laid his right hand upon me, saying: Fear not. I am the first and the last*- This is quite some striking visual image: of the Lord with the stars in His hand (:16,20) placing His hand upon John individually. The idea is that the Lord can act for both the individual and the collective churches at one and the same time. Quite how it all looked to John perhaps cannot be imagined. But the great mystery would have been expressed, of the Lord's individual and collective relationship to us at the same time.

"Fear not" coming from the Lord is language to be associated with a calming of one who feels spiritually unworthy. John writes in absolute terms of our acceptance with the Lord and abiding in Him; but even he felt the tension of his humanity when faced with the Lord.

"The first and the last", the alpha and omega, the beginning and end of the alphabet, is perhaps to get the idea over that time is not really as we see it. The Lord is portrayed in the garb of how He will be at the final judgment; but He is like that in essence right now.

1:18 *The living one; and I was dead, but behold, I am alive for always, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades*- As John lay 'dead' before the Lord (:17), so the Lord reminds John that He too has passed through death and is now alive.

Baptism commits us to a life of sharing His death and resurrection. When John fell at the Lord's feet "as dead", the Lord responded by saying: 'I too was dead, but no more; I'm alive for evermore, and as I died with you and for you, so I live with you and for you, and you do the same for me' (Rev. 1:17,18). The idea is 'I am living'. His ongoing living is manifest to us in the gift of the Spirit, the Comforter, which would replace His physical presence with the disciples on earth, making His presence and life just as real to us as if He were literally present. And that promised gift of the Spirit was to be with us "always" (Jn 14:16). In this sense He is "the living one" right now and always. He is not passive, divided from us by space and spirituality; He is alive and living through us.

The theme is of persecution, of living locked up in life situations we feel trapped in. But the Lord has the keys to death itself. The fact we are guaranteed to overcome even death, which is completely in His power, means that no human system or situation can ultimately trap us. And this has encouragement for those who may not be politically persecuted, but feel locked up in domestic and social situations.

1:19 *Therefore write the things which you see, and the things which are, and the things which shall hereafter come to pass*- This command to "write" was asking John to commit a seriously criminal offence. For within the Roman empire, such application of emperor and

kingdom language to another king, the Lord Jesus, and articulating a plan for His Kingdom to come and the destruction of earth's proud empires... all this meant that the written form of the book of Revelation would have been forbidden literature, and the writing and production of it was criminal and even a capital offence. John's motivation was therefore in order to strengthen by all means the believers with the hope of the Kingdom and ultimate victory against all evil empires. He is encouraged to make this sacrifice and "write" these things *because* the Lord has the keys of death itself (:18). If even death itself is no barrier for us, and we are not finally under the power of it; how much less are we under the power of all structures which appear to lock us down in this life.

Unlike Hebrew, the tenses in Greek are precise and have specific reference. Here John was told to write down the things which he had seen, the things which presently are, and the things which shall be "hereafter". I suggest the things he had seen were the things of the vision of the Son of Man; the things which are refer to the messages to the seven churches; and "the things which shall be hereafter" is a phrase developed in Rev. 4:1, where John is bidden come and see "the things which must be hereafter". The things from then on all refer to the future, the last days and the coming of Christ. The vision of the Heavenly throne room in chapters 4 and 5 therefore refers to how things are in the Heavenly court *in the last days*. That is confirmed by comments on many of the verses in chapter 4.

*1:20 This is the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks are seven churches-* As suggested earlier, seven being the number of completeness, we are intended to understand these churches as representative of all believers, over all time and space. The same basic situations occur amongst all believers, even if the form varies.

I suggest the "angels" refer to both heavenly Angels in the throne room of God, and to the leadership of the churches on earth which they represent before God in Heaven. There appear to be guardian Angels not only for individuals but also for groups of believers- e. g. Israel, or an ecclesia. The stars of the ecclesias in Rev. 1:20 are defined as the Angels of the ecclesias. The seven lamps are the seven spirits / Angels of God before His throne (Rev. 4:5)- yet they are clearly representative of the seven churches on earth of which Revelation has earlier spoken. There seems no reason to doubt that literal Angels are being referred to, especially as elsewhere Angels are also likened to stars-e. g. Job 38:7; and the king of Babylon "exalted (himself) above the stars" (Is. 14:13- referring to Israel and their representative Angels). There seems no more symbolism attached to the phrase "Angels" in Rev. 1, seeing it is in the context of the candlestick parable being interpreted: "The seven stars are the Angels of the seven churches". The apparent rebuke of the Angels is because they are so closely associated with their charges. However, to some degree the words of Jesus in the letters may also apply personally to the Angels- e. g. "I will... remove your candlestick" (2:5) may imply God would take away the Angel's charge from his care unless the Angel repented- i.e. changed his way of dealing with the ecclesia. The frequent calls to "repent" in the letters can easily apply to the Angels changing their mind or way of dealing with the ecclesia. The word is not bound to have a moral dimension. Thus 2:16: "I will come to *you*... and fight against *them*"; or "unto *you* (the Angel)... I say and unto *the rest*" (2:24). Similarly the command to "strengthen the things (the faithful believers- strengthened spiritually by the Angel) which remain" (3:2) cannot apply to a whole church which has many apostate members.

There are so many links between the opening letters to the ecclesias, and the rest of Revelation. The wording is so similar- the themes of persecution, faithfulness, and the promised blessing of the faithful. The letters aren't just 'tacked on' to the prophecy. The dramas which the ecclesias were experiencing on earth are explained by the rest of the book, in its first century, relevant-to-its-hearers level of interpretation. Jerusalem was surrounded by her enemies, the temple was about to be destroyed. They were being persecuted by Jewish and Roman powers, and we see in the rest of the book how this looked from Heaven's perspective- the way the Angels were orchestrating and yet also resisting all this, how God perceived the Jewish and Roman authorities as dragons, whores etc., and how the traumas of AD66-70 were in fact all in His plan and part of a larger picture. It's like the book of Daniel. The book isn't just a life of Daniel with a few prophecies thrown in. It's a life of Daniel, in captivity, awaiting revival, longing for Messiah. And the prophecies give us Heaven's perspective on it. However, Revelation has more relevance than to just the first century hearers. Just as the events of AD66-70 are typical of the last days, so Revelation likewise has its ultimate fulfilment [regardless of any others it may have had over history] in the crisis of the last days, in the final showdown between Babylon and Jerusalem, between the true Christ and the anti-Christ. The book will speak to us in the final tribulation as no other book can- because it's all about the last days.

## CHAPTER 2

*2:1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things says he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, he that walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks-* The Lord is in the midst of the churches in the sense that He "walks" amongst or "with" the churches / believers. This is an idea John uses several times in his Gospel; that the Lord walked amongst or in the midst of men (Jn. 6:66; 7:1; 11:54; 12:35). It is also John who records the wonderful promise of the Comforter; that the Lord's physical absence would be compensated for by the gift of the Spirit in the hearts of believers, so that it would be as if He were present with them still. The Jesus who walked the streets and lanes of Galilee with His followers still walks amongst us today.

If Timothy was the elder of the church at Ephesus, it would appear that the Lord's rebuke of the 'angel' or elder of that church in Rev. 2:1 may well have been directed at Timothy or his successor (assuming an AD66 date for the book of Revelation). This could imply that Timothy failed to follow Paul's charge to him of 2 Tim. 4, and that his initial devotion waned in some ways. And yet on the other hand, a study of 1 Timothy shows that the situation in Ephesus was desperate at that time; doctrinal apostasy and return to the surrounding idol cults or Judaism seemed inevitable as the weaknesses seemed so deep. And so Paul's advice to Timothy was followed and only in the power of the Spirit did Timothy turn things around in Ephesus. But it was at the cost of losing *agape* love (:4). All the same, there is encouragement here that apparently awful and almost hopeless spiritual situations can be turned around by wise leadership and in the power of the Spirit.

*2:2 I know your works and your toil and patience, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and did test them that call themselves apostles, and yet are not, and found them false-* This intolerance of false apostles and teachers would have been in obedience to the commands to Timothy regarding these types at Ephesus in 1 Timothy. The situation there seemed hopelessly weak, and the false teachers entrenched. And yet empowered by the Spirit and with timid Timothy rising up the challenge of dealing with the situation, the problem with the false teachers had been turned around. And yet, at the cost of losing *agape* love (:4), making all this but a pyrrhic victory.

There is a marked warning throughout the letters that there will be a spirit of self-deception and hypocrisy amongst the latter-day ecclesias. Jezebel "*calls* herself a prophetess" (2:20), some "*say* they are Jews and are not" (2:9), others "*say* they are apostles, and are not" (2:2), Sardis had "a name that thou livest" but was dead (3:1). This must be seen in the context of other NT warnings that deceivers would enter the ecclesia, appearing to have the Apostolic gifts of the Spirit. As noted on 1 Jn. 4:1, John's own communities of converts had faced this problem. There was a conscious program of infiltration of the ecclesias by "false brethren unawares brought in" (Gal. 2:4), originating from the 'satan', the great adversary of early Christianity- Judaism. As noted on 1 Jn. 4, John himself had given various tests as to how false and true apostles could be identified. It seems Ephesus had put these into practice. These false apostles were part of a whole system of fake Christianity, called the antiChrist, the fake Christ. In the immediate context, as demonstrated throughout our commentary on 1 John, this referred to the Judaist opposition to Christianity and the program of conscious infiltration of the early churches.

2:3 - see on Acts 20:34.

*I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary-* Patient, long term 'bearing' alludes to the longer term workers of the parable, who complained that they had borne the heat and burden of the day, but struggled to accept that their weaker brethren could receive the same gift of salvation as them (Mt. 20:12). As :4 puts it, they had left their first *agape*. They were motivated by the Lord's Name, enduring persecution for His sake; but the lack of true love was seen as threatening their salvation (:4,5).

2:4 *But I have this against you, that you left your first love-* That we should love as the Lord loved us is the utterly essential basis of the Gospel; it was the "beginning" of what the Lord preached and it was likewise the first thing John included in His message when preaching the Gospel (see on 2 Jn. 5,6). To leave or put away *agape* from this core place was to fall far indeed and required repentance (:5). The attributes of zeal and doctrinal soundness listed in :2 and :3 are seen by many as all that is required to be fairly sure of salvation. But actually they are irrelevant compared to the supreme aspect of *agape* love. "Left" can carry the idea of 'dismissed'. They had come to the mentality that such love could be dismissed as of fundamental importance. The more 'religious' issues of zeal and preserving purity of teaching had assumed such importance in their minds that they had dismissed *agape*, the love of others as the Lord loved us, from its primary place.

The Lord Jesus had "somewhat against" six of these seven ecclesias in the Lycus valley. He had "somewhat against" one ecclesia because they allowed prostitution to go on within the ecclesia. But exactly the same rubric is used here in the letter to Ephesus; the Lord had "somewhat against" them because they had left their first *agape*, they no longer had a spirit of true love within the ecclesia as they once did- even though they were full of zeal in other ways. The similarity of the rubric is surely intended to teach us that lack of true love is just as obnoxious to the Lord Jesus as those other sins which appear so much bigger in human eyes. Indeed, sin is serious, in all its guises. See on 1 Cor. 11:18.

2:5- see on 3 Jn. 10; Rev. 1:20.

*Therefore remember from where you have fallen and repent, and do the first works. Or else, unless you repent, I will come to you and move your candlestick out of its place-* As noted on :4, the supreme place of *agape* love is such that without it, the Spirit would not burn within them. John in his letters has connected such love with the indwelling of the Spirit, the oil within the candlestick. The lack of such love reflected a lack of the spirit or mind of the Lord Jesus; and without that, we are "none of His". So the candlestick was no longer burning; which is why the Lord spoke of removing it, because it had gone out and was just useless clutter. Thus is pointed up an utterly fundamental point: that doctrinal purity and religious zeal, including exclusion of false teaching, is not the same thing as being in fellowship with the Lord. Without love, the spirit of Christ, we are just religious clutter, a candlestick with no oil lamp burning in it. The huge "fall" spoken of here uses the same word as in Gal. 5:4, where the Galatians 'fell' from grace because of Judaist influence. And we suggest the same influence was at work here in Ephesus.

Rev. 2:5 does not tell the sound members of the ecclesias to disfellowship those who had not done "the first works". The "first works" of Ephesus were her "first love" (*agape*). The Lord is using "works" here (as often in the New Testament) to refer to attitudes- Ephesus were doing all the right actions, but the "work" of a loving mind was missing. Note a selection of

passages where "works" refers to abstract spiritual fruits like faith, rather than to physical actions: Jn. 6:29; 8:39; Prov. 12:22 LXX; Rom. 2:15; Col. 1:10,11; 2 Jn. 11,7; Rev. 2:6 cp. 15. And that loving mind would naturally be manifest in "works".

Notice the end-time language found throughout the letters to the seven Ecclesias:

**Ephesus:** repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly. (2:5)

**Pergamos:** Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. (2:16)

**Thyatira:** Behold, I will cast her [Jezebel] into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. (2:22, 25)

**Sardis:** If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. (3:3)

**Philadelphia:** Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly. (3:10-11)

**Laodicea:** Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. (3:20)

This is initially speaking of the state of the ecclesias before AD 70. But it is also a prophecy of the end time condition of the ecclesia churches. We can therefore conclude that the various problems and states of spirituality described in these letters looks forward to that of the last days. Between the seven churches here mentioned, we have a picture of the wider state of affairs in the body of believers at the time of the Lord's return.

2:6 *But this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate-* 'Nicolas' means literally 'victory of the people', and that is roughly the meaning of 'Balaam', who is elsewhere used in the letters as representative of the Judaist false teachers. Although the Lord effectively tells them that their lack of love will lead to their condemnation unless they repent, He still notes their positive points. And we see a huge measure of Him as a person in that. To even note the positive in those who had left His love, their first love. But perhaps the Lord is listing all their apparently good points to highlight and point up their major inadequacy- for lack of love meant that all these apparently positive points had no final meaning.

2:7 *He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* The Lord is "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). The comforter, the gift of the Spirit, was effectively the Lord personally. His physical absence was made good by the presence of the Spirit. The Comforter was to teach them (see on Jn. 14:18). So the idea behind "He that has an ear, let him hear... the Spirit" may be an appeal to those who had received the Comforter to actually listen to what it was teaching them. The primary speaker of the letters to the churches was the Angel representing the Lord- the Angel Gabriel? But they were actually from the Lord Jesus Christ, "The Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17 RV). The one special Angel in the midst of the Cherubim in the Old Testament visions of Ezekiel 1 would then represent the Son of Man ("The Lord the Spirit") in the midst of the lightstands (Rev. 1:13) and the lamb on the throne surrounded by Angels in the four living creatures of Rev. 4 and 5. The Lord Jesus didn't personally pre-exist, but the idea of Him was perhaps represented in Old Testament times by an Angel.

*To him that overcomes, I will permit him to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God-* We see here how the Lord Jesus functions as His Father, without being God in a Trinitarian sense. For now *He* has the authority to permit man back into the garden. There is much language of both judgment and blessing used in the letters; and nearly all of it can have

a present as well as a future application. For in John, the Lord so often insisted that eternal life was given by Him now, in the sense of the gift of the Spirit of His life into the hearts of believers; and thereby they could live now the life which they shall eternally live. And in John 6 He predicated that eternal life upon eating Him. "The tree" is the same word used of His cross. And it can be argued that He was effectively crucified in a garden, for again it is John who notes that He was buried in a garden "in the place where he was crucified" (Jn. 19:41). The association of that garden with the "Paradise" of Eden restored was clearly in the Lord's mind on the cross, when He assured the repentant thief that he would indeed be with Him "in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). He saw that miserable crucifixion field as part of the future "paradise"; He was effectively assuring the thief 'You and I will be here in this very place again- in My Kingdom, when Eden is restored, and this garden where we are dying is part of the Kingdom restored on earth'. So the Lord saw in that thief the representative of all who shall "overcome"; overcome their doubt about the Lord's grace and fear that their sins are too great a barrier between Him and themselves.

*2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write these things: The first and the last, who was dead and lived again, says-* Again, the Lord is presented as Lord of time. His death was the beginning ["first"] and not an end; His living again is "the last", in that sense, the end of 'time' as we know it, for He lives for ever. For the significance of "write", see on 1:19.

*2:9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich!) and the blasphemy of those that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan-* As noted on 1 Jn. 4:1 and elsewhere, the main enemy of the early churches were the Judaist infiltrators who came in under the guise of being Christian brethren (Gal. 2:4). There was an entire system, the Satan / adversary, consciously seeking to destroy the Christian movement. Exclusion from the synagogue system was the punishment for confessing the Lord Jesus (Jn. 9:22), and this meant economic exclusion, unable to buy or sell. Hence their poverty, and tribulation orchestrated by these Jewish infiltrators. They typically operated by making false accusation against the Christian [in this sense acting as a devil, which means 'false accuser'], and then getting local Gentile civil powers to punish the Christians, just as they did with the Lord.

"Satan" often refers to the Jewish and Roman adversaries of the church in the first century. There is no indication here that there was a super-human being working through those Roman and Jewish systems. If it is argued that those systems received power and direction from the Devil in the sense of a super-human being to persecute the church, it must be remembered that the Lord Jesus told the Roman governor: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above", i.e. from God (Jn. 19:11). Thus it is God, not the Devil, who gives power to human governments to persecute His people, as He gave them power to do so to His Son. "The most high rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:32). Thus God was ultimately the power behind the Roman Satan, or system, that was persecuting the Christians in the first century.

*2:10 Do not fear the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison, you may have tribulation ten days-* The Devil that gave the ecclesia at Smyrna "tribulation ten days" was clearly the Romans. It was only they who could cast them into prison. The casting into prison (place of punishment), tribulation and afterwards being honoured (physical reward), recalls the experiences of Joseph and Daniel who were persecuted by the civil powers of Egypt and Babylon, as those at Smyrna were by the civil powers of the Roman "Devil". It has been shown that there were several ten-year periods of

special persecutions of Christians in the Smyrna area: under Domitian, A.D. 81–91; under Trajan, 107–117 and under Diocletian, 303–313. The Septuagint in places uses the term *diabolos*, false accuser, to translate the Hebrew ‘Satan’. ‘Satan’ therefore carried the sense of both an adversary and also a false accuser. “The synagogue of Satan” in Smyrna may well refer to not only Jewish adversarial opposition to the Christians, but also that they falsely accused them to the Roman authorities. There could also be the suggestion that the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna was in fact working with the ‘Satan’, the Roman empire, against the Christians. Kraybill considers that the phrase “synagogue of Satan” is “a way of highlighting commercial or political relationships some Jews had with Rome”. He also gives evidence that Jews in the provinces of the empire cooperated with the Roman government in order to ensure that they continued benefiting from the Roman legislation that exempted Jews from doing military service and paying taxes to the imperial cult (J. Nelson Kraybill, *The Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) pp. 170, 186). In Domitian’s time, a tax was levied to support the emperor and the imperial cult. Jews were exempted from this, and Christians refused to pay it. The “synagogue of Satan” in Smyrna loudly “say they are Jews” (Rev. 2:9), in order to avoid this tax and get benefits from the Roman empire at the time; but probably denounced the Christians to the Roman ‘Satan’ because of their refusal to pay that tax. So “synagogue of Satan... who say they are Jews but are not” was an appropriate description of them (Mark Bredin, ‘The Synagogue of Satan Accusation in Revelation 2:9’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* Vol. 28 No. 4 (Winter 1999) pp. 160–164).

The Devil and Satan in the New Testament often refer to the political and social power of the Jewish or Roman systems. Thus we read of the Devil throwing believers into prison (Rev. 2:10), referring to the Roman authorities imprisoning believers. In this same context we read of the church in Pergamos being situated where Satan’s throne, was – i.e. the place of governorship for a Roman colony in Pergamos, where there was also a group of believers. We cannot say that Satan himself, if he exists, personally had a throne in Pergamos. The Bible repeatedly stresses that human political authority, civil authorities etc. are God given, deriving their power from Him (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17); never are they said to derive their authority from ‘Satan’. Yet they can be called ‘Satan’ in that they are adversarial at times to His people.

The allusion is to Luke 21:12 concerning the latter-day tribulation. "Some of you" may correspond to "some of you shall they cause to be put to death" (Luke 21:16), seeing that they are exhorted to be "faithful unto death". The prison tribulation would be for "ten days... and I will give unto you a crown". This points back to Daniel's 'trial' of ten days (Dan. 1:12), and his later going into prison and emerging to receive a crown. Daniel's 'devil' was Babylon, and the 'devil' of Rev. 2:10 refers to a like power in the last days. The idea of ten days of affliction suggests the 10 days of self-examination and affliction of souls before the day of Atonement- as if the purpose of the final tribulation is to evoke self-examination and repentance in preparation for the High Priest's appearing on the Day of Atonement.

There is the possibility that some may be preserved from the tribulation: "You *may* have tribulation ten days". This will be "because you have kept the word of my patience" (Rev. 3:10). Others will suffer, and even die, but are assured of salvation if they respond to the trials properly. There may be a similar meaning behind Is. 26:20: "Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you (i.e. pray intensely- 2 Kings 4:33): hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast". However, this primarily refers to the deliverance of Israel from Assyria in Hezekiah's time; and the hiding in



chambers in Jerusalem while surrounded by the terrifying Assyrian army was hardly the quiet get out we might imagine this verse offers. However, it seems from the Olivet prophecy that the household *will* go through this time of trouble. The fact it is in some sense not required if we are spiritual enough indicates that the household will be weak in the last days- and therefore we will need it.

There are all manner of possible futures envisaged within God's plans, because He so respects human freewill. This explains the conditional element in prophecies, and in this case the possibility of persecution for some at some points in time. The horn of Dan. 7:21 "prevailed against" the saints. "Prevailed" here can mean 'could prevail' implying that this persecution could be avoided (cp. "You may have tribulation"). Likewise the Hebrew for "make war" can mean 'approached to make war'. Thus it may be possible for the saints to avoid the persecution in some way, e.g. by their "holy way of life" (2 Pet.3:8) shortening the days of tribulation. The fact that the prophecies speak as if there will be persecution may suggest that there will not be sufficient effort in this direction for all the saints to be saved from this. See on 3:10.

*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life-* For all the encouragement that the Father and Son are ultimately in control, death under persecution was still a real possibility. But the reward would be "the crown of life". This may refer to the *stephanos* given to the victor in a race; but the word is also used about such wreaths given to guests at a wedding, or to the bride herself. The imagery of marriage suppers is far more common in Revelation than that of running an Olympic race.

2:11 *He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death-* For "he that has an ear, let him hear..." see on 2:7.

2:12 *And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things says he that has the sharp two-edged sword-* As noted on 1:16, such language is appropriate to the Lord in the day of His final judgment. But effectively, judgment is now; the Lord is not passive toward human behaviour, and the opening of books at the last day should not imply that He is not now our immediate and insistent judge. The sword will be used in judgment of enemies; so it is as if the Lord is standing in judgment over the churches right now, and was looking to severely judge the church in question.

2:13- see on 1 Cor. 15:10.

*I know where you live, where Satan's throne is, yet you remained loyal to my name and did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells-* The Lord is fully aware of our situations. And whatever judgment He makes, even of condemnation (see on :12), that judgment is made taking into full account past evidence of spirituality and commitment, as well as with total knowledge of all our surrounding environmental factors.

Pergamos being "where Satan's seat (throne) is", shows that the Satan referred to is not a personal super-human being. If it is, then his throne was literally at Pergamos, for all to see. It has been shown that the Roman administration of the area was based here, thus the Lord Jesus commends the ecclesia for holding to the Truth, despite being in close proximity to the source of persecution. Thus "Satan" again refers to the Roman authorities. It is also significant that a huge throne dedicated to the Greek gods has been discovered there.

Pergamon was the first city in Asia to have a temple devoted to emperor worship (I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) p. 456). However it must also be noted that Pergamon was a centre for snake worship associated with the shrine of Asclepius (J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1976) p. 228). Revelation speaks of 'Satan', the adversary, as being characterized by the serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). "Satan's throne" may also be a reference to the altar of Zeus in Pergamon. or the special throne-seat of Dionysus in the theatre there. "The city featured various Pagan sites of worship, including a monumental altar to Zeus, and a temple dedicated to Augustus and Rome, which served as the centre of the cult of the Roman Emperor in Asia Minor. Pergamum was in fact the capital of the Roman Province of Asia" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 144).

However, we must bear in mind that the 'satan' described in the New Testament and Revelation is often Jewish and not pagan. It was Jewish opposition to the Christians which led to the local Roman authorities acting against them, as happened with the Lord and Paul. It may be also that there was in Pergamos some centre of Jewish opposition.

The faithful group who existed "even where satan's seat is" may point forward to the existence of an ecclesia at the very headquarters of the final satan/beast. For the situation in the seven churches represents how things will be in the last time. Our suggestion elsewhere that some faithful natural Jews would be taken to such a place, e.g. a rebuilt 'Babylon', would make this possible.

2:14 *But I have a few things against you, because you have there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication-* Balaam was an apostate Jew, who sought to collaborate with the surrounding Gentile powers in order to bring Israel down. He did so by getting Israel to sin sexually by sleeping with cult prostitutes as a sign of their devotion to Gentile idols, knowing this would trigger God's displeasure with Israel, hoping it would mean the withdrawal of His blessing and protection of them. Twice it is emphasized that the false teachers will lead spiritual Israel into the worship of idols, after the pattern of Balaam and Jezebel (:14,20). Both of these advocated the use of the idols of the surrounding nations for political purposes, whilst apparently supporting the true worship of Yahweh at the same time. The false teaching in the early churches was very similar. As noted on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy 2, the use of cult prostitutes entered the Christian churches. The idol worship and prostitution were therefore part of the same scene and not two separate issues. The mix of paganism and Christianity was therefore similar to the mix of Yahweh worship with paganism advocated by Balaam. And again, the source of the problem was Judaist infiltration.

Israel were on the very borders of entering the land when they succumbed to Balaam's false teaching, and the new Israel of the last days, on the brink of the Kingdom, will face and may fail a like temptation. As Balaam well understood, the way to break the strength of a fundamentalist religious movement is to morally corrupt them. The spirit of sexual permissiveness which is in this Sodom-like world of the last days, is evidently affecting the brotherhood of our age.

It may be that the Islamic powers will impose the worship of Islam upon natural Israel and perhaps upon the Western world, and may use their oil stranglehold to make the rest of the world persecute any pro-Jewish religions who will not offer a nominal acceptance of Islam.

This would pressurize Christian churches to make similar compromises with their surrounding non-Christian world.

2:15 *So have you also some that hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*- "Nicolas" has a similar meaning to 'Balaam', 'victory of the people'. However precisely this group were, they would have been advocating the same mix of Christianity with paganism as noted on :14. *Niko*, to overcome, is a word often used in these letters to characterize the faithful as 'overcomers'. The Nicolaitans were therefore framing themselves in spiritual terms when in fact they were the very opposite. And we will meet this kind of idea later in Revelation, where e.g. the whore is described with terminology appropriate to the priestly cult, and Babylon appears as Jerusalem.

2:16- see on Rev. 1:20.

*Therefore repent, or else I will come to you quickly, and I will make war against those with the sword of my mouth*- As noted on :12, the language of latter day judgment is applied to situations now. The Lord judges now; His coming quickly or suddenly can refer to His coming in judgment, rather than His second coming. Even the final word of Revelation 22:12 that the Lord is coming quickly can be read as a connection back to this statement here. For the first recipients of Revelation, the Lord's coming was going to be sudden in that like a thief in the night, He would come in judgment in ways they did not expect. The reference may be to the events of AD70, although these would not have unduly affected Jewish Christian groups in places like Pergamos. Perhaps rather the reference may be to Nero's sudden announcement of persecution against Christians. Or to some unrecorded intervention of the Lord in judging them.

Again we must emphasize that the language of making war (19:11) with the sword of His mouth is all appropriate to His second coming. But the essence of that judgment is now. There are clear connections between the rod of final judgment and the word / mouth of God. Ez. 21:9,10 equates the sword with the rod of the Lord Jesus Christ: "A sword is sharpened... it is the rod of My Son" (AVmg.). The sword is a clear symbol of the word of God's judgment (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:21). Is. 11:4 confirms this link between the judgment word of the Lord Jesus and His rod: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked". Ps. 2:9 shows the power of this word / rod: "You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel". Ps. 110:2 describes the rod of Christ's strength being sent out of Zion to enable Him to rule the world; Is. 2:3 envisages the judgment word of the Lord Jesus going out from Zion. However, in all these cases the rod does not just mean spoken words and mental understanding, but also refers to the physical punishments to be seen in the last days. Thus Micah pleads with Israel to see that God's Hand was behind their present distresses, which were effectively God's word spoken to them: "The Lord's voice cries unto the city... *hear* the rod, and who has appointed it" (Mic. 6:9). And so here the Lord warned Pergamos that unless they repented- i.e. obeyed His word- He would come and fight against them.

There is a significant amount of language used in the letters of Rev. 2 and 3 which has unmistakable reference to the final 'coming' of the Lord. This must have some application to the second coming, and/or A.D. 70. This means that the letters must also be indicative of the state of the latter-day ecclesias. No less than a significant seven times in the letters do we read of Christ 'coming' to the believers (Rev. 2:5,16,25; 3:3, 10,11,20). "I will come unto you

quickly... I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (2:5,23) is language found in Mt. 16:27 and Rev. 22:12, also concerning the second coming: "I come quickly... to give every man according as his work shall be". The Lord's coming "unto you quickly" has particular aptness when this is understood as being addressed to believers living on the brink of the second coming.

2:17- see on Jn. 1:14; 1 Tim. 6:19.

*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* see on 2:7.

*To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna-* Here we have another example of allusion to Jewish legend. It suggests that the churches addressed were known to John whose Gospel was clearly aimed at Jews; they probably included his converts. Hence the allusions to Jewish terminology that would have been inappropriate if largely Gentile converts were being addressed. The Lord Jesus speaks of giving His people "of the hidden manna" – referring to the myth that Jeremiah had hidden a golden jar of manna in the Holy of Holies at the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, which then ascended to Heaven and is to return with Messiah. The Lord doesn't correct that myth, as He doesn't correct misunderstandings about demons– He as it were runs with it and uses it as a symbol to describe the reward He will bring. He adds no footnote to the effect 'Now do understand, this is myth, that jar never really ascended to Heaven nor will it come floating back through the skies one day'. Perhaps this is why the New Testament often quotes the Septuagint text, even where it incorrectly renders the Hebrew original – because God is not so paranoid as to feel bound to only deal in the language of strictly literal truths. If first century people were familiar with the Septuagint, even if it is a poor translation of the Hebrew original in places– well OK, God was willing to run with that *in order to engage with people in their language*.

*And I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it-* It has been suggested that this refers to a custom of writing a name on a stone, breaking the stone in half at random, and each friend keeping one half. The half stone would only fit exactly with the other half stone, and when the friends met in the future, they would fit the stones together as proof of their earlier relationship. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will be in that sense private and unenterable. Bible characters often have epithets in God's record of them- Judas who betrayed, Jeroboam who made Israel sin. We will be given such a name / summation of our relationship with the Lord in the Kingdom. Nobody else knows / understands / appreciates this name. This is a clear statement that other believers cannot enter into the personal relationship between a man and his God. Likewise, none of us can know the name which was written on the Lord Jesus (Rev. 19:12). None of us will ever quite be able to enter into the nature of the relationship between Father and Son. If we could, He would not be our Lord. Paul possibly expresses the same idea of an unenterable relationship in 1 Cor. 2:15: "He that is spiritual discerneth all things (about God), yet he himself is discerned of no man" (AVmg.). Our real spiritual being is a "hidden man" (1 Pet. 3:4).

Eating the hidden manna is to be paralleled with being given the stone. The context implies this will be done at the day of judgment. According to a number of commentators, a white stone was laid down by the judge as a sign of acquittal and acceptance. The Lord would therefore be implying that after our encounter at the judgment, there will be an ongoing relationship in the Kingdom of God between us, a locking together of stones which no-one

else possesses. The white stone is also parallel to the white, stone-looking manna of the wilderness years (Ex. 16:14,23; Num. 11:7). The reward we will be given in the Kingdom will be our spiritual food, to be eaten 'daily' throughout the Kingdom. Israel were to eat on the seventh day (a type of the Kingdom) the manna which they had gathered and prepared on the sixth day. The manna is a symbol of God's word as expressed in Christ (Jn. 6). Biblically, a name refers to personality and character. The new name which no one else knows thus refers to the reward "prepared" for us individually, the new personality which we will be in the Kingdom, the room in the Father's house prepared for each of us (Jn. 14:1). This latter idea alludes to the way that there were chambers around the temple named after individuals (e.g. Ezra 10:6). We will *each* have our own chamber, in this figure. This new personality will be written on the manna / stone, it will be the result of our own very personal distilling of the essence of God's word. The concept of a name written on a stone sends the mind back to the way in which the names of the tribes of Israel were written on the stones of the breastplate, each reflecting a different aspect of the light of God's glory (Ex. 28:17). We will do this through our personal understanding of and response to God's word. It is a comforting yet sobering thought that the Lord sees us as 'names'; not just as people. Biblically, the name speaks of the character. When He says He will confess us before the Father (Mt. 10:32), He means He will confess our name before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

We will relate to each other in terms of our spiritual characteristics. We will each have a name or character which is individual to us. We will relate to each other not by names as pieces of language, but by reason of the characteristics which they speak of. To relate to each other for ever as we do now, in human terms, would be totally unfulfilling. There is an urgent need for us to develop a spiritual aspect to our relationships now, especially between husbands and wives, parents and children.

Compare the engraving on the stone "which no man knows" with the Urim and Thummim stones; the engraving upon them would not have been known to anyone except the High Priest, who perhaps saw them once per year in the Most Holy. Rev. 2:17 also speaks of the "hidden manna", hidden in the Most Holy. It would fit the context if the "white stone" refers to the Urim and Thummim. Alternatively, the reference may be to the "white stone" of the tables of the covenant. The new name written upon them would then connect with the covenant which God writes on the believer's heart as part of the new covenant: "I will put my law in their inward (cp. "hidden") parts, and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:3). Whilst the terms of the covenant are the same for each believer, the personal promise of the

Kingdom is something which no other person can enter into. So we should never be 'bored' with hearing about the basic Gospel, the promises which comprise that covenant.

2:18 *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like to burnished bronze-* The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration. But the immediate point here is that the Lord who will stand in latter day judgment stands in judgment on His church right now. Judgment in essence is now.

2:19 *I know your works and your love, faith, ministry and patience; and that your last works are more than the first-* There was real spiritual progress here; and yet we see how legitimate spirituality can sadly co-exist with serious unspirituality, both within the church and within individuals. For the "nevertheless..." of :20 is serious indeed.

2:20 *But I have this against you: you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols-* "The woman Jezebel" in some manuscripts and RVmg. reads "Your wife Jezebel", as if perhaps the wife of the 'Angel', the pastor of the group, is in view. This would be likening this element of the ecclesia to weak-willed Ahab. The fornication / use of prostitutes and eating of idol food are not two separate things; they are part of the same issue of importing elements of the surrounding pagan cults into the Christian church, whereby at the breaking of bread there was also eating of idol food and sleeping with cult prostitutes. As noted on 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Tim. 2, this was far from the only church which had these problems.

Jezebel teaching believers to commit fornication is the language later to be used concerning Babylon: a prostitute encouraging fornication. This connection suggests that the false teachers within the latter day church will be connected with political 'Babylon' and the beast. The similarities between the "man of sin" within the church and the beast / little horn teach the same thing.

2:21 *And I gave her time that she should repent, and she does not want to repent of her fornication-* Jezebel in the first century, and her equivalent in the last days, will be given "time to repent of... fornication", but they will not take up the offer. This "space" is interpreted by John Thomas as the 1260-day period, which would appear reasonable. I have elsewhere applied this to the tribulation period. The inference is that the state of fornication exists within the churches *before* the tribulation begins, and that the tribulation of that period is designed to bring about repentance.

Thus they will be given a period to repent, the beginning of which will be at the time when the saints first realize that the Lord is about to return (cp. the virgins starting to go forth, Mt. 25:1).

2:22 *Behold, I will cast her into a bed, into great tribulation, and those that commit adultery*

*with her-unless they repent of their works-* Perhaps a 'bed of sickness' is appropriate punishment for her behaviour in 'bed'. We see here how God's plans are open ended. If this element refuse to repent, then they would have "great tribulation". If they repent, then they will not need to pass through it. We noted the same on :10. Yet Jezebel was given space to repent but didn't, therefore judgment was pronounced; but even then, *if* she repented, she wouldn't be punished. This is simply the eagerness of God for human repentance.

*2:23 And I will strike her children dead-* John's letters use "children" to mean converts or those over whom a person has pastoral authority. This lends support to the impression that Jezebel was in the leadership of the church, see on :20. This could have been a threat of literal death, just as Ananias and Saphira were smitten with death. Or the reference could be to the second death at the last day, the judgment for which was given by the Lord in this life when He perceived their refusal to repent.

*And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will repay each of you as your works deserve-* "I am... and I will..." alludes to the Lord's manifestation of the Yahweh Name, He who is, was and will be. And He is *now* (Gk.) ordained as judge of living and dead (Acts 10:42)- and we should preach Him as such. He *is* now the judge of the dead in the sense that His very being and victory is in itself the judgment of all men. Those who reject His message right now are judging themselves. Note the parallel here between mind and works; this was at the core of the Lord's doctrine of the Kingdom, that the thought is seen by Him as the action. The Lord Jesus continually searches our hearts or spirit, in His function as "the Lord the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:10; 2 Cor. 3:18). The extent to which this is true will be manifested in the Lord's final judgment.

*2:24 But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as do not have this teaching, who do not know the so-called deep things of Satan: I will not impose any other burden-* The faithful element at Thyatira were told that they had "none other burden" than to keep themselves separate from "the depths of satan" taught by the false teachers among them. The absence of any command to immediately withdraw fellowship from these people in the run up to AD70, but rather to concentrate upon one's own continuing to hold true doctrine, fits in with the parable of the tares. There is certainly no truth to the idea of guilt by association or a closed table, or the Lord would have taught the need for separation.

"The *depths* of satan" indicates that the pressure on the faithful will be subtle; there will be a distinctly academic and sophisticated edge to the wrong teachings that will circulate within the ecclesia. "The depths of Satan as they speak", refers to the false teaching of the Judaizers, the Jewish Satan, who were pretending to offer deeper spiritual understanding through their false doctrine. They spoke evil about deep spiritual things which they did not understand (Jude 10), speaking words which seemed superficially impressive spiritually (Jude 16). The Judaizers' reasonings about keeping the law and worshipping angels, "intruding into those things which he has not seen" (Col. 2:18; i.e. "which they know not", cp. Jude 10, had "a shew of (deep, spiritual) wisdom" (Col. 2:23). There are many other such examples.

*2:25 Apart from that which you have: To hold fast until I come-* It seems that it is God's especial wish that a man conquer some specific human weakness in his life. If he succeeds in this, God may make concessions to his other areas of human weakness. It seems that the Thyatiran believers had none other burden put upon them than to resist the teaching and practice of the "woman Jezebel" amongst them- although it would seem there were other 'burdens' which the Lord *could* have put on them.

*2:26 And he that overcomes, and he that keeps my works to the end, to him will I give authority over the nations-* "Works" have featured twice in this letter. They are commended for their "works" (:19), but must repent of their bad works of allowing Jezebel to teach fornication (:21), knowing the Lord will judge according to our works (:23). But the key is to keep [perhaps, 'keep hold of' as in :25] the works of the Lord Jesus. For salvation is not of our works, but of trust in Him and having His righteousness imputed to us.

This has a specifically last days relevance: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto *the end*, to him will I give power over the nations" – "the end" being the second coming. Surely the Lord is referring back to his comment that in the final tribulation period, he who endures to "the end" of the period will be saved (Mt. 10:22)- as the one who comes to the end of the days in Dan. 12 is blessed. Enduring to the end therefore means keeping (guarding, doctrinally) the works of Christ- holding on to the One Faith until the end. This evidently won't be as simple as it sounds. The works are "His" works, and may refer to obeying the great commission in taking the knowledge of Him to all the world in the last days. This reference to the great commission is confirmed by the comment that the reward will be to receive power / authority over the nations- the very phrase used in Mt. 28:18 about how the Lord has received just this, and therefore we are to go to all nations with the Gospel and baptize people. All that is true of the Lord is to be true of us; if we keep *His* works rather than our own works, then the gift of "all power" to Him over the nations is also true for us.

*2:27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron-* The allusion is to Psalm 2 which is clearly about the future Kingdom on earth. Yet the Psalm is given a first century fulfilment in Acts 4:24-28. The same prophecy has multiple fulfilments; and that is exactly what we find in the book of Revelation. As the Lord will rule the world with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9) and brake the nations to powder at His return (Dan. 2:44), so will each of those in Him. And notice how Ps. 2:1,2, a prophecy about opposition to Jesus personally, is appropriated to those who preach Him, because they are in Him (Acts 4:25,26).

The Lord Jesus will rule, or shepherd (Gk.) His enemies with a rod of iron. He can somehow both shepherd and crush at the same time. Our relationship with Him is a reflection of these two aspects of His character. Perhaps the idea here is that His punishment of sinners is even then an attempt to shepherd them to be His sheep.

*As the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces; as I also have received from my Father-* The unbelieving will be broken to shivers, "as the vessels of a potter". But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (Jer. 18:4-6; 19:11). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind, as a potter's vessel. Yet this is exactly the language of Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter destruction. The apostate amongst Israel will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). The faithful will have some kind of part in the judgment of the systems which persecuted them, be they Jewish or Gentile.

The structure of the book of Revelation reflects this theme- the first series of visions are of judgments on God's people Israel, whilst the second part of the book is judgments upon the



Gentile powers of Rome / Babylon [however we wish to interpret them]. Likewise the plagues upon Egypt recorded in Ex. 7-10 are frequently alluded to in later Scripture concerning the judgments upon the apostate people of God. Quite simply, God's rejected people suffer the judgments of this world.

*2:28 And I will give him the morning star-* The morning star is the Lord Jesus personally (22:16); as demonstrated in the previous verses, all the Lord's titles, works and functions are ours if we are in Him. The angels of the churches are likened to stars (1:20), held tightly in the Lord's hand. The Lord is stressing His personal identity with His people; they are stars, as He is. And He will give us Himself, He will be all in all within us, as in essence He is now through the Spirit. This is the reference of 2 Pet. 1:19, where the day star arises in our hearts at His return. The Lord likened the manna to Himself, which He gave us personally to eat, to absorb Him into ourselves (Jn. 6:31-33). So the idea of fully giving of Himself into us at the last day should not be strange, at least to any reader of John's writings who had already read John's gospel. For there we find frequently taught the idea of taking the Lord Jesus personally into us, His very self into our very selves, His spirit and life into ours.

The Lord's return in glory will be as the arising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The morning star, or Venus, arises whilst it is still dark, and is the herald of the sunrise. Perhaps there is some reference here to the idea that the faithful will have some portent of the Lord's coming just before it happens; perhaps through persecution, or because the day star arises *in our hearts* before His return (2 Pet. 1:19).

There was something radical in the association of the Lord Jesus with Venus, and the promise of this title to all His followers. For Julius Caesar, and other Caesars, had encourage the cult of Venus worship on the basis that the Caesars were descended from Venus and were the incarnations of Venus on earth. To apply their titles to the Lord Jesus and His followers was a radical form of rebellion against the norms and values of the society in which they lived; just as we are to be likewise rebels.

*2:29 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* see on 2:7.

## CHAPTER 3

*3:1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things says he that has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works-* Seven is the number of totality. The seven stars refer to the angels of the churches. The total power of the Spirit is in the Lord's hand to be used for the care and development of His churches, His people. There is infinite potential power available; and His Spirit is essentially His mind, and not just His power. He wishes our spirituality, as we surely do. And yet God's knowledge is attained through His omnipresent Spirit; He thereby has totality of knowledge and thereby of judgment. God makes His Angels Spirits; perhaps mechanically, if you wish, His presence and power is articulated through the ministry of the Angels. This would be why :5 follows on in the context of the Angels and Jesus uniting to declare our verdict at the judgment: "I will confess his name before my Father, and before His Angels".

*You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead-* The name or reputation of being alive when they were spiritually dead is the very inversion of what is true of the Lord. His Name amongst men is achieved because He was dead but is now alive, alive in His people through the gift of His Spirit which many of them were now in denial of.

3:2 – see on Rev. 1:20.

*Be watchful and establish the things that remain, which are ready to die-* The 'things that remained' uses the same word used for 'the remnant'; He has just used it of the faithful remnant in Thyatira (2:24). The 'angel', the eldership on earth who were represented by Divine Angels in the Heavenly throne room, were bidden strengthen that remnant, for even that was about to spiritually die. The 'you' referenced in "your works" therefore refers to the angel / eldership. They had not watched, i.e. watched out for, the spiritual wellbeing of their flock.

I have explained earlier that the seven churches here provide a picture of how the churches will be in the last days before the Lord's return. The Olivet prophecy, like the Lord's letters, gives a huge emphasis on the need to watch in the last days (e.g. Mk. 13:5,9,23,33,35,37). The watching is for the safety of the house against the 'thieves' of false teachers; we are each the porter, with the responsibility for the rest of the household on our shoulders (Mk. 13:34,35). Throughout the Lord's letters there is this same pointed emphasis upon the need to watch. The idea of the remnant being "ready to die" immediately suggests the parable of the virgins, whom we have portrayed as struggling to keep the flame of real faith from dying away. Seeing that the majority of Sardis are pronounced as "dead" (3:1), this encouragement to keep alive what was about to die can be read as a call to each of the faithful in the last days to not only keep their own faith alive, but to make every effort to keep alive those who appear fatally ill. This command presumes that it will be evident to the faithful what constitutes spiritual life and death. As our experience of the last days goes on, the difference between wheat and tares becomes increasingly marked - without having to anticipate the separation that will come at harvest. "Be watchful" is in the context of strengthening what remains, providing further proof that the command to watch in the last days fundamentally concerns watching over the state of the ecclesia and one's own faith, rather than 'watching' the political state of the world. It seems that for generations, we have thought that 'watching' meant reading 'Signs of the times' articles which were actually no more than a running commentary on the state of the world. The Hebrew word translated "watch" is also rendered "to take heed to oneself". The Hebrew word has the same idea. Thus David spoke of his *soul* watching (Ps.

130:5,6). Habakkuk 'watched' for what God's word really said (Hab. 2:1); God watches over things in the sense of being sensitive to them (Jer. 31:28 Heb.). This Old Testament background to the idea of watching carries through to the NT. It's because we *don't* know the time that we are commanded to watch- not 'signs of the times', because we don't know the time; but rather, to watch ourselves. Thus Acts 20:31 speaks of watching in the sense of being aware of the possibility of personal and collective apostasy. In 1 Cor. 16:31, watching means to stand fast in the One Faith; in Eph. 6:18 and 1 Thess. 5:6,11 it refers to praying for each other spiritually. In the last days, many brethren will turn away, Paul warned Timothy, but by contrast "*you* - watch" (2 Tim. 4:5). If we watch, both ourselves and others, the Lord's return will not be like a thief for us (Rev. 3:3). Thus watching is a sign of our acceptance by the Lord (Lk. 12:37). Yet *watching* our doctrine and way of life, realizing the real danger of mass latter day apostasy, is increasingly unpopular.

*For I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God-* The Lord is right now in the presence or "sight" of God, representing us before Him. And He found Himself having to represent the works of these believers to the Father, and He did not 'find' them complete; they were an appearance of religious activity rather than being the works done in faith and motivated by grace which the Father seeks.

3:3- see on Jud. 16:20.

*Therefore remember how you have received-* They are bidden recall their first conversion; at that time, believers 'receive' the Spirit (s.w. Jn. 14:17; 20:22; Gal. 3:2,14; 1 Jn. 2:27). To receive Jesus as Christ is to receive His Spirit (Jn. 1:12,16). The Corinthians received the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" at the time Paul wrote 1 Cor. 3:1. These believers were likewise being asked to remember the Spirit gift received, and to allow it to function within them.

*And did once hear and keep it, and repent-* They needed to "keep" the Spirit they had been given. The idea of 'keeping' does not solely refer to obedience to commandments, but to allow the Lord's word, His gifted Spirit, to abide / remain within them.

*Therefore if you shall not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall not know what time I will come upon you-* The watching in view is not simply of themselves but of others; see on :2. "I will come as a thief" is an evident allusion to 1 Thess. 5:2 concerning the thief-like coming of Christ to the unworthy in the latter-day church. "You shall not know what time I will come upon you" implies that they *should* have 'known the hour'. This probably continues the allusions to 1 Thess. 5 - this time to :1: "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you (faithful ones). For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (AV). 1 Thess. 5:1,2 in turn alludes to Mt. 24:43 (R.V.): "But this ye know" that "the goodman of the house" would have watched if he knew when the thief would come. The wise at Thessalonica 'knowing' the times and seasons of the thief's coming therefore implies that their 'knowledge' was in terms of appreciating what the spiritual trials of the last days would be like. Rev. 3:3 brings all these strands together in warning the apostate members of the latter-day ecclesias. Not watching is equated by the Lord with not knowing the time. The evident allusion to the disciples not watching (Mk. 14:37) suggests that if we don't know the time, we will be like them- unprepared when we ought to be on the tiptoe of expectancy. The connection with the disciples also hints that when the Lord told them that they didn't know the time, he was in some sense rebuking them

rather than making a general statement about the impossibility of *ever* knowing the time of his return.

3:4- see on Rev. 2:17.

*But you have a few names in Sardis that did not defile their clothes, and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy-* The Lord refers to His people not simply as 'people' but as "names". The Hebrew idea of a name is that it expresses personality and character. We are not numbers on a screen, but unique persons, known intimately to the Lord. These faithful ones were undefiled by the fact the others in their church were apostate- yet another disproof of any theory of 'guilt by association'. The clothes undefiled refer to the gift of righteousness imputed at baptism abiding; just as the gift of the Spirit received abode with them (:3). "Walk with me" is yet another reminder that the destiny of the believer is to share the Lord's destiny; all that is true of Him is to become true of us. And this includes the idea of being "worthy", which we are not in our own strength, but only on account of being in Him, the worthy one.

Again we must give full weight to the fact that the "few" in Sardis who had not defiled their clothes attended an apostate ecclesia; and yet they are *not* seen as "defiled" by the Lord Jesus. This is proof positive that there is no such thing as guilt by association with erring members of an ecclesia. Those faithful members were not rebuked for not disfellowshipping the others. The Lord's criticism of the ecclesias seems to be that they had allowed false teaching to develop, rather than the fact they hadn't separated from it. Smyrna was an ecclesia which received no criticism at all from the Lord; they weren't rebuked for not disfellowshipping the other local ecclesias who were apostate (Rev. 2:8-11). The elders at Sardis, an ecclesia holding many false teachers, were told to strengthen what remained (the Greek is usually used regarding people)- they were to strengthen the faithful minority, but nothing was said about withdrawing from them because they fellowshiped weak brethren.

3:5- see on 1 Cor. 4:9; Rev. 2:17.

*He that overcomes shall thus be dressed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life-* "Thus be dressed" refers to the way that the Lord who spoke these words was at that very time dressed in white garments; they were to share His status, all that is true of Him is to become true of all in Him.

Blotting out of the book of life suggests that individuals were originally included in the plan for eternity, but are removed. Moses asking to be removed from that book is therefore a mark of his extreme love for Israel; willing to sacrifice his place in eternity for them. God did not accept this kind of substitutionary atonement, however. I have suggested that John wrote and spoke his gospel to appeal to his fellow Jews; and his letters were written to his converts. Revelation was perhaps also primarily intended for Jewish converts, and the initial references to the 'satan' refer to the Judaist conspiracy to ween his converts back to the synagogue. The idea of our names remaining in the book of life would have suggested to a Jewish audience that we'll all be like Moses was at the end, in essence; we'll share his finest hours. Our names will not be blotted out of the book of life, as Moses' wasn't (Ex. 32:32). For Jews, Moses was the acme of spirituality, a spiritual pinnacle they could never realistically attain to. But here they are promised that they are not mere Levites but in Christ, can share the peaks of Moses.

But there is the real possibility of names being removed from the book. This is the greatest tragedy; that a person at one point was on track for eternity, but lost that status. We must do all we can to 'watch out' for others, therefore (see on :2); and never, ever, to make anyone stumble from the way which leads to eternal life.

*And I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels-* As noted on :4, we are 'names' and not numbers; in the Hebraic sense of a name reflecting the sum total of a person's character and being. Who we are as unique persons is confessed before the father; and our names, that code, if you will, which summarizes 'us', is recorded eternally in the book of life. This points up the eternal importance of personality and spiritual character; for to some degree, who we are today is who we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal. We as persons shall be saved, meaning 'we' shall be immortalized.

*3:6 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* See on 2:7.

*3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says he that is holy, he that is true-* The Lord's essential character is important to establish, because it is He who has the power to eternally open and close the way to eternity in His Kingdom. 'Holy and true' was one of the many titles heaped upon the Caesars, and again the radical, subversive nature of the book of Revelation appears. For the ultimate holy and true one is not Caesar, but the Lord.

*He that has the key of David, he that opens and none shall shut, and that shuts and none opens-* The quotation is from Is. 22:22, where Eliakim is given delegated rulership in David's Kingdom. Perhaps the idea of David having the key to his kingdom alludes to the way that he consciously chose his successor and did not let it pass automatically to his firstborn. But the power to eternally shut and open the Kingdom has been delegated to us, in the sense that if we do not preach to others, or make them stumble from the path, we have closed up the Kingdom to them. The keys of knowledge are in our hands as preachers, and we can thereby open or shut up the Kingdom to men (Mt. 16:19; Lk. 11:52; see on Jn. 20:23). We have just been reminded that a man's name can at one stage be in the book of life, and then be removed; eternity can be closed to a person, as well as opened. The foolish virgins find the door to the Kingdom eternally locked against them. We get a strong sense from this imagery of the future we may miss, and how commitment to the things of the Kingdom logically demands 100% commitment from us.

*3:8 I know your works (behold, I have set before you an open door, which none can shut), you have a little power-* Although no man can shut the door, the Lord can (see on :7). An open door speaks of an opportunity (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). It is the Lord who takes the initiative, opening the door to the Kingdom, by grace. It is for us to respond to His initiatives. Their "little power / strength" could imply that it could have been far stronger; but all the same, the Lord commends and accepts them. There are ranges of response to the Lord, and He is willing to accept that some ground will yield more harvest to His glory than others. Some work harder and longer in the vineyard than others; but all receive the penny of salvation.

*And did keep my word and did not deny my name-* The aorist suggests this keeping of the Lord's *logos* was at a particular time in the past. They had presumably been called upon to deny His Name and stop abiding in His "word". And they had refused. This could have referred to the local Jewish synagogue expelling them (Jn. 9:22), with the associated

economic and social isolation which ensued for a diaspora Jew. Or in the Gentile context, it could have referred to exclusion from pagan trade guilds, with the same effect; or perhaps a call to show loyalty to the Caesar cult. But :9 suggests that the persecution had originated with the 'satan' of organized Jewish opposition.

*3:9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and they are not, but do lie- behold, I will make these come to you and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you-* The persecution of :8 had been brought about by an organized group of people called here a false synagogue, implying they were Jews, but in name only. Perhaps one of their arguments was that God did really love the Christian Jews; because Judaism had a lot to say about themselves as the unique lovers of God, who enjoyed His special love. John in his letters has argued that if a Jew does not accept Jesus as Lord and Son of God, then such a Jew is outside "the love of God". For he who denies the Son denies the Father also. These Judaist troublemakers will be resurrected and at the last day, see those they persecuted enter God's Kingdom. They will bow before the feet of those they persecuted, just as they will say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!", but all too late for their personal salvation.

Some now in the ecclesia will be dashed to pieces by the Lord at the last day (2:27). Mal. 4:3 speaks of them being ashes under the souls of *our* feet, as if the faithful will play a part in the destruction of their faithless brethren. After our judgment, *we* "will return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not" (Mal. 3:18). Then in our own understanding the Kingdom of God will be likened to wise and foolish virgins; then we will see the tares clearly. Then the apostate false brethren in Philadelphia will worship before the feet of their faithful brethren. It may be in this sense that we will judge Angels / ecclesial elders (1 Cor. 6:3 cp. Rev. 2:1 etc.). Or it could be that the rejected will destroy each other. The surrounding world with whom they will then be associated will destroy themselves, brother against brother (Zech. 14:13); and they will have a part in this destruction. If we bite and devour each other, we may be consumed by each other (Gal. 5:15)- this is the same idea of brethren killing brethren.

*3:10 Because you did keep the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the time of trial which is to come upon the whole world, to test them that dwell upon the earth-* The Lord told the Philadelphians that He had set before them an open door, which elsewhere is a figure for an opportunity to preach (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). He parallels such preaching with keeping His word and not denying His Name. For those who do these two things, i.e. respond to the open door preaching opportunities of the pre-tribulation period, "I also will keep you from the hour of temptation [tribulation] which is to come". If we preach now, and the door is open as never before, then perhaps we will be saved from the tribulation. For one of its aims, as in the first century, will be to inspire us to witness as we ought to have been doing. See on Rev. 2:10, where we noted again this idea of various possible outcomes and chronologies stored up in God's purpose, in response to human freewill decision making. An the same is true especially of latter day chronologies of events leading up to the Lord's return. If the latter day faithful [perhaps especially referring to Jewish Christians within the land promised to Abraham] keep the Lord's word, He will keep them from the "tribulation" designed "to try them that dwell upon the earth" / land - of Israel. So whether or not some shall experience the latter day tribulation depends on factors such as their repentance and witness of the Gospel to all nations.

3:11 *I come suddenly. Hold fast to what you have, that no one takes your crown-* As noted on :3, they were to hold fast to the gift of the Spirit they had been given at conversion, and allow this to continue to guide their path towards salvation. For it is the Spirit which they had already been given. They had been given "eternal life" in the sense of the spirit of that life which they would eternally live. In this sense they already had their crown; but as names in the book of eternal life could be blotted out, so the crown now potentially given can be taken away. The *stephanos* may refer not only to the victor's crown at the games, but to the wreath worn by those invited to a wedding or feast- an image elsewhere used in Revelation, rather than that of the games. Our part in the wedding can be taken away and given to another if we do not want it. Another will take our crown or wreath. This suggests the allusion is to floral wreath given to wedding guests; for a victor's crown in the games could hardly be given to another. But in the Lord's parable, the invitations to the Jews to come to the feast were taken from them and given to others.

3:12 *He that overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall leave there no more, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God; and my own new name-* There was apparently a large pillar in Philadelphia which may have been the reason for this idea. The name of Yahweh being written on a person suggests they are a priest, even the high priest. Instead of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on his chest, we here have the name of the new Jerusalem written- which city speaks of all the believers. This is a major theme of the letters; that the role and exaltation of the Lord becomes true for all who are in Him. As the Lord was the central pillar of the new temple, so shall we be.

It is not surprising that the Lord, as the Son of God and His supreme manifestation to men, should also carry God's name. He could say "I am come in my Father's name" (Jn. 5:43). Because of his obedience, Jesus ascended to heaven and God "gave him a name which is above every name" - the name of Yahweh, of God Himself (Phil. 2:9). So this is why we read Jesus saying in Rev. 3:12: "I will write upon him (the believer) the name of my God... and I will write upon him my new name". That the name was still new suggests these letters were given not so long after His ascension. At the judgment, we will share the Lord's exaltation; He will give us God's name; we then will fully carry the name of God. He calls this name, "My new name". We can now properly understand Is. 9:6, where concerning the Lord Jesus we are told, "His name (note that) shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father...". This is a prophecy that the Lord would carry all the titles and Name of God - that He would be the total manifestation or revelation of God to us. It was in this sense that he was called 'Emmanuel', meaning 'God is with us', although He personally was not God. The way He speaks here of "my God" even in His resurrected glory is proof enough of that. Thus the prophecy of Joel 2 that men would call on the name of Yahweh was fulfilled by people being baptised into the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21 cp. 38). This also explains why the command to baptize into the name of the Father was fulfilled, as detailed in the Acts record, by baptism into the name of Jesus.

And yet the idea of bearing God's Name refers to what already in essence is happening to all who are in the Lord Jesus, by baptism into His Name.

3:13 *He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* see on 2:7.

3:14 *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God-* The subsequent judgments are prefaced by this reminder that the Lord Jesus is the final truth, the "Amen", and had Himself suffered unto death as the ultimately faithful martyr / witness. Laodicea was a hopeless case, it seemed; but the Lord reminds them that He is the beginning of a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and the power of the Spirit which had created the natural creation was available to them too. He had begun the work of new creation in them, and it could still be brought to completion if they repented.

3:15 *I know your works, how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot-* The reference may be to the hot and cold springs near Laodicea. It is easy to assume that 'hot' refers to hot zeal for Him, and 'cold' to total indifference to Him. But why then would He wish them to be totally "cold", and not rather praise them for having at least some heat? For in earlier letters, the Lord takes full cognisance of the fact there is some 'heat', some good points, even in those He chooses to condemn. So I suggest we must read in an ellipsis here. He may mean 'I wish [that you realize that you can only be] either cold or hot'. They themselves considered themselves lukewarm, but thought this was acceptable to Him. And here we have a penetrating attack upon our own spiritual psychology; for we too would likely consider ourselves lukewarm, not coldly indifferent but not red hot in response to Him.

3:16 *As you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth-*

There is no third way. We may as well realize this. The Lord Jesus *hates* the fact that some think there is a third road; He would that we recognized, as He does, that there is really no 'lukewarm' position- only hot or cold. He seems to ask us to realize this: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt" (Mt. 12:33). We know that from God's perspective, we *are* either cold or hot. We either serve Him or mammon. We are either on the road to the Kingdom or to death. So surely the Lord is speaking from *our* viewpoint; He wished that those believers would have the attitude that they were either cold or hot, rather than thinking there was a middle course. In essence, their weakness is ours; for time and again, we hide behind the philosophy of 'balance' in order to justify a "neither cold nor hot" attitude. Our lack of serious devotion, both individually and as a community, rests in this sophistry of 'balance'; lukewarmness has become respectable, both in the brotherhood and in the world; total commitment is branded as fanaticism and simplistic dogmatism.

As tourists came to taste the waters of the Laodicean springs, so the Lord tasted the believers there. The spewing of them from His mouth connects with how the sharp sword of judgment proceeds out of His mouth (1:16; 2:16; 19:21).

3:17 *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing-* The implication was that they believed some kind of false prosperity Gospel, reasoning that their wealth was a result of their spirituality and God blessing them for it. Hence the next half of the verse insists that contrary to what they are think, they are in fact deeply unspiritual. This verse is a powerful argument against the prosperity Gospel, for apparent material blessing is portrayed here as *not* the reward for spirituality but the fruit of unspirituality. The language of saying to themselves that they were rich and "have prospered" is exactly that of the rich fool (Lk. 12:21). So we can safely assume that "you say..." refers to what they, like him, said to themselves within their hearts. And these words of the heart are what we are judged by. But the same Greek word used here is used of how those who accepted 'Babylon' were made rich



and prospered because of her (18:3,15,19). And Babylon is presented in Jeremiah as considering she needed nothing. Whatever 'Babylon' referred to in the Laodicean context, these apparent Christians had materially benefitted from connection with her- be it the synagogue system, the pagan trade guilds or the Roman Caesar cult. And there may well come a latter day wave of prosperity- for those who associate with latter day Babylon. But for Christians, it will cost them their eternity.

*Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked-* They perhaps considered that their material wealth must reflect their spiritual wealth. They were unaware that spiritually they were poverty-stricken and naked, needing to develop the riches of faith and clothing of righteousness. It seems to follow that their feeling of being spiritually rich and needing nothing was fuelled by being "increased with goods" - as if the material prosperity of the very last days will lead some to interpret this as God's blessing upon them, and a sure sign of their acceptability. "I am rich..." is alluding to Hos. 12:8, where Israel's wealth was associated with a feeling that they were therefore without sin: "Ephraim said, I am rich... in all my labours they shall find no iniquity in me that is sin". This encourages us again to think that the first recipients of these letters were Jewish converts. Likewise, the description of them as wealthy but naked is taken straight out of Ez. 16:7 about natural Israel; suggesting that it is Jewish converts who are being written to here.

They were unlike Paul, who lamented "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24 s.w.), throwing himself upon the Lord Jesus in total faith in His grace. The Greek for "miserable" is found only in 1 Cor. 15:9, where apostate Christians considered that they had "hope in Christ" only in this life, and were therefore considered by the Spirit to be "miserable". For them, their level of association with Christianity gave them some psychological benefits in this life, but the wonder of sin forgiven and certain eternity ahead had not dawned upon them. They refused to accept that they were "poor in spirit" and could, upon that recognition, have sure hope for the future Kingdom (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). They refused to see themselves in the man born blind from birth of John 9, who is set up as representative of us all; they would not recognize that they were totally naked before the eyes of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:13). From these references we see that wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked all refer to what we all naturally are; by refusing to see themselves as such, the Lord's work and provision for them was not seen as necessary.

The unfaithful now walk naked, in the Lord's eyes; but they will do so in the final condemnation of Rev. 16:15. They can walk naked *now* and repent, clothe themselves so as to cover the nakedness of condemnation which they now have; but not then.

3:18 *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may become rich-* John's writings continually allude to the power of the gift of the Spirit. It is the Spirit which is the true way to becoming enriched (1 Cor. 1:5; Eph. 3:16; the same word for "prospered" in :17). "Buy from me" obviously recalls the parable of the virgins, where the rejected go to buy oil [cp. the Spirit] all too late. The idea is that we can *now* do, spiritually, what the rejected will so desperately wish to do in the time of their condemnation, but will be unable to. Gold refined by fire is the figure Peter uses for Jewish converts who were being refined by the tribulations of the first century, both at the hands of the synagogue system and the Romans (see on 1 Pet. 1:7). The Jewish converts at Laodicea had flunked out of these testings by fire through their association with 'Babylon'; see on :17. The counsel to buy this refinement by

fire would be another way of saying that they ought to have submitted to the tribulations, so that their faith would have been developed.

*And to clothe yourselves with white garments, that the shame of your nakedness be not revealed-* In the latter day church scene, it seems some because of their refusal to repent, will then have a final tribulation at the end of the holocaust period. Their salvation is what the Lord searches for. There is the suggestion that this group may choose not to suffer the initial stages of the holocaust, in that Rev. 3:18 implies that they are only *counselled* to buy the golden faith that is produced by the fiery trial of the latter day tribulation. Thus as with offering the pinch of incense to Caesar, there will be opportunity to avoid the tribulation by some apparently tokenistic obedience to the beast. By doing this they will waste "the space" given "to repent of her fornication", and will experience a final tribulation.

We are clothed with white garments at baptism. The appeal to clothe themselves with them is an appeal for re-conversion. They could cover their shame now- but they choose not to. And yet, unknown to them, in God's eyes these people foam out their own shame (Jude 13).

*And anoint your eyes with eyesalve so you may see-* "Eyesalve" didn't really improve vision, but just as the Lord used the wrong idea of demons without correcting the science, so here. The idea is that they needed to apply something to help them 'see' differently, not least to 'see' themselves as they truly were before God (:17). That 'eyesalve' is surely the Spirit, which the Lord will give, but which we must be willing to apply. Anointing of itself implies pouring out the oil of the Spirit. For it is the Spirit which opens the eyes of our understanding (see on Eph. 1:18).

3:19 *As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent-* The Lord must have acted in the lives of those wealthy but lost believers in order to bring them to repentance. And He did so out of love. And the arrogant, self-assured wealthy are hard to spiritually love. But the Lord did, and for all time sets us an example of loving sorrow for the wealthy in their spiritual lostness. The Lord's reproof, according to Jn. 3:18, is in who He is as a person; within the light of Him as a person and character. He was therefore seeking to bring Himself to their attention; chastening is intended to direct our focus onto the Lord Jesus. It is the gift of the Comforter which reproves (Jn. 16:8); as baptized believers, they had once received this, and the Lord wishes for that potential Spirit gift within them to be allowed full reign. The Hebrew and Greek words for 'chastening' also mean 'teaching'. None of the Lord's chastening is solely punitive; He seeks to teach, and we need to perceive that in whatever chastening we receive. And the end product of that teaching is repentance.

3:20- see on Mt. 24:15.

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with me-* The Lord stands at the door and knocks at His return, and the faithful will open immediately to Him (Lk. 12:36). And yet the essence of His coming is now. He wishes to enter hearts; those who accept His Spirit have Him 'coming' to them (Jn. 14:18 s.w.). His presence through the Comforter is just as real as was His presence amongst men in Palestine during His mortal ministry. The Lord is here writing to those who have turned away from Him in Laodicea. He is urging them to let Him come to them, to allow the Spirit to enter and fill them.

The Lord stresses, with apparently needless repetition, that to the man who responds to His word, "I will eat with him and he with me". There is something very touching in the picture of a man living alone (unusual in the first century), presumably due to old age or persecution, with no wife (either dead or left him); and the Lord of all knocks at his door. He lets him in (i.e. responds to the word of Christ), and they eat together. Two men, eating a man's meal, earnestly bent together over the table. It's a fine picture of the mutuality between the Lord and the believer. Even in failure and weak moments, that mutuality is still there. The same word is used of the Lord having "supper" and 'eating' with us in the communion meal (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), and so the fellowship of the breaking of bread is also specifically in view.

In the latter day application, the Lord knocking on the door and 'coming' when the believer opens, hints at His second coming once the ecclesia shows a suitable level of spiritual response. In the same letter to Laodicea, the ecclesia being "rich and increased with goods" (:17) recalls the days of Lot and Noah, both typical of the second coming, and the unworthy walking naked is a figure picked up in 16:15 concerning judgment day. Our attitude and response in the split second when we know 'He's back' will effectively be our judgment. When the Lord speaks about knocking on the door of our hearts and our response (Rev. 3:20), He is picking up the language of the Song of Solomon 5:2-8, where the bridegroom (cp. Jesus) knocks at the door of the bride. But notice the sequence there:

While she sleeps at night, the bridegroom comes and knocks [unworthy virgins sleeping instead of being awake; the Lord Jesus comes]  
She replies that she's not dressed properly, makes excuses about her feet, she can't come and open [the unworthy don't respond immediately]  
He tries to open the door from the outside, putting his hand through the latch-hole [by grace, after the pattern of Lot being encouraged to leave Sodom when he hesitated, the Lord will be patient even with sleepy virgins in His desire for their salvation]  
Her heart is moved with desire for him [the rejected still call Jesus 'Lord, Lord'; they love Him emotionally]  
She starts dressing herself up, and then is overtaken by desire and rushes to the door, her hands dripping all kinds of perfume and make up over the lock as she opens it [cp. the virgins going to buy oil, the unworthy trying to prepare themselves all too late, not trusting that their Lord loves them as they are at the moment of His coming]  
But he's gone, he *withdraws himself* [all too late, the door is shut, He never knew them]  
Her soul fails [the shock of rejection]  
She seeks him but doesn't find him, calls but he doesn't answer [Prov. 1:28; the rejected call, but aren't answered; they seek the Lord early, but don't find Him. Hos. 5:6 is likewise relevant: "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to *seek* the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath *withdrawn himself* from them".]  
She feels tired of her relationship with him ("sick of love").  
She is persecuted by the world around her ["condemned with the world"]

The basic point is that if we don't immediately respond to the Lord's knock, we show ourselves to not love Him enough. If we don't open immediately, it's as if we didn't open at all. The Lord wants us as we are, bleary eyed and without our make up, but with a basic overriding love of Him, and faith in the depth of His love, which will lead us to immediately go out to meet Him. And as noted above, His coming to us is effectively now. We shall open to Him in that day if we have opened our hearts to Him today.

3:21- see on Mk. 10:37.

*He that overcomes, I will allow him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne-* Here we see the very intense extent of our possibilities in Christ; all that is true for Him really can be true for those "in Christ", even those as apparently far gone as Laodicea. These descriptions of the faithful in the Kingdom show how they are counted as righteous by grace; they overcame *even as* the Lord overcame. They are described as clothed in white linen, just as was the Victorious Saviour straight after His death (Mt. 27:59). A comparison of our struggles with the Lord in Gethsemane, let alone the cross, reveal that we do not overcome as He did. We have not resisted unto blood in striving against our own sin. We will have the *right* to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14); yet our salvation is by pure grace alone.

'Israel' means 'he who will rule as / with God'. This would therefore be the basis of Rev. 3:21, which promises that he who overcomes (also translated "prevail") will be a ruler with God, on His throne. It seems that the Lord has his mind back in Gen. 32, and he saw all who would attain His Kingdom as going through that same process of prevailing with God, overcoming, and being made rulers with Him.

3:22 *He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches-* see on 2:7.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *After these things I looked, and beheld a door opened in heaven-* John is being given a peep into the heavenly throne room. The 'court of heaven' was a common Jewish idea. The events on earth are reflected there, with representative Angels standing before God and receiving His judgments. The Angels may represent sinners and sinful entities, but Angels themselves do not sin. The comfort is that situations in earth are not out of control, but are known and perceived totally and instantly in Heaven. The opening of a door speaks of an opportunity being provided, perhaps in response to a knock (see on 3:8,20). It could be that John and others had sought desperately to understand their persecutions and how things really were in Heaven; and John's visions were the answer.

*And the first voice that I heard, as if a trumpet was speaking to me, was as one saying: Come up here, and I will show you the things which hereafter must come to pass-* Unlike Hebrew, the tenses in Greek are precise and have specific reference. In Rev. 1:19 John was told to write down the things which he had seen, the things which presently are, and the things which shall be "hereafter". I suggest the things he had seen were the things of the vision of the Son of Man; the things which are refer to the messages to the seven churches; and "the things which shall be hereafter" is a phrase developed here in Rev. 4:1, where John is bidden come and see "the things which must be hereafter". The things from then on all refer to the future, the last days and the coming of Christ. The vision of the Heavenly throne room in chapters 4 and 5 therefore refers to how things are in the Heavenly court *in the last days*. That is confirmed by comments on many of the following verses in chapter 4. The vision is in the form of "a voice of a trumpet". The same Greek words are found in Mt. 24:31 and 1 Thess. 4:16 about the "sound [s.w. "voice"] of a trumpet" which will be heard at Christ's return. The same words are used of the trumpets heard at the final outpouring of woe upon the land at the Lord's coming (Rev. 8:3). The vision therefore has a clear end time reference, and describes the scene in Heaven at that time, rather than being a general picture of how things are in Heaven.

4:2 *Immediately I was in the Spirit-* Being "in the Spirit" was in response to the invitation to come 'up' to Heaven to view the court room (:1).

*And beheld a throne set in heaven; and one sitting upon the throne-* The setting up of the throne recalls the language of the throne being 'set' for judgment at Christ's return (Ps. 122:5; Dan. 7:9). As noted on :1, the entire vision in chapter 4 is of the state of affairs at the last day being reflected in the Heavenly throne room. Thrones set on earth are set in Heaven, just as David on earth sat as it were on the throne of God in Heaven as king.

4:3 *And he that sat on it was to look upon like a jasper stone, and a sardius; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon-* The rainbow suggests that Divine judgment has come to an end, and the faithful remnant saved. As noted on :1, this is a picture of things at the last day. The Lord sits upon the judgment throne with a rainbow as a halo around it, meaning that His judgment is overarched by grace and a desire in fact not to condemn the world, even if they spurn His grace and choose His condemnation.

Jasper is the gem used to describe the appearance of all the faithful (21:11,18,19); the Lord's righteousness and exalted status will finally be true of all who are in Him. The sardine or sardius likewise (21:20), and the emerald (21:19). These are also stones in the High Priestly breastplate, representing the tribes of the Lord's people. We, His people, shine from His face. This is the extent of His total identification with us, and ours with Him. See on 5:3.

4:4 *And round about the throne were twenty four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty four elders sitting, dressed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold-* This again is reflecting the situation of the last days. The elders are 'clothed in white clothing', but every time those words occur in Revelation the context is of believers who have overcome the tribulation and are now clothed in white (3:5,18; 7:9,13). The vision of such clothing in Heaven may suggest that the elders thus clothed are the representative Angels of the believers on earth. Revelation is full of this kind of representation of human situations before the court of Heaven. Their golden crowns (4:4) are the crowns of victory which the faithful wear after judgment (the *stephanos* is specifically a victory wreath- 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; the crown which shall be given "at that day", 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10). Golden crowns are worn by the latter day enemies of God's people (Rev. 9:7); the specific usage of *stephanos* here, the victory wreath, suggests that they are celebrating their brief victory and establishment of a fake Kingdom of God. This is exactly what Moslems expect their Mahdi to do as a result of their latter day victories against the Jews. The ten horns of the beast are also crowned (13:1); the brief victory of the beast is a parody of the establishment of the true Kingdom of God.

These 24 elders recall the 24 orders of priests, who represent all the Lord's redeemed people. For we are a nation of priests, constantly in His service. As noted on :3, the Lord is presented as having the stones of the high priestly breastplate shining from His face as He sits enthroned, as a king-priest after the order of Melchizedek. We too shall be enthroned. Priests who are enthroned are king-priests; the Lord likewise was a king-priest after the order of Melchizedek, and we shall eternally have this status. We have just read that the faithful shall share His throne (3:21). As noted several times on Hebrews, we are not only benefitted by the Lord's high priestly work for us, but merge with Him, entering into the Holiest as did the High Priest- to do the work of the High Priest for the salvation of others.

I am of the view that the seals and vials of Revelation have such strong connection with both the Olivet prophecy and the actual events in the land in AD66-70 that it is impossible to discount the application of Revelation to this period. This means that it would have been written some time before AD70. A major theme is the need to resist the Caesar worship and maintain their separation from the world around them. Indeed, the whole of Revelation can be read, in its' AD70 application, as an account of the struggle between Christ and Caesar. Such strong imagery is used in order to emphasise that there could be no third road. It was one or the other. Thus Rev. 4,5 presents a picture of the throne of Heaven, but it is replete with reference to the imperial ceremonial court. Consider the points of contact and contrast:

- Greco-Roman kings were considered to be divine, and their courtrooms were arranged in concentric circles centring upon the Caesar / King- just as with the true throne room
- Their attendants were often arranged in groups of 7s and 12s- after the supposed seven planetary spheres and the 12 signs of the zodiac. Compare this with the 7s, 12s and 24s [2 x 12] in Revelation (4:4,5,10; 5:6-10).
- These attendants sung hymns of praise to the Caesar (cp. 4:8-11; 5:9-14)
- The Caesar dispersed justice to the empire / kingdom, symbolised by a scroll (cp. 5:1-8).
- Language such as God, Son of God, Lord's day, saviour of the world was used in the imperial cult.

Suffice it to say that today just as much as in the 1st century, there is a radical clash of cultures and belief systems between us and this present world. The radical nature of the conflict cannot be overstated.

4:5 - see on Rev. 1:20; Jer. 1:11,12.

*And out of the throne proceeded lightnings, voices and thunders-* As noted on :1, the vision of the Heavenly throne room in chapters 4 and 5 refers to how things are in the Heavenly court *in the last days*. In this context, the seven heads and mountains of the beast perhaps have their match in the seven spirits / Angels before God's throne. As found in Daniel, the situation on earth is not at all out of control; rather is it a reflection of the Heavenly throne room, just as the beasts of Daniel 7 arise out of the sea as a result of the [apparent] 'striving' of the spirits / Angels / winds. The lightnings which flash out of the throne were not just what were 'usually' there in Heaven; rather are these the lightnings which flash in the last day events of Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18, recalling the flashing of lightning as a sign of God's especial and saving activity of His people (Ps. 18:14). As lightening, fire and thunder 'proceeds' out of the throne and from the mouth of Him sitting upon it (1:16; 4:5), so the same word is used of how fire and judgment proceed out of their mouth of God's briefly victorious enemies (9:17,18). So often the contrast is drawn between the things of God's Kingdom and God's people, and those of His opposition. The thundering recorded here is that of Rev. 19:6 at the time of the second coming of Christ. The great voice out of the throne ["voices" may be a reflection of the Hebrew idea of an intensive plural] is the great voice out of the throne of Rev. 16:17; 19:5 when "it is done". It is the voice of victory which effectively comes out of the throne at the last day (Rev. 7:9,10).

The 24 elders of Rev. 4:5 represent rather than symbolize the believers, whose guardians they are. These Angels represent the saints in the court of Heaven. In this lies the practical meaning of all this; that we, our 'case', our thoughts and deeds, are represented in none less than the court of Heaven; and there they are judged, discussed, and responded to.

*And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God-* It is the faithful who are "before the throne". The seven spirits refers perhaps to the totality of God's Spirit and His power. Seeing He makes His Angels spirits, it could be that God's power is apportioned between seven senior Angels. But the connection with the seven churches and stars, who are the angels of the churches, is also clear. As the indwelling Spirit dwells and abides within us, so we are represented as the seven lamps burning always before Him in Heaven. In the last day, of which this vision speaks, we shall be turned to Spirit nature. We are the elders, and we are the seven spirits. The symbolism reflects different aspects of the same realities.

4:6 *And in front of the throne there was as it were a sea of glass like a crystal-* Here there is a tranquil "sea of glass", but this is the very same symbol as used in Rev. 15:2 concerning how this situation is arrived at *after* and *as a result of* the fiery judgments upon God's enemies in the last days. This confirms the suggestion on :1 that we have here a vision of the state of things in the last days, seen from Heaven's perspective. This glass sea is "clear as crystal"- which is the very metaphor used to describe the Kingdom conditions (Rev. 21:11; 22:1). Again and again, Revelation 4 uses the language of the period surrounding the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. It's a prophetic vision of the things which shall be "hereafter" (4:1), rather than a description of how things were in Heaven at John's time and how they have been 'up there' for the last 2000 years.

In confirmation of this, note that the whole scene happens "in front of the throne", but this phrase is repeatedly used later in Revelation to speak of the situation before the judgment throne of the Father and Son, when this as it were is set up on earth. Before that throne the faithful shall be found faultless (14:5), and they sing before that throne a new song because of their triumph (14:3). Those who overcome the tribulation of the last days are found "before

the throne” (7:9,11,15). So what we are seeing in chapter 4 happening ‘before the throne’ is not a mere description of ‘what was going on before God’s throne at John’s time, and has been going on all along since then’. No. This is about what shall happen before that throne *at the day of judgment at the second coming*. That is the time referent of Revelation’s language of “before the throne”. For the sea of humanity is hardly calm as crystal glass before His throne, and will not be until the last day.

*And in the midst of the throne and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind-* There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle. Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

We have just read that the faithful shall share His throne (3:21). And exactly there is where we find the living creatures. The "four living creatures" are a means of expressing God's manifestation, be it in Angels or Israel in the past. But now, at the point of the last day of which this vision speaks, the reference is to us. This is why we / they are both in the midst of the throne and round about it. We are in one sense before the throne, receiving His grace, casting our crowns there (:10); and in another sense, sharing with Him in His throne itself.

*4:7 And the first creature was like a lion, the second creature like a calf, the third creature had the face of a man and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle-* See on :6. The four beasts full of eyes which are found here (:6,7) are the Heavenly reflection of the four beasts of Daniel 7, and the powerful little horn with its cunning eye is thus presented as a weak parody of the Heavenly reality. As noted on :1, the vision of the Heavenly throne room in chapters 4 and 5 refers to how things are in the Heavenly court *in the last days*. These beasts all exist in the last days in some form, but shall be subsumed within the "four living creatures" of the cherubim, representing the glorified believers; see on :6.

*4:8 And the four living creatures each had six wings, full of eyes round about and within; and they have no rest day and night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come-* See on :8. As the Angelic entity of Heaven, representing the believers, has no rest day nor night from His service and praise, so the beast worshippers have no rest day or night from their judgment (4:8 cp. 14:11). These are the only times in the



entire New Testament that this Greek phrase for 'having no rest' are used. Indeed, so often Revelation uses phrases and words which occur only in Revelation. So I suggest the scene at this stage is that of the last days (see on :1), and here we have ceaseless praise during the period of the beast's destruction. See on :1. The 'beasts' / 'creatures' of the nations shall be subsumed within and by the cherubic "living creatures", representing the believers (see on :6). Their being "full of eyes" is a repeatedly noted feature, and I suggest refers to how we shall then know all. A large element of our struggle in this world is that we do not have full vision, we cannot attach precise meaning to event, nor see the immediate future. This plays no small part in the psychological struggle of believers especially, who sense that there *is* meaning to event, and the hand of God is and shall be in their immediate future history, but cannot see it all in detail.

4:9- see on Rev. 5:6.

*And when the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanks to him that sits on the throne, to him that lives for ever and ever-* The giving of honour to Him who sits upon the throne (4:9) is an idea only found elsewhere in 19:7, where honour is given to the Lord on the throne "for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready". Again, we are directed to understand the giving of honour as appropriate to the Lord's second coming. The picture is specifically of the last days; see on :1. The "living creatures" have something to "thank" the Lord for, and to glorify and honour Him for. I suggested on :6 that at this point, they refer to the glorified believers.

4:10 *The twenty four elders shall fall down before him that sits on the throne and shall worship him that lives for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying-* Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. They will cast their crowns before the enthroned Lord, as if to resign their reward as inappropriate for them. Indeed, they shouldn't be in the Kingdom. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17).

This is another of many allusions to the emperor cult, whereby local kings and rulers knelt and cast their crowns before the Roman emperor. It was a statement of utter submission. But this picture is applied to the Lord Jesus, and contributed towards making Revelation such a subversive and illegal document within the Roman empire. The things we stand for are no less radical and break all the norms of the societies in which we currently live.

Because it is by God's will that we are created, because He is from everlasting to everlasting, because God is creator (:11), we cast our crowns of 'reward' before His throne in a sense of unworthiness, just as David in Ps. 8 had the overawing sense of 'Who am I...?' when he reflected upon God's creation.

4:11 *Worthy are you, our Lord, to receive the glory and the honour and the power. For you did create all things, and for your sake they existed and were created-* "Our Lord" refers to the Lord Jesus, and is again a subversion of the way Caesar was addressed in this way. His creation of all things recalls the prologue of John's gospel, where clearly a new creation is in view (2 Cor. 5:17), a creation of a world of persons in His image. And as the faithful find themselves accepted and immortalized before His throne, they will realize that indeed the

new creation has come to its final term. And they stand there because of His creation of them, and not in their own strength, created of His will [NEV "sake", AV "pleasure"] and not their own. The allusion may be to Jn. 1:13, where the Lord Jesus is presented as bringing us into spiritual being not of our will but of His. In :8,11 we read of “the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” ‘receiving [*lambano*]' “glory, honour and power [*dunamis*]”. The only other time we read of this is in Rev. 11:15-17, when the seventh Angel sounds and the Kingdom of God is established: “We give You thanks O Lord God Almighty, who is and who was; because You have taken [*lambano*] Your great power [*dunamis*] and have reigned”. The vision here is specifically about the state of the Heavenly throne room at the last day; see on :1.

## CHAPTER 5

This continues the vision of chapter 4, which we have clearly located in the last days. The sealed book of 5:1 is the book of life, which is only opened at Christ's return (Dan. 7:10; Rev. 20:12). The opening of the seals is therefore something which is the opening of the book- and the events associated with them therefore occur at the last hour, when the book is opened. Any appropriacy to events at other points in history is intended and was of encouragement to those of that day, but the essence of the fulfilment is in the last days. The joy of the redeemed that the Lamb has opened the book through His blood is not just joy that prophetic revelation has been given in the seals; it is joy that they have been redeemed because the book has been opened (5:5,9). The Lamb's blood was required to open the book, and it is redemption, a place in that book of life, which was enabled by the Lord's death. The actual opening of the scroll is performed by the Lord Jesus in His role as "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (see on :5), and according to Gen. 49:5 this refers to the Lord in His latter day manifestation, triumphing over the prey. The redeemed burst into praise when the Lamb takes the book of life to open it- they thank Him for redeeming them, and for making them "kings and priests, and we shall reign on earth" (:10). This sounds like they are about to start reigning. The time when this is said is therefore that of the establishment of the Kingdom on earth.

Not every detail has been given of how that end has been achieved, but in chapters 4 and 5 we see a broad sweep from the beginning of the last days right through to the full establishment of the Kingdom.

That the scroll refers to the book of life was first pointed out to me by Peter Watkins. One of the most compelling reasons is the way that Daniel 7 is being alluded to, and the parallel with the opening of the books at the judgment is in the scroll of Revelation 5 being opened:

	<b><i>Daniel 7:9, 10</i></b>	<b><i>Revelation</i></b>
(a)	thrones were set	the 24 elders upon 24 thrones (R.V.) (4 :4).
(b)	the Ancient of days did sit.	a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne (4:2).
(c)	His garment white as snow.	like unto a jasper (4:3).
(d)	His throne like the fiery flame.	and a sardine stone.
(e)	His wheels as burning fire.	(Ez. 1:15-21. Not mentioned in Revelation except by implication in connection with the four-fold cherubim-chariot of Rev. 6).
(f)	a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him.	the sea of glass.
(g)	thousand thousands ministered unto Him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.	the number of the angels was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands (5:11).
(h)	the judgement was set and the books were opened.	I saw the dead small and great stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life (20:12).

*5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals-* Note the parallels with Ezekiel- the four living creatures, a throne scene, a scroll- with judgments against Israel on it, to be fulfilled in a Babylonian

invasion. This similarity with Ezekiel would explain the correspondence between the cherubim vision of Ez. 1:22-28 and that of Rev. 4:2-6. But as explained in the introduction, the scroll is the book of life. But the opening of it involves the breaking of the seals, which speak of judgment upon Israel at the hands of an invasion by a latter day Babylon. Perhaps this is the significance of the scroll having writing on both sides; referring on one hand to the blessing of acceptance and salvation, and on the other to judgment to come. This would explain why the scroll of 10:10 is both sweet and bitter. The book of life is only opened once all the seals are broken, and I suggested in the introduction to this chapter that this implies the seals refer to events which happen in short succession in the very last days, just prior to the opening of the book of life. That surely is required by the 'decorum of the symbol'.

*5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice: Who is worthy to open the scroll and to undo the seals of it?*- The great voice recalls the great voice of Goliath challenging Israel to provide a man who could provide their salvation; see on :4. None of course are worthy, and John opened his writings with the statement that not even John the Baptist was "worthy" (Jn. 1:27). This points up the power of imputed righteousness in 3:4 where the faithful are called "worthy". All that is true of the Lord becomes true of us if we are in Him, but by grace alone. All the New Testament commands to "walk worthy..." are ultimately not obeyed by any of us. Only He is worthy.

*5:3 And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the scroll, or to look thereon-* See on :2. No Angel, no human believer currently live nor any who had previously lived and died, was worthy. Perhaps John somehow saw all the past and present believers flash before him in the vision. Being unworthy to even look upon the book of life recalls the impossibility of man looking upon God. The parallel suggests His close identity with all the names in His book of eternal life. In similar style, the face of the Lord Jesus is portrayed as identified with the stones of the breastplate, representing God's people; see on 4:3. But the idea may be that nobody was able to look at the scroll in the sense of reading or understanding it. And thus the simple point is made- that we cannot know who shall finally be saved. And apparently none in heaven, no Angel, knows that either. For we are all a work in progress and have freewill to act in such a way that our name may be removed from that scroll; see on 3:5. Who exactly will be saved amongst the last generation is therefore an open question right to the very end. But I suggested on :1 that the writing on the scroll was on both sides; the names of those saved, and yet also the final judgments. And nobody could even read or know that final picture apart from the Lord. And this again would be because the final chronology of events and nature of the various judgments are to some extent open; if for example Israel repent and accept the Lord early in the process, then various aspects of the judgments will not be necessary. These issues, of defining who are saved and also of knowing the exact chronology of latter day events, have been wrongly fascinating for many. But we not only cannot know them, we are unworthy to know them.

*5:4 And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll, or to look thereon-* See on :3. Weeping because no man could open the book of life, of salvation, has similarities with Israel's inability to find a champion against Goliath. Goliath, representing the seed of the serpent, a personification of sin (i.e. the Biblical devil), needed a man to fight him (1 Sam. 17:8,9). The men of Israel cowered in fear, wishing they could only have the strength and courage necessary, but looking one on another helplessly as the invincible giant made his boast. How to overcome him and the evil intent of this man against God's people was what the men's conversation revolved around: "Have ye seen this man that is come up? Surely to defy Israel is he come up". They also discussed the glorious reward being offered: "It shall

be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and make his father's house free in Israel" - and throw in his daughter for good measure too (1 Sam. 17:25). But "all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid" (1 Sam. 17:24). Now what more precise description could we wish for of our feelings in the struggle against sin? There seems a similarity here with men and their Angel representatives in the court of Heaven weeping because no man was found worthy to look upon or open the book of life- until our Lord prevailed on the cross. John is representative of all of us, weeping at his inability and unworthiness to open the book of life.

*5:5 And one of the elders said to me: Do not weep. Behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered; he can open the scroll and the seven seals of it-* Why this unusual title for the Lord in this context? Surely because the events are happening at the time when He is fulfilling His role as the lion rather than the lamb. That time for active and aggressive manifestation of Jesus against others- not least against the other beasts of the latter days- is at His return. The allusion is obviously to Gen. 49:9 which speaks of Judah's lion as aggressively triumphing over his prey- the work of the Lord Jesus *in the last days at His return*. In Rev. 5:5, the lion of Judah 'prevails', the language of struggle, in order to open the scroll. The loosing of the seals therefore speaks of the Lord's activity at the time of His coming in triumphant judgment upon the other beasts of the field.

The Lord "conquered" or 'prevailed' / 'overcame' in order to open the scroll. This is the language of the Lord's overcoming on the cross (s.w. Lk. 11:22; Jn. 16:33). As the Lord urged us to be of good cheer because He has overcome / conquered (Jn. 16:33), so the Angel urges John. And the word is frequently used of how all the faithful 'overcome' their world (Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 1 Jn. 2:14; 4:4; 5:4 etc). But the Lamb alone has "overcome"; yet we in Him are finally counted as having achieved His victory. Just as He alone is worthy, but we are counted worthy (3:4). This concept of being "in Christ" is so common in Paul, and John too is expressing the same wondrous idea but in different ways. This great truth lifts us up above all feelings of personal inadequacy and failure to achieve. For we are part of One so much greater than us, and His Name and victory are ours.

The concept of conditional prophecy opens up a significant window into the tension facing the Lord Jesus as He approached the cross- indeed, throughout His ministry. So much depended upon Him. If He had failed, so much would simply not have come true as God intended. Rev. 5:5 stresses how the Lamb alone, through His sacrificial death [hence the figure of a lamb] was able to open the seals, and thus enable history as God intended to unfold. Indeed, the sealed scroll can also be understood as the book of life, whose opening was only made possible by the Lord's death. This had as it's basis the language of Dan. 12:4, where Daniel sealed the book. Rudolf Rijkeboer comments: "Daniel's prophecy of the seventy year-weeks takes us to the time of the Messiah, but not really beyond. How things would continue would depend on the Saviour, if He was victorious. That he would be victorious was... by no means a foregone conclusion. It depended totally on the Saviour's own free will... while the scroll remains sealed... that particular future is not going to happen at all!". In this sense we understand that through the cross, the pleasure or 'intention' of God would be furthered by Messiah's 'hand' through His crucifixion (Is. 53:10).

5:6- see on Jer. 1:11,12.

*And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had just been slain-* The living creatures, representing the victorious believers, are in the midst of the throne (see on 4:6). We are set down with the Lord in His throne (3:21). But superimposed upon them is now the ever stronger image of the Lamb standing and not sitting. He is at our centre, in Him He is us and we are Him. For in no other way can we be portrayed as sitting upon the throne. The slain lamb is still standing, rather than lying down as a dead body. Perhaps the idea is that the Lord died on the cross in a vertical position, as if dead whilst still standing in victory.

The lion's triumph is only because He had previously been the sacrificial lamb; but He is portrayed as a rather aggressive looking lamb, having seven horns and seven eyes (5:6). Again we note that the beast with his ten horns and a little horn with eyes (Dan. 7:20) is an anti-Christ, a parody of the real Jesus. We note the sustained emphasis that the Lamb alone was "worthy" to open the scroll of life (4:11; 5:2,4,9,12); but the Lord graciously says that His redeemed people will walk with Him because they too are "worthy" (3:4). This is a deep insight into the extent of imputed righteousness, and what it means to be counted as "in Christ". The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6). See on Mk. 9:47.

Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord's sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realising the wonderful verdict pronounced for them- in terms of praising the Lord Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognising their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross and the judgment and reward are connected. This is why the Sephardim called the Day of Atonement, with all its typology of the cross, "the day of judgment". To come before the cross is to have a foretaste of judgment; there and then was the judgment of this world.

*The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth-* The Lord's death meant that the Spirit was given to all His people (Jn. 7:39). And it was in the power of the Spirit that they went out into all the earth with the Gospel, in fulfilment of the great commission. I noted throughout Jn. 14-16 that the Comforter has especial relevance to the fulfilment of the great commission. And yet the reference is also to the Lord Jesus becoming Lord of all Angels, becoming Himself "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). His Spirit is therefore sent forth into all the earth, just as His followers go into all the earth with Him and the message of His Spirit.

And yet a specifically latter day interpretation is also discernible once we perceive the allusions to Zech. 6:5-7, where the horsemen spirits of the Lord go forth throughout the earth / land promised to Abraham. This theme will be later developed in the seals, trumpets and vials. But at this stage the comfort is that in the awful situation to come upon that area in the last days, the details of which we are to read about in the next chapters, the Lord's Spirit is intensely present, preserving and empowering His people.

### **The Chronology And Structure Of Revelation**

The lamb slain is clearly a reference to Passover. I suggest that the key to the interpretation of Revelation is in understanding how its structure is linked to its interpretation. This doesn't mean that interpretations which ignore the structure are wrong; the book is open to multiple

fulfilments, as most Bible prophecies are. The New Testament often quotes the Old Testament out of context- phrases and verses are taken up and given an interpretation which can't be extended to the surrounding context of the Old Testament passage. And so it's surely legitimate to likewise interpret Bible prophecy in a similar piecemeal manner. However, this doesn't preclude a hermeneutic [scheme of interpretation] which takes an entire book and seeks to make sense of it from start to finish.

Throughout latter day Bible prophecy, there is mention of a 1260 day / 42 month / three and a half year period of final tribulation. The Jews had a three and a half year reading cycle, similar in principle to the annual *Bible Companion*, whereby there were specific readings from the Pentateuch and prophets, with a Psalm read every Sabbath. This system was based around the feasts. The book of Revelation is likewise based around the feasts. It should be noted that the Gospel of John, which appears so similar in style to Revelation, was likewise based around the Jewish feasts; and a case can be made that it was intended to be read over a three and a half year cycle along with the Jewish lectionary readings (Aileen Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel And Jewish Worship* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1960)). Hence John's account of events seeks to place them all within the period of the various feasts; and his material can be seen as a kind of exposition of the Old Testament 'readings for the day' according to the Jewish triennial reading cycle.

There are many connections between the various sections of Revelation and the Jewish feasts. Here's a summary:

<b>Revelation</b>	<b>Feast</b>	<b>Allusions</b>
5	Passover	Rev. 5:6,9 = Ex. 12:13
7	Tabernacles	Rev. 7:9,15,16 RV = Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Zech. 14:16-20
8,9	Day Of Atonement	Lev. 16:31; more detailed links in Harry Whittaker, <i>Revelation: A Biblical Approach</i> 104,105.
11	Dedication & Purim	The Torah readings for these feasts were Num. 7 and Zech. 2- 4 about the dedication of the temple; Rev. 11:10 = Esther 9:19,22. The period from Tabernacles to Purim is 5 months- as mentioned in Rev. 9:5
12	Pentecost & Passover	The Jews traditionally ask: "On this Sabbath, shall I reap?"
14	Tabernacles	
15 + 16	Atonement & Passover	Lev. 16; Ps. 118 the Hallel Psalm
19	Passover	Ps. 113,114 Passover Psalms
21,22	Tabernacles	

Laying out the material chronologically, we have:

Chapter 5: Passover

6 months

Chapter 7: Tabernacles

Chapters 8& 9: Atonement and Tabernacles

1 year

Chapter 11: Dedication 5 months (Rev 9:5)

Chapter 11: Purim

Chapter 12: Passover and Pentecost

Chapter 14: Tabernacles

1 year

Chapter 15: Atonement

Chapter 16 & 19: Passover

Chapter 21 & 22: Tabernacles

1 year

The conclusion would therefore be that we have in the book of Revelation a literal account of the three and a half years tribulation, with the Jewish feasts being the key marker points. And it would appear there will be an especial period of five months tribulation as described between chapters 9 and 11.

Not all prophecy has to be predictive. The Lord Jesus spoke of His future sufferings and commented that once those things happened, the disciples would be able to make sense of them *at that time* because of His previously spoken words about them (Jn. 8:28; 13:19; 14:29; Acts 11:16). And so it may be futile to try to work out precisely how things will be before they actually happen; but as we pass through the final three and a half years, those who understand will be amazingly encouraged as they see everything falling into place. It will be the most amazing, detailed and practically encouraging fulfilling of prophecy that anyone has ever lived through. And given the whole nature of the tribulation, it will be encouragement that the faithful will sorely need.

*5:7 And he came and he took the scroll out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne-* This appears to speak of the Lord Jesus taking the scroll from God. Salvation is from God, but the Son has opened that salvation to us. But all this is indeed a kaleidoscope of images. The Lord Jesus is enthroned (:6), yet He comes to the throne where the living creatures are; He is as a lamb, then a lion, now apparently again in human form. As explained in the introduction to chapter 1, this is classic apocalyptic genre. Over interpretation will lead to false interpretation. The images rotate as in a kaleidoscope, because each image portrays a different aspect of the truth being revealed.

*5:8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints-* The living creatures represent the faithful who are set down in the Lamb's throne and the throne of the Father (see on 4:6). But now they fall before the throne. And here the living creatures are differentiated from the "saints", whose prayers they hold. See on :7 for the idea of a kaleidoscope of images being presented, and the danger of over interpreting these visual forms.

In 15:2 it is those who overcome the beast who have harps. The living creatures and elders are entities in the Heavenly throne room, representing the believers on earth. Whilst the victory is the Lord's, it has been brought to realization by the prayers of the saints. Chapter 8 emphasizes how the incense of their prayers triggers the events which happen on earth to bring about the Lord's visible return to establish His Kingdom. Their bowls of prayer cannot be separated from the seven vials or bowls of judgment which are later poured out on the earth / land; they are poured out as a result of the bowls of prayer offered by the saints. 5:9 will go on to talk of a new song being sung. This is to be connected with the offering of incense; we are being invited to behold a reflection of a temple service in Heaven itself. Edersheim describes the offering of incense in the temple as follows, and note his mention of



the "new song" being sung afterwards, just as we have here in 5:8,9: "As the President gave the word of command which marked that 'the time of incense had come,' the whole multitude of the people without withdrew from the inner court and fell down before the Lord, spreading their hands in silent prayer. It is this most solemn period, when, throughout the vast temple-buildings, deep silence rested on the worshipping multitude, while within the sanctuary itself the priest laid the incense on the golden altar, and the cloud of odours rose up before the Lord, which serves as the image of heavenly things in Revelation (Rev. 8:1, Rev. 8:3, Rev. 8:4). The prayers offered by priests and people at this part of the service are recorded by tradition as follows: 'True it is that Thou art Jehovah, our God and the God of our fathers; our King and the King of our fathers; our Saviour and the Rock of our salvation; our Help and our Deliverer. Thy name is from everlasting, and there is no God beside Thee. A new song did they that were delivered sing to Thy name by the seashore. Together did all praise and own Thee as King, and say, 'Jehovah shall reign who saveth Israel'".

Revelation describes Angels rushing in response to human prayers, vials of judgment being poured out on earth as a result of the incense of prayer accumulating... this is the power of prayer. If prayer is like incense, we must give Dt. 33:10 RVmg. its full weight- that incense would come up "in your nostrils". This is how intimately we are invited to see our prayers being received by God; this is the power of prayer. The golden vials full of prayers of Rev. 5:8 become the vials of judgments which are poured out on the land in Rev. 8:5- so close is the connection between the events that mould history, and the incense of prayer.

*5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open the seals of it. For you once were slain, and did purchase for God a people with your blood, people of every tribe, tongue and nation-* See on :8 for the significance of this "new song". Is. 42:9,10 says that we sing the "new song" now, because we sing / meditate of the "new things" which will be in the Kingdom. In that day, we will "sing a new song" (Rev. 5:9; 14:3). And yet this is undoubtedly picking up on the way in which we can *now* sing the 'new song', every morning (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1).

This presents us with the picture of men and women redeemed from *every* kindred [tribe / clan], tongue [*glossa*- language], people [a group of people not necessarily of the same ethnicity] and nation [*ethnos*- ethnic group, lit. 'those of the same customs']. And they are found to be redeemed at the time when the book of life is opened, which is at the Lord's return. Which we believe to be imminent. This means that not only redeemed 'Yugoslavs' will stand before the throne in the end; but Macedonians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Bosnians... every ethnic group, with every custom, will have representatives who will have believed the Truth and been saved. This idea is confirmed by considering how 70 bullocks had to be sacrificed at the feast of ingathering (Num. 29), prophetic as it was of the final ingathering of the redeemed. But 70 is the number of all Gentile nations found in Gen. 10. And it is written: "When he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Dt. 32:8). A total of 70 went down with Jacob into Egypt; and thus 70 seems an appropriate number to connect with the entire Gentile world. And representatives of *all* of them will be finally ingathered. It seems highly doubtful to me that over the past 2,000 years, the Truth of Christ has been taken to every *ethnos*, tribe, clan, custom and language, especially in Africa and Asia. So it follows that only once *we* have done it in our generation will this come true. The brethren in those parts especially have work to do yet, it seems to me. And we should all support them as best we can. But these days, one only has to stand on the streets of London, Sydney or New York handing out fliers to reach every nation and tongue. I have a real belief that given the current

rate of progress in preaching, the current generation *could* witness literally world-wide representation by those who understand true Christian doctrine- *if we all* do our bit. It is very difficult for me to reproduce in writing the kind of picture I have in my mind. But it is a thrilling and all consuming, all-demanding vision.

We are a purchased people, redeemed, bought out of slavery, by the Lord's sacrifice. A true appreciation of the Lord's work on the cross, a real ability to say that the Son of God loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*, will reflect itself in our attitude to materialism. The Lord gave His blood in order to purchase our body and our spirit for himself (1 Cor. 6:19,20; Rev. 5:9 RV). *Therefore* we must surrender our body and spirit, all that we have, to Him. We are not our own. To hold *anything* back is to deny the cross; to deny the Lord what He paid so terribly to possess: our lives, our hearts, our bodies.

The very close association of the Angels with their charges is shown by the Angels identifying themselves with their charges by saying that Christ had "redeemed us" out of every nation, and given them the hope of being king-priests in the future Kingdom (Rev. 5:9,10). Unto the Angels the world to come has not been put in subjection, nor do they belong to specific nations, but because they identify so closely with us they can speak in this way. Rev. 5:9 RVmg. speaks of the Angels in the Heavenly throne room, representing us, praising God that He had purchased men unto Himself "and madest them to be [AV "made us"] ... a kingdom... and they [AV "we"] shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10). If the RV is correct, we have a picture here of our Angels thanking God in advance for the salvation which He has prepared for us their charges. It would seem from this that our 'guardian' Angel changes according to what we are trying to achieve for God. Similarly the great Angel of the Exodus appears to have been Moses' personal guardian because Moses and the Angel were working for the same ends.

5:10- see on Rev. 6:9.

*And made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they shall reign upon the earth-* Several times so far in Revelation we have noted the faithful presented as enthroned priests, king-priests, after the order of Melchizedek. And the Lamb Himself is likewise presented. It's not that some will be kings and others priests; we shall be king-priests. If we can gain a clear picture of God's intended roles for the priests under the Law, we will have further insight into our future work as king-priests. Through what He achieved for us on the cross, we have been made *now* king-priests, with the future hope of reigning on earth (Rev. 1:6; 5:10).

As noted in the introduction to chapter 5, this whole vision refers to the last day. The redeemed burst into praise when the Lamb takes the book of life to open it- they thank Him for redeeming them, and for making them king-priests who shall now reign on earth. This sounds like they are about to start reigning. The time when this is said is therefore that of the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Seeing there is no conscious survival of death, it is hard to imagine how the redeemed could have said this to Jesus 2000 years ago, especially seeing that many of them were not then in existence. The vision goes on to the time of the total establishment of the Kingdom on earth, when all existence in heaven, earth and sea praise the Lamb (5:14).

5:11 *And I looked, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands-* We are seeing a vision of the heavenly throne room, where the

Angels represent before God the believers on earth. Now we have the kaleidoscope of images merging again; the Angels about the throne are the believers crying out in the joy of victory and final receipt of grace.

This huge number reflects Abraham's seed as innumerable. The living creatures in and around the throne symbolize the redeemed; see on 4:6. The great number of the redeemed could mean that many are saved relative to the wonder of salvation, seeing that many are called but few chosen; and there are plenty of other suggestions that the redeemed are but a minority amongst humanity. But on the other hand, the numbers are intended to be gawped at as huge. This needs to be given full weight by those who consider that only their tiny denomination or fellowship shall be saved.

*5:12 They were saying with a great voice: Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain to receive the power, riches, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing-* Angels and those faithful they represent upon earth (see on :11) are united in realizing that this wonderful salvation is thanks to the Lamb. Not the lion, but the Lamb, thanks to His death, the book of life has been opened and the reward given. The seven terms used are all elsewhere used about the power, riches etc. of the pagan world which has dominated the believers in their lifetimes. The glory of the kingdoms of this world is to be given to the Lamb.

*5:13 And I heard every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying: To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing, honour, glory and might, for ever and ever-* Ps. 69:34 speaks of how *everything* in the sea, heavens and on earth should praise God. This cannot refer to believers in all those places. Rev. 5:13 uses similar language to describe how every creature in the sea, under the earth and on the earth and in Heaven, all praised God for Christ's ascension into Heaven. The dead do not praise God. The impression is given that the whole natural creation will in some way render praise to God. But those under the earth in :3 are dead believers. Those under the sea are believers who died at sea who are to be resurrected when the sea gives up its dead (20:13). Those "on earth" are the believers who are still alive at the second coming. They together with those in heaven, the Angels (see on ;11), unite in praise.

*5:14 And the four living creatures said: Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped-* On 4:6 we discerned that the living creatures, the cherubim, are a visual way of expressing God's manifestation; and in this case they refer to the believers, along with their Angel representatives in the court of Heaven. The elders likewise represent the believers and their Angel representatives. Every form of representation of the redeemed is portrayed as falling down in praise. The language of rapturous praise of One by all is taken from the image of the Roman triumphs and coronation of Caesars. Again, the images of the imperial cult are being applied to the Lord Jesus; which was radical and subversive stuff in Roman society. It is no less subversive in our age, in spiritual terms.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *And I looked when the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder: Come!*- The living creatures as they are in Heaven represent God in manifestation through His Angels, who represent His people on earth. The voice of thunder is as it were God's voice. The invitation "Come!" is later repeated by John at the end of Revelation as an invitation to come and inherit the Kingdom. The Gospel is an invitation into the things of God, to see things from His Heavenly perspective, from the standpoint of His Kingdom. The repeated invitations here to "Come!" are rendered in some manuscripts as "Come and see!". In John's language, this has meant coming and seeing the things of the risen Lord (Jn. 20:1). It is His death and resurrection which has opened the things of Heaven.

### General Observations

The seven seals, seven trumpets and seven vials, subdivided as they are in places into subdivisions, all appear to be parallel. But they aren't necessarily describing the same events. I suggest the seals refer to the judgments to come upon God's people and land, Israel / the land promised to Abraham; and trumpets and vials describe God's commensurate judgment of the beast system which inflicts these judgments. The similarities are because as they have judged, so they will be judged. The cup they give others to drink must be drunk by themselves. And it could be argued that their judgment will be even more severe and complete. Thus in the seals, a fourth part of things are affected; in the trumpets, a third part; whilst the vials speak of total destruction. As with the judgments on Egypt, which form the basis for the seven vials, the people of God may initially be affected by the outpouring of those judgments, but those who are sealed are saved from them.

The vials are really bowls or cups poured out on the land. The same word is used in one of the Aramaic targums on Is. 51:17,22,23 concerning how the "cup" of judgment drunk by Jerusalem will be given to her judges, the beast system of latter day Babylon. This explains why the vials / bowls / cups are based around the plagues on Egypt, representing the abusers of Israel:

<b>Vials in Revelation</b>	<b>Israel's experience and plagues on Egypt, Exodus</b>
Boils 16:3,4	9:8-12
2 and 3. Water to blood, water sources contaminated, 16:6	Water to blood 7:14-21
4. Scorching heat from the sun, 16:8,9	This will specifically not come upon God's people (Is. 49:10; Ps. 121:5,6; Rev. 7:16), just as the later plagues did not harm the Israelites in Egypt.
5. Darkness 16:10,11	10:21-23

6. Gathering to Armageddon- perhaps Jerusalem. The word could mean 'The desirable city', 'His fruitful mountain', 'the mount of assembly'. It may refer to the Mount Megiddo.	Mount Megiddo was where repentant Israel won a great victory against the Canaanites, the tribes within the land (Jud. 5:19).
7. Lightning, plague	As on Egypt. The reference is also to Ez. 13:8-16 which describes such things coming on Jerusalem- perhaps the idea is that those who now dominate Jerusalem will be punished in this way.

The first four seals, the four coloured horsemen, are based upon the horsemen of judgment in Zechariah 1, which vision is repeated in Zechariah 6 but with the difference that the four horsemen go out to judge the nations who have performed these judgments upon Israel, e.g. "the north country". These four horsemen inflict punishments and judgments which are full of Old Testament allusions to prophecies concerning how God would judge His people, His land and specifically Jerusalem for their impenitence. Ezekiel 5-7 is full of the same language about what shall come upon Jerusalem, e.g. famine is described in the same language as in Revelation 6 (Ez. 4:16). The four judgments of Rev. 6:8 are those of Ez. 14:21- to come upon Jerusalem. The language of Jeremiah's prophecies against Judah are particularly alluded in these first four seals (Jer. 6:22-26; 14:11,12; 15:1,2; 16:4,5; 18:11-21; 21:8-10; 38:2; 44:11-14). And the language of the fifth seal is alluding to the Lord's word of judgment upon Jerusalem in Mt. 23:35. Most significantly, the language of the four horsemen is taken directly from the curses upon Israel for disobedience to the covenant in Dt. 32:23-35.

Clearly enough, beyond any question to the serious Bible student, the focus of the four horsemen is upon God's people in their land, and especially the city of Jerusalem, in the last days. The Old Testament allusions continue in the appendix to the seals which we find in Revelation 7:1-17. There, the sealing of some of God's people is obviously based upon Ez. 9:4, where the same was done to the faithful at the time of the Babylonian invasion.

The theme of 'seven' judgments coming upon the land surely connects with the claim that Mohammad waged seven military campaigns against the infidels in the land [promised to Abraham]. The Hadith several times speaks of the "seven military expeditions led by the Messenger of Allah himself (may peace be upon him)" (e.g. Book 19.4469), or of the "seven battles" he was victorious in (Book 19.4462). This would explain the seven fold structure of the seals-trumpets-vials. The Moslem pretenders to the pattern of Mohamad bring seven judgments upon Israel, and are punished by likewise receiving back seven judgments, drinking the cup they made others to drink. The Hadith claims that Mohammad predicted three cycles of calamities in the last days, which would be subdivided into various other calamities: "Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman reported: By Allah, I have the best knowledge amongst

people about every turmoil which is going to appear in the period intervening me and the Last Hour; and it is not for the fact that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) told me something confidentially pertaining to it and he did not tell anybody else about it, but it is because of the fact that I was present in the assembly in which he had been describing the turmoil. and he especially made a mention of three turmoils which would not spare anything and amongst these there would be turmoils like storms in the hot season" (41.6908). This is exactly the Biblical picture- of three cycles of judgments and turmoils in the land (seals-trumpets-vials), subdivided into various specific calamities. As the jihadists strive to obey the letter of their writings, they will thereby be fulfilling the outline picture of the last day crisis which is foretold in Revelation.

The typology of the invasions recorded in Judges as well as those of Babylon and Assyria teaches that the latter day Arab incursions during the period of prolonged downtreading will have consciously aimed to destroy the agriculture and even the physical structure of the land of Israel. Dt. 28 and Lev. 26, which have a specific application to the latter-day curses upon Israel, emphasize this curse of famine and its related problems of disease and death. This is exactly the language of the seal, trumpet and vial judgments of Rev. 6,9 and 16, largely falling upon the earth/land of Israel. Our Lord's prophecy of famines at the time of the end had its primary fulfilment in the land of Israel around A.D. 70 - and its secondary reference is fundamentally to the land of Israel too (Lk. 21:11), although this does not rule out this prophecy's partial reference to famines in the surrounding world also.

It should be noted that the record of the curses in Lev. 26 splits them up into six sections, each introduced by a phrase like, "If ye will not for this hearken unto me... then..." more curses would come (Lev. 26:14,18,21,23,27,36). It is tempting to associate this with the series of six judgments to be poured upon Israel and the Arabs as outlined in the six seals (Rev. 6) and six vials (Rev. 16), leading up to the seventh period, of Israel's repentance and Christ's Kingdom. There are many other points of contact between the curses and the language of the seals and vials. The implication of this is that there are at least six periods of God's appeal to Israel to repent through their trials, which they will refuse to accept. "If you will not for all this *hearken* unto me" (Lev. 26:18) may suggest that God's word will be spoken to Israel along with the trials. This again indicates that the Elijah ministry will operate within Israel during their period of Arab downtreading. "If you will not be *reformed* by me" (Lev. 26:23) uses a Hebrew word elsewhere translated 'to teach', defined by Strong as 'to chastise by words'. This provides further confirmation of the idea.

It's noteworthy that the seven seals and seven trumpets and seven vials all conclude with the seventh being the establishment of the Kingdom. So there are actually six judgments in each case. The Hadith (Book 41.7040) speaks of six signs before the last day: "Hasten in performing these good deeds (before these) six things (happen): (the appearance) of tribe Dijjal, the smoke, the beast of the earth, the rising of the sun from the west, the general turmoil (leading to large-scale massacre) and death of masses and individuals". These six are very similar to the things spoken of in the seals and trumpets- signs in the sun, mass death, smoke, beasts of the earth. The jihadists are seeking to consciously fulfil the Hadith and so, due to the allusions the Hadith and Koran make to Revelation, they will end up fulfilling God's word of their own volition.

### **The Seventh Seal?**

It is my belief that prophecy is to some extent conditional, and the outcome is variable upon human repentance, God's gracious holding back of legitimate, prepared judgments, the intensity of His people's prayers etc. The lack of any detail about a seventh seal, even though

it is opened, is significant. All we read is that there was silence in Heaven at that time for half an hour (Rev. 8:1). This has the same feel to it as the seven thunders whose details were specifically not written down (Rev. 10:4). Why mention them? I submit that the final judgments intended upon the land and God's people are not in fact going to be performed, although they are potentially prepared- because of God's gracious response to human repentance, prayer and the suffering of His dear people.

This idea that the seventh seal is not opened is confirmed by the observation that the sixth seal is the composite one that contains the trumpet and vial prophecies — the *sixth* seal and not the seventh.

<b>Sixth Seal</b>	<b>Seven Trumpets</b>
(Revelation 6: 12-17)	
great earthquake	great earthquake (11:13)
	another earthquake (11:19)
sun black	third part of sun smitten (8: 12)
moon as blood	third part of moon smitten (8:12)
stars fall from heaven	"there fell a great star from heaven" (8:10)
	third part of stars smitten (8:12)
the great day of his wrath	"your wrath is come" (11:18)

<b>Sixth Seal</b>	<b>Seven Vials</b>
great earthquake	great earthquake (16:18)
sun black	darkness in kingdom of beast
islands moved	every island fled away (16:20)
mountains moved	mountains were not found (16:20)
the great day of his wrath	the vials of the wrath of God (16:1)

### **The Seals and the Olivet Prophecy**

It is clear enough that the Olivet Prophecy has application both to the "last days" of AD70 and also to our last days. Revelation is the Lord's expansion upon His words on Olivet- and therefore we should use this as a framework for interpreting the book. It applies to both the first century and also our last days, and the seals are perhaps the clearest example of this.

Rev. 6:1,2	Mt. 24:14	Rev. 6:14	Mt. 24:35
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:3,4	:6,7	:16	Lk. 23:30
:5,6	:7	:17	Lk. 21:36
:7,8	:7	7:1	Mt. 24:31
:9	:12	:3	Lk. 21:18,28
:11	:14	:14	Mt. 24:19,21
:12	:7	8:3	Lk. 21:36
:13	:32	:5	Mt. 24:27

John was told that the events of the seals "must take place" - *dei genesthai*. The Olivet prophecy uses the same phrase (Mt. 24:6; Lk. 21:9).

We have seen that the Olivet prophecy describes the events of both AD70 and our present last days, with special reference to the tribulation of God's people, both natural and spiritual. The connections between the Olivet prophecy and the seals would therefore indicate that the seals, and therefore much of Revelation, has reference to these same two time periods. Fairly conclusive evidence for a pre-AD70 date for Revelation has now been published. In any case, the connections with the Olivet prophecy cannot be shrugged off as incidental. The seals, then, can be applied to our latter day tribulation. There seems no reason to insist that they should be interpreted chronologically; they can quite comfortably be seen as describing different aspects of the same period. This is how series of judgments described in the prophets often have their fulfilment (notably in Isaiah), rather than being a chronological prophecy of events. Zech. 12:3-11 is a passage which contains seven occurrences of the phrase "In that day...". The passage does not have to be interpreted chronologically; this is a list of events which will occur around the same time, "in that day". They are snapshots of the same scene from different angles. The seals and the repeated references to a three and a half year tribulation period can be understood likewise; they do not necessarily refer to chronologically different events, but are giving different aspects of information about the same basic scene. The lack of strict chronological sequence in prophecy is a major feature of the Old Testament; thus a consideration of the phrase "in that day..." in Isaiah reveals that the context 'jumps around' all over the place, from the first coming of Christ to the Babylonian invasion to the Kingdom. There is no reason to think that Revelation is any different.

All the seals must be opened if a scroll is to be opened. The scroll doesn't become partly visible because one seal has been broken. I suggest the imagery is chosen in this way in order to lead us away from seeking to interpret the events of the seals as being continuous historic, consecutive events. Rather are they different aspects of the total picture of what has to happen before the book of life can be opened. The idea of opening a sealed scroll is obviously alluding to Dan. 12:1-4, where Daniel was told that the scroll would be opened specifically in the last days- i.e. the seals to it would be then removed. This means that we have to look to the last days for the time when the seals are removed.

In my youth I attended regular continuous historic studies of Revelation, noting carefully in my wide margined Bible the suggested fulfilments of the various seals, trumpets and vials in events during the Roman empire and subsequent European history. Some of these fitted better than others. I couldn't deny that there was a fairly good fit in some areas, but in others, eyebrows had to be raised. The fit seemed forced and lacked the ring of truth in terms of credible interpretation. We don't need to take a red pencil and put a line through all those interpretations. Like the continuous historical interpretations of the image in Daniel 2, they



have a certain validity. But just as the image was specifically about a latter day entity which stands erect and complete in the land promised to Abraham in the last days, destroyed in totality by the Lord's return, so Revelation has its major fulfilment in the last days. Any shadowy fulfilments we may discern over history are incidental compared to the ultimate and main, intended thrust of latter day prophecy- which is focused upon the events in the land promised to Abraham in the last days before Christ returns. We live at the end of human history; the previous fulfilments are but mere shadows compared to the ultimate reality which is now starting to unfold before our eyes.

### **The Horsemen**

The Hadith claims that the Moslems will be as horsemen in the final conflict at the end of the age: "The Last Hour would not come until... there would be a terrible fight and the Muslims would prepare a detachment (for fighting unto death) which would not return but victorious... Allah will decree that the enemy should be routed... Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: I know their names and the names of their forefathers and the colour of their horses. They will be best horsemen on the surface of the earth on that day". (41.6927). As we find so often in Revelation, the descriptions of the main players are expressed in terms which fit admirably with Moslem self-understanding as expressed in the Koran and Hadith.

### **The Four Horsemen and Zechariah**

The vision of horses going forth to bring judgment is clearly alluding to the similar vision in Zech. 1:8-12; 6:1-8, and we need to get a handle on what is in view there in order to understand how this will come true in the last days:

"I stared into the night, and there was a man mounted on a red horse! The horse was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him there were red, brown, and white horses. Then I asked, "Who are these, sir?" The messenger who was talking to me answered, "I will tell you who these are." The man who stood among the myrtle trees answered, "These are the ones whom the LORD sent out to wander throughout the earth." Then they reported to the angel of the LORD who stood among the myrtle trees, "We have wandered throughout the earth—and look!—the entire earth is at rest. Everything is quiet and peaceful." And the angel of the LORD replied, "LORD of the Heavenly Armies, how long will it be until you show mercy to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, with whom you have been angry for these past seventy years?"... Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?". And the angel answered and said to me, "These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go toward the south country." When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth. And he said, "Go, patrol the earth." So they patrolled the earth. Then he cried to me, "Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country."

The horses of Zechariah 1 are those nations who have trampled up and down the earth / land of Israel, subduing it until it is quiet. The chariots / horses of Zechariah 6 are the Angel cherubim representatives of those nations, who are sent out against them in judgment. Such judgment is portended in chapter 1 also, where straight after the vision of the horses we read of the four horns who have abused Israel being cut off by the carpenter Messiah of Israel.

Significantly, there is an Angel stationed with the horses in the valley from which they emerge, as if to show that the judgments upon the land were Angelically controlled; Israel was not at the hands of chance human evil, indeed the horses report back to the Angel. This sets the scene for the horses / chariots of chapter 6 going out in judgment against those nations. The land lying still and at rest is explained further in 1:11,12- it was because the cities of Judah were lying in ruins after the horse powers had trampled over them. This all looks forward to how Jerusalem shall be trodden down in the last days, after the pattern of how the Babylonians trod it down (Is. 5:5; 28:18; 63:18; Lk. 21:24)- which is when this prophecy will have its final fulfilment. We can look, therefore, for the three or four entities which trod down the land and people of Israel to have their latter day equivalent, and a like judgment from Heaven. And this is what Revelation 6 is explaining in more detail- in a latter day context. The immediate message in Zechariah's time was therefore that a future treading down of the land and Jerusalem was to happen, but the silver lining of that cloud was that this would finally lead to the eternal restoration of Israel. This is exactly the same style as in Ezekiel 38; we noted in studying the context of that prophecy that it was given at the time when news of Jerusalem's fall had come to the rebellious captives in Babylon amongst whom Ezekiel was sitting. They were being told that another even worse desolation was to happen, patterned after the events they were now hearing of, and yet from this would come the eternal restoration of Israel in God's Kingdom on earth. But not immediately.

The two brass mountains of Zech. 6 are from where the horses / judgments issue forth- towards the north and south of Israel. The mountains must therefore be in central Israel. I suggest the mountains in view are both in Jerusalem- the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion, in between which is the valley of Jehoshaphat. These mountains and that valley are from where God's latter day judgments proceed (Joel 3:2,16; Zech. 14:14). Or it may be that they are the two mountains formed by the cleavage of the Mount of Olives predicted in Zech. 14:4, at which time "half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half toward the south". This would connect with the horses / chariots going out towards the north and south here in Zech. 6. Any difficulties with exact chronology may be accounted for by the suggestion that the meaning and nature of time will change in the time around the Lord's coming, as I have outlined at length in *The Last Days*.

The four horses / chariots are understood by most commentators to have connection with the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies. Their connection with the four winds / spirits of the Heavens (Zech. 6:5) recalls the way that the four beasts of Daniel 7 arise as a result of the same four winds / spirits being active. I have explained elsewhere that the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies refer to powers that will dominate the land and people of Israel in the last days, whatever historical application they may have had. The metals and beasts all exist together in the last days, because they are all judged together at the coming of Christ to earth.

### **Potential Fulfilments of the Horses of Zechariah Chapters 1 and 6**

The way prophetic words can be rescheduled in fulfilment is demonstrated by the 70 years. They came to fulfilment at the time of Daniel's prayer in Dan. 9:2; but also at the fall of Babylon and edict of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1); and yet also in the second year of Darius (Zech. 1:1,12). This latter period would have been timed from the actual destruction of the temple (2 Kings 25:2,8,9); whereas the captivity began before that. And the predicted restoration didn't happen as prophesied. But it will ultimately happen- at the Lord's return.

The little horn of Daniel 7 grows out of the fourth kingdom, represented by the fourth beast. But in Daniel 8, a very similar horn grows out of Greece, the third kingdom. We can therefore conclude that the antichrist figure of Daniel 8 would have appeared as an outgrowth of the Greek kingdom, and been destroyed by Messiah's coming. But this didn't happen, and Antiochus Epiphanes became but an incipient fulfilment of the antichrist of the last days. Zechariah, like Daniel, contains many conditional prophecies- "And this shall come to pass, *if* you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zech. 6:15). Zech. 9:13 appears to be another such conditional prophecy, similar in reference to that of Daniel 8 about the possibility of Messiah's coming at the time of the Greek empire. God says He will place Ephraim within the bow of Judah, to be fired at her enemies; and He would "raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece" (Zech. 9:13), leading to the final salvation of God's people, the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, and her Messianic king coming unto her (Zech. 9:9). But this didn't come true; the resistance of the Maccabees was not based on true spirituality, and the Romans took over control of the land from the Greeks. No Messianic Kingdom was established. This would explain the purposeful ambiguity of interpretation which there is in the image of Daniel 2; a good case can be made for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece, and yet also for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece-Rome. Daniel 8 predicts the breakup of the Greek empire after Alexander's death into four horns, out of which a little horn arises (Dan. 8:8). The only other prophetic reference to four horns is again in Zechariah, when we read of how the four horns who had scattered God's people were to be cut off by the carpenters (Zech. 1:18,19). The carpenters surely look forward to the carpenter Messiah. He could have appeared and cut off those four horns; but He did not, and so another prophetic sequence was allowed, in which another [fourth] beast arose, this time with ten horns, not just four. And in Revelation we find this developed further, in that seven heads also appear on the beast, and a whore rides the beast, sitting upon [another?] seven hills / kingdoms. The number and ferocity of the enemies of God's people seems to increase over time. If Israel had repented earlier, then all this would have been unnecessary. The three horses of Zechariah 1 thus become four horses in Zechariah 6. The fact the four cherubim chariots are sent out in judgment of those same coloured horses speaks of how all earthly entities have their representative Angels in Heaven.

This same situation can be found in the way that Zechariah 1 opens the prophecy with a vision of three kinds of horses- red, white and speckled. These represented the powers which had subdued the land of Judah and left it in the desolate state it was at the time of Zechariah (Zech. 1:12). It's tempting to interpret them as Assyria, Babylon and Media-Persia; or perhaps Babylon, Media and Persia. Straight away, we read of *four* horns, representing the powers who had desolated God's people; and how they would be destroyed by the carpenters, surely looking forward to the carpenter Messiah. And the vision of Zech. 6 has *four* and not *three* kinds of horses- red, black, white and speckled. This may be Zechariah's way of saying that because of Israel's inability to fulfil the required spiritual preconditions, the longer version of the prophetic program was going to come into play. Although as always, there is the distinct message of hope, that finally God's triumphant purpose with Israel shall come to realization.

### **The Final Scenario**

The vision of Zechariah 6 could have had fulfilment in Zechariah's time; the three horses of Gentile oppressors in chapter 1 are matched by the horses of the Divine cherubim in chapter 6, who are sent forth to judge those powers. But there are four of them- because by the time of chapter 6, the prophetic program had been extended to coax repentance from Israel. And now in Revelation 6, we have a similar scene in the last days- four horses of different colours are sent out into the earth / land of Israel. The context is the same- these are the powers which

will dominate Israel in the last days, under Angelic control, in order to bring about her repentance and eternal restitution to God. I don't think we have to look for four literal entities. The 'four' clearly connect with the four beasts and four metals, and the speckled horses of Zechariah invite comparison with the feet of iron and clay; especially if we read the Hebrew *amots* in Zech. 6:3 as meaning 'red' [AV "bay"]- they would be speckled with red, as if the strength of the red horse was partially in them. Until Zechariah's time, there had been various horses of Gentile powers, the fulfilments of the metals of Daniel 2 and the beasts of Daniel 7, dominating the land and people of Israel. They had trodden down the land and people until they were silent (Zech. 1:10,11). This treading down is to happen in the last days, when the image stands complete, and all the beasts exist together. This is the burden of the first four horses pictured in the first four seals.

We need not look for these events to come chronologically; for all the seals have to be removed before a scroll can be opened. The event of 'opening the scroll' is presented by the metaphor as one event, and the seals are presenting different aspects of the events required for the scroll to be opened.

The horses were "sent" by Yahweh "to walk to and fro through the land" (Zech. 1:10). These are the same Hebrew words found in Jer. 25:9 for how Yahweh "sent... all the families of the north...and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" into the land. The horses are thus confirmed to represent the nations who had subjugated the land. And the same Hebrew words are found in Hab. 1:6: "I raise up the Chaldeans... which shall march [s.w. "walk to and fro"] through the land". These horses are effectively parallel with the four horns who 'scattered' Israel (Zech. 1:19). Israel were to be "scattered [s.w.] beyond the Euphrates" (1 Kings 14:15); the number four is not perhaps referring to four specific powers, but rather alluding to the way that Israel's domination according to Daniel's visions was to be by 'four' entities.

The coloured horsemen of Revelation 6 are therefore full of reference to the nations who subdued the land and people of Israel, and also to the Angelic powers who ultimately permitted those nations to do that work, and who finally judged them. The horsemen are presented in Revelation as clearly under the control of the living creatures, the Angel cherubim, and that was the same as in Zechariah. The first horse was white and conquering; this doesn't mean that firstly there was a period of military victory, followed by one of hunger and necessity. The seals don't have to be chronologically separate from each other. The opening of the book of life will require a military conquering of the land / earth of Israel, as well as the sufferings of the other seals [hunger, famine etc.].

6:2 *And I looked and beheld a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow, and there was given to him a crown, and he came forth conquering and to conquer-* In the first century application to the "last days" which culminated in AD70, the rider on the white horse "bent on conquest" would initially refer to the victorious Roman march towards Jerusalem in Spring 67. The rider takes peace from the earth (cp. Mt. 24:6,7)- the disruption of the '*pax Romana*', the peace of the Roman empire. "Caesar has obtained for us a profound peace. There are neither wars nor battles" (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3:13:9). The riders on the black and pale horses would then refer to the famine and death resulting from the Jewish war.

The description of the rider on the white horse going out to conquer is intended to be linked with the description of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 19:11. Yet the rider of Rev. 6:1,2 is part of the judgments upon the land. It refers to an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, the ultimate false Messiah; perhaps the Islamic Mahdi.

The white horse here must be understood as the latter day version of the white horse of Zechariah chapters 1 and 6, which went forth to conquer the land promised to Abraham and to tread down its cities and inhabitants. The simple point is that the land of Israel will be conquered; the current technological advantage of the IDF and the bravado of the state of Israel will not ultimately save them. Only faith in Christ will. And yet the figure of a rider on a white horse is used later in Revelation regarding the Lord Jesus. This doesn't mean that it is the Lord Jesus who is in view here in 6:2. For often in Revelation, the powers and entities who dominate God's land and people are presented in terms elsewhere used about the true Kingdom of God and its king. Thus the whore who rides the beast represents the city of Babylon, but the descriptions used have clear connection with the description of the true city of God. This is not to say that they are one and the same. It means that the antiChrist is a fake, imitation Christ, and his Kingdom is likewise an imitation of the true. So the white horse conqueror of the land is an antiChrist- bearing in mind that the Greek idea of *anti* carries the idea of an equivalent or imitation, rather than [as in Latin] someone 'against'. The Hadith in book 19.4388.4390, 4392 and 4437 claim that Mohammad rode on a white horse during the time of the early Moslem battles with the Jews. The language of conquering is very current amongst Islamic jihadists: "Allah hath decreed: Lo! I verily shall conquer" (Sura 58.21).

The horses invite connection with the locusts like horses and "the sound of chariots of many horses rushing to battle" in Rev. 9:7,9,17, which I later interpret as the hordes of Israel's neighbours from the Euphrates who will rush into the land promised to Abraham to destroy it. Horses are frequently used in the Bible to represent military action. In Rev. 14:20, blood comes up unto the horse bridles- these invaders meet a terrible destruction. The final destruction of Israel's enemies features the destruction of their horses (Rev. 19:18), and that prophecy compares their horses with the white horse of the Lord Jesus and His followers also on white horses (Rev. 19:11,14,19,21). This juxtaposition of 'horses' suggests that the white horse conqueror of 6:2 is not Christ, but rather an antichrist, an imitation, fake Christ.

The rider on the white horse was "given" a crown, a *stephanos* of victory, and with that 'gift' he goes out to 'conquer'. We find the same Greek words translated 'given' and 'to conquer' in Rev. 13:7, where "the mouth" of the beast is "given... to make war with the saints [God's people, Israel] and to *overcome* [s.w. "conquer"] them". The mouth of the beast is his publicity agent, the false prophet, the little horn- the antichrist figure. And it is this same individual who is pictured in 6:2 as riding the white horse, an imitation Jesus, an anti-Christ. The same Greek word translated conquer / overcome is also found in a similar context in Rev. 11:7: "The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit [having experienced a death and amazing 'resurrection'] shall make war against them [the two faithful witnesses] and shall *overcome* them and kill them". But the same word is found frequently throughout Revelation and John's letters, speaking of how ultimately God's people shall conquer / overcome. The point is, they will temporarily be overcome, but they shall gloriously overcome at the end. "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen. 49:19).

The crown of the antichrist connects with how the horns of the beast have crowns. His bow connects him with Gog, the individual leader of the assembly of ten nations from within the land promised to Abraham who will invade Israel in the last days. In Gog's defeat by Divine intervention, his bow will be smitten out of his hand (Ez. 39:3). The bow is the weapon of Esau / Edom, the father of the Arab peoples (Gen. 27:3); and it is repeatedly used about the weaponry of the Babylonians and Assyrians and the neighbours of Israel, whose desolation of the land and Jerusalem are the prototypes of the latter day desolation (Is. 5:28; 13:18; Jer.

4:29; 6:23; 46:9; 50:29,42; 51:56). Jeremiah perceived that the bow of Babylon was effectively the bow of Yahweh, drawn against His own people in judgment (Lam. 2:4; 3:12). Again we see that the horses, their riders and weaponry are also those of God, just as the coloured horses of Zech. 1 are matched by the same coloured horses which comprised the Angel cherubim in Zech. 6. Zech. 9:10 speaks of how the horse, chariot and battle how will be "cut off from Jerusalem" just prior to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. Here in Rev. 6:2 we have the development of that situation- and the focus will finally be upon Jerusalem as the holy city of Islam, now proclaimed by some Jihadist theologians as more holy than Mecca.

6:3 *And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying: Come!-*  
See on :1

6:4 *And another horse came forth, a red horse, and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, that they should slay one another. And there was given to him a great sword-* The red horse is literally a flame / fire coloured horse [*purrhos*]. The same root word is found in describing how the horses released from beyond the Euphrates spit "fire" [*pur*] upon the earth / land of Israel, with which they destroy the people there (Rev. 9:17,18). Perhaps the "fire, smoke and brimstone" which they bring upon the land means that they consciously think they are bringing Divine judgment upon Israel- this is indeed the radical Islamist position. Or there may be reference to some form of warfare which makes use of fire, some kind of white phosphorous or other weaponry which creates intense fire which water cannot quench. The only other time we meet the colour 'flame-coloured' ["red"] is at Rev. 12:3, the great red dragon. This horse is therefore to be associated with that system of latter day domination of the land.

Constantly, the comfort is given that none of these calamities upon the land are a result of radical evil, evil that is totally free of any control; for "it was given unto him...". All the traumas to come upon the land are under direct Divine control through the Angels.

"Him that sat thereon" is the same phrase used of how the whore sits upon the beast (Rev. 17:1,3,9,15; 18:7). The whore is the embodiment of the beast, of the same red colour as the red horse. They are symbols for the same thing- an entity of latter day domination of the land which is controlled by an individual-the antichrist, the rider of the horse, the rider of the beast.

It is ultimately the Lord Jesus who sends a sword rather than peace upon the earth (Mt. 10:34); the horses and their woes are all, therefore, under His direct control. There seems to be allusion to Mt. 10:34 because Rev. 6:4 goes on to say the red horse rider has a sword, and he causes those in the earth / land to kill each other. Mt. 10:34 records the Lord teaching that He had come to send a sword in the form of division between persons. The red horse rider causes those living in the territory of the land promised to Abraham to kill each other; and this is the scenario we currently see unfolding in that very area. It is conflicting forms of religion which are clearly at the root of that conflict; this is the characteristic of the feet of mixed iron and clay, that will not cleave to each other.

Revelation is written in Greek but is clearly a Hebrew book. We can safely assume that the *ge* / "the earth" in view is the same as the Hebrew *eretz*- the land of Israel. And this is indeed how *ge* is often specifically used in the New Testament in speaking of the land of Israel. In Matthew alone: Mt. 2:6,20,21; 5:35; 9:26; 12:42 the Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost

part of the *ge*, the land promised to Abraham; 17:25; 23:35 “all the righteous blood shed upon the earth”; 27:35. And almost every reference to *ge* in Revelation can be understood as the land promised to Abraham [this of course is not the same as the territory currently occupied by the state of Israel].

The great sword was "given unto him". Again the idea is that these invasions of the land are allowed and even empowered by God. The idea of being given a sword likewise implies that the horse and rider are executing judgment from God. This is how present day Israel are crying out for serious Divine judgment, from the gay bars of Tel Aviv to the arrogance of the IDF, overarched by a refusal to repent for crucifying God's Son and refusing Him to this day.

The Greek translated “sword” is the word for a knife; being given a great knife has connotations of sacrifice. We think of Islamic State beheadings, publicized by them with pictures of jihadists holding a knife over their victims. This is exactly the picture we have here. This is what we are seeing before our eyes on the media.

*6:5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying: Come! And I looked and beheld a black horse, and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand-* The black horses of Zech. 6 were sent into “the north country”, associating this horse with the invasion from the latter day Assyria / Babylon. It could be that the message is simply that there will be terrible famine in the land, and tiny amounts of food will cost much money. But the rider has the balances in his hand, as if he is the merchant and seller. We think of the prediction that none will be able to buy or sell without the mark of the beast; the suggestion may be that the invading power sells food to some within the land for high prices. Islamic militants insist upon conversion to their form of Islam but will make concessions if a *jizya* tax is paid. So it may be that we have here a description of how famine will come about for God's people as a result of such actions.

*6:6 And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying: A measure of wheat for a denarius and three measures of barley for a denarius-* Comparing the prices here with those mentioned for food during the siege of Samaria in 2 Kings 7, these prices are very high but not as great as when “an ass's head was sold for 80 shekels, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five” (2 Kings 6.25). The figures are not such as we would expect if real famine, and particularly the famine conditions of a siege, were in view. A man could buy three times as much barley as he needed for a day's wage. This isn't talking about actual death by famine, but rather food being sold at grossly inflated prices compared to income- that's surely the impression being created. This would fit my suggestion that the dominators of Israel are pictured as selling food at grossly inflated prices to those under their control, in a manner reminiscent of the Jewish ghettos of central Europe under Nazi domination.

*And do not damage the oil and the wine-* The GNB appears to be closest to interpreting this: "Do not damage the olive trees and the vineyards!". The Greek translated "hurt" occurs several times later in Revelation, also in the sense of hurting or damaging. The Angel of Rev. 7:2,3 is told not to "hurt" the physical land until God's servants have been sealed. And likewise in Rev. 9:4, there is the proviso that men must be hurt, but not the plants of the land. The word is used about the hurting of the people on the earth (Rev. 9:10,19), and the faithful are initially not "hurt"- until they are killed after they have completed their witness (Rev. 11:5). The voice that states "hurt not the olive trees and the vineyards" comes from between the four beasts- it is an Angelic limitation placed upon the damagers of the land / people in the land promised to Abraham. The sense may be that initially, the physical land is not to be

damaged; the people of God, and then the entire dwellers in the land, are to be 'hurt', and not the physical land. Therefore the lack of food created by the rider on the black horse would not be because of famine, but rather as I suggested- because of selling food at high prices as a form of destruction of those who refuse to convert to the Islamic State.

Another consideration is that the phrase could be rendered "Hands off our oil and wine!". Oil and wine occur together in pictures of abundance and luxurious living (Num. 18:12; Dt. 7:13; 8:8; 28:51; 2 Chron. 11:11; 32:28; Prov. 21:17; Jer. 40:40; Joel 2.24); and note especially that these are part of the luxury of the Babylon-beast system in Rev. 18:13. The implication could be that the desolators of Israel enjoy a brief period of opulence, having grabbed the wealth of Israel and the Jews, and submitting those they have conquered to heavy *jizya* tax and exorbitant prices for food.

*6:7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying: Come!- See on :1.*

*6:8 And I looked and beheld a pale horse, and he that sat upon him. His name was Death, and Hades followed behind him. And there was given to them authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with death and by the wild beasts of the earth-* The plural "given unto *them*" presumably refers to death and hades. It's unclear whether "the fourth part of the earth" is geographical, or refers to a quarter of the population. The idea which we meet in the Revelation of 'parts' of the land and people being damaged or killed is in line with the Koran, which speaking of judging "the children of Israel" says that Moslems are "to cut off a part of those who disbelieve" (Sura 7.127).

As it stands, it seems redundant to say that death and the grave [*hades*] kill with sword, famine, wild beasts and death. How can 'death' be one of the four listed methods of killing? Perhaps it refers to some specific kind of death- a death penalty of execution (the word is used in this way in Mt. 10:21; 15:4; 20:18). Likewise how can any one horse rider have power over wild animals? The first century fulfilment was clearly in Christians being thrown to the lions; a related word is used for how Paul fought with wild beasts (1 Cor. 15:21). I would suggest that the latter day fulfilment will be in that those who refuse to convert will meet their end in one of four ways at the hands of this horse rider- death by the sword, i.e. in battle; by controlled and enforced starvation, as in the Nazi death camps; "death" in the sense of the death penalty; or death by being thrown to wild animals, as was done to the early Christians by the Romans.

The Greek word translated "sword" here is *rhompaia*, which has already been used of that proceeding from the mouth of the Lord Jesus (1:16; 2:12,16). It is connected not so much with killing in battle or war, but with deliberate, judicial, putting to death. This recalls the Islamic jihadist approach to killing those who will not convert to Islam- they are seen as being killed in a judicial sense, before a court of Moslems who are both judge, jury and prosecution, as well as the execution squad.

The four judgments mentioned here clearly allude to Ez. 14:21: "I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!". The 'fourth part' of the land that is thus judged is therefore likely to be Jerusalem. Again we see that the location of the 'earth' is not the entire globe but the land promised to Abraham. The Ezekiel passage goes on to say that out of those judgments will



come forth a repentant remnant- which is the same picture we have throughout latter day prophecy. It is this remnant which will enable the return of Christ to Israel. The same pattern is to be found in Ez. 33:27-29; the four judgments on the land, involving a total desolation, result in the repentance of the remnant: “Thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and him who is in the open field will I give to the animals to be devoured; and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. I will make the land a desolation and an astonishment; the pride of her power shall cease and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate [i.e. not producing food-leading to famine], so that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am Yahweh, when I have made the land a desolation and an astonishment, because of all their abominations which they have committed”.

6:9- see on Lk. 18:7; Dan. 5:23; Rom. 14:8,9.

*And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those that had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held-* The fact the people are ‘slain’ on the altar connects with our comment on ‘death’ in 6:8. These are those slain by the Islamic militants for refusing to convert to their false religion. The allusion is to the blood at the base of the altar from the sacrifices, representing the blood or lives lived of the faithful who had been sacrificed. It is blood which is under the altar; the “souls” are represented by the blood. The witness of their lives, who they essentially were, cried out to God, just as Abel’s blood cried out. Cain, his brother, becomes the prototype of Israel’s latter day persecutors- it is their own half-brothers, their Arab neighbours, who slay them. The Hebrew for ‘Cain’ is the root of the word ‘Canaan’. The persecutors of the faithful are Canaan- the inhabitants of Canaan, Israel’s aggressive neighbours

In their death they as it were died with their Lord, the slain lamb (Rev. 5:6). The Greek suggests to be butchered, which is absolutely the behaviour of the jihadists to their victims. Note that those in view are not necessarily Western hostages, but those who are butchered for the sake of their witness to God’s word. What we are seeing in the butchering of any who get in the way of the Islamic militants in the ‘earth’ / land promised to Abraham is a precursor of what can be expected on a wider scale, especially of true Christians witnessing to God’s word.

The believer’s death is a pouring out of blood on the altar (Phil. 2:17 Gk.), which is language highly appropriate to the Lord’s death. It follows from this that the death of one in Christ is the pinnacle of their spiritual maturity, as the Lord’s death was the pinnacle of His. It is a spiritual victory, more than the temporal domination of the flesh which it can appear.

Their preaching God’s word was a *marturia*, a legal testament at court, and this was the basis of their martyrdom. The jihadists believe that all who refuse to accept their version of Islam must in some form come before an Islamic court, often presided over by themselves as both judge and prosecution, and then be legally butchered as a result. From their perspective, they are not guilty of wanton butchering; they claim they are doing it in fulfilment of Muslim legal requirements. The parallel is in Rev. 20:4: “Them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God; and such as worshipped not the Beast nor his image and received not his mark”. The ‘slaying’ is particularly by beheading; and Islam is the only world religion today which legitimizes and practices beheading. And they are publicly doing it.

Seeing that there is no conscious survival of death, could this not refer to the guardian Angels of the former martyrs, crying out for the blood of their charges to be avenged? They are *so* closely identified with them that they can ask for “our blood” to be avenged. It’s apparent enough that this is not the people themselves speaking- for they are dead. Surely then it refers to their Angels, who identify so strongly with them? Perhaps in the same way, Rev. 5:10 has guardian Angels thanking Jesus for making “us” king-priests to reign on earth. And when the believers are finally glorified, there is an ecstatic voice in Heaven, exalting that the Lamb’s wife has made herself ready (Rev. 19:6). Surely this must refer to the Angels rejoicing that their charges have finally made it to salvation? We, for whom they laboured perhaps for centuries, preparing our genetic pool [note how the Angels “prepared” Edom unto destruction long before it happened, Ez. 35:6], and the myriad of circumstances we would meet which were designed to bring us towards the Kingdom. No wonder they will be so ecstatic. Or in another figure, the blood of the dead believers cries out from under the altar, demanding vengeance on this world: on the Catholic, Protestant, Babylonian, Roman, Nazi, Soviet systems that slew them for their faith (Rev. 6:9). To God, their blood is a voice, just as real as the voice of Abel, which cried out (in a figure) for judgment against Cain (Gen. 4:10). After their death, those who had already died are spoken of as being given “white robes” and being told to rest a bit longer. Yet the white robe is given at baptism; a man may cast off Christ, but the prodigal is given again the robe if he returns (Lk. 15:22 s.w.); we are given white robes in this life through our acceptance of the blood of Christ and living in response to that redemption (Rev. 7:13,14; 22:14 Gk.). God giving believers white robes after their death can surely only be understood as His remembrance of how in their lives they had put on those robes. But His view of time is different, and He sees them as doing it again and again, as He considers how they had died for His cause and how thereby He will surely raise them. This is just as we would relive in our own minds the baptism of one of our children who has died. We know of course that there is no immortal soul, and that we personally feel nothing in death. But there is an immortal spirit, in that who we essentially are, our personality, lives on in the memory of a loving Father.

6:10 *And they cried with a great voice, saying: How long, O Master, the holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*- Just as the Lord cried with a loud voice at His death (Mt. 27:46,50; Lk. 23:46). The suffering and even death experienced by the faithful during the tribulation will identify them with the crucifixion sufferings of their Lord. In Revelation, it is usually an Angel who ‘cries with a loud voice’ (Rev. 5:2,12; 7:2,10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12,15; 12:10; 14:2,7,9,15; 16:1,17; 18:2; 19:17- a very considerable theme). We have here another example of Revelation’s theme that the believers on earth have their position reflected in Heaven, by Angels in the court of Heaven. Their representative Angels loudly proclaimed to the court of Heaven the injustice done. It was not so much they themselves who cried out, seeing that death is unconsciousness, but the witness of their lives [their ‘soul’, the ‘blood’] represented by their Angels before the throne of God in Heaven.

Rev. 6:10; 13:15; 14:9 describe the persecuted Christian remnant of the last days in the language of Daniel. The conclusion is that they (we?) will find strength to endure through the understanding of prophecy. Daniel's spirit of "How long...?" is so exactly reflective of the attitude of all God's children down the years that it is hard to deny that Daniel is being framed as the representative of all the saints. Indeed, these very words are quoted in Rev. 6:10 concerning the attitude of the slain saints of the last days.

"How long, O Lord" is clearly alluding to Is. 6:11-13: “Lord, how long? He answered, Until the cities are waste without inhabitant and houses without man and the land becomes utterly

waste, and Yahweh has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. If there is a tenth left in it, that also will in turn be consumed: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stump remains when they are felled; so the holy seed is its stump". The context is the same- an utter desolation of the land by an 'Assyrian' invader, resulting in the repentance of the remnant. This is the context of many other 'How long?' laments in the prophets- the answer is 'Until Israel repent!' (Jer. 4:14 "Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?"; 4:21; 12:4; 23:26; 31:22 "How long will you go here and there, you backsliding daughter?"; Hos. 8:5 "How long will it be until they are capable of purity?"; Hab. 1:2). Particularly relevant is Zech. 1:12: "How long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah". The significance is in the fact that the vision of four coloured horsemen is based upon Zechariah 1, and so the "how long?" theme continues the allusion. Again we note that the territory in view is Jerusalem and the land promised to Abraham. The answer of Dan. 12:6,7 to the question is more precise; effectively it is the same as the answers which said 'How long? Until Israel repent!': "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished". Daniel's answer to 'How long?' appears to be 'Until the three and a half year period is finished, and God's people have been thoroughly broken in pieces'. For it seems it is only then that the necessary repentance will occur. Those interested in trying to work out a chronology of events might take note that these particular believers must be killed earlier in the tribulation period. The cry 'How long until justice?' is answered by the news that three and a half years tribulation must pass, and more must yet be killed.

The "holy and true" Lord is defined earlier in Rev. 3:7 as the Lord Jesus. This is not the usual Greek word translated "Lord". We have to think long and hard as to why a word with such negative connotation as *despotes* should be used about the Lord Jesus. Why not the more natural *kurios*? I suggest that the more tyrannical and draconian *despotes* is used exactly because a despot, the antichrist, is then reigning over the land, and has caused the death of these believers. But for them, their *despotes*, their Lord, is not him, but the true Christ. Hence they address Him as the "holy and true" *despotes*- hinting that there is a false one, one that is *not* holy, to whom they have refused allegiance.

"Do You not judge" perhaps needs the emphasis placed on 'You', seeing they have been judged by some human court and punished with death; see on 6:9 *Their testimony*. The same words for "avenge our blood" are found in Rev. 19:2- the blood of God's servants is avenged at the hands of the "great whore". The horse riders of the seals are therefore part of the beast system dominated by the whore. The avenging of Israel's blood will be by God's "sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates" in the latter day of Yahweh's vengeance, the day of the Lord of Hosts (Jer. 46:10). This suggests again that the shedders of Israel's blood are those from the north country, Babylon / Assyria, who come from the Euphrates. And this is the current source of jihadist Islam.

Their call for vengeance means 'Avenge our blood on those men who shed it'. To describe those men as 'earth dwellers' seems somehow redundant and rather too obviously self-evident- unless there is some particular significance to being an earth dweller. We need to understand the 'earth' here as specifically the land promised to Abraham, and not the whole planet. The significance of the murderers as being 'land dwellers' is perhaps because these

people have come over the Euphrates, the northern border of the land promised to Abraham, and they are invaders now dwelling in the land. The other NT references to dwelling in the earth / land are specifically about dwelling in the land promised to Abraham; Abraham moved into the land of Canaan, in which land the Israelites now dwelt (Acts 7:4); Abraham dwelt in the land of promise (Heb. 11:9). The earth / land dwellers are singled out for particular judgment because of how they have persecuted God's people (Rev. 8:13; 11:10; 12:12). It's as if being an earth dweller is a cause for judgment; this is far more understandable if we understand the term to refer to neighbouring invaders who are now dwelling in the land promised to Abraham in the last days. The earth dwellers are those who worship the beast and give power to him (Rev. 13:8,12,14; 17:2). The domain of the beast is the 'earth' or land promised to Abraham, seeing it is based upon the fourth beast of Daniel 7, whom we have demonstrated to have this specific dominion. Rev. 14:6 draws a distinction between the earth dwellers and every nation, tongue and tribe- which would lend support to our definition of them as the invaders who now dwell in the land promised to Abraham in the last days.

Ez. 32:30, Rev. 6:10 and some other passages give the impression that the dead are somehow alive. And yet we know from an impregnable array of Bible passages that the dead are unconscious. These 'difficult passages' are surely giving us a window on God's timeless perspective. Apart from the death state, there are other examples of where future things are spoken of as having already happened (e.g. Ez. 39:29). God's future actions are simply spoken of as having already happened (e.g. Ez. 32:18). Living believers are called "martyrs" even before they are killed, because God foresees that they will be killed (Rev. 11:7).

6:11- see on Mk. 13:13.

*And each one was given a white robe, and they were told that they should wait a little longer-* Those who come through the great tribulation of the last days are clothed in the same way (Rev. 7:9,13,14), and this tribulation is clearly that which the Lord in the Olivet prophecy predicted for the last days immediately prior to His coming. Revelation aims to give us Heaven's perspective on events on earth; the martyred believers are counted as being clothed in white robes, they are assured of salvation. This is an interesting parody of the belief of Islamic jihadists, that their martyrdom will assure them of salvation. This will in fact be the case for those whom they kill. It is Angels who are presented as clothed in white robes (Mt. 28:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev. 4:4). Again we see how the martyred believers have representative Angels whose clothing is as theirs will be finally. The promised reward of white robes is also for those who "overcome" whatever they must pass through in their generation (Rev. 3:4,5,18). Our sufferings are in that sense no less than the terrible persecution unto death which is in view here in Rev. 6 and 7 for the latter day believers in the land promised to Abraham. The Lord is intensely aware of the suffering and death of every individual believer in Him; hence "Unto every one of them...".

The same word for "rest" is used in Rev. 14:13 about those blessed ones who die in the very last days before the Lord's coming, during the great tribulation: "'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'"'. The "little season" is the very same term used in Rev. 20:3 of the "little season" during which the dragon is let loose on earth after his 'death' in the bottomless pit and he has recovered from his deadly wound. This connection strengthens the suggestion that Rev. 20:3 speaks of events at the time of the establishment of

the '1000 years', and not at their end [AV "fulfilled" can be translated 'established']. The 'season', Gk. *chronos*, "time", is perhaps part of the time, times and half a time of the tribulation period of Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14.

*Until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been, was completed-* Note the AV makes a mess of translating this. The significance of "every one of them" is that God is working to a precise number. Paul speaks of how the full number of the Gentiles must come in (Rom. 11:25). God is working to an exact number, and this is why the calendar date of the Lord's return and the outworking of these prophetic possibilities is to some extent open ended. The sooner that number come in, the sooner the number to be slain are slain, then He will come. Note how the work of preaching is paralleled with the experience of suffering for that latter day witness which makes the converts. The full number of Gentile converts will be reached when the full number of preachers have died. We can expect there to be conversions to Christ despite the obvious risk of death for making that conversion. That is what happened in the first century, and that is the power of the Gospel. The Gospel must be preached for a witness to all nations, and the end shall come (Mt. 24:14). But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution; through the Islamic 'trials' of those who refuse to convert, the Gospel will be spread by the witness of those who are slain for their testimony and refusal to convert to Islam. The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appear to refer to the time of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, and yet it is reapplied to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25.

"Fellowservants" suggests those who serve the same Master, the Lord Jesus. The difference between fellowservants and brothers may be intentional. Perhaps the group in view are Jewish Christians of the last days; their fellowservants are their fellow Christian believers, and their brothers may refer to other Jews. Of course the two terms may be used in simple parallelism, referring to the same group. Another insight is that "fellowservant and brother" is only elsewhere used in Revelation about the Angels (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). There must be some purpose in this. Perhaps the hint again is that these slain believers have their representative Angels in the court of Heaven. Their agony and crisis, just as for all of us, is intensely recognized and portrayed in Heaven. This is why there is an Angelic voice *in Heaven* rejoicing that the false accuser "of our brothers" has been cast down (Rev. 12:10). The Angels see us their charges on earth as their brothers. Truly man is not alone, beyond the steely silence of the skies there is huge Angelic activity and support for all our witness for His sake. Note how in 19:10 the brothers have the testimony of Jesus; in 22:9 the brothers are the prophets. A prophet is strictly one who speaks forth God's word, not necessarily a predictor of the future. The prophets in the new Israel therefore are the preachers, the forth tellers, of God's word. The view of Judaism was that the prophets were a category of white faced saints somehow of an altogether higher category than ordinary members of God's people. But the Lord Jesus created a new Israel in which all His people were preachers, and thus all are prophets.

The sixth seal concludes with the great day of the Lamb coming, with the fig tree casting her immature figs (cp. the fig tree parable), and great changes in Heaven and earth. This must have some reference to the second coming. If it does not, then where is the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture? This sixth seal appears to be an extension of the fifth seal, where persecuted believers plead for vengeance to be shown against their persecutors. They are assured of their salvation (by being given white robes), and rest "for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be

fulfilled" (6:11). Once these brethren were killed, the Lord would take vengeance- by His second coming. It follows that this violent persecution of brethren is going on before the second coming. Perhaps the "little season" refers to the three-and-a-half-year period? The persecuted souls under the altar would then describe the early sufferers in the persecution. It should be noted that once a set number of believers have been slain, then the Lord will come (Rev. 6:11 Gk. and modern versions). This must mean that there will be violent slaying of believers going on right up until the Lord's return (so the Greek for "killed" implies); which suggests that we have yet to see violent persecution before the second coming.

A further indication that the fifth seal concerns the last days is in the obvious connection between the altar scene and the parable of the widow crying for vengeance on her persecuting adversary; she would be avenged "when the Son of man comes" (Lk. 18:3,5). Thus the intense prayers of the persecuted saints of the last days are what prompt the second coming; at least, this is how God wishes us to see it. If our prayers were that fervent now, perhaps the tribulation could be avoided. Revelation 7 then describes how the 144,000 are sealed to ultimately survive the persecution, and due to the accumulated intense prayer of the persecuted believers, the seventh seal of judgment is poured out on the world (8:3,4), resulting finally in the establishment of the Kingdom.

After their death, those who had already died are spoken of as being given "white robes" and being told to rest a bit longer (Rev. 6:11). Yet the white robe is given at baptism; a man may cast off Christ, but the prodigal is given again the robe if he returns (Lk. 15:22 s.w.); we are given white robes in this life through our acceptance of the blood of Christ and living in response to that redemption (Rev. 7:13,14; 22:14 Gk.). God giving believers white robes after their death can surely only be understood as His remembrance of how in their lives they had put on those robes. But His view of time is different, and He sees them as doing it again and again, as He considers how they had died for His cause and how thereby He will surely raise them. This is just as we would relive in our own minds the baptism of a child who has died. We know of course that there is no immortal soul, and that we personally feel nothing in death. But there is an immortal spirit, in that who we essentially are, our personality, lives on in the memory of a loving Father.

*6:12 And I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake, the sun became as black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon turned the colour of blood-* This along with the sun becoming dark recalls the Lord's crucifixion, and is another reason to think that the sufferings of the believers in the tribulation lead them to a close identity with His sufferings, that they might share in His resurrection. And that principle in fact works out in all our sufferings, in whatever generation and context we live in. Mt. 24:7 says that there will be a number of earthquakes in the last days. And it may be that the various earthquakes recorded in Revelation are not all referring to the same earthquake. Zech. 14:5 associates an earthquake with the coming of Christ after Jerusalem has fallen to her latter day enemies. The seals appear to refer to the sufferings experienced by God's people (both natural and spiritual) in the land promised to Abraham; just as the horses of Zechariah 1 speak of the judgments upon the land, and then the horses of Zechariah 6 speak of the judgments upon those nations. The seven vials and the various judgments upon the beast system include similar language, but appear to refer to the Divine judgments upon the persecutors of His people. These judgments will be similar to those they meted out to Israel, according to the principle that the beast system is tormented with the same things they brought upon their victims (Rev. 18:7), being made to drink the same cup she gave others (Rev. 18:6). The earthquake of Rev. 6:12 is matched by the earthquakes of judgment upon Israel's persecutors in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18.

"The sun became... black" is a clear example of the language of the Olivet prophecy about the last days being developed in Revelation. The allusion is to Mt. 24:29: "During [Gk. *meta*, AV "after"] the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light". We are clearly being pointed to a distinctly latter day interpretation. Whatever application this had in the first century (Acts 2:20), the final and main fulfilment is in our last days. The first century fulfilment may have included a literal element in the events of AD70 and the Lord's crucifixion, and so it may also be in the last days. But sun, moon and stars are introduced to us in Joseph's dream as symbols of Israel. We have here for sure a prediction of the total destruction of the Jewish system. It may be that initially a third part of the sun and moon are darkened (Rev. 8:12)- which suggests a literal darkening is not primarily in view. Rev. 9:2 says that the sun is darkened as a result of the beast system arising from the bottomless pit, the deadly wound healed and the vicious revival of the beast system [after an initial Western destruction of them?]. The sun being darkened and the moon turning into blood is the sign that the day of the Lord is about to come (Joel 2:31,32). We are to understand this event as happening immediately prior to the Lord's coming.

"Black as sackcloth of hair, the moon became as blood" are terms hard to interpret. Hair sackcloth would suggest mourning; but why would the sun mourn in this context? And why would the moon become blood? What really could that mean in terms of symbology? I see no very credible explanation in terms of symbology. But I came across online Special Paper 186 [1981] of the Geological Society of America, by Troy Pewe: *Desert Dust: Origin, Characteristics and Effect on Man*. In this very technical article, the author makes the throwaway comment that the words "Black as sackcloth of hair, the moon became as blood" are a superb description of an approaching dust storm coming out of the desert. The Americans called their 1991 military operation in Iraq 'Desert Storm'. The picture is of an army coming out of the desert; and this is exactly relevant to the invasion of Israel by the hordes who burst across the Euphrates and move across the desert to engulf God's land and people.

6:13 *And the stars of the heaven fell to the earth*- This would continue the usage of sun, moon and stars as in Joseph's dream- as symbols of the Jewish system (Gen. 37:9; Dt. 1:10). The sons of Jacob, the stars, will fall into the earth, losing their power and station. This is a direct quotation of the Lord's words about the situation in Israel and Jerusalem specifically in the very last days (Mt. 24:29). We note that the King of Babylon sought to exalt himself above the stars (Is. 14:13)- the Jews in Jerusalem. The connection may imply that the latter day king of Babylon is briefly successful in this, and those stars fall. The latter day little horn, the antichrist, succeeds in dominating God's people and casting them down like stars to the ground, and stamping upon them (Dan. 8:10). This is the basis for the Lord's prediction that Jerusalem shall be trodden down, stamped upon, by the Gentiles. We note the repeated focus upon the fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

*As a fig tree casts her unripe figs when she is shaken by a great wind*- The fig tree and fruit on it is a Biblical picture of Israel's spiritual state. The "winter fruit" or "unripe fruit" refers to fruit that came covered in leaves in the Summer, but never turned ripe. It therefore remained until the Winter, and the strong Winter wind blew it off the tree. The reference is clear- Israel had time to produce spiritual fruit, but they didn't; and so the falling of their stars to earth is precisely because they had not brought forth spiritual fruit. The falling of the figs is parallel with the falling of the stars. The same word for "shaken" is used of the shaking of the Jewish heaven and earth / system in Heb. 12:26. The "mighty wind" continues the allusion to

a desert dust storm which has caused the moon to look like blood (see on 6:12). The wind is representative of both an Angel and also an army. Recall how the four winds / Angels blow on the sea to cause the beasts to arise in Dan. 7. The mighty wind of the invaders is Angelically directed by God. The day of judgment at Christ's coming is likened to a mighty wind in Mt. 7:25,27. This mighty wind is to be connected with the four winds we will soon encounter in Rev. 7:1, which will blow upon the earth / land in judgment but will not affect the sealed, righteous remnant. The strong wind blows away the unripe fruit. It could be that the singular mighty wind prepares the way for the four winds of chapter 7, replete as they are with connection with the four winds of Daniel 7 which cause the beasts to arise in domination of the land.

6:14 *And the sky was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up*- Remember this is all in the context of the scroll being opened by the lamb. For that book to be opened, the scroll / heaven [NEV "sky"] of political Israel has to be closed and removed for ever. The Old Testament passage in view here in this section is clearly Is. 34:4-8. This however speaks of God's final judgment of Edom, which is Esau (Gen. 36:1,8). Revelation 6 is talking about judgments against Israel; but the point is that what latter day Esau / Edom does to Jacob will be done to them: "All of the army of the sky will be dissolved, the sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree. For My sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom and on the people of My curse for judgement. Yahweh's sword is filled with blood, it is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. The wild oxen will come down with them and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; and their land will be drunken with blood and their dust made greasy with fat. For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion".

*And every mountain and island were moved out of their places*- In the first century application, the removal of every mountain would refer to the Roman legions flattening the approach roads: "[Vespasian] sent both footmen and horsemen to level the road, which was mountainous and rocky" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 3.7.3). Having outlined the mountainous setting of Jotapata, Josephus says that Vespasian decided "to raise a bank against that part of the wall which was practicable" (*Wars* 3.7.8).

I mentioned in notes at the beginning of Revelation 6 that the things done to Israel / the land during the seals are then repeated to Israel's abusers during the trumpets and vial judgments. The cup they made her drink must be drunk by them. And in keeping with this, the same ideas are found in Rev. 16:20- when Babylon falls, "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found". However, the repetition of the terms shows that literal islands and mountains are not in view- they cannot totally disappear twice. The supporters of Israel, the powers represented by mountains and islands, those who seemed so stable and eternally fixed in their place, will remove; just as the figurative mountains and islands supportive of Babylon will likewise. I have explained elsewhere that the West must fall or be rendered ineffective.

The final tribulation of Israel will be at the same time as the Elijah ministry; and the intention is to bring down the mountains, making a smooth way for the second coming of the Lord Jesus (Is. 40:4; Lk. 3:5). These judgments, involving mountains moving, are all part of that preparatory process.



6:15 *And the kings of the earth, the princes, the chief captains, the rich, the strong and every slave and freeman*- The kings of the land are parallel with the stars who fall from the sky, the heavens and earth who are rolled up. The leading lights of the Jewish system are the kings of the land. The kings of the land are described later in Revelation as facing judgment for their support of the beast against Israel. The current Jewish rulers of the land are to be replaced, therefore, by a new set of rulers of the land; who will be punished with the same judgment they meted out to the rulers whom they overthrew. The “princes” (AV “great men”) translates the same Greek word found in Rev. 18:23 about how the great men of the earth supported Babylon but would now be judged. Indeed, the terms used here in 6:15 are elsewhere found about those who will be judged in the land for having supported Babylon. The Jewish mighty ones, the stars and heavens, will be replaced, however briefly, by those of the Babylon / beast system. Likewise “chief captains” is found again in Rev. 19:18. The wide range of people listed here in 6:15 stretch right across society; and similar words are used about the entire range who accept the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16) and follow the beast (Rev. 19:18). Jewish society in the Israel of today is to be replaced by that of their invaders and the system of the beast.

*Hide themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains*- This hugging of the earth is a result of the stars and unripe figs falling to the earth (:13). The kings of the land are thus connected with the stars and unripe figs- representative of Israel’s unspiritual leadership. The allusion is to Is. 2:19-21, which was initially addressed to the proud Jews who were in Jerusalem just prior to the Assyrian invasion. They are the prototypes of arrogant, self-assured Israel in the land today: “Men shall go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which have been made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the caverns of the rocks and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily”. But Isaiah 2 speaks of this hiding in the rocks as part of the preparatory process for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, on the tops of the very mountains where men only recently had been hiding themselves (Is. 2:2-4). Yet again, we are dealing with last days language, and also specifically about the situation in and around Jerusalem.

The hiding in caves from the face of the Lamb recalls the desire of those in Jerusalem living just before the Babylonian invasion: they wanted to hide themselves from the Lord’s presence (Jer. 23:24). Likewise the Jews of Amos 9:3 sought to hide themselves in the mountains of Carmel. The idea of hiding from the Lamb very much suggests the kings of the land in view are Jewish rulers of Israel. The Lamb’s wrath was being manifested through the events of the seals, and the Jewish leadership desperately seek to hide from it. Living in the caves and mountains recalls the behaviour of the faithful in Heb. 11:38. Perhaps that connection is purposeful, to hint that through all this suffering, a minority will come to faith in Christ and repentance.

In the first century fulfilment, the ideas of hiding in caves, wishing the rocks to fall on them etc. refers to how the Jews hid underground in the 67-70 war. "On the following days [the Romans] searched the hiding places, and fell upon those that were underground and in the caverns" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 3.7.36). The Lord had told the women who watched His death that they would ask the mountains and hills to fall upon them to cover them (Lk. 23:29,30 cp. Mt. 24:1,2,19,34).

6:16 *And they said to the mountains and to the rocks: Fall on us-* This again is a quotation from the Lord's words about the judgment to come upon Israel because of their crucifixion of Him (Lk. 23:30). It is also a quotation from Hos. 10:8, when because of "the sin of Israel... they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us". My point is that these passages are all talking specifically about Israelites; the kings / rulers of the land of the sixth seal are Jews in the last days within an Israel that is to be crushed amidst unspeakable abuse and atrocity, as the pent up Moslem and Arab wrath of centuries explodes upon them. The Hosea passage in its context speaks of Israel lamenting that they have no human leaders any more (Hos. 10:3,7) and how "the nations shall be gathered against them" (Hos. 10:10). This is precisely the message of the sixth seal- the heavens / stars of the Jewish system fall, sun and moon no longer shine, and all nations are gathered together against Jerusalem at Armageddon.

*And hide us from the presence of Him that sits on the throne, and from the anger of the Lamb-* There are multiple Old Testament statements that in the final time of Israel's sufferings, God will hide His face from them (e.g. Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20; Ez. 39:29; Mic. 3:4). This is from their perspective- the reality is, according to this insight here, that Israel themselves seek to hide from His face [NEV "presence"]. If the reference is to God enthroned in Heaven, this fear seems rather misplaced. Would sinful men experiencing judgment really feel they were in the presence of the throne of God in Heaven, and wish to run away from the one enthroned? The reference is more appropriately understood in a futuristic sense. In some sense, Jesus is now visibly enthroned, on the throne of David in Jerusalem, and the sinful Jews slink away from His throne, just as the rejected are pictured doing in 1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.. Rev. 4:2,9 have introduced the Lord Jesus as enthroned *at His return*. These sinful Jewish leaders have some sense of this, and wish to slink away from His presence in rejection. These people seek to be hid from the face / presence of the wrathful Lamb, but in 14:10 we read of how some will be tormented in the presence / before the face of the Lamb. Their desire to escape His judgment doesn't come to anything.

Note the juxtaposition of ideas in 'the wrath of the lamb'. It is not simply that the Lord died as a lamb but returns as a rampant lion. He will have both lion and lamb aspects at His return. God's character is not just partly severe, partly gracious. His grace and His judgment of sin are wonderfully interconnected within His character. Thus destruction comes from Shaddai, the fruitful, blessing one (Is. 13:6); and the meek, harmless Lamb has great wrath (Rev. 6:16,17).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Who He was then, as He walked around Palestine 2000 years ago, the lamb for sinners slain, is who He will essentially be at His second coming and judgment. It's not quite so that He was once a meek lamb but will roar back as an angry aggressive lion of Judah. Revelation brings out the paradox of "the wrath of *the lamb*"- not the roaring lion. Even in condemning men, His basic passion for humanity, His pain for the lost, comes out. Thus He will call those whom He rejects "Friend", just as He addressed even Judas, a man not fit to breathe the same air as He did. And in any case, it was in His role as the lion of Judah that He opened the seals through His death, not at His return. In His mortality He was the one who served rather than the one who sat at meat; and when He returns He will again come forth and serve us, His Divine nature notwithstanding. He so earnestly desired that even the wicked children of Jerusalem who did Him to death should be gathered together into His Kingdom. As He was, so He will be, and so He is even now.

6:17 *For the great day of their anger comes, and who is able to stand?*- The situation clearly refers to the last day. The Old Testament 'day of wrath' is usually against Israel and her leaders; and these are in view here, the kings of the land. The Babylonian invasion was the day of wrath (Dt. 29:28; Jer. 32:31; 44:6; Lam. 1:12; 2:1.21.22; Zeph. 2:2,3). The same word translated "wrath" is used by the Lord in the Olivet Prophecy concerning how there shall be "wrath upon this people". The people of Israel are therefore those who suffer under the sixth seal. "The great day" is Joel's "great and notable day of the Lord", the second coming. Jude 6 uses the very expression in talking about "the judgment of the great day", "the great day of God Almighty" of Rev. 16:14.

"And who shall be able to stand?" alludes to Mal. 3:1-3 concerning the coming of the latter day Elijah prophet to Israel: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, He comes! says Yahweh of Armies. But who can endure the day of His coming? And *who will stand* when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap; and He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver". At the time of the sixth seal, Elijah (or the Elijah ministry) will be active in Israel amongst Jewish people. Those who do not respond to this ministry will be unable to stand before the Lord.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Revelation 7: The 144,000**

The seals speak of the latter day outpouring of judgment and trouble upon the land and people of Israel, perhaps throughout the entire territory of the land promised to Abraham. God's judgments on His people are never simply the wrath of a powerful Deity; they are intended to elicit repentance. They are His appeal to men. After the seals, we read of the sealing of 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel. This could be all purely symbolic- 12 tribes multiplied by the 12 disciples, making 144, and thousands of them, speaking therefore of Jews who had come to Christ. But the laboured repetition of the "12,000" and the names of each tribe is striking. It may simply be that the Lord wishes to stress how every single one of those latter day believers is known to Him. Or it could be a literal number, and the ethnicity / tribal origins of the Jews is known to the Lord. But I somewhat doubt that kind of literalism is to be found in Revelation or the entire apocalyptic genre. Perhaps there is a geographical reference- Jews from the entire extent of the land and tribal allotments of Israel.

### **The Seals and Islam**

Reading through the seals is like reading parts of the Koran and Hadith which speak of the judgments which Islam wishes upon the Jews. This is not simply because the Koran is full of garbled allusions to the Old and New Testaments [e.g. Sura 2.249 confuses several Bible stories: "And when Saul set out with the army, he said: Lo! Allah will try you by [the ordeal of] a river. Whosoever therefore drinketh thereof he is not of me, and whosoever tasteth it not he is of me, save him who taketh [thereof] in the hollow of his hand. But they drank thereof, all save a few of them. And after he had crossed [the river], he and those who believed with him, they said: We have no power this day against Goliath and his hosts. But those who knew that they would meet Allah exclaimed: How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave! Allah is with the steadfast"]. The reality is that radical Islamists, in strict obedience to the Koran, will seek to bring these judgments upon the people and land of Israel because they think this is what the Koran tells them to do; and in so doing they will fulfil Revelation. For the kind of brutality they practice is only possible for a person who has been brainwashed with religious or political philosophy. That's why jihadist volunteers are firstly sent for weeks of 'teaching' before being sent to fight. The kind of extreme, severe abuse of Israel which is required by the language of Revelation and Daniel 7 is such that it would require people fuelled by deep religious programming to execute it. The Quran often speaks of God's severity against the Jews because of their supposed sins against Mohammad and refusal to accept Islam, e.g. Sura 2.211: "Ask of the Children of Israel how many a clear revelation we gave them! He who altereth the grace of Allah after it hath come unto him [for him], lo! Allah is severe in punishment". This is the reasoning which will inspire the Moslems to abuse the Jews so intensely. "Because of the wrongdoing of the Jews... we have prepared for those of them who disbelieve a painful doom" (Sura 4.160,161). Unashamed aggression is taught by the Koran multiple times, e.g. Sura 9.123 "O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you". "Then seized I those who disbelieved, and how intense was my abhorrence!" (Sura 35.26). And so we could continue:

"Fight (slay and kill) those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the last day (judgement day), nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Messenger have prohibited, nor they follow the religion of truth (the religion of Islam) out of those who have been given the Book (Jews and Christians), until they pay the tax, in acknowledgment of superiority and (recognition that) they are in a state of subjection (to Islam)" (Sura 9:29).

"Worst among men in enmity to the believers (Muslims) wilt thou find the Jews and pagans" (Sura 5:82).

"O ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors. They are but friends and protectors to each other, and he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is one of them Verily, Allah guideth not a people unjust (Jews and Christians)" (Sura 5:51).

"Those who reject Islam among the people of the book (Jews and Christians) and among the polytheists (all other religions) will be in hell fire to dwell in there for ever and they are the worst of creatures" (Sura 98:6).

Not only Revelation, but many other latter day prophecies are full of language strikingly similar to that found in the Koran. The jihadist Moslems seek to obey the Koran, and by doing so, they will be fulfilling Bible prophecy about the last days. For example, Joel 2:6 LXX speaks of how in the final day of the Lord, Israel will be invaded by a latter day Assyrian, "a numerous and strong people" (:2), and "Before them shall the people [of Israel] be crushed: every face shall be as the blackness of a caldron (AV "gather blackness")". The Koran in Sura 7.106 speaks of this happening at the last day, when Moslems will blacken the faces of those who refuse to convert to their religion: "On the Day when [some] faces will be whitened and [some] faces will be blackened; and as for those whose faces have been blackened, it will be said unto them: Disbelieved ye after your [profession of] belief? Then taste the punishment for that ye disbelieved".

The punishments of the seals are the very punishments which the Koran says must be brought upon the Jews in order to make them repent and accept Islam and that Mohammed was a messenger to them: "We shall test you with fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits [so that] when afflicted with calamity [they will] say, Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return" (Surah 2.155,156). These calamities will indeed cause a remnant to repent- but return to the God of Israel, rather than convert to Islam. Surah 4.160,161 and the Hadith [expansions] upon it speak of starving the Jews and torturing them, which is how I interpreted Rev. 6:5-8: "Because of the wrongdoing of the Jews we forbade them good things which were [before] made lawful unto them, and because of their much hindering from Allah's way, and of their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and of their devouring people's wealth by false pretences, We have prepared for those of them who disbelieve a painful doom".

Sura 17, *Al-Isra*, is about future Moslem judgments upon "The children of Israel". Sura 17.7,8 speaks of how latter day Moslems will repeat the historical judgments of the Jews upon them. This explains why some Jihadist groups see themselves as the revival of Babylon and Assyria: "So, when the time for the second [of the judgments] came [we roused against you others of our slaves] to ravage you, and to enter the Temple even as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they conquered with an utter wasting. It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, but if ye repeat [the crime] we shall repeat [the punishment], and we have appointed hell a dungeon for the disbelievers". The language of utter wasting and taking the temple mount is exactly that of latter day Bible prophecies about what is to happen to Israel in the last days. The Hadith and some Suras of the Koran are full of such language of what shall be done to the Jews and Israel: "we annihilate it with complete annihilation... or punish it with dire punishment... There is not a township but we shall destroy it ere the Day of Resurrection, or punish it with dire punishment" (Sura 17.16,58). And radical Islam is all set up to fulfil it. The same Sura continues to liken that final destruction of the Jews to a book of judgment being opened: "We shall bring forth for him on

the Day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. [And it will be said unto him]: Read thy Book" (Sura 17.13,14). Likewise Sura 17.58: "There is not a township but we shall destroy it ere the Day of Resurrection, or punish it with dire punishment. That is set forth in the Book [of our decrees]". This is the significance of the judgments upon Israel in the last days being likened to a scroll / book being opened.

*7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree-* When we come to Revelation, especially bearing in mind its' constant allusions to the Old Testament, the 'earth' can generally be understood as the land of Israel. All the weight of Biblical evidence is in this direction. There are undeniable similarities between the events of the seals and vials, and what happened in the land in AD66-70. The whole idea of pouring out judgment upon the 'earth' refers to the OT images of such judgments being poured out upon the land. Consider too how Rev. 7:1: "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth...". If the earth has corners, it can't really be the globe, rather, an area such as the land.

There seems to be an association between the "four winds", the four "living creatures" and the four "beasts" mentioned at various points in Scripture. It is suggested that these all refer, even if indirectly, to a literal four cherubic Angels. Rev. 7:1 is the clearest evidence: "I saw four Angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth". The stress is on "the four winds". Dan. 7:2,3 connects the winds and the beasts: "Behold, the four winds of Heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea". The "four winds" may refer to Angels- God makes His Angels spirits or winds.

"The four corners of the earth" is proof enough that the earth / land doesn't refer to the whole planet but to a specific territory on the planet- the land, promised to Abraham, with defined borders. The Hebrew word translated 'borders' in the context of the borders of the land is also translated "corners". We think of Ez. 7:2: "You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh to the land of Israel, An end: the end has come on the four corners of the land". The four Angels on the borders of the land connect with the four Angels on the Euphrates, the northern / eastern border of the land, who shall release the hordes they are holding back to surge towards Israel. That process may already be in operation. We are here introduced to the idea that there are Angels holding back the winds of destruction on the borders of God's land and people. This explains the miraculous survival of the state of Israel since 1948. The hordes of neighbouring enemies have been restrained- by the Angels on the borders of the land. But they will remove that restraint, and we can see that already happening. It's worth noting that the key enemies of Israel in the Old Testament are described as dwelling in the corners of the earth / land (Jer. 9:26; 25:23; 49:32); and Israel are described as going into captivity in the corners of the earth / land promised to Abraham (Dt. 32:26; Is. 11:12). So it's appropriate that the winds of destruction come from these same corners of the land. Rev. 20:8 defines "the nations which are in the four quarters of the land" as being "Gog and Magog"; clearly the Ezekiel 38 Gog is being defined as the epitome of the nations along the borders of Israel, who both historically and currently are Israel's main enemies.

The four winds of the earth / land create a picture reminiscent of Dan. 7:2; the four beasts which dominate the earth / land of Israel in the last days all arise as the result of the four winds / spirits / Angels operating over the sea of nations. Now, the four winds / spirits / Angels are told not to blow upon the land and sea until the faithful have been sealed. The

connection would teach that the final domination of the land by the beast systems occurs after the events of the seals; or perhaps, the seals are part of that domination period, but there is a break, the winds of destruction are held back, so that those Jews who have responded in repentance can be sealed. In Ez. 37:9, the wind from the four winds comes to spiritually revive the spiritually dead Israel who have returned to their land from dispersion. But here in Rev. 7, these four winds are the winds of destruction. It is from them and the desolation associated with them- that spiritual life is breathed into Israel. The winds are controlled by the four Angels who 'stand' or 'are appointed' at the four corners of the land- it may be that they were appointed from Old Testament times, not least in Daniel 7.

Significantly, the Koran likens the judgment of Jews and apostates to the coming of winds. The whole of Sura 77 is entitled *Al-Mursalat* (The Emissaries, Winds Sent Forth). These winds of judgment come "when the stars are put out, and when the sky is riven asunder, and when the mountains are blown away" (Sura 77:8-11). This is all very much the language of the seals, trumpets and vials. The judgments upon Israel are brought by the Moslems in terms of their own understanding of condemnation. And they too will be judged in the same way- the thing they greatly fear comes upon them, the cup they give Israel to drink, they must drink.

We noted at the beginning of the seals in Revelation 6 that the first four seals, the four horsemen, are based upon the horsemen of Zechariah 1 who desolate the land of Israel and scatter her people. Here in Revelation, the thought then moves on to the four winds- and the same is to be found in Zechariah, where Zech. 2:6 associates them with the scattering into the provinces of Babylon and Persia: "flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord: for I will gather you from the four winds of heaven" (LXX). The land of the north (Babylon, where Judah were in captivity in Zechariah's time) is "the four winds" because its territory covered much of the land promised to Abraham. The same Hebrew words are found in Zech. 6:5, where the four horses responsible for desolating Israel are "the four winds [AV "spirits"] of the heaven". Judah were also gathered from the four winds in the sense that the Angels were with them, as demonstrated by Ezekiel's vision of the four beast cherubim. This is surely the idea of Mark 13:27: "Then shall He send His Angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth [land] to the uttermost part of Heaven". The earth / land in view is that promised to Abraham, and the heartland of Israel's enemies is [and always has been] at the uttermost part of it, at the Euphrates border. The parallel between Heaven and earth here in the Lord's teaching is in line with what we find so often in Revelation- the situation on earth is reflected by the Angels in Heaven who stand in the Heavenly throne room.

The four winds / four Heavenly cherubim beasts are the Heavenly antithesis of the four winds and four beasts of Daniel 7 on earth who desolate the land. The four horns which arose from the third empire were "towards" the four Angelic winds of Heaven; there was a connection between them (Dan. 8:8; 11:4). There is no such thing as radical evil- even the worst desolators of God's people are under direct Angelic control. We note too the prophecy of the four winds in Jer. 49:36 against Elam, modern day Iran: "I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven. And I will scatter them to all those winds". The "quarters" of Heaven suggest that Heaven, like the earth / land with its corners, is a territory. I suggest that 'Heaven' here is a reflection of the earth / land promised to Abraham. Elam / Iran will likewise be judged by the Arab nations living in the corners of the land promised to Abraham, and will be scattered into those areas.

The four winds [plural] are spoken of as one wind (7:1). This is rather like how the four beasts are effectively one beast. Scattering to the four winds was scattering to “the land of the north” (Zech. 2:6). The four cherubim beasts of Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 are effectively one system, moving the same way. We shouldn’t therefore be necessarily looking for four distinct entities to dominate the land in the last days. The ‘four’ refers to Heaven’s organization, and how it is reflected on earth.

"Holding the four winds" is better 'restraining'. This sounds similar to the idea of the Angels restraining the hordes which then burst over the Euphrates to desolate the land; and to the restraining influence which stops the antichrist being revealed in 2 Thess. 2:5-7. This period of restraint is maybe seen by John in order to serve as a dividing point between the suffering of the six seals, and the fact that some in the land repent as a result of this. These are sealed, and then the trumpet judgments are poured out, and then the desolating powers are destroyed, as outlined in the seven vials. But there may not be an actual period of time required to ‘seal’ the 144,000. The language of winds blowing is that of the final judgment in Mt. 7:25,27.

*7:2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea-* The East is ‘the sunrising’. The idea of the sun rising connects with the language of the Lord Jesus returning as the sunrise (Mal. 4:2). Again the time is located around the second coming of the Lord. The allusion may be to the Lord’s description of His coming as a bright shining arising from the East (Mt. 24:27).

Other references to sealing refer to a mark being placed on a person by God which *He* recognizes, although the world doesn’t see it. Thus Paul’s converts were a seal of His apostleship (1 Cor. 9:2)- to God, but not to men. The seal of God is simply that “The Lord knows them that are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). We are sealed by being given the Spirit in our hearts, very privately and intimately (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). But that knowledge is to Him, and is not publicly displayed. For people to be sealed, they are as it were known by God, stamped with His mark. It might even be that there is a mass baptism into Christ of Jewish people in the land- that would certainly be a point at which believers are sealed. This would admirably fulfil the otherwise strange prophecy of Zech. 13:1, that a fountain will be opened in Jerusalem in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem can be washed from their sin.

The outline idea is of an Angel putting a mark on God’s people so that other Angels don’t harm them with the judgments they are pouring out. And this of course recalls the Passover Angel hovering over the homes of the Israelites who had placed the mark of the Lamb on their doorposts, so that “the Destroyer” Angel would not destroy them. Ez. 9:4 is similar- a mark is placed upon the forehead of those in Jerusalem who are repentant, so that they are not hurt by the judgments of the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the temple. These allusions further encourage us to understand the 144,000 as Jewish Christians within the land / earth.

"The four Angels" connect with how in Daniel 7 it is the four beasts who do the hurting of the land. But these are but the earthly counterparts of the Heavenly cherubim, which are portrayed also as four beasts. And here the point is made explicit- there are four Angels coordinating the desolation of the land in the last days.

"To whom it was given to hurt" again reminds us of the constant comfort that it is God who allows the desolation and even ultimately empowers it.



7:3 *Saying: Do not hurt the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees*- Significantly, the Koran stipulated that trees are not to be damaged during campaigns against infidels. The same word for "hurt" was used in 6:6, where the oliveyards and vineyards were not to be then hurt. This may mean that now the judgments upon the land are poured out upon it.

*Until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads*- This sealing of the 144,000 is presented at the beginning of Revelation 14 as the counterpart to the sealing of the other inhabitants of the land with the mark of the beast in *their* foreheads which we find at the end of Revelation 13. The faithful who come through the traumas of the six seal judgments of chapter 6, refusing to take the easy way out by receiving the mark of the beast in their forehead, are sealed with the Father's Name in their foreheads. They are known by Him, and they know Him. The presence or absence of 'marks in the forehead' decides whether the beast system will persecute people or not; and in response to this, the Divine judgments will likewise be upon those who lack the Father's Name but instead have the beast's name (Rev. 9:4; 13:16; 14:1,9; 20:4). And it is those who have the Father's Name in their foreheads who will again be given it yet more permanently at the day of judgment (Rev. 22:4). This means that their response to the beast's persecution is in effect their day of judgment ahead of time; because they refuse to accept his mark in their foreheads, therefore the Father will give them His mark in their foreheads- which is the reward of the faithful at the last day. This is a feature I commented upon extensively in *The Last Days*- that our response to the tribulation is effectively our judgment day. And this has an appropriacy to it- for if the generation alive at the Lord's coming will be the only one to never die, they need to be prepared in a unique way for the passage into eternity which they will experience. And this will be achieved through their experience of the tribulation.

The mark of the beast in the forehead is clearly intended to be understood as the inverse of the "seal of God" which is in the forehead of the believers (Rev. 9:4). The word *sphragis* used there definitely means a seal, and it is matched by the "mark" of the beast. That mark can be understood, therefore, also as a seal- and what more likely than the seal of Mohammed? It may be that signet rings are used to stamp documents, or it forms part of an insignia without which no business can be done in the land. The Koran itself speaks of how true Moslems will have the mark of Mohammad on their foreheads as a sign that they worship: "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. Thou [O Muhammad] seest them bowing and falling prostrate [in worship], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration" (Surah 48:29). In Revelation 14:9,11, having the mark of the beast is connected with worshipping him. The Islamic jihadist movement set to take over Israel is a highly religious movement, seeking to strictly obey the Koran. They are highly conscious of these verses. They perceive those who don't have *their* mark in the forehead as having the mark in the forehead of condemnation (Surah 9:35); the idea of a seal being placed upon non-Moslems who refuse to convert to Islam is found also in Sura 7.101: "Thus doth Allah print upon the hearts [minds / foreheads] of disbelievers". All this is in fact the picture presented in Revelation of sealing with forehead marks. We have either the mark of the beast [Islam], or of the Father. And so the Koran also says in This is exactly the idea of Sura 7.46,48: "And on the Heights are men who know them all by their marks... the dwellers on the Heights call unto men whom they know by their marks". Islam believes that the unbelievers are sealed by God in their unbelief- whilst the Moslems are sealed as believers. "Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes there is a covering. Theirs will be a great torment" (Sura 2:7). Note too that the Koran and Hadith repeatedly speak of faithful Moslems as the servants of Allah, with

Mohammad as the supreme servant. The description of the 144,000 as “servants of our God” is purposeful in this context; in the time of Moslem domination of the land, they will be the *true* servants of God, in opposition to the Moslems who falsely claim to be His servants. In this context it’s worth noting the claim that “The value of the word "Muhammad" equals the value of the word "Jesus." (Jesus = 444, Muhammad = 444). Therefore, "Muhammad seal" and "Jesus seal" both equal 666”.

The seal is the Name of the Father, Yahweh (14:1). The only personage in the Old Testament who had the Yahweh Name in their forehead was the High Priest, who on his mitre had written ‘Holiness / Dedicated to Yahweh’. The idea was that all of the 144,000 are as the High Priest- in that they are “in Christ” and all that is true of Him is true of them.

*7:4 And I heard the number-* This is added to highlight the contrast with the “great multitude which no man could number” (7:9). This ‘hearing’ contrasts with how John “saw” the great multitude. I suggest that the same group are in view, just seen from different perspectives. He heard something happening in Heaven- there, the 144,000 are marked off or sealed. There is not necessarily any physical mark upon the faithful, repentant Jewish remnant, apart from that they refuse to wear the mark or seal of the beast, which I have suggested is the seal of Mohammed. There will therefore be a tension between the seals- the seal of Mohammed, the mark of the beast, which is visible; and the invisible seal of God which is seen only in Heaven.

*Of those that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand-* The 12 x 12 is obviously intentional, as if to say that this group is the true Israel. The thousands would refer to their being ‘many’. The sealing of a group of faithful within Israel parallels the 7000 “reserved” by God out of Israel for Himself at the time of Elijah’s ministry. The three and a half year ministry of the historical Elijah looks forward to the latter day Elijah ministry during the tribulation for the same period. As 7000 faithful were ‘reserved’ by God for Himself at that time, so the 144,000 are in the last days. The 7000 remnant in Elijah's time were “left” or ‘remained’ to God (1 Kings 19:18). The same word is used of the latter day remnant within Israel: “He that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem” (Is. 4:3). This is the same idea in essence as in Rev. 7- the 144,000 are numbered and written, carefully noted by God. The same word is used of the latter day Jewish remnant in Is. 11:11,16; 17:6; 24:6 (the few men that will remain when the earth / land is made desolate); 37:31 (the faithful remnant in Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian invasion which typifies that of the last days); 49:21; Jer. 21:7 (the remnant who remain after the plague, sword and famine of the Babylonian invasion have devoured them, all of which are the source material for the events of the six seals which the 144,000 have come through); 50:20 (“I will pardon them whom I reserve”, speaking of the forgiveness of the latter day repentant remnant); Amos 5:3 (the ten percent of Israel who ‘remain’); Zeph. 3:12 (the ‘remnant’ of the “afflicted and poor people” who “shall trust in the name of the Lord”); Zech. 9:7 (the remnant who will “be for our God” after the destruction of the majority of Israel); 12:14 (the ‘remaining ones’ who weep in repentance for crucifying Jesus).

The 144,000 are the antithesis of the followers of the beast- these follow the Lamb wherever *He* goes. It’s highly significant that Muhammad is supposed to have had 144,000 followers or *Sahaba* [Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam*, “Ashab”]. This is supposed to connect with the claim that there are 144,000 prophets in Islam [Elwood Morris Wherry & George Sale, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran*]. The 144,000 who follow the

Lamb are thus in purposeful contrast with the 144,000 who are supposed to have followed Mohammad wherever he went. This confirms the entire thrust of our exposition- that whatever previous historical fulfilments there have been, the latter day application of Revelation is to events in the land promised to Abraham in the last days whilst it is under Moslem domination.

Revelation is full of language which is also found in the Koran- because Islam, like Babylon, Assyria and Rome before them, are offering God's people a fake replica of real spirituality and the true Hope of Israel. They are an anti-Christ, an imitation Jesus, a false 12 tribes of Israel rather than the true. This explains why the promises of the Kingdom of God in Revelation are full of language which is also used in the Koran for the reward of faithful Moslems. Revelation will have intense relevance to the persecuted under Moslem domination- the rewards offered by Islam will be seen to be a fake Kingdom of God. Thus in Sura 2:25,266: "Give glad tidings [cp. 'the Gospel'] to those who believe [Moslems]... for them will be gardens under which the rivers of Paradise flow... they will be provided with a fruit therefrom... trees with all kinds of fruit... they will abide therein for ever". The final visions of Revelation offer eternal residence in a restored Paradise and eating the fruit of the tree- to those who refuse to accept the religion of the beast, Islam.

*Sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel-* This makes more poignant the omission of Dan and Ephraim from the list. Due to their apostasy, they are no longer numbered amongst the children of Israel. The order of the tribes is also not according to their age, but it may be according to their faithfulness to God. This is therefore the picture at the time of final judgment, when the true Israel have finally been made up and numbered.

The very laboured mentioning of 12,000 faithful within each tribe may be because they are the antithesis to some yet unseen aspect of the beast. In the ISIS magazine *Dabiq* No. 4 (October 2014) the Islamic State on the back page (p. 56) quote a hadith which states: "They will then gather for the *Malmanah* (the grand battle before the Hour) [the equivalent of Biblical Armageddon], they will come under eighty banners, with each banner there will be twelve thousand people". The IS wish to consciously fulfil such Islamic prophecies in order to hasten the coming of the antiChrist and then the Mahdi. Perhaps in an attempt to fulfil these predictions, there will be groups of 12,000 Moslems who play some role in the earth / land promised to Abraham. Their antithesis- the Jews who refuse to convert to Islam- are therefore here presented as twelve tribes of twelve thousand.

The Koran claims that the twelve sons of Jacob were in fact 'Moslems', and that current Jewish claims to being descended from Jacob's twelve sons are false (Surah 2.140 "Or say you that Ibrahim (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Ishaque (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob) and Al-Asbat [the twelve sons of Ya'qub (Jacob)] were Jews or Christians? Say, "Do you know better or does Allah (knows better; that they all were Muslims)? And who is more unjust than he who conceals the testimony)". Again we see the relevance of the sealing of people from the 12 tribes of natural Israel- if at the very time this happens, they are being accused of not being from those 12 tribes, and that in fact it is Arab Moslems who are the true 12 tribes. This situation is reflected by the way in which the descriptions of the 144,000 are in terms elsewhere used by the beast system. Thus they are sealed, just as the beast seals his followers; the great multitude who proclaim "Victory!" before the throne (7:10) are parodied by the beast's followers doing the same in 13:4.

It is worth noting that two thirds of the Jews within the land are to be "cut off" in the holocaust, meaning that a third survive it (Zech. 13:8,9). Having spoken of this period in Rev. 6, Rev. 7:4 speaks of 144,000 Jews as surviving it. A third of the Jews in Israel is about 1.4 million people; it may be that only a tenth of those will ultimately be found worthy. The 144,000 are sealed so that they avoid God's judgments, which would fit the idea of the righteous remnant miraculously surviving in an Arab occupied Jerusalem.

*7:5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand-* See on :4 and :8.

*7:6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand-* See on :4 and :8.

*7:7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand-* See on :4 and :8.

*7:8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand-* See on :4. It's been observed that the tribe of Dan is excluded from the list of the redeemed tribes in Rev. 7. Dan didn't take possession of their inheritance; they despised it. And so they excluded themselves, rather than being excluded for e.g. bad behaviour. The other tribes all had their moments of terrible failures; but these didn't exclude them. The only one excluded was the one who didn't want to be there.

*7:9 After these things I saw and beheld a great crowd, which no one could number-* An allusion to how the seed of Abraham would be innumerable (Gen. 13:16; 16:10; 32:12; Hos. 1:10). The great multitude are the true Israel, and are thus parallel with the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel.

*Out of every nation, comprised of all tribes, peoples and tongues-* The reference is limited by the context to the tribes of the earth / land promised to Abraham; see on "All nations" later in this verse. This is the same term used about the nations, tribes, peoples under the domination of the beast (17:15), and seems almost a title of the beast system in 11:9. The great multitude are therefore being parodied by the followers of the beast, who also claim [as the Jihadists do] to be universal in their support base. This is just as the 144,000 followers of the lamb are parodied by the supposed 144,000 followers of Mohammad. The events of the last days will bring about the final and ultimate clash of God's Kingdom and the kingdoms of men.

*Standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes and with palms in their hands-* They "stood before the throne", as men will "stand before" God at the day of judgment (Rev. 20:12 s.w.). They had white robes, a term used about those slain at the start of the tribulation (6:11). In this we see the connection between the seals and the sealing of the 144,000 / great multitude. A specific group is in view- those who were slain in the tribulation.

*Of all nations-* The multitude came 'out of' [*ek*] "great tribulation" (:14); yet they also come *ek*, out of, the nations, peoples, languages of :9. The suggestion would be that this group of various peoples are those where the tribulation has occurred. The very same Greek phrase "nations, tribes, peoples and languages" is used later in Revelation for the peoples within the land promised to Abraham who support the beast system (11:9; 17:15). The beast / whore

rides upon them- and her dominion is over the earth / land, which is therefore where these tribes and peoples are located. This also solves the logistical problem of imagining that literally every tribe and language group of the Amazon or central Africa or Pacific islands must come under the direct control of any one world system. We can legitimately translate *ek* as 'out of'; the same word is found in Rev. 18:4 where "My people" are asked to come "out of" Babylon and the beast system- the mass of peoples and tribes within the land promised to Abraham from Euphrates to Egypt, which is under the control and religion of the beast. It's a typical Western stereotype to assume that all the people living in that area are simply 'Arabs'. That's as facile as saying that Europe is inhabited by 'Europeans'. The area is full of various tribes and ethnicities, as the conflicts in Iraq and Syria have demonstrated. So the statement that the great multitude had come *ek* out of the various nations and tribes is not merely a statement of fact, it is a commendation of the fact that they had spiritually 'come out of' those peoples. Rev. 15:2 repeatedly uses the word *ek* to speak of how the faithful had come out of the beast system: "Them that had gotten the victory over [*ek*, out of- "over" is not the correct translation] the beast, and over [*ek*, out of] his image, and over [*ek*, out of] his mark, and over [*ek*, out of] the number of his name". Rev. 7:9 says that the faithful come *ek* out of the *phule*, the tribes [AV "kindreds"]. But we have just read with painstaking repetition of how the 144,000 have come *ek* out of the *phule*, the tribes, of *Israel*! We must not fail to give this due weight in interpretation. The 144,000 come out of the tribes of Israel, and the great multitude come out of the tribes who are willingly dominated by the beast. The picture is that the tribes of Israel submit to the beast, but the faithful refuse to do so. Such a covenant is suggested by Dan. 9, and I have commented upon this elsewhere in writing about the Antichrist. This coming 'out of' the beast system may be in view in Mt. 24:31, where we learn that the Lord will gather His elect *ek*, out of, "the four winds". And Rev. 7:1 in this very context speaks of the four winds of desolation to come upon Israel, from which the 144,000 are preserved.

Think of the misunderstood Jesus, welcomed by the crowds with palm fronds in hope of an immediate Messianic Kingdom. Surely John intends us to think back to that when we read in Rev. 7:9 that the Lord will be welcomed by another large crowd, from every nation, carrying palm fronds and calling out praise to Him for dying on the cross and redeeming them. Here are those who truly understand Him. The Lord had in mind this contrast between the crowd and those who would truly understand Him when He said that "Now is the son of man glorified" in the things of the cross (Jn. 12:23) in contrast to the crowds who were shouting "Glory in the highest!" at the prospect of Him there and then inaugurating the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 19:38). See on Jn. 5:23.

7:10 *Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne*- See on Jn. 20:28. Revelation is full of allusion to Roman imperial court scenes and rituals. In its first century application, it was an appeal for Christians to not convert to the imperial cult, even at the risk of persecution and death. In its latter day reference, Revelation may well be found to be full of reference to and parody of the culture and structure of the entity which dominates the land in the last days. In the first century, the Caesar declared himself as the 'saviour'. The Roman emperors often gathered people from all nations and languages within the empire, who stood before his throne and cried 'Victory!' or 'Salvation!' to the Caesar. This was seen as legitimizing the Caesar as chosen and approved by the entire empire. Radical Islam loves to use the cry of 'Victory!' and to talk of how each town they overrun has been liberated or saved. They also like to claim that they have support from worldwide and not simply from Arab Muslims. The crowd of believers here parodies their claims by giving the true international worship to the true God rather than the false one.

7:11 *And all the angels were standing round about the throne and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God-* The implication is that the Angels are deeply impressed when they see these things working out. They are struck by the wisdom and power revealed in the whole Divine design (:12). This gives a window into what immortality will be all about. We will still be impressionable; able to observe new things with wonder and a sense of praise; and not necessarily able to precisely imagine how plans shall work out.

7:12 *Saying: Amen. Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might to our God for ever and ever. Amen-* As noted on :11, this gives some insight into what it will be like to have the kind of immortal nature which the Angels now have. They are presented as observing how things work out in God's plan, and then being deeply impressed with the whole wisdom and wonder of it all. In seeing God's power and might manifest in such a way, they wish that this shall for ever be the case. And so it shall be. "Amen".

7:13- see on Rev. 6:9.

*And one of the elders asked me: These that are dressed in white robes, who are they and from where did they come?-* This is the clothing of Angels; they are presented as at one with their Angelic representatives in the court of Heaven. The Lord Jesus is likewise presented as clothed both in white and in a red "garment dipped in blood" (Rev. 19:13). The whore who leads the beast is also described as clothed in white linen (Rev. 18:16) and also in *porphura* (Rev. 17:4), a word which can mean 'dyed red'. The external clothing of the real Christ and the antiChrist is similar; because the antiChrist is indeed a fake Christ. Moslems also believe in dressing in white robes; it's as if this group who come out of the Moslem dominated land of Israel are the antithesis of their persecutors.

"From where did they come?" carries the idea that they had come out of something, namely, the beast system (:14). See on :9 *Of all nations*.

7:14 *And I replied: My lord, do you know? And he explained to me: These are they that came out of the great tribulation-* The great tribulation in latter day Israel of Mt. 24:9,21,29. 'Coming out' can be a Hebraism for coming forth successfully from a trial- e.g. "When He has tested me, I shall *come forth* as gold" (Job 23:10). These are the group who respond to the traumas of the six seals and repent. Their white robes connect with those given to those who die during the tribulation under the fifth seal ("And each one was given a white robe", Rev. 6:11).

*And they washed their robes-* Perhaps a reference to mass baptisms into Christ in the beast dominated Israel of the last days?

*And made them white in the blood of the Lamb-* It is the function of the three and a half year Elijah ministry [which will occur at the same time as the tribulation] to be "like fullers' soap" so that Israel may "abide the day of [Messiah's] coming" (Mal. 3:2). Fullers' soap is what makes white. The reference is to those in Israel who respond to the Elijah ministry and make their clothes white. These are the 144,000 or great multitude.

The 144,000 are redeemed from all the tribes of Jewry in the last days, and they wash their robes [through baptism] in the blood of Jesus as a result of "the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14

RV) which they pass through. This great multitude are Jews yet out of every nation and language (Rev. 7:9)- for as Ron Abel shows in *Wrested Scriptures*, the great multitude and the 144,000 are to be read as identical. The witness to them will thus be world-wide. This “great tribulation” is one of many links discernible between Revelation and the Olivet prophecy. The Lord had prophesied that the “great tribulation” such as never was for Israel will occur in the very last days before the return (Mt. 24:21). It is only for the sake of “the elect” that the days of the great tribulation are shortened. This elect are surely the 144,000 of Rev. 7- Jewish brethren in Christ, converted during the very last days. It is this “elect” which is to be gathered from “the four winds” (Mt. 24:31) by the Angels. This suggests that they are not just Jews in the land who are converted, but those throughout the world-wide Diaspora. For the time of Jacob’s trouble, worse than anything they have ever experienced (including the holocaust) must affect all Jewry world-wide. And this includes the USA and other apparently pro-Jewish or tolerant nations.

We must face the questions: Are the 144,000 the same as the great multitude? And are these 144,000 the same as the 144,000 in Revelation 14? I believe they all refer to the same group of faithful believers, perhaps literal Jews, who repent during the early part of the tribulation which is described in the six seals. But each passage gives different aspects of the same picture. The seven trumpets are the tribulations brought about by the four winds of 7:1. These can still be responded to by those within the land. The 144,000 group are preserved from them, just as Israel experienced the first plagues to come upon Egypt but were preserved from the later ones (cp. Is. 26:20). The seven vials are clearly based upon the plagues upon Egypt, and they are part of the extensive description of the beast’s judgment which [interspersed with visions of the faithful] dominate the rest of the book of Revelation.

But are these 144,000 the same as the 144,000 in Revelation 14? The differences don’t necessarily have to make them different; John hears the 144,000 and then sees the great multitude, just as earlier John hears about the Lion but turns to *see* a Lamb (Rev. 5:5,6); and so it could be that he is *told* about the 144,000 and turns to *see* a great multitude. It would be facile to suggest that the Lion and Lamb are two different beings. They are simply different aspects of the same personage- the Lord Jesus. And this is common in Revelation and Jewish apocalyptic generally. So the differences are not fundamental, but rather presenting to us different aspects of the same group. In one sense they are the innumerable seed of Abraham, in another sense they are the 12 tribes, the true Israel. The great multitude are dressed in “white robes”- and this has just been used about those slain at the start of the tribulation (6:11). A specific group is in view- Jewish believers who suffered in the land at the hands of the beast during the time of the seals.

There are similarities between the 144,000 and the “great multitude”. The 144,000 of Rev. 14:3 are “before the throne” just as the “great multitude” of Rev. 7:15,17 are. If the 144,000 represent the church generally, it’s hard to understand why there should be such a laboured enumeration of them as coming from the various listed tribes of Israel. The idea surely is that they are Jewish Christians from within the land- perhaps the mention of the 12 tribes is to show that they will come from the entire geographical inheritance of Israel.

The great multitude have palms in their hands (:9) as if they are lining the streets of Jerusalem to welcome Jesus as King (Mt. 21:8). The term “great multitude” is repeatedly used in the Gospels for the crowds who followed Jesus. So although they do refer to the group of Jewish Christians of the last days, they are clearly to be understood as looking forward to the entire community of Jesus-followers. Rev. 7:14 says of the great multitude:

“These are they which came out of great tribulation”. The many connections with the Olivet Prophecy would surely mean that the tribulation in view is partly that of the last days (Mt. 24:21,29).

*7:15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them-* There is maybe the suggestion here that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph reassuring his brethren.

*7:16 They shall hunger no more nor thirst any more-* Quoting from Is. 49:10 about the repentant Jewish remnant of the last days. Hunger, thirst, no more burning [AV “heat”] and the sun no longer falling upon them [Gk.] all has reference to the experiences in the land during the six seal judgments. The comfort for that group is that these things will be no more.

*Neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat-* The sun is symbolic of the Lord Jesus, but those who have passed through the tribulation will have been under the heat of the anti-Christ, the fake "sun" (cp. Mt. 13:6). The "heat" could refer to the heat of torture or to nuclear warfare. The word literally means a glow or burn. There seems no doubt that the Islamist elements within the earth / land promised to Abraham would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons in their assault upon Israel. However the Hebrew used in Is. 49:10, which is being quoted, refers to the *sirocco* or scorching desert storm wind, an idea used earlier for the Islamist invasion of Israel in the last days.

7:17– see on Lk. 13:15.

*For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of living water-* Again we have a kaleidoscope of images. The Lamb is both in the midst of the throne and leading them as a shepherd. The Lamb, once a sheep, is the appropriate shepherd; His shepherding is on the basis of His own human experience, as a sheep.

The "springs of living water" to which they are led could refer to us; for repentant Israel will be given teachers to teach them (Jer. 3:15). In John's languages, the spring of living water is the gift of the Spirit given in the Lord Jesus. It is ultimately the spring which gives the water of life eternal (22:1). This last generation of repentant Jews will indeed be given the life eternal.

*And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes-* Quoting from Is. 25:8 about the resurrection and immortality of the last day (thus it is quoted in 1 Cor. 15), again about the repentant Jewish remnant of the last days. In the context, this happens on Mount Zion, which is where the 144,000 are found in Rev. 14, at a time when “Moab” and Israel’s neighbour enemies have been destroyed. Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. When we read that the Lord will “wipe away” tears from their eyes, this is the same word used in Acts 3:19 to describe how the sins of repentant Israel will be “blotted out” when the Lord returns. The conclusion seems to be, therefore, that the Lord Himself will comfort them with the reality that their sins and being unworthy of the Kingdom is all truly forgiven. The judgment will have achieved its end for them- a true realization of sinfulness.



## CHAPTER 8

The trumpets of Rev. 8-11 are clearly based upon the plagues of Ex. 7-12. Yet those plagues were each one designed to induce repentance in Egypt; there were various possible futures and outcomes related to each of them. If, e.g., after plague eight, Pharaoh had truly repented- then the other plagues wouldn't have happened. And perhaps it will be the same with the trumpets of the last days. See on Rev. 16:12.

The six seals of Rev. 6 brought judgment upon God's people Israel within the land or earth promised to Abraham. A minority responded and were "sealed" in Rev. 7. Now there are seven trumpets, which are judgments on the Jews who are impenitent, and also on others within the land. But trumpets are warnings. In these judgments there is still an appeal being made, even though time is more than up for both Israel and her enemies. The trumpet judgments begin with desolations upon the physical land, in order to help people in the land understand what is going to happen to them. After the trumpets, there is yet another desperate appeal for repentance; and then in 15:7,8 the temple is closed, and the vials are poured out- of final and utter destruction. The vials come in rapid succession, because they are not intended to elicit repentance. Their finality is implied by the words "the seven *last* plagues". Whereas under the seals and trumpets, only a third or quarter of things were destroyed, under the vials there is total destruction. The language of the trumpets and vials is similar- because Babylon is being made to drink the cup of judgments which she gave others to drink during the seals and trumpets:

:

### Trumpets

1st. earth  
2nd. sea (salt water)  
3rd. rivers and fountains (fresh water)  
4th. sun, moon, stars  
5th. sun and air darkened  
6th. River Euphrates  
7th. "The kingdoms of this world are become  
the kingdoms of our Lord"

### Vials

earth  
sea (salt water)  
rivers and fountains (fresh water)  
sun, moon, stars  
kingdom of beast full of darkness  
River Euphrates  
"It is done"

This explains why the trumpet judgments are effected through a variety of agents, some of them evidently human. The vials, however, are all poured out by Angels.

It should be noted that the seven signs, relating to the destruction of the beast, are also related to the seven trumpets:

### Trumpets

(Chapters 8 -11)

A great star falls from heaven (8:10)

A third part of the stars is smitten (8:12)

"Woe, woe, woe to the inhab-itors of the  
earth" (8:13)

The beast that comes out of the  
bottomless pit . . .

. . . makes war against the witnesses and  
overcomes them . . .

### Signs

(Chapters 12 onwards)

The dragon is cast out of heaven (12:9)

The dragon's tail casts down a third of the stars  
(12:4)

"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth" (12:12)

The beast that comes out of the sea . . .

. . . makes war against the saints and overcomes  
them . . .

... they of the people and kindreds and tongues ...	... power over kindreds and tongues and nations . .
... they that dwell upon the earth... (11:7-10)	... all that dwell upon the earth . . . (13:1-8)
Resurrection and judgment (11:18)	Resurrection and judgment (20:4 and 11-13)
"Thy wrath is come" (11:18)	The vials of God's wrath
Temple of God opened (11:19)	(chapters 15,16)
Lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake and hail (11:19)	Temple of God opened (15:5) Voices, thunders, earthquake and hail (16:18,21)

8:1 *And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven for about half an hour*- Literally “*whenever* he opened the seventh seal...”, as if there is an element of doubt as to whether it will be opened. See on :13. On 6:1 I discussed whether in fact the seventh seal is opened, or has anything in it; hence the silence.

But the silence is also an allusion to the silence in the temple at the time of the incense offering (see on 5:8). The run up to the final tribulation will provoke a “praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:36). Perhaps this intense latter day praying of the faithful is what Rev. 8:1 refers to, in speaking of “silence in heaven” when the seventh seal was opened- for this is one of Revelation's continual allusions to the temple service: “In the Temple, when the incense was offered, the people retired from the court and prostrated themselves in silent prayer”.

8:2 *And I saw the seven angels that stood before God; and there were given to them seven trumpets*- The presence of the article “the” indicates these seven Angels have already been referred to. But the only time we have so far read of them in Revelation is in the description of the seven Angels of the churches who represent the believers before God (Rev. 1:20). The seven Angels feature later in Revelation, pouring out the vials of Divine wrath upon the land and the beast system. The Angels responsible for God's people are the same ones who pour out such terrible calamities upon the land. This is the power of our representation before God in the court of Heaven. This is exactly in context, because we go on to read that because of the prayers of the believers, things are poured out upon the land and Angels blow trumpets. This is the power of prayer, and it will be especially evident in the last days.

The theme of ‘seven’ judgments coming upon the land surely connects with the claim that Mohammad waged seven military campaigns against the infidels in the land [promised to Abraham]. The Hadith several times speaks of the “seven military expeditions led by the Messenger of Allah himself (may peace be upon him)” (e.g. Book 19.4469), or of the “seven battles” he was victorious in (Book 19.4462). This would explain the seven fold structure of the seals-trumpets-vials, and the feature of ‘seven’ judgments in various others way within the Apocalypse. The Muslim pretenders to the pattern of Mohamad bring seven judgments upon Israel, and are punished by likewise receiving back seven judgments, drinking the cup they made others to drink.

The Hadith claims that Mohammad predicted three cycles of calamities in the last days, which would be subdivided into various other calamities: “Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman reported: By Allah, I have the best knowledge amongst people about every turmoil which is going to appear in the period intervening me and the Last Hour; and it is not for the fact that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) told me something confidentially pertaining to it and he

did not tell anybody else about it, but it is because of the fact that I was present in the assembly in which he had been describing the turmoil. and he especially made a mention of three turmoils which would not spare anything and amongst these there would be turmoils like storms in the hot season" (41.6908). This is exactly the Biblical picture- of three cycles of judgments and turmoils in the land (seals-trumpets-vials), subdivided into various specific calamities. As the jihadists strive to obey the letter of their writings, they will thereby be fulfilling the outline picture of the last day crisis which is foretold in Revelation. It's noteworthy that the seven seals and seven trumpets and seven vials all conclude with the seventh being the establishment of the Kingdom. So there are actually six judgments in each case. The Hadith (Book 41.7040) speaks of six signs before the last day: "Hasten in performing these good deeds (before these) six things (happen): (the appearance) of tribe Dajjal, the smoke, the beast of the earth, the rising of the sun from the west, the general turmoil (leading to large-scale massacre) and death of masses and individuals". These six are very similar to the things spoken of in the seals and trumpets- signs in the sun, mass death, smoke, beasts of the earth. The jihadists are seeking to consciously fulfil the Hadith and so, due to the allusions the Hadith and Koran make to Revelation, they will end up fulfilling God's word of their own volition.

The Angels "stood before God". We have just read of how the great multitude, the minority of the Jews in the land who repent as a result of the six seals, stand before God (7:9), as do their representative Angels (7:11). They are "before God" in that their representative Angels are literally in His presence in the throne room of Heaven. Now, those Angels act on behalf of those believers. And the prayers of the believers are likewise before God (:3). There is only one mediator, the Lord Jesus. The Angels do not mediate those prayers, but Heaven is aware of the prayers on account of their Angels. Our final 'standing before God' at judgment day (20:12) is effectively going on now. We are right now in the presence of His judgment throne.

Again we note the idea of "given"; they were "given" the trumpets. The judgments and calamities to be poured out are not because of any radical human evil, unrestrained in the world. These things are all under God's direct Angelic control. The trumpet sound is very much associated with the return of Christ to earth (Mt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16). Our change to immortality will be when the *last* trumpet sounds (1 Cor. 15:52); and the seventh trumpet announces the full establishment of God's Kingdom on earth (11:15). These trumpets therefore speak of events immediately surrounding the Lord's return.

The trumpet judgments contain several of the plagues on Egypt:

<i>Trumpets</i>	<i>Plagues on Egypt</i>
1. Fire from the altar cast upon the earth.	Dust of the furnace (of the altar) sprinkled abroad.
2. Hail and fire.	Hail and fire.
3. Sea became blood.	Waters turned to blood.
4. Darkness.	Darkness.
5. Locusts.	Locusts.
6. Abaddon, the Destroyer.	The Destroyer Angel (Ex. 12:23).

7. Men slain by  
angels.

The firstborn slain by  
angels.

The seal judgments of chapter 6 came upon Israel to bring them to repentance, and a majority repented, as explained in the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7. Now, that repentant remnant are spared the plagues on Egypt, as it were; but the impenitent amongst Israel will suffer along with 'Egypt', the unbelieving world. This is as predicted in Dt. 28:59,60- the plagues of Egypt will come upon unbelieving Israel: "Then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues... He will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt".

8:3 *And another Angel*- Perhaps representative of the Lord Jesus, seeing He is the mediator of prayer.

*Came and stood over the altar*- There are two altars in view here. The Angel takes fire from the bronze altar of sacrifice, which we have recently encountered in 6:9 as the symbol of the sacrifice of the faithful during the tribulation, and uses this to ignite the incense on the golden altar of incense, which we again encounter in 9:13. The sacrifice of the faithful remnant, their endurance unto death, gives power to the prayers offered for the coming of Christ. The sacrifice of the believers during the tribulation in 6:9 gave rise to the prayer "How long...?", the begging for the Lord's coming. And it was because of their sacrifice that their prayers were heard. That is represented here by the fire from the blood covered altar of sacrifice being used to ignite the incense of prayer on the incense altar. Our lives are in that sense a prayer, and give credibility and integrity to our words of prayer. Otherwise, prayer is mere words. But those prayed words cannot be powerful unless they are rooted in a life lived before God. If this were not the case, then answers to prayer would simply go to those who know how to wordsmith their language nicely and persuasively. That is a mistake made by so many Orthodox believers, but we can all tend to believe it too.

*Having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne*- One Angel is given much incense- i.e. prayers- presumably by the individual guardian Angels. He then offers this up on the altar (Christ) to God, and the response from God comes in the form of the Angels sounding their trumpets. It is interesting to note that actually these Angels had already been prepared for what they were going to do (Rev. 8:2) when they had been earlier before the throne of God. God knows our prayers before we say them. He knew what the prayers of the people at that time would be, and had earlier prepared the Angels to answer them, and this was unleashed by their cumulative prayer. But without that prayer- that human part of the equation- the prepared answer would not have been put into action. The prayers were offered up by one Angel- this either means there is one Angel with overall responsibility for offering up prayers to Christ (the altar), or that there is one Angel who collects together the prayers from one period of time or about one particular subject and then offers them up to Christ. The fact "much incense" is mentioned presumably means that there was much prayer made at this time, and this was added to the "prayers of all saints" (v. 3) which had already been made about this.

The sky, the trillions of kilometres between Heaven and earth, are in fact no ultimate distance. That's the simplest message of those visions. In Revelation we see the incense of human prayers arising into Heaven, resulting in Angels coming to earth, pouring out bowls,

blowing trumpets, and major events happening on earth (Rev. 5:8; 8:3). Prayer is noticed; it brings forth quite out of proportion responses.

Rev. 8:3-5 as well as Rev. 11:6 certainly allude to Elijah as a pattern for our latter day witnessing. Much incense of latter day prayer is added to the existing incense, resulting in fire being brought down on earth after the pattern of Elijah (Rev. 8:3-5 RV). The especially intense prayers of the latter day remnant are added to the cumulative prayers of former generations, and result in the second coming and the beginning of the final judgments.

8:4 *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand-* The same Greek words for 'smoke ascended up' are found in Rev. 14:11; 19:3 concerning the smoke of the destruction of the beast system. This ultimately will be brought about by the prayer of the latter day remnant. As I point out in *The Last Days*, much emphasis is given to prayer in the latter day prophecies. But the ascending up of the smoke of their prayers is also to be compared with the ascending up of the smoke from the bottomless pit in 9:2, which gives rise to the locust invasion which torments those in the land. This judgment on the land is therefore a direct response to human prayer.

8:5- see on Rev. 5:8.

*And the angel took the censer, filled it with the fire of the altar and cast it upon the earth-* The fire from the bronze sacrifice altar was used to ignite the incense on the incense altar; see on :3. The earth / land has the fire of judgment thrown at it because of the prayers of and about those who were slain in it during the tribulation. This is the scene at the altar in 6:9; the blood on the altar leads to a promise of judgment against those who shed it. The Lord perhaps foresaw all this when He used the same words about how He came not to cast peace on the land but fire and a sword (Mt. 10:34; Lk. 12:49)- because Israel refused to accept Him. The scattering of fire on the land recalls Ez. 10:2, where fire is scattered over the city of Jerusalem; and the Babylonian desolation which this primarily refers to is a prototype of the latter day desolation of Jerusalem.

*There followed thunders, voices, lightnings and an earthquake-* What was seen in the Heavenly throne room at the start of the vision (4:5 cp. 11:19). This awesome Divine activity in the temple of Heaven, the throne room (11:19), is triggered by the prayers of men on earth. Voices, thunder, lightning and earthquake are all experienced in the events which make Babylon fall in 16:18 under the seventh vial (16:17). The voice of thunders proclaims the establishment of God's Kingdom in 19:6. Putting these things together, we see that the voices, thunders and lightnings are all part and parcel of the same final judgment of the beast system and establishment of God's Kingdom at Christ's coming. There is no way that these various passages refer to events over a 2000 year period. They are the events of the very last days. The earthquake which is associated with voices, thunders and lightnings is clearly that of 16:18, for the same words are used. The literalistic, linear thinking mind would expect that there must be a progression of chronological events between chapters 8 and 16. But that is not how apocalyptic works, nor do we find such a chronological development in Old Testament Bible prophecy. Rather are we given repeated snapshots of the same events from different angles, and often the end point is declared and then there is an explanation of how that position was arrived at. This is true of Biblical language generally- consider how in 2 Samuel 24 we are told that the Lord spared Jerusalem because of David's prayer, but then the text reverts in time to explain how that came about.

The same earthquake is in view throughout Revelation (6:12; 11:13,19; 16:18). We naturally think of the great earthquake which is to accompany the return of the Lord Jesus in Zech. 14:5. The earthquake is described in various parts of the Revelation prophecy because chronological order is not very significant in apocalyptic. The images overlap, giving a kaleidoscope effect.

The language in 8:5 and indeed throughout the trumpets is alluding to the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in Isaiah 29:

"I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation... I will encamp against you all around... and you will be brought low... in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night... so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion... In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD... For the ruthless [the Islamic Jihadists] shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off... Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale... those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding". It's hard to find a complete historical fulfilment of this- when God revealed Himself to deliver a besieged Jerusalem with thunder, earthquake and great noise, which then results in the repentance of a remnant in Israel. This time is yet to come, and it is the time spoken of in Revelation 8. The earthquake which fells Babylon is Jerusalem's salvation, and it comes at a time when Jerusalem is surrounded by enemy armies. This is the scenario of Zechariah 14- Jerusalem surrounded by armies, who are judged by the Lord's return and a huge earthquake.

8:6 *And the seven Angels that had the seven trumpets*- The blowing of trumpets is commonly used in the OT for preparing war against Israel's enemies. The war being prepared is against Israel's latter day desolators. The obvious connection is with the seven priests blowing the seven trumpets which caused the fall of the great city Jericho (Josh. 6:4,6). Israel's latter day enemies are the equivalent of the Canaanites, the non-Jewish inhabitants of the land promised to Abraham. The Angels are as it were the priests, and we have read earlier in Rev. 8 of the Angels as it were doing priestly duty in the Heavenly tabernacle. The blowing of the trumpets is preparing for the fall of the great city Babylon, the epitome of the beast.

*Prepared themselves to sound*- We imagine them lifting the trumpets to their mouths. The detail adds to the general impression that all the calamities of the last days have been carefully prepared. They are not at all the outcome of random evil which has got out of even Divine control. That point is repeatedly made doubtless because it might well appear like that to those who endure those things. There is a strong theme in Revelation of things being prepared by the Angels and then happening on the land (the locusts are prepared for battle, 9:7; four Angels are prepared for action at a precise moment, 9:15; the persecuted woman has a place of refuge prepared for her, 12:6; the hordes from the East are prepared for release from the Euphrates, which is what we are seeing in the preparation of the jihadist hordes in that very area today, 16:12; the bride is prepared through all her tribulations, 19:7; 21:2). It is that preparation process which we are seeing today in the development of the radical Islamists.

8:7 *And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood; and they were cast upon the earth-* One reason why there are such similarities between the seven vials and the seven trumpets [see introduction to this chapter] could be that the vials refer largely to the judgments to come upon the world, and the trumpets to the latter day tribulation of the saints. See on Rev. 11:3.

Seven Vials	Seven trumpets
16:2	8:7
16:3	8:8
16:4	8:10
16:8	8:12
16:10	9:1
16:12	9:13
16:17-21	11:15

The hail is seen prepared in Heaven in 11:9; now it is sent to the earth. Hail is one of the final bowls that is poured upon the beast system in 16:21. What the beast does to those on the land is done to them; the cup or bowl they gave others to drink, they must drink at the time of the bowls being poured out. The idea of "hail and fire mingled" is clearly alluding to the plague upon Egypt, of hail mingled with fire (Ex. 9:24). But the hail plague did not touch the Israelites in Goshen (Ex. 9:26). This is exactly as we would expect- the seal judgments led a remnant of Israel to repent, and through the symbology of the 144,000 in Rev. 7, they are declared the true Israel. They are sealed so that the judgments of the trumpets don't come upon them. So the allusion to a plague on Egypt which didn't touch Israel is appropriate. Is. 32:19 describes the repentant remnant of Israel as being unharmed by hail in the last days. Note that the plagues on Egypt were intended to elicit repentance in Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and that is likewise the purpose of the trumpet judgments upon the beast system. We gasp at God's grace- that He even wants jihadists to repent. We recall too how a confederacy of five kings of the earth / land, under the leadership of the antichrist figure Adonizedek ('Lord of righteousness', a fake Christ), were likewise destroyed by hail during the conquest of Joshua-Jesus (Josh. 10:11).

Hail cast down to the earth is exactly the language of the judgment upon the impenitent amongst Israel in the last days who do not accept the Messiah, the corner stone laid in Zion; those who are not amongst the remnant who repent (Is. 28:2,5,16,17); those Jews who will not 'come out of' the Babylon system will experience her judgments, if they are not part of the repentant Jewish remnant, the 144,000. In similar manner, the impenitent Jews at the time of the restoration were struck with hail, albeit as part of a program intended to bring them even then to repentance (Hag. 2:17).

Hail and blood are used by God to "plead" with Gog (Ez. 38:22). Ezekiel 38 is a latter day prophecy, but we again must note that the judgment of hail, blood, plague etc. is in order to plead even with Gog to repent. Only when the warning trumpets are ignored are the vials of complete destruction poured out and the temple is closed to men (15:7,8).

"Fire mingled with blood" is all part of the Lord's second coming, for He comes with flaming fire in judgment upon those who have refused to know Him (2 Thess. 1:7); thus the eyes of Jesus in Revelation are as a flaming fire (Rev. 1:7; 2:18; 19:12). This is the picture of Him at the time of His coming in judgment to earth. Yet the Angels are His eyes, according to Revelation 1 and 4:5, and they are therefore made a flaming fire (Heb. 1:7). Thus the actual,

mechanical outworking of His coming in judgment in fire will be through the medium of Angelic activity. And this is what we have spoken of here in Rev. 8:7.

Casting fire on the land [of Israel] recalls Amos 7:4, which also mentions locusts, whom we will meet in the fifth trumpet: “The Lord God contended by fire... and it devoured the great deep, and would have eaten up the land (R.V., LXX: “the Lord’s portion”). The context goes on to predict that “the high places of Isaac (where Isaac was offered- Moriah, the temple mount) shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries [the great sanctuary?] of Israel shall be laid waste”. Notice once again that the punishment by fire is Yahweh ‘contending’. It is again an appeal for repentance.

*The third part of the earth was burnt up, as was the third part of the trees; and all green grass was burnt up-* In Ez. 5:1-5 Ezekiel shaves his hair and is told to divide it carefully into three parts, except for a mere few bound in the hem of his robe. These three parts are then consigned to destruction by fire, sword or scattering. We have just read in chapter 7 of the 144,000 faithful remnant. They will be saved, but the three parts of Israel who remain apart from them are to be destroyed. Note that the context of Ezekiel 5 is specifically Jerusalem. Zech. 13:8,9 speaks of two thirds of Jews *in the land* being killed, and a third being refined. Zech. 14:2 has half of Jerusalem going into captivity. Bearing in mind the difference between Jerusalem and the whole land, these proportions aren’t necessarily contradictory. The point is, these Old Testament prophecies of a partial desolation of Jerusalem and the land of Israel are being alluded to in Revelation; and the context is of the last days, rather than of some period in past history.

Not all trees were destroyed by the hail. This is in intended contrast to how the hail upon Egypt destroyed *every* tree of the field (Ex. 9:25- although some escaped, 10:5,12,15) as well as all the grass. Here, all the grass is destroyed but only a third of the trees. We may not need to think in terms of literal grass and trees. Perhaps the point is being made that yes, the situation is analogous to Israel in Egypt and the plagues upon Egypt, but still they are more restrained than those upon Egypt. This would be because God wants the beast system to perceive the similarities [perhaps therefore literal hail will be used], and to repent- before the bowls are poured out, which speak of utter destruction of the beast system. We note that in this case, Moses before Pharaoh must have a latter day equivalent, and we see this in chapter 11, where the two witnesses have similarities to Moses at this time.

The destruction of trees recalls what Babylon did to Jerusalem: “For thus hath the Lord of Hosts said, Hew down her trees (RVmg.), and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her” (Jer. 6:6). Likewise Ez. 20:47: “Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein”. These words were applied by the Lord to Jerusalem’s future judgment, both in AD70 and therefore also in the last days (Lk. 23:31). The idea is that the Babylonian judgment upon Israel is to be repeated in the last days. And that may simply be the point of reference to the trees- perhaps we don’t need to look for any literal application. It could be that as in the Lord’s latter day parable of the fig tree, trees represent nations within the land / earth promised to Abraham. Another Old Testament allusion to be aware of regarding trees is Zech. 11:1,2: “Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O oaks of Bashan; for the



forest of the vintage is come down". These words preface a prophecy of the rejection of Jesus and of the resultant judgment for that in the last days.

It's not my style in this exposition to unduly dwell on the very evident application of Revelation to the run up to AD70, for we want to know the relevance to our days. But it's worth noting that there was a literal removing of trees then. Josephus claims that trees were felled indiscriminately to build engines of war and even the crucifixion of prisoners had to cease through lack of timber to make crosses. There has been an especial attempt to reforest the land of Israel since 1948. This is typical of the way that natural Israel have sought to bring about the fulfilment of Bible prophecies about the fertility of the land- in their own strength. And all that reforestation will be burnt up in the tribulation.

We note that the olive and vine trees were not to be hurt during the time of the seals (6:6). But now, a third of them are. The Hadith records how generally, trees should not be destroyed by Moslems when on campaigns: "The first Caliph Abu Bakr (Allah be pleased with him) gave to his army while sending her on the expedition to the Syrian borders[commands] permeated with the noble spirit with which the war in Islam is permitted. He said: "... Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful" (The Hadith, Book 19 Jihad and Expedition (*Kitab Al-Jihad wa'l-Siyar*)). As often happens, the jihadist may go well beyond their own religion. Or it could be that these particular judgments on the land are brought about by non-Moslems.

"Burnt up" is the same word used about the burning up in judgment of the last day when Christ returns (Lk. 3:17; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:10) and the burning up of Babylon (Rev. 17:16; 18:8). The weeds are gathered together and burnt up (Mt. 13:30), and this is effectively a latter day prophecy of the gathering together of the nations to Armageddon and their being burnt up in the land. "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:40-42). The furnace is specifically defined as Jerusalem under judgment at the hands of Babylon-Assyria (Is. 31:9; Ez. 22:18), the latter day Sodom and Egypt which are also described as a furnace (Gen. 19:28; Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4). Sodom and Egypt are Jerusalem of the last days (Rev. 11:8; Is. 1:10; 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ez. 16:46). The prophecies about this will therefore be fulfilled in stages within the last few days around the coming of Christ. The furnace of Rev. 9:2 must be understood likewise; the overthrow of Babylon is as when God overthrew Sodom (Is. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40).

The specific mention of *green* grass may suggest that this happens at Passover time (cp. Mk. 6:39). *Chloros*, here translated "green", is the same word used about the *chloros* [AV "pale"] horse" of the seals (Rev. 6:8). This similarity with the seals is because what was done to Israel is now being done to those who did it. Babylon is drinking the cup she gave others.

8:8 *And the second angel blew his trumpet and as it were a great mountain-* This can refer to Israel and Mount Zion: "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Mt. 21:21). "This mountain" was Zion, before which the Lord stood at that time, with its altar fire, which never went out. Yet

the great destroying mountain is also Babylon (Jer. 51:25). The punishment upon Babylon will come upon an Israel who fail to come out of her.

The mountains had been moved out of their places in the seal judgments (6:14), and now this is in turn done to the enemies of God's people. For the mountain falling represents the destruction of Babylon in the Old Testament. But it also represents Judaism. The fall of Israel as an entity is framed in the same terms as the fall of Babylon. They had failed to come out of Babylon, and so Babylon's judgments come upon them. We're dealing here with a double symbol- of both falling Babylon and falling Israel. By contrast, the "great mountain" of God's Kingdom, the Mount Zion, stands secure (Dan. 2:35; Rev. 14:1; 21:10). The clearest Old Testament allusion is to Zech. 4:7: "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the corner stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" . The corner stone is the Lord Jesus, whose second coming will mean the fall of the "great mountain". The creation of a plain instead of elevated land is the language of the required levelling of Israel by the work of the Elijah prophet before the coming of Messiah (Is. 40:4). The immediate context of Zech. 4:7 speaks of how the mountain of opposition to Zerubbabel would be removed so that the restoration of Israel's Kingdom could come about. And that opposition was from local Arabs such as Sanballat who were opposing it. Zerubbabel failed to restore the Kingdom and become the Messiah figure he could have become. The essence of the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, when the Lord Jesus will be in perfection the Messiah of Israel. The great mountain will then speak of the fake kingdom of God established by the Babylon beast, which shall be cast down.

*Burning with fire*- This burning with fire is part of the outworking of how fire was cast into the land as a result of the prayers of the faithful remnant (8:5). The mountain is cast down, burning- just as fire is cast onto the earth from above. Yet burning fire is a feature of God's latter day judgment upon the beast, as often spoken of later in Revelation. The Lord Jesus will sit in judgment on the beast enthroned with wheels of burning fire (Dan. 7:19), replete as that language is with reference to the Angel cherubim (Ez. 1:13), the four beasts of Heaven. Again, we are clearly to see in this the language of the last day. The lamps of fire burning before the throne in Rev. 4:5 speak of the view of the Heavenly throne room as it will be in the last day. Finally, the lake of burning fire- fire burning on water- is the end of the beast system. And this same image, fire cast into water and the water burning, is found here in the second trumpet (and also in the third trumpet, where fire hits water again, the rivers). Perhaps we could understand that this is a foretaste of the final judgment of the lake of fire. Only a third of the water is affected, and then a third part of the rivers, unlike the symbology of the entire lake of fire burning. There is again the implication that even at this late stage, men can see what condemnation will be like and avoid it in repentance. This would be in keeping with how God has worked so many times- He gives worked examples of condemnation to men to warn them of where their path shall lead them. Quite simply, because He wishes their repentance. Significantly, the Koran several times claims that the judgment of unbelievers will be severe exactly because they have rejected warnings (especially Sura 54.16-24). The Moslem followers of the beast will be treated exactly in accordance with their own perceptions of Divine judgment.

*Was cast into the sea*- In this sense, there is a sea of glass mingled with fire in 15:2. The sea of glass speaks of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, but the picture is mingled with fire because the throwing of fire into the sea is what brings about the Kingdom. We see again how apocalyptic is not interested in precise chronology- the events are run together. Different aspects of the same picture are given. What this means, however, is that

the casting of the mountain of fire into the sea is definitely a picture of latter day events, immediately around the time of the establishment of the sea as glass, the Kingdom of God on the sea of nations.

The wicked are as a troubled sea (Is. 57:20). But closer examination of that passage reveals that is talking about the Jews at the time of the Assyrian invasion who chose not to be amongst the righteous remnant. This exactly fits our context. And the Hebrew word translated "troubled" means literally 'sent away', and is also translated 'divorced'. The metaphor of divorce is certainly used about God's relationship with Israel, and the destruction of the faithless majority of Israel at the time of the end will be the final climax of that great divorce. such troubling of the sea will be the lot of the majority in Israel, but "Peace, peace" to the repentant remnant (Is. 57:19).

*And the third part of the sea became blood-* In the AD70 application, this may refer to the mass killing of Jews in the Sea of Galilee. Josephus recorded: "One might see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight, there was on the following days over the country. In this way thousands were slain" (B.J. 3:10:9). Likewise, on the Mediterranean coast: "The sea was bloody a long way, and the maritime ports were full of dead bodies ... and the number of the bodies that were thus thrown out of the sea was 4,200" (B.J. 3:9:3). Perhaps something similar will happen in the last days.

Water becoming blood is obviously a reference to the plagues upon Egypt (Ex. 7:20). The continual allusion to those plagues suggest that there has been an abuse of Israel by a latter day Egypt. In *The Last Days* [chapter 5](#) I work out in more detail the typology of Egypt's domination of Israel, with the Passover deliverance being a type of the second coming. That might explain the reference to "green grass", associated as it is with Passover. Both "rivers" and "waters" are described as being turned into blood in Egypt (Ps. 78:44; 105:29), and both rivers and waters are spoken of here in the trumpets.

A burning mountain coming into the sea would create the impression of a sea of fire- and the lake of fire is the picture of the beast's final destruction (Rev. 19:20; 21:8). There may therefore be no specific symbology in the 'sea' or water beyond this.

Fire destroying things in water is surely an indication that this is from God. The Hadith (Book 41.7012) says that the Antichrist of the last days will do the same: "The *Dajjal* would appear and there would be along with him water and fire and what the people would see as water that would be fire and that would burn and what would appear as fire that would be water". The Muslims will therefore see the entity bringing these things about- the Lord Jesus- as the antiChrist and thus be the more motivated to engage in mad warfare against Him, to their own destruction.

In Rev. 8:8 we have an Angel casting a mountain into the sea. This must surely connect with the Lord's encouragement that we can cast mountains into the sea by our faith (Mk. 11:23). Therefore... it surely follows that our prayers have a direct effect upon the Angels. They throw mountains around because of our faithful prayer... Inevitably we see a connection with Ps. 46:2, which comforts us not to fear when mountains are cast into sea. Surely the point is that we shouldn't be scared when we perceive the awesomeness of the power of prayer and its influence upon Angels. It's all too easy to ask for things without perceiving how it would really be if that prayer were answered. We need to have specific and focused faith in what we

ask for, realizing that legions of Angels are potentially able to operationalize what we ask for. See on Is. 6:7.

Jer. 51:25 calls Babylon a "destroying mountain" which is to be judged by fire to become "a burnt mountain". The use of identical language in Rev. 8:8 must make that passage have some reference to the fall of latter-day Babylon. "Destroying mountain" is the language of Dan. 2:44 concerning the little stone destroying the image and growing into a mountain, symbolizing God's Kingdom. Jer. 51:20-23 stresses no less than nine times how 'Babylon' is to be "broken in pieces", which is another connection with Dan. 2:44 concerning the breaking in pieces of the nations who are confederate with 'Babylon', the head of gold.

*8:9 And there died the third part of the creatures (even they that had life) which were in the sea, and the third part of the ships were destroyed-* The connection is clearly with Rev. 5:13, where the "creatures" [s.w.] in the sea all give glory to the Lamb enthroned. To get to that end point, the creatures in the sea who will not give Him glory must be judged. The seals, trumpets, vials and descriptions of the judgments upon the beast and whore can be read as being all aspects of the final judgment. But it could also be that the last judgment of the unbelieving world comes in stages. Here in the trumpets, a third of the sea creatures die; in 16:3, the sea becomes as the blood of a dead corpse "and *every* living creature died in the sea". The same Greek word for "died" is used there as here in 8:9. As commented previously, God gives warning of His final judgments, in the hope that men will learn from the condemnation of others and repent. We marvel at His patience, portrayed as it is throughout the various judgments we read of. Our human sense would be to simply liquidate the entire unbelieving, abusive system in one shot. But He works, with all the intricacies of the systems of seven interlocking, interrelated judgments, in order to try to elicit repentance at every turn. Truly, as Emil Brunner observed, "the wrath of God is the love of God". Even in His style of condemning wicked men and systems, we see shining through His urgent desire for human repentance and other, better outcomes. "The sea" is the area from which the beast arises (13:1). We can therefore interpret it as the power base of the beast- the nations and peoples within the land promised to Abraham. This would explain the repeated judgments upon the "sea" in Revelation. The emphasis given to "the ships" being judged would therefore speak of the mercantile activities within that area. The only other references in Revelation to "ships" are when we read that the ships associated with the Babylon-beast system are destroyed in her final judgment (Rev. 18:17,19). At the time of the trumpet judgments, only a third of them are destroyed- but finally, they are all destroyed. The destruction of a third of them is again a portent of the final total destruction- and is therefore an appeal for repentance. Likewise we read that this third part of shipping was "destroyed" but the word is found elsewhere in Revelation only when we read of the total 'destruction' of those who had destroyed the land (11:18).

*8:10 And the third angel blew his trumpet, and there fell from heaven a great star-* The Olivet prophecy speaks of the stars falling from Heaven (Mt. 24:29), and the context begs us interpret this as referring to the collapse of the Israelite ruling system. The imagery can equally refer to the ruling system of any entity. It seems a specific star or leader is in view, and his fall will result in damage on the earth / land. A great star falling from Heaven to earth recalls Isaiah 14, the parable of the fall of the king of Babylon. And this surely looks forward to the last days. Stars represent rulers or leaders, and Rev. 17:10 speaks of how the five kings supporting the beast system 'fall' [s.w.]; here in the trumpets we have detail of the fall of at least two of them.

*Burning as a torch-* This is the language of the earlier vision of the Heavenly throne room, where the seven lamps of fire burn before the throne (Rev. 4:5). The implication is that this is a result of Angelic involvement in the judgment. But there is also a continuation of the theme that the beast kingdom is a fake kingdom of God. It has just been described as a “great mountain”, which is the language of *God’s Kingdom*. Perhaps the leader who falls will be known as the burning torch or lamp.

*And it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of the waters-* See on 8:8 *burning with fire*. Such judgment on water courses is predicted in prophecies about latter day events in the land of Israel. “The mountains of Israel... Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers (R.V. “water courses”; the reference is to wadis) and to the valleys” (Ez. 6:3). Ez. 36:4, 6 uses identical language about the land of Israel, again in a latter day context. Before the Assyrian invasion, typical of the latter day desolation of Israel, Joel 1:20 records that “the rivers of waters are dried up”.

The Koran and Hadith speak hundreds of times of paradise as being a place of rivers and fountains of waters. The contrast is with the *living* “fountains of waters” which the repentant 144,000 come to (Rev. 7:17). The “fountains of waters” of the beast system are turned to blood and dried up in the various judgments brought upon them. They are *dead*. The Muslim concept of paradise will be destroyed and inverted. In seeking to establish a caliphate in the land promised to Abraham, with Jerusalem as its capital and the temple mount as its central point of worship, radical Islam is seeking to establish a fake, imitation Kingdom of God- just as Assyria offered Judah a land where each would sit under their own vine and fig tree, appropriating the language of *God’s Kingdom* to their own. Whilst there may be a literal element to these judgments upon the waters, I suspect that the judgment must be understood in terms of the Islamic conception of paradise.

8:11 *And the name of the star is called Wormwood-* This is Old Testament imagery for the bitterness of Israel’s judgment at the hand of their neighbours, especially Babylon at the fall of Jerusalem: “Behold I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the nations” (Jer. 9:15, 16; Lam. 3:15,19). “Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land” (Jer. 23:15 cp. Jer. 6:26). The allusion is also to Numbers 5, the trial of the bitter waters of jealousy, for the woman who has been unfaithful to her husband. And that woman is clearly enough representative of Israel, according to many Old Testament allusions.

Sura 37.62 of the Koran speaks of a similar plant that Muslims believe is the food of dwellers of Hell-fire, part of the diet of *Adh-Dhari*, bitter fruit, which intensifies their torment (Sura 69:36,37). The similarities with the Koran could suggest that the victims of these judgments will be subjected to an Islamic judgment of condemnation, i.e. ministered by Islam. Or the hint could be that the self-righteous jihadists will understand that they are being condemned, they will feel their condemnation in terms they understand.

*And one third of the waters became bitter-tasting; and many men died because the waters were made so bitter-* The parallel is between the waters ‘becoming wormwood’ and the waters being “made bitter”. There may not be too much significance in the term “wormwood”, rather is the idea being developed of a curse and bitterness. The judgments of the trumpets are partly upon those in Israel who didn’t repent during the seals, and thus weren’t sealed in chapter 7; and partly upon their desolators, or others within the land

promised to Abraham. The language of bitter waters obviously alludes to Israel's experience at Marah in Ex. 15:23. The bitter waters were cured by a tree being cut down and cast into the water. This clearly looked ahead to the tree of the Lord's crucifixion, through which the bitter waters were made sweet. The unbelieving Israelites were tested / tried at the bitter waters (Ex. 15:25). We could reasonably infer that the way only a third of the waters were made bitter is a hint that this partial judgment is intended to lead Israel to repentance, and to acceptance of the tree / cross of the Christ whom they crucified. Again we marvel at God's ever saving intention, ever desiring human repentance and salvation. After leaving Marah, and learning the lesson of the tree, Israel came to Elim, where there were "fountains of [living] water" (Num. 33:9). The contrast between bitter water and living water is only really found here in Rev. 8:10 and 7:17, where the repentant 144,000 come to living fountains of waters. Those who don't accept the crucified Christ have the bitter waters of Marah, from which they will not move on to Elim.

8:12- see on Rev. 18:8.

*And the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck and a third of the moon and a third of the stars-* The darkening of a third of the stars and a third of the sun and moon is very much the picture in Rev. 12:4, where a third of the stars fall to earth. The picture of a part of the heavens falling is exactly how the Koran envisages the last day judgment of apostates- "A fragment of the heaven falling" (Sura 52.44). The judgment they envisage upon others will come upon them, and it will be articulated in terms appropriate to their cultural understanding. This, I suggest, is the significance of the similarities between the Biblical pictures of the latter day judgments, and the wording of the Koran and Hadith.

Harry Whittaker sums up the various usages of sun, moon and stars as symbols of Israel: "(a) Joseph's dream, where sun, moon and stars stand for his father, mother and brethren, *i.e.* the whole family of Israel.

(b) Revelation 12:1. The woman clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars similarly represents the nation of Israel. From this starting point the chapter yields a coherent and highly relevant interpretation (ch. 27).

(c) Genesis 22:17: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven."

(d) Jeremiah 31:36: "If those ordinances (sun, moon and stars; v. 35) depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever."

(e) Joel 2:10: "The sun and moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining" - the final invasion of Israel in the Last Days (cp. ch. 3:15).

(f) Daniel 8: 10: "The little horn waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them."

(g) Amos 8:9: "I will cause the sun to go down at noon" is coupled with: "I will turn your feasts into mourning."

(h) Luke 23:45: "And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple rent in the midst." Strange conjunction of phenomena in one verse except it is that both are symbolic of the same thing - the end of the Mosaic economy".

They are "struck", using the same word as is used in the LXX of the smiting of Israel by the Assyrians (Is. 1:5; 9:13), who represent Israel's latter day invaders.

*This meant that the third part of them were darkened; and the day would not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner-* Darkness coming upon the earth is the presage

of a new creation (Gen. 1:2). The Old Testament prophets use the metaphor about the latter day invader of Israel bringing darkness upon the land (Is. 8:22; Am. 4:13), but that darkness is the necessary precursor for the Lord arising in glory upon the land (Is. 60:2). This language of a darkened earth is therefore the signal that we should expect imminently the active manifestation of God, through the return of His Son. These events therefore specifically reference the time of the immediate return of Christ. The unnatural eclipse of heavenly bodies recalls the period of darkness at the crucifixion. As so often in Revelation, the message is that the sufferings of the last days will enable people to identify with the crucifixion sufferings of Christ, and through that identification with Him to come to share in His resurrection. The essence of this means to salvation in Christ has gone on throughout the lives of all the Lord's people, at whatever time they have lived. However, the victims of the trumpet judgments are those who did not respond to those of the six seals. We again draw our breath in marvel at how the Lord will even seek with those stubborn people to bring them to identity with Him. Note that many of these judgments are a reversal of creation- for God initially made the sun, moon and stars to shine upon the earth (Gen. 1:15,17 s.w. LXX).

*8:13 And I saw and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice-* According to Vine, "It means, properly, the meridian, the highest point in the heavens which the sun occupies at noon; not the space between heaven and earth". The appeal from the place of the sun at its zenith surely speaks of the Lord Jesus. *En* (AV "through") would be better translated "at", with reference to this specific point. The warning that the next three Angels have very serious judgments to declare must serve some kind of function. It may be to give the impression that these judgments are not to be understood in chronological sequence; they are known before they are pronounced. Or perhaps the declaration is made because, yet again, it is an appeal to repentance.

*Woe, woe, woe!-* This can be read as an invitation to weeping; the weeping of repentance. There is still just about time for repentance, even from those who have turned down the appeals of the six seals. The Muslim jihadists believe they are to pronounce woe upon the enemies in the last hour: "When a decisive surah is revealed and war is mentioned therein... Therefore woe unto them!" (Sura 47.20). The trumpets speak of judgments which are to come on both the beast and the impenitent Jews. But the judgments are brought about by the Moslem beast itself, which is exactly how God's enemies have met their end in history- by destroying themselves. Rev. 17:16 speaks of how the horns of the beast destroy the beast. So the bringing of "Woe" upon those in the land is what the jihadists are preparing to do.

*For those who dwell on the earth-* This talk of "inhabitants" seems rather redundant; until we realize that the reference is likely to those who have but recently invaded the land promised to Abraham, grabbed the wealth of the Jews and are now 'inhabiting' it as their own land.

*By reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound-* But only two of the woe trumpets appear to be sounded (9:12; 11:14). This recalls how there is no seventh seal either- just a pointed silence in Heaven, instead of an expected outpouring of calamity (see on :1). And now it seems there is no seventh trumpet either. This may be because we are intended to see 'the end', the final establishment of the Kingdom, as the seventh trumpet and seventh seal. But the seals and trumpets are of calamities happening to the land and people, not blessings. It could well be that God planned a final calamity which will not happen, just as the seven thunders are prepared but not recorded. His grace and pity may make Him relent; or quite simply the prayers of the faithful for 'the end' are powerful in bringing about some measure of shortening of His work. The Old Testament parallel would

be in Joseph apparently cutting short the more extended program of education which He had intended for his brothers.



## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star from heaven fall to the earth-* If the physical movement of Angels from Heaven to earth to perform certain tasks can be taken literally, Rev. 9:1,11 and certain other passages taken on a more literal slant: "I saw a star (symbolic of an Angel) fall from Heaven unto the earth: and to Him was given the key of the bottomless pit... the Angel of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:1,11). It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

*And there was given to him the key to the pit of the abyss-* The key to death and the grave is in Christ's hand (Rev. 1:18). This person is therefore an anti-Christ. We note how the locusts who are released from it are specifically obedient to their king-leader (9:4,11). The idea of course is that if you're thrown into a bottomless pit ["abyss"] which is locked, there's no way you can ever get out of it. But locusts, representing the desolators of the land, do arise out of it. The figure is similar to that of receiving a deadly wound, a wound that makes one die, and then resurrecting. This is what is said of the beast and its horn (13:3,12). The locusts are connected to that entity. We should be looking, therefore, for the entity which will finally dominate Israel to receive a wound which apparently makes it dead. This could be from Western and / or Israeli intervention against them. There would then be a brief period of worldwide relief- the "peace and safety" period of 1 Thess. 5. But the entity then revives. This scenario is possible as we see from the Western conflict against the Islamic jihadists.

So many of Revelation's allusions to the Old Testament are to material specifically concerning Jerusalem. One could almost argue that the prophecy could have a specific application to the latter day city of Jerusalem. The language of the bottomless pit likewise has specific reference to Jerusalem: "In the floor of the small cave (measuring about 14 feet square with a six foot ceiling) under the great foundation stone in the Dome of the Rock is round marble slab closing a well shaft known as "the well of the souls" (Bir al Arwah) ... A Muslim tradition holds this is the entrance into the bottomless pit, the abyss. The souls of the dead awaiting judgment are said to be audible beneath. The Talmud claims that this is the abyss above the primeval waters of creation and of the Flood" Lambert Dolphin, *Early History of the Temple Mount*.

The language used here is specifically relevant to latter day Islam. Mawdudi writes of how Muhammed and his message came out of "Arabia- the Abyss of Darkness" (Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, 8th ed. (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: National Offset Printing Press, 1986), p.63).

9:2 *And he opened the pit of the abyss and smoke went out of the pit-* This is the same figure used in 14:11 for the destruction of the beast worshippers. But here it speaks of what they did to deserve that destruction- their actions against Israel and the land promised to Abraham is the grounds for their condemnation. The Hadith mentions smoke as one of the ten signs that the last day is coming: "Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) came to us all of a sudden as we were (busy in a discussion). He said: What do you discuss about? They (the Companions) said. We are discussing about the Last Hour. Thereupon he said: It will not come until you see ten signs before and (in this connection) he made a mention of the smoke, Dajjal [Antichrist], the beast, the rising of the sun from the west, the descent of Jesus son of Mary (Allah be pleased with him), the Gog and Magog, and landslidings in three places, one in the east, one in the west and one in Arabia at the end of which fire would burn forth from

the Yemen, and would drive people to the place of their assembly" (Book 41.6931). Again, we see the crisis in the land in the last days foretold in terms which Moslems will relate to. Sura 44 of the Koran is entitled *Al-Dukhan*, 'The Smoke'. It speaks of how painful smoke will be the punishment of God's enemies in the last days: "But watch thou [O Muhammad] for the day when the sky will produce visible smoke that will envelop the people. This will be a painful torment. [Then they will say]: Our Lord relieve us of the torment" (Sura 44.10-12). It could be that jihadists bring smoke upon others in an attempt to judge them according to Islam. And they will be judged likewise, drinking the cup they made others to drink. This means that they will be judged as apostates within their own frames of reference.

*Like the smoke of a great furnace-* See on 8:7. The language of Sodom (Gen. 19:28) and Egypt. Both these places are used to describe Jerusalem under domination of her enemies as the place of particular suffering for God's people (11:8).

The invading hordes come out of the bottomless pit- both the locusts (:3) and the beast arise from here (Rev. 9:1; 11:7; 17:8). They come up out of the "bottomless pit", the abyss, the "great furnace" (Rev. 9:2). But the beast arises out of *the land* [promised to Abraham] in Rev. 13:2. We can therefore understand the bottomless pit and great furnace as being within the land promised to Abraham. The locusts of Joel 2:3 are pictured as coming upon Israel as if it is the garden of Eden, and leaving it as a desolate wilderness. This could connect with the revival of the land of Israel since 1948 as the garden of Eden (Ez. 36:35); or it could be that Eden is the same as the land promised to Abraham. Is. 31:9 speaks of Jerusalem surrounded by the Assyrians as a furnace. Judah's captivity in Babylon was as it were in a furnace of affliction (Is. 48:10; Ez. 22:18,20,22). The deliverance of the faithful Jews from the furnace in Dan. 3:6,11 was an acted parable of Judah's deliverance from captivity in Babylon / Persia and her empire- throughout the land promised to Abraham. And yet in Rev. 20:3, the beast is again cast into the bottomless pit, clearly representing condemnation and judgment. So it would seem that the judgment upon the beast / locusts occurs several times- they are condemned / judged and put in the bottomless pit, and then released, and then placed there again. This probably speaks of various stages in the judgment upon them. But it would be foolhardy to try to work out an exact chronology ahead of time.

*And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit-* Israel's extremist neighbours will not think twice about using nuclear weaponry against her, and one wonders therefore whether this will have a literal dimension. The sun is spoken of as being darkened by the smoke. But the sun itself would not be darkened; that is presented here as it appears from the standpoint of an observer on earth. So often the Bible is written this way, from the Genesis account of creation to the language of demons in the New Testament. Failure to appreciate this leads to wrong interpretation. The darkening of the sun is another connection with the account of the Lord's crucifixion (s.w. Lk. 23:45), the point being that the tribulation of the last days will connect the saints with His sufferings; and having suffered with Him, that generation shall live eternally with Him. It is also a quotation from the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:29). This again confirms that we are reading of things to happen in the very last days, before the Lord's return- and not at some point between centuries before that. The darkening of the sun is the very figure used for the latter day suffering of Israel at the hands of her invaders (Joel 3:15; Mt. 24:29).

9:3 *And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power-* The locusts of the fifth trumpet act in a very un-locust-like way. Unlike real locusts, they have a king. And, astonishing to relate, they are

forbidden to touch grass or any vegetation! Once again the instruction seems to be: "Hurt not the earth, nor the trees"- only on this occasion it is given to locusts. *Akrab* being the Hebrew for scorpion, we may be justified in seeing here an allusion to the word 'Arab', the likely ethnicity of many of the boots on the ground of the last days. :3 The connection between these specific locusts and their place of origin is in line with how the Bible uses plant and animal imagery. "The prophets, when they used symbolical language to denote any events, commonly, at least, employed those which had a local or geographical reference; thus, in the symbols derived from the vegetable kingdom, when Judah is to be symbolized, the olive, the vine, and the fig-tree are selected; when Egypt is referred to, the reed is chosen; when Babylon, the willow. And so, in the animal kingdom, the lion is the symbol of Judah; the wild ass, of the Arabs; the crocodile, of Egypt, etc." (Elliott, *Horae Apoc.* i. 394-406). Being consumed by locusts was one of the punishments upon Israel for their disobedience (Dt. 28:38,42; Ps. 78:46; Joel 1:2). Again, we are to understand this language as specifically applying to Israel.

The parallels between Joel and Revelation 8 and 9 are certainly impressive.

	<i>Joel</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
1 Locusts.	1: 4	9:3.
2 Symbolic of a nation.	1:6.	9: 4, 7.
3 Teeth like lions.	1:6.	9:8.
4 Trees and pasture withered and burnt up.	1: 12, 18-20.	8:7.
5 Destruction from the Almighty.	1: 15.	9: 11.
6 Fire.	1: 19; 2:3, 5.	8:7; 9:17.
7 Rivers of waters dried up.	1:20.	8: 10; 9:14
8 Blowing of trumpets.	2:1, 11, 15.	8:6.
9 Darkness.	2:2.	9:2.
10.Horses.	2:4.	9:7, 9.
11.Chariots.	2:5.	9:9.
12.Torment.	2:6.	9:6.
13.Earthquake.	2:10.	8: 5.
14.Sun, moon, and stars darkened.	2:10, 31; 3:15.	8:12, 9:2.
15.“Turn ye to me ... “	2:12.	9:20, 21.
16.The locust army goes back into the abyss.	2:20.	9:1.
17.Deliverance for the faithful remnant.	2:32.	9:4.

### **Locusts in Joel**

Joel's prophecy is full of reference to the army of locust-horses which invade Israel in conjunction with the Palestinians (Joel 3:4), resulting in the repentance of a remnant who stand on Mount Zion (Joel 2:32), the destruction of the northern invader [another term for the locust army] after their holy war [jihad, Joel 3:9], and then the final establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. He describes the invading army in Joel 2 in terms of a locust swarm, and they come to their end as locust swarms often do in Israel- in the Dead Sea and Mediterranean. In more detail, Joel 3:2,12 speaks of a final conflict in the valley of Jehoshaphat, when the Gentiles "round about" Israel are gathered together and judged- spoken of in Revelation 16 as the battle of Armageddon (which likewise is primarily concerning the peoples "round about" Israel rather than the whole planet). The degree of damage done to the land and people of Israel was limitable- if Judah repented. Hence the frequent appeals for repentance. This prophecy could have had potential fulfilment in the

Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of Judah; but the prophecy is alluded to in Revelation and in other latter day prophecies, as if it has specific and complete fulfilment in the last days. The overall context is exactly as presented in Revelation- the seal judgments appeal for Israel's repentance, the minority who respond are the symbolic 144,000 who stand on mount Zion; and then there are the trumpet and vial judgments, which are full of allusion back to Joel. The frequent appeals for repentance mention the possibility that the program of judgment and desolation can be limited- if Judah repent. And finally, Joel speaks of the establishment of God's Kingdom and physical restoration of the decimated land, into the wonder of God's Kingdom on earth at Christ's return. Joel opens by saying that the destruction of the land he was burdened to portray had no parallel in the past, and the Jews would tell their children of it and the account of it would be passed down throughout future history (Joel 1:2,3). This is another way of saying that this prophecy is about a time of trouble for Israel such as never was, and never will be in the future. And that is precisely the language of the Lord Jesus, Jeremiah and Daniel about the latter day tribulation of Israel.

The Arabs and Muhammed have a unique connection to the locust: "In the Bedoween romance Antar, the locust is introduced as the national emblem of the Ishmaelites. And it is a remarkable coincidence that Muslim tradition speaks of locusts having dropped into the hands of Muhammed, bearing on their wings this inscription – 'We are the army of the Great God.'" (Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Vol. 18).

9:4 *And it was said to them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree-* There are many allusions in this section to the anatomy and style of the locust; the highlighted difference here with locusts [who usually eat up the grass] is therefore intentional. The people represented by the locusts were therefore going to be made to act uncharacteristically due to the charismatic individual controlling them. The reason for this is because these locusts have a king- which, again, locusts typically do not (see on *king over them*).

Keil in his commentary on Joel 2 describes the geographical origins of the locusts which descend upon Israel: "Swarms of locusts come from south, west, north, and east. Their home is not confined to the desert of Arabia, but they are found in all the sandy deserts, which form the southern boundaries of the lands that were, and to some extent still are, the seat of cultivation, viz., in the Sahara, the Libyan desert, Arabia, and Iraq; and Niebuhr saw a large tract of land, on the road from Mosul to Nisibis, completely covered with young locusts. They are also met with in the Syrian desert, from which swarms could easily be driven to Palestine by a north-east wind... Such a swarm as this might be called the *tsephōnī*, i.e., the northern one, or northerner [Joel 2:20], even if the north was not its true home". These are the very areas from where jihadist fighters are emerging in their tens of thousands, and uniting together to establish an Islamic state and destroy Israel. This geographical connection cannot be merely coincidental!

Concerning trees and vegetation, the Koran says: "When you fight the battles of the Lord... destroy no palm trees, nor burn any fields of grain. Cut down no fruit trees..." (Quoted in Barnes, *op. cit*).

Albert Barnes makes the following commentary upon the statement that the locusts would be commanded to not harm the grass: "The often-quoted order of the Caliph Aboubekir, the

father-in-law and successor of Muhammed, issued to the Saracen hordes on their invasion of Syria, shows what was understood to be the spirit of their religion: "Remember that you are always in the presence of God, on the verge of death, in the assurance of judgment, and the hope of paradise. Avoid injustice and oppression; consult with your brethren, and study to preserve the love and confidence of your troops. When you fight the battles of the Lord, acquit yourselves like men, without turning your backs; but let not the victory be stained with the blood of women or children. Destroy no palm-trees, nor burn any fields of grain. Cut down no fruit-trees, nor do any mischief to cattle, only such as you kill to eat. When you make any covenant or article, stand to it, and be as good as your word. As you go on, you will find some religious persons who live retired in monasteries, and propose to themselves to serve God in that way; let them alone, and neither kill them ('and to them it was given that they should not kill them,' ver 5), nor destroy their monasteries," etc. (Gibbon, iii. 417, 418). So Mr. Gibbon notices this precept of the Koran: "In the siege of Tayaf," says he, "sixty miles from Mecca, Muhammed violated his own laws by the extirpation of the fruit-trees," ii. 392. The same order existed among the Hebrews, and it is not improbable that Muhammed derived his precept from the command of Moses Dt. 20:19, though what was mercy among the Hebrews was probably mere policy with him. This precept is the more remarkable because it has been the usual custom in war, and particularly among barbarians and semi-barbarians, to destroy grain and fruit, and especially to cut down fruit-trees, in order to do greater injury to an enemy".

*But only such men as do not have the seal of God on their foreheads-* They also don't have His seal. So perhaps we are intended to read in an ellipsis: 'Have not [received] the seal of God'. The idea would then be that those who have not responded to the appeal to repent (as a result of the seal judgments) are targeted.

Job is being shown to represent "those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4). The idea of sealing is associated with being justified by faith rather than by the Law in Rom. 4:11. If "the earth" in Rev. 9 is read as "the land" and the chapter given a Jewish interpretation, the allusions to Job as representative of unsealed Jewry still depending on the Law become even more relevant. Note the clear connections between Rev. 9 and Job:

#### *Rev. 9*

:5 "To them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented"

:6 "Men (shall) seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them".

The marauding Saracen bands

:11 "A king over them, which is the Angel..."

:11 "A king... Abaddon... Apollyon" ('Destroyer').

#### *Job*

Satan could not kill Job, but was given power to torment him.

Job said he was one of them "which long for death, but it comes not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures" (3:21,22)

The Sabeian bands

The satan/Angel of Job?

"The king of terrors" attacking Job's tents (18:14)

:11 "The bottomless pit"

"Hell is naked before Him,  
and destruction (cp. 'Abaddon') has  
no covering" (26:6).

9:5 *They were told*- AV "It was given". We are surely to read in the ellipsis, that a commandment was given to them. And it is jihadist Islam which forbids damaging trees and plants during military campaigns. Or it could be that the idea is that these jihadists are actually 'told' something by God indirectly communicating with them.

*That they should not kill them*- As locusts don't usually cause death but rather suffering.

*But that they should be tormented*- The same word used about Babylon (18:7,10,15) and the beast worshippers being "tormented" (14:10). The language of torment is not, therefore, reflective of an angry God being mean to sinners. Rather will they drink the cup they gave others to drink.

*Five months*- It could be argued that the book of Revelation will 'come alive' during the three-and-a-half-year tribulation in the land, and it's possible that this is a literal period. In any case, it is based around the fact that the season for locusts is five months, from May to September. Five months is their lifespan, so the idea may be that at the end of it they too will come to their end.

The locusts / scorpions judge the people in the land for five months (Rev. 9:5)- part of the three and a half year tribulation period. When it happens, it will all be clear enough. But for now, the point is that these locust / scorpion hordes, the beast, are restrained and yet then released, to come and destroy the unbelievers in the land / earth promised to Abraham; see on :14,15. It is this restraint which we are now seeing released, as the hordes develop and begin to gush forth from the Euphrates.

*Their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man*- See on :3. There are many links between the trumpets, seals and the Olivet prophecy; and also many links with Josephus' descriptions of what came upon Palestine in AD66-70- e.g. 9:5 "inwardly tormented" Gk. *ebasanizonto* is used in Josephus (*Wars* 5.1.5).

9:6 *And in those days men shall seek death and shall in no way find it, and they shall desire to die and death will flee from them*- Those who in that day will "seek death" are those whose behaviour in this life was effectively a seeking of death (Prov. 21:6). They were and are living out the condemnation experience right now. See on 1 Cor. 10:13. In the latter day application, the Koran in Sura 75:10,11 speaks in similar terms of the final judgment of the condemned: "On that day man will cry: Whither to flee! Alas! No refuge!". Islamists will therefore seek to do this to the Jews whom they believe it is their duty to condemn, and in turn they will drink the same cup, seeking death but not finding it.

9:7 *And the shapes of the locusts were like horses*- Clearly the locusts represent fighters charging to war. The Arab Bedouin call locusts *Farras el Jundy*, 'soldiers' horses'. The description of these horsemen from the East accurately fits the Parthians, who were massed to the East of the Roman empire. There was much angst amongst the Romans of the first century as to whether the Parthians would invade; they did not. But the similarity is explained

if we accept that Revelation is open to many possible fulfilments. It could have all happened in the first century, and God moved the players into place. But due to human failure, the whole scenario was delayed to our last days.

“Like unto” continues the idea that John is seeing in outline form something he finds hard to describe, and he keeps likening the vision to things he is familiar with. Hence “As...as... like unto... as it were”. This is understandable if he saw modern military hardware.

*Prepared for war-* This is the process we see ongoing around us. The Joel allusions encourage us to see this as Joel 3:9: "Prepare war, wake up the might men". The gathering of thousands of fighters to support an Islamic State in the land promised to Abraham is surely the fulfilment of this.

*And upon their heads as if crowns of gold, and their faces were as men's faces-* The *stephanos* may suggest they are victorious, for a brief period, over the land. But John saw their appearance *like* this. Turbans as worn by Moslems today were not used in his day. If he saw, as I suggest, hordes of latter day Moslems streaming into Israel to proclaim a radical Islamic state, then this is how he would've described them- wearing something like a *stephanos*. The Greek literally means something wrapped around the head. This is the picture of Moslem turbans and jihadist headgear. The Hadith records Mohammed as saying "And turbans are the crowns of Arabs". "Like gold" means he saw a yellow colour. Perhaps this group of jihadists will have yellow headgear or turbans? According to Suyuti's Commentary on the Koran, there are Hadith which make this association: "Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr: The latter was wearing a yellow turban on the day of Badr, so the angels descended wearing yellow turbans... the Prophet himself came wearing a yellow turban... The day of Badr the angels came down on piebald horses, wearing yellow turbans" [view these quotations online at [http://www.sunnah.org/fiqh/islamic\\_dress.htm](http://www.sunnah.org/fiqh/islamic_dress.htm) ].

9:8 *And they had hair as the hair of women-* The long hair of the jihadist fighters.

*And their teeth were like that of lions-* The quotation from Joel 1:6 means that these forces will be a latter day Babylon or Assyria invading Israel. Lions are a common OT symbol of Babylon-Assyria, the historical prototype of Israel's latter day invader.

9:9 *And they had breastplates, like breastplates of iron -* Another allusion to how the locust has a firm and hard cuticle on the forepart of the breast, which serves for a shield or defence. “Breastplates of iron” speak of the Arabs’ armour. The poem Antar makes at least four references to a warrior’s cuirass or breastplate. The Koran says, “God hath given you coats of mail to defend you in your wars” ...” (Quoted in Barnes, *op. cit*).

*And the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war-* Alluding to the noise made by locust swarms. They are similar to chariot horses in that the locust's head is similar to that of a horse. The locusts of Joel 1 which invade Israel are also described as war horses in Joel 2:4-6: "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle". The similarity with locusts is in the springing motion of chariots on mountain paths. This was surely the first century way of trying to express helicopter gunships and other modern military technology advancing into the land promised to Abraham in final judgment. Joel 2:8 speaks of how this locust army will not be deterred by weaponry: "they

fall headlong through weapons [*shelach* means literally a missile], and do not cut themselves in pieces". The greatest missiles and military technology of the IDF and the West will be unable to restrain their ever forward march into the land. Currently, it is superior weaponry that enables Israel to survive and the West to control the jihadists. But the picture of the locust swarm is that absolutely no weapon can stand in their way. Perhaps it is by sheer force of suicidal numbers that the jihadists win- and thousands of Muslims are already flocking to Syria and Iraq to enlist in this great army. In Joel 2, the locust army attacks because Judah failed to respond to the call to repent made in Joel 1. But even at that late stage there is the possibility of repentance: "Yet even now, is the saying of Jehovah, turn ye to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). This fits the context of the trumpets admirably. The seal judgments in Revelation 6 appealed for repentance; those few who respond, the symbolic 144,000, are sealed and stand on Mount Zion; and then the trumpet judgments come. But even then there is the chance of repentance, so that God would leave behind a blessing, i.e. the harvest-produce which could be used for a meat offering and drink offering (Joel 2:14)- even though this had "all" been destroyed by the locusts (Joel 1:9, 13). And as a result of this, a remnant of repentant Jews is likewise pictured by Joel standing on Mount Zion (Joel 2:32).

The reference is also to the language of the cherubim chariots; Ez. 10:5 is the only other place in the Bible where we read of the sound of wings as chariots are in motion. The invaders will be led by the Angels, just as the locust army of Joel 2 is described in terms of the irresistible march of the Angels. But there may also be the hint that the invaders see themselves as a cherubic system, continuing the theme of the anti-Christ being an imitation Christ.

9:10- see on Mt. 24:37; Mk. 13:20.

*And they have tails like scorpions and stings, and in their tails is their power-* At first blush, this appears to not be true to the figure of locusts. But Smith's *Bible Dictionary* gives a picture of "a species of locust, the *Acridium Lineola*, a species commonly sold for food in the markets of Baghdad, which has a sting in the tail". We may infer that these symbolic locusts come from Iraq, specifically from the area of the Euphrates. This is in harmony with the later picture within this same chapter of hordes of attackers swarming into the land promised to Abraham from the same area- the Euphrates. The only other reference to a "tail" in the NT is in Rev. 12:4, where the dragon uses his tail to cast down one third of the stars. It could be that we are being shown part of the same process here.

*To hurt men-* Significantly, the same word is used in Lk. 10:19 about how those who are preaching the Lord Jesus will not be hurt by scorpions. This is the context here- these trumpets are part of the judgments which will be restrained from falling upon those who have responded to the seal judgments, the symbolic 144,000. The same word is used in 7:2,3 of how the 144,000 will not be "hurt". And chapters 10-15 teach that the resistant believers at this time will be engaged in witnessing to Jesus.

*For five months-* See on :5.

9:11 *They have over them as king-* Prov. 30:27 observes that locusts have no king. The picture presented is of an unusual and uncharacteristic unity of the locusts under the leadership of a "king" or caliph. This is what students of latter day prophecy are taught by the image's toes of Daniel 2. The components of the final entity to abuse Israel are divided, but uncharacteristically united in their domination of Israel. This will be brought about by the



locusts having a king- just as the disparate materials of the image are united in the form of a man, a latter day Nebuchadnezzar.

*The Angel of the bottomless pit-* This presumably is the same as the fifth Angel, who opened the pit at the beginning of this section. As in Daniel, so here, the Angel refers both to an Angel in the court of Heaven, and to the person on earth whom that Angel represents before God. Again we see how that even the terrible individual on earth spoken of here is in fact represented in the court of Heaven and under the control of God's Angel. The allusion is to the destroying Angel of the Passover deliverance (Ex. 12:23; 1 Cor. 10:10). The Angel comes in judgment upon the Egyptians and also upon any unfaithful Israelites who would not trust in the blood of the Lamb; hence all the allusions to the plagues on Egypt here in the trumpet judgments. The locusts unleashed by the destroyer Angel therefore come forth to punish people for what they did to God's people Israel, and also to punish those of Israel who will not trust in the blood of the Lamb / Jesus.

*His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue-* The two languages are perhaps mentioned because both Jews and non-Jews in the land suffer from this invasion. The locusts have an Angel-King over them, called Abaddon / Apollyon- the destroyer. The idea is that their leader has an Angel representative in Heaven. Again, emphasis is placed upon their having a specific leader, the antichrist. 'The destroyer' was the Angel who destroyed the unfaithful Israelites (1 Cor. 10:10), and the charge of the locusts and their leader is against the same group, within the land promised to Abraham.

*Apollyon-* This is the noun from the verb *apollumi*. Lk. 21:18 says that not a hair of the faithful will be *apollumi* in the latter day tribulation, and this is clearly what the Apollyon Angel is responsible for. There are many word plays upon and indirect allusions to Caesar worship in Revelation. Rev. 9:11 is an example- the condemned King of the bottomless pit is called "Apollyon", which G.B. Caird takes to be an allusion to Domitian, "who liked to be regarded as Apollo incarnate".

Often, Angels are described in terms of the men, empires or armies they control- the frequent descriptions of human armies in language which refers to Angels too provides proof of this (e. g. Is. 66:15; Ez. 26:7,10; Joel 2:5; Nahum 2:3,4,13). Rev. 9:11 is another example: "They (the Arabs?) had a king over them, which *is* the Angel of the bottomless pit". This Angel is both a Heavenly Angel and the earthly leader over which the Angel has charge. Rev. 9:16 says that "the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand"- cp. "thousand thousands" of Angels in Dan. 7:10. Rev. 9:17 continues: "Horses... and them that sat on them". Horses and riders in Rev. 6 and Zechariah have clear Angelic connections (Chapter 11); "the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions"- lions and Angels are linked in Rev. 9:17; 10:1,3.

The locusts have a specific leader- an Angel called Abaddon or Apollyon. Angels as in the Divine beings do not sin, as I've demonstrated in chapter 2 of *The Real Devil*. But Daniel 10 and other passages are clear that situations, nations and individual leaders on earth have an Angelic representative in Heaven, before the court of God. The antichrist figure on earth therefore has a representative Angel in Heaven, just as the prince of Persia did in Daniel 10. 'Abaddon' means 'the destroyer', and the term is used of the destroying Angel of Passover, the same Angel who destroyed the unbelieving Jews in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:10)- and it is also used of the Babylonian invader (2 Chron. 36:19; Is. 14:20; Jer. 4:7; 15:3; 22:7 "I will prepare destroyers against you"; 36:29), the Midianite invasion of Israel (Jud. 6:4), the

Philistines / Palestinians (1 Sam. 13:17; 14:15), the Assyrian invader (1 Kings 18:25) and the Syrian invasion (2 Chron. 24:23). All these nations and incidents were from the territory of the IS, and prefigure the latter day invasion of Israel. The point is, there is a specific, singular leader- and this fits well with the Biblical requirements for an antichrist figure to lead the enemies of Israel in the final jihad against her. The destruction, wanton and conscious, wrought by Islamic jihadists surely justifies the leader of the entity being called 'the destroyer'.

The Islamic world has always been divided, and the neighbours of Israel have likewise been characterized by their historical divisions. What is going to be remarkable, therefore, is their temporary unity against Israel. This is the picture presented of the iron and clay not cleaving to each other, but standing together, however fragile, in brief domination of the land promised to Abraham on the eve of Christ's return. This unity will be under one strong leader, the antichrist. The metaphor in Rev. 9 makes this point, by saying that the invading hordes will be as locusts who have a king over them, called Abaddon (Rev. 9:11). Locusts do not have much centralized structure in their movement, and Prov. 30:27 specifically states that locusts have no king over them. But these latter day locusts will have such a king- for a brief period. Muslim tradition speaks of locusts having dropped into the hands of Mohammed, bearing on their wings this inscription - 'We are the army of the Great God.'"

There can be little doubt that Revelation 9 speaks of the very last days. The smoke and resultant darkening of sun and moon is obviously alluding to the Old Testament prophecies about these things happening in the context of an invasion of the land of Israel in the immediate prelude to Christ's coming: "Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine" (Is. 13:9,10). "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD" (Joel 2:30,31).

9:12 *The first Woe is past. Behold, hereafter there come two other woes-* This could seem relatively pointless information, until we perceive that the idea is to appeal for repentance, even now at a time when the window for repentance provided by the six seals and sealing process of chapter 7 has already passed. I have mentioned earlier that the third of the three woes never seems to happen- perhaps because there is repentance, or because God's mercy is such that He restrains the final destruction. Or perhaps the third woe is the pouring out of the bowls of final destruction upon the beast and impenitent.

9:13- see on Jn. 16:23.

*And the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God-* This is the incense altar, and the voice suggests that the combined prayers of the faithful bring forward the execution of God's purpose, causing Angels in Heaven to sound and do things on the earth / land. The words / voice of those prayers really is "before God". This an attempt to relay the degree to which human words in prayer really are rehearsed before God's very presence, and result in a word of command appropriate to the word of those prayers. Horns are connected with Angels in Zech. 1:18; Hab. 3:4, and these four horns on the altar suggesting reference to the Angel cherubim.

Let's be encouraged by the fact that the sixth Angel releases the hordes from behind the Euphrates because of "a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God" (Rev. 9:13). This is the incense altar, and earlier in the scene we have seen the prayers of the faithful ascending from that altar, eliciting Divine action from Heaven upon the earth (Rev. 8:3-5). The releasing of the peoples beyond the Euphrates which we are seeing before our eyes *is actually a response to our prayers*. We pray and pray for the second coming, and it seems as if nothing very concrete is happening. But it is. The Islamist jihadists were raised up and given control of the Euphrates and are being propelled on their mission to fulfil end time prophecies, so that the culmination may come in the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. In this context we can note that the language of loosing the bound was used by the Lord in His teaching that we can bind and loose things in Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18)- in this case, the Angels. This is the huge significance of human prayer and action for God.

9:14- see on Ps. 78:49; Lk. 1:10,11. For the significance of the Euphrates, see on 16:12,13.

*One saying to the sixth angel that had one trumpet: Release the four angels that are chained at the great river Euphrates-* The voice of prayer is effectively a voice of command to Angels resulting in dramatic action upon the earth / land, and in this case, the loosing of restraining Angels. The voice of human prayer as it were commands: "Loose the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates" (R.V.). They then eagerly go forward to prepare the way for the second coming. The implication is surely that those Angels were geographically bound / limited in the scope of their work by the Euphrates River- and yet in their eagerness to progress the timetable of events leading to the last day, they yearned to go beyond that limitation. The reference to "the Angel of the waters" likewise suggests that an Angel was operative in one geographical area. It could be that as the future elohim we likewise will have areas of geographical influence in the age to come- the "cities" over which we are given dominion.

There seems no reason to doubt that these, along with most other mentions of 'Angels' in Revelation, can be taken as literal Angels John saw in the court of Heaven, representing individuals and groups on earth. The fact that they were "loosed" implies a restraint from action- as if the action they desired to take was held back by another ("the sixth") Angel "preparing" or 'adjusting' (Greek) them for a certain period. This recalls the Angel of death being restrained or held back by the Angel who hovered over the homes of the Israelites on Passover night in Egypt. It's not that there are good and sinful Angels; but there are Angels who have different tasks, and make exceptions in executing those tasks because of the intervention of other Angels.

God Himself has a close interest in and control of the work of His Angels; thus in Rev. 9:13,14 we read of the sixth Angel sounding, wanting to bring about certain things on the earth. The response to this was "a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth Angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four Angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates". This voice was probably either from Christ (the altar), as the head of the Angels, or God Himself; or maybe a mighty Angel representing God or Christ. It instructed the Angel how to bring about His intention by bringing other Angels into operation which this sixth Angel presumably had in its control- hence they were to be "loosed" by Him.

The drying up of the Euphrates spoken of in Rev. 16:12 is what enables the seventh trumpet and seventh seal to come to pass- and they refer to the coming of Christ. It cannot be insignificant that the Islamic State took control of the dams on the Euphrates. The latter day Islamic entity which overruns Israel will likely do the same. The control of rivers, dams, and water installations would be a major weapon in their tactical armoury. This was indeed how it was in the time of Saddam Hussein. For more information on this, see Vidal, John (*The Guardian* 2 July 2014). "[Water supply key to outcome of conflicts in Iraq and Syria, experts warn](#)".

The waters of a river are symbolic of nations (Is. 23:10), specifically the Assyrians in Is. 8:7, Zech. 10:11 and Jer. 2:18- it could be that the reference is to the drying up or destruction [as the metaphor of 'drying up' means] of the nations and tribes of the fertile crescent. And these are the very areas where the Islamic State is so active. The Assyrian armies were those "beyond the river [Euphrates]" which were unleashed by God upon Judah (Is. 7:20). This is the basis for the language of Rev. 9:14, where four Angels are bound by the river Euphrates and unleashed in the sense that a huge army is let loose from beyond that river in order to judge an impenitent Israel. We recall that it was an Angel which stood upon the river in Dan. 12:6. We note that Greece likewise was likened to a ram held back by a river, which it jumped over (Dan. 8:3). The latter day power restrained by the Euphrates is therefore to be based upon the historical Assyria and Greece. Again we see how the image of Daniel 2 stands complete in the last days, because the final entity which dominates Israel will incorporate elements of the previous dominators, such as Assyria and Greece.

Euphrates was the boundary of the land promised to Abraham. Israel were thrown out of their land by being taken 'beyond the river [Euphrates]', just as Adam was cast out of Eden, which appears to have been bounded by the Euphrates. The 200,000 (or RV "twice ten thousand times ten thousand") horsemen were bound at [RV; Gk. *epi*] the Euphrates (Rev. 9:14), which is the northern border of the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18; Ex. 23:31; Dt. 1:7; Josh. 1:4; 2 Sam. 8:3). When Judah were taken to Babylon to be punished, this is described as their being punished in the border of Israel (Ez. 11:10,11). Babylon was located on the border of the land promised to Abraham. The idea is clearly that these hordes will come from that northern border, the Euphrates, and invade Israel. The Islamic jihadists are already using pictures of horsemen as symbolic of their mission. The Greek text speaks of "twice ten thousand times ten thousand", recalling the way that the image of Daniel 2 and the beasts of Daniel 7 will be destroyed when "ten thousand times ten thousand" stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Dan. 7:10). Once the Euphrates is no longer allowed to restrain these hordes, they will race towards Israel- and judgment by the returned Lord Jesus. Note too the language of Mic. 5:6- the latter day Assyrian will "tread within our borders", which include the Euphrates, and then be destroyed by Christ's return. Revelation is putting this another way, in saying that the hordes of invaders will come from beyond the Euphrates, the border of Israel.

The trumpets, seals and vials do not have to be chronologically consecutive events; they are all part of the kaleidoscope of images which we have in Revelation. They are different takes and angles on related events. The sixth Angel loosing the hordes bound at the Euphrates is matched by the fifth Angel coming down to the land and unlocking the bottomless pit with a key (Rev. 9:1,2; this surely refers to a Divine Angel, as it would make no sense for 'satan' to be given the key to his own prison). This released the aggressive locusts to swarm over the earth / land [of Israel] and kill and persecute those in the land promised to Abraham who haven't taken the Father's Name into their foreheads- for all their hypocritical wearing of phylacteries. Again we have the metaphor of restraint being lifted, and swarms of enemies

pouring into the earth / land of Israel. The seventh trumpet begins with the news that there will be no more delay (Rev. 10:6)- the idea is again of an imposed delay / restraint being now lifted. Locusts are symbolic of Israel's neighbouring enemies (Dt. 28:38; Jud. 6:5; 7:12; Jer. 46:23; Joel 1:4; 2:25). Especially significant is the reference in Am. 7:1 LXX: "Thus has the Lord God shewed me; and, behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and, behold, one caterpillar, king Gog". The locusts from the east, headed by Gog, released by the fifth Angel, compares with the kings from the east who are released by the sixth Angel. The locusts arise out of the bottomless pit, just as the beast arises out of the bottomless pit (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). The beast is therefore another image for the locusts; they all speak of the enemies of Israel coming from the east and swarming the land. The locusts are described as having long hair, and striking as scorpions (Rev. 9:5,8)- all very reminiscent of jihadist fighters.

The similarities between Revelation 9 and Joel are striking, and without question Joel is speaking of the neighbour nations pouring into the land of Israel: "The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array... They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march everyone on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks... They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining" (Joel 2:4-10).

The four Angels holding winds in Rev. 9:16 surely alludes to the Angels gathering the elect from the four winds (Mt. 24:31; Mk. 13:27). The process of gathering the elect at the last day is part of the same process as gathering the nations to judgment. It could be that the final gathering of the nations against Israel therefore occurs at the same time as the gathering of the believers to judgment. It would seem that now all is in place for such a gathering of the nations from beyond the Euphrates- and therefore the Lord's coming could be really very near. The whole scene surely consciously recalls that of Daniel 12, where Daniel sees Angels standing on the banks of "the river", announcing that there must be a time of terrible trouble for Israel lasting "time, times and a half" (three and a half years?) and then the whole suffering of Israel would be "finished" by the return of Messiah and establishment of the Kingdom of God (Dan. 12:5-10). "The river" is not defined, but the term is usually used in the prophets for the Euphrates; at the very least it must refer to one of the rivers in the Tigris-Euphrates basin. Note the significance of the river Ulai, a tributary of the Euphrates, in Daniel 8. Revelation expands upon this by saying that the Angels cease restraining the jihadist hordes and then release them in the last days, when the Euphrates dries up. Biblically, the drying up of water is so that armies can pass over (we think of the Red Sea and Jordan being dried up for this intent). The final time of trouble is brought about by Angels standing upon "the river"- and the fact the Euphrates is now in the hands of Islamists is therefore highly significant.

It is also surely no coincidence that there are four nations [represented by the four Angels?] located to the East of the Euphrates, bound by her- Turkey, Syria, Iraq and what is now effectively the nation of Kurdistan. Kurdish independence and the development of a *de facto*

state of Kurdistan is something we can expect to develop. It could just about be argued that Iran is also effectively held back from the promised land by the Euphrates, but Iran doesn't in fact border the river. It could be argued that the part of Turkey which is bound by the Euphrates is Kurdish territory, and may form part of a future state of Kurdistan if it is declared. In this case, the four nations could be Kurdistan, Syria, Iraq and Iran- or perhaps some future Islamic entity. These four nations would be under the control of the four Angels bound at the Euphrates, who then release them when the restraint is lifted.

*9:15 And the four angels were released, that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year-* Vine correctly observes: "This rendering is wrong, since it conveys the idea that the four periods mentioned are to be combined as representing the length of the preparation or of the continuance of the plague. But it is to be noted that neither the article nor the preposition are repeated before day and month and year. The meaning is that the angels are prepared unto the hour appointed by God, and that this hour shall fall in its appointed day and month and year". The parallel is with how the locust-horses are "prepared" [s.w.] unto the final battle. It is this specific battle which is the final date in view here in :15. The way of the kings from the East is likewise "prepared" (16:12 s.w.).

*That they should kill a third of all mankind-* This 'slaying' could be understood as a ritual slaughter [*apokteino*]. The fact it is done at a particular hour on a particular date and year may mean that there is some kind of religious relevance of the exact time of their slaughter; and that the men are slain at the same "hour", suggesting a specific ritual, organized slaughter rather than the gradual killing of people in the process of war or domination of the land. This kind of thing is imaginable in an Islamic state.

"The river" was Biblically the language of Euphrates; the Assyrian invasion is described as the River [i.e. Euphrates] bursting upon Israel (Is. 8:5-8). This invasion is described as the loosing of four Angels (Rev. 9:15,16). It could be that four Angels are involved in the work of arranging this geopolitical situation; or it could be that each Angel represents a particular subdivision of the latter day Islamic entity. Note how "the Angel of the bottomless pit" refers both to a Heavenly Angel and to a human leader on earth, in that the princes of the earth have their Angelic representative in the court of Heaven. These are surely the same four Angels of Rev. 7:1,2 who had been holding the winds from blowing on the land of Israel; restraining the nations around Israel from destroying it from 1948 onwards. But they will no longer hold back the winds; they will loose the horsemen previously restrained by the Euphrates. This may happen in practice by the restraining power of America and the West being no longer permitted to operate by the four Angels. At the time of writing, it's highly significant that most of the cities, towns and areas on the East bank of the Euphrates are now in the hands of jihadists, of various factions; the river was as it were holding them back from advancing Westwards into the land promised to Israel. But that restraint is now being lifted. This idea of a restraint in place is to be found in 2 Thess. 2:7,8. It could be argued that the Roman Empire was the restraining force written about by Paul there, and there will be another restraining power likewise in the last days. In practice, not only has the West been the power broker restraining Israel's enemies, but Israel's nuclear and technological edge have been. This may be removed, in whatever way, so that this is no longer a restraining item.

*9:16 And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard the number of them-* The very words used about the 144,000 in 7:4. The contrast is made between the sealed 144,000 and this far larger group of their opponents, 200,000,000. The figures are surely not to be taken literally, rather is the idea that the

opponents of the faithful are far more, and are as it were a fake imitation of the faithful, just as the anti-Christ is a fake imitation of the true Christ. This concept fits admirably with Islamist theology, as they consider themselves as the descendants of Ishmael to be the true seed of Abraham, and Isaac to be as the Bible presents Ishmael [the roles of Isaac and Ishmael are switched around in the Koran; Moslems believe that it was Jewish scribes who switched the roles to how they are in the Hebrew Bible].

The significance of "*twice* ten thousand times ten thousand" may be in that the latter day dominators of Israel are split into two broad camps, represented by the two feet of the image of Daniel. It may be a reference to the Sunni - Shia division within Islam, or to the two centres of domination of Israel which will appear based in Gaza and the West Bank. Dan. 7:10 contrasts these "ten thousand times ten thousand" who are to be judged with the thousands who minister unto the judge, the Lord Jesus; the thousands of the Lord Jesus will stand in opposition to the thousands of the latter day invaders, just as the true Christ will face off against the anti-Christ.

"By these three was the third part of men killed" suggests that this invading army has three aspects to its work. The huge number of horsemen must allude to the "great company" of horsemen of Ez. 38:4, which is rooted in the Assyrian invasion. The 200,000,000 horsemen of Rev. 9:16 may correspond to the fact that the strength of the Assyrian army which came against Jerusalem was claimed as being 200,000 men. See on Rev. 16:16. But this huge invasion is portrayed here in chapter 9 as being the cause of punishment of the abusers themselves. So as has happened so many times in Israel's Biblical history, their invaders will turn upon themselves. Perhaps that is one reason why the Ezekiel 38 invasion is not recorded as being successful.

9:17 *And thus I saw the horses in the vision and those that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of sulphur, and heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceeded fire, smoke and sulphur-* These are to be connected with the three methods by which the third part of men are killed in :18, fire, smoke and brimstone. The third of men are perhaps divided into thirds, and each killed by a different method. Or it may be that the third part of men are killed by a combination of these three factors. I suggested on :15 that this may be a ritual slaughter, performed at a specific "hour" on a carefully chosen specific date of religious significance. "Jacinth" means 'deep blue'; there may be some specific means by which fire, deep blue and sulphur [brimstone] are used in the destruction process. We are therefore to expect some form of technology which uses these three elements or appearances in order to effect the mass destruction of a large number of people in one hour. The way Babylon's destruction likewise comes in "one hour" would therefore match this; Babylon must drink the cup she gave others to drink.

Another approach is to recall that the fire and jacinth come out of the *breastplates* of these fighters; and yet jacinth [hyacinth] is also one of the stones on the priestly breastplate. In this case we are invited to see these fighters acting as fake High Priests, which would connect with the undoubted theme of 'anti-Christ'- the Islamic fighters acting as if they are the true Israel of God. We note that in the last day, God will put on the breastplate of judgment against His enemies (Is. 59:17). Sulphur and fire have associations with Divine judgment; these people will therefore believe that they are executing God's judgments for Him. This is precisely the spirit of radical Islam.

9:18 *By these three illnesses was one third of all mankind killed, by the fire and the smoke and the sulphur, which proceeded out of their mouths-* The idea could be that one third of the third are killed by fire, another third by smoke, another third by the sulphur. The "all mankind" refers not to the whole planet but to the earth / land promised to Abraham. There have been attempts within the continuous historical approach to locate the fulfilment of this verse at some previous point in history. But the difficulty faced is how to define the earth / land, and "all mankind" within it. Such definitions are arbitrary and *ad hoc*, whereas the Bible envisages only two definitions of the earth / land- either the whole planet, or the land promised to Abraham.

The latter day invasion from the Euphrates (i.e. geographical Babylon) will result in men being killed by fire, smoke and brimstone (Rev. 9:14,18)- nuclear language?

9:19 *For the power of the horses is in their mouth and in their tails. For their tails are like those of serpents and have heads, and by means of them they wound-* There is some stress that their power is in their mouths (:18). Perhaps the reference is to the power or propaganda. We are now seeing Muslims from worldwide gathering to fight against Israel because of the power of this propaganda, spreading through social media so that the word / mouth of the Islamic entity is truly worldwide. The analogy to serpents wounding men clearly makes this element the latter day seed of the serpent; and according to Gen. 3:15, they will be crushed directly by the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus. The final conflict between the Lord Jesus and the serpent will be its manifestation in this group; who as we have demonstrated above, refer to the Islamic opposition surrounding Israel.

The 'wounding' of men is only after there has been an opportunity for the faithful to be sealed. The same word is in 7:3: "Hurt [wound] not the earth... till we have sealed the servants of God". But now that window of opportunity is over. Those responsible for the wounding are now fast headed to destruction and the point is approached where they cannot repent. For the same word is found in 22:11: "Him that is unjust [s.w. 'wounding'], let him be unjust still".

9:20 *And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these illnesses, did not repent-* Again we note that even now at the time of the trumpet judgments, there is the desperate desire that some still repent; even though after the seal judgments, there was a sealing of those who had responded and a shielding of them from the judgments which were to come upon the impenitent.

*Of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons and the idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood-* The allusion is clearly to Dan. 5:4,23, where the very same materials are mentioned as being the idols of Babylon. In the context, the final king of Babylon has been asked to repent in that he had been asked to learn the lesson of his father Nebuchadnezzar, who was smitten with madness and turned into an animal. But Nebuchadnezzar revived from that deadly wound, as it were. It could be that the final leader of the entity known as Babylon is intended to repent because the previous leader was struck down by God, as Nebuchadnezzar had been. But because he didn't repent, he was judged. The appeal of Daniel to him in the very last minutes of his life is therefore to be seen as the equivalent of this final appeal to the leader of Babylon through the trumpet judgments. The 'division' of his kingdom in judgment (Dan. 5:28) perhaps recalls the divided state of the toes of the image just before Christ comes to destroy them. The fifth trumpet began with mention of the opening of a bottomless pit, which I suggested is parallel to the deadly wound of the



beast. The reason for this is so that the deadly wounding will be an opportunity for repentance- this deep Divine desire for human repentance, even amongst His worst enemies, is so clearly portrayed in the structure of this apocalyptic. Nebuchadnezzar's 'wound' was intended to elicit repentance in the final king of Babylon. Hence the allusion to that scenario here in the sixth trumpet.

*Which can neither see, hear nor walk-* This again is a quotation from Dan. 5:28. The similarity with the fall of Babylon is clearly intended. And what was particularly obnoxious about the king of Babylon at that time was that he was using the temple vessels in a drunken idol ritual; this in outline terms is the same as placing an abomination on the temple mount, which will be the reason for his desolation. The reference to "sorceries" (:21) is likewise an allusion to the practices of the historical Babylon and Assyria (Is. 47:9,12; Nah. 3:4). Such things were the calling card of Jezebel, the prototype of the whore who rides the beast (2 Kings 9:22). Note she was from Tyre, in modern day Lebanon. We may well enquire how idol worship and sorcery could be part of a radical Islamic state, seeing they are passionately against such things. The point is that this latter day entity is being cast in terms of the historical Babylon; and for all Islam's protest against idolatry and sorcery, from God's viewpoint, these are the very things they are guilty of.

*9:21 And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts-* This sounds very much the behaviour of jihadist fighters, murdering and thieving, and sexually abusing those whom they conquer (witness the Islamist treatment of Yezidi and Christian women whom they captured and declared as their 'spoils of war'). We observe that both the people being judged, as well as those judging them, can easily be interpreted as radical Islamist fighters. But this turning upon themselves is what we expect, both from Bible prophecy (e.g. regarding the divided state of the toes of the image in Daniel 2) and from Divine historical precedent. For His preferred method of destroying Israel's enemies has been through making them turn upon each other, rather than direct bolts from Heaven. "Sorceries" is a word we only meet again in Rev. 18:23, speaking of the sorceries of latter day Babylon. This trumpet therefore speaks of the judgment upon latter day Babylon. The LXX uses the word not only of Babylon (Is. 47:9,12) but also of Egypt at the time of the plagues (Ex. 7:22). And the trumpet judgments are full of reference to the plagues upon Egypt.

There are at least 10 references in :20,21 back to the sins of Israel in Old Testament times. The suggestion therefore is that the latter day Islamic entity will fail as Israel failed to heed God's pleading with them in the past, both through prophets and judgments. The idea is that the sins of this Islamic entity are effectively those of the Jews, whom they consider themselves so far spiritually superior to. Islamists love to quote the Old Testament condemnations of Israel as justification for their vendetta against the Jews; but these allusions show that they are in essence just as guilty.

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, his face was as the sun and his feet as pillars of fire-* It is quite possible that the Angel of Rev. 10:1 who descends from Heaven in a cloud with a face like the sun, holding the books of judgement is referring to Christ's second coming in person. He is called "The messenger (Heb. 'malak', the Angel) of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1). It could be argued that this chapter is a continuation of the sixth trumpet- Alf Norris makes a reasonable case for this.

The same words "mighty Angel" are used in 5:2, where "a strong Angel" (AV) offers the book, and Jesus the Lamb opens it. Now John, representative of the latter day believers, is asked to follow the role of the Lord Jesus and take the book. The connection with chapter 5 is intentional- hence we read of "*another* mighty Angel". Perhaps this is the same "mighty Angel" who judges Babylon (18:21 s.w.), crying "mightily" (18:2 s.w.); that Angel also "comes down" from Heaven in judgment (18:1 s.w. 10:1 "come down from Heaven").

The Angel arrayed with a cloud represents the Lord Jesus, who comes with clouds (1:7; Lk. 21:27; 1 Thess. 4:17), sitting upon a cloud (14:14). An Angel coming down clothed with a cloud is very much alluding to what happened after Israel left Egypt; although Moses alone saw this. John, despised and imprisoned on Patmos, is therefore being encouraged that he is in no less an awesome position than was Moses- who was seen in Judaism as the epitome of human spirituality, and whose experience on Sinai was presented as the highest a man has ever gone to God. The idea is that now the tribulation of Israel is completed, and instead of the coming down of the Angel clothed with cloud on Sinai, there will be the literal return of Christ to earth.

The rainbow about His head is another connection with the opening vision of a rainbow around the throne of the Lord Jesus (4:3). Cloud, rainbow and sun are all part of the same process which results in rainbows becoming visible. From the point of observation, the rain has ceased but the cloud suggests there is still water around. We can maybe infer that this is a picture of some judgments [the rain] having ended, but others still ongoing. And this is in chronological terms about where we are up to in the book- the remaining judgments described in the book are upon the beast systems, judging them as they had previously judged Israel / God's people.

His face as the sun is the very description of Jesus in 1:16. And "feet as pillars of fire" is just like the Lord Jesus in 1:17; 2:18. After all the allusions to Joel in Revelation 9, it's not surprising that this too alludes to Joel, this time to Joel 2:30- pillars of fire, smoke and blood are to be seen in the land in the last days. The context there would require that this is judgment coming upon the land. And yet this image of judgment is presented along with that of the rainbow, the cessation of judgment- in the kaleidoscope of images which forms the apocalyptic genre. That kaleidoscope of images means we should not be unduly concerned about whether the Angel here is an Angel or the Lord Jesus personally.

Harry Whittaker makes a good case for this Angel being that of Daniel 10. And yet, as he also points out, the connections with the Lord Jesus personally are undeniable:

The detailed parallel between Revelation 10, 11 and Daniel 10, 12 set out below requires that John understood the being he saw to be the angel who revealed so much to Daniel.

<i>Revelation</i>	<i>Daniel</i>
10:1 A mighty angel.	10:5, 12:7 A man clothed in linen.
10:2 Right foot on the sea, left foot on the land.	12:7 Standing on the waters of the river.
10:1 Face like the sun.	10:6 Face like lightning.
10:1 Feet as pillars of fire.	10:6 Feet like polished brass.
10:2 Open book in his hand.	10:21 "I will shew thee that which is noted in the Scripture of truth (the heavenly prototype)."
10:3 Voice as a lion.	10:6 Voice like a multitude.
10:5 Lifts right hand to heaven. (The left hand holds the book.)	12:7 Lifts both hands to heaven.
10:6 Swears by Him that liveth for ever.	12:7 Swears by Him that liveth for ever.
10:7 Mystery of God to be finished as declared to the prophet.	12:7 "All these things shall be finished."
11:2 Temple court "cast out," given to Gentiles.	12:11 Daily sacrifice taken away, abomination set up.
11:2 Holy city trodden under foot.	12:7 Power of the holy people scattered.
11:2 42 months.	12:7 Time, times and an half.
11:18 The time of the dead that they should be judged.	12:2 Many that sleep awake, to everlasting life or to contempt.

And yet the similarities between this Angel and the Lord Jesus cannot be denied:

<i>The Angel of Revelation 10</i>	<i>Christ</i>
(a) Clothed with a cloud.	"A cloud received him out of their sight ... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10,11). "Behold he cometh with clouds" (Revelation 1:7 and 14:14).
(b) His face as the sun	"His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (1:16).
(c) His feet as pillars of fire (contrast the kingdoms of men - feet of iron and clay).	"His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" (1:15)

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|---|--|
| (d) “Cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth.” | “The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to open the seals” (5:5).                       |
| (e) “A rainbow was upon his head.”                    | “There was a rainbow round about the throne (4:3) ... a Lamb in the midst of the throne” (5:6) |

10:2 *And he had in his hand a little scroll that was opened, and he set his right foot upon the sea and his left upon the earth-* The question of course is whether this open scroll is the same scroll, the book of life, which the Lord opened earlier in Revelation, and which He likewise holds in His hand in 5:1; and which is only opened by the releasing of the seals binding it in the very last days. The Apocalypse is a kaleidoscope of images, and we should not be too concerned with trying to define each usage of a symbol in a distinctly separate way. The Lord, represented by His Angel, is standing in judgment upon the land promised to Abraham, judging according to what is written in a scroll. The scroll of "life" was written on both sides, and we saw on 5:1 that this curious feature may mean that it contained both the blessings for the faithful and judgments upon the wicked; hence it tasted both bitter and sweet in :10. In :5 we will read that the Angel representative of Jesus raises His right hand to Heaven; perhaps we are meant to deduce that the small scroll was in His left hand. The book of 5:1 is in the Lord's right hand. That may mean that there we are seeing the blessing aspect, as it has been introduced as the book of life. Here in chapter 10 we have the judgment aspect, hence it is held in the left hand.

The scroll is a little scroll, perhaps not meaning it is a different scroll, but to place the visual emphasis upon the colossal size of the Lord, standing in control of earth and sea; and to fit the decorum of the symbol, in that John will be asked to eat it as if it can be swallowed in one gulp (:10).

The simple take away point is that we, and all the 'earth', are judged not *ad hoc*, according to the emotion of the judge, but according to a predetermined written record based upon actions in this life. The sea is where one beast arises from (13:1), whilst another arises from the earth (13:11). Yet even before they are portrayed as arising, we are assured that the Lord stands firmly in judgment upon both sea and earth; for to have territory under the feet means to judge or be lord over it. If the earth means the territory of the land promised to Abraham, perhaps the sea refers to the territories immediately surrounding it.

Perhaps the little book is the rest of the vision of Revelation being given to John? Or perhaps this receipt of the book is because now the theme of the visions will move specifically towards the witness made by the faithful under persecution. We need not stress about trying to make chapter 10 follow on from the events of chapter 9 and precede the events of chapter 11. That would be to miss the point of the genre of apocalyptic, seeking to impose a European, linear approach to Semitic thought which is not constrained by the linear, chronological model. We also have to appreciate that this vision of the Lord in glory is one of several which punctuate and form the structure of the book; which to quote another could be summarized as:

A Opening vision (Revelation 1)

B Seven letters with seven visions of the saints in glory (Rev. 2,3)

C Christ in glory (Rev. 4,5)

D 7 seals of judgment upon Israel and sealing of the repentant (Rev. 6,7); the language of 'sealing' in both chapters thereby connects them

E 7 trumpets (Rev. 8,9)

10 Christ stands in glory; commissions John to preach

11 Preaching by the saints under persecution

12 The church against the beast- the essence of the Apocalypse

13 Preaching by the saints under persecution

14 Christ stands in glory; the Gospel preached

Ea 7 vials (Ch. 15 & 16)

Da 7 judgments on Babylon, presented as Israel (thus connecting with 'D'); the faithful presented in 19:1-10 in the language of Rev. 7 (Rev. 17:1-19:10)

Ca Christ in glory (Rev. 19:11-21)

Ba 7 visions of the saints in glory

A Closing vision.

10:3 *And he cried with a great voice, as a lion roars; and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices-* The Lord is likened to a lion when earlier He has held the scroll in 5:5, confirming my hunch that it is the same scroll in view. The roaring of the Messianic lion of Judah is in final victory over those who are abusing Israel and the sons of Jacob (Gen. 49:9). Thunders have indeed been associated with judgments so far in Revelation, but voices as thunders could simply mean that His singular voice is Divine, as mighty as seven [completeness] thunders; for this is the idea of a voice as of thunder in 19:6 and Jn. 12:29.

10:4 *And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying: Keep secret the things which the seven thunders uttered and do not write them down-* The voices of thunders pronounced something which John heard but was forbidden from writing. We have series of seven judgments recorded in the seals, trumpets and bowls. It seems there is another possible and potentially planned series of seven judgments, all planned in Heaven, which are not written because they will not happen. There will be the repentance of the remnant so sought for, and so these judgments will not be required. As early as 2:10 [see note there] we have been introduced to the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy; there are various possible outcomes, but not all shall happen, because humans have freewill to repent or resist, and the detailed shape of the latter day events is responsive to that. This is why no detailed chronology of events is presented, but rather the kaleidoscope of images we have in the apocalyptic genre which the Spirit chose for Revelation.

10:5 *And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven-* Presumably holding the scroll of judgments in His left hand; see on :2. This would mean the scroll refers to judgments upon the wicked; it is written on both sides, and I suggested on 5:1 that blessing for the faithful is on one side, and judgments for the wicked on the other.

10:6 *And swore by Him that lives forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be no more delay-* The seventh trumpet begins with the news that there will be no more delay- the idea is again of an imposed delay / restraint being now lifted. This restraint is that noted on 9:14,15. There has been an earlier delay in order to allow the faithful to be sealed (see on 7:3). But there are no more restraints; now the final end shall

come. As noted on :2, the structure of Revelation is such that we are not to think that now chapter 10 shall therefore close the whole of human history. Chapter 11 will revert to how this situation is achieved. The earth and sea where the Angel representative of Jesus is standing have all been created by God. There is no entity that can arise in the experience of God's people that has not been ultimately created by God; indeed the entire heavenly throne room which John is viewing has been created by Him.

10:7 *But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good news which He declared to His servants the prophets-* The message of the prophets was specifically concerning Israel, which is therefore the focus of the "mystery" here. "About to sound" could suggest that the seventh Angel doesn't actually sound; therefore the seven thunders were not written down. I suggested on :4 that this is because that potential sequence of judgments don't happen. Perhaps in His grace and in response to the prayers of the faithful in the last days, the judgments are cut short and these ones therefore don't happen. See too the notes on 6:1 regarding the seventh seal.

10:8 *And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying: Go, take the book which is opened in the hand of the angel that stands upon the sea and upon the earth-* There is a parallel between the commissioning of John in 1:9,19 and his recommission in chapter 10. The open scroll given to him in chapter 10 is the same scroll which has been opened by the seals being removed in chapter 6. The *aggelon ischyron* of 5:2 is the same Angel described with the same words in 10:8; both times the Angel introduces a scroll. I suggest it is the same scroll. As the Lamb took the scroll from the hand of the Angel in 5:7,8, now John does the same (10:9,10). Perhaps in this context there is significance in the scroll having writing on both sides, of blessing [sweet] and judgment [bitter].

10:9- see on Rev. 11:3.

*And I went to the angel, saying to him that he should give me the little book. And he said to me: Take it and eat it up; it shall make your belly bitter but in your mouth it shall be as sweet as honey-* As explained on :10, this was to recall Ezekiel's experience of eating the bitter judgments upon Israel, and also the sweetness of blessing for the faithful within Israel. And in practice it was to enable John to enter into something of the Lord's feelings in dispensing judgments and blessings at the last day; see on :10.

10:10 *And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey. But when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter-* Taking the book of life from the hand of the Angel is exactly what the Lord Jesus did. John is being asked to identify with how the Lord Jesus will actually feel at the last day. As noted on 5:1 and 10:1, I suggest that the scroll is the book of life, with blessings for the faithful written on one side and judgments for the wicked on the other. But in the actual realization of all these things, the Lord literally feels bitter-sweet, just as John did. He is not the impassive judge.

The "little book" is a *bibliaridion*, a term used in :8,9,10, and Ez. 2:9 LXX in a closely similar episode. The book in Ezekiel is "written within and without" (like that in 5.1) and carries a message of "lamentations, mourning and woe", very much the theme of this part of Revelation. Ezekiel was required to eat the roll, as John is here (10.9); but though Ezekiel was to speak its message to Israel, John must prophesy "again over many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (10.11). For each the book was "sweet as honey", and while

in John's case his "belly was made bitter", in Ezekiel's the prophet went about "in bitterness".

10:11 *And they said to me: You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings-* The idea is that John was assumed to be recording his message for the Jews, but it also had reference to the Gentiles. The traumas to happen in the land promised to Abraham will affect both Jew and non-Jew in that land; and this is why both the Hebrew and Greek terms for 'the destroyer' are given in chapter 9. But about can also be "to". The idea is then of a last moment intense witness to all the peoples, perhaps of the world, or within the land promised to Abraham. And this is the theme of the next visions; of witness under terrible persecution during the last days. John was typical of those persecuted preachers, seeing he himself was under tribulation for the sake of his witness of God's word in Christ, as chapter 1 has reminded us.

## CHAPTER 11

*11:1 And there was given to me a reed like a measuring rod, and I was told: Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those that worship therein-* The Apocalypse, within the apocalyptic genre, is a kaleidoscope of images. We are therefore not intended to interpret the various visions in a strictly chronological way. Nor are we to see them all referring to the same groups at the same times. In viewing a kaleidoscope, some images are more impressing or relevant for us than others. And thus the book of Revelation has been for those who have read it over the centuries. But in our last days, all the visions have their final application, culminating in the literal return of the Lord to establish the Kingdom on earth.

Rev. 11:1 speaks of a command to measure the temple- and immediately our minds are sent back to the temple being measured in such detail in Ez. 40:10, 21,22 etc. Is this to be read as a sign that we are about to receive another such conditional prophecy? Assuming that Revelation was given just prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70, we could read the ensuing prophecy in Rev. 11 as saying that although Jerusalem and the outer court would fall to the Romans, the zealots in the inner sanctuary would be preserved, and a command to repentance would be issued by two prophets. Now of course, this didn't happen; but perhaps it could've done, potentially? Consider the possibility- both here and in so many other Bible passages.

A case can even be made that the compilation of Luke's Gospel record of the Olivet prophecy, as well as sections of Revelation, were released throughout the period of Titus' encirclement of Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70. The encouragement to flee Jerusalem whilst it was still possible (Lk. 21:20,21) would have been urgent commands to be fulfilled immediately upon receipt. And then Rev. 11:1 could imply that by the time of the prophecy's release, the Roman attack on the outer court of the temple had already begun. A lot of work remains to be done in working out how this mass of Scripture could have been received by the faithful within Jerusalem in AD67-70, and read as directly relevant to them, requiring immediate response.

But whatever the first century fulfilment, we are to look for a latter day application as the main one. The measuring of the temple in judgment may imply that there will be a literal temple built in Jerusalem by the Jews in the last days. They certainly have plans for one.

*11:2 But the court which is outside the temple, do not measure it. For it has been given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months-* The holy city [Jerusalem] to be trampled for 42 months is clearly the equivalent of Lk. 21:24 concerning the events leading up to AD70: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled". The "times of the Gentiles" are therefore the 42 months. "From Spring of 67 to August of 70, the time of formal imperial engagement against Jerusalem is a period of 42 months". John "measures" the inner temple, altar and worshippers - for protection (Ez. 22:26; Zech. 2:1-5). Thus the external temple perishes but the spiritual reality- the true worshippers, the new Israel- are preserved. This is what happened in AD70.

"The holy city" is one of a series of allusions in this section to the crucifixion, for this same phrase is used about Jerusalem in the context of the crucifixion (Mt. 27:53). The prophecies of persecution in Revelation are shot through with references to the crucifixion; to encourage the people of God that in those persecutions they are in fact sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and will surely likewise share in His resurrection and eternal life. This theme will have especial reference to those who endure the final tribulation- for they are the generation



who perhaps will never taste death and will move directly from sharing His crucifixion sufferings to sharing His resurrection glory and eternal life. Rev. 4:4,10; 5:6,8,14 associate the 24 elders falling down in worship with what happened when Christ died and / or ascended to Heaven; but here, that is said to happen during the time of tribulation (:16). The dead bodies lying in the streets of Jerusalem (:8) recalls Mt. 27:52. The description of Jerusalem as Sodom And Egypt [both OT descriptions of Jerusalem in apostasy] seems almost angry; exactly because the reference is to Jerusalem being the city which killed Jesus (Mt. 23:37). The dead bodies being on display (:9) is apparently what happened in Mt. 27:52- the graves in Jerusalem opened in the earthquake at the death of Christ with the corpses as it were on display, and the bodies arose out of them at His resurrection. Not suffering bodies to be put in graves (:9) is language associated with crucifixion victims, whose bodies were usually cast out from Golgotha into Gehenna. The suffering believers are thereby likened to crucifixion victims. Death for three days (:9) is the same period Jesus lay dead. A case can even be made that He was dead three and a half days rather than 72 hours. "Great fear fell upon" (:11) the persecutors of the saints just as it did upon those who witnessed the resurrection of the crucified Christ (Mt. 27:54; 28:4). Ascension to Heaven in a cloud (:12) evidently recalls that of the Lord Jesus; the earthquake of :13 recalls that of Mt. 27:54. The temple being opened in :19 clearly refers to the veil being rent at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:51). These connections aren't neatly chronological; the point is that the lives of the suffering believers were connected with the sufferings of Christ in various ways and times. Their suffering was riddled with connection and allusion to the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus, just as our lives are, as like Paul we seek to fill up what is lacking in us of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus. The connection between the sufferings of the last days and the crucifixion sufferings of the Lord are made apparent especially in Mk. 13. "It is done" (16:17) sounds very much like "It is finished". The Olivet prophecy as recorded in Mark 13 has many allusions to the sufferings of our Lord, thereby suggesting that our sufferings during the coming tribulation will make us fellowship the cross as never before. The whole idea of darkness, earthquake, open graves, rocks shaking etc, which we read of in the Olivet and other last day prophecies is evidently the language of the crucifixion. The description of suffering before "the end" comes (Mk. 13:7,13; Mt. 24:14) invites connection with Christ's death also being described as "the end", coming as it did after a period of suffering (Mt. 26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). This connection is strengthened by the way in which each record of the Olivet prophecy leads straight on into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Mt. 24:13 commends those who endure to the end- of the great tribulation. The same word occurs in Heb. 12:2,3 about Christ enduring the cross- we fellowship the cross during the last day tribulation. The word in Mt. 24:29 for "the tribulation" is used in Col. 1:24 about the afflictions of Christ. The tribulation will enable those who endure it to fellowship the Lord's crucifixion sufferings, that they might immediately share His resurrection life at His return. This will be especially relevant to Jews under persecution, who will have to come to repentance regarding His crucifixion:

#### As Christ to the Sanhedrin

" They shall deliver you up to the councils...	
beaten...	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony...	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
brother shall betray the brother...	Judas; Peter's denial?
turn back to take up his garment...	John Mark's linen garment

false Christs...	Barabbas
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
watch and pray...	" Watch with me";
	Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing...	Peter's denials
in the morning...	Trial and crucifixion
find you sleeping"	Disciples in Gethsemane

11:3 *And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth-* Empowering witnesses is the language of the comforter in Jn. 14-16. The prophecy here has specific applications to various historical moments and a greater fulfilment in the last days, but the essence is true for all who are empowered in their witness by the gift of the Spirit. The only other NT references to two witnesses is to ordinary members of the Christian church (Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). All believers are witnesses, in the power of the Spirit (cp. Acts 1:8).

The context of this vision is set by 10:9, where John eats the little book. I suggested there that this is part of a recommissioning of John, which introduces the theme of witness to the Gospel under persecution which fills the subsequent visions in Revelation.

John was to "Prophecy (preach) again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (10:11). Such language recalls Jeremiah and the prophets (often initially unwilling also) spreading their message to nations and kings, and also the spirit of first century apostolic preaching. Both these groups did so amidst great persecution; and this is to happen in the last days. John's eating of the book also looks back to Ez. 2:8, where Ezekiel had to do this at the beginning of his preaching ministry to an apostate Israel in captivity. This may hint that this latter day preaching to all nations [within the earth / land promised to Abraham?] will especially focus upon the Jews among them, and those persecuted Jews within the land itself.

The vision of the two witnesses carries straight on, describing in more detail what 10:8-11 has summarized. The dountreading of the Holy City (literal Jerusalem) will be for 42 months. During that time, the witnesses prophecy for a parallel period of 1,260 days- both periods equivalent to three and a half years (Rev. 11:2,3). The two witnesses may either represent the Jews and the Christians, or two individual leaders of the saints who each concentrate respectively on preaching to Jews or Gentiles. The *false* prophet [for the witnesses are prophets, :6,10] is not necessarily an individual but a group of persons, perhaps headed up in one figurehead. Perhaps the two righteous witnesses speak of something similar. The language of :6 has clear reference back to Elijah and Moses- both of whom spoke the word of God [largely to an apostate Israel] during time of great persecution of God's true witnesses.

Other Scriptures describe a three-and-a-half-year period of persecution by the beast. This is matched in Rev. 11 by the three and a half year witnessing in sackcloth, with the power to bring plagues on their enemies. This would equate the witnesses with Moses and the faithful Israelites in Egypt undergoing persecution, at a time when Egypt (cp. the latter day world)

was very prosperous (treasure cities etc.). The sackcloth suggests fasting and prayer- for their deliverance through the Lord's return. I have suggested elsewhere that the second coming is dependent on the intensity of our prayers. To allow the Lord's return to happen, it seems we need this tribulation to vitalize our community's prayer life. In the last days, God's faithful people will be given a mouth and wisdom which their persecutors will be unable to gainsay nor resist (Lk. 21:15). This evidently alludes to how Moses before Pharaoh was given such a 'mouth' (Ex. 4:15). Moses at that time was a type of the faithful remnant of their last days, in their witness against the world during the tribulation. Hence Rev. 11 describes their witness in terms of Moses doing miracles before Pharaoh.

Sackcloth is also a symbol of repentance and recognition of sin (Gen. 37:34; Jer. 4:8; Jonah 3:5; Mk. 2:20). Their own personal repentance and acceptance of God's gracious forgiveness was the basis of their appeal to others. And is it going too far to understand that if these "two witnesses" do indeed represent the latter day witness of true Christianity to the 'earth' / land promised to Abraham, it will be made on the basis of a genuine repentance, brought about by the experiences of the tribulation.

11:4 *These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth-* The allusion is clearly to the visions of Zechariah. They are filled with the Spirit for their witness; see on :3.

Zech. 4 contained a vision of Joshua and Zerubbabel, likened to two olive trees which emptied their oil into the seven branched candlestick, representing the ecclesia of Judah. They represented the kingly and priestly offices. The whole 'lightstand' depended upon these two anointed ones, these providers of oil, and the fact they both in various ways failed to deliver true faith and spirituality meant that the victory over the world which the vision also prophesied could not come about; the final fulfilment had to come through the Lord Jesus, who was the ultimate Priest (cp. Joshua-Jesus) and Prince of Judah (cp. Zerubbabel). This prophecy could have been fulfilled at the restoration; but when we read in Rev. 11:4 that "These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks", is the Lord not saying that now He has redefined and rescheduled the fulfilment of that vision in a latter day context?

The Lord of the earth / land in the Zechariah context was a reference to Israel's Angel (Michael?) who was in control of the land despite all happening within it. But the latter day lord of the land will be the anti-Christ, the fake Christ, the fake, imitation lord of the land. And before him they make their witness. The later allusions to them as it were bringing the plagues upon Egypt suggest they are as it were standing before Pharaoh as Moses did, strangely unhurt by him as Moses and Aaron were strangely preserved from being killed by him, bringing the plagues upon the persecutors of God's apostate people Israel.

11:5 *And if anyone desires to hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies, and if anyone shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed-* These two individuals or entities are miraculously preserved as Moses was before Pharaoh, the lord of the earth in his day (see on :4).

They have power to shut heaven and bring fire upon their enemies - clearly alluding to Elijah. His bringing down fire was against people of his own Jewish race who were persecuting him (2 Kings 1:9-12), suggesting that the Elijah ministry will be bitterly opposed by many Jews, after the pattern of Jeremiah's persecution during the Babylonian invasion. The witnesses are therefore the latter day Elijah ministry, who shall come to prepare Israel before the final day

of the Lord comes, witnessing against powers as well as against Israel; just as John the Baptist did in the spirit and power of Elijah, against Herod who killed him.

*11:6 These have the power to shut the heaven so that it does not rain during the days of their prophecy, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they shall desire-* See on:3 and on :6 for the significance of the Elijah allusions. This latter day Elijah ministry will withhold rain, as Elijah did, for three and a half years, in the hope that it will lead to repentance in Israel. The plaguing of the persecutors as Moses and Aaron plagued Egypt further strengthens the impression that Israel's experience in Egypt is the prototype for the coming tribulation. The plagues brought upon Egypt were likewise in the hope that Egypt and even Pharaoh would 'know the Lord' and repent.

11:7- see on Rev. 6:10.

*And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss shall make war with them and overcome them and kill them-* The same word for "witnesses" is used of how the Babylon system slays the Lord's witnesses in the last days (17:6). This parallels "the beast" here with latter day Babylon. This speaks of a final, furious bout of persecution which brings about the destruction of the beast. It is because of this latter day orgy of killing the saints that the woman riding the beast was "drunken with the blood of the saints (the latter day true Christian community?), and (also) with the blood of the martyrs (s.w. "witnesses"- the two particular ones of Rev. 11?) of Jesus" (17:6). The witnesses 'testifying' suggests association with their prototype John, who was persecuted for his obedience to and preaching of "the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2,9) in the last days before the Lord's 'coming' in AD70. I have suggested earlier on this chapter that John's recommissioning as a witness to all peoples in chapter 10 makes him personally representative of these latter day witnesses. John was encouraged in his tribulation by being given such a deep understanding of prophecy; and his latter day counterparts may be blessed likewise. The "souls under the altar" which we have previously considered were "slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (6:9), which cements the link between them and the apostle John's descriptions of his sufferings.

The dragon/ beast also "made war" with the seed of the woman "which keep the commandments (word) of God, and have the testimony (i.e. preaching) of Jesus" (12:17); it was because of "the word of their testimony (i.e. preaching) (that) they loved not their lives unto the death" (12:11), indicating that Rev. 12 also has reference to this last day persecution and is providing more detail about the events of chapter 11, during which the witnesses are persecuted and slain. Interestingly, the Angel says that he is a fellowservant and brother of them "that have the testimony (preaching) of Jesus" (19:10), i.e. the witnesses- as if the Angels who are with the witnesses in the tribulation are so near those they represent that they almost feel our sufferings.

We note that the beast is mentioned without introduction. The abyss from which it emerges has been mentioned, as the source of the locust invasion of Israel; which previously we have identified as the Muslim onslaught against Israel by her Islamic neighbours. The beast perhaps has no introduction because of the idea of Revelation being a kaleidoscope of images. It's not that a beast is introduced, defined and then we have progressive development of the beast theme in a chronological sense. What we have, true to the apocalyptic genre, is a kaleidoscope of images, rotating before us.

11:8 *And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified-* It would seem that the murder of these two witnesses takes place in Jerusalem, which is spiritual Sodom (Is. 1:10; 3:1,9; Jer. 23:14; Lam. 4:6; Ez. 16:46-56; Am. 4:11) and Egypt (Ez. 23:19-22). This point is clinched by its description as "where also our Lord was crucified" (see on Mk. 13:13). "They of the people (of Israel?) and kindreds and tongues and nations (those preached to in 10:11) shall see their dead bodies three days (literal ones?) and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves" (11:9). This seems a designed contrast to Stephen, the first martyr for preaching the Christian Gospel, whose body was also stared upon, but who was allowed to be buried. There are a number of similarities in Rev. 11 with the events in Sodom. "The God of the earth" of :4 clearly connects with "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" in Gen.18:25. The two Angels (cp. the two Angel-supported witnesses) were warned not to abide in the street (cp. bodies in the street) for fear of violence being done to them; the city is spiritually called Sodom. These references to Sodom and Egypt, both types of the last days, confirm that Rev. 11 also has a latter day application.

11:9 *And from among the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies for three and a half days, and they will not allow their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb-* Converts are to be made from "among the peoples, tribes..." etc. as noted on chapter 5. Perhaps the death of the witnesses makes some converts. But it may be that people from among the peoples, tribes etc. of the earth / land promised to Abraham come up to Jerusalem to gloat over the display of the dead bodies. There seem a number of points of contact in Rev. 11 with our Lord's sufferings, and this may be another one. Had it not been for Nicodemus' bold request, the Lord's body would have been thrown into Gehenna. Compare this with the bodies being unburied here, as if to imply they had been crucified. Thus in their sufferings the remnant under tribulation will really feel crucified with Christ, and therefore have great peace from knowing that if they suffer with Him, they will also reign with Him. It could be that the witnesses are literally crucified; for that is a typical punishment inflicted by jihadists, who make a big deal about display of the bodies of those they have slain.

11:10 *And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them and make merry, and they shall send gifts to each other, because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth-* The earth dwellers are those within the earth / land promised to Abraham. Their brief rejoicing at the apparent death of the witnesses corresponds to Egypt's glee that Israel had left and were trapped at the Red Sea. This rejoicing over the slaughtered saints by the nations of the beast is echoed later by the holy apostles and prophets rejoicing over the destruction of Babylon (18:20)- as if the sufferings of the saints are later brought upon their persecutors. See on 8:7.

11:11 *And after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered into them and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those that saw them-* The persecution period in which the dead bodies lie in the street lasts three and a half days, connecting with the Lord's death for three days; this may indicate a final persecution at the end of the three and a half years. This is followed by the resurrection of the witnesses, after a brief period of rejoicing by the world that these people whose Spirit gifts had plagued them were now no more (by all means compare this with the rejoicing of the world in the three days in which Christ lay dead). The great fear that fell upon them who saw the resurrected witnesses recalls the fear of those who saw the risen Lord (Mt. 28:4,5,8).

Whilst the primary reference of all this is to the situation within the earth / land promised to Abraham, there is reason to think that the believing community worldwide will suffer at this

time too. There is a general, outline theme throughout Revelation that the righteous are gathered *after* they go through the judgments, implying we will experience them, although it would be possible, were we more spiritual, that we could be spared them (Rev. 7:9-17; 11:11,12; 14:13-16; 19:1-10). Thus although the types of Israel in Egypt, the faithful in Hezekiah's Jerusalem, Noah shut in the ark etc. suggest that the faithful will be spared the judgments, the fact is they will *need* the experience of the judgments to make them more spiritual, and therefore ultimately these types may not come true: they will only speak of what was possible. Evidently the latter day ecclesia will not be as strong as God would wish it to be.

11:12- see on 1 Thess. 4:17.

*And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them: Come up here! And they went into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them-* This surely connects with the transporting of the saints through the clouds to meet the Lord, as detailed in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. There are also links with Rev. 1:7- a shout (cp. 1 Thess. 4:16), a cloud, being seen by enemies. We know that 1:7 is concerning the second coming (see note there). There we have the picture of the Lord's persecutors seeing Him personally; some will say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord", but too late (see on Mt. 23:39). They will be resurrected to judgment, and see Him in glory; and the last generation of Israel's persecutors will see not only Him, but the resurrected two witnesses with Him. The exact chronology need not worry us; for here in the Apocalypse we have a kaleidoscope of images and not a strictly chronological outline of events.

11:13 *And in that hour there was a great earthquake and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven-* It is tempting to interpret the great earthquake and repentance of a remnant in 11:13 as referring also to the Lord's coming, accompanied as it will be by a literal earthquake which affects Jerusalem when the Lord returns to the mount of Olives (Zech. 14:1-4; Acts 1:11), heralding the repentance of the Jewish remnant as described in Rom. 11. The seventh Angel then sounds, declaring that the Kingdom has come (note "are become- now- the Kingdoms of our Lord").

11:14 *The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe comes quickly-* Yet this third woe is not recorded. I suggested on 6:1; 10:4,7 that there are some judgments potentially planned which never actually happen. Perhaps because the required number of the remnant repent, or because of the power of prayer, and God's desire to hasten towards the end of His judgments so that He might save His people.

11:15 *And the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said-* As suggested on :14 and also 6:1; 10:4,7, it seems that there are some judgments potentially planned in association with the seventh trumpet which never actually happen, as things hasten towards their close.

*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever-* The kingdom initially in view is that of the Islamic entity which has taken control of the land promised to Abraham. That is now handed over to the Lord Jesus, who as Abraham's seed is the rightful heir to it. Satan's Kingdom has members, those

he is king over [see on Lk. 11:18]. His Kingdom is the people of this world, those dominated by the fleshly mind. When the Kingdoms of this world become those of God at the second coming, this is more than a physical handover of political authority. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). The political power in the world is ultimately God's even now (Rom. 13:1-4). The idea of a handover of the Kingdoms of this world to God must therefore refer to the end of Satan's power; no longer will the world be structured around the desires of the flesh, but around the principles of God. Satan's Kingdom is not a political Kingdom, but an influence, a way of thinking, life lived according to certain principles, permeating every part of a man's thinking and behaviour. The Kingdom of God is the antithesis of Satan's Kingdom. The fact Satan's Kingdom exists now and is the antithesis of the true Kingdom is proof enough that in some sense the Kingdom of God exists in some non-political sense now, although of course this will be politically manifested at the Lord's return. God's Kingdom exists in the same sense as Satan's; as an influence, a way of thinking, life lived according to certain principles, permeating every part of a man's thinking and behaviour. This is why the Lord's parables describing the Kingdom of God refer not to the political Kingdom, but to His ways and principles as they should operate in our lives today. The Kingdom of God in this non-political sense was taken from the Jews and given to us, so that we might bring forth the fruits of the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43). The political Kingdom had already been taken from Israel (Ez. 21:27).

11:16 *And the twenty four elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying-* As noted on 4:4,10; 5:8, these Angels were representative of the faithful. The whole awful program of latter day events is ultimately to elicit the deepest praise and glory to God. And the traumas of our own lives likewise.

11:17 *We give You thanks O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was; because You have taken Your great power and have reigned-* God can do anything, He is omnipotent. But He chooses to limit His omnipotence in order to allow man total freewill. Therefore effectively, how far God will fulfil His purpose depends upon how far we are obedient to Him. Thus Israel limited the Holy One of Israel (Ps. 78:41). Only at the return of the Lord Jesus will God 'take to Himself His great power'- which language of itself suggests that God has chosen to limit His omnipotence for the moment. Of course, God can act quite independently of us; He has the sovereign right and ability to act as He likes, and achieve His objectives how He likes. But it seems that God chooses to limit His ability to do this. We have complete freewill, and God works with us individually in proportion as we work with Him. We have genuine choice, not only as to whether to serve God, but *how* and on what level and to what extent we serve Him, within the salvation we experience in Christ.

The faithful (see on :16) now perceive that God always was in control and in power; all their tribulations were only with His permission.

11:18 *And the nations were angry, and Your anger came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give reward to Your servants the prophets and to the saints, and to those that fear Your Name, the small and the great-* The nations will be angry, and the wrath / anger of God also will rise. When their iniquity has reached a certain level, then judgment will fall (cp. Sodom and the Amorites, Gen. 15:16). The Amorites speak of Israel's aggressive neighbours who are the beast persecuting her in the last days; and Sodom has earlier in this chapter been presented as a type of the last days.

*And to destroy those that destroy the earth-* The reference is to the "nations" within the land promised to Abraham who had destroyed that land. They will be judged as they judged Israel- a major theme of Revelation. The same word is used of how the whore of Babylon corrupted the land / earth (19:2); and these "nations" are those under her control.

11:19 *And there was opened the temple of God that is in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant, and there followed lightnings, voices, thunders, an earthquake and great hail-* John was already viewing a Heavenly temple scene. The opening therefore refers to the opening of the most holy; and there is seen the ark. First century Jews were fascinated with the location of the physical ark. Here it is revealed- in heaven. There was an association of the covenant with Israel, and the ark of the covenant. The loss of the ark and its disappearance was a sign that the covenant with Israel had been suspended. But the ark was never known to have been destroyed, just as the covenant has as it were disappeared, been suspended, but not ended. And so the vision of the ark in Heaven is the sign that the covenant with Israel shall be remembered and revealed; and following from that are more judgments upon those who had once destroyed her. The lightnings, thunders, hail etc. are all the language of judgment; this is the promised destruction of those who had destroyed Israel (:18), in recognition of God's resumed covenant with Israel.

The ark over which the *shekinah* glory dwelt was as it were the throne of God; the idea is that Yahweh shall again be enthroned upon Israel. That the throne of God is represented by the ark of the covenant is shown by comparing Rev. 11:19 and 4:1-5:

<b>Rev. 11:19</b>	<b>Rev. 4:1-5</b>
"The temple of God was opened in Heaven"	"A door was opened in Heaven"
"There was seen in the temple the ark of His testament"	"A throne was set in Heaven, and one sat on the throne. . . there was a rainbow round about the throne".
"There were lightnings, and voices and thunderings"	"Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices"

The throne in Rev. 4 was surrounded by cherubim, as was the "throne" of the ark of the covenant.



## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *And a great sign was seen in heaven-* We are dealing with symbols (1:1), of things to happen after John's time. There is no description here of any historical event in the garden of Eden or some rebellion in Heaven before that. The woman here is caught up to God (:5), so we are not talking about a woman in literal heaven, and the moon and stars which are her clothing show these things are symbols and not literal.

*A woman arrayed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars-* She was who the people of Israel were intended to be, and thus she becomes our representative. The sun is a symbol for the Lord Jesus, and she is clothed with Christ, with His righteousness. This idea is used at the end of Revelation about the believers. Peter Watkins in his excellent book *Exploring The Apocalypse* sees the woman of Revelation 12 as a symbol of the church expressed in terms of Mary- for it was her who gave birth to “the man child” Jesus, who is to subdue the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5 = 2:27; 19:15). The stars around her head would, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, refer to Israel (Gen. 37). There are many links between Revelation and John’s Gospel, and thus it may be significant that in Jn. 19:25-27 Jesus calls Mary “Woman” and then in Revelation, He uses the same title for the “woman” who bears the man child. Yet the point of Revelation 12 is surely to show us from Heaven’s point of view the huge disruption in the universe caused by the birth of Jesus that night in Bethlehem. A baby’s birth, brought about by the quiet faith and indefatigable ambition of a teenage girl, shattered the whole cosmos. This is really what happens when we perform acts of faith based on slowly developed spiritual understanding. We do things which have cosmic consequences. See on Lk. 1:28.

The significance of chapter 12 is that almost every student of Revelation's structure finds this chapter to be the very core of the book. Nils Lund's suggestion has been followed with minor amendments by most students (*Chiasmus in the New Testament: a Study in Gormgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942)):

- A Prologue (1:1-20)
- B Seven Epistles (2:1-3:22)
- C Seven Seals (4:1-8:1)
- D 144,000 saints & Seven Trumpets (7:1-11:19)
- E The Two Witnesses (11:1-13)
- F Woman clothed with the sun (12:1)
- G Dragon in heaven (12:4)
- H Woman flees to wilderness (12:6)
- J Satan cast out (12:12)
- H' Woman flees to wilderness (12:14)
- G' Dragon persecutes woman (12:15)
- F' Woman’s seed keeps the commandments of God (12:17)
- E' The Two Beasts (13:1-18)
- D' 144,000 saints & Seven Angels (14:1-15:4)
- C' Seven Bowls (15:1,5-16:21)
- B' Seven Angels: whore of Babylon vs. New Jerusalem (17:1-22:5)
- A' Epilogue (22:6-21).

But Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images. In viewing a kaleidoscope, some images are more impressing or relevant for us than others. And thus the book of Revelation has been for

those who have read it over the centuries. But in our last days, all the visions have their final application, culminating in the literal return of the Lord to establish the Kingdom on earth. The events spoken of here therefore have various historical applications, and one main application in the last day.

12:2 *She was with child, and was crying out with labour pains and the agony of giving birth-* This is another connection with the gospel of John, where the Lord speaks of His followers under tribulation as a woman in labour, whose release comes when they 'see' Him again (Jn. 16:21). This will ultimately be at His return, and so this language speaks of the tribulation of the church in the last days.

12:3 *And there was seen another sign in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and upon his heads seven diadems-* Alfred Norris in *The Apocalypse for Everyman* sums up the picture of the beasts presented in Revelation: "Once there was a woman in heaven about to give birth, and an evil dragon stood in front of her, intending to devour the newborn child (12.1-3). It had already done great damage in throwing down a third part of the stars (12.4), but when the baby boy was born he was snatched away from the dragon to the safety of God's throne (12.5), while the woman, too, ran away to a safe hiding place in the wilderness (12.6). The wicked dragon was beaten in a war with Michael and his angels and, with its own angels, was thrown out of heaven to the earth (12.7-9). The heavens rejoiced that the dragon had been expelled (12.10-12a), but things looked bad for the earth, for the dragon meant to continue doing evil during the short time left to it (12.12b). First it pursued the woman, but she fled out of its way to her refuge (12.13-14), and even the flood it sent after her failed to overwhelm her, because the earth itself came to her aid by swallowing up the flood (12.15-16). There were still some of her children left, though, remaining faithful to their God and Lord, so the dragon decided to make life hard for them (12.17). What it did was to stand by the seashore and conjure up out of the sea a dreadful beast to which it gave worldwide authority (13.1-2) and also healed it when it looked as though it was wounded to death (13.3); so that the earth fell down and worshipped before the dragon, and before the beast which took over its power (13.4). From the wings of the stage the dragon still caused its voice to be heard through another beast, from the earth (13.11), and helped both beasts to gather the nations together to war against God Almighty (16.13). But its designs failed, for when the beast and the false prophet (the second beast) were beaten by the Lamb it was placed under restraint in the abyss (20.2) and not allowed out for 1000 years, at the end of which it was released, and gathered the nations together against the saints (20.7). The nations were overcome, however, by fire from heaven, and the dragon was finally removed from the scene by being destroyed in the lake of fire where its helpers, the beast and the false prophet, had been cast (20.10)".

It is obviously the same dragon throughout the Book from chapter 12 to chapter 20. The differences between the form it takes are because different aspects of its actions are being presented; again we say, that Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images. I noted on 11:7 that "the beast" is first mentioned there but without introduction. The beast perhaps has no introduction because of the idea of Revelation being a kaleidoscope of images. It's not that a beast is introduced, defined and then we have progressive development of the beast theme in a chronological sense. What we have, true to the apocalyptic genre, is a kaleidoscope of images, rotating before us.

The persecuting entity changes forms and has various aspects. It is presented in chapter 12 as a dragon; the dragon continues to exist, having given power to the beast of chapter 13. Then another beast arises, a "little horn" who also acts as the beast (Dan. 7:11). The beast is destroyed and then finally the dragon himself at the very end of Revelation. Politics and alliances within the land promised to Abraham change quickly. This is the kind of sequence we can expect; one persecuting alliance [the dragon] empowers another [the beast of Rev. 13], then another beast arises, then there is separate persecution orchestrated by the charismatic individuals presented as the little horn, the whore and the false prophet. All these entities have points of similarity with each other [e.g. the dragon and beast both have seven heads and ten horns]. But they are none the less distinct and unique. As noted many times, we are not to look for a chronological fulfilment in terms of a sequence of events. These are all kaleidoscope images of the persecution to be unleashed upon the earth / land. They merge and morph with each other, and yet re-emerge as separate entities. The dragon has seven heads and ten horns, with each head crowned; the beast from the sea has likewise seven heads and ten horns, but now it is the horns which are crowned; on the heads of the beast there are "names of blasphemy" (13:1). Their prototype in Daniel 7:20 has ten horns upon only one head.

These nuances may be significant, but they will only be recognizable when they have their fulfilment in the very last days (perhaps literally) before the Lord returns. It could be that the seven crowned heads refer to political leadership; but then they become the bearers of the names of blasphemy, as if they take on a more spiritual-religious aspect; and it is then the horns who are crowned at the time of the beast in chapter 13. The outline picture is however clear; a succession of groups of leaders and entities controlled by them (for the horns are "kings" and "kingdoms"), all summarized within one coalition of hatred against Israel; and a group of seven various "heads" of this coalition, seven mountains or nations (17:9), who exist either simultaneously or follow one another in quick succession.

It's noteworthy that the vision of Daniel 7 is presented as seven separate visions, each introduced by the rubric "I saw" (7:2,4,6,7,9,11,13). Revelation is an expansion upon Daniel's visions, and there we find seven visions which are in turn subdivided into seven visions and even some of those subdivisions are subdivided into seven visions. Admittedly, these can be defined in various ways, but some of the more obvious ones are:

7 visions:

- 1) Revelation 4 - 8:1
- 2) Revelation 8:2 - 11
- 3) Revelation 12 - 14
- 4) Revelation 15, 16
- 5) Revelation 17, 18
- 6) Revelation 19
- 7) Revelation 20

The seven visions of conflict explaining the Establishment of God's Kingdom between Rev. 11:15-13:8:

1. The woman with child: the birth of Jesus, 12:1-2

2. The great red dragon: the enemy of Peace, 12:3-6
3. The war in heaven: the Cross, 12:7-12
4. The dragon, the woman, and her children: the struggle of God's people, 12:13-17
5. The seven-headed beast from the sea, 13:1-4
6. The war against the saints: persecutions, 13:5-10
7. The beast and his mark: corruption of the emperor and the dragon's agents, 13:11-18

Then there are the Seven Visions of Zion, Rev. 14:1-20; the Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God, Rev. 15:1-16:21; the Seven Visions of the Fall of Babylon, Rev. 17:1-19:10; the Seven Visions of Recompense, Rev. 19:11-21:5.

The point is that the outline scenario of Daniel 7 is repeated in more detail in Revelation. But the primary reference remains the same- a prediction of a final time of trouble within the land promised to Abraham, which will come to term in the return of Christ to earth to establish His Kingdom upon the ruins of Israel's enemies. For this is the metanarrative of Daniel's prophecies, beginning from the empires dominating the land outlined in Daniel 2.

"Seven heads and ten horns" refers to how groups of seven and ten nations and kings surrounding Israel are associated with previous dominations of Israel (7= Dt. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; Acts 13:19; 10 = Gen. 15:18; Ps. 83; the ten surrounding nations starting with Egypt and ending with Babylon of Jer. 46-50; the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2, the ten horns of the beast of Daniel 7; the ten invading nations of Ez. 38 headed by Gog).

The similarity with the fourth beast of Daniel 7 have led many to see a fulfilment in Rome; with the seven heads referring to seven forms of government or the seven mountains, or hills, on which it is claimed Rome is built; or to seven capital cities in the Roman empire (Rome, Carthage, Aege, Antiochia, Augustodunum, Alexandria, and Constantinople). The ten horns are seen as ten European peoples who came out of the Roman empire. This may be true to a limited extent, but the events described here lead to the establishment of God's Kingdom. This didn't happen, and certainly not at the hands of Constantine as claimed. Further, the attempts to enumerate seven forms of Roman government, or ten kingdoms coming out of the broken up Roman empire, are arbitrary and seriously flawed. Far more than ten kingdoms came out of Rome; and Rome broke up over a period of time. Likewise the various forms of Government can be defined variously. It is all rather forced, and involves coming to history looking for a fulfilment of Revelation, rather than letting the symbols speak for themselves and find obvious fulfilment when the right time comes. J.B. Norris has written a helpful critique of the continuous historical approach to Roman history, which remains unanswered. He demonstrates the highly selective use of historical fact and the cherry picking of incidents to fit into a picture required by a pre-existing commitment to the continuous historical approach. The argument that the Roman empire broke up in a very short time into ten kingdoms is particularly suspect. There were far more kingdoms than Huns, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Alans, Burgundians, Heruli, Saxons and Lombards. And these are the kings of the "earth"; and there is absolutely no Biblical reason for interpreting the earth / land as Western Europe. That bears all the signs of 'Western' centric bias.

The Bible is Israel centred, focused upon the earth / land promised to Abraham. Daniel 2 predicts a sequence of body parts which shall dominate that area, and then Daniel 7 gives

more detail about these parts, expressing them in form of beasts, which shall come together in the last days to dominate the land and crush God's people. Revelation develops these beasts further- but the essential message is the same: it concerns the latter day domination of Israel by her enemies. There will be a final time of tribulation, resolved by the return of the Lord Jesus to earth and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. The seven diadems will then be seen as a poor imitation of the "many diadems" on Christ's head (19:12).

So in summary my suggestion is that the seven heads and ten horns on the dragon and beast refer to a quick succession or co-existence of various peoples, leaders or entities originating from or around the land promised to Abraham, which will persecute God's people in the last days. They will all form part of the coalition of evil known as the beast or dragon, and radical Islam will be their religion. The dragon / beast is clearly an extension of the fourth beast of Daniel 7. To understand that beast would require major exposition, which you can see at <http://www.n-e-v.info/cm/dan7com.html> , and yet that in turn requires an understanding of the image of Daniel 2 which is the basis for the beasts; see on <http://www.n-e-v.info/cm/dan2com.html> , and the development of the beasts in Daniel 8, see <http://www.n-e-v.info/cm/dan8com.html>

Dan. 7:21,22 speak of how the "saints" will be persecuted by the beast, and then "the saints" will 'possess the Kingdom'. The "saints" are Israel, the same Hebrew word is used in Ex. 19:5 to describe them as a holy or saintly nation, a nation of saints, sanctified ones. If we understand the Kingdom as primarily the land promised to Abraham's seed for them to 'possess', then this makes sense. That land will be dominated and trodden down by the beast, and then the remnant of Abraham's seed will triumphantly possess it eternally; and that mountain, or Kingdom, will then grow to fill the whole planet. The little horn devours, treads down and breaks in pieces "the earth" (Dan. 7:23); that has little meaning if applied to the whole planet. The context speaks of destruction and persecution of "the saints", God's people in His land. The reference is surely to the specific land of Israel.

The beast will "devour" the land (Dan. 7:7), just as the historical Babylon 'devoured' Jerusalem with fire (Jer. 30:16; Lam. 4:11; Ez. 15:5; 19:12; 23:25; Hos. 8:14; Am. 1:4; 2:5) and the Assyrians devoured the land (Jer. 50:17; Hos. 11:6; 13:8; Joel 1:4,19,20; 2:3,5,25). All these verses use the same word translated 'devour' in Dan. 7:7. Clearly enough, the 'devouring' of the fourth beast is a summation of all previous 'devourings' of God's land and people. Even in Old Testament times, this idea of a singular beast embodying all Israel's enemies was not unknown. For Ez. 34:28 looked forward to the day when "Neither shall the beast of the land devour them [any more]". Mal. 3:11 likewise speaks of how "the devourer" will be rebuked by God when finally Israel respond to the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:1). This again suggests that the final devouring of Israel will be whilst the Elijah prophet is making an ongoing appeal for their repentance and acceptance of Jesus. Once they do so, the devourer is rebuked and Jesus returns to His desperately repentant people.

12:4 *And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and he did throw them to the earth; and the dragon stands before the woman that is about to give birth, so that when she gives birth he may devour her child-* A dragon waves its tail before it pounces. The decorum of the symbol may mean that this is but the prelude to a greater, final destruction which the dragon wants to achieve. The earlier visions have described how 'thirds' of the people in the land are destroyed. Here we have this described in dramatic terms; a third of the stars (referring to the sons of Jacob, Gen. 37; or possibly to their leaders) are thrown to the earth,

in order to be trampled; we have just read of Jerusalem being trampled for three and a half years in 11:2. But the dragon at the same time intends to destroy the seed of the woman, the Christian believers, her newborn male child.

The attempt to destroy the newborn boy child is of course framed in terms of Pharaoh's attempt to destroy the baby boys of Israel in Egypt, and Herod's attempt to do the same to the Lord Jesus at His birth. But neither Pharaoh nor Herod achieved their aim; the baby boys of Israel, especially Moses, were somehow preserved; as was the Lord Jesus from Herod's intentions.

The coalition dominating the land promised to Abraham therefore seeks also to persecute the Christians there and not simply orthodox Jews. Is. 37:3 uses a significant figure in this context to describe how when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrians, with much of the land and people desolated, something was conceived, but there appeared no strength to deliver the child. That person conceived was a repentant remnant of Judah, who were perhaps prefigured by Isaiah's children of sign, and the unusual conception of his wife in Isaiah 7 which became typical of the Lord's conception and birth of a virgin.

The intention of all the latter day trauma which Revelation describes is to bring about the repentance of a remnant. This group of genuine Christians within the land, perhaps largely Jews, will elicit the especial wrath and attention of the dragon coalition. But just as the two witnesses of chapter 11 were miraculously preserved for three and a half years, so the woman and her child are likewise.

The little horn of Daniel 8 is connected with the dragon:

"... it cast down some ... of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them"	"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth"
(Daniel 8:10)	(Revelation 12:4)

The dragon drew a third of the stars of heaven to the earth with his tail. If this is read literally – and Revelation 12 has to be read literally to support the Popular Interpretation – the sheer size of the dragon is immense – a third of the whole universe (or solar system at least) could be contained just on his tail. There is no way the planet earth would be big enough to contain such huge creature sprawling over it. Most of the stars of the solar system are bigger than our earth – how then could a third of them land on earth? And remember that all this happened, or will happen, after the first century A.D., when this prophecy was given.

12:5 *And she gave birth to a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to His throne-* The "man child" is clearly referring to the Lord Jesus, who is to subdue the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5 = 2:27; 19:15). But this is a prophecy of events to happen after His birth. The entity the woman gives birth to is part of "the seed of the woman", they are "in Christ" as Paul would put it; but not the Lord Jesus personally. All that is true of Him becomes true of those in Him. We have

learnt already that those who overcome shall reign with Christ on His throne, and they too "shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces" (2:27). Perhaps that repentant Jewish remnant at this time will be literally snatched away from persecution and be preserved. It would seem that this man child is connected with the two witnesses, who die and are resurrected, and then likewise snatched away to Heaven: "And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them: Come up here! And they went into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them" (11:12). The woman who gave birth to this remnant would then refer to the true Christian believers who were already in existence before the tribulation started. They escape, as explained in :6.

12:6 *And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that there they may nourish her one thousand two hundred and sixty days-* This three-and-a-half-year period is surely the same "42 months" during which Jerusalem is trampled (11:2) and the same period during which the two witnesses testify before their death (11:3). It may be objected that the man child is snatched away before this three-and-a-half-year period begins (:5). It could be that the snatching away to God occurs not immediately, and that we are reading in :5 of a situation which finally occurs (after three and a half years) and now :6 backtracks to explain how this happens. For it was Mary who fled through the wilderness to Egypt with the man child in her arms. And it would seem that she was there in Egypt with the Lord for around three and a half years. This is the same period of the Elijah ministry (Lk. 4:25). The 'problem' with the witnesses being killed after this period and the man child being snatched away before it need not unduly concern us; I have many times made the point that we have in Revelation a kaleidoscope of images, and we are not being given any neat, linear chronological outline of events. As the images rotate and merge, there are going to be points of apparent overlap and morphing of images.

The woman who gave birth to the repentant Jewish remnant, the man child, finds safety in the wilderness as did Mary and as did Israel when they fled Egyptian persecution. There they too were provide for. This may connect with the picture presented in Is. 26:20 of the faithful entering into a quiet room, until the tribulations pass over. Likewise the letters to the churches with which Revelation open feature the idea of the faithful being somehow preserved from tribulation (see on 2:10). The only other time the Greek phrase "a place prepared" occurs is also in John's writings (Jn. 14:2,3); due to the Lord's death, salvation is assured for all in tribulation. The prepared place is in God's Kingdom (Mt. 25:34). Perhaps the woman will somehow be saved or given miraculous protection during this tribulation period.

12:7 *And there was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels retaliated-* John is as it were "in heaven", viewing things going on in the heavenly throne room. Each situation and entity on earth has representative Angels, who are God's Angels, and not themselves sinful nor rebellious; although they can represent sinful situations and actions on earth. Michael, the Angel who stands for Israel (Dan. 10:21; 12:1; Jude 9), fights with the dragon entity and his supporters. We note that Gabriel is the Angel associated with the Lord Jesus. But we read here of Michael, not Gabriel. This is not a struggle between Jesus and the devil. It speaks of a struggle between Israel and Israel's persecutors. But ultimately, those persecuting the Israelites are fighting God Himself and His Angels. The same word for "fought / retaliated" is used of how the beast which the dragon empowers appears invincible- "Who is able to make war [s.w.] against him?" (13:4). Yet he is effectively making war against God, who is at war against him (19:11); the beast in another

of its manifestations makes war / fights with the Lamb (17:14). This is another manifestation of the jihadists locusts rushing to "make war" (9:7,9 s.w.). The war is not only against Israel, but against the believers; for the same word is used of the beast making war against the two witnesses (11:7). This is all part of the final battle when the kings of the land gather to fight (16:14; 19:19 s.w.).

### **What it doesn't mean**

Angels cannot sin and that there can be no rebellion in heaven. Thus this passage – which is the only one of its kind – must be interpreted in a way that does not involve angels sinning or there being sinful angels making people sin on earth, seeing that sin comes from within us, not from outside of us (Mk. 7:20–23). Note carefully that there is no reference here to angels sinning or rebelling against God, only to a war in heaven.

That the Devil–dragon represents some kind of political power is indicated by it having “crowns upon his heads” (v. 3). Revelation 17:9,10 also comments on this dragon: “Here is the mind that hath wisdom” – i.e. don’t try and understand this animal as a literal being – “The seven heads are seven mountains... these are seven kings”. One of the kings continuing “a short space” perhaps connects with the Devil–dragon having “but a short time” in Revelation 12:12.

After the drama of :7–9, verse 10 says that there was “a loud voice saying in heaven, *now* is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night”. If :7–9 occurred at the beginning of the world, before the time of Adam and Eve, how could it be said that after Satan’s fall there came salvation and the kingdom of God? After Adam’s sin, mankind began his sad history of slavery to sin and failure – a state hardly to be described as “salvation” and the kingdom of God. There is rejoicing that the Devil – the accuser – has been cast down to earth. Why should there be rejoicing if his coming to earth was the start of sin and disaster for man? If a fall from heaven to earth is understood figuratively rather than literally, as representing a fall from authority (as Is. 14:12; Jer. 51:53; Lam. 2:1; Mt. 11:23), much more sense can be made of all this. If all this happened before the time of Adam, or at least before the fall of man, how could the Devil have been accusing “our brethren”, seeing they did not then exist? There is nothing indicating that all this happened in the Garden of Eden. A vital point is made in Revelation 1:1 and 4:1 – that the Revelation is a prophecy of “things which must shortly come to pass”. It is not therefore a description of what happened in Eden, but a prophecy of things to happen at some time after the first century, when the Revelation was given by Jesus. Any who are truly humble to the Word will see that this argument alone precludes all attempts to refer Revelation 12 to the Garden of Eden. The question has also to be answered as to why the identity of the Devil and information about what happened in Eden should be reserved until the end of the Bible before being revealed.

In view of this and many other things in Revelation 12 (and the whole prophecy) which are just incapable of any literal fulfilment, it is not surprising that we are told first of all (Rev. 1:1) that this is a message that has been “signified” – i.e. put into sign language, or symbol. As if to emphasize this in the context of Revelation 12, Revelation 12:1 describes the subsequent action as “a great sign” (A.V. margin). In reading of what the Devil does when he is on the earth, there is no description of him causing people to sin; indeed, vs. 12–16 show that the Devil was unsuccessful in his attempts to cause trouble on earth once he arrived



there. This contradicts the popular interpretation. In their eagerness to show that Rev. 12:7–9 refers to fallen angels at the beginning of the world, apologists for a personal Satan have rather overlooked the context of the passage. A woman in Heaven, in the agony of childbirth and resting her feet on the moon, is faced by a dragon, whose tail throws down a third of the stars of Heaven to earth (Rev. 12:4). She gives birth, and the child “was caught up unto God, and to his throne” (Rev. 12:5). Clearly enough the “heaven” where all this occurs isn’t the “heaven” where God lives and where His throne is. Next we read of a power struggle “in heaven”, and the dragon and his angels are “cast out” (Rev. 12:9). The dragon throws one third of the stars of Heaven to earth – are these Angels? If so, how come the dragon and not God casts them to earth? That’s quite the opposite of the scenario painted in *Paradise Lost*. How can a literalistic reading of this passage cope with the *two* episodes of Angels being cast down to earth? At the very least, care in thought and exposition is clearly lacking in the orthodox reading of this passage. The woman, who is never recorded as leaving “Heaven”, then flees “into the wilderness” (Rev. 12:6). Once the dragon is cast to the earth, then he starts persecuting the woman by hissing huge volumes of water at her (Rev. 12:13). The earth opens and swallows this water (Rev. 12:16) – even though the woman is never recorded as losing her “in heaven” status. All this is reason enough to not interpret “heaven” and “earth” in this passage in any literal manner. The appearance of the woman and dragon “in heaven” is described as a *semeion*, a “sign”, something that needs to be interpreted, rather than a literal fact (Rev. 12:1,3).

The language of ‘war’ is surely metaphor rather than literal description. What begins as a literal battle ends as a legal one, as the metaphor changes to the law court, with accusers, judge and Satan’s case rejected. If the legal language isn’t to be taken literally, why should the ‘war’ language be so literal?

### **The Chronological Problem**

The woman of :1 is “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars”. These heavenly bodies, as well as the woman, apparently suspended in heaven, cannot be literal. She could not literally be clothed with the sun, or have stars as big as the earth on her literal head.

Another sign appears in heaven in :3 – a red dragon. This is commonly taken as a literal heaven, but why should it be, seeing that the same heaven is referred to in v. 1 and that is clearly figurative? Verse 4 shows the dragon casting a third of the stars of heaven to earth. We have seen that because of the size of the stars and earth, this cannot therefore refer to literal stars or heaven. The Kingdom of God is to be established on earth (Dan. 2:44; Mt. 5:5), which will not be possible if the earth is destroyed (which it would be) by huge stars falling onto it.

The woman in “heaven” then delivered her child, who was “caught up unto God and to his throne” (v. 5). God’s throne is in heaven. If the woman was already in heaven, why would her child have to be “caught up” to heaven? She must have been a symbol of something on earth, although in a figurative “heaven”. She then flees “into the wilderness” (v. 6). If she was in literal heaven, this means there is a wilderness in heaven. It is far more fitting for her to be in a figurative heavenly place, and then flee to a literal or figurative wilderness on the earth.

We then come to v. 7 – “there was war in heaven”. All other references to “heaven” in Revelation 12 having been figurative, it seems only consistent that this was war in a

figurative heaven. This must be the case, as there can be no rebellion or sin in literal heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5:4–5; Hab. 1:13). The common view claims that wicked angels are locked up in hell; but here they are in heaven. They are not therefore literal angels.

I sometimes ask those who believe in the orthodox idea of the Devil the following question: ‘Can you give me a brief Biblical history of the Devil, according to your interpretation of Bible passages? The response is highly contradictory. According to ‘orthodox’ reasoning, the answer has to be something like this:

a) The Devil was an angel in heaven who was thrown out into the garden of Eden. He was thrown to earth in Gen. 1.

b) He is supposed to have come to earth and married in Gen 6.

c) At the time of Job he is said to have had access to both heaven and earth.

d) By the time of Is. 14 he is thrown out of heaven onto earth.

e) In Zech. 3 he is in heaven again.

f) He is on earth in Mt. 4.

g) He is “cast out” at the time of Jesus’ death, according to the popular view of “the prince of this world” being “cast out” at that time.

h) There is a prophecy of the Devil being ‘cast out’ in Rev. 12.

i) The Devil is “chained” in Rev. 20, but he and his angels were chained in Genesis, according to the common view of Jude 6. If he was bound with ‘eternal chains’ then, how is he chained up again in Rev. 20?

From this it should be obvious that the popular view that the Devil was cast out of heaven for sinning cannot be true, seeing that he is described as still being in heaven after each occurrence of being ‘cast out’. It is vital to understand both heaven and the Devil in a figurative sense.

## **Revelation 12: Deconstructing Pagan Myths**

Various scholars have shown that this passage is full of allusion to contemporary pagan myths (e.g. Neil Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) chapter 13). For example, the Greeks believed that the dragon Python attempts to kill the new born son of Zeus but is stopped the escape of the child’s mother, Leto, to the island of Delos; Apollo then comes and slays the dragon. For the Egyptians, Set the red dragon hunts Isis but is then killed by her son Horus. In other myths, the dragon of darkness tries to kill the sun god but is killed by him. There are other examples of the sun god myth being alluded to in Revelation. Take the description of Jesus as having eyes as a flaming fire and feet of pure bronze (Rev. 2:18). This is said to the Thyatira ecclesia – and the god of Thyatira was Apollo, the sun god, known locally as Tyrimnos, who appeared in this very form on the

city's coins. The point of the allusion was that actually, there is no sun god – for the Christians in Thyatira, that means Jesus.

This is in keeping with what we have seen elsewhere in the Scriptures – pagan myths are alluded to in order to deconstruct them. Surely the point of all the allusions here in Revelation 12 is to say: 'Take your attention away from all these myths of what supposedly is going on out in the cosmos. Get real. Here on earth, you are going to be persecuted by Rome [or some other adversary]. Prepare for it in your hearts. The real enemy isn't a dragon in the sky. It's Rome'. Other scholars have demonstrated that Revelation 12 and 13 contain many allusions to contemporary Jewish writings – e.g. Rev. 12:9; 13:14 speak of the beast / Satan "leading astray those that dwell on the earth", quoting from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and *Enoch* 54.6 about the armies of Azazel / Satan who "lead astray those that dwell on the earth". The point is that pagan Rome and the Jewish 'Satan' were those who were leading astray, and who would be punished in the cataclysm of AD70; and in a last days context, it is the latter day Satan / beast who will lead astray many and be destroyed by the second coming of Christ.

For 15 years Dr. David Pitt-Francis applied an exceptional mind to trying to get to grips with the book of Revelation (David Pitt-Francis, *The Most Amazing Message Ever Written* (Irchester, UK: Mark Saunders Books, 1983)). His conclusion, written up in chapter 9 of his book, was that not only does Revelation 12 not teach the existence of a personal Satan, but it actually is a parody of the whole belief in a sinful Satan figure existing in Heaven. He follows the approach that Revelation 12 alludes heavily to pagan myths of a Satan figure existing in Heaven, and that the whole idea of the chapter is to show that, given the victory of the Lord Jesus over all evil, those pagan ideas are just no longer tenable in any form. The idea of a Satan figure in Heaven has been 'cast down' for the serious believer in Christ: "Satan was imagined to have dominated at least a third of heaven in pre-Christian times. Babylonian, Zend and Teutonic thought assumed 'Satan' or his equivalent to be in possession of about a third of heaven. Jewish apostate thought (as in Enoch) also imagined a third of heaven to be in the possession of rebellious angels. The vision of a dragon occupying a third of heaven, and specifically defined as the 'Devil and Satan' is provided at this stage, not to indicate some literal fact, but to summarise the preconceptions about the Devil which had existed in pagan thought before the coming of Christ, and that had even crept into Judaism... It was primarily the task of Christianity to show the world that evil could have no place in heaven, that it did not occupy a place in heaven except in the imagination of mankind, and that it could be vanquished by the grace of Christ, and the Word of His testimony... The casting forth of Satan from heaven is a powerful symbol of what would happen to the human concept of evil as a result of the teaching of Christ. The woman and the dragon cannot coexist in heaven... Could there have been such a literal 'Devil' or even a 'literal' dragon, who perverted a third of the angels in heaven and cast them to the ground, as Jewish apocalyptic writers had actually believed? If we adopt this literalistic stance, we not only fall into the error of those books against which the Revelation was written but miss the main message of the chapter, that since the advent of Christianity to disprove the concept of imagined evil in heaven, no 'Devil' has ever had any place there". He goes on to suggest that 'Satan' in post-Christian religions [e.g. Islam] has always been envisaged as a being living under the earth, in a supposed "hell", rather than in Heaven. Whether or not we feel happy with this kind of 'spiritualized' interpretation of Revelation, the allusions of Revelation 12 to material in the book of Enoch about Heavenly rebellions, Enoch being caught up to God etc., cannot be gainsaid. And I suggest that such allusions are indeed, as David Pitt-Francis suggests, in order to deconstruct these wrong ideas.

## First century applications

Revelation is a description of events on earth from the perspective of what happens in Heaven – encouraging the early Christians that God and His Son and His Angels are in fact intensely aware of the crises going on, and actually the whole scenario is playing itself out in the court of Heaven. All powers and individuals and organizations on earth have in Heaven their Angelic representatives, and the situations are tried by God before His throne – with the result that it is those on the side of Christ who are vindicated. The language with which John's Apocalypse achieves this is shot through with allusion to earthly realities, often deconstructing the claims of pagans. Rome was the great reality of the first century world; it was appropriate for the Jewish mind of the time to understand the “serpent” / adversary figure as referring to Rome. According to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, “the Serpent is spoken of as *Harasha*’, “the Wicked One,” in Gen. R. xx., Bek. 8a (compare Targ. Yer. Gen. iii. 13); and Rome as the wicked kingdom, *Malkut ha-resha'ah* (Gen. R. lxxvi.)” (5).

Roman coins depicted the goddess Roma, THEAN ROMEN, as queen of the gods and mother of the world's saviour. John speaks of she who claims to be the queen of the earth (Rev. 18:7) – and portrays her instead as nothing but a prostitute, who is soon to be destroyed. The fact Revelation alludes to the goddess Roma in this way doesn't mean that 'she' actually existed in Heaven in reality. And the way John in Rev. 12 likewise alludes to myths about dragons and beasts doesn't mean they exist either. The material in Rev. 12 has some twists in it which debunk the legends – thus it is not emperor of Rome who slays the dragon, it is the victory of Christ on the cross, through His blood, which is the real means of victory against all opposition on earth. The telling paradox is that the escape for the persecuted child is through *death*, through blood, rather than through some dashing heroic victory in battle. When Jeremiah compared Babylon to a dragon gulping down Jerusalem whole, we don't for a moment think that Babylon was a literal dragon (Jer. 51:34); likewise when Ezekiel calls Pharaoh a dragon lying in a stream (Ez. 29:3). The message was that the real dragon / chaos monster was earthly powers – and God would break them. And so it is with Revelation's message, although more attention is given to the idea of those earthly powers having Angelic representatives in the court of Heaven.

The language of judgment is really common throughout the Bible. In fact we could say that legal language is disproportionately common in the Bible. The idea of a Divine, heavenly court is common. God is the judge who upholds the weak, those who are condemned by human judgment (1 Sam. 24:15; Ps. 9:4; 43:1; 140:12; Lam. 3:58; Mic. 7:9); He is even portrayed as the one appealing for justice (Ps. 74:22). If God is the only and ultimate judge, then *His* judgment is all that ultimately matters, and in this sense human 'sentences' or judgment from the court of human opinion are reversed by Him (Prov. 22:22,23). Yet the pain of being judged by those around us is highly significant to us mortals; and time and again, Scripture is reminding us that we should not pay deep attention to this, because God's judgment is what ultimately matters; and the Divine court is sitting in session right now, at the very same time as those around us are judging us with their meaningless human judgments. This, then, is the ultimate answer to the pain of being slandered and defamed, being misunderstood and misrepresented, or feeling that persecution by worldly powers is not noticed by God.

The traditional reading of Revelation 12 makes out that there was a rebellion in Heaven, the Devil came down to earth, and then trouble started down here. But the whole idea of Revelation's visions of 'heaven' is that we are being given snapshots of the 'throne room' of

Heaven, the Divine court... which is a reflection of what is actually going on here on earth, and what will subsequently follow from this in the future. I wish to stress this point, because I think it's fundamental to understanding Revelation. Those visions aren't historical descriptions of what happened before creation, before human history. They are insights into how God right then in the first century viewed what was going on there in the Middle East on planet earth, showing us how He judged the situations and Governments and individuals involved, and what would follow from this. Thus when we read that no place was found for the opposing forces in Heaven (Rev. 12:8), we are to imagine the representative of those forces, the barrister as it were, being thrown out of court. They would simply disappear from the Heavenly court room, thrown out of court as it were, perhaps reflected by the Angel representing them leaving the court. What makes interpreting Revelation so confusing is that there are so many layers of allusion going on in the text at one and the same time. Thus Rev. 12 alludes to the surrounding myths, and yet also on multiple further layers to Old Testament themes. The vision of Rev. 12 clearly has in mind Pharaoh pursuing the escaping Israelites as a dragon pursues (Ex. 14:8), Israel like the early church carried on eagles' wings to some safety (Ex. 19:4), Pharaoh trying to destroy Israel by drowning them in the water of the Nile, God providing for His people in the desert. Again, these allusions are to a real historical situation that happened here on earth – and not to some Biblically unrecorded drama somewhere out in the cosmos.

12:8 *But he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven-* God's side are assured of victory. Literally, the dragon was 'of no power'; for all such power is vested in the Lord Jesus (s.w. 5:12; 7:12). And yet viewed from earthly perspectives, the dragon appears invincible in power (13:4). John is viewing heaven opened, and the geopolitical situation in the land in the very last days being played out before him, with Angelic actors, as it were, representing the various entities on earth. But now the dragon has no more place there; this can also be understood as meaning he had no more power, reading 'heaven' as symbolic of power. We will still read of the dragon; giving power to the beast, and then being chained in chapter 20. Again we see that the visions are not intended to be interpreted in such a way that there emerges a linear chronological progression of events. Rather are we seeing different perspectives and angles on the same ultimate realities. The dragon finally loses power- that is the point.

12:9 *And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him-* The conflict between God and the persecuting coalition of the last days will be the final manifestation of God's battle with sin and evil. He will finally be revealed as triumphant. Perhaps the symbology of a woman is chosen in :1 exactly so as to point up this allusion to the battle between the women and the serpent which began in Gen. 3:15. Eden is now about to be restored. This latter day entity will have deceived the world- perhaps a reference to an influence larger than over the earth / land promised to Abraham. For the coalition of evil will have deceived people worldwide to support their mania against Israel and Christians. It is hard not to see reference here to radical Islam. The same word for 'deceit' is often used in the Olivet prophecy. There would be 'deceit' associated with false prophets (and "the false prophet" is associated with the beast in Revelation- a likely reference to some incarnation of Mohammed, some jihadist imams claiming to be God's prophets on earth). This will "deceive many", here called "the whole world" (Mt. 24:4,5,11,24), "the nations" (20:3), especially those in the corners of the land promised to Abraham (20:8). The deceit will involve claims that the Christ has come (Mt. 24:5)- perhaps a reference to some jihadist

claim about the Mahdi. This deception will be given surface level credibility by false miracles performed by "the false prophet" (13:14; 19:20), which are in fact performed by magic (18:23). The deceitful coalition is cast from heaven to earth; this is figurative for a loss of power, but this entity is now pictures as angry and desperate on the earth / land promised to Abraham.

The Greek word *ballo* translated "cast out" doesn't necessarily mean to throw *down* – Greek has words for this specific idea and it's significant that they're not used here. Here are a few examples of the usage of *ballo*, showing that it really means to expel or re-place:

- A wind "arose" (Acts 27:14); a crowd "threw" dust *up* into the air (Acts 22:23); a sword is "put *up*" into a sheath (Jn. 18:11) imply the word can mean to throw *up* as well as to throw *down*.
- Men "cast" stones (Jn. 8:7,59), "strike" another man on the face (Mk. 14:65), "put" fingers in the ear (Mk. 7:33), people "lay" upon a bed (Mt. 8:6,14; 9:2; Mk. 7:30) – horizontal movement.
- We "put" bits into the mouths of horses (James 3:3) – no vertical movement there. Thomas "thrust" his hand into the Lord's side (Jn. 20:27).
- Believers were "cast" into prison (Acts 16:24,37; Rev. 2:10) – the idea of vertical movement isn't there. Likewise love "casts out" fear (1 Jn. 4:18).
- The dragon casts water out of his mouth (Rev. 12:15,16), horizontally along the ground. Here the word clearly doesn't mean to throw *down* from a height – and the same word is used in that context for the Devil being "cast out", i.e. ejected, from Heaven.
- Men "cast" dust on their own heads (Rev. 18:19).

The serpent is cast out of heaven, implying it was originally there. But the literal serpent in Eden was created by God out of the dust of the earth (Gen. 1:24–25). There is no implication that the Devil came down from heaven and got inside the serpent. The language of "cast down" and "cast out" does not require literal downwards movement – Babylon is "thrown down" in Rev. 18:21. The O.T. basis of "cast out" is in the nations / beasts being cast out from God's presence in the land of Israel. In Rev. 12 we have another woman in the wilderness, who enters the Kingdom [cp. the land] once the beast is cast out. In Dan. 7:9 the thrones of the beast / kingdoms are "cast down" before God's Kingdom is established on earth, just as the beast is cast down before the establishment of the Kingdom in Rev. 12. The idea of being cast out of Heaven was and is common in Semitic languages and even wider culture for a loss of power – thus Cicero comments about Mark Anthony: "You have hurled your colleagues down from heaven".

"That old serpent" (Rev. 12:9) is often misread to mean that the original serpent in the Garden of Eden is now a dragon in the sky. But care in thought and Biblical exposition is lacking in such a view. The orthodox understanding is that Satan sinned in Heaven, and was thrown down to earth, where he tempted Eve in the form of a serpent. But Rev. 12:9 is a prophecy of the *future*, just prior to the return of Christ to earth, saying that *then* there will be a conflict "in heaven" – which we understand to be figurative language. The orthodox interpretation does violence to the obvious chronology, and is evidently an opportunistic grabbing hold of Biblical phrases with no attention at all to their context, and stringing them together to justify popular Christianity's adoption of Jewish and pagan myths about the Devil. In passing, note how Gen. 3:15 prophesies that God *will* put hostility between the serpent and the woman. This is not what we would expect to hear if this were indeed speaking of a pre-existent Christ and Satan. According to the orthodox understanding, the enmity between them

occurred in Heaven *before* Satan supposedly came down to earth. Notice, too, that according to the Biblical record in Gen. 3:15 it is God who created this hostility, whereas the common view implies it was Satan's hatred of God which was the original enmity. We read that the dragon / serpent's "place" was not "found" in Heaven as a result of the final struggle (Rev. 12:8). The same term is to be found in Rev. 20:11, where we read that the 'Heaven and earth' had no place found for them in Heaven as a result of Christ's final sitting in judgment. Clearly, 'Heaven and earth' are figurative – used here, as so often in the Bible, to refer to a system of things. Notice how the Devil / dragon / serpent are thus paralleled with the 'Heaven and earth'. This worldly system of things in the last days, the dragon / serpent power, will be no more after the final judgment seat of Christ. We see all this prefigured in how the rejected Esau came before his father Isaac, typical of the rejection of the wicked at the final judgment, and "found no place", despite his tears and gnashing of teeth (Heb. 12:17). The rejected *people* at the final judgment will "not be able" to enter God's Kingdom then (Lk. 13:24) – and the same Greek word is used in Rev. 12:8 to describe how the serpent / Devil system of people will not "prevail". Clearly the reference of Rev. 12 is to the very last day, when Christ returns to earth in judgment. The serpent 'not prevailing' and 'finding no place' with God in 'Heaven' refers [in the light of the same terms used in other Bible passages] to what happens at the final judgment, at Christ's second coming, and it is therefore *not* descriptive of some past events in Eden. It's also noteworthy that the serpent / Devil is 'cast down' from Heaven to make "woe" for "the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea" (Rev. 12:12). This hardly sounds like the orthodox Satan of *Paradise Lost* being thrown down to earth to make trouble for just Adam and Eve. The people who inhabit "the sea" rather than the earth surely indicates that we are to understand all this literally. And it is "the serpent" who is thrown down from Heaven to the earth / sea. Orthodox thinking holds that Satan was cast down and became a serpent here on earth rather than being a serpent "in Heaven" as Rev. 12 requires. In any case, the woman in Rev. 12 is persecuted by the serpent rather than being charmed and tempted by him; and she escapes from him by fleeing into "the wilderness", which makes the serpent mad with her (Rev. 12:13–17). None of this Biblical testimony fits the orthodox interpretation of the passage – it directly contradicts it.

When we read that the Devil–dragon "deceives" people, this is defined more specifically in Rev. 19:20 as referring to deceiving people in the very last days by false miracles worked in conjunction with the "false prophet". Thus the deceit is not to be understood as a general inciting of humanity to sin in their hearts – the deceit is specified as occurring only in the last days, immediately prior to the Kingdom of God being established.

The "old serpent" may be a reference to the characteristics of the serpent whom we meet in Genesis. The serpent–Eve incident played itself out in history, and still does, in that the children of the woman [God's people] are tempted and now threatened by the powers of sin and sinful organizations. Thus Paul could say that in the same way as the serpent tempted Eve, so Jewish false teachers in the early church were tempting the true bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). So it was again in the persecution of true Christians by the Roman empire, which Rev. 12 initially refers to; so it was throughout history; and so it will be in the time of the final tribulation before the second coming of Christ. My specific suggestions as to the fulfilment of Rev. 12 in the latter day tribulation can be found in *The Last Days* Chapter 12–7.

The dragon power is associated with "the false prophet" and the doing of fake miracles (Rev. 13:14; 19:20) – this is the basis upon which the dragon / Satan / adversary of God's people "deceives" the world (Rev. 12:9). There are multiple connections between the Lord's Olivet

prophecy and the prophecy of the book of Revelation. Almost every commentary on Revelation brings these out, and I have listed many of them in *The Last Days* Chapter 12. The Lord Jesus repeatedly warned His followers not to be “deceived” – using the same Greek word as in Rev. 12:9 about the dragon / Devil ‘deceiving’ unbelievers. But He warns time and again that the source of this deception will be from “*men*... false prophets... false Christs... false prophets” doing false miracles (Mt. 24:4,5,11,24). Jesus says nothing about some fallen–Angel ‘Satan’ being behind these men. He simply warns His followers to beware of *human* deceivers – and Rev. 12 fills out the picture by specifically painting these *men* as part of a massive *human* system called Satan, the adversary, who would have all the characteristics of the serpent in Eden, just as the adversaries of God’s people always have had. This system of opposition, in the first century context, was both Jewish and Roman – hence the dragon is called both “the Devil and Satan” in Rev. 12:9 – *diabolos* being the Greek term for the Hebrew *Satan*. They are practically interchangeable – but both terms occur here, I suggest, in order to show that the opposition to Christianity was coming from both Jewish and Gentile sources. Time and again the New Testament writers warn the Christians of both Jews and Gentiles, *men* [not demons, spirits, fallen Angels, Satan etc. – but *men*] who “seek to deceive you” (1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; James 1:16). “Be not deceived” is a watchword of Paul (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7). It is the *world* which is deceived by wicked men (1 Tim. 3:13; Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:25) – just as Rev. 12:9 says that the dragon / Satan system will deceive “the whole world”. That system was thus composed of wicked *men*. In all these passages, the very same Greek word occurs which is translated “deceive” in Rev. 12:9. Again we have to ask – why did Jesus, Paul, Peter, James and John not spell out to their converts that it was really *Satan* who was tempting them and likely to deceive them? Why do they repeatedly stress that it is *men* and the human heart (Heb. 3:10; 1 Jn. 1:8) who are the deceivers? Why do we have to wait until the very last book of the Bible to be told that actually, it’s Satan who’s doing this? How can belief in a personal Satan be so crucial to many churches, when the earliest Christian converts [made before Revelation was given] had been taught nothing about any Angel falling from Heaven and being responsible for temptation? Was there one Gospel for them, but another for the 21st century church?

“The great dragon was... that old serpent” (Rev. 12:9). The dragon had “seven heads and ten horns” (v. 3), therefore it was not literally the serpent. It being called “that old serpent” shows that it had the characteristics of that serpent in Eden, in the sense of being a deceiver, as the serpent was. Thus the Devil is not literally the serpent. If it is, then the dragon is the snake. But the dragon is a political power, manifesting sin (Satan). Pharaoh is likened to a great dragon (Ez. 32:2) but we can’t reason that therefore he was a literal dragon. Similarly, “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56), but that does not mean that death is a literal snake. It has the characteristics of the snake, through its association with sin. How could the Devil have deceived “the whole world” (v. 9) before he was thrown out of heaven seeing that there was no one in the world before Adam?

The Greek *archaios*, translated “old” in Rev. 12:9 and Rev. 20:2, can easily be misread as meaning simply ‘the archaic / very old’ serpent. But *archaios* is a form of the Greek root *arche* – the dragon power of Rev. 12 is the arch–serpent, the archetypal serpent. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the serpent is very old. For the serpent who tempted Eve suffered from the curse which came upon all other “beasts of the field” (Gen. 3:1), and died. We see serpents today eating dust and crawling on their bellies, living and dying like any other creature. The *arche* serpent doesn’t therefore mean ‘the extremely old serpent, the animal



who tempted Eve, is still actually alive'. We meet the word *arche* elsewhere in the context of meaning 'archetype' rather than 'having been in existence from the beginning of Biblical history': "The *principles* (Gk. *arche*) of Christ" (Heb. 6:1); "the first (Gk. *arche*) principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12); and quite commonly *arche* is simply translated as "magistrates", "rulers", "principalities" – the ordering, *arch*-principles and foundations of society (Lk. 12:11; 20:20; Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15; Tit. 3:1). In line with this understanding, I think we could fairly paraphrase Rev. 12:9 as: "The great dragon, the classic, typical serpent, the thinking and behaviour of Eden's snake played out all over again in classic role, the Gentile / Roman Devil and the Jewish Satan, an evil system adversarial to God's true people".

Austin Farrar coined the term "a rebirth of images" (Austin Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963)) to describe what's going on in Revelation. Old Testament images are taken up and given a new focus; and this is what's happened with the image of the serpent. It's not a reference to *the same* serpent as was in Eden – but a rebirth of that image. G.B. Caird has commented on the very common error of interpretation made with Rev. 12: "Later Christian tradition, by the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, treated this as a precosmic event... quite failing to recognize that John's imagery had an earthly referent" (G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 55). What Caird is saying, in dense theological language, is that Christian folk have over literally interpreted the reference to the serpent, assuming that Rev. 12 is talking about something happening before creation, when in fact it is referring to things happening on earth in John's own generation.

12:10 *And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying: Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers is cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night-* The great voice is presumably from the Angels representing the faithful. Not that the faithful personally are in Heaven, for there is no conscious survival of death. But their representative Angels are there, who look upon those persecuted by the dragon as their "brothers". The dragon is a veritable *diabolos*, a false accuser. In Jewish thought, one can be accused before God, in the heavenly throne room, without personally being there. Within John's writings we have a classic example in Jn. 5:45, where the same word is again used of how Moses [who was dead] accused the Jews before God. Our own thoughts accuse us to God (Rom. 2:15). The dragon entity had representation before the throne of God, falsely accusing "our brothers". The reference would presumably be to the Jewish Christian remnant, rather than to Jewish people generally. The accusation was in the sense that the Islamists consider Jews and Christians to be especially worthy of Divine condemnation; they justify their extreme judgment against Jews and Christians on the basis that they say God has spoken harshly against them. The Koran is full of this kind of thing. God is not unmindful of it.

There are copious links between Rev. 12 and Mt. 24. This chapter therefore has reference to the last days as well as AD70, bearing in mind the reference of the Olivet prophecy to these two periods. What proves this beyond doubt is that as soon as the dragon is cast out we are told "Now is come salvation... the Kingdom of our God... for the accuser of our brethren is cast down" (12:10). Neither salvation nor the Kingdom of God can fully come without the second coming. If Scripture interprets Scripture, then the dragon being cast out must refer to the events of the second coming. There is rejoicing because the believers were no longer

being accused (Greek 'seized upon' or accused in a law court), implying that this will be going on until the dragon/beast is cast out by Michael, the Angel who acts for God's people in the last days (Dan. 12:1). The dragon accusing them before God sounds like Job's satan- as if the supreme intensity of suffering brought upon a materialistic, self-justifying Job to make him fit for God's full fellowship points forward to our tribulation to come. As Job was brought to say that he had heard of God by the hearing of the ear (theoretically), but now, through his sufferings, "my eye sees You" (Job 42:5), so the latter day tribulation will develop God's people.

The 'accusation' of God's people "before God" by the serpent / Devil doesn't mean he has to be literally in Heaven (Rev. 12:10). The same term is found in Jn. 5:45 where the Lord Jesus states that the long-dead Moses 'accuses' the Jews to God. Our own thoughts accuse us to God (Rom. 2:15). What all this surely means is that things done on earth, good and bad, even thoughts and feelings, are somehow represented before the throne of God, perhaps by representative Angels there, and God [to continue the figure] 'judges' those reported accusations. But this doesn't require our literal presence in Heaven to do this. The first century mind, especially those from a Jewish background, would likely have picked all this up with no problem; it is the European insistence on literalism in semantics which has led to so many of the problems in interpretation which these verses have given rise to. We have to somehow shed our slowness and hesitancy to accept that figures [e.g. of a judgment court replete with literal books, throne, accusers, witnesses] are just that- figures.

The 'coming' of salvation and the public assumption on earth of the power, authority etc. which the Lord already has in Heaven can only fully speak of the second coming. Any application to any other events are mere shadows and unworthy of much attention compared to the obvious application to the second coming.

12:11 *And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they did not love their life even to death-* This may imply that their testimony to others is related to their victory against the dragon. The language of overcoming is applied to us all in the letters which opened Revelation. The faithful overcome by the blood of the lamb- by what is done for them- and also by the word of their preaching, as if the act of preaching and witnessing against a hostile persecuting system was what helped maintain their faith. Preaching is a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the preacher. Through their work of witnessing, the persecuted believers overcome their tribulation. Witness is therefore not because God is in need of it, but for the personal spiritual benefit of the witnesses. The testimony made by the "brothers" is that of the two witnesses in 11:7. It is the final witness amidst tribulation that is resolved by the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the Kingdom. See on Mt. 24:14. It is this fearless Christian witness which provokes the beast of chapter 11 to ascend out of the pit to make war with them; and the dragon likewise goes to make war with the woman and the remnant at this time in chapter 12. As the two witnesses are killed at the end of their witness, so here it is during their work of witness that "they loved not their lives unto the death".

12:12 *Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea! Because the Devil has gone down to you, having great anger, knowing that he has but a short time-* Those John was observing in "Heaven" could refer to the Angels. But we have just read of some of the latter day faithful being observed being snatched up to "heaven"

(11:12; 12:5). Perhaps it is specifically they who are referred to. But this defeat by Divine force, just as Pharaoh experienced, provoked a final burst of wrath by the dragon entity. The earth would refer to the land promised to Abraham; and the sea perhaps to the neighbouring territories.

"Therefore he shall go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many" (Dan. 11:44) is a commentary on Sennacherib's rage (2 Kings 19:27,28). Rabshakeh boasted immediately after the receipt of the "rumour" that Assyria would 'utterly destroy' Israel still (2 Kings 19:11). This is matched by "to *destroy*, and *utterly* to make away" in Dan. 11:44. The fury of Assyria against Jerusalem because of their recognition that they only had limited time to destroy it before having to turn their attention against the Arab rebels is the basis of the Jihadist beast of the last days going forth against God's people with "having great anger, knowing that he has but a short time" (:12,17). In the same way as "the king of Babylon heard the report" of the Medes' invasion and was troubled (Jer. 50:43), so the latter-day "king of the north", while personally present conducting the campaign against Jerusalem, will be troubled by "tidings" of this massive Muslim mutiny against him, and will therefore go ahead in a furious rage to try to exterminate every Jew left in Jerusalem (Dan. 11:44,45). Jer. 51:31,32 stresses how the report of the attack on Babylon will spread like wildfire. This relates to the beast launching a final burst of persecution against God's people, "having great anger, knowing that he has but a short time".

If the Devil was cast down in Eden, he has had the opportunity to torment man throughout his long history – which is hardly having only “a short time” in which to wreak havoc.

12:13 *And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that had brought forth the man child-* The allusion is to how Pharaoh recognized he had been beaten by Divine power; and hastily sought to hunt the Israelites to death. That motif is continued by the way in which the destruction of Israel's latter day invaders is celebrated with the "Song of Moses" sung after the Red Sea deliverance (15:3). There are references to Israel and Egypt; the woman flees away from the dragon (cp. Egypt) into a wilderness, but is pursued by the dragon (12:13), who tries to use water as a means of destroying her (12:15; cp. the Red Sea), but by a miracle Israel are preserved from it. The woman is carried on eagle's wings, as Israel were out of Egypt (Ex. 19:4). The woman is "nourished" during the three and a half years, as Israel were fed with manna in the wilderness. Jesus reasons in John 6 that the manna represents the word of God. It may follow that the nourishing of the seed of the woman in the wilderness of her latter day tribulation will be through some special spiritual feeding programme designed by God. It may well be through an increased level of understanding of the Apocalypse and other prophecies of the tribulations which we will then be experiencing.

The wrath of the dragon is because the woman "had brought forth the man child". I suggested above that this refers to the successful preaching of the Gospel to the extent that some Jews repent, forming the repentant remnant which is miraculously preserved from the dragon. It is quite imaginable that exactly because of this, the dragon will so hate the woman, the true Christian church. "Persecute" is the same word used in the Olivet prophecy, of how the true disciples will be persecuted in Israel both in AD70 and especially in the last days (Lk. 21:12).

12:14 *And there was given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly*

*into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time from the presence of the serpent-* "The great eagle" is a symbol for both Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 7:4; Ez. 17:3,12) and Pharaoh king of Egypt (Ez. 17:7,17). It could be that in some way, some element of the persecuting coalition assists her; this would then be parallel with the earth / land helping the woman by swallowing up the flood spewed by the dragon. This repeating of the same idea through two different images is typical of what I mean by saying that Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images, ever rotating, reinforcing general impressions and themes, and yet with each image still unique. In the same way we read in :6 that the woman flees; here in :14 that idea is repeated, but with the detail that she flees by flying. Or it could be that we should read without the article, "two wings of an eagle", as if part of the cherubim vision of 7:4 [the "eagle" aspect of it] assists the woman to safety. Note the connection of Angel and eagle at 8:13. And the allusion would then be to how God brought His people to safety from Egypt "on eagle's wings" (Ex. 19:4; Dt. 32:11).

The woman is in the wilderness, in the presence of the serpent / dragon; for the dragon spits water at her (:15), and in 17:3,8 the beast arises from the wilderness with the blood of the saints. So whilst the woman as a whole is preserved, miraculously, some believers will die as a result of the dragon's mania against them there. The description of a conflict between a serpent and a woman and her seed in 12:14-16 must refer back to Gen. 3:15- from which we can conclude that there will be a short term victory for the devil/ dragon over the seed of the woman in the last days.

The nourishing or feeding for three and a half years recalls Elijah being miraculously fed for his three-and-a-half-year ministry, with ravens bringing him meat at one stage. The woman is part of the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days, witnessing to Israel under persecution.

*12:15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood-* Pharaoh has been alluded to in previous verses; here perhaps is in view his plan to trap Israel and hurl them into the waters of the Red Sea. It was God who provided a stream of water in the desert; yet here the serpent does the same. Likewise it was God who destroyed the earth by a flood; and here the serpent attempts to do just the same. This is the principle of anti-Christ, appearing as the Father or Son when in fact they were bitterly opposed to them and imitating them.

The other allusion is to the Assyrian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem being likened to a river gushing toward God's people (Is. 8:7). This is typical of the latter day Assyrian dominating the earth / land. But just as the Assyrian was unsuccessful in taking Jerusalem, so the latter day river will be swallowed up [the Greek for river and "flood" here is the same].

*12:16 And the earth helped the woman; the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth-* "The earth helped the woman" might refer to some of the Islamists indirectly 'helping' the woman by turning against Babylon. See on Rev. 17:16. I suggested on :14 that the woman escapes through the wings of an eagle, and this may parallel this thought- if we understand the eagle as the symbol of the abusers. Somehow something within their own system enabled her to survive. The earth opening has been encountered in 9:2, where the bottomless pit is opened. Perhaps it is this very source of the locusts which absorbs the flood of judgment the dragon spits out against the woman. The language suggests that the dragon plays God in bringing a flood upon the woman. The Islamists justify their judgment of Jews and Christians by arguing they have Divine, even

Biblical, warrant for doing so. But they are stopped in this, in that the flood is swallowed by the opening earth- itself a sign of condemnation. This is language very similar to how the Koran describes the abating of the flood in Noah's time: "And it was said: O earth! Swallow thy water and, O sky! be cleared of clouds! And the water was made to subside" (Sura 11.44). They themselves will realize that their pogrom of destruction against "the woman" is being stopped by God.

*12:17 And the dragon grew angry with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed that keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus-* Revelation 12 begins with the dragon trying to kill the man child born of the woman, and now at the end of the vision he seeks to kill the rest of her children. I earlier interpreted the man child as the Jewish Christian converts who repent and who are miraculously taken away from persecution. "The rest of her seed" would refer to another group of her spiritual children. They hold the testimony of Jesus in that they too witness to their new faith, in the face of the most awful opposition and persecution. He persecutes "the remnant" of the seed of the woman, just as the fourth beast of Dan. 7:7,19 downtreads "the remnant".

We need to note the parallels between Revelation 12 and 20. There we meet again "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and satan" (12:9 = 20:2). The repetition of this exact phrase indicates we are being given another angle on events here in chapter 12. At the time of the establishment of God's Kingdom, the figurative "thousand years" (see notes on chapter 20), this entity persecutes the faithful; and then once the Kingdom has been established [not at the end of some 1000 year Millennial reign], he is released from his prison and makes a futile attack upon the "camp of the saints" before being finally destroyed by fire (20:9). This event is therefore spoken of here in chapter 12 as 'making war' with 'the rest of the woman's seed'. This is the final stage of the ancient conflict envisaged in Gen. 3:15 between the seed of the woman and the serpent.

Rev. 12 indicates that the dragon is unsuccessful in totally destroying the woman, and therefore turns in a brief period of fury "to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). Here we have the same idea as in 11:7; three and a half years of witnessing amidst persecution, followed by a brief, intense period of horror, as Christ's three and a half year ministry was terminated by three and a half days of especial suffering. Notice that the dragon goes into the wilderness to persecute the woman's seed; 17:3,8 describes a beast from the wilderness, full of the blood of the saints. Thus the beast of Rev. 17 is also to be read in a latter day context.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *And I stood upon the sand of the sea*- A position associated with the seed of Abraham in their land. This is the perspective from which we must view the beasts. The sea shore is on the earth / land promised to Abraham. John is viewing things from the very edge of that territory.

*And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea*- If the earth is the land promised to Abraham, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, then this beast arises from the sea of nations and peoples immediately surrounding it. Iran comes to mind, as does Egypt and Libya, all home to jihadist Islamists with a sworn hatred of Israel. Turkey is also in view, and we can expect her to become more deeply anti-Israel.

There is a clear parallel between the four winds which strove with each other upon the sea, and the four beasts who came up out of the sea. The impression is that these beasts all exist at the same time, and their conflict with each other leads to the final appearance of a beast which represents all of them; and this entity dominates the earth / land promised to Abraham, and God's people upon it. The appearance of this entity will therefore be brought about by massive conflict within the land promised to Abraham- and this is what we are seeing before our eyes. The only uniting issue between the powers in that area is a common hatred of Israel and desire to take Jerusalem. This will be the basis of the final beast arising. We can perhaps look to the development of four distinct power groups within the land promised to Abraham, giving rise to ten 'kings' or leaders, the horns of the beast, the ten toes of the image. The period of conflict between those groups could be very brief. We need not, therefore, think that the Lord's coming isn't near because we can't currently identify those four entities or ten leaders. What we are seeing before our eyes is the winds blowing on the sea, striving between the peoples of the land / earth promised to Abraham, leaving millions dead and the entire region in bitter division. And this, according to Daniel 7, will give rise to the emergence of the final entity of abuse, perhaps on the pattern of the entity known as the Islamic State.

We should therefore be looking for a group of four kings / kingdoms, out of which arise ten kings / kingdoms; and out of them arises one "little horn" in particular. Revelation's take on the beasts adds more detail- there are also seven heads, a false prophet acting as publicity agent for the beast, a whore riding the beast, sitting on seven hills / kings. The four beasts / kings are initially in conflict, striving with each other upon the sea, and arising from that comes the fourth beast entity, the composite beast including elements of all the previous ones. And from that there arises the ten horns and one little horn. We should not, however, think of these situations as having to be chronological developments, i.e. first the four, then the fourth beast, then the ten horns, then the little horn. It may work out like that, but not necessarily. The precise details need not concern us ahead of time; the picture is of a series of leaders and powers involved in the domination of the land promised to Abraham. The fact is, the beasts will all exist together in the last days, just as the metals of the image will. These various entities will "arise" from the land. And this is what we see happening already- in the last few years there has been what is called the Arabic, and particularly Sunni, *sahwa*, 'awakening'. Powers and kings have risen up out of the scrubland and desert of the *eretz*, united in their hatred of Israel, but bitterly divided against each other.

We are for sure in the stage of the winds / *ruach* / Angel controlled nations 'striving' with each other- the *eretz* is full of conflict as never before, not just between Israel and her neighbours, but between those neighbours. There are currently four non-Jewish nations within the *eretz*- Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. But they exist just on paper as lines on the

map; there are other significant entities within the area, e.g. Kurdistan, the Islamic State, Gaza, parts of Egypt and Turkey [depending how one defines the northern border of Israel], parts of Saudi Arabia [depending how the eastern border is defined]. In total they make ten kingdoms, but the number ten may not be literal. We would then be awaiting for the "little horn" to arise- a charismatic, antiChrist leader, or perhaps another very small entity. For the horn is called the *little* horn, and yet it is the most powerful in the very last days. However, the Hebrew and Aramaic words translated "little" can mean 'short' in terms of time as well as size. The idea may be that it lasts a very short time indeed, maybe literally days or hours in the very last day, and is the human representative of the beast / horns who personally challenges the Lord Jesus and is destroyed by the brightness of His coming.

The empires of Daniel 2 dominate the earth. The Hebrew *eretz* can refer either to the entire planet, or to the land- the land promised to Abraham, the land of Israel, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. The dominion of the four beasts is therefore over the same area. Daniel saw the beasts arising out of the great sea. This could be a reference to the laver, which is also called a 'sea' (1 Kings 7:23-26,39). This was a huge circular bowl for washing which was set upon 12 bronze oxen, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. They were arranged in four groups of three, facing north, south, east and west, in imitation of the camp of Israel in the wilderness. The beasts therefore arise out of the territory promised to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rev. 17:15 interprets waters or seas as "peoples". The beasts therefore arise out of the peoples who are to be found in the land of the 12 tribes of Israel. The interpretation is confirmed by the words of the Angel in Dan. 7:17, who says that the four beasts who arise out of the sea are four king[dom]s which "shall arise out of the earth / land".

Another possibility regarding the "great sea" is that it refers to the area of Babylon's dominion. The vision of Daniel 7 clearly parallels that of Daniel 2, which was intended to explain what would happen after the Babylonians. The arena of the "great sea" was to be dominated by other kingdoms apart from Babylon. In confirmation of this, we find the word *rab* ["great"] used about the greatness of Babylon ("great Babylon", Dan. 4:30; Joel 2:2,11). But *rab* is also translated "master" (Dan. 1:3), "lord", "captain", "chief" (Dan. 2:10,14,48), "master" (Dan. 4:19; 5:11). We could understand the "great sea" as the sea of nations ruled over by the master, the lord of the sea, the king of Babylon- and Daniel is seeing this vision in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon (Dan. 7:1). As in the Daniel 2 vision, Daniel is explaining that the leadership of Babylon will not last, other kingdoms will arise to also dominate the sea of nations which was then under Babylon's sole control. This again pushes us towards understanding the entire vision as specifically concerning the area over which Babylon had dominion, and not the whole planet.

*Having ten horns and seven heads; and on his horns ten diadems-* The beasts of Revelation are built upon the beasts of Daniel. In the latter day application, the various beasts are perhaps pictures of various aspects of the final beast. The beast of Rev. 13:2 was "like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion". Here we see the elements of the various beasts of Dan. 7 and therefore the metals of the image of Dan. 2 all incorporated into this latter day beast. It is the equivalent of the image standing complete in the last days. It has "seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 13:1)- which is the total number of heads and horns of the four beasts of Dan. 7. In harmony with this, Hos. 13:7 describes Israel's latter day invader as a lion, bear, leopard and wild beast. All elements of the beasts are brought together in the final latter day invasion. The [singular] beast of Rev.

13:1 arose out of the sea, but the beasts of Daniel 7 all also arise out of the sea; it's as if all those beasts are epitomized in the one beast, just as the image of Daniel 2 stands complete at the time of Christ's return, incorporating all the metals / empires of history. All this is explained further in commentary on [Daniel 2](#), [Daniel 8](#) and [Daniel 9](#).

The metals of the image of Daniel 2 and the beasts of Daniel 7 all have dominion over "the earth", and this has reference is to the earth / land of Israel. This, I suggest, continues to be the focus in the visions of Revelation. When we read of various judgments being poured out upon the "earth", we are reading about the situation in the land promised to Abraham. The references to 'thirds' of the earth / land being judged is clearly alluding to the Old Testament prophetic descriptions of 'thirds' of Israel or the population of Jerusalem being judged, especially in Ezekiel and Zechariah. Indeed Rev. 1:7 opens the prophecy by making the connection between Israel and the "earth": "Those who pierced [crucified] Him and all the tribes of the earth [land] shall wail because of Him". This is quoting from Zechariah's prophecy of how all the tribes *of Israel* will weep in repentance because of their crucifixion of their Messiah.

The four beasts of Daniel 7 are replaced in Revelation by one composite beast, although it is presented from different aspects. This, I suggest, is because the beast of Revelation specifically is the latter day beast, which incorporates all the previous beasts.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the first self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State, said that Muslims should unite to capture Rome in order to "own the world". The significance of this is that the ten horn entity, the latter day radical Islamist entity, is seeking to incorporate an element of the previous metals / beast systems, i.e. Rome. This is what we would expect if the image is to stand erect in the last days. Source: McElory, Damien. "[Rome will be conquered next, says leader of 'Islamic State'](#)". *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 3 July 2014.

The beasts of Daniel represented empires, but this beastly empire in Revelation is a composite Leopard-Bear-Lion (13:2). It isn't just one of Daniel's three empires. It's all three empires rolled into one. In other words, this new empire is composed of the descendants of those earlier empires, in the same geographic location. Looking back at the history of the Middle East, we can now identify this new empire as the various powers that have controlled the Holy Land whilst the Jews were established within it.

It's surely significant that Daniel 7 is comprised of seven visions- each introduced by the statement that Daniel 'beheld'. This matches with the series of seven visions we find in Revelation. I would say that Revelation is therefore a development and expansion of the ideas presented in Daniel; the basic picture presented in Daniel will come true, but the outworking of it is developed somewhat in Revelation.

The four beasts of Daniel 7 clearly are to be connected with the four separate beasts which we encounter in the book of Revelation- the dragon of chapters 12 and 20, the sea beast of 13:1, the earth beast of 13:11 and the beast ridden by the whore in chapter 17. Note how the four 'evil' beasts of Revelation are a conscious contrast with "the four living creatures" of God's heavenly throne room (Rev. 19:4 cp. Ez. 1:5,15). Perhaps the contrast is also to demonstrate how as in Daniel, the nations on earth have their representative, controlling Angels in the court of Heaven.



Each of the beasts has some similarities with the other beasts. Three of them 'arise'; they all have horns; three of them have the same number of horns and heads; they all persecute God's people, etc. They all exist at the same time- they do not arise in chronological sequence. They are a different take on the four beasts of Daniel 7, but they have only outline similarities. The sequence of beasts / empires in Daniel 7 was a potential prophetic program, which never came to complete fulfilment. But the essence of the prophecy is repeated in Revelation, and will come true in the last days. It could be that we should not unduly sweat to understand the precise details of the beasts in Daniel 7, because this was part of a prophetic program which did not come about- I have written elsewhere about Conditional prophecy in Daniel. But the essence of the prophecy will come true in the last days, and we find it fleshed out in Revelation.

We read of "the beast" without any specification as to which beast is in view (Rev. 19:19,20; 20:4,10). This is surely because the various beasts are only manifestations of the one beast, just as the four beasts of Daniel 7 are comprehended in the fourth beast. The beasts are in a sense separate- thus the beast is put into the lake of fire before the dragon is (Rev. 20:10). But in another sense, these entities are all expressing the same reality and principles. Different aspects of the dominating entity may be destroyed at different times in different ways- hence the usage of the imagery of more than one beast.

As noted on 12:3, "seven heads and ten horns" refers to how groups of seven and ten nations and kings surrounding Israel are associated with previous dominations of Israel (7= Dt. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; Acts 13:19; 10 = Gen. 15:18; Ps. 83; the ten surrounding nations starting with Egypt and ending with Babylon of Jer. 46-50; the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2, the ten horns of the beast of Daniel 7; the ten invading nations of Ez. 38 headed by Gog). suggestion is that the seven heads and ten horns on the dragon and beast refer to a quick succession or co-existence of various peoples, leaders or entities originating from or around the land promised to Abraham, which will persecute God's people in the last days. They will all form part of the coalition of evil known as the beast or dragon, and radical Islam will be their religion.

The ten horns represent ten kings- the reference may be to individual leaders rather than to nations (Dan. 7:24). They arise out of the head of the beast, maybe implying they share the same overall ideology or thinking. That ideology would be that of hatred of Israel and a common desire to destroy her- which rather suggests Islam. That is the only appropriate ideology within the earth / land promised to Abraham which could be the candidate for the fulfilment of this prophetic requirement.

## The One Beast

Daniel 7	2 Thess. 2	Rev. 13	Rev. 17	Rev. 19
1. <i>Called:</i>				
The beast		The beast	The beast	The beast

*Also  
called:*

The little horn*	The man of sin		The eighth head	
2.		Comes out of the sea	Comes out of the deep (i.e. the sea)	
3. Associated with 10 horns		10 horns	10 horns	10 horns
4. Emerges at end of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times	End of Gentile times
5.		Amazing recovery	Amazing emergence	
6. A mouth speaking great things against the Most High	God- defying	Opens mouth in blasphemy against God	Full of names of blasphemy	
7.	Deceitful signs and lying wonders	Deceitful signs and lying wonders t		Deceives them that had received the mark of the beast t
8.		Given publicity by the beast out the earth		Given publicity by the false prophet (i.e. the beast of the earth)
9.	All deceived who do not believe the truth	All that dwell upon the earth worship the beast, whose names are not written in the book of life	They that dwell on the earth, whose names are not written in the book of life, wonder at the revival of the beast	

10	Persecutes Intolerant and of all overcomes religions saints	Persecutes and saints overcomesthe whore the saints	Persecutes the Destroys
11	Duration of 3.5 years	Duration of 3.5 years	
12	The son of perdition		Goes to perdition
13	Destroyed by Christ	Destroyed by Christ	Destroyed by Christ Destroyed by Christ

Note that the little horn is treated as the beast (Dan. 7:11).

*And upon his heads were names of blasphemy-* The beast of 17:4 was “full of blasphemous names”. Not only the heads of the Beast (13:1), but its whole body is covered with them, indicating that the entire empire sanctioned the emperors’ arrogation of divine titles; such titles could be found throughout the Roman world, inscribed on public buildings and monuments. The blasphemy of the last days will be in that the jihadists consider that they have Divine, even Biblical warrant to execute His judgments upon Israel and the true Christian church.

As noted many times, we are not to look for a chronological fulfilment in terms of a sequence of events. These are all kaleidoscope images of the persecution to be unleashed upon the earth / land. They merge and morph with each other, and yet re-emerge as separate entities. The dragon has seven heads and ten horns, with each head crowned; the beast from the sea has likewise seven heads and ten horns, but now it is the horns which are crowned; on the heads of the beast there are "names of blasphemy" (13:1). Their prototype in Daniel 7:20 has ten horns upon only one head.

The names of the Roman emperors were to be greatly revered. The cult of emperor worship grew very strongly in the 1st century. Yet Rev. 13:2 describes the names of the leaders of the beast, which on one level represented the Roman empire in the 1st century, as “*blasphemous names*”. To assign divine titles to the emperor was, to the Jewish and Christian mind, a blasphemy (Dt. 11:36; 2 Thess. 2:4). This would have made the Apocalypse an outlawed document in the first century. Consider too the clear references to the evil of the emperor worship cult later in Rev. 13: *one of its heads*. . . is set up as the very opposite of the true Christ.

13:2 *And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were as the feet of a bear, his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority-* As noted on :1, the beast is the composite of all the beasts of Daniel 7. The dragon of chapter 12 is also the same ideology which speaks from the mouth of the earth beast in :11. The dragon may be damaged or apparently destroyed in political terms by the Lord's direct judgment, perhaps at the hands of Israeli or Western militia. But the jihadist philosophy re-emerges in another incarnation, just as has been witnessed so often in the war against various Islamic terrorist organizations.

The beast of Revelation 13 has elements of all the other beasts. And so does the fourth beast of Daniel 7. It had iron teeth and brass nails (Dan. 7:19), alluding to the brass of the third kingdom and the iron of the fourth kingdom. It had “eyes of a man” and a human eye on its horn, (Dan. 7:8,20), just as the first beast, the lion, had a human heart and stood up like a man (Dan. 7:4). The bear, the second beast, had three ribs in its mouth, representing its conquest of three other powers; the fourth beast features a little horn which conquers three other horns (Dan. 7:8). The bear also ‘devoured much flesh’ (Dan. 7:5); the fourth beast ‘devours’ the land (Dan. 7:7). The third beast, the leopard, had four heads (Dan. 7:6), rather like the fourth beast also has ten horns; and Revelation 13 explains that these are later located on seven heads. The fourth beast of Daniel 7 is therefore a composite beast; the other beasts merge into an entity which includes all of them, even though they still exist separately- for in the final Divine judgment, the fourth beast entity is destroyed, but the beasts have their dominion taken away although their lives are “prolonged for a season and time” (Dan. 7:12). This may mean that the final entity is destroyed, but the individual components of it continue to exist “for a season and time”. The only other reference in Daniel to a period being “prolonged” is when the same word is used in Dan. 4:27 regarding the possibility of the king of the kingdom prolonging his life by repentance; it could be that the delay or prolonging is in order they repent. This may also explain why the first beast, representing Babylon, is pictured as having a man’s heart being given to it after its wings [power] are cropped. The historical king of Babylon had a beast’s heart (Dan. 4:16), but his understanding [a human heart] returned to him on his repentance (Dan. 4:34). So this feature of the first beast may be a hit at a repentance after the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4.

It’s apparent that the four beasts of Daniel and of Revelation (dragon, sea beast, earth beast, scarlet beast) are full of allusion to the cherubim vision seen by Ezekiel- also whilst in captivity in Babylon, just as Daniel was. The cherubim were likewise four separate living creatures [beasts] which somehow were also one. The four beasts of Daniel 7 become comprehended in the fourth beast and in the one composite beast of Revelation 13, which includes all elements of the previous beasts within it. Note that the Hebrew / Aramaic for “beast” means literally a living one- the living creature of the cherubim vision. The cherubim featured the faces of lion, ox, man and eagle (Ez. 1:10), and lion, ox and eagle feature in the descriptions of the four beasts; the ‘man’ element is found in that the lion has the heart of a man, and the little horn of the fourth beast has the eyes of a man. The first living creature has wings which are lifted up from the earth (Dan. 7:4)- which is precisely the language of the cherubim wings being lifted up from the earth in Ez. 1:19,21; 10:16,19. As the first beast is made to stand on its feet (Dan. 7:4), so the cherubim caused Ezekiel to stand on his feet (Ez. 2:2; 3:24). The second creature had a “side” which was “lifted up” (Dan. 7:5), as the cherubim likewise had ‘sides’ which were ‘lifted up’ (Ez. 1:8,20). The third beast had four wings as each of the living creatures / cherubim did (Dan. 7:6; Ez. 1:23). The first and fourth beasts / living creatures have feet (Dan. 7:4,7) as the cherubim do (Ez. 1:7). The description of how these living creatures / beasts will be judged by the Lord Jesus includes language also used in Ezekiel’s cherubim visions- One seated upon a throne, wheels of burning fire (Dan. 7:9).

Ezekiel’s vision was surely well known to Daniel and John. The connection is surely that throughout the course of human history, especially the course of Gentile domination of the land of Israel, the glory of God shone through it all, it was all going according to His purpose; and the various beasts were in fact manipulated by the living creatures of the Angel cherubim. Daniel 7 says this in different terms by opening with the statement that the four spirits / Angels of Heaven were responsible for the uprising of the four beasts (Dan. 7:2,3).

Events were not just taking their course, with everything spinning out of control; but rather, God through the Angels was powerfully in control. And His glory shone through the apparent cruelty, shame and randomness of the events that appeared to be happening to His land and people.

13:3 *And I saw one of his heads as though it had a mortal wound; but its mortal wound was healed-* This significant head is to be associated with the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8. See further commentary [here](#) and [here](#).

The little horn represents the beast; the persecution of the saints by the horn is therefore also by the beast:

#### **The Little Horn**

"Diverse" (Dan.7:24)  
from others

"A mouth speaking great  
things" (Rev.3:5)

"He shall speak great  
words  
against the Most High"  
(Dan.7:25)

"The same horn made war  
with the saints, and  
prevailed against them  
(Dan.7:21).

#### **The Beast**

"Diverse" (Dan.7:23) from  
others

"A mouth speaking great  
things"  
(Dan.7:8)

"He opened his mouth in  
blasphemy against God"  
(Rev.13:6)

"Make war with the saints,  
and to overcome them"  
(Rev.13:7)

Thus Dan. 7:11 speaks as if the beast and the little horn are interchangeable: "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain". Rev.13:5 says that the beast makes war with the saints (AVmg.) for 3.5 years- as does the little horn in Dan. 7. The beast was "like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion" (Rev. 13:2). Again we see the elements of the various beasts of Dan. 7 and therefore the metals of the image of Dan. 2 all incorporated in this beast. It has "seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 13:1)- which is the total number of heads and horns of the four beasts of Dan. 7. In harmony with this, Hos. 13:7 describes Israel's latter day invader as a lion, bear, leopard and wild beast. All elements of the beasts are brought together in the final latter day invasion.

One of the heads receives a deadly wound, but this is described as the beast receiving a deadly wound, thus identifying the beast with one of its particular heads (Rev. 13:3,12). The overall picture presented by the descriptions of the horns is of conflict with each other, whilst at the same time dominating the earth / land of Israel. The little horn 'subdues' [to abase / humiliate / degrade] three of the horns, and according to Rev. 17:16, the ten horns hate the whore, the individual riding the beast entity, and bitterly destroy and burn her. And the fortunes of the entire entity ebb and flow- one of the wounds has a deadly wound but revives, the beast itself has a deadly wound from a sword but revives (Rev. 13:3,12,14), the beast was, is not and yet is (Rev. 17:8), and we are beginning to see this ebb and flow of the fortunes of the entity developing in the land / earth. This is precisely the picture that has more recently

unfolded in the land promised to Abraham- a series of increasingly powerful and aggressive leaders and powers, morphing together *from the perspective of Israel and God's people* into a system of abuse such as has never been seen and never will be. And yet from another viewpoint, they are bitterly divided against themselves.

The tendency is to want to clearly identify each of the ten toes / ten horns of the fourth beasts, the wings of the lion, the three ribs in the mouth of the second beast, the four wings and four heads of the third beast, the three horns who are plucked up by the little horn of the fourth beast, and then in Revelation we have seven heads found on the beast, as well as the ten horns, who in Revelation "hate the whore" and burn her; and the whore who rides the beast sits on seven hills or kings. Each of these attributes [toes, horns, wings, heads] refer to kings / kingdoms. Looking at the scenarios through half closed eyes, as it were, not sweating the details, we have the impression of a latter day entity dominating the earth / land promised to Abraham, which is comprised of a bewildering array of smaller powers and charismatic leaders who are often pitted against each other. This is exactly the position we see developing in that geographical area. We don't need to interpret the fine details ahead of time- that is not how prophecy functions. When it all happens, then it will be clear. What we are seeing is the general picture developing- an array of aggressive powers, some strong and some weak, broadly grouped into four groups, matching the four beasts who will exist in the last days. They are all united around a desire to dominate Israel. It's not hard to imagine how they will destroy each other, which is God's preferred method of judging His people's enemies.

The changing of times and laws by the antichrist figure of Dan. 7:25 sounds like the radical Islamist desire to impose the Islamic calendar and *sharia* law in the land promised to Abraham, which they see as their caliphate; and for sure, if Israel becomes part of an Islamic state, then the keeping of the Jewish calendar will be outlawed. The implementation of *sharia* law and changing legal structures to reflect it, is a major theme in their program. It's clear that the three and a half year domination of Jerusalem and changing of the Jewish law and calendar had an initial fulfilment in the abuses of Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the temple. There was a three and a half year period from the edict of Antiochus in June 168 BC to the rededication of the temple in December 165 BC. The little horn of Daniel 8 comes out of the Greek kingdom, but the horn of Daniel 7 out of the fourth kingdom. I suggest that this is because the prophecy could have been fulfilled totally at the time of Antiochus- Messiah could have come and destroyed him. But the various required preconditions weren't met, and so there was another possibility of it coming true out of the Roman kingdom [another possibility is that the four beasts and metals refer to Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece rather than Babylon-Medo Persia-Greece-Rome]. Revelation uses the same imagery to describe the antiChrist of the last days, who will incorporate some elements of the previous historical fulfilments of the little horn in men like Antiochus Epiphanes.

The entire vision of the beasts of Daniel 7 is summed up in Dan. 7:1: "the *rosh* of the words" (AV "sum of the matter"). And the *rosh* surely refers to the individual of Ezekiel 38:2 who will lead the latter day armies against Israel. The whole system of beasts is summed up in an individual *rosh* or leader, just as the metals of the image in Daniel 2 are in the form of a man with the face of Nebuchadnezzar. The little horn of Daniel 7 is actually called "the beast": "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11).

*And the whole earth marvelled as they followed the beast-* One feature of the presentation of the beasts is that both John and "the whole earth / land" wonder at it and at the whore riding it

(Rev. 13:3; 17:6,7). This matches with the stress in Daniel 7 that the fourth beast is strikingly different from all the other beasts. The world will be in shock and awe at the entity which will suddenly develop- and we see the beginnings of that with the awe and fear inspired by the jihadists. This speaks not only of the fear inspired by the entity in its enemies on the ground, but implies a watching world onlooking in awe and fear, unable to do anything against it

Let's not get caught up with the idea that Israel shall survive and defeat the invaders in her own strength. The beast must dominate Israel. Jerusalem will be taken. Dan. 7:7,21 speaks of how the beast made war with the saints and prevailed against them- Israel- *until* the Ancient of days came; in Dan. 7:23 he devours the whole land [as a beast] and shall tread it down. The beast of Revelation is so powerful in the earth / land that "the world" wondered at it and at the whore riding it (Rev. 13:3; 17:6,7), feeling unable to make war with it. This of itself requires the demise and degrading of America, Europe and the West generally. Dan. 11:41,45 are likewise clear about the latter day King of the North: "He shall also come into the glorious land... He shall plant the tents of his palace between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him".

As the entire image was "terrible" (Dan. 2:31), so the fourth beast system is described with the same word (Dan. 7:7). As the image appeared "excellent" (Dan. 2:31), so the strength of the fourth beast was 'excellent' (s.w. Dan. 7:7). Dan. 7:7 emphasizes that this final beast is altogether more aggressive than any previous beast / dominator of the land: "Dreadful, terrible, strong exceedingly... it was different from all the beasts that were before it". The original word translated "dreadful" suggests whoever sees it slinks away in fear- its strength and advantage over others is "exceeding". This is the same awe we find in Rev. 13, where the world looks on at the beast, marvelling at this entity and feeling that nobody can even begin to make war with him. This speaks of an entity that is more aggressive and fear-inspiring than the aggressive Babylonians, Assyrians or abusive Nazis. It implies too the eclipse of the West as the dominant world power block and power broker. The current Islamic jihadist movement may develop into an entity which fits this bill- a reign of terror involving cutting off children's heads and parading their actions on videos, live crucifixion of any who don't agree with them, but with a stranglehold advantage over any critics... The same radical difference between this final beast and all previous ones is brought out by the way in which John, after all he had earlier seen, was in shock at the way the beast drank the blood of the saints, i.e. the people of God, Israel in their land (Rev. 17:6). The whole world likewise is in shock horror at this beast (Rev. 13:3; 17:8). Dan. 12:1 puts it this way: "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was" for God's people, and they will be saved from it by the standing up of Jesus for His people, the resurrection of the dead and the destruction of the "king of the north". The "time of Jacob's trouble" from which he shall be saved (Jer. 30:7) must be understood in the context of how the phrase "time of trouble" is used in the Bible to describe times of Israel's invasion and suffering at the hands of their neighbours (Is. 33:2; Jer. 2:27,28; 8:15; 11:12,14; 14:8,19; Ez. 7:7). "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was" therefore suggests a time of abuse of Israel such as has never been seen. And this includes the Nazi holocaust, the death camps of Europe, the Babylonian and Assyrian atrocities... It's purely wishful thinking to hope that the IDF and Israel's military technology will stave this off. It will not. Jerusalem is to be taken and the women raped (Zech. 14:2). The beast is to dominate the earth / land of Israel.

13:4 *And they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast-* The dragon may be politically off the scene, but the jihadist philosophy continues. Or it may be that we

are simply seeing in these visions different aspects of the same entity, in a kaleidoscope of images wherein some of the images overlap; and the connection between dragon and beast would then simply be that overlap, as it were.

*And they worshiped the beast, saying: Who is like to the beast? And who is able to war with him?*- This will be the world's reaction to the jihadist beast of the last days. They worship him because they feel he is invincible, and have not paid attention to the continued reminders in Revelation that all power, authority and strength is not with human empires but with the Lord Jesus. Seeing that the West has nuclear weapons, this could imply that the beast either deprives them of their weapons (a Muslim dominated and more politically powerful UN or EU could achieve this), or that a new paradigm of weapons, worse than nuclear, are possessed by the beast and used to hold the rest of the world to ransom.

The language is based upon the prototype of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, who likewise had a mouth speaking great things against Israel and Israel's God. That similarity is continued by the description of the small, finally repentant remnant of Jews who overthrow the beast as being like David (Zech. 12:8). This is not to say that there will not initially be opposition to the beast- the horn recovers amazingly from a "deadly wound" which could likely refer to some form of Western operation against this entity (Rev. 13:3). Likewise the beast was, is not, and yet will be [Rev. 17:8- i.e. it will be revived after apparent destruction]. But the final picture is of the beast having free reign in the earth / land promised to Abraham. We must look, therefore, to Zion being forsaken of all her lovers, America particularly pulling out of supporting Israel. We already can see the beginnings of such a situation developing. The West will either collapse, perhaps financially, and become impotent; or will come to a policy position which refuses to support Israel nor get involved in on the ground operations within the land promised to Abraham. Their impotence is however described in terms of their 'worshipping' the beast and *therefore* fearing to make war with it (Rev. 13:4). The Greek for 'worship' can mean to cower or fawn before a person; the West may be forced to this position by Islamic elements within their own nations, by an oil and energy embargo, or something similar. Another option is that the 'world' spoken of in Rev. 13 is specifically the world around Israel; but in our days of a global village, that would still require that the West is left impotent to intervene. It has been their background support of Israel which has kept the current situation in balance so far. But Rev. 9:14 speaks of the hordes of enemies being bound at the Euphrates River, and then being released by Angelic action. This restraint which is released could well refer to an Angelically-orchestrated removal of the West's restraining power. With no such power broker in the region, the forces of Islamic jihad will without doubt burst forth over the Euphrates, the boundary of the land promised to Abraham, and surge towards Israel.

However we interpret the beast and its horns, the point has to be accepted that it is radically different to any entity or empire which has ever dominated the earth / land of Israel before. It was "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong... it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it" (Dan. 7:7). It is this same beast which led John in Revelation to be staggered and amazed. For such an entity to dominate Israel in the last days, the current geopolitical situation must change. The West will be powerless to stop it. The historical support of Israel by the West, and their continual involvement on the ground in the Middle East to avert catastrophe and protect their interests there... will end. This could be because of their financial collapse, or an oil / energy stranglehold over them, or the uprise of domestic forces allied with Islam which leave them powerless to get involved; or maybe they genuinely turn against Israel.



Or perhaps the beast entity is in possession of military technology, just as Goliath was, which leads to the sense that nobody can make war with this beast: "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:4). And if 'all' that is required for peace is to let these guys have their way with Israel... well, that will be a price which will seem cheap compared to the unleashing of nuclear, germ, chemical or some other kind of technology against the West. "Who is like unto the beast?" suggests that it is felt that nobody is comparable with the beast in order to make war with it; there is a superiority of military ability which is perceived which results in recognizing that this entity cannot be challenged. The language is very much of David and Goliath. The current dependency of Israel upon military technology to maintain the upper edge over their enemies must therefore come to an end. All those scenarios are well on the way to development. Nuclear technology is already in the hands of Iran, and can spread easily to irresponsible hands. It would also be typical of Russian foreign policy to spite the West by arming the West's enemies with such technology. Without the West as the power broker in the Middle East, such an entity will surely arise. The release of the restrained horsemen on the banks of the Euphrates may refer to this restraining influence being removed (Rev. 9,16). The growth of the IS shows the potential for it, if nothing else. So the very prediction of such an entity arising in the land promised to Abraham has some radical implications for the West.

Judah's invasion by the Babylonians is clearly a type of the latter day invasion by the Islamic jihadist entity or state. The Biblical record emphasizes Judah's sense of betrayal, in that her lovers and friends [i.e. other nations] had not come to her aid as they had promised and as she had hoped (Lamentations is full of such language). This has its counterpart today, in that Israel depends upon the West to be the power broker deflecting any major strike against them by the Islamic powers around them. But that factor will be removed, the promises and undertakings will not come true- because the Biblical picture is of a huge state in power over Israel without opposition.

If we are looking for a power or ideology within the land promised to Abraham which focuses upon the destruction of Israel, then we do not have far to look. Radical Islam explicitly encourages Muslims to attack Israel and force Jews to either convert to Islam or be killed: Consider these passages from the Hadith: "You will fight against the Jews and you will kill them until even a stone would say: Come here, Muslim, there is a Jew (hiding himself behind me); kill him" (Book 41.6981). Book 19.4366 likewise: "I will expel the Jews and Christians from Arabia and will not leave any but Muslim". The 'Arabia' here is often interpreted as the Arabian Peninsula, but that was probably not in Mohammed's perceptual geography. By 'Arabia' he meant 'the lands where the Arabs live', and that area includes Israel, inhabited as it is by several million Palestinian Arabs.

13:5 *And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies-* The suggested allusion is to David overcoming the Palestinian Goliath, who all else feared to make war with as he spoke his blasphemy against God and Israel- exactly the language of Rev. 13:4-8. Then shall come to pass the word of Zech. 12:8: "He that is feeble among them [s.w. Dan. 11:41 about how many in the land of Israel will be overthrown or made feeble] in that day shall be as David".

The idea of being given a mouth is taken from the Olivet prophecy; in the last days of AD70 and the final last days, the witnessing believers will likewise be given a mouth (Lk. 21:15). They will be empowered to speak against this evil system. All the mouth and authority of this

system will be given it from above, just as was the case with the Lord's sufferings at the hands of the Roman and Jewish systems.

*And there was given to him authority to continue for forty two months-* The point of Revelation is that all authority and power in their utter totality is with the Father and Son. The persecution of God's people, both in the last days and historically, has been allowed and even empowered by them. The idea that the dragon empowered the sea beast is only true from an earthly perspective, and is not at all Heaven's view. And the purpose of Revelation is to help us perceive that. Historically, this might refer to periods like Nero's persecution (Nov. 64 - June 68). But the 42 months is the time, times and a half, the 1260 days, the three and a half years of the Elijah ministry, the period of witness by the two witnesses and the hiding of the infant Jesus in Egypt.

*13:6 And he opened his mouth to blaspheme against God, to blaspheme His Name and His tabernacle, even those that dwell in the heaven-* The 42 months of the Jihadist beast's prolonged persecution of Israel is also aimed specifically at God's "tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (Rev. 13:5,6), i.e. the temple (1 Kings 8:30 cp. 2 Sam. 15:25; Heb. 7:26; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2; 11:4). The figurative 'temple' is therefore the faithful of the last days (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). The earthly temple in Jerusalem has been judged and marked out for destruction in chapter 11. God's tabernacle is in the hearts of the believing Christians of the last days. John is seeing a vision of the heavenly throne room, where all on earth has Angelic representation. In this sense those who are in heaven can be blasphemed and persecuted on earth.

*13:7 And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation-* The concept of the court of Heaven is a major key to understanding the book of Revelation. Events on earth are described in terms of their connection with the Angelic system in Heaven which has arranged them. "The accuser of our brethren" being cast out of Heaven (Rev. 12:10) would therefore refer to how in the court of Heaven, an Angel represents the system who accused the brethren on earth. This isn't to say that the Angel representing the accuser is sinful. "It was given unto" the beast to have power to persecute the saints, just as the Lord had perceived that His persecutors only had the power that was "given" unto them [thereby associating the saints' final time of trial in the last days with the Lord's sufferings]. But the power was "given" by the Angels in the court of Heaven, empowering people on earth to carry out what they permit.

The overcoming of the saints [a term appropriate to both natural Israel and the true Christians of the last days] is spoken of in the murder of the two witnesses in chapter 11. They did not love their lives unto death (12:11); these are the "saints" who are overcome by the beast in Dan. 7:25. Many will be slain, although some will be miraculously preserved by being snatched away, or even literally up into the sky (see on 11:12 and 12:5).

The tribes, peoples etc. who give him authority are primarily those in the area of his provenance over the earth / land promised to Abraham, upon whom Babylon sits (17:15). But it is out of these very tribes, peoples etc. that some will convert to Christ, and they are singled out for especial notice and praise because of this (5:9); for it is they to whom the Gospel is preached in the very last days (14:6).

13:8 *And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain from the foundation of the world-* All inhabitants of the land promised to Abraham worship this entity; with the sole exception of those who shall be saved eternally, the true Christians in that area. This means that on the territory of what is today Syria, Israel, Iraq etc. there will emerge true Christian converts. Jihadists insist upon conversion to their form of Islam on pain of death. Hence the totality of support for them in this area.

13:9 *If anyone has an ear, let him hear-* The inhabitants of the earth / land consider the beast invincible and permanent, and therefore they worship him (see on :4). They have not paid attention to the continued reminders in Revelation that all power, authority and strength is not with human empires but with the Lord Jesus. This is the reason for this appeal, to 'hear' the words of this prophecy and to not assume that the beast is ultimately powerful, permanent nor invincible.

13:10 *If anyone is for captivity, into captivity he goes. If anyone shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints-* This speaks of the final desolation of Israel by the beast in terms of 'leading into captivity', associated with the beast having power over "all kindreds, tongues and nations" in the earth / land promised to Abraham. The remaining Jews will be taken into captivity in those areas; and the attitude of the Islamist jihadists, ever seeking as they are to incarnate Israel's historical enemies, is such that this scenario is now quite imaginable.

To resist his captivity and killing with the sword is "the patience and faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:7,10). The beast leading saints into captivity and death sounds like ghettos and concentration camps- our persecution may well be through our having to suffer along with natural Israel. Those who openly proclaim themselves to be spiritual Israel will be treated the same as the Jews. For this reason, the distinctively Jewish aspect of our hope should be appreciated by us now in this our time of spiritual preparation. The mad intensity of the beast's persecution of the saints in the last days has not yet been seen by us.

Goliath was the Arab "champion" (1 Sam. 17:51), using the Hebrew word 'Gibbor'. This connects with the description of Messiah as 'El-Gibbor' in Is. 9:6, and shows that the latter day Arab powers may well be headed up by one charismatic individual, who sets himself up as a pseudo-Messiah. The Hebrew word used for "champion" in 1 Sam. 17:4 literally means 'the man who goes between the two camps', again pointing forward to the mediatorial office of the true Messiah. The root meaning of 'Goliath' is 'to lead and to go into captivity', which fits in with his wager that the Philistines would go into Jewish captivity if they killed him, and vice versa. This may be the basis of Rev. 13:10 concerning the little horn and mouth of the beast: "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity" (AV). This power having "a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies" (Rev. 13:5) certainly corresponds with Goliath's loud-mouthed blasphemy. "He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (Rev. 13:6,7) is Goliath exactly (cp. his blasphemy of the Angels in 1 Sam. 17:26). "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him" (Rev. 13:8) recalls Goliath's charisma, indicated by the Philistines fleeing once they saw that he was dead. "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword" (Rev. 13:10) nicely concludes this set of allusions- Goliath was killed with his own sword. These parallels indicate that Goliath is a prototype of the latter day 'mouth' or personal

figurehead of the 'beast'. Note in passing how Gen. 12:3 may have hinted at this figure right at the start of God's purpose with Israel: "Him that curseth thee will I curse" (RV). The method of persecution will be by leading into captivity and killing with the sword (13:10)- the house churches of the latter day "earth" herded into cattle trucks and hauled away to mini prison camps, sharing the sufferings of natural Israel? Once again, the account of the beast here is underpinned with hints of our Lord's sufferings (13:10 = Mt. 26:52; 'he that leads into captivity' recalls Jesus being led away by Judas and the soldiers; 13:7 cp. the disciples being 'overcome' in Gethsemane).

13:11 *And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon-* The beast of :1 arose from the sea, the area adjoining the earth / land promised to Abraham. This one specifically arises from within the land promised to Abraham. The beast of 13:1 was empowered by the dragon, and this next beast also speaks as the dragon. The same teaching or philosophy is being taught. But he has horns like a lamb. Lambs, newborn sheep, don't have horns. Goats do. So the idea is that this beast has two horns, perhaps two leaders or entities associated with it, which claim to be Christian, or perhaps claim to be as Jesus. Islam also believes in a return of Jesus, so perhaps these are false prophets, false Christs within the radical Islamist system, who claim to be the returned Jesus.

It's worth mentioning that the Koran teaches that the final punishment of the Jews will involve faithful Muslims becoming as a beast of the earth to Israel: "And when the time for the fulfilment of our word against them will come, we shall bring forth for them a beast from the earth who will speak to them because people did not believe in our Sign" (Sura 27.82). Perhaps Mohammad was again getting his Bible references garbled (note how the Koran assumes Haman and Pharaoh lived at the same time, Sura 28:6); perhaps he actually had in mind "the beast arising from the earth" of Rev. 13:11 which has a mouth speaking great things against Israel. Radical Islamists seek to fulfil the Koran as literally as possible; but because it contains so many fragments of Bible prophecies, they are effectively striving to fulfil latter day Bible prophecy!

The beast of the earth must look back to the common phrase "beast of the earth" in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 1:25). The serpent is an epitome of the bestial desires found in the beasts, and is thus the prototype 'beast' of later prophecies. The serpent being the greatest of the beasts (Gen. 3:1,14) points to the latter-day beast being supreme over the other nations. The most basic principle behind the symbolism of the beast is found in Gen. 1:28, where man is told to "have dominion over" (Heb. 'to break to powder', cp. Dan. 2:35) the beasts. This was to teach him the need to dominate the bestial instincts of the flesh. Thus the beasts are set up as representative of the flesh. It is therefore understandable that the devil (sin), the beast and the serpent are linked in Rev. 12:9, and that Prov. 28:15 parallels "a wicked ruler" with a wild bear or lion; the beast epitomizes the sinful person who controls it.

As the serpent deceived Adam and Eve, so the beast will deceive the Jews and weak Christian believers of the last days. The serpent/beast in its first century Jewish manifestation is described as seducing the saints through the subtle reasoning of the Judaizers (2 Cor. 11:3). These people used many "fair speeches" (Rom. 16:18 cp. Jude 15), suggesting that their prototype, the serpent, persuaded Eve to eat the fruit after a lengthy series of discussions, albeit unrecorded. "Yea, hath God said..." (Gen. 3:1 AV) implies the continuation of an unrecorded conversation. The beast's agents of the last days will likewise use the tactic of extended public speeches using superficially deep arguments. Their political arm will be

doing the same to destroy the morale of natural Israel, after the pattern of Rabshakeh's speeches to the Jews during the Assyrian invasion. Being an apostate Jew he may possibly have a latter-day equivalent in a Jewish leader, who deserts to the Arab cause, urging Israel to capitulate. Likewise there may be a specific "man of sin" who similarly tempts spiritual Israel. The description of him in 2 Thess. 2:3 is framed in terms of Judas - implying that he will be an apostate Christian?

The judgment of the serpent was by the voice of God (cp. Christ, the word) walking through the garden, summoning the sinful parties to judgment. This easily looks forward to Christ's second coming, and the judgment by Him in His role as the word made flesh (Rev. 19:13; Gen. 3:8). The beast has always been associated with a pseudo-spirituality, an aping of true God manifestation; the four beasts of Dan. 7 and Revelation (dragon, sea beast, earth beast and scarlet beast) are a pseudo-cherubim. There is a connection between the beasts of God manifestation and the cherubim in Rev. 4:7; indeed, the Hebrew word for 'beast' seems to be the equivalent of the phrase "living creature" used in Revelation concerning the cherubim. The beast and beasts therefore represent systems which falsely claim that they are the vehicle of God manifestation. This most clearly fits the claims of jihadist Islam. With all this in mind, it must be significant that Is. 14:29 speaks of Assyria as a "cockatrice" born out of "the serpent's root", i.e. she was the seed of the serpent. "His fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent" is the language of Isa. 6:2 concerning the seraphim. Thus the Assyrian seed of the serpent is associated with a pseudo-seraphim, and a false God manifestation. The Assyrian invasion is the prototype of the traumas of the last days in Israel.

Dt. 32:24 connects the 'beasts' of the surrounding nations with the Genesis serpent: "I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust" (cp. Gen. 3:14). There is also a connection between the serpent and beasts in Is. 30:6. "The teeth of beasts" coming down upon Israel will be finally fulfilled in the jihadist desolation prophesied in Joel 1:6,7, where the Assyrians of the future (Joel 1:15) are described as having Israel between their "cheek teeth" tearing the bark off the Israeli vine and fig (cp. Is. 9:12 concerning the Philistines / Palestinians).

Israel being the sheep of God's pasture is a common Bible figure. Whenever their shepherds were negligent over a prolonged period, the figure was extended to describe the 'wild beasts' of the surrounding nations invading the land and mauling the flock. Hos. 13:6-8 is typical of those passages which speak in these terms. Verses 7 and 8 liken these nations to the lion, leopard and bear, all of which are nations mentioned in Dan. 7, which are constituents of the huge system of Arab domination described in Dan. 2. These three beast nations are all part of one "wild beast", as the nations of the image in Dan. 2 are all part of the same latter-day confederacy headed by 'Babylon': "I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard... as a bear... *the* wild beast". Likewise Is. 56:9,10; Jer. 30:16 and Ez. 34:5 feature the beasts of Babylon and the surrounding nations as preying on the flock of Israel due to their sleepy shepherds. After Israel's spiritual awakening *they* will become like a beast among the 'sheep' of the jihadist nations (Mic. 5:8), continuing the theme of the Jews doing to the Arabs as they did to them. It is possible that Dt. 28:26 also refers to the beasts of the surrounding nations: "Thy carcass shall be meat... unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away" (AV). This alludes to the fowls being frayed away while the covenant was made to Abraham. Thus while Israel abode in the covenant, the neighbouring nations surrounding them were kept away. Similarly Ez. 34:25 associates the making of the covenant with Israel in the last days, with the "evil beasts" leaving the land. Time and again Israel's neighbouring enemies are likened to "wild beasts". The list of references is impressive: Hos. 2:12; Ez. 5:17; 14:15; Ps.

80:13; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; Dt. 7:22. Job's Sabean invaders are called "the beasts of the earth... the beasts of the field" (Job 5:22,23). It is possible that "beasts" in these passages can be read as an intensive plural - i.e. 'the great beast', which symbolizes all of Israel's various enemies. This equivalence of the multitude of these enemies with a singular beast is seen in Ez. 34:28, which parallels "the heathen" (enemies of Israel) with "the beast of the land" (singular). Rev. 17 similarly exhibits *the* (singular) beast as comprising a number of nations (heads/horns).

Ps. 74:19 RV asks God not to deliver His people "unto the wild beast". This is one of the Asaph Psalms, written in the context of the restoration. The 'beast' threatening to destroy Judah then was a confederacy of her surrounding neighbours. Ps. 73:13,14 likens these enemies to a many headed dragon. Another such Psalm, Ps. 83, asks for protection against a confederacy of 10 such nations. In all this we have a remarkable type of the last days after the pattern of Daniel and Revelation-a beast with 10 horns, seeking to devour the recently returned people of God from off their land.

There is repeatedly the theme that Israel's enemies are confederated together under one confederacy which has one leader. Ps. 118 can be shown to be relevant to Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion (see George Booker, *Psalm Studies*). He speaks of how "all nations compassed me about", i.e. the surrounding Arab nations confederate with Assyria. And yet Hezekiah speaks about them as if they are really headed up by one individual: "Thou [you singular] didst thrust sore at me" (Ps. 118:13). The beast is to punish people by beheading them (Rev. 20:4)- and it's only Islam at the moment which legally practices beheading as a form of execution.

The symbology of the beast was particularly used concerning Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's king, was given a beast's heart and lived with them (Dan. 4:16) to show his personification of the beast. "The beasts of the field, i.e. the surrounding nations, were given into his control (Dan. 2:38), thus they constituted part of the beast of Babylon, " the noisome beast" of Ez. 14:21. Babylon's army is likened to "beasts" in Jer. 34:20,21. As God gave power to Assyria and Babylon to achieve His will (Is. 10), so He will to the latter-day beast (Rev. 13:5,7). The description of the beast leading people into captivity (Rev. 13:10) shows another connection with Assyria/Babylon, whose trains of captives were well known. The beast causing men to worship it (Rev. 13:12) recalls Nebuchadnezzar's decree concerning the statue on the plain of Dura (Dan. 3:1,5). The historical "beast of the field" was associated with the wilderness (Is. 43:20), as the beast of Rev. 17:3 is a wilderness power.

13:12 *He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his sight. He makes the earth and those who dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose wound had been healed-* The earth beast demands worship for the wounded and healed sea beast, and to "the image of the beast". The beasts may destroy themselves by infighting, or by temporary victories against them by Israel and the West. But they continue reincarnating, repeating the ideology of the dragon system of chapter 12. The beast is identified with its notable wounded horn. Just as the dragon loses power but somehow continues in influence, so the sea beast is down but not out; for the earth beast operates "in his sight" or presence. This could refer to a very fast sequence of Islamist entities dominating the land in the last days. Or it could be that again we have a kaleidoscope of images, and the images revealing different aspects of the beasts overlap with each other as they rotate. All Daniel's four beasts must exist in the last days, just as the four beasts of Revelation co-exist with each other (dragon, sea and earth beasts and scarlet beast).

Those who dwell in the earth / land are forced to worship the first beast. The idea of forced worship fits exactly with the jihadist way of enforcing conversion to their brand of Islam.

Babylon and the beast with which it is associated is said to have power over the nations of whole earth / land (Dan. 7:23; Rev. 13:12). This is referring back to the way in which historical Babylon was praised by the whole earth / land (Jer. 51:41), and had an army which included men from "the whole earth", the territory promised to Abraham (Jer. 34:1). As Babylon of the last days will influence all nations of the earth with her wine, so Babylon of old is spoken of in the same way (Jer. 51:7 cp. Rev. 17:2,4). Thus several prophecies speak of how Babylon's fall had effects on the whole earth (e.g. Jer. 50:46); and latter day Babylon likewise (Rev. 18:9,10). If we are correct in interpreting "Babylon" as a radical Islamic power of the last days, based on the prototype of historical Babylon, then we must look for a nation like Iran or Iraq to gather together the surrounding powers for an assault on Israel, and to somehow bring the whole world under the control of this confederacy. An Muslim-dominated UN [or Muslim-fearful] or other global political power could bring this about. "The Charter of Allah" makes it clear that Islam aims for world domination, within which "co-existence is possible with other religions, but only on Islamic terms and under Islamic domination". Thus the control of the other peoples within the earth / land, and even of the rest of the world may not be as difficult in practice as it may seem; if, for example, the Pope makes some suitable deference to Islam on behalf of all 'Christians', such a situation would come into existence.

*13:13 And he does great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men-* The beast makes fire come down from heaven, just as Elijah did. The inference is that the latter day miracles of the Elijah ministry will be matched, to some degree, by the false claims of the beast. The miracles performed at Israel's deliverance from Egypt were likewise mimicked by the persecutors of God's people. The beast acquires a puppet beast (or "publicity agent" in the words of Peter Watkins) who does "great wonders" (miracles) which deceive many (13:13,14; 19:20). These miracles must be impressive, seeing that they result in *all* that dwell on the earth / land, except the faithful, receiving the mark, of the beast. It is hard to make this prophecy of such impressive false miracles have a significant fulfilment in the past. Miracles of the credibility described here have not been seen since the first century. Again, remember that the Olivet prophecy describes false miracles being done in the last days, which almost convince the very elect. They must therefore really be something very impressive.

*13:14 And he deceives those that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which were given to him to do in the sight of the beast, saying to those that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword but lived-* "The sight / presence" of the beast refers to the first, sea beast; see on :12.

The two beasts of Rev. 13 appear to effectively operate as one, just as the beast is identified with its horn which is mortally wounded and yet revives (the same language is used of the beast- Rev. 13:3 cp. 12,14). It seems that the beast has publicity agents- another beast which appears to be a lamb but speaks as the dragon. Perhaps the idea is that a religious entity like the false Christian / Catholic / Orthodox Church seeks to get people to worship the Islamic beast under colour of some compromise. There will be apparent miracles which encourage people to believe these entities have credibility. Rev. 13:14,15 speaks of an image being made to the beast and the image speaking. It was common in the first century to claim that statues could speak; the Simon Magus of Acts 8:9 is recorded in extra-Biblical history as being able to do this (see G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* p. 184). God

will 'allow' this to happen, in line with His way of deceiving the deceivers and confirming them in the way they wish to go. The bringing to life of an image recalls the way that God created Adam and then gave him the breath of life. The claim will be that resurrection and new life are in the power of the new entity and its leader; perhaps there will be a claim to be the resurrected Mahdi figure of Islam or something similar. And God will "allow" this, or give real power to make it appear that these miracles have really happened.

Perhaps all those living in the earth / land will be forced to make or have some image to the beast, some physical item which demonstrates their allegiance; perhaps worn as a necklace or ring. This would then have the mark of the beast upon it; see on :16-18 where we suggest this is the seal of Mohammed.

The beast of the earth in Rev. 13:11-18 seems to have some first century application to the cult of emperor worship which became so popular throughout the Roman empire: it speaks in the voice of the dragon (:11), from whom it receives its power; and like the first Beast, it attempts to mimic the Lamb (:12, 13). It seems to be a personification of an Antichrist embodied in the pagan priesthood, which endeavoured to draw all men to the cult of the emperor. In these thoughts we see just how radical was the Apocalypse in its first century context. "The image to the beast" (13:13) would refer to representations of the divinized Roman emperors. "The wound of the sword" (13:13) is possibly an allusion to the mortal wound Nero inflicted upon himself in ad 68. Nero was perceived to live again in the persecutor Domitian (Tertullian, *Apol.* 5). Note how it is "the beast" who appears to have died or been wounded and then revives (17:8)- and yet these are references to what happened to Nero. The symbolism correctly perceives how the empire was incarnated in one man, the emperor.

13:15 *And he was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast should speak, and cause to have killed as many as would not worship the image of the beast-* I suggested on :14 that each person dwelling in the earth / land will be forced to make this image to the beast. He is "permitted", by God, to make these images of the beast appear to have real life. This will then be the great example of God confirming people in their misbelief, by allowing these images to have some kind of apparent life and power. Any who would not worship it would then be killed. 13:10 has said that he who kills [s.w.] with the sword shall be killed with the sword; and this will come true at the Lord's return (19:21). So the killing is by the sword or dagger / knife, which is typical of how jihadists kill those who refuse to convert and obey them.

The beasts of Revelation seem to be described in terms of the Kingdom of God, and the descriptions link within Revelation to the descriptions of God's Kingdom. The point is being made that these beasts, both over time and in the last days, are fake Kingdoms of God.

## Beasts

## The Kingdom Of God

The dragon has Angels (Rev. 12:9)	As Christ
He figuratively comes from heaven to earth (12:10)	"
Speaks of us day and night before God's throne (12:10)	"
Has a name in his forehead (13:2)	"



Given power, throne and authority	"
(13:13)	
Does great miracles and signs	"
(13:13)	
Faithful followers have mark in their	Ez. 9:4; Rev. 7:3
hands and foreheads (13:17; 20:4)	
and are "sealed" (13:16)	
All the world worships the beast	All the world will worship God
(13:12)	(15:4)
Followers as numerous as sand on	As the seed of Abraham
the sea shore (20:8)	
Their followers have one mind	How it should be amongst us
(17:3), and are world-wide	
The woman clothed with a blood red	Cp. the sacrificial office of Christ
robe and a cup (17:4)	
The beast is, was and will be (17:8-	God is, will and will be (16:5)
11); an allusion to the Yahweh Name	

The beast systems, as Babylon and Assyria before them, were false Kingdoms of God. The beast has the power to give *pneuma* to the image / body of the first beast (Rev. 13:15)- an evident mimicry of God's creation of Adam. They appear to offer, here and now, the things of the Kingdom, and the fleshly-minded are persuaded by them. This is all playing out the drama of Eden again; the serpent offered equality with God, the wisdom of God, when it was actually the wisdom of the serpent. Adam and Eve grasped for what was offered, unlike the Lord Jesus, who refused to grasp at equality with God (Phil. 2 is full of allusion to the events of Gen. 3). What happened in Eden is in essence the epitome, the prototype of all temptation and sin (1 Jn. 2:16 = Gen. 3:6). Every one of our temptations has an element of this; we are tempted to grasp for what looks like the Kingdom here and now. Pentecostals are an evident example of this; they think they can obtain the full healing and physical ecstasy of the future Kingdom here and now. And on a more common level, there are many of us who reach out for the supposed fulfilment of hobbies, the supposed peace and 'security' of a nice home and bank balance, when these things are actually a false fulfilment, peace and security, the peace and security of Satan's Kingdom which is a counterfeit of the spiritual fulfilment, peace and security of Christ's Kingdom. A very evident example of this is found in Rabshakeh's offer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: 'If you reject Yahweh as your God, the King of Assyria will give you a Kingdom where you will "eat every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree" ' (Is. 36:16); in saying this, Rabshakeh was quoting the very words of Mic. 4:4 concerning the Kingdom of God. The Jews were faced with the choice of God's Kingdom, or Satan's Kingdom, couched as it was in terms of God's Kingdom. Likewise, the world around us isn't passive. It is actively seeking to deceive. There is a tension between us and this world, including the apostate 'Christian' world, which is vital to recognize if we are to share the salvation of God's Kingdom and avoid the condemnation of Satan's Kingdom. There can be no half way position.

Those who will refuse to worship the beast will be killed (Rev. 13:15); but those (responsible) who try to avoid this death will themselves be *tortured* to death by the Lamb, because they worshipped the beast and did not openly testify to their faith (14:9-11; 16:2). See on Mt. 3:11.

13:16 *And he causes all, the small and the great and the rich and the poor and the free and the bondservant, to be given a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead-* The beast system will insist that all people receive the mark in their foreheads (Rev. 13:15,16; 14:11). This was an allusion to the way slaves were branded with a mark of ownership. And so in the very last days it will intensely cost to have the stigmata, the marks / brand, of being true servants of Jesus. It will cost and hurt to really believe His words, that we cannot serve two masters. This is why those who are slaves of others are pictured here as all becoming slaves of this beastly coalition.

We either receive the mark of the beast and ultimately face torture and the wine of God's wrath; or we refuse it and face Babylon's wrath (Rev. 13:16,17; 14:9,10). Now is the time for self-examination.

13:17 *So that no one should be able to buy or to sell, unless he has the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name-* This is very much the language of how those excluded from the synagogues were treated for accepting Jesus as Christ (Jn. 9:22). The figure of 666 (:18) is only found in the Bible concerning Solomon's Israelite kingdom. This of course was but an incipient fulfilment of the final terrorizing of Jews and Christians by the jihadist entity. Likewise it has been shown that in Nero's time it was forbidden for Christians to use Imperial coinage, with its images of Caesar as Lord. It was in this sense impossible to buy or sell unless one was willing to accept the mark of the beast- exactly as in Rev. 13:17. The next verse goes on to identify the number of the beast / man as being 666. And yet this is the sum of the Hebrew letters in 'Neron Caesar'! Whatever other application these verses may be seen to have to Catholic persecution, there can be little doubt that their first century context applies to the persecution of the early converts. Later, Domitian demanded that he be worshipped as Lord and God, "Dominus et deus noster" (Suetonius, *Domitiani Vita*, 13.4). John records how Thomas called the Lord Jesus "my lord and my God", in active opposition to this kind of thinking (although Domitian came after Thomas). One couldn't worship Caesar and the Lord Jesus. The Lord Himself had foreseen this when He warned that His followers couldn't serve two masters. Domitian demanded to be called 'Master', but this was impossible for the Christian. Indeed, much of Revelation seems taken up with this theme of the first century refusal to worship the Caesars and deified Roman empire on pain of persecution (Rev. 13:4; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20). "Following the Neronian persecution, being a Christian was tantamount to being part of a criminal conspiracy, and Christians (unlike other religious groups) were punished simply for being Christians (Tacitus *Annals* 15.44.5; Pliny *Letters* 10.96.2-3). Their crime was an unwillingness to worship any God but their own, an exclusiveness the Greeks labelled "atheism." The refusal to sacrifice to pagan gods and on behalf of deified emperors was perceived as a threat to the harmonious relationship between people and the gods" (J.L. Mays, Editor, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). Although in many parts of the 21st century world the tension between the believer and the beast is not articulated so starkly, the essential realities of the conflict remain, and must be felt by us.

13:18 *Here is wisdom. He that has understanding, let him count the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty six-* The first beast, representing Babylon, had "the heart of a man" (Dan. 7:4). It was the embodiment of an individual person- Nebuchadnezzar. The latter day Babylon likewise will be centred around a person- the antiChrist figure of the last days, who in turn will profess to be the incarnation or embodiment of the false prophet Mohammed. Nebuchadnezzar in his madness became as a beast- with a body like a beast, hair like an eagle, and nails like those of a beast (Dan. 4:33).

This language is all used about the beasts in the later prophetic parts of Daniel's prophecy. They had features of eagles (Dan. 7:4), bodies of beasts (Dan. 7:11), and remarkable nails or claws (Dan. 7:19). Nebuchadnezzar became like such a beast because the latter day beast would be the embodiment of him, just as the image of Daniel 2 had the face of Nebuchadnezzar and was in the form of a man. The beast is epitomized by a man- "the number of the beast... is the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18).

The little horn takes a stand against the Prince of princes and then is destroyed "but not by human power" (Dan. 8:25), i.e. he will be destroyed by the stone [Jesus] cut out without human hands. This is just the language of 2 Thess. 2, of how the Antichrist will be destroyed by the Lord's sudden return. Micah and Isaiah call this individual "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25). We have shown elsewhere that the description of Lucifer being thrown out of heaven can be read as describing the fall of a future King of Babylon in the last days. The most comfortable understanding of antiChrist as being an Assyrian / Babylonian is that he will be an Assyrian / Babylonian, and ruler of those areas. A leader of Iraq would ideally suit this. And their leadership shows every sign of the aggression, megalomania and anti-Semitism which will characterize the antiChrist. Note too that Gog is the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal- areas identified by some as being in present Iran / Iraq. The number of the beast is the number of a man (Rev. 13:18); he becomes personally identified with the system that persecutes the saints and Israel in the last days.

The black flags carried by the jihadists have a roughly drawn circle with a brief summary of the Muslim creed: 'There is none other God than Allah and Mohammed is His messenger'. The circle is roughly drawn because it is a replica of Mohammed's seal which he attached to his decrees and communications. To receive the mark of the beast may well refer to receiving such a stamp or carrying such an insignia, perhaps literally on the forehead. Because pictures of jihadist fighters show them with this symbol on their foreheads. The seal of Muhammad was held to have magic qualities, and the loss of the seal amounted to the loss of the caliphate and the loss of unity among Muslims. Now, the Islamists are popularizing the seal again, announcing a caliphate and urging Muslim unity- a unity which will ultimately be focused against Israel. The false prophet and beast are Biblically associated with false miracles, so something to look for would be the claims of false miracles or magic, as was once associated with the seal- see Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980 (chapter 12). The jihadist flag has a name, just as the British flag is called 'the Union Jack', the Canadian flag 'the maple leaf', the French flag is called the tricolour and the American flag 'the stars and stripes'. It is called The Black Banner or Black Standard, also known as *rāyat al-`uqāb* "the banner of the eagle". The final enemies of Israel are described as coming upon her "as swift as the eagle flies" (Dt. 28:49). Babylon is spoken of as an eagle in Jer. 48:40; Dan. 7:4; Hab. 1:8 and Ez. 17:3,12, as is Assyria (Hos. 8:1) and as are the Ammonites (Jer. 49:16) and Edom (Obadiah 4). The Islamists flying the banner of the eagle therefore associates them with being a reincarnation of Israel's historical enemies.

The mark of the beast is to be worn on the hand, yet the Greek word for "hand" is the same as for "arm". Jihadist fighters are wearing this symbol, the seal of Mohammed, on rings and armbands- and we can expect this to become what they demand of their subject peoples too. We could expect the coinage and other symbols of any such beast entity to include it too, so that literally one could not buy or sell without it, in the earth / land under their control. The mark of the beast in the forehead is clearly intended to be understood as the inverse of the "seal of God" which is in the forehead of the believers (Rev. 9:4). The word *sphragis* used there definitely means a seal, and it is matched by the "mark" of the beast. That mark can be

understood, therefore, also as a seal- and what more likely than the seal of Mohammed? It may be that signet rings are used to stamp documents, or it forms part of an insignia without which no business can be done in the land- e.g. on the coins and gold of the earth / land under their domination. The Koran itself speaks of how true Muslims will have the mark of Mohammad on their foreheads as a sign that they worship: "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. Thou [O Muhammad] seest them bowing and falling prostrate [in worship], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration" (Surah 48.29). In Revelation 14:9,11, having the mark of the beast is connected with worshipping him. The Islamic jihadist movement set to take over Israel is a highly religious movement, seeking to strictly obey the Koran. They are highly conscious of these verses.

The Biblical data concerning the mark of the beast suggests that this will be used by "the beast" and will be enforced upon those who "dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 13:14,17). "The earth" Biblically refers to either the whole planet, or the land- the land promised to Abraham, from the Nile to the Euphrates. This promised land is the focus of the Bible. The beast of Revelation is another take on the beast of Daniel 7, which in turn is an amplification of the fourth empire of the image of Daniel 2. The empires or kings of Daniel 2 all refer to those entities who reigned over "the whole earth / land"- of Israel, as discussed further in my exposition of Daniel 2. The same earth / land is in view here in Revelation. The latter day Islamic entity can therefore be expected to gain control over that territory and to enforce the acceptance of Islam there. The mark is specifically the mark of a man (Rev. 13:18)- and that man is clearly Mohammed, seeing that the ensign of the jihadists is the seal of Mohammed. And according to some usages of gematria [whereby each letter in the Hebrew or Arabic alphabet has a numerical value], Mohammed in Greek, Mahomet, (Μαομετις) has a value of 666:

Mu	Alpha	Omicron	Mu	Epsilon	Tau	Iota	Sigma
40	1	70	40	5	300	10	200
TOTAL: 666							

Don't dismiss gematria too quickly. The Bible itself uses it here in Rev. 13:18. There, the number 666 is not written as it would normally have been, as a number, but rather as three Greek letters, *chi xi stigma*; which between them add up to 666 by gematria. So it would seem that we are being invited to work out the riddle through the use of gematria. There are some connections in form between the letters of the Greek and Arabic alphabets, just as there are between the letters of the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets (e.g. 'R' in the Latin alphabet is the inverse of 'я' in the Cyrillic). When those three Greek letters are turned on their side, they read exactly as the Arabic letters which spell *Bis'm Allah*- "In the name of Allah", which is the credo of Islam and the jihadists. This appears to be another connection between Islam and the mark of the beast.

We note too from Rev. 13:14 that the beast system does apparent 'miracles'; and the seal of Mohammed was historically supposed to be able to perform miracles. We could expect such false claims to be made within the territory dominated by the latter day Islamists also. The Islamic State has already demonstrated how they dealt with areas they conquered- all economic life was controlled by them and people were forced into submission to the new system. Nobody will be able to buy and sell in the territory of the earth / land promised to Abraham without displaying the mark of loyalty to the jihadists- the seal of Mohammed.

The book of Revelation, like all Bible prophecy, will have particular and acute relevance to those who live in the very last days before Christ comes. There is a particular blessing repeated for those who refuse to accept the mark of the beast. That brave and tiny minority will be comprised of those Jews who refuse to convert, and instead convert to Jesus Christ in their desperation. And for them, the book of Revelation holds out particular blessing (Rev. 14:9-11; 15:2; 20:4).

The little horn of Daniel 7 is the beast of Revelation 13:

<b>Daniel 7</b>	<b>Revelation 13</b>
"... a mouth speaking great things" (verse 8)	"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . .
"And he shall speak great words against the most High ..." (verse 25)	And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his
"I beheld, and the same tabernacle, and them that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (verse 21)	dwelt in heaven" (verses 5,6)
	"And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (verse 7)

Notice that the little horn of Daniel 7 is actually called "the beast": "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11).

The little horn is also to be connected with the "King of the north" of Daniel 11, which is based upon Antiochus and the leaders of the northern part of the Greek empire, from Syria. The fact the current jihadist leadership has emerged from Syria is maybe significant in this context:

<b>Daniel 7</b>	<b>Daniel 8</b>	<b>Daniel 11</b>
1.The little horn	The little horn	"The king"
2.At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles
3.Very aggressive	Very aggressive	Very aggressive
4."A look more stout than his fellows"	Magnifies himself	Magnifies himself
5.A mouth speaking great things against the Most High		Speaks marvellous things against the God of gods
6.Makes war against the saints and prevails	Destroys the holy people	

7.Destroyed by the	Destroyed by
Ancient of days	the
	Prince of
	princes

The first beast, representing Babylon, had "the heart of a man" (Dan. 7:4). It was the embodiment of an individual person- Nebuchadnezzar. The latter day Babylon likewise will be centred around a person- the antiChrist figure of the last days, who in turn will profess to be the incarnation or embodiment of the false prophet Mohammed. Nebuchadnezzar in his madness became as a beast- with a body like a beast, hair like an eagle, and nails like those of a beast (Dan. 4:33). This language is all used about the beasts in the later prophetic parts of Daniel's prophecy. They had features of eagles (Dan. 7:4), bodies of beasts (Dan. 7:11), and remarkable nails or claws (Dan. 7:19). Nebuchadnezzar became like such a beast because the latter day beast would be the embodiment of him, just as the image of Daniel 2 had the face of Nebuchadnezzar and was in the form of a man. The beast is epitomized by a man- "the number of the beast...is the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18).

## CHAPTER 14

14:1- see on 2 Tim. 4:17.

*And I looked, and beheld the Lamb standing on mount Zion, and with him one hundred and forty four thousand, each having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads-* See on :3. There is an important difference between the 144,000 in chapter 7 and those in chapter 14. Chapter 7 concerns the *sealing* of the faithful Israelite believers as the latter day tribulation in the land begins. They are marked as God's people, marked for protection, as were the Israelites whose houses were covered by the blood of the Passover lamb, and as repentant Jews were marked on the forehead in Ezekiel 9. In Revelation 14 these redeemed Israelites are *harvested*. They are united to each other and to the Lord Jesus Christ at His return. They are called firstfruits, hinting at the great ingathering later in the same chapter. It seems this group of saints are resurrected before the great multitude from all nations; or perhaps they refer to the Jewish converts within Israel who are snatched away from persecution (11:12; 12:5). This would be another application of the principle, "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Rom. 2:10). Again, there is an allusion to the events of the Lord's death here; for the graves were opened and Jewish believers who had recently died were resurrected and appeared as witnesses against the system who had crucified their Lord.

The Lamb comes to be on Mt. Zion with the believers in that they are snatched away there and judged there; see on 11:12; 12:5. John maybe has the reverse image of Judas and Peter standing with the Lord's enemies in mind when he writes that the redeemed shall stand with Jesus on Mount Zion facing the hostile world.

The Name- i.e. God's character- has been engraved in their foreheads, in distinction to the name of the beast being upon the foreheads of his followers at the end of chapter 13. In 14:11 the name of the beast has to be merely 'received'- a rather passive verb, perhaps reflecting how the beast forces token conversion and worship. We either 'receive' the beast's name, or have God's name slowly engraved. We can't have a forehead / mind / underlying heartbeat which has both names. See 14:9 note. "His *Father's* Name" is used rather than simply 'God's Name', to show how we have God's Name placed upon us because of His revelation in the Lamb, His Son.

14:2 *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers playing their harps-* They are the Heavenly antithesis to the harpers within the Babylon-beast system (Rev. 18:22), just as the 144,000 sealed with the Lord's Name on their foreheads are the antithesis to those at the end of the preceding chapter 13 who have the beast's mark of 666 in their foreheads. Perhaps the harpers refer to the Angels John was beholding in the heavenly vision of the throne room? But in what sense are the harpers different from the four beasts and the 144,000 [believers] of :3? Or was God's one voice somehow like the voice of many harpers, unity in diversity? Or is it that the believers are each represented by an Angel before God, and so the voice and harping of the Angels is that of their charges on earth, those whom they represent? This is the option I prefer.

John often 'flits' between earth and Heaven in his visions, because he is demonstrating how situations and people on earth have their representatives in Heaven amongst the Angels who are before God's throne in the Heavenly court room. Here, John sees the 144,000 on Mount

Zion, on earth. But he then hears a crowd in Heaven singing the song which only the 144,000 can learn. The voices in Heaven are those of their representative Angels; the singing of victory songs in Heaven with harps is likewise performed by Angels in Rev. 5:8,11,12. The 144,000 are "without fault before the throne of God" (14:5) because their representative Angels stand there before the throne acceptable to God (14:3). The Lamb, the Lord Jesus, is now *standing* on earth, on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, rather than *sitting* at the Father's right hand in Heaven. This surely speaks of the time of His return to earth. Psalm 2:6-12 anticipates the Messiah as being enthroned on Mount Zion; then will be fulfilled Is. 24:23 "The Lord of Hosts will reign on Mount Zion".

14:3 *And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders-* Here we have the situation on earth merging with the situation John is beholding in Heaven. There's a frequent connection made between the Angels and the redeemed at the Lord's return, for He returns from Heaven with the Angels. It will be so appropriate for the believers to be united with their guardian Angels at this time. We shall stand before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). Rev. 14:3 paints the picture of the righteous singing before the throne of judgment. In Him, in that day, will be fulfilled Zeph. 3:17: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee... He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful (us) for the solemn assembly", when the Lord will keep Passover with us again.

*And no one could learn the song-* This implies there will be those who try to repeat the song, seek to enter the life eternal, but cannot. Eternal life, salvation, redemption, is likened to an eternally sung song.

*Save the hundred and forty four thousand, they that had been purchased out of the earth-* The 144,000 refers therefore to those who had been redeemed from the earth / land promised to Abraham during the last day tribulation. The idea of purchased "out of" may refer to how some of these latter day Jewish converts are apparently taken out of the earth / land to some safe place (see on 11:12; 12:5). Perhaps there will be a literal 144,000 who repent and convert to Christ, and seeing they did so in the face of the worst tribulation, they are worthy of special mention.

14:4 *These are they that were not defiled with women, for they are virgins-* The "women" are the prostitute women associated with the Babylon system. The contrast is with Babylon the whore who rides the beast system. We have not yet encountered her in Revelation; but as I have stressed so often, we do not have here a linear, chronological timeline being presented. Rather do images rotate and merge, as is typical of the apocalyptic genre.

The faithful Jewish remnant within the land will have resisted pressure to convert to Islam. Such Muslim pressure upon Jews living in the land to convert to Islam is easily imaginable. For the Koran teaches Moslems that they have a special duty to bring Jews to Islam: "O children of Israel!... Believe in what I have sent down to you (this Qu'ran), confirming that which is with you, the Taurat [Torah]... and mix not truth with falsehood" (Surah 2:40-42). Indeed, much of the lengthy second Surah of the Koran is full of such demands for "the children of Israel" to submit to Islam. The reason given is that the Jews supposedly "conceal the truth while they know it" because the Torah supposedly supports Islam, although Muslims claim the Jews changed the original (Surah 2.146); and also that Mohammed was sent to the Jews but they rejected Him (Surah 2.151).



*These are they that follow the Lamb wherever he goes-* Alluding to Mk. 15:41, the women who followed Jesus around Galilee in the days of popularity and mass adulation, followed Him also to the rejection and loneliness of the cross. To follow "whithersoever" is a challenge. Mk. 15:40,41 makes the point that the women who followed the Lord in fair weather times in Galilee also followed Him to the darkness of the cross: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him". Mt. 13:55 makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and now, she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

*These were purchased from among men to be the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb-* The promise of greater harvest is perhaps implied in the subsequent presentation of the Gospel we meet here. At the time of the Lord's return, many others will be converted, far greater in number than those redeemed in this dispensation? Surely "firstfruits" implies that.

14:5 *And in their mouth was found no lie. They are without blemish-* The very language used about the Lord Jesus in 1 Pet. 2:22. His personality and character, down to His way of speaking, are imputed to us. Only by imputed righteousness can it be said that a person has no guile (Ps. 32:2). Guile / deceit / dishonesty is seen as the epitome of sin, and to be without guile is the height of righteousness. To be honest about who we are, not seeking to impress, being straightforward, who we are matching what we say- this, rather than dramatic works, is the height of righteousness. "Found" implies a process of searching- at the judgment? "Blessed is the man... in whose spirit is no guile" (Ps. 32:2) is picked up in Rev. 14:5: "In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God". The picture of forgiven David in Ps. 32 is what we will each be like after acceptance "before the throne of God". Yet David's experience can also be ours here and now; in those moments of true contrition, we surely are experiencing salvation in prospect.

The reference is to Zeph. 3:13 concerning the repentant remnant of Israel. 'Guile' is an allusion to Jacob- this is the true Israel purged of Jacob's negative side. This confirms my suggestion that primarily the 144,000 refer to a group of Jewish Christians redeemed from the earth / land of Israel as a result of their righteous response to the tribulation which comes upon them and their land. It is of course the Lord Jesus who has no guile in His mouth (Is. 53:9)- they are counted as "in Christ" because by faith and baptism they have become in Him, as a result of the Elijah ministry of the last days. We should be beginning that work now.

"Without blemish" is the language of spotless sacrifice in the LXX (Ex. 29:1; Lev. 1:3; 4:3; 5:15; Ez. 43:22,23). As in Col. 1:22 and Jude 24, the faithful are presented faultless before God's throne- only by the Lord's righteousness being counted to them.

14:6- see on Dan. 4:17.

*And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good news to proclaim to those that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people-* Rev. 14:6

describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them. See on Gal. 5:25. Rev. 14:6 appears to draw a distinction between “them that dwell on the earth” and the more general inhabitants of the world: “every nation, kindred, tongue and people”.

An Angel may be given a mission to preach somewhere, and success may be arranged by Him in prospect, but it is for us to put the work into practical effect, without which the converts will not be produced, despite the Angels preparatory work, although of course ultimately this is all foreknown by God Himself. Thus we read in Rev. 14:6 of an Angel being sent "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (same word as 'land'- i.e. the land of Israel), and to every nation, kindred and tongue and people "(i.e. the whole world as well). However, this actual work of preaching to the Jews and to the world will be done by the saints; thus they will work out in practice what was achieved by the Angel in God's plan. In this context it is worth considering how the great commission as recorded in Mt. 28:18,19 is set in the context of other references in Matthew to world-wide preaching. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; and yet it is the Angels who will gather the harvest from “the world” (Mt. 13:38), Angels who will “repay” us for our work at the last day (Mt. 16:27), Angels who gather the elect from “the four winds” (Mt. 24:31) and gather [converts from] “all nations” to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The implication surely is that in our preaching work, the Angels are with us and will gather in the converts which we have made.

The whole scene in 14:6-9 makes more sense if we imagine the nations presently living in the land promised to Abraham, confederated against Israel under Babylon, now having the Gospel preached to them. They are told *not* to confederate under Babylon. The ‘earth dwellers’ in the OT (especially in Joshua) invariably refer to the nations dwelling in the land, not the whole planet. Yet Babylon will reign over “the kings of the earth” (17:18), another phrase so often used in the OT of the nations dwelling in the land. So it would seem that generally they will reject the warning given to them to keep separate from her. Yet Revelation ends with: “the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it”. The kings of the land, once confederate with Babylon, will in the very end come to Zion and accept her rather than Babylon as their capital.

This witness to the nations, tribes etc. living in the earth / land promised to Abraham is also a witness to the entire planet. For the world's attention will be riveted upon what is going on there. But this need not necessarily have to follow chronologically from the 144,000 appearing on Mount Zion. It may be explaining how it came about, that those 144,000 are there; for I have suggested that this group refers to the largely Jewish converts made during the tribulation period, those who responded to the witness made by the "woman" of 12:1 (see note there), whose preaching to them was represented by the Angel flying through the heavenly throne room which John is beholding.

*14:7 He said with a great voice: Fear God and give Him glory! For the hour of His judgment comes, and worship Him that made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters-* Conversion is a call to worship our creator, not merely assent to a set of theology. In

the latter day context, the call is to worship *God* rather than the beast, who demands total worship (13:12,15). This is a last minute appeal: "For the hour of His judgment is come". Like many Old Testament prophets, is this a last minute appeal for repentance in order to avert Israel and the world's final judgment? Perhaps it will succeed, explaining why some potential judgments like the seven thunders do not come (see on 10:4). "When your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9); for "the Lord is known by the judgment which he executes" (Ps. 9:16). Israel's condemnation was to be "an instruction" unto the surrounding nations (Ez. 5:14,15). And Israel herself will know that "I am the LORD" in their final condemnation, as Ezekiel so often prophesied. This clearly associates God's judgment with a learning process. "When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise" (Prov. 21:11). Thus the nations are intended to learn from the experience of Israel's condemnation (Hos. 2:10). The repentance of Egypt will be because "the Lord shall smite Egypt... and they shall return to the Lord" (Is. 19:18-22).

Heaven, earth, sea and waters have all featured in the descriptions of the judgments which have so far fallen upon the earth / land promised to Abraham. The world is bidden accept that the God who brought such turmoil upon them was also their creator.

14:8- see on Rev. 16:12.

*And another, a second angel, followed, saying: Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the great, that has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the anger of her fornication-* The word "fallen" occurs many times in Revelation. Believers either fall before the Lord, or fall in condemnation. We must fall and be broken- one way or the other (Mt. 21:44). Making others sin is the ultimate sin. To make just one brother stumble means we should be thrown into the sea with a millstone around our necks (Mk. 9:42). And Babylon has made multitudes stumble. Just as "the beast" is introduced in 11:7 without introduction, so "Babylon" is spoken of here as if we know all about her; although she is only spoken of in detail chapter 17. Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images. It's not that Babylon or a beast is introduced, defined and then we have progressive development of the theme in a chronological sense. What we have, true to the apocalyptic genre, is a kaleidoscope of images, rotating before us.

In 18:4 we have the same cry, "Babylon is fallen!" and there is then an appeal to come out from her- to leave the beast system which has been dominating the earth / land. This appeal is repeated here when 14:9 warns that those who receive her mark will be destroyed. This is therefore the equivalent to the urgent appeal in :6 to respond to the Gospel. Babylon has fallen from heaven's perspective, but the fact people are asked to separate from her suggests that on earth, she appears still standing.

The Old Testament source passages teach the same; it is a man on a watchtower who perceives from afar that Babylon has fallen (Is. 21:8-10); and Isaiah's first hearers were hearing this *before* Babylon fell. Likewise Jer. 51:8 suggests that at the time of the cry that "Babylon is fallen!", she could still repent and avert her judgment: "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed". And the context speaks of her *impending* fall and destruction as if it is yet future: "I will send to Babylon strangers who shall winnow her; and they shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her around... They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans" (Jer. 51:2,4).

Drinking a cup of wine is a double symbol. It's either "the cup of blessing" or the cup of condemnation. Hence the breaking of bread service leads us to a T-intersection, we take the cup either to our eternal blessing or eternal condemnation. And we can't flunk the choice. God's judgment of her is because of her fornication. Babylon caused the nations around her to drink her wine of fornication, making them "mad" (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 14:8). Wine being a symbol of teaching, this must point to 'Babylon' spreading the idea of Islamic fundamentalism to the nations around Israel (as "the nations" seem to normally refer to), making them "mad" in their hatred of Israel. Iran and Iraq, geographical Babylon/Assyria, are already noted for this. As Sennacherib relied heavily on propaganda and religious rhetoric, so Nebuchadnezzar and his latter-day equivalent will do even more so. Jer. 51:55 speaks of Babylon as "the great voice", referring to her religious propaganda. This will be quite complex, carrying with it all the power and persuasion of a pseudo-intellectuality: "Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you" (Is. 47:10).

*14:9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice: If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives the mark on his forehead, or upon his hand-* As noted on :8, this is an appeal not to continue part of the Babylon system, to be one of the brave who refuse to have the mark of the beast upon them (see on 13:17). This is particularly an appeal to those dominated by the beast, within the territory of her dominion, which is the earth / land promised to Abraham. The mark on the forehead alludes to how prostitutes had their name on their foreheads (Jer. 3:3). By using Babylon as a prostitute, they themselves became as prostitutes. The warning is to come out of the beast / Babylon whore system, or refuse to submit to it even on pain of death.

Daniel's friends' refusal to obey the command to worship Babylon's King is alluded to, which prophesy how the saints of the last days will be tested just as Daniel was, with a like miraculous deliverance. Daniel's representative role is most clearly shown in the figurative death, resurrection and judgment which he receives in Dan. 10. In this Daniel is acting out the experience of each of the approved. The comforting "Fear not Daniel" (Dan. 10:12,19) slots in to many other instances of Angels saying these words to frightened men. This makes it appropriate to speculate that the latter day believers will hear the same words from the Angel who comes to gather them (and cp. Is. 35:4, which gives the same "fear not" message to the generation which sees the second coming).

*14:10 He also shall drink of the wine of the anger of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of His anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb-* The wine of Babylon's fornication is matched by the wine of God's anger. I will be "without mixture", maybe implying that some who are condemned drink wine mixed with water, i.e. are condemned with a lesser condemnation. To drink wine without any dilution at all was unusual in the first century. It would've been very bitter. But those who are told Babylon has fallen and yet still take her whore's mark into their foreheads with Angels flying overhead appealing for repentance- will be punished most severely. The grades of condemnation inversely reflect the grades of acceptance, one star differing from another in glory, one over five cities, another over two.

The sulphur is to recall the destruction of Sodom. Sodom is equated with Babylon. Those who refused to leave or who turned back [Lot's wife] represent those in the last days who will refuse the Angelic call to leave the Babylon system.

This destruction will be "in the presence of" the Lamb and the Angels. He will be back on earth to judge this system, bringing His angels with Him. The Angels John had seen in vision in heaven would come to earth, to the very situations they had as it were acted out in the heavenly throne room. The other Biblical information about condemnation suggests that the rejected will be taken quickly out of the Lord's presence. He takes no pleasure in their destruction. So maybe we have here a snapshot of their agony in His presence as they perceive their final rejection before they are cast out of His presence. The rejected will be punished in the Lord's presence, and then cast out of His presence (2 Thess. 1:9) into outer darkness. This suggests two stages of condemnation: the slinking away, within the Lord's presence, and then being cast out into outer darkness (perhaps literal darkness?). The rejected are handed over to the judge who then casts them into prison or fire. The branches are cast forth, and then (stage two) cast into the fire (Jn. 15:6). There are verses which speak of the rejected being slain before Christ, cut in sunder (i.e. slain with the sword) (Is. 63:1-6; Mt. 24:51; Lk. 19:27). This presumably suggests that some will be punished quite soon after their rejection (e.g. the unwilling Jewish 'subjects' of Christ's Kingdom, Lk. 19:27), whilst others will be punished and yet expelled from the Lord's presence to suffer the agony of existing without any relationship with the Lord they once loved. Again, Lk. 19:27 has an example of both. Surely these are the "many stripes" of Lk. 12:47,48, compared to the "few stripes" of immediate death. Likewise the degree of punishment for individual Israelites in the wilderness was surely reflected in how long they were kept alive until they were finally wasted away by the Lord's hand. Some of the nations / political systems of the world are immediately destroyed at the Lord's coming, whilst others have their suffering period extended for a season and time (Dan. 7:12). The rejected amongst the people of God will in some ways share the condemnation of the world which they loved. It may be that there will be different geographical areas of punishment; some are cast into fire, others into outer darkness, into prison (Mt. 5:25)... or are these simply saying that there will be different kinds of punishment? Or are they different figures for the same thing?

14:11 *And the smoke of their torment*- The allusion is to how Abraham saw the smoke of Sodom's destruction from a distance. They themselves are consumed, but the smoke, the memorial of their condemnation, will eternally remain. Smoke is a memorial to destruction- the individuals are totally and permanently destroyed, but the memorial of that remains. We will remember the rejected, in some sense, for eternity.

*Goes up for ever and ever*- This going on throughout the 'aion of the aions' would suggest that there will always be the reminder of the condemnation of sinners. How this will be achieved in practice is hard to envisage. But in some way, there will always be a reminder of the rejection and judgment of the unworthy of this present dispensation. This will serve as a powerful reminder to the mortals of any future age or dispensation; it may well be something which we use to remind them of the seriousness of sin.

*And they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image and whoever receives the mark of his name*- They are the antithesis of the worshippers of God, who have no rest day nor night in worshipping Him (Rev. 4:8). But this doesn't mean they consciously exist, for the Bible is clear that death is unconsciousness. As noted about *the smoke*, it is the memorial of their destruction which remains, and the "rest" in view is that which they could have experienced. For the same word is used of the "rest" which the Lord Jesus promised to those who believe in Him ("I will give you rest", Mt. 11:28); and although a different Greek word is used, the idea is the same in the descriptions of the Kingdom of God as a "rest" *for the people of God* (Heb. 4:9,10). But these are not the people of God. The way they missed

this eternal rest will be eternally remembered. Another possibility is that "They have no rest day nor night" has a different reference to "the smoke" ascending up "for ever and ever". It may refer to the awful moments, days, months, maybe years, the rejected have to exist after their rejection. Their rejection means that simply existing is mental torment.

This situation will be ongoing "day and night". In the new Jerusalem, there will be no night (Rev. 22:5)- but they will be outside of it, where day and night still exist. This is another illustration of the way that the Kingdom of God starts as a little stone at the return of the Lord Jesus, and spreads to fill the earth.

14:12 *Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus-* Keeping the commandments and having the Faith in Christ are paralleled. To have the commandments is to keep them (Jn. 14:21 Gk.)- a true understanding leads to obedience in practice. Perhaps the emphasis is on the idea of 'keeping'; for under the beast's domination, the Christians within the territory dominated by it will be sore pressed to renounce their faith.

14:13- see on Rom. 14:8,9.

*And I heard the voice from heaven saying: Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from this time forward. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours. For their works follow them-* "Yes, says the Spirit" may refer to a Spirit-Angel (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7) who was the "voice from Heaven", gasping as it were at the wonder of how those who die in the Lord will be saved. Their works "follow" them, literally 'walk alongside with them'. Actions are important, even if we are saved by faith. For faith without works is dead. We come to judgment with our works, our lives, standing next to us. Those who do not worship the beast or have his mark will be killed (13:15,16; 14:11 cp. Dan. 3:6); in this context we are told by a special announcement from Heaven "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (14:13)- as if there will be a special blessing for those who die in the tribulation. This is why the 144,000, representing those converted at this time, are singled out for such special attention and blessing. "Them that had gotten the victory over the beast... his image... his mark... sing the song of Moses" (15:2,3)- implying that their persecution by the beast was like being in Egypt, and their deliverance therefore gave rise to a new song of Moses. Their "works" which followed them may simply refer to their enduring in their faith in Christ and refusal of the beast's mark; for in John's Gospel, the work of God is to believe in His Son (Jn. 6:29).

14:14 *And I looked and beheld a white cloud, and on the cloud I saw one sitting like a Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle-* The white cloud may be representing Angels, or the faithful believers (Heb. 12:1), or simply a reference to how the Lord ascended in a cloud and will return likewise (Acts 1:11). He is now King, crowned, but on account of His humanity as "Son of Man", He is well qualified to judge men. He has intimate personal experience of what it is to be human, and can judge humans appropriately. His sickle is sharpened- He is about to harvest.

14:15 *And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud: Send forth your sickle and reap. For the hour to reap comes. For the harvest of the earth is ripe-* The Lord Jesus reaps the harvest of the earth, what has been brought forth in spiritual fruit in the territory of the earth / land dominated by the beast. This is another explanation of how came about the opening scene of the 144,000 in :1. His emphasis is upon

harvesting the good harvest; the second reaping of :18-20 is of the wicked. In the parable of Mt. 13:30, both the wheat and the tares are "gathered", but to separate places.

The allusion is clearly to the judging of the inhabitants of the land of Israel once "the iniquity of the Amorites [was] full" (Gen. 15:16). And they refer to the non-Israelite inhabitants of the land promised to Abraham. The "earth" here is 'the land'- of Israel. There is to be a spiritual harvest of repentant Jews now accepting Christ. This is the 144,000 of :1 (see note there). The harvest is (Gk.) over-ripe. The second coming will be delayed; wickedness and spirituality will be ripe for judgment but it will be delayed [to allow yet more to repent, such is the Lord's grace?].

Both the cross and the final judgment (Rev. 14:7,15) are described in John's writings as 'the hour coming'; the parallel language indicates that he presents the cross as the essence of the judgment. Is. 53 speaks of the Lord as being "bruised" upon the cross. But Is. 42:4 had earlier used this language about Christ, saying that He would be bruised with the result that he would "set judgment in the earth" (RVmg.). His bruising thus set forth judgment to all. There was a *sedile* or seat affixed to the cross, on which the victim sat in order to get temporary relief. Thus some accounts of crucifixion describe the victim as mounting the cross as one would mount a horse. This would make the cross capable of interpretation as some kind of seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. See on Jn. 19:13.

14:16 *And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth and the earth was reaped-* "He that sat..." is the Lord Jesus in 4:3; 5:7. Now His throne is a cloud- of glory, seeing the time for His open glorification has come. The sickle is literally a gathering hook, designed to harvest fruit. It is the fruit of the Spirit which has been developed throughout the tribulation which is His primary interest. "Reaped" is a form of the word for "summer"- literally, 'reaping time'. It is spiritual fruit on the fig tree, the repentance of a remnant in Israel, which means 'summer' or reaping time has come (s.w. Mt. 24:32). In the Olivet prophecy, this is the final and most certain sign that of His return (Mk. 13:28; Lk. 21:30). All the possible sequences of events hinge around this- the repentance of a remnant within Israel. This remnant is the 144,000 (see on :1), which is why they are given such parade importance in Revelation. This is why we read of the 'reaping' of the earth, whereas the next harvesting is not spoken of in those terms; rather is it a gathering of bad crops to destruction.

14:17- see on Heb. 9:23.

*Another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle-* See on :16. This is a gathering unto condemnation. John has been beholding the temple scene in heaven. But now Angels actually come out of it and go to earth in reality to perform things. We note that this Angel comes out of "The temple which is in Heaven" and another coming out of the altar. Does this imply that the one from the altar is responding to the death of God's people on that altar as sacrifices? Or is the altar in view the incense altar, suggesting that this action of judgment is in response to human prayer offered there?

14:18 *And another angel came out from the altar, he that has power over fire, and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying: Send forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth. For her grapes are fully ripe-* Notice the Angelic cooperation. One Angel calls to another, informing that the time has come for the action which that Angel had been prepared to. This recalls the mutual function between the two

Angels of Passover night; one hovering over the doors with blood on them, so that the destroyer Angel did not go there. See on :17. Perhaps the picture here is of an Angel coming out of the incense altar, and triggered by the incense of our prayers, asking another Angel to do something dramatic on earth. This is how powerful prayer is, especially in the last days. And it would explain why the exact chronology and nature of events in the last days is to some degree open- because the more prayer, the quicker things will happen. The more the unjust judge was nagged [cp. prayer], the more he responded.

The idea of gathering bad fruit and dead branches from the vine and throwing them into the fire is alluding back to the Gospel of John and the Lord's description of the rejected being branches broken off from the true vine, because of their lack of spiritual fruit (Jn. 15:2). Thus it would appear that there is one Angel responsible for co-ordinating the punishment of the rejected, which he does with fire just outside Jerusalem. This suggests that the rejected will be punished by literal fire in the locality of the historical Gehenna. The judgment is of the wild vine of the earth. The people in view would therefore be apostate Israel, those who collaborated with the Islamic beast; and also of the beast itself, in that jihadist Islam presents themselves as the true vine, the true Israel of God, with the Jews and Christians as the rejected Israel of God.

14:19 *And the angel cast his sickle into the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress of the anger of God-* The harvesting of the vine of the earth / land is different from the general judgment of all men and the Gentile world. The vine of the land may refer to specific judgment upon Israel- hence the reference to 1600 furlongs of judgment in 14:20, which was thought to be the length of the land of Israel.

This passage is quoting from Is. 63:1-6, where the treading of the winepress "without the city" (:20) is clearly with reference to the Lord's crucifixion "without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). As He said, in His death, there was the judgment of the [Jewish] world. Our response to the cross is a foretaste of our response to the judgment experience. The essential reason why the people of the earth / land will be trampled there is because they had not accepted the judgment of the cross of Christ.

14:20 *And the winepress was trodden outside of the city; and there came out blood from the winepress, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as a sixteen hundred stadia-* See on :19. Trampled in the winepress "outside the city", i.e. where Jesus was crucified (Jn. 19:20; Heb. 13:11-13) is as if to show that these judgments on Israel came because of what they had done to Jesus, and their refusal of the judgment of His cross. 1600 stadia was reckoned to be the length of the land. The Itinerarium of Antonius of Piacenza says the length of Palestine was 1664 stadia. It could be that the idea of the land becoming awash with blood, the whole length of it, could refer to the final conflagration there. It will be the Lord's judgment of the wild and fruitless vine, but will effectively be brought about by people themselves turning upon each other. And this has often been how God has preferred to have judgment executed throughout history, allowing men to judge themselves by their own actions and with their own swords, rather than by destroying them by bolts of Divine wrath rained down upon them.

"The horses" are not defined. They could be the horses with the Lord Jesus (19:14), but they are "white and clean", and trampling in blood seems an inappropriate clash of symbolism and figure. The other "horses" are those of the jihadist dominators of the land of chapter 6 and 9:17. "The horses" suggests there is indeed reference to some other horses mentioned in



Revelation. So the idea would be, as noted above, that the fruitless or wild vine is trampled to destruction by the beast supporters destroying themselves and trampling upon each other. This kind of crazed hatred within the camp of Israel's enemies has been often noted; and it is the horns who hate the whore who become so incensed against her that they figuratively eat her, performing cannibalism against her (17:16).

## CHAPTER 15

15:1- see on Rev. 19:11.

*And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous. Seven angels having seven illnesses which are the last woe, for in them is finished the anger of God-* Revelation 15 is a short introduction to the vials, and features a picture of a victorious, rejoicing multitude standing on a sea of glass, having gotten the victory over the beast. The vials in chapter 16 explain how this situation came about. One assumes that these seven plagues or illnesses are the seven vials. They may be part of the "plagues" with which the two witnesses smote their opponents "as often as they wished" (11:6; s.w. "illnesses"). In which case we note that they only smote them seven times. The same word for "plagues" (s.w. "illnesses" here) is used in the vials (16:9,21); these are the plagues brought upon Babylon "in one day" (18:4,8). They come, therefore, in quick succession, or even all at the same time; for the fall of Babylon is presented as surprisingly fast and quick. the seven vials / bowls cannot therefore very well refer to events over an extended period of history in the past, as insisted by the continuous historical school.

The purpose of these seven last plagues is not punishment or bloodletting for the sake of it. They are in order to complete the necessary wrath of God, and to usher in the glorious Kingdom situation of :2. This is why in 21:9 it is mentioned that it was the Angel who carried the seven last plagues who was the one who also showed John the vision of the glorified bride. Those plagues were necessary for her final development and exhibition.

15:2 *And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those that had conquered the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God-* The sea has been whipped up by winds and by the emergence of the sea beast from it (see on 13:1). Now all is calm, and those "in Christ" can stand on stormy water, just as He did. But the sea water is strangely mixed with fire. This blessed peace could come about only through the fire of Divine judgment. Those paraded upon or by that sea are those who had overcome the beast and the command to make an image to him and have his name upon them. These again refer to the specific group of Christian converts who endure the tribulation, loving not their lives unto death; the 144,000 of 14:1 (see note there). They are now the harpers, as opposed to the harpers of Babylon (18:22). John himself had earlier stood by the sea observing the sea beast emerge (13:1); now, those who endured the beast without losing their faith, and even came to Christian faith during his domination, stand in that same place as John, who himself had undergone tribulation from the Roman and Jewish beast of his day.

15:3 *And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, singing: Great and marvellous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Righteous and true are Your ways, You King of the ages-* The saints will sing "The Song of Moses", which Ex. 15 records was sung after the triumph at the Red Sea. This indicates that Israel in Egypt prior to that represents the saints, just before the Lord's coming. Rev. 15:2-4 is all in the context of the Exodus: "I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire (cp. the calm Red Sea after it had returned over the Egyptians): and them that had gotten the victory (God was victorious at the Red Sea, Ex. 15:1) over the beast (Egypt is the prototype beast, Is. 51:9; Ez. 29:3) ... having the harps of God (cp. Miriam's timbrels) ... they sing the song of Moses... Who shall not fear You (cp. Ex. 15:14-16) ... all nations shall come and worship before You; for Your judgments are made manifest", referring to how the local nations of Canaan, the earth / land promised to Abraham, were subdued as a result of the Red Sea victory (see Ex. 15:15). There must therefore be a latter day equivalent of the Red Sea deliverance of the faithful.

15:4 *Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your Name? For You only are holy. For all the nations shall come and worship before You. For Your righteous acts have been revealed-* "Who shall not...?" suggests that others now surely must agree to glorify the Lord's Name. The events outlined in Revelation so far have involved the complete destruction of all people in the earth / land promised to Abraham apart from the faithful. So this appeal is to the rest of planet earth. All those nations will therefore come and worship at Jerusalem because of the events in the land promised to Abraham which have unfolded before their eyes, exactly in accord with the prophecies of Revelation.

God's judgments are in all the earth right now (Ps. 105:7). God judged nations in order that men might *know* Him as Yahweh (e.g. Ez. 25:11; 28:22; 30:19). Yahweh is exalted in His judging of men (Is. 5:16). His judgments make His Name / character manifest. This harder side of God converts men, and will convert them at the final judgment. God judged nations [often terribly] in order that men might *know* Him as Yahweh (e.g. Ez. 25:11; 28:22; 30:19). Yahweh is exalted in His judging of men (Is. 5:16). His judgments make His Name / character manifest. A number of OT passages (e.g. Is. 25:3) hint that a remnant of Israel's latter day enemies will actually repent and accept Yahweh's Truth- *after* their experience of His judgments. God is to be feared and worshipped because of the hour of His judgment (Rev. 14:7); but even later, "when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9).

15:5 *And after these things I saw the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven opened-* At the end of the saints' latter day tribulation, the Most Holy is opened, just as it was on Christ's death; as if His hanging on the cross is parallel to the saints' tribulation. The Angels comment "It is done" when the saints are finally delivered (16:17), as our Lord could say "It is finished" at the end of His sufferings. The great earthquake which is then described (16:18) matches the earthquakes at Christ's death and resurrection. See on Mk. 13:13.

In Isaiah 6:1-4 we have a vision of "the Lord high and lifted up", enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls; 6:4). The Lord "high and lifted up" (6:1) is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord, lifted up and exalted "very high" by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. Now Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). Now the work of the cross comes to its ultimate term. Now all those who suffered with the Lord during the tribulation will likewise find heaven opened, the way into the holiest made manifest before their eyes.

15:6 *And there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven illnesses, dressed with precious linen, pure and bright and golden sashes around their chests-* The vials are poured out by angels "clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (15:6). This description is similar to that of the One like the Son of man of chapter 1- the Lord Jesus Christ. It could therefore be appropriately applied to those who have identified themselves with the Lord, that is to say, the saints. Rev. 19:8 says that fine

linen is "the righteousness of the saints". These are perhaps the latter believers of whom we read in 11:5,6: "If any man will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies"; and "these have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues [s.w. "illnesses"], as often as they will". Their power "to smite the earth with all plagues" is exactly what happens in the vials, which are full of allusion to the plagues on Egypt. The Angels may therefore represent the believers, whose guardians they are- and it is those latter day believers who pour out the vials of the wrath of God, the seven last plagues.

Given all the allusions to Egypt, we wonder why there are seven plagues and not ten. Perhaps this is to suggest that potentially possible judgments will not happen; perhaps because of the prayers of the saints at the time, or the required repentance of Israel happening, or God's mercy in cutting short the days. See on 10:4.

*15:7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the anger of God, who lives for ever and ever-* The idea may be that God's eternity is the backdrop to His judgments. They are temporal, but the God of love is eternal. His judgments are not the flash in a pan, red hot anger of an offended deity. They have been long planned and refined. Yet He does have wrath, for that is all part and parcel of being "love" itself. Verse 1 has spoken of the wrath of God being filled up or finished; and here the bowls are filled with His anger. The image of bowls helps therefore to get the idea over- that His wrath has now ended, in its fullness it has been poured out. And His people shall now bask only in His love.

*15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter into the temple, until the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished-* As noted throughout chapter 14, there is an amazing theme in Revelation of last minute appeals being made to people throughout the closing judgments. Such is the desire of the Father and Son for human salvation. But now, although the way into the holiest is open, into direct personal with God, it is open only to the redeemed. The seven vials must be poured out, and during that time, repentance will be impossible for those upon whom they are poured. The rest of the Gentile world must watch, and then on reflection, come to repentance and acceptance of the Lord. Nobody new can come into fellowship with God whilst the seven bowls / vials are poured out; there is no appeal for repentance in the pouring out of the vials, for it is too late. This totally writes off the continuous historical attempts to apply the vials to events in European history stretching over the last few centuries. For people could as it were enter into the temple in that period.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels: Go and pour out the seven bowls of the anger of God into the earth-* The Old Testament basis for bowls used for pouring out is in the bowls for pouring out found on the table of shewbread (Ex. 25:29; Num. 4:7). But they were not for pouring out liquid, but for the frankincense which was to be placed upon the shewbread and burnt, in order to turn the bread into a memorial before God (Lev. 24:7). The LXX calls these bowls "incense cups". The pouring out of the seven last bowls of judgment is therefore portrayed in terms of incense / prayer; because it is the prayer of the faithful, especially in the last days, which brings forth these judgments which herald the coming of the Kingdom. Our prayers trigger action by Angels in Heaven which result in major events on earth. That is the sublime power of prayer.

Alfred Norris wisely observed in *The Apocalypse for Everyman*: "But if Trumpets are warnings, Vials or Bowls are outpourings. We have gone beyond mere disclosure, and again beyond the sounding of the alarm, and have reached the point where there is no return, nothing provisional: the end has come. God is pouring out His final judgements on the world, and there can be no turning back. There are a number of parallels in the Old Testament, where the verb *shaphak* is used in just such a way of the ultimate emptying out of God's irreversible judgements on His own or other people (see Psalm 69.24; 79.6; Isaiah 42.25; Jeremiah 10.25; Lamentations 2.4; 4.11; Ezekiel 7.8; 9.8, etc.; Hosea 5.10; Zephaniah 3.8)". This is why in between the trumpets of warning and the final vials, there is a final desperate appeal through the preaching of the Gospel (Rev. 10:11; 11:3,6; 14:6,7). But after that, the temple is closed and no man can enter it (15:5-8). Revelation stresses God's creative power- He is the creator of heaven, earth, sea and rivers. In the vials, we see a reversal of His creative activity.

16:2- see on Rev. 8:7; Rev. 13:17.

*Harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image-* This is after they have been appealed to, to rid themselves of this mark (see on 14:9). There is no opportunity now for repentance (see on 15:8). The sores recall the growths that appeared on the Philistines / Palestinians who captured the ark (1 Sam. 5:6). The destruction of Dagon in that passage perhaps looks forward to the image of the beast. Those who bear the mark of the beast are within the territory of the beast- which is exactly where the Philistines were. "Harmful" translates a Greek word which in all of its 50 other occurrences means "evil" in a moral sense (e.g. 2:2). Their punishment was appropriate to their own evil. We wonder therefore if their usage of nuclear weaponry against Israel backfires upon them, and they themselves suffer the tumours associated with nuclear fallout.

16:3 *And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died, even the things that were in the sea-* I suggested on 13:1 that the earth / land referring to the territory promised to Abraham, the "sea" refers to the areas immediately surrounding that territory- areas we now know as Iran, Egypt and Turkey. The allusion is to how the waters of Egypt were turned into blood (Ex. 7:17)- not simply as punishment in itself, but as an appeal to let Israel go, to stop persecuting the Hebrews. Which admirably fits the latter day scenario we have suggested. The blood of a dead man is not liquid, but congealed. The picture is of mass death in these areas which gave birth to the sea beast of 13:1. Previously, a third part of the sea had become blood (8:8). But this failed to

elicit repentance, and so now the other two thirds become blood too. The sea appearing blood red may allude to how a "part" of Israel were to be burned as if sea burned by fire (Am. 7:4); what had been done to Israel in 8:8 is now done to their persecutors from the neighbouring nations.

16:4 *And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters, and they became blood-* This is referring to judgments within the earth / land promised to Abraham; the surrounding sea has already been judged in :3. Again the allusion is to the judgments upon water sources which was part of the plagues upon Egypt in Ex. 7:19. That plague is alluded to in another judgment upon Egypt found in Ez. 32:6, where Egypt is told that she shall be covered with her own blood to the extent that her rivers will run with her own blood. And that prophecy goes on to state that her sun, moon and stars shall be extinguished, causing darkness (Ez. 32:7,8)- ideas to be developed here in :8,10. It is unclear when this prophecy of Ezekiel had its fulfilment. The initial context is of Israel trusting in Egypt for help against the Assyrian. And latter day Israel may likewise look to Egypt for help against the latter day Assyrian. But Egypt too, part of the "sea", the territory immediately bordering the "land" promised to Abraham, is to be destroyed. Water turning in the blood of death may refer to some form of literal turning of water into the source of death- perhaps some form of biological warfare against Israel ends up affecting all within the land promised to Abraham. This is how God typically prefers to operate- allowing wicked men to be destroyed by the backfiring of their own devices, rather than by bolts of direct Divine judgment.

16:5 *And I heard the angel of the waters saying: Righteous are You, who is and who was, You Holy One, because You did thus judge-* Revelation abounds with examples of Angels talking and co-operating with each other in order to execute God's purpose; just as the Passover Angel hovered over the doors of the Israelites to as it were stop the destroyer Angel from killing the firstborns there. Gen. 1:26 "Let us make man..." is another example of Angelic cooperation. Here we have an Angel praising God on reflecting upon the wisdom of what has been done. The judgments of the Holy One are effected in practice by a specific Angel. This is the kind of thing we shall do throughout eternity. There is a recognition by the Angel that the awful judgments performed on earth at this point are a reflection of God's holiness and not of any evil or caprice ("You Holy One").

That a specific Angel controls "the waters" in an area is also implied by the way flood waters are described as praising God (Ps. 42:8; 148:7), water trembling at God's presence (Ps. 77:17; Hab. 3:10), and the deep waters mourning (Ez. 31:15). How else can waters sensibly be personified as having such feelings, unless these figures of speech are in fact based upon the real existence of a personal "Angel of the waters"?

16:6 *For they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and blood have You given them to drink. They are worthy-* As the blood of the "saints and prophets" was poured out, so the Angel had poured out a bowl of judgment. The "saints" may refer to Israel as well as Christian believers, those trodden down by the beast (Dan. 7:25). The "prophets" could refer to those killed by the beast system for their latter day preaching; for 'prophecy' is strictly just a speaking forth of God's word, and not necessarily a transmitting of new material by Divine inspiration. But perhaps the murder of the two witnesses is in view, who faithfully prophesied throughout the three-and-a-half-year tribulation before being killed (see on 11:3). The pouring out of blood is the language of sacrifice upon an altar; perhaps literally the saints and

Christian preachers will be killed and sacrificed by the jihadists. Which would explain why an angel from the heavenly altar now speaks (:7).

*16:7 And I heard another angel out of the altar saying: Yes, O Lord God the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments-* As noted on :6, the jihadists may pour out the blood of their victims literally on altars, as if in sacrifice. Which is why now the angel associated with the heavenly altar agrees that the judgment of these people is in truth and righteousness. It is not the expression of the wrath of some capricious God; the judgment is appropriate and a reflection of righteousness rather than of evil intent.

*16:8 And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire-* As noted on :4, the judgment of the sun is mentioned in Ez. 32:7,8 as part of the plagues upon latter day Egypt, whereby her water is turned to blood and darkness comes upon her as a result of judgment upon her sun. But before that happens, the sun becomes very hot and scorches those upon the earth / land; or perhaps this specifically happens to latter day Egypt. The language of scorching may suggest nuclear holocaust; if the attempts to destroy the state of Israel by nuclear weaponry backfire, or the weapons are turned against each other due to internal conflict, then such a scenario is imaginable. And it would be appropriate to the way that God prefers to let men judge themselves rather than judging by His direct bolts of judgment. The "sun" might refer to some particular leader within the beast's political leadership, which are often described as the sun, moon and stars of a nation or coalition. And this is just how they are used in Ez. 32:7,8 which is the source passage for these bowls of judgment. Again we note that "it was given to it..." to scorch men. All power is of God, the cataclysms of these very last days will not at all mean that earth has come adrift from God and evil has found its own momentum and power. All is and will be under His direct supervision and control.

*16:9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they cursed the Name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give Him glory-* The scorching is a plague, an illness. As noted on :8, this seems the language of nuclear holocaust. In their time of destruction, they will realize that all this is from God. But the tragedy of the rejected is that they will perceive God's hand, "know Yahweh" by His judgments, but all too late. See on 1:7. Now is the time for repentance; the rejected will be brought to the point of recognizing God and His Son, but all tragically too late. Being scorched with great heat from the sun is the language only used elsewhere of the suffering of the faithful latter day remnant in Israel at the hands of the beast (7:16). What the beast members did to God's people shall now be done to them. Scorching by the sun is the idea used in the parable of the sower concerning those believers who stumble because the sun of tribulation and persecution scorches them (Mt. 13:6,21). This will have particular reference to the tribulation. Some will fall away because of it; but by doing so, they experience their final judgment. The condemnation process will therefore be a giving of people what they have themselves decided in this life. And those who scorch others and make them stumble shall themselves be scorched at the last day.

*16:10 And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain because of the pain-* As noted on :4, the judgment of the sun is mentioned in Ez. 32:7,8 as part of the plagues upon latter day Egypt, whereby her water is turned to blood and darkness comes upon her as a result of judgment upon her sun. The beast has a throne and Kingdom, just as the Lord has; the beast is an anti-Christ, a fake Messiah with a fake Kingdom of God on earth. "The throne of the beast" could

refer to his capital city. His "kingdom" refers to his people, those recognizing him as their king; for it is they, as persons rather than just an abstract entity, who gnaw tongues for pain. His capital city or centre of rulership could be in Jerusalem, or part thereof. The gnawing of tongues recalls the Lord's pictures of condemnation as a gnashing of teeth. The faithful are comforted that they shall no longer experience "pain" (21:4 s.w.), suggesting that the pain these beast worshippers now experience is the pain they inflicted upon the Lord's followers in the tribulation.

16:11 *They cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds-* As noted on :9, they recognize all too late that there is indeed a "God of heaven", a phrase often used at the time of Israel's exile in Babylon and whilst under Babylonian dominion. Their "sores" could refer to the result of nuclear radiation, brought upon them by the backfiring of their own devices against Israel; see on :2.

16:12 *And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates, and the water of it dried up, so that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the east-* See on 9:14,15,16 16:12 and Jn. 3:32 and 9:14,15,16 for the significance of the Euphrates.

The sixth trumpet in Rev. 9:14 and the sixth vial in Rev. 16:12,13 both refer to the Euphrates and are therefore referring to the same events. We needn't get too fazed by issues of chronological sequence in fulfilment. The trumpets and vials aren't necessarily events which follow each other chronologically. This is the assumption of a Greek-Latin mindset; but in the Hebrew thought which underpins the New Testament, events can be described without attention to sequence. The Old Testament prophecies therefore often appear to 'jump around' in fulfilment, with no clear sequence in mind. Each vial or trumpet can be a description of events which happen around the time of the Lord's coming, but not necessarily in sequence chronologically. The 'continuous historic' school of interpretation is driven by this insistence upon chronological sequence, but this results in seeking unrealistic fulfilments of the earlier phases of the sequence. These suggested fulfilments often do not hold true to actual history, and are out of context with the main thrust of the prophecies, which concern the situation in the land of Israel in the last days. The masses of aggressive horsemen in Rev. 9 are the "kings of the east" of Rev. 16:12- rulers who come from the East of Israel. This would easily refer to the way in which the jihadist coalition and many of its fighters originated in Iran and Afghanistan, East of the Euphrates, and then are released and allowed to march towards Israel. The allusion is to how God allowed Cyrus to dry up [or divert] the Euphrates, and Babylon fell as the Medes and Persians under Cyrus approached from the East. The kings of the East are therefore not believers, but the unbelieving enemies of Israel. I have elsewhere pointed out that the jihadists see themselves as warriors coming from the East to destroy Israel, as one of their own Hadith states: "The final battle will be waged by Muslim faithful coming on the backs of horses... carrying black banners. They will stand on the East side of the Jordan River and will wage war that the earth has never seen before... The black flags will come from the East, led by mighty men, with long hair and beards". These "kings of the east" who are released from the Euphrates are matched in Rev. 9:17-19 by John's description in first century language of the most terrifying technology and aggression of the hordes of horsemen who will be released upon Israel from the Euphrates: "They wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents



with heads, and by means of them they wound". The killing of a third of those in the earth / land surely connects with the prediction of Zech. 13:8 that when Jerusalem briefly falls, two thirds of the Jews will be killed. Presumably the other third are killed by other methods- there is repeated teaching in Rev. 8 of how the 'thirds' of those in the land will suffer in the final tribulation.

Dan. 11:40 speaks of the latter day "king of the north" coming with horsemen and entering into the *eretz*, the land, like a restrained mighty river that is now gushing and overflowing its banks. This is absolutely the picture of Revelation 16: hordes of horsemen surging from the Euphrates river towards Israel. For the "king of the north" [historically this was Babylon or Assyria] to enter into the *eretz*, the land promised to Abraham, he would have to cross the boundary of that land at the Euphrates anyway. He firstly enters the general *eretz* and then enters specifically the *eretz* of glory (Dan. 11:41)- the land inhabited by the Jews. This is described in Ez. 20:6 using the same Hebrew words- "a land... flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all the *eretz*". The land flowing with milk and honey hardly referred to the entire land promised to Abraham up to the Euphrates, much of which is barren desert. The glory of the *eretz* was and is Canaan. We can see the process starting- the Islamists are taking over the wider *eretz*, and will then proceed to focus upon entering into the glory of the *eretz*, the current territory of Israel.

The allusion to the drying up of the Euphrates by Cyrus to bring about the fall of Babylon and the return of the exiles. Babylon fell- but the exiles generally didn't return as God intended. The fall of latter day Babylon is mentioned three times in Revelation (Rev. 14:8; 16:17-19; 17:16,17); and it's hard to work out *when* this happens; Rev. 16:17-19 places the fall of Babylon *after* Armageddon and Christ's return, whilst Rev. 17:16,17 places it *before* Armageddon. I see no contradiction here; it's just that the timing of the actual fall of Babylon and return of Christ are events which depend on various preconditions which may or may not be fulfilled by human freewill decisions. Such considerations may explain why it remains unclear whether Christ returns at the time of the 6th, or 7th vial. The language of both vials has application to His return, and yet some of it seems to speak of *before* His return. Perhaps it's beyond the technique of Biblical exposition to reconcile this language- it may simply be that the actual coming of Christ is dependent upon various conditional factors, and the inspired language of predictive prophecy is therefore appropriately ambiguous. Or take the way Revelation consistently speaks of "the beast" as if there is only one- and yet we read of three beasts, from the sea, the land and the abyss (Rev. 13,17). Is it really that the beast changes form over time- or are there three possible manifestations of "the beast" dependent upon various possible factors in human response? This approach would explain why Revelation is so hard to interpret if we insist on forcing all the events and pictures presented into a strictly progressive chronological sequence.

Another take on this problem is that Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images, some of them overlapping; there is no attempt to give a chronological timeline of events, but rather rotating images, some of which overlap at the edges with each other, giving different angles and takes on the same events.

The drying up of the Euphrates in Rev. 16:12 is parallel with the four Angels being released in 9:14. Angels can represent nations, as we find in Daniel- in that each nation has a representative Angel in the court of Heaven. The Euphrates is literally drying up- water flows are at their lowest ever in recorded history, and it may be that the predicted water crisis in the

Tigris-Euphrates ecoregion is what drives the peoples of that area to look westwards towards Israel, and to seek to resolve their problems by a united *jihad* against Israel. The problem of water is acute in the region: "There are thousands of new "water refugees" in Southern Iraq: people displaced by the changes to their natural environment. "Many villages are depopulated because of that. It has a terrible economic impact upon the population"" (Bakhtiar Amin, Human Rights Minister of Iraq from 2004 to 2005, as quoted at <http://thoughtfulwander.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/marsh-arabs.html>). Historically, the literal drying up, or diversion, of the Euphrates was what led to the fall of Babylon. It may well be that we are intended to make this connection when we read in Rev. 16:12 of the drying up of the Euphrates. The logical deduction is: 'So Babylon is about to fall'. And the fall of Babylon is spoken of in Revelation as coming about at the return of Christ to earth.

But it may not be simply that the Euphrates dries up of its own accord. Now that the key dams could easily fall into the hands of the Islamists, it could be that they like Saddam Hussein before them, dry up the river in order to exert their power over others. And this will bring about the required fulfilment of the prophecy. We recall how the King of Assyria, another prototype of the latter day invader of Israel, boasted that he had dried up rivers and manipulated water sources, and therefore Jerusalem too would fall into his hands: "I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers" (2 Kings 19:24).

16:13 *And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, that looked like frogs-* The drying up of the Euphrates leads to unclean spirits like frogs going out to deceive the nations and gather them to Armageddon. No particularly convincing explanation of the figure of frogs has yet been come up with. The suggestion that it refers to the spirit of the French revolution is desperate; the passage clearly demands a latter day fulfilment, and it would be hard to demonstrate that liberty, equality and fraternity came from dragon, beast and false prophet. It would be impossible to argue that e.g. the spirit of liberty came from the dragon, equality from the beast, etc. The idea is surely that as a frog jumps, so the spirit or teaching / influence of these entities spreads in leaps and bounds. But the appropriacy of the symbol becomes apparent when we realize that the Euphrates is fed by tributaries which feed into the Euphrates through vast marshes. The marshes around the Euphrates are so vast that they have given rise to the description of the locals there as 'the marsh Arabs'. Saddam Hussein drained some of these marsh areas and cut off water to others in his attempt to persecute the very groups which later fought against him and radicalized into the Islamic State. In a literal sense, the hordes pouring forth against Israel are the result of the Euphrates being literally dried up. Wikipedia claims that "According to the United Nations Environmental Program and the AMAR Charitable Foundation, between 84% and 90% of the marshes have been destroyed since the 1970s. In 1994, 60 percent of the wetlands were destroyed by Hussein's regime – drained to permit military access and greater political control of the native Marsh Arabs... After the 1991 Gulf War, Shia Muslims in southern Iraq rebelled against Saddam Hussein who in turned crushed the rebellion and further accelerated the draining of the Central and Hammar marshes in order to evict Shias that have taken refuge in the marshes" [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tigris%E2%80%93Euphrates\\_river\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tigris%E2%80%93Euphrates_river_system) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian\\_Marshes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_Marshes) accessed 12.08.2014].

These huge marshlands are full of frogs! The drying up of the Euphrates would be bad news for the frogs, who will have to leap and bound further afield in desperation. And so the idea seems to be that the Angel dries up the Euphrates, the hordes burst forth over that border

towards the earth / land promised to Abraham; and the teaching of *jihad* against Israel, anti-Semitism in its final term, is spread by leaps and bounds out of the Euphrates basin, leading people from throughout the region and indeed the whole world, to come up against Israel. We note that there are even jihadist fighters from as far away as Australia fighting for the Islamists at the moment. Joel 3:9 speaks of huge multitudes of people being 'awoken' and going up to Jerusalem. The postmodern daze in which many people now live has created a desire for reality, for action, for escape from the virtual world into something truly exciting and passionate. And this is why well-heeled young white Australians are getting caught up in Islamic extremism and heading off to fight for them. Young unemployed males are now seeing the opportunity to play their violent online games in reality... they are awaking from the postmodernist haze of indifference. But sadly to the wrong reality. This awakening is likely to continue and become ever more attractive, likely fuelled by the media's hatred of Israel and desire to portray her as a situation needing radical resolution.

"The beast" has "the false prophet" with him as a kind of associated act (Rev. 19:20; 20:10), the scarlet beast has a whore riding it, the sea beast has a horn which becomes its representative, the earth beast has an image of the beast. These associated acts indicate that each of these entities has an individual controlling them- and this is the antichrist figure. The dragon is described as having "his angels" with him during the fight against Michael and His Angels- which suggests he is to be seen as representative of a person. We note that the dragon was used in the Old Testament not as a symbol of Egypt, but specifically as a symbol of the individual Pharaoh of Egypt (Ez. 29:3); and likewise the dragon is used as the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar personally (Jer. 51:34).

"The false prophet" is given no introduction; he is introduced just as is the beast (see on 11:7). This may be because we have here in Revelation a kaleidoscope of images, according to the genre of apocalyptic. It is tempting to apply this term to the false prophet Mohammad. But perhaps there will arise an individual who claims to be a Divinely inspired Islamic prophet, the Mahdi. The dragon is still around, giving ideological support even if he has been politically destroyed in chapter 12, thrown out of political heaven as it were. And "the beast" suggests that the sea and earth beasts of chapter 13 are effectively one. The unclean spirits coming from their mouths are their teachings, beckoning people worldwide to come to the land promised to Abraham and fight against God's people. In the uprise of the Islamic State we saw for the first time this kind of thing happening on a global level. Babylon is the hold of these unclean spirits (18:2). Yet in the Gospels, to say a man had an unclean spirit or demon was to say he was mad. There will be a spirit of madness, extreme fanaticism, emanating from these three sources of propaganda.

16:14 *For they are spirits of demons, who work signs*- I suggested on :13 that the reference is to propaganda spread worldwide by three separate jihadist agencies, which stir up a frenzy, a mania, which John understood as the Gospel records do in terms of demon possession, a way of expressing madness. They work signs, false miracles, as noted on 13:13 and :14. So far, chapter 16 has been full of allusion to the plagues upon Egypt; and Egypt therefore becomes a prototype of the beast system. Some of the plagues upon Egypt were countered by false miracles from Pharaoh's magicians, pointing forward to the false miracles which will be claimed by the beast system of the last days.

*These go to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God the Almighty*- The "whole world" could refer to the world of the land promised to

Abraham and its environs. But given the power of communication media today, there may well be a global reference. Radical Islam may pressurize the whole world system to give at least token support to their battle. The "war" or (Gk.) battle is that for which the jihadist locusts of 9:7,9 are prepared- by the propaganda from the three sources of :13. This is the final battle against the Jews and Christians in the land spoken of in 11:7; 12:17 and 13:7, a kind of "final solution". But it is effectively a gathering together to battle against the returned Lord Jesus (19:19; 20:8). The same word for war / battle is used in all these references.

The previous invasions of Israel by her neighbour typify those of the future, and they also mention this 'gathering together': Sisera's forces did this (Jud. 4:13), as did those of Ammon (Jud. 10:19; 1 Chron. 19:7), the Amorites (Jud. 11:20), the Arab powers with Assyria in Hezekiah's time (Mic. 4:11), Gog's forces (Ez. 38:7), the Arab-Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30) and especially the Philistines (Jud. 16:33; 1 Sam. 13:5,11; 17:1; 25:1; 28:1; 29:1; 2 Sam. 23:11). This is quite some emphasis. Thus while we can expect to see greater potential Arab unity developing around the Israel issue and perhaps a common allegiance to a charismatic 'Nebuchadnezzar' figure for a brief period, their complete meeting of minds will not be until the final push against Jerusalem.

We need not be concerned that this appears to happen after all the judgments upon the beast system which we have read of earlier in this chapter. Revelation is a kaleidoscope of images; it is simply not chronological. We are now being given to understand *how* the situation came about whereby the beast system is so permanently judged and destroyed, as explained in the preceding verses.

16:15- see on 1 Jn. 2:28.

*Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!* - This is a call to those Christians who have not come out and testified under the beast's domination, thinking they can hide under the garments of nominal acceptance of the beast. They must keep their white garments around them. The paradox is that they will then be exposed as naked; they are apparently clothed, but not in the distinctive white garments of Christ, which publicize their position to all. His thief life coming is an idea used elsewhere about His coming being like this to those within His household who are unprepared. Clearly there will be true believers living under the domination of the latter day beast within its territory, the land promised to Abraham. This is a sober thought. Their numbers at this time are small, but perhaps the witness of the Elijah ministry and various gospel proclamations mentioned throughout the tribulation prophecies will result in many converts.

1 Tim. 5:24,25 implies a 'going through' of the good and bad works of men, with the added implication that it is done in the presence of others. Thus they will "see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). "All that behold" the unfinished spiritual building of the wicked "will mock him" (Lk. 14:29); and the accepted will praise each other for their humility in taking the lowest seat in ecclesial life (Lk. 14:10). The rejected will awake to "the reproach and abhorrence of the age" (Dan. 12:2 Dr. Thomas' translation)- as if they will be reproached by some. "When the wicked are cut off, [the righteous] shall see it" (Ps. 37:34). The 12 disciples will judge the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). At judgment day, the children of the Jews who criticized Jesus would judge them- "they shall be your judges" rather than Jesus Himself (Lk. 11:19). "The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools" (Prov. 3:35) is looking

ahead to the judgment. But "shame" must be in the eyes of someone; therefore the rejection of the wicked will be in the eyes of those who once knew them in the ecclesia. The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel (Mt. 12:41); the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

A read through Rev. 16:13-16 makes it evident that the 6th vial concerns the gathering of the nations to Armageddon; but right in the middle of this section we read: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked"- clearly relevant to the saints. It's as if the punishment of the unworthy believers and that of the nations is to be connected. The collapsing of time at the judgment would enable this to actually happen- the events used to punish the world could fall upon the rejected from the judgment seat. These unfortunate individuals will be threshed, as will the world be (Mt. 3:12; Rev. 16:16). This is foreshadowed by the way apostate Israel were treated like the surrounding Gentile world in the time of their judgments (Jer. 4:7). Thus in the 'judgment day' of AD70, the 'rejected' Jews were sent back into Egypt as slaves. "They shall return to Egypt" had been God's earlier prophesy (Hos. 8:13; 9:3). Their condemnation was expressed in terms of an undoing of the redemption from the world which they once experienced.

16:16 *And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-magedon*- Perhaps this is explaining how the earlier judgment upon the throne / seat of the beast happens (:10).

"Megiddo" and the descriptions of Sisera *gathering* his chariots and God *drawing* them into battle (Jud. 5:19) must link with the nations being *gathered* to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). If this connection is valid, then "the kings of the earth (land - of Israel?) and of the whole world" which are gathered (Rev. 16:14) would primarily refer to the kings of the Islamic world within and around the earth / land promised to Abraham, Sisera of the latter days.

Rev. 16:14-16 and Rev. 19:19 appear to be based upon the ideas of the 'gathering together' of Israel's local enemies outlined in the commentary on Rev. 16:14, and also upon Zech. 12:3. "The kings of the earth" can be interpreted as in Zech. 12:3;" of the whole world" may refer to the world in relation to Israel (as in Dan. 2), or possibly to the fact that all nations literally will be incited to attack Israel, kidded by the beast that some "final solution" to the Middle Eastern problem is necessary. 'Armageddon' meaning 'the valley of Megiddo', takes us back to Zech. 12:9,11: "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem... in that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as... in the valley of Megiddon". The conclusion from this is that although a minority within Israel have repented before their victory in the valley of Jehoshaphat (the same area in terms of prophecy), according to the typology of 2 Chron. 20 and other passages, their full realization of the enormity of their sin of crucifying Jesus only comes home to them on seeing His complete rout of their enemies. Thus their returning to Jerusalem with joy (2 Chron. 20:27) will be preceded by, or mixed with, tears of pent-up emotional release. The similarity of the 'gather together'

language has led us to associate the following:-

- The gathering together of Israel's Arab enemies against her at various times
- The gathering of the Arab nations into a valley near Jerusalem (2 Chron. 20:16, A.V. mg.) for destruction in Hezekiah's time
- Joel's prophecy of all nations being gathered into the "valley of Jehoshaphat" (3:2)
- The gathering together of the Arab nations into the 'valley of Megiddo' (Rev. 16:16) to fight Israel in the last days.

It could be objected that the valley of Megiddo is in the North of Israel whilst that of Jehoshaphat is in the South, near Jerusalem. However, the other similarities of language and context are so great as to suggest that they must refer to the same place. It may be that Megiddo having been the scene of many previous Arab battles in Israel's history, it is being used symbolically in Rev. 16:16 rather than as a literal geographical reference. Back in Rev. 16, the sixth vial has described how the nations will be gathered to their place of judgment in Armageddon. The seventh vial then records the destruction of Babylon, who receives "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" in the form of huge hailstones (Rev. 16:19,21). This equates the nations who are gathered to Armageddon with Babylon, which heads up the coalition elsewhere known as the beast. The cup of the wrath of God alludes to Zech. 12:2,3, where the peoples from the jihadist nations also are "gathered together" and have burdened themselves with Jerusalem are made to drink "a cup of trembling" by reason of doing so. The punishment with giant hailstones recalls how Israel's enemies were destroyed in the time of Joshua/Jesus (Josh. 20:11). This confirms our interpretation of 'Babylon' as having a Middle Eastern context.

The unclean spirits or teachings released from the beast and his publicity agents gather the nations together to Armageddon. "Armageddon" (Rev. 16:16) is from the Hebrew *har-magedon*. *Har* means 'mountain'. The assumption has been made that *magedon* is the same as 'Megiddo'; but the problem is, Megiddo is a plain and there is no mountain there. Also, the word *magedon* would be spelt slightly differently if it were simply the place name Megiddo. The suggestion has been made and well argued that *magedon* is a form of the Hebrew *mo'ed*, and would literally mean "the mount of assembly / gathering"- the title of Jerusalem in Is. 14:13 [see Meredith Kline, 'Har Magedon', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/2 (June 1996) pp. 207-222, available online. He explains the presence of the 'g' on the basis that the Hebrew consonant *ayin* is often represented by the Greek *gamma*]. Rev. 16 says that all nations are gathered to Armageddon, but elsewhere we read of all nations being gathered to Jerusalem. The two localities are surely identical, quite apart from the linguistic arguments. We can expect, therefore, far more focus specifically upon Jerusalem. For this is to be the centre to which all are gathered. This makes perfect sense if we see *magedon* as a Greek rendering of the Hebrew *mo'ed*- the nations are gathered to the mount of gathering. The king of Babylon / Assyria so wished to come to the "mount of assembly / gathering" (Is. 14:13), and it was that desire, and executing it, which was effectively his gathering to judgment. And so it will be with the Islamist obsession with Jerusalem- their gathering there will effectively be their gathering to judgment. Associating Armageddon with Jerusalem would more naturally fit with the upcoming description of "the great city", Jerusalem, being judged by an earthquake (:19).

16:17- see on Rev. 15:2.

*And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air-* This could be purely symbolic, as if absolutely everything will now be affected, and there will now be a complete takeover of power above the earth. But this is perhaps another allusion to the plagues upon Egypt; for Moses sprinkled handfuls of ashes into the air which turned into a dust cloud in all the air, bringing forth sores and boils (Ex. 9:8,9). Perhaps literally the air will be full of thunder, lightning and death, as stated on :18.

*And there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying: It is done!* - Now finally all is finished. But the Lord made a similar pronouncement from the cross. It is only John who records Him saying then: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). The second coming will be our meeting with the Lord who died for us. To come before Him then will be in essence the same as coming before His cross. Rev. 16 describes the events of the second coming, and yet it is full of allusion back to the cross: "it is done", the temple of heaven opened (16:17); an earthquake (16:18), a cup of wine (16:19). The believers undergoing the final tribulation will have fellowshipped the Lord's crucifixion sufferings, that they might know His resurrection life once they are over.

16:18 *And there were lightnings and voices and thunders, and there was a great earthquake, such as has never occurred since men came upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty-* The lightning and thunder may be literal, and the result of the bowl poured into the air (see on :17). The Lord likens His second coming to lightning (Mt. 24:27; Zech. 9:14). The earthquake would be that associated with the second coming, when the Lord sets foot upon the mount of Olives in Zechariah 14.

16:19 *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His anger-* The allusion is to the earthquake of Zech. 14 at the point of the Lord's return. This makes the great city Jerusalem, and yet the great city is mystical "Babylon" in 17:18. The fall of Jerusalem in AD70 was but a small fulfilment of what is envisaged here; although we note that Jerusalem at that time was divided into three opposing camps by internal strife- John, Simon and Elazar (Wars 5.1.1,4). The division of the Jews and Jerusalem in particular into three parts for judgment is all Old Testament language (Ez. 5:2,12; Zech. 13:8,9). We are thereby encouraged to see Jerusalem as the great city which is judged. And yet it is paralleled with the fall of Babylon. The latter day Babylon entity will have made Jerusalem its capital, and this shall fall. This earthquake is that of 11:13, where after the tribulation of the believers and Jews in the land for three and a half years, "the tenth part of the city fell"; and clearly the city in view is Jerusalem, the "great city... where also our Lord was crucified" (11:8). Perhaps the tenth part of the city destroyed by the earthquake refers to the encampment of "Babylon", perhaps a mosque complex built on the temple mount. For the abomination which will bring about the desolation of the temple mount will be placed there (Dan. 12:11; Mt. 24:15), and this surely refers to something like a mosque complex or other visual symbol of jihadist Islam. The language of Babylon and the whore has some first century application to the Judaist 'satan' which was enthroned in Jerusalem until AD70, and the language used in chapters 17 and 18 is often allusive to Old Testament prophecies about Israel as the whore. In the latter day application to the "Babylon" entity, this all still is appropriate, in that "Babylon" will make her throne on the temple mount, in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the three parts refers to how three different subdivisions of the beast entity are enthroned in Jerusalem; for the call to come and fight there comes forth from three different entities, each with essentially the same message (:13).

The subdivision of the final invader into three groups will recall the original Assyrian battle plan whereby the Assyrian army was split up under three leaders, Tartan, Rabсарis and Rabshakeh. Previous invasions had this feature too:

- "The spoilers of the Philistines / Palestinians (raided Israel) in three companies" (1 Sam. 13:17).
- The Israelites fought their Ammonite enemies "in three companies", perhaps because there were three groups of Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:11).
- The account of Gideon's victory over Midian, a clear type of the latter-day invaders, has a triple emphasis on Israel attacking them in "three companies" (Jud. 7:16,20,22) - perhaps for the same reason.
- The Chaldeans (Babylonians/Assyrians) attacked Job, symbolic of faithless Israel, in three bands (Job 1:17). The book of Job has many other links with the Assyrian invasion.

16:20 *And every island fled away and the mountains were not found*- On 13:1 I suggested that the earth / land is the territory promised to Abraham, and the "sea" refers to the nations immediately bordering that land; areas we now know as Turkey, Egypt and Iran. The "isles of the Gentiles", islands within that "sea", would therefore refer to the nations of the world; mountains likewise refer to nations. But they flee away, retreating from the scene in the land, having been urged to come and get involved in the "final solution" of the Jewish / Jerusalem / Middle East problem.

The nations in this confederacy will turn against 'Babylon' in the ultimate 'time of the end'; through them God's judgment against her is administered. Babylon "gathereth unto him all nations", but "shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him... shall they not rise up suddenly (and) bite thee... and thou shalt be for booties unto them?" (Hab. 2:5-8 AV). First of all the islands (nations) flee away from Babylon (Rev. 16:20), the birds and animals scatter from under the big tree as it starts to totter. But fleeing away suggests they are not all caught up in her judgment; the same word is used in Mt. 3:7 of fleeing from the wrath to come in repentance. This is in response to the Lord's command to flee [s.w.] Jerusalem (Mt. 24:16).

16:21 *And great hailstones, each about the weight of a talent, came down out of heaven upon men, and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail. For the plague was so severe*- There may have been a limited fulfilment in the catapults throwing stones of this size upon Jerusalem in AD70. But this all speaks of the final judgment of God against Israel's enemies in Jerusalem; again the allusion is to the plagues on Egypt for their abuse of the Hebrews, this time to the plague of hail. And again as noted on :9 and :11, these people recognize that all this is from God, they come to know "that I am Yahweh", but all too late. The Hadith speaks of extreme rain as a judgment to come upon the land in the last days: "Then Allah would send rain which no house of clay or (the tent of) camels' hairs would keep out and it would wash away the earth" (Book 41.7015). It is a feature of Divine judgment that the thing men greatly fear comes upon them. The jihadist beast will find itself the victim of the very features of Divine condemnation which their own writings say will come upon the condemned.





## CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls and spoke with me, saying: Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute that sits upon many waters-* Babylon is another form of the beast which arose out of the sea (13:1). The same Angel which had just poured out the final judgment upon Babylon at the end of chapter 16 now gives more detail about this "Babylon" entity. The waters represent nations and peoples; but I suggested on 13:1 that if the earth refers to the land promised to Abraham, then the sea would be the territories immediately adjacent to it- areas we now know as Egypt, Iran and Turkey. But "Babylon" has influence upon many such waters. Historically, Babylon's "sea", i.e. the nations local to Israel whom she had power over, dried up from her- i.e. she no longer controlled them (Jer. 51:36; Rev. 17:1,15), "the sea" (those same peoples which were once her power base) will then come up against Babylon to destroy it (Jer. 51:42). This all looks forward to such support for the beast system of the last day. There may be a difference between the whore and the beast she rides; or within the genre of apocalyptic, we could simply take her as symbolic and representative of it. It could be that "Babylon" the whore speaks of some charismatic individual who will control the beast system- the personal anti-Christ which so many scriptures hint at, the chief prince of Ezekiel 38, the king of the north of Daniel 11, the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2 etc. This individual sits upon "many waters" (= peoples, :15), upon the beast (:3), upon the seven heads of the beast (:9). The beast is therefore a coalition of peoples, with seven heads- perhaps a succession of leaders, or seven leading elements all contemporary with each other. But upon all these, the whore sits; she is supported by them. She "sits" as a queen over them (18:7).

Daniel's fourth beast with the ten horns equates with the legs or iron and ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. This entity will be in existence at the time of Christ's return, because it is to be destroyed by His coming. And we have that same picture in Revelation. Historically, the legs of iron represent Rome, but the beast is not a historical entity, it exists in the last days. So although there are parallels and outline similarities between the metals of the image and the beasts, this is not to say that they are all one and the same. The final beast has elements of all the previous beasts, it is a composite entity including all the elements of the previous systems which have dominated the land and people of Israel. Just as the image stands complete in the last days, so the final beast stands complete. The whore sits on many waters, representing various languages and peoples; and yet she sits upon the beast (Rev. 17:1,3,15). The latter day beast is therefore not one nation but an amalgam of peoples.

17:2 *With whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication-* The imagery of being drunk on her wine / teaching is similar to the idea noted on 16:13,14 of the propaganda from the beast system making men crazed and fanatically obsessed. This clearly fits the results of Islamic extremism. The kings of the earth / land suggests that there will be a fast sequence of different rulers over the latter day territory of the earth / land promised to Abraham; or maybe a group of such leaders who exist all at the same time. They along with those dwelling in the "earth" will be radicalized with the fanaticism of her teaching. This is exactly the picture of Islamic extremism.

17:3- see on Rev. 12:14.

*And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness-* The wilderness is where the woman has fled in 12:14; but the dragon has chased her there, she is before "the face" of the serpent /

dragon / devil, in his presence, but miraculously preserved from him. The same word is used of how the Lord likewise confronted "the devil" in the wilderness, and overcame. That struggle will be reflected in the struggle of the Lord's people against the devil / dragon / beast in the last days. There is a difference in Revelation between the dragon and the beast, but the beast gives power to the dragon. Perhaps we are to see them as a sequence of entities which dominate the earth / land of the last days, or simply different takes on the same entity, true to the apocalyptic genre.

*And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast-* This is the fourth of the four beasts we meet in Revelation; the dragon, the sea beast, earth beast and now this scarlet beast. They are different but similar, perhaps incarnations of each other which arise in quick succession in the earth / land promised to Abraham, or different images of the same reality, which only appear separate from each other because Revelation is a kaleidoscope of revolving images. The four beasts of Daniel 7 are the four metals of the image of Daniel 2; and they all co-exist in the last days. Likewise the four beasts of Revelation co-exist, or are different angles on the same entity.

Israel's neighbours confederated with Babylon in their invasion of Israel. Jeremiah describes this in beast language: "I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar... the beasts of the field have I given him... to serve him... to serve him... all nations (around Israel) shall serve him" (Jer. 27:5-7; 28:14). Ps. 79:1,2, a passage whose links with Rev. 11 give it a clear latter-day application, speaks of the beasts of the surrounding Arab nations being confederate with Babylon. As the horns hate the Babylon/whore and turn against her to destroy her (Rev. 17:16), so the beast nations once confederate with Babylon will come and lie down in her (Jer. 50:39; Is. 13:21). Beasts lying down in a ruined city is representative of nations dominating another one (Zeph. 2:14,15). Note that the beast is "scarlet coloured" (Rev. 17:3). Whilst this may have had reference in its time to imperial Rome, let's note that "The Canaanites... derived their name from the purple dye which was produced there and used for making an expensive cloth" (R.E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1972) p. 21). In the light of all this, it is difficult to read the latter day beasts of Revelation as referring to anything other than a conglomeration of Canaanite powers under the leadership of a revived Babylon, between them constituting the most powerful system of opposition to God's people which there has ever been.

Is. 13:14,15 shows the connection of Israel's neighbours with Babylon; people of these areas are urged to "flee every one into his own land (because) every one that is... joined unto (Babylon), shall fall by the sword" in the day of Babylon's judgment. This sounds like a hint that the Arab peoples will be given the opportunity to repent and avoid God's judgments. Their previously being "joined unto" Babylon is the language of marriage/intercourse, showing the brief intensity of their association (remember Babylon is called a whore in Rev. 17:5). The intensity of their joining together is shown by the fact that Babylon is spoken of as the 'hire of the north', although "the north" can refer to other neighbouring powers apart from Babylon (Jer. 1:14,15; 25:9; 46:24). Passages where "the north country" is Babylon include Jer. 3:18; 6:22; 10:22; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; 46:10. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that these powers became part of 'the king of the north' for the purposes of Israel and Jerusalem's invasion and judgment. Jer. 51:20-23 speaks of Babylon as an individual controlling others, i.e. the other neighbouring jihadist nations - e.g. a rider of a horse, a shepherd over a flock, a ploughman over his oxen. This paves the way for Babylon being the whore who rides the beast (Rev. 17:3). In similar vein Is. 49:26 speaks of

Israel's enemies being fed "with their own flesh", whilst Babylon's flesh will be eaten by the powers confederate with her (Rev. 17:16). This shows their close association.

The woman sits upon the beast; she sits as a queen (18:7), whereas the Lord is repeatedly presented in Revelation as sitting enthroned as a King (4:2,3,9 etc.). He is the real power, and not her. The seals of chapter 6 have presented Israel's jihadist invaders as seated upon horses; now there is a charismatic antiChrist individual seated upon a beast, far more powerful. She sits upon seven mountains (:9), headquartered in Jerusalem, the city of seven hills. As explained on 16:19, latter day Babylon makes her capital in Jerusalem; and we note the shift in jihadist theology away from Mecca towards Jerusalem as the key city in their theology. And from there she sits upon all the nations and peoples of the land promised to Abraham (:15).

*Full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns-* The beast was "full of blasphemous names". Not only the heads of the Beast (13:1), but its whole body is covered with them, indicating that the entire empire sanctioned the emperors' arrogation of divine titles; such titles could be found throughout the Roman world, inscribed on public buildings and monuments. The golden cup which the whore has (cp. 18:6; Jer. 51:7) has contents which would have been understood as idolatrous cults and the vices of Rome-all in sharp contrast with its outward beauty and the splendour of the woman. These prophecies were therefore in direct and open criticism of the Roman empire which surrounded the early ecclesia. And yet we can also interpret the whore in line with the Old Testament presentations of apostate Jerusalem and Israel as a whore (Ez. 23, Hosea etc.). The Lord has earlier stated that He considered the Jewish satan / opposition to the Christians as being blasphemy (2:9).

In the latter day application, the beast system is full of blasphemy in that it persecutes God's people (13:6). Jihadist theology insists that the Jews and Christians are not the people of God and therefore should be persecuted and killed, claiming they are acting as God in judging His people. That is blasphemy indeed. The seven heads and ten horns (as noted on 13:1) could refer to how this beast is the composite summary of all the previous beasts of Daniel's visions; perhaps there will be seven leaders, or a succession of such leaders; and a coalition of ten groups who comprise the strength of the composite beast. But the seven heads are here understood as seven mountains (:9). Mountains can refer to nations or peoples. But a literal application would point to Jerusalem, well known at the time as the city of seven hills or mountains. The claim that Rome was such a city might have been relevant to those living under Nero's persecution; but there are many cities famed for being built on seven hills, not least Istanbul / Constantinople, and even my beloved Vilnius. I made a strong case on 16:19 that Babylon is headquartered in Jerusalem; and this is a city of seven hills, and was recognized as such in John's time. But within that city, wherever it is geographically, there may be seven heads / mountains / spheres of control or leaders.

*17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication-* The materials listed here were all associated with the tabernacle, and we can understand how for first century Christians under Jewish persecution this would have encouraged them. The Judaist system, with all its wealth, based in Jerusalem, was nothing but a whore in God's eyes.

Whilst the purple may have had reference in its time to imperial Rome, let's note that "The Canaanites... derived their name from the purple dye which was produced there and used for making an expensive cloth" (R.E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1972) p. 21).

Babylon is given a cup of condemnation to drink (16:19); but here she is pictured holding such a cup and passing it to others in order to make them drunk as she is. The wine would refer to her teaching, whipping up those who drink it into a rage of anti-Jewish and anti-Christian madness. This is clearly appropriate to the effect of jihadist propaganda. Babylon is therefore living out her own condemnation; the cup of wine she offers to others is that of her and their condemnation. Babylon *is* a cup, so closely identified is she with her teachings and condemnation; and she has made all the nations of the earth / land promised to Abraham drunk with her madness against Israel, both natural and spiritual (Jer. 51:7). The teaching / wine she gives is not only propaganda; it is an invitation to fornicate with her, to closely and intimately associate with her personally.

We can observe that the description of the beast in Rev. 17 is very un-Islamic- in fact, the very opposite. The beast is ridden by a prostitute who is drunk- both abominations to radical Islam. The woman has a golden cup- drinking from golden cups is specifically forbidden to Moslems by the Quran. The cup is full of idolatry- and Sunni Islam particularly is passionately against any idolatry or worship of anything apart from God. An image is set up to the beast and worshipped- also abomination for Moslems. The false prophet does miracles- whereas Moslems claim that Mohammed did no miracles and the Quran itself is the one supreme miracle of Islam. The gaudy decoration of the beast and whore of Rev. 17 is far from the sobriety of jihadist Islam. Why the apparent contradictions? The similarities with what Islam is *not* are so pronounced that a point is surely being made. The beast of Revelation is how God views the jihadist entities and radical Islam. From His perspective, they are the very and exact opposite of all they are claiming. And as has often been observed, the supposed 'religion of peace' is responsible for huge destruction and mass murder. Another possibility is that the more opulent descriptions of the beast actually match well with the Islamic conception of Paradise- as defined, e.g., in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Article 'Jannah'): "One day in paradise is considered equal to a thousand years on earth. Palaces are made from bricks of gold, silver, pearls, among other things. Traditions also note the presence of horses and camels of "dazzling whiteness", along with other creatures. Large trees are described, mountains made of musk, between which rivers flow in valleys of pearl and ruby". It may be that the jihadists seek to portray their caliphate as paradise come on earth.

The image is clearly presented as an idol- this is how the word translated "image" is usually used in the Old Testament. The chief deity of Babylon was Marduk who was considered to be the "god of gold". Herodotus described the image of Marduk as a golden statue seated upon a golden throne before a golden table and a golden altar. Pliny also notes that the robes of Marduk's priests were interlaced with gold. The word used for the breaking in pieces of the image (Dan. 2:34) is that used frequently about the breaking in pieces of idols (Ex. 32:20; Dt. 9:21; 2 Kings 23:6,15; 2 Chron. 34:4). The sequence of metals (gold, silver, brass and iron) is found again in Dan. 5:4,23 in describing the materials used by the Babylonian kings for their idols. It's as if they wanted to show that actually all the metals of the image were comprehended within their empire- and they would last for ever. The latter day entity will be distinctly religious, too. The jihadists are passionately against any idols or memorials, hence their destruction of any Shia shrines they take control of. But in a turn of irony which can only be Divine, their religious system is of itself an idol, which is to be destroyed by the

Lord's second coming. The entity represented by the image of Daniel 2, which I suggest refers to an Islamic state established in the land promised to Abraham, is destroyed by the return of Christ as of a stone cut out without hands. But the Kaaba stone, the black stone of Mecca which is the central point of the grand mosque in Mecca towards which Moslems pray, is believed by Moslems to have been cut out without human hands and to have come to earth from Heaven, and will reappear at judgment day. And yet this stone, which serves as the focal point of Islam, will be shown to be but a parody of the ultimately true stone cut without hands, the Lord Jesus, who will return from Heaven as the stone to smash the image.

17:5 *And upon her forehead a name written of a mystery: Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations*- The allusion is to how prostitutes had such names on their foreheads; but this name is that given her by God. The "abominations" of the earth / land were spawned by her. She will set the abomination which will bring about the desolation of the temple mount right there on the temple mount in Jerusalem (Dan. 12:11; Mt. 24:15), and this surely refers to something like a mosque complex or other visual symbol of jihadist Islam. The plural "abominations" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great abomination- that which brings her to desolation. In this context we must read 21:27 which says that there shall be no more abomination allowed in Jerusalem, the holy city of God. For the Islamist abomination there is to be utterly destroyed. The limited AD70 fulfilment was in the icons of Roman gods being placed there by the legionaries. Again, the location for her abomination is Jerusalem. She is clearly set up on the pattern of Jezebel, a woman from what is now Lebanon, who persecuted the Elijah ministry of her day, just as this latter day individual will do according to chapter 11. Radical Islam claims to be against all kind of prostitution and immorality, but the point is that in reality that abusive system is itself a prostitute.

See on 1 Cor. 9:27 for a Jewish / Roman interpretation of "Babylon". The images and applications unite together is that Babylon is enthroned in Jerusalem at the last day, and the fall of Jerusalem is thereby that of Babylon; see on 16:19. There are other similarities with the apostate Jewish system:

Double unto her double	Jer. 16:18; Is. 40:2
Sound of the millstone no longer heard...	Jer. 25:10
In her was found the blood of the prophets	Jer. 2:34; Lk. 11:50 [the blood of all the prophets was required of Jerusalem in AD70]
Great whore 17:1	Ez. 16,23; Jer. 2,3; Hos. 1-4
Arrayed in purple and scarlet	Ez. 28:5,6,8- a priest, cp. Jer. 4:30
Precious stones	The High Priest's breastplate
Golden cup full of abominations	Ez. 23:25, 32-34 cp. Mt. 23:28
Upon her forehead a name written	A parody of 'Yahweh' written on the High Priestly mitre
Mother of harlots	Ez. 16:44-52
Drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus	The first century martyrs

Burnt with fire	The punishment for harlotry cp. Ez. 16:37-41
The habitation of demons	Mt. 12:43-45
Come out of her my people	Implies they were already within her, as God's people. Ref. To Lk. 21:20,21 and the need for the Christians to leave Judaism.
Her plagues...death, mourning and famine	Jer. 18:21
18:12,13 the things traded in	All used in the temple worship cp. 2 Chron. 2:4,7,8.
Rejoice over her thou heaven...for God hath avenged you	Dt. 32:43 LXX re. Israel
A great millstone cast into the sea	As happened to Judaism / the temple mount as a result of faith in Christ (Mt. 21:21; 18:6)
Harpers harping	In the temple
A candle	The menorah
In her was found the blood of the prophets	A prophet didn't perish outside Jerusalem (Lk. 13:33).
Babylon is "the great city"	Which in Rev. 11:8 is where Jesus was crucified, i.e. Jerusalem.
Babylon divided into three parts for judgement	As Jerusalem was (Ez. 5:1-4; Zech. 14:1-4).

17:6 *And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder-* Hab. 2:16 describes how Babylon is punished at the Lord's return because of her drunkenness. Rev. 17:6 defines this as being "with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus", as if to imply that it is the Babylon/ beast's mad, drunken persecution of the saints in the last days that results in the Lord's return in judgment. The "saints" may refer to natural Israel as in Dan. 7:25 and the "martyrs of Jesus" to the witnesses for Him who are killed by the beast, as in chapter 11. Drunkenness is a process; the wine refers to the teaching of Babylon, but it is here the blood of Israel, natural and spiritual. There is the development of a progressive blood lust, the teaching is to kill Israel, and this is exactly the teaching of Jihadism. Once blood is tasted, it becomes the more addictive. Note how after all he has already seen, John marvels at this awful system he now sees portrayed. Although :7 could suggest that the marvelling is a reference to incomprehension.

17:7 *But the angel said to me: Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her-* John himself wrote: "Marvel not if the world hate you" (1 Jn. 3:13). Perhaps this is why he is gently rebuked for marvelling [s.w.] when he now sees the real dimensions of the world's hatred for the believers; for it is those who then dwell on the earth / land who will "marvel" whereas the Lord's people, armed with the book of Revelation, will not (:8). John "wondered with great

admiration" at the scarlet beast (:6), just as the world had wondered after the sea beast (Rev. 13:3). And yet we can read John's "marvel" or wonder more positively. The fear or awe of the Lord, our wonder at Him, is the beginning of wisdom. Wonder isn't a kind of intellectual resignation, giving up on the study of God and retreating into numb feelings. Quite the opposite. True wonder leads to a more earnest seeking after wisdom. The Angel told John that John had 'wondered' in amazement at the visions so that God could now reveal the mystery to him (:6,7). In our wonder we sense we are at the beginning of things of infinite significance, we feel we are starting to grasp something ultimate. And we wish to go further. We will glory in the understanding and knowledge of God which that wonder stimulates us to search out (Jer. 9:22,23)

*17:8 The beast you saw was and is not, and is about to come up-* The allusion is to the Yahweh Name, He who was, is and is to come. The Name of blasphemy on Babylon is therefore a take on His holy Name. Babylon will think: "I am, and there is none else beside me" (Is. 47:8). She appropriates to herself the Name ["I am"] and characteristics of Yahweh; this is her blasphemy.

*Out of the abyss, and to go into destruction-* This beast which arises out of the bottomless pit is therefore connected with the same beast from the bottomless pit as in Rev. 11:7. The three beasts [sea beast of 13:1, earth beast of 13:11 and now this scarlet beast] are all in the spirit and power of the dragon of chapter 12. I suggest the visions may be revealing different aspects of the same entity; or we may have the idea that the beasts will each be judged by God, or damaged by Israeli or Western attacks upon them, but regroup and reform into another incarnation of the same Jihadist principles. This kind of thing is quite imaginable given the geopolitics of the earth / land promised to Abraham.

*And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was and is not, and shall come-* As noted on :7, those armed with the book of Revelation will not "wonder" at the beast as they will understand it. Perhaps only that generation will fully understand what we read here; because the purpose of prophecy is so that when it fulfils, then we perceive the meaning of the original prophecy. The idea is not that prophecy enables us to work out a timeline of events ahead of time. 13:3,12 explain that the world [here called the earth dwellers, those within the earth / land] shall wonder after the beast because it recovers from a deadly wound; a wound which led to death. Here we read that the beast was, is not [the deadly wound], and yet has revived. That deadly wound is upon one of the heads (13:3), which is identified with the beast; just as the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8 is spoken of as the whole beast. That little horn takes a stand against the Prince of princes and then is destroyed "but not by human power" (Dan. 8:25), i.e. he will be destroyed by the stone [Jesus] cut out without human hands. So the deadly wound could refer to Western or Israeli victory against the beast, but it likely is the result of direct Divine intervention and judgment.

Like the Lamb, who was killed and then raised up (5:6), the Beast seems to disappear and then return to life. This passage may be a reference to some definite event, such as the murder of Caesar and the healing of the empire under Augustus, the legend of *Nero redivivus*, whereby Nero was believed to have returned from the dead. The marvellous cure of the Beast excites admiration and leads to the adoration of the dragon and the Beast (17:8). This is an allusion to the rapid progress of the emperor cult and to the ready acceptance of the immoral example of the emperors. Thus Caesar is set up as the very antithesis of the one true Lord and



Master, Jesus. The latter day application is likewise to a specific individual, the equivalent of Nero in the very last days.

17:9 *Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are the seven mountains on which the woman sits-* As discussed on :3, the city with seven hills may have in its time referred to Rome, and also to Jerusalem, the seat of the Jewish satan which so persecuted the early church before AD70. But the latter day reference is to the "great city" where Babylon shall be enthroned; and I have argued on 16:19 that this is literal Jerusalem. But the seven mountains may refer also to a system of seven supporting elements within the beast system which are to be found within the beast headquarters in Jerusalem.

17:10 *And they are seven kings. The five are fallen, the one is, the other is yet to come; and when he comes, he must continue a little while-* The seven mountains refer to seven leaders within the beast system, headquartered in Jerusalem, the city of seven hills. They may refer to a sequence of seven kings, or to a group of seven rulers gathered within Jerusalem. But they are photographed, as it were, at the point of the sixth king. The one yet to come provides the connection with how the beast was, is not, and yet is to come. The deadly wounded head will revive in the form of a seventh head. He continues "a little while", the same Greek used in 12:12 for how the dethroned devil / dragon furiously persecutes God's people, knowing that he has but "a little while". His dethronement would correlate with the head receiving a deadly wound in 13:12, the beast 'not being' due to Divine judgment, and then reviving. The judgment and yet revival of Babylon is for a reason; and I suggest that the God who in judgment always remembers mercy does it this way because He seeks even Babylon's repentance. And that is why in the midst of the prophecies of Babylon's judgment, we read that God "would have healed Babylon", of her "deadly wound", but she would not; she refuses the ointment offered (Jer. 51:8,9).

A pre-AD70 date for Revelation has been well argued by J.A.T. Robinson, H.A. Whittaker and Paul Wyls. John would've been pretty old if it was indeed given in AD96 as claimed by some. The many connections between Revelation and the Olivet prophecy and 2 Peter 3 all suggest that it too is a prophecy of AD70. The historical connections are too great to ignore, and seem of little value if the book is simply alluding at a later date to what happened in AD70. Rev. 17:10 speaks of the leadership of the Roman empire, speaking of "five that are fallen"- clearly referring to:

1. Julius Caesar the first Roman Emperor (44 BC-26 BC).
2. Augustus (27 BC – AD 14).
3. Tiberius (AD 14 – 37).
4. Gaius (AD 37 – 41).
5. Claudius (AD 41 – 51)

The leader who "is" would therefore refer to Nero (AD54-68), and the context of persecution would then be that of his reign. The sixth, Nero, was alive when John was given the Revelation; and the seventh was Galba who reigned only 7 months (June 68 - Jan 69). This order of the Caesars is that taken from standard works: Suetonius (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*); Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 5); Josephus (*Antiquities* 19.1.11 cp. 18.2.2; 18.6.10). The beast's war with the saints for 42 months (13:5-7) would then refer to the Neronian persecution. Note how 13:12,14 interchanges the head with the whole beast. Mosheim confirms this: "The dreadful persecution which took place by order of this tyrant, commenced at Rome about the middle of November in the year of our Lord 64... this dreadful persecution ceased but with the death of Nero... in the year 68 [June], when he put an end to his own life" L. von Mosheim, *Historical Commentaries* vol. 1, tr. Robert Vidal (NY: Converse, 1854) pp

138,139. In the same way as the first century believers could not have accurately predicted how all this would come about, but would have been wonderfully encouraged as they saw it all happening, and perceived then the interpretation- so we will see the Revelation come true, rather than be able to predict its precise fulfilment, in our final "last days".

The problem with the application to Roman Caesars is that the five kings "fall", the same word soon to be used about the fall of Babylon (18:2). The word doesn't mean to die, but to fall from power to destruction. The idea is that five kings will be killed, either together or in quick succession. Any application to the deaths of a succession of Roman Caesars is only a very shadowy fulfilment of the clearer, fuller reality which will be seen in the last days.

17:11 *And the beast that was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes into destruction-* We have noted several times the identity between the horns and the beast. The 'seventh which is the eighth' may mean that the final incarnation of the beast is in its seventh horn' as the horns were, are and shall be (:10), so with the beast itself. The apparent confusion between seventh and eighth in Hebrew thought is found in Lk. 9:28, where "an eight days" means seven days, a week. The idea may be that he is the seventh, and even the eighth, reckoning inclusively, because after this 'seventh' there shall be no 'eighth' to follow. Going away into destruction is the same idea as in Mt. 25:46, where the rejected one-time believers "go away into everlasting punishment". Their destruction will be along with the beast; those who in their deepest heart identify with the world shall share the world's judgment.

17:12 *And the ten horns you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings with the beast, for one hour-* These ten kings would correspond with the ten toes of Daniel's image which stand upon the earth / land promised to Abraham just before the "little stone" of the returning Lord Jesus destroys them; the ten nations of the latter day confederacies of Psalm 83 and Ez. 38, the ten Canaanite nations which had to be driven out of the land / earth. The focus here is on the leadership; these ten kings may be located in Jerusalem along with the beast. Their actual possession of power over the land is very brief- just "one hour". And it is in "one hour" that Babylon is destroyed (18:10,17,19).

Radical Islam has a lot to say about the land promised to Abraham- what the Bible prophecies refer to as the *eretz* or land / earth. The Islamic State and al-Nusra Front speak much about it; their definition of the Levant or Sham is pretty much that of the land promised to Abraham. 'Nusra' is an acronym standing for the Front for the Defence of the Levant. They claim to be fighting to prepare the way for the coming of the Mahdi to establish God's Kingdom worldwide; they call the land promised to Abraham "Land of *Malahim*," or "epic battles", and they expect there to be the *al-Malhamah al-Kubra*, the "Great Battle of the last hour", at Jerusalem. This is what the Bible calls Armageddon. When the true Jesus appears in Jerusalem, all nations in the earth / land will be gathered together to battle at Jerusalem. And the jihadist theology is preparing them for this. They consciously speak of their caliphate as being extended over the land promised to Abraham, and they are urging people to leave their native lands as Abraham left his, and journey to live in the caliphate, comprised as they wish it to be, of the territory promised to Abraham. They call their caliph or leader 'Caliph Ibrahim / Abraham', and urge migration or *hijrah* to the land promised to him. The pieces are all falling into place to fulfil the Biblical pictures of the last days. Jihadist theology makes much of 'signs of the times', leading up to the coming of the Mahdi and the final battle against the antiChrist. These 'signs of the times' they look for are often the same signs which are to be found in the Bible, e.g. the re-establishment of Israel as a nation before Armageddon. So as

they apparently come true, Islamists are the more convinced that antiChrist [who they call *Dajjal* and understand to be a Jew] is about to appear in Jerusalem, and they must fight him in the last great battle, in order to enable the Mahdi to return. Who they consider to be the antichrist will in fact be the true Christ. They will rush to fight Him, believing Him to be the antichrist they are expecting. Their destruction by Him will presage the establishment of God's *true* Kingdom on earth, the revived and restored kingdom of Israel. This would explain why many Biblical terms used about the very last days are also found in Jihadist theology. They speak of the events of the very last days before the Mahdi returns as being "the hour"; and yet Revelation speaks of how the kings of the earth / land will have power for "one hour" and be destroyed likewise in "one hour" (Rev. 17:12; 18:10,17,19). These similarities are unsurprising because Mohammed clearly plagiarized the Bible and Judaism for his teachings.

17:13 *These are of one mind; and they give their power and authority to the beast-* Their "one mind" is another point of connection and contrast with the believers, who are of "one mind" with each other and their Lord, giving Him all power and authority in their lives. This is very much the language of John's other writings, and 4:11 and 5:12 speak of how believers will have given power and authority to Him. The beast is a veritable antiChrist, a fake Kingdom of God. Their unity is based upon their common acceptance of the Jihadist doctrine of destruction of Israel and Christianity within the earth / land. When that is achieved, they then start to squabble amongst themselves, just as the iron and clay elements of the 10 toes of Daniel 2 do not otherwise get along with each other.

17:14 *These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with him, called and chosen and faithful, these also shall overcome-* Overcoming is a major theme of the opening letters of Revelation. Those who overcame in their lives will now have been resurrected and will along with the Lord now overcome this final manifestation of sin. The "war" or (Gk.) battle is that for which the jihadist locusts of 9:7,9 are prepared- by the propaganda from the three sources of 16:13. This is the final battle against the Jews and Christians in the land spoken of in 11:7; 12:17 and 13:7, a kind of "final solution". But it is effectively a gathering together to battle against the returned Lord Jesus (19:19; 20:8). The same word for war / battle is used in all these references.

17:15 *And he said to me: The waters which you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples and crowds and nations and tongues-* Babylon "sits" upon the kings of the earth / land; these are the ones she makes drunk with her teaching. The peoples and nations therefore primarily refer to those within the land promised to Abraham and the "sea", the 'waters' immediately surrounding that land, over which the beast has dominion. It is out of these very peoples that there will arise some genuine Christian converts during the tribulation; see on 5:9; 7:9; 11:9 and 14:6.

17:16 *And the ten horns which you saw: they and the beast, these shall hate the prostitute and shall make her desolate and naked-* According to the prototype of the Old Testament invasions of Israel, their enemies turn against each other. We are to expect this in the last days, so that, e.g., Ethiopia will turn against Assyria as happened historically at the time of the Assyrian attack upon Jerusalem. This may be part of the process whereby the horns "hate the whore" of Babylon/Assyria during the final stage of their persecution of God's people (Rev. 17:16 cp. Hab. 2:8). Nah. 3:9 points out that the real strength of Assyria against Israel was on account of the support she received from the smaller surrounding powers. Likewise

the 'Romans' who destroyed the temple in AD70 were largely Arab and Persian mercenaries. Similarly no one nation presently has any likelihood of dominating the Middle East in terms of military power. Iran and Iraq (geographical 'Assyria') will need the assistance of the other surrounding nations to realistically invade Israel. "*Tidings* out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him" (Dan. 11:44) uses the same word translated "rumour" in 2 Kings 19:7, concerning the 'rumour' Sennacherib heard of his Ethiopian allies turning against him. These 'tidings' can be interpreted in a last-days context as referring to news reaching 'Assyria' of her smaller allies turning against her - the horns hating the whore.

Historical Babylon was not destroyed simply by "the Medes" but by her own former allies turning against her. In the same way as God puts this idea into the hearts of the ten kings (:17), so Jer. 50:9 says of Babylon's destruction: "I will stir up and cause to come up against Babylon a company of great nations from the north country". Babylon has just been pictured as sitting upon many waters, the nations within the land promised to Abraham (:15). But these waters are to be dried up from her, and those very waters come upon her in destruction. Thus Jer. 50:38,42: "A drought is on her waters, and they shall be dried up... The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of its waves". The nations who destroy her were from the borders of the earth / land promised to Abraham: "Many kings shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth (Jer. 50:41). These are the ten kings of Rev. 17 who hate the whore and destroy her, the "nations" of "all the earth / land" whom Babylon had made drunk (Jer. 51:7). Her destroyers are likened to locusts (Jer. 51:14), a figure for the jihadist invaders in Rev. 9 who were once supportive of her. There is large emphasis in Jer. 51 that these destroyers of Babylon will have been "prepared" by God, raised up by Him; just as we read in :17 that God puts this idea into their hearts: "*Prepare* the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz... *Prepare* against her the nations" (Jer. 51:27,28).

*And shall eat her flesh and shall burn her completely with fire*- Eating the flesh of a victim is a Hebraism for total hatred. But within John's thought, the connection is with his record of the Lord's teaching that His followers are to eat His flesh (Jn. 6). The idea may be that although they hate her, yet they are participants in her, as we are in the Lord, and they shall therefore not be saved on account of this but rather judged. Judgment by fire is very much the language of Divine judgment, but we see here how this judgment will actually be brought about by the infighting within the beast system. Under the law, prostitutes were to be burnt to death. So the idea seems to be that indeed Babylon refers to a charismatic individual who leads or rides the beast. As Babylon burnt Jerusalem with fire, so she must be burnt (Jer. 21:10; 51:58).

The animals and birds were even under Babylon's control according to Dan. 2:38. But it is the beasts and birds of the sky who later are prophesied as feasting upon Babylon (Rev. 19:17). This is the equivalent of the horns on the beast hating the whore of Babylon who rides it; the destruction of the Babylon system will ultimately be more by Muslim infighting than direct bolts of destruction from God. Indeed, this was historically God's preferred method of destroying Israel's invaders in Old Testament times.

17:17 *For God did put it in their hearts to do his mind and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished*- We see here clear evidence that God can act directly upon the hearts of people to make them be of one mind and do His mind. How much more is He willing to do so through the gift of the Spirit to His

own people who wish to do His will. We noted on :16 that the nations under Babylon turn against her because God gives them a mind to do so- just as He initially gave them a mind to be supportive of her. We note that they gave their kingdoms to the beast, but the beast does not give them a kingdom until the final "one hour", which is the "one hour" of their destruction; see on :12. Perhaps it is an argument about power sharing and reward, how to carve up the earth / land promised to Abraham, which leads to their bitter hatred of Babylon.

God will make the various nations under Babylon's rule to "agree" (Rev. 17:17)- there will be an unprecedented unity amongst those nations located within the land promised to Abraham. Pan-Arabism will triumph in the end. This union will lead to economic prosperity for the region (Rev. 18:3)- easy to imagine, given the huge oil wealth of these areas. Babylon will become a fake Kingdom of God; hence she is described in terms elsewhere applied to the people and land of Israel (Rev. 18:22,23). Babylon is arrayed in fine linen (Rev. 18:16) as a pseudo-bride of Christ.

The final "day of the Lord" will contain elements of all the previous 'days' of God's manifestation in the affairs of men. It will be the time when "the words of God are fulfilled" (Rev. 17:17), when "all is fulfilled" (Lk. 21:22,32) - presumably referring to the prophetic word. It is therefore fitting that there are many Old Testament historical backgrounds to the prophecies which relate to the Lord's return; those events were types of the final last day. See on Mt. 24:15. The last days will be the time when *every* prophecy has its ultimate fulfilment (Lk. 21:22; Rev. 17:17); the ultimate climax of prophecy. Therefore we are justified in seeing every prophecy concerning Israel and her neighbours as having at least some latter day application.

17:18- see on Rev. 14:6-9.

*And the woman whom you saw is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth-* "Which reigns" returns us to the immediate reality which John is watching, and the reality of the moment experienced by God's people under Gentile domination at all times. That great city is now reigning; but we have just seen how she shall come to an end. As noted on 16:19, the "great city" in its latter day sense is Babylon enthroned in Jerusalem.

As in Hezekiah's time the Assyrians likened captivity in their land to the wonders of being in God's Kingdom, so too Babylon is likewise depicted as a fake Kingdom of God. All the nations flowed together unto her (Jer. 51:44), as they will to the true Kingdom of God (Is. 2:2). She is called "that great city, which *reigns* (Gk. '*basilia*') over the kings of the earth" (17:18). '*Basilia*' is normally used about God's Kingdom. When Jesus described His Kingdom as a tree "greater than all herbs" with "great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mk.4:32), He was actually quoting from the description of the kingdom of Babylon in Dan. 4. By doing so, He was pointing out that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, legendary as it might be, was but a fake replica of His.

When the mountains flee in Rev. 16:10, Babylon loses the support base of the coalition she leads. These kings are described in Rev. 17:18 as the kings of the land- that promised to Abraham. And within the boundaries of that land we find seven such nations- Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Iran. The appeal in Rev. 14:6-8 and Rev. 18:4 for Christian believers to "come out of her" would imply that there are believers within those nations and that there will be a major witness made to her- and it is surely highly significant

that there has been a great growth in conversions in those areas in recent times! This is a sure sign that we are approaching the time of the end. Sadly Rev. 18:24 implies that believers will be murdered in these areas in the final tribulation- and already the persecution and murder of Christian converts is in full swing there. The description of Babylon sitting upon various peoples, nations and tongues is to be connected with the same use of the phrase in Rev. 5:9 and 7:9 to describe the world from which Christian believers are drawn out. And significantly, the same phrase is very commonly used in Daniel to describe the area ruled over by historical Babylon (Dan. 3:4,29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14).

Issue number 3 of the Islamic State magazine *Dabiq* frequently talks of the call to follow Ibrahim [Abraham] in making *hijrah* [migration] to the land promised to him: “Islam in the end of times will be more manifest in Shām... So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm’s hijrah, which is Shām” [Majmū’ul-Fatāwā]. Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullāh) also said, “So he informed that the best of the people on the earth are those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm’s hijrah, in contrast to those who pass through it or leave it. The land that Ibrāhīm made hijrah to is Shām... the land of Ibrāhīm’s hijrah... And the land of Ibrāhīm’s hijrah, has been made for us equal to the land of our Prophet’s hijrah. The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm’s hijrah”. Note how the theology of these jihadists effectively replaces the land of Saudi Arabia and the city of Mecca with that of the Levant, the territory promised to Abraham; and Mecca is replaced in their focus by Jerusalem. With Saudi Arabia now supporting the Western coalition against the jihadists, such a shift in emphasis isn’t surprising. But it means that all is being prepared for the last days- for the Bible prophecies focus upon the domination of the land of Israel and Jerusalem in particular. It’s significant that the Caliph of the Islamic State Caliphate is referred to by his followers as Caliph Ibrahim / Abraham; the idea is that the faithful will follow him in migrating from their homelands to the land promised to him- which is the very same *eretz* which is the focus of the Bible’s latter day prophecies, and which is to be dominated by an antiChrist figure and his beast.

## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lit with his glory-* Perhaps representing the Lord Jesus. The scene of the land lightened with glory recalls Ez. 43:2, a prophecy of how the Kingdom could have been established at the return from exile. The essence of that prophecy will be fulfilled at the Lord's return, although it seems not the details. The visions of Revelation are not chronological; here we revert to how the destruction of Babylon spoken of in chapter 17 comes about, and the implications for believers. John indeed sees "another angel", but this is not to say that the Angel represents someone different to what Angels represented.

18:2 *And he cried with a mighty voice, saying: Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the great, and has become a habitation of demons, a refuge of every unclean spirit, and a refuge of every unclean and hateful bird-* The Babylon section in Revelation is full of allusion to the Old Testament. "Babylon" can be understood as referring to Judaism, to Israel, to the oppressors of God's people under the Roman Empire, and to a latter day Babylon which is the capital of the beast system, and which I suggest refers to radical Islam dominating the earth / land promised to Abraham. The commentary seeks to bring out these various applications. Babylon has not yet "fallen" because those within her are urged to come out from within her (:4); her fall is announced in order that she might repent, according to Jer. 51:8: "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed". But from God's perspective, she had already fallen. The later call to quit Babylon (:4) is made because she refuses this amazingly gracious invitation to repent: "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: [therefore] forsake her" (Jer. 51:9). "Great Babylon" refers specifically to the city of Babylon, which I suggested on 16:19 refers to Jerusalem as the capital of the beast, and place of leadership of the woman known as Babylon, the charismatic leader of the beast system, antiChrist.

There is the assumption by many that all the O.T. prophecies about 'Babylon' were fulfilled in the overrunning of Babylon by the Medes. However, there are many details of those prophecies which didn't have a total fulfilment. It could be argued from this that there must be a literal rebuilding of Babylon and the complete fulfilment of the judgment prophecies against her. However, there are plenty of connections between Babylon and Jerusalem (see on 16:19), and this is the "great city" which shall be judged, where also our Lord was crucified.

The Old Testament judgments upon Babylon were that she would become inhabited by wild, unclean animals: "Therefore the wild animals of the desert with the wolves shall dwell there, and the ostriches shall dwell therein... a dwelling place for jackals" (Jer. 50:39; 51:37). These animals were thought to be connected with unclean spirits and demons. Because Babylon had become a cage and "hold" [AV] or prison for demons and unclean spirits and birds, so she would be punished by being inhabited by wild animals thought to be demon possessed. The Greek terms translated "refuge" in NEV carry the ideas of a prison and cage. Babylon will not let its people out once they are in; and that is what has happened in many cities overrun by the jihadists. A similar idea is used of how the latter day antiChrist, Gog, the chief prince, will be a "guard" [s.w. "prison"] to a group of ten nations who seek to attack and desolate Israel (Ez. 38:7). This is just what Babylon does.

18:3- see on Rev. 17:18.

*For by the wine of the anger of her fornication all the nations are fallen-* The "anger" in view is surely the anger of the judgment wrath of God against her "fornication". The "all nations" are the kings of the earth / land associated with the Babylon confederacy have already at this point begun to drink of that cup which was given to Babylon earlier. Their identity with her (for "he that is joined to a harlot is one flesh" with her) means that Babylon's "fall" is their fall.

Note that being given a cup of wine to drink is a double symbol- of condemnation and also "the cup of blessing". Hence at the breaking of bread we are to review the two possible outcomes of our being given that cup- blessing or condemnation.

*For the kings of the earth had committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich by the power of her greed-* The "all nations" are here defined as the kings of the earth / land promised to Abraham. Not every nation on planet earth will be part of 'Babylon'. They grew rich by her prostitution [for Babylon is a whore] presumably in that wealth was given to her for her services, and her greed and love of opulence means that the commercial sector within the earth / land becomes rich. We are therefore to imagine this latter day entity as being immensely wealthy. Such a situation would probably require the financial collapse of the West and some Middle Eastern Islamic entity becoming fantastically wealthy as a result.

The first century applications would refer to the extreme wealth of the Jewish system based in Jerusalem. The Pharisees "were covetous" (Lk. 16:14), as Babylon was greedy. And Rome likewise. It would have seemed that Rome was invincible, economically and politically unshakeable, admired by the whole world. And yet it was to be brought down by Divine judgment.

18:4 *And I heard another voice from heaven, saying: Come out of her My people-* A final appeal to those living within the territory of this latter day entity. According to previous teaching in Revelation, this group would likely be Israeli Christians, Jews who have turned to Christ in the very last days. They would be under great pressure from the Islamic state governing them to convert to Islam, and they are being urged not to. "Come out" would therefore refer to a spiritual separation, as geographically they would have no place to run to. However it could be that those who respond to this call to "come out" will have a miraculous way of literal exit opened to them, perhaps by the Lord snatching away those who in their hearts say "Yes" to this invitation. This would be the moment of 1 Thess. 4, where those who are alive at the Lord's coming are literally snatched away to meet Him at His coming.

The first century application would be to the Christians fleeing out of the surrounded Jerusalem, in accordance with the Lord's command to flee to the mountains (Mt. 24:16). This would further suggest that the "Babylon" in view here in Jerusalem. See on 16:19.

*Lest you take part in her sins, and partake of her plagues-* Here "sins" is put for 'judgment for sins'. Sin is its own judgment. We cannot sin and psychologically assume that in the future, somehow that sin will not be judged. Sin is its judgment right now. Lot's witness completed, he was told to leave Sodom "lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city" (Gen. 19:15- alluded to here in Rev. 18:4). Babylon is directly equated with Sodom in Is. 13:19 and Jer. 50:40. Babylon geographically and culturally represents the jihadist neighbours of Israel in our last days- and therefore it is not surprising that related neighbouring nations like Edom, Moab and Ammon are also paralleled with Sodom (Jer. 49:18; Zeph. 2:9). This continues a



long-standing Biblical theme that the curses on apostate Israel are the same as those on her enemies- thus Sodom is representative of both Jews and the beast coalition. Jerusalem is the city which is spiritually called Sodom (11:8). The language of Sodom is clearly applied to Jerusalem in the Old Testament (Dt. 29:23; 32:32; Is. 1:10; 3:9; Jer. 23:14). Latter day Babylon is to be punished as Sodom (Is. 13:19; Jer. 50:40). And so we can understand why at this point in Revelation, the judgment of Babylon is framed in terms of Sodom, because Babylon is to be enthroned in Jerusalem (see on 16:19). And will meet a similar destruction.

<b>Babylon (in Rev.)</b>	<b>Sodom</b>
"I will shew unto you the judgment of the great whore" (Babylon); 17:2	Cp. God showing Abraham the judgment of Sodom.
The beast supporting Babylon "was and is not and shall ascend"; 17:8	Sodom and surrounding cities were strong, then overrun by Abraham, then revived.
"Her sins have reached unto Heaven, God has remembered her iniquities"; 18:5	"The cry of Sodom... is great because their sin is very grievous ...the cry of it is come unto me" (Gen. 18:20,21)
"She has glorified herself, and lived deliciously"; 18:7	"Pride... fullness of bread" (Ez. 16:49)
"Utterly burned with fire"; 18:8	'Sodom' = 'burning'.
"Her plagues... death... and famine"; 18:8	"He overthrew all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (cp. "famine"; Gen. 19:25).
"The great city... great Babylon"; 16:19	The city of Sodom.
"There fell upon men a great hail out of heaven" (16:21)	"The Lord rained upon Sodom... brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24).
"They shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment" (18:9,10)	Abraham standing far away and seeing the smoke of Sodom's burning indicates that the surrounding kings did likewise (Gen. 19:28).
Merchants suffered through Babylon's fall (18:11-19)	Sodom was a trading centre (Lk. 17:28)

"...a great millstone cast into the sea ...thus with violence shall... Babylon.. be found no more at all"

(18:21)

"Her smoke rose up"

(19:3)

"Sodom... the land of the plain... the smoke of the country went up" (19:28)

As the Jews were called to leave literal Babylon (Zech. 2:6,7) and Lot was called out of Sodom, so Jews and true believers will be encouraged to come out from Babylon of the last days. The prosperity of Sodom and Babylon made God's people disinclined to leave them. And the opulence of Babylon, and the way she is as a cage (see on :2), will make it all the more difficult for the latter day believers to come out of the Babylon system.

And so the apostate amongst God's people will share in Babylon's judgment. And for all of us, if we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. Those who don't come out from Babylon will share her judgments. There are strong parallels between Babylon and Jerusalem; and they are deeper than simply because the beast / Babylon will capture Jerusalem and enthrone themselves there. Jerusalem is judged as Babylon because in spiritual essence, they were no different. Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9). Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon (Jer. 11:13)- and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. Apostate Israel were always treated like the surrounding Gentile world in the time of their judgments (Jer. 4:7). Israel worshipped the Babylonian gods, and so they were sent along with Bel their idol to Babylon, where their hearts were. And so they were "Condemned with the world...". Likewise in the 'judgment day' of AD70, the 'rejected' Jews were sent back into Egypt as slaves. Their condemnation was expressed in terms of an undoing of the redemption from the world which they once experienced.

18:5 *For her sins have reached even to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities-* The language of the Amalekites, the tower of Babel and Sodom. All these are used as historical foretastes of the last days, and they all involve who are now the Islamic peoples of the Middle East. Jerusalem will become the capital of the beast within the earth / land. Perhaps they will seek to build some mosque complex there, the abomination that brings desolation to the temple mount, just as the tower of Babel was built. But like the Amalekites, who were also dwellers in the earth / land promised to Abraham, this gross iniquity will reach a measure beyond which God will dramatically intervene. They were allowed to dwell in the earth / land until a point when their sin was "full" and then God would drive them out of the land and let Israel dwell there again once their tribulation ended (Gen. 15:16).

18:6 *Give to her even as she gave, and repay her double according to her deeds. In the cup in which she mixed, mix for her a double portion-* This appears a stronger judgment than for historical Babylon: "As she has done, do unto her" (Jer. 50:15). This is to be doubled. Earlier the cup was to be given to her but not diluted (14:10); now it is to be double filled. This increase in the judgments upon Babylon is because she repeatedly ignored repeated offers of healing and forgiveness. As noted on 17:4, the cup of fornication Babylon drunk and offered

to others was in fact the cup of her condemnation. She was quite literally drinking condemnation to herself, just as the rejected within the household do (1 Cor. 11:29). If we enquire to whom this command is addressed, we return to the address to "My people" of :4, who are asked to not only come out of Babylon, but to participate in judging her. The prophecies about the fall of Babylon in Jer. 50 and 51 repeatedly state that it is a revived, repentant Judah which shall judge Babylon. This has yet to be fulfilled, as they were disobedient to God's intended program for them at the time of the restoration.

And yet as explained on 17:16, the destruction of Babylon is at the hands of her ten kings.

It would appear from this that there must be two stages in Babylon's judgment: -

- 1) The jihadist armies attacking her in Jerusalem. They are themselves largely destroyed whilst doing this.
- 2) The saints and Jews complete the judgment, possibly directing some of the repentant Islamist peoples, giving some of the spoils to them.

18:7 *As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says: I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see-* The image of "luxury" continues the allusions to Sodom in :5 and :9. This all suggests that the latter day Babylon will achieve a striking level of opulence. It's debatable whether Israel's Islamic neighbours have reached such a state at the present time.

The chief sin of all pagan empires consists in their assertion that their power and their authority derive exclusively from themselves, that they are their own masters, recognizing no superior law. Old Testament prophecies about the sudden destruction of literal Babylon are the basis for the words of Revelation about latter day Babylon. Yet they were never literally fulfilled to completion. They will come finally true in the judgments upon the Babylon system of the beast. Consider:

"You who are given to pleasures, that dwells carelessly, that says in your heart, I am, and none else beside me: I shall not sit a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children" (Is. 47:8)	"How much she has glorified herself, and lived deliciously... for she has said in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (Rev. 18:7).
"But these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood" (Is. 47:9)	"Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning" (Rev. 18:8)
"Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up" (Is. 47:13)	"For by your sorceries..." (Rev. 18:23)

Therefore we conclude that the Babylon of Revelation is presented as the reincarnation of the Babylon of Jeremiah and Isaiah, literal Babylon, which awaits her full punishment. This conclusion is strengthened once it is appreciated how the harlot Babylon of Rev. 17, loud, gaudy, decked with jewellery and painted face, is replete with reference to Semiramis, the goddess / mother of Nimrod, and one of the patron gods of literal Babylon.

Her refusal to accept she is a widow speaks of someone in denial. The dragon is cast down from 'heaven' by direct Divine intervention in chapter 12, and yet goes into the wilderness to furiously persecute the woman. It seems there will be direct judgment from God against Babylon, in order to appeal for her to repent, in the spirit of "take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed" (Jer. 51:8). Truly God does not willingly afflict, but in judgment remembers mercy, and His ultimate aim of achieving His glory. Thus a tenth part of the city falls first (11:13) before Babylon completely falls (18:4). She is given the chance of repentance, but instead goes into denial about her loss and real status. This is the idea behind her insistence that she has not been widowed, and is a queen- when she has fallen from power.

*18:8 Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death and mourning and famine-* The Philistines, clearly typical of Israel's present Arab neighbours, will also die from severe famine in the last days (Is. 14:30). This may well be due to the weaponry used to inflict this upon Israel being used by the Islamists against themselves. Babylon's famine coming "in one day" would suggest something along these lines - how else can a famine be suddenly created in a day? Famine coming in a day also speaks of modern 'just in time' supply networks and transport, which once interrupted can bring an area to food bankruptcy very suddenly. Earlier than our own age, this would have been impossible. But we can also understand this strange language of famine in a day by proposing that the meaning of time is collapsed around the Lord's return. This would enable all the latter day prophecies to come true, but not in real time as we know it. Babylon is to be punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed. The events around Christ's return were prefigured by those at the time of Joshua's conquest of the land. Some of the records of his campaigns require a huge amount to have been achieved by his soldiers within around 36 hours. The comment that so much was achieved "at one time" (Josh. 10:42) may hint at a compression of time to enable it. "The sun stood still" may well be intended to teach that the meaning of time was collapsed by God, rather than that the sun literally stood still (Josh. 10:12,13). And the sun standing still over Gibeon is mentioned in Is. 28:21 as typical of the time when Yahweh will do "His strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act" in the last days. The same may be true when the shadow went back for Hezekiah. The movement of the planets need not have been altered; the meaning of time was simply suspended. Rev. 8:12, also speaking of the last days, says that "the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise". Could this mean that one day and one night last only two thirds of their usual length, whilst the judgments of the fourth Angel are poured out upon the land? I would suggest that the Lord had in mind the suspension of time when he asked that "the hour might pass from him" in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:35); rather than asking to escape the cross in this request, he was perhaps asking for it all to happen in only a moment of real time.

*And she shall be completely burned with fire. For strong is the Lord God who judges her-* This is the judgment for whores. Babylon is literal Jerusalem where she is enthroned (see on 16:19). The punishment by fire in Jerusalem would then make good sense of the Lord's idea that Gehenna- the always burning fire near Jerusalem- is to be used to destroy all God's enemies of all ages. They will share in the condemnation of the world they so loved in their lives. The burning was Sodom's judgment; and we have seen on :4 that Babylon is Sodom is Jerusalem.

*18:9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning-* Alluding to Abraham

watching the smoke of Sodom's burning (see on :5 and :7). These kings of the land are those who also played a part in her judgment, who hated the whore (see on 17:16). But their hearts are still with her, lamenting with the grief of those who wistfully keep thinking of what could have been. But as noted on :10, the reference may not be to the actual "kings", the horns of the beast; but to the commercial leaders of the surrounding world who are associated with the princes of the earth (:23).

Is. 34 describes the judgments of "all nations" around Israel, notably "upon Idumea", in language which is clearly alluded to in the later prophecies of Babylon's doom in Revelation (Is. 34:9,10 = Rev. 14:11; 17:16; 18:9; v.11=Is. 14:23). Indeed, all God's prophecies against Israel's enemies have marked points of contact with each other. Thus the prophecies against Tyre in Is. 23 are shot through with links with those against Babylon in Revelation; and "as at the report (prophecy) concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre"(Is. 23:5). Is. 14:3 says that Babylon treated Israel like the Egyptians did; they too gave them "sorrow... fear, and... hard bondage wherein (Israel) wast made to serve". Because of these similarities in how they treated and will treat God's people, their judgments will be similar. Yet a number of these nations, notably Egypt and Tyre, are described as being judged and destroyed by Babylon (e.g. Ez. 26:7). However, there is good reason to think that Babylon's own judgment will be at the hands of nations like these, who come under her umbrella during their invasion of Israel. The resolution of this apparent contradiction lies in the prophecies concerning the Islamist powers destroying each other in the final conflict, thus fulfilling all these prophecies concerning their judging of each other.

18:10 *Standing far away for the fear of her torment, saying: Woe, woe, the great city! Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour does your judgment come-* Their deep grief stands in contradistinction from the Heavenly rejoicing at Babylon's fall (:20). They are her sympathizers and are not brought to repentance by her fall. They fear that her torment shall come upon them. They retreat from her, just as the animals and birds scuttle away from under the falling tree of Babylon. They praise Babylon's strength and glory after she has fallen. They are not themselves in Babylon, but have benefitted from her through commerce, as the rest of the chapter makes clear. They would therefore refer to the commercial leaders of the 'sea' around the 'earth'; the Gentile nations who became enriched by Babylon's wealth and demand for delicacies. Surely Western commercial leaders are within this group. They are stunned by how quickly the whole system fell apart, in one hour. Her "torment" however has been going on throughout the three and a half years of the tribulation; for the two witnesses tormented those who dwelt in the land (11:10 s.w.), leading to such rejoicing when they are killed at the end of the tribulation. That torment was a foretaste of the final torment of condemnation spoken of so often (14:10; 20:10 etc.). Again we can perceive that the torment was in order to give Babylon and the beast a chance of repentance by showing them ahead of time what Divine judgment would look like for them unless they repented.

The destruction of the city is a sudden thing. The phrase "in one hour" occurs three times in Rev. 18. This destruction is like that of Sodom and Gomorrah- in a moment, by Divine intervention through fire, sulphur etc. This is not how Rome came to an end, indeed Rome as a city did not really come to an end; and literal Babylon was not physically destroyed "in one hour" in 536 BC. The predicted fall of Babylon must therefore be in our last days, referring to the destruction in a moment of the city which has become the capital of the beast- Jerusalem.

18:11 *Standing far away for the fear of her torment, saying: Woe, woe, the great city! Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour does your judgment come-* See on :10. Their fear of sharing in her torment is a major theme.

The apostate religious system called "Babylon" in Revelation is evidently presented in the language of Solomon - at the time his kingdom was apparently flourishing:

<b>1 Kings</b>	<b>Revelation</b>
10:14	13:17,18
10:23	18:11,12,15
11:1,2	17:1,2
10:22	18:17,19
10:23	18:3,17
10:21,22	18:12
10:11	18:12
10:22	18:12
10:10,25	18:13
10:23	18:3,9
10:28	18:12
9:22	18:13
11:1,5 (Solomon influenced by Zidonian idolatry)	2:20 cp. 1 Kings 16:31
2 Chron. 9:15 (666)	13:18

This serves to cement the connection between Babylon and Jerusalem, especially the Jerusalem temple. In the first century, it was Judaism which was the great satan / adversary and devil / false accuser of the Christians. The temptation was always to give in to the Judaist campaign and return to Judaism. Paul, Peter and John are full of this theme in their letters. But here that system is described in the worst possible terms.

18:12 *Merchandise of gold and silver and precious stone and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet and all kinds of scented wood, and every vessel of ivory and every vessel made of most precious wood and of brass and iron and marble-* These are the materials associated with Solomon's kingdom and temple, and the materials of the tabernacle and temple cult. We see too a reference to how the High Priest Caiaphas was dressed, also with "purple" (Lk. 16:19), likewise in vain appearance. It was the religious clothing of Israel in Ez. 16:10. Throughout these descriptions we see allusions to the Jewish high priesthood. The whole verse clearly alludes to the glory of Tyre in Ez. 27. These various layers of allusion serve to build up the overall picture- an appearance of Judaistic religiosity which is thoroughly carnal and pagan. Judaism was indeed the first century Babylon; see on :11.

The latter day Babylon will therefore seek to quickly build a kingdom and worship system which apes that of Israel and the temple cult- hence the gross blasphemy and abomination on the temple mount which calls for desolation.

18:13 *And cinnamon and spice and incense and ointment and frankincense and wine and oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep and horses and chariots and slaves and the souls of men-* As noted on :12, all these things are associated with Solomon's temple and Kingdom, and the materials of the tabernacle and temple cult. It would have been a great comfort to those under pressure from the Jewish satan in the first century to see God's perspective on that evil system. The latter day application is to an Islamist paradise, more

exotic than the citadels of the Gulf states, established in Jerusalem, with distinct religious overtones. And all to be destroyed even quicker than it was established.

Slaves in the first century were seen as mere bodies owned by their masters or mistresses. Hence Rev. 18:13 describes slaves as *somata*, bodies. They were seen as both the economic and sexual property of those who owned them. It seems Paul had this in mind when he spoke of how we have one master, Christ, and our bodies are indeed not our own- but they are His, to be used according to His wishes. For many slaves, this would've meant running the risk of death or flogging. And yet despite this radical demand, Christianity spread rapidly amongst the huge slave population of the first century world.

18:14 *And the fruits which your soul lusted after are gone from you, and all things that were dainty and sumptuous are lost to you, never to be found again!* - The prophecy has multiple applications; to Jerusalem of the first century; to Rome; and to the restored Babylon of the last days. The reference is to Israel lusting after the fruits of Egypt, and Adam and Eve lusting for the forbidden fruit in Eden. Their sin will be enshrined and manifested in this final system of evil and lust as never before- all under the guise of the strictest possible interpretation of Islam. Just as Judaism did the same in Jerusalem in the first century, under the front of careful obedience to the Law of Moses.

18:15 *The merchants of these things who were made rich by her shall stand far away, for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning-* This category are not consumed in her judgments; they have come out of her in response to flee Babylon *lest* they partake in "her torment", just as Lot's wife did; and yet they are equally on her side, with her in spirit, just as materialistic, as Lot's wife was. Or, as suggested on :10, these merchants are those outside of the earth / land, the likes of Western European businessmen, who became wealthy by serving the huge demand for luxury goods which arises from the dominance of the beast. Perhaps the words of lament are as it were put in their mouths, so we realize the nature of Babylon's existence. In fact in Revelation we know little about the apocalyptic Babylon until we read the laments over her after she is destroyed. They are clearly not believers nor are they fully repentant; for their weeping over her fall contrasts with Heaven's rejoicing at it (:20).

We need to note that the same word for "made rich" is used in the opening letters for how there are some in the church of the last days who are likewise "made rich" and thereby turn away from Christ (3:17). Even true Christians will be caught up in the attraction of making quick bucks for the sake of a nominal acceptance of the beast system.

18:16 - see on Rev. 17:18.

*Saying: Woe, woe, the great city! She that was dressed in fine linen and purple and scarlet and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl!*- "Fine linen" would be very relevant to the application of 'Babylon' to apostate Judaism in the first century, with the precious stones referring to the High Priestly breastplate. The items in which Babylon trades are therefore presented in terms of the opulence of Solomon's Israelitish Kingdom. Appearance of spirituality can be deeply obnoxious to God; Isaiah had predicted that He saw Jerusalem as Sodom, the virgin of Israel as a whore (Is. 1:9). And that language is definitely used here. An appearance of spirituality is no guarantee of acceptance with God; it may actually be obnoxious to Him.

The image of fine linen and wealth recalls to our minds images of wealthy sheikhs walking around Islamic citadels in the Gulf states. But the entity briefly created by Babylon in Jerusalem will outstrip them all. The white linen of jihadist religious leaders is an image mixed here with that of obscene wealth, and a pretension to the Jewish high priesthood. The precious stones, scarlet etc. are all associated with the tabernacle system. This is also a false system of worship. The picture exactly fits Islamist supremacy. We note the revival of gold and precious stones as effective currency in the areas now under the control of Islamic fundamentalists in the area around Israel.

And yet pearls refer to the true believers (21:21). The believers are dressed in white linen, symbolizing righteousness (19:8). The suggestion therefore is that Babylon is quasi-religious and appears highly moral, when actually it is morally delinquent. This is exactly what we see in Jihadist Islamism. There is clear reference to the Jewish priesthood, and the description also connects with the white clothing of Islamic religious leaders. But they are a fake kingdom of God, their leaders are fake saints, and their leader is the anti-Christ.

18:17 *For in an hour so many great riches are laid waste. And every shipmaster and everyone that sails anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living at sea, stood far away-* Despite having seen direct Divine intervention, throughout the three and a half years of "torment" upon the earth dwellers from the miracles of the two witnesses (11:9,10), and now Babylon's final destruction, these commercial people are so materialistic that they do not repent. All they can think about is how much they have lost, and how tragic it is that such material wealth is now "laid waste". This is the power of materialism. It has destroyed so much faith in so many people, and we are to therefore be the more aware of its insidious power.

18:18 *And cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying: What city is like the great city?-* They are connected with faithful Abraham observing Sodom's burning; but although the great city is no more, they speak in the present tense as though it is still existing. This is a reflection of their grief at how much has been lost, both to them and in general terms. This is how stubbornly materialistic they are.

18:19 *And they cast dust on their heads and cried, weeping and mourning, saying: Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her expense! For in one hour she is made desolate-* This casting of dust on the head is sometimes (as with the Ninevites), but not always, associated with repentance. It may be significant that there is no apparent record of the destruction of these merchants. Are we to hope that they repented? Perhaps the idea is that they have the possibility to do so. As noted earlier, their observing of the smoke of Babylon's judgment connects them with faithful Abraham, watching the judgment of Sodom. The vagueness as to whether this refers to repentance or not is perhaps because this is yet unknown- for these people have freewill, and shall make their own decision regarding repentance after Babylon's judgment. But their weeping contrasts with the rejoicing of the believers (:20). Their particular weeping for their now redundant fleets of ships speaks of how their economies were tied in to servicing Babylon with luxury goods; and now that was suddenly, in an hour, no more. Their whole economic structure was useless. And despite all the evidence of Divine involvement and all the evidence of His visible involvement in this earth again, they could only see the immediate and the material, what was right before their eyes. And tragically that is how the majority of people are today.



18:20- see on Jn. 7:24.

*Rejoice over her, you heaven, and you saints, and you apostles, and you prophets. For God has judged your judgment on her-* All the surrounding nations did to Israel shall be done to them. This explains the links between the seals [the judgments on Israel at the hands of their neighbours in the last days] and the trumpets and vials, which speak of similar judgments coming upon Israel's enemies within the land / earth promised to Abraham. The saints may be Israel (Dan. 7:25); the prophets would be the two witnesses of chapter 11. The "heaven" would refer to the Heavenly, Angelic representatives of those who were killed and tormented by the beast during her three and a half year domination of the earth / land; for John had seen them in his visions of the heavenly throne room, and now he sees them rejoicing. What the beast did during his brief domination is now done to him. So the saints and Christians in view are particularly those who endured that.

18:21 *And a strong angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying: Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall never be found again-* Jeremiah's prophecies about Babylon had been cast into the Euphrates tied to a stone (Jer. 51:63). But this is the fate of Babylon. There is a parallel between the word of prophecy, and Babylon; so sure is it of fulfilment.

The same judgment is for those who make little ones stumble (Mt. 18:6). Such behaviour is the same as Babylon's obvious apostasy. The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share. The rejected will weep and gnash their teeth (Mt. 25:30)- and be sent back into the Babylon-world, where they are also weeping and angry (Rev. 18:15,19). As the tree of Babylon will be cut down, so will the rejected be (Dan. 4:14,23 = Mt. 7:19). As Babylon is burnt with fire (Rev. 18:8), and indeed the whole 'world' too (2 Pet. 3:10), so will the rejected be (Mt. 13:40 etc.). It seems the rejected saints will share the judgements of Satan, the beast, the antiChrist. Thus Babylon has a millstone tied around her neck and she is thrown into the sea (Rev. 18:21), just as the judgement of the rejected saints is described (Mt. 18:6). They will be ground to powder by the stone of Christ (Mt. 21:44), just as he will fall on the nations of the Babylon confederacy and grind them to powder (Dan. 2:34). The Lord will appoint his unwatchful servant a place of condemnation "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46). This is understandable once we appreciate the idea that there are only two Kingdoms, God's and Satan's. The unworthy were effectively in Satan's Kingdom, therefore they will suffer the judgement that is prepared for it. Therefore we *must* separate from Babylon, Satan's Kingdom, or else we will receive her judgements (Rev. 18:4). Likewise the condemnation of the apostate in Israel is very often described in the language of the judgements on the surrounding kingdoms (e.g. Joel 1:5,10-12 = Is. 16:10; Ez. 16:37-39 = Rev. 17:16; Jer. 16:9 = Rev. 18:23; Jer. 49:4 = Jer. 31:22; Jer. 51:27 = Joel 1:4; 2:1; Jer. 50:13 = 19:8). The cup of judgement that Israel will drink will be given to the Arab nations who have afflicted her (Is. 51:23). This is all the principle of Rev. 18:6; as the latter day Babylon does to natural and spiritual Israel, so it will be done to her. Apostate Israel are often described as if they are their neighbours- they share the same judgements, because they have effectively sold their birthright. Israel "sat... as the Arabian in the wilderness" (Jer. 3:2). Judah would be punished along with Egypt, Moab and Ammon, the circumcised with the uncircumcised (Jer. 9:25,26). Thus Rom. 9:8 describes faithless Israel as "the children of the flesh", with allusion to Arab Ishmael; and Gal. 4:23 likewise. The early chapters of Romans

reason that both Jew and Gentile receive the same judgment, because both have sinned. The judgements on the nations are all described in similar language, whatever time or place they were in. Thus Babylon's judgement in Rev. 18 is based on the judgement of Egypt as recorded in Ez. 32:4-10, and Egypt's judgement of Ez. 29:4 is that of Gog in Ez. 38:4. The whole description of Egypt's judgments in Ez. 29 is also full of links with those in store for Israel. *They will cry unto Yahweh in their affliction* (Is. 19:20), just as Israel did when Egypt persecuted them (Ex. 2:23; 14:10). There are so many examples of this. Surely the point is that fundamentally, all the nations of the world, in whatever time and place, are all fundamentally the same Kingdom of Satan, and will suffer the same destruction by the Kingdom of God. Likewise the Kingdom of God to which we belong is not limited by time or geography.

When God described Nineveh as a "great city", the very fact of its size elicited a desire to spare it. And of course we meet the same phrase in Revelation, where a condemned Babylon is described as a "great city". This was not God gleefully preparing to destroy a huge city. He surely had Nineveh in mind when He inspired those words. This was, and will be, a God whose very heart is touched by the tragedy of sinners having to be punished, and who is open to a change of purpose if they will repent. Thus the latter day appeal to "Come out of her!", whether we understand 'Babylon' as false religion, the Moslem world, the world of sinners or whoever, is rooted in God's spirit of passionate love towards Nineveh. As Jonah "cried" against Nineveh, so God 'cries' against Babylon (Rev. 18:2). We who make that appeal in these last days should be reflecting here on earth the mind of God in Heaven; not merely pronouncing doom and gloom against 'Babylon', but warning them of God's stated intentions towards them *with a heart that bleeds for them and seeks their repentance*.

The writer of Psalm 137, sitting angry and frustrated by a Babylonian riverside, with his guitar hanging on a willow branch, being jeered ("tormented" Ps. 137:3 RVmg.) by the victorious Babylonian soldiers who had led him away captive... he felt *so* angry with them. Especially when they tried to make him sing one of the temple songs ("sing us one of the songs of Zion"). And, as a bitter man does, his mind went from one hurt to another. He remembered how when Babylon had invaded, the Edomites hadn't helped their Hebrew brethren (Obadiah 11,12). They had egged on the Babylonian soldiers in ripping down the temple, shouting [in a chorus?] "Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation". And so in anger and bitterness this Jew prays with tears, as he remembered Zion, "O daughter of Babylon... happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock" (:8,9 RV). God read those angry words as a prayer, and in some sense they will have their fulfilment. For these words are picked up in Rev. 18:8,21 and applied to what will finally happen to Babylon. Her spiritual children will be dashed against the rock of Christ, the stone of Daniel 2:44, at His return. He will dash in pieces the Babylon-led people that oppose Him.

18:22 *And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute players and trumpeters shall never be heard again in you, and no craftsman of whatever craft shall ever be found again in you, and the voice of a mill shall never be heard again in you-* An allusion to Solomon's temple, confirming the religious nature of 'Babylon'. This fits the first century application to Judaism, and to a latter day application to Jihadist Islam, which claims to be the true Judaism. Craftsmen and creative people of all sorts will have been brought to Babylon, enthroned in Jerusalem, both to build it and continue servicing it. Mills were operated by slaves; those Jews and Christians being abused by this latter day Egypt / Babylon. But that shall be no more.

18:23 *The light of a lamp shall never shine again in you, and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall never be heard again in you-* The Old Testament basis for this is not simply the judgments upon Babylon, but also those upon Jerusalem at the hand of Babylon (Jer. 7:34; 16:9). For latter day Babylon shall be built in Jerusalem; see on 16:19. So it is appropriate also that what Babylon did to Jerusalem shall be done to her. This all suggests that Babylon shall desolate and judge Jerusalem in the latter days and then in turn be judged for doing so. Jerusalem will fall to her enemies, as Zech. 14 and the Lord's Olivet Prophecy clearly require.

The contrast is with how the Lord Himself will be the eternal light of Jerusalem, the city of God (22:5; Is. 60:19,20). A new Jerusalem shall come down from God out of Heaven to replace the burnt ruins of the Babylon system there.

*For your merchants were the princes of the earth; and with your sorcery were all the nations deceived-* All the princes of the earth / land were influenced by her wine, making them drunk with a fanaticism against Israel and true Christians. This radical jihadist propaganda was accepted by the merchants because it made them wealthy by serving the demands of Babylon. We can therefore see the West accepting her sorcery to some extent, for purely economic motives. Although the ten horns / kings of the land are to be destroyed, they are here associated with the "merchants", those not within Babylon itself, but serving her.

18:24 *And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth-* No one religious system is guilty for the blood of every martyr over time. The more sensible reference is to the blood of the believers slain in the earth / land promised to Abraham, during the latter day tribulation. "The nations" in view are those within the earth / land of Babylon's dominion: "At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth trembles, and the cry is heard among the nations" (Jer. 50:46). The nations in view are those of the earth / land. The deaths of all Jews and true Christians in the earth / land during the tribulation is the direct responsibility of the Babylon system.

The reference is also to Judaism and Jerusalem, in whom was found the blood of the faithful (Jer. 2:34). In the first century context, it is Jerusalem-based Judaism which is in view. But in the last days, it is Babylon-Jerusalem, in that the whore of Babylon and her beast makes its blasphemous capital in Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER 19

19:1 *After these things I heard what seemed to be a great voice of a great crowd in heaven, saying: Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power, belong to our God-* John is seeing the Angelic representatives of the believers in his vision of the heavenly throne room. This is the same "great crowd" of 7:9 (s.w.), those who had endured the tribulation of the beast's domination. But the lives of believers are hid with Christ in God; the Lord is in the bosom of the Father. Therefore those 'in Heaven' don't refer to the departed souls of believers, but rather to the believers who are in heavenly places in Christ. This is a common NT theme. By contrast, the earth dwellers of Revelation are those who suffer the latter day judgments. The believers are here spoken of as praising God because the literal articulation of salvation in Christ is now clearly about to be revealed. It could be that the whole metaphor of believers 'in Heaven' is used in Revelation because it is their guardian Angels who are in view, who represent them before God, individually and as collectives, of ecclesias and groups throughout history at particular points and circumstances.

19:2 *For true and righteous are His judgments-* The awful loss of life and gross destruction is recognized by them as not only necessary but righteous. For we have noted how often the Babylon system was given the chance to repent.

*For He has judged the great prostitute, she that corrupted the earth with her fornication, and He has avenged the blood of His servants shed by her-* It's hard to imagine any single entity corrupting literally the whole planet, right into the jungles of Amazonia and onto every island of the Pacific. The more natural interpretation is that the earth refers to the land, a more limited area of the planet's surface- the land promised to Abraham. The behaviours of the whore are either throughout all history, or at a more limited period of time. That period of time is more naturally, within the context of Revelation, the last days. The kings of the earth / land who were influenced by the whore would then refer to the kings of the land area promised to Abraham, influenced by the wine of her jihadist teaching.

"He has avenged the blood of His servants" shows that the cry of those persecuted in the last days within the land of Abraham (Rev. 6:10) has now been answered.

19:3 *And a second time they said: Hallelujah! And her smoke goes up for ever and ever-* The impression is of a sacrifice being offered, although the allusion is to the rising smoke of Sodom. Even in the destruction of the wicked, God is glorified. His judgments are a way of glorifying the principles of His Name, and not the lashing out of an offended Deity. The "great crowd" are as it were watching this, and thus are to be connected with faithful Abraham watching the smoke of Sodom arising.

19:4 *And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God that sits on the throne, saying: Amen. Hallelujah!-* See on :1. The Angels join in with the same praise which their human charges are also making. Thus believers and Angels are presented in parallel. For the Angels in Heaven represent believers on earth. It is in this sense, in a practical, mechanical sense, if you like, that truly, man is not alone, but God is with us. But now at this juncture, Angels and believers are united together in praise by the resurrection.

19:5 *And a voice came from the throne, saying: Give praise to our God all you His servants, you that fear Him, the small and the great-* We have just read of the elders, living creatures and the "great crowd in heaven" doing just this. This appears therefore to be an appeal to

others, on earth, to do what the Angels of Heaven are doing. This is a theme of Revelation- that those who believe are in league with the Heavenly Angels, who are fellow servants with them. Or it could be that again, Revelation is simply not chronological, but a kaleidoscope of images. We would then have explained here in :5 how the situation in :1 [praising God] came about.

19:6- see on Rev. 6:9.

*And I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great crowd, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying: Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns-* This is surely the crowd of :1, referring to the believers. But their voice is mixed with the voice of waters and thunders, the voice of God, which speaks of the intensest manifestation of God through the Angels. Again the impression is given of believers and Angels united, their sounds and voices mingling together as they see the end coming which they both so earnestly desire. God of course reigns now, so their praise that "He reigns!" is therefore a re-statement of what they already believed in their mortal lives, but with so much more power and insight. And this will be so true of much of our talking and praising in the Kingdom age.

19:7 *Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory to Him. For the marriage of the Lamb comes, and his wife has made herself ready-* The collapse of time around the Lord's return means that it is unwise and impossible to construct chronologies of events around His coming. But the decorum of the symbol here means that the judgment of God's enemies slightly precedes the marriage of the Lamb; His wife is now described as putting on her wedding clothes (:8), and the invitation of guests (:9). But some texts read "Has come".

If this voice includes that of those who endured the beast's domination and abuse during the tribulation (see on :1), how can they refer to the Lamb's wife as if this is an entity separate from themselves? Perhaps they now behold the resurrection of all the faithful from history, and realize that the bride has now been fully assembled. Or again, we should just not let such chronological issues disturb us; for this is apocalyptic, a merger of various images, and not a timeline of events.

We note that the bride makes *herself* ready, but with the gift of fine linen clothes of imputed righteousness (:8). Her part in all this is to believe in the imputation of His righteousness and white garments to us in Christ.

19:8 *And it was given to her that she should dress herself in fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints-* In contrast with how Babylon likewise was dressed in "fine linen" (see on 18:16). The suggestion therefore is that Babylon is quasi-religious and appears highly moral, when actually it is morally delinquent. This is exactly what we see in Jihadist Islamism. There is clear reference to the Jewish priesthood, and the description also connects with the white clothing of Islamic religious leaders. The fine linen is given to her- it speaks of imputed righteousness (see on :7). The "righteous acts" of the saints will be publicly arrayed before all (Rev. 19:8)- by none other than the Lord. All their good 'acts' will be revealed to all. And yet that righteousness is what they are clothed with by Christ- perhaps suggesting that their good deeds will be presented in a heightened form, as imputed righteousness, which would explain why the righteous will be shocked that the Lord

could speak so highly of them (“When saw we thee...?”). But the work of God, the action He requires, is to believe in His imputation of righteousness (Jn. 6:29).

19:9 *And he said to me: Write, Blessed are they that are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb-* See on :7. There seems a difference in category between those destroyed by judgments, the Lamb's wife, and the invited guests. Presumably the guests are those who are not believers but are not destroyed in the judgments; and these are now invited to participate in the Lamb's wedding. And who amongst those who survive Armageddon would not attend? This may speak of the conversion of the remaining population of planet earth.

*And he said to me: These are the true words of God-* This recalls how in Jn. 19:35 John struggles to get over the utter truth of the words. This is all so wonderfully true.

19:10 *And I fell down before his feet to worship him, and he said to me: You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you, and with your brothers that hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy-* The Angels are right now serving the same Lord we do; our work for Him is done in invisible partnership with them. The preaching or testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, says Rev. 19:10. I understand this to mean that our testimony to Jesus is in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets. For Rev. 22:6 associates the God of the holy prophets [a phrase referring to the Old Testament prophets in Lk. 1:70 and Acts 3:32] with the same God who is with us in our witnessing to Christ. And Rev. 18:20 speaks of those prophets rejoicing in the last day together with all preachers of the Gospel. This is why incidents from the lives and teaching of the Old Testament prophets are repeatedly alluded to in the New Testament and applied to all of us. James 5:10 puts it bluntly- the prophets are to be taken by us as our examples. Jeremiah was warned: "Be not dismayed of *them*, lest I dismay *you*" (Jer. 1:17 RV). This is alluded to by the Lord when He tells us that if we are ashamed of Him and His words, then He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). The connection surely indicates that the Old Testament prophets and the spirit of their commissioning is intended to apply to us today in our fulfilling of the great commission. Thus the prophets become our pattern for witness; they are our “brethren the prophets” (Rev.22:9). And so an understanding of them becomes programmatic for our witness today. Our audience, the world in which we live, is in essence that in which the prophets lived. Isaiah was up against the attitude that “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die” (Is. 22:13)- and Paul quotes that passage as relevant for all Christians who hold the hope of resurrection amidst a world that does not (1 Cor. 15:32).

The Angel had made prophecies, and John felt that this was something so wonderful that it separated him from the Angel. But John like us was bearing “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9). The same essential spirit which was in the prophets is in all those who in *their* spirit or attitude bear the witness of Jesus. Hence the prophesying Angel encourages John not to worship him, but rather to recognize that he is John’s “fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book”, i.e. all believers (Rev. 22:9). And again, this was radical stuff for the initial audience of the Apocalypse. They were being told that they had the prophets as their brethren, and on account of their spirit / attitude of bearing the testimony of Jesus, the same spirit which was in the prophets was in them. The very act of bearing witness to Jesus in our spirit / disposition is in fact to have the same spirit in us which was in the prophets and was the basis of their prophetic witness. This makes the prophets our “brethren”, not distant white faced ‘saints’. See on Mt. 8:22.

19:11 *And I saw the heaven open*- This introduces the seven final visions. One of the keys to understanding Revelation is to realize that it is structured as a series of visions based around the number seven. It must also be understood that as with many Old Testament prophecies, the book of Revelation is not strictly chronological in its fulfilment. Sometimes we read something which is actually the final picture, and then we read how this situation came about. At other times, we find a series of visions give us as it were 'snapshots' of different aspects of the same process. The seven final visions are introduced by the rubric "And I saw...". It is my suggestion that they each show different aspects of the process of setting up the Kingdom. All references are to Revelation unless otherwise stated. The thoughtful student of the final chapters of Revelation will realize that there are difficulties in 'fitting in' the usual view of the Millennium as a thousand year reign with the information presented there. The suggestion is made in these notes on chapter 20 that the "thousand years" simply means 'a very long time', and refers to eternity. This solves the problem that a rebellion at the end of the 'Millennium' would contradict Is. 9:7; 60:18; Jer. 3:17 and other passages which teach that "they shall learn war no more" after the Kingdom is established. The wrath of God is finished when the seven *last* plagues are poured out (Rev. 15:1 RV), at the Lord's return, i.e. at the *beginning* of the 'Millennium'. At the coming of Christ, the powers represented by the dragon and beast are defeated and chained up. The dead are raised and judged. The rejected join the dragon in the 'bottomless pit', an area on the borders of the land of promise, i.e. the initial geographical extent of the Kingdom. Here they are restrained, but once the Kingdom is established, perhaps after a period of 7 years or so, they 'attack' the land of Israel, where the Kingdom of God has been established. They are then destroyed. The Kingdom then continues eternally. The descriptions of a judgment seat in these final chapters are all related to the same judgment seat, i.e. that when Christ returns. The OT prophecies of a 'Millennium' with mortal people in it either apply to the setting up period of the Kingdom, or they are to be read in a more figurative way.

*And beheld a white horse, and he that sat thereon was called Faithful and True*- A clear reference to the Lord Jesus, who will now bring about the true, faithful fulfilment of God's promises (Rev. 3:14). He was "the faithful witness / martyr" (Rev. 1:5) in that He suffered at the hands of a beast system, and can thus especially identify with those believers slain by the beast in the final tribulation. John has been allowed a peek into the heavenly throne room. But now heaven itself opens, and the Lord Jesus emerges from there to return to earth.

*And in righteousness he judges and makes war*- The same presentation of the Lord Jesus as both a warrior and a bridegroom are found in Ps. 45:3-6. There He is pictured as going forth to make war in all His glory for the sake of "truth, humility and righteousness" (Ps. 45:4). There is a powerful juxtaposition of ideas here- He goes forth in glory on behalf of humility. It is the humble believers who will have been persecuted and slain, and now the Lord of humility goes forth in all His glory for their sakes.

19:12 *And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems*- The seemingly invincible beast with his seven diadems now seems so puny compared to the Lord.

*And he has a name written which no one knows but him*- We likewise will have a unique name known / appreciated only by us (2:17). No-one can enter into the Lord's personal sense of resurrection and reward; there will always be an unreachable, untouchable element in Him throughout eternity. Surely this makes our relationship with Him the more appealing.

19:13- see on Heb. 12:24.

*And he is dressed in a garment sprinkled with blood-* This alludes to Joseph's blood drenched coat and Is. 63:2; the basis upon which the Lord executes judgment is that He died for us, and His garments were literally blood sprinkled at the crucifixion. He Himself said that His qualification as judge is because He is "son of man".

*And his name is called The Word of God-* John reminds us of this title for the Lord because in His actions at the time of judgment and establishment of the Kingdom on earth, He will be the full manifestation of God's word, a word which shall then come to its final climax. Note that "the word [*logos*] of God" is a title of the Lord Jesus. So many misunderstand Jn. 1:1-3 by failing to realize this. That word is God, etc.; but it is a *title* of the Lord, His "Name", rather than he Himself personally.

19:14- see on Mt. 24:28.

*And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses-* Remember that the Lord returns to earth with the Angels, and not alone. However the armies in Heaven also refer to the faithful, who are presented as with God, their lives hid with Christ in Him who is in the bosom of the Father. John has seen them represented by Angels in his visions of the heavenly court room.

*Clothed in fine linen, white and pure-* In contradistinction to the white clothes of the jihadist sheikhs of 18:16, whose white linen was not pure but mixed with all the trappings of materialism.

19:15 *And out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, that with it he should strike down the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron-* The language of the Lord Jesus at His return (Ps. 2:9); and yet it has already been quoted in Revelation about how we shall do the same (2:27). See on 12:5. All that is true of the Lord Jesus personally shall be true of us who are in and with Him.

*And He treads the winepress of the fierceness of the anger of God-* Anyone doing this would have red clothes, spattered with red grape juice. The connection is with His appearance at the crucifixion; see on :13. The cross was "the judgment of this world", and now that judgment is articulated. He judges because He went through the tribulation of the cross.

19:16 *And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written-* A reference to His sword, through which He has become Lord of all human lords and kings (Ps. 45:3)? The allusion is to the way in which names were inscribed on the hilts of swords. His thigh is therefore put for the sword which is on His thigh. For He is presented here as a horseman.

*King of kings and Lord of lords-* As with many aspects of teaching and language, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes: "Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imaginable in the Roman Empire". Philip Yancey likewise: "As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan 'Christ is Lord', a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath 'Caesar [the state] is Lord'". It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and



women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46). The reality of the Lordship of Jesus is used in Revelation (19:12, 16) to encourage the brethren to continue fearless in their witness despite persecution. Jesus is Lord of the kings of the earth; He has control over the world; therefore, no human power can harm us without His express permission and purpose. The exhortation of Ps. 110 is powerful: because Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand, His people offer themselves as freewill offerings in this, the day of His power. They are arrayed in "holy attire" because *He* has been made the Priest after the order of Melchizedek- they share in the work which His exaltation has enabled (Ps. 110:1,3,4 RVmg.).

*19:17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying-* The Angel represents someone or some body of persons standing within the sun of the Lord Jesus, the sun of righteousness which has now arisen. The appeal is made on His behalf by some others- maybe us, or natural Israel, appealing to the nations who have survived Armageddon.

*To all the birds that fly in mid heaven-* I have suggested on :9 that the guests invited to the marriage are not the same as the Lamb's wife, and these guests refer to the unbelievers in the world who are not destroyed in the judgments upon the world. They are here described as in mid heaven, between earth and heaven. The "earth" dwellers are judged; those "in Heaven" are the believers, their lives hid with Christ in Him who is in the bosom of the Father. Those in between these groups would then appropriately refer to unbelievers who have not heard the Gospel and who are spared the latter day judgments upon the earth. But now they are invited to take their place at the Lord's table.

*Come, be gathered together-* I have suggested above that the birds could refer to the Gentile nations now invited to the marriage supper as guests. But birds of prey being gathered together is the language of Ez. 39:17-20, where they are invited to assist in the destruction of the ten nations led by Gog who come up against Israel.

*To the great supper of God-* This Messianic banquet is prefigured in the breaking of bread. We should invite unbelievers there, just as unbelievers are invited to the ultimate banquet (see on :9 and :17). To exclude people from it is serious indeed. It is a means of witness and invitation to participation.

*19:18 Eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bondservant and small and great-* "Small and great" is the same language used about those who accepted the mark of the latter day beast in Rev. 13:16. The allusion is clearly to the similar scene in Ez. 39, where the victims in view are the Islamic host of Israel's neighbours led by "Gog". These are the same group who are pictured in Revelation as the kings of the land promised to Abraham, who come forth to dominate God's people and land in the last days. The emphasis upon "flesh" suggests this is to be viewed as a sacrifice- the great sacrifice which Yahweh has in the Muslim territories of "Edom" (Is. 34:6). The connection with the marriage supper of the lamb (:9) is perhaps in that the believers have their supper, as the Lamb's wife, and those who are not judged to destruction are invited to theirs as wedding guests but not as the bride; or it could be that these are in fact aspects of the same supper. The Messianic banquet is therefore an open table to those not yet believers, in order for them to come to faith. The Lord's table should be used in the same way today, for it is a foretaste of

the Messianic banquet of the last day.

The kings refer to the kings of the earth / land who have given their allegiance to the beast / Babylon. Those invited to eat their flesh are clearly a different category to those who have been slain, and I suggest they refer to the unbelievers left on planet earth who have not yet sided with Christ and yet are not part of the Babylon system.

*19:19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army-* We have already had several visions of the total destruction of the beast; this may be another one, going back to explain how the blessed situation spoken of earlier in this chapter has been achieved. Or it could be that Babylon has been destroyed, but the beast apparently still exists; just as the dragon loses power in chapter 12 but re-emerges in the form of the other beasts. It could be that her capital city is destroyed but the wider system still exists. Or it could be that such a reading is still too much within space-time constructs, and it seems these dimensions will be somewhat collapsed in the events around the Lord's coming, making chronological sequences of events worthless to predict.

The horns on the beast are "the kings of the earth", but these kings and the beast arise out of the earth and the sea [the nations around the earth]; and in line with Daniel 7, this is the land promised to Abraham. The connection with 2 Chron. 20 and the other references to Israel's neighbouring enemies 'gathering together' invites us to see the beast as a primarily Arab organization. If there is a detailed allusion here to the 2 Chron. 20 scenario, Jehoshaphat (against whom the opposing kings initially gathered together) would represent Jesus, and Jehoshaphat's army would tally with the resurrected saints. In this case, the final onslaught will be after the return of Jesus. We saw this in chapters 11 and 12; the dragon is cast out of political power, but with just a short time left, goes forth to make war with the woman. In passing, note the differentiation between the leaders in this conflict and their armies: "The kings of the earth, and their armies... him that sat on the horse (Jesus) and against his army". This would suggest a specific hatred of the Lord Jesus which is separate from, although in addition to, their antipathy towards Israel and the Christian believers. It may also be possible to see in the separation between "the kings of the earth, and their armies" a certain degree of coercion, or difference of motivation, between leaders and people.

Christ goes out to make war (:11), and the Beast and his armies go out to make war against Him- head on conflict. We have gone back in time, as it were, to have another vision of the final conflict, although this has been presented in various ways in earlier visions. This is war with Christ- He is already crowned, 19:12. Likewise the invasion of Ez. 38/9 is after Christ's return, when Israel dwell safely, and we have the Psalm 2 scenario of the Lord enthroned in Jerusalem being attacked by armies. Perhaps the revived beast wants to recapture Babylon-Jerusalem from Him after it has been destroyed (see on 16:19). In this case, we see the limited value of visible miracles; they will have seen plenty of them, but are so blinded by materialism that they wish to still defy the Divine and attempt to recapture Jerusalem.

The beast, the kings of the earth and their armies 'gather together' to fight against Christ. This may be the gathering of 16:13,14; they are gathered together by the power of the false miracles despite all the evidence of true miracles before their eyes. Thus v. 20 mentions how "the false prophet that wrought miracles before [the beast]" is captured with the beast- the scene of 16:14.

19:20- see on :19 and Rev. 13:17.

*And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet, who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur-* There are many connections between Revelation and John's Gospel. These miracles are imitations of the miracles of Christ, for which John uses the same phrase (Jn. 2:11,18; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2,14,30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18,37; 20:30). Thus the false prophet is an anti-Christ, a fake Christ with fake power and fake validation. Despite the presence of Divine miracles at the time, as there have been for three and a half years from the two witnesses of chapter 11, people believe what they want to believe. Visible miracles are not conclusive nor bound to elicit true faith; as our Pentecostal friends need to take note.

The destruction of the beast by fire is Babylon's destruction too by the same method; it is that spoken of in Dan. 7:11; Is. 30:30,33. The beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. This is the lake of 20:14,15; 21:8- where the unworthy one time believers are thrown. Thus the punishment of the rejected and that of the world is the same; and therefore there must be a separation *now*, lest we be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:29). "Burning with brimstone" / sulphur recalls Sodom- where the unworthy believers shared the same fate as the 'world' around them. Lot's wife was turned into salt, as was the surrounding country (Lk. 17:29). "The lake of fire" will be in the presence of Christ (14:10)- not underground. "Cast alive" suggests torture; cp. 14:10 "tormented". Others are simply killed outright by Christ's word of command (20:21). This would suggest that even among the irresponsible there are degrees of punishment. Casting into a pit and fire as punishment compares with Babylon's persecution of Daniel and his friends. What Babylon does to others shall be done to it. Note too how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31-33 as being thrown into a lake of fire- just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20). See on 2 Thess. 2:8.

19:21 *Slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse-* The Lord's destructive power will involve words of command rather than He literally, personally slaying the wicked. We need not therefore imagine us personally killing the members of the beast system. And we have noted several times that their destruction is largely at the hands of each other. Even the coming down of fire and sulphur may be due to their own nuclear weaponry backfiring upon them. The "all men" whose flesh is to be eaten by those in mid-heaven, the Gentile world, are the remaining followers of the beast and false prophet. This eating by fowls is equated with burning in the lake of fire, or Gehenna (Rev. 19:20,21). Several passages in Jeremiah associate the mauling of carcasses by fowls with destruction in Gehenna. This creates the image of the beast being ravaged by the 'fowls' of either natural Israel (as they represented in David's speech to Goliath) or the nations once confederate with 'Babylon', as they seem to represent in Daniel.

## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand-* If Scripture interprets Scripture, then this has to have connection with the Angel who descends and opens the bottomless pit in Revelation 9. This Angel unleashes locusts who bring terrible destruction upon the earth / land for five months, and the Angel morphs into a leader called Abaddon. The Angel may therefore refer to a literal Angel of Heaven who represents an individual upon earth; for all upon earth, good and bad, have Angelic representation in the court of Heaven. The same scene is before us here in chapter 20; an Angel binds and then releases the dragon for "a little time" (20:3), the "five months" of Rev. 9. In my notes on Revelation 9, I have tried to demonstrate that the situation envisaged there suggests an Islamic outpouring of fury upon the earth / land in the very last days. Revelation is not strictly chronological; it is apocalyptic, not a chronological timeline progressing from beginning to end. Our European, linear thinking minds yearn for such tidy chronological progression and we tend to seek to force prophecy into such a structure. But we are dealing with Hebrew, Semitic thought- and moreover, the apocalyptic genre. The various visions refer back to each other, explaining in more detail how the various earlier pictures are arrived at. The events of Revelation 9 refer clearly enough to the events of the last days, at the Lord's second coming; and not to events at the end of a Millennium.

20:2 *And he laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan-* This description is found only in Rev. 12:9, where this entity is cast out of 'Heaven', i.e. a place of power and rulership, at the time of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth at Christ's second coming (Rev. 12:10). This is precisely the picture here- that when the thousand years [the Kingdom] is established [AV "fulfilled"], then the dragon is bound and then released for a short time. At the time of the second coming of Christ, this dragon / serpent / evil / satan entity has "but a short time" (Rev. 12:12). This is the "little time" which the dragon is released for in 20:3. Revelation 12 has left us with the dragon deposed from power but about to get madly furious for a little time. Now Revelation 20 is explaining the details; that final mad fury of the dragon is in fact precisely under Angelic control. And that will be a great comfort to those who live through that period of the dragon's madness; things are not at all out of control, he has been bound and now briefly released by the Angels of Heaven. If we ask *why* it has to be this way- perhaps we are to conclude that the releasing was in order to give the dragon an opportunity to repent. Because throughout Revelation, we encounter this amazing hallmark of Divine activity with even the most desperately evil of men and systems: He wishes to give them every chance of repentance. But in this case, the dragon abuses it, and meets his rightful end in total destruction.

*And bound him-* The chaining of the devil/ dragon/ serpent in 20:2 probably refers more to the binding of the manifestation of sin in the political devil/ dragon/ beast/ serpent of 12:7 than to abstract sin. Revelation is a message from the Lord Jesus. He had earlier spoken of binding and burning the sons of the Devil at His return (Mt. 13:38,39). He uses the same words here- the Devil will be bound and burned. But that binding and burning envisaged in Mt. 13 clearly speaks of events at His return, and not at the end of a Millennium. The Lord uses the same figure of 'binding' to describe how the condemned *people* at the final judgment will be 'bound hand and foot' by the Angels and then destroyed (Mt. 22:13)- at His return, not at the end of a Millennium. Notice that Satan's deceit of the nations and all of his powers were totally in control of God (Rev. 20:2,3,7). Satan is not a free agent to act as he wishes, without regard for God. Rev. 20:1-3 is surely based upon Is. 24:21,22, which prophesied that the kings of the earth / land will be gathered together, imprisoned in a pit and punished. It is these very human "kings of the earth" who are described in the more figurative language of

Revelation as “Satan”. Isaiah 24 is talking about the time of the Lord's return to earth, and not any scene at the end of a Millennium.

The idea of shutting up in the abyss is taken from Is. 24:22,23: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days, they shall be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” The context refers to the events of the Lord's coming, and not 1,000 years after it.

*For a thousand years-* Most numbers in Revelation are symbolic, so it seems unwise to think that this number is literal. I have earlier, elsewhere argued for a literal Millennium, but closer reflection on Revelation 20 has led me to question that view. Because the allusions to other parts of Revelation and other Scripture all speak of these events happening at the Lord's return to earth, not to anything at the end of a 1,000 year period. Further, the Bible was written *for* us and not directly *to* us; it was written *to* its primary audience and in their language. The Jewish audience first receiving this message would have understood the “thousand years” as a reference to the eternal Kingdom of God on earth, and not to a limited Millennial reign of Messiah for 1,000 years. See too my comments on :5 *The first resurrection*, which happens when the “thousand years” are “ended”, or as the Greek better means, ‘established’. This is a stubborn problem of interpretation for those who hold the traditional Millennial reign view. The figure of 1,000 may be connected with the size of the Most Holy Place, 10 x 10 x 10 cubits, which is alluded to in the description of the new Jerusalem: “The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal” (21:16).

I suggest that here again we have an example of Scripture alluding to contemporary incorrect ideas and deconstructing them. The Jews until about 150 B.C. believed that Messiah would return and establish His Kingdom on earth. But influenced by their humiliation under the Romans, they came to believe that the world was too evil for Messiah to return to, and that it required a 1000 year period of purification by the Jews before Messiah could return. Slavonic Enoch 22–23, which has been dated at around 50 A.D., stated this specifically. Revelation was therefore written with this idea current in the surrounding Jewish world. I suggest that this incorrect view is being alluded to and deconstructed, by stating that Messiah will come at the *beginning* of the 1000 years and ‘purify’ the earth forcibly by figuratively ‘chaining’ Satan. Thus Messiah is to come and purify the earth Himself, rather than the Jews having to purify the earth for 1000 years before Messiah could come.

The following difficulties with the classical view of a Millennial reign are taken from Harry Whittaker:

- (a) The prophecies of lasting peace in the kingdom of Christ are quite explicit: “they shall learn war no more”.
- (b) Also, there is to be lasting godliness: “At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart” (Jeremiah 3: 17). “Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders” (Isaiah 60:18). “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).
- (c) Rebellion against immortals is so palpably silly. By comparison modern nuclear

armament, which every Bible reader can see to be a lunatic policy, has calm reason on its side. For, armed with the big bombs, there is always a thin chance that you will devastate the other half of the world before it does the same to you. But for nations, who have had a thousand years' experience of divine power and immortality, to calculate that their puny strength can win against God presupposes a mental deterioration to kindergarten level during the millennium.

(d) The practical problem insists on obtruding itself - where will these rebel nations get their weapons from? Swords will have all been turned into ploughshares.

(e) "He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15: 25). The words imply a steady progress towards complete godliness. The idea of a great boil-up of rebellion at the end is surely most difficult to reconcile with this.

(f) A massive rebellion at the end of a thousand years would stamp the reign of Christ as a failure. To think that the end of all his efforts in teaching, guidance, personal influence and benign rule (to say nothing of the immortal aid of men like Moses and Paul) is to be "We will not have this man to reign over us" - this is just incredible to any who settle down to consider it seriously. Jesus accomplished his work as Prophet, Sacrifice and High Priest perfectly. Can anyone be happy that his work as king is to end in failure? - for can a long, long reign which ends in turbulent rebellion be reckoned as a success?

(g) A rebellion such as is described in Revelation 20 does not arise in five minutes. Even a triviality like the Suez episode in 1957 called for weeks of detailed organization, which could not be kept secret from the rest of the world. Nevertheless one is asked to believe that Christ and his immortals will know nothing at all of this mighty Gog-Magog uprising until it bursts upon the world. The only alternative seems to be that, knowing all that is being secretly concocted, they will pretend to ignore it, so that the rebels may be lured to their own destruction. Would any reader be happy about the morality of such a proceeding?

(h) It is sometimes postulated that if the visible authority of Christ were to be withdrawn for a time, then - human nature being what it is - rebellion would be almost certain to ensue within a short while. But does Scripture speak of any such withdrawal of the Messiah's authority? This seems to have been invented specially to cope with a big difficulty. On the other hand, Isaiah is explicit that "thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light" (60:20).

(i) The coincidence of the names Gog and Magog in Revelation 20 with that of the leader of the great confederacy of Ezekiel 38 does not seem to have been given its proper weight. With any other Bible problem such a coincidence would shout for the two to be equated with each other. Then may it not be said that any interpretation which does line up these two prophecies as having the same fulfilment has a much stronger claim to acceptance than one which severs all connection between them and instead inserts a gap of a thousand years? or is "Interpret Scripture by Scripture" to stand as a sound principle everywhere except in Revelation 20?

(j) Revelation 15:1 R.V. The Vials are described as "the seven plagues which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God." The logical conclusion from these words is that the judgement of the Gog-Magog rebellion takes place before the outpouring of the Vials is concluded.

(k) Has the difficulty ever been properly faced that this amazing rising against all that is good and beneficent is spoken of in Scripture in one place only? Are Christadelphians to copy Mormons, "Jehovah's Witnesses" and such, in their disreputable habit of confidently basing major beliefs on one passage of Scripture? Have we, the people of the Book, not yet learned the elementary lesson of mistrust in our own powers of Bible interpretation? We believe what we believe about our "First Principles" not because of one text of Scripture but because of the massive over-all testimony of many passages. Shall we then go back on this thoroughly sound attitude here, and this, concerning verses in the Book of Revelation, of all

places, the book about the interpretation of which there is less room for dogmatism than any other in the Bible?

To these I would add the fact that 21:4 says that death shall be no more. The passage in Rev. 21 is full of reference to descriptions of the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's return, when the bride meets the bridegroom (21:2). If death itself ends when the bride and groom meet at the Lord's return, then this settles the issue. There will be no more concept of death after that. It cannot be that there will be no more death if a mortal population still exists. Death is ended by death being thrown into the lake of fire here in chapter 20. This is the same as death being no more.

As to what Revelation 20:4 does not mean, in terms of those who wrest it to support the idea of a cosmic satan literally existing; see my comments in *The Real Devil*.

*20:3 And threw him into the abyss-* The same word as in Lk. 8:31,33, where the demons ask Christ not to send them into the abyss; the parallel record says that they asked not to be sent out of the land of Israel (Mk. 5:10). Also Rom. 10:7 uses the abyss as a term for the lands beyond Israel (it is referring to Dt. 30:13). The beast that comes out of the abyss comes out of the sea (11:7; 13:1). It seems that the geographical area outside Israel from where the beast comes (i.e. the Arab world?) is where it is returned to for punishment. I have suggested in commentary on chapter 9 that the abyss may refer to a distinct geographical area in or on the edge of the earth / land promised to Abraham.

*And shut it-* The same word is used of how the door is shut around the faithful believers with whom Christ rejoices at His return (Mt. 25:10). There is a brief, appropriate period of intimacy between Christ and His people, during which the dragon cannot do anything.

*And sealed it over him-* The same word is used about how the final seven thunders of calamity upon the earth / land are "sealed" (Rev. 10:4). This seems to refer to a brief period in between the Lord's return and when He resumes dealing with the dragon system.

*That he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished-* Loosed a little season once eternity (the "1000 years") is established. The same word translated "finished" is translated to accomplish; to establish, build up (Lk. 22:37; Gal. 5:16; James 2:8; LXX: Ruth 3:18; Is. 55:11; Dan. 4:30). Consider the usage of the word elsewhere:

- Luke 22:37: "This that is written must yet be accomplished in me."
- Galatians 5:16: "Walk ye in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."
- James 2:8: "If ye fulfil the royal law ... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye shall do well."
- Romans 2:27: "And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee who ... dost transgress the law?"
- Ruth 3:18: "the man (Boaz) will not be in rest until he have finished (i.e. accomplished, achieved) the thing this day."

- Isaiah 55:11: "My word ... shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please."

- Daniel 4:30: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built".

*After this he must be released for a little time-* Gk. "loosed" (AV), which connects with the theme throughout Revelation of the loosing of the seals and various judgments which are required before the scroll of the book of life is fully unsealed / loosed (Rev. 5:5; 9:14,15). This loosing is required for the scroll of life to be fully opened; it refers to the time of the Lord's return and not the end of a Millennium after His return.

The Lord spoke in parables so that Israel would be deceived and therefore would not come to salvation (Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10 cp. Acts 28:26). This fact is hard to get around for those who feel God isn't responsible for deception. Isaiah spoke likewise (Is. 6:9,10; 29:10,11). The Angels will work in such a way as to allow the world to be deceived at this time (Rev. 20:3,8).

The "little time" is that of 6:11 and 12:12- the time of persecution just before the Lord's return at the end of the three and a half year tribulation.

*20:4 I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed-* Surely this must be connected with the promise made to the disciples in identical language- about their reigning at the beginning of God's Kingdom on earth (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30), at "the regeneration", when the Son of Man likewise takes His throne in glory in Jerusalem, "in my Kingdom".

*Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image, and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands-* This is replete with reference to earlier descriptions in Revelation of those persecuted and slain during the great tribulation just prior to the Lord's return.

*They came to life-* The group in view, the disciples and those who perished during the great tribulation, are resurrected separately. We have seen this implied in notes on 11:12 and 12:5.

*20:4 Then I saw thrones-* Saints sitting on thrones is Dan. 7:22; the throne of the beast is cast down, and judgment thrones given to the faithful.

*And seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed-* "And judgement was given unto them" (AV). This is Dan. 7:22: "And judgement was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom". This is clearly at the start of the Kingdom, at Christ's return, when the beast enemy of Israel is destroyed. This would also be the time of Ps. 122:5-8: "For there (in Jerusalem) are set thrones of judgement, the thrones of the house of David ... Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within you".



*Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image, and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years-* The jihadist State will be a strictly religious entity, keen to take the predictions and commands of the Koran and Hadith as literally as possible. Their crucifixions of their enemies are in strict obedience to passages like Sura 5.36: "The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified... Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom". And the jihadists likewise are careful to obey the commands to behead enemies: "When you encounter the unbelievers on the battlefield, strike off their heads until you have crushed them completely; then bind the prisoners tightly," (Sura 47). The UK *Daily Mail* reported of ISIS: "They lined the streets with the decapitated heads of police and soldiers". Beheading is now a well-known method used by the jihadists, popularized by their videos of beheading Western hostages. We note that it is the fate of those who do not worship the beast or accept his mark in Rev. 20:4. Apologists claim that the Koran doesn't support these beheadings; but it does. *Sura* 8:12 says that beheading can be used in order to psychologically terrify the non-Moslems: "I will cast dread into the hearts of the unbelievers. Strike off their heads, then, and strike off all of their fingertips". *Sura* 47:3 is similar: "When you encounter the unbelievers on the battlefield, strike off their heads". Beheading is justified in some of the hadith on the basis that Muhammad ordered the beheading of 700 Jews in Medina for allegedly plotting against him. It is therefore to be used specifically against God's people. Until recently, it seemed impossible that such a method of death would be literally used- but it is now becoming known worldwide that it is indeed being practiced and gloried in within the entity that is taking over the land promised to Abraham. It must be noted that Islam is the only major world religion today that legitimizes beheadings.

Rev. 20:4 says that there will be a special blessing for those who were beheaded for the sake of Jesus, and this involved them in not worshipping the beast or receiving his mark. The short term fulfilment of this was in the beast as the Roman empire. But the Roman Empire only beheaded *citizens* (e.g. Paul); non-citizens were killed in other ways, e.g. by crucifixion, throwing to wild beasts. Mentioning beheading was therefore purposeful. The text could more easily have said 'martyred' or 'killed'. The blessing in view, in the first century application, was therefore particularly for Roman citizens who refused to accept the faith of their own empire, for the sake of Christ. The climax of all Bible prophecy, however, is not in history; it is in the literal coming of Christ to earth. In the last days, therefore, Rev. 20:4 must have its final and ultimate fulfilment. But the incipient fulfilment in the days of Rome guides us towards understanding that final fulfilment. I suggest therefore that this class of latter day martyrs refers specifically to those who are citizens within the area controlled by the latter day entity known as the beast. Those who do not submit to its rulership will be beheaded. And we are already seeing that happening in the area, with roads lined with heads. And we see the jihadists forcing Christians and Yezidis to convert to Islam, or to face the sword- quite literally, in beheading. They stated themselves in July 2014: "We offer them three choices: Islam; the *dhimma* contract—involving payment of *jizya*; if they refuse this they will have nothing but the sword". The blessing of Rev. 20:4 is for those who endure this for the sake of Christ and witnessing His word in Christ to them. "The word of God" refers to the preaching of the word; the word is designed by its very nature to be preached.

It could be that it is those who perished during the tribulation who now sit on thrones of judgment to judge those who persecuted them, some of whom died during the tribulation, but are now raised to face judgment and the second death.

*20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended-* This could refer to the rest of the believers throughout history; or, as suggested on :4 and :13, to the members of the beast system who died during the tribulation who are now raised to be judged by those whom they slew. We must note that all of Revelation is specifically about events in the earth / land promised to Abraham, and much of it is specifically about those who live and die during the three and a half year tribulation there.

They are raised when the Kingdom, "the thousand years", is 'established' or as the word is translated misleadingly, in most versions, "ended". The Kingdom is "ended" in the sense that it is established. I have shown on :3 above that this Greek word certainly bears the translation "established" or "set up". When the Kingdom is established, the dead are raised; and there will be a period in which the Lord is with them, whilst the dragon is restrained in the abyss.

*This is the first resurrection-* The resurrection of the dead, specifically those killed during the tribulation, is when the thousand years are established ["ended"] is the first resurrection. This is a decided difficulty for those holding the traditional view that there are two resurrections, one at the start and one at the end of the Millennium. For here it is stated clearly that the first resurrection is when the 1,000 years are "ended". I suggest there is little option but to recognize that "ended" is an unhelpful translation, and the sense is rather "established, set up" rather than "ended". The text never speaks of a 'second resurrection'. *Protos*, "first", admittedly *sometimes* implies the first of a series, but it can also mean 'the one big and essential thing'; as in "seek *first* the Kingdom". It could even be argued that the usage of *protos* suggests there is no other resurrection to be thought of at all! The only other Bible verse which speaks of two resurrections is in Jn. 5:29, where the Lord speaks of a resurrection to life- perhaps the "first resurrection"; and a resurrection *at that same time* of the unworthy "to death", spoken of here in Revelation as "the second death".

*20:6 Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power-* The "second death" could refer to those who die in this life responsible to God, having not responded to Him; are resurrected and judged at Christ's return; and then are punished with death, the second death they will have experienced. But the specific reference here is to the members of the beast system who die during the tribulation and are raised to judgment by those whom they killed, judging on the Lord's behalf. The "first resurrection" is that which happens when the 1,000 years are "ended" or, as I suggest it should be translated, "established". The promise not to be hurt by the second death is made to believers of our age (Rev. 2:11)- it occurs at the judgment when Christ returns, not at the end of a Millennium. The second death is symbolized as a lake of fire, into which the dragon is also cast and thus destroyed permanently (Rev. 20:14; 21:8). This second death will in fact be the destruction of death itself, as there shall be no more death after death itself is destroyed (20:14). Yet the second death is threatened to those of this age who do not respond to the Gospel after hearing it (Rev. 2:11). This second death will happen at Christ's return, for that is when we shall be judged, and not at the end of a 1,000 year period. The rejected go away into figurative fire and destruction- at the Lord's return. Not at some point 1,000 years after that.

*20:7 And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be released from his prison-* He

was "captured" (19:20) and imprisoned, just as Babylon had been a cage or hold / prison for others (see on 18:2). Again, "finished" should be translated "established". Satan is released from the abyss as outlined in Revelation 9- which clearly refers to the events of the second coming. See on 20:1 and 20:2.

This overall sequence of judgment on the kings of the earth, gathering them into a pit, shutting them up, then their revival and final destruction and then the unchallenged, eternal reign of Christ is the same sequence as in Is. 24:20-23. Very significantly, Psalm 2 has a similar picture, of Christ ruling amidst his enemies, "the kings of the earth / land" (cp. Rev. 19:19), who then decide to cast away the cords with which Christ has bound them (Ps. 2:3). This is exactly the scene of Rev. 20; the enchained remnants of the first invasion, along with the rejected saints, being loosed from their chains and surrounding Jerusalem. Interestingly, Psalm 2 describes them throwing off their chains, whilst Rev. 20 says that their chains of condemnation are loosed. Presumably this means that they try a rebellion against the Lord Jesus which he 'lets' succeed. The language of Rev. 19:15-18 combines allusions to both Psalm 2 and also Ezekiel 38- as if to imply that they both prophecy of the same invasion, i.e. that after Christ has returned.

20:8 *And shall come to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog*- The similarities with Ez. 38/9 are so strong; an unsuccessful invasion of God's land when His people are in "peace and safety" (a phrase elsewhere used about the Kingdom), and destruction by fire. According to the usual view of Rev. 20, this similarity means absolutely nothing. This cannot be correct exposition. There must be a connection; surely this must refer to the same invasion? It would be the scenario of Psalm 2, where the nations of the land come against the Lord and His people in Jerusalem, after the type of the Assyrians surrounding Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Gog in Ezekiel 38 refers to an individual, not a nation. Is this man Gog to lead an attack against Jerusalem at the beginning *and* end of a 1,000 year reign?

"Shall come to" should be as AV: "Shall go out"- implying the bottomless pit is a geographical area? Satan deceives the "nations"; but 21:1 says that when the Kingdom is established, there will be no more sea, no more nations. Therefore this must be appropriate to the beginning of the Kingdom. During the setting up period, the nations come up to worship Christ, as often prophesied in the O.T.; however, they are described as entering into the city (21:24-27), i.e. attaining immortality through their faith and obedience. The dragon "will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth/ land" (RSV). The Gog / Magog invasion comes from those dwelling in the "isles" (Ez. 39:6); but this Greek phrase often means Gentile areas on the borders of the land (Is. 41:5; Jer. 47:4; and "the isles" in Ezekiel refer to lands bordering the land of promise). Abraham was from the sides of the land of Israel (Is. 41:8,9), the margins of the land of promise- from where the final invasion will come. There is triple emphasis on his deception (:3,8,10). He continues the work of the false prophet, after the false prophet is put into the lake of fire. The dragon carries on his work; the false prophet is Babylon (19:20), who also deceived (18:23). The bottomless pit, where the rebellion comes from, is therefore at the borders of the land. The Kingdom of God is fundamentally based upon the land of Israel.

The dragon was a deceiver back in 12:9, and still is, as Jezebel in the early church deceived (2:20). The dragon of chapter 12 is cast down at Christ's return; the description of the dragon being cast into the pit is an amplification of this. When the dragon is thrown down in chapter

12, he persecutes those of the land (natural Israel?) and the sea (the nations?) for "a short time" (12:12)- the "little season" of 20:3? The dragon is cast out of heaven in 12:9- meaning that he is thrown out of the 'heavens' of the land of Israel (or the temple specifically), into the earth / world.

<b>Rev. 12</b>	<b>Rev. 20</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The dragon persecutes the woman for 3½ years		The tribulation before Christ's coming
Thrown out of the temple / land of Israel (heaven) to the earth / rest of the world	Dragon cast to the abyss	Christ comes to throw the man of sin out of his place in 'heaven' (2 Thess. 2)
There for a while until he realizes he has a short time	Chained	Setting up of the Kingdom
Makes war with the saints for another 3½ years, replicating the holocaust, also involving suffering for the sea (nations) and the land-dwellers (natural Israel?)	Makes war with the saints; aims for Jerusalem.	Rebellion; the invasion of Ez. 38 and maybe the desire for the temple in Joel 3 would then be another similarity between the rebellion and the invasion prior to Christ's return.
	Destroyed by fire	The Ez. 38/39 invasion is destroyed in two stages; five sixths are destroyed first, then the final sixth- by fire.

*To gather them together to the war. The number of them is as the sand of the sea-* They are gathered to "*the battle*" (RV)- the final battle which the OT prophets so often mention. They are a false seed of Abraham, as the sand of the sea. Jihadists claim to be the true seed of Abraham, and Jews and Christians are the false seed.

20:9 *And they went over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them-* They compass Jerusalem- s.w. Lk. 21:20. As they did during the invasion of the earth / land promised to Abraham prior to Christ's coming, so they will do in this re-enactment of it. The rejected saints and defeated jihadist armies will make the rebellion of 20:9. This will connect with the rebellion of Korah and his company of rejects against the encampment of God and His faithful people- which was also destroyed by fire. The lake of fire / bottomless pit / second death all seem to be parallel. This final, futile attack is spoken of briefly in 12:17; see note there about the parallels between Revelation 12 and 20. This is the scenario of Psalm 2, where the Lord is enthroned in Zion and then attacked; and of Ezekiel 38, where Gog comes

down in an unsuccessful invasion against an Israel already enjoying the Kingdom conditions of dwelling without bars and gates and at peace.

20:10 *And the Devil that deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where are also the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever-* The dragon is in the abyss and deceives the nations which are there. The devil will deceive during the rebellion as it did in the period of the tribulation before the Lord's return (12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). The devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet already *are*. This suggests that their punishment lasts until the Kingdom is established, and until the "little season" of the rebellion is finished; the "short time" of desperate persecution of the woman after the dragon has been cast out of heaven / power in 12:12. Thus it would seem that the punishment of the wicked and rebels is to exist for some time into the Kingdom age. A number of passages tend to agree with this. The righteous will go forth from the borders of the promised land and look at their carcasses (Is. 66). The rejected saints go to the same place (20:15), condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11). The devil and beast will be cast to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10), as will all the rejected (Rev. 20:15); they will go to the same place. As Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2), so will the rejected be (Mt. 13:30; 22:13). This will be the antitype of Zedekiah being bound in condemnation (Jer. 52:11).

The beast and false prophet have a specific destruction promised them- the lake of fire which is the second death (:14). If death is their destruction, then they cannot be consciously tormented for ever. "Torment" translates a Greek word which simply means "pain", and does not of itself imply eternal torment. Their destruction will be in "the lake of fire", which is a specific geographic location upon earth, probably Gehenna just outside the Jerusalem which they have tried to recapture. But all the earth shall be filled with God's glory throughout the Kingdom's eternity, so it is inconceivable that this is a literal description. The "forever and ever" translates *aion* which can mean a period of limited duration, an 'age' which has an end. That age would then refer to the age in existence until the Kingdom of God is fully established on earth. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and so He will not be tormenting people for ever; note that the word "hell" doesn't occur here. "Day and night" invites comparison with the fact that there shall be no night in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 22:5); perhaps this is mentioned as if to say: 'Their torment will indeed be painful and constant, every day and night of the old age / *aion*, until the Kingdom of God is fully established on earth and there shall be no more night'.

20:11- see on Heb. 2:3.

*And I saw a great white throne and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them-* 20:11 is amplified / repeated in 21:1. This is about the judgment at the second coming, not the end of the 'Millennium'. Earth and heaven fleeing away (cp. 6:14) refers to the passing of the old human system. "There was no place found for them" alludes to Dan. 2:35 about the beast system being destroyed at Christ's second coming, not the end of the 'Millennium'. This is surely the new heaven and earth of 21:1; that of Is. 65:17 and 2 Pet. 3:13, which will be established at Christ's return.

The fleeing away refers to how along with the beast's remnants, the rejected believers will slink away from the Lord's presence (1 Jn. 2:24 Gk.). The whole heaven and earth of this

present world will likewise flee away from the face of the enthroned Christ (Rev. 20:11; Is. 2:21). Fleeing away is a characteristic of both the unworthy and also the world which they loved. In some sense the world will come before the judgment seat of Christ to be rejected (Dan. 7:9-14).

The great white throne judgment must refer to a judgment at the end of the 1,000 years if we follow the classical Millennial reign view. But Harry Whittaker points out some of the serious problems with this:

1. The earlier visions in this set of seven certainly concern events at the beginning of the Millennium. It would be strange if this series is so broken up that a gap of a thousand years is to be read between the fulfilment of some and of the rest.

2. 20:11: "I saw ... him that sat on the throne, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away." The heaven and earth, which flee away, must be the old human order (compare Revelation 6:14). Is there much point in such a description if this judgement takes place a thousand years after the earth and heaven fled away?

3. "...and there was no place found for them" is a phrase quarried out of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:35). Again the words suggest the work of Messiah in destroying the kingdoms of men. There is little relevance to the end of Messiah's kingdom.

4. 21:1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Isaiah 65:17 and 2 Peter 3:13 are equally emphatic that this is the setting up of the kingdom of Christ.

5. The allusions in ch. 21: 2, 9 to "the bride, the Lamb's wife" are difficult to harmonize with a time when all are redeemed. It is impossible to believe that the Bride waits a thousand years for union with her Lord. This new Jerusalem is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". The symbolism requires reference to "the marriage supper of the Lamb" at the time of his coming. The context of Revelation 19:7-9 puts this conclusion beyond argument.

6. 20:12: "and the books were opened: and another book ... which is the book of life." These are unmistakable allusions to Daniel 7:10 and 12:1. Would anyone argue for an application of these passages to the end of the Millennium?

7. 21:3: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." This is a very slightly modified quotation of Ezekiel 37:26b, 27, the time of reference of which is again unmistakable.

8. The description of the New Jerusalem includes this: "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it ... they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (21: 24, 26). Will there be "nations" and "kings of the earth" when Christ's reign has been concluded?

9. The same passage has a long series of undeniable allusions to Isaiah 60: "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it ... And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there" - these are two examples but the whole of ch. 21 :22-27 should be studied. Again, the question has an easy answer: What epoch does Isaiah's prophecy describe? Then what does Revelation 21: 22-27 refer to?

10. A similar argument can be based on Isaiah 65. Without direct quotation, no less than eight points of contact can be traced between the second half of that chapter and the first eight verses of Revelation 21. So it is reasonable to assume that the two Scriptures are about the same thing. What is Isaiah 65 about?

11. Ch. 22:2: "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." So at the time spoken of there will be nations to be healed!

*20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works-* The opening of the books is that of Dan. 7:10; 12:1, which concern the start of the Kingdom age, not the end of some 'Millennium'.

*Another book was opened, which is the book of life-* The scroll of life is only opened once all the seals are loosed. These seals all refer to events leading up to the Lord's return. The book does not remain sealed until 1,000 years after His return. The reference is to the judgment seat at the Lord's return.

*Judged out of the things which were written in the books-* When Christ opens the books of His people (Rev. 20:12; as if each saint has a book written about him recording his life), He does this through discussing with our guardian the details of our life. Perhaps the Angels with have literal books with them; we pointed out earlier that the Angels do seem to use their facility for reading and writing.

The judgment seat is described as if literal books are written each day we live, and these will be opened and considered by God at the last day, in order to decide whether to give us the reward of the Kingdom or not. When we survey the total of God's revelation, it is evident that this is not to be taken literally. There will be a judgment, the result of which will be proportionate to the way we have lived our daily lives. But God (through the Lord Jesus) will not need to weigh up evidence. The books were written before the world began in the sense that God knew then who would be in His Kingdom. It is almost impossible to suggest that there will be literal scrolls unrolled. The idea of scrolls was no doubt used because it would have been understandable by those who were first inspired with God's word. Yet this is how God reveals the judgment to us; in human terms which we are capable of understanding. We are not explicitly told that there will not be literal scrolls, or that God will not need to weigh up evidence to decide whether we will be in the Kingdom. Moses (Ex. 32:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 13:14) perhaps saw the judgment in this literal sense, but this does not mean that there will be actual scrolls unrolled.

But there is another possibility. As suggested on :4 and :13,14, the resurrection and judgment here may refer to the beast's members who died during the tribulation. They are judged against what they did to those whose names are in the book of life; and it is those whom they killed, whose names are in that book and who are now alive, who judge them, according to what is written in the other book concerning what they did during the tribulation.

*20:13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and every man was judged according to their works-* But 21:1 says that in the new heaven and earth, there is no more sea. If 20:13 refers to the end of the Millennium, then 21:1 must likewise. But the coming of a new heaven and earth is a figure repeatedly used about the establishment of the Kingdom at the Lord's return. And 21:2 says that this is the time when the bride meets her husband, the Lord Jesus. This is at the Lord's return, and not 1,000 years later.

The sea giving up the dead doesn't refer to dead bodies floating upwards; the sea refers to the nations under the beast's dominion (17:5), which gave power to the beast and upon which it sat (see on 13:1). The sea in this sense won't exist after the Kingdom is established (21:1);

therefore this refers to the judgment at Christ's return and not at the end of a thousand year period. Is the bottomless pit to be equated with the lake of fire? A place of punishment? The rebels are punished and then those who survive (i.e. those deserving more punishment) are sent back to this area, where they are punished for a long time, day and night for ever (20:10). But there will be no day and night as such in the Kingdom (21:25; 22:5). Therefore we must take this description of their punishment figuratively.

It could be that this giving up of the dead by "the sea" refers to how those who participated in the abuse of Israel and the believers during the tribulation will not escape final judgment; they will be resurrected and judged for what they did, and destroyed with the second death. This would explain why this is a judgment for "works", when works in that sense are irrelevant to those saved by grace. This group will be raised to answer for their evil works during the tribulation, and then be punished with the second death.

*20:14 And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire-* The destruction of death is paralleled with the second death, which occurs at the judgment (21:8), when Christ comes. The second death can't happen twice, at the start *and* end of the 'Millennium'. What is in view here is events at the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom, not at the end of some 1000 year period. Death, sorrow etc. (21:4) are destroyed for *us*, the believers; this is believer-centric language. Likewise "men" in 21:3 refers to the believers, not all human beings then alive (some will still be enduring punishment).

*20:15 And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire-* The idea of being found written in a book is common in the narratives of the restoration, which looked forward to the final restoration of the Kingdom. Only those "found written" in the genealogies could be Levites in the re-established Kingdom (Neh. 7:5); those corrupted by their time in Babylon were excluded. And specifically it is those Jews who spiritually survive the final tribulation, the time of trouble in Israel such as never was, who are found written in the book and delivered (Dan. 12:1). It is those written in that book who will not have worshipped the beast during the final three and a half year tribulation (13:8; 17:8). Some will tragically have had their names removed from that book (3:5). Again, the purview of the teaching in this chapter is specifically about the believers and unbelievers in the earth / land promised to Abraham during the tribulation period.



## CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away-* This is the situation presented in 2 Peter 3. The present system ["heaven and earth"] passes away at the Lord's return, and is replaced by the new one of the Kingdom age. I emphasize this because Rev. 21 is about the situation at the time of the Lord's return- and not some point 1,000 years after it. This means that the statement that "death shall be no more" (:4) is true at this point- of the Lord's return to earth and establishment of the Kingdom. If death is truly "no more" in the new system ["heaven and earth"], then there can be no 'mortal population' during the next 1,000 years. In other words, the theory of a Millennial reign needs to be radically re-thought, because as it popularly stands it is simply contrary to the text of Scripture.

*And the sea was no more-* "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Is. 57:20). The sea refers to nations in 17:15, and as noted on 13:1, to the nations immediately surrounding the earth / land promised to Abraham who gave power to the beast and Babylon system. We read later in chapter 21 of how the nations enter into the new Jerusalem- the unbelieving, ignorant world at the time of the Lord's return are given the opportunity to come enter into the city of God, where there is only a new Israel, and no national differences. So this would be explaining how the situation where there is "no more sea" / nations came about. However it may be that the point of contrast is with the fact that in the Kingdom age, the source of water will not be the sea and its role in the water cycle, but rather the water which emerges from Zion (Rev. 22:1). The book of Revelation also seeks to subtly undermine the commonly accepted views of evil, by showing that all the beasts, dragons, demons imaginable are in fact not radical, free-ranging evil [as many imagined both then and now], but rather under God's very tight control; they are playing their role within His purpose, all leading towards the final end when sin and evil will be no more on earth. "The sea" was feared by the first century world, as being the source of monsters and evil. Rather than trying to argue that actually, that's nonsense- Revelation 21:1 instead teaches that whatever our beliefs are about "the sea", it will ultimately be no more when Christ returns.

The language of this whole section in 21:1-8 connects with Is. 65, concerning the establishment of the Kingdom, not after the Millennium. Heaven and earth pass away, the former (Gk. *proton*) things pass (:4)- the things that were once first place now pass. In 20:13, the sea gives up the dead; and this is applied to the 'end of the Millennium' by those who believe in a Millennial reign. But here in 21:1, "the sea" no longer exists at the start of the Lord's reign- for it is at this time that the bride meets the groom, and the Kingdom is established. Hence 20:13 must be interpreted as referring to some time around Christ's return; see my notes on chapter 20.

Revelation of the situation after the Millennium would surely be inappropriate, if not impossible, for us to receive in this dispensation. The context of Revelation 21 and Revelation 22 is set in chapter 20. The earth and heaven flee away when Christ sits on the throne, "and there was found no place for them" (20:11). This is almost quoting Dan. 2:35 concerning the establishment of the Kingdom, not the end of a 1000 year period. In place of this heaven and earth, a new heaven and earth appear in Revelation 21:1. This is the language of Is. 65:17 and 2 Pet. 3:13 concerning the second coming. In this context, John sees "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:2,9). The church is only a bride at the time of the second coming, seeing she marries Christ at the marriage supper. At this time, "God shall

wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death", sorrow etc. (Revelation 21:4). The church will not be afflicted by these things during the Millennium; this must refer to Christ's return. Likewise the gift of the water of life (Revelation 21:6) is at the judgment at the second coming. The idea of former things (e.g. death, tears) passing away in 21:4 is one of many connections in Revelation 21 and Revelation 22 with Isaiah's prophecies of the second coming (Revelation 21:4 = Is. 60:20; 65:19; Revelation 21:25 = Is. 60:11,20). Revelation 21:7 speaks of the time when the faithful believer will receive his inheritance. This surely refers to the judgment at the second coming (Mt. 25:34). Revelation 22 has a number of connections with Revelation 21 which would indicate that we are to see Revelation 22 as also referring to the start, rather than the end, of the Millennium (e.g. Revelation 22:14, 21:27; 2:7). "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2) is another obvious example. "They shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5) is the language of Dan. 7:18,27 concerning the judgment at Christ's return.

21:2 *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*- see on 1 Thess. 4:14. The whole prophetic metanarrative of the Bible is in many ways a tale of two cities- Babylon and Jerusalem. There are times when Babylon masquerades as Zion- a false city of God with a false Messiah leading her. Babylon / Babel was a city built to reach *unto* Heaven, in contrast to the true city of God which *comes down* from Heaven (Gen. 11:4 cp. Rev. 21:2). And there are times when Zion in her apostasy has appeared as Babylon. But in the final conflict of the last days, these two cities will be literally pitted against each other. Natural Jerusalem will be where Babylon makes her throne (see on 16:19) and will be destroyed by fire and sulphur; but then the new Jerusalem comes down upon her ruins. It was in Babylon where Nimrod first built the tower of Babel, the first organized rebellion against God; and it was there that God first entered into open judgment of flesh and humanity *en masse*. And it is here likewise that His purpose with sin and His true people will likewise be fulfilled. Babylon was also called Su-anna, "the holy city". Yet "the holy city" is Jerusalem, thus making Babylon a fake Zion, although she is briefly built on the site of Zion. Herodotus says the city was square, just as new Jerusalem. We have shown elsewhere that the events of the Babylonian invasion are typical of the last days. That invasion was "the time of [Israel's] trouble" (Jer. 11:12), clearly typical of Jacob's latter day "time of trouble".

*Made ready as a bride*- "The bride" is married at the marriage supper (19:7-9)- not at the end of the Millennium. Therefore this is about the setting up of the Kingdom at Christ's return. The marriage supper of the lamb is at the Lord's return, not 1,000 years after it. The same words are used in Rev. 19:7 about the preparation of the bride. Therefore this vision, during which it is declared that death has ended (:4), is at the Lord's return. The destruction of death is spoken of in chapter 20 as being when the 1,000 years are established [mistranslated with the sense of "expired"]. Yet here in chapter 21, death ends at the time of the marriage of the lamb. There is thus no place for any theories of a 'mortal population' in the Kingdom of God. In the 1st century application, John the Baptists attempted to prepare [s.w. "made ready"] the bride, but this failed in that Israel crucified her Messiah (Lk. 1:17 s.w.). The marriage supper, the Kingdom, has been "prepared" from the beginning of the world (Mt. 22:4; 25:34;) and through the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3). It is the bride who is not ready. The implication is surely that once the bride is "prepared / made ready", then the marriage supper begins. The preparation of the bride is through the baptism of the last converts, and the spiritual preparation of those who are baptized.

The adornment or making ready is surely of good works and spiritual fruits, by which we adorn the teaching of the Gospel (Tit. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:5). In this we see the significance of

works. The Lord will marry us because we are His beloved, of His sovereign choice. But in response, we adorn ourselves as best we can for Him who has so loved us. And yet the greatest adornment is the white garments of imputed righteousness which are given to us (see on 19:8).

21:3- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And I heard a great voice out of the throne, saying: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them-* This is stating the same wondrous truth three times. God shall indeed live with us on earth. Heaven shall come to earth. This is all an allusion to Ez. 37:26,27, concerning the time of Christ's return. If God lives with us at Christ's return, how will He be shielded from the 'mortal' population? This problem disappears if the 1000 years is seen as a description of the Kingdom itself. Seeing God's face was what motivated Job, and John seems to allude to it as the final consolation in 1 Jn. 4.

"The tabernacle of God", being God's people; He being our God; God living and walking with us, is all evidently alluding to Lev. 26:11,12 and Ex. 29:45,46 concerning the ultimate blessings of the covenant after Israel's final repentance. The shadowy fulfilment they have had in the past through God's manifestation in an Angel doesn't mean that these promises can and must only be fulfilled by some form of God manifestation. Surely Revelation 21:3 is saying that at the second coming the principle of God manifestation will change in that God will personally be with His people. Because we have so far lived under the paradigm of God manifestation, let's not think that it's not possible for God to personally be with us. Let's really try to be broad-minded enough to take this on board.

The other references to "God himself" are to Yahweh personally, rather than to Christ: Is. 45:18; Jn. 5:37; 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:18,19; Eph. 1:5. Indeed, those N.T. references seem to point a difference between "God himself" and Christ. So isn't it lack of spiritual vision- perhaps even of faith - that makes us wriggle against the idea of God Himself, in person, living with us? The idea of God Himself dwelling with men in the tabernacle (temple) of the new city of Jerusalem is a clear reference to Ez. 48:35, which says that the name of Jerusalem in the Millennium will be "Yahweh is there". These ideas doubtless also have reference to Yahweh's promise to David to build an eternal house for Yahweh's Name. This verse seems to teach that God Himself, in person, will descend to earth with Christ. This might sound altogether too incredible. But think about the idea. The King Himself (= God) comes to see the guests at the wedding of His Son (= Jesus; Mt. 22:11). "God himself" here either means God Himself or God manifest in Christ. "God himself shall be with them" seems to me an odd way of describing Christ's second coming. God will "be their God". I would just about be willing to concede that this might apply to God manifest in Christ - but for one significant fact: this Revelation 21:3 is packed with O.T. allusions which explicitly refer to God the Father.

*And be their God-* God promised Abraham that through Christ, His seed, blessing would come on people from all nations, with the result that God would be the God of Abraham's multitudinous seed: "To be a God unto... your seed... I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7,8). The seed is Christ, and the "God" is Yahweh. Let's not confuse them. Now in Revelation 21:3 this fundamental promise is alluded to; God Himself will be our God then; we will see Him and

have a personal relationship with Him. This would mean that this idea of personally being with God is a fundamental part of the Gospel preached to Abraham.

21:4- see on Mt. 25:37-40; Rev. 20:14.

*And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes-* The same word is used in Acts 3:19 concerning sin being blotted out at Christ's return. The tears are for our sins (sorrow likewise is connected with sin in Is. 53). Will we have an emotional breakdown straight after the judgment? The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome. We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly, genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

The tears that will be wiped from our eyes are those associated with "the former things" of this life, and also the emotion associated with our acceptance. But it can't be that it means we will never have the emotion of sadness ever again. For God is made sad, grieved at His heart, even now. And we are to share *His* nature. Consider for a moment the *emotion* which we will feel after being granted Divine nature. Malachi says we will be like stalled animals, who are fed, fattened, kept in small dark pens to be killed... who then suddenly break out into the daylight, and go prancing away through the meadows. This will be our leap of joy and taste of true freedom. Yet the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome.

*And death shall be no more-* The end of death is portrayed in Revelation 20 as death being thrown into the lake of fire, which is also the second death. The second death is for those rejected at the judgment at Christ's return. Their punishment with death is therefore the end of death; there will be no more death after that because the curse of death upon Adam's race will be ended. There is no possibility therefore for a 'mortal population' after these things. If there is to be no more crying or pain after the Lord's return, we are scarcely to imagine that there will be exactly these things at some supposed 'second judgment' and 'second condemnation' 1,000 years later.

1 Cor. 15:54,55 likewise speak of the end of death: "But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to fulfilment the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?". The quotation is from Is. 25:8, which concerns events at Christ's return- not at the end of the 1,000 years. The end of death will therefore come at the resurrection- when Christ returns. And that is what is being taught here in Rev. 20 and 21.

*Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more-* The Greek for "pain" specifically refers to labour pains. This is all the language of the curse on Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. It fits into a theme of paradise being restored. But labour pains are also used with regard to the experience of the believers during the tribulation. As ever in Revelation, there is especial relevance to the believers who are persecuted and die during the final tribulation in

the earth / land promised to Abraham. It is they who have experienced death, sorrow and labour pains.

*The first things are passed away-* The parallel is with the passing away of the first heaven and earth (:1). The 'heaven and earth' is therefore a figure for "the former things". *Former things...* Defined in Is. 48:3,4,5 as God's prediction "from the beginning" that Israel would sin and be judged by Him with exile. When we read that the "former things" will no longer be remembered, and that both God and man will "remember not the former things" (Is. 43:18), perhaps the same reference is in view. Rev. 21:4 predicts that in the Kingdom age, there will be no more tears because "the former things are passed away", literally, 'they are behind'. That may appear obvious, a needless statement of a truism- that past things are past. But the suggestion is that then we will totally realize that our sins are behind us, as God has cast them behind His back. The connection between tears, sorrow and "former things" is a powerful psychological insight into the human condition- sorrow, tears, depression etc. are all connected with our awareness (however subconscious) of human sin, both our own and of others. When we finally grasp that all sin is indeed behind us, then there is the basis for a life without tears. And that is at least theoretically possible even now, if only we will see our sins and perceive them as God does- as past. But we must of course deal with the sins of others in that same way. God's emphasis in Isaiah is that He has "declared" the former things from the start. All our sins in one sense were known to God from the beginning, and He knew how to deal with them.

God (this is important) made Joseph forget all his "toil", his mental sufferings (Gen. 42:51). This was a miracle; no amount of steel-willed suppression of his past could have made Joseph paper over all the pain. But God did a psychological miracle upon him. Has God done the same to Christ now in His glory, as He will to us one day soon (Rev. 21:4)? Yet the Lord will be factually aware of His sacrifice and the associated pain. God presumably did not obliterate Joseph's memory cells, but He made him "forget" the pain. This is surely what God has done to Christ, and what He will do to us: take away the pain on a psychological level whilst still leaving a factual awareness. Is it too much to suggest that even now, God is ready and willing to do something like this?

*21:5 And he that sits on the throne said: Behold! I make all things new. And he said: Write! For these words are faithful and true-* All things will be made new at the Lord's coming, and yet those in whom the new creation is worked out already have all things made new in their spiritual experience (2 Cor. 5:17,18).

The utter literality of all this was emphasized to John, when he was told: "Write! For these words are true and faithful". The almost fantastical description of God Himself wiping away all the tears that are in (Gk.) the eyes of men... this really is true and faithful. It could be that the wonder of the idea of meeting God in person... boggled John's mind to the point he wondered whether he really was intended to write this down, doubting whether all this could be really true. And he exactly represents our feelings.

*21:6 And he said to me: They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life-* We, now, take the water of life (22:17; Jn. 4:14; Mt. 10:8). The picture surely is that at this time, we receive literal immortality. It speaks of the Lord's return and not the end of some point 1,000 years afterwards. It is at this time, when we receive immortality, drinking the water of life, that death itself ends. So there will be no 'mortal population' after that. And

yet as John's gospel stresses, we can right now drink of that water of life; we can receive the gift of the spirit, of the Lord's mind and thinking, of His life; so that we can begin to live now the kind of life which we shall eternally live. And the Greek tenses could imply that throughout eternity we are continually given, in an ongoing sense, to drink of this water of life. It is life as He has it, and not just the one-time gift of immortality.

The "freely" giving of the water of life recalls the river Pison in the garden of Eden, which means 'freely flowing'. There are allusions galore to Eden through the final visions of Revelation- for Eden shall be restored and the curse lifted.

*21:7 He that overcomes shall inherit these things-* The letters to the churches begin Revelation by repeatedly promising that "he that overcomes" will be recompensed at Christ's return- no suggestion is made that the recompense will be 1,000 years after His return (Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). The Greek word translated "overcomes" occurs nowhere else. The reference here is therefore to the time of Christ's return; and it is at this time that death will be ended (:4), i.e. cast into the lake of fire. If death itself is destroyed at the Lord's return, there cannot be any mortal population during a supposed 1000 year reign which commences at His return.

*And I will be his God and he shall be my son-* An application of the promise to David about Messiah to each one of us who is in Christ. The wonder of our eternal living will be that we shall relate to the Father as the Lord Jesus did. The prospect offered to us is very much in terms of *relationship* with the Father and Son, without being disturbed by personal sin and the possibility of sinning; rather than a presentation of a literal picture of a physical, materially optimal existence.

*21:8 But for the fearful and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and fornicators and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their share shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur; which is the second death-* The language of murder, fornication, lying, sorcery and idolatry has all been used in Revelation of the beast / Babylon system and their various associated acts such as the false prophet. It is they who shall be destroyed in the second death; implying that they shall be raised to judgment even if they died during the tribulation. I have suggested in chapter 20 that the descriptions of resurrection, judgment by those who they killed, and destruction in the second death all refer specifically to this category.

These people are those of 20:15, those of 22:15 who are placed (geographically?) outside the encampment of the people of God in Jerusalem, perhaps to be literally burnt in Gehenna outside the city.

But just as apparently 'petty' sins [by secular judgment] are juxtaposed alongside apparently 'major' ones in Paul's writings, so here, the "fearful and unbelieving" are categorized alongside the abusive members of the beast system. Those who won't believe the good news of salvation in Jesus are in the same category as those society would characterize as serious sinners, the abusive members of the beast system. But before God, they all have the same final end. Note that the disciples, whose names are on the foundations of the new Jerusalem, were once both fearful and unbelieving (Mk. 4:40). Indeed they are described as "unbelieving" several times (Mt. 17:17; Jn. 20:27; Tit. 1:15). The point is that those who were once like those outside the city are in fact the foundations of the city.

And yet the language used here is also used about the behaviour of some within the church. The same words are used about believers in 1 Cor. 5:9,11; Heb. 12:16; 13:4. It means that in essence this is how God sees some in the ecclesias. I wonder how many of them will have literally done those things. Surely it is more reasonable to suppose that this is how their other deeds and attitudes were counted in God's sight. Or does it show that far more people than we expect will be classed as responsible to judgment? And it's noteworthy that those who won't believe are in the same category as these more 'awful' sinners. For we are either saved or rejected, there is no third road nor category.

21:9 *And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spoke with me, saying: Come here, I will show you the bride-* We are introduced to the idea of seven last plagues, and thus an expectation is set up that we shall now see some awful catastrophes poured out on earth. Instead, we have a vision of the bride and her Kingdom glory. I suggest this is purposeful; we are being shown that the Lord's focus is upon the salvation of His people. The punishment of the wicked is incidental to that, and not something He at all revels in. Perhaps the idea is that the final attack against Jerusalem is made whilst the Lord and His bride are within it. And His focus is upon enjoying the beauty of His bride rather than the necessary destruction of the invaders through those seven last plagues. Maybe the seven last plagues, like the seven thunders, are potentially prepared but do not actually happen; see on 10:4.

21:10 *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high-* The 'height' of the mountain likely refers more to its glory than its literal altitude. Zion and / or the mount of Olives was the great and high mountain in the Jewish thought in which Revelation is presented. And Acts 1 and Zech. 14 envisage the Lord Jesus returning to that mountain. The exact chronology of events need not concern us; not only will the meaning / experience of time likely be changed, but the chronology must to some extent be open, because the repentance of various groups will be possible. The final outworking of events will take that into account.

*And showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God-* Literal Jerusalem as the capital of Babylon will be destroyed; a new Jerusalem will literally come down to replace it. But this is not a pile of new stones, but more essentially the glorified believers, who as explained on 1 Thess. 4:14 come as it were with the Lord Jesus at this stage.

21:11 *Having the glory of God. Her light was like a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal-* Jasper appears in various colours, representative of the varying individual beauties of the believers, refracting the Lord's light in unique and beautiful [to Him] ways. The Hebrew idea of 'jasper' is 'polishing', and it is that process which is underway in our lives at this moment.

21:12 *She had a wall great and high, having twelve gates; and at the gates were twelve angels, and the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel written thereon-* The 12 gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem are identified with 12 Angels, whereon are written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. This suggests that the tribes of Israel are reflective of the situation in Heaven, where there are Angels representing each tribe. This identity between heavenly Angels and the believers they represent on earth is a common theme in Revelation. This connection between Angels and Israel is commonly found in the Old Testament. Dan. 8:24 speaks of Israel as "the people of the saints" (RVmg.), although v. 13 speaks of "the

saint" (RV "holy one") as an Angel. 1 Sam. 17:45 parallels the Angelic hosts, and the hosts of Israel's armies; they were to follow where the host of God went, just as David's army had to follow the sound of the cherubim "marching" over the mulberry bushes (1 Chron. 14:15). And whilst we follow where we are led, we are identified with our Angels to the extent that what is done to us is done to them. To defy the armies of Israel was thus to defy the armies of Heaven (1 Sam. 17:45). Thus the four faces of the Angel cherubim were reflected in the four standards of the camp of Israel; the people were intended to "keep in step with the Spirit", following where they went, as they had done in the wilderness years. They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). And we too are to follow where our Angel potentially enables us to go. The Angel went in to Jericho to take the city; and the Israelites went "straight" ahead, following the Angel, and thus took the city (Josh. 5:13,14; 6:20).

21:13 *On the east were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates and on the west three gates-* What is the significance of this order? It is not a circular view, i.e. not clockwise nor anticlockwise. Perhaps it is in conscious difference to the order of the gates of the city as given in Ez. 48:31-34, which goes north- east- south- west, i.e. in a clockwise direction, starting from where the hands of the clock would naturally begin, i.e. at the north. The many differences highlighted with the Ezekiel temple visions seem in order to make the point that contrary to Jewish expectation, that temple would not be literally built at the Lord's return. The new Jerusalem will be altogether beyond such literalism.

The square nature of the city (:16) is perhaps to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is open to all peoples from all quarters; and the unbelieving nations who were not destroyed along with Babylon will now equally be able to enter God's Kingdom.

21:14 *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb-* Those men were so weak in their lifetimes, but out of such weakness were made strong. John must have been shocked to see his own name there. We can assume that the device to replace Judas with Matthias in Acts 1:26 was therefore eternally accepted. The tragedy is that the name of Judas could have been there, but it was removed, just as names can be deleted from the book of life.

21:15 *And he that spoke with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city and the gates of it, and the wall of it-* The allusion is clearly to the measurements of the new temple given in Ezekiel 40-48. But the details and dimensions are so different, and those emphasized differences [see on :13] climax in the statement that there is "no temple" in the new Jerusalem (:22). It all seems designed to underscore the point that the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy is *not* going to be built at the Lord's return. It was a potential, conditional prophecy of what could have been at the restoration from Babylon, which the Jews failed to actualize.

It's worth reflecting on the significance of how the same words for "reed" and "measure" are used in Rev. 11:1, where John is bidden measure the temple with a reed. But there is no record of him doing so. Now, an Angel does make the measurements, not just with a "reed" but with a "golden reed", the gold maybe speaking of faith brought to completion. Perhaps John represented the lack of faith and obedience which precluded the Lord's Kingdom coming in the first century. Likewise it was a lack of faith which precluded the building of the temple which Ezekiel had seen measured out with a reed. Hence the difference in reeds- the one in Rev. 21:15 is a *golden* reed, speaking of faith.



21:16 *And the city is laid out as a square, its length is as great as its breadth, and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand stadia-* This is clearly not to be taken literally. And so one wonders why the insistence on reading 'one thousand years' as a literal measurement in this very same section of Revelation.

*The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal-* As were the dimensions of the most Holy, and of Babylon, which was rebuilt briefly on the site of Jerusalem. The perfect congruence of the design reflects how in this life, each of the component parts is being brought into perfect symmetry with the others. This would be one explanation for the interpersonal friction which so many have experienced as a result of their Christian walk. In the bigger picture, this was all necessary to make us fit together so perfectly in eternity.

The square nature of the city (twice emphasized) is perhaps to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is open to all peoples from all quarters; and the unbelieving nations who were not destroyed along with Babylon will now equally be able to enter God's Kingdom.

21:17 *And he measured the wall of it, one hundred and forty four cubits-* Again, numbers are not to be taken literally. The idea is clearly of 12 x 12, the foundations of Jacob's twelve sons mixed with those of the twelve apostles, maybe speaking of the perfect fusion of Jew and Gentile.

*The measurement of a man, which is also an angel's measurement-* The parallel between men and Angels would suggest that now the believers have become as Angels (Lk. 20:35,36). This would suggest a reference to the time of the Lord's return, when there will be this change from humanity to immortality and Angelic nature. John has seen Angels representing believers in the heavenly throne room, and now they are united.

21:18 *And the building of the wall was of jasper-* Why a wall? It can hardly be for protection. Perhaps there will eternally be a sense of separation between light and darkness, saved and unsaved, which we do well to be aware of now too.

*And the city was pure gold, like pure glass-* See on :21 *pure gold*. Glass was not totally transparent in John's day, but he saw glass as if it were transparent, and had the impression this was in fact transparent gold (:21). Yet gold by its nature cannot be transparent. In these paradoxes we have reflected the wonder of the whole thing. The city of God, the Kingdom of God, is transparent- it is *open*. The gold, the wonderful reality which by its nature is closed and dense, is also amazingly open and transparent. For a theme of these visions is that the unbelieving world [those not destroyed during the last judgments] are invited to come in to the Kingdom, to the community of believers, the Jerusalem which is above which has now been revealed on earth. The gates are open day and night, the wall is there- but transparent; the city itself is the ultimate image of openness. The bride and the Lord Jesus are urging the nations to come into it. No longer do the 12 tribes of Israel define membership- the symbolism of 12 x 12 gives the impression of an innumerable greater openness. The spirit of that openness is to be seen in us today.

21:19 *The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones-* The allusion is to the temple in Jerusalem, whose precious stones had made John and the other disciples so awestruck (Mk. 13:1). That was all to be replaced by a spiritual temple. Instead of the names of donors and other leading lights within Judaism engraved on the precious stones, now the names of the humble disciples are to be written. As the bride was

adorned (:2), so the same figure is used here. The adornment is surely of good works and spiritual fruits, by which we adorn the teaching of the Gospel (Tit. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:5).

*The first foundation was jasper. The second, sapphire. The third, chalcedony. The fourth, emerald-* See on :20.

21:20 *The fifth, sardonyx. The sixth, sardius. The seventh, chrysolite. The eighth, beryl. The ninth, topaz. The tenth, chrysoprase. The eleventh, jacinth. The twelfth, amethyst-* The stones echo the spirit of the High Priest's breastplate. Within the city, therefore, is the heart of the High Priest. The thinking, spirit and heartbeat of Jesus is the all-consuming characteristic of the community within those walls, as it should be of us today.

21:21- see on Mt. 7:6.

*And the twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each of the separate gates was of one pearl-* The gates are open constantly (:25), and even if shut, the glory passing through the pearl would have given the effect of the pearl being transparent. This fits with the otherwise strange image of transparent gold (see on :18). The gates are open; but why are there gates, therefore, and why are they effectively transparent? It is in order to teach something to the nations who witness Christ's return. They must recognize that there is indeed a wall and gate to be passed through, but it is effectively open and transparent to them, such is the Lord's will that they should enter in.

*And the street of the city was pure gold, as if it were transparent glass-* Gold cannot by nature be transparent. John is struggling in words to convey what he saw and the impressions which arose. As with the language of demons, we have an example here of how the Bible uses human language and at times records things from the limited perspective of observers on earth.

21:22 *And I saw no temple therein. For the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it-* This seems almost purposefully intended to teach that the temple outlined in Ez. 40-48 will not be built at the Lord's return. See on :13. The dimensions of the city, measured by a reed as was used in Ezekiel's vision, are specifically different from those in Ezekiel's temple vision. I suggest Ez. 40-48 was command rather than prediction; it was what could have been if the returned exiles had built it. Revelation was given in the first century, at the time when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. This was no small tragedy for Jews and Judaism. Revelation's message is that Jerusalem and the temple are not necessary in the new order of things; there will be a new Jerusalem, comprised of the believers; and no need in any case for a temple.

In John's Gospel, the Lord states that He is the temple / tabernacle which was to be taken down in His death and rebuilt in His resurrection. Our abiding in Him is therefore abiding within the temple; for He has prepared for us an abiding place in that spiritual house through His death (Jn. 14:1,2).

21:23 *And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it-* The sun and moon were created partly in order to give a sense of time and seasons, not least the Jewish feasts. Grasping God's view of time means that we will see the Kingdom as immortality, not everlasting life. The eternity of our future existence is not the big theme of the Bible; it is "God manifestation, not human salvation", in the words of John Thomas. The process of

eternity, the life and Kingdom of God, is already going on now; the tree of life *is* now (not 'will be'; Greek tenses are precise) in the midst of the paradise of God, at least from God's perspective (Rev. 2:7). We will have no need of the sun, for the light of God's glory will replace our concept of time (Rev. 21:23). Indeed, "the time of the end" can be read as "the end of time" (Dan. 12:4,9). There will be "time (Gk. *chronos*, the idea of time) no longer" (Rev. 10:6). The image of Dan. 2 is destroyed together by the Lord's return; each metal in some sense exists at his coming. Rather than meaning that each of those empires must have an end time revival, this may be teaching that the whole concept of human history and time will be ground to powder by the advent of the Kingdom. One day, when we are then with the Lord, will be like a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8)- there will be no comparison between our present view of time and what will then be. The ploughman shall overtake the reaper (Am. 9:13)- which may refer to the collapsing of time, rather than just being a figure of fecundity. Before people pray, they will be heard (Is. 65:24- although this is our present prayer experience too, Mt. 6:8). Our focus should therefore be more on the *quality* and *nature* of the Kingdom life, rather than the mere eternity of it.

*For the glory of God did light it, and the lamp of it is the Lamb-* This seems to imply their physical presence. There was no 'candlestick' [Gk.] - no temple and temple furniture was necessary. This was radical reasoning for the first century Jewish audience, dominated as they were by the temple cult.

21:24 *And the nations shall walk by the light of it, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it-* Revelation 20 has described a period of time when the dragon is chained. It could be that during this period, a chance is given to the nations outside of the earth / land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of Revelation and Bible prophecy. And they respond by realizing that indeed their wealth and glory is nothing (:26), and come up to Jerusalem in repentance of their materialism, where they are invited to the Lord's table. See on 19:18. The previous kings of the earth / land had supported Babylon / the beast and were now no more. But they will be replaced by leaders who bring their glory to the Lamb rather than to Babylon.

God dwells in light (1 Tim. 6:16), and this new city will have light from God, through Christ (21:11,23; 22:5)- because Yahweh Himself will be there. Perhaps some of the intensity of that light will spread out to the surrounding world, so that the nations call Jerusalem the place where Yahweh is (Ez. 48:35).

21:25 *The gates of it shall in no way be shut by day (for there shall be no night there)-* Representing the tribes of Israel (:12). They will be continually open to Gentiles entering in and joining with them. There would be no more Jewish exclusivity of the type which troubled the believing community at the time Revelation was given. There will finally be nothing and nobody untouched by the light of the Lord Jesus. And yet John's gospel presents the Lord as the total light of our lives now; in this sense we can live the eternal life now.

21:26 *And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it-* The idea of entering the city (:27) which represents the Kingdom of God is found in the Lord's teaching of the camel passing through the needle gate in order for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. There is the same message here- the wealth and glory of the world must be sacrificed in order to enter in. See on :24.

21:27 *There shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or he that makes an abomination and a lie, but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life-* As noted earlier, there is an intended contrast between the descriptions of the city in Rev. 21 and 22 seem to contradict those given in Ezekiel 40-48:

<b>Revelation</b>	<b>Ezekiel</b>
21:27 Only those in the book of life can enter	45:6 the city is for natural Israel (Zech. 8:5- children play in the streets). 44:11; 46:9 ordinary mortals enter it.
21:25 City gates never shut	44:1 Gates shut at times
22:5; 21:23 Glory of God is the light, eclipsing sun and moon	45:17; 46:1,3 Moon shines in the city
22:14 those who enter the city eat the tree of life	mortal priests inside the city
21:22 no temple in the city	a temple in the city
The true temple has already been sprinkled by Christ's blood.	45:20 This temple needs regular cleansing ("so shall ye reconcile the house") by sprinkling of blood.

These are just some of the many disparities, yet both cities are said to be built on a great mountain. The language bids us look back to Ezekiel's temple- and realize that it is *not* going to be built at the Lord's return. Such literalism will be far out of place once the Kingdom is established in all its glory.

## CHAPTER 22

22:1- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb-* The throne of God and Jesus will be in Jerusalem. The river of life proceeds from there. Whilst I fail to see a doctrine of a Millennial reign taught in Revelation, it's clear that after Babylon is destroyed and Christ and the saints are enthroned in Jerusalem, there is a period of time during which the surviving mortals have the opportunity to identify themselves with the Kingdom and be immortalized. The water of life thus flows out to them, and they are urged to drink freely of it, thereby finding immortality. Likewise the tree of eternal life offers its fruits to them in :2; all they have to do is take it. And both the Lord Jesus and us His bride urge the peoples to come into the city of God, through the gates into the city of eternal life (:17). It may be that in order to eat of the tree of life they must first "wash their robes", undergoing a kind of baptism experience (:14). There may be some literal element of

fulfilment of the prophecy that a fountain will be opened in Jerusalem where sin can be cleansed (Zech. 13:1).

22:2- see on Rom. 5:12.

*In the midst of the street thereof. And on both sides of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations-* The righteous man is right now like "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does (in this work of preaching?) shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3). These words are quoted in Rev. 22:2 concerning our holding out of life to the mortal population at the Lord's return. The conclusion? If we witness now we are living the Kingdom life now, and therefore we will be perpetuated in that time.

Rev. 21 and 22 seem to describe a "wood of trees of life" (22:2- A.V. 'tree' must be wrong because the 'tree' is on either side of the river), watered by the river of life proceeding from the mountain of "the throne of God and of the Lamb". There was a mountain in Eden, seeing there were four "headstreams" there, and it seems fitting to suggest that God's throne was on this same mountain before the fall. So whilst the picture is of Eden restored, there are differences- there will be a whole forest of trees of life, and no liar will be within the restored paradise, i.e. there will be no serpent, no possibility of sinning. Which means paradise indeed.

"The healing of the nations" suggests a process of time after the Lord's return during which the nations are healed, perhaps physically from the effects of the judgments, and spiritually.

22:3- see on Rev. 21:27.

*And there shall be no curse any more, and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein, and his servants shall serve him-* The final chapters of Revelation so often parallel God and "the lamb" (e.g. Rev. 22:3). The Father was so deeply united with the Son in His time of sacrificial offering. See on Jn. 19:19. The descriptions of the new city of Jerusalem in the prophets and Revelation can be better understood once it is appreciated that Eden will literally be restored in that area. Zech. 14:8-11 lays the basis for the descriptions of the city in Revelation, and includes the main elements of Eden- "living waters" ('Hiddekel') going out from a "Lifted up" mountain in Jerusalem, with "no more curse" there, v.11 (the phrase "no more utter destruction" is translated like this when it is quoted in Rev. 22:3).

22:4 *They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads-* The reference seems to be to God Himself. Throughout Revelation 21 and 22 there is a distinction made between God and "the Lamb". This further suggests that the references to "God himself" are *not* to God manifestation in the Lamb, but to Yahweh Himself. "They shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" indicates that "His face" and "His name" refer to the same being. The Name which will be in our foreheads will be that of Yahweh, the Father, not Christ (Rev. 3:12; 14:1). Therefore it is *His* face which we will see. Of course there is *some* reference here to 'seeing' in the sense of understanding, which is how we see the Father now. But then our fuller mental comprehension of the Father will be reflected in our physical vision of Him. Is. 25:6-9 speaks of how God's people will enjoy a feast in Jerusalem at the Lord's return, the veil will be withdrawn from their eyes, all tears will be wiped away,

and then "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God... this is Yahweh". There is a parallel between physically seeing God and having the veil of our present incomprehension removed. The fuller understanding which we will then have will be reflected in our literal seeing of God.

The seeing of God's face is parallel with having His Name or personality in our heads, in the centre of our minds. This is what will make the physical seeing of His face appropriate.

*22:5 There shall be night no more, so they do not need the light of a lamp, nor the light of the sun; for the Lord God shall give them light-* The candle, symbol of God's word (Ps. 119:105) will no longer be needed by the faithful, because "the Lord God shall give them light". Our personal, direct contact with God will replace the ministry of the Bible and indeed all God's manifestations and communications as we now have experienced them. Personally seeing God's face means that we need no other form of illumination.

22:6- see on Jer. 23:18,22.

*And he said to me: These words are faithful and true-* It seems the Angel sensed John's struggle to accept the reality of it all. See on 21:5 *Write!*

*And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants what must soon take place-* Perhaps this continues the theme noted in :5; that now we shall be face to face with God, there is no need for any more manifestation of Him to us through things like His word. His Spirit was in the prophets, but now the God whose Spirit that was- is with us face to face.

*His servants-* We are given the same simple title in :3. We will eternally serve Him, and so we have begun the eternal life now, in so far as we serve Him now. The present experience of the eternal life is a major theme in John's writings.

*22:7 And behold, I come quickly-* These words would be appropriate to the Lord Jesus, so we assume that He spoke them; or that the Angel so intensely represented the Lord that he could appropriately say them. The Lord's quick or soon coming could refer to the suddenness of His coming, implying the need for constant readiness for it on our part. Or the idea may indeed be that He is coming "soon", in that all believers are to live as if the second coming is imminent. And the Lord could have come "soon" after John's time, had Israel repented. The Olivet prophecy and many New Testament references certainly support that possibility. But because of the unreadiness of the bride, the lack of repentance in Israel and lack of spiritual fruit in the church, that coming has been delayed to our days.

*Blessed is he that keeps the words of the prophecy of this book-* The book is hardly a list of commandments, and this particular section of Revelation is a description of the awesome destiny awaiting God's people by grace. So the reference is not really to 'keeping' in the sense of keeping commandments; nor can 'keep' be twisted to mean 'keep the right interpretation of...'. Perhaps the idea is that blessed is he who believes these wonderful things and keeps the reality of them far further than merely seeing the vision, being visually awed, and then slipping back into the humdrum of the mediocre religious life.

*22:8 And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things-* The "these things"

don't therefore refer to the entire vision, but to what John saw prior to falling before the Angel. Presumably the reference is to the amazing vision of eternity in 22:1-5. Faced with these eternal realities, our natural response should be to fall down and worship.

22:9 *And he said to me: You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you, and with your brothers the prophets, and with those that keep the words of this book. Worship God!*- This shows that the Angel was a prophet. This title does not only mean one who foretells future events, but in Biblical usage refers more to one who ministers the word of God under inspiration; the Angel was therefore responsible for inspiring the Bible like the prophets (Old and New Testament ones) were. Note too how the Lord describes the Angels as "servants" (Mt. 22:13), using the common description of the prophets as Jehovah's servants- as if He saw a close connection between Angels and prophets. See on 2 Cor. 3:6.

22:10 *Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. For the time is at hand*- The implication would be that the interpretation of Revelation would be sealed until the time for fulfilment was at hand. Daniel was told the same about his prophecies (Dan. 12:9). This fits with much other Bible teaching, to the effect that prophecy will be understood at the very end of time, just before its final fulfilment in the Lord's return. The flagship verse concerning the opening of our eyes to latter day prophecy must be Dan. 12:4,10: "Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge (of Daniel's prophecies) shall be increased... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This is all in the context of the Angel rejecting Daniel's plea for insight into his own prophecies. All he was told was that they would be fulfilled in the far distant future, but he was comforted with the thought that the faithful at that time would understand. That the fulfilment of all the latter day prophecies will be understood fully in the very last days is implied in Jer. 23:20: "In the latter days you shall understand it perfectly". The "it" refers to "the intents of [God's] heart" revealed in His prophetic word. It is no accident that the Apocalypse ends with words which clearly allude to the closing words of Daniel. John falls at the Angel's feet, as Daniel did. The Angel then says: "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of *this* book (unlike Daniel's, which was sealed): for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still (cp. "the wicked shall do wickedly")". The implication is that the book is sealed for those who are a long way from the time of fulfilment; hence John must not seal the prophecy *because* its fulfilment is near. Thus Dan. 12:4 LXX reads: "Seal the book until the time of its accomplishment"- *then* it will be unsealed and the meaning become apparent. The primary application of Revelation is to the events of AD70; the implication is that the righteous understood the pattern of events then because of this book. There is a repeated stress throughout the NT epistles on the need to understand and get true knowledge (1 Pet. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:2-6,8,16; 2:20; 3:18), perhaps with special reference to Scripture like the Olivet prophecy and Revelation; likewise 1 Tim. 3:1,16; 4:1,2 encourage Bible study in the 'last days' leading up to AD70. The need for understanding and study at that time is reflected in our last days. Paul told the Thessalonians (in the context of AD70) that he didn't need to tell them about the times and seasons because they already understood the prophecies so well- but they needed rather to make sure that their lifestyle was appropriate to their understanding (1 Thess. 5:1-5). The situation in AD70 is a type of the true "last days". Therefore the understanding of Revelation will not be sealed just before its second and major fulfilment in the second coming of Christ. In the same way as Daniel's prophecies will be opened to us in

the last days, so must the book of Revelation, because the understanding of Revelation is so bound up with the meaning of Daniel. "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" suggests that this true understanding of prophecy motivates the faithful remnant in holding on to a righteous lifestyle. Time and again Israel are condemned because their lack of *understanding* of the prophecies led them into sinful behaviour (Dt. 32:29; Ps. 94:8; Is. 44:18).

As to the time being "at hand", see on :7.

22:11 *He that is unrighteous, let him continue to do unrighteousness, and he that is filthy, let him remain filthy, and he that is righteous, let him continue to do righteousness, and he that is holy, let him remain holy-* This verse appears to be stating the obvious and axiomatic, but probably the idea is that God will confirm people in the way they wish to go. Seeing the reference is to the time of the very end (:10), the idea may also be that once the Lord comes, we cannot change our ways. Now is the time to do that. We will as it were be frozen as we are.

22:12- see on Mt. 26:70.

*Behold, I come suddenly-* See on :7.

*And my reward is with me-* The reward has been prepared for us in Heaven (Mt. 5:12). In this sense the new Jerusalem descends from Heaven- to us.

*To repay everyone for what he has done-* Gk. 'according as his works shall be'. It will be in our last days that Israel's blindness starts to be cured, thanks to a Word-based revival, led by the Elijah ministry. Solomon's prayer stated that when Israel properly repented, God would then "render unto every man according unto all his ways" (2 Chron. 6:30). Our Lord here definitely applied these words to the work of His second coming. His allusion to Solomon's prayer should be proof enough that the time of His full apocalypse is related to the time of Israel's repentance. The "everyone" in view is not only the believers; the phrase 'according to works' is found in Rev. 18:6 about the judgments upon Babylon according as their works have been. We noted on 20:13 that the judgment according to works may specifically be a reference to the judgment of those who persecuted the believers during the tribulation. For the believers are not judged according to their works in that salvation is not on the basis of works, although it is also true that our works will have eternal consequence.

22:13 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end-* The Lord Jesus is appropriating to Himself the titles of His Father, as used in Is. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12. Those statements that God is "the first and with the last" are all in the context of assuring a doubting Judah that really, God has saved them. We sense from the encouragement to John to really record all this, and the repeated reminders that these words are true and faithful, that the Lord's people will struggle to grasp the wonderful truth of all this. Right through the process, from our foreknowledge at the beginning to the "last things" of our final salvation- He will have been in the process.

22:14- see on Mk. 10:25.



*Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to eat of the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city-* The reference may be to baptism, and belief in the efficacy of that washing. On this basis we will have the "right" to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14); yet our salvation is by pure grace alone. We are "meet" to be partakers of the inheritance, we walk worthy of the Lord Jesus unto all pleasing of him (Col. 1:10-12), the labourers receive the penny of salvation, that which is their right (Mt. 20:14). We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way.

This parallels the city and Eden by equating having "right to the tree of life" with entering "in through the gates into the city". Rev. 22:3 tells us that the throne of God will be in "it" - i.e. the wood of life (not the river- see context), as in Eden God's throne was in the garden, which garden was presumably a wood of trees and little else ("of every tree of the garden..." -other plants are not mentioned), in the same way as the new Eden is composed solely of trees of life. The invitation "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" is mirrored in "take the water (lit. take from the stream) of life freely" - the stream being that of Eden. Rev. 21:27 stresses that no serpent -"whatever works abomination or makes a lie"- will enter the new Eden as it did before. The midst of the new Garden will be the throne of Christ, who in every way will then be the tree of life and knowledge. This will be paradise restored, but without the possibility of sinning. Paradise indeed.

*22:15 Outside it-* We all worry as to whether we shall be left outside the Kingdom. This description of those outside is helpful in this regard. All are urged to enter, the gates are open constantly, the Spirit and bride both urging entrance, the water of eternal life can be drunk freely, a whole forest of trees of life offer their eternal fruit to all regularly, the wall around the city is transparent. Only those who don't want to be there will not be.

*Are the dogs-* One subtext of these visions is the criticism of Judaism and legalism. "Dogs" are elsewhere used to represent those who teach circumcision and who return to the Jewish law (Phil. 3:2; 2 Pet. 2:22).

*And the sorcerers-* Literally, poisoners. All these categories of the condemned have one thing in common- they entice others into sin and damage others, after the pattern of the serpent in Eden. The message is that paradise will be restored but with the major difference that there will no more be tempters and enticers to sin. *Pharmakeus* could perhaps dynamically be translated as 'drug pushers'. But the reference is to how the system of the beast and Babylon is guilty of all these things, spreading her sorceries, fornication, idolatry and lies to all the peoples in the earth / land during the tribulation.

*Idolaters-* Those who worship images, and Revelation has much to say about those who worship the image of the latter day beast.

*Lovers and practisers of falsehood-* Those who love and create lies. Given all the allusions to paradise restored, this must refer to the serpent in Eden.

*22:16 I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star-* This statement of the obvious seems to be another example of how the utter reality of these things is being emphasized. This is not fantasy or wild dreaming, there is an eternal truth to this message of the Kingdom. And the

message is to be shared with "the churches", initially the seven [representative] churches of chapters 1-3.

The Lord is both the offspring of Jesse and David, and also "the root of Jesse" (Is. 11:1,10). This is another way of saying that He is the alpha and omega of all things. All this wonderful plan was planned for us from the beginning and shall come to fulfilment. Barnes helpfully comments: "Not the root in the sense that David sprang from him, as a tree does from a root, but in the sense that he was the "root-shoot" of David, or that he himself sprang from him, as a sprout starts up from a decayed and fallen tree - as of the oak, the willow, the chestnut, etc. The meaning then is, not that he was the ancestor of David, or that David sprang from him, but that he was the offspring of David, according to the promise in the Scripture, that the Messiah should be descended from him. No argument, then, can be derived from this passage in proof of the pre-existence, or the divinity of Christ".

*22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say: Come! And he that hears, let him say: Come!-* The whole spirit of the Lord Jesus is to invite others to come and share His salvation. He that hears will say to others "Come". This refers to the redeemed community and the Lord Jesus urging the survivors of Babylon's judgments to come within the city of salvation. Those who 'hear', i.e. believe, will invite others to 'come', in the spirit of Zech. 8:21. There is a wonderful theme in these last visions of urging others to accept the great salvation presented. The water of life can be freely drunk, the gates of the city are open constantly, and the Spirit ["the Lord the Spirit", the Lord Jesus] and us the bride urge others to enter. In the immediate context of this chapter, the reference would be to the mortal nations who survive Armageddon who are urged to enter the Kingdom which has been established in Jerusalem.

*And he that is thirsty, let him come. Let him that desires take the water of life freely-* The 'free' nature of the gift of eternal life fits into the general impression given in these visions that the community of salvation is so utterly and easily open to all, and the only qualification is that we 'desire' to be there; that we are those who 'thirst' for the water of eternal life. This goes back to the Lord's opening teaching in the Sermon on the Mount; that salvation is freely available quite simply for those who really want it. Our desire to 'be there' should therefore be the passion of our heart, our defining emotion and wish. And we shall be satisfied.

*22:18 I testify to every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, that if anyone shall add to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book-* The reference is not to the whole Bible, it is specifically to the words of the prophecy of the Apocalypse. The only other time the Greek text talks about 'adding things' is in Acts 15:28 where we read of the tendency to add things to salvation by faith alone. I have suggested that the language of the New Jerusalem and the open temple is all to be understood in the first century context in which it was given. For the admission of non-Jews to a largely Jewish Christian community was a live issue. The picture presented here is of an eternal salvation where literal Jerusalem and its temple are surpassed by the reality of the Kingdom, and the 12 tribes of Israel are no longer to be understood literally. So I suggest with that background, the idea here is that the great salvation just presented is available to all, freely. And anyone who adds conditions to that shall be excluded from it; and likewise any who detract from the vision by not believing it. For the fearful and unbelieving are listed in Revelation alongside the whores and sorcerers who shall remain outside the new Jerusalem.

Yet the plagues written in the book have specific reference to latter judgments upon the Jews and upon the supporters of the beast in the earth / land promised to Abraham during the three

and a half year final tribulation. Islam adds to the prophecies through claiming that the Koran and Hadith were given after the time of Revelation; and first century Judaism added to God's book by elevating their laws and traditions to effectively the same status as the words of God in the Bible.

*22:19 And if anyone shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and out of the holy city, which are written of in this book-* That disobeying the law of God is effectively adding to it was clearly brought home to Israel: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Dt. 12:32). The command to Joshua to "observe to do according to all the law... turn not from it to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 1:7) is probably reiterating the command not to add ("to the right") or subtract ("to the left") from the law. Rev. 22:18,19 is based on these passages.

Only those once written in the book of life can have their names taken out of it. The idea of taking away therefore refers to believers who fall away. In the last days especially, as the tribulation unfolds, it will be tempting for believers to downgrade the book of Revelation, and not to accept the plain teaching about the need for separation from the beast, even if it nets death and persecution. There will be a particular temptation then to "take away" from this book.

*22:20 He who testifies these things says: Yes. I come quickly. Amen-* See on :7. This could mean that the return of the Lord was all set up and possible in the first century, but was delayed due to human failure to meet the required conditions. It could equally mean that He will come suddenly, unexpectedly for many; and the key characteristic of the faithful is that we should be ready for His coming.

*Come Lord Jesus-* There is little point in praying for His coming if it is set for a date set in stone that cannot be altered. The calendar date of His coming is therefore not set; because it depends upon our prayers.

*22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen-* Given the awesome eternal future prepared, it is appropriate we are reminded that this is all by absolute grace. Yet "grace" often carries with it the idea of the gift of the Spirit, and this is a major theme in John's writings. He wishes all readers to accept that gift, the presence and power of the Lord Jesus with us; which is the essence of life now just as it shall be of the life eternal.